



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

Dates for your Diary Summer 2020

At the time of this newsletter going to press, Scotland is still in Phase 2 of Covid lockdown.

As soon as we are given the go-ahead from SWT headquarters to begin running our events again, we will let members know via email and the [Lothians Group webpage](#).

However, not all of our members in the Lothian's have given us permission to email them. If you have not signed up already, you can do it today!

Add yourself to the mailing

list: go the SWT website at scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-group/lothian/

Once on the [SWT Lothians Local Group homepage](#), scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the 'Subscribe Now' button. On the [sign-up page](#), simply pick 'Lothians' from the 'Region' list.

You will then receive up-to-date information about event and talks, a copy of Lothian Talk electronically (as well as your usual paper version).

Full details of any future event updates will be online at swtlothians.org.uk/events



Photograph courtesy of Jo Doake

Message from the Chair

I hope this summer edition of our Lothians local group newsletter finds you well.

As I write these words from my home summer has just begun, and my family and I are looking forward to a 'staycation'. I still can't quite believe that we've spent all of spring indoors, when the beautiful weather was calling and inviting us out.

Like many, during the brief times we were allowed to be outside during lockdown, I sought out green spaces and was evermore grateful for them. Some mornings, I got up very early to listen to the dawn chorus. At other times, I enjoyed a sunset walk, marvelling at the gorse in bloom on the hillsides.

The dramatic and uncertain times remain, and it is still hard to foresee what the Lothian's group may or may not be able to do in the near future. Since April, all of our social and fundraising activities have been cancelled and we are not yet in a position to know when these will resume. We will try to keep you updated as soon as we know more. The best thing to do would be to sign up to the [mailing list](#) (see 'Dates for your Diary' column on the left for details) or to check regularly on our [Lothians local group website](#).



Volunteers needed

Our sub-committee is made up of a small, committed group of friendly people. But there is always room for a few more enthusiastic individuals!

Currently, we need some new folk to help with some specific roles, which are:

- **Organising events and talks** - this is a general role helping to arrange speakers, meetings and events. Perfect for someone wanting to build networks in wildlife conservation.
- **Webadmin** - a Wordpress-savvy person needed to update the local group webpage regularly (and maybe help to develop our social media presence)

People interested in either role should be able to join us regularly at our bi-monthly meetings in central Edinburgh (or online during lockdown). In between these meetings, there will generally just be small amounts of ongoing work to do.

If you are interested, please get in touch with Allan Mathieson at allan@hampton-energy.com

Nevertheless, we are required to hold an Annual General Meeting and it is looking increasingly likely that this AGM will be held remotely using an online platform like 'Zoom'. This will be a first for our group! We will share the exact details nearer the time but we would love you to attend:

Our AGM will take place on the 17th September from 19:30 to 20:00.

Please join us if you can.

The papers prepared for that meeting can be found here - swtlothians.org.uk/2020/05/18/agm-postponed/

In the meantime, I wish you a very good summer and hope that we will be able to enjoy all the beautiful variety wildlife and nature that the Lothians have to offer.

Stay safe.

Nick Warren, Lothians Group Acting Chair

Local Nature: Lockdown Special

Whilst adhering to the lockdown guidance, many of us have been appreciating the simple beauty of nature from our gardens, or during our local daily exercise, even more. Some are even fortunate enough to live close to an SWT nature reserve! Here is just a small selection of photos our members have been sharing with us (look out soon for our *new* social media pages, where you can share your own photos!):



Blue tit by Maggy Nisbet



Ransoms (aka Wild garlic) by Jo Doake



Orange-tip butterfly by Maggy Nisbet



Four-spotted chaser dragonfly by Richard Doake



Leaf-cutter bee by Matt Hodson



Dandelion by Maggy Nisbet

Fossils, Flowers and Feathers... at Wardie Bay

For some years now SWT Lothians has wanted to work with our sister organisation, the Edinburgh Geological society (EGS), to interpret the natural heritage found at Wardie Bay seawall / McKelvie Parade area, in the Granton, Edinburgh. And finally, we have!

