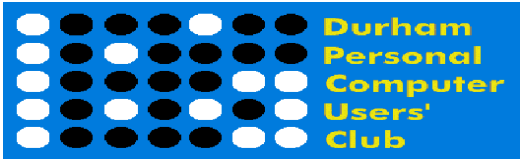**May 2024**   # PC MONITOR

Durham Personal Computer Users' Club Newsletter

DPCUC General Meeting

**Our Club meets monthly on the second Thursday of each month.
All meetings are currently held using Zoom.**

We hope some day in the future to be able to meet in person again.

Please visit the Club Web Page for all the latest links and information
http://www.durhampc-usersclub.on.ca/

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Next Meeting

More to Google than Google It

by Judy Taylour

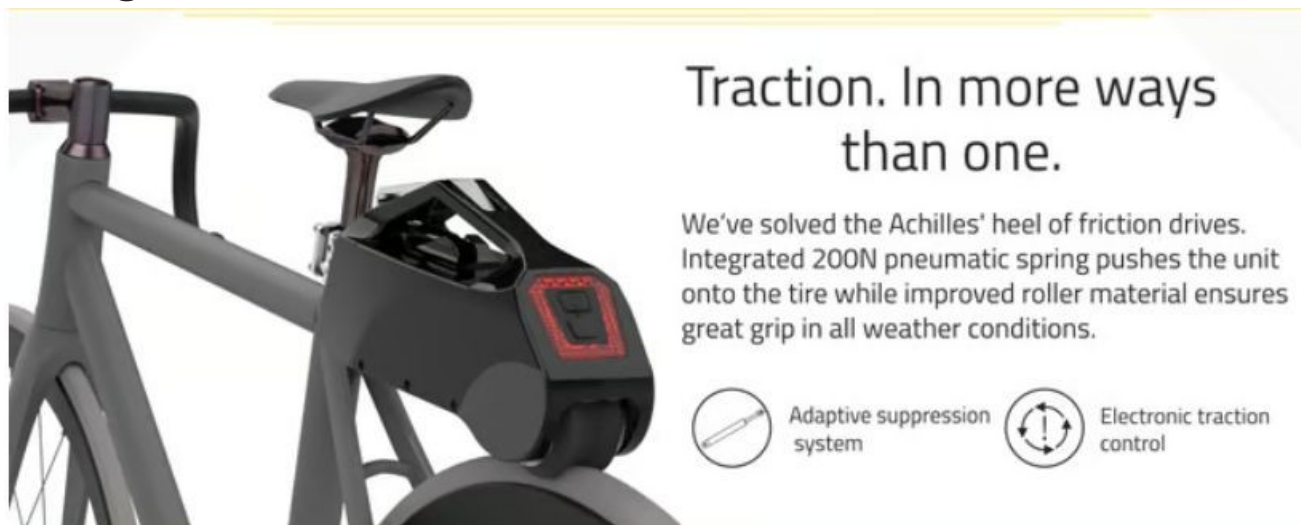**On ZOOM – Thursday, May 9 2024, 7:00PM**

FYI
- By Dan Delong

Rabbit R1

Looking back at the newsletter for January 2024, mention was made of Rabbit R1. It was a soon to be released **AI companion (**a small flip phone sized device) using a **Large Action Model (LAM)** to make decisions, in addition to a **Large Language Model (LLM).** The article left some loose ends because no Rabbit R1s had be sold at that time. One reviewer recently obtained an early model. That report may interest readers.
https://www.zdnet.com/article/i-tested-the-ai-gadget-that-got-the-internet-buzzing-and-it-left-me-wanting-more/
A non-reviewer explains the hype around Rabbit R1... https://mashable.com/article/rabbit-r1-release-date-specs-ai-features

Rubbee – regular bike to e-bike

For those of us needing a little boost while bike riding, **Rubbee** (an extremely well thought-out, friction, battery assist motor) is ideal... for a number of reasons.
First, it assists only while peddling.
Second, the clip-on/off system is thumb operated (for attaching and releasing).

Whether or not you install one, two, or three, drop-in battery packs will make minor difference to the "oomph" factor. Using all three batteries extends the distance to 48km. All pedal assist stops at 20mph, as determined by a wireless sender on one of the cranks. To go faster, just pedal faster.
LEDs on the rear are to signal stops and turns, along with safer visibility for approaching vehicles. Since an existing mud guard would prevent usage of a **Rubbee** motor, the company also offers an optional clip-on mudguard/light.
A phone app tracks your ride and controls both power output and regenerative braking. The company has been making various electric drives for the last 5 years. So, it has gone beyond the incubator stage, to now become a full online retail company. [**https://www.rubbee.co.uk/**]

The original Kick-starter price has increased from about $400USD to $850CAD, and $150 CAD for each of the second and third batteries. This compares to the price for a basic e-bike, which starts at about $1400. If you already own a nice bike, it may be worth the expense.
https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1732543648/make-your-bike-electric-the-new-rubbee-x

Celestron – NexStar Telescopes

For about the same price as an e-bike, this beginner's (to advanced) celestial tracking telescope does a lot for an aspiring astronomer.

