

RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond

Update for Kilmarnock Community Council, October 2018

For any questions, feedback or additional information on any of the items below, please contact loch.lomond@rspb.org.uk. We are also happy to arrange additional meetings with individuals to discuss any of our reserve work.

1. Current planning application – extension of temporary portacabin permissions

A planning application is currently lodged to extend the permission previously granted for the Site Office portacabins, for an additional 5 years.

Budget constraints have meant that it has not been possible to pursue more permanent options at this time, but reserve work continues.

To continue to progress our work on the reserve, we are requesting that the current permissions are extended for a further 5 years.

Screening, including woven willow and hedgerows, that were put in when the cabins were first installed, have now grown/settled well and will continue to soften the impact of the cabins on the landscape.

Additionally, since the original installation of the office cabins, a new access road has been installed which has improved the visibility splay for access and egress of the site for staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors.

No amendments to the original application are being proposed.

2. Visitor access projects

Following on from consultations carried out between March 2018 and September 2018, the RSPB are pursuing plans to develop a Loch Access Path, following a route from the current car park and visitor facilities, to the beach at the Shore Wood (see map below).

Landscape architects have been commissioned to complete designs, and a planning application will be submitted in November/December 2018.

Meetings have been arranged with neighbours who may be impacted by the route, to ensure we can take on board any concerns they may have.

Feedback received so far has been very positive, and any concerns that have been raised are being considered in the design of any new routes. For example, the original indicative route was shown as being close to neighbouring boundaries, this has been altered in updated plans. Another example is that concerns were raised regarding the avoidance of sensitive areas of habitat. As a nature conservation organisation, the RSPB's primary concern is the impact of any development on the important features found on the reserve, and this features heavily in our thinking. However, as a

further method of scrutiny, the RSPB will be carrying out a Habitat Regulations Assessment to inform Appropriate Assessment, and will be seeking an opinion regarding Environmental Impact (EIA screening).

The routing, micro-siting, materials and interpretation that will sit alongside the path are all being considered in detail, alongside all potential ecological impacts.

Additionally, we will be working on designs for a village link path, although we will not be applying for planning permission for this at present. This was discussed recently with the KCT. We will continue to work with the local community and the KCT to develop the detail of this route and how it links in with the Community Action Plan aims and objectives, as well as liaising with the National Park and other interested parties.

Both paths featured as part of the overall RSPB vision, which was initially presented at the March 2018 open day.

3. Reserve management plan review

The 5-year management plan for RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond, covering 2014 – 2019 is currently being reviewed and a new plan written covering the period 2019 - 2024. The new plan considers much of the learning and additional information that has been gathered about wildlife, habitats and visitors over the past 5 years.

A summary of the achievements and challenges over the last 5-years can be found at the end of this document.

