

# Signs of Life

## in the Community Walled Garden



### Report

Friends of Hermitage of Braid & Blackford Hill

Oct 30<sup>th</sup> 2017



**Forestry Commission Scotland**  
**Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba**



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## 1. Introduction

Commissioned by Friends of Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill (FoHB), **Signs of Life** was a cultural-bridging project with a focus on the Community Woodland Walled Garden at the Hermitage of Braid Nature Reserve on Edinburgh's Southside. It was funded by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) as part of their Central Scotland Engagement Programme and their Volunteer Community Champion scheme (FCS VCC), Edinburgh's OneCity Trust and FoHB.

**Signs of Life** was designed to bring hands-on practical activity into the garden and to enhance it through the creation of an eye-catching exhibition, which would also act as a learning and teaching resource. At the same time the project was to provide a meaningful way for groups from different social and cultural backgrounds (some isolated and hard to reach) to meet, share, exchange and find communality. Participants were to be recruited from across the city, in order to bring together children and adults from a range of community groups, some new to the Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill nature reserve and others already using the community garden.

The following activities were proposed:

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- Nature exploration through a series of fun themed workshops inspired by the flora and fauna found in the Hermitage of Braid
- Creation of a new colourful artwork depicting additional fauna commonly found in the garden
- The refurbishment, re-curating and re-varnishing of existing animals and bird 'cut-outs' created in 2013 by a previous project undertaken with the Central Scotland Deaf Community.
- Installation of the resulting woodland fauna artwork along the garden terraces and raised flower beds
- Creation of interpretation signage
- Collation of information for interpretation boards, showing the creation process and crediting the funders, artists and community groups involved
- Creating a wheelchair accessible path inside the garden.

## 2. Participating Organisations

### **Deaf Action Youth Group and the Central Scotland Deaf Community**

As well as directly involving 10 children and young people from the Deaf Action Youth Group, along with their 2 group leaders and 5 parents, the project also indirectly involved an additional 12 children and 8 adults from the Central Scotland Deaf Community, who had been participants in Signs in the Woods Project in 2013.

### **The Edinburgh Nepali Community School**

This group included 21 children, 2 young people and 8 adults from the Nepali community school, including families from the Nepal Scotland Association.

### **Priestfield Positive Futures Group**

This group of 35 adults were mostly over 50s / 60s and included members of the Edinburgh Mandir Cultural Centre. It was a mixed group including 7 men.

### **The RSPB Phoenix Group and the RSPB Newts Group**

These two RSPB groups, already using the garden, included 5 adults, 4 young people and 5 younger children.

### **Friends of Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill**

Across the project delivery, we had a total of 7 adult FoHB volunteers, along with 4 children.

## Service Providers

- **FCS Voluntary Community Champions**  
Govinda Ram Kandel and Nila Joshi
- **The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)**  
Community Outreach Officer, Lucy Graham
- **City of Edinburgh Council Forestry and Natural Heritage**  
Ranger Staff, Susan Dickson and Andrew Law

## 3. Project Management and Delivery

FoHB associate arts organization **Creative Art Works CIC** (CAW) was commissioned to design and manage this project from concept through design to delivery and reporting, participant monitoring and project evaluation.

Date	Activity
July 2017	<b>Pre-Contract</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concept design</li><li>• Liaising with client groups, service providers and participating individuals</li><li>• Project design, planning and preparation.</li></ul>
August/ September 2017	<b>Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buying and treating timber and collating other materials and resources</li><li>• De-install of existing damaged artwork</li><li>• Risk assessments</li><li>• Field research.</li></ul> <b>Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Art/ natural science activity days</li><li>• Creation of artworks</li><li>• Finishing of artworks with volunteers</li><li>• Installation of artworks.</li></ul>

<p>September – October 2017</p>	<p><b>Interpretation /credits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of display boards and identification panels.</li> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Display board build</li> <li>• Installation of display boards, identification panels and signage.</li> </ul> <p><b>Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection and collation of feedback</li> <li>• Processing of photographs and other recorded material</li> <li>• Creation of short written report</li> <li>• Distribution of report including recommendation for future projects.</li> </ul>
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The laying of wheelchair friendly surfacing/ pathways will be undertaken by Jethro Gauld from the RSPB Phoenix Group in November 2017.

## 4. Community Engagement Days

### Session 1 - Wednesday 2nd August

**Creative Art Works** Team working with the **Deaf Action Youth Group** and **The Nepali Community School** group, along with members of the **RSPB Phoenix Youth Group**.