[A close relative recently purchased this (or a similar) telescope and took some amazing close-up images of the moon by simply placing a smart phone camera against the eye-piece.]

An SLR camera can take the place of the eye-piece in order to achieve much higher resolutions.

Once calibrated to any of the 40,000 sky objects in the "astro" database, along with exact date and time, precision gears and motors can find and track any other object, as long as it is above the horizon. Light gathering tube diameters ranges from 5-inches (shown here), to 8-inches. Amazon also recommends some less costly, yet highly-rated, alternatives.

https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B000GUHOYE

Chromebook Choices

This year's market for Chromebooks has many to choose from. My choice would be the HP **Chromebook Plus x360 14c**, mainly because my laptops are this brand and because this Chromebook has a touch screen, long battery life, and a lighted keyboard. Since Chromebooks need to function wirelessly (WiFi-6E and below) higher level hardware components and larger memory are less concerning. The Chromebook Plus x360 14c requires a Google account, along with the accompanying Google apps, and it provides 100GB of storage for one year. The web camera is decent and has a privacy switch, along with a finger print reader, better than usual audio, and a microphone mute button. Storage is limited to 256GB (128GB in Canada) unless thumb drives are plugged into two of the three USB ports. Of some concern over availability is the fact that Canadian models have only 4GB RAM, while others have 8GB. *[$500CAD for 4GB/128GB and $750CAD for 8BG/256GB ($650 Best Buy, but the sale was over on May 2.) A Core i5 with 16GB/512GB might be available]* Future sales may take the price lower, as mentioned in this review...

https://youtu.be/HDIWKmsrxNI?si=iCL_WyQSGVBGdGCm

https://www.hp.com/ca-en/shop/product.aspx?id=7p923ua&opt

Code-a-Pillar Toy

This $40 toy, primarily for younger children, is supposed to teach basic coding.
[In a way, it does... quite indirectly.]
Each segment of the "caterpillar" instructs the motorized "head" to move in certain ways:- **forward, stop, turn left or right, and play music**. The trick here is to order the segments in sequence, such that the paths of travel take the device around objects, or from a starting point to a finishing point. Local suppliers are currently out of stock. Amazon may have it.
https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Fisher-Price-Think-Learn-Code-a-Pillar-Code-a-Pillar/6000196194494

LeapFrog LeapPad Ultimate

Kids yearn for a smart pad at an early age, especially if they see their parents glued to their own small screens. It is tempting to yield to such wants, despite pedagogical advice against screen time before the age of two years. After that age, these tough, touch-screen, **LeapFrog** devices, containing educator approved learning games (and stories on various subjects) may satisfy.
[Although LeapFrogs connect over Wi-Fi, problem sites cannot be accessed by children.]
https://store.leapfrog.com/en-us/store/p/leappad-ultimate/_/A-prod80-602000

For those shopping for a programmable (Python) AI robot (with personality, and that is able to teach while entertaining older kids) have a look at the characteristics built into the **Anki Cosmo Robot 2.0.** It leapfrogs the LeapPad.
https://ankicozmorobot.com/

VTech Kiddie Smartwatches

The VTech brand is well known in the educational toy world.
[At one time (before Chromebooks) local schools bought classroom sets of VTech "learn to type" keyboards.]
The **Vtech DX2 watch** contains cameras for selfies and augmented reality hunts, in addition to numerous games. (Incidentally, it displays time!)
https://www.vtechkids.ca/en/product/search/_/kidi_tech

Razer Firefly RGB V2 Pro Mouse Pad

Does it really matter if a mouse pad lights up, in colours? The $100 USD price tag may not deter aficionados. An app on a smart phone controls dynamic colour effects.
https://gizmodo.com/razer-rgb-firefly-v2-mousepad-excessive-1851414109

Sony Bravia 9 mini-LED – 2024 model

BRAVIA 9 | XR Processor | Mini LED | 4K Ultra HD | High Dynamic Range (HDR) | Smart TV (Google TV)

BRAVIA 9

Our brightest 4K ever

NEW

XR Processor · High Peak Luminance · XR Backlight Master Drive · Studio Calibrated · IMAX ENHANCED · Dolby VISION·ATMOS

- ULTIMATE CONTRAST: High Peak Luminance | XR Backlight Master Drive™
- WORLD'S FIRST TV WITH BEAM TWEETER: Acoustic Multi Audio+™
- FLAWLESS PICTURE, LESS ENERGY: Eco Dashboard 2
- EVERYTHING YOU STREAM. ALL ON ONE SCREEN.: Google TV™* (*Google TV is the name of this device's software experience and a trademark of Google LLC.)
- DESIGN BLENDS IN WITH YOUR LIVING SPACE: Harmonic Presence
- LEVEL UP YOUR GAMING: Perfect for PlayStation 5

| 164 cm (65") |
| 189 cm (75") |
| 215 cm (85") |

$3,999 [1]
for 164 cm (65") model

OLED models seem to be most sought after, yet Sony has drifted back to mini-LEDs for a competitive picture quality on some of the 2024 **Bravia** models, by using improved dimming drivers and an advanced chip.
[I'll let their ad (above) speak for itself.]
Reviewers claim that most modern televisions begin to lose picture quality at about the five-year mark, which is not a comforting thought for someone who has owned a Sharp set for much longer than that. *And, it did not cost anywhere near the $4000.00 CAD retail for this Bravia 9 65-inch model.*
https://www.sony.ca/en/bravia/mini-led

