



highlife

highland
na Gàidhealtachd

**MAKING
LIFE
BETTER**

COUNTRYSIDE RANGERS

**Annual Review
2023/2024**

Photo:
School Children work
with the local Ranger to
improve habitats in
Caithness



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MEET THE RANGERS



Imogen Furlong
Countryside Ranger
Service Manager



Andy Summers
Senior Ranger (North
Highland)



Eilidh-Ann Phillips
Senior Ranger (South
Highland)



Paul Castle
North Sutherland and
Caithness Countryside
Ranger



Roz Summers
East Caithness /Relief
Countryside Ranger



Kirsty Rosie
East Caithness
Countryside Ranger



Patti Bremner
East Caithness
Countryside Ranger



Marcia O'Hara
Easter Ross and SE
Sutherland
Countryside Ranger



Jenny Grant
Wester Ross
Countryside Ranger



John Orr
Inverness Area
Countryside Ranger



Saranne Bish
Badenoch, Strathspey
and Nairnshire
Countryside Ranger



Pam Allan
Torrin Bunkhouse
Warden (Skye)



Michelle Melville
Highland Heritage
Ranger (Lochaber
based)



Donald Mitchell
NW Sutherland
Countryside Ranger



Fiona MacLean
Lochaber Countryside
Ranger /Glennfinan
Bunkhouse Supervisor



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The financial year 2023/24 was marked by success, with a **4% increase** in face-to-face engagements, totalling **11,857 interactions**. This reflects the dedication of the Ranger Service team and strong customer support.

Education and community outreach saw substantial growth, with 240 school visits engaging **5,898 students**, while 21 classes accessed our Rangers' Google Classroom. A total of **449 community learning opportunities** were offered, **up 38%** from the previous year, focusing on sustainability and environmental workshops.

In addition the grant-funded initiative 'Shelf-Life' allowed us to deliver climate education in libraries raising awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss. **Volunteer involvement rose by 28%**, highlighting increased community interest in environmental work.

Our wildlife work continued to strengthen, notable projects include those in butterfly conservation, hedgehog and barn owl boxes, and seabird monitoring in collaboration with the British Ornithology Trust.

A key achievement in 23/24 was the Wildflower Meadow Creation project, which engaged over 1,000 individuals and **established 60 mini-meadows**, providing vital habitats for pollinators and showcasing collective conservation efforts.

Significant progress was made in raising income for High Life Services through Rangers managing two successful bunkhouse operations.

Digital engagement grew with the launch of **Nature Unveiled**, an online ranger publication that expanded our reach and provided new opportunities for interaction and environmental education.

In conclusion, the Ranger Service achieved significant growth and innovation, enhancing both digital and face-to-face engagements to make lives better for Highland communities

Imogen Furlong
High Life Highland Countryside Ranger Manager





STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



EDUCATION AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

High Life Highland (HLH) Countryside Rangers have a central partnership with the Highland Council (HC) to deliver services within community and schools settings. We aim to have impact in the areas of environmental education and social responsibility, by raising awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and providing community learning opportunities to engage with natural and heritage sites. HLH Rangers also aim to have a positive impact on local biodiversity, caring for and making habitat enhancements to a range of HC countryside sites. This contributes to both HC statutory biodiversity duties and HC ecology strategy, as well as providing on site support to HC access teams.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Under the branding "Think Health Think Nature" the work of the Highland Green Health Partnership, aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to promote outdoor physical activity, mental health improvement through nature connection and tackle health inequalities. HLH Ranger Service are both a strategic and delivery partner in this green health collaboration.



CLIMATE ACTION



High Life Highland Ranger service work strategically with both Highland Adapts and Highlands and Islands Climate Hub to create a prosperous climate ready Highland. Rangers support community action to create healthy eco-systems and promote nature positive solutions to climate change.



BIODIVERSITY

High Life Highland Countryside Rangers are partners within the Highland Environment Forum (HEF). HEF is funded by Highland Council and Forestry Land Scotland. The Edinburgh Declaration (2021) set out the commitments of members of the international community, the Scottish Government, its partners, and the wider local community in delivering for nature over the coming decade, by tackling biodiversity loss. This is delivered through the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan for which HLH Rangers are delivery partners.

