



Wild Ways Well and Storytelling

Today's Wild Ways Well task is to go for a walk in your local greenspace and keep an eye out for deer... Remember to follow the guidelines on Social Distancing, stay 2m apart from other people and only walk in your local area – and remember to wash your hands!

You'll **Be Active** by carefully walking outdoors (observing social distancing) keeping your mind busy and occupying your time in greenspaces. You can find inspiration for stories anywhere but often new places will bring new ideas..

We can **Connect** with by opening our senses and engaging with the world in the same way our ancestors did. We can learn about their lives and how they viewed the world – and we can discover that our modern lives aren't all that different.

We can **Keep Learning**, by reading and listening to the stories our ancestors told about the world we can a lot about how they saw that world. We can learn about our own beliefs and about the natural world around us. We can also learn to tell these stories ourselves.

We walk through the same natural environments our ancestors did, but we rarely **Take Notice** in the same way. People in the past may have been more connected to the natural world than we are today, by taking notice we can greatly increase our enjoyment and understanding of the natural world.

We can **Give** by giving ourselves a break from the drama of the current events and focusing on the little things around us that give us pleasure and by sharing these with others, in person or online. We can give back by sharing the stories we have heard – or even by creating our own.





Wild Ways Well



BE ACTIVE – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

The Wild Ways Well project encourages people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health to get outside for some daily exercise and experience nature.

Remember to observe Social Distancing, stay 2m apart and only walk in your local area.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves you have a chance to slow down, relax and take your attention away from current events.

This guide will help you to try out some environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.

CONNECT – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



GIVE – Your time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.



TAKE NOTICE – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.



LEARN – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.





Folklore

What is folklore? Its not as easy a question to answer as you might first think! Most of us will know at least some folklore – who hasn't heard the tale of Red Riding Hood for example? Her adventures with the wolf as she walks to visit her granny is a familiar story. The version most of us know now came to us from 19th Germany as a retelling of a 17th century French tale which has elements of Norse, Roman and even North African traditional stories within it. It is quite possible that the story of Red Riding Hood's walk through the woods has been told, retold, adapted and passed on for thousands of years.

Many modern folktales have similar complicated histories, having been told and retold through the centuries. The words, language and setting might change but the core of the story is carried through history – don't stray too far from home, beware of the dark scary woods, listen to your mother, don't speak to strangers. In fact the same sort of warnings that loving parents have always given their children, dressed up in an exciting way to help make the message stick!

Folklore often contained a warning, or a moral within, it was a way of passing wisdom, beliefs and culture on through the generations, telling stories helped us to define who we were, what was important to us, what made our people, or our part of the world special.

But there were other messages too. Folklore could be a way of teaching about the plants and animals around us – what better way to warn the kids about the dangers of wolves than to frighten the life out of them! Sometimes stories contained real history, sometimes a story could be a map, a guidebook to the places and resources in a local area. In a time before science could explain the world around us, stories could give a sense of comfort, or power, by making sense of how the world worked. And of course stories could be just entertainment – a family might gather on a winter night to listen to a story told by a skilled teller, in just the same way a modern family might gather round the TV to watch the latest TV show or movie.





Animal Antics

Lots of superstitions surrounded animals and birds in the past – our ancestors perhaps took more notice of the natural world than we do and were always watching the creatures around them. Sometimes this was for the good of the animal - Robins were long beloved in Britain and an old rhyme helped protect them.

“The Robin and the redbreast, the Robin and the Wren; if ye tak oot o’ their nest, ye’ll nivver thrive again!”

Other beliefs about animals weren’t perhaps quite so helpful – remember that before electric light the darkness outside of people’s homes, especially in winter, was absolute. People had no idea what went on beyond our circles of firelight – but they imagined... For a long, long time hedgehogs were persecuted and killed on sight all over Scotland because it was believed they stole the milk from cows in the night. Most parish councils even paid a bounty for every pair of hedgehogs ears that were brought to them in order to protect the milk supply! This was possibly due to early rising farmers seeing hedgehogs in the dawn light scuttle away from cows in the fields. Hundreds of thousands of hedgehogs probably died in this way, but in fact we now know that hedgehogs don’t drink milk – in fact they are lactose intolerant, drinking cows milk will quickly kill them! Hedgehogs do hang around cows in fields – but they’re more interested in the crunchy beetles and worms that are attracted to cow pats!

