



ANNUAL REPORT from March 2023 to April 2024

2023/4 was a transformative year for the Trust. The headlines are:

249 Practical Conservation Tasks undertaken by volunteers (*4.8 per week*)

172 Learning Sessions delivered (*3.3 per week*)

11,040 volunteer hours (*220 hours per week, equivalent to 7 full time members of staff*)

20,312 visitors to the Centre plus 3,725 learners on school / group visits and events

335 volunteer patrols conducted along 13 miles of river

A new 5-year strategy was developed and launched

Coalie Park Improvement Project commenced with the installation of two Biomatrix platforms

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust (WOLCT) is a registered charity SC000015 established in 1988.

Our Vision: A healthy river cared for by its community



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

Through partnerships and practical action, The Water of Leith Conservation Trust works to protect and improve the Water of Leith as a haven for wildlife and a resilient blue-green network for the city. We deliver inclusive learning, volunteering and recreational opportunities which connect communities with Edinburgh's River.

This report describes our achievements over the year and our performance against targets set in the WOLCT Business Plan. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust's principal funder, City of Edinburgh Council, for their continued support. We also appreciate the hard work and dedication of our staff, Trustees and volunteer team, not forgetting the resolute backing of our members.

The Volunteer Team & Community Action on the River

There were an impressive 163 tasks undertaken by Trust volunteers, amounting to 4353 hours during the year. The number of local businesses lending a hand also rose this year as 37 groups joined in river clean-ups and walkway maintenance sessions, plus 62 community groups including our regular group of young adults with learning difficulties – the Peregrine Group.

This meant we achieved an impressive 249 tasks along the river overall, an average of 4.8 tasks per week. In total 7792 volunteer hours were given to improve the river, its habitats and walkway. These include:

- 118 river clean-ups including 12 boat clean-ups in Leith
- 62 tasks to survey, treat and manage Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)
- 75 tasks maintaining the Water of Leith walkway and adjoining path network
- 25 tasks scything, raking, and planting our wildflower meadows and maintaining our Community Gardens

*tasks often involve more than one activity – i.e. we collect litter while wading the river treating INNS

Our eyes and ears, the Patrol Team have also conducted a record 195 volunteer river patrols. A scroll through X shows what our volunteers have been up to <https://twitter.com/WOLCT>.

The year also saw the growth of our new Survey Teams, who attended 46 survey sessions along the river. This work ensures our conservation efforts are improving biodiversity and recording helps to monitor the resilience of wildlife as our climate changes, highlighting issues and potential losses. We now have three survey teams:

- Plant identification who focused on surveying our 8 wildflower meadows
- The riverfly team surveyed four locations monthly over 6 months to track the health of these pollution indicating species
- The Fungi team who has identified 109 species in and around the Dells, including 10 rare species

Sustaining this level of delivery for the river and its community is so important for the river's wildlife, its users and for our volunteer team as it is helping to combat the loneliness and isolation of individuals who come along on a regular basis.

Visitor Centre, Learning and Communications

The Centre was open for 354 days and we recorded 20,312 visitors, over a quarter of whom chose to experience our interactive exhibition. We offer drinks, snacks and gifts from our Community Cafe and a whole series of engagement events and activities.

Spring saw our first Wild Welly Walk for under 6's, over the summer and autumn we delivered 25 public events for young people, guided walks and talks, and we ran a very popular Christmas Fayre. This Autumn saw us launch 'Souper Fridays', a chance to come along to the Visitor Centre, enjoy a delicious bowl of soup and some company, board games, and chat with our volunteers.

Our new website is performing well, we saw over 65,000 users and blog subscribers rose to nearly 1800. X (formerly Twitter) continues to be our most followed platform with over 9000 followers with Facebook sitting around 5000 and Instagram 1500.

Learning is at the heart of everything we do, from tiny tots learning through play at the Centre to Stirling University Methods and Applications in Environmental Science students carrying out real-life water quality monitoring. Led by our Outdoor Learning Officer, we have welcomed 91 school groups to experience our diverse outdoor learning programmes.

With the reintroduction of the higher geography assignments, we have been very busy with geography field studies, both our Centre-based study in the Craiglockhart Dells and our Source to Sea study which starts in the Pentland Hills and ends up in Stockbridge. We delivered a record 39 high school classes over the year. In addition, 52 community groups have joined us for walks, talks or 'hands on fun' sessions.

Overall that is 172 learning sessions – 3.3 per week.

Greenspaces, Recreation and Biodiversity

Improving the river’s greenspace took a big leap forward as, after years of planning, our transformative Coalie Park Improvement Project began. In May, two Biomatrix platform were installed in Leith – floating ecosystems which help to restore degraded waterways. They provide somewhere safe to rest and breed for the river’s bird and fish life, plus they will work to improve water quality. At the end of November, the site was closed as contractors moved in to begin the installation of new path surfaces, planters, benches, cycle parking, which have been designed to improve movement through the site while also allowing for pauses to enjoy the greenspace. <https://www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/>. Funders for this project include: 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), First Stage, and the Mushroom Trust. Plus support from the Scottish Government through a partnership between WoLCT and Sustrans.

