

PICTURE OF SUCCESS

Glasgow hillwalker Alan Watt has won Ramblers Scotland's Walking Pals photography competition.

His photo of friends during an ascent of Cruach Ardrain, a Munro near Crianlarich, wins him a walking break worth £500.

Alan plans to use his prize to go with his wife on a full-board walking holiday for four nights at Hassness Country House in the Lake District.

He said: "My picture shows my perfect day out walking in Scotland – with clear skies, great views and a good mix of friends. It's a real honour to win."



GEAR OF THE WEEK

OMM Sonic Smock
Whether it's sunny, damp or windy this spring, runners will be prepared with the OMM Sonic Smock.

The jacket weighs just 52g to 60g (depending in size) and packs away into its collar and a size no bigger than a tennis ball.

The extremely breathable PointZero fabric is windproof and has a DWR treatment for moisture resistance. Features include a single pull drawcord hem, reflective details and thumb loops.

The OMM Sonic Smock is sold in male and female designs, priced £65.

■ See www.theomm.com

TRI NIGHT UNDER STARS

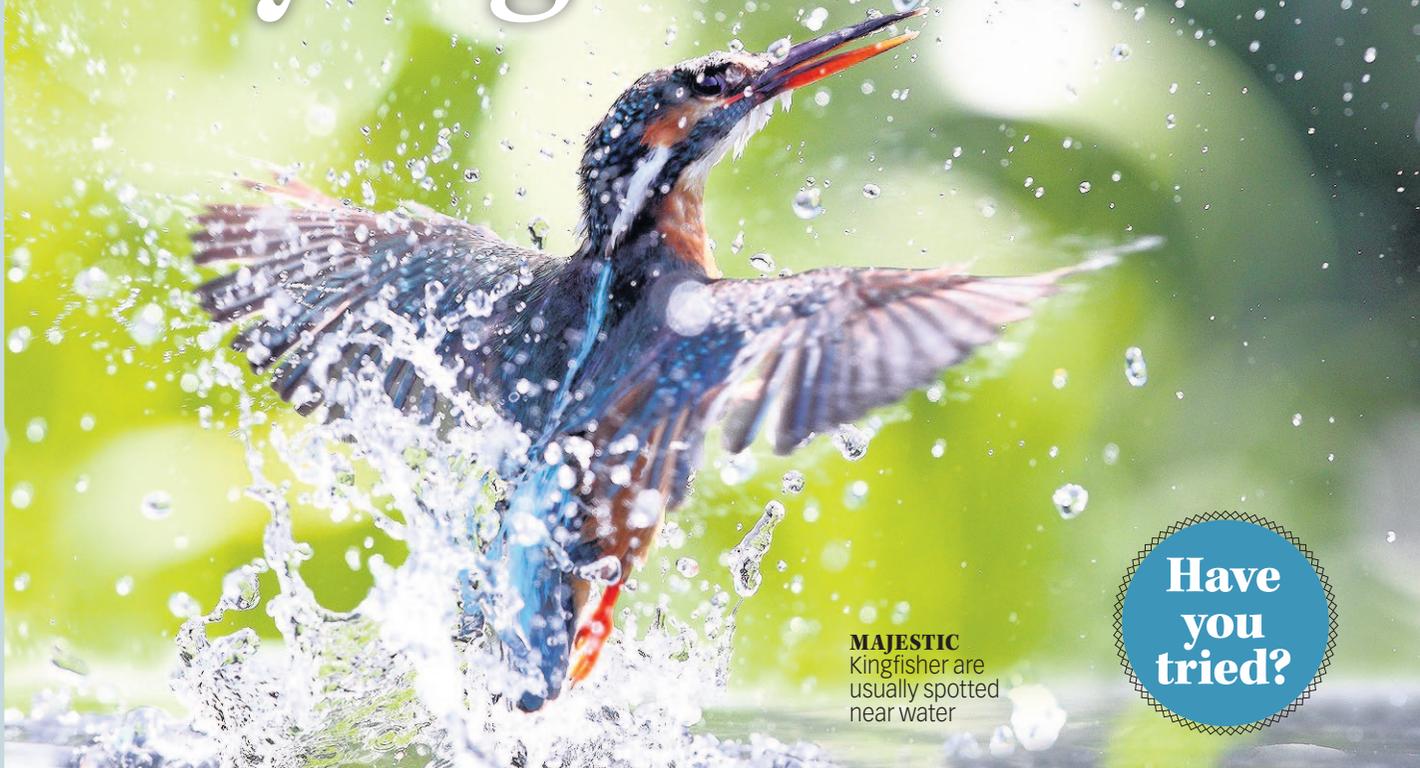
New triathlon The Starman Night Tri launches this summer in the Cairngorms National Park.

