



The Best of East Lothian's Wildlife

The top things to see ... and when!



Wood sorrel

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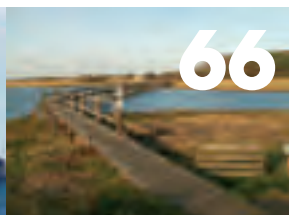
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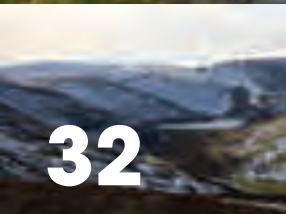
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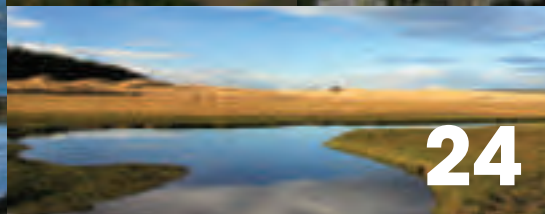
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Wood mouse

Foreword

This wee tome, light in touch and style, is intended to give you an insight into what are considered to be the best places in East Lothian to get close to nature. Our aim is to inspire, to get you out and about all through the year, marvelling at the great outdoors.

Each of the 10 chapters looks at a place in East Lothian and its special natural history interest.

In addition other features of particular interest to that site are indicated, together with directions of how to get there.

At the end of each chapter there is a challenge to find **four** species for that site. They are rated in order of difficulty, with a **one** star item being relatively easy to find, right up to a **five** star item where only luck and perseverance will ensure you are successful. But see how many you can find...



Good Luck!

*Autumn evening view north east towards North
Berwick from the Hopetoun monument*



Introduction

- taking it all in from Hopetoun Monument



Distant Lammermuirs

Start your exploration of East Lothian's wildlife here!

Hopetoun has interests of its own, but it is the **views** in all directions (you can just about see everywhere mentioned in this guide) from the top of the hill, or, preferably the tower itself, that make this a spectacular place from which to begin your journey.

From the top you attain an excellent panorama of the **East Lothian landscape**. Rising to the South are the Lammermuir hills, covered in a patchwork of heather.

Adjacent to the open moorland is a mixture of woodland and upland stock farms. Here, marginal soil precluded arable farming for many years until the advent of fertilisers made more intensive working of the land such as this possible. But, prior to this, these grassy slopes were the home of sheep and cattle.

Looking up a big beech



Few cattle farms remain. Fewer still are the areas still given over to woodland, but it is the upland valleys where you may still explore some of the area's original woods. Other woods occur around the county, but are typically plantations of varying age and with trees species that are only sometime native to this part of the country.

Much of your view all around is now dominated by the large arable fields, indicative of the rich quality of the soil. These fields stretch right to the coastal strip, interspersed only by the odd geological lump, such as Traprain Law to your East, or North Berwick Law to the North East. Together they indicate a volcanic history and reflect the passage of the last ice age. These islands of igneous rocks are important areas of **semi-natural grassland** in a sea of manicured grain.



The Garleton hill ridge extends east from Hopetoun

As you cast your eye to the North, you can appreciate how important the **Firth of Forth** is in the context of the area's human and natural histories. Settlements litter the shore, but so does the wildlife – the **range** of sandy, muddy and rocky **habitats**, together with the sea itself, providing a variety of opportunities for plants and animals. Indeed the **focus** of this book is unashamedly coastal, blessed as the county is with wonderful areas to explore from Musselburgh down to Dunglass.

With that in mind, it is time to come down from the hill now and go looking for our first recommended site.

Hopetoun Monument

The tower was built in memory of **John, 4th Earl of Hopetoun**, an all-round big wig in the early c19, best known for capturing Napoleon and latterly becoming an MP. Well, you can't get it right always. The memorial plaque to him claims that this structure was built by '*a loyal and faithful tenantry*'; that loyalty was surely tested hauling up these huge blocks of sandstone of a dreich morning...

A trip up the tower **is not for the faint hearted**. You climb up 132 darkened spiral steps (a torch is useful), out onto an airy ledge, which, for many, is just a bit too airy. Don't worry if you cannot make it up, though, as the views from the tower's base alone are well worth the effort. Sadly, even getting to the foot of the tower requires a 15 minute hike up the hill, which is not recommended unless you are sure footed.



The tower looms above

HOW TO GET THERE



First Bus operate a service – No. 121 that passes by Hopetoun Monument and you can ask to be dropped off close by.



From Haddington, take the A6137 Haddington – Aberlady road. Near the top of the hill the B1343 turns off to the east. After 200m, as the road bends sharply, turn right and down into the car park.



Disabled access: Unfortunately not good.



