



**Newsletter for East Lothian Countryside Volunteers**  
May 2017

Welcome to May's BBF. Once again thanks to those that responded to my last-minute scabbling around to fill this issue with photographs and articles. Despite the weather, we are entering the wildlife recording season and our regular bee and plant surveys have started or will do soon. There are also several 'public' surveys to participate in. Keep an eye out for the stunning Orange Tip butterfly, and if you see one send in your sighting to Butterfly Conservation's Orange Tip survey. If you prefer something with more legs, the Scottish Spider Survey is now underway and after records of four easy-to-identify spiders. I hope to arrange a series of informal recording sessions over the summer, at some local sites, which will be a chance to discover and document wildlife on our doorstep. Finally, if you want to find out more about wildlife recording from an expert, there are just a couple of places left on the workshop at Levenhall on 17<sup>th</sup> May run by Natalie, the Ecologist at TWIC. This should be an excellent event and prepare you well for a summer of wildlife spotting! Let me know if you'd like to attend. [kbaird@elothianmail.net](mailto:kbaird@elothianmail.net)

### Conservation Volunteer tasks scheduled in 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 to confirm details.



Volunteers ready with rakes © Abbie M

**3<sup>rd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> May Aberlady John;**

[jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**4<sup>th</sup> May Yellowcraig Dave;** [dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**18<sup>th</sup> May Path Warden team Duncan;**

[dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**30<sup>th</sup> May North Berwick Sam;** [sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**30<sup>th</sup> May Levenhall Nick;** [naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**31<sup>st</sup> May Dunbar CVs Tara/Laura;** [dvc@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dvc@eastlothian.gov.uk)

### Upcoming events for volunteers!

**All welcome. If you would like to secure a place on all or any, please send me an email.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> May Amisfield and 5<sup>th</sup> May Gosford: Crack of Dawn Chorus walks at 5am.**

An early morning stroll identifying birds from their song. Just a couple of spaces left. Please indicate your preference for Gosford or Amisfield (or if happy to go on either).

**17<sup>th</sup> May Wildlife Recording Workshop with Natalie from TWIC. 10am – 3pm, Levenhall.**

Get ready for a summer of wildlife recording! Morning indoor session learning the theory, followed by an afternoon outdoors putting it into practice.

**June, July, August** – dates tbc. A series of informal wildlife recording sessions at sites around the county. Discover new places and add to the knowledge of the wildlife there. Share what you know, or learn from others! Ideas for locations welcome.

**24<sup>th</sup> August** – Archerfield Walled Garden. Meet the head gardener for a tour of the garden and take a walk around the estate with Dave Wild. Tea and coffee provided!

**25<sup>th</sup> August** – Rockpooling in Dunbar with Tara. A morning playing in the pools, followed by fish and chips on the beach.

## Erecting the Tern fence at Spike Island



Terns are a protected species and Little and Arctic varieties are rare in the county. So annually the Ranger Service organise a 'fence' around a key nesting site on Spike Island. See some vols hard at work helping (and Tara running round in circles) here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjGNduDE8dA&feature=youtu.be>

Last year we finally saw success with four nesting Arctics. See what we are ultimately aiming at on the RSPB's video <https://vimeo.com/11820521>

## Walling at Yellowcraig



Erecting fences to protect nesting birds at Aberlady

## Volunteer activity during April



Junior Rangers make explosions on the beach. And learn about fossils...

A windy walk around Tynninghame and Whitekirk on a ranger hike. We saw buzzards, brown hares, row deer and sand martins plus some classic cars, a shire horse and 24 fat bikers (fat tyres not cyclists that is!)



Friends of Yellowcraig and Archerfield Walled Garden staff and volunteers clearing the coastline of litter between Broadsands and Eyebroughy. Thanks to North Berwick West Links, Archerfield Links and Renaissance Golf Courses for uplifting the litter and to Archerfield Walled Garden for the welcome coffee and cake to revive fatigued bodies and souls.



Making Hay at Aberlady  
© Abbie

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



# Robin Diary

by Abbie Marland

## Easter Eggs

During the first week of April, our robin established a routine between her nest site and provisioning points. This shaped up as being absent for 60-90 minutes, then in circulation for less than a minute to be fed by her mate, drink from the lily pond and check for cheese. On one occasion, she ejected a small slug in favour of Wensleydale, which shows style.

So eggs were joyfully presumed. By the following week, our robin had developed a brood patch and a scruffy tail, so if folded up she would fit neatly into a teacup. The male robin summoned her off the nest for food every half hour, and I learned his strident call. On Easter Sunday both birds became more energetic in their behaviour, and withstood a very noisy children's game close to the nest site. I started wondering if the clutch had survived, or if I had merely counted up the days wrongly.

There was a very hard frost overnight on April 17th/18. Again, the flying and feeding routine switched to roving outside the usual bounds. On April 19th, I ventured a little closer to the nest site, and with some apprehension spotted an Egg on the ground underneath. But I observed it was old and slightly cracked. Indeed, by later use of a torch, its transparency showed there had never been a developing chick. So we waited with cautious hope.

