

Gladhouse Reservoir

Enabling Responsible Access Pilot Project

Yearly Summary Report
December 2022 – December 2023



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1. Background to the pilot project

Scottish Water (SW), in partnership with Midlothian Council (MLC) have supported the presence of a visitor ranger at Gladhouse Reservoir for a full year now. Elspeth was recruited as part of Scottish Water's Enabling Responsible Access Pilot Project, a key aim of which was to trial having a ranger presence on several SW sites that presented visitor management challenges as well as opportunities to engage with users of the resource to help improve their overall enjoyment of their visit(s). This short piece summaries some of our key experiences but please note that it is not a substitute for any future technical or evaluation report.

2. Overview of the Site

Gladhouse Reservoir and its surrounding woodland has, in recent years, become a victim of its own success insofar as it offers something for everyone; owing much to its designated status and natural beauty it is a go-to location for water recreationists, wildlife enthusiasts, picnickers, overnight campers, dog walkers, anglers and the list goes on. But because it is within easy reach of Edinburgh and surrounding settlements this brings with it a high volume of people and some of their associated negative behaviours – as well as car parking problems mainly on the clearway of the North shore road.

3. Why employ a ranger and what difference do they make?

There remains little doubt nowadays about the benefit of having “boots on the ground” in the form of rangers as a crucially important component of good site management across the country. The positive feedback that we have received about Elspeth and her role is a strong indicator of public sentiment that having a friendly, helpful face on site really humanises the process of looking after the place and assures the wider public that it is not abandoned or neglected.

Elspeth also sits on the local PARC (Partnership Against Rural Crime) group where information is shared across the agencies on matters of theft of farm machinery, vehicles, the illegal persecution of wildlife and suchlike.

She is also learning and sharing best practice with her counterparts in other ranger services and agencies like PHRP, EDC, FLS and NatureScot, to name but a few.

To give a more general idea of the national picture of Scottish rangers and ranger services' impact over the course of a year please click on this link: [Ranger Services in Scotland | NatureScot](#)

4. Gladhouse Stakeholders

As important as the visitor management of Edinburgh day-trippers is, we continue to strive to be mindful and inclusive when it comes to our relationship with our key stakeholders – the local residents, landowners and land managers; specifically how we can best partner with the local community (and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland) in a manner that takes account of their local knowledge and suggestions whilst ensuring that they and SW strengthen our connections to our shared asset.

In this regard we are continuing with a solutions-based approach in our conversations with MLC and Rosebery Estate about better parking management and will keep the Stakeholder group updated at every stage.

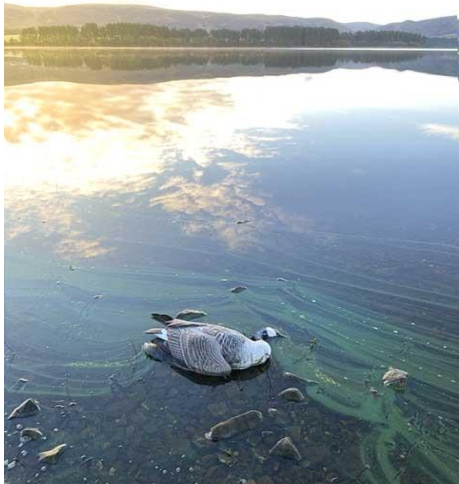
What follows is a rangers' eye account of the past year in the life of Gladhouse reservoir.

5. Winter 2022

Last December we were sadly confronted with an outbreak of bird flu on the reservoir.

The virus accounted for the deaths of over 100 birds in total including, but not restricted to greylag, Canada and Pink-footed geese. It was thanks to the vigilance and quick thinking of local resident (and member of this stakeholder group) that we were able to rapidly begin the process of reporting the outbreak to DEFRA and the collection of the corpses for tissue analysis and the subsequent clean-up operation. Whilst this was a tragic event it highlighted to cooperative spirit amongst ourselves at SW, our partner agencies and, of course, the local community of residents and regular users like the dog walkers and swimmers who effectively became our eyes and ears during the outbreak.

