

MEMBERS' NEWS

JANUARY 2021

JOHN
MUIR
TRUST



Chair's welcome

I remember well a sunny New Year's morning walk along lanes near my house in rural Perthshire at the start of 2020. Bright prospects soon turned into a year of challenge. In turn, difficult circumstance presented opportunities and achievements. I choose my words with care because many of us have experienced loss, disappointment and tragedy along the way – which will continue until Covid-19 is contained.

What has shone through in my first year as chair is the resilience of our Members, Trustees and staff team. You'll see in this issue that, despite the hurdles thrown in front of us, the important work of the Trust continues to leap ahead. Thank you for your continued support in enabling that to happen.

A personal challenge last year was to chair online two Board meetings and an AGM a few weeks into my appointment. Online meetings may transform our work, and give rise to opportunities for more participation, but not meeting in person with colleagues, volunteers and Members has been a negative in my appraisal of 2020. Given the circumstances, we have decided to continue with an online format for our AGM on 19 June 2021. I do hope we will also be able to meet in person as this new year unfolds.

At a time when news is often downbeat, our shared opportunity is valuable work to help mitigate the climate emergency, the loss of biodiversity, the erosion of wild land and to create ways to bring people and communities closer to wild places.

I have been impressed by the work of our policy team, whose work is nuanced: sometimes expressed via the media; sometimes in private meetings with government advisors or other influencers. As you'll read in these pages, the Trust's current casework covers visitor pressures and access, grouse shooting, fish farms and of course assessing a recent increase in the number of proposals for onshore wind developments.

I believe we are making headway, but there is no room for complacency. The staff team informs me that we are actively monitoring 15 wind farm proposals in, or near, wild land area boundaries in Scotland. The Trust is in turn putting increased capacity into objecting to individual proposals that threaten the finite resource that is wild places.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in the Trust's



governance consultation, which was run by research and polling organisation Civica. Almost 1,000 of you have responded at my time of writing. My thanks on behalf of the Trustees for such a high level of participation and a healthy interest in the governance of the charity. Trustees will debate what you have told us and use it to inform our final proposals as we bring forward new Articles this year for Member approval.

At our most recent Board meeting, we agreed to create a Trustee champion in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion. My thanks to fellow Trustee Jane Smallman for taking on this important role and agreeing to work with our staff team to increase focus on this aspect of the Trust's work. Our search for the next cadre of Trustees is already underway. If you can add to the diversity among our ranks please do come forward for consideration at the next Trustee election. You can find out more at johnmuirtrust.org/trusteecall

Dave Gibson

2021 AGM

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Board of Trustees has agreed that our Thirty-eighth Annual General Meeting will be held online on Saturday 19 June 2021, with the Members' Gathering postponed until later in the year. To find out how to sign up for the online event visit johnmuirtrust.org/agm2021

Protecting wild land

- **Visitor management**

From late September to mid-October, Cecilie Dohm, our Junior Policy Officer, travelled to the Western Isles, Skye, Quinag and Sandwood to interview local community representatives for a research project on visitor management. With the easing of the Covid-19 lockdown, Scotland's wild places were more popular than ever, and we wanted to hear what local people living on and near to Trust properties had to say about the impacts on their communities and environment in order to better understand what the Trust can do to help – both on the ground and when lobbying politicians for practical actions and solutions.

We interviewed 38 people, either in person or online. Recurring themes were the lack of infrastructure (car parks, toilets, waste disposal etc.) and associated funding, inappropriate 'wild' camping, and a lack of awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. We plan to publish our findings in a report in early 2021.

- **Land management for nature**

Between July and November 2020, we submitted consultation responses on the proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme (expected to replace the schemes currently available under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy with the potential to make nature recovery in England an everyday part of land management); England's Tree Strategy; Highland Biodiversity Action Plan; and the Scottish Government's Permitted Development Rights Phase 1 programme. We were part of a coalition led by the Campaign to Protect Rural England calling on Ofgem to maintain visual amenity funding for 2021-26 (this funding goes towards the removal of pylons and transmission lines from scenic landscapes).

