Hello again. There have been two extremely successful events involving volunteers since the last edition of Best Boot Forward. At the end of April, the Path Wardens organised the Spring Tyne Stroll, and in May we had the Big Nature Festival at Levenhall, organised by the Countryside Team and significantly supported by volunteers. Well done to everybody involved for their hard work and humour. These events help to raise the profile of the work we all do across the county, and help demonstrate the huge variety of tasks that just couldn’t be achieved without the help of volunteers. Back behind-the-scenes, the hard graft continues with our path wardens checking and maintaining their paths, pony checkers going out every day, regular group tasks at various sites and now our survey teams are getting stuck into various wildlife monitoring projects. So - let the sun shine!

### 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.

- **Aberlady** - John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Weds 1st & Sun 19th June
- **Yellowcraig** – Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Thurs 2nd June
- **Path Wardens team** Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Thurs 16th June
- **North Berwick** – Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Tues 28th June
- **Levenhall** - Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Tues 31st May & Tues 28th June
- **Dunbar** – Tara/Brian; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk  
  Weds 29th June

### Path Wardens Charity AGM – 23rd June Hope Rooms, North Berwick

The Path Wardens are holding their AGM on 23rd June (path wardens: you will be emailed more details soon). Any volunteers interested in the work of the path wardens and perhaps wanting to become involved in what they do is welcome to come along. As well as the actual AGM, there will be a talk and discussions. Please let Duncan know if you would like to come along. (dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk)

Here’s wishing John McLaughlin a speedy recovery to good health. John has been involved in many projects, both with East Lothian Council and elsewhere and is amazing at organising the grass surveyors at Aberlady (no mean feat!). You are missed. We look forward to having you back as soon as you are able.
Volunteer activity during May
This month we have seven pages of it!! (mostly pictures)

Walling at Yellowcraig

Litter picking at Aberlady

Dawn chorus walk at Gosford

Pond survey, Dirleton

barbeque refurb at JMCP

Family rangers at Levenhall

Path wardens at Levenhall

Painting at Whitesands

Junior rangers on the River Tyne

Ranger walk with Bobby

Please send in ideas or content for the next 'Best boot forward' to kbaird@elothianmail.net

Apologies for any omissions, inaccuracies and typos.
On a glorious sunny day at the end of April some of the path wardens, assisted by a few of the Countryside Team organised the Spring Tyne Stroll, a guided walk along a stretch of the River Tyne showcasing the area’s heritage and wildlife and the work that our hard-working path wardens do to keep the paths in good condition. It was a great success and they received some lovely feedback from members of the public who joined the stroll. Well done to everyone involved. Hopefully there will be similar events in the future!

The Spring Tyne Stroll
30th April 2016 by Andy Stevenson

The event was split into two guided walks one led by Dave Q and the other by Dave O. Thomas Bower and Andy Stevenson were back markers. The walk started in Haddington and finished in East Linton, a distance of 6 miles. At regular intervals Dave and Dave talked about the maintenance of the paths and members of the Countryside Team gave brief talks on wildlife:

Just past Abbey Bridge Duncan gave a talk on plants. He gave information on the invasive species Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam.

Nick gave a talk on butterflies and bumblebees. With the use of the cards he brought with him, he showed the different species.

By Hailes Castle Sam gave a talk on birds and the surrounding area.

At East Linton we were taken to the pub for soup and bread before a bus took us back to Haddington.
The Big Nature Festival 21-22\textsuperscript{nd} May

Many volunteers were involved at the Big Nature Festival, an annual wildlife event organised by the RSPB. ELC Countryside Team had a large marquee “Wild about East Lothian” which contained six mini-habitats and lots of interactive activities. Two days of set up saw us digging a pond, putting up a reed bed, building a stone cairn, creating a beach, planting an urban garden, making a mini-farm, installing a woodland corner... and more! Then there were two tiring days talking to the public and inspiring them about the wonderful creatures and habitats of East Lothian. FINALLY, it all had to be packed away again! Huge thanks to all the volunteers who helped in any way, and in particular one or two mad? stalwarts who came along every day. And of course, thanks to the staff members (who also turned up every day) for their enthusiasm, humour and hard work all helping to make it an enjoyable & worthwhile volunteering experience. Great team work!

