

RANGER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Issue 145 Winter 2024



**CMA CONFERENCE 2024: THE WILD WEST
THE HEALING POWER OF GREEN SPACES
THE LENNON LEGACY PROJECT**

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SUBMISSIONS

We welcome submissions from members for inclusion in *Ranger*. These can include:

- case studies of successful management techniques/projects
- scientific articles on relevant countryside management topics
- news from your managed area or region
- letters about relevant topics
- opinions about current issues

PHOTOGRAPHS

We are always looking for good quality images to use to illustrate our articles or simply to showcase the variety of habitats, flora and fauna in our country. We also are interested in seeing images of countryside management staff doing their everyday jobs. If you are a keen photographer and are happy to share your pictures, please get in touch.

The deadline for the next issue is **31 January 2025**.

For more information and to submit your articles and photos, email Liz Bourne at ranger@countrysideassociation.org.uk.

Opinions expressed in *Ranger* are not necessarily those of the Countryside Management Association.



COMMENT

Autumn normally ushers in a raft of conferences, seminars and various gatherings of rangers; this autumn has been no exception with the World Ranger Congress in France in October, our own CMA Conference in the start of November, followed by the 50th Anniversary of the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) Rendezvous, at the end. CMA members played their part in all of these and you’ll see just how some of these events panned out in this edition of *Ranger*.



Our own Conference gathering in Okehampton, Devon has resulted in a potential extra Board member and a new regional coordinator putting their hands up, so that’s great news! It was a truly fabulous Conference, due to the hard work and dedication of the South West team who literally pulled everything together leaving little for the Board to do, except stand back in awe! Major thanks to all involved in whatever way; a very impressive event.

As we head towards the new financial year in April, there are rumours, speculation and much worry regarding funding for Protected Areas, Local Authority settlements and grants for the farming sector. Some Countryside Stewardship Capital grants have been mainly put on hold and I know this is causing considerable dismay in my area. While we all know we have to bite the financial bullet from time to time (and nature herself seems to be the loser every time), it does not currently bode well for the 30x30 targets pledged not so long ago. We’ll see – keep a watch on this over the winter.

On a more positive note, the CMA should soon be joining the Outdoor Recreation Network (ORN) and hopefully also Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL). This gives us the opportunity to put the opinions of the ‘feet on the ground ranger’ into their discussions and policies, adding to the collective voice of many allied organisations in the sector.

Talks with The National Lottery Heritage Fund resume in the second week of December so we can hopefully give feedback on that in the next edition. The Board is trying to attract their commitment to assisting the CMA to employ paid staff for a couple of years to undertake important work for the Association, not least to develop and introduce a much-needed training programme; developed by rangers for rangers. If we can get to that stage, we’ll be coming to you, the members, to input and shape what can be offered.

In closing, I’d like to offer an official ‘Congratulations!’ to SCRA from the CMA in their 50th anniversary year. Check out their celebratory Ranger Rendezvous and maybe post your own congrats! I asked Kate Elliott, who heads up SCRA, how it all went and she said “We smashed it!” and it looks like they certainly did!

Regarding this bumper edition of the *Ranger*; big, big thanks to all those who have contributed and to editor Liz Bourne for another amazing job of pulling it all together. Once you’ve read it, pass it on to colleagues or drop a copy into a meeting or mess room; good idea too to pass it to a manager so they can see the impressive work that rangers and allied staff do in the field every day.

A very enjoyable Christmas to you all and I hope 2025 brings you all whatever you would wish for yourselves. Take good care and see you next year!

Linda Nunn
Chair, CMA

NEWS FROM THE FRONTLINE

PEATLAND RESTORATION IN THE BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG NATIONAL PARK

Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park is home to important habitats, complex ecosystems and almost 16,000 hectares of peat bog stretching across its uplands. Peatlands have a vital role to play in the fight against climate change, and they also support diverse wildlife, help purify water and can reduce flood risk.

Following recognition of the importance of peatland restoration both nationally and internationally, the National Park has developed a Peatland Restoration Strategy for the area and are aligned with Natural Resources Wales's National Peatland Action Programme.

Working collaboratively with other local agencies, as well as graziers and landowners, the National Park has secured agreement, funding and support to carry out peatland restoration across a growing number of locations in Bannau Brycheiniog.

Of vital importance to this work are the National Park volunteers who feel a close connection with the Park's uplands. A small but mighty team of around 12 dedicated volunteers offer their time and skills to help the National Park gain a better understanding of our peatlands. Established in 2022 by Assistant Conservation Officer Jason Rees, with the support of Peatland Project Officer Sam Ridge and Volunteer Development Officer Amanda Brake, the volunteers carry out surveys to help our staff identify peatland habitats in need of restoration.

While supported by our peatland staff, the project was designed to enable the volunteer team to carry out the surveys autonomously, after initial training. A small group of volunteer leaders coordinate the survey days. Volunteers record data using a bespoke recording app developed by the National Park's GIS Officer, and this is fed straight into a GIS layer. The surveys follow the All-Wales Rapid Peatland Methodology; survey areas are identified using satellite imagery showing areas where there is a high probability of peat. The volunteers validate this and collect data on depth

and condition of peat, measure areas of erosion, measure gully depth and widths, and record the variety and distribution of vegetation.

Several of these volunteers were already volunteering with other projects with Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, while others have joined specifically to help with carrying out peat surveys. Carrying out the surveys take our volunteers to some of the most remote areas of Bannau Brycheiniog, so it is essential that they are fully equipped, safe and confident in their role. Several volunteers are qualified Mountain Leaders or Hill and Moorland Leaders, others take a Hill Skills course to equip them with the skills required to volunteer safely in the hills. Volunteer Leaders also undertake additional first aid training.

Jason Rees, who has been coordinating the project says: "There has been a brilliant commitment from the volunteers who carry out important peat surveys over particularly challenging ground, with hard walks into some remote areas. They have surveyed over 600 plots so far – a fantastic achievement. This provides the

Park with essential data to help decision making on peatland restoration and ground truthing remote sensing data sets. This year the team has gone above and beyond and are growing stronger as a unit, also passing on their knowledge by mentoring university students in survey techniques in a live project."

In addition to the surveys, volunteers enjoy the opportunity to be involved in the full cycle of the National Park's peatland efforts by assisting with practical restoration work; this is a fantastic way to illustrate the purpose of the surveys they carry out. A planned field trip to visit our neighbours in the Elan Valley in 2025 will provide further opportunities for volunteers to enhance their knowledge and engagement with peatland restoration in Wales.

There is no doubt that volunteers are a force multiplier for the National Park, helping us achieve work that would otherwise be incredibly time-consuming to carry out, and there are many other benefits to involving volunteers in our work. Through engaging volunteers, we raise awareness and inspire people to understand, value and care for this unique and fragile landscape. We also know that volunteering brings a whole host of individual benefits – there is plenty of evidence that volunteering improves personal well-being and provides social connection with likeminded people. And assisting our peatland work is a tangible way for people to directly contribute to mitigating climate change.

We would like to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to the volunteers who have been involved in the project for their immense support. If you would like to talk to our team about the peatland survey volunteering project, our contact details are listed below.

Jason Rees, Assistant Conservation Officer
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Sam Ridge, Peatland Project Officer
sam.ridge@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Richard Ball, Countryside and Access Projects Officer
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Amanda Brake, Volunteer Development Officer
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COMMUNITY HELPS HARVEST AT THE NATIONAL TRUST'S FIRST MOORLAND PLANT NURSERY

This year the National Trust set up its first ever nursery for moorland plants at Marsden Moor, where essential native species like sphagnum moss are being cultivated.

The Trust's rangers invited members of the public to join them at two harvesting sessions in October, where they helped turn trays of homegrown cuttings into plug plants, ready to be planted out on the moor.

"Sphagnum moss is a wonder plant that can hold 20 times its own weight in water, and it's vital to our moorland conservation work," explained Francesca Bray, one of the rangers who has worked with the Calderdale Sphagnum Project (funded by the National Lottery) to build the polytunnel nursery.

"Now we have grown our first sphagnum plants, we would love to include the local community in helping to prepare them for planting.

"It's a great chance for those with limited mobility or fitness, and also families, to get involved in moorland conservation without having to clamber about on the moor."

Bray and her team of volunteers took the first cuttings from moorland sphagnum this spring and have successfully cultivated more than 20 full trays of sphagnum.

Each of these will provide around 70 plug plants, so this year's harvest represents a saving of over £1,000 for the charity and will cover around 350 hectares of damaged moorland in the next decade.

"The peatlands of the South Pennines have been damaged by centuries of industrial pollution, intensive drainage and overgrazing," says Rosie Holdsworth, the National Trust's countryside manager for West Yorkshire. "By restoring our peatlands, we are stopping the release of carbon into the atmosphere as well as providing a lifeline for the rare insect and bird species that are native to this moorland."

Working with partners, including Moors for the Future and Yorkshire Water, the team have worked to restore more than 2,000 hectares of the moor since 2018. Now, with the new nursery, which will expand to include other native species, that process is set to accelerate.

"The nursery means we can propagate these precious and vital plants in-house, helping funding go further, ensuring local provenance and reducing transportation miles," says Rosie. "It's a win-win situation."



RESEARCH ON FLEA TREATMENTS IN WATERWAYS

By Karin Oleinikova, Programme Manager, Heath Hands

A study led by Imperial College has discovered that ponds where dogs are able to swim at Hampstead Heath in London are contaminated with pesticides from flea and tick treatments. The two chemicals are imidacloprid and fipronil, which are known to be harmful to invertebrates. They were banned for agricultural use in 2018 due to their impact on bees and other species.

The researchers noted the need to develop a better understanding of the environmental impact of dog swimming and these chemicals, which are more prevalent in urban areas, especially close to wastewater treatment plants. They also reported that washing pets is another major source of pesticide pollution in UK rivers.

The research involved the University of Sussex, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Royal Veterinary College, in collaboration with the City of London Corporation. The findings should hopefully lead to more engagement with the dog-walking community and more informed management around the Heath's ponds and watercourses.

For more information please visit: www.imperial.ac.uk/news/256916/hampstead-heath-ponds-where-dogs-swim



From our patron ... Chris Baines The everywhere-else landscape

As a nation we have been quite good at highlighting the most special elements of our landscapes. Seventy years of National Parks is an enviable record. Most of our undeveloped coastline is recognised through a combination of local government and National Trust protection, and the National Landscapes embrace much of our most spectacular scenery. Lack of funding aside, that is quite a portfolio of public and political recognition.

