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NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND RANGERS RISE TO THE CHALLENGES OF GLENCOE'S GROWING POPULARITY

As Glencoe National Nature Reserve experiences one of its busiest ever years, the National Trust for Scotland's Ranger team is working hard with visitors and campers to help ensure they don't damage the natural wonder they have come to enjoy.

With eight famous Munros and the A82 passing through the middle of the estate, Glencoe is inevitably one of Scotland's busiest National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Around 2 million vehicles drive through each year, and balancing nature conservation with responsible enjoyment and access is at the heart of the National Trust for Scotland's activities in Glencoe and Glen Etive. Through activities including visitor engagement, litter picks, camper patrols and family tours, the conservation charity strives to make sure that visitors experience the glen's stunning scenery and wildlife without leaving negative impacts in their wake.

The charity's latest statistics indicate a growth in visitor numbers compared with 2022, with visitors to the Trust's Glencoe Visitor Centre rising by around 35%. There has also been an 18% rise in the number of tents and 10% rise in the number of campervans and motorhomes counted during the Trust's Friday and Saturday evening Ranger patrols through popular areas for camping.

The Trust says that while the vast majority of visitors appreciate the importance of taking care of Glencoe and Scotland's other special places, the work of its Ranger team is critical in managing rising visitor numbers and minimising their impact. For example, so far this season, Trust staff and volunteers have carried out over 200 hours of litter-picking, collecting more than 200 bags of waste.

Raising awareness of responsible access from an early age is a crucial part of the conservation charity's role in caring for Glencoe NNR. To support this, the charity has introduced new family Land Rover Safaris this summer. As well as getting children and young people excited about the wildlife in the glen, the tours encourage them to understand and care for the environment, helping to train future generations of informed and responsible visitors, campers and nature lovers.

Since March this year, the Ranger team has engaged with around 600 people on its evening tours of the glen's camping and overnighting hotspots. During these patrols, they provide help and advice to visitors on how to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code when camping in highly-protected natural landscapes, working closely with The

Highland Council Access Rangers and Forest and Land Scotland Rangers, which look after other popular sites neighbouring the reserve. This work is made possible through the generosity of the charity's members and supporters, as well as by income generated at its Glencoe Visitor Centre. The activity is also supported by NatureScot, through the Better Places Fund.

Scott McCombie, Senior Ranger for Glencoe NNR, explains: "All of us at the National Trust for Scotland want to share our special places, ensuring they're as accessible as possible in a way that is truly sustainable. We thoroughly enjoy meeting people from all walks of life when out and about in Glencoe and Glen Etive, and we engage with thousands of people a season to ensure they get maximum enjoyment out of their time with us and go away inspired to take extra care of their natural environment, leaving it as they found it or even better. The more time my team can spend on habitat conservation, instead of clearing up after others, the better for this incredible landscape and the people who live and work in it year-round."

Building on its work to protect, care for and share Glencoe NNR, the Ranger team is also keen to raise awareness of the ways in which everyone can ensure their behaviour doesn't cause lasting damage to the special place they have come to visit nor to the local community.

The conservation organisation is calling for no campfires on the ground in the reserve after seeing a rise in the number of fire sites compared with last year, with several wildfires caused by careless campers earlier in the spring, and numerous examples of trees being damaged to provide a source of firewood. As well as spotting and dealing with campfires, preventing them escalating during this year's dry spring and early summer, the team is working to educate the public on the impacts of campfires on Glencoe's spectacular landscape.

Scott McCombie adds: "Campfires have a negative impact on both the glens' peat-rich low-level soils and thinner, fragile upland soils. This is not just at times of high fire risk, though it is even more unacceptable at these times. We ask that campers bring only camp stoves, or at least portable metal fire bowls or stands to keep fires off the bare earth, and do not light naked flames during dry spells."

In the famous Hidden Valley, Coire Gabhail, the Trust has been saddened to see woodland renowned internationally for its rich mosses and lichens damaged by campers who have cut branches off trees in an attempt to fuel their campfires.

"This is not only bad for these precious habitats but it's also pointless as live greenwood will not burn," comments Scott McCombie.

Rangers at the Trust are also helping to educate visitors to Glencoe on the rules around cars and campervans driving off-road onto soft verges, peat-rich moorland and even river beaches. Having observed a growing trend for 4x4s with roof-top tents driving off-road, rangers in Glencoe and Glen Etive have been engaging actively with drivers to

explain that the Scottish Outdoor Access Code does not grant a right of access for camping to motorised vehicles.

Scott continues: “Every weekend we encounter vehicles which have been driven off hard-surface laybys and car parks, so that their occupants can get a better view or camp beside or on top of their vehicles – often unaware that they’re breaching the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Off-road driving requires the advance permission of a landowner and while an individual driver might not think they are causing a problem, the cumulative effect at busy locations is damaging. We see disturbance of vegetation and wildlife, soil erosion or compaction, worsening drainage and wetter ground conditions, so educating the public has become an important aspect of our rangers’ conservation activity here.”

Another critical element in the Trust’s mission to protect and share the National Nature Reserve, is its Ranger team’s ongoing work to clear up what visitors leave behind. Top of their list of finds is food packaging, disposable BBQs, used tissues, wet wipes and toilet sites.

Scott added: “Here in Glencoe NNR, we’re lucky to have some incredible places on our doorstep and we want to make sure they’re there for future generations to enjoy – in a way that’s sustainable and beneficial for the local community. Thanks to the generosity of the National Trust for Scotland’s members and supporters, we have our Ranger team on the ground working relentlessly to protect, care for and share these stunning glens. We’re grateful to them, as well as to the local community, volunteers and responsible visitors who help us do that.”

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland, or Glencoe National Nature Reserve, visit www.nts.org.uk.

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Notes to editors

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland’s largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland’s magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland’s heritage which doesn’t have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the

climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.