



THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2019/20

June 2020



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DR CHRIS MILES, PARTNERSHIP CONVENER

I took on the role of Convenor at the Annual General Meeting in October 2019, having joined the Board in 2017. I took over the role from Andy McNab and I want to pay tribute to his contribution to SUP’s story given his untimely death earlier this year. Andy joined the SUP Board in June 2013, taking over from John Thomson as Convenor in October 2017. He continued until he had to step down at the end of his sixth year on the Board at the AGM in October 2019, which coincided with him becoming ill. Andy was a great supporter of the Southern Uplands Partnership and Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere and willingly shared his wealth of experience as an environmental consultant. I don’t think he missed more than one Board meeting in his time with us. We miss his gentle good humour and wisdom.



I have had a long association with SUP, having been present at the birth and able to follow its journey through the various twists and turns when I was with Scottish Natural Heritage. Now being a Trustee I can appreciate more clearly the challenges of running an NGO constantly in search of funds. These are needed to sustain the pursuit of its objectives. Seeing the dedication that working for such an organisation with such goals brings out of staff and volunteers is also inspirational.

It has continued to be busy this year with the ongoing challenges that are described in the report. My first period as Convenor has coincided with significant events for our work, including the Covid-19 Pandemic and the arrival of the South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE). The one may be relatively short lived in impact, we shall see, the other is now here for the duration to help the economic and social sustainability of the south of Scotland. In response to this, and the pressing needs of Climate and Biodiversity challenges across southern Scotland, we are preparing a new Strategy to ensure SUP is able to engage with the new opportunities. Our aim will be to secure the environmental improvements required to give the Southern Uplands and its communities the sustainable social and economic futures they need.

PIP TABOR, PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

Writing in a state of “lock-down”, it is quite hard to think back to last year. Re-reading last year’s report, our main concerns were the need for additional administrative support, the proposed establishment of a trading company and the need for more core funding. Twelve months on and we are still viable, although core funding remains an issue. We have been able to employ a part-time Admin Officer, Sarah Plint, through the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project, and that has made a big difference.

We also now have a trading company – the imaginatively named **Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd**. Wholly-owned by SUP, this new Company (SC642786) has its own Board and has tendered, successfully, for its first contracts. SUPS Ltd will be registered for VAT and hopefully generate income for the charity and allow us to engage in some really interesting work across southern Scotland.

We had an excellent AGM in Moffat in October at which changes to our Articles of Association were approved – the main ones being that the Board has expanded from 12 to 15 members and we no longer charge a membership fee.

During the year, we increased the size of the SUP team from 15 to 18, with the expansion of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project, and the start-up of Loch Ken Alive, a new project extending the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Initiative. For more information on Loch Ken Alive, contact Project Officer, Barney Fryer at (Barnaby.Fryer@lochkenalive.co.uk)



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The increase in our turnover caused by this growth required a full audit of our accounts which generated even more work for our Finance Manager, Sheila Adams. For the first time we hit an issue which has worried us for some time. We have a modest unrestricted reserve accumulated over the years which allows us to deliver projects which are funded retrospectively (as almost all projects are). Money has to be spent before it can be claimed from funders. As we have grown, our reserve has been used more and more and this year it was not enough. We found we could not spend approved funds because we had no reserve left in the bank. Frustratingly, no-one seemed to be able to help us address this problem. The only solution was to negotiate a temporary loan from Social Investment Scotland. This has solved the problem for now, but it is an issue that will recur as we continue to grow. Hopefully a more sustainable solution will be found because it would be tragic if funds were actually lost because of a short-term cashflow deficit.

During the year, in partnership with Borders Forest Trust, we bid for some consultation work on behalf of Scottish Forestry and Scottish Borders Council. This considered two pilot areas within the Scottish Borders where pressure for afforestation was strong. The aim was to seek ways of aiding woodland creation in ways that generated greater local benefits. A series of local events and workshops were held and a final report has been drafted.

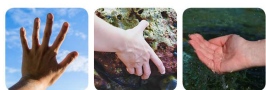
We continued to work with partners on the formation of the South of Scotland Enterprise agency, arranging community consultation events across the region and feeding into “theme” groups run by the South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP). SoSEP transitioned into SoSE at the end of March and promptly had to divert all its efforts into the Covid-19 situation. SUP is keen to ensure that the environment is given adequate attention by the new agency and to this end we worked with the Crichton Carbon Centre to bring together all the environmental groups across southern Scotland to discuss priorities. This group is now the Environmental Alliance for South of Scotland (EASoS) and we hope it will help and influence SoSE and other strategic groups (such as Borderlands Initiative) as things move forward.