A dead Canada goose (L) and Greylag goose (R) on Gladhouse Reservoir near the spillway, casualties of avian flu



Last winter also brought with it two distinct cold snaps where the reservoir iced over making an already dangerous environment a much more daunting prospect. To this end SW instated signage warning of the dangers of ice and Elspeth undertook ice safety training and engaged with visitors about the potential hazards. We are happy to report no known untoward ice-related incidents at Gladhouse at the time of writing.

Harlaw Reservoir training day



Biodiversity actions on the site



We are awaiting confirmation of exactly how many of Arctic migrant geese overwintered on Gladhouse until March of this year but we know it was upwards of 2,000 (although, as mentioned, some mortalities were observed due to avian flu).

Plans remain in place for the creation of a botanical biodiversity area on a section of the North shore. The planting mix of shrubs and ground flora has been agreed and we will be working with the contractor to start the works soon.

We worked closely with the police wildlife liaison officer to design refreshed signage for the island where the Schedule 1 birds come to breed around mid to late March. We are happy to report that they raised chicks this summer and experienced no disturbance from visitors.

Image below is of Wildlife Liaison Officer inspecting protected area.



Since her appointment Elspeth has diligently kept a daily record of her working day: including her foot patrols (which are essentially walkover site inspections), her interactions with the public, her attendance on inter-agency working groups and her outreach work in the form of walks/talks/events and similar service provision.

This recording became particularly valuable when the summer season got into full swing because it was providing a better baseline data set of what issues were happening and where on the site they most prevalent.

Engagement takes the form of stopping to talk to people during foot patrols , offering advice on water safety and SOAC compliant behaviours in a friendly way.

*SOAC stands for the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which encourages and advises on the responsible right of access that we enjoy in Scotland. Please follow this link for more information: [NatureScot \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](https://www.naturescot.org.uk/outdooraccess-scotland.scot)

In order to gauge public perception about her new position and promote the initiative Elspeth also routinely asked visitors the following questions:

1. *Do you know about the new partnership ranger service here?*
2. *Do you think that's a good thing?*
3. *Do you know where to get more information about us?*

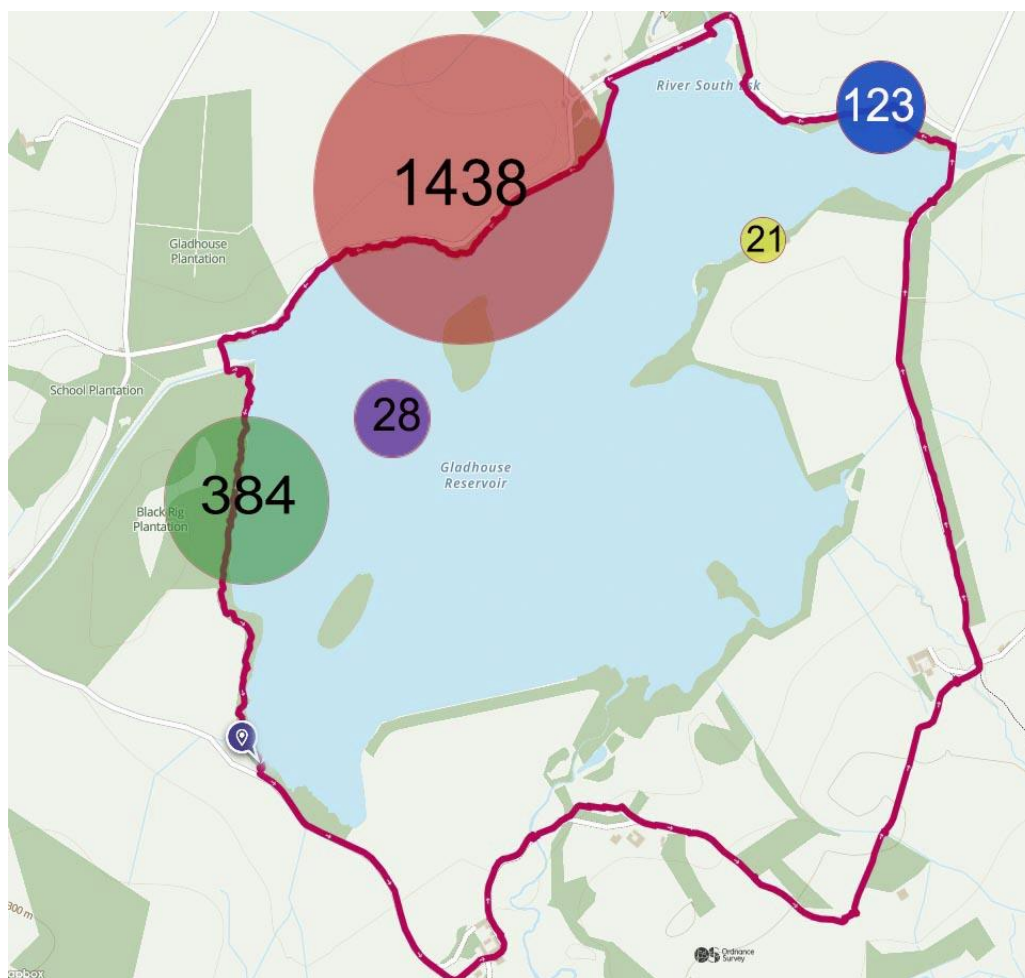
As time went on it became clear that word had got out about Gladhouse having a new ranger on site and the responses to question one grew from “no” to increasingly “yes”. Encouragingly there was a **100% “yes”** response to question 2 insofar as it was agreed that a ranger on site was a good thing. For question 3 Elspeth always signposted visitors to the Scottish Water digital platforms.

