

JOHN MUIR TRUST

JOURNAL

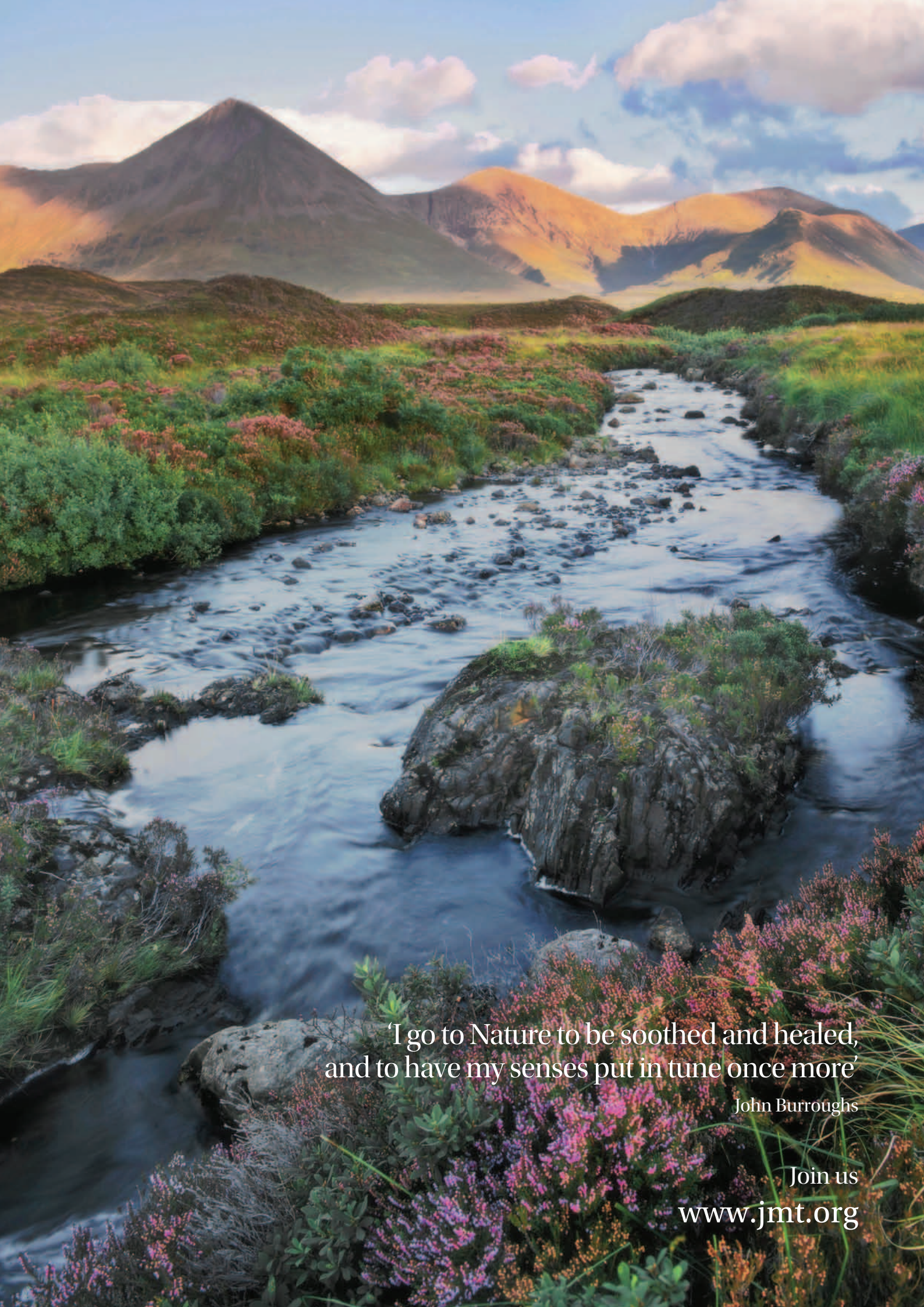
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A wilder, richer future

Is a new day dawning for wild land conservation?



'I go to Nature to be soothed and healed,
and to have my senses put in tune once more'

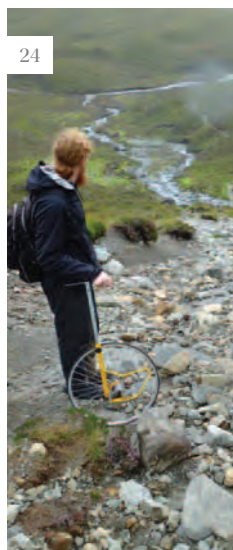
John Burroughs

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INSIDE FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: CIRQUE OF SLIGACHAN, SKYE, IAN CAMERON

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From the chief executive

WELCOME TO members and other readers of this edition of the John Muir Trust Journal. Although we rarely follow a theme in each issue, in my few words here I did want to pick up on what I see as a thread that runs through our work. It's the thing that makes us relevant, and actually the reason for our existence: people.



Of course, that can be read in two ways. If people didn't exist, then nature and wild places would be untrammelled, pristine and in no need of our protection. Wild places only need saving from ourselves. It's a sad truth but not a pragmatic way of looking at the world as long as we are a part of it. But it's also a positive statement; if we look after wild places and engage people in their values,

then we benefit ourselves as well as those wild places and the wildlife that depends on them.

For more than 30 years, the John Muir Trust has expanded its activities, profile and geographical footprint. I'm heartened that when I give a presentation and ask who in the audience has heard of us, the majority of people raise their hands. Still, most will know us for a particular place or aspect of our work. Our challenge is to communicate a core purpose, one that is relevant to everyone: the importance of protecting wild places for all of our benefits. I'm labouring this point because I'd like you to read the articles that follow and consider the relevance of our work to people as well as the places we care for.

And I think the point is best illustrated by our remarkable John Muir Award. If it hadn't been

invented in 1997, we would most certainly be less relevant, less well known, and considered, in some quarters, as rather elitist. Although not the main drivers for establishing the Award, this outstanding educational initiative continues to be hugely beneficial, not least in terms of helping the Trust achieve its objectives.

After all, how else would we be working with every National Park authority in the UK and directly engaging nearly 30,000 people a year in what it means to love wild places? And how would we be delivering our messages to people living in central London, Glasgow and Cardiff, and starting them on a journey of discovering and valuing wild places?

Picking up on this theme, Chris Townsend, well-known for his columns in *The Great Outdoors* magazine, reflects on his personal connections and understanding of wild places – and how they have changed over time. Elsewhere, we bring to life some of the areas covered in the Core Areas of Wild Land map that we've been campaigning so hard for; share some of the highlights of the first year of our Wild Space visitor centre – established to bring our messages to people on the high street; and Chris Goodman, the Trust's footpath officer, outlines our footpath restoration plans for the year ahead. Plenty of news, fascinating interviews and a further major feature on rewilding complete this busy edition of the Journal.

I do hope you enjoy the read. And if picking up the Journal for the first time, please consider supporting us and becoming a member of the Trust.

Stuart Brooks
Chief executive, John Muir Trust



Jump to it: Perth & Kinross Council Youth Services Girls' Group enjoying the fresh air at John Muir Country Park

Silver Flowe National Nature Reserve in Dumfries & Galloway sits within one of the areas included on the wild land map

PHOTOGRAPH: GALLOWAY PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIVE



Strong public support for wild land map

Independent analysis of Scottish Natural Heritage's recent public consultation on its Core Areas of Wild Land map has provided further evidence of strong support for the protection of Scotland's wild land.

For three months to 20 December, members of the public and other interested parties were invited to submit their views. Of 410 submissions received, 300 supported the wild land map. An analysis of the responses carried out by two independent organisations highlighted that 73% of respondents 'generally support' the wild land map; 21% 'oppose or raise substantial concerns' about the map; with the remainder 'unclear or have no view'.

A further breakdown of the data revealed that individuals backed the map by a margin of seven to one; charity and voluntary organisations by five to one; and local councils by three to one.

"The scale of public support for the map shows that people care passionately about wild land and want to see it better protected," commented Stuart Brooks, the Trust's chief executive.

John Hutchison, chair of the John Muir Trust, emphasised that the map is not about preventing small-scale development of renewables or other infrastructure by communities and local people.

"This is about stopping the mass industrialisation of our wildest landscapes under tangles of turbines, pylons, road and power sub-stations," he said. "These developments might generate lavish profits for landowners and distant shareholders, but they create few if any jobs for local people."

The full report from the consultants can be read at www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1218449.pdf

For more on some of the areas included on the wild land map, see p10

Plans for Dalnessie wind farm shelved

Energy giant SSE has abandoned plans to construct a 27-turbine wind farm at Dalnessie near Lairg – a decision welcomed by the Trust and the many other bodies and individuals that campaigned against the proposed development.

The Trust had lodged an objection to the application on the grounds that it was in a search area for wild land. Since then, it has been incorporated into the core areas of wild land as recently mapped by Scottish Natural Heritage. The development was also opposed by Highland Council's North Planning Application Committee.

SSE has since issued a statement stating that the proposed wind farm, along with another at Fairburn in Easter Ross, is no longer financially viable.

"This was an unsuitable development that should never have been brought forward in the first place," said the Trust's head of policy, Helen McDade. "It has wasted a huge amount of time, effort and money, with councillors, planning officials, local communities, environmentalists and SSE all involved in the process."

The move reinforces the need for the Core Areas of Wild Land map "to be incorporated into the Scottish National Planning Framework, to provide clarity for developers, councils and planning officials, and to discourage speculative, time-consuming applications", she added.

Cross party support for wild land protection

During a debate in Holyrood on Scotland's National Planning Framework 3 (18 March 2014), MSPs from Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and the Greens supported the call by the John Muir Trust for the document to include a statement on wild land protection.

An earlier draft published by the Scottish Government had included the phrase 'the Government wishes to continue strong protection for our wildest landscapes'. But in the most recent version of the document, the phrase had been removed.

In summing up for the Scottish Government, the Minister for Planning,

Derek Mackay, expressed some sympathy with the points raised by the cross-party MSPs. The new National Planning Framework will be finalised by a vote in the Scottish Parliament in June.

Following the debate, Helen McDade, the Trust's head of policy, said: "It's heartening to see a consensus among our politicians that wild land should be protected as part of Scotland's unique natural heritage."

On behalf of the Trust, Stuart Brooks expressed his appreciation to all those who responded to the consultations. "We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to argue the case for wild land protection. After this impressive expression of support across the political spectrum, we are more confident than ever before that goal is now within our reach."

Wales appeal update

A huge thank you to everyone who responded to our Carreg y Saeth Isaf appeal, which we launched last autumn. Unfortunately, we don't have a full update as we had hoped by this stage. We are close to reaching our target of £500,000 and financially everything is in place – a major achievement. However, we have hit a significant delay with the owner and the terms of the sale may change. We are in discussion and it is still our intention to try to purchase the property as a private sale for all the reasons that we have explained on our website.

Conservation funding for coastal groups



Inside Elgol Primary School's new garden nursery polytunnel

PHOTOGRAPH: IAN MACKENZIE

A new wildlife observatory in north west Lewis, two community festivals in Harris and a school garden polytunnel in Skye are among ten community projects to be supported by the John Muir Trust's Conservation Fund in 2013.

In all, total funding of £23,684 was distributed to a range of applicants, including the community-owned land trusts at Galson in Lewis, North Harris, West Harris, and Knoydart, plus Elgol Primary School and the Sconser Management Committee, both in Skye. The final three projects to be funded are new deer ponies and deer management training at Knoydart, woodland creation in Skye and Harris, plus a donation to help the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape project involve local schoolchildren in its pioneering land regeneration work.

"The John Muir Trust believes that

people and nature can flourish together across the Highlands," commented Mike Daniels, head of land and science. "We are proud to work in partnership with vibrant community-owned trusts in some of the most remote areas of the West Highlands and islands who understand that there need be no contradiction between valuing the natural environment and developing sustainable local economies."

The range and calibre of the applications received are "a tribute to those working on the ground to make things happen", he added.

The Conservation Fund was established to help community projects on land managed either by the Trust or by community landowners who work in partnership with the Trust.

For full details of each of the ten projects, see <http://bit.ly/1fEDLnz>

Novel idea

Produced for a new generation of teenagers (12-15 year olds), and to be distributed free to secondary schools throughout Scotland during April, an exciting new John Muir graphic novel aims to raise awareness of our natural environment, and encourage young people to become more actively involved in protecting and enhancing wild places.

The novel has been created by the Scottish teen author Julie Bretagna and



Glasgow-based illustrator William Goldsmith. It will educate and encourage responsible behaviour around enjoying, respecting and preserving our natural environment – both within school and also through a range of after-school environmental activities.

The Trust has been an active supporter of the project – a partnership between Scottish Book Trust, Creative Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Education Scotland – with members of the John Muir Award team serving on the steering group for the venture.



PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE MORTER

Volunteers sort through tree tubes donated by Glen Estate

Volunteering year underway at Glenlude

The volunteering year on Trust properties began in February with several ad hoc days and a four-day work party at Glenlude in the Borders.

With the blustery winter weather having blown over a lot of tree tubes across the site, volunteers worked their way around re-staking them as well as weeding. Work also continued on building the polytunnel that will be used as part of the tree nursery that will be established at Glenlude.

One very wet day was spent sorting through second-hand tree tubes donated by the nearby Glen Estate, and building doors for the polytunnel in the comfort of the volunteers' shelter.

