



# EAST LoTHIAN COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

Annual Report 2013/14





*Junior rangers*

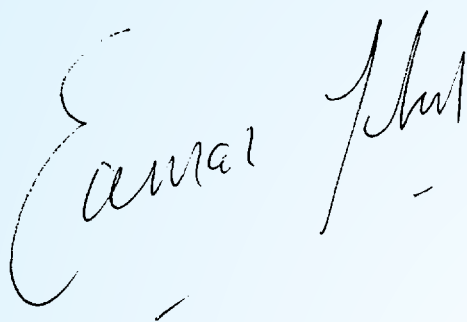


*Hare leverets*

# FOREWORD

*"I am delighted to present Countryside Service's Annual Report for 2013 – 14.*





*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](mailto: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.”*



Female kestrel © Abbie Marland

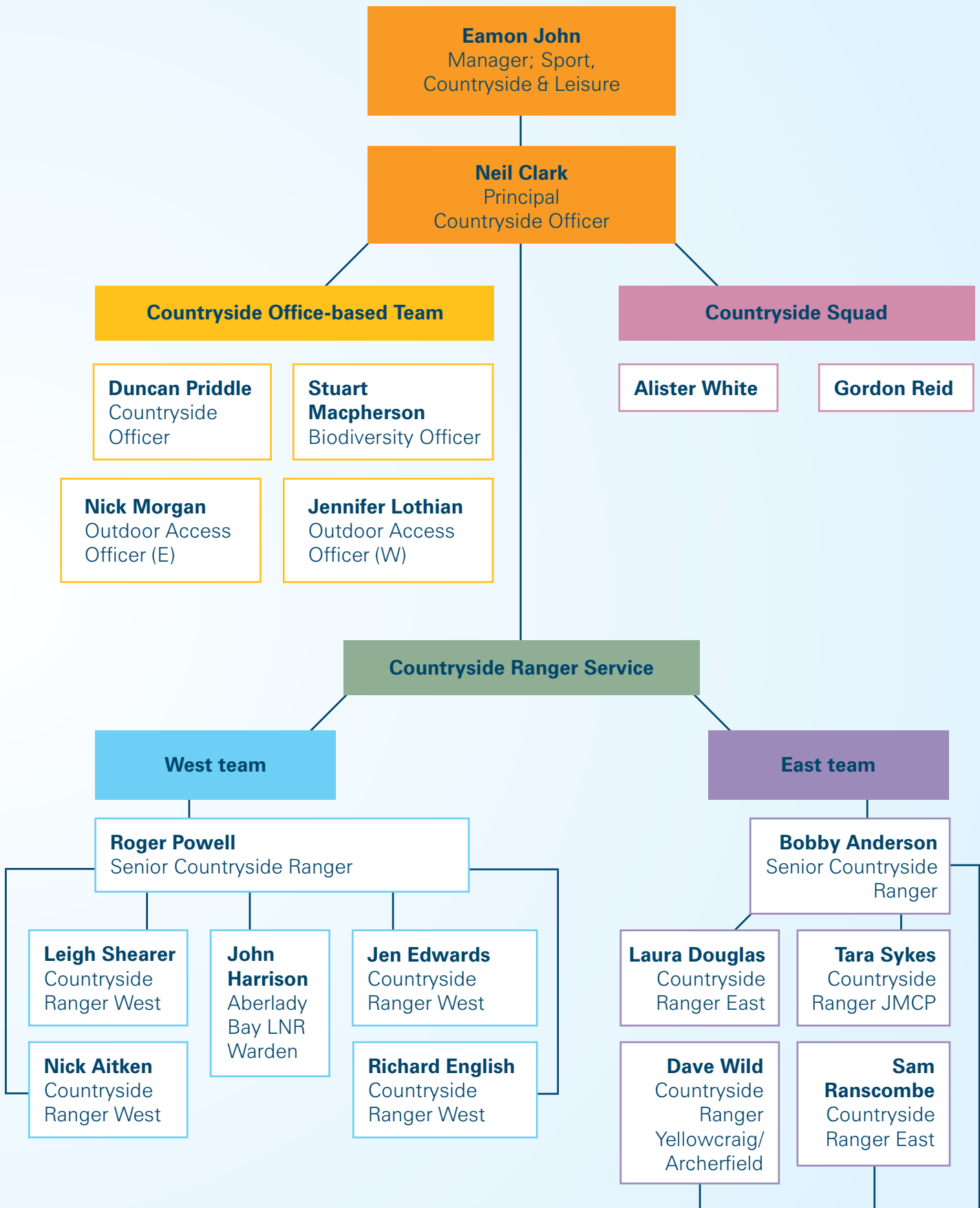
This fifth Countryside Report provides a summary of a series of individual reports (listed in appendix A), prepared to record the actions and events occurring within the defined remits of the Service during the April 1st 2013 to 31st March 2014 period.

As a large degree of the Countryside Service’s work is by definition, out of doors, weather patterns for the year can have a marked effect upon several aspects of project delivery – for example the number of people attending guided events organised by the Countryside Ranger Service.

