A radical challenge to the new Scottish Government

As THE CROFTER went to press we were still taking in the emphatic result delivered by voters in the Scottish Parliament election. We welcome Stewart Stevenson as minister for environment and climate change, with ministerial responsibility for crofting. We will be seeking an early meeting with the new minister and we hope that he will let us have his thoughts on crofting in an article for the next edition.

In one sense, the election drew a line under a process of legislation on crofting that has been going on since 2005. The 2010 Crofting Act, for all its imperfections, has at least let us know where we stand. We look forward to the implementation of some positive aspects, like a majority-elected Crofting Commission, and we will be pressing the case for crofting communities themselves to carry out where possible the mapping required for the new register of crofts and for them to be given the necessary support to do so.

Although we are unlikely to see any new crofting legislation for some time, there is much that government can do to strengthen and expand the system – and this need not incur increased expenditure in current and foreseeable financial circumstances.

In the run-up to the election SCF published its Crofting Policy Resolution – a radical challenge to the next Scottish Government. The resolution calls upon the incoming government to publish, within a year of taking office, an action plan for crofting to meet two key objectives:

1. A radical challenge to the new Scottish Government
2. SCF believes that through this combined approach and with the utilisation of resources and expertise from all parties involved, it will be possible to best make the case for the levels of funding which the crofting counties need and deserve.
**Message from the chair...**

_Eleanor Arthur_

**Director’s blog**

**Derek Flyn shares his spring schedule**

**LOOKING** back, there has been no shortage of things to do. The promise was made last October at the Oban gathering that SCF would seek to ensure that its members are kept informed about the provisions of the 2010 Crofting Reform Act. Since then, the series of meetings attended by Patrick and me have shown this to be a worthwhile exercise. Last autumn we were in Whalsay, Unst, Lerwick and Stornoway and this spring we have continued with visits to Helmsdale, Breakish and Benbecula, explaining the changes and how they affect crofters. At the same time, Patrick has been explaining how the SCF crofting community mapping project (CCMaP) might be carried out. In its plans to provide a national crofting register, the Scottish Government wishes to encourage the mapping of crofting townships as a community process. If SCF proposals are successful, the requirement for individuals to register maps will be delayed until at least 2014. Meanwhile Patrick and I are accepting invitations to extend our travels. With the help of our new company secretary John Bannister and Karen Campbell, I recently formed a membership task force. At the board and council meeting last December, I volunteered to be the director with responsibility for SCF membership. Before that, a working group had spent much time and energy preparing a strategy and it now falls on us to make progress. John and Karen have between them a wealth of experience in the workings of SCF and Karen is pursuing her special interest in youth membership. She attended and spoke well at both Breakish and Benbecula. The SCF board next met in March in Edinburgh and later along with Eleanor, Norman, Russell and Patrick, I went to the meeting of the cross-party group on crofting at Holyrood. My principal interest was to hear about the programme taking forward the implementation of the Reform Act. The first commencement order was approved last December, introducing a few provisions. The second is at draft stage but seems unlikely to be issued before October 2011 as it will include large parts of the act. So look out for further information in these columns.

**Easter Island**

Derek Flyn covers recent SCF activities on members’ behalf in his article also on this page, so I won’t repeat them here. I love this time of year. Every time you go, you see the land changing, from drab winter colours; then the following days a green hue starts to appear and the growing process starts all over again.

The weather here in Shetland over the past month has been excellent for the lambing. We only lost one lamb out of our lot, possibly as they were all pure Shetland this year instead of cross-Texels. The Shetland lambs are very hardy and the ewes are very capable mothers. It is not only important to use and protect our native breeds for future generations, but it also makes a lot of sense to use low-maintenance livestock when you are a crofter with 101 things to do.

I am delighted to be part of the SCF delegation, funded by Vodafone, attending the international Slow Food conference in Sweden which is on indigenous practice in food production. Our presentations will focus on croft use of native breeds of cattle. It is a great opportunity to get crofting on to the international stage again. However, I pity the interpreter who has to translate what I say into different languages!

I was visiting Mary Isbister at Burland croft and got some good photos of her animals. This photo of the cow and calf show what good milkers the Native Shetland cow is, her udder is a proper picture in itself. The calf was a bit of a surprise for them though as Mary and Tammy’s herd is predominantly black and white. However like all things you get an occasional different colour thrown in when you least expect it.

It is approaching show time of year. SCF will have stands at the Royal Highland and Black Isle shows and the international dog trials in Fearn, as well as local groups attending local shows. See you there!

**Firstly** I have to congratulate the recently-elected MSPs, new and returning, and wish them well in their term of office. It is a great thing for us to have our own parliament and of course a huge responsibility. I particularly congratulate the SNP on defying the odds and winning an unprecedented majority. Govern wisely — and SCF looks forward to working with you.

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It is approaching show time of year. SCF will have stands at the Royal Highland and Black Isle shows and the international dog trials in Fearn, as well as local groups attending local shows. See you there!
When SCF commissioned our Houses on Crofting Land report a few years ago it was in response to ever-increasing pressure on crofting land for speculative housing development in our region’s property hot-spots.

The most notorious case of this was the loss of an entire croft at Taynuilt in Argyll, in an area where crofts were already very scarce, when an absentee owner was allowed – thanks to negligent crofting regulation and lax planning policies – to develop an estate of up-market dwellings. One of these houses is currently on the market for a cool £330,000, described by the selling agent as an opportunity to acquire an extremely well-presented home in a highly desirable luxury development.

What a slap in the face for any young person in Argyll wanting a start in crofting or even just a foot on the housing ladder.

SCF’s housing report acknowledges the contribution that crofting land can make to meeting genuine housing needs in the Highlands and Islands. Most crofting townships have areas of relatively poor land on their common grazings that can be made available in order to meet local housing requirements and the report outlines how this can be done without the land or houses finding their way on to the open, and unaffordable, market.

There are some signs that, better late than never, local authority planning policies are taking some cognisance of the circumstances of crofting. For example, the Highland Council’s local plan for Skye and Lochalsh states: “Safeguarding and promoting crofting is a crucial element of preserving Skye and Lochalsh’s unique identity. The plan assists in this process by making the quality of croft land a key criterion in site and settlement boundary selection. Where possible, sites will be chosen that do not represent locally important agricultural land and expansion of townships on to poorer common grazings land will be supported.”

A pilot project to co-ordinate planning and decrofting for house building has been instituted by the Crofters Commission and the Highland Council, which is intended to avoid the situation we have seen so often where the granting of planning permission has forced decrofting regardless of the wider crofting interest.

A recent planning application by the absentee owner of a croft at Drumfearn, Skye, attracted strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong local opposition and considerable media attention.

Such engagement is absolutely crucial if crofting land is to be positively managed and regulated.

In Skye recently we directed hearings into two cases where we felt we needed additional information. The first one was into a very large, whole-croft decrofting, some 450 hectares. Only two crofters attended. Interest in resisting the decrofting application was apparent but, as no public support was evidenced at the hearing, a good full-time unit was removed from crofting.

The second hearing that same day was into the creation of three new crofts in south

Continued on page 4

Striking a balance

A vital question from Crofters Commission board member Angus McHattie

How do we strike a balance in modern crofting that allows individual crofters or landowners to benefit from their assets whilst maintaining the communal aspects of crofting that set it apart from other agricultural or land tenancy systems in Scotland? One fundamental difficulty for crofters in creating such a balance is the number of grazings committees in the crofting areas that are out of office, meaning that those crofting communities have no way to hold up their end over large parts of the crofting counties. Remember, without grazings committees, there is no way to access support funding, should development projects on the common grazings be pursued.

Meanwhile, increasingly large sites are being requested for decrofting for housing on parts of the inbye croft land which is often the better quality land, closest to the road access. This has caused problems in the past and a pilot scheme is underway within part of the Highland Council area to promote early dialogue between planning and agricultural staff when a development application is received.

Hopefully this project will give some pointers to how we can work to protect areas of locally important croft land whilst helping provide much-needed housing. This will only work well if crofters and grazings committees engage with consultation on local plans and define where they want development and where they don’t.

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Continued on page 4
New designation needed: zoned for crofting?

Continued from page 3

demand for crofts for genuine purposes. The planning officer had, incredibly, recommended that planning permission be granted, in breach of the council’s own guidelines for crofting land as stated in the local plan. In this instance the planning committee refused two of the three houses. It remains to be seen when and if the Crofters Commission will carry out its duty to seek letting proposals for the remainder of the croft.

Part of the problem in cases of this kind seems to be that there is confusion (even amongst planning professionals) between land which is zoned for housing and land within the settlement development area. Perhaps we need a new definition – zoned for crofting. If the Highland Council follows its own guidelines on building on croft land then all well and good, but the inclusion of the get-out phrase “where possible” does not at all inspire confidence.

SCF has been advocating a government planning advice note for crofting areas which would in future prevent the kind of abuse that took place at Taynuilt and was only partly avoided at Drumfearn. Meantime crofters must be vigilant in scrutinising and commenting upon any proposed new local plan, to ensure that crofting interests are protected.

Finally, here is an example of how an unscrupulous crofting estate can run rings around the planning and crofting regulatory systems. We cannot go into detail as part of this unsavoury tale is sub judice. A croft was allowed to be held vacant by the estate for no less than eight years. The estate was then granted decrofting of three speculative house sites and applied to re-let the remainder of the croft to itself! When two of the few remaining crofters in the township protested at what was going on, they were sued!

