

Highland



BIODIVERSITY

THE VARIETY OF LIFE

HIGHLAND BIODIVERSITY FORUM 2011 REPORT



**HIGHLAND COUNCIL CHAMBERS, INVERNESS
SATURDAY 2 APRIL 2011**

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1.0 BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Highland Council area holds at least 40% of the high priority species listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which makes Highland the most important place in the UK for threatened, rare and declining biodiversity.

The Highland Biodiversity Partnership was set up to provide guidance and support to an existing network of local biodiversity groups, and to make progress on the key strategic biodiversity issues in the Highlands. The Partnership meets twice a year to discuss biodiversity matters in Highland, whilst a wider Highland Biodiversity Forum meets annually to hear about progress and provide feedback to the Partnership.

The 2011 Highland Biodiversity Forum was held in the Highland Council Chambers, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, from 10.00am – 4.00pm on Saturday 2nd April 2011. The purpose of this event was to provide an opportunity for all those involved and interested in Highland's biodiversity to find out more about what has been happening at both local and Highland-wide levels.

The day started with an update from the Highland Biodiversity Officers on progress towards the delivery of the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan. James Merryweather then gave a very enthusiastic and well-received presentation on his four new computer-based guides to Highland Biodiversity.

The main theme of the morning discussion was the marine and coastal environment, and there were a number of presentations on marine surveying projects. There was a brief workshop session before lunch, where participants had the opportunity to feed in their thoughts on possible marine and coastal projects that could be taken forward at a Highland-wide level in the next few years. Representatives from the Local Biodiversity Groups gave updates on their work in the afternoon (see Appendix Two – Speakers Biographies).

40 participants attended from a range of organisations and local groups (see Appendix One – Attendee Listing). The event was chaired by Councillor Audrey Sinclair, (the elected Independent Councillor for Highland Council Ward 06: Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh) in her capacity as Chairperson of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership.

Feedback from the event indicated that all the participants (100%) found the presentation and updates sessions very or quite useful and the workshops very or quite useful. 65% of participants said that they intended to take action on the issues raised during the day. (See section 10 – Feedback for more details).

2.0 PROGRAMME

The programme for the day was as follows.

- 10.00am **Registration**
Tea / coffee
- 10.30am **Welcome and Introduction**
Chairperson: Councillor Audrey Sinclair
- 10.40am **Highland Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2012: Progress Update**
Janet Bromham & Jonathan Willet, Highland Council
- 11.00am **Launching Four New DVD Guides to Highland Biodiversity**
Dr James Merryweather, Highland Ecologist
- 11.15am **An Introduction to The Marine Act**
Shona Turnbull, Highland Council
- Marine Mammals and Offshore Windfarms**
Prof Paul Thompson, Cromarty Lighthouse Field Station, Aberdeen University
- Monitoring Cetaceans off the West Coast of Scotland**
Gemma Cave, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
- Recording Highland Underwater Life**
George Brown, Seasearch (N Scotland)
- 12.15pm **Discussion Session: Highland Marine & Coastal Project Ideas**
- 1.00pm **Lunch**
- 2.00pm **Local Biodiversity Projects & Groups Feedback**
- Nature Detectives**
Lawrence Bews, Gina Bates & Children from South Lodge Primary School
- Projects in Skye & Lochalsh**
James Merryweather (Chairman, Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum)
- Caithness Biodiversity Group Update**
Phyllida Sayles (Secretary, Caithness Biodiversity Group)
- Update from Inverness area**
Katy Martin (Countryside Ranger & Inverness & Nairn Biodiversity Group)
- Sutherland Partnership Environmental Fund**
Ian Evans (Assynt Field Club & Sutherland P'ship Biodiversity Group)
- Wester Ross Environment Network Update**
Tom Forrest (Chairman, WREN)
- Easter Ross Biodiversity Group Update**
Janet Bromham (on behalf of the Easter Ross Biodiversity Group)
- The River Peffery Project (Easter Ross)**
Meryl Norris, BTCV Natural Talent Invasive Species Apprentice
- Lochaber Biodiversity Group Update**
Jonathan Willet (on behalf of Lochaber Biodiversity Group)
- 4.00pm **Feedback, Conclusions and Closing Remarks**
Councillor Audrey Sinclair

3.0 HIGHLAND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2010-2012: PROGRESS UPDATE Janet Bromham & Jonathan Willet, Highland Council

Highland Biodiversity Officers Janet Bromham & Jonathan Willet gave a joint update on the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan, which can be downloaded from the Highland Biodiversity Partnership website www.highlandbiodiversity.com. This is a three year Plan covering the period from 2010 to 2012, which was launched at last year's Forum. It identified eight strategic issues and proposed 24 projects for members to take forward at a Highland-wide level to address these issues. Janet and Jonathan summed up progress over the last year as follows:

Issue 1 Biological Recording & Data Management

1.1 Project Facilitation *Target: 7 projects linking national partners with local biodiversity groups by 2013 (Lead Partner: Scientific & Technical Advisory Group).*
Progress Report: The project is behind schedule: the promised data that would inform this is still awaited and may not be fit for purpose. Also the delayed announcement about the Scottish Biological Data Sharing Forum is hampering local delivery due to a lack of a strategic national steer.

Issue 2 Local Biodiversity Group Capacity

2.1 Highland Biodiversity Groups Capacity Building Programme *Targets: 7 LBAP Project Plans, 7 funding bids, 21 events, 7 leaflets, 7 websites, 7 training courses by June 2012 (Lead Partners: Highland Council & Local Biodiversity Groups).*
Progress Report: We are over half way through this project, and progress has been slow. Funding has been confirmed for the third year, which means that the project will draw to a close in June 2012. However, two of the Local Biodiversity Groups are experiencing severe difficulties and although Rowantree Consultants are working with the remainder to help them produce project plans, submit funding bids, raise awareness and run training courses, it looks like some of the targets will not be met.

2.2 Volunteering *Target: 3 practical projects involving volunteers to be initiated by 2011, 7 local groups to have representation from local volunteers by end 2011 (Lead Partners: Local Biodiversity Groups).*
Progress Report: The Caithness and Easter Ross Biodiversity Groups have made links with local volunteering groups (Caithness Countryside Volunteers and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers). Representatives attend meetings and joint projects are being worked up or are in progress.

