



Growing Greener Highland Communities:

A Case Study

Introduction

In July 2024 High Life Highland Libraries secured £2500 in funding from CILIPS Scotland to develop four pilot climate hubs within libraries across the Highlands. This case study will focus on the development of these hubs, lessons learned from the initiative, and the legacy of the project.

With funding secured, priority for the service was to share the good news with the libraries team and local communities.

[We are delighted that High... - High Life Highland Libraries | Facebook](#)

The project team for the Green Libraries initiative was formed, consisting of both library staff and High Life Highland Countryside Rangers, our key partner for the initiative. Our enthused team set to work on engaging with local communities and planning for the transformation of Highland library spaces into vibrant places for climate literacy and environmental engagement to take place.

Collection Development

Book collections, both physical and in e-book format, were curated to support community education on climate and environmental literacy. Prior to the start of this project the Highland Adapts partnership [Home - Highland Adapts](#) had already commenced work on developing climate and environmental engagement book lists based on feedback from local communities. This gave High Life Highland an ideal starting point for curating collections as part of the project. The collections were developed with all age categories in mind:





eBook Highlights

highlife
Highland
Highland Libraries

Home eBooks eAudiobooks Search

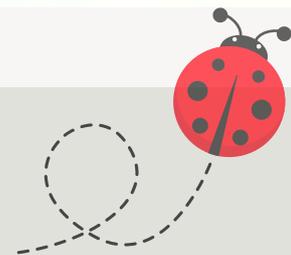
Sign In

Discover My Loans My Reading Lists

- Quirky Creatures: The World's Most Ridiculous Animals - Philip Barling
- Quirky Creatures: The World's Most Pointless Animals - Philip Barling
- Six Tales From Percy's Park - Nick Butterworth
- Life Cycles - DK
- Stuff You Should Know About Planet Earth - John Farnham
- A Galaxy of Whales - Heather Fawcett
- A Galaxy of Whales - Heather Fawcett
- Amazing Expeditions - Anita Ganeri
- Finding Bear - Hannah Gold

Borrow Box.

