

OVER 300 PEOPLE ATTEND WATSON BIRD CELEBRATIONS

The first annual Watson Bird Celebrations attracted over 300 guests and participants to Dalry over the weekend September 30 and October 1 and 2. The programme of events was organised to celebrate the life and work of renowned local bird artist and ornithologist Donald Watson and his son Jeff the well known international expert on the golden eagle and former Director at SNH..

Throughout the weekend Dalry Town Hall was the centre for the Creative Explorer Children's Art Exhibition, and an Exhibition of works by artists John Threlfall, Lisa Hooper, Paul Collin and Silvana McLean. Donald Watson's family generously made available a selection of his own work. On Saturday the art exhibitions were supplemented with information stands promoting wild life organisations and children's workshops. For the more active there were Guided Walks led by the RSPB's Chris Rollie and Andrew Bielinski, both local Dalry residents. The Town Hall was also the venue for performances and talks over the three days.



Watson Bird Project Director, Roger Crofts explained “We are delighted by the number of people – locals and visitors - who attended throughout the three days, and by the real “buzz” created in the village by the wide variety of events. Over 500 attended one or more events. The very positive reaction from both audiences and participants is extremely encouraging as we begin planning for annual Watson Bird Celebrations in the future”

Project Officer and Celebration Organiser, Sarah Keast added “I am delighted that we have been able to bring together so many stimulating events in only four months. It could not have been done without the help and co-operation of the artists and performers; not to mention the group of volunteers who helped prepare and man the activities, and provide refreshments for the visitors”.

There were some unique events over the weekend.

On the Friday Dalry Primary School hosted pupils from Dalry Road Primary School in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh children brought beautifully carved and painted bird sculptures and donated some to their hosts. The local children made birds boxes for distribution around the area. Following some interesting discussions about the differences in lifestyles between rural and urban children both groups joined together to visit the highly successful Red Kite Trail and the feeding station established by the RSPB. We hope that the visit will be the beginning of twinning between the two schools.



Friday's activities were concluded with short talks about Jeff Watson by Chris Rollie and Roger Crofts followed by a showing of the outstanding RSPB film "Eagle Odyssey".

In keeping with the scientific eminence of Donald and Jeff the first Watson Raptor Science Prize was awarded to an RSPB team led by Dr Jen Smart for their paper 'Illegal killing slows population recovery of a re-introduced raptor of high conservation concern – The red kite *Milvus milvus* *Biological Conservation* (2010). 143 (5): 1278-1286. Des Thompson assisted by Ian Newton and Steve Redpath were the scientific panel which selected the winning paper. Jen Smart and Duncan Orr Ewing gave a talk about the red kite re-introduction programmes and the reasons for the relatively poor survival rates of the Black Isle population.



Two unique concerts were also highlights of the weekend and were received with great enthusiasm by very appreciative audiences. A magical concert of classical and modern bird inspired music was performed by the Conference of Birds led by Peter Cowdrey.



Kenneth Steven read his evocative nature poetry with a beautifully accompaniment by the Rhona Mackay trio of Rhona, Eddie McGuire and Sonia Cromarty.



This year's Watson Bird Celebrations were supported by Day of the Region, an initiative managed by Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Programme. The whole Watson Bird Centre and Celebration project is funded by LEADER, SNH and the Big Lottery.

Such was the success of this year's events, especially the very positive feedback from participants and from the Dalry community, we are making plans for our second celebration in autumn 2012. Watch this space for details.

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