

Background

Our Natural Heritage Project (ONH) started in June 2019, designed as a 2-year project, however with the COVID pandemic and the implications of lockdown regulations the project was extended to September 2022 with the approval of all funders.

ONH objective is to introduce people from marginalised groups, with particular reference to Refugee and Asylum Seekers, Black, Asian, and Ethnic communities, to engage with and benefit from accessing nature. Targeting participants and groups that would not normally have access to nature.

Approved Project Activities:

1. Engage with people of all ages and abilities from our target population across Scotland but with a leaning towards the following regions: Highlands, Grampian, Dundee, Moray and Aberdeenshire. Target 400 participants
2. Undertake 48 natural heritage site visits with groups
3. Undertake community consultations / pre or post site visit meetings to ensure cultural and community needs are met
4. Participants to have access to and gain John Muir Award
5. Deliver one outdoor festival for all event
6. Stakeholder progress reports & acknowledgements

The project met and exceeded targets and has forged sustainable relationships between community groups and heritage site staff, with many activities continuing beyond the life of this project and independently of outside resources.

Note: The statistics collated are the total for each engagement activity.

Approved Activities and Targets

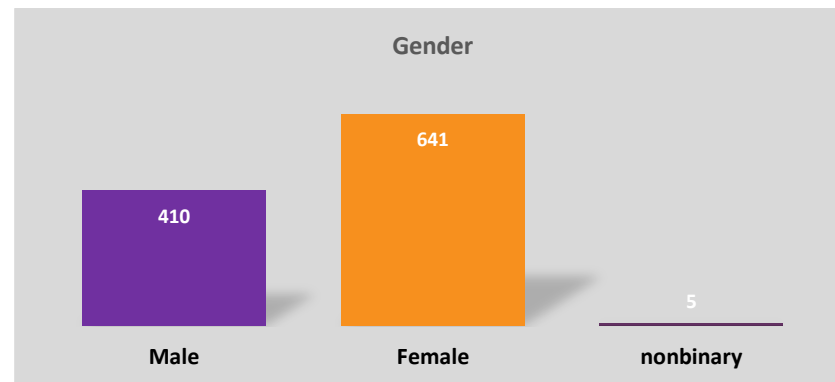
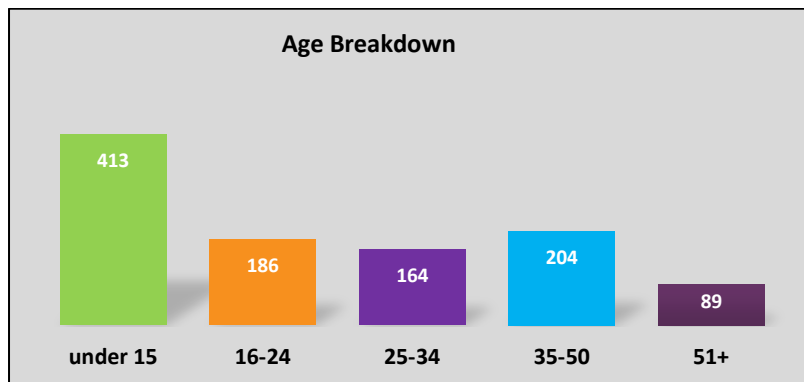
1. Engage with people of all ages and abilities from our target population across Scotland but with a leaning towards the following regions: Highlands, Grampian, Dundee, Moray and Aberdeenshire. Target 400 participants

Total numbers who engaged with the project: 1056 from 23 community organisations. 630 from the refugee and asylum seeker community and 46 participants identified as a person with a disability.

Regions

Highlands Dingwall, Allness, Inverness	Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire	Dundee	Central Glasgow and Edinburgh
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Demographics





2. Undertake 48 natural heritage site visits with groups
3. Undertake community consultations / pre or post site visit meetings to ensure cultural and community needs are met

The project aimed to deliver 48 'nature days out' to a variety of local natural heritage sites. Each visit aimed at 1 minibus of 16 passengers per visit. The project exceeded these targets. A total of 1056 attended 55 days out in nature visiting over 25 natural heritage sites.

Each visit involved consultation and planning meetings before and after the visits. These meetings were a platform for community leaders to meet local rangers and begin their independent relationship for future visits. This also ensured that community needs were met, particularly regarding numbers, gender of staff, approach, and permission for photographs.

