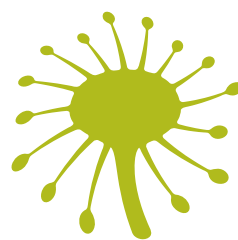


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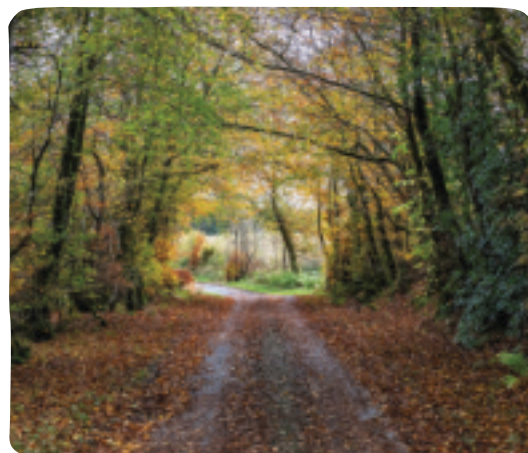


GALLOWAY AND
SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE
BIOSPHERE



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FOREWORD

It is my great pleasure to share the GSA Biosphere's Annual Report for 2023-24 with partners, funders, and supporters.

This was a special year for the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership: we celebrated events that will be unique in the organisation's lifetime, and delivered projects that will be integral to the story of our UNESCO Biosphere for years to come.

Most notably, in 2023 it was confirmed that our ten-year Periodic Review and submission of *The State of the Biosphere Report* was successful, and that UNESCO had renewed Southwest Scotland's Biosphere designation for another decade. The GSAB Partnership Board and officer team are rightfully proud of the confidence and enthusiasm this represents for our ability to deliver a transformative programme.

We are grateful to the Biosphere's core funders, South of Scotland Enterprise, Dumfries & Galloway Council, East Ayrshire Council, and South Ayrshire Council, for helping drive our operations forward across an incredible region where there is such a diversity of potential still to be realised.

Most of all, our thanks go to the people who live, work, play, and learn in the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, for the connections we have forged over the last twelve months. Their passion for nature, community, and sustainable living is an inspiration, and our work continues apace in 2024-25.

Ed Forrest
Director

A LANDMARK ANNIVERSARY:

10-YEAR REVIEW OF UNESCO STATUS BRINGS RINGING ENDORSEMENT AND EXPANDED BOUNDARY

Summer 2023 saw the outcome of the GSA Biosphere's first formal 10-year review. This was based on the Partnership's submission to UNESCO in 2022 which, along with *The State of the Biosphere Report*, gave an account of all the charity's work across the fields of conservation, education, sustainable development, and climate resilience. UNESCO's response was highly complimentary about the Partnership's achievements over its first decade, acknowledging in particular the close relationships forged with communities, the commitment to enacting the principles of sustainable development, and positive feedback received from both partner agencies and the public. On the strength of this assessment UNESCO renewed Galloway and Southern Ayrshire's Biosphere designation for another ten years.

The GSAB Partnership had taken the periodic review as an opportunity to look again at the Biosphere's geographical boundaries and ask local people whether they thought these should be amended. This exercise revealed overwhelming support for an extension that would bring in the Rhins of Galloway, with the public consultation generating excitement about the benefits that designation could bring to communities, local enterprise, marine biodiversity, and coastal

"Working closely with their local communities, the inspiring network of UNESCO Biospheres across the UK plays a vital role in supporting our national commitment to conserve our natural heritage and leave our environment in a better state than we found it. The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere is a world-leading example of this, delivering pioneering work that is making a positive difference to the environment and to communities. I'm delighted that UNESCO's International Coordinating Council has confirmed the well-deserved renewal and boundary extension."

Anna Nsubuga, UK Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO



industries. In light of this overwhelming support the GSAB Partnership's report recommended enlarging the Biosphere to take in the Rhins, the marine environment out to 12 miles from the coast, and Alloway, a high profile 'gateway' to the region known for being the birthplace of Robert Burns.

