

Planning Matters - Autumn 2010

Edinburgh

The new *Edinburgh City Local Plan 2010-2015* has been published, with considerable input from ourselves, designating and protecting 29 Local Biodiversity Sites (LBSs) and 13 Geodiversity Sites. The Corstorphine Hill and Ravelston Wood LBS incorporates the Corstorphine Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The LNR designation for this council-owned site should afford it greater protection via active management for both people and wildlife. However press reports indicate the council is considering swapping an important sector of the current LNR – an area good for shrub cover, views and picnics, some important plants and a badger sett – for a piece of land much higher on the hill currently owned by Edinburgh Zoo. This land is of less local nature reserve value but the swap is said to allow the zoo to fulfil its modernising plan in accordance with current Health and Safety and DDA legislation. The pressure on the council must be enormous, but it was they themselves who designated the LNR, an example of the council actually fulfilling its modern statutory 'Duty to Conservation'. Changing such an LNR boundary without scientific justification for nature conservation would be contrary to that duty and to the intent of that legislation and other designations such as Greenbelt and LBS. Surely the zoo does not wish to replace its potential for scientific world-wide zoo-based conservation effort by destroying part of an adjacent Local Biodiversity Site? Whatever happened to *Think globally Act locally?*

Giving back to the Community

Saughton Prison's Birdbox Project

About a year ago a young prison officer in HMP Edinburgh had an inspired idea. Craig Widdowson, who had trained as a joiner before entering the prison service, suggested that the prison training workshops might be used to make bat and bird boxes for wildlife charities and community groups. "It seemed to me a way to give the men focus to their time in the workshops" says Craig "and it was also a way for them to give something back to the community". With support from organisations like Friends of the Pentlands, primary schools and local countryside rangers, there are now about 200 bat and bird boxes in Edinburgh and Lothians that have been made in Saughton. An imminent development is the provision of swift boxes in Edinburgh to provide new nesting-places following the renovation of buildings that have been traditional nest sites for these birds.



"As a prison we are not allowed to make a profit from a project such as this, so we just charge for materials" says Craig. Asking for about £6 for traditional tit and robin boxes up to about £20 for owl and kestrel boxes, Craig's team are prepared to turn their hand to any kind of box, all of them made to RSPB recommended standards from cedar, which does not require treatment and so are safe and of low-maintenance.

"The men get real satisfaction out of this" says Craig. "They love to hear what is happening out there and how their handiwork is being appreciated by their intended residents".

Craig would like to hear from schools or community groups who may be interested in this project – further information from the Lothian Talk editor at lothiantalk@qab.org.uk.

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).

West Lothian

There is a proposed extension to the Crystal Rig Windfarm in the Lammermuirs and we have commented on a proposed extension from South Lanarkshire Blacklaw Windfarm into West Lothian. There is a proposal coming for a 28-turbine windfarm at Harburnhead near West Calder, 1.5 km from our Hermand Birchwood reserve and close to several candidate Local Biodiversity Sites.

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Lothian Talk

Lothians Members Centre Newsletter
Autumn 2010

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

Darwin and Our Native Orchids

Thursday 10 February 2011

Our wild orchids are well known for their beauty and amazing variety of form. They vary from the wonderful golden flowers of the ladies slipper orchid to the bizarre green two-leaved plants of the twayblade. There are also those strange orchids whose flowers resemble bees, flies and spiders.

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.

The speaker has compiled a sequence of pictures to illustrate Darwin's brilliant observations and conclusions.



Fly Orchid Photo: R Sexton

Dr Roy Sexton is Chairman of Stirling SWT Members Centre.

Eurobeaver - Environmental Engineers for the 21st Century Thursday 10 March 2011

The beaver has been successfully reintroduced to over 24 countries across Western and Northern Europe. In May 2008 the partnership of The Scottish Wildlife Trust and The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland received a licence for a trial reintroduction of the European beaver to Scotland. The first animals were released one year later. The trial runs until 2014 and the outcomes will be used to inform the Scottish Government on any future full reintroduction. The release site in the Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll, is already of very high conservation value with parts designated as SSSI and SAC. The scientific monitoring of the impacts of beavers both positive and negative is a major component of the workload for the partner organisations. In July 2010 the first beaver kits born from released animals were sighted and represent a significant step forward for the Scottish Beaver Trial.