Issue 3 Invasive Non-Native Species

3.1 Invasive Species Mapping Project *Target: Database, maps & report by March 2010 (Lead Partner: Invasive Species Forum).*
Progress Report: Project delivered.

3.2 Giant Hogweed Control Co-ordinator *Target: Co-ordinator post Feb 2010 – March 2012 (Lead Partners: Highland Council / SNH).*
Progress Report: Contractors in place, project ongoing.

3.3 Rhododendron Strategic Control Project *Target: One -year project to start in Summer 2010, funding for extension (Lead Partners: Forestry Commission / SNH).*
Progress Report: Project underway, second and final year of funding confirmed.

3.4 Invasive Species Apprentice – BTCV Natural Talent *Target: One-year apprentice placement starting 2010 (Lead Partners: Conon District Salmon Fishery Board / British Trust for Conservation Volunteers).*

Progress Report: The apprentice (Meryl Norris) is in post and has been busy. She gave a presentation on the River Peffery Project in the afternoon.

Additional actions that have been taken forward include the Inverness Invasive Species Project, Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, Salmonberry control in Caithness, liaison with Highland River Basin Management Plan, support for £1million+ River and Fisheries Trusts project, and lots of partner action.

Issue 4 Biodiversity Awareness in Highland

4.1 Awareness Raising *Targets: regularly updated website, 1 Forum event, 1 newsletter & 4 press releases per annum (Lead Partner: Highland Council).*

Progress Report: Progress has been mixed. The annual Forum continues to meet and press releases are issued regularly. However, the web updates and newsletter are very behind schedule. This is an area the biodiversity officers are keen to address, and it has been decided to drop the Highland newsletters in favour of contributing to the national biodiversity newsletter and to ensure the website is updated on a monthly basis. Jonathan circulates regular e-mail updates to a large distribution list.

4.2 Nature Detectives *Target: Primary School booklet produced by June 2010, rolled out to other Highland schools in 2011/12 (Lead Partner: Highland Council).*

Progress Report: This project was recently launched, and Lawrence Bews and six children from South Lodge Primary gave a presentation on it in the afternoon. Primary schools across Highland have been invited to help their pupils take up the *Nature Detectives* challenge and further resources, including a Gaelic version of the booklet, are being developed.

4.3 School Biodiversity Resources *Target: 1 Local Group to contact & work with a High School teacher per annum (Lead Partners: Local Biodiversity Groups).*

Progress Report: The Rangers have links with schools in their area, and some local groups have worked with High School pupils through them. One local group (WREN) has a developed links with a teacher but as yet, no additional projects have been taken forward.

4.4 Marine Sub Group *Target: Presentation to the 2010 Highland Biodiversity Forum (Lead Partner: Environmental Research Institute).*

Progress Report: The presentation was given as requested last year, and this year's Forum has a marine theme. However, the Marine Sub Group is on hold until a specific deliverable Highland project can be identified.

4.5 Marine Biodiversity Project *Target: Marine awareness raising project to be presented to the Partnership in December 2010 (Lead Partner: Marine Sub Group).*

Progress Report: No specific marine or coastal awareness-raising project has been identified as yet, the Partnership is keen to see what ideas emerge from today's workshops.

4.6 Soil Biodiversity *Target: Newsletter and website article, press release, presentation at 2011 Forum (Lead Partner: Highland Biodiversity Partnership).*

Progress Report: Some progress has been made on this issue nationally and locally with a series of posters put together by James Merryweather, but more can be done on a Highland level and this may be the focus of a future Forum presentation.

Issue 5 Planning, Building & Infrastructure

5.1 Road Verge Biodiversity Project *Target: Joint project to be agreed in 2010 (Lead Partners: Highland Council / Transerv).*

Progress Report: This project has been delayed due to a lack of data about the extent of this resource, it needs a strategic approach. Funding constraints may be an

opportunity to “sell” this project. The Caithness Biodiversity Group is working on a related project (see Phyllida Sayles presentation).

5.2 Biodiversity & Planning Guidance & Training *Targets: EPS Guidance Note early 2010, standard planning conditions produced with training for planners by end 2010 (Lead Partner: Highland Council).*

Progress Report: The European Protected Species Guidance Note is currently being consulted on, and the resulting document will form supplementary planning guidance to the Highland-wide Local Plan. Three area planning courses were delivered in February / March 2011, and the feedback has been very positive. Further biodiversity training is planned for later in the year.

Issue 6 Sustainable Use of Habitats & Species

- | | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| 6.1 | Local Priorities Lists | } | |
| 6.2 | Developing Links | } | |
| 6.3 | Native Woodland Project | } | These issues have been discussed at Partnership meetings, but no progress has been made. |
| 6.4 | Deer Management | } | |
| 6.5 | Uncontrolled Muirburning | } | |
| 6.6 | Wild Harvesting PhD | } | |

Issue 7 Local Sources of Wildflowers, Trees & Shrubs

7.1 Highland Wildflower Nursery *Target: Site identified by Spring 2010, Business Plan written by the end of 2010, Nursery started 2011 (Lead Partner: BTCV).*

Progress Report: The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers are taking this forward. The business plan is almost completed but they have been experiencing difficulties securing a site. This project will happen when the location is finalised. The Caithness Biodiversity Group also has a nursery project, which Phyllida Sayles summarised in her talk.

Issue 8 Local Nature Reserves

8.1 Local Nature Reserves *Target: 1 Local Nature Reserve / equivalent to be created per annum (Lead Partner: Highland Biodiversity Partnership).*

Progress Report: The Partnership agrees this is something that ought to come from communities themselves, and although Jonathan has spoken with representatives from two community groups about the potential for a Local Nature Reserve in their area, no Group has taken it further. Merkinch LNR is doing well.

8.2 Community Gardens *Target: List by end 2010, future Forum to focus on gardening for wildlife in communities (Lead Partner: Highland Biodiversity Partnership).*

Progress Report: No progress has been made on this issue, although the Council is supportive of allotments and the REAL Inverness project is hoping to include a biodiversity element to its forthcoming EcoHub project at Inverness High School.

Conclusions

Jonathan concluded by saying that projects that are going ahead have local and / or national stakeholder buy in, plus policy drivers and some funding available. The invasive species work has all this; biological data has only the former attribute. Although the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan is not delivering everything it set out to do, it is delivering projects for which there is support and this is having a positive impact on Highland’s biodiversity.