UNESCO approved the proposed extension and the area covered by the GSA Biosphere thus grew from a little over 5,200km² to more than 9,700km². Home to more than 103,000 people, this is the largest UNESCO Biosphere in the UK, and includes 96 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 13 Special Areas of Conservation, 8 Special Protection Areas, 3 International RAMSAR Sites, and Europe's first Gold-Tier International Dark Sky Park.



SPOTLIGHT:

The new UK Ambassador to UNESCO, Anna Nsubuga, visited the GSA Biosphere in July 2023, her first official visit in post. A tour of the region was followed by an Ambassadorial Reception at Drumlanrig Castle with community and business leaders among invited guests, alongside representatives from an array of public, private and third sector bodies that the GSA Biosphere Partnership has worked alongside in its first ten years. Official announcement of Galloway and Southern Ayrshire's renewed status was made by the Ambassador in the presence of an international delegation from the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Man & The Biosphere (MAB) Programme.

GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES:

GSAB SELECTED AS A DEMONSTRATION SITE FOR NATURAL CAPITAL AUDITING

In summer 2023 UNESCO announced that the GSA Biosphere is one of five new sites selected to participate in a global project exploring the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), acting as a case study on research, education and innovation. In this second cycle of the project, five UNESCO sites have each been awarded US\$25,000 in funding thanks to the abrdn Charitable Foundation. Alongside the GSA Biosphere Partnership's entry, winning proposals came from sites in France, Montenegro, Romania, and the United States. Each one will be allocated \$25,000 over a 12-month project duration, thanks to funding from the abrdn Charitable Foundation.

GSAB's project, titled *Whole Farm Plans for Agricultural Natural Capital Resilience: Audit Methodology*, will address a critical gap limiting deployment of nature-based solutions relating to the environment. Using a holistic audit methodology, the Partnership's goal is for whole



farm plans to increase natural capital while also enhancing the profitability of farm operations. With the Scottish Government's rural support payment scheme currently under revision, the design and testing of whole farm audits led by the GSA Biosphere Partnership will be critical in supporting our region's farmers and land managers to adapt.

This work leads into a larger project under the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Natural Capital Programme, which aims to understand and test how farmers and land managers within the Biosphere can manage their holdings to address biodiversity loss and climate change impacts. Within the Borderlands initiative, this UNESCO Biosphere region is again acting as a test bed for dynamic, urgent research, with clear potential to support embedded, sustainable solutions in one of Scotland's most important industries.

SPOTLIGHT:

In February 2024 the GSA Biosphere Partnership hosted the first ever Farming for the Future Conference alongside Propagate and the NFUS, bringing more than 60 farmers and land managers together for discussion and networking in Newton Stewart. The agenda included speakers from longstanding partners including SRUC and Pasture for Life, and members of the award-winning SW Scotland Regenerative Farming Network.

"The event was an excellent opportunity for people across the agriculture industry to come together. With policy influencers, researchers, advisors and farmers, we had fantastic conversations and information-sharing about being a profitable, food producing farm business and meeting nature and biodiversity goals. A broad range of experience from speakers and delegates meant everyone could go away with something different to think about and to consider for themselves whether that could be something to implement on their own farming business."

Mhairi Dawson, Dumfries & Galloway Regional Manager for the NFUS



SUSTAINABLE CAREERS: GSA BIOSPHERE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME



In 2022 the GSA Biosphere Partnership created two 12-month Project Support Officer (PSO) roles, paid internships aimed at career starters seeking to gain work experience and develop employability skills that support progression into professional careers. The programme gave postholders the opportunity to work across all core workstreams: land use, communities, climate action, biodiversity, sustainable enterprise and tourism, and to contribute to the GSA Biosphere Partnership’s communications and marketing output.

Twelve months on the Biosphere’s internship programme has indeed been the springboard we had hoped for, leading to quality local career opportunities for both postholders – one of whom has joined GSAB’s permanent team. From April 2023 the GSA Biosphere Partnership committed to paying all employees the Real Living Wage, which further strengthened the



offering we were able to make to the next intake of PSOs. Recruitment in summer 2023 attracted 13 applications (an increase from 8 applicants in 2022) and our two positions were again successfully filled.

