

GREEN SKILLS PROJECT

CASE STUDY 4: PAXTON PITS NATURE RESERVE

17th January – 13th March 2024

WHAT DID THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

The project was made up of a number of different tasks scattered around Paxton Pits Nature Reserve.

Cut back and reshape hedge alongside the Heron Trail

The primary task was to cut back the overgrown hedge to create a more compact, thriving habitat to increase biodiversity and accessibility for people to use the reserve.

Create a natural woven fence

along the path to reduce the risk of people falling close to the water's edge, reusing parts from the overgrown hedge line.

Orchard area

pruning the apple trees, focusing on removing the dead fruit and diseased areas to promote better growth.

Construction of bird and bat boxes

to support bird and bat life.

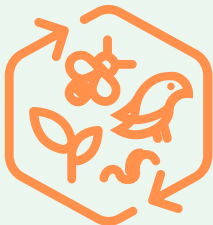
Hawthorn and shrub clearance

to create a rehabilitation area for turtle doves to support them during breeding season.

OUTCOMES:

INCREASED BIODIVERSITY

An area of hawthorn trees marked out by the rangers were cleared. This involved using loppers and saws to strip them down. Hawthorn is abundant in the area, however heavily overgrown and although it is a useful habitat, there are plenty of hawthorn trees in the area to support the needs of the ecosystem. Instead, a rehabilitation area for turtle doves was created. Turtle dove populations have suffered heavily in the last 50 years, declining drastically. This is thought to be due to a loss of breeding habitats. This new habitat will hopefully have a profound impact.



BEFORE



AFTER



Hedges are a habitat that often gets overlooked in terms of conservation and environmental value. Hedgerows not only support mammals, birds and invertebrates directly, they also hugely benefit soil health, and help to control flooding and drought risks. Hedges are a habitat that needs proper maintenance. If they become overgrown, their usefulness becomes limited. In this instance, the

hedge had grown too high, meaning it was far too sparse, providing no cover for birds to nest and mammals to use as pathways. It also reduces the biodiversity of the hedge by allowing excess light through. By cutting down the hedge to an appropriate height and reweaving the fence, this area will provide a better diversity of plant life in the hedge, helping to combat climate change by storing carbon in the vegetation.

Natural materials fences



Natural or living fences not only serve a purpose but also contribute to biodiversity unlike wooden or metal fences. Although their longevity isn't the same as that of hard fences, they don't impose on the environment, creating a new habitat for plenty of invertebrates and small mammals.



INCREASED ACCESSIBILITY & SAFETY

Down the Heron Trail, the group cut back an area of willow that was encroaching onto the path. The group used this material to knock in stake and weave the willow through to create a naturally constructed fence line to prevent people from falling near the water's edge.

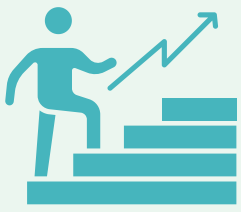


EDUCATION & GREEN SKILLS

10 unemployed people joined the program, minus one who did not attend and two that left in the first week due to the experience not being suitable for them. **7 Participants in total obtained two qualifications while on the course: Level 1 Award in Practical Horticulture and Level 1 Award in Employability. Participants learnt a range of skills:**

- How to safely and correctly use a nylon cord strimmer.
- Maintain hand tools.
- Prepare and plant a hanging basket.
- Nature-based skills, such as dead hedge laying and weaving, quadrat sampling and how to prune an orchard.
- Nature-based education such as how to bird watch, life cycles of dragonflies and identifying different signs of Spring.
- Interview skills.
- Candidate project of researching and making bat boxes to then reflect on this project.





PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Through a completion survey, we found that all participants felt that their confidence, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing had improved during the 8 weeks. Indoor sessions also played an important role in helping the volunteers to grow and develop their communication and coping strategies. One individual even stated that the emotional coping strategies session helped him come to the decision to quit drinking alcohol.

“Without the course I would still be very depressed and low having the feeling I’m worthless. Now I feel like my old self and that is down to the course.”

“Its been an amazing thing for me to do”

“I’ve really enjoyed being out and I’ve really enjoyed my time and learning experience”

“The course has made me get back into work, I start my new job Monday”

“I have changed a lot from this and will use this as I go forward.”

“I feel more confident in myself”

“I think the project is overall beneficial for both physical and mental wellbeing as well as becoming more environmentally conscious.”



LESSONS LEARNT:

- Due to weather conditions, illnesses and not being able to use certain equipment in poor weather meant that there needed to be some flexibility around the schedule including adding two further days to the program to complete assessments.
- A need to boost the indoor sessions by looking at expanding the unit portfolio for the qualifications e.g. Groundwork East are hoping to include an environmental awareness unit in the employability qualification and a tree and shrub identification unit in the practical horticulture unit.