

“Four Seasons in the White and Dark Peak” - A personal journey of rediscovery

In the spring of 2017 Ruth Dixon, an outdoor learning practitioner from Derbyshire, decided to ‘refresh’ her relationship with the [Peak District National Park](#). She embarked on her [John Muir Explorer Award](#) through a broad range of creative projects and immersed herself in her local area, finding out more about how to help protect the wildlife and landscapes she came across.



Local knowledge

Ruth focused on sites local to her, in particular around the Hope Valley, and explored accessibility by making all of her journeys on foot, by bus or by bike. She chose places which she already visited regularly but would dedicate time to looking at in more detail. Great use was made by Ruth of free talks and walks provided by the Peak Park rangers and other local conservation and natural history groups to learn more about her surroundings. She also made time to connect to her wild places in different ways. Yoga and meditation were a favourite outdoor activity and enabled her to fully engage all of her senses in quiet reflection. She learned about natural craft techniques, created land art and took photographs of new finds, to take home for follow up research.

Not all of Ruth’s activity was out in the Peak District National Park. She also spent considerable time improving the spaces closest to her, developing her garden as a safe and inviting space for visiting wildlife. In the summer she journeyed to Dunbar in Scotland and found out more about John Muir himself, visiting his birthplace and surveying the sea creatures to be found in the rock pools where he had played as a child.



Putting something back

Ruth was an active volunteer throughout working towards her John Muir Award, including supporting [Moors for the Future](#) and their Citizen Science initiative monitoring moorland wildlife. She campaigned on litter and carried out her own litter picks at every opportunity. In March 2018 she successfully achieved her John Muir Explorer Award and celebrated with supporters on a final Big Litter Pick, collecting six bin bags full of rubbish from along the Hope Valley in very snowy conditions! Throughout her year Ruth was keen to encourage other people to connect with nature, by sharing her experiences. She did a wonderful job of spreading the word, both through local press and her own writing.

Below you'll find a taster of some of Ruth's reflections on her year of action in her own words, from seed saving to art creating, from hare watching to forest schooling, as documented throughout the year on her inspirational [blog](#).

Travelling light

"Being a non-driver means that I spend a lot of time standing still and waiting for public transport but I always consider this to be precious thinking time where I can really take in my surroundings. And true enough, while standing on the Mytham Bridge looking at the Derwent River, I became aware of the abundance of wildlife surrounding me. Trout in the river, a jay calling and noisily flapping about the tree tops, a busy dipper, bird call all around, a red admiral butterfly making the most of the warm sunshine and a 'loveliness' of ladybirds, from larva to adult, on the bridge."



A world of colours, sounds and smells

"John Muir would regularly sketch in his notebook as a record of his findings on his many wild adventures. [...] As long as I can remember I have always found creative inspiration from spending time in nature and interacting with wild spaces. Rather than sketching or painting I often make something with the natural materials around me, whether it be plaiting the tall summer grasses, balancing rocks or sculpting sand on beaches, building stick stacks and twig bundles or woodland crowns."

Surveys and observations

"This week in the field that slopes down [...] above Hathersage St Michael's C of E school I've been watching four brown hares lazing about in the sunshine. They don't seem to be at all bothered by their proximity to the school [...] and sometimes come close enough to give me and the children a really great view. I've recorded my sightings with the *Moors for the Future Hare and Rabbit Survey* and thought that I'd dedicate this



week's blog to learning a little bit more about Britain's fastest land mammal. I hope to see the four fearless Hathersage hares again this week and find time to watch their antics. Here's hoping that the conservation of these fantastic mammals is a success across the UK and healthy populations of brown and mountain hares continue to thrive in The Peak District."

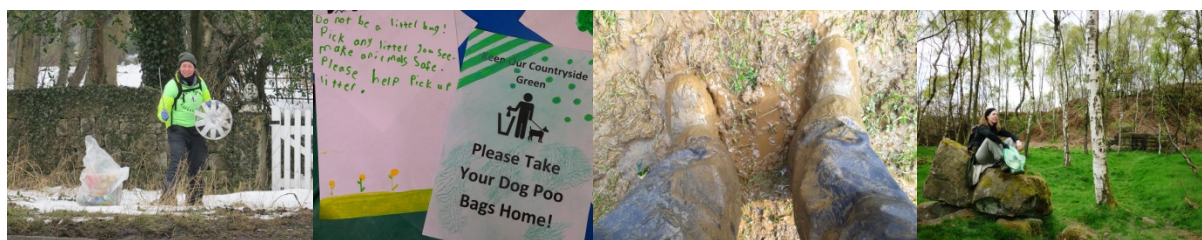
An oasis for nature close to home

“When starting my wildflower project I decided in the autumn to sow a corn field seed mix, knowing that this would suit the richer soil in my garden. I also added extra yellow rattle seed, which is a semi-parasitic, grassland annual that is said to weaken grasses and as a result can promote a better display of wild flowers. In the spring I added a ‘bumblebee foraging’ wild seed mix and also grew some oxeye daisy, foxgloves, scabious and borage seedlings to act as extra plugs in my wild flower meadow area. With that heady combination (and somewhat experimental approach) [...] it will be exciting to see which flora has successfully germinated and established itself!”



Inspiring others

“On Thursday I was involved in the Hope Valley College ‘activities week’ and, led a day of fire-lighting workshops with the year 7s. Throughout the day I could see the positive effect that being outside (in the rain for the most part) and the real sense of achievement that successfully lighting their fires was having on these young people. Friday’s nursery class of little ‘Forest School-ers’ were a delight to spend the morning with as always. As we approach the end of the summer school term [we] can see such a difference in their confidence, communication, independence, development and sheer joy of playing in ‘their woods’. It’s been a busy, hard working week for me but I’ve been rewarded with some amazing ‘snap shot’ moments which will always remind me that what I am doing is making a positive impact on others and definitely reaffirming deep connections with the natural world.”



“I really hope that my year has inspired others, as it has me, and that I've helped to raise the profile of conservation, the [John Muir Trust](http://www.johnmuirtrust.org) and connect people with their natural and wild surroundings.” Ruth Dixon

Find out more

To get involved with **Moors for the Future** and find out about the surveys you can support and training available go to their website: <http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/>

If you are inspired by what you have read and would like to get more involved in supporting the **Peak District National Park** to protect and conserve its special landscapes and wildlife, find out how to take part here: <http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/looking-after/volunteering>