

PRESS RELEASE:

March 2021

CONTACT:

Julie Gough

e: Julie.gough@johnmuirtrust.org



Adventure grant supports Oxford PhD candidate to study endangered Scottish rock doves

A PhD student at The Queen's College, Oxford, will travel to the Outer Hebrides with funding support from the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant.

Will Smith, 23, will travel from Oxford to the Outer Hebrides in November 2021, where he will gather foundational data in the wild about Scottish Rock Doves, a species that is massively understudied and potentially highly threatened.

On receiving the news of the grant offer, Will said: "I'm really excited to carry out fieldwork, collecting important data on the truly wild Rock Dove. This is the ancestor of all domestic and feral pigeons in the world. In Scotland, Rock Doves are now restricted to the far north and west, where they nest in sea caves. This is because, over most of their original distribution, they have been replaced by the much commoner feral pigeon following extensive interbreeding. I am delighted that I will be able to go to the Outer Hebrides to further study a special Rock Dove population that is almost fully isolated from feral pigeons. I am confident that this fieldwork will contribute to our understanding of one of Scotland's most special birds."

Rosie Simpson of the John Muir Trust, who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "Will's application impressed the panel for its dedication to the study and conservation of a native endangered species. Will submitted a careful budget and we're delighted to have been able to offer the full amount requested towards a project that will help our collective understanding of Rock Doves in Scotland."

Will is one of six successful applicants to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant. This grant was established to give people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places in ways which will benefit both the person, and the wild places themselves.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

ABOUT THE DES RUBENS AND BILL WALLACE GRANT

The John Muir Trust administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant for free. The grant was set up in honour of Bill Wallace, who died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips, and Des Rubens, a popular teacher at Craigroyston High School in Edinburgh who was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Since the grant was established in 2007, initially in honour of Bill Wallace, it has supported almost 60 people from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners, take part in life-changing adventures of educational or scientific value in some of the wildest places in the world.

Grants of £200 to £2,000 are awarded annually on merit to individuals who wish to experience wild places in the spirit of Des Rubens and Bill Wallace and meet the grant criteria.

ABOUT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST

The John Muir Trust is a membership based conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places. The Trust was founded in 1983 and was inspired by the life and works of John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born founding father of modern conservation and the inspiration behind national parks. We operate in Scotland, England and Wales and are the guardians of some of the finest wild places in the UK including Ben Nevis, Helvellyn and Schiehallion.

For more info about the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant, contact:

Rosie Simpson
Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant Administrator
John Muir Trust

rosie.simpson@johnmuirtrust.org

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/grants-and-awards/the-bill-wallace-grant>