



Newsletter for East Lothian Countryside Volunteers

September 2017

Well, I'm not quite sure what happened to the summer but September it just about is. Although there does seem to be a seasonal shift in the air, there is still plenty of summer wildlife about to enjoy. For animals much of this involves food. Stocking up to provide reserves to see them through the winter or fuel to migrate to warmer climes. And talking of food (tenuous link), the annual Volly Jolly takes place at the end of the month, with the Countryside team providing free lunch and entertainment to volunteers to say **thank you** for all you do. Details within BBF and on the attached flyer – please let Duncan know if you can make it. In the meantime, enjoy this read. Feel free to send me more content to enliven and diversify BBF and prevent it from sliding into a newsletter about moths and spiders. I know there is more to life. Somewhere.



Conservation Volunteer tasks scheduled in September:

New faces always welcome! If you would like to join in with a group for the first time, please get in touch with the relevant ranger to confirm details.

Wed 6th September Aberlady John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk

Thur 7th September Yellowcraig Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk

Thur 21st Sept Path Warden team task Duncan; dpriddle@eastlothian.gov.uk

Tue 26th Sept North Berwick Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk

Tue 26th September Levenhall Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk

Wed 27th September Dunbar CVs Tara/Laura; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk

Upcoming events for volunteers!

All welcome. For more details or to sign up, please send me an email: kbaird@elothianmail.net

Sunday 3rd September 10am St.Mary's Pleasance Haddington. Moth trap unpacking. Come along to see the moths caught in the garden the previous night.

Saturday 30th September 10am-4pm Haddington. Volly Jolly. See back page of this edition for full details.

Thursday 5th October 09:30 – 12:30 Gifford. Fungal Foray led by Sam Ranscombe.

We will take a walk through Yester Estate, looking for fungi as we go. The aim is to reach Goblins Ha', but that depends on how much we find to stop and look at along the way!

Saturday 18th Nov 19:30 Masonic Hall, Haddington. QUIZ night. Teams of up to 6 people (if you don't have a team, just turn up on the night and join one). Which group will be crowned ELCV brain of 2017? With thanks to Thomas for organising.

Please send in ideas or content for the next 'Best boot forward' to kbaird@elothianmail.net
Apologies for any omissions, inaccuracies and typos.

Volunteer activity during August

(or at least photo evidence of; I'm sure plenty more has gone on unphotographed)



Above and below: Spot the Difference! Two before and afters showing the fantastic work of path warden Di and the difference a bit of a trim and lick of paint can make!



Junior rangers were treated to some spider fun at Yellowcraig with tuning forks and a toothbrush



Get a group of Path Wardens together and no job is too large! Bridge, step and style repair on this month's Team Task. © Di Bulmer



Bumble bee surveys continue for a little longer. Males are now out in force, just to confuse identification further!



Frog Orchid survey at Yellowcraig



Broad-clawed Porcelain crab; Shore crab and Common Starfish. Photos by Liz

Rock Pooling with Roger

Rushing about as usual, I was thinking “I don’t have time for rock pools!”. But I was so glad that I did. We had a fantastic time immersing ourselves (not literally) in the watery inter-tidal world. Beautifully delicate bristle stars, strange wormy-things (polychaetes), backward-darting squat lobsters. Without the inconvenience of small children eager to move on, we could stop and gaze into the pools and watched Hermit crabs sizing each other up and tiny fish pausing in the shallows. My favourite was the Broad-clawed Porcelain crab, a tiny creature proudly sporting some impressive claws. So next time you are near a rocky shore at low tide, don’t feel you need a small child with you and don’t think you haven’t enough time. Indulge yourself with some rock pool wildlife action – you’ll feel better for it!



Tour of Archerfield Walled Garden and estate

At the end of August volunteers were treated to a guided tour of Archerfield Walled Garden by Kerry, one of the gardeners there. The garden has been under development for less than two years, but already it is taking shape and it was interesting to see how much has been achieved so far and learn about plans for the future. The gardeners have the tricky task of making an attractive and safe garden to meet visitor expectations whilst making it as wildlife-friendly and productive as possible. After coffee and too much chocolate brownie, Dave Wild took us into the wider estate and talked about the history (some ancient, some more recent), how the landscape has changed over the eons and gave us a flavour of the wildlife that lives there. A fantastic morning. Huge thanks to Archerfield Walled Garden for hosting us.



The Old Ladies of North Berwick

By Katty Baird

One afternoon in the beginning of August, I chanced upon twelve Old Ladies in North Berwick. Unremarkable perhaps, given the town's demographics. They were nestled together in small groups and hiding in a dark, damp culvert. This was an exciting and thrilling find (for me at least) and according to available statistics, the largest such gathering yet recorded in Scotland!

