

Urban Biodiversity: Successes and Challenges: Civic welcome speech

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Ladies, gentlemen and distinguished guests, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to this event, on behalf of the Lord Provost and people of the city of Glasgow. On the eve of your 160th anniversary, the Glasgow Natural History Society is to be congratulated for bringing together The University of Glasgow, RSPB, Glasgow City Council, Culture and Sport Glasgow as was, now of course known as Glasgow Life, and the Scottish Wildlife Trust to hold this conference marking the International Year of Biodiversity.

With the vast majority of our nation's population living in urban areas, the quality of urban open spaces can have a significant effect on their attitudes to the natural world more generally. Professor Jim Dickson and others' ground breaking book on the plants in our city showed us how even apparently grotty brownfield sites are oases in otherwise less favourable urban environments and help the overall biodiversity of the city. This work has now been complemented by the recent fauna surveys by the volunteers of the Biodiversity in Glasgow project. With the continuing shortage of allotment plots in areas of high demand, the council's policy to help so-called Stalled Development sites become temporary community greenspaces will be welcome to many and it is to be hoped that the owners of such spaces see the benefits they can bring.

Your fascinating programme of talks looks at these wider issues as well as the micro-studies of particular environments, such as bings and wildlife corridors and of particular wildlife such as waterbeetles and epigeal invertebrates – do I assume this means our good friends the earthworms?(Audience response: No, these are surface-livers like slaters, millipedes and ground beetles). With more and more of our schools being not only Ecoschools but also gardening and food growing schools, I am sure our younger generation have a keen eye for Glasgow's biodiversity. And here in the university that enthusiasm is taken to the professional levels. You will be asked to consider if Glasgow is as green as its nickname, dear green place, but I am sure with the council staff, professionals and amateur enthusiasts' energy represented today, we can look forward to every effort being put towards improving the biodiversity in the future. So, I am pleased to provide this civic welcome half-way through your conference and wish you a successful and interesting event.