

The Come Forth for Wildlife and Fife Living Water projects

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ABSTRACT

Froglife is a national wildlife conservation charity that has been active in Scotland since 2008. This article describes the activities involved in two recent projects carried out in different areas of Scotland - the Forth Valley and Fife. Froglife's work combines active practical conservation (these projects created 205 ponds, restored 22, and improved 370 terrestrial habitats) with public engagement (over 200,000 people in these projects) and opportunities for both paid and volunteer training.

INTRODUCTION

The Froglife Trust (Froglife) is a national wildlife conservation charity with a remit to conserve the U.K.'s native reptiles and amphibians. Froglife is a practical organisation that works on the ground, restoring and creating habitats for the species that they represent. However, this work also benefits a wide range of other species, including birds, small mammals, aquatic plants, and invertebrates. Central to Froglife's ethos is the aim to assist as many people as possible, particularly those that are currently under-represented in the wildlife conservation sector, to be able to take action to help the U.K.'s native wildlife, whilst also drawing on the many benefits that engaging with nature gives people.

Since 2008 Froglife has delivered several large, impactful projects transforming landscapes across Scotland. Of these, Larcombe & Stead (2018) reported on the outcomes of the 4.5-year Scotland-wide *Dragon*

Finder project. The *Come Forth for Wildlife* (2019-2023) and *Fife Living Water* (2022-2023) projects were Froglife's most recent large-scale works in Scotland. *Come Forth* operated in the Forth Valley and, in addition to large-scale habitat creation and restoration, a major component of the project was the delivery of public engagement activities. *Fife Living Water* delivered large-scale habitat works at a wetland site in Cowdenbeath, Fife, and connected this site with another in Cowdenbeath, the Swan Pond. *Fife Living Water* also delivered sessions with local schools and volunteer sessions with local businesses. The Froglife team in Scotland continued to deliver habitat work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but public engagement sessions had to be paused for a while. However, once lockdown was eased, we were able to resume public engagement sessions and even exceeded our targets in the end for both projects. This article details the outcomes and impacts that these projects had on habitats, species, and people.

The projects delivered habitat works, wildlife gardening workshops, pond doctor events, a mapestry (a mapestry combines the visual information of a map and qualities of the locality), virtual reality exhibitions, training courses, neighbourhood wildlife corridors and volunteer sessions. These two projects created 205 ponds, restored 22 ponds, and improved 370 terrestrial habitats. The projects engaged with over 200,000 people, over 29,000 helping with the creation of neighbourhood wildlife corridors (Table 1).

Activity	People	Sessions
Wildlife gardening workshop	825	60
Pop-up wildlife gardening workshops	1,635	12
Mapestry	813	25
Mapestry tour	154,984	13
Pond doctor and events	6,575	48
Virtual reality exhibitions	8,822	23
Training courses, community engagement, school and group sessions, business team-building days	657	42
Volunteer sessions	3,276	260
Neighbourhood wildlife corridors	29,009	0
Total	206,596	483

Table 1. The numbers of people involved across the two Scottish Froglife projects, *Come Forth for Wildlife* and *Fife Living Water*, and the numbers of sessions held.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

We delivered wildlife gardening workshops (Fig. 1), pop-up wildlife gardening workshops and pond doctor tents (Fig. 2). These all provided expert advice on pond creation, restoration, and management. The activities attended science festivals, country parks, allotments, community gardens, therapeutic gardening groups, and reached out to new audiences by attending the Highland Games, Comic-Con Scotland (annual celebration of comics, cartoons etc. held at the Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, Edinburgh), community festivals and popping up at railway stations.



Fig. 1. Wildlife gardening workshops helping people to understand the difference between an ornamental garden and pond and a wildlife garden and pond. (Photos: Froglife)



Fig. 2. Pond doctor events held at various venues provided advice to the public on pond creation, restoration and management. (Photos: Froglife)

The projects engaged new audiences by delivering novel activities such as Virtual Reality (VR) experiences (Fig. 3), mapestry sessions (Fig. 4) and tour, and an augmented reality app with a wildlife pond visualiser and ideazone. The VR experience asked the question: “When will wildlife get the green light?”, highlighting the issue of road mortality and campaigning for more wildlife crossings. Comments from the experience include “I never knew that toads needed help!”

The mapestry activity created a map tapestry of the local heritage of the Forth Valley. We worked with local groups, arts venues, schools, and outdoor venues. The completed mapestry, containing twelve sections to represent each month of the year, toured venues such as parish churches, schools, The Helix Visitor Centre



Fig. 3. Virtual Reality (VR) experience within a mock wildlife tunnel exhibit. (Photo: Froglife)



Fig. 4. Mapestry session: the final artwork was pieced together by a tapestry artist. (Photos: Froglife)

(Falkirk, Stirlingshire), shopping centres and community centres. It was viewed by over 200,000 people. Comments include “Looking good! Shows creativity and care for the environment”. At the end of the tour, long-term homes were found for the mapestry panels.

We created and restored ponds and terrestrial habitats (Fig. 5). Terrestrial habitats are often overlooked but are crucial habitats for both amphibians and reptiles. Adult amphibians will spend more time in terrestrial habitats than in water, and hence require areas where they can forage, take refuge from predators, and hibernate over winter. Reptiles require areas for basking – sunny bare ground, and vegetated areas for hunting for food and to hibernate.

Neighbourhood wildlife corridors (Fig. 6) provided connectivity between the large-scale habitat creation and restoration works and urban neighbourhoods. These are smaller-scale interventions that create steppingstone habitats. Connectivity between habitats is crucial, particularly for amphibians and reptiles. Due to their ecological requirements, they are unable to travel great distances, and require mosaic habitats for different seasonal requirements.

Crucial to Froglife’s work is that it leaves a legacy ensuring that all we have achieved is maintained on the ground. Froglife achieves this through an extensive volunteer training programme. They train volunteers in habitat creation, restoration, management, and species surveying. They provide ongoing support to volunteer groups through their commitment to revisit all habitat



Fig. 5. Kildean wetlands, Stirling. Before habitat creation: a non-biodiverse area of scrubby grassland; and after the creation of a potentially diverse pond habitat. (Photos: Froglife)



Fig. 6. Steppingstone habitats linking large-scale habitat works to urban areas. (Photos: Froglife)

sites where they have worked, 1-, 3-, 5- and 10-years post-works: this provides an opportunity to undertake habitat assessments and reconnect with volunteer groups.

In line with Froglife’s mission to involve new audiences in wildlife conservation, they offer paid-for trainee positions (Fig. 7). An essential element of the training is to provide practical habitat creation and management experience and experience in engaging with the public, often elements that are missed in formal education. These projects provided positions for two trainees, both of whom went on to further employment within the conservation sector.

These projects created and restored vital freshwater and terrestrial habitats across the Forth Valley and into Fife, particularly for the benefit of our native reptile and amphibian species. However, they also provided



Fig. 7. Trainees experiencing the practical elements of nature conservation, including public engagement. (Photos: Froglife)

suitable habitats for a wide range of other wildlife. The projects engaged with over 200,000 people, mostly new audiences to nature conservation, encouraging these people to take further actions to help Scottish wildlife. Projects that combine habitat works with innovative and engaging public engagement activities have a huge impact on helping Scottish nature to recover and grow.

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REFERENCE

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