



mud in your eye

SPRING 26 EDITION #75

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THE RETURN OF THE KITTIWAKES
RESPONSIBLE DOG WALKING
LOCAL BIODIVERSITY SITES



Heavens Above



Quartz



Here Comes the Sun



Spring 2026

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Editorial

Well, that was some start to the year! Felt like we got all the rain we never had last summer all at once!

So I am sure we will all be glad that we are heading in to spring, and already it's been lovely to see the daffodils poking their heads out and before we know it they will be in full bloom.

So there is much to look forward to at this time of year; birdsong, wildlife pairing up, longer days, ah the list goes on!

Here in the ranger service things change for us too. We start working towards a busy season along the coast and prepare the sites, and ourselves, for what is to come!



Snowdrops © Abbie Marland

HEAVENS ABOVE

by Roger Powell

Jupiter

It's nearly spring. But more of that below. To begin with, Jupiter is in Gemini in early March. It sits just to the right of the two main stars Castor and Pollux in the South-West, but high enough to be easily spotted as well as being the brightest object in the night sky. Another clue that you are looking at a planet is that it does not twinkle like stars do. Without boring you with too much physics this is due to Jupiters proximity to Earth, meaning it appears as a disc of light rather than stars which appear as points of light. A point of light is affected by atmospheric disturbance making it appear to twinkle. Atmospheric disturbance of light from one side of a disc of light is cancelled out by that experienced by the other side, hence no twinkle.

Jupiter is often referred to as a failed star. It is mostly made up of hydrogen and helium, but is just too small for gravity to force fusion to begin. Regular readers will know that most star systems contain two or more stars orbiting each other. Our own solar system is relatively uncommon in being a single star system.

If you want to be a bit bolder, you can try looking for an open cluster of stars known as M44 or the beehive cluster. It is a rounded patch of stars supposed to resemble a swarm of bees. I mention it because if you are watching Jupiter in Gemini, you will find it just south-east of here in the faint constellation of Cancer. It is just visible to the naked eye in a dark sky, but easy to see through binoculars. It contains at least 1000 stars, although not all will be visible.