Other tales had a grain of truth. Choughs were long persecuted as it was believed that they could start fires with their red beaks and their red legs were marks of the Devil. Every time a house or a barn caught fire the local choughs would be blamed and they were soon driven to near extinction, This seems far fetched... except... we now know that Choughs (and other crows) will collect smoking embers from fires and use them to make a ‘smoke bath’ which helps to clear parasites out of their nests and feathers. Many birds probably did nest in the thatched roofs of houses, or the dry timbers of barns, and a smoking ember thrown out of the nest after it was finished with might actually have been responsible for some fires!





Seasonal Stories

Why do the stars move in the sky? Why, when and how do the seasons change. What is happening when the Sun, the centre of your people's life starts to wane in the sky in midsummer and the days start getting shorter. How do we stop it!?

Sometimes folklore was about the natural human urge to make sense of the world around us – and to control it. By giving meaning to things like the changing of the seasons, creating gods and goddesses of the weather, or rituals and ceremonies that could predict or control the motions of the heavens our ancestors were perhaps trying to give meaning and reason to what might otherwise seem random – and terrifying – events.

If winter was a person (the Cailleach Bheur in some Scottish traditions) then it was no longer an impersonal force that could not be tamed. It was something that could be explained and controlled. A winter goddess could perhaps be placated, or reasoned with, to bring a mild season. If the disappearance of the Sun every winter could be prevented by humans performing fire ceremonies in midwinter then it removed the random element of chance from the equation. There was no need to worry that winter would last forever, the Cailleach Bheur would be replaced by the spirit of Spring as she always was. If we poured offerings into the sea in Autumn then the spirits of the waters would be calmed and the storms less severe, if we lit yule fires at midwinter then the Sun would begin to climb again in the sky in response. If we sang to (wassailed) the apple trees in January then we would get a great apple harvest in October.

Of course sometimes this theory went wrong. Witness the folk tale of the villagers who, on noting that spring came at the same time as Cuckoos arrived, and summer left with them when they migrated South again, decided they could make an everlasting summer by catching all the cuckoos in the area and building a wall around them. So sure were they that this would prevent the winter that they partied all summer long and didn't work to gather in their winter stores...





Winter

In Scottish traditional belief winter was ruled by the Cailleach Bheur—also known as the Carlin, or Beira, Queen of Winter.

Beira was usually depicted as an old woman, she appeared every year in late autumn as the earth was dying, carrying a staff which froze everything it touched and bringing winter storms in her wake. Her breath was the chill winds of winter, she would search the land and cull anything whose time it was to die but would also find and protect the seeds of life buried under the ground, guarding them until spring.

The Cailleach is born as an old woman every year at Samhain (Hallowe'en) but grows steadily younger over the winter until she is a young maiden by Spring—at which point she turns into a grey boulder and rests beneath a holly tree to wait again for winter. This is why no wildflowers will grow beneath a holly.

She was also known as a creator goddess, using her staff and a magical hammer to create lochs, glens and mountain ranges all over Scotland (interestingly this corresponds with the actual action of ice and glaciers creating the landscape during the Ice Age.)

Beira was the protector of wild animals, especially the wolf and the deer, giving them the abilities required to endure the harsh winter weather. She also protected fish and plants and was responsible for keeping the water flowing in streams and preventing wells freezing over. She is one with the land, her blanket is the snow which covers the ground and she always carries brushwood coated in frost.

The Cailleach is fierce and unforgiving but she is also necessary. Nothing she does is out of malice, she only takes what she must, what is essential to ensure the survival of all. She has the wisdom to let go of what is no longer needed and the seeds she guards give hope and confidence for the future. She facilitates change, the darkness of winter used as a symbol for new beginnings and new life.

To honour the Cailleach Bheur we should respect all life in winter and empathise with its struggle. We should tread lightly as we walk through the woods, disturbing nothing and using our senses to see, hear, and smell the signs of life, death and renewal. We should let go of our past troubles and look for and guard the signs of spring to come.





