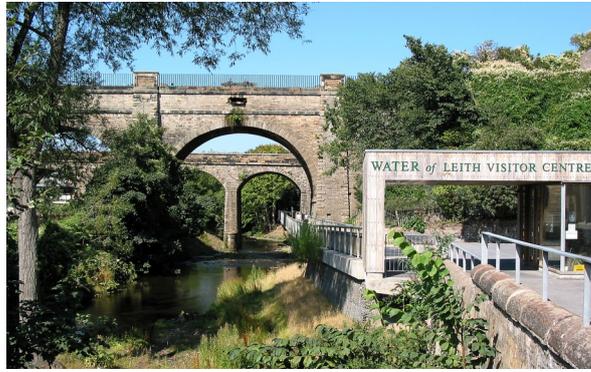


the
**WATER
of LEITH**

Conservation Trust



NEWSLETTER No 72 Winter 2019

30 Years of Action along the Water of Leith

1418	
CONSERVATION TASKS & RIVER CLEAN-UPS - AN AVERAGE OF 47 PER YEAR	
	3714
	SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SESSIONS
128,284	
VOLUNTEER HOURS	
	217,358
	VISITORS TO OUR CENTRE

This November the Water of Leith Conservation Trust became 30 years old. The first river trust to be set up in Scotland, we have blazed a trail in conserving and enhancing urban waterways and have achieved many important milestones in creating a truly clean, green and beautiful river for our capital city.



Lord Provost Frank Ross, Pat Dawson, Trust Chair, Helen Brown, Trust Manager and Councillor Gavin Corbet
Photo : Peter Bourhill, Edinburgh Life

BBC Scotland recognises our 30th Anniversary

The "Landward" programme on BBC Scotland on Friday 7 December contained a feature about the Trust. Euan McIlwraith was filmed in the Dean Village with Helen, Charlotte and our Hit Squad volunteers.

The show explained the history of the river and the role the Trust has played in cleaning it up.

On Wednesday 21st November, 30 years to the day of our launch, volunteers, staff, stakeholders and trustees were invited to a Civic Reception at Edinburgh City Chambers, hosted by the Lord Provost. The event was held to recognise our achievements and proved to be a wonderful celebration in very grand surroundings. After welcome drinks we were thanked for our work by Frank Ross, Lord Provost, then Pat Dawson, our newly elected Chair, gave a wonderful speech recognising the work of staff, volunteers and trustees. Helen Brown, Trust Manager, followed with a potted history of the 30 years and the speeches were concluded by Gavin Corbet, our local councillor, who had nominated us for the event.

Since 1988 we have delivered 1418 conservation tasks and river clean ups - an average of 47 per year for 30 years. We have estimated 5000 cubic meters of rubbish have been cleared from the Water of Leith - enough to fill two Olympic-sized swimming pools. Volunteers have given over 128,000 hours of service to the river, we have led 3,714 learning sessions to school and community groups and welcomed over 217,000 visitors to our Centre in Slateford. Importantly we have seen wildlife return to this once industrial and polluted river.

30 years of Action continued....

There have been many milestones.

In 1988 The Trust was launched at The Dragonara Hotel, by Lord James Douglas Hamilton, the then Minister for the Environment, and the Heritage Centre in Slateford was officially opened in the following spring by Sir Malcolm Rifkind. We quickly gained support and recognition from environmentalists, developing education resources, pioneering volunteer river clean-ups in the city and producing interpretation and publications about the river's long and varied heritage.

In 1998 we took a BIG leap forward as we secured a £2.5million grant from the Millennium Commission with match funding from others, mainly The City of Edinburgh Council and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. Also in that year we launched our 'Environmental Education' programme supported by CEC Education Department – which is flourishing to this day and has taught over 75,000 of the city's young people. Then followed a very busy three years with the creation of The Water of Leith Visitor Centre, the completion of the Water of Leith Walkway and many other improvements brought about by the 'Millennium Project'. In April 2000 a major flood event on the river set back a number of the projects and even threatened the newly completed Visitor Centre. Thankfully all went well and we proceeded with the formal opening by HRH the Prince of Wales on 24th May 2000. The City now had a walkway, a river to be proud of and a Visitor Centre to host the Trust's volunteer team, education visits and as a public information hub.

By 2008 we had seen our centre visitor figures rise to over 10,000. We were delivering nearly 200 learning sessions every year and our volunteers gave an outstanding 4,800 hours of service. We delivered 45 river clean-ups and numerous tasks to manage the habitats along the river and even planned our first fundraising 'duck' race. But the highlight of that year was that we saw, for the first time in centuries, otter cubs born on the river proving that our work to improve the habitats was working. We calculated the equivalent of two double decker buses full of rubbish was cleared from the river each year.

