

Dùthchas



Dùthchas

Community, people, nature,
habitats, brick and concrete.

Bees of Bensham was a two-year art and citizen science project led by Gateshead community arts organisation Dingy Butterflies CIC and artist and beekeeper Barbara Keating. Through walks, talks and creative endeavours they worked with communities in Bensham & Saltwell, Gateshead, North East England, alongside naturalists, ecologists and scientific researchers. The project explored which bees and other pollinators live in the community; what habitats there are; and the relationship between them and our community. The idea of 'saving the bees' is full of complexity and contradictions which Bees of Bensham wished to untangle to create deeper connections and longer-term sustainable relationships between bees, plants, land and people.

The sense of belonging to land is no longer a common concept in urban areas, and the disconnect from nature is acute. People strive for it on allotments, but tenure is often fragile, and it is gardening, with a view to keeping out weeds and pests, that often hinders nature. People are brought up with no real knowledge of how nature works, resulting in it being seen as an unwelcome intrusion into urban spaces. It is no surprise that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, being in the bottom 10% globally for biodiversity.

This book acts, not as a document of the Bees of Bensham project, but as an artist's exploration of urban habitats. How they might be available for recolonisation by nature; how they are repeatedly threatened or lost through human desire for control; and how nature re-emerges through brick and concrete.

The imagery used is taken from across three sites. An older persons' council-owned tower block, where the Residents Association has taken on the lease of the land surrounding the building. The green and wild grounds of a community centre, which supports refugees and asylum seekers through growing food and nurturing the natural environment. A brownfield site, where homes once stood, reclaimed by a richness of biodiversity for nearly 15 years, now cleared again for new housing.

These three areas had the potential to reconnect people with nature, but one is already lost, and another is endangered. The community centre is under threat of losing some of its land for housing, including its wildlife pond, one of the few water sources in the area and home to many life forms, a drinking place for bees, and a spawning ground for frogs. Red-listed sparrows nest here, and scarce starlings are making a comeback, alongside hedgehogs and other wildlife. The need for natural habitats in urban communities can often be dismissed as housing development takes precedence. The green spaces that are left are often heavily managed, where the messiness and chaos of nature is controlled through policies and strategies and the human need for order.

A collective action to focus this concern was led by Keating and the Bees of Bensham residents' group. A richness of biodiversity had developed on a brownfield site, where houses had been demolished over a decade ago. The ground was about to be broken to allow the building of new homes. The group collected seeds from the site, to be distributed back into the communities in a symbolic gesture of rescue and rehoming, honouring the value of brownfield sites and nature's ability to heal itself when given space to do so.

During the two years of the project, survey walks exploring local flora and fauna were led by naturalists and ecologists, fostering an understanding of how losing these sites can adversely impact the wildlife we have in our community.

A recurring image in the book is the Bees' Eye View map, conceptualised by Keating and created by Sebastian Weiss. It leaves behind human names and landmarks, inviting us to think about how small organisms can navigate the urban landscape in search of food and a home. In Seamus Heaney's poem 'Anahorish' he transliterates the title as "My Place of Clear Water", the second line beginning 'The first hill in the world...'. The village and townland of Anahorish is no longer named on any Ordnance Survey map but is kept alive by the villagers as a topographical inheritance. The Bees' Eye View map is populated with sites identified by the Residents Group for simply monitoring and observing, for potential intervention in the form

of different land management practices, or planting and habitat creation, allowing Bensham to become a place of imagination and possibility, encompassing the needs of all its inhabitants.

The title, *Dùthchas*, is a Gaelic word that captures how deeply people, the land, nature, and culture are intertwined. It is the sense of responsibility to take care of where you live and your right to be there and belong to it. In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in this concept and the use of this word to connect to land and understand who owns and controls it. The English language has no word for it, and there is no equivalent. Writers and ecologists have begun using some of these words to explain the loss of biodiversity. “Solastalgia” was coined by philosopher Glenn Albrecht in the 2005 article ‘Solastalgia: a new concept in human health and identity’. He describes it as “the homesickness you have when you are still at home” and your home environment is changing in ways you find distressing.

Taking the honeybee navigation diagrams; InfraRed imagery and data, including temperature ranges and hot spots; bee and plant monitoring data; and photos and text captured over the two years of Bees of Bensham, Keating has categorised them into the four elements of ***Aqua***, ***Ignis***, ***Aier*** and ***Terra***. This is done to understand the natural and human built environment found in a Northern English urban community, and the data collected from these places.

Aqua shows four maps overlaid with plots and isotherms taken from readings of the community centre’s pond and twelve images capturing life supported underwater and around the pond.

Ignis presents two theories of honeybee navigation, after American biologist Adrian Wenner and German-Austrian ethologist Karl von Frisch, superimposed on the Bees Eye View Map of Bensham. This is alongside photographs of some of the bees, ladybirds and spiders found in Bensham whilst on community nature walks.

Aier shows the Bees Eye View map overlaid with InfraRed data relating to the photos on the facing page. Taken from the roof of Bensham Court tower block, revealing urban heat islands; the heat reading of flowers connecting us to the temperature requirements for floral aromas to be released to attract pollinators; and winter and summer thermal readings at the development site, before and after land clearing showing the hot and cold spots.

Terra explores the Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic words for concepts about land, belonging and grief experienced at the loss of “belonging to the land”. We are invited to view the land from the position of the flora and fauna found on the brownfield sites before the bulldozers moved in, and grieve the loss of this habitat, and their exile.

There has been an increase in recent years, in community-led rewilding to restore nature and habitats, to take responsibility and connect communities to land and nature. This connection between communities and people is the aim of Bees of Bensham, not just through rewilding, but through watching and monitoring, being aware of what nature we have in our community, and connecting people to the urban spaces and places where they live. Community, people, nature, habitats, brick and concrete.