AGM & Members' Gathering 2014

This year's AGM & Members' Gathering will take place at Dunbar Parish Church & Hall from 2-3 May. All welcome! Booking closes on 18 April with places filling up fast, so don't delay. Our guest speaker and evening gathering on 2 May are kindly sponsored by Turcan Connell. For further information, or to book, please call 01796 470080, or see www.jmt.org

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Landscape protection under the microscope

In what promises to be a thought-provoking event, a one-off international conference in May will see a stellar line-up of speakers converge on Perth to discuss innovative solutions for the protection and enhancement of the UK's most important landscapes.

Held to honour one of the most influential Scots who ever lived, the John Muir Conference takes place at Perth Concert Hall from 12-13 May. Hosted by Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park along with the Trust and other organisations, with the support of the Scottish Government as part of its Year of Homecoming, the conference comes at a time of growing interest in the management of national parks and protected areas.

The impressive line-up of expert speakers includes Jonathan B. Jarvis, head of the United States National Park Service,



PHOTOGRAPH: GEORGE MONBIOT

George Monbiot (pictured), writer, activist and champion of the rewilding movement, plus Nigel Dudley, vice chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas.

"We are delighted to be part of this groundbreaking conference which we hope will contribute to a national debate on how we protect our wild places, in the

centenary year of John Muir's death," commented Stuart Brooks, chief executive of the John Muir Trust.

In addition to an outstanding line-up of speakers, the event will also see a variety of study tours to a range of locations including Mar Lodge, Schiehallion and Loch Lomond.

For more details, including booking, see www.johnmuir100.com

Award team helps teachers step outside

Members of the John Muir Award team recently participated in the Natural Connections Demonstration Project, one of the largest outdoor learning projects of its kind in the UK. Targeting hundreds of volunteers from more than 200 schools across Southwest England, the project's goal is to significantly increase the number of children benefitting from learning in natural environments.

The Award team delivered training to teachers, youth leaders and others who support outdoor learning in Somerset and helped them to discover how the John Muir Award can take learning beyond the classroom.

For more on the Natural Connections Demonstration Project and how it is working with local schools to create learning hubs, visit www.growingschools.org.uk



PHOTOGRAPH: COLIN HATTERSLEY

Celebrating John Muir

This year sees not just a conference dedicated to John Muir (see story at top of page) but also the inaugural John Muir Festival which will mark the official opening of the John Muir Way.

The festival, which runs from 17-26 April, will feature spectacular arts events and large-scale public performances at selected locations along the length of the new, 134-mile coast-to-coast route from Muir's birthplace in Dunbar to the Clyde at Helensburgh. Runners, walkers and cyclists will be particularly interested in



the coast-to-coast flag relay – a chance to experience sections of the new route and enjoy a variety of artwork on show along the way.

Combining beautiful scenery, wildlife hotspots and sites of historical interest, the new trail aims to explore local heritage along its route including major attractions such as the John Muir Country Park, Hopetoun House, the Antonine Wall, the Forth & Clyde and Union canals, plus the Falkirk Wheel.

For much more on the festival – and the John Muir Trail – see <http://johnmuirfestival.com>



PHOTOGRAPH: JANIE GRIMLEY

Famous face at Winter Words Festival

Trust chief executive Stuart Brooks rubbed shoulders with a mountaineering great when he had the pleasure of introducing Sir Chris Bonington to the stage during the Winter Words Festival at Pitlochry Festival Theatre in February. Returning to Pitlochry for the tenth anniversary of Winter Words, Sir Chris entertained the audience with a fascinating talk that captured the highlights of an epic climbing career.

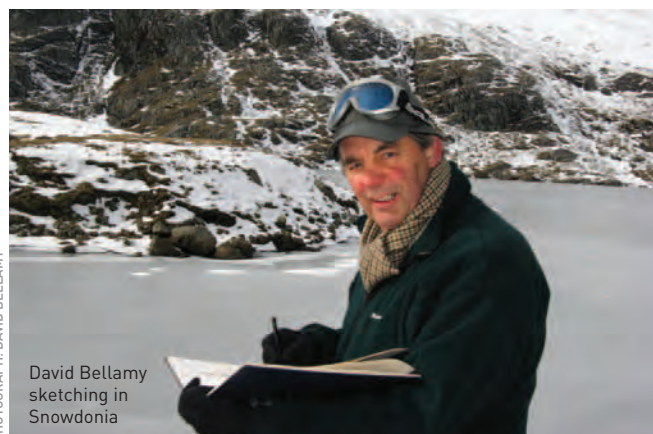
Outstanding year of exhibitions ahead at the Wild Space

The Trust's new Wild Space visitor centre in Pitlochry will once again feature a range of outstanding exhibitions from leading artists this year. Currently on show is an exhibition by award-winning mixed media artist Clare Yarrington. Entitled *Mountain, Moor and Cliff*, the exhibition explores her fascination with how environment is formed, and how we interact with it.

The exhibition runs until 14 April and will be followed by *Wild Highlands*, an exhibition by author and watercolour artist David Bellamy whose paintings are in collections worldwide, including those of Sir Chris Bonington, Doug Scott, Sir David Attenborough and Bill Bryson.

David's work has taken him to celebrated mountain ranges from the Alps to the Himalayas but says that it's always the British mountains, with their own distinctive moods, that mean the most to him. "Painting wild landscapes has been the core theme throughout my life as an artist, and the Highlands have always been an important ingredient in my work," he explained.

"The main aim of my exhibition is to illustrate the wild beauty of the Highlands, without which our sense of freedom is gone, and life is bound in the shallow miseries of a rampant



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BELLAMY

David Bellamy sketching in Snowdonia

commercial world where the natural environment is brutalised for pecuniary gain. Most of the watercolours show Highland scenes, but I have included a few more distant subjects."

Wild Highlands will run from 16 April to 18 June. David will also be giving a demonstration on painting mountain scenery on 23 April. For more information, call the Wild Space on 01796 470080.

www.clareyarrington.com; www.davidbellamy.co.uk



PHOTOGRAPH: SUSAN WRIGHT

New land manager for Schiehallion

Naturalist Dr Liz Auty (pictured above) is to take over the running of the Trust's Schiehallion property – one of Scotland's most celebrated mountains. Liz has served as the Trust's national biodiversity officer since 2007, but is now relishing the challenge of looking after this iconic Munro.

Owned and managed by the Trust since 1998, Schiehallion is a mountain that has everything, commented Liz. "Its Alpine-like peak rises from the dead centre of Scotland, with the mountain itself steeped in legend and folklore," she said. "It is also home to over 300 species, including some of Scotland's rarest wildlife, has dozens of fascinating archaeological structures and a unique place in the history of mathematics, science and geography."

Exactly 240 years ago this summer, Britain's Astronomer Royal, Nevil Maskelyne, conducted a groundbreaking experiment on Schiehallion to calculate the density and weight of the Earth. As a spin-off from that work, the concept of contour lines was developed by Charles Hutton.

Liz will be stepping up the number of species studies carried out on Schiehallion, as well as working in close partnership with neighbouring landowners with a view to developing a network of woodlands across the wider area.

Rural Committee issues deer warning

The Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Climate Change Committee recently released a statement recognising the damage that artificially high deer numbers are having on Scotland's natural heritage. It called on voluntary deer management groups to have effective plans in place to curb the damage by the end of 2016, or face further action.

The Trust gave evidence to the committee in support of an end to the voluntary system of deer management

in favour of statutory regulation.

"We welcome this unanimous recognition by the committee that there is a serious problem," said Mike Daniels, the Trust's head of land and science. "Some of our most precious native woodlands are degraded and dying because of unnaturally high deer numbers."

"We hope this warning to deer management groups will be backed up by rigorous monitoring of deer impacts across the country and followed through with statutory regulation if there is no measurable improvement."

Wild poetry winners announced

The winning poems from the 2014 John Muir Trust Wild Poetry competition were exhibited for all to see at the prestigious Fort William Mountain Festival in February. The annual competition – which this year saw more than 300 entries – is open to all primary school pupils in Lochaber.

As usual, the standard of writing, not to mention passion for the subject, was hugely impressive. "This was a fantastic show of wonderful wild poems in both English and Gaelic," said the Trust's Alison Austin, one of the judges. "It's been a real treat for us to find out how pupils in Lochaber think about all sorts of wildlife, from eagles and otters to deer, foxes, squirrels, salmon and much more."

However, not all the poems were about wildlife, added Alison. "The exciting action poems will resonate with mountain bikers and skiers alike, and the more reflective poems make us realise that all ages appreciate time spent in wild places, whether that's on top of the Ben, splashing in a burn, or exploring woodlands."

The Trust would like to congratulate all the winners and commended poets, and also thank all those who took part, including the many generous prize sponsors. Prize winners received a selection of book tokens, hats, T-shirts, sweatshirts and biking kit.

The winning poems can be enjoyed at www.jmt.org/wild-writing2014.asp

A land apart

Scottish Natural Heritage's wild land map, which identifies Scotland's wildest landscapes, should serve as a blueprint for protecting such areas from the threat of large scale industrial development. We asked those who live, work and play in five areas included on the map just what makes those landscapes so special

A MAP, EVEN ONE AS detailed as the Core Areas of Wild Land map produced by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), can only reveal so much; it gives a position, a location – a hint of the landscape all around. But for a true sense of place, nothing beats actually being there: breathing the air, walking the land and getting under its skin. It is perhaps such personal experience that was reflected in a ringing endorsement for proposals to improve the protection of our wild land in the recent SNH public consultation on the map (see news item, p6).

Published in April 2013, the map (see p13), which covers 20% of Scotland's land mass, was created as part of a major Scottish Government consultation into new planning proposals. The most detailed of its kind in Europe, the map measures 'wildness' according to several criteria, from the perceived naturalness of the land cover and ruggedness of terrain to remoteness from public roads or ferries and the visible lack of other man-made infrastructure.

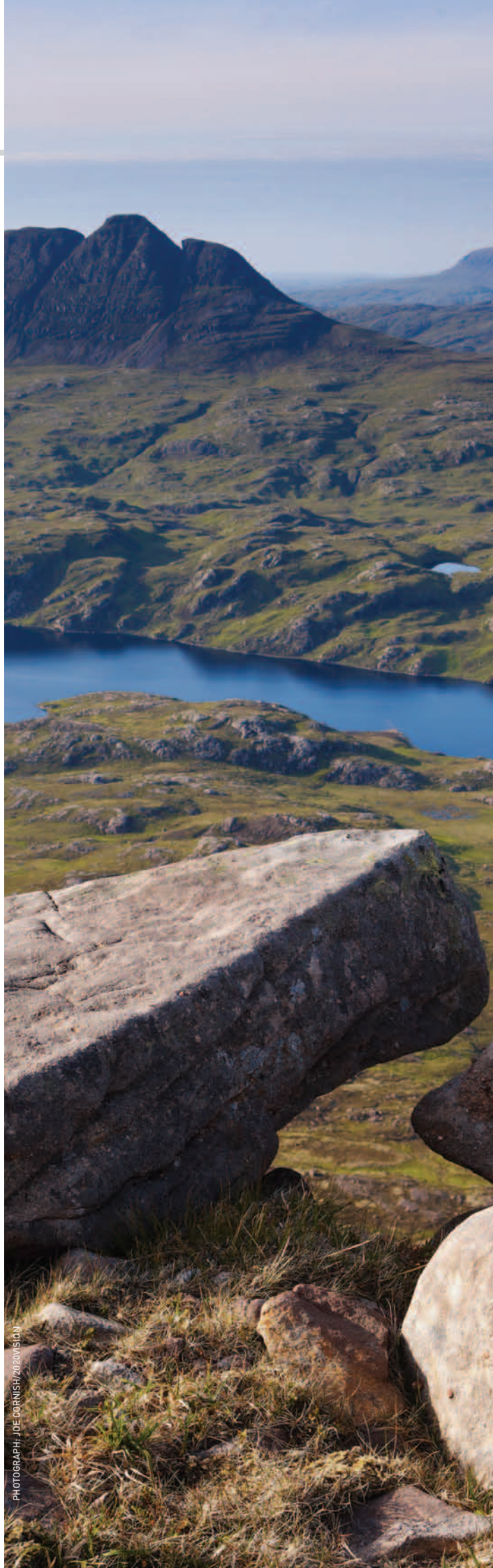
In all, 73 per cent of respondents backed the map, with support coming from many sources: individuals, small businesses (including the Speyside Business Alliance), conservation and outdoors charities, councils, community groups, and national bodies such as sportscotland and Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Such overwhelming support feels like something of a breakthrough or, dare we dream, maybe even a tipping point? It's certainly hugely encouraging for all those who, like the Trust, want to see the map adopted by the Scottish Government as part of new planning policy – a move that could help protect Scotland's finest areas of wild land for generations.

Outdoors writer and photographer Chris Townsend put this need beautifully when talking recently to the *Scotsman* about the Monadhliaths, a range of hills on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park currently threatened by a particularly large-scale wind farm: 'What we're talking about here is the destruction of a subtly beautiful, quiet landscape. But it's not just about aesthetics. I think it's far deeper than that. It's about the sense of being part of nature, the sense of solitude you can get here, the feeling of being in a wild, unspoiled area. It's not just about what it looks like – it's also about what it feels like.'

As the following accounts of wild places, from the Southern Uplands to the Outer Hebrides, illustrate, such land is far more than just a number on a map – each a place to cherish, with a character and soul all their own. Full of natural wonders, these areas often also possess an equally rich cultural heritage, with communities that continue to work with the landscape rather than against it.

