

West Lothian Notes

The winter of 2010-11 treated us once more to snow in respectable quantities. Perhaps this is turning into a trend. Different this year from 2010, it was sit-outable weather in April - we didn't have to wait until May - and April was followed by as short and intense a spring as I can recall. This had some curious side-effects.

Writing about Mid Calder, it has become usual in recent years to see peacock and painted lady butterflies delay their arrival until after the buddleias have finished flowering; too late to enjoy their popular nectar. This year they came in April - far too early! The most interesting news, however, concerns orange-tips. Here, they normally visit in ones and twos, but this year a 'flock' of half a dozen stuck around in April for three days. Always on the wing, it wasn't possible to see what they were feeding on, but, as they are not expected to be here until into May in a normal year, and grace leafy spots and flowering borders until the end of June, we can only hope that the females were in condition for egg-laying. Readers' views please!

Sadly no progress can be reported on the West Lothian Environmental Award Scheme for Schools. For the last couple of years, due to cuts in expenditure, it has not been possible to offer a grant for the best proposals for habitat-creation and environmental improvements to school surroundings. The scheme has been run in the past with the generous help of half or more of the necessary money coming from West Lothian Council.

On a more positive note we can happily report that the Ranger Staff at Almondell and Calderwood Country Park have been able yet again to send the sizeable sum of £55 to the Trust by keeping a collecting tin at the Visitor Centre. The LMC Treasurer has acknowledged this with thanks.

Tom Inglis

Planning Matters - Spring 2011

Because of *Lothian Talk* deadlines, there are usually limited planning matters to report at this time of year but work on designating and protecting the key Local Biodiversity Sites (aka Wildlife Sites) in Edinburgh, West Lothian, East Lothian and Midlothian in partnership with and led by the relevant councils is proceeding very satisfactorily at the moment.

West Lothian

Planning matters for West Lothian are dominated by windfarm projects. A small group of turbines has been erected on a fairly contaminated site of a former colliery between West Calder and Woolfords. It was proposed that the banks of several watercourses be planted to encourage wildlife, including water voles, and that the contaminated water be rigorously filtered to help this happen. Progress on the planting appears to be slow.

Controversial windfarm proposals have been put forward for an exposed and prominent area on the north-west flank of the Pentland Hills. The site straddles the boundary between West Lothian and South Lanarkshire. The plans were called in by Scottish ministers three years ago. Subsequently, the developer withdrew the application on the land in West Lothian. As this in no way diminished the severe visual impact of the South Lanarkshire component, West Lothian Council, as a neighbouring authority, lodged an objection with South Lanarkshire Council. The outcome is being monitored.

At Colzium Hill Farm, close to Harperrig Reservoir, a windfarm of 36 turbines has been proposed by the European Forest Resources Group (EFRG). The developer held public meetings at various places in West Lothian during March 2011 ahead of any Application for Planning Consent being lodged with West Lothian Council. Again the situation is being monitored by our planning representative in the area.

Edinburgh

City of Edinburgh Council has published its legally required 'Development Plan Scheme' document for 2011. This reports that the Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan (RWELP), which was adopted in 2006, is being altered to include the West Edinburgh Planning framework of 2008. This alteration should be concluded this summer. Then the 2010 Edinburgh City Local Plan and the RWELP plan will be replaced by a single all-Edinburgh Local Development Plan, but only after the new Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland (the SES plan) is created to replace the current Lothians Structure Plan (to 2015). Thus the most important activity reported on is preparation for the new (first) Strategic Development Plan for the wider city region (involving input from Fife, Edinburgh, Mid, West and East Lothian planning authorities). We expect to see a Main Issues report published for consultation this summer and it is important to check that strategic guidance for key conservation sites across the Lothians such as the Local Biodiversity Sites is included.

Tim Duffy, Planning Secretary



Lothian Talk

Lothians Members Centre Newsletter

Autumn 2011

<http://www.swtlothians.org.uk>

Thursday 29th September 7.30pm:

All the World's our Garden – The Global Conservation work of the RBGE

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and its three regional Gardens at Dawyck in the Borders, at Benmore in Argyll and at Logan in Galloway, play host to one of the world's richest collections of plants. The 16,000 species nurtured in these remarkably diverse gardens are the product of three centuries of global exploration, as the staff of the Botanics have played a leading role in documenting the plant life of our planet. That work and these collections now not only provide the backbone of four of Scotland's finest Visitor attractions, but also underpin the Education and Conservation work of the RBGE.

In the first decade of the 21st century, horticultural, educational and above all scientific staff from the garden have been actively engaged in work in more than 80 countries all across the globe. This illustrated lecture will reflect on the growth of the RBGE since its founding in 1670, and highlight the importance of its international outreach, focussing on some of its keynote projects from China to Arabia, from Chile to Turkey and from Tasmania to our own Scottish Highlands.