Now in 2018 we have grown yet again, with the centre now seeing over 17,000 visitors and we deliver over 150 volunteer tasks and clean-ups annually. 5,400 hours were spent by volunteers in the last year improving this waterway with an additional 3,400 at our visitor centre. Working with the city's youth remains a focus as we continue to deliver quality outdoor learning programmes for the city's schools - fun events and outings for youth groups and 38 conservation tasks for youths facing disadvantages or with learning difficulties. And the otters continue to breed, along with healthy populations of kingfishers, dippers and over 100 other species of wildlife.



Return of the otters 2008

Throughout our work we have been supported by the City of Edinburgh Council and the citizens of our capital to create a 'silver thread in a ribbon of green'.

We were delighted to have been nominated for the Nature of Scotland Award 2018 and were awarded Highly Commended in our Community Initiative category.

News from the AGM

The Trust held its AGM on 29th October and we are delighted to welcome Pat Dawson as our new Chair. Pat has been volunteering for a number of years and comes to us from a background in Nursing and Health Policy, lately as the associate Nurse Director for NHS Lothian. Pat has worked with and for a number of volunteer led organisations and in a range of partnerships with the voluntary sector. "I am very proud to be the new Chair of the Trust in its 30th year. We are all looking forward to continuing the magnificent work of the charity for the next 30 years working with the staff, volunteers and my fellow trustees. I look forward to meeting and supporting you in any way I can "

Copies of our 2017/18 Annual Reports and Account are available at the Visitor Centre or on our website page www.waterofleith.org.uk/do/

WINTER TALKS PROGRAMME 2019

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

Monday 28th January - 7.30pm

Bat Night at the Water of Leith

Natalie Todman, Lothian Bat Group talks about their fascinating lives and the work done locally to protect them.

Monday 25th February – 7.30pm

A Life On the Rocks

Rab Anderson, one of Scotland's prominent mountaineers, explores a lifetime of adventure spent on the rocks and in the hills.

Making Hay While the Sun Shines

Back in June we surveyed our meadows and found the herb species count is still climbing. There is no one recipe for getting meadow creation right - what works at one site might not be productive on another given issues of trampling, topography and nutrient loads, so it's important we keep track of what we do at each of our four sites and what gives results. In September we collected seed from our meadows and took them back to base where they were sown into trays to be taken home by volunteers and grown on until the size to be planted back out into species-poor areas. The meadows were then cut with strimmers, Austrian scythes, loppers, long handled hooks and shears for the more persistent species. We let the cut stuff sit on site so seed could drop, and then it was raked, bagged and removed to keep the meadows fertility low, which favours the more tender herb species rather than aggressive ruderal like creeping thistle and willow herb.



We planted plugs of species that are missing or scarce such as sneezewort and birds foot trefoil. These came from the Granton Hub or were spare plants from the Hermitage of Braid Walled Garden (thanks Goff). We also transplanted a few plants across sites such as meadowsweet where we had a surplus in one and a lack in the other. The UK has lost 97% of flower-rich grassland since WWII with massive knock-on effects on pollinators and other biodiversity, so in terms of habitat restoration, creating these meadows is really valuable work.

River News Round Up

Saughton Park

Most of Saughton Park's revamp is now complete including a new playpark, outdoor gym and landscaped grounds. The £7.3m scheme to return the Edwardian park to its former glory was made possible with £3.8m from the Heritage Lottery Fund along with grants from other funders including £0.5m from Sustrans. Work is still underway to restore the Winter Garden, the botanical gardens and stable block, with the addition of a new café - due to open in 2019. The park's perimeter paths along the Water of Leith and Main Drive are open, alongside an inclusive playpark. A stone carving at the park's Water of Leith viewpoint, illustrating the river winding through the city has also been unveiled thanks to Friends of Saughton Park, who raised more than £2,500 to create the feature. The project has received a further boost with a £0.5m from SP Energy Networks' Green Economy Fund for a micro-hydro scheme to provide electricity for the community facilities, new cafe and park lighting and to power the newly installed ground source heat pumps which will provide carbon-free heating for the buildings and the Winter Garden glass house

Walkway closures

We are hopeful that works in Bonnington will be completed early in 2019. A closure at Warriston Road is due to bridge repairs at St Mark's Park and the project should be complete mid-February. There is no progress at the Dean Landslide area - if you have any queries about this please contact :

naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sewer Investment Programme

