



the  
**WATER of LEITH**  
Conservation Trust

**NEWSLETTER Issue 82**

**Spring 2023**



*Spring is in the air for the Dancing Dippers by Tom Kelly*

## ***Goodbye Charlotte... Hello Hannah and Michael!***

Charlotte Neary, our Conservation and Volunteers Officer, has been with the Trust since the spring of 2000. Walking into the then newly opened Water of Leith Visitor Centre, this recent Masters graduate from Edinburgh University asked for a job and was given the role of Admin Assistant, on the spot. Fast forward 23 years and 7 different job titles, including a brief stint as Trust Manager when Helen was on maternity leave, and Charlotte is hanging up her waders.

Well, that is not strictly speaking true, as she will still be donning waders in the Forth Catchment as she becomes a Senior Project Officer with Forth Rivers Trust, looking after 13 rivers in the Forth Catchment. One of these is the Water of Leith so we will be seeing her on our river again. She will also be managing a project called Merlin, which aims to restore freshwater and peatland habitats Europe-wide, seeking to combat widespread loss of habitat and the effects of climate change. The Forth Catchment is one of 17 case studies across Europe. Exciting stuff!

It is hard to put into words the hard work, energy and enthusiasm Charlotte has brought to the Trust. There is not a square inch of this river she has not pulled litter from or treated Invasive species on. We estimate she has completed over 2000 clean-ups and conservation tasks over the years and delivered hundreds of learning sessions and events. Not to mention running 100 miles to raise funds for our work.

We will all have funny memories: Charlotte balancing precariously on walls at Murrayfield in full hazard suit worrying the locals. Dressed as the Wulver pretending to be devouring trout on a kids event. Those almost impossible music rounds during the Christmas Parties. Spending her days off and evenings protecting the otters from disturbance. And recently entertaining the whole nation as she explained to the TV audience how vital our river is and the work of our volunteers while appearing on BBC Winterwatch.

We always knew when she was back from being out on the river, as we could hear her laugh from anywhere in the building. We will miss her and wish her all the best for the future.



In April and May, however our staff team will grow again when we welcome Michael Inman as our new Trainee Ranger and Hannah Dry, who will become our Conservation Officer, continuing Charlotte's great work. More on that next time.



## High river levels cause problem for the path network .....and leave litter and sewer waste hanging

One of the major occurrences since our last newsletter was the river level on 30th December. A rise of almost 2m in a matter of hours was the highest we had seen for over 20 years. The river took out the bridge at Belford by the Britannia Hotel; ripped out the surfacing on the walkway at Bonnington, Longstone and Ford's Road; damaged banks in Slateford, Tanfield and Saughton Park; and deposited rubbish galore along the river banks.

However, the relatively low water levels since means we've been able to tackle a lot of the litter by starting the spring clean-up early — at Murrayfield, Stockbridge, Redbraes, Slateford, Saughton, Balgreen and Leith — leading to some of the biggest piles of rubbish we have seen in years.

There was a good deal of plastic waste and many shopping trolleys and dumped items, but also lots of wet wipes and waste sanitary products that had entered the river from the sewage network, which vented during the flood event.

With help from the Edinburgh Young Walkers group we've moved 7 tons of surfacing to improve Ford's Rd and Longstone Rd for users. This was, of course, in addition to the mud galore that was scraped off the walkway at Redbraes, Rocheid & Bell's Mills providing instant gratification for all.

The volunteers acted with their usual grit and determination in often freezing weather to return our river and walkway to tip-top condition.

*Thank you to the dozens of people involved.*



### The Power of Giving

You may have noticed the option to 'give at checkout' while buying online; rounding up the total of your shopping bill while at the supermarket or restaurant; or voting to choose which local charity receives a gift from a company or business. This may, on its own, seem like a small gift, but believe me when I say it can mount up to making a huge difference for the charity and beneficiaries concerned.

