



## **Press Release: January 4, 2019**

### **Another busy year in the Flows**

2018 was another busy year for the Flows to the Future Project. The aims of the project are to promote the Flow Country, so that people have more opportunity to find out more about it and understand its significance for both biodiversity and as a vast carbon store, and to also carry out and advise on peatland restoration work. To find out more about this Heritage Lottery Fund supported project and future events in 2019, see [www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk) or follow #theflowcountry. The project is a Peatlands Partnership initiative, with RSPB Scotland as the lead partner and the other main partners being The Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso.

#### **January**

Postgraduate students from the Art, Space and Nature course at the Edinburgh College of Art put on an exhibition of art work in Edinburgh inspired by their visit to the Flow Country in the autumn. They spent a few days staying at the Flows Field Centre in Forsinard. It was interesting to see the Flow Country through their eyes.

#### **February**

The Flow Country touring exhibition was in Stirling in February, but has also been to Aberdeen, Hamilton, Dumfries and Galloway, Argyll and Dundee this year. Next year it will also go to England.

Throughout the winter months, peatland restoration work carried on in the Dyke plantation near Forsinard, taking down non-native conifers that have been planted on deep peat. Once the trees have been removed, the forestry ditches and drains are blocked, which allows the water levels to start to return to what they were before the planting. This allows the return of the peatland plants and animals.

#### **March**

The Project's Learning Development Officer had a packed week of school sessions as part of the Caithness Science Festival, exploring exactly what peat is, and how it compares with other soils. Lots of peaty handprints were made. On the family day, the Communities Officer explored how people travel to the Flow Country and what you might see on that journey.

## **April**

Tourism businesses attended a tasty lunch and tour at Forsinard, to help them to promote the Flow Country to visitors. The project will be running this session again in 2019!

## **May**

A grand outing around the Kyle of Tongue was led by local historian Jim Johnston and artist Shaun Fraser. Those on the walk had fun getting up close to the peatlands, making moulds of the mossy hummocks using plaster of Paris.

The Flow Country was showcased at an event at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh in May. This focused on a new book, "Our Land" by nature writer Mark Cocker, who was interviewed by Flows to the Future Project Manager Caroline Eccles. The book has evocative descriptions of the Flow Country, as well as outlining the recent landuse history.

## **June**

In June the RSPB Forsinard Flows nature reserve hosted visits from Halkirk, Newton Park and Miller Academy Primary schools. They learnt about the importance of the Flow Country and looked at the life in the peaty pools. They had great fun pond dipping and making musical raps about the life cycle of dragonflies.

## **July**

RSPB launched a limited edition golden plover pin badge, only available in the Flow Country. The golden plover is a small wading bird that is characteristic of the peatlands and for which the Flow Country is a stronghold.

## **August**

The Flows Field Centre was busy throughout the summer and autumn with lots of volunteer groups. In August a group of teenagers visited for a week, doing practical conservation tasks and finding out more about our special landscape. Then there were five weeks of "working holidays" with individuals coming together from across the UK. Some of those taking part had volunteered last year, and enjoyed it so much they were back again. Each week included tasks such as drain blocking (to help the peatland become wetter), pulling up young conifers that had seeded onto open peatland, and carrying out archaeological fieldwork. There was also a programme of talks that was open to the public.

For the second year running the talented young musicians from the Feis Rois Ceilidh Trail visited Forsinard in July. The Flows were a fantastic setting for the beautiful traditional music. The many visitors also enjoyed the Nature's Larder event on the same day, finding out how we can make delicious food from natural ingredients.

Lybster Girl Guides visited Forsinard in August, with a full day of activities including pond dipping and potion making with peatland plants.

## **September**

The Project's Learning Development Officer visited Golspie Primary School to work with the children on ancient cultures in the Flow Country and the weather. There is so much to learn about in the Flow Country.

There was an exhibition in the Thurso Gallery of the work created by Flow Country artists in residence Hannah Imlach and Shaun Fraser. Hannah worked with some of the many scientists who are studying the impact of the peatland restoration that is happening and the benefits of the peat as a huge carbon store. Shaun's work focused on the many layers you can read in the landscape, both natural and manmade.

Residents of Strath Halladale enjoyed afternoon tea at the Flows Field Centre.

The Flow Country featured on BBC1 in September as part of the Grand Tours of Scotland's lochs series.

### **October**

Children from Melvich Primary, Farr Primary and at local museums enjoyed dressing up as fantastic beasts of the Flow Country in October. This was a great way to find out more about the special wildlife of the peatlands.

Thurso's Environmental Research Institute held its Flow Country Research Conference, with around 50 scientists attending from across the UK and beyond. A highlight for the Project, was a talk by artist Hannah Imlach, showing how her art work references the scientific instruments used to investigate climate change, and the intricate structure of peatland plants.

### **November**

The Caithness Astronomy Group once again organised a very popular Dark Skies event at Forsinard, making the most of the particularly dark skies in the Flows. It's great to share the knowledge of our local experts.

Cryptic, an arthouse in Glasgow, have been appointed to create a special event focusing on the Flow Country during the Edinburgh Festivals in August 2019. This will be hosted by the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

The artists have been visiting during the autumn to get the creative juices flowing.

Work started on November on four roadside sites in the Flow Country where there will be some parking and information for visitors. At the moment there are very few places apart from Forsinard and Munsary where visitors can easily stop and enjoy the landscape. The sites will be ready early in 2019.

### **December**

Once again schools across Caithness and Sutherland have been decorating Christmas trees from the Flow Country. They have learnt how these trees have seeded onto the open peatland, and that if they grow up they will dry out the peatland and make it unsuitable for the peatland plants and birds.



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## 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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