



40 years of wild ambition



Wild places

For nature, people and communities



JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

EST. 1983



Matt Glenn and Seana Forbes
South Ridge of the Diablon des Dames
Zinal, Switzerland

Live for the line



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Megan McCubbin

Wildlife presenter, zoologist and author

“I firmly believe that we are all born with an innate curiosity about the natural world around us”



THE best advice I can give is to step outside, take a deep breath and absorb your surrounding environment. I mean *really* look and listen. Can you hear the notes in the song of a blackbird? Detect the scuttling sound of a mouse in the undergrowth or perhaps the gentle buzz of a solitary bee? It's small moments like these that remind me that the wild is truly everywhere.

I firmly believe that we are all born with an innate curiosity about the natural world around us. Whether it be investigating the movements of woodlice in the garden or the wing patterns on a butterfly; at a young age, it all seems so mystical. Harnessing that connection as we go through life has never been more important, both for our environment and for ourselves.

For me, there is nothing more comforting than to be reminded that we are part of biodiversity – one cog in a machine much larger and more complex than we will ever realise.

It's a beautiful, fragile web of life that, when working effectively, provides food and shelter, protects against dramatic climatic events, sequesters carbon and generally makes the planet a liveable, thriving habitat for all species. I can imagine what that landscape might look like, but I can't say I know for sure.

Through anthropogenic activity, we

are forcing that delicate system out of balance. Our planet is warming, our oceans are becoming more acidic, our forests are being cut down and our rivers are overflowing with harmful chemicals. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world – and that's saying something.

Sometimes we forget our connection with and reliance upon nature, but it can be reharnessed. Over the 40 years since the John Muir Trust was formed, many metaphorical sparks have been ignited with a firm message: we can turn this around if we connect, and act, now.

Looking forward to the next 40 years and beyond, I can't wait to see how the Trust will develop and I'd love to congratulate the team for all they have achieved so far. But the work is far from over.

As it continues, I hope to see more courage to reintroduce, rewild and recover; more tolerance of the wildlife we are fortunate to share this planet with; and more understanding of how our individual actions and voices can make a positive difference.

For the benefit of ourselves, our communities and our ecosystems, remember to step outside and look for the wild around you. It may just make your day – and empower you for tomorrow, too. □

Even the most familiar of species can add wildness to our lives



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40th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE, JULY 2023

Contributing editor:

Rich Rowe journal@johnmuirtrust.org

Managing editor:

Julie Gough julie.gough@johnmuirtrust.org

Design and production:

Neil Braidwood
Connect Communications connectmedia.cc

PHOTOGRAPHY ON THIS PAGE: PHILIP HATCHER-MOORE; MARION MCKINNON

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS PRESCOTT; STEPHEN BALLARD; SEAN MACKAY; ZEEMON ERHARDT; LUKE MASSEY/2020VISION; CHRIS RUTTER; PETER CAIRNS/SCOTLANDBIGPICTURE; MARION MCKINNON; IAIN BROWNLIE ROY; JOE CORNISH/2020VISION; ALEX GILLESPIE; KATRINA MARTIN; BENJAMIN STATHAM; DAVE TARVIT; DICK BALHARRY; ZAIN SEHGAL

This journal is printed on Cocoon 100 uncoated stock, a recycled grade paper containing 100% post-consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using an Elemental Chlorine Free [ECF] process. We use a Scottish printer, J Thomson Colour, which has excellent environmental credentials, achieving environmental standard ISO4001 plus FSC and PEFC standards all in 2006.

If you would rather receive publications from the John Muir Trust electronically, please email membership@johnmuirtrust.org




The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN

Charity No. SC002061
Company No. SC081620

HEAD OFFICE

John Muir Trust
Tower House
Station Road
Pitlochry
Perthshire PH16 5AN

t. 01796 470 080
w. johnmuirtrust.org

Follow us on:   
[@JohnMuirTrust](https://www.johnmuirtrust.org)

CONTRIBUTED FEATURES

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Carol Goodey

*With a background in community learning and engagement, Carol first learned of the Trust through colleagues' involvement with the John Muir Award. She now works mostly as an Associate Tutor at the University of Glasgow's School of Education.
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Jessie Paterson

*Until recent retirement, Jessie was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. A keen hillwalker and nature lover, she has been a Trust Member for as long as she can remember.
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Derek Sime

*Derek is a long-time Trust Member and volunteer in Wild Space. Having first gained an appreciation of wild land while on geography field trips with the University of Aberdeen, mountains have long been a passion, both at home and abroad.
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Marissa Trimble

*Marissa is a Step Up to Net Zero Coordinator based in Glasgow. Her interest in environmentalism is one reason why she joined the Trust. She loves spending time outdoors and enjoys going on walks where she can spot wildlife.
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Early days

Bob Aitken, one of the Trust's first members, recalls his personal memories of its earliest beginnings

TEN years ago, reviewing the origins and emergence of the John Muir Trust for our 30th anniversary, founding Member Denis Mollison gave an invaluable historical account of what seemed at the time a complex and sometimes tortuous five-year saga.

It was one that saw a small but committed band of lively and contrasting personalities engaged in a long wrangle with large external processes and multiple agencies and actors with distinctly different agendas and priorities. Thanks to Denis I can perhaps allow myself an impressionistic personal perspective on how it felt – if only to me – rather than how it happened.

It's all a long time ago, but my key memories are of our simple collective passion and our naïve but purist idealism. We thought that it was enough just to buy land, the only ultimate safeguard of wild country. Faced with a long succession of forces reducing the quantity and quality of wild places, we had lost patience with establishment conservation bodies such as the National Trust for Scotland (NTS).

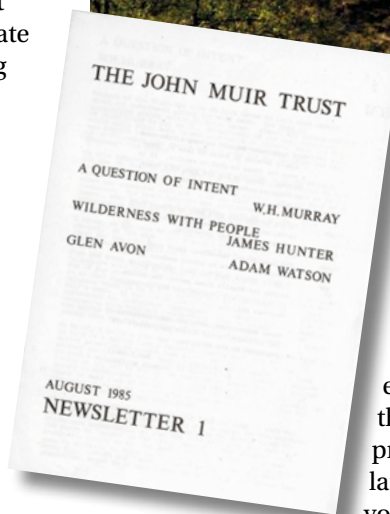
The NTS, which had seemed like the answer, dragged its feet over the application of Percy Unna's purist rules for the wild character of its mountain properties. A mountaineer and philanthropist, Unna was the key figure behind its purchase of a large part of Glencoe in 1937. At the same time, he wrote 'Unna rules' for the preservation of landscape and natural habitats, which are still a factor in the consideration of how to preserve the Scottish environment today.

First myself, then Denis Mollison and Nigel Hawkins had tried from within the Council of NTS to make our case for recognition and protection of wild land, while Chris Brasher had lobbied directly and delivered his trenchant talk on *Happiness is a Wilderness* to its members.

Around 1980, three of us in Edinburgh came together in a conspiratorial cabal that met in Nigel Hawkins' flat in the city's Canongate, before making common cause with Chris Brasher as well as Nick Luard from 'down south'. Chris brought the same thrusting dynamism that had driven him to the



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS TOWNSEND



steepchase Gold Medal in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. He epitomised the man of action who deals in the currency of Getting Things Done – all slightly alarming to a cautious Scot like me.

Chris seemed to have ready access to extensive but cryptic sources of funds that allowed the infant John Muir Trust to present itself as a credible purchaser of land. Nigel Hawkins was the moderating voice who kept us together and provided much of the administrative effort.

We knew we must acquire land, which seemed challenge enough to be going on with, but we were absurdly innocent of the obligations of management that would follow. It was a steep learning curve. For the most part we drew our enthusiasm for conservation of wild land from a passion for mountain landscape and recreation.

At the start, we had limited ecological awareness: in those early days, nature conservation managers tended to be disdainful of subjective talk around wilderness, being primarily concerned with protection of species and habitats.

Our first property at Lì and Coire Dhorrcail in Knoydart inducted us almost at once into



pinewood restoration, but any idea of 'rewilding' – a term which means different things to different people today – was an abstract notion a long way into the future.

In rather the same way, the embryonic John Muir Trust did not immediately conceive of itself as being about 'wilderness with people'. We had a simplistic focus on core wild land, mainly mountain country, with virtually no people on it. Quite quickly we were brought to acknowledge that much of the country that we had in our sights was not empty but emptied.

These fundamental issues came sharply into focus when two of our first Trustees – W.H. Murray, doyen of writers about mountaineering and mountain landscape, and James Hunter, passionate historian and champion of the crofting community – propounded quite diametrically opposed visions for the Trust. For some of us that seemed at first like a deeply worrying tension, but it eventually came to be a considerable strength.

We had at an early stage to address the delicate question of naming our intended Trust. Chris Brasher had not hesitated to use 'wilderness' in his early campaigning articles in the *Observer*, and had at his own initiative commissioned legal papers for a Wilderness Trust.

