



EAST LOTHIAN COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

Annual Report 2015/16





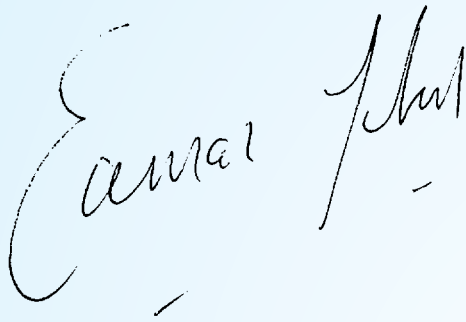


Early bumblebee on bloody cranesbill

FOREWORD

"I am delighted to present Countryside Service's Annual Report for April 2015-March 2016.








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', written in a cursive style.

Eamon John
Manager Sport, Countryside & Leisure

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

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AIM OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE IS TO:

“protect East Lothian’s biodiversity and to promote sustainable management, responsible use, enjoyment and awareness of an accessible countryside.”



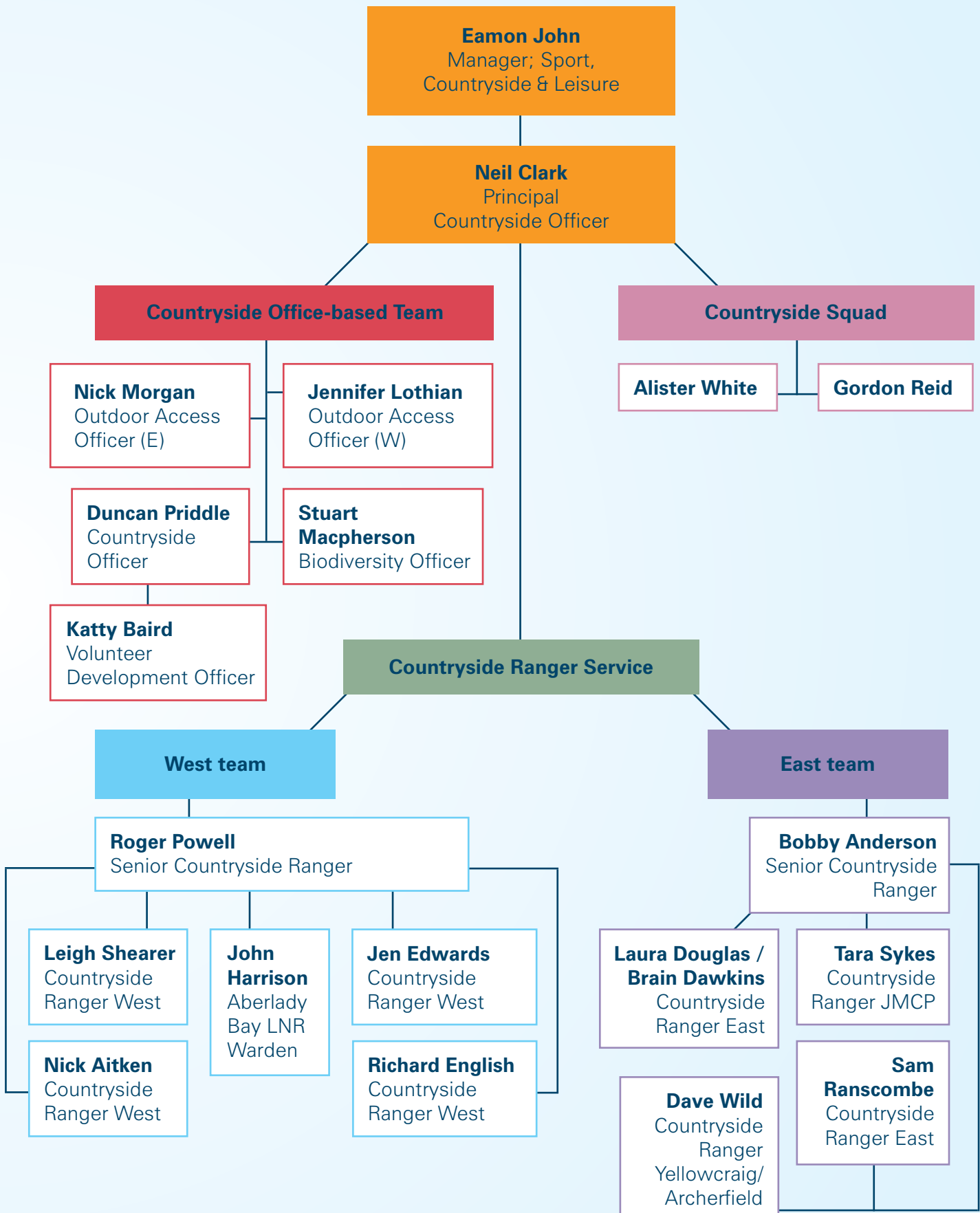
People and nature connecting

This 6th 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 2015 to 31st March 2016 period.

1.2 STAFF

Richard English	Countryside Ranger
Leigh Shearer	Countryside Ranger
Sam Ranscombe	Countryside Ranger
Nick Aitken	Countryside Ranger
Tara Sykes	Countryside Ranger
Dave Wild	Countryside Ranger
Laura Douglas	Countryside Ranger (until August 15)
Brian Dawkins	Countryside Ranger (September 15 – onwards)
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
Katty Baird	Volunteer Development Officer (p-t voluntary post Jan 16 onwards)
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 2015-2016

April was warmer and drier than average (1980-2010, MET Office 2015), however May to July saw on or below average temperatures. May and July were also wetter than average, and in July the number of days that saw greater than 0.2mm of rain was significantly higher. August fared slightly better with sunnier than average conditions and average rainfall.

During November, December and January much warmer temperatures than average were experienced, with two months receiving over 200% of average rainfall. Mild and windy conditions persisted into February and it was noticeable both how few days of ground frost were recorded, together with only one day of snow lying across East Lothian, which quickly melted.



Longniddry strand in winter



Path wardens repairing steps at Elphinstone

2.0

OUTDOOR ACCESS

This section includes work undertaken to fulfil the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, including Core Paths Planning; achieving the objectives of the East Lothian Sustainable Path Network Strategy; and other projects in which the Access Officers were involved.

2.1 CORE PATHS PLANNING

East Lothian's Core Paths Plan was adopted in December 2010. In September 2012 a printed version of the Core Paths Plan made available in a document entitled "*Public Access to East Lothian's Countryside including the Core Paths Plan*". This also contains information about what happens in East Lothian's countryside, what constitutes responsible behaviour, and highlights key paths around the county to encourage people to get out and about. This document was updated and reprinted in 2015 and is available to purchase in East Lothian libraries.

