

Lothians Conservation Volunteers

In support of the Scottish Wildlife Trust

Annual Review

2013 - 2014

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Welcome to the fourth LCV Annual Review which will keep you up-to-date with what's been happening over the last twelve months.

It has been an eventful year with a new Coordinator, a long standing committee member retiring and a new constitution imminent.

Volunteer numbers remain healthy, as do finances. The only fly in the ointment is the lack of a Social Organiser. If anyone is interested in this post please contact me—see the back cover for my contact details.

Leader and driver numbers are comfortable and were recently bolstered by the return of two LCV regulars following sabbaticals.

We had a second successful summer residential at Taynish in scenic Mid Argyll where we had a close encounter with an adder, among other highlights.

Thank you to every one of our volunteers, without whom none of this would be possible.



**Lothians
Conservation
Volunteers**

William McSporran, Coordinator

www.lcv.org.uk



**Lothians
Conservation
Volunteers**

We are a Scottish Charity, run entirely by volunteers, and we've been doing conservation work in and around Edinburgh for over forty years.

We belong to TCV Community Network. Our funding comes from the clients that we work for, and also grants from organisations like Scottish Wildlife Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Charity number SC020384.

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The Editor writes...

Hello,

Welcome to our 2013-14 Annual Review. Whilst this is the fourth Annual Review LCV has produced, it's my first at the helm as Editor. I'd like to start by saying a huge 'thank you' to my predecessor, Sarah McConachie. It was down to her dedication and determination that this publication was handed to me in fine form. I will do my best to keep it alive and thriving.

As you'll see from the following pages it's been a busy year for us conservation volunteers. In addition to the packed-as-usual schedule of weekly tasks and regular social occasions we've had two very fine and fruitful residential trips to Tainish where we've battled with bogs and bracken. Some of us went on a rather splendid tour of the recycling centre at Seafield. While back in January we had a wonderful day of events in Duddingston where LCV members past and present gathered with friends of our organisation to share fresh air, food and skittles and—most importantly—ideas for ways in which we can use the legacy generously left to us by Colin McLean.

That day seems like a long time ago now, but it will not be forgotten, as the committee continue to think about the valuable thoughts and ideas that came out of the day while we plan the more practical aspects of how we can make good use of Colin's gift. I've no doubt there will be more to report on this in future months.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this Annual Review. It is your publication, so if there's a subject you'd like to see covered, or if you have a burning desire to write a story, an article or a poem or send us some photographs, drawings or recipes for inclusion, please drop me a line—mucker@lcv.org.uk.

Nicola Robson, Newsletter Editor

Views

Dispatches from the Western Front: A report on this year's Summer Resi at Tainish

Tainish is a national nature reserve managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). The reserve is a very special oak rain forest located on a little finger peninsula into Loch Sween with the Isle of Jura just over the hill. The Moine Mhor—The Great Bog also managed by SNH—is a few miles north in Kilmartin Glen. LCV has worked on both sites in the past and on this trip we continued with the never-ending task of removing young trees from the bog to prevent it from drying out and turning into a forest. In Tainish we slashed and cut huge swathes of bracken to open up the land which would enable flowers to grow and also help with the humane hunting of deer who feed on tree saplings thus inhibiting natural reforestation.



Moine Mhor from Dunadd Fort

Photo: Sarah McConachie

The LCV team (Tony Irving, Trevor Paterson, Debbie Tribak, David Nutter, Louisa Martin, Sarah McConachie, Catriona Anderson, Willie McSporran and myself, Mark Herron) arrived at Kilmartin bothy on a scorcher of an evening on Sunday 13th July. We got ourselves organised and sat down to a beautiful supper pre-prepared by David. Except for the amazingly squeaky floorboards the bothy is 5 star accommodation right beside the Kilmartin Arms Pub.