The Partnership’s goals for the internship programme link closely with Scottish Government policies relating to Developing the Young Workforce, the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland, Fair Work Framework, Scottish & Local Government Employability Action Plan, and Fair Start Scotland. Our ambition is to create sustainable employment opportunities for young people in our region, adding to productivity and wealth creation in the rural areas within and around the Biosphere boundary.



“As a young graduate with a year’s experience within the third sector, the opportunity afforded to me by the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership to take my learning further and develop a career within the area is something I am very grateful for...I will have the chance to meet some amazing people from all over the Biosphere and beyond, not only helping to support those I meet along the way but also to better my own understanding of conservation, climate action, sustainability and much more.”

Ribh Gallacher, Project Support Officer, GSA Biosphere



SPOTLIGHT:

For the 2023/24 internship, Ribh Gallacher and Matthew McCulloch were recruited to the Biosphere staff as Project Support Officers. Matthew supports the Biosphere’s Communications & Marketing output, and immediately brought in £1,000 of Scottish Government funding through the 2050 Climate Group to develop a project, “that will engage young people from all backgrounds...to (take) the lead in tackling the climate emergency and advocating for a just transition in their communities, their workplaces, and in political spaces.” Ribh joined the Community & Education team and has been working on the Capturing Climate Schools initiative in East Ayrshire and the new, region-wide Blue Biosphere programme, also co-hosting the Sense of Place workshops which have brought more villages and towns – many hundreds of individuals in total – to the Biosphere Communities scheme.

GOOD FOR BUSINESS: THE BIOSPHERE CERTIFICATION MARK

The Biosphere Certification Mark is a trademarked quality scheme that recognises exemplars in sustainable enterprise, and reached the landmark of making the fiftieth Certification Mark award in 2023. Open to seven enterprise sectors and directly aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the scheme is aimed at businesses that wish to maximise the environmental and economic benefits that come through connection to the global UNESCO brand.

Certification brings opportunities for businesses of all sizes. The GSA Biosphere Partnership provides in-person learning workshops and networking events, sustainability support and digital resources, all designed to build capacity. We have created a suite of free marketing materials which showcase the breadth and variety of Southwest Scotland's natural and heritage assets and explain more about the UNESCO designation. The Biosphere Certification Mark logo provides assurance to residents and visitors that their spend brings positive local impacts.



One of the main platforms for Biosphere Certification Mark businesses is Scotland's UNESCO Trail. The GSA Biosphere Partnership was one of the lead agencies in the inception and development of this worldwide marketing campaign, which since its launch in 2021 has won three international awards for its innovative approach to promoting sustainability in travel and tourism. Through UNESCO Trail, Biosphere-certified accommodation, attractions, and activity providers are reaching a new and enthused audience keen to explore areas where landscape, wildlife, and culture are recognised as principal assets.



"The college has been a Proud Supporter of Biosphere for the past five years and we are thrilled to be awarded its Certification Mark for Zest Restaurant. With the college already committed to sustainable operations and processes, this seemed a natural progression, since our ethos is very much reflected in the six principles of the Biosphere's Proud Supporter Charter."

Joanna Campbell, Principal
of Dumfries & Galloway College




SPOTLIGHT:

Zest Restaurant on D&G College's Stranraer Campus achieved the Biosphere Certification Mark in early 2024. Zest allows Hospitality students to train in real-time kitchen and front-of-house environments and develop the skills that will take them into professional careers. D&G College was the venue for the Biosphere's AGM and Year in Review public event in December 2023, and Zest hosted the GSA Biosphere team and Trustees that day for a delicious three-course lunch.

