



## Better Lives Partnership

### Winter Wildlife

**Better Lives Partnership has issued the following press report, after receiving a grant from the SafeDeposits Scotland Community Fund during its August 2024 funding round:**

Dumfries and Galloway Charity Better Lives Partnership's Dumfries site has been enjoying learning about winter wildlife over the last few months while improving habitats and helping local wildlife through the colder months. The charity which supports young people with autism and other learning difficulties by providing a range of opportunities for them to enable them to live independent and fulfilling lives delivers an Environment ASDAN course covering sustainability, weather and recycling as well as an Animal ASDAN course which teaches about animal care, extinct animals and habitat. The group is passionate about the environment; they recycle, collect crisp packets to donate to a blanket project for the homeless and do beach cleans. The young people are very fond of animals too and have two support dogs on site, Izzie and Kallie and a rescue bearded dragon called Draco. The team also collect frog spawn every year and watch tadpoles emerge which they then release into the nearby Crichton pond.

Thanks to funding from SafeDeposits Scotland they have been able to deliver a new project this winter which ties in with both their environment and the animal ASDAN courses. The project has involved feeding winter birds: monitoring and logging the different birds as well as any other winter wildlife that visits the site which has a lovely garden area at the Crichton estate in Dumfries. They have been able to buy six sets of bird feeders, three bird hanging stations, three squirrel feeders, three bird baths, two hedgehog homes, bird and squirrel feed. The young people have been making observations of all the wildlife that they are attracting and learning about the different types of birds and animals that they are seeing.

The young people have taken part in building the equipment bought for the project and they have also been making their own bird feeders. They have discussed the different types of animals that might be at the Crichton and why it is important to feed and look after the animals that are there. The group said that in the winter there is not enough food about as nothing grows the same in the winter and there is a lack of nutritious foods and insects for them to eat. Research has been done to learn more about the birds and wildlife in Dumfries and Galloway and the young people are putting all the information together to make a posters and information leaflets.

The group have researched wildlife reserves and organisations, news, bird numbers, migration, feeding, predators, habitat, weather and volunteering opportunities and they were amazed to discover there are 327 different species of bird in Dumfries and Galloway including red kites, willow tits and a number of different kinds of swans and geese.

On a recent visit to Caelaverock Nature Reserve as part of the funded project the group learned about whooper swan habits and migration and were able to observe hundreds of them on Folly Pond and enjoy a walk around the nature reserve. As well as being lots of fun, the outing contributed to the learning of the young people in terms of animal care, environment and Expressive Arts ASDAN courses. The young people asked the staff lots of questions and took photographs which can be compared with a future visit during spring, summer or autumn for comparison of the landscape.

There's lots more to come and some guest speakers are lined up to come and talk to the young people and trips are being planned for Mersehead RSPB site and South of Scotland Animal Hospital.