2.2 RESOLVING ACCESS ISSUES

There were 11 separate access issues reported during 2015/16. This up from 9 last year, but shows a general reduction in complaints since the Land Reform Act came into effect. For one of these long-standing issues there were six new complaints, four from the land managers and two from members of the public. Interestingly, this year six of the complaints were about locked gates.

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 or at any events they are involved with. All of the walks leaflets have information about the Code, along with some other publications, such as the Council's Active Choices map and ELC Countryside newsletter *'Mud in Your Eye'*. The Access Officers also promote the Code when talking to groups and at events and have written articles about access rights for various publications.

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.

The Scottish Government has established an annual monitoring system to collect information from all access authorities on their progress, expenditure and use of powers and duties under the Land Reform Act. The data received is compiled into a database for analysis, and to help answer requests for information at a national level.

2.5 PATH PROJECTS

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

During 2015 CSGN and SNH have been working with all of the local authorities along the John Muir Way to produce a management plan and they hope to employ a project co-ordinator and promotions officer.

During 2014 and 2015 SNH commissioned a visitor survey for the John Muir Way and it is claimed that there were up to 300,000 visits to the route, with up to 6,000 people completing the whole route on consecutive days and another 5,000 people completing over several visits.

A considerable amount of work has been started on the John Muir Way between East Linton and Stonelaws. This includes upgrading three sections of grass path (490m) to a whindust surface, repairs and re-whindusting another section of path (500m), building a new route for a section (225m), improving two sections of fencing, installing a gate and

painting the handrails on two bridges and a gate. Total cost of this project is £24,850, which is being undertaken by the landowner.

ELPHINSTONE – ORMISTON PATHS UPGRADING PROJECT. During the 'East Lothian On The Move' public consultation (see below for details) in the Fa'side Area Partnership area, the Elphinstone Cemetery Path (core path 164) was highlighted by the local community for upgrading. The path was upgraded to a more durable 'Ultitrec' surface, 2m wide, and this work was completed in March 2016 and has been well received by local people.

As part of this project, Sustrans Community Links 2015/16 funding was successfully obtained, which also enabled a long section (approximately 4km) of the Pencaitland Railway Walk (NCN196) to be upgraded to a 3m wide 'Ultitrec' surface, from the junction with the Elphinstone Cemetery Path to beyond Ormiston.

The project has been well publicised in the Council's publications and much positive feedback has been received from path users. The path improvements will benefit active and sustainable travel, connecting communities, health and wellbeing.

The total cost of this project was £246,000. The Sustrans Community Links 2015/16 grant totalled £201,000, and £45,000 came from the Council's core paths improvement capital budget.



Elphinstone cemetery path, before and after

ATHELSTANEFORD CORE PATH. The core path heading north out of Athelstaneford towards Drem used to have a stile at one end and a very narrow gap past a gate at the other end. With the permission of the landowner we were able to install a self-closing gate at either end of the route to make it more accessible for all users. Total cost of this project was £2,885.

MONKSMUIR TO PENCRAIG CORE PATH. A section of the old post road between Monksmuir and Pencraig approximately 1.1 kilometres long, which had been very wet and overgrown was upgraded to a 1.5m wide whindust path with a wide grass margins on either side. The cost of the project was £17,913. Since this path was completed it has been adopted by some of the residents of the nearby retirement village who have done drainage work on the path, installed a bench and planted daffodils.

DREM TO GULLANE CORE PATH. As has been reported in previous Annual Reports, despite considerable effort by East Lothian Council and the Local Access Forum, this project has not progressed. Until consensus can be reached between the residents of the communities at either end and the landowner there appears to be no way forward. It has now been suggested that a mediator be appointed to talk to all parties involved to try to find a way forward.

GIFFORD TO GARVALD CORE PATH. For the continuing development of this route it was hoped to fence off the core path from the cattle fields at the Garvald end of the route. The Access Officer worked with the landowner and his agent to apply for SRDP funding through the Improving Public Access scheme. Sadly the application was rejected because vehicles use the route to access the dam at Donnolly. It is hoped to find an alternative way to fund this worthwhile project in 2016/17.

THE JOHN MUIR LINK. SNH provided some funding to make some improvements to the John Muir Link. These included installing handrails at Dunglass, improved surfacing and drainage at Bilsdean and creating a slope to allow grass cutting machinery access between two fields. The total cost of the project was £9,962, with SNH contributing £9,476. We are still exploring options to re-route the northern section of this path where it runs along-side Dunbar East Links golf course.

DUNBAR TO DOON HILL CORE PATH. This project was to level 450 metres of a grass path, which had contained a lot of field stone making it difficult to maintain. The local landowner undertook the work for us and he also put in a new strainer post for a self-closing gate. The total cost of the project was almost £1,440.

2.6 PATH MAINTENANCE AND SIGNAGE



During 2015 signs were replaced on the haddington - longniddry railway walk

For 2015, because we had been warned that Amenity Service personnel would be unable to cut the paths, we relied on the Countryside Squad (see below), outside contractors and volunteers. Herbicide application on the whindust paths was undertaken by a contractor. We have been assured that Amenity Services will be able to undertake the Path Cutting Programme as normal in 2016.

The **Countryside Squad** has proved invaluable in maintaining 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. They were increasingly involved with cutting the vegetation on the paths in 2015.

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 WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER PATH WARDENS. In 2011 Countryside Services launched a Volunteer Path Warden Scheme. This scheme enables local people to adopt their local core paths, regularly inspect them and undertake minor maintenance tasks, depending on their ability.

Currently, 44 volunteers look after the majority of the core path network. Path Wardens report back the tasks they have undertaken, their time spent volunteering and any issues they have come across on their paths. During 2015 a path warden volunteer administrator was taken on to help collate the work of the volunteer wardens.

The Countryside Officer continued to organise monthly team tasks where a group of volunteers get together to tackle larger projects. This is also an opportunity for the Path Wardens to get to know one another and for them to receive training for these tasks.

In 2015 a considerable amount of work was done by the Path Wardens to keep the vegetation on the core paths network cut down. Many of the wardens have received training to use strimmers and other grass cutting equipment.

The path wardens were successful in securing £2,089 through various grant award bodies. The funds contributed towards path maintenance, installation of gates at Abbey Bridge, together with equipment and promotion for the volunteer warden scheme.

