

life

falkirk biodiversity newsletter

issue 12 | spring 2011

**B is for biodiversity...
that's bugs, bats,
biosecurity, bees,
blackberries, bean geese
and biodiversity stories.**

**This issue of Life is
positively bursting with
biodiversity!**



Biodiversity
Partnership

Falkirk Council

Where Have You Bean Geese?

This winter children from Slamannan Primary School took part in the 'Where Have You Bean Geese?' project. The school worked with the Bean Goose Action Group and artist Andrew MacKenzie on a three month project investigating the UK's most important bean goose flock which winters on the Slamannan Plateau.

Children from the school visited Vane Farm in Fife to view and learn more about geese and migration. They also tracked the geese on the Slamannan Plateau with the help of expert spotters who had been out from first light. Seeing the birds firsthand provided the inspiration for the children to get stuck into a range of creative work over the next few weeks. The fantastic goose paintings, sketches, prints and photos they created all featured in an art exhibition, opened by a wonderful play staged by the children to entertain and educate their audience.

Julie Bell, teacher at Slamannan primary school, said: "The idea that our local area is involved in an important international conservation effort is something that the children can be proud of. We want to show the local community and the rest of Scotland how important Slamannan is."



Year of the Bat 2011- 2012

Eurobats and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) have designated 2011 as Year of the Bat in Europe, with a global campaign set for 2012. Following the success of similar projects in recent years, Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) has decided to celebrate the year with a dedicated biodiversity campaign.

There will be three strands to this campaign, one focusing heavily on public awareness raising and involvement, with the others concentrating on research and conservation action. As 2011 has also been designated as International Year of the Forest, much of the campaign will explore the link between bats and woodlands, for example, a research study using volunteers to regularly survey woodlands will run throughout the year to look at how bats use woodlands.

Other elements include:

- A programme of guided and self led bat walks
- A survey focussing on the distribution of Nathusius Pipistrelle bats in Central Scotland
- A school pack to be sent to all primary schools in the area which includes a bat box kit for the school, a bat identification poster, information leaflets and activities
- Forest School events looking at bats and trees
- General 'Year of the Bat' poster for visitor centres across the Forest.
- A programme of corporate and community events
- A dedicated section on the CSFT website, with links to roost web-cameras

More information on the Year of the Bat can be found here: www.yearofthebat.org

The Bats section of the CSFT website will be available shortly and will be found here: www.csft.org.uk, and will include information on events and walks in Falkirk . For other information, please contact Emilie Wadsworth at emilie.wadsworth@csft.org.uk

Funding for this project has been received from Forestry Commission Scotland and SNH. Invaluable advice has been provided by the Bat Conservation Trust.



Brownfield Bugs

The Falkirk area was at the heart of the industrial revolution in Scotland. Many of Scotland's heavy engineering works and iron foundries were based in the area. With the demise of these industries many of their former premises have been left as large brownfield sites, which have been reclaimed by nature.

Brownfields are any site that has been altered by human activity, which includes not only derelict land in towns but also quarries, old railway lines and disused airfields. Lack of management combined with a low nutrient content often creates an open mosaic of habitats such as species rich grassland, bare ground and early successional habitats. This mosaic of habitats provides a home for a number of animal and plant species. Brownfield sites also provide linkages or 'stepping stones' between more natural areas of habitat which allows species to move through the often unwelcoming urban environment.

Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land was added to the list of UKBAP priority habitats in 2007, however brownfields have featured in the Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action

Plan (FABAP) for some time in the plans for 'Urban Greenspace' and 'Bings'.

Buglife is currently hosting a Natural Talent apprentice who is looking at the incredible invertebrate biodiversity found on brownfield sites. Habitat assessments of sites listed on Falkirk Council's Vacant and Derelict land register have identified several brownfields that are important for invertebrates. During last summer a programme of surveying was undertaken to investigate the invertebrates that live on some of these sites. Several common species in Britain that have not previously been recorded in Falkirk were found, including the Green tiger beetle (*Cicindela campestris*), Violet ground beetle (*Carabus violaceus*), Field digger wasp (*Mellinus arvensis*), and the running crab spider *Tibellus maritimus*.

The Hobo spider (*Tegenaria agrestis*), a brownfield specialist, was previously only known from five locations in Scotland however surveys at Carron Works, Stenhousemuir turned up a new location for this species.



Another important find is the nationally scarce ground beetle *Amara praetermissa*. The only record of this species from Scotland is from Bo'ness in 1980, however surveys last year found it at Carron Works.

These surveys have shown that brownfields not only have a rich industrial heritage but they also have incredibly rich invertebrate populations. Buglife will be working with Falkirk Council to ensure that these important sites are managed appropriately.

Futurescapes: Working in Partnership



The Inner Forth area which stretches from the Forth bridges to the tidal limit at Stirling has long been recognised as being an extremely important area for an amazing range of wildlife. Mudflats at Kinneil and Skinflats which may not be particularly attractive to us, are incredibly important to wading birds and ducks which flock to these areas to spend the winter or to stop-off during their long migration flights in spring and autumn. Farmland in the district is important, home to species such as barn owl, grey partridge, tree sparrow and yellowhammer.