Superstitions and Sayings

“Make sure to tell the Bees!” A common belief is that bees should be kept informed of all the goings on in a family – especially news of weddings, births, and deaths. Everytime an event like this occurs the family must go and formally tell the bees or disaster will strike! This may come from an ancient belief that bees were messengers to the spirit world, or the belief that bees were very curious animals.. If you didn’t go tell them the news they might swarm into your home to find out what was going for themselves!

Goats protect horses. Goats were beloved of the devil and could not be possessed by witches, so keeping a goat in your field protected all the other livestock. However you could not keep the goat there all day, goats must be released from their field once every 24 hours to visit the devil – or he might come and visit you! It is possible that goats were able to safely eat a variety of noxious plants that would otherwise harm horses and cattle.

“Ladybug ladybug, fly away home. Your house is on fire your children are gone. Fly away East, fly away West, show me where lives the one I love best.” Catching a ladybird and throwing it into the air while reciting this rhyme would cause it to fly straight to the home of your future husband/wife – if you could keep up with it of course!

Bow to the new moon. You must bow to the new moon 3 times. Whatever you have in your pocket when you first see it will govern how your month will go. A similar belief was held about cuckoos – if you had a pocket full of money, were smiling and well rested when you heard the first cuckoo of spring you would have a good summer – if your pockets were empty you’d be poor, and if you were lying down... you’d soon be dead!





Tall Tales

Story telling is a tradition that probably stretches back as long as humans have been... well, human! When our first prehistoric ancestor sat with their friends around the campfire and wondered just what was going on out there in the dark, or when a hunter returned empty handed and said to their fellows

“Listen up folks, you should have seen the size of the Mammoth that got away!”



There are no rules to telling stories, you can make up your own from scratch or you can adapt existing folklore—often one of the great beauties of a traditional story is seeing how it changes through the years as each generation gives a new twist to an old tale.

A lot of traditional stories are concerned with the natural world, with animals and plants but also with natural phenomena like rivers, tides, seasons and harvests. It is human nature to seek an explanation for everything that happens in the world—and if we can’t find one then... tell a story!

If you come up with a great story why not tell us on our social media pages to let others see it? We’re on twitter as **@WildCumbernauld** and Facebook as **Cumbernauld Living Landscape**





The Cumbernauld Stoor Worm

We all know the story of the Stoor Worm, the great sea serpent whose death split the Earth and created the sea between Scotland and Norway, and whose bones even now make up the Orkney and Shetland Islands. But did you know Cumbernauld had its own Stoor Worm? It was just a baby as these things go, being only as long as a river, and weighing perhaps as much as a mountain. Its tongue was enormous, it used it to pull whole forests down into its great mouth, its teeth could crack the walls of the strongest barn and it would suck down whole herds of cows and use entire flocks of sheep as a desert.

The people could not afford this death and destruction so they sent messengers to the rest of the country asking for help.

Soon a man appeared in the town – he called himself a Ranger and he promised he could help. He went around Cumbernauld gathering together secret plants which he ground up into a special mixture. That night when the Worm was sleeping he strode out and walked straight down the Stoor Worm's throat and spread the secret mixture over its heart.

The Ranger just had time to get clear before the Stoor Worm awoke with a roar, its body twisted and it threw its head into the air, its great tongue came out and raised far into the sky – it almost touched the moon before the creature suddenly froze on the spot. With one last spasm the Stoor Worm leapt into the air and came crashing back down to earth. Where it hit the ground it caused a great valley to form, twisting like the curves of a river. The Worm's head lay on Fannyside Muir, its tail stretched to the North Sea in one direction, and its tongue reached the Atlantic Ocean in the other.

The Ranger stepped forward and explained that to keep the Stoor Worm asleep they must bury it, and after it was buried they must plant trees and flowers and bring animals and birds to live in them – only then would the Stoor Worm sleep on and leave the people alone. And so it was. You can still see the shape of the Stoor Worm now if you look – Cumbernauld Glen is the valley formed by the crash of its body, Rabbit Hill in Ravenswood marks a twist of its coils and the Luggie follows the course of its tongue, all the way to the Ocean.

