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John Muir Award Impact Report 2025

Celebrating wins for wild places



Contents

03 Introduction

04 Why wild places need protecting

05 What is the John Muir Award?

06 Impact for wild places summary

07 Impact for wild places

07 Where are wild places?

09 Enabling natural processes

10 Boosting biodiversity with natural features

11 Giving nature a helping hand

12 Advocating for wild places

13 Informing land management practices

14 People and wild places

19 The Four Challenges

24 Who has achieved the John Muir Award

25 Participants

26 Award Providers

27 Leaders

28 Funding



Published: June 2026

Cover image: Award participant removing old fencing in Atlantic rainforest as part of their conservation activity.

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The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. [Charity No. SC002061 Company No. SC081620].
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Introduction

The John Muir Trust (the Trust) is dedicated to protecting, restoring and championing the UK's wild places - now and for the future. The John Muir Award (the Award) is an engagement initiative run by the Trust, encouraging people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places.

There is real potential for wild places to thrive across the UK. Through the many actions of participants in 2025, the Award continues to make a vital difference for wild places.¹ This report tells the story of how small acts, multiplied across communities, are helping to protect and restore wild places, now and for the future.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”

Margaret Mead



¹From March 2024 to March 2025, the Award was paused while the redesign project was completed. During this period, new groups were unable to register for the Award. From March 2025, the Award was relaunched, and groups were able to register and begin activities again. This is reflected in the 2025 numbers.

Introduction

Why wild places need protecting

Wild places across the UK are under increasing pressure; from the scale and speed of human activity to the cumulative impacts of development, pollution and climate change.

Nature thrives in balance, where all members of the ecosystem play a role in the cycle of give and take. Each species within the landscape community contributes to the flow of natural processes that sustain all life on earth. From hazel trees' dependency on the squirrels to spread their nuts, to humans' dependency on wild places for mental wellbeing and clean air - these connections underpin life as we know it.

A wild place is land where natural processes can lead the way. Our wild places inspire awe and belonging, offer space for solitude and renewal, and connect us to something that is bigger than ourselves. They are part of our shared heritage and a legacy we must protect.

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

John Muir

Just as all species contribute to ecosystems that they are part of, human activity has always shaped the landscape. But today, its intensity is beyond what many ecosystems can sustain - and this matters. As wild places decline, so too do the benefits they provide: ecological resilience, climate stability, biodiversity, and the chance to experience nature at its most powerful and restorative.

When wild places are healthier, people are too. Restoring and prioritising natural processes and ensuring people have meaningful opportunities to connect with these places, is essential. When people understand and value wild places, they are more likely to care for them and stand-up for their protection. Helping people build those connections is essential to ensuring that wild places are protected for generations to come.



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

Introduction

What is the John Muir Award?

The John Muir Award supports people to experience and protect wild places - wherever they are on their journey.

For some, wild places are already part of their daily lives, through connections to places near and far. For others, working towards an Award offers a first meaningful experience of a wild place. Spending quality time connecting with and caring for wild places, participants begin to understand the value of these places - and their role in protecting them.

The Award is open to all who can:

- **Complete the Four Challenges:** Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share.
- **Spend 25 hours or more completing their John Muir Award** - with at least 25 per cent of the time spent on Conserve activity.
- **Develop awareness of an inspirational person.** This could be someone making a difference to wild places locally, or a famous environmentalist - past or present.
- **Have an active involvement in decision making** and planning of their Award.

Achieving the Award delivers benefits for both people and wild places. Through its flexible framework, participants are encouraged to tailor their activities to suit both their chosen wild place and their own interests, experiencing wild places in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them. Through the Award, participants develop their awareness and appreciation of wild places and their special qualities, whilst also reaping the benefits of quality time spent in nature for their own wellbeing, creativity and skills development.

Wild places benefit too - through practical conservation actions, and through a growing community of people who understand their value and who are motivated to protect them.



Impact for wild places summary

2,919 participants

32,399 hours of conservation activity



1,218
bags of litter



13,067m²
invasive species
removed



9,221m
footpaths



1,132 m²
wildflowers
planted



173 m²
ponds
created



674
homes for
wildlife



771
wildlife
feeders



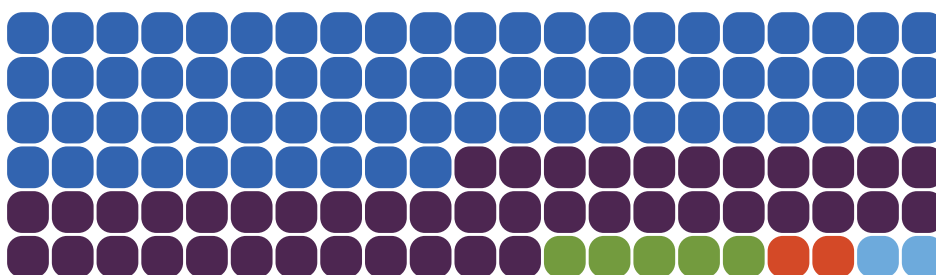
1,736
trees planted



402.5m
of hedgerow



219
shrubs planted



Groups by country:

Scotland 73

England 44

Northern Ireland 5

Wales 2

Channel Islands 2

Impact for wild places

Every year, John Muir Award participants take meaningful action to create real, lasting benefits for wildlife, wild places, and communities. In 2025, 2,919 participants completed the Award, collectively spending 32,399 hours on conservation activities to protect and restore natural processes.

Where are wild places?

There is potential to restore wild places in every corner of the UK. Wild places are often stereotyped as remote mountains, untouched landscapes or other places devoid of people, but the reality is they are part of local communities, intricately intertwined with people's lives. Wild places are areas where natural processes are able to lead the way: local woods, uplands, rivers, community gardens, coasts, and nature reserves. By taking action to care for local nature, individuals and groups are part of a bigger picture, collectively helping to restore healthy wild places across the UK.

