



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

NEWSLETTER Issue 80

Summer 2022



This wonderful photo of an emerging mayfly was taken by David Stevens

Walkway Celebrates 20 years with Openings and Closings

The Water of Leith Walkway has now been open and complete for 20 years, after the missing link at Slateford was opened in spring 2002, but it has seen its fair share of openings and closings since. In May we were delighted to announce that the most significant issue along the path, the landslide which closed



the route around Belford near the Dean Village, had been resolved after an almost 9 year closure. Walkers cannot help but be impressed by the engineering it has taken to stabilize this banking and protect the path from further damage. It is wonderful to see this section completely open just in time for the tourists to return.

The path sections in Bonnington which were also newly opened in 2002 have also had their fair share of issues, largely due to crumbling post industrial walls. These are now fixed, so we hope this section will now stay open to benefit the growing local community as the area changes from commercial to residential. A new section of the Walkway now extends alongside the sharp curve of the river from Anderson Place to the West Bowling Green St bridge.

Further upstream, connecting paths and bridges in the Dells continue to be closed, but the City of Edinburgh Council is hopeful that these will be fixed in the autumn. News also reached us this week that the long-awaited upgrading of the path route from Balerno to the Union Canal along the Walkway and NCN 75 is starting in June. The Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust is undertaking the project on behalf of City of Edinburgh Council, with funding from Sustrans and Transport for Scotland, as part of improving the National Cycle Network in Scotland.

The 8km section is to be upgraded using a recycled material called Ultitrec. Although this is not a sealed surface, it will have a lower maintenance requirement and, along with drainage and other associated works, will allow better access for all abilities. This surface is recommended by Sustrans when a sealed surface is neither feasible, nor wanted.

The project will be delivered in sections. Unfortunately, due to the machinery being used and the need for the path surface to settle before use, this will mean that the public will need to use alternative routes, and sections of the path will be closed for 2–3 weeks. Phase 1 is from Union Canal/Lanark Rd to Colinton Tunnel; Phase 2 from the Tunnel to the Bypass. Further phases will be timetabled once the supply of materials is better known.

Natural Materials Inspire Natural Projects to restore River Habitats

We are always looking for innovative ways to improve the Water of Leith for wildlife. This year we have undertaken two projects to help restore habitats along the river: riverbank spiling at Roseburn and installing eel ropes.



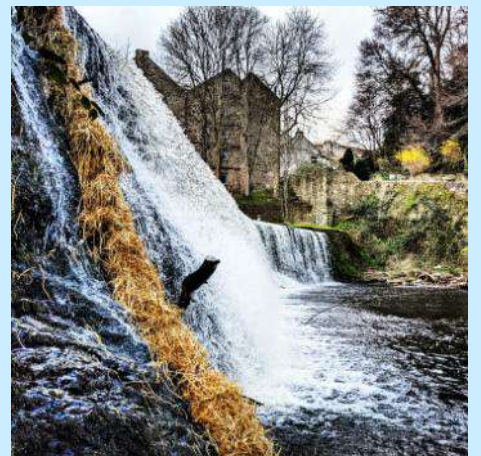
Willow spiling is the traditional method for preventing soil erosion from riverbanks. Hard engineering solutions, in the form of gabions and walls, are sometimes unavoidable but are rarely good for the river's natural environment. With spiling, willow rods are woven between living uprights and then backfilled so the willow can grow into the bank vertically and horizontally. No machinery is used and, as the years go by, the willow grows and gets more established, so the structure gets stronger rather than weaker. This seems ideal to us, so we were delighted at the chance to practise this skill right in the middle of Edinburgh. In early spring we embarked on an epic 25 metre spiling project just downstream from Roseburn pedestrian bridge, working with like-minded organisations *Friends of the Pentlands* and *Earth Calling* and, of course, our own volunteer team. The bank here is steep, so using machinery was not an option. One thousand 2-year-old willow rods, forty 5-year-old willow stakes and 6 tons of soil and stone were all put gently into place by hand. 25 metres of erosion blanket was then pinned into place to secure the bank while the willow gets fully established. This was hard but wholesome work – an amazing experience! Thanks must go to bank owner Heather for giving us the opportunity to share this traditional skill with our volunteers. The photo shows the project two months on and growing well.

