

Tarras Valley Nature Reserve

Spring 2024 Newsletter

We can't believe we are already writing our spring Newsletter with the last few months going by in such a flash! With longer days drawing in, shoots and new growth emerging across the reserve, species such as our hen harriers returning, and our lambs ready to be born, it's starting to feel like the reserve is awakening from its winter slumber.

We have been busy with everything from schools sessions, visits, restoration projects, events and end of year accounts to name but a few!

As always, we want to say a huge thank you for all your ongoing support, without you, none of this would be possible!

Here are the highlights from the past few months:



Photo credit - @love.langholm

Annual Update Webinar

Interested in hearing about what we've been up to?

Join the Tarras Valley team for a short annual update webinar on Wednesday
17th April 6-7pm.

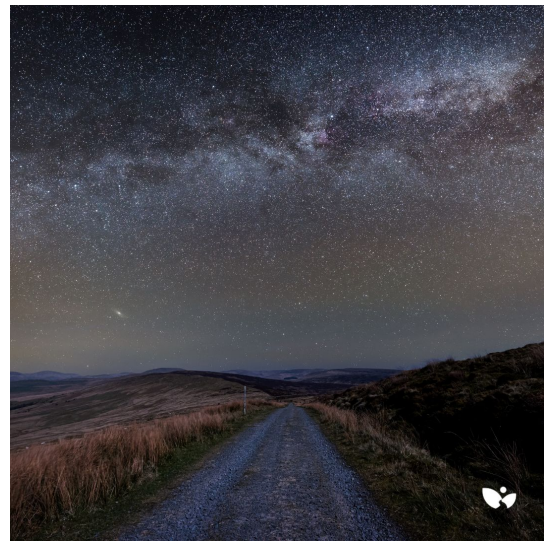
The online event will give you a journey through the last year and all the work that has been taking place since our community buy-outs. We'll be covering our work on nature restoration, climate action and community engagement as well as how we are working towards long term sustainability. The event will

include an interactive presentation from the team and some of our board members followed by questions from the audience at the end.

Spaces are limited so early booking is recommended.

[Book your place here!](#)

People



Dark Skies Night

With the stunning Aurora Borealis making another appearance in Langholm earlier this month, our dark skies really are spectacular on a clear night. We hosted a community event at Broomholmshiels to celebrate our dark skies and find out more about what we can see when we look up on a clear night.

On a cold night, the group wrapped up, enjoying hot chocolate and space-themed snacks. We were joined by Hayden Goodfellow, an Astrophysicist and Science Communicator, who works at Kielder Observatory. Hayden gave us a virtual tour of the universe, explaining the different types of stars and planets, what we can see through binoculars and telescopes, and how our understanding of the universe has changed over time. It was a fascinating talk, full of beautiful pictures that showed that there is much more to the night sky than meets the eye.

Although our view of the real stars was unfortunately blocked by cloud, the insight into the universe that Hayden gave us will definitely impact how we see the night sky in future!

School sessions



Over the last month, the Canonbie Primary P6 class have been busy out on the reserve, working towards their John Muir Discovery Award!

They've been exploring the reserve, playing games, planting trees, clearing sitka spruce, making barn owl boxes, and much more! Find out more about their experience on the award by clicking the button below!

[Read more here!](#)

University Visits

So far this year, we have hosted visits from Bangor University's Forestry students, and Bartlett School of Architecture UCL Landscape Architect students. Both groups were shown around our beautiful ancient woodlands, and had great questions and discussions about the community-led approaches to ecological restoration and woodland management.



We love using our community land as an outdoor classroom and we look forward to welcoming Exeter Uni Wildlife Conservation MA students on their third annual visit in a few weeks time!



Tarras Valley Volunteers

As always, we are immensely grateful for all of the wonderful people who volunteer their time to support the project in a variety of different ways!

To make the volunteer sessions more accessible, we listened to feedback that some people would prefer weekends, so have started running monthly Saturday sessions. If you're interested in finding out more, the dates are available at the bottom of this newsletter, you can also join our facebook group – [Tarras Valley Volunteers | Facebook](#) or get in touch with us directly!

Research and Learning

We have participated in a number of Scottish government commissioned research projects recently who have approached the Langholm Initiative for input. This has included research on native woodland creation by Forest Research; perspectives on Land Reform Futures as part of Scotland's Land Reform Bill by James Hutton Institute, and Scotland's Rural College.

We also visited Holyrood and took part in the People's Panel for Climate Change, looking at how communities can contribute to a net-zero Scotland.

We hope that the work we are doing can help positively shape these wider national discussions.

Nature



Pine Marten Den Boxes

With the support of pine marten expert, John Martin, and the Dumfries and Galloway Pine Marten Group, our volunteers installed two new den boxes in our woodland.

The boxes will provide safe and cosy shelter for these elusive animals, hopefully helping to support and grow the population and habitat range. We will be using an infrared camera to monitor the boxes (from a safe distance!)



Photo credit - Gavin Graham,

Caring for our ancient woodlands

With support from the Woodland Trust, we have been able to carry out vital management works to help care for our beautiful ancient oaks in Longwood. These trees are hundreds of years old and had become surrounded by dense thickets of birch trees which were blocking light causing decline.

