

JOHN MUIR TRUST  
**JOURNAL**

71 AUTUMN 2021

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# Wild awakening

Making wild places count at COP26

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you need.



Casper McKeever  
Ben Nevis  
Photo: Hamish Frost



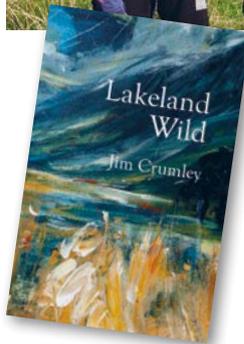
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# Nature, wild places and people

**EDINBURGH** city centre is the last place I expected to contemplate the idea of 'wildness'. But when I passed a restaurant recently which was advertising its 'wild food', I was reminded of just how heavy the 'wild' bandwagon has become. Whether it's attached to coffee or swimming, the word has been increasingly adopted to appeal to, and appease, a primal part of ourselves.

As a wild places charity, we are constantly trying to establish what we mean by the word 'wild' in a conservation and land management context. And unfortunately, the UK has little in the way of authentic landscapes to offer as a definition.

I recently had the pleasure of walking a short way up Ben Nevis with a hiking group focused on connecting minority ethnic groups to the outdoors. Most of the group had travelled from London, Coventry and Manchester, and were in awe of the beauty of the surrounding landscape.

None read it as a monoculture of overgrazing, devoid of trees and impoverished biodiversity;

long term community hunting models to ensure that deer management benefits wider society, not just a few wealthy individuals.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to modernising deer management regulation, too. Earlier this year, it accepted either in detail or in principle 91 of the 99 recommendations made in an independent Deer Working Group report – agreeing that it will be necessary to introduce extensive legislative and regulatory change over the course of this parliamentary session.

But large-scale reform and big picture thinking need incentives and regulation. So, beyond deer, we're looking at ideas that encourage Scotland's landowners to work together more broadly to help accelerate the drive towards the target of net zero carbon emissions. Our recent proposal to introduce a banded tax on landholdings has been met with constructive feedback and support from scientists, political parties and climate change experts around the UK, as well as the Chartered Institute for Taxation. We have taken this feedback on board as we develop a revised version which will be published in time for COP26 – when the world's eyes will be on the UK.

What could all this mean for wild places? Our ambition is that land management for nature and the planet will be the default position, and that there will be incentives to expand the footprint of wild places. Currently, there is no map or register of these areas in the UK, which means there is no baseline from which to build. We recently put out a tender for mapping priority wild places across England, Scotland and Wales to understand better the extent and condition of the UK's wild places, as well as enable us to engage with a wider range of people and help us prioritise limited resources.

One of the Trust's key priorities in wild places management is to ensure that nature has the freedom to recover and people are free to experience them. We have always taken a light touch approach to signage and other visitor interpretation material, preferring to keep signs of human infrastructure on the mountains to a minimum. While this will likely remain our position farther up the slopes, we do want to invest more in the visitor experience at trailheads in areas that we look after. Sligachan, in Skye, for example, has fantastic opportunities for this.

It is our firm belief that wild places are for everyone, and if we're to change the narrative of what a wild place should truly look like in the UK, then we must ensure that the freedom we hope to give the natural world also extends to all people. □

**David Balharry**  
Chief Executive, John Muir Trust



David with members of the Boots & Beards hiking group, Ben Nevis

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

instead, all showed a genuine interest in an ecologist's view of what lay before them.

Giving nature the freedom to restore itself is critical for our future. And if the UK is to meet its targets for mitigating the climate crisis, we must use the natural solutions on our doorstep: most obviously native woodland, which captures carbon, prevents soil erosion and contributes to flood defence. But we must also ensure that people have the freedom to enjoy these landscapes and recognise wild places when they see them. And we must ensure this will be of benefit to local economies and communities.

This is what the John Muir Trust has worked on for the past 40 years. But it is clear from the joint climate and biodiversity emergencies that we must now accelerate the transformation of the land in our care.

As such, the Trust will increase its deer culls going forward and explore options for developing

Glen Cassley  
- site of the  
proposed wind  
farm extension

PHOTOGRAPH: HEATHER ROSS

# Trust objects to Achany Extension wind farm proposal

**Nine years after a similar wind farm proposal was turned down on the Glencassley Estate in Sutherland, a new application has been submitted in the nearby Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area**

On 21 July 2021, SSE Generation Limited submitted an application under section 36 of the Electricity Act 2017 for the Scottish Ministers' consent to construct and operate Achany Extension Wind Farm – a development of 20 wind turbines at 149.9m and associated infrastructure 1.8km from the existing 19 turbine Achany Wind Farm.

A previous application nine years ago was for 23 turbines at 126.5m high, within the Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area, and was ultimately refused by Scottish Ministers in November 2015. In their decision, Ministers closely applied Scottish Planning Policy. They recognised the proposed site was 'an area of significant protection' and concluded that while attempts had been made to modify the design (23 turbines to 20), 'significant impacts on wild land would remain such that the Development would not be compatible with wild land policy.'

Fast forward nine years and a very similar development, brought by the same energy company, for the same

Glencassley estate and within the same Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area, has been submitted as a planning application. The Trust has reviewed the planning documentation and has objected to this development on wild land and peatland impact grounds.

Sited on the upland peatland slopes in the southern part of the Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area, the scale and extent of the proposed development – 17.3km of new access tracks, 20 new turbine foundations each requiring approximately 700m<sup>3</sup> of concrete (totalling 14,000m<sup>3</sup>) and 100 tonnes of steel reinforcement (totalling 2,000 tonnes), a new on-site substation, one LiDAR compound, five borrow pits, new underground cabling and two temporary construction compounds – would result in the loss of the wild qualities associated with the elevated peatland slopes of this part of the Wild Land Area and the ecological integrity of the priority peatland habitat.

## New Trustees sought

The Trust is seeking new Trustees to join the board in 2022. Serving as a Trustee is a way of helping to shape the work of the Trust, and of contributing specialist skills and knowledge to various areas of work, from conservation and lobbying government to financial management. The closing date for nominations is Tuesday 1 March 2022. To find out more, or to express an interest, please visit [johnmuirtrust.org/trusteecall](http://johnmuirtrust.org/trusteecall)

## More partners for major forest project

Two new partners – Grenich and the National Trust for Scotland Ben Lawers – have recently joined the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, increasing the footprint of this visionary Highland Perthshire nature project.

The Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership was launched in 2017 with the shared aim to create a linked woodland corridor across more than 3,000ha, from the Keltneyburn Special Area of Conservation all the way to Loch Tummel, and including Trust land at Schiehallion.

As well as the John Muir Trust, other members include Garth Wood Wilding Project; Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust (Dùn Coilich); Dalchosnie and Kynachan Estate; Scottish Wildlife Trust; Woodland Trust Scotland; plus Forestry and Land Scotland.



## Mapping UK wild places

### Trust project to highlight the UK's best wild places gets underway

The current crises of biodiversity loss and climate breakdown are well-reported and are areas of great concern for the Trust. We are also increasingly concerned about a third crisis: the degradation and disappearance of wild places which offer so much – including wildlife habitat, places for quiet contemplation and delivering ecosystem services such as carbon storage and flood mitigation.

To help us begin to turn around the decline in wild places, we will increasingly focus on developing a better understanding of where the best wild places are, how they are being threatened and how they are seen by the communities living around them and those who visit them.

Over the next few months, we will take an objective look at where the UK's best wild places are. This will take a different approach from previous wildness mapping work, including that which helped to establish Wild Land Areas in Scotland.

Once this initial work has been completed, the next 12 months or so will see further work to understand the rate of attrition of wild places across the UK, from threats that include intensive agriculture and forestry, inappropriate development and other damaging land uses such as management for driven grouse shooting. We will also engage closely with communities, Trust members and the wider public to understand how these important and often threatened places are perceived.

This work to establish the extent of and threats to the UK's wild places will give us greater ability to plan our resource for their protection, including a more strategic approach to the partners and partnerships we work with and within.



Mapping the UK's wild places is a key first step in protecting them



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

Initial ideas will be piloted at Tarras Valley Nature Reserve

## Call for tech companies to find carbon capture solutions

The Trust and three other conservation and community development organisations in the south of Scotland have challenged companies to find an innovative technological solution to tackle climate change through land use.

A partnership between the Langholm Initiative, Southern Uplands Partnership, South of Scotland Enterprise and the Trust aims to discover how technology can help landowners better understand the potential for carbon storage on their land and so inform future land-use decisions.

We have put the challenge out to tender through the Scottish Government's CivTech programme, which exists to invite start-up companies and entrepreneurs to help solve challenges faced by public sector organisations.

Although data on the potential for carbon storage on different habitats does exist in various forms – for example in satellite data – it often cannot be accessed or processed in a meaningful way by land managers.

Successful CivTech candidates will be placed into a tech accelerator programme to explore promising ideas that will be piloted on the new 2,100-ha Tarras Valley Nature Reserve on Langholm Moor in Dumfries and Galloway. Successful trials could inform wider adoption of the technology across Scotland and beyond. The resulting products and services will be revealed in March 2022.

## Carbon emissions land tax

When members of Scotland's Climate Assembly published their 'Recommendations for Action' Report in June, we were pleased to note that one of the 81 recommended actions was for the Trust's carbon land tax proposal (see p10, Spring 21 Journal).

In all, 81 per cent of Assembly members supported the recommendation that we pitched to them in January this year. It was the second most popular of the seven specific taxes proposed – behind a tax on high carbon industrial producers, but well ahead of aviation, road and food taxes.

We expect Scottish Ministers to publish a statement on how they intend to respond to the Report's recommendations before the end of December this year.



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

## Nature champs

**Two MSPs step up and volunteer to champion the lesser butterfly orchid and golden eagle**

The Trust is delighted to welcome two new Nature Champions to our fold: Maree Todd, MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, will champion the lesser butterfly orchid, while Lorna Slater, MSP for Lothian Region, will champion the golden eagle.

Nature Champions – a Scottish Environment LINK initiative – matches willing Members of the Scottish Parliament with a native species and an organisation to support the MSP to advocate for protections for that species.

Maree Todd MSP (left) told us she was pleased to champion the lesser butterfly orchid – a flower with a stronghold in the north-west of Scotland, where it grows in patches on the roadside verges near Quinag.

We suggested that Maree could write to the Highland Council to request that roadside verge cutting happens after the orchids have flowered, giving their seed time to disperse. Maree was keen to take up this action and we hope the Highland Council will see both the money saving opportunity from reducing roadside verge cutting as well as the biodiversity imperative.

In July, we introduced Lorna Slater MSP (right) to the golden eagle. We explained how our work relates to sustaining healthy golden eagle populations and the relationship between types of land management and population health. Following the meeting, Lorna agreed to visit the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project later this year.

We are still looking for champions for three other species closely associated with wild places: Arctic (dwarf) birch, Atlantic salmon and sea trout. We remain hopeful that we can find MSPs to champion each of these important species.