Work Day 1: A Very Wet Moine Mhor

We were prepared for wet weather but the driving rain and winds on the first work day were a little dispiriting and we certainly made good use of our full waterproofs right from the start of the day. We met Doug the ranger and made our first sweep across the bog towards a white marquee which had been set up for a Countrywise film crew doing a piece on Peatland Action. Birch, sitka spruce and rhododendron were pulled up by the roots to prevent regrowth and Doug supplied mini-mattocks and root saws which came in very handy for the bigger trees. We regrouped in the marquee for shelter and hot drinks intended for the film crew—the weather had curtailed their filming—and it was strange to be mixing with media types.

Despite the severe conditions and varying states of wetness beneath waterproofs we continued, making several sweeps of the bog in a dispersed line formation so that no saplings escaped. The terrain was rough with some flooded ditches to cross via plastic dams. For some reason known only to him, Trevor dispensed with his waterproof trousers and had to wring out his socks and empty his boots of bog water by lunchtime! In the afternoon there was a brief respite from the rain but after drying out a little bit the heavens opened once again and so we called it a day before one of us drowned. In my view, such conditions are good as they make you appreciate the better days even more.

Work Day 2: A Scorching Taynish

We met Doug and Gordon the rangers at their work shed and were joined by Jock the jack russell and Katie the black lab who helped throughout the day by carrying sticks and eating flies. We were provided with brand new light metal scythes to which we added four of our own bulldog slashers and we set off on the half hour walk to the work site. I've never cut bracken before and so I wasn't expecting the huge expanse of tightly packed, seven-feet-tall monster bracken we were presented with. It was hard work in the very hot weather and we took lots of breaks to take on water.



Trevor, Debbie and Tony admire the view
Photo: Sarah McConachie

Working individually, we took bites out of the bracken and these bites slowly joined up and expanded outwards. Blisters were a hazard and some hands were taped up like boxers' with new volunteer Catriona showing great resolve in working through the pain of blisters!



Gorillas in the bracken

Photo: Mark Herron

Rest Day

After a coffee stop in a wet Oban we split into two groups with Louisa, David and Catriona heading to the Sealife Centre while the rest of us took a walk around Scottish Wildlife Trust's Shian Wood. I was amazed by the amount of lichen growing on the trees and the feel of a real Scottish rain forest. Back at Kilmartin we dined in the very fancy Kilmartin Arms restaurant.



The beautiful Shian Wood

Photo: Sarah McConachie

Work Day 3: Back to the Bog and Mixing with Media Types

For our third work day we returned to Moine Mhor which looked very different in scorching sunshine. The sun also brought back the Countrywise film crew who spent some time filming us in the background and then, later in the day, there was a staged filming of us melling plastic dams starring Trevor and Willie in full personal protective equipment. It was a surreal day with the media types around and I look forward to seeing the result on STV in the autumn*.



The presence of the sun enabled us to see more wildlife than earlier in the week, such as some beautiful black and gold caterpillars (can anyone identify it from the picture on the left?).

Creature: Identity unknown

Photo: Mark Herron

One of the highlights of the week for me was seeing and photographing a large Scottish adder. She was huge and hissing angrily and we all scattered when she reared up from her coil!



A rare and angry Scottish adder

Photo: Mark Herron



The Countrywise film crew capture a moment of melling

Photo: Mark Herron



Meet the team *Photo: Mark Herron*

Front row, left to right: Colin the SNH ranger, Louisa, SNH team member, Colin the SNH Volunteer of the Year, Debbie, Tony, Sarah, Catriona

Back row, left to right: David, Willie, Blair an SNH volunteer, Mr McBride the Countrywise bog expert, Trevor, Doug the SNH ranger

Work day 4: Back to bracken bashing

On Friday we returned to the monster bracken and made one final push to enlarge the area we had opened up. Because of the heat and very hard work we had an early finish at 15.30. This gave us the opportunity to have a relatively early evening meal and a sunset visit to see the beavers in Knapdale. Some saw one briefly in the water but the evidence of their presence could easily be seen with lots of tree gnawing.

It was a pleasure leading a group where things were organised and done with very little instruction and where everyone mucked in. A special thanks to David for organising the catering and to all those who cooked—the food was amazing both in quality and quantity. With the world falling apart with terrible news from Palestine and Ukraine it was great to get away for some hard physical work, some of the best and most surreal comedy outside of the Fringe, and some of the most inspiring scenery and wildlife in the world.

