



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

Dates for your Diary Spring 2020

Talk: **The Effects of Climate Change on Wildlife**

- Thurs 13th Feb; 7.30-9pm
- Roy Thomson, Professor Emeritus

Talk: **Peatland Restoration**

- Thurs 12th March; 7.30-9pm
- By Clifton Bain

Talk & AGM: **Living Seas: Safeguarding Scotland's Marine Treasures**

- Thurs 16th April; 7.30-9pm
- Marine Protected Areas & Living Seas, by Dr Sam Collin, SWT

Guided Walk: **Bluebells & Redstarts, Woodhall Dean NR**

- Sun 17th May; 10-4pm
- Led by ranger Lesley Fairweather

Open Event: **Johnston Terrace Gardens**

- Sat 6th June; 2pm-3.30pm
- Led by the local ranger

Guided Walk: **Water of Leith**

- Sun 21st June; 10-12pm
- Led by the local ranger

Guided Visit: **Badger Watching**

- 1st, 6th, 9th & 14th July;
- 7.30pm until late
- Led by expert Tricia Alderson

Talk Locations

Unless stated otherwise, all talks are free of charge and take place at:

Guide Headquarters
33 Melville St, Edinburgh, EH3 7JF

Full details of all events can be found online at swtlothians.org.uk/events or in the SWT events booklet



Small Skipper butterfly in Bawsinch
Photo courtesy of Richard Wells

News from Lothian Reserves

Summary of 2019 by Ken Knowles

Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch: While late winter and early spring were dry, the weather then became a lot wetter with above-average rainfall for the remainder of the year. The dry and warm conditions in April meant that exceptional numbers of butterflies were seen on the first guided walk around Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch Nature Reserve. However, the current experience at Bawsinch is distinctly different, with it being necessary to paddle through floodwater to reach the west hide!

At Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch there were new species records with a Small Skipper butterfly recorded for the first time on the flower meadow in Bawsinch and admirably photographed by Richard Wells. There is already a colony of these butterflies in Holyrood Park and hopefully they are now spreading into Bawsinch. In late July a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly was recorded over shallow water at the south-west end of Duddingston Loch. Unfortunately I have no photograph as I had no camera with me. It will be interesting to see whether this is just a one-off record of a wandering male or the start of colonisation.

Conservation grazing remains one of our most important reserve management tools. Grazing continued at Bawsinch reserve on Murder Acre meadow with, at the end of the year, a bull and a bullock (although earlier on there was a mixture of sheep and cattle). In July, BBC Scotland's 'Landward' programme filmed the delivery of some cattle to Murder Acre and interviewed Laura who looks after the Flying Flock/Herd for the Trust. They were clearly taken by the concept of us having to deliver the stock by reversing a vehicle and trailer right through the Innocent cycleway tunnel.

To assist in work on our reserves this year Lothian Group contributed £1000 to purchase a chain saw and protective equipment to be used as needed by qualified volunteers, initially mainly at Bawsinch.

Woodhall Dean and Roslin Glen: Pied Flycatchers provided interest at both Woodhall Dean and Roslin Glen Reserves. At Woodhall Dean, a Pied Flycatcher, the first observed in the reserve for many years, sang loudly for two weeks and started a nest, but in the absence of a female gave up. At Roslin Glen Reserve a similar highlight was the arrival of a male Pied Flycatcher, causing great interest among the bird recorders. It sang for about two weeks and started to build a nest in a bird box but failed to attract a female, as far as is known. Such is life in the bird world but at least gives us hope for future years.

The bird boxes at Woodhall Dean revealed a variety of occupants this year, making a change from the usual Blue tits and Great tits. A Nuthatch pair had closed the lid of a box with mud and successfully reared young. Redstarts were seen feeding young in one of the remaining front opening bird boxes, and yet another box was occupied by roosting Pipistrelle bats. This made the annual clear-out of debris more exciting and made up for the inevitable biting of fleas!

Red Moss: At Red Moss of Balerno this year, as well the annual open day celebrating International Bog Day, there was a Moth trapping day organised by the Butterfly Conservation Scotland and a Sphagnum identification workshop organised by the ENHS.

Brock Wood: As I reported in last year's news, selective felling was carried out over part of Brock Wood Reserve. The aim of the felling and subsequent replanting was to remove an area of predominantly non-native conifers and replace with a mix of native broadleaved trees, thus enhancing the wildlife value of the reserve. Following removal of the felled timber (the sale of which was used to offset the costs of replanting) the Friday volunteer team moved in during January 2019 to clear much of the brash and make a start to re-planting.

