

IT'S IN OUR NATURE

STORIES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



LET'S EXPLORE OUR SUSTAINABLE STORIES

This dynamic document allows you to take a journey through the experiences of just a few of the inspirational stories from our nature based tourism businesses. Look out for the navigation arrows to move between pages, click on the arrows to skip to interesting destinations with highlights that will take you to see and hear videos bringing the stories to life. Check out the links to interesting websites that will elaborate our stories. Don't forget to visit the websites of our storytellers and even more great businesses on the Wild Scotland website.

**LOOK OUT FOR
TO NAVIGATE
THE DOCUMENT**

Will take you back to the beginning of our story

WHERE ARE WE GOING

The principles and sustainable practices of their businesses that inspire others to follow

WORK

VISIT THE WILD SCOTLAND WEBSITE

Find out about the people whose passions, values and commitment run these businesses and the customers and communities they interact with

FOLK

PLACE

The places they aim to protect through their business activities and just how they go about it

ROAD MAP TO NET ZERO

Asks and ideas from the nature based tourism sector to the way forward

OUR STORIES

Read in full our businesses' inspirational stories

What's needed to ensure the sector is able to highlight its increasing importance within the Tourism, Environmental and Rural development aspects of Scottish life

THE BIG ASKS

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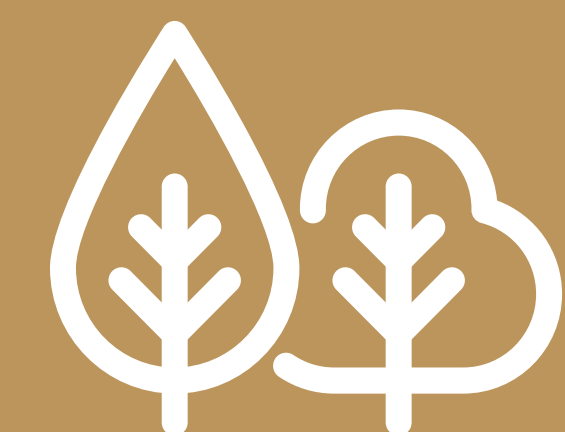
OUR STORIES

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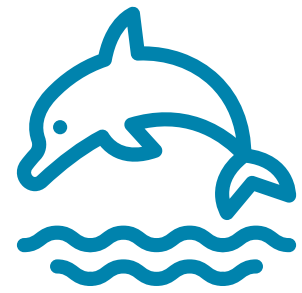
LET THE PEOPLE SPEAK

THE BIG ASKS



WILD SCOTLAND – IT'S IN OUR NATURE

WILD SCOTLAND MEMBERS COMMIT TO OPERATING ACROSS FOUR PRINCIPLES;



RESPONSIBILITY



SUSTAINABILITY



CARE



EXCELLENCE

These principles guide the behaviour of members in wildlife, adventure & activity tourism. This is enhanced by a Code of Conduct and a member's pledge including promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Wild Scotland Members are not just passionate about Scotland's wildlife, it's in our nature to build these values into business practice. By so doing, we will influence and inspire our customers and communities, to navigate our way towards a net zero Scotland that will mitigate climate change and enhance our landscapes and wildlife.

- 1 HIE, Adventure Tourism in Scotland 2015
- 2 Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group 2016
- 3 Transform Scotland 'Routes to Growth: Developing Scotland's Cycle Tourism Sector' 2018
- 4 Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland 2019
- 5 Economic Benefits of UK Boating Tourism, 2017-18, British Marine
- 6 SnowSports Scotland
- 7 Nature Scot's approach and contribution to Tourism
- 8 VisitScotland Insights – Walking Tourism 2017

OUTDOOR TOURISM IN SCOTLAND – WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?

Adventure tourism – £759 million¹

Country sports – £155 million²

Leisure cycle tourism – £345 million³

Mountain bike tourism – £141million⁴

Sailing – £411m⁵

Snow sports in Scotland – £31million⁶

Walking holidays – £1.26 billion⁷

Wildlife tourism – £127m⁸

2022 SCOTLAND'S YEAR OF STORIES

Stories are embedded into the fabric of Scotland's culture. Sharing stories helps us understand and relate to the world around us and to the people we live and work with. The small family businesses that make up the nature based, outdoor tourism sector in Scotland have powerful,

#TalesOfSustainableTourism

inspirational, important stories to tell about the folk, the places and the way they work to ensure a better future for Scotland's communities and nature. Dive in, listen, read and see their stories unfold...

SUPPORTING YEAR OF STORIES 2022
A' TOIRT TAIC BLIADHNA NAN SGEUL 2022

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NAVIGATING THE WAY TO NET ZERO

Net Zero isn't a destination but a way of getting to a better place. On this road, we seem to be stuck on an endless roundabout, wondering which is the right direction to take. Government policy is signposting that a change is needed, if Scotland is to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss and remain economically viable. Yet actions across industry, business and government lack the urgency required or seem to be going in different directions.

Inspirational stories and sustainable choices by many small businesses in the nature based tourism sector are leading the changes needed. These individually may seem small measures but collectively and acting as exemplars to the rest of the tourism industry, these adventure, marine and wildlife businesses are seeking to bring about the changes in approach and practice needed to mitigate climate change and reverse biodiversity loss in Scotland.

That change in direction was something urged by Malcolm Roughead OBE, Chief Executive, Visit Scotland where he said in Scotland Outlook 2030.

SCOTLAND
OUTLOOK
2030

One of the most powerful forces for change is personal experience.

The potent stories from Wild Scotland members help shine a light to indicate the direction needed to go towards a sustainable Scotland, that is good for people, good for nature and good for tourism.

“I’D SUGGEST THAT THE KEYWORD GOING FORWARD IS ‘CHANGE’. CHANGE IN TECHNOLOGY, CHANGE IN SKILL SETS, CHANGE IN DECISION-MAKING DRIVERS TO VALUES-BASED RATHER THAN JUST VALUE-BASED, CHANGE IN HOW WE LOOK AT AND PROTECT OUR NATURAL ASSETS, CHANGE IN OUR APPROACH TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN TERMS OF CARBON EMISSIONS, WASTE REDUCTION AND ETHICAL INVESTMENT.”