Mark Herron

* Sadly the Countrywise feature was not aired so LCV will have to have its five minutes of fame another day.

Sorting at Seafield: Community Recycling Centre tour, June 2014

'Just so you know, I usually give these talks to primary school children!' exclaimed Hannah, Changeworks representative and our guide for the session. Despite this, she coped admirably with the barrage of questions from fifteen informed and engaged LCVers, adroitly turning her prepared presentation into an interactive discussion.

Changeworks is a local organisation which started in 1989 as Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership (LEEP) and—along with Scotland-wide services for business recycling, home energy advice and renewable energy consultancy—they give talks in the Waste Education Cabin at the Seafield Community Recycling Centre. This is where we started our tour.

After a brief introduction we were asked to estimate the proportions of waste discarded into landfill which could be reused or recycled instead. This led to an animated discussion as we all shared our knowledge, questions and observations. We covered topics such as our collective disappointment that Edinburgh City council doesn't recycle all types of plastic while Midlothian and East Lothian councils do; the best place to recycle shredded confidential waste (the food waste caddy, interestingly) and that any shop which sells batteries is obliged to supply a means of battery recycling.

Next, we donned hard hats and hi-vis jackets, some of the latter being a little on the snug side for us grown-ups.



The LCV fifteen
Photo: Sarah McConachie

First we made our way into the Reuse Cabin. This is where unwanted household items can be deposited for later collection by local charities such as Bethany—although not by Lothians Conservation Volunteers, we were sad to learn.



The Reuse Cabin
Photo: Sarah McConachie

As this was an evening excursion the machinery was idle. Nonetheless we were still able to marvel at the digger with its crusher attachment, our enthusiasm for this piece of equipment possibly rivalling the most lively of Hannah's school groups.



Admiring the crusher
Photo: Sarah McConachie

As we walked we were accompanied by a chorus of birdsong and enjoyed a view of Arthur's Seat, these local examples of biodiversity reminding us why sustainable waste management is so important. Finally it was back to the cabin for a short video of waste being sent to landfill, a salutary reminder, if any were required, of the need to minimise our non-recyclable waste.

Thanks to Rachael for organising this fascinating trip and to Hannah and Changeworks for their expertise.

Sarah McConachie

Grappling with gorse: Taynish Residential, February 2014

On Friday 31st January at 6pm ten of us left Edinburgh heading for Mid Argyll in the face of an apocalyptic weather forecast. Our plan was to spend the weekend removing gorse on the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) reserve of Taynish. We had an uneventful journey to Balloch where we paused for some scran at the chippie. Suitably refreshed, we then began the 'interesting' part of the journey making for the Rest and Be Thankful where—despite signs warning of increased landslip risk and some roadside snow—we reached our journey's topographical high point. We soon arrived at Kilmartin and its wonderfully misnamed bothy.

And the weather? Well, Saturday dawned with a notable lack of overnight rain: unfortunately it had snowed instead. And that wasn't all. Breakfast was accompanied not by the rumble of stomachs but of thunder. Our 'interesting' commute to Taynish via Knapdale (site of the soon-to-be-completed beaver reintroduction trial) was through a winter wonderland. We were met on site by SNH ranger Gordon, who explained that our task was to improve the habitat of the rare marsh fritillary butterfly.

Suitably kitted out we began to cut and burn the gorse in an area new to LCV. The cutting initially considerably outpaced the burning until heavy duty firefighters were deployed. We continued in mainly dry conditions, the cooler winter temperatures keeping the local frog population at bay so no amphibian rescue missions were required as on our previous visits to the reserve. Play for the day was halted around 4.30pm and we retired to Kilmartin where Sarah provided us with a splendid dinner.



David and Alan coax the recalcitrant fire
Photo: Louisa Martin

After a sound night's sleep Sunday dawned showery and so began round two. Today we were accompanied by the new reserve manager Alan, his predecessor John Halliday having moved on. The day's work had two fronts, both aiming seaward to

Loch Sween in the east and Linne Mhuirich in the west on opposite sides of the narrow Taynish peninsula.

