

The John Muir Award – a catalyst for Youth Social Action



- 29,384 John Muir Awards achieved by 10-24 year olds across the UK in 2015
- 30,975 days (21,6827 hours) of 'Conserve' activity
- Average 9 hrs per person making a positive difference to wild places
- Overall contribution valued at £969,518 over 12 month period
- 24% of those involved were young people experiencing some form of disadvantage

What's a Conserve Audit?

It's a monitoring exercise to identify the amount and type of activity carried out to meet the Conserve Challenge of the John Muir Award. This includes practical action, campaigning, and minimising impact, and captures how participants make a difference to wild places. A summary of UK-wide activity carried out during 2015 is available here www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/consERVE-audit-2015.

Conserve activity and Youth Social Action

Participating in Conserve-related activities through the John Muir Award provides young people with a platform to take personal responsibility for the natural environment. It gives opportunities to take action, develop a wide set of skills, make decisions and voice opinions as part of a collective. This can help to create a positive and lasting impact on their communities, and on themselves. Such pro-environmental action contributes directly to the youth social action movement and connects young people to national campaigns such as the #iwill campaign¹. Many organisations also use social action through the John Muir Award as a central approach to developing character² and skills for life, learning and work.

Who was involved?

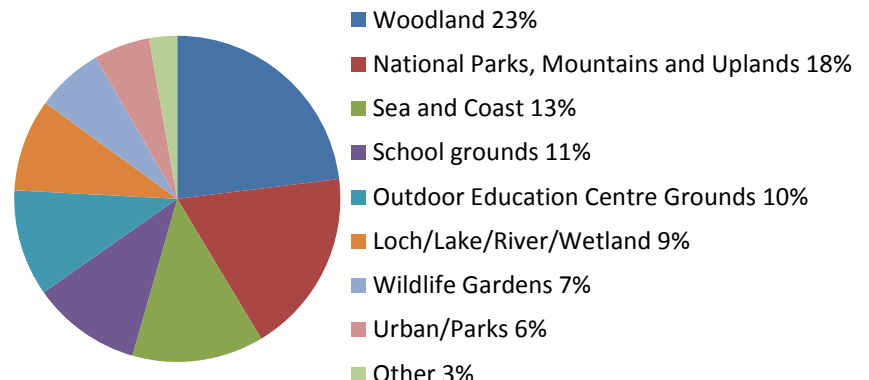
29,384 10-24 year olds across the UK achieved a John Muir Award in 2015 through activity with schools, colleges, youth groups, outdoor centres and clubs. 89% (26,265) captured their Conserve activity in this 12 month Audit exercise. The John Muir Award is made available for free by the John Muir Trust and is open to all regardless of background or location. 7,052 10-24 year olds who achieved theirs were experiencing some form of disadvantage. Many organisations including The Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and all 15 National Parks are represented in this Audit and use the John Muir Award to frame conservation activities within wider experiences - Discovering wild places, Exploring them, Conserving them, and Sharing these experiences.

Where and what did youth social action look like in this Conserve Audit?

The data reflected activity in diverse habitats across the UK.

Volunteering at school and in the community

- 18,918 participants cleared 8031 bags of litter, recycling 1078 bags.
- 44,215m of footpath maintained, created or improved.
- 11,407 trees planted by 3624 participants.
- 2629 young people carried out felling, coppicing and brashing activities in 88,400m² of woodland.
- 17,370m² of wildflower meadows planted or reseeded by 200 participants.
- 192 groups cleared 27,633m² of invasive non-native species including Himalayan balsam, Rhododendron and Japanese knotweed.



“When tasks were linked to the principles of the John Muir Award, students became far more aware of the scientific, ecological and social implications of the conservation they were involved in and of the positive effect they were having on their local community.” Angela Owen, Samworth Church Academy.

¹ The #iwill campaign promotes social action amongst 10-20 year olds. See the John Muir Trust's pledge [here](#).

² [Developing Character in Schools with the John Muir Award](#). A document highlighting how the John Muir Award is used as a supporting approach to character development in schools.

The Audit highlights the John Muir Award's potential to initiate interest and stewardship in the natural environment. Many groups were inspired to undertake additional volunteering activities to support biodiversity. Groups created community seating, cleared blocked rivers after flooding, made raised beds and rainwater systems for allotments and gardens, and built ramps to improve wheelchair access.

“The boys who achieved their John Muir Award developed useful skills and learnt about the positive impact they can have on the community. It was great to see the joy on their faces as local community members passed through, looking thoroughly pleased then thanking them for their hard work”. Danny English, CommuniTree Initiative.

Campaigns and initiatives

- 3141 young people campaigned on local and environmental issues.
- Over half of all respondents considered their impact on the natural environment and contributed to 'Leave No Trace' (63%) and 'Minimum Impact' (52%) principles in relation to their activity.
- 484 groups (51% of groups monitored) actively respected and followed the Countryside Code and Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- 25% of participants engaged in Citizen Science activities - monitoring, gathering, recording and analysing environmental data to support a number of large scale studies.

The Conserve focus gave participants the opportunity to campaign and raise awareness for various charities and organisations such as the RSPB, Marine Conservation Society, Bee Conservation Trust and the John Muir Trust. Groups created posters to support Local Authority anti-fly-tipping campaigns and dog fouling initiatives and raised their profile through letters, leaflets, talks and awareness days. This pro-environmental behaviour was integrated into many groups' activities and often highlighted an emotional connection to a place or cause as young people spoke up on behalf of wild places.

“We know that young people want to play an active part in improving their communities, and that in doing so, they develop their own skills for work and life. We're excited that the John Muir Trust has pledged its support to the #iwill campaign to recognise the work that the John Muir Award does in encouraging young people to take practical action for nature.” Charlotte Hill, #iwill Campaign Coordinator, Step Up To Serve CEO

Fundraising

Several groups were motivated to fundraise for nature, and through sponsored walks, bake sales, stalls and enterprise projects they improved awareness and brought about change for wild places. Some groups sold items grown from allotments or made from recycled materials; others served locals at community cafes with home grown produce.

Developing Character through Conserve Audit activity

Participation in civic activities such as volunteering, fundraising and campaigning contributes to a thriving society and can build individual character traits such as confidence, respect and empathy. This Audit shows that participants are engaging in environmental community action projects as a way of meeting the Conserve Challenge - getting stuck in to local conservation activities to show a commitment to environmental stewardship and service.

Conclusion

Completing a Conserve Audit over a full year shows the significant contribution young people from all walks of life can have on the natural environment, communities and themselves. Achieving a John Muir Award provides opportunities for young people to show their commitment to making a difference. It's a positive example of youth social action.

The John Muir Trust would like to thank the hundreds of Provider organisations for contributing and enabling us to demonstrate the impact that the John Muir Award can help them make.

In England the John Muir Award is supported by The Heritage Lottery Fund.

The John Muir Award in Scotland has significant support from Scottish Natural Heritage, Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Parks, Scottish Government, The Gannochy Trust, and The Robertson Trust. www.johnmuiraward.org

