JOHN MUIR TRUST

JOURNAL

October 2008 No 45

Biodiversity: helping nature heal itself

Saving energy: saving wild land

Scotland's missing lynx

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Black grouse, one of the species likely to benefit from the Trust's biodiversity policies - page 8.

Picture: Peter Cairns, Northshots

Nigel's notes

Foreword from the Chief Executive of the John Muir Trust, Nigel Hawkins

The John Muir Trust has constantly seen change as it develops and grows as the country's leading wild land organisation.

Change is brought about by what is happening in society, the economy and in the political world, with the Trust responding to all of these. But the biggest changes in the Trust are those which the Trust brings about itself as it works to realise its ambition and aspiration for wild places to be valued, protected and enhanced. This is fuelled through the enthusiasm of our Members, volunteers, staff and other supporters.

The Trust is a wild land organisation. Some people might think that seeking the beauty and solitude of wild places is about getting away from people – and there are times when, for many of us, there is truth in that.

But building a wild land organisation which is able to take positive action to safeguard and enhance wild land is all about engaging people with the cause of the wild land they love. Everything that the Trust has achieved in its first 25 years is a consequence of the dedication and determination of the Trust's huge band of supporters and devotees – all those people who care passionately about wild land and believe in what the Trust is trying to do.

During those 25 years there has been a constant process of change as people become involved at different stages of our development and then move on, having made their mark in all sorts of different ways.

We are going through another period of change at the John Muir Trust as two of us who have been very involved in the Trust and in taking it forward, step down. In the process, opportunities are created for new people to become involved and to bring in their own energy, freshness, experience, skills and passion for our cause. We can be very confident – based on past experience – that this is exactly what will happen and the Trust will continue to develop and grow in the future.

Dick Balharry is an exceptional person who has made an outstanding contribution to the Trust during the past seven years, first as a Trustee and then as chairman. Dick is a kenspeckle figure in the Scottish countryside through his passion for wild places, his deep understanding of nature and his ability to communicate and inspire others.

Dick will complete his second three-year term as chairman in August next year. In preparation for that, and bearing in mind the other changes taking place in the Trust, the Trustees have elected John Hutchison as chairman-designate, enabling him to prepare and work in tandem with Dick during this period of transition.

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Based in Lochaber, John joined the Board last year. He has a lot of experience in the community land movement and many links in the West Highlands and Islands. In John the Trust has attracted an excellent person as its future chairman and we can feel very confident in the leadership role he will play in taking the Trust forward in the years ahead.

The other major change involves myself. This will be the last 'Nigel's Notes' I write as Chief Executive as I am standing down from this post on 28 February, 2009. Trustees have started the process of seeking a successor and I am very confident they will find an excellent person to help take the organisation forward in the future.

Having been involved in the Trust right from the start, I have seen huge changes over the years as we have developed and grown. But the one thing that has not changed is the commitment of people to our cause. I am so impressed by how people are willing to give of their time, energy, resources – and of themselves - to help forward this cause which they believe in so passionately.

Passion can, of course, lead to intense debate and huge emotional investment. But this has been part of the essential dynamic which has made the Trust such an adventurous and vibrant organisation.

I am very grateful to everyone who has shared a passion for wild land and has helped to build the John Muir Trust into the highly respected organisation that it is today.

The Trust has developed from its early days where guardianship of key wild areas was our priority. That is still very important but we now take a far wider view of how people engage with wild places and in doing so increase their understanding and appreciation of the natural world. At the same time, we wish to extend and enhance wild places and increase biodiversity – the range of animals, birds, insects, plants and fungi which can be found there.

More than 70,000 people from all walks of life have taken part in our John Muir Award and for many of them it has been a life-changing experience. We have also encouraged a national debate on issues which impact on wild places and their importance to present and future generations.

We have tried to follow in the footsteps of the great Scotsman John Muir, the father of national parks, who called on us to "do something for wildness and make the mountains glad".

Although much has been achieved – and it is humbling to look back and see just how far we have come from our first stumbling efforts - there is still so much to do. We are a long way from achieving our vision for wild places to be valued by all members of society. But at least we have started on that journey.

I wish my successor, the staff, Trustees, Members and everyone else who supports the Trust every success in taking our cause forward.

Having said that, I am not about to spend seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year out there in those fantastic wild places – much though that is an attractive thought.

I have been asked to continue my links with the Trust and deploy my knowledge and enthusiasm in a new part-time role as Director of the John Muir Trust Anniversary Foundation, the charity set up by the Trust to help raise funds for our work. In this new role, I shall be developing present and new contacts and relationships aimed at building up funds from new sources for the Foundation to channel towards the work of the Trust.

I am looking forward to this new challenge and wish to help create a very firm foundation for the Trust's future work. I have had fantastic support from everyone involved in the Trust over the years – and I thank you all for that. I very much look forward to continuing to work with friends, colleagues and acquaintances in the future.

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE?

Members display conflicting views on re-introduced species

In the July 2008 edition of the John Muir Trust's Members' News our Chief Scientific Officer, Mike Daniels, outlined the Trust's draft policy on the re-introduction of once-native species. (The key points appear in the panel.) Members were invited to contribute their views and we publish on this page extracts from some of the letters and e-mails received. As the Trustees prepare to take a decision on the policy, it is clear that our Members hold a wide, and conflicting, range of opinions on the subject. On page 11, David Hetherington expresses a personal view on the potential for re-introducing the lynx.

Here are extracts from Members' responses:

"I can see from some of the jargon-speak being adopted that the John Muir Trust is in danger of not being a 'pioneer' but of becoming another green-wash, subscription conscious, single-issue group. That would be a shame since I think the history behind the Trust demands ambitious, far-reaching and progressive policies. Even radicalism if necessary."

"The wider walking population, which often means families, may well be quite hostile to such reintroductions and it may be politically unwise for the Trust to muddle its own message by getting involved with a very different issue."

"Overall I was disappointed at the cautious draft of the policy and particularly its emphasis on current rather than historic wildlife. Much of what we think of as classic Scottish wilderness is largely a man-made wet desert, and the imbalance in favour of grazing herbivores has played a large part in this."

"Surely a wilderness as envisaged by John Muir, to be complete, should have a full complement of wildlife."

"I disagree totally with the re-introduction of once native species which could endanger both domestic animals and human life."

"It seems odd to me that your draft policy should claim a key aim to be 'to maintain robust and natural ecosystems capable of sustaining healthy populations of native wildlife' and at the same time distancing yourselves from including the very species that helped to evolve those ecosystems."

"Within a few years wild boar will become a serious nuisance and perhaps even a danger to the public. The proposed introduction of beaver will almost certainly ruin the salmon fishing in whichever rivers they colonise .... If the people who want to bring back the beavers have their way they will then demand the re-introduction of wolves and after that lynx."

"I think the biggest risk to the John Muir Trust is of being trapped into a belief that 'keeping things as they are' is sustainable or meaningful."

"Perhaps when people see how good it is to have beavers and wolves back in the countryside, and how they can live with people perfectly happily, they will get over their prejudices, but I fear it will take a long time. I am less happy about bears being re-introduced as they are a danger to walkers and campers ... We don't have enough wilderness for such a large animal."

"I would rather that the money spent on re-instating the beaver was spent in more beneficial ways, like broadleaf (native species) and Scots pine woodlands or protecting the red squirrel or creating butterfly and moth habitats."

"How about a reference within the principles [in the draft policy] to the Trust's commitment to access to wild land?"

Brown bear and cub, photographed in Finland.

PETER CAIRNS/NORTHSHOTS

"I am very much opposed to the reintroduction of wolf and bear to Scotland. In much less populous times, our ancestors did a good job in removing these species ... One of the joys of walking in Britain is the absence of threats from such large predators."

"Having bivouacked and camped on many occasions in bear, boar and wolf territory, I can understand ... why people may fear these animals, but there is little basis to justify what is yet another passive withdrawal from reality and objectivity."

Draft policy on introductions

The Trust's draft policy on re-introductions of once-native species is underpinned by three principles:

- **The Trust's focus is on the protection and management of wild land and its associated wildlife. This includes current threats to existing native habitats and species.**
- **The Trust is principally concerned with current and future management of wild land and its associated wildlife as opposed to what was there in the past.**
- **A key aim in the management of wild land is the need to maintain robust and natural ecosystems capable of sustaining healthy populations of native wildlife. Such ecosystems are also likely to be important in countering the effects of climate change on wildlife.**

Where proposed re-introductions are compatible with the above principles, the Trust will support re-introduction subject to the following conditions:

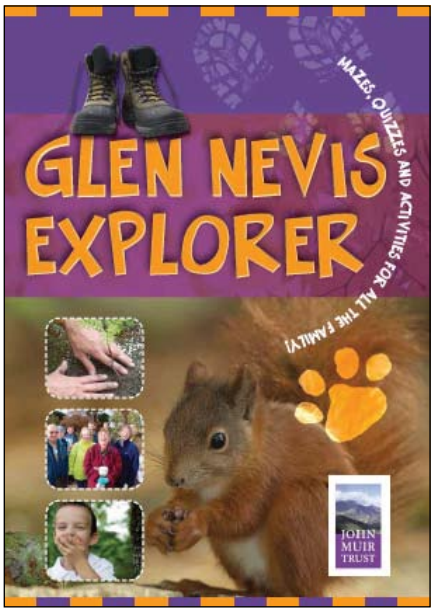
- **Full consideration being given to the potential positive and negative social, economic and environmental effects of the re-introduction.**
- **Adherence to international guideline criteria on the biology, socio-economic and legal requirements, planning, preparation and post-release for the re-introduction ie IUCN (World Conservation Union) guidelines www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/publications/policy/reinte.htm**

News

‘Glen Nevis Explorer’ provides a wild read

The Trust has produced a free leaflet for young people introducing them to Glen Nevis and Ben Nevis. It is full of information, quizzes and nature notes as well as safety advice. Playing ‘Bird and Butterfly Bingo’ might open a lot of eyes in Glen Nevis.

Copies of the ‘Glen Nevis Explorer’ are available from the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre.



DICK BALHARRY

Water vole success

Recent surveys show that the water vole (pictured) is thriving in Highland Scotland while there has been an estimated 90% decline in the south, mainly as a result of habitat loss and predation by mink. The Scottish water vole population appears to have escaped unscathed, largely because mink are deterred by the harsher habitat.

Evidence of this strong upland population has only emerged in recent years. Wildlife monitoring carried out last summer on Trust properties as part of the Wild Land Biodiversity Project found signs of thriving populations of water voles in the Highlands, even as high as 600m on Ben Nevis.

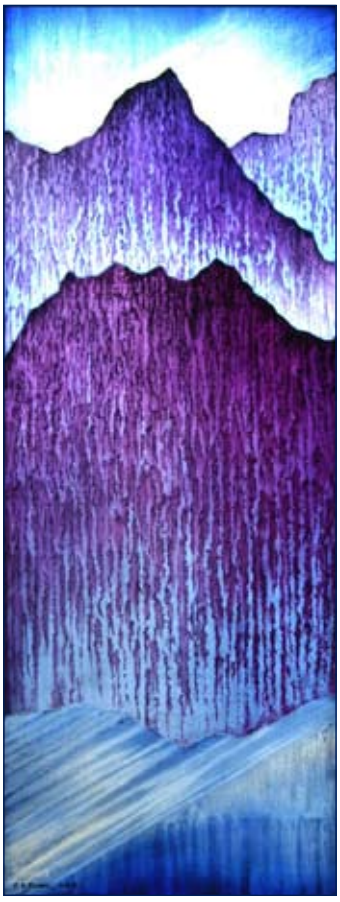
There is a distinctive Scottish genetic variation. Highland water voles are black while their cousins south of the border are brown.