Windows11 and forced ads

Sooner or later, the Windows Start Menu will include ads. If you object to this, a personalized setting can turn ads off... for a while. Alternatively, install a different, paid, start menu. These two programs, **Start11** ($15 CAD for one computer; $22 CAD for five) and **StartAllBack** ($5, $9, and $12 USD for one, two and three computers). They will replace the standard start menu, while adding some attractive new features of their own. The link (below) compares both programs.
https://www.xda-developers.com/start11-vs-startallback/

MS-DOS 4.0 now open source

Before Windows, IBM XT PCs ran on DOS. According to the article, Microsoft previously released DOS 1.25 and 2.0 to a digital museum. Now **DOS 4.00** has been released under the MIT license... a DOS version capable of multitasking. However, the **git files** downloaded from **GitHub** are no longer the original binary files, but a 'textified' version.
https://www.hanselman.com/blog/open-sourcing-dos-4

Chinese hijacking—poorly understood

Due to a strange behaviour within the Great Firewall of China, "Muddling Meerkat" may be attempting to map the Worldwide Web, in addition to blocking banned queries coming from China. This has been going on for about five years, yet it is still not a fully understood technique.
https://thehackernews.com/2024/04/china-linked-muddling-meerkat-hijacks.html

Chinese keyboard apps—risky

Surprisingly, the free keyboard app from Huawei was the only Chinese keyboard app without a security risk. In other words, encryption claims by other apps are mainly bogus.
https://thehackernews.com/2024/04/major-security-flaws-expose-keystrokes.html

Sony's improved personal cooling/warming device

The **Reon Pocket 5**, positioned at the nape of the neck and largely concealed by clothing, transfers cooling or warming air via contact with a metal plate and some battery-propelled, fan air. Response to changing environmental temperature and humidity is hastened by communication with an additional, small, sending tag.
https://www.sony.co.uk/electronics/reonpocket5

Thintronics – dielectric advances

The very thinnest insulating dielectric layers are advantageous to chip designers. US based **Thinktronics** claims to have developed the best and thinnest dielectric chemistry, yet. This could give America a significant lead over other countries, in both chip design and manufacturing.
https://www.technologyreview.com/2024/04/11/1091143/thintronics-ajinomoto-dielectric-chip-semiconductor-competition/

TikTok Ban passes Federal Senate.

A bill, forcing the sale of a portion of TikTok to businesses not hosted in China, has been signed by President Biden. The intent is to remove China's ability to consume so much personal information about Americans, because it could compromise international and national security. TikTok is countering with a court challenge, also claiming that so much money is injected each year into the economy, through its small business owner content, that it would damage the United States financially. https://www.thestar.com/news/world/united-states/u-s-senate-passes-bill-forcing-tiktoks-parent-company-to-sell-or-face-ban-sends/article_124c3e07-5240-5a4f-94c5-4704c145e904.html

Netflix and Prime Video

These two streaming services seem to be popular in Canada. Periodically, shows are added, and shows are removed. **Mobile Syrup** keeps an eye on such changes. Click the link below for a list of removals made in May 2024. Further links on the same page lead to upcoming additions to both services.
https://mobilesyrup.com/2024/04/30/leaving-netflix-canada-prime-video-may-2024/

Google Storage Saver for Photos and Videos on phones

As with Google's computer version, cell phones can now shrink storage space used for Google media, by selecting "**storage saver**". Those who have paid for supplementary storage may not see this offering. Each Google account allows 15GB of free storage space, an amount too little for those who have held an account for over a decade, or who use their phone as a main camera. Media stored on the SD card will not be compressed further, nor content in Gmail. Drive or YouTube, but synchronized content will be, if backup has been chosen in the past.

https://9to5google.com/2024/04/11/google-photos-storage-saver-conversion-android/

Just to consume more storage, Gmail is bringing out a "**Selfie GIF**" feature. If you use Google Messages, and a camera icon appears somewhere, clicking on it will turn on on your camera and prompt you to allow the camera to take a 3 second animated GIF video, which you can then attach to messagess.

5G Home Internet

Rogers offers rural high speed 5G internet for under-served areas, accompanied by a lower monthly fee for existing mobile customers. Two 5G routers are available ($400 -$450 if not returned). They are the **Nokia FastMile 5G Gateway** and the more portable, battery powered **Inseego MiFi X Pro 5G**. Each device is equipped with a unique SIM, capable of 5G speeds, but able to drop back to 4G if the faster coverage is not yet available. They are self-installed and completely wireless, unless you wish to insert a router in to the mix (probably not necessary). 5G speeds should be great for most "Non-Gamers". Fibre still beats it for overall speed.

