The goose epidemic: conservation gone mad?

Ask any crofter in the Inner or Outer Hebrides what the bane of their lives is and they will say geese.

It is widely believed the goose epidemic is the biggest single threat to the continuation of island crofting. Crofters’ complaints about the goose problem are not new but it is now reaching devastating proportions in Tiree, Islay and the Uists and is fast becoming the same in the rest of the Western Isles, the Northern Isles and parts of the mainland – a significant proportion of the crofting counties.

Crofting agriculture is very important to the Western Isles, much of which is designated high nature value. But crops of cereal and grass are being ruined by the grazing and fouling of geese. A crofter will wait on tenterhooks for the crop to ripen, balancing this against the risk of the geese coming. If unlucky, just when the crop is capable of being harvested, they move in and completely destroy the field in hours.

A 1986 report estimated that there were around 700-800 breeding pairs in the UK, of which around 150 were breeding in the Outer Hebrides. At that time, North Uist crofters were seeking to control the spread of greylag geese, an annual visitor. Now the Uists alone are year-round home to more than 10,000 greylag geese and that population is growing. Yet, despite these vast numbers, geese are still protected by law. Crofters are told they can shoot marauding deer on their crofts – but not geese except at certain times of the year and at the will of the landlord. Crofters can’t even sell wild goose meat. With robust annual counts and the cooperation of all parties on the islands in supplying shot figures, there...
What does the Federation want for crofting?

Our man in Brussels

Since the last Crofter many strange things have come to light. One is how important traceability is until the heads come off. I remember Allan MacRae so wisely say that when the head comes off then traceability goes out the window. Crofters are punished if one ear tag is missing on the croft, even if it is the only cow owned. In fact this becomes 100% failure on the croft by the Scottish Government.

ROFTING must retain its rightful place in the national scheme of land management and livestock production. Crofters' best practices should be remunerated for their capacity to deliver the basic public goods desired by a modern society. But public financial support can only sensibly relate to the proper stewardship of land and any such incentives should be related to the husbandry methods practiced and the category of the land used.

This highlights the need to map and measure the land we occupy. Whether or not one agrees that crofters should have to produce plans showing their own boundaries, that is how the matter was decided by the Scottish Parliament when setting up the Crofting Register. To justify this to crofters and their advisers, I find myself repeating, "It can hardly be the mark of a mature system that boundaries are uncertain or left open to challenge," for it cannot. In the future, this new national register will be able to provide certainty for crofters as well as much-needed ammunition to justify our claims on behalf of crofting.

That is why we at SCF encourage crofting communities to get together and map their crofts collectively. We aspire to help all those who wish to do so, for we strongly believe that this information is needed now and will avoid a more costly piecemeal approach later.

It is not necessary to employ expensive methods to produce boundary maps and we have said so at public meetings throughout the crofting areas. As proof of legal boundaries, IACS maps are not sufficient and care must be taken, especially where it is known that ineligible areas have been removed. SCF alone has argued successfully that base plans be made available to crofters at reasonable cost, on which they can themselves mark their boundaries. We shall be monitoring closely how the forthcoming requirement to provide boundary maps is applied.

But it is going to need more than boundary maps to protect the future of crofting. To nurture and protect crofting communities, a statutory duty of residence has been placed on everyone with a legal boundary, IACS maps provide employment and to sustain the population.

Yesterday, whilst I awaited the arrival of my daughter at the bus station, in the rain, I found myself in the reading room of the adjacent Inverness public library. There, where I have spent many an inclement hour, in volume IV of the evidence to the Napier Commission, I read again about the Highland Land Law Reform Association in 1983. Its object was to bring about by constitutional means a better system whereby the people might be enabled “to live comfortably on the land by their own industry”. Members of our Federation would surely subscribe to that.

Continued on page 3
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announced: “By bringing forward a bill as soon as possible after Easter, I hope this provides some comfort to crofters that a solution is on its way. I look forward to receiving parliament’s support in the coming months to resolve this issue.”
SCF believes this is the correct (and only) way forward.

UPDATE FROM THE CROFTING COMMISSION

Concern over the ability of owner-occupier crofters to apply to the Crofting Commission for approval to decroft land has been prominent in the press over the last two months. This is as a result of the commission acting on legal advice, which holds there is no provision within the Crofting (Scotland) Reform Act 2010 for it to issue a decrofting direction to a resident owner-occupier crofter.

Commissioners understand that this is a situation which needs to be resolved urgently, but once the legal advice was confirmed, the commission would have been acting without authority, as set out in the current legislation, if it had issued decrofting directions to owner-occupier crofters. Since the issue was first highlighted, the Commission has been working hard with Scottish Government colleagues, exploring the most expeditious solution to the problem.

In response, Paul Wheelhouse has announced that the Scottish Government will bring forward a bill shortly to address this issue, which requires amendments to the current legislation.

Work on the draft bill is now underway and to aid the process a member of the commission’s legal team, Joseph Kerr, has been seconded to work with colleagues in Edinburgh until the end of May. This will help ensure the legislation is developed with direct input from the commission. It looks likely that there will be cross-party support in parliament for this measure, to help ensure the legislation is developed with head of regulation.

Commenting from her home in Inverness, Catriona said: “I am delighted to have been appointed chief executive of the Crofting Commission. It is 25 years since I first worked in the Crofters Commission and while both the organisation and I have evolved and progressed, crofting has remained a key element in my life. This is an exciting time for crofting and I am looking forward to working with everyone at the commission and our partners, to ensure that the Crofting Commission is modern, relevant and makes a real difference to crofting and the people of Scotland.”

Catriona Maclean and Susan Walker at the new Knocknagael Stud

For convener Susan Walker this completes a year of transformation for the organisation. “The Crofting Commission has experienced a lot of change over the last year, with a new name, a new act, new commissioners, new convener, new assessor panel and the retirement in November 2012 of chief executive, Nick Reiter. The appointment of Catriona MacLean completes the renewal and change process. In her current post within the Grampian and Highlands criminal justice board, Catriona has demonstrated an ability to work innovatively and collaboratively on various projects to develop better, more efficient ways of team working.

“As we approach a new chapter in the life of the commission, I wish to express our gratitude to David Balharry, who worked tirelessly and diligently as acting chief executive during the last six months. Under his guidance, the Commission has made progress on a number of important and also challenging issues and he has shouldered his responsibilities over this period with good humour and dedication. Catriona hopes to take up her new position in mid-May.

New chief executive for the Crofting Commission

Ms Catriona Maclean has been appointed as new chief executive of the Crofting Commission.

CATRIONA IS FROM a crofting family who still live in Tong on the Island of Lewis. Born in Glasgow, her family returned to Lewis where she completed her secondary education at the Nicolson Institute. As well as her family ties to crofting, Catriona previously worked with the Crofters Commission for over 14 years in various roles, including head of regulation.

Our man in Brussels

Catriona is from a crofting family who still live in Tong on the Island of Lewis. Born in Glasgow, her family returned to Lewis where she completed her secondary education at the Nicolson Institute. As well as her family ties to crofting, Catriona previously worked with the Crofters Commission for over 14 years in various roles, including head of regulation.

Continued from page 2

the minister faced our concerns on the de- crofting of owner occupied land. He assured us he would fix this anomaly. At the sheepmeat advisory group meeting in Brussels I will be interested to find out if curried old dairy cows sold as lamb will be mentioned. In late June I will be attending the European Parliament on an event organised by ECVC when the final votes on CAP are expected.

Meeting with small-holders from throughout Europe and the Middle East, I realise that the problems crofters are facing are the same worldwide. I originally believed it was government but I now realise that it is big businesses manipulating governments.