THE BIOSPHERE BY NUMBERS

100 ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE TRAINED IN CARBON LITERACY CO₂

1 AMBASSADORIAL TOUR AND RECEPTION 

13 BIOSPHERE EXPERIENCE TOURS AND PACKAGES CREATED FOR VISITORS AND TRAVEL TRADE 

821 PUPILS TAKING PART IN LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY SESSIONS 

26 COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION PROJECTS SUPPORTED THROUGH SEED FUNDING VIA THE D&G CLIMATE HUB 

47 SCHOOL WORKSHOPS DELIVERED 

30 INDIVIDUALS TRAINED AND ACCREDITED AS BIOSPHERE GUIDES 

2,806,000 METRES OF YARN SPUN TO MAKE MERRICK SCOTTISH BLACKFACE KNITWEAR (AROUND 500 SHEEP PARTICIPATED) 

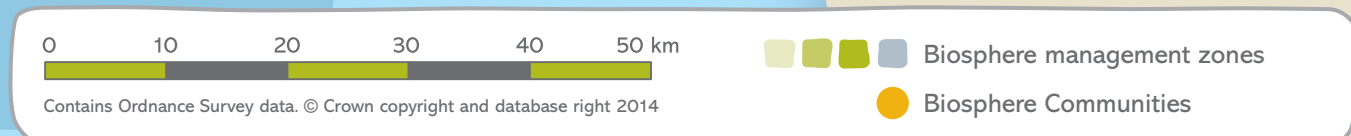
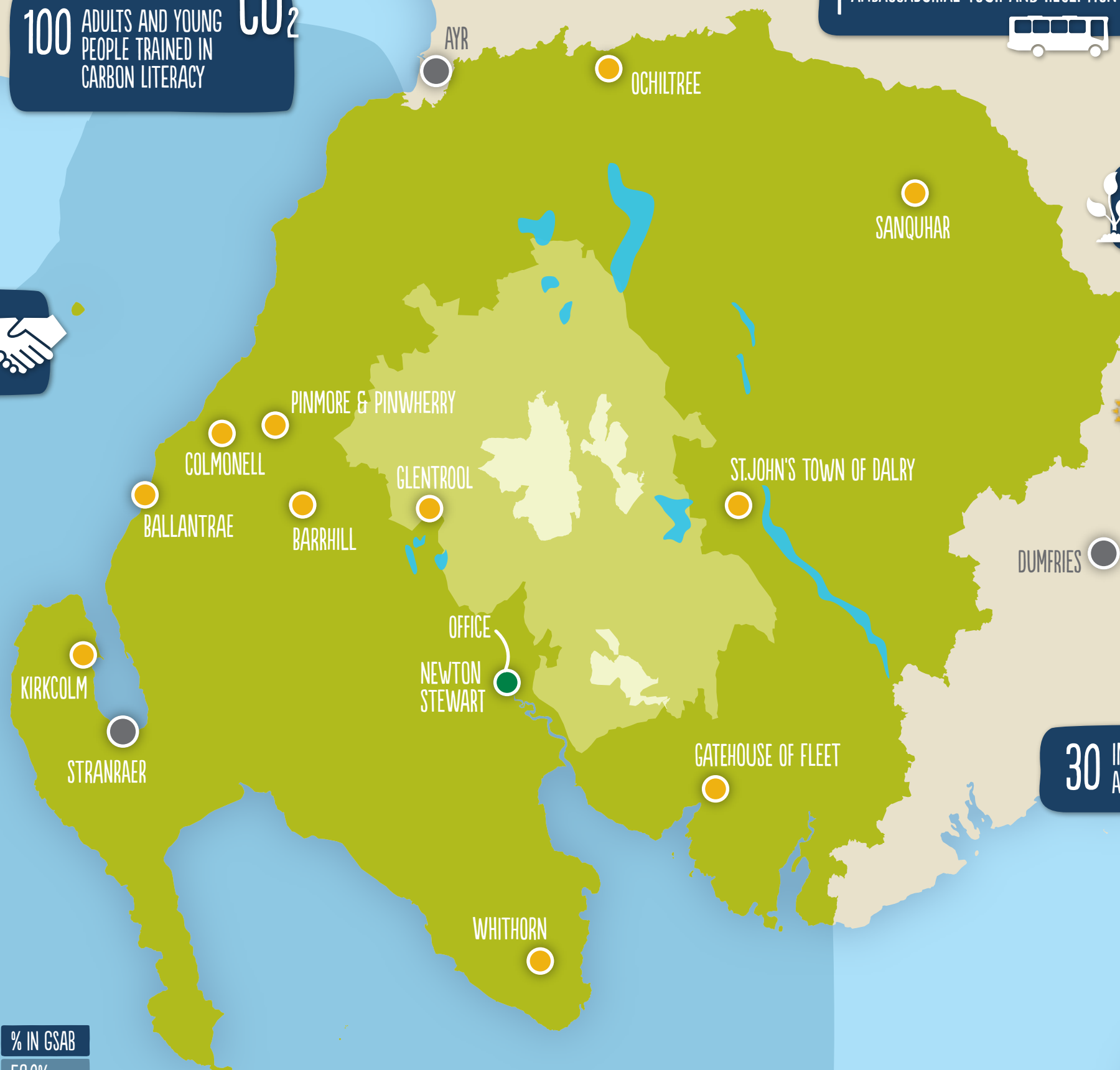
3367 PEOPLE ATTENDING GSAB EVENTS, PRESENTATIONS, CONSULTATIONS 