THURSDAY & FRIDAY IN PICTURES - SETTING UP

Photos mostly by Abbie Marland
We counted in 1327 people on the Saturday
We counted in 1594 people on the Sunday
Total = **2921 people!! (this compares with 2300 last year)**
16 new volunteers signed up
We received evaluation comments from 90 people (well done Junior Rangers) and loads of lovely comments... see the next page for a selection.

Some statistics for those who like numbers....
So much natural resources feels like we are in the countryside. This is a WONDERFUL tent. It is brilliant. I enjoyed the fishing and what is in the box as well. Wow! Great tent! Everything is first class. Tops.

Excellent! - and every section buzzing with enthusiasm. Well done!

Awesome you built a whole world. Best tent of the event! Great stuff for kids and adults. SUPER!

It's amazing. Well done.

I had fun in the tent making a medl. I like the way you put signposts around.

MAGNIFICENT - thank you. This tent was the highlight of the day. Fantastic!

The bee hive was amazing! Cool! Interesting!

This is the best place ever! There is so much to do. by Eilidh.

Grat! I love nacher.
A dawn chorus walk with Duncan Priddle
by Liz Curtis

At 5 a.m. on 1 May Duncan led a group of seven volunteers into some beautiful wild woodland behind Amisfield Walled Garden to listen to the dawn chorus. The weather was a little temperamental but there were still plenty of birds to listen out for.

In this habitat, Duncan explained, we should hear birds similar to those in our own back gardens. They sing when they wake up with the rising sun. May is a good time to hear them, because they are breeding. The male birds do their display calls, telling the females, 'Come and look at me!'

Recognising birdsong is like learning a language. Duncan advised, 'The best way is to go out on your own and get used to your local patch. If you can go away with three calls this morning, I'd be delighted.'

We heard the high-pitched and complex call of the wren and the liquid song of the blackcap. Easier to remember was the monotonous call of the chiff-chaff - 'squeaky squeaky squeaky' to some ears. Also memorable was the yellowhammer's request for 'a little bit of bread and no cheese', spinning out the final sound.

There was some discussion as to how to remember the chaffinch's song: 'like a willow warbler but ending in a mess', or ending 'pleased to meet you' or 'tittiwahu'. Duncan advised, 'Choose whatever way of remembering works for you.'

We made our way to an area of grassland, where willow warblers were flitting about in willow trees beside a pond, and a blackbird was calling from a treetop. We saw - but did not hear - reed buntings among some reedmace in a patch of marsh.

Part way through, Duncan miraculously produced hot drinks and biscuits from his rucksack, most welcome on a chilly morning.

Back in woodland, we watched a song thrush spilling out its spell-binding improvisations on a branch in front of us. A highlight came when one of our group spotted a bullfinch, whose glamorous red plumage contrasts with its dull song.

We heard the sharp call of blue tits, the varied song of a greenfinch, the cooing of wood pigeons and the rattle of a woodpecker hammering a dead tree trunk. Finally we heard the delicate sound of a goldcrest in a giant sequoia tree near the carpark.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable and educative outing, and everyone agreed they would like to repeat it.

You can listen to individual birds here: http://www.british-birdsongs.uk

Thanks also to John Harrison who led another group of volunteers on a dawn walk around Gosford. We too had an excellent time (well worth the stupidly early start) and definitely an event to be repeated.
Summaries of some of the other volunteer events during the past month

**Emergency First Aid**
At the end of April 10 volunteers attended this excellent training run by Outdoor Learning. They learnt how to deal with some of the more common emergency situations including CPR, choking and wound dressing. Thanks to Martyn Pegg for leading the session. The more volunteers who gain a knowledge and confidence in basic first aid the better.

