



Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27

Summary Progress Report 2023

Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present this 2023 progress report for the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27. Across the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, individuals and organisations have carried out a wide range of activities to support biodiversity in the city. Most of the work carried out involves volunteers and community groups.

There have been significant changes to policy and strategy relating to the nature crisis during 2023. City of Edinburgh Council declared a Nature Emergency in February. A revised Scottish Biodiversity Strategy with draft 5-year delivery plans was published, alongside frameworks for Nature Networks and 30x30 targets across Scotland. The relationship between the climate and nature emergencies are increasingly understood, with a resilient natural environment essential to adapt the city to the impacts of climate change. This is reflected in the draft Climate Ready Edinburgh plan published in December.

In the delivery of the EBAP, we have seen, over the course of this year, habitat creation, practical conservation work, project delivery and community and volunteer activities to manage and monitor important sites. We continue to see an increase in valuable citizen science wildlife recording and the number of species records held for Edinburgh, which are managed by The Wildlife Information Centre. Many previously unrecorded species, as well as species not recorded for years or decades, have been added to Edinburgh's list of wildlife records. These improvements in understanding and appreciating wildlife in our city are even more important, in light of the nature emergency, which highlights the need for transformational change in how we value and invest in the recovery of nature from decades of ecosystem decline.

As the Partnership continues to deliver the five-year Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan, we will set out a vision and principles for supporting nature's recovery by improving the quality and connectedness of our natural spaces across the city.

Dr Max Coleman

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Chair of Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership

Introduction

There has been a continued focus in 2023 on the twin climate and nature emergencies. The Council declared a Nature Emergency in February 2023. Alongside the 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency and target for Edinburgh to be net zero carbon by 2030, this has given a renewed focus on biodiversity action and nature recovery. The work of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership has mirrored this focus, with the Council and partners:

- Contributing to Scotland-wide work on policy and guidance responses to the ecological crisis, eg for National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), with Scottish Government and NatureScot;
- Engaged in development of the national frameworks for Nature Networks and 30X30;
- Collaborating on city wide programmes such as the draft Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan, City Plan 2030, development of the Green Blue Network and Edinburgh Nature Network.
- Working with local communities and volunteers to enhance parks and greenspace to increase biodiversity and wellbeing.
- Deliver ongoing important site management activities on our most important sites for nature, managed by the Council and partners such as Historic Environment Scotland and the Water of Leith Conservation Trust.
- Secure funding and resources for project work to increase biodiversity through habitat creation and improvements.

A healthy natural environment is essential for resilience to deal with the challenges of climate change. Green surfaces, trees and vegetation can all offset the problems caused by climate change in urban areas such as extreme rainfall events, flooding, pollution, poor air quality, urban overheating and building insulation to lower energy and carbon demands. Habitats and soils also act as carbon stores.

The work of the Partnership is reflected in plans and strategies and will continue to respond and collaborate on emerging priorities from strategic projects like the Green Blue Network and Million Trees initiative.

Delivery for biodiversity in 2023

This review highlights just some of the outcomes and actions from the last year delivered by the Partnership. Further information about the overall programme and aims is available from the [Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27](#).

- Edinburgh's most important places for nature continue to be managed and improved by the Council's Natural Heritage Service and [Historic Environment Scotland Ranger Service](#). These include Holyrood Park SSSI, 8 Local Nature Reserves and Pentland Hills Regional Park. Activities include habitat management, habitat creation, priority species monitoring and conservation, community and volunteer engagement.
- In Holyrood Park, [Historic Environment Scotland Ranger Service](#) have actively undertaken survey work, conservation management and interventions for some of our rarest priority species. Public awareness and involvement includes over 2500 people

taking part in outdoor learning activities and volunteers carrying out biodiversity surveys.

