

Seawilding Annual Report January 2024



It's been another busy and fruitful year for Seawilding. Outlined below are this year's highlights, as well as some thoughts about where we are going in 2024.

Our flagship projects to restore a million native oysters, and acres of seagrass meadows in Loch Craignish – the first of their kind in the UK – continue to make many kinds of progress.

We hope this will be resolved in 2024 and in the meantime plan to invest in a “spatting pond” to increase local production. Our target is still to release 1 million native oysters into Loch Craignish and in 2024 we'll also open our new native oyster nursery in Loch Broom, Wester Ross. This will enable us to restore 100,000 oysters a year to that depleted sea-loch as well as identifying new opportunities for restoration further up the coast.

In the last two years Seawilding has planted approximately 1/2 hectare of seagrass in Loch Craignish to enhance the pre-existing 5 hectares of meadows. To do this we continued our experiments with a land-based nursery to improve seed germination rates and to plant out seedlings.

Excitingly, Seawilding also decided to trial the UK's first seagrass rhizome restoration which involved transplanting 10,000 of these protected plants to a ¼ acre restoration area. If all goes well (and it's looking good) we hope to expand on this trial by planting at least 1 acre in 2024. Four of our team are qualifying as professional, commercial divers which should speed-up our work and as we go forward we're becoming increasingly convinced that seagrass rhizome plantation is the key to restoration at scale.



Despite these successes, 2023 wasn't without its challenges. In the summer we saw a spike in sea temperature of approx. 5 C. This resulted in a high mortality in our native oyster nursery - a reminder that we live in a rapidly changing world, making our research into the possibilities of marine habitat restoration all the more vital.

It has been a foundational policy to make everything we learn in our research open-source, in order to encourage marine-conservation around the UK and in 2023 we welcomed a host of community groups and representatives from wildlife trusts to Loch Craignish for a weekend of practical training. Over 300 people attended our Wild Seas Weekend and three young marine biology graduates went on to join us as interns over the month of August to learn about what we do. We also launched our Underwater Surveyor Course via e-learning and helped co-ordinate a Great Seagrass Survey which mapped 75 seagrass beds around the coastline.



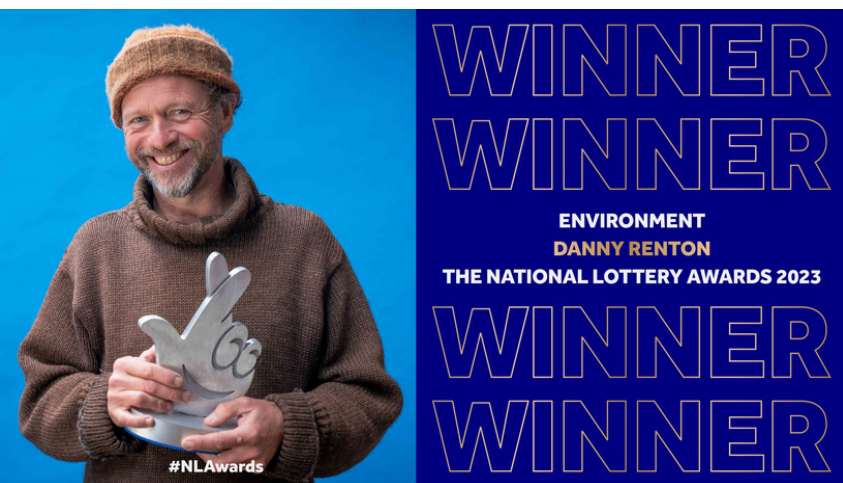
Our portfolio of University partnerships continues to grow and in 2023 4 PhD students joined us to research marine habitat acoustics, bio-diversity change, carbon capture and environmental DNA. As such, Loch Craignish is becoming a living "marine lab" and Seawilding is leading a community bid to have the Loch designated a Demonstration and Research Marine Protected Area by the Scottish Government.

Volunteers are essential to our efforts and over the year scores of our community and others have given hours of their time to process seagrass, survey native oysters and to help organise our events. Additionally, with the help of our partner NGO, Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation, six primary schools visit our oyster cages on a monthly basis to conduct "citizen science" and 29 local children have joined "Seawildlings" to learn about and celebrate the sea.



Seawilding now employs a team of seven local people, full-time. It's been a rapid growth for our small charity since we began in 2020 and we believe the interest in our pioneering work is testament to the urgent need to address the rapid decline in ocean health and the climate crises.

Gratifyingly, Seawilding won two major awards in 2023 – the National Lottery Environment Award and the Holyrood Climate Awards.



Thank you for the support from all our donors, 2023 has been a bumper year.

SEAWILDING

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