



Newsletter for East Lothian Council Conservation Volunteers

April 2016

Hooray! Spring is here: let's hope it stays. With this comes the start of some of our wildlife surveys – bumble bees, butterflies and eiders to name a few. If you are interested in taking on this kind of thing new faces are always welcome so please get in touch. This month also sees the start of some of the training/fun sessions we are arranging for volunteers. For those of you that are attending these, I hope they are worthwhile. If you haven't got round to signing up, there are still places on tools & strimmers, first aid and the dawn chorus – go to the doodle poll (links below) to participate.

Please send in ideas or content for the next 'Best boot forward' to kbaird@elothianmail.net
Apologies for any omissions, inaccuracies and typos.



TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

There are still a few places on some of the Volunteer training/workshop sessions. If you fancy coming along, please sign up using the doodle poll links. (And please leave an email address and name so I can identify and contact you!)

STRIMMERS & TOOLS, Yellowcraig 6th April 9.30am. At the moment a morning session learning about safe use and maintenance of strimmers and other tools. If there more participants we will run an afternoon session as well. <http://doodle.com/poll/ta4itug9uxvbdau>

FIRST AID, Musselburgh 29th April 9.30-3pm. Delivered by Outdoor Learning in Musselburgh, a beginner course focussing on outdoor scenarios. <http://doodle.com/poll/32b4eq9f5zsrcd2r>

DAWN CHORUS, 3rd May 5am – 8am Amisfield or Gosford. Experience the spring time dawn chorus and join us on a gentle stroll learning how to identify birds from their songs <http://doodle.com/poll/sshhngae9i6sr7zx>

ELC Conservation Volunteer tasks planned for April:

New faces always welcome! If you would like to join in with a group for the first time, please get in touch with the relevant ranger for details. **Aberlady – Weds 6th and Sun 17th April**

John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk

Yellowcraig – Thurs 7th April

Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk

Path Wardens team task – Thurs 21st April

Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk

North Berwick – Tues 26th April

Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk

Levenhall – Fri 29th April

Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk

John Muir CP – Sat 9th and Weds 27th April

Tara/Brian; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk



Playing a new version of Pooh Sticks at Yellowcraig...

Volunteer's news

If you have done (or are going to do) something that might be of interest to other volunteers, do write about it and send it in – Evidence of a life beyond volunteering is always good to see!

Whilst many birds head North to join us in Scotland for the summer, one of our volunteers, Karl Metz, is heading in the opposite direction to spend a year in Crete. Here he summarises his volunteering experience with ELC over the last few years. We wish him well with the warmth and wildlife of southern Europe.

I start volunteering for East Lothian Rangers winter 2013 helping look after sheep at Barns Ness. I then joined the Levenhall volunteer group March 2014 monitoring butterflies and helping out at the monthly group meetings. By the summer I had also joined the Dunbar volunteer group to help put up Tern fencing and take part in the monthly group meetings.

My plan was to volunteer one day a week which worked out just fine with the last week of the month a busy one. This led to me learning new things and trying to help in areas such as butterfly monitoring, lichen survey, bee survey and I also attended a one day conservation course at Oatridge Agricultural College in Broxburn, meeting other volunteer groups and various conservation organisations such as the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Sustrans.

There are many high points when working at the various rural locations across East Lothian: to mention a few were Tara's superb chilli just before Christmas at Barns Ness gorse burning, helping out at the Big Nature Festival on the sea creature exhibition, attempting to create a dry scrape at Levenhall to attract more butterflies (hopefully!) and getting to know so many regular volunteers at Dunbar, Levenhall, Barns Ness, Traprain Law and the dedicated support of rangers who all make sure volunteering is enjoyable and that we never run out of chocolate biscuits.

There were a couple of times when things didn't go to plan, such as losing two ewes at Traprain Law, one lost its sight (picture) the other fell off the rocks...ouch!)...

