



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

NEWSLETTER 85 Summer / Autumn 2024

Coalie Park *A new lease of life!*



BEFORE....



.....AFTER



On 22nd May we took some time to celebrate all that has been achieved so far at Coalie Park with Phase 1 of the transformation complete. The local community, delivery partners and funders all gathered to celebrate. Cllr Val Walker did the honours of untying the ribbon. Huge thank you to all involved. Phase 1 of this project was backed by funding from Paths for All Ian Findlay Fund, the Place Based Investment Programme (administered by the City of Edinburgh Council), Leith Community Fund, Avondale Environmental (Scottish Landfill Communities Fund), the Mushroom Trust and from the Scottish Government through Sustrans.

For the past three years the Water of Leith Conservation Trust (WOLCT) has engaged with the local community and users of Coalie Park to create a space which celebrates the history and heritage of the area, improves access for all and creates meaningful habitat improvements for wildlife.

The improvements include:

- New riverside amphitheatre style steps and an access ramp
- New benches and seating suitable for different users
- A fully upgraded and improved path surface, including a beautiful section of resin bonded gravel depicting the river as a 'silver thread'
- Cycle parking installed along the route
- The installation of two Biomatrix platforms
- Planting of a new hedgerow, three new oak trees, a meadow and 'coastal' themed planters – all helping pollinators.

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Coalie Park continued...

With Phase 1 complete, the space will achieve its potential and become a valuable recreational space. The path upgrades have created a safer alternative for people walking, wheeling and cycling to reach nearby destinations, engage in exercise and travel to other parts of the city. We must thank the original designer Liz Thomas for her vision, TP&E who developed the design and project managed this stage and the contractor P1 who began construction at the end of November 2023, and worked throughout the wet winter transforming the space.

So what's next?

With work complete downstream of Great Junction St Bridge it is time to upgrade the western part of the Park, dubbed Phase 2. This work has planning permission and is partially under way! Over the years, buddleia has damaged the riverside path and wall, the plants were removed last spring and now repairs are ongoing. We also have funding to create two community murals: A. - The Story of Water on the graffitied brick structures at the west end of the site; B. - the connecting steps to Largo Place and Keddie Park. Watch for news of design workshops in the coming month.

We are also hoping to make our aspirations for THE DOCK – skate spot, meeting place and community garden space – a reality, **but we still need more funding**. This area is dominated by a redundant brick structure which was once built as a viewing platform.

The removal of this structure would be too costly, so instead we're proposing to incorporate it into a newly purposed space having growing areas and new concrete skate/teen hang-out seating wrapped around the structure. This will be delivered in collaboration with Edinburgh Wheels —www.edinburghwheels.co.uk/



BioBlitz at Coalie finds 264 Species!!

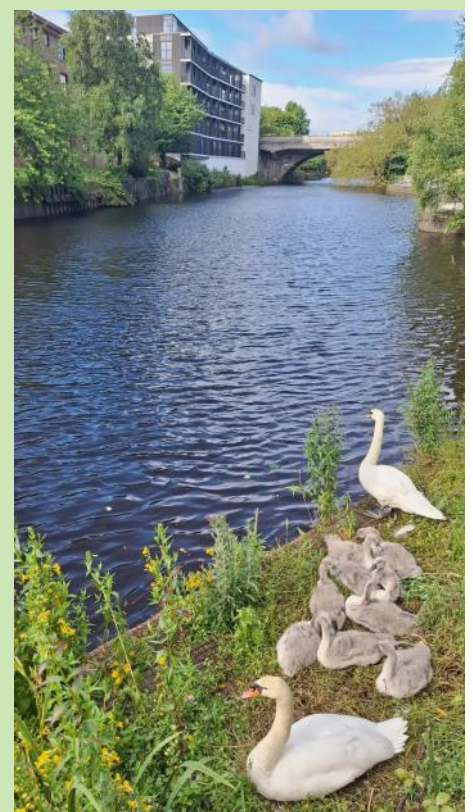
One of the key aims of the Coalie Park project was to improve the space for wildlife, as well as people. In order to give us a benchmark we decided to conduct a BioBlitz. This will give us a baseline for the biodiversity of the park after Phase 1 and will help inform future active management procedures. Thanks to all the volunteers who participated and helped us achieve the amazing count of 264 species.

Breaking this down a bit we found 84 species of animals, 17 fungi and 163 plants! Wildflowers were the most abundant group with 119 species recorded. The varied and semi-naturalised state of Coalie Park had certainly aided this, alongside the planting and seeding of wildflowers along paths, banks, and planters! 24 tree species were recorded, including willow, elm, alder, ash, birch, lime, cherry, holly and sycamore.

We recorded 45 species of insect, which function as key indicators of ecological health. These were restricted to terrestrial species, so it is likely many more aquatic species were unrecorded. Key pollinator include 5 bee species (red tailed, white tailed, buff tailed, common carder and tree bumblebee) and 3 butterflies (orange tip, small white, speckled wood). Five species of ladybird were also recorded including pine and harlequin.