Deaf Action kindly provided the event with a BSL (British Sign Language) interpreter.

**Indoor art activity:** Participants from all three groups worked in Hermitage House with the Creative Art Works team; Children and adults chose from various pre-cut wooden shapes representing woodland birds and animal, then used the imagery provided to draw and colour-in features and textures using pencil, overhead projection and finally paint and brushes.

**Outdoor woodland play:** This included exploring the surrounding woodland community garden, pond dipping with **TCV** (The Conservation Volunteers) Outreach Ranger. Working with the Nepali FCS Community Champion enjoying Nature Detective activities such as Scottish native leaf spotter game.

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## Session 2 - Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August

**Creative Art Works team** working with **The Nepali Community School** group, along with members of both the **RSPB Phoenix Youth Group** and some younger children from the **RSPB Newt Group** and younger siblings of the pupils from the Nepali Community School.

Additional support provided by volunteers **Rob Walker** and Bird expert **Keith Donnelly**.

**Indoor art activity:** Continuing the artwork in Hermitage House with Creative Art Works team, this time also creating some additional pencil drawings of birds, amphibians and animals ready to be transferred to wooden for painting in a future session (25<sup>th</sup> Aug).

**Outdoor woodland play:** This included exploring the surrounding woodland and working with FCS Community Champion on a specially prepared "Nature Detective" Scavenger hunt activity, involving using adapted egg boxes with images inserted to collect organic materials from the woodland floor and sort them into categories such as colour, texture, weight, description (e.g.: soft, sticky, bumpy, light, pretty, etc.). On both days, the groups also enjoyed a picnic lunch. On Wednesday (2<sup>nd</sup> Aug) this was outdoors in the sun, on Friday (4<sup>th</sup>) the onset of rain meant the group moved into the upstairs space at Hermitage House for their indoor picnic.

## Session 3 - Friday 25<sup>th</sup> August

The **Creative Art Works team** working with volunteer adults from **RSPB** and **FoHB** in Hermitage House painting additional birds, animals and amphibians.

## Session 4 - Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August

**Creative Art Works team** working with 35 participants from the **Positive Futures Group** – this included men and women of diverse cultural heritage, mostly over 60s and including a wheelchair user and others who required additional mobility support.

**Indoor art activity:** Participants worked in Hermitage House with the Creative Art Works team:

- Joanna Boyce - Lead Artist
- John Cunningham - Arts Assistant
- Lindsay Snedden – Photographer.

Participants chose from 35 Birch slices prepared with white silhouettes of Butterflies and Day flying moths found local to the Hermitage of Braid nature reserve. They then

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worked with palettes of paint and a range of fine brushes to copy detail and colour on to the birch slices from photographs and illustrations from relevant wildlife brochures, creating 35 beautifully detailed artworks. The group was naturally very artistic and was delighted with the day, finding it not only artistic and creative but also meditative. Learning about the individual butterflies and the biodiversity that supports them was also part of the process.

**Outdoor activity:** This included:

- Gentle walks and exploring surrounding woodland
- Visiting the Community Walled Garden, where the group met Head Gardener Goff Cantley and many of them put their hand to some weeding, composting and other simple garden maintenance
- Group and individual photos against a woodland backdrop
- Enjoying Asian food picnic-style in the green space in front of Hermitage House visitor centre.

### **Sessions 5, 6 and 7 - Tues 29<sup>th</sup> August, Wed 30<sup>th</sup> August and Thurs 31<sup>st</sup> August**

These comprised of 3 finishing days at Hermitage House working with **RSPB** and **FoHB** volunteers. These three sessions involved finishing all the birds and animals and treating and painting the backs of each artwork. Also collating all butterfly images against the Butterfly Conservation Leaflet 'Butterflies and Day Flying Moths of the Lothian and Borders'. Participants worked in Hermitage House with the **Creative Art Works team**.

### **Session 8 - Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September 17**

This half day additional (in kind) session took place at Priestfield Church Hall on Dalkeith Road (where the **Positive Futures Group** have their weekly meetings) and involved presenting the completed and varnished butterflies to the Positive Futures Lunch Group and matching the painted images with photographic images from the Butterfly Conservation Scotland's ID brochure. The Group enjoyed posing with their artwork in the Church community garden and made plans and suggestions of how to refurbish the Church garden inspired by the Hermitage of Braid Community Walled Garden.

