



# Best boot forward

**Newsletter for East Lothian Council Conservation Volunteers**  
October 2016

Welcome to the October's Best Boot Forward. From now on this will be produced less often; probably 4-6 times a year. Any news or information that needs to be imparted between these times will be done via an email bulletin. Meanwhile, our sister publication Mud in Your Eye will be produced slightly more regularly, so there should be something available to entertain and amuse throughout the year. BBF will aim to keep its volunteer-focus, with MIYE appealing to a wider and more general readership. Both publications very much welcome articles and images from volunteers on anything relating to EL's Countryside and wildlife. If you would like to help put these features together, or take on a regular slot – get in touch. Meanwhile, enjoy this issue and the next one will be.....a CHRISTMAS SPECIAL!

## ELC Conservation Volunteer tasks scheduled in October & November:

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.



Stretchering off rubbish at Aberlady © Abbie

**Aberlady** – Weds 5<sup>th</sup> Oct; 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov; Sun 16<sup>th</sup> Oct; Sun 20<sup>th</sup> Nov

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

**Yellowcraig** – Thurs 6<sup>th</sup> Oct; 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov

Dave; [dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Path Wardens team task** – Thurs 20<sup>th</sup> Oct; 17<sup>th</sup> Nov

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

**North Berwick** – Tues 25<sup>th</sup> Oct; 29<sup>th</sup> Nov (morning)

Sam; [sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Levenhall** – Tues 25<sup>th</sup> Oct; 29<sup>th</sup> Nov (morning)

Nick; [naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Dunbar** – Weds 26<sup>th</sup> Oct; 30<sup>th</sup> Nov

Tara/Laura; [dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk)

## Upcoming events for volunteers:

**17<sup>th</sup> October** Fungal Foray at John Muir CP. This is one of the regular public Ranger events, but all volunteers are very welcome! Details at <http://eastlothian.bookinglive.com/ranger-service-annual-programme/family-activities/>

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2pm North Berwick** – Stuart MacPherson will present an informal update on the grazing project plant surveys.

Also a pub quiz (or similar) is in the pipeline... An email will be sent out with more details soon.

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

# Volunteer activity in September



Hunting plants at Kidlaw



Installing electric fence at Aberlady



Dunbar Conservation Volunteers at JMCP

Willow weave near Hailes to help reduce River Tyne bank erosion



WATCH THE WILLOW WEAVING ACTION!

<https://youtu.be/x4yvPBApfyw>



Ratchetting by the Tyne



Andy B collected 25 bags of litter and a few other assorted items from the east end of Gosford Bay.



Buckthorn bonfires return to Aberlady



## Discovering Levenhall 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016

*At the beginning of September, Nick Aitken led a guided walk around Levenhall for volunteers. Thanks to Andy Stevenson for writing this report. Photos by Andy.*

The walk round the Levenhall Links with Nick Aitken was very interesting as it gave us an insight as to what this site was like originally compared to the land use today.

Levenhall is an area covering around 134 hectares of land that was reclaimed from the sea this was accomplished when the power company built the sea wall and started to dump the fly ash from the power station into the four lagoons.

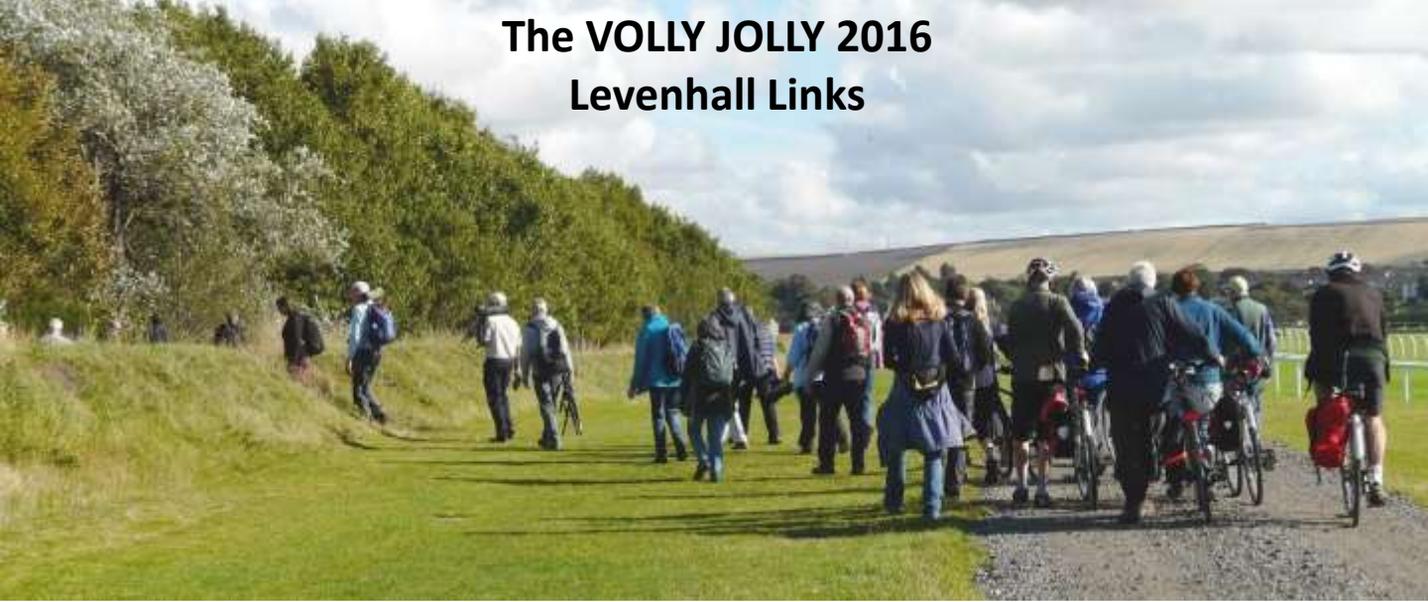
The scrapes up by the bird hides are home to many different species of birds. The water in the scrapes is pumped up from the river to a small reservoir then pumped from there to the scrapes keeping them at a constant level for the birds



