

Urban Biodiversity: Successes and Challenges: Introduction

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Early in 2009, GNHS Council discussed how we might respond to International Year of Biodiversity, designated for 2010. We quickly agreed that the most appropriate theme for a city-based natural history society would be a focus on urban biodiversity: after all, it is still the case that too many people think of biodiversity as something you only find 'out there' in the countryside. So we felt that a conference discussing the range of biodiversity in towns and cities would be valuable. We were delighted when Jim Coyle of Glasgow City Council's biodiversity team gave immediate support and we soon assembled a steering group comprising representation from GNHS, RSPB Glasgow, SWT, Glasgow Museums and GCC's Biodiversity team. An early meeting agreed on the title: 'Urban Biodiversity – successes and challenges', because we wanted to describe and celebrate the successes achieved in conserving and enhancing biodiversity in Glasgow and other towns and cities, but also to discuss the challenges we still face in making further progress.

Timing was easy to decide on. Two factors settled the final weekend of October 2010. First, the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity meeting, planned to achieve agreement on new conservation targets was scheduled to end in Nagoya, Japan on Friday 29th October. Second, a new book, Co-ordinated by Glasgow Museums 'Wildlife around Glasgow' was due to be launched during the same week.

We decided early on a two-day meeting and that it should be over the weekend (the debate between weekend and weekdays for such a meeting is a tricky one, but venues are easier at weekends). The plan was to devote the Saturday to formal presentations: these would deal first with policy issues, achievements and benefits. We were very keen to ensure that the meeting would highlight the benefits of urban biodiversity to people. Saturday would also cover case histories, including single species, groups and unusual habitats, both by talks and by posters. We also hoped to entice some high level political presence and were very pleased when Roseanna Cunningham, Minister of the Environment, agreed to open the conference.

Sunday was to be a more practical, interactive day with the morning devoted to participative workshops with choices of topics, and the afternoon to excursions to interesting biodiversity locations within easy distance: we realised the riskiness of this in terms of weather and impending darkness on the last Sunday of October.

Over approximately monthly meetings from October 2009 the programme you see before you came together. We were very pleased by the response from our invited speakers: this seemed to be a meeting people wanted to contribute to.

What of the omens for success? First, 'Wildlife around Glasgow' was successfully launched on the Thursday before the conference, and a beautiful publication it is. Many congratulations to Richard Sutcliffe and his team. Second, despite gloomy reports during the week, the 190 nations meeting at Nagoya reportedly agreed on 20 new tough biodiversity targets to be met by 2020. It will be up to all of us to ensure that these are not just paper commitments. Third, as I came through campus to get ready for the meeting, a fox crossed my path – now a very common sight in the West End of Glasgow!

I'd like to thank all members of the conference steering group for their input over many meetings and e-mails; also, our funders, Glasgow City Council, the University of Glasgow and the Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest. I also acknowledge the honour bestowed by the Lord Provost in providing the Civic Reception which closed the proceedings. Most importantly, I must thank Richard Weddle whose tireless efforts made this conference possible.