From the Channel Islands to the Highlands and Islands, Award activity has taken place in all four nations.

The Award is active across the UK, delivering benefits to a range of landscapes from urban to rural. It's important to note that wild places are not simply visitor destinations, but are part of integrated landscapes that are embedded within communities. They exist within a human and cultural context, in rural and urban communities and all need protecting. In 2025 there were 73 groups that completed in Scotland, 44 in England, 2 in Wales, 5 in Northern Ireland and 2 in the Channel Islands.

“We are all connected to each other, to the land, and to the creatures we share it with. And if we each do our part, no matter how small, we can make a difference”

Award participant

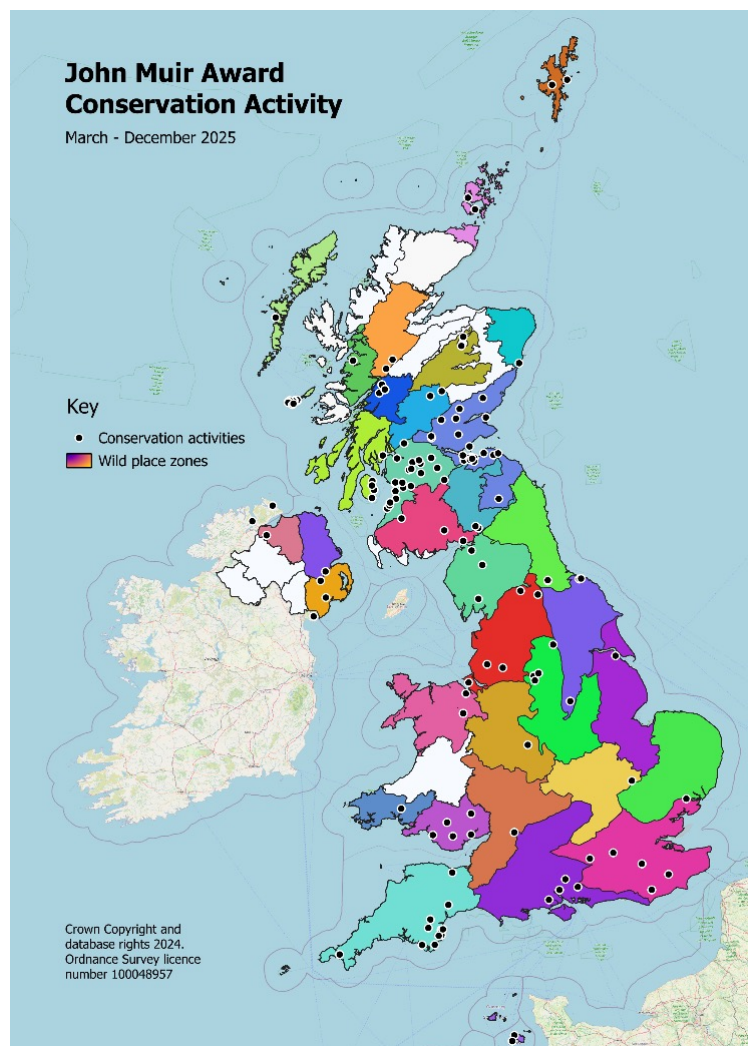


Figure 1 Conservation activity over the Wild Place Zones. Zones where conservation activity has taken place are coloured whereas zones with no activity are white.

