

# THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WATER OF LEITH CONSERVATION TRUST



**APRIL 2013 to MARCH 2014**

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust is a registered charity SC000015 established in 1988 whose mission is: *To conserve and enhance the Water of Leith as a haven for wildlife and an educational and recreational resource for all.*

2013 was a landmark year for the Water of Leith Conservation Trust, we turned 25 years old! A remarkable year in so many ways, including; delivering over 100 volunteer workdays and clean-ups along the river, being awarded the Clydesdale Bank 'Spirit of the Community Award' and our work supporting the biodiversity of the river reached new heights, expanding our work on invasive species and the management of 6 Biodiversity Boost sites. This report describes the achievements over the year and our performance against targets set in the Water of Leith Conservation Trust Business Plan 2010-2014. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust's principal funders for their continued support - City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. We also appreciate the hard work and dedication of our staff, trustees and volunteer team, not forgetting the resolute backing of our members.

Chairman: George Hunter OBE KStJ KLJ

Trustees: Ian Anderson, Bill Alexander, Derek Ferrier, Brian Henderson, Bill Shannon, Ron Hill, Karen Young, David Hudson, Bryce Morrison

Staff: Trust Manager - Helen Brown

Community & Volunteers Officer - Charlotte Neary

Centre Assistant - Kit Russell

Trust Administrator - Sandra Boyle

Education Officer - Ruth Prince

Visitor Centre Assistant – Tyler Ellis Community Jobs Fund Placement (April to Dec)

Community & Volunteers Assistant – Emily Sanderson (October onwards)



The objectives of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust are to conserve the Water of Leith and its environs, promote the natural and built heritage of the river, advance education and benefit the community by:

- a. raising awareness of the river.
- b. providing teaching and learning services for all age groups.
- c. operating the Water of Leith Visitor Centre as an educational visitor attraction and community resource.
- d. encouraging the protection and enhancement of biodiversity along the river and its environs.
- e. enabling volunteers and the public to take practical action to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.
- f. encouraging responsible access to, and recreational use of, the river and its walkway.
- g. promoting the sustainable use and management of the river.
- h. working in partnership with others.

# EDUCATION AND AWARENESS AT THE WATER OF LEITH VISITOR CENTRE



The Water of Leith Visitor Centre continues to grow as a community resource. We saw visitor numbers remain stable at 16,024 and showed a modest increase in income through the shop and cafe. We hosted a number of Exhibitions during the year including: The Scottish Nature Photography Awards Finalists, a Photographic look at The Curries Wa's, once used as climbing practice by celebrated climber Dougal Haston, and a beautiful series of illustrations entitled 'Water of Leith Patterns' created by Illustration Students from the Edinburgh College of Art.

Under the guidance of our Education Officer and thanks to the continued support of The City of Edinburgh Council's Children and Families Department, our formal Environmental Education Programme continues to grow. Over the year we saw the number of classes utilising the programme reach 88, meaning over 2000 pupils experienced our diverse and engaging programmes. For Scotland's senior stage students, the new curriculum has brought new exam qualifications, now called the 'Nationals'. In response to requests from Edinburgh High Schools, we developed a National 5 Rivers and Water field studies programme where students measure the river velocity, graph out the river bed and sample the water quality. Back at the Centre, they find out more about conservation, land use, and environmental issues facing our river. The students later analyse the data they collected on the Water of Leith in exam conditions as part of their final assessment. We've received some really positive feedback from teachers and high school students on our new programme and are very thankful to geography teacher Kirsteen Scott from Westerhailes Education Centre for assisting us on its development.

To complement the formal education, our more informal Group Visits programme was also busy, welcoming a further 81 groups from all walks of life. Guided Walks and 'Hands on Fun' Youth Group Visits were all popular, and our reputation as guest speakers gives us a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness of the river and the management issues it faces.