**Talk on Seabirds of the Forth**
Volunteers were treated to an informal and informative talk about seabirds of the Forth from John Hunt. We started with a brief outline of the more common seabirds before heading out into the sunshine (and cold wind!) with binoculars to have see what we could spot. Returning to the warmth of the Scottish Seabird Centre we were let loose on the webcams to have a closer look at the bird action on the islands. We finished with tea and biscuits and a chat about some of the threats facing seabirds. Should we be concerned about climate change? Thank you John for sharing your knowledge and to the SSC for hosting us.

**Managing Events Safely, Dalkeith**
Thomas and Andy attended this training course at the invitation from Mark Hinchliffe the Mid Lothian Health and Safety Officer who gave the Asbestos training in Haddington on the 13th April 2016.

**Orienteering Event, Vogrie CP**
A few volunteers helped Outdoor Learning at the East Lothian Mid Lothian joint orienteering event on 4th May 2016 at Vogrie Country park. Thomas helped guide the coaches into the car park and Andy was on the meet and greet as the school parties came in.
Name: Sam Ranscombe

Job Title: Countryside Ranger, East Area

Length of service: 5 years

What do you do? My area runs through the middle of the county covering North Berwick, Athelstaneford, East Linton and Gifford - coast, field, woodland and moorland! My job includes managing countryside sites, monitoring wildlife, providing education and promoting responsible access.

Brief career: My background is a bit unusual for a ranger! Originally from south of the border, I studied English Literature and then primary teaching at University before moving to Scotland 22 years ago. Previous jobs include working for the Church of Scotland Children’s & Youth team and working as an International Officer for Abertay University travelling to India for 12 weeks a year to recruit students. My interest in being a ranger started when I volunteered for Scottish Wildlife Trust as a convenor of their smallest reserve below Edinburgh Castle, Johnston Terrace. I loved it but didn’t have a clue what I was doing so I studied a distance learning HNC Countryside Management course for 2 years and on completion of this won a British Trust for Conservation Volunteers Natural Talent Apprenticeship in Mycology (fungi) for 18 months at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. I worked for 18 months as an Education Ranger at Bowhill House, near Selkirk and began volunteering with John at Aberlady and at Traprain checking sheep before joining the staff team in 2011. A 5 year career change but worth every minute.

Favourite place: Bamburgh, Northumberland. Many happy childhood holidays, where my husband proposed and where the most beautiful beach in the world is.

Favourite wildlife: Fungi of course! Although I recently did some falconry and would like to have a Harris Hawk! This might be useful as I don’t have a ranger dog.

Best East Lothian wildlife experience: I live in Musselburgh and am spoilt by the birds that pass on migration. Seeing 6 Short eared owls at once this Christmas was pretty special.

Which place do you most want to visit? New Zealand – Bobby our Senior Ranger has just visited and says there is no litter! Perfect!
Other events, opportunities and goings-on

**Visiting a wetland area? Take part in the British Dragonfly Society’s Complete List survey**

*What is it?*
Complete Lists are simply a list of the adult dragonfly and damselfly species you see during a single visit to a wetland site. This information can be used to tell us how dragonflies are faring across Britain, highlighting any changes, such as those caused by climate change.

*How do I take part?*
No special equipment is needed. If you are visiting a wetland site, simply make a list of the species you see. Complete lists should be carried out in warm, calm and sunny weather between May and September. Details at: [http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/node/6421](http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/node/6421)

If you want to learn more about dragonfly identification, BDS will be running a workshop for us in Aberlady in August. Details to follow soon.

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**Northern Brown Argus survey**

The Northern Brown Argus is a butterfly found only in the north of England and Scotland. Most of the Scottish populations occur in the East of the country, including East Lothian. The presence of the butterfly is relatively easy to detect - in sunny conditions it flies freely and will perch to allow identification. And in poor weather, even when it's raining, the conspicuous white eggs which are obligingly laid in the upper surface of Rock-rose leaves are easy to spot. Rock-rose is the caterpillars’ only food source so when looking for this butterfly finding Rock-rose is a good first step.

