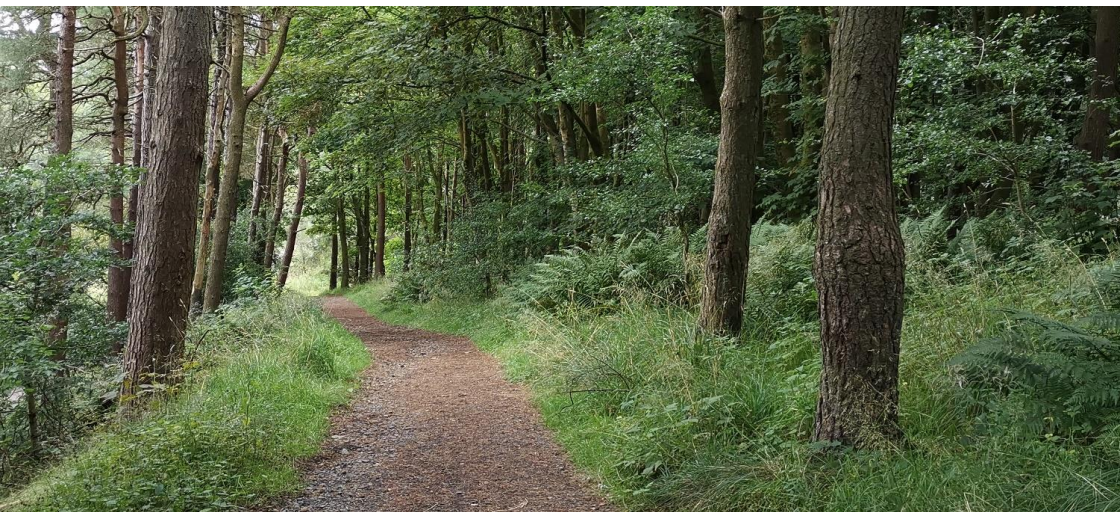




Creating Natural Connections

Abronshill Activity Pack



HOW TO GET THERE

How to get there: Start your walk at Abronhill Town Centre off Larch Road, G67 3AZ. There is a small car park here and another by the Library and Health Centre on Pine Road.

Description: A moderate walk over urban pavements, gravel and dirt paths. The route through the Glen involves a couple of inclines. The circular route is around 4.3km long (approx 6500 steps)

What to see : There are excellent opportunities to spot urban wildlife in Abronhill itself, and the ancient woodland of the Glen is perfect habitat for all sorts of woodland birds and mammals, as well as incredible trees.

WILD WALK

This week's Wild Walk will take us through the heart of Abronhill and down into historic Cumbernauld Glen - an ancient woodland, dripping with history, alive with wildlife, right in the middle of a busy town.

We're going to start our walk in Abronhill Town Centre. Usually when people talk about historic places in Cumbernauld the attention focuses on Cumbernauld Village, but this site has a long history of its own. Although not as large as the Village, there has been, at least, a modest settlement here for a long time. A cluster of buildings – probably farm buildings - is shown at the junction of what is now Pine Road and Pine Close in maps from the middle of the 19th century. One of the first detailed maps of Scotland (the Roy Lowland map of 1755) doesn't show any buildings here but it does give the place a name – Abronhill.

Most of Scotland's landscape is human-made. When walking in the outdoors it can be a fun (and mindful) activity to try and strip this layer of human activity away and see the wild landscape that lives beneath. You're standing on a high point here with the ground falling away in every direction and with water on three sides. This would likely have been a bit of a wild spot once upon a time, near enough to surrounding settlements like the Village and Cumbernauld House, accessible if you knew how, but somewhere people rarely came.

This very wildness might explain its name – the modern name 'Abronhill' is a corruption of the older name 'Abraham's Hill', a title it was given in the 17th century during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. At this time only 'official' state-approved church services could be held inside buildings so 'Covenanters' (those who supported a different church system) would meet outdoors to hold their services. Being caught at one of these events was a capital crime so wild places like Abraham's Hill, where worshippers would gather in secret, were used.

The modern town centre couldn't be more different from this history, but it is interesting to look back and strip away the concrete and brick to get a hint of the wild land beneath.

LET'S GET STARTED....

We're going to be heading north for the first leg of our walk down into the Glen. Turn left at the Spar shop and follow the path between it and the church building. You'll pass a small planting area with young birch and ash trees. These trees are often planted in urban areas because of their attractive colours. Birch and ash are native trees to Scotland and would likely have been growing all over this place once upon a time. They are fantastic trees for wildlife. The silver birch provides food and habitat for more than 300 different insect species, and its open canopy allows lots of light down to ground level – which is great for people, and for wildflowers like bluebells, violets and wood anemones.

Next to the trees is another plant that you often find in urban areas, a laurel hedge. Laurel is often used as it is an evergreen, and its dense foliage is good at screening places off from view and preventing people walking through. Unfortunately, it is not a very good plant for wildlife. It is not native, and it spreads very aggressively, its thick leaves and branches block light and it usually kills any flowers or plants that try to grow near it. Its berries are not regularly eaten by birds or mammals and the whole plant is poisonous to humans. Our volunteers often work in areas like this, removing plants like laurel and dogwood which were planted for their looks, but which have now become an invasive problem, overgrowing paths and crowding out wildlife.

What do you think about this? There's no doubt that laurel is a useful hedge plant for people but how does this weigh up against the problems it causes? Should our town planners only think of people when designing planting or should they take the natural community into account too? An alternative hedging plant for this area might have been holly – do you think this would be a better choice in the future? What other factors should be considered when planning urban planting?

