



Newsletter for East Lothian Council Conservation Volunteers

February 2017

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2017! Here's hoping that conservation volunteering in East Lothian during 2017 is as fun and productive as 2016. The plan is for me to continue in the much the same way as I did last year, producing this publication and organising a programme of events for volunteers. Planning for these is underway, with a few events in the pipeline, but if there is anything that you would like to receive training on or learn more about then do let me know. And if you have a particular passion, or area of expertise that you would be willing to share with other volunteers then there is certainly opportunity for you to run, or help run a session – please get in touch! Also in 2017 East Lothian Conservation Volunteers (ELCV) will hopefully secure charitable status, allowing us to access additional resources to enhance the work we do. We are a large group doing a variety of tasks so now is the time to provide feedback and suggestions that you feel might improve the work or groups you are involved with. Please chat to or email the rangers or Duncan with any thoughts you have. Feedback is always helpful and appreciated by those involved in taking this process forward.

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.



©Liz

- 19 Feb & 1 March Aberlady** John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 9 March Yellowcraig** Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 14 Feb Longniddry/Hadd r'way walk** Jen; jnewcombe@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 16 Feb Path Warden team** Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 22 Feb Dunbar CVs** Tara/Laura; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 23 Feb Tyne Team** Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 28 Feb North Berwick** Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk
- 28 Feb Levenhall** Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk



Path Warden wins "Hero of the Month" award!



Andy Bradshaw, one of our path wardens, has been recognised by Keep Scotland Beautiful as their "Hero of the Month". Andy works hard keeping Gosford Bay litter-free, visiting twice a week and relying on public transport to get there. A well-deserved reward for all his efforts and dedication, which will hopefully help highlight the problem of coastal litter raise awareness of the valuable work carried out by volunteer path wardens across the county. **Congratulations Andy!**



Volunteer activity during December and January

Leaf blowing on the Haddington railway walk



Controlling rhododendron at JMCP



Keeping ahead of Houdini Sheep! Reinforcing walls and fences at Barnsness @Liz



Path clearing at West Barns



Friends of Yellowcraig and staff from Charles River getting stuck into Buckthorn removal and repair work at Yellowcraig. © Abbie



Junior Rangers sharing their stories about the work they have been doing over the last year



Christmas cookouts at Barnsness and Aberaldy © Abbie & Liz



First Buckthorn bashing of 2017 at Aberlady © Abbie



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

Summaries of some of the other volunteer activities and events

Emergency First Aid

In December some more volunteers had the chance to attend this excellent training run by the Outdoor Learning team in Musselburgh. Hopefully we'll never have to put it to use, but knowledge and confidence in basic life-saving skills is important. Hopefully we will be able to run more sessions during 2017... watch this space!

Christmas Wreath Making

Christmas seems a long time ago now, but in December, to help us get in the mood, Sam Ranscombe led a wonderful Christmas wreath making session for volunteers. Making decorations out of cut greenery, rather than throwing them on a bonfire is perhaps a novelty to the conservation volunteer but a great time was had by all and some lovely wreaths produced. Huge thanks to Sam for organising.



© Abbie M

Fencing at North Berwick Glen



Thanks to those who were able to volunteer at short notice to erect a fence at North Berwick Glen. In 2016 a huge fallen tree damaged the old fenceline and an ambitious engineering solution has been put in place to protect the path from erosion involving steel rods and sockets to hold the timber fencing. More work is planned for the path edges and surface this year.



Photos © Joyce Kent

Path wardens Xmas lunch

You know they say its the journey rather than the destination? – well that's certainly true of this video of our Christmas lunch!

[//youtu.be/E3U3qan2TOs](https://youtu.be/E3U3qan2TOs)

Dec 15th saw the Path Wardens head out on their Xmas ramble. We walked from Aberlady to Gullane and thence to *The Main Course*. En route the group enjoyed the sights of sanderlings following the tide line, flocks of fieldfares on the buckthorn and even nipped into a sea cave to soak up the atmosphere.



Robin Diary

by Abbie Marland

Several BBF readers have enquired about the tame Robin which featured in the last edition. So here's an update.



Over New Year the robin continued to visit each day, taking food from my hand and perching in the porch during bad weather. It could be summoned by a whistle call, and peered inside windows to see where I had got to. Several times it was clearly making food requests by flittering its wings in my presence. Whilst walking down the farm track from home, I noticed "my" robin was accompanying me. Although it travelled discreetly along the hawthorn hedge, any stops on my part brought it flying into view. This behaviour was not appreciated by other robins holding territory on that patch. Tameness of robins, and in particular British as opposed to European ones, is very well known. However, this particular attachment seems unusually strong.

In mid-January the temperature rose sharply. Birds were quickly into song, and my garden was more clearly divided up into territories front and back. I don't yet know whether "my" robin (which doesn't sing) is a cock or a hen, as both share the same plumage, but it was quite often seen comfortably in the close company of another. On Jan 17th, I was surprised by its absence at my front door. Instead, there was a large clump of robin feathers strewn there, clearly the work of a Sparrowhawk. Eventually "my" robin, and another tame blackbird were found in deep cover behind the garden shed. Neither would come out into the open, and both seemed alarmed. The tame robin's pair was never seen again.