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 is continuing to develop its ambitions with a Community Action Plan almost completed, written by Consultants, Creetown Initiative, and exploratory work is underway into the potential for a shared ownership stake in the Crossdykes Windfarm.

We also continue to work with the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership on a number of local initiatives.

For more information, visit <http://sup.org.uk/>

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

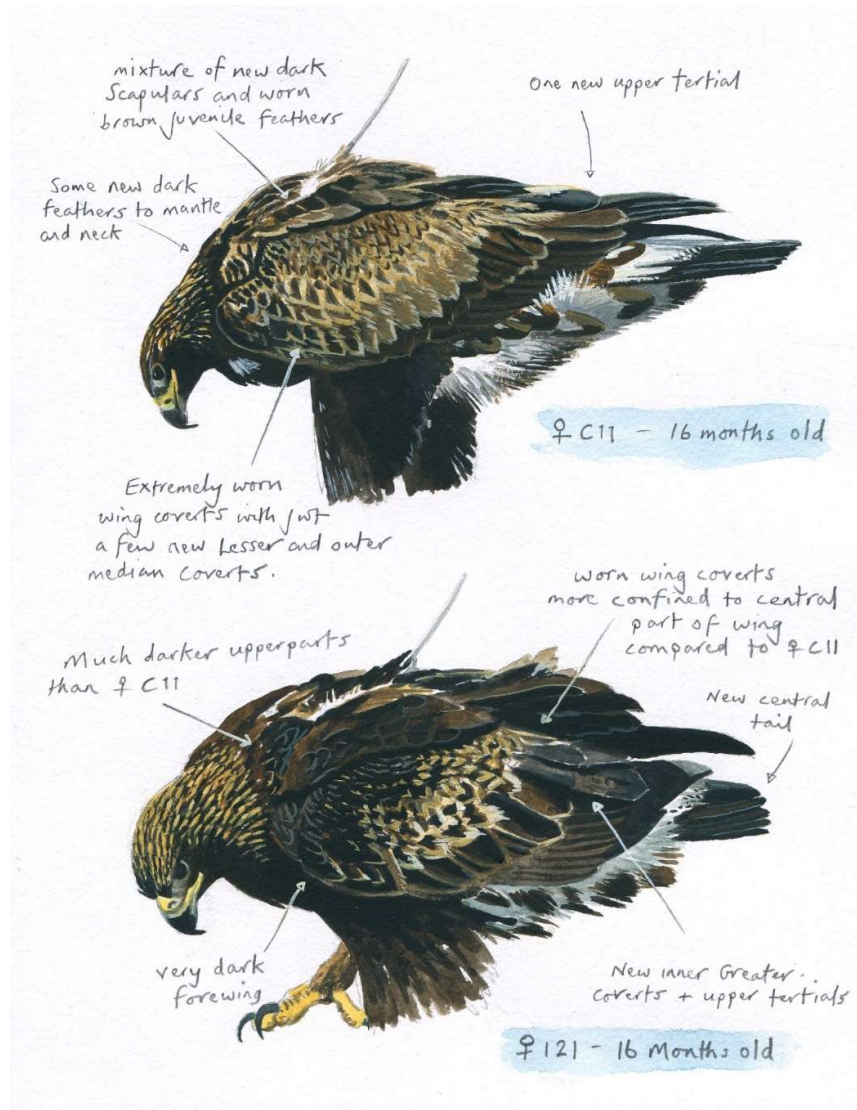


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2019/20 Project Highlights

South of Scotland Golden Eagle project

Released in 2018, Beaky, Edward and Emily continue to thrive as they explore far and wide across the south of Scotland. We have even seen Beaky make a recent journey to the north Pennine hills where she spent a few days 'sightseeing' and was regularly spotted hunting rabbits by a local gamekeeper before returning to the south of Scotland.



