



MAKING  
LIFE  
BETTER

# COUNTRYSIDE RANGERS

Annual Review  
2024/2025



Photo: Volunteers work with the local Ranger to improve footpath access



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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) & Bunkhouses



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



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



**Kirsty Rosie**  
East Caithness  
Countryside Ranger



**Patti Bremner**  
East Caithness  
Countryside Ranger



**Katie Grant**  
Wester Ross  
Countryside Ranger



**Jenny Grant**  
Wester Ross  
Countryside Ranger



**John Orr**  
Inverness Area  
Countryside Ranger



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



**Pam Allan**  
Torrin Bunkhouse  
Warden (Skye)



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



**Donald Mitchell**  
NW Sutherland  
Countryside Ranger



**Fiona MacLean**  
Lochaber Countryside  
Ranger /Glennfinan  
Bunkhouse Supervisor



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The 2024–25 year marked a period of strong growth and achievement for the High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Service, with a notable increase in both face-to-face and digital engagement across our diverse range of activities.**

## AWARD WINNING SERVICE



from L-R: John Orr, Countryside Ranger, Imogen Furlong, Countryside Ranger Manager, Caroline Vawdry, Highland Environment Forum, and John West, Director of Culture and Learning, with the Green Apple Gold Award.

Our Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project won the National Gold Award for Education and Training in Conservation and Wildlife at the 2024 Green Apple Environment Awards.

Andy Summers, Senior Ranger for the North, was runner-up for Outstanding Employee of the Year at the HLH Staff and Volunteer Awards, recognised for his incredible work with communities and volunteers.



Andy Summers collects his staff award

Our in-person engagements rose by 10% to a total of 13,031, reflecting sustained public interest in the work of our Ranger Service. Engagement with schools remained a core strength, with 3,775 children participating in curricular outdoor learning and nature experiences with the ranger service.

Community learning saw particularly impressive growth, with engagement numbers rising from 5,382 to 8,109, a 51% increase, as more people accessed our workshops, events and outreach programmes focused on sustainability, climate action, and learning about nature and the environment.

Volunteer involvement also rose significantly, with 861 engagements recorded, up 45% from the previous year's total of 593. Feedback gathered through our customer survey showed that 1 in 5 respondents had taken part in a volunteer event, underlining the deepening relationship between the Ranger Service and local communities, with more individuals taking environmental action.

Our digital reach continued to expand through our "Nature Unveiled" online publication, which saw 91,653 digital engagements over the course of the year. This platform has provided a powerful tool for environmental education, storytelling, and widening public access to nature-based content relevant to the region.

Two successful, grant-funded restoration projects were delivered with Highland Council support. **'Puddles to Ponds'** (p11), a freshwater ecology project, gained international recognition at the 2024 International Freshwater Pond Conference. **'Food for Nature, Food for Life'** (p12) focused on orchard tree planting and was well supported by schools and communities.

2024–25 was a year of progress and innovation keeping the service relevant. By combining local action with digital storytelling, it's clear the Ranger Service is helping more people care for, learn about, and connect with the nature around them.

**Imogen Furlong**

**High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Manager**

# Impact Report

## How our Countryside Ranger Service improves lives for Highland residents

In Person Engagements

**13,031**

Digital Engagements

**91,653**

In Person Engagements

Up by

**10%**



Customer Satisfaction Level

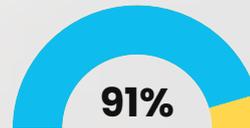


**100%**

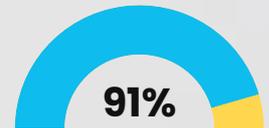
97% of customers reported our service **made life better** for them in the following ways:

- Learning new things **92%**
- Connecting with nature **77%**
- Meeting new people **73%**
- Making a positive difference for nature **63%**
- Feeling part of a community **62%**
- Improving mental wellbeing **61%**
- Encouraging physical activity **57%**

