



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

NEWSLETTER 88

Autumn / Winter 2025

Growing Roots: Outdoor Learning that lasts a lifetime



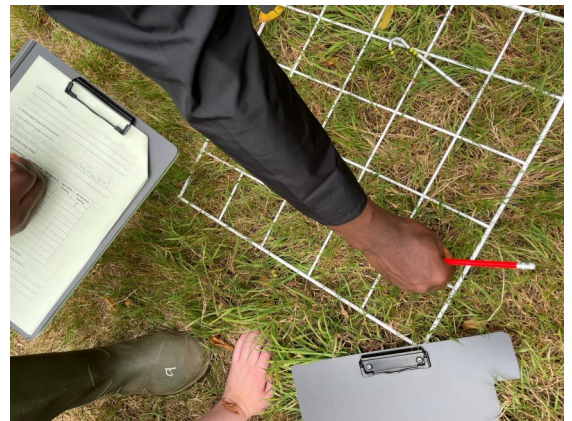
Photo by Tom Kelly.

By Ruth Prince , Outdoor Learning Officer

Last year, an S6 pupil attended an Advanced Higher Biology class. “Miss,” she said to me, “I want to show you something.” She got out her phone and scrolled through her photos to find a shot of her dressed in a Jacobite plaid, mud on her face, standing in front of a shelter she’d made while doing our *Jacobites in Edinburgh* programme, a full seven years earlier. “Wow,” I said, “do you remember that day?” “Of course I do,” she told me, “it was a great day.”

As amazing as this story is, we get lots of children who come once for a party or with a partner group and another time for a summer event or with their school class. With each visit they get to know the river and the woodlands around it a little bit better and we hope it that this translates into caring not only for their local river, but for water sources everywhere.

Luckily, we have no shortage of teachers in Edinburgh and the wider Lothians who agree with us. Many teachers have come to see that learning with their classes outside can be very effective. As a result, for the last year or two we have been fully booked for both the autumn and summer terms and we inevitably end up turning classes away.



However, in 2025, with the welcome opportunity to expand our programme to two members of staff, we now have the capacity to take on more bookings and to reach a wider range of learners. I no longer have to look pleadingly at my colleagues to step in and support me for a school who needs to bring two classes in one day to justify the cost of a minibus. In March we took on Laura as our Outdoor Learning Assistant. She’s had a lot to learn: an education programme that spans nursery through senior stage high school with an occasional higher education group. However, Laura has embraced the challenge and has also become the point person for cub and scout visits as well as many of the holiday clubs and events that occur over the summer holidays.

Last week, for example, was the first full week of the academic year. I was able to lead four senior-stage days of high school biology while Laura took off on the cargo bike to meet with three different classes on the meadows at Bogs and Balgreen. She spoke to the children about the importance of pollinators and then to have them stomp in the seeds and to then rake off the dead vegetation. Those children will now have the pleasure of walking past the meadows in years to come and will be able to think: ‘I helped that meadow to thrive!’. Could any education programme ask for more?



Determined Dedication: A Record-Breaking Clean-Up in Leith

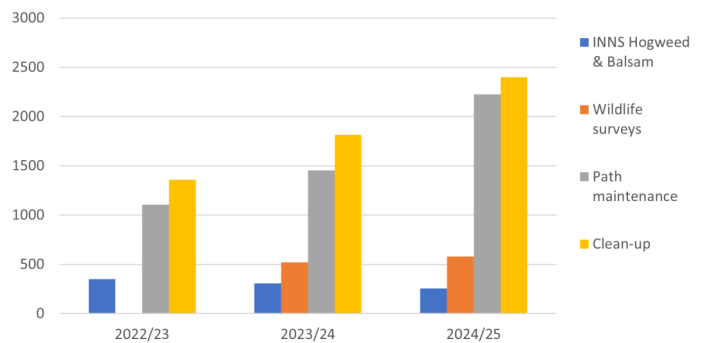
This August, our monthly clean-up in Leith revealed a striking number: 180 cans collected by volunteers in just one session! While this shows the ongoing challenge of litter in our green spaces, it also highlights the immense dedication of our community to keeping the Water of Leith clean and healthy.

Despite the challenges, volunteer commitment continues to grow. Over the past three years we've seen a significant increase in participation:

- Clean-up hours have risen from approximately 1,350 to nearly 2,400—a 77% increase.
- Path maintenance hours have more than doubled, from 1,100 to over 2,200.
- Specialised tasks such as wildlife surveys and control of invasive plant species have also seen steady growth.