## 5. Design and Technical

Creative Art Works design team completed the following:

- The research and collation of a 'fun fact' for each of the represented wildlife
- Layout and print of name signage
- Design of visuals and texts for the both the information board and the butterfly ID board
- Sign build and sign painting.

Creative Art Works technical team gave all artworks professional quality primers and varnishes as follows:

- Before community painting with Rosco Supersaturated acrylic paints, the wooden cuts outs were primed with 3 coats of white Rosco supersaturated whitebase on the front and edges
- This was followed by 2 coats of undercoat on the back and a coat of black water based eggshell paint
- After the community had painted their pieces, all the artworks were treated with 4 coats of Polyvine Dead Flat Decorators Varnish (for internal and external use)
- This was finished with 3 coats of Polyvine Satin Varnish (additional coats will be applied this winter for extra protection)
- The butterfly board and painted birch slices were all treated with several coats of a high gloss lacquer.

The technical team installed all art-work and signage week 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> September. In November, the Creative Art Works team will unscrew the board and bring it indoors to give it a further 3 coats before reinstalling for the winter. They will also attach a small brass plaque with the names of the artists, replacing the current, temporary laminate version.

Jethro Gauld and a team of volunteers from FOHB designed, specified and installed the wheel-chair accessible surface.



## 6. Project Overview

The participants in The Signs of Life Project came from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds, including two hard to reach groups and some from areas of regeneration and deprivation. The overall age range was diverse and there were a number of additional support needs amongst the group participants.

The sessions were informal yet focused, with all groups enjoying relaxed conversation at the same time as researching visual images for their chosen bird or animal.

The painting activities provided a focus for all groups - especially those from isolated communities - to meet, get out, enjoy activities in the woods and to study, research and be inspired by flora and fauna of the wood.

The wildlife topic provided a common interest for the diversity of the group and the Creative Art Works team maximized all opportunities to encourage discussion and example of how people should respect wildlife and take responsibility for the stewardship of local woodlands. The outdoor element of the project gave those involved a chance to be active together in their local woodlands. The group leaders highlighted the importance of the health and well-being benefits of being outdoors and of activities such as the nature walks.

The cultural bridging dimension of this session was particularly evident with members of the Deaf Youth Group sharing BSL signs with both the Nepali and the Phoenix groups. This not only included signs for various fauna but also an introduction to some basic conversational language.

The Signs of Life delivery provided a platform for the two FCS Volunteer Community Champions to deliver sessions and to shadow experts. With the involvement of FCS, City of Edinburgh Natural Heritage Service, RSPB and TCV, group leaders had opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of how to access and enjoy their local woodland. They were also able to learn some Scottish woodland animal and bird identification.

The project brought a wide range of ages and cultures together. The final display has enhanced the Community Walled Garden as a green space for social interaction and learning about the biodiversity of woodlands.



## 7. Image Gallery



More images of the event(s) can be viewed at  
[www.creative-art-works.org/clients/signs-of-life](http://www.creative-art-works.org/clients/signs-of-life)

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## 8. Participant Monitoring

Gender		
AGE	Male	Female
0-4 yrs	4	1
5- 6yrs	5	5
7-10yrs	7	7
11-15yrs	3	12
16-24 yrs	4	
25-35 yrs	4	7
35-44yrs	3	5
45-55 yrs	5	5
55-64 yrs	3	25
65 yrs +	38	9
Totals	38	76
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>114</b>	

Religion	
Buddhism	20
Sikhism	3
Christianity	6
Hinduism	11
Judaism	-
Other	30

Ethnicity	
White	
Scottish	27
Irish	-
Other British	7
Other White	-
<b>Mixed</b>	
Any mixed background	7
<b>Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British</b>	
Indian	5
Bangladeshi	4
Nepali	31
Iranian	3
Mauritian	2
Pakistani	21
Japanese	1
African-Arabic	3
<b>Black, Black Scottish or Black British</b>	
Caribbean	
Other	1
<b>Other Ethnic Background</b>	
Cuban	1
Vietnamese	1

## Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines disability as any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do.

