

Cairngorms Youth Climate Camp

7 – 11 August 2023

Badaguish, Glenmore, Scotland

Executive Summary

A meeting of 38 young people from areas and network across Scotland, UK and Europe, including National Parks UK, EUROPARC and Scottish Youth Local Action Groups (LAG). The event was part -commissioned by the Cairngorms Youth LAG and the programme was drawn up by co-design between the Cairngorms Youth Action Team and staff at CNPA. It incorporated workshops, fieldtrips and outdoor activities exploring the nature and climate crises. The programme was themed by days: 1. **Climate and Nature Crisis**; 2. **Wild Adventure and Nature Connection**; 3. **Youth Action**.

Here follows a summary of the main discussion workshops and the key themes that emerged.

1. Challenges, Solutions and Actions for the Climate and Nature

Crises

Through a workshop session, the young people outlined their thoughts and ideas on the Challenges, Solutions and Actions that could be taken for the Climate and Nature Crises.

There were concerns about biodiversity loss, shifting baselines, lack of funding for education and conservation, land rights and access, mass tourism and power structures that exclude the nature perspective from decision -making. Short -term thinking and short-term projects were also identified as a problem.

Overall, it was felt that an **enhanced nature culture** and **nature connection** is essential. People wanted to see more opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature. This could be achieved through education, community projects and volunteering opportunities.

Ideas for solutions included work on legislation, education, volunteer and community action to combat eco -anxiety and despair, narrative work and making public transport free.

Actions included steps that each young person could take, from writing to their MP, to sustainable lifestyles, developing education and engagement programmes and sharing knowledge and opportunities. Full details can be found in supporting document.

A **youth network** would provide a valuable forum to progress these ideas, linking up different areas working on the same agenda.

For full details see Appendix.

2. Wild Adventure and Nature Connection

Through a workshop in the forest of Glenmore with the Cairngorms National Park Ranger Service, youth delegates took part in outdoor activities aimed to stimulate discussion about nature connection.

Physical, mental and social health benefits of nature connection were discussed. These can be extremely important for individuals and **reduce strain on public health services**. **There is a need for skilled individuals to link up nature connection opportunities with the people that need them most.** In the Cairngorms National Park, Green Health Link Workers are employed and are in the process of setting up a formal system for this with the NHS (National Health Service).

Participants from Scandinavia highlighted their **land access laws** (allemannsretten) and **outdoor culture** sets young people up with more opportunities for nature connection throughout their life. Scottish access rights are similar, although it was identified that beyond the law, there are many additional barriers to accessing the outdoors.

A key theme was that people often think of outdoor pursuits as being **high adrenaline activities** where the aim is to **climb/conquer a peak or route**, travel in a **faster** time or take part in a **harder** grade of that sport. This has a competitive and elitist quality, which means that people looking to try new outdoor activities may feel that such pastimes are out of reach.

Many of the camp participants considered themselves fortunate to have the knowledge, experience and confidence to find out about and access new outdoor spaces, as a lack of these is a barrier for many people.

At the end of the session, camp participants noted down ideas from the day that they can take home and utilise for the benefit of others to enhance nature connection in their own communities.

3. EUROPARC Youth Manifesto

The document produced in 2018 was revisited by all groups. The youth read the content and discussed its on-going relevance. Consensus was that **the Manifesto is still relevant**. What is missing is **an emphasis on climate change and mental health and wellbeing**, as well as the cost-of-living crisis for UK youth. It was suggested a review could highlight these missing areas. It would also be useful to conduct **an appraisal of all the work that has been accomplished since the 2018 manifesto**. This could include case studies and examples of implementation to good success, e.g. youth representation on Boards and the Cairngorms Youth LAG Fund.

4. Youth Parliament

During a workshop session, Scottish Rural Action facilitated time for individual reflection and group work to identify the ways in which young people felt they could influence change and provide solutions to some complex problems. In addition to revisiting the Youth Manifesto, the upcoming Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament provided a framework for the discussions, offering an opportunity for young people to consider one platform (of many) to connect with policymakers.

