Hello! Another month and once again I’m wondering what on earth to write in this opening paragraph! July has been a good month with lots going on. Plant and bee surveyors have been particularly busy recording their things but the ever-present litter picks and path and site maintenance tasks continue too. Events for volunteers have included a woodland wander at Yellowcraig and a hugely popular and spectacular boat trip around the islands. I have been busy with bright lights in beautiful locations. Read all about this, and more, in the following pages. It would be wonderful to receive articles from any of you about what you have been up to in the countryside (within reason!) or topics you think fellow vols might be interested in. Thank you to Dave O, Andy S, Dave Q and Abbie who have provided material at the last minute and to everyone else who has contributed.

Upcoming ELC Conservation Volunteer tasks:
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 to confirm details. (I’m not 100% confident of my accuracy this month 😊)

**Aberlady** - John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk
**Weds 3rd & Sun 21st Aug**

**Yellowcraig** – Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk
**No scheduled task this month**

**Path Wardens team** Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk
**Thurs 18th Aug**

**North Berwick** –Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk
**Tues 30th Aug**

**Levenhall** - Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk
**Tues 30th Aug**

**Dunbar** – Tara; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk

Upcoming events for volunteers:
Open to all, but please sign up, preferably with doodle poll (a link will be emailed). However, if this is too complicated, feel free to email me.

- **2nd August**  
  Dragonfly workshop in Aberlady with the British Dragonfly Society

- **22nd August**  
  Come and investigate the rock pools at Longniddry

- **5th Sept**  
  Bird walk – check out the wader scrapes and surrounding habitats at Levenhall

- **1st October**  
  VOLLY JOLLY – our annual get together with mini-workshops, lunch and fun!

- **11th October**  
  Guided walk along Longniddry railway path

Please send in ideas or content for the next ‘Best boot forward’ to kbaird@elothianmail.net  
Apologies for any omissions or inaccuracies.
Volunteer activity in July: some photos

- Levenhall vols did a great job removing thistles and ragwort from the meadow area.
- The never-ending pirri-pirri quest, Yellowcraig
- Aberlady vols having a break/cleaning the beach
- Trainee ghostbuster working the Donnelly Reservoir path
- Painting lines in the sky at John Muir Park
- Forensic search for Frog Orchids, Yellowcraig
- Fence improvements at the Glen in North Berwick

©Abbie Marland
©Dave Q
©Liz Curtis
©Sylvia Beaumont
Bird and Bees and other East Lothian wildlife in July

Stunning Spotted Orchids at Blindwells ©Duncan Priddle

Frog orchid at Yellowcraig ©Katty

Viper’s bugloss & yellow flower (hawksbit/catsear?) at Yellowcraig ©Abbie

Some summery butterflies ©Abbie Marland (L to R: Grayling, Small Skipper, Dark green Fritillary, Small Copper)

Male red-tail bumblebee and a pair of Gypsy cuckoo bumblebees ©Katty Baird

Roe deer ©Abbie Marland

Skylark at Barnsness and Kittiwake with chicks, Dunbar ©Liz Curtis

Young hedgehog at Barnsness ©Liz Curtis
Who’s who
This month we hear from Richard English, one of our West area rangers, and possibly the only one without a bit of coastline in his patch?

Name: Richard English

Job Title: West Area Countryside Ranger, covering the Ormiston, Pencaitland, Humbie, Saltoun areas.

Length of service: 17 years

Brief career:
Assorted voluntary and part-time posts back in the 80s with Middlesbrough/Newcastle/Gateshead councils. I then moved up the career ladder (slightly) to seasonal posts in North Tyneside and Angus. These were interspersed with three spells in higher education – one being a spectacular failure, the other two rather more successful. A short blast of training with SWT in Aberdeen was followed by my big break in 1999 when I became Seasonal Ranger at John Muir Country Park (hooray!). After a second season at JMCP I then took over as the ranger at Levenhall Links, a post I filled for four and a half years. There then followed a sideways promotion to my present post covering the south west area of the county. The main council owned/managed sites are the Pencaitland Railway Walk and Woodhall Picnic Site but there are also large privately owned areas such as Saltoun Big Wood, Humbie Woods and Winton Estate.