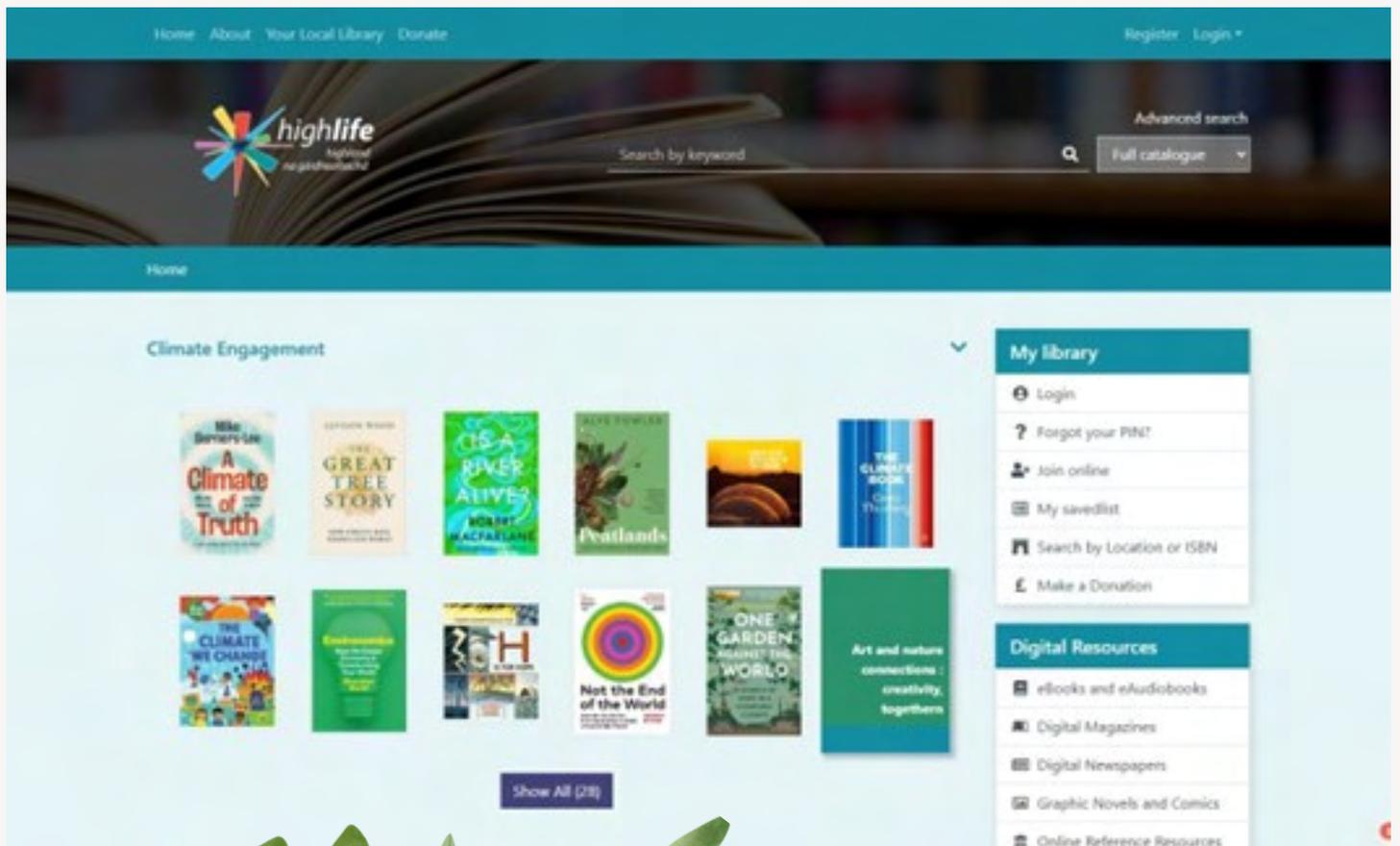
BORROW FREE EBOOKS AND EAUDIOBOOKS USING OUR BORROWBOX APP



eBooks and eAudiobooks were purchased which reflected climate engagement themes



Book Collections



We purchased a range of climate engagement and nature themed books for our collections in libraries and promoted them on the catalogue.

Seed Libraries

The project group researched seed library models across the UK and examples from across Europe also. A toolkit was then developed (see attached) to assist staff in setting up community seed libraries. The initial plan for the project was to develop two pilot seed libraries but due to community demand the decision was taken to develop seed libraries across all four hubs, plus an additional one at the most northerly library in the Highlands, Bettyhill.

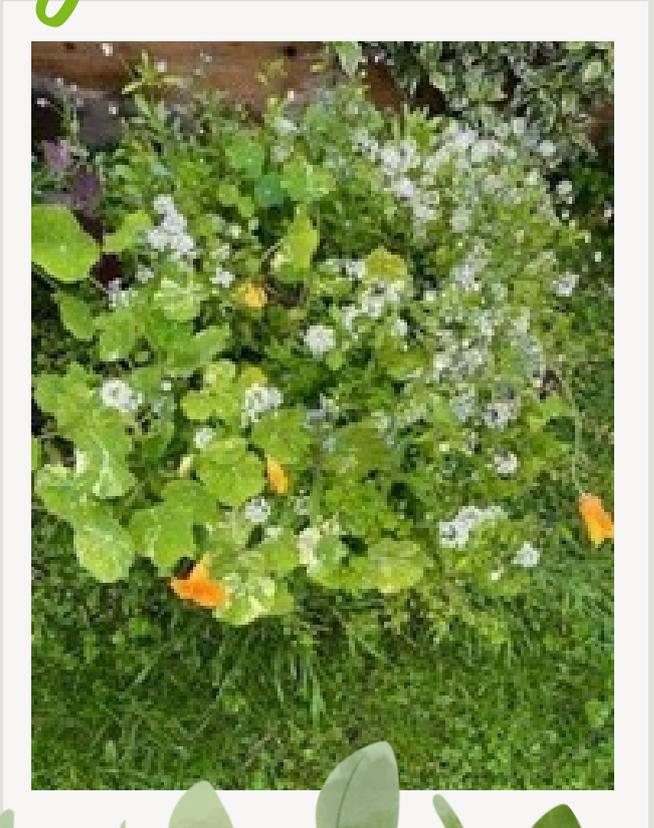
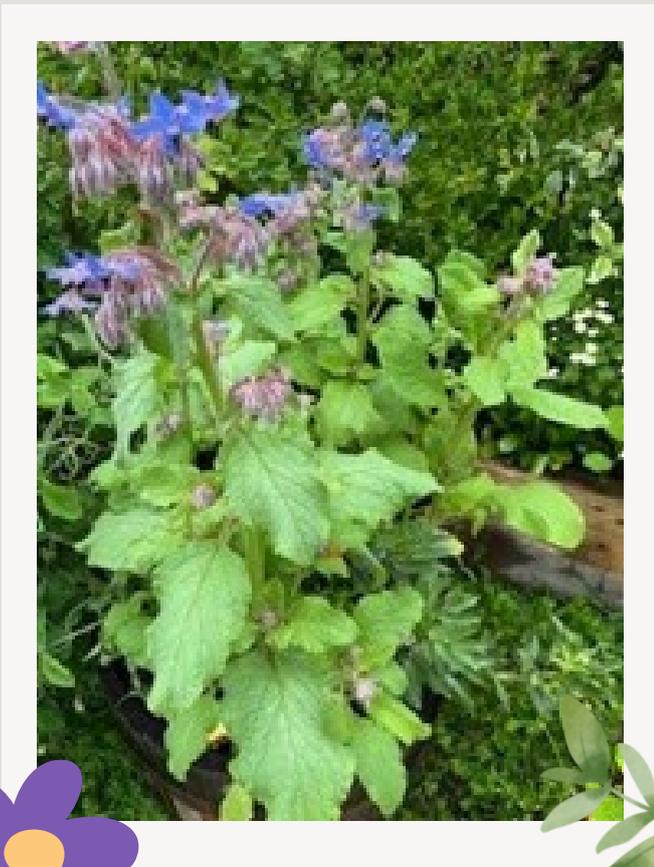
Seed Library



