

Lothians Conservation Volunteers

In support of the Scottish Wildlife Trust

puggled mucker

Winter 2008
Issue 144



Inside:

Task programme	3
How to book & what to bring	10
LCV news	12
Social events	14
Views	16
Contact details	23



**Lothians
Conservation
Volunteers**

www.lcv.org.uk

LCV relies solely on volunteers to organise and run all our tasks and we always appreciate help with running the group. It is very encouraging to learn that our recent leadership training course was full and I look forward to seeing those who attended use their new found skills and leading tasks with LCV soon. I would like to thank David Monaghan for running the course and Edel Sheridan for giving practical examples of what could happen when leading.

One perk of offering to lead or drive on a task is that you are guaranteed a place in the minibus, so if you are interested in helping the group and yourself, give me a call.

Thanks to all who helped at our fundraising ceilidh. It was very enjoyable and a great success. Special thanks go to David Nutter, Louisa, Sarah McConachie, Emma, Pauline, Ken, Greg Parker, Greg Milne, Chris, Jenny, Edel, Simon and everyone else who helped with the organisation before and on the night.

The minibus has recently required some expensive repairs. Funding for a replacement van is now necessary. If anyone knows of any potential sources of funding, please contact Ken Humphreys.

Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Sarah Humphreys—Co-ordinator



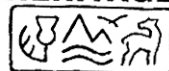
Lothians Conservation Volunteers

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

We are affiliated to BTCV,
the UK conservation volun-
teering charity. Our funding
comes from the clients that
we work for, and also by
grants from organisations
like Scottish Wildlife Trust and
Scottish Natural Heritage.

Charity number SCO20384

**SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE**



Supported by
grant aid from
Scottish Natural
Heritage.

The Editor Writes...

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the *Mucker* this winter.

Louisa has provided a comprehensive review of the eventful Tainish residential task. Find out more about LCV's misadventures near one of Scotland's oldest oak woods on p16. Sarah McConachie has given us an insight into volunteering abroad with a vivid account of her BTCV holiday earlier this year; for memories of Bulgarian sunshine and innumerable buckets of sand see p19.

Apologies are due to Tony Irving for managing to muddle his phone number in the process of transcribing the Autumn *Mucker* into its new software. I am assured that the number is now fixed, so Tony will be able to respond to all your Tree Nursery related enquiries. Sorry Tony.

This is your newsletter, and contributions from all LCV members are welcome. Most formats can be accommodated—handwritten, drawn, photographed, electronic. Just get in touch with me— see *contact us* section of website— by 25 March if you have something you'd like to see included in the next edition. Happy holidays.

Nicola Murray

Task Programme

Dec 14

Pease Dean: tree felling

This coastal reserve immediately above Pease Bay was purchased by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) in 1988, and it overlooks the North Sea near Cockburnspath, Berwickshire. Part of the 31 hectares has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and it is considered to be one of the most important ancient woodlands in the Borders. It consists of two steep-sided valleys—deans—clothed in mixed broadleaved woodland, including an area of ancient sessile oak. Several very rare mosses, liverworts and beetles are also found here. We will be working with members of the local SWT branch to hand-fell non-native trees. Removal of the non-native trees will leave space for re-planting with native species.



Dec 21

Addiewell Bing: Christmas-tree felling

Addiewell Bing is a long, narrow reserve of 21 hectares just south of Bathgate in West Lothian, which is leased and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). It is an excellent example of how a derelict industrial site—part of the oil shale industry—can be converted into an important wildlife refuge.

Most of the reserve is covered by woodland and scrub, but there are also patches of bracken, heather, open grassland and marshy ground with a rich variety of plants and birds. The area was extensively planted with native species including oak and ash, as well as conifers such as larch and lodgepole pine to help stabilise the steep sides of this old spoil heap.

In the past we have upgraded the footpath and cleared invading broom from areas of heather. This time, under the guidance of Colin McLean of SWT, we will be continuing to thin areas of lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta contorta*) so that the area can be underplanted with native broadleaved trees at a later date. Volunteers on task may select the tops off the best thinnings to take home for Christmas trees. If you bribe the driver, you may also have it delivered to your door!

Dec 29 – Jan 3 Pease Dean New Year Residential: tree felling

See 14 December for a description of this site. We will be working with members of the local Scottish Wildlife Trust branch to hand-fell non-native trees, continuing the task from the last three successful New Year residentials, and stacking previously-felled trees. Removal of the non-native trees will leave space for re-planting with native species. Accommodation is in the same cottage as last year.