Generally, young people explained that systems are not set up holistically to hear from young people and act upon their ideas and demands, leading to persistent 'tokenism'. There was a consensus that young people are '**rights holders**' and not simply 'stakeholders'. Furthermore, they emphasised the need to hear a range of young people's voices: equity and inclusivity must be always upheld and centred. However, they did express nuance that some geographies engaged better with young people than others. Overall, they felt that their voices are better amplified when they are heard collectively and when their input is recognised at all levels of possible action i.e., locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

The group demanded better support to ensure their views are **not only heard but acted upon**, and that their **voices actively change systems from within**. They demanded organisational support and dedicated resources from members of staff in their localities. However, many did recognise the challenges of this in more rural areas.

In section 2 of the workshop, young people were asked to identify individual issues they would like to see action on. They discussed various topics including, but not limited to, public transport, mental health, media segregation, rural employment, increased education, second home ownership, diminishing water quality and single-use plastics. However, when asked to **combine their individual challenges into broader thematics**, youth delegates theorised actions on a **systemic level**: they demanded socio-economic and political transformative change, breaking away from thinking in silos on single issues with single solutions.

Finally, the youth delegates **demanded this change** across different levels of society: in public consciousness, in media outlets, in regional politics and in governmental action. Collectively, they argued for widespread engagement across different groups of people including young people, online audiences, politicians, and civil society.

For full details see Appendix.

5. Feedback

Overall, the feedback was positive. People were generally happy with the accommodation, catering, travel and workshops. Many young people reported they left feeling:

*Motivated Inspired Informed Confident Enlightened Hopeful
Understood, optimistic about people, relaxed, full of ideas*

Some said the Camp was too short and they would have appreciated more time to explore the Cairngorms. Some said they would have liked time to meet as a group and process their ideas into action.

6. Next steps

This is where we hand over to you, the young people. We invite you to **organise a meeting and plan your next steps as a group**. How do you want to stay in touch? What actions would you like to see go forwards? How can you share knowledge and make this happen?

Come up with your ideas and present them to your National Park / Youth Network organisers.

Appendix

I. Challenges, Solutions and Actions for the Climate and Nature Crises

Through a 2.5 hour workshop session in the style of the 2018 Youth Manifesto sessions, the young people attending the Cairngorms Youth Climate Camp outlined their thoughts and ideas on **Challenges**, **Solutions** and **Actions** for the Nature and Climate Crises.

This session was proposed by Ellie D -D, a member of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team. The working group discussions were facilitated by members of the EUROPARC Youth Core Team and the Cairngorms Youth Action Team.

The ideas came from 4 working groups of 30 young people from across Scotland, UK National Parks and the EUROPARC Youth+ network.

Challenges

What are the biggest challenges you feel that we are facing with the Nature and Climate Crises?

- Disconnection from nature
 - o empathy; caring
- Lack of nature education
 - o knowledge and understanding of nature and climate thinking
- Short term thinking
 - o most projects 2/3/5 years
 - o climate change and nature crisis needs a longer vision (100/200 years)
- Biodiversity loss – species disappearing
- Land rights, ownership, access
- Nature culture needs to be better developed
- Shifting baseline – we don't know what we've lost / is missing
- Power structures
 - o people at the top / with power aren't addressing the problem. They're too disconnected
- 'Ostriches' – too many people have their heads in the sand not taking responsibility for our role in climate change

- Emotions
 - o eco-anxiety / fear / anger or complacency about the problem
- Lack of funding for nature, conservation, education
- Valueing nature not just for £
- Mass tourism
- Capitalism

Solutions

Having looked at and discussed these challenges, what are the solutions you propose to deal with these problems?

