

The Cot Burn: a Home for Nature

Hidden burns: Burns are small streams. They may come directly from rain water or other surface water e.g. a pond, or emerge as springs from ground water in the rocks below, like the Cot Burn. Over the years, fields have been drained, and water has been piped as supplies for homes or industry. This has resulted in burns that were once visible, now being hidden underground in pipes and culverts. The Cot Burn enters and leaves the Toll Park in culverts, so it can only be seen in the park. Where it once ran past fields, it now runs in an unnatural ditch and is surrounded by buildings, asphalt paths and roads.

Trees by the water: Trees can help prevent bank erosion and stabilise the water temperature for water-living creatures. Trees also provide perches, food and nest sites for birds. Some trees like willows and alders prefer to grow beside water. We have planted other small and medium sized native trees by the Cot Burn for birds and people to enjoy.

Plants in and by the water:

Some plants are adapted to grow in the water. These include tall plants like reeds (**below left**) and short ones like watercress (**below right**).



Other water loving plants grow close to the water's edge like yellow flag iris (**below left**) and marsh marigold (**below right**), shown here by the Kirkton Burn.



Animals: Insects, Birds & Amphibians:

The more diverse the plants, the greater the variety of insects they will attract. Many plants, including the crops that we rely on for food, need insects to pollinate them.

The insects, in their turn, are food for birds like wrens, robins and dunnocks. Insects are also eaten by spiders, fish, reptiles, and amphibians.

Amphibians such as toads, frogs and newts, are special creatures. They need water to lay their eggs (spawn). These hatch to produce swimming young e.g. tadpoles, that can breathe in the water like fish. Once they develop into their adult forms and grow legs, they can leave the water and breathe in the air like us. They are cold blooded like fish and reptiles, but their skin is not scaly. Common newts (smooth newts) have been found in the Cot Burn.

Below left: Common Toad **Below Right:** Common Frog

Frog photo is courtesy of FRAG: Fife Reptile & Amphibian Group.



Loss of suitable habitat means that safe homes for amphibians are becoming rarer. Some also get squashed by traffic when moving to and from their breeding sites. Little streams like the Cot Burn, garden ponds and bog gardens are increasingly important for the wildlife that rely on them.



Above clockwise from top left:

Willow, Alder, Holly and Rowan trees.

Use your smart phone camera to focus on the QR panel on the left to access the Burntisland Heritage Trust website for additional information.

Above left: a variety of plants in and by the Kirkton Burn.

Above right: Celandines looking confusingly like marigolds!

Many plants, like the celandines, that grow on the Cot Burn banks are common in meadows or damp woodland. They cope well with the damp and often shady conditions here.