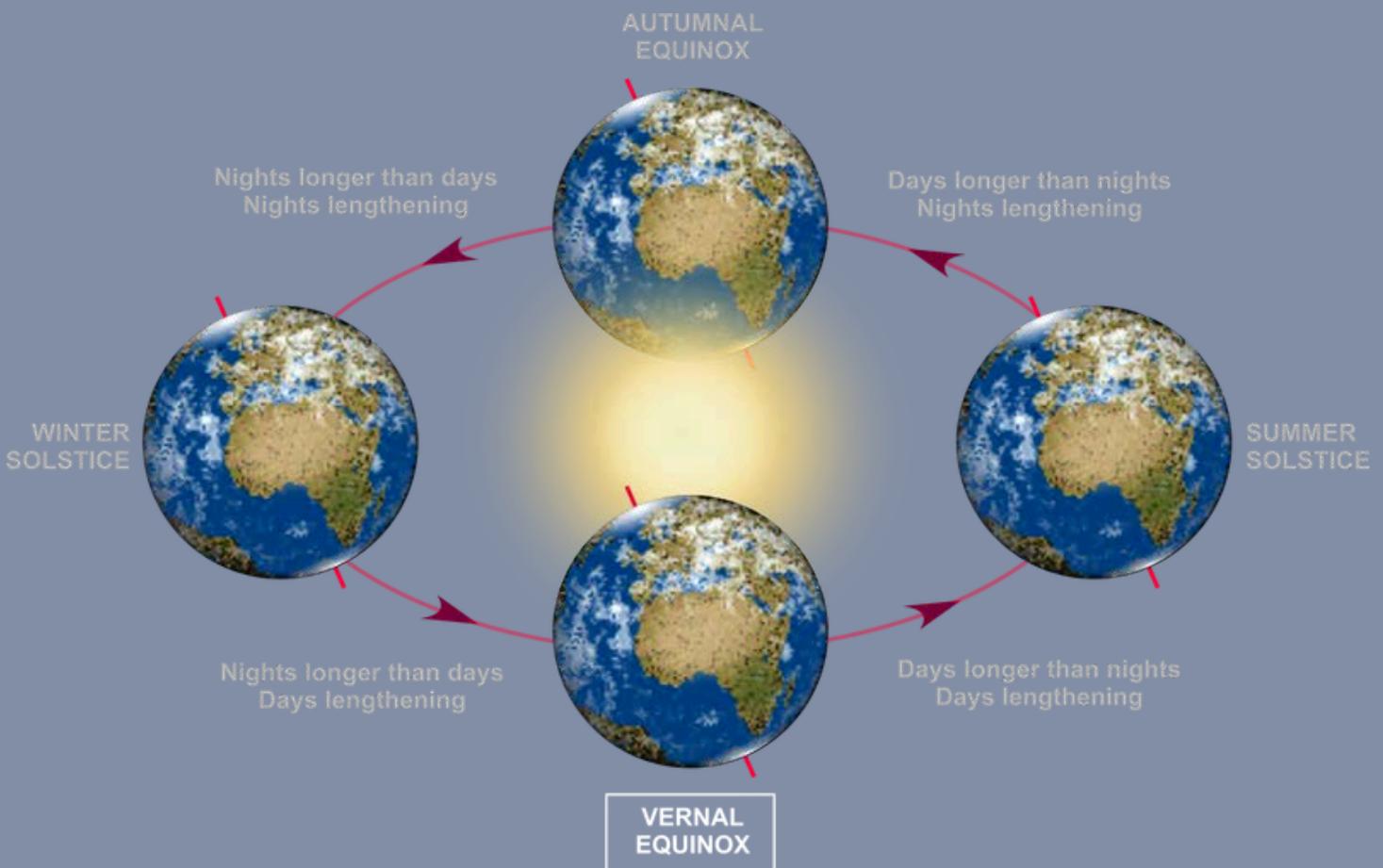
Beehive cluster

So, to Spring. The 20th March marks the Vernal Equinox, the start of astronomical spring. Usually either the northern hemisphere or southern hemisphere is tilted toward the sun, but on this day neither of them are. Astronomical spring runs from 20th March to the 21st June. Meteorological spring on the other hand begins on March 1st and is based on average temperatures. To be fair, nature doesn't take much notice of dates, and spring begins when it's ready!

On April 18th there will be a small planetary alignment of Saturn, Mars, Mercury and Neptune just before sunrise, although it will be low in sky so you'll need an uninterrupted horizon to see it.

April 22nd marks the peak of the Lyrid meteor shower. Between 10 and 20 meteors per hour. This is the oldest recorded shower having been recorded as far back as 687bc.

In May, there will be two full moons. One on the 1st and another on the 31st. The second is known as a blue moon, hence the expression 'Once in a blue moon' for anything that rarely happens.



Vernal equinox

QUARTZ

by Richard English

Pale quartz arenite capping Arkle
(credit Raibert MacAoidh)

The Earth is made up of many different rock types, which are in turn made up of various minerals. One of the most common of these is quartz – it makes up a large proportion of the constituent parts of many sedimentary and metamorphic rocks and is a defining feature of igneous rocks such as granite. In fact quartz may make up as much as 12% (by mass) of the Earth's crust and upper mantle.

In terms of chemistry, quartz is made up of silica (SiO_2), which occurs naturally in a range of forms. Quartz is often found in crystalline form, in which the individual crystals can be clearly seen. However, silica also crops up in micro- or cryptocrystalline forms, where the crystals are too small to be seen without a microscope. These latter types can still be classified as quartz, but also include flint, chert and gemstones such as opal and agate.

In ideal conditions quartz will form into hexagonal crystals, with six-sided pyramidal pointy bits (technical term) at either end. Unfortunately, these conditions don't always exist, so much of the quartz we see will lack this perfect crystalline structure - instead, it often appears as partially formed crystals. Commonly, where crystals have been distorted or grown into one another, quartz is found without any apparent crystals or internal structure at all. This form of a crystalline mineral is termed massive and is the one we're probably most likely to find in the field.



Quartz vein running through Ben Starav, Scotland

Quartz often forms as a result of hydrothermal processes, where dissolved silica is transported in heated water through fractures within bedrock. In the right conditions, this silica can become so concentrated that it precipitates to form solid quartz crystals. This often leads to the formation of quartz veins; grey-white lines running through rock surfaces. If the precipitation takes place in a hollow space within rocks, then geodes can form. In this instance the empty space of the hollow allows the crystals to develop, sometimes producing superb displays of form and colour. Speaking of colour, small amounts of impurities in quartz can produce a wide range of shades – Citrine, rose quartz, smoky quartz and amethyst are all essentially the same mineral. This may come as a surprise to crystal “healers” and their ilk, who attribute wildly different properties to these. Perhaps the impurities make the quartz vibrate at different quantum frequencies, or something.



Amethyst geode (credit Daderot)



Rose quartz

The ubiquitous nature of quartz is in large part down to its hardness and resistance to erosion. In the NW of Scotland several mountains, notably Foinaven and Arkle, are topped by a layer of quartz-arenite (a very quartz-rich sandstone) and many upland areas of Torridon are formed of ancient sandstones. This hardness has also led to quartz being exploited since prehistoric times for tools, in addition to its attractiveness making it popular for decorative and ceremonial uses.

