# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

### **Our** vision

A world where wild places are valued for present and future generations

## Our purpose

Conserve, protect and restore wild places for the benefit of all

## **Our focus**

Inspire people about the benefits of wild places across the UK and showcase how wild places tackle the climate crisis and reverse biodiversity loss



johnmuirtrust.org

# **Chair and Chief Executive report**

The Trust's 40th anniversary year kicked off with ambitious plans to engage with a wider audience across the UK, to allow even more people to engage with and appreciate the need to protect wild places.

To do this, we embarked on a programme of engagement with more people from diverse communities and continued to build on our presence in England and Wales. To make wild places relevant and accessible to a wider audience, we initiated the development of new projects and programmes with the aim of inspiring more people to engage with wild places.

For example, work began in Coventry to connect urban communities with their local natural environment. Working in partnership with Historic Coventry Trust and Coventry City Council, the Trust developed plans for Charterhouse Heritage Park, a unique urban wild place in the heart of Coventry.

We also added a new, iconic 18-hectare site to the land in our care. Kylesku sits on the shoreline of Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin, next to Quinag in Assynt. We are working with the community to explore the development of a visitor attraction. The site currently has 10 lodges which are delivering much needed income while we assess future options.

In September, the Trust took on the interim management of the John Muir Way, host to 400,000 walkers every year. During this interim period, we are assessing whether it might take on long-term management of the route and if so, in what capacity.

We made progress on accelerating the transformation of land in our care. Action was taken to reduce grazing pressure from deer on our properties,



Jane Smallman Chair, John Muir Trust

to give seedlings freedom to grow. We commissioned a 30-minute documentary, *Clear on Deer*, to raise awareness of the facts surrounding deer management. The *Clear on Deer* roadshow provided respectful discussion of the issues.

Our restoration of mountain woodland at Schiehallion got underway with the Seed to Tree project, which involved local primary schools and members of the community. On Quinag, the team collected data for a new seedling monitoring project, and at Glenlude, 5,500 native broadleaf trees and shrubs were planted in areas previously covered in larch trees.

Our proposed Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) continued to gain traction across three of Scotland's five main political parties – the SNP, Scottish Labour and the Scottish Green Party – and among wider civic society. We started work to build the UK's first register of the most important remaining wild places, creating an important resource for future monitoring and protecting of those places.

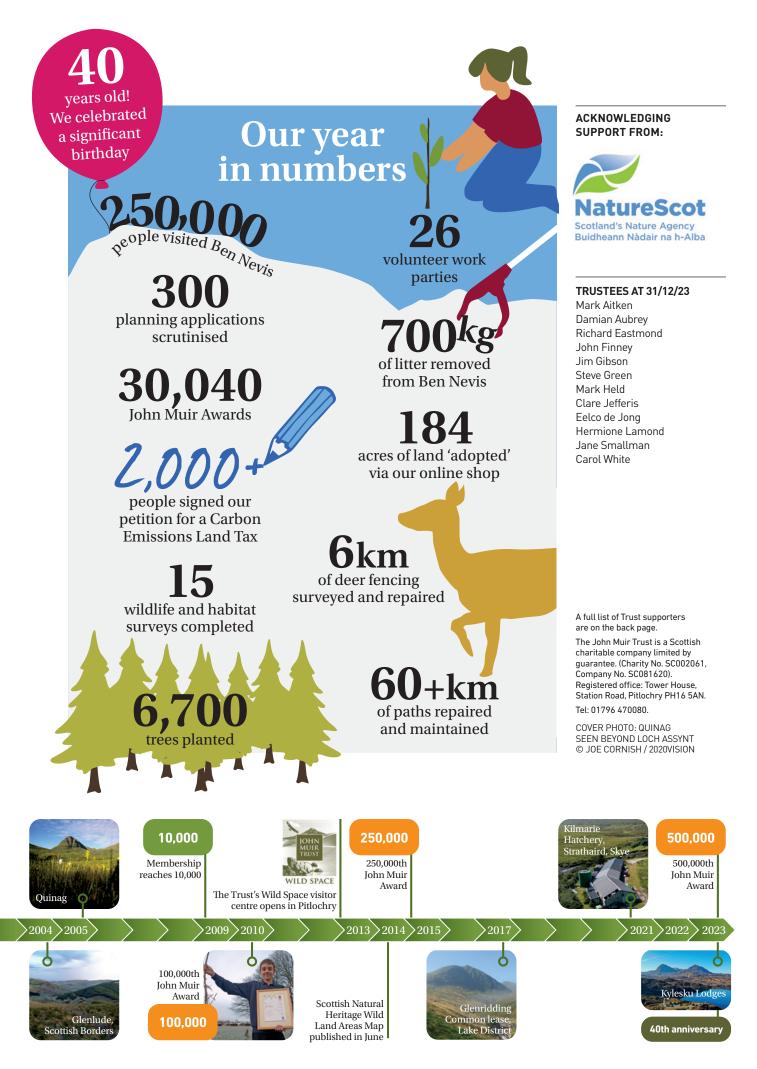
The second half of 2023 brought major challenges, which left the Trust facing a difficult period. 2024 will be a transition year that will see us refocus and reset the business of protecting wild places across the UK. Our priority is to ensure the Trust's future financial sustainability, so that we can continue our important work to protect wild places.