- **Grouse shooting to be regulated**

On 26 November 2020 the Scottish Government made the welcome announcement that new legislation will be brought forward in the next Parliament which will require grouse shooting to be licenced in Scotland. Practices associated with grouse shooting such as muirburn will also require a licence. This response follows the recommendations made in the independent review on grouse moor management led by Professor Werritty published in December 2019.

Skye's peatland restoration starts

Richard Williams, the Trust's Land Operations Manager (North), reports on a new approach that is helping to restore important habitats

Work is now well underway to restore 35.5 hectares of peat bog at Faiolean, on our Isle of Skye Strathaird Estate, thanks to funding from NatureScot's Peatland Action programme.

Activities will include felling and extracting 17 hectares of Sitka spruce; reprofiling ditch and furrow irrigation channels; creating peat dams and blocking drains to increase water levels and smoothing the ground by 'stump flipping'.

The site was partially felled about 10 years ago, but this new funding means we can now remove all non-native Sitka spruce and ensure that the carbon already stored up here is secured, while also enabling the bog restoration and carbon sequestration processes to get underway.

Part of the work will involve the removal of Sitka and we hope that Trust volunteers will continue to help us remove any spruce seedlings that germinate on the site in the future.

At the end of the project, we will install interpretation panels to explain the process and our hopes for increased biodiversity, richness of habitat and carbon storage of the land.

While work is in progress, there will be some localised disruption until March 2021. Find out more at johnmuirtrust.org



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS TOWNSEND

Join our Board of Trustees and help shape the future of the Trust and wonderful wild places like Knoydart

Call for new Trustees

The Trust is seeking six Trustees to join the board in 2021. Chris Townsend, who is stepping down from the Board at our 2021 AGM after serving two terms, says: "Being a Trustee is a great privilege, and one that comes with great responsibility.

"The Board governs the Trust and has many important decisions to make. I've found being involved with this fulfilling and challenging. I've also learnt how the Trust works - it's far more complex than I realised - and what great staff we have.

"As my term as a Trustee comes to an end I will look back on it as a valuable experience and I'll depart being even more committed to the Trust and its values than I was before."

To fill the gaps that Chris and his

fellow Trustees will leave, we are keen to attract Members who have experience working or volunteering in: finance; community land ownership; communications; campaigning; HR; fundraising; governance; strategy development; organisational and business development.

We would also like to see more women coming forward, as well as Members from all age groups and ethnic backgrounds around the UK - and from areas local to the land we manage.

Closing date for nominations is 2 March 2021. Find out more about the process at johnmuirtrust.org/trusteecall

News in brief

- **Loch Hourn fish farm**

In September 2020 we looked at Mowi Scotland's plans to expand its fish farm at Loch Hourn. The proposals are of particular relevance to the Trust as a landowner, with ties to the local community, and our charitable objective in protecting wild land (Li and Coire Dhorrcail's wild coastline is to the east of the proposed site, surrounded by Kinlochhourn-Knoydart-Morar Wild Land Area). We wrote to add our concerns to those already expressed by the local community, emphasising the harm the fish farm expansion would have on wild nature in a wild, remote and beautiful part of Scotland.

- **Orkney and Shetland islands**

In October 2020 we submitted comments on a proposal for a six-turbine community wind farm in Hoy's Wild Land Area. Our comments followed helpful engagement in summer 2020 with the team developing the proposal. Our submission expressed a wish to see the project, which is intended to generate money for community services, succeed overall, but urged re-consideration of the siting of one of the turbines within Hoy's Wild Land Areas.

October was also the month we submitted comments on the proposed plans for a 23-turbine wind development in the north of the Isle of Yell in Shetland. This development poses a threat to an area of relatively strong wildness (as identified in NatureScot's 2014 map of relative wildness) predominantly characterised by peatland habitat of national importance.

- **Glenshero Public Local Inquiry**

The Public Local Inquiry into the proposed Glenshero wind farm adjacent to Stronelairg in the Monadhliath Mountains concluded its hearing session on Wednesday 18 November. Sincere thanks to Steve Carver and Ian Kelly for their immense contribution to the case against the development made on behalf of the Trust and Wild Land Ltd. We will now wait for the Reporter's report and the final decision of Scottish Ministers.

