

Schools in England help care for natural environments through the John Muir Award



Conserve Audit 2015 reveals that:

- 12,054 pupils and staff from 410 school groups across England made a positive difference to wild places through participation in the John Muir Award
- 65,813 hours (9402 days) of 'Conserve' activity, valued at £386,110
- 19 % 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 www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/conserves-audit-2015.

Conserve activity with school groups in England

Participating in Conserve-related activities through the John Muir Award gives pupils and staff an opportunity not only to connect with and enjoy wild places, but to actively care for nature and local communities, to take responsibility and make a difference. The Audit reveals that schools across England integrate this activity into their outdoor learning, curriculum, residential experiences, alternative provision and extra-curricular offer. It is also used to help support wider school priorities such as attainment, behaviour, character development and the promotion of pupils' emotional and physical wellbeing. Growing evidence shows that connecting to nature and getting involved in social action has clear benefits to pupils. It can help to develop their skills, character and life opportunities as well as having a positive impact on the natural environment and community¹.

Who was involved?

12,054 pupils and staff from schools across England achieved a John Muir Award in 2015 and 84% captured their Conserve activity in this exercise. The John Muir Award is made available for free by the John Muir Trust and is open to all. 21% of those involved were pupils experiencing some form of disadvantage, contributing nearly a third of the total hours spent taking practical action for nature.

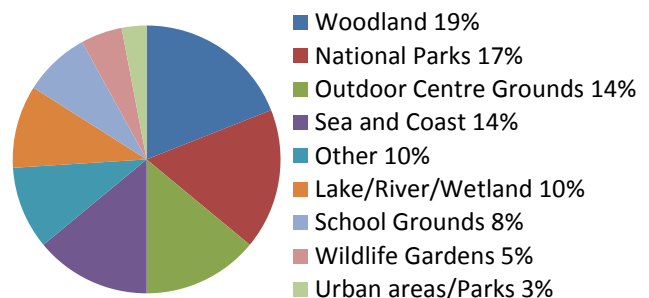
"Encompassing wide catchment areas and including those from very different backgrounds, the John Muir Award links all pupils to the natural world on their doorstep." Amersham Field Centre.

Where did this happen?

The data reflected activity in diverse habitats across the UK.

Summary of activity

- 3706 trees planted involving 1141 pupils.
- 77 school groups cleared 5830m² of invasive non-native species including Himalayan balsam, Rhododendron, Hottentot fig and Japanese knotweed.
- 12,188m of footpath maintained, created or improved.
- 485m of hedges created.
- 227 school groups cleared 2567 bags of litter recycling 13% of litter removed.
- 522 pupils created or maintained 35 compost heaps.
- 1087 feeders made to support and encourage birds, bees, other insects and hedgehogs.
- 39 groups planted or reseeded 2144 m² of wildflowers.
- 1025 pupils carried out felling, coppicing and brashing activities in 74,983m² of woodland.
- 999 pupils campaigned on local and environmental issues.



"The John Muir Award was a great way to give credit to the children's hard work." Jill Gaunt, Richard Bonington Primary and Nursery School, Nottinghamshire.

¹ [Social Impact Report](#), The Outward Bound Trust, 2014

School Grounds

2281 pupils' actions were monitored as they stepped outside their classroom door and into their school grounds to improve, maintain or develop wild places for nature to thrive and school communities to enjoy. The Conserve Challenge provided regular opportunities to engage in a broad range of practical experiences and to understand the importance of conservation and environmental awareness, as set out in the High Quality Outdoor Learning guide². Many schools utilised the expertise and resources of organisations such as Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust and County Council Services, extending and enriching outdoor learning and exciting further interest in the natural environment and conservation activities.

Local Community

263 school groups went out into their local community undertaking work in parks, woodland, wildlife gardens and allotments. The Audit demonstrates how practical action for nature can play a key role in raising a school's profile within its community, encouraging collaboration and resulting in a shared interest in environmental and community stewardship. 227 school groups got involved in litter picking activities clearing 2567 bin bags of litter, 13% of which was recycled. The Audit also revealed that the litter picks often initiated further action, prompting pupils to lead their own campaigns.

"This activity has helped the way the community sees us." Blackpool Aspire Academy, Lancashire.

Further afield

53% of the Conserve activity was carried out by pupils and staff venturing further afield. 163 school groups engaged as part of their residential experience, demonstrating how using the John Muir Award can prompt variety and challenge, bring the environmental context to the fore, promote pupil ownership, and can help bridge the gap between school and outdoor/field centre experiences. These are noted as contributing factors of a 'Brilliant Residential'³. 166 school groups undertook their Conserve activity in National Parks - the second most visited location - helping to protect their special qualities. Many groups commented on the increased opportunities to contribute to, and understand the importance of, the Countryside Code and the 'Leave No Trace' and 'Minimum Impact' principles.

Youth Social Action

The Conserve Challenge provides young people with a platform to take personal responsibility for the natural environment, creating a positive and lasting impact on their communities and on themselves. This pro-environmental action contributes directly to the youth social action movement and connects pupils to national campaigns such as the #iwill campaign⁴. Pupils have the opportunity to take action, develop a wide set of skills, make decisions and voice their opinions as part of a collective. Many schools also use social action through the John Muir Award as a central approach to developing character⁵.

Citizen Science

1923 pupils and teachers connected with nature through Citizen Science projects such as OPAL's Bugs Count Survey and the RSPB's Big Schools' Bird Watch; gathering, recording and analysing environmental data to support large-scale studies. Getting involved in hands-on science projects presented opportunities for pupils to apply and learn a range of skills and techniques across the curriculum, contributing directly to science, literacy, maths and computing outcomes.

Conclusion

Carrying out a Conserve Audit with English schools over a full year shows how the John Muir Award can help pupils connect to nature and make a difference in ways that are relevant and engaging to them. The activity carried out to meet the Conserve Challenge of the John Muir Award provides pupils with a sense of purpose and opportunities for participation in activities that support their personal development, the community and the natural environment - all widely evidenced in this Audit.

The John Muir Trust would like to thank the hundreds of Provider organisations for contributing to the Conserve Audit and enabling us to demonstrate the impact that the John Muir Award can help them make. The John Muir Award in England has support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. www.johnmuiraward.org



"Pupils started to appreciate the difference they can make." Dave Iliff, Headteacher, St James's Catholic Primary.

² High Quality Outdoor Learning, English Outdoor Council, 2015 p18

³ Brilliant Residentials, Learning Away Report, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, June 2015

⁴ The #iwill campaign promotes social action amongst 10-20 year olds. See the John Muir Trust's pledge [here](#).

⁵ [Developing Character in Schools with the John Muir Award](#). A document highlighting how the John Muir Award is used as a supporting approach to character development in schools.