In more modern times quartz has been invaluable in glass-making, electronics, optics, metallurgy and a host of other industries. Not bad for stuff that you can find lying around on any old beach.

THE RETURN OF THE KITTIWAKES

Dunbar Castle in winter

In winter, the walls of Dunbar Castle are quiet. The ledges that will soon hold nests sit empty, the red sandstone darkened by rain and sea spray. Only the wind and the North Sea move below. It is hard to imagine, standing there in January, that this exposed place will once again host hundreds of birds. Yet every spring, without fail, they return.

The black-legged kittiwake is one of our most familiar seabirds, and also one of the most sea-bound. Unlike many gulls, kittiwakes spend almost their entire lives at sea. They come to land for one reason only: to breed. Dunbar Castle has been doing that job for them for generations.



Kittiwake pair

Kittiwakes are elegant birds, smaller and more delicate than the larger gulls many people know. Adults are pale grey and white, with clean black wing tips, bright yellow bills and distinctive black legs. Their name comes from their call – a sharp, ringing “kit-ti-wake” that carries clearly on the wind and quickly fills the air once the colony is established. Each year, usually from late March into April, the first birds begin to appear off the Dunbar coast. They circle the harbour and the castle ruins, calling loudly, as if testing the place. Within weeks, the walls are alive again.

Dunbar is home to one of the most accessible kittiwake colonies in the UK. They nest on the castle ruins, building their nests on narrow ledges just metres above the sea. In the past, many birds nested here, and while numbers have changed over time, the site remains one of the most important urban kittiwake colonies in Scotland.



What makes their return remarkable is where they have come from. When the breeding season ends in late summer, Dunbar's kittiwakes leave. Adults and newly fledged young head back out to sea, dispersing across the North Sea and nearby Atlantic waters, where they will spend the winter months. This is their true home. Out there, far from land, they feed on small shoaling fish, riding storms and swells that never reach the shore.

For months, the birds are invisible to us. The castle stands empty through autumn and winter, while the kittiwakes live a completely different life beyond the horizon. Then, as the days lengthen and the seas change with the season, they return — often to the very same ledges they used the year before.



Once back at Dunbar, the pace of life changes quickly. Pairs reform or reunite, greeting each other with calling and head-tossing displays. Both birds take part in nest building, carefully layering mud, vegetation and seaweed to create a solid platform on the bare stone. One or two eggs are laid, usually in late April or May, and are incubated by both parents.

When the chicks hatch, the colony becomes noisier still. Adults commute constantly between the nest and the sea, bringing back fish to feed their young. The chicks grow rapidly, sheltered by the walls and crowded closely together on the ledges. After five to eight weeks, they are ready. One by one, they leave the nest and take their first uncertain flights out over the water below.



By late summer, the castle quietens again. The cycle is complete.

What makes the Dunbar kittiwakes special is not just their visibility, but their consistency. Year after year, they survive months at sea in the North Sea's harsh winter conditions, only to return to the same exposed stone walls and cliffs to breed. Their presence is a reminder that Dunbar is not just a town on the coast, but part of a much larger marine world – one that continues to shape the wildlife we see every spring.

When the kittiwakes return, spring has truly arrived.

HERE COMES THE SUN



When lesser celandine (*Ficaria verna*) carpets East Lothian's woodland floors and stream banks in late winter it's a reassuring sign of the season's turn. Its glossy, heart-shaped leaves and brilliant sunburst-yellow petals herald longer, warmer days ahead.

It was Wordsworth's favourite flower: "There is a flower that shall be mine, 'tis the little Celandine." It's also the flower that blooms all over Narnia when - spoiler alert - spring reawakens in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