A report on the Wild Land Biodiversity Project appears on page 8.

John Muir celebrated in stained glass

The life and work of John Muir is to be celebrated in an entertainment venue in Glasgow's West End. Colin Beattie, owner of the Oran Mor, has commissioned stained glass artist John K Clark to create four stunning windows inspired by Scottish landscapes as well as a glass screen incorporating the words of John Muir. John Clark trained at Glasgow School of Art and has established an international reputation from his studios in Frankfurt. The windows are now installed in one of the Oran Mor restaurants which will be re-launched shortly as 'The John Muir Room'.

Colin Beattie is a John Muir enthusiast who has walked the John Muir way and regularly commissions artistic work for Oran Mor (where Alasdair Gray decorated the ceiling) and his other pubs and restaurants, including the Ben Nevis. That connection prompted him into organising friends in a fund-raising walk to help the Trust buy Ben Nevis itself. His enthusiasm for John Muir's message, he says, is in his blood. His ancestors belonged to Tiree and he still goes back there when he can. "I want more Scots to know about John Muir," he says, "and I want more people to hear his message today."



JOHN K CLARK

Rare moth found on Knoydart

KEITH REDSHAW

The Great Brocade moth, a member of the 'Nationally Scarce B' category for British moths, has been found on Knoydart. Andy and Maggy Tebbs, moth enthusiasts from New Romney in Kent, spent time with the Trust's conservation work parties at Steall Bothy and Inverie during the summer and monitored local moth populations. They identified more than 40 species at Steall and over 70 at Inverie including the Great Brocade. 'Nationally Scarce B' indicates that the moth has only been recorded in between 31 and 100 10km squares in Great Britain since 1980.

They also identified over a dozen species in the next rarest classification of 'Local' including the Pyral Trachycera advenella, also known as the Grey Knot-horn. 'Local' means it has only been recorded in 101 to 300 10km squares in Great Britain since 1960.

KEITH REDSHAW

Top right: The rare Great Brocade moth found in Knoydart. Above: Pyral Trachycera advenella, one of more than 70 moths identified at Inverie.

Turf wall building at Skalanes

GORDON JACKSON

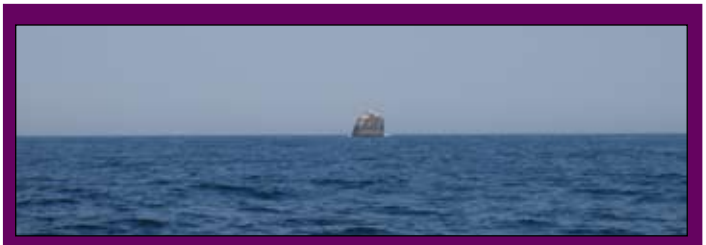
Trust volunteers go turf-walling in Iceland

Seven regular participants in Trust work parties took their skills to Iceland this summer in a follow-up visit to the Skalanes Nature and Heritage Centre on the east coast of the island (see Journal 44). Much of the work was familiar to Scottish work parties – tree planting, track maintenance and the like - but building a turf wall was a new experience for a Trust party. Carole Scott, one of the volunteers, describes it as "not unlike dry-stane dyking, but muddier". Once built, the wall was planted with plants gathered locally and then watered in, a task subsequently rendered pointless by the continual and torrential rain which led to the party being evacuated by boat as floods took out the access road.

Skalanes is a growing private reserve run by Ólafur Örn Pétursson with Wren Franklin who is in charge of conservation planning. It hosts workshop groups from abroad, university parties on field trips and also receives a fair number of day guests. Conservation volunteer work parties are less common in Iceland and their assistance is welcomed.

GORDON JACKSON

Skalanes work party underway with the Seydisfjord in the backdround.



B&B opportunity on Rockall

Andy Strangeway, the first person to sleep on all 162 Scottish islands of 40 hectares and over, is now tackling smaller islands including Rockall.

The self-styled 'Island Man' failed in May to land on the Atlantic rock which he dubs "The most difficult island in the world to sleep on". Now he is recruiting for a return expedition next year. For full details visit www.islandmanrockallexpedition2009.com

News

Bringing back the Ettrick Forest

Local youngsters have already been busy tree planting at Carrifran.

A partner organisation of the John Muir Trust is expanding a bold initiative to recreate the rich diversity of the Ettrick Forest that has long been destroyed by centuries of intensive management and grazing. The Borders Forest Trust (BFT), already working to restore valuable lost habitats and associated wildlife to this part of southern Scotland, now plans to extend its work.

With support from the John Muir Trust, BFT purchased Carrifran valley eight years ago. Nearly half a million trees have been planted there to re-create a wildwood and wildlife, such as black grouse, is returning to the land. BFT now has an option to secure 640 acres of land at Corehead, only two kilometres from Carrifran.

Corehead is a stunning area, divided into five valleys forming the source of the Annan Water. On its eastern edge is the shoulder of Hartfell which, at 808m, is Dumfriesshire's highest hill. To the west lies the Devil's Beef Tub where Border Reivers cached their stolen cattle. Once Corehead is purchased, the Trust plans to return the lost habitats of the Ettrick Forest by planting native woodlands, regenerating heathland, establishing montane habitats and re-creating wetlands. The BFT aims to encourage species such as peregrine falcon, golden eagle, black grouse, reindeer moss, globeflower, alpine rush, adder, scotch argus butterfly and mountain hare back to the hills of Corehead.

Borders Forest Trust needs to raise £700,000 by May 2009 to purchase Corehead. At the time of going to press there is still £580,000 to raise. While the BFT hopes to secure funds from grant giving bodies, individual donations are also needed. Ettrick Forest provided not only habitats for wildlife but also homes and food for Border clans such as the Johnstons, Moffats, Armstrongs, Douglas, Elliots, Kerrs and Humes. BFT is already working with local Moffats and Armstrongs to encourage clan members to contribute towards the purchase of their ancestral lands and become Stakeholders of the Beef Tub. The support of other names, from the Borders or further afield, will be welcome. Information and details on making a donation can be found at www.bordersforesttrust.org or contact 01835 830 750.

The Devil's Beef Tub, a major feature of Corehead.

Hidden gardens reveal a wild side

A task force of John Muir Award volunteers has transformed a derelict wasteland in Glasgow into a wildlife haven.

With the help of the BBC Breathing Places Campaign, the group has created a wildlife area to increase biodiversity in the Hidden Garden at Glasgow Tramway.

As well as gardening, the volunteers surveyed birds and wild flowers, and sketched, photographed and wrote about what they found.

BBC Breathing Places aims to inspire millions to 'do one thing' and encourages everyone to make a difference for wildlife. The group achieved their John Muir Discovery Awards through the project.

JAMIE GRANT

"Some days we get creative with art in the garden, if it rains we can use the greenhouses, and some days we get plenty of exercise from turning our compost." - Shali Sengupta, volunteer.

Gardening as therapy

The John Muir Trust and the Chrysalis Project have worked together to create the John Muir wildlife garden at Dundee College. The Chrysalis Project works with people with mental health problems and provides a range of vocational training and occupational activity in horticulture. The garden, which is open to college students and staff all year and to the public at certain times, was designed by a group of Dundee residents recovering from mental health issues.

The gardeners, working towards their John Muir Award, have created a meadow, pond and bogland with a wall especially designed for toads. One part of the garden has been built up and planted with wild mountain plants. Nature has been allowed to flourish in the garden with plants that are typically thought of as weeds, such as thistles and teasels, deliberately cultivated to encourage wildlife.

JAMIE GRANT

"There is wildlife all around us even though we don't notice it," says Phil Jenner, Chrysalis Project gardener. "Getting back in touch with nature gives me a real sense of fulfilment and is very therapeutic for mental health."

Mountain invertebrate survey

The John Muir Trust is working with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to survey invertebrates on three mountains on Trust land; Ben Nevis, Blaven and Schiehallion, along with Beinn Eibhinn on Corrour estate.

Staff, contractors and volunteers have been helping the Trust fulfil the contract, sampling invertebrates from tree-line to summit.

The SNH project is surveying 12 mountains Scotland-wide to:

- *provide a list of montane invertebrates in a European context;*
- *rank the species in terms of threat from climatic change;*
- *highlight areas of high biodiversity or where there are concentrations of 'rare' species.*

Below: High on Ben Nevis in June weather, Alison Austin, the Trust's Nevis Conservation Officer, and a volunteer helper check out an insect trap.

SANDY MAXWELL

Nine out of 10 people value our wild places

A report published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Cairngorms National Park Authority shows that the vast majority of Scotland's residents values its wilder landscapes. The report, looking at public perceptions, found that 91% of people think it important for Scotland to have wild places. There is also very strong support for the conservation of wild land in Scotland.

Half the people interviewed believe that wild places in Scotland are under threat and around three in five residents thought that action is required to preserve wild areas in Scotland. The main perceived threats to wild areas were development, urbanisation and humans.

The report was based on interviews with over a thousand people across Scotland and 300 within the Cairngorms National Park.

Wild places are valued because they are seen as part of Scotland's culture, heritage and tourist industry. They are also seen as important for wildlife and nature, the environment, and the local economy.

JOHN ROSS

Biodiversity

HELPING NATURE HEAL ITSELF

Understanding that everything in the world is 'hitched to everything else'

The John Muir Trust's Wild Land Biodiversity Project is a long term, ambitious vision for future generations. **Fran Lockhart** *explains what it seeks to achieve.*

If you were to explain the Wild Land Biodiversity Project to someone with no knowledge of conservation, you might say: "We are reducing deer numbers on our properties to let the plants grow". That's it in a nutshell. Nothing too startling there – until you start to look at the complexities of nature and you discover how unlikely things are connected – how nurturing alder trees may help fish such as the Atlantic salmon.

ALAN P SCOTT

BIODIVERSITY is everywhere and it is not just being lost from exotic locations such as rain forests. In the Highlands of Scotland much has been lost already; the lynx, wolf, beaver, elk and probably countless species of the less sexy types such as mosses and lichens. So what's next? Black grouse? Salmon? Wildcat? Or perhaps something that is still relatively common? Could we lose red deer if their population is allowed to grow until their habitat can no longer support them?

A typical Highland glen features a river wending its way past heather-clad slopes. A few scattered pockets of ancient birch, alder and Scots pine cling to life in steep gullies that cut down the slopes or along the river bank. They survive only because they grow where the relentless chomping of herbivorous teeth and the woodman's axe can't reach. As thousands of postcards and hoards of tourists will verify, it all looks stunningly picturesque, wild and natural . . . except it is not! It is a mere shadow of what once was; a land of moor and woodland – the great forest of Caledonia.

It is easy to criticise others for the mismanagement of our landscape; the grazing of massive sheep flocks, deer numbers kept unsustainably high, the persecution of raptors to protect grouse, the destruction of native woodland to make way for commercial timber. However, we mustn't forget that we also belong in the landscape, we are part of it and need it to survive as a species. But is it really possible to recreate the majestic forests and associated habitats of the past from their skeletal remains? That is exactly what we are trying to do. Nature is a great healer. It always fights back and that is what we are allowing it to do.

'Biodiversity' – the story of a word

In 1992 delegates from 177 countries met at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development - 'The Earth Summit' - in Rio de Janeiro. On their agenda was pollution, overpopulation, resource use, economic development, global climate change and the destruction of many of the Earth's ecosystems and the species within them. The conference defined the natural biological diversity of the planet as "the variability among living organisms from both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems." 'Biodiversity' became the in-word for what we used to just call 'nature'.

The only difference between the terms was the recognition that humans were also an important part of the natural scheme of things. The conference concluded that nature (biodiversity) could not be separated from politics (people) - something John Muir had realised over a hundred years earlier.