We want to extend a big thank you to all our Members, volunteers, Trustees, donors and to our staff for rallying to our support at a difficult time and for your ongoing commitment and enthusiasm.

David Balharry Chief Executive, John Muir Trust



### John Muir Trust milestones



# Giving wild places a voice

Influencing government and land managers to protect wild places so that nature, people and communities have the freedom to thrive

The Trust kicked off 2023 by announcing our intention to accelerate the transformation of land in our care. We informed members, neighbouring landowners and the public of our aim to increase tree cover by increasing deer culls on the land in our care – supported by out of season and night shooting authorisations from NatureScot.

#### Wild Places Survey

Almost 12,000 people shared details of their favourite wild places by completing our Wild Places Survey, we started work to build the **UK's first register of the most important remaining wild places**, creating an important resource for future monitoring and protecting of those places.

### **Clear on Deer**

We commissioned a **30-minute** documentary, Clear on Deer, (available to watch at johnmuirtrust.org/ clearondeer) that saw wildlife presenter Libby Penman travel across Scotland to talk to landowners. conservationists, animal welfare organisations and rural communities about deer management. The Clear on Deer film roadshow and Q&A toured 11 venues across Scotland and England and inspired great conversations.

An important policy recommendation to remove close season for male deer was approved by Parliament and came into effect in October.

#### Planning casework and consultations

Our team continued to submit responses to a variety of planning applications in 2023:

- We opposed an access track from Barrisdale Estate to Loch Quoich on land adjacent to Li and Coire Dhorrcail. Pleasingly the Highland Council refused planning permission after considering variety of opposing comments.
- We responded to Scottish and Southern Electricity Network's proposal to reinforce the transmission line from Spital to Beauly via Loch Buidhe and investigated and responded to scoping proposals for the Earba Project - a proposed pumped storage hydro-electric scheme within a wild land area to the south of Loch Laggan in the Highlands.
- We objected to the proposed extension of the operational period of Sutherland's Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and were disappointed to hear that an application to extend the Achany

Our 30-minute documentary - Clear on Deer - explored issues around deer management and inspired great conversations.

Wind Farm near Lairg was approved, despite our concerns that it would negatively impact a Wild Land Area and high-quality peat on which it is sited.

• We alerted Perth and Kinross Council to possible breach of planning following construction of a hill track on the Glenlyon Estate near Schiehallion without planning permission. The council concluded that there was no breach of Planning Control.