After a week, the robin started taking food (cheese) from my hand again, but with less confidence. Every sound or movement caused immediate retreat. Only at dusk would a small face would appear close up at a lighted window, and an open front door found the robin waiting.

At January's end, "our" bird quietly occupies up a patch in the back garden. It is up and about at early dawn, and will come for cheese before going to roost. Sparrowhawks are very hungry and active just now, as they are early breeders. So with neighbouring cats on the prowl too, robins need to keep on their wits about them.

We'll keep you posted.



Who's who

This month we meet a new member of the ranger team. Catherine is covering Leigh Shearer's maternity leave and brings plenty of enthusiasm and experience to the role. We hope she enjoys her stint in beautiful East Lothian!

Name: Catherine Cumming

Job Title: West Area Countryside Ranger (Temporary contract to cover Leigh's maternity leave)

Length of service: A few weeks!



Brief career: I studied Geography at university, swiftly followed by an MSc in Environmental management. I got into rangership accidentally through volunteering with the National Trust for Scotland and luckily for me, my volunteering soon led to a seasonal ranger position at Culzean Country Park. After that I was a TCV trainee working with Edinburgh Council for 6 months before landing a full time job at a private estate in Fife. Relocation back to Edinburgh led me to East Lothian!

Favourite place: It's a toss up between the Isle of May and Lewis/Harris – islands are awesome in general, and I like both of these for very different reasons – Isle of May for the seabirds and Lewis and Harris for the machair!

Favourite wildlife: I'm a big fan of our UK mammals and really like bats in particular. Many a happy evening has been spent bat detector in hand, and obviously working at Culzean was particularly fun as it is home to at least 8 species.

Wildlife you most want to see? I've seen minke and beluga whales in the wild but I'd love to see orca one day. It would be a bonus to combine this with a trip to another island or two...



Random animal facts!

Beluga whale.

Possibly my "most want to see" mammal so am very jealous that Catherine has seen one in the wild! Belugas live in Arctic and sub-arctic waters. Adults are easily distinguished by their often pure white skin, small size (for a whale!) and their lack of dorsal fin (which helps them swim under ice). They are closely related to Narwhals but, instead of the long horn, Belugas have a distinctive bump on their forehead known as a melon. The melon helps with communication (sounds and facial expressions) and is also used in echolocation.



Other events, opportunities and goings-on

Online survey about participation in physical activity

Many of us have identified health and physical activity as one of the benefits that volunteering in the countryside provides. If you would like to contribute to research into this, here is a link to the Health and Sport Committee Inquiry questionnaire requested by MSPs regarding views on participation in physical activity and sport. <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/SportInquiry/>

Recording and Conserving Edinburgh's Butterflies and Moths

Whether you're a seasoned recorder or completely new to the fascinating world of butterflies and moths, Butterfly Conservation Scotland would like to welcome you to this free event in Edinburgh on Sat 11th Feb.



This event will introduce the main butterfly and moth recording schemes, with advice on how you can get involved in recording in your area. There'll also be information on our plans for practical conservation work, training workshops and volunteer opportunities in Edinburgh.

There will be opportunities to identify some recording and conservation priorities for Edinburgh. So if you've any thoughts on what we should do, please do come along and make your voice heard! Finally, we'll have a workshop to show you how to get started with trapping moths.

For information and booking contact Urban Butterfly Project Officer Anthony McCluskey on amclluskey@butterfly-conservation.org or call 07730221266

Venue: City of Edinburgh Methodist Church, 25 Nicolson Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9BX

Time: Registration from 10am; event from 10.30am



Mountain Hare Project

The Mountain Hare project featured in previous editions of BBF has made great progress. Graham Pettigrew and his committed team of fellow volunteers have been up in the hills in all weathers... I suppose winter studies of an animal with 'mountain' in its name are unlikely to be warm and comfortable.

At time of writing, two hares have been successfully radio-tagged and further funds have been secured for thermal imaging equipment.



Sustrans vols

We are working with Sustrans on their Greener Greenways project on both the Pencaitland and Haddington-Longniddry Railway Walk. On these work days, we carry out tasks such as grassland management (yes, that means scything!), scrub clearance and pond work. For more info check out:

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/events>

The next volunteer workday is 14th Feb

RANGER HIKE February 26th: The Link

Join the rangers on a coastal route of 7.5 miles (13km). From woodland gorge to high eroding cliffs, along sandy beaches to boulder shores. Industry and history on display all the way along this route. Return transport will be provided.

For more details of this and other ranger-led activities visit:

http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/downloads/file/11240/ranger_service_events_2016-17

Recording the wildlife you see and when out and about (and submitting the records) can provide important information about where local plants and animals are found. Across the UK there are Biological Record Centres which collect, analyse and disseminate these wildlife records. Our local centre is "TWIC", The Wildlife Information Centre. Here is a little more about what they do and how you can help.