When this kind of thing can still happen we need as much as ever a regulatory authority that will take the side of crofters and crofting, rather than a neutral tribunal. How can an agency which aims to promote occupancy of crofts, active land use and shared management by crofters, as a means of sustaining and enhancing rural communities, remain neutral in such a carry-on?

Houses on Crofting Land is available at www.crofting.org/index.php/publications/66

A radical challenge

Continued from page 1

* 70% of existing crofts in productive use by 2020 and 85% by 2030
* Creating 10,000 new crofts (half of them woodland crofts) by 2020 and a quarter of the land in Scotland in crofting tenure by 2030

The document goes on to outline the social, cultural and agro-ecological advantages of crofting. It states what is needed in terms of regulation and governance in order to develop and optimise the system’s existing advantages.

It describes the changes of emphasis and direction that we believe are required to bring Scottish agricultural policies in line with emerging issues of biodiversity, resource use and sustainability as these have been defined by the global community and its institutions.

Finally, it makes plain our resolve that the time has come for government to recognise the advantages that crofting brings to our country, to extend the crofting system and make it the model for rural development throughout Scotland.

The agenda is a visionary and radical one for what we hope and expect to be a radical government. It seeks the changes needed to bring population, economic growth and biodiversity back to poorly-managed, deserted and abandoned land. It emphasises food and energy production, agri-tourism, woodland expansion and conservation of carbon stocks in the peatlands, by getting stock back on the hills and moors.

To achieve that agenda, and to deliver what we know crofting can achieve for Scotland, we need a simplified and accessible SRDP; ring-fencing of crofting support schemes; targeting of LFASS to vulnerable areas; support for small producers in the next CAP reform through capping of SFP; further land reform; safeguarding of native crop varieties; reinstatement of the croft entrants scheme and extension of Crofting Connections; and enhanced crofter housing support.

Finally, here is a challenge to our incoming government: Don’t just settle for leading Scotland. Be a world leader in land use and rural development.


Visit us online at www.crofting.org
The energy-efficient croft house

Where do we start the search for an energy efficient croft house? The best approach is to look backwards. The black house was for many centuries the standard housing form of the Gaeltachd. It was long and narrow, generally made of stone and thatch and was termed a longhouse or byre dwelling. To the English academic, E Cecil Curwin, who visited Lewis in the 1938, they revealed that there was an “iron-age society” still existing in the modern British Isles. He titled his essay in Antiquities magazine The Hebrides – A Cultural Backwater.

It was no wonder that many Highlanders became ashamed of their indigenous architecture, viewing it as a symbol of backwardness and poverty. But in the 21st century, concerns over energy resources and global warming allow us to reappraise the black house and learn lessons which can be applied to modern day challenges.

The black house was a model of sustainable architecture. It used locally-sourced materials, was extremely energy efficient and was designed and sited to respond to topography and climate. The Gaelic saying “An iar’s an ear, an dachaigh as’ fhéarr – cùl ri gaoith, ‘s aghaidh ri iar’s an ear, an dachaigh as’ féarr – cùl ri gaoith,” (East to west, the house faces to the sun) was often applied that’s best – back to the wind and gréin.” (East to west, the house was an improvement in design, which replaced the black house with the stone and slate white house made of stone and thatch and people may think that this is where it loses its relevance with the needs of modern day house builders. But the most important lesson of the black house was adaptability of the materials.

People used stone and thatch because it was the material to hand. They could collect stones and pull heather and reeds from the fields. It was affordable for people who had to battle against a subsistence living.

The late Duncan Stalker, master thatcher and clachar of Camuslunie, would tell the anecdote of an old man in his childhood village whose job it was to twist together discarded wire to form staples for fixing the thatch. It was laborious and tedious work. But when the community could afford to buy steel staples, they did so. When metal sheeting became available to replace the thatch, this would be used instead, as it saved time and was lower maintenance.

We adapt as technology moves on and find ways to save time and make improvements.

While some would argue that the stone and slate white house which replaced the black house was an improvement in design, with its careful proportions and nod to classicism, it was not energy efficient, nor did it respond to the climate. And it was not cheap to build. Timber-frame kit houses, however, were easy to build, easy to insulate and used materials which were relatively cheap and accessible. But to many who admired the bedded-down modesty of the black house, or the simple beauty of the pattern-book white house, they were ugly.

But why should they be? Why not combine the lessons of the black house, with its response to climate and topography, with the considered proportions of the white house, with the modern technology of timber-frame construction?

Fortunately, in my view, this is now happening. Sustainability isn’t just about the amount of energy a building consumes in its use, but it being sustainable through its design. If we build houses which are beautiful, adaptable and which fit and enhance the amazing landscape which we are fortunate to live in, then future generations will preserve and cherish them.

A house may be energy efficient, but if it is ugly it diminishes a locality; if it later is demolished because of its ugliness, it is a waste of the embodied energy used to build it. Architects have taken up the challenge of trying to develop modern houses based on traditional forms. My own practice, Dualchas Building Design on Skye, has shown how this can be done, with many more architects across the Highlands following a similar path.

Our clients demand large areas of glazing so that they can watch the landscape and violent weather from the comfort of their living room – not something which the crofter, who spent all day outside come rain or shine, would require. And often the houses are timber clad, the larch allowed to weather to a silver colour to match the rocks and birch. But it is the pattern book kit house which has the answer to the needs of the Highlands, as despite my best efforts, not everyone will employ an architect. Modern building standards mean that highly efficient houses have to be built. Air tightness is measured and renewable heating systems are now mandatory if a proposed house is going to be approved by the council. Kit companies have taken up this challenge, with new construction technologies, such as structurally insulated panels (SIPS) being used more and more often.

The downside of this is that costs are going up, but with the political push towards carbon reduction, this is unlikely to change.

Therefore, the best approach is to carefully consider not the cost of the house, but what is the best investment. Some renewable technologies give generous feedback tariffs, but capital costs and the efficiency of the system have to be carefully weighed up.

Building a house which isn’t bigger than you need is also useful – open plan living and double height volumes can give a feeling of space while keeping the footprint smaller.

But most of all think about the bigger picture. The black house – whatever attributes and emotions people attach to it – enhanced our landscape and was part of our people attach to it – enhanced our landscape and was part of our

Neil Stephen is a partner in architect practice Dualchas Building Design (www.dualchas.com 01471 833 300) and director of kit company Hebridean Contemporary Homes (www.hebhomes.com 0141 550 7380).
The same good management of our stock, land and produce has to be extended to what we build. As steddies, sheds and other enclosures have to be thoughtfully put together, it goes without saying that the same applies to the home, workshop and home office.

Low or zero carbon energy usage – firstly with new construction – is now an international and local aim. The Scottish Government’s introduction of Section 7 to the Scottish building standards has initiated sustainability labelling for buildings to reinforce the emphasis on good use of our energy and other resources.

Turning the byre (illustrated below) into a house annex illustrates four practical applications of all this.

Best use of space

It is very important that any arrangement of space inside and outside our buildings is pleasing and attractively set out. A basic 3D illustration can engage the household in an informed discussion and give a clearer idea as to what is required early on. Expensive changes during construction are minimised and reduced waste and construction effort are friendly to the pocket and the environment.

Heating, hot water and ventilation

A wood burning stove is the main source of heat here and a small heat recovery box linked to the kitchen and shower room ventilation recovers waste heat when the weather is cold. The fan is powered in part by photovoltaic (PV). Basic solar water heating (2.5m2) helps to keep the hot water cylinder warm when the fire is not burning and in addition to warming water for sink and shower use will give some heat to the building to keep it dry. A similar provision (2.5m2) of PV panels will provide power for low voltage lights in the darker areas of the building and power that is not required can be used in the home, or sent into the national grid using an inverter box instead of being stored in batteries.

The capital cost of the solar water and photovoltaic systems will need to be looked at closely, as over the next months the government’s financial payback support, through Renewable Heat Incentives (RHI) and Feed in Tariffs (FIT) will be determined.

Fitting your construction well together

The focus is on locally-sourced (joinery) skills to build efficiently and effectively. As with the construction of your house, there is the requirement for structural calculations. For a building warrant, the services of a certified structural engineer are normally used.

Locally-sourced materials

Using local and indigenous materials, where possible, at reasonable price is the key to sustainability.

Windows may come from Norway and slates from a quarry in Spain – but all at reasonable cost despite the energy used in transit.

If horse hair could be used as a breather membrane under Ballachulish slate 100 years ago, surely we can use wool as an insulant on a commercial scale to wrap up our buildings, let them breathe and keep us warm? With new ways of developing products there can be a downside, but measures can be taken to reduce the risk and it is encouraging to see a number of manufacturers offering wool as a building insulant.

Finding the most appropriate recycled materials to suppress weeds below attractive plants and bushes is as significant as choosing the colours and textures for our walls and can be researched on-line.

Awareness and demands for products and energy systems that are friendly to our environment are finding focus through web sites like the BRE’s green guide to specification (www. Greenspec.co.uk) – recommended by the building standards section of the Scottish Government.

In the stringent times we face, research will continue to be focussed on advancing new ways of using the materials and harnessing the energy we have to hand.
Ardgeal affordable housing

Ronnie MacRae, director of the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT), explains how one community achieved affordable housing for its local people.

We all know how important housing is to rural areas. If the community can’t ensure suitable affordable housing for its families it risks losing them – and the free care support they provided for elderly neighbours, the workers required to keep the rural economy sustainable and the care workers required to look after the ageing population.

This affects viability of schools with falling rolls, medical surgeries, reduced trade for post offices, shops, pubs and small businesses. It also reduces the chances of getting improved transport and communication links.

Partnership working, pulling together all the parties that can make rural development happen, is essential if we are to ensure we have sustainable communities in the longer term.