## Customer Survey Results



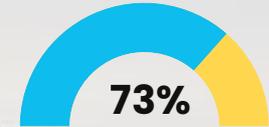
found us accessible



said we take excellent care

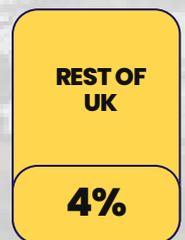
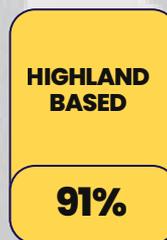


said we met or exceeded expectations



return visits

## Customer Location



The 2024–25 survey highlights the outstanding impact of the High Life Highland Ranger Service regionally, with an incredible 100% overall positive rating from customers for the service. 90% of respondents rated the service as excellent, and the remaining 10% as good. 91% said they found us accessible, and 97% reported ranger events had improved their lives; enhancing wellbeing, building community, encouraging physical activity, and deepening connections with nature. Respondents praised the rangers' knowledge, enthusiasm, and inclusivity. The service is clearly cherished and widely seen as a vital part of community and outdoor life. Customer comments are featured throughout this document reflecting the depth of appreciation and the real-world impact of the service on individuals, communities and wildlife. Further write ups on case studies referenced are available through hyper-links embedded in the report.



# STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



## EDUCATION AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers deliver a place-based service that supports key outcomes in the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP). We contribute to Community Learning and Development (CLD) by providing inclusive informal learning opportunities, skills development, and engagement with nature and heritage. Our programmes promote health and wellbeing through active, nature-based experiences. Rangers also support statutory duties by enhancing biodiversity on Highland Council sites and assisting with outdoor access monitoring and public engagement, including promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

This partnership also enables us to build volunteer capacity within communities for environmental stewardship, countryside management and operate bunkhouse accommodation for visiting groups. Through shared priorities and joint delivery, our work strengthens strategic outcomes for people, place, and nature across the Highlands.



## HEALTH & WELLBEING

Under the branding "Think Health Think Nature" the work of the Highland Green Health Partnership, , aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to promote outdoor physical activity, mental health improvement through nature connection and tackle health inequalities. HLH Ranger Service are both a strategic and delivery partner on the Green Health Action Plan



## CLIMATE ACTION

High Life Highland ranger service work strategically with both Highland Adapts, Highland Council Climate Change Team and Highlands and Islands Climate Hub to create a prosperous climate ready Highland. Rangers support community climate action to create healthy eco-systems and promote nature positive solutions to climate change.



## BIODIVERSITY

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers are an active partner in the Highland Environment Forum (HEF), which is supported by The Highland Council and Forestry and Land Scotland. The Edinburgh Declaration (2021) outlines the shared commitments of the Scottish Government, local authorities, and international partners to address biodiversity loss over the coming decade. In the Highlands, these commitments are being implemented through the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan, where HLH Rangers play a key role in the shaping and delivery of the plan.



# BIODIVERSITY REPORT



Photo:  
Ranger Paul Castle teaches children about freshwater ecology in Caithness

Grants and donations continue to support the High Life Highland Ranger Service in delivering community-based conservation and wildlife support. In 2024/25, the Nature Restoration Fund enabled biodiversity enhancements, citizen science, and habitat restoration, including installation of 19 new ponds and community-led tree planting at 15 sites.

Rangers worked with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to monitor the Highland slow worm population, and with [Butterfly Conservation](#) to protect the [small blue butterfly](#). Other actions included coordinating the first Highland-wide [pollinator counts](#), [elm tree restoration in Assynt](#), rabbit-proofing the [Farr Glebe bumblebee reserve](#), [monitoring for mink](#) and [conducting gull, badger and bat surveys](#). This work feeds into The Highland Council's statutory biodiversity reporting and helps strengthen local ecosystems while engaging communities.

One customer summed it up: **“The local rangers provide an excellent service... kind, encouraging, supportive and knowledgeable. They go above and beyond for all ages and stages of the community.”**

Short biodiversity case studies are included on the following page.



Seashore monitoring events in NW Highlands





# CASE STUDIES



## Elm Tree Planting

High Life Highland Ranger Service worked with local communities on the Assynt Elm Project, protecting Scotland's last Dutch elm disease-free wych elms by planting saplings grown from local seed beside ancient trees. Volunteers carried out remote planting and protection to ensure the survival of these keystone species, supporting rare lichens, invertebrates, and the remnants of the once-vast Atlantic rainforest ecosystem. [More reading.](#)

## Slow Worm Monitoring

High Life Highland Rangers partnered with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to launch 'Slow Worms Scotland'. Using Facebook and Instagram, we invited photo and location sightings from the public. An online winter talk hosted by the Rangers showcased the results. Records support national conservation and update distribution maps. Sightings could also be submitted by email or post for non-social media users. [More Reading](#)