Or the clearing of tons (well it seemed like that!) of soaking wet boating pond weeds at Levenhall, or when I was told the dry scrape I was to dig out would be a few inches deep to get through the clay soil only to find it was well over a foot down, thanks Nick! :). That was when I decided I didn't need to go back to the gym to keep fit.



Having just turned 60 I am taking an extended break travelling by car through Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, mainland Greece then onto Crete island. Staying in a traditional Greek house in a village for a year, away from tourists but close enough to the beaches to enjoy that side of the island when I choose. I have not planned too much on what I will do there but staying on a hill near the Diktamos gorge and Roman settlements behind the 8,000ft White Mountains will give me plenty of opportunity to explore and catch up with some friends I know there.

Volunteering for the Rangers has been a pleasure and a rewarding experience. Thank you.

Who's who

Name: Dave Wild

Job Title: Countryside Ranger
Archerfield/Yellowcraig

Length of service: 8.5 years

What do you do?

A rewardingly large array of conservation, education and access work, focused on Yellowcraig and the local area. Tasks include standing alongside a bedraggled windswept dog while counting birds, to standing among windswept birds while counting dogs, and a lot in between.

Brief career:

After working on my geography skills during a year travelling, and a subsequent university degree course, I worked as a researcher in the Scottish Parliament. My heart was in the outdoors so I found myself travelling south to volunteer and take employment with the National Trust on their amazing properties near Land's End. I returned to Scotland taking up a seasonal position at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP before gaining a full time Ranger position at Buccleuch Estates for several years prior to starting with East Lothian Council.

Favourite place: The sea and the sense of wilderness that you get as soon as you dive in it or travel on it.

Favourite wildlife: Anything other than large spiders, a lot not to like there. Ants are very, very cool...see Holldobler and Wilson: Journey to the Ants!

Best East Lothian wildlife experience: Sunset kayak around the Bass rock during gannet fledging season.

What animal would you most like to see? The Panamanian Golden [waving] Frog. It's a frog (actually a toad), and it waves, which is cool in itself but you'd see lots of great things on your way to discovering that there aren't enough waving frogs in the wild for you to stand a chance of spotting.

Which place do you most want to visit? The Himalayas



*One man went to mow... a reedbed.
Essential components for the freshwater exhibit at the
Big Nature Festival in May.*

Being close to April 1st, I (Katty) had to check out these waving toads. Obviously I should believe what Dave says... They do exist and they really do wave at each other to communicate!

Victims of habitat destruction and a fatal fungal disease, the Panamanian golden frog is now believed extinct in the wild. The last sighting was 2007 (by David Attenborough's film crew) but there are captive populations in zoos.

Perhaps we should mount an East Lothian Conservation Volunteer expedition to the Panamanian rainforest to rediscover them...



Making Tracks – East Lothian's Path Wardens

The path wardens look after many miles of path in East Lothian and have made a real improvement to the accessibility of our countryside. Dave Oldham tells us a bit more about what they do.

East Lothian Council's Countryside Team has organised a variety of ways through which volunteers can improve their local environment. Around 50 people have chosen to become a Path Warden and taken on one or a number of paths. The priority has been to look after the most important and popular paths such as Rights of Ways and Core Paths.

Looking after a path can involve many tasks. Litter picking, cutting back vegetation and drainage work are all on the agenda. Path wardens are issued with secateurs, loppers and a folding saw to tackle problems. If there are issues such as fly tipping or fallen/dangerous trees these are reported to the Countryside Team for the Council to resolve.



However, it is recognised that hand tools can only do so much. An increasing number of wardens have been trained to use leaf blowers, strimmers and grass cutting mowers to keep their paths in order especially between March and October. This has certainly brought an improvement to the path network across East Lothian.

Generally wardens work by themselves but each month there is a Joint Path Warden Task where a dozen of more wardens tackle a big job together. In addition, there are a number of wardens who have signed up to the Tyne Team to keep the path between Haddington and East Linton in good order. Joint working is an opportunity to talk to other wardens and to make a real impact on a major task.