There are many sites with no recent records and certainly others waiting to be discovered so this year Butterfly Conservation is starting a survey to confirm where Northern Brown Argus is still present and also assess the condition of suitable habitat. Population levels have shown an ongoing decline and this butterfly is a priority species for conservation efforts. One aim of the survey is to gain a better understanding of how sites are faring and whether action might be taken to prevent the loss of colonies.

If you would like to be involved in the survey, contact Richard Buckland r.buckland@blueyonder.co.uk for details of sites and survey methods. If you see this (or any other butterflies) when you are out and about, you can send records to Nick Morgan (nmorgan@eastlothian.gov.uk) who would be delighted to hear of them.
Edinburgh Sparrowhawk Study

The ecology of urban Sparrowhawks has been studied within Edinburgh since the late 1980s and over the last four years 124 Sparrowhawk chicks from 20 nest sites in Edinburgh have been ringed with unique colour rings. You can greatly assist this research project by watching for and reporting any observations of these colour ringed birds.

The colour rings are white, uniquely coded with 2 vertical alphanumeric characters and are placed on the right leg. If you observe one of these colour ringed Sparrowhawks, please record the ring code, date and time, as well as the location. (Enlarging a digital photo may assist your reading of the ring code)

Please report all sightings of these birds, even if you were unable to determine the ring code, to:-
Alan Leitch (ringer) (Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group)
Email: alan.leitch1@virgin.net

Thank you!

Eider crèches have been seen!

*There are now reports of eider ducklings all along the East Lothian coast. Thanks to Sam R. for a brief update of the eider monitoring project volunteers are helping her with in North Berwick*

This year we have a great team of 11 volunteers taking part in the survey. Thank you to them all.

We are recording good numbers of male and female eider duck with 101 males and 37 females the highest numbers seen so far. (Numbers of the black and white males seen tend to be higher as they are much easier to spot than the brown females which blend in to the rocks and seaweed.)

Neil spotted our first crèche* of 3 ducklings on 10 May which is 2-3 weeks earlier than normally recorded. Another crèche of 5 ducklings was spotted on 23 May.

We are regularly seeing ringed plover and oystercatcher, suggesting they are breeding in the area. Other birds recorded during the surveys include common and sandwich tern, razorbill, dunlin, whimbrel, swallow, siskin and whitethroat.

*In eiders, several different broods of ducklings are often looked after together in a ‘crèche’, with the adult females sharing the caring duty between them.*
Scottish Wildlife word search by Thomas B

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

Crossbill   Golden Eagle   Grouse
Osprey      Otter          Ptarmigan
Red deer    Red squirrel   Swan
Wildcat

RECIPE TIME!
Wild garlic pesto

Wild garlic (Allium ursinum) is a common plant in damp woodland / hedgerow areas at this time of year. It smells of garlic, and both stems and leaves can be eaten though the flavour is considerably reduced by cooking. Here is a simple recipe you can try. (Be sure you have identified it correctly and wash plants before use!).

Place a large bunch of washed wild garlic, a small bunch of parsley, 50g of toasted pine nuts and 50g of parmesan into a food processor and blitz for a minute or two then slowly pour in 150ml olive oil until blended. Season with a squeeze of lemon, salt and pepper.

This pesto is good stirred into pasta but to continue the ‘wild’ food theme (and show off), try it stirred into nettle soup (there are plenty of recipes for this online).

Where in EL?
Some more pictures taken whilst out and about in East Lothian. Where are they?
Thanks to Neil for the photos. Last month’s answers below.

Last month’s answers:
The dispersal art project in Yellowcraig wood. Each year a member of the community buries a wooden cap taken from the top of these metal cylinders at their favourite location within Yellowcraig. This is documented, providing an interesting record over the 99 years of the project.

Part of the dam wall at Hopes Reservoir - the stone used for the wall came from the Old Calton Jail in Edinburgh
One of the natural arches on the coast near Bilsdean