JOHN MUIR TRUST
JOURNAL
61 AUTUMN 2016

Change in the air

What future for wild places in a time of political upheaval?

JOHN MUIR TRUST

NO TIME TO REST

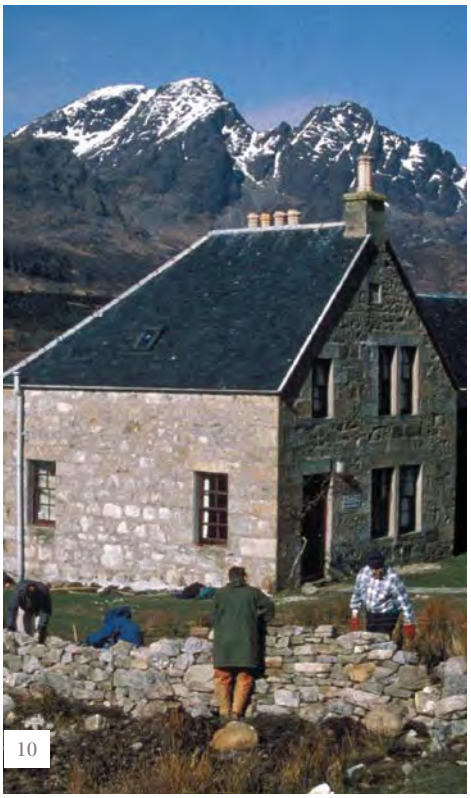
Tackling the extremes together for 40 years

Making the best gear in the world has more to do with momentum than a moment's inspiration. The Lhotse Jacket was born from decades of innovation and testing in the toughest conditions in the world. The outstanding protection it brings you is the result of a forty year partnership with W.L. Gore that started with Britain's first Gore-Tex® jacket and has continued with an unbroken chain of development ever since. The Lhotse is the definitive waterproof jacket for mountaineers and serious walkers that demand completely reliable protection for all four seasons.

MOUNTAIN
EQUIPMENT

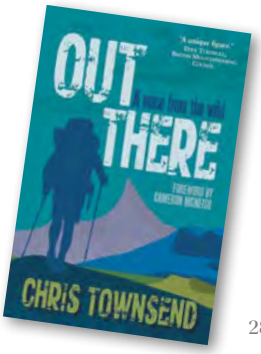
mountain-equipment.co.uk

20



10

34



28

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN MUIR TRUST AND ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS

COVER: DETAIL OF GOLDEN FRINGE (STANDING BY LOCH CUL DROMMANA LOOKING TOWARDS STAC POLLAIDH) BY IAN CAMERON

JOURNAL 61, AUTUMN 2016

Editor:
Alan McCombes alan.mccombes@johnmuirtrust.org

Design and production:
Neil Braidwood
Connect Communications connectcommunications.co.uk

This journal is printed on Cocoon 100 uncoated stock, a recycled grade paper containing 100% post-consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using an Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF) process. We use a Scottish printer, J Thomson Colour, which has excellent environmental credentials, achieving environmental standard ISO4001 plus FSC and PEFC standards all in 2006.

If you would rather receive publications from the John Muir Trust electronically, please email membership@johnmuirtrust.org

The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN

Charity No. SC002061
Company No. SC081620

HEAD OFFICE

John Muir Trust
Tower House
Station Road
Pitlochry
Perthshire PH16 5AN

t. 01796 470 080
w. johnmuirtrust.org

Follow us on:
@JohnMuirTrust

REGULARS

FEATURES

Sign up for our monthly enewsletter at johnmuirtrust.org/newsletter

Keep up-to-date with events and local activities at **johnmuirtrust.org**

From the chief executive

IT IS MY pleasure to welcome all readers to this autumn edition of our Journal.

I write this having just returned from the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) World Congress in Hawaii. Although I attended the congress in my capacity as the Chair of the IUCN UK National Committee, the Trust is an IUCN member – which meant I was able to wear that hat proudly too, and make lots of useful connections that will help us promote our work to protect wildness in the UK.

The IUCN is the leading global nature conservation organisation, with its membership uniquely derived from national states, NGOs and the scientific community. Titled 'Planet at the Crossroads' – in recognition of the urgent need to take action to alter the course of the survival of species and ecosystems which we are ultimately dependent on for our own survival – the event was welcomed by President Obama to mark the first ever IUCN Congress held in the USA.

Over 8,500 delegates agreed the Hawaii Commitments, which highlight nature-based solutions to climate change, such as the restoration of forests and peatlands. I was pleased to lead on a motion calling for higher level global action to conserve peatlands (a project championed by the IUCN UK Committee) and also lend our voice, alongside many others including the Wild Foundation and Sierra Club, in calling for a ban on industrial developments in protected areas. We can now use this agreement in our UK-based campaigning to protect wild land from industrial development.

Closer to home, the second State of Nature report has just been published. While it acknowledges some positive landscape-scale conservation in the last three years, it also paints a sorry tale of the demise of our wildlife. The UK has lost significantly more species over the long term than the global average. We are among the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

On a more positive and optimistic note, I was really struck by the emphasis at the IUCN Congress on the value of connecting people to nature. The Trust is a signatory, alongside 195 partners worldwide, to the new #NatureForAll initiative. This is a global movement "to inspire a new generation of thinkers and doers across all sectors of society to connect with nature and take action to support its conservation". At its core is a very simple idea: the more people experience, connect with, and share their love of nature, the more support there will be for its conservation.

Our own John Muir Award is a shining example of how this can work in practice – and I think we can offer a lot to this new global initiative. It comes at an excellent time when the UK Government has made a commitment, through its 8-Point Plan for National Parks in England, to get 60,000 school visits a year. Providing a new generation with opportunities to experience wild places will, I believe, ultimately lead to society valuing and protecting them – and I hope begin to reverse the decline in the state of our landscapes and nature.

In this issue, we've tried to strike a balance between celebrating the wonders of the natural world and analysing the challenges we face in these turbulent political times. I've offered my views on how the threats to the natural world posed by Brexit can be avoided and turned into an opportunity to reverse the decline set out in the State of Nature reports. Others have written beautifully about the transformative power of forests, mountains and wide open spaces. I'm sure John Muir would have approved of that balance.

Enjoy this copy of the Journal…

Stuart Brooks
Chief executive, John Muir Trust

In the shade of a Hawaiian monkeypod tree

PHOTOGRAPH: STUART BROOKS

Policy round-up

• Scottish Natural Heritage has come out strongly against a resubmitted application for a 24-turbine wind farm which was last year thrown out by the Scottish Government. Among the reasons for its opposition to the proposed Limekiln development in Caithness, SNH cites "significant adverse effects on a nationally important area of wild land, Wild Land Area 39, East Halladale Flows".

• With a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) about to begin into the proposed Crossburns wind farm on the route of the Rob Roy Way in Highland Perthshire, the Trust held two local public exhibitions to draw attention to the cumulative impact of a series of industrial-scale developments in a major tourist area within sight of Schiehallion.

• Two political parties, individual MSPs and members of the public have called on the Scottish Government and SSE to waive their right to seek legal costs from the Trust for the Stronelairg legal challenge. The Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Conservative Party separately wrote to Scotland's Energy Minister Paul Wheelhouse, as did some SNP and Labour MSPs. Meanwhile the Trust continues its work with MSPs across the political spectrum, welcoming some to our Glenlude and Schiehallion properties, and attending the autumn party conferences.

PHOTOGRAPH: BLAIR FYFFE

North Face Survey breaks new ground

Driving rain and swirling mist failed to deter scientists and climbers from carrying out the third annual geological and botanical survey of the North Face of Ben Nevis.

Among the participants was Alison Austin, the Trust's land manager on Nevis. The team discovered a new area of rare Wavy Meadow Grass clumps and discovered a new location for Tufted Saxifrage.

They were also able to update the existing geological model of Ben Nevis, making it more comprehensive than ever before. The main areas surveyed so far include Little Brenva Face, Orion Face and Observatory Gully.

The main aims of the study, led by the Nevis Landscape Partnership, are to create a 3D map of the mountain, raise its public profile and examine the impact of climate change.

Scottish Government to assess deer numbers

The Trust's call for better regulation for deer management remains high on Scotland's political agenda.

The Scottish Government's recently published programme for the new parliament contains a commitment to consider "whether any changes are needed" in deer management regulation, following a report by SNH due in October.

Mike Daniels, the Trust's head of land management, responded: "Along with other major environmental NGOs in Scotland, we believe the voluntary approach has so far failed to deliver the public interest in deer management. Ongoing damage to woodlands and peatlands, caused by land management that maintains high deer populations primarily for stag shooting, remains a major problem.

"We are hopeful that the Scottish Government will now take action."

Yorkshire John Muir Award group turn limestone into music

A group of adults with learning disabilities called the Purple Patch Arts group have gained John Muir Award certificates after spending a year working with artists, musicians and staff from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to tell the story of limestone through music.

The project – 'the Song of the Sea that Was' – involved composing six tunes related to limestone. A composer then turned it into an orchestral piece, played on a 'lithophone' – like a xylophone but made from local stone.

Catherine Kemp of the Yorkshire Dales National Park said: "The Purple Patch Arts group have made an inspirational contribution towards the interpretation of our local geology."

Members' news

• Almost 200 members have signed up for the new membership research panel to help inform the Trust's future direction. Find out more and register at **johnmuirtrust.org/mrp**

• The first-ever Wales Members Gathering – in Capel Curig at the start of October – was addressed by Trust chief executive Stuart Brooks and Dr Steve Carver of the University of Leeds Wildland Research Institute, who talked about wild land mapping with a special focus on Wales.

• Andy Wightman, Scotland's leading land reformer and now a Scottish Green Party MSP, will address the Edinburgh Members' Gathering on 26 November, along with the Trust's head of land management Mike Daniels and Clifton Bain, author of *The Ancient Pinewoods of Scotland*.

• The panel of speakers at the Southern Members in Bristol on 12 November will include Helen Meech, the Director of Rewilding Britain, and Chris Townsend, the esteemed outdoor writer, explorer and board member of the Trust.

• Next year's AGM/Members' Gathering will take place in Fort William on 26-27 May.

Trust stalwart leads Nevis community land bid

Around 125,000 acres of land adjacent to the Trust's Nevis property could be taken over and managed by local people if a new community land trust achieves its aim of buying the Rio Tinto Alcan Estate. The future of the estate, which includes the Lochaber aluminium smelter and associated hydro schemes, is under review by the company.

The East Lochaber and Laggan Community Trust (ELLCT) was established with a view to buying and managing the land. If it succeeds, it will be the biggest ever community land buy-out in Scotland.

The group does not seek to take over the smelter or hydro power, but hopes to find partners to take over these assets and secure 150 jobs under threat at the smelter.

The ELLCT has conservation principles among its objectives and is chaired by John Hutchison, who was chair of the John Muir Trust from 2007 to 2014. Several other Trust members are on the steering committee of the community, including one of our board members, Patricia Jordan.

John Hutchison is leading what could become Scotland's biggest-ever community buy-out

PHOTOGRAPH: CRISTIE MOORE

Glasgow gaels: School students from Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu in Tomintoul

Gaelic students celebrate John Muir Award

This summer, 50 Gaelic-speaking school students from Skye, Lochaber, Glasgow, Islay, Inverness, Mull and Dingwall came together in one of Scotland's highest villages to continue their work towards their John Muir Award – Duais Iain Muir – and to celebrate the connections between the language and the natural world.

The event, in Tomintoul in the Cairngorms, was organised by Comunn na Gàidhlig (the national body for Gaelic speakers).

Activities included bushcraft, gorge walking and exploring the landscape and culture of the local area. This was followed by a special ceremony conducted entirely in Gaelic, where students showcased their work, before being presented with their certificates by advanced Gaelic learner, Cristie Moore from the John Muir Trust.

Dòmhnall Morris of Comunn na Gàidhlig said: "The John Muir Award offers a flexible learning structure for Gaelic speakers interested in nature and the outdoors. It's also a lot of fun and the participants have made many new friends since we started delivering Duais Iain Muir."

PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH LEWIS

Volunteer Heather gathers Wych Elm seeds on Skye in June

Bumper year for gathering native seed

This autumn sees the Trust's land team using their training and specially-bought equipment to make our final deposit into Kew's Millennium Seed Bank.

Quinag conservation officer Romany Garnett started collecting wych elm seeds earlier in the year and is now collecting downy birch seeds and rowan. "After a poor harvest last year, there was a bumper crop of rowan berries this time – possibly due to the mild spring."

Schiehallion manager Liz Auty agreed that it has been a good year for seeds and berries: "The rowan trees are bursting with fruit! We have had two dry days for the collecting, which was especially important for the birch seeds."

Skye conservation officer Sarah Lewis collected wych elm seeds in June and recently enjoyed gathering raspberries from "a tightly woven patch of young willow, birch, fern, heather and blackberries, accompanied by the warming hum of bees busy nectaring and Scotch Argus butterflies daintily probing".

All three agreed that the project has been worthwhile.

Romany said: "It is good to know the genetic stock from these remote trees will be stored and used in the future."

Liz concluded: "The information collected will raise the profile of our threatened native trees and provide useful genetic information to ensure their survival in the face of the many challenges they will face from disease and climate change.

"Most of all, the John Muir Trust team is pleased to do its bit for this worthwhile project."

Trust steps up pathwork

For the next two years, the Trust will be heavily involved in two major footpath restoration projects in the North West Highlands.

The contracts for the Suilven work have been put out to tender, with the first phase of repairs expected to begin in early 2017.

Meanwhile, the Trust has launched a major new programme of pathwork and training on Skye, which will be spearheaded by Donald McKenzie, an experienced footpath repair expert who lives in the village of Glenelg.

The two-year project – 'Skye's Wild Ways: Path Repairs and Conservation Skills' will focus on two key paths – from Sligachan to Coruisk, and the route up Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach in the Red Cuillin.

The project builds upon work carried out last year at Druim Hain. Battling against a succession of fierce Atlantic gales, the contractors completed repairs on a badly eroded stretch of the footpath to Coruisk. The daily two-hour trek to the site meant that the workers walked the equivalent of the length of Britain over four months, in addition to the back-breaking labour involved in building drains, steps and ditches.

LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

The ongoing work aims to improve the lower sections of the path. It will also allow the Trust to offer opportunities to local volunteers and college trainees to develop specialist path skills under the guidance of experienced professionals.

The Trust also plans to develop interpretation facilities to help visitors better understand the natural and cultural history of the area.

The work has been made possible thanks to a grant of £57,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), together with support from the Brown Forbes Memorial Fund, the Scottish Mountaineering Trust and the Kestrelman Trust.

Despite inclement weather so far, there has already been successful helicopter lifts carrying 90 tonnes of stone to Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach and a further 60 tonnes to Druim Hain on the Sligachan route.

"Maintaining and repairing paths is a major undertaking," explains Trust footpath officer Chris Goodman. "By its nature, most upland pathwork takes place in remote, exposed areas, subject to extreme weather conditions. It is expensive and labour intensive, frequently involving helicopter lifts of materials combined with man-handling tonnes of stone to create a sensitive hand-built finish.

"The work is carried out by an elite and dedicated handful of contractors who frequently work away from home for months at a time in gruelling conditions. It can also be expensive – in the region of £200 per metre depending on conditions – so we need a constant flow of donations to keep our upland paths in tip-top condition."

Wild ways

For more information on the Trust's Wild Ways path project contact Chris Goodman at **chris.goodman@johnmuirtrust.org**
To donate to our Wild Ways appeal, visit **johnmuirtrust.org/wildways** phone 01796 470080, or text MUIR14 £10 (or £1, £2, £3, £4, £5, £10, up to £30)

Flying start: Early September saw 90 tonnes of stone airlifted onto Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach in Skye

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS GOODMAN

Majestic mountain

Suilven, one of the most majestic mountains in Britain, rises dramatically out of the rocky moorlands of Assynt, towering like a colossus over the lochan-strewn landscape.

The mountain is famed for its distinctive shape and spectacular summit views over land and sea. It has been widely celebrated in poetry, music and song by such diverse artists as the late 'Bard of Assynt', Norman McCaig, the Gaelic rock band Runrig and the classical music composer, Giles Lamb.

It is owned and managed by the community land group, the Assynt Foundation, with whom the Trust works in partnership as part of the wider Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Partnership (CALL).

Last year, the Trust won £18,000 in an online poll organised by the European Outdoor Conservation Association (EOCA) towards the £200k cost of the restoration work. We subsequently raised a further £50k thanks to our members and supporters.

The balance has been funded by the wider CALL Partnership, including donations from the Heritage Lottery Fund and SNH.

PHOTOGRAPH: NICKY McCLURE

Pioneers move on after 28 years

Nicky McClure talks to newly retired Keith and Jane Anderson, whose decades of backroom work helped transform the Trust from a small band of diehards into a powerful voice for wild places

"YOU HAVE A PC – would you like to take over the membership records?"

This simple invitation, issued in autumn 1987, marked the start of Keith Anderson's 28 years at the John Muir Trust. To find out a little bit more about these years of change, I headed to East Lothian to spend an afternoon with Keith and his US-born wife Jane, who has just stepped down as the Trust's membership secretary.

Keith was involved with the Mountain Bothies Association when he met Denis Mollison, one of the band of four who founded the John Muir Trust back in 1983. On hearing that Keith was computer literate, Denis roped him in to help out with membership records, reassuring him that "there will never be any more than 400 members".

Keith (member number 79) started working initially as a volunteer. "My workload began as a list on the back of an envelope," he says. "However, everything changed in May 1988 when Chris Brasher [another founding member] wrote in the *Observer* about the Trust's purchase of Li and Coire Dhorrcail".

The Trust acquired its second estate – Torrin on Skye – in 1991, which happily coincided with Keith meeting, marrying and recruiting Jane (member number 1066) to help look after the growing membership.

Work of art: Jane's quilting talents helped raised funds for the Trust back in 2001

A spate of property purchases inspired more people to join the Trust over the next few years. After Torrin came Sandwood in 1993, Strathaird in 1994, Sconser in 1997, Schiehallion in 1999. Then in 2000, the Trust was offered the opportunity to buy the summit of Ben Nevis…

"We were on holiday when the Nevis appeal was announced and came back to a two-and-a-half foot tall pile of mail!" recalls Keith.

Jane's role as membership secretary allowed Keith to take on more IT-related tasks looking after the networks, hardware, software and membership database.

He said: "The phone I use today is umpteen times more powerful than the computers we used when we started working for the Trust. There was no email. We were still in the IT equivalent of the stone age!"

But it's the members of Trust that the pair will miss most. Jane said: "I've kept in touch with many of them since I started, by correspondence, phone and face-to face. I've grieved for those who have passed away, cheered over weddings and new family members, had lots of laughs and long conservations – some even about the Trust.

"I enjoy writing to them. One member kindly emails me photos of his Australian Highland cattle each year when he renews. I love that, along with the cards and letters.

"When we first took on Schiehallion, a member wrote to say she had climbed it for the first time when she was 27, then again in her 30s and again to celebrate her 60th birthday. She intends to do it again when she turns 90. I responded: 'Let me know when that is, because when you reach that age I should probably be able to keep up with you!'"

The couple have exciting plans for their retirement, but first they want to reclaim their home. Keith said: "We're decluttering. The office will become a bedroom again and we'll update the bathroom, kitchen and windows. Imagine trying to renovate when you are both working from home in a small flat."

We wish them a happy retirement!

Nature in focus: a new vision for volatile times

With political uncertainty in the air Trust chief executive **Stuart Brooks** ponders the threats and the opportunities that lie ahead for nature and wild places

LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE in the universe, nature is forever changing. I remember a conversation I once had with Dick Balharry, then Chair of the Trust, when he insisted that conservation is not about striving for balance. Nature is in a constant state of flux, he said. It fights, it fluctuates, it evolves. And more often than not, it is humans who impose our will on nature, to control it, to create the kind of landscapes we desire, to protect the species we value.

Dick always encouraged me to think about underlying processes and to accept that it is impossible, undesirable, arrogant even, to think that conservationists can manipulate nature to achieve some kind of pre-determined condition. The nascent rewilding movement has that philosophy at its heart: a conviction that natural processes should drive ecological change, and a belief that our species benefits from living alongside wild nature.

Today we live in uncertain times. The recent vote to leave the European Union and the prospect of another Scottish independence referendum will, over the next few years, engage people in a search for their national identity. But what might this mean for the environment, and in particular for the wild places we love? Will these changes lead us even further along the road of managing nature for our own ends? Or could they lead to a reassessment of our relationship with wild places and the natural world?

EU DIRECTIVES

Before we look to the future, we need to examine the present. We can still find places where nature is in command, mainly on the high tops and remote shorelines, where wind and water still shape the rocks in the same way they have done for countless millennia. If we reduce our field of view, we can find other places where nature remains unencumbered, such as peatlands and woodlands within protected areas – although even these are subject to conservation management objectives whose priorities are determined by humans.

Outside these pockets of protection, nature remains under

Distant horizons: gazing out to the Irish Sea from the Llyn Peninsula in North Wales

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY TEASDALE/VISITWALES

siege from human development. Last year, Jean Claude Juncker, the President of European Commission – with the support of the UK and other governments – put out to review the EU Birds and Habitats Directive, widely recognised as the world's foremost nature conservation legislation. Along with many other nature and conservation organisations, the Trust staunchly defended the directives against what appeared to be an attempt to dilute the legislation in order to remove barriers to commercial development. For the time being the directives remain intact.

In the UK, however, they will no longer apply in their current form post-Brexit. Instead, the legislation and processes that underpin it will be in the hands of Westminster and the devolved governments.

BACKING FOR NATURE PROTECTION

Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, has promised that in the event of Scotland being forced out of the EU, at least current levels of protection, based on EU-derived regulation, will be maintained.

The Westminster government has yet to clarify its position. However, evidence is mounting that the wider public wants to maintain strong nature protection laws. A recent UK-wide YouGov poll commissioned by Friends of the Earth found that 46 per cent want even stronger legislation to protect wild areas and wildlife, while a further 37 per cent want to keep the same levels of protection as provided by EU directives. In contrast, just 4 per cent want lower standards of protection (with 12 per cent undecided).

This resounding backing for strong nature protection was almost as high among Leave supporters as among those who voted to Remain, and will put pressure on politicians to guarantee protection for wild places and wildlife irrespective of constitutional arrangements.

However, any post-Brexit environmental legislation can only go so far because there will be no mechanism to seek redress at a higher political level if domestic governments in London,

→ continued

PHOTOGRAPH: NIGEL SHEPHERD/VISIT WALES

About the EU birds and habitats directives

- Aims to protect all 500 wild bird species in EU.
- Protects 1200 non-bird species which are endangered.
- Developed a network of protected areas.
- Monitors the status of over 9700 species.
- Supported over 4000 nature conservation projects.

Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast breach their own laws. And while legal action would remain an option, the UK court system is expensive and cumbersome, and in our view fails to comply with a key point in the United Nations Aarhus Convention, which states that the public should have access to environmental justice (see *Why we need environmental justice* on page 25).

Consequently, I would be concerned that, out of the EU, we lose crucial sanctions, such as fines on member states for breaching laws to protect nature. This in turn could make it easier for developers to be given a free hand, backed by governments looking to stimulate the economy.

NATURA 2000 SITES

Another major question mark surrounding Brexit is the matter of future funding from European sources. Remote and fragile rural communities have undoubtedly benefited from significant EU investment in infrastructure and social development.

The Trust wants nature to flourish in the wild places we manage and seek to protect. We also want thriving communities in these areas, based on sustainable local businesses, with good roads to provide access for tourists, safe places to park, varied accommodation that can cater for a diverse range of visitors, strong networks of paths and trails, and reliable broadband and mobile phone coverage. Our landscapes, mountains and beaches are a global draw, but during the peak tourist season our infrastructure is creaking.

Brexit does not necessarily mean that investment is under threat, but it does mean that our governments will need to ensure that funding will continue to be made available for sustainable economic development.