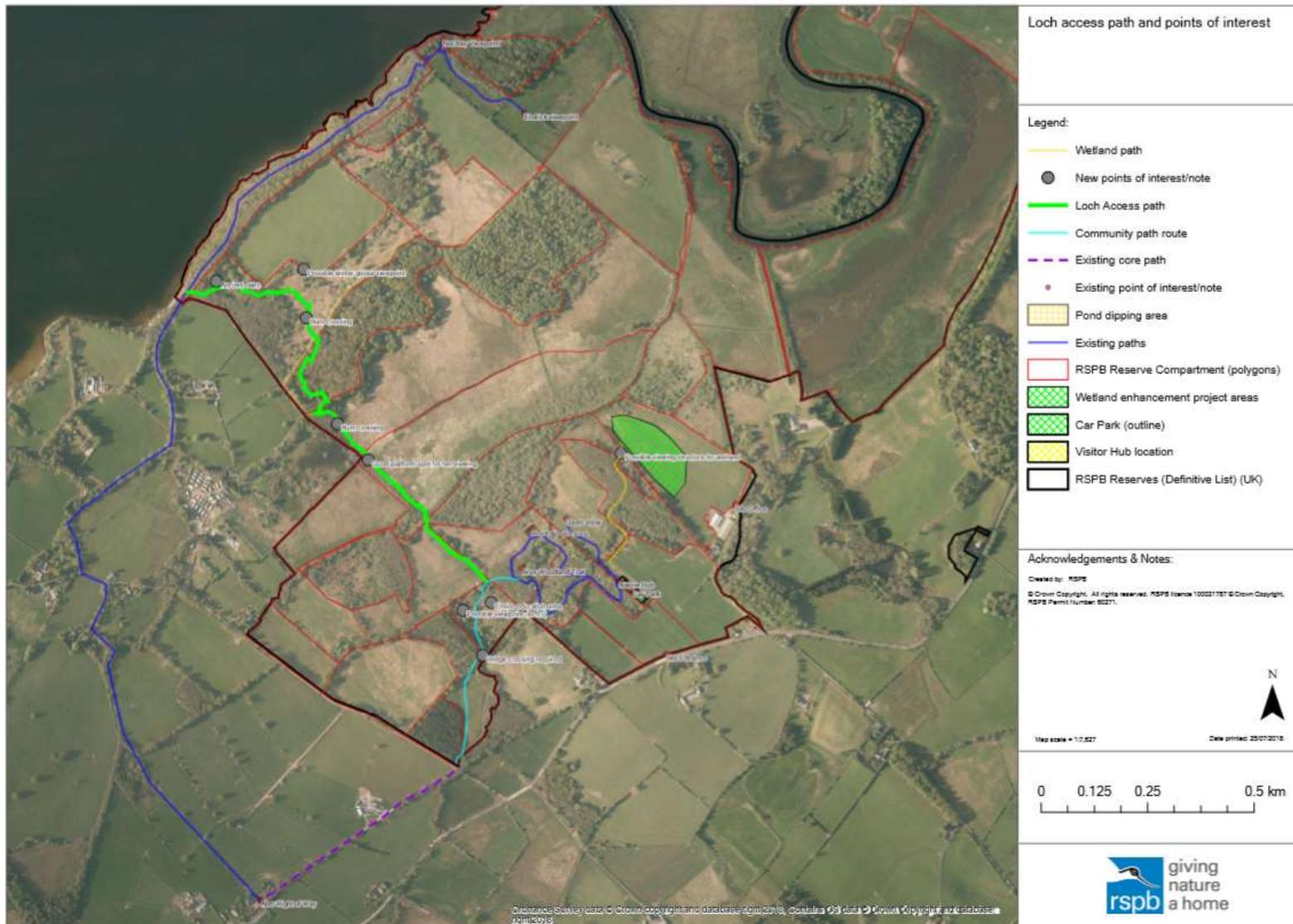
A copy of the new 2019-2024 plan will be available for those who wish to receive it. Please email loch.lomond@rspb.org.uk to request this when available (approx. Dec 2018)

4. Woodland management plan

Details of the proposals included in this were made available during the Community Open Day, in March 2018. The headline objectives include:

- a. Removal of non-native conifer plantations in three locations on site, and replanting with native deciduous species, the mixture of which will match closely to existing reserve woodland characteristics
- b. Removal of willow and alder successional scrub from open habitats, including the Aber Bog, where the spread of scrub is causing decline to the notable features of the SSSI, including the hydromorphological mire range, breeding bird assemblage and vascular plant assemblage. This will take place over the next three years.

Further details available on request.



Map 1 showing indicative routes of new Loch Shore access on site, alongside other plans for access and facilities.