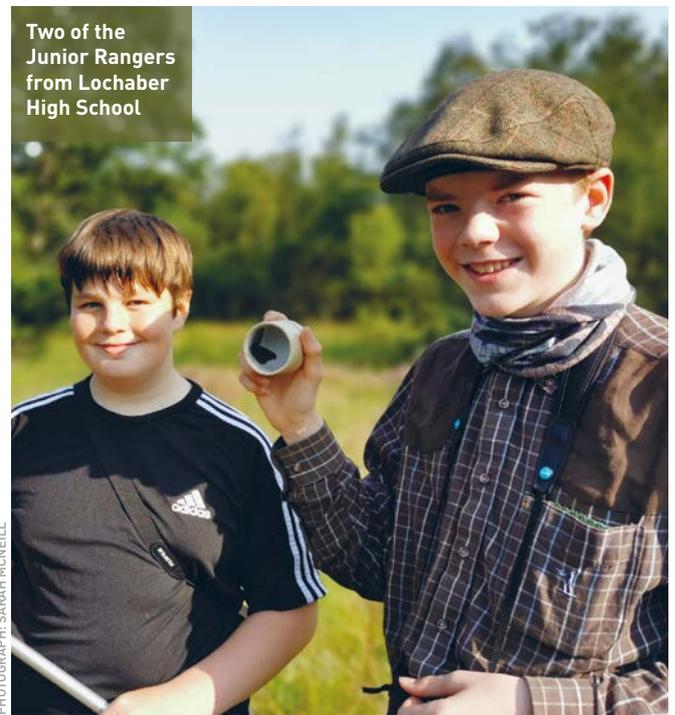
## First Junior Rangers step out

**New programme enables high school students to discover more about Quinag and Nevis**

The Trust's first Junior Rangers programme was launched this August, with 18 high school students volunteering to contribute to conservation projects in their area and gain experience in the outdoors and conservation sector.

"We are delighted to be working with 18 passionate and motivated teenagers over the course of this academic year, encouraging them to connect with and make a positive difference to their local wild places," commented Sarah McNeill, Junior Ranger Project Officer.

Two of the Junior Rangers from Lochaber High School



PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH MCNEILL

The Nevis Junior Rangers, all from Lochaber High School, were taken along the River Nevis to the foot of the Ben Nevis mountain path. As they walked with Trust staff, they recorded a number of butterfly and bee species and undertook some freshwater invertebrate identification surveys and river quality tests.

Meanwhile, the Quinag Junior Rangers from Ullapool High School spent a morning exploring an off-grid forest base in nearby Leckmelm Wood. They increased their skills and knowledge of food growing and foraging as they picked some freshly grown toppings for homemade pizzas, cooked in the outdoor pizza oven.

Both events marked the start of fortnightly Junior Ranger sessions that will take place throughout the rest of the academic year. Tailored specifically for each site, the programmes will very much take into account the local environment, individual interests and needs, plus the many partnership opportunities available at each location.

The Junior Ranger programme has been made possible with funding from ALA Green and through support from partners such as Nevis Landscape Partnership, Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership and the Woodland Trust.



Sandwood Bay,  
Northwest  
Highlands

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS

# Taking to the stage

## Trust lays initial groundwork for theatre roadshow planned for 2023

In partnership with Community Land Scotland – the umbrella body for community landowners – the Trust has taken the first steps towards developing an exciting new theatre project that will aim to inspire communities across the Highlands to engage with the public debate around land use, ownership and management.

Over the summer we assembled a creative team to take the project forward, and in Joe Douglas, Luke Holbrook and Jenna Watt we have three of the brightest young talents in Scottish theatre. In 2015, Luke and Joe worked together as producer and director of the hugely successful revival of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* – garnering five-star reviews.

Jenna, another award-winning theatre maker who also recently achieved a MSc in Sustainable Rural Development, has a deep interest and understanding of the interconnection between people, landscape and the natural environment.

We have so far held preliminary discussions with Creative Scotland and other arts bodies. During 2022 we aim to raise the necessary funding that will enable us to take a thought-provoking, entertaining production to venues across rural and urban Scotland in 2023.

With the project still at an early stage, Trust member Drew Campbell, an experienced developer of music, literary and theatre projects, is pulling together the threads of the project on behalf of the Trust and Community Land Scotland.

For more details, contact [alan.mccombes@johnmuirtrust.org](mailto:alan.mccombes@johnmuirtrust.org)

## Launch of NorthWest 2045 vision

The Trust is playing a leading role in the development of a community-led vision for the future of the Northwest Highlands for the year 2045.

Over the past year, NorthWest 2045 has brought together a range of landowners from the Achiltibuie to Bettyhill area, along with government agencies and Highland Council. Consultation took the form of online workshops, surveys and in-depth interviews with local people and organisations. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges people face and their aspirations for the future.

Several key themes emerged. Housing and broadband provision were high up the list, as was addressing the democratic deficit that many feel when decisions about the area's future are made in Inverness and Edinburgh, with little direct input from those living locally. Ambitions also included a more sustainable approach to land use with greater opportunity for community involvement in active land management.

On the back of this work, the area has been selected as one of the Scottish Government's five Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot Projects. Find out more at [northwest2045.scot](http://northwest2045.scot)

## Trust joins Zero Hour campaign for groundbreaking new CEE Bill

In May 2019, the UK Parliament became the first national government to declare an environment and climate emergency. While the declaration sparked a renewed sense of hope and urgency, government policies have failed to deliver the pace and scale of the action needed.

Enter Zero Hour, the campaign for the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill. Drafted by scientists, legal experts, ecological economists and environmentalists, the CEE Bill is a proposal for a new law designed specifically to reverse

the climate and ecological breakdown currently faced by society.

This groundbreaking new Bill requires the UK to take responsibility for its fair share of greenhouse gas emissions, to actively restore biodiverse habitats and to stop damaging the natural world through the production, transportation and disposal of the goods we consume.

The CEE Bill was initially presented in Parliament as a private member's bill by Caroline Lucas MP in September 2020. An updated, and strengthened, version of the Bill was reintroduced in

Parliament in June 2021.

Today, the Bill is supported by 143 MPs and Peers from all political parties, 104 Councils, over 13,000 individuals and more than 250 organisations, including the Trust.

With the recent publication of the UN's damning sixth IPCC report and the UK's failure to meet many of the UN's biodiversity targets, it is clear that decisive action is required.

The CEE Bill addresses the gaps in the Climate Change Act and the Environment Bill, acknowledging the need for more joined-up legislation.



# Wild awakening

As Glasgow prepares to host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) summit in November, Rich Rowe explores how the Trust plans to make its voice heard – and its efforts to ensure that wild places are part of the conversation

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PUDDIPHATT

**WHEN** the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its latest report in August, it made for grim reading – and even more alarming headlines. The report was quickly dubbed a ‘code red’ for humanity and was accompanied by front page images of the many wildfires, storms, flash floods and landslides that countries around the globe have suffered in 2021 alone.

Climate change is rapid, widespread and intensifying, it said, with many of the changes observed unprecedented in thousands of years. Some, such as continued sea level rise, are likely to be irreversible. Without immediate, sustained and large-scale reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, limiting global warming to 1.5°C – a goal enshrined in the Paris Agreement of 2015 – or even 2°C will be beyond reach.

Over the coming decades, the report projects that climate change will increase in all regions. Even with 1.5°C of global warming, there will be more heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2°C of global warming, heat extremes will more often reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and public health.

## ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

But climate change is not just about temperature. It also results in a variety of changes in different parts of the world – ocean acidification, coral reef decay, loss of coastal habitats, desertification, species migration and more – all of which will only increase with further warming.

Overall, the IPCC’s update on the physical science basis of climate change provides a much clearer picture of the past, present and future climate. It also highlights a key point: that efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so far have been wholly insufficient.

Which brings us to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow over a period of almost two weeks this November. The summit aims to accelerate action to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Some paint it as a last chance for the world to address in a

meaningful way the connected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and global public health.

For the John Muir Trust, COP26 is about exerting pressure where it counts most. But in amongst all the noise that surrounds such a major international summit, what are the key messages? And how is it possible to get them across?

In a recent presentation to staff, David Balharry, the Trust’s Chief Executive, dwelled on the word ‘Anthropocene’ – a term used to define Earth’s most recent geological period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic. It is based on overwhelming evidence, not least from the recent IPCC report, that key earth system processes are now fundamentally altered by humans.

“I think this is the bit that society hasn’t woken up to yet,” says David. “For millions of years, humans have walked the planet and no matter what they did, the planet always recovered. But that is no longer the case.”

However, despite the alarming headlines and the ensuing global empathy among the world’s leaders, such drama often plays out slowly in terms of action at a political level – meaning a degree of realism is needed about some of the hoped-for outcomes from COP26.

In a way, organisations such as the Trust must find different ways into the conversation. One strategy is to marry the big, global issues with a more local appreciation of specific challenges. And for the Trust, that comes back to a core message around the value of wild places to people, nature and the wider environment.

On a Scottish level, and with this ‘local’ appreciation in mind, there is growing concern about the increased drive by both UK and Scottish Governments to see the least developed areas of the UK as being the location for the bulk of our onshore wind farms, often because the planning restraints elsewhere are too stringent.

By way of illustration, David recalls recent conversations with senior figures from a leading power generation firm in which major strategic challenges around renewables were discussed together with options for delivering the 16GW of



The Trust aims to ensure that wildness is relevant to the majority in society, not just the few

onshore wind power estimated to be required by the UK Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget in 2020.

It became clear that there is a real risk that the unique qualities of the Scottish Highlands are seen as the path of least resistance when it comes to meeting the UK's shortfall in wind energy. Already, development companies are encroaching onto formally recognised Wild Land Areas which are part of Scottish Planning Policy – and with many more developments planned.

In a statement as part of its recent programme for work, released in September, the Scottish Government said: “We will ensure no onshore wind developments in National Parks and National Scenic Areas are supported and the sensitivity of other nationally important designated sites is respected. Subject to fuller assessment, development in all other areas will be supported in principle unless impacts are unacceptable.”

All of which sets alarm bells ringing – not least as Wild Land Areas are a planning consideration rather than a form of designation. “There is no doubt in my mind that the Scottish Government is being lobbied by those who highlight Wild Land Areas as a key constraint to wind farm developments, as required by Scottish Planning Policy,” comments David.

“The fear is that the current requirement to take account of the UK's best Wild Land Areas in planning considerations will be removed in a blind drive to meet policy targets. This sees industrialisation of unique natural assets pitted against nature – an economic asset in its own right – simply for the short-term political aspiration of economic profit.”

As David adds, there is deep concern that the global empathy for climate change could potentially be used “to introduce the trojan horse of helping Scotland become a leader in renewable energies, at the cost of devastating our natural assets”.

Such a scenario that sees corporate profit placed above safeguarding finite natural assets is exactly the kind of ‘local’ issue that an organisation such as the Trust can and should

raise its voice about. “As we head towards COP26, that's the kind of more local challenge we need to bring out into the open,” states David.

“The Trust firmly believes that we can protect our unique natural assets and that Scotland can be a leader in renewable energies while also demonstrating that it can provide a world-class rural economy based on the intrinsic value of nature and our landscapes.”

## COMING TOGETHER

Another way to be heard when there is danger of being drowned out is to align with others. “At the start of the year, we began to look at our potential engagement with COP,” explains Toby Clark, the Trust's John Muir Award Scotland Manager. “A colleague likened it to performing at the Edinburgh Fringe – at something so huge, how is it possible to be noticed?”

