



## **Best boot forward**

### **Newsletter for East Lothian Countryside Volunteers**

October 2018

Autumn is upon us. And although I kind of miss the warm days of summer, fungi in the woods, geese calling overhead, leaves starting to change colour and even the cold mornings make this a refreshing (perhaps sometimes too literally) change. Volunteers tasks will start to shift from surveying-orientated to habitat management-orientated; time to get out the loppers, bow saws and firelighters then! Tasks can become quite physical at this time of year, so it's important to pace yourself and try not to overdo it. Not only will the physical exercise make you feel good, remember calories lost to activity can, if wished, be replaced by calories taken by mouth. Perfect.

### **Conservation Volunteer tasks scheduled this month:**

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. Also see: [www.elcv.org.uk/dates/](http://www.elcv.org.uk/dates/)

**Yellowcraig** Dave; [dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Aberlady** John; [jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**North Berwick** Sam; [sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Path Warden team task** Duncan [dpriiddle@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dpriiddle@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Dunbar CVs** Tara/Laura; [dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk)



### **Ranger-led Activities and Hikes**

Visit [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rangerevents](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rangerevents) for details and to book

**HIKE: Gullane, Gosford and Geese Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 10am. A 10-mile hike between Gullane and Gosford Estate returning via the coast.**

**GOOSE WATCH: Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October 1900 – 2100 Aberlady.** Join the ranger to enjoy one of Autumn's wildlife spectacles as thousands of Pink-footed Goose return to the coast to roost

### **OTTER workshop**

**Weds 17<sup>th</sup> Oct**

**10:30-12:30**

**Amisfield Walled Garden**

Come and find out more about otters and how and where to look out for them in East Lothian

Spaces are limited. Contact: [tom@tbower.plus.com](mailto:tom@tbower.plus.com)

### **Willow set maintenance training session**

**Tues Nov 6<sup>th</sup>**

**10:00-15:00**

**7 spaces available**



This course is for people who have never worked with willow before and want to see how it can be used as a 'green' engineering solution to stabilise paths close to bank edges etc. If you are interested / want to find out more contact: [dpriiddle@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dpriiddle@eastlothian.gov.uk)



# Volunteer activity

Path checking and Pony checking by Thomas B



Fencing at Aberlady



Litter picking the Aberlady way



Pond clearing, Dunbar



North Berwick Conservation Volunteers getting wet and dressing in style and...?



Levenhall volunteers weeding, removing sea buckthorn and drinking tea





# The Curlew

Curlews are Europe's largest wading bird, found on wetlands and uplands. The call of the Curlew is haunting and beautiful, a fluty far-carrying "cour-lee", often heard at dusk. In autumn they can be seen out on tidal estuaries, probing the mud with their long, sensitive bills for worms, shellfish and shrimps, sometimes also taking small flat fish. Their richly intricate plumage, lengthy bill and long legs makes for easy identification, with only a passing likeness to the smaller and rarer Whimbrel, which has a broadly striped crown.



The UK's breeding population of Curlews is of international importance, estimated at more than 30 per cent of the global total. And of these, 60% are to be found in Scotland. But in recent years this species has suffered a catastrophic decline, causing so much concern that it is conservation "Red" listed in the UK, and "Near Threatened" on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Wader populations are declining worldwide, with causes often being linked to the loss and degradation of habitats, increased predation, and a changing climate.

Environmental changes in particular are having a strongly negative impact on Curlew. Degradation of habitat is a key driver, since this species breeds at highest densities in areas of semi-natural grassland and moorland. The afforestation and draining of such upland areas has severely affected Curlew abundance. Their breeding populations are also dwindling due to loss of extensive arable farmland, whilst increasing drought has reduced invertebrate prey numbers.



An old Scottish name for the Curlew (and still used in the Borders) is "Whaup". Its evocative call has been immortalised in the Anglo-saxon poem, *The Seafarer*, which dates back to 1,000 AD, but may be even older: "I take my gladness in the... sound of the Curlew instead of the laughter of men".

*Words and pictures by Abbie*

# Behind the scenes at the Museum's insect collections

2pm Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> Sept 2018

A group of us were lucky enough to visit the National Museum of Scotland Stores in Granton, Edinburgh. We were shown round the entomology (insects) department by Ashleigh Whiffin who was super enthusiastic and knowledgeable about all things insecty. They have more than 2 million specimens stored there in vast rows of drawers and cabinets including various 'type specimens', the first of their kinds described. Laid out for us were rows of glass-topped boxes containing beautiful iridescent beetles and butterflies including some truly impressive huge African Goliath beetles. She explained to us how insects are collected, identified and preserved (including a 'relaxing chamber' for the particularly crunchy ones to soften up in so that they can be pinned with their appendages fanned out appropriately for posterity!) and showed us a mostly empty box to show happens to specimens that are not cared for properly... Their oldest specimen was collected 230 years ago!

