



**Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust**

# Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

## Dates for your Diary 2021

### Join our talks online!

Our popular winter talks programme is still happening online, free of charge via Zoom. This includes our **AGM** on Thurs 22nd April, which will take place just before the talk. All members are welcome.

**To book:** go to [scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-events/](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-events/)

**Don't miss out!** Before each talk, an email will be sent to everyone on our mailing list with booking information.

**Add yourself to the mailing list** on the SWT website at [scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-group/lothian/](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-group/lothian/)

Once on the [SWT Lothians Local Group homepage](#), go to the bottom of the page and click the 'Subscribe Now' button. On the [sign-up page](#), simply pick 'Lothians' from the 'Region' list.

You will then be emailed up-to-date information about all future talks and events.

**Full details of the talks programme can be found online at [swtlothians.org.uk/events](https://swtlothians.org.uk/events)**



*Noctule bat at Roslin Glen, by Lesley Fairweather*

## Lothian Reserves 2020

*by Ken Knowles*

Certainly a year to remember (or try to forget!). Coronavirus lockdown and restrictions significantly reduced work groups, and prevented us from having guided walks in any of our reserves. There were notably more visitors to some of the more accessible reserves, but unfortunately we had problems with mountain bikers at Roslin Glen and groups intent on partying broke through the road fence at Bawsinch. We hope for better in 2021.

**Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch:** New species records were few this year. Two Reed Warbler were heard singing in the west reedbed; a first for the reserve. Although no female birds or evidence of breeding attempts were seen, this species has been moving north so we can reasonably hope that Reed Warbler will be a breeding species here sometime in the future. Butterfly numbers were down from 2019, although all normal species were present. Numbers of Common Blue Damselflies recorded were markedly down from previous counts, although other damselfly species appear to be relatively stable in number.

**East Lammermuir Deans and Linn Dean:** Northern Brown Argus butterflies were counted as usual. There was a good variety of other butterflies in both these reserves but they were not counted.



## Thanks for your beautiful shots!

Thank you to people such as D. King (who sent us the above photograph, taken at Aberlady NNR) for emailing your fantastic local wildlife pictures to us! Other people have been uploading them onto our Facebook and Instagram pages. More of the photographs can also be seen in the online version of this issue, which you can find here:

[swtlothians.org.uk/lothian-talk](http://swtlothians.org.uk/lothian-talk)

Do you love taking photographs of nature? Would you like to help to inspire others about their local wildlife and SWT reserves by sharing some of your fabulous photos with us?

One of the aims of the SWT Lothians local group is to promote our reserves, and using photos is a great way to do this.

You could help us by contributing your photos of SWT reserves and their wildlife throughout the year.

They will be gratefully received!

**Contact** Jo Young: [jo@dunadd.co.uk](mailto:jo@dunadd.co.uk)

Visit our Lothians Group **Facebook** page for all the latest news, events and information:

[www.facebook.com/  
swtlothians](https://www.facebook.com/swtlothians)

or find us on **Instagram** at @swtlothians

**Roslin Glen:** There was a second record of a Noctule Bat (first record was 2008) found in a bat box during a survey. Noctules are not nationally rare, but we are near their northern limit so they are not common here, and there have only been 15-20 records in the Lothians in the last 10-years.

**Reserves Management:** The Dalkeith management team was badly affected by Coronavirus restrictions, as the SWT minibus could not be used to transport volunteers. However, they were able to start groups again in July and do significant work.

Oak trees (from our own tree nursery) were planted in November at Woodhall Dean, along with a mix of other Scottish trees. A large variety were planted at Brock Wood in January/February including oak, holly and rowan, with alder and willow on wetter ground.

There was a lot of activity repairing and replacing footbridges at Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch, and the central bridge in Woodhall Dean. The latter was quite an event, as the new timber had to be transported to the heart of the reserve. The local farmer very kindly helped by allowing us to take the timber across the fields, from where it had to be slid down a steep woodland slope to the bridge site.



In autumn, attempts were made to catch up with our programme of tree clearance and reed cutting in the west reedbed at Bawsinch and Duddingston Loch reserve. We had been unable to do any last year, partly because of high water levels. Unfortunately, water levels rose again this

December and made accessing the reedbed impractical once again. However, we still achieved a lot this autumn. The objective is to try to maintain the area as marsh and reedbed, a habitat which otherwise naturally wants to become woodland. From photographs dating back to 1904, we know the area has historically been reed and marsh when it was maintained by grazing.

