

Letter from Scotland

Squirrel Siegfried has appeared in my local park, just in time to get his feet wet in the recent flooding. He tells me he is one of the last 120,000 red squirrels left in Scotland. But, as in the Norse legend, Siegfried is determined to slay the carbon dragon and save his species from climate change.

It comes at the end of Climate Change Week which has seen parts of central London closed down by protestors from "Extinction Rebellion." Here in Scotland we are digesting an unsettling report from 70 of our environmental organisations entitled "The Silence of the Seasons" which draws attention to the fact that more than a tenth of the 6,000 species surveyed are in danger of extinction eg kittiwakes and wildcats. And half the others are in serious decline eg kestrels, lapwings, oystercatchers, butterflies and moths and much loved trees such as the ash.

The Scottish Government says it's doing its bit to save the planet. It's set us a world-leading target of being carbon-neutral by 2045. Glasgow is hosting the next big UN climate change conference next year, so the pressure is on to set a good example. This week, with the help of the Greens, the SNP

pushed a transport bill through parliament which allows councils to introduce a "work-place parking levy." Labour and the Conservatives voted against, saying such a levy would hit the poorest hardest and there was no evidence from elsewhere that it would encourage people to go to work by bus or train.

The SNP holds its annual conference in Aberdeen this weekend with "independence" much in the air, if not on the agenda. The Brexit fiasco – for such it is, whichever side you are on – has put severe strain on the United Kingdom. Last weekend there was a pro-independence march through Edinburgh which attracted over 100,000 people, the largest Saltire-waving march ever. It has to be said there was some dispute over the turnout but when I cycled past the Meadows at 5.30pm, there was still a loyal crowd cheering the band, in the rain, three hours after the end of the rally.



All Under One Umbrella

The SNP leader Nicola

Sturgeon did not attend the march, though she said she “was there in

spirit.” All week she’s been urging independence

enthusiasts to “keep the heid”, wait for the right moment to hold an official

referendum – sanctioned by Westminster – and campaign till they have won the

hearts and minds of a clear majority of the people. At the moment, the opinion polls are showing a 50/50 split.

Just like the division over Brexit. And on this issue, the Scottish courts had something else to say this week. Lord Pentland ruled against petitioners who were asking for a court order forcing the prime minister to comply with the “Benn Act.” He said there was no evidence to suggest the government

was going to defy parliament and not ask for a Brexit extension by the 19th of October if no deal is reached. However this was swiftly followed by another ruling from three judges at the appeal hearing in the Inner House which left the case open till the 19th to see if Boris complies with the Act or not.

To get away from all these shenanigans, let me take you to the high mountains of Pakistan. 30 year old Ally Swinton from Fife has fallen into a crevasse, 5400m up Koyo Zom in the Hindu Raj. He's injured and barely conscious. But his companion, Tom Livingston, manages to rescue him and keep him alive for a day and a half till a helicopter arrives. Now, a fortnight later, they are both safely home and telling the story of what they are philosophically calling their "amazing adventure."

It might have been an amazing adventure for Scotland's footballers in Moscow on Thursday night. But the Russians trod not so gently on their dreams. 4-0 the result. It was sweet revenge for Russia who suffered a similar punishment in the World Cup Rugby tournament in Japan. Scotland 61- Russia 0. Scotland now face Japan itself on Sunday, a game they must win to reach the next stage. But, as I write, the weather forecasters are trying to work out if and when "super- typhoon Hagibis" will reach Yokohama where the game is due to be played. If it's cancelled, Scotland is out of the Rugby World Cup.

In the end, the climate may sweep us all away and Siegfried

the squirrel will get more than his feet wet.



The Court of Session