



# Lothian Talk

## Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter Summer 2025 – Extended version

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### Dates of Summer events.

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**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July**

**Red Moss Open day. 12am to 5pm.**

You will be welcomed by members of the Red Moss Committee who will lead guided walks and pond dipping and other activities. Suitable for all ages but children must be accompanied. The route is mainly on a board walk. No booking required.

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**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August 10am -12 noon**

**Bawsinch Nature Reserve.** A walk led by Julian Warman. Numbers are limited to 12 and booking is essential. We will send out Eventbrite booking information prior to the event – by email. Please see note on email updates overleaf.

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### Autumn and Winter Events

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The dates and brief info of the programme are below. More details will be in the winter newsletter. The venue is The Cornerstone (unless specified as Zoom) and the time is 7.30-9pm

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October**

A talk about the Tweed Valley Ospreys Project by a member of the project team.

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November**

Three Words for Forest – a film and speakers Rachel Clive and Deidre Heddon.

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December** –a talk about the recent purchase by SWT of Inverbroom Estate.

NB it is a Tuesday not a Thursday.

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February** – A talk about Levenhall Links by Kristian Purchase, East Lothian Council Ranger.

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March** – Karen Chambers and Leonie Alexander from Edinburgh Shoreline will talk about their work in a range of marine supporting projects.

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April** – AGM followed by a talk on Nature and Planning by Tim Duffy.

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NB Booking for specified outdoor events is **essential**. We will send out Eventbrite booking info by email before the event. NB see the members email section overleaf

\*In person events are held at The Cornerstone Centre, St Johns Church, Lothian Road/Princes Street Corner (EH2 4BJ). Events are free and donations are most welcome.

**Full details of all events** are available online at

[Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians \(swtlothians.org.uk\)](http://www.swtlothians.org.uk)

Any queries please contact

[editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk)

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### Committee information

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The committee is the organising hub for events.

At the AGM on 24.04.25 we said farewell and many thanks to our chair of 6 years, Nick Warren (who continues as an ordinary member) and to 3 members who have left over the year – Catherine Sturrock and Ruth Palmer who have both moved home to other locations, and Jo Doake who has been a committee member for many years. We elected a new chairperson, vice chair and secretary and existing office bearers continue. 9 committee posts are shared between 6 people. We have 2 additional committee members and space for more. We welcome others to come along to meetings and see how things work. We meet 6 times a year. [www.swtlothians.org.uk](http://www.swtlothians.org.uk)

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### Nick Warren, outgoing chair

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Nick has written an interesting and uplifting article describing his reasons for volunteering with SWT Lothian and his transition to chairing the group and the benefits and challenges he has experienced over the 6 years of being chairperson. It is not possible to fit all into this brief newsletter, so I encourage you to read the online version. It is an encouraging article for those thinking of volunteering. Nick has had opportunity to learn about the management, protection and appreciation of the Trusts local reserves. He describes additional project work with the Pilton's Children and Young People's Project and with the Grassmarket Community Project as part of the Wildlife Trusts Nextdoor Nature scheme. See Nick's full report below.

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### Tim Duffy, new chair.

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Tim returns for a second term as chair and has written a detailed and enthusiastic article which is available in full online. Tim reflects on the role of the committee as stated in the Memorandum of Association and that our new committee has the office bearers in place to achieve this. Tim is also the lead Planning Rep for SWT Lothian. He sends many thanks to Susan Manson who is stepping down from many years in her role as Planning Rep for Midlothian. We need 4 new area Planning Reps to undertake the interesting and essential work planning liaison. Please read Tim's full article online.

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## Planning Matters

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Glossary of abbreviations: **LBS**=Local Biodiversity Site; **NPF4** = National Planning Framework 4; **TWIC** = The Wildlife Information Centre; **BSBI** = Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

### Midlothian.

Susan Manson reports that Midlothian's second Biodiversity Action Plan was compiled in 2018 and ran from 2019-2024. Covid and other factors have delayed action on the plan.