Given the generally low profile afforded to nature by all governments, there is an obvious danger that Brexit will lead to a cut in funding for Natura 2000 sites, which are Europe's best nature areas, representing the full range of habitats and species across the EU.

In the UK, there are currently 918 terrestrial and marine Natura 2000 sites, covering nearly 10 per cent of Britain's landmass and a sizeable chunk of its marine area. Over the past 10 years, these sites have benefited from millions of pounds of funds derived directly from Europe.

Let's be in no doubt: our best sites for nature need investment to bring them into more favourable condition, to restore functioning natural processes and biodiversity. Taking all the results for habitats and species together, nearly half (46 per cent) have 'unfavourable-bad' status while only 16 per cent have 'favourable' status. Funding has helped to reverse some long-term deterioration but we have a long way to go and this will require ongoing financial support.

Will our domestic governments guarantee at least the equivalent amount of funding that we currently receive from Brussels for our best nature sites? Farmers and research institutions have managed to secure some assurances that their existing income levels will be protected until 2020, but no such assurances have yet been given for biodiversity. More than ever, nature needs NGOs to speak up on its behalf.

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect"

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

While the loss of funding for existing protected areas is an obvious threat, Brexit does nonetheless open up an opportunity to radically reform the existing system of support for land management in general and farmland in particular.

Even without Brexit, the system of agricultural payments was in dire need of reform. Last year, UK landowners and farmers received over £3bn under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Because the subsidies are paid by the hectare, the biggest farmers receive the largest subsidies, with many reaping in six-figure sums annually. The poorest farmers are excluded because the qualifying level is five hectares.

The huge decline in farmland birds – down 54 per cent since 1970 – is evidence that something has gone drastically wrong in our wider countryside. As George Monbiot bluntly put it, "the Common Agricultural Policy is a €55bn incentive to destroy wildlife habitats".

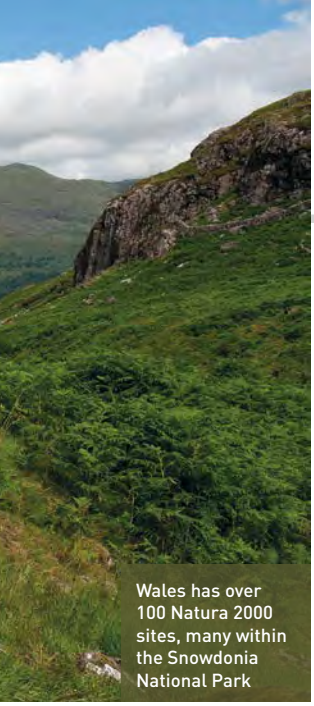
Moreover, CAP makes no sense economically – and if land management is left to market forces after Brexit, there could be an exodus of both sheep and farmers from our uplands. For conservationists, that may seem like a silver lining. Some commentators even predict a trend towards land abandonment leading to passive rewilding.

But rather than allow livelihoods to be destroyed as nature takes over abandoned farms and crofts, wouldn't it be in everyone's best interests to engineer a system that utilises the skills and knowledge of upland farmers for the benefit of nature and communities? And instead of cutting off funding, could we not guarantee a bright future for upland economies and communities by redirecting subsidies towards environmental and conservation activities that would benefit the whole of society?

NATURAL SOLUTIONS TO FLOODING

Changing our land management practices could, for example, help reduce flooding, a rising problem caused by a combination of climate change, loss of woodland and drainage of upland peat bogs.

PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated that just two storms in the north of England last year cost the economy £1.3bn. The area around Glenridding, in the Lake District, was cut off from the rest of the world for three days, while thousands of tonnes of silt, stone and gravel were deposited into Ullswater from the slopes of Helvellyn, increasing the chance of further flooding in the future.



Wales has over 100 Natura 2000 sites, many within the Snowdonia National Park

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN McCOMBES

Cattle relax by Loch Slapin with Bla Bheinn in the background. Below: drystane dyking at Glenlude

In the wake of this devastating natural disaster, the local community, with support from the UK Government and its agencies, devised a flood mitigation and resilience plan. At its heart is an acknowledgement that what is done upstream on the hills and in the becks will determine the fate of towns and villages downstream.

Instead of just throwing billions to repair the damage after it's been done, we could invest in the type of cost-effective nature-based solutions championed by respected expert organisations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

We could, for example, reduce flooding downstream by restoring peatlands, and expanding tree and shrub cover to increase surface roughness and transpiration rates. We could also rewild our rivers to allow them to meander and hold deadwood and other large objects, which in turn would impede flow rates and help channel flooding onto open agricultural land upstream rather than into built-up areas downstream. This type of approach is far more cost effective than large-scale engineered solutions.

PHOTOGRAPH: SANDY MAXWELL

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A shift in our approach to upland land management would bring multiple other benefits to society. Farmers and land managers would still receive public payments for continuing to produce food while also helping to transform our landscapes, restore biodiversity, store more carbon and improve flood resilience. Crucially, within that mix, we need more space for nature and natural processes to help restore upland ecosystems for the benefit of us all.

In a recent speech, Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust in England and Wales, set out six principles that could underpin reform.

First, that public money should only pay for the public good, rather than subsidising private profits (or in some cases, offsetting private losses). Second, that all land subsidies should be conditional on meeting higher standards of wildlife, soil and water stewardship. Third, that nature should be abundant everywhere, in the lowlands as well as in the uplands, in the towns and cities as well as in the countryside. Fourth, that we need to think long-term and large-scale, and seek to restore nature at landscape level. Fifth, that those farmers who deliver the greatest public benefits should get the largest subsidies. And sixth, rather than invest in techniques that damage nature – for example by intensifying crop yields with the use of industrial machinery and harmful fertilisers – we should focus on supporting science and technology that benefits nature. These principles could help build a beneficial new contract between the public and our farmers.

This is as much about values as it is about economics. We shouldn't shy away from making economic arguments for nature conservation, but neither should we dismiss non-monetary values. We know it makes economic sense to restore upland peatland catchments – a demonstrably cheaper way of maintaining water quality than building water treatment works.

But we can never attach a price tag to that more intangible sense of remaining connected to nature and to our own past.

The latest summary of the State of Nature – contained in a report produced by the UK's conservation NGOs, including the Trust – paints a pessimistic picture of continuing decline in the abundance and diversity of our wildlife. Frustratingly, our political leaders appear to remain wedded to systems that emphasise the 'separateness' of humans and nature.

On a more optimistic note, Scotland, at least, has begun a national conversation about the rights and responsibilities of owning and managing land.

The Land Reform Act 2016 sets out a vision "for a strong relationship between the people of Scotland and the land of Scotland, where ownership and use of the land delivers greater public benefits through a democratically accountable and transparent system of land rights that promotes fairness and social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity."

This goes beyond the question of who owns the land towards establishing new foundations for policy, based on the twin principles of public good and sustainability.

If we can start to achieve these goals in Scotland, make them relevant to the other nations and regions of the UK, and simultaneously align public payments to the public interest, we could then be within tantalising reach of forging an invigorating new relationship with the natural world, with the benefits reverberating across the whole of society.

About the author
Stuart Brooks is the chief executive of the John Muir Trust. He can be contacted at **stuart.brooks@johnmuirtrust.org**

Gael force poetry and pictures

Skye-based photographer and mountaineer **Alistair Young** finds a new way of expressing the ancient link between the language and landscape of the West Highlands

THERE IS SOMETHING in the light of early October that brings a sense of change and sharpens awareness of the landscape. Things are happening. Trees are drawing down to their roots, the bracken has retreated to naked brown contours, the streams rush louder and for me, the Muse comes. She comes with the big clouds of the colding season. The keen winds of autumn heighten the senses and her subdued light stirs something within, connecting me directly to the mountains I wander.

It was on such a day it all really came together for me as a flock of geese arrived from Greenland, high above the low hills of south Skye. I was just wandering, looking up, drawn to their honking when it simply came to me in the form of a haiku poem. I scribbled the thought in my notebook and once in from the cold I decided to write it in Gaelic. And so the 'gaiku' was born. Gaelic haiku.

Saighead chabadaich
air thilg bho bhogha gheamhraidh
speur geoidh mu dheas

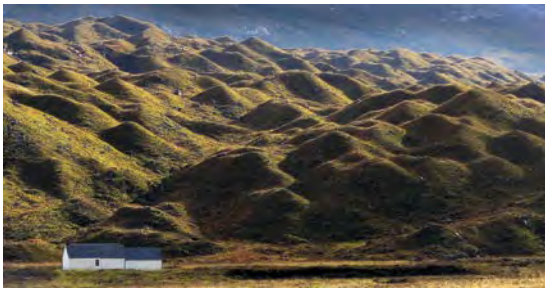
Chattering arrow
fired from winter's bow
sky of south bound geese

Gaelic has a long tradition of links with landscape and I'd just discovered the 16th century poem *Òran na Comhachaig* (also known as *'The Owl of Strone'*), written at Creaguaineach at the head of Loch Treig by Dòmhnall MacFhionnlaigh nan Dàn. In it, the poet in old age recounts youthful exploits ranging across mountains in pursuit of the deer. He describes the lonely summits and rough corries in intimate detail while his aged owl listens on its perch. Injured and taken in for companionship, its eyes flicker in the firelight as the old man relives a life lived in high and wild places.

I was also steeped in the stories of John Muir and how he'd transformed people's awareness of what was around them. It occurred to me that here was a chance to bring his philosophy and that of the Gael together in my own interpretation of

Main picture: rainbow in a south Skye storm looking over to Knoydart. This picture: early morning mists around Beinn Sgritheall on the Knoydart peninsula from Skye

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALISTAIR YOUNG



Above: evening light brings the hills alive at the Coire of a Hundred Knolls behind the Scottish Mountaineering Club's Ling Hut in Glen Torridon

Above: Sgurr Alasdair, highest mountain in the Skye Cuillin, seen from Glen Brittle

Above: Early morning sunlight on the Red Cuillin – Marsco and Glamaig seen from Bla Bheinn

landscape photography. The glue was gaiku – the short three-line poem of observation and reflection.

The photograph says: 'This is what I feel.'

The gaiku's observation says: 'This is what I see' while its reflective lines say: 'This is what it means to me.' The gaiku describes what I see in the landscape, and unlocks the emotional door behind which I create the image based on the story I want to tell, my interpretation of what I see, and how I feel at that moment.

At the end of October, I'll be publishing *The Little Book of Gaiku*, a collection of my photographs with their haiku poems. It will also include the original Gaelic and English translations, and some of my thoughts about what each of the images and poems mean to me.

I hope the collection allows people to stop and think about what they see, what their experience of wild land means to them and perhaps even to write their own interpretation in three lines and tell the world how wild land inspires them. "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings" and bring them to the world in three lines.

We all feel differently about remote landscape. We all see different things in it and we all experience it in different ways. It's that process that I try to capture in photographs and gaiku.

Once we see we have a stake in wild land, we're more protective of it. It becomes part of us and losing it means losing an indefinable but essential part of ourselves.

There is a saying, "Anail a'Ghaidheal air a'mhullaich" – the soul of the Gael is on the summit. We're all on the summit for different reasons. My reasons are in my photographs and their gaiku.

Find out more

For more information about Alistair Young and his gaikus and photography visit **gabbrophotography.uk**

Share your own wild moments with members at **johnmuirtrust.org/wild-moments**

Bringing communities and nature together

Working with people and communities has always been central to the Trust's vision of a world where wild places are protected, enhanced and valued. Here, John Muir Award Scotland manager **Toby Clark** looks at how our engagement initiative gets local people involved with nature

THERE ARE MANY DEFINITIONS of community engagement. Put simply, it's about people being collectively involved with the places and issues that affect them. It means groups and individuals connected by geographic location, special interest or affiliation working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. It is vital for organisations such as the John Muir Trust to be part of, not apart from, communities.

Since it formed in 1983, the John Muir Trust has worked with communities of place and interest, from crofters to volunteer work parties and those who turn to wild places for adventure or solitude.

