

Junior Ranger 2023 project review



Cairngorms
National Park

Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



186

Junior
Rangers

37

Partners

57

Junior Ranger
sessions

16

Ranger
services

Junior Rangers collecting twinflower

Introduction

About the project

The Cairngorms National Park Junior Ranger project is an exciting, fun and adventurous outdoor learning programme for young people aged 11–18 years based on the EUROPARC model.

The project aims to:

- Engage young people living within the Cairngorms National Park catchment area and give them the opportunity to act as advocates for the National Park.
- Increase the understanding of the work of Ranger Services in the Cairngorms National Park.
- Develop the skills and experience of young people and provide a springboard for employment in the conservation/land management sector.
- Educate young people about the climate emergency and empower them with opportunities to tackle this at a local and regional level.
- Be a leading example of a Junior Ranger Project and work with colleagues through the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association, National Parks UK and EUROPARC to promote and increase the benefits of these projects.

The project is a part of collective efforts to meet four of the National Park Partnership Plan objectives – B9 Mental and physical health, B10 Park for all, B11 Volunteering and outdoor learning and B4 Skills and training.



Above: Junior Rangers trying out kit used in deerstalking at Hill to Grill, a Cairngorms Connect community event

Partnership working

The support of the family of ranger services and related professionals throughout the Cairngorms National Park is essential to the success of the Junior Ranger project. The project is co-ordinated by the Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service and is delivered by the family of ranger services and other related professionals operating in or close to the National Park.

This partnership approach is fundamental to the programme's success; allowing Junior Rangers to benefit from a wide breadth of knowledge and experience and explore a range of sites around the Cairngorms, whilst allowing different Ranger Services and related professionals to contribute in a way that is sustainable for them. The schools programme is also reliant on the commitment of the six schools involved and their dedicated teaching staff, whilst the monthly programme couldn't happen without the support of parents.

We are extremely grateful to everyone that have helped to make the project happen this year. Thank you!



Junior Rangers clearing paths with Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Ruaridh and Park Authority Ranger Sarah

Ranger services	Other partners	Schools
Aberdeenshire Council	Able2Adventure	Aboyne Academy
Atholl Estates	Alzheimer Scotland	Alford Academy
Balmoral Estates	Badenoch and Strathspey Goldeneye Study Group	Grantown Grammar School
Cairngorm Mountain	Bumblebee Conservation Trust	Kingussie High School
Cairngorms National Park Authority	Cairngorms Connect	Pitlochry High School
Dorenell Ranger Service	Highland Folk Museum	Speyside High School
Forestry and Land Scotland	Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust	
Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service	Highland Wildlife Park (RZSS)	
Glenlivet Estate	PlantLife	
Highlife Highland	Ride in Peace Adventures	
NatureScot	River Dee Trust	
Highlife Highland	Roths Community Trust	
NTS Killiecrankie	Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA)	
Perth and Kinross Council	Sustrans	
Rothiemurchus Estate	Wildland Ltd	
RSPB Abernethy and Insh Marshes		

Schools programme

Introduction

In 2023 the Cairngorms National Park Junior Ranger project continued its work with local high schools following on from the success of 2022. The programme of activities again took shape as a series of five-day Junior Ranger 'Discovery Weeks' with the six high schools in the Cairngorms National Park catchment.

The aim of the programme is to better connect young people to nature through practical conservation work, adventurous activity and the opportunity to meet a wide range of rural workers. Participants work towards their John Muir Discovery Award and deliver a short talk or video at the end of their experience to teachers, parents, partners and peers. Most of the sessions are delivered in the Cairngorms National Park, with the Cairngorms National Park Authority funding any transportation costs or fees associated with adventurous activity (bike / canoe hire, instructor daily rates). There are 13-15 places on each Junior Ranger week, depending on the size of the school minibus, and most participants are in S2 year.



At the start of 2023 we hosted a development workshop for teachers from the six schools involved in the Junior Ranger schools programme. Here we discussed ideas and compared programmes between schools to make the 2023 as good as it can be. It was a great opportunity for teachers to network with other schools in and around the Cairngorms National Park.