6. Spring/Summer 2023

In terms of preparing for the start of the busy summer season (which typically begins around Easter holiday time) there was much to do and as expected, visitor numbers (and the associated challenges) increased markedly around the first week in April.

Over the course of the year Elspeth successfully completed over 2,000 person to person or person to group engagements (about ¾ of those taking place on the busy North Shore stretch), with the next busiest area being the West shore – as well as other site hotspots near the spillway, the North-East section further on from the spillway and the Eastern shore itself. Additionally there were verbal engagements with water recreationists whilst they were using the reservoir. My engagements during the times I was on duty throughout the year at the site reflect the same spatial usage pattern as Elspeth’s observations and, combined, takes the total number of person to person and person to group engagements to over 2,500. The map below better illustrates where the visitor densities were spread:

Location and number of unique ranger:visitor engagements December '22 to December '23.



Summer visitor numbers across most sites see a rapid rise when the schools break up at the end of June and this was the case at Gladhouse – however, the hot weather began at the end of May and continued through June with a correspondingly high number of visitors, especially at the weekends. It is acknowledged that parking displacement, especially along parts of the designated clearway, is still in evidence. This is not ideal and it is not sustainable in its current form (i.e it is unenforced along with the reality that there are very few alternative parking spots). Further comment on this issue is outwith the scope of this document and will be reserved whilst negotiations are ongoing to find a solution.

Working alone on a site that is 8Km in circumference during high season with several hundred visitors (on land and water) at any given time is a challenge. And whilst there is a broad consensus that the majority of visitors are here to have an enjoyable time and often leave no trace of their visit there is also a small but visible minority who behave irresponsibly and gain unwanted bad press for the site. Sometimes their behaviours are not deliberate but nevertheless they do have a negative impact. It is those instances where visitors need guidance and advice on their responsibilities under SOAC where ranger intervention in the form of helpful dialogue can be of huge value. There are many examples of when Elspeth and myself took the time to talk to visitors who were displaying anti-social behaviour, dirty camping, hacking at live trees, with a dog dangerously out of control, negligently raising fires, swimming near the air curtain where our interventions, we are sure, made a positive difference both to the situation and to the individual(s) involved.

We are cognisant of some harsh realities about the usage profile of Gladhouse given its proximity to such a high urban population with a 30 minute or less travelling distance.

