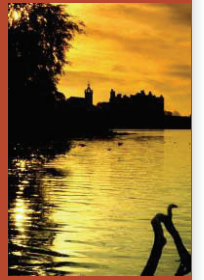
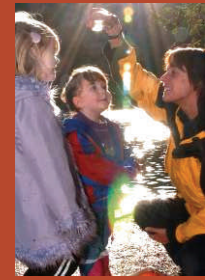


# CRAG & PEEL

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News from the Holyrood & Linlithgow Parks Ranger Service

## WILD HOLYROOD

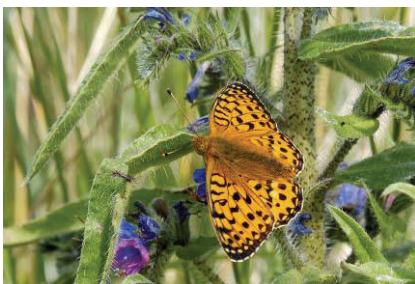
Holyrood Park may be in the centre of Edinburgh, but that does not stop it being a fantastic place for wildlife. Stuart Rivers, Conservation Ranger, tells us about some of the wildlife highlights from 2008.



'One of the brilliant things about conservation monitoring in Holyrood Park is just being outdoors and looking for rare and scarce plants or animals in a fantastic landscape. If you add to this the fact that you are fulfilling an essential part of Historic Scotland's obligation to safeguard these species, that many of these species are actually very attractive to look at, and that there is always the chance of something unexpected, then it becomes a really great way to spend your time.

In all of this work Volunteers play a critical part. Put simply, volunteer help almost doubled the amount of time and effort we were able to devote to our survey work in 2008, and was a major factor in allowing us to check more areas and increase coverage.

In terms of results we found that butterfly numbers bounced back after a very poor year in 2007, but still short of the record totals of 2006. Nonetheless 2008 produced the best ever totals of Northern Brown Argus, a species which has very recently returned to the Park after an absence of over 100 years when over-zealous Victorian collectors wiped out the population here. What was really unexpected were the discovery of a Dark Green Fritillary on one survey, and the first ever Holly Blue recorded in Holyrood Park. This latter species is now establishing a small population in the Edinburgh area, but



otherwise its most northerly breeding range is the Inner Solway and an isolated pocket in Northumberland. Perhaps more evidence of climate change? In all 16 butterfly species were recorded in 2008, plus 6-spot Burnet Moth, Cinnabar Moth and Hummingbird Hawk-moth.

One of our early successes was with the 'Wood Sage' Plume-moth (*Capperia britanniodactyla*), where "acting on information received" (from Ranger Nicky) checks were re-established in spring as well as autumn. All 26 larvae and 40 or so wilted plant-tips (indirect evidence of caterpillar presence) found since 2000 had been in spring. In 2008 we found a grand total of 224 caterpillars and 445 wilted-tips during May (none

in autumn) – an amazing result, though perhaps best of all were several adult plume-moths we found in June and July. Was it just the change of tactics or a bumper year for the moth? Hopefully 2009 surveys will shed some light on this.

A new venture for 2008 was a series of surveys and conservation activities at Wells o' Wearie. These have proved very popular and have established the site as being home to an amazing number of frogs and toads, as well as numerous invertebrates and plants. Examination of the aquatic life on a 4-weekly basis has revealed a great diversity of species to be present and in very good numbers, but we were piped at the post by children from Parson's Green Primary School who found Water Scorpions when on a pond dipping visit!



We intend to continue this surveying and active habitat management at the site throughout the year and volunteers are always welcome!

If you're interested in helping out with our survey and conservation work in 2009 please get in touch with Stuart at [stuartrivers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stuartrivers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk), or by phoning 0131 652 8150.

### IN THIS EDITION

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# ALARM BELLS FOR BLUEBELLS

The native Bluebell is now considered to be under threat from the introduced Spanish variety. Ian Lewis, Countryside Ranger, tells us about the fight-back.

‘Those of you who know Linlithgow Peel might recognise that, because of its location and history, the site has both areas that are heavily managed for human use, and other areas that are no longer used as they once were. Fiddlers’ Croft is one example of the latter. This area of grassland on the south east edge of the loch was given to Historic Scotland in 1977 on condition that it be used in part as a bird sanctuary, and that its parkland meadow-with-trees character should be maintained. At the time certain provisions were made to ensure that the site was grazed and maintained fit for grazing.

Winter grazing allows meadow plants to flower and set seed while breaking up the dense grass and giving those seeds a fair start. A history of summer grazing followed by no grazing at all has left the grassland here species poor and nutrient rich, while the over abundant rabbits take care of anything that hasn’t evolved to cope with serious nibbling. Thus we are left with a field full of dock, nettles, thistles and rank grasses, which has some wildlife value, but could be so much better.