Butterfly signals success

Lester Standen, a wildland ranger for the John Muir Trust, was walking past scattered birches at the edge of woodland on the north coast of the Knoydart peninsula when something caught his eye: a bright flash of green, fluttering amongst a patch of blaeberry. He pulled out his camera and crawled forward. He instantly recognised the vivid colouring of the green hairstreak butterfly (pictured). It was the first recorded sighting of this butterfly at Inbhir Dhorrcail, part of the Trust's estate on the peninsula.

"The green hairstreak isn't rare in Britain but it was very exciting for me to find it here," said Lester. "This species generally occurs in small colonies where there is adequate scrub . . . the fact that they are starting to appear here is a sign that our habitat restoration programme is encouraging wildlife to return."

Twenty years ago, Inbhir Dhorrcail was heavily overgrazed by red deer and, as a consequence, was a barren place of impoverished grassland, bracken, eroding soils and exposed slabs of rock. Today it is teeming with life; a mixture of trees and shrubs has grown up interspersed with heather, blaeberry and bog myrtle. Around 350 hectares have been enclosed with deer fences to allow this regeneration of the heathland and woodland, drawing in an abundance of birds, animals and insects, including Lester's green hairstreak butterfly.

ALAN P SCOTT

Contrast in regeneration of woodland inside and outside protective fencing

Many conservation practices involve the use of fencing, sheep flocks moved round for controlled grazing and the planting of trees. The Wildland Biodiversity Project is taking a different approach. We are endeavouring to let nature heal itself by using minimum intervention and managing only that which can be attributed to human activity. We have set up vegetation monitoring to enable us to make informed decisions regarding culling of deer (rather than relying on number counts alone), removed sheep wherever possible, and controlled the invasion of non-native species such as rhododendron.

The state of upland rivers can demonstrate how the impact of the Wild Land Biodiversity Project may benefit biodiversity. In upland areas, water is typically clean and free from pollution. Such water is oligotrophic – it lacks nutrients, unlike many lowland rivers which are eutrophic, suffering from nutrient enrichment. Those of us using upland streams as a water supply may consider it to be good water quality. However, this nutrient-free state is not, for the most part, natural.

Only 2% of the native woodland that once covered half of Scotland remains. Riparian woodland would have followed our rivers and burns and the surrounding land would have been covered with native woodland up to the treeline. Riparian trees are important in maintaining a thriving freshwater habitat for fish. The fish feed on insects falling from overhanging branches and aquatic invertebrates thrive on leaves falling into the river. Alder trees, in particular, are important as they fix nitrogen from the atmosphere and accumulate other nutrients from the soil. Their leaves break down on the riverbed relatively slowly compared with those of other species, allowing a gradual release of essential nutrients into the river. This maintains the natural productivity of the water system.

The loss of riparian trees on upland rivers has led to impoverished systems with the nutrient input being reduced and soil erosion increased. By reducing herbivores on our property through the Wild Land Biodiversity Project, riparian woodland has begun to recover in small areas with promising signs of regeneration. This, in time, should help fish populations by increasing the productivity of the river system - or so you might think - but it's much more complex than that. Reduced grazing is only part of the story and we begin to realise again Muir's wisdom: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe".

Although nitrogen can be replaced in river systems, in part by nitrogen-fixing alders, there is no equivalent mechanism for replacing other nutrients such as phosphorus. As phosphorus is washed out of the soils, it passes to the sea where it can form insoluble compounds and become incorporated into rock. This loss eventually limits freshwater productivity and fish numbers can dwindle. Herbivores accumulate phosphorus from the plants they eat so when sheep and deer are removed from the upland habitat, further phosphorus is lost from the system.

So, by reducing herbivore numbers, we are increasing nitrogen levels in the river system, but may be reducing the levels of the other essential nutrients such as phosphorus! The challenge is how to reach a process in the short term that will prevent further loss and allow the system to repair as a whole and become more robust long term. When the rangers shoot deer on our properties, some carcasses are left to be eaten by scavengers and break down naturally, thus the nutrients from their bodies are retained in the system.

Leaving carcasses is by no means the complete answer. Atlantic salmon may be a key factor in returning phosphorus to upland streams. Radio-tracking shows that a significant proportion die in headwater streams or lochs close to their spawning grounds. Further studies show that marine nutrients from their carcasses pass into the food chain and are found in freshwater invertebrates. Many factors affect wild salmon populations; fish farming, overfishing, pollution and, of course, appropriate water quality. This is only one simplistic snap shot of our immensely complex ecosystem. If one link is broken, the consequences can be far reaching.

The Wild Land Biodiversity Project is a long term, ambitious vision for future generations. It is fully funded for three years (we are already well into year two) with the aim of extending it to five. By then, we would hope to see an increase in all woodland, not just riparian. We have a vision of young Scots pine regenerating in Glen Nevis providing increased habitat for black grouse, red squirrels and hen harriers; of willow scrub recovering on the lower slopes of Schiehallion; of birch woodland tentatively creeping out from the gullies on Quinag. But regeneration is not enough. We can never step back and say, "Well that's that job done." It is infinite, stretching ahead for millennia until we, as a species, can blend in once again with nature, where we belong.

ALAN P SCOTT

Trust members undertaking a transect to measure revegetation on Knoydart

Biodiversity

PETER CAIRNS, NORTHSHOTS

Black Grouse is one of the species which stands to benefit from the regeneration of woodland.

ALAN P SCOTT

Tree growth along river banks benefits water quality in Glen Nevis (above) and on Knoydart (central picture).

• Additional information from Simon McKelvie, Biologist, Conon District Salmon Fisheries Board

The John Muir Trust has launched the Wild Land Biodiversity Appeal, encouraging all those who would see a devastated terrain grow into a thriving landscape to invest in the diversity and beauty of Scotland's wild land.

Visit www.jmt.org for more details.

ADVERTS

RESTORING THE MISSING LYNX

Opinion

What would be the point of reintroducing the lynx to Scotland?
David Hetherington* *explores the potential consequences of restoring this secretive member of the cat family to Scotland.*

IT could be argued by some that there is a moral duty to restore a species that we humans made extinct in the past. More practically, lynx could be a useful deer management tool, bringing ecological and economic benefits.

Eurasian lynx once lived throughout Britain. Bones have been found at several Scottish sites and the species was known to mediaeval Gaels as 'Lugh', the name given to the Celtic god of light. The lynx is a Labrador-sized, solitary ambush hunter of small woodland deer and requires very large areas, mainly of forest, to survive. Given the early and severe clearance of forest in Britain, depriving the species of its food and hunting cover, it's perhaps not surprising the species became extinct here.

As a result of 20th century reafforestation and the strong recovery of woodland deer populations, conditions for lynx are better in Scotland than they have been for many centuries. Lynx do not require pristine wilderness, as is demonstrated by their presence in areas of Europe much more densely populated than most of Scotland.

Map showing potential lynx habitats (in green)and habitat corridors (red lines) based on author's research.

They would be equally at home in a commercial Sitka spruce plantation, picking off non-native sika deer, as in a Caledonian wood, hunting red deer calves and roe deer. Research I completed at Aberdeen University shows that suitable habitat and prey are now so abundant that a viable lynx population could be supported across much of mainland Scotland.

A lynx typically kills and eats 50-60 roe deer in a year and in some parts of Europe lynx control low-density roe populations. Research from the Swiss Alps, however, where roe and chamois densities are high, shows that lynx can have a significant effect on populations of herbivores, not by dramatically reducing their population size, but rather by changing prey behaviour, with consequent ecological impacts.

NIALL BENVIE

During the lynx's 100-year absence from Switzerland, roe and chamois clustered at high densities in areas of good feeding. After reintroduction, the expanding lynx population exploited these 'honeypots' of predator-naïve prey, driving down roe and chamois densities. After a while, the prey adapted by spreading themselves more evenly through the landscape, which allowed their populations to recover. This redistribution of prey resulted in much-reduced densities of large herbivores at their favoured feeding sites, such as young plantations and areas of regenerating woodland. The lynx's home range size had to expand considerably in order to meet their food requirements.

Foxes in Scotland have had no regular, natural predator for centuries. Evidence from across Europe, however, shows that lynx routinely kill foxes. A Swiss study of 600 lynx kills over 10 years recorded one capercaillie and 37 foxes, suggesting that ground-nesting birds might benefit from having lynx in the ecosystem.

Although extremely wary of humans and therefore very difficult to see, lynx are undoubtedly beautiful and charismatic creatures – potential icons of wildness. Since their reintroduction in the Harz Mountains of Central Germany, authorities and businesses have used lynx to promote the area – "Incredible wilderness in the Kingdom of the Lynx". There is an increased perception among visitors that the area is wild and beautiful because the wild and beautiful lynx lives there once more.

The chairman of VisitScotland, the national tourism agency, described discussion of the reintroduction of large carnivores as a "hugely positive development". Reintroduced lynx could bring real economic benefits to remote areas both directly, as people seek opportunities to catch a glimpse of such a charismatic species, or indirectly, by serving as an icon of wildness. Given the fascination such animals generate, a lynx reintroduction project could attract considerable funding not otherwise available to nature conservation.

It could be argued that all the advantages of having lynx in the landscape could apply to wolves too. However, there are fundamental differences between the species which mean that it is much easier for people in rural areas to live alongside lynx. Its relatively small size and very shy nature mean the lynx poses no threat to human safety and, unlike Europe's other large carnivores, it is not perceived as potentially dangerous by the people it lives among. Furthermore, unlike lynx, wolves live in packs and hunt by chasing prey in open habitats.

Opinion

Consequently, they can cause considerable problems by preying on pasture-grazed livestock. In countries such as Slovakia and Romania, where there are good populations of lynx, wolf and bear, the shepherds are concerned mainly with protecting stock from wolves and bears. Losses to lynx are negligible. In landscapes where sheep are grazed in open pasture, as in most of continental Europe and Scotland, losses to lynx are very small scale and localised.

In Switzerland, government funds have been used recently to reduce conflict between lynx and sheep farmers by encouraging changes in animal husbandry, subsidising protection measures and compensating for losses. This has been effective with the annual number of livestock killed by Switzerland's 100 or so lynx dropping year by year to just 15 in 2006. By contrast, in the same year, the number of sheep killed by the handful of wolves that have crossed the frontier from Italy stood at almost 100.

Encouragingly, the white-tailed eagle already provides a template in this country for the successful assimilation of a reintroduced and iconic large predator into the rural economy. Once persecuted to extinction as vermin, this bird is now highly valued and protected by the islanders of Mull, despite the odd lamb being taken now and then. These losses to the local economy are more than offset by the considerable revenue brought to the island by wildlife tourists who come to see the thriving eagle population. The Mull Eagle Scheme offers financial support to hill sheep farmers who manage their lambs in a way that reduces the likelihood of predation by the eagles. Furthermore, the scheme rewards farmers who improve habitat and help safeguard the eagles by monitoring their nests. It is this kind of positive agri-environmental funding which could permit the painless absorption of lynx into the worked and farmed landscapes of modern Scotland.

The availability of forested habitats and suitable wild prey indicates that Scotland offers favourable conditions for lynx reintroduction. Indeed, it is possible that their reinstatement, in addition to restoring natural processes in the forest ecosystem, may actually bring economic opportunities in rural areas. However, reintroduction of lynx in Scotland will only succeed if the rural human population is closely involved and is willing to co-exist with them. A meaningful and respectful dialogue is therefore essential.

CHRIS GOMERSALL/RSPB

The white-tailed eagle provides a template for successful reintroduction.

** Dr David Hetherington works as Ecology Advisor for the Cairngorms National Park Authority. The opinions expressed here are his own.*

'Leave No Trace' message spreads to Scotland

The American-based 'Leave No Trace' movement is gaining ground in the UK and training workshops are to be held in Scotland.