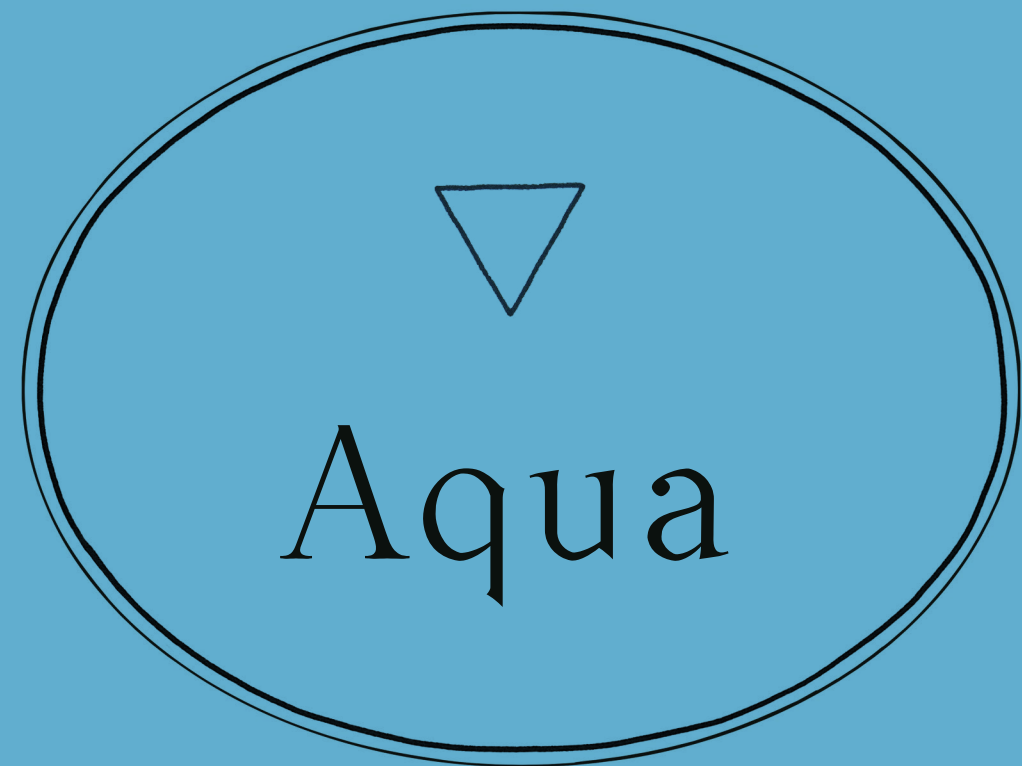
Ben Jones and Barbara Keating

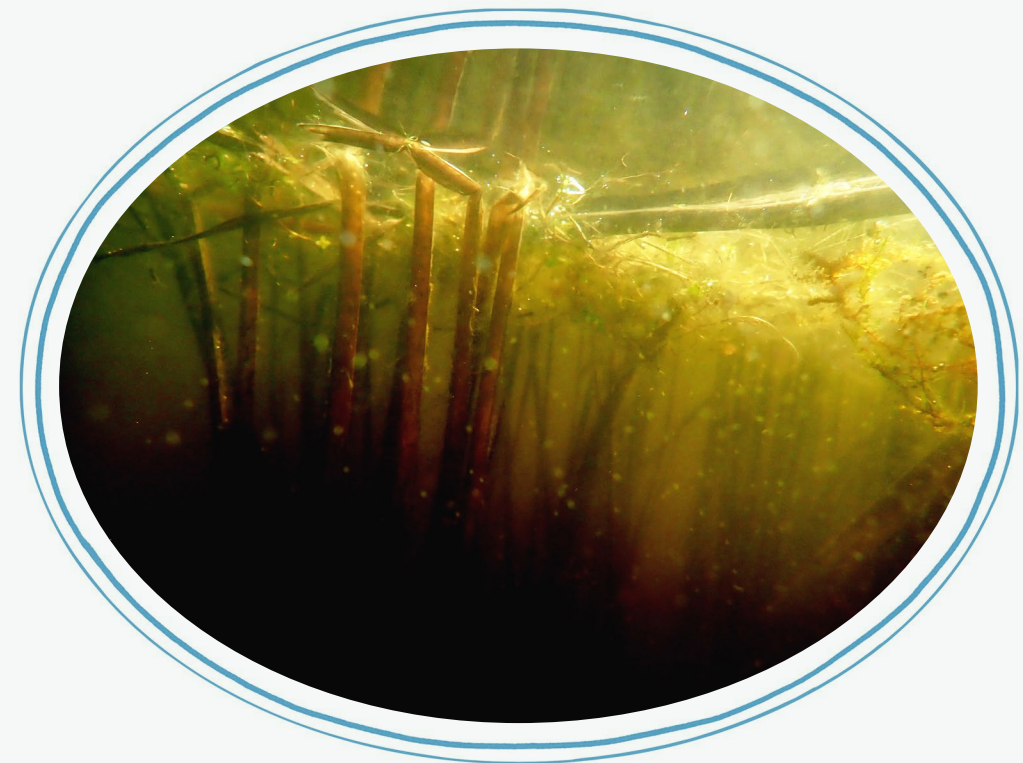
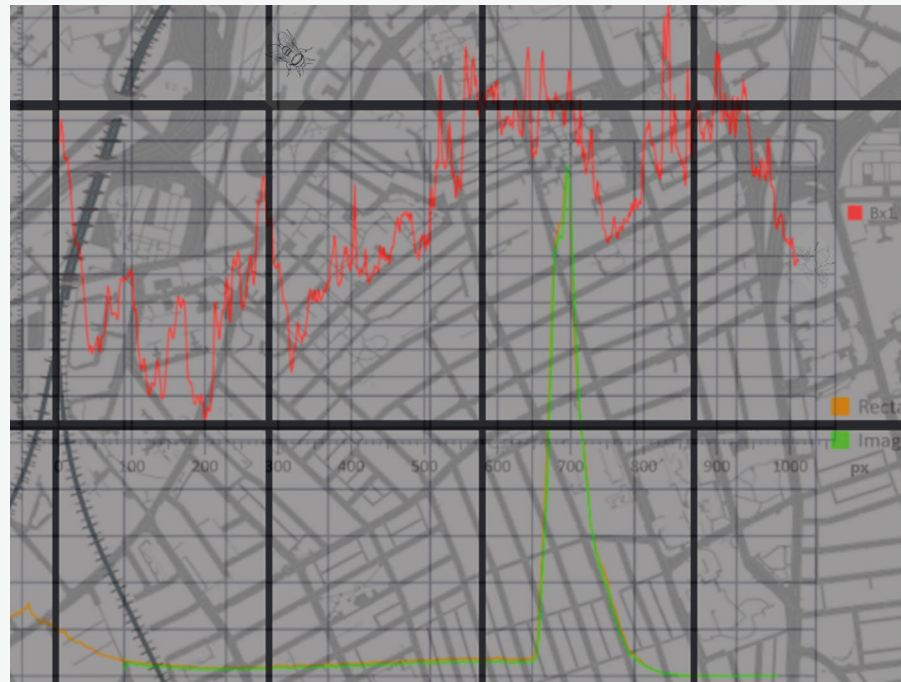
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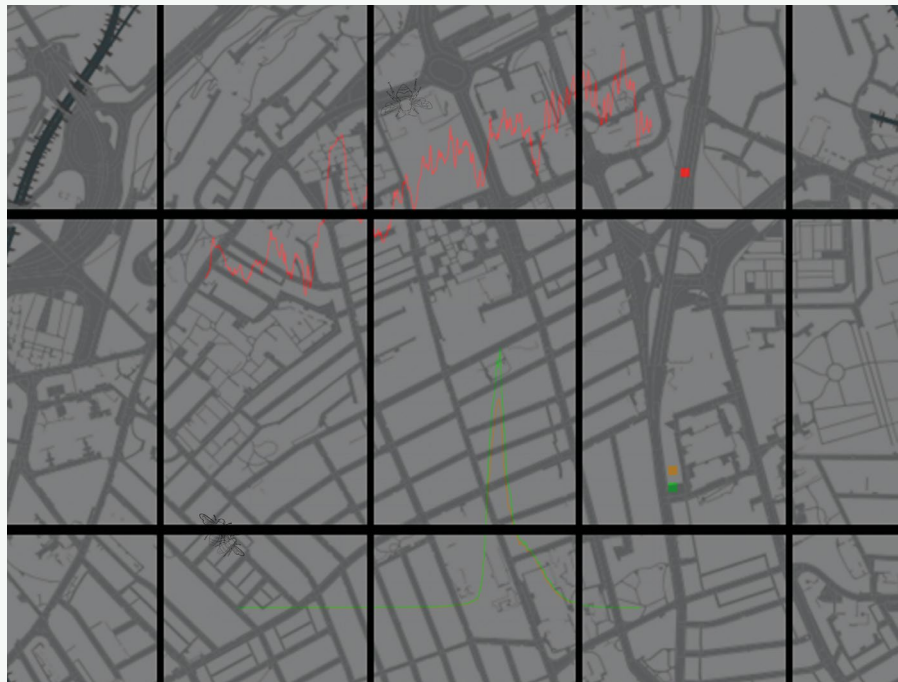
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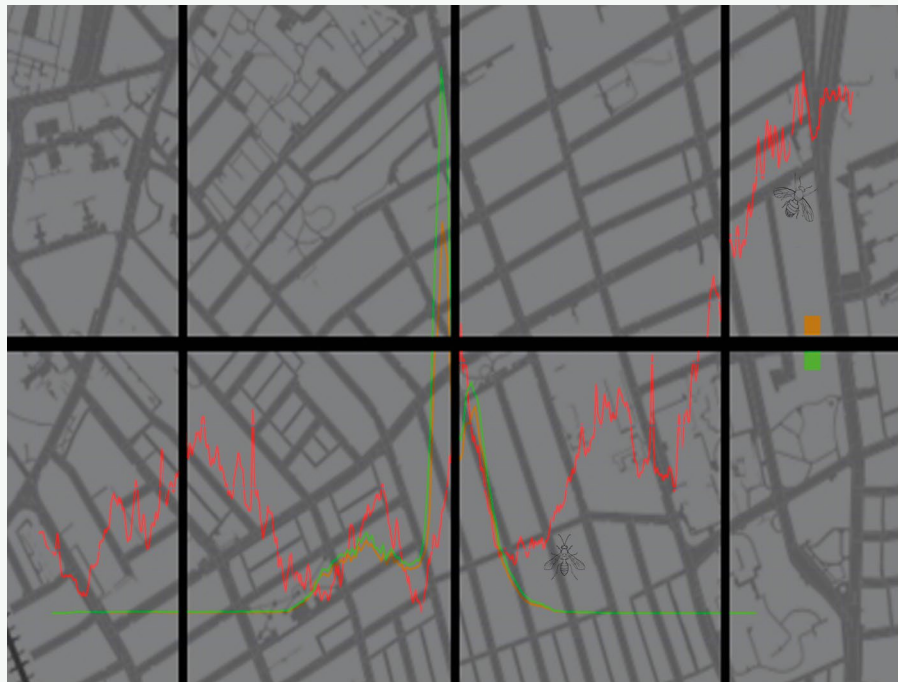
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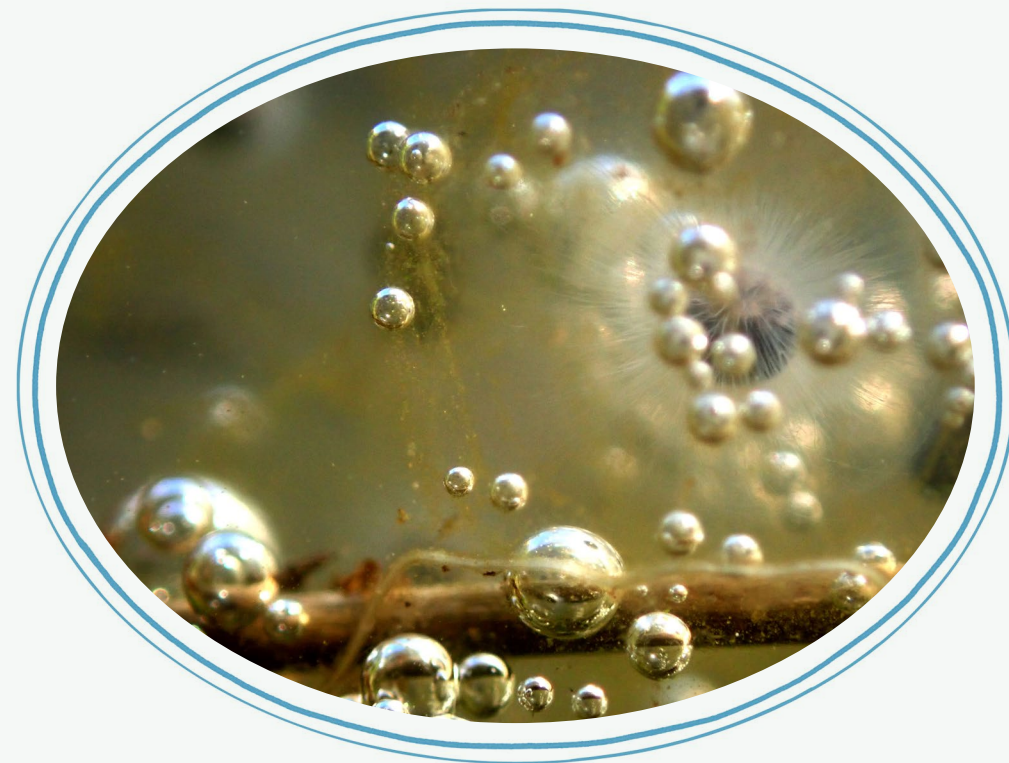
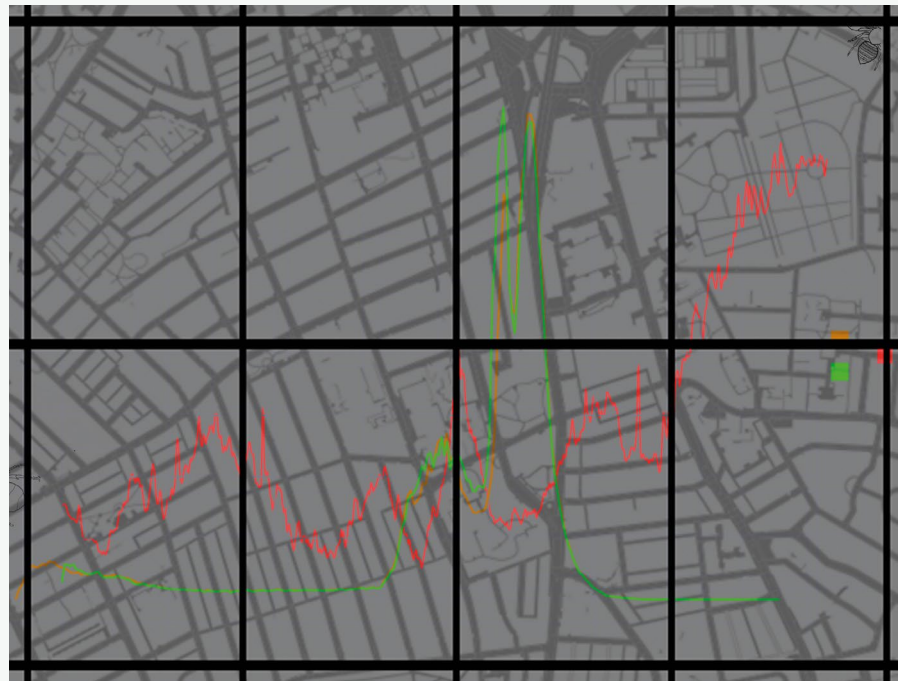
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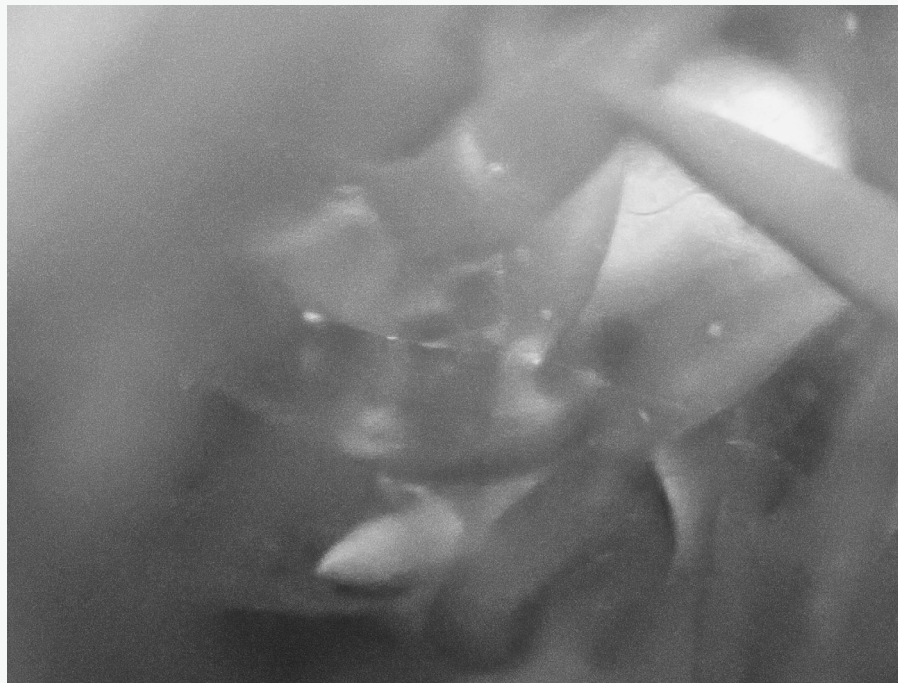