Midlothian's population has increased dramatically – by 13,000 in the last 12 years. This is one of the highest rates of increase in any Scottish Local Council area. The area still has a diversity of special places, semi natural habitats and protected areas. The council staff are working hard to produce a new action plan and are one of the first councils to produce a Local Nature Network Declaration of Intent – as all councils must now do, incorporating the NPF4 biodiversity enhancing policies. The council work well with TWIC and with SWT.

Susan is stepping down from this post as she has moved to the Borders. She encourages interested people to come forward to volunteer. It is not an onerous task.

### Edinburgh

Tim Duffy reports on the progress of the planning action group of Western Harbour Ponds. We pointed out that this now falls under the policies of the new CEC Local Development Plan 2030 and the Scotland wide NPF4. It is hoped that this will be a test case for the application of the new Biodiversity Emergency protecting NPF4 National Planning Policies.

### East Lothian

Several members were trained as habitat surveyors for East Lothian Local Biodiversity Sites last year, and many have come forward to continue the task aiming for completion by October of this year. Do be in touch if you would like to participate.

Some new members have come forward to assist with checking the current existence of previously listed priority plant species. There is good back-up support from BSBI volunteers. Additionally, you can use a mobile app such as Plantnet to aid identification of species.

### Pepper Wood SWT Nature Reserve, Kirkliston.

Following a thorough reserve review, the Trust will be returning the management of the site to its owner. This will help staff put more effort into its larger reserves and those it owns. This is with great appreciation to the late Ken Knowles for his 47 years of convenorship. Lothians Local Group paid for a full survey and re-assessment of

the Pepper Wood reserve in 2022. It is an important LBS adjacent to a linear path and a possible new school. The head of the Trust's reserves and the chair of the Trust's Conservation committee have encouraged the Lothians group to agree an LBS Management Brief with the landowner and to lead a pond digging task there at the local level.

**Contact** Tim Duffy on [planning@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:planning@swtlothians.org.uk)

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## Contacting SWT Lothian members by email

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We use email to let members know of booking information etc for upcoming events. We only hold email addresses for about half of our Lothian group membership so if you are not hearing from us and would like to please email [editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk)

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## Website update and Committee emails

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The website is under ongoing improvement – with many thanks to Colin Murray and to members for photos.

**NB** We now have organisation email addresses for all committee members to improve our efficiency and accountability.

**Our apologies** to any members or interested others who might have contacted the committee recently and not received a reply. During our website update we discovered a contact@ email address which had not been monitored recently. Please get in touch again. We want to hear from you!

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## Words of the Wild

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Words of the Wild competition is running again this year with the submission closing date of 12 July.

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wordsofthewild/competition/> Please check out this link and let people know.

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## Scottish Land Commission

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On May 14<sup>th</sup> the Scottish Land Commission launched a public conversation on the Land Reform Scotland Bill currently in parliamentary progress. The bill looks at a wide range of land-based issues including how to manage land ownership. See the Scottish Land Commission website and go to the News section. (This is additional to the 4-month public consultation in 2022)

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## The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

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The bill was introduced on 19.02.25 and is now at stage 1 of the parliamentary process. Stage1 to be completed by 31.10.25 then to stage 2. The bill is an essential part of biodiversity protection in a global climate crisis.

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Lothian Talk is printed by Abbey Print of Dalkeith on environmentally friendly FSC paper (Forestry Stewardship Council)

## Wanted to do something to help, and learnt many things along the way...

At our last AGM this April, I stepped down as chair of this group after 6 good years. Our editor kindly invited me to share here some brief impressions on my experience to offer some insight into our activities and encourage you perhaps to get involved with this local group too.

There are many reasons why people wish to volunteer their time. I first got involved back in 2017 when I was starting to lift my head out of the intense early years of bringing up a young family and I wanted to do something for nature in my city.

Different options were going through my head but I had always admired the work of the Trust and welcomed the opportunities it offered its members to take part in their work through their local groups and so I joined up.

I first started helping to organise events. Coming up with ideas and contacting possible speakers lead me to meet fascinating people talk passionately about all sorts of topics linked to Scotland's wildlife. These events are greatly appreciated by many members and the public too.