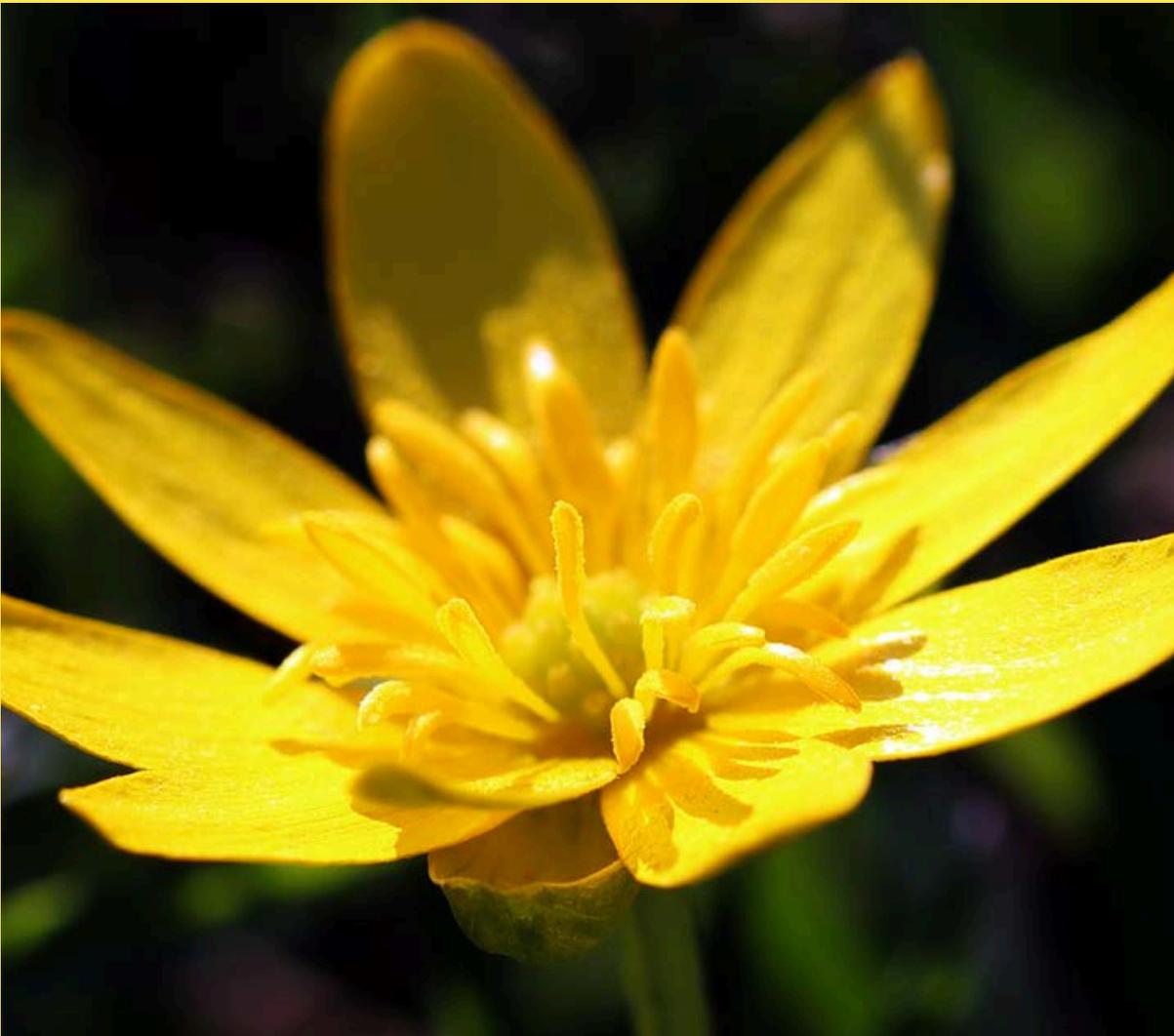
This perennial herb is often mistaken for a buttercup and to be fair it's in the same Ranunculaceae family. But buttercups have five petals and five sepals whereas the lesser celandine has seven to twelve petals and only three sepals. And despite a superficial resemblance, it's not closely related to greater celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) which is in the poppy family.



Lesser celandine flowers from late Feb to May and its name comes from the Greek for Swallow as its blooms were believed to coincide with the reappearance of those iconic migrants. Its Celtic name, *grian*, means 'sun' because, well, these floral gems are little golden-rayed stars.

Native to Scotland and the rest of the UK, it emerges before trees are in leaf so can bathe in the sunlight reaching the forest floor and it often grows where and when there aren't many other competing plants. It's branded a troublesome weed by British gardeners and is a non-native woodland invader in North America.

It spreads via underground gnarly tubers and is pollinated by bees, beetles and flies. Its flowers are an especially valuable early nectar source for bumblebee queens. The blooms open and close in response to daylight and before rain, which is why the plant was traditionally believed to be a weather predictor.



It used to be called pile-wort; in folk medicine it was used to treat haemorrhoids in an age when plants that resembled body parts were believed to be able to treat those parts (think: knobby, swollen roots!). But don't self-medicate with it at home as cases of acute liver toxicity have been reported. Another of its common names is scurvy-wort due to the high levels of vitamin C in its young leaves, which must be cooked before eating.

The poor wee celandine is a floral star but is so often overlooked. So let's stop and take time to appreciate these brilliant little suns as they usher in the first glimmers of spring.

(Don't eat any wild plants you find unless you know for sure what you're picking and how to safely prepare them.)

RESPONSIBLE DOG WALKING

We love East Lothian's coast and countryside, as does the wildlife that breed, feed and rest here.

Small changes in how and where we walk our dogs can make a huge difference to our local wildlife.

