

3.4 Awareness and Knowledge

Aire agus Eòlas

Objective: To raise awareness of biodiversity and related issues, and help children and young people to learn about local nature and wildlife.

Amas: Aire a thogail mu bhith-iomadachd agus nithean buntainneach, agus clann is daoine òga a chuideachadh gus ionnsachadh mu nàdar is fiadh-bheatha ionadail.

Background

Cùl-fhiosrachadh

All Highland's Biodiversity Action Plans identify general lack of awareness on the biodiversity of Highland as a key issue. Highland supports 75% of the UK BAP priority species which are known to occur in Scotland (40% of the UK priority species). This means Highland is the most important place in the UK for threatened, rare and declining wildlife.

If people don't know how important Highland biodiversity is they may be more likely to damage it (albeit inadvertently) and less willing to support projects that help conserve, enhance and celebrate it.



Lack of awareness amongst children and young people, and on marine and soil biodiversity were highlighted in the 2010 Highland BAP as key issues. Despite projects

to tackle each of these issues, they remain priorities for future action.

Opportunities

Cothroman

Wildlife Tourism: There is growing recognition of the value of wildlife and green tourism, and this is a growing issue in Highland.

Citizen Science: Increasingly, funders such as SNH are prioritising projects that include a 'citizen science' element.

Local Biodiversity Groups: Many of the local biodiversity groups have websites and have in the past run projects that raise awareness of biodiversity generally or on specific habitats or species. There may be scope to draw together a Highland-wide project to help the local groups engage with a wider local audience.

The issues, updates, project ideas and case studies for Awareness and Knowledge have been grouped under the following three sub-headings:

General Interest in Wildlife
Children and Young People
Marine Biodiversity

General Interest in Wildlife

Ùidh Choitcheann ann am Fiadh-bheatha

Issues

Cùisean

There is a general lack of interest and awareness of nature and what the public can do to help local wildlife. The majority of Highland residents are not aware of the wildlife that share their homes, gardens and surrounding areas.



Update

Cunntas às Ùr

Highland Biodiversity: The Highland biodiversity website¹ has been renewed and continues to grow. News and events sections are regularly added (as time allows). Annual forum events are held in Inverness & Nairn and Easter Ross, and conferences / networking events are held each Spring. This takes a lot of officer time and in 2014 this role was passed on to the Highland Environment Network as part of a larger contract to provide administrative support to the Highland Environment Forum. This contract will run until March 2017, but requires an ongoing funding

¹ www.highlandbiodiversity.com

commitment from The Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Urban Flora of Scotland: The Botanical Society of Scotland recently launched a new project on the Urban Flora of Scotland, which aims to bring together botanists and members of the public to survey the flora of our towns and cities.

Wildlife Gardening: There is a lot of information available on gardening for wildlife in many sources ranging from books, magazines and newspapers to TV programmes to the internet and social media.²



² Further information on planting for wildlife can be found at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/habitats-and-ecosystems/greenspaces-and-gardens/wildlife-in-gardens-and-allotments/gardening-for-biodiversity-at-home/> and on many other web sites.

Case Study

Sgrùdadh Cùise

Planting the Future

A' Planntachadh am Ama Ri Teachd

The idea for Planting the Future came from a suggestion that the Caithness Biodiversity Group could promote the regeneration of Thurso River Juniper through propagation and replanting. This developed into a wider project to collect and propagate local wildflowers in a nursery area.

The objectives of the project are to enable people with learning disabilities and others to benefit from therapeutic gardening; and to create a source of native plants and trees for use in biodiversity projects in Caithness. Caithness Biodiversity Group and Key Community Supports, who work with for

people with learning disabilities, are developing the nursery.

A suitable plot of land was secured and leased through Thor House and the site, which comprises a hard standing area with raised beds, a wooden shed, cold frames and a wildflower area, was developed during the Summer of 2012.

The photo shows Caithness Countryside Volunteers sowing bee friendly flower and grass mix in May 2012.



Future Action

Gnìomh san Àm ri Teachd

24. Wildlife Gardening Project

Pròiseact Gàirnealaireachd Fiadh-bheatha

Rationale: There is greater interest in growing food and demand for allotments. Some local groups have identified the potential to work with new audiences through a gardening project, and the Caithness Biodiversity Group has started a similar project in Thurso.

Project Proposals

24.1 Develop links with local allotment and gardening groups, and provide advice on gardening for wildlife.

24.2 Run a pan-Highland Wildlife Gardening Project with events, competitions & garden visits, funded by HEF partners & led by the Local Biodiversity Groups.

Lead Partner: Highland Environment Forum

Supporting Partners: LBGs, P, BBCT, THC, SNH, RSPB, other HEF partners, Gardening Groups, Garden Centres & Nurseries

25. Nature Connections

Ceangalan Nàdair

Rationale: Local wildlife knowledge is being lost due to our lack of connection with the natural world. Older members of the community and those involved in managing the land often have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the natural world, and there could be great benefit in helping others to learn from them.