I too had used that term in my own PhD

thesis on *Wilderness Areas in Scotland*, completed at length in 1977. It now seems embarrassingly simplistic, but I like to think that by way of redemption it played a part in the gestation of our new body: in the course of my research in American sources I'd become aware of John Muir, at that time a prophet almost entirely without honour in the land of his birth.

"We were brought to acknowledge that much of the country that we had in our sights was not empty but emptied"

I think it was Nigel who latched onto the idea that adopting John Muir's name would give us a hero figurehead: the Scot who had become the high priest of wilderness values and their protection in the New World. That meant that we could avoid giving any hostages to exact terminology in our more complex context in the Old World, and perhaps reduce a tendency to kneejerk resistance to the Trust from concerned folk in the

Highlands, or from those with a pejoratively Biblical cultural perception of 'wilderness'.

One of our founders' bolder initiatives in assembling the first eclectic group of Trustees was to enlist Dr Jean Balfour. Jean, who died only recently, was a formidable lady, a pillar of the landed and land managing establishment, a forester, a noted amateur botanist and a long-serving Chair of the Countryside Commission for Scotland.

Although not an entirely comfortable Trustee of this rather radical new body, on one memorable occasion, departing a Board meeting, she quoted at us the well-known challenge from the Marquis of Montrose:

*"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all."*

The John Muir Trust certainly felt like a bold venture 40 years ago. We owe much to the founders that they accepted the challenge and set the Trust firmly on the road to its current solid status and reputation. □

About the author

As the Trust's first membership secretary, Bob Aitken registered himself as Member no.13 in 1984. Since then he has provided specialist advice on footpath management on Trust properties and served as a Trustee from 2008 to 2010.



Land in our care

We believe that wild places are for everyone and that society is enriched when nature has the freedom to repair itself, communities have the freedom to thrive and people have the freedom to benefit from wild places. Here is a glimpse of how we are working to achieve those three freedoms on land in our care

3: Quinag, Assynt

Acquired: 2005

Quinag's dramatic peaks cover 3,699ha of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area. Quinag provides one of the settings for our Junior Rangers programme which encourages young people to learn about their local area, develop skills and gain experience of practical conservation work.



4: Torrin, Strathaird and Sconser, Isle of Skye

Acquired: 1991, 1994, 1997

Encompassing 12,000ha from coastline to the high summit of Blà Bheinn in the Cuillin hills, these three adjoining estates are mostly under crofting tenure. Here, in this particularly dramatic part of the Isle of Skye, we protect a rich diversity of habitat, including areas of peatland that form an important carbon sink and provide a home for many rare plants and animals.



5: Lì & Coire Dhorrcail, Knoydart

Acquired: 1987

Rising from the shores of Loch Hourn, the 1,255ha Lì and Coire Dhorrcail Estate includes the north-eastern slopes of Ladhar Bheinn. Working with the Knoydart Foundation, our ambition for this remote area is to create the ideal environment for natural regeneration of woodland habitats.



9: Glenridding Common, Lake District

Leased: 2017

A hugely popular destination for walkers, this 1,100ha area of common land includes the summit of Helvellyn and the connecting ridges of Striding Edge and Swirral Edge. Together with local volunteer growers, we are re-establishing populations of rare Arctic-alpine plants and mountain woodland species on the higher crags of Helvellyn with the goal of creating a self-sustaining population.



2: Kylesku, Assynt

Acquired: 2023

The Trust's most recent acquisition, this 18ha site sits on the shoreline of Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin, next to our neighbouring site at Quinag. Here, we plan to work together with local people to establish an exemplary model of good practice in land management, ecological restoration and economic development.

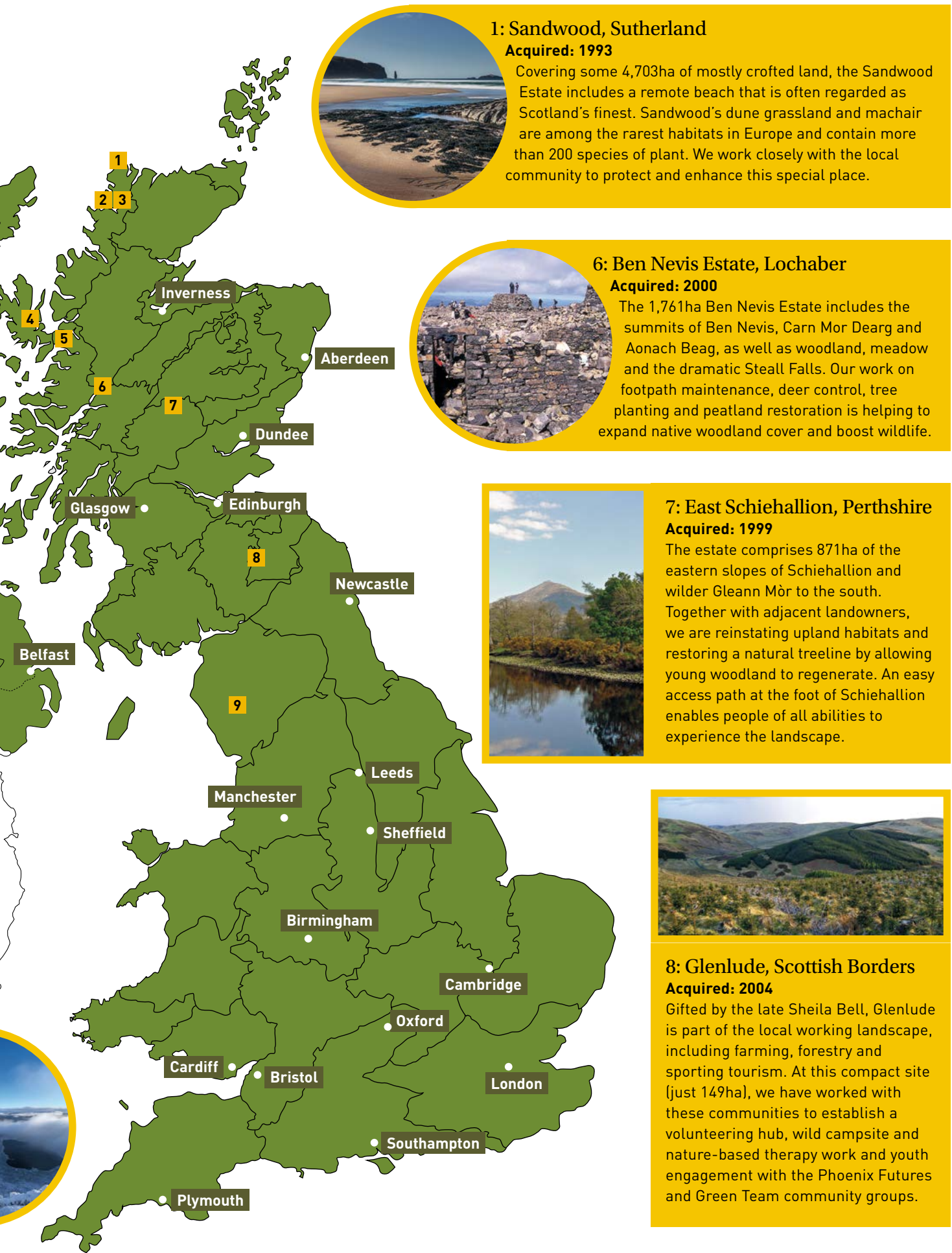
Wild land zones

To illustrate our vision for the future, we have divided the UK into 45 wild place zones, as shown on this map. The zones are based on biogeographic regions created by Living England and NatureScot.

In each zone, we plan to manage, or support partners to manage, at least one site to exemplary standards ensuring more people across the UK have access to wild places.

Following a recent survey, we are compiling the first register of the UK's most important wild places – a resource that will enable ecological scientists to monitor and protect them for the future.

Such a register of wild places that give nature, people and communities the freedom to thrive together will also enable us to develop collaborative approaches to caring for them better.



1: Sandwood, Sutherland

Acquired: 1993

Covering some 4,703ha of mostly crofted land, the Sandwood Estate includes a remote beach that is often regarded as Scotland's finest. Sandwood's dune grassland and machair are among the rarest habitats in Europe and contain more than 200 species of plant. We work closely with the local community to protect and enhance this special place.



6: Ben Nevis Estate, Lochaber

Acquired: 2000

The 1,761ha Ben Nevis Estate includes the summits of Ben Nevis, Carn Mor Dearg and Aonach Beag, as well as woodland, meadow and the dramatic Steall Falls. Our work on footpath maintenance, deer control, tree planting and peatland restoration is helping to expand native woodland cover and boost wildlife.



7: East Schiehallion, Perthshire

Acquired: 1999

The estate comprises 871ha of the eastern slopes of Schiehallion and wilder Gleann Mòr to the south. Together with adjacent landowners, we are reinstating upland habitats and restoring a natural treeline by allowing young woodland to regenerate. An easy access path at the foot of Schiehallion enables people of all abilities to experience the landscape.



8: Glenlude, Scottish Borders

Acquired: 2004

Gifted by the late Sheila Bell, Glenlude is part of the local working landscape, including farming, forestry and sporting tourism. At this compact site (just 149ha), we have worked with these communities to establish a volunteering hub, wild campsite and nature-based therapy work and youth engagement with the Phoenix Futures and Green Team community groups.