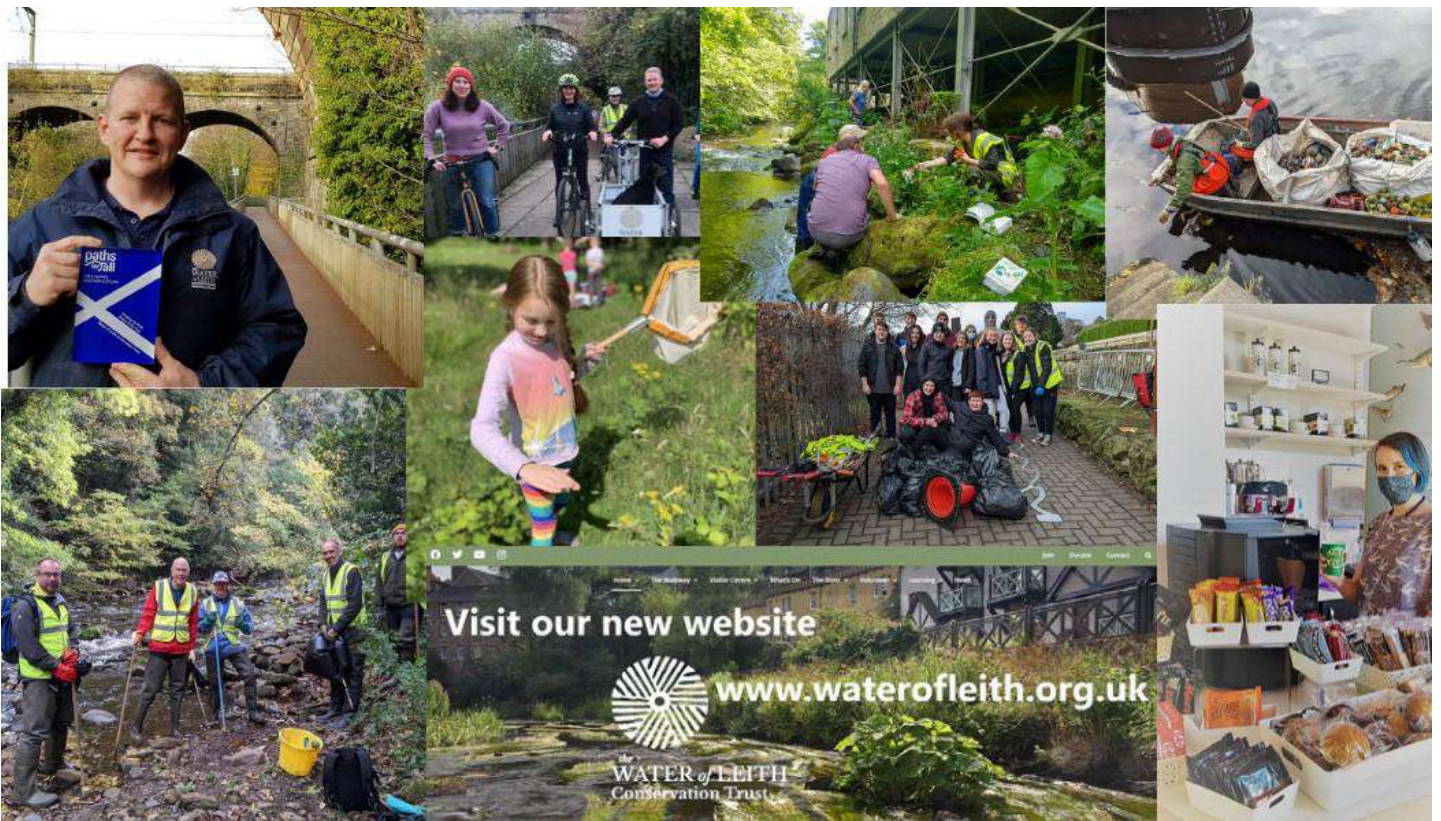


Eels Can Climb!

Eel ropes made from twine and straw are a cheap, messy, but effective way to help eels over river barriers such as weirs and small dams. Inspired by the Members talk by Jack Wooton of the Forgotten Fish Project last January, we hosted a workshop where volunteers learnt this traditional craft. Natural twine is used as the core of twisted long-cut straw to create a natural loose rope that acts as a ladder for young eels. As long as the rope stays saturated, eels can climb even the

largest of weirs, thus opening up their habitat upstream. This increases the chances of eels maturing to complete their unique life cycle, which involves a 4000-mile migration to the Sargasso Sea and back. We've put a number of these ropes out on the river and during the electrofishing survey we hope to see how many eels are in the catchment to inspire future 'eely' good projects throughout the catchment.





2021-22, A Landmark Year for the Trust.

Trust Manager Helen looks back over the past twelve months

As we entered the new financial year back in April 2021, I think it's safe to say that we were filled with anticipation and uncertainty of what the year might bring. We'd just emerged from yet another lockdown, opened our new-look community café, and began the vital task of managing the river's invasive species and persistent litter issues. As it turned out, the year had many more highs than lows and I am delighted to summarise some of our successes here:

- **10,151** volunteer hours – a value of £96,500 at the national living wage, so like having 5 additional full-time members of staff working on the river and at the Centre.
- **317** conservation tasks - an average of 6 per week - 234 by Trust volunteers and 83 by community groups - the most we've ever achieved in a year!
- **157** outdoor learning sessions delivered to schools and to the public - averaging 3 per week.
- **296** Volunteer Patrols conducted along the river

Since we opened the new and improved cafe area, income from this volunteer-run resource has increased by a third to £35.5K – proving tea-and-a-pee is helping to make the Trust more sustainable - and its all down to our friendly Centre volunteer team and staff. In August we launched the new-look website and updated many of the ways people can join the Trust, donate, sign-up as a volunteer and book in for events; all cutting down on admin time and providing a better, more secure service to our supporters. We were delighted to welcome the support of 37 new members, and ran 27 popular public events - all booked online.