The convenor for the path wardens, Peter Coupe, stepped down at the Annual General Meeting and was replaced by Andrew Stevenson. In addition, a further two members joined the committee.

THE TYNE TEAM. Itself a branch of the volunteer path wardens, the Tyne Team continued to meet on a monthly basis to undertake maintenance on the River Tyne Path between Abbey Bridge and Hailes Mill. They installed the kissing gates mentioned above.

OTHER PATH VOLUNTEERS. The Countryside Team are keen to encourage local volunteers to work across East Lothian. Examples of work on paths include British Horse Society and Sustrans volunteers installing the grip strips on the bridges on the Haddington to Longniddry Railway Walk, the residents of Monksmuir retirement village adopting the Monksmuir to Penraig path and East Linton residents painting the white bridge near Preston Mill.



Tyne team path warden at newly installed gate

2.8 COASTAL COMMUNITIES FUND

In a joint bid to the Coastal Communities Fund, East Lothian Council, Volunteer Development East Lothian and The Conservation Volunteers were awarded £280,000 for a two year project starting in May 2013. This included the employment of a project co-ordinator and six apprentices in 2013. For 2014/15 eight apprentices were employed and this project has been extended for a third year with a further eight apprentices being employed for 2015/16. The apprentices undertake a number of tasks on the John Muir Way, which improve the route and increase their skills.

2.9 SUSTRANS COMMUNITY LINKS FUNDING

We are very grateful to Sustrans Community Links 2015/16 for funding totalling £201,000 for the Elphinstone – Ormiston paths upgrading project detailed above.

In addition, ELC's Sustainable Travel Officer successfully obtained Sustrans Community Links 2015/16 funding for three projects this year:

- Phase II of upgrading the pavement to a shared use cycle path leading west out of North Berwick to Dirleton;
- Phase II of upgrading the pavement to a shared use cycle path leading north from Tranent towards Ormiston;
- Upgrading the pavement heading east out of Gullane to a shared use cycle path.

2.10 EAST LOTHIAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

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

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

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

2.11 PLANNING ISSUES AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

The Access Officers continue to work with planners and other colleagues across the Council to ensure that adequate provision of paths and active travel routes are included in any new sizeable development. It is also important to ensure that new developments do not impact on the existing path network.

The Access Officers have secured developer contributions for core paths improvements in the vicinity of new housing sites that have planning consent at North Berwick, East Linton, Haddington and Ormiston. Similarly, the Access Officers have been working with planners to try to minimise the impacts of windfarm developments on the path network. One of the Access Officers was called to give evidence at the Local Inquiry for the Aikengall IIA windfarm extension.

The Access Officers have continued to work with colleagues to ensure that public access is included in the redrafting of the Local Development Plan.

2.12 GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

The Access Officers worked with colleagues across the Council to produce a Green Networks Strategy for East Lothian, which will hopefully be included in the Local Development Plan as supplementary guidance.

The Strategy describes East Lothian's green network assets, and outlines the guiding principles and actions for developing and enhancing these assets, which include access to the countryside and paths to connect communities. It is hoped this will bring wide ranging benefits, including improving health and wellbeing, contributing to reduction in carbon emissions, and improving biodiversity.

2.13 LOCAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY – ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN

A new Local Transport Strategy is currently being developed to coincide with the publication of the Local Development Plan. Feeding into the Transport Strategy will be various action plans and the Access Officers have been working with others in the Council to produce a draft Active Travel Improvement Plan. This will include the existing networks of core paths, national cycle routes and other active travel routes, along with planned, short, medium and long-term links.

One proposal currently being developed by the Access Officers along with Transportation (Active Travel) colleagues is for a main segregated active travel route (Segregated Active Travel Corridor) across East Lothian alongside the A199 from Dunbar via Haddington and Tranent to Musselburgh and on to Edinburgh, with links from this main spinal route in to other settlements and stations. A consultant was appointed in 2015 to undertake a feasibility study for this project.

2.14 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT OFFICERS' GROUP

The Access Officers both attend a regular Sustainable Transport Officers' meeting, which includes Officers from various Council departments. Officers report on work they have been involved with such as planning, transportation, supported bus service, East Lothian Community Rail Partnership, active travel, core paths and outdoor access, climate change mitigation and Area Partnerships. Officers are able to exchange ideas and ensure that their work complements the work of others, with the combined aim of improving sustainable and active travel in East Lothian.

2.15 WORKING WITH AREA PARTNERSHIPS / ACTIVE TRAVEL IMPROVEMENTS

6 Area Partnerships (APs) in East Lothian have been set up to ensure communities have more say in influencing Council priorities in their local area and that these meet local aspirations. Several APs are keen to improve active travel opportunities for their areas.

The Access Officers were part of a working group that successfully applied for £84,863 from *Paths For All's* 'Smarter Choices Smarter Places' 2015/16 funding for two projects:

- **'Big Nature Festival: Get There Greener'** project involved working in partnership with the RSPB to encourage visitors to their Big Nature Festival at Levenhall Links, Musselburgh (May 2015) to use sustainable methods of transport to get there. It is hoped this will be a 'template' for similar events in East Lothian in future
- **'East Lothian On The Move'** involved the Access Officers and other colleagues working closely with the Area Partnerships to undertake mini-conferences in each AP area, looking at what can be done to increase active travel choices and encourage more sustainable travel. These led to 'long lists' of actions for each AP area, which were then prioritised by AP sub-groups to create Action Plans for each Area Partnership area, based on the information gathered from local people. The Access Officers continue to be, heavily involved in this process.

'Smarter Choices Smarter Places' funding was then used to implement active and sustainable travel 'seed projects' in each AP area during 2015/16, including:

- **Fa'side AP** is underway with a system for auditing the core path network in their area. Local schoolchildren and teenagers (through 'Recharge Youth Community Facility' in Tranent) will assist us with auditing surveys on the core paths, which will inform us what signage and other improvement works are needed. They also produced a Core Paths walks leaflet for the Fa'side area
- **Musselburgh AP** undertook a path surface improvement to the John Muir Way on the west side of the River Esk in Musselburgh: the 'missing' 80 metre section of tarmac in the path/cycleway was replaced
- **North Berwick Coastal AP**. Amenity Services has done a lot of work in the North Berwick area. The path from Yellowcraig car park towards the beach has been resurfaced, they have improved the path from Rhodes Park towards the Glen and they have upgraded a short section of the John Muir Way at North Berwick Law
- **Preston Seton Gosford AP** has undertaken improvements along the John Muir Way, including benches and cycle racks
- **Haddington AP** used their funding for cycle racks in various locations in Haddington.