- **National planning**

Casework continues to inform our contribution to responses to changes to planning policies at a national level. Recognising that the adoption of Wild Land Areas within Scottish National Planning Policy has helped to safeguard these areas from development, we wrote to the Welsh Parliament Committee responsible for scrutinising future National Planning Policy for Wales. We asked that they consider a more nuanced approach to a spatial energy strategy by exempting wild land from the target zones for new large-scale renewable energy development.

White-tailed eagle
in Beinn Eighe



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HAMBLYN/2020VISION

Raising the profile of Scotland's rainforest

As a member of the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest, we are raising the profile of Scotland's rainforest (also known as Atlantic woodland or Celtic rainforest) – a globally rare and internationally important native woodland habitat on Scotland's west coast. In November 2020, we supported a Public Petition to 'Protect Scotland's remaining ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors.' New legislation that strengthens the level of protection for these woodlands would be a timely, meaningful response to the biodiversity and climate crisis.

We suggested this legislation would need to address the different, compounding land use threats from over-grazing, inappropriate development, commercial conifer plantations, invasive species such as rhododendron and diseases like ash dieback. We also proposed that it could be part of a suite of new legislation for climate and biodiversity ahead of COP26 that could also include a new Deer Act.

In the meantime, Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to require careful siting of new development and a presumption to avoid development that fragments or destroys ancient, native and semi-native woodlands.

Parliamentary elections 2021

The Trust is holding meetings with policy advisors and political parties ahead of the Holyrood elections in May 2021 to raise awareness of the importance of managing land in the public interest, for nature's recovery and for capturing and storing carbon. Scottish Environment LINK and Wales Environment LINK have developed manifesto ideas which have been published and are being promoted ahead of the Holyrood and Senedd Cymru 2021 elections.

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST



Full steam ahead for Langholm

The south of Scotland's largest community buyout is set to go ahead following one of the most ambitious community fundraising campaigns ever seen, with the community of Langholm in Dumfries and Galloway raising the final funds needed in the nick of time.

A landmark community buyout agreement of £3.8 million for over 5,000 acres of land was reached between local charity The Langholm Initiative and Buccleuch Estates – paving the way for the creation of a huge new nature reserve to help tackle climate change, restore nature, and support community regeneration.

The John Muir Trust was the first major organisation to support the project, with a pledge of £100,000 on the opening day of its crowdfunding campaign, as well as supporting The Langholm Initiative with fundraising and logistics.

The Trust's Head of Policy and Land Management, Mike Daniels, said: "The John Muir Trust is delighted that the Langholm community has achieved its aim. Our Members and supporters played a significant role in supporting the community financially right from the start, helping to create the momentum that has generated this fantastic outcome. Empowering communities to repair and rewild their natural assets is part of the DNA of the John Muir Trust, and we look forward to engaging with the people of Langholm on the next stage of their inspiring journey."



Margaret Pool, Chair of The Langholm Initiative, said: "This is an amazing result for Langholm which will live long in the memory. Our community has a strong cultural connection to this land, which has never been sold before, and securing it for generations to come means so much to so many. Huge thanks to Buccleuch for their positive engagement."

The purchase – to be finalised by early in 2021 – will lead to the creation of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, with globally important peatlands and ancient woods restored, native woodlands established, and a haven ensured for wildlife including rare hen harriers. The project will also support community regeneration, including plans for the community to capitalise on new nature-based tourism opportunities. Discussions will continue over the remaining 5,300 acres of land the community has expressed an interest in buying.

The relationship between the Trust and Langholm is not new, with the local community delivering over 150 John Muir Awards in the past three years. The Trust's assistance at this crucial time has also served to strengthen ties further.

The Initiative's project leader, Kevin Cumming (pictured above), has now joined the Trust as Land Operations Manager (South) and will be staying on at Langholm as one of the Board. Kevin said: "I'm delighted to be joining such a prestigious and well-respected organisation. Having worked closely with the Trust over the past 12 months it is great to now be part of an organisation that is dedicated to protecting wild land and wild places."