- Creating a narrative
 - o Empowerment through stories
 - o Our shared thread
 - o Empathy with nature
 - o Updating curriculum education re climate change
- Working in countryside
 - o subsidising salaries
 - o land reform
 - o better training in agriculture
- Green economy and finance
 - o taxation
 - o natural capital
 - o consumer choices
- Nature -based solutions
 - o landscape -scale
 - o low till / good soil management
 - o Interconnected wildlife corridors
 - o Increase number of hay meadows
 - o Rewilding
 - o Introducing predators to help species balance
 - o Incorporate biodiverse spaces into cities and towns, bringing nature to the masses and helping wildlife in urban areas
- To combat eco -anxiety and complacency:

- o volunteer work
 - o Vitamin N (Nature)
 - o Outdoor / nature education on school curriculum from Nursery to High School
 - o Optimism over despair
 - o Show solutions alongside problems in the media
 - o Legislation
 - o Unity
 - o Targeted, local community action / change
 - o Use nature as a solution to other problems, e.g. mental and physical health. Promote the benefits
- Education, knowledge and learning
 - o Reinforce the knowledge that climate change will have serious effect on our lives and future generations
 - o Reinforce that individuals do make the difference
 - o Mandatory climate education
 - o Education should be more details (e.g. not only updating about a certain problem but also stimulate free thinking, like we're doing now)
 - o A more positive approach
 - Legislation and governance
 - o Fine large companies for not meeting green targets
 - o Fund things properly
 - o Make more things illegal
 - Make all public transport FREE!

Actions

From Challenges and Solutions to Actions: what are the actions you think we can do now to address these challenges and begin to action the solutions?

- Buy local
- Make a narrative that people can relate to
- Don't be afraid to be the educator
- Make a network for young like -minded people
- Sharing = motivation

- Support young people in leadership opportunities
- Go to EUROPARC Conference
- Use our voices for conference
- Speak with local MPs

- Sustainability
 - o more sustainable living (food shopping, kit, energy use, transport use)
 - o Use your wallet wisely
 - o Grow your own food (lower carbon footprint)
 - o Support local shops, farmers etc
 - o Vote with your money – When you go shopping try to chose products that are sustainable

- Engagement and Education
 - o Volunteering
 - o Outreach programmes for children who do not have access to nature
 - o Host engagement days for people aged 18 -30 at National Parks
 - o More Youth Action teams across the world!
 - o Spread awareness in local area
 - o Bring new & fresh ideas back to your local area
 - o Inform and educate yourself and others
 - o Closer connection and communication between all youth groups
 - o Hold meetings / camps regularly to discuss issues and progress in local/global sphere
 - o Include people from outside of Europe, e.g. Youth COP 26

- Politics
 - o Write to your local MP highlighting issues in your area
 - o Become Prime Minister
 - o Check where your local politician stands on the environmental topic – vote accordingly

- Biodiversity
 - o Look after your cats and dogs. They kill a lot of wildlife
 - o Use your head when buying plants for your garden. They could be a threat to local biodiversity.

- Sharing Knowledge
 - o Educate young people to know about the possibilities of rewilding

- o Visualizing what is possible – visit places where nature has bounced back
- o Training
- Share Opportunities
 - o Join local action groups
 - o Network with boards – youth reps & lobbying
 - o Creating spaces for community and common purpose to allow change
- Protected Areas
 - o Transport links to access these places
 - o Limiting vehicle access to protected areas
 - o Free public buses into the mountains – no cars
 - o Allesmansright – implement in the UK and more widely
 - o A baseline of rules for being in nature
 - o Communicatians on outdoor access
 - o Local volunteering – finding ways to engage and allow people to take part

II. Youth Parliament

Overview

[Scottish Rural Action](#) were delighted to join the Youth Climate Camp. Board director, Aimee Spence, and staff member, Catriona Mallows attended and delivered a workshop encouraging young people to reflect on the ways in which their voices, both individually and collectively, are heard. They showcased the importance of working collaboratively on a variety of issues, encouraged young people to think about their engagement at different levels (i.e., locally, regionally, nationally) and encouraged them to self-organise and deliberate solutions to some complex problems. Aimee and Catriona also sign-posted attendees to various platforms for rural and island people within Scotland and across Europe, including the [Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament](#) and the European Rural Parliament.

How do you think your voice is currently heard? By whom?

- I think it is sometimes heard but often only by young people, and if heard by others it can be very tokenistic and tick box;
- There are geographical differences in the way our voices are heard – so some national parks are good at hearing from young people, but others are not.

- Voices can be heard and acted on but can stop at certain levels – sometimes our thoughts and ideas don't go as far or are as impactful as we might want.