**Surveys:** The Trust commissioned Ben and Alison Averis to carry out a National Vegetation Classification Survey (NVC) in five Lothian reserves: Hadfast Valley, Hermand Birchwood, Petershill, Roslin Glen and Woodhall Dean. Surveys provide an excellent record of the vegetation, and repeat surveys provide useful information on the condition of the reserves to help determine whether management work is having the desired effects. During the survey, a notable species of moss, *Ulota calvescens*, was found at Hermand Birchwood and Petershill. The Hadfast Valley report said it is, "...a notable find because this is an uncommon western oceanic species that was known in Britain almost entirely from the west Highlands until recent years, when it has been turning up in some areas further east. This record, and one from another of this year's series of surveys of SWT reserves in the Lothians (Petershill), are the first for the Lothians and are the easternmost in Scotland, except for a record between Moffat and Langholm."

**Members photographs** (clockwise from top left: Woodhall Dean; Hadfast Valley; Bawsinch; Hadfast Valley)



Photograph by D.King



Photograph by M. VanOijen



Photograph by M. VanOijen



Photograph by D.King

## Planning Matters: January 2021

### West Lothian

Planning applications were arriving at a slow rate for most of 2020. However, this changed in the final three months of the year, with a relative deluge of applications. Christmas-time controversial applications are a well-known phenomenon from long before Covid!

#### Applications considered unlikely to have an impact on LBS/pLBS\*

- Housing development - full application for an area in Linlithgow south of the Union Canal LBS. The development will not encroach on canal corridor any more than all the other existing and adjacent housing in Linlithgow.
- Housing development - requirement for EIA\* for an area south of Middleton Pond pLBS. The development is separated from the pLBS by a road.
- 2 x Housing developments at Clapperton Farm (scoping report and EIA screening opinion). The developments are close to but unlikely to affect Almondell Country Park and Drumshoreland LBS.
- Housing development at Westfield, full application. The development is near but not adjacent to Barbauchlaw Burn pLBS
- Warehouse at Deans Industrial Estate. This is on the opposite side of the railway to Tailend Moss, so no impact on SSSI/Nature Reserve.
- Housing development at Clarendon Farm Linlithgow, EIA screening opinion. The proposed access road is close to the Union Canal LBS, but the development itself will have no impact.

#### Updates on previous applications

An EIA screening opinion Starlaw Distillery: West Lothian Council has decided that an EIA is not required for the development, even though the EIA scoping report mentioned both Tailend Moss and Easter Inch Moss and their conservation status. Although adjacent to the eastern boundary of Easter Inch Moss, the development will have no impact on the LBS as it is within the existing boundary of the distillery, and doesn't encroach on the LBS. However, the northern part of the site (North Field) is a new development and the development boundary is directly adjacent to the Tailend Moss SSSI/Reserve boundary. The EIA scoping report only considers the landscape aspects of the development, as viewed by visitors to Tailend Moss. However, it recommended that a buffer of marshy grassland be left to the north of the development, adjacent to Tailend Moss. The Ecological Report does specify that the marshy grassland be maintained and protected by fencing to avoid damage during construction and maintenance of the grassland as a buffer between the development and Tailend Moss. This may be enough to reduce risk, but we need to keep a careful eye on the application when it comes in. Presumably NatureScot will have to give an opinion on this development as it is directly adjacent to a SSSI.

Housing development directly adjacent to Little Boghead LBS: It seems to be on the site of a pig or chicken farm. While not impacting the site directly, it would increase the people pressure on the site and create more of an island effect, isolating the LBS from the north west. It would definitely impact on any possible Bog Burn "blue corridor" scheme. The original planning application in 2018 attracted a large number of objections, including those from SWT members and the WLC Countryside Ranger Service – the site is a WLC Nature Park. The original application was refused. The developer appealed to the Scottish Government against the Council's decision. The appeal was successful, and so the application gets the go-ahead, despite the objections and Council decision. It seems nothing further can be done about the planning application, but this is something to be taken into account in trying to develop a blue corridor approach to the Bog Burn.

#### Applications that could have an impact on LBS/pLBS/SSSI\*

Housing north of Hogshill farm: This is adjacent to Calder Wood SSSI. It seems likely to be separated from the woodland by a grassy slope and the Linhouse Water. Presumably NatureScot will be minded to comment on the proposal as it is adjacent to an SSSI, but we should keep an eye on this one as well.

Access track from Longhill Burn Wind Farm to the C24 road, through Paties Hill Wind Farm to service an underground cable: The cable and track will cross Harwood Water Woodsmuir Plantation to Baad's Hill

pLBS. NOTE – the underground cable follows the same route, but does not need planning permission. Therefore, the ground will be dug up anyway.

Housing development Mid Calder: EIA screening request and proposal of application for the development. This will fall within the River Almond Howden Bridge – Sewage Works LBS. The EIA screening request says that there are no environmental designations on the site – though they have only checked NatureScot records! Though we shouldn't have to we will have to point out the existence of the LBS when the full application comes in.