We were happily surprised to discover Saturday's fire embers still aglow which came in useful for igniting our new bonfire. The wind remained low despite the earlier assertions of the forecasters so our firelighting skills were tested again. Cutting continued and by the day's end we had removed an impressive mountain of gorse for future workers to burn.

We hit the road back east to Edinburgh accompanied by radio commentary that Scotland's 2014 Six Nations campaign had begun with a defeat in Dublin. Travelling up Loch Fyne to Inveraray we could see the countryside which had been shrouded in darkness two days previously and after refuelling at the chippie we continued to Edinburgh via Glasgow. Thanks to Louisa for leading and to Sarah for driving and catering.

William McSporran



Sarah and Maria drag gorse in the winter sun
Photo: Louisa Martin



Maria and Georgia pause for lunch
Photo: Louisa Martin

Colin McLean's Legacy Event, 18th January 2014

You may have read our 2012 Annual Review which celebrated the life of Colin McLean, one of our most important founding members. He left LCV a generous legacy so current and former LCV members spent a day in Duddingston deciding how best to use the money. We started with a guided walk around Colin's Bawsinch nature reserve before our planning meeting. We then relaxed over a meal and repaired to the Sheep Heid Inn for a game of skittles.

Sarah McConachie

Colin McLean's Legacy Event, 18th January 2014: Bawsinch guided walk

On an overcast, cold and rainy winter afternoon we met at the wicket gate for a tour around the Bawsinch Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) Reserve. I love going to Bawsinch as it's one of my favourite places in Edinburgh, a hidden gem of quiet, trees, birds and otters with the magical backdrop of Arthur's Seat. While waiting in the bird hide for everyone to arrive I had a good look out over Duddingston Loch to see if I could spot the otters which are apparently living there: no luck this time, unfortunately, but no doubt I will be back to try again.

Meanwhile, as I was mammal-hunting, fellow walker David Long made a note of the following birds from the hide: five goldeneye, four mute swans, one moorhen, two magpies, five herons, ten tufted ducks, two greylag geese and lots of coots and mallard.



Simon and Kirsty
enjoy themselves
Photo: Greg Milne

Next, our guide, SWT volunteer John Knox, led us around the reserve giving us all an update on the ongoing practical conservation work as well as answering questions about the site's history and future plans for the reserve.

We heard about the plan to transform Goose Green into a wildflower meadow and about the ongoing removal of dogwood from the reed beds, a task which LCV is particularly familiar with at present!

Towards the end of our walk we were joined by Ken Knowles, the current Bawsinch convenor, who was also available to answer our questions. We then made for Duddingston Kirk Hall for the next event of the day.

Many thanks to John Knox and Ken Knowles for organising this lovely walk. I look forward to returning to Bawsinch with LCV in the future.

Rachael Taggart

Colin McLean's Legacy Event, 18th January 2014: Deciding our priorities

Thirty people. Twenty thousand pounds. No agreement about what to spend it on. So how do you get a roomful of people to agree on something, make sure that everyone's opinion is heard and not take hours and hours and hours over it?

We started with lots of equipment. Nicola took me at my word when I said we'd need lots of Post-it Notes and marker pens and had bought a mountain of stationery in a range of striking colours. She had also found some really cool flipchart paper that stuck to the wall by itself. I was deeply impressed, even if nobody else was. I used to facilitate events like this for a living, and I appreciate having the right gear. We were certainly well set up for the challenge.

Louisa introduced the session eloquently, and I followed with an outline of the agenda and rules ('silence means agreement', 'one person talking at a time', 'we're collectively responsible for the success of this event' and so on) and then we moved into the first stage. I took great pleasure in pointing out that we were bang on schedule according to the timings shown on the agenda.