We have for some years worked with community land trusts such as the Assynt Foundation, the West Harris Trust, the North Harris Trust, the Galson Trust (on Lewis) and the Knoydart Foundation. More recently, we have helped form collaborative landscape partnerships rooted in people and place, such as the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape and the Nevis Landscape Partnership.

The Trust's reach extends beyond land management and associated community partnerships. Its main engagement

PHOTOGRAPH: MOORSIDE SCHOOL

On top of the world: Pupils from Moorside School enjoying a spectacular view over the Lake District

National Park case study

Since 2011 the Lake District National Park Authority has hosted the John Muir Award in Cumbria. It's one of the Park's tools to engage residents and visitors alike in enjoying and understanding what makes the Lake District special and what makes it a National Park. Schools, colleges, community and special interest groups all get involved. Last year the landmark of 10,000 John Muir Awards achieved through this partnership was celebrated.

Sat on the edge of the Lake District National Park, with its endless opportunities for outdoor activities, Kendal College is ideally located to run its BTEC Sport (Outdoor Adventure) course.

Alongside adventure, course tutor Steve Randles is keen to ensure a broader connection with landscape, to introduce traditional conservation skills, and to integrate a sense of responsibility too. "These students wouldn't have seen themselves as traditional environmentalists at first. Doing the John Muir Award gives us a reason to better consider the place we use, and how we can care for it."

For students such as Jack it's an approach that brings home the connections between their adventure playground and the respect it needs: "Completing our John Muir Award gave us a really good opportunity to give something back to the Lake District. This was important, because we use it a lot as part of our course. On Lake Windermere, for example, we do a lot of kayaking and canoeing so it was really nice to build paths along the shore and help the community out as well."

An introduction by the John Muir Award Cumbria Manager to the National Trust at High Wray Basecamp in Windermere has led to a fruitful relationship with students, who are now learning skills such as walling, path maintenance, hedge laying and coppicing.

It's a win-win situation: students gain employment skills and a wider understanding of their adventure playground; the National Trust and Kendal College enjoy a close working relationship to benefit both the students and nature; and the Lake District National Park benefits from the respect of its future custodians.

It's a point not lost on National Park staff. Catherine Johnson, Lake District National Park Ranger, says: "The John Muir Award is helping inspire a new generation to get involved with our local issues and to give something back to the Lake District, while providing them with valuable life skills, as well as supporting them in their chosen future careers."

initiative, the John Muir Award, was launched in 1997 and has since become a catalyst for relationships between people and place in diverse communities throughout the UK.

This 'fit' is well described by Glenlude Conservation Ranger Karen Purvis: "Using the John Muir Award is a great way to add structure when engaging a wide range of community groups with wild land. It's flexible, it can be pitched to where people are at, and it's great for celebrating achievement."

By creating and managing a nationally recognised environmental award scheme, the Trust has worked with nearly 300,000 people of all ages and backgrounds, from school students to pensioners, from Scouts to prisoners. It does this by being accessible, flexible and relevant to the partner organisations that deliver it, which include youth groups, schools, clubs, outdoor centres, adult and family support groups, colleges, ranger services and more.

This has proven to be a successful model. Over 1,250 organisations delivered the John Muir Award in 2015. Each used the scheme to increase awareness of their chosen wild places, and to put something back. Locations have varied from school grounds and urban gardens to mountain ranges and remote coastlines.

Here we look at three case studies showing how the John Muir Award is being used in community settings:

- in a National Park
- in an urban setting
- in a rural setting.

→ continued

Urban case study

With its 8.6 million residents and over 300 languages spoken, it's easy to overlook the fact that London is 47 per cent green space and water, and is home to 13,000 species.

Established in 1981, the London Wildlife Trust is the only charity dedicated solely to protecting the capital's wildlife and wild spaces.

London Wildlife Trust volunteer Zak Lakota-Baldwin (pictured third from the left) became the 250,000th John Muir Award recipient in 2015 at Camley Street Natural Park

It works with schools, youth groups, families and adult groups, refugees and asylum seekers. Its role as an influential organisation in a multicultural city is based not only on its nature reserves and ambitious regeneration projects such as Woodberry Wetlands, but also its widespread community-based activity.

"The John Muir Award aligns with our approach of engaging London's population. We want to open the door to experience, enjoyment and appreciation of the wild places on people's doorsteps", said People & Wildlife Projects Manager Gareth Morgan.

"It's achievable, affordable, not too time-demanding, and has proved to be an effective way to engage diverse groups. This helps our aim to increase representation of under-represented groups so that what we do more accurately reflects London's population."

One such project is Growing Out, which is working over a three-year period with 90 young adults, aged 18 to 45, with mild learning disabilities to develop skills in gardening and practical conservation work. Referral partners include City and Islington College, Camden Society, Lambeth College and the National Autistic Society.

Camley Street Natural Park, Southwark's Centre for Wildlife Gardening and East Reservoir Community Garden in Hackney are community hubs in which participants learn with volunteers and peers about nature and wildlife, forming new relationships along the way.

John has created a mini national park and is sharing his new-found knowledge of John Muir on social media. Marion has developed her idea to learn more about butterflies in South London. She is carrying out a butterfly survey in Southwark, and creating a butterfly-friendly area within the Centre for Wildlife Gardening.

"The John Muir Award is really good to use, it makes you stop and think about things other than just getting a fence built or a tree planted" says Community Project Officer Georgie Mavrakis.

PHOTOGRAPH: TOBY YOUNG

Rural case study

High above the shores of Loch Ness in the Highlands of Scotland lies the scattered rural community of Abriachan – home to about 140 people and one of Scotland's largest community-owned forests.

In the mid-1990s the community was concerned that it might be denied access to Abriachan Forest. Uncertainty turned to resolve as locals established the Abriachan Forest Trust in 1998 to buy the land on which it sat and safeguard community interests. Since then, 534 hectares of planted commercial forest, remnant old pines and naturally regenerating open hillside have been managed as a social enterprise. Its purpose is to create local employment, improve the natural environment, and encourage public enjoyment of the site.

Education Officer Suzann Barr takes up the story: "Early on, during the formation of the community steering group, we recognised the importance of connecting people with our forest, fostering a sense of belonging. A focus on nature engagement really works at Abriachan. Lots of different types of people and groups visit, and we see not only an improvement in people's wellbeing and their health, but also in their broader engagement in learning and life – essential for any community.

"That's why we've run the John Muir Award since 2010. It works well for us here. Its flexibility and simplicity means that we can use it with school groups and young people, as well as vulnerable adults and adult learners. It doesn't tell us what to do, and it can be tailored for different people. It reinforces our common purpose of enjoyment, environmental connection and care. It chimes with what we are all about."

Ben Mackenzie, a 13-year old from Glen Urquhart High School, spent time at Abriachan getting to know the forest. Reflecting on his relationship and understanding of place, he shared his thoughts on Abriachan's natural fit – its 'common purpose'– with a charity named in honour of one of nature's greatest champions.

"John Muir and Abriachan Forest Trust are all to do with the outdoors, both fond of everything that is wild. John Muir had developed a passion for wild places at the age of 10 and this is what Abriachan is doing for me. People of all ages and backgrounds are encouraged to explore and to understand the importance of wildness. It's a great place to be all about the outdoors."

Tree of life: A sample of Highland schools that work with the Abriachian Forest Trust

PHOTOGRAPH: TOBY CLARK

Courses at Scotland's Rural College

SRUC

Campuses in locations across Scotland:

Aberdeen, Ayr, Barony, Edinburgh, Elmwood and Oatridge

Study at SRUC:

- Postgraduate Distance Learning
- Undergraduate Degree
- HND/HNC
- National Certificate (NC)
- Work-Based Learning (SVQ/MA)
- Access Courses
- Vocational Study and Training Courses
- Full-time, Part-time and Distance Learning

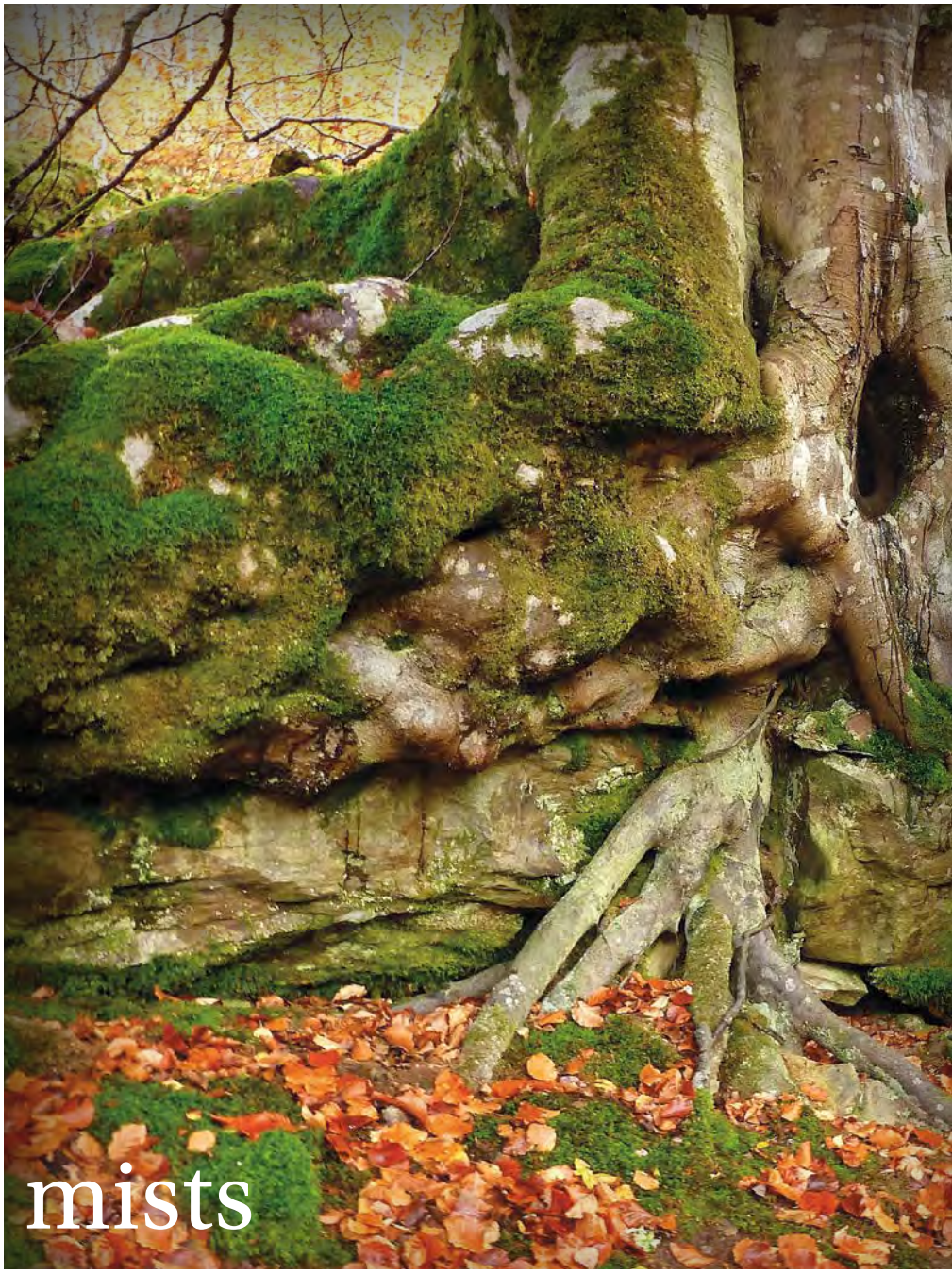
A job doesn't have to be based in an office!

Study at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and become an expert in your field!

www.facebook.com/sruc.ac.uk www.twitter.com/srucstudents

recruitment@sruc.ac.uk

For more information visit: www.sruc.ac.uk/education or call us on 0800 269 453. SRUC runs Open Days at each of its campuses regularly – find out more at www.sruc.ac.uk/opendays



As the leaves start to turn, **Susan Wright** talks to acclaimed nature writer Jim Crumley about his new book *The Nature of Autumn*

Season of mists

JIM CRUMLEY AND I are sharing a moment. Standing atop Ballengeich Hill, the outline of Stirling Castle's ramparts to our left, we're staring through ground-licking August cloud in the direction of the mountains of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. But beyond the narrow string of M9 motorway, a swathe of sun is cracking open the drizzle, painting a wow moment over hill, field and tree.