For the Trust, one answer was to join the COP26 Coalition, a UK-wide civil society coalition of groups and individuals looking to mobilise around the theme of climate justice during the summit. With similar objectives in mind, the Trust also joined Climate Cymru, a proudly Welsh campaign with a more targeted aim: to add 10,000 voices to a direct call to the Welsh Government to protect the places that people love.

There have since been a range of light touch campaigns that have resonated well with the Trust's own approach. In February, hundreds of thousands of people took part in Show Your Love 21 – a COP26 Coalition campaign centred around how our relationship with the world is the longest relationship of our lives; Climate Cymru created a range of social media campaigns around people's voices being heard; and in September, the Trust participated in a series of UK-wide events celebrating action on climate change as part of the Great Big Green Week.

Similarly, in Scotland, engagement with COP26 has seen a partnership approach. Through Scottish Environment LINK, the Trust signed up for the Climate Scotland Campaign,

which follows the Climate Cymru model of gathering 10,000 voices, this time from the people of Scotland; in November, it will run a workshop for teachers about learning for climate action on behalf of the National Network for Outdoor Learning (Scotland); and the Trust has been invited to sit on the advisory board of a flagship project – the creation of a Scotland’s Young People’s Forest.

But while the summit is crucially important, such wide-ranging efforts are not based solely on one fortnight in November, notes Rosie Simpson, the Trust’s Senior Policy Officer. “Understandably, there is a lot of focus on this one event, but we haven’t just started looking at this kind of work because of COP26 – we’ve been doing it for years,” she says.

### ENGAGING ALL

‘Relevance’ is a word that is used more than ever as conservation organisations of all shapes, sizes and priorities seek to get their messages across at a time when more people than ever are listening.

But relevance can mean different things to different people; for the Trust, it is about ensuring that the value of wild places is understood by a much wider audience. “The climate crisis is important and so too is the biodiversity crisis but are wild places part of the conversation?” questions David. “I think we have a lot more to do in terms of making wild places relevant to the majority of society.”

The starting point is to help connect more people, of all ages and from all walks of life, with wild places wherever they may be. That was exactly the goal of the Trust’s involvement in Keeping it Wild, a three-year National Lottery Heritage-funded project in partnership with London Wildlife Trust (LWT), Headliners and London Youth that reached an urban, education-age audience which remains poorly represented in nature conservation.

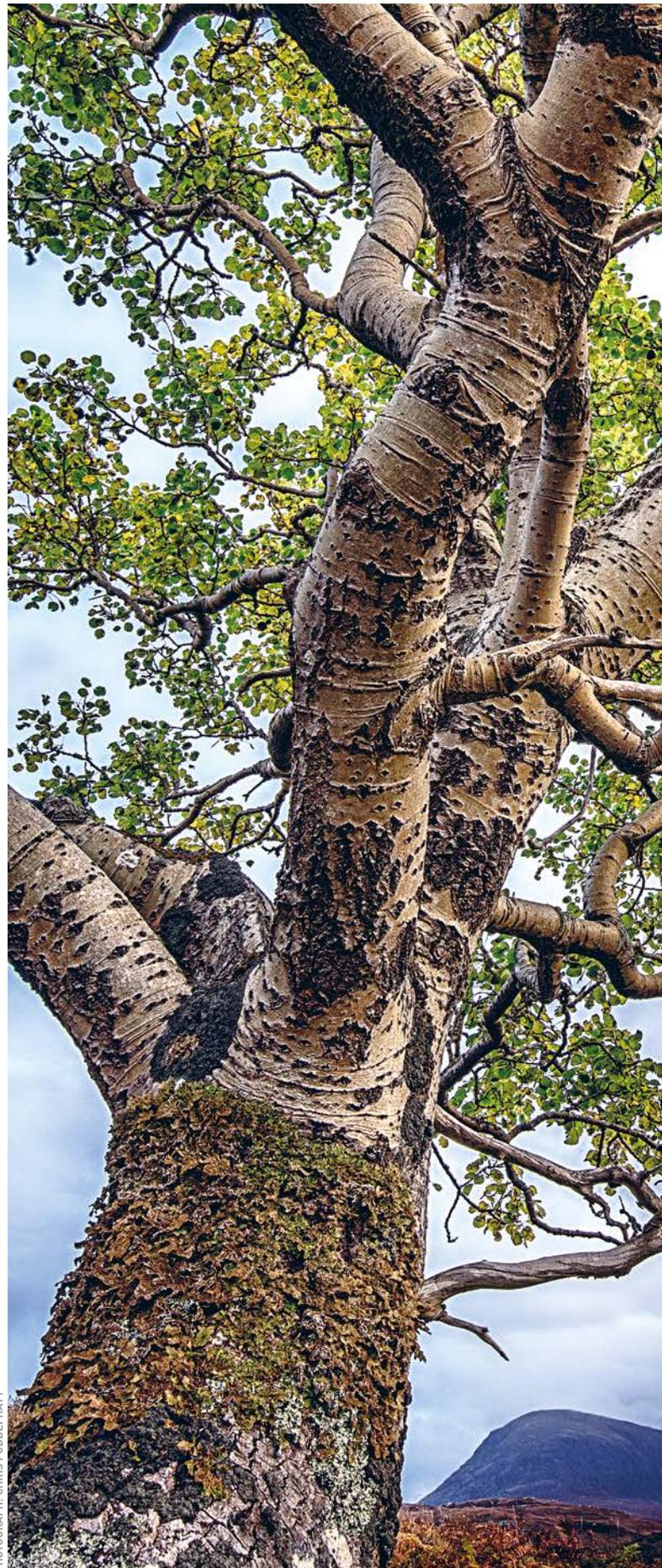
Through a mix of Wild Action Days for individuals, Social Action Programmes involving youth clubs across the capital and a Young People’s Forum, which enabled voices to be heard at every level of LWT, the project helped connect hundreds of young people with wild places across London – with participants able to achieve a John Muir Award along the way. It also offered traineeships for 18 to 25-year-olds to take on a paid placement at LWT, so providing an invaluable first step on the conservation career ladder.

“For us, it was a great opportunity to work directly with that audience base – something that we don’t often get a chance to do,” explains Phil Stubbington, John Muir Award England & Wales Manager.

Keeping it Wild came to an end in September, but there is now an opportunity to replicate it in some form elsewhere in the UK. “It’s not quite a drag and drop to a new urban population, but we can definitely pull out the bits that worked really well and implement them elsewhere with the right partners,” says Phil.

One of those involved with the Keeping it Wild Young People’s Forum is Krishna Sharma, who recently moved from London to Edinburgh to study for a Masters in Science Communication and Public Engagement. Following contact with the Trust through previous volunteering with LWT, she will combine her studies with a volunteer communications role at the John Muir Trust.

It’s a role that she is looking forward to while adjusting to a new life in Scotland. “With COP fast approaching, it’s an interesting time to come north,” she smiles. “One thing I am



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PUDDPHATT



Outdoor connections: Quinag, Sutherland (main); students from Ullapool High School enjoy their first taste of being Junior Rangers (right and top)



PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH MCNEILL



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

“For millions of years, humans have walked the planet and no matter what they did, the planet always recovered. But that is no longer the case”

DAVID BALHARRY



PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH MCNEILL

hoping for is some insight into how governments plan to tackle the socio-economic effects of climate change, as it is no secret that it is people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are most impacted.”

She is also looking for much more from conservation bodies. “Just making conservation more accessible would be a good start,” she suggests. “It feels a little like a playground for the elite – something only for those who can afford to volunteer their time. It’s a shame when there are barriers to people gaining experience.”

### LEADING THE CHARGE

As pupils return for a new school year across the UK, gaining skills and contributing to nature conservation is precisely the aim of a new pilot outdoor and environmental education programme underway in the Scottish Highlands. One morning each fortnight, and for the entire academic year, a total of 18 third- and fourth-year students from Lochaber High School in Fort William and Ullapool High School in Wester Ross now take part in Junior Ranger sessions alongside John Muir Trust staff and local partners at Nevis and Quinag respectively.

Place-specific, each programme considers the local environment, individual participant’s interests and needs, plus partnership opportunities at each site. During the year, the students will gain a true taste of life as a ranger through the seasons. This means working on habitat and species monitoring, visitor management, navigation and hill skills, learning first aid skills, practical conservation tasks and much more. Together they are learning how to protect wild places, developing new skills and gaining qualifications while also having a lot of fun exploring together.

The programme is funded by ALA Green, which has previously funded conservation officer roles at six Trust properties as well as a policy post and mountain woodland project post. The idea is to plug what is seen as a gap at high school stage in terms of switching young people on to working in the conservation sector.

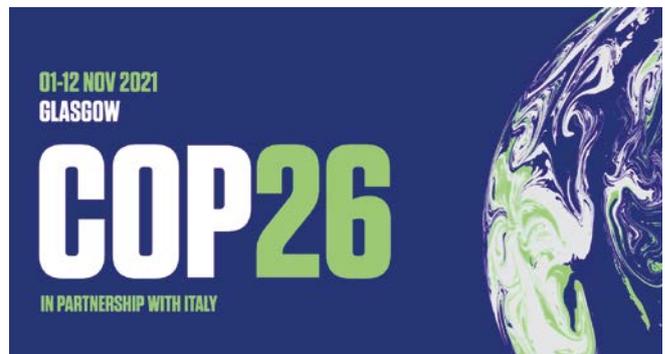
“We are excited about giving young people living in and around our properties the space to connect more closely with their local environment and help them develop knowledge and skills for conservation along the way,” explains Sarah McNeill, the Trust’s Junior Ranger Project Officer. “Our Junior Rangers are taking direct action to help create change to protect their local wild places and nature, which we hope will foster lifelong wonder and empathy for the natural world.”

Schools have leapt at the chance to be involved, embedding the Junior Ranger programme into the curriculum and linking it with Scotland’s Developing the Young Workforce initiative. The Trust has already received requests to expand the scope of the programme even further, and to extend the programme out to interested young people from other schools.

In amongst the noise and drama and clamour of a world trying to right itself, it is perhaps through exactly this kind of local engagement that medium-sized conservation charities such as the Trust can be truly heard. □

#### About the author

Rich Rowe is contributing editor of the Journal



PHOTOGRAPH: KRISHNA SHARMA

**“Conservation ... feels a little like a playground for the elite. It’s a shame when there are barriers to people gaining experience”**

KRISHNA SHARMA





All eyes will be on Glasgow during COP26 in November



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

## Carbon journey

While there is intense focus on what happens at government level over the coming months, the Trust is also looking within. In March, as part of crystallising its own thinking around what kind of organisation it wants to be, the Trust appointed Nikki Gordon (pictured above) as its first ever Carbon Officer.

She has a big job ahead. Using 2019 as the baseline year, Nikki's initial task was to benchmark the current carbon footprint across every area of the Trust's activity and then establish a carbon reduction strategy for each element.

As an environmental charity, Trust staff are naturally switched on to reducing their impact. "People get it, so that's a big help," says Nikki. "Similarly, a lot of the processes in place are already carbon friendly and so don't need to be improved too much. Having someone who can filter that carbon thinking through every department in a coherent way. That's the value that I bring."

The Trust's target is to reduce its direct emissions to absolute zero by 2030 and reduce total emissions to as close to zero as possible by 2035 at the latest. Ultimately, however, the ambition reaches beyond net zero to becoming 'carbon credible'.