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPH: JOE CORNISH/2020VISION



Assynt forms part of a key area of wild land that encompasses a national scenic area



PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES HILDER



PHOTOGRAPH: JIM KNIGHT

AREA 1: MERRICK, GALLOWAY HILLS

Covering the Merrick, Mullwharcher and Silver Flowe, southwest Scotland's only core wild land area is also at the heart of the recently-designated Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Somewhat ironically it was only 30 years ago that Mullwharcher was proposed as a site for the storage of nuclear waste, but today once you get away from the popular tourist path up The Merrick, these hills are wild, lonely and windswept with rough terrain and few visitors.

Running up the eastern flank of The Merrick is Silver Flowe National Nature Reserve – an extensive assemblage of blanket bog that is a designated RAMSAR site and home to the rare azure hawker dragonfly. With peat that can exceed depths of 7m, it can be a challenging place to explore.

In recent years there has been a programme aimed at recreating the natural forest fringe around the flanks of the hills which, together with the removal of inappropriate conifer plantations, contributes to the feeling of wildness that has attracted golden eagles to nest in the region.

As one of the darkest places in the UK, and indeed Europe, the area was awarded gold standard Dark Sky Park status in November 2009 – the first such site in the UK and one of only five in the world. With special events running year-round, there are plenty of opportunities to experience the dark skies or to join guided walks through this wild and lonely place.

Ed Forrest, Project Officer, The Southern Uplands Partnership
www.sup.org.uk

**AREAS 2/3: TALLA-HART FELLS/
BROAD- DOLLAR-BLACK LAWS,
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY**

The high plateaus and glaciated valleys of the Talla to Hart Fell area of wild land are unique to the south of Scotland and more akin to landscapes of the Highlands. While there are no Munros in this area, there are a number of Corbetts and

Donalds that attract many walkers. Two of Dumfries and Galloway's highest hills, White Coombe (821m) and Hart Fell (808m), nestle within its heart.

The area comprises steep rolling landform with deep valleys and rounded peaks of glacial origin. The more rugged, rocky summits in particular have a strong sense of remoteness, with little overt human influence on the landscape. Home to black grouse, ring ouzel, dotterel and mountain hare, plus interesting flora such as bog bilberry, bearberry and purple saxifrage, the outstanding biodiversity is recognised with the Moffat Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation designations on nearly half the site.

The dominant habitats across these hills are moorland with rough grass and heather, suited to the major land use of upland hill farming, although a new type of land management is becoming widespread: ecological restoration and 'rewilding'. Substantial areas of this land are now in conservation management through ownership by native woodland restoration charity Borders Forest Trust at Carrifran, Corehead, and Talla and Gameshope, plus the National Trust for Scotland at Grey Mare's Tail.

Work is underway to restore habitats such as native woodland and montane scrub that once would have thrived here so that, over time, this area of wild land will become even wilder.

Nicola Hunt, Woodland Habitats Projects Manager, Borders Forest Trust
www.bordersforesttrust.org

**AREA 14: RANNOCH-NEVIS-
MAMORES-ALDER**

Ben Nevis and the hills surrounding it are unique. For hill walkers, mountaineers and climbers, they offer a wild landscape of opportunity for adventure and connection with nature. There is a strong heritage of self-reliance in mountaineering in Scotland and this means the hills feel particularly wild. Not only can you get away from all sign of man-made

infrastructure but there is little evidence of man's intrusion in the hills by way of signs and waymarkers, or even paths in many places.

Ben Nevis in particular, being the highest peak in the UK and having such a vast scale of cliffs on its north side, is home to some of the best climbing in the world. In winter, the variable weather conditions build a type of snow-ice that forms nowhere else. Ice climbing on Ben Nevis is not restricted to natural watercourses. Snow-ice forms on the rocks and slabs to give a unique style of climbing.

This is combined with a tradition for using natural protection on the climbs, leaving the crags clean and free of fixed anchors, to give an experience that is respected throughout the world. Ben Nevis is setting a worldwide standard for adventurous climbing that is regarded very highly and is now seeing a resurgence in many countries.

Mike Pescod, Abacus Mountaineering
www.abacusmountainguides.com

AREAS 30-35: NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS

This is a vast landscape of intimidating scale (see opening spread) that extends through the remarkable mountainscape of Coigach and Assynt to the tip of Cape Wrath. Home to Scotland's first European Geopark, and with a wildness unlike anywhere else in Britain, this is a land of pristine beaches, plunging sea cliffs, lochan-studded moorland and a roll call of some of Scotland's most celebrated and unusual peaks.

Steep sided with ragged tops, iconic mountains such as Canisul, Suiulven,



A patch of
cottongrass
illuminated by
the setting sun



Wild sides (from left to right): the Galloway hills are home to the UK's first Dark Sky Park; views over Gameshope Burn; climbers on Ben Nevis



PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE PESCOC

Quinag and Foinaven sit like sentries watching the march westwards of industrial-scale wind farms. Pockets of shrinking, ancient woodland dot the landscape too; here and there, trees peep over rocky shoulders and hide in gullies as if waiting to burst forth and head off the technological enemy with a spread of new saplings and fresh green leaves.

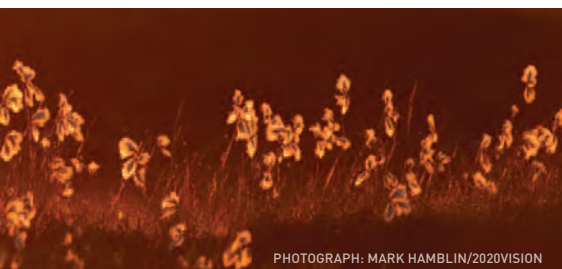
In one corner of this remarkable area, a group of landowners has joined forces to develop a 40-year vision for breathing new life into the landscape. The Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape (CALL) partnership, which brings together local communities, landowners and NGOs – the Trust included – enables those with interests in the area’s natural and cultural heritage to share skills and expertise.

This exciting partnership is putting in place the building blocks for a more coordinated and holistic approach to managing the landscape. As part of this approach, the remaining fragmented and isolated patches of native woodland will be jointly managed on a broader landscape scale, with the aim of reconnecting and expanding enduring fragments, while also creating new woodlands.

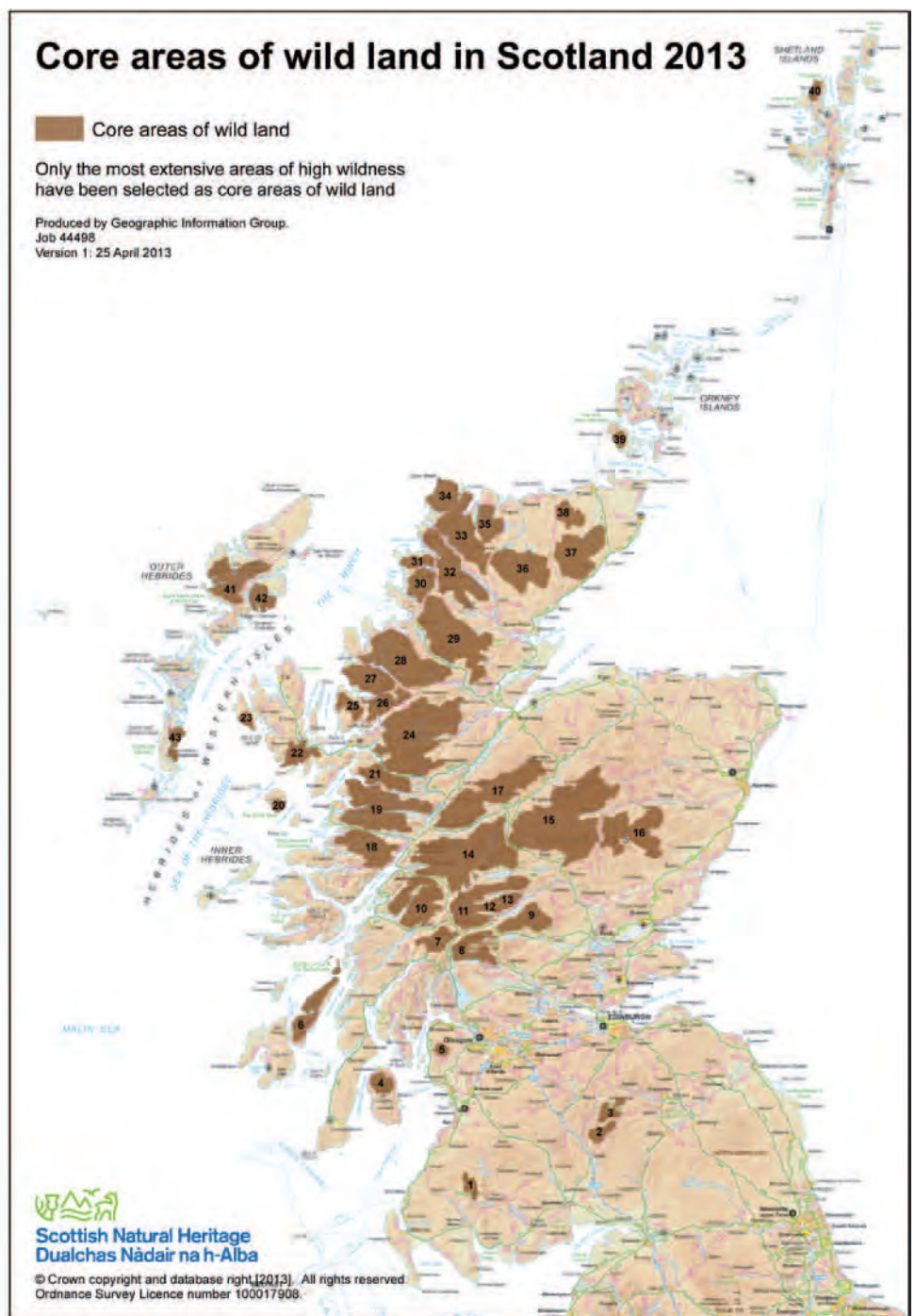
But as CALL works to restore woodlands depleted by generations of insensitive management, it’s the 150m-high metal trees with revolving arms that pose the most immediate threat to the tangible sense of wild space found in this wonderful part of Scotland.

Fran Lockhart, Property manager – Nevis, Sandwood & Quinag, John Muir Trust

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION





Close to the land: the Harris-Uig hills are home to hardy crofters, small-scale eco-tourism businesses and glorious beaches (below)

PHOTOGRAPH: LAURIE CAMPBELL/NORTH HARRIS TRUST

AREA 41: HARRIS-UIG HILLS

Stand on the improbably vast beach of Tràigh Mheillein in North Harris, opposite the restored holiday homes and abandoned ruins on Scarp, and the whitewashed houses of Mealasta in Lewis can clearly be seen five miles to the north. A short hop in a boat, but 75 miles by road ...

This is country as wild and remote as any in Scotland – a land of small but spectacular coastal mountains and semi-impenetrable moor and bog. The variety of wildlife is astonishing. Golden and sea eagles, red- and black-throated divers, greenshank, golden plover, dunlin, mountain hare, Atlantic salmon ... the whole area is a refuge for some of our most important and threatened species.

Here, too, are historic tales of human endeavour and perseverance in a harsh landscape. Feannagan (lazybeds) corrugate the hillsides, old shielings hug the banks of allts and abhainns, while beehive dwellings occur almost anywhere, appearing out of the hillsides like tiny monastic cells.

Today, this magnificent area of wild land hosts a surprising amount of economic activity. Small numbers of hardy crofters still send their sheep out onto the moors and hills, and the rivers of Lewis are world famous for their salmon fishing. Meanwhile, community landowners such as the North Harris Trust are promoting tourism and bringing in money through small-scale renewable energy projects. And increasingly, as the Outer Hebrides wins more and more international tourism awards, small eco-tourism businesses are helping visitors to discover for themselves the natural wonders of this exquisite landscape.

Mick Blunt
Area manager (Western Isles), John Muir
Trust; Owner, Hidden Hebrides
www.jmt.org; www.hiddenhebrides.co.uk □

Passionate response

The SNH Core Wild Land map public consultation generated a total of 410 submissions, with 300 in support of the map. For sake of comparison, other recent public consultations saw a total of 472 responses on alcohol minimum pricing; 139 on reducing the drink driving limit; and 56 on the abolition of corroboration. It was not just the scale of support for the map but also the eloquence of the responses that underlined how passionately people feel about Scotland's wild land. Here is a snapshot of some of the responses:

'We feel that the wild lands map is an essential tool in the identification and protection of one of the Highlands' increasingly valuable – and yet increasingly threatened assets – wild land.'

Aigas Field Centre (Scotland's foremost nature study centre which last year hosted BBC's Winterwatch).

'The Core Areas of Wild Land map is a useful tool for illustrating where this nationally important asset is located. If given sufficient weight, it will provide protection against inappropriate development.'

Speyside Business Alliance (a consortium of businesses in the Strathspey region)

'We support the wild land designation not least because it would have clearly helped us in our fight against the Erribol superquarry proposals, which would have devastated Laid and Loch Erribol.'

Laid Grazings and Community Committee, Sutherland

'The protection of the areas of wild land indicated by SNH is of vital importance to businesses such as ourselves operating in the tourism sector, based in the glens and other areas adjacent to the wild land areas. The importance and value of maintaining these wild land areas to tourism businesses cannot be overstated.'

