



# HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND COUNTRYSIDE RANGERS

**Annual Review  
2022/2023**



Photo:  
Community Volunteers  
maintain access  
to Mellon Udrigle beach

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# MEET THE RANGERS



**Imogen Furlong**  
Countryside Ranger  
Service Manager



**Andy Summers**  
Senior Ranger (North  
Highland)



**Eilidh-Ann Phillips**  
Senior Ranger (South  
Highland)



**Paul Castle**  
North Sutherland and  
Caithness Countryside  
Ranger



**Roz Summers**  
East Caithness  
Countryside Ranger



**Kirsty Rosie**  
East Caithness  
Countryside Ranger



**Marcia O'Hara**  
Easter Ross and SE  
Sutherland  
Countryside Ranger



**Jenny Grant**  
Wester Ross  
Countryside Ranger



**John Orr**  
Inverness Area  
Countryside Ranger



**Michelle Melville**  
Highland Heritage  
Ranger (Lochaber  
based)



**Donald Mitchell**  
NW Sutherland  
Countryside Ranger



**Saranne Bish**  
Badenoch, Strathspey  
and Nairnshire  
Countryside Ranger



**Fiona MacLean**  
Lochaber Countryside  
Ranger



# OVERVIEW

**Imogen Furlong**

**High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Manager**

The High Life Highland Ranger Service has seen a good recovery over the last financial year, with our face to face customer engagements up by 121% on 2021/22. Our customer satisfaction survey clearly demonstrates that our customers are happy with the quality of service with 99% saying it met or exceeded expectations.

As well as delivering our popular guided walks and interpretive events, we have built some strong partnerships with a number of organisations and funders over the last 12 months and delivered on more targeted projects with specific outcomes for health and well-being and environmental education.

We have seen the opening of two new ranger huts in Glen Nevis and Clachtoll for community and visitor education purposes. We have worked on several art and heritage projects, including our own Mammal Art competition for Schools (in partnership with the Royal Zoological Society), and captured local stories within the 'Lochaber Quilt' for the Scottish Year of Stories 2022.

We have committed resource to supporting communities to improve nature outcomes. As a result a strong grassroots volunteering workforce is emerging. At the heart of everything we do is nature, heritage and community. With the rapid decline in biodiversity, it has never been more important to connect with the natural world understand and nurture it, protect and treasure it. The work we do with schools and young people helps to embed this with the next generation.

This review will highlight some of the important conservation and education work that has taken place this year.

## Customer Satisfaction



**11,504**  
Customer Engagements



### CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS

**93%**

**Live in Highland**

"Our Ranger is always keen to help with any questions and makes a huge effort to make his walks successful. If all other rangers are like him then High Life Ranger service is very fortunate"

"Rangers provide a very valuable service to all age groups and a contribute to wide variety of events"

**67%**

**Have a High Life Membership**

**80%**

of customers

said they were satisfied with the range of guided events

**85%**

of customers

said we took excellent care of them on our events

**99%**

of customers

said our events either met or exceeded their expectations



## Long Service Awards

The Countryside Rangers collectively celebrated 150 years of long service as a team. Six members of Countryside Ranger Service Team were formerly recognised at the High Life Highland long service award ceremony in 2022. Andy Summers, Paul Castle, Fiona MacLean, Saranne Bish, John Orr and Eilidh-Ann Phillips were recognised at the event for the dedication and commitment to protecting highland's wildlife and providing interesting and engaging educational events through these past decades.

# Partner Funded projects in 2022/23

HTSI Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund supported our Healthy Minds delivery in Badenoch and Strathspey

Museums and Galleries Scotland - Year of Stories Fund supported the Weaving Tales Project in Lochaber

Connecting Carers funded targeted green health walks for those with caring responsibilities

Nature Restoration Fund are supporting the pan Highland Jan - June 2023 Meadow Mosaic Project



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



### EDUCATION AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers have a central partnership with the Highland Council to deliver services in within community and schools settings. We provide environmental education; raise awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code; provide access to nature and heritage interpretative information for the general public; and design a programme of walks and other events. We also help fulfil Highland Council targets around biodiversity and advise and manage a range of countryside sites to provide safe visitor access and ensure conservation of important species.



### HEALTH & WELLBEING

Under the branding "Think Health Think Nature" the work of the Highland Green Health Partnership, funded by NatureScot, aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to tackle physical inactivity, mental health improvement and tackle health inequalities. HLH Ranger Service are both a strategic and delivery partner in this green health collaboration.



### CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Highland Adapts is a highland wide partnership initiative working to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate ready Highland. High Life Highland Ranger service sit within the Community Advocates tranche of the partnership work, around community action to create healthy eco-systems and nature based solutions to climate change.



### BIODIVERSITY

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers are partners within the Highland Environment Forum (HEF). HEF is funded by Highland Council, NatureScot and Scottish Forestry. The Edinburgh Declaration (2021) set out the commitments of members of the international community, the Scottish Government, it's partners, and the wider local community in delivering for nature over the coming decade, by tackling biodiversity loss. Highland Nature : The biodiversity action plan 2021 - 2026 was created through surveys and meetings with Highland Environment Forum members and the wider public, and is delivered through the commitments undertaken by its partners. This work is overseen and coordinated by the Highland Environment Forum's Biodiversity Working Group. The HLH Countryside Rangers are key delivery partners.



# HIGH LIFE WILDLIFE



Picture:  
Andy Summers installing Barn Owl  
nesting boxes in Sutherland



## Puffins

Paul Castle, North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger has been involved in assessing the potential negative impact of increased visitor numbers on sensitive Puffin habitats and developing mitigation measures to help monitor the issues at Drumhollistan Puffin Colony. Paul has also been working with NaureScot, RSPB, the local land-owner, the police and the public to bring a halt to the harassment of Puffin colonies by drones.

## Barnacle Geese

Scotland is the main wintering ground for Annex 1-listed Greenland barnacle geese. With numbers on the decline, Donald Mitchell, NW Sutherland Ranger has undertaken a fortnightly survey of the Geese at Balnakeil in Durness throughout the winter. This work helps to inform whether conservation management measures are being successful. results of the survey are supplied to the RSPB. He has also undertaken education with Durness Primary school on these species, connecting local community with the nature on their doorstep.



## Barn Owls

Having noted a lack of nesting sites in Sutherland for Barn Owls, Andy Summers, Senior Ranger (North) committed some time to building barn owl nesting boxes and found suitable sites for them. The result has been really positive as four pairs were found to have bred successfully in 2022. Andy holds a licence to check these nests, which should never be undertaken by unlicensed personnel.

## Avian Flu

During the last 12 months the HLH Countryside Ranger Team have been fielding enquiries from general public and businesses about Avian Flu. Avian Flu has had a huge impact on the birds living and breeding around the coast of Highland and the effects are visible with a significant number of dead bird carcasses washed up on our beaches. HLH Rangers have been actively promoting bio-security measures at many popular beaches, by creating signs and placing them at prominent entry and exit points. We have also been liaising with The Highland Council environmental health team, and DEFRA, as well as undertaking a beached bird survey with volunteer assistance and sending in records of deceased bird counts to NatureScot and RSPB.

## WARNING

Due to potentially serious health issues linked with Avian Influenza (bird flu), please do not touch any dead or dying birds found along the shore.

Please keep children and dogs well away and safe.

The dead birds on this site have been reported to the DEFRA helpline on 03459 335577

**Please Stay Safe!**



# MAMMALS



## Mink

Several HLH Rangers in the north team have been working in conjunction with West Sutherland Fisheries Trust to set and monitor Mink Rafts in Wester-ross, Caithness and Sutherland . We now have rafts up and running in several locations. Removing mink before they have a chance to breed in the spring is critical in national attempts to reduce overall numbers. Mink are a non-native species that out-compete the local otter population and threaten their survival.



## Otters

HLH Rangers have been working with a number of stakeholders this year to protect Otters and their habitats. In Ullapool, Jenny Grant, Wester Ross Ranger has been collaborating with SSE and the golf club around the protection of otter habitats in the area and undertaken an otter survey at Loch Broom. Andy Summers, Senior Ranger (North) worked with The International Otter Survival Fund on Skye to re-release the otter "Storm" back into the waters in Assynt where she was rescued as a pup.



## Bats

Paul Castle, North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger, has given advice to the John O Groat's Mill Trust and local environmental consultants on the bats using the mill building. Saranne Bish the Badenoch and Strathspey Ranger, has undertaken monitoring of Long Eared bats in Abernethy, after part of school was demolished, and over 100 bats were recorded. We continue to run numerous successful public bat walks across the region, increasing awareness and appreciation of this mammal and count and record the bats we observe. Roz Summers, East Caithness Ranger, has worked with local volunteers to put up bat boxes along the Wick Riverside.