Toby Clark *reports.*

Eroded footpaths, tainted water sources and left-over lunches are as much part of the outdoor scene now as micro-fleeces, wet feet and sky larks.

While the John Muir Trust works to guard against inappropriate developments impacting on wild land and has had success with repairing scarred tracks, as on Schiehallion, instances of rubbish left in bothies, human waste near water sources and litter crammed into cairns and dykes play their part in destroying wild places.

Every year thousands of people climb Ben Nevis and several times each summer work parties from the Trust and partner organisations remove dozens of sacks of rubbish discarded on the summit plateau or dropped on the track. Yet this damage on Ben Nevis and other locations is inflicted by people who would, like you and me, claim to enjoy wild places. Is this behaviour the result of simple ignorance: a lack of knowing how to respect the great outdoors? Or perhaps people are not given enough advice on how to minimise impacts when walking, camping or passing through the countryside.

In Scotland, since 2005, the Outdoor Access Code has helped to shape access thinking with a focus on care, respect and responsibility. The evidence suggests more needs to be done.

This gap may well be met by the 'Leave No Trace' movement. Already it is making a mark in the UK, complementing existing outdoor access education programmes and filling awareness gaps. 'Leave No Trace' aims to influence decisions about how we can reduce our impacts when we walk, camp, picnic, ski, run, bike, paddle, ride horses, fish or climb. 'Leave No Trace' programmes increase understanding about individual responsibilities as well as offering educational resources for outdoor centres, schools and youth groups.

This autumn and winter the Institute for Outdoor Learning (Scotland), with support from Scottish Natural Heritage, is running a number of day-long 'Leave No Trace' workshops. The events are targeted at those who visit wild places with groups and aim to make links between the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and 'Leave No Trace'. Visit www.outdoor-learning.org for further details.

The 'Leave No Trace' educational approach is similar to the John Muir Trust's, as practiced through the John Muir Award. This aims to 'encourage awareness and responsibility for the natural environment, in a spirit of fun, adventure and exploration'. An educational ethic that aims to engage people in caring for, and understanding, the outdoor environment is essential. There is an urgent need for more people to place personal value on these wild places.

Visit the 'Leave No Trace' website www.lnt.org where there is a wealth of information including hands-on workshops, entertaining resource materials, inspirational trainers and the promotion of responsible enjoyment.

ALISON AUSTIN

Volunteers with sacks of rubbish left by walkers on Ben Nevis.

'Leave No Trace' originated over 40 years ago with the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. It is now a non-political, non-profit organisation developing educational programmes rooted in scientific studies and partnerships.

The information is framed under the seven 'Leave No Trace' principles:

- **Plan ahead and prepare**
- **Travel and camp on durable surfaces**
- **Dispose of waste properly**
- **Leave what you find**
- **Minimise campfire impacts**
- **Respect wildlife**
- **Be considerate of other visitors**

INSPIRATION POINT

Many of us can recall a particular place where our eyes were suddenly opened to the wonders of wild places. We will be inviting guest contributors to describe the 'Inspiration Point' where they first encountered that unique sense of being in wild places. Our first contributor is* Elizabeth Smith*, Conservative MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife and a member of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Ossian: the best place since sliced bread

Loch Ossian PHOTO: MIKE MERCHANT

EARLIER this year, before the start of what I knew would be a very busy parliamentary day, I opened my John Muir Trust Journal and my eyes fixed on the fantastic photograph of Loch Ossian.

Lots of happy memories came flooding back because Loch Ossian is a very special place for me, not just because of the outstanding beauty of the surrounding wilderness, but also because it was the place, 25 years ago, which truly inspired me with my passion for outdoor education and the important role it should play in the school curriculum.

However, if I'm being honest, that was not my initial reaction. In May of 1983, I had been asked to drive a minibus with a mountain of outdoor kit, a 3x3 canoe trailer and sufficient food for 14 pupils and two adults for 13 days, between the Glen Nevis and Loch Ossian Youth Hostels. En route, I was told to pick up 40 loaves of bread from the William Low shop in Fort William High Street.

A simple task, you might think, and, after testing the patience of many drivers while one rather reticent shop assistant and I loaded the 40 loaves of bread into the minibus, I set off on my journey. At the roundabout beside Fort William station, I became aware of the driver behind me tooting and gesticulating furiously. There were a few blank seconds until I saw in the mirror that the back doors of the minibus had opened and all but three of the loaves had spilled out on to the road - very neatly if one were to take an aesthetic point of view. There was nothing for it but to stop and laboriously empty all the bread bags into every conceivable litter bin I could find, much to the delight of every seagull on Loch Linnhe. Of course, the worst part was to return to William Low and ask for another 37 loaves to replace those which had been flattened by the passing traffic.

SALLY RAE

Elizabeth Smith

Later, during the long and very bumpy haul in from Moy to Strathossian, one arm of the canoe trailer snapped, with the result that nine canoes became six. As there was also some damage to the school minibus, it was not the most auspicious start to my career in outdoor education. But happily, things just got better and better.

Many readers will know of Tom Rigg, long-serving warden at Loch Ossian Youth Hostel in the 1980s and early 1990s; a man for all seasons and the most wonderful raconteur and expert in all things outdoor. Apart from being responsible for organising The Run (the challenge was to run the perimeter path of Loch Ossian under the hour), Tom was the man in charge of the water pumping, a Heath Robinson system which replaced the buckets and rope that we had to use when the old pier was still in place. He cleaned the chemical toilets, lit the Rayburn stove at 5.30am, filled the kettles, got the wireless to croak out a weather forecast and lit the paraffin gas-lamps.

Ossian has an ambience of both grandeur and magic and it provides the perfect setting for an outdoor education project, given its proximity to a dozen or so Munros, the canoeing and orienteering facilities and the spectacular views of both the Glen Nevis mountains and Ben Alder. The hostel may have had its 'renovation' in recent years, but in the days when it boasted absolutely no mod cons, its splendid isolation and basic subsistence living taught the pupils lessons they never forgot, about teamwork, initiative and the need for careful use of the environment.

As a teacher, I believed these lessons should be the right of every child whatever background. As a politician, I have become even more convinced of that view, particularly in today's world of fast changing values and consumer selfishness. For me, the true value of education is not about passing examinations and getting a job, although that is important, but it is about producing well-balanced, responsible human beings who are able to cope with the full range of life's challenges and able to put trust in their own decision-making.

If it is 25 years since Ossian first became my passion and source of inspiration, it is also 25 years since the John Muir Trust was founded. Like many people all over the country, I am a huge fan of the work of the Trust and everything it stands for and so I would like to end with a message of thanks and congratulations to all those who work so hard to give the rest of us such a wonderful experience in the outdoor world.

MIKE MERCHANT

The Bill Wallace Grant

Ilya Maclean won his Bill Wallace 'Go and Do It!' grant to lead a joint UK and Tanzanian team to develop ways of working with local people to protect the biodiversity of the coastal forest of east Africa. As he reports, conservation initiatives that do not involve the people who live locally are unlikely to succeed.

Tackling conservation challenges in Tanzania

The coastal forests of east Africa are a globally recognised area of great biological importance and diversity. Many species are confined solely to these forests and often found in a single forest patch. Forests only 100km apart may have an 80% difference in their plant species. The forests are equally important for their fauna, hosting no fewer than 12 endemic primate species, two elephant shrews and 15 species of endemic bird.

The forest once formed an almost continuous tract from Somalia in the north to Mozambique in the south. Only a few forest patches remain. Most of the trees have been cleared for agriculture and grazing or logged for timber and firewood. Logging has also exposed the forests to a new threat: forest fires. As trees are felled, the understorey beneath the once dense canopy flourishes and during the dry season is highly inflammable.

The project

With a team of assistants from the UK and Tanzania, I set out to assess the impacts of these threats on biodiversity, specifically birds, primates and elephant shrews. However, our visit wasn't only about birds and mammals, but also about people, many of them living in poverty. While it is easy to bemoan the loss of species from the comfort of the UK, if biodiversity conservation costs local people their livelihoods, then it is not only morally reprehensible, but is unlikely to be successful. Our aim was to find measures that benefit both people and wildlife and to involve local people in wildlife conservation, making them feel part of the solution.

We chose southern Tanzania because this part of the coastal forest has received little attention from biologists and on account of an innovative Tanzanian government land scheme.

Several species of bird and mammal have only recently been discovered and we found potential new species ourselves. We discovered a mysterious warbler, not unlike a European reed warbler, but differing from anything described in books covering the region. Work is ongoing, analysing vocal recordings, biometric measurements and phylogenetics to determine with certainty whether the bird is indeed entirely new, and where it fits in with existing taxonomy. We also caught brief glimpses, and obtained poor photographs, of an elephant shrew which does not resemble anything described to date.

The Tanzanian government has initiated a Village Land Forest Reserve Scheme whereby local villagers can claim ownership of a forested area provided they produce an approved management plan demonstrating sustainable forest use. Working with our Tanzanian partners, The Mpingo Conservation Project, we sought ways in which forest use could be sustainable, both in terms of the resources extracted and for the wildlife the forests contain. Key to this process was providing the necessary training to villagers so that they could monitor the extent and impacts of the activities.

Working with local villagers, our Tanzanian counterparts and the district forestry office, we identified several measures that could benefit people and wildlife. We have set in place several schemes which encourage the sustainable harvesting of high-value timber. Low-intensity harvesting of this timber has minimal impact on wildlife, but provides people with the necessary income to prevent them from carrying out more detrimental activities. We are now working towards a timber certification scheme. We have also trained local villagers in using a list of relatively easy-to-identify species of birds and mammals to monitor the health of the forest. Although much of our work is ongoing, I am excited about the early successes and look forward to our work having a real and lasting impact.

ILYA MACLEAN

ILYA MACLEAN

Above: The coastal forrests of Tanzania host a rich biodiversity, including unique mammals such as giant elephant shrews.
Below: The mysterious warbler - new to science?

Lasting impressions

One of my most vivid impressions of the trip was seeing and speaking to people who weekly have to undertake a two-day return journey by foot or by bicycle to the local town through one of the government-protected forests to sell their goods. The forest, being protected, hosts many elephants. However, elephants can be dangerous and many people are killed. In response, the government hires scouts to kill rogue elephants. Elephants live in extended family groups and have a complex social hierarchy. The killing of one elephant can anger the remainder, making them more aggressive. This situation highlights to me what can go wrong if the needs and wants of people and wildlife are not considered together. The traditional 'fences and fines' approach to wildlife conservation often does not work and conservationists today must rise to new challenges. I and my team feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to take on this challenge.

• Bill Wallace Grants offer between £500 and £2,000 to independent expeditions which have an educational or scientific content and are heading for wild places. The deadline for the next entries is 15 January, 2009.

ILYA MACLEAN

Working with local communities is an essential part of African wildlife conservation in the modern era. Often the children were the most enthusiastic.

Green kayaking

Tom Pendrey was one of this year's winners of a Bill Wallace 'Go and Do It!' grant. He paddled his sea kayak 275 miles, the length of the Western Isles, to promote sustainable expeditions. As he reports, his month-long expedition allowed plenty of time for reflection on human activity and sustainability.

I'd wanted to paddle up the Western Isles for years. I was also attracted to a self-sufficient outdoor life and was keen to challenge myself. But what would be the point if no one knew about it? I thought a website would be good, and so 'Sustainable Expeditions' was born! The aim of the 'organisation' is to promote more sustainable lifestyles by undertaking expeditions living off what can be caught and gathered and using environmentally friendly fuel and equipment wherever possible.

