

EAST LOTHIAN



COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

Annual Report 2014/15

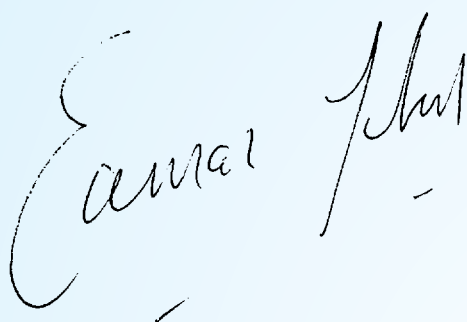


Countryside Ranger exhibits drew all sorts of interest during 2014-15

FOREWORD

"I am delighted to present Countryside Service's Annual Report for 2014 – 15.








This report captures and highlights both the range and depth of work completed by East Lothian Council's Countryside Service within the past financial year."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eamon John', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eamon John
Manager Sport, Countryside & Leisure

Feedback on how you find the report, how easy it is to follow and depth of information should be directed to Duncan Priddle, Countryside Officer at; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AIM OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE IS TO:

“protect East Lothian’s biodiversity and to promote sustainable management,

responsible use, enjoyment and awareness of an accessible countryside.”



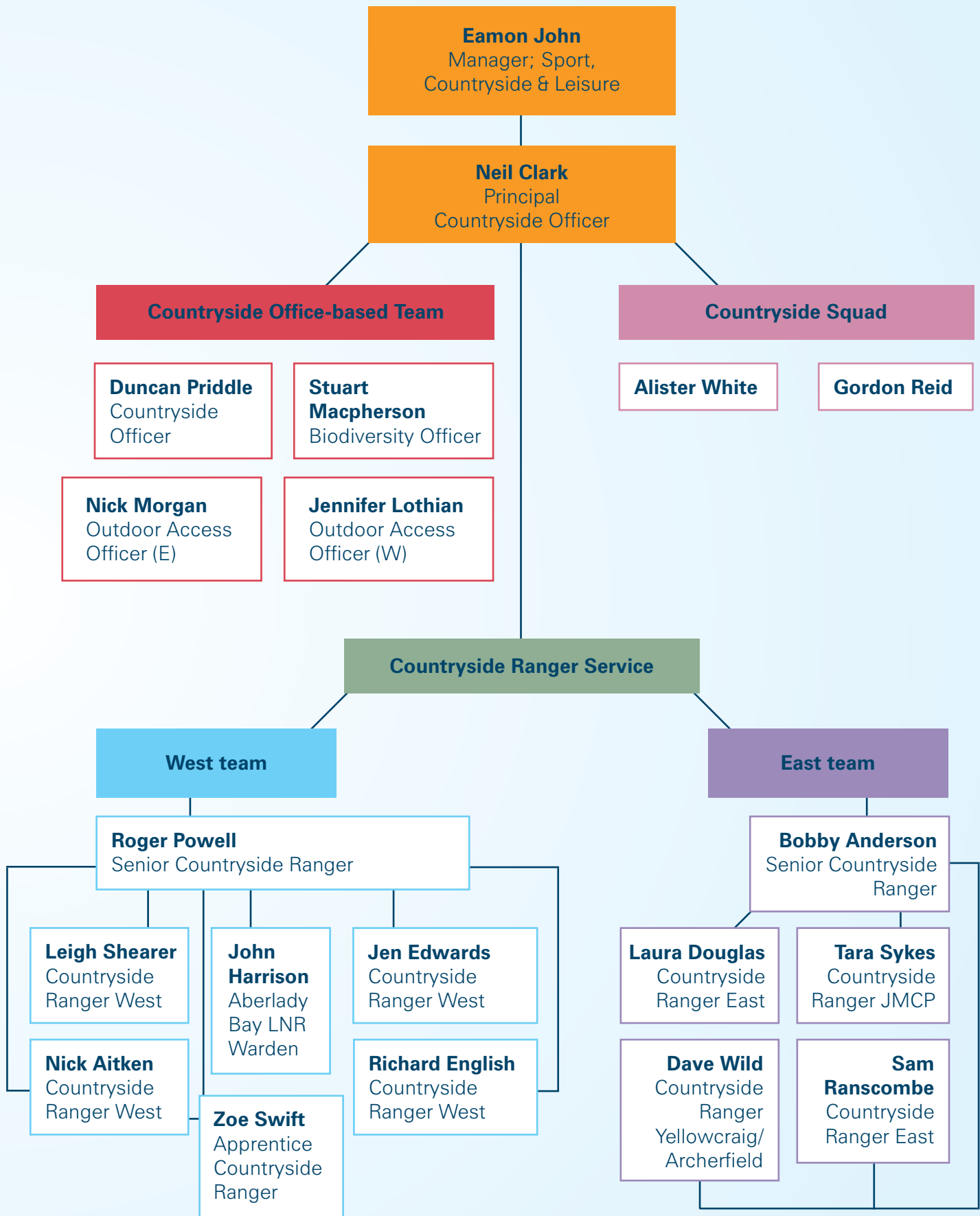
Performer at John Muir Festival

This fifth Countryside Report provides a summary of a series of individual reports (listed in appendix A), prepared to record the actions and events occurring within the defined remits of the Service during the April 1st 2014 to 31st March 2015 period.

1.2 STAFF

Richard English	Countryside Ranger
Leigh Shearer	Countryside Ranger
Sam Ranscombe	Countryside Ranger
Nick Aitken	Countryside Ranger
Tara Sykes	Countryside Ranger
Dave Wild	Countryside Ranger
Laura Douglas	Countryside Ranger
Jen Edwards	Countryside Ranger
Zoe Swift	Apprentice Countryside Ranger (December 2014 onwards)
John Harrison	Nature Reserve Warden
Roger Powell	Senior Countryside Ranger
Bobby Anderson	Senior Countryside Ranger
Alister White	Countryside Squad
Gordon Reid	Countryside Squad
Nick Morgan	Outdoor Access Officer
Jennifer Lothian	Outdoor Access Officer
Stuart Macpherson	Biodiversity Officer
Duncan Priddle	Countryside Officer
Neil Clark	Principal Countryside Officer
Eamon John	Manager Sport, Countryside & Leisure

1.3 STAFF STRUCTURE



1.4 WEATHER SUMMARY FOR 2014-2015

Spring was (as much as possible) a normal mixture of rain with occasional warm days. The summer was notably dry and warm until the weather pattern turned in mid-August with a deep low pressure system bringing cooler and windy conditions.

Autumn and winter were in general mild, with there being only a handful of days with frost on the ground and only 2 days when snow lay at lower levels, on each occasion lasting less than 24 hours.

March 2015, by contrast developed into a fine month with extensive periods of cool but calm and bright conditions.



Winter dawn



The River Tyne path near Hailes

2.0 OUTDOOR ACCESS

The Land Reform Act places a duty on local authorities to draw up a plan for a system of core paths sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area.