Favourite place in East Lothian: The Ormiston Yew – just a brilliant tree, with so much history to it.

Favourite place not in East Lothian: The NW Highlands, especially Assynt. Over a billion year’s worth of geology on show and I find it a tremendously relaxing place to be.

Best Natural history experiences:
Standing on Spike Island (JMCP) watching gannets diving into the Tyne estuary (it was at high water). There was a storm approaching, so these huge white birds were cast against a very dramatic purple/grey sky. Utterly magical.

Favourite wildlife: Swifts. No debate and I’m willing to fight anyone who disagrees. Daubenton’s bats come a close-ish second.

Swifts (Apus apus) are impressive birds with some enviable talents. Here are a few:
- After leaving the nest where they hatched, they’ll keep flying non-stop for three years!
- They eat, mate and sleep in the air. They can ‘snooze’ with one side of their brain, and then switch to the other side.
- Swifts drink by catching raindrops in the air, or by flying low over water, skimming a mouthful from the surface.

Richard posing with a short-eared owl at the Big Nature Festival this year.

Ever wondered who is the author of the monthly Countryside News bulletins that appear on noticeboards at countryside sites around East Lothian? Yes - Richard! His ability to produce an informative, witty and easy to read natural history article month after month is no mean feat. Hats off.
Summaries of some of the other volunteer events during the past month

Botanising at Morrison’s Haven

On a glorious hot day in the middle of July a group of volunteers went to Morrison’s Haven to learn more about plant identification and help Stuart MacPeherson document some of the plants growing there. We now have a band of keen “plant volunteers” who are building confidence in plant identification and hopefully will be able to take on some recording themselves soon. More sessions are planned at locations around East Lothian in the coming months.

Seeing the wood for the trees, Yellowcraig

Dave Wild, the ranger at Yellowcraig led an informative and fun walk through the woods, talking about trees, how they grow, how to identify different species and how to manage woodland. We used some state-of-the art equipment to measure tree height, listened to their inner working with a stethoscope and had a go at blowing bubbles through logs. Thanks Dave!

Boat trip round the Bass

On 24th July volunteers were treated to a boat trip around Craigleith and Bass Rock. We learnt about the seabirds, geology and history of the islands with informative commentary from James and Duncan. For many it was their maiden voyage around the islands, but even for those who have made the trip before, the sight of all the gannets around the Bass never fails to be awe inspiring and the noise and smell incredible! Getting close to puffins (“The clowns of the sea”), and all the other summer seabird residents of Craigleith as they go about their business was also special –we are incredibly lucky to have this world-class wildlife spectacle on our doorstep. Huge thanks to Colin Aston taking us and letting us have the trip at cost price, and to the Council for their contribution.

Check out stunning photos of the trip on the next page and Dave Q has made a brilliant video of the trip available on the path warden’s website https://pathwardens.wordpress.com/blog/ or direct from You Tube: https://youtu.be/Fla85xfHrm0
Boat Trip Photo competition – results! Thanks to everyone who sent me photos of the boat trip. The overcast conditions were challenging, but some excellent photos were taken and a good variety too. There were 8 photos in the shortlist, and my children each rated them from 1 (favourite) to 8 (least favourite). Interestingly, they each had a different favourite, but adding up the scores the overall winner was Jim Dickson with his gannet portrait, followed extremely closely by Graham P’s puffins in flight. So - congratulations Jim!!! Duncan will be in touch shortly with a prize.

SOS Puffin work parties resume!
The SOS Puffin work parties to control tree mallow on the islands near North Berwick restarts once again in mid-August. The planned dates and times for work parties during the period up to mid-October are as follows. Anyone wishing to join us on one or more of these trips is welcome to contact John Hunt on johnf_hunt@yahoo.co.uk

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Can you spare 15 minutes to count butterflies?

The **big butterfly count** is a nationwide survey aimed at helping assess the health of our environment. Butterflies react very quickly to changes in their environment which makes them excellent biodiversity indicators and butterfly declines can be an early warning for other wildlife losses.

