



THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2020/21

August 2021



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Contents

Annual Report 2020/21

Dr Chris Miles, Partnership Convenor	Page 2
Pip Tabor, Partnership Manager	Page 3
2020/21 Project Highlights	
South of Scotland Golden Eagle project (SSGEP)	Page 5
Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere	Page 9
PLACE (People Land Art Culture Environment) in the Biosphere	Page 10
Connecting Threads	Page 12
South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC)	Page 13
Next Steps for the Southern Uplands Partnership	Page 15
Thank You	Page 15
Funding Acknowledgements	Page 16

DR CHRIS MILES, PARTNERSHIP CONVENER

It has been an exceptional year for all of us of course and SUP has weathered the storm incredibly well. We managed to keep our project staff working throughout the Pandemic and, although it has been far from normal, SUP's financial situation has remained stable enough for us to invest in a new core staff member in the west. The post has been filled by job-sharing and we are pleased to welcome Darren Flint and Katy Ewing. They replace Ed Forrest who has now left SUP and moved completely to work for the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership.

The Biosphere secured significant funding from the South of Scotland Enterprise and can at last fund a small core team to take the Biosphere forward. It is great to see an initiative that SUP played a formative and supportive role in become mainstreamed. The Biosphere exemplifies what SUP stands for and offers an approach to life that we believe is truly sustainable as it puts the care of nature and what it gives us at the heart of how communities go forward. With the Biosphere becoming independent of SUP, we have a shortfall in income we have to make up this year and are working hard to do that.



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Anyone who believes in our mission and wants to ensure we are here to champion the south of Scotland's sustainable future should get in touch. We have set out in a new strategy what our aims and priorities are for the next few years. You can find this online on SUP's website.

The great challenges we face as a society become ever more insistent in public dialogue. Throughout the Pandemic we have heard how valuable open spaces have been for people and how critical contact with nature is for people's health and wellbeing. We at SUP have been saying as much for over 20 years. It is reassuring to hear these sentiments being more widely recognised but we need them to be turned into positive actions if we are not simply going to go back to business as usual once the Pandemic is over.

Later in 2021 the world's attention will be on Scotland as it hosts the World Climate summit. It is a great time for Scotland to showcase its credentials as a nation that is serious about tackling both climate change and biodiversity loss. SUP has produced a Position Statement on Forestry in South Scotland (available to read or download from website) that attempts to show how, if the right trees are planted in the right place, we can deliver not only on Climate change by locking up carbon, but on biodiversity gains, recreational opportunities and numerous other ecosystem services. But tree planting and management will have to be done differently if we are to change the direction of travel on these two big global challenges.

PIP TABOR, PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

This time last year we were working in a state of lock-down and hoping for a quick recovery. Here we are, working in a new normal, zooming and teaming and getting rather used to seeing much of the world through a screen. Hopefully this time next year we will be less restricted!

Things at the Southern Uplands Partnership have not stood still. During the year, the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere Partnership was awarded funding through South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) so that it could become a fully-fledged, self-governing entity. While it is sad to see "our" project fly the nest, it is excellent to see the Biosphere philosophy being valued and supported in this way. The big downside for us is the loss of Ed Forrest as he took on the role of Manager of the new organisation as of November and Marie McNulty has also moved across to be employed by the Biosphere. We wish them both well in their new roles.

Thanks to support from NatureScot we produced a series of scoping reports during the year, which can all be read or downloaded from SUP's website:

- The case for a Borders Biosphere
- Nature Based Tourism in South Scotland
- The role of "Aires" in South Scotland
- A Strategic Framework for Equestrian Tourism Across the South of Scotland



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Our trading company – **Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd** - has completed its first full year and made a modest profit. Our sincere thanks to those who commissioned work from us and who worked with us to deliver it. We hope that this initiative will continue to grow.

We had a novel online Annual General Meeting in November 2020, where Claire Pencak and Emily Taylor joined the Board. Claire brings with her a wealth of knowledge on the cultural sector, and Emily is well known as a national expert on peatland restoration and carbon storage. Charles Strang stood down from the Board after six years of active engagement. We will miss his advice and observations!

