

Giving back to Ånderdalen National Park

2025 illustrated report



En hjelpende
hånd 2025

A helping hand 2025

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Background

Visitor numbers on Senja have increased sharply, with **Ånderdalen National Park** seeing a rise from about 2,000 in 2010 to nearly 20,000 in 2024. This surge poses a major challenge: how can the park provide quality visitor experience while protecting its landscapes and wildlife, especially with limited staff and funding? This issue extends beyond Ånderdalen to other areas on Senja, and many destinations across Northern Norway.

In 2022, Delphin Ruché (the founder and director of the nonprofit Rissa Citizen Science) contacted Ånderdalen National Park manager Inge Birkeland with a key question: **how can visitors actively support the park's conservation?** After several meetings and presentations, the park's Board of Directors approved Ruché's proposal. Ruché then led a scouting trip in 2023, followed by two pilot projects in the summers of 2023 and 2024, where volunteers mapped wildlife and evaluated trail conditions. The Ånderdalen National Park Board responded positively to the reports highlighting the volunteers' achievements.

- In spring 2025, Ruché led a field trip with 12 pupils (aged 14 to 15) from **Fénelon school in La Rochelle**, France, who traveled with three adults to Ånderdalen and back using only trains and buses to reduce their carbon footprint. During six full days, we documented bird species, restored damaged trail areas, protected a drainage ditch from erosion, and helped mark a new hiking path. During the park's annual celebration day, about 100 local youth from Senja joined the French pupils. Together, they restored trails and shared knowledge and experiences across cultures. The week was a great success and an unforgettable adventure for everyone involved.
- Building on these past successes and a strong foundation of trust, the Ånderdalen National Park Board and Rissa Citizen Science decided to formalize their partnership in July 2025, advancing through an official collaboration with **"A Helping Hand 2025"** to Ånderdalen. We dedicated our days to restoring nature and (re)marking trails inside the National Park.

The main goal of these initiatives is to provide visitors with a more meaningful experience of Ånderdalen National Park that directly supports its conservation. Following regenerative travel principles, this approach encourages visitors to actively give back to the place they are visiting. Biodiversity mapping addresses knowledge gaps, while nature restoration tackles pressing needs. These initiatives also aim to raise visitor awareness of local cultural values while connecting visitors and locals through nature-positive actions.

This illustrated report presents the two 2025 initiatives: what we achieved and what lessons we learned before planning the next editions in 2026.

Fénelon Middle School

La Rochelle, France





Fénelon school, La Rochelle, France

When

May 30 to June 6 in Ånderdalen National Park

Who

12 pupils, aged 14 to 15, and 4 adults*

Alban, Charlotte, Clarisse, Clémence, Clovis, David*, Delphin*, Gabin, Jean-Patrick*, Kalina, Marion, Morgan, Myrtille, Nicolas, Pierre* and Victor.

The journey from France and back

Committed to reducing their carbon footprint, the group traveled the 8,000 km round trip by train and bus, avoiding over 15 tons of CO₂ emissions. The round-trip took about 6 days in total.

The mission

- Map biodiversity, with a focus on birds
- Repair hiking trails
- Restore a large ditch
- Mark a new trail



4 blog articles:

[12 teens on a mission in Ånderdalen National Park](#)

[The journey](#)

[Myrtille's sketches](#)

[Play time](#)



On You Tube



12 teens from La Rochelle in Ånderdalen National Park

Rissa Citizen Science

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3



Share



Download



Save





Round trip:
8,000 km
6 days
14 trains
6 buses
15 t. of CO2 avoided
compared to air
travel.

CREEKS
ORIGINAL
SINCE 1974


TBO

1161

WC

1L



A group of people, including a man in a grey jacket and a woman in a black jacket, are standing in a forest. The man is holding a shovel and pointing towards a pond in the background. The woman is looking towards the man. There are several other people in the group, some wearing hats and jackets. The background shows a pond, trees, and a forest. A green octagonal text box is overlaid on the top right of the image.