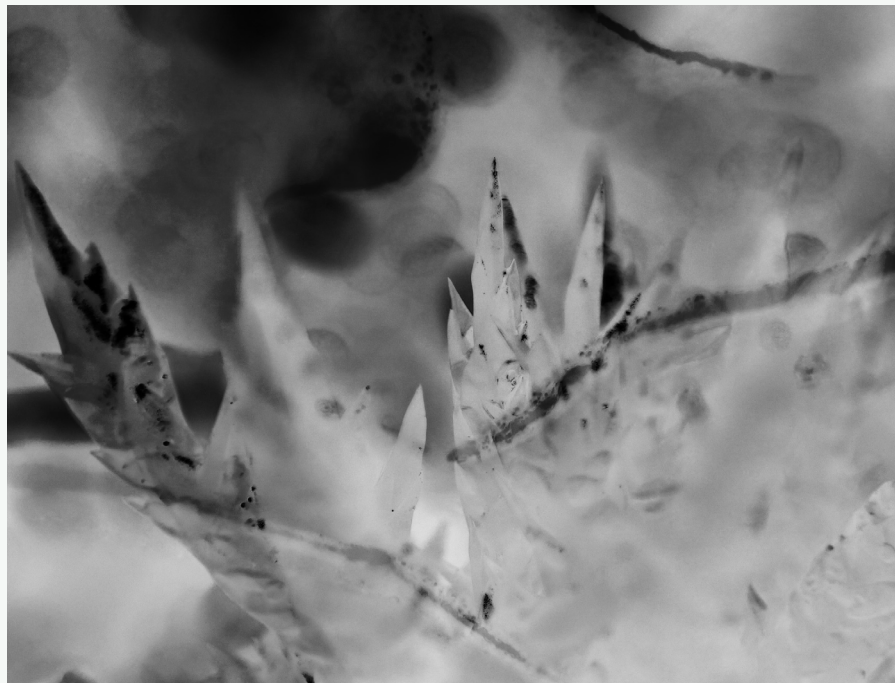


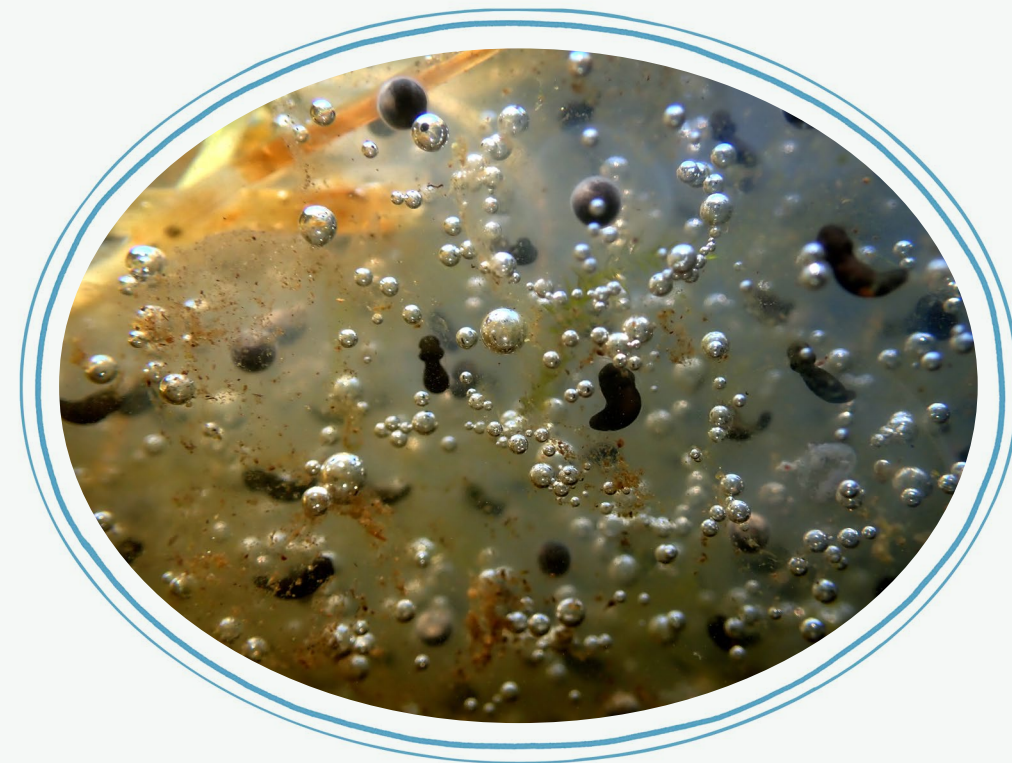
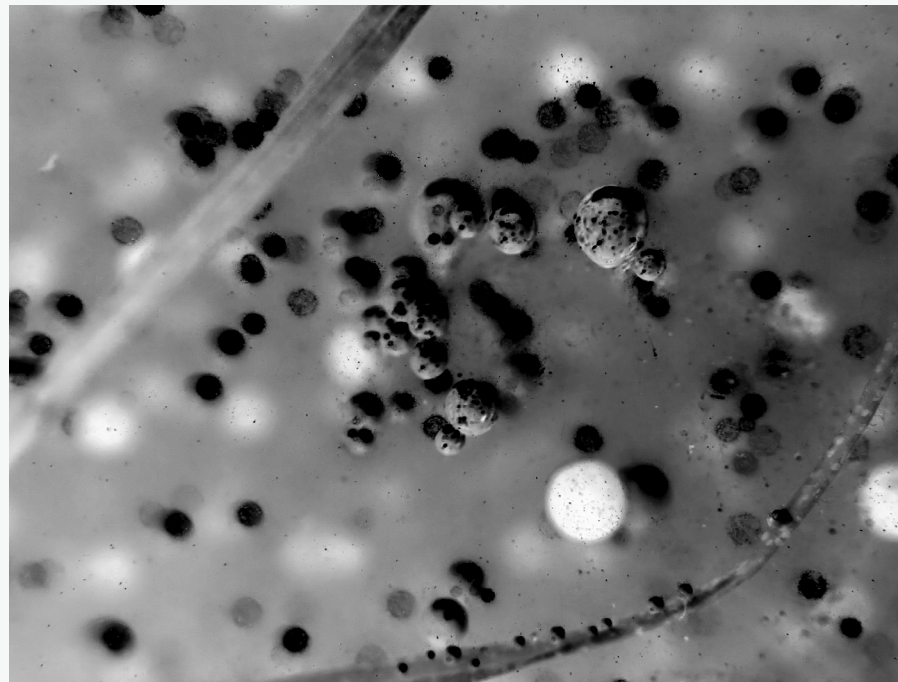




