

Bikes, Butterflies & Bees:

A John Muir Award along the National Cycle Network



"On Tuesday I headed up to the Cairngorms for work. On the way I read a letter in the RSPB Nature's Home magazine from someone recommending bicycle as a way to birdwatch...I agree completely, and went on to hear my first cuckoo of Spring, and several willow warblers, as I rode the Speyside Way (NCN7) between Aviemore and Boat of Garten."



Inspired by volunteers completing their John Muir Awards through Sustrans' Citizen Science programme, Sustrans Scotland Volunteer Coordinator Laura White decided to work towards her own Award, focusing on enjoying, surveying and learning more about wildlife along the National Cycle Network. Alongside gaining valuable headspace through getting outdoors, writing posts for her John Muir Award Record eBook became a highlight - *"it's reminded me just how much I love sitting down and writing."*

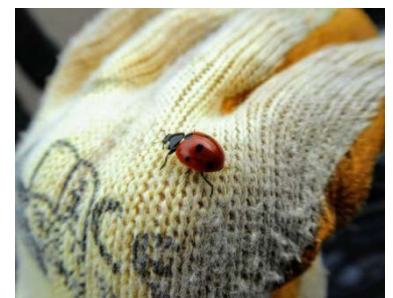
[Laura's Record eBook](#) can be viewed in full online, documenting her wildlife-spotting and the nature writers and folklore that have inspired her adventures; see below for a few highlights.

"On the morning of the sunny Bank Holiday Monday, NCN754 along the Union Canal in Edinburgh was awash with newly-emerged Orange-Tip butterflies as we litterpicked along the towpath with Scottish Canals. Feeling my luck was in, I headed straight to the Roseburn Path (NCN1) in Edinburgh for my weekly UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme survey, thinking I'd find them there too. But it's a different habitat, and there was nothing nothing nothing. And then there was this. A Comma. The first one I have seen there in 3 years of surveying, and only the second one I have seen ever. Smuggly McSmugface. Where will the Award take me from here?"



"Lots going on at the moment and I had no time or motivation to leave the office for my bumblebee & butterfly survey on the NCN nearby, but - thank-you, John Muir Award and 30 Days Wild! - I went anyway. I'm always amazed at the ability of taking a break outside to re-set the head. Sun, plenty of bumblebees, no butterflies, but chiff-chaffs, bullfinches, blackbirds and chaffinches singing, and a song thrush lurking in the undergrowth looking for snails, plus woody nightshade, bladder campion and feverfew all flowering in the verges. I spotted this feather, and wondered what bird it was from as I picked it up, but as soon as the sun hit it and the edge sparkled blue, it was clear it was a magpie. So beautiful to see close-up and now sitting on my desk to remind me to go outside even when I don't think I can."

"Ladybirds are often seen as a symbol of security and good fortune - various thoughts are that the number of spots is connected to how much money you will come into, or how many months of happiness are coming (24-spot please), or that the direction they fly off your hand in is the direction a wish will be granted from, or where your future love lives: 'This lady-fly I take from the grass, Whose spotted back might scarlet red surpass? Fly, lady-bird; north, south, or east or west, Fly where the man is found that I love best.' I'm married, pretty happy, and it's payday, so I'd better start thinking of some wishes for next season..."



All change...

Sustrans Volunteer Coordinator 25 Feb



Deep sleeps the Winter, Cold, wet and grey; Surely all the world is dead; Spring is far away. Wait! the world shall waken; It is not dead, for lo, The Fair Maids of February Stand in the snow!"....a poem looked up in one of the (ahem) grown-up books tucked in my collection - A Flower Fairies Treasury - after a cycle on route 76 which was awash with snowdrops.

It was a slow cycle as I kept stopping to look underneath the flowers, having learnt a few years ago that the underside of snowdrops is even prettier than their nodding heads. What else could I learn about them after seeing so many? They're non-native, which surprises me as they are such an intrinsic part of the season for me. Their Latin name means milk flower. And an alkaloid in the bulb has been approved for the management of dementia in over 70 countries, including the UK.

With these clever little flowers calling out that Spring is on its way, joined by the warmer air, and birds belting out their territory songs, I couldn't help but feel a bit sad that I've come to the end of my John Muir Award and the time needed in my wild place for Discovery level; there's going to be so much to see and record and learn about over the next few weeks as the season changes. But, there are more Award levels to do, so all I need is a new idea of how to spend time exploring, sharing and conserving. Maybe, like my snowdrops, I'll find inspiration from a different angle... :)

The John Muir Award Record eBook is a free, digital, optional resource available to Award participants, providing a way to record and share experiences online.

Go online to see what other participants from across the country are sharing and to watch a 2 minute introductory video explaining how the Record eBook works:

www.johnmuiraward.org/recordebook