Other major funders of the buyout include The Woodland Trust, South of Scotland Enterprise, Carman Family Foundation, the Bentley Foundation and Garfield Weston Foundation. As well as the John Muir Trust, other environmental charities that have supported the buyout include Borders Forest Trust, Rewilding Britain, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, and Trees for Life.



PHOTOGRAPH: NATHAN BERRIE

Conservation work parties in 2020

From mid-March onwards we followed government guidelines to protect our staff, volunteers and the communities where they live. This meant suspending most of our regular conservation work parties until further notice. However, when the first lockdown eased we were able to start working with small groups of our regular local volunteers at Ben Nevis, Glenlude and Quinag.

At Nevis, Conservation Officer Nathan Berrie had help with two summit litter picks which were sorely needed during an exceptionally busy season. In July he collaborated with the Nevis Landscape Partnership (NLP) and some local regular volunteers who were not shielding. The team spent two days clearing litter and carrying out basic path maintenance. The helpers returned in October for the final summit litter sweep of the year. With help from the NLP seasonal ranger team, they cleared 13 bags of litter and an abandoned tent.

Meanwhile in the Scottish Borders, Glenlude Manager Karen Purvis was delighted to welcome her regular volunteers back. Since clearing the timber from the north side of the property at the beginning of September, using logging horses, the regular volunteers have been working hard to complete three brush hedges. Once they've been planted with broadleaved native species, they will become an extension of the now-established Phoenix Forest.

At Quinag, fortnightly volunteer days restarted in the summer, but were limited to local residents only. Quinag Conservation Officer Romany works with her volunteers in the tree nursery and doing path maintenance. Most recently the group has been helping at the beginning of the footpath up Sail Gharbh, filling in boggy sections with gravel while the contractors ACT Heritage work on stone pitching further up.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PUDDPHATT

Volunteers help out on Ben Nevis (top) and Quinag

Planting at Glenridding Common

Pete Barron and Tom Hayek report on planting progress at Helvellyn

During the past three years we have been working to increase the tree and shrub cover and diversity on the land we manage at Glenridding Common, including Helvellyn from the low valleys to some of the highest crags in England, with aims to benefit wildlife and sequester carbon.

Starting right up on the highest parts of the common, since we took over the lease we have committed to a 15-year objective to establish a viable population of the montane downy willow (*Salix lapponum*) which had decreased to only 23 remaining plants - all female and so not able to propagate. The local population of this key upland shrub now stands at around 1,500 plants!

In order to protect the genetic integrity of the population as much as possible, this incredible effort has occurred without involving commercial plant nurseries. Instead, the trees planted back out onto the crags are a combination of cuttings from the local plants (grown on by John Muir Trust and Natural England staff and our trusty local resident growers in the Ullswater Valley) and cuttings from male plants from the nearest known population in Dumfries and Galloway.

We are thrilled to have seen the willows we've planted not only establishing well on the crags but now producing seed. The exciting possibility of self-seeded downy willow in the Lake District for the first time for many years could now be a reality.

There are other willow species that can thrive as a key part of healthy montane habitats and we have also grown on and planted tea-leaved willow (*Salix phylicifolia*), eared willow (*Salix aurita*) and a rare hybrid of tea-leaved and dark-leaved (*Salix myrsinifolia*) willows. These other willows can be planted at lower altitudes with the downy willow reserved for higher, extreme locations. One more willow species that we would like to see increase on restored summit areas is the dwarf willow (*Salix herbacea*) which already has a reasonable population on the summit of nearby Raise. This upland specialist grows very low to the ground, often in very exposed locations, and is vulnerable to both trampling and heavy grazing.

Elsewhere on the common, one of the other key shrub species we have been focussed on is common juniper (*Juniperus communis*). An area of roughly 20 hectares is fenced from stock grazing as part of an agri-environment scheme, largely to protect and permit expansion of the large existing juniper stand on the common. For three years, the area has been more or less free from grazing with remarkable results in terms of expansion of the juniper and increases in the depth of vegetation. This area provides an important dense habitat for nesting birds, a seed source for birds and small mammals in winter and a food source for a number of specialist micro-moths and some larger moths such as juniper carpet (*Eupithecia pusillata*). In addition, it helps to slow water flow in this flood prone area.