For instance, Anti-Social Behavior (or ASB) is not uncommon in the form of loud music/ noise, drinking, evidence of drug use and the like and is reportedly highest in the evenings after 5pm and at weekends – when ranger cover is not in place and when things can occasionally escalate to becoming a Police Scotland matter. Typically, when ranger duty commences the next morning it is clear via the littering, irresponsible toileting and scorched ground and new campfire circles that some visitors' evening behaviours are not sympathetic to the management aims of the site.

Fires were a common feature across the site, mainly on the north shore but also on the north island, west shore and to some extent the East side as well. Directly associated with the creation of campfires was the harvesting of living and dead wood as a fuel source. This behaviour demonstrated a lack of preparation but also wilful negligence on the part of a small minority of site users. Many living trees were damaged or killed in this way but nobody was “caught in the act” of vandalising them. When visitors were found to have axes, hatchets or saws it was made clear to them that they were not to be used on the site. A total of 146 fire pits and/or stone circles were made good (moved, destroyed or remediated to an extent) but with new ones popping up to replace them on a daily basis the process can feel akin to playing “whack-a-mole”. Elspeth has an accurate and ongoing mapping process which identifies the main areas for fire pits and where the new ones are appearing from her baseline data set taken at the start of the season.

When fires were unattended and left to catch the peaty soil and/or dry wood the SFRS well called out to the incident – this happened at least 4 times to our knowledge. Visitors were strongly advised not to make campfires within the woodland areas; instead, it was recommended that a stove was used or that disposable barbecues be utilised on top of a large stone and then properly extinguished after use. This advice often fell upon deaf ears and seemed to evidence the theory that that this aspect of outdoor recreation is poorly understood or deemed unimportant to visitors not only here but country-wide, based on shared information from other ranger services. Paradoxically, when the national fire ban was imposed by SFRS at the height of the drought, visitors complied 100% when told to put their fires out or not to start any new fires. Elspeth and I encountered in excess of 20 hot, unattended fires that had been recklessly abandoned during the summer season. This is an issue that we are discussing with the SFRS at local level to put together an action plan of joint working to continue discussions around:

- Provide better messaging about peoples rights and responsibilities when it comes to fires.
- Better preparation for short, time-limited prevention of woodland fires during periods when SFRS advise (nationally or regionally) no fires during droughts.
- Education/outreach sessions with local schools on SOAC (incl fire advisory).

- Joint patrols between SW and SFRS to engage with visitors on site.

Littering poses a problem across many of Scotland's greenspaces and Gladhouse is no exception. SW has an established arrangement with a contractor to carry out weekly (Every Monday between 31st March and 7th November) litter picks across the busiest sections of the site and, largely, this captures the bulk if not all of the rubbish left on site. Additionally, Elspeth noted that she collected around 40 bags (full black bin liners) herself with myself collecting around half a dozen. In the main the waste comprises of leftover food, packaging and wrapping, glass bottles (soft drinks and alcohol), textiles, disposable BBQs and similar camping and picnicking paraphernalia. However, it is not uncommon for larger items to be discarded such as tents, sleeping bags, folding chairs, cooking utensils too.

We recorded 23 dirty toileting sites (open air latrines, often in amongst the trees) which we agree is likely to be an underestimate. Often, these latrines are visible and close to the public footpaths and, hence, the reservoir itself. They tend to be characterised by the presence of used toilet paper and little or no attempt having been made to dig a hole or bag and remove the waste. This is unpleasant for other visitors and detrimental to the site in general. Our contractor deals with this waste so it is not left on site any longer than it has to be.

The phenomenon of littering, poor fire management and irresponsible toileting tend to be some of the key behaviours that define what is termed "dirty camping". But it would be unfair and inaccurate to class all campers this way when in fact our experience has been that they constitute a small – but admittedly high profile – minority. Engaging with the dirty campers was a priority for us throughout the season and all such interventions (except one) proved to be fruitful insofar as the campers agreed to tidy their pitch and as far as was reasonable to leave no trace.

