

Lothians Conservation Volunteers reach 40!

Lothians Conservation Volunteers (LCV) has celebrated its 40th birthday! Founded in September 1970 by then SWT members as the 'Lothians Conservation Corps' the group was set up to carry out practical conservation work on SWT sites.

From modest beginnings the group quickly established itself as a source of workers willing to come out in all weathers and tackle a range of jobs. A dedicated core of repeat volunteers have built up considerable expertise in practical conservation tasks and the group has also amassed a large collection of tools, including a range of unusual specialist tools. This means that clients can be offered volunteers who are fully equipped as well as keen.

An entirely volunteer-run organisation from its earliest days, LCV still has no paid employees and the volunteers juggle full time jobs, childcare commitments and LCV work with considerable skill and commitment.

LCV now runs a task virtually every Sunday of the year and has been expanding a programme of Saturday tasks to cope with increased demand. A typical workday starts at 09:30 when a group of volunteers is collected from central Edinburgh and driven to that day's site. There the client will outline the task and then the volunteers are let loose until lunchtime. Free tea, coffee and biscuits over lunch restore any flagging spirits and keep everyone motivated until tea-break time. The day usually ends at about 16:30 or 17:00 so as to have everyone back at the pick up point by 17:30.

Though the group now works for some twenty clients SWT remain the biggest, receiving around 140 work days each year. In the last year volunteers have worked at four SWT reserves: Bawsinch, Addiewell Bing, Red Moss and Linhouse Glen. On these sites they have planted trees, felled, weeded and pulled up trees, cleared invasive species and carried out pond improvement work. The group has also got a new bus on the road and, with assistance from SWT, are working to get all their drivers properly qualified to drive it.

Looking forward, LCV hope to expand the range of sites they are involved with, to consolidate the Saturday task programme and to work out a way of fitting wheelbarrows into their new bus. Also, there is always space for new volunteers, so if any SWT members are interested in a bit of practical conservation activity they should check out the excellent website at www.lcv.org.uk.

Here's to another 40 years!

Louisa Martin

The work of LCV will be the subject of a presentation at the Lothian Members' Centre AGM on Thursday 21st April.



Photo: Memories from the 70s

Letter to the Editor

In the Autumn 2010 issue of your Lothian Talk newsletter there is a piece on Darwin and Our Native Orchids with the following statement: "In the early 19th century it was widely supposed that the Creator had made these plants for man's enjoyment as a form of 'Celestial Art'. Darwin saw this explanation as a challenge and he systematically studied all of our orchids attempting to show that these shapes had evolved for some practical purpose. He was able to demonstrate that they were all 'contrivances' to attract insects to visit the flowers and in doing so transfer pollen from plant to plant cross-pollinating them."

Two points should be made in response. First, these explanations are not alternatives. The Creator has designed a clever and practical pollination system where flowers and insects are mutually interdependent. In addition the flowers appear beautiful to most people.

Second, what does the word 'contrivance' imply? It seems to be implying that the flower manages to make itself look like a bee in order to attract pollinators. The theory that out of billions of possible flower configurations these ones 'just happened' to look like a bee and therefore survived has about as much credibility as the multiverse theory.

Alison Carter



Lothian Talk

Lothians Members Centre Newsletter
Spring 2011

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

Members' Centre AGM Thursday 21 April 7.30pm: 40 Years of Lothians Conservation Volunteers

This year our AGM at 33 Melville Street Edinburgh takes the form of a presentation by Matt McCabe on the work of Lothians Conservation Volunteers through its 40 years of association with the SWT. This will be followed by refreshments and our annual business meeting. Admission is free but donations appreciated. Note that disabled access is available but must be arranged in advance with Averil Stewart (01506 842676).

George Bigley - Conservation Worker: An Appreciation:

A band of friends known officially as the Baden-Powell Guild, but affectionately as the Goldies, has just lost its leader, George Bigley. George died of cancer on August 23rd 2010 at the age of 88.

The Goldies had common interests in the Scouts, Caravanning and Conservation. George led them from 1987 in all sorts of work at Bawsinch, Addiewell and Vane Farm. For one day a week during winter months, they tackled anything. Pond digging, path making, tree planting, weeding, felling were all grist to their mill, and their involvement has been invaluable.

George often joked about the lack of a Christmas Bonus from SWT. He has it now, in the affectionate memory, and appreciation of his work.