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Folk, Place, and Work is an idea for living in harmony with our environment first espoused by Patrick Geddes.* If we look after these three things equally, across all aspects of our lives, it will imbue our thinking and hence our approach and actions to realising a better society for us all. It is that simple and yet that complex.

It's these three fundamentals that the Wild Scotland members featured here have built sustainable tourism businesses upon. Their focus on Folk, Place, and Work is what is changing the tourism sector in Scotland.

***Sir Patrick Geddes FRSE is one of Scotland's forgotten heroes. A great "Thinker, Teacher and Doer". His work is ever relevant and it would do us well in these time to revisit it.**



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Alongside Scotland's amazing landscapes, it's our people who are our sustainable businesses' most significant asset. Their passion powers the industry and its values and principles upon which the sustainable tourism sector is built and give it true authenticity.

The sea runs through David Steele of Uist Sea Tours' veins. Generations of his family have made their livelihood, understanding and respecting what the sea has to offer. That symbiotic relationship, that connection to the sea, landscape and culture of South Uist is truly authentic in David and his business. Built on generations of fisherman knowledge, he branched out into sea tours to share his passion for his place. He shares with his customers his pride in the culture of the Hebrides and his love of the wildlife around its shores. David has a passion and authenticity that can never be replicated and a sensitivity about the people and place he lives and works in and a deep commitment to values he wishes to develop in his business.



Dan and Rachael Brown, are professional naturalists and owner operators of Wild Discovery. It is built on passion and driven by a desire to make their business, community, and wider society aware and responsive to the biodiversity and climate change crises impacting us. They want to do more than "educate" people but inspire them to understand their connection to the natural world and positively influence their actions towards it.



Morag Slesser of Provident Sailing, with a background in NHS mental health services, is passionate in delivering experiences that will help both people and nature. She sees first-hand the healing effect of sailing, where the carapaces of anxiety, stress and tension fall away as people find peace and connection with the natural world. In a world where mental health is a silent plague, these sailing experiences, particularly being in nature and in all weather, provide calm in the storm of life.



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Where the River Forth meets the North Sea, BlueWild tours provide an opportunity to do more than point at things to see - they aim to inspire visitors to understand marine life behaviours. That's the passion Alan Stewart imparts to guests on BlueWild's nature encounters.

For Dan the Merman, it's more than just swimming, it's total immersion into the landscape, culture and nature. He sees first-hand how these can be life-affirming and lifestyle-changing experiences for some people. Whilst lightening the impact on the land and sea, he sees how being truly connected to nature can maximise the impact on people's wellbeing and their consideration of how they can live more sustainably.

Wilderness Scotland has a strong focus on its own people, those who work in the business. Paul Easto and Stevie Christie are committed to training and upskilling the team, and include opportunities for them to get out and explore the wilderness for themselves, which is at the heart of the business. "This is good for personal development as well as the mental and physical health of our team", they explain.



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All our nature based businesses inspire and influence their clients and communities as well as contribute to their wellbeing by connecting guests with nature.

Wild Discovery's guests have many "wow" moments and there are great opportunities for all guests to "give back to nature". All Wild Discovery tours provide a financial donation to various local wildlife charities, not only that a tree is planted in the Highlands on behalf of every guest. They can also take part in various "citizen science" projects where their "wow" moments are turned into data for scientists to analyse and use.

For BlueWild, sustainability is more than just the economic and environmental, they help realise social benefits too. They work with organisations supporting young people from challenging backgrounds, offering sightseeing, crewing and nature guide experience. This includes a nascent partnership with the Scottish Ornithologist's Club (SOC) on a pilot project to encourage young people into careers in nature and environmental protection. BlueWild also provides voluntary support for the Ocean Youth Trust Scotland and projects with local schools. Efforts also continue to create a community science project around Dunbar and North Berwick on marine pollution.

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF TRAVELLERS (69%) WILL LOOK TO APPRECIATE MORE SIMPLE EXPERIENCES SUCH AS SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS... OVER HALF (56%) WILL SEEK OUT MORE RURAL, OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK EXPERIENCES TO IMMERSE THEMSELVES IN THE OUTDOORS.

— booking.com



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As sustainability is infused across all aspects of the business, Ocean Vertical not only encourages guests to give back to nature through donations and voluntary work but as a business, they actively organise the annual “Blue Friday”; a day where they become volunteers and undertake active conservation projects themselves. In this, they encourage previous guests, and other partners to participate. Now in its 4th Year, it grows in reach and collaboration and is something that the tourism sector more generally could replicate and expand on.