A bid has been submitted for further 'Smarter Choices Smarter Places' funding for East Lothian for 2016/17, which includes Phase 2 of 'East Lothian On The Move' (i.e. implementation of further active travel projects with the Area Partnerships based on their priority lists).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote biodiversity and to produce a report explaining the biodiversity conservation work that they undertake. Work of the Biodiversity Officer in East Lothian Council can be described under 4 headings:

- **Protect what we have** – ensure that the work of others (e.g. developers and farming / forestry operations) does not affect biodiversity in East Lothian
- **Habitat Enhancement** – work in partnership with others to improve the quality and extent of habitats
- **Raise Awareness of Biodiversity** – increase public understanding and appreciation of biodiversity and encourage community action
- **Survey Work and Research** – increase our own understanding of biodiversity within the county, through ecological surveys and research projects.

It should be noted that the wider Countryside Ranger Service also promotes biodiversity, particularly through work on the Council's countryside sites, e.g. Longniddry Bents, Yellowcraig and Traprain Law

3.2 PROTECT WHAT WE HAVE

Construction, farming and forestry operations can have a negative impact on wildlife and policies exist to regulate some of these activities. Over the next few years, planning and development is likely to have a significant impact on the look and feel of some parts of the county. This is particularly true around Musselburgh, Tranent and Cockenzie & Port Seton, where up to 6,000 new homes are proposed.

To manage this level of development, the Council has to produce a Local Development Plan (LDP). This requires the involvement of many different disciplines, including biodiversity, landscape, paths and countryside access and education, to try to ensure that development brings a positive change to the overall community, and not just lots of houses.

A number of new documents needed to be researched and written in 2015, to inform the LDP. These include a Green Network Strategy and Local Biodiversity Site Supplementary Planning Guidance. In addition, the Council can seek a financial contribution from developers in order to fund public infrastructure improvements, including environmental works.



Tree bumblebee, a recent colonist of East Lothian

All this work is about ensuring that Council policies and strategies are effective, so that operations and proposals do not damage wildlife and ideally bring environmental improvements. At the time of writing, the Council had yet to approve the various strategies.

THE GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY combines the aspirations of nature conservation, landscape, paths and countryside access, sustainability and other disciplines to produce an 'environmental' plan for the county.

Scottish Natural Heritage ran a number of workshops within the Council to discuss environmental issues across the county, but focussing on the main settlements. These ideas have been incorporated in the resulting Green Network Strategy. This provides an overview of environmental action that should take place. Discussions for each area also produced a series of specific actions that need to be implemented to help deliver more sustainable communities in the future.



The green (and blue) corridor of the River Tyne offers space for people and wildlife

BIODIVERSITY SITES AND GEODIVERSITY

SITES. Areas of particular importance for migratory birds (including the East Lothian coast) have been designated as a Special Protection Area. The SPA is a nature reserve of European importance. Areas of national importance for wildlife can be designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These sites receive legal protection, as well as protection through planning policies. SPAs and SSSIs, however, are not the only places where interesting wildlife can be found, and these other places also need protection.

The previous LDP (2008) included maps and policies relating to the SPA and SSSIs, but also to Wildlife Sites. These were locally-designated areas that had been identified by the Scottish Wildlife Trust as having good biodiversity value.

Since then, ideas on designated sites have developed to include wildlife networks. This recognises that wildlife cannot be restricted to particular sites, but needs to be able to migrate across the county and the country according to the needs of different species. In the same way that towns are linked by a network of roads, wildlife sites need to be linked by a network of wildlife corridors. This is particularly important to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

Scottish Government guidance recommended that local authorities develop a network of 'Local Biodiversity Sites'. The guidance also recognised the value of geology, partly for its own intrinsic value, and partly because geology is the foundation that defines habitats and supports biodiversity. Consequently, the LDP needed to produce its own local guidance and policies on geodiversity and biodiversity.

Geology is a specialist subject, and the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh was commissioned to survey and produce reports on some of the main geodiversity sites in

East Lothian. Although this is not a complete record, it does designate these areas and provides a scientific statement of why they are important and how to protect them.

A network of Local Biodiversity Sites was identified using a combination of aerial photographs, historic and more recent habitat surveys, and records of notable species. Supplementary Planning Guidance was produced to explain the process of identifying the network and to provide maps of the network itself.

PLANNING OBLIGATIONS. A series of Green Network related projects that could be part-funded by local developers was identified for each of the principal development areas. These projects mainly concerned path creation and improvement, but also included improvement of countryside sites (notably Levenhall Links). These projects were costed, evidence was provided to support each case, and the overall package was submitted to the LDP as part of the wider Planning Obligations strategy.

POGBIE WIND FARM: A CASE STUDY. Planning permission was granted in 2008 for a 6-turbine wind farm at Pogbie, on the edge of Dun Law wind farm. Permission has now been sought to expand this wind farm by an additional 6 turbines.

This type of development requires an Environmental Impact Assessment. The report for Pogbie recognised that development would cause ecological disturbance such as damage to habitats, impacts on protected species and impacts on the landscape. A Habitat Management Plan was required to mitigate against these impacts. This should ensure that development brings environmental improvements, not just turbines.

Production of the Habitat Management Plan progressed steadily through 2015 and has now been approved by the Council. When implemented, the plan should bring the following environmental benefits:

- The felling of about 10 ha of non-native commercial forestry plantation, to be replaced by about 12 ha of native broadleaved woodland
- Extension of an existing conservation grazing regime, to cover a field that is currently improved pasture
- The planting of new hedgerows along field boundaries
- Construction of a path, essentially to service the wind farm, but in an area that is walked by the local public.

This is a good example of developer, consultant and Council working together to produce a good quality plan that brings wider public and environmental benefits. Of course, the plan now needs to be implemented, but the good working relationship with the developer should lead to its delivery.



Turbine similar to those proposed for Pogbie

BLINDWELLS BEE ORCHID: A CASE STUDY. Blindwells open cast quarry near Tranent was restored to an agricultural condition in the late 1990s. Following restoration, areas of lime-rich rock and spoil close to the surface were ideal for supporting a colony of bee orchid. This plant is more common in England and there are only three known locations of the species in Scotland.

Blindwells is identified as a potential site of a new town in the LDP. Due to the rarity of the plant in Scotland, a plan was delivered to move the species to a new location within Blindwells. This type of operation is known as translocation.

