

BIODIVERSITY

Communications Toolkit

Green and blue corridors

Lead and partner organisations

- The Waterways Trust Scotland

Aims and objectives

Engage people with biodiversity through Scotland's canals by:

- Encouraging volunteers to help enhance canal habitat
- Raising awareness, appreciation and knowledge of canal wildlife among those who use the canals for leisure

Target audience

- Communities that are connected to Scotland's canal network

Background

Scotland's canals are steeped in the history of Scotland. Before the railways, they were the life blood of industrial development, allowing the movement of goods from east to west.

Nowadays, they are used more for leisure as areas to walk, run, cycle and canoe. Canals and associated land are also important for biodiversity – they are rich and varied habitats and importantly, they connect city with the countryside. Canals offer a unique opportunity to engage people with biodiversity conservation and prompt them to do something practical and positive.

Summary of activity

The Waterways Trust implements a range of activity and initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the rich variety of nature and wildlife surrounding canals and encouraging local communities to get involved with canal conservation.

It has raised £1million for an outdoor activity centre on the Grand Union Canal. In Falkirk, it has been running the Green Scene, which promotes community engagement in improvements to the area surrounding the Auchinstarry basin. The 'Protect and Restore' initiative is aimed at conserving and re-establishing hedgerows on canal land boundaries and 'Action Outdoors' promotes a variety of outdoor activities for training and personal development.

Canal clean-up days help to build interest and pride in the local canal.

Schools are an important part of all initiatives and in 2006 in Glasgow, 240 pupils took part in cycling, canoeing and environmental walks. Pupils also create ceramic tiles with a wildlife theme which are being used to decorate litter bins.

Outcomes

Although these initiatives are similar to other practical conservation volunteering programmes, they have the added value dimensions of what might be called 'strategic impact'. Habitat improvements in one location along the canals can bring benefits elsewhere; habitat improvements in several locations along the canal system will reinforce each other. This

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clearly demonstrates how people can actually 'do something' to help nature. Hedges, trees and meadows alongside canals will greatly increase structure and connections in the natural world.

Safety is often considered to be a problem with canals, but a two-year study and community consultation along the Forth-Clyde and Union Canals by The Waterways Trust did not identify safety as a major issue. In addition, risk assessments are routine for any work with children.

The biggest issue is vandalism, but is one which should decline if communities become more engaged and place greater value on the canals.

The canal initiatives offer a good example of a more people-friendly and strategic form of nature conservation, which emphasise the importance of managing habitats for nature's sake, as well as for people who live near and use the canal network.

Further information

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