- The Council Natural Heritage Service secured new equipment through the Nature Restoration Fund to improve meadow management in Local Nature Reserves and the Pentlands. Bonaly Country Park benefitted from 1,800 new native trees to create a mosaic of habitats and woodland network. More than 30 volunteers supported the annual programme of priority species surveys in the Pentland Hills.
- Council Parks and Open Space service delivered project work to naturalise urban parks and greenspace, including Million Tree City and Nature Networks.
- Council Planning Service are embedding the new [National Planning Framework 4](#) policies for biodiversity in Planning decisions through training and applying [updated guidance](#).
- [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#) actively increased biodiversity of cut grass areas within the Botanics, converting to short, species rich lawns and reducing grass cutting. The research work at the garden supports increasing biodiversity across the city and studies include green roofs and SuDS ponds. A new team to focus on research and guidance for Nature-based solutions will support with information for partners on future planting choices and using nature to mitigate climate impacts. In addition, staff at the garden support the ambitious Restoration Forth project, to expand seagrass beds and native oysters to the Firth of Forth.
- [The Wildlife Information Centre](#) is the local environmental records centre for South East Scotland and provides a vital service to inform all biodiversity work in Edinburgh. The Centre promotes and supports wildlife recording and surveying, and manages biodiversity data for City of Edinburgh. The hold over 400,000 records for Edinburgh. These records are mainly created by expert volunteers and also through public citizen science surveys. The data is used under licence by the Council and other partners, and supports the identification and designation of Local Nature Conservation Sites among other priorities. TWIC promotes and organises wildlife recording events across the region and in 2023 held an event at Corstorphine Hill Local Nature Reserve which created 300 new species records in one day.
- [Edinburgh Natural History Society](#) is a volunteer group of experts in wildlife recording. They run a programme of events and site visits to identify and record species in important places for nature. They also promote new Apps and tools to record wildlife wherever it occurs, such as iNaturalist. The members work with partners and also Friends of greenspace groups to support recording of nature in local parks and cemeteries. The work of the Society also links to national biodiversity recording programmes.
- [Water of Leith Conservation Trust](#) delivered a huge amount of work to keep the whole river corridor free from litter and invasive plant species, as well as managing 8 'biodiversity boost' sites. Volunteers carried out 2,500 hours of litter clearance from in and around the river. Monthly clean ups by boat at the shore result in 30 bags of litter being removed each time. This huge effort helps to maintain a healthy watercourse which supports wildlife including otters, and provides a haven for wildlife from the Pentlands to the sea at Leith. In addition, trained staff and volunteers carried out 35 days of Giant Hogweed control, and 300 volunteer hours controlling other invasive species. Volunteers carried out over 500 hours of activity managing meadow habitats on the river and patrolling to monitor river status and record wildlife.

- [Edinburgh Lothian Greenspace Trust](#) have supported tree planting in parks and are giving away 10,000 trees to Edinburgh residents to support the Million Tree City project. The Pentlands to Portobello project is creating a variety of habitats in parks along the length of the project route, including meadows, tree planting and riparian habitat improvements.
- [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#) Lothian members branch managed their nature reserves in the city and Pentland Hills, monitoring priority species of plants and insects with volunteers and members. A reintroduction of a priority plant species (Pillwort) is underway at Bawsinch. A partnership project with Edinburgh Zoo is continuing to expand the population of Slender Pond Snail through captive breeding and release in the Pentland Hills.
- [RSPB](#) delivery of priority species conservation and specific projects such as the Nature Prescriptions project officer embedded in the Western General Hospital. The Community Connectors Project Officer is supporting communities across Edinburgh to deliver action for nature in local greenspaces. RSPB also support volunteers to deliver conservation for Swifts, one of Edinburgh's most at risk bird species, and encourages citizen science activities through the annual City Nature Challenge, which resulted in over 1,200 records of 449 species in the 3 day challenge in April 2023.
- [The Conservation Volunteers](#) have secured funding for a four-year Green Skills John Muir Way project, with City of Edinburgh Council as one of four Council partners. The project will deliver a work training programme for 24 young people, supporting biodiversity improvements in Council parks.
- The [University of Edinburgh](#) and [NHS Lothian](#) supporting biodiversity improvements through changes in estate management and other initiatives.
- [Marine Conservation Scotland](#) are a lead partner in the Restoration Forth project, which aims to expand the important areas of seagrass beds in coastal areas around Edinburgh and the wider Forth. Seagrass is an important coastal habitat and also an important plant for carbon sequestration. Volunteers have carried out introduction of new plants on to intertidal areas. The project has also started to reintroduce native oysters, which have been absent from the Forth for decades.

