

# life

Falkirk Council **Biodiversity Newsletter**

Issue 17 Winter 2015



## Inspiring Meadows

The free Inspiring Meadows Conference, which was held in Stirling this September as part of the Inner Forth Festival, brought together local authorities, land managers, environmental organisations and community groups with an interest in the creation or better management of wildflower areas. It was hosted by the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative (IFLI) and On the Verge, and was jointly organised by IFLI, On the Verge, Stirling Council and Buglife.

There are many projects across the UK aiming to establish wildflower areas, which are not only fantastic for biodiversity, but also great community assets, as well as being very effective at reducing CO2 emissions. In fact, there are a number of new meadows being developed in the Falkirk area, including IFLI projects at Kinneil Foreshore and Grangepans Meadows, with Buglife and Falkirk Council.

The conference gave nearly 100 delegates from all over Scotland and beyond an opportunity to learn from experienced practitioners and to hear about successful projects. Over half of Scotland's local authorities were represented, including Falkirk, along with delegates from many public bodies, charities, and community groups who were keen to learn and share their knowledge and experience in this field. Topics included site selection and preparation, management, and potential carbon and cash savings. You can find case studies, presentations and other information from the event on the IFLI website at [www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/events/93-inner-forth-festival-2015/139-inspiring-meadows](http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/events/93-inner-forth-festival-2015/139-inspiring-meadows)



## Art in the Park

Avondale Environmental, the HLF and Maddiston Community Council are funding an innovative Art in the Park project at Muiravonside Country Park. The project is designed to promote awareness of rare species which contribute to the breadth of Scottish biodiversity and encourage further exploration of natural habitats. It links the children's poetry in the book 'Imagining Things', by Kenneth Stevens, with Scottish artists and craftsmen working in wood, metal and stone. Working with the local community these artists have been designing seven sculptural pieces to create a trail around the park. Interpretation boards will give more information about the species and the habitats they call home, and the trail will encourage people to explore the park and appreciate the natural heritage on their doorstep.

Work started at Easter 2015 with a public open event at Meadowbank Library. Since then various groups have been working with Kenneth and the other artists to link the poems to different species and places in the park and in August the last of the public open sessions was held. Jim Whitson the 'Blazing Blacksmith' was on site work-shopping elements of the gateway structure which will mark the start of the trail, Kenneth provided poetry readings in a gazebo, the rangers led walks around the proposed route of the trail and Pat the goat from Newparks Farm even got in on the action greeting children in the car park.

Species and habitats highlighted by the trail will be, Great Crested Newts, Wildflower Meadows, Owls, Bats, Swallows, Orchard Environments and Bees. Public bat walks by Echoes Ecology have taken place this year and wildflower seed collection and growing events and apple celebration days are also planned. See the FCT events calendar on line for more details.

[www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org](http://www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org)

This project is part of the larger three year 'Learn Explore Enjoy' programme funded by HLF aimed at improving Muiravonside Country Park. The Park Ranger is always interested to hear from volunteers who would like to get involved in delivering this exciting project which ties together the natural and social heritage of the site.

Contact [simon.bowers@falkirkcommunitytrust.org](mailto:simon.bowers@falkirkcommunitytrust.org) for more details about getting on board.

## Bridgeness Biodiversity

'Bridgeness Biodiversity' is an exciting project that will manage a brownfield site and wildflower area in Bo'ness for wildlife and people. The project will manage a brownfield site known locally as Bridgeness Ship Breakers for the UK priority habitat 'Open Mosaic Habitat on Previously Developed Land' (OMH), as well as creating and managing a wildflower meadow in the Grangepans area which is currently amenity grassland. Both Bridgeness Ship Breakers and Grangepans act as a vital green corridor that links important habitat and allows the movement and mixing of wildlife throughout Bo'ness.

During a recent survey, Bridgeness Ship Breakers was identified as being important for wildlife, particularly invertebrates such as the Hobo spider (*Tegenaria agrestis*) which is uncommon in Scotland and typical of brownfield sites; this site is also important for wildflowers with over 90 species being recorded so far.

With the help of volunteers from the local community, this project will remove invasive buddleia, control scrub and brambles and clear litter to protect the site's wildlife and make it a safer place for the local community to use and enjoy.

