

MEMBERS' NEWS

JULY 2023



JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

EST. 1983



Chair's welcome

I recently visited Fort William where I sat down for a chat with 16-year-old Archie Ferguson, a former Junior Ranger and now a volunteer with the Trust, who was interviewing me for a special 40th anniversary magazine (see enclosed).

It is full of articles written by individuals who have worked with us in the past and who will take over from us in the future. I came away from my meeting with Archie believing that we will be leaving the Trust and its work in good hands.

As usual, the staff team have been extremely busy in recent months. One big announcement is that we have taken over the management of the John Muir Way on a trial basis. This great Scottish trail runs for 215km from John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar in the east of Scotland to Helensburgh, from where he left for America, in the west.

Over the next 18 months we will develop and evaluate the future management, governance and funding options for the trail and explore how it can help us achieve our aims to connect people with wild places. Trustees will decide whether to take on the management role permanently by September 2024.

It is 26 years since the Trust first created the John Muir Award and, as you will read on page seven, we



are now in the process of reviewing it and defining what a new Award could look like. We welcome your input to help ensure that the considerable benefits of the Award are enhanced and delivered for the benefit of wild places and future generations.

At Strathaird in Skye, we have been working with a team of consultants and the local community to discuss a wide range of ideas for the future use of the former fish hatchery,

surrounding land and adjacent buildings. A consultation with local people under the banner 'Reimagining Strathaird' sees us move closer to creating a high-level development plan for the site.

The consultation has demonstrated there is common ground and I was recently involved in discussions on how the Trust can support and facilitate local community projects. Expect to hear more in the coming months as we look to establish Strathaird as an asset for the peninsula and a place where people, community and nature can work in harmony.

Finally, I would like to thank all who have supported the Trust over the past 40 years. With your ongoing support we can continue to ensure that wild places are protected and that people from all backgrounds can experience their many benefits.

Jane Smallman

Let's get clear on deer

We've been making the case to government and landowners to act on deer management for decades. Now, through policy change and public recognition, we are finally seeing the wheels of change start to turn.

At this pivotal point in Scotland's journey to a greener future, it is essential to keep up momentum and act now. Help us spread the word about sustainable deer management and transform Scotland's landscapes. Please donate now at johnmuirtrust.org/clearondeer

A step too far

The Trust has objected to a proposed extension of the operational period of a recently opened wind farm in Sutherland

The Trust, among others, previously objected to the wind farm due to its siting partly within the Foinaven Ben Hee Wild Land Area, a sensitive wild area that includes nationally important peatland. However, Highland Council approved the application in 2016, with the site becoming operational earlier this year.

During the site's construction, the Trust was made aware of concerns that planning conditions, particularly those related to the safe storage of excavated peat for re-use on site, were not being complied with.

In March 2023, a Proposed Variation to extend the operational life from 25 to 40 years was submitted. There was no explanation as to why it was being sought so soon after the development had become operational and before there could be any reassurance that all planning conditions had been discharged successfully. Given the sensitive location, and in the absence of monitoring data to understand the impact that the development is having on the environment, the Trust has objected.

By requesting permission for the Proposed Variation now, rather than at the end of the consented period, the Applicant is unnecessarily asking Scottish Ministers to predict Scotland's land use priorities in 2063.

In granting an extension, Ministers must be confident



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MUIR TRUST

that the site will remain appropriate for a large-scale development in 2063. In our view, they should also be satisfied that environmental harm is being avoided and that, under new National Planning Policies, biodiversity is being enhanced.

Without such guarantees for the protection of peatland on this site or adjacent to it, we do not think this application is appropriate.

Pointless telecoms mast coverage plan

The Trust has prepared a joint statement with Mountaineering Scotland in response to the UK Government's Shared Rural Network programme – a collaboration with four mobile phone operators that seeks to extend 4G coverage across much of the UK.

The statement has since been supported by a coalition of eight other organisations representing community, environmental and outdoor recreation interests.