"I didn't bring my camera," says Jim. "I thought this was just going to be a straight walk in the rain." Which is funny, because Jim, one of Scotland's greatest and prolific nature writers, is a master of capturing moments. In his latest book, *The Nature of Autumn*, he treats us to some of the best: a special encounter with a green woodpecker in autumnal woodland; an ankle deep venture among naturally regenerating trees in Glen Finglas; the reaction of 30 whooper swans to a microlight in the Carse of Stirling; the savouring of a crab roll and coffee in Crail. Then there's my favourite: a matter of minutes when the skies break apart during a ferry trip back from a gloomy, rain-sodden Harris.

"The miracle, when it happened was as sudden as whirlwinds, as startling as rainbows. It began in the south. A far headland of Skye appeared where none had been visible moments before. A hole appeared in the dark smother of cloud, and sunlight poured through in a tilted column that smote the headland and lit it from stem to stem.

"It was the precursor of a kind of Hebridean rebirth that made all the visible world new again. The sky fissured open and began to leak sunlight with the energy it had recently channelled into leaking rain, and in a hundred different places at once. The ocean that had been dull grey was suddenly ablaze, then slowly turned deep green and deep blue, and an unbroken band of molten white light as vivid as a Luskentyre breaker lay all along the horizon."

All of us who love the outdoors have drawn breath at moments such this. It's one reason why *The Nature of Autumn* is so enjoyable. It's a freewheeling romp around Scotland – a nature book but

Man for all seasons: Jim Crumley's *The Nature of Autumn* is the first in a quartet of books charting the annual cycle of nature

PHOTOGRAPH: POLLY PULLAR

Instruction for the Bard

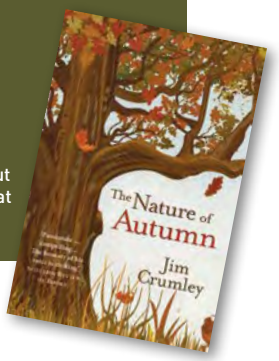
Take this to the Bard.
Tell him the land is empty
of Gael and wolf,
their first song and howl
cut from their throats
by the nature
of their banishment

Tell him the land is empty
of bright, wind-sighing trees
and of beavers, denying it
the slow ebb and flow
of beaver-laboured
forests and waters.

Tell him the land is full
of grey silence
and black, birdless forests;
of copses of steel trunks
branched with scythes
that slash open the air.
(These make red foliage
of mist-blinded swans
and eagles, fallen litter
of flesh and feather.)

Take this to the Bard

To read more of Jim Crumley's thoughts about autumn, order his book at **saraband.net**



part-travel, with a little bit of history, some environmental commentary and a poignant foray into the author's personal memories of his father who died in autumn time.

It offers insight into the complexity and unknowns of nature – when he muses on why turnstones are the only waders tolerated at close quarters by seals, for example. Or when he sees the green woodpecker eating rowan berries – a fact not observed in any bird guides he has read.

The idea for the book came to Jim years ago while he was driving from Skye listening to Roy Orbison's song, *It's Over*. "There's a line in it, 'Golden days before the end, whisper secrets to the wind.' It made me think there was a book in it. I had the autumn idea sitting in a notebook for years after that. I would keep coming across it and like all good ideas it eventually found its time and place."

Writing *The Nature of Autumn* allowed Jim to revisit some of his favourite autumn places, such as Glen Etive below the Buachaille, and Loch Tulla, where he discovered "perfect alignment of all the defining components of the season – beautiful light, the hill grasses an amazing orange, lots of trees and the red deer rut".

It also gave him freedom to explore ideas and be a bit more contemplative than was possible in his previous, more-focused books such as *The Last Wolf*, *The Eagles Way* or *Natures Architect: The Beavers Return to Our Wild Landscapes*.

"In between the framework of the beginning and the end I had complete freedom to do what I wanted. And I just went where it took me. I spent the whole of autumn 2015 sitting in different places, scribbling sketches, really getting close to the season. And it triggered memories of previous autumns. When I sat down to write, it just poured out."

Jim has been described by the *Los Angeles Times* as "the best nature writer working in Britain today". Nature writers that have influenced him include Aldo Leopold, whose *Sand County Almanac* is, he says, "the single best piece of nature writing ever. It was written in the 1940s

→ continued

and it just gets more true".

Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water* had a huge impact on him when he read it aged 18. He was also affected by Margiad Evans' *Autobiography*, an out-of-print book by an English poet and novelist which he stumbled on by chance and bought for 75 pence. "It's a book of intimate, closely observed nature written on a very local scale. It's about her love affair with the land and her symbiotic relationship with it."

In *The Nature of Autumn*, he mentions several Scottish writers, including George MacKay Brown, Seton Gordon and Frank Fraser Darling. And he includes in the book a touching poem, *Instruction for the Bard*, in which he implores Robert Burns to write about the destruction of Scotland's land (see box on previous page).

"The reality is a lot of our landscape is in a mess," says Jim when I mention this poem. "There's nothing more artificial than a deer forest or a grouse moor and there's an awful lot of them. Also, the depopulation of the Highlands has impaired the landscape. The population of the Highlands was highest when nature was at its most diverse. The two aren't incompatible."

In this latest book, he also turns his gaze to wider horizons, describing how 95 per cent of the sea-based part of the Zachariae Isstrom glacier in Greenland has been lost since 2005, and noting that more of the Arctic ice sheet melted in the first decade of the 21st century than in the whole of the 20th century.

We're in a time where nature is trying to tell us something. We're treating the earth abominably and the least we can do is listen

Climate change is not a subject he's written much about in the past, but he now talks eloquently about the global threat.

"I spend a lot of time outside sitting around and I've been getting the sense that everything is restless. When the storms came this year they felt significant too. We're in a time where nature is trying to tell us something. It's manifesting itself in all these extreme weather events.

"We're treating the earth abominably and the least we can do is listen. All indigenous people have the idea of listening to the land. People in the developed world need to do this too. Governments need to act in the interest of the sea and the land because there's a tipping point after which it can't be recovered."

Although born in Dundee, Jim has lived in Stirling and the surrounding area for more than 40 years. There's a lovely bit in his book where he seeks out his local wild patch, this hill where we're standing now, following a near-catastrophe when he just misses running over a stricken motorcyclist lying on the road.

Up on the hill, he watches sparrow hawks ducking and diving for prey above the urban skyline. Here in the same spot now, chatting, it's a different moment. We've seen a bullfinch but no sparrow hawks. It's been wet though. Which is why we can't see the distant mountains and why we're standing with sodden jeans after a short trek through thick face-high raspberry bushes, wild flowers and weeds.

As we make our way back down the hill, on a different path this time to save our wet legs, two young Canadians stop us to ask: "Is the beheading stone near here?" Jim directs them back up above us, to the site, amid old cannons and tombstones, where a number of executions were carried out in the 15th century. It's a reminder that wars, killings, destruction are nothing new.

But nature is our life force. Writers like Jim Crumley remind us of this in their books. As he says, the land is everything. We need to start listening.

About the author
Susan Wright is a communication specialist and a partner in DX Films, which has worked closely with the Trust on a range of video productions

PHOTOGRAPH: MALCOLM DAVIES/VISITWALES

On fire: Snowdonia National Park flaunts its vibrant beauty in the autumn sunshine

Chill in the air: Stronelairg now faces the bulldozers after the Trust lost its legal battle to protect this peaceful landscape

PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN LELLAND

Stronelairg – why the Trust took legal action

When the Trust took out a judicial review against the Stronelairg wind farm, it was the first time in its history it had challenged a development through the courts. **Helen McDade** explains why

LEGAL ACTION is never something to be taken lightly. But we believe that the decision to approve the Stronelairg wind farm back in 2014 was seriously flawed.

The application was exceptional both in scale and in its potential for ecological damage. It involves 67 turbines, mostly 135 metres high, spread across an area of around 35 square kilometres in the heart of the Monadhliath Mountains near Loch Ness.

Although the site is close to the Glendoe hydro power reservoir, the Trust along with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) believed that the Stronelairg site still included a substantial tract of wild land. An area of 200 square kilometres around the site was included in the draft Core Areas of Wild Land map produced by SNH in 2013, but was then removed from the final version of the map – Wild Land Areas 2014 – after the Stronelairg development was approved by the then Energy Minister Fergus Ewing.

Judicial reviews of this type are not concerned with the merits of a planning application. Instead, they focus on the process and seek to determine whether the public authority – in this case the Scottish Government – acted in compliance with the law. Interpretation of the law in complex planning decisions is rarely a clear-cut, black and white decision.

In this instance, our legal advice was that we had a strong case. Given the impact of Stronelairg, the controversy surrounding its approval, and the absence of any other way of challenging their decision, we took the decision to seek a judicial review.

Until recent years, it was routine Scottish planning practice that a substantive objection to a major development from a statutory agency would lead to a Public Local Inquiry (PLI). Yet in this case, despite a substantive objection by SNH, this didn't happen.

Had Highland Council objected to the application, a PLI would have been automatically triggered. But that decision was mired in confusion. The original application was for 83 turbines. Highland Council planning officials made a recommendation that no objection should be lodged – but only on condition that the development was reduced to 67 turbines.

The Trust believed that the Highland Council Report which led to no objection from the council was severely inadequate in its assessment of the wild land impacts.

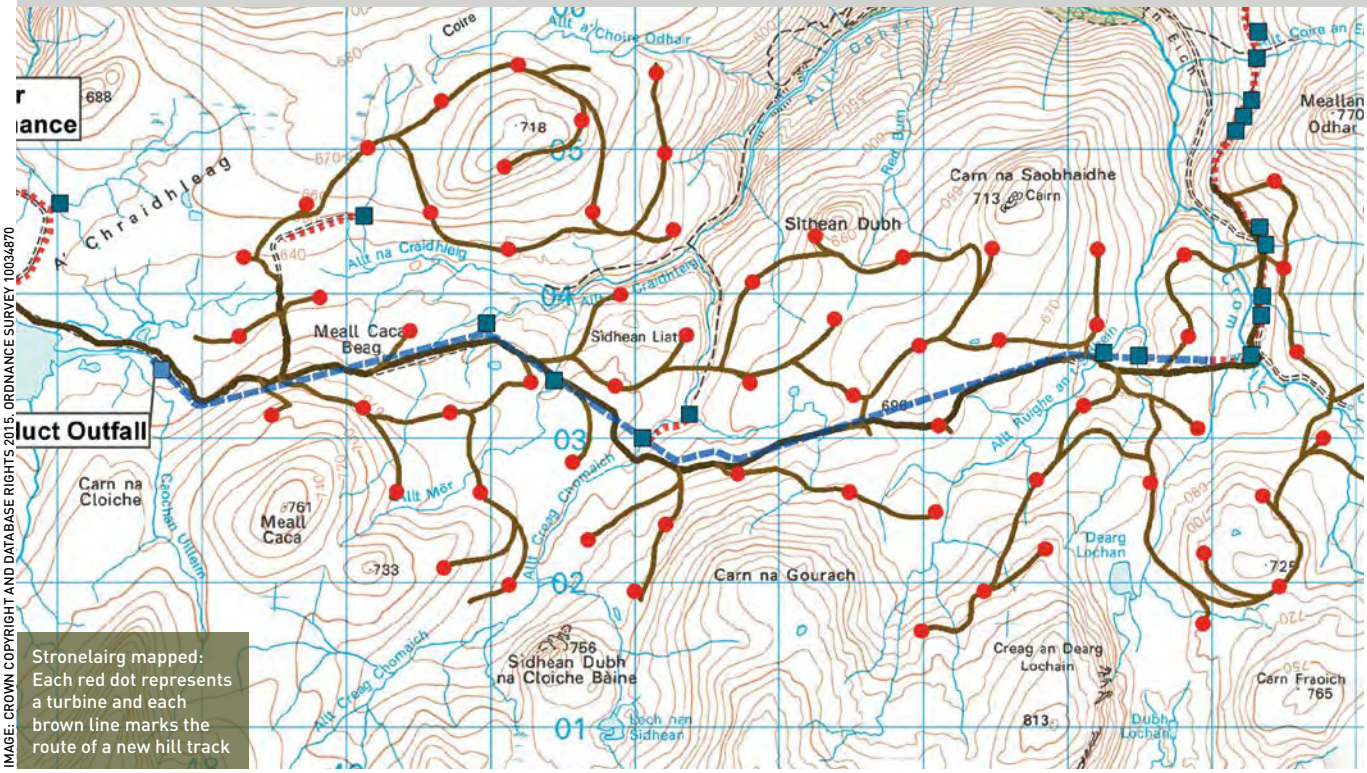
So in 2013, the Trust initiated a judicial review against the Highland Council. Unfortunately, we were refused a Protective Expenses Order (see *Why we need environmental justice* on page 25), so felt that we were financially unable at that time to proceed with the judicial review. Besides, it was still possible that the Scottish Government would, especially in the light of the objection from SNH, order a PLI.