7 days learning and discussing about Senja, nature, history, Sámi culture, wildlife, local communities, tourism and the challenges related to the management of Ånderdalen National Park.

36 species of birds identified and mapped, including 2 listed as Endangered (EN) and 2 as Near Threatened (NT) on Norway's Red List.





One ditch repaired





200 meters of
hiking trails
stabilized





2 shelters
filled with
firewood





An alternative trail marked with poles



Teamed up
with Senja
Ungdomskole at
the National
Park Day



A Helping Hand to Ånderdalen National Park

- En Hjelpende Hånd 2025 -



A Helping Hand to Ånderdalen National Park/ En Hjelpende Hånd til Ånderdalen

When

July 26 to 3 August 3 in Ånderdalen National Park

Who

14 adults and 2 teenagers*

Ann, Anna, Carina, Ed, Francois*, Ines, Iona, James*, Léa, Luisa, Marek, Megan, Samara, Simone, Sonja and Virga. Although most of the participants lived in Tromsø at the time, they are from Australia, Belgium, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Spain, UK, USA and Switzerland.

Leaders: Delphin Ruché (Rissa Citizen Science), Ingve Birkeland (Ånderdalen National Park)

Contributors: Øystein Kristiansen (Sállir Natur), Ann Berit Påve Kristiansen, Roger Kristiansen, Bente Merete Solbjørg, Hilde Lisbeth Strand, Odd-Arne Andreassen, Solveig Nylund and Morten Svergre and Midt-Troms Friluftsliv.

The mission

- Map biodiversity, with a focus on birds and dragonflies
- Repair hiking trails
- Restore peat bogs
- Close an overly damaged trail
- Create an alternative trail
- Build boardwalks
- Repaint DNT Senja trail

The project was funded by **Miljødirektoratet**, **Troms Fylkeskommune**, and **the It's Great Out There Coalition**, with substantial in-kind contributions from Rissa Citizen Science, Sállir Natur and Ånderdalen National Park.



2 blog articles:

[What we have accomplished](#)

[Lea's watercolors](#)



Restored
peat
bogs

Repaired
hiking
trails





Created an
alternative
hiking
trail





Built
boardwalks



Repainted
DNT
Senja
trail





Mapped species,
including one new
to Senja (European
badger)

Some lessons learned

- **From overtourism to voluntourism**

Many visitors are seeking alternative ways to travel. Like the experiences in 2023 and 2024, these two examples demonstrate how nature restoration and citizen science can offer visitors meaningful ways to give back to the places they come to enjoy.

To maintain a high level of engagement throughout the week, it is important to vary the tasks and include occasional leisure activities and time off.

- **Collaboration**

Close collaboration between the lead partners is essential. Regular and effective communication between Rissa Citizen Science and Ånderdalen National Park ensured smooth coordination both before and during the project weeks.

- **Local partners**

Including locals was a priority for Rissa Citizen Science and the Ånderdalen National Park Board. Locals assisted with logistics such as transport and activities, but equally important, everyone gained from learning from and drawing inspiration from each other.

- **Knowledge gap**

Motivated volunteers can contribute valuable knowledge to Ånderdalen National Park. However, experts need to lead the effort, since accurate identifications depend on their guidance and validation.

- **Recruitment**

Although we successfully recruited enough participants, future editions will require a more organized campaign to increase the project's visibility. The recruitment and interview process is time-consuming and should be accounted for in the initial timeline and budget.

- **Food**

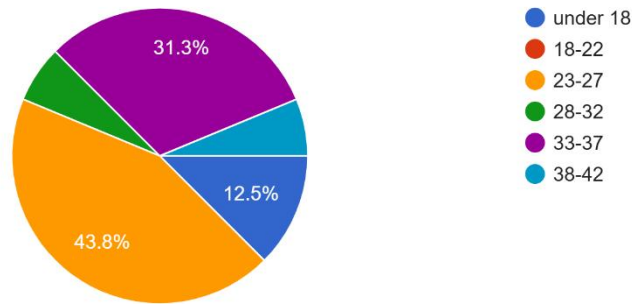
Delicious and varied meals help keep spirits high in most situations. We were aware of this, and these two weeks once again confirmed the importance of planning generous, diverse meals and snacks.