Coalie Park and the surrounding area has proved to be a valuable habitat for a range of bird species, with over 30 recorded including waterfowl such as heron, eider duck, breeding goosander and swan. Songbirds included greenfinch, wren, great tit, swift and bullfinch alongside garden favourites like bluetit, robin, starling and sparrows! Mammal records, however, were sparse, but we did get some fox prints, vole burrows and a grey squirrel!

The bankside Biomatrix platforms have also been a major biodiversity success with over twenty-one plant species recorded!
See image complete with nine cygnets



Slow the Flow—by Trust Manager Helen Brown

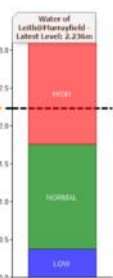
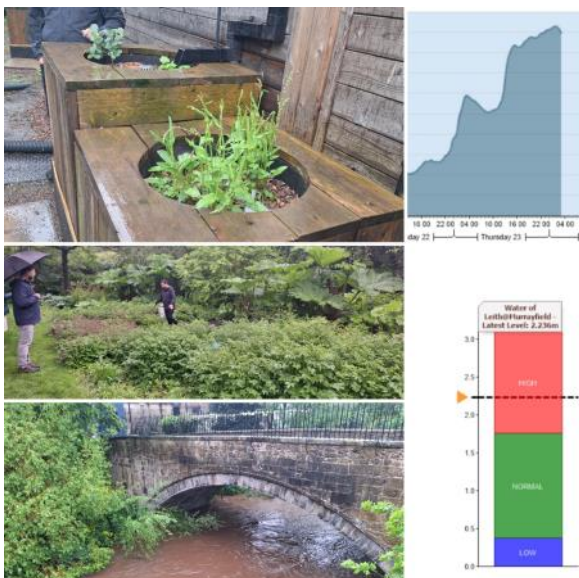
The 23rd May was a very wet day! Trust Manager Helen was at a conference at the Botanics to understand strategies for 'slowing the flow' of water from our towns, cities, farms and greenspaces into rivers. Investigating interesting concepts like swales, rain gardens and 'smart' water butts. And it rained, appropriately enough, but then the rain did not stop for 24 hours and soon enough a flood event was declared on the river and defences were enabled. Only 12 days earlier, Helen had been visiting projects in the Forth Catchment on the rural Allan Water and River Devon with ex-Conservation Officer, Charlotte, to look at farmland projects and natural flood management which mean water moves through the water course more slowly. With the frequency of high rainfall events predicted to rise, it's definitely time to look at these green infrastructure solutions to 'slow the flow' into the Water of Leith, both in the hills and in the city. As more of the city is developed and green / brown spaces become concrete and tarmac, the rain runs straight off into the Water of Leith. The over-stretched sewer network cannot cope and also 'vents' into the river along with all the day's sewer waste!

In the upper catchment beyond Balerno, peatland, farmland and forestry prevails, but with many drainage ditches focusing flow into the channel or tributaries, water can soon rush into the river. The reservoirs are there to help hold back some of the upper catchment run-off, but when they are full there's little that can be done. We need to slow the flow of water into the river, so water needs to be held back in the catchment... but how?

Upper Catchment – ideas from the Allan and Devon.

On our field trip with Charlotte we looked at natural flood management at the Pools of Muckhart: leaky dams hold back water when the small streams become swollen; flood overflow channels and wetland scrapes divert flow into pools/wetland areas which flood; and then slowly the water percolates back into the ground rather than running off.

We also looked at flood overflow channels along the Allan water, a larger-scale project. The landscaping works here improve water storage capacity and act as a natural flood management measure by diverting the pathway of floodwaters so that water flows over the re-connected floodplain. By incorporating scrapes into natural flood management, water storage capacity is increased, processes like sediment capture and nutrient filtration begin, and a wetland habitat is established. This increases biodiversity by creating habitats for several plant and animal species, such as wading birds, insects like damselfly and dragonfly and amphibians. It was teeming with tadpoles when we visited. In this area log jams had also been used to encourage natural erosion and re-meandering of the main river, which had been straightened and channelised in sections. There was also extensive riparian planting and signs of beaver activity. Could such ideas help in the more rural areas of the Water of Leith Catchment?



In the City – green infrastructure solutions.

A workshop run by Heriot-Watt and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, funded by the RECLAIM Network, explored the issues of maintenance and upkeep responsibilities of urban green infrastructure. It looked at how rain gardens, green roofs and swales can be created and what levels of maintenance is required in the future. These structures are undoubtedly cheaper to create than hard engineering solutions, but like SUDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) they need regular skilled maintenance to remain effective. And what of storm—water butts? Could we all use these to deal with water from our roofs and drainpipes? Could blocks of flats have storage solutions, making water available for watering and exterior cleaning? Could these butts even become gardens themselves?

What could we ALL do to help 'slow the flow'?

Members and Public Events

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

Sunday 21st July, 1.30 – 3.30. Adult guided walk. The Dells in summer: Trees. Meet at the Centre.