The service found the seed libraries to be an ideal way to engage with local communities. Some customers proudly sent into their local library photographs of plants developed from the seeds and library displays were then created from the images.



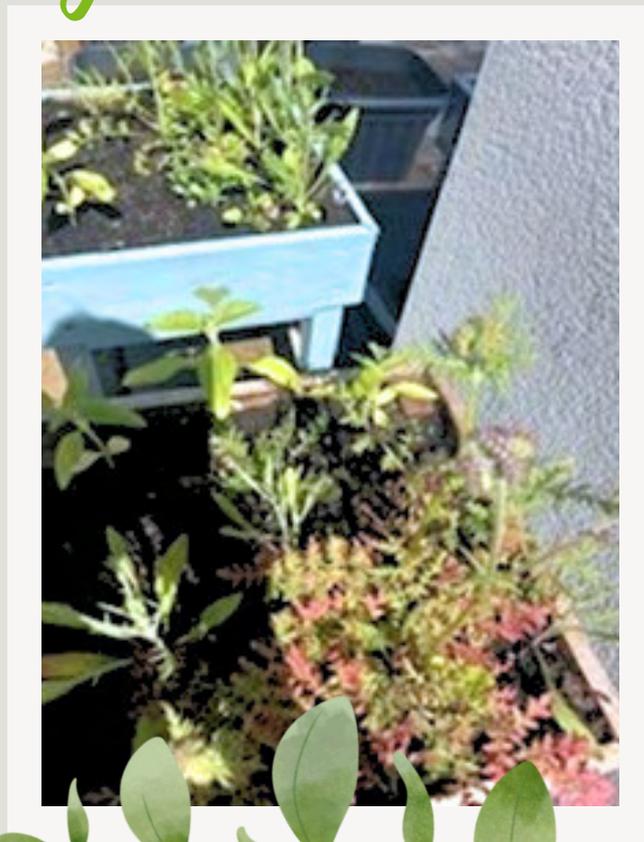
Community Gardens



At some libraries the community got involved in growing vegetables and flowers from the seeds, in planters outside their local library.



Flowers & Vegetables



The seed libraries were promoted on social media posts and by word -of- mouth locally. Our key partner in the initiative, High Life Highland's Countryside Rangers developed an article on seed libraries, with a reference to those running in the Highlands. The article was then published on their Nature Unveiled blog pages.

[A Growing Tradition - Part 2 - by High Life Highland Ranger](#)

Commenting on the article, one customer said:

'I shall head to my local Dingwall Library first thing tomorrow- excellent- this makes my heart sing. Thank you!'

Another stated:

'This is so important!'

Commenting on libraries social media posts, customer feedback included:

'Absolutely love this idea, I shall be visiting soon.'

'What a brilliant development'

The seed libraries also tied in with the wider work of the Rangers service and strengthened cross-service working. The wildflower meadow mosaic project [Meadow Mosaic - Highland Environment Forum](#) is one example of how both services could join up their resources for the benefit of local communities.