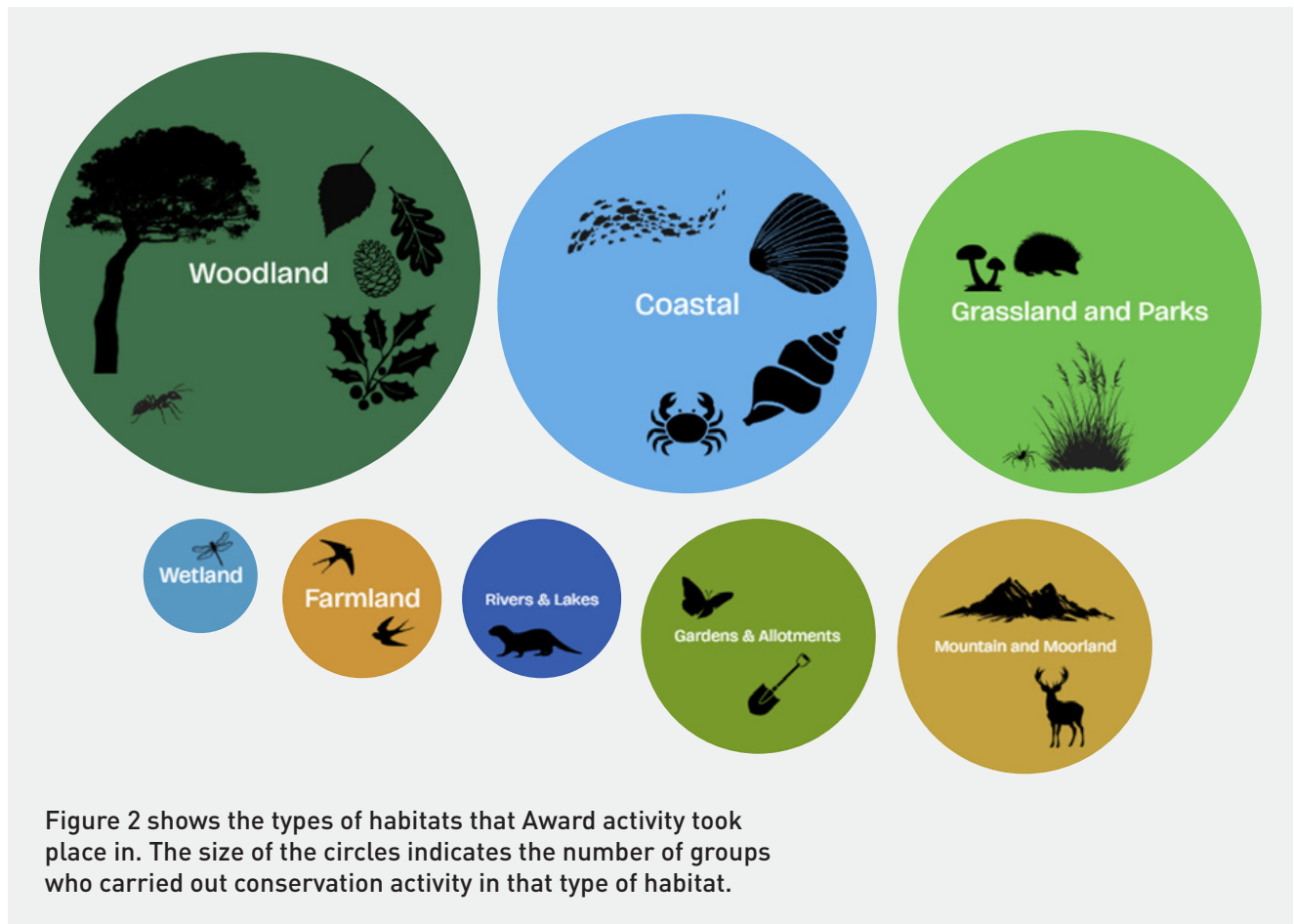
Impact for wild places

Each point on the map represents an area where a group carried out conservation tasks to protect and restore wild places (see figure 1). The map is organised by Wild Place Zones, 46 biogeographic areas across the UK. They help the Trust focus work strategically by ensuring diverse habitats and communities are represented, enabling coherent, landscape-scale restoration and engagement. In 2025 there was conservation activity completed in 34 of the 46 zones, with activity spanning a rich variety of habitats, reflecting the diversity of wild places.

The UK is a mosaic of interconnected habitats, each vital to the health of the others. Changes to one habitat ripple through the ecosystem, impacting species from many different habitats. Through their efforts, Award participants have cared for this web of life, bringing positive change to their wild place and contributing to a network of resilient, thriving wild places.

Thanks to dedicated conservation efforts from participants, nature is being supported to thrive in an incredible variety of habitats:

- **Woodlands**, from ancient to Atlantic rainforest to plantation.
- **Coastal landscapes**, from sandy beaches, machair and estuaries to seascapes reached by boat
- **Farmland**, managed to support both crops and wildlife
- **Freshwater habitats:** rivers, lakes and ponds alive with aquatic life
- **Mountains and moorlands** including upland heath, montane zones and upland springs
- **Grasslands** from wildflower meadows and species rich grassland to parks and town greens where people and nature meet
- **Wetlands:** peatbogs, fens, and floodplains that hold water and nurture rare species
- **Gardens and allotments**, turning everyday spaces into havens for pollinators and birds



Enabling natural processes

Wild places face a range of threats and there are easy actions that can be taken to reduce their negative impact. Human actions are one of the biggest threats to wild places. Litter isn't just an eyesore; it causes harm to wildlife and ecosystems by releasing toxins and fosters a culture of disrespect to the world we live in. 1,218 bags of litter were removed from wild places across the country. To protect nature after they had cleaned up the litter, many groups created and displayed signage, provided informative resources and encouraged others to 'leave no trace' and keep wild places clean. Reflecting on their experience of litter picking one participant commented:

“I feel like we've made such a difference just ourselves, imagine how much of a difference we would make if everybody did a little bit every day?”

Award participant

Visiting wild places responsibly is core to the access codes of the UK. Many participants learned about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and Countryside Code through their Award so that they, and the others they educate, could visit wild places without causing harm and with greater awareness of their impact. 9,221 metres of footpaths were created or maintained, promoting safe and responsible access.

Invasive species threaten wild places by outcompeting native plants, damaging habitats, and disrupting food chains. Their spread reduces biodiversity, weakens ecosystems and there is need for human interventions to reduce this threat. 13,067 metres squared of invasive species were removed, helping protect and restore wild places.



“We learned about invasive plant species like rhododendron - I did not know it was not from here”

Award participant

“I didn't know pulling up one plant could help the forest, that was cool.”

Award participant

Boosting biodiversity with natural features

Key to protecting wild places is knowing what species and features should be present in them, but with the UK's depleted state of nature, it can be hard to know what the landscape should look like. Through the Explore Challenge, participants surveyed and monitored the species present in their wild place and learned how humans have influenced how the landscape looks today. To further understand their wild place, many groups sought guidance from ranger services, conservationists and landowners to shape their activities. This helped participants gain deeper insight into the condition of their wild place and consider which natural features should be introduced or restored to help it thrive.

1,736 native trees were planted, contributing to the long-term restoration of vital woodland habitats across the UK. Native woodland cover in the UK remains far below where it should be² and with trees providing so many benefits for people, wildlife and wild places, it's important to take steps to plant and nurture the right trees in the right places. By reintroducing native tree species, participants helped to rebuild resilient ecosystems and restore the missing pieces of the puzzle that natural processes need to thrive.

219 native shrubs were planted, contributing to an ecologically diverse landscape and providing essential habitat for a wide range of species. Shrubs offer shelter and nesting sites for birds, food sources for pollinators, and cover for small mammals. Their presence supports ecological connectivity and helps reduce erosion and improve water retention. In areas where understorey vegetation has been lost, reintroducing native shrubs is a key step in restoring layered woodland ecosystems.