## Badgers

High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service have been undertaking the National Badger surveying in several areas, in conjunction with Scottish Badgers and the Badger Trust. In Sutherland we organised and ran a training course for community volunteers on how to look for signs of active badgers sets.

## Herring



The 2022 season saw a large number of whitebait trapped in Lochinver bay. This attracted an amazing ariel display of a large numbers of birds, as well as many seals. Andy Summers, Senior Ranger (North) sent off samples of fish for analysis. The West of Scotland Herring Hunt project with Edinburgh Napier University was able to identify both sprats and herring. It's really exciting there are confirmed herring and could be a sign that herring are finally coming back into the Minch. HLH Rangers will continue to monitor this during the 2023 season

## Salmon



In conjunction with West Sutherland Fisheries Trust and Lochaber Fisheries Trust the HLH Rangers have been sampling water fauna and in particular monitoring salmon smolts. Data collection allows environmental health of waterways to be assessed. The native salmon population in the community owned Strontian River, for example, was found to be "virtually extinct". Funding was sourced locally to build a hatchery to address this. Working with Strontian Angling Association, Eilidh-Ann Phillips, Senior Ranger (South) has assisted with the release of 30,000 Salmon fry back into the river in May 2022. This re-population project is ongoing.

## Ostracods



High Life Highland Ranger for North West Sutherland, Donald Mitchell, and Countryside Ranger Manager Imogen Furlong assisted two researchers looking for a rare subterranean aquatic creature at Smoo Cave. Styglobitic creatures live entirely below the earth's surface and preliminary findings show that one particular ostracod could be the first recorded in Scotland. The survey results of that trip by Lee Knight and Dominika Wroblewska, have now been published in the Cave and Karst Science Journal. They found 130 individual species within the sampled cave systems; among these were dragon fly nymphs and caddis flies, water crickets and pea mussels.

## Cetaceans Seawatch

HLH Countryside Ranger service organised several events as part of the 21st National Whale and Dolphin Survey in July 2022. Members of the public were invited to take part in this annual citizen science event by conducting surveys and joining in with HLH Ranger watches.



# PLANTS AND POLLINATORS



## Sea Pinks

Jenny Grant, Wester-ross Countryside Ranger has been working with local volunteers and the Ullapool Harbour Trust to save the Sea Pinks, a wild flower, from the shoreline of Ullapool, whilst development works to Shore St take place. Volunteers spent hours removing the plants from the shore wall and help them spread by transplanting to other locations. This should hopefully prevent the loss of the thrift from this part of the Ullapool village.



## Butterflies

John Orr, Inverness area Ranger has been working closely with local volunteers and The Butterfly Conservation Trust to seed the upper-shore of Ardersier Common NNR with kidney vetch and birds-trefoil. These plants provide the habitat for the small blue butterfly and the dingy skipper. He has also arranged habitat management days to clear gorse and birch to open the glades for the butterfly populations to thrive, as well as teaching local volunteer citizen scientists how to undertake Butterfly transects.



## Great Yellow Bumblebee

The High Life Highland Ranger Service manage both the Farr Glebe Bumblebee Nature Reserve site and Castlehill verges to ensure the right habitat is sustained for one of the rarest bumblebees *Bombus distinguendus* aka: the great yellow. Paul Castle, North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger led events to cut and remove cut grass from both sites which allows the bees to thrive here. Students from Farr High School helped out in 2022.



# CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERING



“ Work continues transplanting Machir grass to Clachtoll seafront. Scarce species live in machair, which benefits from managing the area to promote high biodiversity. The variety of plants encourage a variety of invertebrates, which encourage birds to the machair to feed and breed. The machair also helps to stabilise the sand-dunes. Sand dunes play a huge role in coastal protection. Dunes shelter inland habitats from coastal flooding and from the worst of the winds during storms ”

Andy Summers: Senior Ranger (North)

# Nature Restoration



Roz Summers, East Caithness Countryside Ranger created a new wildflower bed at Wick Riverside. Engaging with 40 volunteers and Highland Council staff, who assisted by removing six inches of topsoil. These community volunteers planted a cornfield annual mix, bee pollinator mix and northern hay meadow mix of annuals and perennials. The bed provided beautiful display for Wick Gala day. Specail thanks to Wick Riverside Volunteers and ThinkHealthThinkNature and Noss Primary school.