## Action for Pollinators

124 volunteers took part in a week-long survey of 39 mini wildflower meadows across the Highlands, recording over 1,300 pollinators. Despite poor weather, the count showed the value of small-scale habitats and community engagement through the growing Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic, led by High Life Highland Rangers. [More reading](#)

## Farr Glebe Restoration

In 2024, rabbit grazing devastated Farr Glebe wildflower meadow in Bettyhill, threatening rare great yellow bumblebees. Led by the High Life Highland Ranger Service and funded by Species on the Edge, volunteers installed rabbit-proof fencing and one-way escape tunnels to protect this vital half-acre pollinator haven and support its recovery. [More Reading](#)



# VOLUNTEERING REPORT

Increase in volunteer  
engagements

↑ **45%**

This year saw a continued rise in volunteer participation, with **861 volunteer engagements, up from 593 the previous year, a 45% increase.** Our annual customer survey showed that **1 in 5 respondents** had moved from being a service user to actively volunteering with the service, reflecting the growing appeal and accessibility of our volunteering opportunities.

In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service successfully organised **78 volunteer events** across the region. From **community litter clean-ups, beach cleans** and **path restoration work**, local groups have played a vital role in improving their environments. We launched a monthly 'green teen' environmental group, encouraging young people to take part in outdoor action and conservation. Our citizen science work also expanded, with 124 volunteers supporting a pollinator observation event and 48 taking part in coastal Seawatch surveys for cetaceans.

One volunteer shared: **"It's great that Rangers are available to help with community events. The partnership works well as we can drum up support for events locally and the Ranger provides all the expertise."**

We extend our sincere thanks to all our volunteers, your energy and commitment are making a lasting difference across the Highlands.



- ✓ Beach Cleans
- ✓ Community Clean ups
- ✓ Footpath Maintenance
- ✓ Biodiversity monitoring
- ✓ Habitat Management
- ✓ Sessional delivery



Photos: **Footpath Volunteers Lochaber, Creating and new pond with volunteers in Fort William; Volunteer with rubbish after Beach Clean in Sutherland.**

Photo:  
Andy Summers delivers a marine mammal  
family learning session



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# COMMUNITY LEARNING REPORT

**8,109**

Learner engagements

**↑ 51%**

Increase



Pirate event at Bught Park



Clachtoll annual Sand Sculpture event



Winter Tree ID workshop

This year, the High Life Highland Ranger Service delivered 8,109 community learning engagements, up 51% from 5,382 in 2023/24. Our programmes reached all ages and stages, with a strong emphasis on inclusive, place-based learning.

Events ranged from workshops on fungi, bats, and lichen safaris, to family events such as sand sculpture, rockpooling and a popular pirate day at Bught Park.

Our heritage strand featured traditional craft workshops (such as wool and stained glass) and archaeology walks to sites like Clachtoll Broch and Clava Cairns.

We launched five new after-school nature clubs and ran a winter talk series online on topics including otters and natural dyeing. Our nature themed **'Growing Greener Communities'** workshops delivered in libraries were supported by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS).

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: **"Wide range of interesting talks/walks and, even though I've been on them again and again, there's always something fresh. Always opportunities to ask questions too."**

92% of respondents said our sessions helped improve their lives through learning, and 91% found our sessions accessible, with participants praising our inclusive approach and staff expertise. One customer told us **"I am neurodiverse, I felt welcome and included."**

Our growing programme is helping Highland communities learn, connect, and thrive.

# SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT REPORT

**3,775**

Pupil engagements



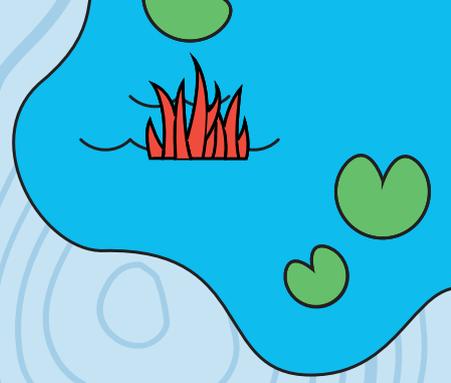
In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service engaged **3,775 pupils** in hands-on environmental education, through activities such as pond creation, tree planting, and immersive outdoor learning.