Early in 2016, heavy machinery was used to dig up turfs and move them to their new location. This is quite a disruptive process, but the ‘digger team’ was experienced and understood the operational requirements. A team of volunteers has since helped to secure the turfs, by filling gaps between them. Several bee orchid leaves have been observed since translocation took place. Subsequent monitoring in the years ahead will take place to measure the success of the project.

This new bee orchid location will be maintained as an orchid nature reserve within any plan for a Blindwells new town and will be landscaped and managed accordingly.

FORESTRY APPLICATIONS for thinning and felling are reviewed for their biodiversity impact. Thinning operations generally do not have a significant impact on biodiversity, but felling and re-stocking can significantly change the habitat. The Forestry Standard ensures that a basic level of environmental protection and enhancement is brought through forestry operations. Biodiversity comment reflect Comments generally ensure that felling and re-stocking operations bring biodiversity gain.

A number of forestry operations in 2015 have brought environmental improvements, these plans having been reviewed in the past. Begbie Wood near Bolton is an example of benefits that forestry operations can bring. A commercial forestry plantation had previously been planted on either side of a narrow burn. This type of forestry casts a dense shade that prevents other plants from growing in the wood, and causes acidification and siltation of the burn through the shedding of needles. The conifers were harvested and replaced by native broad-leaved species to create more appropriate and ecologically beneficial woodland adjacent to the burn.

FARMING OPERATIONS. Farmers can apply funds through the Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme to create habitats around the farm. Farmers do not need to consult with the local authority over their applications, although letters of support can be provided for good schemes.



Bee orchid (above) and earth moving equipment (below) translocating bee orchid seed beds to new location





3.3 HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

Much of the Council's work is delivered through a process known as the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). The East Lothian SOA has 10 principal objectives, including Objective 8: a healthy, connected natural environment that is protected and enhanced.

Each objective is monitored by a set of indicators. Historically it has been difficult to identify simple indicators for Objective 8 because of the complexity and diversity of the natural world. A new indicator is now being developed that incorporates the management of the Council's countryside sites and ecological connectivity between these sites and the wider countryside. The indicator is still under development. When operational, however, it should influence management of countryside sites and could identify opportunities for habitat creation in the wider countryside.

3.4 RAISE AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY

A biodiversity article is a feature of every edition of *East Lothian Life*, and has been since 2010.

Each year about 10 schools request a talk from the Biodiversity Officer. These talks often fit into projects that a class or school has been developing. A series of talks on biodiversity, food webs, nature reserves and evolution can be arranged by any school at any time. This is in addition to school visits carried out by the Countryside Ranger Service.



Yellowcraig beach

The Big Nature Festival (see section 4.2) was a new opportunity in East Lothian to promote the work of the Countryside Ranger Service and biodiversity in different types of landscape. Specifically, an urban biodiversity display was created for the festival, which worked alongside similar displays for farmland, coastal, woodland, wetland and upland landscapes.

3.5 SURVEY WORK AND RESEARCH

Survey work is a regular request of applicants when planning proposals are submitted.

Over the last two or three years a close association has been developed between the Countryside Service and Edinburgh University and Napier University. In the last year, four MSc research projects were carried out on the following topics:

- GIS modelling of Green Networks in the Musselburgh Area
- Analysis of Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data from the Tynninghame Estuary
- Investigation of water quality Issues at Seafield Pond, West Barns
- Analysis of the formation of Spike Island, John Muir Country Park, using satellite imagery and digital mapping technology.

CONCLUSION

It was a very busy year, dominated by the need to inform the LDP process. With the exception of the Blindwells case study, however, all of the work described above has theoretical benefits only until plans are translated into actual habitat improvements. Having produced various strategies and policy-related documents attention must now focus on delivering meaningful benefits for biodiversity.



Countryside volunteers working at BNF

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

4.1 COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER INPUT. Volunteers continued to provide a fundamental role in the progression of countryside projects and in the maintenance of site infrastructure.

The total of **recorded** volunteer time across all countryside projects came to over 8,200 hours, i.e. equivalent to over 5 full-time posts. Additionally, many hours of unrecorded effort was given by people clearing litter from countryside areas etc. on an ad-hoc basis. Volunteers gave their time and efforts principally to the following areas of work;

- Site-based 'Friends of' groups at Aberlady, Levenhall, Yellowcraig, North Berwick and Dunbar areas; work being a combination of practical work and some survey duties
- Biological monitoring of target flora and fauna, including eider colony monitoring, bumblebee surveying and plant monitoring



Aberlady Bay volunteers off to work



- Animal welfare checks of (conservation) grazing sheep at Aberlady and Barns Ness, and of Exmoor ponies at North Berwick and Traprain Laws
- Path wardens (see commentary in section 2.7)
- Specific local community interest groups – Dunbar Shore & Neighbourhood Group; Cache in, Trash Out (Scottish Geocachers)

The number of people expressing an interest in volunteering continued to build. The Countryside Officer co-ordinated volunteers and their deployment. In January 2016 an existing volunteer – Katty Baird – offered to take on a new (unpaid, part-time) role of Volunteer Development Officer (VDO). The aims of the post were split between providing some support for the Countryside Officer in the face of the ever-increasing body of conservation volunteers, together with providing a more co-ordinated and structured level of developmental training for the volunteers themselves.

Though still in the early stages, the VDO post has already greatly enhanced the communication between volunteers and the Countryside team, together with amongst the volunteers themselves. A monthly newsletter 'Best Boot Forward' IMAGE 4.1.3 is now a feature in all volunteers' in-trays, which highlights tasks completed and planned. In addition the VDO has arranged for a series of training workshops for the year which are open for volunteers to join up to. A number of future developments are proposed which will enhance the volunteering experience further, key to this being securing funding in order to be able to resource the initiatives and the time required to co-ordinate the programme.

Best boot forward
 Newsletter for East Lothian Council Conservation Volunteers
 April 2016

Hooray! Spring is here: let's hope it stays. With this comes the start of some of our wildlife surveys – bumble bees, butterflies and eiders to name a few. If you are interested in taking on this kind of thing new faces are always welcome so please get in touch. This month also sees the start of some of the training/fun sessions we are arranging for volunteers. For those of you that are attending these, I hope they are worthwhile. If you haven't got round to signing up, there are still places on tools & strimmers, first aid and the dawn chorus – go to the doodle poll (links below) to participate.

