



Galloway Glens

Online John Muir Award Programme 2020

Final Report

1. Outline

The Online John Muir Award programme was initiated as a response to the Covid 19 restrictions during summer 2020. The aims of the project were to:

- Actively engage with the public during Covid 19 restrictions, and provide an alternative to facilitated outdoor projects that could not be undertaken.
- Encourage and support people, especially families, to engage meaningfully and actively with their local environment during Covid 19 restrictions and beyond.

Extending the ethos of our 'Go Wild' summer project in 2019, the programme also committed to being widely accessible, free to take part in and to promote outdoor activities that are free or low cost and do not require specialist knowledge or equipment.

The John Muir Awards were chosen to provide a focus for the programme but with the flexibility for participants to tailor their activities to suit them and their chosen area. The Family awards enable all ages to participate. The John Muir Trust were keen to support the programme.

"You have a wonderful basis for an Award. It is open and flexible, which is ideal for an online group working in their own chosen wild places and I loved that there is such a high level of support"

Jenny Holmes, John Muir Award Scotland Project Officer



To meet the criteria for a John Muir 'Discover' Award, either Family or Individual, participants are required to complete 24 hours of activities that encompass the four challenge areas: to Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share wild places.

The Galloway Glens Online John Muir Award programme was designed to support participants to complete the award criteria, through direct online communication and providing a platform for participants to connect and share activities. Galloway Glens acted as the Award Provider, responsible for assessment and putting forward participants for their Award. Because the programme ran remotely with participants from different locations, each participant was encouraged to tailor their activities to their own chosen area and interests.



Although the majority of participants were living in or visiting the Galloway Glens area during the programme, some were from other parts of Dumfries and Galloway or Scotland but had a connection to the area. All based their activities at least partly in Dumfries and Galloway.

The project was conceived and prepared over a short timescale, preparations beginning mid-June for delivery from 3rd July. An end date for participation was given as 10th August, with some leeway for those taking longer to complete and record their Award activities.



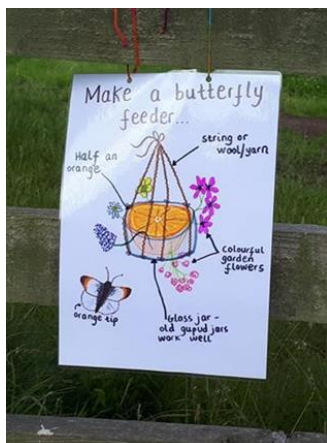
2. Key Outcomes

As a result of the programme:

- 24 people achieved a John Muir 'Discover' Award.
- 44 adults, young people and children actively engaged in discovering, exploring, conserving and sharing their experiences of local landscape and wildlife over the summer.
- Of the above, all achieved this in time spent wholly or partly within the Galloway Glens area.
- Galloway Glens has achieved John Muir Award Provider status for 2020 / 2021
- Positive recognition and feedback has been generated for the Galloway Glens from the public, other organisations / landscape partnerships, the John Muir Trust and other funders - particularly in recognition for an innovative response to Covid-19 restrictions
- A new, open Facebook group will be established for sharing local outdoor ideas, activities and information for families with a focus on the Galloway Glens area
- A series of video resources on the land and wildlife in the Galloway Glens area has been created
- A bank of ideas, activities and resources created by the participants is available as a resource for future projects

"It has been interesting how much my eyes have opened more to the 'wild' around us in terms of wildlife, food and general beauty, even though I thought I took a lot of notice before!"

(Family)





3. Numbers

Initial interest was high and achieved primarily through online / social media advertising. The number of participants moving through from interest, registration, engagement and completion reduced over time - 31% of those signing up completed their Awards, while 48% were active participants.

To put this in context, recent research on accredited and non-accredited online courses found an average completion rate of 12.6%, most ranging between 5% and 22% completion.

	Individual Awards	Family Awards	Total Awards
Initial enquiries	13	28	41
Registration requests	9	28	37
Sign-ups	6	23	29
Active participants	3	11	14 (44 people in total)
Awards completed	3	6	9 (24 people in total)

Of those signing up but not completing the online John Muir Award programme, some did not engage at all after initial registration but most made contact and cited a change in circumstances during the duration of the programme such as increased family or work commitments as the reason for their withdrawal. Some also said that, although the idea of completing a John Muir Award had initially attracted them and they found the ideas and support useful, they found that they preferred to enjoy outdoor activities without the pressure of completing the criteria.