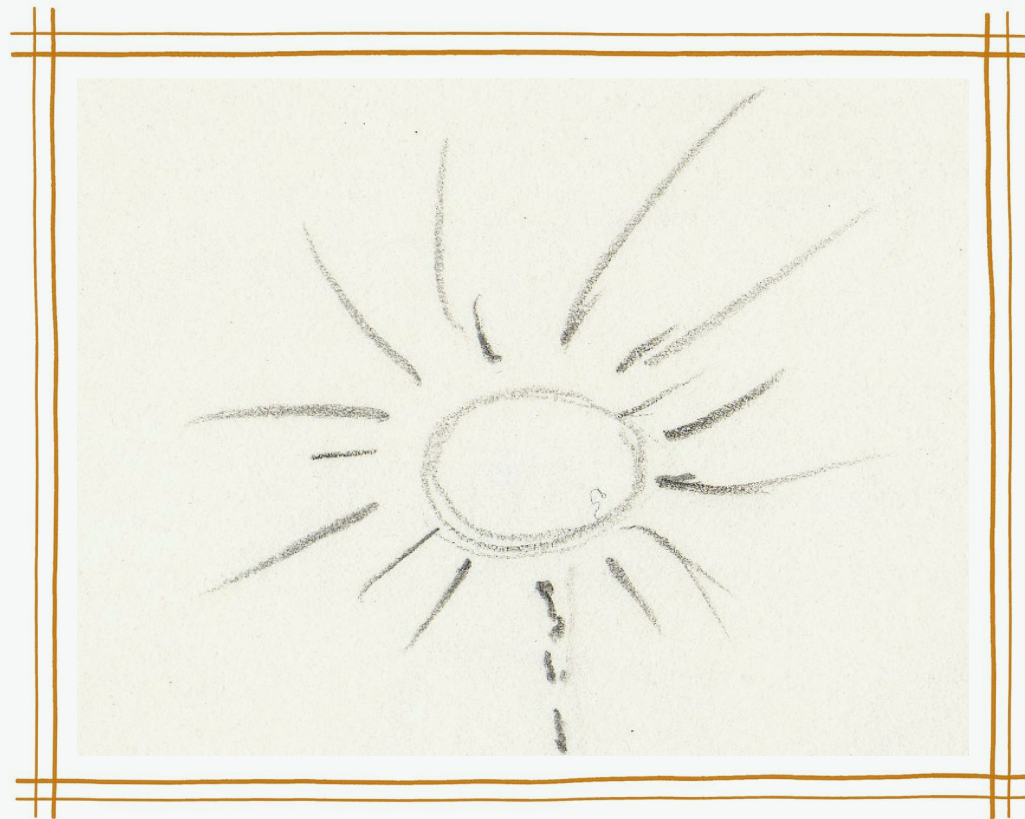


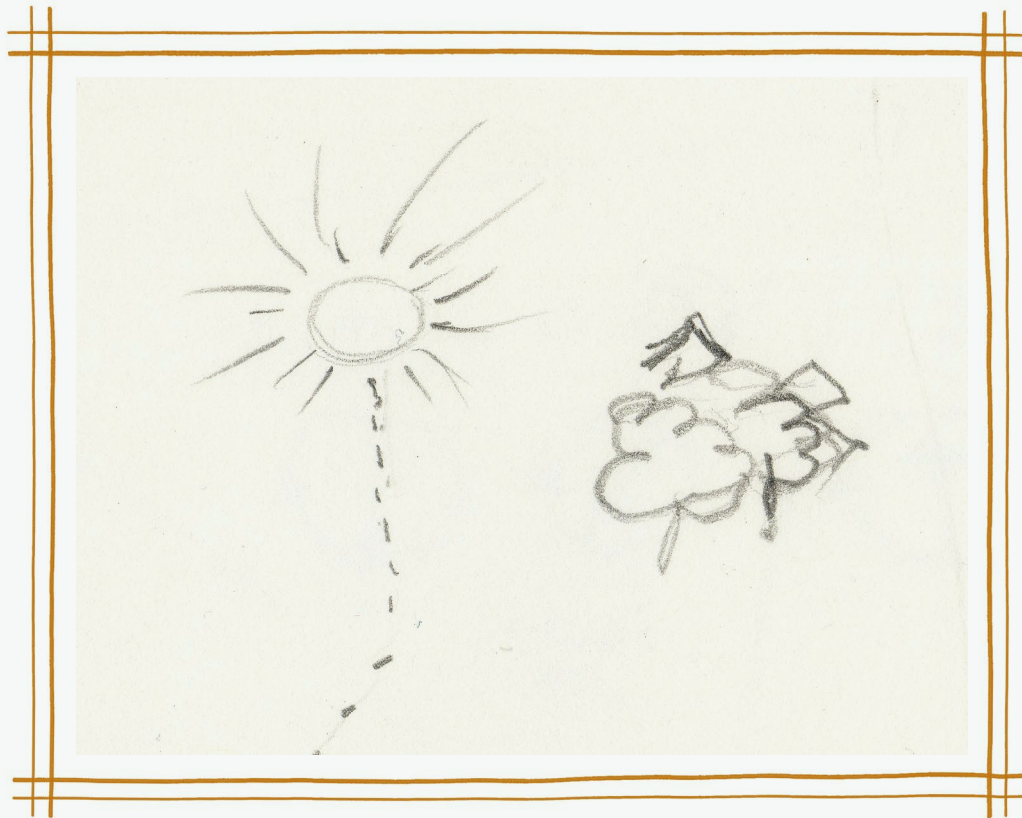


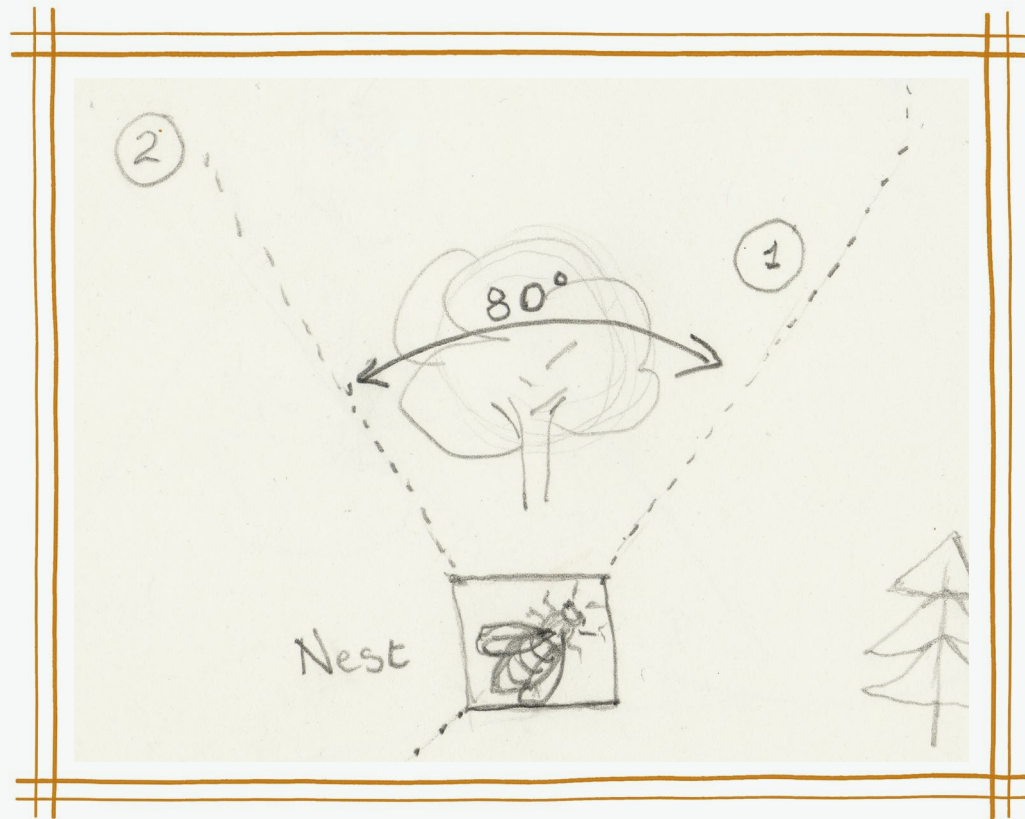


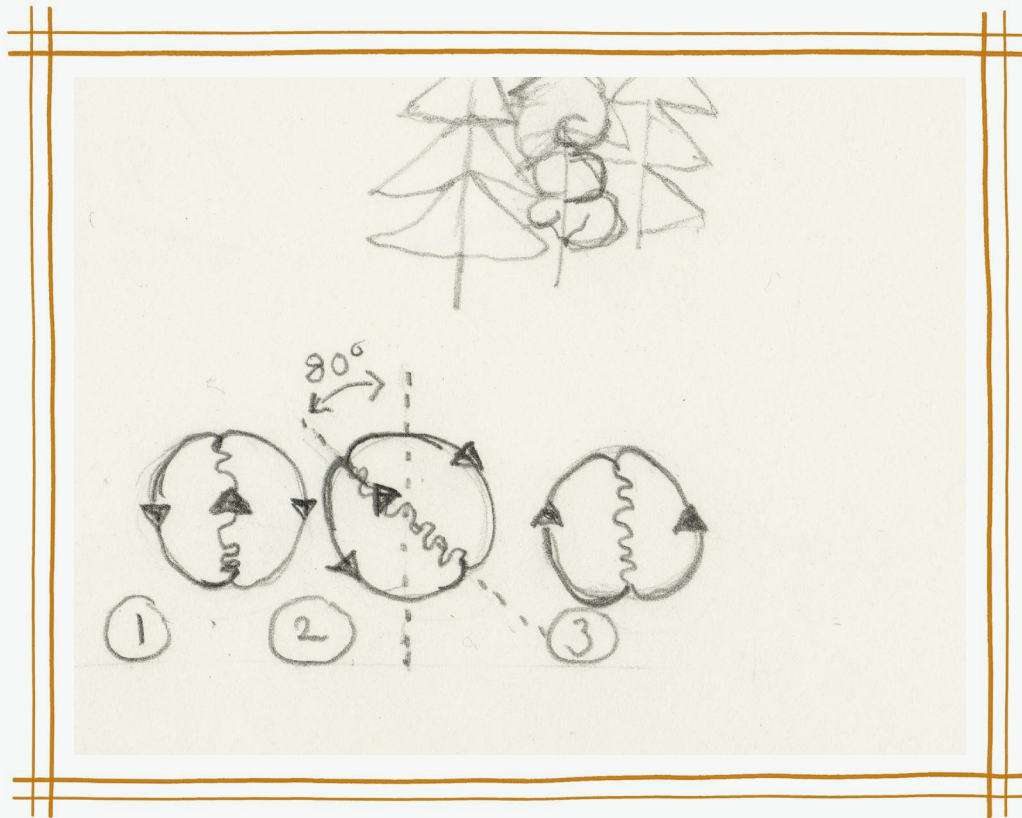




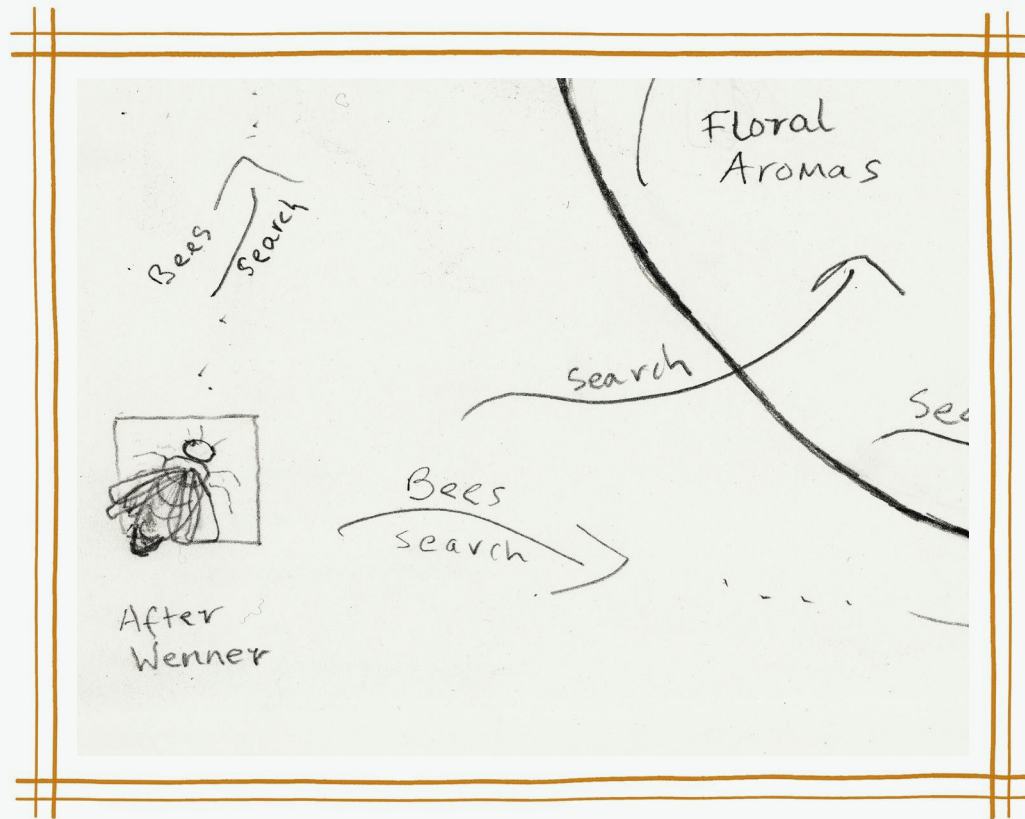


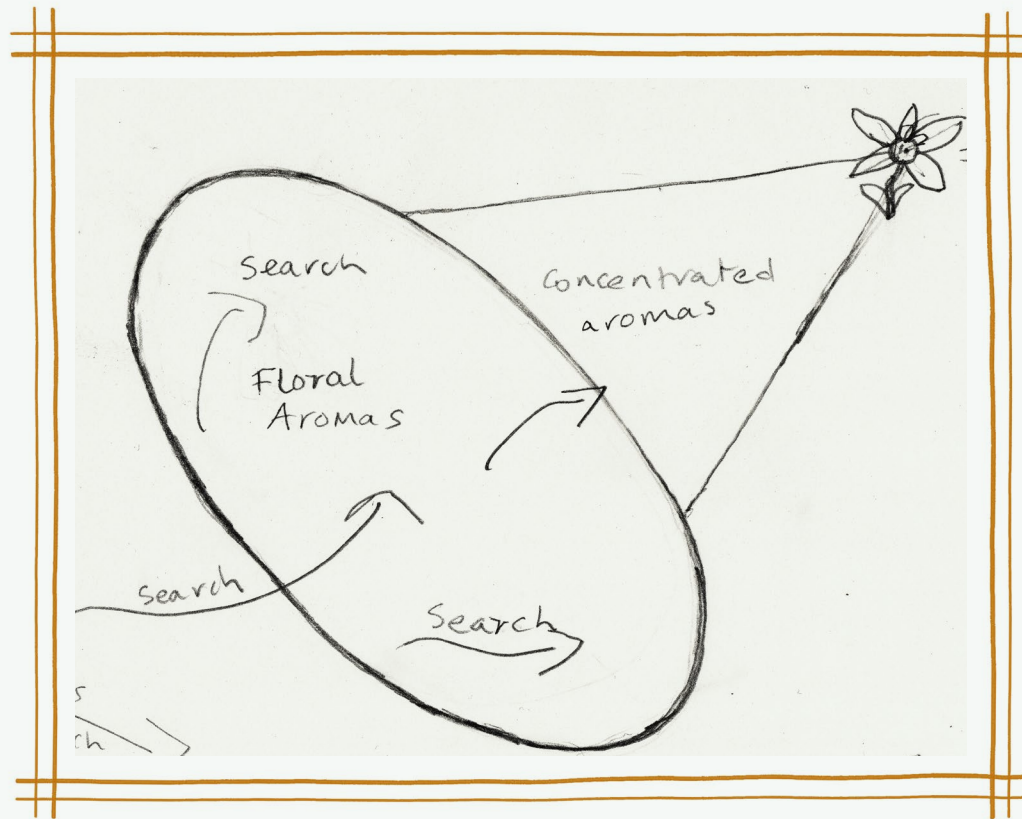


