

John Muir Award Handbook



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Welcome

Thank you for choosing
the John Muir Award.

The Award is designed to encourage people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. Participants will learn about the special attributes of wild places and through the Award, they will Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share their experience of wild places.

We very much hope you enjoy
leading the John Muir Award.

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The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee.
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The John Muir Trust

Founded in 1983 the John Muir Trust is a leading voice for the UK's wild places.

We care for some of the finest wild places in Scotland, including Ben Nevis, Knoydart, Sandwood and areas on Skye.

We define wild places as areas where natural processes are able to thrive, whether that's urban green spaces, national parks, rivers, mountain ranges or woodlands.

johnmuirtrust.org

The John Muir Award

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. Since its launch in 1997 over half a million people have completed an Award.

The John Muir Award meets you where you are on your journey with wild places. Whether your participants are taking their first steps in wild places or are already enjoying spending time in them, becoming a Wild Places Guardian is the perfect way to strengthen their connection. It recognises their achievement towards the protection, restoration and conservation of wild places.

John Muir Award ethos

The Award supports people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places through a structured yet adaptable scheme.

- ✓ It's for people of all backgrounds – groups, families and individuals.
- ✓ It fosters connections between people and wild places.
- ✓ It's non-competitive, inclusive and accessible.



The John Muir Award challenges you to:

How to take part

The John Muir Award is open to anyone who can understand and meet the Award criteria. It includes people from a diverse-cross section of society.

In our experience, this usually means people who are working at upper primary school level and above. The John Muir Award isn't suitable for nursery or lower primary level groups.

Adults are welcome – indeed actively encouraged – to get involved too, alongside young people, students, or in their own groups.

Participation can be through involvement in an organisation, or as an individual or small independent group.

An illustration of two children, a girl with dark skin and curly hair in a pink shirt and blue pants, and a boy with light skin and red hair in a yellow shirt and orange pants, both carrying logs. They are walking on a path in a forest with green hills and trees in the background. A large orange circle contains the text 'Benefits of the John Muir Award'. To the right of the circle are three numbered points in orange circles: 1. Encourages adventure and exploration. 2. Promotes social and personal development and responsibility. 3. Provides opportunities for connecting with wild places, enjoyment and creativity.

Benefits of the John Muir Award

1

Encourages adventure and exploration.

2

Promotes social and personal development and responsibility.

3

Provides opportunities for connecting with wild places, enjoyment and creativity.

The John Muir Award team offers Providers (organisations or groups that successfully deliver the Award) the following:

- Support, guidance and advice on the delivery of the John Muir Award.
- Promotional materials and resources.
- Digital certificates for all individuals who successfully complete each Award.

- An annual certificate to recognise John Muir Award Provider status.
- Opportunities to access John Muir Award training courses and events (costs may apply).



4

Offers a way of engaging with topics that some might find daunting or inaccessible – sustainability, biodiversity, citizenship, the environment.

5

Can be used to link experiences with wild places to a range of themes – curriculum, healthy lifestyles, youth work, employability, wellbeing.

6

It's accessible – it can easily be used by non-outdoor specialists.

7

Is inclusive – people's circumstances don't need to stop them from experiencing wild places.

8

It helps care for your wild place.



How to be an Award Provider

We term groups or organisations that have been approved to deliver the Award 'Providers.' To gain approval, leaders must submit a Proposal which describes the group and how the Award will be delivered. Our approval creates an agreement between a Provider and the John Muir Trust.



Provider pathway





Provider responsibilities

To become an Award Provider you will:

- Ensure your group leaders are at least 18 years of age.
- Hold a John Muir Trust Group Membership.
- Promote the ethos of the John Muir Trust (page 4 - 5).
- Take time to fully understand the John Muir Award and criteria.
- Plan activities to ensure all participants can meet the criteria and minimum time commitment.
- Use John Muir Award processes, documents and timeframes to ensure effective registration and confirmation, and maintain relevant records.
- Using John Muir Award resources and training materials, provide suitable information, guidance and training opportunities for your staff/ volunteers.
- Ensure timely and accurate communication with John Muir Award staff (by email/phone/MS Teams).
- Ensure that adequate Health and Safety measures are in place, and organisations are covered by appropriate public liability and personal accident insurance.
- Share good practice with colleagues, and with other organisations, as appropriate.