It begs the question: "How far do you take the whole sustainability thing?". The expedition gave me a lot of time to think about this. I feel responsibility for my actions and their effects on the environment. I reduce, re-use and recycle as much as possible. I prefer to fix things rather than buying new ones. I'm not too bothered by fashions but prefer to make do with what I've got. The main thing that we can do to reduce our impact on the environment is to use less energy, but again the question comes up, "How far do you take it?".

The biggest problem for the environment is humans, and the best thing for the environment would be if we weren't here, then there would be no excessive greenhouse gas emissions or destruction of natural habitats. Do we want to leave this world having had as little impact as we possibly could, or do we want to exploit and take advantage of as many resources and opportunities as we can? I guess that comes down to your own individual values. For me, I would like a comfortable life, surviving as much as possible on what I have around me, as far as is practically possible. I would call this lifestyle. So you're living a comfortable life, you've got a good job with disposable income. What do you do with that? Do you drive a 4x4 to some remote place in Scotland to appreciate the wilderness? Or do you get the train with your bike then cycle into a bothy and donate your disposable income to people who aren't so lucky?

I'm not trying to impose any opinions on anyone, just expressing feelings and suggesting questions to ask yourself. But what happened on the journey? How did I make it a sustainable expedition?

I love sea kayaking. It allows you to be self-sustained for weeks and months on end, travelling naturally. It is a completely silent way of travel and allows experiences of wildlife that wouldn't be possible by any other means. I cooked on driftwood and heather as much as possible, though I did have my emergency petrol stove. I caught and found as much of my food as possible, including fish, cockles, muscles, seaweed, plants and eggs. My favourite plant is sorrel which has a lemony zing to it. I also ate some stringy seaweed which I had to spit out. If I couldn't find or catch anything, I bought or was gifted food. The award allowed me to buy a solar panel for charging safety equipment and a waterproof digital camera to document the trip. I made an electrical circuit using the solar panel to charge a small 12V battery then, using a £30 off-the-shelf inverter, stepped the 12V DC up to 230V AC then, using a multisocket, I could plug in all my chargers, including mobile phones, a VHF radio, camera and battery chargers. Fantastic!

My main regret from the trip is that I didn't get more research done into what I could eat from the land and sea. I would like to have eaten more plants, seaweed and fish. However, the journey has inspired me to learn much more about what you can eat and how you can find and catch it. There is so much just at our fingertips that we can use but the skills to use it are being lost, mainly, I think, as a product of our supermarket culture.

So what next? Well, I'd love to paddle round Skye in the same style, though one thing's for sure: next time I will know more and will do more research. Also, education could be a major part of it. There's so much to learn about the environment around us. Within a square kilometre of the wilderness, there could be enough material to study for decades - outdoor education, geology, geography, biology, zoology, history, chemistry, engineering, physiology, psychology. I also think that taking children on a journey like this would be great, and they are the ones who should get these opportunities - because they are the future.

You can read Tom Pendrey's blog at www.sustainableexpeditions.org

Policy

Saving energy: saving wild land

Helen McDade

The John Muir Trust's Renewable Energy Policy

The John Muir Trust supports the development of small-scale, sensitively-sited renewable energy schemes, adjacent to existing settlements, which demonstrate that renewable energy may be sourced and benefit local communities without impacting on wild land.

Our response to a consultation or planning application depends on the proposed location:

Away from wild land:

Developments proposed within intensively managed landscapes are unlikely to be opposed if they are of an appropriate scale.

On the periphery of wild land:

Developments proposed away from managed or inhabited areas but adjacent to wild land will be assessed according to design, scale and importance to the local community. We may oppose the development if it:

- significantly impacts on nearby wild land or protected landscapes
- is not supported by the local community
- threatens wildlife (especially designated habitats and species)
- is not sympathetically designed
- is considered to be of an excessive scale

Core wild land

A key aim of the Trust is to protect the integrity of wild lands. We therefore oppose the location of renewable energy schemes in such areas.

We check proposed developments against existing landscape, wildlife and habitat designations and against our Wild Land Policy.

"**WHY** is the John Muir Trust always talking about energy when we're supposed to be concerned about wild land and places?"

Energy has promoted more discussion (frequently heated) within the Trust over recent years than any other issue. Industrial-scale onshore wind developments and major electricity grid proposals in sensitive locations have put the Trust in the firing line, whether we like it or not. We have to address issues such as biofuels (made from crops) and biomass (wood, etc. which is burnt) as well as off-shore wind, wave and tidal schemes which will affect our coasts.

The typical Member reading this will be having one of three reactions:

1 So what? It's nothing to do with what the Trust was set up for.

2 The threat to the world from climate change is so great that the Trust should not oppose any 'green energy' developments. To do so is irresponsible; a selfish display of nimbyism.

3 The Trust has to stand up and defend our last areas of wild land. We have a very precious, diminishing resource which is at risk of being squandered for no good purpose. We must be sceptical of claims that any proposal for renewable energy must be beneficial.

". . . the Trust is not against wind power generation at an appropriate scale in appropriate places"

I get the impression that Members who contact us on the issue are equally divided between arguments 2 and 3. How does the Trust address those conflicting views and develop a policy on renewable energy?

Members and the Trust

The Trust is a membership organisation, responsible to the Members. It is also bound by the Memorandum and Articles which set out its charitable purpose. The Trustees decide on the strategic framework and direction for the Trust and staff work within that remit. That framework has produced a Wild Land policy and a Renewable Energy policy (see panel) which provide guidance. Even so, decisions are not easy since guidelines can be interpreted in different ways.

SIMON WASSERMANN

The absence of a national energy strategy means there is no definition of 'good' or 'bad' sites for energy production.

Our first priority is set out in our Vision "that wild places are valued by all sectors of society, and wild land is protected throughout the UK".

This view is shared by the vast majority of people in Scotland. A recent survey by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Cairngorms National Park Authority found that 91% of residents think it important for Scotland to have wild places.

The Trustees have agreed that the biggest threat to our wild land in the UK over the next few years is the wholesale destruction of wild land areas by inappropriate renewable energy projects and infrastructure. If even a few of the proposed big industrial onshore wind developments in the most sensitive locations, such as National Scenic Areas, go ahead, our wild land will be very considerably diminished. As we argued on behalf of the Beauly Denny Landscape Group at the Inquiry into the Beauly Denny power line, the integrity of the whole landscape will be shattered in those areas where, at present, we still have significant wild land mass.

The 'greater good' argument

Some might argue that it is worth sacrificing wild land for what they would claim to be 'the greater good'. The Trust, however, would have to change its Memorandum and Articles if it were going to support such a position and accept the destruction of wild land.

The more I have examined the claims and counterclaims about renewable developments, the more convinced I am that such a sacrifice is unnecessary. It would not achieve the aims claimed for it and would be a pyrrhic victory for the proponents, as well as a disaster scenically for Scotland.

This is the thinking which underpins our renewables policy (see panel) but, within that framework, there are still different approaches which can be taken by the Trust.

The Trust can be primarily *re*active by looking at individual planning applications as they occur and saying: "Yes, we need to object" or "No, this is OK".

Or we can take a *pro*-active approach and say: "There are so many planning applications for renewable and grid developments which give us concern that there must be something wrong at EU, UK and Scottish policy level. We therefore need to interact with policymakers and achieve changes to the policies."

The need for an energy strategy

The Trust has moved over the last few years to an increasingly pro-active stance. We cannot make individual representations in response to all the applications of concern which arise: the sheer number of inappropriate applications is a clear indication that things are not right at national policy level.

The alarming reality is that the future of Scotland's energy mix is being decided, right now, reactively, on a decision-by-decision basis. Because of the absence of an Energy Strategy for both Scotland and the UK, we bounce from one individual planning decision to the next.

MIKE MERCHANT

Loch Laggan displaying the 'tide mark' when water is drawn down for power generation.

An Energy Strategy could bring a logical approach - agreeing what we need from energy production in the UK. This would be:

- a secure and affordable energy supply
- a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in line with suggested targets of 80% (of 1990 levels) by 2050
- a commitment to protect our local and global environment as much as possible.

The Trust is concerned about the effects of climate change and the implications of global warming for people, the environment and wild land. It supports calls for strong UK and Scottish Climate Change Bills, incorporating targets of 80% GHG reductions by 2050, to try and prevent average global warming exceeding 2 degrees Celsius. These reductions should be achieved by a combination of measures - including increasing the proportion of energy produced by a broad range of renewable energy sources, including wind-generated energy.

Reducing energy use is the priority

Despite claims by critics, the Trust is not against wind power generation at an appropriate scale in appropriate places (see policy panel). But crucially, and as the preferred and prior choice, the principal measure must be the reduction of energy consumption. Within that context, renewable developments need to take place with due respect to the local and national importance of one of the UK's key assets – its natural heritage.

It is well recognised that energy conservation measures in businesses and homes could have a very significant effect in reducing demand. Improved energy conservation would also address the increasingly important issue of fuel poverty.

The Scottish Parliament, in its

"Far less encouragement and support has been given to agencies promoting the reduction of energy use than to those promoting renewables."

2005 Report into Climate Change, found that "*. . . approximately 40% of energy could be saved, and half of the 60% CO2 reduction target for 2050 could be achieved cost-effectively by improved energy efficiency. Energy efficiency measures have struggled to gain a high priority for individuals and businesses. A range of radical additional policy instruments is required.*" Despite these clear recommendations, backed by all parties, very little has been done in this area. Far less encouragement and support has been given to agencies promoting the reduction of energy use than to those promoting renewables.

Decision-making should not be focused on exceeding secondary targets (for renewable energy) when there are better, more cost-effective, less environmentally-damaging options available to achieve the primary aims of reduced GHG emissions and ensuring an adequate energy supply (which would be easier to achieve if consumption is reduced). We need to ask: "What is the most cost-effective way to achieve the aims listed above, with least environmental harm?" .

Consumers subsidise inappropriate developments

Regrettably, there is no national energy strategy for Scotland or the UK which addresses how energy is provided, stored or distributed. The current system encourages a succession of speculative applications in remote areas for renewable energy installations which will be subsidised at the end of the day by the consumers who will also have to pay the increased costs of long distance transmission - while the natural heritage bears the damage. There is therefore a perverse incentive to go for cheap sites far from consumers. Without an overall strategy, there are no 'good' or 'bad' sites for renewable energy installations and each case has to be argued separately.

"The current system encourages a succession of speculative applications in remote areas for renewable energy installations which will be subsidised at the end of the day by the consumers who will also have to pay the increased costs of long distance transmission - while the natural heritage bears the damage."

The House of Lord's select committee on economic affairs is holding an Inquiry into the economics of renewable energy. In its submission to the Inquiry, the Trust urged the Scottish Executive to work urgently with the UK government to produce an energy strategy that provides a clear vision of the energy generation mix required to meet emission reduction targets and a clear route map towards achieving that mix. Current policies are not achieving that but the John Muir Trust is optimistic that reasoned, scientific argument will prevail over blind belief.

Helen McDade is Head of Policy at the John Muir Trust.

SIMON WASSERMANN

Policy

Climate change and sustainable communities project

The John Muir Trust has always recognised that humans are part of the biodiversity mix. It is also the case that remote communities are often the first to feel the effects of change. That is why the Trust is participating in the Climate Change and Sustainable Communities Project (CCSC), supporting communities on the edge to lead the way for the future.

The CCSC project will work alongside communities that live on or close to land owned by the Trust, such as our estates on Skye and at Sandwood, or land owned by our partner organisations such as the Knoydart Foundation, the North Harris Trust, the Galston Trust on North Lewis and the Assynt Foundation.

We will support communities to reduce their carbon footprint by drawing together and sharing their experiences, both of technical issues and also the process of keeping everyone on board. We are teaming up with the Island of Eigg Trust to learn from their experiences of working towards being carbon neutral.