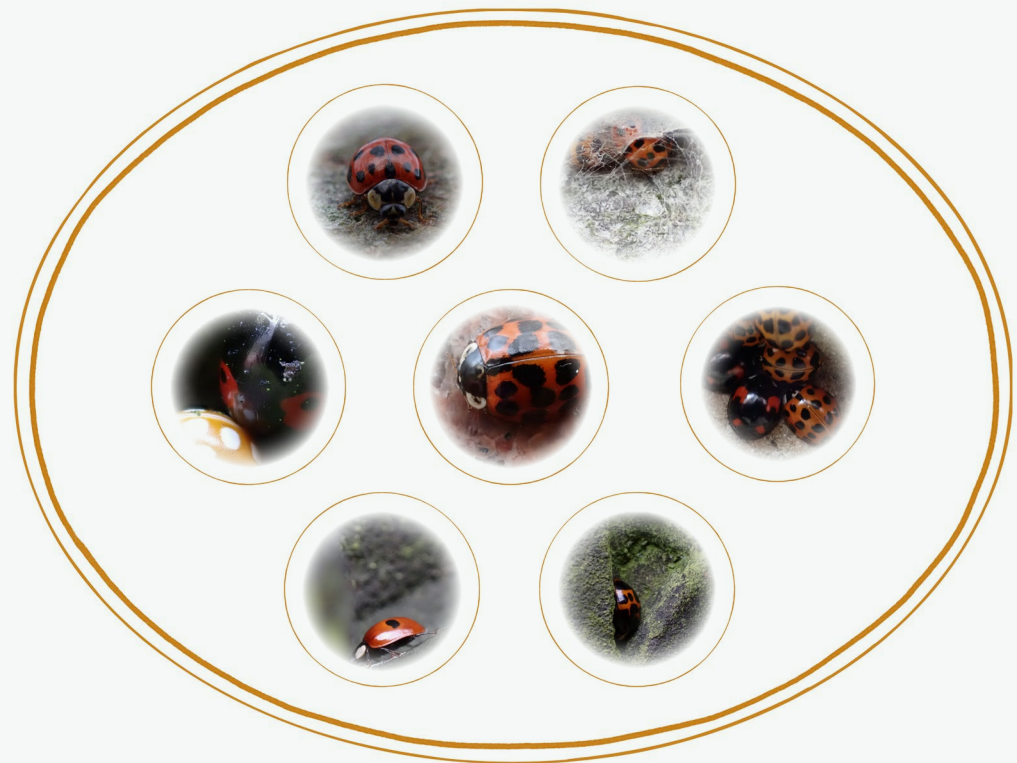












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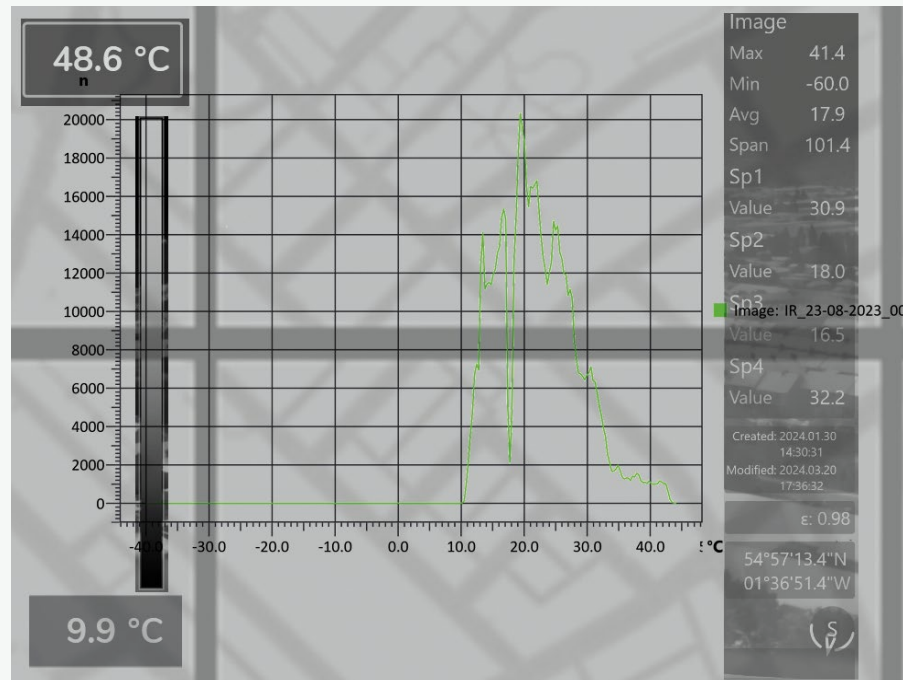
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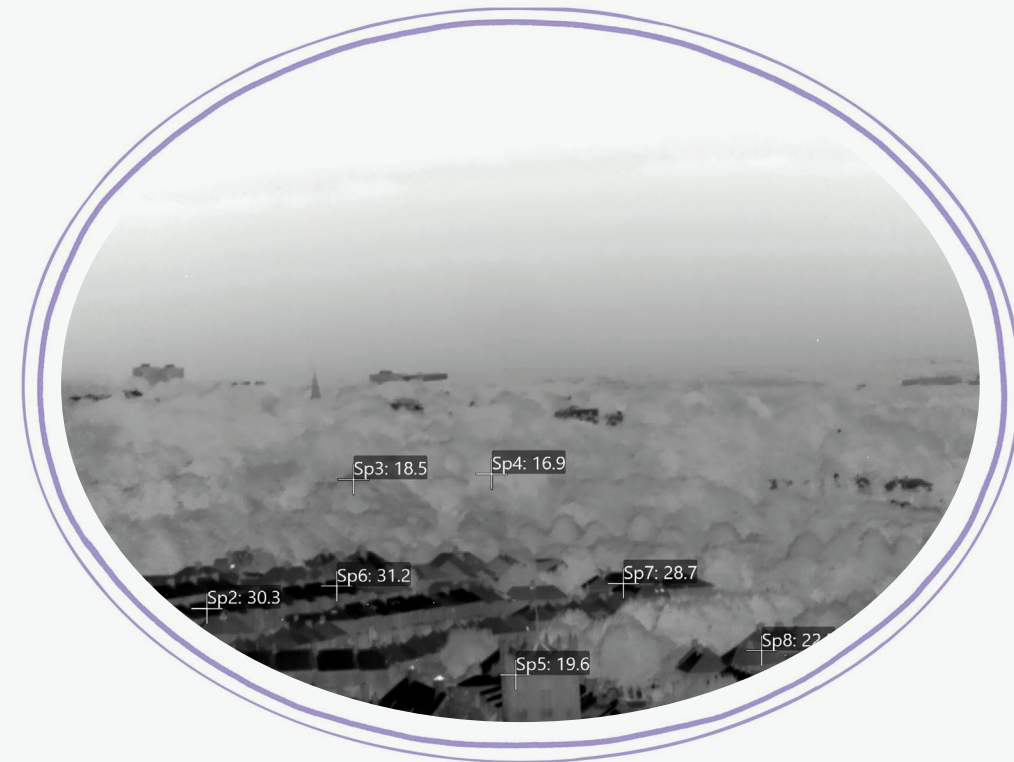
