

Wildlife Corridors



STATUS & ECOLOGY

Terrestrial wildlife corridors are natural or permanently vegetated physically connected linear spaces situated in areas otherwise built up or used for intensive agriculture. Not only are wildlife corridors important for the conservation and movement of plant and animal species within Edinburgh, they also provide valued accessible green space for the capital's residents and visitors. In particular, linear routes allow people the opportunity to find solitude from urban living and provide safe and attractive routes for walking and cycling within the city and out to the surrounding coast and countryside.

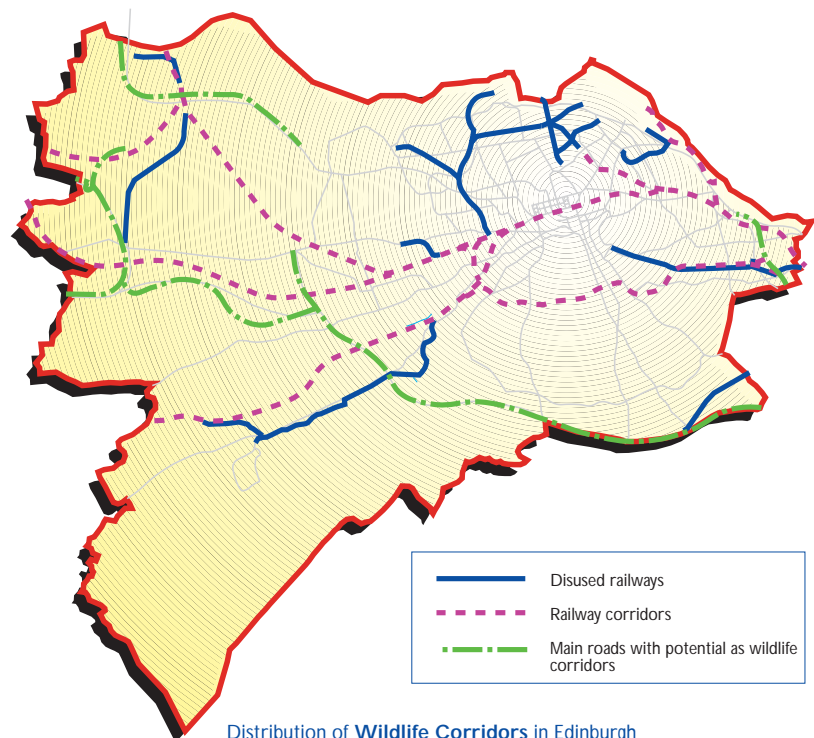
There are almost 40km of disused railway within Edinburgh, the majority of which has been developed over recent years as walkway or cycleway. Most of this length is characterised by banks or verges with varying stretches of semi-natural mixed woodland, woodland scrub and/or tall herb dominated grassland. This represents an important mosaic of linear habitats for many animal and bird species and plant communities. Tall scrub (mainly willow, hawthorn and elder) is of particular value to wildlife and is now quite rare in the Edinburgh area due to the loss of countryside hedgerows.

Three particular types of wildlife corridor are considered: the city's disused railway network; the four main railway lines running into the centre of Edinburgh and the little used suburban line running through Craigmillar, Newington and Morningside; and the embankments and verges alongside the main roads into and around the city.

Because of its ecological function as a corridor for the movement of plant and animal species throughout the city, almost all of the disused railway network is designated as either an Urban Wildlife Site within the Edinburgh Urban Nature Conservation Strategy, or as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) in the Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan.

Similar habitat can be found on the embankments, cuttings and verges running alongside live railway lines, the city bypass and other principle roads such as the M8, M9, A90, A720, and A1. In total the Railtrack network is 79km long and the motorway and major road network extends over 42km. Given that, in general, semi-natural habitat extends along both sides of these transport networks it is clear that such features represent extensive areas of wildlife interest.