At Grangepans amenity grassland, the project will create and manage a wildflower meadow for wildlife and people. A diverse range of native species of wildflower and grasses will be planted through seed and plugs with the help of volunteers and local schools. Work has already started on site to prepare the ground for sowing.

Buglife will be working in partnership with Falkirk Council and the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative (IFLI) and the project is funded and supported by Falkirk Environment Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund through IFLI and European LIFE funding.

If you're interested in volunteering on the Bridgeness Biodiversity project and for more information, please contact Suzanne Bairner on [suzanne.bairner@buglife.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.bairner@buglife.org.uk) and 01786 447504.



## Bog Squad

Butterfly Conservation Scotland's 'Bog Squad' is a team of volunteers dedicated to improving the health of Scotland's peatland habitats. Peatlands are fascinating places with specialised flora and fauna well adapted to living in the harsh environment. Over the last year we have been working at Easter Drumclair Bog in Limerigg wood near Slamannan to remove invasive spruce scrub which is threatening this special bog. We'll be returning there this autumn and winter period to continue our work. If you would like to get involved please contact David Hill on [peatproject@btconnect.com](mailto:peatproject@btconnect.com) or for more information check out our blog: [www.bogsquad.weebly.com](http://www.bogsquad.weebly.com).

## Battling invaders

The River Forth Fisheries Trust has worked closely with the Falkirk community in previous years to tackle the Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) that are problematic within the area. Tackling invasive species under the FINNS programme aims to improve biodiversity and allow for easier access and better habitat next to our watercourses. This increases the quality of the area for plants and animals.

The work undertaken includes surveying and monitoring invasive species with the help of volunteers. Species targeted include Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed. These species are tackled in a strategic way with top-down catchment control. The third year of the Forth Invasive Species programme (FINNS3) focuses on priority areas due to an unfortunate lack of funding which limited the areas that could be treated.

Work to be undertaken within the Carron and Avon catchments in 2015 includes:

### On the River Carron:

- Japanese Knotweed treated by contractors arranged by the Trust from Fankerton to Checkbar roundabout.
- Trust staff intend to treat Japanese knotweed from Checkbar roundabout to the Railway line at Stirling Road and further downstream if possible.

### On the River Avon

- Japanese knotweed control by the River Avon Federation (RAF) along the whole of the river.

Funding permitting, the next programme intends to build on the efforts from previous years and by liaising with Falkirk Council, other members of the Falkirk Invasive Species Forum and volunteers we will continue the effort to control the problem in these catchments.

For information about training and other events please sign up as a volunteer: [www.fishforth.co.uk/inns/volunteer/](http://www.fishforth.co.uk/inns/volunteer/)

Contact: Amy Fergusson  
[a.fergusson@fishforth.co.uk](mailto:a.fergusson@fishforth.co.uk)  
07510699741



## Avonglen Wildlife Haven

The Avonglen quarry, near Polmont, is home to a wide range of wildlife including the rare Great Crested Newt. Since quarrying stopped in the 1980s it has gradually returned to nature. However, recently it's had a helping hand from Falkirk Council, Froglife and local volunteers.

In early 2015 conservation charity Froglife, with Falkirk Council, cleared and deepened three ponds as part of their Scottish Dragon Finder Project. This work ensures that the ponds remain suitable for a host of wildlife including great crested newts. A group of local volunteers also cleared ponds and planted trees, as well as building hibernacula to provide a safe and sheltered place for the newts to spend winter.

The population of these rare newts at Avonglen is estimated to be around 200, making it a really important breeding site.

Surveys show that following this year's work the newts successfully returned to the ponds to breed. There is lots of other wildlife on the site including invertebrates such as solitary bees and pond insects. The woodland, ponds, grasslands and bare ground areas are all great for wildlife such as woodland birds, butterflies, and mammals.

Future plans for the site include: tree planting, creating nest sites for sand martins and barn owls, pond management, and more surveying to get a better picture of the wildlife that the quarry is home to.

Falkirk Council has been working hard to prevent damage to the site by motor vehicles, however pedestrian access is welcomed. For more information about the site contact the ranger service: Tel: 01324 504950.