Working together

Michael Hunter from the North Harris Trust reflects on a 20-year relationship that has helped support wide-ranging work on one of Scotland's largest community owned estates



THE North Harris Trust has worked in partnership with the John Muir Trust since we came into being in late 2002. Our two organisations have much in common, including a deep appreciation for the natural environment and shared objectives to ensure that places such as North Harris can support and sustain local communities long into the future.

When our community took ownership of the land in 2003, the John Muir Trust made a key financial contribution, committing £100,000 to the original buyout. Although this support came with no strings attached, we have maintained a close working partnership that has benefited many aspects of our work.

Most practically, we have gained from the hundreds of John Muir Trust Members who have volunteered on dozens of work parties across Harris. Bringing experience and enthusiasm, these volunteers were often led by able John Muir Trust staff who would also help us to develop our own skills in maintaining paths and other key access infrastructure.

Especially in our early years, this support enabled the community to take active responsibility for what was previously seen as the domain of the private landowner.

As well as delivering practical land management, we have also found volunteering to be an important way to engage people in a better understanding of our community land. This is true for visitors, but also important for members of the community itself – and especially our young people. This volunteering aspect of our work continues today and is most visible through a ranger service which has been in place for more than a decade.

The John Muir Trust has also proven to be a valuable source of advice in terms of land management and wider organisational planning where appropriate. For relatively small organisations such as the North Harris Trust, such a deep pool of knowledge has been a fantastic resource to draw upon.

GAINING STRENGTH

With such support, we have gone from strength to strength over the past 20 years. This includes taking even more of North Harris into community ownership, with the North Harris Trust now responsible

“Around 30,000 native trees have been planted here in the past year, with a further 150,000 to come”

for an area covering almost 26,000ha of croft land, common grazings, sparkling beaches and open

hill ground. This includes An Cliseam – at 799m, the highest peak in the Western Isles.

Large areas are nationally recognised for their biodiversity value, with just under half of the estate designated for its natural heritage. Most notable is the mix of open heath habitats which support one of the highest densities of golden eagle in Europe.

Maintaining these habitats has been a key part of our work, primarily through responsible deer management and monitoring. In the early years of community ownership,



PHOTOGRAPHY: NORTH HARRIS TRUST



Open year round, the estate's Eagle Observatory is a major tourist attraction (main); Michael planting alder in Gleann Lacasdail (inset)

Overall, around 30,000 native trees have been planted here in the past year, with a further 150,000 to come over the next three seasons. All is being done in a way that is sympathetic to the landscape and prevailing conditions, with careful planting in pockets of appropriate ground that will contribute to the mosaic pattern of habitats.

COMMUNITY CARE

Our work is not all about natural heritage – the focus is very much on people, too. The North Harris Trust has made good progress in providing affordable housing to improve the retention of young people and families within the community. So far, we have built four affordable housing units of our own and facilitated further developments by the local housing association.

In support of our 172 croft tenants, visitor management has been another key focus. Our geographic location offers some cushion from unsustainable visitor numbers, although pressure can still be significant in certain areas – not least at Huisinis, a particularly striking area of machair land under crofting tenure in the far west of Harris.

Here, working with local crofters, we constructed the Huisinis Gateway building which now provides a range of visitor services, from toilets, showers and parking to interpretation on the local landscape and history.

Such a mutually beneficial solution, one that enables local people to live and work in the township, provides additional employment, improves the visitor experience and conserves the area's biodiversity, epitomises what the North Harris Trust is all about. □

we facilitated the establishment of a local stalking group, which enables community members to become involved in deer management in a safe and regulated manner. A real success story, the group currently has 30 members, including a few young Hearsaich who are being mentored while they develop the necessary skills and experience.

Habitat restoration has also been a notable objective. Although there is a healthy mosaic of heathland habitats, there is a significant lack of native woodland in North Harris. To rectify this, a few areas of native woodland have been established on the estate, with a particular focus on riparian sections alongside streams and rivers at the base of glens. However, this approach involves relatively expensive deer fencing and is limited to quite small-scale planting.

To date, less than 1 per cent of the

estate is under native tree cover – a figure we aim to double over the next decade or so. To help us achieve this goal, NatureScot has funded a restoration project now underway on the southeast of the estate. Covering around 1,000ha, the site has been chosen due to a relatively low deer density, which has been created through increased stalking pressure alongside natural barriers in the terrain plus an electric fence that isolates the area from the main deer population in Harris.

About the author

Michael Hunter has worked for the North Harris Trust since 2019, firstly as a ranger before moving into the manager role. Although the natural environment is what drew him to Harris, it is the community which has led him to stay. Michael lives and crofts in Scalpay. For more information, visit north-harris.org



Community trust

For Carol Goodey, the Trust's work with communities has set it apart from the very beginning

IN POLICY and legislation in the UK, there is considerable focus on involving people and communities in the decisions that affect them. But responses to this requirement can be tokenistic. Organisations undertake consultations, tick boxes and, often, frustrate communities. People soon realise that, despite the rhetoric surrounding the ongoing engagement, their involvement and influence is limited. After they've answered the questions asked of them, they have no further role to play.

As a community learning worker for many years, this has also frustrated me. That is why it has been such a pleasure to read through the pages of John Muir Trust publications over its first 40 years and to learn more of its work with people and communities.

In this, as well as in conservation and land management, the Trust can serve as an example not only to other conservation groups but to organisations more widely in the public and third sectors.

The focus on people and the wellbeing of communities has been a key aspect of the Trust's work from its very early days and, in 2008, Denis Mollison, one of the Trust's four founders, reminded us of the three main ideas that began it all: the value of wild places for their own sake; the value of wild places to people; and what he described as "the entanglement of humans with 'wilderness' throughout our history".

It was clear to the founders from the beginning that the Trust would need to work with other people. An early lesson came during the first campaign to purchase land at Knoydart where a breakthrough was only possible when common cause was found with local people and innovative proposals put forward to bring together the interests of conservation and community.

Writing in the Trust's second ever newsletter, in 1987, Denis Mollison explained how working with local people was considered an opportunity to "be seen more widely for, rather than against, local interests" – an approach which "would bring conservationists wider benefits in the Highlands as a whole, as well as being of obvious benefit for the folk of Knoydart".

There are many examples in the Trust's publications of how this commitment to building relationships with communities has proved worthwhile. Roddy Maclean, a mature student at the Gaelic-medium college in Skye, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, talked to local people about the

activities of the Trust while conducting research on the Torrin Estate. In a 1992 newsletter, he reported that: "In the course of interviewing a large number of people in Torrin, the most negative outlook I encountered was suspicion over the fact that things were going so smoothly!"

And where other conservation groups were being seen as interfering in local issues, the "Trust's policy of sitting tight and doing very little to begin with is paying dividends in building up confidence and goodwill in the population that lives on the estate".

ENHANCED CREDIBILITY

Such dividends were realised in the purchase of Strathaird. In the first newsletter of 1995, Director Nigel Hawkins recognised that not only did the Trust's reputation as an important player in conservation help secure funding, but that its commitment to working closely with local people also enhanced its credibility as a landowner. This acceptance locally was important to Strathaird's former owner who took the property off the market to negotiate with the Trust.

Nevertheless, working with people and communities can take considerable time and energy. In his Chair's message in 1995, Nick Luard wondered if it took up too much of the Trust's resources. "We set out in the wilderness business," he said. "We are now significantly in the people business." He also asked Members where the Trust's focus should lie: "Wilderness alone or wilderness with people?"

The responses expressed clear support for the latter, emphasising the long history of people living and working in the remote areas of the Scottish Highlands and asserting that people and land could not be separated. "Everything is linked," as one Member wrote.

It was felt that all who live in and near wild places should be involved in the decision making that affects them. As another Member stressed: "We have no choice but to take local people with us. If we don't, and try to impose solutions, we are dead."

The Trust's approach and experience of environmental

"All who live in and near wild places should be involved in the decision making that affects them"



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



Exploring Strathaird, Isle of Skye (main);
members of of Glasgow's Boots & Beards
community group enjoying the hills (inset)

management and working with communities led to an invitation to join the North Harris Trust in their bid to buy the North Harris estate. This signalled an important step as more communities were becoming interested in taking on the management of the land where they live and work.

In this case, the North Harris Trust would benefit from its new partner's 20 years of experience working with people and wild land while, in turn, the John Muir Trust could support the management of a wild place without having to raise the funds for its purchase.

"We believe that conservation and community go hand in hand," reiterated Nigel Hawkins in 2003, adding that "North Harris gives us another outstanding opportunity to prove that the Trust is relevant to local people and to the wider national interest".

CONTINUED SUPPORT

Over the past 40 years, the Trust has continued to work with communities in many different ways. It has supported community efforts such as the Chrysalis Project to create a wildlife garden in Dundee and the Yearne Stane project in Clydeside. It has also supported other community buy-outs, including that of the Langholm Initiative where, as Mike Daniels, the Trust's Policy Director wrote in 2020, the "protection and restoration of wild places and the regeneration of rural communities go hand in hand".