Abbreviations

National Nature Reserve <i>NNR</i>	Royal Society for Protection of Birds. <i>RSPB</i>	National Trust for Scotland <i>NTS</i>	Cairngorms National Park <i>CNP</i>	Lochlomond & Trossachs National Park. <i>LTNP</i>
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Sites visited

Lochleven: NNR/RSPB Muir of Dinnet: NNR/RSPB Hermitage: NTS Tentsmuir: NNR/RSPB/Scottish Forestry & Land Forvie: NNR/RSPB Haughton Country Park: Aberdeenshire Council Loch Morlich: CNP Glenmore: Scottish Forestry & Land Balmoral Castle & Estate: CNP	St Cyrus: NNR & RSPB Haddo Country Park: NTS/Aberdeenshire Council Bennachie: Scottish Forestry & Land Aden Country Park: Aberdeenshire Council Stonehaven Beach: Aberdeenshire Council Cambo Gardens & Estate Glen Tanar: NNR/CNP Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh	Craigellachie: NNR/ CNP Balmaha: LTNP Lochlomond :RSPB/LTNP Conich Hill: LTNP Beinn Dubh: LTNP Tarfside: CNP Balloch Park: LTNP Royal Botanical Gardens Benmore
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4. *Participants to have access to and gain John Muir Award*

All participants who attended more than 3 visits were offered the John Muir Award Discovery. 50 were awarded their JMA Discovery Certificate locally by their community leaders. The conservation activities they participated in included litter picking, shrub clearing, bird counts, species identification, moth life and generally learn about climate change and environmental protection.

In addition to the awards leaders were offered formal training to support the sustainability of the project. Participants were given the foundation skills to lead groups safely in an outdoor environment as leaders and as an organisation. The training stressed the of duty of care required by organisations.

Qualification/Training/Award	Outdoor 1 st Aid Course	MIDAS: Minibus training & test	Navigation and Outdoor Leadership	Organisational Development	John Muir Award Discovery
Number of Participants	32	9	18	40	50

Organisation leaders who participated in the training were supported to lead nature exploration sessions with their own community. This resulted in 3 weekend residentials in the Cairngorms National Park led by our new leaders delivering to a total of 44 community members.

The Red Cross Young Refugee Group Glasgow 12 participants	The Red Cross Young Refugee Women’s Group 10 participants	Bradford University Take A Hike Group 22 participants
Glenfeshie Hostel. Supported by Cairngorms National Park rangers.	Glenfeshie Hostel. Supported by rangers from Cairngorms National Park, Cairngorm Connect and RSPB	Smugglers Hostel Tomintoul. Supported by Cairngorms National Park Rangers

5. Deliver one outdoor festival for all event

The project delivered 3 outdoor festival events.

- 2021 October 30th at Glenmore Park Forestry & Land Scotland in the Cairngorms National Park. 111 participants signed up to the event with 94 attending on the day. Refugee and Asylum seekers from Aberdeen, Inverness, Alness and Dingwall, with 4 members of the public. The event was supported by 28 staff they classed themselves as white. Backbone staff consisted of 3 South Asian and 1 Scottish. **Full report attached**
- 2022 June 18th at Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve. 161 participants associated with community groups attended the event from Dundee and Aberdeen. The event was supported by 18 staff they classed themselves as white. Backbone staff consisted of 3 south Asian, 1 black and 1 Scottish. **Full report attached.**
- 2022 July 2nd at Balmoral Castle & Estate in the Cairngorms National Park. 58 Afghan Refugee and Asylum Seekers from Scottish Refugee Council Aberdeen City of all ages attended the event. We put this event on specifically for this group as there was limited capacity for everyone to attend in June. This event was hosted by Balmoral Estate Ranger Service and supported by Aberdeenshire Council Rangers. They provided a host of activities to include guided walks, outdoor art, leaf bashing, tour of the castle and grounds, bird boxes, moth traps and environmental games.

Demographics for Balmoral Castle & Estate

Age Range

Under 15	16-24	25-34	35-50	51+
30	6	8	14	1

Gender Split

Female	Male	Non-Binary
36	22	0

Members of this group have continued their relationship with Aberdeenshire Council and Balmoral Ranger Service with 2 members joining the public conservation sessions at Balmoral Estate. Plus, an additional nature day, they organized independently for 15 members to Glen Tanar with activities laid on by the ranger team.

6. *What participants and rangers have to say and what participants learnt about nature*

It is important to keep the beach area clean and tidy as more and more animal species are migrating towards the area. Therefore, litter picking is important to prevent injuries and danger to the animals e.g., seals, birds, and dolphins that visit during the summer period.

Wildlife – there are now seals, grey and common seals present in groups on the Tentsmuir point. Squirrels and rabbits are found all over the forest area of Tentsmuir. Different types of bird are also seen in the area.

History - The remains of large concrete blocks were seen which were used as a defense to block of enemies during the world war 2.

It was really amazing; my group thoroughly enjoyed their day out and we even made brilliant links with Samina's group in Falkirk.

It was an ideal trip for me. I've been far away from my friends for a long time, but this trip gave me an opportunity to make lots of lovely friends again. I spent the whole weekend with my new friends and my two kind teachers. I experienced so many things for the first time, like hiking, collecting Blaeberrries and having bananas on the barbecue. I am very thankful to those that made this trip possible.

We really appreciated how both Polly and Sydney catered their activities to our group, considering that the group is still learning English. They explained the work that they do in a way that was very accessible and delivered activities that allowed the group to explore their creativity and think about the benefits of being in nature and preserving the natural environment.

It was fascinating to learn about the history of this area (Tarfside) and how 800 thousand acres were owned by one family and how the deer here were shipped to New Zealand as they are a strong breed. It was nice to get fresh air, it was like the air was so clean and pure and made me feel refreshed and I forgot about all my worries.