The following Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan species can be found along Terrestrial Wildlife Corridors:
Animals: hedgehog, badger, pipistrelle bat, sparrowhawk, swift, tree sparrow, song thrush, bullfinch, spotted flycatcher, common toad, common blue butterfly, ragged robin, *Pipiza luteitarsis*. **Plants:** giant bellflower, meadow crane's bill, bluebell and golden sock.



Distribution of **Wildlife Corridors** in Edinburgh

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Most stretches along Edinburgh's wildlife corridors have not been managed principally for biodiversity. Other objectives and concerns, such as landscaping, amenity and safety have taken precedence and led to biodiversity loss or change. Lack of adequate resources to effectively conserve and enhance biodiversity has also been an ongoing issue and is best exemplified by the continual presence of litter and the unchecked spread of non-native invasive species such as giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed.



"Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet"
Gerald Manley Hopkins

CURRENT ACTION

Management plans have been written for many of the disused railway lines. However, ecological management has been limited. Attempts have been made to slow the spread of giant hogweed but this has been piecemeal.

Railtrack operate a similar policy of minimum action with respect to lineside vegetation outwith a 5m area cleared for safety. They raise awareness of the wildlife value and biological diversity of undisturbed lineside to counter complaints from neighbours/travellers who prefer more intensive lineside management, as well as try to increase lineside management contractors' awareness of undesirable non-native species.

The Scottish Executive has recently reviewed its landscape design and management policies for trunk roads. These are outlined in the paper 'Cost Effective Landscape - Working with Nature', and seek to incorporate ecological principles into the establishment of new roadside landscape schemes and the maintenance of these and existing roadside habitats.

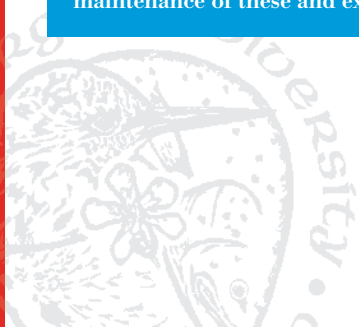
Habitats adjacent transport routes are also prone to the effects of contamination from the pollutants emitted by vehicles.

Additionally, transport routes present a significant danger to several species of animal, many mammals, birds and amphibians being killed every year on Edinburgh's roads and railways.

Threats

All these impacts continue to threaten the mosaic of habitats associated with terrestrial wildlife corridors. In addition to the likelihood that in many cases public expenditure reductions will increasingly limit maintenance activities, it is possible that this will coincide with a decline in public and political support for the maintenance of such areas caused by the perception that unmanaged, litter-strewn vegetation has little merit.

Inappropriately located urban development could fragment the network and thereby reduce its function as a wildlife corridor. Development is currently proposed along stretches of disused railway at Granton and Lochend which will sever sections of the corridor network and remove extensive tracts of semi-natural habitat.



ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objectives

To maintain and enhance the biological diversity of the network of terrestrial wildlife corridors in Edinburgh for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

Targets

Establish regular winter maintenance contracts to cut back verges and overhanging vegetation.

Maintain the diversity of all areas of herb rich grassland along the disused railway network.

Establish a programme to control the spread of non-native invasive species.

Increase public awareness of the biological value of terrestrial wildlife corridors and involve local people in their management where appropriate.

Actions

1 Include designated wildlife sites on the Railtrack management database by Summer 2000

and forward this information to contractors when appropriate.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Department of City Development, Railtrack and Scottish Wildlife Trust)

2 Set up a maintenance contract for the Craighall Sidings wildflower meadow by Autumn 1999.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Department's of Recreation and City Development)

3 Establish a co-ordinated programme for the control of giant hogweed along publicly accessible wildlife corridors by Summer 2001.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Department of Recreation)

4 Establish a management regime by Autumn 2000 to maintain a mosaic of tall scrub, bramble and herb rich grassland along the Warriston-Trinity Triangle section of disused railway.

(Actioned by: Scottish Wildlife Trust, Spokes & Lothian Conservation Volunteers in consultation with City of Edinburgh Department's of City Development and Recreation)

Key Contacts

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CHAMPIONS

EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

RAILTRACK

