

East Lothian Council Countryside Rangers

November 2019

# MUD in your EYE



## Wildlife It's Seal Pup Season!

Very cute – but leave  
them be. **Pages 6-7**

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Welcome to the 42nd Edition of  
'Mud in Your Eye'

We'd love to hear from you!  
Email: [ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk)  
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 East Lothian Countryside  
Ranger Service

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East Lothian  
Council

Mud in your eye - November '19

# Winter Quiz



1. Which small bird is traditionally associated with winter?
2. Why would Christmas Eve be the best time to ask your dog a question?
3. Which colourful bird is associated with the term Halcyon Days?
4. How many animals are there in the song 'The twelve days of Christmas'?
5. In the same song, what is a Collie Bird?
6. Which biblical character is supposed to have planted the Holy Thorn at Glastonbury, which bloomed on Christmas Day?
7. What sex are the reindeer that pull Santa's sleigh?
8. In the poem 'The Night Before Christmas', how many reindeer were pulling Santa's sleigh? How many can you name?
9. If a woman picks sage on Christmas Eve, what is she supposed to dream about that night?



Answers on page 5. No cheating!

# Painted Ladies

Most people won't have failed to notice the number of Painted Lady butterflies we have had in East Lothian this summer. Towards the end of June hundreds of them were spotted flying in over the sea along the coast of South East Scotland. And then, at the end of July, even greater numbers were seen arriving.



*Painted Lady butterfly on a Buddleia (butterfly) bush.*

These heroes of the butterfly world are thought to have set off from Scandinavia, Germany or the Netherlands. Either way, that is a flight of more than 500 kilometres with no options for stopping for a rest. Painted Ladies can fly up to 150 kilometres a day, so they had probably been on the wing for more than three days and nights. No wonder they were so intent on feeding when they reached our coast.

Most of the butterflies that arrived on our shores were looking a little worse for wear, but within a few days they had dispersed inland and some continued flying west, being seen in good numbers in the Outer Hebrides. I only hope they stopped there and didn't continue west!

Many of the Painted Ladies settled here and laid eggs on thistles. A few weeks later we were seeing shiny new Scottish Painted Ladies.

It used to be thought that this generation perished when cold weather arrived, but modern radar has detected them flying south in vast numbers at heights of 1,000 metres or more. These young heroes will make an even more remarkable flight of up to 4,000 kilometres to North Africa, to complete a cycle started a year earlier by their great, great, great grandparents!

# Say Hello to Jenny....



*Jenny Hargreaves (seen here in warmer climes)!*

Jenny obtained her MSc in Country Recreation Management at Sheffield Hallam University.

**Our new Countryside Officer, Jenny Hargreaves.**

**Jenny joined the team in October, and is getting to grips with countryside projects here in East Lothian, a stone's throw from her previous job with Edinburgh City Council.**

She comes with a wealth of experience, having been with Historic Scotland for 10 years, followed by the City of Edinburgh Council for the last 13 years in various countryside roles. She has worked over a variety of sites from moorland to coastal habitats, working closely with volunteer groups, farmers and Friends groups. Her most recent role was in the Pentland Hills Regional Park, working with farmers and landowners on visitor management.

## Quiz answers

1. The Wren – In many villages at Christmas, wrens were carried around from door to door by children who begged for money, often reciting or singing a rhyme in return. For one such song, see 'Pleased to Meet the King' by Steeleye Span.
2. Animals were supposed to be able to speak for a very short time at midnight on Christmas Eve.
3. Kingfisher – It stems from a Classical Myth, where Alcione and her husband were transformed into Kingfishers. Their nests by the sea were in danger of being washed away, so the gods allowed a period of calm during the winter for them to nest safely.



4. 184 – That's a lot of geese, swans, hens, collie birds, turtle doves and partridges.
5. Blackbird
6. Joseph of Arimathea – He owned the tomb in which Jesus was laid after the crucifixion. One legend says he also brought over the Holy Grail, although where he hid that is anyone's guess!
7. All female – Male reindeer tend to lose their antlers after the rutting season in autumn. As the reindeer are usually depicted with antlers, they therefore must be female.
8. Eight. They are Dancer, Pancer, Donner, Blitzzen, Cupid, Arrow, Dasher and Vixen.
9. She would dream of her future husband!



