



# Seahouses Youth Project

## Conservation Award Case Study



Like the shoreline near John Muir's childhood home in Dunbar, the Northumberland coast has 'no lack of wildness'. Three Young Rangers from Seahouses Youth Project discovered this over the three and a half years they volunteered with the Project. In May 2010 Andrew, Laurence and Alex became the first people in Northumberland to be awarded the highest level of the John Muir Award, the Conserver Award, through an organisation.

### Seahouses Youth Project and the John Muir Award



Seahouses Youth Project works in collaboration with the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership to deliver the 'Young Rangers on the Coast' programme. It aims to get young people aged 13 to 21 out into a wide variety of habitats in the AONB, and links this activity to the John Muir Award framework – discover a wild place; actively explore it; do something to conserve it; and share your experiences. The Youth Project has been involved with the John Muir Award since 2006 and uses it to promote awareness and responsibility for the natural environment, frame activities and celebrate the Young Rangers' achievements.

Seahouses Youth Project supports Young Rangers at all three levels of the John Muir Award. Progression promotes individual development, increased activity and a deeper involvement. Throughout the three levels participants develop *"skills and a love of the great outdoors that will stay with the Young Rangers into adulthood"* says Shirley Wright, Project Manager for Seahouses Youth Project. As challenges become greater, participants often surprise themselves at what they can achieve.

### A journey to the Conserver Award

At the beginning of their Discovery Award Andrew, Laurence and Alex embarked on a journey of personal development and learning. The experience helped them to build up transferable skills essential for higher education and employment. Having been led by youth workers through structured activities and tasks and keen for new challenges, the boys planned and organised projects for their second level, the Explorer Award. With the increased responsibility and ownership, the boys thrived as leaders and decision makers.

## Taking ownership

At the Conserver level they faced their biggest challenge yet - the trio transformed an area of neglected land into a space for wildlife. They fundraised for new plants and organised community litter picks. They planted native trees and shrubs and built boxes for hedgehogs, birds and bats. The Young Rangers produced a heritage trail booklet which featured a map, history of the area and species specific fact sheets. The group also designed educational tools such as quizzes which they shared with nearby schools and playgroups.

## Partnership working

As well as managing their own projects, the boys worked with a range of partners and undertook a wide variety of tasks on the coast. Activity included digging out silted-up ponds on Coquet Island RSPB reserve, building otter holts, clearing gorse from whin grassland sites, and coppicing trees and managing grasslands on the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve. Iain Robson, Assistant AONB Officer said, *“The Young Rangers on the Coast not only conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and habitats of the Northumberland Coast AONB, they also act as ambassadors for the Partnership. They are a real asset to the work of the AONB Partnership and the landscape we all help to look after.”*



***“The opportunity to take part in the John Muir Award scheme and achieve the Conserver Award has been fun and interesting; and given me the knowledge, skills and confidence to continue as a volunteer leader and help persuade others to respect our environment. I would highly recommend the scheme to other young people.” Alex, age 17***

## Inspiring others

Andrew, Laurence and Alex’s increased understanding of the natural world and conservation equipped them with the confidence to inspire other young people and lead them through their own Discovery and Explorer Awards. At the Conserver level, the boys took a lead role in planning and chairing team meetings. They shared their experience, enthusiasm and knowledge with new participants. Peer teaching helped the Young Rangers to develop leadership, communication and organisational skills.

The three Young Rangers appreciate the value of what they have gained throughout the process and look back on their experiences fondly. 17 year old Laurence said, *“I was extremely pleased to receive the John Muir Award as it is terrific reward for all the hard work and time spent helping the environment. This Award is a valuable addition to my CV as I look towards university places, as well as a reminder of the valuable help I have contributed. Seeing the Award on my shelf helps to make me feel proud of what I have achieved.”*

## What’s next?

Seahouses Youth Project is extremely proud of their first Conserver Awards and is now supporting a new set of aspirants. Andrew, Laurence and Alex’s achievement has motivated Young Rangers working towards their Discovery and Explorer Awards to take it to the next level.