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REPORT TO: Members' Library Service

MEETING DATE:

BY: Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Community Services

SUBJECT: East Lothian Biodiversity Report

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Members of the need to conserve biodiversity and of the submission of the biodiversity report.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the Biodiversity Duty and the contents of the report.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on public bodies to 'further the conservation of biodiversity'. The Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires public bodies to report the actions that they carry out to deliver this Biodiversity Duty. The attached report meets this reporting requirement.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial - none
- 6.2 Personnel - none
- 6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 East Lothian Biodiversity 2014.

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East Lothian Biodiversity 2014

Fulfilling the Council's
obligation to report
on actions it takes
to conserve biodiversity



Introduction: the problem with biodiversity

People use '*biodiversity*' as another word for wildlife and nature conservation, but there is a difference. Looking after nature usually means looking after nature reserves and protecting wildlife sites. This has been helpful but nature reserves cover a small area of countryside only, which means that habitats are still damaged and species still become extinct. Biodiversity is a nature conservation process that improves habitats and helps species in towns and across the wider countryside.

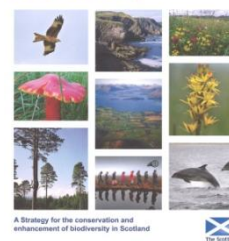


Biodiversity is not just saving wild plants and animals. Biodiversity provides many things that we use each day: food, fresh water, building materials, medicines. Wild landscapes can also prevent flooding and storm damage, attract visitors and build a tourist economy or simply provide a pleasant place for people to live. Without biodiversity we would not have the things that make our lives better. Biodiversity is all about improving our quality of life.

Biodiversity became a global issue at the Earth Summit in 1992. Government leaders signed the Convention on Biological Diversity, committing their countries to developing new nature conservation methods.

Recovery plans have been produced for species and habitats that are becoming rare. Extra conservation effort has involved government agencies, conservation charities, local authorities, farmers, universities, expert amateurs and the public.

2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity

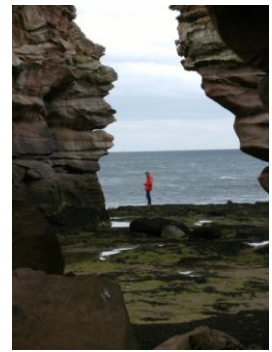


Despite all this effort biodiversity is still in decline. In 2000, international targets aimed to halt the loss of biodiversity within 10 years. Across the UK and across the world we failed. A new set of targets was agreed at a global conference in Aichi in Japan, to be delivered by 2020. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy sets out the Scottish nature conservation vision for the next 10 years.



One way to save the planet is to fit biodiversity more strongly into the way that local authorities and other public bodies operate. All public organisations (such as Scottish Water, health boards etc) have a legal duty to 'further the conservation of biodiversity' within the fulfilment of their normal duties. This was part of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 now requires public bodies to report on the work that they carry out to help biodiversity.

This report summarises how biodiversity has become part of normal working life in East Lothian Council and lists actions where improvements could be made in the coming years. As you may imagine, the way we look after the landscape has a huge impact on biodiversity. The Council must look after its land for biodiversity and encourages others to look after biodiversity on their land also. All departments of the Council need to contribute to the biodiversity duty. Different functions of the Council are described separately in this report so if you have a particular interest in one topic you can identify clearly how we are performing.



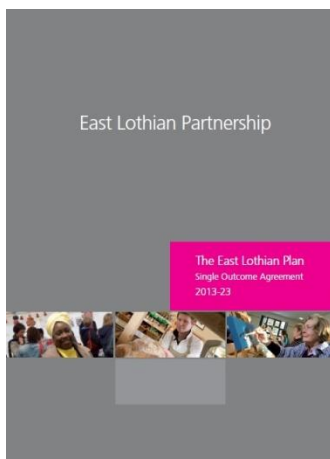
This report is a summary of work carried out. If you would like more details about any of the work, if you have ideas for improving biodiversity action, or if you would like to share the work that you do to help biodiversity, please contact ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk or write to Biodiversity Officer, John Muir House, Haddington, EH41 3HA.

Local and national government cannot resolve biodiversity issues by themselves. Businesses and communities also have a strong role to play in preventing damage to biodiversity and actively encouraging biodiversity. This report can give you ideas on how you can help at work, in your community or at home.