However, it hasn't always been easy and the work with communities not always smooth. When Chief Executive Andrew Bachell spoke with veteran land reformer Jim Hunter in the Spring 2019 edition of the *Journal*, it became clear that there had been less emphasis on working with communities in recent times. "It can be very difficult to work with some communities," commented Andrew, "because no matter how much effort you make, it isn't always reciprocated."

The Trust, however, has been reconnecting with community land trusts who have welcomed the prospect of restoring relationships. Andrew's view was that "we have to go and earn that reciprocation because unless we bring these elements together, we'll end up in a polarised state where nothing is achieved and nobody benefits".

This is a positive move according to Jim who was very involved in the Trust in the early days, because, as he reminded us, "one of the things that set the John Muir Trust apart at the beginning was that it always attempted to work with communities".

And, since those very earliest days, it has continued to listen and develop its experience and expertise in this area. "We mustn't think we have all the answers - many other people have answers too and we must be prepared to



A memorial to poet Hugh MacDiarmid, Langholm Moor; visitor signage (below)

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN



PHOTOGRAPH: MARION MCKINNON

listen even more than talk," wrote Nigel Hawkins as he considered the future of the Trust in July 1996. "The Trust is on a learning curve and the day we think we are not will be the day we start making major mistakes."

Today, as we look to a just transition, working towards both social and environmental justice, the approach of the Trust can serve as an example not only of how to work with land, but also of how to work with people with openness, reciprocity and respect. □

About the author

Carol Goodey has worked in community learning and engagement for many years and first came to know of the Trust through colleagues' involvement with the John Muir Award. She now works mostly as an Associate Tutor in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow.



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*Offer open to individual memberships only that are bought or renewed before 31 December 2023. Ts and Cs apply.

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EST. 1983

Life lessons

Jessie Paterson reflects on the Trust's role in outdoor learning – and the many lives that have been enriched over the past four decades

HAVING worked in the education sector for many years I am always drawn to anything that involves the topic of learning, so I jumped at the chance to delve deeper into the educational work of the Trust over the last 40 years. And what an inspiring journey it turned out to be.

Ever since first becoming a Member many years ago, I have been impressed by the Trust's role in 'education' in the widest possible sense. As Chair Dick Balharry neatly summarised in the 2008 Annual Report: "The Trust has an increasingly important educational role in which the John Muir Award and its outreach to all members of society is an important part. But all our activities are educational – both to those we reach out to and to ourselves."

While the John Muir Award – the Trust's long-running environmental award scheme – is the first thing that came to mind when I began reading about the Trust's wider work, the educational thread was apparent in almost everything I came across.

When announcing the appointment of Mike Daniels as the Trust's Chief Scientific Officer in 2008, the Trust's Chief Executive Nigel Hawkins commented: "Trustees consider it is important that the Trust can speak to politicians and other decision makers on wild land conservation with authority and be able to present a very robust case in support of safeguarding and enhancing wild land."

Having such expertise within the Trust to educate and inform politicians and others making decisions felt like a big step forward – and remains vitally important today.



PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES ROBERTSON



Collecting seeds for the Trust's Seed to Tree project at Schiehallion

Similarly, the Trust's work on the ground serves as an exemplar of conservation in action both for the volunteers taking part and for people watching from afar. As Peter Tilbrook noted in a *Journal* article from 2009 "by taking an innovative approach to land management, the Trust can certainly be in there making a positive contribution rather than simply responding to eventual changes".

I was particularly struck by pieces in the *Journal* from 1999 that detailed work carried out at Knoydart. In one, John Worsnop described the early days of tree planting with the volunteer team learning new skills that led to measurable, observable outcomes from day one: an example of education in action also producing something tangible that enables others to learn.

More recently, as detailed in an edition of the *Journal* in 2018, work carried out at Glenlude highlighted how simply caring for the land was an educational experience that brought people into the fold of nature conservation – as Rich Rowe noted it was "as much about the people who come here as the place itself".

STARTING POINT

For me, the John Muir Award is the obvious starting point when considering the Trust's formal work on education. When the initiative was launched in 1997, Trust Development Manager David Picken wrote in the *Journal* about how the Award "grew from a realisation that very few young people are active in the conservation movement" and that "very few nature conservation organisations are active in the youth sector".

As it gained ground year on year, the Award celebrated many landmark achievements both in terms of the number of participants and the diversity of people involved. It is an immensely positive journey

well covered in *Journal* articles marking the Award's 21st anniversary and its recent 25th anniversary in 2022.

Reading these and the numerous stories about the Award throughout many of the Trust's publications, there is a strong message around individual growth in all things wild, as well as a tremendous impact on wellbeing and general societal benefits. Proving direct causality is always hard, but I get the distinct feeling that involvement in the Award has been genuinely life-changing for many of those involved.

One or two stories really illustrate the point, including a partnership with Venture Scotland that began in 1999. Working with disadvantaged young people, Venture Scotland had already enriched the lives of many but by adding the Award to its work, the organisation was able to provide participants with tangible recognition of their achievements – something that perhaps only a few had ever received before.

"I get the distinct feeling that involvement in the Award has been genuinely life-changing for many of those involved"

And then there is a simple but powerful comment from a 37-year-old janitor from Fife in a *Journal* article from 2002. "Thanks to the John Muir Award I am learning things that I didn't even care about a year ago," he said. "My outlook on life, planet, plants and wildlife is turned full circle. I am trying to teach my children the same."

Previously I had tended to think of the Award as something purely for young people, but how wrong I was. With this comment and many others, it became clear to me the extent to which the Award has enabled people from all walks of life to appreciate the world they live in as adults.

For me, outdoor education and an appreciation of nature in today's world is key to ensuring the future of wild places. Through its own work, and in partnership with others, the Trust has positively impacted nature



PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN STATHAM

Volunteering at Glenlude, Scottish Borders (main); one of the Trust's recent Junior Rangers (below)



connections and increased environmental awareness for many people of all ages.

CREATING ADVOCATES

But awareness is really just the starting point. For 'wildness' as we know it to be part of our collective future, we need individuals to go beyond enjoyment and appreciation, and begin to care about and advocate for the precious world we live in. Does the Award meet this aim? I am not qualified to answer that question but probably the answer is yes and no. It, therefore, feels like it has probably reached a point where it needs to evolve to meet the needs of the future.

To my mind, the direction of travel must include educating the young,

with nature connection a core element of all outdoor education. Recent work by the Trust with young people through its Junior Rangers programme at Quinag and Nevis, plus the Seed to Tree project at Schiehallion may only involve small groups but are so crucial in facilitating that nature connection and helping young people see what can be achieved through their individual action.

Such educational activities can help young people grow into adults who go beyond appreciating and start acting to help ensure the future of wild places – an awareness to advocacy journey that is so important. If the Trust can find a way to support and encourage young people to add their voice and advocate for the protection of wild places and understand that there are things they can do, then that would be very powerful indeed.

Adult education is a harder one, with no one size fits all. As a city dweller (albeit an escapee to the great outdoors whenever possible), I'm aware of how often I don't necessarily appreciate the nature that is around me. A few months ago, I inherited a small project studying the trees in our local park. It was something I thought would just be a fun thing to do but has since grown into a real journey of discovery as I document and learn about the trees

that I have walked past so many times.

Even from this 'micro' educational experience, I feel more strongly about how we conserve and ensure the future of wildness, wherever it may be. But perhaps the big question is how we best bring others into this fold and encourage them to go beyond enjoying to actively being involved in ensuring that wildness is part of all our futures?

Looking back over the last 40 years, the Trust has a lot to be proud of and to celebrate. While taking such a direct role in education was possibly not part of the original plan, the Award has, as was remarked in a 2013 *Journal* article, "helped spread the Trust's conservation message to a much wider audience – with a particular focus on encouraging young people to engage with the outdoors".

Speaking recently, Annabel Davidson Knight, the Trust's current Director of Operations who is tasked with steering a redesign of the Award, stated that engagement work will evolve to include a greater focus on advocacy.

And while the past work of the Award has impacted many and will continue to do so in different ways in the future, the indirect, educational impact achieved through policy and exemplar land management and conservation will also have had unseen benefits that we have yet to realise. What the next 40 years brings will be extremely interesting to see. □



About the author

Until recent retirement, Jessie Paterson was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. A keen hillwalker and nature lover, she has been a Trust Member for as long as she can remember.



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Keeping it wild

In his review of the Trust's publications over the last four decades, Derek Sime explores how the challenges and the means to protect wild places have evolved over that time

THE John Muir Trust was born out of a threat to a specific area of wild land: the Ministry of Defence's intention, in the wake of the Falklands War, to purchase land on the Knoydart peninsula and turn it into a military training area. Such a move threatened to destroy the wild nature of the place and restrict public access.

Having succeeded in raising sufficient funds, the Trust purchased Li and Coire Dhorrcail, a 1,255ha area of Knoydart that included the summit of Ladhar Bheinn, in July 1987. The ambition was to protect the land and maintain access, and also to return as far as possible the natural habitat, especially native woodland.