In December 2013 East Lothian Volunteer Path Wardens (ELVPW) became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Charity. It has seven trustees - five path wardens and two Council officials. The charity was created to secure funding for path projects from sources that the Council cannot access. Over the last couple of years a number of small donations have been secured to purchase tools and promotion materials.

Path maintenance is the main aim for ELVPW but it also has the aim to assist the Council in securing funding for capital projects to develop new path links, reopen moribund paths or upgrade existing paths. In the ELVPW Business Plan prepared for securing charitable status three "capital projects" were put down for the first year but only one has been delivered. In 2014/15 the reopening of a section of the Gifford to Morham path was achieved through three Joint Path Warden Tasks. The other two projects are in abeyance as there are problems with the landowners agreeing to move the project forwards.

So it's the start of a learning curve for us but we feel we are making a difference and learning from experience as with all new ventures.



Join the path wardens for a Spring Tyne Stroll: Sat. 30th April

To promote the attractions of the River Tyne Path and the work of the East Lothian Volunteer Path Wardens, there will be four guided walks from Haddington to East Linton (approx. 6 miles). Learn more about the wildlife, history and management of the path and surrounding countryside. Light refreshments provided at East Linton, and transport will be provided back to Haddington. All welcome! Book at

<https://pathwardens.wordpress.com/events/springtynestroll/>

April Wildlife Watch

On the Wing

Words and pictures by Abbie Marland

April is sensational. There is so much to see and hear, East Lothian is alive with wildlife. This month migrating birds start to arrive in high numbers, some to stay and breed, others passing through. Apart from the familiar Swallows and House Martins, two of our tiny summer visitors are the Willow Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochylus* (which spent the winter in tropical Africa), and the Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collibyta* (which winters in around the Mediterranean plus south of the Sahara).

What a huge journey for creatures which weigh only about 8 grams. These small greenish brown “leaf” warblers slip through branches and flit along hedges, darting to catch flies. They really do have quite distinct, if subtle, differences - including the colour of their legs (Chiffchaffs are darker). But for most ordinary mortals, the surest way to tell the difference between a Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff is to listen. The song of a Willow Warbler is sweet and whistling, with descending notes. The Chiffchaff does what it says on the tin: A forceful, clear monosyllabic song of two or three well-spaced notes, which carries far. This photo shows a Willow Warbler, newly arrived and checking out a territory.



These birds have seen a population decline in recent years, and the Willow Warbler now has an Amber alert conservation status. Both species breed in East Lothian, but many stop off along our coast, and then carry onwards. A particular delight is to witness an influx or “fall” of Chiffchaffs in early morning. They come inland, feeding on insects *en route*, calling as they go. Apart from coastal sites which offer scrub and woodland, the Haddington to Longniddry railway walk is a good place to catch the action. You can, quite literally, travel alongside the birds on bike or foot, as they move through the canopy. And this visible Spring migration is logged by a special website: <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/summer-migrants/>

What else is on the wing? Early in the month, watch out for Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies, out of hibernation and laying eggs. But this Spring has already proved very special in this part of the UK: Red Admiral butterflies have also over-wintered in significant numbers, instead of perishing or departing south. Later in the month, we can look forward to the first Green-veined White, Orange-Tip and Speckled Wood butterflies. The Speckled Wood has been rapidly expanding its range into East Lothian since 2008, with populations moving north along coastal and river woodlands.

East Lothian is a good place to spot or study butterflies. Help add to the picture, and send in your records! We are lucky to have an Access Officer (Nick Morgan) whose second hat involves collating butterfly sightings. You can send your sightings to him: nmorgan@eastlothian.gov.uk.

Test your knowledge. Six of the Spring butterfly species Abbie mentions are shown in her photos overleaf – do you know which is which?