HSCHT’s Ardgeal development is an example of what can happen when multi-partners such as the community, landowners, strategic bodies (council, etc), contractors and housing providers are working towards the same goal.

Finding the location

We worked very closely with Kincraig and Vicinity Community Council. Having identified a shortage of affordable housing, the Ardgeal site was eventually selected by the trust and its partners, including the community council, Highland Council, Cairngorm National Park Authority, Scottish Government and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). The role of FCS was critical, as its decision as landowner to sell the site to the trust at an affordable price through the National Forest Land Scheme made the project viable for further detailed consideration.

What then?

Designs submitted by David Sommerville Architects form the basis of what is now built on site. The house designs and large plots provide low-cost home ownership opportunities specifically with the option of working from home and the capacity to support a significant element of self-sufficiency.

The homes are highly insulated and designed to be constructed with minimum damage to the local environment with high levels of energy efficiency, low emissions and make best use of locally-sourced timber.

House design proposals were also expected to be, as far as practicable, replicable in any part of the Highlands or beyond where affordable housing may be required – especially in environmentally-sensitive locations such as forest or peaty areas where the stilts construction will provide cost savings.

Heat source

The houses are heated with wood-burning stoves located centrally in a large space with living and dining areas opening to an upper-floor study. Its central location takes full advantage of heat gains from the flue. The open plan layout of the house will allow heat from the stove to flow naturally.

Local timber is available as fuel for the stove which helps reduce fuel poverty and the use of wood as fuel helps reduce CO2 emissions when used appropriately. A solar panel will provide hot water, particularly in summer months, and will supplement the wood stove in spring, autumn and even to some extent in winter.

Solar gain is exploited by aligning the house such that all main living and bedrooms have a south-facing window. The large surface areas of the two-storey living space will be able to absorb any summer overheating with the ultimate option of opening a window. The use of north-facing windows has been minimised to further reduce heat loss.

The resulting estimated CO2 emissions from the house amount to 30.1 kg CO2/m²/year or 2738 kg CO2/year, compared to an average house built according to 1995 building standards of 4241 kg CO2/year. The use of wood burning stoves and solar panels reduces that impact even further.

Affordable

The trust applies what is called a rural housing burden (RHB) to all sales. The RHB secures an equity share in the home roughly equivalent to the discount on market value that the selling prices represent. In Ardgeal that equity share has been fixed at 35%. The trust has a right of pre-emption to buy back at 35% below market value on any resale after which it can sell to another priority household on similar terms. The RHB lasts in perpetuity and therefore locks in that discount.
### Connecting coastal communities

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**A fresh look at our land struggles**

**Iain MacKinnon reports**

A **ROUND FIFTY** people met in Glendale in north-west Skye in mid-April to learn about the key role played by Skye and Lewis crofters during the land struggles of the late 19th century.

Key to the event was the participation of people from some of the communities on Skye and Lewis where the crofters rebelled against their landlords. It was in large part as a result of these rebellions that the British Government set up the Napier Commission, whose report led to the crofting system of land tenure being enacted in 1886.

From Glendale emerged some of the most powerful anti-landlord sentiment and action during the 1880s and at the head of it were crofter John M‘Pherson and local minister Rev Donald MacCallum.

Professor James Hunter highlighted the ongoing relevance of the crofters’ achievements during the late 19th century and Iain Blackford of the Glendale Trust described the background to the Glendale rising and how the actions there had helped galvanise anti-landlord feeling on Skye.

Journalist Norman MacDonald analysed the testimonies of the Glendale delegates to the Napier Commission, emphasising the role that oral tradition had played in the statements of the Glendale men, explaining that their testimonies were part of a communal memory going as far back as the time of Culloden.

He said: “These are the kind of people who were facing the Commissioners. It pervades the evidence they gave that they a feel for the world and a feel for their own world. There comes out of the evidence a deep feeling of regret at that which has been lost. It is a theme that runs through the evidence of the Glendale people.”

Seumas MacDonald from Brogaig in Staffin told about the land struggle in other parts of Skye, including the Staffin area. Speaking in Gaidhlig, with English translations provided by Gilleasbuig Ferguson, Seumas’ clear account was grounded in oral traditions of the rising, but also asked the question of what its leaders would make of crofting communities on Skye today, at a time when there are moves towards community ownership of land on neighbouring islands.

Also speaking in Gaidhlig, Lewiswoman Anne MacLeod gave a compelling and at times dramatic account of past resistance in one of those areas presently striving for community ownership. In her description of the Creach Mhòr na Pairece (the Great Ppair Deer Raid) of the winter of 1886 she emphasised – as did all the other speakers – the sincere religious motivations of the raiders. Anne said that during the raid the crofters thanked God for the plentiful food about them and asked a blessing on the good work they were doing on His behalf.

Colin Shields then spoke about his great-great-grand uncle, Rev Donald MacCallum. MacCallum was Church of Scotland minister in Glendale in the 1880s and his unflinching support of the crofters’ cause in the late 19th and early 20th century has made his name remembered with honour in the Highlands to the present day.

Throughout the afternoon tour of historical sites around Glendale, lively discussions continued about crofting past and present.

Thanks to this excellent, informative gathering organised by the Glendale Trust and the Islands Book Trust, they are discussions that are likely to continue in Glendale, and beyond, the weeks and months to come.
WITH GLOBAL warming and rising concerns about food security, food shortages and fuel and food prices, we are constantly being told we have to find new, more sustainable ways of living. Living sustainably is not a new concept. Up until the first decades of the 1900s, the crofting townships of Scotland understood and practiced how to live within their economic and ecological means.

In Camuscross and Duisdale in south Skye at the turn of the 20th century, almost everyone lived on a croft. Despite the crofts being extremely small, with an average of three acres of generally poor inbye land each and a scouming of only two cows, most households produced much of their own food. There was also a local shop, selling everything from food, to hardware, to clothing; and a range of craftsmen from cobblers to blacksmiths. It was possible to provide all your household needs without travelling further than a mile from your door.

In 2011, modern progress means that 48% of our population of 180 live on the 50 crofts but very few households produce any significant quantity of their own food. Since 1999 there has been no shop in the township and people have to drive up to a 20-mile round journey to the Co-op in Broadford to buy even a pint of milk. There is a growing recognition that the present situation for our crofting township is unsustainable, both ecologically and economically, as fuel and food prices continue to rise.

Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative (CDI), set up in 2008, is a community company working to develop projects which will benefit the community. In autumn 2010, community consultation commissioned by CDI indicated strong interest (72-96%) amongst all respondents in buying local food – with vegetables top of the list, followed by eggs, soft fruit and meat. The consultation also found that 73% of crofters interviewed want to make their crofts more productive.

This April CDI was delighted to secure funding from the Climate Challenge Fund to work with our community members, including crofters, to increase food production again in the townships. We hope to show that even a very small croft with poor land can make a significant contribution to a family’s and a community’s food needs. The project has been further strengthened by the offer of the Scottish Crofting Federation’s Crofting Resources team to work in partnership with CDI on the project.

A series of workshops, demonstrations and exchanges with other crofting townships is now being planned. The training sessions will include producing vegetables and fruit in gardens and polytunnels; tractor skills for small field cropping; and will also include butchering, cooking with local produce and harvesting and preserving field and garden crops. Crofters’ markets will take place later in the growing season and there will be a series of talks and demonstrations over the autumn and winter.

The project also wants to rekindle the concept of communal and partnership working. While many comment that the communal working of the past was developed out of sheer necessity, the demands of modern life, – with most crofters in full time employment – might result in communal working becoming a mechanism enabling busy crofters to return to cropping their crofts. The project also wants to encourage the use of unused croft land and already two crofters have offered their land for growing crops. The project intends to experiment with communal cropping on some of this land.

People who follow the movement to develop more sustainable lifestyles will have heard of the transition town movement. This started in Kinsale in Ireland and is an attempt to prepare communities for the transition which they believe we will all have to make to prepare for a future without oil. Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative is therefore keen to see if it can work towards becoming Scotland’s first transition township!

We have a very long way to go, but being able to produce more of our community’s food will be an important first step.
Tradational Shetland food joins Ark of Taste

On 24th June at the Royal Highland show the SCF will celebrate the entry of a variety of traditional food from the Shetland Isles into Slow Food UK’s Ark of Taste. These include Shetland lamb, Shetland cabage, Shetland cattle, reestit mutton and the wonderful Shetland black potato. To celebrate, we will be serving bowls of reestit mutton soup to give you a flavour of the excellent produce available from the Shetlands.

The Ark of Taste is a catalogue of traditional and regional foods that are danger of becoming extinct. The project is run by Slow Food UK, part of a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members around the world that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

By identifying and celebrating foods that are sustainably produced, unique in taste, part of a distinct ecological region and which are in danger of extinction due to current mass food production, the Ark of Taste promotes a greater understanding of these vulnerable gastronomic traditions and supports and protects the overall biodiversity of our food system.

Working with farmers, producers and their communities our local groups run educational events, food tastings and farm visits; and our network of slow chefs up and down the country feature ark products on their menus.

If we lose these foodstuffs, we lose choice, flavour and the varied landscape and wildlife associated with traditional food and farming.

Find out more at www.slowfoodark.com.

Ed Crowley, Ark of Taste Coordinator, Slow Food

Horticulture in Shetland

There has been a dramatic decline of about 90% between 1971 and 2008 in the area of crops being grown in Shetland. Consumers have started to value local produce. Thanks to regular farmers’ markets and the efforts of some small local food shops, we can now source a good range of locally-grown produce.