**As a result of the success of this patch, High Life Highland Rangers have bid into and been awarded monies from the Nature Restoration Fund Grant to create 30-40 similar meadows across Highland.**

831

Volunteering Hours



6/10  
Volunteers  
return after  
first session

## Litter Picking



There is litter problem in Dingwall Community Woods and Marcia O'Hara, Easter-Ross Ranger and Saranne Bish, Ranger for Badenoch, Starthspey and Nairnshire have been developing volunteering work along the Core Path through the Wood to help tackle the impact its having on the local habitat. In addition locally sourced woodland wildflowers have been planted along the path to increase biodiversity and add some colour. Work will continue here at this site over the next year to continue to make improvements.

## Habitat Management



Work has been undertaken at Borgie Breco Forest in North Sutherland by Paul Castle, North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger and some willing volunteers to complete pond clearance. This small pond often used for wildlife studies had become very choked with vegetation. Volunteers used rakes to remove the weed from the pond. All removed weed was left on the bankside to allow any accidentally trapped wildlife to re-enter the pond. They noted several immature palmate newts which were returned immediately to the water.

Thanks to our partners Forest and Land Scotland, North Sutherland Wildlife Group, Plant-Life Scotland 'Species on the Edge' project, the Highland Council Access Rangers and local volunteers.

## Youth Green Leadership

Elizabeth MacDonald in the HLH Leadership Team has been working in partnership with the HLH Ranger Service to create the Green Leadership SCQF Award, adding an environmental strand to its existing youth leadership programme. The Leadership Programme has become the hallmark of good practice for young people to get involved in their communities and is open to all secondary school pupils, up to and including the age of 25. The programme offers involvement in a variety of awards including HLH's Choose To Lead Award (SCQF Level 4 & 5), Asdan Youth Achievement, John Muir Award and the Junior Ranger Award. The Highlands Green Leadership SCQF Award is being supported by the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger service and there were 52 hours of youth volunteering logged in the last 12 months, we hope to build on this moving forward.

**“We are working to support HLH young volunteers in the local communities to deliver projects that conserve and protect biodiversity in their area”**

**Countryside Ranger Service Manager  
Imogen Furlong**



## 49 volunteer events organised

### Beach Cleans

HLH Rangers have organised a number of beach cleans in the last year. Including at Ardersier and Raffin Beaches. Working with staff from Moray Firth Coastal Partnership and nature reserve volunteers, John Orr, Inverness area ranger undertook a litter pick and survey at Merkinch Local Nature Reserve. Every piece of litter was categorised and recorded. This sort of data helps to inform decisions around use of plastics, and will be used to make a positive impact on our ocean.

HLH Rangers have also organised events as part of the international nurdle hunt on the beaches. Nurdles are tiny persistent and potentially toxic plastic items. Nurdles in the environment can pose a threat to creatures and habitats for years to come. Due to their size, and often clear colour, nurdles can look like fish eggs which makes them particularly attractive to seabirds, fish and other marine wildlife.

### Dune Management

- Mellon Udrigle
- Gruniard Bay
- Dunnet Dunes
- Clachtoll

### Habitat Management

- Roche Moutoneese
- Culag Woods
- Lliy Loch
- Borgie Breco
- Thurso River
- Ardersier Common NNR
- Farr Glebe NNR

### Path Maintenance

- Mellon Udrigle (board walk)
- Kildary Core Path
- Ullapool Riverside
- Ullapool Hill
- Peffery Way Core Path

# HEALTH & WELLBEING



**“ Having been diagnosed with Neuropathy, Eilidh-Ann's Short walks into Nature are an excellent way of getting me out for exercise and enable me to socialise with the other participants. The numbness in my feet & legs can just about cope with the length of the activity. Learning about bats & fungi (each walk having a theme ) is an added bonus. ”**

**Short Walk to Nature - Participant**

## Short Walk into Nature

All HLH Ranger 'Short Walks into Nature' are flat, under an hour in length and suitable for all abilities and levels of fitness. The short walk into nature series has been particularly successful in Strontian. Set up by Senior Ranger (South) Eilidh-Ann Philips this local green health walk helps less agile residents to reconnect with the natural world, enjoy some leisurely exercise, friendly company, great views, and fresh air. Following a different theme each week, the walkers find out a bit more about the nature on the doorstep. There were 114 engagements in the last year.



