



**Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust**

# Lothian Talk

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

## Dates for your Diary

Open day: **Red Moss of  
Balerno Wildlife Reserve**

- Sunday 23rd July; 12-5pm
- Help to celebrate  
International Bog day!
- Family-friendly, free, no  
booking required

## Autumn / Winter Talks

Content to be confirmed, but we are hoping to cover topics such as moths, kites & beavers, oysters, lynx reintroduction, regeneration and etymology. Check the website for details! The talks will take place from 7-9pm on the following dates:

- Thurs 19th October 2023
- Thurs 16th November
- Thurs 14th December
- Thurs 15th February 2024
- Thurs 14th March
- Thurs 18th April

Unless stated otherwise, all talks are free of charge and take place at:

The Cornerstone Centre  
St. John's Church  
Princes Street  
Edinburgh EH2 4BJ

Details of all events,  
including directions and  
meeting point, can be  
found online at  
[swtlothians.org.uk/events](https://swtlothians.org.uk/events)



*Forget-me-nots at Bawsinch by Jo Doake*

## Bawsinch & Duddingston Nature Reserve walk

Summer had definitely sprung on the SWT visit to the Bawsinch & Duddingston Nature Reserve in Edinburgh on 13th May.

The reserve was looking beautiful with the fresh green of the leaves and a few early flowers adding more colour. Lothians Reserve Manager, Julian Warman, guided the group along paths and over ditches, past a couple of hides overlooking Duddingston Loch. It became an SWT reserve in 1971 with a mixed history up to then, including the threat of being developed for housing. There is a wide selection of mostly native trees and we heard at least 15 species of birds. There is a fox family, roe deer, otters and grey squirrels. We saw orange-tip, speckled wood and comma butterflies.

In the middle of the reserve, away from the sound of traffic, looking over the loch to Arthur's Seat you wouldn't know you were surrounded by Edinburgh. Thank you Julian for an excellent visit.

*by Jo Doake*

## Planning Matters

**Midlothian:** The current **Midlothian Local Plan** was approved in 2017. The Council is now embarking on the early consultation stages for the next review of the Local Plan. It is intended it will replace the old plan by 2027 and cover the period until 2036.

The key issues for the new Plan include the climate emergency and the 'nature / biodiversity crisis'. Other issues are 'protection of natural, cultural and historical assets'. However, the plan also has to satisfy government requirements for housing land supply. As always there will be a trade off between the need to build houses, and where and how the houses will be built. In the first 20 years of this century, Midlothian Council area saw its population rise more than most other authorities in Scotland. Statistics from the Council predict that between 2018 and 2028 the population in Midlothian will increase by 13.8 %. This is compared to 1.8% for Scotland as a whole.

Local people and communities in Midlothian are being encouraged to engage with events being organised between April and October this year. There are also surveys on the Council's website including the Open Space Strategy Survey (Check the [Consultations page](#) on the Council's website). SWT members can look on Midlothian Council website for details of events and ways to get involved in their area.

**Penicuik House and Estate** is an extensive Local Biodiversity Site. The designed landscape around the ruins of Penicuik House is one of the oldest and most important in Scotland. New management are proposing a 'Landscape Hotel' and Landscape rooms around the High Pond. The Hotel will be in the existing building (formerly the stables) adjacent to Penicuik House. The whole project plans to be of the highest environmental standards using sustainable building practices. The Estate is also planning a new car park at the existing entrance off Carlops Road, and a visitor centre and farm shop to cater for local people and visitors, who are using the estate in increasing numbers. The planning application is accompanied by ecological surveys and landscape plans. More planting will be included in the development, plus increased walks and paths around the Estate, and links with surrounding areas including the Pentland Hills.

The **Midlothian Outdoor Festival** will take place between 13th to 16th October. Run by the Ranger Service but supported by a large number of volunteers, there are walks and events over the long weekend. Included is a walk around Gladhouse Reservoir with the newly appointed ranger.

Earlier in the year Midlothian's Ranger Service was threatened with major budget cuts. The Ranger Service was to be reduced to one post. The Council reversed its decision after many individuals demonstrated their support for the Service and the work it does, by contacting Councillors, and writing emails and media posts.

The annual Local Biodiversity Sites meeting was held on 8th February 2023. Supported by The Wildlife Information Centre and Midlothian Council, the group members confirmed the status of four Local Biodiversity sites; namely Aikendean Glen, Mount Lothian Quarry Ponds, Middleton Lime Quarries (west) and Stretchendean Wood.