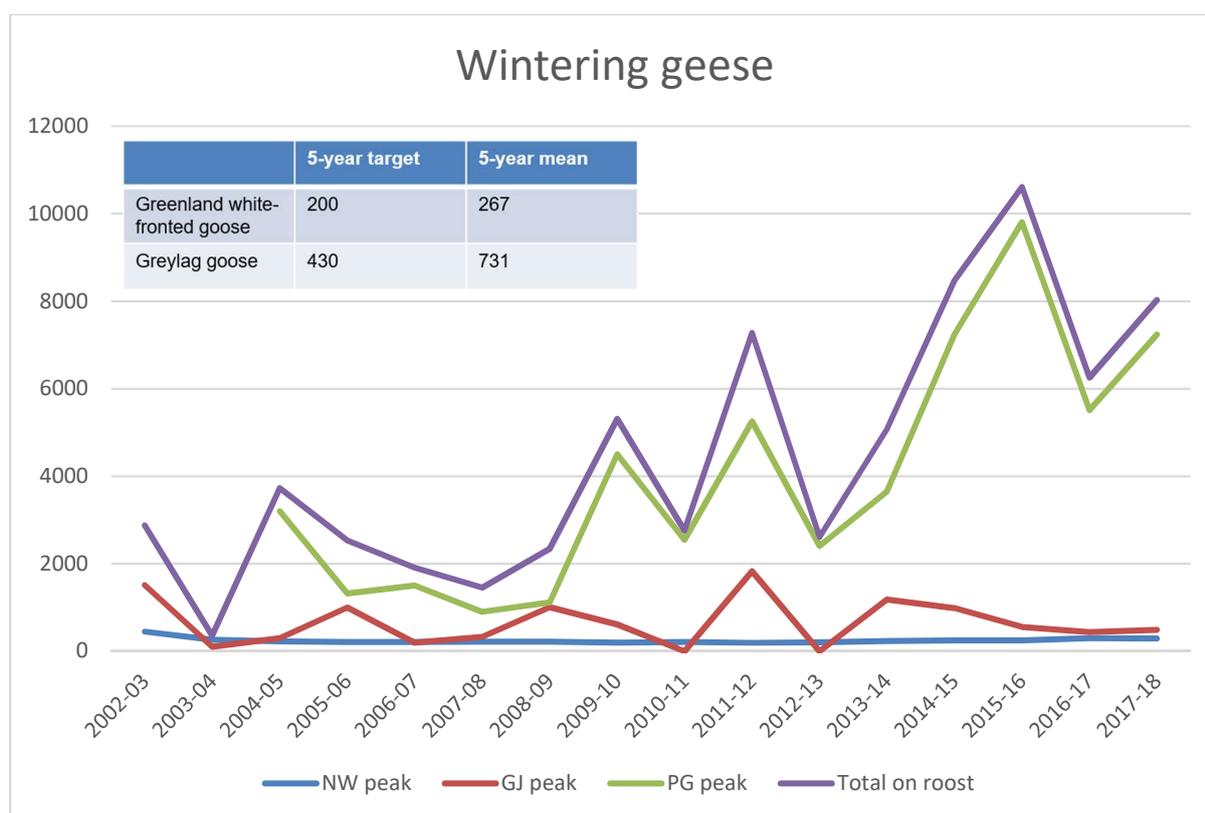
RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond 2014 – 2019: A summary

The information below briefly summarises some of the main achievements against the objectives that were set in the 2014 – 2019 RSPB management plan.

Record goose numbers during the last 5 years

All goose species are currently exceeding the targets that were set for the previous 5-year period, with a significant increase in the total number of birds using the roost, mainly due to the increased presence of pink-footed goose.

This includes a peak count of 300 Greenland white-fronted geese during winter 2016/17, which is the highest count since 2002.

