

Co-created Citizen Science recording with older people



Pilot Summary

The Conservation Volunteers worked with Kinross Day Centre, which support the local older people of the district, to enable a group of older volunteers to co-create and trial a suitable method of recording wildlife. The project was carried out in partnership with the Open University who provided assistance with project design and co-creation methodology. The volunteers were supported to find the most suitable recording method for their needs, interests and abilities. The various recording methods were narrowed down to one simple record gathering method, which was trialled and found to be suitable for the participants.

The pilot aimed to;

- enable a group of volunteers from Kinross Day Centre to establish their own co-created project
- support the group to establish a pilot engaging in outdoor environmental recording activities (Citizen Science), using the co-created methodology
- improve the groups health and wider community integration through their participation
- increase participants skills and knowledge about wildlife and the environment

Pilot Methodology

On discussion with Kinross Day Centre's manager, we agreed to recruit a group of volunteers and support them over a 3 months period. We would offer weekly support sessions and encourage the group to feedback during these sessions the different techniques we collectively explored. Email support was also offered and used.

- 12 x 2 hour sessions involving up to 10 people per session
- Training sessions with TCV and OU staff as required
- Kinross Day Centre volunteers recruit new people to the recording project

Guided by the centre management, we set up a workshop session with all the attendees of the Kinross Day Centre. Around 40 regulars attended the workshop where Stevie Jarron from The Conservation Volunteers outlined the need and benefits of citizen and Ronald Macintyre from Open University explained the method of co-creation we would be using and what we were intending to learn from this pilot.

We then expanded the session with a simple question "tell us what you see", getting them to write it or draw it on flip charts we provided. This got a good conversation going about what people saw around them. We added in "where do you see it" to get a flavour of their movements and interests. We discussed with the group about what their interests were and what they would like to learn about. From this session a few volunteers wished to know more about local wildlife and a date was set for meeting with them the following week.

At the following meeting 6 volunteers attended to join the pilot group. We again explained the idea behind the co-creation process and about citizen science activities. The group were shown various recording sheet types, methods of recording in surveys, single species, habitat surveying, online surveys, fold out charts and ID books. We showed the range of plants, fungi, birds, mammals, that biological recording covers. We showed them environmental monitoring surveys for weather, air quality, phenology that they can take part in.

Over the first few weeks the group trialled various surveying methods and discussed with us how simple or difficult, convenient or restrictive the methods were. We discussed where and when they recorded, how they could check what they saw against what they knew or needed to find out and where the recording fitted with the other activities they undertook.

The group came upon a simple method for record capture, police style notebooks, complete with pencil. They also thought that small Collins gem books, on birds and insects were convenient and useful for their instant use and portability. Photography was also explored as a means of capturing a record.

The language used to capture a record was also examined, simplified and written as a template in the front page of their recording book to remind them of what a complete and robust record should look like.

They then set out recording and in subsequent visits queried some of their own sightings, increasing their confidence and knowledge in what they saw with support from Stevie Jarron, support material provided to them. They also looked at how they could “sell” this project to recruit new people to the group and looked at where they could go to record in their local area with the existing transport system open to them.

The Pilot Group

The 6 regulars who took up the challenge, were all near or beyond retirement age. In generally good health, beyond a few age related ailments (one group member was partially deaf, another visually impaired). None of the pilot group owned their own vehicle, so local public transport was an issue, having recently been reduced due to cutbacks. The winter services were also less useful than the reduced summer services.

The Monitoring Activities

As a co-creation pilot, the idea was to offer a range of ideas and methods around citizen science recording. The group then went through these options, looking at the benefits and drawbacks of each.

The group quite quickly settled on the simple choice of recording method of a policeman’s note book with pencil. This was portable enough that it was taken nearly everywhere with them. Gradually record collecting became something they did within most of their usual activities.

The area around Kinross is a patchwork of mature broadleaf and coniferous woodland, farmland with hedgerows, parks and gardens and a large freshwater Loch with a large resident and passage migrant bird population. The local area has several SNH/RSPB hides and a large RSPB centre. There is a [heritage trail around Loch Leven](#) and multiple lanes through Kinross that link lochside with parks and farmland.

3 of the pilot group became very keen on the activities and started going out more and more often to record, walking more often and walking further than before. Their interests expanded from general interest into wildlife photography, birds and butterflies/moths. The autumn migrations and winter passage migrants will allow a continuance of recording over the winter.

Pilot Learning

Engagement

The group of 6 were easy to recruit although fall out rate of members from the original 40 centre attendees at the beginning was quite high. The core group formed and stayed the course. This group commented on how difficult it was to get anyone in Kinross to participate with many facilities closing due to lack of participation, young and old.

We provided the participants with small notebooks and small pocket bird and insect guides (Collins Gems). The group also viewed Field Studies Council [fold out charts](#) to supplement some of their sighting with positive IDs. The group were given the links to a variety of websites that can help with ID ([iSpot](#)) and recording ([BirdTrack](#)) which were taken up and used by a few.