Of course I'm not referring to the sort of Old Lady that I look forward to becoming someday soon, but instead an impressive species of moth. Based solely on its name (as good a reason as any), it was a moth I had been wanting to see for some time so to discover it on my doorstep was fantastic.

The name "Old Lady" is believed to derive from the wing markings that look a bit like the shawl that old ladies might once have worn. In Latin it is called *Mormo maura*: In Greek mythology Mormo was a spirit who bit bad children and maura probably derives from Latin or Greek words for dark. Not necessarily a kind old lady then.

They are on the wing in July and August and rest up by day in dark places such as outbuildings, tunnels and bird boxes. The moth is found through much of the UK, usually in damp places by streams and rivers, but it seems it is never numerous. This might in part be a reflection of the fact they are not readily attracted to light, the method most often used by moth enthusiasts to record species. Also, I suppose not many people visit dark culverts; those that do almost certainly won't be looking for moths. As with many species of insect which are neither 'of conservation concern' nor 'an economic pest' I could find very little information about their habits or ecology. So, using small dabs of paint to identify individuals, and visiting the culvert regularly both day and night, I endeavoured to learn a bit more about our North Berwick Old Ladies.

Without going into too much tedious detail, I can report that females 'called' to attract males around dusk and mating also took place in the culvert around this time. Sometimes individuals didn't go out for the night, but stayed in the same spot until the following night. Some individuals weren't found in the culvert every day, so presumably they use other daytime roosting spots. The longest period over which I recorded one individual was two weeks. I found no evidence of sherry or bingo.

By the third week of August it was all over, and I haven't seen an Old Lady since. But I look forward to acquainting myself with their offspring next year.



Marked with a small dot of yellow paint allowed me to identify individuals



A female in classic "calling" posture, with the abdomen expanded and raised above the wings



A mating pair. Rudely, but briefly, interrupted by my torchlight

Increasing biodiversity –you may have more than you realise!

Encouraging wildflowers has become an aim for many Beautiful Scotland and Its Your Neighbourhood groups who now set areas aside for native species. Often they presume this must mean planting or sowing. This North Berwick example of a 1.7 ha wildflower meadow, known locally as the Coos Green as in the past livestock were grazed there, has had neither. We simply encouraged what was there naturally but had been inhibited by regular grass cutting to provide public recreational open space. It is on a raised beach just inland from the present high tide mark so the soil is very sandy and free draining. This has a big effect on what plants grow there. Simply by reducing mowing to one cut in the autumn an interesting variety of wild flowers has emerged. We have recorded nearly 30 species of flowering plants. Lady's bedstraw, Restharrow, Thyme and trefoils grow on the drier hummocks. Cowslips give early spring colour. The Scottish bluebell –harebell to southerners - is prominent later in the summer. In a damper patch we have an expanding colony of native orchids among the abundant buttercups. In June 2017 653 spikes of northern marsh and 95 common spotted orchids were recorded. Orchids are notoriously promiscuous so we are now finding some hybrids. In hollows bigger plants like knapweed and ragwort thrive. This last is somewhat controversial as it is poisonous to livestock but as no grazing now occurs we allow it as a native species and food plant for the distinctively striped cinnabar moth caterpillars.

To allow the public easy access and avoid accusations that this is just the council saving money, paths are cut through the sward which allows people to walk their dogs without getting wet feet on damp mornings.

The East Lothian coast can have little more than 20 inches of rain per annum. That means that in some years we can cut but do not need to lift as there has been so little growth. However a damp summer in 2016 led to an increase in coarse grasses and fewer flowers. Last autumn, after the cut, NBIB and ranger led volunteer groups spent several mornings raking off the material. As an experiment we asked the mower operator to scalp parts of one section and we sowed yellow rattle into the bare patches. This has germinated successfully and was in flower by June. It is well known as a hemi-parasite on grasses so it will be interesting to see if it reduces their vigour in the trial area. The many hours spent laboriously raking has paid off with excellent flowering this spring and summer.

Note that were we to repeat the operation even 50 metres further inland we would have a different wildflower meadow as the soil is much heavier so would support a different plant community.

Samantha Ranscombe, East Lothian Council Ranger Service, John Stevens, East Lothian Council Groundcare, Stan da Prato, North Berwick in Bloom.



