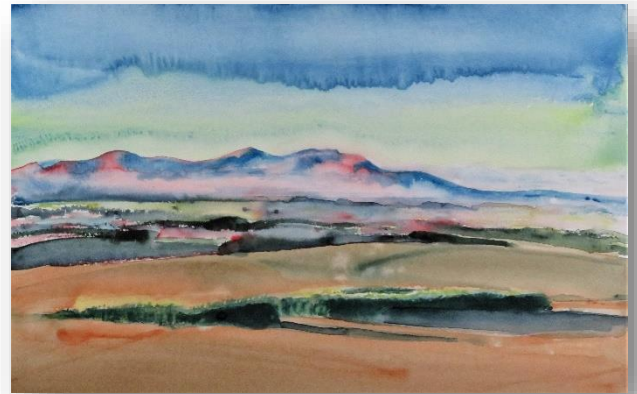




The Esk Valley Trust Newsletter

Spring 2023



The 2023 AGM: will be held on Friday 26th May at 19.00 by Zoom

Annual subscriptions: Many thanks to those who have joined or renewed membership. If you haven't, but want to, try:

[Esk Valley Trust \(membermojo.co.uk\)](http://membermojo.co.uk)

Welcome

Although artificial intelligence (AI) programmes have existed since the mid 1950's the launch of ChatGPT ([Chat GPT - AI Chatbot Online \(chat-gpt.org\)](http://chat-gpt.org)) in November 2022 and then Bard ([Bard \(google.com\)](http://google.com)) in March 2023 are notable (and controversial) milestones in the widespread availability of such tools. There have been many other potentially significant changes in life's rich panoply since the Autumn Newsletter (not least the unpicking of various political reputations) but I choose these as they made me wonder what AI systems would make of the Esk Valleys in the Lothians. You can see the answer later on. I have no intention whatsoever of handing the production of our Newsletters over to a 'robot' – but, as it is said, 'it makes one wonder what the future holds' – as do all of those political changes I suppose!

At a different level you may have noticed that we have now introduced a streamlined option for existing members to renew their subscriptions and for new members to give support. Many thanks to Nigel Evans for doing the hard work to get this system up and running. If you haven't already used it, it is very easy – just click on [Esk Valley Trust \(membermojo.co.uk\)](http://Esk Valley Trust (membermojo.co.uk)) to have a look – and to renew your support if you so wish. Thank you to all of you who have already used this system, and a warm welcome to new supporters. If you haven't quite got round to it yet – there's no time quite like the present

Our programme of evening Zoom talks has been, and still is, very popular. Ed Clerk's talk on his future plans for the Penicuik Estate broke all records, with over 300 people registering and more than 200 logging in for the talk. Is it interesting that, with remarkable consistency, the

proportion of people who log in to our Zoom talks is nearly always 60-75% of those who register?

In total almost 500 different people have registered for the Zoom talks over the last couple of years or so since we began them. Zoom has great advantages of easy access and a wide geographical spread – but lacks the opportunities to meet people. Face-to-face meetings have the great advantage of personal interactions, but not so many people want to travel far to get together, and especially not if the weather is bad. There is a balance to be struck here. If you have any thoughts on how best to strike that balance do let me know (enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org).

Having ‘featured’ a painting by Nigel in the last Newsletter you might remember me wondering if there are other talented artists among our membership who might like to share their work. Well, there are. John Kerry kindly offered some paintings and all of them will get used. The one above is of the Pentland Hills from Broad Law and the one at the end of Canada Geese near to Gladhouse. Many thanks to John.

Any other artists, poets, literary or other kinds of genius are most welcome to offer their work for inclusion – though 2D is probably easier to deal with than 3D.

Lastly, please note that the **Annual General Meeting will start at 19.00 on Friday 26 May**, by Zoom and will be followed by a talk by Craig Statham. More details are given later in this Newsletter.