2.1 CORE PATHS PLANNING

East Lothian's Core Paths Plan was adopted in December 2010. The Plan has been available to view on the Council's web site and since 2012 available as a hard copy (for purchase).

There have been some minor changes to the core paths since its adoption.

2.2 RESOLVING ACCESS ISSUES

There were 9 separate access issues reported to the Council during 2014/15. This was down again from previous years (17, 2013/14; 26, 2012/13). The number of issues seems to be levelling off in recent years. It is thought that this may be because of the greater awareness of the right of responsible access by both access takers and land managers.

2.3 PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE ACCESS

The Access Officers and members of East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service take every opportunity to publicise the Scottish Outdoor Access Code on any displays / events they are involved with. Copies of the 'Code' are also handed out to land managers and others whenever appropriate.

The "Public Access to East Lothian's Countryside including the Core Paths Plan" document, which was produced last year, contains information about the 'Code', responsible behaviour and the annual cycle of rural activities in East Lothian in an attempt to raise awareness and make the Code relevant.

2.4 REPORTING TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

East Lothian Council is required to report to the Scottish Government on progress with its duties and powers under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

One of the Access Officers was invited to join a working group to help the Scottish Government with the redevelopment of the monitoring form. This has made it much simpler to complete and will hopefully result in more consistent recording.

2.5 PATH PROJECTS

THE JOHN MUIR WAY. In July 2013 it was agreed that a coast-to-coast route across Central Scotland, being developed by the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and running from Helensburgh to Dunbar, could use the John Muir Way name. This new route runs along existing paths for 134 miles, using part of the original John Muir Way from Musselburgh to Dunbar.

The new John Muir Way was launched on 21st April 2014 in Dunbar by (the then) First Minister, Alex Salmond, as part of the John Muir Festival.

The remaining section of the original John Muir Way from Dunbar to Dunglass and on to Cockburnspath has been re-named the John Muir Link.

ELPHINSTONE TO ORMISTON – THE HOWDEN CORE PATH. In June 2014 a 120 metre section of The Howden path north of the bridge over the Pencaitland Railway Walk was re-surfaced. A new semi-bound



Horse pass and motorbike barrier combination

path surfacing material - 'Toptrec' was used, which looks very similar to whindust but more resistant to erosion. This was the first time Toptrec has been used in East Lothian, and to date it is holding up well and has been well received by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. In addition a motorcycle barrier / horse step stile and new field gate were installed, together with 500 metres of hedgerow planted by volunteers. The total cost of this project was £13,126.

GIFFORD TO GARVALD CORE PATH. Yester Estate changed hands late in 2013. The new owners decided to continue with plans to create a new entrance into the estate for a core path, but they changed the route of the core path slightly. A gate was installed and a new section of core path built to connect into an existing track. This work cost £6,352 and was completed in December 2014.

In a joint project between East Lothian Council and Yester Estate an 800 metre length of new core path was built linking the new entrance to the existing core path heading towards Danskine. All of the core paths on the estate were signposted by the Council and a contribution was made towards the core path construction. Total cost of this project was £10,000.

SMEATON BING CORE PATH. This was a joint path project undertaken by the Access Officers with colleagues in ELC's Transportation department, the aim of which was to implement the 'missing link' (aspirational core path) in the path network around Smeaton Bing, near Crossgatehall. Specifically, a new section of 2.5 metre wide *bitmac* shared-use cycleway/footway was constructed for a distance of 620 metres alongside the B6414, to replace the existing footway which was in very poor condition. Improvements were also made to the crossing for cyclists/walkers at Crossgatehall.



The new path at Smeaton Bing

The new path link now means that people can cycle more easily and safely from Pencaitland to Dalkeith, Musselburgh and Edinburgh.

The project was part funded by Sustrans Community Links programme 2014-15 (£30,000), by the Core Paths Improvement capital budget (£30,000) and by ELC's Cycling budget. The total cost of the project was £189,828.

DREM TO GULLANE CORE PATH. Regrettably the year saw no progress on this unresolved core path. The landowner was unwilling to allow the adopted core path (357) to be upgraded, but instead offered an alternative route. However, this alternative route received objections from a number of the residents of Drem.

A campaign group was set up, which lobbied for a route between the two communities and the Local Access Forum has tried to find a solution.

Despite all of the effort of the Local Access Forum, no consensus could be reached. East Lothian Council has taken the view that it cannot continue to spend staff time on this route until agreement has been reached between the communities of Drem and Gullane.

OLDHAMSTOCKS BRIDGE. This was a community project to build a new bridge on the core path in Oldhamstocks. The previous footbridge had been washed away in 2010. The bridge was designed by East Lothian Council staff and project managed by the Access Officer. Much of the work was undertaken by Torness staff as part of their Small Community Project Scheme.

Lafarge Cement provided cement for the foundations, a local quarry donated aggregate, a contractor was employed to build and install the metalwork, and various members of the community did other work including attaching the timber decking and handrails and making good the access to either side of the bridge. The total cost of the project was almost £11,000. £2,000 was provided by East Lothian Council with the remainder coming from community wind farm funding.

2.6 PATH MAINTENANCE AND SIGNAGE

The Path Cutting Programme in East Lothian is revised annually to take account of new and upgraded paths in the network requiring maintenance. This work is usually carried out by Amenity Services staff and their contractors. However, in 2014, due to staff shortages, they were unable to cut many of the paths. Instead, many volunteer path wardens (see section below) helped to keep the network clear.

The Countryside Squad also proved invaluable in cutting the vegetation on the paths in 2014. In addition, the Countryside Squad undertook minor repairs to paths and path furniture, as well as addressing drainage problems and forestry work.

The Unpaid Work/Community Payback Service (formerly Community Service by Offenders) team continued to complete maintenance work on the path network and countryside sites.

2.7 EAST LOTHIAN VOLUNTEER PATH WARDENS

Since 2011, volunteer path wardens have helped maintain the core path network, regularly inspecting them and undertaking minor maintenance tasks. In 2014-15, the number of wardens rose to 51 (from 42, 2013-14).

The Countryside Officer co-ordinated the path wardens and organised monthly team tasks where volunteers could get together to tackle larger projects and receive training.



Path wardens mark the opening of the Gifford – Morham link

In 2014 a considerable amount of work was done by the path wardens to keep the vegetation on the core paths network cut back. Many of the wardens received training to use trimmers and other grass cutting equipment.

The *Tyne Team* - a group within the volunteer path wardens – continued to meet on a monthly basis to undertake maintenance on the River Tyne Path between Abbey Bridge and Hailes Mill.

In December 2014 the path wardens secured Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. This will allow them to access funding for equipment and path projects that would not be available to the Council.

One of the first projects that the charity undertook was the clearance of the old right of way from Morham towards Gifford (*The Clarty Road*). This involved cutting back vegetation, improving drainage, installing a bridge and a gate. This path was opened in March 2015.