[I can't say for sure what a new customer would pay, but my link brought up a rapidly calculating screen, that settled on $50CAD/month +$6.50 tax, for 500GB at 100Mbps. Other Rogers website links showed remarkably different prices and speeds.]

Rogers 5G Home Internet cannot make phone calls or send texts, but there are work-arounds for both.
The best deal might be had by calling: - *"For Rogers customers that only have Home services, contact us at 1-866-586-4421 to get your 5G Home Internet plan."*
[For FOCA members (cottagers), it looks like Rogers is offering a 30-day free trial this Spring, with no data cap and a 100Mbps speed.]

https://www.rogers.com/mobility/5g-home-internet

Ryoko Portable Wi-Fi- hot spot

Ryoko may not always use 4G speeds (claims 150MB/s), but you can take it almost anywhere, with no contracts. In any of the 112 countries, turn on the device and scan the QR code that shows up on its screen. That will allow connecting a phone, tablet, or laptop to the Internet. China, where the devices are made, is on the list of accessible countries. Out of the box, each unit provides 500MB of free data.
[I therefore assume the bill for data will escalate significantly, depending on the countries visited.] Perhaps this is the reason for a current 70% discount, to 90 euros, or about $130CAD. Also, the device is useless without a SIM card from **https://viaota.com/**, which costs $30 to $63 CAD/month at the current heavily discounted price for 3GB to 10GB of data.
That's where the monthly contract comes in. https://ryokorouter.com/ryoko-pro/product

DPCUC President's Notes   by Peter Camilleri

Well it's Spring and it seems that appropriate weather has finally arrived. Well at least for today.

In the news, chip maker Zilog has announced that the venerable Z-80 processor chip, used in the TRS-80 and many other notable old time computers, is ceasing production. Updated version of the chip will remain, but the original is going away.

My first serious computer was a CP/M machine based on that chip. For those who are not as old as I am, CP/M was early operating system and was loosely an ancestor of MS-DOS. For those really not young, MS-DOS was the ancestor of Windows. If you don't know what Windows is, please return to your horse and buggy!

That little machine with all of 128K of memory (K not M or G) enabled me to run business applications like the Wordstar word processor, a spreadsheet, a database as well as numerous programming tools, like Borland Turbo Pascal. It was a fun machine and there are time I miss the simplicity of its small architecture.

It appears that I am not the only one nostalgic for the Z-80. Since the announcement, there have been videos published on alternative chips and even an open-sourced replacement. Fun Times!

OK; So *two years ago* I wrote:

> "Finally, in the wide world, I cannot believe that this insane war continues into it's third month as the people of Ukraine fight bravely to save their country. As before, we can only hope and pray that sanity is restored soon, but the toll in human suffering continues unabated."

Another year passes and something has changed. We now have a horrible war raging in Gasa too. It feels so futile but all I can still say is "Pray for Peace".

Peter Camilleri, President DPCUC.

Linux in the News   **by Alex Morrison**

Dillo 3.1 Open-Source Web Browser Released After 9 Year Hiatus

Dillo 3.1 open-source web browser is now available for download with support for floating HTML elements, support for OpenSSL, LibreSSL, and Mbed TLS 2 and 3 for HTTPS, and more.

GIMP 2.10.38 Released with Much-Requested Backports of GTK3 Features

GIMP 2.10.38 open-source image editing software is now available for download with more GTK 3 features backported to GTK 2, as well as various bug and crash fixes.

TUXEDO Stellaris 17 Gen6 Linux Laptop Launches with Intel Core i9-14900HX

TUXEDO Stellaris 17 Gen6 Linux-powered laptop is now available as a high-end gaming computer with an Intel Core i9-14900HX processor.

Neofetch Journey Ends, Repository Now Archived

After nearly four years without new updates, Neofetch's future development has been officially discontinued.

LibreOffice 24.2.3 Office Suite Is Now Available for Download with 79 Bug Fixes

Coming a little over a month after the LibreOffice 24.2.2 update, LibreOffice 24.2.3 is here to address more of those pesky bugs, crashes, and other annoyances reported by users in the latest LibreOffice 24.2 office suite series, thus improving its overall stability and reliability.

Proton 9.0 Released with Support for THE FINALS, Lord of the Rings: Gollum

Proton 9.0 compatibility tool for Steam Play based on Wine is now available for download with support for more Windows games to play on Linux, as well as various improvements.

Linux – Keepass   By Alex Morrison

Password managers of all types are plentiful. Many use an encrypted password vault stored online. Some are free to use and some cost varying amounts of money.

The risk with an online vault [reliability or reputation aside] is the possibility of the online database being hacked. Yes that does happen as we read about this daily.