Continuing our series of themed guided walks, join Kat for a hands-on exploration of summertime in the Dells. We'll mainly be looking at identifying trees in leaf, but we'll also discover which plants and flowers are thriving and spotting any wildlife

Sunday 18th August, 1.30 – 3.30. Adult guided WADE Meet at the Centre

See the river from a different viewpoint. This guided WADE from the Centre to Bogs Bridge will showcase the heritage and wildlife of the river from the river. Waders will be provided. This walk will be in the water on very rough, rocky and slippery terrain and participants will need to be fit and healthy to ensure safety. Note: if river levels are high it will be cancelled.

Sunday 1st Sept, 1pm – 4pm. Coalie Park Funday.

Join us as we celebrate the upgrading of Coalie Park with games, activities and stalls for all the family.

Monday 30th September, 7pm. WoLCT AGM and members evening. At the Centre.

Guest speaker will be Charlotte Neary – Forth Rivers Trust to speak about natural river restoration and flood attenuation projects in the Forth catchment.

Saturday 5th October, 1.30 pm. Photography walk – Belford to Dean Village. Meet at Gallery of Modern Art entrance

Join us and Scottish Nature Photographer of the Year. Charles Everitt for a guided walk designed to make you pause and look at your surroundings. Capture unique images on your camera or phone of one of the most picturesque parts of the river - or simply come to enjoy the autumn light on the river.

Sunday 17th November, 1pm. Walks of Art: Canonmills to Leith. Meet at Canonmills Bridge.

There are many works of art to discover along the river, including both heritage features and contemporary sculptures. Join Helen and Scottish Nature Photographer of the Year Charles Everitt for a guided walk designed to reveal the hidden treasures of this most urban part of the river and how their images could be captured.

Monday 25th November, 7pm. Members Talk at the Centre. *Scotland beneath the surface* by writer and historian Bruce Keith.

Returning after his popular talk on bridges, Bruce's latest book is a journey exploring the natural and man-made heritage under our feet. A subterranean odyssey looking at natural caves, tunnels, buried treasure, oil-shale and coal mining, hydro-electric power generation (including Scotland's hollow mountain) and the building materials sourced from the rocks beneath our wellies.

Christmas Fayre. 7th December 11am – 2pm

Monday 27th January, 7pm. Members Talk at the Centre. *Spotting urban wildlife on the Water of Leith*
Wildlife photographer, Tom Kelly, presents a photo talk on his 4-year journey photographing the urban wildlife of Edinburgh. During this period, Tom has walked over 3,000 miles by the Water of Leith, with camera in hand. Tom will describe this journey and also share plenty of tips and insights on how to spot more wildlife.

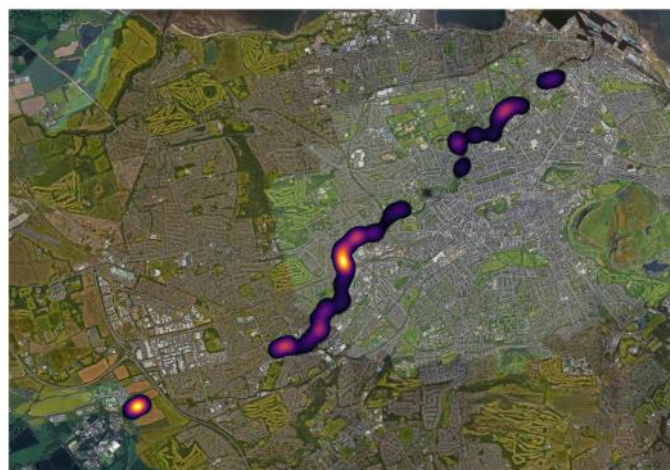
River News Round-Up.

After years awaiting repairs and resurfacing, the seating and viewing area at the site of Lindsay's Mill in Dean Village is now almost complete.

Delivery of a new bridge for the 'pipe' in the Dells is expected soon, which would mean the re-opening of the east bank to walkers.

The Victoria Swing Bridge has now re-opened after refurbishment.

Giant Hogweed management has been challenging this year due to all the wet weather, but our team has made huge progress, with over 4000 plants treated (just 40 upstream of Slateford). This heatmap shows the concentrations in the farmer's field along the



Murrayburn and the deposition area at Murrayfield.

Scottish Water CSO works are ongoing in the Slateford/Longstone area. They are due to move to the Balgreen and Gorgie areas in the autumn.

It's been busy spring for the volunteers:

- May saw our busiest, and most profitable, month EVER at the Visitor Centre, and we now stock fresh cakes and some savory treats from local bakers.
- Our volunteers out on the river joined in 37 tasks totalling 1111 hours, mostly on path-work and clean-ups. We also worked with 11 corporate teams, including folk from Scottish Water.
- Patrollers have also been extra busy conducting 91 river patrols—our eyes on the river.

And finally we are delighted to welcome Dan Rayner to the team as Conservation Officer — sadly Steven did not stay long as the lure of Ecological Consultancy proved too strong. Dan has been working at the Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill and at Earth Calling, and is looking forward to meeting supporters and volunteers.



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

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