## 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
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 2013-2014

2013 served up a contrast of weather to that of the preceding year.

April began with wintry conditions, proving slow to leave, with a consequence that plant growth was estimated to be 4-6 weeks behind recent patterns, resulting in the latest arrival of spring for many years.

Once warmer weather arrived, however, the county enjoyed sustained sunny and dry spells right through until early autumn. In consequence almost drought-like conditions were experienced, with river levels falling low and many plants quickly setting seed in the arid conditions. Butterflies and other insects, however, appeared to flourish in the good weather.

Winter saw a relentless succession of strong but mild low pressure weather systems run in off the Atlantic from early December (this month was the wettest on record for Scotland) until mid-February. On the 5th December a tidal surge caused extensive modification of the coastline. Over the entire winter period there were less than 10 frost days recorded and no snow lay at lower levels.



*Tidal surge in North Berwick*



*John Muir Way at Dunbar*

## 2.0 OUTDOOR ACCESS

### 2.1 CORE PATHS PLANNING

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.

Following comprehensive consultations the East Lothian Core Paths Plan was adopted in December 2010 and in September 2012 a printed version of the Core Paths Plan was produced. A full copy is available via the link in Appendix B.

## 2.2 RESOLVING ACCESS ISSUES

There were 17 separate access issues reported to the Council during 2013/14. This was down from the previous year when there were 26. 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.

## 2.5 PATH PROJECTS

**2.5.1 THE JOHN MUIR WAY.** The John Muir Way was East Lothian's long-distance path. In July 2013 it was agreed to incorporate this route into a longer (200km) route from Helensburgh to Dunbar, whilst retaining the same name for the overall path.

One section (Dunbar to Dunglass) section of the original John Muir Way has now been re-named the John Muir Link.

Many of the interpretation panels on the original John Muir Way are now out of date and will need to be changed as a



*John Muir Way looking to cockenzie*

result of the route changing. This is also true of the leaflets, a number of web sites, maps and books.

Repairs were undertaken on the Cliff Top Trail, (part of the John Muir Way west of Dunbar harbour), to try to overcome damage by erosion. In a separate incident the esplanade to the east of Dunbar was damaged in a storm and repaired by Dunbar Golf Club. It is considered that much of this section of the coast will be vulnerable to future erosion.

**2.5.2 RIVER TYNE PATH – HAILES TO HADDINGTON.** In July 2013 a 'soft' engineering system - *Filtrexx Stabilisation* - was employed to repair a 10 x 10m slump in the banking. Compost and grass seed were secured with willow stakes and anchors. The grass quickly established a natural-looking surface and the roots have helped bind the soil together.

A people counter was installed on the River Tyne Path at Sandy's Mill in February 2014.



*'Soft' engineering bank repair*

This section of the River Tyne Path from Abbey Bridge to Hailes Mill is maintained entirely by the East Lothian's Volunteer Path Warden '*Tyne Team*'. The team meets on a monthly basis to undertake maintenance tasks, such as vegetation control and resolving drainage issues.

**2.5.3 GIFFORD TO GARVALD.** In May 2013, a planning application to create a new access into Yester Estate from Park Road in Gifford was passed, despite some objections. Since this date, Yester estate has changed owners and this is seen as beneficial in the progression of proposals to improve access within the estate.

**2.5.4 DREM TO GULLANE CORE PATH.** Negotiations for the 'missing link' in the core path route between Drem and Gullane commenced in 2008/09. Despite repeated attempts to facilitate the progression of this route, still, in early 2014, no resolution had been achieved.

In January 2014, following a public meeting, a campaign group in favour of the path's development, wrote to East Lothian Council demanding that the Council made full use of its legal powers to implement the core path along the original route shown in the core paths plan.

Using legal powers to implement a path would be seen as a last resort by the Council, therefore options to accommodate a footway leading north out of Drem are being explored. If a shared-use footway was to be built, it could connect into the alternative route north of the village and should resolve most of the issues raised about this route.

**2.5.5 LONGNIDDY GOLF COURSE PATH.** Repairs were completed to 22m of the right of way across the golf course that had been subject to flooding. The cost of the work was £2,383 and £400 was contributed by Longniddry Community Council.

**2.5.6 BECKY'S STRIP.** In 2013 colleagues in Transportation applied for funding through Sustrans' Community Links Programme to upgrade this path. The route comprised a wide grassy farm track, slightly rutted in places. The proposal was to use a "soil stabilisation" process, to form a firm surface.

This proposal drew objections. Despite subsequent public meetings and consultations, these objections could not be resolved. Councillors remained supportive for the path's development but by March 2014 the landowners of the path withdrew their support for the scheme.

## **2.6 PATH MAINTENANCE AND SIGNAGE**

Each summer, a programme of path verge cutting and spraying is undertaken across identified key routes. This work is carried out by Amenity Services and their contractors on a regular basis.

The Countryside Squad has proved invaluable to ongoing maintenance work on the path network. This two-man squad is able to promptly undertake minor repairs to paths and path furniture such as fencing, gates and signage, as well as addressing minor drainage problems and forestry work.