Project Proposals

25.1 Run a nature project for all ages to help communities to learn from their elderly members.

25.2 Run a Biodiversity and the Arts project to investigate how nature influences the arts (art, music, prose etc)

Lead Partner: Highland Environment Forum

Supporting Partners: LBGs, THC, SNH, WES, SGA, OU iSpot

Children and Young People

Clann agus Daoine Òga

Issues

Cùisean

There is a concern that school children have little knowledge or connection with the wildlife on their doorstep, and there is a lack of capacity amongst teachers and support staff to enable children to find out about it in interesting and practical ways.



Update

Cunntas às Ùr

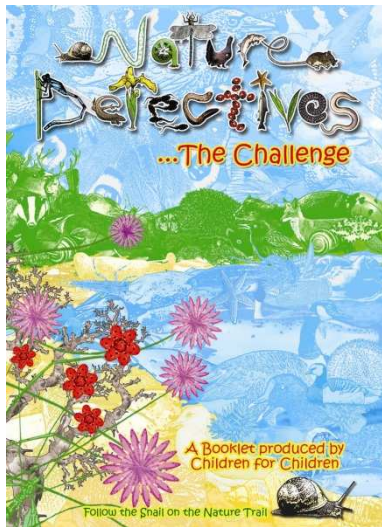
Eco Schools: The Eco Schools programme was running very successfully in Highland. Many schools secured and were maintaining green flag status, and biodiversity was one of the topics they focused on during this process.

However, with the loss of dedicated officer support and the increasing pressures placed on head teachers this initiative seems to have slipped down the priority list, and some Highland schools are losing their green flag status.

Schools Work: The Council Rangers, RSPB, RAFTS & Wildthings all work with schools on wildlife-related projects and outings. There is a lot of great information available on various websites (e.g. Grounds for Learning³,

³ <http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland/>

Woodland Trust nature detectives⁴, SNH⁵) but more needs to be done to promote these resources in schools.



Nature Detectives: Pupils and teachers from South Lodge Primary School in Invergordon worked with a local artist to prepare workbooks that could be used throughout Highland to help children identify and learn about their local wildlife.

The project had input from the Council Biodiversity Officer and Easter Ross Biodiversity Group, and the booklets were issued to 38 Highland schools. Work started on a Gaelic version, but this and further promotion work in schools has ceased due to pressures of other work.

Cairngorms Nature is working with schools through supporting skills development, and promoting the John Muir Award and initiatives like OPAL⁶ (Open Air Laboratories, a UK-wide citizen science initiative that allows **you** to get hands-on with nature, whatever your age, background or level of ability).

⁴ <http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/resources-for-teaching/>

⁶ <http://www.opalexplornature.org/aboutopal>

The John Muir Award is an environmental award that encourages people of all backgrounds to connect, enjoy and care for wild places through a structured yet adaptable scheme⁷.



Forest Schools: Forest Schools are a learning approach that offers all learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

The ethos is shared by thousands of trained practitioners across the UK and beyond, and its roots reach back to early years' pioneers in outdoor learning and across the sea to Scandinavia.^{8 9}

SNH has further resources for teachers looking to take classes outdoors available online.

⁷ <https://www.jmt.org/jmaward-about-the-award.asp>

⁸ <https://www.forestschools.com/>

⁹ <http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/>

Case Study

Sgrùdadh Cùise

Teaching in Nature

Teagasg ann an Nàdar

SNH funded a project that aimed to give teachers the time and confidence to take classes into the countryside.

A group of five teachers from different schools in Inverness were given time to meet at Merkinch Local Nature Reserve with The Highland Council Ranger, who showed them some of the highlights of the LNR and the potential for interactive lessons outdoors. The teachers then met again to work through ideas for their different class visits as a group. Supply cover was provided on both occasions to allow the teachers time to get involved in the pre-class visit to the LNR.

These teachers are now in a far better position to lead future classes outdoors as well as mentoring other teachers in their own schools.



Future Action

Gnìomh san Àm ri Teachd

26. Eco Schools Co-ordinator

Co-òrdanaiche Eag-Sgoiltean

Rationale: The Eco Schools programme lost its officer support, and some Highland schools are losing their green flag status. The Council Rangers do a wonderful job raising awareness of wildlife and green issues in local schools, but there is no central officer support to help and encourage schools to continue with this programme.

Project Proposals

- 26.1** Employ a dedicated volunteer or member of staff to work closely with Teachers and Rangers, helping Schools to re-engage with the Eco Schools Programme and other green initiatives such as the John Muir Award, and to access resources and support for wildlife-related work as they need it.
- 26.2** Encourage links between schools and farms, crofts and estates to help children learn from practical people who work the land.