Nature Clubs

A key element of the project was to develop nature clubs for school-aged children, at each Green Hub. The nature clubs were promoted in a High Life Highland press release [Growing Greener Communities with High Life Highland Libraries](#) as well as on social media and within library buildings.

In partnership with the Countryside Rangers service, the clubs aimed to provide a fun and engaging way to instil a sense of responsibility and curiosity about the natural world, laying the groundwork for future environmental stewards.

Equipment and other resources were purchased to support with the delivery of the nature clubs, including:

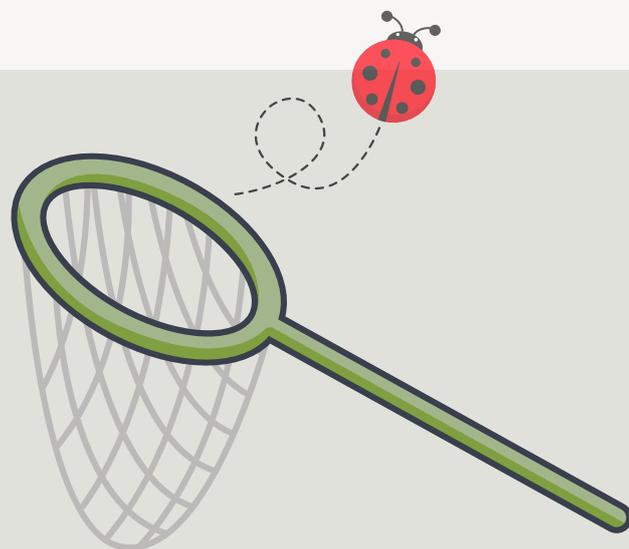
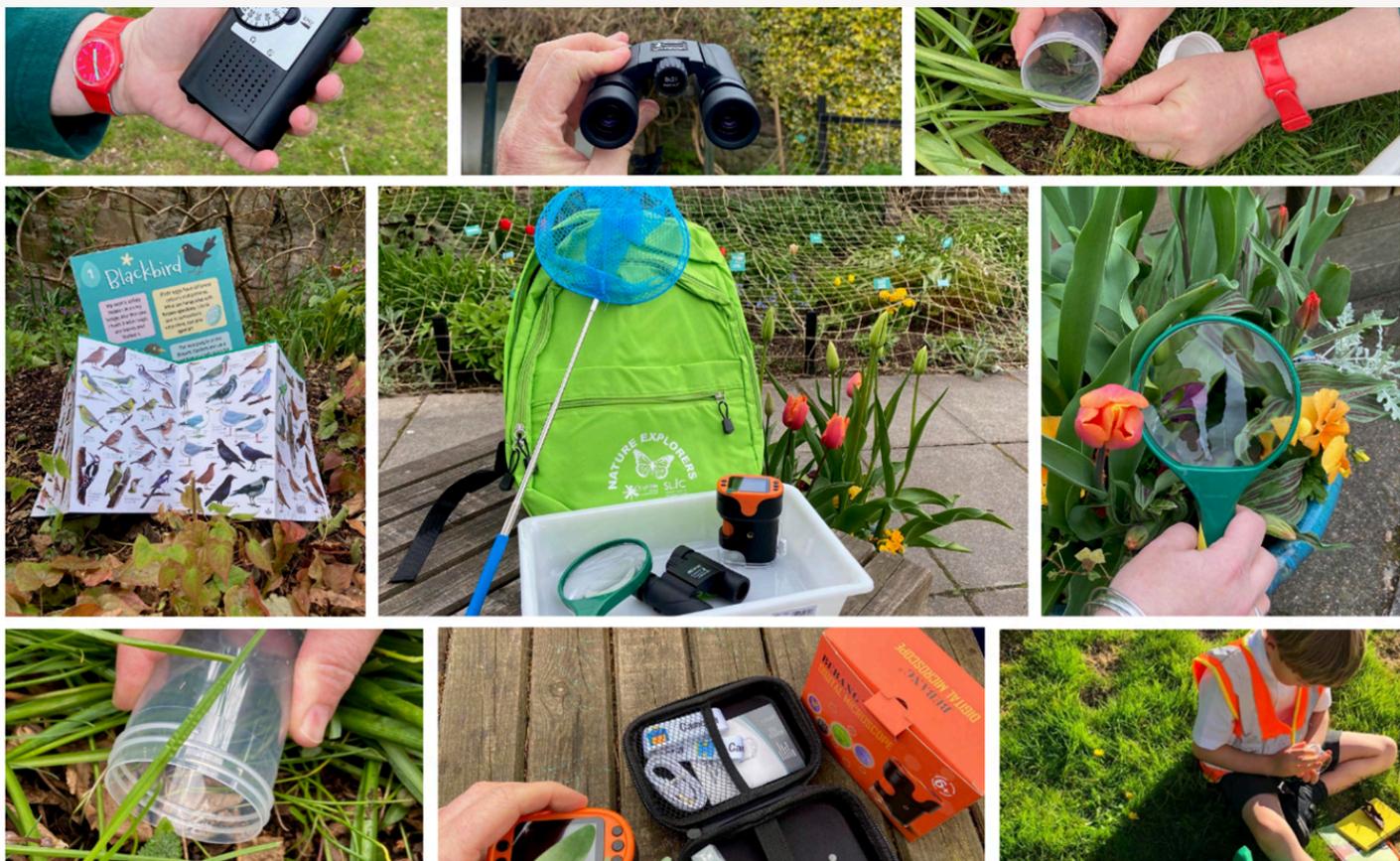
- Plant and bird identification cards
- Seed Trays
- Notepads
- Handheld Magnifiers
- Large Magnifying Bug Pots
- Binoculars
- Digital Microscopes