Please send in ideas or content for the next 'Best boot forward' to kbaird@e1sthianmail.net
 Apologies for any omissions, inaccuracies and typos.

TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS FOR VOLUNTEERS
 There are still a few places on some of the Volunteer training/workshop sessions. If you fancy coming along, please sign up using the doodle poll links. (And please leave an email address and name so I can identify and contact you!)

STRIMMERS & TOOLS, Yellowcraig 6th April 9.30am. At the moment a morning session learning about safe use and maintenance of strimmers and other tools. If there more participants we will run an afternoon session as well. <http://doodle.com/so6U312best@ians2r>

FIRST AID, Musselburgh 29th April 9.30-3pm. Delivered by Outdoor Learning in Musselburgh, a beginner course focussing on outdoor scenarios. <http://doodle.com/so6U312best@ians2r>

DAWN CHORUS, 3rd May 8am – 8am Antfield or Gosford. Experience the spring time dawn chorus and join us on a gentle stroll learning how to identify birds from their songs <http://doodle.com/so6U312best@ians2r>

ELC Conservation Volunteer tasks planned for April:
 New faces always welcome! If you would like to join in with a group for the first time, please get in touch with the relevant ranger for details.

Aberlady – Weds 6 th and Sun 17 th April	John; jhartson@eastlothian.gov.uk
Yellowcraig – Thurs 7 th April	Dave; david@eastlothian.gov.uk
Path Wardens team task – Thurs 21 st April	Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk
North Berwick – Tues 26 th April	Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk
Levenhall – Fri 29 th April	Nick; nallen1@eastlothian.gov.uk
John Muir CP – Sat 9 th and Weds 27 th April	Tara/Brian; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk

Playing a new version of Fosh Slacks at Yellowcraig...

CONSERVATION GRAZING, MONITORING THEREOF.

Volunteers continued to monitor the impacts of the introduction of grazing animals at each of the 4 sites where animals are employed. Surveys took the form of botanical recording and of bumblebee monitoring. In this, the third year of surveying, an increased level of confidence and accuracy was reached amongst the recorders, with training again provided by members of the Countryside team.

ANIMAL WELFARE. Additional volunteers provided daily checks on the grazing sheep and Exmoor ponies. It is pleasing to report that there were no serious issues during the year. The sheep at both sites were reported to have escaped from their grounds – on a number of occasions at Barns Ness – but thankfully no adverse consequences were encountered. The

Exmoor ponies at both Traprain and North Berwick Laws continued to graze both sites with only minor issues of localised erosion being reported, these outweighed by the overwhelming benefit that their grazing pressure has brought onto both, hitherto, under-grazed locations.

'VOLLY JOLLY'. The annual get-together to thank volunteers for their collective efforts was well attended this year, with some 37 volunteers attending. Members of the Countryside team provided a series of workshops on a variety of conservation issues.

VOLUNTEER AWARD. March 6th 2016 saw countryside volunteer Neil Mitchell recognised at the STRIVE's 'Volunteer of the Year' awards. Neil received the 'Highly Commended' award in the education and environment category for the diverse and long-standing commitment he has given to the Countryside team.



4.2 INTERPRETATION

BIG NATURE FESTIVAL. In conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, East Lothian Council Countryside co-ordinated the planning and delivery of the Scottish Bird Fair. Renamed the Big Nature Festival, the event took place for the first time in East Lothian, on 23rd-24th May.

The RSPB had been looking for a suitable venue to replace a previous venue which was no longer suitable. In discussions with Countryside, it was agreed that Levenhall Links, Musselburgh would be best suited for such an event.

The theme of the event was two-fold – to provide a focus for bird-watchers to learn more about specifics of birds and their biology, and, secondly, to offer an event that interpreted the wider natural environment for family audiences. In order to meet these aims a variety of exhibits, events, talks and walks were put on over the weekend with over 100 exhibitors attending.



Bill Oddie at big nature festival



BNF Woodland quiz box

The Countryside team designed and built their own marquee in which aspects of East Lothian's natural environment were interpreted. The range of exhibits proved incredibly popular and the marquee was soon full of people. Feedback received from members of the public was extremely positive. ELC Conservation Volunteers helped enormously in the creation of the exhibits and in explaining aspects of them to the public.

Over the 2 days an estimated 6,000 people came along to the Big Nature Festival. The weather conditions – clear with light winds – no doubt helping visitor numbers. Colleagues from other ELC departments helped greatly in marketing of the event, site preparation, providing transport services, together with promoting a 'getting there greener' campaign.

The level of impact upon the site was acceptable given the positive experience that the event managed to give to so many people. Ground preparation and repair work was, nonetheless, required.

Given the success of the Big Nature Festival ELC have agreed to host the event at Levenhall again in 2016.

COUNTRYSIDE NEWSLETTER – 'MUD IN YOUR EYE'. This publication continued to be produced on a regular basis, with the 30th edition being produced in February 2016.

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

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

SOCIAL MEDIA   **@ELCRANGERS**

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

4.3 NON-NATIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

SEA BUCKTHORN. The programme of sea buckthorn control entered its 9th year. It was pleasing to note that both the level of herbicide control required and the amount of time required delivering the control programme, having now both declined as the amount of the plant decreases across the county. No mechanical removal of mature plants was undertaken this year.

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

TWO-SPINED ACAENA AND PIRRI-PIRRI BURR. Two-spined acaena (*Acaena ovalifolia*) and pirri-pirri burr (*Acanea novae-zelandiae*) are two other non-native introduced species to East Lothian that share a similar preference for coastal dune grasslands.

Within East Lothian two-spined acaena occurs at Aberlady Bay and Gullane Bents with 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 longer-term to eradicate.

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

4.4 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 path maintenance.

4.5 SITE MANAGEMENT PLANS / STATEMENTS

Site management plans are produced for all principal Countryside sites, and are updated on a 5 year rotating programme. 2015-16 saw final drafts being produced for Barns Ness, Gullane Bents and North Berwick Law.

4.6 COASTAL CAR PARK CHARGING

June 2015 saw the commencement of car park charging at most coastal countryside locations. In preparation for, and as a consequence of the introduction of a car park fee, infrastructure improvements took place at these locations, including the creation of hard-standing parking areas, road access upgrading and the installation of new site information panels.