During the year we focused attention on the Murrayburn, a badly polluted and giant hogweed-infested tributary. Clean-ups revealed decades of rubbish and accumulations of wet wipes and sanitary products. We also investigated the Cockburn (a rural tributary) for Himalayan Balsam, and the Oriel Burn for poor water quality. Long term, we’d like to get into these tributaries more to reduce invasive species, increase tree cover and biodiversity to benefit the Water of Leith.

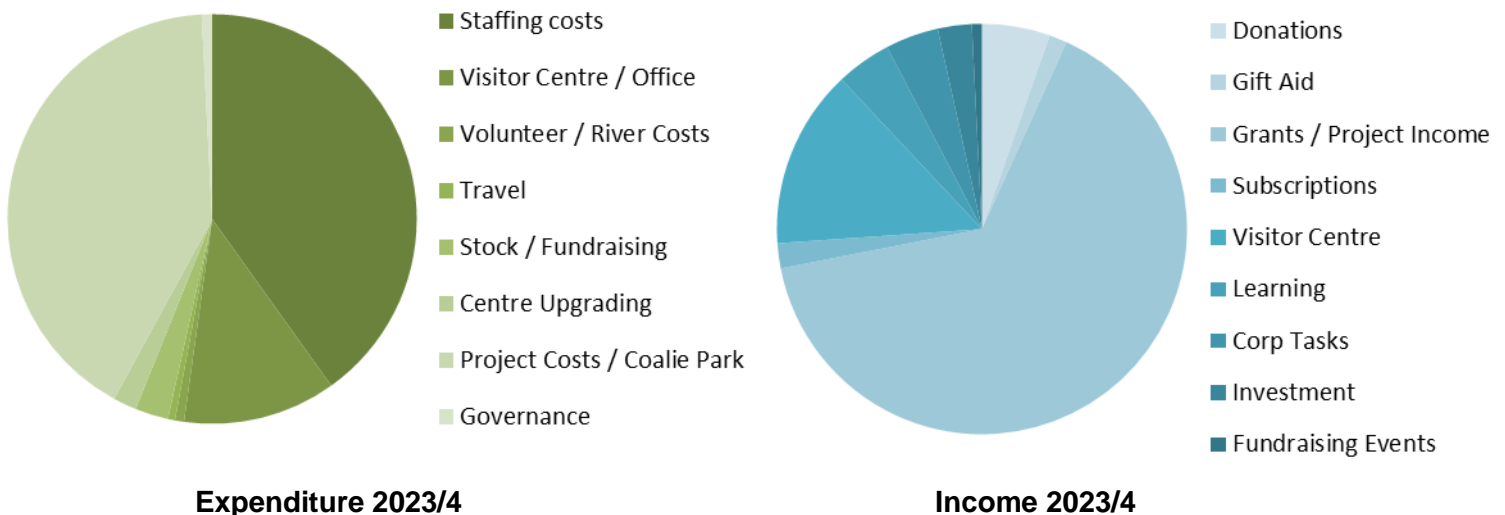
We still focus work on the management of INNS, 183 hours and 41 tasks were spent in the treatment of Giant Hogweed. Our monitoring work shows after eight years it’s really making a difference upstream from Slateford with just a few hundred plants remaining. We have been working downstream and along tributaries for just three years so there is still a long way to go to get this area under control. After over 10 years of volunteers’ hand-pulling Himalayan balsam in the catchment this plant is much reduced, with less than 138 hours spent on its removal. Proving our efforts against these invaders is finally working.

Looking after the walkway is at the core of our work and the volunteers have spent a muscle-aching 1800 hours scraping, sweeping and cutting back the edges of 13 miles of path network, plus restoring blocked drains and repairing fences: equivalent to having a person working full time all year round keeping the route accessible. The Trust also supported the delivery of a major walkway resurfacing project along five miles of the Walkway from Balerno to Slateford and the reinstatement of Redhall Bridge in the Dells

In addition, we lead the Water of Leith Action Group and contribute to the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, Nature Network development and the assessment of ‘Local Biodiversity Sites’.

Governance and Financial Summary

The charts represent a summary of how our accounts were apportioned for the year ending 31st March 2024. During the year, The Water of Leith Conservation Trust had a total income of £445,072 (2023: £267,471) and expenditure of £445,969 (2023: £254,011); this increase is due to the grant income and project expenditure related to the Coalie Park Improvement Project. Unrestricted income was £254,170, unrestricted expenditure £249,652. The total funds of the Trust are £336,643 (£337,251).



The Trust would like to extend its thanks to all its members, private donors and funders, especially: City of Edinburgh Council – Parks and Greenspaces and Communities and Families, Baillie Gifford, and Groundwork UK. Also many Charitable Trust's and corporate giving donors including: CMS Law, The Paterson Trust and The Barfil Trust

During the year we also developed and published a new five-year strategy to guide our work for the next five years. Based on the following pillars and our new vision of:

'a healthy river cared for by its community'



Details of our governance, Trustees, the full independently examined accounts, The Management Plan and our 2024-9 Strategy are all available on our website:

www.waterofleith.org.uk/the-trust/

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