Image © Ocean Vertical

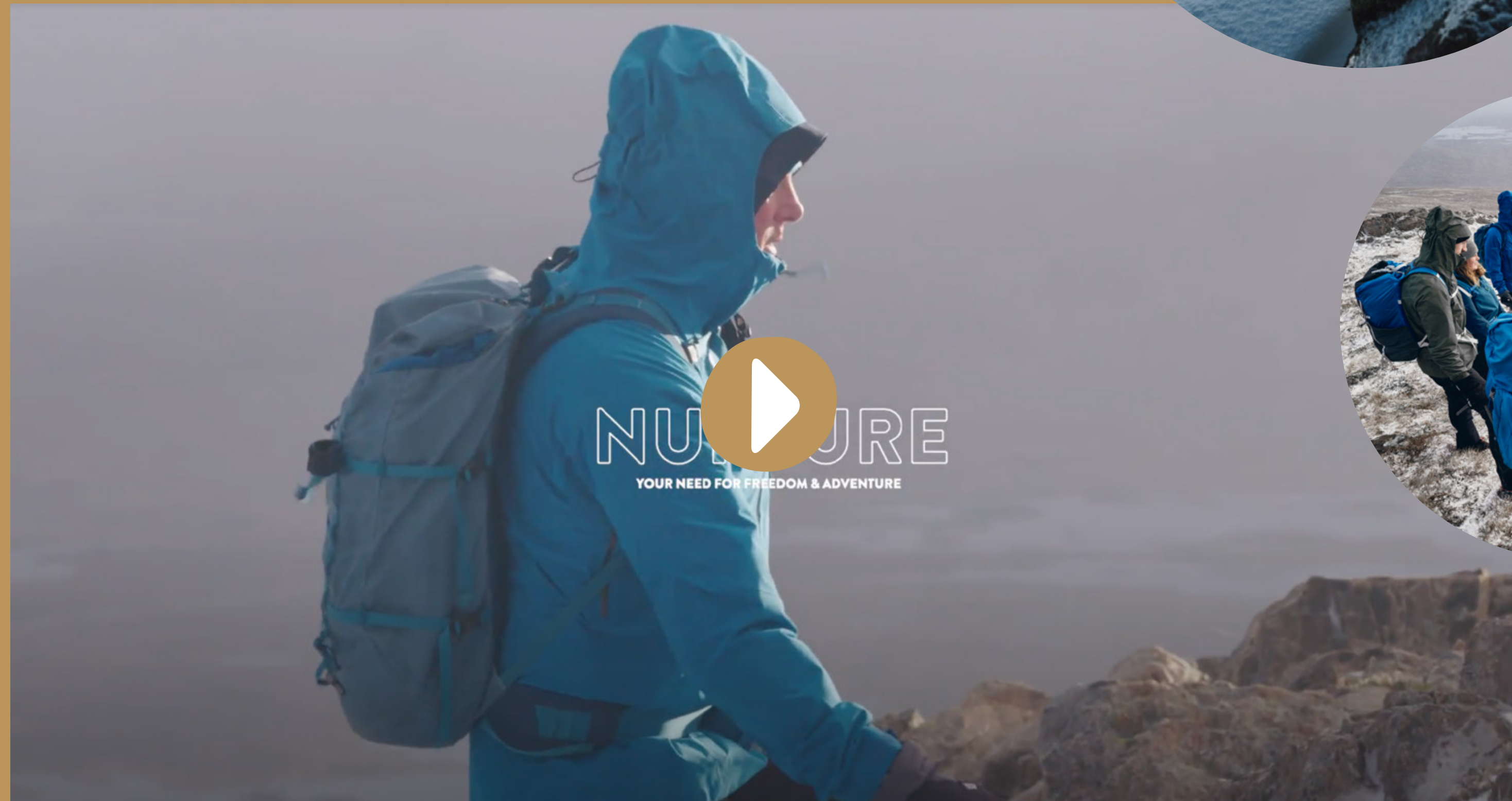


Image © Wild Scotland



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STATE OF NATURE SCOTLAND REPORT 2019

THE STATE OF NATURE SCOTLAND REPORT 2019 REVEALS THAT 49% OF SCOTTISH SPECIES HAVE DECREASED, 28% HAVE INCREASED. NATURE IS CHANGING RAPIDLY, WITH 62% OF SPECIES SHOWING STRONG CHANGES. OF THE 6,413 SPECIES FOUND IN SCOTLAND THAT HAVE BEEN ASSESSED 11% HAVE BEEN CLASSIFIED AS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION.



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NATURESCOT'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FRANCESCA OSOWSKA SAID:

“OUR HABITATS AND OUR SPECIES ARE UNDER THREAT...BY IMPROVING THE STATE OF NATURE WE CAN HELP SOLVE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY. WE ARE READY TO DELIVER THE TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE NEEDED TO BRING A NATURE RICH FUTURE FOR SCOTLAND.”



Scotland's land and seas are the workplaces of our nature based tourism operators and its in their interest to leave no trace in their operations. The access rights afforded in Scotland provide great opportunities for people to get out of doors and close to nature. These rights are balanced by responsibilities towards nature and towards others with detailed advice provided by the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** and the **Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (SMWWC)**. Nature based tourism operators actively demonstrate responsibility in how they present themselves and the experiences their offer to their clients. They seek to develop positive interactions with others who live and work in these places and want to contribute to the transformational change needed in how are land and seascapes are managed.

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation has the ambition to create a fairer, wealthier and greener country. NatureScot is pledged to a nature-rich future for Scotland and the Outlook 2030 states that "Our natural assets – our landscape, scenery, natural and built heritage will be cared for, protected and invested in for our current and future generations to experience and enjoy". Without the landscape of Scotland, there is no tourism industry. So, ensuring that our natural assets are protected, restored and well-managed is fundamental if we are to ensure a sustainable future for tourism. Nature based tourism businesses must show how that is being done in their business practices and the principle of care imprinted in Wild Scotland as an organisation, is lived by our members. Nature tourism businesses are not educators per se, but through example, inspiration and demonstration can indicate to a wide client base, not just how tourism can reduce impacts on wildlife but actively promote, enhance and make a positive change to improve nature on our land and seas.



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Provident Sailing shows that business and society can contribute by operating in a way that is more sustainable, to reduce the impact of climate change whilst protecting and nurturing wildlife. Underpinning all is that sense of responsibility for the sea, its nature and the people who live beside it, work on it and come to experience it. Morag ensures that guests are conscious of the energy consumed on the ship, every shower, every time the oven is on, revealing how much precious energy is used and is a highly valuable lesson for guests to take away to be more conscious of our consumption. Beach clean-ups are a feature of the landing walks, again reminding people that this plastic comes from their choices. Being a sailing ship affords close up sight of marine mammals, all done within wildlife watching codes of conduct.

