



NEWSLETTER No 74 Winter 2019/20

Practical Tasks - Five Days a Week

The first 6 months of this financial year have proved to be extraordinarily busy for the Trust as we delivered **146 volunteer tasks, which now amounts to 5 per week!** Just 3 years ago we were delighted to announce that we had conducted 129 tasks in the year and now we do more than this in just 6 months.

There are a number of reasons for this rise:

- ♦ The Community and Wildlife Project – having a fully funded second member of staff delivering tasks has made all the difference
- ♦ Hit Squad – a hardy crew 15 or so volunteers turn out rain, hail or shine every week
- ♦ Invasive Non-Native Species work – The Giant Hogweed Project and Balsam Blitz work amounts to over 1150 volunteers' hours, roughly a quarter of all hours spent on tackling this issue.

We have also seen a big rise in local businesses giving back to their community and the environment and so far we have had 22 corporate groups join us for tasks, in most cases supporting us financially as well as with volunteer power. Ranging from small groups, given time off work to join in with Hit Squad tasks to teams of 50 from Skyscanner giving Coalie Park a total makeover (pictured below). In all we have seen a total of 224 people from 18 business giving 850 hours.

There seems to be no end of projects and a steady stream of volunteers to help us meet the challenges of managing an urban watercourse. Meaning that we have to tackle day-to-day issues of litter and access while balancing the need to manage habitats, control erosion and monitor species.

Thank you to all our volunteers

Skyscanner Team at Coalie Park



Footsteps and Famous Five Fundraising Fun

This year's Fundraising events have been a great success from our best ever Plant Sale in May, followed in June by our 'There and Back Again' Sponsored Walk and in September with a Famous Five themed treasure hunt. In all we have raised £4750.

The unique 'There and Back Again' walk saw 23 walkers, 1 cyclist and 1 dog complete either an 11, 15 or 26 mile challenge along the Walkway. The day was perfect and everyone completed their challenge. Mind you Trust Manager Helen nearly did not make the last two miles of her 26 miles and was last to cross the finishing line, half an hour after her 12 year old daughter !

Our Family Fun days and Treasure Hunts always bring out the best in our staff and volunteers. This year's Famous Five event was no exception. 30 families joined us for the afternoon to follow a trail of activities at the Centre and through the Dells.

Uncle Quentin's Laboratory had been ransacked and robbers had made off with his secret formula. Grown-up Ann, Dick, Julian, George and Timmy were hot on the trail but we needed families to help track down the robbers and unravel the clues to discover what secret had been stolen!! Spoiler - Ginger Beer is the secret to eternal youth! Such 'jolly japes'.



Photos by Alistair Baird

River News Round Up

The Dean Valley Landslide

This issue is still causing a problem for walkers. Here is the latest statement from City of Edinburgh Councils Natural Heritage Team :

The Council ("CEC") has raised legal proceedings against a number of parties in respect of the landslide at the Dean Path. Before steps can be taken to reopen the path, the causes of the slippage require to be identified and measures to prevent further slippage implemented. Public safety and future amenity of the area remain paramount. Technical investigations are progressing well and CEC is in close communication with all relevant parties to identify a suitable solution. Once a practical solution is identified it will require agreement between CEC and the neighbouring owner(s)

Update:

The council has authorised the use of funds to jointly meet the cost of specialist engineers to design and provide costings for the retaining works.

The case has been sisted until 30th October 2019 for discussions.

2020-2030 Water of Leith Management Plan

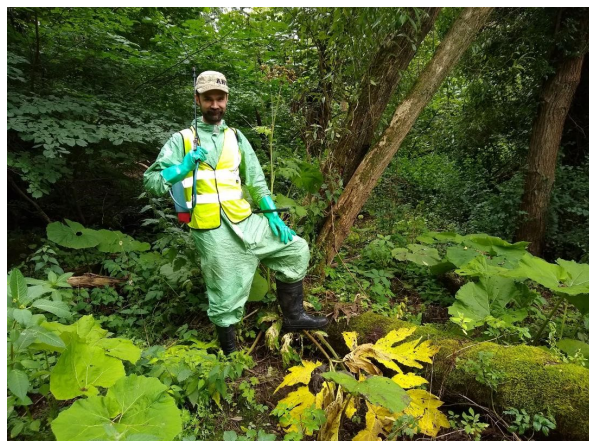
In November we will begin the production of a new management plan for the river. This will bring together many partners and stakeholders to agree a series of actions to improve the river for all to enjoy. We are grateful to City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forth Ports, SEPA and Miller Homes for their support with this project. If you would like to be consulted or have particular issues to raise please email admin@waterofleith.org.uk

Gorgie Weir Micro Hydro Scheme

We have been watching the development of the project to use the Water of Leith power at the newly re-opened Saughton Park and recently it took a big leap forward as the Archimedes screw type turbine arrived from Holland. At 10m long and some 10 tonnes manoeuvring into place was no mean feat. When up and running it should produce around 39Kw of electricity for the cafe, lighting and glasshouses.

Hogweed Hunter

This Summer, with funding from Baillie Gifford our work to control Giant Hogweed took a leap forward as we were able to employ Robert Engstrom for 20 days as our official Hogweed Hunter. This is his story :



I started volunteering with the Trust early in 2016 and through Charlotte, I got to know more about the Trust's work on invasive plant management. She expressed concern about using herbicide near the watercourse as she knew it was toxic for aquatic organisms and wanted to investigate alternatives, particularly for treating giant hogweed.