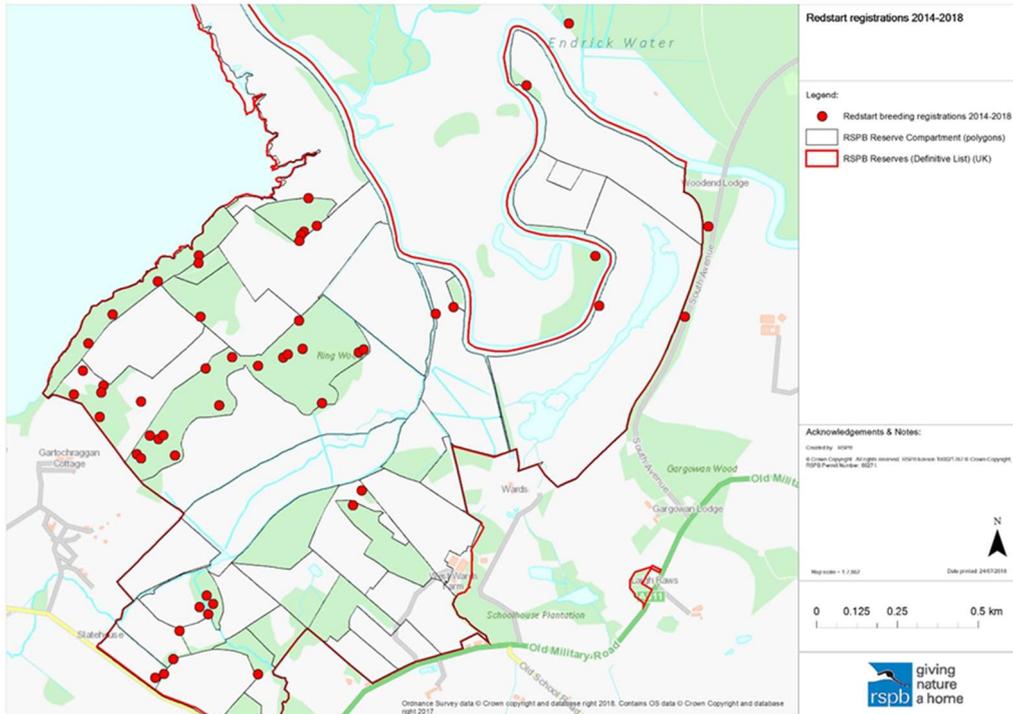


Graph 1 shows the number of wintering geese recorded during both roost counts and ad-hoc surveys on site between winter 2002-03 and 2017-18. Blue = Greenland white-fronted goose, red = Greylag goose, green = Pink footed goose. Purple represents the total roost size, which closely follows the increases seen in pink-footed goose.

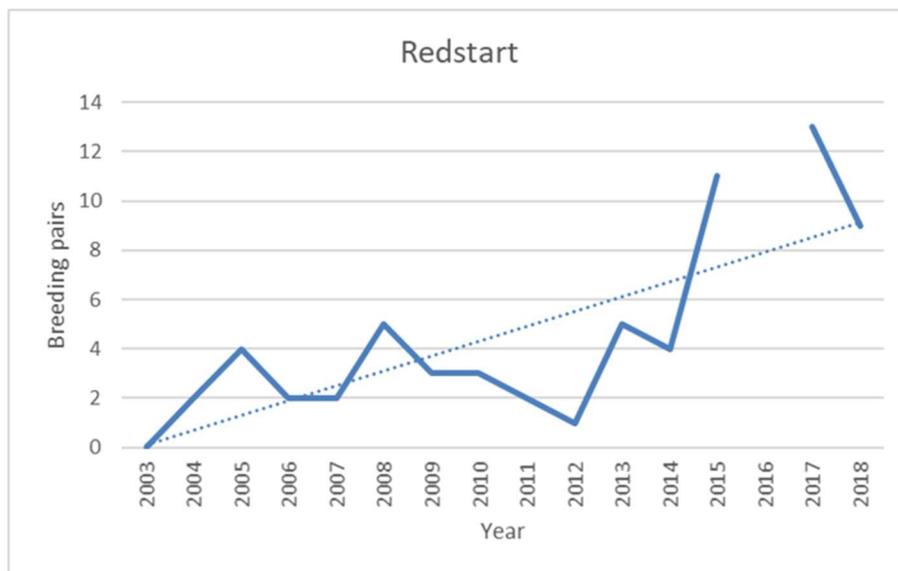
Breeding bird successes

Key breeding species on site include redshank, snipe, redstart, tree pipit, grasshopper warbler, reed bunting and wood warbler.

All key breeding species, except grasshopper warbler, are either meeting or exceeding their target. Grasshopper warbler declines can be attributed to national trends as well as localised management conflicts, some of which are being addressed in the 2019-2024 plan.



Map 1 shows the locations of all singing redstarts recorded during breeding bird surveys between 2014 – 2019. This is an example of maps produced for all key species on site.



Graph 2 shows the numbers of breeding pairs of redstart between 2003 and 2018 (2003 – 2012 records via SNH). This is an example of graphs produced for all key species on site.

New and rare species recorded on the reserve



Clockwise from top left: Bronze shieldbug (*Troiilus luridus*), Narrow-fruited water starwort (*Callitriche palustris*); Great otter spider (*Pirata piscatorius*); Horsetail sloth weevil (*Bagous lutulentus*)

There have been several rare or unusual invertebrates, plants and lichens recorded, including some new additions to the vice-county. These include great otter spider (*Pirata piscatorius*), bronze shieldbug (*Troiilus luridus*), horsetail sloth weevil (*Bagous lutulentus*), narrow-fruited water starwort (*Callitriche palustris*) and violet crystalwort (*Riccia huebeneriana*). Also, there has been a recent discovery of one of the most notable northerly populations of great pond snail (*Lymnaea stagnalis*).

Nuthatch has been recorded as a new breeding bird species on site, as of 2018.

