



Newsletter for East Lothian Council Conservation Volunteers

Here is the second issue of our Volunteer Newsletter, which now has a snazzy (illustrated) title. Thanks to an anonymous contributor and friend for inspiration.

As Spring arrives (which it surely will?), our activities will shift a little bit away from the cutting, bashing, burning type and more towards wildlife monitoring (time to say good bye to sheep and bonfires and remember which bumble bee has a white bottom and a long nose). Plans for some talks and workshops for the coming months are coming together... watch this space! If you have any skills or expertise you would be willing to share, please let me know. Hopefully enough of us will be able to support these events to make them worthwhile.

This newsletter includes articles about some of the other conservation volunteering activities that happen in East Lothian. If you have any more time to spare, you may like to get involved in these projects, either regularly or as a one-off.

Please send in material for the next newsletter to kbaird@elothianmail.net. A paragraph or two about wildlife or your favourite East Lothian haunts, outdoor activities, quizzes, photos, stories... maybe you are a poet and you don't even know it?



An Inspiring Volunteer

CONGRATULATIONS to East Lothian Conservation Volunteer Neil Mitchell, who has been shortlisted in STRIVE's Inspiring Volunteers Awards. Neil has been volunteering with East Lothian Council for 10 years, helping at Yellowcraig, North Berwick, Traprain, John Muir CP, Barns Ness and various sites in between. He is also a path warden, a sheep counter and a pony checker. A well-deserved nomination; fingers crossed he will be walking away with an award next Friday!



The Running Wave – a volunteer's blog

Want to see some beautiful photographs taken in and around east Lothian? (plus a few from much further afield!) Check out Amanda Graham's blog:

<http://therunningwave.blogspot.co.uk/>

Recent photos taken in wintery sunshine are lovely – they make me want to head outdoors and enjoy our beautiful countryside!



Volunteer activity in February

As always, plenty of activity going on. Mostly cutting, burning, counting and clearing. The sheep have now left for their summer holidays and the sheep checkers can hang up their crooks and have a rest from shepherding and a job well done. Nearly time for the grassland surveyors to move in and monitor if the sheep have been doing *their* job properly...

:: Gorse burning :: Path wardening :: Scrub removal from dunes :: Woodland thinning ::

:: Beach clean :: Fence and path work :: Buckthorn burning :: Wildlife monitoring ::



Levenhall family rangers, working in the woods



Buckthorn bashing and burning at Aberlady

© Abbie Marland



Path wardening - Thomas Bower's patch



Synchronised gorse burning at Barns Ness



The troublesome sheep of Barns Ness



Apple tree removal from Yellowcraig

© Abbie Marland



Sunshine and promise of bonfires attracted nearly 30 volunteers to Aberlady

:: Fence work :: Litter Picking :: Sheep and Pony checking ::

Who's who

The Council have two ranger teams operating in East Lothian, an east team and a west team. Each team has a Senior Ranger in charge of it, and this month we meet Roger, the Senior ranger for the west team, which includes sites from Gullane westwards and southwards.

Name: Roger Powell

Job Title: Senior Ranger (West)

What you do? As well as carrying out many of the duties that the rest of the Rangers do, I am responsible for the day to day management of the West team, the welfare of the individual Rangers and ensuring that they carry out the duties that they have been charged with.

Length of time with East Lothian Council: 24 years

Potted Career: I obtained a PhD in Marine Biology in 1990, but decided to pursue a career as a Ranger, as the academic opportunities were almost non-existent! I began work as a Seasonal Countryside Ranger with Midlothian Council in 1990 and then worked for a year with the Scottish Wildlife Trust before coming to East Lothian in March 1992.

Favourite place in East Lothian: The top of Lammer Law (stunning views on a clear day) or anywhere by the sea.

Favourite wildlife: Amphipods*; I studied them for three years for my PhD and still have an affection for them! Also any of our UK mammals - fox, badger, otter, etc.

What wild place would you most like to visit? New Zealand, particularly South Island.