Local contractors, Triskel Trees and Borders Forestry Ltd, have been busy halo thinning birch trees around the oaks to provide much needed space and light as well as cutting back and treating invasive Rhododendron plants.

Following the felling works, our volunteers have been building log and brash piles across the woodlands to create new habitats for wildlife and support biodiversity.

An aerial photograph of a forest. In the center, there is a small, dark-colored machine, possibly a skid steer loader or a similar piece of forestry equipment. The forest floor is covered with a mix of green vegetation and brown, fallen branches or debris. The overall scene is a dense woodland area.

Tarras Strip Felling

Since October we have been working with Tillhill and local consultant Mark Seed to fell 36 hectares of sitka spruce plantation, operations are nearing completion with some timber haulage still to carry out before the operation is finished. We're going to be holding some community events over the coming months to get ideas and suggestions for the next stage of restoration and are looking at how we can improve walking routes, create new wetlands and encourage native woodland across the site.

If you are a local resident, you will receive an update in the post from us shortly.

You can read Tillhill's January press release about the project by clicking the button below!

[Read more here!](#)

Climate

Peatland Restoration Planning

Our peatland restoration programme with the Crighton Carbon Centre is going full speed ahead, with applications for Naturescot licensing and Council planning permission now submitted.

The tender for the first stage of 190 hectares of ditch blocking on Middlemoss Head, which will block over 35 miles of drains, is now being advertised for contractors to bid and will be live until 17th April 2024.

We also held a community event to talk about historic peat cutting on the restoration area, to get peoples thoughts and feedback. We hope to do some interpretation as part of the work to record people's memories and celebrate these important cultural links to the land. We are aiming to start this work in the Autumn this year.



Woodland Creation

We have been working alongside Rotary International Dumfries and Galloway branches, who have been pitching in with volunteering days, doing everything from clearing our walking routes, planting trees, removing sitka spruce trees and old fencing on the reserve.

They have now kindly funded some new plastic free tree guards and stakes for a riparian tree planting project, which is being carried out by volunteers and school groups. We were keen to trial the effectiveness of biodegradable tree guards and we'll be using them to see how they compare with the traditional plastic guards over time. A big thanks to the Rotarians for their ongoing support!



Sustainability

Financial Sustainability and Community Bonds Survey

As you will be aware, ensuring the reserve's sustainability includes the need to develop independent income streams and this is something we have been working on the past year. Working with John Gilbert Architects, we have now developed a draft Master Plan for key properties and have been conducting market research on tourist accommodation including glamping, hostels, field studies centres and mountain bothies, as well as exploring housing, business location and land based activity on the reserve.

We are now at the stage of comparing the income streams and profitability of the various business options as well as investigating funding options – including ‘community bonds’. Community Bonds allow ‘ordinary’ people to make investments in local initiatives. In return they receive a financial return for themselves and a social/ economic/ environmental return for the community. We would like to get a feel of whether there is any appetite for this approach to developments on the Tarras Valley, with this short survey – if this is of interest, link below!

We will let you know the results in a future newsletter as well as showing images of what some the developments may look like!

[Community Bonds Survey](#)



Cronksbank cottage

At last after what seems an awful long time waiting for funders, we are about to start the process of looking at how best to renovate Cronksbank Cottage and bring it back into use as a property rented at an affordable rent.

Architects have been out on site this week undertaking survey work – we are using John Gilbert architects who have lots of experience in looking at how we can renovate the property to see if it can achieve net zero. This is always difficult with ‘retrofitting’ old properties so we will be looking at different options and what the implications are for building costs and what improvements mean for running costs for future tenants.

If you want any more information on the project, please contact

angela@tarrasvalleynaturereserve.co.uk

We would like to thank funders who are supporting this stage of the process – the Scottish Government Rural Housing Fund and Crossdykes Community Benefit fund as well as South of Scotland Community Housing who will be helping us keep the project moving!

Visiting Langholm? Dates for your

diary!

Whether you're interested in learning about habitat restoration from experts; taking part in practical conservation activities, or just want a brief update on what has happened on the reserve over the last year, there's something for everyone!

We'll be posting updates on our social media with more information before each event, but feel free to get in touch with any questions!

Upcoming events

March / April



March 7th 7-9pm @ Broomholmshiels
Dark Skies Evening [Sold Out]

March 23rd 1-3pm @ Broomholmshiels
Tree planting volunteer session

April 17th 6-7pm Online
Tarras Valley: A year in review –
Annual update webinar

April 24th 6-7pm @ Langholm Social Club
A journey through Tarras Valley
Peatlands with Crighton Carbon Centre

April 27th 1-3pm @ Broomholmshiels
Old Railway Clearance volunteer session

Upcoming events

May / June



May 25th 1-3pm @ Broomholmshiels
Bracken Bashing volunteer session

June 13th 6-7pm @ Langholm Social Club
Restoring our Rivers: Opportunities on the
Tarras – talk by Galloway Fisheries Trust

June 22nd 1-3pm @ Hallpath
Hallpath woodland tidy-up

June 27th 6-7:30pm @ Buccleuch Centre
'Why Not Scotland?' Film screening

Please follow our social media for further updates about our projects and the work we've been doing.

With all our thanks,

The TVNR team and volunteers

The Langholm Initiative

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