ECVC is the only vehicle we have to gain direct access to decision makers before policies which can affect us so badly are written.

My interest is to see things get better for our younger people – or at least not get any worse. The doors that have been opened to us via ECVC make me feel that we are now at the top table and not on the menu.

Norman Leask
THE CROFTER, JUNE 2013

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What now for the sporting rights on Raasay?
Continued from page 1

Commenting on the consultation in a letter to the West Highland Free Press, SCF Raasay branch member Anne Gillies said that the minister’s actions are dividing the community in Raasay. The rest of Anne’s letter follows.

The minister insisted he was legally bound to consult the community in Raasay before reaching a decision for the longer term, although there are already instances where sporting leases are extended rather than put on the open market. He has chosen to make an issue of this where none need have been made.

The issue is not community, but crofting. If he has chosen community over crofting in such a straightforward case — and he is minister for crofting — where the crofters were doing a good job, where it was running smoothly, when no one else on Raasay had shown any interest in taking on the lease, then it bodes ill for crofting. Why has he created divisions between the wider community and the crofters where none existed before, by inviting competition for control?

Crofters are given grants and subsidies that are not available for their non-crofting neighbours because, if they are doing their job properly, they manage the land by keeping cattle and sheep out on the hill grazings. Does it matter if there are sheep and cattle on the hill? Yes, it does! Areas of land with little use to man nor beast. Apart from anything else, uncontrolled ticks and long, ungrazed heather offer poor walking conditions.

Crofting is not a high-earning occupation. Even with subsidies the income is poor and without them it is unsustainable. The work can be hard and unremitting and the weather and the bureaucracy are worse. The various schemes, which come and go, have become increasingly complicated and at times seem to be devised to trip you up. Whole booklets on penalties are now the norm.

Crofting is a way of life and skills are passed from generation to generation. If the cycle is broken it could be lost forever. Bureaucracy and regulations have already discouraged droves of crofters who previously kept a couple of cows and 20 sheep. Those who are left have to be more dedicated, as fewer people share township work. Year after year more leave and few want to encourage their children to take on such hard, uncertain work. Far better if they can get employment that pays a decent wage and can be left behind at five o’clock.

This issue is not about how many venison burgers can be sold in the shop. It’s not about how many holiday cottages can be let out to tourists. These are extras — which the Raasay crofters managed to add on. The issue is whether anyone in the Scottish Government is prepared to support active crofting and those doing a service for their community by managing the land around them.

So far, the answer appears to be “No!”
New entrants group update

Thanks to all those who responded to the invitation to be part of a new entrants’ working group. The working group has been set up following the establishment of the New Entrants Advisory Panel (NEAP), created to advise the Scottish Government on issues affecting new entrants to farming and crofting.

The panel was set up in September and it is chaired by Scottish Government head of agriculture, David Barnes. Members include a number of other government officials, representatives from the new entrants group, Scottish Tenant Farming Association, Scottish Rural (University) College (SRUC), NFUS new generation group and the Bucileuch Group. The panel advises on a range of topics, but mainly focuses on CAP support – pillar 1 direct support and pillar 2 support provisions through Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP). Following a request by the cross party group on crofting, an SCF representative was invited to join the panel to ensure that crofters’ voices were also included.

At the first meeting SCF’s Karen MacRae attended. There were updates on four main topics: CAP reform; talent; skills and mentoring; land and finance.

David Barnes gave an update on the progress of CAP reform discussions. The main points which were identified, particularly in pillar 1 (direct payments) relevant to new entrants follow.

Council and parliament texts allow new entrants into the new basic payment scheme (replacing single farm payment) and as much of the national reserve as needed can be used as a top-up for those who have a low historic payment.

The parliament text allows for annual top-ups of the national reserve. However there is not yet agreement on this.

All payment should be area based by 2019. The speed of this transition can be decided by the member state.

The Scottish Government (SG) has been engaging with stakeholders on regionalisation. Once a decision has been made on this, trading of entitlements will be allowed within a region, but not between regions.

Under pillar 2 (SRDP 2014-2020) there will now be a sub-programme specifically designed for new entrants.

To simplify the process of application, there is an intention to remove the need for regional proposal assessment committees and decisions will be made at local SG principal agriculture officer level, with possible ministerial approval over a certain threshold.

More lobbying is needed to ensure that new entrants are defined irrespective of age.

There were also updates on the Land Reform Review Group and the SRUC new entrants programme.

The main item of discussion was the new entrant scheme. £2 million has been pledged by the cabinet secretary as an interim measure to help those who are not currently in receipt of single farm payments. The panel had been asked to advise how the money would be best spent and see that it was allocated fairly.

There was a long discussion on this topic and SCF is working hard to ensure that crofters will get a fair share of this payment.

Details of the scheme have not yet been announced but if you would like to be kept up to date with this please let us know – karen@crofting.org – or register directly by sending an e-mail quoting your business reference number and main location code to the SFPMailbox@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

New young crofters need opportunities

No one can disagree that, if crofting is to have a future, young people must be attracted, encouraged and enabled to take over crofts.

When so many crofts are neglected and abandoned there should be plenty of opportunity for those with energy, skills and enthusiasm to gain a foothold on the land, a place to build a home, the opportunity to start a business and the chance to return a once-precious piece of ground to productivity. The results of a new generation of crofters taking over can be spectacular. However, as very many young, would-be crofters know, it’s not so simple.

Back in 2006, SCF became aware of a township where all the crofts were in a village with an ageing population, surrounded by holiday homes and neglected from an initial enquiry to getting that tenancy. This is how a resident of that township puts it:

If you want to croft don’t be put off by the often seemingly insurmountable obstacles that you may face. It has taken six years having done so and getting a positive response, things were looking good. However, family intervention based on understandable but unrealistic nostalgia stopped the process in its tracks.

The encouragement and support of the Scottish Crofting Federation and the local landowner meant that the search continued. Objecting to an absentee proposing assignment to another absentee did progress things a bit further. Finally, six years later, she has a tenancy.

If crofting is to have a future there have to be young people getting involved. So if you know a young person who wants to croft, encourage them, support them and don’t give up.

We are delighted to be able to report a silver lining to this particular cloud. This is how a resident of that township puts it:

Having done so and getting a positive response, things were looking good. However, family intervention based on understandable but unrealistic nostalgia stopped the process in its tracks.

The encouragement and support of the Scottish Crofting Federation and the local landowner meant that the search continued. Objecting to an absentee proposing assignment to another absentee did progress things a bit further. Finally, six years later, she has a tenancy.

If you want to croft don’t be put off by the often seemingly insurmountable obstacles that you may face. It has taken six years.
England and Wales leave Scotland trailing on common grazing support

Recent data on the uptake of agri-environment on common land in both Wales and England reflects very badly on Scotland’s performance on its common grazings.

Though Wales’s new Glastir scheme has only been available since January 2012, by December 32% of all common land was signed up, with Welsh Government minister Alun Davies predicting uptake of over 75% by the end of 2013. Common land is currently four times more likely to be in Glastir than sole-use farmland, though uptake in previous schemes was very low, at only 2%.

Meanwhile, in England Defra figures suggest that around 74% of commons are in agri-environment agreements. The numbers are not directly comparable to Scotland, since entry-level schemes (roughly equivalent to LMO) have replaced LFA support in both England and Wales but, significantly, in England most of the commons are also in a higher level scheme (like ESA or Rural Priorities).

English law has nothing which corresponds to Scotland’s Common Grazings Regulation Act which allows for government-backed grazings committees with primary responsibility for the management of the grazings. Each commons has to create not only an association, but has in effect to reach unanimous agreement between the rights-holders. It is ironic that Scotland, with its apparently strong legal framework and long tradition of common grazings governance, should find itself so far behind.