Bluebell planting came about through the happy co-incidence that the Central Scotland Forest Trust were running a year long campaign called “Alarm Bells for Bluebells” to highlight the threat to this lovely woodland floor plant from the introduced Spanish variety, and promote the planting of native bluebells in suitable sites. While the Linlithgow Burgh Beautiful are always looking for projects to enhance the local environment, I was wondering what to do about the many sites around the loch that, through a combination of heavy shading under densely planted trees and the depredations of rabbits, are nothing but bare ground.

So it was that on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, volunteers were in place, twenty or so children from Linlithgow Primary and Donaldson’s School were brought together, trowels were handed out, and one thousand bluebell bulbs were planted in a corner of Fiddlers’ Croft under some cherry trees.

Hopefully most of them were planted the right way up, deep enough to evade foraging squirrels through winter, but not so deep that they never make it to the surface, and next year there will be the beginnings of a blanket of bluebells. If they do well, in future years we shall be able to move some bulbs to new areas throughout the Peel, enhancing the environment and helping to conserve this important native species.’



Planting Bluebells

## A WEEK IN THE LIFE

Lotte Fisher, a student at St Thomas of Aquins high school, joined us for a work experience placement in the depths of winter. She describes her experiences.

‘Our work experience week at St Thomas’ takes place in December, so me being me, I went for a placement out of doors at Holyrood Park! I was not fazed at first by the fact that I would be walking around on a hill in the middle of winter, but people who were doing cosy indoor office placements started to question my choice of job and I did start to worry a bit, but not enough to make me chicken out.

When I arrived I noticed the friendly atmosphere as I was shown around the Education Centre and office, everyone was willing to help me have a good time as well as getting on with their own jobs.

I went out on patrol in the land-rover to check for any problems in the Park, and went out on foot patrol as well. I also helped with a group that came in from Oakland’s school to do archaeology. I have learnt a lot about wildlife that is found in the Park which was very useful and interesting it has inspired me to try and find out more about other plants and animals.

Overall my week has been really, really enjoyable and I would seriously consider this as a job option. I didn’t get too cold at all and it has been a very worthwhile experience.’



Out on patrol in the Land Rover



Fires from 2007. But would 2008 be the same?

## NOT THIS TIME

Bonfire / Fireworks night / November 5th. With all the precious wildlife here in Holyrood Park these are terms guaranteed to instil fear in the heart of a Holyrood Park Ranger - but not this time around! Jan Tapson, Park Ranger, tells us a different tale.

'As a very new ranger at that time, my memory of the park on the 6th of November 2007 was of the massive pall of slowly rising smoke which engulfed the north ridge of Arthur's Seat. This fire burned for the next week, bursting out at new points as the turf below the gorse heated up and reignited at every whim of the wind. The fire service was called on a daily basis by members of the

public, and they eventually resorted to pumping water from St Margaret's Loch in an attempt to douse the sparks. Sadly it must be presumed that many rabbits, toads, weasels and other small burrowing creatures didn't survive.

In 2008 an attempt was made at 'on-the-night management' when rangers were brought in to work in partnership with a unit from Lothian and Borders Police. The first task was to prevent 'wild parking', and to this end all the roads in the park were closed and the Broad Pavement car park cordoned off around 6pm – just after rush hour and before the firework display scheduled at Meadowbank Stadium. After this we patrolled the Park in the Land Rover and truck watching out for the beginnings of fires or people carrying the types of fireworks which appear capable of blowing up banks!

The Meadowbank display went off relatively uneventfully and the swans coped by forming a small tight white raft in the centre of St Margaret's Loch. Overall our efforts kept the major firework litter confined to the corner of the park nearest to Pollock Halls and there were no major fires to report.

So a definite improvement on 2007, but still some lessons to be learned for 2009!

## HBOS TEAM CHALLENGE

On an extremely cold, but mercifully dry, Friday morning in late November, a Halifax Bank of Scotland team met at the foot of Arthur's Seat in Holyrood Park to do some gorse clearing work. The visit was arranged as part of the partnership working between the New Caledonian Woodlands organisation and the Historic Scotland Ranger Service. Nicola McRae of HBOS takes up the story.



The HBOS team enjoyed their day

'Our team had volunteered to help clearing gorse bushes (a.k.a. whin or furze bushes depending upon what part of the UK you come from). We were met by Donald McPhillimy from Caledonian Woodlands and Graham Checkley from the Ranger Service, who took us half way up Whinny Hill to the area that we were going to be clearing for the remainder of the day. Before we got started we were provided with a very welcome cup of hot tea whilst Donald explained to us the importance of the task in hand. The gorse and brambles need to be cleared to allow newly planted tree saplings to thrive.

