



Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan

Annual Report 2024

Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present this 2024 progress report for the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27. It has been another busy year across the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, with a wide range of projects and activities to support and increase biodiversity. Council services, partners and volunteers are all involved in delivery.

There have been further changes to policy and strategy relating to the nature emergency during 2024. The refreshed Scottish Biodiversity Strategy with a 5-year delivery plan was published in December. The new Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan contains actions relating to nature, linked to the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan, with shared actions in both. It is increasingly well understood that nature is essential to adapt the city to the impacts of climate change. An initiative launched at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in spring 2024, "Plants with Purpose", aims to explore this further. It will research and promote the role of plants in nature-based solutions to the climate emergency.

This year Partners have carried out 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 species records for Edinburgh, which are managed by The Wildlife Information Centre. 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.

Looking forward to the coming year, 2025 marks the 25th anniversary since the first publication of an Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. It is encouraging to note that most of the founding members are still active Partners today, and I would like to pass on thanks for their ongoing commitment as we celebrate this important milestone in the year ahead.

Dr Max Coleman

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Chair of Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership

Introduction

The Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership (EBP) was established in 1997 and brings together over 30 organisations working for Nature within the City of Edinburgh. The Partnership is led by the City of Edinburgh Council, and currently chaired by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The overarching vision of the EBP is to make Edinburgh a greener city with more opportunities for wildlife, enabling people to engage with nature.

The continued delivery of the [Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan](#) supports the Council's commitment to addressing the nature crisis, and contributes to meeting the statutory Biodiversity Duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

There has been a continued global focus in 2024 on the twin climate and nature emergencies. The work of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership has mirrored this focus. The Council and Partners have been:

- Contributing to Scotland-wide work on policy and guidance responses to the ecological crisis, for example the [biodiversity metric consultation](#) and national [Nature Network toolkit](#).
- Collaborating on city wide programmes such as the [Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan](#) and [City Plan 2030](#) (adopted in November 2024), with new policies to protect and enhance biodiversity.
- Working with local communities and volunteers to enhance parks and greenspace to increase biodiversity and wellbeing.
- Delivering ongoing 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](#).
- Securing funding and additional staff resources for project work to increase biodiversity through habitat creation and other improvements. This includes an additional Biodiversity Officer to support the ongoing work of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan.

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.

Delivery for biodiversity in 2024

This report highlights outcomes and actions delivered by the Partnership in 2024. Further information about the overall programme and aims is available from the [Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27](#).

City of Edinburgh Council Services

- Council Planning Service have embedded additional policy requirements for biodiversity in [City Plan 2030](#), which is now adopted. The revised draft [Edinburgh Design Guidance](#) includes updated guidance on biodiversity, to support the City Plan 2030 policies. The draft guidance was approved in November 2024 and there will be a public consultation on the document early in 2025.
- 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 Site of Special Scientific Interest, 8 Local Nature Reserves and Pentland Hills Regional Park. Activities include habitat management, habitat creation, priority species monitoring and conservation, and community and volunteer engagement.
- The Council Natural Heritage Service worked with Edinburgh Lothian Greenspace Trust to manage erosion and improve access on the Cramond foreshore, part of the Firth of Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest. Working with Friends groups and volunteers, staff manage and improve habitats across the Council's Local Nature Reserves and Natural Heritage Parks. More than 30 volunteers supported the annual programme of priority species surveys in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.
- The Council's Senior Planning Ecologist provided expert advice on biodiversity matters to 208 planning applications, ensuring species, habitats and designated sites were protected and enhanced throughout the development process
- The Biodiversity Officer continues to actively engage with the Scottish Local Biodiversity Network, and in December 2024 became the Chair of this group. This role involves working closely with Scottish Government, NatureScot and COSLA to shape policies and decision making on a national stage
- Council Parks and Open Space service delivered project work to enhance nature in urban parks and greenspace, including Million Tree City and Nature Networks. Trials are being undertaken to change management of amenity grassland and increase habitat for pollinators on CEC Housing Land. Working with The Conservation Volunteers and Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, several parks have had wildflower meadows restored and tree planting activities with local communities.
- The Council Outdoor Learning team have appointed a project officer to deliver the Wilding Wee Spaces project. This will be a learner-led project with schools to create habitats and natural areas in or near schools, across the Schools estate.
- The Council Forestry Service carried out Dutch Elm disease control work. This is a successful long-running programme of works which has ensured that Edinburgh continues to have a large number of surviving Elms, unlike many other parts of the UK.