Number of adults and children by age (including each person participating via a Family Award, some families including participants both under and over 12)

	Adults	12+	Under 12	Total
Active participants	18	5	21	44
Awards completed	9	5	10	24

“Whilst doing the John Muir Award, I discovered that coastlines and beaches can be so different and diverse both in habitat and species that live there. I will continue to explore my local area and further afield to discover new places and what secrets they hold. I have always been interested in nature since I was small and will continue to do so. I find being in nature makes me happy and peaceful. There is so much to learn and discover. When I am older, I would love to work with animals or in conservation.”

(Individual, aged 14)



4. Process

The programme was carried out by the Galloway Glens Education and Community Engagement Officer (EO), Helen Keron, and freelance Project Coordinator (PC), Mary Smith. Mary was also the project coordinator for the pilot Galloway Glens 'Go Wild' programme in 2019, which also delivered John Muir Discover awards

Time	Focus	Tasks	Who
Early June	Award Proposal	Initial contact with John Muir Trust; Award proposal completed and approval for the award programme granted	PC
Mid June	Publicity	- Graphic designer commissioned to produce an advert for the programme - Programme advertised through Galloway Glens website and social media, local press release and poster display e.g. at Tesco's - Information pack sent to those who enquired	EO with input from PC
Registration closed 3 rd July	Registration	- Registration forms designed - Registration forms sent as requested - Registration information collated	PC
End June	Facebook Group	Closed Facebook group created for programme	EO
Start July	Introduction	- Welcome and introductory emails sent - Activity Log online form created and sent - Ideas and resources information sheet created and sent	PC
Ongoing July / August	Ongoing support	- Ongoing individual email contact with participants in response to questions or problems, and for encouragement - Engagement through Facebook group	PC / EO
	Newsletters	Online newsletters created and distributed with extra ideas / resources / showcasing activities so far	PC
End July	'Checking in'	Individual emails checking in mid-way through programme	PC
Early Aug	JMT communication	Checking in with JMT to review progress	PC
Early Aug	'Finishing up'	Individual emails sent towards end of programme	PC
End date 10 th Aug	Assessment	Activity logs and other records gathered and reviewed	PC
Mid Aug	Completion	Individual confirmation of completion and congratulation emails sent	PC
End Aug	Certificates	- Certificate request form completed and sent to JMT - Galloway Glens certificates designed and completed - Certificates posted to participants	PC / EO / PC
End Aug	Feedback	- SurveyMonkey feedback form designed and sent - Verbal / email feedback gathered	PC / PC



5. Examples of Activities

Participants entered into a wide range of activities within the four Award criteria, and were encouraged to share these as they went, along with any questions or concerns. Whenever possible, ideas were suggested that built on or expanded the scope of activities in line with the award criteria, and participants linked to resources or organisations to help them with this. Some of the activities undertaken were:

Discover / Explore

- Mapping Barrhill Woods and researching its history
- Visiting new Solway beaches and recording seaweeds, rockpool fauna and seashore plants
- Exploring Loch Mitton in detail by walking around the shore, by kayak and swimming
- Revisiting a spot many times, e.g. Loch Ken shore, garden or field at end of house and observing and recording the variety and quantity of wildlife and nature they contain

Conserve

- Taking part in The Big Butterfly Count
- Making hedgehog and minibeast 'hotels'
- Rescuing and hatching snail eggs
- Litter picking and creating anti-litter posters
- Making posters detailing local flora and fauna, and showing ideas for conservation projects
- Creating bee feeders
- Joining local conservation groups, e.g. D & G Eco Warriors and Loch Ken Trust
- Carrying out moth surveys
- Carrying out wild-flower surveys

Share

- Creating poems, art works and maps and sharing online and in newsletter
- Inviting friends and family to join in walks
- Writing articles for newsletter
- Posting activities and observations online
- Making and posting you-tube video on moth trapping and moth varieties
- Creating a wild-flower identification booklet





6. Feedback

Informal feedback was requested throughout the programme and gathered both through email and the Facebook group. At the end of the programme, a link to a short online questionnaire was sent by email to those still actively participating and also to those who had withdrawn from the programme but given permission to be contacted for feedback. The link was also posted on the Facebook group.

All participants responding to the feedback survey reported being 'unlikely or very unlikely' to have undertaken a John Muir Award this summer without the Galloway Glens online programme.

All respondents agreed that as a result of participating they had spent more time discovering and exploring wild places, and also that **they were inspired to spend more time discovering, exploring and conserving wild places in the future.**



Most also agreed that they had a greater understanding of and appreciation for wild places and more awareness of conservation issues and opportunities locally.

Only half agreed that they had undertaken activities they would be less likely to do otherwise, indicating that the level of outdoor engagement was already quite high. This in a sense adds more value to the other statements, as the majority of these families and individuals were already actively engaging with the outdoors but still felt they had been inspired and gained greater understanding and appreciation as a result of participating.

