

Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation

Summary

1. Founded in 2016 and constituted as a SCIO in Feb 2017. Took on lease from FLS in 2017 for Barrandaimh in Knapdale to create the Argyll Beaver Centre. The 2 founders, Oly Hemmings and Pete Creech both worked for the Scottish Beaver Trial. There are 6 local trustees. Our remit is environmental conservation and education
2. The centre functions as a tourist information point, environmental interpretation centre, education centre and community resource.
3. Users include 19th Argyll Scouts, Kilmartin Museum, Fyne Stirrers spoon carving club (who meet monthly), 'Heads-Up' group and UHI (centre used as field study base for HND Horticulture students).
4. 3,200 people visited the centre over 102 days in 2019. We engaged over 2,000 more via our programme of guided walks, events and activities. We are extending our hours and will be open for 130 days next year between March and October
5. The centre is off-grid with its own water supply and a compost loo. As far as wildlife centres go we are unique in this respect.
6. We have a contract with to the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) to monitor the further release of beavers into Knapdale until the end of 2020. We provide regular tours for Wilderness Scotland's customers and guided walks and talks for Melfort Holiday Village clients.
7. We engage with a number of primary schools throughout Argyll, from Campbeltown to Oban. Last year we worked closely with Luing and Easdale primary schools developing a vegetable garden and approaches to scientific surveys. We also work with Oban High School's additional support students.
8. Another of our core purposes is to increase the level of bio-recording in the area. We do so by inspiring the public to become involved in citizen science projects, attending moth mornings, pond dipping etc. and submitting data and images via our social media pages. If we don't know it's here, we can't protect it.
9. Highlights in 2019 included working with the Natural History Museum to provide a 360-degree film of one of our beaver walks for their YouTube channel, being involved with a community-driven native oyster reintroduction project at Loch Craignish and representing UHI (where we both also work as tutors) in a joint UHI and RZSS funding bid to create a new centre for wildlife conservation training/species reintroduction at the Highland Wildlife Park. We also hosted like-minded people from all over the world from Brazilian filmmakers to zoo workers from New Mexico.

Points for Consideration

1. We knew there was a need, we didn't realise how big and wide that need was!!
2. To enable us to continue delivering and developing our service, and the economic benefits it is bringing to the area in terms of increased tourist numbers, we need help. Environmental funding streams in Scotland lag way behind their English counterparts. The nation's heightened environmental awareness has yet to filter through to mainstream funders, particularly an awareness that all of this work cannot be done by volunteers.
3. We provide a de-facto ranger service for Mid Argyll, a non-statutory obligation that as far as we are aware has never been provided by the Council. Ranger numbers have nearly halved in

Scotland in the past decade. It is our belief that this service will largely fall to private operators and social enterprises in the medium term.

4. We provide face-to-face tourist information of a high calibre to visitors to the area. We are a Visit Scotland 'Visitor Information Point' and we are 'World Host' trained. Apart from a web page on the Visit Scotland site and a badge and a sticker we receive no support.
5. We still seem to be fighting to get onto the radar as far as Argyll and Bute Council is concerned. We believe we are bringing tangible economic benefits into a remote rural area, providing inspirational and unique formal teaching to local schoolchildren and massively raising the profile of the area as a prime wildlife tourism destination in Scotland, along with lots of help from our partnership with the local beavers!

Partnership Action

1. We have good working relationships at a local level with Forestry and Land Scotland, The Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Kilmartin Museum and Scottish Canals.
2. We believe that the sympathetic and sustainable development of low-key wildlife tourism within Mid Argyll can bring multiple benefits for a wide variety of other businesses within the locale.
3. Partnership working is the only way things can be made to work in an area with a small, scattered population and limited resources.

For further information please contact: Oly Hemmings or Pete Creech info@heartofargyllwildlife.org