Flutterby fun?

G R E E N H A I R S T R E A K
X B V Y E L L O W S H E L L D
S N W O R B W O D A E M I O E
M I E T I H W E G R A L O I L
A B X F C O M M A B N W G E C
L C R S C Y Y N L D D G H S A
L N O T P I H S R E H T O M T
S B G N F O I X L H M E S A C
K R N I N S T K B S R K T L E
I O I I M A C B R I G C S L P
P R L P A E B G U N F O W H S
P E Y Z P L L A W R I C I E D
E P A S M N Z V R U N A F A S
R M R I N G L E T B A E T T Y
R E G I T N E D R A G P T H U

Looking for Lepidoptera

Can you find these East Lothian moths and butterflies in the letter grid?

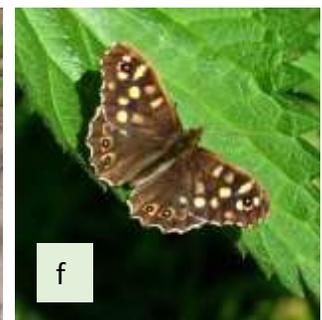
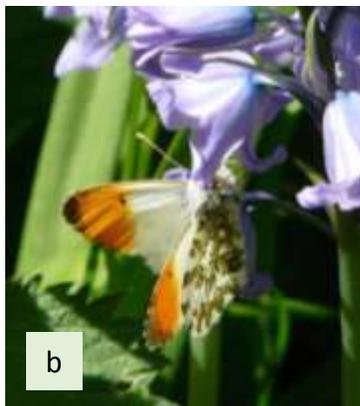
BURNISHED BRASS
CINNABAR
COMMA
EMPEROR
GARDEN TIGER
GHOST SWIFT
GRAYLING
GREEN HAIRSTREAK
LARGE WHITE
MEADOW BROWN

MOTHER SHIPTON
PEACOCK
RINGLET
SIX SPOT BURNET
SMALL HEATH
SMALL SKIPPER
SPECKLED WOOD
SPECTACLE
WALL
YELLOW SHELL

Did you know? Butterflies and moths belong to a group of insects known as Lepidoptera. This word is derived from the Greek meaning "scaled wings" (lepidos = scale and pteron = wing). The wings of these insects are covered with tiny scales which are actually modified hairs, and give the wings their beautiful patterns and colours. More on moths next month...

Butterfly Bonanza

Here are six species of butterflies that can be spotted in East Lothian in April. Do you know their names? Photos by Abbie Marland; answers at bottom of page.



ANSWERS: a)Comma, b)Orange-tip, c)Green-veined White, d)Peacock, e)Small Tortoiseshell, f)Speckled Wood

More volunteering opportunities with ELC

Get Grassing

East Lothian Council use sheep and ponies to help manage grassland habitats at several sites. To help monitor the effect this grazing has on the grassland plants, a team of volunteers carry out surveys each summer. New volunteers are welcome to join the teams –there is plenty to do! No previous knowledge needed as training is provided. Contact Duncan (dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk) for more information or to sign up.



Eider monitoring

Between April and July we monitor the numbers of eider duck at a group of intertidal islands near North Berwick. Each survey takes an hour and can be done weekly, fortnightly or whenever volunteers are able. Bird identification skills are not essential - training will be given. For further details contact ranger Sam Ranscombe sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk 07810 057129



© Katty Baird

Big Nature Festival

The RSPB's Big Nature Festival is back at Levenhall on 21-22nd May and East Lothian Council's Countryside team will have their marquee again. For those that weren't involved last year, the marquee was a marvel! It included a range of habitats from mountain tops to the sea shore, with a real pond, mountain cairn, woodland corner and much more. It got many great reviews but couldn't have been put together and manned without the help of us volunteers. So once again, Duncan is asking for help with the setting up (19th & 20th May) manning the displays (21st & 22nd) and taking down afterwards (23rd). Volunteers helping over the weekend get a free pass and some lunch. All offers of help welcome – you aren't expected to help every day! Please get in touch with Duncan dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk for more info/to offer help.



