

Water of Leith Conservation Trust Annual Report April 2019 to March 2020

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust is a registered charity SC000015 established in 1988 whose mission is: *To conserve and enhance the Water of Leith as a haven for wildlife and an educational and recreational resource for all.*

2019/20 proved to be another exceptional year for the Trust and the river with more people than ever engaged in our work and more projects completed to improve the river for wildlife. Overall we delivered 244 practical conservation tasks and 198 outdoor learning sessions and events. Here for the community 7 days a week, we welcomed over 16,000 people to our Visitor Centre and volunteers gave a record breaking 11,600 hours of service to keep the Water of Leith 'Clean, Green and Beautiful'.

This report describes the achievements over the year and our performance against targets set in the Water of Leith Conservation Trust Business Plan 2017-20. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust's principal funders, City of Edinburgh Council, for their continued support and corporate sponsor Baillie Gifford. We also appreciate the hard work and dedication of our staff, trustees and volunteer team, not forgetting the resolute backing of our members.

The objectives of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust are to conserve the Water of Leith and its environs, promote the natural and built heritage of the river, advance education and benefit the community by:

- Raising awareness of the river.
- Providing teaching and learning services for all age groups.
- Operating the Water of Leith Visitor Centre as an educational visitor attraction and community resource.
- Encouraging the protection and enhancement of biodiversity along the river and its environs.
- Enabling volunteers and the public to take practical action to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.
- Encouraging responsible access to, and recreational use of, the river and its walkway.
- Promoting the sustainable use and management of the river.
- Working in partnership with others.

**For more information about any of our work please contact:
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0131 455 7367, admin@waterofleith.org.uk www.waterofleith.org.uk @WOLCT**



The Volunteer Team & Community Action on the River

A record 244 practical tasks and 8000 volunteer hours spent on conservation work.

Our Volunteer Team

The team continues to grow with over 300 registered volunteers who regularly support; weekly Hit Squad tasks, monthly Sunday and Thursday conservation tasks, regularly patrol the river and manage reception and the community cafe at our Visitor Centre. The biggest area of growth was in the number of Hit Squad tasks which reached 51 this year, a truly weekly activity now for our team of regulars. In all this group of 15-20 folk delivered **800 volunteer days**. The larger teams mean the group can now tackle multiple jobs on site so we regularly combine a river clean-up with path work and a project such as fencing, planting or repairs. We have also begun a Hit Squad Skills Group where new or less confident volunteers can learn skills such as river wading, fencing, hand tool felling, etc. **Over all our team delivered 129 tasks and over 3800 hours on the river.**

Youth and Community Groups

The number of Youth volunteering tasks delivered rose to **36** working with partners including Firrhill and Drummond High School, Barnardo's, Roots, Princes Trust, Youth Vision and Citadel Youth Centre. A total of **1100 volunteer days**. We hosted 14 high school placements, one SRUC work placement and two post graduate placements. In addition we supported 7 Community Clean-ups and 43 tasks from our Peregrine Group of adults with learning difficulties and autism from the Tiphereth project.

Corporate Volunteering Days

We have been delighted to welcome four teams of staff from Baillie Gifford on Corporate Volunteering tasks this year, amounting to around 200 volunteer hours. They worked so hard even when faced with grotty drain clearances or huge planting challenges. In fact, Corporate Volunteering really took off in 2019/20 as we welcomed 29 teams, many from the financial sector, bringing with it a much needed income of £8,000.

Patrolling. As part of developing our volunteer team and creating citizen science opportunities within the Trust, we have been working on the development of our river patrol team. Meetings and training sessions have been hosted and a new online reporting system developed to better record the wildlife seen, walkway users and highlight the problems which then inform where the Hit Squad or other volunteer teams should work on next. The patrol team conducted a phenomenal **341 patrols**.



Learning & Engagement at the Visitor Centre

198 Outdoor Learning sessions and events delivered, attended by 3909 people

Primary and Nursery School Classes

83 classes joined us in the year. Our primary classes have investigated life cycles in the river and explored the biodiversity of the river and woodlands. In our heritage programmes, they've re-enacted the life of a Jacobite soldier in the woods and looked at ways in which the old technologies of water milling can be used to develop renewable energy sources for the future. They have also achieved the Adventure section of their JASS award and contributed to conservation tasks. We had the pleasure of participating in the Outdoor Learning Challenge at Holyrood Park in September.

High School field studies in Geography and Environmental Science

Pupils have the opportunity to develop their senior stage fieldwork skills while also learning about their local river and ecology on a record 28 class visits. Positive feedback from teachers stressed the advantages of local and more affordable fieldwork with all equipment and resources provided for each group.

Special Needs Outdoor Learning

We piloted a special needs senior stage Source to Sea biology field study with Woodlands School in Currie. Ruth took two groups (a senior and junior) of pupils on four separate field studies from near to the source of the river in the Pentlands right down to Leith. At every location, the pupils surveyed the invertebrate life in the river, the bird life and the vegetation. Between January and March the whole of Rowanfield special school followed a guided trail from Colinton to Slateford learning about food chains as they walked and worked together to build a fire and toast marshmallows at the end.

