

## The Coalface to Wildspace Midlands project, 2022-2025



Coalface to Wildspace, Midlands was a new and innovative community engagement and habitat creation project delivered for 3 years across Walsall and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. This was the first project that Froglife had led in the West Midlands region and included new ideas that Froglife had not delivered before.

The concept of 'Coalface to Wildspace' is all about working in an ex-mining, post industrial area and working to prioritise wildlife, particularly Amphibians and Reptiles and to educate the local community about their local, natural heritage. Walsall was the perfect place to initiate this concept with its history rooted in the mining of coal and limestone and later, the production of bits, stirrups, buckles, saddles and leather goods.

Following the success of this 3-year project, Coalface to Wildspace has been rolled out in developmental stage to similar post-industrial areas of Scotland and Yorkshire.

### What were the project aims?

The aims of this project were to work with local communities to improve urban habitats across Walsall through the creation of Neighbourhood wildlife corridors. It also sought to educate and engage people about local, natural heritage through a variety of creative methods and bring awareness to Amphibians and Reptiles.

There had previously been little focus on Amphibian and Reptile Conservation in the region, so the project aimed to bring awareness through public engagement as well as improving habitat for these species through the creation of new ponds.

### What did we do through the Coalface to Wildspace Midlands project?

**Neighbourhood wildlife corridors:** We created 8 neighbourhood wildlife corridors with local people to improve habitat connectivity between Walsall's parks and nature reserves. We encouraged people to consider wildlife in their gardens with actions such as fence gaps and log piles and together we created 9 new ponds and 80 small interventions which included mini ponds, meadows, wildlife homes, bird boxes, bug hotels and pollinating plants. According to government statistics, residential gardens account for 4.9% of total land use in England, which is a greater area than all nature reserves combined. We can make a huge difference by managing gardens for wildlife!

**Wildlife gardening workshops:** We delivered 42 interactive workshops to community groups and schools across Walsall which offered information about how our gardens and greenspaces can be managed and enhanced with wildlife in mind and how we can encourage amphibians and reptiles, even through small actions such as mini ponds and Toad abodes. Through these workshops we also gave an introduction to our species and how to identify them.

**Layers of time- Frogglebox:** We created a new and exciting 3D film designed to immerse the viewer into the depths of Walsall's historic past. The film begins in the Silurian period, 444 million years ago and travels through the Carboniferous, Triassic and Quaternary to arrive at the present day, challenging us to build a better future for local nature. We screened the film across community venues and local Primary and Secondary Schools. We reached 5066 children across Walsall with this film which included curriculum linked education sessions.

**Layer of time- Lego workshops and displays:** To bring Frogglebox to life, we ran 40 brick workshops with the help of Bricks Mcgee, inviting the people of Walsall to watch the film and choose an animal or plant that spoke to them and recreate it on a tile using Lego bricks. We then enlisted the help of Infamous Arts to create a magnificent display of all the tiles, one for each of the five layers of time. The displays collectively housed 252 tiles made by local people, celebrating the area's local, natural heritage. We invited members of the community to a special judging event where the best tile and display were chosen. They liked the display about present day best which featured lots of Fly Agaric, Butterflies and Fish. All five displays have been on a tour to Walsall's libraries and Arboretum visitor centre. You can now find them at The Crossing at St Pauls, Walsall.

**Speaking Sculptures:** We ran 32 workshops with 8 different community groups in partnership with Juneau projects who worked with over 400 people during the sessions to design and create 8 Speaking Sculptures. Each sculpture is unique and celebrates nature on our doorstep with native plants and animals. The sculptures all feature a gabion with dead wood habitat, a bird nesting box made by the Men's Shed at Caldmore Community Garden and a soundscape accessible via a QR code which links to the voices of the community talking about their nature memories and connections, weaved with nature sounds. You can find the sculptures standing proudly in Reedswood Park, Pleck Park, Palfrey Park, The Arboretum, Park Lime Pits LNR, Pelsall North Common LNR, Swannies Field and Caldmore Community Garden.

**Speaking Sculptures festival of events:** To celebrate the sculptures and encourage people to visit their local greenspaces, we ran and participated in over 40 events attracting 3430 people to the parks and nature reserves where the sculptures can be found in events to celebrate nature. These included Bat walks, Reptile walks, foraging workshops, Wreath making workshops, Tree ID walks, and Pond dipping.

**West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA):** In addition to the 3-year Lottery Heritage Funded project, we had 1 year of funding from the WMCA. This allowed us to add even more value to the project with a big pond restoration project at Reedswood park. We hired a sessional worker, Kyra who delivered 12 'Amphibian Hops' education sessions with local schools, 15 wildlife gardening workshops with allotment and community garden groups and 2 Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors across Palfrey and Pleck. We made two ponds, 28 mini habitats and planted 800 trees!

**Ironmongers Sculpture:** Another addition to the project, to help celebrate the new ponds at Reedswood park, we were awarded a grant from the Ironmongers Company and commissioned

artist Luke Perry to design and create a magnificent steel sculpture which was opened by the deputy mayor of Walsall and featured in the Express and Star. We consulted over 300 local school children who chose the Common Frog as the animal they wished to be represented in sculpture form. You can find it on Reedswood Way.

### Ways you can continue the work of Coalface to Wildspace, Midlands?

- Visit one of our Speaking Sculptures in Walsall's parks and listen to the soundscapes
- Learn about the Layers of Time by visiting our Lego displays at The Crossing at St Paul's, Walsall
- Volunteer with Walsall Conservation Volunteers
- Create your own pond or other wildlife habitat
- Record your Amphibian and Reptile sightings on our Dragon Finder App.