We saw a multitude of moths, butterflies, a box of the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest stick insects (the largest don't fit in the cases they're so big) and even some tarantulas (yes, not insects, but still...). Later she showed us some wasps that prey on spiders and some ladybirds; whatever we requested in fact, heading straight to the correct row, cabinet and shelf (she must be amazing at Kim's Game).

We also saw some 'hand-blown caterpillars' and some assorted sea creatures in the room where 'insect soup' and other wet specimens are stored in alcohol. The alcohol evaporates, so needs to be constantly topped up - if anyone fancies volunteer for this or in helping to curate the dry specimen records, they have lots of tasks for you. Thank you to Katty for organising this great trip!

By Sarah Hannis





## The return of the Pink-foots

It's that time of year again. The sound and spectacle of Pink-footed Geese filling our skies in their thousands. Arriving fresh from Iceland, most won't usually hang around here for too long, using Aberlady Bay as a staging post before heading south and west to their wintering grounds. So if you want to see them in numbers, now is a good time! However, depending on where the food is (spilt grain, tatties and sugar beet) some will hang around up here for longer. In the past many more used to spend the winter in East Lothian, but reserve warden John H suggests that the combines don't drop so much grain nowadays and the stubbles are ploughed soon after the harvest, so pickings for hungry geese are in shorter supply. Norfolk sugar beet seem to be their preferred food just now.



*Thanks to Mike Fraser for the photos and info*

# Volunteer news

## Margaret Wight

Many will know by now of the death of Margaret Wight at the age of 89. She was a wonderful supporter of SOS Puffin from the early days and came on 96 work parties while she was also a regular volunteer at Aberlady Bay over the last ten years. In fact she devoted much of her retirement to helping conservation and other causes and was East Lothian Volunteer of the year in 2012. She made many friends and in her quiet way was a great inspiration to us all. She will be much missed but leaves many happy memories.

John Hunt



## WINNER!!!



Congratulations to **Kate Odling** who scooped **"most committed volunteer"** at the recent CoCoast awards. Kate says: "I was very pleased!! I only live 5 mins away from the beach so it was fairly easy to nip down to do the surveys. I love guddling around in rock pools so it was fun!"





# Wild about East Lothian

Some of the wild things that have been spotted recently



Field mouse ©Abbie M



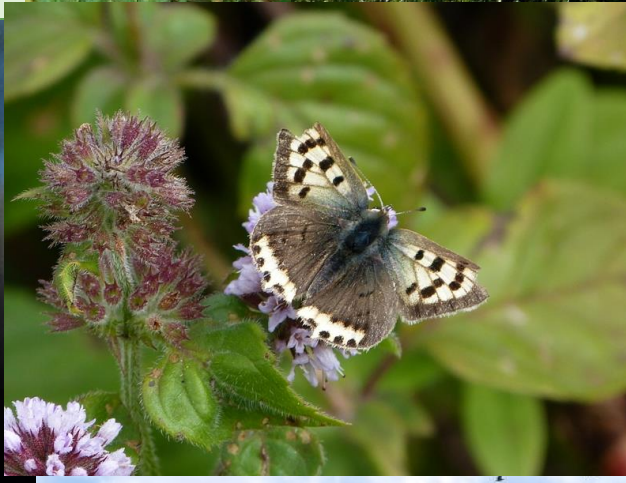
Little Egret ©Abbie M



Merveille du Jour ©Katty



Hanging Herald © Katty



Small Copper: This is an aberration called *schmidtii* seen by Nick Morgan near Haddington on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Occasionally butterflies have slightly different colours or markings to what is "normal" for their species. These are known as aberrations. This happens for a variety of reasons, but extreme temperature changes when the butterfly is developing in its pupa is a common cause. Some aberrations occur fairly regularly but others are spectacularly rare and were once what butterfly collectors prized the most. Now of course we can take photos.



Pink-footed Geese ©Abbie M



Elderberries ©Colin I



## 7<sup>th</sup> October: Moths in the Garden

This last of the year for this monthly event in Haddington.  
Come and admire some moths close-up. There are some beautiful species on the wing at this time of year!  
St. Mary's Pleasance, Haddington 10am





# Some things to do

## PROJECT OWL

This autumn and winter the BTO are running a Tawny Owl Calling Survey to learn more about Tawny Owl population change and understand more about their calling behaviour. They need your help!