The juniper is expanding (albeit slowly as you would expect from this species) and we have seen better recovery in this fenced-off area from our annual monitoring for growth and expansion of coverage. Unfortunately, even in those areas starting to recover, there is another threat to the habitat from the fungus-like juniper disease *Phytophthora austrocedri* which is present on the common. We follow the most up-to-date advice to avoid planting juniper or other trees from nurseries within the stands to avoid the risk of further disease introduction and spray our boots

with disinfectant when entering and leaving the enclosure. If you walk anywhere where there is juniper present, it's always a good idea to scrub the soles of your boots with disinfectant when you get back to the car to prevent transferring any disease to other areas.

We are trying to combat this disease threat by only planting trees which have been 'home grown' from local stock and in an environment unlikely to have disease. As well as juniper, we are growing on hawthorn, hazel and aspen in this way (the latter from rhizome cuttings from selected higher altitude trees) to boost the diversity of habitat in this part of the common. However, juniper grown from on-site seed is very slow to develop and a minimum of four years growing is required for it to get strong enough for planting out.



Obituary: Doug Scott

Doug had been a friend of the John Muir Trust from the early 2000s when he encountered groups doing their John Muir Award with the Life Science Trust in Pishwanton Woods, East Lothian. He presented the 7,000th John Muir Award at Holyrood Park Education Centre and generously offered his voice for films, leaflets and campaigns.

He became only the third John Muir Trust Lifetime Achievement Award recipient in 2005, after Tom Weir and Adam Watson. This recognised not only Doug's exceptional mountaineering accomplishments over more than 40 years, but his commitment to conserving environments and supporting communities around the world.

On receiving it, Doug said: "I'm really pleased to accept this award as it all helps to highlight the need to preserve wild places and support the people that live there. The Trustees of Community Action Nepal and myself are constantly inspired both by the landscape of the Himalaya, and its hard working, resourceful inhabitants. We must ensure that these opportunities for inspiration continue well into the future."

Rob Bushby

This is an excerpt from Rob's tribute, which can be read in full at johnmuirtrust.org

Wild times in the Western Isles

The Trust's new community ranger in the Outer Hebrides, **Clara Risi**, has been busy connecting with the communities of Harris and Lewis to great effect

The Plough children's sessions run by Galson Estate resumed in the autumn, to the collective relief of children and parents alike. Clara has assisted and led on woodland and beach activities, which combine active play with learning about natural history and responsible access. Group sizes were restricted to 10 per session, but were all fully booked.

Clara said: "It was great to be out and about interacting with the children, who had a fantastic time rock pooling, beach cleaning, toasting marshmallows, making woodland dens and learning all about their local area. Parents were also delighted that the sessions ran, after a long spring and summer juggling home working with home schooling and childcare."

The coastal theme continued in October, with a single day in West Harris on beaches and nearby roadsides securing a whole trailer's worth of litter. The day was very well supported with 20 local volunteers showing up to lend a hand.

Planting plans are also well under way on both North and West Harris Trust community land holdings. Three days of planting will take place between December and February, involving pupils from the rural skills course at Sir E. Scott school in Tarbet, as well as scout groups, local volunteers and staff from the Trusts. There are around 2,000 seedlings to go in, some of which are being sourced from the Woodland Trust's crofting project (MOREWoods Scheme).

Clara's work illustrates the power of partnership work in bringing people together to improve their local environment, but also includes wildlife guiding and the occasional rare sighting while on other duties. On her way to a Whale and Dolphin Conservation shore watch for North Harris Trust in the summer, she was lucky enough to spot a honey buzzard at Scalpay



PHOTOGRAPH: CLARA RISI

Clara connects with local children and wildlife, like the honey buzzard below

common grazing. "I later found out that it was the first one to be recorded in Harris. Other records for the Outer Hebrides date from 1988/89 in South Uist, and one in Benbecula in 1991, making this the first honey buzzard spotted in the islands for 30 years."

Honey buzzards (*Pernis apivorus*) are a rare summer visitor to the UK, spotted mainly in England and a few locations throughout Scotland and Wales. They spend their summers within mainland Europe before migrating to Africa to overwinter. They breed in open woodlands, feeding on nests and larvae of bees and wasps. A welcome visitor to the islands at a time when more trees are being planted.