The East Lothian Partnership: managing community interests

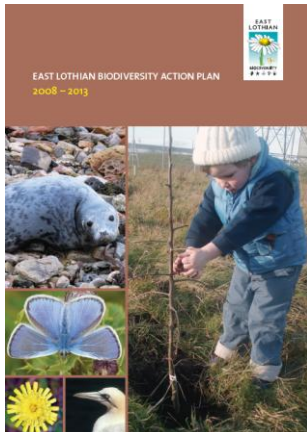
The Council delivers public services as part of a wider group of organisations known as the East Lothian Partnership. This includes health, fire and police services, business groups, education, charitable and community groups. The process of working with others is known as community planning and is supported by the Scottish Government through a process known as the Single Outcome Agreement.

The East Lothian Partnership has created a community plan with 10 key outcomes, relating to communities, the economy and the environment. These three elements are the basis behind sustainable development. One of the outcomes (Outcome 8) is directly related to biodiversity and aims to ensure that East Lothian has 'high quality natural environments'. You can read more about community planning at www.eastlothian.gov.uk/EastLothianPartnership.



This high level recognition helps support the biodiversity duty and other environmental duties, notably with regard to protected wildlife sites and climate change. The Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy and the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 require each area to provide an effective network of wild space to help biodiversity adapt to the effects of climate change. Policies and work of East Lothian Council must ensure that it helps to deliver these environmental obligations.

East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership: working with other people



The biodiversity process in East Lothian is assisted by another partnership, which includes conservation groups, farmers groups, government agencies and is chaired by the Council. This group has produced a Biodiversity Action Plan since 2003.

The existing plan can be viewed at [East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan](#). It contains a description of biodiversity across the county and a series of actions to enhance biodiversity in different habitats. Some actions are more readily achieved on Council land, and have made a difference. Biodiversity work on private land is more difficult to deliver.

The plan needs to be reviewed, to take account of these issues. Work is also progressing on a new Local Development Plan, which includes Council policies. This gives an opportunity to integrate biodiversity further into Council functions, through development of a Green Network.

Biodiversity on Council Land: where nature and people mingle

Wild Countryside

East Lothian Council owns and manages many important and popular wild areas. These include most of the coast and key inland sites such as North Berwick Law, Traprain Law and the Railway Walks. These areas are managed by the Ranger Service.



Because they are popular with locals and tourists the sites need to be managed to provide a quality experience for visitors as well as to encourage wildlife. Key sites are managed through a management plan that specifies work required on each site. Management plans cover 7 coastal sites, the two Laws, two Railway Walks and the River Esk.

Management at the five most significant sites is overseen by advisory groups. They consist of interested charities such as RSPB, and government agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland, as well as landowners and community representatives. Copies of management plans can be viewed at John Muir House in Haddington and are available at libraries.



In recent years, management included removal of sea buckthorn from sand dunes and restoration of grasslands through grazing or mowing. Grassland can be difficult to manage but ponies and sheep are very effective habitat managers. These projects are supported by a large number of volunteers who check livestock and conduct wildlife surveys to monitor improvements to the habitat.

Many of these places are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Scheduled Ancient Monuments and proper management helps to improve the value of nationally significant heritage.



Habitat management and species monitoring also take place on sites that are not designated or covered by a management plan, for example at Butterdean Wood near Gladsmuir and Hopetoun Monument near Haddington.

Biodiversity Action: Wild Countryside

- 1. Ensure at least 85% of actions listed in management plans are completed.**
- 2. Review management plans every five years.**
- 3. Develop new projects to improve habitats on the Council's countryside estate.**

Green Towns

Urban greenspace includes all the open areas within or next to a town that are used by people and wildlife. It includes parks, flowerbeds and shrub beds, sports pitches, playgrounds, riverside walks and urban woodland. These areas are managed primarily by the Council's Amenity Services teams. Public use of greenspace is a priority but over the last 15 years biodiversity has been designed into these areas as much as possible. Biodiversity landscaping improves the amenity and value of parks and open space, and helps local people get closer to nature on their doorstep.