The programme also attracted interest from other Landscape Partnerships, and we were delighted to share information and resources on the programme with both the Isle of Axholme & Hatfield Chase Landscape Partnership and the Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership Scheme.

"Thank you. we have really enjoyed the past few weeks. After lockdown I really wanted to explore locally and get to know more of lovely D&G. The award really focused this which has been wonderful."

(Family)



7. Considerations for future programmes

Approach

Two of the participants who did not complete the programme said they would like to have seen more of a more directive approach, with prescribed activities. However, this would have been difficult to achieve with the range of places and interests within the group, and less in keeping with the John Muir Award ethos.

Instead, it is recommended that future programmes use clear, specific examples of the kinds of activities that could be done, drawing on the work of participants this year. This should help to make a range of example activities readily available without being prescriptive, as well as to demonstrate the recording process. As stated earlier, it is worth considering the degree to which achieving the Award is the focus of the programme.

Facebook group

This was very effective and at the suggestion of participants will evolve into a public group for Spring 2021. It is definitely worth exploring alternatives to Facebook that would enable younger people / those not on social media to participate in a similar way.

Newsletters

These were time consuming for the PC and less interactive compared with the Facebook group – feedback suggested they were appreciated, and they were an attempt to involve and give a platform to those not participating in social media. However, if all participants are engaging on social media or equivalent the newsletter may not be necessary.

Online forms

Forms were designed and sent using Adobe Acrobat DC after investigating a number of platforms. The registration form sent individually through the 'Fill and Sign' application worked well. The other forms (activity log and four challenge review), sent collectively, were unreliable as online documents and were off-putting for some. In future, it is recommended that examples of documentation be given instead, and participants create their own.





Timing

Five weeks was a reasonable amount of time to ensure people had time to complete the hours required, averaging 4 / 5 hours per week to complete the Awards. However, as restrictions started to ease and work commitments increased towards the end of the summer, and with the start of school approaching, the focus began to drift and some participants found they no longer had the time to finish. In future, an end date around a week before the end of term would be more helpful, as well as a clearer indication in the initial information of the time commitment required.

Webinars and other group meeting opportunities

It had been thought to include at least one webinar as part of the programme, to provide extra input and an opportunity for participants to meet live online. However, as the programme evolved, it appeared that participants were happy with the level of engagement the Facebook group provided, and 'experts' videos that were filmed for the programme took the place of the webinar idea. If circumstances allowed, mixing online support, a Facebook group or similar, and some opportunities to meet up and participate in activities in person could be a great combination and may help to keep a larger number engaged throughout.

"We have always spent a lot of time outside as a family but the online John Muir award has definitely inspired us to get out more and properly 'see' what we have perhaps just taken for granted. By showing our friends our wild spaces, we have realised how properly lucky we are."

(Family)



8. Conclusion

Although the numbers completing the award was significantly lower than those initially signing up, the quality of participation and the enthusiasm shared with those who embraced the programme was high and more than achieved the aims of the Awards and the programme.

The programme perhaps worked best for those who had already had an outdoor focus, were used to engaging their family or as individuals with outdoor activities, had sufficient time to devote to activities and were happy to engage with the Facebook group.

It may have worked less well for those with less confidence and experience outside, or those who were unable to spend as much time supporting their families through the award. In order to better support families and individuals in this category, a more targeted and directive programme of activities may be more appropriate, and **some thought could be given to a programme that focused on bringing families together for activities designed to increase confidence and participation in outdoor activities, when restrictions allow.** This could be achieved through a blended approach of online and in-person contact.

The fact that some participants reported that the Facebook group was inspirational and a valuable support in encouraging and inspiring outdoor activity, even when meeting the award criteria was not possible, indicates that the programme has value beyond the target of completing the John Muir Award. Although the John Muir Award was a good focus for some, it is important that the activities are valued and celebrated for their own sake and there is no sense of failure associated with not completing the Award criteria.

Finally, there was some particularly pleasing work undertaken by younger participants, including artwork for posters, writing and video diaries. Building on these, the Galloway Glens could consider projects targeted at young people directly online or in-person, such as wildlife filming, photography workshops or competitions, conservation workshops or similar. Content aimed at this demographic could perhaps be done in partnership with GCAT Youth Arts, Kirkcudbright Youth Group and / or council youth work services. This could also be one way to continue to engage with young people involved previously either through the Go Wild or Online John Muir Awards programmes

Mary Smith, Project Coordinator, Nov. 2020

Thanks to participants for the use of some of their many fantastic photos

Appendices – available on request from helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk

1. Initial ideas sheet sent to all participants
2. Newsletters examples
3. Activity records - 3 example logs of activities and hours per activity