

Urban Biodiversity: Successes and Challenges: Connecting habitats and communities workshop

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Urban environments are becoming increasingly valuable habitats for a wide variety of species. As these areas are associated with large populations of people there has to be a balance between protecting valuable habitats and providing suitable housing and related industry. Local communities have a considerable amount to offer and gain from being involved in improving their local area for wildlife.

Froglife's Living Waters projects are working in London and Glasgow to engage with local communities and help complete habitat creation and restoration work on standing open water habitats. This work is being carried out in partnership with Glasgow City Council and relevant London Boroughs, and is supported by local volunteer and 'friends of' groups from different urban parks. To promote sustainability of habitat work, communities are involved where possible on site and opportunities are provided to teach survey and practical conservation techniques.

Froglife designed the workshop 'Connecting Habitats and Communities' to promote the importance of community involvement and raise awareness of enhancing habitats and creating essential wildlife corridors to increase connectivity between sites.

The workshop commenced with a short presentation introducing Froglife's work followed by an interactive discussion with the audience. Eighteen people attended the workshop and were split into four groups. The groups were provided with a map of an urban site featuring a park, a school, ponds, hedgerows, ditches and allotments. A role-playing exercise was completed with each attendee being assigned a role as a different stakeholder with an interest in the local area. The character briefs included: a Head Teacher of the local school, a Council Park Manager/ Biodiversity Officer, and a representative from each of the following groups: a Friends of Group, a Local Natural History Society, a Wildlife Charity Officer and a Local Allotment forum.

The groups held discussions in which each person gave suggestions from their point of view to provoke discussion and develop ideas for the area. This

included how they would improve the selected site for wildlife, a proposed methodology for completing this work, and suggestions on how to involve members of the community.

There were many aspects to cover in the session, but each group was able to provide one suggestion from their discussion to share with the rest of the audience. Groups had also written down a number of other ideas. Some similar themes emerged, as well as new initiatives for this type of urban site.

Examples provided from the group discussions are shown below:

- Pond creation and management - connecting and improving habitats including areas beyond the site boundary.
- Conducting surveys of flora and fauna and mapping what is present to improve records.
- Encouraging more local people to assist and gain new skills.
- Training and sharing knowledge across different community groups on wildlife friendly gardening, vegetable growing, pond creation and surveying.
- Working with local groups such as allotment users to save resources, for example water and tools.
- Improving amenity grassland with wildflower meadows. Connecting habitats and encouraging communities to get involved through planting and enjoying the aesthetic value of wildflower meadows. Creating more hedgerows to connect habitats.
- Writing a wildlife column for a local newspaper to share news e.g. nature diary or update community with recent work completed.

To conclude the workshop the site for which participants had made their suggestions was revealed as Footh Cray Meadows in South London. Work completed by Froglife in the area was also discussed, including enhancement of one pond and the creation of eight new ponds. Work is also taking place to improve the surrounding terrestrial habitats not only for amphibians and reptiles but also wider biodiversity. Friends of Footh Cray Meadows have been involved with Froglife and support the habitat improvement work.

The workshop was presented by Eilidh Spence and Sam Taylor from Froglife. Eilidh is the Glasgow Living Water Project Officer and can be contacted by email at eilidh.spence@froglife.org, or 01413390737. Eilidh is based at the University of Glasgow in the Graham Kerr Building. Sam is Froglife's Head of Communication and deputy CEO and is based at Froglife's headquarters in Peterborough. Sam can be contacted by email at sam.taylor@froglife.org