Dan the Merman, works within the Argyll and Isles marine “hope spot”, as designated by Mission Blue, an area scientifically identified as critical to the health of the ocean. Hope Spots are championed by local conservationists, like Dan, who are supported by Mission Blue, with communications, expeditions and scientific advice. Amongst 146 “hope spots” globally, Argyll and the Isles act as a lighthouse, a beacon to show the importance and need to protect coastal and marine waters. It is that respect for the local environment that informs all of Dan’s decisions regarding where the tours with guests take place and importantly how he and they arrive there, espousing the use of e-bikes and car sharing. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) is inherent to his approach and is explained to all tour participants. He carefully assesses the sensitivity of each arrival point, deciding how frequently and how many people he will take to reduce their impact on the place and to ensure the guests’ safety and quality of the experience.

**MISSION
BLUE**



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Wildlife is essential for Wild Scotland businesses.

Being fully aligned with **SOAC**, **SMWWC**, **WiSE** and **Wild Scotland** codes of conduct, BlueWild ensures that all wildlife encounters are undertaken respectfully and with the care of the birds and animals' paramount .

Uist Sea Tours, give their guests the best and really importantly, safest experience whilst ensuring their business is sustainable. The respect for marine wildlife he shares with visitors means he complies with WiSE codes of conduct and David's family connection to the fishing community means they provide him with intelligence as to where sightings may be, again ensuring efficient trips. He seeks to have plastic-free trips, having seen first-hand some of the debris that does, unfortunately, wash up on Western Isles shores. With South Uist being on the critical list for coastal erosion, itself only 1 m above sea level in places, his concern for climate change is real. These are aspects he points out and discusses on his tours. The climate change threat is seen in more adverse weather events and destruction of the coast, putting his and other tourism businesses and the islands' economy at risk.



Images © Uist Sea Tours



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The spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation and the creation of skilled green jobs foreseen by the strategy for Economic Transformation is inbuilt into Wild Scotland member businesses.

Understanding the mindset and motivations of a sustainable business isn't always easy so Alan, co-owner of BlueWild Nature Boat Tours shared his mind map.



This simplifies the vision, illuminating the complexity and interconnectivity of every business decision, revealing purposeful care taken in every action.

Developing staff skills is important to BlueWild who create their tours based on their guide's expertise, passion and enthusiasm backed by informative good science. BlueWild crews are encouraged and supported to expand their knowledge and skills, with inputs from experts and time to research and deliver new tours.

Adrian at Ocean Vertical wants to keep the wild, wild with a business committed to being a force for good. "Being able to sustain ourselves as individuals and as a business and creating a wider sustainable society through a passion for ethical adventures", is the core of Adrian's company belief and which imbues every business decision going forward. This include make careful choices throughout the entire supply chain, of equipment, food and drink and even premises!

What Paul and Stevie couldn't have predicted when they started Wilderness Scotland many years ago, was how significant the threat of a changing climate would become. Wilderness Scotland's mission is to maximise the positive benefits of tourism while seeking to minimise the negative impacts and so they take their effect on climate change and emissions reductions seriously. They feel the time has come to ramp up the action, work harder and act more creatively to respond to the climate and biodiversity emergency with renewed focus and energy. They deliver significant support each year to conservation projects and communities through their pioneering Conservation Contribution Scheme with donations from their clients.

They made a Climate Emergency Declaration and have always sought to run an environmentally sustainable business.



“The concept of community tourism does apply in Scotland” say Paul and Stevie - and it’s a key part of Wilderness Scotland. This involves spending money in locally-owned businesses, rather than working with larger hotel chains and suppliers. Encouraging out-of-season travel helps many local businesses, which have little income over winter. Wilderness Scotland guides will educate clients about any local issues and the tours are designed to respect the local communities by, for example, travelling in small groups only (typically around 8 guests), so as not to overwhelm local shops/cafés when their group arrives.

Collaboration is a feature of Wild Scotland businesses, creating an important ecosystem of connectivity across many interdependent businesses, especially in rural areas.

Working with businesses with a similar ethos is imperative for Ocean Vertical to remain true to its purpose. Networking, sharing, learning and working with others is a valuable asset that should not be underestimated across rural economies.



Dan’s sustainable business in Argyll, may seem small on the surface, but like the environment within which he operates, it has many hidden depths and interconnections to others across a large rural area. He works with those who share his eco-ethics across accommodation and food providers, as well as community organisations, such as Wild Argyll. His recent collaboration with other Wild Scotland members, Provident Sailing and **Heathery Heights**, will bring new sustainable products that literally connect guests with the land and the sea. Helping them to understand how people interact at this crucial environment intersection.

Collaboration, using locally sourced food is one of the most important of Provident’s ethics. As well as exploring the complex marine ecosystem, creating a human ecosystem of producers and businesses across the islands visited is of vital importance. Provident wants to be part of supporting the livelihoods of those who live in fragile, marginalised communities. They try to make it clear to guests where their food has come from and what it has taken to produce it. Provident aims to be a low plastic-ship, visitors are encouraged to bring reusable bottles and vegetables are purchased wholesale to avoid packaging. New collaboration with fellow Wild Scotland members, Dan the Merman and **Walk Wild Scotland** to create sustainable and value-led “packages” combining sailing, walking and wild swimming are new products to be tested. Morag is looking too for an accommodation that operates sustainably that she can connect with on the land-based portions of the sailing experiences.



Wild Discovery, they see their business as part of the well-being economy, which starts local, using local people, local food, and local transport. It means re-modulating societal thinking to focus less on business success only in economic terms, but to be aware that being part of an integrated, holistic circular economy is positive for the health of the business and the communities within which it sits.