Biodiversity landscaping includes sowing areas with annual plants to provide long-lasting colour in place of short mown grass or bedding plants. These dazzling displays attract invertebrates, especially hoverflies but also bumblebees and butterflies. Annual wildflowers such as cornflower and corn marigold are often included in the mixes, both of which are extremely rare in East Lothian. Wildflower seed from a local (Fife) source is used, so the seed mixes help to maintain the provenance of these rare species in the county. Other self-sown annual wildflowers, such as poppy, fumitory and mayweed also benefit from these biodiversity areas.



Even where specific biodiversity areas are not created, flowerbeds and shrub beds now include a greater proportion of plants that have a value for bumblebees and butterflies. A list of such plants is available from websites and includes spring bulbs, herbs and fruit bushes. Using certain types of flower such as single (simple) flower heads rather than double flower heads (with more petals than normal) ensures that bees can feed on the flower's nectar. This has also resulted in less peat-based compost being used by the Council's plant nursery and a more efficient allocation of staff time.

Work is often carried out with local community groups, including Scotland in Bloom groups in Dunbar, North Berwick, East Linton, Haddington and Cockenzie & Port Seton. As well as providing an attractive

display, flower planters and hanging baskets can encourage pollinating insects to high streets which previously may have had little to attract them.



Over the last few years the Council has had to secure headstones that were in danger of falling over. In cemeteries, different rock types used for memorial stones support many different species of moss and lichen. Securing headstones could have an impact on lichens, but every effort was made keep headstones in the same position. Specifically, upright headstones were not laid flat, a practice that would have killed off many lichens through shading or changes to moisture levels. Biodiversity must look after the small and seemingly insignificant as well as the popular and well known.

Biodiversity Action: Green Towns

1. Maintain a record of biodiversity landscaping per town and cluster area and ensure that opportunities are spread around the county.
2. Conduct research to quantify the wildlife value of different urban biodiversity landscaping schemes.

Urban Forestry

Street trees provide many benefits to towns and villages. They frame the urban landscape and can remove pollutants from the air. They also act as a habitat for lichens, mosses, invertebrates, birds and bats. Over the last 10 years, East Lothian Council has planted over 1000 street trees, to replace trees that are lost through age, disease or damage.



Street trees are managed more intensively than woodland trees, to keep them looking good and to prevent problems such as excessive shading in gardens. This management reduces their biodiversity potential, but there is still a need to ensure that tree maintenance does not affect nesting birds or roosting bats, both of which are protected.

In addition to larger rural woods such as Butterdean and Yellowcraig, the Council owns many urban woods. These are often shelterbelts planted on the edge of residential areas, or may be woodlands that have become surrounded by houses, e.g. at Pencaitland. They should be pleasant landscapes, offering places of recreation for people and habitats for urban wildlife. Urban woodlands sometimes are poorly designed to achieve these aims.



Management Plans were produced for urban woodlands in 2006. They included Ormiston Park, Longniddry Dean and Muirfield in Tranent. These plans aimed to make the most of the habitat for people and wildlife. In some instances woodlands can be changed from badly used landscaping strips into multi-purpose habitats and community resources. Biodiversity management has included removal of less appropriate species (such as lodgepole pine) encouragement of native species and formal path creation.

Biodiversity Action: Urban Forestry

1. Record the potential of Council trees to support protected species and note other biodiversity benefits. Use this to inform the management carried out.
2. Provide training for forestry workers so that they understand the biodiversity value of trees and their wider obligations as regards protected species and the biodiversity duty.
3. Identify opportunities for fitting bird and bat boxes to trees during maintenance operations.

Invasive Species

The Council aims to eradicate invasive species from Council-controlled land, including railway walks and roadside verges. Problem invasive plants include Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed and they can have a significant impact on native vegetation as well as property.

Biodiversity Action: Invasive Species

1. Continue to control invasive species and tackle new populations as they are reported.

Roads and Bridges

Roadside Verges are long narrow grassland habitats along the edge of roads. They support many species of wildflower and can be important wildlife corridors, especially if they are wide, or next to hedgerows and ditches. Roadside verges need to be cut to maintain a clear road edge and to maintain sightlines at junctions.