Questionnaire

The 16 volunteers who joined **A Helping Hand 2025** filled out a questionnaire designed to gather feedback and to help us improve the next editions. We are sharing here some of the results.

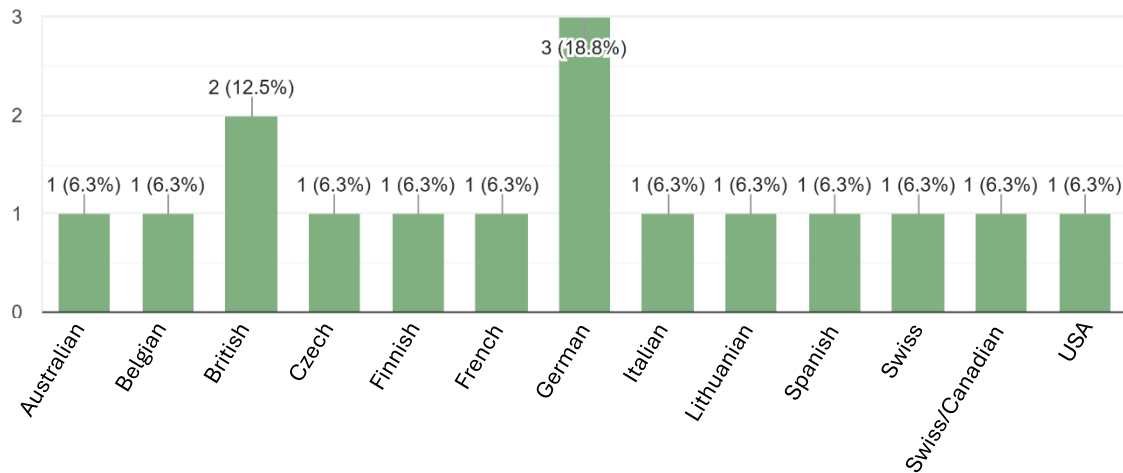
What is your age group?

16 responses



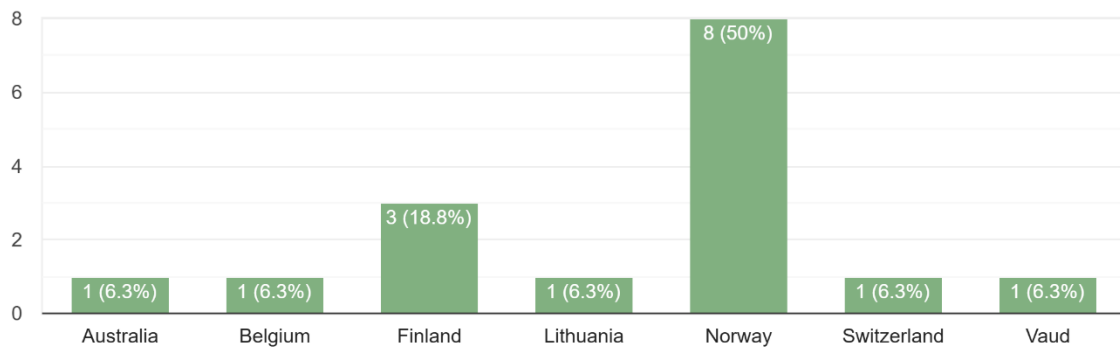
What is your nationality?