Keep on walking and cross Pine Place. Most of the streets in Abronhill are named after tree species, a nice nod to the past, but also a reminder of the costs of human development, with concrete and houses replacing the woods which would have once stood here.

Walk along Pine Place. You can cut down any of the little lanes on the left here, they all end up at the same place. We're heading for the underpass under Blackthorn Road.



Keep an eye open for signs of urban wildlife as you walk. Life is all around you, even here. The planting strips, the trees and urban gardens are full of plants and flowers – and there are still more to be found right at the soles of your feet, growing in the cracks, between pebbles and kerbs, even forcing their way up through the concrete. Some people might call these weeds, but what is a weed anyway? In one sense, a weed is just a flower growing somewhere people don't want it. Many of these weeds would be considered wildflowers if they were growing elsewhere. They attract bees and butterflies, hoverflies, beetles, caterpillars – the building blocks of the ecosystem around us.

You can always find surprises wherever you go! On a recent walk, I came across the enormous caterpillar of an elephant hawk moth (pic above) – a huge green and pink moth – which looked like the miniature trunk of an elephant (or a tiny baby crocodile!) crawling across the concrete path.

Elephant hawk moths are incredible creatures. They lay their eggs on plants of the bedstraw family. You're probably familiar with at least one common member of this family called 'cleavers' – sometimes called 'goosegrass' or 'sticky willie'. The moths themselves are nocturnal and love to feed on night flowering plants like honeysuckle. They hover in front of flowers rather than land on them and they have incredible night vision: unlike us, they can see in full colour, even in the dark.

Researchers have discovered they can even be trained to associate different colours with food rewards. They fly for only a few weeks each summer, hibernating through the winter in cocoons which are often hidden underground or in piles of leaves – another reason not to be too tidy in your garden!

If there are flowers and pollinators around, you're also sure to get creatures like birds and mammals too. Keep an eye out for robins which love to sing from on top of lampposts or high in urban trees. Many of the common species you see round towns, like sparrows and



Dunnocks, can be hard to spot in an urban environment, superbly camouflaged in amongst the trees and hedgerows. Other species seem to flaunt their bright colours. Greenfinches and chaffinches stand out, but the stars of the finch family must be the goldfinches, which look like they've decided to pop over to our gardens for the day from some tropical jungle paradise.

Foxes are common visitors here, living secret hidden lives in amongst the houses and strips of green. It takes surprisingly little space for a fox family to live, and they can often do so pretty much un-noticed, feeding on human scraps as well as insects, birds and small mammals, such as the mice and voles also making their homes here.

Try to walk through the streets and see them through the eyes of a fox. What dangers are there? Where would you live, how would you stay out of the way of people? What would you eat, where would you go to find water? Where would you choose to raise your young? Foxes are clever and adaptable problem solvers. If we give them just a little space, they can make it go a long way.

If you live in a street like this one, think about how you share the space with wildlife. What could you personally do to help a fox, a goldfinch, a hedgehog, or a wildflower? Could you give some space to a tree or leave a patch of ground for some pollinators? Could you provide some water, or a safe space for a hawkmoth to hibernate? Would it be better to work on your own or could you work together with your neighbours, or the wider community, to make a bigger impact? You can find out about some of the things our community volunteers do to help wildlife later in this pack.

If you've been following one of the winding paths between the houses, you should be at the underpass by now. If you're still on Pine Place or Pine Grove, turn left and follow the paths down – if you've made it as far as Pine Court, you've gone too far! Turn back and find the path that winds down to the underpass.



Walk through the underpass under Blackthorn Road and follow the path through the playing field, keeping Broom Road on your left (blackthorn and broom are other brilliant native hedge plants that could be used in urban areas!). You can take a detour here if you like, walk round the small football pitch to the area of rough grass behind it – this can be a brilliant spot for wildflowers and pollinators. There's a possibility there are some hawkmoths hidden in here, and on a warm summer's day it's worth taking a close look and seeing if you can spot all of the 'Big Seven' common British bumblebees.

Head back to Broom Road. It might look pretty modern, but this road has been here a very long time. It's shown on the Ordnance Survey map from 1859 following exactly the same route as it does now, with a small settlement named Low Abronhill on its left side.

You can take another detour here if you want. Just before you get to the houses on the right-hand side of the road you can follow a path which leads up into the woods. You'll come to an area of open woodland with evidence of people spending time here. Local schools and nurseries use this area to get their kids outdoors into nature, something Cumbernauld Living Landscape loves to help with. There's no formal path through this section but if you head diagonally uphill, on your left you'll come across a paved path. Turn left when you do, and this path will bring you back down to Broom Road.

If you don't take this detour just keep walking straight ahead until you come to a low gate and an information board. This marks the entrance to Cumbernauld Glen. Most people probably think of the Glen as just a park, or an area to walk their dogs but – as well as these things – it is also a Wildlife Reserve. It is owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a charity whose purpose is to promote the conservation of wildlife and their habitats. A common misconception is that Wildlife Reserves are things that you only find in remote places around pristine lochs and mountains. In fact, the Scottish Wildlife Trust has four Wildlife Reserves in Cumbernauld covering a range of amazing habitats. It's just as important to protect and conserve areas for wildlife in densely populated places like Cumbernauld as it is in the Highlands or Islands.

CUMBERNAULD GLEN



Cumbernauld Glen is an example of what ecologists call a 'SNAW' - a Semi Natural Ancient Woodland. 'Semi Natural' indicates that, although most of the woods have developed naturally, they have had some human management over the centuries. 'Ancient' means there has been a woodland here at least since human records began. In Scotland, this usually means since the first proper maps were published in around 1750. These woods will have been here much longer than that, though. It is likely there has been tree cover in this glen for thousands of years.