However, I wonder if the prospect of new nationally protected landscapes is a mixed blessing. Of course, I welcome the recognition that a new national park or two will bring. The prospect of a series of new 'Coronation' National Nature Reserves is welcome too, and the re-labelling of AONBs as National Landscapes may help to raise their status. But what about the everywhere-else landscapes that clearly mean so much to people in their daily lives?

One silver lining to the black cloud of Covid confinement was the discovery by so many people of the pleasure they could gain from green spaces within walking distance of home. In my case, despite championing urban green space all my working life, I still discovered far more of the Black Country's nature-rich canal network and its numerous pockets of emerging urban forest during that strange period.

As well-informed landscape professionals we know only too well that protective designations have failed to save our most precious landscapes from decades of habitat loss. The UK is now officially the most nature-depleted nation in Europe, and

the loss of wildlife and ecological integrity has certainly not been restricted to the undesignated tracts of countryside. There is a risk that special labels give a false sense of well-being that masks the reality of underfunding and unsympathetic land-use management.

Thankfully there is a growing presumption against major development in these protected landscapes, but as a consequence this clearly risks creating a second-class status for the landscapes in between – the *everywhere-else* landscapes. We can see this with the routing of new infrastructure, with proposals for new settlements and the general drive for new development as a cornerstone of economic growth. Greenbelt to Greybelt is a worrying symptom of that trend. Another is the assumption that every post-industrial site can be earmarked as a brownfield development priority, no matter how wild, green and locally popular it may have become.

Not surprisingly, this two-class system is triggering a backlash. The 'love of the local' can be measured by the density of placards and posters that appear in opposition to quarry extensions, new energy infrastructure, housing expansion, highway construction, etc., etc. Such public reactions are all too easily dismissed as NIMBY-ism, and of course there is some truth in that, but they are also a clear manifestation of the value ordinary people place on their particular *everywhere-else* landscape.

The fact is that all these landscapes are precious. Most of them are shadows of their former selves – and all of them can be revitalised. The challenge is to harness the local passion for the *everywhere-else* landscape, and encourage a popular determination to bring nature back, improve access and increase understanding nationwide.

CMA Conference

2024: the Wild West

From Monday 4 to Wednesday 6 November, over 70 people gathered at Bracken Tor YHA in Okehampton, Devon, for a full programme of wide-ranging sessions and presentations themed around 'wilder landscapes' and 'wilder people'.

To give you an idea of the scope of the Conference, here's a list of the presentations that were given:

Welcome to Dartmoor National Park: Richard Drysdale, Director of Conservation and Communities, Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Dartmoor dynamic landscapes: James Sharpe, Strategic Planning and Projects Officer, Dartmoor National Park Authority.

The role of species reintroductions: Peter Burgess, Director Nature Recovery, Devon Wildlife Trust.

Wild neroche: Tristan Colaço, Forest Wilding Manager, Forestry England.

Think big, act wild: Sara King, Rewilding Manager, Rewilding Britain.

Rewilding, a personal perspective: Derek Gow.

Life on the Edge project: Nicky Bailey, Community Projects Officer and Life on the Edge Volunteering and Learning Officer; Rob Skinner, Life on the Edge Project Manager, South Devon National Landscape.

Restoring Stover Park: Eve Malster, Community Engagement Officer; Emily Cannon, Project Officer, Devon County Council

Miles Without Stiles access project: Tim Russell, Recreation and Access Projects Officer, Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Lower Otter/Pebblebed Heaths visitor management: Kim Strawbridge, Reserves Manager, Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust.

Visit the Members' Area of the CMA website to view the presentations.

Each year, we hold a raffle to raise money for the Thin Green Line Foundation UK. This year, plenty of prizes were donated and we raised £250. Thanks to Derek Evans for running the raffle so well!



Feedback from the Conference was overwhelmingly positive. Here are some of the comments:

Thanks for a really good few days at the conference. It was well organised with some great field trips. Quite an eye-opener to hear about all the different projects going on in that area.

We live in challenging times for nature and climate. However, all across the country rangers are leading positive action with enthusiasm. There are inspiring projects quietly getting on with some ambitious nature recovery, involving lots of partners and landowners as well as engaging local people. Rangers are getting on with it!

Yarner Wood was amazing. I'm going to try and emulate what they are doing, on a much smaller scale, with no budget! I've been blown away by the scale and vigour of work being done across the area. Wales is very far behind, so thank you for the kick up the butt!

I absolutely loved my first CMA event. It's been so inspiring and very educational. A much needed experience in this current climate. I will definitely be promoting CMA.

Great organisation, really interesting – great to meet like-minded people.

Congratulations on a successful conference. One of my team attended and was buzzing with enthusiasm when she returned to the office after!

Was great to meet you all and actually get to talk to people doing similar jobs. You do forget how isolated it can be in our little areas.

Ted Talbot organised a poetry competition, encouraging attendees to put pen to paper to reflect on the Conference. Here are some of the entries.

Rangerwocky by Roger Cole (with apologies to Lewis Carroll) – winning entry

'Twas misty and the Rangers bold
Did swoop and gather on the moor
All noisy were they just before ...
'till the Lindy Nunn did roar!

"Beware the Stevie Peach my son ...
His pens do squeal, and his flip charts scratch,
Beware the feedback, Ted-Ted bird
And Derek's Ranger Raffle – Snatch"

The talks were whiffling; goodly done!
The trips galumphing with misty moos
We drank deeply at the clink – clink bar
And talked the talk that Rangers do.

Three frabjous days! Callo, Callay!
We'll meet again another day

A Conference limerick

There was an apprentice ranger
Who came with a passion and hunger
She found she learnt lots
Visited lovely spots
And said, "I'd love to stay longer."

Dartmoor haiku

Beautiful Dartmoor
Sharing knowledge, trading skills,
Rangers connecting

Leaving haiku

Be brave!
Be inspiring
Be Ranger!

Conference field trips



East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Area (EDLRA): a collaborative approach to scaling nature conservation.



Plymouth Natural Grid: nature-based solutions to climate change in an urban environment.



Credit Ted Talbot.

Great Gnat's Head – NT Upper Plym Estate: peatland restoration in a challenging setting.



Credit Ted Talbot.

Winter 2024



Credit Rachel Limb.

Dartmoor Military Training Area: integrating military training in protected landscapes.



Credit Rachel Limb.



Credit Karin Oleinikova.

Winter 2024

Black a Tor Copse National Nature Reserve: the highs and lows of Dartmoor.



Credit Andrew Chamberlain.

The Lennon Legacy Project – winner of the Gordon Miller Award 2024



This year's winner of the Gordon Miller Award was announced at our conference. Find out more about the Barn Owl Trust's winning project.

In 2001, a generous legacy from Vivien Lennon enabled the Barn Owl Trust – a conservation charity devoted to conserving the barn owl and its environment – to purchase 26 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture. This land had been stripped of much of its natural richness over decades of grazing and artificial fertilisation. Not a single wild barn owl had been seen there since the 1960s. Yet with a commitment to creating 'barn owl heaven', a new vision was planned for these tired acres, beginning what is now known as the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP).

The first steps were transformative. The Trust launched in-depth baseline assessments to understand the land's current state and what would be needed to restore it. They set up monthly photographic monitoring and carried out surveys on butterflies, invertebrates, small mammals and birds, while measuring the abundance of grasses, herbs and wildflowers. By the end of 2002, they had a robust management plan in place.

Central to the project was a return to simplicity. They allowed the land to breathe by ending artificial fertilisation and changing



the way the grasslands were managed with only lenient cattle grazing by cattle in the winter months. Volunteers and staff worked to rebuild stone walls, restored ancient hedgerows and re-established a traditional orchard. Slowly, the land began to show signs of renewal. In the first years, the rough grassland started to draw back field voles – an essential prey item for barn owls.

And then, in 2005, a wild barn owl appeared. This first owl was a powerful symbol of success, the land's health finally restored enough to draw these majestic birds back. But the barn owl was only the beginning. Blue speedwell flowers began carpeting the ground, their colour merging with the yellow of buttercups, trefoils and celandines joined by the white of stitchworts and yarrow. Previously unseen species like white campion, slender mullein and musk thistle flourished, creating a new tapestry of colour and life.

Hundreds of insects and pollinators arrived, with multitudes of marbled whites, many more ringlets, meadow brown and gatekeepers, small skippers and large skippers, dingy skipper, wall brown, small pearl-bordered fritillary, dark green fritillary, silver-washed fritillary, holly blue, common blue, painted lady, small copper ... the list goes on. The field pulsed with life, buzzing with grasshoppers and crickets. Swifts, swallows and house martins filled the skies, feeding on the insect abundance.

The ripple effect continued. Before long, roe deer, badgers, foxes and even an otter in the pond had made the LLP their home. Birds of prey, like peregrine falcons and hobby, began to visit as well. It was clear that Vivien Lennon's legacy had ignited a remarkable change that has exceeded all expectations.

This revival is fuelled by the dedication of volunteers, who bring energy and commitment to the LLP from across the West Country. More than 20 regular volunteers now work on the land, not only to help it flourish but also to learn conservation techniques like hedge-laying, scrub clearance and orchard management to name a few. Team-building days bring corporate groups to the land as well, and each visitor becomes part of the LLP's ongoing story.

Throughout the year, the Trust also invites the public to share in the LLP's beauty through guided nature walks. Bird, butterfly, wildflower and dawn chorus walks allow people to experience the LLP as a reserve for both wildlife and community. It also provides a fantastic opportunity for the conservation team to spread their knowledge of the habitat management with landowners, influencing the wider landscape.

None of this would have ever been possible if it wasn't for the initial legacy left by Vivien Lennon – it was her generosity that has enabled the whole project and for this, we are truly grateful.

DEAD HEDGING INSTALLATION AT BREARY MARSH – A JOURNEY INTO NATURE CONSERVATION, SUSTAINABILITY, OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

By David Preston, Countryside Ranger, Jodie Roberts, Conservation Officer, and Michelle Glover, Outreach and Learning Manager

Breary Marsh Local Nature Reserve is in Bramhope, North Leeds, adjacent to Golden Acre Park. It contains the most diverse example of wet alder wood and associated fen communities in West Yorkshire. Natural England designated Breary Marsh as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1979, providing clear land conservation objectives, and legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Natural England regularly audit the site to ensure favourable conditions are being achieved, identifying conservation management, preserving healthy habitats and features. Leeds City Council Breary Marsh and the surrounding area including Paul's Pond and the woodland was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1992. Collectively, the site presents with unique challenges to conserve, protect and enhance it.