The Unpaid Work/Community Payback Service (formerly Community Service by Offenders) team continues to do a lot of maintenance work on the path network and countryside sites.

## **2.7 EAST Lothian VOLUNTEER PATH WARDENS**

During 2013 -14 the number of volunteer path wardens continued to grow, to in excess of 50 volunteers. A recorded 1,004 hours of volunteer time was delivered by these volunteers (up from 631 hours in 2012-13).

The Countryside Officer co-ordinates the recruitment and training of the path wardens and maintains a record of their work. Additionally he organises monthly team tasks where volunteers can undertake larger projects. This also provides an opportunity for the volunteers to get to know one another and to receive training.



*Path warden team task at Amisfield*

During 2013-14, the Countryside Officer and Access Officer worked with three of the volunteer path wardens to secure independent charitable status for the group. Path wardens as a consequence will now be able to apply for funding for equipment and path projects that would not be open to the Council.

## **2.8 COASTAL COMMUNITIES FUND**

In May 2013, following a joint bid to 3rd party funders, *The Conservation Volunteers* were awarded £280,000 for a two year project to employ a co-ordinator and six apprentices. The team will be trained up in countryside skills, including path maintenance. So far, the apprentices have undertaken a great deal of work at several coastal sites.

Four of the 2013-14 apprentices have subsequently been offered employment and it has been suggested that eight apprentices can be taken on during 2014-15.

## **2.9 SUSTRANS COMMUNITY LINKS FUNDING**

Using 2013-14 funding, a consultant was appointed to undertake a feasibility study to consider various path upgrades and alternative routes.

A final report was submitted in March and an application form for *Commonwealth Games Legacy* funding has been provided as part of this contract.

Working with the Transportation department, applications have been submitted to Sustrans for funding through their *Community Links Programme* for various projects in 2014-16.

## **2.10 PATHS STEERING GROUP**

The Paths Steering Group continued to meet throughout 2013, but due to a number of staff retiring, and with external agencies no longer attending, it was regretfully decided to disband the Paths Steering Group in January 2014.

It is hoped that contact with many of these organisations can be maintained via the Local Access Forum (see 2.11) and through informal meetings with Council staff.

## **2.11 EAST LOTHIAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

At each meeting the Access Officers report on progress of the Sustainable Path Network, core paths and access issues and continue to provide the secretariat for the Forum. As well as the usual agenda items, the main topics that were covered included the Drem to Gullane path and various access issues that had arisen during the year.

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

## 2.12 PLANNING ISSUES AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

The Access Officers have increasingly been involved in strategic planning of development across East Lothian, particularly in the more built-up western part of the county. Access Officers have worked closely this year with planners to secure 'green networks' of access and 'green space' links. This work will feed into the *Main Issues Report* for the forthcoming *Local Plan*, to help protect access and green space for the future.

Core Paths as well as rights of way are now available to planners on the Council's GIS database. In consequence there has been considerably better understanding of access legislation from planners for development sites within 100m of either type of these thoroughfares.

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The biodiversity process began in 1992 with agreement between 150 governments that nature conservation was a global priority. 20 years later the basic goal to stop the decline of biodiversity had not been achieved. More recently there has been growing recognition that biodiversity helps people in many ways: fresh water, pollination, attractive landscapes, raw materials, are all provided by the natural environment.

Collectively these are termed '*ecosystem services*'. A decline in biodiversity is a decline in these ecosystem services. The cost would be prohibitively high if the services had to be created artificially, so maintaining biodiversity in good condition is of benefit to everybody.

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.

East Lothian has had a biodiversity action plan since 2003, overseen by a partnership which includes farmers, conservation groups, government agencies, and local businesses.

In East Lothian the local biodiversity process 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.

### 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.



*Common and silk-button spangle galls*



*Dead wood is an important habitat*

The Scottish Government produced guidance for local authorities on the designation of Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS). East Lothian Council first incorporated such sites into the 2008 Local Plan (then called Wildlife Sites) along with policies to protect their biodiversity interest from inappropriate development. Local Biodiversity Site boundaries have been reviewed in advance of 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.

Forestry applications in 2013 included forest plans for Baro, Carfrae and the Clint Estate.

To assist these consultations a series of GIS layers have been created, to illustrate biodiversity priorities across the county. The maps show where specific conservation work should be targeted. The GIS layers mean that conservation priorities can be easily identified for all parts of the county.



*Crystal Rig wind farm*

The Central Scotland Green Network is a nationally significant planning concept, to be incorporated into the emerging Local Development Plan. Work has started to map a proposed green network for East Lothian. This should help sustain a quality local environment through the major urban expansion that will progress in the coming years.

Significant planning applications in 2013 included wind farms at Aikengall and Keithhill and proposed major residential developments. Wind farm applications include management plans that describe how the surrounding landscape will be managed during the lifetime of the turbines. Both wind farms involved woodland creation and grassland management, with the Keithhill plan specifically aimed at enhancing habitats for black grouse.