A new interpretive panel has been designed which interprets both the 'blue space' in front, and the new 'green space' behind, the reader. This beautiful panel will be sited on the sea wall just west of the water works (eastern end of Lower Granton Road), as soon as the council workshop has kindly completed the stand for it once they have emerged from lockdown. In particular, the panel shows:

- the special fossil record found below the sea surface (a geological SSSI never uncovered by the tide)
- the bird life on the sea surface
- and the new wildflower meadows at Lower Granton Road. A new coastal wildflower meadow mix was specially designed for use in this area, and hopefully this will be seen and enjoyed for many seasons to come.

The wildflower meadow area is being developed by Sustrans and the City of Edinburgh Council, and the interpretation panel (pictured below) was 50:50 funded by SWT and EGS. It was finally completed just before lockdown and was manufactured by a French company after they emerged early from lockdown (that company was chosen as they have the best tested anti-salt system known!).

The project is an SWT Lothians contribution to the Edinburgh Living Landscape (edinburghlivinglandscape.org.uk) and the RBGE Shoreline Project (edinburghshoreline.org.uk).

Fossils, Feathers and Flowers

Spot any sharks?
If you'd been standing here 340 million years ago, the warm, shallow waters in front of you would have been swimming with many different kinds of sharks and other fish. Scotland was a very different place back then with this area sometimes covered in shallow sea but more often muddy fresh-water lagoons. And the best bit? Scotland was on the Equator! The climate was hot and steamy, the perfect conditions for life to thrive. Some of the remains of animals and plants that once lived in this environment were preserved as fossils in the accumulating mud.

Believe it or not, this is Edinburgh's most important fossil site. The flat-lying black mudstone that you can see at low tide is the source of many types of fossil that have been collected and studied since the 1820s. The fossil fish are well preserved in ironstone nodules that are harder than the mudstone, and are left behind as the mudstone erodes away.

Fossil catchers
Many of the big names associated with Scottish palaeontology have collected fossils at Wardie, including the Swiss-American geologist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), Hugh Miller (1802-1856) and Ramsay H. Traquair (1840-1912), whose Monograph on British Carboniferous Fish is illustrated with many Wardie specimens. These were drawn by his wife Phoebe, an accomplished artist well known in Edinburgh for her murals in Mansfield Traquair and St Mary's Cathedral.

During the 1970s, Stan Wood (1939-2012) took an interest in this site and started collecting new specimens, publishing a list of over 15 fish species found here. One of the major hazards of Wardie Shore in the 1970s was contamination by raw sewage, so Wood boiled all the rocks he collected to sterilise them.

The ones that got away
Rhodus hiberni is the largest fresh-water fish that ever lived, growing up to seven metres long. This huge predator lived in these waters in the Carboniferous Period, and a beautifully preserved fossil of a medium-sized specimen (a mere 3.5 metres long) was discovered here by Ramsay Traquair's assistant, Thomas Stock in 1878. Five years later, Stock had had enough of fossils and he sold his collection to Harvard University in Massachusetts, USA, much to Traquair's annoyance.

The large Rhodus hiberni specimen was stored in Harvard for over a hundred years, until a recent study of the fish's fin bones revealed a similarity between the pattern of bones in this fish and all modern land animals: the blueprint for your arms and legs was laid down some 350 million years ago. However, you have a useful addition that is missing in these early fish - fingers and toes!

Are there any left?
Ironstone nodules have been collected from this beach for centuries but only a small proportion of them contained fish fossils. Today, this is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, which means that hammering of the rocks is not allowed without permission. If you do spot anything interesting in a nodule, please get in touch with palaeontologists at National Museums Scotland or the University of Edinburgh.

Today, fish fossils are rare and you are more likely to find smaller, egg-shaped nodules perhaps containing sparkly iron pyrites. These are fossilised fish poo called coprolites!