## Think Health Think Nature walks

Think Health Think Nature walks are the work of the Highland Green Health Partnership, one of four area-wide partnerships developed in Scotland contributing towards "Our Natural Health Service", a programme set up by NatureScot which aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to tackle physical inactivity, mental health issues and health inequalities. HLH Rangers have been partnering to provide nature interpretation on the health walks.

## Online Training

Ten volunteer walk leaders from right across Highlands learnt from Andy Summers our experienced Senior Ranger (North), how to bring nature interpretation into a health walk to add value. The training covered Simple ID and species recording methods, responsible access and invasive species. Walking the same route and keeping records can also help us tackle biodiversity loss through citizen science and it all starts with nature awareness.



“Recently we had a lovely leisurely walk in the sunshine at Thurso shore with local Ranger Paul Castle. We looked at some of the birds, including gulls, wigeon ducks, oystercatchers and turnstone. We were also lucky enough to watch common seals while we walked and talked. I'm really looking forward to our next walk at Thurso riverside in May”

Participant

# 274 green health events organised

## Connecting Carers

The High Life Highland Countryside Rangers are working in conjunction with Dingwall based charity Connecting Carers to provide a series of short walks for Carers across the region. Connecting Carers' aim is to support unpaid Carers throughout Highland to access the help, information and support they need to enable them, and the people they care for, to have a better everyday life.

“Improving our connection with nature brings a whole host of health and wellbeing benefits – reducing stress, improving sleep and boosting your immune system to name just a few”

Linda Birnie, Training Officer,  
Connecting Carers



## Healthy Minds

The Healthy Minds project is funded through HTSI Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. In 2022 we engaged with hard to reach adult community members within Badenoch & Strathspey who are suffering from diagnosed mental health issues and have been struggling to cope following the COVID pandemic. Healthy Minds has established a peer to peer support group who meet in a local green space. A cosy and safe area is created using a tarp for shelter, and chairs, bean bags and a firebowl or stove for comfort. Conversation and activities are nature based and facilitated by the HLH Badenoch, Strathspey and Nairnshire Countryside Ranger, Saranne Bish. This project has also been supported by Cairngorm National Park Authority Volunteers and Ranger Team. Participants share experiences, learn about the natural world and feel the healing benefits of nature. Saranne, provides activities such as bushcraft, wildlife identification, wildlife camera trapping, after-dark adventures and outdoor cooking in a safe outside space. This to gives participants the opportunity to relax, learn and enjoy nature and wildlife on their doorstep. This project acts as a continuum for adults already engaged with the Community Mental Health team in Aviemore. The Aviemore Community Mental Health team have assisted the project by identifying those that may gain something from attending. The Healthy Minds project group works on a self referral/ social prescribing model. Healthy Minds provides another 'pathway' for struggling vulnerable adults, facing hospitalisation, medication, exclusion and loneliness.

## Branching out

Marcia O'Hara, Easter Ross and SE Sutherland Ranger has worked as a delivery partner on Evanton Wood Community Company's Branching out programme. Branching out is an outdoor therapeutic intervention for adults who use mental health services in Scotland. The programme comprises weekly woodland activities for a group of 12 participants delivered over a 3 month period.

## Gather

Gather was an event run as part of the 2022 Mental health awareness week – the event was attended by those with disabilities. The activities, delivered by Jenny Grant the Wester Ross Ranger, centred around collecting natural artefacts; examining them under a microscope. The participants then designed and wrote a postcard, with the aim of passing on the knowledge gained. This activity works on a number of levels to meet the 5 ways to well being of:

- Step 1 – Connection
- Step 2 – Physical Activity
- Step 3 – Taking notice
- Step 4 – Learning
- Step 5 – Giving



# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



♥♥ Our pupils are such nature lovers! They loved doing the mammals project with our local Countryside Ranger, John Orr, and really enjoyed creating their own 'Highland Acre Wood' which looks a bit like the woods outside our classroom ♥♥

Julie MacLeod, head teacher at Balmuir Primary

# 120 school visits



The High Life Countryside Ranger service engages with schools with the purpose of raising environmental awareness of Highlands habitats and fauna, and assisting schools achieve and maintain Eco School Status. In 2022 HLH Ranger Service undertook regular school visits on our "free to schools" theme of the year Highland mammals.

In total the rangers undertook 120 school visits to 71 schools, reaching 3057 pupils in the Highlands.