10 Jan SATURDAY Addiewell Bing: tree felling/planting

See 21 December for a description of this site. On this visit we will be working with the Scottish Wildlife Trust to continue to fell lodgepole pine trees in order to provide more room and light for future planting, we may also plant some native trees in previously cleared areas of the site.



11 Jan Aberlady Bay: Sea buckthorn clearance

Situated on the coast, Aberlady Bay is a Local Nature Reserve owned and managed by East Lothian Council. It is a large area—580 hectares—made up of an open bay with sand and mudflats, as well as expanses of saltings, dunes and grassland. The area is best known for its birds, where over 200 species have been seen. There is also considerable botanical interest—you can see the full plant succession from mudflat to saltmarsh, to dune scrub and grassland. On this task, we will be clearing areas of invasive sea buckthorn. Sea buckthorn is quite prickly, so hard-wearing clothes are advisable.

18 Jan

Vogrie: tree thinning/snedding

Vogrie is a popular country park four kilometres south-east of Dalkeith run by Midlothian Council. About half the area is covered by woodland and scrub, with smaller patches of grassland, three ponds, an alder coppice and a conifer plantation. Over the years we have cleared the ponds, cut meadow grass, repaired part of a drystone dyke, cleared scrub, coppiced alder and planted trees. On this visit we'll be thinning and snedding an area of trees near an old hut that may be developed into a birdwatching area. We will be improving the woodland habitat for both wildlife and potential birdwatchers.

25 Jan

**N. Edinburgh Cycle Path:
tree thinning/path maintenance**

This cycle/walkway follows the old inner city railway network, and runs from Roseburn to Leith with branches off to other areas. The management of the verges of these routes is organised by a committee, which includes the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The aim is to enhance the wildlife value of the network by maintaining a variety of habitats—scrub, wildflower meadows, marsh and narrow areas of woodland. On this visit we will be thinning the woodland to help maintain the pathway. This will also increase biodiversity and create new habitats for wildlife.

31 Jan SATURDAY

Addiewell Bing: tree felling/planting

This task is a continuation of the work from 10 January.



1 Feb

Gore Glen: broom clearance from tree plantation

Gore Glen is a good example of land restoration. This former coal bing has been relandscaped into an attractive area for both wildlife and visitors. Invasive broom is threatening to outcompete newly planted trees. We will be hand pulling broom where possible and burning on site.

7 Feb SATURDAY

Bawsinch: elm clearance

Bawsinch and Duddingston loch are found on the southern edge of Holyrood Park, just below Arthur's Seat and only three kilometres from the city centre. This 26 hectare reserve, partly owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, is a bird sanctuary and has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The area boasts breeding and wintering wildfowl, marshland with reedbeds and willow, patches of scrub and woodland, some freshwater ponds and an area of grassland named Goose Green. Formerly a derelict industrial site, Bawsinch is a triangular area next to the south shore of the loch. In the past LCV has felled trees, cleared ponds, built log bridges and cleared back invasive vegetation. On this task, we will be clearing elms to keep the habitat/footpaths open.

8 Feb

Longniddry: sea buckthorn clearance

Longniddry Bents is part of the Firth of Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is known for its many sea and wading birds. Due to low nutrient levels and exposure to sea winds, which make it difficult for large, vigorous plants to become established, there are a large number of wildflowers, including cowslip during spring and bloody cranesbill in summer. Forming part of the John Muir Way, which runs from Dunbar to Musselburgh, Longniddry Bents is a popular spot for many users, from walkers and birdwatchers to horse riders. On this visit we will be clearing sea buckthorn which is encroaching on a public right of way. This path is part of the John Muir Way.



15 Feb

Penicuik to Dalkeith Walkway: boardwalk construction/pathwork

The Penicuik to Dalkeith Walkway is part of the former Edinburgh to Peebles railway line, a 9.5 mile linear route that passes through many of Midlothian's historic towns and villages. The route is an important resource for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and is also a haven for wildlife. Otter and kingfisher can be found on the River North Esk, which meanders along its route. The tree-lined railway embankments support a rich variety of tree species and related wildlife. On this visit we will be improving access along this section of the Walkway. This will involve path drainage and surfacing as well as the construction of a small boardwalk within the Valleyfield/Eskmills Nature Trail.