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Translocations continued in 2019 where another three birds were collected from eyries in the Highlands with support from Scottish Raptor Study Group and estates. The three birds, all male, were safely transported to our aviaries in the Moffat Hills and successfully released six weeks later. Unexpected events were to follow when Beaky returned to the release valley and subsequently killed two of the recently released males. This behaviour has not been observed in a translocation setting before. While adult territorial eagles are known to be aggressive towards other eagles, this type of behaviour is very rare in a bird so young and whilst we cannot be 100% certain as to her motives, we suspect she may have developed a connection to the release area or was acting to defend the feeding stations. The remaining 2019 male was recaptured by our Eagle Officer and returned to the aviaries for his own safety. He was subsequently released at a newly constructed aviary, several miles away from the initial release valley. Skan, meaning 'spirit of the sky', and named by volunteer, Charlotte Martin, was re-released several days later following a vet check. He has gone from strength to strength and has since crossed paths with Beaky without trouble.

Community Outreach

Our outreach programme has continued to engage people right across the south of Scotland through a series of talks, events and educational programmes. Our Eagle Schools programme, now well established, has been delivered to another four schools. We have broadened our approach to engage older children and young adults. In partnership with Scottish Borders Community Learning and Development we have begun a programme with pupils from Peebles High School who face personal challenges and take part in extra-curricular activities to develop interpersonal skills and build confidence. Sessions have been focused on upland conservation work with John Muir Trust at its Glenlude property.

In partnership with the Scouts, we have launched an Eagle Champion badge with the backing of adventurer, Steve Backshall. Ten groups are engaged with the badge to date with an aim of reaching every Cub pack across the south of Scotland. The badge was specially adapted for students from Borders College who were undertaking part of their course as Explorer Scouts. Students, who have additional support requirements, took part in eight eagle themed sessions which included a Landrover tour to 'Eagle Country', courtesy of Bowhill Estate.

2019 also saw the launch of our Raptor Identification Workshops, 158 hours dedicated by volunteers, and in December 2019 we celebrated reaching 10,000 individuals as part of our outreach and stakeholder work, a figure that demonstrates the commitment of the project to communities in the south of Scotland. This was quickly surpassed as the winter talks circuit continued.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement continues to be a key aspect of the project, with Bryan Burrows developing and maintaining relationships with estates and land managers across the south of Scotland and Northern England. New team members, Jennifer Clark and Patrick Laurie, joined the team for short contracts in early 2020 to help expand our stakeholder engagement in the south west and engage further with private forestry interests in the borders.



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The Year Ahead

Whilst Covid-19 won't impact the movement of the four project eagles, it has meant a rethink of our work for the year ahead. We have taken the difficult but correct decision not to translocate eagles in 2020, a process that requires considerable forward planning, monitoring trips and the work of many individuals and teams. Monitoring of the four released eagles will continue unabated through satellite data beamed direct to our laptops.

Our outreach work continues, albeit now from our screens, as we post daily blogs, convert school sessions to downloadable activities and launch our new Facebook page. Find us at South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project.

For more information, visit <https://www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk>

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

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere has had another positive year. Our UNESCO Biosphere Certification Scheme, the only one in the UK and which recognises businesses that are operating sustainably, has grown from three local business at its launch in June 2018, to 21 certified Businesses in March 2020. They range from accommodation and activity providers to food and drink and manufacturing. There is growing interest in the scheme with five or six new applicants in each window.



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The engagement with business is also reflected in the 150+ Biosphere Proud Supporter businesses, of whom 40 came together to hear about how the Biosphere can benefit business at an event in January 2020. They heard from local businesses who had taken part in learning journeys with Biosphere Officers to international biospheres in Germany and Finland during 2019. A key output of the event was cross-sectoral networking for the businesses – accommodation, activity, food and drink, recognising how by working together they can create a package that truly reflects the sustainability messages of the Biosphere. The three year NPA €1.5m SHAPE project which we have been part of finished at the end of March 2020, following a final conference in Finland that saw designated areas from across Europe come together to share their experiences of how eco-tourism development could help stimulate greater understanding of our natural and cultural environment whilst also benefiting the local economy. The event was hugely stimulating and we were joined on it by partners from VisitScotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council.



A key focus of the year has been around pressures on land use and the opportunities of Regional Land Use Partnerships along with exploring the opportunities that Landscape Enterprise Networks might offer for connecting the natural capital of the biosphere with local businesses. This has linked in well with research work we have supported through James Hutton Institute into cultural ecosystem services, and with Edinburgh University and Forest Research into development of a vision for future land use in the Biosphere. As we end the current financial year thoughts are very focused on the longer term future for the Biosphere and we are exploring potential new funding options and looking at how we can grow the staff resource on the Biosphere.

