**Outdoor Woodland & learning North East Group Meeting**

**Rangers Room (use back stairs) Crathes Castle**

**9th March 2020 at 11am – 1230pm.**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

**Present:** Joanne Evans, Ian Talboys (Aberdeen City Council Ranger

Service), Neil Taylor (Forestry & Land Scotland Ranger), Julia MacKay (acting

Chair), Jill Birch, Lindsey Duncan, Claire Livingstone (Treasurer), Doug Gooday

(Aberdeenshire Council Ranger), Stephen Reeves (Dorenell Ranger Service), Claire Marsden, Eric Baird (Glen Tanar Ranger Service), John Malster, Alex Stuart (NESBiP), Elaine Crawford.

**Apologies:** Juliet Robertson, Joan Anderson, Aileen Salway, Tim Gordon-Roberts.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting 9th December 2019, matters arising**

* No matters arising. Approved JM, seconded DG.

**3. Events update – Outdoor Learning Taster Day 18th February 2020 (LD)**

* Outdoor Learning Taster Day took place at Cults Woods on 18th February 2020. 5 workshops run in the morning and afternoon organised by OWLS members and Aberdeen City Ranger Service. It was an excellent venue with toilets accessed at Cults Primary School. 35 people attended and feedback was good. We could rotate this event around other parts of the Shire in the future.

**4. Events Programme 2020/21**

The following events were proposed for 2020/2021:-

* Outdoor Learning Taster Day in Huntly & Stonehaven. **Action:** JE to contact DHT Gordon Primary School to find out about ISD availability. Huntly could also involve Christine Steiner from TOADS and the Dorenell Ranger Service.
* Bioblitz 16th May 2020 @ Muir of Dinnet – part of the Cairngorms Big Nature Weekend. Lucy Ford is coordinating this event. JB doing a freshwater activity. Elaine to do some tree craft. Liaising with AS from NESBiP.
* IT suggested running an Outdoor Learning CPD follow on from the Taster Day to cover topics in more detail.
* School Forestry Day with Aboyne/Banchory Academies. JB working with EB on this.
* Maintenance of willow structures suggestion from Juliet Robertson. This was discussed at the meeting. **Action:** JM to speak JR about this.
* Special Grant application was unsuccessful. This idea has been shelved for now and will be discussed at the next meeting in June. **Action:** JM to add to agenda and invite Luke Nicol to meeting.

**5. W4L grants (JE)**

As per AGM minutes, 9 grants have now been awarded for 2019-20. Dorenell Ranger Service submitting their application this month.

**6. OWLNEG Finance/Accounts (statement from CH)**

As reported at AGM.

**7. Update from constituent organisations send Doug brief summary for minutes**

**Ian Talboys**

**Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service update 28/2/20**

**Educational visits stats 10/12/19 to 28/2/20**

**School/Early Years/Student Groups** 16 groups 311 attendees

**Public events** 9 Ranger led events organised 120 attendees.

**Teacher Training Courses**

First chargeable safe use of fires training course starts on 9 March for school teachers. This will be 4 twilight sessions and is fully booked. A pilot early year’s version of the course is also now fully booked. A poster is being developed to circulate to schools electronically and as a hard copy to advertise the training course.

A pilot course for early years staff called Wee Woodland Care has been run with two nurseries. This is looking to train staff to be able to do minor work to keep their ‘Wee Green Spaces’ safe to use so looking at minor tree pruning, pruning back brambles etc., litter picking etc. and when to ask for help from the Ranger Service for bigger works.

Next training courses being developed will be around basic wildlife ID in collaboration with NESBReC, hand tools and knots.

Successful teachers’ outdoor learning taster day held in collaboration with OWLNEG held at Cults Woods. Thanks to all the OWLNEG volunteers for leading workshops and Lindsey Duncan for organising the event on 18th February.

**Wee Greenspaces**

The work with nurseries to develop their Wee Green Spaces projects continues with more nurseries starting to make use of their local greenspaces and making sure they keep in communication with the relevant landowner/manager so everyone knows what is going on when.

**Forest School programme**

Cults Academy have started up a Forest School programme with the Countryside Ranger Service in Cults Woods, just a couple of sessions so far.

**Wildflower Meadow creation**

We are continuing to work with the Friends of Westfield Park to restore an area of wildflowers and create some new ones in the park. NESBiP have offered the groups some wildflower seed to help with this. Scotstown School are going to try growing some plug plants from seed to help with this.