The Trust's Nextdoor Nature scheme encouraged us to reach out to other community led organisations around the Lothians. I am proud of the two projects we ran with the Grassmarket's Community Project and the Pilton Youth & Children Project. The trip to Bass Rock which we organised for the children of Pilton stands out for me as there are not many greater wildlife spectacles around the world in my view than Bass Rock at the height of the gannet breeding season. Go and admire it, the children did.

I learned too about all of the Trust reserves around the Lothians. What management they require, how storms or diseases (e.g. ash dieback) affects them as well as some of their wonderful secrets.

In a growing region like the Lothians, development can put pressure on local biodiversity sites, and I followed with great appreciation all of the work our planning team do to protect these important sites. I know that our new chair, Tim Duffy, is keen to strengthen this aspect of our work, so watch out for opportunities there.

Volunteering gave me the opportunity too to chair meetings and do more public speaking, which, while not alluring to most, benefited my professional work. I am an introvert and practice makes perfect.

Our group is of mixt age, some are retired, others working and we celebrate such mix. Where in today's society do generations come together like this other than at ceilidhs! So, I encourage you to embrace this spirit of the ceilidh and think about contributing your time to the Trust and this local group for the benefit of many and nature. One thing is for sure; you will definitely learn a thing or two along the way.

Nick Warren, Outgoing chair.

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## From the new chair:

At the recent AGM I proposed to the members that I return as chair for the second time (having served the 6 years before Nick's 6 years, thanks very much Nick, you are staying on the committee helping us to work on the reserves in our area) on the basis that we have a very enthusiastic committee fulfilling the necessary roles (with several people having more than one role but a good sharing of the work) but that as Planning secretary since 1984 it is time I found a successor to train up in this role so that I can retire from it in maximum of 6 years! As it happens, I also have to find 4 area planning reps now as Susan Manson has decided to resign from the Midlothian planning watch after so many years we cannot count them! Everlasting thanks for this work and support to me Susan. You will notice that we are moving as much as possible as a committee to non-personal emails so please write to [planning@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:planning@swtlothians.org.uk) for planning issues in any of CEC, MLC, WLC and ELC from now on.

Now it is worth reviewing what activities a constituted SWT local members group can engage in as part of the bigger SWT charity and these are currently not planning to be changed anytime soon:

*"The object for which the Group is established is to further the objects of the Trust as set out in its Memorandum of Association, and in particular (and always in accordance with the said Memorandum of Association) to provide activities*

*for members as appropriate to the membership and circumstances of the Group, such as for example but not restricted to, lectures, field trips, wildlife sites work, statutory planning casework, fund raising and publications.”*

The Lothians committee covers ALL of them currently.

You will be familiar with our support for the Lothians local planning authorities local plan designated Local Biodiversity Sites within this work. This local group actually paid for a full survey and re-assessment of the Pepper Wood reserve in 2022 (we chose it because it was then a reserve) and as a still very important LBS adjacent to a linear walkway LBS (with a potential new school being built nearby) it will going forward play an important part in the council's statutory 'Local Nature Network'. Accordingly the head of the Trust's reserves and the chair of the Trust's Conservation committee have encouraged me to lead a pond digging task there and agree an LBS Management Brief with the landowner once it is no longer a formal reserve - writing such management briefs is something we do for such LBS' that want one, to ensure the site continues with its biodiversity and indeed hopefully increases it. This is the sort of thing we can do at the local level.

Tim Duffy

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## **Planning Matters April 2025**

### **Midlothian**

Midlothian's first Biodiversity Action Plan was launched in 2006. The second iteration was compiled in 2018 with great support from Midlothian Council officials. The plan ran from 2019 to 2024. With Covid and other constraints, the situation has changed radically in that time and there has been limited action in relation to the Plan.