“Some are even part of a ‘lunch time watering group’ should the trees or plants need watering.”

Award leader

402.5 metres of hedgerow were planted, creating vital ecological corridors and connecting fragmented habitats. Hedgerows support wildlife, including birds, insects, and small mammals by offering food, shelter, and nesting opportunities. They play a crucial role in landscape-scale restoration by enabling species to move safely between habitats and coexist with agriculture. Hedgerows don't only benefit wildlife; they contribute to soil health which in turn benefits crops. As well as providing food for wildlife, they provide food for people such as berries, fruit and nuts that we can forage and enjoy.

1,132 metres squared of native wildflowers were planted, creating much needed habitat for bees, butterflies and hoverflies. By reintroducing wildflowers, participants helped to increase biodiversity, improve soil health, and strengthen the resilience of local ecosystems. In landscapes where wildflower-rich habitats have been lost or degraded, such interventions are vital for reversing declines in insect populations and restoring natural processes. Introducing wildflower areas to urban environments supports the bugs and beasties we live alongside and enriches our experience of urban areas as we cross paths with nature and tune into the seasons.

173 metres squared of ponds for wildlife were created to benefit local biodiversity by providing vital habitat for amphibians, aquatic invertebrates and wetland plants. Ponds are among the most species-rich freshwater habitats and support complex food webs and wider ecosystem resilience.

²Downey, H., Aizlewood, S., Ash, A., Bavin, S., Burton, V., Chemais, M., Crawford, J., Gosling, R., Hewitt, D., Hugi, M., McHenry, E., Jackson, H., Nichols, C., Pyne, E., Reed-Beale, N., Underwood, F., Walsh, T. (2025) State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2025, Woodland Trust.

Giving nature a helping hand

Some species in the UK struggle to find suitable habitat to live in as their natural habitat has been eroded or removed by humans. Hedgehogs, bats and many of the birds that visit gardens do not have enough habitat left to sustain a healthy population and so benefit from short term interventions such as bird, bat and owl boxes. 674 homes for wildlife were created this year. Habitat loss also means the loss of food sources and so introducing feeders, stocked with appropriate food, is another way to help native species thrive. 771 wildlife feeders were created and maintained this year.

While their natural habitat is regenerating, introducing bird boxes, bug houses and feeders provide many people with the opportunity to bring species back to urban areas and build important connections between humans and nature. It is a great opportunity to introduce people to nature and foster a desire to care and protect native species. There is a benefit for people too as spending time connecting with nature through these activities improves wellbeing³.

“Some of the students live in urban areas and they were delighted at sight of a slow worm, a robin, butterfly and red kite which really excited them and motivated them to help the habitats.”

Award leader



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

³Birdwatching linked to increased psychological well-being on college campuses: A pilot-scale experimental study (Peterson et al. 2024.)

Advocating for wild places

Shaping public discourse to focus on the importance of wild places, their need to be protected and advocating for their legal protection is core to the John Muir Trust's work. As part of the Conserve Challenge some groups looked to make waves for wild places in the policy space.

Pupils at Sgoil Bhaile A' Mhanich on the Isle of Benbecula protected their wild place by campaigning to stop the removal of a pond and woodland from their wild place and keep it open to the community to enjoy. They presented their case to the Parent Council and Local Authority and built community support through social media.

Their collective voice was heard, and the proposed work was halted. Their wild place now remains open to the community and pupils from the school can connect with and learn to care for the plants and animals that live there. They've not only protected their wild place but shaped a culture of stewardship in the school for years to come ensuring their wild place can thrive now and into the future.

Learning to campaign and speak up for wild places supports participants to develop valuable confidence and transferable skills, whilst also generating awareness and impact for wild places. Other examples of participants' campaigning activity in 2025 include:

- **Campaign for better waste management** to improve the water quality of the River Itchen. The group used survey data to inform talks with councillors, Southern Water and the Environment agency.
- **Engaging in talks** with Perth and Kinross council to plant fruit trees on a felled site. The project gained support and is set to commence in 2026.
- **Educating communities about littering issues** and the steps they can take to contribute to the solution. This included giving interviews on BBC Radio Orkney to shape public discourse.
- **Lobbying regional decision makers** to acknowledge the importance of, and involve children in, conservation action.
- A host of groups produced **educational leaflets, presentations and newsletters** to educate communities about the threats to wild places and the actions each person can take to reduce the impact of these threats.

“We discovered that the school’s facility management company had decided to bring in a digger to clear the pond area and remove the trees around it. They wanted to padlock the gates to this area which they deemed to be dangerous. The class and school were very upset by this and moved into conservation activist stage!”

Award leader

Informing land management practices

Survey work carried out through the John Muir Award plays an important role in protecting and restoring wild places now and for the future. A host of groups use survey data to inform evidence-based land management practices, ensuring decisions are grounded in real-world conditions and target the threats and pressures faced by the wild place that they want to protect.

By contributing to national databases and sharing findings with local landowners, councillors, and other decision-makers, these surveys help shape robust management plans that safeguard habitats and promote natural processes. Land managed for the benefit of all leads to healthy habitats that are resilient at both local and national scales.

Importantly, these surveys are carried out by participants who are often members of the community enabling local people to feed into management plans, which in turn fosters a sense of stewardship to the land, helping ensure its long-term protection.

“One of the leaders analysed the combined data and confirmed that the pond is showing signs of eutrophication, likely caused by nutrient build-up and poor water flow. This long-term evidence has strengthened the case for funding to drain and dredge the pond, with the aim of restoring it to a healthier state and improving biodiversity.”