Aboyne Academy Junior Rangers
building a leaky dam on Balmoral
Estate

2023 school weeks

Aboyne Academy discovery week

Leader(s)	Activity
National Trust for Scotland Mar Lodge	Deer stalking and tree regeneration
Balmoral Estates Ranger Service	Peatland restoration
NatureScot Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service	Biological surveying and land management
Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service	Visitor management, navigation, biological surveying, wildfires and cycling
Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	John Muir Award presentations

Alford Academy discovery week

Leader(s)	Activity
Dorenell Ranger Service	Wind farm visit, land management, biological surveying
Nature Scot Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service	Biological surveying and land management
Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service	Visitor management, navigation, biological surveying, wildfires and cycling
Balmoral Estates Ranger Service	Peatland restoration
Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	John Muir Award presentations



Alford Academy Junior Rangers cycling on Glen Tanar Estate with Ranger Rory

Grantown Grammar discovery week

Leader(s)	Activity
Wildland Ltd	Deer larder, estate hike and history
Grantown Grammar School	Glenlivet journey on two wheels
Dorenell Ranger Service	Wind farm visit
Grantown Grammar School	River Spey descent on canoes



Grantown Grammar Junior Rangers mountain biking at Glenlivet

Kingussie High School discovery week

Leader(s)	Activity
Wildland Ltd	Deer larder, venison BBQ, lodgepole pine removal
Outdoor Active	River Spey descent on canoes
Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service	Cairngorm summit hike and drain clearing
Kingussie High School Park Authority Ranger Service	Glenlivet journey on two wheels
Kingussie High School	Presentation day

Pitlochry High School follow on 22/23

Leader(s)	Activity
Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Map / navigation session
Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Reflective walk, canoeing on Loch Insh
Pitlochry High School	John Muir Award presentations

Pitlochry High School discovery week 23/24

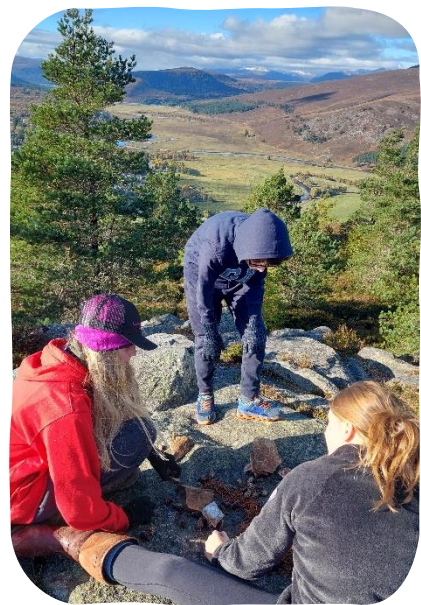
Leader(s)	Activity
NTS - Killiecrankie	Charcoal making and fence weaving
Atholl Estates Ranger Service	Habitat maintenance
FLS Ranger Service	Path maintenance
HPLCT	Schiehallion drain clearing
Pitlochry High School	John Muir Award presentations

Pitlochry High School follow on 23/24

Leader(s)	Activity
Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Map / navigation session
RZSS	Intro to Cairngorms Nature Plan species



Kingussie High Junior Rangers
with Wildland Ltd Conservation
Assistant Ronan



Pitlochry High Junior Rangers
creating mapping models
above Braemar

Speyside High School discovery week

Leader(s)	Activity
Cairngorms Connect	Deadwood and deer larder workshops
Dorenell Ranger Service	Wind farm visit
Roths Community Trust	Path maintenance
Glenlivet Estate Ranger Service	Peatland restoration, spruce regen removal and pond dipping
Speyside High School	Presentation day
Outdoor Active	Spey descent on canoes



Intergenerational tree planting - Junior Ranger with Roth's Community Trust member

Monthly programme

We are delighted that the monthly programme, open to any 11-17 year old living in and around the Park, has continued to grow since being rejuvenated in November 2021. On Speyside the group has grown so big that for many sessions we need to split it in two and the Deeside group is almost in the same position.

With the support of dedicated partner Ranger Services and related professionals a varied programme of sessions has been delivered on weekends throughout the year. As the table on the following pages sets out, the sessions have given the Junior Rangers opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge across many topics whilst helping to look after the Cairngorms.