Rob Thomas is Conservation and Research Manager with The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

Reminder:

Thursday 9 December 2010
Red Kite Reintroduction -
20 years On
Duncan Orr-Ewing

Lectures start at 7.30 and are held at 33 Melville Street Edinburgh. Admission is free but donations appreciated. Non-members welcome.

Musselburgh Lagoons

Saturday 18 December 10.30am

Guided walk led by Nick Aitken viewing wintering wildfowl. Meet at Goose Green, end of Balcarres Road, Musselburgh, near river mouth (grid ref: NT347734)

Lothians Conservation Volunteers at 40

Lothians Conservation Volunteers, who are partners to SWT in many practical projects around the Lothians reserves, celebrated their 40th birthday this September. There will be a full feature on their work in the next *Lothian Talk*.

Vacancy

Jill Neufeld is stepping down from the sub-committee and from her role as membership secretary for Edinburgh. This involves sending out welcome letters to new members on a monthly basis, summarising membership figures and attending 5 committee meetings a year. More information from Averil or Jill. Jill's lively contribution and commitment have been appreciated and will be missed.

Averil Stewart 01506 842676

Jill Neufeld 0131 441 5446

Lothian Talk

Feedback and contributions to:

lothiantalk@qab.org.uk

News from *Wildlife Watch*

Nancy Stewart of Wildlife Watch reports on a trip to Holyrood Park

A meeting that I enjoyed was all about wild flowers. It was in Holyrood Park and we started with a game where the leaders had a tray of toffees, we had a box which was a hive because we were bees and the leaders were flowers, and the toffee was nectar. We had to run and get a toffee, we were only allowed to get one at a time. At the same time the leaders (flowers) were sticking white stickers on our backs and they represented the pollen.

After that we got given a check list of what flowers we might find. Around Holyrood the leaders had set up a kind of flower treasure hunt. First we looked at some daisies and found out that all the little yellow balls were tiny flowers. Then we saw the first flowers on the hunt. We found gorse bushes easily as they were all over the hill. Soon we were spotting all sorts of flowers but because of the bad winter there wasn't as many out. We didn't pick any because there were not many left. When we came to a gorse bush we stopped to smell the flower but we had to watch out for the prickles. The flowers smelt of coconut.

Near the end of the walk, Phoebe and I ran ahead to climb a big tree, when we came down we found daffodils, red dead nettles which were part of the mint family, stinging nettles, nettles that don't sting, mushrooms and sticky willow that we stuck on each others backs.

On the way back we saw some ferns and found out some information that was very interesting, we were told that ferns have been around since the dinosaurs and that in the jungle they are taller than some of the leaders. WOW!

Apart from all the lovely flowers we also saw runners, cyclists, walkers, pigeons, crows and ducks. I really enjoyed that meeting but I must tell you that before I started I couldn't decide what meeting to choose as they are all so good. If you are a kid and would like to learn about wildlife, I would recommend the Scottish Wildlife Watch Group. I had a great time and I learnt lots.

Nancy Stewart, aged 10

Visit Reports

Wild Food Picnic

It was a relatively small group of 8 which met up with Ian Edwards in Gorebridge early in June. The weather was very kind: perfect for walking and stopping. The route along the old railway line and into Gore Glen provided varied habitats and the time of year meant there were still young leaves on trees to be sampled and many flowers to be admired. Without Ian's knowledgeable eye we would never have seen the parasitic toothwort or dared to try various leaves or seeds. To end the walk enjoying a picnic with his young family in a tardis-like, hidden garden was magic. The veranda dripping with wisteria was beautiful and the warm welcome with tasty home-baking much appreciated. While the group may have been small it was just right - overall we rated the wild food picnic a success well worth repeating.

Averil Stewart Photo: Gavin Stewart



Tigers at Aberlady!

Mention Aberlady Bay and most of us think of its rich birdlife or perhaps the diversity of its flora, but there is another hidden world which we were privileged to discover on a moth-trapping session there in late July. Reserve Warden John Harrison had set up two light traps the previous evening and we were fortunate that the morning was dry, sunny and windless after a settled night. There were over 70 moths in the two traps, made up of 18 different species, including scalloped oak, rosy minor, smoky wainscot, archer's dart, both large and lesser yellow underwing, peppered moth, brown-line bright-eye, burnished brass and the spectacular garden tiger. All the trapped moths were released safely after being identified by John. On our walk around the reserve we also saw some day-flying six spot burnet moths and several butterflies. For anyone who might have thought of moths as dull, brown and boring, the session was quite a revelation.