Last year's pond creation

Before
After



Counting butterflies

If you would like to get involved with butterfly monitoring and can offer a regular commitment, there are opportunities to help with transects. These are routes walked regularly throughout spring and summer and the butterflies seen recorded. One transect in need of help is along the River Tyne from East Linton to Hailes. It takes 2-3 hours and would suit somebody who is local and flexible as transects can only be done on good weather days (and the timing of these can't be predicted in advance!) Training will be provided. For more info contact Sam sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk 07810 057129. Rangers and volunteers also have butterfly transects in other parts of the county. If you are keen to get involved but don't live near to the East Linton/Hailes transect contact Nick nmorgan@eastlothian.gov.uk to see if there are any opportunities near you.



© Katty Baird

Other projects in East Lothian and beyond...



The John Muir Pollinator Way

by Suzanne Burgess, Buglife Scotland

Over 3 million hectares of wildflower-rich grassland has been lost in the UK over the last 70 years. This has led to widespread declines in some of our most loved wildlife, including insects that provide free pollination services and are an essential part of our natural heritage.

The 'John Muir Pollinator Way' is a Buglife project funded by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Central Scotland Green Network ideas fund. This inspirational landscape scale project aims to map opportunities for grassland habitat creation, enhancement and management along the John Muir Way to form Scotland's first B-line (habitat corridor for pollinators). This will provide an essential first step for a much wider habitat creation partnership project that will ultimately help to reconnect fragmented habitats across the central belt of Scotland from Dunbar to Helensburgh.

These new connected habitats will help to improve important pollinator populations in the Central Scotland Green Belt allowing them to be more resilient to climate change and habitat loss in our ever changing world. This will also provide a nature rich experience for walkers and cyclists, and improve local green spaces and enhance green infrastructure for some of Scotland's most deprived communities.

Buglife are running training workshops along the entire route of the John Muir Way on grassland habitat creation and management as well as pollinator identification and monitoring with a focus on bumblebees, hoverflies and other insects. In celebration of John Muir's birthday week from the 16th-24th of April, we are running an event every day starting in Helensburgh on the 16th and ending in Dunbar on the 24th. In Dunbar we are running two bug walks meeting at John Muir's birthplace museum and heading to Lauderdale Park to look for bees and other bugs. Booking is essential for this event. For more information on the events being run over the week and how to book please look at the Buglife website: <https://www.buglife.org.uk/events>

For more information on the project and how to get involved please contact Suzanne Burgess on suzanne.burgess@buglife.org.uk and 01786 447504.



Buff-tailed bumblebee © Suzanne Burgess



Tiger Hoverfly © Suzanne Burgess



CAPTURING OUR COAST

Capturing our Coast is looking for adult volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in recording wildlife on rocky shores throughout the UK. A few of us went along to a training session held in North Berwick at the beginning of March. Our tutor, Hannah Grist (with the daunting task of being responsible for the *whole* Scottish coastline) gave an excellent introduction to what's involved.

There are more training sessions at the seabird centre in April and May, after which you are issued with a tape measure and quadrat and can get stuck in. Surveys don't require any prior knowledge, can be done as little or often as you like and anywhere in the UK – so you can take your quadrat on a family beach holiday if you so wish! For more information and to register go the Seabird Centre's website <http://seabird.org/conservation/capturing-our-coast/44/217>



There is more to Periwinkle identification than you might imagine... © Abbie Marland

John Muir Coast Festival 22-24 April: Lots of events along the coast for outdoor enthusiasts and families. www.johnmuirfestival.co.uk

Twic's Spring Conference 30 April, Galashiels: Talks on wildlife and recording in Lothians & Borders. Meet naturalists & find out about local projects. www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/news.php