

Spring 2016



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group Newsletter

<http://swtlothians.org.uk>

Chairman's notes

We started 2016 having recently welcomed 7 very handsome Shetland cows from the Trust's 'Flying herd' to Edinburgh's new Bawsinch reserve extension 'Murder acre', one of the most exciting reserve extension projects in the Lothians for some time. Read the article here and try and visit to overlook the reserve either from the Holyrood park upper road, from the lower Innocent railway adjacent to the meadow or from the Bawsinch hide to spot these four-legged eco-engineers doing their stuff for the grasslands!

Our programme of evening talks and summer outings continues – if you enjoy these please consider joining the membership sub-committee of fellow SWT member volunteers that meets on average 4 evenings a year (usually at a good hostelry) to suggest ideas for talks and events and to share their organisation (see the events archive on our local website <http://swtlothians.org.uk/events> for examples of what we have organised in the past). The current chair Karen Pearson has done 4 years sterling service and needs to retire soon and key member Allen Skinner has done many years helping out and has also resigned –

many thanks to both for their long contributions. Existing committee member Peter Bain has kindly agreed to take over the chair in May so he is looking for two replacement members who want to help organise these events – we need new blood from our 5500+ members in the area – your events needs TWO of YOU! Please ask for Peter at one of the upcoming evening talks or call him one evening at his home phone number 0131 447 8937 to chat about what it entails and consider volunteering to help and get the events you want to attend!

Tim Duffy



Badger walks. June/July 2016

Our three fully booked 2015 badger watches were very successful with all the groups getting to see badgers. This year the badger watches will be held in a new location in the Pentlands. We are now able to take bookings for the three 2016 dates Tuesday 28th June, Wednesday 6th July and Thursday 14th July. The walks will begin at 7:30pm and cost £5 to attend. Children over 10 are welcome when accompanied by an adult & we can send you more information about what to wear & what to bring closer to the time.

If you would like to come please email karen.pearson@swtlothians.org.uk stating the dates in your order of preference. Please note that places are issued on a first come first served basis & these events are likely to fill up fast. If you do not have access to email you can book by calling Karen Pearson on 0131 667 3855.

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News from Lothian reserves from 2015

Another steady year in our reserves (aside from the reserve extension at Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch described elsewhere) which while good in many ways does not create much in the way of news.

The common bird breeding census which has now been carried out annually at Roslin Glen reserve by volunteer surveyors for 30 years, gives a valuable insight into local changes and trends. This year the Tawny Owl returned and produced 2 young, Spotted Flycatcher appeared at the last moment and Nuthatch reached a record of 7 breeding pairs. Collared Dove was a first to breed in the reserve while Siskin, though present, did not show proof of breeding. Numbers of common breeding bird species in the woodland at Roslin Glen remained relatively constant at 31. At Woodhall Dean, despite a high occupancy rate of the nestboxes, many clutches failed to hatch – presumably as a result of a rather damp and cool summer. A pair of Great Crested Grebes again nested at Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch and after a false start built their nest platform in full view of the hide giving excellent views to visitors including a delightful, if rather cold, Thai family who particularly wanted to photograph the birds. Cuckoos were again seen and heard around Red Moss but numbers of Redpolls seem to have gone down. Woodcock was

seen in January at Red Moss – in winter this is actually quite a common species but not easy to spot.

At Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch our recorder found and photographed two unusual looking flies in the marsh areas. These have subsequently been identified as first records for Scotland for both species one having not been recorded before north of Yorkshire and the other north of Cumbria.

Most of the management work on our reserves this year has been a continuation of work started in previous years although installation of plastic sheet dams, to block up drainage ditches on our raised bog reserves is approaching saturation point. It is however evident that the dams are having a beneficial effect in retaining water and encouraging development of the Sphagnum mosses. At Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch we took advantage of the very dry autumn to clear invasive Red-Osier Dogwood from the wettest area where it has spread – even then it was far from easy with planks with planks having to be laid down to avoid sinking into the mud. Just as well we got it finished before the (apparently endless) rains started in November and the water levels rose too far.