35 SCOUT AND GIRLGUIDE GROUPS ENGAGED IN EARNING THE BIOSPHERE BADGE 

331 BUSINESSES AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE BIOSPHERE'S PROUD SUPPORTER SCHEME 

4070KM² OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT ADDED TO THE UNESCO-DESIGNATED AREA 

LOCAL AUTHORITY/AGENCY	AREA INSIDE GSAB (KM ²)	% IN GSAB
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY	3938.25	59.0%
EAST AYRSHIRE	661.77	52.1%
SOUTH AYRSHIRE	1051.10	85.1%
SOSE	3938.25	34.4%



PUTTING THE 'OO' BACK INTO WOOL: CIRCULAR ECONOMY MEETS RURAL HERITAGE

The Biosphere's wool project reached a turning point this year with production of the first clothing designs under the Merrick Scottish Blackface Knitwear brand, and the launch of Biosphere Enterprises Ltd as the Partnership's trading arm. From the start the project encompassed multiple goals: to connect people with rural heritage, to widen understanding of the circular economy, and to support sustainability in farming.

Made from 100% Scottish Blackface wool sourced in the UNESCO Biosphere, Merrick Knitwear is a unique social enterprise that will plough all profits back into the region, by reinvesting in projects led by the GSA Biosphere Partnership. The concept attracted widespread support,



with local people turning out in their numbers for public engagement events that platformed discussion about the future of rural industries. Project partners include the Scottish Blackface Breeders' Association and British Wool, with the innovation-led approach bringing in leading knitwear designer Jo Storie, British design consultancy Knitlab North, and luxury lifestyle brand Begg of Ayr.

Most excitingly, the wool project reached people worldwide. Biosphere Enterprises and the launch of Merrick Knitwear – which requires a modern e-commerce site, factory micro-production, commercial photography, and more – was made possible through a landmark crowdfunding campaign. The original target of £12,000 was exceeded, with publicity (including coverage in *The Scotsman*) helping raise £13,292 in 28 days. The first pre-orders of Merrick Knitwear are now being sustainably packaged and sent out to customers across the UK, Ireland, Europe and the United States.

"With an increasing awareness of the huge pollution issues brought on by micro-plastics in our atmosphere and oceans coming from oil based man-made fibres, wool must begin to be taken much more seriously. It is an extremely sustainable, natural and biodegradable product with outstanding environmental credentials, produced in the most natural environment in the world. It is vital that the fashion industry begin to use more wool and lead the way."

"The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere's exciting Blackface Wool Project, which is aiming to produce high end garments entirely and exclusively from the very best of Blackface wool, is what has been needed for a very long time."

Alec Telfer, President,
Scottish Blackface Sheep
Breeders' Association

SPOTLIGHT:

In June 2023 British Wool invited the Biosphere team to take the first Merrick Knitwear range to the Royal Highland Show. The first four prototype designs were on display in the Scottish Showcase alongside leading high-end clothing and homeware brands, and featured in the inaugural 'Flock to Fashion' show. This was the first of two catwalk appearances by Merrick Knitwear in 2023; the garments were also part of November's Re:Dress Scotland Slow Fashion Festival in Dumfries.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:

COORDINATORS AND GOVERNING BOARDS OF SWEDEN'S UNESCO BIOSPHERES TAKE LEARNING JOURNEYS TO GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN Ayrshire



After a Covid-related hiatus, collaborative projects with European UNESCO Biospheres could begin again in 2023, and the GSA Biosphere Partnership was proud to host two separate visits by delegations from Sweden's UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. These learning journeys covered sites and organisations that are driving sustainable development through their connection with and support for SW Scotland's UNESCO Biosphere.

