



Volunteer News

February 2016

Welcome! To the first issue of what will probably be monthly output, with news, views, and any other information related to ELC Conservation Volunteering. It will showcase volunteer activity across the county so we can see what each other gets up to, share ideas and stories and generally marvel at the hours and effort we all put in. **Please send in photos, articles, thoughts, suggestions** for future editions. You can get in touch with me at kbaird@elothianmail.net. All feedback is welcome



Katty trying a path warden team task at Longniddry bents in January.

Volunteer Development – Katty Baird

I've been volunteering for East Lothian Council Countryside team for about four years, putting in most hours at Yellowcraig but occasionally venturing slightly further to the east and west. Spiders are probably my area of expertise but I have a fondness for many unloved and under-studied creatures without a backbone. At the end of 2015 I idly enquired of Duncan if there were any voluntary projects I could get involved with, possibly to augment my cv just in case a 'proper' job comes my way. And so, on the back of feedback from last years volly jolly, here I am. My remit is reasonably loose and will follow what the needs and wants of you, the conservation volunteers are. At the moment I think the general aim is to help coordinate activities across the county and to organise training or workshops as needed. This training will hopefully enable you to take on new tasks if you wish but also enable you to improve your knowledge of the countryside and have some fun.

Volunteer survey

Thanks to all those that have replied to the survey sent out last month. It seems we are a contented bunch of volunteers, but there were plenty of suggestions for ways to improve the volunteering experience. A programme of workshops or training seems popular, along with indoor talks and social events. Of course, with varied interests and availabilities the biggest challenge will be pleasing everybody. So no promises, but hopefully some events will be arranged soon. In the meantime further feedback, suggestions and offers of help welcome.

E-mail was almost universally requested as the preferred means of contact. However, there were a few requests for a webpage and a few for paper. This has been noted and *will* happen! If you would like to join the mailing list, let me know at kbaird@elothianmail.net. And use this email if you wish to be removed from the list.

Volunteer activity in January 2016

Here are most of the many things the countryside volunteers got up to in January, and the number of volunteer hours spent on each task (some of these are guesstimates). Apologies for any that have been missed out and there was additional voluntary work done by external groups. Needless to say LOADS of good work was done last month and the photos even suggest there were some good weather days!



Yellowcraig – Eil burn cleared and scrub clearance 36 hours

Aberlady - beach clean 84 hours

Aberlady –buckthorn bashing 120 hours

Aberlady – surveying 6 hours

North Berwick Law – Gorse Control 24 hours

Levenhall – Friends of Levenhall Links 9 hours

Dunbar – steps at Stenton 28 hours

Dunbar – gates –fences at Barnsness 28 hours

Dunbar – litter picking & bird counting 19 hours

Path wardens Team task – Longniddry 52 hours

Tyne Team – River Tyne 10 hours

Path Wardens – estimate 100 hours



Sheep and Pony counting at Aberlady, Barnsness, Traprain and North Berwick Law approx 200 hours!

In January we worked approx. **716** volunteer hours !!!

(I had to check that calculation twice!)



Who's who

This column will be a chance to get to know members of the Countryside and Landscape team, especially those that do important work but rarely get to leave the office. First up, and leading by example, is Duncan who you have hopefully had some contact with at some point in your volunteering.

Name: *Duncan Priddle*

Job Title: *Countryside Officer*

What you do?

Help deliver the countryside service work programme; especially developing volunteer involvement and delivery of conservation grazing scheme

Career highlights:

Not an early developer, I left University unsure of where to focus my talents, to the extent that I became a fully-paid up ghost of the Old Town, delivering the Witchery Tours. Eventually tired of the nocturnal existence I volunteered with conservation groups in Edinburgh, building up my skills. This culminated in securing my first seasonal ranger post, in East Lothian, at Longniddry in 1994 where I spent the summer picking up litter and learning a lot about humanity at the same time! Further seasonal contracts followed prior to obtaining a full-time position back in the City of Edinburgh where I developed my knowledge and took the chance to complete a 3 month job exchange in Iceland in 2000. Returned to work in East Lothian in 2005 when my current post was made available.:

Best East Lothian wildlife experience:

Seeing peregrines returning to the county

Favourite place in East Lothian:

Woodhall Dean

Favourite wildlife:

Reptiles, sadly as we're not best placed for them here!