#### Partnerships

2023 saw us supporting our colleagues in the **REVIVE coalition** for grouse moor reform by signing an open letter to the Scottish Government asking them to licence all muirburn. We also worked with Scottish Environment LINK to respond to Scottish Forestry's Future Grant Support for Forestry consultation. We formed a coalition with community, conservation and outdoor recreation groups to express our concerns about the UK Government's Shared Rural Network telcoms mast programme, which would see countless phone masts erected on Scotland's hills.

#### **Carbon Emissions Land Tax**

Our proposed Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) continued to gain traction across three of Scotland's five main political parties – the SNP, Scottish Labour and the Scottish Green Party – and among wider civic society.

The proposal was backed organisations representing over a million people including:

- more than 50 community groups
- trade unions
- churches
- charities
- businesses.

A poll commissioned by the Trust found that **64 per cent of Scots supported** the introduction of a **carbon emissions tax on Scotland's largest landholdings**, with just 14 per cent opposed to the proposal. The proposals were endorsed by the Scottish Government in the draft budget for December when it committed to: "include consideration of a proposal for a Carbon Emissions Land Tax, as has been suggested by the John Muir Trust."

PHOTOS: MOUNTAIN MEDIA, JAMES ROBERTSON



We were delighted when the team's work to protect wild places was recognised by the John Muir Association (California). It presented us with its 'Conservation Award to a Non-profit Organisation' to mark the Trust's significant contributions to conservation and advocacy across the UK.

## **Repairing and enhancing wild places**

Demonstrating exemplary management of wild places so that nature, people and communities have the freedom to thrive

At Strathaird on Skye we have installed a new office and welfare facilities at the farm, which will serve as a base for operations as the Reimagining Strathaird Project develops. Work has focused on investigations into the potential to lower the reservoir dam, the structural integrity of the church and removal of materials from the old hatchery building. We have also started to tackle invasive non-native species across the wide estate, informed by comprehensive mapping and survey work, which complements the current refresh of the Strathaird Long Term Forest Plan, due to complete in spring 2024.

NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund enabled us to hire **three seasonal rangers** at Sandwood, Skye and Nevis to help look after some of our busiest sites this summer.

- Janine focussed on keeping Sandwood clean for everyone (including wildlife) to enjoy and assist with recording and observing the local flora and fauna.
- Ben focussed on monitoring and repairing fire pits and generally encouraging campfires to be set in safe locations on **Skye**, following a particularly dry spell. He also joined the team in targeting marine waste that washes up on the beaches and organising beach cleans with local schools and community groups.



A northern emerald dragonfly was discovered on Nevis

• On Nevis Jenny completed several litter picks on and around the Ben. She also worked with volunteers on our peatland restoration site, set up a transect to monitor dragonflies after a rare northern emerald dragonfly was discovered earlier in the year and fixed paths affected by storm damage.

Kylesku Lodges has a dramatic view across the loch to the spectacular three-peak mountain, Quinag, which the Trust has looked after since 2005.

#### Schiehallion Seed to Tree

Plans to restore mountain woodland at Schiehallion had a good start when our Seed to Tree project worked with local primary schools and members of the community to collect local tree seed to grow on and eventually plant out on the mountain.

#### Kylesku Lodges

In Assynt, we added a **new 18-hectare** site to the land in our care. Kylesku Lodges includes 10 A-frame lodges on the shoreline of Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin, next to – and with extensive views of – Quinag. Our aim is to develop the site in line with our twin goals of conservation alongside community economic development.

**Quinag seedling monitoring** Over on Quinag,

the team collected data for a new seedling monitoring project, recording density of seedlings within different zones, and the percentage of seedlings that are below and above vegetation height.

#### **Glenlude treeplanting**

At Glenlude, a local forestry company planted **5,500 native broadleaf trees and shrubs** in areas that that PHOTOS: SEAN MACKAY, ROBYN MURRAY, JAMES ROBERTSON

previously held larch. To minimise our use of plastics, these trees were planted in biodegradable tree tubes.