Birds on the Forth
The Firth of Forth is widely recognised for its important wildlife. Here, the vast expanses of sand at low tide and shelter from harbour at high tide encourage a variety of species throughout the seasons, meriting the designation of Special Protection Area, RAMSAR site and Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Granton Harbour's floating pontoons are fantastic roosts for knot and redshank, "knot" to mention the summer visitors with ever-increasing numbers of both common and sandwich terns. Wardie bay provides ideal shelter for large numbers of goldeneye, which come here in their thousands.

You might spot a long-tailed duck or two in their midst while further out sander are often encountered en masse. Newhaven harbour provides protection and turstone can be seen atop the wall. If you're lucky, you might see kingfisher feeding.

Did you know? The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is conducted monthly by volunteers and officials to count all identifiable coastal bird species along segmented stretches of coastline. The British Trust for Ornithology use the surveys to monitor trends in numbers and identify opportunities to enhance populations. Why not get involved?

Wildflower Meadows near the shoreline
As Edinburgh's living landscape develops, the shoreline is being returned to a more natural and wildlife rich state - as Charles Darwin (1809-1882) would have experienced it when he was studying Geology and Marine Biology here. Behind you are specially designed Urban Pollinator Wildflower Meadows - these wildflower rich grasslands provide food all summer long for bees, butterflies, hoverflies and many other flying insects that pollinate plants and provide vital ecosystem services. You will also find specially designed Coastal Wildflower Meadows that represent the sorts of wildflowers that are commonly found in these natural coastal areas.

If you have anything you would like to contribute to a future edition of Lothian Talk, please get in touch via email at editor@swtlothians.org.uk

Planning Matters

June 2020

Midlothian

Although the coronavirus has closed Council offices, the planning system is still operating in Midlothian and there has been a small decrease in number of applications coming through.

Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS) Steering Group: In February, SWT attended the annual LBS Steering Group meeting hosted by Midlothian Council. The Wildlife Information Centre for Lothians and the Borders (TWIC) reported that they had completed a huge amount of survey work and reviewing of Local LBS throughout Midlothian. The following sites have been reviewed and remain as LBS (with some slight boundary changes):

- Dalhousie Castle Estate
- Fullarton Water
- Springfield Mill and Maiden Castle.

The meeting also identified five sites to be surveyed over the summer for review later in the year. There are currently 69 designated (surveyed and assessed) LBS in the Midlothian Council area, with a further 5 new prospective candidate sites.

Cycle Paths: These are in the news again, and Midlothian Council is bidding for £200,000 to improve and extend the cycle path network in Midlothian. This is partly driven by the increase in cycling and other forms of exercise during the lockdown period. Although not a direct 'wildlife' issue there are fringe benefits for wildlife in creation of green networks and scrubby habitat.

Monitoring Planning: Anyone who monitors planning websites knows that there can be changes to applications even once they are uploaded on the relevant Council website or planning portal. A few voluntary organisations and individuals are now trialling a new computer application which monitors a portal, and notes any changes to any of the documents. This could make life a whole lot easier for anyone monitoring any complicated or large applications. More details at a later date.

Rosewell: The extensive landfill site at Drummond Moor near Rosewell is now closed and the ground is partially restored. There is a planning application for 64 holiday homes and associated infrastructure on the site. The proposal is some 800m from Shiel Burn LBS, but the application does not impinge on it and should not have any impact. The site is planned to have a lot of new planting so the overall wildlife value should increase over time.

Gorebridge: A proposed 'solar array' of 52 solar panels is planned for a site just south of Camp Wood LBS.

East Lothian

Whitekirk: The Council have approved in principle the development of 41 holiday lodges on the former golf course site. This application caused some objections from the local community and the Trust were asked to become involved. However the wildlife implications are limited and it was more of a landscape issue.

Blindwells/Cockenzie: The Council is creating and building a new 'town' at the former opencast mining site. The plans include a lot of sustainable developments and proposals for a 'carbon neutral zone'. Ground works have started and planning for around 1600 houses so far is approved. The Council in East Lothian launched an ambitious vision for the next 30 years for this site, and for the neighbouring Cockenzie Power Station site. Part of the consultation involves 'Greenspace and Biodiversity' and the 'Water Environment'. Consultation started on 1 June and will last for 8 weeks.