Ken Knowles

Events for your diary

Wild about weeds. 10th Mar.

33 Melville Street. Edinburgh. 7:30pm

Our commonest wild plants are often the most overlooked and undervalued. Our native weeds have a rich and vibrant history of uses for food, medicine, and many other purposes, sustaining the poor in times of need and enriching our cultural heritage along the way. They continue to play a vital role in Scottish biodiversity. Join Anna Canning of Floramedica on a virtual wild walk on Thursday 10 March to find out more.

Wild plant walk/workshop. 23rd Apr.

Hermitage of Braid. 10:30am

Following her talk in March, Anna Canning will talk us on a wild plant workshop & walk at the Hermitage of Braid. This event will start at 10:30 am, finishing at 1 pm. The event will cost £7 per person (under 12s free) including a set of plant notes & recipes to be emailed to participants after the event.

We have up to 20 places available for this event, please book by emailing karen.pearson@swtlothians.org.uk (or calling 0131 667 3855- please book by email if you can).

AGM and Bawsinch and Duddingston loch talk. 21st Apr.

33 Melville Street. Edinburgh. 7:30pm

Our AGM this year will be accompanied by a talk from Ken Knowles, Reserve Convenor at Bawsinch and Duddingston loch, who will update us on developments at this reserve which we have recently been able to extend significantly. As well as illustrating some of the wildlife to be found in the reserve, the talk will describe some of the history of the area and give an insight into the work involved in managing the reserve including the recent introduction of cattle from the SWT Flying Flock (or Herd for pedants) to provide conservation grazing of the reserve extension.

Reserve extension for Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch

We were pleased last year to agree with Historic Scotland an extension to our lease of Duddingston Loch and its surrounds to include an area further to the west. This extends our reserve nearly to the Innocent Cycleway tunnel. The new reserve area is known historically as Murder Acre, a cheery and memorable name which goes well with Hangman's Rock adjacent, already part of our reserve.

The new area of 3.62 Ha. is part of Holyrood Park and is included in the Duddingston Loch Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is a rare survival of unimproved grazing meadow but unfortunately it has not been possible to graze the area for a good few years which has resulted in the meadow becoming dominated by coarse grasses, nettles and bramble. In addition, Gorse and Elder had spread down the slope from Duddingston Low Road and started to convert some of the area to scrub. However, still locally visible are a variety of herbs and on the slopes there are numerous, impressively large, earth mounds formed by the yellow ant, *Lasius flavus*.

The key to the Trust being able to effectively manage Murder Acre is to reinstate grazing and we had to be satisfied that this could be achieved before taking on a lease. To ensure security, particularly to allow grazing with sheep, new stock fencing was required. This has been possible thanks to the generosity of Lothian Conservation Volunteers who donated £5000 from the legacy they received from Colin McLean, the long serving Bawsinch reserve convenor. The remainder of the cost was provided through Save Our Magnificent Meadows, a project led by Plantlife and funded by Heritage Lottery Fund. Although one of the great advantages of the new area is that it is remarkably inaccessible, and hence little used by the public,

that also presented problems for getting stock in and out. Our thanks are due to the City of Edinburgh Council who, by agreeing to allow us to deliver stock by driving along the Innocent Cycleway, enabled this problem to be solved.

Once clearing of scrub and dense bramble was completed (after a great deal of volunteer effort) and fencing and gates installed, three Shetland cows from the Trust's Flying Flock were delivered to the meadow on the 15th October last year. This was a somewhat more exciting business than might be imagined as we knew that there was little room to spare to get the vehicle and large trailer through the cycleway tunnel and even less to spare for making a U-turn along the cycleway. Happily it all worked, though I was glad I was not the driver. Subsequently a further four cows have been delivered and all seven will now remain at least throughout the winter. So far they seem to be settling in well and the biggest problem has been spotting them, they can hide remarkably well! The Holyrood Park Rangers are very kindly carrying out a daily check on the cattle for us as part of their routine monitoring of the Park. We will be monitoring the effect of the cattle but already it is clear that the coarse vegetation is being reduced and we look forward to seeing the first results next summer. It will however take several years of grazing before we can expect to see major changes in the vegetation.