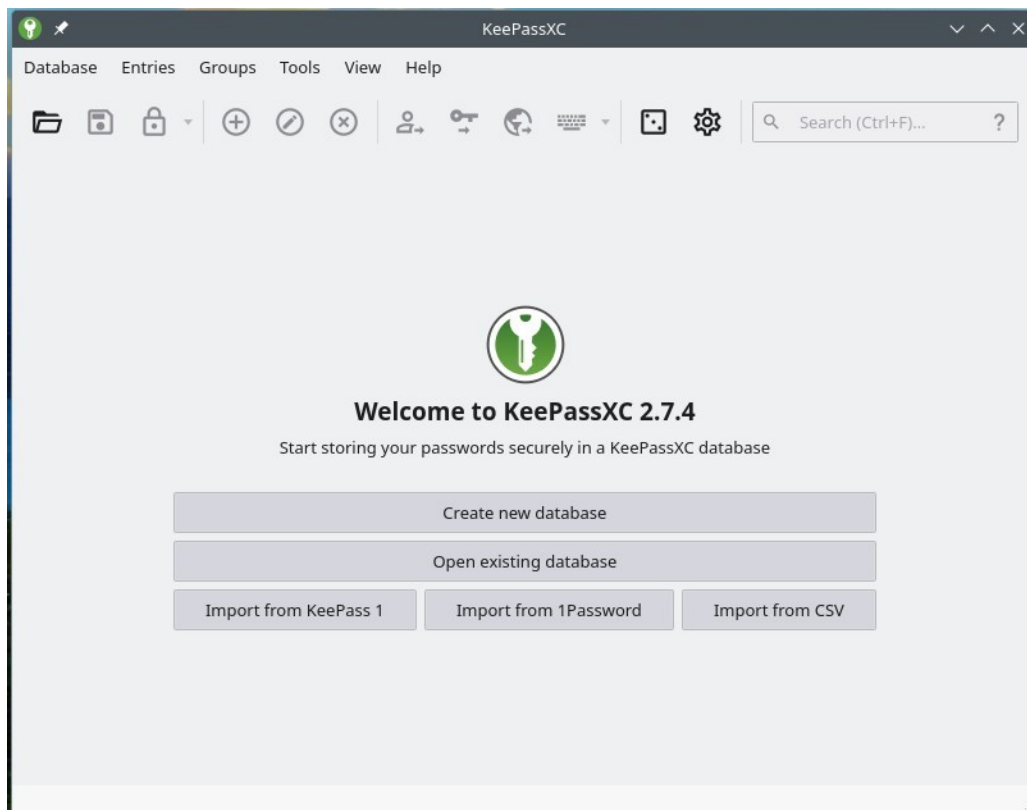I decided to go back to a local encrypted database on my own PC.

Looking at a few options I selected Keepass.

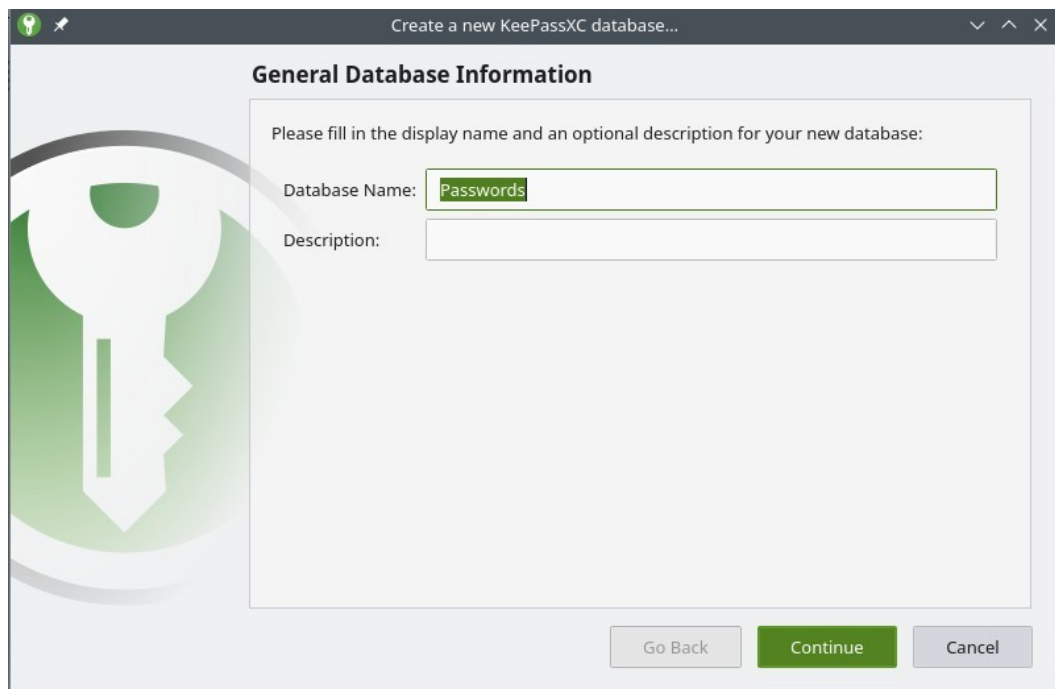Keepass can be installed on Linux, Windows or Mac. Keepass is most Linux software repositories.

It can be downloaded and read about here --→ https://keepass.info/

Without going in to too much detail I will show some images and describe a basic setup. Keepass has a lot of advanced features if needed.