During the year, the SUP team worked really hard under difficult circumstances and I would like to thank them all for their professionalism and diligence. Some projects came to an end and others started up. The most significant arrival is Connected Threads, which forms part of the Destination Tweed project, which we hope will create a new trail linking Moffat and Tweedsmuir with the mouth of the Tweed at Berwick. Emily Cropton and Rachel Hunter have been employed, initially to develop the project, but if things go to plan, they will continue to deliver the scheme over the next five years. Further details on Page 12.

The continued high level of our turnover again required a full audit of our accounts which generated even more work for our Finance Manager, Sheila Adams.

SUP has continued to work with the Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group SCIO (DECBG) to help it manage the Community Benefit Funds linked to ScottishPower Renewables' Ewe Hill 16 Windfarm. The Group completed its Community Action Plan for East Dumfriesshire and commissioned further exploratory work into the potential for a shared ownership stake in the Crossdykes Windfarm.

For more information: [Home - The Southern Uplands Partnership \(sup.org.uk\)](https://www.sup.org.uk)

Contact: Pip Tabor (piptabor@sup.org.uk)

2020/21 Project Highlights

South of Scotland Golden Eagle project (SSGEP)

Translocation 2020, Stakeholder Engagement and Eagles

The COVID-19 pandemic hit just as preparation was underway for the 2020 breeding season and translocation. Scottish Raptor Study Group volunteers were unable to monitor nests in the Highlands and Islands which meant we could not locate donor nests of twins.



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The SSGEP Board felt that going ahead with a translocation in 2020 would contradict the Government's guidance on non-essential travel and movement so no translocation of chicks went ahead.

Remote monitoring could continue during lockdown and fieldwork began as soon as rules allowed. The 2018 translocated eagles: C11 - Beaky; C09 – Edward; and 121 – Emily, have all continued to thrive in the south of Scotland. The three birds are showing signs of favouring particular areas. The young male released in 2019, Skan, successfully survived his first winter and has interacted with all three 2018 birds with no sign of problems.

Stakeholder engagement was restricted to telephone and email communications for a period until outdoor socially distanced meetings could take place.

Education Community Outreach

Schools

In response to the Covid-19 restrictions we have adapted the incredibly successful Eagle Schools programme to an entirely online version which can be delivered by the core staff in school.

We hope to include outdoor falconry visits as part of the programme and schools are keen to host an 'online Eagle Day' to share their learning with the wider community.

We piloted this new format in three primary schools. Not only did this allow us to continue our educational work during the restrictions but, beyond Covid-19, it greatly increases our reach, both geographically and in terms of staff time, enabling us to include more schools in more areas than ever before.

Moffat 2021

As Moffat 2020 was postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions, we are optimistically aiming to hold the Moffat 2021 Eagle Festival in September 2021. We have made preparations with almost all of the speakers, musicians and contributors to the festival programme re-confirmed and some new additions added to the line-up. We have also confirmed Gordon Buchanan to deliver the virtual keynote speech to close the programme of speakers.

E-newsletter

October 2020 saw the launch of our first E-Update, a targeted newsletter updating subscribers of recent news and directing them towards the project blog. The newsletter has been successful in increasing traffic to the website.



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Blog

The blog became an even more important engagement tool at the end of March 2020. The project issued daily blogs for 50 days between 21st April and 9th June in an effort to maintain contact with project followers and to offer a small daily respite for those stuck at home. We received some outstanding contributions to the blog during this time from within and outside the core project team. We also received some lovely additions from the public and reports of sightings have increased. The blog continues to provide an important link and has been widely appreciated from feedback received.

Children's Book

In a further bid to extend engagement, the project supported the work of author John Miles. John produces some lovely children's books which highlight key environmental issues. His latest book, *Roxy the Golden Eagle*, follows the story of Roxy, the last Golden Eagle known to breed in the Scottish Borders. Through this beautifully illustrated short story, the importance of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is presented to new audiences around the country, capturing the hearts and minds of young people and introducing them to this enigmatic species and the challenges they face in the southern extreme of their UK range.

The Eyrie (the Eagle Information point at the Waterwheel Café, Philiphaugh)

Back in the summer of 2019, Philiphaugh Estates announced that they had been successful in a funding bid to the South of Scotland Economic Partnership as well as the Fallago Windfarm Fund. The primary purpose of the bid was to extend the Waterwheel Café that sits on the estate including improved access and facilities.