“The target to cover 95 per cent of the UK with 4G mobile phone coverage would see countless phone masts erected on Scotland's hills, without considering whether people living in remote areas actually need the masts nor the necessity of protecting Scotland's wild places,”

commented Mike Daniels, the Trust's Policy Director.

“We absolutely support the principle behind the programme,” added Davie Black from Mountaineering Scotland. “Local residents and businesses have the right to digital connectivity. But it is communities themselves who are saying the siting of the masts will not benefit them.

“We want to ensure digital connectivity is achieved while protecting Scotland's last wild landscapes”

The coalition has now asked to meet NatureScot and representatives from Shared Rural Network to discuss these concerns.

The full position statement is available at johnmuirtrust.org/masts

Can you help?

Do you know the track that runs between Fortingall and Uamh Tom a Mhòrhir to the south of Schiehallion – see map (grid reference: 56.644562, -4.101053)? We have been notified about substantial work being done to the track, which Perth & Kinross Council are unaware of. To help the council review the development, we are sourcing photographs of the old track (ideally where it passes Meall Crumach and Meall nan Eun) to understand how it looked before the work was carried out. Images can be sent to policy@johnmuirtrust.org



Deer legislation

The Trust is pleased to see progress by Lorna Slater, the Scottish Government's Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, on the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Deer Working Group.

In May, the Minister consulted on a number of proposed changes, including removing male seasons for deer species. In response the Trust commented that we "...believe these changes are essential to deliver better deer management in line with the urgent need for enabling natural climate change

mitigation and boosting biodiversity.

"Native deer are an integral part of our ecosystems but in the absence of natural predators they need to be managed within environmental limits. In many places their numbers are far too high, to the detriment of habitats and species – including the welfare of the deer themselves. These measures will provide more tools for Scotland's skilled deer managers to be better able to do their job, to manage deer for the benefit of biodiversity, climate and communities."



A stretch of dam at Kilmarie Hatchery

Reimagining Strathaird update

In June 2021, the Trust announced its purchase of the Kilmarie Hatchery, a 6ha site in the south of Skye that includes a fish farm building, a residential property and a lochan – all sat within our existing land holding at Strathaird on the Elgol Peninsula.

Immediate actions on site included clearing materials from the hatchery, refurbishment of the Clach Glas and Blá Bheinn cottages, installation of a temporary office and the removal of non-native woodland and invasive species.

Since then, the Trust has conducted extensive consultations with the local community to explore a range of options for sensitive development, community involvement and public engagement.

Further work is now under way to develop a masterplan for the site that includes a path network study, analysis of the options for lowering the dam, facilitation of discussions locally on the potential de-crofting of land for housing, plus any business case and expressions of interest for a community campsite at Faolin.



Push for a Carbon Emissions Land Tax

This summer, the John Muir Trust is campaigning for a bold new policy to become law in Scotland – a Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT).

Applicable to estates over 1,000ha, this tax will bring a sea change in how land is managed in Scotland, enabling upland landscapes to provide a variety of climate, nature and economic benefits.

The Trust believes that changes in land use, especially in upland areas, will have huge benefits in terms of carbon reduction and storage, improving biodiversity and creating green jobs in rural communities.

However, with the Scottish Government currently on the fence about this proposal, we recently launched a 100-day campaign to highlight widespread public support for CELT. The campaign includes developing partnerships with other organisations, targeted lobbying and a variety of media initiatives.

Together, we need to convince decision makers to pass world-leading legislation that tackles the joint climate and nature crises while also strengthening rural communities.

Read the full proposal and sign a letter of support at johnmuirtrust.org/CELT



Celebrate 40 years with us

This summer sees a celebration of the Trust's 40th anniversary – with all Members invited to get involved

The John Muir Trust was established in 1983 to help safeguard the natural beauty of wild places for future generations. Our founders were pioneers, leading the way in securing access to these landscapes for all to enjoy, as well as giving local communities a voice in land management.

