

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL RANGER SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

1.0 PUBLIC EVENTS

The team delivered a public events programme across Aberdeenshire for children, families and adults to promote awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of public events	98	81
Number of attendees	2471	2080
Attendees who found the events well organised, informative, enjoyable and made to feel welcome	99%	99%

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of public volunteer events	27	n/a
Number of volunteers	199	n/a
Number of volunteer hours	647	n/a

2015/16 is the first year of breaking down figures for volunteer sessions delivered by the service

Included in the programme were events to support the following local and national festivals and initiatives:

Active Aboyne; Ballater Victoria Week; Ballater Walking Festival; Banchory River Festival; Beachwatch (beach clean and litter surveys); Big Butterfly Count; Big Garden Birdwatch; Big North East Pond Dip/Pooling Our Ponds; Cairngorms Nature Festival; Energetica Summer Festival; Glenbuchat Spring Fair; Muir of Dinnet Fun Day; National Meadows Day; National Moth Night; National Nest Box Week; Scotland's Nature Festival; Scottish Archaeology and Heritage Festival; Turriff Show; Wild About Aden; Westhill Gala; World Oceans Day.

In addition to Ranger Service led events, the team worked in collaboration with the following partners:

Baillies of Bennachie; Bennachie Centre Trust; Butterfly Conservation; Cairngorms National Park Authority; Dee Catchment Partnership; Forestry Commission Scotland; Huntly Networks of Wellbeing; KIMO; National Trust for Scotland; NE Scotland Biodiversity Partnership; NESBats; Other local Ranger Services; River Dee Trust; RSPB; Rhynie Woman; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish Wildlife Trust

2.0 COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISED GROUPS

The Ranger Service worked with local communities and organised groups to raise awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage, and to provide opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of community/group sessions	107	120
Number of attendees	1739	2090
Attendee percentage who found the events well organised, informative, enjoyable and made to feel welcome	100%	100%

Numbers are less than last year due to an additional Seasonal/Volunteer Ranger for the Garioch Area in 2014.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of community/group volunteer sessions	15	n/a
Number of volunteers	135	n/a
Number of volunteer hours	348	n/a

2015/16 is the first year of breaking down figures for volunteer sessions delivered by the service

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable	27	n/a
Number of disadvantaged or vulnerable attendees	191	n/a

2015/16 is the first year of breaking down disadvantaged/vulnerable group sessions delivered by the service

Support was also given for 8 groups undertaking the John Muir Award.

3.0 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS

The Ranger Service supported teachers and other environmental education providers in their delivery of outdoor learning.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of school sessions	249	340
Number of attendees (children)	6597	7521
Attendee percentage who found the events well organised, informative, enjoyable and made to feel welcome	100%	100%

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of volunteer school sessions	15	n/a
Number of volunteers	737	n/a
Number of volunteer hours	348	n/a

2015/16 is the first year of breaking down figures for volunteer sessions delivered by the service

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of school sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable	4	n/a
Number of disadvantaged or vulnerable attendees	15	n/a

2015/16 is the first year of breaking down disadvantaged/vulnerable group sessions delivered by the service

Support was given for 9 classes undertaking the John Muir Award.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
Number of CPD sessions for teachers/group leaders	4	7
Number of attendees	101	148
Attendee percentage who felt confident to do more outdoor learning with their class	82%	85%

The Ranger Service contributed to a programme of local Scottish Countryside Ranger Association training events for other environmental education providers.

There is a continued commitment by the Service to deliver sessions for schools and environmental education providers and this accounts for a substantial amount of Ranger time. Numbers are slightly less than last year due to there being an additional Seasonal/Volunteer Ranger for Garioch in 2014, deciding not to attend Techfest and the delivery of resource intensive sessions for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

4.0 PROTECT AND ENHANCE NATURAL HERITAGE, AND PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE ACCESS

57 public events and sessions for schools, groups and communities were delivered to satisfy the Ranger Service Strategy Objective to protect and enhance our biodiversity, through offering practical conservation and biological recording opportunities.

100 public events and sessions delivered for schools, groups and communities promoted the Scottish Outdoor Access Code message.

The Ranger Service worked with colleagues and partners on the following projects and initiatives to protect and enhance Aberdeenshire's biodiversity:

Local Nature Conservation Sites (monitoring); Natural Networks (Ellon); NESBReC Mammal Atlas; NES BAP projects – Pooling Our Ponds, Small Blue Butterfly; OPAL Surveys; Pollinator Strategy; Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels; Scotland's National Peatland Plan; Scottish Mink Initiative; UK BAP Priority Habitats - lochs & ponds, lowland raised bogs, wetlands, woodlands; UK BAP Species – priority Lepidoptera species, water voles.

5.0 THE BENNACHIE VISITOR CENTRE

Staff changes were implemented at the Bennachie Visitor Centre (BVC) in April 2015, changing from 2 part time Wardens (1 FTE) to 1 P/T Warden (0.5 FTE) and part time Seasonal/Relief Assistants (0.7 FTE). This resulted in a more effective and sustainable staffing structure. The BVC opened seven days a week from 1 April to 31 October.

Partnership working with the Bennachie Centre Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Bailies of Bennachie has continued to deliver improvements to the BVC including:

- New BVC website.
- Introduction of people/visitor counters.
- New BVC leaflet.
- New interactive display launched in April 2016.
- New series of temporary themed exhibitions.
- Improved visibility and accessibility.
- Production of a BVC Annual Report and Action Plan.

The BVC team introduced some new performance measures throughout the last year.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2014/15</i>
BVC Facebook likes	808	n/a
Number of public events at BVC	13	n/a
Number of sessions at BVC for schools and groups	39	n/a
Number of training/worships/meetings at BVC	63	n/a

The team continued to use Facebook and SurveyMonkey as methods of communication and feedback. Visitor feedback showed that all felt welcomed by the staff and that visitors enjoyed the educational value, that it was good for children and a general appreciation of the facility.

6.0 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Ranger Service continued to work to the 2013-2016 Strategy delivering a quality service to residents and visitors focussing on National Outcomes, National Ranger Aims, the Aberdeenshire Council Plan Strategic Objectives, the Community Plan themes and the Infrastructure Service Plan.

The team continued to use Facebook and Surveymonkey as methods of communication and feedback. The Ranger Service Facebook page now has 791 likes, and the programme of 2016 summer events post reached 12,624 people on Facebook. The Council's website changes resulted in work undertaken to conform to the new guidelines and improve the Ranger Service web pages.

Members of the Ranger Service Team attended 36 training courses to increase knowledge and skills, keep up to date with legislation, guidelines and research, and benefit from examples of best practice to ensure a quality delivery of service.

The Rangers continued and developed working relationships with colleagues in other Aberdeenshire Council teams. 37 public events and sessions with schools and groups were delivered in partnership with Community Learning and Development, Social Work, Macduff Marine Aquarium, Museums Service, Libraries, Environment Planning, Aberdeenshire Outdoor Access Forum, NE Outdoor Learning Strategy Group, NESBReC and Landscape Services.

Ranger Service policies, procedures, and plans were continually reviewed and updated – in particular this year, in collaboration with the Environment Team, a focus was given to procedures with regard to biosecurity, and invasive and non-native species.