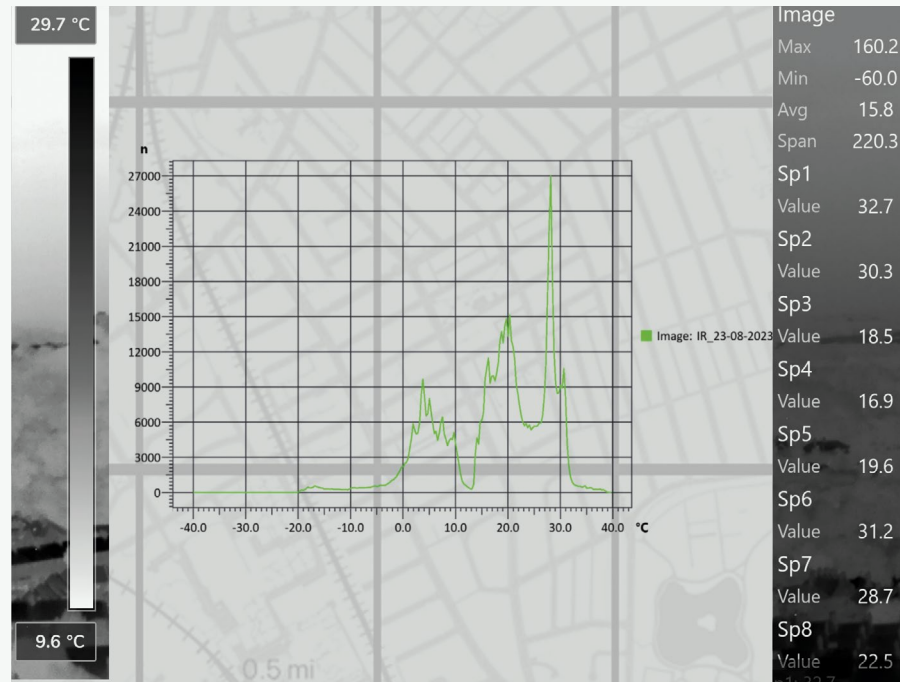
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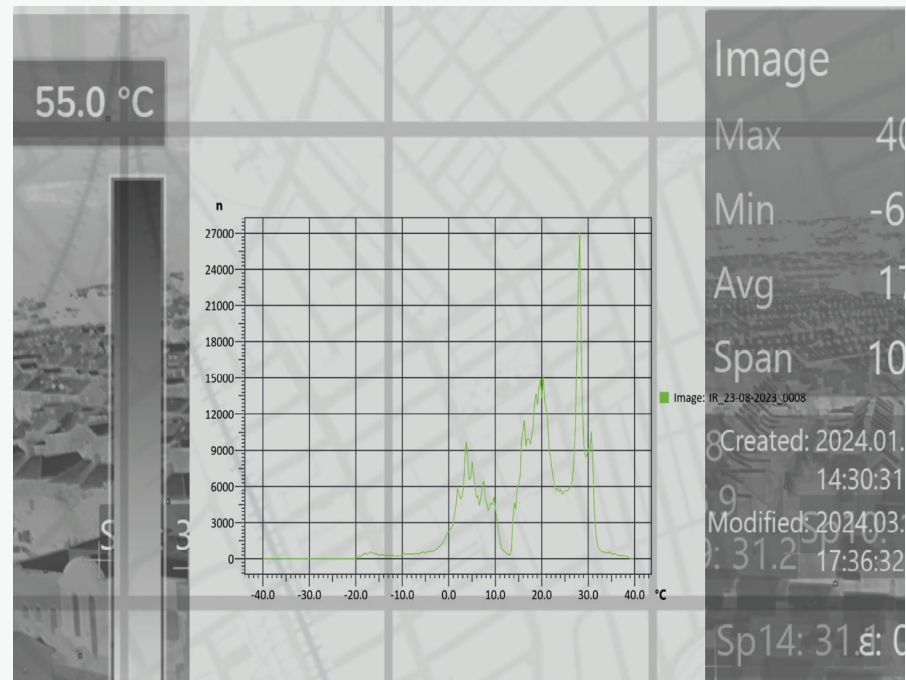
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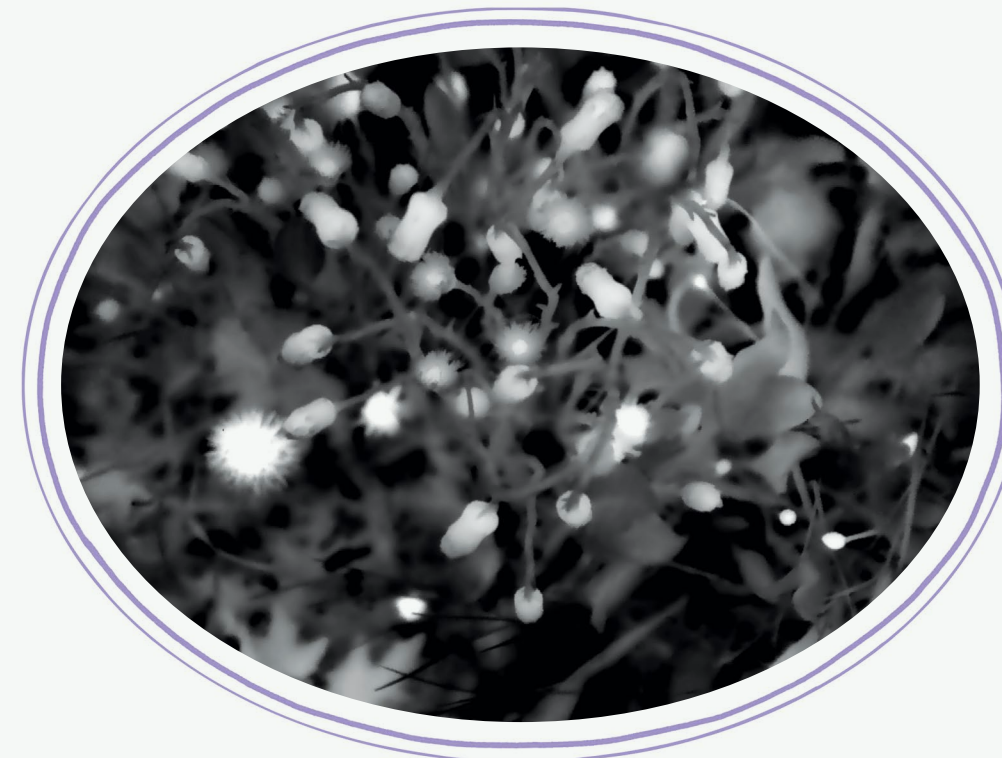
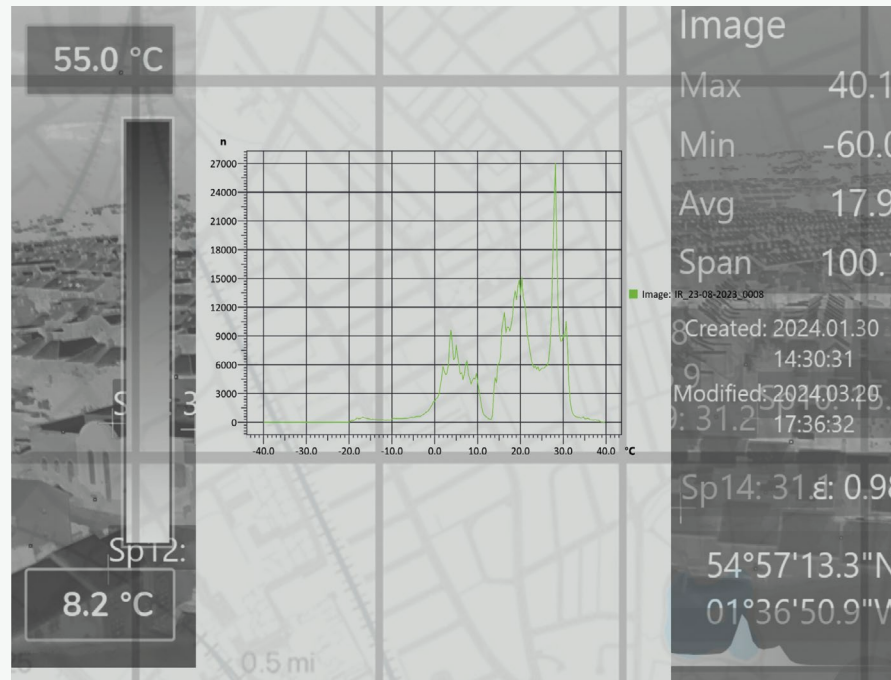