The first stage was a 'Gallery of Ideas'. The way this works is that each person in the room sits by themselves and thinks up ideas for how we might spend Colin's legacy. We encourage any idea, however unlikely it might seem, so this is a kind of

collective brainstorming. Each time someone has an idea, they write it on a Post-it Note. When they have a pile of Notes in front of them, they stick them on the wall (although in our case it was actually the window). The hall went quiet save for the sound of marker pen squeaking on Post-it Note (and Sarah, Nicola and Rachael working hard in the kitchen). The first few Post-it Notes appeared on the window. The trickle grew into a flood and suddenly there were hundreds of Notes filling the windows along the length of the hall. As you'd expect, lots of people had similar ideas, but there were also lots of unique suggestions. Some of these were brilliant and some were quite frankly bonkers ('buy Alex Salmond some tartan trews', for example), and they all contributed to getting a feeling for what the people in the room thought was important.



Keith adds his idea to the Gallery
Photo: Sarah McConachie

Then we worked to group and categorise the ideas. Everyone joined in at the windows, sorting, moving and collating Post-it Notes until we had them in neat labelled groups with common themes. This process goes round in circles for a bit as people discuss whether 'buy new saucepans' fits into the 'New Tools' category or goes into a new 'Catering Equipment' category along with 'repair kettle', but the main principle is that the person whose idea it was is consulted and gets the final say about what happens to their idea. After 30 minutes' work we had grouped the Notes into a dozen or so categories that everyone was content with. All the ideas were still up on the windows, and everyone had a chance to comment on the groupings and categories. At this point we were still bang on schedule.



Christine, Alan and Edel study the Gallery of Ideas
Photo: Sarah McConachie

Then we weren't. The next step in the process was to pick the top six categories from the dozen or so in front of us. I had a plan for this that has worked in the past, but there was a delay while we discussed and agreed alternative approaches. I updated the timings on the agenda, warned Sarah to stop cooking the rice, and moved to the voting process. We asked each person to vote for as many of the options as they wanted to progress. The ones with the most votes went on to the next stage.



The group decides *Photo: Sarah McConachie*

When the voting was over we'd identified six suggestions to develop further. People divided themselves into six teams based on which suggestion they were most interested in, and went to prepare presentations. With all the Post-it Notes in front of them, the teams set to work on a short talk, supported by a couple of flip chart pages, about the advantages, disadvantages, risks and benefits of spending Colin's legacy on the suggestion they had adopted. The hall went quiet again: above the murmur of discussion and the flapping of flip chart paper we could hear the sound of the cooks stirring vats of steaming rice.

After 20 minutes of preparation, we started on the presentations. We kept these to less than five minutes, and each was followed by questions from the floor. The questions weren't answered at the time, but were a way of capturing comments and improvements from everyone present to make sure that each proposal was the best it could be. At the end of the presentations we had a set of flip chart notes and questions from the floor for each team.



Edel, Greg, Rob,
David and Keith
relax after a job
well done
*Photo: Sarah
McConachie*

Then there was final round of voting. Having heard the presentations, and seen the suggestions from everyone present, I asked for a show of hands in favour of each of the final six topics. People could vote for more than one suggestion, so this gave a pretty clear view of what the 30 or so people in the hall thought was important. The results were:

- Contributions to Bawsinch SWT Reserve (24 in favour)
- Develop other reserves in our area (22 in favour)
- Plant trees on an existing reserve further afield (17 in favour)
- Establish a small grants fund (10 in favour)
- Establish a training fund for LCV members (3 in favour)
- Buy some land (nobody in favour)

And then it was time to stop talking and to eat! It was a bit later than expected at the start, and I'm grateful to the cooks for coping so calmly with my ever-expanding schedule.



Dinner time! Our shared meal
and the bottomless vat of rice
Photo: Sarah McConachie

The process generated hundreds of ideas. We narrowed those down to a dozen or so topic areas, and then picked our top six from there. The six had more detailed review and scrutiny to present a prioritised list for the Trustees to consider. This was a robust and rigorous process. For example, the suggestion to buy land was one that seemed a good idea to start with, but during the process of detailed scrutiny it was discarded because the risks and costs outweighed the benefits.

