



the  
**WATER of LEITH**  
Conservation Trust

## NEWSLETTER 87 Summer 2025

### *Celebrating 25 Years of The Water of Leith Visitor Centre*



*Male kingfisher who has managed to fledge  
five chicks this May. Photo by Tom Kelly.*



This spring we marked an extraordinary milestone: 25 years since the Water of Leith Visitor Centre opened its doors to the public. From humble beginnings on 3rd April 2000, the Centre has grown into a beloved hub for nature, learning and community — welcoming over 355,000 visitors through our doors in that time.

To mark the occasion, on 13th April we hosted a special celebration day filled with fun for all ages. Regulars, volunteers and local families joined us for river dipping, wildflower bingo, “fishing out the filth” games, a mayfly meet-and-greet, exhibitions, and our “silver thread in a ribbon of green” treasure hunt — plus plenty of tea and a slice of celebration cake!

What began as a modest centre has blossomed into a vibrant place where families explore nature, curious minds engage with exhibitions, and loyal regulars drop in for a cuppa or a chat. Our exhibition space alone, free to enjoy (but with donations always appreciated!), has been visited by more than 100,000 people.

Although some of the original features have changed over the years (farewell bubble tubes, hello river waste displays!) our core mission remains: to inform, inspire, and connect people with the natural heritage of the Water of Leith.

None of this would have been possible without our incredible volunteer team, who have donated an astounding 71,000+ hours to keep the Centre and its work running. Whether brewing coffees, tending the gardens, running events, or sitting on our board — they are the backbone of this place. That time, if costed today, equates to over £866,000 in value, but to us it's priceless. Over the years, our volunteers have not only given their time, but created a community of care, humour, and friendship, and some volunteers have been with us since the doors opened!

Our café and shop have evolved too. From a basic tea service to barista-style coffees, fresh bakes, and a retail section full of thoughtful, sustainable gifts, we've grown alongside your support. Our income has more than doubled in the last five years, helping us reinvest in our mission. From plant sales, duck races and treasure hunts, to Halloween fire-spinners, bug hunts, faerie trails, and survival skills, our events programme has brought joy to thousands. We've always believed learning in nature should be magical and inclusive.

Even during challenging times, like the 2020 lockdown, we kept going, serving takeaway coffees through a side door, offering safe walking routes, and keeping the community connected. That resilience and sense of purpose carried us through, and still drives us today.

As we celebrate 25 years of stories, dedication, and connection, we look to the next 25 with hope and ambition. Thank you to every visitor, volunteer, supporter, and friend who's made this journey possible. Here's to the next chapter — may it be as wild, wonderful, and full of life as the last!



*The Trust's new chairperson Gavin  
Corbett cuts the celebration cake*



## Coalie Park Phase 2 — Latest News

### Help us complete the final stage at Coalie

We're getting close to the finish line at Coalie Park — a community-led project turning a previously neglected part of Edinburgh into a green, useful public space.

Phase 2 is now well under way. With the help of local volunteers and young people, we've been building new skate features, creating murals, expanding planting areas, and making the site more accessible and environmentally resilient. But as we approach the final stages, we've hit a few funding gaps we need help to cover.

There are three specific things we're looking to fund:

- **Volunteer Support – £1,000.** Young people and volunteers are doing much of the heavy lifting on site. We provide them with PPE, meals, and cover travel expenses. It costs about £100 per working day, and we estimate we need around 10 more days to get the job done.
- **Hydro Break – £2,500.** This flow-control device helps manage water on site and prevents flooding into the Water of Leith. It wasn't part of our original budget but is now an expensive required part of the build.
- **Compost and Plants – £750.** We've expanded the raised beds using reclaimed cobbles from earlier work. Now we just need compost and plants to bring the space to life and support local wildlife.

If you believe in practical, hands-on community projects and want to help bring this space to completion, we'd really value your support. Whether it's a donation, materials, or just helping spread the word, it all helps. Find out more or support the project here: [www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/)



**A Marvellous Murals —** With the mural project now complete, artist Kate George reflects on this vibrant new addition to the Water of Leith Walkway, made possible with funding from Sustrans Art Roots.