This year's schools programme "Puddles to Ponds" focused on **freshwater habitats**, exploring local species and the impacts of climate change on rivers, lochs, and ponds. We delivered sessions across Highland schools and led workshops at the **Caithness Science Festival**, using creative and practical approaches to build environmental awareness. The **Curling Heritage Project** brought together STEM learning, local history, and indoor curling, linking past and present through fun, curriculum-based activities. Pupils also took part in a freshwater ecology art competition, with winning entries now featured on the interpretation board at the restored curling pond at the Highland Folk Museum. We partnered with the Youth Development Officer at Ardnamurchan High School to support ASN pupils through the Ardnamurchan Art in Nature Project, funded by the Community Regeneration Fund. In early years, 27 nurseries learnt about tadpoles and helped name a new character for the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. We also co-designed a **Gaelic nature trail** in Ullapool with a local Gaelic medium pupils, linking place, language, and nature.

These diverse learning opportunities reflect our commitment to connecting young people with nature, climate awareness, and their local environment.



# CASE STUDY PUDDLES TO PONDS



## POST-PROJECT REFLECTIONS - SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS EDUCATION THROUGH RESTORATION PROJECT



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The 2024 'Puddles to Ponds' project has focused on the power of small bodies of water to become thriving habitats and outdoor classrooms. With the help of funding, we've created 19 new ponds and renovated one large pond. In various locations across the Highlands, from Lochaber to Caithness. While the importance of ponds for biodiversity is well known, this project highlights how these ponds have also served as invaluable tools for educating and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards.



**CENTRAL POND RESTORATION**  
at the Highland Folk Museum

**PONDS CREATED**  
in Highland Schools



**1412**  
Pupils  
engaged



## PARTNERSHIP

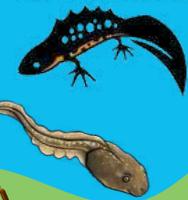
We partnered with many organisations on this project to ensure the greatest impact. The Highland Council Nature Restoration & Cairngorm Trust for Nature Resilience Funded the Puddles to Ponds Project



### NEW HABITATS INSTALLED

Pre-moulded ponds were installed at 12 school sites, and a total of 46 schools participated in freshwater education sessions. A total of 1,412 children were engaged in learning about pond health. Some schools hesitated to install ponds due to safety concerns at their particular site, but alternative education activities were provided. The enthusiastic response from both students and teachers made the project a success.

amphibian and reptile  
conservation



### NAME THE TADPOLE

27 highland nursery schools took part in a competition to name the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust's new tadpole character. The winning name was "Losgy" (a play on the Gaelic for frog) dreamt up by the children at Ullapool Gaelic Nursery. This new character joins "Newtrino" as part of ARC Trust educational resources.

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

### A RESTORED HABITAT

The restored curling pond at the Highland Folk Museum plays an important role in connecting nearby freshwater habitats like the Sawmill Pond, Loch Imrich, and the River Spey, boosting biodiversity in the Strath. The pond is located within a regenerating woodland, making it ideal for supporting species from the Cairngorm Nature Action Plan. The Cairngorm National Park Junior Rangers worked with High Life Highland Ranger Service to create a baseline species survey & featured on the BBC Landward show.

The High Life Highland Ranger Team invited students to create illustrations for the museum's restored pond interpretation panel, inspired by the wildlife in and around their own local ponds. The winning artworks have been transformed into the colourful, child-friendly interpretation board below, that now helps visitors explore and learn about the museum pond's diverse species. An exhibition at the Inverness Museum and Gallery of the original artworks is planned for 2025.

### Puddles to Ponds

Puddles are small bodies of still fresh water - not salty like the sea.  
The plants and creatures living in and around the pond need fresh water to thrive.  
The plants growing in the pond give oxygen to the water helping to keep it healthy, and animals eat these plants.  
The small insects become food for larger creatures, like frogs and bees.  
In this way, all the creatures can live happily together in and around the pond. This is called an ecosystem.  
Even a small pond will attract wildlife - why not put one in your garden?



### LIVING CLASSROOMS

Ponds are living classrooms, offering hands-on learning experiences. Highland students have had the opportunity to observe creatures like dragonfly nymphs and minibeasts up close, enhancing their understanding of freshwater ecosystems.



