

*Issues affecting  
Midlothian habitats*

# Cross cutting issues

## Community involvement

Involving the local community with the Midlothian Biodiversity Action Plan is fundamental to the success of the plan and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. Many community groups are already involved in looking after their local environments with biodiversity and heritage remits. Their ability to drive projects from grass roots levels and acquire funding for these projects is vital.



However to be able to engage with the wider Midlothian community, awareness raising of biodiversity issues and its associated benefits is key to their participation. The health benefits and mental well being that are enjoyed by people engaging with biodiversity and greenspaces are well documented by organisations like Greenspace Scotland and BTCV's Green Gym project. This engagement can simply be brief encounters with nature in local parks or viewing it out of your window through to becoming more involved through practical conservation work. Community pride and sense of place evolves when quality greenspace is near to local communities and when they are used for community events and projects. Events that celebrate biodiversity and raise awareness

of the issues can also lead to promoting other benefits such as social inclusion of groups or individuals that may otherwise be disengaged with communities. These can offer support through education and life long learning. Communities also benefit economically from businesses attracted to these areas because the environment there offers a positive setting for their businesses.

To engage with the communities of Midlothian SNH, the Edinburgh Green Belt Trust, Midlothian

Rangers Service, The Pentland Hills Rangers Service as well as the Council's own various departments:

- undertake educational or awareness raising projects,
- host community events and
- support communities with funding or advice.

The support of existing environmental community groups is an especially important task undertaken by the partners.



## Alien invaders

Invasive species, or 'alien species' (also called non-native species) do not come from the country that they are in now. Mainly humans, for various reasons have brought them in to the region. Some could have been for farming practices, like mink, or for ornamental reasons like rhododendron bushes, or accidentally like rats on ships. Today a lot of alien plants get into native habitats by escaping from gardens either through careless dumping of garden waste or unintentionally as they grow and spread. Some species do not survive well here and can die out before ever having become a threat. However other species, like the species mentioned above, do survive and can cause immense damage. They will compete with native species for food or habitats, sometimes changing habitats or spreading diseases. In some cases they survive better and adapt more quickly to a change in their surroundings than the native species. Invasive plants are second only to habitat destruction as a risk to biodiversity in the UK.

To protect our habitats and species, the law says you must not release certain species into the wild. Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 forbids the release of animals “not ordinarily resident” or those that are not regular visitors to Great Britain. It is also illegal to plant plants listed in Part II of Schedule 9 in the wild or cause them to grow there.

In Midlothian these species affect our rivers, woodlands, and farmlands. Even country parks suffer from these aliens. Once established they are also very difficult to get rid of and there is still debate as to the best method for doing this. SNH has mapped three riverine invasive species in Midlothian. These are Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Giant hogweed. By working together, with appropriate funding, we hope to bring these species under control. This will help river habitats and species here and in East Lothian where alien species spread along the river corridors of the Tyne. These partnership projects may also help us to work out the best way to do this and pave the way for further projects with other alien species. However, we can only target this issue as problem areas or specific threats arise and if funding is available. A co-ordinated national approach is needed to get rid of these unwanted invaders.

### Access strategy

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone the right of responsible access across Scotland. The new rights of responsible access to the outdoors cover most land and inland waters including open spaces in towns and cities. The Act itself has raised the profile of access in all its forms and has highlighted the role of access in policy agendas, including biodiversity.

Education and interpretation are also key to promoting ‘Responsible Access’ as prescribed within the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and set out within the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Responsible access is central to helping people use path networks, and helps to make sure that people enjoying the outdoors respect the natural environment and understand the needs of reciprocal ‘Responsible Management’ by local landowners and land managers.

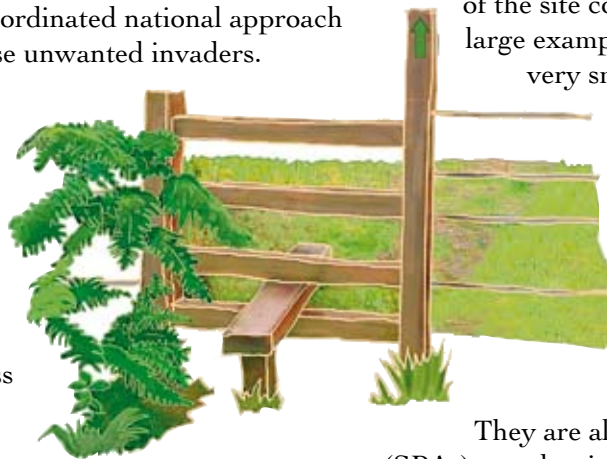
The Midlothian Outdoor Access Strategy 2005-2010 provides a framework and identifies a network of core paths to develop, manage and promote walking, cycling and horse riding. It acknowledges that Midlothian has varying landscapes, such

as country parks, designed landscapes, urban greenspace, woodlands, rivers and streams, and recognises the importance of biodiversity.