Allan Bennell is Head of Visitor Services & Principal Scientific Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh

Thursday 10th November 7.30pm:

Red Kite Reintroduction - 20 years On

Red kite reintroduction to Scotland began in 1989 and is administered and funded by RSPB Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. The project has since received the support of many landowners, foresters, farmers and volunteers. Having become extinct as a breeding bird in Scotland as a result of human persecution, the red kite has now been reintroduced in four Scottish locations, and is now breeding successfully in the wild with a sustainable and increasing population. It is hoped that eventually the species will recolonise all areas of suitable habitat. The reintroduction project now supports a number of facilities which allow the public to view red kites without fear of disturbance to the birds and provide rural communities with diversification and tourism development opportunities. Red kite reintroduction in the UK is seen as one of the most successful projects of its type anywhere in the world, and the approach is now imitated elsewhere.

Duncan Orr-Ewing is Head of Species and Land Management for RSPB Scotland

This lecture was postponed from last season due to inclement weather.

Lectures start at 7.30 and held at 33 Melville Street Edinburgh.

Admission is free but donations appreciated.

Non-members welcome.

Disabled access available by prior arrangement - contact Averil Stewart 01506 842676

News from Wildlife Watch



Cramond Wildlife Watch group headed out for a trip to Cramond Island to discover its secrets – wildlife and otherwise!

We headed out on the causeway at low tide and started spotting wildlife right away - redshanks, razor shells, mussels and oystercatchers were ticked off on our sheets!

When we arrived on the island 20 minutes later, we learned about people using the island during the war: some of the buildings were used for housing guns and the pillars beside the causeway were to stop ships and submarines from reaching the Forth bridges. We then set about exploring the hill, discovering an old ruined farmhouse and taking in the amazing views.

Next we got busy making art from natural materials found on the beach - things like seaweed, shells and sticks. We made some cool pictures - from lighthouses to trees and imaginary sea monsters! We then tucked into a picnic, which had a flavour of the sea in the shape of prepared seaweed, as well as seaweed tea!

It was a great day and everyone enjoyed exploring.
Donna Matheson

Bats at Hermand Birchwood

Hermand Birchwood is a complex but fairly stable SWT Reserve, so generally nothing much changes. I have, however, noted one rather dramatic shift - certainly noteworthy to a bat - which has occurred over the last few years, so I thought I'd bring it to the membership's attention, in case it was part of a greater pattern.

SWT volunteers and the Lothians Bat Group have since 1996 been counting the bats in this West Lothian SWT Reserve, usually in late October or early November. There are now about 30 bat boxes of various designs. Once established, the numbers have averaged about 15 in total, all pipistrelles (pips). Usually about half to three-quarters would be in one box, the rest scattered here and there. In 2007 and 2008, however, we counted 5 Natterer's bats (in one box) and a third of the usual pips. In 2009 it went back to the usual 15 pips, but in 2010 there were 14 Natterer's and only 2 pips. Global warming? Statistical fluctuation? Dr Stuart Smith of the LBG is sure that we haven't been mistaking Natterer's for pips; in fact he was very excited by the first discovery of Natterer's in the Lothians. It does emphasise the need for surveys, even if it highlights our lack of understanding. By tracking changes, like the dramatic fall and rise of sparrows recently, we may be able to find the causes. This confirms the value of hauling ladders around the reserve when normal people are keeping warm and dry indoors. As to the cause, the jury's out as yet, but we should have a better idea in a few years, when we've gathered a few more statistics.

Jim Hewlett



A (briefly-wakened) Natterer's bat from the survey

Changes in the Lothians Members' Centre Committee

Following the AGM of the Local Members Centre (LMC) in April there were some changes in the Members Centre Committee. On the retirement as Treasurer of Christine Johnson the role was taken on by Trevor Paterson. Tim Duffy was elected Chair in succession to Jim Hewlett, who had to stand down having done his maximum continuous six year stint in this role - and, no doubt, to have some time to himself - although he continues as Vice-Chair.

"After 28 years on the LMC committee as your planning secretary it was more than time I did my stint as Chair!" commented Tim on election to his new role. Tim will continue as planning secretary also but he is on the lookout for more help with the planning side from each of the four council areas (East Lothian, West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh) covered by this LMC. He would welcome contact from anyone who can offer help. He continues also as a trustee of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and as an elected member of the Council of SWT.

A brief excerpt from the LMC constitution summarises the role and range of activities of the LMC nicely: "The object for which the Members Centre is established is to further the object of the Trust as set out in its Memorandum of Association: *to advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations*. Also, in particular, and always in accordance with the said Memorandum of Association, to provide activities for members as appropriate to the membership and circumstances of the Members Centre, such as for example, lectures, field trips, management of Trust reserves, Local Nature Conservation Sites work, planning casework, fund raising and publications".