Securing funding for our staff is vital. This year, thanks to support from City of Edinburgh Council, Baillie Gifford and many private donations, our conservation team was able to deliver the following conservation work to help manage the habitats for wildlife in the river corridor and improve the space for human users:

- Volunteers and staff treated all giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam plants from Balerno to Leith –mapping the location and spread of these invasive and harmful plant species.
- Sadly, river clean-up sessions are still at the heart of our work. Volunteers delivered 12 boat based clean-ups in Leith, preventing litter escaping out to sea; and a whopping 1500 hours on litter picking alone.
- We were awarded **Community Path Group of the Year** by *Paths for All* in recognition of all the volunteer hours spent maintaining the Walkway – 126 work days in total.
- We expanded our Biodiversity Boost network to 8 sites and completed 32 habitat-management tasks. These included training volunteers in the ancient art of scything – a low carbon, high-energy way to manage the meadows; and planted 1000 wildflower plants and 1000 native bulbs.

During the year we consulted on, and produced, an impressive Improvement Plan for Coalie Park in Leith, which aims to transform a neglected and run-down part of the Walkway. We also hosted a unique fun day at the park in September. We hope 2022-23 will bring exciting changes for this area of Leith.

Looking forward, the Trustees are optimistic and are planning workshops to look at a new five-year strategy for the Trust's work. Exciting times! It's all thanks to our members, volunteers and supporters.

Members Events 2022

For details and information on how to book visit
www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/

Members should use their special code when they book to get free or discounted entry – email admin@waterofleith.org.uk if you need your code otherwise it is £7 per person

The routes less travelled - Tours away from the river's hot spots

Sunday 26th June– Murrayfield to Belford – 11am

Saturday 23rd July Saughton to Murrayfield – 11am

Sunday 4th September– Slateford to Gorgie- 2pm

Sunday 2nd October– Warriston to Bonnington – 2pm

Sunday 13th Novr– Balerno to Juniper Green – 11am

Children's Summer Events

Every Tuesday and Thursday of the holiday from 2pm to 4pm. Tuesdays is fun activities for 5 to 10 year olds and Thursdays is more adventurous for 8 to 12 year olds. Booking essential - £7 per child

Tuesdays

2pm to 4pm, 4 to 10 year olds

Fun Activities for younger kids with parents joining in, accompanying Adult Free – £7 per child

12th July – River Dipping

19th July – Fairy Folk

26th July –STICK

2nd Aug– River Dipping

9th Aug – Bush Craft

Thursdays

2pm to 4pm 8 to 12 year olds

Drop off activities suitable for older children
£7 per child

14th July– Ultimate Survival

21st July– Extreme River Dipping

28th July – EAT - Hardcore Hunting & Foraging

4th August– Wild at Art

11th Aug – Extreme River Dipping

For more information or to subscribe to our blog visit
www.waterofleith.org.uk

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Plant Sale Successes

We celebrated another 20th anniversary this May when we hosted our 20th Plant sale (despite losing two years to Covid). This year's most popular fundraising event also proved to be our best ever sale – we raised over £1500, selling bedding plants, veggies, shrubs and houseplants. A huge thank-you to all the volunteers who either donated or helped on the day, and to the many hundreds of you who came to buy.

Charlotte Runs Again....

Not content with a mere marathon distance, this time our adventurous Conservation and Volunteers Officer is taking on Scotland's first Backyard Ultra in Orkney on 25th June. This involves running a 4.16 mile loop every hour, on the hour and within the hour. Charlotte has been running for 6 years, and in 2020 ran 28 miles from Source to Sea along the river. Now she's upping her efforts to see just how far and for how long she can run. 7 times round would be 29 miles; 10 times round would be an amazing 42 miles! This exciting challenge will be run on almost the longest day – as it hardly gets dark there, she could be running day and night! – and in potentially very windy conditions, so it's going to be tough. Show her your support and help our work looking after the Water of Leith. Find her on Just Giving, and in your message predict how many loops she will do.
www.justgiving.com/campaign/charlotterunsagain

Giant Hogweed work begins again

For only the second year, we have been awarded funding from City of Edinburgh Council to treat the whole river for giant hogweed – previously it had only been from Balerno to the Visitor Centre. Since March, Johnny, Charlotte and a crack team of specially trained volunteers have been out once a week to treat over 5000 plants infesting the river banks, while other volunteers gave the river a thorough spring clean. The map shows what the team has hit to date. It would be a big help if you could keep a look-out for hogweed while out walking by the river. Let us know of any sightings – we often have to do revisits!.



Charlotte with her wading crew in her Giant Hogweed treating suit