But there is still an unmet demand, and this prompted SCF’s fieldworker Sue White to look into setting up a horticultural producers group in Shetland.

Training was one of the needs identified and in March Audrey Litterick ran a two day course for professional and budding horticulturists. Where to start, what to grow, site and soil assessment, propagation, protected cropping and crop rotation were covered, plus pests and diseases and crop nutrition. Following the classroom lecture on the components and properties of good soil, practical tests demonstrated structure, texture, organic matter, drainage properties and likely fertility.

We learned the definition of pests – those animals which attack your crops; diseases – illness caused by pathogens that attack them; and disorders – illness in plants not caused by either of the above, but might be due to lack of light, too much or too little water, too high, low or variable temperatures.

Nutrient cycling and maintaining soil fertility were explained and what constitutes a well-structured fertile soil that is full of life.

The soil has to have a balance of nutrients and the ability for water and air to move freely, drainage of excess water and yet good water-holding capability. Poor soil structure can be caused by over-cultivation, continuous cropping, heavy machinery, working in wet conditions, over-grazing, livestock and formation of natural pans. Climate and topography also influence production. Although Shetland does not experience the rainfall of say, the north west Highlands, it does suffer from a lack of sunshine and particularly a short growing season; possibly less than a third of that of the south of England!

Horticulture emphasises prevention rather than cure, trying to avoid pesticides where possible and limited use or, better still, avoidance of bagged fertilisers. Balancing soil nutrients is essential and can mean the difference between poor and good cropping. Audrey recommended soil tests, even on small plots, and particularly a check on pH. Soil acidity/alkalinity levels are very important as the pH affects plant growth indirectly through influence on nutrient availability and take-up through the presence of toxic ions.

Each crop has an optimum soil pH and a good average to aim for would be about 6.5.

The right order of crop rotation becomes particularly important here. If, for instance, club root is a problem with brassicas, a pH level of 7 might be advised, but anything greater than 5.5 can cause scab on a potato crop. So be careful not to over-lime, as too alkaline a soil can inhibit take-up of other elements – both macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium sulphur and magnesium) and micronutrients that include iron, manganese, boron, zinc etc.

Crops demand different amounts of N (nitrogen), P (phosphorous) and K (potassium). Root crops tend to need more P and K; grass and cereals more N; green vegetables N and P; brassicas N and K; legumes no N, plenty of other elements – both macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium sulphur and magnesium) and micronutrients that include iron, manganese, boron, zinc etc.

Bulky fertilisers should be able to supply most, if not all, of crop nutrient requirements, but the timing of these applications in the rotation should be targeted towards crops that are likely to benefit most from the nutrients and improved soil conditions developed.

We cannot hope to describe Audrey’s course in full, so if you get a chance to experience it first hand, do so!

Pete Glanville, Shetland Organics CIC
Sue White, CRP
NORTENERGY grew out of Powerdown, a Scottish Government initiative taken up by the Northmavine Community Development Company (NCDC).

To try to make NCDC sustainable, a new wholly-owned subsidiary called nortenergy (yes, no capitals) has been set up. The aim is to give a full service to any and all customers considering installing any kind of renewables solutions.

One of the surprise early successes have been our polycrubs. These started out as a Powerdown design for a community polytunnels venture which has seen two community-run polytunnels erected across the parish of Northmavine.

As demand grew from as far away as Mull, they acquired the name ‘polycrubs’ (from the Shetland term ‘crub’ meaning enclosed growing space) since they are quite different to conventional polytunnels.

Polycrubs are designed to withstand all that the Shetland weather can throw at them and are built from recycled plastic pipes and twin-walled polycarbonate sheets. Patents are now being sought.

Powerdown started building polycrubs last year as part of a local food project. However due to popular demand we are now making these available in kit form to anyone who wants them, from the trading subsidiary nortenergy Ltd.

The most popular size is 4.3m wide by 10.6m long although the length can be extended/shortened to customers’ requirements. There is also a 3m-wide version but only one of these has been built so far and we would like to monitor its performance for a while before offering it widely.

We’ve just delivered a few to the Isle of Mull, and if they can stand Shetland’s rigours they are bound to do well there.

We are confident of a very long life span. Polycrubs are quite different to conventional polytunnels.

The nortenergy website will soon be live and will include full information. In the meantime, anybody interested in acquiring one should contact Colin Dickie on 01806 544 222 or colin@nortenergy.co.uk.

THE RARE Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation of the UK’s rare breeds of native farm livestock, which include breeds such as Shetland cattle (fewer than 750 breeding females) and North Ronaldsay sheep (fewer than 500 breeding females).

Between 1900 and 1973, when RBST was formed, 26 native breeds of farm animals – and the genetic resources they represented – were lost forever; but since the formation of RBST, no native breed of livestock has become extinct.

Rare breeds represent a living part of our precious agricultural heritage and provide vital genetic diversity within the UK’s farm livestock, which could be important in a major disease outbreak or in meeting the farming needs of the future. Wool from rare breed sheep is valued by spinners for its colour and fine quality and breeders may also sell sheepskins. The produce from native breeds also offers consumers an important choice in the range of food they eat.

Natural management of the environment has created a new market for rare breeds, grazing environmentally sensitive areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and nature reserves. Natural pastures need to be diverse and offer many plants and herbs and may vary from breed to breed. RBST maintains a national gene bank of semen samples to help safeguard the future of these rare native breeds.

Our conservation team analyses pedigrees to develop breeding conservation programmes and RBST provides breed support grants, either for promotion of a breed, for the support of breed registrations or for technical breed research.

We have two field officers who travel the country offering advice and support to keepers of rare breed livestock. Ruth Dalton is field officer for Scotland and she may be contacted on 07880 584551 or email ruth@rbst.org.uk. You can see rare breeds at RBST’s two approved conservation farm parks in Scotland: Palacerigg country park near Cumbernauld and Doonies farm near Aberdeen. RBST has two active volunteer support groups in Scotland and we are always looking for new volunteers to help us.

Contact Ian Bell (Perthshire, Angus and Fife), simpsonbell@btconnect.com or Ernie Strachan (North East Scotland), strachern@gmail.com. If you would like to find out more about our work and how you can support us visit www.rbst.org.uk or call 02476 696551.

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Seann innealan agus cosgais innealan ùra

Chonaicm fiery agus seann innealan ùra dh'osraich a bhitheas buailteach briseadh.

Innealan ùra, tha thu ag obair le seann thu dol a chosg fortan ann a bhith ceannach seach lathaichean de dh'obair leis a' ghràp.

Togaidh sinn am buntàta ann an aon fheasgar, ann a bhith gan cumail glan.

Gu leòr gus nach bi tuilleadh 's a chòir obrach ar truinnsearan tron gheamhradh, ach beag feur. 'S e iomairean beaga tha mi a-mach air a rithist le fras feòir gus an tèid e air ais gu buntàta 's a' bhliadhna an dèidh sin sìol coirce agus a' cur sìol ag an ath bhliadhna cur chan eil sinn ach a' treabhadh iomaire beag eòrna cuideachd.

Am buntàta air a chur, agus feur agus sìol riamh. Cha b'fhada an uair sin gus an robh beathaichean cho tràth 's a sguir sinn ghaoithe agus sguir sinn biadhadh nam air fàs.

Dh'obhach an t-seannann mun robh sinn bùileach deas air a shon! Gu h-obann am meadhan a' Ghillebein dh'huais a n-tise ñlàth agus thòisich am fear fàs.

Tha innealan againn a-nis airson buntàta a chuala mi, nuair a bha mi thall an uiridh, a dòigh airson innealan math a cheannach, rud obrachadh, b' fhiach e buidheann a chur air每个 thaobh aois – dà fhichead bliadhna a-nis. Tha ort a' cheannachd uidheaman ùra? no 's chleachdadh? iasad fhaighinn bhon bhanca ag obair leis nuair a tha e a’ dol.

Dh'fhreagairt a th' ann ma-tà? Contractor a chluachadh? 1. Lasad fhaghinn bhon bhlanca agus a' ceannachd udeachman ùra? no 's dòcha a bhith co-obraichd le lòbaidh, mar a tha mi fhìn a' deanaich le cuid de na h-innealan. Tha sin a' gearaidh na cosgaisean gach dhuine. Agus ma ghabhas e obraichd, b' fhìach e bidheann a chur air eachdigh innealan mheadh a cheannach, rud a chuaill mi, nuair a bha mi thall an uiridh, a tha cumanta ann an Reorbidh.

Bhi dh' e math gmeine taic-airgid a bhith ann airson a leithid mar a bha bhon t-seann Bhòrd Leasaachaidh aig aon àm. Gabhan Mac a’ Phearsain

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Concerns over abattoir downturn

THE ABATTOIR SITUATION in the Highlands has taken a turn for the worse. This is a result of the curtailment of the excellent delivery service that was operated by John M Munro Ltd, at Dingwall abattoir.

Farmers and crofters over a huge area of the northwest mainland and the Isle of Skye have become increasingly dependent on Munro’s as local abattoir facilities have gradually shut down. From the north end of Skye it takes three and a half hours to make the journey to Dingwall with a stock box in tow. A long stretch of that journey is over very poor roads, adding to the stress on the animals.

At least up to now a cheerful and helpful Munro’s driver would deliver the chilled meat back to the customer, whether butchered or in whole carcass form, but no longer. Meat will now only be delivered to centres such as Kyle or Portree. Anyone beyond such places will have to make their own arrangements for the last stretch, which will involve breaking the all-important ‘cold chain’, essential for food safety, unless they happen to have their own chilled vehicle.