Young Oak saplings, grown from acorns of local provenance at the SWT tree nursery, were planted first to ensure they would have maximum light as they grew. This was followed by other Scottish native trees such as Hawthorn, Holly, Hazel and Rowan sourced from a local commercial tree nursery. Alder and Willow followed, predominantly in the damper areas. In all, some 500 tree saplings were planted. All were protected by the use of recycled wire baskets taken from other SWT reserves and reused plastic vole guards, thus giving the young saplings some protection from browsing by Roe Deer and other herbivores until they become established. The planting was completed in May,

and the Friday volunteer team visited again later in the summer to check the trees and weed around them. Hopefully as the trees grow and the signs of felling disappear, those passing by or living in nearby Spott can look forward to an enhanced Brock Wood Reserve.

Petershill: Cattle were brought onto Petershill, near Bathgate, for the first time in January for several months and then returned in October. The grazing has been greatly aided by a group of enthusiastic volunteers living nearby who have carried out the required daily checks on the cattle for the Trust. We are very grateful to all of them for their enthusiasm.

With thanks: After many years as Convenor at Milkhall Pond, Neville Crowther was finally able to retire and we welcome Pete Sykes as his replacement. Many thanks to Neville for his sterling work over many years. We also welcome Nick Warren who has taken over as Convenor at Johnston Terrace Wildlife Garden, a post which had been vacant for some time.

Message from the acting Chair

Wishing you a happy New Year and start to a new decade.

We are fortunate to live in a beautiful part of the world. Edinburgh and the Lothians have so much to offer, and wonderful wildlife to observe and support.

Over the following months, our activities will switch from our indoor talks to exploring the outdoors. We hope that you will continue to enjoy the talks of this winter. Those I have heard so far have certainly been very interesting and inspiring. Our last one of the season will be on the 16th April about marine conservation, which will run alongside our AGM.

Across our region, the Scottish Wildlife Trust has 21 reserves which I encourage you to visit - <https://swtlothians.org.uk/reserves/>. And why not come and see our smallest reserve on Johnston Terrace, which lies at the heart of the city, during its open day on the 6th June.

Unfortunately, last year ended on a sad note for this group, as our chair, Ken Knowles, had to step down early from his duties due to illness. Ken has been volunteering for the trust for many years and chaired this group for the past six, for which we are all very grateful. We wish him and his wife all the very best, and look forward to welcoming him back in the future.

Happy New Decade to you all.

Nick Warren, acting Chair



Planting trees at Brock Wood
Photo courtesy of David Ross



Your Help is Needed

The ongoing work of the Lothian Group to support and protect local wildlife, relies mainly on donated funds. Despite an increasingly cashless society, the mainstay of our income still comes from collecting loose change in supermarkets.

Thanks to a recent SWT HQ email, an impressive number of you responded and volunteered for the Jan & Feb collections. An enormous help - thank you! However, we have recently lost several wonderful volunteers and are still short of people.

Could you spare a few hours to help us?

Volunteers usually work:

- Together in pairs at a local supermarket (in the warm!)
- For no more than 2-hours at a time (between 10am - 6pm)
- Only occasionally and at a supermarket near your home

Most of the collections are in Edinburgh, but we also collect in West Lothian, Midlothian and just into East Lothian.

If you would like to know more, please get in touch, by phone 0131 539 6643, or email barbara.knowles@outlook.com

Hoping you can help!

Barbara Knowles, Fundraising
Organiser

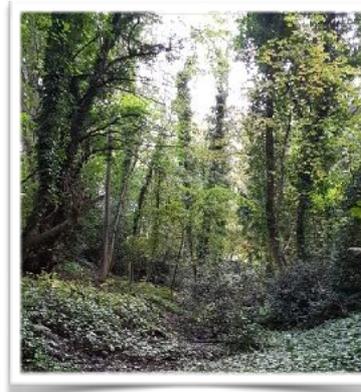
Planning Matters: Jan 2020

Midlothian

Eskbank: Eskbank, on the west edge of Dalkeith, is largely housing. In the middle are the remains of an old railway, now a welcome slice of green amidst the built up area. The railway supports mature trees and wet areas, but is also subject to dumping of garden waste and other rubbish. A brief mention in our Autumn newsletter about a proposal for a walkway and/or cycle path raised some local concerns.