Breary Marsh is made up of oak, birch woodland and alder carr; natural floodplain habitats. During the medieval period until the late 19th century, this type of habitat was more common and covered areas into the centre of Leeds. Historically the site was managed by a mixture of grazing with cattle and sheep, and traditional woodland management such as the coppicing and pollarding of trees for building materials, heritage crafts and wood fuel.

Access to the site and to Paul's Pond is by bridleway, (part of the Leeds Country Way) and a new bridge has been constructed by the public rights of way team. The site contains a range of interpretation panels and is well signposted to educate, inform and guide the public.

Breary Marsh has become increasingly popular over the last ten years. Increased public footfall, particularly during the Covid pandemic when people were trying to keep to social-distancing rules, has resulted in damage to the ground flora by ever-widening desire lines. Areas once abundant with bluebells have been eroded away with new paths leading into the protected, previously undisturbed wet woodland and marshland habitat. This area is dangerous to walk in due to the depth of mud and water. Other negative impacts include the increased spread of invasive plant species such as Himalayan balsam, and disturbance to animals such as amphibians, mammals and birds.

An increase in litter and fly-tipping were noted on site during the pandemic. Bins are situated onsite for members of the public to use and are regularly emptied by Golden Acre Park staff. The Countryside Ranger Team gain extra support from volunteers who help with litter picking within habitat-protected areas.

Senior Countryside Ranger Dan Malster, Countryside Ranger David Preston, Conservation Officer Jodie Robertson and Woodland Officer Justin Williamson met onsite in 2021 to discuss habitat management plans. They identified the best way

forward to protect the nature reserve and mitigate the damage from desire lines and help Breary Marsh regenerate naturally for future generations to enjoy.

Various sustainable lines of enquiries were investigated including building wood fencing, establishing hedgerows, etc. alongside the ever-increasing issue facing most local authorities during the financial crisis – dwindling budgets. The decision was taken to construct a natural boundary fence – a dead hedge! – using arisings (cuttings) from coppiced, thinned and pollarded wood, left from routine management of the site. Dead hedges are wonderful habitats, providing hiding places and nesting habitats for all sorts of creatures, as well as food for insects. Tangled mazes are perfect hideaways and shelter for wildlife; birds such as blackbirds, robins and wrens to nest and forage, small mammals also use the area for shelter, such as hedgehogs and wood mice.

During the last five years, we have constructed the dead hedge boundary using material from habitat management work, while leaving as much as possible standing or fallen deadwood habitat. This has provided valuable learning activities for our volunteer groups, Friends of Breary Marsh, Meanwood Valley Volunteer Rangers, Leeds Wildlife Volunteers, corporate groups from National Highways Agency, Stickyeyes Digital & Content Marketing Agency, Mace, Environment Agency and youth and school groups, and a valuable opportunity to recruit new volunteers. We have installed some interpretation signage explaining how significant the installation of the dead hedge can be and why it is needed.

Collectively, the project has provided valuable learning opportunities in nature conservation and cost-saving techniques for all Leeds City Council colleagues, including our horticultural apprentices and volunteers. Dead hedges are a positive way of guiding the public to stay on the bridleway, while reducing desire lines, discouraging people from walking across sensitive habitat, thus protecting wildlife.



Diversity and green spaces - a new study



Three years ago, we ran an article by Tao Jaiyesimi in *Ranger* about racial diversity in the countryside and experiences of being a person of colour visiting our green spaces. Earlier this year, researchers from the University of Bedfordshire and the Chilterns National Landscape released the results of the largest UK study on how diverse communities engage with green spaces and the countryside. Have things moved forward?

The study focused on Luton and Dunstable and found that only 33% of participants visited green spaces weekly. Older individuals, those facing deprivation, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds were revealed to be the least frequent users. Luton is a very diverse town, with a population of 225,261 with a 54.8% non-white majority in the town (combined). The largest ethnic group is Asian, Asian British at 37%; the black ethnic group makes up 13.2% of the population. The Other white category, which includes people from Eastern Europe, is now 3.5%, an increase driven by Romanian migration to the town. Dunstable has a population of 40,627, with a South Asian population making up 6.3%, black ethnic group 4.7%, mixed heritage backgrounds 3.5% and other ethnic groups 1.2%.

Fourteen focus groups, nine interviews with community representatives and a community survey generating 906 responses were involved. The objective was to ascertain the current level of engagement with green spaces and the countryside; understand the barriers and enablers for accessing green spaces and the countryside; and to co-create



sustainable, scalable activities which overcome the identified barriers.

The report makes for interesting reading. Just as Tao reported back in 2021, some participants reported that they feared racism and discrimination when visiting green spaces, often in the form of microaggressions like 'looks' and dogs being let off leads to scare people.

The key findings included a limited awareness of green spaces and the countryside, and barriers including a lack of essential facilities, concerns about racism and discrimination, anxieties about unleashed dogs, and worries about the costs and availability of transport.

The Pakistani and black Caribbean participants use green spaces significantly less compared to Indian participants. Muslims had the lowest use of green spaces, which was

significantly less than participants who self-identified as Christian, Hindu or Sikh. The study's authors propose that they pilot a collaborative-targeted outreach programme (CTOP) for access to green spaces and the Chilterns countryside with ethnically diverse Muslim communities in Luton and High Wycombe, where they are the largest ethnic group. The results can then be used to inform further CTOP approaches with other communities.

Dr Elaine King, CEO at the Chilterns National Landscape, spoke about the study's findings and emphasised the need for inclusive access to the Chilterns landscape. She said: "The Chilterns is a very special landscape, and everyone should be able to access and enjoy all that it has to offer. At a time when so many inequalities exist in society, the results of this study provide an opportunity to improve both people's enjoyment of the countryside, and the

positive effects it can have on their health and well-being."

Reading the report, there are echoes of Tao Jaiyesimi's words in 2021, "The countryside IS open to all but is it welcoming to all from diverse ethnic backgrounds?" Director of the Institute for Health Research at the University of Bedfordshire, Professor Gurch Randhawa, offers some optimism: "Working with diverse communities, we want to co-create ways to increase access for under-represented groups to green spaces and the Chilterns countryside." Let's hope that this can act as a template for further-reaching changes.

The report can be accessed on the Chilterns National Landscape website, www.chilterns.org.uk, under flagship projects.

The healing power of green spaces

By Colin Houston, Volunteer and Engagement Manager, Hampstead Heath

WE ARE DEVELOPING AN EVER-DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW BENEFICIAL TIME SPENT OUTDOORS IS FOR OUR HEALTH. WHILE THERE ARE LOTS OF CAMPAIGNS AND AWARENESS, SUBJECTS LIKE TRAUMA, MENTAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY CAN BE DELICATE SUBJECTS TO ADDRESS. MOREOVER, IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMMES TO ADDRESS WELL-BEING ISSUES CAN BE COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING AT OUR RESPECTIVE SITES OR AREAS OF WORK.

We're broadly aware that levels of stress, isolation, anxiety and depression are high and increasing in many parts of society. Many people with conditions such as autism or learning disabilities are at increased risk of suffering poor mental health. A record 3.8 million people in England alone were in contact with NHS mental health, learning disability and autism services over the last year, up almost two fifths compared to before the pandemic. It's estimated that 1 in 5 people under the age of 25 have a mental health disorder.

Physical health is also an issue, with estimates being that by 2030 the population will be 35% 'less active' than it was in the 1960s. Low physical inactivity is associated with 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and is estimated to cost the UK £7.4 billion annually (including £0.9 billion to the NHS alone). We couple mental and physical health together under the term 'well-being' – particularly as regular physical activity decreases your risk of depression by 30%.

A study in *Nature* (2019) found that people who spend an average of two hours or more per week in nature are more likely to report being in good, or very good, health. Children spending more time in nature is associated with better health, increasing physical activity,

well-being, and mental performance (Natural England 2023) and it's estimated that the health benefits from outdoor recreation are valued at around £445 billion. However there's been a significant drop in the number of people visiting green spaces, with 1.1 million people fewer gaining health benefits across the UK (ONS 2023).

Access to green space as a resource for well-being is not straightforward: over 38% of the population lacks access to green space (measured as within a 15-minute walk). For people in urban areas, with lower incomes and from minority groups this is higher.

You may already have heard of terms like 'ecotherapy' and 'green social prescribing', however using such terms can be problematic (the therapy/prescription part anyway), and therefore here at Hampstead Heath we've coined the term 'health connections' to provide an umbrella reference term that enables us to develop ongoing collaborations with a range of stakeholders, including charities, local social care providers, NHS departments and networks of GP surgeries among others.

On Hampstead Heath, we've trialled and rolled out several Health Connection initiatives. With a 'walk on the Heath'

being almost a dictionary term for North Londoners, we've developed a range of organised Health Walks for the general public. Volunteer-led, they were started by the Ramblers and our local authority, catering for varying fitness levels (different length/time). We also run a couple of ranger-led walks each month on specific themes (everything from bats to butterflies, or geology to nature photography). More recently we've launched a regular women's-only ramble, responding to feedback, and identifying that this group, and specific sub-groups, feel more comfortable exercising in female-only surroundings. Importantly, all these walks are free, running on different days of the week, to help reduce barriers to participation.

More specific interventions around addressing poor mental health include free bi-monthly forest bathing (nature mindfulness) sessions with trained practitioners. In autumn 2024, we launched a new targeted mindfulness programme for parents or carers of children experiencing poor health, in partnership with a local hospital and well-being practitioner. We also offer chaperoning for visitors with mobility issues, or who may be lacking confidence to access our activities or leisure facilities. Often, something simple, like a friendly face meeting you 'off the



bus', really helps people take positive first steps to addressing their health and well-being issues.

