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Introduction

Wetland Arts was a programme of creative events themed around the Freshwater Habitats Trust's GroWet project running throughout 2022.

This booklet will take you on a journey through all aspects of this Wetland Arts Programme, showcasing the achievements of all involved and the beautiful art inspired by rare wetland plants and their freshwater habitats.

The Wetland Arts Programme was developed by Community Engagement Advisor Helen Edwards with Andy Gunn and Elizabeth Every of Freshwater Habitats Trust. This Wetland Art Booklet was designed by Elinor MacDonald and edited by Helen Edwards, Elsa Hammond, and Cathrin Poppensieker.

GroWet

GroWet is a plant conservation and community engagement programme from Freshwater Habitats Trust. Part of the Building Oxfordshire's Freshwater Network project, it works with local horticulturalists at Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum to:

- Propagate some of Oxfordshire's most endangered wetland plants
- Engage and inspire people to grow these endangered wetland plants at home
- Introduce the propagated plants to high quality freshwater and wetland habitats

Through this work, the project aims to begin to reverse the catastrophic declines in freshwater plant diversity in Oxfordshire and involve local communities in ecological recovery.

Wetland Arts

The Wetland Arts programme was developed to get people involved in the lives of rare wetland plants and understand why it is important that we protect them. The art events gave people in Oxfordshire a range of ways to express their feelings and observations from engaging with the GroWet project.

The creative events, open to all, offered participants the chance to discover more about the rare wetland plants, their ecology, and the local conservation work of Freshwater Habitats Trust. Bringing art and science together, the programme offered opportunities to inspire and inform, and contribute to an increasing body of art and science dialogues. The programme developed innovative artistic work illustrating the GroWet project's key messages, stories and activities, culminating in an exhibition in September/October 2022.

SciPo

SciPo explores the creative common ground between science and poetry. Sarah Watkinson and Elsa Hammond have been forging links between scientists, creative writers and musicians, as well as literary studies academics with important contributions to make to the representation of science in poetry across the ages. As well as running yearly poetry conferences with prominent invited guest poets, SciPo has offered regular poetry competitions for both adults and under-18s, facilitated popular poetry workshops, and has produced a trilogy of poetry anthologies, edited by Elsa Hammond.

Elsa Hammond is a Lecturer in English at St Hilda's College, Oxford a poetry editor and an award-winning travel writer.

Sarah Watkinson is Emeritus Research Fellow at Oxford University Dept of Plant Sciences, building on her research to engage audiences in the science underpinning current concerns about ecosystem resilience to climate change. Since 2016 she has been SciPo organiser at St Hilda's College and PI at the Oxford Centre for the Humanities.

SciPo offered three poetry workshops in different locations exploring the links between science and poetry inspired by endangered wetland plants, their propagation, mythology and landscape in Oxfordshire.



Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre

Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre is an experimental performance group specialising in butoh, the iconoclastic dance form that originated in postwar Japan. Based in Oxford, Café Reason is the only permanent butoh company in the UK outside London and has achieved a fine reputation for its innovative theatre, site-specific and improvised performances. From its establishment in 1997, Café Reason has been committed to an ongoing process of exploration. Its regular classes experiment with form and movement, and its developing body of work aims to extend the boundaries of perception and the interpretation and expression of universal human experience. Café Reason dancers Helen Edwards and Elizabeth Spight offered outdoor dance workshops and the new site specific Fen Dance commission was choreographed by Helen Edwards.



Fusion arts

Fusion Art is a Community Arts Agency, based in East Oxford, successfully running community arts projects over the last 30 years. Fusion Arts connects artists with communities, promoting dynamic creative projects that drive social justice and celebrate diversity. Fusion Arts responds to challenging social circumstances by delivering meaningful, participatory artistic experiences that provide tangible value for all involved. Through partnership between Freshwater Habitats Trust and Fusion Arts a range of artistic events was developed for people of all ages. These offered participants opportunities to develop both observational and artistic skills as well as gain understanding of the stages of the life cycle of endangered plants, their propagation needs and ecology. The workshops were run by the artists Grace Exley and Jezella Piggott and the project managed by artist Cathrin Poppensieker.



Event timeline



GroWet

Images from Freshwater Habitats Trust community engagement project - protecting rare wetland plants.



Greater water-parsnip

Fen violet

Frogbit



Rare plant collection



Volunteer recruitment events



Marsh pennywort



Water violet



Propagation at Oxford Botanic Garden



Greater water-parsnip

Delivering plants to you!



4.

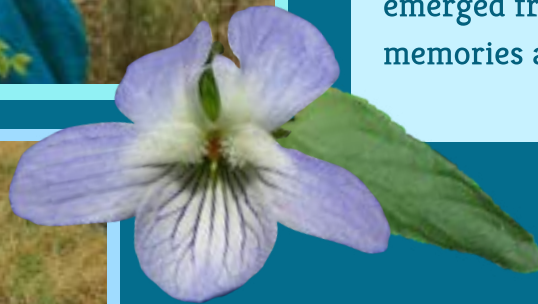
Plant pictures from our GroWet volunteers!



Putting plant packs together

Dance

A display of images from the beautiful Dance for the Fen Violet



'Fen Dance' site specific dance performance

Café Reason presented a new site specific work 'Fen Dance' inspired by one of the rare and endangered wetland plants, the Fen Violet and its ecology. This performance at Hinksey Nature Reserve Big Nature Day explored the qualities of Fen Violet, the mythology and propagation of the plant, feelings, symbolism and images evoked by the flower as well as its history and presence in the Oxfordshire landscape. The piece was developed and choreographed by dancer and choreographer Helen Edwards.

Dancers: Ayala Kingsley, Fabrizia Verrecchia, Karen Goonewardene, Juliet Henderson, Bob Lyness, Elizabeth Spight, Cath Blackfeather, Nathalie Descamps and Helen Edwards.

Musician Bruno Guastalla

Outdoor dance workshops offered by Helen Edwards and Elizabeth Spight were well attended. Participants were encouraged to interact with 'flora and fauna', 'landscape and horizon' and 'season and place'. There was time to develop solos and small group pieces inspired by inner dance responses that emerged from playing with simple movement impulses, emotions, memories and the imagination, linked to the theme of endangered wetland plants and their landscapes.

*Seeds brought to life
by conservation efforts*





Fen violet bursts into colour



A Dance for the Fen Violet

Camilla Lambrick, Oxfordshire Flora Group's flora guardian for Fen Violet

'Disappearing species are a tragedy of our times, and this dance catches both the haunting misery of populations slowly dwindling, and the delight when they are rescued. The green cloaked figures, with faces hidden, progress slowly and finally, individually, crouch, almost lost to sight, as was true for the Fen Violet at all its known localities in Great Britain. However seeds buried in the soil have been brought to the surface by conservation efforts, and the plants reappeared, even as the dancers do, helping each other, slowly rise to life. They climb a steep slope, nudging one another and eventually spread their green cloaks facing a restored pool and fen on the hill above Hinksey. Suddenly they shed their cloaks, revealing a burst of violet colour in which they dance, restored and liberated, as indeed the Fen Violet is now flourishing again at Otmoor under the watchful care of the MoD, the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire and the RSPB.

Stunning! A very thought provoking dance. It must have required a lot of patience and concentration.'

POETRY

A selection of poems inspired by freshwater habitats and species

Said the Dragonfly to the Rush

You
Pierced
young
Horizons
to Lift
my Life
of Pebble
drift
and
Gravel
scrabble
to Air

Amanda Holland



Tarn

The turn of a bird
in low flight over water,
wings outstretched -
white coverts catching
the absolute blue
of cloudless sky.

We dip our sweating feet
into this high cold,
so clear we see straight down-
each dark stone,
each weightless green frond.

We cannot stay too long
up here - just enough
for the sheer grace of the tarn
to lend us lightness.

Alice Willington



Taking inspiration from nature

Eyfield

The gypsy scholar under the shelter of his great elm
and with his clear view of the spires

wakes to walk down the copse and brier
to wash in the cold stream

he rests a while to let his mind follow the waters
from source to salt

and then he rises to walk back up to higher ground
and carry on his day

reading minds of walkers without compasses as they
pass the wood of orphan primrose.

7. *Jane Thomas*



Re-meandering the Cole*For Richard Watson at Coleshill*

Water – a spring – a stream, a need to flow
 freed after two trafficked centuries, the Cole
 tries to remember its long-vanished self:

a six-mile flow, from Swindon into Thames
 enabled marshland; sallow, alder, osiers –
 cattle hock-deep in winter mist. The Cole

tries to remember Lammas meadows, floodplain
 blaze of spring flowers, scythed hay, grazed aftermath,
 Shakespeare's even mead. But that flow was power

the water's fall was wealth. With dams and leets
 the mill wheel turned, man gained and nature lost.
 Life's fabric, we thought then, was made for man.

Is it too late? In a new-made bed, under the hot sky
 a small stream glitters, ripples over gravel. It is the Cole
 remembering its course, and the land forgiving.

Now see them come: forget-me-not, figwort, crowfoot,
 mayfly and stickleback; already, otter cubs most years.
 Soon, wet woodland: alder, oak, five kinds of willow.

Sarah Watkinson**On Walking by the Cole***Observation*

Sunbeam reflections sparkle
 Dazzling diamonds
 Rushing by,
 over
 Shallow beds
 Swallows overhead
 Attracting curious creatures.

Participation

I can only imagine, as I walk in the footsteps of people passed,
 those who once trod here for work and play.
 Times forgotten or memories made
 no regrets to be displayed.
 It has been and will no more return,
 carried on in the flow
 No chance left to hold on to days we miss
 or joys relived
 For generations gone, and those yet to come
 the evidence of nature's course
 is freedom in the wild.

*Poetry event at The River Cole, Coleshill.*

Incantation to Frogbit

Frogbit my fair, your nature so sweet,
As pure as the water you part
Your surfaces so green,
Seep into the pulse in the very felt of my heart

How we could all be if entangled
We lived clad in your roots
As rosette as Hydrocheris,
Safely harboring newts

Helen Edwards

Spires desire

drags rags on sky
dragonfly
blows thistle by
our journey

leaves rusted gone
girl goes alone
woman knows its tone
leave a stage her home

aged in shadow
passing hollow
owl fly's low
breath earth follows

art in the ear hears
laughter float on tear
boulder dust man clears
I walk connected free of
fear

Adam Shaw

Lesser Spearwort

Ranunculus flammula

Spearwort: standfast in soil set.
Crewcut of blades, armed arms uncoiling.
But blades with soft feel, fists of buds
that become wet open palms, yellow, greeting.
Banewort, defensive, ducked in damp places.

Mark Leech

Lesser Spearwort

Hollow stemmed creeper,
working ceaseless zenith magic,
rain-harvesting water reaper,
in bog pitch, blooming logic.

Florets flourish, holding light,
muscled from air, like time's tears,
flaming spears keep bane in spite,
marginal, at the pond's frontiers.

I cannot speak your languages,
plant grammar, verdant syntax,
flower-faced, root damp messages,
unbalanced wit, beyond pure facts.

Yet eye caught glimmers can understand,
golden flowers in an old marshland.

Alison Jones

Art

Collaborative and individual pieces of art produced both in nature and at home.

Partnership between Fusion Arts and Freshwater Habitats Trust provided the opportunity for people to learn skills and create inspired pieces of art.