Walkhighlands (multi award-winning online tourist guide)

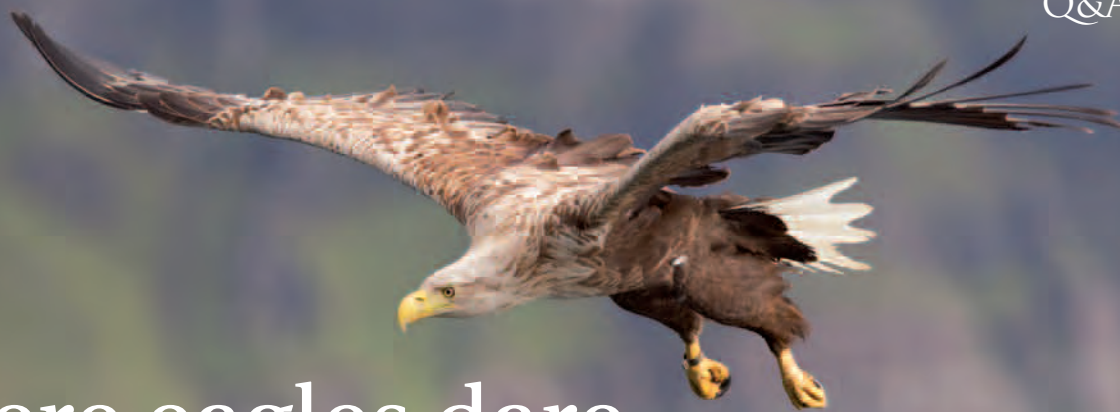
'Areas of wild land are needed, and need to be safeguarded, for the repose of the human spirit as well as for nature.'

John MacAulay (boat builder and crofter of Flodabay, Harris); Alastair McIntosh (Centre for Human Ecology & School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh); Robbie Nicol (Head of the Institute for Education, Teaching & Leadership, University of Edinburgh)

All 410 responses can be viewed at www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1184205.pdf



PHOTOGRAPH: LAURIE CAMPBELL/NORTH HARRIS TRUST



Where eagles dare

Susan Wright talks to prolific nature writer Jim Crumley about his latest title, *The Eagle's Way*, and what drives his writing



How was it writing this particular book?

Inevitably you enjoy writing some books more than others. *The Eagle's Way* is actually my 26th book, and I enjoyed writing it more

than most. It surprised me at almost every turn and lured me to some of the most important landscapes of my life – the Tay estuary where I grew up, the wider Trossachs area which I think of as my nature writer's 'territory', Argyll and Mull, Skye, and Orkney.

The time I spent at the 5,000-year-old Tomb of the Eagles in Orkney gave me much more than I had bargained for, and set the tone for so much of the research.

The interaction of the two subjects of the book – the golden eagle and the sea eagle – was utterly intriguing because I have known golden eagles for over 30 years, whereas the sea eagle has really only come into my life in a significant way over the last four or five years. And I was aware that I was writing nothing more than a chapter of a story that will evolve dramatically over the next 20 years. A nature writer can't ask for anything more really.

What do you enjoy most about being a nature writer?

Pretty well everything. I love to write and being in nature's company. It is essentially quiet, contemplative work and that suits my temperament. The fact that I can also make a living doing it constantly astounds me.

Why are wild places important?

For two reasons. Firstly, they are important for their own primitive sake; they are governed by nature's priorities rather than ours (which invariably compromise nature's) and give us the opportunity to study those priorities. Secondly, because they are good for us. The godfather of modern nature writing in Scotland, Seton Gordon, put it thus: 'In

the immense silences of these wild corries and dark rocks, the spirit of the high and lonely places revealed herself, so that one felt the serene and benign influence that has from time to time caused men to leave the society of their fellows and live on some remote surf-drenched isle – as St Cuthbert did on Farne – there to steep themselves in those spiritual influences that are hard to receive in the crowded hours of human life.'

Ironically, he was writing (in 1924) about Lurcher's Gully, where the crowded hours of human life in the guise of skiing development have long since obliterated any vestige of the spirit of the high and lonely places.

How can we change the attitude of land managers to see beyond deer and grouse?

Well, I suppose we could wait for hell to freeze over. Or the conservation movement becomes more political, more willing to flex its *collective* power in common cause, and, by demonstrating that there is a better way of managing land that gives nature its head, begins to squeeze the old regime out. Scottish Government support for organisations like the John Muir Trust to buy sporting estates and run them as showcases for nature conservation would help. So would a new agency to replace Scottish Natural Heritage – one with real teeth, the ability to make laws and to acquire land. The grouse moor and the deer forest are the two most unnatural ways imaginable to run a Scottish estate. The more land that is managed naturally, the healthier the land and the greater its biodiversity. The benefits for people would multiply immeasurably.

What should we do to gain wide support for a wilder, richer Scotland?

Work harder. There is no other way. It applies equally to every conservation organisation and every individual who cares. Be more proactive at spreading the word, hold more public meetings, more road shows, get more political, win friends in professional politics, write

more letters, join in more phone-ins, and find new ways to work collectively so that the strength of the movement is visible and, in particular, so that politicians understand there are a lot of votes in nature conservation.

How does land ownership fit in or is it all about land management?

It's both. Land ownership reform is long overdue. We should consider a maximum acreage of land ownership by individuals, a presumption against land ownership by companies that have nothing to do with land management (insurance companies, trust funds, banks, oil companies etc), and state funding to assist individuals and organisations that undertake the restoration and expansion of every native habitat. And national parks should be owned by the nation, rather than by fractious coalitions of often unwilling private landowners.

There's much to fix in our world and Scotland in particular. Where do you find hope and inspiration?

Hope: in the everyday example of people who love the land – people who plant trees, and wild flower meadows, people who spread the gospel of beavers, musicians like Dougie Maclean, people who write me encouraging letters!

Inspiration: the forgiveness of nature; rainbows; swans, eagles, otters, wolves, aspens, Scots pines, rowans, ancient hazel woods, alpine flowers, orchids; other writers – Gavin Maxwell, Seton Gordon, George Mackay Brown, Burns; mountains – Marsco, Ben Ledi, Suilven, Braigh Riabhach; the Americans – Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, David Carroll, Nancy Lord, Aldo Leopold. And John Muir, of course. ☐

Further info

Jim Crumley will celebrate the launch of *The Eagle's Way* at the Trust's Wild Space visitor centre in April. For a review of the book, see p33.

About the author

Susan Wright is the Trust's head of communications. She can be contacted at susan.wright@jmt.org



PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA MARTIN

Award for all

Whether it's climbing a hill, snapping snowdrops or building a bird box in the playground, our initial contact with nature can be the start of a personal journey towards valuing wild places. **Rob Bushby** reminds us why the John Muir Award is such a central component of the Trust's work

IT WAS JENNY'S FIRST ever presentation: just four PowerPoint slides and a crumpled piece of paper with a few scribbles on it. She could have been aged anywhere between 35 and 55; it was hard to tell from an appearance that could fairly be described as 'lived in'. As the new regional manager for the Trust, it was my first John Muir Award presentation, too. Held at the Big Issue offices in Glasgow, the event was small scale and low key, involving half a dozen vendors and staff. But from Jenny's shaking hands and bright eyes, you could tell this meant something.

She wanted to tell us about watching this kestrel in Pollok Country Park. Her group had been involved in path maintenance and they had stopped to take in their surroundings. "So this kestrel, in this field, he was beautiful," Jenny said, going off script. "Then he came across the field, right up to me. So I stood at the fence and put my hand out," she continued, vivid



Teachers, rangers and youth leaders come together at a recent Award Providers' networking event in Dunbar

raptor images coming to mind for those listening. "Then he bit my finger!" It turned out that Kestrel was the name of a horse.

Jenny then told us about her first ever sighting of a kingfisher on the same day – "this amazin' blue flash". She described how proud she was of her path work and the camaraderie involved, and finally what it meant to be presented with something that acknowledged her experiences and successes. It was the first certificate she'd ever achieved.

It's a very personal thing, connecting with nature. Many of us find our own pathways to the wild. But many also appreciate and value a little support along the way. It might be to help de-mystify 'the environment', the offer of resources and ideas, or a catalyst for new partnerships and fresh thinking. That, in essence, is the function of the John Muir Award.

To have progressed from working with 1,500 people in 2001 – of which Jenny was one – and 70 groups, to a UK-wide network of 1,100 organisations helping over 29,000 people gain their own Award in 2013 is quite an achievement for the Trust. Behind the numbers lie thousands of similar personal stories, from a Cairngorms pupil rapping "Pick up ya littaaa!" to the Environment Minister and a Cumbrian primary school class counting 92 flying marsh fritillary butterflies, to the student on a recent Outward Bound expedition heard to comment: "Wow! That view across the Rois Bheinn is like something I would expect to find on a computer desktop!"

ORIGINS AND GROWTH

The John Muir Award was established in response to a statistic from the early 1990s that only 0.1% of 15–24 year-olds in Scotland were involved in environmental organisations. It was launched in 1997 in Dunbar where, fittingly, the Trust will hold its AGM this year. From the outset, the Award has been tied closely to Muir's ethos – one of care, curiosity and creativity – and has kept Muir at its heart ever since. Its structure – spend time discovering wild places, explore them to encourage awareness and understanding, do something to conserve them, and share those experiences – invited participants to actively engage with this philosophy, and remains unchanged to this day.

My own introduction to the Award came in 1995 when I had the opportunity to pilot it with Venture Scotland volunteers and unemployed young adults. At the time, I described the Award as "tying a ribbon around what we did". It helped blend adventurous activities, the environmental dimensions of our Bothy Ventures in Glen Etive, and developmental aims such as building confidence, communication and teamwork into an integrated whole. It's a proud claim to fame to have presented the very first John Muir Awards (pre-launch) in October 1995.

Being open to all was also part of the ethos from the start – an aim that was codified in 2000 when the target was set for 25% of all Award participants to be from 'inclusion' backgrounds (a target that has been exceeded every year since). By 'inclusion' we mean organisations that work with people who experience some form of exclusion or disadvantage. This may be due to ethnicity, age, unemployment or disability, and is interpreted by referencing government

indicators such as free school meals and Indices of Multiple Deprivation where appropriate. The importance of this approach was confirmed by our three-year study with the University of Glasgow (see Award timeline sidebar, p19) which showed that those from the poorest backgrounds are six times less likely to access wild places.

The absence of age limitations has opened the Award up to all sorts of adult audiences. This approach incorporates peer learning – with teachers and outdoor leaders participating alongside their charges – and invites family shared experiences. It also embraces the interests of adult groups, from college adult education classes, to conservation volunteers and health walking groups, as well as drug and alcohol recovery services.

It's always interesting to reflect on why so many people have embraced the Award over the years. One reason is that it doesn't treat 'the environment' as a bolt-on, or as the realm of specialists. Nor is it about competition, winners and losers, us and them. Instead, it works with people 'where they are at', letting them tell us how and where they want to get involved, in ways that suit them (whilst ensuring time requirements and criteria are met). The result is that we see the Award being used by music teachers as well as outdoor instructors, by lads and dads groups alongside asylum seekers, in a King's Cross nature park, at an open prison, and on the summit of Ben Nevis. People use it because they like a degree of structure and support, flexibility, ownership and recognition. Oh, and they get a lot of enjoyment out of it, too.

OUTDOOR CONNECTIONS

Just how well (or otherwise) we are connected to the outdoors today is a subject that has seen much media coverage in recent years. If we only consider the eye-catching headlines about childhood obesity, 'nature deficit disorder' and excessive screen time, then we'd be forgiven for thinking that our 'disconnect' with the outdoor world is beyond salvation. But that's a misleading picture; such headlines ignore the many thousands of teachers, outdoor instructors, countryside rangers, volunteers, care workers and parents who connect with wild places every day.

And they are just the ones we're privileged to hook up with on a regular basis, with many more outside the contact of our 13-strong team of Award staff. Hundreds of thousands of mainly, but not solely, young people experience nature through residential runs by The Outward Bound Trust, YHA, Local Authorities, Wide Horizons, Kingswood and many others. Nearly 600,000 people participated in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch last year, while there are now more than 150 million visitor days each year at our National Parks. The Wild Network, which emerged from the National Trust report, Natural Connections, (see article in Journal 53) and is affiliated with the widely publicised Project Wild Thing film, now has more than 6,000 organisations and individuals behind it.

And there are many other positive signs. In an education context, the current political climate offers

more opportunity now than for many years. Scotland, in particular, has the potential to be a world leader in 'outdoor learning' through its Curriculum for Excellence and with a strong policy lead from Scottish Government and Education Scotland emerging. We also see increasing use of outdoor learning approaches across the UK, and there is plenty of scope for more – according to Playforce, 74% of children feel that the outdoor environment is not used enough by teachers during the school day.

Meanwhile, the likes of Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales now promote people engagement more than ever before, and our National Parks focus heavily on helping visitors to have positive experiences. The health, well-being and educational benefits of time spent outdoors are increasingly articulated by NGOs and associated networks, academic sources and the media. Now more than ever, there is an open door for engaging with the outdoors.

CORE ROLE

If we focus only on the negative stories about disconnecting from nature we neglect the successes, the lives transformed, the investment of time, energy and expertise of outdoor professionals and enthusiastic 'amateurs' alike. Through the Award, the Trust has spent 17 years exploring what works, what inspires, what connects, and sharing lessons learned. The sustainability communications agency Futerra urges the Trust and others like us to 'sell the sizzle', while Common Cause for Nature recommends a focus on how amazing nature is, and encourages action and creativity. We wholeheartedly agree.

