



Abriachan Winter 2024

Caption competition, what on earth are they seeing under the buildings? You'd be very surprised...anything from dragons' eggs to frogs' legs!



Lots of learning took place during the term...here are a few photos of the bike week with Jonny taking the lead before he left and the very famous visit of Hamish Turnbull with a very heavy piece of the Eiffel Tower round his neck. The children were amazed at all his bike parts, tried on his sleek go-faster clothes and his huge Olympic medal. As well as cyclists, they have also been astronauts and astronomers since the day length has reduced. This has involved making a planetarium, singing about space ships, measuring huge distances and timing rocket speeds...lots of literacy and numeracy.

Thanks are also due to Seanmhair Cairistiona who comes in to sing Gaelic songs twice a week and provides much appreciated jam for spreading thickly on campfire pancakes. It is literally made of kilos of fruit and might count as part of their healthy eating energy-giving snack on cold days! Similarly so, when they gobble up their porridge it's sometimes supersonic-ed up with blaeberries from Urs and Jacqueline. The end of term gathering took place last week with plenty positive comments from attendees who enjoyed the baking, making and singing together. Huge thanks to everyone who contributed and made such generous donations towards our work with children and young people.





It has been a very hectic term for all the early years' adults....not so busy for the children, more of the usual playing and learning routines. Roni moved on in September to work for the Family Links project in the Inverness High School catchment – so Abriachan's loss is the IHS's gain. Jonny also decided to leave in October to concentrate on his family business and continue supply teaching in local primary schools. Both Jonny and Roni have been missed. This meant we had to advertise and recruit very speedily and, despite forewarnings about it being very difficult to find Early Years' staff, we had some excellent applicants and tricky choices to make. So, by the start of November, we had Shirley-Anne Stevenson stepping into the role of Early Years Manager and Kerry increasing her Early Years' Practitioner days to three. Kerry continues her energetic levels of enthusiasm in all aspects of her work in Abriachan and Shirley-Anne has stepped into the breach with quiet efficiency and her considerable experience of being a primary headteacher. In the midst of all this kerfuffle we also had notification from Education Scotland that the nursery would have an HMIE inspection during the first week back after the October holidays....the timing could have been better but provided us with the opportunity to self-evaluate, plan for improvements, streamlining of paperwork and identifying the golden thread! Overall, the inspectors' report was good with some easily achievable work being required on evidencing some aspects of the curriculum. The parent/carer/partners' pre-inspection questionnaire results were very good with over 94% extremely satisfied with the setting. Suffice it to say there are no concerns with regards to the calibre of pedagogy and quality of learning experiences the children benefit from in Abriachan. Well done staff, we all rate you as pure gold anyway!





Feedback from the Peat Path and mountain bike trail improvements continues to be very positive, particularly from local MTBL guides like [Jonny Ride North MTB](#) and [Gregor Highland Bike Academy](#) who have led fully booked programmes during the school holidays. The pump track continues to be well-used with requests from family members that we provide benches for them to sit back and admire the more dare-devil members riding the berms and shooting the drop-offs. Leopold benches are on their wayno sooner said than done!

It's hoped that we can provide the delivery of UHI Countryside Skills course next year and will also provide a programme of getting together sessions for those family members who have been living separately and don't get the chance to play together in a neutral outdoor location. This also links with and adds to the outdoor learning work we do with our Thursday pupils and ensures all of our stakeholders gain that important sense of ownership.



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Visitors during the October holidays included a Wild Things' fungal foray, Jonny Laing mountainbike leader with his popular riding sessions, Community Woodlanders, Stars and Stories' astronomers and QRM synthesiser musicians and Dr Fraser Macdonald who plans to come back in the New Year!



Continuing the [Life Changes Trust/Lottery](#) legacy partnership with [Moniack Mhor](#), [Calman Trust](#) and [Articulate Trust](#) we have supported young people through the Creativity and Care Experience project. A poetry residential during November saw them working with Jen Hadfield, poet and visual artist. Participants from all over Scotland enjoyed their week creatively writing interspersed with charcoal making, bramble and alder ink marking, nature printing, whittling, a lantern parade and designing glow in the dark texts on selected slices of wood. They also had some guidance from Luke, Guillemot Press in how best to bind and publish a booklet of their work. It is hoped the final edition will be in print in the new year so watch this space.



