

Schools in Scotland help care for natural environment through the John Muir Award



Conserve Audit reveals that during 2015:

- 13,468 John Muir Award pupils and staff made a positive difference to wild places
- 411 school groups involved
- 101,680 hours of Conserve activity – valued at £487,931
- 24% of Awards achieved by pupils experiencing disadvantage

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, minimising impact – capturing 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/conserve-audit-2015.

Conserve activity with school groups in Scotland

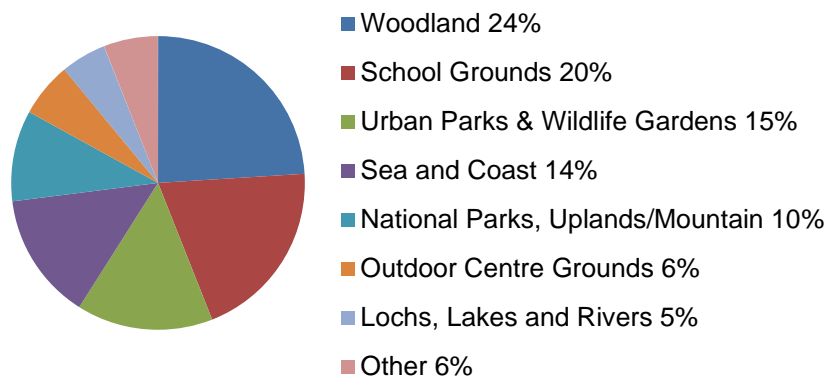
82% of all participants who achieved a John Muir Award in Scotland during 2015 had their involvement captured through this exercise. Engaging in activity that meets the Conserve Challenge of the John Muir Award helps deliver Curriculum for Excellence outcomes and demonstrates Learning for Sustainability in action. It involves pupils taking responsibility for nature (in school grounds and communities), helps establish aspirations for healthy behaviour, and improves wellbeing in line with Scottish Government SHANARRI indicators¹. Such activity helps foster a culture of achievement in schools – building essential skills for life, learning and work, and raising attainment for all².

Who was involved?

13,468 pupils and staff from 411 schools (later stage of primary, secondary level, & special schools) across Scotland achieved a John Muir Award in 2015. The John Muir Award is made available for free by the John Muir Trust. Nearly a quarter of pupils involved were experiencing some form of disadvantage.

Where did this happen?

Schools from Shetland to the Borders integrated this activity into their outdoor learning, curriculum, residential, fieldwork, social action, alternative provision and extra-curricular activities. The data reflected activity in diverse habitats, with woodland, school grounds and urban parks most frequently used.



Summary of activity

- Wildflowers - 10,670m² of planting and reseeding, plus 338m² of specific meadow management
- Homes for wildlife - 1,403 maintained or created, including minibeasts, newts and bats
- Feeders - 2,352 made including for birds, butterflies, red squirrels and ladybirds
- Litter - 3,922 bin bags of litter removed (13% sorted for recycling)
- Ponds - 3,140m² restored or created
- Compost - 45 compost heaps maintained or created, including wormeries
- Tree planting - 4,338 trees planted and 170m of hedges maintained or planted
- Woodland activity - 6,062m² of felling, coppicing and brashing
- Invasive non-native species - 4,600m² cleared (e.g. rhododendron, Himalayan balsam)
- Footpaths - 10,020m maintained, created or improved

¹ John Muir Award Providers Survey 2015 www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/scotland-provider-survey-2015

² [Attainment and the John Muir Award in Scotland](#)

How schools make connections through Conserve activity:

The Conserve Audit demonstrates, in many settings, a positive ethos and contribution towards the life of learners, school and community. It can be seen to help towards: a whole school approach to **Learning for Sustainability**; developing **outdoor learning approaches** through practical nature conservation; awareness of wider environmental issues (**sustainable development education**); active participation as **global citizens**.

“The John Muir Award gives a sense of participating in something bigger, recognising the importance of small exploration and conservation within a global perspective. Each individual takes responsibility to play their part”.

Alasdair Earnshaw, Head Teacher, Auchtertyre & Loch Duich Primary Schools, Highland.

Curriculum

4,005 participants (over a third of those monitored) gathered, recorded and analysed environmental data showing a strong engagement with Citizen Science, contributing to learning in sciences and technology (STEM) subjects. Over a third of participants acted sustainably by reducing, reusing and recycling waste, reducing energy, reducing food miles, growing food and utilising green travel. Over half considered outdoor rights and responsibilities through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and actively minimised their impacts on wild places. All this contributed to learning across diverse subjects such as Religious & Moral Education, social studies and health & well-being³.



School Grounds

One in five participating schools improved their grounds for biodiversity, including planting trees and wildflowers, litter picking, and creating wildlife habitats. Activity was integrated with Eco-Schools topics, and in collaboration with partners such as the Woodland Trust, RSPB, TCV, Grow Wild, OPAL, Grounds for Learning and Countryside Rangers.

Community

80% of activity was carried out beyond the school gates. Schools worked with local residents and in partnerships with interest/campaign groups, as well as national initiatives and agencies. 1,811 people engaged with environmental campaigns such as Beach Watch and National Spring Clean. 21% of participating school groups completed their Award through a residential experience at an outdoor centre. High quality residential experiences often support Conserve activity in remote areas and/or act as a catalyst for carrying out activity more locally back at school⁴.

Conclusions

Carrying out a Conserve Audit with Scottish schools over a full year has quantified one aspect of the contribution that John Muir Award involvement makes towards education priorities in Scotland. It highlights people from all backgrounds supporting and accessing an entitlement to Learning for Sustainability, and improving educational attainment. It shows how Award participation can help school learners and staff take personal responsibility - and make a difference to their community and the natural environment - in ways that are relevant and engaging to them.

The John Muir Trust would like to thank all the schools and their educational and community partners for contributing towards this Conserve Audit, and recognises support from Scottish Natural Heritage.

www.johnmuiraward.org

Photo credit: Emma Smith, Gairloch High School

³ [Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award](#)

⁴ Brilliant Residential Learning Away <http://learningaway.org.uk/residentials/>