What do you do in your spare time: reading, walking, cycling, family history (when I get time), watching Spurs win (never used to be that common, but check this season out!)



Roger dressed and ready for something (maybe he's just phoning for a pizza)

© Katty Baird



* wondering what an amphipod is? Here's one: a sand hopper, on a North Berwick beach. Sandhoppers live in damp sandy places but most amphipods (and there are approaching 10,000 species worldwide) are fully aquatic, living in freshwater or the sea. I'm sure if you are *really* interested, Roger will be able to tell you MUCH more...

March Wildlife Watch

This month Abbie Marland writes about the Brown Hare. March is a good month to see these mammals, and East Lothian farmland not a bad place to try.

Brown Hare

By Abbie Marland

What is a symbol of fertility, luck and magic, depicted in art and carved in stone, linked to deities and sought for the pot? Our humble hare!



Adult Brown Hare by Abbie Marland

In East Lothian our most familiar hare species is the Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*). It is native to Europe but not to Britain, where it was probably introduced by the Romans. This mammal is adapted to temperate, open countryside, sometimes locally inhabiting woodland. It is related to the European rabbit, which is in the same family but in a different genus. Hares are larger than rabbits, have longer ears and hind legs, breeding in sheltered depressions on the ground (“forms”) rather than in a burrow.

Mostly nocturnal and shy in nature, hares change their behaviour in the spring. As the breeding season peaks, they can be seen in broad daylight, chasing one another around fields and meadows. Known as “Mad March Hares”, they jump, sprint and box with their paws. Some of this courtship behaviour is male competition, but also females objecting to their suitors. Hares are herbivorous and feed on a wide range of vegetation, buds and bark. Their natural predators include birds of prey and foxes. They rely on speed to escape from such threats, and can reach over 40mph. Their powerful hind legs give them an advantage when bolting uphill. However, an alternative strategy is to “freeze” and lie low until danger is passed.

Hares give birth to 2-4 young called leverets. They are born fully furred and open eyed. For the first few weeks they are dependent on their mother’s milk, only suckled once a day at dusk. This helps protect them against predation, but sometimes attracts human attention. Unless a leveret is found wounded, best to leave it alone. Its mum has stashed it in a sheltered spot on purpose, and will definitely return.



Brown Hare Leveret by George Hogg

The Brown Hare is listed as an East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan species. Overall, it is declining because of changes in farming practice. There are fewer places to feed and shelter now, and agricultural machinery and road traffic also take a high toll. Last year saw a welcome rise in hare population numbers, probably due to uncultivated field strips being set aside.

John Hunt (and his dynamic team) have worked tirelessly over the last decade to run volunteer work parties to Craigleith and Fidra, and it is gratifying to hear that the puffins are benefitting from all this effort. Those of us have helped out can testify that spending a day on the islands is a wonderful experience. Exhausting yes, but in a good way! Here, John gives us an overview of the project and how to get involved if you would like.



Happy volunteers tackling a tree mallow jungle

The SOS Puffin Project

By John Hunt

A wonderful feature of the East Lothian coastline is the chain of four islands near North Berwick. As well as providing a delightful backdrop to the landscape they are hugely important for their nesting seabirds. Seabirds are under a lot of pressure these days from fishing practices and climate change but another unusual threat has emerged in recent years – the invasive plant tree mallow.

By 2006 tree mallow which can grow to nearly 3 metres high formed a dense jungle covering 90% of the island of Craigleith and had spread to cover nearly half of Fidra. The very large puffin population on Craigleith crashed and that on Fidra was under threat. After much consultation the Scottish Seabird Centre set up the SOS Puffin project to control tree mallow using volunteers. Funds were kindly provided by Viridor Credits and others to pay for boats and equipment and regular work parties began in 2007.

Since then over 1,000 volunteers have been out on 235 work parties to help control tree mallow which is cut using loppers and shears. Many volunteers come repeatedly and everyone seems to enjoy the experience of working together on attractive islands doing something positive to help the puffins and other seabirds.