HLH Rangers also delivered workshops for the Caithness Science Festival (Sept 2022) and Dingwall Science festival (Dec 2022).

## Google Classroom

HLH Lochaber Countryside Ranger Fiona MacLean worked with the Highland Council education team to develop a Google Classroom called Highlife Wildlife. This has allowed teachers to enhance their lessons around the subject of biodiversity and our the local environment. Through this mechanism the environmental education reach has been extended to schools not within easy travelling distance of a ranger base.

### Mammal Project 2022

The 2022 Mammal project was a project designed to help raise awareness of the wide range of the special mammal species within the Highlands. Wide engagement took place with schools and the general public to educate about the variety of Highland species, their distribution both historic and at present and to teach the importance of highland ecology. We engaged across Highlands on the project and further a field via online talks. We partnered with the Royal Zoological Society Scotland to create a school art competition as part of the project, with the winning school being given the prize of a visit to the Highland Wildlife Park to feed a polar bear.



Balnain Primary School were the overall winners of the art competition



# 3057 pupils engaged

## Scottish Outdoor Access Code: Teacher Training

Imogen Furlong, Countryside Ranger Manager and Fiona MacLean, Lochaber Ranger have been working with Susan Webster, Access Education Officer from Nature.Scot to create a box of resources that can be used to support awareness of the SOAC in schools. These are now available to teachers and other practitioners via HLH Libraries. By way of an introduction, a teacher training day was organised in October 2022 at Inverness Botanic Gardens where the resources and educational games were introduced to teachers and environmental practitioners.





## Hill to Grill

High Life Senior Ranger (North) Andy Summers and Wester Ross Ranger Jenny Grant worked with the John Muir Trust and Ullapool High School on this innovative activity. The young people at first stalk the deer with a camera on the day, learning about deer management and how the deer interact with their environment. The young people also learn how to butcher the deer and cook and eat the meat.

## RHET collaboration

Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) Highland has a number of farms in the area with a network of volunteer farmers and their families who kindly give their time to support RHET. HLH Countryside Rangers Marcia O'Hara (Easter Ross) and John Orr (Inverness) partnered with RHET in 2022 to deliver educational sessions to students at Fortrose Academy and Millburn Academy, on the subject of Soil Biodiversity. HLH Countryside Rangers Paul Castle (North Sutherland and Caithness) and Roz Summers (East Caithness) collaborated with RHET at a food and farming day at Quoybrae Mart to deliver workshops on the science of pollination - engaging with 8 schools.

## Northern Coastal Communities Funded youth delivery

HLH North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger Paul Castle and HLH East Caithness Ranger Roz Summers have been working with HLH Youth Development to engage with targeted young people who live within the coastal communities of Caithness and North Sutherland. The High Life Rangers embarked on a programme of nature engagement and outdoor learning within woodland, beaches and bog for these young participants of high school age. These sessions were funded by the Northern Coastal Communities Fund (NCCF)



## After School Nature Clubs for Young People

HLH East Caithness Ranger, Roz Summers has been working with a keen group of budding naturalists at Wick Youth Club leading a series of well attended nature outings to a girls group from Wick. HLH Wester Ross Ranger Jenny Grant has re-initiated an after school nature club which meets at the Ullapool Library. HLH Senior Ranger (South) Eilidh-Ann Phillips has worked with the HLH Youth Development Officer and Active Schools Co-ordinator in West Lochaber delivering nature based sessions throughout the year.

# 71 Schools

## Caithness and Sutherland

Mount Pleasant Primary  
Farr Primary  
Miller Academy Primary  
Castletown Primary  
Melvich Primary  
Crossroads Primary  
Halkirk Primary  
Watten Primary  
Thrumster Primary  
Canisbay Primary  
Bower Primary  
Reay Primary  
Lybster Primary  
Lybster Nursery  
Newton Park Primary  
Noss Primary  
Castlehill Primary  
Thurso High School.  
Wick High School  
Thurso High School.  
Wick High School  
Durness Primary School  
Kinlochbervie primary school

## Easter Ross and SE Sutherland

Golspie Primary  
Hilton of Cadboll Primary  
Coulhill Primary (two classes)  
Tarbat Old Primary  
Ben Wyvis Primary (Multiple classes)  
Culbokie Primary  
Avoch Primary  
Kiltearn Primary  
Newton Park Primary  
Fortrose Academy  
Noss Primary  
Dingwall Academy