16 responses



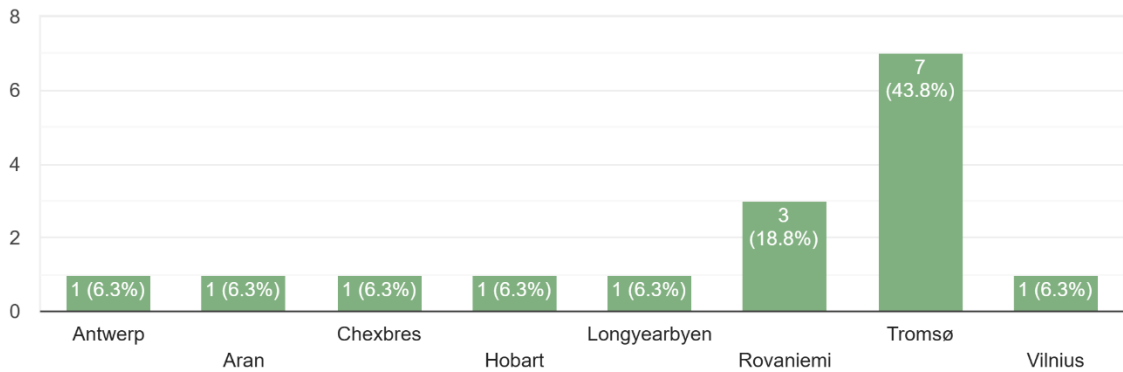
What is your country of residence?

16 responses



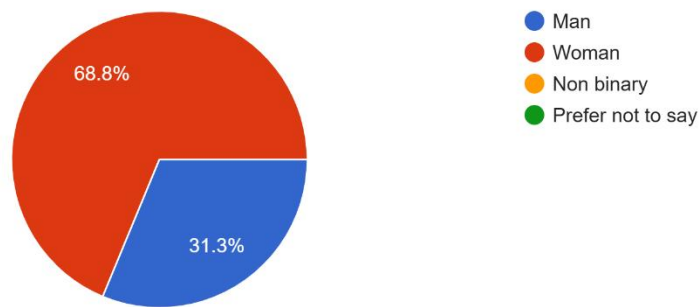
What city do you live in?

16 responses



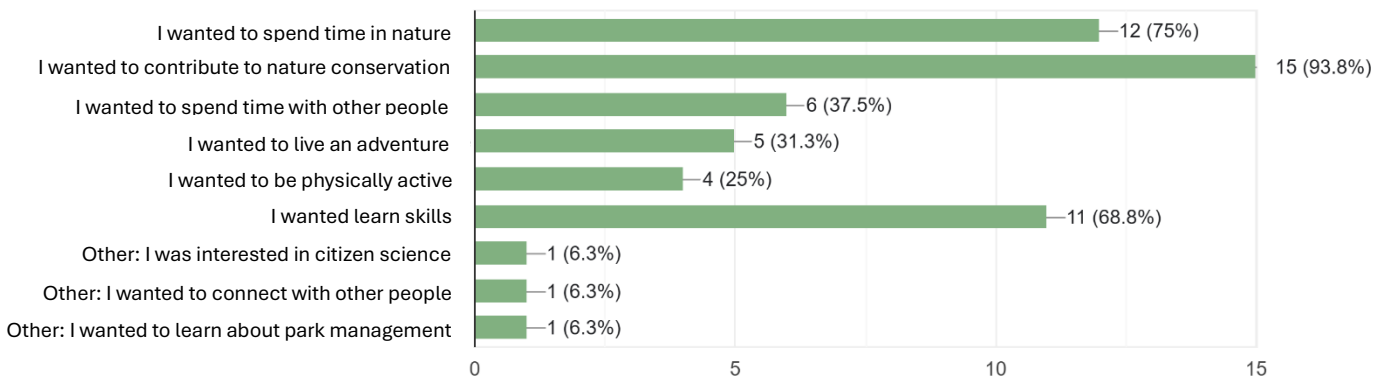
What is your gender identity?