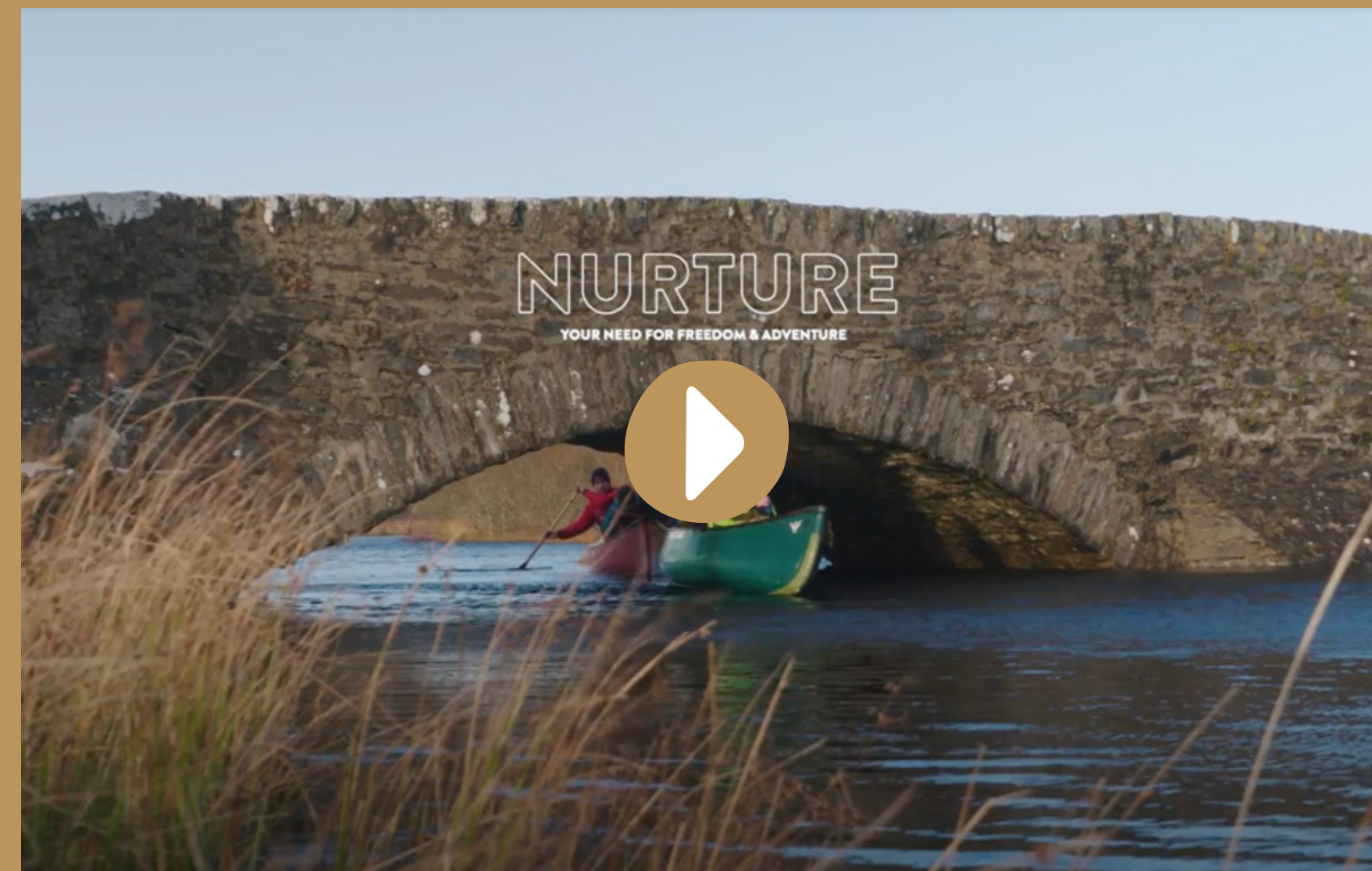
Adaptability and innovation are key features of Wild Scotland's sustainable tourism businesses. The adaptations needed during the covid pandemic, challenging though they were, have helped build resilience in our businesses.

With the fallout from covid and a poor weather year in 2022, both impacting the boat tour and wildlife watching business, in true island style, David of Uist Sea Tours drew on that flexibility and adaptable approach, to bring new additions to his core sea tours business. He trained in paddle boarding in order to offer an environmentally sensitive activity, getting people even closer to the sea. He is teaming up with local accommodation and wildlife tour guides to offer walks for the land-lovers as new products in the coming year.



Following the covid lockdowns, there was not only a rise in people, generally, but different audiences accessing Scotland's countryside. Wild Discovery altered their offering during covid with short, guided self-driven tours; they have proved so popular they have continued with e-bike tours also being added. Covid saw an increase in the number of small businesses operating entirely from a home location.

Whilst the natural environment offers the immediate spectacle, BlueWild is working to enhance methods of engagement and information interpretation with visitors of all ages. Plans are for experiments with 2nd and 3rd screen interactivity, augmented reality and mobile devices that would make the wildlife experiences even more relevant to digital natives.



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Adrian at Ocean Vertical is acutely aware of the current pressure on people and of the bounce back from the expectations that came out of Covid, with mass tourism and people retreating back to less sustainable holidays on the rise. Having an adaptive and flexible approach, Ocean Vertical have looked to diversify their product range, bringing in more group and corporate clients, without deviating from the alignment of their purpose. With corporate groups, they can really see a difference in attitude and behaviour towards nature and in being more sustainable, not just in individuals but across whole teams and indeed “non-green” businesses. They ensure people still have an intimate, safe experience that is rooted to and connected with nature and the wild elements.



Energy efficiency is not just a feature of a responsible and sustainable business but is not even more of an economic imperative in the current economic climate.

On Uist Sea Tours David’s commitment to being more sustainable means he has made changes to the boat’s engines to ensure it is more fuel efficient. He berths as far west as possible on the island to ensure the trips can themselves give the shortest route to wildlife-watching areas. Similarly, Alan with Wild Blue engine performance and fuel efficiency matched with skipper driving training is monitored and managed to give 40% more fuel efficiency compared to unleaded outboard engines.



ROAD MAP TO NET ZERO

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS; BUILDING RESILIENCE

Despite these encouraging stories from these sustainable businesses, the nature based outdoor tourism sector and the recent economic setbacks have curtailed what was the burgeoning recovery in the post Covid and post-Brexit scenarios. The sector is facing harsh economic conditions and is in desperate need not just of investment, but of new connectivity, new innovations and to build personal and business resilience. Indeed, recent **tourism market data** suggests a “recovery” of European travel, moving closer to 2019 levels, with a forecast rise in long haul travel, particularly with US and soon Asian travellers, to Scotland.

