

# The Value of Volunteering

By Iona Skyring



The Nevis Training Project began in 2015 with 7 eager trainee volunteer rangers (TVRs), ready to take on a summer of path work and conservation management. In the years since it started, the programme has grown in popularity and success. We've had 33 TVR's over the last 4 years who have seen 7 of our projects completed, thousands of trees planted, many kilometres of path repaired, and hundreds of species of flora and fauna surveyed. Over the course of the three-month programme, the TVRs gain valuable, hands on experience in environmental management which has taken our previous volunteers on to a range of different jobs at local, national and international levels.

This year, from June until September, we had Chris, Scott, David, Andrew, Jake and Cameron on the final summer programme, keeping us on our toes but contributing six very useful pairs of hands to our projects. The volunteers each looked after their own projects over the summer. This covered various areas of environmental and tourism management that the Nevis Landscape Partnership have worked on over the last four years. The six areas were moth and butterfly surveying, done by Jake, Mink monitoring, done by Scott, traffic and road surveying by Cameron, bracken bashing and tree planting by Chris, the John Muir Award film, done by Andrew, and constructing a new pond dipping platform at the Ben Nevis Visitors Centre, was run by David. These projects provided new learning areas and tackled many important management issues that exist within Glen Nevis. The boys came away from the programme with new friends and new skills, so we asked them what they got out of it, and where it will take them in the future:

***What motivated you to join the programme?***

**Chris:** I was looking for something to do over the summer before starting back at university, and 12 weeks of living and working in a stunning part of the Highlands sounded ideal. I felt it would be a good opportunity to put my existing knowledge into practice whilst also gaining new skills and meeting new people.

***What is the most interesting thing you learned?***

**Cameron:** I enjoyed learning about the interconnectivity of different parts of the ecosystem, such as fungi and flowers and the wild boar and bracken. It was interesting to learn how one species can be so easily affected by changes in the environment.



***Where do you think your experience in the programme will take you?***

**Andrew:** Hopefully I'll be able to take everything that I've learned and experienced on the programme into a full-time job. It would be great to be able to work as a ranger or conservation officer to help maintain and promote the outdoors.

***What was your favourite training while on the programme?***

**Scott:** I really liked doing such a wide range of wildlife and species surveys. It's been really good to get practical experience in ecological survey as it's so different to learning about it in a classroom. I hope to use these skills in the future.

***What did you like most about your project?***

**Jake:** I had always had an interest in butterflies and moths, however previously had never had the opportunity to get involved with them. Taking a lead role in the lepidopteran monitoring project therefore gave me this opportunity to learn new skills, meet local experts and explore taxa I previously didn't know much about.

***Why do you want to work in the environment and conservation sector?***

**David:** I want to give something back to ensure that our amazing natural world is still here and thriving years from now, so that others can go explore and experience all the wonders of the Scottish wilderness. All creatures deserve to thrive, our world wouldn't be the same without all the flora and fauna.

Our trainee rangers have always been very positive about the programme and how much they got out of it which is a great outcome for the Nevis Training Project. The value of volunteering is experienced through both those who are helping, and the organisation that receives the help. The Nevis Landscape Partnership has achieved so much beyond just completing the projects, and volunteers have been an integral part of that. If you would like to volunteer or come to one of our engagement events, please visit our website: [www.nevislandscape.co.uk/events](http://www.nevislandscape.co.uk/events)