Other land purchases followed, initially in what many would consider to be wild and remote areas: Sandwood in the far northwest Highlands (1993); in Skye (Torrin in 1991 and neighbouring Strathaird in 1994); Quinag in Assynt (2005); and Glenlude in the Scottish Borders (2003).

There were also purchases aimed principally at visitor management to protect popular 'honeypot' areas; East Schiehallion in 1999 and then the Ben Nevis Estate the following year – bringing the summits of two of Scotland's most celebrated mountains into the Trust's care.

At Schiehallion, one challenge was the footpath erosion caused by the sheer number of visitors to this popular summit. Endless footpath repairs are also a feature at Ben Nevis, the Trust's most visited property with around 140,000 people reaching the summit of the

UK's highest mountain every year. Such numbers create other challenges, not least a near constant clean-up operation, with discarded banana skins and plastic bottles among the worst offenders.

PARTNERSHIPS

Denis Mollison, one of the Trust's founder trustees, wrote in 2011 about the Trust's philosophy on land acquisitions. To safeguard the finest landscapes, he considered that outright ownership remained the securest safeguard, although partnerships also offered a means to protect areas facing specific threats.

One such was with the North Harris Trust (see page 10) which involved one of the largest community owned estates in Scotland. Another partnership entered into was with the Galson Estate Trust in northwest Lewis, working with crofters on land management issues. The Trust also helped with fundraising for the Assynt Foundation, latterly with setting up the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape, while a similar arrangement was reached with the Knoydart Foundation.

There were also some unsuccessful partnership bids – in Glen Feshie with the RSPB in 1994, and also Mar Lodge (later purchased by the National Trust for Scotland).

Elsewhere, in 2017, the Trust signed a lease with the Lake District National Park Authority to take over land management of Glenridding Common, which includes the summit of Helvellyn. A UNESCO World Heritage site for cultural landscape – hefted Herdwicks and

“At Schiehallion, one challenge was the footpath erosion caused by the sheer number of visitors to this popular summit”



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PRESCOTT

all – it was the first land to be managed by the Trust outside of Scotland.

ONGOING THREATS

At a conference in October 2004 to mark the Trust's 21st anniversary, it was clear that the threat to wild land was undiminished but had taken on a different form: the pressure now coming increasingly from industrial-scale windfarms, run-of-river hydro schemes and the occasional large-scale hydro scheme.

This, of course, presented something of a dilemma as the Trust is not opposed in principle to renewable energy – quite the contrary in fact – but such developments have to be in the right places.

In 2005, Trust representatives discussed the issue of renewable energy with Scotland's Deputy Environment and Rural



Ben Nevis is the Trust's most visited property, with around 140,000 people reaching the summit each year

Development Minister who advised that reference to wild land in the *National Planning Policy Guideline 14 – Natural Heritage* would ensure that such areas would be taken into account in planning decisions and that the Scottish Government would not shy from blocking inappropriate developments.

A report by the Trust in 2009 on the impact of wind farms argued that wind turbines can be a sustainable part of the armoury against climate change, but only if installations are sited and operated to reduce their environmental impact. The Trust has also long argued that such developments should be subject to the same standard of environmental protection regulation as any other major civil engineering projects.

Associated with onshore wind are pylon routes. In 2006, the Trust requested a public inquiry on a planned transmission line running

from Beauly, just west of Inverness, to Denny, near Falkirk, which it felt would set a worrying precedent for encroachment on wild land.

The Trust's concerns were threefold: the proposed line passed through an area of wild land (also directly affecting East Schiehallion); given the size of the pylons, it would have significantly greater visual impact than the existing line; and undergrounding of the line through the most vulnerable areas of wild land was feasible.

Although deemed prohibitively expensive at the time, recent undergrounding of sections of life-expired pylon routes has been undertaken elsewhere, so it was justifiable to question why such an approach was not also used in this instance.

Director Nigel Hawkins wrote in 2006 about how the Trust was "deeply concerned at the headlong

rush towards onshore wind generation at the expense of investment in other means". Four years later the Beauly-Denny line of mega-pylons was approved despite vehement opposition.

Today, history is repeating itself with SSEN's (Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks) recent proposal to reinforce the transmission line from Spittal to Beauly via Loch Buidhe – a project that will see almost 170km of additional overhead transmission line.

BETTER PROTECTION

In 2011, Chief Executive Stuart Brooks referred to the multiplicity of land designations and the lack of meaningful connection between them. He also referred to the Trust's petition to the Scottish Parliament seeking better landscape protection for wild land and the response from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH, now

NatureScot), agreed that better protection was required.

SNH highlighted how areas of the country without visual influence of human development had decreased from 41% in 2002 to 28% in 2009, principally due to the proliferation of onshore windfarms.

Two years later, Helen McDade, the Trust's Head of Policy, expressed her frustrations around the consents granted to industrial-scale wind farm developments. "That land can never be reclaimed," she said. "First, because almost all the wind developments on Scotland's wild land are on peat soil and once that is dried out, it's degraded forever and starts releasing carbon into the atmosphere. And second, because a large wind development will need up to 40km of paved roads to maintain and service it ... We go to inquiries, we give very good evidence, we have experts - and although we should have had the right result on several occasions, we didn't get the right result in any of them. The current planning system is not fit for purpose."

In 2014, SNH produced a 'Core Areas of Wild Land' map which cited 43 areas covering some 20% of Scotland's land mass, which the Trust wished to see adopted by the Scottish Government as part of its planning policy.

At the time, the Monadhliaths were threatened by an 83-turbine wind farm at Stronelaig. That year's autumn *Journal* reported that the Trust had initiated a judicial review challenging the Scottish Government's approval of Stronelaig on the grounds that it was in an area of wild land with significant landscape impact; it was situated on an extensive area of upland blanket bog; and that the area had initially been on the Core Areas of Wild Land map but had since been excluded from it (leaving just 42 Wild Land Areas).

Without a public inquiry, and no substantiation of carbon emission benefits, it was felt that this was the wrong decision and one that set yet another dangerous precedent.

In 2017, David Lintern explored

Making good (clockwise from top left): Wind turbine, Stronelaig; woodland regeneration, Knoydart; footpath repairs, Ben Nevis; tree planting, Thirlmere

the background to the Trust's 'Keep it Wild' campaign, which sought to strengthen planning protection for Scotland's Wild Land Areas, noting that the Scottish Government's inclusion of the Core Areas of Wild Land map in planning policy from 2014 onwards was a great success for the Trust (albeit without the Stronelaig area).

David's article also noted, with some prescience, that while the

map's inclusion in planning policy improved the chances for wild land, it did not guarantee their full protection.

PLANNING DISCONNECT

In 2018, Helen McDade reported on the disconnect between planning and land use, and the constant pressure to abandon protections to promote development (particularly energy related) resulting in changes

PHOTOGRAPHY: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): DAVID BALHARRY; STEPHEN BALLARD; CHRIS PRESCOTT; STEVE ASHWORTH





for similar applications on adjacent land to be approved.

Throughout this period, the Trust was aware of the fine line between challenging specific wind farm applications while also being supportive of renewable energy. By this time, there was already one large wind farm within a wild land area – at Creag Riabhach in Foinaven-Ben Hee – and the Trust argued for protection to be retained in the forthcoming National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

However, the pressure from onshore wind interests to remove reference to wild land in planning applications brought concern that wild land would no longer be a consideration in approving schemes.

And so it came to pass: despite assurances to the contrary, when published, NPF4 ‘supported meeting renewable energy targets’ in wild land areas. The Trust cautioned against sacrificing Scotland’s remaining wild land for renewable energy development and is now challenging the policy and its implementation.

So, over the 40 years of the Trust’s existence, is wild land now any safer from development? Sadly, experience shows that it is not and that organisations like the Trust are needed now, perhaps more than ever. □



About the author

Derek Sime is a long-time Trust Member and volunteer in Wild Space. Having first gained an appreciation of wild land while on geography field trips with the University of Aberdeen, mountains have long been a passion, both at home and abroad.

in the planning system that thwart environmental protection.

Helen noted that the Planning (Scotland) Bill did not adequately address the rights of communities (both geographical and communities of interest) or environmental protection. This meant that wild land areas did not have the same protection as, say, national parks, nor equal rights of appeal on poor decisions.

And the threats continue. Between January and the end of May 2021, a total of 49 wind farms were proposed. A year later, the approval of a wind farm on the Sallachy Estate in Sutherland was considered particularly significant in terms of the future of wild land. As the Trust highlighted at the time, the decision contravened planning policy, threatened further peatland degradation and opened the door

Time well spent

In her look through the Trust's work over the past 40 years, Marissa Trimble explores how a connection with wild places has become increasingly valuable to so many people

THERE is something about how a wild place can captivate my senses. Whether standing on the summit of a Munro, the wind blowing across my face, or in a forest with trees towering above me, I find spending time in such places incredibly powerful and energising.

But why do I and so many other people seek them out with such passion – and how does that translate into supporting the work of the John Muir Trust?