# It's Seal Pup Season!



*Common Seal.*

**The Firth of Forth is home to one of the largest grey seal colonies on the east coast of the UK. October to December is when they have their pups, which stay white and fluffy until they are weaned at around three weeks.**

It is during these months that we often see the young hauled up on our beaches.

## **What should you do if you come across one?**

Well, most of the time there is nothing wrong - the young are usually enjoying a rest while the mum feeds just offshore. Many people believe putting it back in the water is the best thing – but it first has to be health checked by a trained person before this happens, as it may need treatment.



*An undeniably cute Grey Seal Pup.*

## It's Seal Pup Season! – Continued

Despite their undeniable cuteness – please do not go anywhere near them. Not only is it a wild animal with a very nasty bite, but approaching can scare off mum, permanently. It's best to observe from a distance – keeping children and dogs well away.

If you are concerned about a seal pups health or location, please contact

**East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service (during office hours) on – 01620 827 421**

OR

**Scottish SPCA on – 03000 999 999**

In contrast, common or harbour seals give birth in the summer, with the young able to swim after only a few hours!

Despite their name, common seals are not as abundant in the UK as the grey seals.

How can you tell them apart? Well. It's all about noses! Adult grey seals have a long roman nose, which can make them look very distinguished. Common seals are smaller, with a flatter forehead and a smaller, rounded nose, which some would say makes them look much cuter than a grey seal.

*A more common Grey Seal (if you see what I mean)!*



# Constellation of Auriga



**The planet Mercury will be in transit on 11th November. This means that it will be crossing the sun and can be seen as a small dot moving across the sun's surface. Now, I hope it goes without saying that you should not try to look directly at the sun!**

The only safe way to observe this is to project an image from a telescope onto a piece of white card or paper. Alternatively, look out for the professional images on the web. Transit will last from about 12.30 pm until late.

High in the night sky this autumn is the star Capella. It is the sixth brightest star as seen from Earth, and is in the constellation of Auriga, which is due north of the familiar

shape of Orion, just beginning to appear now in the southern skies. Capella is actually a group of four stars in the same solar system. Two of them are large white stars that orbit each other and the other two are faint red dwarves that circle them. The two largest stars are about ten times the sun's diameter and sit only 60 million miles apart – that's only two thirds of the distance between the Sun and Earth!



# Constellation of Auriga Continued



Many solar systems have more than one star. Our solar system is rather unusual in that we only have the one.

Capella is known as the goat star. Auriga, in ancient times, was depicted as a goatherd with Capella being a she-goat he was carrying. Three nearby faint stars are supposed to represent her kids. In later myths, Auriga became a charioteer and was said to be the inventor of the four-horse chariot. In some pictures, he is shown as both charioteer and goatherd, with a whip in one hand and a goat over his shoulder.

The goat is sometimes associated with Amalthea, the goat that was supposed to have suckled the infant Zeus.



# Gifford to Garvald

**Start:** Gifford village centre  
**Finish:** Garvald  
**Distance:** 9½km / 6 miles  
**Time:** 2½ - 3½ hours each way  
**Terrain:** Paths, tracks and quiet roads.  
**Description:** This walk follows the Gifford Water through Yester Woods and then past the Donolly Reservoir and along the Papana Water to Garvald.

**Directions:** Opposite the village hall, follow The Avenue towards the gates to Yester Estate. Before the gates turn left and follow the signs for Yester Path. At the end of Park Road there is a gate leading into Yester Woods and the path is well signposted from there. After 4 kilometres, cross the road and follow the track past Danskine Loch and along the side of a field. Turn left when you reach the road and after 100 metres look out for the path going off to the right. For this next section you will be walking around the edge of a field which could contain cattle. Cattle can behave aggressively towards dogs and also take care if you have young children. The path then runs along the

side of the Donolly Reservoir and then down a track through farmland. The last 800 metres of this walk is along a quiet road into Garvald.



