

## Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group

### Chair's Report 2021

Co-written by Nicholas Warren (Chair), Allan Mathieson (Sub-committee convener), Tim Duffy (Planning Secretary), Ken Knowles (Reserves) and Trevor Patterson (Treasurer)

#### Notes on the Committee

We have a main committee, a sub-committee, and a reserve committee to help run this group.

The main committee key responsibilities continue to be to oversee the activities of the SWT Lothians Group, monitor possible planning and planning development affecting Local Biodiversity Sites across the Lothians, fundraise; represent the Trust at local external events, manage the groups finance, allocate available financial resources, and organise and run the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

While the sub-committee organises all the outdoor events, winter lectures, produces the Lothian Talk newsletter and maintains our website and social media presence.

Finally, the reserve committee offers an overview of the management of the Trust's Lothian wildlife reserves from the perspective of volunteers mainly by compiling reserve annual reports and meeting bi-annually.

We would like to express our thanks to the members of both committees for all their hard work over the past year.

#### Winter Talks and Summer Outings by Allan Mathieson

The last year has seen the disappointment of having to cancel some of our indoor talks (including last year's AGM) and all our planned outdoor events in the summer/autumn of 2020. This has been somewhat offset by the start-up of our (so far) very successful Zoom based meetings at which attendance has been significant (and very welcome).

The cancelled outdoor events included such favourites as the badger watching, bat watching at Blackford Pond, along with botany and birdwatching trips to the Aberlady reserve and Musselburgh Lagoons respectively. In addition we had planned some new outdoor activities such as a Ranger lead walk along the Water of Leith, a 'Bluebells and Redstarts' walk in Woodhall Dean reserve, an open day at Johnstone Terrace Gardens and a visit to the John Muir Country Park. It is hoped that we will be able to run some of these events this coming year.

Our indoor events, now presented online, have proven to be a huge success with up to 200 members attending at some of them. We kicked the season off with a very interesting talk by Mr Tom Ovendon about the possible re-introduction of the lynx to Scotland – a topic that

engendered quite a few questions. That was followed in November by a talk by one of the local SWT members about a nature watching trip to the Falkland Islands where Catherine Grierson used some wonderful photographs to illustrate the talk.

Our Christmas talk was by SWT's Dr Sam Collins on the safeguarding of Scottish Marine treasures which was very well attended – unfortunately, we each had to supply our own punch and mince pies this year!! We kicked off 2021 with a talk about the Firth of Forth Landscape Initiative project in February. In March we were regaled with a talk about Beavers in Scotland from Roisen Campbell-Palmer from the depths of South Wales where she was involved in monitoring beavers at a number of locations in Wales and SW England.

The Zoom online meetings have proved to be very popular with attendance averaging around 100 per event and we are also grateful to all of you who have donated online as this helps offset the cost of the software licence to run the online talks.

It is hoped that with the easing of restrictions, we can resume and re-instate some of our outdoor meets in 2021/2022. Regarding the talks, we are looking into conducting most of them online using the Zoom facility, but we are also considering some indoor meets to allow for social interaction amongst members – these would also be broadcast on Zoom.

**Lothian Talk.** We continue and wish to continue to offer two formats for our newsletter. The two-page paper format is sent alongside the magazine to all SWT members in the Lothians, while an extended electronic version may be received by email or read on our website.

Special thanks go to our editor, Kate, for her work in putting this information together.

**Website, Facebook, and Instagram** – Thanks mainly to the work of Jo (Young), our foray onto social media continues and our Facebook page receives increasing amounts of interactions.

Thanks to Ruth, our website page is kept up to date.

**Planning Matters** by Tim Duffy

This has been a particularly busy year for the SWT Lothians volunteer Planning team – as Scottish Government covid legislation ensured that planning application management continued almost the same as if covid was not affecting society – just with fewer on-site visits. The year started with a major consultation from the City of Edinburgh on the future 'Choices for the City plan 2030'. The Council led Local Biodiversity Site designation/re-designation committees have met regularly in Edinburgh Mid and West Lothian councils and there have been many applications close to such LBS but thankfully nothing too destructive or contrary to existing Local plan LBS protection policies.

There were climate change initiatives both in Midlothian and East Lothian (focussed on the Cockenzie area re-development master plans) which we ensured had a biodiversity focus. There has been quite a lot of activity in East Lothian but unfortunately, we sometimes hear of this later than we would like as the council has again stopped giving us timely warning of applications near to/on LBS'. Constrained council staff have asked us to request a formal meeting with the head of planning.

I must thank the never ending work of the Edinburgh planning representative Ian Whittaker, The Mid and East Lothian rep. Susan Manson and in particular Dr. Cameron Easton who after many years doing planning watch on West Lothian is in process of training up a keen new blood replacement for him this new year – Carmina Cazan.

### **Reserves** 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.

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."

**Fundraising** – We were unable to carry out our usual fundraising activities this year, thankfully we have sufficient financial reserves to continue the group's work and support a number of local conservation activities.

We are grateful for the donations we receive for our talks which allow us to pay for our zoom license.

## **Finance**

Our treasurer, Trevor, prepared the group accounts for this year and a summary of these in comparison with the previous year can be found in the accompanying document.

Fundraising was impossible throughout this financial year because of COVID restrictions; however, we were fortunate to receive over £1000 as an inducement to move our current account away from RBS. Our new Coop account also provides us with free electronic banking facilities for the first time. For the year going forwards, as long as we continue to

offset the cost of Zoom meetings with donations from attendees, we can stay solvent, but will have increasingly limited opportunity to fund any local reserve work until we can generate some income.

### **Proposed Committee Members for the next year**

There are few proposed changes to the committee this year. Nick Warren will start his second year as chair for this group. Gordon Swann is stepping down as Secretary but remains as an ordinary member for the group. Our vice-chair Carmina is currently covering this position until we find his successor. We also welcome Allan Mathieson and Colin Shepherd as new members to this group.

Allan will continue to convene the activities of the sub-committee. Matt Hodson has decided to leave the group. Ken Knowles will chair the reserve management group.

**Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or wish to join us.**