Health was the initial hook for some to participate in the pilot, but wildlife became a key factor in the reasons for the groups continued participation.

Set up

Initially we gave a talk to the wider centre regulars on the benefits, personally, locally and nationally to the individual and to wildlife of Citizen Science. Volunteers from this initial talk came forward and the smaller group met weekly after that. Regular visits greatly helped the group form the method they were most comfortable with and kept the momentum going at the beginning. Group enthusiasm begun slowly but gained momentum as it built confidence.

Training

Training can be seen as a barrier as “needs training” were translated into meaning “difficult” by this audience. This is more a slow confidence building process. The initial few visits were slow to get across the idea of co-creation, but as time went on a real energy grew in the group.

Tools & methodology

As this was a co-creation pilot, the group chose their own method. A number of wildlife recording methods were introduced to the group and the method they selected was chosen as being simple yet effective, using accessible language and easy to use. The tool chosen was small policeman style notebooks with pencil. The 1st page was set up with the wildlife record requirements of who, when, where, what and how many, as language that they easily understood and made the perfect record.

These prove to be a simple but effective way for the group to make wildlife recordings. Online tools were explored, iSpot etc, quite helpful to some, but a no go area for others who have no interest in learning about the internet.

A list of simple and effective recording methods and equipment could be made for future groups to choose from, based on the experiences of this group.

Data

With regular visits the group were able to check their records against guides and each other’s knowledge. Photos were used by 2 of the group which prove very useful in ID process rather than just a description. Some of the group showed great knowledge and growing confidence as the pilot went on.

The records collected will be perfectly useful wildlife records. Contact was made with Fife Council records Centre (FRC) and they are extending the range of their records to include Loch Leven and providing an advanced Excel sheet for accurate data records to be added by the group.

Feedback

The group feel they have been rewarded with the knowledge that their efforts are appreciated and that their records are valuable. The feedback should show their records on a map once FRC get their records in the database. This group if typical of their peers, said all they need in the way of feedback is an acknowledgement of their efforts.

Participants

We introduced ourselves to all the 40 attendees at the day centre, inviting them to join the pilot. From this a group of 6 formed aged between 62 and 81. The role of the group was to look at biological recording methods and design a route for them to become involved that suited their interests and abilities. They also then trialled the method, sought to recruit new members to the group and looked at future support improvements.

One of the group took on a role of organising meeting times with the others. They and one other kept in touch by email with photographs taken of wildlife for confirmation of their ID. The group started slowly, but by the end of the pilot were very keen recorders.

Outcomes

The group agree that they are now more active and more aware of the wildlife and the seasons around them. They will definitely keep doing it. They know more about the local wildlife than ever before and enjoy discovering new plants and animals all the time.

Some have noticed a bit of weight loss. Taking more short walks, but also some longer walks, the pattern keeps evolving. The group are now willing to try new routes and places to experience the wildlife they can see there.

They are being more sociable as a group, they know more people within the Day Centre than before, exchanging information. They are more sociable with people from outside the Day Centre as they are proud to tell people what they are doing.

Recommendations

From the lessons learned in the previous section we recommend that those wishing to carry out Co-created Citizen Science projects with an older age group of participants should;

- Remember this is a hard group to encourage to do more activities, most want to do less. The outdoor element could put a few people off, so promote it as day trips out as a way to attract people. A warm van, a warm wildlife centre or hide are also likely to be encouraging features.
- Recruit local support, having a lead person to organise things very useful.
- Use as a hook - Health, exercise, wildlife watching, getting out more, meeting people.
- Be very clear and very upfront with the simplicity of what is being asked for. Over selling the wider benefits doesn't impress. Keep it local and personal.
- Keep in touch, it is appreciated. Set up local leadership and support. Look for links with other groups.
- Call it something other than training. This is a voyage of self discovery, the participants probably already know a lot but have never been asked to impart.
- Don't set targets, this age group will go at their pace.
- Suggest the notebook system as a perfectly simple and effective method for wildlife recording
- Suggest a list of simple wildlife guides and [FSC sheets](#), with [iSpot](#) type websites will help support the recording activities.
- Suggest [CD of bird calls](#) for any Visually Impaired people on your group, it helped with one of this pilot group.
- Suggest the [Biological Recording in Scotland \(BRiSc\)](#) website as a place to send records or find Local records Centres to send records.
- Encourage that someone locally takes on a lead role in data verification and use. It is important to ensure that there is a route for the records raised by the group. Without a home for the data the participants may lose interest.
- Seek support from local wildlife groups, Government (Scottish Natural History, Forestry Commission Scotland) or NGOs (TCV, RSPB), who may be supportive to your group and make it more sustainable after any pilot ends.
- Feedback should be sought for participants. Just the reward of thanks can be enough.
- Try not to be too technical and formal. This group were happy to help once they got through our barrier of language use. An honest simple request for "tell us what you see, it's important" was enough for them to join in.
- Create a short, printed explanatory note of the pilot's aims and activities so the participants can recruit new members to join in. This proved the easiest approach for the pilot group rather than try explaining to others in their own words.