This area would once have been home to bears, wolves, lynx, wild boar, moose and beavers. Humans drove these animals to extinction in Scotland, in large part by destroying the habitat they lived in. We can't bring all these animals back but by looking after the Glen and respecting its current wild inhabitants we can give them space to survive alongside us into the future, and maybe allow other species to come back too.

Whilst it is important for people to feel welcome in the Glen, and think of it as a place to play, exercise, walk and relax, it is also good to remember that it is not just a park. As a Wildlife Reserve, the Glen has special status as a refuge, a place where plants and animals can be protected. An ethos to remember is to 'leave no trace' when we visit a place like the Glen: enjoy it, spend time in it, but don't hurt or damage anything living. Respect nature and leave nothing behind when we leave.

Step over the gate into the Reserve and continue down the hill towards the railway line and cross the bridge. Railway lines have obvious downsides for wildlife but it's strange to think that, in some ways, they can actually help it too. Because railway lines are so dangerous, people don't tend to frequent them, and they're often surrounded by a buffer strip of land where trees and flowers are left to grow. They can act like gigantic green corridors running right across our landscapes, allowing plants and animals a tiny little bit of undisturbed space where they can travel from one place to another.

If you're here in summer or autumn, you should be able to spot one species that has taken advantage of railway corridors straight away. Rosebay willowherb grows in thick clumps beside the bridge here. It has tall spikes of pink flowers growing on long green stems with lance-like leaves. Rosebay willowherb used to be a rare woodland plant but nowadays it is common all over Britain. Watch it on a breezy day in late summer and you might get a clue as to why....when the wind blows through its flowers you should see clouds of seeds, looking like tiny strands of cotton, floating up into the air. Each plant can produce up to 80,000 of these tiny parachute-like seeds, which are easily caught up in the wind vortexes created by passing trains and are dragged along the railway lines to set seed and grow wherever they land.

An old name for rosebay willowherb was 'fireweed' as it was known to grow in places where humans had burned down areas of woodland. With the coming of the railways, it gained a new name, 'ironweed,' as people saw it spread wherever the iron lines of the railway went. For me, the success of rosebay willowherb is a reminder that our relationship with nature and the landscape isn't fixed, it's changing all the time. Nature is brilliant at seizing opportunities wherever it can and if we can just give species an inch – they might take a mile.

Once you're across the bridge you can take another detour. You'll see a track heading into the trees on your right. This leads to a woodland clearing which, in summer, can be alive with flowers and pollinators. Walk carefully in here and stay on the path of short grass around the meadow - as many of these flowers are delicate and won't survive being trampled. This is a good spot in July and September to see harebells.

Harebells are also known as bluebells in Scotland – which can be very confusing as they are not the same species as the more famous bluebells which grow elsewhere in the Glen. They're also sometimes called 'Devil's bells', 'auld man's bells', 'fairy bells', 'witches' thimbles' and 'cuckoo shoes' in different parts of the country. Scientific names (*Campanula rotundifolia* for harebells) which remain the same no matter where in the world you are can be very useful!



Much of the folklore surrounding harebells is mixed up with that of the common bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) because of this confusion, but people believed that they were beloved of the Devil and that he could be seen nearby them. Witches also used them to turn themselves into hares, or to see hidden things, and if you are ever in a patch of harebells listen very closely. If you hear one start to ring, you must run! It means the run, it means the fairies are coming for you! It was also believed that only a faithful lover could wear a harebell on their lapel. They stood for true love and constancy – especially if you dreamt about them.

If you've taken the detour then once you're done come back on to the main path and continue on downhill. You'll pass over the Red Burn which can be seen flowing through the trees below you on either side. Have a good look around here – this is a spot where several people have reported seeing red squirrels in recent years. There have been no confirmed sightings as of yet (in 2021) but it is definitely worth keeping your eyes peeled. If you do see one then make sure to try to get a photograph so it can be confirmed!

Reds haven't been officially seen here in many years. The problems of the red squirrel are well known. They are suffering from the arrival in the UK of the invasive grey squirrel, which is a native of North America. Grey squirrels are unfortunately capable of carrying a disease called squirrelpox which is relatively harmless to them but fatal to red squirrels. Greys are also a bit bigger, a bit hardier and eat a wider variety of food, meaning reds just simply can't compete with them. The Scottish Wildlife Trust's 'Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels' project does a lot of work all over Scotland to try and protect them, but it is an expensive and difficult challenge.

We may have discovered a natural ally however - pine martens, which are an agile predator capable of hunting squirrels in the treetops. Pine martens were driven almost to extinction in Scotland in the 20th century due to hunting and persecution.

But since being given legal protection, their numbers have started to increase again and in recent years they have recolonised areas of Cumbernauld, including the Glen. Some studies have shown that when pine martens move into an area, grey squirrel numbers decrease, and red squirrel numbers increase.



We'll talk more about this pine marten effect on a future walk but for now just know that they are here and keep your eyes on the trees!