Figures from the Scottish Government show that only 4.8% and 5.6% of common grazings are in LMO and RP agri-environment measures respectively. In stark contrast to Wales, common grazings are three or four times less likely than sole traders to be in the schemes.

The Welsh Government was so concerned at the possibility of poor uptake by commons, partly reflecting a lack of commoners’ associations (corresponding roughly to grazings committees), that it allocated some of the technical assistance funds from its Rural Development Plan (RDP) to the appointment of 18 commons development officers to work with commons to prepare them for the new scheme.

In Scotland the lack of a real incentive to join schemes, combined with the extra difficulties of doing so and the poor chance of success in many cases, are probably the main reasons for low uptake. But the low proportion of grazings which have committees in office and the large number of grazings which have never been regulated raises concerns as to the capacity of grazings to respond to any improvement in the measures available. Action by the Crofting Commission to address this has so far not been proportionate to the scale of the issue.

Meanwhile, calculations show that the advisory provision to crofting areas is at a much lower level than that to more productive areas of Scotland. Shetland is particularly badly off, with only one SAC advisor for almost 1200 potential clients, compared to a Highlands and Islands average of one per 326 and an average of one to only 180 in the rest of Scotland.

All of these issues can be addressed in the next RDP – Shetlanders need to get directly involved in the debate!

Gwyn Jones
gwyn@efncp.org
**Croft house grant scheme**

SCF has for some time been concerned about the future of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS). This arises from a steady stream of complaints from members being refused the grant. There appeared to be a change in the criteria for awarding the grant and there were questions regarding the administration of the scheme and the appeals procedure.

We have met with the Scottish Government officials responsible for the grant and the meeting was very informative.

The administration of CHGS continues to be based in the Tiree office; but oversight, policy matters and appeals are conducted from the SGRPID office in Oban.

The reason, we are told, for grant refusals is almost always that applicants do not submit plans for purposeful use of the croft, or that a new croft has been created, usually by division, which is too small to have any such purposeful use. The latter is clearly an issue for the new Commission to consider. We were told of crofts being created as small as 0.2ha which were then the subject of a CHGS application.

Members applying for CHGS should therefore be prepared to demonstrate that a new house on the croft is necessary for the working of the land. It may well be that the Scottish Government will ask for a business plan showing how crofting activities (or other purposeful use) will be developed within a given time scale. Also, crofts created by division must be of sufficient size to have a genuine crofting use (or other purposeful use), possibly when combined with a common grazing share.

SCF has successfully argued cases for members initially refused CHGS and we will continue to do so, but we would ask all members who might wish to apply to the scheme to be prepared to back up their application with a business plan; and those considering dividing a croft to ensure that the resulting new holding is genuinely a croft and not just a house site.

Any member who considers they have been unreasonably refused CHGS assistance should contact SCF head office.

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**Crofting debate in Parliament**

On 12 March 2013 Jean Urquhart MSP secured a debate in the Scottish Parliament on crofting. To read the transcript please go to the Scottish Parliament website and search the official report under ‘Crofting’ or go to the SCF website for a link.

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**Mapping crofts: important advice**

As with any new legislation, rumours and mis-information abound.

To refute one such; boundary maps submitted to the Crofting Register do NOT have to be digital. Registers of Scotland (RoS) will accept hand-drawn boundaries on a base map that they can provide for a small charge. SCF and RoS have worked together to make this possible so do not be duped into paying a lot of money to have a digital map produced. RoS officials will be present on the SCF Royal Highland and Black Isle show stands to answer any queries about the Crofting Register.

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**The goose epidemic: conservation gone mad?**

Continued from page 1

the islands in supplying shot figures, there seems no reason to not change the law so that geese can be controlled year-round and wild goose meat and products can be sold.

Two very effective projects have been working together to control numbers – the Machair Life+ project (run by RSPB and partnered by SCF) which is due to end this year; and the SNH adaptive management trial which is under pressure due to government cuts. It is clear that if the Scottish Government does not provide more funding for goose control it will not be possible to keep the flood at bay.

Biodiversity is of course important, but the key to this is to safeguard the livelihoods of the people who live here, whose croft-work nurtures a balanced ecosystem. There is a catastrophe unfolding and officialdom appears to have failed to recognise this and to take action. Crofters and their families are now the endangered ones.

Note: A paper petition has gone up in public places in North Uist and an on-line petition has been submitted to the Scottish Parliament. It can be found on the Scottish Parliament website. Please take the opportunity to sign these.
Registering a croft

The new Crofting Register: a brief guide to applications

Whether we like it or not, the new Crofting Register is here to stay. The Scottish Government has invested a million pounds in it so it’s not going away. Most people would agree that an accurate, map-based register of crofts is long overdue. If the old Crofters Commission had started the process back in 1955, the crofters of today would not be faced with the bother and expense of supplying the information required for a definitive register of all the land subject to crofting tenure.

The following is a brief guide to the process of registering a croft in the new Crofting Register. For full instructions and forms see www.ros.gov.uk/croftingregister/guidance.

1. Do you have a good map of the croft and any apportionment(s)? The principal mapping requirement is that Registers of Scotland (RoS) must be able to identify the land to be registered on their master Ordnance Survey map. The map presented should preferably be at 1:2500. Beware the IACS map, which may not show the actual boundaries of the croft. Maps can be obtained from RoS for £16 plus VAT each. Contact them at croftenquiries@ros.gov.uk. An agricultural consultant or mapping specialist (see adverts in The Crofter) will also be able to supply maps but these will usually cost more than from RoS.

It is important to ensure that the croft boundaries are projected to reach the public road, the sea-shore or any other important feature so that there is no opportunity for landlords, other crofters or anyone else to create ransom strips; and that no odd pieces of ground are left out of crofting registration.

2. Complete the form. This should not be too hard if you know all adjoining owners and occupiers, your common grazing share and details of any decrofting within the last 20 years. Decrofted areas should also be shown on the map and highlighted to distinguish them from the croft. You may need to use additional sheets for the information requested on the form.

3. Submit the form, map and fee of £90 to the Crofting Commission. They will check the application against the information they hold. If all is correct they will forward the application to RoS. If not they will return the application with a letter stating reasons and the action you need to take before they can forward to RoS.

In due course you will receive a certificate and map from RoS and your croft will appear in the on-line register. This is not the end of the matter though. You will get a letter from the commission and so will all your neighbouring owners and tenants. They will have nine months to challenge your registration in the Scottish Land Court. Basically this will be if they disagree with the boundary you have registered.

Now the sting in the tail. The Commission will enclose a notice which you must display “in a prominent position on the croft” for nine months and you must advertise the registration for two successive weeks in a weekly, local newspaper. The Commission will supply a suggested form of advertisement. As with other crofting notices, this may appear in a community newspaper if there is one, eg De Tha Dol and Ullapool News, so long as it is a weekly. Make sure you ask for the cheapest available size and format.

Why do it now? In November, registration will become compulsory at trigger points. A trigger point is any of the usual transactions carried out through the Crofting Commission. These include assignation, bequest, decrofting, division, letting and apportionment. If you anticipate any of these events taking place it is worth registering now, as there may well be delays once the system has to deal with a large volume of possibly complex applications. It will save time and money if townships can map all their crofts co-operatively. This is being done at Badrallach (Wester Ross) and in the Strathfleet townships (parish of Rogart). SCF can advise on what is required.

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New brooms sweep in for training post

John Bannister reports on the appointment of SCF’s new training managers.