Nick, volunteers, Goosander, Eider and Bar-tailed Godwit.



# The VOLLY JOLLY 2016 Levenhall Links



On 1<sup>st</sup> October, volunteers were treated to a selection of workshops, a free lunch, and a spot of birdwatching at Levenhall Links. We learnt about Roe Deer, Dragonflies, the wrong way to lead a guided walk and the right way to hack a hedge. Lunch was walked off in glorious sunshine, with some guidance on bird ID in the hides and along the seawall. Huge thanks to Duncan for organising the day and to Nick, Neil, Dave, Roger and Thomas who ran the workshops. Photos by Abbie.



# Morag's dog bag collective challenge

## VOTES NEEDED!

Although not really a laughing matter, for a bit of fun at this year's Volly Jolly, volunteers were set a "Dog Poo Challenge": to come up with an appropriate collective noun for a collection of deposited dog waste sacks.

Volunteers were then asked to add their vote to whichever word they think is the most appropriate

Please **add your own vote** now – choose your favourite word from those listed below and email to [dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk)

Voting finishes on October 25<sup>th</sup> and a **prize** will be awarded to the person whose word proves the most popular.



- Abomination
- A-bum-ination
- Dangle
- Disgustation
- Dollop
- Dump
- Fling
- Flingshots
- Guttie practice
- Mess
- Pootrefaction
- Pooley
- Treefull
- Tumulus
- Yuck
- Poo-kup
- Pride
- Pooplar-tree

Duncan adds: "Once selected, we'll use the word in all professional literature hereafter and endeavour to have it added into the Oxford Dictionary!"

## "East Lothian Countryside Volunteers" Charity:

An update from Dave O

At the Volly Jolly on Saturday October 1st there was a brief discussion of the possible expansion of the remit of the East Lothian Path Wardens to embrace the broader range of all the Countryside Volunteer groups and individuals. Fortunately there was a good attendance and a good mix of volunteers.

In summary there was support for the proposal. It was made clear that the main roles for ELCV would be fundraising and promotion of the work undertaken by volunteers. The work of the volunteers on the ground would continue in the same way. However, it was important that volunteers come forward to represent the range of groups on the Steering Group that will take this forward.

The next meeting of the Trustees of East Lothian Path Wardens is on October 17. Following on from that we hope to contact all volunteers by email to update everyone as to how we plan to proceed. We will be inviting people to give their feedback to this and to come forward as possible Steering Group members. We will also set out a range of skills that we feel we need to get this initiative underway.

I hope that that there is broad support out there for this exciting initiative that will further our work and the improvement of the countryside of East Lothian.

# GEESE!



*The wonderful sight and sound of pink-footed geese is filling the skies of East Lothian again: one of my favourite signs of Autumn. Aberlady Bay is one of their favourite roosting spots, so who better to tell us a bit more about them than John, the ranger at the reserve.*

Photo © Abbie Marland

At this time of year, the skies of East Lothian are alive with the sights and sounds of geese. Most of these are pink-footed geese (or pinkfeet, as they are affectionately known) which have nested in Iceland and Greenland and will spend the winter in the UK. Numbers peak here in late September and early October but they are likely to be here in their thousands into November. The peak count so far at the Aberlady Bay roost was of 27,595 on 30<sup>th</sup> September. This population of pinkfeet has increased massively from around 50,000 in the early 1960s, to over half a million birds last year. Such a large increase is largely down to an increase in breeding and moulting sites in Iceland and Greenland, a plentiful supply of food through the winter and a decrease in shooting pressure in the UK.