Lots of factors affect wildlife along roadside verges. Soil type and surrounding habitats are natural factors, but the method and timing of grass cutting can be controlled a little. The Council currently cuts verges along A-class and B-class roads only. Verges are cut to one width of the flail in early and late summer. Additional cuts may be required in some years. Verge cutting on C-class or unclassified roads will take place on a needs-only basis.

This approach gives wildflowers an opportunity to flower and set seed on at least some of the county's roads. This is a reasonable compromise between maintaining necessary standards of road verges and maintaining a biodiversity resource. Some farmers and landowners cut verges around their property, to maintain their own standards. This could have an impact on plants, but is beyond Council control.

Rivers and bridges can support bats, otters or water vole. All these species are legally protected. Although water vole numbers are restricted, otters are now found all over the Tyne and Esk catchments. Repair and maintenance work on or near bridges can affect these species and appropriate surveys need to be carried out before works can progress.

Biodiversity Action: Roads and Bridges

1. Identify road verges that have particular biodiversity value and agree a management regime.
2. Ensure that appropriate wildlife surveys are carried out prior to engineering or maintenance works taking place.
3. Make survey results available to local wildlife recording groups.

Regulation of Development and Forestry: encouraging biodiversity in others

Planning and Development

The Council assesses development proposals for East Lothian and decides which proposals should be allowed to go ahead. Development can affect biodiversity and the Council must ensure that impacts are minimised, or that development enhances biodiversity. Planning proposals and policies are described in the Local Development Plan. A revised Plan should be available for public consultation later in 2015.

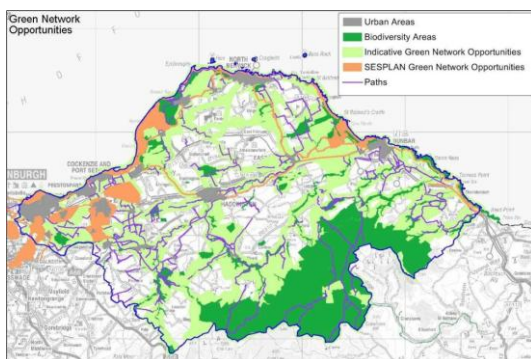


Sites of Special Scientific Interest are designated for their biodiversity and geological value through legislation. Along with other local authorities, East Lothian Council has recognised additional areas of importance to biodiversity. These are known as Wildlife Sites (to be revised as Local Biodiversity Sites).

Geodiversity is a similar process to biodiversity and recognises the social and scientific importance of rock formations. A survey of important geological areas is due late in 2014 and should lead to the designation of Local Geodiversity Sites. New planning policies will aim to minimise damage to such sites through development, or will seek to enhance the sites.

The Local Plan must also protect wildlife outwith designated sites. Policies and legislation should reduce the effects of development on key habitats, protected species and other biodiversity.

Every planning application is sent to a group called The Wildlife Information Centre. TWIC has nearly 1.5 million records of wild species, including many rare or declining species. They also have maps of important wildlife areas. TWIC informs the Council when the location of a planning application matches one of these sites or species. The Biodiversity Officer can then discuss the application with a planner to minimise the impact of development. In a few instances development is prevented, but discussions almost always have been able to amend proposals to reduce or prevent damage.



Local planning policy is influenced by Scottish Planning Policy, which promotes development of natural and resilient places. The National Planning Framework is a government document that describes developments that are in the national interest. One of these developments is for a Central Scotland Green Network, which aims to deliver a 'step-change in environmental quality, woodland cover and recreational opportunities'.

Each local authority in the CSGN area (including East Lothian) must define what that Green Network will deliver for local communities. This may include improvements to path networks, parks and open space, biodiversity or wider landscapes. The Green Network for East Lothian is currently being developed, in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage. The Local Development Plan (or Supplementary Guidance to the Plan) will provide details of the Green Network in East Lothian.

Biodiversity Action: Planning and Development

1. Develop a Green Network and appropriate policies and guidance for East Lothian.
2. Monitor implementation of the Green Network.
3. Develop planning policies that help to protect biodiversity in the wider countryside.

Forestry Applications

Woodland planting and felling is controlled by Forestry Commission Scotland. Applications for such work are reviewed by the Biodiversity Officer to ensure that the work will not affect important habitats or species. Comments are also made to try and enhance the general wildlife value of applications.