4.7 BUDGET SUMMARY

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



Gull parking area

Item	Cost	Notes
Countryside	£734,656 (£734,500)	£583,324 = employee costs (£529,900)
Income	£69,167 (£88,255)	(£10,000 Scottish Power, £49,361 Caledonian Heritable Lt and Hamilton & Kinneil Estates, others; SRDP)
Net expenditure	£665,489 (£646,248)	

EAST LoTHIAN COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE

*Countryside ranger leading
bee orchid monitoring*



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

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

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

5.4 ADVISING ON COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS ISSUES

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

The path network was monitored and minor repairs completed.

CASE STUDY 1, EAST LOTHIAN ON THE MOVE

Each of the 6 East Lothian Area Partnerships has an 'On the Move' sub group – looking at Active travel within each ward. ELCRS were involved in taking forward the Fa'side list of actions generated from public consultations.

This included the creation of a Core Path Audit, to be delivered in partnership with *Recharge*, local volunteers and schools. As part of this process, funding was allocated for initial set up. For example, hand tools and materials were purchased to enable volunteers to undertake practical path improvement tasks. In addition, cameras were bought to record access issues and pedometers to encourage volunteers' active choices. The audit itself will happen in the autumn of 2016 and will provide the basis for prioritising and tackling many of the other action points generated as a result of the consultations.

ELCRS also oversaw the creation of a Core Path leaflet for the Ward – another item identified in the consultations. This promotes the 56km network of paths, places of interest and wildlife to spot along the way. Importantly, it also includes smaller maps to help people navigate to the start / ends of the paths from the towns and villages. This leaflet has been printed and is also available online.



Elphinstone area map

CASE STUDY 2, WOW! – ABERLADY PRIMARY SCHOOL'S 'WOOD OF WONDER'

During a week in mid-March, primary 4 and 5 students, staff and parents at Aberlady Primary School joined forces with Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve volunteers to do something special for the wildlife in their school grounds. This week was the culmination of several weeks of background research and planning. The results were fantastic for both the wildlife area and for all the people involved.

We visited the area a few weeks earlier to explore the different plants and minibeasts we could find there already so we knew what we were dealing with. We found a nice mix of 30-year old trees (as it turns out, planted by East Lothian's, and Scotland's, first ever Ranger, Archie Mathieson), a few wee shrubs, some fairly boring 'playing field' grass and not much else. The children were tasked with coming up with ideas for the area as well as a new name. The P5s mapped the area and all the children researched the plants we could put in and their benefits to wildlife.

By the end of the work we had created: a woodland trail with bulbs planted along it; a bog garden; a wildflower meadow; an outdoor classroom; hazel fencing; and a hedgerow. It was important that the P4s and P5s were involved in all aspects for the WOW project. Having planted bulbs in the woodland, plants in the bog garden and sown seeds in the wildflower meadow, it is hoped that this gives a degree of ownership of the place and a self-engendered desire to protect it for the future.

The project culminated in a launch when the children put on an amazing two days' of drama, presentations and guided tours of the Wood Of Wonder for parents and other pupils.

John Harrison, Nature Reserve Warden

5.5 PROVIDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

EDUCATIONAL GROUPS. The Countryside Ranger Service worked with over 200 school classes, reaching in total 4,366 pupils. This total included work with 16 Additional Support Needs groups with 135 children. Subjects delivered included topics as diverse as Seashore Studies, The Night Sky, Team Building Skills, Woodlands and Rivers.



The Aberlady wood of wonder

TALKS. 20 (13) talks were given to various local groups and societies on wildlife related topics.

HIKES / EVENTS. A series of 34 guided hikes / summer events were delivered in order to promote a greater understanding of countryside issues and to increase people's confidence in accessing the wider countryside. The number of people attending was 529 of whom 250 were children.

Furthermore, the Countryside Ranger Service provided a fundamental and extensive role in preparation and delivery bulk of East Lothian Countryside marquee at the Big Nature Festival (see section 4.2).



Guided hike on a windy day

CASE STUDY 3, COUNTRYSIDE INSIDE

We took the countryside 'inside' this year to a number of elderly groups at the Day Care Centre and Community Centre in North Berwick. We gave illustrated talks about wildlife and local countryside places including North Berwick Law, Bass Rock and Cockenzie Power Station (before and after demolition) which generated discussion and a sharing of stories about eating rabbits during wartime and playing on the beach as children.



Bringing nature indoors at a North Berwick car home

A loan of stuffed animals from Museum Services provided opportunities to see a fox, a badger and a barn owl close up and share our experiences of seeing these in the wild. We also did a quiz to guess East Lothian landmarks such as the Garleton hills and Fisherrow harbour and we had to name a number of different natural objects such as acorns and sycamore leaves.

The tactile visual objects and images were fun and stimulated forgotten memories for all. A member of the group suffering severe dementia clearly recalled helping as a steward at the top of North Berwick Law during the annual running race. One overheard comment is perhaps a challenge to us all - 'I realise I do not take time to enjoy these things that are all around me. I will now.'

Sam Ranscombe, Countryside Range

OTHER GROUPS AND EVENTS. In addition, 66 other groups reaching 983 individuals from all age groups ranging from Beavers to University of the Third Age received presentations from the Countryside Ranger Service. Topics ranged from specific themes such as bat walks and goose watching, to general guided walks.

TRAINING. The Countryside Ranger Service delivered 7 training events on subjects including bumblebees, eider monitoring and tool maintenance. Rangers also attended in total 14 training events for their own / the team's professional development, topics including mental health first aid and wildlife survey techniques.



Junior rangers river surveying

JUNIOR RANGER SERVICE. The Junior Rangers delivered 394 volunteer hours this year. They have continued to discover and explore different natural spaces across East Lothian as well as working to help conserve the wildlife they found.

Activities ranged from checking bat boxes and learning about the magical world of fungi to doing mortar repair work at Yellowcraig and completing a 1st aid course. These events helped them achieve they Discovery level John Muir Award. They also participated in the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association launch of the national Junior Ranger Scheme at Holyrood.

5.6 WILDLIFE MONITORING / CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

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



Clustered bellflowers

CASE STUDY 4, GREENER GREENWAYS SUSTRANS PARTNERSHIP

The Countryside Ranger Service has been working in partnership on the Railway Walks with Sustrans on their Greener Greenways project. The scheme encourages volunteers to work to enhance the habitats along the National Cycle routes throughout Scotland. Working with the Sustrans Ecologist and Volunteer Co-ordinator, the Countryside Rangers have developed a programme of habitat management days, as well as supporting the volunteers when they are working solo. Work days also gave the opportunity for East Lothian Path Wardens and Conservation Volunteers to join forces with the Sustrans volunteers to complete work. Examples of projects that have been initiated this year have included a wetland enhancement day at Laverocklaw pond near Cottyburn on the Haddington-Longniddry Railway Walk and removal of invasive snowberry at Ormiston Station on the Pencaitland Railway Walk.