PARDON THE PUN but the brooms in question are from the Loch Broom area and they take up this appointment as a partnership – a relatively new experience for SCF.

Any connotations associated with brooms, however, could not be further from the truth. Here we have Lucy Beattie and Tina Hartley, two highly qualified, professionals with a wealth of experience in teaching and training, including course director and tutor on our SCF induction courses, happy to join us after former manager Su Cooper left us for pastures new.

Applications for this post were advertised and we had a good response from a number of very competent people. Qualifications alone, though, were not enough and the selection panel looked further for chalk-face experience, which subsequently led to a short-list. The interview panel met with the various short-listed applicants, all of whom gave a remarkably good account of themselves on the day. Finally, the successful candidate was chosen unanimously after an impressive partnership bid from Lucy and Tina, whose personal profiles speak so winsomely for them (see below).

By the time you read this, the partnership will already be in post and coming to terms with the challenges of the task ahead.

A new training management takes us into another era of crofter training. Some fifteen years ago we saw the first crofting entry level induction course (then called the foundation course) on the Isle of Skye. Since then the popularity of the course has exceeded all expectations and it has been run throughout the Highlands and Islands. It is our aim to broaden this and provide training for all crofters, irrespective of experience. And to extend that commitment to the furthest reaches of the crofting areas, where local resources and a critical mass of students can be identified.

We welcome Tina and Lucy to our team.

Tina Hartley – partner training manager

I originally come from Lancashire. With my husband and young family I now live in Ullapool. Having purchased land in 1996 we settled permanently in the area during 2001, with dreams of a quieter, safer and much slower pace of life. Previously I had worked as a senior manager in social services and decided to put these management skills to good use and become an independent business advisor and trainer. Working locally, I helped set up Made in Ullapool, a social enterprise, and my most recent achievement was to assist the people of Drumbeg and surrounding townships achieve their aim of total renovation of their village hall. In 2011 I was asked to become the SCF’s local training director for Ullapool and I then went on to successfully run two entry-level courses. I employed Lucy Beattie as a tutor on each course and we found SCF’s concept of training to be quite innovative. I had no prior knowledge of crofting but found that I enjoyed the work and certainly recognised the potential for future development in that sector.

Like many folk, living and working in a rural location means that one sometimes has to be creative about employment opportunities. This new post allows Lucy and I the opportunity to create a working partnership and combine our joint skills in project management, training and agriculture.

I very much look forward to the challenge of running the various levels of this training programme. Our aim is to further develop existing links with crofters and small landholders; to promote the opportunities that training can bring to new entrants and established crofters alike; and indeed to promote training as an important step in the personal development process.

Lucy Beattie – partner training manager

I was brought up at Leckmelm estate near Ullapool and have always had a fondness for farming and rural issues. From an early age, I would spend my spare time fishing for trout or feeding orphan lambs at the farm. I spent my gap year working on farms through the WWOOF scheme in the USA, which eventually led to me study at Harper Adams Agricultural College. After gaining my degree I worked my placement year with RICS Accreditation as a trainee valuer for Severn Trent Water at their Lake Vyrnwy estate in Wales.

Following the loss of both of my parents, I returned to the Highlands in 2000 to run Leckmelm estate. Today I operate a mixed tourism, forest and farming enterprise with 150 head of sheep, a small number of cattle and I also rear and process turkeys for Christmas. As a lecturer for UHI West Highland College, I teach the SVQ rural skills programme which links to Ullapool High School. I have worked with Tina on college projects and together we are studying for our teaching in further education qualification – continuing our professional development. I also worked with Tina on the previous SCF training programmes. We are excited by the opportunities that lie ahead for promoting crofting skills to new entrants and creating training opportunities for promoting best practice in crofting.

With a young family, I feel exceptionally fortunate to be supported by friends, family and a great team of staff at Leckmelm as Tina and I move into our new role with SCF.

Making your subscription go further

Training discounts

Following the recruitment of the training managers for next the phase of our crofters skills training programme, we are pleased to announce that members will be able to receive a discount on training courses.

Members are entitled to a discount on the entry level crofting induction course and also a 10% discount on a package of practical courses.

There is a very high demand for these courses so please make sure you register your interest to ensure that you receive notifications about any upcoming courses. This can be done by emailing training@crofting.org or by phoning HQ.
Agri-environment uptake by crofters: report raises serious questions

A *RECENTLY-RELEASED* analysis of agri-environment uptake by crofters shows that uptake is not only much higher in Scotland in general, but even in some intensive agricultural areas with low nature value and much higher farm incomes.

The report draws lessons from a number of sample parishes; the figures for Shetland are used here to illustrate the findings. While the Scottish uptake amongst potential non-common grazings applicants is around 21% and 17% for Land Managers’ Options (LMO) and Rural Priorities (RP) respectively, the figures for Shetland are only 2% and 10%. Strangely, even Lewis’s LMO uptake rate is three times higher than Shetland’s!

The contrast with intensive non-LFA Aberdeenshire is stark. 18% of farmers are in LMO agri-environment and 28% in RP. At the detailed level, things are even worse. Even in the basic LMO scheme, 17 out of the 23 Shetland parishes have no participants. And for RP, while the best uptake per parish is comparable with the national average, seven parishes have no participants at all.

In lowland Aberdeenshire, while some parishes did have poor uptake, 39 of the 76 parishes have an uptake higher than the national average; 18 have more than twice the average; eight are over thrice the average and five are over four times the average – the highest participation rate is 80%.

This all raises the question of what uptake should be. Agri-environment is different from the Single Payment or LFASS, which more or less every farmer or crofter is expected to claim. Policy-makers must consider what an appropriate rate of participation might be to deliver their goals, for example the conservation of biodiversity.

In the 1990s, Shetland’s agriculture was considered to be of sufficiently high nature value for the islands to be designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), receiving targeted funding for low-intensity farming when no such schemes were generally available. Given that, it might be assumed that uptake rates for the current agri-environment offers should be substantially higher than the Scottish average, not significantly lower.

In any case, serious questions need to be asked – one lesson from the ESA is that lack of interest in such payments is not an issue in itself. That suggests that the problem lies squarely with the policy and its delivery.

*The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism report, published online, is based on Scottish Government data and is intended to inform the debate on the current CAP reform process.*

Gwyn Jones

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A crofting heroine

**URDINA (ENA) CAMPBELL**, Clisham, Rhue was elected clerk to the grazings in 1979 and served continuously until September 2009. She then became chairperson until August 2012 when she retired to become a committee member.

In 1979 crofter meetings were convened under the A835 Strathan Burn bridge – a neutral point between the three crofting communities of Morefield, Rhue and Ardmair. Since then neutral locations have given way to meetings in more comfortable surroundings.

When Ena was asked to attend a meeting at Mairi and John Mackenzie’s house at Morefield to consider a proposal, she did not question the arrangement. Everyone knew she would come as she never missed croft meetings.

When she arrived she was surprised to see some younger members of her own family there. Her surprise was complete when Joe Stewart, her neighbour, presented her with a framed certificate signed informally by all our crofters as a gesture of our appreciation of her 33 years of conscientious service. A bouquet of flowers, tea, coffee, home baking and reminiscences contributed to an enjoyable afternoon.

We are very fortunate that our crofts have remained basically in the same families for several generations. We have no absentee crofters or indeed absentee landlords. Our two landlords at Strathan and Rhidorroch reside here on a permanent basis and are very supportive and accessible for consultation. In the Highlands many estates seem to be administered from solicitors’ and factors’ offices in places like Chester and absentee landlords cause as much difficulty as absentee crofters.