4.0 LAUNCHING FOUR NEW DVD GUIDES TO HIGHLAND BIODIVERSITY

Dr James Merryweather, Highland Ecologist

James Merryweather gave a presentation on the series of four DVD / CD ROM biodiversity guides he has produced. These guides cover the Seashore, Ferns, Flowerless Plants and the problem of *Rhododendron ponticum*. They contain a wealth of information, and James has made them freely available to anyone interested in these subjects.

A flyer was issued in the delegates packs (see Appendix Four) with an order form, and several hundred copies were ordered on the day. Anyone wishing their own copy should contact Janet Bromham at janet.bromham@highland.gov.uk.

5.0 MARINE & COASTAL PROJECTS

5.1 An Introduction to The Marine Act

Shona Turnbull, Highland Council

Shona Turnbull, Coastal Planner Officer for the Highland Council, presented a tour of the plethora of information that has been produced about our marine environment over the last couple of years. She noted that this was her personal interpretation and not necessarily the views or opinions of the Highland Council.

Why do we have all this marine activity?: legislation & policy

It began with the *EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)*. Its purpose is to protect the marine environment across Europe and to achieve ‘Good Environmental Status’ (GES) of the EU's marine waters by 2020. It is also intended to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. (The economic element especially appears to be reflected strongly at the Scottish level.) The MSFD has been transposed in to UK law by the *Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009* and our *Marine Scotland Act 2010*.

Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

How did the Marine Act come together?

There were lots of working groups and background documents produced. Two key documents are: *Scotland's Seas: Towards Understanding their State* and *Sustainable Seas for All* – the pre-marine bill consultation. *The Scotland's Marine Atlas 2011* and other supporting documents will also be of great value in building up the local picture.

What does the Marine Act do?

The Marine (Scotland) Act provides a framework which will help balance competing demands on Scotland's seas. It introduces a duty to protect and enhance the marine environment and includes measures to help boost economic investment and growth in areas such as marine renewables. The main 5 measures are:

1. *Marine planning*: a new statutory marine planning system to sustainably manage the increasing, and often conflicting, demands on our seas;
2. *Marine licensing*: a simpler licensing system;
3. *Marine conservation*: improved marine nature and historic conservation with new powers to protect and manage areas of importance;
4. *Seal conservation*: much improved protection for seals and a new comprehensive licence system and
5. *Enforcement*: a range of enhanced powers of marine conservation and licensing.

The *Pre-Consultation Draft Marine Plan* and eventually, the *Scottish Marine Regional Plans* are key elements coming out of the Marine Act. These two documents, the latter in particular, may be the key areas of interest for local marine biodiversity.

What have we got locally to help us do our bit to protect our fabulous coastal and marine resources in Highland?

The Highland Wide Local Development Plan will be the overarching Council policy document that in turn will have lots of Supplementary Guidance for specific issues. The intention is also to adopt relevant documents that have recently been prepared such as the Coastal Development Strategy and the new generation of Aquaculture Framework Plans as additional Supplementary Guidance. Thus, there are lots of documents out there that could provide site specific information for your area.

How can you contribute?

- Decide what you want: what's important or special about your coastal and marine area?
- Pool the information you already have: local knowledge is vital.
- Look for key themes in wider policy documents and play to them.
- The evolution of the Scottish Marine Regional (SMR) Plans may be where you're main influence can be now. SMR Plans could be shaped by you. There has already been consultation on where the boundaries should be for each Marine Region. It seems likely that Highland will have 2 or 3 regions. It's also looking likely that a few areas with existing Coastal Partnerships e.g. Moray Firth, will be piloted first. Subsequent areas may therefore take years before their SMR Plan is developed.

There is a huge amount of data out there and you've already made a start in the Local Biodiversity Action Plans. You will also be best placed to know where the gaps are. You should feed these into the SMR consultations. Websites such as *The Marine Life Information Network* (MARLIN) can also be a good starting point but it does take a bit of time and patience to get out the information you're after (see Appendix three).

In conclusion, it's time for action!

- This is an exciting time for our marine and coastal environment!
- Take part in ensuring the biodiversity of our fabulous coastal and marine areas are given appropriate consideration in any development.
- Get out there: enjoy it, record it, share it.

5.2 Marine Mammals and Offshore Windfarms

Prof Paul Thompson, Cromarty Lighthouse Field Station, Aberdeen University

The EU has set target of 20% of energy from renewables by 2020 and off-shore wind is essential to help meet these targets. There have been 3 rounds of development of windfarms – we are now in the 3rd round. There are likely to be 6000-7000 wind turbines around our coast by 2020. The challenge is the need to balance nature conservation & sustainable development.

Research is ongoing re how the windfarms affect marine mammals. These include:

1. Coastal species (Bottle-nosed Dolphins, Harbour and Grey Seals)

Animals from Special Areas of Conservation may interact with wind farm sites

2. Offshore species

Occasional presence at wind farm sites

3. Harbour porpoises

Abundant, widespread and occur regularly within wind farm sites

Key Issues for these mammals are:

- Risk of injury
- Behavioural responses
- Displacement

A range of organisations are trying to understand the impact of noise (eg navy sonar, pile driving, seismic surveys) on these animals. Surveys have been undertaken in the Moray Firth in 2009/2010 – both visual and acoustic

- Passive acoustic surveys (July-Oct 2009)
- Aerial surveys (Aug-Sept 2010)

This information is being feed into environmental assessments, but still more work is needed to answer key questions, including:

- How significant might this disturbance be for protected populations?
- How do we optimise mitigation measures to minimise these potential impacts?

5.3 Monitoring Cetaceans off the West Coast of Scotland

Gemma Cave, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

Gemma Cave, Education Officer with Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust began by giving some background information about the HWDT. The Trust was established in 1994 (based in Tobermory, Isle of Mull), its main roles are research and education and it has 6 staff, assisted by volunteers and consultants. The Silurian is the HWDT research vessel & floating classroom.