John Oldham

New Era for Mavisbank

It is just over a year since we had a Zoom talk on Mavisbank House followed by a small survey of opinions about its future. Quite recently some progress was announced. I am grateful to Sarah Barron, who chairs the Mavisbank Trust, for permission to include this item which she prepared for the Lasswade and District Civic Society:

A new beginning could be in store for Mavisbank House and its grounds following the recent, successful ‘Expression of Interest’ Application, made by The Landmark Trust to the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The NHMF exists as the funder of last resort, to save the nation’s greatest treasures. Mavisbank is undoubtedly one of the most important historic houses in Scotland with an international reputation, however, it is also the most endangered.

After a disastrous fire in 1973 the house lies in ruins and the policies largely neglected. Over the past twenty years several attempts have been made by the Mavisbank Trust and its partners to secure the necessary funding for a major restoration project, but plans have always been thwarted and in the meantime the house and grounds fall further into decline.

The Landmark Trust, which has a long record of rescuing historic buildings, will now submit a full application for grant funding to the NHMF, for the initial phase of the building restoration work. A grant of up to 5 million pounds could be made which would allow Landmark to save the building and stabilise the historic structure, allowing public access and offering training opportunities through masonry apprenticeships. Once a grant is secure, Midlothian Council, which has been a supporter of the restoration of Mavisbank, will use its Compulsory Purchase powers to acquire the building for the Landmark Trust, thus ending 50 years of uncertainty. If Phase 1 of the restoration work is successful, after a further round of fundraising, The Landmark Trust hope to convert the house into self-catering holiday accommodation, with one of the pavilions in community use.

The historic designed landscape is currently in the ownership of Historic Environment Scotland, who unfortunately have limited resources to maintain the grounds. The ambition of the Mavisbank Trust is to transform the policies into a community open space by launching a 'Friends of Mavisbank' group. This will allow the local community, volunteers and other supporters to join together and take an active role in protecting and enhancing the grounds of Mavisbank, as well as shaping their future for generations to come.

The Friends of Mavisbank will work with the Mavisbank Trust, HES, Midlothian Council, local organisations and community volunteers, to develop and support projects within the grounds. A further, longer-term ambition could be to explore the potential of bringing Mavisbank into community ownership through the community buyout process, which has been used successfully elsewhere in Scotland.

Further information can be found on the Landmark Trust Website ([Mavisbank House | The Landmark Trust](#))

Midlothian Council Countryside Ranger Service – saved for now

'Progress' might not be the word to apply to the challenges that Midlothian Council (and all of the other local authority Councils) has faced in drawing up its budget for the new financial year (2023-24). In its initial proposals to deal with a large budget shortfall the Council suggested that the Countryside Ranger Service would be cut from three people to just one and that, in a spirit of hope, volunteer action might 'fill the gap' in sustaining services. Other important public services were also threatened with substantial funding reductions – but the Ranger Service does work that is particularly close to the interests of the Esk Valley Trust.

Now, in general, the Trustees do not see the Trust as a 'lobbying body but we did feel that it was appropriate to alert the membership to changes that, if implemented, would impact on our ability to achieve our charitable aims. The Ranger Service contacted a wide range of people to ask them, if they wished, to comment on the Council's proposals – and many did. Out of all of the proposals for cuts in the budget, the ones targeted at the Ranger Service received the fifth highest number of comments (185); it is reasonable to presume that they were all, or just about all, supportive of the service.

In the end the Council solved its budget shortfall in effect by re-mortgaging its debt – something that cannot be done very often. Almost certainly the same kind of financial problem will return at the budget round for next year. If you are interested in keeping an eye on the Council's funding proposals [Spending on council services | Midlothian Council](#) is a good place to start.

The Hewan Wood

The primrose bank (on the left as you begin to walk down the wooden steps) in the Hewan Wood was impressive over the Easter weekend.

Impressive, but rather less edifying, was the appearance of a three-piece suite (yes, you read that correctly, a three-piece suite) tucked away, admittedly quite neatly, in an improvised shelter in the area that is regularly used for camping down by the river at the Maiden Castle. There is no objection to people camping in this area from



time to time if they stick to the sensible rules in the Outdoor Access Code. The area around the shelter was littered with drinks cans.

Notices pinned to the structure asking for adherence to the Outdoor Access Code and removal of the seats and shelter were torn down within days but a small working party of volunteers has removed everything. Many thanks to those helpful people.