Community Learning and Events

Engaging people and groups from all ages continues to flourish as we welcomed 56 youth and community groups on informal learning sessions and delivered 31 public events. In addition to a series of guided walks and winter talks we ran three fundraising events. May saw our most profitable Plant Sale to date. In June a 'marathon' sponsored walk took place where 23 walkers, 1 cyclist and 1 dog completed an 11, 15 or 26 mile challenge along the Walkway. Finally in September we saw the 'Return of the Famous Five', where 30 families joined us for the afternoon to follow a trail of activities at the Centre and through the Dells.

The Visitor Centre

The focal point for all our work remains the Visitor Centre. **16,031** people learnt more about the river by popping in to see us this year and 3600 voluntary hours were given at the Centre working on reception, administration, maintenance and fund-raising. Sadly due to the coronavirus outbreak we had to close the centre from 17th March.



Biodiversity & Invasive Species

63 sessions involving INNS Management and 50 volunteer days conducting Survey Work.

Survey work – Otter and Trout Spawning Habitat

Citizen science has always been at the heart of what we do, whether it is recording the wildlife spotted on the river or carrying our botanical surveys of our meadows. This year we have focused on two important surveys. Teaming up with a master's student we have trained our volunteers to carry out an otter survey over 10k of urban river. The aim is to understand how the otter family is moving around the city and what they are eating and yes this involves analysis of their poop. We have also trained volunteers to survey the river's potential for trout spawning, so that we can understand and support fish populations – this will continue for another two years. In addition two of our Biodiversity Boost meadows were surveyed by volunteers and the total wildflower list for the lower zones of the river updated. Much of the survey work is completed by volunteers on their own or in small teams so recording total hours is tricky but we estimate **50 volunteer days** – 20 days for the Otter Survey, 15 days on the Trout work, and 15 days on wildflower work.

Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) Removal and Pesticide Reduction Project

Our work tackling Giant Hogweed was also supported by Baillie Gifford meaning we could employ Robert (pictured above) to further the project investigating how we can treat this aggressive and damaging plant whilst reducing our use of harmful chemicals. In all, we set up 50 survey quadrats, surveyed 156 plants and delivered 16 dedicated Giant Hogweed project volunteer days (230 hours) plus 8 staff days to update survey data. This project has a further two years to run to make our findings statistically viable. The 'Blitz on the Balsam' also continued and featured on a record 47 tasks from April to September (this means pulling the invasive species formed part of a task which may have included a clean-up, path work, etc.) Over all a total of 1150 volunteer hours around **200 volunteer days**, were dedicated to the management of INNS.

Biodiversity Boost Sites & Bonnington Beds Project

During the year we extended the boost sites network by completing planting projects in Colinton and Leith (which included a 'shoreline meadow' in the docks and planters by the Royal Yacht Britannia). Work at the Bonnington Boost site also took a leap forward as after over 12 months of closure we were able to access the site again and were able to plant up the path edge beds and devote a total of 20 tasks to the area. Over all at the 7 sites we completed **43 tasks**, which included 8 meadow cutting sessions and 10 community gardening sessions, amounting to over **350 volunteer days**.

Wildlife Sightings

The year proved to be very eventful for the resident otter, who was frequently spotted with 3 cubs. Over all we had 56 confirmed sightings. In total 1275 records were gathered from the public and through patrols. Dipper, Kingfisher and Heron populations continue to do well along with the 50 other bird species spotted.



Projects & River Management

Artistic Enhancement along the river and walkway

The old Colinton railway tunnel was a dim, damp and unwelcoming part of the walkway but during the year it was transformed into a 140m vibrant mural featuring the Robert Louis Stevenson poem 'From a Railway Carriage'. The Trust supported the Colinton Tunnel Project with advice and volunteer power and we were delighted to attend the opening in November. The year saw the return of four Anthony Gormley statues to the river. The '6 Times' work originally appeared in the river in 2010 but after repeated damage to the statues by the river they were removed two years later. However this spring saw their return to Bells Mills, Stockbridge, St Marks Park and Bonnington. In June they were tested by the river as it once again flooded but they withstood the onslaught.