#### **Glenridding Common** Our six-year

lease of 1,100 hectares of Glenridding Common from the Lake District National Park Authority came to an end in October. This followed our decision not to tender for a proposed 99-year lease because we couldn't balance the terms for continued management of the site with our charitable objectives. Junior Rangers learn about geology and tree identification at Quinag.

# **Connecting and caring for wild places**

Inspiring everyone to benefit from and advocate for wild places, so that nature, people and communities have the freedom to thrive

Trust friends reunited in our Wild Space Visitor Centre in Pitlochry to celebrate four decades of caring for wild places. They enjoyed catching up at an informal drinks reception, touring our special 40th anniversary exhibition before settling down to watch our new film Clear on Deer, followed by a Q&A session with the team.

#### John Muir Award

Another Trust milestone reached in 2023 was half a million John Muir Awards achieved since its launch 26 years ago.

- Of the 30,040 awards achieved in 2023, 28 per cent were by people experiencing a disadvantage.
- While 56% of Awards are achieved in Scotland, the Award continues to have a significant presence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland too.

- John Muir Awards are achieved through 1,577 Award Provider organisations, from schools to national parks, from outdoor centres to youth groups.
- Trust staff supported, registered, approved and helped nearly 3,000 groups celebrate activity and action in wild places. Those same participants, providers, partners, supporters and funders have been invited to help redesign and update the Award.

#### Junior Ranger programmes

Students from Ullapool High School and Lochaber High School once again took part in Junior Ranger programmes at Quinag and Nevis respectively. They learned first aid, navigation, orienteering kills, brashhedge building, woodland and deer ecology and management, geology, exploration and crofting.

#### John Muir Way

The Trust took on interim administrative management of the John Muir Way – a 134-mile longdistance walking trail across central Scotland. We are working with the John Muir Way Partnership to assess whether to take on long term management of the long-distance route and if so, in what capacity.

#### Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant

Six conservationists were awarded a Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant to help them undertake a adventure in a wild place with a scientific or education focus. Partnered with Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to create a resource targeted at John Muir Award groups.

#### **Health connections**

We helped fund an investigation into opportunities for Green Prescriptions near our sites in North West Scotland, where mental health can be heavily impacted by shorter



days and social isolation.

Around 200 people gathered at Schiehallion for the latest celebration organised by Glasgow's Children's Hospital Charity. The day enabled patients, parents, siblings, friends and staff to come together and pay tribute to those cared for on the Schiehallion oncology ward by planting a tree or taking part in another fun activity on offer.

#### **Creative projects**

We initiated two exciting creative projects in 2023. Firstly, we jointly commissioned a play with Community Land Scotland to explore different views around the future of Scotland's land through a mix of drama, comedy and original music. Plus, we invited artists from all disciplines to respond to the question: what does freedom for wild places mean to you? Planning began on a 'Creative Freedom' exhibition for the artwork chosen by our expert panel.

### Our volunteer heroes



At **Glenlude** (also see above), 36 volunteers (including three from our corporate partners Absolute Escapes, 11 from the Waldorf School Vancouver and a group from Artemis Investment Management) joined our core volunteers to give over 90 days of conservation work. They reinforced 150m of brash hedging, planted 300 trees to reinstate the screen of larch that was removed.

Our **Lake District team** helped local volunteers plant 1,500 native broadleaf trees in Wythburn Valley to the west of Helvellyn in March. The project is part of the Thirlmere Resilience Partnership with United Utilities and Cumbria Wildlife Trust, with the goal of creating a more resilient catchment for water quality and improved biodiversity.





At **Nevis** our staff and volunteers helped remove 140.5 kg of litter from the Ben and 113.1kg from the Glen. Plus a group of UHI Countryside Skills and Rangering students helped our path contractor carry out path repairs in Steall Gorge near Ben Nevis. The **North East Scotland Local Members' Group** gathered for 15 conservation days and three two-day events in 2023, hosted by the rangers at Glen Tanar, Balmoral and Mar Lodge. They also met for a couple of evenings to enjoy talks and a screening of the Trust's Clear on Deer film. Average turnout for this year's conservation days was nine, peaking at 17. Tasks ranged from demanding footpath repairs after winter storm damage, to the delicate handling and planting out of the endangered twinflower.