Partner Funded projects in 2023/24



£11K from the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund supported the Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project.



£5K from the Scottish Libraries Information Council funded Ranger-led Climate Change events in Highland libraries.



Photo:
Local Bio-blitz events teach species
identification for biodiversity
monitoring in Wester-Ross

BIODIVERSITY REPORT



Small grants and donations aid the High Life Highland Ranger Service to support our community work and wildlife assistance. In 2023/24, grants, fundraising and income generation facilitated important activities such as ranger led citizen science and biodiversity monitoring training. Habitat restoration projects, such as the Highland Wildflower mosaic project (see p7), repaired damaged ecosystems, while working together with wildlife rescue operators and species specific conservation agencies saved and protected species. This work gets fed back into the Highland Council's statutory reporting on its biodiversity duties.

Community education programmes raised awareness about conservation (case study on p11), generating local support. Biodiversity monitoring ensured that interventions were effective and adaptive. These contributions have a direct, positive impact on biodiversity in the communities in our region, demonstrating how even modest funding can lead to significant environmental benefits. The four case studies of work in 2023/24 are highlighted on p7 and show how we are working towards achieving a sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife.



Hedgehog Habitat
Improvements



Seabird survey



CASE STUDIES



Sea Gulls- Surveys

The HLH Ranger team have contributed survey data to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), focusing in 23/24 on Sea Gull colony recording as part of the WinGS initiative. This vital work monitors gull populations, including red-listed species, and their wintering patterns, contributing to conservation efforts and enhancing our understanding of these important seabirds.

Butterfly conservation

John Orr, Inverness area Ranger and Paul Castle, North Sutherland and Caithness Ranger have been working closely with local volunteers and The Species on the Edge team within Butterfly Conservation Trust to seed sites with kidney vetch and birds-trefoil. These plants provide the habitat for the small blue and the dingy skipper butterflies. John has trained 15 new volunteers to undertake butterfly transects on the site.



Barn Owls

Public donations to our service have helped to create even more nesting sites in Sutherland for barn owls. The result has been really positive as breeding pairs are becoming more established in 2023/24. Andy Summers, Senior Ranger (North) has been monitoring progress and holds a licence to check these nests ,

Hedgehogs

Jenny Grant, Wester-Ross ranger and Fiona MacLean, Lochaber ranger have been working with wildlife rescue groups and communities to educate, and create hedgehog friendly areas within urban and semi wild areas. These measures by the team and the local community groups and residents have seen new areas thrive as a hedgehog havens.





Photo: Volunteers tree planting native woodland species in Sutherland

VOLUNTEERING REPORT



In 2023/24, the High Life Highland Ranger Service successfully organised **69 volunteer events, a 28% increase** from the previous year. Our dedicated volunteers contributed **1,227 hours** of adult volunteer time and **355 hours** youth volunteer time, reflecting strong community commitment to nature.

With **593 volunteer engagements**, our enhanced outreach efforts have developed a **robust volunteer base**, boosting our capacity to manage and preserve local natural areas. This remarkable participation aids in maintaining natural spaces and strengthens community bonds, promoting environmental stewardship.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our volunteers for their invaluable contributions.

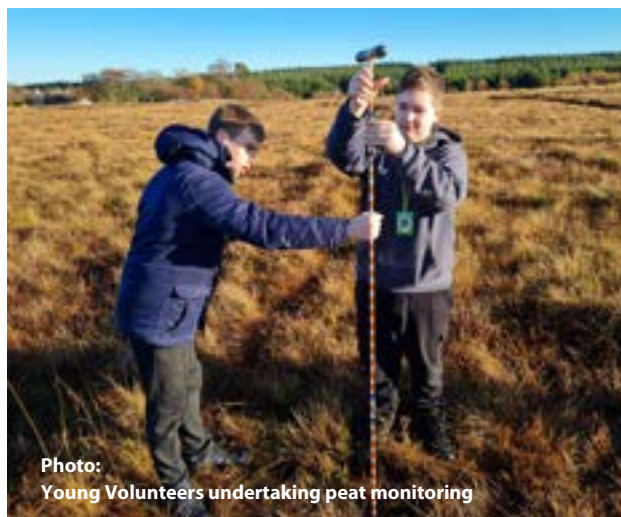


Photo: Young Volunteers undertaking peat monitoring

- ✓ Beach Cleans
- ✓ Community Clean ups
- ✓ Footpath Maintenance
- ✓ Biodiversity monitoring
- ✓ Habitat Management
- ✓ Sessional delivery

