

Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust

Newsletter



SCO 044045

October 2025

Editorial

I hope you all enjoy reading the newsletter. We have some lovely items from volunteers and board members but it would be great to hear from other CLLCT members with feedback — comments, photos and even articles.

See the box below for contact details.

We are pleased to welcome Fiona Robertson to be our new secretary, replacing Helen Keene who we thank sincerely for her valued work over the last years. Fiona and Helen have written articles for us on Page 4.

Contents

Page 2	Habitat Officer's Report
Page 3	New Castle Loch volunteer "Mast Year"
Page 4	Ex Secretary and New Secretary

Brew and Bite

What is a "Brew and Bite"? It is a social occasion, a fund raiser and a means of maintaining the profile of the Loch and the Trust in the local community. We have held 4 of these this year on the last Sunday of the month from May through to August and, on most occasions, we have been blessed with favourable weather.

These sessions require to be hosted by volunteers and the home baking is also provided by volunteers for all of which we are most grateful. It is a very pleasant and relaxed day and allows us to interact with visitors, both local and from further afield, and to get their feedback about the Loch, the path and the facilities which we provide. We have made quite a few minor alterations or improvements to the path as a result of these discussions.

As a fund raiser, we are very fortunate in that our visitors are very generous in their donations in return for a pleasant cuppa and some delicious home baking, and this is very important as we are constantly looking for funding to cover our day- to -day expenses, as grant funding can be applied for on a larger scale, but these tend to be restricted to specific projects.

We would normally receive between £100 and £150 in our little donation box on a good day and we are always very grateful for that.

We have also recently installed QR Code Donation signs in a couple of places and we would encourage people to take the opportunity to donate through these as well if they have enjoyed their walk and the surrounding environment which we maintain.

And finally, it is important that the Trust itself is recognised working away in the background to maintain this wonderful facility, and Brew and Bite gives people an opportunity to meet and chat with Trustees and Volunteers.

Dougie Fountain—Chairman CLLCT

Please note that your membership, although free, does show your support for the Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust. Members also receive the quarterly newsletter. If you live in Lochmaben, Templand, the Royal Four Towns or the surrounding district, you are eligible for membership. Just contact any Trustee, or Rhonda at Lochfield Cottage, if you or someone you know wishes to become a member.

Control and click on this link to join CLLCT and access the website [CLLCT - Contact Us](#)

Contacts for Castle Loch Community Trust -

Facebook CLLCT

Email— [castlelochcommunity @outlook.com](mailto:castlelochcommunity@outlook.com)

Habitat Officer Report

Volunteers have been busy over the past few months catching up with lots of growth seen this year, impeding the pathways. With the growth now slowing into autumn we have seen an abundance of fruit, berries and acorns. One of the ongoing volunteer projects has been to prepare Kirkhirst Woodlands for some tree planting which has to be completed by March 2026. The charity has funding in place to plant nearly 350 tree saplings and contribute towards the regeneration of Kirkhirst Woods. This has involved the removal of more of the invasive rhododendrons along the farm track to let in more light and support the growth of the immature trees to be planted.

Castle Loch is lucky enough to have a number of different habitats making up the 270 acre site. The grassland, or meadowland, walk is a vital habitat alongside the carr wetland which supports a vast biodiversity for a huge range of wildlife such as pollinators, invertebrates, birds and small mammals. Cutting the grass annually promotes the growth of different ground flowering species and fungal growths which would be inhibited by larger growing plants and shrubs — *“a fifth of all priority species for conservation in the UK are associated with grassland habitat”* (aleofglamorgan.gov.uk, 2025).



In order to maintain this habitat and keep it as grassland, it must be cut annually to prevent shrubs from taking over. The grass is then lifted to prevent fermentation. Another way to manage the grassland would be to allow seasonal grazing. However, due to the presence of Cowbane, a poisonous plant, this cannot take place.

Rhonda Graham

Volunteers raking cut grass for removal

Guided Nature Walk



Malcolm showing a find

Thank you to Malcolm Haddow from The South West Scotland Environmental Records Centre (SWSEIC) for giving yet another guided walk round the loch. Walkers very much enjoyed the visit and appreciated being shown some of the many species of invertebrates, birds and fungi that can be found in the woodlands and other habitats around the loch.



A group of the walkers

George Hunter Trust

CLLCT has been funded by:-



And - many thanks to all anonymous donors

New Castle Loch Volunteer

Hi there, I'm Dorothy Stewart and I am the newest and apparently the oldest member of the group, and so for some reason I get to do this report!