One of our volunteers recently wrote this blog about the health benefits she has experienced from taking part in our programmes: www.heath-hands.org.uk/blog/hampstead-heath-and-mental-health

In addition to running our own programmes and activities, with Health Connections we can also signpost people to our on-site Parkrun, sports clubs, swimming and cafes. A post-activity cuppa and cake (and socialising) has a big part to play in improving well-being and reducing social isolation! Cold water swimming (so all year-round in the UK!) is being shown to provide huge benefits to people's health, and you can find local groups online or ask your local lifeguards for advice.

We also spend a significant amount of time meeting and supporting local community groups to run activities on their own terms. These groups include local Mind groups, young carers groups, those representing minority communities, SEN schools and many others. These ongoing connections and relationships allow different sections of the community to get involved in ways appropriate to themselves.

One aspect that is still in its early stages is the development of more formal links to NHS and other well-being services – green 'social prescribing' remains difficult to define, fund and quantify. To contribute to developing learning in this area, we've been working with the UCL Medical School (associated with large London hospitals, such as the Royal Free), to run nature-based sessions for their medical students, showcasing the benefits that can be reaped for patients (and for the students themselves) from non-medical approaches. This will hopefully feed into the longer-term development of this area of work within the healthcare sector.

In addition, here in London, Natural England has been piloting a range of health-related initiatives, including an annual Happier Outdoors Festival, which launched in 2023 to bring social prescribers together and provide those delivering 'health connections' programmes a focus, so we will also be feeding into those discussions.

While writing this, it became apparent that we, as professionals in the green sector, are often promoting or setting up initiatives for our visitors, volunteers or the general public, but it's also important to look inwards: it's worth acknowledging that working in our sector isn't a guarantee of good health and that many colleagues suffer from a range of well-being issues.

Recently, Hampstead Heath and the wider City of London Corporation's Environment Department has been prioritising staff well-being. A roll-out of Mental Health First Aid training across teams, changing the focus of the traditional 'sports clubs forum' to become the Sports and Wellbeing Forum, and promoting its Employee Assistance Programme are all valuable developments. Staff have also been encouraged to attend suicide-prevention training, and the excellent (free) resources on the 'Stay Alive' app are worth a look.

Finally, with winter sometimes being a particularly challenging time for people, the leading charities have a number of awareness days and campaigns. These can be a good hook for awareness, communications or team meetings. Here's a selection over the coming months:

- Children's Mental Health Week – 5 February
- Time to Talk Day – 6 February
- Social prescribing day – 14 March
- Mental Health Awareness Week – 12 May

For more information on some of what we do in terms of Health Connections on Hampstead Heath please visit: www.heath-hands.org.uk/health-connections

Wilder Melbury and the Melbury Valley: 2021–2024, the journey so far

By Clive Whitbourn, Area Ranger, North and West Dorset Team, National Trust

Scene setting

Melbury Wood is a 74ha block of woodland near Shaftesbury in North Dorset. A former Forestry Commission (FC) beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) plantation, with drifts of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra*) which was planted as a nurse crop, it was planted in 1947 on common land that was once chalk grassland permanent pasture. Purchased by the National Trust in late 2019, it adjoins the Trust's Melbury Down, a 95ha SSSI, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Regionally Important Geological site (RIGS), and Win Green plantation, a 19th-century two 2ha beech hanger of coppiced beech. Melbury Down is prime north-facing downland featuring steep scarps and coombs centring on a long valley. Melbury Wood and Melbury Down are set within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape.



Forestry Commission enclosure plot, with evidence of pig rootling in the foreground. Photo credit: Clive Whitbourn, NT Images.



Adonis blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*). Photo credit Clive Whitbourn, NT Images.



Mangolitza cross rootling in Melbury Wood. Photo credit: Clive Whitbourn, NT Images.

In October 2023 two Mangolitza cross gilts were introduced

Forming part of the Fontmell and Melbury Downs estate is the largest contiguous chalk grassland site to be found anywhere in the UK. Its genesis came from purchasing a series of downland holdings as part of a public appeal dating back to 1977 in memory of Thomas Hardy.

The purchase of Melbury Wood by the Trust coincided with an era of opportunity for managing our woodland habitats in a way that was not possible previously. Landscape scale is the buzz word we hear, and it makes complete sense to become bigger, better and joined up as Sir John Lawton famously said in the Lawton report from 2010.

There is increasingly a move in land management towards managing our vulnerable semi-natural habitats with natural processes, as we have seen at the Knepp estate in West Sussex. The results of embracing elements of the natural processes toolkit means we can strive for better, more natural gains

with emergent properties becoming the measure of success.

The zeitgeist in the countryside is letting the land do what it naturally wants to do with impact and dynamism provided by grazing, rootling and browsing animals, reducing our intensity of intervention, and increasing both sustainability and diversity over time and linking in with our neighbours through Farmer Cluster Groups. Creating wood pasture and encouraging scrub species to thrive and become 'managed' by grazing animals, where appropriate, is seen as a method to increase biodiversity and stabilise our soils to lock up carbon. In this project we envisage the creation of a version of a generic New Forest wood pasture with veteran beech trees, glades, scrub and wallows, teaming with bird, plant and insect life.

In an era when trees are being planted across the land to help mitigate climate change, here in North Dorset we have been taking a different approach: creating wood pasture, by felling trees to create Permanent Open Space as classified by the Forestry Commission, with as minimal intervention as possible. Timing is everything. The previous owner had the wood for more than 30 years and had at numerous times discussed selling it to us, with the aim of leaving a legacy for wildlife to flourish. The wood is within an area of large traditional estates with driven game and commercial forestry being at the core of their ambition, balanced with space for nature alongside.

There were caveats in place when we purchased the wood including not actively publicising the purchase to avoid it being overloaded with visitors. This included no social media or online presence, which has been a unique experience in many ways. The transition from private to Trust ownership was handled slowly and in a leisurely way, initially indicated only by the occasional sight of the ranger's liveried Land Rover. The Trust's ubiquitous classic Omega entrance signs were installed a few years after purchase.

Small numbers of local visitors have long been aware of the wood's existence prior to Trust ownership as it is former common land, and public access was always made clear through signs. As in many places, numbers increased during lockdown and have remained higher. It is remote in the sense that you must be committed for a notable walk with parking limited to an often fly-tipped



Melbury Valley. Melbury Down and Melbury Wood. Looking west to Melbury Hill. Photo credit: Clive Whitbourn, NT Images.

layby which is uninviting and comes with risks of occasional car break-ins. But for many the positives far outweigh the negatives.

The keys were formally handed over in early 2020. Not long after, the pandemic hit, the first lockdown began and the world changed. During this time, an opportunity arose to prepare the first of many iterations of a FC Woodland Plan spanning ten years in the usual format.

Fortunately, there was a useful plan produced previously by an independent and well-respected local forestry consultant which made the process far easier with data and historic management to work from – including detailed biological reports highlighting some rare, surprising and interesting species including yellow birds' nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) and greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*).

From this earlier plan we learned that the uniform lines of beech, planted in straight rows, had been planted with the help of a crawler tractor by two Forestry Commission forest workers who had apparently returned from war service, arriving on a motorbike each day to toil with the land in an era recovering from war and a drive to produce timber aligned with what was then the Forestry Commission's core purpose.

The first thinnings were carried out back in the 1980s, by Fountain Forestry. Later management in the 1990s included felling to create wider woodland rides, glades and clearings once the woodland had passed into private ownership. These glades turned out to be of such high quality that in 2009 they were designated by Dorset Wildlife Trust as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), which although not a legally binding designation is still significant.

These herb-rich chalk grassland glades are home to the only known woodland colony of Adonis blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*) butterflies in the UK and are found along the main east-west ride which runs from end to end of the wood. Rare orchids such as the white helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) can be found along the woodland edge, with herb-rich grassland originally being grazed by fallow deer (*Dama dama*) and stray sheep over the years.

A pond was excavated on the lower boundary where the hydrology is naturally low lying and wetter, which always struggled to retain water despite the use of geotextiles and much trial and error, now becoming ephemeral ponds and a wallow for both deer, cattle and pigs after periods of sustained wet weather.

Bat and bird boxes were installed across the wood, which has started an ongoing bat survey by Dorset Bat Group since 2008, with the group now maintaining them. The most ambitious creation has been the building of a bat adit or cave hidden below ground created by cut and fill, with concrete rings creating the structure and entrance to this hibernation chamber, welded shut with metal bars and located in the most remote area of the wood.

The vision

Starting from an almost blank canvas, the plan sets out to create a wood pasture over the coming decades through coup fells, felling to widen existing glades and to create woodland scallops through a selection system under a thinning regime.

Replacing fencing of the boundary was also a key challenge to establish grazing throughout the site. 'No fence' animal collars were initially considered and trialled but at the time the signal and satellites available for them to function effectively were not reliable, so it was

back to the drawing board and physical stock-proof fencing for now. Timing as already mentioned is key. Farming in Protected Landscapes FIPL grants were opened for application (early 2022) with our local Cranborne Chase National Landscapes team, which we applied for at speed after considering the options for fencing specs and succeeded in winning a generous grant towards the installation costs, balanced with internal funding from an internal Centrally Restricted Fund.

We consulted our colleagues at the Trust in Purbeck who manage, in partnership with other organisations, the Purbeck Super NNR. They had erected a new stock-proof netting which is 80cm shorter than the standard 100cm net, installed with an additional barbed wire strand below and running parallel with the top wire of the netting on which they had been advised along with the RSPB and Natural England (NE). We also chose to install this style of fence, along with an electric fence, in the valley/woodland edge with Melbury Down to allow flexibility when felling and to make it less hazardous to deer crossing.

The 6km combined electric/chestnut/stock fence went in under a tight deadline, with issues becoming known about boundary ownership/replacing the fence boundary like for like and shortages of materials' availability following the pandemic. A tree shear was used to high prune overhanging branches to make way for the contractor's tracked post bumper and flail, which although brutal



Aberdeen angus browsing nettles with Digit animal collar. Photo credit: Clive Whitbourn, NT Images.

We obtained a grazing licence for the provision of grazing services for ten in-calf Aberdeen angus cows

proved to be cost effective. The fence has been a mixed success with further learning gained from it being in place (see the spring 2024 Ranger article regarding deer and fencing for more details).

After completing the necessary applications for Annex 1, consent from NE, a water supply was installed into the wood to supply two troughs suitable for both cattle and pigs, which required high pruning from the overhanging beech trees to allow a tracked tractor to mole-plough and pull in both the blue pipe and water tape in one operation over a two-day period from the nearest supply on Melbury Down.

