

Learning about our Local Wildlife

Graeme Wilson, Centre Manager of The Wildlife Information Centre, writes the first in a short series of articles about the work of TWIC

TWIC is the biological records centre that covers the Lothians and the Scottish Borders, a 'one-stop shop' providing an objective, independent wildlife information service for people and organisations from all sectors. First known as the Wildlife Institute, TWIC was founded in 1991 as a project run by the Scottish Wildlife Trust under its job creation scheme. Over the years, the Centre has changed to become a self-supporting project within the SWT, employing a centre manager and benefiting from contributions from volunteers. Since April 2002 the Centre has become a long-term venture in its own right, a not-for-profit company with charitable status with its own staff and resources. In 2009 the Centre expanded the geographical area covered to encompass the Scottish Borders.

Currently funded through grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage and other grant giving bodies, Service Level Agreements with various statutory and non-statutory bodies and from income generated from providing data to consultancies, TWIC is a focal point for biological recording, working to increase our knowledge of land, freshwater and marine wildlife throughout the Lothians and the Borders.

The Centre provides a wide range of data services including routinely supplying data to local authorities for screening planning applications, to consultants for preparing environmental assessments and to conservation bodies for writing management plans. It is only possible for TWIC to supply this wide range of services by ensuring that it continues to receive up to date biological records. This is done in several ways.

Information Gathering

Firstly TWIC works closely with organisations and individual recorders recording wildlife and habitats on a regular basis. Data-sharing agreements ensure that TWIC has as much verified information as possible and that the organisations and individuals are sent the information that TWIC holds to add to their own records. Additionally, TWIC works closely with volunteers and actively encourages the public to get involved with recording wildlife and sending in what they record. These records are verified by experts to make sure that they are correct before being added to TWIC's databases. All records are useful but TWIC works hard to try to target survey effort to specific sites and species if a need has been identified.

One way this is done is by organising recording outings for recorders at several locations each year from spring to autumn. These outings are attended by a wide variety of individuals, from experienced recorders through to the more inexperienced looking for a chance to expand their identification skills. Sites are chosen to benefit the partner organisations that TWIC works with. For example, a site may be a proposed Local Biodiversity Site (LBS), former SWT Wildlife Sites, but there is a lack of species data. The recording outings can gather enough species data to allow the site to be assessed and added to the relevant local authority's list of LBSs.

Public surveying effort is also encouraged by TWIC running workshops, open to everyone, which assist in training volunteers in areas such as habitat surveying and species identification. Workshops are run at various times throughout the year so it is worth checking TWIC's website for up-to-date information. Over the years TWIC has carried out several public surveys to encourage recording and also to help gather a picture of species distribution. The current survey is looking at hedgehog numbers in the Lothians and Borders.

Awareness Raising

TWIC also has a role in raising public awareness of biological recording and providing an opportunity for interested and like-minded people to assess and share information about biological recording. TWIC has been developing various ways of doing this over the years and developments in the last few years have expanded this role. These have included twice-yearly conferences, one in the Lothians and one in the Borders, to allow people to meet and listen to interesting presentations on a range of subjects, as well as having the opportunity to discuss relevant issues with a wide range of people.

TWIC has also recently developed a strong online presence to assist in awareness-raising. As well as a website, about to undergo a facelift, TWIC also has a Facebook page and Twitter account. These social networking sites are being developed to let as wide an audience as possible know about what TWIC is, what is happening and how they can become involved. The most recent online development has been the launch of a new TWIC discussion forum in December of 2011 to replace under-utilised Yahoo Groups. Details of TWIC's Facebook page, Twitter account and discussion forum and much more, such as the latest news and events, can all be found at www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk.

The next article there will look at one of TWIC's key projects, the Hedgehog Survey.



Lothian Talk

Lothians Members Centre Newsletter
Spring 2012

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

'Our Lothians Reserves'

Thursday 19th April 7.30pm: 33 Melville Street Edinburgh.

For our final evening meeting of the season, three of our Reserves Convenors will give short illustrated presentations on their reserves. These will be followed by the AGM of Lothian Members Centre. Admission is free but donations are appreciated. Non-members are welcome, and disabled access is available by prior arrangement - contact Averil Stewart 01506 842676.

Addiewell Bing in West Lothian has been an SWT Wildlife Reserve since 1987. Once an oil shale bing, it was re-graded and largely planted with trees in the early 80s to ensure it did not collapse into the Breich Water. Over the last 25 years, a variety of habitats have developed, and lodgepole pine is being replaced with Scots Pine and native deciduous species. We shall look at the different habitats and their management and how these have developed over 25 years.