# **Consolidated Financial Report 2023**

#### Overview

Group income for 2023 was £2,972k (2022: £3,553k) and expenditure was £4,800k (2022: £3,674k) giving an operating loss for the year of £1,828k (2022: £121k). Gains on Investments of £120k (2022: loss of £777k) resulted in a net loss of £1,709k (2022: net loss of £898k).

The factors leading to this deficit were a combination of a planned increase in expenditure, and a decrease in anticipated legacy income.

#### Income

In 2023 legacy income was £938k from thirty-eight individuals (2022: £1,862k). This was a reduction of £924k (50%) compared to the 2022 legacy income. We are actively working to reduce reliance on this stream of income and focus on other areas where we can secure funds and multi-year grants which will allow us to budget with more certainty going forward.

Donations and charitable Trust income in 2023 was £825k (2022: £755k) an increase of £70k (9%).

Membership income was £363k (2022: £345k) an increase of £18k (5%).

Grant income (including Government grants) was £226k (2022: £280k) a decrease of £54k (19%).

Income from other sources was  $\pm 620k$  (2022:  $\pm 312k$ ) an increase of  $\pm 308k$  (99%).

Income from Investments was £120k (2022: loss of £777k).

#### Expenditure

Total expenditure in 2023 was £4,800k (2022: £3,674k), an increase of over £1.1million (31%). The majority of the increase was on Charitable Activities totalling £4,193k (2022: £3,226k). The cost of Raising Funds also increased in the year, to £607k (2022: £448k), an increase of £159k (35%).

Staff salary costs increased by £389k (18%) to £2,592k (2022: £2,202k).

which was the result of new roles created in line with the agreed strategy, and the next stage of our levelling up exercise to ensure that all roles were benchmarked appropriately.

Charitable Activities on the land increased by  $\pm 573k (40\%)$  to  $\pm 2,009k$ (2022:  $\pm 1,436$ ). The expenditure included an increase in Deer Management activity, which includes the use of contractors.

Charitable Activities on awareness increased by £257k (21%) to £1,473k (2022: £1,216k).

Charitable Activities on policy increased by £138k (24%) to £711k (2022: £574k).

Support and governance costs are allocated to expenditure on Raising Funds and Charitable Activities. These support and governance costs increased by £489k during 2023 due to IT costs as we invested in new systems, contractor costs to implement new systems and staff costs due to salary increases awarded during the year.

The result of the reduction in income and increase in expenditure was an operating loss for the year of  $\pm 1,828k$  (2022: loss of  $\pm 121k$ ) before investment gains/losses.

JMT Trading Company Limited made a profit of £68k (2022: loss of £10k) which included trading income of £270k (2022: £83k). The increased income and profitability were driven by rental income from lodges at Kylesku which were purchased during the year. However, due to historical losses in JMT Trading Company Limited, no distributions were able to be made from JMT Trading Company Limited to the charity.

#### **Funds & Reserves**

Total funds of the Group at the end of 2023 stand at £9.2m (2022: £10.9m). These include Restricted Funds £1.6m (2022: £3.0m); designated funds (excluding heritage properties and fixed assets) £1.6m (2022: £2.2m); designated in heritage properties and fixed assets £5.2m (2022: £3.3m); and unrestricted reserves of £0.8m (2022: £2.4m).

Recognising that the unrestricted reserves dipped below the minimum level outlined in the reserves policy, on 7 March 2024 the Trustees approved the de-designation of £1.5m of funds which had been designated for strategic work back to unrestricted reserves.

Trustees have reviewed the reserves policy after 31 December 2023 and established that the minimum requirement for the year to 31 December 2024 is £1.5m.

The Board set out a strategy for 2022 to 2026 in December 2021 that included investment with strategic objectives. Given the financial results and the impact on the reserves in 2023, the strategic objectives have been reviewed and refocused.