A second planned project - a link between the River Tyne Path and the Garleton Ridge - however, was impossible to progress, due to unresolved concerns of the landowner. It is hoped that this may be taken forth at a date in the future.

2.8 COASTAL COMMUNITIES FUND

In a joint bid to the Coastal Communities Fund, East Lothian Council, Volunteer Development East Lothian and The Conservation Volunteers were awarded £280,000 for a two year project. This included the employment of a project co-ordinator and six apprentices. For the second year, eight apprentices were employed and undertook various tasks along the John Muir Way, improving the route and learning new skills.

2.9 Sustrans COMMUNITY LINKS FUNDING

Working with ELC's Transportation department, funding was awarded by Sustrans through their Community Links Programme for four projects in 2014/15:

- The 'missing link' at Smeaton Bing between the Pencaitland Railway Path and Whitecraig-Smeaton Railway Path mentioned in section 3.4;
- Cycle lanes and improvements to the shared-use pavement between Dunbar and the Whitesands road;
- Upgrading the pavement to a shared use cycle path leading west out of North Berwick (phase I);
- Upgrading the pavement to a shared use cycle path leading north from Tranent towards Ormiston (phase I).

A successful application was submitted to Sustrans for Community Links funding for three projects in 2015/16.

2.10 EAST Lothian Local Access Forum

The Local Access Forum continued to meet on a quarterly basis throughout 2014/15.

At each meeting Access Officers reported on progress of the Sustainable Path Network, core paths, access issues and other work, and continue to provide the secretariat for the Forum.

There have been a number of changes in membership, but a balanced representation of land managers and recreational users has been maintained.

2.11 PLANNING ISSUES AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Additional work for the Access Officers came through their involvement in strategic longer term planning of future development in East Lothian. Access Officers sought to improve public access, outdoor recreation opportunities and active travel links around the county. Emphasis was placed upon ensuring that new developments maximised active travel opportunities, connections to the wider path network and access to green spaces.

The Access Officers submitted comments on the Council's Main Issues Report as one of the first stages leading to the new Local Development Plan for East Lothian.

In addition, the Access Officers commented (where relevant) on individual planning applications. The adopted Core Paths Plan means that core paths as well as rights of way have protected status and are subject to consultation from planners who are aware of their importance.

2.12 GREEN NETWORKS

Access Officers worked closely with SNH and other Council Officers to produce a (draft) Green Network Strategy. A considerable amount of land allocation for future housing development is proposed in East Lothian to meet Scottish Government targets. These developments are likely to have a detrimental impact on biodiversity and open green space together with causing increased road congestion.

The draft Green Network strategy identifies assets that should be protected and opportunities to enhance East Lothian's green network by linking together existing habitats and paths and providing green space in new developments.

It is hoped that the strategy will be included in the new Local Development Plan.

2.13 LOCAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY – ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN

During 2014-15 a Local Transport Strategy was developed to coincide with the publication of the Local Development Plan. Access Officers worked alongside fellow Council Officers to produce a draft Active Travel Plan.

One proposal under development is to create an active travel route (Segregated Active Travel Corridor route) alongside the A199 from Dunbar via Haddington and Tranent to Musselburgh and on to Edinburgh.

2.14 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT OFFICERS' GROUP

Access Officers attended the Council's Sustainable Transport Officers' meeting, Officers reported on planning, transportation, public transport, active travel, core paths and outdoor access, climate change mitigation and Area Partnerships. Officers were able to exchange ideas and ensure that their work complemented the work of others, with the combined aim of improving sustainable and active travel in East Lothian.

2.15 EAST Lothian COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

One Access Officer sits on the Steering Group of East Lothian Community Rail Partnership (ELCRP). It aims to work with local communities to improve stations and encourage use of the rail network and sustainable transport, including walking and cycling to stations, and has developed an action plan for station improvements. The ELCRP was awarded £4,000 for station improvements, including better signs to highlight connections to the local path network; the grant partially funded a line guide encouraging people to visit East Lothian by train and walk/cycle from stations.

2.16 AREA PARTNERSHIPS – ACTIVE TRAVEL IMPROVEMENTS

Six Area Partnerships (APs) have been set up in East Lothian to ensure communities have a greater say in influencing Council priorities in their local area.

Several APs are keen to improve active travel opportunities for their areas. The Fa'side AP in particular has taken this forward rapidly; the Access Officer assisted their Active Travel Sub-Group in developing an Active Travel Action Plan.

Access Officers formed part of a working group that secured grant aid £84,863 from *Paths For All's 'Smarter Choices Smarter Places'* funding for two projects. The first project is to undertake six mini-conferences, one in each Area Partnership, looking at what can be done to increase active travel choices and encourage more sustainable travel.

The second project was to encourage visitors to the Big Nature Festival at Levenhall Links (May 2015) to use sustainable methods of transport to get there, and for this to be a 'template' for similar events in East Lothian in future. The total cost of this overall project was £169,728; this was made up of the following contributions: Paths for All: £84,863; SEStran: £25,000; East Lothian Council: £36,135; In Kind: £23,730.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The biodiversity process began over 20 years ago following increased international concern about the loss of wild species and habitats. Although improvements have been made, wild species and habitats are still in decline due to human activity. It is widely recognised that humans cannot live without biodiversity and that we need to reduce our impact on the natural world.

Wildlife provides people with many essentials of life, including the basics, such as air, fresh water and food. Biodiversity also provides medicines and raw materials. Attractive landscapes and species also give us personal well-being. Biodiversity is as important in East Lothian as it is in East Timor.

Collectively these biodiversity benefits are known as 'ecosystem services'. Many of them just happen, at no cost, but they can be damaged by human activity. A decline in biodiversity results in a decline in our quality of life.

All public bodies have a legal duty to 'further the conservation of biodiversity' as described in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Public bodies also need to produce a report on how they implement this duty. The East Lothian report was published in December 2014, summarising actions that the Council takes to enhance biodiversity. It also listed additional actions that could or should be taken.

The local biodiversity process in East Lothian has four main principles:

- protect what we have, so that there is no greater decline in biodiversity
- improve habitat quality and wildlife links across the countryside
- raise awareness of biodiversity and encourage public involvement
- develop survey work and research to better understand biodiversity and to provide a better advice service to the Council and others.



Blue tit with nest material



Sea potato



Discovering the life of a rock pool

3.2 PROTECT WHAT WE HAVE

All planning applications are sent to The Wildlife Information Centre to be screened against a database of notable species and habitats. This highlights where an application may affect biodiversity, and where further consideration may be required. The Biodiversity Officer comments on all planning applications where nature conservation is an issue. This includes protected species and designated sites, but also wider biodiversity issues.

The boundaries of locally important Wildlife Sites were approved by the Council in the 2008 Local Plan.

Government guidance now encourages protection of areas of local geological interest. As a result, the Council worked with the British Geological Survey to identify about 25 sites of particular interest for rock type and rock formation. It is hoped that these will be designated in the forthcoming Local Development Plan.

