

RSPB CONNECTING COMMUNITIES WITH WILDLIFE PROJECT

Introduction

This is an interim report to Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Programme in respect of their funding support for the above project, which began in April 2010 and is projected to be completed in March 2012. The project involves connecting local and visiting communities with the varied wildlife and natural environment of Dumfries & Galloway, including a significant educational element with school children in line with the Scottish 'curriculum for excellence'. This is achieved largely through the employment of dedicated Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and Field Teachers and involves undertaking a range of events and activities on and off RSPB sites in association with various communities, partnerships and organisations. In addition, there is an element of interpretational and other work on RSPB sites to enhance the visitor experience and generally promote the wildlife and environment of Dumfries & Galloway.

Summary

Significant achievements have been made in the first half of this project, which are broadly in line with projections in the agreed proposal. Three Community Liaison Officers have been busily employed at each of Mersehead (MHD), Mull of Galloway (summer season) and on the Galloway Kite Trail (GKT). They have been undertaking a range of activities, both on and off RSPB sites, and integrating with a large number of communities in the process, including visits to LEADER funded Langholm, Eskrigg and Corehead projects. Three Field Teachers have been employed and have engaged with children across our reserves, but especially at Mersehead, together with various outreach visits to schools and other events. Details of achievements are set out below against the agreed targets and outputs.

Unfortunately, there has been an under spend on the project due to staff changes that were outwith our control or anticipation. The original Mersehead CLO (Keeley Spate) moved south to take up a new post in mid June 2010 and her replacement (Becky Jones) started in mid August, resulting in a two month under spend in salary and associated transport and other costs, together with engagement shortfall at a key site in holiday period. However, since then Becky has done a superb job delivering the project. We also lost our Mull of Galloway CLO (Paul Tarling), who moved to take up a new post at our new Crook of Baldoon Reserve, but because this was an internal move, we were able to achieve this with no loss of staff time and Hannah Doyle is now in post and delivering the project. Our Galloway reserves Site Manager (Gus Keys), with responsibility for delivery at Wood of Cree and Mull of Galloway, left the Society in late May 2010 and wasn't replaced (by Andrew Bielinski) until early September. However, considerable in-kind support from myself and other staff ensure that there was no loss of delivery in the project.

7.1 Project Targets, Outcomes & Outputs

Progress and comments against the target groups that are expected to benefit directly from the project.

| Group | Target | Achieved | Comment |
|------------|--------|----------|---------|
| Males <25 | 2,000 | 950 | |
| Females<25 | 2,000 | 968 | |

School visits severely affected by drop in their transport budgets, by closure of Mersehead due to severe weather last winter and by recent absence of Lead Field Teacher. So far as possible, outreach visits have been increased in attempt to compensate, but transport costs for schools is a major issue and likely to severely affect our ability to achieve the targets.

| | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|------------------------------------|
| Males >25 | 50 | 50+ | Need to gather evidence |
| Females>25 | 50 | 50+ | Ditto and this now happening |
| Over Aged 60 | 40 | 233 | Will greatly exceed this target |
| Micro businesses | 21 | 25 | Achieved already |
| Social Enterprises | 1 | 2 | GKT/Catstrand |
| Unemployed | 40 | ? | Still to extract this info re vols |
| Disabled people | 100 | 28 | Difficulty in establishing this. |
| Farming Community | 20 | 20+ | Greatly exceeded this target. |

7.2 Project Achievements

| Achievements | Target | Comment |
|---|--------|--|
| Improvement in rural community capacity | 80 | 16 volunteers on claims so far, but projected 74 when all accounted for. |
| Number of communities participating | 14 | Achieved already |
| Individuals trained/re-skilled | 100 | 64 achieved so far |
| FTE Jobs safeguarded | 3.5 | Achieved |
| Jobs in non-profit sector | 3.5 | Achieved |

| Achievements | Target | Comment |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Social cohesion projects | 1 | This project. |
| Community facilities created | 1 | Wildlife garden due in 2011 |
| Community facilities improved | 2 | Achieved 1, with other due 2011 |
| Promotions undertaken | 80 | Achieved – for 80 events. |
| Marketing activity undertaken | 2 | Achieved: Trail Guide; Reserves Leaflet. Wildlife Manuals due soon. |
| Quality of life improvements | 1 | Wildlife garden due in 2011 |
| Adding value to local products | 1 | Due in 2011 |
| New markets accessed | 4 | Achieved – MHD tourism initiative. |
| Feasibility Study | 1 | Draft completed Jan 2011. |
| Heritage Sites' interpretation | 2 | Mull of Galloway done; Wood of Cree due 2011. |
| Tourism Projects | 1 | This one. |
| Access/Biodiversity Projects | 1 | This one |
| Sustainability Projects | 1 | This one |
| New/additional visitors | 1,200 | 1,918 children achieved so far, plus many more adults. Achieved. |
| Best practice model | 1 | 350 farmers attending event day at West Preston (MHD). Achieved. |

Conclusion

The RSPB's Connecting Communities with Wildlife project is progressing very well, with a number of targets and outputs achieved and exceeded. The above summary simply outlines a wealth of exciting and rewarding work underway across the region, on and off RSPB sites. The major areas of shortfall, in terms of under spend and targets, have been highlighted, together with actions undertaken to address these. On balance, we feel we have achieved a great deal for local communities, visitors and the biodiversity of D&G through this project and we are extremely grateful to LEADER and our other partners for support in this work.

Chris Rollie, RSPB Area Manager, 3 June 2011