

Caring for England's natural environment through the John Muir Award



Conserve Audit 2015 reveals that in England

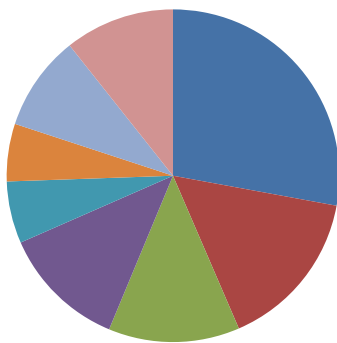
- 10,958 John Muir Award participants made a positive difference to wild places
- £422,000 worth of activity, through 94,695 hours (13,522 days) across England
- 27% of Conserve activity carried out by people experiencing disadvantage
- 24% of participants engaged in Citizen Science activity

What's a Conserve Audit?

It's a monitoring exercise to identify the amount and type of activity carried out to meet the Conserve Challenge of the John Muir Award. This includes practical action, campaigning, and minimising impact, and captures how participants make a difference to wild places. A summary of UK-wide activity carried out during 2015 is available [here](#).

Conserve Activity in England

72% of all participants who achieved their John Muir Award in England (7,890 out of 10,958) during 2015 had their Conserve activity captured in this exercise, through 354 completed Conserve Audits. This is just one aspect of each participant's experience, along with Discovering a wild place, Exploring it and Sharing these experiences. 27% of the overall activity was carried out by people experiencing some form of disadvantage – many who would not normally engage in positive environmental action.



Where did it happen?

- Woodlands 63%
- National Parks 27%
- School grounds 24%
- Outdoor centre grounds 15%
- Urban/Park locations 15%
- Wildlife gardens 13%
- Lakes 13%
- Mountains 16%

What did this look like on the ground?

From city centres and council estates to coastlines and National Parks (and everywhere in between), Conserve activity in England has been widespread. Over 95% took place through established groups, including schools, adult learning centres, colleges, outdoor centres, and youth clubs, as well as families and individuals.

A summary of activity shows:

- Woodlands – 82,084m² of felling, coppicing and brashing.
- Footpaths – 22,086m maintained, created and improved.
- Invasive species – 13,279m² cleared, including rhododendron, non-native evergreen, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, laurel, bamboo, larch and snowberry.
- Habitat management – 8885m² managed, including tackling bracken, gorse, weeds, beech, bramble, ivy, nettle, willow, ragwort & horsetail.
- Fences – 6182m maintained, created and removed.
- Wildflowers – 4020m² planted and reseeded.
- Tree planting – 4881 trees planted, including wild cherry, fruit orchard, hazel, ash, hawthorn, blackthorn, oak, holly, silver birch, elder, alder, willow, crab apple, rowan & yew.
- Meadows – 3907m² planted, seeded, mown and raked.
- Litter – 2405 black bin bags removed, with 20% being recycled.
- Wildlife Habitats - 1897 homes created for birds, bees, butterflies, minibeasts, moorland species, peat bog species, frogs, newts, small mammals, bats, hibernaculum, amphibians, hedgehogs, voles, dormice, and a nesting 'beach' for waders.
- Other: 1135m² of ponds restored and created, 1735m of ditches maintained and improved, 1236 feeders made for birds, butterflies, red squirrels, hedgehogs, insects & bees; contributions to over 40 local and regional Biodiversity Action Plans.

Citizen Science, Curriculum, Outdoor Learning

The Conserve Audit demonstrates the growing enthusiasm for Citizen Science - monitoring, gathering, recording and analysing environmental data - with 24% of all participants involved. This included soil health, quality of air and water, and invertebrate surveys; it contributes directly to sciences, literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, social studies, as well as wellbeing and health curriculum areas. Taking active responsibility for the environment relates well to themes of citizenship and physical, social, health and economic education (PSHE). It can help to establish a school's role within a community, giving profile and presence and encouraging partnership working. Conserve activity – putting something back - brings a valuable dimension to learning outside the classroom. It contributes to the ten key outcomes for Outdoor Learning identified in the [High Quality Outdoor Learning](#) guide, including enjoyment, environmental awareness, activity skills, skills for life, and increased motivation and appetite for learning.

“Students were surprised at how much they enjoyed their litter pick. They’re very proud of keeping the area tidy. Local Authority owners delighted!” Abbeyfields Forest School

Social Action, Volunteering

Quantified data – in terms of time inputs, what’s been achieved, and financial value – offers important measurable outcomes. It collates countrywide activity, complements anecdotal evidence, and can be used in relation to national initiatives. Information from the Conserve Audit can be used to support Department for Education priorities for promoting character, to show contributions to youth social action initiatives, and to demonstrate National Citizen Service programme outcomes.

“We know that young people want to play an active part in improving their communities, and that in doing so, they develop their own skills for work and life. We’re excited that the John Muir Trust has pledged its support to the campaign to recognise the work that the John Muir Award does in encouraging young people to take practical action for nature.”

Charlotte Hill, #iwill Campaign Coordinator, Step Up To Serve CEO

Health & Wellbeing

Two of the [‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’](#) (evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing) identified by the new economics foundation and promoted by NHS England are demonstrably met through Conserve activity. ‘Be active’ and ‘Give’ (‘volunteer...link to the wider community’) are widely in evidence through this audit. Healthy lifestyles are inevitably promoted through the sorts of non-sedentary, outdoor activities identified in the audit.

‘The therapeutic nature of the Conserve activity was underestimated by the team leaders at first. We will be exploring the benefits for those suffering long term health problems in more depth with future groups.’ Education Futures Trust, Without Walls Project

Conclusion

Completing a Conserve Audit in England over a full year demonstrates that the John Muir Award is used not only to help people connect with and enjoy wild places, but to actively care for the country’s biodiversity and natural environments too. There is a significant contribution being made to protect natural heritage – as an integrated part of many programmes, courses and projects – by people from all walks of life, regardless of background or location. It demonstrates support for national agendas and initiatives across England and the UK, including curriculum outcomes, wellbeing, social action and volunteering.

A full report on the [John Muir Award UK-wide 2015 Conserve Audit](#) is available.

The John Muir Trust would like to thank the hundreds of Provider organisations for contributing and enabling us to demonstrate the impact that the John Muir Award can help them make.

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