Of course, the Trust now has an ever broader remit, but as it works to protect wild places, seeks to influence planning and policy, and restore ecosystems on the land that it manages, it's easy to forget that many people wouldn't even have the opportunity to connect with the natural world if it wasn't for the wide range of organisations using the Award. As Trust chief executive, Stuart Brooks, points out: "We will only protect our wild places for future generations if we engage with this one – and that needs to happen across the UK and across all sectors of society."

What's also clear is that the Award helps the Trust engage an audience far beyond its current membership demographic. In this sense, the Award is an outreach tool that has helped the Trust develop a UK-wide presence through establishing long-term partnerships with organisations of all shapes and sizes, as well as working with individuals and families. We now work with all 15 national parks in the UK, including dedicated management resource in the Lake District, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, and Cairngorms (where we celebrated a decade of partnership in 2013). Meanwhile, The Outward Bound Trust, YHA, Phoenix Futures and The Wildlife Trusts all have strong working links with us, as do more unusual and creative initiatives such as Mission:Explore and It's Our World.

It's also heartening to see that our track record, and growing expertise, is increasingly being recognised. We're often called upon by government, educators and communication for information and perspectives. Examples include Scottish Government

investing in our work to engage people in Year of Natural Scotland; the Award being referenced by the schools inspectorate; contributions to Holyrood's Education and Culture Committee evidence session on outdoor learning; and participating in the Common Cause for Nature research into communicating values. So, as well as urging people to 'get out there', the Award also plays a significant role in shaping the social and political landscape in which people connect, learn and develop.

Outdoors writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish once asked, rhetorically, in a magazine editorial, whether we needed 'a new John Muir'. His response was no, we needed *thousands* of John Muirs. The conservationists of the future need a first taste of wildness, and the value of what it can bring to their lives.

The Award exists to offer that and is being picked up by both mainstream and 'hard-to-reach' groups to be shared with people in increasing numbers. People like Stuart who was introduced to the Trust's newest property, Glenlude, by Phoenix Futures. "When I was young, my Dad sometimes took me to the Campsie Hills," he explained. "He planted a seed, but I went off the rails in my teens. This has brought me back to that, and given me a sense of responsibility I never had before."

And then there is Philip, an S3 pupil at Bucksburn Academy High School, which delivers the Award across mainstream, additional support needs and community courses: "It's instilled in me an interest and a curiosity about nature I do not think I have ever felt ... the John Muir Award is a different subject to say the least! You exercise your creativity and intuition in a way other subjects can't do."

Now something of a movement rather than simply a tool, the Award can be a starting point; it can add value to what groups already do; and it celebrates what people achieve.

NEXT STEPS

But what does the future hold for the Award? The best result would be that it is no longer needed – that the natural world is so woven into our lives that it becomes obsolete. But we're not there yet, and probably never will be. For now, the Trust has a dedicated team of Award staff and a growing network of over 1,000 organisations working towards this goal. It's very much part of the Trust's wider Vision.

It's always a particular thrill for colleagues when an Award recipient from years gone by resurfaces to say 'I did my own Award and now I'm helping a new group with theirs' or 'My experience opened up a new career path'. What's really positive is that we are hearing this more and more.

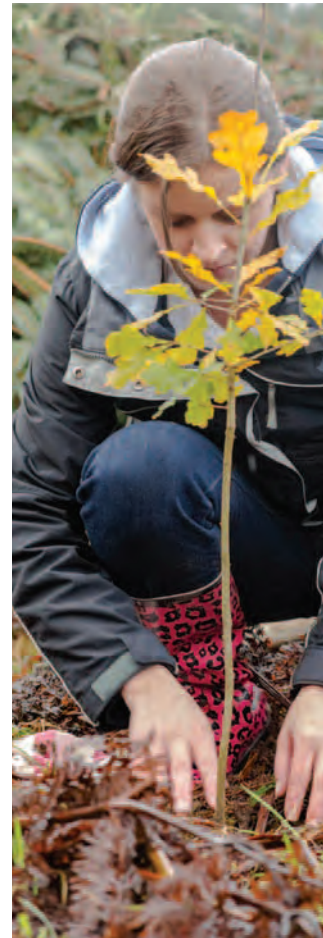
And while I don't know that we've heard from Jenny recently, I remember her, and I do know she remembers her path, her kingfisher, and Kestrel. □

Further information

Visit www.johnmuiraward.org to enjoy a ten-minute introductory film about the John Muir Award and learn more about how to get involved.

About the author

Rob Bushby is the John Muir Award manager at the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at rob@johnmuiraward.org



Outdoor connections: (clockwise from above): tree planting at Glenlude; the Award's UK-wide reach is stronger than ever; the John Muir Award team; Cumbernauld High School pupils in the school garden prior to receiving their Award certificates; working together with The Outward Bound Trust on joint-branded message boards

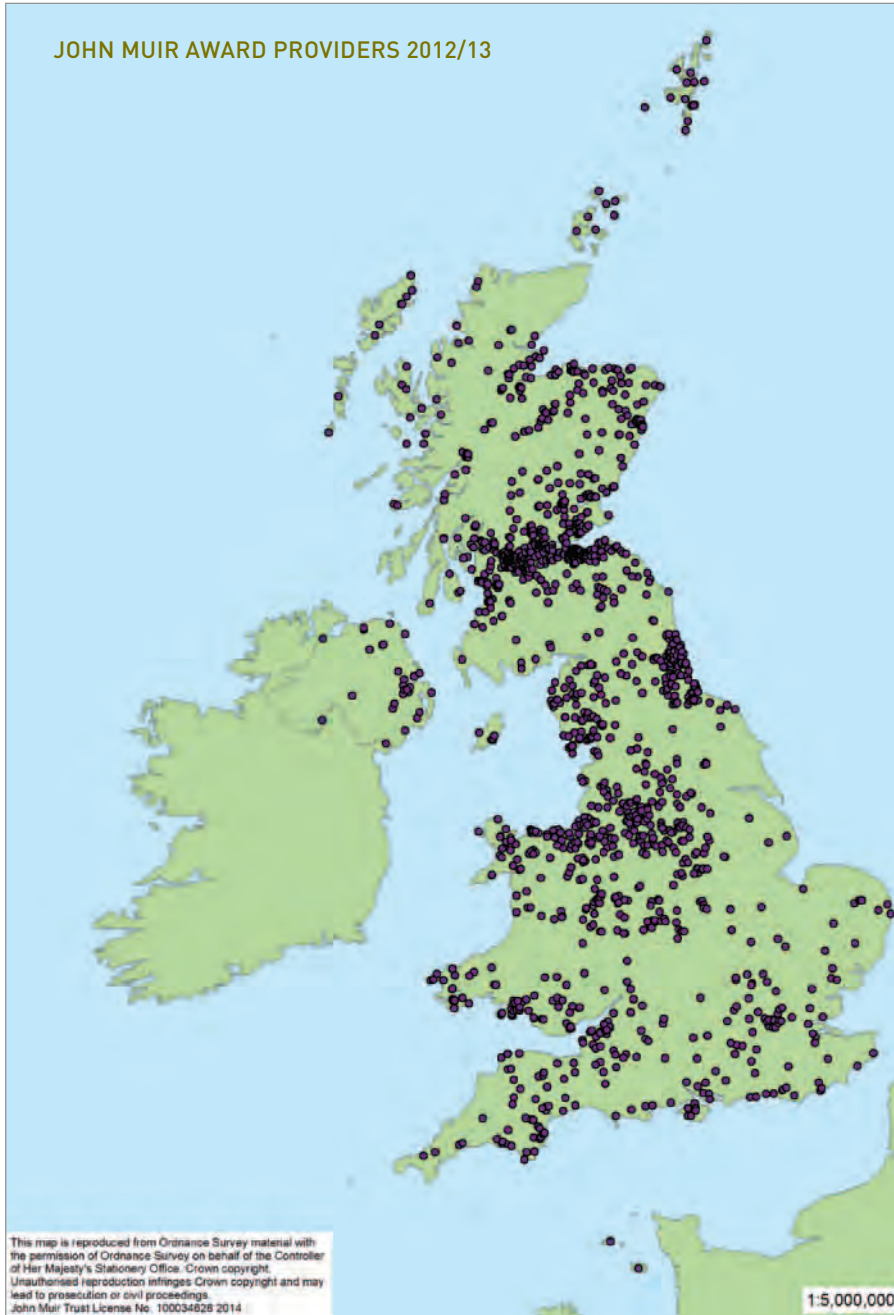
Perhaps more than ever before we need to better understand our relationships with wild places and natural processes.





PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

JOHN MUIR AWARD PROVIDERS 2012/13



PHOTOGRAPH: ROB BUSHBY

Award timeline

Key moments from the Award's history to date:

- 1995**
Feasibility study and pilot.
- 1997**
John Muir Award officially launched in Dunbar.
- 2001**
Two regional managers for Scotland appointed.
- 2002**
7,000th Award presented by Doug Scott.

Managers appointed to run Award in Wales.
- 2003**
Cairngorms National Park Authority employs Award manager
- 2007**
50,000th John Muir Award is presented in August.

Tenth birthday of the Award.
- 2009**
Three-year study with the University of Glasgow and Glasgow Centre for Population Health to assess the Award's impact on health-related behaviours, attitudes and aspirations of participants.
- 2011**
Full-year audit showing the value and impact on wild places of Award Conserve activity (11 key habitats saw 24,432 days of 'conserve' activity, valued at £977,280).
- 2012**
Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £350,000 to help establish a team of three to manage Award activity in England over the next five years.



PHOTOGRAPH: THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST



PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA MARTIN

Come on in

With a prime position on Pitlochry's busy main street, the Trust's new Wild Space visitor centre has proved hugely popular with locals and visitors alike – with those who step inside transported to a very different world, writes **Richard Rowe**

PHOTOGRAPHY: CRAIG MACLEAN

Step inside: Jane Grimley and team offer a warm welcome to all who visit the Wild Space

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a year makes. Once an unloved, empty shop front, the ground floor of Tower House has been transformed into a high-quality exhibition space, gallery, shop and meeting room that offers an oasis of calm amidst the hustle and bustle of one of Scotland's busiest tourist towns.

Unsurprisingly, visitors are often heard to remark on the ambience of the Trust's new Wild Space visitor centre – a tranquil place in which to reflect on the power of wild landscape thanks in part to the beautiful imagery that looms large in the space. Comments such as 'brings the protection of wild land alive' and 'made us focus and think' are typical of those found in the centre's visitor book. Many also comment on the smell of new wood which still lingers in the space and seems to add another tangible link to the outdoors.

It's the kind of feedback that delights Jane Grimley, who has managed the Wild Space since its opening on 22 April last year. "We are very different to what else is on the High Street," she says. "I hope it's a place that members can be proud of and I hope all who come in remember it for the friendly welcome."

BUSY START

With the Wild Space having welcomed almost 30,000 visitors during its first ten months of operation, the Trust has been vindicated in its decision to create a first ever shop window to the world. Its head office already occupied the upper two floors of historic Tower House, so it was logical to buy the shop and basement below when the opportunity arose. The purchase and subsequent remodelling of the whole building was made possible thanks in large part to generous funding from Alan Reece, a long-time supporter of the Trust.

"Alan passed away before the Wild Space was finished but we're sure he'd have been pleased with what we've done," says Jane. "He loved getting out into the hills and he wanted the Trust to have a public space that would inspire others to love wild places."

With its double-glass front, open plan design, use of natural materials – including a striking interactive display carved in layers of windblown native oak, cherry and ash, plus Douglas fir – the Wild Space is light, airy and inviting. It also has great 'kerb appeal' with the windows featuring an ever-changing display of prints from past exhibitions, books and foraged finds from the surrounding hills to tempt people through the door.

Inside, visitors can put on headphones and listen to stories from Trust properties, watch the Trust's film at the centre-piece of the interpretation, or just browse a well-stocked shop with a range



Something for everyone (from left): appealing window displays, events such as the recent reading and book signing by Robin Lloyd-Jones and a fantastic retail offer are proving a major draw

of outdoor and nature-related books, plus gifts for children and adults alike. From day one, the Alan Reece Gallery has also proved a major draw, with a rolling series of exhibitions from leading photographers and artists such as Peter Cairns, David Fulford and Iain Brownlie-Roy.

MEET AND GREET

The Wild Space is as much about people as it is about wild places, and the Trust is fortunate to have someone with the energy, enthusiasm and experience of Jane as the public face of the visitor centre. Having worked in tourism in Perthshire for many years, she has a good feel for how to attract visitors through the door. And as a Trust member herself for the past decade, she understands what a significant step opening a visitor centre has been. "Running the Wild Space is a big responsibility," she says. "I owe it to the Trust, and Alan Reece, to really make it work."

As with any new venture, there was an element of uncertainty about what would happen when the doors first opened, but the Trust's optimism about the appeal of the space has proved well-founded. "We couldn't have asked for a better response to the Wild Space," says Trust chief executive Stuart Brooks. "Visitor feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and we've even had other organisations visit to get ideas and inspiration for their own visitor centres. It took a lot of energy to bring it together but when we see how we're reaching a whole new audience, it makes it all worthwhile."

A healthy interest was promoted from the outset thanks to Jane's pre-opening efforts, including the careful sourcing of stock for the shop, leafleting to local businesses and ensuring information was available at accommodation and visitor centres throughout Highland Perthshire.

"We do see plenty of locals coming in

but with Pitlochry having so much day traffic, there are lots of other people passing through," she explains. "Our shop window is a particular draw – we always try to link what's there to the different aspects of the Trust's work."