- Look out for wildlife and always keep your dog in sight. If in doubt, use a lead.
- Don't let your dog chase wildlife; it might seem harmless, but it causes stress and disrupts feeding and resting.
- Give wildlife space - roosting or feeding birds need 40-50m; if they lift you've got too close.
- Between March and August birds will be nesting on the ground in grassland, on the beach and in farmland. Keep your dog on the paths and away from the top of the shore to avoid scaring birds and trampling eggs and chicks.
- Please follow all signage and requests from Rangers.
- Share the care. Tell your friends and family what simple changes they can make to help wildlife.



WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

Winter



Snowdrops
© Abbie Marland



Redwing
© Abbie Marland



Blackbird and winter aconite
© Abbie Marland



Wigeon
© Abbie Marland



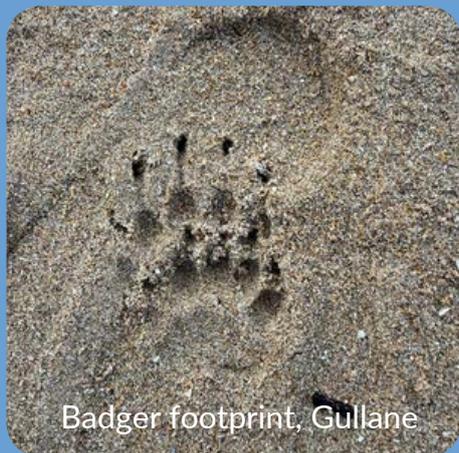
Snow bunting
© Abbie Marland



Teal
© Abbie Marland



Redshanks
© Abbie Marland



Badger footprint, Gullane



Fieldfare
© Abbie Marland



Haws



Whooper swans
© Abbie Marland



Robin
© Abbie Marland

RANGER LED VOLUNTEER TASKS

We have a variety of volunteer groups across the county, undertaking a variety of tasks. Here is just some of the work they have been doing over winter:



Dunbar Conservation Volunteers tree planting.



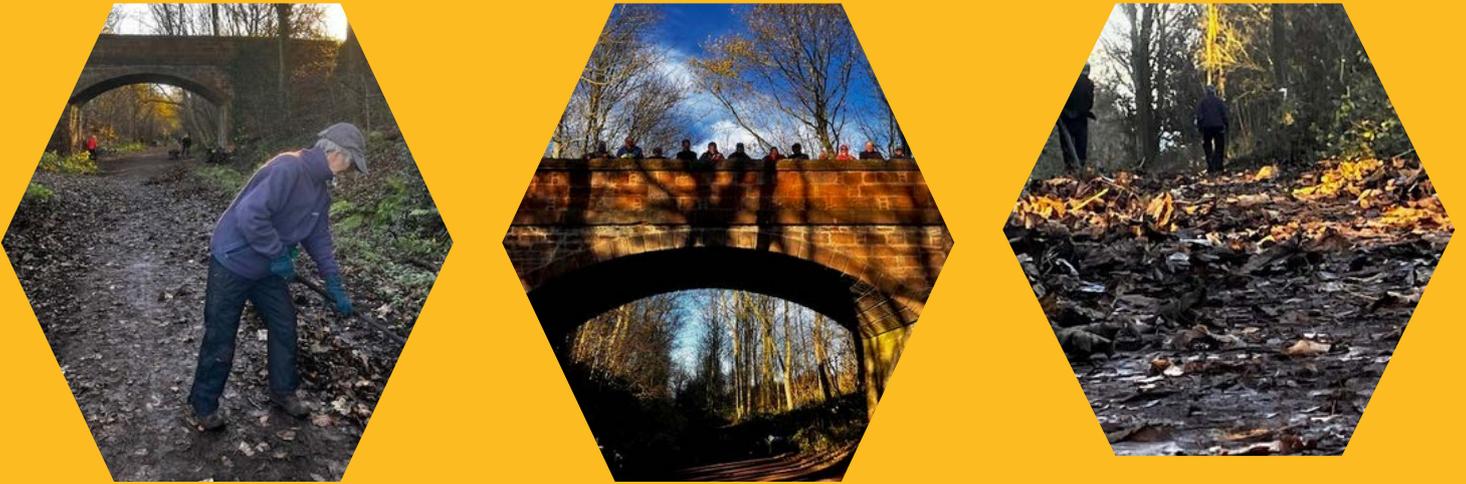
Way Out West festive gathering.



Longniddry-Gullane Conservation Volunteers doing some hedging work at one of two new ponds.



Friends of Yellowcraig removing scrub and tree saplings from the dunes.



Path Wardens on Haddington to Longniddry Railway walk clearing leaves at the Seton wood section



Tyne Team undertaking path work near the Abbey Bridge.