22 Feb

**Leadburn Community Woodland:
tree thinning/planting**

Leadburn Community Woodland was recently purchased from the Forestry Commission by a small group of individuals known as the Friends of Leadburn Community Woodland. The group intend to replace the previous plantation of conifers with native trees such as silver birch, ash, oak and rowan, among others, and planting at the site has recently begun. On our first visit last summer, we helped to clear brash and scrub to create space for planting. On this visit we will be helping to thin and plant trees. The area is boggy in places, so wellies are recommended if you have them.



1 Mar

Spottiswoode: tree planting

Dr David Long from the Royal Botanic Gardens has purchased land near Lauder that contains a spruce plantation. His aim is to gradually remove the spruce and replace it with natural broadleaf woodland, to increase biodiversity. LCV has visited Spottiswoode a number of times in the last couple of years, clearing and burning spruce and planting trees. On this task, we will be continuing the tree planting work, planting native species on the land cleared of spruce and brash, and protecting the trees with guards and stakes.

8 Mar

Donald Rose Wood: tree tubing

Donald Rose Wood is in Fife near the village of Star, close to Markinch. It was formerly a sitka spruce plantation, which was acquired by a group of six people in 2001, including our own Tim Duffy. The site is around a picturesque reservoir, with stunning views of the Ochil hills and Edinburgh. Part of the reservoir has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. On previous tasks, LCV have burned the spruce brash from the former plantation to make way for planting with native broadleaf trees; planted many trees and carried out the post planting management called 'beating up'. This means checking trees in the newly planted areas are healthy, weeding, restaking and restocking dead—or eaten by roe deer—trees as necessary. On this task we shall be tubing and staking trees that need to 'get away' from the effects of the beautiful roe deer. Sixty of the tubes are recycled from a farmer friend of Pauline's so this will be an exercise in trying to lower the impact of the overall tree planting process. There will also be chicken wire cages to put on especially sensitive and apparently tasty species.



14 Mar SATURDAY

Bawsinch: vegetation maintenance

See 7 February for a description of this site. On this visit we will be cutting back vegetation which is encroaching on the path and removing invasive plants.

15 Mar

**Straiton Pond LNR:
tree thinning/habitat maintenance**

Straiton Pond was a clay pit until the 1950s and was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 1991. This popular site, adjacent to the City Bypass, is a haven for wildlife and demonstrates a remarkable amount of biodiversity. The vegetation is home to many bird species and the pond supports populations of little grebes and mute swans. In the summer this reclaimed industrial site is ideal for wildflowers such as St John's wort and northern marsh orchid. On this visit we will carry out woodland management, thinning Willow within the reserve and improving the newt pond by thinning trees around the pond edges and clearing the island areas.

20 – 22 Mar

Taynish Residential: beech clearance

The ancient deciduous woodland at Taynish is one of the largest in Britain. Oak trees have flourished here for 6,000 years or more—a little longer than people have lived here. Once a source of timber and charcoal, these woods now form one of Britain's largest remaining native oakwoods. The importance of the site was recognised in 1977 by designation as a National Nature Reserve and it is now managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Taynish lies on a scenic peninsula overlooking Loch Sween, which was scoured out by glaciers 11,000 years ago, and has an atmosphere all of its own.

The peninsula has a wide range of habitats, including shoreline, grassland, scrub, bog, heath and woodland, each home to a host of plants, insects, birds and mammals that thrive in the clean, humid air. In all, between the woodland's dripping ferns and mosses and the marsh and grassland, over 300 plant species and more than 20 kinds of butterfly are supported. To help the woods keep their near-natural character and rich wildlife, SNH is encouraging the spread of native trees by controlling deer, which browse on young trees. SNH is also removing rhododendron, which crowds out other plants.

On this visit to the site we will be removing invasive beech. Accommodation is in the luxurious Kilmartin 'bothy' with cosy beds, *en-suite* showers and a useful 'drying room' for your gear in the unlikely event of rain. Duvets and pillows are provided, but please bring (single) bed linen with you. Book your place with Debbie by 18 March at the latest.