These market forecasts highlight the “confusing” signposting on the road to net zero. Encouraging even more long-haul air travel when measured against the impact of climate change and the cumulative effect on biodiversity loss – is this the road to net zero?



“CLIMATE ACTION NEEDS A DRAMATIC STEP-UP IF WE ARE TO HAVE A SHOT A LIMITING GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE TO 1.5 C. THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM SECTOR HAS A BIG STAKE IN DECARBONIZATION BECAUSE A DESTROYED PLANET SERVES NO ONE’S PURPOSE. THE SECTOR HAS LESS THAN 10 YEARS TO ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION TO LOW-CARBON AND CIRCULAR BUSINESS SOLUTIONS; TO CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN ENERGY GENERATION AND HALVE TRANSPORT EMISSIONS BY 2030; AND TO INTEGRATE Nature based SOLUTIONS INTO THEIR OPERATIONS.”

Inger Andersen, Executive Director,
United Nations Environment Programme



Visit Scotland is advocating a “values-driven” approach to new tourism in Scotland, indicating high demand for sustainable, guided, close to nature experiences. This too is confirmed by global surveys by the UN. Such an approach is what drives Wild Scotland members who can additionally, using sensitive communications and immersive experiences, help visitors understand their impacts and choices to the climate change and biodiversity crises.

The UNDP’s “Peoples’ Climate Vote” indicates that:



Image © Wild Scotland



Image © Ocean Vertical



MORE THAN 60% OF PEOPLE BELIEVE CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GLOBAL EMERGENCY, AND THEY SAY THEY'RE WILLING TO TAKE ACTION TO BE MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY. ON THE TOURISM FRONT, 71% OF UK TRAVELLERS SAY SUSTAINABILITY IS IMPORTANT TO THEM.

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No story would be complete without hearing from others involved in it. Here are some of the testimonies of those who have experienced the adventures and wild experiences nature based businesses offer.

Tom D – Trustpilot

WILDERNESS SCOTLAND

A great kayaking experience led by an excellent guide. The original itinerary was adjusted slightly to cater for the weather conditions but we had a lot of fun with day trips around the beautiful islands. Nothing quite like camping beside sandy beaches, challenging yourself with kayaking in different conditions and waking up early to the sight of otters down by the water.

Emily Haworth – Google Maps

DAN THE MERMAN

I booked a coaching session for my mother for her 80th birthday. Mum is an avid outdoors enthusiast and has been swimming in the sea mostly every day for years. I think she was excited to participate but sceptical about what she could possibly learn... Well, she absolutely loved it and said she learned alot of new helpful techniques and was beyond thrilled. Memories were made. It was such a success we have booked another session so more people can attend. This is the **MUST** do Argyll experience! I can not wait to meet Dan myself, he is becoming a legend on the Killberry road. Sustainable experiences do not get more sincere or real than this. Dan even uses an electric bike for transport, which is quite a feat on top of all those cold swims.

OCEAN VERTICAL

We had the most amazing day going coasteering with OceanVertical! Stevie and Mollie were great guides making sure everyone felt safe and had fun. It was so much fun to jump into the water and climb out and explore the coast. We also saw seals, which was awesome would definitely recommend this activity for anyone who enjoys being outdoors and wants to explore a beautiful coast!

Giulia – Ocean Vertical Website

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READ IN FULL OUR BUSINESSES' INSPIRATIONAL STORIES



THE BIG ASKS

The powerful testimony from the businesses whose stories are told here, are just a few examples of the progressive work Wild Scotland members undertake to push Scotland towards a net zero country. In order to maximise the impact of the nature based tourism sector, some new ideas, support from agencies and “asks” are necessary. This will ensure the sector is able to highlight its increasing importance within the Tourism, Environmental and Rural development aspects of Scottish life.

ASK 1. JOINED UP THINKING AND ACTION

A positive national policy framework and associated strategies although present **NEED** better integration across all sectors with targeted action for the outdoor tourism sector.

ASK 2. JOIN THE DOTS

Invest in
Infrastructure

ASK 3. WALK THE TALK

Communicating the
Road Map to Net
Zero: Signposting
Sustainability

ASK 4. HOW NOT WHY

On-Going
Commitment to
Sector Skills and
Training

ASK 5. WORKING TOGETHER

Creating and
Sharing Good
Practice

ASK 6. COUNTING CARBON

Measuring Our
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ASK 1. JOINED UP THINKING AND ACTION

A POSITIVE NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES ALTHOUGH PRESENT NEED BETTER INTEGRATION ACROSS ALL SECTORS WITH TARGETED ACTION FOR THE OUTDOOR TOURISM SECTOR.

The ambition of the Scottish Government is applauded, but the move from fine words to targeted and focused actions and support that will immediately impact the business striving to be more sustainable, is needed. There is clear contradiction and confusing signposting, even within the tourism sector about the drive to net zero, with positive recovery of biodiversity even less evident. This is merely magnified across industry and transport.

The ambition is there, as evidenced in the desire for a well-being economy described in **National Strategy for Economic Transformation** and the relationship with the



Tourism Scotland; Outlook 2020 strategy endeavoured to highlight where sustainable tourism sector sits within the overall policy framework.

Scottish Government ambitions to protect and restore biodiversity needs to be better represented or integrated across the National Strategy for Economic Transformation. As the recent consultation on the new biodiversity strategy notes “Biodiversity is the best chance we have to adapt to climate change and ensure we continue to be able to enjoy the things that nature provides, on which we all depend”

Marrying the net zero ambitions, which have been more fully articulated, with the urgent need to reverse biodiversity loss and the action to be taken and embedded across all government policy areas, is at the heart of the lack of clear signposting for business.

