

WATSON BIRDS DECEMBER 2018 UPDATE

I thought it was time to give an update on the Watson Birds project. You may have thought it had died a death, but no it is still alive and kicking and we are hoping for faster progress next year.

Last autumn we held two 1 day workshops on raptor research. For the first time, we held an event outside The Glenkens at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. Led by the internationally renowned raptor scientist Ian Newton, eight speakers brought the 70 strong audience up to date on the latest raptor science research. Excellent discussion on conservation issues and best practice were held. The following day we repeated much of the programme but also added speakers talking about local bird watching opportunities. Again, an audience of 70 were present. At both events we sold pictures and books by Donald Watson. The participants fees, support from two sponsors and entrance charge meant that we more than covered our costs.

We have not run the Watson Raptor Science Prize this year as two of our three judges have asked to stand down and I have not been able to recruit reputable replacements as yet.

Preparations are advancing for the Watson Birds component of the Dalry Heritage part of the HLF Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership. Waymarking for the two trails, preparation of a commentary on an app, recording of oral history of the Watsons and development of the orientation hub at the Town Hall are the key elements which are our contribution. With the change in ownership of the Black Craig wind farm to a hedge fund, I am assured that the community benefit funds will be available, although the timing is not yet settled. We need access to these funds to allow all of the Dalry HLF projects to go ahead as HLF only fund 40%. As Fiona Smith of Balmaclellan has now taken over as chair of The Glenkens Community Trust to administer the funds we know that fairness and speed of operation will be the order of the day.

In Dalry, it is particularly pleasing to see the work at Barone by the new owners, the Wests, in preparation for the Watson Bird Garden. Both are very committed to public access to the garden which stretches alongside their house from the street to the northern boundary wall. Graeme has been working to the plan drawn up by Chris Rollie, Andrew Bielinski and myself. Car parking will be provided. We are about to set up a formal agreement between Watson Birds (through GCAT our parent) and the Wests to complete the garden arrangements, which in turn will mean that it can be grant aided. Additionally, the West's intend to establish a café in Barone. This is a facility that many in the village have been wanting for a long time. It will be an opportunity to promote the project and the related activities and to display some of our Watson paintings.

We have agreement from the Pamela Young Trustees to use the memorial garden for project work and we will be in discussion with the school about the possibilities next year.

Bird boxes will be placed around the village to cater for the different species. We are likely to contract The Men's Shed folk in Balmaclellan to undertake the work to designs provided by Andrew Bielinski.

With the agreement of the Dalry Town Hall Committee, we have installed a superb painting of raptors by Donald Watson in the Town Hall, along with a description of Donald.

Finally, the conversion of the Smithy in Balmaclellan as a GCAT project gives us an opportunity to have some of Donald's archive on display. Hopefully, this will come to fruition by the middle of next year. Spreading the project around the Glenkens is most appropriate as Donald painted throughout the area.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support.

Roger Crofts

December 2018