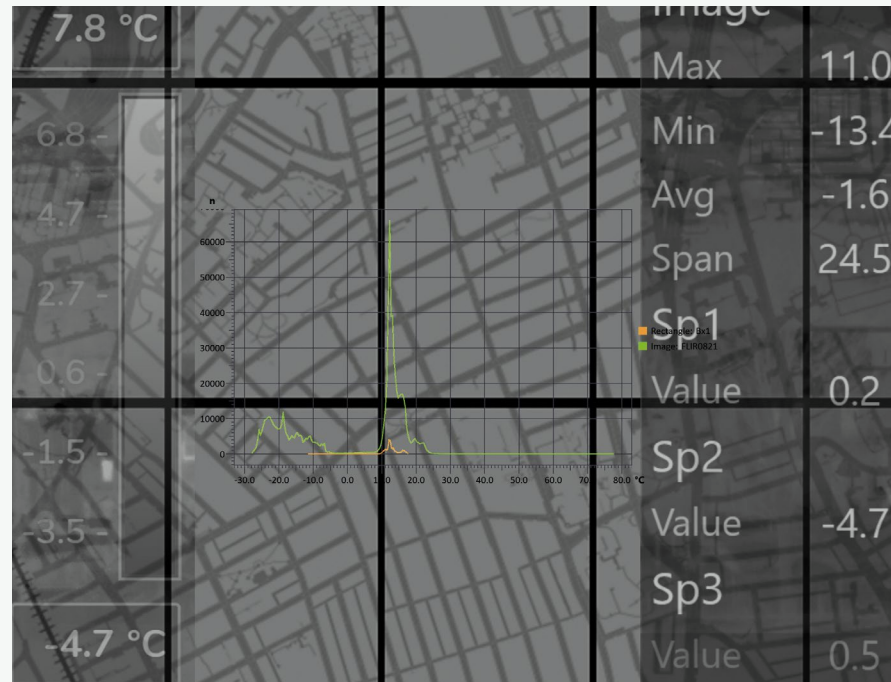
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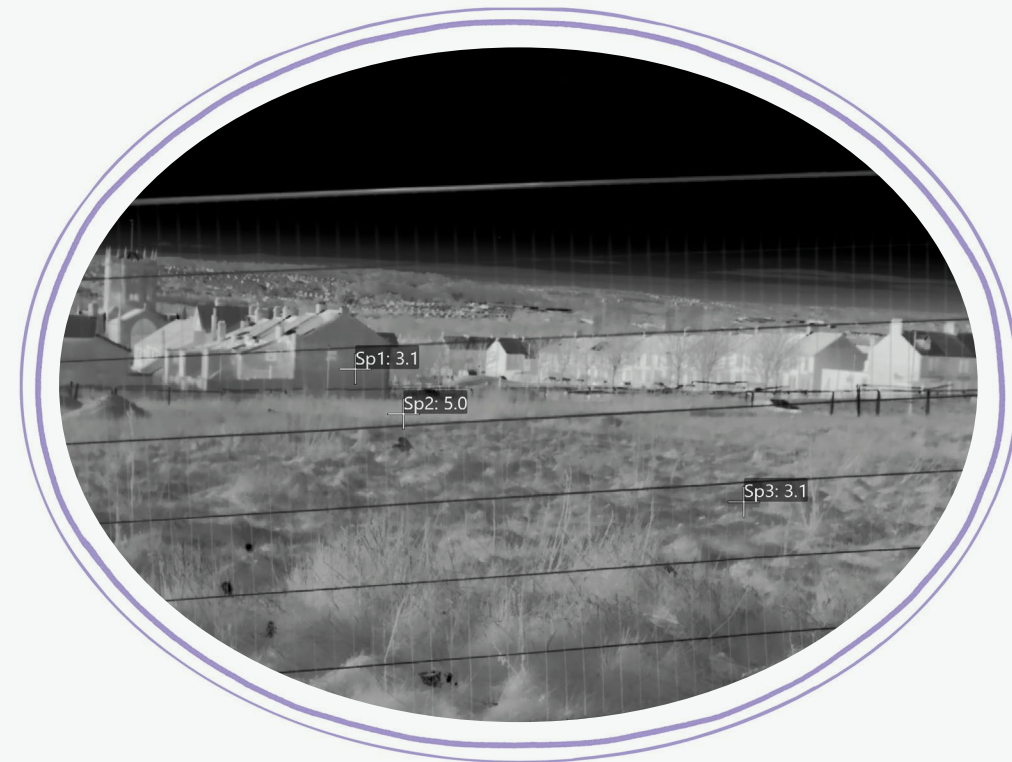
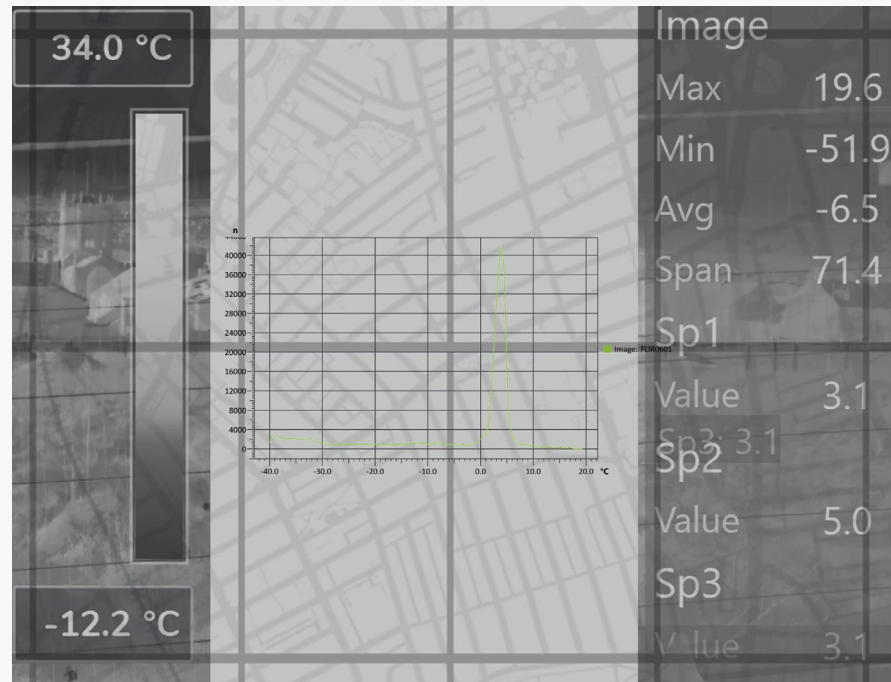