Woodland management is regulated by Forestry Commission Scotland. All felling applications and proposed woodland plans are screened by the Biodiversity Officer to ensure they do not conflict with notable habitats and species. LBS boundaries and important grassland habitats have been incorporated into the Forestry Commission constraints map to ensure that publically funded forestry work does not adversely affect woodland biodiversity. Local Geodiversity Sites will need to be incorporated as well.

In the last year, comments have been made regarding forestry work at Archerfield and Lennoxlove estates and on other smaller forestry projects. Environmental standards for forestry operations are now better than they were 30 years ago. Older plantations should be better habitats in future, by providing deadwood, improved tree species selection and river protection.



Ringed plover nest

3.3 IMPROVE HABITAT QUALITY

Scottish Planning Policy was revised in 2014 and describes the importance of Green Networks. Most notably, the National Planning Framework described the need for a Central Scotland Green Network. This is an environmental concept with very strong links to public health and well-being. It aims to ensure that design and delivery of a quality environment encourages a healthy and active life style and encourages economic investment. In East Lothian this must influence the design of new residential expansion.

The green network reflects all those natural features that help make our lives better. Areas of woodland, a river, a local park, a pond or even of a view of a landmark all add character and interest to our lives. If these features are joined up and connect to the places we need to get to (school, work, train station, shops) then we live in a place of environmental quality. The green network planning policy aims to ensure that we all live in this type of attractive landscape.



The River Tyne at Clerkington

Through 2014 -15, East Lothian Council has developed Green Network Supplementary Guidance to be incorporated into the forthcoming Local Development Plan. The guidance identifies the existing green network across the county and lists actions that need to be taken to improve it. Some of these are related to biodiversity, but the green network concept also builds in path connections, landscape improvements, flood alleviation, cultural heritage and climate change adaptation. This is joined up thinking.

3.4 RAISE AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY

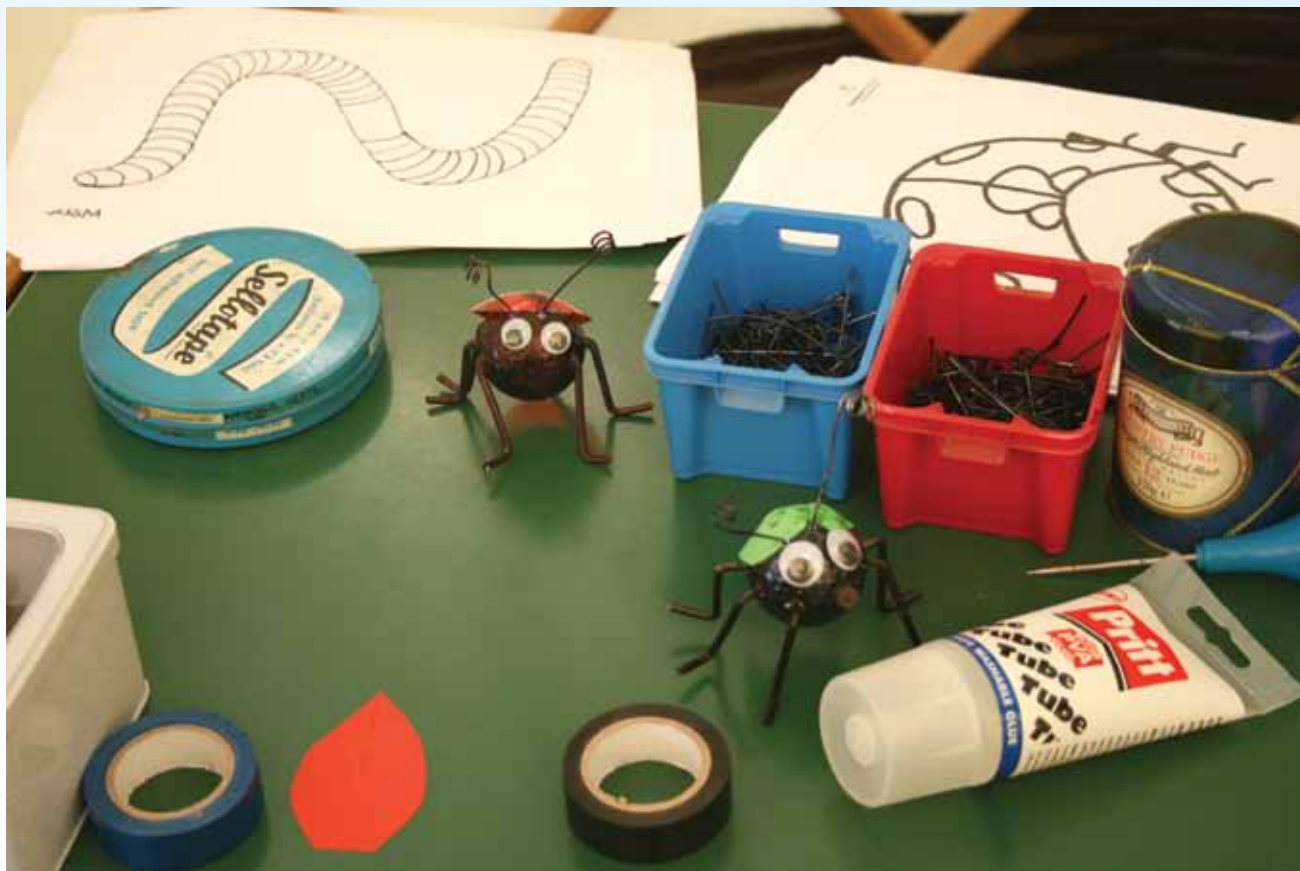
A biodiversity article is a regular feature in East Lothian Life magazine. Articles in 2014 included wildlife recording, favourite wildflowers and the opening of the John Muir Way. Biodiversity articles are also written for Mud in Your Eye, the newsletter of the Countryside Ranger Service.

Talks to primary schools about biodiversity are popular events in April and May and 12 schools were visited in 2014. Occasional talks were also given to community groups.

3.5 DEVELOP SURVEY WORK AND RESEARCH

Good links have been made with Edinburgh University and Napier University. This year four MSc students worked with the Council on their research project. These included analysis of 50 years of bird survey data at Tynninghame, an assessment of water quality at Seafeld Pond and an assessment of urban landscaping in Musselburgh. The Seafeld Pond project and urban landscaping project have direct relevance to Council services. Links with the universities has proved to be mutually beneficial.

Public wildlife recording events, known as BioBlitz, are popular. Help was given to such events at Dirleton and at various locations organised by The Wildlife Information Centre. These surveys increase our knowledge of biodiversity and encourage people to learn a little more about their surroundings.



A year of make and mend in Countryside

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the report records principle countryside projects undertaken during the year. Some have a specific objective or obvious output; others are part of a longer-term development both for the East Lothian Countryside and for the Service.