Since the first plan was published Midlothian's population has increased dramatically and acres of land have been developed, largely for housing. In the last 12 years the population of Midlothian has grown by over 13,000. The rate of increase is one of the highest in Scotland by local authority. However, Midlothian still has a diverse variety of special places, semi natural habitats and protected areas. It is an ongoing task to monitor changes in the countryside and in this we are fortunate to have TWIC and the staff there. Midlothian council staff are working hard to produce a new action plan and are one of the first councils to work on producing a Local Nature Network declaration of intent that every local authority must do now incorporating the new NPF4 biodiversity enhancing policies and of course based around their excellent Local Biodiversity Site core network which SWT Lothians continues to help them to monitor and enhance.

Although I have been doing Planning Matters for some years now, I now stay in the Borders and my links to Midlothian are less. It is time for someone to take over this (not very onerous) role of monitoring planning matters in Midlothian while I help in the fight to prevent giant pylons crossing the Borders.

Susan Manson

### **Edinburgh**

We reported in the last issue that a local community planning action group for wildlife rich pond and wooded areas at Western Harbour ponds at the end of the western harbour of Leith Docks asked us to comment on an in-detail planning application (24/05114/FUL). Although not an LBS it is the sort of site that contributes to the now mandatory for councils Local Nature Network and is of course of great importance to the local community. We had pointed out to the council that as the application for detailed permission (outline permission given in 2008) now falls under the policies of the new CEC Local Development Plan 2030 and more importantly the new Scotland wide planning policies of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), any such permission would have to follow those more modern policies – which would certainly preserve this site for biodiversity as there are other sites that can be appropriately development in the locality. The council itself put a TPO on the site last year so presumably they are already appreciating that this is a test case for the application of the new Biodiversity Emergency protecting NPF4 National Planning Policies.

The local group reports that the planning application has currently been withdrawn but we expect a new one sometime perhaps not directly on the wood that the council placed the TPO on.

## **Pepper Wood**

In April, the Trust's Head of Reserves informed the Lothians members group that it would be terminating its management agreement with the private owner of this wood after nearly 50 years of management in the interests of nature conservation of this site (with the late Ken Knowles, voluntary convenor of the site for 47? of them!). This came out of an HQ review of all the reserves last year we do not own as a charity, but manage under agreement, with frequently little or no money coming from the owner to help cover our management costs. We are lucky in Lothians not to have lost more than one reserve under this review but be aware we may lose another couple of reserves in the next couple of years where the management agreements just come up for renew after say 25 years and the owner just no longer wants to sign up to our refreshed nature conservation criteria.

The criteria in this review did not include the value of the reserves as an LBS or as part of the local council's Local Nature Network so you will be familiar with our Local Group support for the Lothians local planning authority's Local Plan designated Local Biodiversity Sites within this work. Lothians Local Group paid for a full survey and re-assessment of the Pepper Wood reserve in 2022 (we chose it because it was then a reserve) and as a still very important LBS adjacent to a linear walkway LBS (with a potential new school being built nearby) and it will, going forward, play an important part in the council's statutory 'Local Nature Network'. Accordingly the head of the Trust's reserves and the chair of the Trust's Conservation committee have encouraged us to lead a pond digging task there and agree an LBS Management Brief with the landowner once it is no longer a formal SWT reserve - writing such management briefs is something we do for such LBS' that want one, to ensure the site continues with its biodiversity and indeed hopefully increases it. This is the sort of thing we can do at the local level."

## **East Lothian**

Many of you who habitat surveyed EL LBS' last year have come forward to do some more this year – (I shall be doing 3 on a disused railway line by bike!) – please help us to complete this task by late October. Some new members have come forward to help with the specific task of checking the current existence of historical priority plant species records on the 54 sites this summer. That is starting to happen and BSBI support in the form of as past location as accurate as possible records will be provided to such volunteers (and personally I will be aided by the mobile app. PlantNet!) and Marion Moir the BSBI recorder for East Lothian is kindly doing a dozen of these sites herself this summer. Get in contact with me if you would like to help with this specific task.

Dr Tim Duffy SWT Lothians Planning Secretary – [Planning@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:Planning@swtlothians.org.uk)

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