We are helping the Brighter Bucksburn Community Group develop a wildflower area at Cloverfield Park in Bucksburn. The Bucksburn Academy students applied to the Young Scot grant scheme and were awarded £600 towards this which will fund the seed for the area along with some id guides and equipment to allow the students to make use of the area as part of their studies. The students are going to help with the ground prep and seed sowing and are looking to grow some plug plants from seed too. The area being developed is approx 30mx50m

**Den of Maidencraig flood alleviation project phase 2**

The phase 2 works are now started which will improve the path network and accessibility to the Den of Maidencraig LNR for all users. The project is also funding new interpretation panels for the site, a new pond dipping platform at the pond, some plaques with images of pond life, other insects, birds etc which can be used to make rubbings, a sand martin nesting wall, a viewpoint platform on the Langstacht side of the valley and some benches. This work should be complete by the end of May. These developments will improve the site for outdoor learning both for school groups, community groups and individuals.

**Branching Out**

Branching out continues with funding from NHS & Scottish Land and Forestry. A new programme has started, we are at week 4 of 12 at the moment. There will hopefully be further funding from NHS and Scottish Land & Forestry to do at least one Branching Out programme in 2020-21 within the City.

**Discovery Woodland**

We have been continuing to develop the Discovery Woodland in the Grove Nursery which we use for Branching Out and other groups where working in a publicly accessible woodland is less appropriate. A total of 1815 trees along with 1800 hedge shrubs have been planted over the last year. The trees have been planted by some of the groups who use the woodland for their sessions along with the Countryside Ranger Service mid-week volunteers and other groups from Aberdeen Drugs Action, Healthy Minds etc who work at the Grove Nursery.

**Ranger Service vlog**

The ACC Corporate Comms team are working with the Countryside Ranger Service to produce a bi-monthly video blog based around the natural environment of Aberdeen. The first one is due for release in April. These will be themed around a particular countryside site/nature reserve in the City or something that is seasonally relevant. We may look to invite guests to appear too! The vlog will be posted on the Council website and on Youtube with links from the Countryside Ranger Service facebook page.

**Climate Week Events (20-29 March)**

The Countryside Ranger Service is hosting several events during Climate Week NE, including the Green Family Funday at Hazlehead Park, an urban nature trail, and a guided walk around Seaton Park Wetland.

**Outdoor Adventures with the Countryside Rangers**

The summer edition of Outdoor Adventures with the Countryside Rangers, our events programme is currently in production and will be available in mid/late March.

**Elaine Crawford**

No longer working at Stramash. Now working at Monymusk for outdoor learning activities and also volunteering at Greener Kemnay.

**Joan Anderson**

I am doing free walks again this Easter, mainly to support Ballater’s new community hub. The Cairngorms National Park is also creating a hub in the Halls. I am concentrating on heritage of the V and A halls and the area, but hope to connect to the CNP situation as well, if only to direct people from my walks to them. In the middle of the day, I will be out at Tullich for the stories about the stones and the area. I am hoping to get people coming out by bike, on foot and on the bus from both directions and am being supported by the hall trustees (not cash, but great access to heritage stuff long forgotten in the old building). That might be where I picked up the cough on Friday.

I have a small request. Could you ask if anyone knows anything about a gentleman called William Henry Austin, who was a town councillor in Ballater between 1906 and 1936? I have found a very old document in which the council and citizens say heartfelt thanks to him for his long and fruitful efforts to gain public access to Craigendarroch (called Craig na Darroch in the document). I am going to contact Invercauld Estate when I feel a bit better, but I just wondered if anyone had ever heard of this man. Craigendarroch remains a favourite walk and climb among all of us.

**Alex Stuart**

# Update from Coordinator February 2020

## Work with Schools

I have worked with a small number of schools since the last meeting, mainly providing input into how they can improve their school grounds for biodiversity. For example, Joanne Evans put me in touch with Brimmond school who I have met and talked over grounds improvements with, and NESBiP have been able to supply wildflower seed for a small area of the grounds. I am also visiting Bracoden Primary soon to work with the whole school on a bug hotel and have been asked for input to Old Machar Academy and Keig school.