And the Ranger's descendants are still here, protecting the Glen, the moor and the Luggie even today, ensuring that the trees grow and the plants flower, the animals and birds thrive – and the Cumbernauld Stoor Worm remains peacefully sleeping.





Quotes

"Old wisdom out of the cluster of gathering shadows."

George Mackay Brown

"Pay heed to the tales of old wives. It may well be that they alone keep in memory what it was once needful for the wise to know."

J.R.R. Tolkien

"Witches never existed, except in people's minds. All there was in the olden days was women and some men who believed in herbal cures and in folklore and in the wish to fly. Witches?

We're all witches in one way or another. Witches was the invention of mankind, son. We're all witches beneath the skin." Ian Rankin

*"Listen to stories carefully. They might be folklore, or it could be a leg pull... If what he said was, "That stone turns round whenever it hears the church clock strike midnight", he's speaking a very literal kind of truth, and what you have to ask yourself is, "How often does a stone **hear** a clock?" ... That's the leg pull. On the other hand, if what he said was, "That stone turns round when the church clock strikes midnight", Well, he's folk, and that's lore."* Jaqueline Simpson





Plants and Trees

Folktales centred around plants were often a way of passing on useful plant lore and knowledge. Knowing which plants were edible, which were poisonous, which had healing qualities, and knowing where and when to find these plants was vital knowledge in the past – as important as knowing how to navigate a supermarket or a website is to us today.

For instance, there is a legend, held in slightly different forms all over Britain, that blackberries shouldn't be eaten after Michaelmas (10/11th October) as after that date they are claimed by the Devil. How he claims them varies, in some areas he merely lurks nearby guarding them, in other places he spits on them rendering them inedible – in Cornwall he urinates on them!

This is an example of a story which surrounds a practical truth, Blackberries rapidly go out of season at the beginning of October, becoming inedible – if you want to eat them, or collect them to make jams then you better remember to pick them before then!

Other legends maybe reminded us of the uses of certain plants. Ash trees were associated with witches brooms and speed through the air – is it just coincidence that Ash is the best wood to use to make arrows and spears... and that even as late as the Second World the amazing Mosquito Fast Bomber aircraft was made with large amounts of Ash to give it the strength, lightness and speed it required?

Many tales are told of Bluebells and how they are protected by fairies. To pick a bluebell and bring it into the house was believed to be certain death in many parts. This is good for bluebells (they take a long time to grow and are easily killed by picking) but it might also be good for people. Someone who was inexperienced in foraging might just mistake a bluebell root for Spring Onions or Garlic – with deadly consequences as bluebell roots are highly toxic. What better way of reinforcing the lesson of being sure about what you are picking before you eat it, and of learning the difference between fairy protected bluebells and dinner. And if you do make the mistake and eat a bluebell... well you were warned, and your sickness just proves the fairies revenge!





The Fairy Tree

One night a man decided to travel between Abronhill and the Village to meet his friends at the pub. His wife begged him not to go out on such a dark night but he was determined, so he put on his jacket and headed out the door.

It wasn't the best night, it was cold, there was a storm in the air, clouds covered the moon and the stars and in those days there was no good path to follow, but the man turned towards the Village and began to walk. He hadn't got very far however before the clouds grew thicker and the winds grew stronger, somehow the darkness of the night became even blacker. To make things worse it wasn't long before the man began to feel that he wasn't alone on his walk. He kept looking over his shoulder, sure he heard the noise of footsteps or of creaking laughter behind him.

He remembered his old granny's tale of Fairy folks who would play tricks on travellers after dark *"Everything sounds louder at night"* he told himself *"It's just the trees"*.

He pressed on. The wind grew stronger, howling around him and the rain began to pelt down. Soon he was soaked through and he began to feel that it wasn't such a good idea to go to the pub after all. He decided to seek shelter, there was nothing nearby, but a brief gap in the cloud revealed a lone tree just off the path, its branches swaying in the wind. He made his way towards it, struggling through the undergrowth, but the clouds came and covered the moon again and he could no longer see. He pressed on, sure that the tree was so close that he couldn't miss it, but when, several minutes later, the moon reappeared he could see the tree was still a long way ahead of him, and slightly to his right.

