



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

NEWSLETTER 84

Spring 2024

George Hunter OBE

*an appreciation of one of our
Founding Trustees and
Chairman for 27 years*



George sadly passed away in Cairdean Care Home on the 20th of December aged 97! Those who have been members of the Trust for many years will remember George, efficiently steering AGMs and frequently at the Centre, at the Centre, chatting to volunteers and visitors, and making sure we were not wasting electricity! He was a founding trustee and our chairman a remarkable 27 years, steering us through periods of great change and improvement of the river for the wildlife and citizens of Edinburgh.

George was born in Portabello, and at age 14 he became an apprentice at Lawson Donaldson (Seeds) Ltd. In 1944, when he turned 18, George joined the army and completed his training with the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). He became an officer and rose to the rank of captain while serving in India and Java. On his return to Edinburgh in 1947, he became the sole representative for Lawson Donaldson covering Scotland and the north of England, working his way up to become a senior director. It was there he met Eileen who was to become his wife for a happy 62 years.

George had a lifelong interest and involvement in sport, which began with rowing at George Watson's College, and included the formation of many rowing clubs and becoming Honorary Secretary of the Scottish Amateur Rowing Association, a position he held for 56 years. He also became very much involved with the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland, serving in many roles. He was proud of his part in bringing the Commonwealth Games to Edinburgh in both 1970 and 1986.

In 1988, George joined forces with other local people and set about forming the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. He was instrumental in securing funding from the Millennium Commission, with matching funding from Edinburgh City Council, for £5 million for the renovation of the Slateford School and completion of the Water of Leith Walkway. On 20th May 2000 he welcomed the then Prince to Wales (now HRH King Charles) to open the Visitor Centre and see first hand our work to conserve the river.

Another way he served his community was as a local councillor for Longstone, then Craiglockhart for some 15 years – and in 2011 he was awarded 'Citizen of the Year'. George received many honours in his life including his OBE for services to sport. He was a community stalwart who spent over 60 years in the public eye, often sporting his trademark bowler hat. Few individuals have given more to public service than George Hunter, and we are indebted to him for all he did for the Trust.



George with Trust Manager Helen in 2004



George with Peter Hitt and then Prince Charles at a special ceremony at the newly opened Centre

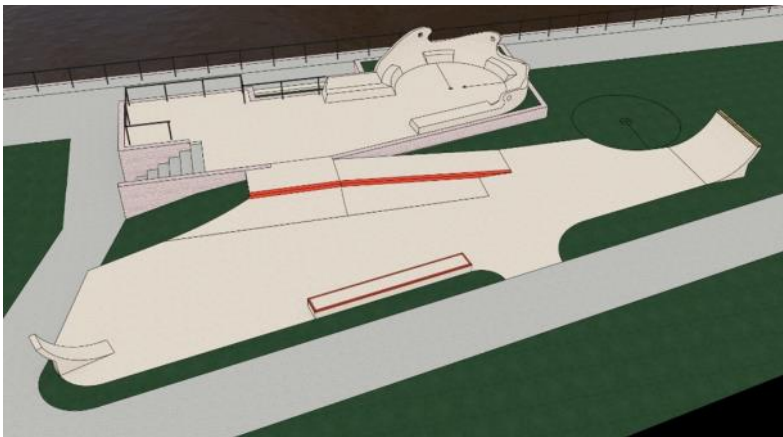
Latest Improvements at Coalie Park



November saw our Coalie Park Improvement Project finally starting to take shape on the ground. It has been a long process from the initial Landscape Proposal Plan which was produced four years ago to diggers on site, but it's very exciting to see Phase 1 get under way. P1 Solutions are the contractor and are due to complete the works in May 2024.

One of the main onsite transformations is the riverside gathering space by Great Junction St Bridge. The ramp angle will be reduced and new 'amphitheatre' riverside seating installed, allowing a greater connection with the water and providing a lovely space to relax. One of the main issues here has been a conflict between fast and slow movement through the site. We hope improved surfaces for cyclists and a more attractive riverside with upgraded paving, new benches and solar spots will encourage more people to enjoy the area.