Of course, there is no simple answer to these questions. And all are personal to each individual. In a Trust newsletter from 1992, Chair Nick Luard wrote about experiencing wild places: "To try to define the essence of wilderness is almost impossible. It means different things to all of us – to the mountaineer, the hillwalker, the ornithologist, the botanist, the cross-country skier, even those of us who simply walk quietly upwards to be alone and experience the healing qualities of a silent landscape."

But there are fleeting moments that do go some way towards defining why wild places mean so much to so many. The Trust has an online library of 'Wild Moments' – a place for Members and supporters to share experiences that have stayed with them forever. In one, Trust Member Sandy Franklin tells the story of swimming in a favourite loch in Assynt. "As I pulled on my swimsuit, I heard the sound that for me is the call of the wild," he wrote. "No further than 50 metres from the edge of the loch were two red-throated divers, calling to one another and seemingly calling to me to announce their presence.

"I was thankful, filled with joy...I lowered my body into the water and swam and swam, relishing the cool water on my body, my face. Relishing the silence. Relishing the surrounding landscape. Most of all relishing sharing the loch with two red-throated divers."

Today, in a time when so many people struggle to get outside their homes and off their screens never mind out to a wild place, such an experience resonates more than ever.

Personally, I have known for a long time that being outdoors makes me feel better in many ways, but the wellbeing benefits of time spent in nature are now backed by science. A whole range of studies have shown that immersion in nature can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, boost the immune system and lower stress levels. It can even improve cognitive function, with exposure to natural light helping to regulate natural sleep cycles and improve mood.

But for many people, it's much simpler than that:

being outside just makes them feel happier. It's little wonder that we are now seeing the growing practice of Green Prescriptions – a form of social prescribing that enables GPs to treat patients through interaction with nature rather than medication.

Such benefits are perhaps most apparent to those who live in urban environments, where being surrounded by built structures can make people feel disconnected from wild places and the natural world. When exploring somewhere wild, I often feel a sense of calm that I find unreachable in the loud, busy city where I live. Crucially, I slow down and am present in that particular time and place.

HUMAN NEED

Of course, as we saw during the Covid pandemic, wild places can also act as healing spaces. During lockdown, those lucky enough to be able to access the outdoors close to their homes did so with relish; gardens became a refuge, socially distanced walks in nearby woods a tonic.

In *The Mountains are Calling*, a Trust film made during the first lockdown, six mountaineers were asked about their past adventures. It was clear from them all in their wistful reflections just what being in the hills meant to them. As mountain guide Lucy Wallace said: "The hills give me space and time to think. I miss them a lot."

And as restrictions lifted and we all gradually began to emerge from our homes once again, people flocked to greenspaces within cities and any outdoor space they could reach. Beaches, mountains and country parks all provided a much-needed sense of escape and rejuvenation: after months of living on screen, people had a safe space in which to interact once more.

In the autumn 2020 edition of the Trust's *Journal*, Helen Todd, Campaigns & Policy Manager at Ramblers Scotland, and a former chair of Scottish Environment LINK, wrote about the role of wild places in supporting people to recover from the pandemic. "In this Covid era, it has become clearer than ever that our desire to access and experience nature is not so much a luxury as an intrinsic human need," she noted.

Her words highlight the importance of the role played by organisations such as the John Muir Trust which places such emphasis on helping people connect with wild places. And, crucially, all people. In 2004, the Trust's 'Declaration for Wild Land' encouraged the UK and devolved governments to "support people of all ages and of all backgrounds to experience and



About the author

Marissa Trimble is a Step Up to Net Zero Coordinator based in Glasgow. Her interest in environmentalism is one reason why she joined the John Muir Trust. She loves spending time outdoors and enjoys going on walks where she can spot wildlife.

understand the value of wild places, for the benefit of their health and spiritual wellbeing”.

Much earlier still, in 1997, the Trust founded the John Muir Award as a means of helping, especially, young people engage more with wild places. A large part of that early focus, and much of it since, has been about increasing access to wild places and enabling those who have traditionally not been able to experience and connect with the outdoors to do so.

Such efforts to include communities of people currently marginalised from wild places today is one reason why I am so drawn to the Trust.

Through its work, there is an understanding of how I feel about wild places and what they give to me. And without the Trust’s ongoing preservation and care of those wild places, they couldn’t be enjoyed by the many people who, like me, gain so much from time spent in them. □

Nature fix

Andy Whitfield explores why the need for landscape-scale restoration of wild places in the UK has never been more important for the survival of nature and natural processes

KRIS Tompkins, the American conservationist and former CEO of clothing brand Patagonia, once commented: “Landscape without wildlife is just scenery.” It’s a line that rings true for the John Muir Trust as it works to conserve and protect wild places with their indigenous wildlife, plants and soils all intact for the benefit of future generations.

And the need to do so has never been greater. The planet is in the midst of not only a climate emergency but also a biodiversity crisis, with just 3 per cent of all ecosystems remaining intact. Shamefully, the UK is one of the world’s most nature-depleted countries, currently ranking in the bottom 10 per cent globally for biodiversity.

This is something I care deeply about. My personal ecological journey began with an early enjoyment of mountains and the experience of being in a wild place. Much of that time was spent in Eryri (Snowdonia) and to a lesser extent the Lake District. These experiences, allied to studying ecology, led to a realisation that all was and is not well.

I came across exclosures in Cwm Idwal in Eryri and saw the vegetation recovering from decades of sheep grazing. Within the fenced areas there was structural and species diversity with heathers and trees, while on the sheep-bitten ground outside there were few other species present. The exception was on steeper and rockier ground where rare Arctic-alpines clung on.

These steeper hillsides and

inaccessible gorges are also home to Eryri’s bryophyte-rich Atlantic oakwoods – specialised woodland communities that represent the true native vegetation of much of the surrounding landscape. A glimpse of what once was, and what could be again.

THINKING BIG

In the mid-1990s, having stumbled across the ‘rewilding’ movement and searched for applications of its ideals in the UK, I wrote to Dave Foreman, the American activist and environmentalist who was involved in coining the phrase in the early 1990s.

At the core of his sense of rewilding was a need to switch from the historical approach of protecting small areas or populations of specific species, in isolation from what is happening across the wider landscape, to large-scale ecological restoration of entire ecosystems.

Such areas, it was argued, should be large enough to sustain apex predators that provide the key checks and balances needed to ensure the stability and full function of those ecosystems.

This chimed with me.

Although there have been some successes in maintaining and, in some cases, reintroducing species and habitats, the general picture is a depressing one regarding the current status and future of nature across the UK.

When Foreman replied, he suggested that I look to the John Muir Trust and Trees for Life as two organisations who were looking to apply the broader principles of

“The planet is in the midst of not only a climate emergency but also a biodiversity crisis...”



PHOTOGRAPH: BENJAMIN STATHAM

rewilding here in the UK.

Our mountainous and wild landscapes, the main focus of the Trust’s on-the-ground conservation work, offer dramatic scenery but natural they are not. They lack the green veneer that would naturally cloak these areas; the finer grain is missing or barely functioning.

The Trust’s recent Strategy outlines three ‘freedoms’, one of which is for nature to have the freedom to repair itself. As we aspire to this aim, we must look to a future nature where the past informs us but natural processes are in place to allow species assemblages, habitats and ecosystems



Local growers have helped boost populations of downy willow and other plants at Glenridding Common

to develop in ways we may not expect. In many respects, we simply need to stand back and let go.

This approach is in accord with a movement away from management interventions for particular species or habitats and instead towards landscape-scale restoration. However, this is not to suggest that some micro-management is no longer required. As writer Aldo Leopold once said: “To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.”

DEER MANAGEMENT

In my opinion, the most significant

role the Trust has had, and continues to have, regarding ecological restoration and in influencing the national debate around it, is in relation to deer management.

Although an important part of the natural species assemblages of woodlands, the lack of natural predators and the prevalence of a particular type of land management designed to encourage large numbers of deer for stalking has resulted in population levels far beyond the carrying capacity of the land.

At high densities, red deer cause significant environmental damage, with heavy browsing preventing tree

regeneration, reducing the carbon capture capability of the land and decreasing overall biodiversity.

The Trust has consistently lobbied for a change in deer management in Scotland and made a significant contribution to an independent deer report, published in 2020, that recommended a raft of changes designed to safeguard public interests and promote the sustainable management of deer.

While waiting for that political change, and with little or no commitment to reduce deer numbers to a sustainable level from some neighbouring landowners, the Trust



Working for nature (clockwise from top): tree nursery, Glenlude; peatland restoration, Glen Nevis; close encounter, Glenridding; tree planting, Thirlmere; golden eagle; red deer

has been forced to take action, upping deer cull levels as part of a long-term damage limitation exercise on some areas of land in its care.

However, even with appropriate deer management, there are still areas that are too isolated from natural seed sources for regeneration to occur. In such cases, the Trust has intervened, with the planting out and re-establishment of native woodland a long-term undertaking of many volunteer work parties.