You are invited to join us for a unique exhibition at the Wild Space gallery and visitor centre in Pitlochry, which delves into our 40-year history, highlights key milestones along the way and articulates our bold ambitions for the future of wild places.

The exhibition, which runs from 1 July until 31 August, is much more than just a history of the Trust. It also provides an interactive and informative story about much-loved landscapes where people can explore the wonders of carbon-absorbing peatland, be inspired by the communities working to improve their local economies and discover how connecting with wild places can change people's lives.

There will be activity sheets for families to get outside and explore the local area, as well as a chance to tell us about your favourite wild place and enter a prize draw.

The exhibition will include screenings of our new film *Clear on Deer* at 2pm each day (except Tuesdays). This 30-minute documentary is fronted by nature presenter Libby Penman, who travels across Scotland to meet a range of people, all with different perspectives, to learn more about the rationale behind proposed changes to deer management in Scotland.

Visit the Wild Space exhibition and see our new film, *Clear on Deer*. Find directions and opening times at johnmuirtrust.org/wild-space

40th anniversary magazine

Visitors to Wild Space this summer can take away a copy of our special 40th anniversary magazine, featuring a range of articles written by individuals who have worked with us in the past – and who will take over from us in the future.

In particular, we were delighted when four Members, each with varied interests and experiences, volunteered to research our work over the past 40 years and reveal what it has meant to them.

In what was a herculean task, Carol Goodey, Derek Sime, Jessie Paterson and Marissa Trimble read through the Trust's archive of publications and pulled out four themes close to their hearts: working with communities; the threats to wild places; education and learning; and health and wellbeing.

The magazine also includes articles that explore the Trust's work around nature climate solutions, landscape-scale restoration, diversity and inclusion, and our long-standing relationship with the North Harris Trust.



Film roadshow

As well as showing at Wild Space in July and August, *Clear on Deer* will screen at venues across Scotland and England as part of a hosted roadshow later in the year. At each screening, there will be a chance to speak with Trust staff and the presenter of the film, Libby Penman. Look out for details on dates and venues, coming soon through our e-newsletters, website and social media channels.

Where eagles dare



When Fife-based artist Paul Bartlett (pictured) heard that we were celebrating 40 years of conserving and protecting wild places, he was inspired to create a bespoke image to support our work into the future.

Taking his usual mixed media and sustainable approach, Paul has created a magnificent portrait of a golden eagle (see opposite) using cuttings from old issues of our Members' *Journal* – with a limited edition run of prints for sale at Wild Space and online.

Wild Space Manager Emma Castle-Smith said: “Paul’s earlier mountain hare print proved hugely popular with Members and visitors to Wild Space and we are hopeful that his soaring eagle will prove equally captivating.”

For more on the prints, visit johnmuirtrust.org/shop



The path laid on sheep wool

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACRAE

So far, so good for Skye wool path

In 2022, our Skye manager and local crofter John MacRae tested an intriguing material to repair a section of coastal path that had become very muddy where it crosses deep peat.

Rather than the usual laying of gravel on top of a plastic membrane, he used raw, unprocessed sheep wool to hold the gravel in place. John sourced the fleeces from nearby crofts, including from his own flock.

More than a year on, he is delighted with how the path is holding up. “It’s equally as strong as a section that was done using plastic membrane,” he reported. “It’s survived winter well so far and is working better than I’d hoped. I am keen to do more sections of path after this year’s shearing season.”

John’s innovative technique has created much interest in the media as well as other organisations. Late last year, he was visited by a peatland restoration professional who works with Forestry and Land Scotland and has since heard that they are keen to use the same technique at their restoration sites.

Award milestone

A major milestone was reached in June when the John Muir Trust and a host of partners in Cumbria achieved 50,000 John Muir Awards in a partnership with the Lake District National Park.

Every single John Muir Award matters to the individuals who achieved them and the wild places they connect with – from those first young people who gained their John Muir Award at Outward Bound Ullswater in 1997 to those getting involved in ever greater numbers today.

For some, the experience will have provided the spark to launch a lifetime of engaging with nature. For others, it will have offered the chance to move away from a life of health problems, addiction or crime.

And in Cumbria generally, participation in the John Muir Award has helped people see what’s special about the Lake District National Park, allowed them to get a taste for volunteering and to contribute to initiatives such as Fix the Fells, active travel and woodland restoration.



Some of Cumbria’s Award participants

PHOTOGRAPH: MOORSIDE SCHOOL/CUMBRIA OUTDOORS



Volunteers help with measuring work at Quinag

PHOTOGRAPH: DENIS MOLLISON

Quinag measures up

Engagement Manager Romany Garnett reports on how volunteers have helped capture a new set of data to show seedling densities at Quinag

Out on Quinag working on a new seedling monitoring project, our aim is to record density of seedlings within different zones, as well as the percentage of seedlings that are below and above vegetation height.

A measuring ruler is jabbed into the thick heather beside a rowan seedling and we record its height: 35cm. We inspect the shoots to look at percentage browsed. Each has a history to tell and close examination can reveal the various struggles each tree has endured to reach this stage in its lifecycle.

Helping me capture the measurements are Imogen Gray, a volunteer from the University of Sheffield, and Trust colleagues, Mike Daniels and Mhairi Stewart. On the first day, we are also joined by Denis Mollison, one of the Trust's founders.

As we eat sandwiches by the sea, Denis works out the density of seedlings based on the number from one of the recording sheets: 20 seedlings in a circular plot 25 metres across extrapolates to about 400 per hectare for a larger area of

similar conditions.

The plots are divided into five zones and chosen within a certain distance from a seed source, so that the likelihood of regeneration happening was quite high.

Windblown seed species such as birch and willow are the dominant species. Rowan was also reasonably frequent, being helped along by migrating winter thrushes such as fieldfare and redwing that are such effective seed berry spreaders.

Nut-bearing trees such as hazel and oak are less mobile and generally grow where they roll. But small mammals can help by carrying them to a cache for a later snack and then misplacing them.

The hazel nut, for example, can then germinate and grow but is very palatable to herbivores, as are aspen. Aspen spread from suckers and within a certain distance from the parent. The young seedling clones shoot up nearby, but these are less mobile across large areas.

While the findings are yet to be analysed, the work will provide an insight into the density of seedlings and what's happening to regeneration across parts of Quinag.

Adventures beckon

Des Rubens and Bill Wallace were former Presidents of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and led inspiring and adventurous lives. Each year, a grant in their name funds dedicated conservationists to undertake adventures with a scientific or education focus.

The Trust administers the grant to help more people access opportunities to experience wild places in ways which will benefit both the individual and the wild place itself.

This year's Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant recipients are: Violet Fraser, Ben Stainton, Iris Gray, Ben Parker, Carla Huynh and Mae Aiko Macadam.

We are grateful to the long-standing contributions of Chair, Dick Allen, and grant panel member Maude Tiso who both retired from the panel this year. Geoff Cohen has taken up the position of Chair.

The next round of grant funding will be awarded in February 2024. Application details can be found at johnmuirtrust.org/rubenswallace

Carla Huynh, one of the 2023 grant recipients



Delightful dragonfly find

Team Nevis enjoyed a fantastic day on the hill in June with Trust staff joined by members of the Nevis Landscape Partnership on a familiarisation visit to our peatland restoration site.

All were impressed to see the difference the leaky dams have made during the recent dry spell, with some areas that would previously have dried out holding water well, and sections of bare peat already showing signs of plant recolonisation.

A good deal of time was also spent looking for dragonfly larvae and exuvia – the cast-off outer casing of dragonflies as they emerge from the water – in anticipation of establishing a monitoring programme here in the future.