Our Wild Future event recordings now available

Our Wild Future was a series of four discussions, held online between October and December. Attended by over 400 people, they brought together a diverse group of experts, activists and artists to discuss some of the key debates in conservation, rewilding, diversity, access and the climate emergency.

We started with a discussion on the future of wild places, considering the challenges facing rewilding, balancing the needs of wild land and green energy, urban conservation and new ideas in conservation. In mid-November, we turned to responsible access, and how we minimise our footprints on the environment, communities and the climate when we go into the great outdoors. Our attention turned next to

diversity and inclusion, why improving access to wild places for all is important for society and our planet. Lastly, we brought together those who work closely with communities and conservation, asking why we need to engage with communities and how conservation can benefit those who live in wild places.

The aim was to look beyond 2020, at how the events of recent years have affected conservation and our connection with nature. From lockdown, to youth climate strikes, Black Lives Matter and the climate emergency, everything has an impact on conservation. You can listen to recordings of the first four discussions online at [soundcloud.com/john-muir-trust](https://www.soundcloud.com/john-muir-trust)

Steve Carver took part in an Our Wild Future event





PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS TOWNSEND

Journey for Wildness

Back our campaign to take action to protect wild places and support the fight against climate change

Chris Townsend, and below, Damian Hall, are both committed to the campaign

We introduced 'Journey For Wildness' in our Spring *Journal* last year. Covid-19 and nationwide lockdown restrictions led us to postpone the initiative, but we are delighted to be relaunching it for 2021.

The concept is unchanged – throughout the year we are asking members and supporters to take their own 'Journey For Wildness'; to get outdoors to explore and connect with wild places, and to inspire others by raising awareness and money to help the Trust protect and repair our wildest places. Journeys can be long or short; by foot, bike or kayak; on land or on water; solo or in a group... They can incorporate litter-picks, tree planting or other creative ways to actively conserve the places we care about.

Author, adventurer and John Muir Trust Trustee Chris Townsend is excited about the prospect: "Next spring I'm planning on a journey in the North-West Highlands that was cancelled due to the pandemic. I'll be exploring this wild area on foot with many camps and looking at conservation and tourism issues and how they can be reconciled."

Ultrarunner Damian Hall, who in 2020 set a record for the fastest time (totally carbon neutral) on the Pennine Way while collecting rubbish along the way, has also pledged support: "The natural environment is the most precious thing we have – that's the number one lesson my parents passed on to me and the most important thing I want to pass



PHOTOGRAPH: DAMIAN HALL

on to my kids. Most of my happiest times have been in green and lumpy places.

"Our hills, woodlands and rivers are under constant attack and sometimes we need to stand up and fight for them."

All Journeys must be planned and undertaken in line with relevant government guidelines, but there is no shortage of possibilities. When lockdown kept us at home last year, cut off from the wildness we take succour from, it also highlighted the importance of local green spaces – so why not take this opportunity to explore your local area more closely and support the Trust at the same time?

Together we will raise our collective voice for nature by sharing our photos, stories and films through social media and through the Trust's publications. As part of a collective fundraising campaign, we will support people to set up online fundraising pages, and to seek sponsorship and donations to raise funds to carry on our vital work dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places.

We'd like as many members and supporters as possible to take their own Journey For Wildness, and we're excited to see what you all get up to. To get involved, please visit johnmuirtrust.org/journeyforwildness where you can sign up and download our guide with ideas and advice on how to get started.

Virtually Open Mountain

The Trust was proud to continue to support Kendal Mountain Literature Festival's Open Mountain event, held online at the end of November. Once again the event focused on inclusion in and connection with wild places. It showcased prose and poetry from under-represented groups in wild places, with a panel discussion exploring the experiences of marginalised groups in the outdoors and how to tackle the barriers that face them.

Host Polly Atkin, (pictured in black) said: "The pandemic has thrown into sharp relief existing inequalities, including inequalities

in access to green spaces and wild places, and access to literature and cultures around them.

