



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 5.03 – John Muir Country Park: Wildlife

John Muir Country Park offers a rich and wide variety of landscapes which are home to hundreds of birds, animals, insects, trees and plants. Its eight mile stretch of cliffs, rocky shores, sandy bays, grasslands, pine plantations and rare salt marsh are managed by East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service and enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year.

'I see him yet we would cry'... 'I see him yet!'

John Muir and his friends loved to play around Dunbar's rocky shores and the surrounding countryside. They would watch the skylark until it was just a speck in the sky. Though the skylark is now on the RSPB endangered species list, seabirds, waders, ducks, woodland and grassland birds can all be seen in the Park today with new 'visitors' arriving with the changes in the seasons.



© East Lothian Council Library Service



© Laurie Campbell



© Maurice Penny

As well as general maintenance and education, an important part of the rangers work is the constant monitoring of wildlife in the area. Regular bird counts are taken with the results sent to the national Wetland Bird Survey or 'WeBS' database. Here the information makes a useful addition to national surveys and helps the Ranger Service and Park Advisory Committee to make informed decisions.

Birdwatchers also come from all over to see the colony of kittiwakes nesting on the ruins of Dunbar Castle. They were first recorded nesting on the Granary by Dunbar Harbour in 1934 and moved to the castle in the 1970s.



Courtesy of R Anderson

Butterflies too are carefully monitored with once rare species such as the ringlet now appearing more frequently. Trees, such as the scots pines at Hedderwick provide shelter, homes and food for animals such as squirrels, foxes, hedgehogs, stoats, weasels and badgers. Other animals, such as the numerous rabbits and moles, have to be controlled.



Courtesy of East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service



Courtesy of R Anderson



Courtesy of R Anderson



Courtesy of R Anderson

Plants such as viper's bugloss, once used as a cure for snake bite, are commonly seen, while others, such as Grass of Parnassus, with its heart shaped leaves, single white flowers and faint smell of honey have become a rare sight on the saltmarsh.

Changes in climate, vegetation and in man's activities have all had an effect on the Park's rich and diverse wildlife. Coastal erosion, pollution, fly tipping, litter, vandalism, oil spills and controlling invasive species are just a few of the problems the Park has had to face in its first 30 years. As a result, some species have flourished, while others have almost disappeared.

Courtesy of East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service



Courtesy of East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service

Further reading

- Muir, John. The Story of My Boyhood and Youth. Wisconsin; The University of Wisconsin Press.
- East Lothian 1945-2000, Fourth Statistical Account Volume One: The County, 2003.

Websites

- East Lothian Council Countryside Ranger Service
- John Muir's Birthplace
- RSPB

www.eastlothian.gov.uk
www.jmbt.org.uk
www.rspb.org.uk