## Wildflower Seeds

There are still some funds available for wildflower seeds with our Scotia Seeds fund – get in touch if you know of a group/individual who can benefit from this. Current new orders include - Greenmyres Farm with HDDT, Insch Meadows through Tamsin Morris, Sunnybank Park and Brimmond School.

## Seminar and Awards 2020

Our Seminar and Awards are on Friday 20th March 2020, based at the James Hutton Institute, and the event is part of [Climate Week North East 2020](https://www.climateweekaberdeen.org/) which ties in well with the theme of our awards being to promote those who have taken action for biodiversity. Booking is still available through the [Eventbrite page](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-north-east-scotland-biodiversity-partnership-seminar-and-awards-2020-registration-83949498209).

## Camera Trap Loan Scheme

JHI is currently going over the loan agreements and issues of liability/ownership before I can start putting them out to the groups we have listed for loans. As soon as they are happy, then everything is set to get them out.

## Website

Since the last meeting, there have been calls from a variety of organisations for more content on the new [NESBiP Website](https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/) such as best practice examples of local biodiversity improvements in building works (from both NGO’s and councils), as well as of recent local wildlife projects. I am currently working on creating some more content for this with help from other partners such as Aberdeen City Council and Huntly Swift group. The Management Group are also looking into what older documents can be made available on the website, such as the original LBAP document. In the meantime, please feel free to promote the website within and out-with your organisations and let me know of any documents/links/content you would like to see on the website.

Grace Banks was in touch with me at the start of the year and is writing up some content for the website about her recent school projects.

***The rest of my update below is perhaps less relevant for OWLNEG!***

## Amenity Grassland & Road Verge Talks Follow-up + B-lines

I have been busy since December’s talks trying to encourage efforts to implement trial sites this year with the three local councils – all of which are on board with trialling some sites using existing machinery. There was briefly discussion of applying for Biodiversity Challenge Funding from SNH with Aberdeen City and Shire councils, although due to the short time limit and the framing of the proposal, the provisional idea got the thumbs down from SNH. There is the potential to work up a more detailed strategic proposal over this following year for next year’s round of funding.

Buglife has also very recently been in touch regarding trying to map areas of the North East to tie in with their [B-Lines](https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/) project. NESBiP will host their introductory 3-hour workshop on this at the James Hutton on Friday 1st May, with relevant local groups/individuals involved who can help with identifying and ground-truthing these areas. We are currently awaiting more info about what the session will involve so that we can tailor the invite list. If we can get help in mapping these areas, then this would go a long way in helping to identify a strategy for any future BCF funding bid for the north east. If you would like to be involved in this then let me know.

## A96 Dualling + AWPR

I was invited along to an Environmental Steering Group meeting for the A96 Dualling project, to do a short presentation on the biodiversity benefits associated with altering their grass area design and management strategies on the 30th January. The idea being to encourage all the standard grass areas be converted to low-fertility wildflower areas, and trying to sell them on the reduced costs and the idea of the ‘longest continuous linear pollinator habitat in the U.K.’ This was met with mixed reactions, with Transport Scotland maintaining that they already implement this strategy, but several engineers in the room thinking this was new. (The Partnership has been chasing Transport Scotland for specific details of their AWPR work, especially follow-up monitoring of their environmental work, but with little success so far.)

I am also investigating the possibility of the addition of local orchids to some areas of the A96, this could potentially include some of the UK Priority Species for Scotland. We are also promoting Kidney Vetch which is the food of the caterpillar for one of our [North East Big 5](https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/our-biodiversity-in-the-north-east-of-scotland/the-north-east-scotland-big-5/), the Small Blue butterfly. Ewen Cameron and I have also been investigating the possibility of a kidney vetch translocation project on the AWPR with SNH, who seem supportive of the idea from their side.

I also received an invite for, and will be attending, an event about road verge management at HRH’s Highgrove House on the 2nd April with key members of a number of organisations such as Transport Scotland.

## Golf

Richard Mullen (Banchory Golf Course) and John Milne (Rothes Golf Course) were recent finalists in the Conservation Greenkeeper of the year category at the [Golf Environment Organisation awards](https://golfenvironmentawards.com/2020/01/22/golf-environment-awards-2020-winners-revealed/?fbclid=IwAR2bAgPSwHKdybMqhmM4S0L8ROClIe1l8ioubfcdpgd-mwk-4sc6haE1nS0) on the 22nd January. Richard Mullen also was nominated for and won their Operation Pollinator award for his work with wildflowers on the site and the wide range of pollinators recorded there. I also submitted posters for Richard into the [Aberdeenshire Architectural and Landscape Design Awards](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/built-heritage/aberdeenshire-design-awards/) 2020 in December for the landscape design category.

