



**Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust**

Winter 2013

# Lothian Talk

Lothians Members Centre Newsletter

<http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-member-group/lothian/>

## Successful badger watches

**D**uring June and July, three groups of LMC members enjoyed watching the badgers on Corstorphine Hill (a fourth outing was unfortunately rained off). Tricia Alderson of the Lothian and Borders Badger Group led the groups.

Three of us set off from the car park on the night I went, but the small number of attendees meant the disturbance was kept to a minimum. En route we were fully briefed and the various hand signals were explained so we could be silent when we arrived.

Once there we settled down and made ourselves comfortable on the path and waited. It was almost meditative listening to the sounds of the evening as they faded away. Then, when we thought we might be unlucky the hand signal came to rise to our feet as quietly as possible. And there they were right in front of us, it was delightful and a real privilege



to see these nocturnal creatures so close. All the groups saw the badgers who were very co-operative and came to within five metres of the watchers. We are very grateful to Tricia for leading the groups and hope to offer members the opportunity to watch the badgers again next summer.

*Jan Brogan*

## A cloud of feasting bats at Blackford Pond

**A**n excellent attendance of more than 40 members assembled late on a balmy August evening at Blackford Pond for the annual Bat Walk, led by Carol Hodgson, her husband Nigel, and Joan Carter from the Lothian Bat Group.

Carol described the habits and habitats of the species we may see; the common pipistrelle, the soprano pipistrelle (differentiated as a separate species in 1999 and now more common than the common pipistrelle) and the Daubenton's bat.

An unexpected highlight (and much appreciated by the children)

was the live soprano pipistrelle that Carol had brought along from the bat hospital, perfect for illustrating anatomy.

Nigel demonstrated two types of bat detector. These hand-held devices are crucial for species identification by converting the bat echolocation ultrasound calls into audible human frequencies (the common pipistrelle at 45 kHz, the soprano pipistrelle at 55 kHz and Daubenton's bat at 35-37 kHz).

We then set off on a circuit of the pond, where the detectors picked up soprano pipistrelles hawking midges and mosquitoes among the trees above our heads;

a pipistrelle eats 3,000 midges a night. At the first stretch of water, we heard, and then saw, a Daubenton's bat circling over the water, while a common pipistrelle obligingly flew overhead.

Dozens of Daubenton's bats provided a marvellous finale to the evening at the western end of the pond, flying in circles low over the water, devouring chironomid midges and mayflies and flashing their white underbellies as they twisted and turned in our torchlight beams.

Thanks to Carol, Nigel and Joan for an inspirational evening.

*Ian Jackson*

# Wildlife Watch

**N**ewhailes Nature Detectives Club has had a great year, with activities ranging from bird racing to finding out about John Muir to rock pooling and getting the lowdown on bees.

During August, the group visited Inveresk Allotments in Musselburgh where they learned about the fruit and vegetables grown there and had a go at tattie howking. In addition, the group

learned about the different flowers and plants that grow at the site and how wildlife benefits from the allotments. The group did a butterfly survey and rounded off the day with a wildlife quiz.

The group has been running for seven years, supported by SWT and the National Trust for Scotland. The club meets on the third Saturday of the month and is for 7-12 year olds. They meet at Newhailes or Inveresk Lodge Garden, but they

also go on trips too. The full programme is available at <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/activities-for-children/east-lothian/>. For information, contact NTS Ranger and group leader Stuart Whittaker (0844 493 2124).



## Planning matters - autumn 2013

**M**idlothian Council has produced its *Main Issues* report, part of the process of preparing the new *Midlothian Local Development Plan*. The *Issues* report sets out the vision and key issues to be addressed in the proposed plan. There is also an *Environmental Report*.

The plan, once approved, will guide development in Midlothian until 2024.

Rather predictably, the plan focuses on economic growth and areas of search for new housing. Midlothian will have to find land for over 1,750 new housing units and 45 hectares of economic land within the plan period up to 2024. There are also proposals to alter the Green Belt boundaries.

The A701 has two new proposed routes, to the west of the existing route and potentially skirting Old Pentland cemetery and Cameron Wood. If approved, and built, the road will provide the new Green Belt boundary with land within Seafield and Bilston removed from the Green Belt.

Biodiversity and wildlife protection do get a mention but

certainly not in any high profile policies or proposals. The main opportunities for natural heritage enhancement are likely to come with Central Scotland Green network. The report also confirms that so-called Non-statutory Local Biodiversity sites will be subject to an ongoing review including the identification of new ones – the latter is particularly required in the ‘very important to Midlothian river valleys’, the council just needs to find the funds to have these re-surveyed. Forty-three ‘new’ Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS based on the older SWT recommended Listed Wildlife Sites) are confirmed to be included in the forthcoming *Local Development Plan*.

Within East Lothian the expansion of housing in and around Haddington is gaining speed with proposals for 385 houses and 48 flats on a site to the west of Haddington. Although on arable farmland and not involving loss of any wildlife habitats, water voles have been noted in the water courses that cross the site.

In the last issue of Planning Matters we covered the application

for a wind farm at Mount Lothian Moss, Penicuik, and we can report that currently that application has been withdrawn.

In West Lothian an EIA screening for a mixed use development for application 0231/EIA/13 appears to be adjacent to Greendykes Bing LBS and Union Canal LBS and it may directly affect the southern part of the Bing LBS. We shall read the coming EIA statement carefully.

In Edinburgh the layout of housing at Craigpark quarry is being amended after new species surveys. Mitigation recommendations look thorough and acceptable if carried out.

