



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

Dates for your Diary

Online Talk: **Scottish lichens**

- Thurs 17 March; 7.30pm-9pm
- Dr. Rebecca Yahr, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Online Talk: **The Trust's Living Landscapes (& AGM)**

- Thurs 21 April; 7.30pm-9pm
- Cathleen Thomas, SWT's Living Landscape Manger

To book onto a talk go to:
scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-events/

Summer walks & events

We are planning to start our walks and events programme again in spring. Details will be posted on our website & social media pages shortly.

Volunteer for Lothians Group

Our membership subcommittee is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to assist us.

Get in touch if you are interested in helping us to arrange meetings and events, contact speakers, or if you (or anyone you know) would like to present a nature-based talk.

Contact Allan Mathieson on 01314478389 or by e-mail to chair@swtlothians.org.uk

Full details of the talks and events programme can be found online at swtlothians.org.uk/events

In this issue, we welcome two articles highlighting some of the wonders of, and pressures on, Edinburgh's green spaces. Alongside those is an update on the work we do commenting on planning proposals affecting local biodiversity sites across the Lothians.



Snowdrops by Colin Shepherd

The snowdrops of Astley Ainslie *by Sara Stevenson*

The centre of the green corridor of public parks, which runs south from the city of Edinburgh into the hills, consists, somewhat unexpectedly, of the grounds of a hospital and a graveyard: the Astley Ainslie Hospital and the Grange cemetery.

The broad swathe of land derives from the 12th century gift of King David to Edinburgh for the Common Good. By the 19th century, the lands known as Canaan which the hospital now occupies, had been alienated and sold, and were occupied by private villas and farmland. But, most happily, two things happened.

The land slopes down to the south, is filled with light, and is protected by walls and trees. It is an admirable place for growing and for human health. In the 19th century, the houses were surrounded by gardens – the owners competing at the Caledonian Horticultural Society and winning many of the national prizes. The surgeon, James Syme, for example, grew pineapples, peaches, oranges, and when his young assistants went out from the Infirmary in the Crimean War, they brought

Save Midmar Paddock

Midmar Paddock lies just west of Blackford Hill, Edinburgh. It is visited by hundreds of people every week for enjoyment and open-air exercise.

But the paddock is once more under the threat of housing development, in spite of the many protections given to the site over the years. It is a **Green Belt** and a **Special Landscape Area**. It is designated as an **Open Space** and a **Local Nature Conservation Site**. It has a **Core Path** running across the field.

You might think these designations would be more than sufficient to protect it from development, but recent events suggest otherwise.

Can you help the Friends with their campaign to 'Save Midmar Paddock'? Find more information on their website at:

www.morningside.org.uk/planning/midmar-paddock/

You can also follow them on Facebook. Look for "Friends of Midmar Paddock" or on Twitter @MidmarPaddock

Friends of Midmar Paddock

We need your help in assessing the situation and in devising methods for improving it. We do know something about the trees, but what other plants and animal life are living there is less clear. Are the snowdrops in the old garden of Millbank, James Syme's house, from the Crimea? Is it possible that the rhododendrons in the Ivorys' old garden are distinguished? The place has been tidily maintained for too long, and could be returned to good planning and gardening practice. It could be made more agreeable and interesting, and the wildlife could be allowed to flourish. Your help and encouragement would be invaluable and we much look forward to hearing from you.

See the Astley Ainslie website www.aact.scot for information about us, and please consider joining us to strengthen our cause. We have produced a journal, *Leaves*, on issues of nature, health, wellbeing and creativity in which international, national and local voices and artists discuss the issues and possibilities. See the publisher's website studiesinphotography.com/products/leaves-issue-two Also available from the Edinburgh Bookshop and Cameratik.

him back snowdrops and other plants that took their eye. The Ivory family joined a company collecting tree seeds in North America, and the great trees in their garden – including a giant redwood – are still largely flourishing there. There are some 2,000 trees within the grounds.

Secondly, in the 1920s the land was bought back for public benefit by the trustees of David Ainslie, who wished to establish a convalescent hospital for patients from the Royal Infirmary. They were assisted with a gift of plants and seeds, and given advice by the Royal Botanic Garden. And it was here that the then plague of tuberculosis was largely wiped out by good light and air and peaceful engagement with the beauty of the natural world.



The NHS took over the hospital in 1948. In recent times, they intended to sell the land, and the Astley Ainslie Community Trust was formed four years ago to keep the land in public hands. A year ago however, the NHS declared that the land was no longer on the market.

Covid necessarily restricted access to the Astley Ainslie - we need to avoid the buildings holding the wards. But the land has three rights of way cutting through it, and is a favoured walk from the roads. It is an agreeable place and, if it can continue to be used for our health, this is a good thing. We would like to work alongside the NHS in the interests of the landscape and in aspects of our health which may lie beyond their remit.

Planning Matters, February 2022

This issue we are focusing on the draft of Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as it will redefine not just national planning directions but, for the first time, will become statutory planning policy for all Local Authority Planning areas. This means that the final version - which should become law in the summer - will have policies that must be reflected in Local Development Plans (LDPs). NPF4 will include all of Scottish Planning Policy 2014 so everything will be in one document. This is a major change and evolution of planning in Scotland.

But do the policies look good currently for biodiversity? On the face of it, very much so. For the first time Local Nature Conservation Sites (Local Biodiversity Sites and Local Geodiversity sites to you and me) are not just specifically focussed on and protected. **At least** this level of protection must be in all LDPs to come:

“Policy 32: Natural Places - Local development plans should identify and protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally valued natural assets, landscapes, species and habitats. These assets and areas should be safeguarded in the spatial strategy in a way which corresponds with the level of their statutory status. Spatial strategies should also be designed to better connect nature rich areas through establishing and growing nature networks to help protect and restore the biodiversity, ecosystems and natural processes in their area... Development proposals that affect a site designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site or a Local Landscape Area should be supported where development will **not** have significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area **or the qualities for which it has been identified**; or any such effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of local importance”.



This is combined with the ground breaking new policy: “Policy 3: Nature Crisis - Development proposals should **contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity**, including restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them”. This applies to ALL developments, which doubly protects LNCs’ as their baseline biodiversity is on the record and they are seemingly not allowed to go backwards. Bruce Wilson, our SWT HQ planning policy expert, is also fighting hard (with Scottish Environment Link etc.) to get the word ‘should’ in the former quote changed to ‘must’.

Nonetheless, there are 70 references to biodiversity in this document and we expect most of them to make it through to the legislation. If you want to help with that process, search for 'NPF4 consultation' on the web - you have until 31st March 2022 to let the government know you support these policies. Otherwise email me well before that deadline with your tuppence worth!

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Contacts For Planning Matters Affecting Wildlife Sites

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