As ever the highlight of the year was our events programme, with our 'The Horrid Histories of the Water of Leith' event in September really allowing our imaginations to take flight. The Slateford area has a turbulent and amazing history. During the event over 250 visitors journeyed back though 1000 years of life by the river. Volunteers and staff created a treasure trail of enactments, activities and 'hands on' fun for families to enjoy. These included: The Victorian Classroom, Waulking and Grinding at the Mill, Staging a Jacobite battle re-enactment, Visiting the Age of Enlightenment Grotto, Collecting leeches for the doctor, Laying siege with Cromwell to Redhall Castle, Visiting the Witch and the Stocks, and having a go at traditional agricultural activities including haymaking and 'gong' farming!! We even had a highwayman lurking around the Dells trying to steal the rewards the groups collected for trying out all the activities. We are so lucky our Volunteers and Staff are willing to act up in this way – it was fun and educational.

The river's online community also continues to grow and our weekly blog has 700 subscribers and our twitter account exceeded 2500 followers. Visit us at [www.waterofleith.org.uk](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk) or @WOLCT

# THE VOLUNTEER TEAM AND COMMUNITY ACTION ON THE RIVER



Volunteers are the bedrock of our work for the conservation and enhancement of the river. They help in so many ways - patrolling, improving access, removing invasive species, fundraising, administration, education, events and of course the hard graft of river clean-ups. Our Volunteer team has over 120 active individuals, who gave a record 5451 hours this year. The management of the river and the operation of the Visitor Centre and the Trust rely on this outstanding team of people. This year hours have been devoted in the following areas:

Reception Duties	Trust Admin	Youth Placements	Fundraising & Events	Practical Action	River Patrols	Clean-ups
<b>2310</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>703</b>

This year practical action along the river really escalated with the support of SNH and was further boosted when we were awarded £10,000 from the Clydesdale Bank Spirit of the Community Award. Called our 'Community and Volunteer Development Programme' this funding enabled us to employ an Assistant Community and Volunteers Officer to work alongside Charlotte for 2 days per week, and provided much needed resources and equipment. In October we welcomed Emily Sanderson to the team and we were able to launch 'The Hit Squad', a small group of volunteers who go out regularly to tackle smaller tasks and clean-ups along the river. So in 2013/14 we delivered a record number of workdays including: 16 river clean-ups/practical tasks, 4 Himalayan Balsam pulling sessions, and 20 Hit Squad Tasks. We also greatly increased our practical work with Youth Groups and were able to welcome more young people on volunteer placement with us. All clean-ups and practical work days are organised and co-ordinated with the assistance of the Council's Services for Communities and the City's Natural Heritage Service.

Our biggest event of the year was the launch of our Big Annual Clean-up; an amazing 84 volunteers arrived to blitz the Slateford / Gorgie section of the river. For the first time ever we also teamed up with a local scout troop – who set up a recycling station in our yard, and the young people set about cleaning and sorting what could be recycled from the days huge haul of rubbish.

Over the past 10 years we have planted many thousands of native wildflowers at our Biodiversity Boost sites, and in April, thanks to funding from £eith Decides, Leith got its turn for a boost. In partnership with Friends of the Water of Leith Basin we decided to improve a neglected wooded greenspace in the triangle created by the river, Great Junction Street and Coburg Street. We held 3 volunteer workdays in the area, the first to clear the site of litter, prune shrubs and remove invasive or non native species. The second workday involved planting 800 wildflower plugs and the final workday in September involved planting 1000 spring flowering bulbs including: Bluebell, Wild Daffodil, Snowdrop, Winter Aconite, Solomon's Seal and Lords and Ladies. Over 60 Volunteers helped with these mass planting events. We hope it will look much more diverse in years to come.

Voluntary help at the Centre continues to be the backbone of the Trust. Our 20 strong team of Reception Volunteers manages the day-to-day operation of the Centre, meeting visitors, providing refreshments and giving information and advice to walkers. This team is complemented by



volunteers who help with administration, manage membership and volunteer databases, and maintain the wildlife sightings and patrollers' information.

The volunteer fundraising team also works throughout the year to coordinate our events and look for ingenious ways to raise money for the Trust. During the year this group ran the Plant Sale, the Horrid Histories Event and coordinated many raffles and small fundraising talks and walks. Complementing this work one volunteer, Alistair Baird, undertook another personal challenge to raise funds for the Trust, once again he became the 'Walker of Leith', this time completing a 90 mile coast-to-coast trek across Central Scotland from Helensburgh on the Firth of Clyde to the Shore at Leith in just 5 consecutive days – he raised nearly £1000.

