



Biodiversity Newsletter

GREETINGS Settle down with your mince pies, mulled wine and Biodiversity Newsletter for tales of birds a-singing, salmon leaping, and geese a-flocking...

Time for Action is now!

The time for action is now, delegates at the recent Falkirk Area Biodiversity Partnership event were told. The event, introduced by Councillor Robert Spears and attended by members of local environmental organisations, community groups, interest groups, environmental agencies and community councils, updated delegates on progress with the Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action Plan and highlighted the importance of community involvement in turning the plan into action on the ground.



While many successful environmental projects have been completed over past years there is considerable scope for greater community involvement in local biodiversity conservation. This event aimed to inspire new ideas for community projects

and encourage everyone to get actively involved. Delegates helped to identify what needs to be done to support local community and interest groups undertake environmental projects and suggest some new projects for the future. The ideas and suggestions will help the Biodiversity Officers to develop and support a range of community biodiversity projects over the coming years.



Several partners also ventured out on a site visit to Carron Glen to witness conservation in action. The reserve, managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, includes a stretch of the River Carron with a large area of adjacent broadleaved woodland. Delegates learnt about the wildlife of the site, management of the reserve, consultation with local people and site users and plans for future work.

Leaping Salmon



Leaping salmon in Falkirk – surely not! Well, you’d be surprised how many salmon make the annual migration up both the River Carron and River Avon to spawn. This autumn has seen healthy numbers of salmon swimming from the sea up these rivers to find suitable sites to lay their eggs. At the right times and in the right conditions salmon can be seen leaping up obstacles such as small weirs and waterfalls in rivers – a spectacular sight.

Along with the iconic salmon, the rivers Avon and Carron also support lampreys. Lampreys are some of the most primitive vertebrates alive today. They are not true

fish. Unlike fish they have no jaw. Instead they have a round sucker-like mouth with, in the adults, strong, rasping teeth. A recent survey of the River Avon found lampreys at 5 different sites along the river suggesting that it supports a healthy number of these peculiar creatures.



In each newsletter we’d like to feature a local wildlife area or species that is particularly important or valued in the Falkirk Council area. If you have any suggestions of ‘wildlife on your doorstep’ that we should include please do let us know.

Wildlife on your doorstep...

Birds Need Cake Too!

Feeding birds helps them to survive cold weather and gives you a chance to watch them up close. Try making this tasty bird cake for them.

Bird cake ingredients and materials

- Block of lard
- Bag of wild bird seed mixture/unsalted peanuts/leftover food – moist bread, pastry, cheese, cooked potatoes, dried or bruised fruit.
- A selection of containers e.g.: clean yoghurt pots, a half coconut shell, or a log with holes in

Method:

- 1 Melt the block of lard in a pan over a gentle heat.
- 2 Once the lard has melted add a few handfuls of bird seed/unsalted peanuts/leftover food.
- 3 Remove the pan from the heat.
- 4 Let the mixture cool slightly, but not set.
- 5 Then fill your container with the mixture. (First attaching string to the container to hang it up)

You can also make cake balls.

Take a small handful of the mixture and roll into balls for placing on a bird table or in a feeder. Or, thread a piece of string through the middle of the ball before it sets to hang it up with.

Photos courtesy of: Falkirk Council, RSPB Images, Julie Stoneman - Butterfly Conservation, Fisheries Research Services.

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What's On

2006 Bat Training Courses

July 31st – Aug 1st 2006

Basically Bats

1st – 3rd Aug 2006

Field Surveying for Bats

3rd – 4th Aug 2006

Insects & their Bat Predators

(For details & costs or to reserve a place contact Neil Middleton: middleneil@msn.com)

Get in touch

To find out more about biodiversity action in this area contact:

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If you have any news, articles, events or ideas for the next Biodiversity Newsletter please send them to the Biodiversity Officer by 21st April 2006.

BIODIVERSITY = THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Biodiversity News



Sustainability Seminar

Management staff from across the Council's Housing and Social Work Services met recently to discuss how they could operate more sustainably. With ideas ranging from dual flush toilets to bird feeders and wildlife gardens a vast array of opportunities were explored. The hundreds of ideas are already being whittled down to a set of smart actions to take forward.

Bean geese

The cold weather sees the return of the Bean Geese to the Slamannan Plateau. So far this year a maximum count of 265 geese has been recorded, up yet again on last years numbers.

Rhody bashing volunteers

On 1st October members of the Council's Development Services Management Team downed pens in exchange for saws and loppers. 14 intrepid volunteers took part in a day of Rhododendron bashing at Muiravonside Country Park as part of this corporate volunteering initiative. Great fun and plenty of fresh air and exercise was had by all.

Action plans

The third and final set of habitat and species action plans in the Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action Plan has been finalised. These plans will be published shortly. The focus of the Falkirk Area Biodiversity Process now turns to implementation of these plans.

Great crested newts discovered

Recent surveys have confirmed the presence of breeding great crested newts in at least four different sites within the Falkirk Council area. Since there are only thought to be around 1000 great crested newts in Scotland, our local population could be very important. Plans will now be developed to protect these rare local residents.