A member in Skye recently described the procedure he had to go through to get an over-thirty-month animal slaughtered at the Lochmaddy abattoir. He chose to go to Lochmaddy because they have the flexibility of a small unit to hang the carcass according to the customer’s requirements – essential for an OTM, native-breed animal.

The abattoir provided an excellent service, but the cost and uncertainty around a ferry crossing in winter and arranging chilled transport of the meat back to Skye added considerably to the stress of the experience. The costs involved accounted for at least half the value of the animal.

Crofters in Lewis and Harris will be faced with similar problems in future if they need to have a beast slaughtered outwith the opening season of the council-run Stornoway abattoir, which this year is to be cut back further, not opening until into September. The Comhairle blames increasing costs and reduced throughput, which is a familiar scenario.

The time seems to be right for a fresh look at the whole abattoir question, as the status quo is no longer an option. We need to look at facilities of appropriate scale that can easily be opened up and closed down in accordance with demand. Scotland has gone, by default, for a network of industrial scale abattoirs in major centres.

It is a model that simply does not work for the Highlands and Islands which has half of the country’s landmass and a very poor transport network. One of these large plants, at Dornoch, has recently been taken over and closed down.

We need to look as well at community ownership and appropriate business structures; and to see if we can learn from recent developments in Shetland, where a new, co-operatively run abattoir is taking shape; and from other EU countries that have retained local slaughterhouses.

At the time of writing a group of concerned individuals is coming together with new proposals for the Skye and Lochalsh area. We will report on any progress in the next issue.
Landmaps provide accurate maps that are suitable for all aspects of land management from buying or selling land, to farm and forestry management. We can define croft boundaries for land registry purposes and provide Ordnance Survey maps, aerial photos and land use maps.

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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law
Society of Scotland as a specialist in
Crofting Law.
THE CROFTER, JUNE 2011

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

The hills are alive

A look at the shellings of Dalwhinnie 250 years ago

This was the title of a talk given recently at Dalwhinnie primary school as part of the school’s involvement in the Crofting Connections project.

David Taylor, former head of history at Kingussie high school, has been studying the Dalwhinnie area 250 years ago as part of his PhD research and he told the Dalwhinnie community about his findings.

The talk explored the importance of the shellings system to the local economy and included viewings of some very old and interesting estate maps. Rather than the ten to twenty people expected at the talk, we were amazed to have more than 60 attend and enjoyed a very informative and interesting evening.

One of the most interesting points to arise from Mr Taylor’s research has been the sheer numbers of livestock that were on the ground at the time and this certainly surprised many of the people who attended. He also raised several new points on how the shellings system actually worked which should lead to further discussion in the future.

As the audience came from all walks of life, a very lively question and answer session followed the talk, with some of the older farmers and estate workers adding to what had already been said.

Head teacher Miss Filshie thanked David for coming and speaking to us and adding to our knowledge of our local area. The evening was such a success that it is hoped to have another evening in the future.

Moira Webster
Teacher, Dalwhinnie primary school

Crofting Connections is funded by HIE, Scottish Government, EU, Lottery, Leader, Craiginish Trust, SNH.

MY VISIT to Shetland in February was a refreshing reminder of how enthusiastically pupils, teachers and crofters have engaged with the project.

The first four schools, Baltasound junior high, Whalsay junior high, Burravoe primary and Dunrossness primary are now in their second year of the project, while two new schools – Urafirth primary and Cullivoe primary – joined in August 2010. The schools show that Crofting Connections can provide a framework for the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence in very small primaries as well as larger ones and in all classes from nursery to S4 in the junior high schools.

Highlights include watching five Urafirth pupils taking turns to grind oat groats in a little hand mill, working together to mix, shape and bake oatcakes and then leaving the classroom clean and tidy for the next day – all in the space of one lesson.

A second group was making a model of the hills, fields, beaches and voes of the local crofting landscape in papier maché, ready to place their models of croft houses into the landscape just as their parents and grandparents have placed their real houses in this stunning part of Shetland.

A third group was involved in desk research on crofting, using books and computers. Here was Curriculum for Excellence in practice as a whole school worked in an integrated way across a range of subjects and skills, both traditional and contemporary, supported by staff with deep connections in the local crofting community.

Burravoe primary, surrounded by crofts on three sides and very much the centre of the community, is a wonderful example of the balance between the practical skills passed on by local crofters and the impressive IT skills of the young.

Children, who now use just the tips of fingers and thumbs to send messages and click on a mouse to expand their virtual horizons, are able to balance this narrowing of focus on keyboard and screen with the rhythms and more expansive movements involved in geology, gardening, spinning, baking and exquisite felt-making with help from their very real and supportive community.

Cullivoe school pupils are learning from local crofters how to cut peats and how to make kishies and skelkers’ hats from Shetland aet straw. Balancing traditional and contemporary skills is the essence of Crofting Connections – the indoor and outdoor skills of traditional croft work through intergenerational exchanges whose relevance goes beyond just studying the past.

Teachers, even in very rural schools in the Highlands and Islands, are concerned that some children do not have enough exercise and fresh air. I was at a Royal Society meeting in Edinburgh last week, where academics were discussing the challenge of food security and global food production.

The global food industry allows us to outsource the drudgery of growing food to other less affluent societies or to use poorly paid immigrant labour in caravan camps in the cold muddy fields in arable areas of the UK to pick Brussels sprouts or root vegetables in the winter. How will we re-dignify the manual labour required to grow local food in crofting areas where the large machinery of industrial arable farming is totally inappropriate and anyway we may have to face the oil running out? Or should we just keep relying on the ferry to stock the shop shelves?

Whalsay and Baltasound pupils from nursery to S4 are engaged in gardening, animal husbandry, in discovering where food comes from and how much can be grown locally. The younger classes are great gardeners, producing salads and peas and strawberries for school dining rooms. Older pupils are able to engage with the more complex issues around food production which will help to shape the future of crofting.

In Dunrossness primary children are making global connections with a school garden project in Kenya, where rural communities face challenges of weather, climate change and population decline as young people move to the cities – similar problems, but with more stark consequences in Africa.

Outside in the grounds of all the schools are the school gardens, some shared with the local community, waiting for the spring planting of strawberries, aubergines and tomatoes in the poly-tunnels – which reflect the contemporary diet – and of tatties, roots and cereals of the traditional crofters’ diet of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

And in the spaces between the cultivated and play areas of the grounds, children will be making compost and sowing wildflowers to attract insects to the gardens – a ray of hope for this summer and for many summers to come, a new generation working for the benefit of our crofting communities.

Pam Rodway, project coordinator, on achievements in Shetland

Crofting Connections in Shetland

The hills

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The revolution of tradition: farmers’ and crofters’ seeds

In contrast, farmers’ seeds are naturally reproducible from harvest onwards and are the product of population varieties which were not bred in a laboratory using industrial techniques. Farmers’ and in our case crofters’ seed varieties have been produced over many years through multiple cycles of adaptation to the land, to agrarian practices and to the climate, by seeking to maintain the diversity of their cultivated varieties. This system employs exchange and collective management to avoid and limit genetic erosion, to increase diversity and maintain the adaptability of the seed to different conditions.

Current research into plant improvement takes place almost exclusively in laboratories, where scientists paid by agri-industry corporations manipulate genes and transform varieties in order to file for plant breeders’ rights or a patent allowing the industrial breeders to progressively appropriate every kind of seed. The majority of these seeds are not reproducible from saved seed.

It is now time for researchers to return to the fields, to recognise the expertise of farmers and crofters in selecting and renewing locally adapted varieties, traditionally grown and selected to grow in our demanding environment, truly capable of adaptation to climate change and suitable for open pollination.

The SCF’s participation in the European Farmer’s Seeds Project – Best Practices in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty: development of an inclusive approach in the fight against poverty – aims to raise awareness of these issues by promoting small-scale agricultural and agro-ecological models.

More information on the project can be found on the Projects and Partners page of the SCF website www.crofting.org.

This project is funded by EU.

The poor had no lawyers – and still don’t

Carol Anne Stewart reports on a recent visit to Hungary

My TRIP to the Let’s Liberate Diversity conference in Szeged involved, as you can imagine, a considerable amount of travelling. I left Kyle on a wet and windy Tuesday evening and arrived in a snow-covered Szeged on Wednesday evening. To while away the hours spent on planes and trains I took Andy Wightman’s latest book The Poor Had No Lawyers. I was struck by the similarity between the issues surrounding farmers’ rights to use farm-saved seed and some of the issues Wightman raised in the book.

The legal system, of land registration, which disenfranchised the poor and allowed the rich and powerful to appropriate what they wanted, is in effect what is now happening with the current system of seed registration. The asymmetry in the current legislation gives advantage to a few seed corporations and fails to recognise the rights of the many farmers and crofters who conserve agricultural biodiversity and indigenous knowledge on their farms and crofts.

In the EU seeds can only be legally marketed (this includes selling, sharing or even giving away for free to your neighbours) if they fulfil strict criteria and are entered onto the member states’ national list and then the EC common catalogue of agricultural plant varieties.

This has resulted in thousands of local varieties being lost as any variety that did not pass its distinct-uniform-stable (DUS) test could not be registered. To comply a variety must be distinct from any other variety; the plants in a particular variety must be similar to one another (uniform); and a variety is deemed to be stable when its characteristics remain unchanged over two years.

The DUS testing required to register a variety is costly and prohibitive unless you are a large corporation and wish to sell seed in large quantities. In this way the large corporations have appropriated the ownership not only of the seeds that they have genetically modified but also the ownership of traditional, non-GM varieties. If a variety is not in the catalogue, then it is technically illegal for such non-varieties to be marketed. This has, in effect, made many of our traditional crops and seeds illegitimate.