For more information, visit <http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/>

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



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Great Place project: PLACE in the Biosphere

The PLACE in the Biosphere project aims to encourage people to be curious, take a closer look at their surroundings, appreciate the natural and cultural heritage assets in their countryside and tell the story of their place to a wider audience. Managed by Southern Uplands Partnership, the project is one of nine in Scotland supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund Great Place Scheme. The PLACE in the Biosphere project involves communities in three distinct landscapes within the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere: the Borgue Peninsula; the Wigtownshire Moors; and the Stinchar Valley. Two Project Officers, Jono Hudson and Lynsay Forsyth, engaged with people from nine settlements that each have a different geography, infrastructure and administrative relationship with the other communities in the project. They gathered information on themes that people thought were an important element to the character of the area and organised activities and events that provided opportunities to find out more about local heritage. Activities included a heritage walk, talk and exhibition at Kirkcowan, a place name talk at Glenluce, a visit to explore wildlife at the curling pond in New Luce, a place name walk at New Luce, a guided walk to Ardwall Isle in Borgue, a deserted farmstead talk in Kirkcowan and an exhibition at Borgue Fair.

Both Project Officers left the project in 2019 to be replaced by Nic Coombey who has continued to organise events and activities. Two interns were appointed to assist with the project, Katy Ewing between May and September, and Jenny Forsyth between September and November. Katy worked with communities in the Stinchar Valley and focused on the relationship between Colmonell and the river. Her involvement in workshops and a guided walk resulted in a booklet of poetry being published. Jenny worked with communities in the Wigtownshire Moors producing reports on the curling pond in New Luce and Balkail Glen Community Woodland in Glenluce. Community volunteers from the Borgue Peninsula have gathered and, with the help of experts, researched the meaning of both place names and field names in the parish. The information collected will be available online and has been used to produce four place name films, as well as being used to create a watercolour field name map of the area. Volunteers in Borgue have also cleared vegetation from an ancient monument at Castle Haven and have produced virtual reality content which it is hoped will be accessed on future interpretation of the site.

At the end of March 2020, the full implications of vital social distancing measures to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus on the PLACE in the Biosphere project were unknown. The restrictions led to the cancellation of planned activities and an approach to deliver the aims of the project until March 2021 was being developed with the Great Places Team at the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

For more information, visit <http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/living-in-the-biosphere/biosphere-in-action/place/>

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



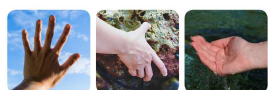
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Galloway Glens Biosphere Experience

This project started in September 2018 thanks to funding from Dumfries and Galloway LEADER, Heritage Lottery Fund, Dumfries and Galloway Council and SUP. Laura Davidson delivered the work until the project ended in March 2020. The aim was to encourage local businesses, individuals and groups to explore opportunities to promote experiential tourism within the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership area. We wanted people to see how their skills and knowledge could provide a unique experience for visitors by immersing them in the history, culture, environment or art of the region.

It was hoped that this would encourage collaboration between businesses to begin to offer packages of activities, accommodation and food to create a more bespoke experience for guests. If successful this would hopefully lead to improvement in the local economy due to increased numbers of visitors and potentially job or training opportunities for young people in our rural communities who may not have considered tourism as a career path.



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All of the activities that ran as pilots were very well received by attendees. In general people liked the small groups, knowledgeable group leaders and the local focus. Generally, the participants were from Dumfries and Galloway but the feedback suggests that this would be of interest to tourists too.

Overall, there has been good networking between businesses, community groups and individuals. The project has been successful in helping to build working relationships that did not already exist. It is hoped that these networks will continue to function and expand as a legacy of the project.

There was an increased momentum towards the final six months of the project with more businesses approaching and expressing an interest in being involved. This highlighted that there is an enthusiasm within tourism businesses to develop their offering and work together for greater benefit.

The workshops and events running in the last three months of the project proved very popular and all booked up extremely quickly. Sadly, the COVID-19 outbreak meant some of these could not go ahead but they have shown there is demand for these types of activities.