Of course, the landscape of the Inner Forth has seen dramatic changes throughout the centuries with a long

history of industrial and agricultural use leaving an indelible mark and a significant loss of wetland habitat. Today, the pressures on wildlife are still present whether through development, disturbance or the effects of climate change. The RSPB's Futurescapes initiative aims to develop landscape scale conservation across the UK, and has identified the Inner Forth area as an area with huge and exciting potential to redress loss of habitat and protect existing habitats. The idea that 'bigger is better' in conservation terms is not a new one and the RSPB has shown in other areas of Scotland such as Forsinard in Caithness that landscape scale conservation brings real benefits to both people and wildlife. Futurescapes will not only benefit wildlife but has the potential to make the most of opportunities for sustainable flood management, recreation and education. The aim of the Inner Forth project is to provide rich habitats for wildlife via landscape -scale habitat creation and management around the Falkirk and

Alloa area, centred on our Skinflats nature reserve and equally important, to provide diverse green spaces for people to enjoy. Given the ambitious nature of the initiative, a vital aspect of the project will be to build partnerships with Local Authorities, government agencies and other organisations.

The first stage in realising this vision is to investigate the feasibility for landscape scale habitat restoration and creation, collate existing information and to explore and identify interpretation and access opportunities in the area. A Project Officer (Scott Paterson) was appointed in September 2010 with the support of Central Scotland Green Network, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Forestry Commission. Scott is based near Skinflats and currently exploring the Inner Forth area and making contact with interested parties. More details on this exciting project are available from Scott at scott.paterson@rspb.org.uk.

Battling Alien Invaders

The battle against alien invaders is afoot! Many non-native plants or animals can quite happily co-exist with our native wildlife, causing it little or no harm. However, some introduced species can do considerable damage to our native biodiversity. For example Japanese Knotweed spreads rapidly and will out-compete native plants, while American mink have devastated native water vole populations on which they prey.

The Falkirk Invasive Species Forum was recently set up to help progress action to control invasive non-native species across the Falkirk Council area. Its members include interested community groups, landowners, businesses, statutory bodies and Falkirk Council.

Considerable effort has already been put in by a number of local groups to map Japanese knotweed and this year projects are planned to monitor mink and invasive plants along the River Avon and River Carron. Building on this work, the group is currently focusing on developing a pilot project to control invasive non-native plant species along a tributary of the Carron.

The group will be working closely with the Forth Invasive Species Forum and Invasive Species Officer, who will be promoting biosecurity across the Forth catchment area.

If you want to tell us about an invasive non-native species in the Falkirk Council area get in touch with the Biodiversity Officer or use the electronic reporting form on the Ranger Service page of www.falkirk.gov.uk.



Biodiversity begins with a B

Scottish Natural Heritage has recently released a short animated video about biodiversity on YouTube: youtube.com/watch?v=v_otglfIQw4

Biodiversity begins with a B is a darkly comic look at the importance of bees to our natural environment. Featuring the voice of Scots comedian Phil Kay, the video highlights that some bees are not doing so well and promotes a few easy actions - growing wildflowers, using less pesticides, mowing the grass less often - we can take to help support bees and the variety of living things around us.

New Plan for Local Biodiversity

The Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action Plan (FABAP) has recently been reviewed. The new plan, which covers the period 2010-2013, identifies a programme of projects which will help safeguard our vibrant and varied local biodiversity. The consultation draft of the plan is available online at www.falkirk.gov.uk (click on biodiversity in the A-Z menu) or on request from the Biodiversity Officer. The deadline for comments is 18th March 2011.

Have you seen Ratty?

I was a mere youngster last time I saw a water vole (i.e. it's been a while)! Sadly, others are reporting that they too have not seen this cute little mammal for many years. A local resident recently told me that "its at least 5 years since I saw any water voles in the Abbotshaugh area of the River Carron, they were common here 40 years ago." Unfortunately water voles have suffered dramatic declines and many of our local populations may now be extinct. To try and find out if our water voles are still hanging on we'd like you to let us know when and where you last saw a water vole in the Falkirk Council area. E-mail the biodiversity officer on anna.perks@falkirk.gov.uk or Tel: 01324 504863.

Biodiversity Stories

For John Muir Award the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 has evolved into a new Decade of Biodiversity 2011-2020 to continue the celebration of the variety of life on Earth. They have collected a wide range of inspiring Biodiversity Stories showing how groups have engaged with Biodiversity through their John Muir Award activity. In one of the stories, local resident Alistair Findlay of Slamannan, highlights the awe and wonder of a familiar place. Read Alistair's story or download the full Biodiversity Stories leaflet at www.jmt.org.

Orchard Project

This winter 10 local primary schools have planted their own orchards. With orchard packs and lots of support supplied by Falkirk Council, each school planted a mix of eating apple, cooking apple, pear and plum trees. Every school orchard also has blackcurrant, blueberry and blackberry bushes. The project encourages growing a variety of fruit in school grounds to strengthen the links between food and where it comes from and to develop pupils' understanding of food production and biodiversity. (The project was funded from the Falkirk Council Sustainability budget)

What's On

The Falkirk Council Ranger Service will be offering a range of mid-week and weekend walks, as well as several family events during the school holidays this year. For details of events visit www.falkirk.gov.uk or contact the rangers on rangers@falkirk.gov.uk Tel: 01324 504950.

The Jupiter Urban Wildlife Centre will be running a range of events and activities throughout the year. For details contact the ranger at jupiterranger@swt.org.uk or Tel: 01324 486475.

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 31/7/11.