So what sort of community are we trying to create?

Imagine a community that is thriving economically and socially without costing the earth. There are no net carbon emissions coming from the houses.

You may not see anything immediately but if you look closer you will notice the difference:

All the buildings in the community would be well insulated so that little of the energy going into heating the buildings is lost. Insulating a house is one of the most effective ways of reducing carbon emissions. For the average house, 30% of the heat simply escapes through the walls. North Harris Trust is looking at this approach now.

The energy devices used in buildings and homes would be energy efficient.

The efficiency of household devices varies dramatically between models. The most efficient models use up to 50% less electricity.

Households would use less electricity than before by simple actions such as using lower temperatures on washing machines.

After energy reduction and efficiency measures are in place, it will be clearer what the other energy requirements are. Power that is needed will be generated locally through a diversity of means according to what suits the locality.

This might mean biomass heating using wood supplied from locally grown trees, generating electricity by harnessing wind power using small-scale turbines or from small-scale hydro schemes, or by using photovoltaic panels to harness solar energy. It is likely that several types of renewable energy will be more effective than reliance on one only.

Will it work? On Eigg a diversity of approaches to generating power means that they are already well under way. On the Danish island of Samsø the 4000 strong community is totally self sufficient in energy terms. The benefits of this approach go beyond the energy equation: new skills are required, job opportunities are provided, there is investment in housing stock with lower running costs, making them more affordable and reducing fuel poverty.

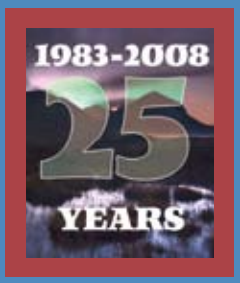
SAMSØ ENERGY ACADEMY

Young people on Samsø discover the potential of water power.

Fran Loots
Communities Officer

HOW VOLUNTEERS BUILT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST

Volunteers still play an important part in the Trust's activities but, as **Denis Mollison** *recalls, everything in the Trust was once done by volunteers.*



Continuing our review of 25 years of the John Muir Trust

"IF you had responsibility for management," the National Trust's chief ranger said as we discussed wild land in Glencoe, "you wouldn't find it so easy". I realised how right he was when the John Muir Trust's first work party landed in Knoydart a few years later. But I also realised how hugely enjoyable it could be.

By this time, June 1988, the Trust had existed for over five years.

It had been entirely volunteer-run during the long negotiations that finally resulted in the purchase of our first property of Li and Coire Dhorrcail, and during the year it had taken to raise the £105,000 to pay for it. This volunteer staff consisted of Nigel Hawkins as secretary, myself as treasurer, Ben Tindall as Journal editor and Bob Aitken as membership secretary.

Things were now changing rapidly. Our public launch that April, at John Muir's birthplace on his 150th birthday, and an article in the *Observer* by Chris Brasher, had brought members flooding in. Bob handed over to Keith Anderson to build a new database for Members, as numbers soared from fewer than 100 to nearly 1000 by the end of the year. Bill Wallace, mountaineer and professional accountant, took over as treasurer and we appointed our first, half-time, member of staff, Terry Isles.

Terry and I made the arrangements for that Knoydart work party: I had escaped the treasurership only to become chair of our new land management and conservation committee. In the spirit of John Muir, our draft management plan for Li and Coire Dhorrcail set out the need to discover as much as we could about all aspects of our property: from archaeology to mountain footpaths and from otters to woodland regeneration.

So our first visit focused on surveys. Caroline Wickham-Jones, an expert on early settlements in Scotland, helped us see just how many of the small bumps in this remote landscape were of human origin: from the shielings in upper Coire Dhorrcail to the nousts on the shoreline dug out to hold beached boats. Dave Mardon, the ranger from Ben Lawers, surveyed the flora - I particularly remember the beautiful small white orchid, *pseudorchis albida*.

Bob Aitken surveyed the path into Coire Dhorrcail, which above its largely intact zigzags had deteriorated into swamp for long stretches following decades of neglect of its drainage. He was helped by Richard Wood, a tough hill-goer and frequent visitor to the area, who later lent us superb photos of the wildlife, including eagles and otters.

Terry and I returned in August with a different group of volunteers, again in excellent weather. We cleared invasive rhododendron from the gorge of the Dhorrcail river and started work on the path, most memorably levering a one-ton boulder off the path where it turned a fairly steep corner. One of our volunteers this time was Paul Jarvis, an expert on ecology and forestry at Edinburgh University; he subsequently recruited a student in his department, Mary Cunningham, to write her MSc thesis on the woodlands of Li and Core Dhorrcail, thus providing the basis for our regeneration programme. Another was Colin Eastwood, who soon afterwards took over as Journal editor.

Twenty years later, there's a different balance between staff and volunteers. Nor is it possible nowadays for such a proportion of volunteers to be found places on the Board - Paul, Caroline, Colin and, most recently, Bob, all went on to become Trustees.

But the Trust still very much relies on volunteers for a wide variety of tasks, from digging ditches to expert surveying to writing web pages.

ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

25 years of the John Muir Trust continues overleaf.

The volunteer workparty of June 1988 at Barrisdale. Left to right are Caroline Wickham-Jones, Terry Isles, Penny Aitken, Bob Aitken, Richard Wood

Botanist Dave Mardon brought his skills to identifying plant specimens on the Knoydart estate.

An early volunteer work party in Knoydart clearing a one-ton boulder off the path.

An extraordinary Journey

Parents and children carry the baton across Shetland.

ROB BUSHBY

The baton comes ashore at John Muir's home town, Dunbar, passed from kayakers to the Dunbar Sub Aqua Club.

KEN PATTERSON

George Reid, MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament (centre), receives the four batons at Holyrood at the end of their journey.

On 4 October 2006 four batons, hand carved from native woods and joined in a roundel of elm, were presented to George Reid MSP, the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Five months earlier the batons had begun their separate journeys from the cardinal points of Great Britain: The Isles of Scilly, St Kilda, Shetland and the North Sea. With the batons came the 'Message for the Wild', carried by the Journeyers and delivered to our decision-makers on behalf of all those who care for wild places.

For a total of 2,500 miles, the batons were carried by 1,577 Journeyers over seas, through mountains, down rivers. One baton was lost in a bog – but found again – and all four were united at Ben Nevis before being carried the final, fifth leg of the Journey to the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood.

The Journeyers travelled on foot and by kayak, by cycle and by rowing boat – altogether 16 varieties of non-motorised transport were used. The Journeyers included schoolchildren and veteran climbers, lone walkers, running teams and family parties. Fifty John Muir Award providers and groups took part, three-fifths of the participants were young people and 10% were from socially excluded groups.

Designed to celebrate 10 years of the Activities programme and unite people and places associated with the John Muir Trust, the Journey brought the ethos of the wild to people across the country, generated local and national media coverage and engaged with contemporary concerns about climate change, access to the countryside and the promotion of volunteering and healthy lifestyles. It attracted new Members to the Trust and involved politicians at six political events along the way. 44 MSPs signed a supportive motion in the Scottish Parliament. The highly successful Journey was a unique event, uniting our core supporters and inspiring thousands of others to take part. It has provided the Trust with a wealth of experience, a network of contacts and the potential to stage further Journeys in the pursuit of our goals.

Discovering, Exploring, Conserving: the John Muir Award story

In 1993 the Trust began exploring ways to promote the philosophy of John Muir through educational initiatives, a process which was to lead to the John Muir Award being established. This has now engaged with more than 70,000 people across the UK.

Graham White and David Picken (now the Trust's development manager) conducted a feasibility study, liaising extensively with Trustees and environmental organisations and assessing existing environmental awards in Scotland. The World Summit on the Environment in Rio and 'Agenda 21' were key reference points of the day.

The study found that only 0.1% of 12- to 24-year-olds in Scotland were 'doing something for wild places'. All that 'green stuff' belonged to those with fleeces and beards. The brief was to create a mainstream, prestigious, accessible way of encouraging large numbers of people to get involved in the broad environmental agenda.

The outcome was a proposal for a distinctive Award enabling people of all ages 'to do something for wild places and creatures'. Four themes or 'Challenges' were identified that reflected John Muir's life and also presented a holistic experience: Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share. To achieve a John Muir Award requires activity that fulfils all four.

The Award would aim to foster knowledge of John Muir's life and conservation achievements and of the Trust's work in conserving wild places (see panel).

Underpinning the Award were Muir's principles and ethos, particularly his 'Wilderness Aesthetic' - that people need access to the beauty and solitude of wild places for their spiritual and aesthetic development – and that sympathy with the plight of the natural world was not enough; they must become 'active conservationists', as campaigners, as practical project workers, as scientists, as artists, as writers.

The John Muir Awards quickly established themselves as an attractive way of getting people of all ages excited by the environment.

As its key education initiative, the John Muir Award directly relates to the Trust's Articles of Association, in particular:
- **"conserving wild places and their landscapes, both for their own sake and for the sustenance and inspiration they give to humanity";**
- **"promoting an awareness and understanding of wild places for their own sake and for their value to the benefit of humanity";**
- **"working with local communities and encouraging them to live in harmony with wild places";**
- **"stimulating public support to help protect wild places";**
- **"encouraging voluntary participation in the conservation and renewal of wild places".**

Lifetime achievers

The first John Muir 'Lifetime Achievement Award' was presented in 2000 to broadcaster and champion for wild places, Tom Weir.

In 2004 the John Muir Trust staged a prestigious Wild Land Conference in Pitlochry when a Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred on the Cairngorms conservation guru, Adam Watson (pictured). He said: "I have never sought awards, and colleagues who chase knighthoods and official honours are regarded as ridiculous. But I regard this honour as a real one, not phoney like those other ones. If it does something to help towards better protection of wild places and wildlife then this has achieved something more important than me and any of us."

Doug Scott, first Briton to reach the summit of Everest and founder of Community Action Nepal, received a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

Highlights in the Award story

In 1995 the Award was piloted with several organisations and, two years later, the John Muir Award was officially launched at Dunbar by Lord Lindsay, Minister for the Environment. Funding from the Rank Foundation supported an Award worker in East Lothian. By 1999, 51 organisations were using the John Muir Award.

In 2001 two regional managers were appointed in Scotland. The following year, its fifth birthday was celebrated at Holyrood Park in Edinburgh, when the 7,000th Award was presented. In 2002 a manager was appointed to run the Award in Wales.

Expansion continued via partnerships with Cumbria Youth Alliance and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, each employing a dedicated Award Manager. In a survey, 90% of John Muir Award Providers agreed that involvement raised awareness of John Muir.

The first nationwide networking events - Gatherings - were held in six locations across the UK.

A survey of Award participants in Scotland was carried out.

"I felt it was good just putting something into it rather than taking something out," said one respondent. "That was the most fulfilling thing for me."

In 2005 the Scottish Education Minister, Peter Peacock, presented the 20,000th John Muir Award .

88% of John Muir Award Providers agreed that involvement promoted educational, social and personal development.

In 2006 more than 50 John Muir Award groups participated in the John Muir Trust Journey for the Wild.