Part of the café extension includes the construction of a small room, 4x4m which Philiphaugh was keen to dedicate to educational purposes, much in the way it has with its popular salmon viewing centre. Given its proximity to our office and the Moffat Hills where the birds are released, Philiphaugh proposed working in partnership with the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project to turn the room into 'The Eyrie: The Eagle Information point at the Waterwheel Café'.



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A study was commissioned by SSGEP to explore the opportunities for interpretation. The Eyrie will inspire visitors with this iconic species whilst promoting the work of the SSGEP and others such as the Raptor Study Groups, in eagle conservation.

The Eyrie presents an amazing opportunity to inspire and enthuse locals and visitors from afar with the golden eagle and our work to conserve it in its native range in the south of Scotland. It will also provide an opportunity to engage volunteers who can assist with visitors, whilst providing a location for school visits, a start-point for guided walks or trips into the Yarrow Valley, and a location for talks and events.

Both Philiphaugh Estates and the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project committed funds towards this facility and Studioarc was appointed to develop the interpretation through to installation. We worked towards the opening in early May 2021.

Volunteering

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, volunteer involvement in the project across the last year has been extremely difficult. As the team has switched to using online video conferences for meetings and talks, we extended this to volunteers in the form of project updates, with the first event taking place in January. Our 'Eagle People' blog allowed us to catch up with many different people involved in the project including volunteers. We have continued to recruit 'Eagle Spotters', an informal role which encourages those out and about in their local area to report any sightings.



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Certainly, under lockdown restrictions we experienced an increased number of sightings as more people explored their local countryside. Many of these turned out to be buzzards or other birds but it provided an opportunity to engage more people in the project who might otherwise not have found us.

Project Leaflet

Whilst we were unable to physically reach groups and host activities, we put great effort into producing a project leaflet which is available from our website and also in print. In December 2020, we worked with our partner Scottish Land and Estates, to include a copy of the leaflet inside the winter issue of its magazine, which was delivered to 2,500 members.

The leaflet was produced with Scottish designer, Kirsten Murray, as well as Galloway-based artist, Lisa Hooper. Lisa's print of an eagle features as an A2 poster when the leaflet is unfolded. The idea for this came from a desire for the leaflet to be more sustainable and have a purpose beyond the initial information.

It was whilst working with Kirsten that we discussed the idea of a children's activity book which ended up as the Eagle Spotters Zine. We quickly decided this should be for younger children which would allow us to engage an age-group not covered by any of our other programmes. This would also open up an opportunity to engage families. Activities include colouring in project eagles, identifying local raptors by their call and making your own eagle mask. The activity zine is available as a download from our website and by March we had plans in place to have a physical copy which can be utilised at events and face-to-face activities.

Public Events

During the initial lockdown in April 2020, we contributed activities and video footage to the Dumfries and Galloway Environment Fair which was delivered online.

We were eventually able to engage several groups in online talks. This included a talk to students studying Countryside Management at SRUC and Keswick Naturalists. We actively reached out to groups who wished to host an online talk, whilst also extending the offering to partner organisations who want to engage members with the project. This resulted in providing four online talks in January and February 2021.

Website

During 2020 we took the opportunity to work on several upgrades to our website including an easier newsletter sign-up function and new templates which expands our ability to include more information and multi-media in blog posts.



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Another update was the ability for users to attach images to enquiries which was particularly timely. With many more people getting out into the countryside we received an increased number of enquiries of potential eagle sightings including pictures.

We have also added a donation function following several expressions from members of the public who wanted to donate financially to the future of the project.

The website was a particularly vital tool throughout 2020 with blog posts and enquiries allowing us to stay connected with the public. Furthermore, we were able to offer our new project leaflet and activity book as a download. We will continue to utilise the website in this way with plans to include more downloadable content and more information on the work we carry out and the people we work with.

For more information: [South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project \(goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk\)](http://goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk)

Contact: Cat Barlow (cat@sup.org.uk)

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere Partnership was delighted at the announcement that the South of Scotland Enterprise agency has committed to a five-year funding agreement worth £1.9M which sees the Biosphere growing its core team and activities across south west Scotland significantly.

The support comes on the back of long-standing funding commitments to the Biosphere, made despite the challenges of austerity, by Dumfries and Galloway Council, South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils, NatureScot and Scottish Forestry.