On a more positive note we have now submitted an application for a further WIAT (Woodlands In and Around Towns) grant to do further work in the Hewan Wood over the next five years to continue the programme of 'light but regular' management of the woodland so that its amenity and biodiversity value both continue and improve over the long term.

Developments at the Penicuik Estate

Our thanks to Ed Clerk for the excellent talk that he gave in January about his plans for the next stages of development of the Penicuik Estate. Several people have, subsequently, asked if there is a recording of the talk but we did not record it. This was simply because the plans are still at an evolutionary stage. However the plans for the Estate can be found at [Penicuik Estate Sets a New 50 Year Vision — Penicuik House](#). No doubt this site will be updated as the plans mature.

Part of the planning at the estate is to enhance the path network and we remain very positive that this will lead to a much improved route for the North Esk Way through the Estate – though we will need to be patient to allow the relevant parts of the plan to fall into place to allow this to happen.

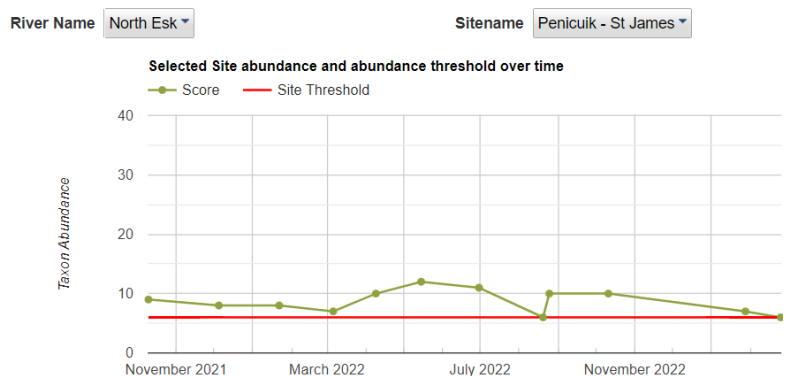
Rennie Frazer Bequest

When Rennie Frazer, a long-time supporter and Treasurer of the Trust, died in October 2021 it was a shock and a great loss to his family, many friends and those who knew him through his work for EVT. True to his generous nature and support of the Trust during his life Rennie bequeathed £1500 to the Trust from his estate. This is a wonderful gift and will be used carefully to recognise Rennie's contribution to and fondness for the work of the Trust.

Riverfly update

Rebecca Lewis, Laura Goble and Sally York gave an excellent Zoom presentation in March outlining the development of the Riverfly project and introducing some of the results to date.

Since its formation in 2019 Riverfly on the Esk is fast becoming a flagship citizen science group in Scotland providing catchment scale monitoring on the Lothian Esks as a community driven citizen science group. It is also part of a nationwide community-led citizen science project called the Anglers' Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) that collects aquatic invertebrate data on waterways in the UK. The project relies entirely on volunteers to



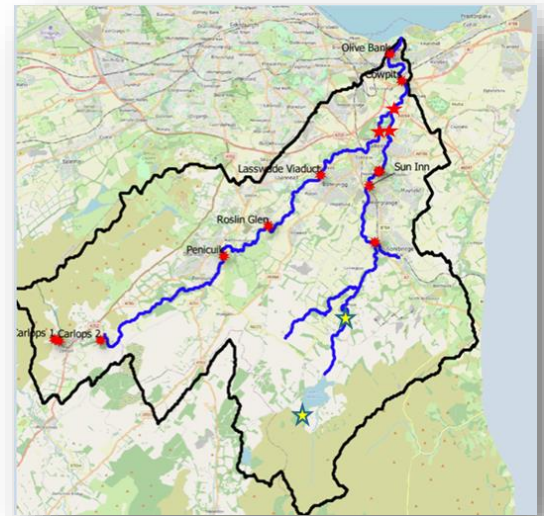
survey rivers for specific riverfly groups (Mayflies, Stoneflies, Caddisflies). The presence or absence of these groups, as well as their relative abundances then translates to a biological score, which acts as an index of the water quality of a location on the river over time. The graph shows results from monitoring in Penicuik. The data include the dip that detected a fault in the local water treatment works. The red line is a threshold, or trigger, value, agreed with SEPA, that is an alert value for further investigation and action.