All you have to do is choose a location (your garden, park or local countryside), preferably a warm day and record the butterflies you see during a 15 minute period. You can either do this from one spot, or during a walk. Then enter your results on the website. Of course there is also an app to make the whole process “easy?” . Full details, including identification tips can be found here: [http://www.bigbutterflycount.org/](http://www.bigbutterflycount.org/). The survey finishes on 7th August – so still time!

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**Ragwort Removal on Traprain – HELP NEEDED**

*If you can spare a few hours as a one-off or on a weekly basis, one of our volunteers would love some help!*

One of our volunteers, Liz, has been working extremely hard to remove ragwort from Traprain Law but would love some help to get rid of the remainder of this year’s flowering plants. Although not the ponies’ food plant of choice, ragwort will cause serious damage if ingested (and it is an accumulative poison). Therefore, as part of our duty of care for the ponies we need to do our best to remove the plant from Traprain and Berwick Laws where they graze.

If any one can help Liz on either Tuesdays or Wednesdays, from approx 10am – 1pm, she would love to see you. The work involves pulling up the whole ragwort plant, collecting it into green rubbish sacks, and taking them to a road-access point.

We are also after anyone with a trailer who would be willing to cart full bags of ragwort to one of the council’s recycling facilities.

**Please get in touch with Duncan dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk if you are able to help out.**

In addition Liz will be at Traprain every evening to the end of the school holidays and if anyone could help her carry the bags to the road-access point on any day, it would be a major help to her. To help with shifting the bags just contact her on 07454 655 955 and she would be able to tell you exactly where to meet her that day.
**Workshop on recognising and reporting wildlife crime in Scotland**

**Wednesday, 14 September 2016; 9.00-16.00; Battleby Conference Centre, Perth**

This free, one day workshop might be of interest to volunteers, and will certainly be a worthwhile event to attend. Places will fill quickly so if you are interested contact me and I’ll forward a booking form. It would be great if any volunteers attending could report back on the day and share some of the information with us.

| What is it about? | Wildlife crime can take many forms and affects some of our most iconic species and habitats. This event will provide a summary of some of the most widespread crimes occurring in Scotland’s countryside, help you to recognise signs of suspicious activity and explain what to do if you come across evidence of a potential wildlife crime incident. |
| Content: | Presentations and outdoor-based activity sessions which will enable participants to identify different types of wildlife crimes and to discuss what action should be taken. |
| What will you gain from attending? | Participants will gain a better understanding of the network of organisations within Scotland working together to reduce wildlife crime. There will be valuable opportunities for networking and learning from others about wildlife crime 'scenarios' and an opportunity to share and discuss issues. |
| Who is it for? | Representatives of outdoor recreation organisations (walkers, cyclists, dog walkers, horse riders), and those in wider conservation and land management who wish to inform a variety of audiences about wildlife crime. The event will enable people to recognise what wildlife crime looks like and to understand what actions should then be taken. |
| Cost: | Free Lunch and refreshments will be provided. |
| Booking: | Booking essential and as soon as possible, but no later than Friday 19 August. PLEASE email kattybaird@gmail.com and I can send you a copy of the booking form which you need to complete and send on to SNH. |
Mothing Madness by Katty Baird

*A brief description of my latest obsession – recording the moths of East Lothian*

Insomniacs may have noticed bright lights shining around the East Lothian countryside by night recently - from the Laws, along the coast, in woodlands and reedbeds. This isn’t an alien invasion or attempted communication with extra-terrestrials, but something much more down-to-earth.

For the love of light

The lights, (mine and others’), are put out to catch moths. Most moths find bright lights hard to resist (there are several theories as to why) making them a very effective way to attract and catch them. As they flit in ever decreasing circles around the light they end up falling into a box beneath the bulb, where they become trapped (unharmed) and can rest until morning. At dawn, somewhat reminiscent to Christmas morning as a child, the trap is opened and the moths counted, identified, admired and released.

The challenge

Moths, the larger ones at least, are reasonably well-studied as far as insects go. Enthusiasts up and down the country switch on bright light traps in their gardens overnight and count the moths that are caught in the morning. However, much less is known about the distribution of moths in more rural and remote areas, largely because of the inconvenience of lugging moth traps (which require heavy batteries or a generator to power them) to these locations. For somebody like me who likes a challenge, loves invertebrates, and is chomping at the bit to get some wildlife action compatible with being otherwise committed during daytime, mothing is proving to be just the thing.

What it is all for?

Efforts in recent months mean we now have respectable moth lists for sites that previously had very few records e.g. Berwick and Traprain Laws. Also several ‘new’ species have been added to East Lothian list this year. All exciting stuff in its own right, but more importantly it improves our knowledge of which moths occur where. Moths tend rely on a narrow range of food plants and can be very sensitive to changes in their habitats. Monitoring their numbers and distribution can serve as an early warning system to changes in our own environment perhaps caused by new farming practices, air pollution or climate change. On a personal level, it gets me to beautiful locations at the best times of day, feeds my nerdish need to ‘collect’ new species and has re-ignited my competitive streak in a quest to be the first to find them. A new meaning to being a mother.

A small selection of moths recorded recently in East Lothian

Thanks to John Harrison and Mark Cubitt for supporting my quest to get to grips with mothing and for raising the bar of what to find and where to go ever higher and to everyone else who accompanies me, humours me and makes traps for me.
**Tool of the Month – The slasher**

Following Bobby’s starter on Tools last month, Dave O kindly agreed to write about his current tool of choice – the simple, but oh so effective (when used correctly) slasher.

Maybe it's the time of year, but my favourite hand tool at the moment is the slasher. For those of you who have never used or seen one its a metal strip almost three foot long with a wooden handle at one end and a rounded tip at the other with the last 6 inches turned up so you can cut low to ground level.

At this time of year, with vegetation growing so fast and tall, the slasher is the best hand tool for keeping brambles, nettles, sweet cicely and butterbur in check. It's lighter than a strimmer and able to reach the plants that the grass cutters can't reach.

The only downsides are after using one for an hour you're knackered and you have keep a tight grip on so you don't damage yourself or someone else nearby.

Enjoy!

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**Au revoir Bobby!**

Bobby Anderson, one of our senior rangers, retires at the end of July. We wish him all the best, and here are few words from Abbie who has known him since he was a “young ranger”.

Back in the last century (well, 32 years ago), my partner and I took a summer’s walk with our baby son on the saltmarsh near Belhaven. Except for a distant figure inspecting seaweeds on the strand, we were the only people, with wheeling terns and curlews calling. After a while, we crossed paths with that person. He was a young Ranger named Bobby. We talked birds and flowers, and I learned that I needn’t be homesick for blue butterflies, because there were plenty “just around the corner”. And possibly dolphins too. Coming from the deep south, with no knowledge of Scotland, I began to feel at home.

That young man was, of course, Bobby Anderson, who has worked for 32 years with the East Lothian Council’s Ranger team. He started at Gullane with a seasonal post before progressing to a full-time and Senior role at John Muir Country Park as Head of the East Area. Friend, mentor, colleague, champion of wild places, font of local knowledge, ace organiser and excellent company, Bobby has now retired.

So on behalf of many of us who have worked and had adventures alongside Bobby, I would like to thank him for all the great service. East Lothian’s environment would be much the less, had he not been on hand. We wish him and his family a very happy retirement. Last week, I asked whether he might go on holiday after finishing up this particular chapter. “Holiday?” Bobby replied..... “The rest of my life will be a holiday!”

Not too far away, we hope.
Ranger Summer activities

The school summer holidays are at least half-way through, but if you have children to entertain in the coming weeks, it is worth checking out the Countryside Ranger Services programme of activities. From rummaging in rockpools to learning survival skills there are a variety of activities suitable for children and young people aged 5-16 years.

Details can be found here: http://eastlothian.bookinglive.com/summer-activities/ranger-service/

The events are free but places on some of the events need to be booked in advance in order to manage the number of people attending. Children should be accompanied by an adult.

Where in EL?

This month, just one picture taken somewhere in East Lothian by Neil M. Do you know where it is?

If you have any mystery photos, or any other ‘fun’ quiz-type ideas for this back page, please send them in! Thanks

Last month’s answers:

- Hope’s Reservoir
- Plaque on Heugh side of North Berwick Law to commemorate planting trees by BT in 1991.
- On Fidra, with North Berwick Law in the background.
- Weather vane on Whitekirk church