Here is the opening screen when you first launch the program.
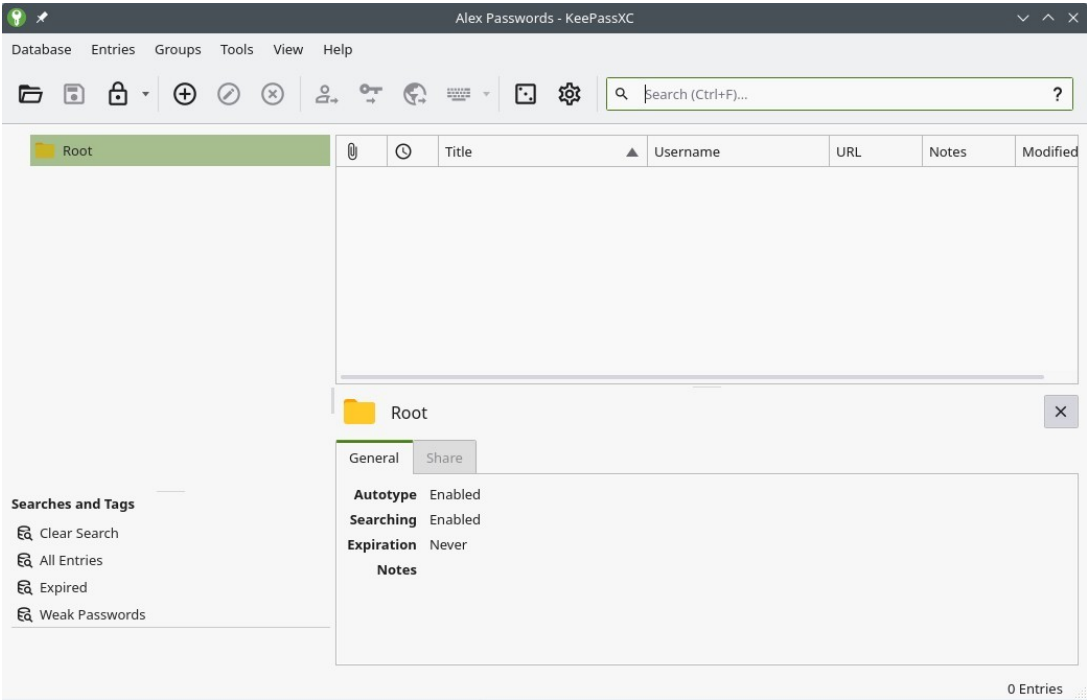
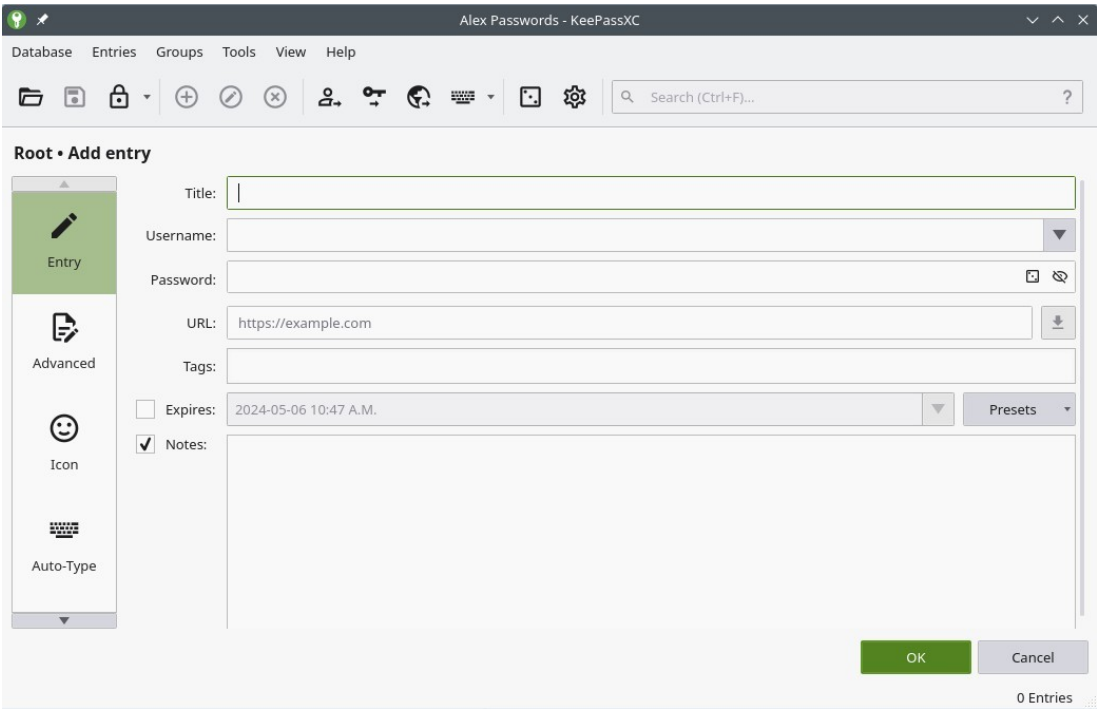Step 1 is to click Create new database and give it a name and description.