The multiple use of the Wild Space has almost certainly added to its appeal, although the retail side is its bread and butter, helping to make the centre financially viable. "I'd say there is not one single item that isn't selling inside the shop," reports Jane. "That's given me more confidence to try new things – I'm getting to know the audience well now and we have doubled the number of items on sale."

Meanwhile, the Alan Reece Gallery has really captured peoples' imaginations – both in terms of visitors and those who are keen to have their work shown in the Wild Space. The quality of work has been high, with all genres selling well. The current exhibition, *Mountain, Moor and Cliff* by award-winning mixed media artist Clare Yarrington, explores the relationship between people and landscape, and runs until 14 April.

"We are delighted to showcase such high-quality work, but also feel that the artists themselves are proud to be aligned with what we're about," says Jane. "The gallery is now booked up until June 2015, with a huge variety of genres due over the coming months."

The Wild Space is also fast becoming a hub for other creative talent and events. In February, to tie in with the Winter Words Festival at Pitlochry's Festival Theatre, it hosted Robin Lloyd-Jones who read from his new book, *The Sunlit Summit*, about the life of Scottish mountaineer WH Murray – one of the Trust's first trustees. In April, acclaimed nature writer Jim Crumley will use the space to celebrate the launch of his latest work, *The Eagle's Way* (see Q&A, p15, and review, p33).

REACHING OUT

Already a powerful tool for highlighting the work of the Trust, having a public face has also brought other benefits – namely more than 90 new members at the tills. "That's been a real bonus," says Jane. "We didn't really expect that. What is even more encouraging is that we're reaching a different age profile – families and people in their 30s and 40s."

In many cases, people come in having been attracted by the contents of the window rather than any prior knowledge of the Trust. As Jane points out, while they might not actually buy anything, all leave having learnt a little more about the Trust.

And it's that contact with the public that she enjoys the most. "I'm proud of the Wild Space, proud of the Trust and what it does in challenging times, and love to talk to people about things I believe in," says Jane. "I really feel that the three strands – shop, gallery and exhibition – combine well to emphasise the Trust's messages about the value of wild land." □

Further info

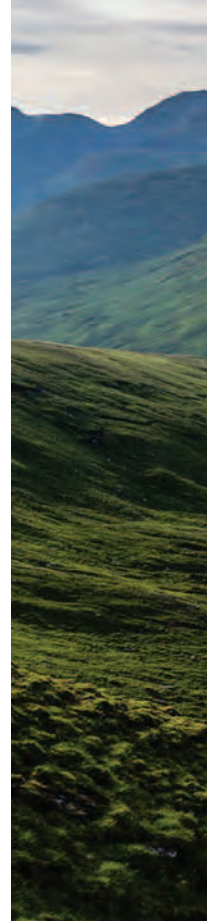
The Wild Space is open six days a week (closed on Tuesdays) from 10-4.30pm (11-4pm on Sundays). www.jmt.org/wildspace.asp

Coming soon

The Wild Space is delighted to announce that its next exhibition will feature paintings from landscape artist David Bellamy (www.davidbellamy.co.uk). The exhibition will run from 16 April to 18 June (see news item, p9).

About the author

Richard Rowe is editor of the John Muir Trust Journal. He can be contacted at journal@jmt.org



Perceptions of wildness

Chris Townsend has spent a lifetime exploring Britain's mountain landscapes, but it took time spent in true wilderness elsewhere for him to realise that all is not as it should be at home

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS TOWNSEND

A WIDE BELT OF Corsican pines runs along the coast at Formby in Lancashire. These were the first large woods I ever saw as a child; mysterious and inviting and promising excitement and adventure. Beyond the pinewoods lay marshes and then sand dunes – the highest hills I knew for many years – and finally the sea. Wandering this landscape I discovered the joys of exploration, solitude and nature. To me it was wild and vast. As a child the concept of wilderness didn't really exist. I just accepted what was there and assumed it was as it should be, and always had been.

Then as a teenager I discovered, via school trips, Snowdonia, the Lake District and the Peak District. These national parks were a revelation. The mountains seemed huge, the wildness almost infinite. Although I read natural history books, I didn't grasp anything about ecology or natural systems. I wanted to identify what I saw but I didn't understand how little I knew about how it all related. It didn't occur to me that these wild mountains could be anything other than natural and untouched. I saw sheep – plenty of sheep – but had no idea of the effect they had.

Once I'd discovered the hills, my outdoor desires changed from woodland exploration and bird watching to reaching summits and striding out along

ridges. I discovered wild camping and started carrying a tent into the hills, revelling in nights out in the silence and splendour of the mountains.

HIGHLAND AWAKENING

My second revelation came with my first visit to the Scottish Highlands. I wandered up onto the Cairngorm plateau and stood there amazed at the scale of the landscape. I can still remember the sense of shock. I didn't know anywhere this big existed. All those hills to climb! All those wild places to camp! Suddenly the English and Welsh hills didn't seem so big after all.

I set out to climb all the Munros in what I again assumed was a pristine wilderness. I read Fraser Darling and Morton Boyd's *The Highlands and Islands* to learn about the natural history of my new favourite place, but the words about deforestation and degrading of much of the landscape didn't sink in. I didn't 'see' it when I was in the hills. The bare glens looked natural, so I thought they were.

A change in my thinking came not in the Scottish hills but in the High Sierra of California. Here, in John Muir's heartland, I discovered real forests and real wilderness. I was hiking the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada and had already been impressed by the small transverse ranges and the deserts of Southern California when I reached the High Sierra and was faced with hundreds of miles of roadless wilderness. The rugged alpine mountains were magnificent but it was the forests that really impressed themselves on my mind. Many of the individual trees were impressive but it was the extent and naturalness of the forest as a whole that most affected me.

The trail rose and fell, climbing high above the timberline and then dipping down into dense forest. Timberline! There was a new and magic word. I fell in love with timberline, with that band between the bare mountains and the forest where the trees grew smaller and more widely spaced until they faded away completely. I noticed how timberline rose and



Signs of life: ancient tree stumps poke out of a Highland bog (top); woodland restoration at Carrifran, Southern Uplands (above)

‘I could no longer walk the bare Scottish glens without thinking of the forest that should and could be there’

Spot the difference: the gradual timberline found in the Cascade Mountains in the US (opposite) and a treeless glen in the Fannichs (above)



fell with the aspect of the hills – higher on the warm southern slopes, lower on the colder northern ones. No straight lines here.

The forests continued all the way to Canada. I had never spent so much time in the woods. Back home after the walk, I missed the trees and started to wonder why our forests were so small or else just block plantations that didn't look or feel like the woods of the High Sierra and the Cascade Mountains. The Pacific Crest Trail had changed me. I started to think about the tree stumps I saw sticking out of the peat in those bare Scottish glens. I started to wonder why in so many places the only trees were on steep slopes in ravines or on islands in lochs. I noticed the lack of a timberline like that in the High Sierra.

Once I started to ask these questions the answers appeared quite quickly and I understood properly the concepts of deforestation and overgrazing. I didn't though think that anything could be done about it and my growing interest in protecting the hills was still solely about preservation. Restoration was a concept still to come.

CLARITY OF THINKING

A second long American walk, this time down the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico along the Continental Divide Trail, reinforced my love of big forests and big wilderness. I was reading conservation writers now – John Muir, Edward Abbey, WH Murray – and thinking about their words. In the US, I read about restoration projects in wild areas. Back home, developments in Scotland helped my thinking develop. The year I hiked the Pacific Crest Trail, the Scottish Wild Land Group was founded. A year later, the John Muir Trust came into being. I joined both. Then, not long after I had hiked the Continental Divide Trail, the then Nature Conservancy bought the Creag Meagaidh estate and began the process of forest restoration by reducing grazing pressure. The forest could return.

My eyes open, I could no longer walk the bare Scottish glens without thinking of the forest that

should and could be there. Sometimes I regret this. It was nice being innocent and thinking this an unspoilt wilderness. But more often I look for any signs of recovery and relish them when I see them, whether it's a single sapling poking through the heather or a fenced enclosure of planted native trees intended to create a natural forest (overall I prefer not to have fences or planting but if they are the only option I don't object). Over 20 years ago, I moved to the Cairngorms, an area where the largest extent of wild forest remains, and one of my greatest joys is to see this forest regenerating and spreading.

I still return to North America every so often to experience again the vast wilderness areas. Most recently I hiked the Pacific Northwest Trail and saw magnificent Sitka spruce in its natural habitat. Each time I see these glorious forests I think that with will, determination and effort our wild areas could be so much more natural and wooded. □



About the author

Chris Townsend is a prolific outdoors writer and photographer with a passion for wilderness, mountains and long-distance walks. He has served as President of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and is currently Vice President of the Backpacker's Club and spokesperson for the Save the Monadhliath Mountains campaign. www.christowntsendoutdoors.com



Running repairs

With the audit of more than 100km of footpaths on Trust land complete, a major round of repair work is now planned – with the heavily-eroded path on Bla Bheinn one of several priority jobs. **Chris Goodman**, the Trust's footpath project officer, explains

IT'S SEPTEMBER 2012 and I'm on my way to Bla Bheinn, one of the most celebrated hills on the Isle of Skye. It's easy to see why. Standing apart from the rest of the Cuillin, imposing buttresses towering high above Loch Slapin, it is a mountain full of presence and grandeur.

Having set off from the car park by Loch Slapin about half an hour ago I've reached a point where I can see a broad path leading up into Coire Uaigneach ahead. Visible from such a distance, it's condition is a concern already. I'm here to survey the path together with trainee Thomas Harper who pushes a measuring wheel while I take pictures, measure the path width and make notes on its condition. The work is part of the Trust's comprehensive audit to establish the extent – and condition – of the path network across all of our properties.

This is my first time on Bla Bheinn, so I don't know what to expect. We cross the Uaigneach burn and begin to climb the broad path that was so visible from below. Up close, it looks even worse. The path, if you can call it that, is about seven metres wide and set in a gully almost a metre

deep in places. A swathe of vegetation and hundreds of tonnes of soil have been lost over a 300m stretch of the path. It's a dry, sunny day, but evidence suggests that when the skies open, a considerable amount of water washes down this way – the key to understanding what has happened here.

Foot pressure from walkers frequently wears away upland vegetation to create a path. On its own, this might not be too much of a concern but when heavy rain then runs down the path, it washes away the exposed soils, leaving behind awkward stones in a narrow gully. When this happens, walkers instinctively step onto easier ground to the side of the path and the process repeats itself. Here on Bla Bheinn, I'm looking at a severe case of erosion caused by a combination of steep ground, a wet climate and the popularity of the hill itself.

Bla Bheinn has captured the imagination of people since the days of pioneering local climber Alexander Nicolson, who considered it one of the finest peaks on all of Skye. And with the main route to the summit less demanding than many of

the other high summits on Skye, its popularity amongst walkers is only further enhanced.

WHY WE INTERVENE

We all visit the hills for different reasons, but maybe one of the most valuable is the opportunity to step away from the man-made world and reconnect with the natural. To walk on low-key upland trails, or even away from paths altogether, offers a sense of freedom and adventure not often found in day-to-day life. We spend so much of our time travelling on roads, pavements and built trails, so to find our own way across remote ground is to see the world from a subtly, but profoundly different perspective. To me, that is immensely rewarding.

And that's why the decision to introduce man-made features into an otherwise unbuilt path is not taken lightly. It's also why, before any work is undertaken, there is a great deal of thought not only about whether it's absolutely necessary to intervene but how we can adapt standard techniques to make the work as low-key and 'naturalised' as possible. I don't enjoy



High and mighty: Bla Bheinn in all its glory; the heavily-eroded path into Coire Uaigneich (below)



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS GOODMAN

‘The decision to introduce man-made features into an otherwise unbuilt path is not taken lightly’

walking up heavily-engineered formal paths with flights of stairs and that’s exactly the feedback I tend to receive from other hill walkers too.

That said, it’s important to remember that any path in the hills is already a man-made feature – the cumulative effect of so many boots heading for high places. And when this results in a stretch of eroded ground several metres wide, then that also detracts from our experience. This is the real reason behind path repairs; it’s not to make the path easier or ‘nicer’, but to protect the environment, the spectacular landscape and the sheer joy of being in wild places.

We aim to repair this stretch of the Bla Bheinn path this year – a major job that will require specialist contractors. Their work will ultimately determine the nature and feel of the path, so we need to work closely with them to come up with innovative solutions that marry their experience and craft with our determination to protect wild land.

We’re also trying to involve communities in the decision-making process so that those with an interest in the hills and feel protective of them understand why and what we’re doing, as well as have a chance to input into those decisions. Sometimes local knowledge on the history and dynamics of a path can be invaluable, plus of course it is those locals who see and use a path so often that are most affected by any work undertaken.

WIDER WORKS

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to keep a path or repairs as low key as we’d like – especially on very popular routes – but we do try to ensure that they remain as in keeping with the surroundings as

→ continued



Digging deep: a Lochinver-based contractor working at Sandwood recently (left); sensitive path repairs incorporating existing rock features at Steall Gorge, Nevis (below)



possible. In addition to this stretch of path on Bla Bheinn, there's a similar level of erosion at Druim Hain where the path climbs out of Glen Sligachan towards Loch Coruisk. This is remote ground and is likely to require on-site accommodation for contractors to undertake any repairs there.