The nature clubs also provided an ideal opportunity to link in with some existing library resources such as borrowable nature explorer backpacks, elevating the service's overall offering for climate and environmental family learning.



Nature Clubs



Themes that ran throughout the nature clubs included:

- Signs of Spring
- Love your local nature
- Tree planting
- Earth month
- Looking after your local area
- Under the seaweed

Tree Planting



The nature sessions focussed on educating children about the importance of preserving nature and the environment. They included fun and engaging practical activities such as gardening, planting trees, and recycling projects as well as providing opportunities for scientific exploration through nature-based experiments. The clubs also provided an opportunity for children to develop their social skills and friendships through shared experiences in nature.

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers have in recent days highlighted their experiences with the nature clubs in their Nature Unveiled blog [Binoculars, Backpacks and Bug Hunts](#)



With the Countryside Rangers



Climate & Environmental Engagement Programmes

The project team was tasked with developing programmes of climate and environmental engagement activities for all age groups, in collaboration with other services and local communities and organisations. A press release, a Nature Unveiled article [Green Libraries Week : Growing Greener Communities](#) and local promotion within libraries , focussed on a call out for local communities to get involved. Programmes were launched during Green Libraries Week and were developed around nationally recognised themed days/weeks including:

- National Tree Week
- BBC Birdwatch
- Earth Hour
- Green Health Week
- World Bee Day

Local and national organisations that participated in the engagement programmes included:

- Local climate engagement groups
- Whale & Dolphin Conservation [Whale and Dolphin Conservation](#)
- RSPB Scotland [Scotland: Our work to protect Scotland's wildlife](#)
- British Divers Marine Life Rescue [British Divers Marine Life Rescue](#)
- Scottish Beekeepers Association <https://scottishbeekeepers.org.uk/>

The activity programmes aimed to empower communities to act on climate change by demonstrating affordable and practical ways to engage and help their communities adapt. A wide range of events and activities took place including litter picking, climate fiction book groups, climate engagement talks, Grow your Own Food workshops, fungi workshops, plant swaps, bee talks, RSPB talks, nature walks and Dolphin & Whale Conservation workshops. The climate and environmental engagement programmes attracted over 700 people in total, to local libraries.



Dingwall Green Libraries Plan January to March 2025

January New Year, Green Habits		Displays: Eco-Friendly Living Green Habits Green Resolutions	Library Staff
Thursday 30 th January Winter Tree ID	2pm – 3pm	A talk with Marcia with examples to learn how to distinguish our native tree species, their history and folklore.	Library Staff & Highland Ranger
Friday 31 st January Make A Bird Feeder	1pm – 3pm	Activity and conversation with adult learners and tutors	Library Staff & Learning for Life Team
February What's Happening in Our Area?		Information and posters about local nature organisations and clubs to be placed on a display board.	Library Staff
Tuesday 11 th February TALK	10.30- 11.30	Importance of Green Spaces and What's Happening in our Area: Strathpeffer Way, Pefferside Park restoration project.	Highland Ranger
Tuesday 25 th February NATURE CLUB	3.30- 5pm	Nature Club – craft and activities.	Highland Ranger & Library Staff
March Spring into Action		Book Display: Grow Your Own Adventure – gardening and plant care books. Earth Hour Display	Library Staff
Saturday 22 nd March Environmental Activity Day	11am – 2pm 3pm- 4:30pm	Litter Picking (library as base) Themed activity sheets. Refreshments – Library Staff Dolphin Rescue Activity – Life size Dolphin	Library Staff & Ranger British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Nature Activities At the Library