Two Membership and Reserve Management Group sub-committees currently report regularly to the LMC committee, and in total these three committees seek to carry out these constitutional activities as well as possible with the volunteer effort of members and professional support from SWT staff based at Cramond head office in Edinburgh.

"I look forward to working with the existing members of these committees" says Tim "but I would remind all Lothian Talk member readers that we are always looking for 'new blood' to take the work forward in new and innovative directions. If you are interested in being co-opted onto any of these committees please get in contact."

Contact Details: Tim Duffy, Lothians Members Centre Chair & Planning Secretary

Flat 4F2, 34 Warrender Park Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 1ED Tel/Ans 0131 228 8785

Colin McLean at 90 - A Well Deserved Retirement

Walking along shady rides in Inchwood in Bawsinch reserve last summer, perhaps puzzling to recognise an unfamiliar tree, admiring the flower meadow or trying not to tread on a frog near one of the many ponds, it is hard to imagine that 40 years ago the reserve was little more than an overgrown rubbish dump. Its transformation since 1971, when the Trust purchased Bawsinch, has been the result of a great deal of hard work by many individuals, but one stands out in particular, Colin McLean. Last year he retired as Convenor of the Bawsinch and Duddingston reserve committee. Given that he has recently celebrated his 90th birthday, it can be fairly said to be a very well deserved retirement.

Colin developed his love of wildlife as a child, reinforced during his army service during WWII when he recalls one of the few brighter moments as listening to the dawn chorus of gibbons in the Burmese jungle. After the war, his choice of a career with the Forestry Commission was also influenced by his interest in wildlife. This career choice coincidentally led to his joining SWT in 1969, when the Trust had a stand at an exhibition at Bush estate where he worked. Forgetting the old army maxim of "never volunteer", he joined a Lothian Conservation Volunteer work party in 1972 at the newly-purchased Bawsinch reserve, and by November 1972 had been co-opted onto the reserve committee. In 1976 he became convenor of the committee, and he has served continuously in that position until his retirement, putting in a huge amount of work both in Bawsinch and adjacent Duddingston Bird Sanctuary.

The transformation of Bawsinch has included major excavations for numerous ponds and the creation of a flower meadow. In Duddingston Sanctuary, Colin organised a major scheme in the 1980s to clear a series of channels through the reedbed to the west of Duddingston Loch using a floating dredger. Perhaps his most distinctive achievement, reflecting his forestry interest, is the creation of Inchwood, following proposals developed by the Edinburgh University Forestry Department. Inchwood is a 3.5ha area of Bawsinch, described at the time of its acquisition by the Trust as being "rubbish and willowherb". The wood is now a maturing collection of all species of trees and shrubs known to be native to Scotland, along with smaller groups of most woody species native to Britain. These have all been sourced and planted under Colin's supervision and include groups of Scots pine grown from seed taken from almost every known native pinewood in Scotland.

However Colin's contribution to the Trust has been much more wide ranging than Bawsinch. He was recruited onto the Lothian Branch (later Lothian Members Centre) committee and has served on the committee almost continuously since, in a variety of roles including a term as Chairman and Lothian representative on the Trust Council. He has always passionately believed in the importance of acquiring land for nature reserves - almost any land including overgrown rubbish dumps! - and has been involved in the acquisition and management of many of our current Lothian nature reserves, including Addiewell, Roslin Glen, Linn Dean, Woodhall Dean, Linhouse Glen, Bathgate Lagoons, Tailed Moss and Pease Dean (actually just in the Borders area). At Addiewell reserve Colin was also Convenor until retiring last year.

Fortunately he remains on the Bawsinch committee to give the benefit of his encyclopaedic knowledge of the reserve and its development and he can be seen still on a fine day wielding his trusty slasher clearing paths.

Ken Knowles

Outdoor Events

Musselburgh Lagoons

Saturday 24th Sept 10.30am

Guided wildfowl walk. Meet at Goose Green, end of Balcarres Road, near river mouth (OS Landranger 66 grid ref: NT347734)

Aberlady Bay

Saturday 8th Oct 3pm

Aberlady Local Nature Reserve - the arrival of the wintering geese: meet at Aberlady Reserve Car Park (OS Landranger 66: grid ref NT 472804).

Bawsinch Open Day

Sunday 23rd Oct 11am-4pm

Bawsinch Reserve Duddingston: enter by wicket gate on bend in Duddingston Road West (OS Landranger 66: NT285725). Parking is limited

Remember: Bat Walk - Thursday 11 August 8.45pm - Blackford Pond Edinburgh

The *Scottish Wildlife Trust* is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland (registered number SC040247) having its registered office at *Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cramond House 3 Kirk Cramond Edinburgh, EH4 6HZ*. It is also a Scottish registered charity (charity number SC005792).