# Gifford to Garvald - continued

## Points of interest:

- 1. Gifford**, – dating from the 17th century, the village was built to replace the village of Bothans, which was demolished to make way for a walled park around Yester House..
- 2. Yester House** – Construction of the house started in 1699 for the Marquis of Tweeddale. There have been many alterations made over the years and the house remains a private residence.
- 3. Donolly Reservoir** – Dating from 1889, the reservoir is no longer used as a water supply. It is a lovely spot for wildlife watching.
- 4. Garvald** – Beautiful red sandstone village. There has been a church here since the 11th Century.

## Public transport:

There is an occasional bus service to Gifford.  
No public transport to Garvald.

## Local Services:

Gifford has various shops, pubs, coffee shop and public toilets. There are toilets and a pub in Garvald.



*You can always rely on a lab to dive in!*

# Autumn Tracks and Trails

**Winter can be a great time for wandering about looking at the ground. Not only does it keep the rain/wind/snow out of your eyes, but it also gives you the chance to look for some of the tracks, trails and other signs left behind by wildlife. Try searching in mud or snow to find the distinctive paw/hoof prints left by otherwise shy and elusive animals.**



*Fox tracks – more elongated than your dog's.*

Fox tracks are similar to, and often confused with those of dogs. One distinguishing feature is that fox tracks tend to be more elongated than dog tracks. Fox prints show a clear vertical gap between the outer (lateral) pads and the inner (anterior) ones. In dog prints, there is usually a vertical overlap between the two sets of pads.



*Badger tracks in the snow.*

Fox trails also tend to be direct, often travelling in a straight-ish line, unlike dog trails, which will be all over the place. Perhaps a fox just has more of a sense of purpose than the average spaniel. Badgers produce a distinctive footprint consisting of a kidney-shaped pad with five toe and claw marks in front. Sometimes the smallest toe print may be missing, so the footprint can appear to be four-toed. However, it's easily distinguished from other four-toed prints such as foxes and dogs. Badger toes are grouped almost in a line, whereas fox/dog/cat toes are arranged in a distinct arc around an oval pad. The roe deer is Britain's smallest native deer species. Their prints have a distinct "cloven-hoof" form. Occasionally, deer tracks will take on a more splayed appearance and will show signs of the dew claws (as two smaller rounded prints behind the main hoof prints). These splayed prints usually result from the deer running at speed, particularly over soft ground.

*Otters produce droppings known as spraints.*





*Roe deer footprint.*

Animals don't just leave prints behind them, they'll also deposit some fascinating excrement (no, really). Not only can it tell you what animals have been around, but in some cases it can also tell you what they've been eating. I should stress at this point that you shouldn't really get too close to the stuff, or handle it, as most animal poo can carry some fairly unpleasant bacteria and parasites.

Foxes are opportunistic omnivores – that is, they'll eat pretty much anything they find lying around. In towns and cities many foxes live off food waste that us humans leave behind, but in the countryside they have a much more natural diet. As a result, fox poo can contain a lot of animal fur (often rabbit) and small bones.

Another common feature are the tips of feathers. When a fox eats a bird it will avoid eating the feathers by chewing them off. However, the tips remain in the bird's flesh and pass through the fox, undigested.

Otters produce droppings known as spraints. These are often found on rocks in burns and rivers, or on tree stumps near waterways. When fresh, spraints are usually black and tarry, although they become dry and crumbly over time. There's a distinctive sweet, musky odour to spraints and they often contain fish bones and scales.

Badgers also leave characteristic remains behind them. They are the only British mammal to use open "latrines" in which they leave their droppings. These consist of a series of small, shallow holes, which may be visited repeatedly by the badgers. Latrines can be found near setts, but they're often used as territorial boundary markers – a kind of smelly warning to other badgers that this area is already occupied. Speaking of smells, badger droppings are not that bad odour-wise. They have a kind of musty, damp soil/leaves kind of smell and, frankly, for something that's come out the back end of an animal it could be a lot worse. Like foxes, badgers are omnivores and all sorts of bits and pieces pass through them, including fruit stones, beetle cases and cereals (from crops that is, not Weetabix).