In a newsletter from 1991, the Working Party Report described the planting of 200 Scots pine saplings, all grown from seed collected in Knoydart's Glen Barrisdale, as probably the first offspring from the old granny pines that stood any chance of "surviving the ravages of

fire, deer and sheep for nearly 200 years". This is the challenge of mountain ecology management in a nutshell.

More recently, at Glenlude in the Scottish Borders, the Trust has established a tree nursery that now provides a seed source that is fuelling the gradual replacement of an area of commercial plantation and the return of other areas of sheep-grazed hillside into a mosaic of natural habitats.

COLLABORATIVE ACTION

There has been important partnership work, too. In the mid-1990s, the Trust supported Borders Forest Trust in its ambitions to restore Carrifran, a valley that has since been transformed through the planting of more than half a million

native trees; in 2005, it helped the Assynt Foundation raise £550,000 towards the purchase of the Drumrunie and Glencanisp Estates; and its recent support for the Langholm Initiative has resulted in southern Scotland's largest community-led ecological restoration project.

But it's not just about woodland. In late 2022, Trust volunteers helped to 're-wet' an area of degraded peatland in Glen Nevis to enable the growth of sphagnum mosses and allow it to function properly, once again capturing and storing vast amounts of carbon.

At Glenridding Common in the Lake District, the Trust has re-established a viable population of downy willow, numbers of which



PHOTOGRAPHY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): BENJAMIN STATHAM; ZEEMON ERHARDT; BENJAMIN STATHAM; STEVE ASHWORTH; MARK HAMLIN/2020VISION

had reduced to just a handful of plants due to sheep grazing on the fells. Working with Natural England and helped by local growers around Ullswater, seeds and cuttings have been collected and grown on, with hundreds of established specimens planted out on the crags.

A similar approach is also helping boost populations of rare Arctic-alpine flora, with their vivid colours increasingly now a feature of craggy terraces.

MORE THAN SCENERY

Writing in the Trust's summer 2003 edition of the *Journal*, Chair Dick Balharry suggested using the golden eagle as a species to help us define wild land, pointing out that "the health or biodiversity of the land to

produce prey, and a home range with minimum disturbance, are crucial to their success".

It got me thinking. In the absence of any other apex predators, we could perhaps think of the golden eagle as a means of measuring the ecological health of our landscapes today.

Currently, Scotland retains a healthy population in the Highlands and Islands, while there is an ongoing project to boost the golden eagle population in the south of Scotland and feasibility studies into their return to Wales. There are also parts of northern England with living memory of golden eagles in the sky.

If the Trust could continue to play a part in the ecological restoration of our landscapes to the extent that they support healthy populations of

golden eagles, then that may well be a very fine measure of nature having the freedom to repair itself. □



About the author

Andy Whitfield is a professional ecologist with a particular interest in ecological restoration and management. He is also a Trustee of the John Muir Trust.

Call to action

Thomas Widrow provides a policy-led window into the Trust's work to combat the climate and biodiversity crises – including personal thoughts on how others might like to get involved

While politics can be fast moving, policies themselves can be slow to implement

MY colleagues and I in the Trust's policy team work mostly in the background, in a world of political intrigue where the ground can swallow you up as fast as the Cape Wrath blanket bog. But equally, we work within the slowest of worlds because the democratic process and its bureaucratic apparatus forbid rapid action.

That presents a considerable challenge: how to get ambitious policies that tackle the climate and environmental crises passed by risk-averse politicians, while also pushing against a bureaucracy's tendency to say 'no' to change.

It might make some wonder why we do this job at all. But I'll share how I came to work in environmental politics and suggest why – and how – others might be tempted to follow.

A decade ago, an inspiring history teacher made me fall in love with her subject. A year later, I moved to Scotland to study history and politics at the University of Glasgow. I would have gladly continued to research 19th century colonialism, but that was before I came across the IPCC's special report on the impact of global warming at 1.5°C.

I had known about climate change since

primary school and became increasingly aware of its seriousness as I got older. But it wasn't until I read the IPCC's terrifying report in full that I realised how bad the situation had become.

While in Glasgow, I studied the history of human mistakes and the body of theories that power our dysfunctional politics. Between those studies and the IPCC's report, I had little hope for my generation's future and no faith at all in our leaders to act on the science.

So, how did I go from a place of despair to working with the John Muir Trust five years later, lobbying the very politicians I had no faith in as a student? After reading the report many things happened at once, including meeting my partner and a circle of friends who were far more environmentally switched on than my classmates.

I applied for a job with the university's sustainability team and worked with motivated students on everything from zero waste food to sustainable laboratories. And in November 2018, I watched in disbelief as protesters blocked bridges in London and dropped huge banners that summarised the IPCC's take on climate inaction in more direct language.

“Every policy that deals with the environmental and climate crises challenges the status quo”

In the space of a few months, I went from being mildly climate conscious to having a job that paid me to act on the science, and a realisation that thousands of other people were organising themselves around a global environmental campaign.

TAKING ACTION

I attended Glasgow's first Extinction Rebellion meeting in a little organic shop on a wet and cold evening in February. I expected to find half a dozen hippies and anarchists but instead opened the door to find the place full of people of all ages and backgrounds. All wanted to tell the truth about climate breakdown and demand action from our leaders. All I had to do was join them.

And join them I did. I took part in Extinction Rebellion actions in Scotland, London and France. I learned the strengths and weaknesses of direct action and people power. Meanwhile, my work with the university's sustainability team taught me how slow institutions are at accepting change. I did a masters in political communications and learned how easy it can be for the rich and powerful to manipulate an electorate.

Then Covid hit. I had a lot of time during lockdown to think about what my actions had achieved so far. Scotland had declared a climate emergency. Westminster as well. However, neither had made clear how it would be tackled.

Soon after, I read the Scottish Greens' manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections and discovered that the party's views aligned with mine. I had a masters in political communication. There was an election around the corner. Maybe I should get involved?

And, again, that's exactly what I did, helping Scottish Greens candidate Ariane Burgess become elected as an MSP. A year later, I led the Highlands and Islands Greens' council election campaign which resulted in Highland and Orkney's first ever Green Groups as well as Shetland's first ever green councillor.

This was all great, but the Greens weren't the majority party. I had to focus my efforts on those with the power to pass the policies we so

desperately need. And that's when I joined the Trust's policy team.

Over the past 18 months, I have organised meetings with parliamentarians and Scottish Government, talked to councillors about our Carbon Emissions Land Tax and networked with the environmental third sector to push for a Just Transition in wild places.

Every politician I speak to knows how bad the situation is, but many refuse to move at pace because they are playing the personal long game. Unfortunately, the climate and environmental crises cannot wait for their ambition to catch up.

Everybody in the environmental movement knows this but nobody quite has the answer to unleashing political action. But there is something we can all do to try and unlock the situation. In recent years, I have experienced what sections of the climate action movement can achieve together: motivated students can plant the seeds of change among the youth; and the youth can bring to life mass mobilisation groups that propel overlooked issues to the top of the agenda in just days.

And with those issues in people's minds, environmentally aware political parties can create the opportunity for us lobbyists to advocate for policies at the heart of government.

PEOPLE POWER

Every part of the climate and environmental movement is essential. Diversity makes us stronger, just like in nature. Complexity makes us more resilient, again just like in nature. But this diversity, this complexity, is not innate. Our power comes from new people joining the movement.

So please treat this as an urgent invitation to get involved. If you have an idea that will change your town – or the world – share it. If you have money to spare, donate it. If you have lots of it, fund someone else's project. Develop new skills and expertise, quit your job and work for charities or companies that fight the good fight.

Perhaps most importantly, if your fire burns strong, get into politics and run to be in the room where decisions are made. Every policy that deals with the environmental and climate crises challenges the status quo.

If you share my love for the natural world and my belief that humans must find their rightful place in it, then I guarantee you have a place in this movement. You can reinforce its diversity and add to its complexity. And you can create a better world: one in which nature, people and communities all have the freedom to thrive. □



PHOTOGRAPH: MADZIK/ADOBESTOCK



About the author

Born in the US and raised in France, Thomas Widrow came to Scotland to study and never left. Alongside his campaigning, Thomas was also a commercial market gardener before joining the Trust's policy team where he works as Campaign Manager.