I enjoyed the challenge of running the session, although I was strangely tired the next day. I hope that everyone who took part found it fun and engaging and that they felt their voice was heard and their contribution valued. I'd like to thank the Legacy Event team (Sarah, Nicola, Rachael and Louisa) for letting me do it my way, for buying great stationery and for organising such a brilliant event. [And thanks to David Monaghan for running such a complicated event so calmly and skilfully—The Legacy Event team]

David Monaghan

Colin McLean's Legacy Event, 18th January 2014: Skittles at the Sheep Heid Inn

After clearing up and sharing out the leftovers from a very delicious and filling meal about twenty of us headed over to the Sheep Heid Inn in Duddingston village for a game or two of traditional skittles at Scotland's oldest skittle alley.

I had never played skittles here and I wasn't too sure what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised. The pub is a fantastic venue with the skittle alley being hidden away at the back. We had booked both lanes so had the whole alley to ourselves.

We split the group into two teams and, after watching those who had most definitely played skittles before show off their bowling techniques, we all got stuck in. The game had a novel 'do-it-yourself' element which involved two people waiting at the end of each lane, each carefully tucked away to avoid the hurtling balls. Their job was to pick up and rearrange the skittles and then return the balls to the start ready for the next round. I found watching everyone play as much fun as actually taking my own turn: it was clear that old skittle rivalries were alive and well!



Rachael and Partha
choose their weapons
Photo: Greg Milne

Towards the end of our two hours we tallied up the scores on the chalk board to find the person with the winning score. Ken Humphreys was duly awarded with the LCV Skittles trophy which he'll keep in his trophy cabinet until our next game.

I had an excellent night and it looked as if everyone else did too. Well done to Ken and thanks to everyone who came along for making it such a fun occasion. Let's do this again soon! [And thanks go to Rachael for organising this event.]

Rachael Taggart

Resi Recipe

If you'd like to try cooking on an LCV residential but don't know where to start, you can find many tried and tested recipe ideas on www.lcv.org.uk. This delicious yet easy to make sweet treat will get you started.

Partha's chocolate ginger crispy cakes

These crispy cakes are a grown-up version of the childhood favourite. Replacing the cornflakes with branflakes makes the cakes more substantial, while the perfect pairing of dark chocolate and ginger really packs a moutwatering punch. They're super simple to make and are perfect as a tea break snack, or serve with a generous dollop of ice cream for dessert.

Ingredients (Makes 12)

- 100g butter
- 100g milk chocolate broken into chunks
- 100g dark chocolate broken into chunks
- 6tbsp golden syrup
- 200g bran flakes, lightly crushed
- 3-4 chunks of preserved stem ginger finely chopped (the preserved ginger that comes in a jar of syrup is best but ginger in other forms will also work)

Method

- Melt the butter, chocolate and syrup in a pan over a low heat, or in a microwave on a low setting.
- Stir the branflakes and ginger into the melted mixture.
- Scoop the mixture into small muffin cases arranged in a muffin tin.
- Allow to set in the fridge. This will take at least an hour but overnight is best.