4.2 COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers continued to provide a fundamental role in the progression of countryside projects and in the maintenance of site infrastructure. Their assistance is summarised below;

	Category	Group details	Primary duties
1	Individual unsung heroes!	n/a	Litter picking of coastal / countryside sites
2	Site – specific 'Friends' groups:	I. Aberlady Bay LNR	Practical conservation work / biological monitoring
		II. Dunbar Shore and Neighbourhood Group	Beach management
		III. Dunbar area	Practical conservation work
		IV. North Berwick	Practical conservation work
		V. Levenhall	Practical conservation work
		VI. Yellowcraig	Practical conservation work
3	Path wardens	51 (42) path wardens	Path maintenance / improvements to core path network
4	Conservation teams	e.g. Lothian Conservation Volunteers	Practical conservation work – sea buckthorn clearance
5	Monitoring projects;	I. Stock 'lookers'	Checking numbers of stock (sheep, ponies) and their condition, management of their habitat and site security
		II. Eider counters	Monitoring productivity of nest colony
		III. Bumblebee surveyors	Recording target populations / habitats at areas undergoing conservation grazing
		IV. Grassland surveyors	Recording target populations / habitats at areas undergoing conservation grazing
		V. Goose surveyors	Recording distribution of flocks of geese
6	Criminal justice; Unpaid Work	n/a	Path upgrading, River Tyne path; litter collection all countryside sites
7	Corporate group volunteers	Specific large projects	Price Waterhouse Coopers, practical work and fund raising at Aberlady Bay LNR

The number of people expressing an interest in volunteering continued to increase in the year 2014-15. The Countryside Officer continued to co-ordinate volunteers and their deployment.

The total of **recorded** volunteer time across all countryside projects, came to over 8,000 hours, i.e. equivalent to over 11 full-time posts. Additionally, many hours of unrecorded effort was given by people clearing litter from countryside areas etc. on an ad-hoc basis.

PATH WARDENS. The volunteer path wardens continued to expand – increasing to 51 (42) members - and develop and in December successfully established themselves as an independent charitable group.

CONSERVATION GRAZING. Volunteers continued to monitor the consequences of the introduction of grazing stock at each of the 4 sites where animals are employed. Surveys took the form of botanical



Volunteer path wardens at East Linton



The grazing sheep of Barns Ness



Exmoor pony scratching an itch

recording and of bumblebee monitoring. In this, the second year of surveying, an increased level of confidence and accuracy was reached amongst the recorders, with training being provided by members of the Countryside Team.

ANIMAL WELFARE. Additional volunteers provided daily checks on the grazing sheep and Exmoor ponies. It is pleasing to report that there were no serious issues during the year.

'VOLLY JOLLY'. The annual get-together to thank volunteers for their collective efforts was well attended this year, with some 35 volunteers attending. Members of the Countryside Team provided a series of workshops on a variety of conservation issues.

4.3 INTERPRETATION

COUNTRYSIDE NEWSLETTER – 'MUD IN YOUR EYE'. This publication continued to be produced on a regular basis.

THE BEST OF EAST LoTHIAN'S WILDLIFE AND EAST LoTHIAN'S CORE PATH BOOKLET. Launched in September 2011 and July 2012 respectively, these publications continued to be marketed as opportunities arose.

ARTICLES FOR THE EAST LoTHIAN COURIER. The Countryside Ranger Service continued to provide monthly articles for the local newspaper.

SOCIAL MEDIA.   **@ELCRANGERS**

Facebook and Twitter accounts continued to be managed by the Countryside Ranger Service. Both mediums have already proven their value as mechanisms to attract new volunteers and as a means of imparting information to site users.

NESTA OPEN DATA PROJECT.

The Countryside Officer co-ordinated the design and creation of a countryside app – 'Go Explore'. The project was in partnership with the NESTA Open Data scheme which aims to make data held by agencies, such as local authorities, more publicly available.



The webpage for the 'go explore' app



Storytelling at the Wild about East Lothian display

WILD ABOUT EAST LoTHIAN. As part of a wider festival to celebrate the 175th anniversary of John Muir's birth and the associated opening of the new coast to coast route bearing his name, the Countryside Team created a series of displays and activities at Lauderdale Park, Dunbar. Over the Easter weekend, 1,100 people visited the Countryside marquee to discover all about the county's natural history.



4.4 NON-NATIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

SEA BUCKTHORN. The programme of sea buckthorn control entered its 8th year. It was pleasing to note that both the level of herbicide control required and the amount of time required delivering the control programme, having now both declined as the amount of the plant decreases across the county. No mechanical removal of mature plants was undertaken this year.

Across all sites, regenerating shoots continued to be controlled by an application of *Garlon4* which is effective at killing off regenerating shoots.

TWO-SPINED ACAENA AND PIRRI-PIRRI BURR. Two-spined acaena (*Acaena ovalifolia*) and pirri-pirri burr (*Acanema novae-zelandiae*) are two other non-native introduced species to East Lothian that share a similar preference for coastal dune grasslands. They are low growing, forming dense mats, 1-2cm above ground level. They colonise areas of the dune system due to the ease by which they seed (burrs) are transported by animals, the spreading nature of their tendrils and because they often grow undetected for many years.

Within East Lothian two-spined acaena occurs at Aberlady Bay and Gullane Bents and the closely related pirri-pirri burr at Yellowcraig and John Muir Country Park. Efforts continued to control the spread of both these plants, with a view to longer-term eradication.

OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL. Three, further, plants were controlled across countryside sites via a combination of physical removal and / or chemical control (where appropriate). The species, giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Himalayan/ Indian balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) have a strong association with fresh water habitats and occur in varying densities across the county.

4.5 COUNTRYSIDE SQUAD

The operations of the Countryside Squad continued to provide an invaluable asset to the maintenance of the countryside portfolio. A number of estate duties were completed, from bridge construction, to tree planting and aftercare to right-of way maintenance.

4.6 PROFESSIONAL DOG WALKERS – APPROVED USER STATUS SCHEME

During 2014-15 the perception amongst Countryside staff was that the number of commercial dog walking companies in East Lothian continued to increase. To engage with these companies and to promote a code of best practice, the Countryside Officer, together with colleagues from the Amenity Protection Team, maintained a close dialogue with commercial dog walkers and continued to operate an approved membership scheme. Now in its 5th year, membership continues to develop and has been used as a model by other Local Authorities around the UK. In the autumn, overall management of the scheme was passed onto the Amenity Protection Officer.



Countryside squad staff giving instruction



4.7 SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS / STATEMENTS

Site management plans are produced for all principal Countryside sites, and are updated on a 5 year rotating programme. 2014-15 saw the final drafts produced for both John Muir Country Park and Traprain Law.