In total, volunteers contributed over 5,000 hours in the 2024/25 period, a remarkable rebound from the slowdown caused by the pandemic. While litter-picking remains vital, the growing volunteer base allows us to focus more on long-term enhancement projects. If you fancy joining the team then registrations are currently open on our website: www.waterofleith.org.uk/volunteer/

Volunteer Hours for key tasks



From neglect to nature and creativity: The Renewal of Coalie Park

From 2021 to 2025, the Coalie Park Improvement Project has transformed a once-neglected stretch of riverside into a vibrant, accessible, and wildlife-rich space. Delivered by the Water of Leith Conservation Trust with the City of Edinburgh Council, local partners, and volunteers, over £550,000 of investment has brought new paths, seating, murals, planting, and floating ecosystems. Hundreds of community members – from families and volunteers to youth trainees – helped shape and build the park, leaving a legacy of creativity, accessibility, and connection to nature. What do you think?

The Dock is the final and most exciting stage of the project — a new skate and social space designed with the Edinburgh Wheels Project and Odyssey Skateparks. Featuring wheel-friendly elements, creative landscaping, and a Gaudí-inspired mosaic seating area, it has also been a hub for youth training, with local young people gaining skills and industry qualifications through its build.

Although almost complete, The Dock is still closed while we await the installation of safety railings before it can be officially opened and handed over to the Council. It will then provide an inclusive, community-led space for recreation, art, and gathering.

Thanks must go to all our supporters, whose generosity has helped bring this project to life.

Funders: Paths for All – Ian Findlay Fund, City of Edinburgh Council – Place Based Investment, Leith Community Fund, The Mushroom Trust, The National Lottery Community Fund, Sustrans Scotland – Network Development & ArtRoots Funds, Avondale Environmental – Scottish Landfill Communities Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Robert Barr Foundation, Scape Scotland, Longstone Foundation, dozens of private donors and local businesses.

In kind support:

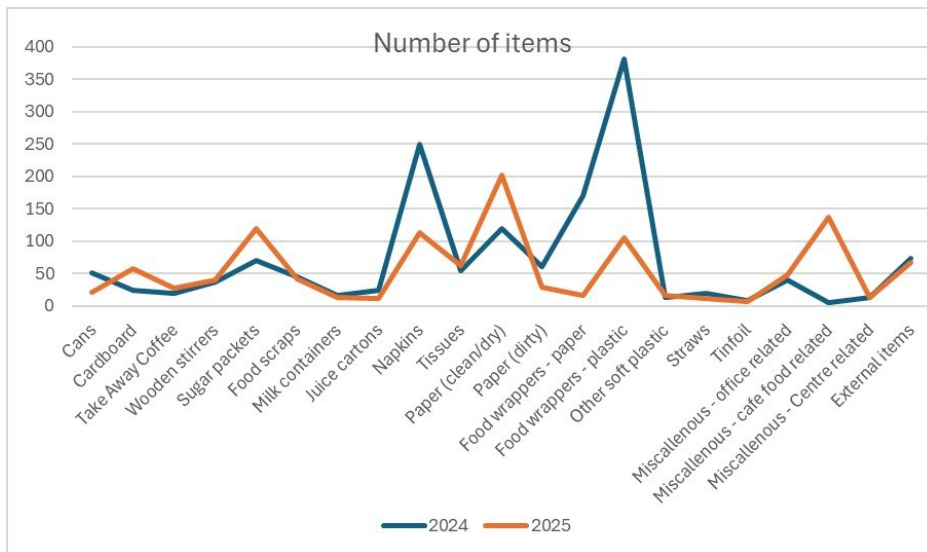
BALFOUR BEATTY, Sunbelt Rentals UK, City Access Scaffold, Jewson, BRC, The NWH Group, The Breedon Group, Under Pressure, Tile Star, First Stage Studios, Dulux Decorating Centres, Network Rail.



From waste to watts: our journey toward Zero Carbon and waste

Back in spring 2024 we shared an article which featured our first steps towards reducing our environmental footprint. At that time we had just begun making changes to our toilet paper, cleaning products, and café snacks, while also preparing for our very first waste audit. Now, 18 months on, we're excited to share with you what we've learned, what's working, and where we're heading next.

Waste audit – digging into the details



In April 2024, we literally rolled up our sleeves and sifted through our bins. Unsurprisingly, single-use packaging and food waste made up a large share, and we also spotted gaps in how our recycling systems were being used. This gave us a clear starting point. Since then we've:

- Improved signage and staff training around recycling.
- Switched to more sustainable packaging in the café.
- Begun offering fresh, locally baked goods instead of individually wrapped snacks.

When we repeated the audit this spring the results were encouraging: overall waste items dropped 22%, from 1,533 to 1,191. Food packaging waste showed the biggest improvement — down 69%, from 451 items to just 142, thanks to replacing wrapped cakes with fresh bakes. Even after accounting for extra packaging from ingredients (like butter wrappers), overall food packaging waste has halved. Napkins and paper towels also fell by more than 50% (250 to 114) thanks to the switch to hand towels and better composting awareness. And this year there were no stray teabags in staff or volunteer bins! There is still room to improve — more items ended up in the wrong bins, which costs staff time to sort. A little extra care from everyone will make a big difference. Our goal for next year: even less waste, and even better disposal habits.