Unusually among birds, these geese stay together in family groups until the spring. The noises you hear them make are family groups calling to each other to stay in contact. Amazingly, within the cacophony of noise of a big flock, young and parents can individually recognise each other and thus remain together. A pair of pinkfeet will stay together for life and, on average, live for around 8 years. However, the oldest known goose was ringed in Tayside as an adult in 1959 before being found dead at Gladhouse Reservoir in 1998, and so would have been at least 39 years old!

Keep an eye out too for barnacle geese which will be passing up the Forth in October. These black, white and grey geese are on their way from Svalbard to the Solway Firth. You may be alerted to their presence by their calls, which sound like little yapping dogs.



Photo © Jim Wood

## More on Moths

The winged insects we think of as moths are of course only the adult stage of the creature's life cycle. Caterpillars are just as worthy of discovery and have the advantage that they can be looked for during the daytime. Here are a selection of the species found from in East Lothian during the last couple of weeks, illustrating that caterpillars can be every bit as splendid as the adults they become. (Exception = the Cabbage White caterpillars on my garden brassicas)

Photos © Katty



Poplar Hawk moth caterpillar on Willow in Haddington



Buff tip almost ready to pupate, on Eared Willow near Whiteadder



A young Garden Tiger caterpillar near Whiteadder



Northern Eggar (aka Oak Eggar), on Eared Willow near Whiteadder



Clouded Border, on Eared Willow near Whiteadder

## Other events of interest to volunteers



Ranger hikes take place on the last Sunday of the month. They are led by one of the rangers and explore various parts of East Lothian. Everyone welcome!

The next one takes place on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October

More details:

<http://eastlothian.bookinglive.com/ranger-service-annual-programme>

North Berwick community beach clean on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 10.30am-12.30pm meeting at the East beach by the boating pool. No experience required (although most of you have plenty), all equipment provided and usually a free ticket to the Discovery Centre at the Scottish Seabird Centre for all participants. All volunteers very welcome!



# Who's who

*This month we are back on the East side with Laura*

**Name:** Laura Douglas

**Job Title:** Dunbar East Area Countryside Ranger, which includes Whitesands, Barns Ness, Skateraw, Thorntonloch and Traprain Law

**Length of service:** Coming up for 12 years full time

**Brief career:** I got my BSc (Hons) in Environmental Biology from Napier University and whilst I was studying I used to volunteer with a company called Earthcalling who ran after school wildlife clubs for primary school children. After a year of travelling I went back to Napier University and got an MSc in Wildlife Biology and Conservation. I got the seasonal ranger post at Gullane back in 2003 and then came back the following year as the seasonal ranger at John Muir Country Park before getting the full-time post at Yellowcraig/Archerfield in 2005. I stayed there for a few years before moving over to the Dunbar area after Victor retired.

**Favourite place in East Lothian:** Traprain Law. The view from the top is just breathtaking and it is such a quiet, thoughtful place to be.

**Best wildlife experience:** Seeing a moose in Canada. I absolutely love moose and was desperate to see one. We chanced upon a female moose at the side of the road so we got out the car to watch her and she wasn't bothered by us at all. We were close enough that we could hear her munching, then slurping away as she took a drink! We watched her for about 10 minutes and then she slowly made her way into the woodland.

**Favourite wildlife:** Definitely badgers, so much so I chose to study them as part of my masters. They are such large, striking animals yet so elusive. Until I studied them I had never actually seen one alive and even since then I have only seen one very briefly as it ran across the road near Traprain Law. They are also very clean and tidy animals and the sight of one shuffling out of the sett backwards as it removed its old bedding never failed to make me smile!

**Wildlife you'd most like to see:** There is still plenty of wildlife in Scotland that I haven't had the chance to see yet, one of which is the Capercaillie. To watch the males strut their stuff at a lek and listen to their fascinating call would be great!



Apparently one of the only photos of Laura with her eyes open...

## Two of Laura's top wildlife picks:



Did you know? The word badger is said to derive from the French 'bêcheur' meaning 'digger' and Moose from 'Moosu' an old American Indian word meaning 'he strips off' and referring to their habit of bark-stripping.



Would you like to get involved in any of the following?

- **Organising events for volunteers:** Do you have a hobby or skill that you could share with a group of volunteers, or maybe you have useful contacts that would?
- **Articles Best Boot Forward:** Articles are always needed. Anything to do with wildlife and the outdoors that might be of interest to volunteers... fact-filled pieces, what you've been up to, puzzles, quizzes – almost anything you like! Both one-off contributions or offers to take on a regular feature are welcome
- **Supporting the formation of East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Charity:** (more on this later in the month)

*Just drop me an email to offer your help or find out more: [kbaird@elothianmail.net](mailto:kbaird@elothianmail.net)*

## Where in EL?



Two mystery photos this month, taken in the countryside around East Lothian – but do you know where? Thanks to Duncan and Sam for supplying the images.