B1.1 Conservation Volunteering Around the Forth

Project Overview:	This project created a group of volunteers trained in a range of practical, natural heritage and survey skills who used these skills across sites in the Inner Forth area to help manage them for wildlife and people. Led and recruited by the RSPB Forth Reserves Warden and Assistant Wardens, the group ran twice per month over the four years of the IFLI programme. The group predominantly undertook work at RSPB led IFLI project sites around the Inner Forth, including RSPB Skinflats, RSPB Black Devon Wetlands and Kinneil Lagoons. To enable a diversity of experiences, and to allow for work parties to take place in months where there was naturally less habitat work that could be undertaken at IFLI project sites, the group occasionally travelled for work parties at RSPB Inversnaid and RSPB Loch Lomond reserves within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park or on other RSPB Forth Reserves (Fidra, Fannyside). The volunteer group was regularly over-subscribed and attracted volunteers of a range of ages and experiences. Volunteers were provided with appropriate PPE and offered opportunities to attend formal training in first aid and brushcutter use resulting in a qualification – then they could use this machinery during sessions. Volunteers also undertook training in a range of species identification and survey skills: badger, lichen, mammals, saltmarsh plants and micro moths. Tasks undertaken by the volunteers included: invasive species control, path maintenance, installation and planting of floating islands, installation of pond dipping platforms and construction of boardwalks, planting willow screening, bracken control, scrub control, vegetation management, removal of old fencing, installing solitary bee nest boxes, litter picking and small tree removal, installing brushwood revetments, species surveys, supporting RSPB events at the Black Devon Wetlands Reserve.
Project lead organisation and other organisations involved:	RSPB Scotland Volunteers
Project Location:	Landscape wide, but based at RSPB Skinflats Reserve, Falkirk NS921861
Project dates	May 2014 to March 2018 (Year 1 quarter 1 to Year 4, quarter 4)

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
No of volunteers trained in practical and survey skills	15	36	
No of volunteers confident to participate in events	15	3	

Volunteer work parties delivered	N/A	83
Volunteer attendance at work parties	N/A	428

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of the Inner Forth?

By creating this group of trained volunteers, the RSPB has been able to deliver much better habitat management across three wetland sites (Kinneil Lagoons, RSPB Skinflats, RSPB Black Devon Wetlands), improving them for the birds and wildlife present, making these sites valuable wildlife havens.

What difference has this project made to people?

This project has enabled participating volunteers to gain new skills; knowledge and experiences, put them to good use in the volunteering sector and in their wider lives. It has provided opportunities to spend time out-of -doors and meet new people, both of which have a range of health benefits.

By improving the range of habitats and infrastructure at sites, the volunteers have improved the visitor experience at a range of locations and helped to create a sense of ownership of sites on the edge of conurbations that has engendered a sense of pride in the landscape, so often lacking within the Inner Forth area.

By providing both formal and informal training as well as the chance to gain valuable experience in conservation management techniques, the project has enable several volunteers to get their first job in conservation including one volunteer who got a job as a season ranger with East Lothian Council, another who got a job as a seasonal ranger with Loch Lomond National Park and one volunteer, Ami Kirkbright, who is now the Forth Reserves Assistant Warden. Ami says:

'It's been an incredible journey from volunteer to Assistant Warden, and it all started with the Inner Forth conservation volunteer program in 2014. I joined the volunteers while I was at university studying Environmental Protection with the intention of absorbing as much knowledge and experience as possible. We met once or twice a month carrying out practical management and maintenance tasks on the RSPB reserves. It was everything I'd hoped for! The skills I learnt and support I received have been invaluable to me in getting on the career ladder, gaining confidence in my abilities and has enabled me to progress further in a job I love.'

Useful Links

There is a page for this project on the IFLI website:
http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/projects/recording-celebrating/conservation-volunteering-around-the-forth

Future Plans

The volunteer group that has been created by this project will continue to work on the RSPB reserves with the bi-monthly work parties carrying on. The volunteer vacancy is still available on the RSPB

website and will be for the foreseeable future so if anyone is interested in joining the group in the future then they will be welcome to do so.

All efforts will be made to continue to offer both formal and informal training to the volunteers (e.g. several volunteers recently attended a dragonfly id workshop run by the British Dragonfly Society at Black Devon Wetlands) but it is likely this will be at a reduced level compared to during the project. This will be funded from core RSPB Budgets.

Lessons Learned

Overall, the project went exceptionally well. We have recruited some fantastic volunteers who are really keen to help us achieve our aims on our reserves. It wasn't without it's issues however, from unsuitable volunteers to working out how best to communicate with volunteers with varying levels of technological know-how.

One big issue we had was a lack of work at the start of the project while we waited on other projects e.g. Black Devon Wetlands to get up and running so it may have worked better if we had waited until we were sure of plenty of work for the volunteers to do before we recruited them.

Also, it may have been better to keep the scope of the project a bit narrower, particularly in terms of training, as it became quite apparent from the start that the majority of people who were interested in joining the group were mainly interested in the practical aspects of the project rather than the people engagement aspect as very few of the volunteers had any interest in getting experience in helping out with events. It was also a bit of a struggle at times to get the volunteers to take up the offer of training, especially the informal training so being clearer from the start about what is available may have helped.

One thing that worked very well for the group was having a large project like Black Devon Wetlands that they could be involved in most aspects of. Volunteers have helped us with just about everything at Black Devon Wetlands, from boardwalk installation to biodiversity surveys and we have kept them up to date Being involved from the start of the project and seeing it develop along with us has given many of the volunteers a real sense of achievement, they feel they are part of the bigger picture.

Photographic Evidence

Volunteer pathwork at Kinneil Lagoons, Y1Q4.

Volunteers creating brash bundles at RSPB Skinflats to help with drainage erosion repairs, Y2Q3.

Volunteers burning brash at Kinneil Lagoons, Y3Q4.

A Volunteer planting up the floating islands at RSPB Black Devon Wetlands, Y4Q4.

Photos courtesy of RSPB.

Funding Partners

Funding raised by The National Lottery and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

heritage lottery fund LOTTERY FUNDED

rspb giving nature a home .... Scotland

Bringing change to life CSGN .... Central Scotland Green Network