The project has succeeded in bringing tree mallow under control and for the last seven years puffins have been able to nest without being affected by the plant. Numbers of puffins are now recovering. However there is a large amount of tree mallow seed in the soil and each year a new generation of plants appears which needs to be cut. The war is slowly being won but it will be several more years before we can relax.

More information about the project can be obtained from johnf_hunt@yahoo.co.uk. The Spring programme of work parties starts in early March and there are still some spare places if anyone would like to help. If so please contact John Hunt on the above email address.

Opportunities on the railway walks

Ranger Richard English provides a bit more information about volunteer activities on the County's two railway walks – an opportunity to learn new skills, work with some familiar faces and meet some new ones!

There's been quite a lot happening on East Lothian's railway walks recently. Both the Haddington-Longniddry and Pencaitland Railway Walks have seen groups of volunteers carrying out valuable conservation tasks. This is part of an ongoing collaboration between the Countryside Ranger Service, East Lothian Conservation Volunteers and Sustrans staff and volunteers.

So far, we've been carrying out grassland management in Haddington, Ormiston and Pencaitland with the aim of promoting wildflower diversity. We've also been trying to eradicate non-native snowberry from Ormiston Station. But there's lots more work to be done! Over the coming months we'll be doing more grassland work (including training in how to use a scythe – very exciting!), pond clearance, newt surveying and having another go at that pesky snowberry.

Anyone who's interested in coming along to help is more than welcome. If you want to get involved in Sustrans growing network of volunteers, contact Laura White at Laura.White@sustrans.org.uk. If you'd prefer to be involved as an East Lothian volunteer then get in touch with Duncan Priddle at dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk.



Dunbar Community Woodland Group (DWGC) www.dunbarwoods.org

If you live in the Dunbar area you might like to get involved in this community project.

DCWG is looking for volunteers to help care for local woodland. All sorts of talents are being sought: tree planters, wood-workers; fund-raisers; conservationists; website & IT help; woodland maintenance volunteers & machine operators; artists; event organisers; book-keeper ...

Contact Ute Penny, membership secretary, ute_penny@live.co.uk

Next work party: SUNDAY 27 MARCH, 1pm – 3 pm in the LEARNING WOOD (meet at corner of Kellie & Middlemass Roads) to help clear weeds around baby trees

Some more things to do



DUNBAR SCIENCE FESTIVAL

4-13 March (5th/6th March for most family events)

Loads of activities over the weekend aimed primarily at families plus an interesting programme of evening events for adults the following week. East Lothian Ranger Service will be there on Saturday with a few volunteers, so if you are visiting then be sure to come and say hello! Details at: <http://dunbarscifest.org.uk/home>

Buzzzzzz!!!

If you'd like to help out in the annual bumblebee surveys at Barns Ness, Aberlady, Traprain or North Berwick Laws, Duncan is looking for new recruits to add to the team NOW. No experience necessary, just a willingness to help with surveys once-twice a month. Training given. Surveying will start in April.

If you are interested please email Duncan: dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk



© Katty Baird

Walk off that Easter Chocolate (or make room for some more)

Sunday 27th March:

Ranger-led walk: Faseny to Gifford (via Meikle Says Law)

A 17.5km (11 mile) walk through the Lammermuir Hills to Gifford with spectacular views across East Lothian along the way. Mostly along well-defined tracks with some quiet country lanes. Return transport will be provided. Details at <http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rangerevents>



ELC Conservation Volunteer tasks planned for March:

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 (as plans can change!).



© Abbie Marland

'Supervising the Sous Chef...'

Volunteering includes keeping an eye on those rangers to make sure they do a proper job...

Aberlady

John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk

Weds 2nd: Clear up of the beach

Sun 20th: Remove electric fencing

Yellowcraig

Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk

Thurs 3rd: Wall repair

Path Wardens team task

Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk

Thurs 17th: Task tbc

North Berwick

Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk

Tuesday 22nd: Task tbc

Levenhall

Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk

Tues 29th: Hedge weaving

John Muir CP

Tara/Brian; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk

Weds 30th: Replacing bollards

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