Other young people who experience living in care have been busy this term achieving elements of their Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards. These activities included clearing a secret path between the round house back towards the classroom, improvements in the woodland workout gym, speed carving a shinty caman, making doorstops, dog beds, wooden games and the iconic AFT wooden birds. Recent tree identification skills have been honed while collecting evergreen materials to create Home to Highland festive wreaths which were displayed and sold in Highland Council HQ. Time spent in the woods provides these young learners with practical life skills, helping them develop emotional resilience and more ability to cope with unexpected challenges in their lives and learning.





Volunteers continue to help deliver some of the maintenance, repair and rebuild tasks around the forest. Recent sessions have resulted in tree planting, weeding out lodgepole pine, selecting some as Christmas trees, rebuilding the humpbacked bridge on the green mountain bike trail, building a flurry of Leopold benches, chicken-wiring boardwalks, collecting and planting tree seeds and planting *Salix aurita* where an area of Sitka spruce had been cleared.

Jude is still on maternity leave and Alan new dad to 3 month old River, is taking a break from firewood production until April.

We run crafty volunteering on Fridays 10-3.00 with Charlotte from Arts in Nature so, if you wish to join, please let us know in advance. These days usually involve some ordinary nature restoration style tasks in the morning, followed by lunch of soup from the garden vegetables and, for the creatives, something arty in the afternoon. forest@abriachan.org.uk



Over the past year corporate social responsibility(CSR) groups and individuals have participated from SEPA, Scottish Water, SSEN and NatureScot...thanks to you all.



AFT continues to be advised on **forestry matters** by Dietrich Pannwitz, Sylvestrus.co.uk so, restructuring continued according to the forest design plan and a thinning of Lodgepole pine and harvesting of Sitka spruce was successfully completed in the spring of this year. Dietrich's sage advice on when best and where to harvest has ensured the continued economic sustainability of other social, educational, recreational and the natural capital aspects of our organisation. Following that operation we have deer fenced and begun to replant the plantation that had provided shelter for the houses at the top of the Achpopuli road leaving them more exposed to the harsh north easterly blasts. A more diverse woodland of mixed indigenous tree species planted by volunteers will eventually replace the Sitka. Forest operations over the next couple of years will see the ongoing removal of Lodgepole pine and spruce in the wrong spot as well as thinning and maintenance of existing forest blocks as appropriate.



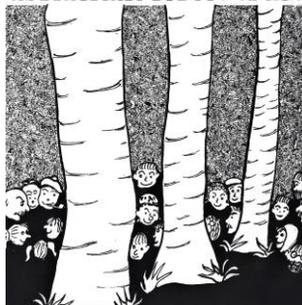
Biodiversity highlights this autumn season included the over wintering whooper swans on Loch Laide, mostly a family group of five but more than thirty early one November morning. When the loch is frozen the regulars fly down to the lower fields and Beaully Firth. Migratory woodcock have boosted the resident numbers in recent weeks. Nordic thrushes such as fieldfares and redwings and many blackbirds arrived in their hundreds and cleared the heavy crops of rowan berries this mast year. The bumper hazelnut and acorn crop has meant raucous jays, noisy great spotted woodpeckers and red squirrels have been feasting in the lower woods but they will all move back up the hill for the occasional foray into the Scots pine and Sitka over the winter. In recent December days the tops of the pines have been the melodious courtship spots for lots of crossbills. We've also been lucky to see signs of pine martens, otter, foxes, badgers and hare - and excitingly, a potential wildcat sighting skulking along McLarty's and below Balchraggan.



We are still awaiting a decision on whether the translocation of beaver is a possibility. Nature Scot have suggested that, to ensure genetic diversity, a separate location, as well as Loch Laide, must be identified so that more than one family can be moved to suitable habitat on Abriachan Forest Trust land.



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