Around the same time, the Trust attempted several times without success to discuss the issue with the civil servants involved with the application. Then on 6 June 2014, the Scottish Government gave its consent to the application.

The Trust then took out a judicial review against the decision on three grounds.

1. That the government had taken into account supplementary environmental

→ continued



Stronelairg mapped: Each red dot represents a turbine and each brown line marks the route of a new hill track

information which had not been advertised and, therefore, contrary to law, the public was never given an opportunity to see and comment upon the information.

2. That Scottish Ministers had acted unreasonably by granting consent to a development in an area defined by its own advisors as 'wild land'. Stronelairg had long been in a Search Area for Wild Land (SAWL). By the time of the decision, it was included in the more formal Core Areas of Wild Land map adopted by SNH in 2013. Consequently, Stronelairg was excluded from the Wild Land Areas 2014 map, which was later incorporated into Scotland's National Planning Framework and recognised as a barrier to major wind farm development. When considering the application Ministers failed to give proper consideration to SNH's advice that to consent Stronelairg would mean "the Search Area of Wild Land would no longer be wild land".

3. That the Minister's decision letter contained incorrect statements and gave inadequate reasons for departing from SNH's strong advice.

Although the judicial review was specifically taken out against the Scottish Government (because it is only possible to take such action against a public authority), the Stronelairg developer Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) joined the case as an "interested party". That meant we faced not just one but two sets of lawyers, thus increasing the potential financial liability should we lose the case. So once more we applied for a Protective Expenses Order (PEO) – but again we were unsuccessful. However, due to the overwhelming and ongoing generosity of campaign supporters, we were able to continue the case.

In December 2015, Lord Jones gave a decision in favour of the Trust on grounds one and three (above) and "reduced" the planning permission (i.e. set it aside). In explaining his decision, Lord Jones explicitly stated that we had taken the action for the public good. Naturally, we were overjoyed, but only for a few weeks.

When the Scottish Government and SSE appealed the ruling we once again sought a PEO – and once again we were refused, albeit on a split decision.

Scottish Ministers acted unreasonably by granting consent to a development in an area defined by its own advisors as 'wild land'

In May, three appeal judges overturned Lord Jones's ruling. Clearly, we're incredibly disappointed.

We maintain that a Public Local Inquiry would have allowed detailed expert assessment into the visual and ecological impacts of the development. This would have included, for example, a thorough evaluation of whether the amended scheme, with fewer turbines and consequently less renewable energy generated, would still have been worth the destruction of the landscape and peatland across this vast area. This judgment could never have been made without a full and thorough inquiry.

Having been refused a PEO at each stage, and having taken into account our legal advice, the Trust concluded – despite generous donations – that we were unable to continue the case to the UK Supreme Court.

Notwithstanding this decision, we believe that by taking out this judicial review we have shown the determination of the Trust to defend and protect wild land. This was why the Trust was founded over 30 years ago.

Since we initiated the legal action in August 2014, the Scottish Government has refused a number of major wind farm applications in and around Wild Land Areas, including Allt Duine, Glencassley, Sallachy, Limekiln, Carn Gorm and Talladh a Bheithe in Rannoch, while Highland Council has also objected to several such developments. We believe that the high profile legal case over Stronelairg and the public support it has generated may have influenced some or all of these decisions.

Above all, this case demonstrates that the UK is not "Aarhus compliant". The refusal of Scottish courts to grant the Trust a PEO to pursue this case suggests that environmental charities and community organisations will find it difficult to use the law to secure environmental protection.

In the months and years to come we will work with others in Scotland and across the UK to achieve reform and ensure that, in line with the Aarhus Convention, we all have access to environmental justice.

About the author
Helen McDade is the Trust's head of policy. See her follow-on article overleaf on environmental justice

Why we need environmental justice

The march of progress has to respect the environment and the wishes of local communities, argues **Helen McDade** – but that means reforming our planning system to ensure fair treatment for all

Endangered landscapes: current planning policy leaves nature and communities vulnerable

PHOTOGRAPHS: GLOBALWARMINGIMAGES

ACCORDING TO THE widely accepted definition coined by United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

This may sound abstract for an organisation whose aim is to protect and enhance wild places, but our experiences over the years have demonstrated the need for a system which allows the public, including environmental charities like the Trust, to be a respected part of the decision-making process.

The UK's environmental policies have evolved over many decades and originate from different jurisdictions – Westminster, the devolved parliaments, the European Union, the Council for Europe and the United Nations. Some of the best known milestones have included the establishment of national parks in England and Wales (1949) and in Scotland (2000); the European Birds and Habitats Directives (2000); and the Scottish 'Right to Roam' Act (2004).

These and other legislation and planning policies provide an excellent framework for protecting our environment.

However, that framework will only deliver the desired result if it is applied properly, or if it can be reasonably challenged when it fails to do so. This perhaps explains the fairly common experience of hearing politicians proclaiming how good UK environmental protection laws are, while local communities simultaneously complain that their environment has been damaged. Even the most well-intentioned legislation can be rendered ineffective by poor regulation or enforcement.

Before working for the Trust, I had little interest in planning. I'm not a professional planner so had never studied 'how things are done'. I had faith that 'due process' would be delivered fairly in Scotland and the UK.

Eleven years on, after having represented the Trust at the Beauly-Denny transmission line Public Local Inquiry, several other local inquiries and the Stronelairg judicial review, I believe the inadequate application of planning policy and law, in all the developed countries of the UK, causes major environmental injustice.

The UK is a signatory to the UN Aarhus Convention, based on three principles that give public the right of:

- access to environmental information
- public participation in environmental decision-making
- access to justice.

In Scotland, the first two principles have been enshrined in the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, with similar legislation for other UK countries.

However, in the absence of the third principle – reasonable access to justice – these requirements are not adequately enforced. Throughout the UK, developers have a right of appeal if their application is refused – but if the development is approved, objectors have no such right.

That means that the only way to challenge a controversial planning decision is to seek a judicial review, which is both time-consuming and expensive. There is generally no legal aid available for charitable organisations seeking to defend the public good on environmental matters. It is possible to apply for a Protected Expenses Order (PEO) in Scotland, or a Protected Costs Order (PCO) in other parts of the UK, to limit liability – but only when the potential costs are deemed "prohibitively expensive".

The planning regime across the UK is weighted in favour of developers with huge financial resources

In the Stronelairg case, judges refused to grant the Trust a PEO – even though the estimated legal bill is likely to add up to around £300,000.

As things stand, the planning regime in Scotland and across the UK remains weighted in favour of developers with huge financial resources at their disposal. We believe that the first step along the road towards genuine environmental justice would be to create a level playing field in planning. This would allow charities and communities the same rights as developers and landowners, including crucially the right to appeal against decisions that have a potentially adverse effect on the environment or on people's health and well-being.

About the author
Alongside her role with the Trust, Helen McDade sits on the board of Planning Democracy Scotland which campaigns for a fairer system
helen.mcdade@johnmuirtrust.org

Helping dementia with forest therapy

The Trust's membership officer, **Emma Cessford** takes a walk in the woods to explore ground-breaking new research

PHOTOGRAPHS: MANDY COOK

MANDY COOK, a PhD student from the University of Dundee and Trust member is in the final stages of her pilot project looking at forests as places of mental well-being for people with dementia. I met with her one drizzly afternoon for a walk in the woods to find out more.

Over 850,000 people in the UK are living with dementia, an umbrella term used to describe a number of progressive neurological conditions. Dementia can affect memory, cognitive awareness and communication but every individual experiences the illness differently.

In recent years, a mass of evidence has been accumulated showing how greenspace and woodland promote physical, psychological and social well-being. Research into the link between nature and dementia is still at what you might call the sapling stage. Existing studies are limited in number and design. Many focus on later-stage dementia and are concerned principally with promoting outdoor exercise to manage symptoms, rather than looking at the wider benefits that nature can bring.

EARLY-STAGE DEMENTIA

"The potential for woodland areas to have a positive impact on mental well-being for those affected by dementia is huge," says Mandy as we pause by a woodland stream. "Woodlands stimulate all the senses: sound, smell, touch – everything."

She is right: the clean, heady scent of moss and pine fills the air while the chattering birds overhead interrupt our conversation. As we duck under low-hanging branches, we stop often to look at thriving wildflowers, touch glossy red berries or hold our breath as we try to track the movements of a darting squirrel.

We find sanctuary from the rain under a leafy canopy, the bouncing droplets creating a rhythmic backdrop as if we were sheltering in the percussion section of an orchestra. I ask Mandy why she chose to focus her research on early-stage dementia.

"People with early-stage dementia tend to still be living at home and are independent. They are able to do a lot of things but are coming to terms with a new diagnosis. I wanted to create a programme that would be used by people with dementia as a stepping stone to help give them the confidence to learn skills as part of a specialised group."

While designing the programme, Mandy visited a number of groups across Scotland who run outdoor activities for people affected by dementia. She interviewed group leaders and participants, healthcare professionals and woodland rangers, and studied Forestry Commission Scotland's 'Branching Out' project, which is aimed at people with mental health issues.

People with dementia were referred to the 10-week woodland programme via Alzheimer Scotland. Each person was interviewed beforehand to find out more about their desires and abilities. "Dementia affects everybody differently. You can't develop the programme with a 'one size fits all' approach," says Mandy.

SENSE OF PURPOSE

Every week rangers from Forestry Commission Scotland delivered the programme at Callendar Wood in Falkirk. Initially the activities included woodland walking, building fires, cooking and nature photography, although Mandy points out that "some people just wanted to come along and sit by the fire – and that's fine".

Feedback suggested that participants enjoyed the programme, but there was perhaps too much focus on art-based activities. When developing a second programme, Mandy introduced the John Muir Award, inviting participants to work towards the Discovery level. She says that conservation activity gave people a sense of purpose and made the experience more meaningful. Working with the rangers to plant native trees or build bird and bat boxes gave people a feeling of purpose and self-worth. Instead of simply being a 'dementia patient' taken out for the day, participants saw it as an opportunity to help the rangers and give something back to the woodland which had provided them with tranquillity and reminiscence.

"The people on the programme have so much knowledge and expertise to offer. A diagnosis of dementia can take so much from a person but the woodland programme gave so much back," says Mandy.

At the end of the programme, John Muir Award certificates were presented among family and friends in a ceremonial style which added a sense of achievement to the occasion. "People say that those with dementia can't learn new skills, but they are quite capable of learning and the certificates proved that."

As we continue our stroll through the woodland, the sun makes an appearance, creating a green kaleidoscopic cover above us. Our conversation mirrors the 'walk-along interviews' which Mandy conducted in woodland areas with people diagnosed with dementia, carers, rangers and healthcare professionals to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. I can see why she chose this method: it feels to me that it stimulates both the senses and conversation. Mandy agrees and recalls how some people who normally found it difficult to articulate their feelings found it easier to take part in conversation in a more natural environment.