## The Wildlife Information Centre

Do you love spotting wildlife? Perhaps you even make a note of what you see. Or maybe you're a seasoned wildlife recorder. Either way, you'll be delighted to know that The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) is now able to receive biological records from the Falkirk Council area.

The centre gathers and manages all sorts of plant, animal and habitat information, which can then be used by a wide variety of groups, organisations and businesses to inform their work and make sure it takes full account of local biodiversity.

For more information visit:  
[www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk](http://www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk)



## Mini Orchards

As part of the IFLI Action for Nature project, Central Scotland Green Network Trust have turned their attention to Orchards for 2015. Orchards are a wonderful, but sadly diminishing resource, with many of the small orchards in our traditional growing areas of the Forth Valley and Clyde Valley being replaced by commercial orchards in England or Europe.

The "Plant a mini orchard" campaign aims to work with 30 primary schools in the Forth Valley to help them create and look after an orchard in their schools grounds. The official definition of an orchard is 5 fruit trees, so each school will be provided with 5 apple trees, along with all the resources needed to plan, plant and look after the orchard. Included in the pack is advice on all aspects of orchard management and maintenance, as well as a Teachers Resource Pack which shows how orchards can be used in the classroom for all areas of the curriculum.

Funding has been received from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative and CSGNT. Forth Valley Orchards Initiative is providing valuable assistance to the project, and will be running training courses on orchard management over the summer and autumn.

More information on the campaign see CSGNT's website: [www.csgnt.org.uk/activities/plant-a-mini-orchard](http://www.csgnt.org.uk/activities/plant-a-mini-orchard). For more information on IFLI, go to: [www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk](http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk) and for details on the training events, go to: [www.forthenvironmentlink.org/projects/forth-valleys-orchards/projects/workshop-programme](http://www.forthenvironmentlink.org/projects/forth-valleys-orchards/projects/workshop-programme)

## Pond Creation

In spring 2015 Froglife, in partnership with Falkirk Council and Falkirk Community Trust, created four new ponds at Muiravonside Country Park. They also did work to improve an existing pond. The area is important for Great Crested Newts as well as other pond wildlife and the new ponds help to provide a much larger and more robust area of habitat for the newts to use. It's amazing how quickly creatures will find a new pond and make it home. Already there is plenty of wildlife in the new ponds, including newts!



## Owl Babies

The Falkirk area Barn Owl nest box project is now in its 5th year, with nest boxes located across the Falkirk Council area. 2015 saw 12 barn owls successfully fledge, plus 5 kestrel chicks. Great news for our local barn owls!

For more information about the project contact Lesley Sweeney Tel: 01324 504950.



## Orchids Count

Volunteers helping to count the helleborine orchids at Almond Bing this summer were delighted to find hundreds of orchids in flower. Well over 230 orchids were identified. Whilst most were the commoner Broadleaved Helleborine, some showed signs of evolving towards other much rarer variants of the orchid, such as Young's Helleborine.

## Greenspace Funding

Communities across Scotland will soon be able to apply for up to £12,000 for local greenspace projects thanks to a new grant scheme being launched with the proceeds generated from the sale of carrier bags by Tesco. It is anticipated that there will be two funding rounds per year over the next three years. The first funding round opens on 19 October 2015 and will close on 30 November 2015. The scheme is open to community groups, charities and some public sector organisations and will fund capital improvement projects such as parks, play areas, community gardens and other greenspaces. The scheme is managed by environmental charity Groundwork, working in Scotland with Greenspace Scotland. <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/get-ready-for-new-community-grant-programme.aspx>.

## What's On?

For details of forthcoming outdoor events check out the Outdoor Events Diary at [www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/environment/countryside-management](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/environment/countryside-management)

The Inner Forth Landscape Initiative is offering a wide variety of events including walks, talks, celebrations, activities, workshops and training courses around the Inner Forth. For details have a look at the events calendar at [www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk](http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk)

## Get in Touch

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

The Biodiversity Officer, Abbotsford House, David's Loan, Falkirk FK2 7YZ

Tel: 01324 504863

E-mail: [biodiversity@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@falkirk.gov.uk)

If you have any news, articles, events or ideas for the next issues please send them to the Biodiversity Officer by 30/4/16.



Falkirk Council

Images courtesy of: Falkirk Council, Falkirk Community Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Jan Smith, and David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))