**East Lothian:** In the last issue of Lothian Talk, we reported that SWT had raised funds to help East Lothian Council monitor its network of Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS) for the first time in over ten years. We are very pleased to report confirmation that they can match our donated funds, thereby doubling them and their effectiveness. Accordingly, a project run by The Wildlife Information Centre (the biological records centre for Lothians and beyond) is going ahead this summer to, 'Design and test a Local Biodiversity Site monitoring and evidence provision system for East Lothian Council'. The system should allow Local Development Plan planners to include the LBS' in the next Local Plan for East Lothian. These LBSs form the core of the 'Nature Network' that every council now has to create due to recent planning legislation.

**For other planning news, inc. West Lothian and City of Edinburgh Council, see [Planning Matters](#) online.**

### Contacts For Planning Matters Affecting Wildlife Sites

**Midlothian:** Susan Manson - mansonsc@castlesteads.net

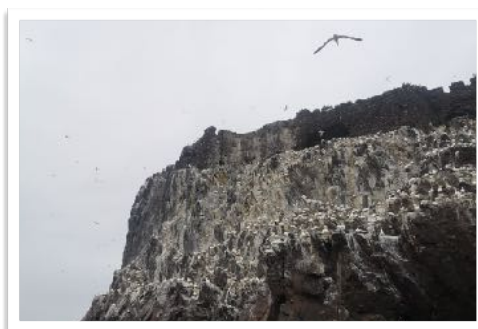
**East Lothian:** Ian Whittaker - ianw0@yahoo.co.uk

**West Lothian & City of Edinburgh Council:** Carmina Cazan - carminacazan@yahoo.com

*Dr Tim Duffy (SWT Lothians Planning Secretary) [timrduffy1@gmail.com](mailto:timrduffy1@gmail.com)*

## Avian flu and Bass Rock update

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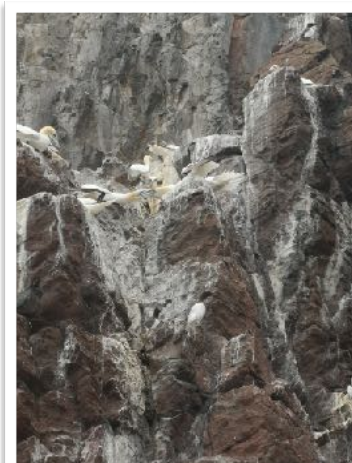


Recent research has now confirmed that gannets can survive avian flu (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1) and that a colour change in the iris is an indicator that a bird has previously contracted the disease. Survivors have been found to have black eyes, diverging from their usual pale blue colouring.

The research was carried out by scientists from the RSPB, the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh, Heriot Watt University and the Animal Plant Health Agency, in partnership with the Scottish Seabird Centre. They investigated avian flu among the gannets of Bass Rock here in the Lothians, the largest colony of gannets in the world. It was found that adult survival between 2021 and 2022 was 42% lower than the average over the previous 10 years. For further information see [the RSPB press release](#) on the study. You can stay up to date with future developments through the [NatureScot website's Avian Influenza \(bird flu\) page](#).

I was lucky enough to visit Bass Rock for the first time at the end of May and saw these stunning birds up close. Regardless of the population reduction, the sheer numbers of gannets crammed onto every surface of the rock (with a smattering of guillemots, gulls, and razorbills in between) was breath-taking. I didn't notice any black irises but did see a range of fascinating gannet behaviour including 'mutual fencing', where bonded pairs waggle their heads around each other in a sort of dance before preening one another.

Gannets are monogamous and mate for life. They take turns guarding the nest site and going out to fish. We saw a nested gannet stick her head straight up towards the sky in a 'star gazing' position to indicate to her partner it was time to swap. The most exciting moment was when two of these extremely territorial birds got in a clash over a nest site, locking their bills together in a fierce battle until one was knocked off the cliff, leaving the remaining gannet to claim his prize, a little worse for wear.



I came away from Bass Rock feeling quietly hopeful in the knowledge of all the fantastic work being done by the Scottish Seabird Centre and partners to help better understand avian flu. Here's hoping Bass Rock continues to be home to a thriving colony (gannetry) for many years to come.

*Photos & text by Catherine Sturrock*

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## Balerno LNR Red Moss Open Day

The Scottish Wildlife Trust's Lothians Group is hosting an open day at Red Moss of Balerno reserve on the edge of the Pentland Hills from 12 to 5pm on International Bog Day, Sunday 23rd July.

For more information about the event, including directions to the reserve and meeting point, visit the Scottish Wildlife Trust's website at [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk) or contact Dr Tim Duffy, Reserve Convenor, on 07968 530678.

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*If you have anything you would like to contribute, please get in touch via [editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk)*





### *Photo Gallery*

Here are a selection of the photographs members have shared with us by one of our members, Dave King, since our last edition, taken on various reserves and wild places.

You can see more [our social media pages](#). You can also share some of your own photos of local nature, and local nature reserves!



### Your local nature

If you have any photographs of local wildlife that you would like us to share here, please send them to [editor@swtlothians.org.uk](mailto:editor@swtlothians.org.uk)