The proposal for this path originated in the Eskbank & Newbattle Neighbourhood Plan of 2014 and was proposed by the Community Council. In order to take the proposal from the community forward, the local Development Trust, One Dalkeith (working with Sustrans), undertook to investigate further. The railway line is an area supporting a variety of wildlife. A biodiversity survey indicated that the site did not meet the criteria for Local Plan protection by the council as a designated Local Biodiversity Site (LBS). The main value of the site is as an area of habitat within an urban location. A higher score for a LBS designation would be possible if public access could be achieved. Since the land is privately owned there is no leverage to make this access possible, unless a community action or community buy-out takes place.

Sustrans and the local development trust, One Dalkeith, proposed a feasibility study for a community buy-out and cycle path through the site. However local residents persuaded One Dalkeith to drop these feasibility studies and to date, no independent community consultation has taken place. One positive outcome though is that the renewed interest in the line encouraged some local residents to organise the clearing up of dumped rubbish.



Mavisbank: Mavisbank House, near Loanhead, is in the news again. Midlothian Council has agreed in principle to help secure the future of the house – but only if a viable funding package is in place to restore the building. Restoration cost continue to rise and, while the figure of £20 million is estimated for the building, there is no mention of the historic landscape around Mavisbank and alongside the River North Esk. This is a Listed Biodiversity Site. Previously the Scottish Wildlife Trust has suggested a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) to protect the local wildlife value and public access.

Sheriffhall Roundabout: The dreaded Sheriffhall Roundabout on the A720 is to undergo a major upgrade. The proposals are out for consultation until 31 January 2020. The A720 will go across the existing roundabout in a flyover. However if there are any environmental benefits from this transport project, it is the much-improved pedestrian and cycle links between Midlothian and Dalkeith, in particular, and Edinburgh. Previously cyclists had to take their life in their hands to negotiate the roundabout. Alongside the cycle paths will be landscaping and ponds which, in time, will enhance the wildlife value around the bypass.

City of Edinburgh Council

Frogston Road East: Members have alerted us to the coming possibility of another housing application (westward extension of existing new housing) on land south of Frogston Road East. We have visited the site and it might not affect any Local Biodiversity Site (Lothian Burn LBS to the south is the nearest), but we shall look at it carefully when an actual planning application comes forward.

Contacts For Planning Matters Affecting Wildlife Sites

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

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

City of Edinburgh Council Planning Representative: We are pleased to welcome the new volunteer planning representative for Edinburgh, Ian Whittaker - ianw0@yahoo.co.uk

Dr Tim Duffy
SWT Lothians Planning Secretary - timrduffy1@gmail.com

In December 2019, Dr Tim Duffy was recognised as a 'Specially Commended Regional Champion' in the Association of Local Government Ecologists Silver Anniversary awards, for his planning work on behalf of SWT with the Local Authorities of the Lothians.

Tim has been SWT Lothians Planning secretary since 1984 (he thinks...). Congratulations Tim!

Q&As from the 'Dragonflies of Scotland' Talk

At the end of the October talk by British Dragonfly Society, as part of the SWT Lothians Group's annual events calendar, there were a couple of questions that required more in-depth answers. Thanks to the speaker, Andrea Hudspeth, for following them up for us.

Q1. When we get new migrants into the country, do they appear as a huge influx like migrant butterflies (Painted ladies for example) or just a few individuals?

Ai: It depends on species and conditions. Things like Small Red-eyed Damselfly arrived in some numbers (100s) at a few sites when it first appeared. Smaller invasions have been noted since. The famous influx of darters to Great Yarmouth cemetery in 1995 numbered at least 600-700 Common Darters with lesser numbers of other darters and a couple of Camberwell Beauty butterflies. More recently the Vagrant Emperors, Lesser Emperors and Red-veined Darters have been coming in a singles or small groups with some sites recording 10-20 of each. We don't seem to get invasions of thousands of individuals, but migrations of dragonflies are often associated with the same weather patterns that bring in migrant moths and butterflies from the continent.

Aii: I agree that the position varies. I suspect that dragonflies tend to disperse from their breeding sites and if mass emergence happens to coincide with particular weather patterns then we may see significant numbers reaching this country from the continent and the fact that other species tend to get caught up with these arrivals tends to confirm that weather patterns are involved. The rapid spread of Small Red-eyed tends to confirm that large number disperse after emergence as large numbers would be needed to ensure that at least a male and a female reached the new sites that might be 20km from where they emerged based on the rate at which they have spread. A radius of 20km suggested that they have spread over an area greater than 1200 square km if dispersion is random.

Q2. The Dragonfly fossil looks like a Dragonfly rather than a Damselfly. Do we know in what era the group separated and the first Damselflies appeared?

A: A quick check suggests that there are fossil records for damselflies or at least their forebears going back almost as far as for the equivalent for dragonflies. I suspect that the larger the insect the more likely there is to be a fossil record and so it may be difficult to be completely sure.