Riverfly on the Esk now has 51 volunteers to help survey 16 sites along the North and South Esk rivers. Various public events and work with schools and early learning centres have helped to raise awareness and to engage the younger members of our communities.

From a total of 171 biological monitoring events there have been no trigger breaches but two trigger 'hits', two flagged events and one major alert.

More recently chemical monitoring has been possible at selected sites. Of 52 samplings the majority of results were good with three indicating only moderate quality and just one indexing poor quality. The team has also been involved in some restoration work with 230 native trees planted along a tributary and along banks of the North Esk.

Thanks are due to Midlothian Council, Newbattle Abbey College, Buglife Scotland, Musselburgh District Angling Association, Eskbank and Newbattle Community Council and Earthwatch for support



An Esk Forum?

With attention increasingly focussed on how we can better manage river catchments in the context of the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity, consideration is being given to the establishment of an Esk Forum embracing the whole catchment of the North and South Esks.

We are at a crossroads between the past and the future. Regional Land Use Strategies to engage all interests in the future planning and use of land and water are underway. The Principles of Land Rights and Responsibilities for everyone is now established and will become a fundamental element of land use in the future. In addition, the Scottish Government has set out new policy principles for more integrated use of land and water resources. Later this year the Scottish Parliament will be asked to approve new environmental and agricultural support legislation. Work on the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme has put into perspective that downstream flood control cannot be divorced from upstream land and water use.

Looking after nature and looking forward to mimicking it are well established approaches used around Europe. Taking up that approach and preparing to implement the new policies, legislation and funding streams which will inevitably accompany them, provides an opportune moment to bring all of those with rights, responsibilities and interests within the Esk catchment to discuss the future. That is the essence of what an Esk Forum would do. The best exemplar of a forum approach in Scotland is the Tweed Forum.

Cooperation in how a catchment is best cared for is a complex series of activities and must involve many interests, most especially those with rights such as owners of assets, especially

land and water, and their managers, as well as resident communities, and other wider interests.

What sort of things might be considered? How to balance food production, sporting management, tree planting, restoring habitats and species, improving fish stocks, carbon sequestration, recreation and access, making the area more natural are some of the issues that will need to feature.

Another way is looking at how water can be retained in the catchment and therefore reduce downstream flooding risk and bring other benefits. For example, considering planting trees along stream courses to reduce water temperature and increase nutrient supply, creating ponds, blocking drains that are no longer needed and ensuring that new buildings do not increase the flooding.

We are considering the feasibility and desirability of establishing such a forum to discuss what shared interests there are and what could be achieved over time.

If readers have an interest, please contact Roger Crofts at roger.dodin@btinternet.com



Midlothian Outdoor Festival

This year's Midlothian Outdoor Festival will be held from Friday 13 to Monday 16 October. You will see in the Zoom talk list below that we shall host an evening talk on Thursday 12 October as part of the Festival and members of the Trust will also be involved in leading walks within the walking programme. Full details have yet to be confirmed but we will circulate them as soon as they are available.

I, Robot

Some of you might recall the book of short stories by Isaac Asimov with this title (there was an earlier novel by the same name but by different authors) – and possibly even his 'three laws of robotics'. We seem to be approaching a point in the evolution of AI (Artificial Intelligence, not the other one) where real concerns are being expressed about the impact that recent developments may yield on the fabric of our lives (some even suggest on our continuing existence). This is not the place to delve into the philosophical arguments about this, but, just for interest, the question '**Please give me a short history (no more than 500 words) of the Esk river valleys of Midlothian**' was asked of both ChatGPT and Bard.

This is what ChatGPT had to say:

The Esk river valleys of Midlothian, also known as the Esk valley, have a long and rich history dating back to prehistoric times. The valley is made up of the areas around the River Esk which runs from the Scottish Borders to the Firth of Forth, passing through Midlothian.

The earliest known settlements in the Esk valley date back to the Neolithic period, around 4000 BC. Archaeological evidence has been found of stone circles, standing stones, and burial cairns, suggesting that the area was a significant place for ritual activity.

In the Roman period, the River Esk formed the boundary between the Caledonian tribes to the north and the tribes who lived in the south of Scotland. The ancient Roman road, Dere Street, ran through the valley, linking the Roman cities of York and Edinburgh.

