

Baldernock Gardening Club: February 2024 Newsletter: After a month of storms, snowdrops still appear

Good wet afternoon one and all,

On another dank, dark, dreich and draughty day in January, it seems the opportune moment, or hours, to sit down to write the monthly ramblings of a frustrated “gardener”. It has been a miserable couple of months with weather that has veered from coldish, a touch of snow, the occasional glimmer of low, bright sun blinding you when driving and the seemingly constant rain with the added ingredient of strong winds. Saturday and Sunday, of the immediate past weekend, were a joy as I was able to spend two days in the garden, which is something I haven’t done since November. One of my tasks on these days of not quite Kinlochewe temperatures was to pick up all the fallen dead, and some not quite so dead, branches from the trees battered by successive storms, all exotically named by various European Met Offices. What the winds have been unable to dislodge from a couple of my trees are two magpie nests, which have swayed mightily in the gusts but have not collapsed. This is a tribute to the magpies’ engineering skills, but a nuisance to me as they continue to offer me a discordant reveille each morning outside of the bedroom window. Despite all the climatic gloom, the garden is definitely coming to life. The snowdrops are out, with still plenty more to come and every year it is amazing how such a small, white flower is able to raise everyone's spirits. The few winter aconites I have are displaying their almost neon yellow, but then I keep on wondering what has happened to all the other winter aconites I have planted over the years that have not appeared and why aren’t they spreading as they are supposed to do. I blame the gardener or the squirrel. All around the garden the tips of spring bulbs are poking above the soil with the promise of what is to come, unless the deer have other ideas. The hellebores are budding with some actually flowering (deer don’t like hellebores, which is a real plus) and other perennials are tentatively testing the atmosphere. With more minutes of daily light, except on days like today, the garden is amazingly once again creating conversation along the lines of “a snowdrop is out”! I do have to admit that my snowdrop display is really kind of paltry when compared to the wonderful carpet of white that covers the woodland and hedgerows of my neighbours’, Annika and Robert, garden; it is a sight to behold.

The natural world in the garden has not been as bountiful as in past years. Our garden-door-knocking-pheasant has not made an appearance this year after many years of strutting about and disturbing the neighbourhood with his raucous calling. The visitors to the bird feeders have been less numerous, though loyal visitors continue to be the nuthatches, the woodpecker, the tree creeper and varieties of tits, including the flash-mob of long tailed ones, plus various pairs of robins, who spend their days chasing each other away from the food, as do the blackbirds. An amazing amount of energy is expended ensuring another bird can’t have what the other hasn’t time to eat because it is chasing the competitor away. The herons are regularly in the pond and a pair of dippers are back in residence. There is a rock in the pond which the dippers regularly use as their latrine. This rock has been cleaned by the rain and the rise of water levels, but after a day or two of calmer conditions, you can see the

evidence that they have been bobbing up and down on the rock. It is always a good indicator that they are nesting close by.

It is just three weeks ago that many of you enjoyed the wonderful talk by Laura Willgoss of Wildegoose Nursery. I am still overawed by what she and her husband have achieved in a relatively short period of time in creating such an interesting and floriferous garden. I felt exhausted just listening to what they have done, but rationally you have to realise that they are creating their livelihood, unlike most of us who are amateurs (some of us are amateur amateurs) who do it because they enjoy it for personal satisfaction; the flaw in that reasoning is that they enjoyed it for their personal aspirations as well as their commercial ones. Over the years the club members have listened to many very, good speakers, but Laura's talk must rank as among one of the best. Zoom is not the best medium for allowing the audience to ask questions.

Talking of Speakers, **Shirley Graham of Shirley's Garden** is our speaker on **Wednesday 14th February 2024 at 19:30 in Baljaffray Parish Church Hall**. Shirley is a no dig gardener, who has been growing vegetables for over 20 years in her garden at home on the farm near to Biggar. Shirley is passionate about growing vegetables and she will delight in telling how her ideas have flourished into a successful market garden business. Unfortunately, I will not be in attendance that evening (fleeing the country in search of some sun, only to discover the long range forecast predicts rain!), but Marjorie Thorburn will be on vocals, with Jill Campbell at the keyboard. Everything will work swimmingly and you will have a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

On **Wednesday 13th March 2024** our speaker is **Alan Featherstone** who is an ecologist and Founder of Trees for Life. Alan's talk will be on his mission of **Restoring the Caledonian Forest**. He is also a very good photographer.

Your committee has been sitting, and taking minutes to record the discussion, to start planning the speakers for the 2024/25 season. Several spots have already been filled and the programme is starting to shape up to be another interesting series of subjects. All will be revealed in due course. I am delighted, and Douglas Patrick is ecstatic, that we have a new Treasurer-in-Training. Caroline Preacher has transferred from the Outings Department to Finance and will take over from Douglas after the May 2024 AGM. In the short meantime, Caroline will continue to organise imminent outings as well as learning the intricacies of the BGC finances. We should all be very grateful to Caroline, who has probably relieved many of you wondering when an approach would be made to you. I wouldn't get too complacent, as new blood is always required. I thank, too, those very few who replied to my plea to release Douglas.

John Anderson, a past Member, who is currently working hard for Milngavie in Bloom planting at the beginning of the West Highland Way. John is in need of small stepping stones or cracked slabs for a bare area he is just about to plant up. If anyone can help old slabs that are just lying in a corner of your garden, then please let me know and I will advise John.

With just over three months to the **Annual Plant Sale on Saturday 11th May**, now is the perfect time to remind you to start looking for cuttings and seedlings from your gardens to bewitch and enchant our customers into parting with their cash. Last year we had an excellent selection of plants of quality, though, perhaps, the volume of offerings was obviously down. This year a smallish increase in volume would be appreciated, but the quality must not be diminished.

On that gentle reminder that it is just not your garden you have to think about, I had better close. Hopefully many of you will turn up at Baljaffray Parish Church for **Shirley Graham on Wednesday 14th February** (what better way is there to celebrate St Valentine's night?) and have a most enjoyable evening. I will be back for the March meeting, but in the meantime, stay safe and enjoy your gardens when it is dry enough and the storms have disappeared.

With best wishes

Willie