Around the same time, we were starting to get closer to signing off a Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement which after many revisions and amendments was finally signed off in 2023, which includes options WD2, WS1 WS3, to maintain woodland to support biodiversity, access and landscape value, creating 2.34ha of permanent Open Space.

Now that fencing was in place and with buy-in from our existing neighbouring farm tenant, we looked at ways to fulfil our grazing ambition. Coincidentally at that time the Trust produced a Woodland Pasture toolkit, which was helpful in setting out a rationale that we could use to inform the public about our ambition for the wood and increasingly the wider landscape which led to the Wilder Melbury and Melbury Valley project which has grown organically in the past two years (more of this later).

Using some of our CS payments in June 2023, we obtained a grazing licence for the provision of grazing services for ten in-calf Aberdeen angus cows provided by our existing neighbouring tenant now acting as a contractor. Each cow was fitted with a Digit animal GPS collar to help aid and reduce daily stock-checking time. The collars are useful although not always accurate owing to atmospheric, low cloud and poor signal issues, but it was still felt by the grazier to be successful enough to renew the annual licence for future use. To support the cattle grazing and our longer-term objectives we produced information panels at all three entrances to the wood, with the text checked by an internal Trust tone-of-voice specialist to reach as wide

an audience as possible. Our initial drafts were heavily edited and amended which was a useful experience.

The grazier was initially sceptical as to the amount of available grazing available for ten cows in the wood and they were selected in the hope that they might lose some weight – in the event, the cows increased their daily live weight gain during those first three months which was a surprise to all! Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) became a staple browse, and their cowpats reflected the fibre they were consuming in fawn-coloured pats dotted throughout the wood. With the cows' positions available to view on our work phones, the dynamics of the herd were interesting to see as individuals peeled off on their own and broke into small groups. They were relaxed, with plenty of choice in diet and shade or light. No issues arose and the same has happened in this year's (2024) grazing.

In October 2023 two Mangolitza cross gilts were introduced to the wood, provided by the same grazier, and contracted to provide rootling services for three months. Pigs add a whole new dynamic. They are our ecosystem engineers. Never a dull moment. They were introduced to the wood by penning them within a small electric-fenced enclosure, with a sty created from an old lfor Williams canopy. The first night they broke free, caused by deer running through the wood and disturbing the fence, and they even escaped the wood via a kissing gate which quickly had to be adapted.

Initially they struggled to gain weight, but this changed after the first month as they became more adept at rootling out food where the turf and soil was deepest in the valley bottom, grassland areas and tracks. They made the wood feel like it was a wilder place with the unknown expectation of when and where they might appear and follow you. Their presence in the wood soon got around and visitors started to make special trips to see them, which caused us some challenges and resulted in the need to be explicit in our signs at entrances, expressly asking visitors to not interact with them. Their rootling was impressive, and we hope they will create a seed bed for scrub species, which are desperately needed for habitat diversity. We are monitoring the results using an enclosure plot and fixed-point photography surveys, but it is too early to say whether they are making an impact.

Six months after they left, evidence of their rootling is difficult to trace, and

hence in their first year their impact has been positive rather than damaging as some feared. Rare species such as the rare yellow bird's nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) were a concern, which a survey has found have not been affected by either pigs or cattle. At the time of writing (late November 2024), two new younger gilts have been introduced, so all bets are off as to how they will fare over the coming months to Christmas and the New Year.

Monitoring as mentioned has been a mixture of transects, within fenced off enclosure plots and at fixed external locations to monitor the impact of grazing animals as specified by the FC, installed as capital works. We also carried out counts of yellow bird's nest spikes, and a grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) transect which we have carried out and have contracted out to the setting, checking and dispatching of grey squirrels caught in live cage traps – the control has been successful after a later start, with traps being easily moved, and a total of 156 have been caught in the first season.

Deer management is also under way with a population of over 200 fallow deer (*Dama dama*) thought to be using the wood (taken from an early morning survey in October 2022) with staff and volunteers placed throughout the Melbury Valley within the wood and on the down to record the time of sightings with the results being cross-referenced later.

Both the squirrel and deer lethal control management and rationale for control is based on evidentially negative impact to the target species and habitats and based upon strict compliance to the organisation's Wildlife Management Policy.

Having a licensed deer stalker is a useful presence in the wood, discouraging commercial truffle foraging and other undesirable activities taking place, and eyes and ears on the ground. He carries out walked-up stalking in the early morning and late evenings throughout the season. Removing carcasses in such a remote location and on steep woodland is challenging.

Through the local Farmer Cluster group meetings, exchanges of deer numbers and sightings are helpful to create a joined-up approach to deer management. This has been possible through frank conversations about the numbers culled – often this is not discussed and is not so positive for the management of the herd.

The cluster has also funded one tawny owl (*Strix aluco*) and one kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) box which were installed in June 2023. They await their first occupants!

The creation of 50 standing deadwood beech (by ring barking) was carried out and funded as part of the previously mentioned FIPL grant and an additional 27 selected trees were haloed to create the veterans of the future as part of our CS works.

Felling of 600 cubic metres of beech is planned to take place between 2025 and 2030 now that complications with felling licences and access tracks have been resolved. The 16 waney edged scallops in the valley and eight internal rides scallops have all been marked and plotted, and the ride and glade widening will be marked in early 2025.

A local NPTC/Lantra-approved trainer in chainsaw operations has a licence to carry out aerial cutting throughout the wood. Working to an agreed specification, this has been useful for opening tracks and rides, allowing experimentation with pollarding and deadwood creation adjacent to glades, and improving accessibility for tractors and estate vehicles at no cost to ourselves.

Zone 1 selective ride flailing forms part of the annual work programme, ensuring that emerging scrub species are marked to allow them to grow on, while the hemp agrimony that is dominant along the main ride is managed, with follow up trampling taking place by cattle.

Conclusion

It is early days still but the prospect of scoping for even more ambition to extend Wilder Melbury and the Melbury Valley into the adjoining Trust holding at Melbury Down to create a bigger, better, wilder, more diverse landscape is empowering. We aim to achieve more for climate and nature, enriching local visitors' experience of wildlife and enabling them to connect with the nature on their doorstep.

We have been sharing our experiences with land management/nature conservation NGOs, neighbouring landowners, and internally with local Trust teams, as well as running a training day for the CMA on 17 October this year.

At the time of writing, we have prepared an internal client brief and are scoping to widen the project to conduct a pig trial for a short pulse on Melbury Down.

This will require a NE Habitats Regulation Assessment, a Likely Significant Effect (LSE) stress test and substantial baseline survey using a low flying UAV or drone to film at high resolution before and after pigs pulse on the trial area, as well as commissioning a biological survey with a view (subject to permissions being granted from NE) to start in the autumn of 2025. If successful, this will pave the way for a longer-term plan to pursue a single holding throughout the Melbury Valley and further afield as future opportunities arise eventually removing all internal fences in a landscape of free-roaming cattle and pigs – and in time, perhaps ponies in a species-rich diverse wood pasture with chalk grassland scrub mosaic. The introduction of pine marten (*Martes*) to help the occasional visiting goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) to control grey squirrels is certainly a strong consideration. We envisage becoming more sustainable, limiting intervention except when necessary, locking up carbon in a landscape that is dynamic and adaptable for the challenges our world faces in the 21st century.



1950 RAF Aerial of Melbury Down and area prior to planting. Image credit: Dorset Explorer Local Government House Ltd; and 2024 aerial image, Google Earth.

Europarc International Junior Ranger camp



By Imogen Hammond

In July, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (CRDV) were proud to host the 20th annual Europarc International Junior Ranger camp.

The CRDV has two Young Ranger groups, one in the Clwydian Range run by me and one in the Dee Valley run by Countryside Ranger Sam Langdon. When we were asked to host, we knew it would be a big undertaking, but couldn't have guessed how good the week would turn out to be!

The camp was an opportunity for Young Volunteer Rangers from countries around Europe, between the ages of 14 and 17, to come together to volunteer, share stories and have fun in a designated landscape. The programme of events allowed Junior Rangers to get involved in inspirational activities, learning by doing and helping each other and the protected area. We were hosted in Bryntysilio Hall, based in the stunning Dee Valley, who as well as providing accommodation, provided expert outdoor professionals, minibus rides, food and enthusiasm.

Junior Rangers from 16 Protected Areas across 11 European countries attended the camp, including Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Latvia, Italy, Estonia, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and (of course!) Wales.

We started the week with introductions, after everyone was collected from the airport, train station or campsite (on the part of the adventurous Swedes). To break the ice, we all played

games in the pouring rain. The Junior Rangers were also acting as ambassadors for their designated landscapes, and they each presented posters they had prepped, all about their country and the work they do in their local Junior Ranger programme.

The first full day in Wales, we introduced the guys to the Dee Valley by taking them on a scrambling adventure up the Eglwyseg escarpment and a guided walk from Rhun, the head ranger in the Dee Valley. We looked for fossils in the limestone, discussed the landscape, land management and adaptations from plants which survived sheep grazing, either by being spiky or by growing out of reach. We admired the rare and endemic Llangollen whitebeam growing out of the cliffs.

In the evening, the Junior Rangers shared foods brought from their home countries. These ranged from Czech bread and honey (apparently smuggled through in a carry-on), Swedish salted liquorice, Italian salami and cheese, and sweets from Estonia which looked like (but didn't taste like) aquarium gravel! The next day, we visited the iconic hillfort of Caer Drewyn above Corwen. Important principles of the week were to introduce the visitors to Welsh heritage and history, which was delivered by an expert tour from archaeologist Fiona Gale, who told us all about the history of the site and was very patient with many, many enthusiastic questions. The Dee Valley ranger team – Sam, Ruth, Dwynwen and Morgan – led the Junior Rangers on two practical maintenance tasks. We grabbed scythes, slashers and rods and got to work bracken bashing. Bracken forms dense colonies, potentially undermining the features of the hillfort and limiting diversity in the ground flora. Thirty-two keen Juniors Rangers made short work of it.



We also had a go at the traditional British heritage skill of dry stone walling, dismantling and rebuilding a section of wall, part of the ranger team's ongoing project on Caer Drewyn.