The four areas of strategic focus will be:

1. To demonstrate best practices for natural processes in wild places throughout the UK.

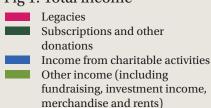
2. To promote wild places for their value to humanity and the environment.

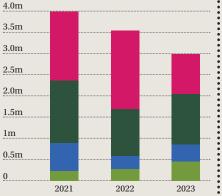
3. To influence legislative and funding changes for the conservation, protection and renewal of wild places.

4. To exemplify organisational best practice within the Trust.

James N Gibson Finance Committee Convenor

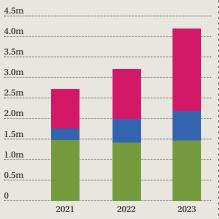






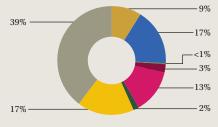
#### Fig 2: Charitable expenditure





### Fig 3: Funds

- General unrestricted funds
- Designated funds projects
- Restricted policy
- Restricted awareness
- Restricted land management
- Restricted land (purchase only)
- Fixed assets
- Heritage properties



### Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities incorporating Income and Expenditure Account (extract)

for the year ended 31 December 2023

	2023	2022
	£'000	£'000
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:		
Donations and legacies	2,352	3,242
Charitable activities	168	31
Other trading activities	308	120
Investments	115	125
Other	29	35
Total income	2,972	3,553
EXPENDITURE ON:		
Raising funds	607	448
Charitable activities:		
Land	2,009	1,436
Awareness	1,473	1,216
Policy	711	574
Total expenditure	4,800	3,674
Net (losses)/gains on investments	120	(777)
Net (expenditure)/income	(1,709)	(898)
Fund balances brought forward	10,867	11,765
Fund balances carried forward	9,159	10,867

## Consolidated Balance Sheet (extract) as at 31 December 2023

	2023	2022
	£'000	£'000
Tangible assets	1,307	699
Intangible assets	243	-
Heritage properties	3,617	2,617
Investments	3,217	5,512
Current assets	1,640	2,374
Current liabilities	(865)	(335)
Total net assets	9,159	10,867

Funds		
General unrestricted funds	835	2,441
Designated funds	3,088	2,827
Heritage properties	3,617	2,617
	7,540	7,885
Restricted funds	1,619	2,982
Total funds	9,159	10,867

This information is a summary of the Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet derived from the group financial statements, which received an unqualified audit report from WBG (Audit) Limited and were approved by the Board on 27 June 2024. It may not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of the financial affairs of the charity.

The group's statutory financial statements will be available free of charge on the Trust's website (www.johnmuirtrust.org). The group financial statements are in the process of being submitted to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

## Looking ahead to 2024

- Develop a fully costed three-year plan for the period 2025 to 2028.
- Showcase exemplary management of the land we care for by reducing grazing pressures and scoping the challenges associated with removal of invasive non-native species.
- Promote partnership working to increase societal understanding of wild place qualities and their steady decline.
- Develop and embed new engagement approaches, including re-design of our Award programme to align with wild place understanding.
- Influence the Scottish Government's package of climate change policies most relevant to wild places – including a Carbon Emissions Land Tax and deer management reforms.

## Thank you

The support from our members, our friends, our community fundraisers and from our donors is invaluable. We cannot name each individual, but offer our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you.

