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Launch of the Donald Watson Trails

The life and work of Donald Watson, the famous bird artist who did much of his work in the Galloway landscape, is now brought to life through a new Walk and Art Trail around The Glenkens.

Donald Watson (1918-2005) was a painter most famous for his accurate depiction of birds and their habitat setting. He published a number of books about his work and specifically about the Hen Harrier. He also illustrated many notable bird books in the Poyser and New Naturalist series for other writers and produced all of the plates in the outstanding Oxford Book of Birds. He ultimately contributed to more than 30 books in all, with much of his most famous work being based in the landscape of the Glenkens.

The Watson Bird Project is an initiative of Roger Crofts with Chris Rollie and the Watson family, and is a longstanding initiative of the Glenkens Community & Arts Trust. Its purpose to link birds, nature and the arts as a celebration of Donald's work and to stimulate everyone into making their own contribution. A series of activities have been held over recent years, including scientific talks, arts events and guided walks, together with an ongoing installation in the Donald Watson room in the Balmaclellan Smiddy and an exhibition currently on show in the CatStrand. See www.watsonbirds.org for full information.

This month sees the launch of the new Watson Bird Trails, providing an insight into Donald Watson's work and focussing on participants reaction to the changing Glenkens landscape.

- 1) **The Donald Watson Walk** starts at the Dalry Town Hall and takes people on an approx. 2 hour-long walk around St. John's Town of Dalry, drawing on inspirations for Watson's work.
- 2) **The Watson Arts trail**, again starting and finishing at Dalry Town Hall, allows participants to actually visit 9 sites around the Glenkens that either feature in or inspired some of Donald's most famous paintings.

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The route brochure and leaflets are available on the www.watsonbirds.org website, from The CatStrand, retail outlets in The Glenkens or by visiting the signs at Dalry Town Hall for information.

The two trails were funded in partnership by the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme and by Blackcraig Wind Farm Community Fund with funding from Blackcraig Wind Farm (Scotland) Limited, administered by Foundation Scotland working in partnership with The Glenkens & District Trust.

Upon the launch of the Watson Bird Trails, Professor Roger Crofts CBE, Director of the Watson Bird Project, said:

"I am delighted that the trail markers and interpretation boards have now been installed. This makes tangible the information provided in the two brochures. I hope residents and visitors alike will gain new insights into the changing landscape of The Glenkens by using the two trails. I also hope that you will be stimulated into producing your own response in whatever medium is best for you: such as a photo, painting, sketch, poem, prose, music. Please send in your reactions via our web site.

This work could not have been completed without the financial input from the Blackcraig Wind Farm Community Fund and the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership, the support of many farmers, land and property owners for the placement of the signs, and the willing help of Galloway Glens staff."

Galloway Glens Project Officer Nick Chisholm, said:

The Donald Watson trails are a perfect opportunity to reflect upon landscape change. The Artist captured the essence and texture of our landscape during the 50s, 60s and 70s. Much has changed since then – why not join the conversation about our ever-evolving landscape. We are so grateful to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their input and the support of partners including Dumfries & Galloway Council's Environment Team."

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The Watson Bird Project is an initiative of the Glenkens Community & Arts Trust (GCAT). GCAT's Executive Manager, Helen Keron, added:

"Roger Crofts and his team of volunteers have worked for many years to highlight the relevancy and beauty of the work of Donald Watson to a wider audience, and this project is a fantastic culmination of their work so far. Thanks so much to the Galloway Glens and Blackcraig community funding through the Glenkens and District Trust and Foundation Scotland for helping us take this project to the next level – and a new audience."

Fiona Smith, Chairman of the Glenkens & District Trust, said:

"We were delighted to support these trails which celebrate the life and work of Donald Watson. Encouraging people to enjoy the area while thinking about how and why it has changed and what this means for them, enhances our connection with our local environment."

The Galloway Glens Scheme is an initiative of Dumfries & Galloway Council's Environment Team, primarily supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with support from partners including the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere.

Esther Tacke, the Biosphere's Business Engagement Officer, added:

"We are delighted to have two new walking trails for the enjoyment of local people and visitors to our UNESCO Biosphere, especially since they launch as the birds that Donald Watson so admired are beginning to nest. Having a tour or trail as a guide can add such depth to the days we spend walking and exploring, in this case bringing history, art and nature together in the very heart of the Biosphere. It is our plan to incorporate the Donald Watson Trails into themed Biosphere Experiences which will connect people with unique locations across the region when they are launched later this year."

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