Volunteers raking up the cut grass in autumn and some of the floral displays (Orchids and buttercups top, Yellow Rattle below) on show during the summer

Moths in the Garden

By Donald Smith

Those who turned up to the first "Moths in the Garden", held in St Mary's Pleasance, Haddington, didn't know what to expect as the lids were carefully taken off the moth traps. All through the preceding night moths would have been attracted to their lights and then dropped into the containers below to hide amongst a jumble of egg boxes. However, the night started off with gusts of wind and a clear sky and the traps might have been empty, Luckily for those, young and old, who had turned up, there was plenty to see. Most numerous were the Large Yellow Underwings, a common resident of gardens and parks. Less familiar were two other yellow underwing species (Lesser and Lesser Broad Bordered), as well as the scuttling and more beautifully marked Copper Underwing, its forewing like a detail from an oriental carpet, its underwing a flash of copper kettle. Other moths included an Orange Swift, a Square-spot Rustic, and a July Highflier, all evidence of the variety of moths that can be found even in the centre of Haddington, as well as to the charming variety of moth vernacular names. The star find of the morning, both because it is uncommon in Scotland, but also because the event was hosted by the Haddington Garden Trust, was the Garden Dart, an almost black moth with even darker markings of delicate lines and ellipses. After being identified and photographed, the moths were all released back into the flower borders where they could hide for the rest of the day before flying free again the following night. The records of the moth species seen, all of which are new for the garden, will be sent to the East of Scotland branch of Butterfly Conservation who collect and validate records.

Photographs © Abbie Marland.



Above: Orange Swift; Below: Garden Dart. Both new records for the area.



"Moths in the Garden" events will be held on the first Sunday of each month at St Mary's Pleasance at 10am and are free to attend. Next event Sunday 3rd September 10am
For more information contact mothsinthegarden@gmail.com



Field Gentian ©Abbie



Meadow Grasshopper © Katty



Linnet © Liz



Beadlet Anemone ©Abbie



The crack of dawn © Katty



Black Rustic moth ©Abbie

Photo Gallery



Chicory at Torness ©Liz



Looking the wrong way (or daring to be different) ©Abbie



Grey Heron on the Tyne © Liz



Nest of a Tree Wasp © Abbie



Squat Lobster on thumb © Liz



In hibernation already! This Herald and Small Tortoiseshell have given up on summer ©Abbie Marland

Volunteer opportunities at Gilmerton House Kitchen Garden

The walled garden at Gilmerton House has lain in some disrepair since the early 1950s but is now being nurtured back to its former glory. The charity, Growing Matters, operates from the garden, supporting and training volunteers in a range of garden activities. There is an open volunteering session each week every Thursday afternoon from 1pm to 4pm as well as many other ways for volunteers to get involved – check out the website for more details or contact june@gilmertonhouse.com

www.gilmertonhousekitchengarden.org/



The Scottish Spider Search

The search for spiders continues. This month the spotlight is on the **Four-spotted Orbweb spider**. An impressive species which has been seen at Aberlady, Yellowcraig and John Muir Country Park... but where else might it be lurking?

The Four-spotted Orbweb spider is most obvious at this time of year when the large adults are about. They can be found in areas with vegetation tall and strong enough to support their web, which can be up to 40cm in diameter. The web is rarely higher than 1.5 m from the ground so undisturbed rank grassland, areas with gorse or heather, marram dunes are good places to look. The key feature to distinguish this spider from other superficially similar species are the four white spots on the back of the abdomen. The colouring of the spider can be quite variable, ranging from greens to yellow to orange. Their colour can change and is possibly related to humidity (in damper places they tend to be paler and greener whist in drier areas they are more orange). Egg-laden females are big; in fact this species is has the accolade of Britain's heaviest spider, with records of 2g not unusual. **If you see one send your record into the Scottish Spider Search!**



Deciding which fly to try next? © Tim Gibbons

More fascinating information about this spider can be found at:
http://britishspiders.org.uk/wiki2015/index.php?title=Araneus_quadratus

Full details of the Scottish Spider Search can be found on The Wildlife Information Centre's (TWIC) website www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/scottish_spider_search.php
<https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/join/scottish-spider-search>

The Last Page



Come along to our annual VOLLY JOLLY

Meet fellow volunteers, eat cake and maybe even learn something



Date

Saturday September 30th



Place

Haddington Town House in the morning; the wilds of Amisfield in the afternoon

Start

8:30am (optional earlier start to look at moths) or 10:00am for those wanting/needing to start with a cup of tea.



Finish
by 4pm



Programme:

A morning of informal talks and discussions ranging from the lofty heights of the Pyrenees to the lowly world of spiders.

A FREE LUNCH.

An afternoon "bioblitzing" Amisfield - looking for, learning about and recording the wildlife that lives there PLUS a tour of the Walled Garden

Hope to see you there!



Where in EL?

Where in East Lothian did Liz take these pictures?

Last month's answer:
Hopes Reservoir