### **3.3 IMPROVE HABITAT QUALITY**

Sea buckthorn is an invasive shrub that covers much of the sand dunes at Gullane Bents. Significant amounts of scrub have been cleared in the past 7 years but a lot remains. A graduate volunteer mapped grassland and scrub at Gullane to inform a management plan for the sand dunes. This provided us with useful information and gave the volunteer valuable experience in the hunt for a conservation-related job.

As a cost-saving exercise, a review of grassland management took place at Levenhall Links. Up to half of the estimated £40,000 maintenance costs could be saved and in the process, useful grassland habitat can be created. Some revenue may be raised in future years through leasing grassland for hay cropping. This review will be extended to other areas in 2014.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme is a government fund for countryside management. It has largely been restricted to forestry works and management of SSSIs, which excludes many East Lothian landowners. Efforts have been made to incorporate Local Biodiversity Sites into the funding stream, to allow a greater number of local farmers to access this money.

### 3.4 RAISE AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY

A biodiversity article has been a regular feature in East Lothian Life magazine since 2010 and continued during 2013-14. Biodiversity articles also featured in *Mud in Your Eye*, the newsletter of the Countryside Service.

Talks to primary schools about biodiversity and 10 schools were visited in 2013. Four further schools sought advice about wildlife improvements in the playground. Where possible, this is designed to fit with the Curriculum for Excellence.

Secondary schools increasingly request help with different environmental-related courses. In 2013 this included the 'Monitoring Environmental Resources' course at North Berwick High School and Preston Lodge.

© Bumblebee conservation trust



### 3.5 DEVELOP SURVEY WORK AND RESEARCH

Pink-footed geese are protected by European legislation and until recently little detailed information was available about their feeding and roosting sites. A survey, initiated in 2010, continued through the autumn of 2013. Results have been important in early discussions with developers, both to support their proposal and to advise on possible impacts of their project.



*Pink-footed geese*

MSc students from Napier University conducted research projects into the impacts of rabbits on sand dunes, and the diversity of bumblebees at Yellowcraig. Rabbits are an important mechanism for maintaining sand dune quality, but little was known about their populations at Yellowcraig. Similarly, there was little information about bee species, so the projects were particularly relevant.

Links have also developed with Edinburgh University regarding coastal and marine issues, with MSc projects likely to develop through 2014. A research project into public perceptions of biodiversity was also developed in 2013. This is a European-wide project that will progress in the coming year with research carried out by Amsterdam University.

Public wildlife recording events, known as *BioBlitz*, are popular. Help was given to such events at Inveresk Lodge 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.

# COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

## 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 for the Service.

## 4.2 COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS

**4.2.1** 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;



*Building willow sets to prevent bank erosion*

	Category	Group details	Primary duties
1	Individual unsung heroes!	n/a	Litter picking of coastal / countryside sites
2	Site – specific 'Friends' groups:	Aberlady Bay LNR	Practical conservation work / biological monitoring
		Dunbar Shore and Neighbourhood Group	Beach management
		John Muir Country Park	Practical conservation work
		North Berwick	Practical conservation work
		Levenhall	Practical conservation work
		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;	Stock 'lookers'	Checking numbers of stock (sheep, ponies) and their condition, management of their habitat and site security
		Coastal counters	Recording of people on the coast / activities being undertaken
		Eider counters	Monitoring productivity of nest colony
		Bumblebee and grassland surveyors	Recording target populations / habitats at areas undergoing conservation grazing
		Winter 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

**4.2.2** The number of people expressing an interest in volunteering increased once again this year. The countryside officer continued to co-ordinate volunteers and their deployment.

**4.2.3** 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 (compared to 7,008 hours 2012-2013).

**4.2.4** New for the 2013-14, was the delivery of species and habitat surveying by volunteers. Commencing in April, bumblebee surveyors and botanical recorders were trained up and sent out to conduct surveys at the 4 areas into which we have introduced conservation grazing (Aberlady Bay LNR, North Berwick Law, Traprain Law, and Barns Ness).

Bumblebee surveyors walked transects at each site on a 1 / month basis and recorded the different species and sexes of species they encountered. The botanical surveyors conducted quadrat surveys at the sites in order to establish a base-line population of key indicator species.



*Botanical surveying at Aberlady*

**4.2.5** It is hoped that continued surveying will demonstrate positive changes being wrought as a consequence of appropriate grazing. The expectation is for an increase in the abundance and diversity of flowering plants and an increase in bumblebee populations. Whilst it is too early to draw conclusions, the botanical surveys this year indicated a significant decrease in the amount of dead vegetative material (compared with the amount prior to the introduction of grazing), together with a marked reduction in overall vegetation height.

**4.2.6** Due to the diversity of roles being undertaken by volunteers, together with the extent of occasions when volunteers are required to work on their own or in pairs; it was with universal support that the countryside volunteers were provided with their own identification badge, modelled on that of the countryside ranger badge, in recognition of their help they provide.

**4.2.7** As a 'thank-you' to the countryside volunteers, a get-together was held in September 2013 and many of the groups held separate sessions, co-ordinated by the countryside ranger service.