### Physical disability

Male	2
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Female	1
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### Visual Disability

Male	-
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Female	-
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### Hearing Disability

Male	-
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Female	5
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### Mental Disability

Male	1
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Female	-
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### Learning Disability

Male	1
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Female	-
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### Any Other Disability

Male	-
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Female	-
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## 9. Participant Feedback

*“Little did we know that this project would take off in such a way – and it has been proven to be full of surprises. It reflects the ‘soul’ of this particular Garden – a place for groups to use and explore, a joy for visitors and a haven for wildlife.”*

**Jessica Morgado** – Senior Natural Heritage Officer  
City of Edinburgh Council Forestry and Natural Heritage

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*“The project has been a really fun and exciting one to be involved with, especially seeing how it has evolved over the past few years. I know the young people who helped to create and renovate the pieces of art in the walled garden have taken a lot of pride in their work, all eager to show me what pieces they did! Thanks for involving us and we look forward to continue working on this project, thanks again for the great day.”*

**Alex Furneaux** - Youth Work Co-ordinator

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*“What a fun way to use the local woodlands to bring families and communities together on a joint venture with a lasting legacy. Well done “*

**Lucy**

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*“I think this has been a fantastic project. It’s incredible to see so many people together from so many different backgrounds and different ages and abilities. This is what community is all about.”*

**Arne Strid**

Chair of Morningside Community Council

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*“What a lovely artwork installation - it would be amazing to see this valuable work developed. There used to be so many butterflies and how marvellous if this project can initiate a comeback – so do some planting and conservation so that we can see the butterflies in their habitats. The animal, bird and butterfly art in this garden just adds value. It’s a beautiful and useful resource.”*

**FoHB Committee member**

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*"I enjoyed being part of this project. Regarding improvement - the only thing I can think of (and I know it is not easy when you are juggling different groups) would be to have had a firm timetable earlier in proceedings that could have been publicised more widely – that may have resulted in more volunteers from the local area, if required."*

**Maggie Nisbet**

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*"The Signs of Life sessions were all very focused and relaxed. It was helpful to be shown how to mix colours and use different colours and mix the right tones for painting the wildlife. Also when to use different brushes for different paint technique. Painting is such fun and both my daughter and I loved it. We also enjoyed exploring the river and identifying birds and animals in and around the river. We were able to identify a Dipper, after watching John paint one. The kids had a really good time learning how to make fire for the BBQ. One of the really interesting thing about this project was meeting people from other communities – and seeing how interested they were in trying out some simple sign language."*

**Tania Allan**

Project Participant and Deaf Action member

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*"It is so important to encourage projects involving wildlife conservation and outdoor work. We are pleased to have been part of such an accessible project with its wide social, cultural and generational mix. We need to create more opportunities locally to encourage people to work together - especially those targeting work with children, young people and adults who do not usually take part in physical or arts activities."*

**FoHB**

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*"Our groups feedback is that the whole project made for a wonderful adventure, we enjoyed it so much that we can't wait for next one. The workshops were well organised. We were reminded of our younger days, through the lovely outdoor nature-inspired art activities. Painting Butterflies was a wonderful experience. The Woodland walks were very relaxing and therapeutic, and for many of our group this helped them with health problems."*

**Nila Joshi** - Volunteer Group Leader, Positive Futures Group

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*“Joanna at Creative Art Works was a force of Nature getting this project through completion. The team worked very well in the space available and the completed project has been a positive addition to the walled garden project...”*

*Overall a great success and a big turnout on the final day”*

**Andrew Law**

Natural Heritage Officer, City of Edinburgh Council Forestry and Natural Heritage

## 10. Recommendations

Running the activities over a series of days allowed for high-level engagement across and between different groups. This meant that participants had the opportunity to really take to the activities, engage with their surroundings and interact and work collaboratively with people from groups they may not encounter on a day to day basis. As an approach, this promotes integration, understanding and engagement with the subject matter and it could add to future projects as well.

Communication between the organisers, Creative Art Works, and City of Edinburgh Council Forestry and Natural Heritage could have been tighter. Additional time/resources would have enabled the space for a closer working relationship before, during and after the engagement days.

In the original proposal, BSL for each creature was to be displayed alongside English, Scientific, Gaelic and Scots names. After meeting with members of the Central Scotland Deaf Community it was decided that rather than rushing with insufficient funding they would approach funders with a proposal to do a separate project with this group. Their specific intention is to create signage in British sign language, following on from the FCS Signs, Seeds and Woods BSL glossary project. This could be an opportunity for FCS/ OneCity to support further integrated projects for deaf and hearing people in the community, so they can share and learn together.

A lower level of matched funding than initially anticipated for the desired project scope led to a considerable amount of in-kind work for the creative team in order to deliver to a professional standard. Whilst there is satisfaction in a job well done, we need to ensure that

the professional team running these projects is being paid a professional wage for the work undertaken, or that project scopes are refined to reflect the budget available.



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