

Caring for nature through Scotland's National Parks - the John Muir Award



Conserve Audit 2015 reveals that:

- 4,740 John Muir Award participants were supported by Cairngorms National Park and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authorities to help care for wild places
- 35,360 hours (equivalent of over 5,000 days) dedicated to Conserve activities overall, 27% of which were contributed from people experiencing disadvantage
- Activity was valued at £183,002 based on Heritage Lottery Figures

What is 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 [online](#).

Conserve Activity in Scottish National Parks

A sample of 3,218 participants (68%) had their Conserve activities recorded as part of the Conserve Audit 2015. John Muir Award activity supported by both of Scotland's National Parks ensured that participants experienced first-hand what is special about both Parks, completing all or part of their Award within National Park boundaries. On average, each participant contributed 7.5 hours of Conserve activity, including time spent on practical tasks, managing impacts and raising awareness of conservation issues. Participants experiencing some form of disadvantage - many of whom would not usually engage in positive environmental action - contributed an impressive 10.2 hours per person.



What did this look like on the ground?

56% of John Muir Award participants undertook some or all of their Conserve Challenge activities within National Park boundaries, with some - inspired by National Park engagement - taking place in home communities. Locations included woodlands, school grounds, outdoor centre grounds, coast, lochs, urban/parks, mountain/upland and wildlife gardens.

Activities undertaken to enhance nature included:

- **Habitat management** – bracken and ragwort cleared across 121,835m².
- **Woodland activity** – 21,276m² of woodland improved, through felling, coppicing & brashing.
- **Invasive non-native species removal** – 3,039m² cleared of rhododendron, lodgepole pine, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, laurel and western hemlock.
- **Tree planting** – 951 native trees planted.
- **Litter** – 967 bags of litter collected, 44% recycled.
- **Wildflowers** – 934m² planted with wildflowers, including bee friendly mixes.
- **Footpaths & fencing** – 719m footpath maintained, created or improved, and 2025m fenced.
- **Wildlife feeders & habitats** – 652 feeders created for birds, butterflies and red squirrels, and 361 wildlife habitats for birds, invertebrates, red squirrels, bats, hedgehogs, badgers & bees.
- **Other** – 500m² meadow planted, 380m ditch improved, 77m² pond restored, 65m hedge maintained or created, 31 compost heaps, 6m wall restored and 1 wormery created.

“The Cairngorms are a very important, unique place and I realise and understand deeply the need for young people to be involved with nature and the environment.”

Young person on Junior Ranger Programme, Cairngorms National Park

Supporting National Park biodiversity initiatives

In Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, Award participants have directly engaged with key 'Wild Challenges' set out in the [Wild Park 2020](#) biodiversity strategy by helping to tackle invasive species, improve woodland habitats and conserve key species. In the Cairngorms, woodland and wetland-focused Conserve activity contributed to the priorities of the [Cairngorms Nature Action Plan](#).

Nature surveys proved popular, contributing towards National Park initiatives such as the Trossachs Water Vole Project, and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels surveys, as well as national Citizen Science projects including marine, invasive species, tree health, birds and invertebrates. All the submitted wildlife records in the Cairngorms National Park directly contributed towards informing biodiversity management. This valuable data supports the work of a range of National Park partners and agencies, including OPAL, RSPB, Buglife, The British Phycological Society, Whale & Dolphin Conservation and British Trust for Ornithology.

"By getting actively involved in putting something back, John Muir Award participants really help to look after the landscapes and wildlife within Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park – contributing to Wild Park 2020, our nature conservation strategy."

Linda Winskill, Biodiversity Officer, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

Access and environmental impact

National Park-supported John Muir Award participants raised awareness of issues such as litter and responsible behaviour, promoting the [Tread Lightly Campaign](#) in the Cairngorms and [Your Park](#) and the [Respect campaign](#) in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs. Hands-on Conserve activity also enables people to be more active, contributing to health and wellbeing priorities in the National Parks, and a focus on improving and maintaining path networks in the Cairngorms contributed towards the [Active Cairngorms Strategy](#).

68% engaged with [Leave No Trace](#) principles and 65% took care to have minimum impact on the environment whilst enjoying both National Parks and their local wild places. Further to this, 60% specifically engaged with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), helping understanding of rights and responsible behaviour in the outdoors.

Conclusions

The John Muir Award encourages people from all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places, including Scotland's National Parks. It helps National Parks deliver their Statutory aims by combining enjoyment and recreation within National Parks with positive practical action to conserve and enhance natural heritage. Award participants gain more understanding of their special qualities, as well as a sense of why it is important to enjoy them responsibly and respectfully, raising awareness of biodiversity, sustainability and human impacts on nature. The John Muir Award Conserve activity also contributes to National Park active agendas, and the health and wellbeing of those living in and visiting Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs.

Participants also take National Park conservation values, messages and actions back to their local communities. This audit shows them actively caring for and respecting local greenspaces, helping wildlife thrive in school grounds and campaigning for nature. It demonstrates how helping people connect with and experience Scotland's National Parks positively impacts on wild places elsewhere.

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

www.johnmuiraward.org