### Planning contacts

For Midlothian and East Lothian planning matters contact Susan Manson [mansons@castlesteads.net](mailto:mansons@castlesteads.net), or at Castlesteads, Dalkeith, EH22 2NJ. For West Lothian contact Dr Cameron Easton [dr.c.easton@gmail.com](mailto:dr.c.easton@gmail.com) or at 1 Bellsburn Avenue, Linlithgow, West Lothian, EH49 7LD.

*Tim Duffy*  
LMC Planning Secretary

# Evening events

Thursday 12 December 2013 (including festive refreshments)

## **The new Queensferry Bridge and the environmental considerations. Liz Morrison and Peter Gilchrist**

The Forth Replacement Crossing is the biggest infrastructure project in Scotland for a generation. Construction started in Autumn 2011 and is due to be completed in 2016. Liz Morrison and Peter Gilchrist, environmental specialists from the Forth Replacement Crossing project team, tell us about the environmental impact assessment undertaken for the site and the ecological impacts and mitigation. Caring for the environment is an important part of the project and habitats supporting species such as badger, bats and otter were identified during ecological surveys. Bat boxes, replacement badger setts and mammal underpasses have been designed and implemented to protect them. As part of the project we are also putting in place a management plan for enhancing the habitat at St Margaret's Marsh SSSI.

Thursday 13 February 2014

## **Saints and Seabirds – looking after St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve. Liza Cole**

Liza Cole, Property Manager/Senior Ranger Naturalist at the National Trust for Scotland's St Abb's Head will introduce you to all the interest features of this spectacular coastal nature reserve. The illustrated talk will cover everything from the geology to the natural history and will give you an outline of the work carried out to manage the reserve.

Thursday 13 March 2014

## **Ash dieback and other tree diseases. Professor Steve Woodward, University of Aberdeen**

Professor Steve Woodward's recent research focuses on the potential for alien invasive pathogens to cause major problems in forest ecosystems. He will tell us about ash dieback caused by a fungus called *Chalara fraxinea* (*C. fraxinea*). The disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees and usually leads to tree death. Ash trees suffering with the infection have been found widely across Europe, with the first trees reported as dying in large numbers in Poland in 1992.

In February 2012, the pathogen was found in a consignment of infected trees sent to a nursery in Buckinghamshire, England. Since then it has been found in young ash trees in a variety of locations in Great Britain, including urban landscaping, newly planted woodland, and nurseries.

**Date of the AGM will be Thursday 24 April 2014**

Lectures are held at 33 Melville Street, Edinburgh and start at 7.30pm. Admission is free but donations are appreciated. Non-members welcome. Disabled access available by prior arrangement, please contact Karen Pearson 07795 066490.

## How to get updates on events and talks...

Between issues of Lothian Talk you can get still get updates on events and outings. If you sign up to the Lothians members Yahoo group you'll get email reminders for outings and talks and if arrangements change you'll also be notified by email automatically. To sign up go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/swt-lothian> and click on 'Join this group'. You can also get up-to-the minute information on our website as well as the latest issue of Lothian Talk. Don't forget you can save the page as a favourite <http://swtlothians.org.uk>

## Final can collections

As we go to press our final two can collections for 2013 are still to take place. However, we are delighted to report that over £858 was collected during two days at Tesco Bathgate in June and over £509 at Tesco South Queensferry in July. Thank you to everyone who rattled a can this year. I hope to have 10 collection days next year and some dates for early 2014 will be organised soon.

*Averil Stewart*

## Next issue...

We hope to have a round-up on the reserves and details of the AGM. The deadline for the spring issue is 1 January 2014 and the newsletter should be with you early in March. Please send your stories and photographs to: [editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk).



# New Alpine House provides ideal conditions for plants

**T**he chance for a guided visit to the recently opened Alpine House at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh saw a dozen or so SWT members gather at the spectacular John Hope Gateway on a sunny June Saturday.

Our guide was Rosemary Anderson who led us to the new Alpine House by a circuitous route that allowed her to share with us her knowledge and her enthusiasm for alpine plants by showing us some of the more arresting species growing in the garden. Rosemary's narrative was enhanced by her experiences of plant hunting in montane areas and encountering alpinists in situ.

When we arrived at the Alpine House, we were confronted with a striking, modernistic structure made of galvanised steel. The building is a stark contrast to the old, conventional structure adjacent to it that was built in the 1970s and has been left in service.

The new Alpine House, which was designed by Smith

Scott Mullan Associates, is a very open geometrical design. Roofed with glass, to protect the plants from winter damp, it also provides the airiness that is required in alpine plant culture.

## **The tufa wall**

The main feature of the Alpine House is the tufa wall. Tufa stone is a highly porous, sedimentary rock (limestone) composed of calcium carbonate that forms in close proximity to water. The wall shows the alpinists growing in their natural environment.

It is planted with lime-loving species and has an ingenious internal watering system. Outside there is also a tufa rockery that

complements the internal wall. Both of these features make use of a quantity of tufa that the garden has had for some years, having been recycled from a road-building project in southern Germany.

Although plantings are at an early stage, the tufa wall will contribute much to the understanding of the culture and ecology of alpine plants. Of particular interest to the garden are the Gesneriads and members of the genera *Ramonda*, *Jankaea* and *Corallodiscus* are represented, along with dwarf *Daphne petraea* from northern Italy, various *Dionysias* from Iran and some *Primulas* and *Saxifragas*.

*Quintin Blane*



*Modernistic structure:  
The new Alpine  
House at Edinburgh  
Royal Botanic  
Gardens*

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