In May, Swedish Biosphere Co-ordinators met the Glentworth & Bargrennan Community Trust to discuss the Biosphere Communities initiative, and visited Girvan, to speak to Biosphere-certified social enterprises Adventure Carrick and Biosphere Bikes. At New Luce the group took a tour at Kitchen Coos & Ewes, learning more about diversification, agritourism, and the visitor appeal of the Biosphere's rural heritage. They explored the Biosphere's Core Area at Cairnmore of Fleet National Nature Reserve, a critical site for habitat restoration, and met the local development initiative in the Biosphere Community of Gatehouse of Fleet, to discuss how volunteer projects are helping people and nature to thrive.



In September GSAB Trustees hosted the second international exchange. Among the delegation were the highest-ranking politicians from six municipalities covered by the Nedre Dalälven UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, including representatives from non-profits and conservation agencies alongside engineers, farmers, and fisheries experts. A four-day itinerary took the group to meet project leads at key locations, including the former coalfield communities of East Ayrshire and sites that have been reclaimed and regenerated for people and nature: Crawick Multiverse at Sanquhar, Ochiltree Community Hub, and Wigtown, 'Scotland's Book Town'. Representatives of both Biospheres participated in a Board Workshop to exchange insights on strategy in governance, and to explore in detail the GSA Biosphere Partnership's contribution to natural capital protection and economic development.



"We were very impressed with your work in the Biosphere, especially the breadth of activities and the engagement from the local communities. We have brought with us lots of ideas and are very much looking forward to future cooperation with the GSA Biosphere Partnership, as we believe that this type of exchange of experience is crucial for our future work with sustainable local community development."

Peter Kärnström KSO, Chair,
Nedre Dalälven UNESCO Biosphere



SPOTLIGHT:

Like the UK, Sweden has seven Biosphere Reserves. As well as having commonalities with the GSA Biosphere in landscape, climate and industry, these too are seeking to embed sustainability in tourism, forestry, and marine industries. All learning exchange participants are active in conservation across protected areas, promoting nature-friendly farming and working with the public and private sector towards carbon reduction goals.

COMMUNITY-LED CLIMATE ACTION:

GSA BIOSPHERE CHOSEN TO DELIVER NEW CLIMATE HUB FOR D&G

In September 2023 it was announced that the GSA Biosphere Partnership had been awarded leadership of a new regional Climate Hub, that will bring support to communities and community-based organisations in delivering action on climate change. Dumfries & Galloway Council supported the GSA Biosphere Partnership's Climate Hub bid which brought a Scottish Government funding package of £140,000 and new jobs for D&G as the Partnership recruited two Climate Officers to deliver the programme, potentially with more to follow in 2025.

Operating across the whole of Dumfries and Galloway, the hub is tasked with coordinating and facilitating community climate action, and sharing best practice tools to support local resilience. Taking a place-based approach that combines experience and innovation, work focuses on climate change impacts on food production, energy provision, transport, and the



cost of living, and the local response to extreme weather events such as fire and flood. In addition, Climate Hub officers are delivering accredited Carbon Literacy training to local groups, and leading Local Place Planning in collaboration with community councils and local authorities.

The announcement of the D&G Climate Hub was made during Scotland's Climate Week, during which the Scottish Government and other agencies try to raise awareness of Net Zero goals. Scotland was one of the first countries in the world to declare a climate emergency in 2019 and the GSA Biosphere Partnership is a key operator in the Southwest, working across the region and with national partners to achieve Net Zero targets by 2045.

"... Climate Action Hubs will put communities at the heart of net zero and I'm very pleased to see the Dumfries & Galloway Climate Action Hub joining our growing network. These hubs, which are being supported by the Scottish Government's £4.3 million programme, will help coordinate local activity and increase public participation in climate action. Local communities have a crucial role to play in helping us to achieve our shared national climate change targets and I look forward to working with the Climate Action Hub and the many others that are being created across Scotland."