## Lochaber

Kinlochleven Primary  
Rum Primary  
Lady Lovat Primary  
Kilchoan Primary  
Acharacle Primary and GM Unit  
Inverlochy Primary  
Lundrava Primary  
Caol Primary  
Lochaber High school  
Duror Primary  
Ballachulish Primary  
St. Brides Primary  
Glencoe Primary  
Mallaig Primary  
Ardnamurchan high  
Lochaline Primary #  
Bun Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar  
Spean Bridge Primary

## Wester Ross

Applecross Primary  
Ullapool Primary  
Gairloch Primary  
Achiltibuie Primary  
Ullapool Gaelic Nursery  
Creative Hands (ASN group)

## Inverness/Nairn/ Badenoch and Strathspey

Holm Primary  
Balnain Primary  
Crown Primary  
Farr Primary  
Bishop Eden Primary  
St Joseph's Primary  
Millburn Academy  
Culloden Academy  
Nairn Academy  
Aviemore Primary  
Grantown Primary  
Carrbridge Primary



# COMMUNITY LEARNING



The kids really enjoy it

So nice to get the community back together at outdoor events

We would come to these every week

The little ones immediately start collecting sticks for the Ranger as soon as they arrive

There is nothing else like this in the area

## Showcase : Story by the Fire

Aimed at families with toddlers, "Stories by the fire" was developed by the High Life Highland Easter Ross and SE Sutherland Ranger Marcia O'Hara in partnership with the HLH Library service and its popular early years Book-Bug. These outdoor sessions are now delivered across the region in Evanton, Strontian, Acharacle and Lochaline, Lochinver, Fort William and Granton on Spey. They are free to attend. The Story by the Fire events have proved very popular. Based in local woodland areas around a carefully managed fire, the sessions incorporate reading a story and woodland play activities. The first "Story by the Fire" booked up ridiculously quickly with lots of positive feedback. It was subsequently rolled out throughout the Ranger service across the region.

## Glen Nevis Community Outdoor Learning Hub



This project was funded through donations from Nevis Landscape Partnership, The Nineveh Charitable Trust and Fort William and Caol Ward Discretionary Fund. The building sits within the Glen Nevis outdoor classroom area behind the Ben Nevis Visitor centre. Michelle Melville, the HLH Heritage Ranger conceived of the project and sought funding for its installation including an outdoor fire area. The area will be used by children and adults of all abilities to learn about the nature and heritage of the Highlands through short courses and events. Sessions for visitors are also planned in 2023.

## New Clachtoll Ranger Hut Opens



HLH worked in partnership with Historic Assynt and North-west Highlands geopark, Highland Council and Cogialch Assynt Living Landscapes (CALL) to install a new Ranger Hut at Clachtoll.

The hut build was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic Assynt. The internal interpretation space is populated by HLH Countryside Ranger Service, Historic Assynt and the NW Highland Geopark.



## Blogs and Articles

The Ranger service produce a monthly blog on the [highlifehighland.com/rangers](https://highlifehighland.com/rangers) website, and in January 2023 the team launched a regular "Making Space for Nature" column in the Highland News Media, offering advice and guidance on how Highlanders can help to increase biodiversity in their garden or locality.

## Online Talks

A series of online talks presented by our HLH Countryside Ranger team were provided over the winter, making Highland wildlife and landscapes accessible for everyone. Each talk was one hour in duration. The focus last year was on woodland habitats.



Environmental  
Education Projects

432

Community Based  
Learner Engagements

3,898



## Interpretation board at Dunnet

Dunnet Bay boasts some of the most stunning coastline in the Far North of Scotland, but it is also a fragile habitat for many species. NatureScot in partnership with the High Life Highland Countryside Rangers produced the two identical panels to highlight the special scientific importance of this wonderful sandy bay. Noth Sutherland and Caithness Ranger Paul Castle and East Caithness Ranger Kirsty Rosie partnered on the interpretation and installation of the interpretation boards, which will help inform visitors on how to respect wildlife whilst visiting remote conservation areas, thanks go to local landowners for granting permission for the panels to be installed at Dunnet Bay. Information includes details of some of the varied wildlife species including Oystercatchers and Great northern divers.