On the third day, we discussed the plight of the curlew, both in Wales and across Europe, an issue connecting us across borders. Every language had a different name for the curlew, and a different way of spelling out their evocative call. We were joined by artist and printmaker Rhi Moxon. Under her guidance everyone designed a piece of art to print on a tote bag to take home.

Later in the week we joined the Eryri Junior Rangers in Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri. We went litter picking around tourist hotspots Beddgelert and on the lower slopes of Yr Wyddfa, brilliantly hosted by the ranger team in Eryri. It was an opportunity for the Junior Rangers to experience another Designated Landscape in Wales, and hear some traditional Welsh legends told to us by bilingual storyteller Fiona Collins. Some of these legends linked different countries through their similar stories. A fantastic moment for me was when Tristan heard the legend of King Arthur asleep on Yr Wyddfa and told us a similar story, of King Ogier, a Danish legendary king who sleeps in Kronborg castle and will wake when Denmark is in peril.

My usual job for the ranger service is based out of the Clwydian Range, which is the other half of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape. As such we couldn't call it a complete week without a trip to my stomping ground, and the tallest hill in the Clwydian Range, Moel Famau. We were joined by the Clwydian ranger team, Saul, Raz, Jonny, Amy, Rachel, Charlotte and Edd, and Phil and Ceri, two of our fantastic volunteer rangers. The team planned a day of practical moorland management, and footpath maintenance works. Junior Rangers divided and conquered, some digging out drainage culverts, some cutting scrub, and some litter picking. It was a constant inspiration throughout the week how enthusiastic the youths were and how much they got stuck in, no matter the task we threw at them.



A key feature of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley is how close it is to the urban centres of Liverpool and Manchester, and we discussed the challenges of keeping the area maintained and safe for millions of visitors a year. This was reflected in the essential footpath maintenance works, and also through a visit from the local mountain rescue team North East Wales Search & Rescue (NEWSAR), and Search and Rescue Dog Association (SARDA).

A staple of these international camps is a campfire, and most evenings everyone gathered around, told stories, chatted and sang songs. We put out a light moth trap overnight and a few keen souls got up for 7am to unbox the moths and see which species we had caught, learning about local biodiversity. On this theme we also had a visit from the mobile observatory and Gwenno, Ceri and David, who work with Project Nos, a project across Wales educating people about the importance of our Dark Skies and the impacts of light pollution on our natural world. This was a chance to have a galactic tour of stars and constellations, but also see the light pollution from everyone's home countries projected on the dome, and discuss the implications on our Designated Landscapes.

We capped off the week by going on a steam train ride, including a guided tour of the engine house from Alex Elbourne of the Llangollen Railway Trust. Finally, everyone donned wetsuits and the Bryntysilio guides took us white water rafting down the Dee, going over the iconic weir at Horseshoe Falls and down to the Serpents Tail, a popular pastime and one of the main draws of tourists to the Dee Valley.

It was an absolutely fantastic week, made possible by endless support from Europarc, and funding from Tirweddau Cymru and Welsh Government. The adult mentors, some rangers like myself and Sam, and some volunteers, were able to have workshops and discussions about the challenges facing our respective ranger teams, and Junior Ranger programmes. But most importantly, it was a brilliant experience for these youngsters from all over to come and learn about rangers in Wales, around Europe, and learn from each other.

SPANISH RANGER'S ORPHANED CHILDREN ENJOY QUALITY TIME IN THE UK

Just over two years ago, we were informed about the tragic death of Spanish ranger, Juan Pedro de la Cruz Sagredo. He died in the line of duty, leaving his wife and two daughters, and without the type of compensation that the family would have received if such a tragedy had occurred in the UK.

As a result of the lack of support for rangers' families in Spain, the charity AMINTA was set up to provide aid. In autumn 2022, Borja Diaz, Spanish ranger and ERF training officer, approached me about an idea from AMINTA to ask UK-based rangers' families to offer a holiday experience to these rangers' orphans, to show just how the ranger community can come together to support families in need. Borja and I spent the next 12 months working together, with the support of the Countryside Management Association, to make this a reality. Once the plan had taken shape, a call for families in the UK to host was put out to the CMA members.

Fortunately, Mark Baker, Secretary of CMA, read the advert asking for a placement and thought that he and his family could be the perfect people to offer a place. Mark and his wife Sarah have two young daughters aged 12 and 13, one of whom is learning Spanish at school. They have travelled extensively around Spain and Mark felt that it would be a great experience for his family, especially his children, to meet and host a young person from the Spanish ranger community. Rosario, Juan's youngest daughter, had just turned 13 so the match couldn't have been better,



Family walk with the Wane family, Frensham, Surrey.

but then came the problem of how to bring an unaccompanied minor over from Spain to the UK. Fortunately, one airline allowed youngsters to travel alone providing thorough safeguarding was put in place, and plans were made for the trip to happen in July 2024.

In the meantime, Raf Wane, ranger for the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (part of Hampshire Countryside Service) who, coincidentally, met his wife Karen during a conservation volunteer assignment in the Spanish Extremadura, also read about the programme in *Ranger* magazine. Raf initially felt that it would be great for them to offer to host, but then decided they might not be suitable hosts because their children, aged 24 and 26 respectively, were no longer living at home, so it might not be so much fun for the youngster. However, as Raf lives near London, he kindly offered to pick Rosario up from the airport and drop her off with the host family.

As it turned out, Raf's offer of help couldn't have been better timed, as Rosario's older sister, Carmen, decided she would really like to join the trip and, being 19, could happily stay with Raf



Ian and Claire dropping off Rosario, with Mark, Chloe and dog Lottie.

By Ian Brooker



Rosario, Chloe and Mark on the log flume at Crealy Theme Park.

and Karen and experience life with them for a week, while Rosario stayed with Mark and his family. Fortunately, this also meant that the logistics of flying an unaccompanied minor over to the UK were overcome!

Online meetings were set up with Mark and his family, Raf, Karen, Borja and myself to chat through the logistics of the programme, and to make sure everyone was happy with the arrangements, including the girls' mum. The date for the trip was set, tickets were bought, and the lead-in time (approximately five months) gave Rosario and Carmen an ideal opportunity to chat with their placement families via WhatsApp and get a feel for what it would be like during their stay in the UK. This exchange of information proved invaluable for the host families to be able to tailor their plans by getting to know the girls and their interests.

The time for the trip grew closer and closer and, luckily, myself and my partner Claire already had a pre-planned visit to London, so we were able to pick the girls up at Heathrow airport and then drop them off – Carmen with Raf and Karen in Reading, and Rosario with Mark and his family in Bovey Tracey. This saved

the host families the cost of travelling to and from London or expecting them to find their way from Heathrow on the UK's sometimes challenging public transport network!

It was then over to the host families. Both girls could speak some English, especially Carmen, but having a full week of immersion in English-speaking culture enabled them both to improve their language skills. Rosario had never been to the UK before, so everything was new for her, including her first ever trip on a train. Carmen had only visited London once before, on a school trip, so there were plenty of new experiences for her as well.

The girls and their host families all stayed in touch during the week, and regularly checked in with their mum back in Spain. Borja also provided backup in case of any issues, or if the girls felt that they needed to talk to someone from home who could speak fluent Spanish and English. The WhatsApp group quickly became filled with photos and videos of the fun they were all having and, luckily, the English weather was fantastic throughout.

Knowing Carmen's interests beforehand gave Raf and Karen a good steer as to what she would enjoy. Activities included walks

in the local countryside; meeting up with their grown-up kids and their partners; a stay at their favourite campsite via a ferry ride across a bay; and swimming in the sea at Studland and Worbarrow Bay. Carmen seemed to really enjoy camping, putting up her own tent and helping to prepare the food. On the way back, they drove to the New Forest to see the wild ponies. Karen also took Carmen to a local Zumba class and shopping in a local market town to buy presents for her family, and on another evening they all went to a local pub for Carmen to get a 'taste' of English pub culture!

Mark's girls had been in contact with Rosario via WhatsApp for months before their visit, so they were able to organise activities based on her interests, and things that his girls would also enjoy. They went for walks, went bilberry picking in the nearby woods, and cooked English and Spanish food together. This allowed Rosario to get to know the area, and the girls to get to know each other better. Rosario's love of horses led Mark to plan a visit to his country park, where there is a horse-drawn passenger boat on the canal. Rosario really enjoyed a special 'behind the scenes' treat arranged for her, to meet the barge horse and groom him. During an action-packed week they went climbing at the Clip 'n' Climb venue in Exeter; visited a local

beach; went to Crealy Theme Park; shopped in the local town; enjoyed a local music festival; and as she wanted to see a bit of our capital city, the family stayed in a hotel in London the day before her flight home so that she could see some of the famous sights. Rosario summed up her trip: *"The day before flying back to Spain, we stayed at a hotel and visited London. I was really happy seeing the iconic London Tower, etc. By that time, I was speaking a lot of English. It was great – we played a lot of games together and laughed a lot."* Judging by the comments made by both girls, and from the host families, these inaugural placements were a great success. **A huge thanks must go to these host families who made such huge efforts to make this the success it was.**

Borja and I had had some concerns during the planning stage, but the success of this trip dispelled them. For instance, the death of their father was still relatively recent, so it was one of the reasons why we reduced the visit from two weeks to one. In fact, the death of their father did come up naturally in conversations during the week but was not problematic. Seeing a ranger vehicle sparked a comment by Carmen, that her father had liked this type of vehicle. She also shared a photo with myself and Claire, showing their father at home on

the family farm. We had already made sure that both families would have been open to talk about things if the girls had wanted or needed to talk more, and Borja and their mum were also on hand and prepared if more support was needed. Two minor problems did occur; one when one of the girl's payment cards hadn't been activated for UK use; and the second, when returning them to the airport to fly home could have resulted in a very expensive parking charge had Mark and his family not been able to meet up with Carmen and walk them both to the departure area.

There is, inevitably, a cost to the host families in providing the activities during the week. All travel costs to the UK are covered by AMINTA but everything else is at the expense of the host families. There are, of course, lots of free activities so this doesn't have to be a costly element but the costs of travel during the hosting week, food and any excursions must be considered when thinking about taking on these placements. There are several other ranger families in Spain who will hopefully be encouraged by this first holiday programme. It's very worthwhile to do something positive for these families who have experienced unimaginable tragedies. We're really pleased that this first experiment seems to have worked really well.



Chloe and Rosario beside a horse-drawn barge.