Towards the end of the year staff at the 'PayPal UK' Edinburgh voted for us to be their Community Impact Charity of the Year—one of three charities to be part of its Community Impact Grants Program to receive support from the business and a grant of \$20,000. Wonderful news for us, which has helped to support staff costs, and buy new tools, waders, wildflower plants etc. We also featured as a charity for PayPal's 'Give at Checkout', where people can choose to donate £1 when they pay with PayPal online. This along with a £7000 donation from Baillie Gifford has meant we could achieve our ambition to purchase a new electric van — bigger, better and not emitting nasty fumes. We can now take more equipment to sites along the river, supporting bigger teams of volunteers, while reducing our running costs and environmental impact. Thank you to all who donated £1 it helped us buy a van!

We have also been in receipt of funding given by staff and customer of John Lewis, Scotmid Funerals, Waitrose Morningside, Toll House Restaurant and the Kitchin Restaurant...and in April you can vote for us in local Tesco shops.

*Small donations make a BIG difference*







## Coalie Park - Past, Present and Future

At the upstream end of the tidal flow of the Water of Leith once lay a coal depot, railway yard and place for ship repair. Bombed by the Luftwaffe in 1941, the area fell into industrial decline in the 1960s. However, thanks to investment from the Scottish Development Fund in June 1982, the space was dubbed 'Coalie Park' for the first time and formally opened by Tom Morgan, Lord Provost at that time. Over the last 40 years there has been a great deal of pressure on the space, while Leith has been transformed from a transport and manufacturing centre to a residential area. The now dilapidated Coalie Park is plagued by littering, graffiti and anti-social behaviour. The time has come for some care and investment.

We hope regular readers will already be aware of our plans to improve this space alongside the river. Back at our 2021 AGM we presented the results of our first Coalie Conversation, which showed that 98% of respondents wanted to see change in the park. Well, it has been a long and winding road, but we are very pleased to say that in 2023 the project will get under way.



The first addition, we hope, will be two Biomatrix platforms. These installations are floating ecosystems anchored to the bank of the river to create in-stream habitat where currently there is none. They will be placed in an undisturbed area of the site where fish and waterfowl can flourish, but where they can be viewed from the park. This modular system of interconnected platforms creates both a safe haven for birdlife on the surface for nesting, and a sub-surface habitat and shelter for fish. It also promotes improved water quality.

Then, planning permission pending, we will look to transform the area downstream of Great Junction St bridge. The objective is to develop the fast route / slow route approach which includes: clarity and rerouting of NCN route 75; limiting conflict points such as at the riverside space and the car park / entrances; and enabling the space to support different user groups and speeds of travel. Work will include the installation of new path surfaces, planters, benches and cycle parking, all of which have been designed to enable either free flow through the site or pausing to enjoy the greenspace. There is also an ambitious 'place-making' design for the riverside. See the plans and follow the development of the project at [www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/)



## SPRING EVENTS 2023

For details and information on how to book visit

[www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/)

### Monday 27<sup>th</sup> March • Visitor Centre Talk Coalie Conversations – Past, Present and Future of this Unusual Place,

with Helen Brown and Sandie Boyle  
7.30pm, Free to Members, Guests £4

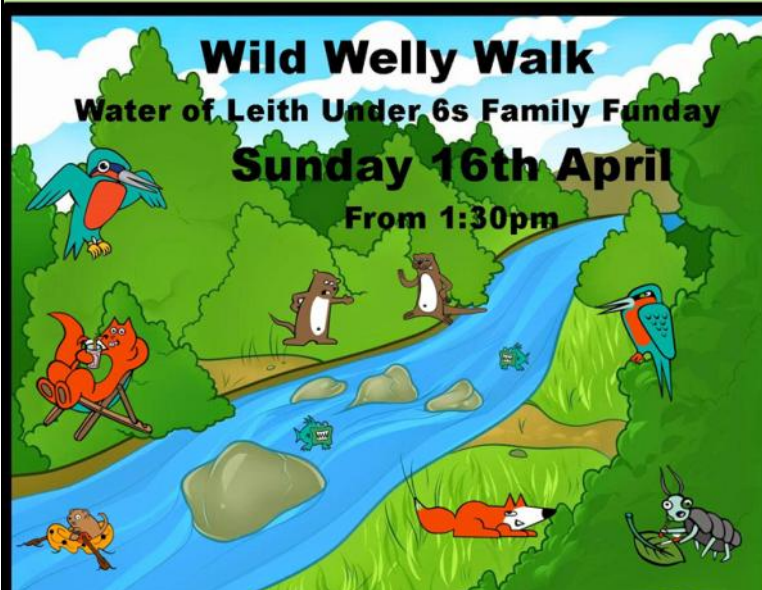
With projects happening in the lower reaches of the river,  
Helen and Sandie reflect on the long and turbulent history of  
the river as it nears the Firth of Forth