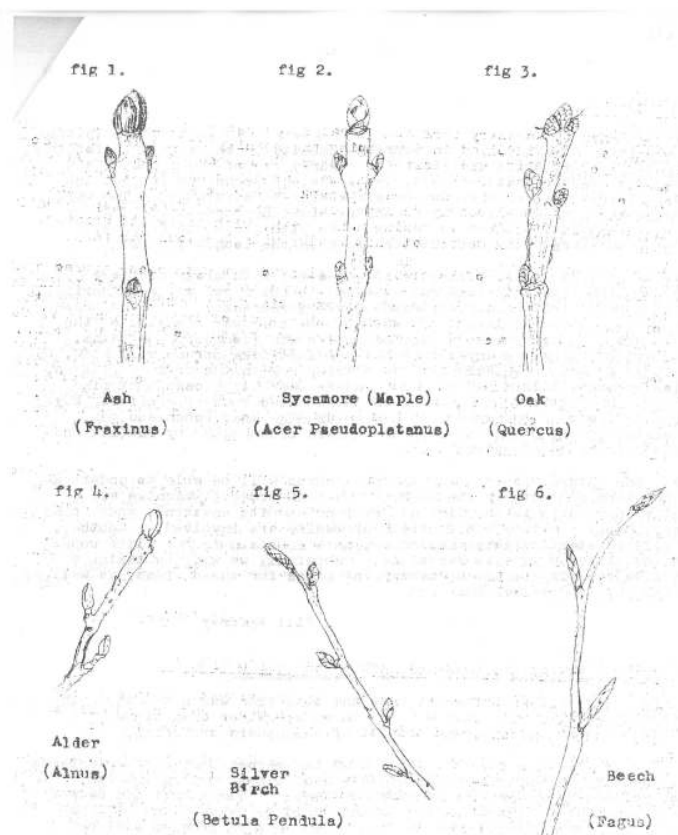
From the Archive

As Newsletter Editor I also act as Keeper of the Mucker Archive. In reality the archive is a modest shoebox full of paper, but in another way it's a treasure trove of historical snippets and LCV dealings from years gone by, as well as being a fine object lesson in the recent developments in desktop publishing.

A preliminary delve into the box has revealed that there was once a residential chainsaw training course (now that sounds like fun!), for one summer BBQ members were instructed to 'bring a friend and a sausage' and in the autumn of 1984 there were plans to 'raid the local squirrels' to collect acorns for planting (poor squirrels).

Here, from issue 34, January 1982, are some charming hand-drawn illustrations to help you identify deciduous trees in winter.

Nicola Robson



Review of the Year

Work carried out

In the year to the end of March 2014, LCV ran 60 (2013: 65) tasks for 11 (2013: 15) different clients at 17 (2013: 22) different sites and did 621 days of voluntary work (2013: 750, 2012: 716, 2011: 684, 2010: 621) for conservation projects in Scotland. The number of volunteer days is down primarily because the number of tasks is down: fewer clients took up the offer of Saturday tasks and there were two extra tree felling training tasks in 2012/13, because there was one fewer residential task than usual and because of unusually high turnout for the summer and New Year residential tasks in 2012/13. We had an average of 9.8 volunteers on each task (2013: 10.5, 2012: 10.7, 2011: 10.3, 2010: 10.6). Midlothian and West Lothian Councils were our two biggest clients, with 143 and 97 of our total workdays respectively (2013: 129, 79). The Scottish Wildlife Trust came third with 89 days (2013: 140). Our summer residential was at the Taynish and Moine Mhor NNRS and a New Year multi-day non residential task took place at sites in Midlothian.

Minibus

LCV runs a minibus that is used to transport tools and volunteers to the work sites. The minibus is used exclusively for the purposes of the group, and this year it was driven 2,879 miles (2013: 3,408) on task. The minibus is vital for our operation: it allows us to welcome volunteers who do not have their own transport, and gives us the means to transport bulky tools safely. We plan to replace this bus with a new one in 2019.

Tool store and garage

LCV owns a wide variety of tools. One of the strengths of the group is that we can provide the client with volunteers who are fully equipped for the task. This year has seen a continued investment in new tools and safety equipment to ensure that our volunteers have everything they need to do an excellent job. We have not made any significant investments in our buildings this year.

Training

LCV aims to provide the training volunteers need to undertake tasks safely and in a skilled fashion. We have not needed any specific training courses this year.

Publicity and volunteer recruitment

A total of 46 new volunteers (2013: 64) came on their first task with us during the year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of new volunteers find out about LCV from our website, which during the year received 23,126 hits, corresponding to around 800 unique visitors per month (2013: 18,052, 652). The task programme is the most popular page and most users reach it directly or via bookmarks. Around 7% of visitors arrive through search engines. Mobile browsers are increasingly popular. We have recently started attracting volunteers through a posting on the University of Edinburgh's volunteer post register. We also attract a significant number from the Edinburgh Volunteer Centre, by word of mouth and by our attendance at local volunteer fairs.

