

## Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) & Geopark Youth Leaders 2026



Welcome to Youth Leaders 2026. If you have a passion for the outdoors and nature conservation, are considering an environmental career, or want to encourage others to responsibly enjoy our precious landscapes; and are **16-24 years old** we want to hear from you!

This exciting new youth programme will mainly be delivered within the Ring of Gullion and Strangford and Lecale AONBs. Please see the schedule of activities below for full details.

During the programme, which will run from June 2026 until Feb 2027, you will participate in a range of environmental and nature conservation themed sessions, where you will develop new personal and practical skills, allowing you to become an Environmental Youth Leader and champion for nature. Through the planned activities you will be introduced to a range of natural habitats and meet the people who are committed to protecting them. The skills you will gain are transferable skills, which you will be able to implement in your chosen career.

## Additional Opportunities

By becoming an AONB & Geopark Youth Leader you will also;

- Complete a whopping **100 hours** connecting with nature which will mean you will receive the highest **Wild Youth Award** available, see [Wild Youth Awards | Ulster Wildlife](#) for more information.
- Gain additional qualifications in **Leave no Trace Awareness** and an AQA in **Facilitating nature-based activities for wellbeing** (2-day residential course)

Thanks to funding from Action Renewables and sponsorship from [Landscapes NI](#) this programme is **free of charge**. All we ask from you is a commitment to attend the whole programme.

Please note when applying, there will be two groups of Youth Leaders, one in each AONB, you are applying to join either the Strangford and Lecale group or the Ring of Gullion group.

## Selection criteria

Youth Leaders will be selected based on the following criteria in order below

- 1- You must be 16 – 24 years of age on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2026
- 2- Those able to commit to the most sessions
- 3- Those who reside in their chosen AONB
- 4- Candidates who have previously completed a Youth Ranger programme
- 5- Those who live outside their chosen AONB but are within a 10-mile radius

If there is a tie between candidates answers to the following questions will be scored.

Q1. Why is your chosen AONB important to you? – 50% weighting

Q2. Why are you interested in becoming a Youth Leader? – 50% weighting

\* In the case of deadline extension, priority will be given to applications received before the first deadline.

**Applications close 5pm 31<sup>st</sup> May**

**Please read the schedule very carefully and check you have availability for the majority of the programme before applying**

Activity Overview	Strangford & Lecale		Ring of Gullion	
	Date	Venue	Date	Venue
<b>Programme overview</b> – Online session with leaders, parents and youth leader.	Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> June – Teams meeting			
<b>Introduction Day</b> - Get to know your fellow participants and become familiar with your chosen Landscape.	Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> June	Delamont Country Park, Downpatrick	Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> June	Bluebell Lane Glamping, Newry
<b>Facilitating nature-based activities for wellbeing AQA</b> – 2-day residential training. Learn how to lead fun, safe outdoor activity sessions and get hands-on practice facilitating them. You'll also learn a bit about the research linking nature and wellness.	Monday 29 <sup>th</sup> -Weds 1 <sup>st</sup> July, Kilbroney Centre, 1 Forestbrook Rd, Rostrevor, Newry BT34 3BT, UK			
<b>Coastal Ecology Bioblitz</b> - A taster day in coastal ecology, surveys and management	Tues 7 <sup>th</sup> July	Tyrella Beach	Thurs 9 <sup>th</sup> July	Cranfield Beach
<b>Event volunteering (optional)</b> – Lend a hand with making sure Castlewellan Agricultural Show is a great success!	Sat 18 <sup>th</sup> July – Castlewellan Forest Park			
<b>Upland Management</b> – Enjoy a hike up Slievenaslat learning about the unique ecology and management. Volunteer activity in Castlewellan Walled Garden.	TBC – week 20 <sup>th</sup> July Castlewellan Forest Park			
<b>Event Outreach (optional)</b> – Represent your AONB on an outreach stand at a public event	Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> or Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug	Delamont Country Park – Skiffy Fest	Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> or Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug	Warrenpoint Wake the Giant
<b>Bird Ringing</b> – Join us for a very special morning learning about bird ecology and ringing opportunity	Tues 4 <sup>th</sup> August, The Turnip House, Leitrim			
<b>Sustainable Food</b> – Visit a working farm which is managing to produce high quality food whilst encouraging biodiversity to thrive.	Tues 11 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Strangford area	Weds 12 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Wild Ways Ireland, Forkhill, Newry, BT359RY

<b>Woodlands</b> – An introduction to woodland habitats and native seed collection to grow trees for the future.	Tues 25th Aug	Delamont Country Park	Weds 26th Aug	Kilbroney Country Park
<b>Practical conservation day</b> – This is your opportunity to give something back. You could be tackling invasive species or taking part in a wildlife survey.	Sat 12th Sept	TBC Ards	Sun 13th Sept	Derrymore House
<b>Orienteering</b> – An opportunity to learn and develop navigational skills whilst traversing in a Forest Park and lowland mountain environment. Also, an introduction for carbon literacy.	Sat 26th Sept Castlewellan Forest Park			
<b>Seed Collection</b> - Explore our countryside and collect/process seed for our native tree nursery	Sat 10th Oct	Downpatrick Area	Sun 11th Oct	TBC
<b>Invasive Scrub Control</b> - Invasive scrub can quickly overcome native plants. Join us in a day of manual removal	Sat 7th Nov	Tyrella Beach	Sun 8th Nov	Slieve Gullion Forest Park
<b>Native Tree Nursery</b> - Join us in our native tree nursery processing trees for our annual giveaway	Sat 21st Nov Castlewellan Forest Park			
<b>Leave no Trace</b> – Are you aware of how your actions affect wildlife? Take part in a leave no trace awareness course.	Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Portaferry	Sun 17 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Jonesborough
<b>Online Winter Talks</b> - An opportunity for you to learn from the experts! A series of online talks in the evening from mid Nov to mid Jan. Topics include Geology of the Geopark, Birding for community groups, Built Heritage of our Geopark, Pond ecology, Marine Priority Species and Gardening for Wildlife	TBC - Online			
<b>Let's celebrate!</b> – Presentation of certificates and celebration. With e-mountain biking!	Sat 6th Feb Castlewellan Forest Park			

\*Please note that this schedule may be subject to change and will be dependent on weather conditions

### What to expect?

- To learn about the natural environment you have to be in it! Each of our sessions will involve significant time outdoors in a range of weather conditions. We only cancel sessions if it is unsafe to be outside, not if it is raining.
- You will meet a range of people working in the Conservation sector and this is your opportunity to ask them questions. Make the most of your time by making as many contacts as possible.
- You will be expected to work as a team and adhere to the **Code of Conduct**
- Sessions will mostly run from 10am to 4pm (with the exception of the 2-day residential)
- You will be required to arrange your own transportation, there may be opportunities for car sharing.

### What to bring?

- Sturdy outdoor shoes/boots
- Waterproof coat and trousers
- Spare dry clothing in a waterproof bag
- Packed lunch
- Personal medication
- Small rucksack

\* All safety equipment will be provided and a separate equipment list for the residential will be provided.