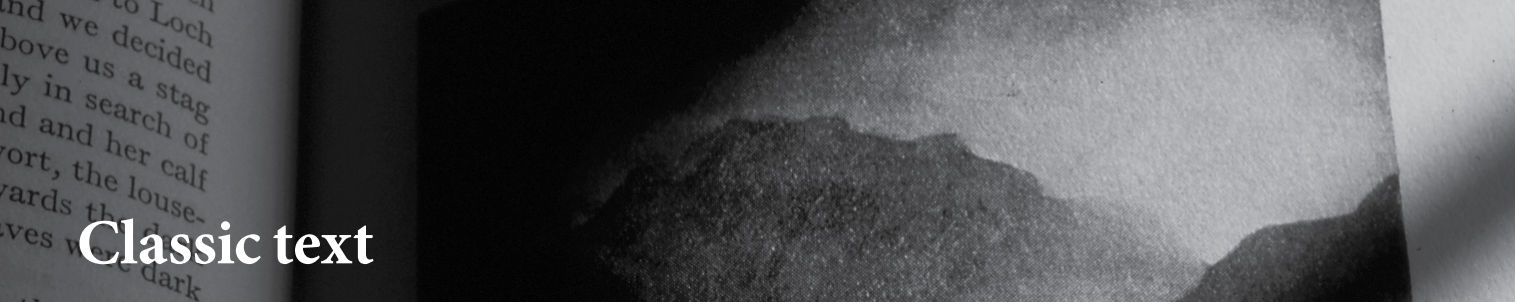
96% of Award Providers agreed in a survey that involvement encouraged people to value and care for wild places.

Last year, the 50,000th John Muir Award was presented, as was the 10,000th Award in Wales where Welsh language and bilingual materials are now produced. Over 1,000 organisations have been involved, ranging from schools to over-65 groups and from homeless charities to expedition groups which have undertaken the John Muir Award in 35 countries.

While the purchase and management of iconic wild land has always been seen as the core Trust activity, the Award has helped the Trust to become known to a wider audience. It has enabled the Trust to engage widely across society - more than 25% of Award participants are drawn from socially excluded backgrounds – and added youthful vigour to its portfolio of activity, countering any suggestion that the Trust is merely a landowner.

Lord Lindsay, Environment Minister, and some helpers, formally launches the John Muir Award scheme at Dunbar in 1997.

ALL PHOTOS: KEITH BRAME



Classic text

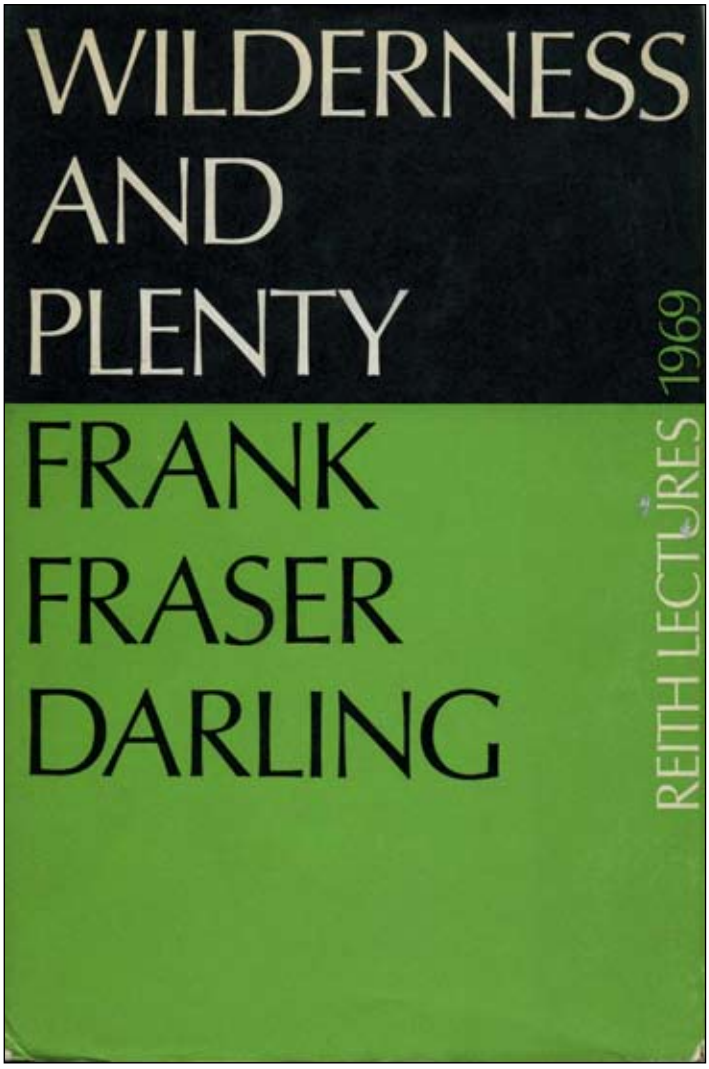
Introduced by Geoff Simmons

Wilderness and Plenty: The 1969 Reith Lectures

Frank Fraser Darling

This brilliant set of six lectures encompassed many of the concepts that have now become mainstream in conservation and geography. What did Fraser Darling mean by 'Wilderness and Plenty'? He answered this question in his first lecture, 'Man and Nature', by saying: "…population, pollution and the planet's generosity". Then he drew out complex interconnections in his succeeding lectures entitled: 'The impact of man on his environment', 'The technological exponential', 'Global changes, actual and possible', 'The forward vision in conservation' and 'Where does responsibility lie?'. It was a masterful summary in little more than 80 pages.

Fraser Darling was keenly aware of the insidious impact of uncontrolled population growth and its adverse effect on the natural environment. In the second half of the 20th century, world population was doubling every 30 years although it has slowed markedly in the last decade to approximately 200,000 births per day, worldwide. Fraser Darling said: "I see no early relief to the world's population explosion but I think active thinking and working on preservation of the few untouched plant and animal communities and their habitats, the positive sense in which I am using the word wilderness, and on the rehabilitation of the existing degraded environments in which so many live, as possible and immediately desirable."



In his lecture, 'The technological exponential', Fraser Darling expressed huge misgivings concerning the proliferation of technology in the developed world. "As a world problem," he wrote, "pollution and population pressure are partners spectral and sinister. The question is whether they are going to shrink our lives to a condition of life in death, or do we look outward and proclaim that we live in a beautiful world in which we believe and which we intend to maintain?"

What did Fraser Darling have to say about 'wilderness'? His lecture on global changes gives us some pointers. He writes: "The ecologist sees the decline of the great natural buffer of wilderness as an element in our danger. Natural wilderness is a factor for world stability, not some remote place inimical to the human being. It is strange that it has been so long a place of fear to many men and so something to hate and destroy. Wilderness is not remote or indifferent, but an active agent in maintaining a habitable world, though the co-operation is unconscious." I'm sure John Muir himself would have concurred.

A golden thread running, like a Scottish burn, through this series of lectures, is the theme of conservation. Fraser Darling gives a résumé of various conservation bodies and it is interesting to note his comments on the National Trust for Scotland. He pointed out that: "…in 1943 the NTS appointed a committee on wildlife conservation and I would say that the Scottish Trust now leads the world in the wholeness of its approach to environmental management". High praise indeed.

Finally, in his sixth lecture, 'Where does responsibility lie?', Fraser Darling returns to his concept of 'wilderness' which foreshadows the views of James Lovelock ('Gaia; the practical science of planetary medicine', 1991). Fraser Darling wrote: "I have said little of the wilderness as a place where such men as can

Frank Fraser Darling

should spend their forty days alone or with a companion. This is a time for recreation of the spirit for which too few men find opportunity. Whether it is forest, mountain or desert is immaterial as long as the wilderness is not a man-degraded one of recent time . . . The wilderness does not exist for our recreation or delectation. This is something we gain from its great function of being, with the oceans, part of the guardianship of the world in which we have come so recently to be a denizen." I gained my first wilderness experience as the RSPB'S warden on North Uist in the summer of 1967: halcyon days.

Fraser Darling concludes his lectures with a moral point: "There can be no greater moral obligation in the environmental field than to ease out the living space and replace dereliction by beauty. Most people will never know true wilderness although its existence will not be a matter of indifference to them. The near landscape is valuable and lovable because of its nearness, not something to be disregarded and shrugged off; it is where children are reared and what they take away in their minds for their long future. What ground could be more hallowed?"

Most people associate 1969 with the Moon landing and the fresh perspective of the 'Earth rise'. Perhaps we should also remember it for a slim volume called *Wilderness and Plenty* by Sir Frank Fraser Darling?

Geoff Simmons has taught for 36 years in schools in Britain, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Cooling off time

Wild Swimming
Daniel Start
Reviewed by Mike Merchant

"Thirty years on [from the big-pesticide era] over 70 per cent of our rivers are in good or excellent condition again. They are hidden havens for wildlife once more, secret corridors into forgotten corners of our countryside." Thus John Muir Trust Member Daniel Start introduces his guide to fresh water swims throughout Great Britain.

I've always been timid about entering fresh water (weeds, currents, pollution) except for the sheer bliss of cooling off from a long hot walk. Luckily, there is plenty here for those who like to plunge, paddle and dive, as well as to do serious deep-water swimming, and all the water described is asserted not to poison the swimmer.

The author is right, of course, about rivers being 'secret corridors' into wild places, and perhaps the book's greatest strength is how many such corridors it reveals in relatively 'tame' country - from the Wessex chalk streams to the impassive flows of the Stour, Bure and Waveney. It's very strong, too, on swimming places around some of the major outdoor areas in England and Wales. Tongue Pot in Eskdale in the English Lakes is pictured below; there are many entries for tarns and quarry pools in Snowdonia - places that we normally speed by with our eyes on the road or the path.

Scotland is rather thinly represented in this book with nothing from the Clyde and only one entry, Killiecrankie, from the great Tay river system. However, a 'faerie pool' on Trust land - on the Allt na Dunaiche below Bla Bheinn - makes the list, alongside its better known namesake over in Glen Brittle.

This is a finely produced book. The author's own photos are excellent and enticing. Vital information on how to get to the exact spot is there in great detail, as are suggestions for games and activities, building a sauna, and the euphemistic process of,'cold adaptation'.

See www.wildswimming.com and www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com for further information.

Wild Swimming is published by Punk Publishing, £14.95.
ISBN 978-0-9552036-7-1

DANIEL START

Tongue Pot, Eskdale, Lake District

Floating stones

Ceramic stones lie on frozen Cam Loch, Suilven in the background. Artist Lotte Glob placed three stones on each of 111 lochans and left them to begin their own stories. Floating Stones is her exquisitely illustrated account of the stones and their lochans. It is published by Watermill Books, £25. ISBN 978095543581 2. A display celebrating Lotte's 50 years' work in ceramics can be seen at the Watermill Gallery, Aberfeldy. (MB)

Saving Scotland's Alaska

Wilderness Dreams:
The Call of Scotland's Last Wild Places
Mike Cawthorne
Reviewed by John Donohoe

Mike Cawthorne is the author of *Hell of a Journey*, the story of his epic winter traverse of the Scottish 1,000 metre peaks. This new book has a different structure, eight separate chapters on different journeys in and around the wild corners of Highland Scotland.

The heart of the book, and the longest chapter, is an account of his youthful ascent of all the Scottish Munros with a fellow refugee from the Thatcher regime. Skint, disorganised, with inadequate clothing and gear, this was very different from his well-planned winter journey.

Other journeys are to threatened landscapes. There is a lyrical description of the stunning Shieldaig and Flowerdale Forest threatened by hydro development, an issue with which the John Muir Trust vigorously engaged. Sadly, anyone repeating his ski traverse of the Monadhliaths will find A' Chraidhleag inundated by the Glencoe scheme. The casual way we are sacrificing the Monadhliaths for power production mirrors the damage to the Flow Country for once-fashionable afforestation projects now, as then, driven by badly directed public subsidy. He calls this northern landscape Scotland's Alaska. Spot-on!

He culls hinds with Peter Duncan on Creag Meagaidh, uncomfortable but necessary. Why do we give credence to three metre fences, lynx and wolves when we have direct evidence of a strategy that works?

