

Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group

Chair's Report 2022

Co-written by Nicholas Warren (Chair), Allan Mathieson (Sub-committee convener), Tim Duffy (Planning Secretary), Pete Sykes (Reserves) and Trevor Paterson (Treasurer)

Notes on the Committee

We have a main committee, a events 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 events 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 all committees for all their hard work over the past year.

Winter Talks and 'Summer Outings' by Allan Mathieson

The Lothians Group has held a full programme of online talks over the winter and spring of 2021/2022, thanks to our successful use of the Zoom facility. Attendance at the talks has been very good with an average of around 80 - 90 people attending each talk 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. We are starting to look into the possibility of restarting physical, face to face, meetings in October 2022 but also assessing the feasibility of conducting these as hybrid physical and online meetings.

We have had a very varied programme of speakers ranging from Environmental Policy and Climate Change just prior to COP 26 through to excellent talks on Scottish wildflower meadows and lichens and, further afield, cetaceans and seabirds of the Southern Ocean. The Trust's Lothians Manager and his supporting reserve conveners also presented a set of talks on the various Lothians SWT reserves which proved to be very popular and gave us all an insight into the work the Trust and the conveners do (and issues they face) on an ongoing basis.

Again, we have been unable to run any outdoor events in the past year due to Covid restrictions but the Committee is starting to plan for a series of events in the 2022/2023 season. We are starting off with a ranger lead walk at Woodhall Dean on 30 April. On the same day, our group is hosting, in conjunction with Edinburgh Natural History Society, three events to celebrate the city's nature in a variety of habitats from the hills to the coast. The day will start (at 0700) with a morning at the Red Moss of Balerno, an afternoon at the Johnston Terrace and an evening at Wardie Bay. These three events coincide with the City Nature Challenge.

During the coming year we hope to re-instate more outdoor events such as badger watching, along with botany and birdwatching trips to the Aberlady reserve and Musselburgh Lagoons respectively. In addition, we hope to plan some new outdoor activities such as a Ranger lead walks along the Water of Leith and around Holyrood Park.

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 this group's website.

This newsletter is sent out to over 12,000 members (over 6,000 memberships) in the Lothians.

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 another 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 effort by our local experienced planning volunteers to input into the creation of an Ecological Coherence Plan for Edinburgh with input from a larger collection of relevant public bodies and eNGOs than has been seen working together for decades in Edinburgh. This is now called the Edinburgh Nature Network and alongside the network of Local Biodiversity Sites it will set the framework for all biodiversity enhancement and transformational change that is required to tackle the Climate Emergency using nature-based solutions and the Nature Crisis in Edinburgh up to 2030. The Council led Local Biodiversity Site designation/re-designation committees have continued to meet in Edinburgh, Mid and West Lothian councils with many sites re-surveyed and re-assessed and

West Lothian, for the first time, is expected to complete its evidence based assessment of all its sites by the end of this financial year. There have been many applications close to such LBS but thankfully nothing too destructive or contrary to existing Local plan LBS protection policies.

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 which we will do shortly now that the national consultation on the groundbreaking draft National Planning Framework 4 is completed. This document will become statutory planning law rather than just guidance in the late summer, includes all of existing Scottish Planning Policy – refers to biodiversity 70 times (earlier versions only 11 times or less and they were only guidance) – and explicitly states that all Local Authorities should have Local Nature Conservation Sites (what we refer as LBS') and a Nature Network. The devil will be in the horse trading and detail as the actual legislation in parliament approaches.

I must thank the never ending work of the area planning representatives including Ian Whittaker – who has now moved to cover East Lothian , The Midlothian representative Susan Manson and to Carmina Cazan who is now covering West Lothian and the City of Edinburgh. To read more on their work in your area do not forget to read the on-line PDF version of Lothian Talk which usually contains much more issues than can be covered in the 2 page paper summary version.

Reserves by Pete Sykes

First, we regret the sad loss of Ken Knowles. Ken had been chair of the Lothians Reserves Management Group and convenor for Pepper Wood reserve for longer than any of us care to remember and also he took over management of Bawsinch 10 years ago. Ken will be sorely missed and leaves us a long-lasting legacy.

In early 2021, reserve management was still affected by the pandemic but as restrictions eased, the reserve convenors and volunteer work parties were able to go back out and undertake the practical management and surveying work as in previous years.

At Woodhall Dean, 9 Pipistrelle and 1 Myotis bats were recorded in the bat boxes and 3 Redstarts were seen in in the central part of the reserve. Much of the work focused on tree planting and maintenance of tress planted in earlier years with weeding of younger trees and removal of wire baskets form the more mature ones. 102 Oaks and 10 Rowan were planted in November and 400 Hazel and Hawthorn in March '22. Storm Arwen in November bought down many trees at the start of the woodland leading towards Tinker's Leap. These were cleared by Eddie and Julian to keep the circular route for visitors safe.

Similar management was carried out at Brock Wood and Thornton Glen, tree planting and weeding. At Brock Wood, 83% of the bird boxes had been occupied in 2021 and 66% in Thornton Glen.

The same group that manages Woodhall Dean also looks after East Lammermuir Deans. Here, a visit to check the Northern Brown Argus butterflies was made on the 14th and 17th July. A timed count is done each year and the results sent to SWT and to Butterfly Conservation. 4 NBA were seen on the 14th July and 6 NBA were seen on the 17th July (this is much as usual) along with many others such as Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Common blue, Grayling and Dark green Fritillary. Wild flowers, especially Thyme, were in great profusion. However, no Painted Ladies were seen and these were also absent in 2020.