The Wildlife Information Centre: An Introduction

By Natalie Harmsworth (Ecologist), Jackie Stewart (Data Processor) and Graeme Wilson (Centre Manager)

The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) is the local environmental records centre for south-east and central Scotland that collects, collates and disseminates information about the wildlife in our area. As a focal point for biological recording, we aim to increase knowledge of the land, freshwater and marine wildlife throughout our region. TWIC provides a wide range of **data services**, routinely supplying data to local authorities for screening planning applications, to consultants for preparing environmental assessments, to conservation bodies for writing management plans and to students to help with coursework. TWIC is a not-for-profit company with charitable status and is funded through grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities and from income generated from consultant data requests.

Working closely with local recorders, natural history groups and recording schemes, TWIC aims to hold as comprehensive a record of the wildlife of our region as possible. The data we receive also feed into national recording schemes and societies databases and ultimately are made available online on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway and NBN Atlas Scotland. Currently (as of January 2017), TWIC holds **2.2 million species records** covering a wide range of taxa, from microscopic fungi to mammals and plants. In addition we hold data on designated sites and habitats.

TWIC welcomes all wildlife sightings for our area, no matter how widespread or common the species. In fact, common species are often under-recorded. Casual sightings – as well as records from systematic surveys – are useful as they help fill gaps in recording. Each year, our programme of **recording excursions** targets survey effort at specific sites chosen to benefit our partner organisations, e.g. we target recording on proposed Local Biodiversity Sites (pLBS) for Local Authorities. The aim of the outings is to make a close study of each site, recording as many different species as possible. The outings also provide an opportunity for individuals to record in a social environment, enabling beginners to learn from more experienced recorders and for individuals to share knowledge across taxonomic groups.



Regular recording excursions are arranged during the year

For those keen to improve their identification skills, our **workshops** can help – so keep an eye on our website for details. Our spring and autumn **conferences** provide a platform for interested and like-minded people to join together and listen to presentations on a range of topics and to provide opportunities for people to share news on local recording initiatives. Our next conference is on Saturday 29th April 2017 in Musselburgh (free entry, booking essential).



TWIC conferences are held twice a year

TWIC staff attend local events to promote recording to new audiences and we also encourage public participation in wildlife recording through surveys that focus on particular species. The latest of these is the **Scottish Spider Search**, launched in November 2016 in collaboration with the British Arachnological Society, Caledonian Conservation and Buglife and part-funded by SNH. This survey focuses on four easily identified spiders - Four-spotted Orbweb Spider (*Araneus quadratus*), Zebra Spider (*Salticus scenicus*), Nurseryweb Spider (*Pisaura mirabilis*) and Daddy Longlegs Spider (*Pholcus phalangioides*). Spiders are some of our most familiar and widespread invertebrates, but there are still big gaps in our knowledge of their distributions in Scotland. This is your chance to get to know this group of organisms better and contribute to knowledge of these species. Anyone can submit a record to the survey, by going to our website:

www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/scottish_spider_search.php and letting us know **what** you saw, **when** you saw it, **where** you saw it and **your name**. Just remember to send your supporting photographs to natalie@wildlifeinformation.co.uk, so we can confirm your sighting!



The latest wildlife survey supported by TWIC – spiders! (As featured in last month's BBF)

To follow all our latest news and activities please visit our website, www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk. You can also like us on our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter. Why not get involved!

Junior Rangers get Exploring!

2016 was a busy year for the Junior Rangers. Way back in January they started their Explorer level John Muir Award. The Explorer Award is the second level of the JMA and it is expected that the participants both carry out the activities for longer period of time and take a bit more ownership of the development of the programme. The Junior Ranger chose to spend the year exploring the River Tyne from source to sea.



Many things are written about John Muir, but the Juniors were keen to explore the river as close to how Muir would have, so one of the first ports of call was the John Muir Birthplace. There they got a great understanding of his wanderlust, curiosity and adventurous side that was to be a common thread through their explorations. They did many activities over the year but a couple of particular days stand out in our minds.

One was a lovely afternoon spent 'playing' at the Meeting of the Waters in Pencaitland. The Juniors were able to truly lead their own exploration leading to dams being built, natural boat races, butterbur experiments and wet socks!

Another wonderful time was had exploring the river on the water. Aided by our Outdoor Learning team the Juniors paddled up the Tyne at Haddington in canoes and coracles. This led on to them helping Michael Portillo paddle on the Biel Burn for his Great British Railway Journeys programme!

Sharing is an important part of the John Muir Award and the Junior Rangers certainly did that in style as they simultaneously presented exhibitions of their Explorer journeys in four of the county's libraries, then coming together for the presentation of their Award certificates.

So 2016 was a big year for the Junior Rangers, who knows where 2017 will take us!



The LAST page

Bird Photo Quiz

Here are some of the wonderful photos of local birdlife taken by volunteers Abbie, Liz and Sylvia over the last couple of months. Can you identify them?



© Liz



© Liz



© Liz



© Sylvia



© Abbie



© Abbie

Where in EL?

Do you know where these photographs were taken?



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