Pond clearance



Volunteers clearing snowberry

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



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

6.1 ABERLADY BAY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

The Reserve covers an area of 582 hectares and represents the most extensive complex of sand dune, saltmarsh and mudflats in southeast Scotland. It also contains a wide range of associated habitats, particularly calcareous grassland and freshwater marsh and supports a large variety of plant species with many Scottish and local rarities.

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

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



Aberlady Bay at dusk

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

RESERVE MANAGEMENT

- Sheep grazing (this season between early October and mid February) over a 20-hectare plot continued for a 9th year
- Sea buckthorn clearance continued. No removal by heavy machinery or any herbicide spraying was carried out
- 2 days were spent clearing reedmace from the Wader Scrape in August
- Giant hogweed and two-spined acacia (previously recorded as pirri-pirri bur) were both removed
- Vegetation was cleared away from the South Pool to retain its last remaining area of open water.

WILDLIFE MONITORING

- One species – sanderling- was recorded at its highest level since records began and now occurs in nationally significant numbers
- Peak counts of mallard, teal and widgeon were, for a second year running, all below average
- Internationally significant numbers of pink-footed geese peaked at 20,224 on 13th October 2014
- The five-year mean figures for six species of bird were nationally significant, these were: red-necked grebe; Slavonian grebe; eider; velvet scoter; sanderling and bar-tailed godwit

- Counts of both common and velvet scoters were well above average
- Golden plover peaked at over 2,500 birds in the autumn while lapwing numbered over 1,200
- After a year's absence, it was pleasing to see purple sandpipers wintering at the site again
- It was a very poor year for breeding wading birds at the Reserve with just two pairs of lapwing (both failing to raise young) and two pairs of redshanks rearing at broods of at least three and two
- Vegetation monitoring was carried out in the Grazing Area and, by volunteers, over a larger area proposed for grazing expansion
- Monitoring was carried out of hairy violet, frog orchid, moonwort, Scot's lovage and purple milk-vetch
- In its 9th year, the butterfly transect recorded the second lowest total of 1,059 butterflies since it began
- The Wildfowling Panel met in late July to receive a report on the 2014-15 season and decide on permit issue for the 2015-16 season.

PEOPLE

- Volunteers carried out 2,774 hours of work on a range of tasks including sea buckthorn removal, beach cleans, sheep lookering, and biological monitoring
- For a 4th year running, no Assistant Warden was employed in 2015 which had an impact on work at the site
- The Reserve Advisory Group met twice during the year in March and September (which included a tour of the site).

6.2 JOHN MUIR COUNTRY PARK

INTRODUCTION

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



Salt marsh pools, John Muir Country Park

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

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

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

SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

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

6.3 JOINT LAWS

INTRODUCTION

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

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



Looking north to Traprain Law and North Berwick Law

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

Both sites contain archaeological evidence indicating extensive periods of human occupation. The large hill fort on Traprain Law is one of the best known prehistoric monuments in Scotland and, as such, has been notified as a Scheduled Ancient Monument by Historic Scotland under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The hill has been the subject of a number of excavations over the years and has revealed traces of use from the Neolithic period 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.

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

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

SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

TRAPRAIN LAW

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

- Badgers continue to be active
- Ragwort removal by Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV) on 2 occasions and gorse removal on 1 occasion
- There were regular uplifts of pulled ragwort, pulled by volunteer Liz Mercer
- A group of volunteers cut gorse regrowth on northern flank on 3 occasions
- Fixed point photograph continued – summit grazing and pony damage to paths and pond
- Concerns regarding the horse damage through trampling of the summit pond, and main rampart. Options to address this problem at summit pond being explored
- Traprain Law race – 72 runners took part on 3 June 2015.

NORTH BERWICK LAW

- 7 ponies continue to graze the site
- Volunteers undertook grassland fixed quadrat surveys and bumblebee transect surveys
- Various contractors worked on site to manage gorse, repair and install fences and gates and improve the John Muir Way path surface.
- Monitoring of maiden pink (*Dianthus deltoides*), meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) and purple milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*) continued
- Ragwort removed by North Berwick Conservation Volunteers, Lothian Conservation Volunteers, TCV Coastal Communities and Scottish Seabird Wildlife Club this year.
- North Berwick Law race – 236 runners took part on 5 August 2015
- Dissertation by BSc (Hons) Geography student on the impact of grazing
- Fixed point photography established to monitor changes to paths and sensitive areas

6.4 LEVENHALL LINKS

INTRODUCTION

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

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

Levenhall Links is jointly owned with Scottish Power. The post of Countryside Ranger is co-funded by Scottish Power. 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.

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’**.



Levenhall Links

SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR:

- 42 Ranger led activities over the year
- 1098.5 volunteer hours on site and the adjacent shore
- 657 students benefited from Ranger input
- The Big Nature Festival is held at Levenhall Over May 23-24th with over 6000 visitors over the 2 days
- Biological recording undertaken by *Blue Leaf Nature* identified 5 new invertebrate species apparently new for Scotland and a further 84 that were 1st records for Scotland.

6.5 YELLOWCRAIG/ARCHERFIELD ADVISORY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

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



Beach view, Yellowcraig

Managed since 1944 by East Lothian Council (ELC)

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

- Car park charging commenced
- Work to control pirri pirri and sea buckthorn continued
- Resurfacing of a section of the main path to beach was completed
- Scrub removal within the dunes continued by volunteer and ELC, with larger scale work commencing to clear self-seeded trees near the agglomerate rocks
- Seaside Award was achieved for the 22nd year
- 16 school groups were led by the Countryside Ranger service
- 9 Countryside Ranger events and walks were conducted
- The Friends of Yellowcraig volunteer group continued to expand in numbers with a total of 532 hours of labour being conducted on site.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Individual Site Advisory Group Annual reports links:

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



Cover images:

Front

1. Sunset, Merry Hatton; 2. Volunteer litter pick, Whitecraig; 3. Rabbit; 4. Preparing a display at the Big Nature Festival; 5. Whitethroat amid wheat; 6. Weasels

Rear

7. Cutting back trees, Haddington-Longniddry Railway walk; 8. Garden Tiger moth; 9. Sunset over Forth; 10. St Baldred's Cradle; 11. Path wardens prepare for work