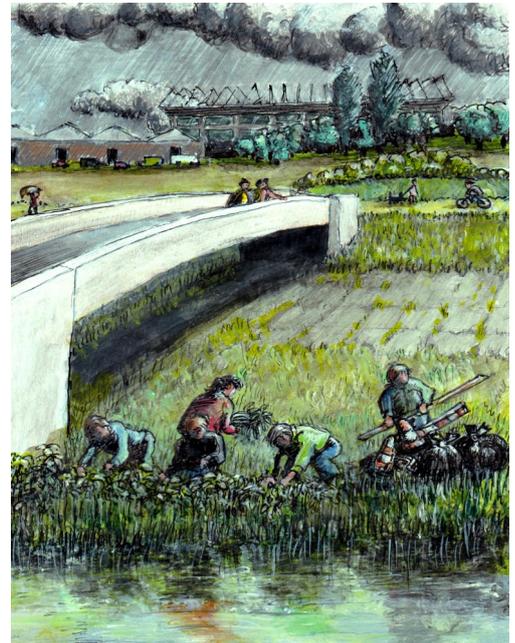
Scottish Water and SEPA have identified 17 areas between Balerno and Longstone where sewer debris could currently be discharged to the watercourse in periods of high rainfall. These overflows occur from chambers called Combined Sewer Overflow's which relieve the sewers of water during periods of heavy rainfall. The existing chambers do not have adequate screening to retain sewerage debris and are classified as having Unsatisfactory Intermittent Discharges (UID's). Scottish Water is planning a multi-million pound investment to install new pipework, chambers and screens to reduce the risk of debris entering the Water of Leith and removing the UID's- to be carried in a year or so.

Balsam Boot Camp

Our battle with Himalayan Balsam was a big feature this summer. We ran 19 dedicated balsam pulling sessions where 227 volunteers spent a total of 365 hours balsam pulling. Once you add in events where there were multiple tasks, 443 volunteers spent a whopping total of 611 hours.

Evening and weekend events proved popular and we roped in corporate, youth and community groups to get more people to help out. Local people helped by allowing access to the river - on one occasion we all trooped through a downstairs flat in Stockbridge, and over the sofa and out the window onto the river. We also tried some new techniques - bagging and snipping the balsam seed heads where they were well developed. We thought our volunteer Nigel had invented this technique, but turns out the Irish got there before us. We used inflatable kayaks to reach some tricky spots in Coltbridge and managed, to the surprise of seasoned local paddlers, not to drown or puncture them.

Some particularly committed volunteers spent their own time chasing up outliers and making repeat visits to catch late seeding balsam. Many thanks to those people. Balsam seed can survive for two years so in 2019 we get to do it all again, though we reckon we can be more targeted in our approach as well as getting some more big groups on board.



*Illustration by Rob Hainsworth (Volunteer)
There will be a display of Rob's work at the
Visitor Centre in 2019*

Great Day for Ducks

Sunday 16th September saw our 8th Biennial Great Water of Leith Duck Race and Funday, and it proved to be our busiest yet. We welcomed many hundreds of visitors and raced close to 2,000 ducks. The event raised a record breaking £4,250 - thank you to all who supported the event and of course all the companies who donated wonderful prizes: Yellow Duck Race sponsors included: Restaurant Martin Wishart, The Royal Yacht Britannia, Roseleaf Cafe in Leith, The Orchard Canonmills, The Imperial Palace, China Red, Pizza Express, Dantes, Water of Leith Cafe Bistro, Cafe on the Corner, Mimi's Bake House, Java Moment Cafe. And for the Blue Duck Race prizes included family trips to; Escape Room Experience, Our Dynamic Earth, The Camera Obscura, Scottish Seabird Centre, Butterfly and Insect World, Conifox Adventure Park, Edinburgh Zoo, Jupiter Artland, Crolla's Ice Cream and an actual Blue Duck donated by Colinton Arts.



Our large Reservoir Ducks were all sponsored by local businesses - Mr Green (ASDA) was the winner with Mr Purple (Wildcat-one) in 2nd place. Other ducks were sponsored by EHS Architectural LTD, Sainsburys, The Builder Supply Co, Browns Body Services, Fairbairn & Laing, The Paint Shed and Bennett & Co Accountants.

See the fun on video : www.waterofleith.org.uk/bigevents/

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 Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ

www.waterofleith.org.uk admin@waterofleith.org.uk T: 0131 455 7367

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