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EDITORIAL

A perfect planet?

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Sir David Attenborough's latest TV series *A Perfect Planet* was shown in January 2021, at the start of the latest COVID-19 "lockdown". It provided spectacular insights into the lives of animals across the planet and was watched by a record audience: the BBC iPlayer saw the highest viewing figures in its history. The title was perhaps unfortunate: in January 2021 the global death toll due to COVID-19 had reached two million (Our World in Data, 2021), which seems to jar with the concept of a “perfect” planet; but then the BBC had announced the commissioning and name of the series as early as February 2019 (Waterson, 2019), months before the virus began to manifest itself. More seriously, the intended meaning of the title, which was emphasised repeatedly during different episodes, was that the Earth is perfect for the flourishing of life, the implication being that planetary properties and conditions could not be better for living things. This is disputable: for example, if the Earth had a greater planetary mass, it would have a larger surface area and be potentially able to support a greater biomass and greater biodiversity; there would also be more interior heating due to radioactive decay, resulting in a prolongation of the time the planet could stay habitable; it has been suggested that planets with up to twice the Earth's mass could be "superhabitable" (Schulze-Makuch *et al.*, 2020). These quibbles about the title aside, like all of David Attenborough's series, *A Perfect Planet* was a glorious celebration of biodiversity across the globe and to that extent helped viewers find, to use his own expression, "comfort and solace in the natural world" during a particularly stressful period (Cutmore & Barrett, 2021). *The Glasgow Naturalist* is also a celebration of biodiversity and, although it focuses on only one small corner of the planet, perfect or not, the editorial team hopes that it too will bring comfort and solace to our readership as we emerge from the pandemic.

At the time of writing (April 2021), a recent relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in Scotland allows travel between Local Authority areas for the first time in almost four months. Those interested in the natural world once again have the freedom to explore without geographical constraint (as long as they get back home within the day!). When the editorial for the previous issue was written (March 2020), the first lockdown had just started. It was anticipated that the strict rules might encourage an interest in local natural history, because this was an activity that could be combined with the "one form of exercise" permitted per day. Research seems to have borne this out. An online survey of U.K. residents conducted by the University of Cumbria revealed that, during the first lockdown, all age groups spent more time daily in nature. "Listening to birdsong was the most common way adults noticed nature during lockdown (94% of respondents), followed by watching wildlife (87%) and taking time to notice bees or butterflies specifically (83%)" (Lemmey, 2020). In another online survey, 64% of residents of the state of Vermont, U.S.A. reported increased engagement in "wildlife watching" (Morse *et al.*, 2020).

Another expected outcome of the lockdowns was that, since there was less opportunity for outdoor and social activities, more articles would be written and submitted to the journal. However, despite an initial surge of submissions, this issue contains only three more articles than the previous, though this is due to an increase in the number of full papers from six to nine. The geographical range of the articles extends from Fair Isle to East Lothian and the Firth of Clyde, with islands being a theme: Fair Isle, the Isle of May, and the Isle of Cumbrae, the last represented by two articles one of which includes an important bibliography of research associated with Kames Bay. The diversity of taxa covered is as great as in the previous issue, but different. Although there is the same imbalance between animals (20 articles) and plants+fungi (three articles); vertebrates are better represented in this issue, with eight articles on fish, birds or mammals, in comparison with 12 on invertebrates. Some of the articles are highly topical. A paper on mountain hares (*Lepus timidus*) in the Lammermuir Hills (Pettigrew, 2021) was received in the month when it became illegal in Scotland to intentionally kill, injure, or take mountain hares at any time without a licence. Two articles refer to unusual sightings of bottlenose whales (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) in the Firths of Clyde and Forth, thereby adding to the evidence that U.K. waters are being visited by an increasing number and diversity of whales: as recently as early April of this year a sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) was spotted in the Firth of Forth

(Hutchison, 2021), only the fifth recorded sighting in Scottish waters (NBN Atlas, 2021).

Two of the full papers and six of the short notes comprise Part 2 of the supplement *On the Wildside Revisited: 200 years of Wildlife in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens* the first part of which appeared in Volume 27, Part 1. This series gives an excellent indication of the diversity of organisms that can be found in a fairly central city park where almost all habitats and substrates owe their existence directly or indirectly to human agency, and which endured over a hundred years of severe air pollution during the industrial trajectory of the city. Weddle & Downie (2021) point out that, although 1,384 species have been recorded in Glasgow Botanic Gardens, some groups of organisms are seriously under-reported, particularly protozoans, algae, slime moulds and prokaryotes (e.g. bacteria). Whilst the investigation of most of these groups is feasible only for professional specialists with access to laboratory facilities, the relative neglect of freshwater habitats and their macroscopic denizens leaves some scope for amateur naturalists to make a contribution. The final articles in the *On the Wildside Revisited* series will be published in Volume 27, Part 4.

In this issue we also pay tribute to an outstanding professional naturalist and long-standing member of Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS). John Mitchell was for 27 years the reserve warden for the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve. During his career he contributed around 3,500 records to the database of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland and wrote numerous articles, including around 50 for *The Glasgow Naturalist*. He also wrote the highly praised book *Loch Lomondside*, No. 88 of Collins New Naturalist Library, which was published in 2001. He received an Honorary MA from the University of Stirling and the Fellowship of the Zoological Society of Scotland and was recently awarded Honorary membership of GNHS. John Mitchell was a star in the firmament of Scottish natural history.

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