Litter pick at Dingwall Library

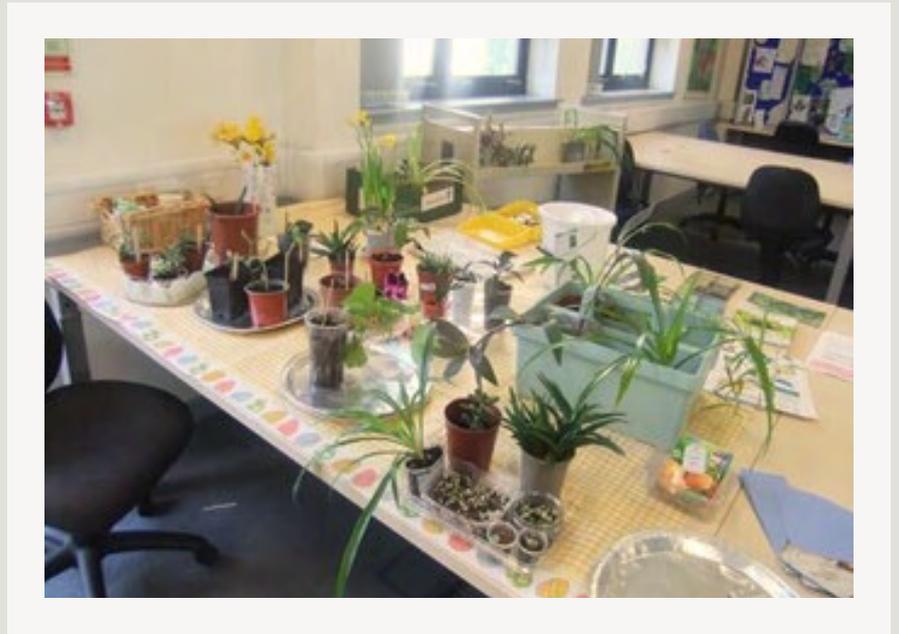
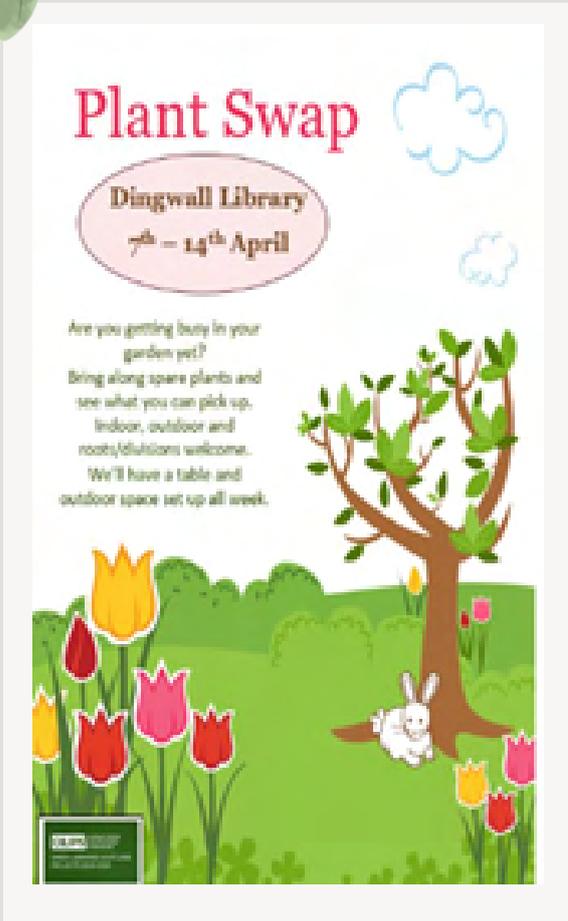