This is the first time I have been out the city since two years and it feels like freedom, like I have been let out of a prison. I can't wait for the next trip!

It was lovely to meet some of the older Pakistani carers and have a chat to them I didn't realise their English was so good (better than some Dundonians I know!). I learnt about one of the women caring role for her adult son and some of the challenges she has and thought they are so similar to mine.

I had fantastic day today because I haven't been out like this for long time since my husband's illness, and today was amazing day out. My best time it was we go for walks and art activity then have a lovely lunch with lovely ladies.

I really enjoyed our trip today to Tentsmuir! And that is a surprise considering I was dreading it due to the cold, wet and windy weather! The rangers were very knowledgeable and super friendly! I had been to Tentsmuir before with family, but this trip made me see it in a different way with all the rich and beautiful history. I definitely left with more knowledge and appreciation of the place. I really enjoyed making the bird box! I'm placing it in my garden today and can't wait to see the robins in there.

I really enjoyed the trip. Even though the weather was a bit tough. I didn't feel held back or unable to enjoy the day. Warmth was provided by through the friendliness of our organizer . The patience of our bus driver, and the dedication of the park rangers who did everything they could to ensure an enjoyable experience. The woodwork activity was tedious but very rewarding.

. I had been looking for a close community to be with since I arrived 5 months ago and I'm so grateful to have found one. The ladies are warm and supportive. The Tentsmuir trip will be a fond memory for a while because I got to see a sleeping seal at the beach, and I made a birdhouse! The rangers were so helpful, and I had my first lesson on some history of Dundee.

Although it was rainy day I think the rain, the beach and the forest made me feel like I was in my natural state, and it was so refreshing, and I experience genuine freedom and joy. The feeling helped me ease my stress and anxiety, it also opens my mind to lots of limitless opportunities . thank you for the good work.

They walked around most of the Park; Omar asked questions and wanted to go up as far as the deer statues. The man-made lake was explained to them and the memorial to the 4th Earl's wife and four children. We walked around the outside of the house too. They all seemed to have had an enjoyable time.

Keen to learn about animals in the Park; I showed him a badger sett and explained about them, and the legal protection afforded them.

We talked about wild and tame animals, in particular geese and their migratory pattern. How squirrels eat pinecones was explained to them. The reinvigoration of hazels by coppicing was explained as a sustainable source of poles and wood. The value of their nuts was talked about. Showed them a 388-year-old ash tree.

I explained to them about the fire-retardant bark of Giant Redwood trees in the garden.

The rangers from Nature Scotland were very helpful on the day and great companions. We walked for 2 miles between the beach and the forest which was very enjoyable. Kids were appreciating the information/ tips coming from the rangers while walking. We were able to watch the seals which was a lovely.

The children being very engaged and telling us about all the things they do that is related to the outdoors.

We found a sea urchin case on the beach which was very cool!

I didn't know what to expect but Cambo exceeded my expectations and I learnt so much!

The ranger was very helpful on the day. The kids and the adults loved the fairy trail, very creative really. The edible garden. The walk to the beach. Everything was great. Looking forward to another summertime visit maybe.

At Cambo we learnt about food production, foraging and recycling – the rangers were brilliant and then we learnt about the beach animals.

Loved the beach art stuff with shells, seeing seals and hearing them squeak!.. I was so excited!

As a ranger the main impact has been meeting and interacting with people I only ever hear/read about in the media. And it's thanks to your organisation that we get to mix and come together.

They all made comments on the beauty of various plants and habitats. Particularly the old oak woodland.

Show them some moths that had been captured the night before. I think they really enjoyed this and made comments about how many different kinds of moth there were. We also did some pond dipping which I think they enjoyed, and they made comments again about the variety of life in a pond

I showed them pictures of different animals found on the reserve and spoke to them about the natural history of these and other species. We spotted an Osprey in the distance and looked at moths and pond life. One of the men did not know what a moth was before the session however enjoyed handling them. I believe they learned about the variety of life present in different habitats.

I was pleased that the men took well to the moths and pond life and got involved with handling things. They made several comments on the beauty of the site. I was glad that they were able to see such a variety of wildlife and habitats all in one day.

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to work with such a diverse range of individuals and show them the beauty and variety of nature in Scotland.

Spoke briefly about the woods they were walking through; that it was temperate rainforest and how rare a habitat it is and that climate change with an increasing number of dry days poses a threat to its existence.

One participant was facetimeing his pal and showing him the beautiful countryside and he also videoed it to send to his mum.

7. Conclusion

This project rose above the disruption of the COVID pandemic thanks to the continued support and flexibility of the funders. Targets have been exceeded and a variety of natural heritage sites were visited and put on the radar for future visits.

Backbone continues to have requests for a simple “days out in nature” experiences, an effective and safe approach to introduce rangers to community groups who they would not normally contact.

Our recommendation is to continue this type of engagement. A little bit of leadership training to include safeguarding procedures and access to minibus drivers and minibuses (transport) is the key to this sustainable project.

Thank you to our funders for this project: NatureScot, Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland and Cairngorms National Park Authority