The organisation's mission statement is: *HWDT is dedicated to enhancing knowledge and understanding of Scotland's whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans) and the Hebridean marine environment through education, research and working within Hebridean communities as a basis for the lasting conservation of local species and habitats.*

The Hebridean environment is a unique situation for Europe - influenced by warm Atlantic waters (North Atlantic Drift), cold waters from the Arctic, coastal currents and tide. This creates a complex system of various habitats and promotes high species diversity. The mixing of different water bodies reflects in the number of species recorded for the region and the distribution of the species. The gradient in temperature is key with common dolphin, basking shark and minke (all typical warm water species) arriving in spring from south, and white beaked dolphin (cool water species) mainly located in northern part of the research area. Deep water species such as northern bottlenose whale, sperm whale and Risso's dolphin can be seen in the area.

There are 24 species of cetacean (whales & dolphins) found in the waters, ranging from common, occasional, rare and strandings. Some are resident while others are seasonal. 14 of these species are priority for conservation (intern., EU, UK). There are a number of direct and indirect threats to their survival, including bycatch, noise pollution, ship strike, climate change.

These species include:

Harbour Porpoise: Previous findings showed preference for inshore coastal waters
Shift in 2009-2010 to slightly more offshore waters

Bottlenose Dolphin: Seen year-round in coastal waters
Third largest population in the UK
Photo-id indicates 2 sub-groups & several more mobile animals

Common Dolphin: Summer visitor to coastal and offshore areas
Group size usually 30 to 50 but can be >100

White-beaked Dolphin:	Typically seen in open water and in northern Hebrides Possible niche partitioning with common dolphins
Killer Whale:	Photo-identification indicates 9 individuals Recent findings suggest mammal eaters
Minke Whale:	Apparent recent decline in population; photo-ID 130 animals Photo-id shows evidence of boat collisions & marine litter injuries
Basking Shark:	Apparent increase in numbers; photo-ID 10,000 individuals Change in prey abundance

HWDT has recorded a decline in minke whale numbers and an increase in basking sharks. It may relate to a decline in sand-eel and herring meaning less food for the minke. On the other hand, less fish means less predators for (zoo) plankton and more food available for basking sharks. However, whether this is a natural fluctuation (and therefore might turn back), or whether it is a long term permanent change, we don't know. It is important we keep on doing this research!

HWDT continue to monitor these mammals using a system of visual surveys, acoustic surveys, photo-identification and the Community Sightings Programme (including strandings).

5.4 Recording Highland Underwater Life

George Brown, Seasearch (N Scotland)

Diver and marine biology enthusiast George Brown spoke about the Seasearch Project. The aim of Seasearch is: *To gather information on seabed habitats and associated marine wildlife in Britain and Ireland through the participation of volunteer recreational divers.*

Additional aims include:

- To gather data, particularly for areas where little data exists or where there is a conservation need
- To provide training in recording skills
- To make quality assured Seasearch data available to our partners and the general public
- To raise public awareness of marine biodiversity

Seasearch Scotland 2000 -2010 has included more than 50 trips, 30 courses, 300 divers and generated more than 2,000 records. The process for collecting information is as follows:

- Divers complete comprehensive record forms after each dive.
- All Scottish forms are sent to Calum Duncan for collation
- Entered by consultant → Marine Recorder
- Passed to UK Co-ordinator Chris Wood
- Merged with all other UK & Ireland data
- All data passed to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- JNCC upload data to www.searchnbn.net

All Seasearch data is being used to identify possible Scottish Marine Protected Areas and Marine Conservation Zones (E/W). The data is used as follows:

- Made available at www.searchnbn.net
- Regulatory advice on fish-farms
- Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative (Clyde, Shetland and Sound of Mull)
- Species identification guides
- Loch Torridon dive guide
- Important species and habitats records
- Plugged knowledge gaps

- Informing “Your Seas Your Voice” sites

An example of Seasearch taking action is that Seasearch divers with the Community of Arran Seabed Trust, trained by MCS in Scotland, gathered evidence to support their proposal for a No-Take Zone in Lamlash Bay. They are still working to get the remainder of the bay protected from mobile fishing gear.

For more information about Seasearch contact:

Calum Duncan, Scotland Programme Manager, Marine Conservation Society; tel: 0131 226 6360 e: calum.duncan@mcsuk.org or visit www.mcsuk.org

Chris Rickard, Seasearch North Scotland e: seasearch_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk

George then gave a very interesting slideshow to illustrate some of the marine life and interactions between species that he has observed in his 40+ years of diving.

6.0 DISCUSSION SESSION: HIGHLAND MARINE & COASTAL PROJECT IDEAS

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION 1:

Existing projects

- Otter surveying
- Moray Firth Partnership
- SAC implementation
- Loch Torridon Project
- HBRG Jellyfish survey
- MCS Jellyfish Survey
- Beach Guardians
- Seawatch
- Photo ID work – Aberdeen Uni / Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
- Shore thing – Marine Biological Assoc
- Population dynamics of harbour seals in Loch Fleet
- Wester Ross Fishery Trust – Herring
- Bird surveys – WeBS / Ringing on the Sutors
- Mink Surveys
- SNH site condition monitoring
- Dolphin Defenders
- Lochinver schools – what lives in our seas.
- Rosemarkie Beach interpretation
- Fishery Trusts – Salmon and Sea Trout
- Moray Firth Sea Trout project
- Cromarty Firth Sea Chest
- Sea Cromarty Sparkle
- MFP Under the Surface banners
- Sea birds at Sea surveys JNCC
- Ongoing seal population surveys

Gaps

- None / hardly any projects relating to humans and the marine coastal environment
- There was a project in Lochinver – fishing, environment and local community
- Boat trips/ wildlife tours – possible links not utilised

Why have successful projects worked?

- Involving people
- Not too complicated
- Visual themes
- Not bombarding with science
- Encourage commitment
- Support mechanism

Key issues

- Ranger service last (only) resort of expertise and now last bastion on knowledge
- Lack of time with SNH not helping their staff to get involved in projects
- Lack of knowledge in the more remote areas
- Lack of critical mass of knowledgeable individuals

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION 2:

Possible projects identified from the preceding discussions:

Training

- Easy coastal marine survey workshop/ roadshow for adults using James's DVD. Collate existing resources and surveys for this e.g. MCS Jellyfish ID sheets, iSpot.
- Primary School workshops using a simplified version of James's DVD.

Research

- Research Herring and its return to inshore waters.