29 Mar

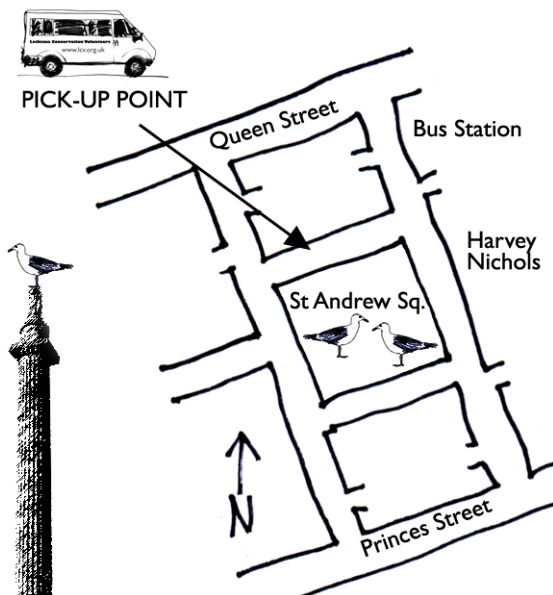
Leadburn Community Woodland: tree planting

This is a continuation of the work from 22 February.



How to book and what to bring

Day tasks



We meet on the north side of St. Andrew Square at 9.30 a.m. prompt—look out for our yellow minibus. We normally aim to return around 5.30 p.m. Bring waterproofs, a packed lunch and boots or wellies—steel toe-cap wear is recommended. If you have your own work gloves, you might want to bring them, though we do have gloves that anyone can borrow. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided.

Transport is free, but please phone Debbie, the Transport Secretary, by the Friday evening before the task if you are coming—this is so that we know how many tools to take, whether there's room in the minibus and so that we don't go without you. Tasks are very popular, so you're advised to book early. We also only have 12 seats in the bus, so please come if you've booked, or someone else might miss out. If the bus is full, or it's easier for you, you can of course meet us at the site of the task, but again please inform the Transport Secretary, so we can let you know the meeting point and also when we expect to arrive.

We don't cancel the task if it's raining.

Residential Tasks

Residentials are great fun (see the Tynish review later in the Mucker) and allow LCV to undertake larger tasks further from Edinburgh. They involve a weekend away to work on the Saturday and Sunday. We leave on Friday night and usually take in a chip shop on the way. We get back to Edinburgh on Sunday evening.

Regardless of the time of year, bring a complete change of clothing so that you can get out of your work clothes in the evening. Remember that the weather can be very changeable, so bring a warm jumper and hat and above all don't forget a waterproof jacket and trousers and sturdy footwear. Unless otherwise indicated you'll probably need to take a sleeping bag and, if sleeping on the floor, a Karmat or air-bed.

On residential tasks, breakfasts, lunches and the evening meal are organised by a volunteer. Everyone helps to prepare the food. The fare is usually vegetarian and there is plenty of it. Food for a weekend usually works out at £6–7 each. Pick-up is from St. Andrew Square at 7.30 p.m. on Friday, unless otherwise stated. If you want to go on a residential task, please book with the Transport Secretary. Normally, bookings will be accepted for weekend residential tasks up to the preceding Wednesday evening.

Before you come on any task with us, please make sure that your tetanus vaccination is up to date.

Monthly meetings

Every second Tuesday of the month, we have a meeting at 16 Forth Street, off Broughton Street, at 7.30 p.m. We leave a notice near the door with a bell to alert us to let you in. Tasks and everything else that is going on are discussed—everyone is welcome. Afterwards we go for a drink in *Mathers* on Broughton Street, from around 9 p.m. Come along for a drink even if you can't make the meeting.



News

In Remembrance of Mo Ellis



It is with great sadness that I write of the passing of Mo Ellis. She was a very active member of LCV for many years, helping on the committee as social organiser. She loved the outdoors and brought her sense of fun on tasks. She will be sadly missed. A tree will be planted in her memory.

Sarah Humphreys—Co-ordinator.

Leading tasks and driving for LCV

We are always looking for new volunteers to lead tasks. There is a description of how to lead a task on the LCV website—look under ‘how to’—and training courses are run from time to time. Normally an experienced leader would be around for backup for the first few tasks. Minibus drivers are also needed—if you are a relatively experienced driver, the first step is to do an LCV familiarisation session with the minibus to see how you get on. Our aim is that all LCV drivers will also receive MiDAS training, which involves theoretical and practical aspects of safe driving. If you might be interested in either leading tasks or driving for LCV, please contact the LCV co-ordinator—see *contact us* section on the LCV website.