## Rangers support Refugees ESOL

The High Life Highland Ranger Team have been running educational workshops with Refugee families in partnership with the HLH Adult Learning team. John Orr, Inverness area Ranger worked with groups around Clava Cairns, Ardersier Common and Ness Islands. John Orr and Saranne Bish, Badenoch & Strathspey Ranger led a trip to Carigellachie Nature Reserve for recently arrived Ukrainian Refugees. Roz Summers, East Caithness ranger has been working with Afghan Refugees in Wick on a project "Wick Wonders and wanders" working in conjunction with the Pultney Peoples Project (PPP).



## 62 community events

### Guided Walks and Interpretive nature events



The Countryside Rangers have been busy over the year with a full programme of Guided Walks and interpretive events for all ages and abilities. Among these were Nature Interpretation walks; Hill walks for beginners, including Ben Wyvis and Suliven; Scavenger Hunts on school strike days and our staple favorites: bat walks and fungi walks. In addition, this year, we have been embarking on dark skies and dawn walks.



HLH Rangers also ran publicly bookable events in partnership with other HLH services and partners including events which formed part of Ullapool Feel Good Festival; Green Health Festival; The Cairngorm Big Weekend; The High Life Highland's 'Schools Out' Summer programme and Highland Climate Festival.



**Donald Mitchell** teaches visitors to the Reay Estate Open Days about Highland Mammals



**Michelle Melville** teaches crafts to visitors to the Inverness Highland Games



**Paul Castle** teaches bird box building to community members

# CULTURE & HERITAGE



## Showcase : Weaving Tales The Lochaber Story Quilt Project

Michelle Melville, High Life Highland Heritage Ranger engaged with young and old alike to create this incredible pictorial of the area in a celebration of the Scottish Year of Stories 2022.. The finished piece hangs in the Fort William library on permanent display together with an ever increasing book of stories.

100m of material, 5000m of thread, many hundreds of needles, bags of fleece and over 900 people went into creating the Lochaber Story Quilt. Each square of the quilt represents something special about Lochaber to its creator. From Rum to Kilchoan, Duror to Lochaline, Mallaig to Glencoe, Spean Bridge to Acharacle and Fort William to Kinlochleven, the 21 panels capture the wealth of stories Lochaber residents have to tell. They capture the area's history, culture and languages as well as landscapes, wildlife and people.

The Lochaber story quilt has been supported by the Year of Stories 2022 Community Stories Fund. This fund was delivered in partnership with VisitScotland and Museums Galleries Scotland with support from National Lottery Heritage Fund.





## 2022 Clachtoll Sand Castle Competition

The annual sand sculpture event at Clachtoll beach attracted a 52 entries in 2022, ranging from dolphins and mermaids to minions, giant squid and an ancient Egypt scene with pyramids and a sphinx. Organised by Andy Summers the senior countryside ranger for north Highlands, the event attracted more than 200 people on Clachtoll beach, and was celebrated as a great family day out.



## Highland Print Studio

Funded by the Scottish Arts Council, the HLH Ranger Service was involved in this art intervention project with UHI students who were struggling and needed some support. Inverness area ranger, John Orr led a walk on Ness Islands to inspire creativity, which was then used to produce etchings and prints, culminating in an exhibition at the Highland Print studio.



## Caledonian Canal

Working in collaboration with HLH Inverness Library and partnering with Merkinch Local Nature Reserve, the HLH Countryside Rangers delivered guided walks along the Caledonian canal in October 2022 to commemorate it's 200th year. Participants were able to see a scale model of a section of the canal from the Muirton Locks to the Sea Lock at Clachnaharry, all built (with a little help) by children attending the library during the summer holidays.

These popular walks allowed members of the public to learn about the history of the Caledonian Canal whilst enjoying incredible views across the Beauly Firth. They were so popular that the Inverness library/ranger walk collaboration will be repeated in 2023.



## Butterfly benches

Inverness area ranger, John Orr coordinated the installation of four new plasiwood picnic benches at Ardersier Common picnic area as well as a carved butterfly themed bench halfway along the path through the Common. Help was provided by the Highland Council Access Rangers team.



## Hanging for Nature

High Life Highland Rangers; Inverness Museum and Gallery and HLH Adult Learning delivered a Nature inspired Art & Poetry project, aimed at improvements in Mental Health and Wellbeing during 2022.



# Donate to the High Life Ranger Service

You can make an online donation using the QR code or by visiting:

<https://high-life-highland.myshopify.com/collections/donate/products/countryside-rangers-donation>



**We are looking for supporters**

If you love what we do and would be interested in discussing a larger gift, please email one of our team and we would be delighted to discuss this with you.

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