## 4.3 INTERPRETATION

- 4.3.1 COUNTRYSIDE NEWSLETTER – ‘MUD IN YOUR EYE’.** This publication continued to be produced on a quarterly basis. It highlighted wildlife news, together with information upon local places to explore and how people can become involved in volunteering projects. 2,000 copies of each issue were distributed to local outlets and / or given out by hand to members of the public by the Countryside Ranger Service.



In early 2014, after 25 issues, the format of Mud in Your Eye was updated and received critical acclaim for its revised style.

- 4.3.2 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.
- 4.3.3 ARTICLES FOR THE EAST LoTHIAN COURIER.** The Countryside Ranger Service continued to provide monthly articles for the local newspaper.
- 4.3.4 SOCIAL MEDIA.**   **@ELCRANGERS.** Both *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts were created for use by the Countryside Section this year, their management being co-ordinated 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.

## 4.4 NON-NATIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

- 4.4.1 SEA BUCKTHORN.** A non-native species to East Lothian, widely planted historically to stabilise sand dune systems; sea buckthorn is a plant that can aggressively dominate dune grassland systems to the detriment of local habitats and species.



*Sea buckthorn berries*

2013-14 marked the 7th successive year when sea buckthorn control was undertaken by East Lothian Council, in accordance with strategic guidelines. Mechanical removal was confined to Aberlady Bay LNR.

Across all sites, regenerating shoots continued to be controlled by a combination of herbicide application – *Timbrel* – which is effective at killing off regenerating shoots. From the autumn of 2014, however, this product will no longer be permissible, and it is expected that re-growth will be instead be controlled by a glyphosate-based product, e.g. *Roundup* (together with the hand-digging of shoots when spraying is not deemed appropriate).

**4.4.2 TWO- SPINED ACAENA AND PIRRI-PIRRI BURR.** Two-spined acaena (*Acaena ovalifolia*) and pirri-pirri burr (*Acanea novae-zelandiae*) are 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.

**4.4.3** 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 ASH DIEBACK (*CHALARA FRAXINEA*).**

Despite initial fears and the proximity of infected trees being discovered in neighbouring Berwickshire, no infected trees were reported on countryside sites this year. Members of the team will, however, continue to monitor for signs of infection.

## **4.6 CONSERVATION GRAZING**

During 2013 a fourth site – North Berwick Law, was prepared to receive grazing stock. Funding for this work was made possible by the receipt of £24,190.00 grant aid in the form of funding from the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). The money enabled the erection of stock fencing, together with associated gates and stiles. In addition funding was secured to undertake a large-scale programme of gorse control, as the shrub had spread unchecked for many years across the site and was adversely affecting the qualifying criteria (botanical) for which the site is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). An opportunity was also taken to open up areas of water to provide both a drinking facility for the grazing animals and to re-create a habitat that had declined locally.



*Pond creation, North Berwick law*

On October 2013, seven Exmoor Ponies were delivered onto the site. Additional volunteer recruitment was achieved locally to ensure that the animals were able to receive daily welfare checks. Unfortunately in January 2014 one of the ponies died in an unspecified incident. Following a review of the circumstantial evidence, however, the grazier was happy to let the remaining ponies to remain on site, since when they have been grazing without any further incident.



*North Berwick ponies*

#### 4.7 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.

#### 4.8 PROFESSIONAL DOG WALKERS – APPROVED USER STATUS SCHEME



Now in its 3rd year, membership continues to grow; the scheme being managed by the Amenity Protection Officer and supported by the Countryside Officer and Countryside Ranger Service. The scheme has enabled the development of a useful dialogue between professional dog walkers and the countryside ranger service, as well as providing a mechanism to support companies that are adhering to 'best practice' criteria.

#### 4.9 SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS / STATEMENTS

Site management plans are produced for all principal Countryside sites, and are updated on a 5 year rotating programme. 2013-14 saw the management plans revised and updated for Levenhall Links and Haddington to Longniddry Railway Walk.

#### 4.10 BUDGET SUMMARY

Costs and expenditure for the year were as follows;

Item	Cost	Notes
Countryside Costs	£782,270.00	£ 584,920.00 = employee costs
Income	£87,001.20	£10,000 Scottish Power, £46,315.20 Caledonian Heritable Lt and Hamilton & Kinneil Estates, others; SRDP £30,686.00
Net Expenditure	£695,268.80	

# EAST LoTHIAN COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE



*Golden plover and lapwing flock*

**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.

## 5.3 WELCOMING VISITORS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

**5.3.1** 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.

**5.3.2 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 17 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

*(Last year's figures in brackets for comparison)*

**5.5.1 EDUCATIONAL GROUPS.** 122 (178) classes were taken this year. Activities ranged from seashore studies to hill walks and from Advanced Higher Geography to Nursery classes. We have also worked with ASN classes, using visits to the countryside to improve self-esteem, team work and behaviour. Some of these groups have been working towards completing a John Muir or Duke of Edinburgh Award. We also ran a training day for teachers at Gullane Primary School to assist them in organising their own activities in the outdoors for their pupils. This is something we are keen to develop with other schools.

**5.5.2 OTHER VISITING GROUPS.** 53 (46) from guided walks to survival skills, covering the complete age range from U3A to family support groups and after school clubs.