I have been out to see Paul Mills from Newmachar golf course, and will be working with him to help identify and improve biodiversity on his site. Before Christmas I was also contacted by Nigel Spencer from Sports Aberdeen about arranging to come out and speak to him about the potential for biodiversity improvements on his sites at Balnagask, Hazlehead and Kings Links in his efforts to work towards GEO accreditation.

Things have currently stalled with contributing to an industry-led 2020 golf programme for biodiversity with myself, Ewen, Jonathon Smith from GEO and Kath Leys at SNH, however we have been chasing this.

## Glasgow School of Arts Highlands and Islands Campus

I was contacted by the GSA Highland campus in Forres in December about speaking to their post-grad design students about integrating biodiversity and community engagement for their Interaction design course. I went for an initial meeting with them on the 28th January to discuss potential for the design students to include more biodiversity topics within their work and then did a talk for the students on 11th February. This was with the hope that they will decide on an environmental project for their group work.

## Convention on Biological Diversity Events with SNH and Scottish Government

Scottish Govt and SNH have been working to organise the global sub-national government biodiversity workshop happening in Edinburgh, the main workshop for international delegates is 1-3 April.  On the 31st March there is a national stakeholder afternoon and separate evening reception for senior Scottish decision makers, which the Partnership has requested to attend. Members of the LBAPO network are also trying to attend as observers for the main event.

**John Malster**

Doing some work at Greenmyres for Huntly & District Development Trust. Bioblitz taking place on 16th August at Greenmyres on their open day.

**Eric Baird**

Follow up on Elaine’s query on adult to child ratio in outdoor learning settings for 1140 implementation. JM stated that OWLS is already giving advice on best practice through its FOLA training.

Children from Camphill came to Glen Tanar to cut down their Christmas trees and plant new ones in December.

Briefing about the Glen Tanar Estate at the Illuminator Half Marathon.

FOREST EDUCATION ACTIVITIES 2019-20

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| * A selection, to give the flavour………
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|  |
| Universities x2 |
| Secondary Schools x 37 |
| Primary Schools x 6 |
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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | European Forest Institute Study Tour  |  | 104 |

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| Norwegian Forestry Study Tour 15 |
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|  | OWLNEG (Family Forestry Day) |  | 55 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Grampian Fungus Group |  | 6 |

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|  | Illuminator Run |  | 1000 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Aboyne Climate Change for Kids Group |  | 33 |

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| Hands on conservation x 12 |
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|  | Venture Trust |  | 12 |

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|  | Moray Ramblers |  | 35 |

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| Special Needs Groups x 55 |
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**Doug Gooday**

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service.

 update 10/3/2020

• School Environmental Education

156 sessions, 3814 children

Sessions delivered C4E outcomes and included the following activities: John Muir Awards, pond-dipping, forest ecology, rocky shore ecology, tracking and wildlife signs, camera trapping, biological recording, plant ID/surveys, seasonal signs and fungi.

• Public Events

109events, 1742 adults, 1369 children

Events included: guided walks, bike rides, beach cleans, habitat maintenance, promoting pollinators, moth and bat mornings/nights, support for RSPB at Dolphinwatch, Wild about Aden, Wildlife Wednesdays at Bennachie and geological walks.

• Groups

122 groups, 1077 adults, 779 children

Activities for groups included: talks and guided walks, CPD sessions for teachers, John Muir Awards for adult groups, health walks and nature connection activities for special needs and disadvantaged groups, minibeast hunts, building bug hotels and wildlife site maintenance.

• We have run 66 volunteer sessions, resulting in 1272 volunteer hours of work for conservation.

• We have delivered 48 sessions for disadvantaged/vulnerable groups, for 282 people.

• 25 of our sessions were delivered with Health and Wellbeing being a principal objective, several of these were in partnership with NHS Grampian.

Projects

• B-Lines wildflower sowing by the Banff and Buchan Ranger at a school and a day care centre in Fraserburgh. If it's successful, the project will be rolled out to other schools in the area.