VOLUNTEER TASK DATES

Volunteer Group	When	Time
Aberlady Volunteers	First Wednesday of the month	0930-1500
Friends of Yellowcraig	First Thursday of the month	0930-1500
North Berwick Conservation Volunteers	Second Thursday of the month	1000-1300
Longniddry & Gullane Volunteers	Third Tuesday of the month	1000-1300
Way Out West	Second last Wednesday of the month	1000-1300
Friends of Levenhall Links	Last Tuesday of the month	1000-1300
Dunbar Conservation Volunteers	Last Wednesday of the month	1000-1300

EAST LoTHIAN'S COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS



East Lothian Countryside Volunteers are a group of over 200 volunteers who help look after the countryside in East Lothian either independently or through ranger-led tasks.

Recent updates:

- A new pair of feather flags for display purposes and for marking team tasks are being designed and sourced using ELCV charity funds.
- Over £6000 funding has been received from the Brown Forbes Memorial Fund for the surfacing and fencing of the new path from Tynninghame village heading North towards Binning wood.
- Joyce Stevens has now been co-opted as an ELCV trustee. Welcome to Joyce who has been an active countryside volunteer in East Lothian for over 10 years and has immense local knowledge and experience.
- Postcards are being designed in a joint effort between the rangers, ELCV, Balanced Horizons and The Scottish Seabird Centre. This is part of a campaign to encourage responsible dog walking in regard to breeding birds and wildlife in general. ELCV are contributing towards the costs.



Volunteers taking a well earned break at Yellowcraig

CONTACT US

Email: contact@elcv.co.uk

Facebook: [ELCV](https://www.facebook.com/ELCV)

Visit: www.elcv.org.uk/

GIANT HOGWEED

The fight to eradicate it on the River Tyne

Several new people are needed to help locate Giant Hogweed plants, both on the River Tyne and the upper Esk. Everyone gets allocated their own small stretch of the river and it's only a couple of days a year, plus a few hours training. Have a look at the website page [here](#) for more information.

WANTED

Dead or Alive

REWARD \$10,000

For Invading the Countryside
Dangerous and Heavily Armed!
Trackers Needed
Telegraph the Sheriff
hogweed@elcv.org.uk

A group of volunteers in a grassy field, some wearing jackets, are looking towards a survey plot. The text 'LOCAL BIODIVERSITY SITE SURVEYS 2026' is overlaid in large white letters.

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY SITE SURVEYS 2026

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Volunteers surveying Moonwort at Yellowcraig

East Lothian's Local Biodiversity Site Surveys will be continuing for a third season up until July this year. For the past two years, hardworking volunteers have been surveying Local Biodiversity Sites across East Lothian and have completed a whopping 39 sites. East Lothian has 57 Local Biodiversity Sites designated under East Lothians Local Development Plan in partnership with Scottish Wildlife Trust. Sites were designated for:

- Being a semi-natural habitat close to existing designated site (SSSI or Wildlife Site) or a semi-natural habitat linking two designated sites (SSSI and/or Wildlife Site) thereby defining a habitat network.
- Being a semi-natural habitat or have a good range of species.
- Being an important site for key species, e.g. European Protected Species, ancient woodland flora, species in significant decline locally, etc.
- Be a site of importance for local community contact with biodiversity.

The Local Development Plan is currently being updated and Local Biodiversity Sites need to be checked to ensure that they still meet the criteria for which they were designated. Trained volunteers have been out across the sites surveying using Phase 1 habitat survey techniques to check for condition of habitats and any impacts to biodiversity and species of interest. This information helps build an evidence base to advise planning responses and how developments can adhere to national and local planning policy and deliver outcomes for the natural environment. It also advises the best management to enhance or ensure condition of a site for landowners. Further, these sites play an important part in building East Lothian's habitat connectivity through the development of Nature Networks.



The survey season starts from the 1st April to 31st July which matches the timeline of the work for the next Local Development Plan. There is a call for volunteers that have an interest in habitat surveying and would be confident surveying independently with a botanical interest. Many of the sites are away from towns and villages and may rely on car travel.

There will be a training session before the season starts. Details can be found below:

Date: 24th March

Location: Donnelly Reservoir

Time: 10am

There are a maximum of 12 spaces available to join the session due to the lack of parking around the reservoir, if you are interested in attending the session and surveying a Local Biodiversity Site please email: lmiller5@eastlothian.gov.uk



Volunteers undertaking Frog Orchid survey at Yellowcraig



WHERE IN EAST LOTHIAN?

Can you work out where in East Lothian these phone boxes are?

Answers on page 24.



Did you know...

Scott's design of the K2 cast iron telephone kiosk won a Post Office sponsored competition in 1924.