After successfully delivering the Award to at least one group and receiving completion certificates, Providers can request an annual Award Provider certificate to acknowledge their achievement.

Wild Places Guardian criteria

The John Muir Award meets you where you are on your journey with wild places. Whether your participants are new to wild places, or already enjoy spending time in them and protecting them, the Award recognises their achievement towards the protection, restoration and conservation of wild places.

Becoming a Wild Places Guardian is the perfect way to start your relationship with wild places. It focuses on gaining an awareness of how special they are and how you can help them.

To become a John Muir Award Wild Places Guardian, each participant must:

a) Spend 25 hours or more completing their John Muir Award – with at least 25 per cent of the time spent on Conserve activity.

b) Have an active involvement in decision making and planning of their Award.

This helps to build individuals' sense of agency and belief that they can make a difference beyond the Award.

The level of involvement will look different from group to group, so there is flexibility on how this is achieved. Meeting this criteria could range from offering a choice between two activities to - where participants are able - letting them plan their whole Award activity themselves.

c) Develop an awareness of an inspirational person. This should be an environmentalist, past or present, or someone making a difference to wild places locally.

The John Muir Trust is inspired by John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born pioneer often regarded as the founder of the modern conservation movement. To learn more about John Muir and his contribution, visit our website. While many people find inspiration in John Muir's remarkable legacy, some Award participants may connect more closely with contemporary figures.

d) Complete the Four Challenges.



Four Challenges

Discover

Discover a wild place through nature connection activities and consider what makes it wild, how wild it is and how it makes you feel. Why is it special? Could it be wilder? See a wild place through the lens of its qualities (e.g., natural processes, visual characteristics, soundscape, human influence, connectivity and remoteness).

The Discover Challenge is about developing your connection to your wild place and experiencing it through your senses.

As you spend time there, think about your relationship with the place and the things that live there.

Take time to notice your wild place with a sense of wonder - see it for what it truly is. If you have been before, look at your place in a new light. How does your wild place fit into its surroundings?

The place you choose should be an outdoor space with the potential for nature to thrive. It can be of any size but should be somewhere that you can carry out at least six hours of conservation activity and have the landowner's permission to do so.



Discover a wild place

Explore

Explore your wild place, deepen your knowledge and understand it better. Enjoy a variety of activities with a sense of adventure and curiosity. Learn more about your wild place – how is it good for nature, how is it good for humans, what might threaten keeping it wild? Consider what you can do to help protect or restore it.

The Explore Challenge is about taking practical steps to learn about and understand your wild place; enjoy spending time there and deepen your connection to it. Identify the species that exist there already and how they contribute to its ecosystem. Explore their positive and negative influences on your wild place. How has it changed over time; consider the history, geography, and ecology. Develop the skills and confidence to go out into wild places and be safe and respectful.

An illustration of a hiker with a green backpack and a brown hat, pointing towards a forest. The hiker is walking on a path. In the background, there are green trees and a small orange squirrel. A speech bubble contains text about wild places.

We define wild places as areas where natural processes are able to thrive, whether that's urban green spaces, national parks, rivers, mountain ranges or woodlands.

Explore it

Conserve

Now it's time to take action to protect or restore your wild place. You can do practical conservation activities, raise awareness or take other actions to help protect wild places. Consider the longevity of your actions – how can you sustain the benefits beyond your Award activities? By engaging in the Conserve Challenge, you will help the John Muir Trust look after wild places across the whole of the UK.

The Conserve Challenge is about looking after your wild place. It's important to consider how your activity will have a positive impact. Your aim should be to conserve, protect and restore wild places to enable natural processes to thrive.

Sometimes well-intentioned efforts can make a place less wild; your plans may benefit humans but have unforeseen negative impacts on your wild place.

If you're adding artificial features (like bird boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog houses, or feeders) because natural processes are missing, think about how you can encourage those natural processes to return over time. This way, your wild place can thrive with low levels of human intervention in the future.

Questions to consider:

- How will your activities encourage the restoration, protection and/or conservation of your chosen wild place?
- How will your activities enable natural processes to thrive?
- How will your activity benefit your wild place for future generations?