4.8 BUDGET SUMMARY

Section costs and expenditure for the year were as follows (last year's figures in brackets);



Efficiency drives were undertaken in all areas

Item	Cost	Notes
Countryside	£734,500 (£782,270)	£529,900.00 = employee costs
Income	£88,255 (£87,001)	£10,000 Scottish Power, £47,566 Caledonian Heritable Ltd and Hamilton & Kinneil Estates, others; SRDP £30,686.00
Net expenditure	£646, 248 (£695,268)	

EAST LoTHIAN COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE

5.1 The aim of the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service is to provide an awareness and understanding of the countryside; enhance the variety of people's experiences provided by East Lothian's countryside and coastal sites and to ensure these sites are managed in a sustainable manner.

5.2 In practice this has been achieved by **4 objectives**;

- To welcome the local community and visitors to East Lothian's countryside and coastal sites and enhance their enjoyment of the sites
- To assist and advise on countryside access issues, including rights of way
- To provide an experience and promote understanding of the countryside through environmental interpretation and education for the community of East Lothian and its visitors
- To ensure the countryside and coastal sites owned or managed by East Lothian Council that have the potential for leisure, information recreation or nature conservation, are managed in a sustainable manner.



Countryside Rangers try out new uniform at the John Muir Festival

5.3 WELCOMING VISITORS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Countryside Ranger Service continued to manage countryside sites on a day-to-day basis, carrying out essential duties and minor maintenance tasks, including litter management, monitoring visitor use and ensuring site safety.

Seaside Award status was retained for eight coastal sites managed by East Lothian Council.

5.4 ADVISING ON COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS ISSUES

The Countryside Ranger Service continued to respond to any access issues raised by the Outdoor Access Officers and to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code during countryside events.

A series of 15 guided hikes were undertaken in order to promote a greater understanding of countryside issues and to increase people's confidence in accessing the wider countryside.

The path network was monitored and minor repairs completed.

5.5 PROVIDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

EDUCATIONAL GROUPS. 169 (122) classes were taken this year, equating to 3,500 pupils. Activities ranged from seashore studies to hill walks and from Advanced Higher Geography to Nursery classes. The breakdown of school ages was as follows;

Primary School	129
High School	23
Nursery School	9
Tertiary College	8

Case Study 1, Princes' Trust XL – Knox Academy

The Countryside Ranger Service (ELCRS) have been working with staff at Knox Academy to deliver a Prince's Trust XL award for a group of S3 Personal and Social Development students.

The project was designed around the John Muir Award framework aimed at encouraging the pupils to get out and explore their local natural environment in Haddington.



Countryside Ranger with Knox academy Princes Trust students

The Countryside Rangers facilitated the choice of the content of the project by encouraging pupil participation from the outset. The class developed two very different projects; once centring on the bat population around the Tyne and the other interested in the conservation of aquatic life of the river.

ELCRS has both delivered educational activities to the groups, ranging from river dipping sessions to bat box creation as well as helping the staff and the pupils make connections with the local community. This was largely through contact with the Bloomin' Haddington group, leading to the groups assisting on shrub and bulb planting in the town, but also through funding applications to assist in the purchasing on gardening equipment for use by the group and local community in the future.

Jenny Duff, Head of Health and Wellbeing, Knox Academy:

"Without Jen and Richard's support with the two Princes' Trust groups we would not have successful outdoor/community project groups running in the school. With their practical experience, their working knowledge and their work ethic we have managed to branch out into our local community and help these pupils achieve more than they ever thought. The structure they have provided for us to follow has allowed us to work towards these Awards knowing that we have the full support of the Countryside Ranger Service. The time and effort both have put in has been outstanding and many good relationships have been built between them and the groups. Their experience really shows with their patience and style of work with young people means these relationships form quickly and they have adapted their styles to suit both groups who are vastly different making the experience a positive one for all."

Case Study 2, Children With additional learning requirements

Levenhall Links saw the successful trial of a series of visits tailored for children diagnosed with autism to enable them to carry out and gain a John Muir Award. As well as learning about the site itself, the children were able to carry out small conservation tasks and benefit from working together in the outdoors. It is hoped the format of this trial can be used with autistic children throughout East Lothian.

OTHER VISITING GROUPS. 62 (53) other groups, totalling approximately 1,000 people were escorted on a variety of activities, from guided walks to survival skills, covering the complete age range from U3A to family support groups and after school clubs.



Beach wheelchairs being demonstrated at North Berwick

Case Study 3, Beach Wheelchairs, North Berwick

Sam Ranscombe (Countryside Ranger, North Berwick area) has been involved from the initial concept of this project which evolved after she was contacted to take two children rock pooling in wheelchairs – one with the primary school and one at a rock pooling summer event.

She arranged the loan of an adult 4x4 wheelchair from Beyond Boundaries for these sessions which meant the children could access and fully engage with the activity. Unfortunately no child 4x4 wheelchairs are available for loan and the 4x4 adult chair was a basic chair, not particularly suited to soft sand.

The families of the children decided to research what kind of beach wheelchairs were available and found that no such chairs were available or being used in Scotland. They set up a group to look at providing this facility at North Berwick and Sam was

part of this group. This group is now fundraising for 2 beach wheelchairs, one adult and one child and had an open day 13 February 2015 for people to come and try different kinds of wheelchairs. The Harbour is providing storage for the chairs and volunteers will run the hire scheme. They hope to have at least one chair for use by the summer of 2015 in North Berwick.

TALKS. 13 (17) talks were given to various local groups and societies on wildlife related topics

EVENTS. The Countryside Ranger Service were present at 20 formal events including the Haddington Show, Dunbar Science Festival, Junior Ranger gathering and the Beach Wheelchair Project afternoon. A Senior

Ranger was involved in a staffed Scottish Countryside Rangers Association display entitled 'Scotland's Rangers Deliver' at the Scottish Parliament, assisted by members of the East Lothian Junior Ranger Team.



North Berwick class help clear ragwort, the day goes to one of their heads

JUNIOR RANGER SERVICE. The East Lothian Junior Rangers worked on a very wide range of projects over the last year. Between the team of 15, they completed 615 hours of volunteer work, completing tasks such as sea buckthorn removal, planting hedges and creating car park bollards. They learned about the natural world by completing a fungi foray and creating art with natural materials and paints. The East Lothian Junior Rangers assisted at public events such as the John Muir Festival and by joining other Junior Ranger schemes from across Scotland in a Gathering event held at Holyrood Park, Edinburgh.

APPRENTICE COUNTRYSIDE RANGER. East Lothian Works is a partnership of key agencies that deliver initiatives to improve the local economy and get more people into quality



This year's crop of junior rangers matured nicely

jobs. Through a funding initiative, resources were made available to fund a 6 month apprentice countryside ranger post. Zoe Swift was recruited to the post and began her contract on December 31st 2014.

5.6 WILDLIFE MONITORING / CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Target flora and fauna continued to be monitored and managed in accordance with prescriptions contained in individual site management plans. Countryside volunteers contributed extensively in the delivery of this area of operation.