SHOWCASE



Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic

The Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project, led by the High Life Highland Countryside Rangers a community-driven initiative funded by a £11K grant from the Highland Council's Nature Restoration Fund, aimed at reversing biodiversity loss. Engaging over 1,000 individuals in 23/24, the project established more than 60 wildflower mini-meadows across the Highlands, showcasing the power of collective action in conservation.

Key activities included identifying suitable sites with community input, securing necessary permissions, and preparing sites by lifting turf, planting seeds, and watering. The project emphasised community engagement, with 351 volunteers involved in meadow creation, 292 school children participating, and over 500 individuals attending workshops and events.

The project created a sustainable patchwork of wildflower meadows, enhancing local biodiversity and supporting pollinator populations. The initiative fostered community ownership and environmental stewardship, contributing to social cohesion and ecological awareness.

An interactive meadow map on the Highland Environment Forum webpage allowed for detailed progress tracking and increased community involvement.

<https://www.highlandenvironmentforum.info/meadows-map/>

The project has laid a foundation for ongoing environmental stewardship, ensuring the long-term success of these biodiversity havens. By fostering community commitment and providing ongoing support, the Highland Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project serves as a replicable model for other regions.

This project demonstrates the significant impact of community involvement and innovative conservation practices on local ecosystems, making it a valuable case study in successful biodiversity restoration.






Photo:
School Children learn about
fresh water ecology in the
puddles to pond project in
Ross-shire

92% ↑

Increase in pupil
engagements

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT REPORT

240

School Ranger Visits

During 2023/24, the ranger service significantly boosted its school engagement, conducting **240 school visits— a 100% increase** from 120 in 2022/23. We engaged with **5,898 students, a 92% rise** from the previous year. This growth was driven by successful initiatives such as the wildflower meadow project, which provided hands-on biodiversity enhancement experiences.

Teaching the Scottish Outdoor Access Code is vital in ensuring understanding and respect for the environment among young people. Our activities not only do this but also promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and align with Learning for Sustainability (LFS) principles.

Our diverse delivery included a variety of exciting hands on conservation opportunities from fieldwork at Forsinard Flow Country to understanding freshwater ecology at both off-site and onsite sessions on school grounds. All sessions are designed to be inclusive and can be adapted to all ages and key stages.

We organised a wildflower poetry competition in both Gaelic and English, collaborated with the Royal Highland Education Trust to deliver farming lessons. Additionally, our presence at the Caithness and Dingwall science festivals, held at the respective high school campuses, highlighted our commitment to integrating environmental education within the broader school curriculum

62 Schools

engaged in 2023/24

(* those who participated in the wildflower project)

Caithness and Sutherland

- Lochinver*
- Kinlochbervie*
- Durness*
- Tongue*
- Watten*
- Keiss*
- Noss*
- Scourie*
- Newton park*
- Dunbeath*
- Halkirk*
- Melvich*
- Pennyland*
- Castletown*
- Canisbay
- Miller Academy
- Mount Pleasant
- Crossroads
- Scallywags ELC
- Kinlochbervie High
- Wick High
- Thurso High



Inverness/Nairn/ Badenoch and Strathspey

- Aviemore *
- Newtonmore *
- Carrbridge *
- Grantown *
- Auldearn*
- Aldourie
- Drummond *
- Dochgarroch *
- Teanassie *
- Farr
- Muirton
- Inverness High
- Inverness Royal Academy



Lochaber

- Ardgour *
- Lochaline *
- Lady Lovat *
- Arisaig *
- Caol *
- Banavie *
- Duror
- Bun-sgoil
- Ghàidhlig



