



Caroline Standring Explorer Award

‘The cure for anything is saltwater – sweat, tears and the sea’

I read the above quote in an article by Sarah Outen, who in 2009 was the first woman and youngest person to row solo across the Indian Ocean...and even though my ‘self guided’ John Muir Award is not quite on the same scale the words struck a chord. My journey has been connected by saltwater – sweating whilst running along urban rivers, doing beach cleans by the sea and shedding a metaphorical tear while researching our impact on our oceans.

The John Muir Award has prompted me to find out about many new places, meet many new people and try out a wide range of activities – all within its simple structure, and linked through one theme of water.

As it was the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 I chose to focus on the biodiversity in the areas I visited. I was running along urban waterways regularly so made time to get to know my routes a little better – over the seasons, at different times of day and in various locations including Glasgow, Birmingham and London – not renowned for their wealth of wild spaces! Through stopping to look around and taking time to sit and listen I saw things I would never have noticed - fungi of all shapes and sizes, beautiful patterns in tree bark, gorgeous reds and greens of leaves, and gulls soaring over the city at dusk. Returning to the same spot made me aware of the changing of the seasons and the wildlife around me.

Getting to know my local waterways got me interested in finding out where they go. I spent time at the coast and on islands. To learn more about the marine wildlife I started to draw species I would see – using drawing as a way to study them at home to enable me to identify them when out.

This lead me to research the threats facing our waterways and coasts and with the help of the Marine Conservation Society I learnt about sustainable fishing and the effects of pollution. A fundamental part of the John Muir Award calls on individuals to do something to conserve the wild spaces they discover and get to know. For me this took a combination of practical activities and changes to my daily life.

I did litter picks while running, cleared an urban canal and organized a beach clean. My research highlighted the threat to marine wildlife that plastic poses. I have made a conscious effort to clear it up when I see it and have highlighted the ‘Don’t Let go’ campaign to stop balloon releases as balloons can be fatal to marine life.





I volunteered with the Seabird Centre in North Berwick to clear invasive species from islands to help the nesting puffins. Along with my resolution to use less plastic I decided to support Greenpeace's campaign and eat less fish **"because there aren't plenty more fish in the sea"**.

Some of these activities have been done alone while some have been done with others. I have discussed my Award with friends and family and think a comment from a friend during a beach clean says it all - she described the day as a 'Caroline day' - "you walking along picking things up – shells, bones, litter... **Before I met you I didn't notice all this, sometimes I wish I could go back to being blind but I can't and I want to help.**"

My journey with my Award has taught me a lot – to open my eyes and stop and wonder at the world. It has also made me feel more empowered to make a change for the better in the environment. I think this can be summed up by this graffiti I saw on a bridge over a canal. The future is ours and we can make a difference - it is up to us to decide which way we want to go and to make it happen.

'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?' said Alice.
'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said The Cat.