Colin Shepherd

Reserve News: Highlights of 2009

A great deal of work goes on at our reserves and thanks should be expressed to all who helped during 2009. We received assistance for the first time from Friends of the Pentlands who helped at *Red Moss* by pulling out pine and birch seedlings along the line of the boardwalk. Open days at some reserves were also particularly successful with 180 people attending the *Johnstone Terrace* Open Day and 135 at the *Bawsinch* Open Day in October.

One of the SWT training teams continued the clearing of trees from the reedbed at the west end of Duddingston Loch adjacent to *Bawsinch*. A photographic record is being kept to allow us to monitor reed re-growth and a new pond was excavated. Flood prevention work on the Braid Burn adjacent at the Foorckenford gate was completed by the Council and the area reinstated. At *Addiewell Bing* progressive felling of the lodgepole pine continued for replanting with native trees. At *Milkhall Pond* the training team in wetsuits again attacked the aquatic vegetation in the main pond. At *Tailend* an additional section of boardwalk was installed.

Heavy rain in September 2009 resulted in the footbridge at the Tinker's Leap at *Woodhall Dean* being washed away. This has now been replaced, hopefully less vulnerable to flooding. More recently a landslip carried away a section of the walk through the reserve, which will require a new route and probably negotiations with the adjacent farmer. The main part of the summer was distinctly wet which is reflected in many reserve reports particularly affecting butterflies, moths and breeding birds. *Red Moss* however has recorded a rise in water levels which is helping to preserve the raised moss.

Bogburn Lagoons again recorded breeding of water rail. At *Hadfast Valley* 16 nest boxes were erected for tree sparrows which were well-used, with around 100 young tree sparrows being counted.

Mammals in the form of an otter swimming past the hide as visitors watched did us proud at *Bawsinch* during one of the open days. Although common generally, a record of roe deer there was the first for many years.

There are few unusual records of insects in the reserve reports this year. There were very small numbers of northern brown argus butterflies recorded at *East Lammermuir Deans* but it is hoped that the better fencing will increase the numbers over the next few years. *Bogburn Lagoons* recorded two clouded yellow butterflies. Moth trapping was undertaken at *Milkhall Pond* with around fifteen new species recorded including large numbers of light emeralds. At *Woodhall Dean* ticks were noted as plentiful and bird box fleas gave a record 49 bites to the volunteers cleaning them out! Funny how some records seem nicer than others!

As ever there are also more negative reports from several reserves of problems with so-called "wild" camping becoming an issue, causing disturbance and damage due to campfires in particular.

Ken Knowles, Reserves Convenor

Visits to Bawsinch Reserve

After a poor year for numbers of visitors to Bawsinch during Open days, the committee has decided that the current five Open Days per year is using too much scarce volunteer resource. We have decided to reduce the number to two next year. However we are keen that the reserve is accessible and trust members are already able to obtain keys to use the bird hide. However we are also happy to arrange guided visits for interested groups (large or small), whether Trust members or not.

If you would like to arrange a visit please contact Ken Knowles, Bawsinch Convenor, on 0131-539-6643.

Fund raising 2010

Can collections in 2010 have so far raised £3779.54 from 9 days in 8 locations drawing on 132 volunteer hours. A return of almost £60 for a two-hour stint is so worthwhile. Few fundraising activities gain as much for little outlay. It helps to fund the lecture programme, provide materials for reserves in Lothians and give a donation to HQ. It is also great when SWT members introduce themselves and give encouragement.

We always welcome newcomers! Dates for 2011 are being sought from the bigger supermarkets. There could be one near you! If you can spare two hours on a couple of occasions in the year please get in touch with Averil: gaveril.stewart@virgin.net. Tel 01506 842676



Did you know?

Answers to the quiz in the summer edition of Lothian Talk.

1. Skye: the question refers to the hills usually known as McLeod's Tables and the sea-stacks nearby known as McLeod's Maidens.
2. The 'swift naval reserve' is Loch Fleet in Sutherland
3. Handa Island Reserve has a 'big door' (*Dorus Mor*), a Puffin Bay and an abandoned village.
4. The Silver Flowe is a raised bog in Galloway
5. The Wailing Widow is a waterfall at the outflow to Loch na Gainmhich in Sutherland