01 Birds on the

Levenhall Links

Where better to start our wildlife tour than on the spoil heap of a power station? **Levenhall Links**, lying to the East side of Musselburgh, is just that. The nearby Cockenzie power station generated so much waste – known as fly ash, that somewhere was needed to put it. Levenhall was nearby, the mudflats on this side of the River Esk were enclosed by a sea wall and the land slowly created.

From an ecological perspective, not ideal. Yet, from this unlikely beginning, the site has been landscaped to the extent that today its mixture of open water and grassland are favoured stopping over points for loads of birds. That **sea wall** is great too; it allows you at high water to get the closest views possible (but you'll still need a telescope or binoculars) of whatever is on the water. This is where we begin...

When to go?

Overall, best in winter for large wader numbers and wintering ducks. Spring / autumn for passage migrants.

The wader scrapes

About 1-2 hours either side of high water.

Sea watching

High water is when the birds come closest in.

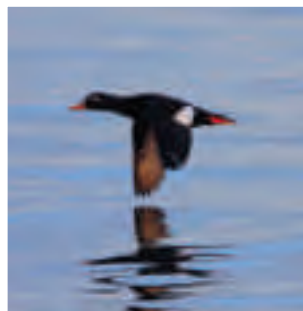
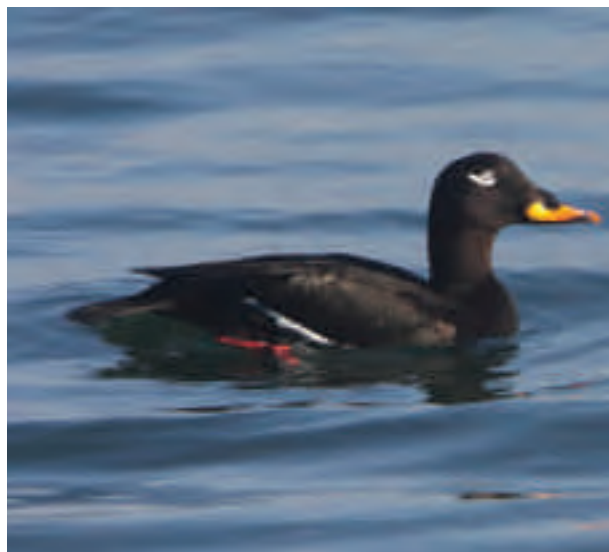
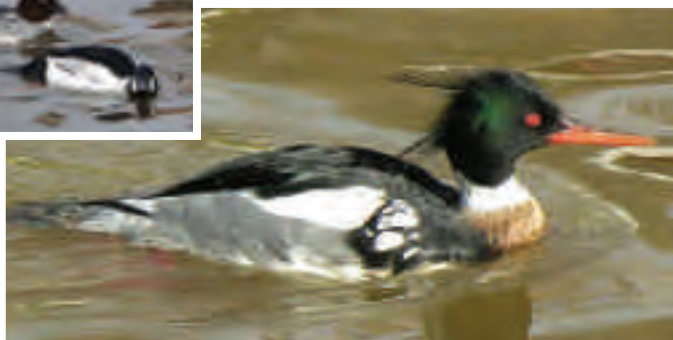


Sea birds

Between **November – February** off the sea wall, you'll get perhaps the best views possible of a number of **sea ducks**. An identification book (see appendix), some binoculars and calm conditions really will open your eyes to a whole new world. Several species – **long-tailed duck**, **eider**, **common** and **velvet scoter**, **goldeneye**, **red-breasted merganser** and goosander – all patrol off-shore. Most are winter visitors from the Baltic area, seeking the relative calm of the inner Forth.



Right, punk duck! The spiky plumed male red breasted merganser. Females are grey with chestnut head colouring, easily confused with female goosanders which also occur here. Above, goldeneye pair, the male is turned towards you.



Left and above, male velvet scoter are identified by the white wing flash and eye liner. Females are all brown with 2 paler spots on their cheeks (but these can be hard to see).



Whilst the ducks all have compact rounded bodies with short necks, **other-shaped birds** are on the waves. Longer-necked and more streamline in profile, both **grebes** and **divers** frequent these waters at this time. **Great-crested grebes** are the largest of their family, then comes the red-necked. The two smallest grebes here are the black-necked and the Slavonian grebe. Any of these four can be present, so try to get an idea of relative size (again an identification book is invaluable).

You may confuse grebes with **cormorants** and **divers**. Both are bigger, though. Cormorants are all black with long necks, whilst divers in winter are feathered black and white, with shorter and thicker, necks. The **red-throated diver** is the most common here, and typically holds its bill pointing up slightly. Great northern and black-throated divers can occur, too.



Red-throated diver in winter and summer plumage – note 'pointing up' bill



Great-crested and a red-necked grebes. Difficult to separate in poor light. The red-necked grebe's yellow bill is a good feature, as its neck moults to a pale grey in winter. Slavonian grebes are perhaps the most common here, but easy to confuse with their black-necked cousins.