Ken Knowles

Guided walks at Bawsinch.

10th Apr/8th May/5th Jun/24th Jul

Bawsinch hide. 2:00pm

Come along to our monthly guided walks at Bawsinch. Take a guided walk in Bawsinch Nature Reserve or simply bird watch from the hide and walk around part of the normally closed reserve.

Seabird Centre & Bass Rock. 28th May.

Seabird Centre, North Berwick. 10:30am

Visit to Seabird Centre, North Berwick and boat trip to Craigleith and Bass Rock. The boat trip is likely to last around 1 hour. The start time is TBC, depending on the tides and schedule.

Please call Gordon Swann on 0131 334 4769 2-3 weeks ahead to confirm times and book. Places will cost £15 per person

Aberlady reserve walk. 14th May.

Aberlady bay. 10:30am

Guided walk at Aberlady mainly to see summer migrant birds but we will also look at flowers and insects - led by John Harrison. Meeting at Aberlady bay reserve carpark (OS Landranger 66: NT 472804).

For more info contact:

colin.shepherd@swtlothians.org.uk

Unless otherwise stated, all events are free but donations are greatly appreciated

Planning matters

East Lothian

The council approved an amended draft proposed Local Development Plan (following the publicly consulted Main Issues Report last year) on 17th November 2015, which includes the Scottish Government's approved Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland policy for 10,000 more houses in East Lothian. Council officers will finalise essential policy and technical work and submit a 'final' proposed plan to the Council in due course'. The latter will then be submitted for examination by Scottish ministers.

Midlothian

The final adopted version of the new Midlothian Development Plan (to run until 2024) is expected later in 2016.

West Lothian

This section is in reference to the proposed West Lothian Development Plan which can be viewed online at: <http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/proposedplan> and the trusts online response to it (ref:b69a27c)

Not to be outdone in this year of new Lothian Development plans, West Lothian has publicly consulted on its proposed (quite well developed, quite good for wildlife in theory) new plan and we include here some of our comments as examples of the sorts of comments we can make at this stage:

4. Vision Statement and Aims: The Scottish Wildlife Trust endorses the inclusion of the vision statement committing the plan to protect the natural environment

5. The Spatial Strategy: The Scottish Wildlife Trust endorses the proposals for the Natural and Historic Environment contained in paragraphs 5.139 to 5.184, which it considers provide a strong framework for protection and enhancement of biodiversity in West Lothian.

-In particular the Trust supports Policies: Env 2 – 21(incl)

-In addition, the Trust endorses the following policies that affect the natural environment: NRG 3,4 EMG 1 – 3(incl) MRW1 – 5(incl),8,9

6. Development Proposals by Settlement: In a number of cases sites have been proposed for development despite there being a likelihood of significant adverse effects and/or likelihood of policy divergence with environmental objectives in the WLLDP. Specifically, risks were identified in the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Baseline Report because development on these sites would not:

-Avoid causing significant effect on designated national/regional/local biodiversity sites and ancient woodland/geodiversity sites, and/or

-Avoid direct adverse impact on species/habitats/or makes a positive contribution to the emerging green network.

It is disappointing that, for the great majority of these sites there is no mention of the potential impact on biodiversity in the detailed site Appendices. Therefore, the Trust requests that for all of these sites:

-The potential impact on biodiversity and the need for assessment/investigation is added to the "Other" column in the same way as the potential archaeological interest.

-No development should be permitted on these sites unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no impact on biodiversity and the natural environment.

Tim Duffy

Planning contacts

Midlothian and East Lothian: Susan Manson -mansons@castlesteads.net, or at Castlesteads, Dalkeith, EH22 2NJ.

West Lothian: Dr Cameron Easton - dr.c.easton@gmail.com or at 1 Bellsburn Avenue, Linlithgow, West Lothian, EH49 7LD.

Lothians Group Planning Secretary: Tim Duffy - Flat 4F2, 34 Warrender Park Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 1ED