The weather was getting worse, the temperature dropped and the winds blew harder. He had to find shelter. He pushed on towards the tree, but soon the moon disappeared again and he lost sight of it. He struggled on through the thick mud. Suddenly he heard the creak of a tree in the wind, it sounded a bit like laughter but he turned to his right and headed toward it. The moon appeared again, and again he saw the tree, ahead and to his right.

This went on for a long time with the tree, when he could see it, always just out of reach, ahead and to his right. He was freezing now, the icy cold rain trickling down his neck, his boots soaked through, his fingers and toes numb with the cold. He walked through the dark with his arms outstretched, sure he must find the tree soon. He must have walked for miles following glimpses of the tree and creaking laughter, but eventually his hands finally met the gnarly trunk of the tree and he sank gratefully down to the ground. The trunk protected him from the wind, the branches kept him dry, he felt better, warmer and safer immediately as he huddled into its protection.

Then he heard a voice, speaking in the same creaky tones he had heard laughing through the night. *"I don't know about you"* said the voice *"but I am getting soaked. I'm heading home to a warm fire and a soft bed."* and with that the tree uprooted itself and ran off into the night laughing, leaving the man stranded, freezing and lost, deep in the wet peat of Fannyside Bog.





Wildflowers to Spot this Week



Birds foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) A member of the Pea family, Birds foot trefoil flowers have the classic family look with 5 bi-symmetric petals and 5 fused sepals behind. The name comes from the seed pods which look like birds feet. Other common names are Eggs and Bacon (from the colours) and Granny's Toenails! It is very important for pollinators and is a food source for Common Blue and Small Copper butterflies. Grows very low to the ground – it symbolised revenge in Victorian Flower Language!



Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) Grows in wetland edges, along riverbanks and marshes. The flower is the inspiration for the royal fleur de lis symbol – as used by the Scouts. It grows up to a metre tall and its sharp leaves give it the name Sword Grass. It is known as Cheepers in Scots as the leaves can be used to make a whistle – the Gaels called it the flower of light as it seems to glow even on dull days. Although it was used medicinally it is quite toxic – in legend it is said to repel evil.













Meadow Sweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) A sweet smelling flower, often found growing in damp meadows and ditches. Groups of frothy white flowers atop tall stems. The scent can be detected on the air for a long distance but is especially intense if a flower is crushed – it divides opinion, some think it smells sweet, others think it smells of antiseptic! The name probably comes from its use as a flavouring in mead. It has aspirin like painkilling properties and is a traditional hangover cure! The legendary hero Cuchulain wore it as a belt.



Activity Sheet

See how many of these things you can spot or do this week.

- Listen to or read some folklore
- Make up your own folklore
- Tell someone some folklore
- Spot three different bee species
- Spot three different butterfly species
- Spot three different ladybird species
- Sit quietly in a green space
- See some Yellow Flag Iris
- See some Meadowsweet
- See some Birds Foot Trefoil

	2pt
	5pts
	10pts
	1pts
	5pts
	10pts
	1 point per minute
	2pts
	5pts
	1pt

Total _____





Links

Go further with your Wild Ways Well activity by trying these links once you come home

Cumbernauld Living Landscape www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk

Wild Ways Well www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well

Activities www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/

Facebook www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape

Twitter www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld

The Conservation Volunteers www.tcv.org.uk/scotland

The Scottish Wildlife Trust www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

SamH www.samh.org.uk

NHS Five Ways Well www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing

MIND coronavirus and your wellbeing www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

Lanarkshire Green Health Partnership www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf

Deer and the Wolf Folklore www.youtube.com/watch?v=mScY0e55gB8

Scottish Storytelling Centre www.scottishstorytellingcentre.com

British Library www.bl.uk/childrens-books/articles/fables-and-fairytales-myth-and-reality

Scottish Legends www.scotland.org/features/scottish-myths-folklore-and-legends



cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk