

Education and Lifelong Learning Policy

Policy summary

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that people benefit from understanding wildlife and that understanding fosters responsibility. Children and adults alike should have the opportunity to learn about nature throughout their lives. Everybody should be equipped with enough knowledge to make the right choices for wildlife and to understand its importance to their daily lives.

Our principles for education and lifelong learning:

- The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that every child and young person should have regular, meaningful, first-hand experience of the natural environment as part of formal education and their daily lives outside of school
- Every person should have the opportunity to learn about wildlife and its conservation at every stage in their life

Scottish Wildlife Trust action to support education and lifelong learning:

- We will provide children and adults with a wide range of enjoyable, relevant, high-quality learning experiences that promote wildlife conservation and sustainability
- We will enable our staff and volunteers to seek opportunities to deliver high-quality public engagement including guided walks, lectures and informal talks
- We will encourage the widespread understanding of learning through wildlife and promote the value of learning outside the classroom
- We will champion and support good practice and use less jargon
- We will seek ways to getting people involved in science

1.1 The Scottish Wildlife Trust's **25-year Vision** is for *a network of healthy, resilient ecosystems supporting expanding communities of native species across large areas of Scotland's land, water and seas.*

1.2 We believe that this can be achieved through:

- Protecting valuable habitats from further loss
- Restoring and enhancing degraded habitats
- Expanding these areas to form an integral part of large-scale, wildlife-rich landscapes
- **Having a diverse range of people who are increasingly knowledgeable of, and actively engaged in, wildlife and conservation.**

- 1.3 The last of these, people who are knowledgeable about and actively engaged in wildlife and conservation, is essential to realising our Vision.
- 1.4 This policy addresses how the Scottish Wildlife Trust will aim to make best use of its resources to engage people with wildlife through education and lifelong learning, and how it will encourage others to do so.
- 1.5 The Trust currently undertakes lots of educational and lifelong learning activities. Our reserve staff carry out both day-to-day public engagement and education-focused talks; we lead groups on guided walks and we give lectures. Organised student groups from schools, colleges and universities visit our reserves for study and research. Our magazine, *Scottish Wildlife*, carries a wide range of high-quality and informative articles on conservation and the environment. Our website is a public-facing educational resource available to anybody connected to the internet. Trust visitor centres run both formal and informal education programmes and we have an extensive network of children's Watch groups.
- 1.6 We recognise that all of our staff and volunteers are involved in education and lifelong learning. Every contact with a member of the Trust, a member of the public, a land manager, a politician, a journalist or any other stakeholder is an opportunity to impart knowledge and increase understanding. In order to do this more effectively, we will cut the amount of jargon we use and try to tailor our communications more effectively to their audience.
- 1.7 The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that people benefit from understanding wildlife and that understanding fosters responsibility. Children and adults alike should have the opportunity to learn about nature throughout their lives. Everybody should be equipped with enough knowledge to make the right choices for wildlife and to understand its importance to their daily lives.
- 1.8 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires (at Article 29) that States Parties should enable children to develop respect for the natural environment. We believe that this can only be achieved through regular, first-hand experience of the natural environment. As childhood contact with nature is a predictor for adult attitudes to nature¹ the importance of giving children the opportunity to develop understanding of, and respect for, nature has clear implications for how they come to interact with nature as adults.

2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 "Nature study" has, in one form or another, been part of education for many years, both as part of the formal curriculum and as an informal means of engaging children with the world around them. The Scottish Wildlife Trust recognises the value of such engagement and encourages parents and teachers to continue to engage (in particular) younger children in this way.

¹ Lester, S. and Maudsley, M.J. 2006. *Play, naturally: a review of children's natural play*. Children's Play Council.

2.2 The UNESCO Tbilisi Declaration on Environmental Education of 1978 sets out a definition of environmental education which distinguishes it from nature study:

“Environmental education is a learning process that increases people’s knowledge and awareness of the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action.”

2.3 We also support formal environmental education as a subject worthy of study in its own right. We support the use of the natural environment and its wildlife as a teaching tool across the curriculum where this can be done safely without any negative impacts on wildlife.

2.4 In 1993 the then Secretary of State for Scotland published *Learning for life: a national strategy for environmental education*. *Learning for life* identified that the involvement of bodies with environmental expertise, including the voluntary sector, is essential for the success of an environmental education strategy and lifelong learning through the environment.

2.5 Lifelong learning has continued to be the subject of considerable attention in Scotland. The then Scottish Executive published a lifelong learning strategy *Life through learning: learning through life*² in 2003. The Strategy saw lifelong learning as encompassing -

“the whole range of learning: formal and informal learning, workplace learning, and the skills, knowledge attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in their day-to-day experiences.”

2.6 *Life through learning* drew on a 2002 report of the Scottish Parliament’s Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee which defined lifelong learning as:

“The continuous development of knowledge and skills aimed at enhancing the individual’s quality of life and society’s wellbeing”³.

2.7 While it is not always helpful to be too restricted by definitions, the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee’s articulation of lifelong learning is sufficiently flexible to provide a useful framework for environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust to consider how we can fill the gaps in lifelong learning provision identified in *Life through learning* and its predecessor documents.

2.8 The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that lifelong learning through and about wildlife and nature should be available to everyone. This means that people should have the confidence to engage with wildlife in natural settings; should be able to access areas of importance to wildlife near their home and should be equipped with the knowledge to treat wildlife and the environment respectfully and to know what to do

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/02/16308/17752#1>

³ Scottish Parliament Education and Lifelong Learning Committee. 2002. *9th Report: Lifelong learning*. SP Paper 679

and who to contact when they see evidence that others have not behaved in a responsible way.

- 2.9 Urban greenspaces which are of particular importance for wildlife, amenity or environmental education should receive particular official recognition, attention and protection either as Local Nature Reserves, urban Wildlife Sites or as sites of nature importance in local authority strategies. Links should be made with local Biodiversity Action Plans wherever possible.

3.0 Formal education

- 3.1 The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that environmental education should be further incorporated into the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence. In developing a respect for the natural environment, as it their right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children should have access to high quality education about the environment including global and local challenges. They should be given the opportunity to develop understanding and respect for wildlife and nature through regular, first-hand experience.
- 3.2 Outdoor learning, using wildlife and the wider environment, is of proven benefit^{4, 5} for individuals with special educational needs. Outdoor education in both formal and informal sectors has a proven track record in delivering effective education programmes to individuals with special needs, affecting behaviour and health in a positive way and improving cross-curricular learning outcomes.
- 3.3 Teachers and other school staff should be equipped to deliver environmental education and enabled to take pupils into the field, backed by appropriate resources and knowledge, including knowledge of outdoor health and safety. The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that teacher training and professional standards should recognise the importance of environmental education and that all trainee teachers should be trained and assessed in environmental education theory and practice. We will seek opportunities to contribute our expertise and experience of environmental education to teacher training colleges and in-service training.
- 3.4 The Scottish Wildlife Trust will continue to encourage school groups to make planned visits to appropriate reserves and visitor centres where damage to conservation interest or reserve infrastructure is unlikely to result. Where resources allow, Trust staff should try to make themselves available to support such visits, subject to other demands on their time.
- 3.5 Any such visit should only take place when the appropriate risk assessment has been undertaken in accordance with Trust health and safety policy and established best practice.

⁴ <http://www.playscotland.org/assets/Documents/CYWURResearchComplete.pdf>

⁵ Farnham, M. and Mutrie, N. 1997. The Potential Benefits of Outdoor Development for Children with Special Needs. *British Journal of Special Education*. 24(1): 31-38

- 3.6 The Trust will continue to support school education through its Visitor Centres. Visitor centre-based education activities include the highly successful teacher naturalists programme based at the Montrose Basin Visitor Centre and outreach and community engagement work based at the innovative Jupiter Urban Wildlife Centre at Grangemouth which are both specifically designed to facilitate school visits.
- 3.7 The Scottish Wildlife Trust will continue to support initiatives such as Eco-Schools which put into practice conservation ethics and policy development bodies such as the Real World Learning Scotland which seek to promote outdoor learning.
- 3.8 We believe that wildlife and the environment should be mainstreamed across the curriculum into subjects such as science, mathematics, English, art, history, economics etc. This requires both leadership from teacher training colleges and encouragement and advice from nature conservation organisations. We will highlight and champion good practice where we see it and encourage others to follow good examples of the imaginative use of wildlife and the environment in lessons and other educational activities.
- 3.9 We value our relationships with a number of universities and colleges and will continue to welcome students on directed (i.e. taught) field trips and to support research by prior agreement with the reserve manager/convenor and where the conservation interests of the reserve will not be compromised. The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes strongly in the importance of evidence-based conservation and sees hosting research as a part of its commitment to continuously improving conservation practice. The contribution and assistance of the Scottish Wildlife Trust should always be acknowledged in any publications resulting from work undertaken with the Trust's assistance or on Trust reserves.
- 3.10 The Scottish Wildlife Trust will encourage its staff to further develop relationships with educational establishments including schools, colleges and universities in order to support the early professional development of future conservation practitioners. The Trust will seek to support honours and masters students through co-supervision of research projects.