Award leader

Surveys in 2025:



Species surveys

Groups took part in bird counts, butterfly and moth monitoring, mammal surveys, pond and river invertebrate sampling, vegetation surveys, and habitat assessments. Data from these surveys was submitted to national schemes such as



BTO, UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, OPAL, and iNaturalist.



Litter survey data

Collected from beaches, school grounds, and community spaces was submitted to a range of organisations including



The Marine Conservation Society, Keep Britain Tidy, the 'Big Blue Bag' database, Community of Arran Seabed Trust, Loughs Agency, Till the Coast is Clear project, local councils, ranger teams, and in some cases directly to landowners. Schools and youth groups also used their own survey data internally, feeding into eco assemblies, behaviour change campaigns, and annual litter trends.



Habitat and environmental quality surveys

Groups also undertook surveys assessing the health of local habitats, including river quality checks, hedgerow audits, peatland vegetation surveys, chalk downland assessments, deadwood checks, and baseline habitat surveys for future restoration.

People and wild places

To understand the depth of people's experiences in wild places, the Trust carried out a reflective thematic analysis. The four themes constructed through the analysis convey how **knowledge, responsibility, support and connection** shape people's relationships with wild places and why these relationships are integral to their protection.

For clarity, the term *study participants* is used to refer to all individuals whose experiences are represented. These include individuals undertaking the John Muir Award (referred to as *Award participants*) and those supporting them through the Award process (*Award leaders*).



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

Theme 1: Knowledge

Constructing knowledge through structured and unstructured experiences

This theme explores how knowledge of wild places is constructed through both structured learning and unstructured, experiential engagement. Study participants described learning as an evolving process shaped by scientific knowledge (e.g., species ID, ecological threats) and experiential knowledge built through presence, curiosity, and observation.

Combining formal learning with direct experience deepened understanding; as one Award participant said, *“I was able to see and feel, which made the learning more real.”* Sensory and emotional experiences helped Award participants form a richer picture of place, supporting calls in the literature to recognise diverse ways of knowing beyond traditional scientific perspectives. People consistently valued how emotional and sensory cues helped them understand variation in landscapes and processes, for example commenting on *“how different they feel.”*

Slowing down, noticing subtle changes, and allowing themselves to be immersed enhanced learning further. Awe-inspired moments such as being *“mesmerised by the continuous changing and dynamic atmosphere of the canopy”* enabled Award participants to tune in to species behaviour and develop deeper ecological awareness. As one Award leader noted, *“They [Award participants] learned to notice details they might have previously ignored... the importance of insects like bees and butterflies.”*

As familiarity increased, Award participants’ perspectives shifted. Many described rethinking places they previously assumed they knew: *“I thought I knew the wild space really well but I look at it differently now.”* Study participants also recognised vulnerability: *“We realised how fragile and threatened the area is... how easily things can be displaced or lost.”*

This awareness fostered intrinsic valuing of wild places. Quotes such as *“Do not damage nature. Nature needs protecting”* and *“I care more about the river now that I know more about it”* demonstrate a move toward valuing nature for its inherent worth rather than its utility. Learning also highlighted how small actions can have significant ecological benefits: *“I didn’t know pulling up one plant could help the forest.”*

Award participants also realised that wild places were often closer than expected: *“I can’t believe I’ve never been into these woods before and they’re right behind the school!”* This proximity supported stronger place-based relationships and the idea that engagement with wild places does not require travelling far but rather noticing and valuing what is already nearby.

Overall, structured and unstructured experiences cultivated an ethic of care, grounded in an understanding of both the physical features and lived experience of the wild place.



Theme 2: Responsibility

Taking responsibility to effect positive change for wild places

This theme examines how Award participants developed a sense of responsibility toward wild places and translated it into pro environmental behaviours. Initially, many viewed wild places primarily as recreational spaces, *“a place to play or walk through.”* Over time, these spaces became understood as *“living ecosystems that need care and protection.”* This shift reframed Award participants’ relationships with wild places, positioning them as active members of, rather than visitors to, the wild places.

Practical conservation tasks played a crucial role. Physically demanding activities produced clear results and a strong sense of achievement *“Although the work was tough, we felt a real sense of achievement and could physically see the difference we were making.”* This visibility fostered hope and agency: *“It feels like I am accomplishing something important to me and nature.”* For some, this extended to global framing relating them to the bigger picture *“We are helping to save the world.”*

Responsibility was understood collectively rather than individually: *“If we each do our part, no matter how small, we can make a difference.”* Understanding interconnection between humans and other species encouraged Award participants to act for the shared wellbeing of the whole ecosystem.

This responsibility also extended beyond Award activities. One Award participant reported, *“We have Himalayan balsam in our garden – we’re going to pull it out at the weekend.”* This shows the Award’s influence on ongoing stewardship, indicating powerful behaviour change.

For some, these experiences shaped aspirations, e.g., *“It has definitely confirmed conservation is something I’d like to pursue in the future.”* Award leaders also noted changes in identity, such as participants seeing themselves *“as caretakers of nature.”*

Overall, taking responsibility empowered Award participants, strengthening their sense of agency and intention to continue pro-environmental behaviours in the future.



Theme 3: Support

The power of wild places in supporting personal development, wellbeing and resilience

This theme shows how wild places supported wellbeing and personal development, offering emotional, physical, and psychological benefits.

Study participants frequently described feelings of calm, joy, and relaxation, such as *“I always feel so relaxed and grounded amongst the trees.”* Wild places provided respite from daily pressures. One reflection *“It isn’t often he can take five minutes to relax and reflect”* illustrates the restorative role of wild places. Others recognised the long term value: *“I know I will always need time outside to help my mental health.”* Wild places supported those facing mental health challenges, with comments like *“It’s the best therapy”* and *“It’s taken away the depression I was in.”* These reflections highlight how wild places provided effective mental health support, offering an outlet for challenging emotions and a way of building resilience to cope better.