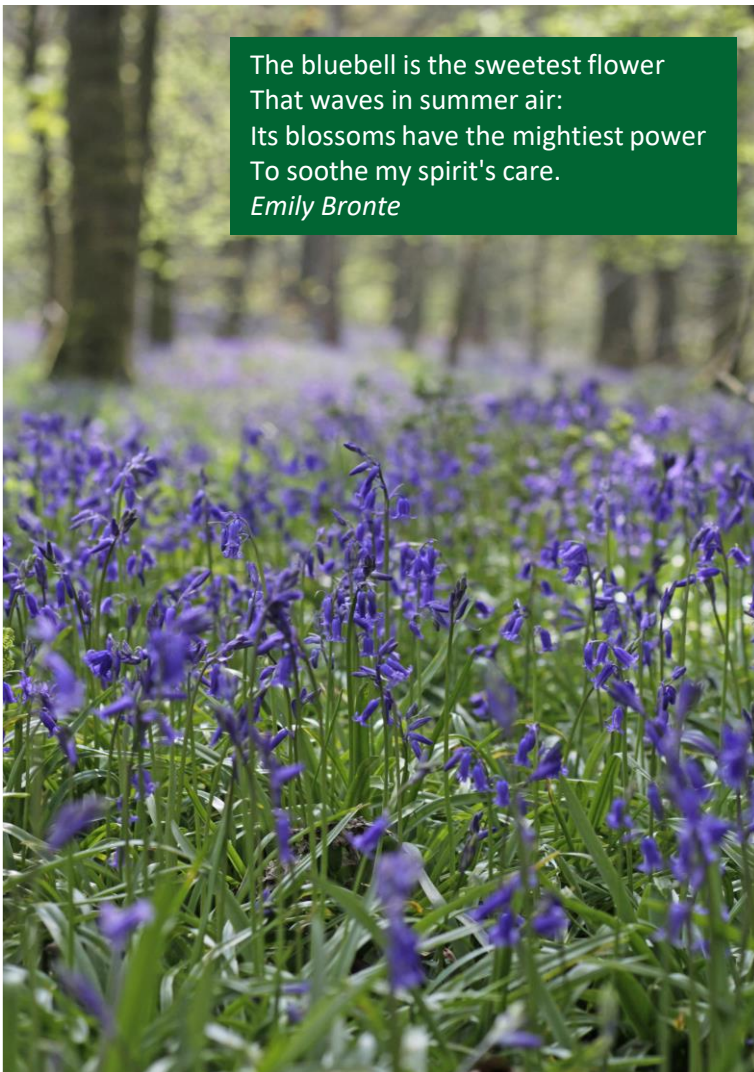
You'll come to a fork in the path, next to a stone wall and iron gate. To your right the path heads up towards Wardpark Industrial Estate and to the Glen's Mountain Bike Trail. We're going to turn left though and head further into the woods.

The road you're now walking on is another that appears on some of the earliest maps of Scotland. It's closed to traffic now, but once upon a time it would have been one of the main ways to get to Cumbernauld House – and perhaps even Cumbernauld Castle before that. This area has been a managed woodland for a very long time. It was owned by the Comyn family until 1306 when Robert the Bruce killed John 'the Red' Comyn and gifted the land to his supporters, the Flemings. The estate was managed by the Flemings, and other noble families, for the next few hundred years and had a variety of uses in that time, but the tree cover remained and it was never developed.

As you walk you'll catch glimpses of the Red Burn to your left. To your right the land rises quite steeply and is covered with trees - oak, ash and sycamore chief among them. Eventually you'll come to a stone tower.

This is a restored 16th century dovecote – though many local children refer to it as the ‘witches’ tower’ and it has a spooky reputation. The dovecote would once have served as a larder for Cumbernauld House, providing fresh pigeon eggs and meat through the year. As part of its restoration, it was sealed up, but you can still see the doorway and, high up at the roof, the holes where pigeons could fly in and out. We have found signs of bats on our guided walks and surveys in this area, and it is possible they might be living in the structure. Old maps show kennels and a cottage at this point but there is no trace of them still standing now.

In late spring the sloping ground here is carpeted with bluebells – this time the common (or English) variety *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, which has a string of violet, bell-shaped flowers with creamy white pollen on a delicate drooping stalk.



The bluebell is the sweetest flower
That waves in summer air:
Its blossoms have the mightiest power
To soothe my spirit's care.
Emily Bronte

Bluebell woods like these are a critically endangered habitat. The UK has almost half the world's population of them, but they are increasingly coming under threat. They grow best in woodlands, like the one here in the Glen, but this sort of habitat is becoming rarer as it is lost to development. Another threat to the native bluebell comes from its invasive cousin, the Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*).

Spanish bluebells look similar at first glance, but a closer look reveals the differences. Instead of the violet blue (very occasionally white) flowers of the native species their flowers come in a range of colours from light blue to pink and white. They don't droop over, they have upright stems with flowers all around them, they have blue pollen inside and they have no smell at all, unlike the beautiful sweet scent of the native variety.

Spanish bluebells were brought to the UK by gardeners, but they quickly escaped their garden confines and began to grow in the wild. The biggest issue is that Spanish and native bluebells are capable of hybridising with each other, meaning that once you have both species in the same area, over time, both will be replaced by the hybrid and the original bluebells will be lost forever. The first hybrid was found in the wild in 1963 and it has spread rapidly since.

Luckily, we think the bluebells here in the Glen are all native, but we cannot be complacent about this. The Scottish Wildlife Trust works hard to make sure the habitat here is perfect for native bluebells and is on guard for signs of the Spanish or hybrid variety appearing. Realistically, little could be done if Spanish bluebells do reach this site, so the best thing we can all do is be careful not to assist them in getting here. If you have Spanish bluebells in your garden, consider removing them and replacing them with native ones bought from a reliable source (some unscrupulous sellers dig up native bluebells from the wild – the opposite of what's needed to protect them!). Be careful not to bring seeds or plants with you– it is incredibly easy for a stray seed to get on your walking boots and then on into the woods!

