



Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire Project Summary

Background

The Southern Uplands Partnership hosts the South West Scotland Environmental Resources Centre (SWSEIC). The Centre is a not-for-profit organisation which aims to further the appreciation, understanding and protection of the natural environment by collecting, collating, managing and safeguarding relevant data, by providing a focal point for accessing this information and supporting those involved in wildlife recording activities. A partnership of organisations (East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage) based in Ayrshire approached the Southern Uplands Partnership to explore the opportunities for developing a similar provision across their local authority area that builds on the experience and expertise of SWSEIC. From those early discussions "Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire?" was developed. Although initially programmed to run as a two year project the partners hope to demonstrate "a need" that will see the project become part of a South West Scotland Environmental Centre encompassing both Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway. The project began in October 2016, and after a successful year the project needs to continue to be delivered and promoted across Ayrshire.

The project

Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire? is a project designed to engage people throughout the region in wildlife recording. In the first year of the project it has created a focal point for training in identification skills, the collation and safeguarding of volunteer-gathered environmental data and is beginning to improve the sharing of that data to influence better environmental management in the region. The project is overseen by a Steering Group including representatives of the host organisation and funders. The group meets quarterly to guide the project as it develops.

Keys aspects include:

Citizen science surveys

Two citizen science projects focusing on identification and submission of records relating to easily recognised species or species groups, designed to appeal to a broad range of people (e.g., schools, families and individuals). In 2016 the chosen species were amphibians and reptiles as they are very poorly recorded in Ayrshire. This survey was developed as both an online survey and a postcard survey. In 2017 another focus species or species group will be chosen for the second citizen science survey.

Maintaining a project website

The project has developed a website to provide information about Ayrshire's wildlife. It provides a source of information about important local species, provides an online portal for submission of biological records, provides context for sightings by providing maps of other sightings, provides guidance on identification of key local species. The website also posts regular blogs on the project as well as having a calendar of wildlife recording events taking place across Ayrshire.

Promoting the project

The project has already developed some promotional materials to help raise awareness of project activities --pop-up banners, leaflets and branded notebooks and pens. The project also uses social media to publicise the project. The project officer will be available to give talks to local wildlife and community groups. In the first year of the project these have typically happened in the winter period and have been aimed at a wide variety of audiences across Ayrshire who have an interest in their natural heritage, and are intended to raise awareness of local biodiversity, generate new interest in





wildlife recording and get more people involved in the project. Further talks will be required in 2018, as well as attending events such as the Ayr County show to continue the promotion of the project.

Building a network of local wildlife recorders

A key part of Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire? is focusing on training communities and individuals in the skills required to identifying local wildlife in Ayrshire. We plan to continue to offer a programme of training events at different locations in the county (with a series of at least four training courses each year, repeated in each of the three local authority areas) that focus on getting communities and individuals out identifying and recording wildlife in their area. In 2017 four training courses have been repeated in each of the three Ayrshire areas. These species ID courses have given local people the skills and confidence to record amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. The subjects of the training days in 2018 are flexible, but should differ from those covered in 2017. It may be possible to organise or facilitate training days for more experienced recorders by working with national groups or organisations.

Two networking events -- one each year -- will also be held, with the first having taken place as the Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire? conference held at Eglinton country park in March 2017. The purpose of this conference, and future networking events are to bring together established NGO's, local wildlife groups, community based 'environment groups' and individuals to share experiences and help guide future recording priorities for Ayrshire. Providing feedback to the project participants (existing and potential) will be important in maintaining engagement with the project. The project produces monthly newsletters which will continue to be part of the project in 2018.

Producing a wildlife recording event toolkit

Through providing training and a toolkit, we hope to create the foundations for volunteers to get involved in running their own wildlife recording events in their locality, and sharing that information so that we can develop a detailed picture of the natural heritage of Ayrshire. The toolkit will help guide community groups in how to set up an event to explore their natural heritage, who to go to how to for help and support identify species, how to record finds etc.

Building a database of information

The project officer will continue to liaise with local and national recording groups to mobilise new and existing information about wildlife to form a comprehensive database of biological records that reflect species and habitats across Ayrshire, which can then be mapped through GIS applications to show region-wide distribution that can used to influence decision making.

Funding Partners

The project is jointly funded by Ayrshire LEADER, Heritage Lottery Fund, East Ayrshire Council (EAC), South Ayrshire Council (SAC) and North Ayrshire Council (NAC).

Project evaluation and reporting

The project officer will be responsible for gathering of feedback from attendees at networking events, training courses, talks etc. to evaluate the number of people attending events and where they have come from. A final project report summarising the achievements of the project, who has been involved, and how WWA can continue to progress in the future will be prepared at the end of the project.