"Net zero is a noble ambition but can be at the expense of reducing consumption rather than just counted emissions," explains Nikki. "Carbon credible means taking holistic, conscious, systemic and ecologically-responsible action to reduce and minimise our carbon footprint."

"We are trying to change that system of thinking not only within our own staff but in everything we do – from locking up carbon on our land to promoting pro-environmental thought leadership."

Of course, the reality is that the Trust will burn carbon – that's just a fact of managing land in rural areas. "But what I would like to see is that we are at the forefront of thinking in how to manage areas of land in a way that has most regard for that carbon," comments David Balharry, the Trust's Chief Executive. "It's about addressing consumption in a way that is realistic, practical and as pragmatic as possible."

PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH MCNEILL



A Nevis Junior Ranger gets to grips with species ID

PHOTOGRAPH: UNFCCC



The top table at COP25, Chile/Madrid, 2019

# Making good

This summer, the UN launched its Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. **Ali Wright** shares nine ways in which we continue to do our bit on the land in our care



PHOTOGRAPH: STEPHEN BALLARD

**1 TREES NOT BOMBS**  
 Almost 40 years ago, the John Muir Trust came into being with the purchase of Li and Coire Dhorraicil (above) to prevent the Ministry of Defence from turning much of Knoydart into a bombed-out wasteland. Since then, we have planted thousands of trees and helped to keep deer numbers under control so that woodland can regenerate naturally in the absence of natural predators.



PHOTOGRAPH: PETE BARRON

**2 TREES WITH ALTITUDE**  
 They might not be as headline-grabbing as species such as lynx, but trees that grow on the tops of mountains are also important. At Glenridding Common in the Lake District, we are re-establishing rare arctic-alpine plants and mountain woodland species through propagation (above), while at East Schiehallion we've been introducing a range of native tree species that couldn't get there without our help.

**BIG THINKERS**  
**3** We believe in landscape-scale restoration. That's because large areas with less fragmentation allow nature the space to move, adapt and become ecologically resilient. In 2010, alongside 13 other organisations, we helped create Europe's largest environmental restoration project, the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership. Covering 635 square kilometres, it includes Trust land at Quinag in Sutherland.

PHOTOGRAPH: CALL



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

**4 LEAVE IT IN THE GROUND**  
 Peat, like fossil fuels, is best left in the ground. Peatlands account for only three per cent of the earth's surface and yet store 30 per cent of the world's carbon. One fifth of Scotland's land is peat but 80 per cent of it is damaged. Thanks to NatureScot's Peatland Action programme, we've been restoring 36.5ha of peat bog at Strathaird, Skye (below) by removing commercial timber and blocking drains.





**5 NATURAL CARBON STORES**  
 The thing about carbon capture is that nature does it perfectly already. When ecosystems are restored, carbon gets captured in trees and soils, which reduces climate change impacts and, in turn, makes ecosystems more resilient. And we've come up with an idea for a natural carbon land tax that would require large landowners to manage their land in the best way for biodiversity and carbon capture. This way, every living being gets to benefit irrespective of who owns the land.



PHOTOGRAPH: FRAN LOCKHART

**7 SUSTAINABLE DEER MANAGEMENT**  
 Deer belong in the Scottish countryside, but current numbers far exceed the carrying capacity of the land. As part of the Scottish Environment LINK Deer Working Group, we submitted a report that proposes changes to deer management. In March this year, the Scottish Government agreed that most of the recommendations need to happen if climate and biodiversity goals are to be met.



PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LELLAND

**8 HOWDY PARTNERS**  
 There's power in numbers. We're working with the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest to restore rare and ancient west coast rainforest, while at Schiehallion (above) we're part of the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership's work to restore 3,000ha of mountain woodland. And on Nevis, we work with neighbouring landowners as part of The Nevis Landscape Partnership to limit visitor impacts and help grow the native pine forest.

**9 WE ARE NATURE TOO**  
 Restore ecosystems and you also restore people. We help people from all backgrounds, and wherever they may live, to get out into wild places through volunteering and the John Muir Award. We also work with communities who have brought land back into their control to share best conservation and restoration practices.



PHOTOGRAPH: PENNY DIXIE



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

**6 STAYING ON THE PATH**  
 They say the path to hell is paved with good intentions. We, on the other hand, have been using hard graft to repair paths in the other direction - to the tops of mountains. Paths such as the old stalker's path into Coire Dhorrcail on Knoydart (above). Good paths are vital to reduce erosion and protect fragile plants and soils from all those boots on the ground.

*About the author*  
 Ali Wright is a freelance writer focusing on nature and sustainability



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

# A fine balance

**Although imperfect, the Wild Land Areas map that is incorporated into Scottish Planning Policy could yet evolve to become far more than just a policy planning tool.**

**Rosie Simpson explains**

**AS A** wild places charity with a remit to protect wild places in the UK, and operating at a time of climate emergency, we are aware of treading a fine line between challenging individual renewable energy development applications if unsuitably located, while also being broadly supportive of wind energy – a form of electricity generation that has already played an important role in decarbonising Scotland's power sector.

The perceived polarisation is reflected in views of our members. Some have written to say that wind turbines have aided their enjoyment of the wild; the tracks help them access the hills by eBike or on cross country skis, while the motion and sound of the blades also bring a certain pleasure. For them, wind turbines are symbols of a

new world of clean energy abundance rather than out-of-place industrial developments.

Others, however, are alarmed at the rate of expansion of onshore wind turbines across the country, or in particular regions. Those members wonder what the overall plan is. How many more turbines are needed? And where will all the additional infrastructure go?

## **WATERSHED MOMENT**

In Scotland, the adoption of 42 mapped areas of wild land – the Wild Land Areas map (see opposite) – into Scottish Planning Policy in 2014 was a watershed moment in protecting these places from onshore wind energy development. The current National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) refers to

wild land as 'nationally important', while current Scottish Planning Policy (SPP2) mentions Wild Land Areas as being 'nationally important mapped assets' in which 'wind farms may be appropriate in some circumstances'.

There is no equivalent mapping of Wild Land Areas in England, Wales or Northern Ireland but, as planning is a devolved matter, we can expect the UK countries to have different policy approaches to onshore wind.

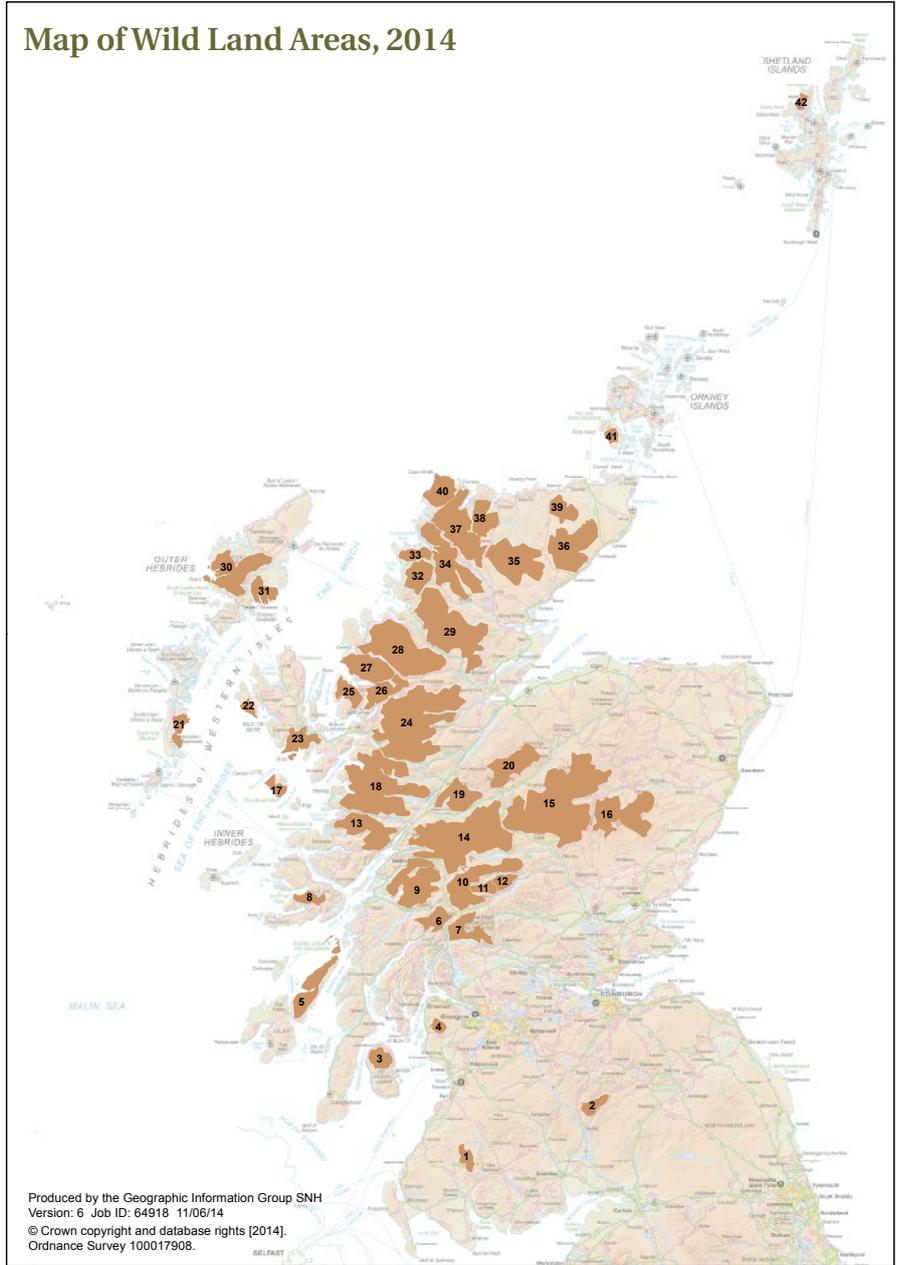
In Scotland, the approach adopted in 2014 evolved from past planning policy and consultation led by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot), with the eventual mapped areas representing the 'most extensive areas of high wildness' in Scotland.

In its note of advice to the Scottish Government in June 2014, Scottish Natural Heritage acknowledged that while the Core Areas of Wild Land map consultation had not been perfect, it had nonetheless received support from 73 per cent of respondents. This provided the evidence it needed to

**KEY TO MAP**

01 Merrick	23 Cuillin
02 Talla-Hart fell	24 Central Highlands
03 North Arran	25 Applecross
04 Waterhead Moor – Muirshiel	26 Coulin & Ledgowan Forest
05 Jura, Scarba, Lunga and Garvellachs	27 Flowerdale – Sheildaig – Torridon
06 Ben Lui	28 Fisherfield – Letterewe – Fannichs
07 Ben More – Ben Ledi	29 Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis
08 Ben More, Mull	30 Harris – Uig hills
09 Loch Etive mountains	31 Eisgein
10 Breadalbane – Schiehallion	32 Inverpolly – Glencanisp
11 Lyon – Lochay	33 Quinag
12 Ben Lawers	34 Reay – Casley
13 Moidart – Ardgour	35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest
14 Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder	36 Causeymire – Knockfin Flows
15 Cairngorms	37 Foinaven – Ben Hee
16 Lochnagar – Mount Keen	38 Ben Hope – Ben Loyal
17 Rum	39 East Halladale Flows
18 Kinlochhourn – Knoydart – Morar	40 Cape Wrath
19 Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh	41 Hoy
20 Monadhlaith	42 Ronas Hill & North Roe
21 South Uist hills	
22 Duirinish	

**Map of Wild Land Areas, 2014**



support the inclusion of a Wild Land Areas map in Scottish Planning Policy. At the time, the Trust was also supportive of the map and participated in the consultations.