The new enhanced funding partnership offers an opportunity to grow the Biosphere Team from the 1.5 full time equivalent staff (FTE) it has operated with recently to an aspiration for 11 FTE over the next few years. Key priorities over the next five years will focus on how it can support and integrate the sustainability agenda into all our lives, benefitting communities, businesses, landowners, land managers and individuals.

They will include:

- Delivery of practical marketing and branding projects to raise the profile, understanding, physical presence and economic value of the international UNESCO Biosphere brand to both locals and visitors;
- Expanding and promoting the Biosphere Certification Mark to include new business sectors, offering them specialist advice and support in sustainability best practice;
- Creation of a specialist team who can offer guidance and support to land managers in the development and delivery of biodiversity and land management projects to add value through conservation, learning and sustainable land use;



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- Developing the Biosphere Communities Scheme to support community level networking, collaboration, learning, discovery and new community-based sustainability projects.

With its newfound stability, the Biosphere Partnership Board has elected to become fully independent, employing staff and managing its own finances. This is after a long-standing relationship with SUP, which was one of the founding partners in the Biosphere Partnership that explored the initial viability of a UNESCO Biosphere for southern Scotland, and went on to manage and employ staff on its behalf for ten years. Whilst the Biosphere and SUP may be coming independent organisations its hoped that the partnership working with SUP will continue.

For more information: [Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve \(gsabiosphere.org.uk\)](https://gsabiosphere.org.uk)

Contact: Ed Forrest (ed@gsabiosphere.org.uk)

Great Place project: PLACE in the Biosphere

PLACE in the Biosphere project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, has been extended to September 2021 and continues to engage with nine rural communities who are taking a closer look at their natural and cultural heritage. Community gatherings and social events to discover heritage topics have been limited by Covid-19 restrictions and the project has developed a greater use of modern media to share what participants discover and, as a result, have reached a wider audience. In the Stinchar Valley, two films were commissioned to capture places that are cherished by local people. One film followed the River Stinchar from source to sea, showing the changing character of the river and surrounding countryside and features villages and places of interest along the way. Narrated by Alan McClure, the film successfully combines our landscape heritage with the meanings behind place names as well as the history of churches and castles within the valley. A second film takes a look at the complex geology of the Ballantrae area and the hills on either side of the Stinchar Valley. Narrated by geologist Stuart Graham, the film seeks to reveal the story of the rocks beneath our feet as well as the cultural history of the hills, including standing stones, ancient forts and the well-preserved earthworks of Dinvin Motte. A virtual reconstruction of Ardstinchar Castle has also been produced to help people envisage what it looked like in the past. Built by Hugh Kennedy in 1450 after returning from France where he had been Joan of Arc's Scottish Captain, the Castle had a commanding view over everyone who crossed the River Stinchar. The digital reconstruction of the Castle is available online and a QR code will be included in the refreshed information panel that will be erected near the Castle remains. Research has been undertaken to inform renewed interpretation panels for Pinwherry and Pinmore with a focus on the meanings of place names.



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Communities in the Wigtownshire Moors have benefited from the reports undertaken by Jenny Forsyth, one of our PLACE in the Biosphere interns. The report on the curling pond in New Luce was used to support a successful application for funding to enhance the wetland habitat, improve access to the abandoned pond and enhance the opportunities for learning including online heritage research. The report on Balkail Glen in Glenluce has inspired work to manage the woodland as a community resource. In Kirkcowan, old photographs of people and places have been gathered, some of them dating from the 1860s, and include images woollen mills, inns and bridges. Poster sized prints have been displayed in windows in the village along with information provided by local people to create a Street Exhibition to tell the story of Kirkcowan. It is hoped that some of the photographs will be recreated to show the changes that have occurred over the last 160 years.

Volunteers from Borgue have continued to gather and analyse field names. Over 1,000 names have been collected and mapped and the information is now available online. The project has generated a lot of interest and a Borgue Field Name Exhibition has been created, to be shown at the Mill on the Fleet Visitor Centre in Gatehouse of Fleet.

PLACE in the Biosphere is looking forward to revealing more about the heritage of our countryside. In the meantime, you can read the blog at <https://www.tumblr.com/blog/view/biosphereplace> or take the opportunity online to see what has been achieved to date.