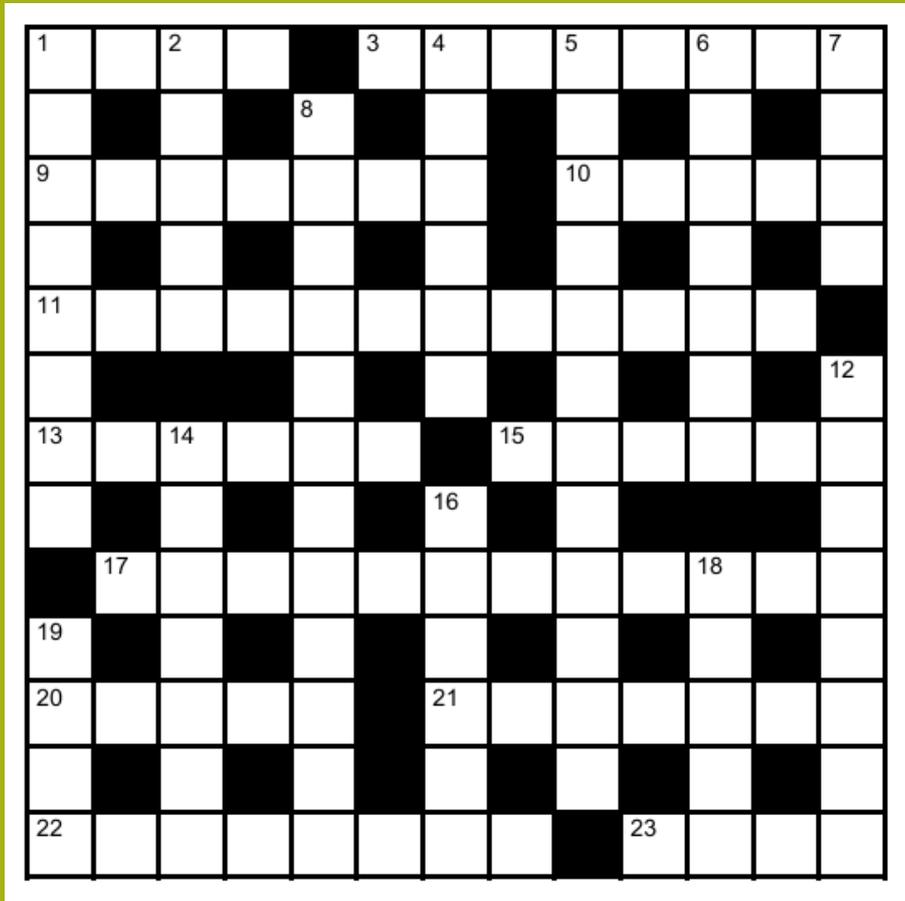
Did you know...

Red phone boxes were designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.

CROSSWORD

by Dave Quarendon

The answers are the same for each set of clues. Answers on page 23.



QUICK CLUES

Across

- 1 Home for bird (4)
- 3 Summer skin issue (4,4)
- 9 Angle of a star (7)
- 10/20 ELCV trustee for funding (5,5)
- 11 Completely obscured (5,7)
- 13 Fight back (6)
- 15 Trustee meeting points (6)
- 17 World traveller (12)
- 20 See 10
- 21 New ELCV trustee (3,4)
- 22 Evaluator (8)
- 23 Water bird (4)

Down

- 1 Less than average water movement (4,4)
- 2 Quick bird (5)
- 4 Morals (6)
- 5 Where stuff is dumped illegally? (7,5)
- 6 Skilled worker (7)
- 7 A Lepus (4)
- 8 Countryside site near Muirfield (7,5)
- 12 Pimiento powders (8)
- 14 Satisfies (7)
- 16 Needs two speakers (6)
- 18 Hitch a ride (5)
- 19 Involving water (4)