Phase 1 of this Project is fully funded thanks to: Paths for All Ian Findlay Fund, the Scottish Government's Place Based Investment Programme (administered by the City of Edinburgh Council), Leith Community Fund, Avondale Environmental (Scottish Landfill Communities Fund), The Mushroom Trust and support from the Scottish Government through Sustrans Scotland's Network Development Fund.



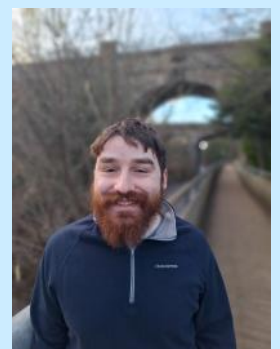
So what about upstream of the bridge? This area will be Phase 2 with work on the riverside path getting underway in May. We are hoping to transform the connection to Largo Place at the brick structures with community murals and the space near the bridge into The Dock – skate spot, meeting place and community garden space. These plans are now with Planning and we have some fundraising to do but, fingers crossed, we will be able to deliver this element soon, in partnership with Edinburgh Wheels. Discover more:

www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/

Welcome to Steven — our new Conservation Officer

In February we welcomed Steven Renton to our team. He has an MRes in Ecology and Environmental Biology from the University of Glasgow. His thesis looked at rodent ecology in ancient and young woodland. He has experience working as a ranger in the Lothians and Borders on practical conservation work. Steven has a passion for wildlife, conducting protected species surveys as an ecological consultant; also wetland, breeding bird, and insect surveys from the Lothians to the Cairngorms.

He is excited to join our conservation team and engage with our wonderful group of volunteers and the visitors to the Water of Leith!



Riverfly Surveys — the results are in

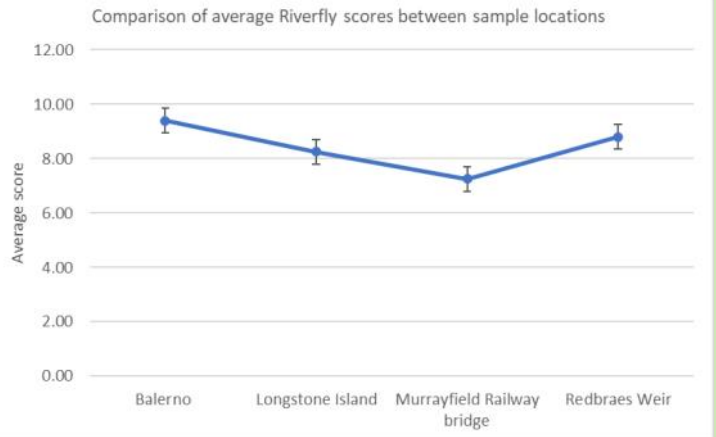
Riverflies are invertebrates that spend all or part of their life cycle in a river, stream, pond or lake. The three key groups are stoneflies, caddisflies and mayflies. Along with other freshwater invertebrates, they are at the heart of the freshwater ecosystem and are a vital link in the aquatic food chain. Their common characteristics of limited mobility, relatively long life cycle, presence throughout the year, and specific tolerances to changes in environmental conditions make them good indicators of water quality.