See www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016787802800189 and www.researchgate.net/publication/248606208 The earliest damselfly-like insect and the origin of modern dragonflies Insecta Odonoptera Protozygoptera

If you have anything you would like to contribute to future editions of Lothian Talk, please get in touch via email at editor@swtlothians.org.uk

Scotland's Urban Birds of Prey – the Final Frontier

Mike Thornton, SNH Operations Officer in the Forth Area and active member of Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group, talks about the colonisation of birds of prey into our towns and cities – and why we should celebrate these charismatic urban predators.

I walk slowly through the wood, feeling watched – the intense, penetrating stare of the hawk entering my very soul. Noise from cars, sirens and voices punctuate the tranquility of the wood. I search for the sparrowhawk's nest in an avian crime scene - songbird pluckings littering the forest floor. How are the sparrowhawks faring this year, have they survived, are they breeding successfully in the city and why should we care?

Over the last four decades, many birds of prey in Scotland have recovered, principally due to the banning of harmful agricultural pesticides and a decrease in human persecution in much of the lowlands.

As rural populations have expanded, these birds of prey started to colonise towns and cities, with the sparrowhawk one of the first species to colonise in the early 1980s. The colonisation of Edinburgh occurred after 1980, and within five years, there were probably more than 20 pairs breeding within the city limits. Many of their breeding sites have been monitored since the late eighties, and a recent scientific study has shown that over a four-year period, breeding success in Edinburgh was significantly higher than a rural population in Ayrshire. The residential gardens, parks, small woodlands and hedges in Edinburgh provide both suitable nest sites, as well as an abundant songbird prey supply. Sparrowhawks have also been reported breeding in other Scottish cities, including Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen.

Another urban coloniser is the peregrine falcon, with an increasing number breeding on man-made structures, such as buildings, bridges, steeples and industrial cooling towers, as well as quarries. Although there were only a handful of pairs breeding on man-made structures in the early 20th century, such as the Tay Bridge, Dundee and Sinclair Castle in Cathiness, it wasn't until the late 20th century when they started breeding in our cities.

We now have these charismatic predators breeding on buildings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The results of the most recent National Peregrine survey revealed that almost 25% of all pairs monitored in Scotland were breeding on man-made structures or in quarries, with 45% in England. This newly acquired habit of tolerating human presence has allowed the species to spread into much of lowland Britain. Furthermore, some urban peregrines have been observed hunting nocturnal bird migrants using the light from street lamps, a true testament to their adaptability to breeding in these new environments. These urban breeders are doing well, and studies from England suggest that breeding success in urban populations is higher than in many rural areas.

Once confined to the western extremities of the UK, the expansion of the buzzard population has arguably been one of the biggest changes in British birds during the last three decades. There has been more than a doubling of its range in the UK since the 1990s, and this species has also recently colonised our urban environments. A thriving population is currently being studied in Cumbernauld, and Edinburgh now supports at least six breeding pairs, all within close proximity of the city centre.

Although the kestrel was once a more common sight over our towns and cities, breeding on buildings and hunting over rough grassland in parks and roadside verges, this species has become less common in urban environments. This reflects a national decline, with a greater than 60% decline in Scotland since 1995. Research is currently being developed by RSPB Scotland to identify the causes of this decline. Let's hope that in the future we see kestrels returning to grace the skies over our towns and cities.

The red kite was also once a common bird of prey in towns and cities. In Victorian times, it was common in London, scavenging on human waste. However, like many other birds of prey, it was heavily persecuted in the 19th century to protect game birds, and was eventually driven to extinction in Scotland and England. However, thanks to an RSPB/SNH red kite reintroduction programme, the species has reclaimed some of its former haunts and is now commonly seen over cities like Aberdeen. If the growth of the red kite population continues, it may not be long before this species fully returns to exploit opportunities in the urban environment.

The colonisation of our towns and cities by birds of prey is a good news story, one that we should celebrate. These spectacular predators depend on urban green space, as do many of us. They bring a sense of wilderness to our highly civilised societies, injecting a sense of wonder to our lives. However, their future, as well as the future of our wider urban biodiversity, will depend on how we plan our towns and cities, and manage our urban green space for generations to come.

I eventually find the sparrowhawk's nest in an old beech tree next to a busy footpath. People walk by, oblivious to the breeding activities of these urban hawks. I wonder whether they will successfully raise young again this year.

For more information on raptors in Edinburgh see <http://www.edinburghhawkwatch.org.uk/>

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