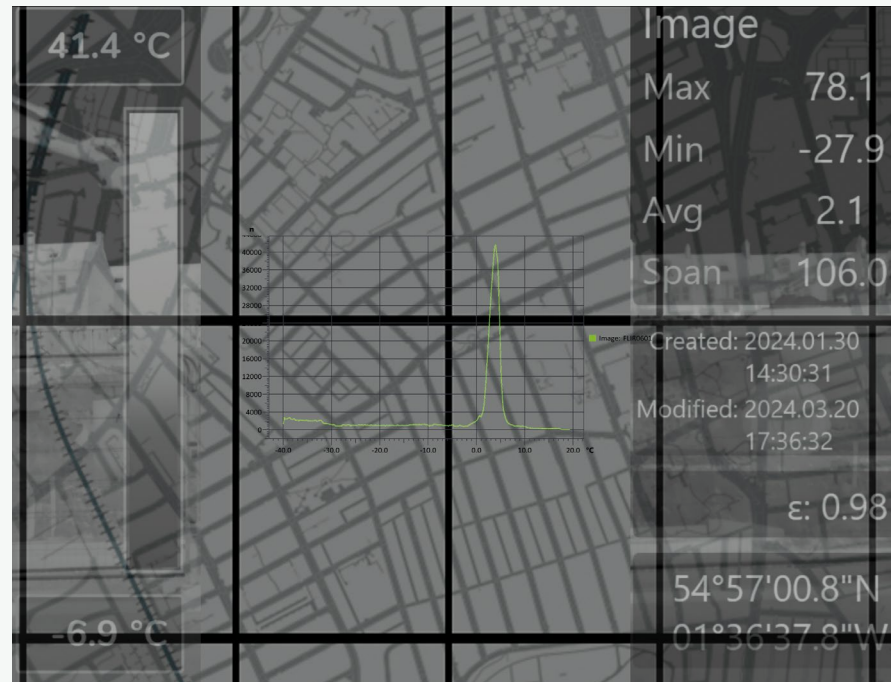
















Terra



Dùth

The natural way of things.





Dùil

The created order, and also the word for "hope".





Dùthaich

The place that you belong to.





Dualchas

What you learn about how to live in a place,
and make sense of who you are.





Dùthchas

A sense of responsibility towards land, a tangible conduct and action motivated by a sense of ethics, respect, and responsibility for said place and community, to maintain ecological balance.





Deoraíocht

Exile





Deoraithe

Those who were forced to flee.





Hiraeth

Formed from "hir", meaning long, and
"aeth" meaning sorrow or grief.



Biographies

Dingy Butterflies CIC is a social enterprise, started in 2015 by founder and director Ben Jones. They work across Gateshead, in particular Bensham & Saltwell, developing participatory and socially engaged art projects and events. Working with artists, residents, local communities, organisations, academics and experts, to develop projects that explore the past, present and future of Gateshead. www.dingybutterflies.org

Barbara Keating is a media artist and beekeeper. Her creative practice explores the life of bees through film and community engagement, so that more people establish an emotional, scientific, sensory and practical relationship with them, and a deeper connection to our own food traditions.

Barbara Keating's "Bees Banquet" began in 2011 as an immersive food event as part of the EAT! Festival in Newcastle Upon Tyne. Diners were invited into a space, surrounded by sounds, images and scents of honeybees. This has led on to the current iteration, which uses InfraRed to follow the lives of an urban honeybee colony over the course of a year, and the pilot "Bensham Bites" food network project.

Acknowledgments

Dingy Butterflies

www.dingybutterflies.org

Dr Ben Jones, Dingy Butterflies, Artistic Director
Barbara Keating, Bees of Bensham Lead Artist
Amy Mitchell, Freelance Project Coordinator

To contact Dingy Butterflies CIC you can email us at: info@dingybutterflies.org



Thank you to the participants who took part in the project especially Carlos, Doris, Elaina, Eric, Estefani, Gina, Ian, Rosy, Rudy, Valerie, Emma... and many others.

Thank you to all the organisations and individuals who supported the project through hosting us, leading on creative activities, walks, talks and their expert knowledge:

Sharon Lashley, Managing Director, Climate Action North

Phil Macari, Ecology and Community Rewilding Director, Climate Action North

Eleni Venaki, Director, The Comfrey Project

Nicola Bushell, Session Coordinator, The Comfrey Project

Charlotte Rankin, Pollinator Conservation Officer, Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Christine Wright, Community Outreach Advisor, Royal Horticultural Society

Mark Welfare, Freelance Naturalist

James Common, Senior Naturalist, Natural History Society of Northumbria

Fiona Greenwold, Engagement Officer, ERIC North East

Dan Gordon, Keeper of Biology, Great North Museum

Daisy Macari, Freelance artist

Mattie, Bees of Bensham podcaster

Hannah McParlin, Film maker

Iris Priest, Freelance Artist

Tom Robinson, Freelance Project Coordinator

Sheinaz Stansfield, Oxford Road and Rawling Road Medical Centre

Ryan Clarke, Heather Devey and Cain Scrimgeour, Wild Intrigue

Dr Mark Goddard, Assistant Professor, Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University

Dr Rinke Vinkenoog, Assistant Professor, Applied Sciences, Northumbria University

Dr Matthew Pound, Associate Professor, Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University

Federica Paradiso, PhD Researcher, Northumbria University

Beatrice Dale, PhD Researcher, Northumbria University

Brigit Strawbridge, Wildlife gardener, amateur naturalist, and advocate of bees

Suzy O'Hara, Lecturer in Digital Arts and Enterprise, University of Sunderland

Hannah Marsden and Tigist Belew, Dwellbeing Shieldfield

Sebastian Weisse, Director, PlaceChangers Ltd

Joe Haydon, Photography

Cafe under the Spire for hosting the Bees of Bensham symposium

Darrel Taylor, Sarah Wilson and Jason Cargill of Flir for use of the thermal imaging camera



Photography by Charlotte Rankin, Mark Welfare, Ryan Clarke and Barbara Keating

Designed by Sally Pilkington, Morph Creative, www.morphcreative.co.uk

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund



First Printed: August 2024

ISBN 978-1-9165003-1-0