Share

Share what you have done to inspire others to care for wild places. Tell people why your wild place is important and special to you, and how they can help you look after it.

The Share Challenge is about taking pride in what you have achieved and inspiring others to take action for wild places too. Reflect on what you have experienced, how your activities have made you feel, what you have learned and what you have achieved.

Consider why wild places are important and how you have helped your chosen place; what impact do you think this has had for wild places as a whole? What actions / activities will you engage in to support wild places beyond your Award?

Who do you really want to share this all with? Let them know! To celebrate your achievement, discuss your adventures and experiences in wild places. Think about how you want to share what you've done – get creative!

An illustration of a person with brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt and purple shorts, sitting on the ground and writing in a white notebook with a black pen. The person is positioned in front of a large orange circle. To the left of the person are green bushes with purple star-shaped flowers. The background consists of dark green hills and a dark brown ground.

Share your experiences

How to get started

1. Understand the Award criteria

Review the John Muir Award criteria and consider the opportunities within your organisation to meet them.**

2. Become a Member

If your organisation plans to deliver the John Muir Award, you'll first need to join the John Muir Trust as a Group Member. This covers all Award leaders in your organisation and activities during the year's subscription. Find out more at johnmuirtrust.org/award/getting-started/group-membership.

3. Plan your Award activity

Create an activity plan that ensures all Award criteria can be met. Please plan for at least a quarter of activity time to be spent on the Conserve Challenge.

To make the process easier, consider drafting your responses in the Word template before submitting the proposal.

4. Submit a Proposal Form

Complete and submit a web-based Proposal Form at least two weeks BEFORE you intend to start Award activity, including details about:

- Proposed timeframe
- Number of sessions
- How the group will meet each Award criterion.

5. Await confirmation

Once your proposal is approved, you'll receive:

- Email confirmation
- A unique reference number (please use this number in all communications about your group).

If your proposal does not meet the criteria, we'll provide feedback and support to help you revise it.

**If you are completing the Award as an individual or family, please get in touch with us by emailing award@johnmuirtrust.org

6. Keep records

Maintain detailed records of your group's Award activity. To understand what's required, take a look at the Review Form before you start.

Award participants can make use of a Record Book to track their own progress. This can be downloaded and printed from our website, or ordered as a hard copy at a cost of £3 each. The Record Book is for personal use only and does not need to be returned to the Award team.

7. Submit the Review & Certificate details

After completing all Award activities, submit the Review Form and certificate details, providing:

- Comprehensive information about your activities.
- Participant names (ensure accurate spelling for certificates).

Digital certificates are provided electronically at no cost.

Please check certificate names and details carefully as an administration charge will apply for reissues.

Please email award@johnmuirtrust.org for reissue requests.



Inclusion and the John Muir Award

A key aim of the John Muir Award is to ensure that circumstances are not a barrier to experiencing wild places, ensuring they are accessible to everyone.

Across the UK, hundreds of organisations supporting people who experience structural barriers in everyday life use the John Muir Award to protect, restore and conserve wild places. We would like to better understand the barriers that Award Providers are working to address and will ask you to tell us a bit more about your group when you apply. This is to help us to ensure that the Award remains inclusive and accessible.

The Award is used across a wide range of sectors that promote inclusion. It can be a tool to help organisations access and work with hard-to-reach audiences across diverse settings from inner-city wildlife gardens to isolated communities.

If you'd like to find out more about how to make the Award more accessible, read our Inclusion resource or contact us to discuss your specific case.



A high-angle, top-down photograph of a group of children sitting on a grassy field. They are gathered around a large, white, rectangular sheet of paper that is laid flat on the grass. Several children's hands are visible, holding pens or pencils, as if they are about to write or draw on the paper. The children are wearing casual clothing, including a red shirt and a green shirt. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting it is daytime. The text of the advertisement is overlaid on the left side of the image, primarily on the white sheet of paper.

Where to find more information and inspiration

Still have questions?

Take a look at our FAQs

The Award pages on our website contain lots of helpful resources including case studies, resource guides and support for teachers. You'll also find training dates and information at johnmuirtrust.org/award

Still can't find what you need?

Drop us a line at award@johnmuirtrust.org