That same afternoon the scenario changed dramatically. Our female robin appeared at the front door shaking water off her plumage. Not merely having taken a quick dunk, but truly soaking wet to the skin. I have never seen her thus. Anyway, she requested food, then spent a couple of hours doing circuits and flying about with enjoyable abandon. Feathers returned to perfect order. No more sitting. Rather humanly, it looked like sheer relief, and I supposed that the incubation had failed.



Oh, so wrong! Near dusk I watched both birds catch tiny flies and start visiting the nest site. Over the next 48 hours the male (who is very shy and keeps to cover), delivered a few small caterpillars. Slim pickings, given the low temperature. I learned up about caterpillars, and found a few of my own to offer in support. On April 21st, the female robin visited my front door, and swapped a faecal sac for these provisions. And yes, it made me proud. So we ventured out together down the lane on a caterpillar hunt. Thirty yards of nettles do sting, but yielded a few nourishing atoms for the robin at my heel.

As I write, caterpillars have thankfully become more plentiful. The weather forecast is for snow, so every beak full counts.



### ***POSTSCRIPT***

Winter weather returned with a blast of Arctic air, snow and gales. The robins struggled to collect insect food for their chicks. I supplied cooked egg yolk, and this was rapidly taken to the nest site deep inside an evergreen bush. Despite the storms, the parent birds kept up multiple visits until dusk on April 24th.

On the morning of April 25th, I walked out early into a silent garden. No robins were on the move. Puzzled, I saw our tame bird sitting quietly in shadow. She did not come close, or request food. After a few hours, it was painfully clear that the robins were no longer visiting their nest, so I carefully investigated. The chicks had gone without trace. Perhaps a stoat or other predator needed to feed its own young, but we are very sad for the loss

# Who's who

This month – Neil Clark. Rarely seen 'in the field' but an essential component to that well-oiled machine that is East Lothian's Countryside Team. (Think we need to do something to change his choice of favourite place in East Lothian though)

**Name:** Neil Clark

**Job Title:** Principal Countryside Officer.

**Job Description:** Take the blame, pass on the praise and write cheques.

**Length of service:** 15 years ELCRS, 20 years or so Countryside Officer; far too long.



What a weight to carry on one shoulder!(c) Abbie Marland



(c) Abbie Marland

**Brief career:** Reached mutual agreement with headmaster that I would leave school. Stumbled into being a Forestry Commission forester whose office had one window looking out to Ben Lui and the other to Cruachan. Stumbled again into being an East Lothian Countryside Ranger when the prerequisite was to have a beard and a red face.

**Favourite place in East Lothian:** My desk.

**Favourite place in the UK:** Scotland's west coast islands.

**Favourite place in the World:** Erte Alle and the Danakil.

**Best local wildlife experience?** Pod of orcas breaching in Gosford Bay

**Favourite wildlife?** Ormiston Yew and I like Baobabs.

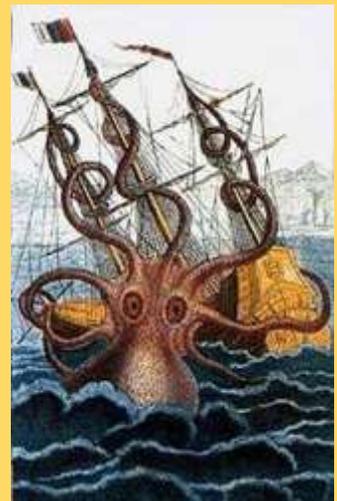
**Where would you like to visit next?** It moves around; there's just a chance of Socotra next year.

**Wildlife you'd most like to see?** A friendly Kraken

## THE KRACKEN

The Kraken is a huge mythical monster, said to haunt the seas from Norway to Greenland. It specialises in harassing ships, attacking vessels with its strong arms and is allegedly able to devour an entire crew in one gulp. If this strategy fails, the beast will swim in circles around the ship, creating a fierce maelstrom to drag the vessel down.

Let's just hope Neil never makes friends with one...



## Other events, opportunities and goings-on

### Litter Pick at Prestongrange



A posse of Rangers and Volunteers carried out a spring clean of the grounds of Prestongrange Museum, collecting litter accumulated over the winter months. Many thanks to the volunteers who answered the call, giving up their valuable time to assist in this task. Also thanks to Debbie from Museum Services for providing hot coffee and warm scones as a reward for our endeavours. Prestongrange Museum is now open to the public for the summer, every day from 11.30 until 16.30. For details go to [www.visiteastlothian.org/attractions](http://www.visiteastlothian.org/attractions)



### How to lead a guided walk training by Liz

Thomas and Dave with Roger, who led a walk leader training session in Haddington. Liz took the photo. She said: 'It was a beautiful day and we walked along the Tyne from Nungate Bridge. Roger gave us lots of useful tips on how to lead a safe and enjoyable walk. Thomas and Dave will be putting the information to good use, when they lead a 'path warden' walk from East Linton.'  
<https://pathwardens.wordpress.com/>

### ELECTRIC STRIMMERS by Steve Cox

On Wednesday 26th April, another volunteer (Jim) and I had a great training session with Duncan at Traprain Law, showing us how to use and maintain the new electric strimmers. We practised on one of the footpaths that runs alongside the Law, where the strimmers made short work of the vegetation. The noise level was surprisingly low so they shouldn't be as intrusive as petrol ones for wildlife and walkers. Having learnt how to use one, I hope to be able to put my experience to good use on the reserves and core paths.