4.0 School age informal education

- 4.1 Scottish Wildlife Trust has over 25 volunteer-led children's groups located throughout Scotland, all of which form part of Wildlife Watch. Most of these groups meet at least once a month and take part in wildlife-themed activities, from nature trails to bat detecting. We will continue to use the Watch network to engage young people and their families in conservation-focused activities.
- 4.2 While Watch is dependent on the availability and commitment of trained volunteers, engagement and educational activities led by Trust staff such as rangers and outreach activities such as those run by the Scottish Beaver Trial and supported by the Trust can be a route to ensuring that the Trust offers learning opportunities to as wide a social mix as possible.

4.3 The Trust will encourage the responsible use of its reserves as outlined above as a resource for after school groups such as the Scouts and Brownies where there is an educational outcome relating to wildlife conservation. Trust staff will aim to provide support for such visits subject to resource availability and operational priorities.

5.0 Lifelong learning

5.1 Lifelong learning is open to everyone. The Trust supports the ideals of lifelong learning as outlined by the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Lifelong learning Committee in 2002 (see paragraph 14) and believes that facilitating and promoting lifelong learning is central to its Vision.

5.2 We will make our reserves and expertise available to community groups of all ages in order to promote lifelong learning about wildlife and wildlife conservation. We aim to help equip people with the skills and knowledge to make a difference in their local environment as well as to make the right choices for the wider – including global – environment. We will also encourage our staff and volunteers to seek opportunities to deliver talks, guided walks and other public engagement activities.

5.3 We will continue to develop our own website as a self-directed educational resource, taking full account of website users' views in designing and amending content.

5.4 So-called "citizen science" is increasingly being used by researchers, often in collaboration with environmental charities and sometimes broadcasters to gather data about a wide range of matters from astronomy and computing to wildlife censuses and phenology. This can be a powerful tool to engage individuals and communities, to demonstrate to decision-makers that communities care and people are motivated, to gather data useful for conservation and to promote wildlife conservation to a wider audience than may currently be the case. It harks back, in a wholly positive way, to the almost lost age of the amateur scientist. Participants in citizen science projects are active collaborators.

5.5 The Scottish Wildlife Trust supports citizen science where the data generated can be validated and will seek opportunities to make use of citizen science-gathered data on its own or in collaboration with others, including other eNGOs, schools, universities, community groups, government and others. In the context of Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves or Members' Centre activity in the wider countryside this is likely to be wildlife recording and survey. The Trust believes that reliable and validated wildlife records generated through work on its reserves or through its Members' Centres should be recorded with local biological records centres where they exist and on the National Biological Network.

5.6 Lifelong learning is voluntary, it is self-motivated and it should be fun. Where conservation interests will not be compromised, and there is no other significant reason why not, the Trust will support the use of its reserves to promote wildlife-inspired arts, be they visual art installations, literature or wildlife-inspired music. The arts can be a powerful tool for engagement and the Trust will seek, subject

always to the primacy of wildlife conservation, to support wildlife-friendly art, music and literature.

6.0 How the Trust will use this policy

- 6.1 The Trust will seek to influence decision makers and education providers to promote environmental education and support it with adequate training and resources. We will pursue this policy with government and the teaching profession.
- 6.2 We will follow this policy in operational decisions concerning access to our reserves and the allocation of staff resources.
- 6.3 We will recognise that all our staff and volunteers engage in the provision of education and lifelong learning opportunities.

7.0 Cross-reference to other Scottish Wildlife Trust policies

- a. Natural Greenspaces in Towns and Cities (2003)
- b. Public Access to our Wildlife Reserves (2005)
- c. Environmental Volunteering (2011)
- d. People and Wildlife Strategy (2010)

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