So, what about you? Are you interested in offering a placement for the summer of 2025? If you would like to have an informal chat before making any commitment, please contact Ian Brooker brookerian2@gmail.com. Please help make a difference!



Rosario cooked Mark and his family paella.



Mark, Martha, Chloe and Rosario by the Houses of Parliament.

RANGERING AROUND THE WORLD: PART 6

Travelling from Oceania to Asia we were excited but also a little apprehensive. We knew this would be the final leg of our trip.

Starting in Alice Springs we caught a bus south, to Adelaide. After 22 hours on the road we were glad to stretch our legs and see some of the city. But unfortunately, by the time we arrived at Adelaide airport to catch our flight to Sydney, we had timed it perfectly to coincide with the global IT outage ...

So after one more sleepless night in the airport (following the previous night's 'sleep' on the bus), we boarded our early morning flight to Sydney. The next 12 hours were spent enjoying a beautiful sunny day sightseeing around the city. And, after finally getting a decent night's sleep, we made our way to the airport and boarded our flight to Singapore.

Singapore was only a 24-hour stopover on the way to our next placement in Taiwan, but it was a real highlight. Once again we sacrificed sleep for a chance to see some of the city, and were completely amazed by the Gardens by the Bay area, an urban park spanning 105 hectares of Central Singapore. Walking around at night with everything lit up was stunning, particularly the 'Supertree Grove' – consisting of 150-foot tall artificial trees covered in bromeliads and ferns, and that capture rainwater for the rest of the garden. (Interestingly, the site was originally managed by the country's National Parks Board, and represents a good example of a highly urbanised protected area.)

Following our exploration of the city, and going ever deeper into sleep debt, we boarded our flight from Singapore to Taiwan. Singapore was hot, even at night during our visit, but the heat we encountered in Taiwan hit us like a wall of blistering humidity as soon as we left the air-conditioned airport building.

Making our way into the city centre we were met by Jacky, from Taiwan's Thousand Miles Trail Association (TMI Trails), and Lino, a long-time volunteer and our host for the next two weeks. Over one of the most delicious meals we had on our entire journey, they explained the plan for our time with them: working with TMI Trails to build, repair and maintain some of the island's extensive trail network – both in and around heavily used urban areas, like Taipei, and in some more remote places, like Mount Jade National Park.

Apart from a brief interruption by one of the biggest typhoons in Taiwan's history – Typhoon Gaemi – we spent the next two weeks working out on trails in some spectacular locations around Taiwan. Having undertaken a variety of trail work in our jobs back in the UK – as well as on previous placements,



BY CHARLIE
WINCHESTER

ALL IMAGES: CHARLIE
WINCHESTER AND KATE
DZIUBINSKA.

particularly in the US – it was fascinating to learn about the organisation's particular approach to trail building. With a special focus on employing environmentally low-impact methods, TMI Trails promotes a philosophy they call 'Eco-Craft', employing trail-building methods that seek to reduce the use of machinery and foreign materials, and prioritise understanding and respecting the local historical context – including any traditional trail-maintenance techniques that may have been used previously.

It was a fascinating experience to learn some different trail-building techniques and apply them to Taiwan's subtropical environment, and we particularly enjoyed working on an urban trail popular among Taipei's many residents. TMI Trails is an incredible organisation that relies on its many highly trained volunteers (known as Trail Masters) to undertake its work all across the island. And during our time there we were lucky to be hosted by Lino, herself a Trail Masters and longtime volunteer for the organisation.

Taiwan was experiencing a heatwave when we visited, so as we left – already missing the delicious food we'd sampled over the past two weeks – we were pining for some cooler weather. Unfortunately, that was not going to be the case on our final stop: Sumatra.

Touching down in Medan, we made our way into town to meet with the founder of the Sumatran Ranger Project (SRP), Amy, a Kiwi who also works as a primate specialist at Auckland Zoo. After learning a bit more about what was in store for us over the next few weeks, we were on our way to the far north of the island.

Once the minibus had taken us as far as it could, we met up with Senior Ranger, Jasson, and, jumping into the back of his jeep, he drove us the rest of the way along bumpy tracks, deeper into the jungle. Every so often Jasson would suddenly



stop and point out an orangutan nest high up in the trees. His enthusiasm was infectious but our lack of sleep was beginning to tell. Eventually we made it to the team's office set among a scattering of other houses in a small village. By now it was late, so Kate and I blew up our air mattress and settled down for our last night within four solid walls for a while.

After an early start we packed up our gear and met Jasson and Togar outside. Hopping on the back of their bikes we sped into the jungle until the road ran out, crossing a number of rivers on the way, and trying our best not to let our heavy packs destabilise us as we went round corners. Once we met up with the rest of the team – a group of ten other dedicated rangers – it was on foot all the way for the next ten days, accompanying the rangers on their fortnightly anti-poaching patrols on the border of Gunung Leuser National Park.

The hiking we did over the next week has to be some of the hardest we have ever done. Not only was the temperature in the upper 30°C and the humidity over 80%, but the terrain was incredibly challenging (steep and slippery) and the dense vegetation at times almost impenetrable. And the wildlife could sometimes be a little alarming too. At one point, while trying not to trip as we pushed through a tangled curtain of vines, Jasson stopped us to point out a snake coiled motionless in a branch just a few feet overhead. Known locally as a moon snake, or Wrangler's pit viper, it had a beautiful blue and yellow colouration. When I asked Jasson if it was venomous, he casually said, "Yes, very."

Each day of our patrol we would search for snares and other traps that poachers had set along the border of the park, and every evening the group would find a flattish spot next to a river or stream and assemble a shelter big enough for 15 people within about 30 minutes. It was truly astonishing to watch. By the time Kate and I had put our packs down and rinsed off in the river, the rangers had cut lengths of bamboo, flattened the ground (often using lengths of bamboo fashioned into a makeshift spade), lashed the various sections together, and tied on a tightly fitting plastic sheet to keep out the rain. And once the shelter was assembled, every evening we were treated to some amazing Indonesian cooking, often incorporating a variety of jungle 'greens' that had been picked along the way, but always including rice and some extremely hot curry too

(Jasson's favourite phrase to remind us of as we were eating dinner was "no rice no power, no spice no energy!").

The skill and ingenuity of all the rangers – not to mention their dedication in the job – was inspiring. And despite the hard going it was a real joy to accompany them on a patrol and get a sense of the challenges they face every day. We were particularly struck by the mile upon mile of palm oil plantation we encountered in this part of Sumatra, often running right up to the border of the national park. Although there's no doubt that habitat loss to palm oil is one of the biggest threats to wildlife in this part of the world, it's also one of the few industries from which people can make an income. Places like Sumatra are lucky to still have some incredible wildlife (not least orangutan, Asian forest elephants and Sumatran tigers), but making sure people's livelihoods don't threaten their conservation is an incredible challenge.

There were so many other highlights during our time in Sumatra that it's hard to fit them all in! But they include: going on a patrol to help protect the critically endangered Sumatran elephant, learning about the tiger-proof enclosures that the SRP is building for local livestock owners, spotting wild orangutans, and seeing one of the largest flowers in the world, *Amorphophallus titanum*, which has the largest unbranched inflorescence in the world, smells like rotting flesh and only grows on the island of Sumatra. But despite seeing all these amazing things, our fondest memory is sitting in our makeshift shelter by the river, drinking strong coffee and listening to the rain drumming on the plastic overhead while some of the rangers prepared the evening meal over the fire.

As we boarded our flight back to London we felt a strange mixture of emotions. We were excited to be heading home, but sad that this would be the last part of our trip. It had been just over two years since we left our jobs in the UK and set off on a quest to learn more about the work of rangers internationally. Since then, organising our travels had kept us so busy there had barely been a moment to reflect on where we had been and what we had done. It's going to take time to take it all in, but there's no doubt that our admiration and appreciation for the work of rangers is greater than it ever was. And we feel lucky that we got to experience some of this work, making our own small contribution along the way.



Follow our journey on our Instagram account: [rangering_around_the_world](#).





WORLD RANGER CONGRESS, HYÈRES, FRANCE 2024

By Luke Knowles, with helpful notes from Jeff Cherrington

After having the pleasure of attending the CMA conference in Ilam park, Derbyshire in 2023 – where I met so many of you wonderful people – I felt a strong sense of belonging to a community who are all working towards the same goals. It was great to share knowledge and be inspired by how colleagues from right across the industry are tackling similar challenges. I left Ilam Park with a refreshed sense of purpose, encouraged by the things I heard and the passionate people making it happen. Hearing from and meeting our Georgian ranger colleagues was especially interesting: it made me reconsider how I thought about my role as a ranger in the UK and the wider ranger profession. I thought about how I was only a small part of a global effort towards looking after nature and I had a strong desire to meet more rangers from across the world. Luckily the IRF provides just the thing for such a gathering and upon hearing the next Congress would be soon (in the south of France no less!) and titled ‘Rangers at the Heart of the 30 x 30 Target: Engaged for People and Nature’, I had to attend. I successfully applied for a bursary from the CMA which kindly funded the Congress ticket and, with some added funding from my organisation, I was able to book the train and accommodation. Excited and very motivated, my thoughts now went to wishing I paid more attention in GCSE French.

The Congress was hosted by the Gardes Nature de France, who made a great first impression as they had two of their most enthusiastic rangers meet us at Hyères train station. A welcome sight after a train journey from northern England to southern France, despite excellent travel companions in the form of some National Trust colleagues Rob, Chloe and Jeff. We arrived after dark and were warmly welcomed, checked in and off to bed ready for what was sure to be a brilliant week.

The Congress started the next day with a beautiful sunrise over the Mediterranean Sea and the gathering of over 450 people, from over 80 countries and from all continents, including Antarctica. The atmosphere was incredible, to see just how many people had attended from all over the planet and be part of something so positive was a privilege. After a wonderful welcome from IRF president Chris Galliers and Gardes Nature de France president Carole d’Antuoni, the Congress began with opening speakers who were all highly respected people in the world of nature conservation. One of which was Dr Madhu Rao, chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN WCPA). She highlighted where the ‘30 x 30’ phrase has come from and its part in the bigger picture of protecting the world’s biodiversity:

“At the Convention on Biodiversity COP15 in 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) was adopted. The KMGBF has 23 targets, one of which (target number three) is the 30 x 30 target i.e. 30% of the land under effective management for biodiversity by 2030.” By effective management it means these areas have 1) to be areas of biodiversity importance, 2) good governance and management, and 3) deliver committed management, i.e. through rangers.