The other thing we can do is to look after the native bluebell woods we have. If you come here to see the bluebell displays in April and May (and you definitely should!) make sure to stick to the main path and do not go walking into the woods. Bluebells are very delicate plants.

and they cannot survive being walked on. If their leaves are crushed, they die. It takes seven years for a bluebell to grow from a seed to a flower, so every one that is lost when someone walks over it takes a very long time to be replaced. Bluebells are a protected species. It is against the law to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy them, and it is all our responsibility to look after them.

Our ancestors believed bluebells were a sign of honesty, gratitude and love. It was said that putting a wreath of bluebells around someone's neck would force them to speak only the truth, and that a potion made from them could cure snakebite! The common name, 'bluebell,' is relatively recent. They were known by many names in the past: 'granfer griggles', 'blue bonnets', 'harebells' (just to confuse things again), 'adder bells', 'crow's legs,' and wild hyacinth among many others.

As you walk, you'll no doubt see a distinctive stand of tall, evergreen trees on your left – this area is known locally as the Spruce Wood, and it has an interesting story to tell - which we'll come back to on a later walk! It's a favourite place for our Wild Ways Well group to visit but, for the moment, we can just say that in this section of wood you'll find the spot where the Bog Stank and the Red Burn meet – the meeting of the waters that may give Cumbernauld its Gaelic name.

For now, tear yourself away and keep walking: there's more to the Glen than can be discovered in one visit! The spruce trees themselves are a reminder that not all the trees in this wood came here naturally. Look around and take notice of all the different forms of tree that you can see. There is a good mix of species, size and age here – a sign that this is a mostly natural woodland. We've already mentioned oak, ash and birch but you should also spot yew, holly, alder and rowan. In among these native trees, you'll see other familiar types like lime, sycamore and beech, some of which look very grand. You might also see some less-familiar species, probably even a few that you think you've never seen before!

These species hint at another chapter in the Glen's past. It was once very fashionable for wealthy landowners to collect exotic trees – in much the same way as some rich people today might collect rare and expensive luxuries like supercars. No grand estate was complete without a few specimen trees which had been collected by plant hunters who explored all over the world looking for new species to bring back.

These species hint at another chapter in the Glen's past. It was once very fashionable for wealthy landowners to collect exotic trees – in much the same way as some rich people today might collect rare and expensive luxuries like supercars. No grand estate was complete without a few specimen trees which had been collected by plant hunters who explored all over the world looking for new species to bring back. Look at the structure of the woods around you, you might notice that many of these trees have been planted in ways that are designed to catch or draw your eye. Often, they are in pairs, one either side of the path, or they occupy a prominent spot at a bend in the stream, or a high point on the hillside. It's almost like walking through a living art gallery.

You'll come to another fork in the path soon. Take the left-hand route over the bridge – don't worry, we'll be covering the other path in another walk. The ground will start to rise now so take your time – it's good exercise for the calf muscles! Before you get too tired, however, you should notice another path opening on your left, turning back towards Abronhill. Take this path and we'll start heading back.

Our volunteers have been at work in this section removing invasive dogwood, snowberry and balsam, freeing up space for native plants to grow. On your left you'll see some the remains of some trees that have been 'topped' and left as standing dead wood. Dead trees like these are an incredibly important resource for wildlife and all sorts of creatures are reliant on them. Birds like treecreepers, nuthatches and woodpeckers love them to nest in and to hunt for insects, and bats like to live in the hollows within. On a recent bat walk, we were very confused by the strange noises our bat detectors picked up here – we couldn't identify what species we were listening to, until we realised we were hearing the distorted calls of bats that were inside the trees we were walking past!

On your right, you'll see another line of trees and a fence marking the boundary of Cumbernauld House Park – you don't need to look too closely here, we'll be coming back to walk around it soon! You should be able to quickly see the difference between the open ground of the park, designed for people to spend time in, and the Wildlife Reserve.



The slope to your left here is steep so be careful as you walk. This is a great spot to find snowdrops in late winter/early spring, growing in great white drifts. Surprisingly, snowdrops are another non-native plant. They were brought here by religious orders in the 16th century who used them in ceremonies at Candlemass. Snowdrops generally aren't considered to be a problem species. They do not spread quickly in this country, as they find it very difficult to set seed, and they are not competing with any native plants. In fact, they provide a useful early nectar boost for insects. Their slow spreading habit and their association with religion makes them a useful tool for historians too. A large established patch of snowdrops in an area often means that there was a religious building somewhere nearby in the past.

Walk on past the open area of the House Park and stay on the main path. It'll begin to curve down and to your right. You might be familiar with this area if you've ever attended one of our Hallowe'en events, where we dress the woods here with spooky decorations and dare any families brave enough to come and walk through the woods in the dark with us. There are often a few surprises on the way – witches, wizards, giant spiders, ghosts and werewolves have all been seen in these woods on All Hallows' Eve!

Look up into the birch trees here and you might even see some witches' brooms in among the branches right now. This is the name for the dense bundles of twigs which you often see high up in birch trees. People sometimes mistake them for birds' nests but they're actually growing from the tree itself. They're caused by tiny micro-organisms – fungi and bacteria – which cause the tree to lose control of its shoot and bud formation and grow these tangled, twisted balls of twigs.

Soon the path will double back on itself, and you'll start descending downhill towards another bridge, this time over the Red Burn. This area was heavily used in the past for industry and there were once lime kilns cut into the cliffs.

Follow the path now as it runs parallel to the railway one side and the Red Burn on the other. Roe deer spend a lot of time here picking their way through the undergrowth. They can be very difficult to see as they know that they are trapped by the river if they are spotted and so are very wary – especially if there are dogs around. The Glen is a brilliant place for dog walking. It must be a fascinating place for a dog to visit with all the exciting smells and different noises!