During the year we were delighted to have the support and action of many local community groups and businesses. A record 63 Groups from across the city have spent days helping us with the practical improvement of the river environment. In total, 925 people gave an impressive 3036 hours, largely rolling up their sleeves and getting stuck in to clean-up work and creating habitats. We would like to thank the volunteers from all the following groups for their efforts:

#### Community Groups

- Geocachers
- Coltbridge Residents Association
- Dean Village Association
- Colinton Amenity Association
- Tiperreth
- Warriston Crescent Res. Association
- Dry Stone Walling Association
- 14 Tasks with The Peregrines of Tiperreth

#### Corporate Groups

- Tesco Bank
- Scottish Widows
- 3 Tasks with The Lloyds Banking Group
- Bank of Scotland
- Foresters Members
- Asda Chesser
- ICAS

#### Youth Groups

- 2 Tasks with The Rock Trust
- 108<sup>th</sup> Pentland Scouts
- Cliftonhall School
- Firrhill High School
- Lorne Primary School
- Roseburn Primary School
- Merchiston Castle School
- Edinburgh Colleges
- With Kids – Whale Arts Centre
- SRU Minors
- Inverleith Community Action
- Prince's Trust
- 3 Tasks with Action for Children Youth Build
- 4 Tasks with Broughton H. School John Muir Award
- 5 tasks with The Green Team
- 3 Tasks with International Voluntary Service
- 3 tasks with Broughton High School
- Dregghorn Air Cadets
- Fette's College Prep. School
- 2 Tasks with Balerno Scouts

.So in all, the Trust supported over **100 workdays** and **8500 hours of volunteer service** helping to keep the river clean, green, accessible and beautiful. We thank the thousand or so people who have given up their time for their hard work and dedication.

## OUR MEMBERS

The Trust welcomed the support of 264 members during 2013/14. Including 133 concessionary members, 36 individual, 23 family members, 8 groups and 64 life members

The programme of Members' Talks held at the Centre proved very popular with our members and friends. At our AGM we welcomed Alison Baker, FINNS Programme Coordinator, River Forth Fisheries Trust, discussing the issues surrounding invasive and alien species around the Forth catchment and along the Water of Leith. In November we learned of the 'Plight of the Bumblebee' from Anthony McCluskey from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Following extensive research Helen and Sandie launched a new presentation, The Milling Heritage of the Water of Leith, complete with old photos. Then we were treated to more of Fred and Rita's travelogues. This time we went on '**An Overland Journey through Lebanon and Syria**'. Finally in March, Beverly Bergman, from Edinburgh Geological Society led members on a Geological Themed Walk around Slateford and the Dells. We published 3 issues of 'Under the Bridge', with the Audio Trail Launch and the Spirit of the Community Award stealing the headlines and issue 60 was a special bumper 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue

# WATER OF LEITH PROJECTS, MANAGEMENT AND BIODIVERSITY



Thanks to funding from our Local Neighbourhood Partnerships we were able to improve the infrastructure along the river. A new interpretation panel at the start of the Walkway in Balerno provides a map of the river and local history and wildlife information. In the Slateford area we placed two new vandal proof benches, a 10 space bike rack and another information board to orientate walkers. We were also delighted to work with the Scottish Drystone Walling Association on the creation of a superb stone bench in the Dells.

Launched in March 2013 The Water of Leith Audio Trail has proved very popular with some tracks receiving over 1000 listens/downloads in under a year. This innovative interpretation project enables walkers with access to a smart phone or mp3 player to download or listen directly to 20 specially created 'tracks' as they explore the Water of Leith from Balerno to Leith. Listen on line at <http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/audio-trail/>. Each track provides local history commentary, and information about special features, the river and its wildlife. It also gives advice on the route and orientation.

2013 saw the completion of Phase 1 of the Water of Leith Flood Prevention Scheme, and the re-opening of all sections of the walkway and river including some upgraded sections of path along Warriston Road and Stockbridge. During the year we have worked closely with Lagan Construction, the main contractor and ARUP, environmental consultants for the scheme. Plans for Phase 2 at Murrayfield are in progress.