## Plant Sale

**SUNDAY 7th MAY 11am to 2pm**

Entrance FREE. Bring CASH

Pick up a bargain & help the Water of Leith



**A family event for children under 6 to explore  
the river and woods in springtime.**

- **Help the Duck get her babies home safely.**
- **Search for the forgetful Squirrel's lost nuts.**
- **Build a den for your favourite soft toy**
- **Meet Children's Author Elizabeth Kelly**



SCAN ME

**Book your space by visiting**

**[www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/)**

**Aimed at under 6s but all welcome.**

**Donations welcome**

In aid of The Water of Leith Conservation Trust SC000015,

**Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Rd, EH14 1TQ.**

Bus 36, 34, 44, limited parking

## Children's Easter Events

Fun activities for 4 to 10 year olds. Booking essential.  
£7 per child, accompanying Adult Free  
1.30pm to 3.30pm

### Wednesday 5th April • Nature Raft

Build a raft to race down the river and have fun  
discovering life above and below the water.

### Wednesday 12th April • Fairy Folk

Discover all about the 'wee folk' who love to cause  
mischief in the springtime.

## Path resurfacing project starts again. — Redhall Bridge repairs under way.

Beset by problems, the project to upgrade the  
walkway from Balerno to Slateford gets under way  
again this spring. After the chosen surface *Ultra-  
trec* failed to bind, *Flexipave* has now been cho-  
sen as it is suitable for all user groups including  
walkers and cyclists. It is not designed to provide  
a much faster route for cyclists, rather it has the  
following benefits providing a better experience for  
everyone:

- A sustainable product which is manufactured  
from recycled car tyres.
- Very high level of porosity, helps to stop  
ponding, and ice forming on path surface.
- High level of durability and very  
low maintenance.
- Good impact absorption.
- Non-cracking.
- Excellent anti-slip qualities due to rubber  
content.

There will be local rolling closures most of the  
spring/summer as the project moves upstream.  
This project is being coordinated by Edinburgh  
and Lothian Greenspace Trust and City of Edin-  
burgh Council. Also under way is the reinstatement  
of Redhall Bridge in the Dells, which is likely  
to take around 8 weeks. This means the car park  
at Spylaw will be out of action and there  
will be occasional disruption while materials are  
delivered to site.

## Helping Ukrainian children discover Edinburgh's wild side

Over the winter months, Ruth has been on a one-  
day-a-week secondment to the City of Edinburgh  
Council Sports & Outdoor Learning Unit to support  
a programme which gives Ukrainian pupils at Trin-  
ity and Victoria primary schools a full day of out-  
door learning, while also exploring a little more of  
our beautiful city. With these pupils Ruth has been  
cycling, taking walks down to the river, climbing at  
Alien Rock, lighting fires and toasting marshmal-  
lows and creating wonderful environmental beach  
art projects, visiting the zoo and having a fun day  
out at the Water of Leith Centre. The children are  
nearly all living on the cruise ship in Leith, so while  
they've a wonderful view of the Firth of Forth from  
their temporary homes, they don't have as much  
opportunity to play and explore outdoors as they  
might. Sometimes it's the simplest of pleasures  
that can make them laugh with joy – like breaking  
the ice off a pond or looking at the world through  
ice windows. It's child's play and it's important.

**For more information or to subscribe to our blog visit**

**[www.waterofleith.org.uk](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk)**

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