"We're delighted to have finished the murals on the Water of Leith. It's been such a joy painting beside the river, with so much encouragement and kind words from people passing by. Walking between the wall and the water, surrounded by colour and reflections, makes you feel like part of the artwork," says Kate.

The creative journey began last year with a series of art labs at Leith Library. Local residents joined in to explore nature-based designs, starting with black-and-white cutouts inspired by the local environment. These were later transformed into vibrant layered prints at @ootblueprint, forming the basis for the final mural layout.

More than 75 people, from age 3 upwards, got involved in designing or painting the mural, including many curious passers-by who joined in spontaneously. The experience wasn't just creative, it was calming. Sunny days and the peaceful riverside setting made the painting sessions feel almost meditative.

Kate extends a big thank you to all the volunteers but especially Michael, who supported the early stages and workshops, and to Roberto, who helped daily with the practical side, pushing paint-laden wheelbarrows to and from the site.

The mural is not just a piece of public art — it's a celebration of community, creativity, and connection with nature.

Find out more about Kate's work at: [www.kategeorgedesign.com](http://www.kategeorgedesign.com)



## Wildlife Watch: Sightings soar thanks to river patrollers

Following a record number of public wildlife sightings earlier this year (as featured in our spring newsletter), we're delighted to share even more exciting news — our dedicated River Patrollers have completed their 2024 logs, and the results are amazing. Thanks to their efforts, total wildlife sightings on the Water of Leith this year have soared to 2,872, up from just 654 in 2023. This huge leap is a testament to the time, skill, and passion our volunteers bring to the river every week.

While iconic species like otters, kingfishers, dippers, and herons remain favourites with the public, our River Patrollers reveal a far broader picture. Their regular surveys capture a much wider range of species, including invertebrates and songbirds, many of which go unnoticed by casual observers.

Among the highlights this year:

- A chorus of songbirds including blackcaps, willow warblers, mistle and song thrushes
- Four types of tits and finches: great, blue, coal, and long-tailed tits; gold, green, bull and chaffinches
- Bark-foraging favourites: treecreepers (climbing up trunks) and nuthatches (often heading down!)
- Rarer sightings of jays, redwings, and the colourful green woodpecker

All species logged are valuable, even the more common ones. Take the Eurasian blackbird, for instance. Though still widespread, it's seeing worrying declines in parts of the UK due to Usutu Virus, a disease linked to rising mosquito populations driven by climate change. Our patrol data can help track the virus's spread and inform conservation efforts.

All wildlife records are shared annually with The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC), which manages biodiversity data for south-east and central Scotland. Do you love wildlife and the Water of Leith? Join our team of River Patrollers and contribute to vital conservation work while enjoying time by the river.



## Spring into action. River conservation in full flow.

Over the past few months, our dedicated volunteers and staff have been hard at work, engaging in a wide range of conservation activities along the river.

**River clean-ups:** The spring clean-up is almost complete. From top to bottom, every inch of river and bank has been hand-picked clean by our volunteers and community groups. Thanks to unusually low water levels, we've managed to remove items that have clearly been in the river for years, including a very rusty, old-style parking meter! Over 600 volunteer hours have been logged on clean-ups since 1st April.

**INNS (Invasive Non-Native Species):** The big Giant Hogweed Hunt is back on! It's that time of year and we're back tackling this invasive and harmful plant along the river banks. With populations still high in the city sections, we've returned to the Murrayburn in search of the seed source and discovered another huge population to address in Currie. If you see Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed or Himalayan Balsam you can help our team by logging it on <https://innsmapper.org/map> where you can also track their progress.

**Corporate Collaboration:** With the Water of Leith flowing so close to the city centre, it's no surprise that Edinburgh-based offices feel drawn to it. It's been a busy start to the new financial year, with seven local businesses joining the effort this spring — helping with river clean-ups, painting railings, and tackling drainage issues on the paths. Many more are already booked for our bespoke sessions throughout the summer.

**Wildlife Monitoring:** Survey season is in full swing! Early assessments have taken place across all meadow sites, riverfly monitoring is underway, and our pollinator transect teams have begun their regular recording cycles. This valuable data not only helps us understand the impact of our own work, but also contributes to national databases, revealing broader patterns in biodiversity across the country.