Red squirrels are now regularly recorded on the reserve and there have been no sightings of grey squirrel in the last 5 years. Pine marten and otters continue to do well.



Habitat works

Work has taken place to reduce the ongoing spread of soft rush in many compartments on site, especially those likely to host feeding geese during the winter months. This has included some reseeding works, changes to grazing regime, weed wiping, cutting and removal, plus muck spreading and liming in places.

Following the installation of replacement access bridges in 2017/18, work took place using specialist 'Softrak' machinery (see image below) designed for wet ground, to cut and remove vegetation build up from the fen. This is part of the ongoing management to improve the condition of the fen for designated features, including vascular plant assemblage, breeding bird assemblage, beetle assemblage and hydromorphological mire range. Trial management using hand held machinery had taken place in the years prior to this.



Invasive non-native plants such as Himalayan balsam continue to be a significant problem on site, requiring intensive periods of control during the summer. This is a problem across the whole NNR, and indeed the Endrick Water catchment.

All SSSI's remain in favourable condition, as do the SPA and SAC features. Fen condition is declining (and has been for many years prior to RSPB's arrival) but this is being addressed through management on site now and in the future.

Infrastructure projects

Essential infrastructure has either been installed or replaced to assist with the delivery of reserve objectives. This has included: temporary office portacabins to allow us to develop work on the reserve; 4 replacement bridges in various locations; new cattle handling facilities at Limehill; and the installation of a dedicated access road.



Clockwise from top left: Temporary office portacabins summer 2018, with screening and hedgerow now well established; new access road completed; cattle handling pen installed at Limehill; new bridges installed on Snipe Flats.

Visitor facility projects

Several projects for nature reserve visitors have been delivered in the past 5 years. These include a small, 15 space car park; temporary 'Nature Hub' visitor information structure created through the conversion of an old exhibition trailer; footpaths around the coppice woodland and leading to one of the reserves best viewpoints; and a pond dipping area and shelter. Improvements have also been made to the well-used and well know Net Bay viewpoint, work on which is ongoing. Plans to increase access on the reserve continues but is limited by current resources. Plans to create more permanent visitor buildings and offices are also on hold for the same reason.

The visitor experience has received 3-star accreditation from Visit Scotland as well as many positive reviews via different platforms.



Clockwise from top left: 'Nature Hub' conversion from events trailer to meet and greet centre; new footpaths installed on site in winter-spring 2016-2017; pond dipping area and shelter built adjacent to paths and existing pond; willow sculpted deer, part of a series of sculptures created for the site by artist Trevor Leat and part of the overall reserve interpretation vision.

Events, activities and feedback

Over the past few years, our events programme has continued to grow, offering a range of different activities across the reserve, from bug hunts to goose walks to food foraging. We have hosted approximately 1200 event participants taking part in 227 different events during the 5-year period, and this continues to grow year on year. In addition to this, we have also held special events each year for members of the local community to learn more about our ongoing work.

Gartocharn Primary School have visited on many occasions and we have also worked with Drymen and Buchanan Primary Schools as well as schools in Balloch and Alexandria. In the past 5-years we have joined the 'Scout Friendly Site' scheme, and have welcomed more Beavers, Cubs and Scout groups as a result.



Clockwise from top left: Families enjoy bug hunting activities on site; neighbours, councillors and volunteers attend the Nature Hub open day; volunteers help with path launch event; Gartocharn Primary School join in with bug hunting activities on site.

Part of our overall aims for the Nature Hub was as a place to gather information about what visitors would like to see happening on the reserve in the future. This has been done through a mixture of questionnaires and informal feedback, which has been collated and used to inform our plans.

When asked “*What, if anything, would improve your visit here*” these were the categories of responses:

9 people commented about **paths**:

“I was expecting a connection to the loch side path. More feeders on the circular trail”

2 people commented about **facilities**

“What about a small bird hide as a future step in the site development. And proper loos!”

3 people commented about **signage**

“Better sign on the main road. We overshot turning”

4 people commented about **interpretation**

“Develop the use of web cams (screens in hub)”

16 people commented about **other ideas**

“A mobility scooter to allow me to take more time to explore”

53 people said “**nothing**” or left their answer blank

Figure 1: Example of feedback gathered from visitor questionnaires in 2017, a total of 82 responses were received for this question.