Traditional shared duties of stock and land still exist, but on a much reduced scale, and many of our meetings revolve around forestry schemes; deer control; radio and telephone mast rentals; support for the fox club and things like fence maintenance.

Ena’s meticulous minute book formed the foundation for Avril Scott, our current clerk, to make the transition to computerised accounts and typed minutes. Currently we are working on the maps for apportionments and preparing for croft registration.

When we first got involved in forestry one of our crofters was very much against it and stated, “Planting trees is forfeiting the heritage of our forefathers – and no good will come of it.” When the cheques started to come in he could not believe it.

Crofting used to be an occupation and a way of life, but has now become a business with shareholders. It still requires conscientious individuals like Ena to set an example of dedication.

*KJ MacDonald (Ian)*
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You will get promotion on our website, use of our exclusive Scottish Crofting Produce logo, a certificate to certify your subscription and leaflets to let people know about the brand. There are also opportunities to attend events which will help with the promotion of your produce.

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ON THE CROFT

The joy of potatoes

My interest in potatoes began about sixty years ago, writes Neil MacGillivary, when during the Easter holidays I helped my father plant potatoes on our Camuscross croft.

Traditionally, the weekend of the Sleat communion in early July was when they would be first lifted and I believe that no potatoes I have eaten since were half as good. Memory lends enchantment – not only to the lifting and eating but also the pleasure a young lad experienced in the work.

We did not plant in lazy beds – my father had taught gardening as a schoolteacher and maybe that method was looked on as old fashioned! My father was born in 1883 and I am sure that he helped with potato planting as a boy, learning from his father who was born in 1843 – and so the tradition has now lasted into a third century. I still use dung and seaweed just as we did sixty years ago but now I plant some of my potatoes in lazy beds and find it a very good method. The term lazy beds is a misnomer, there being nothing lazy about it. It is the way that the original potato growers in South America grew their crop.

Mention of my grandfather brings to mind the potato famine which he must have experienced as a small boy in the late 1840s when the blight destroyed the crop not only here but throughout Europe, most devastatingly in Ireland. The blight is still with us but there is hope, in that there are scientists working to develop strains of potato which are blight resistant. For example, the Sárvári Research Trust (SRT) headed by Dr David Shaw (if ever there was a perfect surname for a potato scientist Shaw must be it!) produces several varieties and can be found on the internet: http://sarvari-trust.org/.

Each year I plant some heritage varieties such as International Kidney, Home Guard, Craigineil, Pink Fir Apple, Arran Victory, Dunbar Rover or Edgecote Purple. I have grown all of these at one time or another and although yields vary, as does the taste, it is well worth experimenting and at the same time it helps to preserve these for future generations.

Diversity has to be preserved and encouraged.

Russell Smith
Global issues, local solutions

The Scottish Crofting Federation has embarked on a new project, Hungry for Rights, which aims to educate and raise awareness of alternative food systems such as short supply chains, direct sales and smallholder produce.

In a nutshell this means all networks of producers, consumers and distributors which are not part of the standardised anonymous industrial food supply. A shortened food supply chain means shorter distances between producer and consumer, making the origin of food more transparent; shortening the distance between consumer and area of produce origin (hence regional product brands).

The drivers of growth in these alternative food networks are well-known: on the one hand the price squeeze for farmers in the supermarket production model and on the other hand consumer distrust of industrial food. Short supply chains can contribute significantly to rural development and have been seen as a good model for peripheral rural areas. It was estimated in 2003 that of a total of seven million farms in 15 European countries, some 1.4 million farms (20%) were involved in direct selling, 800,000 (12%) in quality production, while approximately 100,000 farms (1.5%) were engaged in organic production.

Development of short supply chains depends not only on producers, but also on consumers, retailers and local authorities. For this reason, the project will bring together representative of these groups.

Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University, London, spoke recently of food democracy: people actively engaging in food affairs and being heard in their preference. Translated to Scotland, this would be croft producers rather than GMOs, nano- and other o-foods that may be in the pipeline of food technicians and engineers.

The project will start assessing local needs and challenges, offer training in skills development and capacity-building towards the active promotion of short supply chains. The target area will be Western Isles and Skye and Lochalsh. Training courses will be developed on the basis of needs indicated by participants.

This forms an excellent chance to keep building on the SCF’s Crofting Resources Programme which finished last year.

If you are interested in attending the local needs assessments, please get in touch with SCF HQ.

Community supported agriculture: a brief history

One of these alternative food networks is community supported agriculture (CSA). Japan has a long history of co-operatives and nowadays nearly a quarter of all Japanese households belong to a food co-op. From the 1960s to 80s a series of food scares and fraudulent labelling led to consumer co-operatives being established to source safe foods. In 1965 a group of women created the Teikei system (literally translated as putting the farmer’s face on the food), with a series of consumer-producer co-operatives designed not only to source safe food, but to reduce the food supply chain. Today there are 3,000 members of the Teikei movement.

In Germany in 1924 an idea took root to create small self-contained farms capable of feeding themselves and those around them. The first official CSA in Europe was started in 1968 in Germany by followers of biodynamic principles. This was followed by CSAs in Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands.

The origins of CSA in the UK can be traced back to a period of decline in farming incomes in the early 1990s, while at the same time an interest in organic produce and local food developed. In the UK the Soil Association has initiated much CSA work and it provides farmers and communities with a range of support and advice, a toolkit, technical information, case studies and a comprehensive website: www.soilassociation.org/csa.

A very famous example is Scotland’s first CSA, Earthshare, set up in 1994 as a result of a shared desire to have more food produced and supplied locally in the wider community in Findhorn. They now provide 175 family shares.


FRANCE HAS A very good example of an alternative food system supporting small-scale farming, AMAP. "Associations pour le maintenance du agriculture paysannes" translated to the Highlands and Islands would be "Association for the preservation of crofting agriculture".

By joining an AMAP group, consumers deal directly with growers and commit themselves months ahead of the harvest to buy a selection of fruit and vegetables from a particular farmer. For the consumer it means fresh seasonal food, often organic, made from plant or animal breeds or ancient land; for both partners it means a fair price. Thirteen euros (£11) for a small box and 23 euros (£19) for large box seems on the expensive side compared to box schemes in Scotland which are usually around £7 for a small box and around £10-£15 for a large box.

Running for more than 10 years, there are now almost 1,600 AMAPs with regular deliveries of 66,000 boxes to some 270,000 consumers. Boxes contain mostly fruit and vegetables, but also cheese, eggs and meat. The movement was gradually structured by networking through mainly regional trade and, more recently, by the formation of an inter-regional movement of AMAP (MIRAMAP). These regional or inter-regional structures are essential for the exchange of experience, training designers and co-operation from official institutions (regions, departments, etc).

Visit www.amap-france.org (in French) and http://blog.urgenci.net/?p=1080 for a Welsh visitor’s comment.

Bogsa Uibhist vegetable box scheme on Uist

LAST YEAR a small-scale pilot box scheme was run on the Uists through an informal partnership of three growers – Bunait in North Uist; Ardivachar croft garden, South Uist; the Sustainable Uist vegetable trial site in Liniclate, Benbecula (thanks to Sustainable Uist making the site available); and East Camp horticultural and social project in Balivanich. With the exception of East Camp, all sites are on croft land.

By combining forces – especially five greenhouses – over a hundred boxes could be delivered during ten weeks without much extra planning and without one single meeting. Produce included a wide range of salad leaves such as baby spinach, rocket, oak leaf, mizuma, giant mustard, lettuces; vegetables, including tomatoes, French beans and many chard types; and a wide range of herbs and edible flowers.
ATTLE IN THE UK are commonly affected by gastrointestinal worms, the commonest being Ostertagia ostertagi and Cooperia oncophora.