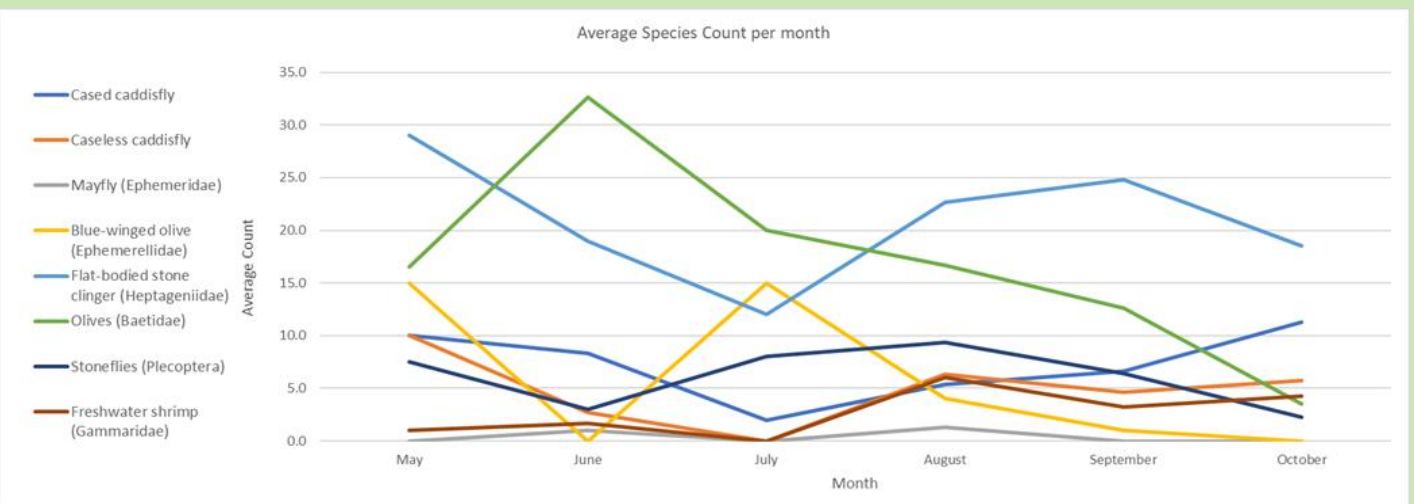
The Trust began riverfly sampling in May 2023. After some provisional monitoring and trialling a range of different sites, 4 locations were chosen to enable consistent monitoring of these fascinating pollution-indicating insects — Balerno, Longstone, Murrayfield and Redbraes weir. The idea is to provide a baseline set of reliable results over 6 months from which to build a robust and valid sampling schedule that can be replicable over coming months and years. The riverfly sampling scheme provides an insight into water quality in real time, gives evidence of pollution events occurring and gives a long-term trend of water quality. It is important that these results are kept consistent to ensure validity, especially during reported pollution events so that these can be understood and acted on.

The average riverfly score was calculated over the 6 months for each site (see graph). Murrayfield Railway Bridge has the lowest score (7.25) of all 4 sites – this site is shaded, which might be a factor in the lower score. A second site next to the railway bridge, but out of shade, should be sampled to test whether the lack of light significantly effects the riverfly score.

The Balerno site scored highest (9.4). It's also the highest in the catchment (in elevation) and has the least pressure from urbanisation and run-off. This would support a higher riverfly score both in number and diversity.



The average score of each riverfly species was calculated, and how this changed through the seasons (see graph below). The Flat-bodied Stone Clinger was the highest scoring riverfly found (blue line). These are a species of up-wing in the Heptageniidae family that typically breed in fast flowing streams. The lowest scoring riverfly was the mayfly species known as an up-wing but part of the Ephemeridae family (grey line). The Blue-winged olive (Ephemerellidae) also had a significantly lower score than other Olive species counted. These two riverfly families should be targeted during future sampling to understand what is causing their lower scores and what could be done to increase their levels.



Riverfly sampling will continue in 2024 with our trained and dedicated team of riverfly volunteers. All the data collected has also been passed to the Riverfly Partnership - www.riverflies.org and will contribute to their nation-wide monitoring of our rivers.

Spring Events

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

Spring in the Dells — Guided Walk Sunday 24th March - 1.30pm

Following on from her autumn hands-on exploration, join Kat in the Dells. This walk will focus on tree identification and spotting the early signs of spring. This springtime the walk will focus on tree identification and spotting early signs of spring.

Free to members (use promo code) others £7

WILD WELLY WALK Sunday 7th April from 1.30pm. A Family Fun Day aimed at 3 to 6 year-olds.