Resources

- SNH slide pack on Moray Firth (early 1990's?) needs updating to modern day.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION 3:

Existing projects

- Sweep netting for sea trout – many spp caught
- WDCS Seasearch along West coast
- Ruadh Reigh Lighthouse seashore events
- Ranger Service
- SNH seabed mapping re MPA's
- Wester Ross Marine Rescue group ROV work
- Cetacean watches
- Tain Field Club events and knowledge
- Torridon
- Academia re Marine renewable – ERI/ISAM/ICIT = lots of research.
- IFGs

New projects

- Work with industry. Academia
- Skye & Lochalsh – mesh work and raise profile – LNRS/ More snorkelling for schools.
- Seachest
- Wester Ross Herring project
- Disseminating information – between active groups and to local communities.
- Info and recording ships or ferries ad charter boats
- AMGs - currently wild fisheries and aquaculture
- Working groups for ICZM
- INNS on coast – issue of ballast

Issues

- Risk from ship to ship / rescue tugs

Resources/ Ideas

- Seasearch for divers – positive = running. Negative – data correct? data gaps?
- MARLIN website = positive add records rock pools
- ISPOT website to help with ID
- Biobuzz/Blitz – “experts” and public
- Dornoch beach results over time – data collection
- Highland Council Rangers
- Rockpool rambles – recording sheet
- How do we engage with fishermen? Loch Torridon Project
- SAMS education people
- Ask fishing farming co's if staff could contribute to projects

7.0 NATURE DETECTIVES

Lawrence Bews, Gina Bates & Children from South Lodge Primary School.

Assistant Head Teacher Lawrence Bews and the children from South Lodge Primary School in Invergordon gave a presentation about the Nature Detective Project.

Lawrence began by saying that Scottish Education is presently experiencing a revolution in the way in which the curriculum is delivered by means of “A Curriculum for Excellence”. This has huge implications for both teaching and learning, where the role of adults and children alike takes on new significance. A child-orientated emphasis assumes that the direction and emphasis of the learning process is dictated to by the children themselves. It is the adults’ role to facilitate this by becoming co-learners themselves, adapting and changing to meet the identified interests of the pupils. This is a much more dynamic, open-ended approach to more traditional teaching methods and demands flexibility and resourcefulness on the part of the teacher if it is to be a successful.

The Nature Detectives booklet has been produced with this in mind. Adapted from an original Orcadian version, it has been modified to reflect the rich and varied character of wildlife throughout the Highlands. The aim is for children to use it as a tool or framework for experiencing their environment at first hand, as a way of developing an appreciation and love of their surroundings.

The children then gave a presentation on how they selected and produced the images for the booklet. Copies were available for people to take away. There was also a big display on show, which had been put together by local artist Gina Bates, who worked with the children to produce the booklet.

The project was developed with help from the Easter Ross Biodiversity Group and funding from the Big Lottery Fund and Leader 2007-13 Programme.

8.0 LOCAL BIODIVERSITY GROUP PRESENTATIONS

8.1 Projects in Skye & Lochalsh

Barbara Macritchie , Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum)

James Merryweather had to leave the Forum as he had a prior engagement to attend in Skye, so Barbara Macritchie gave a short update on behalf of the Group. She said there is still lots of enthusiasm within the Group, but that they had had a fairly quiet year.

- The mink project is ongoing. It is providing training and receiving lots of good publicity.
- There was an issue of members not coming to meetings, so they have changed the format to be more of a forum, which has been quite successful.
- Project work has been quiet.
- SLEF are planning an event in May to tie in with Biodiversity Week. They are at the early stages of planning for the Balmacara Biodiversity day and local producers market, but hope to have lots of activities and local people involved.
- The Group hope to have more to report next year.

8.2 Caithness Biodiversity Group Update

Phyllida Sayles (Secretary, Caithness Biodiversity Group)

Phyllida Sayles began her presentation by looking at some of the special places in Caithness, which is small in area but rich in habitats. These areas included the RSPB Reserves at

Forsinard, Broubster and Dunnet Head, Dunnet Forest, Achvarasdale Woods, Latheron, Latheronwheel, Tacher, Dirlet, Newton Hill, Munsary Reserve, Thurso River and the cliffs & coast!

The Caithness Biodiversity Group has many people involved and is very active, partly due to the enthusiasm of the individuals. Recent and ongoing CBG project include:

- **Salmonberry Control Project:** Project that aims to eradicate the Salmonberry, which is widespread in Caithness. Ongoing work includes surveying, trial of control measures, awareness raising (leaflet) and publicity (possibly seminar).
- **Road verges:** 11 key stretches of verge in Caithness have been identified and CBG is working with Highland Council to manage them better.
- **Great yellow bumblebee project (*bombus distinguendus*):** CBG is working with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Scottish Agricultural College to provide nectar rich grassland on farms that will be monitored for bumble bees by volunteers trained by the Trust. 11 farms have been sown with pollen & nectar-rich crops. There will be parallel education & farming packs.
- **Thurso River Walks:** This is a long term project to improve public access, enhance habitat for native species and juniper conservation along the Thurso River. This will be led by the Caithness Partnership. CBG hope to begin work this year on one small part of the river bank, using the skills of the Caithness Countryside Volunteers to improve the native woodland.
- **Planting the future:** The main objective of this project is to create a source of native, local provenance plants and trees, which can be used by the Caithness Biodiversity Group (CBG) for future biodiversity projects and which can also be supplied/sold to organisations and individuals looking for local provenance seeds and plants. CBG are especially keen to propagate local juniper because it is slow to propagate and they have identified potential future projects that will require juniper. The second objective of the project is to involve people with learning disabilities in setting up and tending the nursery. Horticultural therapy (or therapeutic horticulture) provides therapy and rehabilitation through outdoor activity and physical exercise in a supportive atmosphere. This will be a joint community project with Ormlie Community Association, Pentland Community Enterprises and Key Community Support.