LCV clothing

Our range includes LCV tops—S, M, L, XL sizes in deep navy or khaki with the LCV logo on—and fleece neckwarmers—one size in charcoal, with drawstrings, so they also double as hats. Costs are: £25 for a hooded sweatshirt, £20 for a sweatshirt, £12 for a T-Shirt and £7 for a neckwarmer. If you're interested in adding to your wardrobe, please contact the membership secretary—see *contact us* section on the LCV website—noting the item, size and colour. We will need payment with your order: please make cheques payable to ‘Lothians Conservation Volunteers’.

Newsletter subscriptions

If you would like to receive the *Puggled Mucker* newsletter, the cost to cover printing and postage is £4 per year (£2 unwaged). Please send a cheque to ‘Lothians Conservation Volunteers’ to the membership secretary—see *contact us* section on the LCV website—and let her know if your contact details change.

LCV Online

Don't forget that you can check the task and social programme online at www.lcv.org.uk. The website is a mine of useful information for leading tasks, working the kettle and catering for large groups on residential. Join our Yahoo! online discussion group, where we publish LCV news, discussions about LCV activities and social events. for further information contact the LCV treasurer—see *contact us* section on the LCV website.



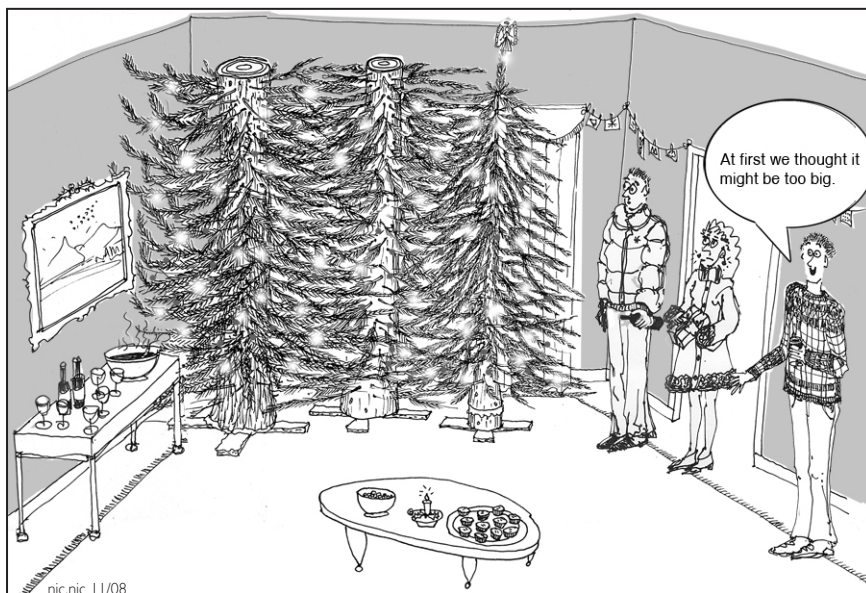
Social Events

For all events it is better to book beforehand by emailing either Alexandra or Emma, social convenors—see *contact us* section of LCV website—giving your contact details, this way you can be updated if there is a change in arrangements. But, if you are not sure what you're doing until the last minute, for most events it is possible to just turn up.

Thurs 18 December

German Market and the Big Wheel

Join LCV to visit the German Market on Princes Street for some mulled wine, some ice skating and—if you are feeling brave—a ride on the Big Wheel. Meet at 7pm by the Scott Monument.



Sun 21 December**Mulled Wine and Mince Pies**

From 8pm, meet for mulled wine and mince pies. Please let Sarah know if you are coming.

Please bring along a festive contribution.

Thurs 15 January**Pantomime – Aladdin at Kings theatre**

Join LCV for some panto fun and see Aladdin at the King's Theatre at 7.30pm. If you want to go and didn't manage to book a ticket with Alexandra earlier this month* it may still be possible to buy a ticket independently and meet up at the theatre on the night.

*The previously advertised deadline for booking tickets for this event was changed and an update circulated online in November via the newsgroup. Apologies if you missed this.

Wed 25 February**Film and drinks**

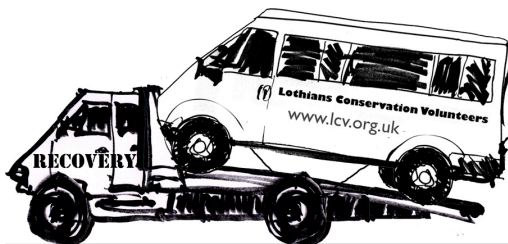
Come along to a relaxing evening where we will go to see a film and then have a few drinks afterwards. Contact Alexandra for further details of the film and the meeting arrangements.