During the Middle Ages, the area became an important centre for agriculture and saw the development of several small villages and towns. The valley was also a focal point for the battle for Scottish independence, with several significant battles being fought in the area in the 14th century.

In the 17th century, coal mining became an important industry in the Esk valley. The coalfields of Midlothian attracted many workers from the surrounding areas, leading to the development of new towns and villages.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw a significant period of growth for the Esk valley. Many grand houses and estates were built in the area, including the famous Dalkeith Palace, the ancestral home of the Duke of Buccleuch. The valley also saw the development of several industries, including paper and textile manufacturing.

During the 20th century, the Esk valley continued to grow and develop. New housing estates were built to accommodate the increasing population, and the area became an important commuter belt for Edinburgh.

Today, the Esk valley is a beautiful and thriving area, with a rich history and a strong sense of community. It remains an important part of Midlothian, attracting visitors from around the world to explore its heritage and stunning scenery.

And this is what Google's Bard produced:

The Esk river valleys of Midlothian are a beautiful and historic area of Scotland. The rivers North Esk and South Esk rise in the Pentland Hills and flow northeast through wooded valleys rich in wildlife, history, towns and villages, to their confluence at Waters' Meet in Dalkeith Country Park. As one river, the Esk then flows through Musselburgh to the Firth of Forth.

The Esk river valleys have been inhabited for thousands of years. The first people to live in the area were hunter-gatherers, who followed the herds of animals that roamed the land. Later, farmers settled in the valleys and began to cultivate the land. The first recorded mention of the Esk river is in the 7th century, when it was mentioned in a poem by the Scottish poet Taliesin.

The Esk river valleys were an important part of the Scottish kingdom in the Middle Ages. The river was used as a trade route, and the valleys were home to many important towns and villages. The town of Dalkeith was founded in the 12th century, and it became the royal burgh of Midlothian in the 14th century. The town of Musselburgh was also founded in the 12th century, and it became an important port town.

The Esk river valleys were also the site of many battles. The Battle of Roslin was fought in the Esk valley in 1303, and the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh was fought in the Esk valley in 1547. Both battles were fought between the Scots and the English, and both battles were won by the Scots.

The Esk river valleys continued to be an important part of Scotland in the modern era. The valleys were home to many industries, including coal mining, papermaking, and agriculture. The towns and villages in the valleys grew and prospered.

In recent years, the Esk river valleys have become a popular tourist destination. The valleys are home to many beautiful parks and gardens, including Dalkeith Country Park, Roslin Glen,

and Eskbank Country Park. The valleys are also home to many historic sites, including Roslin Castle, Penicuik House, and Newbattle Abbey.

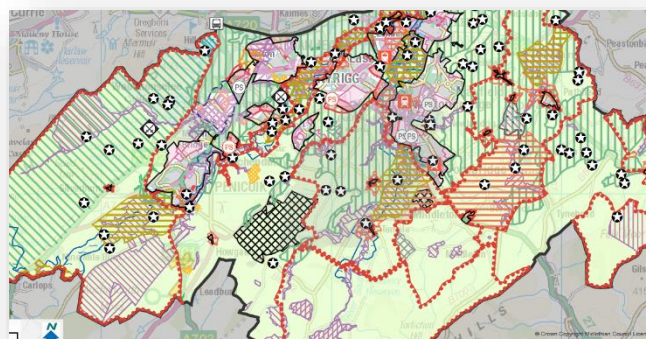
The Esk river valleys of Midlothian are a beautiful and historic area of Scotland. The valleys are home to a rich history, a variety of industries, and a number of popular tourist attractions. The Esk river valleys are a great place to visit for a day or a week.

The styles may be a bit 'flat' (a comment perhaps lacking in self-awareness) and the last paragraphs worthy of VisitScotland – but as each commentary took less time than it took me to ask the question, really quite remarkable. Anyone who has felt that an enquiry may be too daunting may well be attracted to these new tools – at least to scratch the surface. As ever, apparent facts would need checking!

Midlothian Development Plan.