#### LEGACIES

Janet Allison David J. C. Bailey David Harold Blenkinson Frederick Bridges **Richard Courchee** Irene Dear **Richard Hugh England** Mark Fitton Ian Charles Fraser Ann Hawkins Alistair Paterson Hay **Rosalind Ann Jackson** Margaret Susan Jarvis Agnes Sheenan McAlister Kindlen John McKenzie Lonie Ella MacGregor lain Thomas Mackie Lindley Joan MacLeod Catriona Rankin MacMillan Peter Currie Mann Alice McMichael James Donald Menzies Judith Mylne Roland Ernest Shaw John Gavin Stewart David Richard Thompson Gerald Whelan

#### PARTNERS

**Richard Allan Betty Albon** Goff Cantley Consano Earth Peter Charlton & Val Crookes Michael Crompton Heather Currey Tony Gladstone **Clare and Nick Harris** Nicola Howarth Gordon McInnes Carol Pudsey Tim Raffle Barry Rose Jen Ross Maude Tiso **Tarquin Shipley** 

Callum Sword Andrew Telfer Simon & Anne Thompson Alan & Karami Ure Sally Westmacott John Young

#### CHARITABLE TRUSTS, FOUNDATIONS AND GRANTS Alan & Karen Grieve Charitable

Trust Alan G R Findlay Fund Anderson Burgess Charitable Trust Artemis Charitable Foundation Braithwaite Bell Charitable Trust Brown Forbes Memorial Fund Canopus Trust Castansa Trust **Corra Foundation** Daniell Trust **Fat Face Foundation** Gibson Graham Charitable Trust Hilda & Johnny Gibb Charitable Trust Jeremy Willson Charitable Trust **Kestrelman Trust** Lizandy Charitable Trust Lucie Állsop Memorial Fund Natural Resources Wales NatureScot Pastest Charitable Trust **Richard Budenberg Charitable** Trust **Richard Fraser Charitable Trust** Scottish Forestry Scottish Government Stichting Teuntje Anna (TA Fund) Tay Charitable Trust Tekoa Trust William Haddon Charitable Trust WHS Wallace Charitable Trust Woodland Trust Scotland

#### CORPORATE MEMBERS PEAK PARTNERS J & L Gibbons, Matthew Algie, Mountain Equipment, Tiso, Wilderness Scotland

GOLD MEMBERS Ben Lomond Gin, Berghaus, Glasgow Vein Clinic, Harrier Trail Running Ltd, Intelligent Growth Solutions, Original Mountain Marathon, Shibui Tea, ST&G's Marvellous Maps, Sendonomics, Walk Highlands

SILVER MEMBERS About Argyll Walking Holidays, Ben Nevis Distillery, Coruisk House, Jungle Culture, King's Manor Hotel, Stag & Bear, Wandel Vakantie

BRONZE MEMBERS Absolute Escapes, The Big Domain, Bookspeed, Castle B&B, Cottages & Castles, Dean Allan Photography, DGR Motorhomes, The Green Greyhound, Holiday Cottages, Hot Aches Productions, Irvine Springs, The Living Project, Martin Moran Foundation, McKinlay Kidd Ltd, Mini Mountain Marathon, Phil's Mowing Dorking, SNO Ski Holidays, Stag & Bear, Sykes Holiday Cottages

Thank you also to all other companies who provide support with donations, payroll giving and in-kind work on our behalf, with special thanks to Profitmaster, River Rock Whisky and Ourea Events.

#### PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND SUPPORTERS

The Alan Turing Institute, Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest, Assynt Field Club, Assynt Foundation, Emil Blum/ Calumma Design, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Community Land Scotland, Connect Communications, Culag Community Woodland Trust, Fort William Mountain Festival, Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, Highland Trail 550, Inkcap Design, John Muir Birthplace Trust, Kendal Mountain Festival, Knoydart Foundation, Lake District National Park Authority, Langholm Initiative Community Development Trust, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, Moffat Eagle Festival, Mountain Media, Mountaineering Scotland, Nevis Landscape Partnership, North Harris Trust, NorthWest2045, North West Highlands Geopark, The Outward Bound Trust, Phoenix Futures, Scottish Environment LINK, Scottish Landscape Photographer of the Year, Southern Uplands Partnership, South of Scotland Enterprise, Telford & Wrekin Local Authority, Thirlmere Resilience Partnership, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn, Vertebrate Publishing, Wales Environment LINK, West Harris Trust, Wilder Carbon, Wildlife and Countryside LINK