Following the map’s publication, 42 Wild Land Area descriptions were published with the aim of helping broaden an understanding and appreciation of the areas. Draft guidance for developers on “Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas” was also published in 2017 (although not formally approved until 2020). Since inclusion of the map in Scottish Planning Policy, developers have applied the guidance, evaluating whether a Wild Land Impact Assessment is needed at scoping stage, and subsequently assessing impacts where needed.

Similarly, local authorities and Scottish Ministers have used the assessments on impacts to help them determine the outcomes of individual energy development applications.

From the start, the policy intention

for including Wild Land Areas has been clear: Scottish Government intended to provide decision-makers with a backstop to protect these areas, on a case-by-case basis, from large-scale onshore wind farms. And given that only one large-scale onshore wind farm has been constructed in a Wild Land Area (Creag Riabhach in Fionaven-Ben Hee) since the adoption of Wild Land Areas into planning policy, it can be argued that this policy intention has been fulfilled.

**DIFFERENT VIEWS**

However, much has changed since 2014 and it is worth reflecting on the mapping approach from other perspectives. From days of empire,

leaders of nations have drawn lines on maps. These have served different purposes but have often created a sense of division. There is the theoretical division (you are on one side of the line or the other) and the cultural division (who decides where to place the line and according to what values or criteria?).

There is also potential for creating fresh division in communities, with lines on maps used to direct future decisions and resources according to where those lines have been drawn. Overall, they can be rather blunt instruments, at odds with both a rapidly changing world and the reality that nature is no respecter of digital or paper boundaries.



Wind turbines at Stronelairg (previous page); Strathaird Farm, close to Wild Land Area 23; swimming in the shadow of Bla Bheinn

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

In Scotland, such maps have appeared to some as cultural appropriation – an insensitive marking out of ‘what is wild’ when what is wild was once understood and interpreted by families and communities living in these places. Does it matter, for example, that there is a lack of Gaelic interpretation of the Wild Land Areas? And is that at odds with the many Gaelic place names for landscape features within these areas?

People make sense of areas through geographical identity, through their own language, familiar place names and experiences. The maps, in this respect, have not necessarily captured what is meaningful to local communities living near the mapped wild places. Instead, they are a planning tool which, depending on where you live and your viewpoint (in both senses of the word), can direct resources, development and job opportunities away from or towards your region.

### TRUST MANIFESTO

In our Manifesto for the Holyrood 2021 elections, the Trust asked for ‘a strategy for Scotland’s Wild Land Areas with the aim of realising their environmental, ecological, educational, health and economic potential’. The intention was to create room for a conversation around Wild Land Areas being much more than just a planning policy tool.

Existing community land-owning and partnership models suggest this is possible. The Yearn Stane Project within the Waterhead Moor-Muirshiel Wild Land Area, the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Partnership in the



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID BALHARRY

**“We are for wild places, and we are also for ending the destructive burning of fossil fuels”**

Inverpolly-Glencanisp and Quinag Wild Land Areas and The Nevis Landscape Partnership in the Rannoch-Nevis-Mamores-Alder Wild Land Area are all strong examples.

Of course, there is every chance that a different land use pattern will emerge in the coming years driven by global and UK energy companies, already heavily invested in onshore wind, to achieve their own targets to double onshore wind energy capacity in Scotland by 2030.

The Trust’s own perspective is clear: we are for wild places, and we are also for ending the destructive burning of fossil fuels as soon as possible. And as the Wild Land Areas provide the most accurate representation of some of the best of Scotland’s wild places, we will

ask for some qualified level of protection for them to be retained within the forthcoming National Planning Framework (NPF4) – a draft of which the Scottish Government is expected to consult on this autumn.

We intend this not as a block on energy development – after all, some development may be appropriate in these areas – but as a safeguard for ecological restoration; for the land to be managed as a natural carbon sink; and as part of a wider vision for Scotland’s uplands to be managed by people and local communities.

And while we embraced Wild Land Areas as a way to protect wild places in Scotland from development, we are aware there are many wild places that are excluded from the map – places that register meaningfully with people who don’t necessarily identify with the mapped images or descriptions of vast upland landscapes of bog, heather and moor. As such, we are now looking ahead, beyond the Wild Land Areas map, to mapping wild places around the UK to a different set of criteria and in a way that includes as many people as possible.

When we next look at the draft NPF4, we will scrutinise the wording itself. And we urge you all to get involved by similarly scrutinising the draft text and having a say on what role the Wild Land Areas map should have in determining the future course of land use in Scotland. □

#### *About the author*

*Rosie Simpson is the Trust’s Senior Policy Officer*



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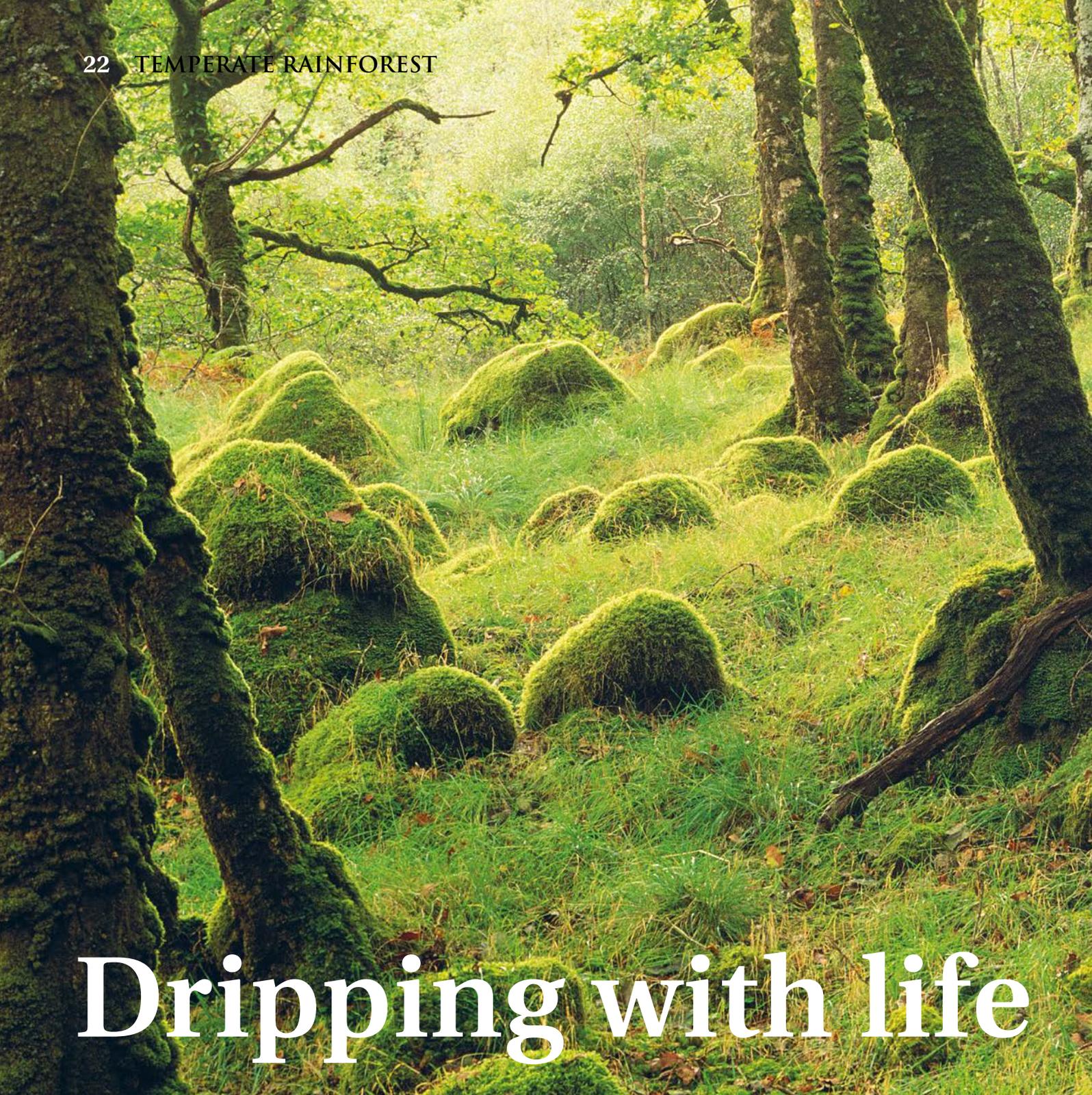
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# Dripping with life

**Cecilie Dohm** explores the wonders of Scotland's temperate rainforest and reflects on efforts to save a dwindling habitat that once cloaked much of Europe's Atlantic coastline

**FOR** many people, the word 'rainforest' conjures images of tangled jungle far from home. The mind wanders to parts of South America or Africa; somewhere hot and humid, with colourful birds, tropical plants and exotic animals. That is certainly what I used to think of. Before I joined the John Muir Trust, it never occurred to me that Scotland might have its very own rainforest.

We can probably all agree that Scotland has rainy forests, but what makes them actual rainforest? On a recent trip to Ariundle Oakwood National Nature Reserve on the Ardnamurchan peninsula – a crooked finger of land that points out into the Atlantic by the Isle of Mull – I got to

experience this rainforest at first hand. It was one of those rare summer days on Scotland's west coast; a gentle breeze drifted through the trees, sunlight dappled through the canopy and the air was full of the gentle hum of insects and the trill of countless woodland birds.

Then, just as I reached the heart of the woods, the weather changed with remarkable suddenness. As the rain poured down, I found shelter beneath an ancient oak; it was only then that I really started to notice the woods and my eyes were met by a kaleidoscope of green. All around me, thick carpets of moss dripped with water, ferns danced beneath the bombardment of heavy raindrops, while the smell of



PHOTOGRAPH: LORNE GILL/NATURESCOT

Mossy oakwood at Ariundle, Ardnamurchan

rain-dampened trees hung heavily in the misty air. It was as if the forest itself had come alive.

Standing there amidst twisted trees and gnarled roots, it was easy to imagine pixies and fairies hiding among the moss-strewn hummocks of rocks and fallen trees. The rain had transformed the forest into something primeval – a place of secrets, mysteries and magic. Instantly, I was reminded of a poem by J. R. R. Tolkien: “Beneath the roof of sleeping leaves, the dreams of trees unfold.”