When you create the database there are advanced options available if you need them. I skipped this.
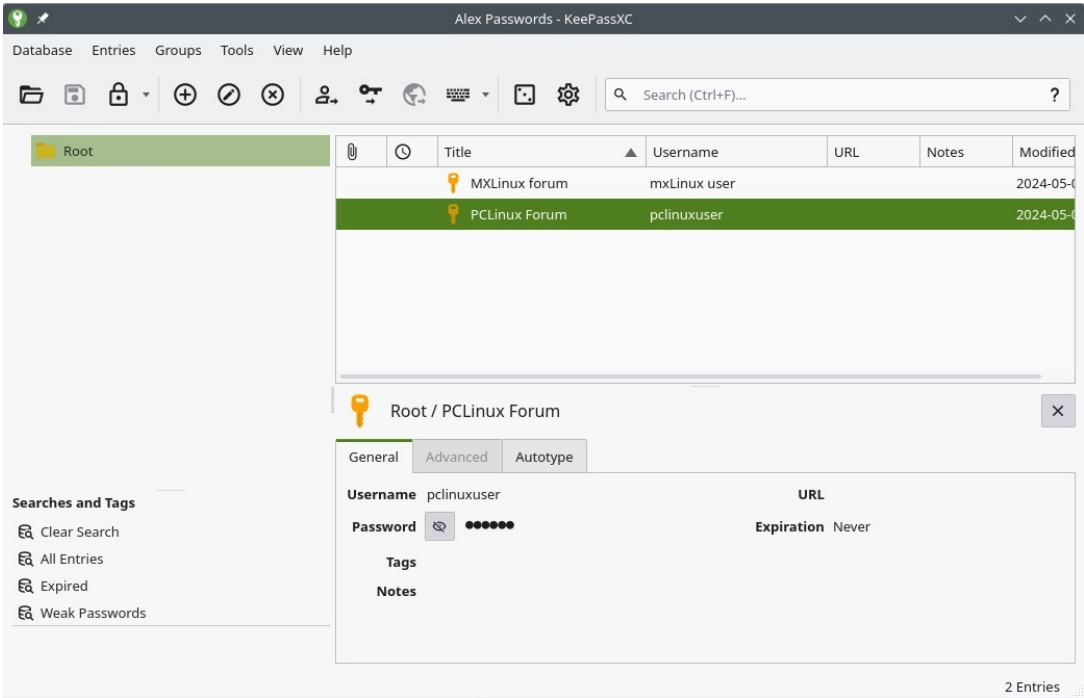
Now we have the Entry screen for password storage. Right Mouse click in the empty window to add a password.
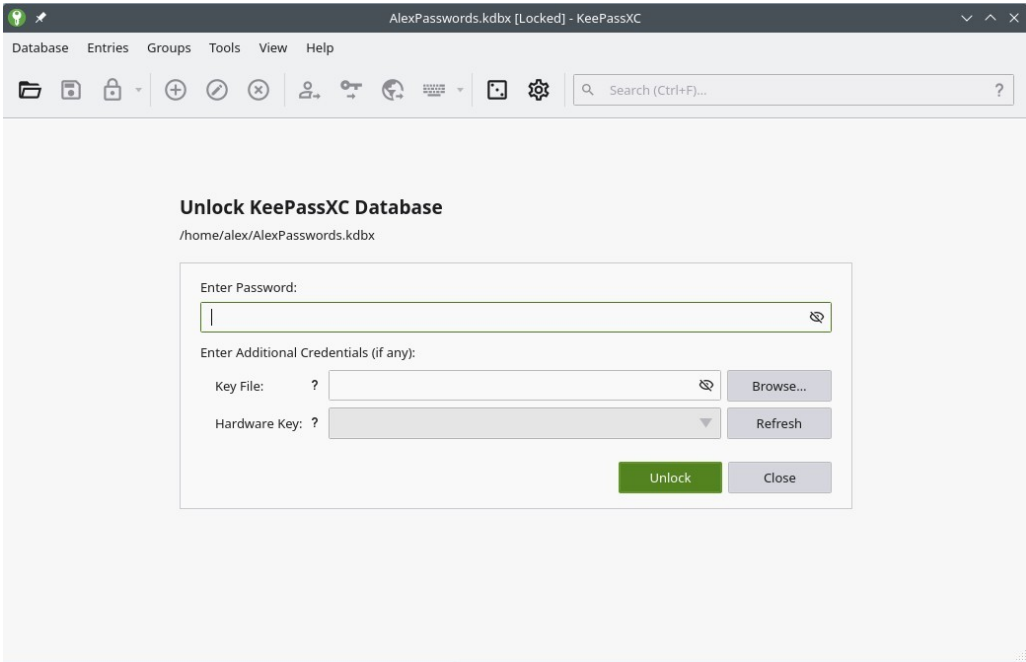
When you click Add Entry the screen below appears. You can give a description [Title], enter your user name and password here. I skipped the advanced options again.
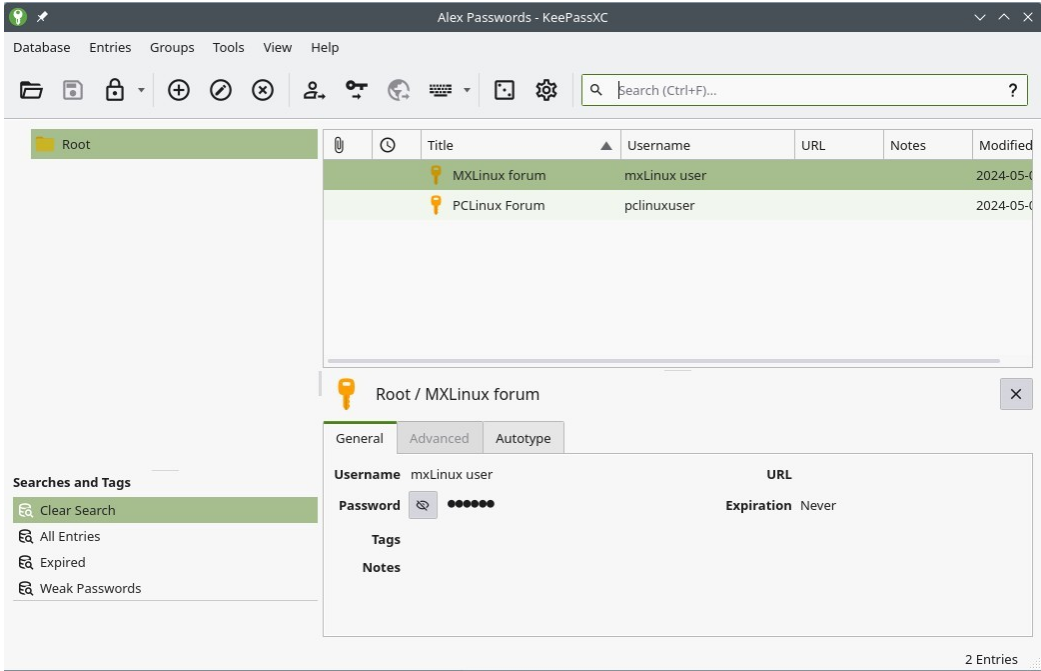
I entered two dummy forum user sand passwords for this example.

