

## Matthew Ross

“I am a Learning & Discovery Ranger for the Peak District National Park, in the U.K. My role involves engaging young people and families with the national park, particularly through organising school and community group visits, outreach activities and junior ranger groups. I am passionate about opening young people's eyes to all the benefits and joy that the natural world can bring. My parents gave me this experience, leading to a lifelong love of nature and the outdoors: the richest of inheritances! However, I know that not everybody has this opportunity, and it is a privilege to be able to help open this door for them. With my colleagues, I am especially working to engage hard-to-reach and underrepresented groups.

The Peak District is surrounded by densely populated urban areas and receives an estimated 13 million visitors a year. However, many of those closest to us are those who are least aware of what the national park can offer. For instance, many children attending school trips from local schools have never even visited a rural area before. I am looking to develop ways we can engage these people from peri-urban areas. Sadly, our proximity to urban areas also brings some negative issues, including wildfires, littering and antisocial behaviour. We hope that reaching out into these communities and showing what the park can offer may help to reduce this behaviour and encourage greater stewardship.

It is a huge honour to be awarded one of the Alfred Toepfer scholarships, and I am very excited to learn from my colleagues and friends in Europe. My study visits will focus on visiting other parks close to peri-urban areas: Germany's Sächsische Schweiz National Park, and Hungary's Duna-Ipoly Nemzeti Park. I will focus on education and outreach techniques and look forward to learning lots from the experience to help me in my work!”