**RARE HABITAT**

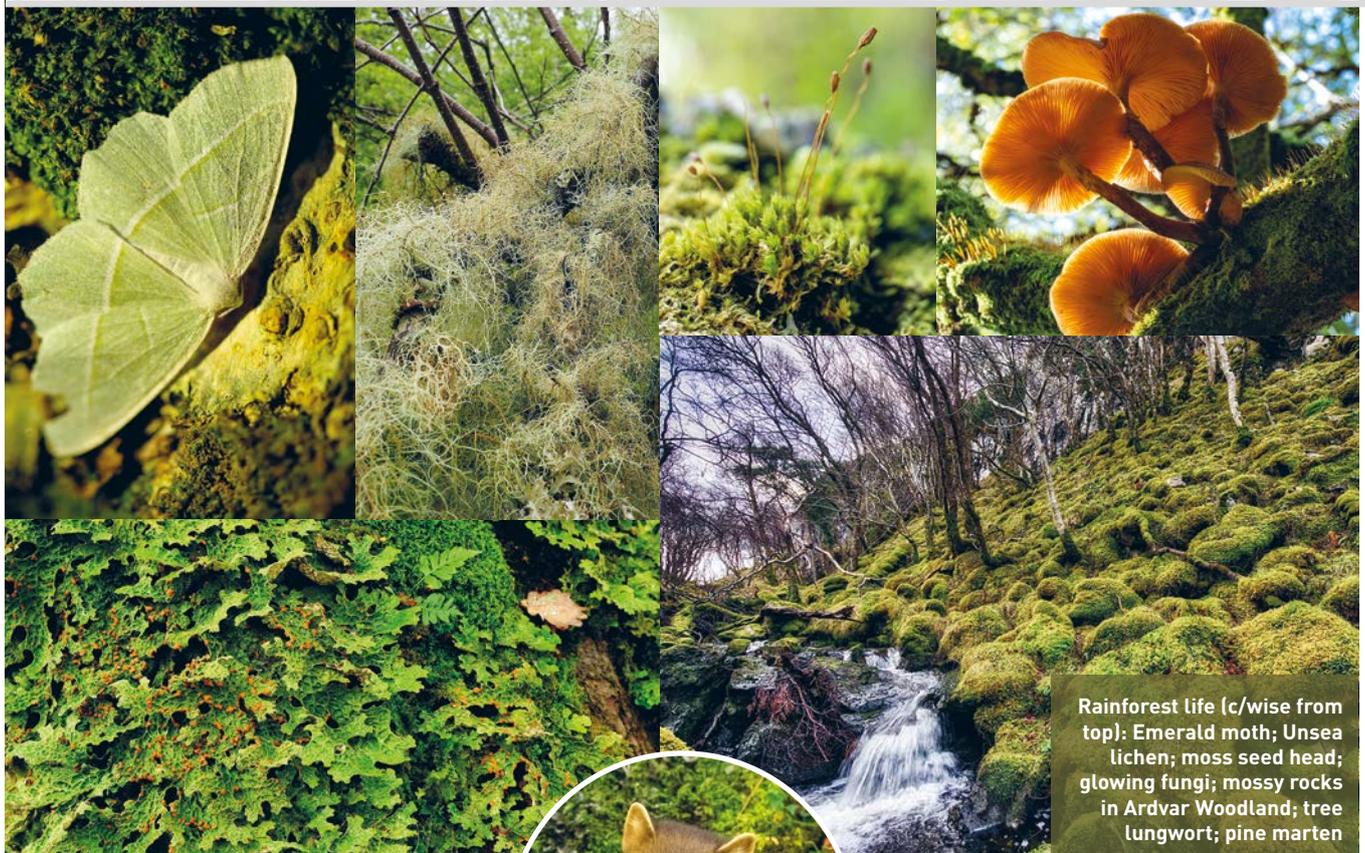
Ariundle Oakwood is a surviving fragment of the temperate rainforest that once cloaked much of Europe’s Atlantic coastline. Today, this habitat is incredibly rare – rarer even than tropical rainforest – and only occurs in a handful of places around the globe, with the west coast of Britain and

Ireland one of its last strongholds.

Scotland’s rainforest, also called Atlantic woodland or Celtic rainforest, is found in what is known as the hyper-oceanic zone along the west coast. A unique habitat of native woodland – oak, hazel, birch, ash and pine – glades, gorges, crags and boulders, this fragile ecosystem locks up carbon and provides a vital home for a range of wildlife such as red squirrel, pine marten and Scottish wildcat.

The relatively mild year-round temperatures and high levels of rainfall provide ideal conditions for an array of plant life. Every available surface in the rainforest teems with life; intricately detailed lichens hang from the trees, while liverworts, mosses, fungi and ferns carpet the woodland floor, each creating miniature forests within forests. All help to maintain the high humidity of the forest and contribute to its special feel and atmosphere.

PHOTOGRAPHS: PHILIP FORMBY/WTML; GORDON WILLOUGHBY/WTML; LAURA CORBE/WTML; CHRIS PUDDPHATT; LORNE GILL/NATURESCOT; AILEEN LOUIDON/WTML



Rainforest life (c/wise from top): Emerald moth; Unsea lichen; moss seed head; glowing fungi; mossy rocks in Ardvar Woodland; tree lungwort; pine marten

It is the diversity of these lichens, liverworts and mosses that make Scotland's rainforest internationally important. They are a particular hotspot for lichens, with many species being rare outside of Scotland, if found at all. Formed through the symbiosis of a fungus and an algae, lichens come in dazzling shapes, colours and sizes, creating great networks that link and support trees and woodland life.

One example is the tree lungwort; the presence of this large, leafy lichen is an indicator of ancient woodland and, when healthy, it can grow to an impressive size. Like most lichens, tree lungwort is sensitive to environmental changes and air pollution, and it has, sadly, experienced serious decline in recent decades. Having become extinct across much of central and southern Europe, it is now restricted to the remaining fragments of Scotland's rainforest, as well as isolated sites in North Wales, Pembrokeshire, Dartmoor and the New Forest.

### RESTORATIVE ACTION

Scotland's rainforest is a special place, but it is in trouble. Today, just 30,000ha of rainforest remains – a mere two per cent of Scotland's overall woodland cover and only one fifth of the area that has climatic conditions suitable for rainforest.

There are two principal drivers behind this decline: invasive non-native *Rhododendron ponticum*, which spreads rapidly and chokes the woodland; and grazing pressure from unnaturally high densities of deer and other herbivores, which prevents the trees from regenerating. The rainforest also faces further threats from disease such as ash dieback and nitrogen pollution, while a significant proportion of Scotland's rainforest sites have been planted with non-native conifer plantations.



As a result, the remaining woodlands that cling on are small, fragmented and isolated from each other. Consequently, they are less resilient to change and almost all show little or no regeneration.

Restoring and linking the remaining patches of rainforest is the key aim of Saving Scotland's Rainforest, a project led by the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest – a voluntary partnership of more than 20 organisations. As a founding member of the Alliance, the Trust is helping to raise the profile of this precious habitat that, thanks to collective advocacy, is increasingly recognised in the Scottish Parliament as a nature-based solution to the joint climate and biodiversity crises.

In addition to providing policy support to the Alliance, the Trust manages and cares for rainforest sites at Knoydart, Nevis, Strathaird and Quinag. We also contribute to a collaborative monitoring programme and are ramping up our deer management to improve habitats. Most recently, we have developed a new partnership with Matthew Algie, a sustainable coffee company based in Glasgow, which has helped us secure funding to preserve 250ha of rainforest across our properties.

By continuing our work to reduce grazing pressures, clear invasive species and establish new native woodland, we hope to play our part in helping Scotland's rainforest to thrive once again – allowing people to enjoy the magic and mystery of these special places for generations to come. □

#### Further information

For more, visit [savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk](http://savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk)

#### About the author

Cecilie Dohm is the Trust's Policy Officer. She represents the Trust on the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest

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**Daisy Clark** explains why the Trust's new Wild Action Fund could be its most impactful appeal yet

# Action stations

**IN THE** face of climate and ecological breakdown, the importance and urgency of collective action has rarely been more apparent. We already know that hands-on work to protect and restore wild places is critical to help balance ecosystems and maximise carbon capture. But how can we scale up this work to a level that helps create the change that is required?

There is growing evidence that if people have meaningful experiences with nature, they are more likely to help protect and conserve it. A recent report from Simon Fraser University in Canada, for example, reviewed 92 studies involving more than 27,000 people and found evidence of "a strong and robust connection" between nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours.

As Sir David Attenborough has commented: "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

So, how can we do more to improve people's relationships with nature and the outdoors? For the Trust, one response is the launch of a Wild Action Fund which will support everything from conservation work parties, events and talks to established initiatives such

as the John Muir Award and the development of other new projects.

The goal is to inspire and enable more people to have a positive impact on our environment, whether it be through hands-on volunteering in a wild place, undertaking conservation activity close to home, or advocating for wildness.

## **ENABLING VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteering has long been at the heart of the Trust's work. Our conservation work parties are a critical resource for our land teams and deliver an equivalent average of 600 days of conservation activity in a typical year. Volunteers maintain and repair paths, collect litter from beaches and mountain summits, build fences, remove invasive species and so much more. And many return time and time again, developing their skills and acquiring expert knowledge.

While volunteers donate their valuable time and efforts to the Trust, the Wild Action Fund will help support volunteer supervision, transport and training, provide essential tools and materials such as protective gloves and clothing, spades and buckets, and – crucially – help us promote and expand these opportunities to allow

more people from all backgrounds to get involved.

Another powerful route to connecting with nature is through participation in the John Muir Award – a UK-wide environmental scheme that each year sees around 40,000 people from all backgrounds enjoy hands-on experiences with nature. One in four John Muir Awards are achieved by people experiencing some kind of disadvantage.

For many participants, it is the first time they have connected with a wild place, and it can often have a profound impact, igniting a spark that leads to a lifelong love of nature. For some – including the Trust's own ranger at Glenridding, Isaac Johnston – Award participation can be the first step towards a career in conservation.

Each Award contributes an average of seven hours of active conservation. Multiply that by 40,000 people annually and it's clear that the Award has a real collective power and impact at grassroots level.

In 2019, the Trust's Conserve Audit estimated that the total value of conservation work delivered through John Muir Award activity in just one year was more than £1.5 million – a valuation based on Heritage Lottery





Many hands: conservation work in a London green space (main); tree planting at Glenlude, Scottish Borders

**“No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”**

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LINTERN

Fund figures – with participants contributing 12,600 days of their time everywhere from coastlines and mountainsides to local parks and school grounds.

Over time, the combined impact of Award groups can be considerable. At Glenlude in the Scottish Borders, participants in the Phoenix Futures Recovery Through Nature Programme have created the flourishing Phoenix Forest by planting 2,000 trees over the past decade. Elsewhere, in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, Award groups have contributed in different ways to the ongoing Trossachs Water Vole Project through invasive species control, habitat management, vole surveys and more.

In total, more than 442,000 people have achieved their John Muir Award since its launch in 1997, with more than 90 per cent of participants under the age of 25. The Wild Action Fund will support a growing network of Award Provider groups, creating more opportunities to instil an appreciation of the natural world in every participant.

### NEXT GENERATION

For many, however, access to wild places and conservation experiences can still appear out of reach; it’s an

option available only to those with the required time, access, opportunity and income. Meanwhile, young people’s screen time is on the increase and the amount of freedom that children have to roam outside has decreased significantly in recent decades.

One of the Trust’s core goals as an organisation is to give as many people as possible, from all age groups and backgrounds, opportunities to experience wildness and to get involved in nature conservation.

Since 2013, the Trust has supported the #iwill campaign to make social action a part of life for young people. This year we have renewed this commitment by signing the #iwill Power of Youth Charter to advocate for youth social action for the environment, celebrate the positive difference that young people make for wild places and commit to at least 25 per cent of John Muir Awards being achieved by people underrepresented in the environmental sector.