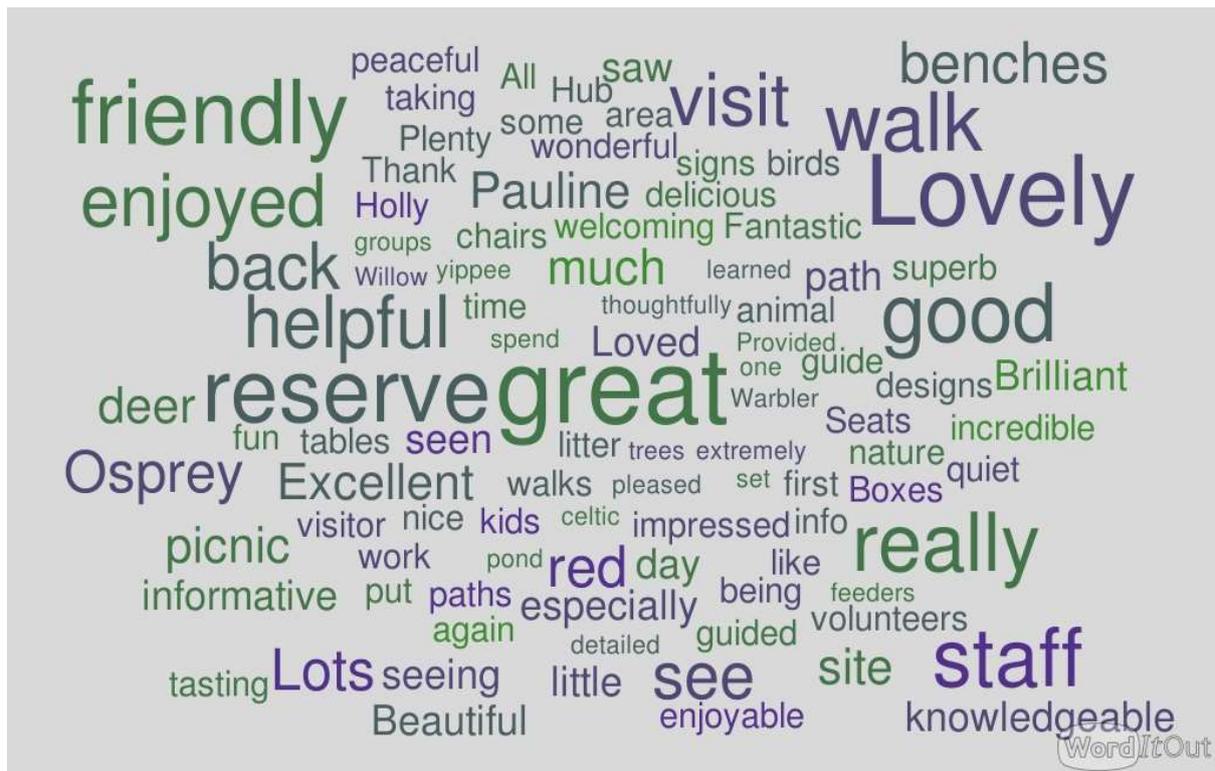


Figure 2: A ‘wordle’ created using the feedback provided on our ‘We’re All Ears’ cards. The size of the word represents the number of times it was used in feedback.

Volunteering

The team of volunteers contributing to our work has grown from 1 person to over 50 in the last 5 years, and now volunteers contribute around 4000 hours per year towards a range of work. This includes volunteers from Gartocharn, Drymen, Helensburgh, Alexandria and Balloch, as well as people from further afield. We have also established a long-term residential volunteer programme and we often work with volunteers from Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. All the above assistance is essential to allow us to deliver our objectives for nature.



Clockwise from top left: Ditch clearing to the west of Aber Bog; Volunteers from RSPB, SNH and LLTNP out on the NNR; Fen burning; volunteers stand by their handwork after having completed fence repairs at Net Bay.

Management plan review process

- 'Pathfinders' with internal colleagues and external partners to discuss specific issues that require work, as well as to discuss general direction of travel for reserve projects. Review of visitor feedback received and any ongoing issues/concerns - Completed
- First draft plan developed and shared with internal colleagues and partners – shared for feedback gathering and amendments – due for completion mid November 2018
- Second draft plan produced for sharing with any interested parties – End Nov 2018
- Final plan submitted to SNH for statutory sign-off – Jan 2019