Local Brownies visit Wick Library during National Tree Week





Plant Swap



Plant Swap at Dingwall Library

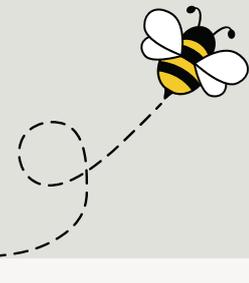




Nature Workshops



Bee talk at Dingwall Library

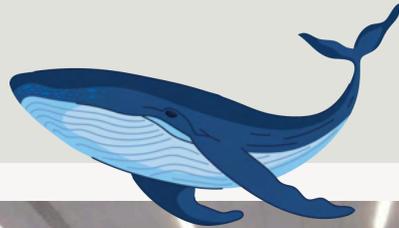


Make a bird feeder workshop at Bettyhill Library



The Growing Greener Highland Communities initiative ended with a visit to Dingwall Library by the Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society. This family event was attended by local schools and nurseries as well as the local community. The event attracted many local residents who had not used their local library before, resulting in new memberships for the library.

Under the Sea



MEET WDC'S INFLATABLE HUMPBACK WHALE, HOPE!

FREE!

Suitable for all ages!
All kids must be accompanied by an adult.

SATURDAY 31ST MAY (12pm - 4pm)
Dingwall Academy

LOOK INSIDE!

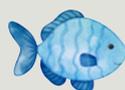
A free, fun family afternoon with Whale and Dolphin Conservation.
Plus 'Rescue a Dolphin' with British Divers Marine Life Rescue. Learn about Marine life and how we can protect it.
Meet the Countryside Rangers and find out about the natural world.

This event is organised by Dingwall Community Library (situated next to the Academy) as part of The Green Libraries Scotland project 2024-2025.
Dingwall Library 01349 869869 dingwall.library@highlifehighland.com

WDC | highlife | CILIPS | Green Libraries Scotland



Meet WDC's inflatable humpback whale, "Hope"!



Customers enjoyed the Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society's inflatable humpback whale experience at Dingwall Library.

Legacy of Growing Greener Highland Communities

As a result of this successful pilot, it is the service's intention to continue developing Green Library hubs across the Highlands, as and when further funding opportunities become available. Lessons learned from this initiative will support the service in continuing to develop our green offering for Highland communities.

One of the main lessons learned by the service has been to avoid being prescriptive in how each hub will develop. Library staff were encouraged to work closely with other High Life Highland colleagues and their communities to develop a Green Hub offering that met local need. In this way both our staff and their local communities have felt empowered to be creative and to take ownership of how their hub has developed. Nature clubs have developed differently within each setting based on community needs, with younger school children in attendance at some and older school children at others. It has been a real joy to watch staff and communities thrive within this environment.

When we started out on the project, we also had no idea that we had beekeeping enthusiasts and marine biologists working within our libraries team! The initiative has enabled some of those involved to draw upon their wider skills and experience, and to share these with their local communities.

The project's nature clubs proved to be a fun and educational way for children to develop a sense of curiosity about the natural world, and to learn how we can all take steps to help to protect the environment. The sessions were led by our Countryside Rangers colleagues, with library staff shadowing and supporting them. The clubs strengthened community links as well as strengthening cross-service working. By working together closely, our staff developed an enhanced and mutual respect and appreciation for each other's different areas of expertise.

With the funding element of the project coming to an end, it is our intention to continue running the nature clubs. Some basic themes and workshops e.g 'how to build a bug hotel' and 'how to make a bird feeder' have been learned through the initiative and these sessions will now be led by library staff. Our Countryside Ranger colleagues will contribute to the nature clubs when they have the capacity to, enhancing the sessions with their environmental skills and expertise. We will continue to work with local communities and organisations, to encourage them to contribute to the delivery of nature clubs and the overall Green Libraries programme of events. Plans are already in place to extend the number of libraries delivering nature clubs throughout the Highlands.



The development of seed libraries in High Life Highland buildings has proved extremely popular with local communities and has been a very effective way to increase customer engagement within the service. We have already received requests from customers to offer this service from some of our other libraries and new seed libraries will be included within our Green Hub development plans.

A key priority for the service will be developing Green Libraries Champions from the team that were involved in setting up the four pilot hubs. These champions will be tasked with sharing their experiences with a view to supporting other staff setting up new hubs. The service will also commit to offering all library staff climate literacies training, with Green Libraries Champions being prioritised as the first cohort.