After a short presentation from Donald about safety, our team of eight split up into four groups with two people in each group. Two all-male groups worked slightly higher up the hill on a large area of particularly thick and mature gorse whilst the two other groups worked on a lower area where there were more saplings to "rescue" from the gorse and brambles. Donald stayed with us, flitting from group to group, ensuring that none of us were mistaking a sapling for a gorse bush, whilst simultaneously providing us with a little botanical knowledge by identifying the species of each sapling that was rescued.

Although the task was fairly physical, we all agreed that we got a real sense of achievement from clearing away the gorse from a fairly large area of the hillside. The two all-male groups worked in competition with one another to see which group could clear a larger area, the result of which is that between them, they cleared so much gorse that a new natural pathway has been created going up Whinny Hill! I have since been told that the other two groups worked so carefully that they rescued a significant number of trees including some that they were not even aware of being there!

We all enjoyed a truly great day together whilst helping a really worthwhile project in our locale. David Bell, Chris Johnston, Jamie Watts, Richard McConnell, Graeme McCraith, Kate Hurcomb, Fiona Pringle and I would all like to thank New Caledonian Woodlands for, their help in coordinating the day for us, the very welcome cups of tea and coffee that they provided for us and a special thank you to Donald for helping us to make the day such a success for everyone. Jamie Watts has even mentioned that he would like to volunteer again!!'

# YOU'RE GOING TO DO WHAT...?

It may still be cold but there's a lot going on for kids and adults alike through the winter into the spring. For more information or to book a place on any of the events contact the Rangers. Details are below.

## HOLYROOD PARK

**Winter Warmer** Sunday 15th February

A general guided walk to find out more about the fascinating history of the Park

Meet: Holyrood Park Information Centre (lodge next to Parliament) Time: 11am -3pm Booking: Recommended

**The Lost World** Saturday 28th February 09

Family workshop (am) A unique experience for families to be inspired by the geological and natural wonders. A short guided walk then back to the Centre to create your own Lost World with our Artist in Residence. Followed by a walking tour in the afternoon for over 16's

Meet: Holyrood Education Centre  
Time: 9.30am -12.30pm & 1.00pm - 3.00pm  
Booking: Recommended

**Watch Out Toads About** Sunday 29th March 09

Help the Rangers with the spring toad migration. Possible activities at centre will be detailed in the next edition.

Meet: Holyrood Education Centre  
Time: 9.30am -12.30pm & 1.00pm - 3.00pm  
Booking: Recommended

## WILDLIFE TO WATCH FOR

**Graham Checkley, Community Ranger, highlights some of the wildlife to watch out for in October**

Following in the footsteps of 2008 we're very keen this year to watch out for the following species – Skylark, Meadow Pipit, all birds of prey and all mammals (excluding Rabbits!).

Some of the species we're looking out for in 2009 -



## GET IN TOUCH

We are always on the lookout for more volunteers, suggestions or ideas. If you would like more details about our range of educational services or any aspect of our volunteer or conservation work please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.

Historic Scotland Ranger Service  
Linlithgow Peel Kirkgate Linlithgow  
West Lothian EH49 7AL  
Tel/fax: 01506 842065  
email:hs.rangers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Historic Scotland Ranger Service  
Holyrood Park Education Centre  
1 Queens Drive Holyrood Park Edinburgh EH8 8HG  
Tel: 0131 652 8150 Fax: 0131 652 8151  
email:hs.rangers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk



## LINLITHGOW

**Two Houses and a Castle** Sunday 22nd March 09

Spring walk from the House of the Binns, via Hopetoun House, to Blackness Castle. Return transport, tea and biscuits provided. Joint event with National Trust for Scotland and Hopetoun House Preservation Trust.

Meet - House Of Bins 11am - 4pm  
Price - Family £12, Adult £5, Child £3  
Booking: Essential

**Nature Detectives  
Spring Up!** Tuesday 7th April 09

For primary age children with an adult. Spring and Easter related nature games and activities for kids

Meet: Linlithgow Palace  
Time: 10.00am - 12.00pm  
Booking: Recommended

**Scavenger Hunt** Tuesday 14th April 09

For primary age children with an adult. s  
Meet: Linlithgow Palace  
Time: 10.00am - 12.00pm  
Booking: Recommended

## HOLYROOD SURVEYS

As Stuart Rivers mentioned on the front page, volunteers play a critical role in the survey work carried out in Holyrood Park.

On Monday 13th of April we'll be carrying out a swan survey, and during the month of May we'll be looking for Plume Moths. So if you're interested in helping out with our survey and conservation work in 2009 please get in touch with Stuart at [stuartrivers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stuartrivers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk), or by phoning 0131 652 8150.

Survey dates for June onwards will be published in the next issue of the Crag and Peel newsletter.