For more information: [PLACE in the Biosphere Project | Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere](https://www.tumblr.com/blog/view/biosphereplace) ([gsabiosphere.org.uk](https://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk))

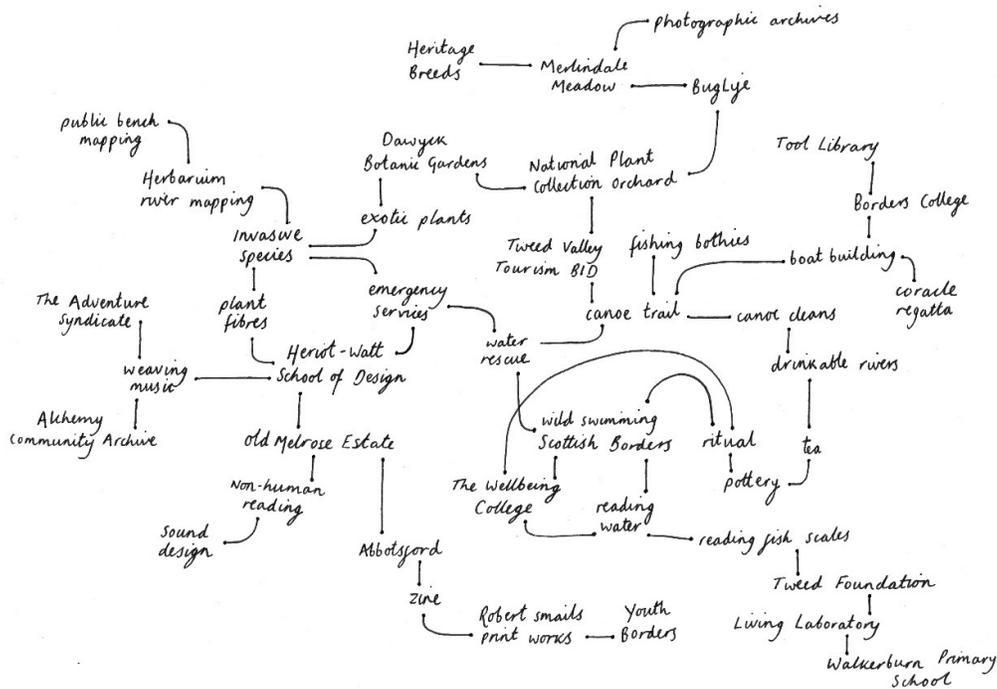
Contact: Nic Coombey (nic@gsabiosphere.org.uk)



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Connecting Threads

Connecting Threads is the cultural strand of the landscape-scale initiative, **Destination Tweed**. Led by the Southern Uplands Partnership, Connecting Threads is developing a five-year cultural programme, shaped by the River Tweed’s habitats and heritage.



Between November 2020 and October 2021 Connecting Threads is engaging with people as part of a twelve-month development phase through one-to-one meetings, online events and pilot activities on and around the river. The Team has been speaking to, learning from, and working with, communities in the Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and north Northumberland, alongside local and national cultural, environmental and educational organisations.

In the first six months, River Tweed Cultural Curator, Rachel Hunter, and River Culture Animateur, Emily Cropton, met with over 100 individuals and presented at five online events, reaching a further 200 people. During summer and autumn 2021, Emily is producing a series of pilot cultural workshops and activities on the river between Innerleithen and Kelso. These events aim to test out ideas for the proposed five-year programme whilst engaging people with the river and the early stages of the project in an experiential way.



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A workshop with St Ronan's Well's Community Garden volunteers and Buglife explores connections between pollinators, plants and people, whilst a summer school at the Old Melrose Estate invited students from Edinburgh and Galashiels to engage with the river through drawing, moving image and model making. A series of three professional development workshops is bringing together creative practitioners with those who have specialist knowledge of the river environment, and our pilot artist residency is seeing the artist Jules Bradbury embed herself within a new hay meadow in Upper Tweeddale. These are just some examples of the type of pilot activities that are being developed.

The response so far has been incredibly positive, with interests in our connection to nature, and the stories, heritage and future of the river being echoed in conversations from source to sea. Connecting Threads hopes to build on existing activity and interest to support a growing culture of stewardship, collaboration and shared learning. By October 2021, the Team aims to have developed a proposal for the creation of a cultural 'ecosystem', connecting the hubs of Berwick and Dumfries through a network of cultural activity along and around the River Tweed. If the five-year initiative is funded, two more River Culture Animateurs will join the Team, working in collaboration with communities in the upper and lower reaches of the river.

Contact: Rachel Hunter (Rachel@sup.org.uk)

or Emily Cropton (Emily@sup.org.uk)

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC)

The South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC) is the local environmental records centre for Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire, acting as a focal point for gathering and sharing local wildlife information. The Centre is hosted by SUP and is based, in non-Covid times, at a rural office in Kirkgunzeon.

As for many organisations, 2020/21 was a challenging year. SWSEIC staff have been based at home throughout the pandemic, and whilst this has not always been ideal, we have managed to retain good contacts with our local wildlife recording community, partners and clients. Our data holdings continued to grow, with a further half-a-million records added, and we are delighted that data held by the Centre was used more times in 2020/21 than in any previous year. Many of our planned public activities were inevitably impacted by the pandemic, but like other organisations we adapted to the circumstances. Spare rooms became offices, projects were deferred, field events were replaced by online talks and workshops were held via the Zoom platform.



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Yet whilst one door closed another one opened. During the first spring/summer lockdown in 2020 we launched our 'Wildlife at Home Challenge'. The project was devised to encourage wildlife recorders to keep submitting records to SWSEIC, despite being largely confined to their houses and gardens. It was open to all who were resident in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway during the lockdown and was launched in April 2020, and subsequently promoted using social media contacts. The premise of the 'Wildlife at Home Challenge' was for participants to find, identify and record as many species as they could from within, or seen from, their houses and gardens. iRecord, a UK online wildlife recording system operated by the Biological Records Centre, was used as a vehicle for submitting records to the Challenge. A separate 'activity' area within iRecord was established for the Wildlife at Home Challenge to enable all participants to view all records submitted to the Challenge within minutes of them being added.

Eighty people joined and actively followed the activity, with 54 people taking part by submitting records. The activity ran from 1st April to 31st May 2020. In total, 4,343 records were submitted during this period and over 1,000 different species recorded. It included some fascinating finds, such as the Southern Pill Woodlouse, a new species for Scotland, and the rare Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (image thanks to Buzz Clark).



A full account of the project results is available from the SWSEIC website.

For more information: <https://swseic.org.uk/projects/wildlife-at-home-challenge/>

Contact: Mark Pollitt (mpollitt@swseic.org.uk) or

or Peter Norman (pnorman@swseic.org.uk)



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Next Steps for the Southern Uplands Partnership

As we emerge from months of disruption, the Southern Uplands Partnership has a new strategy and the signs are that things are moving in “our” direction. We have been calling for a more integrated approach to land management and the Government is about to launch Regional Land Use Partnerships which will be charged with developing regional land-use “frameworks”. This is the next step in the development of a land-use strategy. ‘Natural Capital’ is a term that is now mainstream but effectively means that we should give more thought to the way we use the environment so that it delivers a range of benefits for everyone. South Scotland now has an Enterprise Agency with a remit that includes supporting communities and taking care of the environment. We also have the Borderlands Growth Deal which is investing in a range of local sustainable development projects.

We have several “shovel-ready” projects that could start if funding support was available. These include the extension of the Equestrian Tourism project into Dumfries and Galloway; the Wildland initiative; the Borders Energy Agency; the Solway Coastal Trail, WildSeasons; the 3to1 Proposals, etc. We will continue to support other initiatives where we can use our significant administrative experience to help (e.g. with Loch Ken Alive) and we will continue to support ongoing initiatives such as the annual Black Grouse surveys. SUP Services Ltd is already delivering contract work and we expect further work to come our way during the year ahead. It will be another exciting and challenging year!

Thank You

As always, we thank the many people who support our work in cash or in kind. We are very fortunate to have an excellent staff team and a supportive and active Board.

We would like to thank our Patrons for the generous support they give and thanks too to those who make annual donations. Without such support we would not be able to function.

The fact that Southern Uplands Partnership is still working, and growing, 21 years after it was established suggests we have got something right.



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Funders and Patrons of Southern Uplands Partnership



Individual Supporters and Group Members

Project Funders



Ride Scotland's Horse Country; South of Scotland Golden Eagle project



PLACE in the Biosphere
South of Scotland Golden Eagle project
Destination Tweed Connecting Threads



Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group; European Regional Development Fund; Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme; NatureScot; Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme; Rewilding Britain; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Forestry; Scottish Land and Estates; ScottishPower Renewables; South of Scotland Economic Partnership; South of Scotland Enterprise, Tweed Forum.



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