"In the end, Kate Davis and I were in a lovely make-shift studio the festival had set up in the Brewery Arts Centre in Kendal, and our third judge, Anita Sethi, and the five chosen writers were online. We heard excellent work from Aileen McKay, Kim-Marie Walker, Elspeth Wilson, Andrew Wang and Nayeli Urquiza Haas. It didn't matter that we were in different places, and in Kim-Marie and Aileen's cases, different time-zones. For that hour-and-a-half we were together, and travelling together through each other's writing."



PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY IDDON



Local Members' Gathering

James Brownhill reports from the North East Scotland Local Members' Gathering – held online in November

The John Muir Trust North East Scotland volunteer group, active for the last ten years, was not only pleased to gather for this year's autumn evening talk via Zoom for the first time, but also thrilled to hear the Trust's Chief Executive, David Balharry's presentation entitled 'Wild – From Cerro Torre to Sandwood Bay.'

Prior to being appointed, David had arranged a once-in-a-lifetime trip with his son to attempt a climb of the formidable granite shard of Cerro Torre, at 3,128m, located within the Southern Patagonia ice field of South America and definitely very "wild".

With two years of training in the Scottish mountains in all weathers and seasons, and an 8,000-mile journey to Patagonia, this was a serious undertaking. The mountain has a reputation for only brief climbing weather windows and this proved to be the case, with David showing some stunning photographs of practice climbs and his approach to the base of the shard in a "no rescue services" zone of the icefield.

The adverse weather limited any summit bids but resulted in David spending more time with the local population in the small mountain village of Chaltén. Here he had time to discuss and consider the changes that 21st century trekking/climbing tourism has brought to a remote settlement of 350 people in the wild places of Patagonia.

David took his audience on a whistle-stop journey through his life to adulthood in Speyside, a youngster hand feeding deer, crouching ear to ear with an eagle on a rocky crag, helping with the hay making, and later as a member of the local shinty

team. He spent time with the elders of his community, learned from their words of wisdom gained over many decades and then started to realise that the status quo of the Scottish countryside was not ideal, for instance a good proportion was ravaged by an overpopulation of deer. David quoted human ecologist and author Alastair McIntosh: "Reconciling people and place is the greatest challenge facing environmental organisations." This, without doubt, applies to the John Muir Trust.

David expanded the challenge of "people and place" to include de/repopulation; rewilding; biodiversity; ethnic diversity; the value of tourism; farming subsidies and climate change. He believes that the John Muir Trust can make useful contributions in all these areas by driving policy through exemplary land management, by assisting communities to develop economies based on natural assets, by creating world-class interpretation that inspires, and by raising the national consciousness of the importance of wild places to the health and wellbeing of everyone. With David as CEO, John Muir Trust has an exciting future.

Can you organise a Local Members' event, work party or discussion (however big or small) in your area? We can support you. Contact ross.brannigan@johnmuirtrust.org to find out more.

To keep up to date with local Member activities in 2021, sign up to our e-newsletter at johnmuirtrust.org/newsletter

Wild Moment: Matt Barrett

Lockdown Fox

The first yank up was the plastic gong of a falling bin. Then, more bird than dog the second pull was its rasp, close, urgent and hoarse, I knew instantly who it was.

On near sleep limbs de-blooded like asparagus I flopped briskly to the window. 01:13 standoff by the Skoda between cat and fox. Thrilled by this moment of uncaged encounter I remembered the lockdown.

Cat moved smooth, off round the kerb. Fox more a vertical jog down the street on lopye stilts from sodium blob to sodium blob oblivious to the human umpire.

Covid has us cornered covert simian immobiliser confiner to corridor, cupboard, ventilator.

But I asked the fox to take a part of me, of us, through people's gardens, crossing fences, playparks, supermarkets and forecourts, into the woods, trotting free lines unhindered by civilisation's surprise traps, across leaf mold and moss, not giving a toss.

I heard it two minutes later some way off, then again after four, now quite far.

Find out how to share your own wild moment at johnmuirtrust.org/wild-moments

Ben Nevis at 21

We are celebrating 21 years of looking after Ben Nevis this year. Please share your related photos and stories. Email nicky.mcclure@johnmuirtrust.org

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COVER BANNER IMAGE: HELVELLYN VIA STRIDING EDGE BY ELA DZIMITKO

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