Junior Rangers building goldeneye boxes

2023 Programme table

Month	Location	Leader	Activity	Attendees
Jan	Highland Wildlife Park	Highland Wildlife Park (RZSS)	Polar Bear enclosure improvement and self-guided walk	34
Feb	Rothiemurchus	Rothiemurchus Estate Ranger Service	Deer management and path improvement	21
	Ballater	Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Public engagement session planning and litter pick	17
Mar	Glenmore Visitor Centre	Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Navigation skills and path improvement	25
Apr	Loch Muick	Balmoral Estate Ranger Service	Peatland restoration	19
	Glenlivet Estate	Glenlivet Estate Ranger Service	Tree maintenance and constructing a willow screen	22
	Muir of Dinnet	Bumblebee Conservation Trust	Bumblebee ID and bug hotel building	18
	Drumin Wood	Glenlivet Estate Ranger Service and PlantLife	Twinflower planting plot preparation	7
May	Forest Lodge, Abernethy	RSPB and Bumblebee Conservation Trust	River kick sampling and sweep netting	30
	Balmoral	Balmoral Estate Ranger Service	Path improvement	19
Jun	Cairngorm Mountain	Cairngorms Connect	Willow walk	4
	Glenmore	Forestry and Land Scotland	Reindeer, woodland activities and outdoor cooking	15
	Glen Tanar	Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service	Tree nursery, navigation and emergency situations	19

2023 Programme table

Month	Location	Leader	Activity	Attendees
Aug	Muir of Dinnet	Nature Scot and Aberdeenshire Council	Bat and moth night	10
Sep	Badaguish	Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service, Cairngorms Connect Forestry and Land Scotland, RSPB and Able2Adventure	Junior Ranger camp	43
	Forest Lodge	Cairngorms Connect	Deer larder session / bat walk	10
	Ballater	Cairngorms National Park Authority and NatureScot	Junior Rangers at Thrive	19
Oct	Anagach Woods	PlantLife	Twinflower planting plot preparation	3
	Glenlivet Estate	Plantlife	Twinflower planting	2
	Nethy Bridge playing field	Cairngorms Connect and RSPB	Hill to grill event	10
Nov	Cambus O'May	River Dee Trust	River sampling and tree planting	17
	Highland Wildlife Park	Highland Wildlife Park (RZSS)	Enclosure improvement and self-guided walk	26
Dec	Glenlivet	Glenlivet Estate Ranger Service and Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service	Sitka spruce removal and BBQ	34

Cairngorms Junior Ranger Camp

In September, 43 Junior Rangers spent a fantastic weekend at Badaguish Outdoor Centre taking part in varied activities lead by a range of partners. They got hands-on learning about widening outdoor access through adaptive bikes and wheelchairs, built goldeneye nest boxes, explored the forest in a new way as part of an art project, created a wildflower meadow for the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre and improved their navigation skills by orienteering.

Just as importantly, they forged deeper relationships with each other, developed teamwork and resilience away from home and showed off their cooking and cleaning skills!

But what did the Junior Rangers think about it?

"I think I have gained more trust in different people and have become more connected to nature! (Even though I already am!)"

"I have met new people in a different environment and had the chance to be more independent."

"I have a broader knowledge of nature/ wildlife and it has also helped me appreciate the outdoors more."





Top: all cheering together
 Left: creating a wildflower meadow
 Right: trying out off-road wheelchairs

EUROPARC Junior Ranger Camp

We are connected to an interesting array of similar projects across Europe who are also based on the EUROPARC model of engaging young people in protected areas. Sharing experiences and knowledge is a key component of this model. So, after a hiatus due to Covid and a competitive application process, two excited Junior Rangers prepared a brilliant presentation and headed to northern Denmark for a week of discovery with Junior Rangers from 11 countries across Europe.



Junior Rangers from around Europe with their flags © EUROPARC

Katherine

"Sometimes it was challenging to get into a routine, but I made an effort to push myself out of my comfort zone, and it helped that I made some special memories and bonds on the camp. One evening I got to bring something I love about Scottish culture to our international group by sharing one of my favourite ceilidh dances, Strip the Willow! The evening felt full of laughter, joy and a shared sense of community."