First of all, why did I become a volunteer? Well, in January of this year I sadly lost my husband Tony who, I have discovered, was a bit of a legend with this group. He had been a member for a long time and loved it. When trying to work out what I should be doing I knew I needed to get out more and decided to follow in his footsteps and find out what was so good about this group of people. I can tell you that I instantly felt very welcome and was taken very good care of. I felt safe and very much appreciated. I am now very proud to be a member of this hard working group. So, as always, Tony was right and this is such a good place to spend time and such a special group of people to work with, so please do think of coming to join us. The group meets on the morning of the first Saturday of each month and again on the morning of the third Thursday of each month.

The volunteering days are always good fun but we all have our favourite activities, with some highs and the occasional low! Tasks include grass cutting, removing invasive plants and maintaining the path. I have mostly had highs and only one real low! My ability to get over barbed wire fences is a definite weakness! Luckily it was a one off and not something we do on a regular basis! I am apparently the 'queen' of the weeds at the door to the cottage. My natural vinegar based weedkiller has cleared those persistent weeds and made the front patio area and its picnic table a little more welcoming. Litter-picking is something included in most of our sessions. So as always the message is - please take your litter home – only leave footprints.



There is always time for a coffee stop when we all get together and solve our problems. The wife of another volunteer sends the very best cakes for us to have at coffee break. Thank you so much for such a treat!

If you like the sound of all this please think about joining us. We need more, possibly younger, pairs of hands to help us keep Castle Loch in good condition for you all to enjoy.

Dorothy Stewart

Dorothy helping to gather cut grass on the meadow

A 'Mast Year'

Walking round the loch and elsewhere you may have noticed how much beech mast (seed cases) and acorns there are; it is definitely a 'mast year' which happens about every five years. One theory for this occurrence is that in the years when fewer seeds are produced predators such as birds and squirrels survive in lower numbers, so then trees produce a bumper crop of seeds to ensure that there are plenty to grow into new trees after several years when fewer have been produced. The good summer we have just experienced is ideal for trees to produce a bumper crop of seeds.

Freda Seddon

Castle Loch and Helen, the Ex-secretary



We moved to Lochmaben in 2013 and used the paths around the loch sporadically on days off or summer evenings. By mid 2016 I had retired and with my new dog Walt we began to walk the paths each day. As he grew, we increased the distance we covered until the circuit became our regular daily walk. I loved it. It changed with the time of day and the seasons. The wildlife, the trees and the chance to think, plan and get some exercise ! We met local folk and visitors, as an incomer that was invaluable. A dog always helps you to make friends.

As I grew to understand the work entailed in keeping the loch 'alive' and functioning, I became interested in helping; though I wasn't sure how as

I'd never done anything like it before. I joined as a member which is free and spoke to people who knew more about it. In 2021 I was invited to join the Board, which meant attending meetings and becoming more knowledgeable about what it takes to maintain site both physically and financially. Everyone was friendly and happy to share their knowledge. The volunteers are amazing, everyone has different skills as we all come from different backgrounds and have done different jobs, everyone is valuable and each of us does what we feel comfortable with be that strimming the grass, advertising functions, fund raising, clearing rhododendrons or baking and serving teas. It's entirely up to us.

Around 2021 or so I took on the role of secretary. If I am honest a bit reluctantly as admin wasn't my background. It has proved to be a really rewarding post. A little bit of a pivot point for the Board providing agendas, typing meeting notes and circulating them but also being a part of a great bunch of people. It also gave me the chance to work alongside our Habitat Officer Rhonda and learn from her.

Meetings are much more enjoyable than I remember from my work and usually they keep to time.

This month I have to hang up my keyboard as we are leaving Lochmaben to move nearer to our families. I'll miss the Castle Loch and all of the folks I've met and worked alongside. I am very lucky and relieved to be handing the keyboard to the new secretary Fiona Robertson, who I hope will enjoy the job as much as I have.

Helen Keene

- and Fiona, the new Secretary

I'm incredibly grateful for the warm welcome I've received from Dougie, Rhonda, and the rest of the team as I step into the role of Castle Loch Community Trust (CLCT) Secretary. My thanks go to Helen as the retiring Secretary, for her immaculate record keeping and generous handover. I will miss our chats at the summertime "Brew and Bites", but am hoping that she will be back from time to time to have a cup of tea and a catch up, without the washing up!

Since our family moved here in February 2023, I've been volunteering with the Saturday working party. Through this, I've come to truly admire and appreciate the ongoing efforts to keep the loch looking beautiful—and, just as importantly, open and accessible to all.

Before I retired earlier this year from the NHS, I could only offer a few hours a month to help with general maintenance and the occasional bit of baking. Even with such a small commitment, I was made to feel that my contribution mattered. The team offered not just purpose, but genuine friendship—and the tea break snacks (thanks to a volunteer's wife!) were a definite bonus.

Behind the scenes, a small but dedicated group of trustees ensures the smooth running of the Trust, managing everything from governance and finances to future planning. I consider it a real privilege to now be part of that team.

Fiona Robertson