**5.5.3 TALKS.** 17 (16) talks were given to various local groups and societies on wildlife related topics

**5.5.4 JUNIOR RANGER SERVICE.** The East Lothian Junior ranger scheme continued to flourish– see case study below;

**Case Study #1 Junior Rangers**

Commenced in April 2013, East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service developed and continued to run a Junior Ranger group. The group has been an integral part of a national pilot scheme run by the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association. Over this period of time, we have had 18 young people in total become part of the team from all across East Lothian. They have worked on both East Lothian Council managed and privately owned countryside sites across the county. The Junior Rangers contributed over 417 volunteer hours between April 2013 and mid February 2014.



*Junior ranger on survival skills training*

**5.5.5 EVENTS ATTENDED.** The Countryside Ranger Service was involved in 6 events during the year, including the Haddington Show, Dunbar Science Festival and the Multicultural Day at Prestongrange. We also ran our own two day event, 'Tyne and Toon', a series of activities over a weekend in September based in Haddington.

**5.5.6 TRAINING COURSES.** Members of the Ranger Service attended 12 training courses throughout the year, including a Teaching the Teachers workshop and the Beachmaster Oil Pollution Training programme.

## **5.6 MANAGING SITES IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER**

Conservation volunteers continued to provide an invaluable input into the management and conservation of sites across East Lothian;

- **Volunteer Groups** – 164 (79) volunteer groups carried out a wide range of tasks from litter picking and sea buckthorn removal to path maintenance and tree planting. This amounted to 5398 volunteer hours.

**Case Study #2 North Berwick Countryside Volunteering**

A new volunteer group was set up by the Countryside Ranger to encourage the local community to help out with practical conservation and management tasks at countryside sites in the North Berwick area. The group met 1 / month to work on tasks such as vegetation control, tree maintenance and litter at North Berwick Law, Glen and the beaches. The



*North Berwick volunteers*

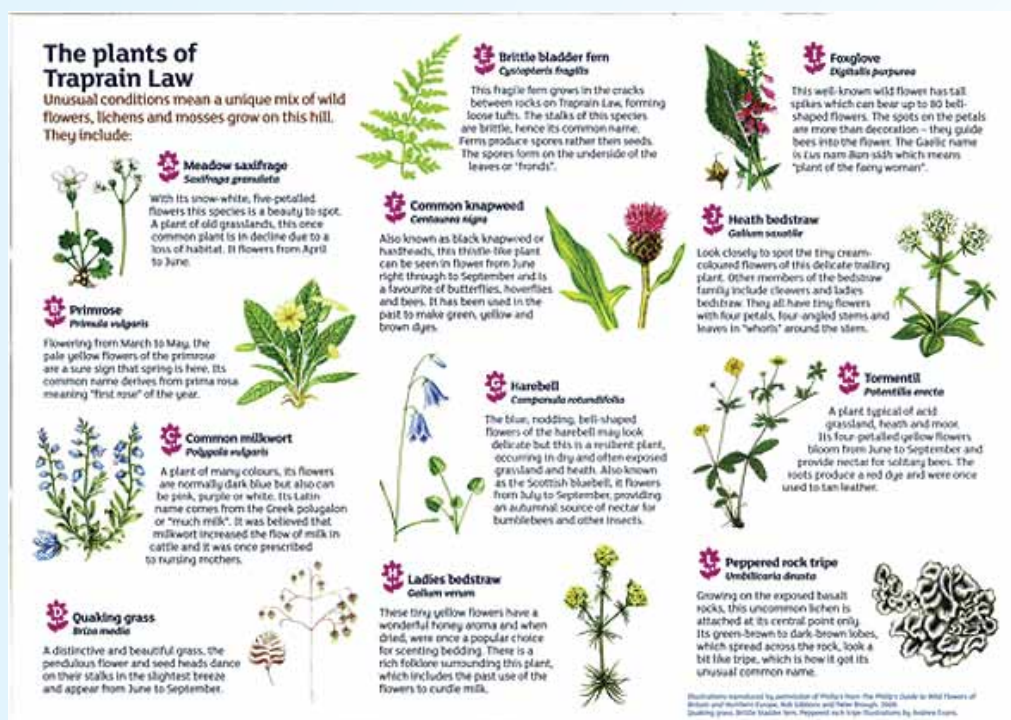
Countryside Ranger has also included the Scottish Seabird Centre and North Berwick in Bloom to organise annual beach cleans for the local community to take part in. The first of these was held in September and 130 people helped clean the East beach.

- **Unpaid Work** squads undertook specific tasks, led by a dedicated supervisor employed by the Criminal Justice team. They completed approximately 60 volunteer hours of work at JMCP.
- Individual projects were undertaken that utilised local people who volunteered their time and effort.

## 5.7 WILDLIFE MONITORING/CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Target flora and fauna continued to be monitored and managed in accordance with prescriptions contained in individual site management plans.