Female eider takes a drink



Weighed down by reedmace removal



Fog hanging over Aberlady Bay

Members of the Countryside Service contribute towards the workings of five Advisory Groups. Each Group is site-specific but share similar terms of remit. Groups will comment and advise on management plans, approve the annual work programmes, together with providing recommendations to East Lothian Council.

Annual Reports are produced for each Advisory Group, detailing the work completed by East Lothian Council's Countryside Service at each location; see Appendix A for further details.

6.1 ABERLADY BAY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

INTRODUCTION

Aberlady Bay was designated as Britain's first Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1952, due to its botanical, ornithological and geological interest. In 2001, the Reserve became part of the Firth of Forth SSSI and much of the site also lies within the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area and Ramsar Sites.

The aim of the Reserve is **"to conserve the geomorphological and physiographical features, the habitats, flora and fauna found within the Reserve and the resultant landscape character"**.

The Reserve continues to be managed by East Lothian Council, with the support of an Advisory Group that represents landowners, conservation bodies and the local community. A Management Agreement exists with the landowners formalising and defining a management framework.

The Reserve covers an area of 582 hectares and represents the most extensive complex of sand dune, saltmarsh and mudflats in southeast Scotland. It also contains a wide

range of associated habitats, particularly calcareous grassland and freshwater marsh and supports a large variety of plant species with many Scottish and local rarities.

The main ornithological interest of the Reserve relates to the site's national or international significance as a feeding and roosting area for wintering wildfowl and waders, and its regional importance for several breeding species.

The main geological interest is a sequence of Carboniferous Limestones and Teschenite sills as well as the extensive naturally developing sand dune system.

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

RESERVE MANAGEMENT

- Sheep grazing (this season between October -March) over a 20-hectare plot continued for an eighth year
- Sea buckthorn clearance continued. No removal by heavy machinery or any herbicide spraying was carried out
- Two days were spent clearing reed-mace from the Wader Scrape in August
- Giant hogweed and two-spined acacia (previously recorded as pirri-pirri bur) were both removed, although very little was found of either this year
- Vegetation was cleared away from the South Pool to retain its last remaining area of open water.

WILDLIFE MONITORING

- For the second year running, two species were recorded at their highest number ever at the site. These were shelduck and oystercatcher. Slavonian grebe numbers also peaked
- Peak counts of mallard, teal and widgeon were all below average
- After a seemingly never ending increase in the numbers of pink-footed geese at the Reserve, the lowest peak count since 1999, of 10,303 was surprising. This number is still of international significance
- The five-year mean figures for five species of bird were nationally significant, these were: red-necked grebe; Slavonian grebe; eider; velvet scoter; and bar-tailed godwit.
- Counts of sea duck and divers were low
- There were peaks of over 1,000 lapwing and golden plover on the same day in late October
- For the first time on record, there were no sightings of purple sandpipers
- With the exception of low counts of knot, peak counts of wading birds were around or above average
- Four low water bird counts were carried out between November and February 2014/15 on a 5-yearly monitoring programme

- There was a slight increase from last year in the number of pairs of breeding lapwing and redshank (7 and 8 respectively), with both species raising some young to fledging
- The number of breeding pairs of most species of passerine was generally higher than in 2013 and good numbers of fledged young were noted
- Vegetation monitoring was carried out in the Grazing Area and, by volunteers, over a larger area proposed for grazing expansion
- Monitoring was carried out on pyramidal orchid, variegated horsetail and moonwort
- In its eighth year, the butterfly transect recorded the highest total since it began of 2,476 butterflies and the first record of speckled wood
- The Wildfowling Panel met in late July to receive a report on the 2013-14 season and decide on permit issue for the 2014-15 season.

PEOPLE

- Volunteers carried out 2,400 hours of work on a range of tasks including sea buckthorn removal, beach cleans, sheep looking, and biological monitoring
- For a third year running, no Assistant Warden was employed in 2014 which had an impact on work at the site
- The Reserve Advisory Group met twice during the year in March and September (which included a tour of the site)
- An MSc student carried out a project on breeding waders in the spring.

6.2 JOHN MUIR COUNTRY PARK

INTRODUCTION

The Countryside Commission for Scotland registered the Country Park in 1976. The Country Park currently extends to 713.5 hectares and comprises of a variety of habitats. The majority of the Country Park is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, with



Salt marsh pools, John Muir Country Park

original designations that pre-date the Country Park status by some twenty-four years. These were designed to help protect the biological, geological and geomorphological features found within this environment. Two further, more recent, nature conservation designations have been put in place. The site is now incorporated into the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area and has also been notified as a Ramsar Site. (Ramsar Convention on Wetland of International Importance as a Waterfowl Habitat, 1982.

The diversity of habitats within the Country Park is one reason why this area has proven attractive for public recreation. There has always been a realisation that the interface between the visitor and the natural environment needs to be managed. Since its inception, the Country Park has had a Management Plan, which continues to evolve by taking into account the ever-changing opportunities and pressures.

The overall management aim is **“to manage public recreation and conserve the geomorphology, geology and landscape, and sustain the biodiversity of the Country Park.”**

SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

- Monitoring of flora and fauna continued this year in line with the prescriptive management plan
- Control of invasive species was undertaken at the Biel Burn, Seafeld Pond area, and Spike Island with giant hogweed removed to ensure visitor safety. On Whitberry Point and Spike Island pine sapling and sea buckthorn control was carried out to protect these habitats. Pirri-pirri bur was sprayed within Hedderwick plantation.
- Changes were made to the car park to accommodate the new car park charging plans
- Site maintenance work was completed as required
- Monitoring of user groups and their interactions was regularly undertaken to gauge use of the site
- The Friends of John Muir Country Park was amalgamated with Friends of Barns Ness to form a larger group, Dunbar Conservation Volunteers. This group continued to undertake tasks
- The Advisory Group would like to thank all those groups of individuals who volunteered their time during the year, to work on management projects within the Country Park.

6.3 JOINT LAWS

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Laws Advisory Group covers two sites, Traprain Law and North Berwick Law.

Both sites are striking upstanding features within the lowland East Lothian landscape. Both are designated LGS' (Local Geodiversity Sites) for their geological and geomorphological importance, Traprain representing a superb example of a laccolith, whilst North Berwick Law is a volcanic plug. Both features were heavily sculpted during the last glacial period resulting in their current shapes today.



Looking NW from Traprain Law

Traprain and North Berwick Laws are notified Sites of Special Scientific Interests due to their geology and botany – both having extensive areas of mineral rich unimproved grassland – a rare and declining habitat within East Lothian. In addition, the notification Traprain Law includes reference to the regional significance of the sites for the distribution of lichens found across the site.

Both sites contain archaeological evidence indicating extensive periods of human occupation. The large hill fort on Traprain Law is one of the best known prehistoric monuments in Scotland and, as such, has been notified as a Scheduled Ancient Monument by Historic Scotland under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The hill has been the subject of a number of excavations over the years and has revealed traces of use from the Neolithic period until about the 5 Century AD. Perhaps the most impressive find was unearthed in May 1919 when a hoard of flattened silver was recovered, which was later restored to its original glory, and is now displayed in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. North Berwick Law is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument although little fieldwork, has, as yet, been undertaken.