No gnomes were harmed in Duncan's training session; no photos were taken either!

# Spring Tyne Stroll II



The Guides



Preston Mill



Phantassie Doocot

A dozen of us enjoyed the first Path Wardens walk of the year, from East Linton to Linkfield along the John Muir Way (on JM's birthday!). It was cold but bright. We heard about history and nature - the local inventor of the threshing machine, recognising swallows, sand and house martins, and the exotic animals in the family park. Unexpected but very welcome, half-way round there was coffee and cake!



Next year we plan to continue round Dunbar and on to Barns Ness – keep an eye on facebook or the website



Sand-martin nesting site



## Best boot forward?



Come for a walk on East Lothian's beautiful paths. East Lothian has a large network of core paths which are maintained by volunteer Path wardens along with the East Lothian Council Countryside section. During this year, Path wardens will lead walks along a selection of these paths and you are invited to join them.

### The next guided walk is Bolton – Gifford on 20<sup>th</sup> May...

May 20th (morning) Bolton to Gifford (Pedlar's way) Led by: Graham and Maxine Pettigrew (pettigrewgraham@gmail.com)

This walk offers a mix of history, wildlife, Spring flowers and sweeping views. We will follow the Colstoun water upstream to Gifford and then return on the public right of way above Colstoun Mill. The round trip of about 8 km will take about 2.5h. The path is gravel or grass and is gently uphill on the way out.

Pathwarden activities are described at: <https://pathwardens.wordpress.com/>  
Take a look to find out what they have been up to and details of forthcoming guided walks.



## HELP NEEDED at the Haddington Show

If you'd like the chance to visit the Haddington Show on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July for **FREE**, the Ranger service are looking for a couple of volunteers to help man a small stall during the day. If you are interested, please get in touch with Roger [rpowell@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:rpowell@eastlothian.gov.uk). **First come, first served!**

## Search for Spiders!



The **Scottish Spider Search** is now up and running and after sightings of four easy-to-identify spiders. Although all the species in survey could be found now, a good one to start with at this time of year is the **Daddy Longlegs Spider**.

This spider may be hiding in corners of your house that you don't often see a duster. It is quite small and delicate-looking with very long legs. Although completely harmless to humans, it is quite capable of catching the much larger house spiders, as well as pesky flies and other insects. So if you find one, don't dust it away! Leave it in peace and send your sighting in to the survey. Full details can be found on The Wildlife Information Centre's (TWIC) website and you can also submit your records here.

[www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/scottish\\_spider\\_search.php](http://www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/scottish_spider_search.php)



# SCOTTISH ORANGE TIP SURVEY

Photos © Abbie Marland



Adult Female



Adult Male



Adult showing mottled green underwings



Thorn-like chrysalis

## Have you seen an Orange-tip?

The Orange-tip butterfly has experienced a series of dramatic range changes in Scotland. Once widespread, it suffered huge declines and by the 1970s was largely restricted to parts of Aberdeenshire and southern Scotland. In the mid-1980s a revival began and since then the butterfly has mounted a stunning comeback, surging into many parts of its former range!

To help monitor these range changes Butterfly Conservation Scotland held a Scotland-wide public survey in 1997 and then again in 2007. Another 10 years on we are repeating the survey to see if further changes have occurred.

The adult butterflies have one brood a year, emerging in mid-April and are on the wing until early June. Males have very distinctive orange-tips to their wings (hence the name!), and whilst females lack the orange-tips they can be identified by the distinctive green mottling on the underside of their wings. The butterfly is fond of damp grassland habitats though it can be found in many places including riverbanks, gardens, farmland and parks.

**For more details and to submit your sightings visit**

**<http://butterfly-conservation.org/15223/scottish-orange-tip-survey.html>**

# QUIZ TIME!

## Name that plant

Some photos of April's blooming plants. Can you name them? (a couple of tricky ones in here)  
 Answers at bottom of page.



(c) Liz C



(c) Liz C



(c) Liz C



(c) Abbie Marland



(c) Abbie Marland



(c) Abbie Marland



(c) Abbie Marland



Barbara from Dunbar took this picture of a rather unusual visitor to the town last month. Do you know what it is? And 'Seagull' only gets you quarter of a point ;-)

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**Does your brain like quizzes? And/or would you like a fun evening out?**

We would like to get some Countryside Volunteers (friends and family included) for an evening quiz. If you're interested let me know! If we have enough teams we can pit ourselves against each other (fantastic prizes guaranteed); if not, we will join an existing quiz.

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