"There was a lovely moment during one of my walk-along interviews when a lady suddenly stopped and reached out to touch the thick, craggy bark of a huge tree. She talked about how solid the tree was in comparison to the fluidity and uncertainty of dementia. For her, the tree seemed to be both a physical and metaphorical anchor."

The project has already helped people with early-stage dementia. It has given them more purpose, and brought them into contact with wider social networks

The research revealed that woodlands could also help people with their confidence in walking. "One lady couldn't manage the steps at home because dementia affects spatial awareness. So when you put one foot in front of the other, sometimes you'll see a hole in front of you where there isn't one," explained Mandy, as she stopped to demonstrate what it might be like to suddenly feel that you're about to fall into an invisible hole.

An excerpt from a healthcare professional Mandy had previously interviewed backs this up: "She was much more relaxed and her focus was on the hills around her, she wasn't watching her feet… and her confidence with her walking was really, really improved."

Three years ago, when the project was coming to fruition, Mandy couldn't have anticipated the success it would lead to. "In the first woodland programme, we could only get three people to sign up. I was quite disheartened." However the latest woodland programme, which just started in the summer, is now fully booked.

As we come to the end of our walk, leaving the gossiping chaffinches behind us, Mandy talks about the future and how further research, on a bigger scale, is needed to quantify the benefits of woodland activity programmes for people with dementia, a condition which is on the increase as life expectancy rises.

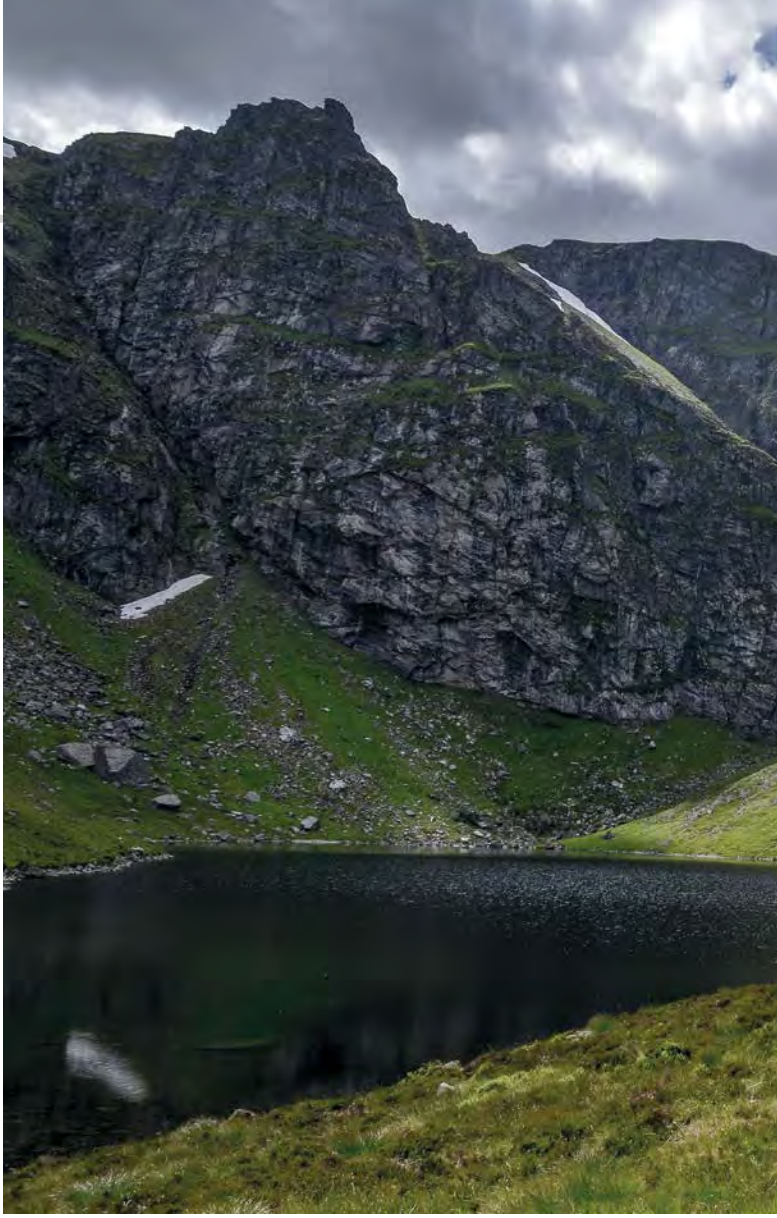
"The project has already helped people with early-stage dementia. It has given them more purpose, and brought them into contact with wider social networks.

"But so much more can be done. It is important to have alternative, more holistic services available which are adapted for people of varying ages and with diverse interests," says Mandy. "I would love to one day design a programme for people with advanced stage dementia in care homes but we need to take it one step at a time."

Above: Learning how to identify trees. Right: Planting the trees of the future. Below: Building bird boxes

Find out more

For further information about the research project, or future research plans, you can contact Mandy on **mandypcook@gmail.com**



PHOTOGRAPH: WALKHIGHLANDS

A sense of space

For 40 years, **Chris Townsend** has explored the wild places of the world, charting his adventures in 22 books. Here we publish extracts from his new book *Out There: A Voice from the Wild,* a collection of writings distilling his thoughts and experiences into a single volume

ONE WARM SUNNY evening early in the summer I walked into the great bowl of Coire Ardair in the Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve, admired the dark snow-streaked cliffs rising above the lochan, and climbed the steep stony slopes to the narrow notch known as The Window. Here the world suddenly opened up.

Until now I had been in the corrie, surrounded by its steep walls rising to long rippling ridges. The corrie was wide and there was no sense of being closed in but I could not see beyond its confines. From The Window I could look out to wave after wave of shadowy mountains vanishing into the distance. The sudden sense of space was liberating. I revelled in the vastness as I climbed the last slopes to the big plateau of Creag Meagaidh, that broad bulky mountain set in the heart of the Highlands. Up here there was just sky and mountain and wildness and this seemingly untouched landscape stretched to the horizon all around with few signs of human interference.

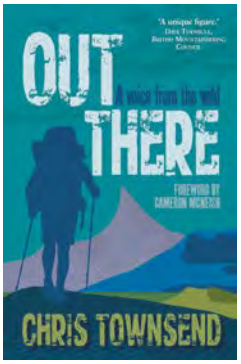
I camped just 50 metres below the summit, my tiny tent dwarfed by the immensity of the mountain. The western horizon turned pink, the sun sank behind distant clouds, the first stars emerged. The ranges of hills became silhouettes, the corries below pools of blackness. The feeling of a huge world remained.

Morning came with a hazy sunrise. Far off hills were pale and vague, hovering in the cool air. Slowly, as the sun rose and strengthened, they hardened and sharpened. I gazed at the spreading view from Creag Meagaidh's summit cairn then set off on the long high level walk over a series of tops to Carn Liath. I was above the world, striding over the hills free from the concerns of the locked-in land far below.

From Carn Liath I began a slow descent. The land closed in, the world shrank, the mountains rose on either side. I felt restricted. The freedom of the summits had gone.

This sense of space and freedom is one of the great joys of the hills. I can find it on any summit but most especially on big plateaux or long ridges, places where I can stay high for hour after hour. I've also felt it on wide beaches, particularly remote ones such as Sandwood Bay, and there's a hint of it in wide meadows in forests. In deserts it sometimes seems all there is.

In such places nature is dominant and nature is large. Size is a key component of this feeling of space. It has to be seen spreading out all around. This is why in Britain mountain tops and ridges are the places to find it. High passes can provide it too but we don't have many of those, unlike the High Sierra in California or the Himalaya, both places where I've enjoyed the vastness of the landscape without climbing summits.



As well as size I find naturalness important. The curving, flowing lines of the landscape, unbroken by human straight lines, have a beauty that speaks of space. In Britain it's rare to have a completely unsullied view.

Even from Creag Meagaidh, surrounded by hills, I could see blemishes – a distant wind farm, the white blades catching the eye; the pale slashes of bulldozed roads; the stark War of the Worlds marching metal towers of electricity pylons; blocks of conifer plantations – but these were tiny in the great scale of the landscape. Every new turbine, pylon or road has an effect though, gradually diminishing the beauty and sense of space.

This sense of space, of a world unconstrained and free, matters. We need to know such places still exist, that there is still somewhere to go that is beautiful and wild and in which we can lose ourselves. Glens, forests, corries can all be magnificent and wonderful but they don't, can't, have the same feeling of space. I love them for the details of nature, for the protection they offer from storms, for the views up to the summits, but to really see them I think you need to climb high above them and look down.

The regenerating woodlands of Coire Ardair are lovely and inspiring and walking through them is a pleasure, but to see how extensive they are you need to be on the hills above. From the heights you can see the shape of the land too, the shape of the corries and glens, the shape of the lochs and rivers. I love watching the landscape and seeing how it is constructed, how the parts fit together.

Pictured are Corie Ardair in Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve; regenerating woodland at Glen Feshie; and Sandwood Bay where the hills meet the ocean

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS TOWNSEND

This sense of space, of a world unconstrained and free, matters. We need to know such places still exist

PHOTOGRAPH: ROB BUSHBY

→ continued

A speck in the universe

It took me five and a half months to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, 4,160km from Mexico to Canada through deserts and mountains.

This walk was a revelation both of the grandeur and power of nature and wilderness, and of the rewards and meaning that came from spending nearly six months in the wild. Day after day, I travelled through magnificent forests, jagged mountains, spacious deserts and towering canyons. The land unfolded, developed, expanded and was revealed.

I grew familiar with plants from desert cacti to mountain conifers, with animals from shy mule deer to rattlesnakes and black bears. I grew to know the noises of the night and the forest, and no longer woke, as I had in the first few weeks, to sounds that were unfamiliar and potentially threatening.

I felt fulfilled and ecstatic, full of the glory and power of nature, of the amazing life of this tiny planet, this speck in the unimaginable vastness of the universe. I also felt that I had a new understanding of life, that possessions and a frantic urban lifestyle are imposed upon us and mask our place in the natural world; superficialities that are dangerous when they persuade us that we are apart from nature and not part of it. We came from the wild and it is still within us, and without it we are nothing. Understanding this means understanding that protecting nature is vital, and that walking and sleeping in nature is the best way to reach that understanding.

Pacific Crest Trail: just some of the amazing scenery that Chris passed through on his five and a half month hike

Call of the wild

I was crossing a big meadow when the feeling came over me that I was being watched. I stopped, looked towards the forest a few hundred yards away and froze with a mixture of awe, excitement and, I must admit, slight fear. On the edge of the trees a pack of wolves was watching me. There were six of them, ranging in colour from pale grey to almost black, all silent, alert, magnificent. After several minutes they vanished into the trees and I breathed out and relaxed. Later in the evening I heard them howling, a wonderfully wild sound.

That incident, far away in the Yukon Territory, remains a highlight of all my days in wild places. I saw wolves once more on that trip and heard them howling many times more. How I would love to hear that sound in the Scottish Highlands!

Realistically wolves are unlikely to be reintroduced here in the near future, due to the opposition of estate owners and the false picture created about them over the centuries. Other less controversial species could be reintroduced though, such as lynx, while beavers could be released in more places.

In the meantime, the main way for rewilding to take place is to allow natural forest regeneration by reducing deer numbers.

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER CAIRNS/2020VISION

Remembering an inspirational talent who loved wild places

Adam Pinder explains how family and friends of artist Emma Herman-Smith honoured her life by helping the work of the Trust

BOUND TOGETHER by a shared affinity for wild land, all John Muir Trust members will have their own unique motivation for supporting our work. It could have been sparked by a hard slog up Ben Nevis, by a sunset walk along the sands of Sandwood Bay, or perhaps by working towards a John Muir Award certificate. But there can be no more personal reason to give to the Trust than in memory of a loved one.

In-memory, or in-memoriam, giving is the act of paying tribute to a lost friend or family member by donating to charity in their name. Preserving a link to a cause that a loved one was passionate about can be a precious way of celebrating their life, keeping their memory alive and creating something positive out of loss.

Artist Emma Herman-Smith had a strong connection to the Trust. Her long-standing interest in wild places was nurtured further during a year-long residency on the Isle of Mull from 2011 to 2012, and another in Dunbar in the summer of 2013. These experiences prompted her to become a member.

She had planned to raise funds for the Trust the following year by completing an ambitious 1,000 Mile Walk from Indiana to Florida, retracing the steps John Muir himself had taken in 1867. Sadly, ill health prevented her from undertaking this adventure, and she died in October 2014, aged just 47.

Inspirational: Emma's death was a tragic loss for her family and the wider art world

Many of Emma's family and friends made donations to the Trust in her memory. Last year her mother Pene Herman-Smith decided to hold an exhibition and sale of Emma's acclaimed art, with the proceeds going to the John Muir Trust and Maggie's Centres. We were touched to receive £1,200 from the sale.

Pene said: "Suffice to say that losing a child is one of the worst experiences in life. Losing an artist who loved and understood the world around her and in particular the wildness of the environment, its history and its treasures, is very hard to come to terms with.

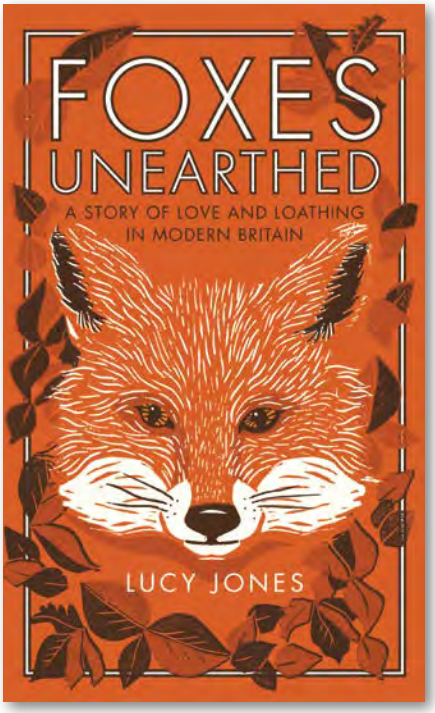
"The exhibition was truly inspirational, and so full of goodwill and love towards Emma and her work. I know you will use the money wisely and in joyful memory of my darling daughter."

There are several ways to donate to the John Muir Trust in memory of a loved one. Funeral directors can arrange collections, often including the option to give online rather than on the day. Many people now choose to invite donations to charity in lieu of flowers.

Family and friends can also elect to contact the charity directly, or to set up an online donations page through Virgin Money Giving or JustGiving. Some people may even decide to donate annually on their loved one's birthday or anniversary.

We always value these donations that help us protect and improve wild places while honouring the memory of those who are no longer able to support our work.

About the author
Adam Pinder is the John Muir Trust's fundraising manager. He can be contacted on **adam.pinder@johnmuirtrust.org** or **01796 484 965**. Find out more about Emma and her work at **emmaherman-smith.com**



Foxes Unearthed: A Story of Love and Loathing in Modern Britain by Lucy Jones

Liz Auty finds out more about a beautiful and highly intellligent animal that has capitivated her imagination since childhood

THIS WELL-RESEARCHED BOOK begins with a study of the fox in literature through history, from *Aesop's Fables* to more recent tales like Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*. A recurring theme in fox stories is the cunning intelligence of the creature and its capacity to solve problems. But it is not until *Fantastic Mr Fox* that he is portrayed for the first time as the hero of the story.

What I liked about the book was that Lucy examined the subject from all angles. This was not just a desk-based work either – she got stuck in and met a wide range of people who cross paths with the fox, including people involved in hunting, pest control and wildlife rescue. Through these encounters, she reveals some interesting experiences.

Lucy reflects on how much debate this animal excites, and on how often we ascribe human personality characteristics to a wild creature which cannot possibly experience human emotions.

Foxes are omnivorous and have a varied diet. They are skilled hunters, capable of running at speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour and can maintain a steady pace of six to 13 kilometres per hour over great distances. They use sensory whiskers on their faces – vibrissae – to help detect prey. Their powerful sense of smell can detect mammals hidden a metre under the ground. And they can hear high frequency sounds up to almost 50 metres away.

Along with small mammals, foxes also take earthworms in spring, fruit in summer and crane flies in autumn. Like other predators they come into conflict with some people, but attract the admiration of others.

Urban sprawl since the 1960s has brought people into closer contact with foxes, which are now a familiar sight in towns and cities. These animals are highly adaptable and can make use of new food sources we provide, whether that be discarded rubbish or food put out specially for them in people's gardens.

Yet there is no evidence that they are becoming domesticated. Their success is based on their knack for opportunism. Some surveys suggest that the population is now pretty stable, though the figures are disputed by some.

In recent times there have been some high profile examples of how skilfully foxes can adapt to our cities, with some spotted deep in the London Underground and others discovered riding on train carriages.

Like Lucy, I have been fascinated by foxes since childhood. For me, it began with reading David MacDonald's *Running with the Fox* in the 1980s, which inspired me to try and spot foxes in the Oxfordshire countryside. On one memorable occasion, when I was in my teens, I found an injured fox on a local common and called in the RSPCA to rescue it.

In this book, I felt Lucy strived to give an objective view, particularly on the subject of fox hunting, an activity that her grandfather enjoyed. Because I have my own strong views on the subject, I found this part difficult to read.

But overall, I would recommend this book as a thoughtful, intelligent and entertaining account of one of our most charismatic species. I learned a few new things from the book, identified with some of its characters and disagreed with some of the author's views.

As Lucy Jones says: "The fox has come to represent a thorny and emotive array of concepts to different people, from liberty to beauty, class to cruelty, hunter to hunted, pin-up to pest."

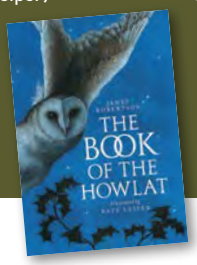
£14.99, hardback, **eandtbooks.com**

The reviewer
Liz Auty is the John Muir Trust's Schiehallion land manager. She can be contacted at liz.auty@johnmuirtrust.org

Others we like

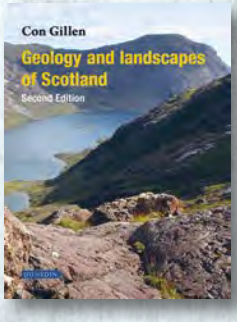
***Wild Times*, Jini Reddy**
This book will "fuel your love for Britain's wilder side, sometimes in pleasingly unexpected ways," says adventurer Alastair Humphreys. Barefoot walking, rewilding a forest, prehistoric outdoor cookery, natural navigation, urban birding and horse whispering are just some of the wild experiences brought to life with imagination and insight. £14.99, **bradtguides.com**

***The Book of the Howlat*, James Robertson (illustrated by Kate Leiper)**
Published in two versions – English and Scots – this beautifully illustrated children's hardback by acclaimed novelist James Robertson reimagines a famous medieval Scottish fable. All the characters are birds with human personalities, the howlat of the title being an old Scots word for owl. A nice Christmas gift? £12.99, **bcbooksforkids.co.uk**

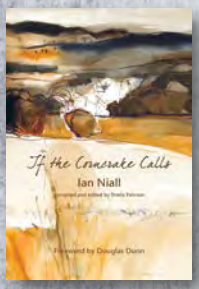


***Autumn: An anthology for the changing seasons*, Melissa Harrison (ed)**
Published in conjunction with the Wildlife Trusts, *Autumn* is an evocative celebration of a time of transformation. £12.99, **eandtbooks.com**

Discover the landscape of Scottish books



GEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPES OF SCOTLAND
Con Gillen
Scotland's landscape is not only much loved but also much studied by geologists and geographers from the beginnings of geology as a science. Profusely illustrated with photographs and maps, this is the complete account for the many for whom the geology and scenery of Scotland are so special.
Published by Dunedin £24.99



IF THE CORNCRAKE CALLS
Ian Niall
When John McNeillie died in 2002 aged 85, he left behind a legacy of over 40 books. Almost all were written under his pen name, Ian Niall. Drawing on these and his other works, his daughter, Sheila Pehrson, has compiled an anthology of nature writing and observations on wildlife that both showcases his talent and reveals the world that shaped the writer he became.
Published by Neil Wilson Publishing £12.99

THE SMALL ISLES
John Hunter
This comprehensive guide – illustrated with a wealth of photographs, maps and drawings – takes readers on a tour of both place and time across Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum. Criss-crossing the landscapes of four fascinating islands, it reveals traces of a forgotten past in everything that has been left behind.
Published by Historic Environment Scotland £25

Breathing space: Alastair in a rare moment of relaxation

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS

Alastair Humphreys

The intrepid Yorkshireman has cycled round the world, rowed across the Atlantic, ran through the Sahara Desert, published nine books and won the National Geographic Adventurer of the Year accolade. **Kevin Lelland** finds out more about what makes him tick

You coined the term 'microadventure' – why would you want people to go on a microadventure, rather than a 'big old traditional' adventure?
I think a 'big old traditional adventure' is a brilliant thing to do, and I'd urge anyone to try to make one happen. But the reality of life means that many people struggle with the time, money, expertise or fitness necessary for a big expedition. So rather than doing nothing at all, this is where the microadventure comes in. The idea is to look at what is possible rather than what is not possible.

You recently travelled around John Muir Trust properties for a film you're planning to bring out soon. Did that make you think anything new or different?
It reinforced my love for Scotland's wild places and, in particular, the north west of the country. It taught me more about the work of the John Muir Trust and subsequently made me feel more impressed by the Trust's work. Our aim was to explore the diversity of landscapes and the variety of adventurous activities that can be done in those places. Scotland certainly has plenty of wildness in which to seek adventure, and the John Muir Trust is doing a fine job protecting those landscapes.

You're well known for your inspirational writing. Which writers inspire you and why?
Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* made me fall in love with Spain. He travelled slow, lived simply, slept on hilltops, relished spontaneity, and loved conversations with the different people he met along the hot and dusty road. His descriptive writing is beautiful.

John Steinbeck for his development of characters and his exploration of the human spirit. And Roger Deakin for his good-humoured exploration of the UK, demonstrating that you don't need to go to the ends of the earth to find wildness, beauty, and adventure.

What's the thing people underestimate about going on an adventure?
That it is such a good investment for your life. Sure, adventures cost money, they take time, they are hard, they are a hassle etc. etc. etc. But I love it when I meet old people and the way their eyes glint when they begin recalling the adventures of their youth. Adventures make you a better person, I'm sure of that.

You want to make London a National Park City. Is that realistic?
I'd say that anything that makes people more aware of the wildness around them is a good thing. Also, anything that makes people discuss the role of 'normal' National Parks is a good thing too. Having a National Park City in no way demeans all the other parks.

I believe you've a few other strings to your bow, so to speak. Any plans to give up writing to become a full-time busker?
You've clearly never heard me play…!

Find out more about how Alastair busked his way across Spain here:
alastairhumphreys.com/going-walk-one-midsummer-morning

Further info
Alastair Humphreys is the speaker at the second annual Spirit of John Muir event on 8 November in Edinburgh. Book tickets at:
johnmuirtrust.org/spiritofjohnmuir

About the author
Kevin Lelland is the Trust's head of communications and membership. He can be contacted at
kevin.lelland@johnmuirtrust.org

SUMMIT GOOD

BEN NEVIS DISTILLERY

(FORT WILLIAM)LTD,

www.bennevisdistillery.com

Your Adventure Specialists

BRINGING YOU THE BEST AUTUMN BRANDS | SINCE 1962

Get Geared up for Less

with a FREE Outdoor Experience Card for JMT Members

John Muir Trust members are eligible for free Outdoor Experience cards. Benefits include 10% off everything at Tiso, Alpine Bikes* and Blues the Ski shop, including sale and special offer items, monthly offers, exclusive launch events and much more.

GET YOURS IN STORE TODAY!

* Outdoor Experience card holders get 5% off bikes at Alpine Bikes.

IMAGE: © HAMISHFROST.COM

SHOP ONLINE AND INSTORE | tiso.com #mytiso