Talking conservation

Archie Ferguson (16), a recent Junior Ranger and now a regular volunteer with the Trust, sat down with our Chair, Jane Smallman, in his hometown of Fort William. In this extract from their conversation, Archie wanted to learn about Jane's own journey and what the future holds for budding environmentalists like him

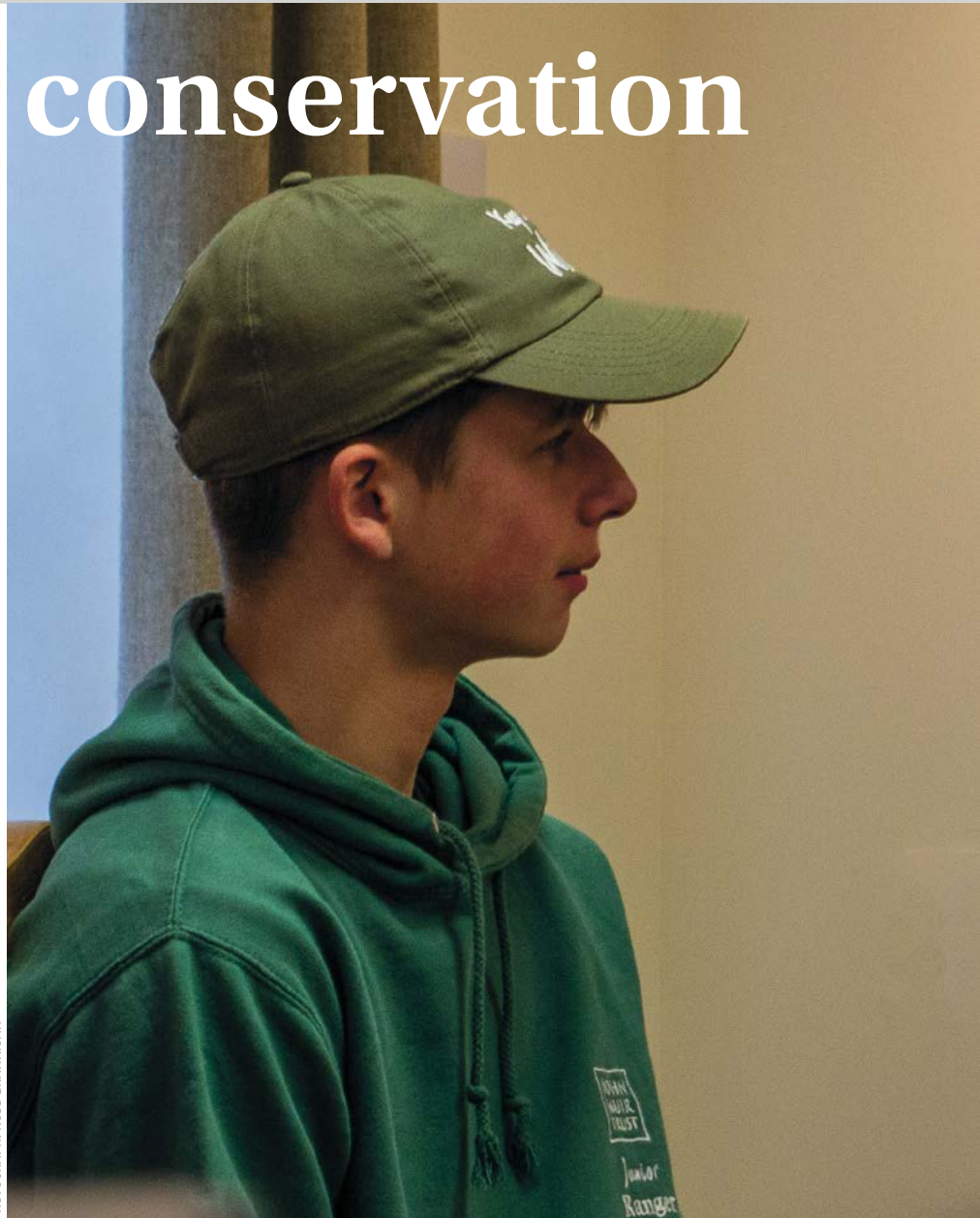
Archie: How did you find out about the Trust and become its Chair?

Jane: I love walking and used to spend a lot of time in the Northwest Highlands, visiting places such as Sandwood Bay – part of an area of land in the Trust's care. The environment there is fantastic and it made such an impression on me that, when we got back to the car one time, I picked up a Trust leaflet about the area to take home. Then, when I retired, I asked my colleagues to make a contribution to a Life Membership of the Trust as my leaving gift and I have been a Member ever since.

A couple of years later, I saw an advert for Trustees to join the Board. As someone who loves walking and mountains, I wanted to give it a try but I was conscious that I don't have a background in ecology or conservation. The Trust was, however, looking for someone with experience of running organisations and, as I do have that, I managed to gather the nominations to be elected onto the Board and, recently, became Chair.

Archie: We are in the middle of a biodiversity and climate crisis. What does that mean in the UK and what is the Trust doing about it?

Jane: There are many problems on many different levels. For example, in the south of England where I live,



PHOTOGRAPH: ROSS BRANNIGAN

“I have been along Glen Nevis again since and can already see how the water is building up and the peatland is becoming healthy again”

Archie Ferguson

we see noticeably fewer butterflies, bees and other pollinators which are so essential to the ecosystem. That can be down to more unpredictable weather that affects feeding and breeding opportunities. There are also fewer habitats for many species, with intense grazing pressures leaving landscapes quite bare.

I was at Schiehallion in Perthshire a couple of years ago with one of the

team, and they've been very successful in re-establishing the native plants in the area. Once you bring the plants back, then they attract the insects which in turn attracts birds to feed on them and it all progresses and becomes much richer.

It also saddens me to see wilful damage caused to wild places, such as littering. I would like to see more



Good to talk:
Archie and Jane
swap notes

“I would like to see more positive behaviour change so that people respect these places and leave them tidy for other people to enjoy and for nature to thrive”

Jane Smallman

positive behaviour change so that people respect these places and leave them tidy for other people to enjoy and for nature to thrive.

Jane: Why did you decide to become a Junior Ranger, Archie?

Archie: I’ve lived in Fort William my whole life and when the sheets came around at school to sign up for the

Junior Ranger programme, I immediately thought it sounded like totally my thing. Every Wednesday for a whole year, we spent time learning new conservation skills and we’d sometimes also head up into Glen Nevis to put those skills into practice.

After the Junior Ranger programme, I decided to stay on as a volunteer with the Trust and worked

on the peatland restoration project in Glen Nevis. I volunteered for that because it’s really beautiful up there, and it’s amazing to know how much carbon a healthy peatland can actually store. I have been along Glen Nevis again since and can already see how the water is building up and the peatland is becoming healthy again.

Archie: As I begin my career in conservation, what advice would you give me?

Jane: It’s such a great thing to do. I would say keep volunteering to show your commitment by doing things like this interview and be involved in as many related things as you can, but overall be enthusiastic and find what you have a particular passion for in the sector.

Archie: This year is the Trust’s 40th anniversary. Where do you hope the Trust will be in another 40 years?

Jane: Well, I won’t be here in 40 years’ time! So, part of this will be down to you, too. I would like us to have returned large areas to a natural forested state with fully functioning ecosystems. It would be great for the Trust to have a few more sites across the UK as well so that we can help return them to a healthy condition. I also think making wild places more accessible so that many more people from all walks of life can enjoy their benefits is hugely important. □

Further information

The Junior Ranger programme is a partnership scheme between the John Muir Trust and schools in Lochaber and Ullapool.

Each year, a group of secondary school pupils living near our properties have the opportunity to learn about their local area, develop conservation and mountain skills such as species identification and navigation, and gain first-hand experience of practical conservation work.

Opening doors

Nav Bakhsh from Boots & Beards reveals how he came to discover wild places – and why diversity and inclusion in the outdoors is so important

DIVERSITY in the outdoors can take many forms, from race and ethnicity to gender, age, ability, socioeconomic status and more. It is crucial to recognise and respect these differences and ensure that everyone feels welcome and included in outdoor spaces.

Doing so opens doors – and minds. Take my own path into the outdoors, for instance. I had no inclination or desire to be a hill walker. This was perhaps because there was a lack of representation or it was just something you never heard of people doing in my particular community on the south side of Glasgow.

I come from a generation where you knew what being part of a family meant. Living close by, we all used to meet on a weekly basis when growing up and understood the essence of our culture, where we belonged and why that made us different from some other people.

But as a father of four, I began to see a changing dynamic; how over the years my family structure and extended unit was being eroded by a variety of factors: individuals moving away, kids spending too much time on their screens, and people becoming confused about their identity.

It came to a point where my immediate family would only meet up with cousins and other family members on occasions such as weddings and funerals. This realisation made me wonder how we could protect the family unit. My answer? I came up with the idea of going for a collective hill walk!

One day, we gathered together all of our brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces and went to Balmaha for a



Nav (main and inset) with group participants of all ages at Loch Ard

PHOTOGRAPHY: ZAIN SEHGAL/BOOTS AND BEARDS



walk up Conic Hill which overlooks Loch Lomond. We all enjoyed it and our visits to new locations soon became a fortnightly event, shared with friends through social media.

As the idea filtered through the wider community, it quickly became clear that I was not alone in being concerned about identity and belonging. With that understanding, Boots & Beards was founded and our work with communities to improve their health and wellbeing truly began.

Although born and bred in Scotland, I have been fortunate enough to experience more of my country in the last five years than I have in my whole life. Every new place that I visit or take a group

to is wild for me, as it is for them.

Crucially, our understanding of how important the outdoors is and how it is a source of healing for those experiencing difficult times grows by the day.

For me, fostering this kind of shared experience is a vital step towards engendering a sense of responsibility and stewardship among all communities towards the natural world and what is, after all, our shared planet. □



About the author

Nav Bakhsh is co-founder of Boots & Beards, a Glasgow-based organisation that works with diverse communities to build bridges into nature and wellbeing.

bootsandbeards.co.uk

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