Gastrointestinal worms can impact on animal health, productivity and profitability and it is therefore important to adopt an effective and sustainable control strategy to help reduce the impact.

Worms and your cattle

First-season grazing calves are most susceptible to gastrointestinal worm infection and may show signs of parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE). As well as reduced weight gains, PGE can significantly reduce milk output and affects reproductive performance and carcass quality in older animals.

In the UK, four roundworm genera are most often recorded in cases of PGE. Two of these live in the true stomach (abomasum) and two in the small intestine. The stomach worms are the brown stomach worm (Ostertagia) and the barber’s pole worm (Haemonchus). The intestinal species are the thread necked worm (Nematodirus) and Cooperia.

Nematodirus often causes disease in very young calves from six to eight weeks of age, usually in late May-June.

Ostertagia can cause two types of disease syndrome. Type I is usually seen from mid-July onwards in first season grazing calves. Type II disease generally occurs in yearlings in late winter/spring. The latter results from the re-emergence of arrested larvae ingested during the previous autumn.

Outbreaks of haemonchosis tend to be commoner when the weather is warmer and wetter and therefore tend to occur in mid-summer to autumn.

Treatment

Over the last 25-30 years, and with the advent of anthelmintic drugs used in combination with pasture management, producers have successfully negated the impact of parasites in their cattle to maximise profits. Unfortunately, although the routine use of effective anthelmintics has been shown to maximise productivity it is not, by itself, a sustainable solution with increasing reports of anthelmintic resistance in a number of cattle gut worm species.

In light of these findings it is becoming more important to consider sustainable control of roundworms in your herds. Moredun has developed the acronym ACME with the aim of reducing the risk of developing anthelmintic resistant worms on, or transferring them to, your croft:

• Adopt an effective quarantine strategy.
• Check efficacy of treatment.
• Monitor the need for treatment.
• Ensure best practice is followed.

More information on treatment strategies to control parasitic roundworms in cattle can be found in our 12 page news-sheet. Please contact the Moredun communications team on 0131 445 5111 or email info@moredun.org.uk for your free copy.

Scottish kye: a future key?

This article introduces a new series, where issue by issue we will take a fresh look at our traditional breeds.

THE TRADITION OF THE CROFT and the kye as part of survival in a demanding environment goes back a long, long way. A mixed, low-intensity system is sustainable in difficult environments because no single component becomes dominant and thereby the risks of failure are spread. The slow evolution of such systems also means that many complementary relationships are built up between the individual components. The financial, environmental and societal links are extensive.

However, a variety of pressures in the minute window of the past three decades has virtually eliminated the hill cow from the Scottish uplands and we can increasingly see the value of what we have lost. The value of the Scottish hill cow needs to be re-evaluated and placed in the 21st century.

The breadth of that value needs to be measured in greater terms than the price at the mart. The traditional upland cow was part of the family banking, providing annual income and a final fillip when times were desperate. The impact on the environment was immense, from the wealth of invertebrate species that thrived on the dung to the plants that benefited from the impact of their feet. And some species did not benefit, such as bracken. The impact of hill cattle on vegetation is such that they are being reintroduced in the Pyrenees in an attempt to reduce the risk from heath and forest fires.

And we have not even touched on the provision of high quality genetics and food raised on herbage to help sustain a massive and growing population. Let us look again at the Scottish kye.

Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems Ltd,
Aberdeen
Cattle health planning for townships

**ON THE CROFT**

**Cattle health planning for townships**

Beef from Scottish crofts and farms has a great reputation. Protecting this reputation through health planning is crucial and can also improve herd profitability. However, this can be problematic in a township where several herds are mixing both for grazing and use of the bull. In this article SAC’s Janette Sutherland looks at the two most important diseases to tackle and ways to start a township health scheme such as SAC’s Premium Cattle Health Scheme (PCHS).

**Building on BVD eradication scheme**

All herds should have been tested for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) under the Scottish Government BVD Eradication Scheme, so you already will have an indication of the status of your herd. If selling suckled calves or breeding heifers, being able to guarantee them as BVD free could be a valuable marketing point.

The effect of BVD can be felt at all stages of the production cycle – from bulling all the way through to calving and into the rearing stages of the calf. It is spread by persistently infected animals (PIs) which have become infected whilst still in the womb. Infrertility, extended calving periods, abortions, dead calves, malformed or weak calves are all signs of BVD infection. Because the immune system can be suppressed by the disease, calf scours and pneumonia are also common. Often the PI animal will die with mucosal disease in which the digestive tract is severely ulcerated – an animal welfare issue. Often these deaths will be in finishing units so buyers will become more discerning in where they buy their stores.

Breeders should test for evidence of PI animals and remove them. As a result the herd will be healthier and animals sold from the herd can be classed as BVD-free.

Testing for BVD will involve blood sampling of five calves (over nine months old) per management group. Two clear tests at annual intervals will confer accredited status to the herd. For accredited status, appropriate bio-security measures are also necessary – e.g. a 3m boundary between your cattle and any neighbouring cattle. If you cannot create 3m boundary fencing you can get vaccinated and monitored free status, in which you still have to sample the five calves per management group but you also need to vaccinate the breeding animals and the bull.

The result from the initial screen of calves will determine whether there is evidence of a PI in the herd. If PI is present, is it has to be tracked down and this will necessitate testing more cattle – cattle to test will be determined in discussion with your vet.

To maintain accredited or vaccinated monitored free status an annual screen of five calves per management group has to be undertaken.

**Categories of freedom from BVD**

1. **Herd accredited** – bio-security measures in place including a 3m boundary between your cattle and neighbouring cattle. Cattle can be vaccinated if required.

2. **Herd vaccinated and monitored free** – a lesser status as the 3m boundary is not required, however, bio-security is vital. Cattle must be vaccinated prior to being exposed to the bull. Many suckler herds should aim to be in this category and this could be very useful for townships without fenced bio-secure boundaries.

3. **Cattle virus-free and vaccinated** – This category is available to vendors of bulling heifers, in-calf heifers/cows and heifers/cows with calves at foot. All stock have to be screened free of BVD virus and breeding stock must be vaccinated prior to sale. If you are selling these classes of stock, speak to your vet and start testing.

If a producer tests and finds out he has no BVD in his herd, he needs to source clean replacements; so it is necessary that adequate supplies from the above categories are in the market-place. There is likely to be a growing market for stock showing freedom from BVD.

**Johnie’s disease**

Johnie’s disease is frequently diagnosed and can cause substantial financial losses due to depressed fertility, reduced milk yield and shortened breeding life. It is also a disease which impacts on animal welfare and is fatal. All cattle over two years of age need to be screened. Although this appears costly, identifying an animal at an early stage may save money.

If infected animals are kept, they could lose a lot of condition and be worth little while spreading disease around the croft. Identification of the disease at an early stage means that the animal has a decent cull value and this can pay for the cost of testing the whole herd.

If keeping home-bred replacements there is a need to show freedom from Johnie’s disease under the PCHS rules.

**In a township**

Individual producers may become members of PCHS and test for one or more diseases. However, if cattle mix across various producers, as in townships, it is essential that all producers join together for testing purposes so that all cattle can be monitored. It is crucial that cross-fence contact (especially for BVD) is avoided among cattle within and between townships. Fencing works are not required if aiming for vaccinated and monitored status.

Always start any proposed scheme with an information meeting for all cattle keepers so they understand the costs and the benefits of tackling disease at a township scale. Local SAC consultants may be able to attend committee meetings.

Once people are willing to proceed, contact your local vet to ensure a practical testing programme is created. Consider when you normally handle cattle and fit in testing and vaccination (if undertaken) at those times as much as possible.