Along with a healthy number of common species, the team was delighted to find a recently emerged Northern Emerald dragonfly – a red-listed species that had not been recorded in the area before.

With the species now confirmed as breeding at Nevis for the first time, it is hoped that the long-term recovery of the site will further help the population in the future.



Northern emerald dragonfly at Nevis

PHOTOGRAPH: CATHLEEN THOMAS



PHOTOGRAPH: TOBY CLARK

Help shape the John Muir Award for the future

After 25 years and almost half a million Award achievements, we would like to hear from past and present participants, providers, partners, supporters and funders as we look to redesign the John Muir Award.

Wild places are critical to the health of our planet but they need to be protected and restored if they are to play their role in combatting the twin climate and biodiversity crises.

More than ever, we need people to experience, value and protect the wild places around them and, crucially, advocate for

their protection.

The John Muir Award has long provided an opportunity to connect people with nature, and will continue to be an important part of the Trust's focus on engagement with people and communities.

Looking to the future we want to enhance the John Muir Award so that we can continue to inspire people from all backgrounds to join us in advocating for the repair and protection of wild places for years to come. Get involved and find out more at johnmuirtrust.org/award-redesign

Creative freedom

What is it about wild places that inspires a sense of freedom? And what does 'freedom' mean to you?

We invite all those with an artistic spirit – writers, photographers, sculptors, filmmakers, musicians and podcasters – to capture the essence of your favourite wild places in our Creative Freedom competition.

Due to be launched in August, the competition offers an opportunity to infuse your art with the power of nature. For more, visit johnmuirtrust.org/creativefreedom



PHOTOGRAPH: FRAN LOCKHART

Breakfast with the birds

Kat Martin and the Assynt team have organised a series of events and volunteering opportunities at Quinag this summer

The events series kicked off in early June when a keen group joined Kat for a dawn chorus walk in Culag Woods. "It was a gentle wander among the trees learning to pick out some beautiful birdsong – or beautiful to our ears, that is," commented Kat.

"In bird language this incredible morning performance is all about defending territories. Among the poetic profanities, we heard the impressively loud trills of tiny wren; the encouraging cheers of chaffinch; the slightly more conceded notes of willow warbler; and, of course, robin contributed an enjoyable and friendly performance to the show."

As well as regular volunteer days (see opposite), Kat and the team invite Members to join them at Quinag car park on Thursday 10 August for a full day of activities. For much more information, visit johnmuirtrust.org/events

Volunteering update

We have a number of volunteering opportunities available at various locations this summer:

Quinag

Wednesday Volunteer Days every fortnight at the Little Assynt tree nursery (10am to noon) and Quinag (1pm to 3pm)

Glen Tanar

Join our North East Scotland Members on 19 August, 16 September, 21 October, 19 November and 9 December.

Balmoral

Join our North East Scotland Members on 15 August, 5 September and 17 October.

Glenridding Common

Book for a weekend work party on 2 and 3 September.

Skye

Join us in the Blá Bheinn car park to plant 40 trees to celebrate 40 years of the John Muir Trust caring for wild places – plus hear a bonus talk on trees on 13 September.

Find out more at johnmuirtrust.org/events

Artemis at Glenlude

In June, Trust Fundraiser Sophie Mackness joined staff from Artemis Investment Management for a work party at Glenlude.

The firm is sponsoring the 2023 Artemis Pentland Peaks Challenge, an endurance walk across Edinburgh's Pentland Hills on 2 September which will raise money for the John Muir Trust and Mary's Meals.

The day offered a chance to demonstrate the types of projects the money raised through the event will support.

Fancy taking on the challenge? Visit pentlandpeaks.com

Get in touch

What have Trust Members and local groups been up to? Tell us your news and stories.

Email ross.brannigan@johnmuirtrust.org

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COVER BANNER IMAGE: MACHAIR AT
ACHMELVICH BY KAT MARTIN

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