### 7 PONDS CREATED In Community Settings

Seven additional mini ponds were installed by community groups, expanding the project's impact. These ponds support local biodiversity and provide hands-on learning for all ages. By working together to create these small but impactful habitats, the community groups played a key role in expanding the project's reach.



# SHOWCASE



## Food for Nature, Food for Life

### Tree planting Project

The Food For Nature, Food For Life project, led by the High Life Highland Countryside Rangers and funded by £4,000 from the Highland Council's Nature Restoration Fund, set out to create mini community orchards that nourish both people and wildlife.

Over the winter of 2024/25, 78 fruit trees (apple, plum, cherry, and pear) were planted across 15 Highland sites, with support from local schools, volunteers, and community groups. Locations were carefully selected in partnership with Highland Council's Greenspace Officer to ensure trees were well placed, welcomed, and cared for.

In Melvich, five local young people planted trees and cleverly repurposed car tyres to protect them from strimmers. In Wick, students from Thurso UHI and the local library nature club dug in enthusiastically. Castle Heather, Hilton in Inverness saw a wonderfully diverse turnout, including members of the refugee community, all pitching in to create something lasting.

These trees are more than landscape features, they will in time become living ecosystems, supporting pollinators, birds, and mammals while providing future food and shade. Wildflower seeds were also sown to boost biodiversity. This project showcased local environmental stewardship and intergenerational community pride.

[Read More](#)



New community orchards can be found at Wick, Tongue, Scourie, Farr, Melvich, Golspie, Ullapool, Caol, Allness, Inverness, Spean Bridge, Claggan and Achiltibuie. With further funding we will look to expand on this project.

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT

Photo: Participants take a leisurely stroll in nature to learn about nature

In 2024/25, the High Life Highland Ranger Service continued to deliver inclusive, community-based sessions that supported mental and physical wellbeing across the region. Participants reported that engagement with the Ranger Service improved wellbeing by connecting with nature, meeting new people, learning new things, and feeling part of a community. A wide range of opportunities were offered from shorter, accessible walks to longer guided walks and hill routes. In addition we provided sessions tailored to support those managing stress, anxiety, or low mood. We also engaged older and more infirm members of the community in Caithness with a residential home visit. We actively promoted Green Health Week in May, raising awareness of how nature and the outdoors can support wellbeing. Feedback we received from customers highlights that the wellbeing benefits of our service are felt especially strongly by those living in isolation or remoter rural areas.



Parent and Toddler session at the Community Learning outdoor classroom at the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre



Field Studies workshop with Rangers

**“The Ranger events are such an important aspect of rural life – an increase would benefit so many who otherwise live in isolation.”**

In addition to in-person delivery, our digital engagement reached 91,653 interactions, through online talks, resources, and the Nature Unveiled publication, significantly extending our reach to those unable to attend in person. One subscriber wrote: **“I think the local ranger service is a very important role within the community. The writing of Nature Unveiled supports and encourages the importance of personal interaction with nature. I believe this is invaluable in maintaining good mental health and in the wider climate challenges we face”**

The Ranger Service continues to offer welcoming, inclusive, and engaging opportunities, both outdoors and online making a meaningful difference to health and wellbeing across Highland communities.



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## Ways you can support us

### Join *highlife*

Joining High Life supports our charity work to improve lives and communities, membership also gives free access to gym and leisure facilities, plus numerous discount benefits. Support us and Join High Life today!



### Book a break at our bunkhouse

Why not relax and book a short break at our bunkhouse in one of two iconic Highland locations: Torrin on Skye and Glenfinnan in Lochaber. Operated as a not-for-profit, any surplus benefits the charity. Enjoy a warm welcome from our wardens Pam and Fiona. Its the perfect getaway for groups or families. [Scan or click for more information.](#)

### Read

Discover **Nature Unveiled** our HLH Ranger online publication filled with fascinating stories, nature and heritage articles, and news from our dedicated team of Rangers. [Scan or click to read and pledge your support.](#)



### Donate

Give a one off gift to the Ranger service to support our conservation, education, and community work in the Highlands. Help us protect wildlife and sustain this unique region's natural heritage for future generations. [Scan or click to donate now.](#)



*Thank you*