The Right Course

The biggest green space in Larbert and Stenhousemuir is getting greener. Thanks to a partnership between the Tryst Golf Club, Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) and Falkirk Council, 11,000 new trees have been planted and major improvements to the paths across the golf course have been carried out. CSFT carried out the programme of woodland tree and hedge planting with the encouragement of wildlife in mind. The cost of the whole project was £160,000 with funding provided by the Forestry Commission, Falkirk Council, Tryst Golf Club and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Wildlife Counts

Did you know that rare species such as great-crested newts and otters are found in the Falkirk area? Although often seen as one of the more urban places in Scotland, the Falkirk area has a rich array of animals, plants and habitats, many of them found right on our doorsteps in parks, rivers, woods, bogs and even road-side verges.



The Wildlife Counts Project aims to increase people's understanding of local wildlife by offering training to volunteers from local communities to identify plants and animals, and to learn about biological recording. The project aims to involve several communities and sites from the Falkirk, Stirling and North Lanarkshire areas, with the data collected by the volunteers contributing to national and local conservation schemes, such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

The Wildlife Counts Project is run by BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland), a charitable organisation that promotes the gathering of environmental data in order to increase public awareness about biological diversity in Scotland, and to ensure that effective actions are taken to conserve this resource. The project is based at British Trust for Conservation Volunteers Scotland in Stirling and supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils and Falkirk Environment Trust.

Engaging with local people and communities, the Wildlife Counts Project will offer hands-on experience in biological recording, including:

- learning about and looking at tracks, trails and signs of mammals, amphibians and reptiles;
- identifying flowering and lower plants (mosses, liverworts etc);
- watching and listening to bats and birds;
- identifying terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates; and
- accessing and channelling others' skills and knowledge in wildlife identification.

Also provided will be background training on how biological recording is done, and very importantly, why. Local training events, including indoor and outdoor sessions, will start in the spring 2006 and run until the summer of 2007.

The Wildlife Counts Project is being organised by the recently appointed project officer, Dr Claire McSorley. Claire says: "We aim to work with several communities in the Falkirk area, involving anyone that is interested in and enthusiastic about wildlife, but have little or no experience of biological recording. Volunteers will be offered the tools and training to learn more about the animals, plants and habitats in their local area, and at the same time, make a valuable contribution to increasing local knowledge of biodiversity, by submitting biological records. The Wildlife Counts Project aims to introduce as many people as possible to observing and studying wildlife whilst having fun along the way! We hope that for some volunteers this introduction will develop into a lifelong interest."

Although the project is still in its early days, interested volunteers can contact Claire on brisc-wcp@btv.org.uk.

Dr Claire McSorley
BRISC Wildlife Counts Project Officer
www.bris.org.uk

Last Seen Heading North

Normally a southern dwelling bird, a Nuthatch was spotted recently on the bird table at Muiravonside Country Park by the ranger. Reports of this bird over the years gradually moving northwards may just be another sign of the trend in global warming currently affecting us.

Deriving its name from its habit of fixing nuts in the crevices of trees and "hacking" them open, this bird is the only member of its family to breed in this country. It is generally heard before being seen but its unique ability to move both up and down the trunk, its bold eye-stripe and colouring make it a very distinctive species to recognise.

It usually nests in hollows in trees and uses mud to reduce the size of the entrance hole to deter predators. It can generally be found in woodland habitats, parks and gardens.



Biodiversity's for life, not just for Christmas

The days may be shortening, bringing with it the time for hibernation, but there is still plenty you can do at this time of year to help your local biodiversity. Be it in your garden, local park or in the way you celebrate Christmas. Here are a few tips to get you going:



Feed the birds. The ones in your garden become reliant on you once you start feeding them, so keep it up throughout the winter months with a supply of fatty scraps and fruit as well as the usual nuts and seeds. Feed the ducks and swans in your local park too, it'll get you out into the crisp fresh air for some healthy exercise!

Prepare your garden for snowfalls - bring delicate plants inside, or make covers for them before the worst of the frosts occur; tie together multi-stemmed trees, like conifers, to prevent breakages during heavy snowfalls; and keep a small patch of your pond ice free by floating a rubber ball on the surface.

At Christmas, try making your own decorations from natural materials like pine cones, twigs and berries. If you buy a wreath for your door and it contains peat and moss, make sure that they've been obtained from sustainable sources. After Christmas, plant your tree outside, it'll give you a tree for years to come, and you could decorate it with strings of fruit, raisins and popcorn as a present for the birds!

Seeing The Woods For The Trees

There are 2,700 acres of woodlands in the Falkirk Council area and they are coming under the microscope. Falkirk Council and Callendar Estate are working together on what will be the first comprehensive survey of local woodlands. The aim is to identify all the area's woodlands and find ways to revitalise them for community benefit. High-tech geographical information systems will be used to survey all local woodlands and the information will be used for wide public consultation and as the basis for a management plan. The Council and Callendar Estate were awarded nearly £48,000 from the Scottish Executive's Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) Challenge Fund to carry out the project which included holding an urban woodland seminar for landowners on November 18th. WIAT promotes woodlands to improve the lives of people living in towns and cities. Once it has been discovered what our woodlands consist of, who owns them and what needs to be done to protect and improve them, the project steering group will be in a position to work in partnership with local communities and landowners to prepare management plans and a programme of woodland improvement works. The resulting management and enhancement work will benefit both local people and woodland wildlife.