Currently there is 17% of terrestrial land and 8% of marine land covered by the above. It is estimated there are 286,000 rangers worldwide but in order to deliver the 30 x 30 targets there will be the need for approximately 1 million rangers. It was also pointed out that the benefits of maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the world also contribute to other targets within the Global Biodiversity Framework including areas such as resource management, sociological, psychological, health, community and commerce benefits as well as climate change mitigation.

At each World Ranger Congress the IRF adopts a declaration which it uses as a blueprint for their work over the next three years. The Hyères declaration will be taken to the Convention on Biodiversity COP 16 in Cali, Columbia, in November to raise awareness among governments that rangers not only contribute to the 30 x 30 biodiversity targets but also to other targets within the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The messages, enthusiasm and passion shared in the first morning set a clear precedent for the week ahead, and luckily for me translators were on hand via headset to make sure everything was understood. The week contained a plethora of presentations and workshops covering various topics from ranger teams across the world. It was only possible to attend a few but the range included:

- Working with fishing communities in South Africa in a marine protected area.
- Removing invasive non-native animals in the Antilles in the Caribbean.
- Use of drones and AI to survey and monitor bird populations in France and Spain.
- Managing poaching in a rainforest in Columbia.
- Setting up a ‘young ranger’ project for disadvantaged teenagers in the Black Forest, Germany.
- Setting up partnerships and exchanges near Madagascar in

the Indian Ocean to create a larger more resilient network of marine protected areas.

- Raising awareness in partnership with communities/local/indigenous people in many locations such as Philippines, Queensland in Australia, Carpathian region in Romania.
- Welfare/well-being and profile raising of rangers.

One presentation not to be missed was the IRF’s Gordon Miller Lifetime Achievement Award, which went to the UK’s very own Roger Cole, for the work he’s done in highlighting the work of rangers at all levels and promoting the work of ranger associations.

The workshops did an excellent job of showing how the ranger profession is becoming more inclusive and fairer, with various indigenous communities and female rangers taking the stages to show how they have been empowered to lead and deliver work across various protected landscapes and regions. For example, Larissa Hale, co-founder and MD of Queensland Indigenous Women’s Ranger Network, who gave a powerful talk on the work to conserve the Great Barrier Reef and on being recognised, winning the Earthshot prize.

There were plenty of opportunities in the programme to network and mix with rangers from near and far. As well as learning about their professional work it was fascinating to learn about other cultures and customs. The flag ceremony in particular was a great opportunity to see everyone together and admire the range of people and uniforms! As a ranger for a charitable organisation who wears a friendly looking red fleece with an oak leaf on, I may have looked out of place anywhere else stood with someone in military camouflage and someone wearing a headdress crown of tropical bird feathers (indigenous ranger and tribe leader from Brazil), but not at WRC! It was fascinating to hear from and meet so many different individuals from so many different places who all had similar values at their core – the protection of their region’s nature, ecology and people.



Sometimes it was a difficult and humbling leap to compare work stories with a ranger who is carrying a rifle and trying to prevent poachers in a Nigerian rainforest but in talking with many rangers from all over the world and listening to presentations, there are certain themes that keep us all connected: engaging with people/communities, getting the right tools/people for the job, keeping up with the latest ideas/training, raising awareness of the issues rangers face in the field, doing the best with the resources at hand and working with others just to name a few.

The Congress gave everyone the opportunity to attend a field trip to a local protected area and meet the team who looked after it to discuss its management. The nine field trips varied from visiting salt flat wetlands to forests, but my trip was by sea to Porquerolles island, the largest of the three Golden Islands of the Gulf of Hyères. The island is known as a 'natural museum' and boasts an array of impressive Mediterranean flora and fauna, including on the seabed, and has been designated a marine protection area. All while sitting right in the centre of the national park and attracting over 1 million visitors a year. The rangers walked us around the island and we discussed invasive species, compliance and permits, the community living on the island and explained how, due to the risk of fire, visitor management is a huge task in summer. This made me reflect that although I was far from the Lake District on a small rural island in the south of France, the ranger team here have remarkably similar challenges to mine back home, albeit without the Herdwicks. The choppy seas on the return journey also made me reflect on my large breakfast.

One evening we watched *Rhino Man* with an introduction from the director, an important but terribly sad film about South African ranger Anton Mzimba, the head of ranger services at the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve who was sadly murdered for his work to protect rhinos from poaching. The mood was sombre but the sense of solidarity and unity in the room was strong. The Congress really shone a light on how important ranger representation and welfare is. The ranger community is full of exceptional individuals who together achieve fantastic things, and this was showcased throughout the Congress.

The Congress ended with a beautiful cultural evening and celebration. The friends made and relationships forged were toasted with traditional French regional dancing, flute playing and good old merriment. The ranger family is a wonderful thing I am proud to be a part of; attending the Congress really made me feel a part of a larger whole, a massive positive force that can achieve great things, like 30 x 30. I return inspired, motivated and encouraged to continue doing what I can to protect nature. The people I met, and stories heard over the Congress fill me with hope that I will bring home and share with my team.

Comments from some of CMA's participants
Roger Cole, former CMA Vice President

It was inspiring to witness the lively interaction between 450 delegates from over 80 countries and to hear that Gordon Miller's 1992 imaginative concept of bringing the world's rangers together within the IRF family now boasts a membership of approximately 200 global ranger associations.

Emilie Currey, Lancashire Countryside Ranger Service

It was incredible to be welcomed so warmly into the ranger community and networking with rangers from all over the world, who appreciate each other and our goals. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to attend the World Ranger Congress.

Hayden Bridgeman, New Forest National Park Authority

The stand-out moment for me was feeling like I'd found 'my people', getting the opportunity to share stories and swap notes with rangers from around the world who all hold the same beliefs and go through what you do on a daily basis – it was invaluable.

Jeff Cherrington, Countryside Manager, National Trust

My overwhelming impression from the WRC is one of rangers everywhere passionately helping the biodiversity of the world and helping others understand how important this is for the planet.

Rob Rhodes, Head of Countryside Management and Rangers, National Trust

My takeaway was how inspiring it was to meet rangers from around the world and connect over shared aims and ambitions, our motivation and our shared challenges. Despite the ranger role being different across various continents we all share the same challenges and desire to protect what we care for. I returned from the WRC super motivated and inspired to play my part.

Kate Elliot, Chair of SCRA

That feeling you get when you know you're in the best company – our global ranger family really is the best!

Chloe Bradbrooke, Tree and Woodland Advisor, National Trust

I was really heartened to see the increase in representation from both indigenous and female rangers and to hear of their unique contribution. It gave me an understanding of the importance of their voices on the global stage, bringing strength, passion, warmth and wisdom. I also noted the complementary combination of modern science and indigenous knowledge being greater than the sum of their parts. It left me with an afterglow of hope, that despite the challenges, there are great people out there striving to help and heal the earth.



CMA's international coordinator, Chloe Bradbrooke, and Lado Kakhoizze.



THE IMPACT OF FRIENDSHIP: BRITISH-GEORGIAN UNITY ON THE ROAD TO THE WORLD RANGER CONGRESS

*By Maia Tsignadze,
Georgian Ranger Association*

The 10th IRF World Ranger Congress (WRC) in Hyères, France, marked a significant milestone for Georgian rangers, as it was the second time a Georgian representative had the opportunity to attend the Congress with the support of the Countryside Management Association. This ongoing partnership of Georgian Ranger Association (GRA) and CMA demonstrates the strong commitment of both organisations to promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange in the field of conservation.

Lado Kakhoizze, the Georgian participant, shared his experiences at the Congress, highlighting the importance of international cooperation in preserving our planet's biodiversity. "The WRC provided a remarkable opportunity to attend different workshops, connect with fellow rangers and learn from their unique experiences," Kakhoizze stated. "Through this event,

we have built lasting relationships and deepened our resolve to preserve our planet's biodiversity. This Congress created the unique space for networking. I want to sincerely thank the Countryside Management Association for their continuous support throughout the entire Congress."

Notably, this year's Congress also made history as it was the first time a representative from a Georgian Protected Landscape attended such an event. This achievement showcases the expanding reach and inclusivity of the WRC, providing a platform for diverse voices within the conservation community to be heard and valued.

Together with the CMA and GRA, this remarkable opportunity was made possible through the unwavering support of the Caucasus National Fund (CNF) and the Akhmeta Municipality City Hall. Their dedication to a sustainable future is invaluable and has allowed Georgian rangers to contribute to this critical global dialogue.

The World Ranger Congress continues to demonstrate the potential for positive change when rangers and conservation organisations unite, fostering connections and sharing valuable knowledge to safeguard our planet's natural and cultural treasures for generations to come.

NEW MEMBERS

The CMA is pleased to welcome the following new members*:

EAST MIDLANDS:

Emilie Bonnevey – Member
Georgie Dixon – Student Member
Ruben Stapleton – Student Member

GREATER LONDON:

Hannah Dineen – Member
Katie Leacock – Student Member

NORTH WEST:

James Findlay – Member
David Heath – Member
Jacob Rowell – Member
Ryan Gordon – Student Member
Iain MacKennon – Student Member
Alysia Webster – Student Member
George Windle – Student Member

SOUTH EAST:

John Flowers – Practitioner Member
Brad Draga-Williams – Member
Anna Peacock – Student Member
Matthew Pullen – Student Member
James Sanders – Student Member

SOUTH WEST:

Andrew Chamberlain – Member
Sama Euridge – Member
Jeremy Fielden – Member
Robert Jackson – Member
Katie Jones – Member
Ian Pegg – Member
Jane Baker – Supporter Member
Jack Greenslade – Student Member
Erin McDermott – Student Member
Ella Ronan – Student Member

WALES:

John Ball – Member
Rhiannon Bartley – Member
Saul Burton – Member
Mari Jones – Member
Jonathan Lee – Member
Edd Sopp – Member
Karen Weaver – Member

YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE:

Rachel Todner – Member
Benjamin Gillmeister – Student Member

International:

Adam Mitchell – Supporter Member (USA)

The CMA would also like to welcome back:

John Cartwright (Member, South West)
Marie Steinbach (Member, South West)

*Membership applications processed by 28 November 2024

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