• Early Years in Nature Staff Training Course. The whole Ranger Team have worked with NESOLG to develop and roll out this training course to get more early years and nursery staff engaged in outdoor learning. This is funded by Aberdeenshire Council Education department.

• Discovery Trail in Arnhall Moss LNR. The Garioch Ranger has been developing a Discovery Trail in Arnhall Moss with Elrick Primary School and Taqa, there are eight rubbing posts on the trail, worksheets can be downloaded from the Elrick School website.

• Aden Country Park HLF Project. The Buchan Ranger has been developing biodiversity improvement plans for the lake and broadleaved woodland in the park

• INNS Several Rangers have been mapping and monitoring invasives in the ongoing SISI project.

• Priority species surveys & habitat management. The Marr Ranger has been working with Butterfly Conservation/Rare Invertebrates in the Cairngorms project volunteers and land managers to survey for Kentish Glory & Dark Bordered Beauty moths on Deeside and construct fencing to protect aspen suckers (DBB larval foodplant) from grazing.

• Junior Ranger Programme: The Formartine Ranger has been developing a programme for teenagers based on the SCRA Junior Ranger Programme. This will be delivered at Haddo Country Park starting at Easter.

• Willows Animal Sanctuary Habitat Improvement. The Buchan Ranger has been working with Mark Young and Glenn Roberts to develop a habitat improvement plan and education plan for the sanctuary near New Pitsligo.

• Aberdeenshire Greenspaces. The rangers have been working with the Greenspace Officers on tree-planting and biodiversity improvement projects in Westhill, Inch, Macduff, Fraserburgh and Peterhead.

**Neil Taylor**

Events include nursery visits to see Christmas trees in December and taking part in the visitor your parents at work day.

**Claire Hudson**

Involved in the Early Years in Nature course with Kate Malster. Teacher training will finish in August 2020.

**Lindsey Duncan**

Forest School sessions are continuing at Dunecht School and Tough School.

I have run several short outdoor learning sessions at Cluny School as part of their 'Skills Academy'.

Learning Pathway Plus sessions are still ongoing at Cluny School.

Dates confirmed for 2 whole day Forest School/Outdoor Learning days at Castle Fraser woodland for Tullynessle School working with Toni Watt the NTS ranger.

Coordinated the latest OWLNEG event at Cults Wood on the 18th February. We had 35 participants and 4 workshops - evaluations from the day were all positive with a definite desire for there to be more similar training days in the future.

Taken on the role of NESOLG chairperson and getting more involved with the group

**Julia MacKay**

Quiet in December and January building a dry stone dyke at home. In February and March planning for the new FOLA course. Plus campfire and food hygiene on 14th March at Haddo and Abriachan on 28th March.

**Stephen Reeves**

Dorenell Ranger Service is ramping up its activities and publicity. 100 engagements so far and building an outdoor learning programme with various schools in the area (Rothiemay, Dufftown). Working with CLD Aberdeenshire to do a bushcraft course. 4 events scheduled so far – walks and taking part in the Big Nature Weekend as part of Cairngorm initiative in May. Students from SRUC visited and Speyside High School. Facebook page created - please share and like!

**Claire Marsden**

Working as an RSPB volunteer for Dolphinwatch, running a SCRA birdsong course and organising the woodland group volunteer programme.

**Jill Birch**

Taken some time out due to family commitments. Working on the Branching Out lottery application with Julia – telephone interview 10/03/2020. Also planning the Branching Out Plus programme.

**Joanne Evans**

* Gardening4Kids 2020 starting in March with a new website
* Beechgrove Garden is back for its full run this year with 26 programmes – filming starts at the end of March.
* Gerbera Designs is busy.
* Doing a show garden for Trellis at Gardening Scotland 2020. Any suggestions for sponsors greatly appreciated!
* Running an Easter holiday Forest School Club at Den Wood near Oldmeldrum as a Daviot Oldmeldrum Explorers fundraiser for their Uganda trip.
* Planting trees in a newly developed bushcraft area at Daviot Oldmeldrum Scout Group site.

**8. AOCB**

* 2020 is Year of Scotland’s Coasts and Waters. An outdoor event is being held at Balmedie in July 2020. Date TBC. OWLs could possibly be involved.

**9. Date for next meeting –** Monday 8th June 2020 10.30am at Glen Tanar Visitor Centre.