Mairi McAllan, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

SPOTLIGHT:

In its first five months the D&G Climate Hub awarded funding to more than 25 projects, with grants ranging from £495 to £1,000. Climate Officers have been part of key networks and events during this time: cohosting consultation on the Scottish National Adaptation Plan, presenting to attendees at the SCOTO (Scottish Community Tourism) National Gathering 2024, and facilitating a live Zoom learning exchange with Kenyan farmers in Likia, Nakuru County.

NEXT GENERATION: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE UNESCO BIOSPHERE



In June 2023 the GSA Biosphere Partnership announced the launch of a new Biosphere badge for Scouts and Guides, created with South West Scotland Scouts, Girlguiding Dumfries & Galloway, and Girlguiding Ayrshire South. The badge represented an opportunity for Leaders to view Southwest Scotland through a fresh lens, and for young adventurers to explore, learn, and develop new skills. By the beginning of 2024 more than 35 Scout and Guide groups had partnered with the GSA Biosphere, and over 350 Biosphere badges had been earned.

Community & Education officers have continued to build engagement with schools across the Biosphere region – with additional requests for the GSA Biosphere's learning resources received from institutions even further afield. Following the successful launch of the *Learning for Sustainability Toolkit* in 2022, the team have been delivering an extensive workshop programme in schools through 2023/24.



'Capturing Climate Schools' in East Ayrshire was a collaborative project with the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership, with sessions designed to deepen pupils' engagement with the causes and effects of the climate crisis. Meanwhile, an international exchange based on wildlife and habitats connected young learners in local schools with pupils in Iceland and Sweden, including schools in the Vänern Archipelago with Kinnekulle UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The learning programme does not finish as school careers come to an end. Free, bookable, community-based educational workshops are available to groups of any age, covering Carbon Literacy, wildlife data recording, waste reduction and energy saving, as well as the bi-annual Biosphere Guide Training Course, which equips micro- and SME start-ups in the tourism sector.

"It was good to learn what's Scottish and what's not!"
– Arran

"I think it was really fun because we got to see prehistoric shark teeth."
– Lyle

"I enjoyed learning about how we can help the planet and finding out sea potatoes are real."
– Sophie

P5-P7 pupils at Kirkcolm Primary School, among the first to participate in GSABP's Ocean Odyssey, part of the Blue Biosphere programme.



SPOTLIGHT:

The Biosphere's learning programme utilises award-winning resources developed in research at the University of Manchester, including RoundView; this science-based framework for sustainability learning and decision-making has also been employed by the Biosphere team for community visioning in landscape-scale nature restoration along the River Nith.

DESTINATION BIOSPHERE:

GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE ACCLAIMED BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER, ROUGH GUIDES, LONELY PLANET, AND WANDERLUST MAGAZINE



In November 2023 *National Geographic Traveller UK* announced its prestigious annual ‘Cool List’, naming the GSA Biosphere as one of “the editors’ selection of global destinations set to make the news over the next 12 months”. This was the only Scottish destination to feature in the list, which identifies the top places around world, “where tourism benefits communities and the environment as much as the visitors and locals themselves.”

Soon after, and as part of Scotland’s UNESCO Trail, the GSA Biosphere was named in Rough Guides’ 24 best destinations to visit in 2024. Launched in 2021, this award-winning trail is a world first, and includes all 13 of Scotland’s UNESCO-designated sites: Global Geoparks, Creative Cities, World Heritage Sites, and the country’s two Biospheres.

Further features in *Lonely Planet* and *Wanderlust* followed, generating extensive media focus and features in national press. To make the most of the region’s global travel and tourism accolades, the GSA Biosphere Partnership joined forces with VisitScotland to launch a promotional campaign at the start of 2024. With a new evergreen page on [visitscotland.com](https://www.visitscotland.com) and match-funded marketing across social media, the campaign achieved more than 5,500 page-lands in its first month.



