

**PRESS RELEASE:**

22 March 2019

**CONTACT:**

Alan McCombes

t: 01796 484936; m: 0771 744 2805;

e: alan.mccombes@johnmuirtrust.org



## **Fife-based mammal researcher set to investigate plight of harbour seals thanks to mountain men's legacy**

Thanks to a grant dedicated to the memory of two inspirational mountaineers, a young research assistant at the Sea Mammal Research Unit in St Andrews is set to explore the waters around Orkney and Shetland by kayak to investigate the potential role of killer whales in the curious decline of Scotland's harbour seals.

Twenty-seven year-old Emily Hague, who in her spare time is part of the RNLI Anstruther Inshore Lifeboat crew, is one of six recipients of an annual grant established in honour of Bill Wallace and Des Rubens who died in the Alps ten years apart, in 2006 and 2016 respectively.

Emily's dream is to become a marine mammal specialist and hopes that this pilot study will help her towards fulfilling that dream. On receiving news of the grant, she said: "I am both delighted and overwhelmed to be lucky enough to receive a grant from the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace fund.

"I plan to summon up the spirit of adventure and courage shown by the two men when I set off with my walking boots, camera and kayak to the islands to investigate the decline of harbour seals and the role that killer whales may play in this decline.

"As a young researcher in science, funding is difficult to receive and sometimes your ideas and dreams can seem too far-fetched to be taken seriously. Securing this funding for my first research adventure just proves anything is possible if you are just brave (and stubborn!) enough. I can't wait to report back to the grant and funders on the project's progress, and cannot thank them enough."

Rosie Simpson of the John Muir Trust who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "We've been delighted with the number and quality of applications this year. Emily's passion for the sea came through strongly in her application. We wish her all the best with this intrepid investigation.

"Des and Bill lived active, adventurous, outdoor lives and would be delighted to know that their inspirational lives are now helping to look after the wild places that were so close to their hearts."

The Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant was established to help people gain life-changing experiences in wild places that have scientific or educational value.

- You can follow Emily on twitter and instagram via @onthekillerwhaletrail.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### **ABOUT THE DES RUBENS AND BILL WALLACE GRANT**

The John Muir Trust administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant for free. The grant was set up in honour of Bill Wallace, who died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips, and Des Rubens, a popular teacher at Craigmoynton High School in Edinburgh who was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Since the grant was established in 2007, initially in honour of Bill Wallace, it has supported almost 50 people from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners, take part in life-changing adventures of educational or scientific value in some of the wildest places in the world.

The John Muir Trust looks to support projects, adventures or expeditions that reflect the ethos of both men and give others an opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

### **ABOUT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST**

The John Muir Trust is a membership based conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places. The Trust was founded in 1983 and was inspired by the life and works of John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born founding father of modern conservation and the inspiration behind national parks. We operate in Scotland, England and Wales and are the guardians of some of the finest wild places in the UK including Ben Nevis, Helvellyn and Schiehallion.

#### **For more info about the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant, contact:**

Rosie Simpson

Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant Administrator

John Muir Trust

01796 484966

[rosie.simpson@johnmuirtrust.org](mailto:rosie.simpson@johnmuirtrust.org)

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/grants-and-awards/the-bill-wallace-grant>