Volunteer retention

Of the 47 new volunteers who came out in the past year 24 returned for a subsequent task. This number is above the average of 22 for all years since 2004/05. This is impressive given the relatively low number of new volunteers. Eight came out on at least four tasks suggesting that they are becoming established within the group.

A new volunteer survey was launched during the year to collect feedback from volunteers after their first task. All new volunteers were offered the chance to respond to this, and three did so, a response rate of 6%. The responses received were broadly positive but the sample size is too small to allow any firm conclusions to be drawn.

Volunteer development

LCV had 16 active task leaders and drivers in the last year, with 10 active task leaders and eight active drivers (some volunteers do both). The long term average is 13 active leaders (1995/96 to 2012/13) and 10 active drivers (2004/05 to 2012/13). However, excluding task leaders and drivers whose contribution was to one task only (who therefore do not have much impact on the workload shared by the most active contributors) the 2013/14 figures were eight and seven in comparison to long term averages of nine and eight. We are therefore close to the long term average for both task leaders, and drivers.

LCV prefers to avoid asking the same individual to lead or drive more than one task a month. Though the spread of responsibility is quite good overall, in the last year four individuals have exceeded the 12 task level. This is worse than in 2012/13 when it was three but it is notable that one leader, one driver and one leader/driver have returned to the group following extended absences and were not fully active in 2013/14. LCV would therefore still like to recruit more leaders and drivers (especially drivers) but the situation is not currently worsening.

Tree nursery

LCV runs a tree nursery in which we grow native trees of known provenance. Our Tree Nursery Manager plans the planting in the nursery in consultation with our clients to enable us to provide trees that they require. Being able to provide quality trees of known provenance is important for tree planting projects.

It can take up to four years to grow a tree from seed to a size that is suitable for planting on a reserve, and the tree nursery thus represents a considerable investment of volunteer time. We are grateful to the City of Edinburgh Council for providing us with a site for our tree nursery.

Conclusion

It has been a good year for the group with healthy volunteer activity, recruitment and retention. We have run a wide variety of tasks to maintain the enthusiasm of both long-standing and new volunteers, and our residential tasks have been popular and well-attended. Recruitment of leaders, new committee members and drivers continues to be our biggest challenge. The committee will continue to plan ahead to ensure that there is a supply of volunteers willing to take on senior roles in the group as they become vacant, by identifying likely candidates at an early stage.

Noticeboard

Leading tasks

We are always looking for new volunteers to lead tasks. If you'd like to give it a go, visit the 'how to' section of our website—www.lcv.org.uk— to find out what's involved, or have a chat with one of the regular leaders. Normally new leaders will shadow an experienced leader to begin with and occasional training is provided. For more info contact Partha, our Leader and Driver Organiser—see page 24 for contact details.

Driving the minibus

If you're a relatively experienced driver and would like to volunteer to drive our minibus the first step is to get in touch with Trevor, our Minibus Officer—see page 24 for contact details. We aim to ensure all LCV drivers receive MiDAS training, which involves theoretical and practical aspects of safe driving, and we can also arrange DI training for those who need it.

Paper copies of the Puggled Mucker and Annual Review

If you would like to receive a paper copy of the quarterly Puggled Mucker newsletter and our Annual Review the cost to cover printing and postage is £4 per year. Please contact Louisa, our Membership Secretary—see page 24 for contact details—who will advise you how to pay.

Change of contact details

If your contact details change, particularly your email address, please inform Louisa so that she can update our records and make sure you don't miss out on any vital LCV correspondence. See page 24 for her contact details.

LCV online

www.lcv.org.uk is where you can find the forthcoming task and social programmes, information about the places we work, articles about past activities plus a host of other information.

Our **Yahoo! discussion group** is where we post the latest information about tasks and social activities. Join it by contacting David—webmaster@lcv.org.uk.

Join our small—but growing—band of followers on **Facebook** to get updates about LCV activities and share photographs of the things that we do.
www.facebook.com/LothiansConservationVolunteers

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Find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/LothiansConservationVolunteers

www.lcv.org.uk