PLACE

ROAD MAP
TO NET ZERO

OUR STORIES

WHERE ARE
WE GOING

FOLK

WORK

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LET THE
PEOPLE SPEAK

THE BIG ASKS

There has been relative inertia since the tourism industry made its first climate promises. Yet 300 initial signatories, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the World Travel & Tourism Council, committed to the **Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism in 2021** to halve tourism’s emissions by 2030 and eliminate them to near zero by 2050. No similar action has been identified for the global targets within the Convention for Biological Diversity to which Scotland is aligned. This is a serious gap in the tourism sector’s interests and needs to be addressed at a government and agency level. There is an imperative to ensure the climate and biodiversity issues remain interlocked at a policy level and realised in business practice, given their significance to the Sustainable Tourism sector.

To realise these ambitions, the stories told by our nature based tourism operators highlight the need for a re-set of financial support, a re-prioritisation, and a whole new direction for the policies, choices and actions that are needed. Better incentives on what we can do now to be more sustainable are critical. This means, long-term finance, tax breaks, VAT reduction, fuel subsidies, sustainable products, innovation grants, light-weighting materials, digital to replace paper, new power sources, training and re-training support: “funding to do and improve sustainable practices- not to have consultants tell you what you should do” says one business owner.

It is important to support fishing, farming, forestry, wind farm, business supply chains and corporate-level development, to move to more sustainable ways of working across all of Scotland, but there is a real threat that a lack of integrated approach could support one sector to the detriment of sustainable tourism.



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ASK 2. JOIN THE DOTS

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE.

Living and operating in rural areas across Scotland, nature based tourism businesses are acutely aware of changes that would make a positive difference, move towards greater sustainability and closer to a net zero and biodiversity rich Scotland. Here are some of their experiences and stories.

The transport infrastructure desperately needs attention but so too would further incentives and subsidies to enable rural businesses to adopt electric vehicles. As Wilderness Scotland indicated, the upfront cost of buying an electric vehicle is significant. Costing 50-100% more than an equivalent petrol vehicle. With a limited choice of electric minivans coupled with “range anxiety” (a 7-day tour needs military-level planning to ensure there is enough power to get from A-B) as well as the unavailability and unreliability of charging points (a recent study found that 25% of charge points could be out of order at any point in time and many popular spots have queues), makes the more sustainable vehicle choice for rural businesses, a considerable risk at present.

Integrated public transport is a significant barrier to greater sustainability. Surely better incentives for sustainable transport options have to be something not just for the cities but for rural areas too.

The inconvenience of the lack of public conveniences, with easily accessible toilets in particular being another factor that would improve the experience for many outdoor tourism guests. The investment in new multi-use cycle paths is welcomed, more would be better as would more connectivity between routes.



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ASK 3. WALK THE TALK

COMMUNICATING THE ROAD MAP TO NET ZERO: SIGNPOSTING SUSTAINABILITY

Nature based tourism businesses repeated the difficulty in accessing advice and support from funding to training, marketing to business support. There appears to be a plethora of information that is impenetrable, sometimes contradictory and appears unaligned with the policies espoused by the government. A lack of real support or access to information for businesses seeking to make more sustainable choices has been apparent. Information and advice is spread across multiple agencies. An information hub signposting the different support available for these businesses would already be a significant help. It is important for government and agencies to translate the fine strategic words to focused actions that are coherent with the sustainability messaging.

Sustainable tourism businesses are saying that innovation funds are inadequate. While welcome, innovation funding remains complex to access for many small tourism businesses. More funding is also needed if new products and sustainable tourism practices are to be developed by the sector. This especially the case for those operating in more remote areas of Scotland and even more so in the marine sector.



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As David Steele highlights, developing new products and markets is key to all our businesses. In South Uist, there are opportunities for new products, especially in the off-season with great dark open skies for star gazing and northern lights viewing, another way of helping people connect with the natural world. Some support and assistance with developing and marketing such products would really help.

There is some concern however across nature based tourism, about how islands such as South Uist and indeed other products such as NC 500 are being marketed. These are top-down driven marketing with little consideration for local communities. This is tourism that offers very little back to the economy, such as some types of campervanning

with some new products like the Hebridean way is not as embedded in the local economy as it could be. Further these types of tourism products seem to contradict the drive to net zero or the impacts on biodiversity. Continuing to improve infrastructure and invest in basic services will do more to retain visitors, offering opportunities to engage with nature based tourism operators, and indeed invest in the local economy. The opportunity for more locally based tourism products, routes and infrastructure should be explored, incentivised and encouraged. Again, this is not just about investment per se, but being consistent in the net zero journey and ensuring we can positively enhance biodiversity through business practice.



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ASK 4. HOW NOT WHY

ON-GOING COMMITMENT TO SECTOR SKILLS AND TRAINING.

The stories from the sector reveal a strong skill base and a latent need for better career pathways into sustainable tourism. Taking forward the actions in NatureScot's Nature based jobs and skills Action Plan 2022-2023 would help to both support the skills and capacity of existing businesses but also encourage more people to enter the sector. All who operate sustainable tourism businesses have already answered "why" they do so, having better competency is how to do so, with what and with whom, will enhance the sector and help grow businesses and provide more green jobs.

As BlueWild indicates, developing staff skills is important as they create their tours based on their guides' expertise, passion and enthusiasm backed by informative and good science. BlueWild crews are encouraged and supported to expand their knowledge and skills, with inputs from experts and time to research and deliver new tours.

It is reaching new customers, that's a bit of an inhibitor to Ocean Vertical's business at the moment. Gaining intelligence and access to market information relevant to

them is needed to ensure its economic survival. Again, this need for an easy to access information hub and a better understanding of market trends is needed across the Outdoor tourism sector as well as an upskilling in marketing and communications. There is a desire within the nature based tourism sector for clearer understanding of impacts on wildlife and adoption of practices that minimise disturbance and enhance positive wildlife experiences.

Investment in the people who operate sustainable tourism businesses will pay dividends in not just satisfied and returning customers, but in customers who themselves are inspired to change their relationship with nature.