Leith Litter Agreement

During the year the Trust worked with local stakeholders in Leith to spearhead a partnership agreement on litter and debris accumulations in the Water of Leith at the basin areas and boom. In addition to collecting litter from all 12 miles of river to Leith we now venture out around once a month to clear the litter off the boom and from the impounded basin corners. This work is part of an official agreement on the day-to-day management of the Water of Leith basins which has been approved by key Water of Leith Basin partners; The City of Edinburgh Council, Water of Leith Conservation Trust, Forth Ports Limited, Water of Leith 2000 Limited, Bluefield 1502 LLP and Friends of the Water of Leith Basin. This group has jointly committed to maintain the basins, addressing the build-up of debris and plastic waste. The full partnership agreement can be accessed from our website www.waterofleith.org.uk/management/

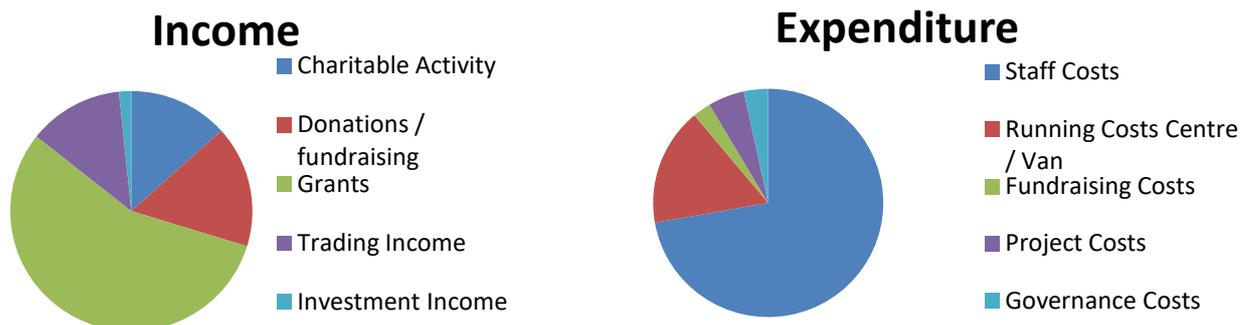
The Water of Leith Management Plan

The Trust managed to raise funds in 2019 to enable the production of a new Management Plan for the river, finalised in April 2020. It has been designed to last for 10 years and covers all the major uses and issues related to the river. The action plan aims to deliver environmental improvement for the Water of Leith whilst balancing the needs of all stakeholders and user groups. The plan has been prepared for The Water of Leith Action Group with funding from most partners in the group, and produced by Helen Brown, our Trust Manager. The Water of Leith Action group, along with dozens of landowners, stakeholders and user groups have been involved in its production and it contains a total of 165 actions. You can view or download the whole plan at www.waterofleith.org.uk/management/

Saughton Park and Gorgie Weir Micro hydro

We have been watching the development of Saughton Park with great interest and this year saw the grand opening and a project to use the Water of Leith to power the park's facilities. A 10m long Archimedean screw type turbine now sits by Gorgie Weir and generates around 39kW of electricity for the cafe, lighting and glasshouse. The park itself is now a beautiful asset for the river and local community.

Governance and Financial Summary



The charts represent a summary of how our accounts were apportioned for the year ending 31st March 2020. Unrestricted income for the year was £127,947 and unrestricted expenditure was £136,338. With funds of £349,390 brought forward from 2018/19 and a loss of £2737 on our investments this leaves the total funds of the Trust at £338,262. Within the restricted or Project Fund income was £44,300, with an expenditure of £36,966, leaving a surplus of £7334 add to this the £7670 brought forward from 2018/19 and this fund total stands at £15,000 to fund our Community and Wildlife Project for 2020/21. Full independently examined accounts are available on our website.

During the year we appointed an Independent Financial Advisor and agreed to invest £200,000 for the long term security of the Trust in accordance with our Investment Policy, with this capital largely coming from the gift of a substantial legacy in 2018. During the year we also chose to invest around £8000 in improvement works to the Centre, including a lighting upgrade to reduce our carbon footprint and utility bills.

The Trust would like to extend its thanks to all its members, donors and funders, especially:

- City of Edinburgh Council – Services for Communities
- City of Edinburgh Council – Children and Families
- Baillie Gifford
- KPE4 Trust
- Virgin Money

Our Community and Wildlife Project was generously funded for 2019 to 2021 by a private donor and the following Charitable Trusts; The KPE4 Trust, The Mushroom Trust, The Russell Trust, The Hugh Fraser Foundation, Lindsay's Charitable Trust, The Cruden Foundation and The Pumphouse Trust.

Trustees:

Pat Dawson (Chair)
Bryce Morrison (Secretary)
Tony Gray (Treasurer from 24th June)
Karen Young
David Hudson
Bill Alexander (until 28th October)
Ron Hill (until 28th October)
Philippa MacDonald (until 28th October)
Kat Kane (from 28th October)

Staff:

Trust Manager - Helen Brown
Volunteers Officer - Charlotte Neary
Trust Administrator - Sandra Boyle
Education Officer - Ruth Prince
Centre Assistant - Kit Russell
Project Officer – Sandra Maclean until 12/19
Project Officer - Johnny Wells from 01/20

Future developments

The Trust has produced a new Business Plan 2020-23 which sets out the operational objectives, provides more detail on annual activities and emerging programmes, details the three year projected budget and sets out the 2020/21 Action Plan and associated budget. However the Coronavirus outbreak and subsequent lockdown measures led to the closure of the Centre and suspension of volunteering activities. The resumption of operations will be on the condition of advice from the Scottish Government. This will have a significant impact on all areas of our work and finances.