

## Adventure grant supports documentary film project on rare Eriskay ponies.

20 February 2024

Lizzie MacKenzie and Bonny Mealand will live and work on the remote Eriskay peninsula of South Uist to document these native ponies and their importance within local communities.

Lizzie will spend a total of four weeks spread throughout 2024 on the remote island of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides, studying the endangered native ponies and their place within the evolutionary non-human and human ecology of this area. She aims to develop a relationship with the land, elements, ponies and people of this unique area and share her experiences through film. Already successful with her Scottish BAFTA winning film 'The Hermit of Treig', Lizzie is keen to expand her ecology-inspired storytelling.

Lizzie and Bonny's project will also explore the history of Eriskay and the link between these iconic ponies and the highland clearances. Close working with local islanders will be essential in their studies and they hope to return to the island in each of the four seasons to see first hand the range of landscapes and conditions these animals have endured throughout the centuries, as well as their mutualistic relationship with islanders.

On receiving the news of the grant offer Lizzie said: "We're over the moon to have received this timely support from the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant, to help us tell the story of Scotland's original native horse and their life intertwined with people. As Eriskay's own Father Calum MacLellan said "Without the people of Eriskay there would be no pony, but without the pony there would have been no people on Eriskay". We're living in a time when the need to understand the perspectives of the other species we share this planet with is so incredibly vital. If the Eriskay pony could speak, what would it say about the two-legged creature they've shared their little island with? The entangled nature of the human history of the Highlands and Islands with its ecology is fascinating on so many levels. With this story, a collaboration between myself, equine podiatrist Bonny Mealand, and - most importantly - the human and non-human inhabitants of Eriskay, we're excited to explore the ways humans and the wild can collaborate, learn from and support each other. Eriskay, with its light, the ever-changing colour of the sea and the look in the ponies eyes, holds such magic; we'd love to bring this project to life on the big screen and are currently seeking

financial support to enable the next steps. This grant is an exciting start to our fundraising endeavours!"

Sophie Mackaness of the John Muir Trust, who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "The grant panel were excited to support a project into such a fundamentally Scottish species and that explores the centuries old relationship the Eriskay ponies and islanders have endured."

Lizzie and Bonny's project is one of six successful applicants to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant in 2024. This grant was established to give people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places in ways which will benefit both the person, and the wild places themselves.

## Editor's Notes

### About

The John Muir Trust is a leading voice for the UK's wild places. Its stewardship of some of Britain's most iconic wild places, including Ben Nevis and Helvellyn, is guided by three freedoms; ensuring nature has the freedom to repair itself, people have the freedom to enjoy the benefits, and communities have the freedom to thrive. For 40 years, the Trust has advocated for the protection of wild places by evidencing their benefit to society. Driven by the belief that wild places are for everyone – it also provides opportunities for people from all walks of life to engage with nature through its UK-wide environmental award scheme, the John Muir Award.

### About the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant

The grant commemorates two former Presidents of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, who each led inspiring and adventurous lives. It was set up to give others an opportunity to follow in their adventurous footsteps and experience wild places. Projects should have an educational or scientific component and benefit wild places.

Bill Wallace, died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips.

Des Rubens, was a popular teacher at Craigroyston High School in Edinburgh was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Grants are for £200 to £2,000 and open to UK applicants of all ages. Closing date for applications is 15 January each year. Further details on how to apply: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/grants/des-rubens-and-bill-wallace-grant>

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