Pride was also strongly present, often linked to taking meaningful action: *“We are proud we are doing something good for our community.”* This illustrates how wellbeing and stewardship reinforce each other.

Study participants described wild places as spaces offering freedom and play, which fostered curiosity and joy. One noted that being outside *“allowed students to act like kids again, be silly and enjoy simple things.”* For some, this was transformative; one refugee child found joy simply in the freedom to run. Feelings like *“It makes me feel free”* highlight how unstructured engagement contributes to wellbeing.

Study participants recognised physical benefits such as increased fitness, e.g., *“Walking along the coastal path and litter picking helped improve fitness in an enjoyable way.”* Other benefits included better sleep and appetite. These examples show how emotional and physical health benefits complement each other.

Wild places also supported personal growth. Study participants described the confidence gained through new experiences: *“I didn’t know I could actually do this.”* This was especially meaningful for those disengaged in traditional educational settings. Confidence also extended to environmental advocacy: Award participants became more confident in *“speaking about the importance of protecting wild places.”*

Sub theme: Accessing the benefits of wild places through social support

In many cases, the benefits of wild places were made possible by social support. Award participants acknowledged that they accessed places they otherwise would not have: *“I’ve been really pleased to go to places that I might not otherwise have been able to.”* Award leaders provided reassurance, helping Award participants overcome barriers, such as someone who *“was too scared to turn a log over... now he is so relaxed.”*

Social support was mutual, with Award leaders and Award participants learning together. One noted, *“I learned a lot from them as they did from me,”* showing how shared experiences, new friendships, and collective confidence are facilitated through engagement with wild places.



Theme 4: Connection

Building connection and sense of belonging through wild places

This theme explores how people connect with each other and with wild places, recognising humans as part of the wider, multi-species community. Study participants described giving back to wild places in recognition of the calm, space, and belonging they offer. Study participants expressed a growing sense of reciprocity in which humans, plants, and animals all contribute to shared wellbeing.

Wild places supported new and strengthened friendships. One Award leader described how quieter pupils *“found their space... their connection to nature and to other people who liked the same things.”* These experiences extended beyond peer groups; for example, one Award participant looked forward to bringing their family to a place they had discovered, showing how enthusiasm spreads outward.

Study participants spoke about a sense of belonging within the places they visited: *“He felt like he belonged there.”* This reflects a multidimensional connection, intertwining relationships with people and place. They described feeling connected *“to each other and the landscape,”* demonstrating how meaningful engagement deepens relational values.

Award participants developed a clearer understanding of ecological interdependence. Comments such as *“It made him appreciate the complexity of nature and how it all lives side by side”* reflects this shift. Many had not previously considered the importance of wild places for both humans and wildlife until beginning the Award.

This awareness led Award participants to recognise their own role in the landscape community. As one study participant said, *“Pupils now see themselves as part of their environment and understand the role they can play in protecting it.”* Caring for the environment became a natural extension of feeling part of it.

Overall, Award participants came to see wild places as communities in which humans play a meaningful, reciprocal role, motivating care rooted in belonging and responsibility.



The Four Challenges



Discover

Through the Discover Challenge, participants form an emotional connection with wild places. It invites people to engage all their senses and immerse themselves in nature in a meaningful way. By slowing down, observing, and noticing what makes their chosen place feel special, participants begin to see their surroundings in a new light, developing a sense of wonder and appreciation. See figure 3 for examples of the activities undertaken by participants.

Developing this personal relationship becomes the foundation for deepening connection. As participants spend time in their wild place, they are encouraged to reflect on how it makes them feel and to consider its unique qualities. Through this lens, they begin to build a connection not only with the place itself but also with the life it supports and to better understand its importance for the relationship between the health of wild places and peoples' wellbeing.

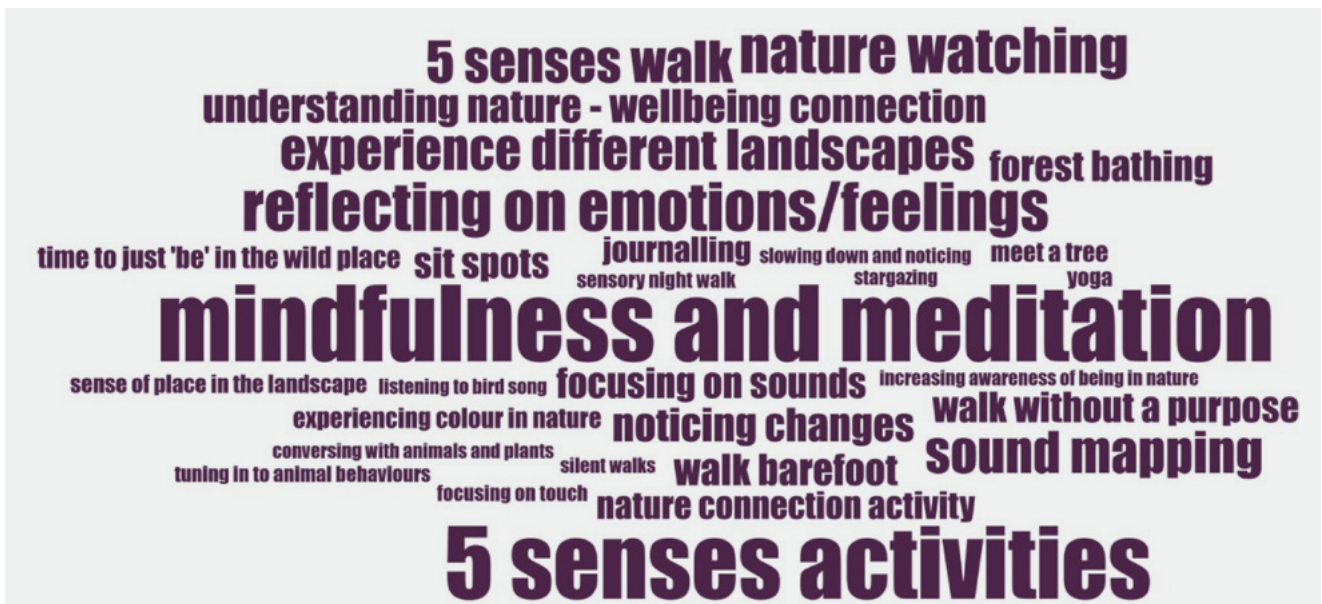
“I thought I knew the wild space really well but I look at it differently now.”