### Case Study # 3 Plantlife Scotland Important Plant Areas project



The Countryside Rangers worked with Plantlife Scotland this year on a project to produce leaflets and guided walks on Traprain and North Berwick Law. This was part of a wider Plantlife Scotland project to produce a series of leaflets and community engagement events about Important Plant Areas in Scotland. The leaflets were produced and distributed to local libraries, tourist information centres and other organisations. Guided walks were jointly led by the Countryside Rangers and Plantlife Scotland for local communities to find out more about the plant life at both sites.

#### **Case Study #4 Boat sinks at Dunglass, resulting in minor oil spill**

East Lothian's coastline is of international environmental significance and 98% is covered by formal designations. The East Lothian Council Oil Pollution Plan provides the framework for a multi-agency response to pollution incidents. The Countryside Ranger Service plays a vital role in assisting with oil pollution response having detailed knowledge of the coastline. In these emergency situations they are

able to get on site and assess the situation for impacts on birds and people as well as provide information on access, weather, tides, sea conditions etc.



On 1st July 2013 a small fishing vessel capsized near to Dunglass and began to sink. There was one person on board who entered the water and was picked up, uninjured but cold, from the water by Dunbar Lifeboat, with the assistance of Dunbar Coastguard, and made a full recovery. The capsized boat had to temporarily remain within the water due to its location, and the outgoing tide, and contained approximately 100 litres of diesel. As part of the East Lothian Council Oil Pollution Plan this incident was being treated as a tier 1 (minor).

Once alerted, the Countryside Ranger was sent to assess the situation and report. The Countryside Ranger remained on site to monitor the boat, provide information to members of the public and liaise with ELC and Dunbar Lifeboat.

After consultation with the Counter Pollution Branch and Maritime & Coastguard Agency it was decided, due to the topography of the coastline and due to the small scale of the spillage, that no action would be taken. The diesel evaporated within 48 hours and monitoring after the event revealed no discernible damage to local wildlife.

# ADVISORY GROUPS

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.



*Aberlady Bay LNR*

## 6.1 ABERLADY BAY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

### INTRODUCTION

- 6.1.1** 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 Site.
- 6.1.2** 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'**.
- 6.1.3** 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.
- 6.1.4** 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.
- 6.1.5** 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.
- 6.1.6** 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, between mid October - March, over a 20-hectare plot continued for a 7th year
- Sea buckthorn clearance continued with limited Spring spraying and much removal in the winter, all by hand
- 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 little was found of either this year.

### WILDLIFE MONITORING

- Peak counts of wintering wildfowl and waders were generally higher than the low figures of the previous year
- Pink-footed geese continued to be recorded in internationally important numbers with a peak count of 24,379
- During 2012/13, the Reserve, and the waters offshore, held nationally important numbers of five species, namely: red-necked grebe; eider; velvet scoter; ringed plover; and bar-tailed godwit
- Counts of sea duck were slightly up on last year but remained low
- Peak counts of both Shelduck and Oystercatchers were their highest on record
- Autumn counts of lapwing remained below 1,000 while a large flock of golden plover in November represented a significant increase on the previous three years' peaks
- Breeding lapwing fell to their lowest number for at least 18 years while redshank numbers remained the same as the previous two years. Both species, however, fared better in the number of young they fledged
- It was generally a poor year for the number of breeding warbler territories and for grassland species such as skylark, meadow pipit and reed bunting. Poor spring weather may have had an impact
- 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 Bog Pimpernell and Variegated Horsetail (both Turf Nursery), Hairy Violet and Moonwort
- Largely down to volunteers, a Butterfly Transect was recorded for the seventh successive year, recording high numbers of most species
- The Wildfowling Panel met in late July to receive a report on the 2012-13 season and decide on permit issue for the 2013-14 season.

## PEOPLE

- Volunteers carried out 2,222 hours of work on a range of tasks including sea buckthorn removal, beach cleans, sheep looking, and biological monitoring
- For a second year running, no Assistant Warden was employed in 2013 which had an impact on work at the site
- The Reserve Advisory Group met twice during the year in March and September.

## 6.2 JOHN MUIR COUNTRY PARK



*Tyne estuary, John Muir Country Park*

## INTRODUCTION

- 6.2.1** 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 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.

**6.2.2** According to the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, (the enabling act for the creation of the Country Park), a country park is “a park or pleasure ground in the countryside which by reason of its position in relation to major concentrations of population affords convenient opportunities to the public for enjoyment of the countryside or open-air recreation”. The landscape features, especially the vast expanses of sand, exposed when the tide recedes, have made this area a favourite location for a wide variety of recreational pursuits. Through the years since its establishment, visitor numbers have risen steadily, though poor summers in both 2007 and 2008 resulted in slight declines from the peak record returned in 2006.

**6.2.3** The diversity of habitats within the Country Park is one reason why this area has proven such a magnet 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.

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

#### **6.2.5 SUMMARY**

- 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
- Prairie dogs were sited within the car park area at Linkfield and one dead animal was found near the “frog” pond
- 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 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



*North Berwick Law*



*Traprain Law*

### INTRODUCTION

- 6.3.1** The Joint Laws Advisory Group covers two sites, Traprain Law and North Berwick Law.
- 6.3.2** Both sites are striking upstanding features within the lowland East Lothian landscape. Both are designated RIGS (Regionally Important Geological 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 'crag and tail' shape today.
- 6.3.3** 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.
- 6.3.4** 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 through till 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.
- 6.3.5** North Berwick Law is subject to a Conservation Agreement with the National Trust for Scotland.
- 6.3.6** 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.