Dogs are very welcome here but one of the best things you can do for wildlife as a dog owner is to keep your pet on a lead when it is in the Wildlife Reserve. Dogs can't help but run around and chase things when they are off the lead, it's in their very nature as hunters, and while most of the time they are just playing, the wildlife doesn't know that. The Glen is heavily used by walkers, and a wild animal that lives here might see dozens of dogs every day. Being constantly on alert, running and hiding from our four-legged friends puts a lot of strain on animals like deer, otters, foxes and badgers, and takes up a lot of their time which could be better used in their struggle for survival.

For some reason, I always think of this stretch as a sunny one, maybe I just always get good weather along here? The woods seem open and inviting and this is an area where I often see or hear great spotted woodpeckers and treecreepers. Listen for the drumming of the woodpecker and see if you can spot the flash of colour as they fly. Jays are another colourful bird more heard than seen here. They are incredibly intelligent birds and are adept at hiding from people. Often, they'll follow a walker through the woods, flying alongside or behind you, making their distinctive alarm call, letting all the other woodland creatures know that there is a human around. Kingfishers, too, have been reported in this area. It's incredible to think that these colourful creatures are all around us. You'll be lucky to see one, but you never know!



Pretty soon as you walk along this path, you'll reach the junction where it joins the main path at the railway bridge. This is the path we walked down earlier. Turn right and head back up to Broom Road.

Follow the same route you came down to get back to Abronhill Town Centre.

Thank you for joining us on our Wild Walk through this incredible landscape. Please try out some of the other activities in this pack. It is now well known that walking amongst, and engaging with, nature in this way is incredibly good for our mental and physical wellbeing. It is vital that we continue to experience nature like this and learn to value the lessons that nature has to teach us.

If you've enjoyed this walk, why not let us know on our Facebook page (Cumbernauld Living Landscape) or our Twitter/X and Instagram pages (@WildCumbernauld). Don't forget you can also check our website www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape for more walks and activities or to join our volunteer, schools and wellbeing groups.

ABRONHILL TO CUMBERNAULD GLEN TREASURE TRAIL

How many of the following things can you spot on your walk?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| • The railway bridge | 1 point |
| • The iron gate | 2 points |
| • The crooked Scots pine | 3 points |
| • The stone tables | 2 points |
| • The meeting of the streams | 10 points |
| • The dovecote | 2 points |
| • Ivy growing on a tree or wall | 5 points |
| • A mossy log | 1 point |
| • A snowdrop | 2 points |
| • Jaggy holly leaves | 2 points |
| • A robin | 10 points |
| • Two of the same animal together | 10 points |

Total



The crooked tree



The dovecote



Stone table



Snowdrops



A robin

SPECIES SPOTTER

Common sights to see now?

Roe deer

January- December

Most common native deer in Scotland, roam in small groups in winter but tend to be solitary in summer.

Brown and slender with no tail and three-pointed antlers (males)

Although they mate in July- August roe deer delay their pregnancy, so kids don't start growing until January, avoiding unfavourable conditions in winter.



Dipper

January- December

Striking white throat stands out against its dark body. Look for its pointed-up tail and bobbing movement as it stands.

These little birds are very well adapted to water and will walk underwater to find a meal of insects and even small fish. They can use their wings to push themselves further down and hold small stones in their feet to anchor themselves against fast currents.



Long-tailed tit

January- December

Unsurprisingly identified by its long tail that's almost twice the length of its body.

Sociable little bird even during nesting season. Will help raise the young of close relatives if their own chicks fail.

When building their nests, long-tailed tits will weave in spiderwebs that allow the web to expand as the chicks grow.



Wren

January- December

Not the smallest but is the shortest of Scotland's birds and only weighs about as much as a pound coin (8.75g). By proportion, these little birds are also the loudest. Wrens have quite long legs compared to their round little bodies, short wings and tail which points upwards.

Most common breeding bird in Scotland. Wrens don't have a good time in the snow and can lose 25% of their population in harsh winters.



Snails

- Lifespan: 2-5 years
- Snails are found everywhere on earth
- Have no backbone and a single lung
- Some snails hibernate
- Usual speed 0.5-0.8 cm per second
- Record speed: 1.3 cm per second



SPECIES SPOTTER

Others to spot when you're out and about!

Chaffinch ☐

January- December



House sparrow ☐

January- December



Snowdrops ☐

January - March



What else do you see (make a note):

Who to look for at a later date

Wildflowers



Bluebells

April -
May

Hedgehogs



April -
November

Swifts



April -
September

URBAN WILDLIFE

Humans have changed the landscape and placed artificial structures in the place of natural ones. Although this has alienated some wildlife, others have adapted to co-exist with us, or in some cases even rely on humans to survive.

House mouse

Few populations are truly wild, and the majority rely on human shelters and food scraps.



Deer

Growing human populations infringe and overlap with deer's current range.



With no natural predators it's common to see them venture out of the safety of trees and long grasses.

Great tits

A common garden bird delighted by bird feeders. Urban populations sing at a higher pitch than in rural populations.



Bats

Pipistrelles often favour roosting in old buildings to fit in with city living.



They are also less affected by streetlights than other bat species.

Foxes

Human settlements attract rodents, so foxes have plenty of prey as well as leftover scraps that humans leave behind. They have also adapted to living around human structures such as hedgerows, sheds, and one was even found exploring the 72nd floor of The Shard building in London while it was being built.