NATURESCOT
ASSESSMENT OF
NATURE BASED
JOBS AND
SKILLS



ASK 5. WORKING TOGETHER

CREATING AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

The need for Wild Scotland itself as a convening and advocacy platform as well as a place to network, learn, innovate and indeed build collaborative new products was expressed through all stories told. The future of the organisation itself needs investment and public sector support, in order for it to be a conduit and channel of information, to build best practice, deliver capacity building across the sector and develop across Scotland the sustainable tourism sector.

However, as all have indicated, some help is needed to ensure our sustainable tourism businesses can go on to help themselves. As Morag at Provident summarises, for her, that help is threefold. Social - in terms of networking, learning and sharing with like-minded businesses. Economical - access to grants and funds that support staff posts, provide travel grants for staff working in remote locations and support business. Monies that would ensure the quality food produced on islands is subsidised, to ensure it is economically viable and environmental. Lastly, investment in better and more integrated public transport.

NATURE
BASED JOBS
& SKILLS



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There is a plethora of sustainable standards, accreditation schemes and certifications, unfortunately many outdoor tourism business fall between them all. The Principles, Code of Conduct and Guidelines established by Wild Scotland are well respected and agreed throughout the sector. However, there is a need for some clearer national recognition of the excellence in nature based, outdoor and adventure tourism. This would recognise not just the sustainability credentials, but also the protection of biodiversity and care for customers and community joining up considerations of business response to the twin crises. Wild Scotland members are keen to have independent scrutiny and assessment and want to explore this further.

Some members are thinking even more strategically. It is Dan's first-hand experience in seeing the environmental and wellbeing economy up close that convinces him of the merits of reducing the working week for all. This would really address the work-life balance that many struggle with. Resulting not just in a reduction in carbon emissions, getting us closer to those net zero targets, but increasing the opportunities for people to connect with each other and with nature, creating a healthier and happier nation. For Dan he can guide and inspire many to be immersed in Scotland's waters, clearing the mind, encouraging empathy and truly opening eyes and minds to change attitudes and behaviours that will benefit people and nature and really create that wellbeing economy.



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ASK 6. COUNTING CARBON

MEASURING OUR SUSTAINABLE CREDENTIALS

One of the main challenges for any nature based tourism business is seeking to improve the sustainability of the business, staying true to its purpose and ethos, whilst still being financially viable.

Collaboration within the sector is something inherent in Wild Scotland member's approach. They want to ensure that the tourist experience remains consistently sustainable across adventure, guiding, food and accommodation. Finding sustainable products and services across the supply chain is challenging. Rewarding and incentivising businesses to choose more sustainable products and practices, given the current financial premium on these, would "accentuate the positive" effort towards net zero and go some way to "eliminate the negative" choices that are in fact forcing the tourism sector away from a more sustainable future. This would ensure visitors access local, authentic products and experiences, keeping the carbon budget low. Wilderness Scotland for example, prefers to team up with accommodations working to sustainable principles, but there are limited choices available in the Highlands.



Public sector support for investment in hotels to improve their sustainability would have a positive knock-on effect for the whole sector.

Wilderness Scotland tours seek to reduce food miles, focusing on restaurants and suppliers that source food locally, which has clear economic and environmental benefits. They also request that the hotels offer a wider selection of vegetarian dishes, reducing the reliance on meat production.

Paul and Stevie feel that Wilderness Scotland's commitment to reducing emissions is the response needed across the travel industry. Backed by science and with expert independent input, they have committed to reducing the carbon emissions of the entire business by 90% by 2030 (9% per annum for 10 years from 2020). They have initiated a carbon-labelling scheme which not only measures the carbon impact of the entire business but of each and every trip.

Wilderness Scotland has assessed every aspect of their business to benchmark their carbon footprint and give a baseline to work to. The three key contributors to their footprint are travel; the hotels where guests stay, and food consumed. These three items account for over 80% of their carbon footprint as a business. Paul and Stevie want to do more but encounter these barriers to change for example, although public funding is available for Electric Vehicles it's insufficient to allow them to speed up the process of decarbonising their fleet of vehicles.

Based on the innovation and experience from Wilderness Scotland, businesses across the nature based tourism sector are keen to adopt a national network of carbon offset projects within Scotland that can be supported collectively. Such a fund could enhance Scotland's nature and landscapes, upon which our nature based sector depends.



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WE CAN DO IT...

Sustainable Tourism practice as exemplified by the stories from Wild Scotland members presented here, has a key role to play in tackling climate change and addressing biodiversity loss. To address these twin challenges requires urgent change across the industry as a whole. The paradox is that travel and tourism can be an amazingly positive force for good. Well managed, sustainable tourism supports local economic development, sustains local communities and traditions and shines a light on nature and wildlife conservation.

ASK 1.

JOINED UP THINKING AND ACTION

A positive national policy framework and associated strategies although present **NEED** better integration across all sectors with targeted action for the outdoor tourism sector.

Finding answers to these asks will enable more sustainable tourism practice to flourish helping to support the transition we need to a nature rich, net zero Scotland. This will require targeted investment in the training, guidance, information, infrastructure and carbon accounting systems we will need to build capacity, improve skills, and develop new low carbon products and markets in nature based

ASK 2.

JOIN THE DOTS

Invest in Infrastructure

ASK 3.

WALK THE TALK

Communicating the Road Map to Net Zero: Signposting Sustainability

ASK 4.

HOW NOT WHY

On-Going Commitment to Sector Skills and Training

ASK 5.

WORKING TOGETHER

Creating and Sharing Good Practice

ASK 6.

COUNTING CARBON

Measuring Our Sustainable Credentials

The frustration is that business can be better: it can implement change now that would help towards maximising the contribution to a net zero target. Most just can't afford it now. We need to be realistic.

tourism. Our Sustainable tourism businesses, provide not just the quality experience expected by visitors provide investment in rural communities and economies, but ensure that Scotland does become that world-class sustainable destination everyone aspires it to be. That is the ambition of Wild Scotland and our members, that is the story they have told, because **Sustainable Tourism – It's in our Nature.**



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