Mike writes separate and generally sympathetic chapters on the characters who took over the bothies at Strathan and Strathcailleach near Sandwood. Land seizures or squatting are controversial strands in the history of land ownership, a process not yet complete. Dealing with the Northways or James McRory-Smith cannot always have been easy and the tolerance and hospitality of the communities around Kinlochbervie would have been well tested.

Read this book. You will be inspired to visit these wild places.

Wilderness Dreams is published by The Inn Pinn, £14.99. ISBN 1903238900

Winners of the Wild Writing competition, 2008

Winners of the 2008 Wild Writing Competition were announced at the Fort William Mountain Festival. Kay Sexton from Sussex took first place with her short story, 'Cleft', winning a week at Moniack Mhor Writing Centre. Ellie Stewart from Bathgate was second with her poem 'Giant'. She won a week's self-catering accommodation at The Orkney Croft and Benethill Café.

Joint runners-up in the prose category were Hazel Bines and Frank Wood. The second-placed poets were Andrew MacCallum and Stephanie Green.

Rachel MacGillivray from Fort William and Alexandra Clark from Ardgour shared the children's prizes, writing poetry in Gaelic and English respectively.

Cynthia Rogerson of the Moniack Mhor Writing Centre and Kenny Taylor, writer and naturalist, judged the competition.

Winner Poetry Writing Category

Ellie Stewart writes poetry and drama. 'Giant' was conceived one Christmas Eve on Iona.

Giant by Ellie Stewart

I
She uncurls slowly
lifts an arm
trails fingers through midnight.
Parts heavens, reveals
pebbles deep above.
Flicking the moon with ragged nail
spills silver in the Sound.

II
No Cinderella, she
has massive, bony feet
that stretch into the sea.

III
She yawns, sea souks
stones rumble down the beach.
Grit rattles through her teeth, she knows
the graves are shallow here
and easily breached.

Winner Children's Gaelic Poetry Writing Category

Stoirm by Rachel MacGillivray
Fort William RC Primary

Nuair a tha stoirm ann,
Bi a h-uile duine a' fuirich a-staigh.
Eadhon na clann.
Cha bhi daoine a-muigh

Bi an tairneanach ag eigheachd,
Bi an uisge a' tuiteam.
Cha bhi na h-eon a' sgeitheadh,
Neo na coin a' comhartaich.

Tha na beatainnean a' coimhead brònach,
Leis an t-uisge a' ruith sios.
Fhathast nan seasamh laidir.
Is na loch dol suas nas áirde is nas áirde.

Tha a' ghaoth cho garbh.
Is tha an talamh a' crathadh.
Tha na craobhan a'coimhead marbh,
A' tuiteam chun talamh.

Tha mi a' faireachdainn sabhailte,
Ann an leabaidh agam.
Oidche mhath! Tha mi 'n dòchas
Gun tig a' ghrain a-rithist!

Winner Children's Poetry Writing Category

Ben Keil by Alexandra Clark
P7, Ardgour School

The frost shines in the sun light,
I gaze at this beautiful sight.
An eagle swoops for its prey,
It'll continue searching all day.
A waterfall is the only sound.
I watch the deer as they bound.
I'll keep on climbing to the top,
Nothing will make me stop,
Until upon the peak I stand,
And look around this amazing land.

Winner, Prose Writing Category

Cleft by Kay Sexton

Cleft = declivity, break, chink, cleavage, crack, crevice, fissure, rift, split, indentation.
I'm telling myself this as I lash a rope around the same protruding rock that Matt had used. It's just a declivity, a chink, a cleft, like the cleft in Matt's chin, and cleft can be a good thing, a very good thing. Sometimes. I keep talking to myself as I tie the rope around my waist. I'm supposed to belay, or something, but I don't know what that means - Matt is the climbing expert, and he's lying face-down at the bottom of a cleft, cleavage, fissure, rift, about sixty feet below me.

This is insane. It can't be happening. It's like something out of a horror film where the stupid youngsters go off for the weekend and get hacked to death by a lunatic. I start talking to myself again, looking for other synonyms for cleft, to take my mind off my fears.

It all started so well. Matt and I had been together for about eight months, and this climbing trip was just a natural extension of our hobbies. Climbing, he said, is like any other extreme sport - it takes you to the edge and beyond. It's a test of athleticism, power and lust - lust for life.

It's addictive. We're both fit anyway, he's a personal trainer and I teach PE, so we'd been in the habit of stretching ourselves beyond the mundane, but the whole idea of it being just the two of us, relying on each other, was what made it sexy. No guide, no guidebook even. Matt talked about hiring a little boat in the summer and touring the Hebrides, one of us sailing round an island while the other walked across it, swapping routes on the way back and spending our nights swapping stories from the day, and body fluids, and love - that was the next holiday in line, he said, after this

The Wild Writing competition returns for 2009!

The John Muir Trust is again running a competition for aspiring writers to coincide with the 2009 Fort William Mountain Festival. Our aim is to celebrate our landscape and wild places by encouraging new and upcoming writers to write about their experiences and share their stories in poetry or prose. This year's judges will be announced on the website shortly. A selection from the winning articles will be published in future editions of the Journal.

How to enter

The closing date is 26 January 2009. Entries, in prose or poetry, should not exceed 1200 words.

Download an entry form and view further information at www.mountainfestival.co.uk or contact Alison Austin on 01397 705 049 or nevis@jmt.org

trip to Lochaber to teach me the rudiments of climbing. Now I was wondering if we'd fulfil either dream.

I told myself to think of good things. I was going to lower myself into this cleft, down to Matt, and hope that he was alive when I got there, and no amount of worrying would help me do that. Good things: Matt, asleep this morning in the deep blue light of the tent, me rolling over so that I was able to run my fingers down his back, feeling the muscles jump to my touch like fish rising in the loch below us. Remember, don't let your mind drift! Matt rolling over in turn, smiling as I sat up and reached for the camping gas stove . . .

Matt is just unconscious, he's knocked himself out somehow and once I get down there I'll be able to bring him round and make sure he's okay before heading further down the cliff to where I can pick up a signal for my mobile. It will be okay. Everything will be okay. The problem is, I don't know anything about climbing - Matt was going to teach me. So I'm tying this rope and sitting on the edge of this thing that I'm refusing to think of as what it is. It's a chimney, that's what it is - in climbing terms, anyway. It's a cleft, a crack on the rock, and Matt is at the bottom of it, and I'm at the top, trying not to think about how I am going to get down there and what I'll find when I do.

So - going down. Me going down this thing; this cleft.

I see Matt's crescent-moon smile in the tent's blue gloom before he locks his arms behind my back and hugs me into a kiss.

Down. I'm about a quarter of the way down, my fingernails scrabbling on the bare rock for purchase - why didn't I put on my cycling gloves?

Down. I'm halfway down. The thing is, although I'm doing it, I don't really know how. So I can't look down, my eyes are fixed on the

In 2008 Kay Sexton was commissioned to write a short story for national radio and was finalist in the Willesden Herald *fiction contest. Her novel,* Gatekeeper, *is currently with an agent.*

rock in front of me, watching my fingers cram and crush themselves into gaps and fractures in the rock that I wouldn't have believed would hold a fly. Up close, I can see patterns in the lichen that thrives where the sunlight reaches: rust and gold and grey and green, feel them under my fingertips: tiny hills and mountains, rivers and clefts. Whole landscapes, covered by my hand, crushed by my grip.

Crush. Me. My spine crushed against Matt's chest, just a couple of hours ago, when he helped me traverse the crag to this new camp. Crushed, Matt, at the bottom of the chimney. No. Don't think that.

There's a sound beneath me. A scrabbling noise then, "Jules . . . ?," Matt's voice, a little cracked, like this rock, but basically sound. I try not to look, not to sob. He's alive.

I slow down, although I want to speed up. Right now my judgement is not good - if I rush, I could fall too. So it's important not to give in to the desire to move faster, to push the boundaries, to GET THERE. Discipline, that's what I need. My job is to move like a glacier, like the glacier that made this rock, probably - although maybe not, I'm no geologist - to get there when it's time for me to get there, and not before.

My foot, my whole foot, touches level ground. I've made it down. I crawl to Matt, because my knees are suddenly so weak that I can't walk. He's got a nasty gash on his head, but his crescent-moon smile is in place and he holds me, crushes me, to his body. I kiss him gently. He's alive, we're both alive.

After a while we separate ourselves and Matt laughs. "I must have knocked myself out in the chimney. I can't believe you came down after me."

I'm examining his pupils, belatedly realising that he may have concussion. I hug him tightly, remembering how scared I was in the cleft, crevice, crack, chimney. "Do we have to go back up that way?"

He shakes his head, beginning to untie the rope around me. "We're going the long way round, Jules. There's a path around the crag. The most extreme thing I want, right now, is a cup of tea and you curled up beside me. And next time, we hire a guide, okay?"

I look up at the dark shadow that bisects the rock face. I can't believe I climbed down it. I rub my hands over my face, recalling the feel of the lichen under my fingers, remembering its beauty.

I smile, and Matt grins at me. I turn away from the chimney, declivity, cleft, and hold out my hand, pulling him to his feet for the walk back.

Writing student uses John Muir Award in schools placement

Fiona Russell from Langholm is a student on the MLitt Writing course at the University of Glasgow's Crichton Campus in Dumfries. She gained a John Muir Award herself some years ago and when, as part of her degree course, she had to undertake an eight-week work placement, she chose to use the John Muir Award scheme as a vehicle for her work with 36 children.

Fiona worked with two primary schools. Canonbie school based their work on Byreburn Woods while Glenzier chose their school grounds as the 'wild place' for their project.

She said, "Using the Award has given the children a sense of achievement whilst working as a team in a spirit of adventure, exploration and fun. It is a fantastic and relatively flexible way of encouraging people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to gain awareness and responsibility for the environment. Both schools seem to have enjoyed the project and I hope the children will carry on with their interest in their local environment."

The project was run in conjunction with Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association.

Left: The Canonbie children are pictured in Byreburn Woods where they undertook their Award work. They received their certificates from broadcaster Fiona Armstrong. Right: Award- winning sculptor Elizabeth Waugh, who presented Award certificates at Glenzier School, using some of her animal sculptures to demonstrate how animals inspire her art.

PHOTOS: FIONA RUSSELL

Classifieds

Self-catering

ABOYNE 4* s/c for 2, ACHILTIBUIE 3* 3 bedroom house overlooking Summer Isles. No pets; children 7yr+ welcome. Mrs J H Strachan, Dorevay, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5BT. 01339 886 232; jo.strachan @virgin.net, www.holidayfreedomscotland.com

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The John Muir Trust

The John Muir Trust is the UK's leading wild land conservation charity. The Trust owns and safeguards eight iconic areas of wild land including parts of Ben Nevis, the Red Cuillin in Skye, Schiehallion, Quinag and Sandwood Bay. The Trust works closely with the communities on its own land and with the community bodies that own and manage land in Knoydart, North Harris and Assynt. For more information visit www.jmt.org

The John Muir Trust campaigns against threats to wild land and for wild places to be valued by society.

The John Muir Trust encourages people to experience wild places and to 'put something back' through the John Muir Award. For more information visit www.johnmuiraward.org

The Trust takes its name from the Scot, John Muir, one of the pioneers of the modern conservation movement. Born in 1838 in Dunbar, East Lothian, John Muir emigrated as a child to America. He went on to find fame as a botanist, geologist, mountaineer and pioneer of what is now called ecology. He successfully campaigned for the establishment of National Parks to safeguard wild lands such as Yosemite Valley in California.

Next issue

The next issue of the John Muir Trust Journal will be published in March 2009. Copy should be sent to the Editor, Mike Brown, at journal@jmt.org or to 'Drumcreel', Kirk Road, New Galloway, Castle Douglas DG7 3RS to arrive **by 19 January 2009**.

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