Colin McLean

Outdoor Events

Badger Watches - Wed 15 & Tues 21 June Mon 11 & Wed 20 July

Watches take place at Corstorphine Hill in Edinburgh, starting at 7.30. These events are very popular but not suitable for children under 10. Places are limited. If you would like to be considered please send a letter and stamped addressed envelope to Averil Stewart, 29 Highfield Crescent, Linlithgow EH49 7BG or email her at gaveril.stewart@virgin.net before April 29, stating your preferred date(s) and number of places requested. These will be allocated by draw in May. Full details will be provided for those whose application is successful. For those who attend, a donation of about £5.00 is suggested for Edinburgh and Lothians Badger Group.

Aberlady Bay: April 16 and June 18 10.30am

Led as usual by John Harrison, the emphasis of the April visit is bird life, while in June we look mainly at flowers and butterflies. Meet at 10.30am at Aberlady Reserve Car Park (OS Landranger 66: NT 472804).

Musselburgh Lagoons: May 14 10.30am

Our regular outing to this waterfowl-rich location, led by Nick Aitken. Meet at 10.30am at Goose Green, end of Balcarres Road, near the mouth of the Esk (OS Landranger 66: NT 347734).

Reminder:

Thursday 10 March 7.30pm
33 Melville Street Edinburgh
Eurobeaver - Environmental Engineers for the 21st Century
Rob Thomas

Biodiversity Week 22-29 May

Come and see us at the SWT/LMC stand at Royal Botanic Gardens, John Hope Gateway on Sunday 22 May at the start of Biodiversity Week.

Fundraising Briefing

At the end of 2010 it is very gratifying to report that in the past six years over £25k have been raised by a small but stalwart band of volunteers.

As we go to press we know there will be can collections at Sainsbury's, Straiton, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 4, 5 and 6 July between 10 and 4. If you can help, Averil will be delighted to hear from you.

Can collectors will be having a pot-luck supper in late spring. If you would like to know more and so get a chance to meet other volunteers, again - please contact Averil.

Averil Stewart: 01506 842676
E-mail: gaveril.stewart@virgin.net

With sadness we report the death of two very active can collectors: Joss McLean, who along with Colin made a formidable team doing the first two hour stint together on every possible occasion; and Pat Simpson, a most regular and effective can collector who was also membership secretary for many years. Both Joss and Pat have been much appreciated and will be greatly missed by family and friends.

Lothian Talk

Feedback and contributions to:
lothiantalk@qab.org.uk

Event Reports

Fantastic Fungi at Bawsinch

We had a perfect morning for our fungi foray on 30 October at SWT Bawsinch wildlife reserve, noting 24 different species. We learnt that fungi are not a plant or an animal but have a kingdom of their own and we have over 9000 different species in the UK. They are challenging to study but we made a good start by learning the difference between Funnel Caps (with decurrent gills) and Toughshanks (never with decurrent gills). We learnt about stomach fungi, which keep their spores inside a puffball, earthball or earthstar before splitting the top and "puffing" out, and also found some bracket fungi including the turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*) and the artists' bracket (*Ganoderma applanatum*). Other highlights included the stunning purple edible wood blewit (*Lepista nuda*), a troop of huge shaggy parasol (*Macrolepota rhacodes*) and a disgusting smelling stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*). A fox kept us company as we forayed on the lawns and a stoat ran past as we closed the gate. A wonderful morning!

Sam Ranscombe

A full species list from the foray can be found on the website:

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



The Wildlife Watch Foray: Photo: Donna Mathieson

...And Wildlife Watch had their very own Foray!

Fungi-tastic Foray!

On a crisp October morning Cramond and Edinburgh South Wildlife Watch groups met up for the first time and went for a fungal foray at Bawsinch Reserve. The group was led by a Historic Scotland Ranger, and the kids (and leaders!) learned some weird and interesting fungi facts!

Starting by doing a sweep of the large meadow, there were a few small species to be seen. Following on into the woodland, the kids were met by large bracket fungi, and heard stories about people using it to sharpen razors in the past. They also found Jelly Ear fungus, Puff Balls and Fly Agaric amongst others, and listened to tales of stage managers in Shakespearean times using Giant Puffball spores to create snowstorm effects on stage!

There was no shortage of wildlife either with frogs being spotted in abundance, and even a newt being found by one eagle eyed spotter!

This was a great chance to check out the beautiful Bawsinch reserve and to learn a lot about fungi too! A great morning was had by all.

Donna Mathieson

News from Lothian Reserves from 2010.

The most immediate recall of 2010 is the reserves disappearing under a blanket of snow in late November and only starting to reappear at the end of the year. Apart from affecting wildlife, particularly birds, it also made management difficult or impossible – for example clearing snowberry at *Bawsinch* suddenly became a whole lot harder with the shrubs buried under a carpet of snow!