Under the pretext of using humanity’s common heritage, or through negotiations with sovereign states, multinationals award themselves free and unconditional access to all the seeds selected and conserved by farmers and then privatise them through industrial property rights which means that certain parties profit more than others in the use of common resources.

We believe that plants and plant varieties are not inventions over which anyone can claim intellectual property rights. The management of locally-adapted crofters’ seeds is carried out first and foremost at a local level. Locally defined collective rights of usage for crofting communities must take precedent over globally extensive private industrial property rights.

These locally defined rights enable communities to put a stop to the private monopolisation of resources defined as a common good (biopiracy), to control the use made of these resources, to outmanoeuvre the unfair competition of major food producers and to protect local seeds from genetic contamination from exogenous and patented sources.

The Scottish Government must recognise the past, present and future contributions of crofters to the conservation and renewal of cultivated biodiversity in Scotland as enshrined in international biodiversity legislation. We require the Scottish Government to recognise that crofters have the rights to conserve, use, exchange and sell croft-saved seed, without requirement to standardise seed for certification, or to homogenise or stabilise varieties for catalogue registration.

SCF is working in conjunction with a network of European organisations to raise awareness of these issues and defend our members’ right to have control over their own seeds and to encourage the development and conservation of biodiversity.
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ON THE CROFT

Muirburn

Eilidh IM Ross, a solicitor with Inksters, outlines the legal position

The Muirburn Code is contained in the Hill Farming Act of 1946. The 1946 Act has recently been amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011. Previously, the period during which one could burn heather was 1st October through to 15th April. This could be extended until 30th April or 15th May for areas above 450 metres, if the landowner consented, but there is no distinction now for areas above 450 metres. The rest of the muirburn regulations remain the same.

The muirburn code includes a prohibition on burning at night and leaving fires unattended – and those managing the burning have a responsibility to control it and prevent fire spreading to neighbouring properties. If the land is affected by a designation such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the prior approval of SNH must be sought. Areas of woodland, scheduled ancient monuments, nesting bird areas, or areas of blanket bog or exposed peat should also be protected from damage.

The purpose of burning heather is to remove old, dead heather in order to promote new growth and also to preserve wildlife habitats. Heather which is not managed by burning presents an increased risk of hill fires; a problem which dominated local headlines during the month of April. These uncontrolled hill fires this year happened unusually early due to the prolonged dry weather. Organisations such as the John Muir Trust and other environmental bodies have indicated a likelihood of widespread environmental damage, particularly to ground nesting birds.

For more information on muirburn and the muirburn code, see the following links:-
- The Muirburn Code (NB this has not been updated since the 2011 Act in relation to the dates, but other aspects remain unchanged) - http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/04/08154231/2

Newsflash...

Readers may like to know that Eilidh recently joined the firm of Inksters and will continue to advise clients on matters of crofting law. Inksters was founded in 1999 by Brian Inkster (a Shetlander) and currently has its base in Glasgow. The firm will now also have a presence in the Highlands and Islands as Eilidh will be based in Inverness, making regular visits to various crofting areas.

Inksters’ use of the very latest technology will ensure that Eilidh can spend a much higher percentage of her time in the crofting areas, providing advice on your crofting legal issues regardless of geography.

Red diesel – a confusing picture

When a member contacted us recently with various concerns regarding the supply, storage and use of rebated heavy oil fuels (red diesel) we were unaware of the confusing picture that has developed in recent years, placing yet more unsustainable burdens on small agricultural producers.

This article attempts to set out the problems and some possible solutions.

The easiest question to answer is “What can red diesel be used for?” Tractors and light agricultural vehicles such as quads can use red diesel on the public road provided they are employed for purposes of agriculture, horticulture or forestry. Other agricultural machinery may also use red diesel. Suppliers of red diesel may require the purchaser to complete a form stating their name and address and what the fuel is to be used for.

Full details can be found at http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk.

EC Directive 2005/33/EC requires that, with effect from the start of this year, non-road vehicles and plant, including agricultural tractors, can only be fuelled with low-sulphur diesel. This has caused difficulty for some members who have been buying their tractor fuel from marine fuel suppliers.

Marine diesel is still high-sulphur and can only be purchased by signing a declaration that it is to be used in a seagoing vessel.

SCF has carried out a survey of members to determine the extent of this problem and responses are still coming in at the time of writing, but it is already clear that there are significant problems both with supply and storage. It may be that in some remote areas and small islands marine diesel is the only fuel available. If this is the case we will need to press the Scottish Government for a solution.

A further complication is that certain modern diesel engines will only run on low-sulphur fuel. Even if you have an assured supply of the new fuel, that is not the end of the matter. There are practical issues and legislative requirements regarding storage. The low-sulphur fuel is more difficult to store due to its bio-diesel content, as any water contamination causes a bacterial sludge; and it waxes more readily at low temperatures. Both of these conditions can cause blocked filters. The water contamination issue can be resolved by either siting tanks under cover or by fitting a water drain tap at the lowest point of the tank.

Since 1st April 2010 it has been a legal requirement that any fuel tank with a storage capacity of 200 litres or more must have a secondary containment (a bund or drip-tray) to ensure that any leaking or spilt oil cannot enter the water environment. The secondary containment must be of sufficient capacity to hold at least 110% of the maximum contents of the tank. Provision of new fuel storage tanks is an allowable operation for CCAGS funding.

One way of avoiding some of this expense would be to store less than 200 litres at a time. In this case the regulations state only that the container must be of sufficient strength and structural integrity to ensure that it is unlikely to burst or leak in its ordinary use. Unfortunately the standard oil drum size is 205 litres, but there are ready-made containment vessels on the market to fit a standard drum.

Storage of fuel is a cross-compliance issue that will be checked by government officials in any inspection.
CÚRSAICHEAN AIR ASTAR

Faigh barrachd fiosrachaidh air a’ prògram ionnsachaidh air astar againn airson a h-uile duine a tha ag iarraidh Gàidhlig ionnsachadh no an cuid Gàidhlig a neartachadh. Tha iomadh latha tòiseachaidh is clàr-ama againn agus bidh na cùrsaichean againn gad fhàgail nas fileanta sa chànan agus a’ leigeil leat a dhol air aghaidh gu ire ceum oíthigh tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

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The new process means you no longer need to send hard copies through the post and documents reach your case officer quickly and securely. You view the information your case officer holds about your proposal at the touch of a button.

For information on how to get started visit the guidance updates section at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/FarmingRural/SrDP/VisitTheGuidanceUpdates.

Once you commit your proposal, you can no longer upload documents online. Instead, you should send any further documents to your case officer who will upload them for you. Similarly, if you don’t have access to a scanner, your case officer can upload your documents on your behalf.

Good food for everyone forever

A people’s takeover of the world’s food supply by Colin Tudge

Everyone who is ever likely to be born on to this planet could be fed to the highest standards of nutrition and gastronomy – and this could be done without cruelty, or destroying our fellow creatures.

By 2050 we will need to feed 9.5 billion people – which is as big as the world population is ever likely to get. To achieve this we need only to design farming expressly for the purpose – what in this book called enlightened agriculture.

But present-day governments, the corporates and banks who determine policy and the scientists and economists who advise them have no such strategy. Instead they are committed to a neoliberal economy intended simply to maximize wealth. To achieve this they encourage industrial farming – which is immensely damaging. It follows that if we, people at large, truly take our future seriously, then we need to take matters into our own hands.

Good Food for Everyone Forever describes what’s needed and why. Picking up from his earlier book, Feeding People is Easy, the author introduces the new campaign for real farming, intended to bring about nothing less than a people’s takeover of the world’s food supply; and in particular the college for enlightened agriculture – already existing in virtual form as a website, but planned to evolve by degrees into a bricks-and-mortar establishment.

In short: this book is intended not simply to inform and to stimulate but to invite everyone, from day one, to get involved. Our future is in our own hands. The powers-that-be have got it horribly wrong and we cannot afford to leave our affairs and our children’s lives in their hands.

Details of the campaign for real farming and the college for enlightened agriculture can be found on www.campaignforrealfarming.org.

Good Food For Everyone Forever by Colin Tudge
www.parpublishing.com

Bracken control

No opinion decision by EU committee

The proposal to ban asulam (Asulox) – one of the most cost-effective and selective chemicals available for bracken control – was discussed in March and again in May by the EU’s standing committee on the food chain and animal health.

The EU wish to ban asulam as there were concerns over its safety when used on spinach and other food crops. However an outright ban would have the effect of removing one of the key chemical controls of bracken. The SGF lobbied both the Scottish and UK Government to ensure that any ban would apply to food crops only.

The vote for the non-inclusion of asulam, the active substance of Asulox, resulted in “No opinion” from a blocking minority of eight member states, including the UK. In effect this means that at the moment Asulox may still be used for bracken control. The dossier on asulam will be referred to the appeal committee, a new procedure that has yet to be tried and tested.

At the moment we have no timing for when this appeal will be considered.

Crofters will recognise the seriousness of this situation. Climate change combined with the loss of stock from the hills is leading to a bracken stranglehold in some areas which undoubtedly has been one factor in this spring’s wildfires in the north-west. If asulam is being misused on food crops in certain countries, then surely it is that misuse that must be dealt with rather than leave us defenceless against a rapidly advancing pest species.

We must not have a repetition of the sheep EID fiasco, when some EU member states imposed an impractical solution to a non-existent problem from a position of willful ignorance.