These collective efforts underscore the Trust's ongoing commitment to a  
*'healthy river, cared for by its community'.*



**Staff team changes:** This spring we were excited to welcome four fantastic new members to our team.

**Gavin Corbett.** From 15th April Gavin has been our new Chair. A long-time supporter and volunteer, Gavin has lived near the river for over 30 years. With a background in housing, politics, and now at Ramblers Scotland, he's passionate about making the river more loved, protected, and accessible.

**Katie Cole.** Conservation Officer. With a strong background in environmental science, conservation, and outdoor leadership, Katie thrives in the great outdoors. She's eager to connect people with nature — especially if it involves otters!

**Laura McRedmond.** Outdoor Learning Assistant. Laura helps lead learning groups along the river, inspiring care and understanding for the environment. With an MSc in Environment and Development, she's fascinated by the role of volunteer work in ecological sustainability.

**Rosie Phillips.** Sunday Visitor Centre Assistant. A friendly face in our café and Visitor Centre, Rosie is passionate about wildlife and sustainability. Studying Ecological and Environmental Sciences at Edinburgh University, she's always keen to hear about wildlife sightings!



## Members and Public Events

For details and information on how to book visit

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

Adult events are £7 or free to members

Events run 1:30pm-3:30pm

### Sunday 22nd June – Guided Walk: Discover the Story of “The Coalie”

Join us for a guided walk around the Coalie Park area as we uncover the rich and evolving history of “The Coalie” in Leith.

### Sunday 20th July – Guided Wade: The Dells

Join our ranger Johnny for a wade on the wild side and experience the river like never before.

### Sunday 17th August – Adult Guided Walk: Contemplate Colinton

Join ranger Dan on this reflective walk as we contemplate all things Colinton.

### Children’s School Holiday Events

1:30pm – 3:30pm | £7 per child | Accompanying adult free  
Booking essential. Events begin at the Centre unless otherwise stated.

Tuesday 1st July – River Dipping (ages 5–10)

Thursday 3rd July – Splash (ages 3–6)

Tuesday 8th July – STOCKBRIDGE: A Summer Exploration (ages 5–10)

Thursday 10th July – Bushcraft (ages 5–10)

Tuesday 15th July – Ultimate Survival (ages 8–12)

Thursday 17th July – COALIE PARK: Art in the Park (ages 5–10)

Tuesday 22nd July – Butterflies and Bugs (ages 5–10)

Thursday 24th July – Extreme River Dipping (ages 8–12)

Tuesday 29th July – Fairy Folk (ages 4–8)

Thursday 31st July – Bugs (ages 3–6)

Tuesday 5th August – River Dipping (ages 5–10)

Thursday 7th August – Butterflies and Bugs (ages 5–10)

## Walkway Updates

**Redbraes Tunnel** was plagued with persistent flooding and surface damage. This had made this vital route impassable for months at a time — but not anymore! Thanks to new drainage, a Flexipave surface, and a safety handrail, the tunnel and surrounding paths are now safer, smoother, and accessible all year round for walkers, cyclists, wheelchair users, and more. This project reconnects key routes through St Mark’s Park and along the Water of Leith Walkway—just in time for spring adventures! This project was delivered through careful planning, collaboration with ourselves, the City of Edinburgh Council, Paths for All and contractors trained in Flexipave installation.

We are pleased to say that the main Walkway and most of the connecting routes are open and accessible at the moment, just one bridge in the Dells still closed and some ongoing wall repairs near Slateford affecting users.

## Popular plant sale



Thank you to everyone who supported our plant sale. We had a phenomenal sunny sale. It was the busiest year yet with the most plants on sale.

Once again volunteers pulled out all the stops, sowing and growing, sorting and selling. We raised a record £2800!!

For more information or to subscribe to our blog visit [www.waterofleith.org.uk](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk)  
Water of Leith Visitor Centre,  
24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ  
0131 455 7367 [admin@waterofleith.org.uk](mailto:admin@waterofleith.org.uk)  
Registered Charity SC000015 Company No. 114294