Boundaries of Wildlife Sites are used by Forestry Commission Scotland to protect wildlife areas from forestry operations. Forestry applications for areas of semi-natural habitat, particularly grasslands and wetlands, can also be amended if the impact of forestry is thought to be too damaging for the habitat.

Biodiversity Action: Forestry Applications

1. Incorporate Green Network opportunities into forestry applications.

Education and the Countryside Ranger Service: teaching the teacher and the child

If children know about biodiversity they will protect it and value it. In order to reach that stage children need to learn about it and experience it. Biodiversity as a science topic is part of the school curriculum, known as Curriculum for Excellence. There is also a wider support network that helps teachers to maximise the potential of biodiversity as a teaching resource.

The Ranger Service has always worked with schools, visiting classrooms with exhibits, leading guided nature walks, rock pooling etc. Follow the link to the Countryside Service Annual Report for more details ([Countryside Report 2013/2014](#)) or search on the Council's website. Although this work continues, the Countryside Ranger is also adapting to new teaching pressures and practices.

Teachers must now deliver aspects of the curriculum outdoors. This means using nature sites and natural resources that they contain to teach classes, including those that are not usually linked to the environment such as maths or history. Curriculum for Excellence has changed the ethos of teaching towards outdoor learning and the Ranger Service is helping to facilitate this among schools. This includes delivering aspects of class topics but also training the teachers to use outdoor resources.



The Ranger Service was closely involved with previous government schemes to encourage outdoor learning, including Forest Schools. Nationally, this approach is becoming formalised and promoted

through an agency called Outdoor & Woodland Learning, Scotland. The overall education ethos is now one of embedding natural environments into the teaching resources of schools.

Rangers work most frequently with primary schools. One-off school visits and teaching sessions are possible but there is also capacity to develop longer term progressive projects. These build stronger relationships with schools, teachers and pupils and develop a bond and personal confidence between child and the natural environment. The John Muir Award and Citizenship projects are two initiatives that can help develop more in-depth projects.

Links with secondary schools are less strong, largely because the curriculum is less suited to outdoor study. Support is provided for some biology and geography classes, with the 'Monitoring Environmental Resources' course being particularly suitable. Help is also provided to Life-skills classes where personal development and confidence building are promoted. Delivering these classes in woodlands and other natural settings can be extremely effective.



Projects often improve school grounds, through habitat creation, development of vegetable beds or planting orchards. These improvements help to facilitate teaching in the outdoors.

Biodiversity Action: Education and the Countryside Ranger Service

1. Continue to adapt to the challenges of Curriculum for Excellence by supporting biodiversity education and teaching in the outdoors.
2. Develop the results of local wildlife surveys for use as a teaching resource by schools.

Housing and Social Care: bringing nature to people

The Housing Department originally set up a biodiversity checklist to ensure that new social housing would not be built on areas important for biodiversity. The checklist is less important now since planning policies protect biodiversity more widely.

The landscaping around some areas of social housing has been enhanced for wildlife. Good examples include bulb planting at Lady Jane Road in North Berwick and at Warrender Crescent, Dunbar.

Allotments were created as part of the Muirpark development in Tranent. Although allotments are more about growing food for people, the range of crops provides many opportunities for wild species.

The allotments and wider landscaping are adjacent to Muirpark Gardens sheltered housing. There is a growing body of evidence that shows how important wildlife is in maintaining personal and community well-being. This type of gardening and landscaping therefore has a dual role in encouraging nature which then brings health benefits. This type of landscaping is perhaps most important in places where people may be less able to get out and see wildlife or the wider countryside.

Biodiversity Action: Housing and Social Care

1. Seek further opportunities to enhance the grounds of sheltered housing and nursing homes.
2. Identify ways that people with reduced mobility can enjoy wildlife in the grounds of sheltered housing and nursing homes.

Volunteering and Public Awareness: nurturing the wild-self

The work of the Countryside Ranger Services is strongly focussed on increasing the public's understanding of wildlife and wider countryside as well as encouraging people to get involved. Wildlife articles feature regularly in the local newspaper (A Ranger Writes in the *East Lothian Courier*) and the county magazine (*East Lothian Life*).