Cynics may wonder if there is a Plan behind Midlothian's development, but there is and views are being canvassed on its latest evolution (Midlothian Local Development Plan 2, MLDP2). The Trust recently received this message from the Council which gives the opportunity to increase your awareness of what is being planned and to make comments:

Midlothian Council have published our first MLDP2 newsletter today [MLDP2 Newsletter | MLDP2 Newsletter 1 - April 2023 \(midlothian.gov.uk\)](#)



The newsletter includes information about a series of drop-in events that are being held in May and June. The six drop-in events are:

- Thursday 4 May – 1pm to 7pm at Gorebridge Library, 98 Hunterfield Road, Gorebridge, EH23 4TT
- Tuesday 9 May - 1pm to 7pm at Loanhead Library, The Loanhead Centre, George Avenue, Loanhead, EH20 9LA
- Thursday 11 May - 1pm to 7pm at Dalkeith Library, 2 White Hart Street, Dalkeith, EH22 1AE
- Tuesday 23 May - 1pm to 7pm at Lasswade Library, The Lasswade Centre, 19 Eskdale Drive, Bonnyrigg, EH19 2LA
- Thursday 25 May - 1pm to 7pm at Newtongrange Library, St Davids, Newtongrange, EH22 4LG
- Thursday 1 June - 1pm to 7pm at Penicuik Library, Carlops Road, Penicuik, EH26 9EP

The Council would like to know your views on Midlothian now and how it could develop so have also launched a survey for people who live and work in Midlothian to complete [Local Development Plan 2 Activity - Place Standard Survey - Midlothian Council - Citizen Space](#)

Midlothian's organisations and businesses (including developers) are asked to offer comments about their needs and interests relating to Midlothian as a place through another survey [Local Development Plan 2 Activity - Organisations & Businesses Survey - Midlothian Council - Citizen Space](#)

Future evening Zoom talks

This year's programme of Zoom talks began with the talk on Plans for The Penicuik Estate in January followed by a presentation on the Riverfly project in March.

To register for any of the future talks just click on the link below the description of the talk you are interested in (if you received this by email) or go to the Esk Valley Trust website where you will find a link to the programme on the News and Events page ([Esk Valley Trust - News & Events](#)). The programme is:

Friday 26th May at 19.00. **Annual General Meeting and talk by Craig Statham of the National Museum of Scotland**

The AGM will start at 19.00 and will be followed by **Craig's talk** on the Museum's map collection with highlights of the mapping history of the Esk River valleys.

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYqc-6qpiMrGNH9J1n52VqMk6K7_GBdrfiB

Thursday June 15 at 19.30. **Caroline Freeman** the Ranger at Newbattle Abbey will give a talk on the Abbey and its woodlands.

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMvceiqgDsvHdN_wfJL3CY5Sq2iSiRuxaZW

Thursday 21 September at 19.30. **Nim Kibbler and Ross Hughes** from the Forth Rivers Trust will talk about: '**Citizens of the Esk – communities of people and wildlife**'

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEduypqz8uEtG28gfPIBZ2yob8qHaFbxKb>

Thursday 12 October at 19.30 **Elsbeth Smith** will present '**Gladhouse from top to bottom**'

Elsbeth works for Midlothian Council in partnership with Scottish Water. Her Ranger posting is part of a larger project to 'Enable Responsible Access' to reservoirs in Scotland.

This talk is part of the Midlothian Outdoor Festival programme of events.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMkd-ugrj8oG9wPnCOd-E8LvOVkxURR2UK4>

Thursday 30 November at 19.30 hrs **Mike Bullock OBE**, Chief Executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board will talk about: **More than Lighthouses**

Mike took early retirement from the Royal Navy in the rank of Commodore to join the Northern Lighthouse Board as Chief Executive in April 2014. Find out about NLB's rich heritage and how the organisation operates today.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAvfuqrrTwtG9AuytZJnn7q62j71tACwIKN>

Membership subscriptions and donations

If you want to support the Trust an easy way is to use [Esk Valley Trust \(membermojo.co.uk\)](http://membermojo.co.uk).

Alternatively visit [Support Us - Esk Valley Trust](#) where you will find options to give support – or just contact us at enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org and we will be happy to help.



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