Partners

- 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 Wildlife Information Centre \(TWIC\)](#) 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. There was an increase of 27,000 records within the Council area in 2024. This brings the total number of records to over 448,000 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. It supports the identification and designation of Local Nature Conservation Sites, among other priorities. TWIC promotes and organises wildlife recording events across the region. Two were held in 2024 at the River Almond, Cramond, and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Staff also attended the Community Environment Fair at Northfield Community Centre in September 2024.
- [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. Phase 1 of the riverbank improvements at Coalie Park was completed in 2024. The project includes new bio-raft enhancements.
- [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. For example, additional tree planting in Meadowfield Park with pupils from Parsons Green Primary School.
- [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#) Lothian members branch manage 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.
- [RSPB](#) delivery of priority species conservation and specific projects including
 - A Nature Prescriptions project officer embedded in the Western General Hospital, holding two bioblitz events for staff at the hospital site in 2024.
 - The Community Connectors Project Officer is supporting communities across Edinburgh to deliver action for nature in local greenspaces.
 - RSPB has delivered further training for the Swift volunteers to increase use of the Swift Mapper tool for one of Edinburgh's most at-risk bird species.
 - They also encourage citizen science activities through the annual City Nature Challenge, which resulted in over 1,605 records of 621 species in the 3-day challenge in April 2024.
 - Alterations to the nesting raft for some of our rarest species, Terns on the Firth of Forth, has resulted in more than 60 nests this year and improved protection from predators.

- [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#) actively increased biodiversity of cut grass areas within the Botanic, 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 ‘Plants with Purpose’ initiative will focus on research and guidance for Nature-based solutions. It 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. Our community engagement programmes continue to engage a diverse range of communities in their local biodiversity, the global issue of biodiversity loss and what they can do to protect biodiversity
- [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 a programme of biodiversity improvements in Council parks.
- [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 greenspaces groups to support recording of nature in local parks and cemeteries. The work of the Society also links to national biodiversity recording programmes.
- 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 [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 in Table 1 below.

Scottish Government and NatureScot have both published documents supporting this transformational change. The finalised [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) and [new 5-year delivery plans](#), alongside [Nature Networks and 30x30 frameworks](#), were published in 2024. The Scottish Government’s [National Planning Framework 4](#) and supporting [Developing with Nature](#) guidance from NatureScot, 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 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. The most recent global initiative for cities, the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, was launched at

COP 16 in October 2024 and the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership are taking a leading role in exploring the opportunity for Edinburgh to sign this pact.

Table 1 - Global Biodiversity Framework 2030 targets relevant to Edinburgh

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 Plan Green-blue Strategy
Target 11	Restore maintain and enhance nature 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. Ensure biodiversity inclusive urban planning. Increase wellbeing through provision of ecosystem services.	Thriving Green Spaces Green-blue strategy. Edinburgh Nature Network. 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 2025

The coming year is the 25th anniversary of the first Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. The Partnership will celebrate this milestone by showcasing the work carried out for biodiversity through events and communications. While recognising the ongoing challenge and nature crisis, a review of new work areas and project development is underway. A review of priority species for Edinburgh is underway. This work will link to Planning policy requirements of National Planning Framework 4 and City Plan 2030, as well as wider conservation activity. A city-wide habitat baseline survey is planned, to update the existing baseline and inform the Evidence Report for City Plan 2040. Work to further develop metrics and indicators for biodiversity and ecosystem health will also be carried out.

Finally, the recently published details of the finalised Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plans will inform any changes to activity within the Council and wider Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership.