



Scottish Wildlife Trust: Lothians Group Newsletter

Spring 2026

++ Extended On-line Version ++

Spring 2026 Events

Thursday 16th April 2026 – 7:30 to 9:30pm.

AGM then Planning and Nature in the Lothians

The Lothians group AGM, followed by a talk on Nature and Planning in the Lothians region by Tim Duffy covering the work of the group, its impact, successes, challenges, and hopes for the future.

Venue: The Cornerstone Centre

Sunday 26th April 2026. 10:30am for about 3.5 hours.

Guided walk at Woodhall Dean reserve

The first of our outdoor events with Lesley Fairweather, Numbers strictly limited to 20, so Eventbrite booking essential.

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-events/>

Saturday 23 May 2026 – 8am to 10:30am.

Moth trapping and Identification. Join Moth Expert

Mark Cubitt at our Red Moss Reserve for an introduction by inspection of traps set Friday evening. Eventbrite booking will be required with numbers limited to about 16.

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 to support the hall costs. Teas/coffee provided.

From the Chair – Dr Tim Duffy

There was a problem with the distribution of the Autumn 2025 newsletter hence both the Autumn and Spring issues now appear in your magazine. I am pleased to report that following our appeal we now have a new newsletter editor with professional experience of writing and publishing and they will start with the Summer newsletter.

We have another appeal for assistance. If you believe you have never received an email from us with a web link to the PDF longer version of our newsletter or a specific email inviting you to one of our talks in person or online or outings, then please send your email address (and membership number if possible) to webmaster@swtlothians.org.uk. Your email will be passed to SWT HQ where they will administer it under GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) rules for

which they are responsible, and we can then ask them to email our Lothians actual membership wishing to receive such email communications. HQ have provided us with recent more detailed information on our Lothians current membership which helps us address the wide gap between membership and those who are officially explicitly not wanting to receive emails from

the local group. Our current Lothians memberships is 6819. Of these 3939 have requested that they don't receive the Trust's magazine nor emails from HQ or the Lothians Local Group. Another 767 are deemed to have explicitly requested not to receive Lothians Local Group emails. On GDPR record only 4505 members currently wish to receive Local Group electronic newsletters meaning that there are at least 1154 members who may not realise that they could get more than this hardcopy summary newsletter. Yes, it's all a bit complicated to follow!

There are advantages for subscribing SWT members to being contactable by the Lothians Group in this way - it is a benefit of being an actual SWT member in the Lothians. If you only receive this hardcopy newsletter consider emailing webmaster@swtlothians.org.uk to be added to the emailing list.

Planning Matters

East Lothian

Some of you have kindly joined me in helping ELC (East Lothian Council) to re-survey its existing Local Biodiversity sites (LBS) for the first time in many years. This has been in the form of phase 1 habitat surveys with an easy to use survey manual produced by local expert Ben Averis and in addition some detailed checking for the presence/absence of priority plant species and other groups on the sites. I am very pleased to report that at a recent meeting with Lydia Miller of the countryside section and two planners, there to learn about the re-assessment system - we assessed two sites (and passed them!) and in February will meet to assess 20+ more. Completing this process is important to inform the imminent new Local Plan in East Lothian and we must complete this habitat stage by end July 2026. We also need to complete the priority plant checking process by then and I am very pleased to report that the East

Lothian BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland) recorder Marion Moir and her BSBI volunteers have agreed to complete this process by then. Some volunteers hoped to do some of these plant records but if you have not been put off by the bureaucracy hoops involved in doing survey work for the council please could I ask you to reapply to do Habitat survey work as there are still 30+ sites to be investigated by the end of July 26. So Lydia and I formally ask for one more push to get this done and please contact Lydia to re-join in 2026 noting that we will all survey from 1st April onwards. We have a kind offer from Ben Averis again who will do another training/refreshing day on his habitat survey method on Tuesday March 24th at Donnelly reservoir time 10.00 a.m. So please email if you want to help us finish the habitat surveys this summer – and are up for training/a-refresher (12 places only!) at the end of March just in time for the start of the survey season. Good progress is being made and there is light at the end of the tunnel! **Contact:** lmiller5@eastlothian.gov.uk

Midlothian

Our new Midlothian planning representative Alison Macfadyen reports that we've had loft conversions requiring bat surveys at the Penicuik Mill Lade and Dalkeith Estate. There has been a shed erection and a home extension potentially affecting the Bonnyrigg disused railway and Penicuik House sites. In respect of these application, bee bricks, homes for hedgehogs, plants for pollinators and bird boxes have been suggested. Tree work such as that at Ironmills Park, Waverley Railway Gorebridge to Tynehead and Newbattle Abbey must be undertaken outwith the bird breeding season and with consideration of bat roosts. The erection of three new houses near to the Bush Estate and Glencorse Burn prompted suggestion of creation of hedgehog highways, native tree planting and species rich native hedges. A proposed solar array at Glencorse House more than 500m from the Greater Crested Newt breeding pond but within 100m of another pond with potential for breeding requires a Greater Crested Newt Survey by a qualified Ecologist. These are but a few examples from the last four months of activity.

Contact: MidlothianPlanning@swtlothians.org.uk

West Lothian

We are seeking a West Lothian planning representative but meanwhile the relatively well staffed West Lothian council Ecology and Biodiversity team is forging ahead on all fronts with great progress. In fact, they have just found some unspent money to employ Ecosulis

consultancy to carry out peatland surveying throughout West Lothian, to give them a better overview of peatland across the whole area. The main aim is to map and roughly gauge the condition of all peatland sites, find out which areas are in good condition and get an idea of where restoration may be a priority, which will all help to inform the WLC Nature Network and potential landscape-scale restoration projects.

City of Edinburgh Council

We are searching for a planning representative here which is a simpler job, in that the council will write to you if there is a planning application that affects or is near a Local Biodiversity Site. These are very well protected in the new Local Plan and so very few applications typically affect a designated LBS. The only problem is when a council department, other than the planning department, tries to give itself planning permission or promotes a development as existing policy that affects a LBS.

The second council public consultation on the now infamous plan to use the Roseburn Path LBS (designated and protected strongly in the brand new local AND previous local plans) as a new tramway segment ends on 17th November 26.

<https://www.savetheroseburnpath.com/> for details.

We will continue objecting on the grounds that instead of offering one route on existing roads and one on this disused railway path as the options to choose from, neither option should have included Roseburn Path LBS. i.e. both options should have been on existing road routes. The latest Local Plan does, for historical legal reasons, include a policy that safeguards the Roseburn Path disused railway LBS for potential use in the future as a transport corridor due to legislation from 2006. We argue that all local plans and Scottish government National Planning Policy Framework 4 (NPF4) since that date i.e. the modern view on biodiversity and greenspaces, makes the 2006 policy contradictory and completely out of date and irrelevant. Three months on and we have still heard nothing official about decisions from the consultation and only interpretations of statements by the Scottish Government Transport secretary Fiona Hyslop that might imply the Edinburgh Tram proposal should be incorporated into a SE Scotland Transport review of transport issues in the wider area which is just about to start and may take a long time. Tim Duffy, Planning secretary. timrduffy1@gmail.com

There is much more on our local Lothians website with our extended version of this Newsletter with photos and

other news. The longer newsletter is also emailed to Lothians members.

Woodhall Dean Reserve Walk Report 17th May 2025

17 people gathered in good weather for a guided walk through the reserve, a rare example on the Scottish east coast of an oakwood comprised of Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*). Due to heavy grazing by Roe deer natural regeneration is limited, so SWT volunteers annually gather acorns to be grown-on, then planted out as young saplings along with many other Scottish native trees, resulting in a nicely varied habitat.

At the central bridge there is a wonderful specimen of the rare Wood vetch which was in full flower in May. The main indicator of ancient woodland is Dogs mercury which is evident in many areas, though with a dull green flower it is easily missed. Definitely not to be missed at that time of year is the magnificent display of native Bluebells! Approaching Bob and Betty's bench, halfway round the main path, a Garden warbler serenaded the group and a "passing" Cuckoo did the same. The picnic



stop at the bench was a welcome rest and there one of the participants spotted a Wall Brown butterfly – rare compared to the more common Speckled wood butterfly widely seen elsewhere on the reserve.

Finishing the walk a dead adder was inspected, road kill, unfortunately, but showing there is a presence of these rare snakes in the reserve.

Lesley Fairweather.

Bawsinch reserve at Duddingston

Last year a great plant mystery was solved on our SWT Bawsinch Nature Reserve. A beautiful wee flower – Water-Speedwell (*Veronica* sp.) was found whilst botanising along a reserve path and there were old records from long ago for it being on site – but it was believed it had died out. But was it the more common Blue Water-Speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica* L. – “corolla Predominantly lilac-blue,

but pale blue and pinkish - lilac occur,”) or the less common around here Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenate* – Corolla predominantly suffused pink, rarely pink-lilac or white)? Well after much deliberation by experts – and several specimen pressings taken over a long period - we decided we had to get to the national plant Herbarium at the RBGE (Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh) along with expert Douglas Mckean to finally sort it! We found a reference specimen from the site from the sixties of *V. Catenta* – with the signature of a (presumably very young) D. McKean at the bottom! This specimen helped to show it was the Pink one after all. However, this non-expert botanist learnt the obvious – do not rely on colour names of flowers in the English names of plant. Real botanists always say use the Latin anyway – and they are right!

I have been doing other plant work at Bawsinch for the EBAP (Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan) re-introducing Pillwort – an ancient small fern *Pilularia globulifera* – for several years now into a pond that was especially dug for it back in the 90's in what we now call Murder Acre. However, with our SWT flying flock and flying herd regularly grazing Murder Acre now, in particular our flying cattle herd, they are helpfully poaching with their hooves the edge of the pond – perfect for Pillwort.

Placing new material in the pond each July got interesting this year as a bull – who I now know is known as ‘Hagar the Horrible’ not only gave us a very hard time doing the job safely, but apparently he refuses to be take away from site at the moment and given I was hoping he was to be converted into beef burgers last year this Hagar saga is going to run a bit longer. The moral is to take great care when you see beware of bull signs, bring a friend, two sticks and be prepared to walk slowly back if required and be very patient.

Tim Duffy

Red Moss of Balerno project has its 30th birthday.

30 years of Red Moss water monitoring achieved.

2025 saw the 30th anniversary of establishment of dipwells on Red Moss of Balerno. October was the 30th anniversary month. The team measure the water table monthly for height, minimum and maximum and rainfall. Although there have been gaps in the SWT volunteer records over the years since 2020 there has been continuous monthly coverage and January 2026 represented 75 months in a row of records! 2025 was by far the driest year yet recorded on the site, which is a concern for conservation of the site.

The Red Moss management team are analysing this data, and with the assistance of Heriot watt university

resources are linking this data with other data sources to establish longer term trends and how climate change might be impacting the raised dome bog in Balerno and others elsewhere. This includes data sourced from multiple satellite systems, principally the European Copernicus system, a free and comprehensive user-friendly and simple to access resource.

Alastair Lyndon, Colin Murray

Red Moss Open Day 27th July 2025



International bog day was celebrated in style again this year at Red Moss of Balerno on 27th July with good weather and around 150 visitors taking guided tours on all aspects of the peat bog. The visitor numbers were significantly enhanced this year by advertising the event in local Edinburgh social media sites for weekend children's activities. The day was supported by a number of experts within the local volunteering team.



Search **swtlothians** to find us.

The pond dipping was particularly popular and introduced many children to aquatic biology. As always, the insect eating and other specialist bog plants were high on everyone's agenda to view. The site is managed by the SWT and is a rare lowland raised peat dome bog, the only one remaining in Edinburgh, and has an estimated 7500 visitors each year. It's open all year and wheelchair friendly. The Red Moss Management Group volunteers have been tracking water movements at the bog for 30 years now. Concerningly, it has been extremely low this year and the pond dried out, something we have not observed before but this was common to long established ponds in the Lothians and across Scotland this summer – hopefully a rare event!

The bog is a Media star!

The site is something of a 'media star' regularly used for radio and TV interviews on wetland/peatland issues due to its proximity to Scotland's capital city, parliament and nearby airport. The Red Moss was designated as a SSSI in 1971 and managed by the SWT from 1975. It's home to several rare habitats and species not recorded elsewhere in the UK. The next International Bog open day at the reserve will be on Sunday 26th July 2026 12am to 5pm. Come along to enjoy this 'rainforest of Scotland.'

Do you know your numbers?

- The Lothians region has 4000+ members with an email address. About half of these email addresses are active.
- We print 6400 copies of this newsletter inserted into the Scottish Wildlife magazine. One for each active member household in the Lothians postcode. Other volunteer groups also publish occasional newsletters for their local areas.
- We are missing probably 2000+ email addresses within the Lothians area. (Please register!)
- Our talks typically attract about 40-50 attendees and the St Johns church hall at Princes St costs £150 to hire per event.
- All outings and tours are always oversubscribed.
- We have 18 reserves, and organise about 6 talks and 6 visits annually. Nationally there are 100+ SWT reserves.
- The Trust has around 44,000 members. (This number varies with renewals.)

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