

# Letter from Scotland

Easter is a time for egg-hunts, holy days and planting seeds in window boxes, gardens and 12-hectare fields.

It's a time to be joyful. It's springtime.

"God's in his heaven and all's right with the world." Except it isn't. There is war in Europe, floods in South Africa, a cost of living crisis, and we can't be sure Covid has gone away.

But for the moment, these are distant threats for us in Scotland. Putin's Stormtroopers are not about to march into East Lothian. Climate change is still just the talk of conferences. Inflation may be at a record seven per cent, and wages rising by only four per cent, but we are still the fifth wealthiest country on Earth. And from Monday, we are no longer under a legal obligation to take mask-wearing seriously.

In Downing Street, it appears, the Covid rules were never taken seriously. Boris Johnson's £50 police fine for attending his own birthday party has led to a little saucer-shaking in the Conservative Party in Scotland. The leader

Douglas Ross was calling for Johnson's resignation when "Party-gate" first emerged but then changed his mind when Putin invaded Ukraine. Wartime, he said, was not a good time to change prime minister. But then he was immediately contradicted by his predecessor, Baroness Ruth Davidson, who insisted that Boris had to go. Labour and the SNP agree with the Baroness, of course, and the other Tories are keeping quiet, hoping the whole sorry affair will fade away with the spring flowers.



Baroness Ruth Davidson on a walkabout in Davidson's Mains ahead of the 2022 election PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter  
It is curious though that Scotland has joined England and



Wales in declaring that the legal battle with Covid is over while case numbers are still over 4,000 a day, with 2,000 people in hospital and 139 deaths in the last week. We have indeed learned to live with Covid, just as we do with flu and other infectious diseases. Now that we have the vaccine, one begins to wonder what all the fuss is about.

All the political parties are now concentrating on the local council elections on 5 May. Top of the agenda for all of them is the “cost of living crisis”. It’s been eased slightly by the UK government’s £150 subsidy on the average council tax bill. The Scottish government duly passed this on, but has been criticised, quite rightly, for not targeting the help on the most needy. My own council tax bill actually fell this year (despite the 3 per cent rise introduced by Edinburgh Council) and this at a time when councils are all reporting black holes in their finances and local services are being cut.



Springtime – will anything grow ? It's a time to keep our balance between hope and fear. National Museum of Rural Life, South Lanarkshire.

The opinion polls are showing the SNP well ahead of all the other parties, with Labour expected to come second and the Conservatives third. We have a proportional system of voting in local elections in Scotland, with three and four member wards, so the outcome in the 32 council areas is difficult to predict.

Opposition party leaders are always being asked if they will allow local parties to enter into coalitions to form joint administrations to keep the SNP out. The answer is usually "no" or mumbled, until the day after the elections.

The frustrating thing about local elections is that they are not really fought on local issues. This is because most of the actions of local councils are controlled by the central government, either in Edinburgh or London, either by law or by finances. So although there is much talk of potholes and rubbish collections and shortages of teachers and care workers, the elections are mostly about the state of the parties nationally.

Not that any of this matters to a happy couple living high up in a tree at the Loch of Lowes in Perthshire. I reported a month ago that Osprey LM12, known in the popular press as Laddie, had arrived from Africa for the breeding season. About 10 days later, his Lassie, Osprey NCO, came breezing in. Now, the first egg has been seen in the nest and the staff at the Scottish Wildlife Trust are hoping they have a new Osprey family on their visitor attraction list and their webcam.

No matter what mess we humans make of the planet, nature just carries on. Or at least, we hope it is able to carry on. And that is the real meaning of Easter.