**Sun 8 March****Water of Leith Walk**

Join LCV for a walk along the Water of Leith. Meet at 11am at the bus stop beside Balerno High School. Bring some snacks/lunch and some money for a well-earned coffee at the end of the walk in Leith. Contact Emma if you would like to come along.



Views



Autumn Taynish Residential: October 3-5th

The Taynish Resi left bright and early from St Andrew's Square for the quite considerable drive up to Kilmartin. Excellent work by Peter and Willie got us to the chippy before we died of hunger and Willie's claim that there were toilets in the Co-Op turned out to be well founded even if you did have to climb over half the stock to get to them!

Despite a shocking weather forecast everyone was up bright and early on Saturday morning and we got off to a good start, meeting Hazel the ranger and setting off for the site. So far so good, but, just beyond the shelter of some woodland, on an appropriately bleak and lonely stretch of road, the bus decided it was not in the mood and coasted to an unexpected and, as it turned out, rather persistent halt. Hazel's truck disappeared into the distance. She thought we'd stopped to look at hen harriers. We would have, had we not been looking at the interesting red warning lights on the dashboard instead.

We hopped out of the van to peer at the engine and say 'hmm'. Despite a passing acquaintance with the mechanical workings necessary to keep my bicycle on the road, 'hmm' was about the most useful contribution I felt able to make at this point. However, as no-one more knowledgeable was able to come up with much more than 'hmm' we concluded that the time had come to call on a higher authority, namely 24 hour breakdown. The experts were duly summoned.

Hazel had decided by this point that even hen harriers could not be this exciting and came back to find out what had happened. We decanted half the group into her truck and set off for the site. After an hour or so of waiting in SNH's rather dark and chilly shed while it rained torrentially outside Hazel retrieved the rest of the group except Willie who'd been abandoned with the bus to await rescue.

As there is always a silver lining to every cloud I was pleased to note that the torrential rain had eased off by the time the second half of the party were on their way to the site. A further minor delay following the discovery of a hawk (huge-dragonfly) on the path gave the weather time to ease up a bit more. Hazel got us started on the task and then set off again with Trevor who as 'sole member of the

party actually carrying their driving licence' was the only one in a position to drive SNH's spare truck. The rest of us set to the business of fire-starting and gorse cutting with some enthusiasm. Tony's fire-building skills soon had us a cheery gorse blaze going which later claimed the weekend's second casualty—Willie's drying sock.



Is it dry yet? Willie retrieves the charred remains of his sock.

At about three in the afternoon Trevor and Willie reappeared with the news that the garage had not had anything much more constructive to offer than 'hmm' either. However, they would be able to get us back to Edinburgh on the Sunday and we now had at least one fully functioning SNH vehicle. A couple of hours of work with the whole group ended at five when Trevor began ferrying everyone back to the bothy at Kilmartin. David and willing kitchen assistants went first while the rest of us stayed to do a bit more work and put the fire out. Of course, as soon as half the group had left, the last of the clouds blew away to leave a beautiful evening at what is undeniably a beautiful site.

Saturday evening brought promising clear skies, well-deserved hot showers and food. It also brought the frustrating news that the breakdown people could not give us a firm departure time until Sunday morning and that we might be called

on to leave at short notice. On Sunday we were told we could leave at four as we'd suggested but, alas, too late! If we'd taken the risk and gone out on task first thing we could have made good use of the gorgeous weather but by the time we knew when we were leaving there wasn't enough time to do anything useful. Still, we were able to see Kilmartin at its best and go round its museum and up its hills before we had to head off. We were driven back to Edinburgh in style in a taxi and a breakdown truck. No stopping those trucks once they're up to speed and we were back in double quick time and able to abandon the bus at People's Garage and head home.



Gorse at Taynish

So, not exactly the weekend we all signed up for but thanks to Willie, Peter and Trevor for driving, David for cooking and everyone for taking the setbacks philosophically. The final good news is that the van is now showing definite signs of recovery and may well be up to taking us back to address our unfinished Taynish business.

Louisa Martin

Thanks Louisa for leading and documenting the Taynish experience—Ed.

Bulgarian Buckets



‘What did you know of Bulgaria before you came here?’ asked Rauman, a member of Green Balkans and fellow conservation volunteer. After several moments of anxious hesitation I replied ‘Umm...didn’t you used to be a Communist country?’ He was clearly unimpressed. ‘And of Scotland?’ I queried. ‘You had lots of clan warfare ’ he replied. ‘And aren’t all Scots misers?!’ Unfortunately I was unable to indignantly refute the latter, as by day five of my conservation holiday with BTCV I had yet to buy a round of drinks. At least I hadn’t attacked anyone with my klamptore.



