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For immediate release

Discovering the wonders of the Flow Country

Schools have been on their summer term outings to RSPB Scotland's Forsinard Flows reserve to learn more about the amazing landscape on their doorstep. Primary 6 pupils from Golspie had a discovery mission with the Education Team from the Flows to the Future Project to find why the Flow Country is so special, and also so important for rare and specialised species.

On their visit to the Flow Country the children learned about why these peatlands, which form the largest blanket bog in Europe, are the perfect habitat for many different plants and animals which thrive in our cool, damp climate. Using identification charts the enthusiastic youngsters set about finding as many different species as they could on Forsinard's Dubh-lochain Trail. To their amazement, finds included insect eating plants like sundew, lizards, basking in the sun, rare wading birds like greenshank in amongst the flowering crossed leaved heath and sweet-smelling bog myrtle.

Pupils learned how to use binoculars to spot distant flying birds, deer and landscape features like the Ben Griam hills from the Flows Lookout Tower. They also entered the magic world of sphagnum spells and used their best wizarding voices to pronounce the tricky Latin names of three of the different types of sphagnum moss found on the trail. Sphagnum moss is one of the most important plants in the peatlands as it does not fully rot down when it dies and so forms peat.

Searching for the dwellers of the dark pools on the Dubh-lochain Trail proved to be one of the most popular activities and also one of the most revealing about life in the Flow Country. Palmate newts, dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, great diving beetles were all discovered, closely examined using magnifying glasses and then carefully returned to their watery homes.

Ann McInnes, teacher at Golspie Primary said, “We had a fantastic field trip at the Flows Field Centre. The facilities are amazing with the well-equipped field centre next to such a wonderful, wild landscape and the trail through the peatland habitat is perfect for a group of children. All the staff were friendly and interacted really well with the children who enthusiastically engaged with all of the well thought out activities. All of the tasks set were age and stage appropriate and integrated perfectly with what we are doing in class. We can now use our experiences and learning from the field trip in class to deliver meaningful numeracy lessons, writing tasks, science and social studies work. We are so lucky in Sutherland to have world renowned habitats full of amazing plants, birds and animals right on our doorstep and it is essential our children appreciate what is there so they have the knowledge to inform others and care enough to protect it in the future.”

The outdoor learning activities at RSPB Forsinard are provided as part of the Peatlands Partnership’s Flows to the Future Project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The visitor centre at RSPB Forsinard is open daily during the summer. There will be a family day during the summer holidays on Wednesday 7 August. Activities will start at 9:30, 10:30 and 2pm so that families can visit by train. The event is free and it would be helpful if people could advise if they plan to come by emailing hilary.wilson@rspb.org.uk or by telephoning Forsinard Field Centre on 01641 571225.

The Feis Rois Ceilidh Trail is visiting Forsinard visitor centre on Wednesday 14th August from 2pm – 4pm, when talented young people will be playing traditional music. Visitors will also be able to sample food provided by Scotland’s Natural Larder, showcasing the many opportunities for eating wild and natural products. There will be a ceilidh in the evening at the Halladale Hall from 7:30pm – see <http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk/> or <https://www.facebook.com/TheFlowCountry/> for more details.



NOTES TO EDITORS

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, The Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Third Sector Interface, The Flow Country Rivers Trust, and The Environmental Research Institute. It is chaired by Professor Stuart Gibb from the Environmental Research Institute.

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