A wildlife book for East Lothian and a wildlife guide specific for Yellowcraig have been produced. A Ranger Service quarterly newsletter (*Mud in Your Eye*) includes articles of seasonal interest and on places to visit. More immediate updates can be found on the Ranger Service Facebook page.

Countryside Rangers and other staff regularly give talks to interest groups such as the Rotary and University of the Third Age. Ranger-led work parties and hikes allow for more personal interpretation of the countryside. Many of the countryside sites contain interpretation boards or similar, which describe local geology, wildlife and history.



Much of the practical work on our sites is carried out by groups of keen volunteers, including site-based groups (e.g. at Levenhall and Yellowcraig), corporate team building events and unpaid work (also known as community service by offenders). This all ensures that the countryside estate is managed to conserve biodiversity, but also to deliver a huge amount of satisfaction for the volunteers. This work also serves the wider community by providing the landscape that supports a tourist industry, a sense of place and community well-being, and an educational resource.



Conservation projects can be very valuable for volunteers, many of whom are retired and want to be involved in a useful task. Younger volunteers may wish to work with wildlife and need to build experience for future employment.

A Junior Ranger team meets every two weeks to carry out practical work, survey work, or to discuss particular issues of countryside management. Junior Rangers range from 11 to 18 years of age and meet every two weeks through the school year.

Biodiversity Action: Volunteering and Public Awareness

1. Continue to promote East Lothian's wildlife in towns and countryside.
2. Continue to offer a wide range of opportunities for volunteers.

Monitoring Biodiversity: a county health check

Birds, plants and butterflies are monitored on many Council-managed sites. These species are good subjects to monitor because they are well understood and indicate the type and quality of habitat that occurs in different locations. Over many years, changing populations of wild species give a good indication of whether the site is in good condition or where further management might be needed. Rare species are monitored on many of the Council's sites to ensure their populations remain healthy.

It is important to monitor the Council's countryside sites but it is also important to understand the health of the wider countryside. This is a particularly difficult task because the county is large and many different factors can affect habitats and species. The Wetland Bird Survey is one way of monitoring the health of our coastal waters. At some coastal locations monthly bird surveys extend back fifty years, giving a good sense of how bird numbers have changed over the years.



Biodiversity Action: Monitoring

1. Set up a database for wildlife records and share this with The Wildlife Information Centre.
2. Support existing survey work and identify additional monitoring that needs to take place.

Conclusion

In 2004, the biodiversity duty placed a need for public bodies such as East Lothian Council to implement measures that conserve biodiversity. In many ways, the Council understood the need to conserve wildlife long before this. East Lothian had the first Countryside Ranger of any Scottish local authority, and the first Local Nature Reserve in the UK. Coastal biodiversity is the foundation of the local tourist industry and many local residents value the attractive landscape for walking, shooting, fishing or just peace and quiet. Biodiversity in that sense is not new.

The Nature Conservation Act placed a need on local authorities to look at how biodiversity could be embedded more widely into Council functions. In that regard, East Lothian has demonstrated how biodiversity is not a burden on Council functions, but fits well into its daily operations.

The global failure to meet international biodiversity targets in 2010, and the setting of new targets for 2020, shows that more needs to be done if we are to avoid continual decline in biodiversity. That is the biodiversity challenge over the next 10 years. Other environmental obligations, such as the Green Network, are opportunities to help meet that challenge. We will continue to report on what we have achieved for biodiversity and green networks, and how that links to wider biodiversity action.

Photographs

P1: wind turbines and North Berwick Law; the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; Lauderdale Park, Dunbar. **P2:** Bilsdean arches; The East Lothian Plan. **P3:** East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan; Traprain Law; Exmoor ponies. **P4:** Hopetoun Monument on the GarletonHills; Polson Park, Tranent; Lewisvale Park, Musselburgh. **P5:** Lichens on a gravestone; urban forestry; the Glen, North Berwick. **P6:** Roundabout at Tranent. **P7:** wind turbine in the Lammermuirs; proposed green network from the East Lothian Main Issues Report. **P8:** tree planting along a farm ditch; a Countryside Ranger leads a guided walk. **P9:** river dipping at Haddington cascades. **P10:** biodiversity and art with Peter Potter Gallery, Haddington; tree planting at North Berwick Law. **P11:** Countryside Ranger leading a moth survey with community group.