BTCV regularly joins conservation working holidays run by Green Balkans on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. Green Balkans was formed in 1988 when the Communist administration poisoned over a million wintering birds. I can only imagine the bravery of these individuals as their protest against the totalitarian regime must have come at considerable personal risk. Even today’s democracy doesn’t guarantee environmental protection as there is considerable pressure to develop the Black Sea for tourism. This is clearly a battle Green Balkans is struggling to win, given the scramble of lilac, orange and yellow high-rise hotels in evidence. Much of this, at times illegal, construction is apparently a direct result of endemic corruption and money-laundering operations; the lawful status of National Park or Ramsar (a wetland site of internationally recognised importance) nullified. Green Balkans often has to turn to the EU courts to uphold the protection of Bulgaria’s wild places—thus the continued backing of international bodies such as BTCV can only lend weight to their case.

Bulgaria is renowned for its migrant bird populations, being on the ‘Via Pontica’, one of the world’s main avian migration routes. Pomorie Lake, a shallow hypersaline lagoon, is particularly rich in birdlife, having a Ramsar designation. Twelve

years ago Green Balkans constructed an artificial island in the lake to provide a safe haven for nesting birds. Predation by dogs and foxes has been much reduced and sandwich tern numbers have risen dramatically—from six nesting pairs in 1997 to 1,300 in 2004. Our job was to create a human chain onto the island to transport buckets of shell sand in order to make repairs before next spring's breeding season. The work itself was straightforward and we soon got into a rhythm—almost trance-like at times! And I was much taken by the Green Balkan policy of only working in the morning—definitely something we should consider at the next LCV AGM.

Afternoons were free, therefore, to fill the enormous gaps in my knowledge of Bulgaria, which our hosts worked hard to achieve. I hadn't appreciated the wealth of ancient heritage that trips to various Thracian tombs and sacred sites revealed. I was slightly disturbed to learn that when a polygamous Thracian leader died his 'favourite wife' was killed in order to accompany him to the afterlife—and this was seen as an honour! (Yet another reason, girls, to refuse to iron his shirts—as if one were needed.) We also took in the local Museum of Salt and I had myself a therapeutic mud bath. Local delicacies were sampled—such as pan-fried offal and polenta with cheese—all washed down with the flavoursome local wine. Doncho, the Green Balkans leader, was a fantastic naturalist and led several bird-watching expeditions both on Pomorie Lake and in some nearby nature reserves. It was great to see species such as pelicans, avocets, black-winged stilts and bee-eaters in the wild and the balletic beauty of the annual stork migration was a real highlight.

We spent our last weekend in the Balkan mountains, travelling via the Green Balkans 'Bird Rescue Centre' where their team of vets and volunteers nurse injured birds back to health. A good proportion of these birds, such as Imperial eagles and Griffin vultures, are released back into the wild. Those too injured take part in the breeding programme.

So what do I know about Bulgaria now? Well, my short sojourn has afforded me a glimpse of a country with a vibrant culture, fantastic natural history and above all, a friendly and welcoming people. As one of the most recent nations to accede to the EU, their well-organised NGOs are able to use their new-found access to European law to protect their abundance of wildlife—efforts which can only improve biodiversity the world over. And did I ever buy that round? Well, I am Aberdonian...

Find out more about Bulgarian nature conservation at: www.greenbalkans.org

Sarah McConachie



Resi Recipe

Quick chick pea curry (vegan)—thanks to Fiona who made this on a New Year residential in 06/07 and passed on the recipe so I could make it on Mull this summer. If you are willing to share your vegetarian culinary secrets send a recipe (for ten) to me—see *contact us* section on the LCV website—and we'll pull one out of the pot for the next *Mucker*. Ed.