So, even if you don't get to see foxes, badgers, deer or other wildlife, there are obvious signs that these animals leave behind, and with a bit of practice it's fairly easy to tell the difference between a range of species.



*Badger poo.*





# Volunteer Round Up

## EAST LOTHIAN CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS GET 'A LOTTA LOLLY'!

**It has never been easier to help keep our coastline clean thanks to a £1,000 donation from the Doris Family who operate the ice cream vans at Gullane and Yellowcraig and own the Amalfi Ice Cream Parlour, Dirleton.**

With the donation, East Lothian Countryside Volunteers (ELCV) have been able to supply litter picking equipment which is now available for use by the general public at both Gullane and Yellowcraig beaches. Information on how to borrow the equipment is available on site at Gullane and Yellowcraig, and on the ELCV website:

**[www.elcv.org.uk/tasks/litter/](http://www.elcv.org.uk/tasks/litter/)**

David Oldham, chair of ELCV said, "This donation which has helped purchase litter picking equipment for ELCV is hugely appreciated, and will give visitors to Gullane

and Yellowcraig the opportunity to give something back during their visit in helping to keep our countryside clean."



## The importance of grasslands

Along the coast, we have a number of important grasslands that we need to manage to ensure that we maintain species diversity and prevent the establishment of invasive species that would otherwise take over. Much of our autumn meadow cutting is done these days with old fashioned, but more environmentally friendly scythes. There is a definite skill involved in scything, and many of our volunteers are now well versed in this technique. In addition, the cuttings need to be removed to prevent extra soil fertility that can lead to more vigorous species becoming established. The assistance of our volunteers has been invaluable.

Important grassland areas have now been cut and raked, ready for a spring and summer flush of wild flowers in 2020.



*The art of Scything at Yellowcraig.*

# Path Wardens

2019 has been a challenging year for keeping the paths cut back. The mix of warm and showery weather has resulted in a great deal of plant growth. Many of our paths have received an extra cut to keep them clear.

We are very grateful for all of the work that the Volunteer Path Wardens have put in to ensure the paths have been kept in good condition this year.

For our July Team Task, we cut the core path along the side of the Donolly Reservoir towards Danskine using the Great Dane and brush cutters. In the afternoon some of us continued and cut another core path in Yester Estate.

For the August Team Task we had the joy of scraping mud off the surface of the core path in Longniddry Dean and spreading whindust on the surface.

The Tyne Team has been very busy this year cutting the River Tyne Path between Abbie Bridge and Hailes Mill. Being next to the river this path quickly becomes overgrown and they have cut it five times so far this year!

Quite a number of Path Wardens have borrowed trimmers and brush cutters to cut their paths. This has all resulted in a record number of hours being put in by the Path Wardens this summer and we are very grateful for all of their help.

*Vital maintenance work keeps paths accessible to us all.*



*Longniddry Dean - Before.*



*Longniddry Dean - After.*

## volunteer diary dates

Where	Day	Date	Time	Action
Dunbar	Wed	30 Oct	10:00 - 12:30	tbd
Aberlady	Wed	06 Nov	09:30 - 15:00	Sea buckthorn control
Yellowcraig	Thu	07 Nov	09:45 - 15:00	Pirri pirri removal
North Berwick	Tue	12 Nov	10:00 - 12:30	Lichen Survey at North Berwick Law
Aberlady	Sun	17 Nov	09:30 - 15:00	Beach clean
Levenhall Musselburgh	Tue	26 Nov	09:30 - 15:00	Woodland management
Dunbar	Wed	27 Nov	10:00 - 12:30	tbd
Tyne Team	Thu	28 Nov	10:00 - 12:30	tbd
Aberlady	Wed	04 Dec	09:30 - 15:00	Sea buckthorn control
Yellowcraig	Thu	05 Dec	09:45 - 15:00	Dune scrub removal
North Berwick	Tue	10 Dec	10:00 - 12:30	tbd
Aberlady	Sun	15 Dec	09:30 - 15:00	Sea buckthorn control

For information on all events please contact [ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk)