Meanwhile, this summer, a new cohort of young environmentalists began their journey into the world of conservation through our new Junior Ranger programme. Two pilot groups of students at Lochaber High School and Ullapool High School will gain

hands-on experience of a conservation career as part of their academic year, including a range of practical tasks as well as gaining an understanding of complex issues such as visitor management, environmental advocacy and public engagement.

With your support, we can do even more to provide the next generation of conservationists with opportunities to become advocates for, and caretakers of, the environment. □

### Further information

Help inspire more people to experience and care for wild places by supporting the Wild Action Fund at [johnmuirtrust.org/wildaction](http://johnmuirtrust.org/wildaction)

### About the author

Daisy Clark is the Trust’s Fundraising & Digital Campaigns Manager

## Wild Action Week

This year, we challenged as many people as possible to take a wild action between 11-17 October. Learn more at [johnmuirtrust.org/wildactionweek](http://johnmuirtrust.org/wildactionweek) and browse #wildactionweek on social media.



PHOTOGRAPHY: WALES COUNCIL FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

# A changing nation

**Phil Stubbington** charts how the combination of a change in political thinking and a great deal of collaboration have helped place the Trust at the heart of outdoor learning in Wales

**FOR** a recipe to be successful, more often than not it needs the right ingredients in the right amounts added at the right time. And in a way, that is exactly what has happened in Wales over recent years – with the Trust now firmly embedded in a new approach to connecting people with nature.

The key first ingredient came in 2015. Around the same time that 196 countries were committing to the Paris Agreement, Wales was also putting new and defining legislation in place. The Welsh Government (or Senedd as it is now) passed the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act (2015) with the aim of giving everyone in Wales the ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve the country's

social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing.

Proposed in 2011 by Jane Davidson, then Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, the Act mandates Wales' public bodies to prioritise sustainability, moving away from short-term 'sticking-plaster' policies towards longer-term preventative measures to help combat key issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

"The Act can facilitate new disruptive conversations at the local level about what communities want to do for themselves," commented Jane Davidson a few years later. She described the Act as "legislative glue", holding together a values framework

within which strategies such as environmentalism can operate.

While acting as a set of principles for individuals, small businesses and NGOs, the Act also sets into law principles and targets for public bodies to improve the resilience and wellbeing of the country's people, its economy and its natural environment.

Like most new legislation, the Act is not without its challenges and limitations, but what it has done is create the backbone for a promising new narrative for Wales – looking forward, investing in the future of a nation and empowering all.

As this legislation took shape, so too did a new public body – ingredient number two. Formed from the merging of Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission, the newly created Natural Resources Wales (NRW) was charged with bringing a stronger, more coordinated approach to the

A wild camp in the Brecon Beacons (main); play time (inset)



management and protection of the country's natural environments.

And then came the third key ingredient: a new curriculum for Wales, which saw a complete overhaul of how children are taught. Building on learning from Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, it allowed each school to develop its own curriculum, with an emphasis on developing well-rounded individuals focusing on themes such as wellbeing, physical and social responsibility, hands-on learning and sustainability. Having been piloted for the past two years, the new curriculum will go live in 2022.

### CLOSE CONNECTIONS

Such far-reaching changes throughout Wales further strengthened the need to work collaboratively across the conservation and outdoor learning

sectors – something that has been the lifeblood of the Trust since its very earliest days.

One particularly important connection has been the Trust's near ten-year membership of the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, even serving as chair of the organisation since 2018. The Council has grown to become a main advisor to the Senedd on outdoor learning and nature connection, inputting to a variety of consultations, the development and rollout of the curriculum for Wales, plus return-to-school guidance following Covid.

"As well as acting as a national voice, the Council also influences the development of outdoor learning regionally and locally, supporting organisations and leaders to take learning outside as part of their daily engagement with young people," explains Bedwyr Ap Gwyn, the Trust's John Muir Award Inclusion & Welsh Language Manager.

"By delivering training, supporting the creation and funding of the government-endorsed High Quality Outdoor Learning guide, we have been able to support outcomes that would not be possible working as a lone organisation."

This involvement in outdoor learning has since grown further and deeper through the Trust's relationship with Natural Resources Wales. A successful pilot project in

2018, that saw the Trust support Welsh-speaking communities and those least likely to engage in wild places, highlighted the Trust's ability to deliver on many of the Senedd's ambitions for outdoor learning through the John Muir Award.

At the beginning of 2021, the Trust formalised its partnership with Natural Resources Wales, with significant funding for a three-year project to support more than 13,000 people to connect with and take action for nature throughout Wales. The work will provide the infrastructure and capacity required to support a growing network of schools, leaders, community groups and families to participate in the John Muir Award throughout the project and beyond.

A tailored, regional-based approach

will enable every school in Wales to receive high-quality information, advice and guidance from the Trust. It will also enable educators to access a suite of free, bilingual and curriculum-focused resources, as well as training and development opportunities.

"The John Muir Award is an essential and cost-effective way for Natural Resources Wales to support opportunities for meaningful nature connection activities at scale," comments Sue Williams, NRW's Lead Advisor for Health, Education and Natural Resources.

"The Award is accessible to a diversity of audiences and the John Muir Trust is experienced at working with groups often underrepresented in nature conservation. Many charities, schools and small businesses in Wales benefit from being able to access the Award and we are delighted to be able to support this."

### THE FUTURE

So, what next in Wales? The inequity of access to green spaces is well documented; it has been estimated that more than two million households across the UK will have experienced multiple lockdowns without a garden and with limited access to green space. Following this time of anxiety and uncertainty, the health and wellbeing benefits of nature are needed more than ever.

Sadly, those who need this nurturing environment most are the ones who are least likely to be able to access it. As such, the Trust will continue its mission to help remove barriers and support as many people as possible to access natural spaces and have an opportunity to get involved in nature conservation.

And while we have made huge strides forward in Wales in recent years, with national organisations working collaboratively supported by a public body, national legislation and a new curriculum, the Trust is really only just getting started. □

### Further information

For more on the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, visit [walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org](http://walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org)

### About the author

Phil Stubbington is the Trust's John Muir Award England & Wales Manager



## Meaning in life

**Mike Wilson** outlines his recent research that explores how nature connection and wildness may not only be good for our wellbeing but also facilitate how we make sense of life itself

THE sun's morning glow casts flecks of brightness through the forest canopy to the heather, blaeberry and springy moss. It is mid-June and the pine, birch, mountain ash and alder at the lochan's edge are at different stages of emergence. Delicate greens against darker tones. There is a quality of stillness in the forest, with the occasional voices of birds here and there. Enveloped by trees, I am aware that being in the forest is an immersive experience, which brings feelings of contentment, quiet joy and a sense of being at peace with myself.

Of course, the benefits to mental health and wellbeing from being in nature are well known, including from time spent in urban parks, on allotments and in wilder settings. There is also a reported benefit difference between walking through nature and connecting with it by making meaningful contact.

In fact, most wellbeing benefits are linked with nature connection. This is partly because bringing more awareness to our experience helps to increase benefits. These include nature's contribution to increase resilience, help regulate emotion, enable relaxation and spiritual wellbeing, and reduce depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, benefits to mental health and wellbeing of exercising in nature may go beyond that of exercising in a gym or other indoor settings, especially if time is spent in areas rich in greenness and biodiversity.

### NATURE IMMERSION

Coming from a background in psychotherapy and education, and with a lifelong passion for being in nature, in 2006 I began facilitating day-long nature immersions. The explorations are informed by psychology, including my own



PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE WILSON

research into nature connection. As a psychotherapist and psychologist, I am naturally interested in life meaning and sense-making. Meaning in life is often linked to wellbeing. Yet, studies linking nature connection, wellbeing and meaning in life are lacking.

In the weeks leading up to the pandemic I was set to conduct a qualitative study to explore this topic in Northumberland National Park. Then came the first lockdown. Fortunately, the study was able to continue by initially restricting participation to individuals authorised to access the park. The study suggests that alongside mental, emotional and spiritual benefits from being in nature, connection with wildness may also facilitate how we make sense of life.

During the onset of the pandemic, being in nature was not only restorative but felt safe. The study suggests that nature connection may contribute towards life meaning through feeling part of nature and with this comes a sense of belonging and place identity.



Finding meaning (from left to right): Mike Wilson; Loch an Eilean, Cairngorms; Harthope Valley, Northumberland

## MEANING-MAKING

While an emphasis in wellbeing studies is often on increasing positive feelings, this study highlights the importance of a range of feelings in meaning-making. As such, it may not be useful to think of feeling in only positive or negative terms. Meaning-making is often through finding perspective on life difficulties or even on life's journey as a whole through nature's magnitude, such as the height of trees or the scale of place.

Meaning may also be found through the perspective of time, such as the long history of place in contrast to the journey of a single life. With this, perspective is often gained through memory, such as those of past visits to the forest. Also, while we often take our troubles with us on our walks, these often quickly drop away in favour of being more present in the here and now.

Strikingly, the study also suggests that meaning-making is often through 'conversation' with nature. Aspects of nature may become metaphors for aspects of our life. For example,



**“The benefits to mental health and wellbeing of exercising in nature may go beyond that of exercising in a gym or other indoor settings”**

the solitary heron may in some way reflect a person's own solitariness in life. The study implies areas rich in biodiversity and high levels of greenness may contribute to greater meaning, whereas the loss of wildness and biodiversity, and the loss of experience of this, may deplete life meaning.

Facilitating groups in nature engages many of these themes, in particular viewing nature as metaphor. With wellbeing in mind, my nature connection days are often focused on deepening this connection and reflecting on life meaning and may include explorations on themes related to the seasons, such as 'life transitions' often linked to autumn. Practically, the days are a balance of conversation with time alone in nature. Time alone is particularly important as conversation often distracts from nature connection.

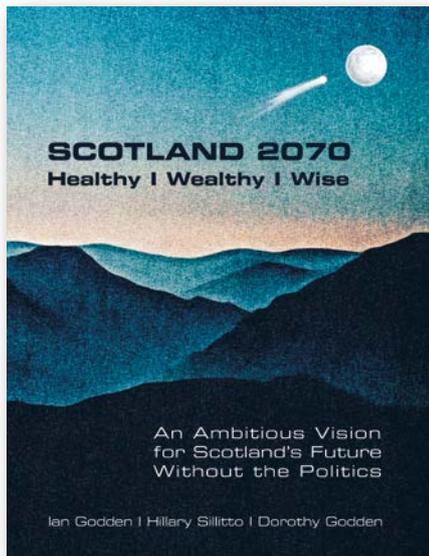
Since the pandemic, my work is moving more towards being in nature with groups and, increasingly, with individuals, in Northumberland, the Trossachs and Cairngorms. □

### Further info

A full version of this article is available as part of the Trust's Wild and Well repository – an online hub for content exploring links between wild places and wellbeing. [johnmuirtrust.org/wildandwell](http://johnmuirtrust.org/wildandwell)

### About the author

Mike Wilson is a psychotherapist, psychologist and Trust member



## *Scotland 2070: Healthy, Wealthy and Wise*, by Ian Godden, Hillary Sillitto and Dorothy Godden

### Hugh Salvesen is inspired by a future vision of Scotland

**THIS** excellent book has as its strapline “An Ambitious Vision for Scotland’s Future Without the Politics”. The phrase ‘without the politics’ means primarily that it takes no view on whether or not Scotland will or should be an independent state 50 years hence. The policies it advocates will, it argues, be good for Scotland either way. And with a 50-year horizon, it takes a longer view than that customarily taken by politicians worried about the next election.