How do you want to be heard? And by whom?

- I want to be heard at a local level to make a difference to my local area;
- We are right holders: not just stakeholders and that must always be understood;
- My voice should be heard at all levels of policymaking and more;
- Things must be more than just creating space to 'hear' from us – we need to be able to influence things;
- My voice, and other young people's voices, must hold people to account – they must change things!
- Our voices need to be heard all together.

If more voices like yours need to be heard, how do we build that in a movement and what considerations need to be put in place?

- We might be heard, but systems don't really involve us;
- There are still very hard to reach groups whose voices are not heard and there need to be better ways of encouraging them to get involved and break down barriers in doing so;
- We need to be included at all levels of decision -making about our futures;
- We need organisational support to help us – but it must be youth -led and co-designed;
- We must ensure there are ambassadors for children too – i.e., under 16s;
- Ensure there are similar values in the work we do but celebrate diversity of ideas, too;
- Start with where you are at – dig where you stand. We don't want to tick boxes. We have unique experiences. That must be considered;
- Ensure people feel comfortable to share their views. How they see the world is a beneficial thing to include;
- We want to be making a bigger difference. It feels like a big responsibility to have a voice locally, with a particular challenge in rural communities, but there could be better systems to ensure we can be heard in kind and impactful ways;

Some brilliant quotes during this session included:

“If you want to go far, you have to go together”

“We are heard but not listened to”

“We are moving and shaking but is it making a difference to those who hold power?”

“Thought AND action is great, but critiquing the system is making REAL progress”

“Be bigger, be louder”

12.00noon - 13.00pm

In part 2 of the workshop, everyone was encouraged to identify **ONE** issue they felt most strongly about tackling. Upon writing this down on an individual post -it note, they were then encouraged to self-organise these different topics into broader themes, and within their self-organised groups, they were asked to propose solutions to these bigger thematics.

The following list includes the individual issues people cared most about:

- Rural employment retention
- Media segregation
- Mental health
- Failure of public transportation
- Lack of action
- Break the chain of importing produce – buy and sell locally to improve food economy and invest in local action
- Lack of transport options
- Spreading better knowledge and awareness of climate and social issues
- Apathy about environmental issues
- Transport
- Failure of political systems
- Education about/in nature
- Responsible outdoor access
- Youth changing education
- Second home ownership
- Single use plastics
- Diminishing water quality
- Overconsumption and consumerism
- Detachment from nature

- Knowing where to start and how to get youth together and change education
- Aversion and denormalisation of wildlife
- Funding and support
- Support guidance and recognition

All attendees then grouped these individual issues into the following themes:

GROUP 1: Access to public transport

GROUP 2: Lack of communication, knowledge, and organisation

GROUP 3: Trends, especially in the media

GROUP 4: Environment (greed and consumerism)

GROUP 5: Systems change

GROUP 6: Funding priorities

Everyone was then asked in their groups how they were going to change this: what solutions do they propose, and who needs to hear them?

Group 1: Access to public transport

Encourage more people to use public transport

Reduce price and increase frequency

Increase under 22s bus travel to include more age groups and ensure that it is taken up in more rural areas, and really assess what to do if there is no bus service: could this be applied to train travel?

→ Local councils and politicians

→ Everyone!

Group 2: Lack of communication, knowledge, and organisation

Connect individuals and organisations to nature

Improve knowledge and communication through education

More rangers and volunteers

More funding

→ Funding organisations and trusts

→ Support organisations to assist with funding opportunities

→ Schools – students and teachers

Group 3: Trends, especially in the media

Make environment issues 'trendy' and influence things online!

Encourage people to buy 'sustainably' (and define that/set parameters on what it actually means)

More transparency in where money is going in consumerism, especially things being bought online: is it ethical?

→ Everyone – conversations, doing things kindly

Group 4: Environment (greed and consumerism)

Exposing root cause of greed: who is profiting?

Societal refocusing of values and priorities

Championing minimism and simplicity of living

→ Young people and politicians

Group 5: Systems change

Accountability

Constructive criticism

→ Everyone!

Group 6: Awareness: make a video

Lobbying

→ Everyone!