Award participant

“I found the wild areas very calming and interesting. As someone who lives in a city, it can sometimes be hard to grasp the idea of nature properly and really be able to respect and see why we set out to protect these places.”

Award participant

Figure 3: Frequency of approved proposal form Discover activities



The Four Challenges

Conserve

Completing the Conserve Challenge requires participants to undertake practical conservation activities to remove threats, boost biodiversity, give wildlife a helping hand or campaign to protect wild places. Activities have taken place across a range of habitats from coastal, to gardens and mountain reflecting the need to restore natural processes at a landscape scale, with litter picking, removing invasive species and surveying proving particularly popular (see figure 5). Though one action may seem small, many small actions lead to a web of thriving, connected and resilient habitats.

Participants are encouraged to consider the longevity of their actions and think about how their intervention will benefit their wild place after the Award is achieved. The Conserve Challenge builds a sense of purpose, responsibility and awareness of the actions that can be taken to protect the wild places we depend on.



“We all really felt we were making a difference which inspired us to keep going.”

Award participant

“Whilst we were pulling out the invasive plant species although the work was tough afterwards we felt a real sense of achievement and we could actually physically see the difference we were making”

Award participant

Figure 5: Frequency of approved proposal form Conserve activities



The Four Challenges

Share

Sharing the Award is the final challenge, where participants tell others about their experiences of wild places, why they are important and inspire others to protect them too. Participants are encouraged to reflect on what they have learned and achieved, feeling a sense of pride in what they have accomplished. Participants are encouraged to get creative and follow their interests to share in ways that feel relevant and meaningful for them; see figure 6 for examples of the varied sharing participants undertook.

The positive impact of the Award extends far beyond the individuals who achieve it. As participants strengthen their connection with nature and develop a sense of responsibility for the environment, they inspire those around them to do the same, creating a ripple that impacts friends, families and organisations. This widening circle of influence helps foster a culture of care and stewardship for wild places.



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

Figure 6: Frequency of approved proposal form Share activities



Who has achieved the John Muir Award

The Award is powered by people. The positive impacts for wild places showcased above have been generated through the collective efforts of participants and Provider organisations across the UK. This section explores the people and organisations who get involved and the growing movement they represent.



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

“I’ve realised that this award is not just about spending time outdoors. It’s about understanding our connection to the world around us. It’s about building a relationship with nature that is rooted in respect, curiosity, and care. It’s also about how we pass those values on to our children, our families, and our communities”.

Award participant

Who has achieved the John Muir Award

Participants

2,919 people achieved the John Muir Award in 2025.

A strength of the Award is the diverse range of participants who get involved. A variety of organisations embed the Award into their work to support the delivery of their core priorities and add value for the people they work with, whether children, young people or adults. The majority of Awards are achieved through participants working as part of a group, supported by a leader. 133 groups completed Awards during 2025, encompassing sectors including education, health & wellbeing, skills development & employability, and youthwork (see figure 8). This rich mix of participating groups demonstrates the relevance of the Award as a tool to deliver multiple priorities; and the interest in people from across society to get involved in environmental social action that makes a positive impact for wild places.

However, equitable access to nature is not a given. Many people encounter barriers that make it harder to experience and enjoy the outdoors. The Award's flexible Four Challenge framework helps to break down these barriers by enabling people to develop a personal connection with wild places in a way that is relevant and meaningful to them. 947 people who achieved the Award in 2025 were facing barriers to experiencing wild places.

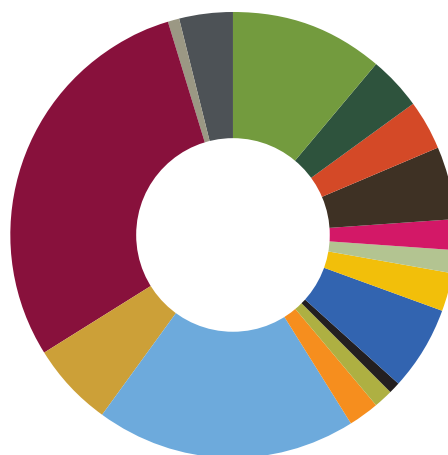
Wild places offer a fantastic and diverse environment for a wide range of personal and practical skills development. From school pupils to mental health patients, every participant who achieves their Award realises their capacity to make change and deliver positive impacts for wild places, as well as experiencing the benefits of nature connection for themselves.

Most participants engage with the Award through a leader. However, the Award is also open to self-guided participants who plan and undertake their own activities; and to families who wish to work together to collectively achieve a joint family Award. In 2025, 6 Awards were achieved by self-guided participants, and 2 Awards by families.