Disadvantages of living near humans:

- Light pollution
- Noise pollution
- Roads
- Litter

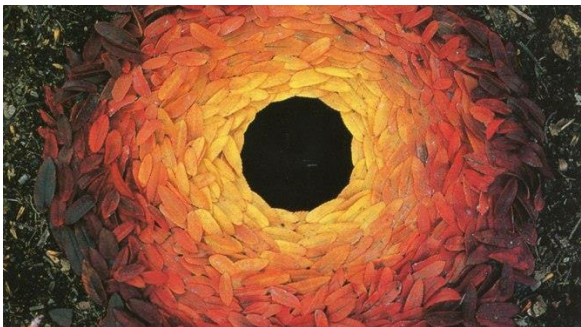
Advantages of living near Humans:

- Food
- Ready-made shelters

MAKE ART WITH NATURE

Humans have been making art since the dawn of time, long before we had paint or paintbrushes. Art is how we express ourselves, and sometimes the message of art is simply to say, “I was here.” Our stone age ancestors used the natural materials around them to create art. They would use organic and mineral-based pigments, such as metal oxides and iron, to make marks on cave walls.

Making art from nature involves using the natural materials around us such as leaves, sticks, stones, etc. These materials can be used in a creative way to make a new art object. The resulting artwork makes a statement about nature and our relationship to it.



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Andy Goldsworthy is an artist who uses natural materials in this way to create works of art. His sculptures take a lot of time and effort, but they aren't built to last. Once completed, his works are photographed and then left exposed to the elements of weather and time. In the picture above he has made use of bright autumn leaves to create warmth in the forest.

MAKE ART WITH NATURE

Some artwork prompts

When you are out for your walk this week why not challenge yourself to make a piece of artwork using only the natural materials around you? Why not make one of the following:

1. A piece of art that represents spring
2. A piece of art inspired by our stone age ancestors
3. A piece of art that tells a little about who you are and gives a simple message of 'I was here'

Good materials to use

Sticks, stones, leaves,
grass, berries,
feathers, earth,
flowers, water

Using wild materials

- If you plan on picking any flowers for your artwork it is best not to pick flowers that are on their own, pick common flowers from areas where there are many of the same type and pick them at the stem and **not** the root so they can readily regrow.
- Never cut or break live twigs or branches off a tree or bush. Take only things lying on the ground.
- Only pick berries you are SURE are not poisonous – such as brambles, elderberries or rose hips. If in doubt leave them alone.

STICK RACE

Materials needed: One stick or twig per person

Number of players: Two or more

Where to play: In Cumbernauld Glen there are several bridges going over the streams. Any of these bridges would be a great place to play this game.

How to play:

- Each player drops their stick on the upstream side of the bridge then runs to the other side.
- The one whose stick appears first on the other side is the winner.

WILD WAYS WELL - NOTICING NATURE

Next time you go out for a walk in nature, why not try a small experiment...

Take a small amount of food – a handful of peanuts, some bird seed, a crust of bread - and leave it somewhere (NOT in a nature reserve, though! This introduces non-native seeds into wild places and stops birds and animals from foraging for food in natural ways).

How long do you think it will take an animal to spot this new feeding opportunity? How long would that same piece of food lie in the area before a human noticed it?

Animals have to pay attention to natural signs because for them it is a literal matter of life and death. The slightest moment of inattention could lead a loss of a vital feeding opportunity – or worse could lead to a predator making a meal out of you!

On your walk, keep an eye – and an ear – out for the signs that nature is paying attention.

Listen for the alarm calls coming from areas in front and to the sides of you. These are short, loud calls made by birds and mammal species like squirrels that alert others that there is danger around – in this case you! See if you can spot the birds and animals making the calls. Sometimes the alarms will lead to flight. Look for the birds flying away out of your path, or the deer running for safety.

Animals watch each other, so often when you see one bird fly away, you'll spot others in the area doing the same thing. Deer will often freeze, trusting in their camouflage to fool you, but even they will run when they are sure they've been spotted.

Now why not see if you can spot these sentinels before they spot you? Walk quietly and carefully, stop in places where the wind is blowing into your face (so your scent is being carried back the way you came) and scan the area. Can you see a deer peacefully browsing? A squirrel eating on a tree stump? A bird foraging through the undergrowth with its back to you?

Sit somewhere comfortably and watch carefully – can you predict when the next person will walk by on the trail by looking for the alarm signs of birds and animals?



© Bob Coyle

Birds of prey, like this kestrel, are always on the lookout for opportunities to bag their next meal. Watch out for them hovering over open grasslands, looking for voles, mice, shrews and small birds.

WILD WAYS WELL - NOTICING NATURE, NATURAL NAVIGATION

In Cumbernauld, while it is very difficult to know where the wind will blow from on any given day, we know that the prevailing (most likely) wind direction is from the southwest (SW) and, over time, all the natural life here has adapted to this.

Lone trees will often have a noticeable lean to the northeast (NE) (away from the prevailing wind). In groups of trees, you can see this same effect in the very top branches, which will tend to point NE. Branches on the SW side will tend to grow tightly together, with no outlying stragglers – and branches on the NE will be looser, with more straggly branches poking out.

If you can see the trees' roots, you will often note another growth pattern – the strongest, bulkiest roots will be on the SW side, anchoring the tree against the prevailing winds, just like guy ropes on a tent.

Animals must also deal with the wind, and they know how to find the most sheltered spots. You can use this knowledge to help you in your navigations. A quick look at an isolated bush or tree might show that one side has more flattened grass, browsed leaves or sheep/rabbit droppings than the other. This will likely be the side that is most protected from the wind and rain – the NE in Cumbernauld.