If the committee agrees to plan for health then township regulations can be altered to either: 1) segregate an area for accredited and non-accredited cattle if, for example, the common grazing is in two distinct areas or ii) only allow tested cattle to use the common grazings. Non-tested cows would need to stay on individual crofts. This would be similar to previous dipping regulations.

If you are using a Crofting Commission township bull then it will have been tested for these diseases. If you have your own bulls or hire privately ensure they are part of the programme.

Freedom from disease is a great way of differentiating your product, especially if selling animals suitable for breeding. Healthy home-bred replacements will also be more productive and profitable.

For further information about cattle testing schemes contact your vet and SAC office. Please note, other health scheme providers are available.
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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in Crofting Law.

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SAFETY FOCUS - Fees for intervention - Beware possible financial implications if you have a visit from the HSE

The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for managing and enforcing Health and Safety within agriculture, and could visit your croft for various reasons; perhaps to undertake a spot check, to investigate a report of non compliance, else, can, in certain circumstances, charge you for their time. These charges are known as Fees for Intervention (FFI).

What is a Material Breach?
A material breach is when, in the opinion of the HSE Inspector, there is or has been a contravention of health and safety law that requires them to issue notice of that opinion in writing.

How much will be charged?
The fee payable is £124 per hour of HSE time. Costs could also include third party involvement, e.g during accident investigation; the costs for which could be higher.

How Can I avoid incurring such costs?
Under FFI, the HSE will only recover the costs of its regulatory work from dutyholders who are found to be in material breach of health and safety law. As such, businesses who are compliant with the law, or where breaches are not considered ‘material’, will not be charged FFI for any work undertaken by the HSE. As such, there is no better time to ensure you are complying with relevant Health and Safety regulations.

How Can I find out more?
Further information on FFI can be found in the following HSE publications, available to download free from the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/fee-for-intervention/what-is-ffi.htm. In particular guidance notes HSE48 – Guidance on the Application of FFI.

For further information or to discuss how NFU Mutual Risk Management Services Ltd could help you manage Health and Safety within your business, please contact Fiona Mackay on 07970 516670 Fiona_Mackay@nfumutual.co.uk

To find your local NFU Mutual Branch visit nfumutual.co.uk

Agent of The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited.
Regulating to promote active crofting, to help sustain the wellbeing of rural communities.

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THE CROFTER, JUNE 2013

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NAME OF COMPANY: Scottish Crofting Federation

COMPANY No: SC 218658

REGISTERED OFFICE: Unit 26 Kyle Industrial Estate, Kyle of Lochalsh, IV40 8AX

NOTICE is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Scottish Crofting Federation will be held in the Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness on Friday, 14th June 2013 at 2.00pm, to consider and if thought fit to pass the following resolutions:

1. To receive company's accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th November 2012. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting or on request to the registered office.

2. To elect persons proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq). Ratify the appointment of four directors: David Smith, Finlay Matheson, Iain Keith and Roddy MacDonald.

3. To re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR as accountants/auditors and to authorise the directors to fix their remuneration.

By order of the board of directors.

Company secretary: John Bannister

Date of notice: 30th May 2013

The Annual General Meeting will be followed by a presentation given by Neil Ferguson on the subject of alternative architecture through crofting.
ALBA AIR ENERGY SLASH HEATING BILLS ACROSS THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Alba Air Energy delivers energy efficient heating solutions at an affordable rate across the Highlands and Islands, from Islay to South Uist, Tarbert to Aberdeen, the borders to Caithness and all points in between.

Using air source heat pump technology eliminates the need for expensive ground works as the units are self-contained. Installation typically takes less than a day to complete, with minimal disruption to the property. All at an affordable cost of around £3,200 including installation (plus VAT rated at 5%)

The good news is that energy savings can be as high as 80% - heating your home for approximately £200 per annum. Alba is currently working on projects in all areas of Scotland. Please ask for a FREE survey. Installation references are available on request.

Hughie McLean from Tarbert would be delighted to talk to you about the system. Margaret Walker from Daliburgh, Margaret Rozga from Islay, Hughie, and many more are now enjoying the benefits of warm homes and reduced costs energy bills.

Why not join them?

Call us now!

For further information, contact Bill Hall on 01320 366 808 or email bill@albaairenergy.co.uk
www.albaairenergy.co.uk
Members’ legal helpline

Eilidh Ross of Inksters reports

The first few weeks of the SCF’s legal helpline have been busy, as word gets around that SCF members can call Inksters and speak to either Brian Inkster or myself, both specialists in crofting law, to receive around 15 minutes or so of free legal advice on crofting law.

We have spoken to more than a dozen crofters so far, about all sorts of issues, including the Crofting Commission, owner-occupied croft decrofting, croft purchase, grazings committees and common grazings, the sometimes complex interface between an owner-occupier crofter and his former landlord, the worry of liability for future care home fees, the problems which can arise when landlords (or former landlords) grant servitude rights to third parties over croft land, often to the detriment of the crofter – and the tax implications of selling croft land.

Eilidh has also spoken to young crofters about how they need to structure the legalities of building a house on croft land, ie the order of various processes in obtaining planning permission – including a Section 75 agreement, where the council insist on it – decrofting, purchasing and obtaining a grant must take place. Eilidh is about to embark on that process herself, so is reading Karen MacRae’s diary with great interest (see page 19 of the March Crofter).

When the helpline was launched, we said that crofters would receive around 15 minutes of advice and so far we think that was probably about the right amount of time. The calls we have received have lasted for an average of 12-15 minutes; and we hope that in all cases crofters have left better informed than they were at the outset. We have found that 15 minutes is sufficient to establish whether there is a problem which requires further attention. Each case is different.

Everybody at Inksters is looking forward to developing the helpline with the SCF over the coming months and years.

Have you had a look at the SCF’s website recently? If not, you should. It has been refreshed and improved and is now full of fantastic images of crofting life and lots of useful information on crofting and what the SCF is about. Pop in for a browse today!

Diversification

Are you doing something interesting and different on your croft? Please let us know what diversification projects are happening around the crofting areas. Email hq@crofting.org or phone 01599 530005.
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Together, we’re generating results

We’ve always worked closely with the people at the heart of the land. It’s one of the reasons why we added to our dedicated Energy & Natural Resources team with a Gaelic-speaking crofting lawyer and why we founded the Scottish Highland Renewable Energy Conference – which this year placed the spotlight on crofting and renewables.

With expertise in renewable energy projects on croft land and common grazings, and with offices in Inverness and Thurso, we’re perfectly placed to help you harness the full potential of your land.

Contact Calum MacLeod on 01463 795 043, or by email at calum.macleod@harpermacleod.co.uk to see how we can work together.
Small wind turbines pay big dividends
Lease land for small wind turbines and gain free electricity

Many farmers, small-holders and home owners are combating the continual energy price increases by investing in small wind turbines and taking control of their energy costs.

Small wind turbines, those designed to power farms and homes – not to be confused with large-scale turbines or commercial wind farms – enable owners to fix electricity costs for 20 years, or in some cases gain free electricity for 20 years.

The Evance R9000, the most popular small wind turbine in the UK, suits most sites as it is a versatile solution with flexibility for location and connection – single phase and three phase, on-grid and off-grid.

If you have the space and the wind for small wind turbines but not the finance, you may be able to lease a small portion of your land for R9000 turbines and use the generated electricity free of charge. Already over 400 Evance turbines are supplying free electricity to landowners.

To benefit from this free electricity the proposed location for the turbine needs to be suitable. Once the site is accepted the process is hassle free for you – as a site survey, planning application and installation are all managed.

