

Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group- Chair's Report 2024

By Nicholas Warren (Chair)

Notes on the Committee

We continue to have three committees to help run this group. Although because of vacancies, the main and events committees will be trialling joint meetings next year.

The main committee key responsibilities continue to be to oversee the activities of the SWT Lothians Group, monitor possible planning development affecting Local Biodiversity Sites across the Lothians, fundraise; represent the Trust at local external events, manage the groups finance, allocate available financial resources, and organise and run the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

While the events committee organises all the outdoor events, winter lectures, produces the Lothian Talk newsletter and maintains our website and social media presence.

Finally, the reserve committee offers an overview of the management of the Trust's Lothian wildlife reserves from the perspective of volunteers mainly by compiling reserve annual reports and meeting annually.

We would like to express our thanks to the members of all committees for all their hard work over the past year.

'Walks and Talks'

Over the past twelve months, we organised 12 events, six of these were outings, the other six were organised talks which took place at the Cornerstone Centre off Princes street, Edinburgh.

- 13-05-2023 - Guided walk around the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Bawsinch reserve led by its reserve manager.
- 17-06-2023 - An open-day at Johnston Terrace from 1-4pm.
- 23-7-2023 - Red Moss of Balerno Wildlife Reserve on International Bog Day.
International Bog Day is a global celebration of these rich peatland habitats for wildlife and this event provides a great chance to explore the last remaining raised bog in the city of Edinburgh.
- 07-09-2023 - An evening observing bats at a local site with Natalie Todman of the Lothians Bat Group – Jo Doake had to cover for Natalie at the last minute.
- 19-10-2023 - An evening celebrating the Outer Hebrides, St Kilda and their wildlife with Steuart Fergusson. This event was cancelled as the speaker fell ill.

- 11-11-2023 - Musselburgh bird walk with ranger Kristian Purchase.
- 16-11-2023 - Charlotte Neary, senior project officer, Forth Rivers Trust talked about the work of the Trust in the rivers and their catchment areas around the Forth valley.
- 18-01-2024 - 'Nextdoor Nature and the Scottish Wildlife Trust: breaking boundaries and enriching environments. Lola May gave a general overview of the work of the Trust with a particular focus on the Nextdoor Nature project.
- 22-2-2024 - Bonnie Vandesteeg, talked on her book "Land for What? Land for Whom? Senses of Place and Conflict in the Scottish Highlands" The talk explored the various conflicts that exist between livelihood, recreation and conservation approaches to land use in the Cairngorms.
- 14-3-2024 - Lothian-based ecologist Katty Baird shared her passion for moths – talk based on her book 'Meetings with Moths'.
- 22-3-2024 - A dog friendly walk around Blackford Hill and Hermitage local Nature Reserve.
- 18-4-2024 - The Lothians group Annual General Meeting A brief presentation of the group's annual activities and finances from the group's chair.
- 18- 4- 2024 Project Seagrass conservation/habitat restoration by Anna Inman - the talk focuses on the project's efforts to reintroduce native oysters to the Forth.

Lothian Talk. We continue and wish to continue to offer two formats for our newsletter. The two-page paper format is sent alongside the magazine to all SWT members in the Lothians, while an extended electronic version may be received by email or read on this group's website.

This newsletter is sent out 3 times a year to over 12,000 members (over 6,000 memberships) in the Lothians.

Special thanks go to our editor, Kate, for her work in putting this information together.

Kate will be stepping down from this position after this AGM. Alison will be editing the next edition.

Website, Facebook, and Instagram – Thanks mainly to the work of Jo (Young), our foray onto social media continues and our Facebook page receives increasing amounts of interactions. As of April 2024, our Facebook page has 832 likes and 950 followers (up from 550 likes • 630 followers in 2022-23).

While our Instagram account now has 78 followers (up from 69).

Jo stepped down from this position in November 2023. This group now runs a minimal service, mainly posting upcoming events.

Thanks to Ruth (Palmer), our website page is kept up to date.

Planning Matters

A very busy and ever growing in activity year for planning in the 4 Lothian council areas which has not been helped by bad luck in West Lothian and Edinburgh and East Lothian planning representatives having to leave after excellent and hard work, new ones being found and then having to leave soon after starting – so we are now back to looking for someone to help me in West Lothian and Edinburgh again. It will be very interesting work I assure you as for example the year ended with CEC internal departments deciding to trash long standing policy on protecting the CEC LBS network – the core of the now statutory to have Local Nature Network in Edinburgh – by proposing to completely destroy the biodiversity value of the Dalry to Blinkbonny and Craigmyle to Pilton LBS’ – definately the ‘Foveran links/Coul Links event for CEC LBS’.

In Midlothian Penicuik house and Estate LBS has been under the microscope again along with work starting on the next Local plan for the area. West Lothian has been getting it’s act very much together regarding their next Local Biodiversity Action Plan with several new posts for Ecology all funded grants such as Nature Restoration fund.

We have spent a lot of effort planning to refresh the East Lothian LBS network and some of you are helping to survey habitats and species there this summer and the next.

Dr. Tim Duffy, SWT Lothians Planning Secretary

Reserves Committee



The Reserves Management Group offers a volunteer perspective on the 19 Scottish Wildlife trust reserves in the Lothians and Pease Dean in Berwickshire.

The committee met once this year on the 27th of February 2024. In advance of this meeting, the following annual reports were prepared by the conveners for the following reserves:

- Brock Wood
- East Lammermuir Deans
- Erraid Wood
- Hermand Birchwood
- Johnston Terrace Wildlife Garden
- Milkhall Pond
- Roslin Glen
- Woodhall Dean

Of conservation interest:

- This was the first time that no Northern Brown Argus were seen during the summer surveys in East Lammermuir Deans, though other butterflies such as Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Common blue, Grayling, small Skippers and Dark green Fritillary were present as usual.
- Roslin Glen got its third record for the Noctule bat on the reserve. The Noctule is Britain's largest bat and is relatively rarely seen in these parts.



(Photos D King – handling bats requires a special license)

Representing the trust at external events

In the past this has also been part of our remit but is something we have nothing to report on. Maybe it is something the events committee could look at this year.

Nextdoor Nature Projects

The Lothians Group secured funding through SWT's Nextdoor Nature initiative to run two projects this year.

The first is in collaboration with the Grassmarket Community Project (GCP) and involves the GCP's wood workshop group designing and building wooden window boxes. The GCP's gardening group will then fill the boxes with hardy plants that are good for pollinators, before the boxes are distributed to the local community.



(Photos of the project's window boxes – Catherine Sturrock)

While the second is for the children at the Pilton Youth and Children's Project (PYCP) centre. This project runs from February to May 2024 and combines workshops on nature in and around the centre, with a trip to the Bass Rock gannet colony during the breeding season. This Northern gannet colony - the largest in the world for the species - is an amazing example of Nature next door to us! It has been a great experience co-creating this project with the PYCP.

The aim of the Nextdoor Nature initiative is to deliver actions for nature in partnership with existing community groups or organisations embedded within communities. It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Finance & fundraising – see the attachment.

Our treasurer, Trevor, prepared the group accounts for this year.

Our group income comes from two main sources of fundraising. The first is can collections which Barbara Knowles organised at the local supermarkets (mainly Tesco). Can collection volunteers on the up which is great to see.

The second comes from the donations we receive for our organised events (walks & talks)

Some progress made for electronic card readers. We are still making decent amount of money with cash during our collections, but we now also offer a card reader as an option to receive donations.

Proposed Committee Members for the next year – see the attachment.

There are some changes to report on this year. Nick Warren will start his fifth, and final, year as chair for this group.

We have said farewell to Carmina Cazan, Allan Mathieson, Jo Young and, welcomed Catherine Sturrock and Alison Edelsten.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or wish to join us as a volunteer on the committees or to do more hands-on work on the reserves.