CRYPTIC CLUES

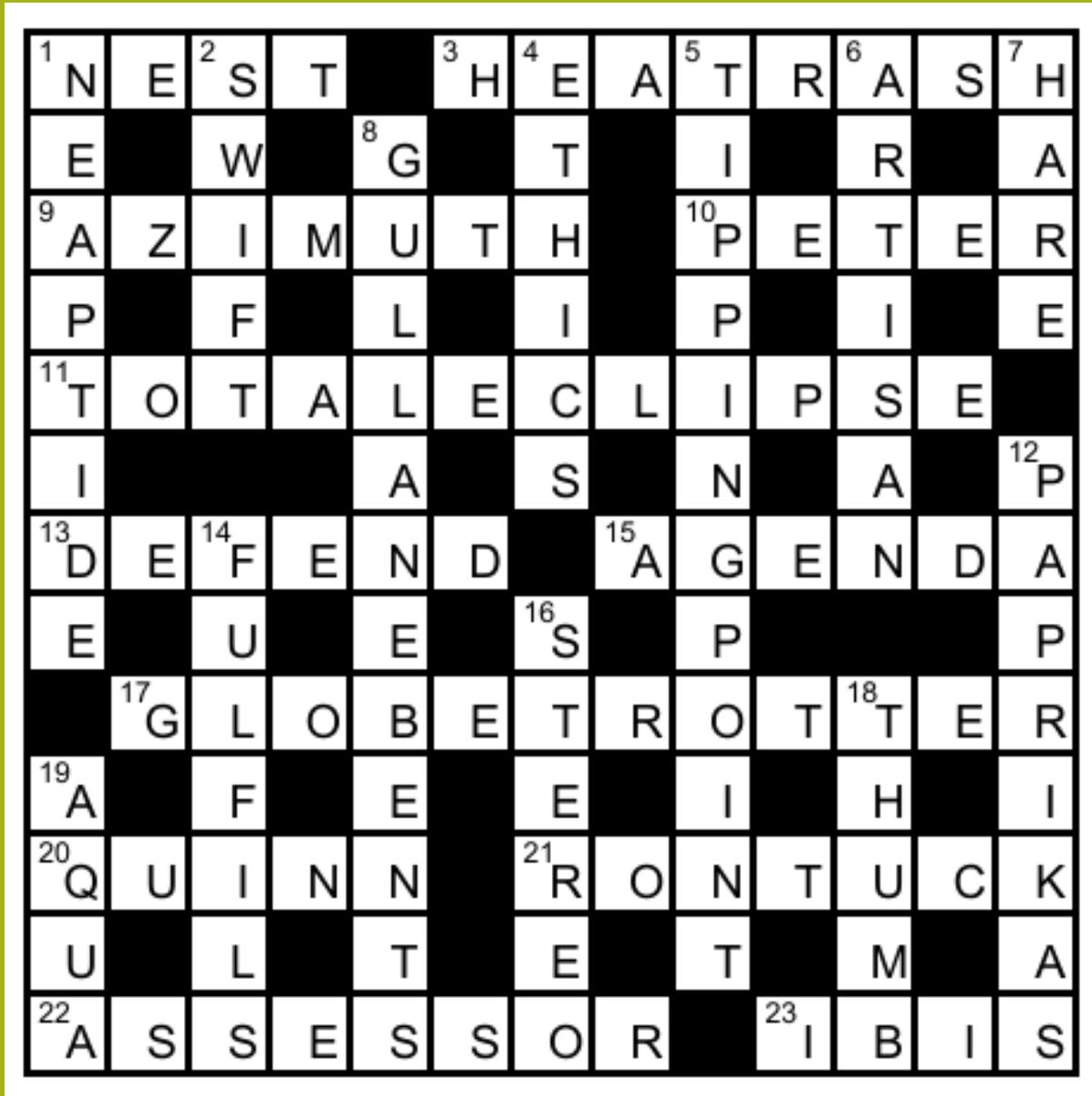
Across

- 1 Where fledglings live in ones territory (4)
- 3 He has a rubbish skin issue (4,4)
- 9 The angle to cut topaz - I add some bismuth (7)
- 10/20 Print Queen? No! - Funding King! (for ELCV) (5,5)
- 11 Top celestial arrangement (5,7)
- 13 Fight back of foreign force is the goal (6)
- 15 Time for non-disclosure agreement list (6)
- 17 World traveller rewrites log - better to start reading (12)
- 20 See 10
- 21 Trustee on a gathering following religious leader (3,4)
- 22 An evaluator for donkeys - so right! (8)
- 23 Possibility of legal action held back flyer (4)

Down

- 1 I need tap turned for water movement (4,4)
- 2 Fast wi-fi in the street, but one that drops out (5)
- 4 Is tech working for moral science? (6)
- 5 Little money donated here? (7,5)
- 6 Worker in the Mart is angry (7)
- 7 Animal found in beach area (4)
- 8 Countryside site's gulls ate a Scottish type of grass (7,5)
- 12 Spices king in Pisa rap composition (8)
- 14 Satisfies nearly full French son (7)
- 16 Audio device possibly obtained from e-store (6)
- 18 Up, its getting approval, although opposable (5)
- 19 A quail loses both its tails - it involves water (4)

CROSSWORD ANSWERS



The crosswords can also be found online:

[Quick clues](#)

[Cryptic clues](#)

FUN FACT



Kittiwakes are one of the few gulls that only come to land to breed. For the rest of the year, they live entirely at sea, spending the winter months out on the North Sea and nearby Atlantic waters before returning each spring to the same nesting sites, sometimes to the very same ledges.

Kittiwakes can drink seawater because special glands above their eyes remove excess salt, which then drains away through their nostrils.

ANSWERS TO 'WHERE IN EAST LOTHIAN'
A Kidlaw B Dirleton C Pencaitland D Drem E Whitekirk

We'd love to hear from you!

Email us at ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk

Or follow us...

 @ELCrangers

 East Lothian Council Countryside Rangers