Serves 12 (10 hungry)

Ingredients:

90ml/6tbsp vegetable oil
8 cloves garlic crushed
12cm/4" root ginger peeled and finely chopped
60ml/4tbsp commercially available vegetarian Korma curry paste
3 x 400g/14oz tins chopped tomatoes
450ml/3/4 pint light vegetarian stock
6 onions peeled and chopped
675g/1.5 lb mushrooms, sliced
3 x 425g/15oz tins chick peas, drained
250g/8oz flaked almonds, toasted
150g/5oz creamed coconut, grated
handful fresh coriander leaves, chopped

Method:

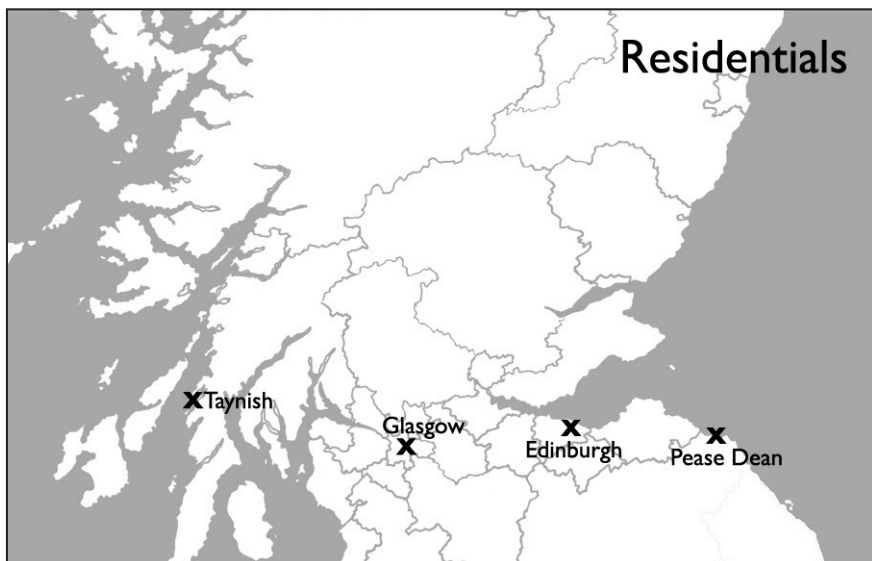
1 Gently fry the garlic, ginger and korma curry paste in 3 tbsp of the oil for 2-3 mins. Add the tomatoes and stock and cook for a further minute. Blend the ingredients in a liquidiser until smooth (I didn't do any blending at Torosay, not vital.)

2 In the original pan, fry the onion in the remaining oil for 3 minutes, add the sliced mushrooms and cook for a further 3 mins.

3 Pour the curry paste over the onions and mushrooms and add the drained chickpeas and most of the coriander. Heat gently for 10 mins.

4 Stir in the creamed coconut and flaked almonds, reserving a few, and season to taste. Serve hot, garnished with the remaining coriander and toasted almonds.

Task locations



Conservation Tasks

December	Sun 14th	Pease Dean	Tree felling
	Sun 21st	Addiewell Bing	Christmas-tree felling
	Dec 29 - Jan 3	New Year Residential	Pease Dean Tree Felling
January	SAT 10th	Addiewell Bing	Tree felling/planting
	Sun 11th	Aberlady Bay	Sea buckthorn clearance
	Sun 18th	Vogrie	Tree thinning/snedding
	Sun 25th	North Edinburgh Cycle Path	Tree thinning/path maintenance
	SAT 31st	Addiewell Bing	Tree felling/planting
February	Sun 1st	Gore Glen	Broom clearance
	SAT 7th	Bawsinch	Elm clearance
	Sun 8th	Longniddry	Sea buckthorn clearance
	Sun 15th	Penicuik—Dalkeith walkway	Pathwork/boardwalk construction
	Sun 22nd	Leadburn Community WoodInd.	Tree felling
March	Sun 1st	Spottiswoode	Tree planting
	Sun 8th	Donald Rose Wood	Tree Tubing
	SAT 14th	Bawsinch	Vegetation maintenance
	Sun 15th	Straiton Pond LNR	Tree thinning/habitat maintenance
	20th-22nd	Taynish Residential	Beech Clearance
	Sun 29th	Leadburn Community WoodInd.	Tree planting



Other Events



December	Tues 9th	7.30pm	Monthly Meeting
	Thurs 18th	7.00pm	German Market & Big Wheel
	Sun 21st	8.00pm	Mulled wine and mince pies
January	Tues 13th	7.30pm	Monthly Meeting
	Thurs 15th	7.30pm	Pantomime - Aladdin at Kings
February	Tues 10th	7.30pm	Monthly Meeting
	Wed 25th	evening TBC	Film and drinks
March	Sun 8th	11.00am -	Water of Leith walk
	Tues 10th	7.30pm	Monthly Meeting