

BIODIVERSITY

Communications Toolkit

Ferintosh Community Council – Community Bird Survey

Lead and partner organisations

- Ferintosh Community Council - Community Bird Survey
- The Moray Firth Partnership

Aims and objectives

- To gather valuable information about the bird population in the Ferintosh area
- To raise awareness of and promote education about the local bird population
- To encourage involvement by people of all ages in the project to develop teamwork and community ownership

Target audience

- People of all ages living in the Ferintosh Community Council area, particularly children attending the four local primary schools
- Businesses and other organisations in the local area

Format of communications

- Schools pack
- Community events
- Story book

Background

Local amateur birdwatchers Sheila Maher and Graham Sullivan proposed the idea of conducting a year long bird survey to the Community Council in early 2004.

The area covered by the Community Council stretches over approximately 15 square miles. The landscape is varied and includes coast, farmland and woodland. It also accommodates numerous settlements and four primary schools.

Community Council membership was low and the project was seen as a catalyst – not only to obtain valuable information about the local bird population – but also to encourage people from within the scattered community to come together, get to know one another and participate as a team.

A steering group was formed which included, by invitation, a representative of the RSPB.

Funding was obtained from Scottish Natural Heritage, Leader+ and Highland Council.

Summary of activity

The steering group developed a strong framework for the survey and recording sheets were initially distributed to over forty volunteers – aged from eight to 86 years!

As the data gathering process got underway the group realised the magnitude of putting the data into spreadsheet format for analysis. It was important to spread the load, so an IT training workshop was offered to as many participants as possible - yet another new skill learned by the volunteers!

An adaptable recording process was put in place to allow volunteers to record sightings on a casual basis – or complete a regular programme at a site of their choice.

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The steering group realised at a very early stage that a well-planned publicity programme was essential to the success of the project. The project and related events were well advertised – not just to those volunteers taking part, but to the wider community.

- **Schools**

Local schools were provided with a pack of supporting materials and a series of presentations by experts in the field was delivered. The children took part in workshops making bird boxes and setting up bird tables, and teachers made time to take the children bird watching.

- **Community Events**

Guided walks at dawn, nest box building and bird ringing events were open to the wider public, generating a great deal of interest and local media coverage.

- **Booklet**

A booklet telling the story of the project and providing comprehensive species accounts taken from the data collected during the year was launched at a public event. The cover for the book, which is also available in Gaelic, was designed by a local primary school pupil who won a local competition to have her design used on the cover.

Outcomes

A stronger feeling of community cohesion has been developed through the project. It is clear that a common interest can not only provide valuable education on a subject, but also encourage greater community co-operation.

The project has undoubtedly raised awareness about the suitability of the area for bird watching and local wildlife. People are still taking an interest in the birds, their migration and changing trends.

This was clearly demonstrated in spring 2006 when the exciting news of a sighting of the rare breeding Red-throated Diver spread throughout the community. Everyone knew what to do – don't get too close and don't take photographs. The RSPB were informed and in the summer of that year a chick was reared at the same site – great news!

Some people have commented on the health benefits of the project and how it has encouraged them to spend more time outdoors. People are more aware of birds and their knowledge and that of their children has significantly increased.

The success of the project has now inspired plans for the establishment of a Ferintosh Environmental Group. The exact nature of the group and its activities will be defined following public consultation.

Further information

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