Keep your diary

Keep your crofting calendar up to date with the guide below, put together in partnership with Scotland’s Environmental and Rural Services (SEARS).

These are some of the key dates and deadlines for application forms, licenses etc. The list is not exhaustive and some dates may change.

• 10 June – Last day for the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate to receive:
  • Single Application Form (SAF) 2011*. SAFs received on or after 11 June 2011 will not be accepted.
  • Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities funding round (axis 2 only). Claims received on or after 11 June 2011 will not be accepted.
• 15 June – Return date for holdings which were sent a June agricultural Census Form.
• 15 July – Last day to commit applications for the September 2011 Rural Priorities funding round (Axis 2 only).

*The last day for return of the SAF without penalty was 16 May 2011.

For more information on SEARS visit http://www.sears.scotland.gov.uk
Interested in generating your own electricity?

With the introduction of the UK Government’s Feed-in-Tariffs (FiTs) for small scale low carbon electricity generation in April 2010, there has never been a better time to invest in renewable energy. Payback could be within 4 years subject to wind speed.

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Skills for the 21st century training programme

Training manager Su Cooper reports

Skills courses are up and running and began with a course in fleece felting at the end of April. This was well received by participants, who all ended the day with a finished product such as a rug or bag. The course showed just how simple it can be to create an unusual and unique product.

Courses in small-scale horticulture and safe use of pesticides also took place during May to get the programme off to a good start.

Anyone with an interest in crofting, smallholding and other rural skills is welcome to attend any of the training sessions that are currently being arranged, whether they are currently interested in attending or not. Upcoming courses include:

- Sheep shearing in Shetland
- Polytunnels in the Western Isles
- Vet skills in Inverness-shire
- Dry stone walling in Skye
- Livestock husbandry in Caithness and Sutherland
- And around 30 others.

Some of the above topics will be advertised on the website in more than one area and courses are being arranged on an almost weekly basis, responding to demand from across the Highlands and Islands. The training page of the website will be regularly updated with details of these training sessions. If you would like to attend any of the courses advertised on the website please get in touch.

A leaflet with further information about the training is included with this edition of The Crofter – please feel free to pass on to anyone else you think may be interested.

Further training requests are welcomed, as the programme will be running until at least May 2012. Contact Su Cooper for information training@crofting.org, 01463 796836.

Entry level induction courses

In addition to the normal winter running of the entry level crofting induction course, an autumn series will also be arranged this year, thanks to funding from the Scottish Government and HIE for the whole training programme. It is intended to run four or five courses from September to December. The exact locations depend on the demand for the course so please get in touch if you would be interested in participating.

Also, local course directors will be needed for each course – this role involves booking an appropriate venue for the course, arranging speakers for each evening in accordance with the course synopsis and handling publicity to attract participants to attend.

For further information on the role and payment rates please get in touch with Su Cooper training@crofting.org.

Young crofters revolution!

As we went to print the SCF’s young crofters group were waiting on confirmation of a grant for £5000 from the Co-operative. The Co-op’s initiative has already helped hundreds of thousands of people to bring their ideas to life and they want to empower even more revolutionaries to get involved; to keep communities thriving, support co-operatives, protect the environment and respect animal welfare.

They asked applicants what our revolution aimed to achieve and this is what we told them.

This year is the 125th anniversary of a successful revolution when the crofters of the Highlands and Islands rose up against the tyrannical oppression of their landlords to win the right to work the land without the threat of eviction.

But how do we keep the revolutionary spirit alive? The movement of young crofters is the answer. Our revolution is to kindle the spirit of crofting in the heart of the new generation.

We can achieve this by inspiring young people in the crofting counties to get actively involved in their communities. Young people of these areas have already expressed an interest in the movement.

The next step is to get a greater understanding of hopes and aspirations of young crofters. By going out to meet crofters we can get a better appreciation of these aspirations and formulate our action plan.

The findings in the action plan will be presented, discussed and if necessary, revised by young crofters themselves during the SCF’s annual gathering in October.

As well as developing the action plan, the gathering will also give young crofters the chance to speak with crofting elders about their knowledge and experiences. People at the gathering will then go back to their communities and spread the word that young crofters are active.

We will have held our first young crofters meeting by the time The Crofter is printed – but don’t worry, there will be plenty more activities happening as the group gains momentum.

To keep up to date with the young crofters get in touch with Karen on 01599 530005 or email Karen@crofting.org.
Membership matters

Update on membership groups

Everyone should now have been informed that individual membership has increased to £47.00. However, if you have not already signed up to direct debit but do so now, you will receive a discount of 20% taking your next year’s payment to £37.60.

Joint membership is also available; it is open to households which would like to have a double membership. It costs £70.50, which is a saving of £22.50 on two individual memberships. If you would like to make any changes to your subscription please contact Karen at HQ.

Communications

Karen has started producing regular E-newsletters. The first went out at the start of May and had a good response. It included information on training courses, deadline reminders and a recent press release on wildfires. If you would like to receive a copy of the newsletter please email hq@crofting.org or give Karen a phone.

Dates for your diary

We would also like to invite all members and supporters to come and visit us at the shows. We will be attending the Royal Highland Show, from 23rd to 26th June and the Black Isle Show on 3rd and 4th August.

You can help with recruitment

BUILDING a stronger SCF with an even more powerful voice to protect and develop crofting is a vital goal.

This is something every member can help with. Below are some of the reasons why every crofter and every person who cares about our crofting communities should support the Scottish Crofting Federation. Please use these pointers at every opportunity when you are in conversation with folk who are not SCF members and persuade them to join up.

The future of crofting depends on a strong representative organisation, now more than ever.

The Scottish Crofting Foundation is the only organisation lobbying exclusively for the interests of crofters and small producers.

Through collective action, support for crofting and remote rural communities gains a higher profile. Stronger arguments are made for policies and enhanced schemes directly specific to crofting such as the Croft House Grant Scheme, Bull Hire Scheme, and Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme. Thanks to the efforts of the SCF, the beneficial parts of the Crofting Reform Bill have been retained while the many negative aspects have been removed.

• As an SCF member you are part of a wide network of contacts for sharing experiences and sourcing information.
• SCF members benefit from the resources in The Crofter magazine and e-mail notifications from SCF HQ of policies, information and news.
• SCF members have access to advice and can be put in touch with someone who can help solve problems.
• SCF members can make use of a discount scheme from suppliers across the Highlands and Islands, and the savings made can recover the cost of your subscription.
• SCF members have access to the services of the NFU Mutual Insurance Society, whose schemes have been specially drawn up to cover crofting homes and activities.
• SCF members have the opportunity to help shape crofting policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our rural communities.
• For all this and much more, the annual subscription is only £47.

Feedback from the members’ survey last year suggested that people wanted to see more local activity, so the Caithness and East Sutherland Area decide to put on a full programme of meetings over the winter.

Area meetings were held on the implementation of the Crofting Act and on CAP reform; branch meetings were addressed by Rob Gibson MSP and Rod Mackenzie on the National Sheep Strategy; a hustings was held prior to the Scottish Parliament elections; and the annual trip to the Royal Highland Show will take place in June.

The best-attended meeting was the discussion on the Crofting Act and community mapping. The worst attended was the branch meeting with the MSP (though he did get the constituency vote at the election). Most of the meetings did get a few new faces along.

So what are the lessons to be learned from this season’s events?

• Topics – more directly relevant and practical topics draw bigger crowds. Variety is good as different topics attract a different group of people. Non-meeting activities again bring out some people who don’t go to evening meetings.
• Venue – area meetings can draw on a bigger pool of people but the extra travelling can put others off. A journey time of one hour seems to be the cut off.
• Advertising – postcards sent out from HQ are the most effective means of informing people but they only reach members so you still need adverts in the paper to attract potential new members. Everything should be SCF branded in order to keep the profile up.
• Cost – postcards are expensive for HQ to send out so plan the whole programme early and get it on one mailing. Adverts and booking a hall can easily cost over £60 so branches need fund raisers, sponsorship or grants.
• Membership – always have a few membership forms available and don’t be shy about handing them out.

Membership forms are available from SCF HQ and local contacts. New members can also simply and easily join up on-line via the SCF website.

Our mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities

Scottish Crofting Federation
Of mice and rats

I AM NOT AFRAID of spiders or mice, but I loathe the rats. I have had the company of both spiders and mice throughout the winter and while I would never kill a spider I have trapped plenty of mice without a second thought – until a month ago.

I was awoken at 3am with what felt like a gentle ruffling of my hair which I thought might have been a spider dropping from the ceiling, I flicked it away and went back to sleep. Half an hour later the same thing happened but there was now a definite pattering of tiny feet across my scalp. I flicked it off again and lay there wondering what to do as I am a grumpy old woman if I don’t get a good night’s sleep.

I could hear scuffling under the bed and, knowing it was a mouse, I lifted my duvet and went next door to sleep. Going into my bedroom next morning I found a tiny mouse, curled up fast asleep on my fleece-covered hot water bottle. As my granddaughter would say, it looked so cute and I just couldn’t kill it, so I opened the window and returned it to the wild.

On telling this story to a friend he told me of an even more amusing incident which took place in the Straan in Tulloch involving one of an even more amusing incident which took place in Tulloch. But who knows when they might migrate here as they are frequent travellers. My uncle, who was a shepherd in Glen Roy, told me of being on the hill with his dogs when they stopped suddenly and cowered behind a boulder.

He was always a gentle person who would never scold or beat his dogs so he knew by their behaviour that there was something unnatural going on. He took out his glass and spied on the valley below him. It was then he saw the sneaking, moving mass of migrating rats. Hundreds of them were on their evil way, set on mischief and destruction.