Global and national context

The new Global Biodiversity Framework was agreed at COP 15 in December 2022. It includes 23 global targets for biodiversity, and many of these are directly supported by the work of the Council and the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan, detailed below.

The UK governments have made hugely significant commitments for nature. Each of the four countries of the UK have distinct and evolving policies and powers to recover nature and to respond to climate change, and all have recognised the need for ambitious change. Perhaps most notably the UK has committed to:

- the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, which has so far been signed by leaders from over 85 countries,
- the '30by30' commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030, agreed by more than 60 countries.
- Through the G7 the UK also committed to 'halt and reverse biodiversity loss' by 2030, in other words to become Nature Positive by 2030.

These commitments require transformative change across sectors and in the way we protect, value, use and engage with nature.

Scottish Government and NatureScot have both published documents supporting this transformational change. The revised Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and draft delivery plans, alongside draft Nature Networks and 30x30 frameworks, which were consulted on at the end of 2023. The Scottish Government’s National Planning Framework 4 and supporting Developing with Nature from Nature Scot, both seek the scale of change required to create a ‘Nature Positive’ future. NatureScot also continued to manage the Scottish Government funding for the whole of Scotland through the Nature Restoration Fund.

City of Edinburgh Council signed up to the ‘Edinburgh Declaration’, which was developed when the Scottish Government held a meeting for Post 2020 Global and Sub-national Biodiversity Targets in May 2020. Another global initiative is in development, the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, and the Council supports joining this initiative in principle, once it has been finalised.

Global Biodiversity Framework 2030 target	Summarised aim	Supporting mechanisms available in Edinburgh
Target 1	Bring loss of high biodiversity areas to development or land use change close to zero by 2030.	NPF4 and City Plan 2030
Target 2	Ensure by 2030 at least 30% of degraded ecosystems are under effective restoration, to enhance biodiversity ecosystem function, ecological integrity and connectivity	EBAP 2022-27 Edinburgh Nature Network
Target 3	By 2030 at least 30% of land and water is effectively conserved and managed through both protected areas and OECM.	EBAP 2022-27 Local Nature Conservation Site designation system
Target 4	Urgent action to halt extinctions and for recovery and conservation of species under threat, including restoration of genetic diversity.	EBAP 2022-27 Climate Ready Edinburgh Strategy
Target 6	Reduce impacts of invasive non native species, reduce introductions by 50%, eradicate or control from priority sites.	EBAP 2022-27 CEC Parks and Greenspace operations
Target 7	Reduce pollution levels until not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystems by 2030 – chemical and plastic.	Regulation, SEPA Council chemical use policy EBAP 2022-27
Target 8	Minimise climate change impacts on biodiversity; increase resilience through nature based solutions.	EBAP 2022-27 Climate Ready Edinburgh (Adaptation) Plan Green-blue Strategy
Target 11	Restore maintain and enhance natures services to people, such as regulation of air, water, climate, soil health, pollination and protection from natural hazards.	EBAP 2022-27 Green-blue Strategy Edinburgh Nature Network Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan
Target 12	Significantly increase area and quality and connectivity, access and benefits from green-blue spaces in urban areas.	Thriving Green Spaces Green-blue strategy. Edinburgh Nature Network.

	Ensure biodiversity inclusive urban planning. Increase wellbeing through provision of ecosystem services.	City Plan 2030. EBAP 2022-27 Active Travel Action Plan
Target 14	Ensure full integration of biodiversity into policy, regulation, strategies, assessments and national accounting.	NPF4, City Plan 2030 Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plans
Target 21	Ensure that the best available data information and knowledge are accessible to decision makers.	Maintain access to local ecological data sources through Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership and The Wildlife Information Centre.

Looking forward to 2024

There are some key work areas planned during 2024 relating to biodiversity. A review of priority species for Edinburgh has begun. This work will link to Planning policy requirements of NPF4 as well as wider conservation activity. An updated city wide habitat baseline survey is planned, subject to funding being secured. Work to further develop metrics and indicators for biodiversity and ecosystem health will also be carried out.

Finally, further details of the finalised Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plans and Nature Network Framework will inform any changes activity within the Council and wider Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership.