

### How it started

The relationship between **Scottish Seabird Centre** and **Changes** started when Changes had been awarded funding, from the VCSE health and wellbeing fund, in June 2022 to deliver nature-based activities designed to improve mental wellbeing. The idea for a workshop specifically around bird identification came from Changes participants attending other groups and courses. Changes were also aware of scientific evidence supporting the links between improved mental health and bird watching and listening to bird sounds.

The first session delivered by the Scottish Seabird Centre was held in September 2022 at Musselburgh Lagoons and was delivered as part of Changes **Wellbeing in Nature** course.



The Scottish Seabird Centre team led a 4-week block of sessions in North Berwick in November 2022, which included varied activities such as a mindfulness walk, listening to the sounds of nature, beach clean, seaweed search, beachcombing, nurdle hunt, rockpooling and beach art.

Changes, East Lothian, is a mental health charity that has grown from within the community since 1996 to enable people to achieve and maintain good mental health and wellbeing.

The Scottish Seabird Centre is a conservation and education charity that has been helping people to learn about Scotland's marine wildlife, habitats and iconic seabirds for over 20 years.



Positive feedback from participants led to further collaboration, as it became clear that the values of both charities aligned, to support residents in East Lothian and raise awareness of local nature and marine life.



Changes explained that the four week course was transformative for many participants, some of whom had never been to the Scottish Seabird Centre, because they had not had the confidence to go somewhere new. They felt that they were given an opportunity for a safe and understanding environment through the collaboration. The course was tailored to be educational, informative, but accessible for those looking to improve their mental health by getting to know the marine life in North Berwick. Typically, participants come to engage with Changes through either self-referral, or by hearing about the service from their GP, health services, community centres, hospitals, friends and families.

**12 drop-in bird watching events delivered in spring 2023 and a further 12 in spring 2024**



The four November sessions prompted a request to run two sessions specifically focussed on seaweed. So two events were scheduled for February and March 2023 to gather, learn about and press local seaweed to create natural artwork. This workshop has since been rerun several times. The popularity of bird watching led to a facilitated bird watching drop-in programme running for 12 weeks during spring 2023 and again during spring 2024.

**“I wasn’t sure what to expect but thoroughly enjoyed all that I discovered and learned about. The leaders...were fantastic and so good at imparting their knowledge.”**

**Birdwatching participant**

### **Current activity**

As we embark upon a new year of collaboration, we continue to learn from experience and make adjustments to the programme based upon participant feedback. This year we will lead off with two ‘get to know us’ informal social sessions ahead of our main programme of **wellbeing in nature** sessions, **bird watching walks** and **seaweed pressing workshops**. It’s important for potential participants to know what to expect from our activities in advance and to have the opportunity to ask questions and get to know us.

### **Future development plans**

Changes and the Scottish Seabird Centre will collaborate on a programme of joint activities during 2025, drawing upon past experience and are excited to see how the partnership will develop .