I remember a folksy rat story told to me by an Irish chap who used to work for the RSPB as well as helped the Tulloch crofters. On one occasion when Lorcan came to help us inevitably got round to talking about potatoes and as the spirit moved, mostly around the table, we swapped stories of frosts and famine. But we were all spellbound as he told us this tale from distant times.

It was early May and the farmer was driving his cattle to the common grazing before joining the rest of the family planting potatoes. It was a warm day and his feet got too hot so he took off his boots.

On the way he passed his neighbour’s farm where turnips and potatoes were stored in a pit and where a weasel and a rat were fighting to the death. The bootless farmer took pity on the tiny weasel, for the rat was strong and evil, clearly winning the fight.

While the animals were locked in battle, the farmer stood on the rat to give the weasel a chance to kill it and, as he did so, the rat bit deeply into his heel. In agonising pain the farmer picked up a stick and killed the rat. The weasel, exhausted and dewy eyed, cleaned herself – removing the filthy rat hairs stuck in her teeth and paws and assiduously licked all the rat’s bloody puncture marks. She disappeared into the dyke and was seen no more.

The farmer went home, cleaned and bandaged his foot, put on his boots and joined the others planting potatoes. In no time the foot was swollen and painful and he had to go home to bed. The swelling got much worse during the next two days and despite poultices of herbs, the foot turned a worrying blue/black, the infection having spread. The nearest doctor was a day’s travel away and not considered.

The rest of the family had to get back to the potato planting while the farmer sat at the fire bathing his foot, unable to walk. The door stood open. As he sat there the weasel came through the door and laid a small green leaf on the flagstone in front of the fire. In a little while she came back with another leaf of a different kind. She did this a third time bringing a new kind of leaf. The farmer knew she had brought the leaves to cure his foot; so he laid them on the wound and bandaged his foot. He fell asleep and when he woke up the swelling had gone and he was cured.

Pairc community buyout appeal

Fundraising is now underway by the Pairc Trust to raise money for a community buyout on the Pairc Estate in Lewis. John Randall, vice-chairman of the trust, explains the background.

Many members of SCF will have been following the long saga of the Pairc community buyout – which started back in 2004, but which after many twists and turns along the way is hopefully now reaching the final stages. Pairc is a rural area in south-east Lewis, consisting largely of rough moorland and 11 crofting townships. The population today is around 400, compared with nearly 2,000 a century ago. The decline is mainly due to continuous emigration throughout the 20th century as people left for better opportunities elsewhere. A familiar story!

These 400 people live on the Pairc Estate, an area of 73,000 acres, which has been controlled since the 1920s (through Pairc Crofters Ltd and more recently Pairc Renewables Ltd) by the Lomas family – of whom the leading member today is Barry Lomas, an accountant living in Leamington Spa. There is no estate property in the area and over the last 85 years the estate has not created one local job. Estate management can best be described as passive, until the last decade when plans for a large commercial wind-farm in conjunction with SSE have been developed.

The Pairc Trust was formed in 2004 with a mandate from the local community to buy the estate on their behalf. We wish to create jobs, better services and more affordable housing in the local area – to reverse the chronic population decline. Our business plan includes renewable energy projects owned by the community plus housing and tourism projects. Community ownership has led to increased investment and improved economic trends in other parts of the Highlands and Islands and we believe these advantages can also be realised in Pairc.

But there have been long delays due to opposition by the landlord to a meaningful community buyout, pending a decision on his wind-farm plans. On 21st March 2011, the Scottish Government finally approved the applications by the trust under Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to purchase land and an associated lease on the estate. This followed two ballots of the community; a referral to the Land Court of an interposed lease established by the landlord; and protracted but unsuccessful discussions with the estate about a possible voluntary transfer. An independent valuation has been commissioned and (unless further legal action by the landlord intervenes) the trust will have six months to raise the money from the date of the government’s decision.

The Pairc community buyout has become a test case for land reform legislation. The community has shown great resilience in pursuing its goal of community ownership, despite many obstacles and setbacks. We are most grateful for the support shown us throughout this struggle by the SCF.

We are now seeking to raise funds for purchase of the estate, following the valuation and also for the first projects under our business plan once purchase has been completed. The trust has had encouraging discussions with HIE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Big Lottery Fund, but it expects the community through its own fundraising efforts also to make a contribution. Our initial target for the fund is £150,000.

A leaflet is enclosed with this newsletter. Please make cheques payable to Pairc Trust and send to: Iain Begg, Treasurer, Pairc Trust, Resource Centre, Kershader, South Lochs, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9QA.
CLEARLY, the role of the crofter’s wife’s differs from that of the crofter’s.

Here on Number 8 my regular duties are predominantly within house and garden. This doesn’t mean I don’t get out onto the croft or hill; but between looking after the boys, the house and fitting in work, it can be difficult finding the time to get out there.

Over the winter months this is especially the case. The demands of house and kitchen find me perfectly content within the warm confines of the kitchen topping up the teapot, making never-ending pots of soup, trying to keep the

Let’s Liberate Diversity forum to be held in Scotland

THE LET’S LIBERATE Diversity forum are the annual gatherings of farmers’ organisations, gardeners, artisan food producers, civil society organisations, researchers, breeders and representatives of gene banks concerned with the issues surrounding agricultural biodiversity in Europe.

The 2011 forum was held at Szeged University, Hungary and its central theme was the question of farmers’ rights related to conservation, sustainable use and development of agricultural biodiversity.

A wide range of thought-provoking topics was covered at the forum including local food systems; collective management of cultivated biodiversity on farms and in gardens; international and European seed legislation; intellectual property rights and how these relate to current seed legislation; and the impact of GMOs on agricultural biodiversity.

The role of small scale farmers in conserving the thousands of breeds of domesticated livestock species was also debated. However, these diverse breeds are fast disappearing as industrial livestock production is spreading. There is a worrying and increasing trend towards a pyramidal selection system of livestock breeding, which is in effect diminishing the gene pool for most of our domesticated livestock. There were several presentations on the situation of small animal races in Eastern Europe with speakers from Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria focussing on and the obstacles for small-scale practices, and how small scale farming can add to productivity, environmental sustainability and more employment. There were also presentations on the situation in Western Europe where stockbreeding has become increasingly industrialised.

A poster display was set up at the university which gave delegates the opportunity to discuss what was happening to conserve agricultural biodiversity in each country. The SCF posters focussed on the situation in Scotland, where field crop landraces survive on the very margins of Europe in a uniquely Scottish combination of remote islands and crofter agriculture.

A very-well-attended seed exchange was arranged on Saturday afternoon at the farmers market in Szeged.

The forum has gone from strength to strength with the number of participants increasing over the years. The first forum, held in Poitiers, France was attended by 150 delegates from across Europe. The gathering in Szeged was attended by over 280 delegates. In the intervening years the event has been held in Spain, Germany, Italy and Austria and SCF is pleased to announce that the 7th edition of Let’s Liberate Diversity will be coming to Scotland in 2012.

A meeting of the European co-ordinating group for the next event will be held in Kyle of Lochalsh in July and full details will be available in the September Crofter.
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From Merseyside to Kyle

Barbara Thayer, who’s now in charge of SCF accounts, introduces herself.

Born on the Wirral, Merseyside, the youngest of four girls, I had dreams of becoming an archaeologist. However my career was to be a very different one.

A Wednesday morning, late June 1977, began my entrance into the world of administration with these resounding words from my dad: “Don’t think you’re lying in bed all day. You’ll get a job in an office or factory and you’ll start by Monday.” I’d finished school the day before and I dutifully did as instructed.

On that Monday I started work for a building company on a youth opportunities programme. The wage was £10.00 a week and I felt like the richest girl in the world.

For many years I worked in the Liver Buildings for a shipping company; operating the telex machine, making up the bills of lading and on occasion a sojourn down to the renowned docks – a truly fabulous job.

The murky waters of the Mersey were then constantly bustling with boats and container ships were then constantly bustling, yet we had to keep the peace amid fierce rioting; the rest, as they say, is history. In 1886 the Crofters Act was passed through parliament and the crofting community for the first time had the rights which we still value today.

After 125 years, crofting is still a valued and valuable form of landholding and the gathering will be celebrating this. Children from throughout crofting areas will be performing the poetry and song of their island ancestors and the gathering will be a celebration of becoming an archaeologist.

From Merseyside to Kyle

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THE CROFTER, JUNE 2011

HE THEME of this year’s annual gathering will be “1886 and all that”.

It is appropriate that the gathering should return to the Isle of Skye, after a break of almost 10 years, as 2011 is the 125th anniversary of the Crofters Act.

Skye was the place where crofters’ discontent at their ill-treatment rose into a mass protest and a national scandal, and names like the battle of the Braes and the Glendale martyrs entered Scottish consciousness. Police and troops were dispatched to keep the peace amid fierce rioting; the rest, as they say, is history. In 1886 the Crofters Act was passed through parliament and the crofting community for the first time had the rights which we still value today.

After 125 years, crofting is still a valued and valuable form of landholding and the gathering will be celebrating this. Children from throughout crofting areas will be performing the poetry and song of their island ancestors and young crofters will be meeting to describe what they feel are the needs and aspirations of their generation.

The gathering will be held at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, on 3rd and 4th October. A celebration ceilidh organised by our young crofters’ group will take place on Monday evening.

Tickets for this event will be available separately and anyone interested in attending should contact Karen@crofting.org.

Further details including booking forms have been sent to all members with this edition of The Crofter. The SCF would like to thank Scottish Islands for supporting this event.