Follow the trail to discover who is living in the woods and river in springtime. £4 per participant

Bird life in the Dells — Guided Walk Sunday 21st April—1.30pm

Next in our Dells discovery guided walks is a tour Steven, our Conservation Officer, focusing on the bird life. What can you hear? What can you see? Free to members, others £7

Water of Leith Quilt Exhibition at the Visitor Centre from 30th March to 15th April

The talented Thistle Quilters, Edinburgh's longest-established quilting group, have produced a stunning representation of the river in quilt work. Come in and see the work on display. No need to book. Free. Open daily.

Saturday 11th May – 11am The Plant Sale !

Pick up some bargain plants and help the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. Please bring cash and a bag.

Children's Easter Holiday Events

Fun activities for 4 to 11 year-olds. Booking essential.
£7 per child, accompanying Adult Free
1.30pm to 3.30pm

Thursday 4th April—Spring Exploration.
Seasonal fun & games with Kat looking at what happens at this growing time of year.

Tuesday 9th April—River Dipping
Join us in the river for this favourite activity

Thurs 11th April—STICK
A stick –probably the most useful and fun thing in the wild.

Walkway Update

There has been more progress in the Dells, with work starting in early March on the Pipe Bridge on the east bank. When this work is complete, the circular route via Redhall and Kate's Mill will be back. Engineers are also meeting to see if a non-technical affordable solution can be found for the Dell Road access path.

Connecting routes have also been given a makeover recently with upgraded steps at Juniper Green and Magdala Steps near Belford. Contractors have also been working on the old mill site in Dean Village, repairing stonework and removing damaging vegetation, we hope this space will soon be open again for all to enjoy .

Great to see the City of Edinburgh Council investing in the walkway.

ZERO IMPACT—We're Not Just Talking Trash

Some people say we talk a lot of trash and they're right; we do! Our social media, blog posts and newsletters are full of talk about the trash we pull from the river and gather on the walkway. But our environmental commitment runs deeper than just our river clean-ups. In creating our Strategic Plan we found themes around waste and our environmental impact and from this, our Zero Impact Action plan was born.

Becoming completely zero waste and carbon neutral may be blue-sky thinking but we can still make changes to lessen our impact on the natural world. We're committed to educating ourselves so we can make informed choices as we work towards reducing our waste and carbon footprint.

Our focus begins at the Visitor Centre. With so much going on here, there's no doubt it's our largest source of waste and carbon usage. So where do we start?

What goes down our drains can directly impact the river. If you use our toilets, you may notice new toilet tissue. Not only is it carbon neutral and made from cellulose fibres recycled from drinks cartons, but it's kinder to the sewerage system too, as it breaks apart as it's flushed, reducing blockages.

Also going down our drains are cleaning products. As we use up our old stock we'll begin using more environmentally-friendly, biodegradable products that are kinder to the environment and opt for fragrance-free products where we can.

Then there's the cafe, a favourite for many regulars and a welcome break for those using the walkway. Here you can enjoy an organic, fairtrade, rainforest alliance, bean-to-cup latte, but the snack options aren't so sustainable. During the pandemic, individually wrapped cakes and biscuits made sense for hygiene, but this excess packaging produces a lot of waste. By the summer we hope to be able to offer fresh, locally made cakes and snacks. It's a small shift with a significant impact – less waste, more flavour!

In April we're going to delve into our rubbish (quite literally) and conduct a waste audit. We'll identify what makes up the bulk of our waste and set the baseline for improvements, allowing us to evaluate our efforts to improve in years to come. We'll also be checking whether our systems for recycling waste are effective. Recycling can be really confusing, as there's no nationwide formula and the approach varies from council to council. Expect a blog post in the coming months on the subject!

Looking to our future goals, we'll be tackling energy sources and usage. Can we lower our consumption? Insulating the loft halved our gas usage! Could we generate our own power and heat through solar panels or heat pumps? Maybe there's a way to harness the energy of the hundreds of excited who pass through the Centre each year. As we set out on this journey, we'd love to bring you along with us too. If you have any ideas, suggestions or feedback then please do get in touch.

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

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