What wild place would you most like to visit?

Highlands of Venezuela



Not sure what Duncan's been up to here (suggestions?), but he looks happy and/or proud to be muddy.

February Wildlife Watch

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

(Photo: Abbie Marland)



Regular visitors to the River Tyne may be familiar with this charismatic brown bird with a white throat. Its name presumably refers to its habit of dipping in and out of the water and perhaps also because of frequently 'bobbing' its head (somebody has even monitored this and recorded 60 bobs per minute). Dippers live alongside fast moving rivers and streams, and remain in the same area all year, unless severe weather forces them to move e.g. to unfrozen rivers or sometimes the coast. Scotland is a good place to see them with half of the British population living here. Dippers are superbly adapted to their watery habitat. They can walk into and under water and stay submerged as they swim or walk along the river bed, kicking over stones in search of small fish and aquatic invertebrates. Nostril flaps, eyes that can function underwater (thanks to an extra eyelid called a nictitating membrane) and blood that stores large amounts of oxygen help them to do this.

ELC Conservation tasks planned for February:

The usual regular work parties are scheduled for February, except the Path Warden's team task which has been cancelled. If you would like to join in with a group for the first time, please get in touch with the relevant ranger for details. Apologies for any omissions.



Aberlady– Weds 2nd Buckthorn burn & Sun 21st Beach clean
John - jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk
Yellowcraig – Thursday 4th Scrub clearance
Dave - dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk
North Berwick– Tuesday 23rd
Sam - sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk
Levenhall – Tuesday 23rd Woodland work
Nick - naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk
Dunbar area – Tuesday 23rd Gorse burning
Tara - tsykes@eastlothian.gov.uk

Some other February dates for your diary:

14th Nature Photography workshop with Laurie Campbell at Waterston House

<http://www.the-soc.org.uk/laurie-campbell-nature-photography-workshop-5/>

9-26th Scottish Snowdrop Festival, Shepherd House, Inveresk

<http://shepherdhousegarden.co.uk/>

28th Castles and Mansions. A 13km (8mile) circular walk through lowland East Lothian.

This is one of the Ranger-led Hikes. Details at <http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rangerevents>

Opportunities for anyone with a little more time to spare...

Test your grass knowledge!



Looking for a challenge? Try this grass quiz – WARNING – it is quite tricky!

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/speciesrecovery/the-gigantic-grass-identification-quiz-uk-1rucb>

If you get more than one correct, you automatically qualify to become a grass surveyor at Aberlady, North Berwick Law, Traprain Law or Barnsness!!! Get in touch with Duncan dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk to find out more about this summer project.

Volunteers wanted for Capturing our Coast!

Do you want to learn more about wildlife on our beaches? Then become part of the largest coastal citizen science project in the UK! Capturing our Coast is looking for adult volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in cutting-edge marine science. There are free training courses in North Berwick on 9, 10 & 11 March. More details can be found on the Seabird Centre's website:

<http://seabird.org/conservation/capturing-our-coast/44/217>



Volunteers needed to help count toads!



Toads will soon be starting their migration throughout the Lothians. Lothian Amphibian and Reptile Group (LARG) need people to help with their toad patrols. This involves going out after dark to help toads cross roads safely and recording numbers and sizes. Patrols are good fun and an opportunity to do something a bit different of an evening (beats watching TV)! If you're interested, please email lothianarg@outlook.com for more details.

Volunteers needed to help survey plants!

The National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) aims to collect data to provide an annual indication of changes in plant abundance and diversity across the UK. Volunteers needed to monitor key species at plots within an allocated 1km square. Training is available. More details here:

<http://www.npms.org.uk/sites/www.npms.org.uk/files/PDF/NPMS%20flyer.pdf>



I hope you've enjoyed this newsletter! Please send in ideas or content for the next issue (don't be shy; (almost) anything goes). We also need a snappy title: "Volunteer News" is a bit boring, but I ran out of inspiration. Please send suggestions to kbaird@elothianmail.net now!

All omissions, inaccuracies and typos are my own and I take full responsibility...