The night-time triathlon, organised by True Grit Events, starts at midnight on August 19 near Aviemore, with a swim of 1.2 miles in Loch Morlich.

Next up is a bike ride of 56 miles on silent Speyside roads in the early hours of the morning, finishing with a switch-back climb to Cairn Gorm mountain.

There is an entry limit of 200 places for the inaugural triathlon. ■ www.starmannighttri.com

City high-fliers



MAJESTIC
Kingfisher are usually spotted near water

Have you tried?



FIONA RUSSELL

URBAN BIRDING

What is it? Urban birding is bird spotting, or twitching, in towns and cities.

Tell me more: While traditionally associated with the countryside, a new generation of bird watchers are discovering a rewarding hobby in urban area.

There appears to be a number of reasons why the trend has caught on, including affordable new technology, such as digital and automatic cameras.

Research also shows that the British public are more environmentally aware and keen to attract birds and wildlife to their gardens.

In addition, a number of celebrities, including Elbow frontman Guy Garvey, TV presenter Alex Zane, Blur's Damon Albarn and artist Matt Sewell have declared their love of urban birding.

Why do birds live in cities? While not every bird species can survive in built-up areas, many towns and cities do provide nesting and feeding sites in numerous habitats.

In part, this is because urban centres generate a "heat island", which means the temperature can be 3C warmer in the day and 10C higher at night compared to the countryside.

Added to this, people living in urban areas like to feed garden birds so that naturally attracts more to tables for easy feeding.

How do I do it? You need to rethink the traditional rural bird spotting locations and find new places to spot birds in urban



SPOT OF FUN
Urban birding is a rewarding hobby with many celeb followers

areas. Buildings replace cliffs and crags, while parks, gardens and allotments are substitute urban moorlands and hills.

Urban birders prefer to keep track of birds using modern technology, rather than a notebook and pen. Find an area close to your home and start watching it on a regular basis.

Founder of The Urban Birder, David Lindo, said: "You only have to look upwards to notice gulls, wood pigeons and perhaps even a peregrine soaring through the skyline."

Gardens can be a great place to spot birds. Set up a nest box or provide a table with food and then sit back indoors and watch through the window.

Five birds to spot in urban areas: While you will quickly compile a list of more common garden birds, here are five lesser-seen birds to spot in urban areas.

■ Kingfisher – A colourful bird of rivers and streams, the kingfisher can usually be spotted

sitting quietly on low-hanging branches over water.

■ Woodpecker – You will hear the clear wood-tapping sound of a woodpecker before you see it. Listen – then try to spot them in areas of woodland or trees.

■ Sparrow hawk – Edinburgh is a hotbed for sparrow hawk survival with more than 100 nests recorded in the city.

■ Tawny owl – You will need to be urban birding after dark to spot a tawny owl, which has a brown back with a paler streaked underside and dark eyes.

■ Pied wagtail – A more urban common sighting but still a delight to see. You may spot the small black-and-white bird dashing over lawns or car parks in search of food or hear the calls at night as the birds gathers at dusk to form large roosts in city centres.

Where can I find out more? www.theurbanbirder.com, www.rspb.org.uk, www.snh.gov.uk and www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

Join me on my adventures in Scotland's great outdoors by checking out my award-winning website at www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk. You'll find lots of great information about walking, cycling, running and other outdoor activities, as well as kit reviews.

Advice and ideas