The natural history interest of *Red Moss* in the Pentlands south of Balerno was formally recognised in 1952 when the site was designated as an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). Although the site also includes birch woodland, marshy grassland, scrub and a pond, its principal interest is for extensive raised bog, host to some 43 species of bryophyte, including ten recorded species of sphagnum moss. Round-leaved sundew and the pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly are other species of interest.

The third reserve to be presented is *Woodhall Dean* in East Lothian: an article about this reserve, and details of a visit to this reserve on Saturday 5th May, can be found in the inside pages of this *Lothian Talk*.

Outdoor Event

Saturday 31st March 2012 7.15am

Dancing Grebes on Linlithgow Loch

Early morning walk at Linlithgow Loch with a Historic Scotland Ranger. We will hopefully see our breeding pairs of Great Crested Grebes dancing and displaying in the quiet of the morning, along with the dawn chorus possibly including the first of the spring arrivals. Dawn 6.50 approx.

Meeting place: car park at SW corner of Loch, access via Water Yett, 1/4 mile west of Palace & Market Cross at 7.15am. (OS Landranger 65: NS998771)

There is an opportunity afterwards to join the Stewarts for a late breakfast. If this appeals please let Averil know by the 30th 01506 842676

Thursday 8th March 7.30pm:

**Reminder:
Carrifran Wildwood: Past, Present and Future**

33 Melville Street Edinburgh.

News from Wildlife Watch

North Berwick Wildlife Club have been helping keep their town looking pretty by planting some bulbs. They went out with a *North Berwick in Bloom* volunteer, and began digging holes and planting some tulip bulbs in their local park - they are all looking forward to spring when they can try and spot the flowers they planted! Keeping with the floral theme, the kids then did their bit for charity by planting some daffodil bulbs (and getting mud everywhere!) which they will care for all winter and then sell in aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Donna Matheson



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).

Planning Matters - Spring 2012

City of Edinburgh Council is consulting on the main issues report (issues that should be covered by policy) for the forthcoming Edinburgh Local Development Plan. Developments at the Craighouse campus (formerly Edinburgh Napier University) adjacent to the Easter Craiglockhart Hill LNR are being watched closely.

East Lothian Council has consulted us on their proposal to set up a new formal Local Nature Reserve (LNR) at Levenhall Links. An LNR gives extra legal protection to a site being set up under legislation for Local Authorities and makes it easier to attract management funding from outside sources, and so is likely to be very good for the long term future of such sites.

Proposals for enhancing the Midlothian Ski Centre at Hillend are also being watched for their possible impact on open green spaces in the area.

Reminder: for Midlothian and East Lothian planning matters please write to Susan Manson, Castlesteads, Dalkeith, EH22 2NJ, in the first instance

Tim Duffy, Lothians Members Centre Planning Secretary
Flat 4F2, 34 Warrender Park Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 1ED
Tel/Ans 0131 228 8785

LMC Associate Webmaster

LMC wants to maintain and improve on its web page. LMC is lucky in having Barry O'Kane with his expertise in web design. There is an opportunity for a younger volunteer to join him and so help develop and maintain the site. If interested contact: barry@endzone.co.uk

Summer Events

Aberlady Bay: April 14 at 10.30am and July 21 at 9.30am

Led as usual by John Harrison, the emphasis of the May visit is bird life, while in July is mainly a moth-trapping event: please note the earlier time for this. Meet at Aberlady Reserve Car Park. (OS Landranger 66: NT 472804).

Bat Walk Thursday 9 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. 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 and insect repellent are strongly advised. There is no need to book in advance.

Badger Watches - June 18 & 27 July 3 & 20

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.

Can Collections

Look out for LMC volunteers with green sashes collecting:

- Saturday 14 April at Morrisons, Ferry Road

- Wednesday & Thursday 20 & 21 June at Tesco South Queensferry
If you would like to help then or in other locations for which dates have not yet been given, Averil will be delighted to hear from you: gaveril.stewart@virgin.net

Yahoo Group

If you are not already a subscriber to the SWT Lothian Members Yahoo Group, why not sign up today? All subscribers receive e-mail reminders for SWT talks and outings, which are sent out approximately one week before each event. If it becomes necessary to cancel or postpone an event, we will also do our best to notify you by a further e-mail. Occasionally we may also let you know of events run by other organisations, if we think these may be of interest. Membership is free and entails no risk of spam. Simply submit a membership request to the administrator at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/swt-lothian>

Musselburgh Lagoons: May 19 at 2.00pm

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

Bawsinch Reserve Visiting

As noted in the last Lothian Talk, we will be opening Bawsinch Reserve Duddingston for a guided walk at 2pm for approximately two hours on the first Sunday of each month from April to October in 2012. If visitors prefer they will be able to either make use of the hide or simply walk the same route at their own pace. There will be no charge but donations would be welcome. Enter by wicket gate, Duddingston Road West by bend in road, opposite parking bays (OS Landranger 66: NT285725).