Another important force is sunlight. As we are in the northern hemisphere, the sun is highest and the light most plentiful to the south.

Trees will tend to have their lushest growth and longest branches on the South. The leaves on the north side will usually be larger and sparser. Look at a rock or tree trunk – which side do you think will have more plentiful and more colourful lichens on it? Or try taking notice of wildflowers growing in a ditch – the side which faces south will tend to have a larger variety and healthier flowers.

Walk into your woods and try to read some of these signs that are all around you. See if you can become a natural navigator.

FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING



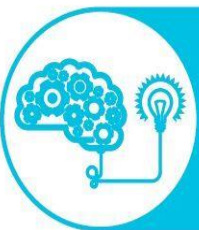
BE ACTIVE – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

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.

SPENDING TIME WITH NATURE IMPROVES WELLBEING

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

Wild Ways Well gets people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health out into the greenspaces of Cumbernauld.

While out among the trees, parks and reserves participants get a chance to slow down, relax and enjoy being in the company of other people.

All sessions include a walk, a chance to safely socialise with other people over a hot drink (often round a fire) and opportunities to try a variety of environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.

GLEN GALIVANTING

Cumbernauld Glen is one of the most spectacular greenspaces in Cumbernauld. The Abronhill section is a delight with grandiose historic buildings, awe inspiring trees and glistening, slaloming streams. Cumbernauld gets its name from these: it is a corruption of a Gaelic word meaning the joining of the streams!

We need to look after these waterways. What happens up-stream can dramatically impact downstream. We must look out for alien invaders in them! One such invader is a plant: Himalayan balsam. Introduced to the UK over 150 years ago it has spread everywhere! Balsam uses streams to invade new territories. Growing along riverbanks, the plants and seeds wash down stream and reroot easily. Each plant can disperse 800 seeds over an area of four metres. With no nature predators, it can grow exponentially. Large colonies of balsam have terrible impacts on surrounding riverside plants, out competing them. They also have shallow roots so can also destabilise riverbanks and contribute to erosion.

It is vital to remove these plants at the earliest possible opportunity before seeds emerge. And the best method of doing this is.....volunteers! Our Nature Ninjas tackle these plants every May/June. The process of removal is simple. A gentle pull is enough to take them out (making sure to leave no roots in the soil). After that, we crunch the nodules of the plant and leave it off the ground on a nearby branch. It is crucially important to not remove them from the immediate area – the plant wants to move and re-root! Just keep them off the ground within the current vicinity.

Balsam bashing is a favourite activity of our volunteers. The crunching of balsam is so satisfying and taking them out in large numbers can make a readily apparent impact on the local area. It is incredibly important to do this year after year ensuring that balsam does not spread. If done properly this leaves the area open for native plants to reclaim.

VOLUNTEERS WORKING HARD AROUND CUMBERNAULD.....



CUMBERNAULD GLEN - A SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST WILDLIFE RESERVE



Cumbernauld Glen has been owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust since 1995. It is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

SINCs (or Wildlife Sites) are sites of significant nature conservation value, and they are vital to enable the planning system to recognise, protect and enhance special places. Conserving and enhancing SINCs makes an important contribution to putting local Biodiversity Action Plans into practice, and to managing the features of the landscape which are of special importance for wild plants and animals.

The ancient woodland of Cumbernauld Glen is a haven for wildlife, and it also provides an important, relaxing environment for local people. However, Cumbernauld Glen is different from a country park. It must be managed in a way that safeguards local wildlife and the protected species that live here, as well as providing enjoyment for visitors.

Events and activities need to be delivered in the Glen in partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust, as the landowner and manager. The Trust needs to grant permission for anyone to run an activity. The Reserves Manager and Cumbernauld Living Landscape will then work with local groups and individuals to plan the activity.

This involves advising on the best time and location for the event (avoiding things like ground nesting birds and breeding seasons, or onsite works like woodland management), how long the event will last for, making sure everything is removed afterwards, ensuring the materials that are used are safe for people and wildlife, and carrying out risk assessments. Activities that have been delivered in the past include our regular Halloween event, Green Health and Wellbeing groups, conservation activities, and performances. For more information about the wildlife reserve visit.

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserve/cumbernauld-glen/>

Cumbernauld Living Landscape is improving Cumbernauld's greenspaces for both people and wildlife, while helping everyone in the community connect with the nature on their doorstep.

Cumbernauld is incredibly green, and we believe that everyone should benefit from this. However, these green areas are often disconnected from one another, and many are not as good for people – or wildlife – as they should be.

Without good quality, healthy places, people and wildlife cannot flourish. Working closely with the local community, we need to ensure that healthy places are at the heart of the town's future. We will achieve this through a range of projects across the town, divided into four major workstreams.

Improving Habitats and Access – We're improving habitats for wildlife and making it easier for people to find and access these sites. We will also enable people to volunteer and take practical steps to conserve and improve these places.

Connecting Young People to Nature – We're providing opportunities for children to get involved in practical environmental projects and helping schools use the outdoors as part of their lessons.

Promoting Green Health and Wellbeing – It is now well established that access to the outdoors is vital for people's health. The Wild Ways Well project helps people, care practitioners and groups to use nature to manage their mental health.

Unlocking Community Capacity – We are unlocking and developing the skills of the community. By building relationships with groups and individuals and helping them to take action for nature we will ensure a legacy that will last beyond this project.



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute and TCV – The Conservation Volunteers.

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Partners



Funders



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a Scottish registered charity (charity no. SC005792) and a company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland (registered no. SC040247). Wild Ways Well is provided by TCV, registered as a charity in Scotland (SC039302).