The project has also been well placed to raise awareness of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere. A number of businesses have signed up as Proud Supporters as a result of the project and are actively talking about the Biosphere in their own marketing activity. This is a key opportunity for businesses to capitalise on the world-renowned designation and use it to attract more visitors.

In summary, the project can be viewed as a success. Despite some challenges with the timescale and networking needed, a good range of activities were investigated during the course of the project. There were opportunities to create new business networking opportunities and generate ideas amongst existing tourism providers. It is expected that through the Biosphere Team, these connections will continue to work together to build on the progress made so far.

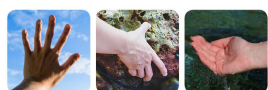
The project successfully showed that there is a need locally for an organisation such as the Biosphere Partnership, to co-ordinate tourism packages and assist small businesses with the networking and marketing aspects that come with trying to promote these more widely. Having a resource that can help with the logistics and communications to the travel industry and visitors would allow the activity and accommodation providers to focus on their own business and service levels.

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

Equestrian Tourism - Ride Scotland's Horse Country

The second year of this project saw a number of significant milestones delivered.

The website www.ridescottishborders.com continued to grow and develop with over 30 equestrian and rider-suitable accommodation providers listed on it. All the accommodations link into the trails and we are starting to see a solid network developing, meaning visitors have more choice and can easily ride through the Borders from East to West as well as North to South. Route maps also provide skill-level guidance. Catering options during rides and at destinations are also highlighted, as are opportunities to visit attractions, events and galleries for family and friends for rest days during the rides.



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Ann Fraser MBE (second left) and Gowan Miller (second right) being awarded a Regional Thistle Prize for Collaborative Tourism.

During the year, the project was nominated for the Regional Thistle Awards run by VisitScotland as an example of the best in “collaborative tourism” and it won! Well-deserved recognition of the work put in by the Project Officer, Gowan Miller, and the project Steering group.

The project website attracts lots of interest. The majority of users are searching from within the UK but also from the United States, Australia, Canada, France, Netherlands, Japan, Ireland, India and Germany with searches from a further 42 countries.

Social media continues to develop with Facebook and Instagram pages @ridescottishborders. We have also started a “hacking buddies” group for local riders to meet up. Statistics show that posts from January – March 202 reached 36,565 people and just over 10% of viewers have engaged through liking, sharing, commenting or following. Instagram is also steadily growing with 420 followers, 90% in the UK and the rest in the United States, Ireland, Brazil, Australia and Canada.

The project is being promoted through flyers, banners, printed adverts and social media campaigns which went out UK wide in three of the top equestrian magazines as well as a successful campaign in the Scottish Field. A successful promotional video has drawn interest (and bookings) from all over the UK and abroad with one group coming from America (<https://youtu.be/sROeyfEmevY>). A four-page article was published in Your Horse magazine in conjunction with their #hack100miles campaign. ITV Border Life has also done a feature on the project which resulted in three businesses contacting us.

<https://www.itv.com/news/border/2019-08-30/watch-border-life-30-08-19>



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The original Tweed Trails along with key core paths were all surveyed to evaluate current and potential horse access. 43 routes have been surveyed amounting to 536.4 miles. Where routes have been found to be suitable, descriptions have been documented with photographs and each has been electronically mapped. The routes are available to download and can be followed on a smart phone. A booklet of 15 horse trails in line with Scottish Borders Council 'Walks Around' series has been produced and is ready to print. Various new trails have been developed and horse gates have been installed thanks to funds from British Horse Society (Scotland).

We have built relationships with over 30 new businesses, providers, attractions and travel trade experts and we have attended a number of networking events and shows. Stakeholder meetings have featured prominently, especially in regards to route development or landowner permissions. Scottish Borders Council's Access Team, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and the British Horse Society have all played important roles.

We are often asked is there a worthwhile equestrian tourism market? From our equestrian business returns, we estimate a conservative 200 visitors for 2 nights = 400 bed nights per year would be worth about £28,000 pa income per business. Since the project started, the number of businesses interested in this market has grown from 7 to 30. And there are wider benefits. The cost of farriers / tack / feed and bedding / labour and of course local food and drink for 200 additional local visitors is not insignificant.

On the back of the growing interest and after a six-year hiatus, we were in the process of reviving the once popular Borders Festival of the Horse, with over 20 events lined up ready to take place across the Borders. Unfortunately, this had to be cancelled because of Covid-19, but we hope to try again in 2021.

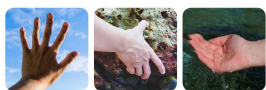
For more information, visit <https://ridescottishborders.com/>

Contact: Gowan Miller (gowan@sup.org.uk)

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC)

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC) is the local environmental information centre for Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway. Throughout the year SWSEIC continued to collate and share information about species, habitats and sites across south west Scotland. As of 31 March 2020, the SWSEIC database contained 1,967,822 wildlife records. This represents an addition of 130,697 records during 2019/20. SWSEIC continues to promote the use of the iRecord online wildlife recording website for submitting casual wildlife records, and the system now handles over 20,000 records each year from volunteer recorders in the south west Scotland area.

The information held by SWSEIC has been provided to a range of users, including recorders, individuals, students and to environmental consultants carrying out environmental assessments. SWSEIC processed 91 data enquiries during 2019/20, meaning the data was used more times in 2019/20 than in any previous year. The Centre's work in Ayrshire continues to expand, and the number of requests processed for Ayrshire exceeded those of Dumfries and Galloway for the first time.



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During the year SWSEIC ran several training courses, covering identification of dragonflies, amphibians and reptiles and promoting participation in the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS).

A conference for local wildlife recorders was held at Maybole on 7 March 2020. It was attended by approximately 50 people, and featured a range of talks on themes from forest fringe management in the Galloway Forest Park to raptor monitoring in south west Scotland and upland restoration at Carrifran.



Moths at Home project

The Moths at Home project was led by the South West Scotland Branch of the charity Butterfly Conservation, working with SWSEIC to demonstrate the beauty and diversity of moths that live in their own gardens to communities in the Galloway Glens area. It was funded by the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership's Small Grants Scheme.

A typical garden in Galloway may support 200 or more different species of moth. Many are large and colourful, but the average garden owner is often totally oblivious to their presence. The project involved running community moth recording events with six different communities between May and September 2019. At each event, participants were provided with a moth trap and training on how to set it up. Each took it away and set it up in their own garden or community greenspace site. The next morning, participants returned with their traps to a central point where the catch was identified by local volunteer experts and the moths released unharmed.



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Six moth-trapping sessions were held with local communities between May and September 2019. 35 traps were set in 19 different 1km squares in the Glenkens. A total of 1,912 moths were caught and identified, covering 204 different species. The detailed results for each of the community moth trapping sessions can be viewed on the SWSEIC website at <https://swseic.org.uk/projects/moths-at-home/>.

For more information, visit <https://swseic.org.uk/>

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

Next Steps for the Southern Uplands Partnership

As mentioned at the start, the SUP Board are working on a new strategy for Partnership in the light of recent developments in southern Scotland including the new Enterprise Agency and the Borderlands Initiative and of course the growing need to address climate change and the biodiversity crisis. The Strategy will be ready to launch at this year's AGM in November (virus-permitting).

SUP Services Ltd is already delivering contract work and we expect further work to come our way during the year. The Board will need to monitor how to balance demands of SUP and the trading company.

It remains very unclear what projects may be supported in the year ahead. There are several "shovel-ready" projects that could start if support was available. These include the extension of the Equestrian Tourism project into Dumfries and Galloway; the Wildland initiative; Tweed Connections; the Borders Energy Agency; WildSeasons; the 3to1 Proposals, etc.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere is approaching the point where it may well become independent of SUP although the two organisations will remain closely aligned. Indeed, there are those calling for another Biosphere to be developed in the Borders, perhaps as a precursor to a National Park?

Thank You

As always, we thank the many people who support our work in cash or in kind. We are very fortunate to have excellent project staff 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, 20 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



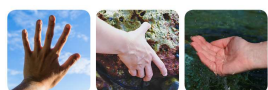
Galloway Glens Biosphere Experience; Rhon Biosphere Learning Journey;
Ride Scotland's Horse Country; South of Scotland Golden Eagle project



PLACE in the Biosphere
South of Scotland Golden Eagle project



British Horse Society (Borders); British Horse Society (Scotland); Butterfly Conservation; Energise Galashiels; European Regional Development Fund; Future Hawick; Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme; Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme; Rewilding Britain; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Forestry; Scottish Land and Estates; Scottish Natural Heritage; ScottishPower Renewables; South of Scotland Economic Partnership



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