8.3 Update from Inverness area

Katy Martin (Countryside Ranger & Inverness & Nairn Biodiversity Group)

There is no active Local Biodiversity Group in Inverness & Nairn as such, but Ranger Katy Martin gave an update on some of the biodiversity projects she is involved with:

- Merkinch LNR work has continued. Our people counter figures show 25,000 visitors in 2010. Moves are afoot to include Carnac Point in the LNR. Benches have gone in, hydrologist dip wells have been installed and monitoring has begun. The old ferry ticket office is open regularly through the summer to provide information to visitors.
- Junior Rangers programme: 10 sessions over summer last year. Children in upper primary school came along to participate. We've almost completed a SROI programme.
- Also Green Gym: about 300 people have been out on a Green Gym session in the last year. They are proving extremely popular. We are training local people to identify species. These Green Gym people completed a frog and toad survey with me in June. We didn't find any,

but that's not to say they aren't there. They have also been mammal trapping, orchid identifying, bird watching (not just with me but with RSPB, The Harbour Master, and other 'experts' too).

- Inverness Bat Group has gained an award from Greeninverness which will allow expansion of the group, buying some bat kit, promotional materials and training. Activities include building and putting up bat boxes, checking bat boxes and bat watches. They discovered a new Natterer's bat roost at Dochgarroch, which is at the northern limit of its range.
- Housing Expo: The Rangers had an on-site presence, working with school groups and others to promote biodiversity at the Housing Expo.
- Small blue butterfly at Ardersier: collecting seed to expand range of kidney vetch and hopefully small blue butterflies.
- Production of SNH leaflet: 'Simple Pleasures easily found around Inverness'. Katy is leading guided walks on Wednesday's through April to promote this leaflet.
- Ecoschools: the Rangers are working with primary and secondary schools to help them achieve awards (Green Flag being the top award) under the Ecoschools programme. We help make stuff happen, help gain funding and we even have a request to help a school find a flagpole to fly their Green Flag. Hands on improvements include making willow sculptures and school grounds improvements for wildlife, pupils and staff.
- Highland Print Studio: The Rangers are working with vulnerable groups and taking them to green spaces around the city and outwith.

8.4 Sutherland Partnership Environmental Fund

Ian Evans (Assynt Field Club & Sutherland P'ship Biodiversity Group)

Ian Evans, a member of Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Group and Assynt Field Club, gave an update up the Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Fund.

The Fund was set up by the Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Group in the spring of 2009, with a three year operational life. It amounted to £36,000, derived from SNH (£20,000) and Leader (£16,000). Its purpose was 'to enable community/voluntary organisations to implement new projects supportive of the Sutherland Biodiversity Action Plan'. The maximum grant was set at £6,000 and applicants were expected to contribute at least 5% of the overall costs in cash or kind.

At the last reckoning (in March), the Fund had made offers of some £18,000, with applications for a further £13,000 currently awaiting final approval. Successful applications have been received from a wide range of groups, including the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments for Scotland, Culag Community Woodland Trust, Gearchoille Community Woodland Group, East Sutherland Bird Group, Assynt Field Club, Brora Golf Club and Stoer Primary School Parent Council.

The nature of the projects funded (or likely to be funded) is equally wide-ranging. Two are for site management to enhance biodiversity (cleaning out an old curling pond at Ardgay, and planting up a large area of species-poor grassland at Golspie). Four are informational (including sets of playing cards relating to the Cape Wrath Firing Range and Sutherland/Caithness bat information cards). Two were designed to help protect an arctic tern colony at Brora (badges and leaflet). One was an environmental education project involving Stoer and Lochinver Primary Schools, the Ranger Service and the community, which looked at the changes in the landscape, its management and biodiversity, over the last 2500 years. The rest aim to improve our basic knowledge of the biodiversity of Sutherland, information on which is extremely patchy. They include a field survey of aquatic habitats on the Culag Community Woodland Trust property at Little Assynt, complemented by the operation of a Malaise Trap, computerisation of the results of 14 years of Garden Bird Surveys by members

of the Assynt Field Club, and publication of an account of the 899 species of fungi so far recorded in Assynt by a local mycologist. The split in funding objectives is roughly a third front-of-the-house, a third site management, a sixth improving our knowledge of Sutherland biodiversity, with a sixth still to be allocated.

Finally, much of the credit for the setting up of the Environmental Fund and its successful promotion and operation must go to William Sutherland, Manager of the Sutherland Partnership since September 2005, who started his well -earned retirement yesterday.

8.5 Wester Ross Environment Network Update

Tom Forrest (Chairman, WREN)

Tom started his presentation by thanking outgoing chair of WREN, Aaron Forsyth for his input over the years. He then talked about activities, including:

- Wester Ross Yearbook – produced and now being sold online and at events. The Group plan to use the money from sales to produce an environmental fund.
- A new promotional leaflet is in production.
- The Group were involved in a biodiversity weekend at end of May 2010 in Gairloch, which was successful but wet!
- July 2011 –“ Walkabout Gairloch” events planned with many activities – WREN will be involved.
- A new mink survey project with Elaine Fraser using tunnels and rafts has just started.
- Members are also very active with their own projects.

8.6 Easter Ross Biodiversity Group Update

Janet Bromham (on behalf of the Easter Ross Biodiversity Group)

Janet reported on some changes to the Easter Ross Biodiversity Group (formerly called the ‘Ross & Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Group). The Group has always operated slightly differently, with a more agency-focused membership than some of the other Local Biodiversity Groups in Highland. It has refocused to provide a network for other wildlife / environmental groups in the area, and will hold an annual forum event, inviting local groups and agencies to tell people about their activities. The other main purpose of the Group is to meet annually to review and help deliver the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

8.7 The River Peffery Project (Easter Ross)

Meryl Norris, BTCV Natural Talent Invasive Species Apprentice

In Scotland our rivers are classified and managed under the Water Framework Directive. This very important piece of legislation produces river basin management plans that are set out to protect and improve the water environment. This links in with the Fishery management plan produced to protect and improve the water bodies under the fishery trusts remit. The main aim of the WFD is to ensure water bodies do not fall below *good ecological status* and are restored to *good ecological status* if necessary by 2015.