Lead Partner: The Highland Council

Supporting Partners: SNH, RSPB, JMT, WES, SGA, NFUS, CC, other HEF Partners

Marine Biodiversity

Bith-iomadachd Mara

Issues

Cùisean

Marine biodiversity in particular was identified in the 2010 Highland BAP as a key area where our knowledge is lacking, both in terms of the range and extent of specific habitats and species, and in terms of the impacts we are having on our marine environment in general. Even in fishing communities, knowledge of the marine environment is negligible.

We need to be more active in terms of educating children and adults about marine biodiversity and the issues facing it, learning from experiences elsewhere, using innovative methods and active hands-on experience to engage audiences and retain interest.



The seven Highland LBAPs with a sea coast identified a range of marine biodiversity issues, most of which need to be tackled at a national or international level. However, there are things we can do at a Highland or more local level, as was shown by the designation in 2008 of Lamlash Bay on Arran as a Community Marine Conservation Area and No-Take Zone.

The current discussions on Marine Protected Areas in Highland present new opportunities both in terms of managing our marine resources, and in terms of raising awareness and expanding our collective knowledge of the biodiversity of the marine and coastal environment.



Update

Cunntas às Ùr

Marine Working Group: The 2011 Biodiversity Conference focused on marine biodiversity, and a presentation on underwater biodiversity was given to the first meeting of the expanded Highland Environment Forum in September 2013. A Highland Marine Project Group was set up, and meets twice annually to deliver the Seashore Project.

Seashore Project: The Highland Seashore Biodiversity Project started in January 2013, and will run until December 2015. It is delivering multiple outputs (see Case Study below).

Case Study

Sgrùdadh Cùise

Seashore Biodiversity Project Pròiseact Bith-iomadachd Cladaich

The Highland Seashore Biodiversity Project is a three year project that began early in 2013, and will run until December 2015. It aimed to encourage, enthuse and share knowledge about the Highland Seashores with local communities and visitors.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Highland Council and The Crown Estate, it had a broad spectrum of criteria to meet and big targets to achieve.



The project gathered momentum easily through the years. There is a natural enthusiasm coupled with curiosity for all things marine, it was just a case of how to deliver events that would tap in to that underlying appeal.

The beauty of the project was is that it was able to have events across the full spectrum of human interest. This ranged from pure natural history with its citizen science element of training seashore surveyors, to seaside family fun roadshows with sustainable seafood stalls and demos, stories from the sea, sand sculpture competitions, rock pooling and touch tanks.

Day-long festivals were held all around the coast, celebrating local marine heritage and

culture through song, art and music. The Countryside Rangers lead a number of smaller biodiversity days, where aspects of the coasts heritage and natural history were explored. These events ranged from very serious seashore surveys to an intense session of seashore play and exploration.



Two and a half years into the project, it has delivered all its criteria and more than doubled its original targets. The events attracted huge audiences:

- 1,597 people attended 7 Festivals,
- 2,528 people took part in 8 Roadshows,
- 1,065 people participated in 16 Biodiversity Days.

In addition, the project trained 86 Seashore Surveyors, and there are currently 12 Seashore Specialists verifying records.

Still in budget, the Seashore Project is going beyond its original specification by carrying on with 4 more festivals, 5 more biodiversity events and more workshops for surveyors.

At the end of the project it will be important that the momentum continues. With this in mind the interpretation and equipment budgets have created a central pool of items and resources, stored and managed by The Highland Council Countryside Rangers, for Rangers and community groups to use at future events.



The Project Co-ordinator has been working with partners to ensure that some of the work will continue, and the Management Team is considering how to build on the legacy of this project through a future Highland Marine Heritage Project.

Lastly, it is important to recognise the tremendous voluntary contribution that has gone into this project from individuals and specialists alike, not to mention the additional contribution from the Project Co-ordinator.

Future Action

Gnìomh san Àm ri Teachd

27. Marine Heritage Project

Pròiseact Dualchais Mara

Rationale: The Highland Seashore Biodiversity Project identified a tremendous interest in seashore wildlife, and there is a desire to continue the momentum established through this Project and find out more through further marine events.

Project Proposals

27.1 Secure funding for and run a second marine awareness raising project, focusing on Highland's coastal heritage and traditional links with the sea. The project could include opportunities for children to appreciate marine biodiversity through boat trips, drop-down cameras or even links with research trawlers.

A funding bid was worked up for a Wester Ross Herring Rediscovery Project which would improve our understanding of the life cycle and spawning grounds, and teach children about marine biology and our cultural links with herring fishing. It was thought this would be better delivered across Highland, and this could form part of a Highland Marine Project.

Lead Partner: Highland Environment Forum

Supporting Partners: THC, SNH, MCS, SEPA, MFP, RAFTS, CE, JMT, HBRG, Field Clubs, Museums, Fishing Groups