After closing the database and reopening the program you just enter the main database password.

Now we are back in the database where my user names and passwords are stored.

There are many advanced options in Keepass that cannot be shown here do to space limitations. We will be talking about Keepass at the next Linux meeting.

Hope you all enjoy Keepass and find it useful.

Free Linux Wallpaper [From MXLinux]

Sudoku   May 2024   by Alex Morrison

EASY

	3	9			4			
				1			9	6
	7			8		4		
	5	8						1
				2				
	9					3	6	
		4		6			5	
7	6			4				
			3			6	2	

Sudoku

The game boards on this page were produced using **Sudoku** on MxLinux 64 Bit running KDE Plasma.

The objective is to fill in the missing numbers ensuring that every 3 X 3 grid has the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats and every full column or row has the numbers 1 through 9 again with no repeats.

If you have troubles solving the puzzles send an email to me and I will send you the solution.

Have fun! Alex

MED

		4	3				7	
7	3			6		8	5	
	8				2			3
		6		7				8
	9		4		3		1	
3				1		5		
9			6					3
	5	3		9			8	4
	4				5	7		

HARD

					4	3		
			6	8		2	7	
		2		7			4	
3	4					8	2	
2								9
		9	5				1	3
	7				6		9	
		9	2		4	3		
			1	8				

IF you don't Like Sudoku puzzles – try these pages

https://www.boatloadpuzzles.com/playcrossword

http://www.freegames.net/puzzle-games.html

https://www.cryptograms.org/play.php

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS SIG's

Special Interest Groups are for members only.

SIG's are really free monthly
seminars with question and answer sessions following the presentation(s)

Members of SIG's enjoy a feeling of community and share common goals and interests.

Most SIG's are informal and members who attend them set the agenda for the meeting based on their own needs.

New ideas for SIG groups are welcome.
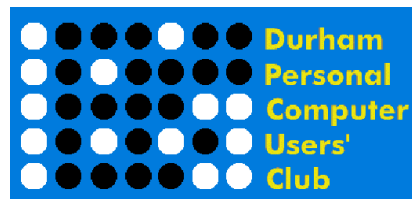
Special Interest Groups

Durham Linux User Groups

Coordinator: Ed Goudge

Our Linux group meet on the first Thursday of every month.

All meetings are currently held using Zoom.

We hope some day to meet again in person.

**DPCUC
EXECUTIVE**

2022-2023

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HOME PAGE   --- http://www.durhampc-usersclub.on.ca/

**Newsletter
Information**

PC Monitor is the official publication of the Durham Personal Computer Users' Club and is published monthly at Oshawa, Ontario.

The DPCUC mailing address is dpcuc@live.com

The PC Monitor cannot be responsible for errors or inaccuracies in the content, although efforts will be made to publish information accurately.