“Watching the group go from unsure explorers to passionate protectors of the environment was one of the most rewarding aspects of the award journey. It was amazing how engaged every single child was, and how keen they were to get stuck into every activity!”

Award leader

Figure 8: Pie chart segmented by 'group type'



- Alternative Curriculum: 15%
- Building Skills & Improving Employability: 5%
- College: 5%
- Community Organisation: 7%
- NGO/Conservation group: 3%
- Family: 2%
- Forest School: 4%
- Health and Wellbeing: 8%
- Home Education: 1%
- Independent School (fee paying): 2%
- Individual: 3%
- Outdoor Education Centre: 25%
- Special School: 8%
- State School: 39%
- University: 1%
- Youthwork: 5%

“Taking learners regularly outside and letting them learn in a nonclassroom format allowed everyone to succeed and participate in a meaningful and active way. Learners became passionate about the learning”

Award leader

Who has achieved the John Muir Award

Award Providers

The John Muir Award is delivered via a network of Award Provider organisations across the UK. During 2025, 87 Provider organisations delivered the Award to completion, with an additional 221 Providers registering plans and beginning to deliver Award activities for participants who are set to complete in 2026. 45.9% of organisations identified themselves as inclusion Providers, organisations with a core focus on removing barriers and supporting access to opportunities where the Award can be a vehicle for helping increase engagement, improve outcomes and offer recognition.

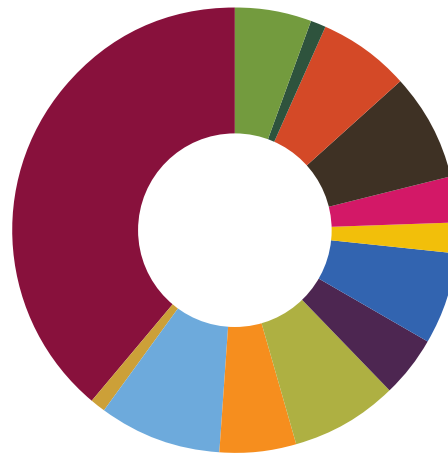
A wide range of organisations engaged with the John Muir Award, reflecting its flexibility and relevance across different sectors (see figure 9). The majority of Awards were completed within the education sector demonstrating how easily it can be integrated into diverse learning environments and contribute to learning outcomes across a variety of curriculum areas. A wide range of education providers took part including state schools, colleges, independent and special schools, and universities. The Award has also been embedded into alternative curriculum programmes, outdoor education centres, home education networks and forest schools.

Organisations focused on health and wellbeing, youthwork, and employability also embraced the Award, highlighting its value in supporting participants' health and personal development. Community initiatives, conservation groups and environmental organisations also contributed to the diverse array of groups.

“Teachers noticed improvements in emotional regulation, teamwork, and confidence, particularly among pupils who often struggle in traditional classroom settings. For some children with additional support needs, being in a natural environment provided a non-pressured space to engage and succeed.”

Award leader

Figure 9: Pie chart segmented by 'Provider type'



- Alternative Curriculum: 5%
- CLD: 1%
- College/University: 6%
- Community Organisation: 7%
- Adult Group: 3%
- ENG0/Conservation group: 2%
- Forest School: 6%
- Health and Wellbeing: 4%
- Outdoor Education Centre: 7%
- Special School: 5%
- Youthwork: 8%
- Private School: 1%
- State School: 35%

“This work links brilliantly to work we are doing this year on rivers and the water cycle in Geography, food chains in Science and Forest School activities in PE. Linked to this, in History we are having a focus on the local area. The group is being led by someone who is passionate about conservation and teaching the children about the environmental issues that face society today.”

Award leader

Who has achieved the John Muir Award

Leaders

The Award is powered by an inspiring community of leaders, the Trust's champions on the ground. They plan sessions, lead groups, and promote the Trust's ethos through creating meaningful opportunities for people to experience, enjoy and care for wild places.

112 leaders delivered and completed the Award with their groups in 2025. Since the relaunch of the Award, the Trust has been thrilled to welcome back many experienced leaders who continue to share their passion and expertise. Alongside returning leaders, 24% of leaders were delivering the Award for the first time, highlighting the continuing relevance of the Award as a delivery tool for professionals across a variety of sectors.

511 individuals participated in online training workshops designed to offer an introduction to the Wild Places Guardian Award whilst also providing opportunities to connect and share ideas with leaders from a range of other organisations.

“The John Muir Award is the highlight of my teaching year. I love getting the young people out into nature and seeing them thrive. You see a completely different side to my students. Those that are quiet around school become lively and talkative in the great outdoors [...] Sometimes due to the nature of our young people’s difficulties it can be hard to motivate them but during our John Muir sessions I feel this is never the case. The young people are eager to learn and help out nature.”

Award leader

“As the leader of this Award I have watched the pupils gain in confidence, resilience and understanding of the world around them. Pupils who were quiet and on the periphery of friendship groups suddenly found their space - their place for reflection, their connection to nature and to other people who liked the same things. The group became close knit over the weeks we have completed this Award and new friendships have been formed.”

Award leader

“I just wanted to say a big thank you for this morning’s John Muir Trust Award workshop. The information on your webpages and newsletters is already very comprehensive, but I still found it really helpful for you to go through the different components with us. I also enjoyed hearing from people who have experience of being award providers, as I have not yet been involved.”

Training participant

Funding

The Trust would not be able to run the Award without the crucial support of our funders. We gratefully acknowledge these funders, including the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Corra Foundation on behalf of the Scottish Government's Children Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund. The contribution that Award Providers make through their annual group membership subscriptions also helps make the Award more financially sustainable.



Photograph: © Philip Hatcher-Moore

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The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee. (Charity No. SC002061 Company No. SC081620).
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