Powered by the sun – going all-electric

Energy use is another major part of our footprint, and this year we've made big strides. The Visitor Centre is now powered by the sun, with 27 solar panels and a battery storage system providing most of our electricity. On sunny days, we generate enough to run the café, offices, and even charge two electric vehicles, without connecting to the grid. We're also cutting our reliance on gas. In a draughty Victorian building that's no small feat, but upgrades like secondary glazing, thermally efficient blinds, destratification fans, and improved insulation have already reduced heating demand. These improvements mean we're not only using less energy overall but also shifting more of it to clean, renewable sources.



Our carbon journey – progress not perfection!

Alongside the waste audit we've been taking a closer look at our carbon footprint. Every action leaves a trace — from the energy that heats our building to the rubbish we put in the bins — and after measuring it, we can begin to shrink it.

There's still work ahead. Further upgrades to our heating and hot water systems, and continued investment in renewables, are firmly in our sights. What matters most is that our direction is clear: steady, meaningful progress toward a future where the Centre treads more lightly on the planet. Zero Impact remains our guiding vision. We may not reach it overnight, but every change — whether switching products, reducing waste, or rethinking energy use — adds up. With your support and feedback, we'll continue openly sharing with you our journey, celebrating the progress we make and learning from the challenges along the way.

AGM and Members' Evening Monday 6th October, 7.00pm Water of Leith Visitor Centre.



the
WATER of LEITH
Conservation Trust

A Year in Numbers 2024-2025.

11,527

Total hours volunteered

8,393

River works

3,134

Visitors centre

Volunteering Impact

Across 8,393 volunteer hours we executed 222 practical tasks including clean-up, path work and habitat improvement sessions.

Learning and Community Engagement

We delivered 93 school sessions, 63 community learning sessions and 26 public events.

182

Educational learning sessions

48

Primary school lessons

45

Secondary school lessons

26

Public events

63

Informal learning activities

21,770

Visitor centre visits

Visitor Centre

We welcomed over 21,000 visitors to our centre across 355 days, totalling 3,134 volunteered hours.

Thank you to all of our volunteers, visitors and supporters!
A healthy river cared for by its community

After the formal businesses our special guest speaker will be:
Rebecca Barr – Director, Project L-and Community Enterprise.
“Farming Together for Nature in the Pentland Hills”
A story of how local farmers joined forces to form a nature-focused cluster: sharing aims, exploring projects, and tackling challenges to farm with wildlife in mind. Find out more about how neighbouring farms in the Pentlands are working together across fence lines to deliver landscape-scale benefits for wildlife, farming, and the wider community.

The AGM and presentation will be followed by a drinks reception and an opportunity to meet our staff, trustees and fellow members.

Please RSVP by 2nd October 0131 455 7367 |
admin@waterofleith.org.uk

The Agenda, Minutes of the 2023.4 AGM, 2024.5 Annual Report and Audited Accounts are available on our website or on the night. www.waterofleith.org.uk/the-trust

Members and Public Events

For details and information on how to book visit www.waterofleith.org.uk/whats-on/
Adult events are £7 or free to members. Events run 1:30pm-3:30pm

Sunday 21st September – Elemental Walk – Earth, Wind and Fire (with Water)

1.30 to 3.30pm. Join Kat to discover the Elements of Nature, on this unique and interactive walk through the Dells. Together we'll explore nature through the eyes of the elements (Earth, Air, Water and Fire) and learn how they shape the world around us. Through elemental activities, we'll see the woods and river from a fresh perspective, connecting with nature through sound, movement, exploration and conversation. Note: This event will not feature music by the 70s group “Earth, Wind and Fire”, despite being the inspiration for the walk!

Sunday 26th October Heritage Hike with Helen – Currie to Juniper Green

1.30 – 3.30pm. Meet at the small car park on the Kirkgate in Currie, then walk down to Juniper Green. This guided walk will explore the rich heritage of this ancient and fascinating stretch of the river, including: Bronze Age settlers, interesting graves, ancient wells, historic church and the many mills that once lined the river

Children's School Holiday Events

1:30pm – 3:30pm | £7 per child | Accompanying adult free | ages 5–10
Booking essential. Events begin at the Centre.

Tuesday 14th October – River Dipping Join us to explore the river and find out what lives in the water.

Thursday 16th October – Autumn Antics Enjoy an afternoon of seasonal fun and games in the Dells

Monday 24th November – Members Talk

Wild Homecomings – an evening with author Keith Broomfield 7pm

Nature writer Keith Broomfield talks about the wildlife of his current home area – the River Devon in Clackmannanshire – as well as Edinburgh, where he grew up and a city that sparked his passion for nature, and which led to the publication of his latest book, Wild Edinburgh

CHRISTMAS FAYRE 6th DECEMBER 11am to 2pm

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

Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ, 0131 455 7367 admin@waterofleith.org.uk
Registered Charity SC000015 Company No. 114294