Housing development to west of Limefield Mains, Polbeth. Limefield Glen and Harwood Water to Gavieside Bridge LBS: Awaiting decision. The western part of development takes in part of the eastern section of the LBS. The Google Earth view suggests this is part is conifer woodland, the Ecological Appraisal indicates mixed woodland. This (admittedly small, low value) part will be destroyed. The development will then be directly contiguous with the broadleaved woodland (oak, beech, sycamore, elder) within the LBS to the east of the Harwood Water, though separated from it by a path. There are several existing paths running through the woodland to the east of the Harwood Water at this point. The ecological appraisal calls for barriers to protect the woodland during construction and installation of a permanent (hedge) boundary to reduce human access to the woodland edge. Given the nature of this part of the site, it may be that this kind of buffer will reduce the impact of the development. However, the presence of the LBS and the need for its protection needs to be stressed.

### Midlothian

Mavisbank House at Loanhead has popped up regularly in planning issues in Midlothian over the last 40 years! While project teams debate how to conserve and utilise Mavisbank House, the abandoned grounds have developed into a important wildlife resource. It is a LBS. The original landscaped lake is much overgrown but still a valuable habitat. The project team from Historic Environment Scotland and Landmark Trust carried out a virtual survey just before Christmas, to seek views from the local community on the proposals to develop the site and seek funding from Heritage Lottery Fund. The intention is to submit an application in February 2021.

The most surprising application in Midlothian for some time is a proposed Rocket Engine testing facility. This is being suggested for an abandoned quarry near Gladhouse Reservoir. While the application has not gone for planning as yet, there are discussions about a possible EIA. Gladhouse is a SPA, Ramsar Site and SSSI\*. The main interest is the Pink Footed geese who use the reservoir in autumn and winter. Additionally it is near the Moorfoot Hills SAC\*, where moorland breeding birds are the main interest.

### East Lothian

In the last issue of Planning Matters there was mention of the Seagreen Offshore Wind Farm. The windfarm will have 150 turbines and will be based north of East Lothian, off of the Fife coast. This application has developed into a proposal for the onsite infrastructure to be sited at the previous Cockenzie Power Station site between Cockenzie and Prestonpans. This will potentially allow power from 36 of the turbines to be connected into the existing infrastructure. There was a planned 'virtual' public exhibition on 18 January 2021 to inform and consult with the local community. The proposal will be developed further after the consultation. More information on [seagreenwindenergy.com](http://seagreenwindenergy.com)

Some people may have seen newspaper reports of a proposed F1 racetrack at the Lagoons at Musselburgh. This is such a far-fetched proposal that it might be considered a fanciful if not ridiculous proposal. The Lagoons have been developing as a wildlife habitat and valued local recreational resource for years. Scottish Power is in the process of handing over ownership to East Lothian Council. Some final works on the creation of a new wildfowl scrape and pond are imminent. Already a bird hides and wildlife ponds have been created. The Lagoons are adjacent to the Firth of Forth SPA and the Firth of Forth SSSI. Additionally the John Muir Way traverses the Lagoons. Access to the Lagoons is largely through residential areas so while this is not an issue for existing uses, it would be impractical to say the least for a racetrack. Climate change policies in East Council and the Scottish Government should surely preclude any serious consideration of this proposal. This proposal is not yet formally a planning application to the council as of January.

## Edinburgh

There seems to have been very little relevant planning activity in City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) in recent months and we are checking this carefully; if you have heard of anything please do let us know – it may just be that the Edinburgh LBS’ are particularly well bedded in to the council planning system. However we have spent many hours this quarter participating in zoom meetings, to make an Ecological Coherence Plan (ECP) for Edinburgh using the Ecological Coherence Protocol. This is a CEC ‘Thriving Greenspaces’ initiative that is run by two SWT staff: Donya Donaldson (embedded in council offices) and Cathleen Thomas (the SWT national Living Landscapes officer). It works collaboratively with an impressively large number of key organisations, to bring together expert knowledge to map the habitat network and ecosystem services across the city. Ecosystem services are the benefits provided to us by nature from healthy and functioning ecosystems. Examples of these benefits include clean air, improved mental and physical wellbeing, and natural pollination of plants. By combining all this information with practical on-the-ground considerations, we will identify opportunities to provide multiple benefits for both people and nature.

Eventually, we hope to focus the on-the-ground work of these organisations – including SWT Lothians – on those geographic areas where biodiversity enhancing work is needed, rather than being led by where current project funding dictates.

*Site designation key	
LBS	Local Biodiversity Site
pLBS	potential Local Biodiversity Site
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SPA	Special Protection Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
Ramsar Site	Wetland site of International importance

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### Contacts For Planning Matters Affecting Wildlife Sites

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*If you have something to contribute to Lothian Talk, please get in touch [editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk)*