Celebrating everything that makes Galloway and Southern Ayrshire cool, visitors are invited to find adventure, discovery and inspiration, and ‘live local’ whether their time in the UNESCO Biosphere is long or short. With other longstanding destination marketing partnerships with the SSDA, AADA and SCOTO as well as leisure and hospitality businesses region-wide, and ongoing collaborations with local authorities and South of Scotland Enterprise, the GSA Biosphere Partnership is recognised as a driving force in making tourism a force for good.



“The Biosphere has a key role in contributing to make Scotland a world-leading responsible tourism destination and it is fantastic to see the Biosphere included in *National Geographic’s* Cool List for 2024. This accolade will help shine the spotlight on the awe-inspiring beauty and diversity of the region as well as the invaluable work between the Biosphere and the local community.”

Gordon Smith, VisitScotland
Destination Development Director

SPOTLIGHT:

Interest in the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere as a destination for meaningful travel has grown exponentially in 2023/24. With more than 8,000 followers on social media and over 20,000 unique visitors accessing www.gsabiosphere.org.uk in the last twelve months, analytics show that most digital visitors are looking for trip-planning ideas and advice. The GSA Biosphere Partnership hosts an array of free resources supporting businesses and travellers alike: Biosphere Experiences, Low Carbon Days Out, Biosphere-accredited events, and a Visitor Charter that inspires people to keep Galloway and Southern Ayrshire ‘unique and amazing’.

AFTERWORD

As a long-time member of the Partnership Board I am delighted that one of my first tasks as its Interim Chair is to oversee delivery of the GSA Biosphere's Annual Report for 2023-24. The achievements that it records are a striking testament to the efforts and imagination of all involved and not least to the enthusiasm and commitment of our previous Chair, Melanie Allen, who stepped down in March.



Melanie's aspiration on starting in post was for the GSA Biosphere Partnership to be "bold and creative" in sharing our stories and seizing opportunities to put Southwest Scotland on the global map. There can be no doubt that over the past year we have realised this goal. For a small organisation the range of activity was astonishing - from launching our new range of high-end knitwear using wool from the region's traditional sheep flocks to hosting the region's first ever 'Farming for the Future' Conference and working with colleagues in UNESCO Biospheres elsewhere in Europe to explore and demonstrate new approaches in education, nature restoration, and sustainable tourism. As our UNESCO reviewers most gratifyingly acknowledged, we proved once again just what innovation and partnership can achieve. This dynamism is well reflected in our Annual Report, which is full of energy, colour and positivity – just like our UNESCO Biosphere in real life.

Our gratitude and very warmest wishes go with Melanie to her new post with Visit Isle of Man – what a pleasure it is, and what opportunities it presents, to have this personal and professional connection in our sister UNESCO Biosphere, whose marine boundary now meets our own in the Irish Sea. Melanie's stewardship and advocacy stands us in great stead, and I am excited to be leading the GSAB Partnership as we pursue our renewed set of strategic goals.

I echo the thanks expressed by GSAB's Director, Ed Forrest, to our local communities, businesses, schools, organisations, and everyone who has contributed time and expertise to help achieve truly sustainable development in the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere.

John Thomson
Acting Chair

"Tackling the interconnected global challenges of our time – from the catastrophic impacts of drought, biodiversity loss, and flooding to the loss of traditional knowledge systems and gender inequality – requires everyone at the international, regional, and local levels to work together in new and unprecedented ways. The innovative work that has been done within Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere truly exemplifies the real difference that this collaborative approach can make."

**Professor Anne Anderson, Chair,
UK National Commission for UNESCO**

"SOSE has been a proud supporter of the Biosphere since our inception in 2020, as we recognise the important role it has to play in supporting our tourism industry, as well as our region's journey to Net Zero. 2023 has been a fantastic year for the Biosphere with its tenth anniversary celebrations, renewed UNESCO status and boundary extension. I am sure 2024 will see the Biosphere continue its great work towards creating a better future for local people and nature."

**Professor Russel Griggs,
Chair of South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)**



GALLOWAY AND
SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE
BIOSPHERE



unesco
Galloway & Southern Ayrshire
Biosphere Reserve
since 2012
Man and the Biosphere
Programme

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