**Over and Out!**

After realising my passion for science and nature after finishing my A Levels at QEII High School, I decided to begin a new chapter studying for my undergraduate degree at Nottingham Trent University. With a slightly strange first couple of years at university (you guessed it… Covid!), I took the optional “sandwich year” to learn more about the application of conservation in real-life scenarios.

I was ecstatic when I found out that Manx Wildlife Trust would support me for the year. What initially attracted me the most to MWT was the small team, exciting projects and freedom to explore whatever interested me the most. As well as this, it would also allow me to see the Island, which I thought I knew so well, in a completely new light. As MWT’s first year-long Student Intern, I was in new territory; I didn’t know what to expect and had to be open-minded.

The beauty of working in conservation on the Isle of Man is the wide range of biodiversity. I have improved my knowledge in upland, urban, coastal, freshwater, woodland, agricultural and wetland habitats. I admit that, as many people do, having grown up on the Isle of Man, I took the diversity for granted.

I am so grateful to have been involved in MWT’s 50th year. This impressive milestone allowed for organisation-wide reflection on the past and future of MWT, allowing me to truly appreciate the work that has gone into protecting Manx wildlife and how brave people can make a huge impact. A fine example would be the Muckers – volunteers who care for the MWT reserves. Never have I met a lovelier group of positive, talented, and enthusiastic people. They taught me about dedication and loyalty, and I have a lot of respect for them. I hope to continue joining the group when I visit home as ‘Once a Mucker, always a Mucker’!

One aim following MWT’s 50th year was to increase public engagement levels. I saw the engagement team grow throughout the year and shine at events where I thoroughly enjoyed getting involved and stepping out of my comfort zone. A particular highlight was the infamous Festival of the Sea. Here, I spoke to members of the public about climate change and respecting sea life. Connecting with the visitors felt special as I could tell the information I was passing on was resonating with them.

**What did I get up to?**

The first stand-out project I have been involved in this year was a feasibility study into the reintroduction of freshwater pearl mussels. This endangered bivalve went extinct on the Isle of Man in the early 1900s for reasons unknown, and the project hopes to one day bring them back. I investigated the water quality patterns of all monitored rivers on the Island, writing a report about my findings. I included maps to display my data and recommendations for what needs to happen next.

I have assisted with tree planting sessions and helped manage volunteers at the Hairpin Woodland Park, including the creation of the brand new ‘Logstickle Course’! I had a fantastic time building steps and balance beams, which made me feel more confident in my practical working abilities.

When I started with MWT, I soon realised that my knowledge of GIS (Geographic Information Systems – a mapping computer software) would benefit the team. Having learnt about the software in my second year at university, I was eager to put my skills into practice. I have been able to digitise maps from the archives, update maps of the reserves and help with planning permission forms. I even taught a couple of staff members the basics!

Another project that I took the lead with was the annual carbon emission audit. I had to gather information on MWT’s fuel consumption, waste, material use and the livestock we were responsible for. As a part of this project, I designed a comprehensive form for all staff members to fill out so that the data is easier to gather in the future and sent feedback on the ease of the process to the central Wildlife Trusts team.

**What am I taking away?**

Looking back on my year with MWT, I realise how much I have developed. My confidence has certainly grown, as has my knowledge of wildlife conservation, both in the field and behind the scenes. Being immersed in Manx wildlife has fuelled my desire to make positive change and helped me to develop a love for the complexity of ecology at a landscape scale. I am leaving my internship feeling motivated and inspired by the incredible team at Manx Wildlife Trust, and although I am still unsure of what my future looks like, I hope my journey leads back to them at some point down the line.