All you have to do is listen for Tawny Owl from gardens or other greenspaces for 20 minutes. Ideally you need to do a listen each week, but it doesn't matter if you miss weeks or only manage a few. Registration is now open and you can start recording from 30 September. Full details at the link below:

[www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-calling-survey](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-calling-survey)



## Community Beach Clean

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October

10:30am – 12:00

North Berwick East beach boating pond

Just turn up! All equipment provided.



## ART EXHIBITION

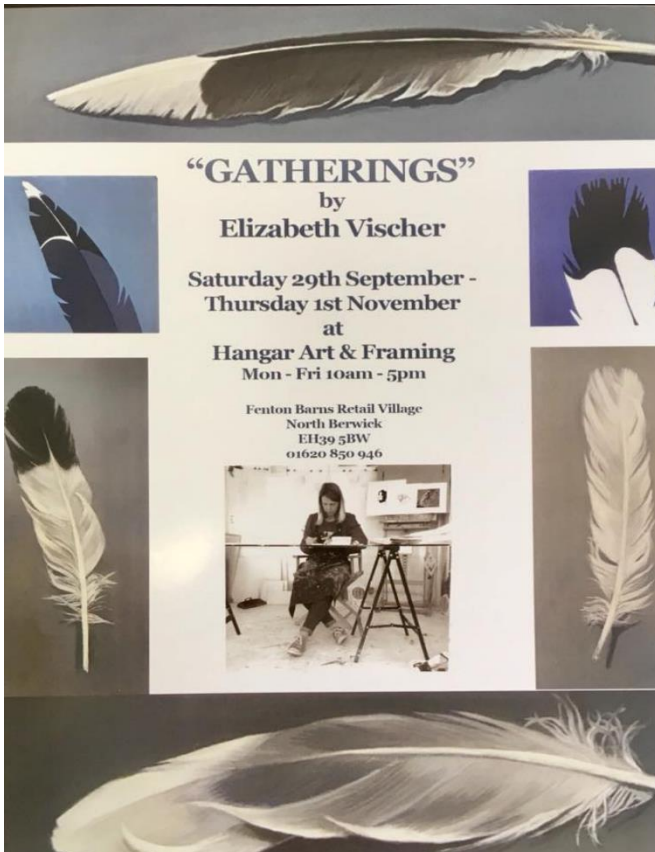
One of our volunteers has an exhibition with an environmental theme running throughout October at Hangar Art & Framing, Fenton Barns – why not take a look?

### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

These paintings are a record of some of my 'gatherings' - in this instance, the feathers discarded by the birds that live and breed along this coast, each so unique in size and pattern and yet very species specific and ultimately identifiable.

These feathers sit amongst so much rubbish - our own human 'discardings' - symbols of an increasing struggle for sustainable life in an ever more polluted world.

The objects displayed alongside these paintings are a tiny fraction of all I have collected but are an attempt to show the variety of items I come across when searching the shore for natural 'treasures' and how blatantly out of place and obviously harmful many of them are.





# The Last Page

A quick, quality, quiz.... Answers at bottom of the page



1

1. Which Ranger has just walked through a muddy field?



2

2. (a) Which Ranger has got very small legs, and (b) what is (s)he holding?

3. Which Ranger is this and what is she doing?

3



## PROSIMIANS

Wordsearch by Thomas Bower.

E	O	O	I	D	E	L	I	A	T	G	N	I	R
I	A	S	A	T	T	M	O	N	G	O	O	S	E
S	D	O	G	A	L	A	G	D	E	F	F	U	R
R	R	T	R	G	G	E	Y	A	E	Y	A	S	Y
A	I	N	D	R	I	O	A	R	N	W	O	R	B
T	O	E	R	E	L	P	G	R	E	F	N	N	R
A	T	I	E	Y	R	E	O	R	E	C	P	A	I
I	N	A	C	G	P	O	F	T	Y	F	E	L	T
E	F	L	E	E	M	O	E	I	T	I	S	D	Y
K	E	O	G	N	S	I	R	O	L	O	B	A	O
A	E	C	O	T	I	O	K	C	A	L	B	N	O
U	E	A	G	L	O	E	K	T	E	I	M	A	R
A	T	F	O	E	W	K	T	I	I	A	F	Y	T

INDRI  
BROWN  
AYE AYE  
LORIS  
RUFFED  
TARSIER  
GREY GENTLE  
GALAGO  
POTTO  
MONGOOSE  
RINGTAILED  
BLACK  
SIFAKA

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/411954/>

Quick Quiz answers:  
1) Laura  
2) (a) Don't know; (b) part of a Sperm Whale's jaw bone  
3) Tara. Pretending to be a Labrador?

## Where in EL? Last month's answers



Stone marker (and Duncan) at the base of Whitecastle Hillfort



Statue in Dunbar harbour © Liz C