Meanwhile, at the north end of Glen Sligachan, the short, steep climb onto Druim na Ruaige enroute to Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach is in the early stages of erosion. Although not too badly damaged at present, it has the potential to erode rapidly, so pre-emptive work will help to avoid a repeat of what has happened on Bla Bheinn. Elsewhere, on other Trust properties, the largely unbuilt path on Quinag requires intervention on some of the steeper sections, while the paths at Nevis, Schiehallion and Sandwood all also require ongoing maintenance.

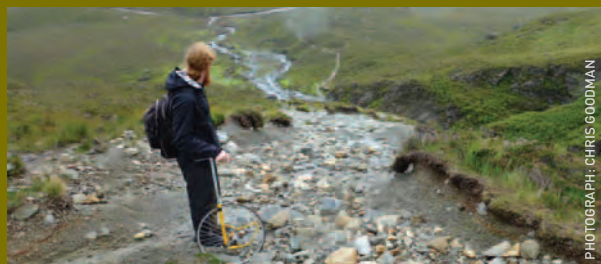
Phase one of our path project will see the repair of acute cases of erosion such as on Bla Bheinn, but after that the focus will be on pre-empting the process of erosion to prevent this kind of damage from happening in the first place.

In May, the Trust will launch a major new footpath appeal to secure funding for path maintenance and pre-emptive repairs, and eliminate the need for some of the more costly and intrusive work that we would otherwise have to undertake. It's all part of a strategic, long-term vision for protecting our spectacular landscapes and ensuring that we can all continue to enjoy the hills and 'get away from it all'. □

About the author

Chris Goodman is the Trust's footpath project officer. He can be contacted at chris.goodman@jmt.org

Priority paths



One of the Trust's primary aims is to inspire people to connect with nature, so we want to maintain paths on our land in an appropriate condition. However, we don't want to sanitise or urbanise our wonderful wild places. As such, we look to repair or reconstruct paths to a high standard, so that the visual and ecological impact is kept to a minimum, while striking a balance between maximising walkers' enjoyment and protecting the wild land and habitats they come to visit.

To date, mainly out of financial necessity, our approach to path management has been reactive and somewhat piecemeal. Without a wider strategy, repair work has been carried out on an ad hoc basis by contractors and volunteer work parties. We're now taking a much more proactive approach, so long as finances allow. We know that many of our members and supporters are great hill walkers and have supported our path appeals in the past. If you'd like to support our path work, please speak to the fundraising team on 0131 554 0114, or email kate.barclay@jmt.org

There is plenty of work to be done. Of the 31 paths covered in the Trust's recent path audit, a total of eight paths were prioritised as requiring work:

Bla Bheinn, Strathaird – one of the most popular and accessible of Skye's Munros. Approx 300 metre section (pictured above) is the worst case of path erosion on Trust land. Substantial work required to repair and consolidate seven-metre-wide gully.

Sligachan to Coruisk, Strathaird – route into loch Coruisk from Glen Sligachan over Druim Hain. A remote site with significant section of erosion that needs substantial work to repair.

Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach, Sconser – a small hill near Sligachan that offers a fairly easy hill walk and good views. Steep section of path in early stages of evolution likely to erode dramatically if not protected.

Ben Nevis – a heavily used but robust path to Britain's highest mountain. Needs relatively minor works to contain path.

Schiehallion – a popular Munro, particularly with groups and families. Major works carried out in 2002. Now needs additional stone work and resurfacing.

Spidean Choinnich & Sail Gorm, Quinag – robust path to lower summits on Quinag. Some steep sections on high ground will need pitching to consolidate.

Sail Gharbh, Quinag – old stalker's path leads to bealach and the summit of Sail Gharbh. Steep section on high ground will need pitching to consolidate.

Sandwood Bay – popular and fairly easy path to Sandwood Bay. Needs further ditching and drainage features to protect from on-going erosion and path spread.

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Nature's way

Rewilding is about enabling nature to heal itself – already a key part of the Trust's approach to land management. **Susan Wright** and **Mike Daniels** explore the potential dawning of a new age

IMAGINE A WORLD where our forests and woodlands are growing instead of disappearing. Where space for nature and ourselves is expanding rather than shrinking. Where species aren't being lost or persecuted. Where top predators are at home in the habitats in which they belong. Where wildlife is diverse and thriving. And where natural processes are working as they should in all their infinite complexity.

It isn't a radical vision. It's a world that still exists – in corners of the Amazon, swatches of North America and even nooks of Europe (in Romania and Poland, for example). But much of our natural world has been unravelling for centuries. We've chopped down trees, concreted over wilderness, dammed rivers, blown off mountain tops, torn out hillsides, extinguished species and belched out enough carbon dioxide to radically change our climate. We're frantically, rightly, trying to reduce carbon emissions but without reducing consumption. And while we panic, we're ignoring John Muir's keenest insight, that 'When we

try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.'

Deforestation, flooding, upland management, carbon sequestration, peat extraction, climate change – they're all connected. And while we might regret the impact we humans have had on the environment, we know we can't go back in time to a magical point where everything was more in harmony than it is now. But what we can do is take a good hard look at where we are, how we got here and how we can reach a better point in the future. A future that builds on restorative decisions made today.

BUILDING MOMENTUM

This future might depend on a global movement that's quietly gathering force; a movement for rewilding. It's a movement born out of loss but which recognises all that we could gain if we adjust our current trajectory and take aim towards a wilder, richer future. It's a movement bursting with hope



Beavers have already returned as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial in Argyll (main); woodland regeneration at the Trust's Knoydart property (above right)

and positivity and encouragement, which has the potential to galvanise people.

'Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, reimagine, and reconsider,' the author and environmentalist Paul Hawken has said. And, we might add, rewild.

So what is rewilding? "For me, rewilding is about restoring natural processes and allowing them to happen, whether that's encouraging trees and rivers to do their thing, or allowing predators and prey to interact more naturally," says David Hetherington, ecology advisor at the Cairngorms National Park Authority who produced a report last year *Assessing the potential for the restoration of vertebrate species in the Cairngorms National Park*.

By this definition, rewilding is already embedded at the heart of the John Muir Trust. From inception, the

→ continued



PHOTOGRAPH: SUSAN WRIGHT

The Trust and rewilding

Rewilding is seen as a rather modern concept, but it's what the Trust has been doing on its land for a long time – working to re-establish natural processes on properties and improve their ecological function. For most of our properties, the initial objective has been to reduce grazing pressure, from either domestic or wild grazers, to a more 'natural' level where trees and shrubs can begin to grow again.

Once the foundations are established, birds, mammals, plants and insects can recolonise under their own steam. This is beginning to happen on Trust properties where we are able to exert some control. It's also happening across other areas in the UK, and encouragingly on a landscape scale not just within the confines of nature reserves. But our starting point is a very long way from a desired outcome due to centuries of land use that has been working against nature.

Over the next few months the Trust plans to stimulate and contribute to a wider debate on rewilding in the UK. In particular we want to help develop a practical vision for rewilding and understand our place within it. We want to help establish a more cohesive context for species reintroductions based on what is possible as well as desirable. The debate needs to engage the full range of decision makers and land managers for change to be implemented at the necessary scale to make a difference.

There is already a burgeoning coalition of the willing. I hope we can convince others of joining us to shape a wilder future. Rewilding is not about turning the clock back but about finding a new, wilder future – a new-wilding if you like. Our members' views are important, and if you would like to contribute to our thinking, please do get in touch with our head of land and science, Mike Daniels (mike.daniels@jmt.org), or one of the trustees.

**Stuart Brooks, chief executive,
John Muir Trust**

‘Evidence has accumulated around the world of how top predators are the key to functioning ecosystems’



PHOTOGRAPH: LAURIE CAMPBELL/NORTH HARRIS TRUST



PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN WATSON FEATHERSTONE/TREES FOR LIFE

How it could be (from left to right): sea eagles and wild boar have already returned, but what price the wolf?

Trust's management of land has taken a light touch approach to help natural processes reassert themselves – for example, favouring natural tree regeneration (the preferred way of encouraging growth of native woodlands) and maintaining deer numbers at levels the land can naturally sustain. Rewilding encompasses the restoration of native woodlands, including high mountain habitats such as dwarf birch and montane scrub (now almost entirely extinct in the UK) through to the reintroduction of native bird and animal species.

HEADLINE GRABBERS

The potential reintroduction of keystone species that have significant impact on their environments such as lynx, beaver and wolf tend to grab the headlines – for example, when author and activist George Monbiot suggests that elephants could still be roaming Europe or when Paul Lister of the Alladale estate in Easter Ross talks about his plans to bring back wolves and bears to the Highlands. Neither notion is as crazy as they might seem; certainly not from a biological or geographical point of view. Monbiot's book *Feral* (reviewed in the last issue of the Journal) does a good job of explaining why.

The reintroduction of the wolf is the predator most often seen as synonymous with rewilding (see Let's talk about the wolf sidebar, opposite). Perhaps this is due to the use of the word 'wild'. A wolf has sharp teeth, will kill a sheep and has been thoroughly demonised for centuries in legend and fairytales. Unlike a domesticated cow or dog, it is 'wild'. But a wolf is also a top-of-the-line predator. Its reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park in the United States has provided hard evidence of the importance of this species to functioning ecosystems, and has helped demonstrate

the concept of trophic cascade where the impact of one species resonates through an entire ecosystem. A great video on YouTube, narrated by Monbiot (and viewed over 2.5 million times), explains how wolves alter the course of rivers by way of the Yellowstone example.

Meanwhile, evidence has accumulated around the world of how top predators are key to functioning ecosystems. In January, the results of a study by researchers from Australia, the US and Europe revealed that the rapid loss of top predators such as dingoes, leopards and lions is causing an environmental threat comparable to climate change. It found that the removal of large carnivores, which has happened worldwide in the past 200 years, has effects that domino (cascade) through food chains and landscapes.

The study looked at the ecological impact of the world's 31 largest mammalian carnivores, with the largest body of information gathered on seven key species: the dingo, grey wolf, lion, leopard, sea otter, lynx and puma. It concluded: 'There is now a substantial body of research demonstrating that, alongside climate change, eliminating large carnivores is one of the most significant anthropogenic impacts on nature.' And it's not just carnivores. The elimination of other keystone species such as beavers has a far reaching ecological impact through their absence.

Yet in continental Europe there has been something of a rewilding renaissance in recent decades. The lynx has been introduced into seven countries, beavers into 25, while the wolf, under its own steam, has returned to countries such as France, Belgium, Denmark and even the Netherlands. Of course, this has not been without conflict and controversy in some areas and for some groups of people. However, the majority of citizens in these countries have welcomed the return

of these natives. Indeed there is both a legal imperative (under Article 22 of EU Habitats and Species Directive) and a moral imperative (if we believe we are part of nature and not just a user of it) to consider such reintroductions. And in the UK we have to act upon this imperative even more firmly than in continental Europe. The wolf or lynx are not going to make it here on their own. If we want them back we are going to have to bring them in.

PART OF THE PUZZLE

So how do reintroductions fit into rewilding? The simple answer is they are part of it. Ecological restoration and ecosystem enhancement without the return of some key predators will only take rewilding so far. To achieve the full effect you need the full range of species, especially the keystone ones whose impacts cascade through the whole system. Within the UK too there is a growing rewilding movement. There have been positive returns of species such as beaver, red kite and sea eagle following official reintroductions, and the more recent unofficial appearance of species such as wild boar as well as beavers on the Tay catchment.

Yet others – osprey and crane – have returned under their own steam and, miraculously, have not been shot to extinction. These flagships are the vanguard not just for a growing rewilding movement but a growing wider public awareness that our impoverished fauna and flora doesn't have to stay impoverished if we don't want it to.

"If we adopt a bigger, more ambitious approach then we're saying we want something better for our landscapes than keeping them in their degraded state," comments Hetherington. "We can transform them into more vibrant places for both nature and people."

It's heartening that across the UK fledgling ecological restoration projects are under way. All have different approaches, ownership and management structures. Some are merely about restoring species that are already there, while others seek to reintroduce lost species. But from Wild Ennerdale to Alladale, from Glenfeshie to Dundreggan and from Glenlude to Glen Nevis a range of projects are now attempting to restore, enhance and ultimately rewild at least some of our land.

This then is perhaps the dawning of a third age in UK wild land conservation. First we had protection – simply to declare an area a nature reserve or a national park was enough. Then we had active conservation – the recognition that we had to actively manage habitats and species to enable them to survive and thrive in our heavily human-modified landscapes. And now we have rewilding, drawn from the understanding that it's not enough to simply preserve what we have. We have gone too far down the elimination route for that.

Unless we bring back lost species and restore natural processes we will not truly be able to cherish our wild places. Surely we can afford a corner of the country where nature in the raw, in tooth and claw, can reign supreme? □

About the authors

Susan Wright is the Trust's head of communications. She can be contacted at susan.wright@jmt.org

Mike Daniels is the Trust's head of land and science. He can be contacted at mike.daniels@jmt.org

Let's talk about the wolf

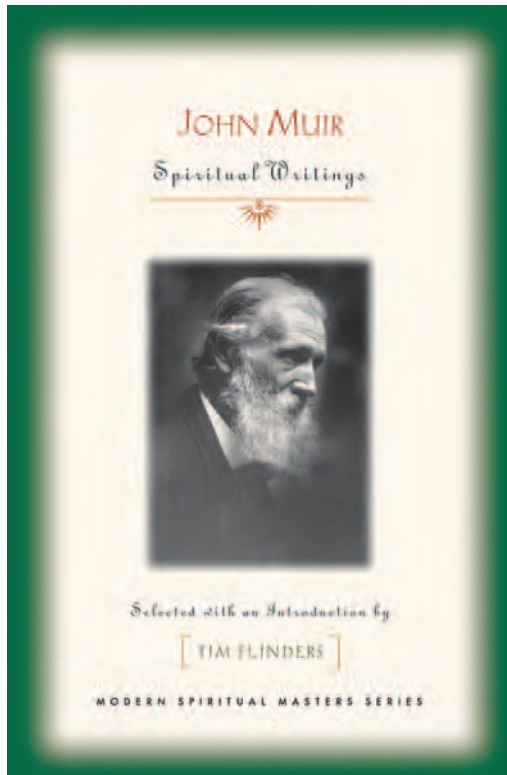


Wolves have returned to much of continental Europe, so could they be here in the UK too?