The River Peffery runs through the town of Dingwall. The project aims are to:

- Restore the conservation value of the Peffery and its riverside.
- Improve amenity value for the people of Dingwall.
- Restore the sea trout of the Peffery and the habitats that support them.
- Reduce flood risks in Dingwall by restoring more natural river processes.
- Act as a demonstration catchment for delivery of WFD using a partnership approach

The project partners include Cromarty Firth Fishery Board / Trust; Highland Council; Moray Firth Sea Trout Project; Wild Trout Trust; SEPA; British Trust For Conservation Volunteers; Dingwall Environment Group; Forestry Commission and SNH

Works done to date on the River Peffery include:

- **1995 Habitat Survey:** *The detailed habitat survey shows how suitable the substrate in the river bed is for fish habitat.*
- **2008 Invasive Non Native Plants Survey:** *Mapped the distribution and abundance of Japanese knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Himalayan balsam and Rhododendron.*
- **2009 Walkover survey to map issues:** *Walkover survey along 250m transects, identifying all issues posing a threat to the river quality*
- **2009 Electro-fishing survey:** *Measured all trout fry caught in 5 min timed sessions. The results show us numbers are poor in the lower reaches of the Peffery, improve in middle reaches but decline again at the very upper section...obviously pinpointing a problem.*
- **2009 Wild Trout Trust visit and report:** *Collating data from the above surveys and making recommendations*

A number of issues have been identified, these include:

1. Invasive alien species degrade the rivers ecological status, they can cause erosion (Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed) and can be harmful to human health (giant hogweed)
2. Dredging / straightening which results in loss of instream habitat, loss of bankside cover, increased erosion and siltation and increased downstream flood risk.
3. Removal of riverside trees which results in loss of cover for fish, reduced nutrient input, increased water temperature and increased downstream flood risk.
4. Sediment from agriculture -which results in loss of spawning habitat, loss of juvenile fish habitat and changes in flora and fauna
5. Contamination with fish factory effluent – which creates a biosecurity risk - possible transfer of pathogens from farmed fish to wild stocks.
6. Obstructions to fish migration (Weir at Strathpeffer STW/ Culverts on burns) which can cause loss of access to spawning habitat and reduction in production of juvenile sea trout
7. Loss of amenity value – need to increase riverside access, potential to create new walks, interpretation and issues of rubbish dumping / litter

Development of project:

- Develop Restoration Plan and work programme from Wild Trout Trust report.
- Link partners to tasks, using the relevant members of the North Highland Area Advisory Group.
- Raise funding, initially through the SEPA Restoration Fund with match funding from Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust and MFSTP.
- Development of partnership with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to provide contract labour.
- Commenced works 2010.

Taking action:

The restoration plan and plan of works to be carried out have been developed by the Wild Trout Trust walkover surveys. Two clean up days have been held since 2010 with another one planned for 6th April 2011. The Wild Trout Trust have drawn up a plan of instream modifications to improve instream habitat and Tree planting is being undertaken to restore riverbank habitat and increase biodiversity. BTCV are an excellent source for volunteer labour

Next steps:

- River Restoration Centre Report.

- Meetings with SEPA and Scottish Water to progress Strathpeffer weir.
- Explore options with Cromartie Estates for upper sections.
- Explore options for lower reaches with Highland Council and Dingwall Environment Group.
- Plan specific restoration actions with Moray Firth Sea Trout Project and Wild Trout Trust and prepare grant applications.
- Continue invasive species removal works.
- Continue river clean up days.
- Look at forestry drainage with Forestry Commission.

8.8 Lochaber Biodiversity Group Update

Jonathan Willet (on behalf of Lochaber Biodiversity Group)

Jonathan Willet made a short presentation about the Lochaber group. He noted that Lorna Anness stood down as chair and the group have been moving on without the drive of a chair. The group has produced a promotional pop-up and poster and plan to participate in a SNH biodiversity event in October 2011. Individuals from the group have been commenting on the Lochaber Community Plan. However, group still working on deciding exactly what their role and way forward is.

Group held a first joint meeting with SLEF - which was very positive and could be repeated. Suggestions from this meeting included joint projects for Atlantic Hazelwoods and Rhododendron.

The group has ideas for projects through the Capacity Building project – including determining habitat quality training for Deer Managers. They hope to have more to report next year.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the conference was successful, giving the local participants an opportunity to find out what is happening at a local and national level, and to network with other groups. The discussion from the workshops will be reported to the next meeting of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership in June, and if Members agree, a Marine Sub Group will be set up to take some of the ideas forward.

10.0 EVENT FEEDBACK

Delegates were asked to complete and return feedback forms at the end of the event. Twenty completed forms were returned - representing 50% of all attendees.

Timing

1. Do you think this is a good time of year to hold this event?

	2009 (MARCH)		2010 (MARCH)		2011 (APRIL)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
YES	27	96%	20	100%	20	100%
NO	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	28	100%	20	100%	20	100%

All of the attendees (100%) felt that early spring was a good time of year to hold the event.

2. Is a Saturday event better than a week-day event?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
YES	15	75%	13	65%	16	80%
NO	4	20%	2	10%	2	10%
EITHER	1	5%	5	25%	0	0%
NO ANS	0	0%	0	0%	2	10%
TOTAL	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

80% of participants preferred a Saturday for the event.

3. Do you have any comments on the timing of the day itself?

Comments included:

- *“For speakers, 15 minutes is a bit tight and almost guarantees going over time. Starting at 10.00 is great.”*
- *“Good timing”*
- *“Move workshops to after lunch or schedule lunch for 1.45pm -2.45pm”*
- *“Needs chair to be more rigorous in keeping speakers to time”.*
- *“Things did slip a little (timing-wise) but if the programme had been much longer it might have made travel awkward.”*
- *“Timing good – but I didn’t have to travel very far.”*

Organisation

4. How would you rate the organisation of the event?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	16	80%	12	60%	11	55%
Good	4	20%	7	35%	8	40%
Average	0	0%	1	5%	0	0%
Poor	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
No ans	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%
Total	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

95% of the attendees rated the organisation of the event as excellent or good.

4B. Did you feel that you received all the information you needed for the event?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
YES	18	90%	18	90%	16	80%
NO	0	0%	1	5%	1	5%
N/R	2	10%	1	5%	3	15%
TOTAL	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

80% of participants felt they received all the information they needed for the event. All participants were supplied with a map to the venue in advance.

Comments included:

- “*Couldn’t find anything on the web about the event*”.
- “*Thought useful to also have the programme on the website.*”
- “*Was just a little bit late, as I was out of the office for the week prior, but then it was all in the delegate park, so was fine in the end*”.
- “*Wider and earlier advertising may have increased numbers attending.*”

5. How would you rate the venue and catering?

	2011	
	Number	%
Excellent	12	60%
Good	8	40%
Average	0	0%
Poor	0	0%
Total	20	100%

All of the attendees (100%) rated the venue and catering as excellent or good.