The authors bring a vast amount of experience to bear, from the oil and gas, defence, aerospace and healthcare industries. All have roots in Scotland. Although the Goddens currently live in the Middle East, they have a home in Rothiemurchus. Edinburgh-based Hillary Sillitto has spent much of his life in the Scottish hills.

Between them, they outline six opportunities for Scotland to build an economically, socially and environmentally successful future. All are presented in lively, thought-provoking prose, supported by good graphs and charts, and without too many brain-boggling statistics.

Top of the list is the message: look north. By mid-century (or perhaps sooner, since Siberia is now on fire), the Northern Sea Route along the top of Russia will be ice-free. Shipping East

Asian exports to Europe that way will take a week less than it does via Suez. There will need to be a big marine logistics hub for ship-to-ship transfer somewhere up there. Where is the largest natural harbour in the North Atlantic? Scapa Flow. One to think about.

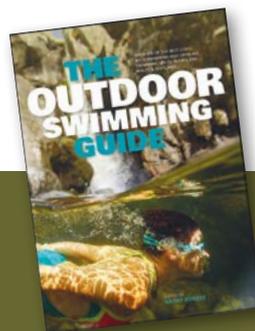
Also striking is the chapter about trees. The authors say that fully 60 per cent (60 per cent!) of Scotland should be forested, with a mix of commercial plantations, agro-forestry and rewilding. This homegrown timber should, they argue, be used also for zero-carbon wooden housing built to Passiv-Haus standards or similar. Not coincidentally, the Climate Change Committee has just castigated the UK Government for continuing to promote the construction of houses which, without expensive retrofitting, may be uninhabitable within a generation.

Only once does the authors’ apolitical mask slip a bit, when they consider how Scottish defence forces should be configured (there is no mention of the nuclear submarines). Nor is there any discussion of the climate-induced migration which is surely heading our way. But they ask lots of other good, provocative questions. Does it make sense for Edinburgh and Glasgow to have separate airports? Not really. Should a country of 5.5 million people have 14 universities? Probably not.

**£13.99**, [collegepublications.co.uk](http://collegepublications.co.uk)

### *About the reviewer*

*Hugh Salvesen is a Scottish Blue Badge tourist guide and former Trustee*



## Others we like

*The Eternal Season, Ghosts of Summers Past, Present and Future*, Stephen Rutt

The Eternal Season is an evocative exploration of a time when nature is in full bloom. Written against the backdrop of a global pandemic, the author seeks reassurance from nature in summertime, but becomes aware of disturbances to natural rhythms: birds singing at the wrong time, disruptions to habitats and

breeding – and the many other ways in which the British summer is changing. **£14.99 (hardback)**. [eandtbooks.com](http://eandtbooks.com)

*The Outdoor Swimming Guide*, edited by Kathy Rogers  
Featuring more than 400 outdoor swim spots throughout the British Isles – from rivers, lakes, lidos, reservoirs and tidal pools – this is a wonderfully informative guide to swimming as once was. As the editor writes in the introduction, while indoor swimming growing

## *The Farthest Shore: Seeking solitude and nature on the Cape Wrath Trail in Winter*, by Alex Roddie

### Julie Gough enjoys a reflective account of a wild winter walk

**ALTHOUGH** I didn't know what to expect from this book, I was quite excited about reading it: to become immersed in someone's journey across remote and rugged landscapes that I thought I half knew. I was also intrigued by Alex's idea of isolation and aloneness that seemed to me appealing and scary in equal measure.

I even thought I might fancy the Cape Wrath Trail myself. I was wrong. It didn't take long for me to realise that I don't have what it takes to navigate the Trail during a period of warm, sunny cloudlessness, let alone in winter. Why would I want to? Why would anyone?

Alex Roddie's writing has a calm serenity to it. He is quietly observant of what is around him and his feelings and reactions to it. His descriptions of the scenery and conditions – when a stunning vista is there one minute and snatched away the next – are truly evocative. It brought vividly to mind the awe and fear of my own Munro bagging trips. But this trail is far more remote and pathless and awesome than anything most of us have ever experienced.

Alex may have been disappointed by the spring-like conditions for his trip and frustrated by the unnecessary amount of heavy winter gear he'd taken with him but the physical hardships were less important to the narrative and the purpose of his journey which was to experience solitude, and restore his mental equilibrium by escaping from the tyranny of the internet, or as he brilliantly describes it: "... a toxic collective solitude where everyone is battling their own demons in their own

infinite echo chamber..."

His passion for wild land and his deep sadness for our troubled environment are also writ large, as he powerfully articulates issues which the John Muir Trust campaigns and lobbies and strives against: the ruination of biodiversity and its ability to rejuvenate naturally; the complete loss of certain habitats, livelihoods and communities; and the devastating drive of human development.

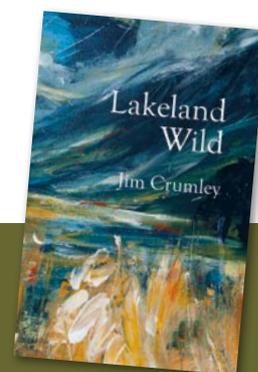
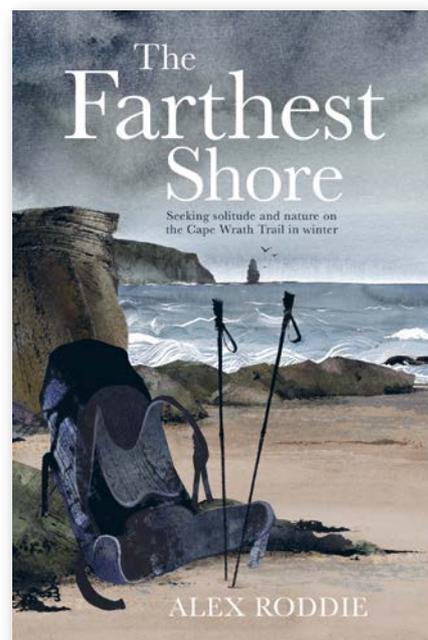
"These woods may be diminished, and most of them may be ageing into senility as grazing pressure from deer prevents any regeneration, but to walk through such a place is to feel the glow and the glory of non-human life. It's a reminder that the real world is not the smooth, streamlined, cynical machine of capitalism and the internet and human concerns, and all the other terribly important stuff we fill our time with."

There are no dramas in this book. No wild stories of danger and derring-do or fighting with the elements. And, although it is interspersed with the harsh reality of the effects of human activity on our wild places, it is gently mindful and reflective, spiritual even. Alex considers his impact on this earth – from his solitary boot on the mere hint of a path, to his words in a book which inspire dreams which form into plans which ultimately become more boot imprints that help create a new well-trod path.

As he nears the end of his journey and considers his return to the world and his own anxiety within it, he concludes that he'd been worrying about the wrong things and that "the decline of wildlife in the wild places you love is far more important" and pledges to focus in future on the things that really matter.

**£14.99, v-publishing.co.uk**

*About the reviewer*  
Julie Gough is the Trust's Marketing and Communications Manager



up "was about lessons, lengths and endless verrucas, outdoor swimming was like walking or running or scrambling – just another way of moving through the world, of being in the open air". **£20. v-publishing.co.uk**

*A Scurry of Squirrels*, Polly Pullar [with foreword by Romain Pizzi]  
Having hand-reared numerous litters of orphan kits on her Perthshire farm, Polly Pullar knows more than most about red squirrels. Here, she shares her experiences and love for the squirrel and explores how

our perception of the species has changed down the years. **£14.99. birlinn.co.uk**

*Lakeland Wild*, Jim Crumley  
The prolific Jim Crumley turns his naturalist's eye on Lakeland's lesser-known spots where nature still holds sway. In doing so, he reveals that there are places that few are aware of and pleads the case for a reappraisal of all of the Lake District's wildness. **£12.99. saraband.net**



PHOTOGRAPH: MARY-ANN OCHOTA

# Mary-Ann Ochota

**Broadcaster, anthropologist and Trust member Mary-Ann Ochota chats with Julie Gough about her love of wild places and why equitable access to the outdoors is so important**

## Why the outdoors and mountains?

I've always enjoyed time outside, but it was only in my mid-20s that I really started keening for adventure. After my brother sent me a navigation handbook and a guide to sleeping under the stars, I bought a bivvy bag and spent my first wild camp on Dartmoor. I've since done some winter walking, scrambling and mountaineering. In 2016, I was invited to become a hill walking ambassador for the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) to represent 'normal folk.'

## How did you get into broadcasting?

I studied archaeology and anthropology at university; I enjoyed it but didn't want to be an academic. After a few years of doing other things, I wanted to return to the subjects I'd enjoyed, but perhaps share that information with a wider audience. TV seemed the obvious place, so I did work experience as a junior researcher on factual programmes and then a friend helped me record a showreel

so I could approach agents. Fast-forward 12 years and I now write articles and books, host radio documentaries, podcasts and TV shows. It keeps me on my toes.

## Any particular career highlights?

I co-presented series 19 of *Time Team* which was pretty special. Watching field archaeologists interpret what they're excavating in real time is fascinating - it's both art and science.

## Has your heritage proved influential?

My mum is Indian, my dad is Polish, and I grew up in northwest England. I think that international heritage - experiencing other ways of being and understanding the world - has been a huge influence. It's also a basic tenet of anthropology: identify your own quirky cultural worldview and never assume it's true for others.

## What inspired you to join the Trust?

A friend died from Covid at the start of the pandemic and his family requested

that donations be made to the John Muir Trust in his honour. I'd been following the Trust's work for some years, but this was the prompt I needed not just to honour my friend, Grey, but also to support the Trust's work financially. Being a member of the Trust is something that I'm incredibly proud of - and Grey would definitely have approved.

## Why is equal access to nature so key?

When you are in a bubble surrounded by like-minded people, it's easy to think that there aren't any barriers. But what if you don't know where to go or what to do when you get there to be safe and responsible? And what if, when you do go, there's no one who looks or talks like you, and you don't feel particularly welcome? It's important that everyone has a stake in feeling like they belong, because you care about what you know.

## How can diversity be improved?

It's about building partnerships over the long-term so that under-represented communities can develop their own leadership, skills and knowledge to make the outdoors part of their lives. One-off projects or adventure weeks at the end of the school term might give a child a taste for the outdoors, but what do they do with that when they get back? Short-term projects won't necessarily transform lives, but long-term investment and support will.

## What's next on the horizon?

We've just launched a new podcast for the BMC called 'Finding Our Way', where I interview diverse walkers, climbers and mountaineers about their adventures, with lots of thoughts on improving inclusion in the outdoors. Plus, I hope to keep working with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), hosting conferences for business leaders on achieving net zero, decarbonisation strategies and embedding the green revolution into all levels of society. □

## Further information

A longer version of this interview can be found at [johnmuirtrust.org/mary-ann-ochota](http://johnmuirtrust.org/mary-ann-ochota). Find out more about Mary-Ann's work at [maryannochota.com](http://maryannochota.com)

## About the interviewer

Julie Gough is the Trust's Marketing and Communications Manager



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