Artwork by Jezella Piggot



The abundance and diversity of nature - community art

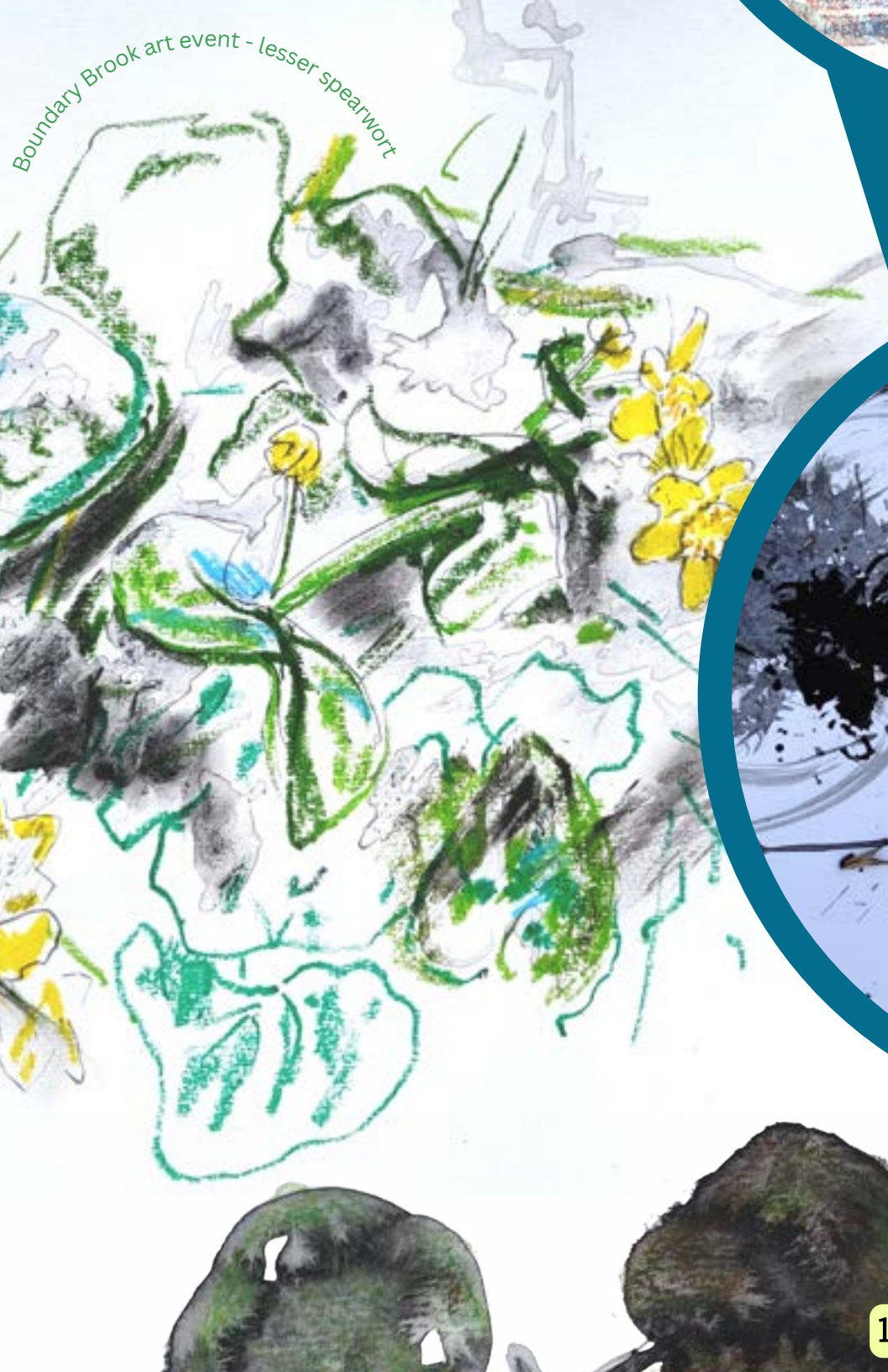


Charcoal trees

Community art piece - feathers and fronds



Boundary Brook art event - lesser spearwort



Teasel in ink - creating art whilst in nature

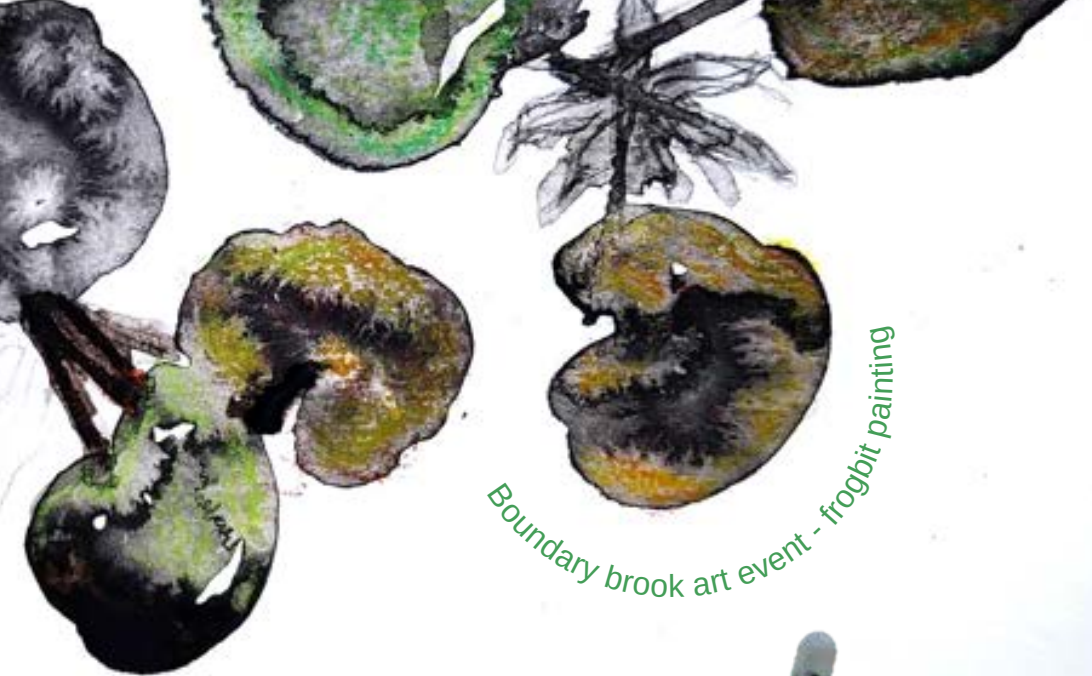


Greater water-parsnip print



Community art piece





Boundary brook art event - frogbit painting



Some reflections from artist Jezella Piggott

'I was delighted to be asked to come and run a drawing workshop as part of the Growet outreach project. Having very little knowledge of the project this was an opportunity for me to learn more using drawing as a way to engage with the project and also the environment they were using to research some of the wetland plant at the Boundary Brook nature reserve.

The experience was multifaceted, through it I was able to offer a range of drawing techniques and a good range of materials - inks, pencils, pastels.

Once we were underway there was a wonderful atmosphere of conversation around the plants and their habitats, the history of the plants and their origins. The drawings became a part of this dialogue exploring and wandering, seeking onto paper. 'Aquatic, saturated, emergent, moist'. For a short period we became immersed in the wetlands habitat at the reserve, collectively pursuing understanding and revelation.

The plant specimens themselves were curious, and filled us with wonder soon to become something more bonded and friendly feeling. Out in the sunny elements, we became greener more photosynthesised, in need of nourishments, water, light and air, a shared biology with our fellow water violets, Bog asphodel, Frog bit and Greater Water-Parsnip.

What would become of us if we stayed here a bit longer?
I wondered.'

Celebration of Wetland Arts

Bringing together artists and propagators from the volunteer community for a final celebration and exhibition.

Thank you to
guest speakers
Mark Brent at
Oxford Botanic
Garden and
John Brimble
from Hinksey
Heights
Nature
Reserve.

The Art of Wetland
Plants Exhibition
was curated by
Fusion Arts in the
Windows Gallery,
and the Celebration
of Wetland Arts
event at Fusion Arts,
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Freshwater Habitats
Trust in
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Fusion Arts.



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Credits:

Photographs by Freshwater Habitats Trust, Liberal Media, Helen Edwards or Fusion Arts.

Artwork by workshop attendees.

Fen Dance photographs by Stu Allsop.