Moving to Mid Lothian, the same pair of mute swans successfully bred again for the 3rd year at Milkhall Pond, though with a large population of Crows nearby, a couple of Heron, and a pair of Otters, the smaller water birds such as the Dabchicks, Moorhen and Tufted Duck had limited success in raising a brood. On one day in July, after the Friday Team had finished work on path strimming and pond bank reinforcement, they were treated to the sight of a Noctule Bat feeding over the main reservoir; feeding in the mid afternoon as well as at night indicates she probably had a brood nearby.

The Friday Team was active in Roslin Glen and, while the road through the reserve was closed for several weeks, the opportunity was taken to carry out some pruning and felling of diseased roadside Ash trees which could have been a problem in the future. A small number of Oaks and Rowans were planted into gaps in the reserve's southern strip, while invasive non-native species (Knotweed, Snowberry ...) were monitored and treated if required. The common bird census (CBC) for 2021 which records the territories of breeding birds was completed in 10 weeks starting in April. Common birds such as Robin, Wren and Blue Tit were present in good numbers. The Tawny Owl was recorded again, now 5 years in a row, and the Green Woodpecker's yaffle was heard most weeks between early April and early June. Three pairs of Greenfinch may not seem many but the last time a high of 3 was noted was in 2012. The return of the Spotted Flycatcher, after 3 years of absence, was cheering but there were no signs of the Pied Flycatcher this year. Starlings remain absent from Roslin Reserve and the Willow Warbler seems to prefer breeding along the railway leaving only one pair actually in the reserve. Nuthatch numbers seem to have peaked at 9 breeding pairs whereas Great Spotted Woodpeckers had fallen a little with only 4 pairs recorded this year. Bat box occupancy was high.

At Erraid Wood, bird species now includes breeding Nuthatches and Jays. Bat box occupancy has increased since the boxes were supplied by the Friends of the Pentlands and installed by SWT volunteers in 2010. Last year 5 of the 9 boxes were occupied. Common Pipistrelles and a Soprano Pipistrelle were noted. The clearings made in the 1990s are now fully stocked with a mix of Rowan, Holly, and Cherry though unfortunately Ash dieback seems to be

present in both the mature and pole stage areas. There is ample deadwood, standing and fallen.

The Red Moss reserve saw a huge increase in visitor numbers as the pandemic progressed. The council is responding to this with increased car parking and also a bus turning circle with the intention that the public service bus route may be extended into the foot of the Pentlands. International Bog Day on July 25th went very well with a “self service” system using pre-dipped pond samples. In terms of practical conservation work, the SWT Dalkeith Team labour was used for tree sapling removal along eastern edge. Grassland at the reserve entrance has been cut and areas scalloped to encourage Violets for the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary to feed on. Spraying for exotics - Yellow Archangel – also took place (very persistent). For the first time in possibly 15 years, during the annual LCV task, rutters were used to remove vegetation/peat in the public dipping pond to ensure that 40% of the pond surface was open and available for dragonflies etc. to feed.

Management at Hermand Birchwood has included grazing the meadow as the Hebridean sheep which have been doing the job recently were to be sold. A new farmer has been found and in November, 16 sheep moved onto the meadow. In Edinburgh the Johnson Terrace Wildlife Garden continues to demonstrate what can be done to invite nature into small green spaces – e.g. flower meadow for pollinators, compost bins, the Palm House, and a wildlife pond. It is often used for recreation and education and has proved a popular art venue, hosting a part of the Edinburgh Art Festival in August.

We will round up this review of reserves with Bawsinch, and once again remember Ken who managed it for so long. It is notable that November 2021 saw the 50th anniversary of the Trust purchasing the reserve and since that time, the reserve has changed from an industrial wasteland, associated with the Innocent Railway and a nearby brewery, into a valuable woodland and wetland haven so close to the centre of Edinburgh. Here once again volunteer work parties have been busy maintaining the trees planted in the reserve, improving paths and drainage, managing the grasses on Goose Green, and clearing litter from the reserve (not much general litter, but hundreds of golf balls!). Three pairs of Mute Swan nested with mixed success. Otters and Hedgehogs were seen, the latter in Goose Green, also 4 Spotted Chaser Dragonflies, a Grasshopper Warbler feeding young in the nest, a young Sedge Warbler, 4 Great Spotted Woodpeckers, 19 young Herons in the heronry, many Common Sandpipers, and a Snipe were seen. Finally, Common Spotted Orchids flowered in 2021 and were not being eaten by Canada Geese as usually happens; possibly because the geese were feeding on the shorter grass in Goose Green after it had been cut in May.

Finance & fundraising

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 this financial year has again been strictly limited by COVID restrictions. Our only income source has been online donations made through Eventbrite by attendees of our on-line Zoom talks. These donations have been generous throughout the year, often surpassing £100 a talk, and easily cover our Zoom subscription costs. However, our pared down expenditure is still exceeding our annual income, so we will need to re-establish our fundraising in the coming years, and we are considering how we might adapt our traditional method of supermarket can collection in an increasingly cashless society.

Proposed Committee Members for the next year – see the attachment

There are few proposed changes to the committee this year. Nick Warren will start his third year as chair for this group.

Allan will continue to convene the activities of the sub-committee.

We welcome Mollie Cochran amongst our ranks, a recent graduate from Edinburgh.

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