The Presentations

6. How useful did you find the presentations and update sessions?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Very useful	17	85%	10	50%	16	80%
Quite useful	3	15%	10	50%	4	20%
Not useful	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

As in previous year, all the participants (100%) found the presentation and updates sessions very or quite useful.

The Workshops

7. How useful if you find the workshop sessions?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Very useful	6	30%	7	35%	4	20%
Quite useful	7	35%	10	50%	16	80%
Not useful	2	10%	2	10%	0	0%
N/A	5	25%	1	5%	0	0%
Total	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

All of the participants (100%) found the workshops very or quite useful.

8. Are there any additional points you would like to make?

- *"The break-out session did have to be cut a little short – which was unfortunate."*
- *"Review workshop output."*
- *"As always not enough time for the workshops."*
- *"Good idea to theme the talks."*
- *"Marine focus was of particular interest to me this year, wouldn't have been quite so useful for me if it had been terrestrial biodiversity as I'm not from the region so wouldn't contribute much."*
- *"Workshop plenary."*
- *"Workshop scratched the surface. If HBP is to facilitate marine projects, will require some effort to pull together ideas."*

The Day Generally

9. What part of the day did you find *most* useful, and why?

- *"Afternoon roundups and marine overview."*
- *"All good – good mix". Marine issues useful though key people from SNH missing. Still not clear how locals can get involved (except on paper)."*
- *"All of it - good mix of talks and updates."*
- *"All presentations were useful, gained some knowledge from all."*
- *"All sections had something to offer..."*
- *"All."*
- *"Feedback from groups was good – progress updates and guides was informative – networking useful and Q&A session useful and interesting."*
- *"Hearing what others have achieved. Some good models to follow."*
- *"Local groups reports."*
- *"Lunchtime discussions and afternoon Q&A session."*
- *"Marine."*
- *"Morning talks."*
- *"Networking – speaking to other people."*
- *"Networking opportunities and marine focus overall, esp. Morning presentations."*
- *"Only attended morning but this was very useful."*
- *"Session of marine issues because it was very informative about an area of which I am largely ignorant."*
- *"The biodiversity groups feedback, good to find out what is happening with neighbouring groups."*
- *"The reports from different areas and the main presentations provided ideas and materials I can use in my journalism."*
- *"Updates from groups helps share progress, ideas and enthusiasm."*

10. What part of the day did you find *least* useful, and why?

- *"Afternoon evening presentations as I do not know enough about local groups."*
- *"Discussion session – it was too short to achieve very much."*
- *"DVD Guides."*
- *"I found something of interest in all presentations."*
- *"Progress update."*
- *"The Marine Act info – too little info and it wasn't placed adequately in context."*
- *"Workshops – but only because of my lack of knowledge."*
- *"Workshops – only because of no pulling together."*
- *"Workshops – too short."*

11. Will you or your organisation be taking action on any of the issues raised today?

	2009		2010		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
YES	11	55%	15	75%	13	65%
NO	4	20%	1	5%	3	15%
N/R	5	25%	4	20%	4	20%
D/K	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

65% of participants said that they would be taking action on the issues raised. Issues to be addressed included:

- *“Continue to explore how best to use public records for supporting marine research and management.”*
- *“Following up on many new contacts; encouraging recording and reporting cetaceans in the area to HWDT; hope to offer local presentations and school visits.”*
- *“I will use some it in my newspaper columns.”*
- *“Marine conservation issues.”*
- *“May look at some marine aspects”.*
- *“Nature Detectives – pass on the idea.”*
- *“Not at present – all little time.”*
- *“Several good ideas for projects and events.”*
- *“Use of the DVD’s and encouraging more biodiversity projects – looking at partnership working more actively.”*
- *“Will be asking about Seasearch for land lubbers/ rock poolers. Will be asking the British Sub-Aqua Club about snorkelling for schools.”*
- *“Will probably look at writing or updating LBAP. Also will discuss a marine or coastal project.”*

12. How can the Highland Biodiversity Forum help and support you further with this issue?

- *“Communication about what is going on – events etc.”*
- *“Continue to provide a network of interested parties – develop more co-ordinated recording on the shore – at Seasearch.”*
- *“Good as it is. More active promotion and encouragement of local nature reserves.”*
- *“Help link with relevant groups and local contacts.”*
- *“Key partnership for networking between projects and people.”*
- *“More info on what is happening in local groups!”*
- *“Networking.”*
- *“The event provides opportunity to make contact and network.”*
- *“We will think of something.”*
- *“Yet to be defined.”*

13. Are there any other things that you would like to see from the Highland Biodiversity Forum?

- *“All good.”*
- *“Clearer outline of biodiversity funding available to local groups. In E Ross little comes directly from the group to local interest groups.”*
- *“Should we be doing more interactive or awareness raising online.”*

14. Do you have any general comments/suggestions about the event or any follow-up events that you think are needed?

- *“Attendance was a bit low but I think this was one of the best HB Forums we have had.”*
- *“HBP could discuss strategic coastal/marine work.”*

- *“Keep in coming.”*
- *“Marine and soil sub-groups could reform.”*
- *“Suggest that HBF is opening out to small local groups esp. around Inverness – rather than having a separate event. Perhaps make it a 2 day event sp that one day would be workshops and local visits – might attract more of the general public – could be tied in to some practical BCTV type training.”*
- *“The amount covered was sufficient for one day where previously there has perhaps been too much for the average brain capacity. It was good to see a presentation by children.”*
- *“Timing in AM still too tight. PM timing much better than in the first few years.”*
- *“Workshops/training on marine issues.”*

Feedback conclusions

Overall, the event was successful – creating an annual opportunity for groups to network, share knowledge and experience. All the participants (100%) found the presentation and updates sessions very or quite useful, while 100% of participants found the workshops very or quite useful. Over half of participants (65%) said that they would be taking action on the issues raised as a result of the event.

For 2012, feedback suggests:

- Allow plenty of time in programme for the talks (with questions) and workshop sessions.

Rowan Tree Consulting
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