However, prior to November significant management work was done on reserves last year. At *Red Moss* the major task of replacing the entire length of the original boardwalk was completed and at the pond a fine new platform, with disabled access, was built for pond dipping. At *East Lammermuir Deans* new fencing was installed around the areas where rockrose grows. This should slowly improve conditions for the small colony of northern brown argus butterfly by allowing control of the timing and level of grazing. At *Erraid Wood* a new gate is being constructed to allow access from the bordering Pentlands Regional Park – completion was delayed by the snow. More dams were constructed at *Longridge Moss* and *Tailend Moss* to help reduce drainage and preserve the bog areas. At *Woodhall Dean* the access path through the reserve was reinstated in the section where it was destroyed by a landslip. At *Linhouse Glen* substantial work was carried out cutting and clearing bracken to preserve grassland and also clearing birch regeneration from the heathland area. Ideally the reserve would be grazed but difficulties of access have to date prevented this.

Johnstone Terrace Wildlife Garden again managed to be well at the top of the class for visitor numbers: during the Open Day in June 210 people were recorded. The garden is also well used by keyholders and the local Cowgate Nursery as well as other schools.

It is difficult to give an overview of the wildlife observations for the year until reserve reports have been received but there are nonetheless some interesting records. Nuthatch, which have been breeding in woodland adjacent to *Roslin Glen* for several years, were at last recorded as successfully breeding on the reserve. There was some excitement at *Erraid Wood* when a male pied flycatcher was seen inspecting nest boxes but unfortunately nothing came of it - perhaps 2011 will see a pair nesting. At *Hermand Birchwood* the annual bat count in the boxes found 14 Natterer's bats this year, many more than previously. I had the impression that butterflies had a good year and was pleased to see numbers of small pearl bordered fritillary at *Red Moss* and numerous dark green fritillaries at *Linn Dean*. These were also recorded at *Linhouse Glen* along with numerous greater butterfly and fragrant orchids. One more exotic observation by Neville Crowther was of an erythristic (reddish coloured) adder at *Woodhall Dean*.

A more complete overview of 2010 will be prepared for the AGM and this will be posted on the Members Centre website.

Ken Knowles

Outdoor Events

Bawsinch Open Day Sun 29 May 11-4

Enter by wicket gate, Duddingston Road West by bend in road, opposite parking bays (OS Landranger 66: NT285725).

Bat Walk

Thursday 11 August 8.45pm

Blackford Pond Edinburgh

Blackford Pond in Edinburgh, below the Royal Observatory, is one of the few places locally where we can guarantee to see more than one species of bat. On previous walks with Stuart Smith we have seen pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats. The bat detectors provided convert the bats' ultrasonic echo-location calls into audible sound, enabling us to identify different species and to note various behaviour patterns. Meet inside the gate to Blackford Pond on Cluny Gardens at the junction with Oswald Road.

A £3.00 donation to Lothian Bat Group is optional but appreciated. A torch is strongly advised.

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).

Visit Report

Red Kites at Ardgaty

On Saturday 6th November 26 SWT members and their friends enjoyed a most interesting visit to Ardgaty near Doune to see red kites from the purpose-built hide overlooking the area where food is put out daily to attract the birds. Red kites, which had become extinct in Scotland many years ago, were reintroduced to the area as part of a programme begun in 1989 and there is now a thriving population in Perthshire. As soon as the food was put out a large number of kites arrived, probably between 40 and 50 birds. We watched their amazing acrobatics as they zoomed in to snatch food from the ground. We were also given an informative talk about the birds and the reintroduction programme by Mike, the Warden at the site, and our members were able to take some excellent photographs: see the Lothian Members' Centre website.

Eric Brown

Planning Matters - Spring 2011

Midlothian

Historic Scotland has, on its own initiative, consulted publicly on its Mavisbank Policies Landscape Management Plan. According to this, it believes it has a duty to now consider progressing management of the 'woodland' policies surrounding the derelict Mavisbank estate house – irrespective of whether money is ever found for the maintenance or re-establishment of the core historic building itself.

The SWT has responded by pointing out that the site has long been designated a Wildlife Site/ Local Biodiversity Site. As such it is protected in the current Midlothian Local Plan and has long been proposed as a candidate Local Nature Reserve (LNR - legal Local Authority designation) in accordance with the Council's existing Local Biodiversity Action Plan. We encouraged Historic Scotland to take the LNR proposal seriously; to recognise the 40 years of development of the surrounding landscape as an important wildlife refuge for the adjacent urban areas of Midlothian; and that a local authority-led Local Nature Reserve was a relevant and cost-effective vehicle to take forward appropriate management of nature and landscape for both people and wildlife which would enhance aspects of the historic landscape near the building.

Tim Duffy, Lothians Members Centre Planning Secretary

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