

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Meet the people who are simply wild about Glasgow's gardens

Remember the summer of 1988 as a series of jumbled, disconnected events woven through with moments of huge personal transition. I broke my ankle that summer, the night before my first day at senior school, and spent three itchy weeks in plaster (there was an embarrassing interlude with a trapped ruler that I'd rather not think about). I got a pet rabbit that summer too, after many, many months of parental pestering, a little Netherland dwarf named Josephine.

But one other thing that sticks out in my memory from that summer was a school trip to the Glasgow Garden Festival; I guess it would have been in June or July. In fact, I found some of my photos from that trip just the other day. Hard to believe it was almost 30 years ago.

It was a seriously hot day when we went, and being Scottish kids that did leave us somewhat wilted and unenthusiastic. But I'm pretty sure we still did the festival justice: going up in the Clydesdale Tower, wandering around all the exhibits, and ogling the Coca-Cola Roller Coaster (from a safe distance). We all zonked out on the bus going home, wishing we'd brought more to drink.

Much has been written about the festival since that hot summer of '88: about its legacy, about what it did for Glasgow, but there's a general consensus that the outcome was a positive one. Its success helped the city move forward, transforming its image from an industrial heritage



It's not called the Dear Green Place for nothing... Jenny Tweedie introduces this year's Glasgow Wildfest

site to a tourism destination, and ultimately, a city of art and culture.

But one legacy seems to get little attention: the green legacy. This was a garden festival, after all, and Glasgow was well known, then and now, as the dear green place. Almost 30 years on, has the garden legacy vanished? Just how green is Glasgow in this modern era of development and urban squeeze?

Greener than you'd think. Across the city there are dozens of organisations and small groups working in parks, community gardens and hidden greenspaces making a real difference to that green legacy. Take GOW, a flourishing community group focussed around a tiny, triangular garden in what would once have been a back court, hidden by high tenements. Or the Friends of Springburn Park, nearing the completion of a new community hub and garden on the south side of the city. FORK, the Friends of the River Kelvin, run weekly sessions along the river bank, picking up rubbish and removing non-native invasive plants.

And in December of last year, campaigners at North Kelvin Meadow successfully defeated an attempt

by developers, to build on an area of greenspace transformed by the community from municipal football pitches. Children's Wood offers forest school classes, and spaces where people can meet and enjoy the natural surroundings.

All these organisations, and many more, come together once a year for their own version of the Glasgow Garden Festival: The Glasgow Wildlife Garden Festival, or Glasgow Wildfest as it was re-named last year (because it was a bit of a mouthful!). Launched by RSPB Scotland in 2014, the idea behind Glasgow Wildfest was to capture the garden spirit of the original festival, and keep it alive by celebrating just how wild Glasgow still is.

Because it is a wild city. There are more than 90 parks and formal gardens in Glasgow, many of these improved with wildlife in mind in recent years. Add to this the usual array of cemeteries, private gardens, and riverbanks, and even railway lines, and you find a city criss-crossed with wildlife sanctuaries and corridors.

Foxes are probably the best known and most visible creatures on Glasgow's streets, but many of the city's other wild inhabitants might sur-



prise you. Peregrines have been known to nest on Glasgow's high-rise flats, otters and kingfishers are making more appearances on and around the rivers, and the population of water voles, discovered a few years ago in the east end, is so large that it caught scientists by surprise. These tiny creatures have declined dramatically across the UK, but in East-erhouse, they live happily, away from

water and well-adapted to their ring-side view of the M8, and the brown-field areas where they feed and breed.

Water voles are actually one of six "ambassador species" that Glasgow Wildfest helps to celebrate, along with bats, bumblebees, hedgehogs, house sparrows and swifts. But as much as Wildfest is about wildlife, it's also about people. It's about engaging people with their greenspaces, and

encouraging an interest in activities such as planting wildflower meadows, putting up nest boxes for house sparrows, and taking part in community projects. Now in its fourth year, its success is a good sign that the garden legacy of the Glasgow Garden Festival is alive and well.

So why not come along this September and take part? Events run for the whole month at sites around the city,

and there are activities from a massive bioblitz in the Botanics, to a civilized picnic at the Hidden Gardens, to the accompaniment of live chamber music. And keep a look out for wildlife while you're there. You never know what you might see. Join in the conversation on social media using #Glasgowwildfest and find out more at www.glasgowwildfest.org Jenny Tweedie, RSPB Scotland.

↑ Glasgow has a surprisingly large population of water voles



Now we will learn if Grey Partridges have reaped the benefits of our work

Harvest time is crucial in the struggle to conserve species, says Dr Dave Parish

This is an exciting period for the EU's North Sea Region PARTRIDGE project as we approach harvest time on our demonstration farms. This is when we find out how the Grey Partridges have fared this year and how many chicks have been produced – crucial in the yearly cycle of this species.

The PARTRIDGE project involves ten partners from Scotland, England, Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands, all working together to improve the habitats on ten demonstration sites, to show what can be done to help the Grey Partridge and thereby farmland biodiversity in general.

Most of the habitat improvements

being introduced on all sites are focused on a new type of cover crop developed in Germany but adapted locally. This comprises a large mix of perennial, biennial and annual plants sown in large blocks or wide strips. Half of the crop is cut each year in an alternating fashion so that there is always some taller, thicker cover in which birds can nest and hide, alongside shorter, more open cover that is better for chicks to hunt for insects.

The large size of these habitats is crucial because research shows us that nesting success of the Grey Partridge is higher in strips wider than ten metres rather than in narrower strips because predators find it harder to locate nests.



↑ The Grey Partridge

Most of the demonstration sites have already started adding these crops and we are all preparing to start counting the Grey Partridge to see if they have helped. This will be done once harvest is under way by slowly driving around stubble fields at dawn and dusk when the birds are usually most active, searching for the family groups, or coveys.

By working out how many adult males and females there are, plus chicks, we can get an insight into their overall breeding success and adult survival rates when we combine the data with those from spring when pairs were surveyed.

Here in Scotland, GWCT has been working with Balgonie Estate in Fife

and Whitburgh Farms in Midlothian, where new cropping has been sown this year and is looking good.

Unfortunately, we have also had some very heavy rain coinciding with periods when we would expect young chicks to be on the ground, which is never good because the chicks are vulnerable to chilling. We are still keeping everything crossed and hoping for the best as you can never know for sure what the season has been like until you get out after harvest and do the counts.

If anyone with access to farmland would like to count Grey Partridge to find out about their local populations, please get in touch with GWCT via our website (gwct.org.uk – Par-

tridge Count Scheme) as we can not only help with guidance but the feedback we provide from your data is often invaluable in highlighting what may be holding back your birds.

The PARTRIDGE project is using the Grey Partridge as a model species because we know that so many other species share its requirements, but we are still monitoring many other farmland species too so that we can illustrate the wider benefits to biodiversity of this kind of management.

Ultimately, we hope to persuade policy makers to provide better support to farmers for managing the land to benefit wildlife – especially important in the UK in light of Brexit, but also in our partner countries

in Europe where they have similar problems of declining farmland wildlife and support mechanisms that aren't always as helpful as they might be. Dr Dave Parish, Senior Scientist, Scottish Lowland Research, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust



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