By the time she had been spraying giant hogweed with herbicide for a few years without noticing any significant reduction. Furthermore, Edinburgh Council's Parks and Greenspaces Maintenance Team who deal with invasive plants on the river downstream of the Visitor Centre, had recently started looking into ways

of reducing their herbicide use. Hearing this, and being an environmental student with Edinburgh Napier University at the time, I suggested we make a proper scientific research project of it and managed to get my lecturers on board: Jay Mackinnon and Rob Briers.

It started in April 2017 when we surveyed the river upstream of the Visitor Centre until we could not find any giant hogweed, using maps and GPS devices to mark out spread and population density. To decide on treatment we researched 'more natural' herbicides (bioherbicides) and different manual methods of removing all or part of the plant and at different growth stages. The difficulty, however, is to get to the relatively large and deep-growing taproot: other herbicides than glyphosate will not kill it off, and if you cut the plant down you have to do it several times before new shoots stop coming up. The alternative treatments we used were a reduced herbicide concentration or cutting through the taproot a minimum of 10cm down and uprooting the plant. Treatment days have usually involved a core group of dedicated volunteers and students but the fieldwork also includes my revisiting the sites to record efficacy and impacts on associated plant communities.

Findings are at an early stage but it appears that using 75% of the recommended glyphosate concentration is as efficient and although digging takes longer it appears to have less of an impact on associated vegetation, which in turn could minimise risks of riverbank erosion. Plant community data has not yet been analysed so this statement is just based on observation. The treatment efficacy data has a lot of variation in it so we need to collect more of it to get a clearer picture of any significant differences between treatments. The study is aiming to continue for at least another 2-3 years.

WINTER TALKS PROGRAMME 2019

Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh. Free for Members, Guest £2.

Monday 18th November – 7.30pm

Past Lives of Leith

John Lawson, City of Edinburgh Council's Archaeologist

John will talk about archaeological excavations in advance of the Edinburgh Trams in Constitution Street, Leith. The project unearthed an unknown section of the graveyard associated with South Leith Parish Church. He will explore the results of the detailed forensic analysis of nearly 400 burials. The work also showcases forensic art reconstructions of some bodies. Books will be on sale.

Monday 16th December – 7.30pm

#STOPThePlasticTide

Catherine Gemmell, Scotland Conservation Officer for the Marine Conservation Society

Catherine will take us on a whistlestop tour of her journey to help Scotland #STOPThePlasticTide. From citizen science with amazing volunteers to personal plastic-free journeys to campaigning for change at government level there have been some great success stories over the last few years.

WINTER TALKS PROGRAMME 2020

Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh. Free for Members, Guest £2.

Monday 27th January – 7.30pm

The Shale Trail

Heath Brown, Shale Trail Project Manager

The Shale Trail is a new 16 mile trail across West Lothian linking sites, features and communities relating to the area's oil shale heritage. The trail largely follows existing paths from West Calder to Winchburgh. The talk will also explore how the development of the shale industry in West Lothian has shaped the local landscape, economy, wildlife and culture.

Monday 24th February – 7.30pm

Beavers are Back! The Scottish Beavers Project in Knapdale Forest, Argyll

Dr Helen Taylor, RZSS

The beaver population introduced to Knapdale Forest in 2009 was the first legal release of beavers in the UK and has played a big part in bringing beavers back to this country after an absence of over 400 years. The project is run by Scottish Beavers, a partnership between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). Helen will explain the history of the project, the status of beavers in Knapdale today, and what conservation challenges.

Monday 23rd March – 7.30pm

Historical Heartlands of the River : Leith

Sandie Boyle, WOLCT

Over the next few years we plan to create talks which highlight the fascinating heritage of particular parts of the river. Sandie will begin with a look at Leith.

Art Works Enhance the Walkway

A stroll along the river has become a bit like a visit to an art gallery with three recent projects all enhancing the environment. Readers will be aware of the Antony Gormley statues which were extensively damaged by the river and removed in 2012, well they are back and with a new fixing to the river bed they have managed to survive some extremely high river levels caused by this summer's high rainfall. Entitled '6 Times' the works begin at the Gallery of Modern Art entrance with five further statues at Bells Mills, Stockbridge, Warriston, Bonnington and finally in Leith on one of the dock piers.

There have also been two mural projects appearing this summer. In Roseburn Park one of the walls now carries a very attractive mural commemorating its construction as an Armoury during WW2.

Further upstream Colinton Tunnel has been given a make over by artist Chris Rutherford. Themed around R.L. Stevenson's poem "From a Railway Carriage" it is a wonderfully colourful and engaging public artwork. Local schools have been involved and each have a section of wall. There is a lovely stone bench created by our friends at the Drystone Walling Association and our volunteers have been involved in helping landscape around the tunnel and plant hundreds of wildflowers. Well worth a visit.



Colinton Tunnel artwork

How to join the Water of Leith Conservation Trust - Complete the form and post payment to the address below or visit www.waterofleith.org.uk/join and join through our PayPal account

Individual membership	£16	Concession (retired, student, unemployed)	£10
Family	£30	Group (schools and voluntary bodies)	£32

Name.....

Date.....

Address.....

Email.....

Tel No.....

**Post to: Trust Administrator, Water of Leith
1TQ**

Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14