The Trust and the Water of Leith Action Group continue to work to the objectives and actions set out in the Water of Leith Management Plan, launched in March 2011. This landmark document can be viewed on our website at [www.waterofleith.org.uk/management](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/management) and provides a steer for all the stakeholders responsible for the management of the river. We also attended and presented at The Exploring Scottish Rivers Conference and Networking Event in Grangemouth.

Along the Water of Leith we have problems with the following Invasive Non Native Species; Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and the North American Mink. The Trust has begun working with The River Forth Fisheries Trust on their Forth Invasive and 'Non Native Species Programme' (FINNS), targeting these species along the Water of Leith Catchment. In the spring botanically minded volunteers survey the river for the presence of these species. During the summer we target Himalayan Balsam, using volunteer power to remove manually as many plants as possible. In February Charlotte and Emily were formally trained and gained qualifications in the safe use of pesticides to enable us to complement the Council's spraying regime targeting Giant Hogweed. And we hosted a 'Mink Awareness' training session for volunteers – who were treated to views of the otter during the training.

We now actively manage 6 Biodiversity Boost sites along the river with our volunteer team and members of the river community, including two meadows, two gardens, path edge planting and the new site in Leith (detailed above). All these sites have been planted with dozens of wildflower species with the aim of improving the diversity of plant life which will in turn improve the habitats for birds, butterflies, bees and a host of other wildlife. The wildlife along the river is also monitored through our Wildlife Sightings Database and in 2013 we had over 1000 sightings of 67 species recorded on the river, including 6 sightings of the otter and 43 of the Kingfisher.

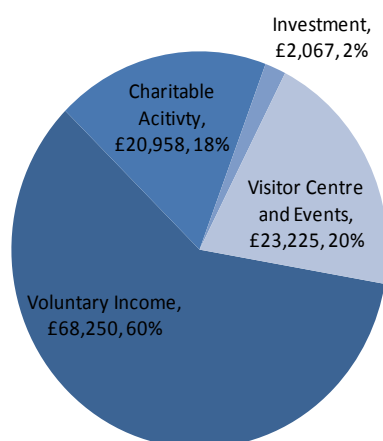
## FUNDING AND FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The Trust wishes to record thanks to the following for their financial contributions towards its continuing activities:

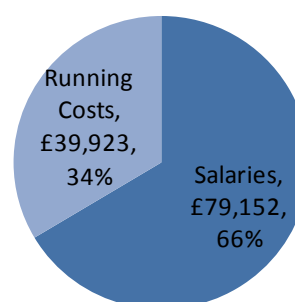
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- The Clydesdale Bank

A big 'thank you' must go to our many donors and members for their support. We are also grateful to the numerous small donors through the Visitor Centre and all who support our Fundraising Events and campaigns, without whose contributions we would struggle. Cowan and Partners, our accountants complete the 'Independent Examination' of our accounts and to provide quarterly support and monitoring for the Trust Manager and Trustees. Full Examined Accounts for the year are available on request. A summary of the operation of the Trust is detailed below, excluding restricted project funding and depreciation on the endowment fund (Visitor Centre improvements following the Millennium Project in 2000). A deficit of £1575 is shown; however there is £10,250 in restricted funding for the Community and Volunteer Development Programme and Visitor Centre Development to be carried forward into 2014/15.

### Income 2013/4 £114,500



### Expenditure 2013/4 £116,075



## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust has prepared a Business Plan 2014 - 2018 to steer the direction of the Trust and to continue the development of our services. The 2014/5 Action Plan within the Business Plan clearly defines the activity and targets for the coming year, and we endeavour to develop our work in the following areas: Visitor Centre Development, The Community and Volunteer Development Programme, and to meet our Management Objectives in the Water of Leith Management Plan. Small charities meet fresh challenges each year, and attention will also focus on the provision of sustainable income streams.

Should you wish to discover more about the work of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust or receive a copy of the Business Plan, please call in to the Visitor Centre, visit our website or contact us: Water of Leith Conservation Trust, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ. Tel: 0131 455 7367 Email: [admin@waterofleith.org.uk](mailto:admin@waterofleith.org.uk) Website: [www.waterofleith.org.uk](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk)

*Explore Edinburgh's hidden natural asset the Water of Leith, flowing through the heart of the city like a 'silver thread in a ribbon of green'.*