The Outdoor Access Strategy gives us the chance to promote education and learning, building on the unique cultural and natural heritage of Midlothian. Initiatives, such as interpretation and signage about the natural and historical culture of the area, will help to raise awareness of its management needs and how access works with conservation. Well signposted access routes, which include information about features of interest, will help people to find out about their local heritage. Well-integrated, well-planned routes that link natural and cultural heritage features of interest are proposed to provide opportunities to access the countryside and biodiversity from the main towns and settlements.

### Site protection

When an area has a high value in terms of native biodiversity, it is possible to protect this site as a nationally or internationally important site. The value of the site could be either due to it being a large example of a certain typical habitat to a very small population of a very rare species. In Midlothian there are a number of these nationally and internationally important sites.



Two water bodies, Gladhouse Reservoir and Fala Flow, are internationally protected sites designated under the Ramsar Convention for wetland areas.

They are also Special Protection Areas (SPAs), another internationally important designation because of the large number of Pink-footed geese that roost there in wintertime. Midlothian has 16 nationally protected Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), designated for the quality or the rarity of the habitats and species found there. A further site is known as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) because of its nature conservation interest, its accessibility and its potential to deliver environmental education. All of these are known as statutory sites and are protected by law.

There are non-statutory sites as well, which are locally important sites. This means they have been recognised in a local context as being valuable for biodiversity and are areas of land and/or water managed primarily to safeguard the fauna, flora and physical features which they contain. In Midlothian these include 50 or more Wildlife Sites, two Woodland Trust Reserves and two Country Parks.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust owns or manages five sites in Midlothian, including two SSSIs.



Sites are regularly assessed and their condition monitored so these designations can change from time to time. Different Council areas use different methodologies for designating their local sites of biodiversity importance. This leads to inconsistencies in approach and protection. There is a national system in place to designate these sites, which SNH, the Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities, SWT and other bodies has developed. The current list of designated sites can be found in Appendix 6.

### Habitat and species information

Information about habitats and species data is needed to inform actions and direct resources at a local level. These data can be obtained from a number of sources. National organisations undertake nationwide species surveys using local recorders or specialists. At a more local level amateur or professional recorders collect more informal data. These data need to be shared. As a first step, the Biodiversity Officer will work with the Lothian Wildlife Information Centre (LWIC) to help disseminate relevant information to the particular habitat Working Groups. The National Biodiversity Network Gateway [www.searchnbn.net](http://www.searchnbn.net) is a web-based species data-sharing site. As more records are added to the website, it will be easier to share information and obtain more accurate data. The LWIC, the Midlothian Ranger Service and the Pentland Hills Ranger Service collect a large amount of valuable wildlife information each year for Midlothian. These data are also passed on to the national data collection agencies.

### Monitoring our future

The list of Key species in Appendix 7 demonstrates the variety of life within Midlothian which should be protected and enhanced for this and future generations. However it is not possible to monitor the health of every species on the list. Instead the health of habitats will be monitored and through that, the species associated with them. A recruitment drive and

awareness raising campaign will be undertaken to highlight the importance of monitoring local habitats. Monitoring habitats can be a costly and lengthy process and it is hoped that local communities and individuals will become interested in being involved and monitor areas that they like to walk regularly.



### Wind farms

The role of wind farms in our future is not yet known. The Government is committed to reducing the use of non-renewable sources for energy production by 12% by 2010. To do this, more renewable sources such as wind turbines are needed to fill the gap. The main biodiversity issue with wind farms is that they may damage the habitats around them. Another issue is the possible disruption of flight paths to migrating birds. This will have to be judged case by case with help from the RSPB and SNH.

### River Basin Management Planning

In order to deliver the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, eight Area Advisory Groups are being set up to provide advice on setting objectives for water bodies in each area of the Scotland River Basin District. They will also advise on the measures required to achieve the objectives and on the prioritisation of these measures. These objectives will normally be to achieve good ecological status by 2015 unless alternatives are agreed and justified, and to avoid deterioration of ecological status of water bodies.

In some instances the improvement measures may contribute to biodiversity in the Midlothian region. It will also be necessary for the local BAP to take account of objectives for water bodies and of priorities for improvement measures as they evolve over coming years. As the objectives include ecological considerations it may be possible that the local BAP becomes a vehicle for delivery of certain improvement measures. Some theoretical examples of measures that could add to biodiversity would be the introduction of buffer strips to reduce diffuse agricultural pollution, the re-opening of culverted streams, the reduction of nutrient loadings to rivers and estuarine receiving waters.