### 6.3.7 SUMMARY

#### TRAPRAIN LAW

- 13 ponies continued to graze the site
- Volunteers undertook grassland and bumblebee surveys
- 2 Peregrine chicks & 1 Raven chick fledged
- Badgers continued to be very active
- Speckled wood butterflies continue to be recorded
- Ragwort removal by Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV) and GRO groups; 3.5 days at Traprain
- Traprain Law race – 108 runners took part on 8th June 2013.

#### NORTH BERWICK LAW

- 7 ponies were introduced to graze the site in October 2013
- Volunteers undertook grassland surveys and bumblebee transects
- Gorse removal, fencing and pond creation took place as part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme grazing management project
- A pedestrian counter was installed in December 2013
- Badger setts were monitored by Lothian and Borders Badger Group
- Ragwort removal took place with North Berwick Countryside Volunteers group, Law Primary School and LCV
- North Berwick Law race – 235 runners took part on 7th August 2013
- Plantlife Important Plant Area leaflets were produced for both sites.

## 6.4 LEVENHALL LINKS



*Levenhall Links*

### INTRODUCTION

**6.4.1** 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.

**6.4.2** 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.

**6.4.3** Levenhall Links is jointly owned with Scottish Power. The post of Countryside Ranger is co-funded by Scottish Power. In addition to the full time Countryside Ranger based at Levenhall a Seasonal Countryside Ranger is employed from April to September; this post being solely funded by East Lothian Council. The Countryside Rangers are responsible for the day-to-day management of the site and also provides a programme of educational and interpretational events throughout the year.

**6.4.4** 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’**.

### 6.4.5 SUMMARY

- Biological surveying was continued on site over the year adding to the 18 years of existing data
- 13 Ranger led educational visits in the Musselburgh area. 9 of which were at Levenhall Links

- Discussions continue between Scottish Power and East Lothian Council regarding the final handover of the seawall and restoration of Lagoons 6 and 8
- A formal volunteer group, Friends of Levenhall Links was established in December 2013. With other volunteer groups a total 681 hours of volunteer time was spent between Levenhall Links and Fisherrow Sands
- A busy year with birdwatchers at Levenhall Links with good numbers of spring and autumn migrant waders showing well in the Bird Reserve.

## 6.5 YELLOWCRAIG/ARCHERFIELD ADVISORY GROUP

### INTRODUCTION

- 6.5.1** 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.



*Yellowcraig and Archerfield*

- 6.5.2** 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.
- 6.5.3** 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.
- 6.5.4** 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.
- 6.5.5** 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.
- 6.5.6** 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.'**

### 6.5.7 SUMMARY

- Breeding records for eider and arctic tern
- Work to control pirri-pirri burr and sea buckthorn continued
- New toilet block opened in spring 2013
- Drainage work was conducted in the car park
- Work was conducted by the Coastal Communities Fund Apprenticeships on the John Muir Way and main path to the beach
- Seaside Award achieved for the 20th year
- 6 school groups were led by the Countryside Ranger service
- 7 Countryside Ranger events and walks were conducted
- *Giants in the Forest* took place on site at Yellowcraig
- Volunteer time with the Countryside Ranger Service at Yellowcraig continued to expand.

## 6.6 NORTH WEST QUARRY

**6.6.1** Quarrying at this site, close to Dunbar, has ceased and consent granted to create a water feature with associated grassland and woodlands. To guide the restoration a **Working Group** was established by East Lothian Council to work with the owners, LaFarge.

**6.6.2** From July 2013 East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service transferred site monitoring duties over to the RSPB's case officer, in lieu of the partnership agreement signed in January 2013 by LaFarge and the RSPB.

**6.6.3** The RSPB case officer developed a feasibility study to identify and evaluate a range of habitat creation and restoration opportunities for the area. Visitor potential and access facilities compatible with a conservation end-use were assessed. The study set out a number of habitat creation/restoration options for the site based on site ecology, resource constraints, legal framework and quarry operational requirements. For a full copy see Appendix C.



*North West Quarry development*

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

(Click on title below to view online report)

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

## APPENDIX B

- Access 2013 -14
- Core Paths Plan

## APPENDIX C

- North West Quarry

Hard copies of all reports the appendices can be made available by contacting the Countryside Officer on 01620 827459.



Cover images: 1. Looking towards Hopetoun monument; 2. Exmoor ponies on North Berwick Law; 3. Misty view from Hopetoun; 4. Tree creeper; 5. Puffin; 6. Rowan leaves; 7. Volunteers at work; 8. Volunteers on North Berwick Law; 9. White-fronted geese; 10. Junior rangers training day; 11. Large white and hoverfly; 12. A ranger focuses; 13. A giant head at Yellowcraig; 14. Pencaitland railway walk; 15. Cyclist; 16. Countryside volunteers at work.