16 responses



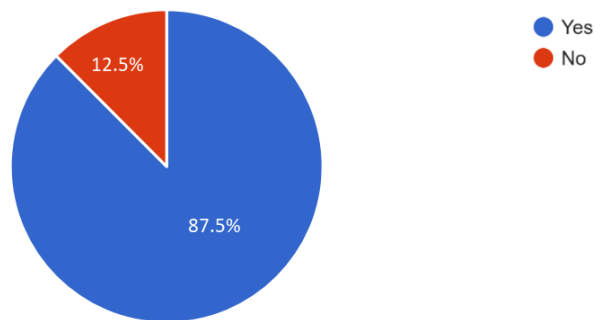
What motivated you to join the project?

16 responses



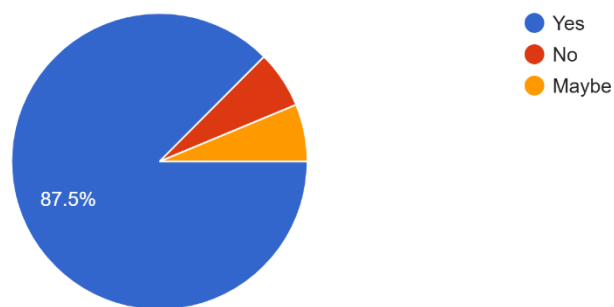
Has this experience changed the way you think about using the outdoors?

16 responses



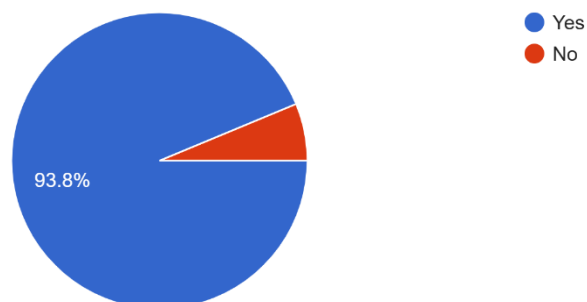
Did you feel you were contributing to something useful?

16 responses



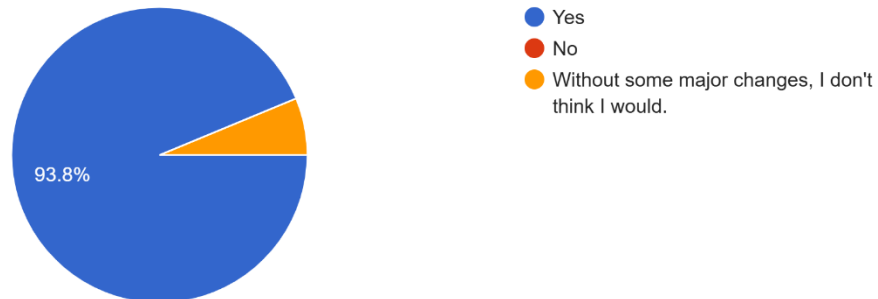
Do you believe visitors should be given the opportunity to contribute to conservation efforts in Ånderdalen National Park?

16 responses



If joining "A Helping Hand" was free of charge again, would you recommend people to join the next edition?

16 responses



What did you enjoy most in this project?

“I enjoyed the concept of meeting new people and being outdoors while contributing to nature conservation. I felt like everything was well planned and I am very grateful for all the opportunities we got (boat trip, dinner, canoe trip, hike). I was also very happy with the amount and quality of food. It is not easy to plan the food for a big group.”

“I enjoy a lot to be immerse in the nature so to fully understand the place that we were going to help with. I particularly appreciate the fact to spend the first 2 day before to start the actual work to have an overview of the place.”

I enjoyed feeling like I was contributing to the upkeep of the park and giving back.”

Has this experience changed the way you think about using the outdoors? If yes, what has changed?

“More concious of where to walk to not damage the nature”

“It made me more aware of how easily new tracks are created. I also enjoyed the concept of working for the nature and meeting new people combined to being outdoors and I would like to do that more in the future.”

“Until this project I didn't realise how much damage can be done by not following the trail. I became more mindful of how my presence impacts vegetation”

“Being in the nature for one week with people that I don't know. Opening up to everyone and feeling that what we were doing was beneficial to the conservation of a beautiful national park.”



Ånderdalen
nasjonalpark

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