No serious water safety incidents in or around the reservoir were reported to SW over the past year. There is, however, always room for improvement when it comes to the way that visitors use the water and their understanding of the potential risks they might face when making the decision to enter the water. The organised groups that we have met take water safety for themselves and their member very seriously. On the other hand I noted that on a given day around 50% of "casual"/less experienced kayakers, swimmers and SUP's were not wearing personal buoyancy aids and many were using what could be considered sub-standard craft. It was brought to our attention that one SUP (Stand Up Paddleboarder) had been seen using the buoys above the air curtain as slalom practice and was quickly advised by someone to move away from the area. A separate incident saw a family and their dog swimming in and around the bank adjacent to the air curtain and they were advised to move out of the area. Both examples seem to come from a lack of awareness on the part of the visitors. Please note that a boom has now been instated on the waters surface above the air curtain.

SW continues to promote and signpost visitors to appropriate guidance on safe and enjoyable use of our assets whilst not pulling our punches on the potential hazards that are present. Please follow these links for more details:

[General Visitor Information - Scottish Water](#)

[One Last Breath - YouTube](#)

[Respect Our Reservoirs - Scottish Water](#)

A final, positive, thing to say about the air curtain is that a stakeholder from this group built a small, conceptualised working model of one from an old fish tank, an inner tube and a lego man. This was lent to Elspeth who has successfully used it to demonstrate to groups of children how negative buoyancy works and why to keep clear of the operational part of the reservoir.

7. Summary of ranger highlights

In addition to Elspeth's visitor engagements and patrols she has been involved with other work streams too numerous to mention but some of the standouts have been:

- Her contribution to the design and content of a new suite of **interpretation panels** for the site.
- Establishing a **close working relationship** with the Dalkeith SFRS station commander.
- Hosting **3 school groups** on site on themes such as water safety, SOAC and tree identification.
- More biodiversity work in the form of several outings (**3**) with a member of this stakeholder group to undertake freshwater ecological survey work (kick sampling for river fly in a feeder burn, the results of which will be shared with the Esk Rivers Trust and Buglife).
- Local Primary School outreach work on water safety (using the stakeholder's aforementioned air curtain model).
- A recent **botanical and fungal guided walk** for the Penicuik Nature Appreciation Society (for which she received glowing praise and a request for another nature walk).
- An online event called "*Gladhouse from Top to Bottom*" in which Elspeth provides an overview of herself and the site. **At least 50 local people tuned in**, probably more, and all provided glowing verbal feedback to Elspeth. Please see the link here: [Elspeth Smith - Gladhouse from top to bottom - YouTube](#)
- Last but not least, Elspeth planned and delivered a guided walk as part of the 2023 Midlothian Outdoor Festival in October. The route took participants on a circular walk, going anti-clockwise, around the **8Km (5 Mile)** circumference of the reservoir. It was a huge success and was enhanced by the good weather. There were **9 walkers** as well as Elspeth and a SW colleague who provided back up on the day. **Of the 7 participants who gave feedback all said it exceeded their expectations!** Elspeth now has an appetite to provide more events like this.
- It should be noted that during the guided walk mentioned above that the group collected and recorded valuable data (species and numbers) for the international Big Bird Count which was subsequently submitted to Birdlife International. *summary report available showing **18 species were recorded.**

This brings us to winter '23/'24 and we intend to continue patrolling the site with an emphasis on water/ice safety messaging and engaging with all users of the site.

It's fair to say that this update is somewhat limited by the fact that it's a snapshot as seen through the eyes of a Scottish Water staff member and a partnership ranger. What is clear is that there will be learning outcomes from our first year of having a ranger *in situ* and that we are resolute in our aim of bringing the site under a continually improving set of management objectives that will mitigate the challenges and improve the enjoyment for visitors and stakeholders alike.

This final phase of the pilot study draws to completion on March 31st 2024. At this point SW will evaluate all the learning outcomes from across all the sites with a view towards agreeing next steps in the management of our sites.

We value your continued support and partnering in pursuit of our joint aims.

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