News from Lothian Reserves 2011

The cold winter spell at the end of 2010 does not seem to have affected bird breeding numbers judging by the results of the Common Bird Census at *Roslin Glen*, with numbers of many species in 2011 equal to or higher than the previous year. Following the previous year's first recorded breeding of nuthatch actually in the SWT reserve at Roslin, it is pleasing to report that four territories were recorded in 2011. Redstarts bred successfully at *Woodhall Dean* in a nest box put up for them. A barn owl box was put up there this year so now we have to wait to see if it is successful. The annual survey of dragonflies and damselflies at *Bawsinch* and *Duddingston Loch* recorded six species with first sightings for a number of years of common darter and emerald damselfly. It is hoped that work carried out on the ponds during 2011 will help maintain these species along with benefitting other pond life. An otter was seen at *Woodhall Dean* early in the year and it was pleasing to have five records of otter at *Bawsinch* during November – generally seen from the hide swimming and feeding in Duddingston Loch.

Ken Knowles

Why you should visit Woodhall Dean

Woodhall Dean Reserve is a classic example of an East Lothian dean where the steep-sided gorges have made cultivation impossible and therefore ensured the preservation of ancient woodland with consequent benefit to wild life. Being off the beaten track it is quiet yet a circular path allows the varying habitats in the reserve to be accessed. The pure sessile oaks, some coppiced, some in their full ancient forms, are the main attraction. A relatively new planting, in 1993-94, of Scottish native trees is thriving on the sheltered steep banks, and it is here in warm weather that basking adders are often seen. Mature hawthorn trees form a tunnel into the centre of the woodland and swathes of bluebells start here and continue through the reserve.

The two burns, Weatherly and Woodhall, have cut out deep gorges. The constant humidity and woodland canopy makes sure of a lot of botanical interest with 152 species of bryophyte being recorded. Bridges cross the burns though the ancient stone-built packhorse bridge is better to be admired than crossed. Dippers can be seen here especially in the breeding season and the many bird boxes along the sides of the burns give protection to many tit families from the marauding grey squirrels. A small pond was constructed by volunteers close to the tinker's leap bridge and frog spawn and dragon fly larvae flourish there.

A well-used badger sett can be viewed from the path amongst the oak trees and the open knoll above the sett is a favourite spot for roe deer.

With the purchase of land from the farmer, the woodland has been expanded outwards with many Scottish native trees being planted. Where the ground was very exposed the rank grass has been cut and raked to encourage meadowland. This varied habitat, both open ground and woodland, encourages all kinds of bird life with warblers and red starts thriving in the spring and finch flocks in winter.

You are welcome to join us on a visit on Saturday 5th May - or visit at leisure in your own time.

Lesley Fairweather

Visit to Woodhall Dean: Saturday 5th May at 10am

Booking is not required to participate in the visit to Woodhall Dean reserve near the village of Spott, East Lothian, but a car-share is planned, not least to reduce pressure on the limited parking available. If you are able to offer places in your car, or would like to avail yourself of places in a car, could you fill in the form below and send it to *Quintin Blane, 18D Kirkhill Road, Penicuik, EH26 8HZ* not later than Saturday 28th April, or send the details in an e-mail to lothiantalk@qab.org.uk

Visit to Woodhall Dean

Name..... Contact Tel No..... E-mail:.....

Offering places/Requiring Places (delete as appropriate) No of places offered/sought.....

Musselburgh Lagoons Visit - An Apology

The Committee of Lothians Members Centre wish to apologise for the non-appearance of the leader at the planned visit to the Musselburgh Lagoons on 24th September. This was due to sudden illness and there was no opportunity to inform participants of this. Because most events are not pre-booked it is not possible to inform intending participants individually of unforeseen changes. If in doubt get in touch with the Event Contact whose telephone number is listed in the *Events and Activities* leaflet to confirm arrangements. If you have access to e-mail, membership of the LMC Yahoo Group is also recommended.