Thornton Glen Reserve: The SWT has given permission, on request from Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE), for an ecological survey of its Thornton Glen Reserve and LBS. This is in connection with a possible offshore wind farm nearby which will be called Seagreen 2. If given permission, they would need on-shore cables to come ashore (such cables are already being built for the Neart na Gaoithe offshore wind farm near Torness). It is possible that they would not want the cables to come through the SWT reserve area itself.

Markle Quarry: An application involving overhead power lines near Markle Quarry Pond LBS has been withdrawn.

West Lothian

Notifications of planning applications potentially affecting Local Biodiversity Sites, as identified by The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC), have slowed to trickle during the lockdown period. Most of the applications on the list are

triggered because they occur within a defined buffer distance of an LBS. Many of the applications are inconsequential, and have no impact on the nearby LBS – i.e. replacement of dormer windows, changing use of existing buildings etc. This has been the case for most of the notifications since January.

Bog Burn: Sadly, one application slipped through the net while the volunteer planning watcher was away enjoying nature from below the sea surface (he insists we mention this as it proves we must **all** always be on planning watch in our areas!). A proposal to create a woodland (children's) nursery for "engaging with nature" in a "relatively open" part of Tor Whittie Wood, Harburn, was made in January 2020, and approved in March. This is firmly in the centre of one of the main woodland areas of the Bog Burn - West Torphin to Annetcross Bridge LBS (designated 2018 by WLC). Such a development, while not destroying the woodland as such (which has allowed public access and use for a long time under private ownership), will undoubtedly have an impact on the detailed interest of this part of the site.

This shows that our development scanning system is fallible, as it depends upon the availability of individuals and their ability to respond very quickly. However, it also shows that the protection afforded to LBS by West Lothian Council (WLC) is far from complete. Once lockdown is over, we will be asking WLC Planning how approval of this development squares with the recently published policy statements about presumption against development within LBS, and the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before any such development occurs. No EIA was carried out, and the existence of an LBS is not mentioned in the constraints section or anywhere else in the documentation (in particular, where it would be expected in the "Policies considered" section of the planning officer's report). This is not the first time that LBS status has been omitted from development proposals, so the role of SWT in watching planning applications is as relevant today as it ever was.

Winchburgh: The massive development here continues. Specific development proposals appear quite regularly but they are all within the already-approved development area. So far, there does not seem to be any impact on the wildlife sites in the area (Union Canal LBS, Canal Wood LBS and Clay Quarry Pond pLBS).

Planning For Nature: An extremely valuable step forward has been taken with the publication of WLC's formal Planning Guidance "Planning for Nature – Development Planning and Wildlife" (April 2020). I am pleased to say that WLC incorporated all of SWT's comments on the draft into this final version.

This published document supplements and supports the planning policies set out in the statutory Local Development Plan (approved in 2018). It describes the types of site protection, from international and statutory, to Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites. It clearly states that there is a presumption against development in LBS, which runs contrary to the reality at Bog Burn above! There is a list of local biodiversity and geodiversity sites although the list does not distinguish between LBS and pLBS. A section covers the range of protected species, though only mammal species are given as examples. Practical guidance is given on:

- requirements for site appraisal and ecological survey before applications are submitted, including a site audit check-list,
- design and mitigation methods for wildlife
- and licensing requirements.

All in all, this is a really good document. In principle, it means that LBS and protected species should be well safeguarded by the planning policies of West Lothian Council.

City of Edinburgh Council

In April 2020, the CEC consulted on the Future Edinburgh 'Choices for the City Plan 2030' and asked for views on various questions about how our city develops. One response from SWT Lothians is available to view on the SWT Lothians group website - swtlothians.org.uk/lothian-talk/

Contacts For Planning Matters Affecting Wildlife Sites

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