The most potent symbol of rewilding is undoubtedly the wolf. There's no ecological reason why wolves couldn't come back – we have the climate, the habitat and the food. The weight of evidence suggests that the absence of the wolf has had a profound effect, impoverishing our ecosystems. Culturally, though, we have distanced ourselves from the wolf, demonising it beyond rational or logical argument. Many are afraid of the 'big bad wolf' even though they are far more likely to be harmed by their pet dogs (or indeed their horses) than by any wolf, if it were present.

Yet in most of the rest of Europe, where the wolf is returning, the majority of people seem pleased or proud to have it back. From Poland to Portugal, wolf ecotourism is growing as rural communities cash in on the appeal that this wildest of carnivores has for many people. Of course, not everyone is enamoured. In Sweden, when the courts recently overturned a proposal to cull 30 wolves, farmers and hunters claimed that their way of life was threatened to such an extent that civil unrest was possible.

Our relationship with the wolf runs deep in our ancestral make up, and there's no doubt our natural history and our wild land is profoundly entwined with this key predator. What the future holds though is much less certain.



John Muir Spiritual Writings, with an introduction by Tim Flinders

Ali Wright explores Muir's spiritual side in this deeply reflective collection of journal entries

THIS COLLECTION of John Muir's journal entries highlights some of his revelations about life and the universe, as well as the deep connection to nature that he experienced during his time in the wilderness. A brief introduction is given by Tim Flinders, a California-based lecturer and researcher on spirituality, in which he highlights some of the spiritual themes that run through the book. While Muir is renowned as a naturalist, writer and environmental advocate, this is the first book that focuses on his more unorthodox thinking which he himself self-censored in his published writing at the time.

Muir's writings do indeed provoke that feeling of connection felt by many of us in nature, if only for a fleeting moment. It seems he maintained that higher state of consciousness for much of his time in the Sierras, although he did also engage in some ascetic practices such as fasting and sleeping rough without a blanket. 'You bathe in these spirit beams, turning round and round as if warming at a campfire,' he writes. 'Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence.'

Most of his ideas about the nature of the universe seemed to stem from this exalted state, while much of the language he uses to describe it is biblical in tone. Muir refers to nature in terms of God and creation, but never as being at odds with evolution. He also recognises the oneness of everything and love as being a universal force, flowing through everything: 'Rocks and waters ... are words of God and so are men. We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love.' One of his entries suggests he also mastered the art of mindfulness, a popular practice in modern-day spirituality: 'There is no pain here, no dull, empty hours, no fear of the past, no fear of the future.'

It is interesting that 100 years later California became home to the hippie movement that popularised such thinking. Can this be traced directly to Muir? Or is it the magic of California that inspires such thinking? It's a fascinating thought and one which the book doesn't

analyse in any detail. Certainly, the writings collected here suggest that not only was Muir the father of the environmental movement in the United States, but that he also perhaps foreshadowed West Coast new age spirituality.

Another theme highlighted by Flinders was Muir's belief in the equality of everything in 'Creation.' 'From the dust of the earth the creator has made Homo Sapiens from the same material he has made every other creature.'

This was in direct contradiction to Christian thinking at the time which held that man had dominion over nature. Indeed, people were still wrapping their heads around the theory of evolution (Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published only a decade before Muir's travels in Yosemite) and here was Muir saying not only did we all evolve from the same stuff but that every living thing is equal and has a right to be here. He recognised early on that there is an intrinsic value to nature, beyond its utility to man.

And as Muir deemed everything in nature to be inter-connected, there followed a belief that science and spirituality were not mutually exclusive. It was through deep observation that he saw how perfectly nature works and how nothing is wasted. He writes of a harmony of life and death where things are 'eternally flowing from use to use, beauty to yet higher beauty.' Such concepts gained currency in late 20th-Century ideas such as permaculture, biomimicry and cradle to cradle design. Despite experiencing a few telepathic experiences himself, Muir thought that a belief in the mysterious or supernatural led to a 'blindness to all that is divinely common.' Nature *was* the mystery.

It would have been interesting to read more discussion about how Muir's spiritual ideas and philosophies fitted with those of his time, and how they compared to other cultural belief systems, both before and after. Also, whether such revelations were entirely brought upon from experience, or whether he was influenced by anyone. Certainly, whether you are a believer or a sceptic, but are in any way drawn to nature, this collection will make you want to head for the woods to find out why. □

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The reviewer

Ali Wright spent many years in California, working latterly in permaculture design, before returning recently to Scotland. She runs The Earth Fixers blog at www.theearthfixers.com

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The Eagle's Way, Jim Crumley

In his latest book, nature writer Jim Crumley turns his attention to our relationship with eagles – including the reintroduced sea eagle. It leaves Mike Daniels wondering whether we will ever truly accept large predators in our midst

THE GOLDEN EAGLE has particular resonance for wild land. Dick Balharry, the Trust's former chairman, believed that the simplest definition of wild land was the distribution of the golden eagle. Our recent wild land mapping strongly supports this hypothesis – there is a high degree of overlap between the two. Golden eagle country *is* wild land. And if golden eagles are symbolic of wild land, then sea eagles are symbolic of rewilding – returning a predator that man eradicated less than a century ago.

But man's relationship with predators is polarised. The golden eagle was last year voted by the public as the most popular animal in the 'Year of Natural Scotland'. It is currently subject to a petition in the Scottish parliament to make it the national bird. It is highly protected by law. And yet the National Farmers Union of Scotland recently declared that sea eagle numbers were 'out of control' while, in the last seven years, the deaths of *over 20* eagles have been investigated by police on grouse moors in Scotland, with to date not a single prosecution. These facts illustrate the stark dichotomy that exists between those for whom the glimpse of an eagle is an exhilarating, once-in-a-lifetime experience, and those who see them as 'vermin', killing things they want to kill.

Jim Crumley explores his and our relationship with eagles in his latest book. His nature writing is as always a powerful cocktail of fascinating fact, nature-infused poetry and thought-provoking insight. On the factual front, the book explores our past relationships with eagles. From the Tomb of the Eagles in Orkney, where sea eagles were worshipped and performed human sky burials for our ancestors, through population estimates that indicate the past and relative abundance of both species (650 pairs of golden and 2,550 pairs of sea eagles), to exploding the myth that sea eagles will have a detrimental impact on golden eagles '...the essential truth that for ten thousand years

since the Ice Age, golden eagle and sea eagle thrived side by side.'

The author's poetic imagery belies the thousands of hours he has simply sat and watched, immersed in the natural world. From watching an individual golden eagle, his '... idea of her life is gleaned from scraps she lets fall like discarded feathers', while the sea eagle is '... a shape shifter' that, when it flies, '... deploys something like a half-opened parachute ... an apparently uncoordinated acreage of wingspan'. And in relation to the ecological role that eagles play in our wild land '... the eagle is all the wolf nature has to work with'.

Much of the book's focus is on the impacts, perceived and real, that reintroduced sea eagles have made. As a species, they are much more comfortable around people than golden eagles. They are also, by any standards, massive birds, such that '... the sudden appearance of such a huge predator at such close quarters and in the midst of [our] workaday world is an extraordinary and intrusive event'. This, in your face, reintroduction has inevitably caused reaction: '...making enemies with axes to grind. The old morbid loathing of anything with a hooked beak is surely our most stubbornly enduring Victorian legacy, and its disciples have never had a hooked beak quite like this one with which to vent their spleen and grind their axes.'

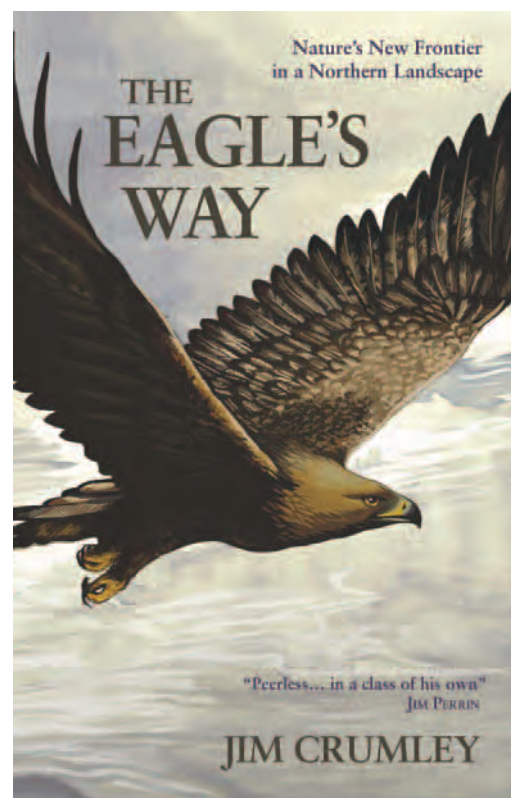
It is a sad truth that a century after we first exterminated sea eagles from our country, history is beginning to repeat itself. There have already been poisonings and shootings, nest destruction and pedalling of myths that sea eagles 'could take children'.

On the other hand, the economic case is making itself – the sea eagle 'economy' of Mull has become a well-documented phenomena. We need to make more of the moral and ecological case for restoring lost species, both for their sake and ours. As the author states: '... the principle of repairing a systematically raided ecosystem by installing new native blood at the top of the food chain is one that cannot fail. That, and the restoration and expansion of every native habitat is all the help nature needs to recreate something of an older, wilder order.' □

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www.saraband.net

The reviewer

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More...

Jim Crumley will celebrate the launch of *The Eagle's Way* at the Trust's Wild Space visitor centre in April. For a Q&A with the author, see p15.



Susie Allison researched and wrote *Scottish Trail Running* to share the activity that makes her most happy – going for a run, preferably in as wild a place as possible. Nicky McClure learns more

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUSIE ALLISON

So, what is trail running exactly?

Trail running means running on paths and tracks through the countryside, away from roads. Off-road trails can be found everywhere – in the middle of town as well as in Scotland's most scenic areas. A trail run can be anything from a 10-minute urban exploration to a multi-day wilderness adventure.

What do you need to do it?

It's easy to get started with running – all you need are a positive mental attitude and a pair of trainers. You can begin with whatever sports clothes and shoes you already own. As you explore rougher, muddier paths, trail shoes are a good buy since they have more grip than normal trainers. You'll also want to ditch the cotton t-shirt in favour of synthetics. If heading out for long runs and into remote areas, then it helps to have a lightweight rucksack/bumbag to carry supplies.

What makes a good trail?

Great scenery, a clear runnable path and a logical circuit. For my book, I put a lot of effort into route selection as I wanted to show the variety of fantastic scenery we have in Scotland – from Borders hills and East Lothian sea cliffs to wild Highland glens and the golden sand beaches of the northwest. I also wanted to make them mostly easy to reach, so chapters focus on towns and popular tourist areas such as the Cairngorms, plus a few wild routes further afield to show the potential. The routes also had to meet strict criteria on 'runnability' and almost all are circuits. I drove all over Scotland to run all the potential routes, sometimes as many as three in a day.



Source of inspiration (clockwise from above): Susie with a copy of her book; cliff-top heaven near Sandwood Bay; running wild on Raasay

Did you include any trails on Trust land?

Yes! I'd camped at Sandwood Bay many years ago and knew I had to include it. It was my third run of the day and I nearly didn't go due to tiredness. I'm so glad I stepped up to the challenge! Turning it into a circuit was tricky: I had to stretch my runnability criteria, but it was worth it. As well as the gorgeous beach, I was delighted to find an exhilarating cliff-top path. I remember running along it with the sun setting over the sea – it was spectacular.

What's your favourite trail?

That's a hard one. There are 70 in the book! The project gave me an excuse to run in all the most beautiful parts of Scotland. I love the wilder routes in places like the Cairngorms, Assynt and Knoydart. My route on Raasay is a bit rougher and muddier than most but had to be

included because of its incredible view of the Cuillin on Skye. Then the one that I never tire of is close to home on the West Highland Way. It includes that first glimpse of Ben Lomond – a tantalising taste of the stunning hills ahead.

What do you get from trail running?

I am happiest in the outdoors and travelling light and fast gives me such a feeling of freedom. Although terribly cheesy, 'cleanses the soul' is the right expression to describe what trail running does for me. Getting out for a run, in as wild a place as possible is a proper reset; my motivation for writing the book was to share this enthusiasm and inspire others to get out there and explore Scotland.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking about trying trail running?

Start today! Look at a map and head to your nearest country park, river or canal footpath. Or pick up a copy of *Scottish Trail Running* – there is sure to be a route relatively nearby. Go easy, listen to your body and just enjoy – it's supposed to be fun! That doesn't mean it won't feel hard at times, but the most worthwhile things are never the easiest. ☐

Further info

Scottish Trail Running is published by Pesda Press, www.pesdapress.com

For more on Susie's running exploits, visit www.scottishtrailrunning.com

About the author

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