Wester Ross

- Ullapool*
- Ullapool High
- Achiltibuie*
- Gairloch*
- Lochcarron*
- Scoraig*
- Bualnaluib*
- Poolewe*
- Applecross*

Easter Ross and SE Sutherland

- Tarradale*
- Golspie*
- Hill of Fearn*
- Culbokie*
- Avoch*
- Tore*
- Gledfield*
- Rogart*
- Kiltearn
- Dingwall Academy*



Photo: Participants learn about climate change and look at ice age relic bones on a guided walk in Sutherland

COMMUNITY LEARNING REPORT



NATURE UNVEILED

Launched in November 2023, "Nature Unveiled" quickly gained over 200 subscribers by March 2024. This learning portal provides fun and accessible information about Highlands ecology, showcasing rangers' work and community conservation efforts. It promotes citizen science projects, engaging residents and visitors in preserving the region's heritage, and emphasises the vital connection between people and nature. We will start to report on digital engagements next year.

<https://highlifehighlandranger.substack.com>

449
Community Learning Opportunities



During 2023/24, our ranger service engaged the community through **449 events**, focusing on education for all ages. Highlights include Easter family fun events attracting large numbers of attendees, and highlighting the importance of families learning together. In total we saw 5382 learner engagements - an increase of 38%.

Our environmental educational outreach spanned diverse demographics, with a range of exciting in person learning opportunities, such as the whale and dolphin watching, the sand sculpture at Clachtoll (covered by STV news), bat walks, fungi forays, bird watching, nature safaris and other guided walks.

Rangers also delivered **climate change** learning sessions in libraries supported by the Scottish Library Information Council - engaging with over **150 participants** of all ages. These sessions spoke to environmental stewardship and carbon literacy. A popular programme monthly talks held over the winter on topics like puffins and beavers demonstrated our commitment to accessible education being undertaken in a combination of online and at local venues.

Heritage events, teaching traditional crafts such wool crafting and leather working, the 'wild escapes' project working with several museums, and historic archeology walks such visits to The Schold sheilings - showcase the diverse community heritage learning opportunities on offer.





Photo:
Participants take a leisurely stroll in a regular themed nature walk in Lochaber

HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT



In 2023/24 the HLH Rangers significantly contributed to the **Green Health Partnership**. We were represented at the Green Health showcase event in May 2023, sharing a stall in the Atrium with Inverness Botanic Gardens and engaging with partners about our Nature, Health, and Wellbeing projects. The Healthy Minds project was highlighted at the event as an example of best practice with a short film presented to community planning partners.



COLLABORATIONS

Collaborating with NHS Highland, we built relationships with **New Craigs hospital**, delivered at their summer community fete, and provided mental health interventions such as **Branching Out** at Evanton and the **Healthy Minds project** in Badenoch and Strathspey. We also delivered sessions for the **Brora Macular Support Group** in Sutherland. HLH Rangers engaged in activities such as hill walking with High Life's Adult Learning team and Afghan **Refugee groups**. Staple events like family reading in the woodland, **short walks to nature**, and **Connecting Carers** nature walks continued. Ranger led craft events in libraries and other local outdoor venues thrived. The social prescription pilot study of nature and culture activities with **UHI/Edinburgh University** concluded.



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Ways you can support us

Join *highlife*

Joining High Life supports our charity work to improve lives and communities, membership also gives free access to gym and leisure facilities, plus numerous discount benefits. Support us and Join High Life today!



Book a break at our bunkhouse

Why not relax and book a short break at our bunkhouse in one of two iconic Highland locations: Torrin on Skye and Glenfinnan in Lochaber. Operated as a not-for-profit, any surplus benefits the charity. Enjoy a warm welcome from our wardens Pam and Fiona. Its the perfect getaway for groups or families. Scan or click for more information.



Read

Discover **Nature Unveiled** our HLH Ranger online publication filled with fascinating stories, nature and heritage articles, and news from our dedicated team of Rangers. Scan or click to read and pledge your support.



Donate

Give a one off gift to the Ranger service to support our conservation, education, and community work in the Highlands. Help us protect wildlife and sustain this unique region's natural heritage for future generations. Scan or click to donate now.



Thank you