

## Caring for Wales' natural environment through the John Muir Award



### Conserve Audit 2015 reveals that in Wales

- 5,075 John Muir Award participants made a positive difference to wild places
- £155,549 worth of activity, through 23,114 hours (3,302 days)
- 29% of Conserve activity carried out by people 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, 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 Wales

97% of all participants who achieved their John Muir Award in Wales (4,905 out of 5,075) during 2015 had their Conserve activity captured in this exercise, through 170 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. 29% of overall activity was carried out by people experiencing some form of disadvantage – many who would not normally engage in positive environmental action. (Information is available here '[Inclusion, Wild Places and The John Muir Award](#)').

### What did this look like on the ground?

From towns and council estates to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Conserve activity in Wales 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. Locations used included woodlands (the most frequented), mountains, coastlines, lakes, school and Outdoor Centre grounds, parks and urban settings (including back gardens).

### A summary of activity shows:

- Footpaths – 16,826m maintained, created and improved.
- Habitat management – 3,536m<sup>2</sup> managed, including tackling bracken, bramble, ragwort & hard shield fern.
- Invasive species – 3,064m<sup>2</sup> cleared, including rhododendron, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, laurel, bamboo, holm oak and pheasant berry.
- Litter – 1,474 black bin bags removed.
- Meadows – 1,080m<sup>2</sup> planted, seeded, mown and raked.
- Wildflowers – 836m<sup>2</sup> planted and reseeded.
- Woodlands – 491m<sup>2</sup> of felling, coppicing and brashing.
- Tree planting – 346 trees planted, including wild cherry, hazel, hawthorn, birch, crab apple & rowan.
- Fences – 326m maintained, created and removed.
- Wildlife Habitats - 199 homes created for birds, minibeasts, otters, newts, small mammals, bats, hedgehogs & reptiles.
- Contributions to over 30 local and regional Biodiversity Action Plans.
- Other: 78m<sup>2</sup> of ponds restored and created, 139 feeders made for birds, red squirrels, hedgehogs, bees, butterflies & other insects.

**“The group were engaged & focused - asking lots of questions & willing to try new things, explore new environments and discover new ways to take responsibility for the natural environment”** – Visiting Teacher, Plas Dol Y Moch Outdoor Education Centre

### **Taking responsibility for Wales' National Parks**

A primary Statutory Purpose of each UK National Park is to 'conserve and enhance its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage'. 85% of John Muir Award activity took place in National Parks, valued at £124,439. Whilst only 0.6% of this was with direct support from National Park staff, all of this John Muir Award activity (4,159 Awards delivered through 29 Award providers) directly contributes to Park aims. See [here](#) for a Summary of Conserve activity in all 15 UK National Parks.

### **Access and Environmental Impact**

A significant number of responses show a high level of activity (4,663 Awards) working towards enhanced understanding of rights and responsible behaviour in the outdoors, including the Countryside Code. 30% of participants utilised Green Travel principles, with substantial numbers of John Muir Award participants in Wales engaged with environmental agendas such as reduced waste (38%) and recycling (40%).

### **The Wellbeing of Future Generations in Wales**

The [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. A 'Healthier Wales' is one of seven long-term wellbeing goals identified, and considers approaches such as '[Five Ways to Wellbeing](#)'. Two of these evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing (identified by the New Economics Foundation and promoted by the NHS) 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.

**"Spending time taking responsibility for wild places through active conservation is a great way to get fit and active, allowing individuals to gain a great sense of achievement, whilst burning calories by stealth; contributing to a happier and healthier lifestyle."**

- Tom Cockbill, Wild Elements

### **Conclusion**

Completing a Conserve Audit in Wales 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, both on the doorstep and further afield.

It demonstrates support for national agendas and initiatives across Wales, including wellbeing for future generations, [social action](#) and volunteering by people from all walks of life, regardless of background or location.

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.

The John Muir Award in Wales is supported by the [George Bairstow Charitable Trust](#).