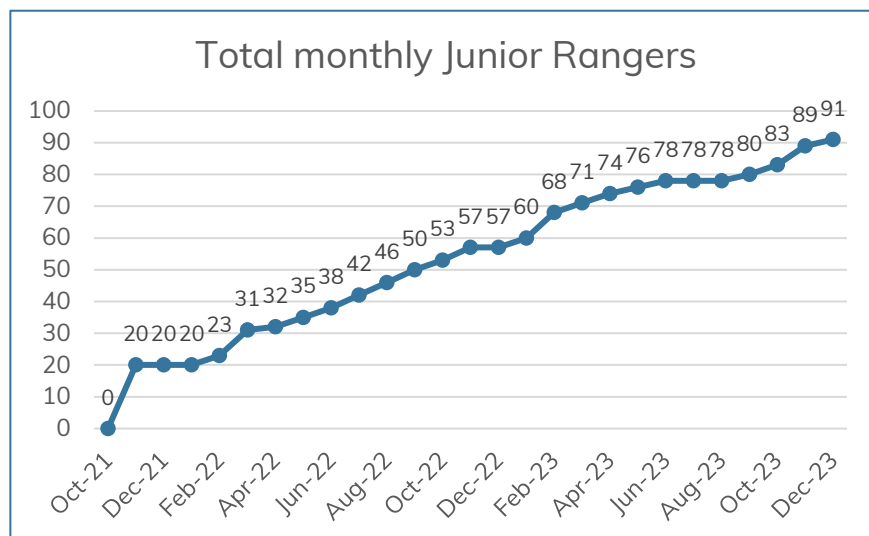
Tilly

"For me there were too many good things about the trip to highlight just one or two. I enjoyed all of it – from the food to the people and the different history and old traditions they showed us. I loved going to the point where the North Sea meets the Baltic Sea and dipping my toes in each of them."

I learned a lot from other Junior Rangers around Europe, but something that stuck out was what I learned about the different species they are protecting across Europe, and the many different ways and ideas they have designed to help and preserve the animals in their National Parks."

Growth and success

It feels like the two years since rejuvenating the monthly Junior Ranger programme have flown by. The young people involved are fantastic to work with and it has been a privilege to get to help them develop. They are a credit to themselves and brilliant advocates for the Cairngorms.



To start from zero and now have 91 signed up Junior Rangers is more than we could have dreamed of and has only been possible thanks to the support of all the ranger services and other partners that have delivered sessions.



Rangers Pete (Park Authority) and Georgia (Balmoral Estate) along with Junior Rangers (Finn, Leah and Innes) were ecstatic to receive the 2023 Scottish Land and Estates Helping it Happen Education Award on behalf of the Cairngorms National Park Junior Ranger project down in Edinburgh in September this year.

SCRA Junior Ranger Award

This year we decided to encourage the monthly participants to work towards the [Scottish Countryside Rangers Association \(SCRA\) Junior Ranger Award](#). SCRA is the professional membership body for rangers and allied professionals and exists to promote and support the work of rangers.

The SCRA Junior Ranger Award recognises commitment to rangering and to achieving competencies in a range of areas including getting to know and care for your area, caring for visitors, events and interpretation and teamwork. Those who achieve the award can go on to develop their leadership skills by taking ownership of their group and activities and mentoring newer members.

At the Junior Ranger camp this September we explained the Award and handed out journals to the Junior Rangers who wanted to work towards it. Since then, many of them have been diligently logging their Junior Ranger activity after every session and tracking their progress toward completing the Award.



SCRA Junior Ranger Award journal

SCRA Junior Ranger video competition

Two of the Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers had winning entries in SCRA's videography contest in 2023. The brief was to film a video of no more than 3 minutes in length and should promote the work of Junior Ranger groups. Winning entries from the Cairngorms were submitted by Tilly and Kata, bagging some great prizes!

For more information

Go to cairngorms.co.uk/junior-rangers or email rangers@cairngorms.co.uk



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