North Berwick Law is subject to a Conservation Agreement with the National Trust for Scotland.

The shared management aim for both sites is **'to conserve and enhance the natural and human heritage'** this being delivered through the implementation of site management plans.

SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

TRAPRAIN LAW

- 13 ponies continue to graze the site
- Volunteers undertook grassland fixed quadrat surveys and bumblebee transect surveys
- 3 peregrine chicks fledged
- 2 raven chicks fledged

- Badgers continue to be very active
- Wall brown and common blue butterflies noted
- Monitoring of peppered rock tripe (*Umbilicaria deusta*) lichen with Plantlife and Dunbar Conservation Volunteers
- Ragwort removal by Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV) on two occasions
- Gorse removed by hand in the north-west corner by Junior Rangers
- Trees removed from quarry face and quarry fence repairs completed
- Two fences, two stiles and the pony pen were repaired by Dunbar Conservation Volunteers
- Traprain Law race – 78 runners took part on 14th June 2014.

NORTH BERWICK LAW

- 7 ponies continue to graze the site
- Gorse removal and spraying took place
- Change to site SSSI boundary due to denotification of east field
- Volunteers undertook grassland fixed quadrat surveys and bumblebee transect surveys
- Monitoring of maiden pink (*Dianthus deltooides*), meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) and purple milk vetch (*Astragalus danicus*)
- Monitoring of Bird-perch gristle lichen (*Ramalina Polymorpha*) with Plantlife
- Ragwort removed by North Berwick High School, North Berwick Scout groups and LCV
- North Berwick Conservation Volunteers undertook vegetation control, fence repairs and pond and lichen monitoring
- North Berwick Law race – 291 runners took part on 8th August 2014.



North Berwick Law

6.4 LEVENHALL LINKS

INTRODUCTION

Levenhall Links is a 120 hectare area of mixed grassland, woodland and wetland situated adjacent to the mouth of the River Esk on the East Lothian coastline. The entire site is land that has been reclaimed from the sea using pulverised fuel ash (pfa) a by-product of Cockenzie Power Station. Areas that have reached capacity for the disposal of pfa have been landscaped to provide habitats that are of significant value both for recreation and wildlife conservation.

The site is popular with local people who use it for informal recreational pursuits. Additionally there are regular visits from water sports enthusiasts and those interested in natural history. The bird reserve and lagoon 8 have gained national recognition for their importance for wildfowl and wading birds and were notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest in 2001. These areas have also been included in the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar designations. Because of this the Links has developed as a nationally respected and recognised bird watching venue.

Levenhall Links is jointly owned with Scottish Power. The post of Countryside Ranger is co-funded by Scottish Power. The Countryside Ranger is responsible for the day-to-day management of the site and also provides a programme of educational and interpretational events throughout the year.

The overall management aim for Levenhall Links is **‘to create and maintain open space for recreation and nature conservation; while enhancing the visitor experience and landscape’**.



SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

- 62 Countryside Ranger led activities over the year
- 1312 volunteer hours on site and the adjacent shore
- 654 students benefited from Countryside Ranger led educational activities
- 2 new invertebrate species for Scotland were recorded during biological survey work and one new site species
- The final design for handover conditions of Lagoon 6 and 8 have been agreed in principle between Scottish Power and East Lothian Council Countryside Department
- In December 2014 the RSPB announced that Levenhall Links will be the 2015 venue for Scotland's largest wildlife festival – The Big Nature Festival.

6.5 YELLOWCRAIG/ARCHERFIELD ADVISORY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The stretch of coast from Gullane to Broad Sands was notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1967 and was subsequently incorporated into the Firth of Forth SSSI in 2001. The Firth of Forth itself is a Special Protected Area (SPA) and a Ramsar site as a result of the nature of its birdlife and wetland habitat.



Beach view, Yellowcraig

Managed since 1944 by East Lothian Council (ELC)

and falling within the SSSI boundary, Yellowcraig has a long history of public use and sensitive management. The site is very popular both with locals, holiday makers and day trippers from further afield.

Archerfield Estate was privately owned by Hamilton & Kinneil (1987) Ltd and as an agricultural site had limited public use. However in 1999 the eastern section of Archerfield Estate was sold to Caledonian Heritable Ltd (CHL) and in 2001 CHL lodged a planning application for 2 golf courses (Archerfield Links), 100 houses, 50 holiday cottages, hotel, clubhouse and the restoration of Archerfield House.

Lying to the west of Archerfield Links is Renaissance Golf Club. Similarly to Archerfield, this land formed part of the Hamilton & Kinneil Ltd privately owned estate but was instead leased to Renaissance Golf Club on a 99 year agreement. The golf course is currently open for play and the construction of a hotel, clubhouse and associated facilities are ongoing.

The management area stretches from Eyebroughy in the West to the Eel Burn in the East and includes land at Archerfield Links and Renaissance Golf Clubs alongside work with Dirleton Community.

The overall management aim is to ensure 'The conservation and enhancement of the natural and historical heritage of the Management Area, via the joint workings of ELC, CHL and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The management of visitors within the Management Area so as to prevent so far as is reasonably practicable, direct access from CHL land to the SSSI and generally to minimise disturbance to the immediate and wider SSSI.

SUMMARY

- Breeding recorded for common tern on Eybroughy
- Work to control pirri pirri and sea buckthorn continued
- Enlargement of Yellowcraig car park hard standing was completed
- Tool store moved, developed and surrounds planted
- Staircase constructed on Yellowcraig
- Work was conducted by the Coastal Communities Fund Apprenticeships ; scrub removal and path maintenance and construction
- Seaside Award achieved for the 21st year
- 20 school groups were led by the Countryside Ranger service
- 10 Countryside Ranger events and walks were conducted
- Volunteer group continued to expand in numbers and a new website launched.



The water body at the North West quarry

6.6 NORTH WEST QUARRY

Now named Whitesand Loch RSPB have concluded their feasibility study to identify and evaluate a range of habitat creation and restoration opportunities for the area. These were presented to, and subsequent advice was offered by, ELC Countryside. Informal dialogue over the need to control water levels took place between RSPB and ELC Countryside.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Individual Site Advisory Group Annual reports links:

- John Muir Country Park
- Joint Laws
- Levenhall Links
- Yellowcraig / Archerfield
- Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve



Cover images: 1. Volunteers learn how to lean on a spade; 2. East Lothian plain from Lammermuirs; 3. Redwing; 4. First Minister launching the JMW; 5. Starling flock roosting; 6. A junior ranger focuses; 7. Volunteers at the yellowcraig prayer wall; 8. Lesser celandine; 9. Putting out exclusion signs; 10. Mallard with ducklings; 11. Go explore app logo; 12. Junior rangers.