Although small and unobtrusive, the R9000 makes a significant impact to energy savings. Costs are reduced as less energy is purchased due to using wind-generated electricity; also there is the additional income available from the Feed-in Tariff (FiT) scheme. For a site with a mean annual wind speed of 6 m/s the R9000 can deliver a return of up to £5,100 a year and two R9000 turbines up to £10,200 a year!

For the best return, the time to act is now as the current FIT rate of 21.65p per kWh of energy generated is unlikely to be maintained for systems installed after April 2014.

Evance Wind Turbines is working in partnership with Claymore Energy. For further details contact 01738 472 121.

Woodland carbon code

The Forestry Commission has announced a new initiative which has potential financial benefits to crofters and townships.

Plant a new woodland which follows the Woodland Carbon Code and you can:

- generate a new income stream;
- create a lasting legacy for future generations;
- make a real contribution to tackling damaging climate change.

New woodlands which meet the standards set out in the Woodland Carbon Code could provide an alternative to agricultural income, with the future possibility of:

- additional income upfront to help with the establishment of the woodland;
- future income from the carbon sequestered in the woodland;
- future income from timber products from sawlogs to woodfuel.

Woodland creation projects are sustainable projects which not only sequester carbon but also provide a range of social and environmental benefits such as:

- provide shelter for animals or humans;
- protect water and soils;
- benefit wildlife and biodiversity;
- provide timber which can then also continue to store carbon in long-lasting timber products.

For full details go to www.forestry.gov.uk/woodlandcarboncode or speak to your local Forestry Commission woodland officer.

Unlocking the energy potential of common grazings

A report by Calum MacLeod

Crofting and renewables was one of the hot topics at the recent Scottish Highland Renewables Energy Conference (SHREC), hosted by law firm Harper Macleod in Inverness in April.

Lisa Maclean from Urras Oighreachd Ghàbhhsainn (Galsin Estate Trust, in the Isle of Lewis) and Calum MacDonald from Point and Sandwick Power joined me in speaking at a special session devoted to the issue, where I delivered an overview of the rights of crofting tenants, owner-occupier crofters and common grazers to develop renewables on their crofts and common grazings. I also discussed the appropriate routes for removing land from crofting tenure for the purposes of developing renewables.

Lisa Maclean spoke about the crofting wind farm project which, as a community landowner, they are undertaking themselves. It is a fantastic project which will bring tangible benefits to the crofting community.

Calum MacDonald then considered the potential for common grazings to be used for renewable energy development. Point and Sandwick Power are commissioning what will become the UK’s largest community-owned wind farm which will bring an average of around £1.4 million per annum to the local crofting community – on common grazings at Beinn Ghrideag.

Compared to other crofting communities, Point crofters are fortunate to be dealing with a community landowner who granted them a windfarm lease. Calum believes the legislative framework needs amended to give crofters greater renewable energy development rights on common grazings. Generally crofters have less control over development of common grazings than in-bye crofts. As a solicitor involved in these projects, the key is being able to have a valid windfarm lease that allows a funder to take security over the project.

Calum’s proposal, and the routes which could be used to unlock the potential of the common grazings, gives much food for thought and will undoubtedly be a reform to which the Land Reform Review Group may be giving consideration.

Calum MacLeod is a solicitor specialising in crofting and renewables at Harper Macleod LLP in Inverness and can be contacted on 01463 795 043.
Alternative architecture through crofting

Following the SCF AGM on Friday 14th June (details on page 21) chartered architect and SCF member Neil Ferguson will give a presentation on the next generation crofting affordable zero carbon homes initiative – empowering and enabling crofters to multi-skill and build innovatively on the croft.

Neil aims to gather views on how best to build affordably, give pointers to the way forward and contribute to next generation crofting initiatives by SCF.

Topics raised during a previous croft housing workshop will be looked at further.

• Housing is too expensive for young people to get a foothold.
• Designs should start small and be easily extendable.
• Future-proof innovative croft housing by keeping building and running costs down.
• Support funding and in-kind contributions, all linked to croft management plans.
• Enhance the crofter’s own labour and building expertise – acquiring additional skills and obtaining specialist advice.
• Cut carbon emissions through high energy efficiency, making the most of renewable energy.
• Initial needs and lifetime requirements can be met by better use of local materials.
• The presentation will look at the whole picture of what is built, promote innovation and lower environmental impact as the way forward through;
• creative and affordable designs that are energy efficient, with appropriate form that responds to its surroundings;
• improving on increased legislative standards and requirements within available funding with flexible designs;
• affordable design and building guidance for crofter starter homes in liaison with the University of the Highlands and Islands, including building virtual demonstration projects with live technologies;
• helping young people to build virtually using their IT skills, communicate their ideas in 3D and make the most of what is built;
• advocating Scottish Government support for the SCF initiative through pilot projects with real crofting clients in different Highland locations and all to show what can be achieved on the ground.

New accredited specialist in crofting law

Macleod and MacCallum are pleased to announce that David Findlay has been accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in crofting law, one of Macleod and MacCallum’s niche practice areas. He becomes one of only four solicitors able to claim this accreditation at the present time. David gained his first hands-on experience of crofting when he lived on and ran the family croft in the Western Isles. During this time he trained as a solicitor in Stornoway and gained his first experience of crofting law.

Since joining Macleod and MacCallum, David has specialised in crofting law and agricultural law and has dealt with a large number of complex crofting transactions. David has a particular interest in common grazings and renewable energy developments on croft land and common grazing land. Now he regularly advises clients in both the public and private sector on crofting law, which includes representations in the Scottish Land Court where appropriate. David regularly travels throughout the Highlands and Islands to see clients with Macleod and MacCallum’s mobile office and is able to offer a combination of expertise and local service.

Should you wish advice on any aspect of crofting law, please contact David Findlay on 01463 239393 or email him at david.findlay@macandmac.co.uk.

Show dates for your diary:

30th May
Highland Sheep Dingwall Mart

19th to 23rd June
Royal Highland Show Ingleston

31st July and 1st August
Black Isle Show Muir of Ord

SCF staff and volunteers will be at all of these shows to answer any questions you may have on grants, testing or any other topic! We will also have copies of all of our publications including the popular Horticulture Handbook. We will also be hosting Registers of Scotland staff. They will be present to answer any questions about the Crofting Register and the process of registration.

Hope to see you there.
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A celebration for Agnes

In the last issue of The Crofter, we highlighted that SCF Shetland representative Agnes Leask had received the British Empire Medal for her services to crofting.

Agnes’ award was celebrated at a reception held in Lerwick town hall in April.

The photo shows standing, left to right: Malcolm Bell, SIC Convener Richard Briggs, SCF member SCF’s Norman and Evelyn Leask Pauline Gilfillan Dean Gilfillan, SCF member Lord Lieutenant Robert Hunter

sitting, left to right: Mary Graham, widow of the late Lollie, former local chair and SCU founder member Agnes Leask and her husband Davie Georgie Arthur, Davie’s sister

2013 SCF Annual Gathering
common grazings: utilising potential

18th to 20th September (evening 18th, all day 19th, am 20th)

The theme of this year’s SCF annual gathering is common grazing. Common grazings make up a large proportion of land covered by crofting tenure, extending to nearly 600,000 hectares. Their management has been regulated for over 125 years. These common grazings play an important role for many crofters and provide a significant amount of public benefit, environmentally as well as aesthetically. They provide 15% of high nature value farmland and 30% of the area with peat of over 2m in depth.

Common grazings: utilising potential — a two day event — explores ways to develop opportunities offered to crofters and the wider community through action to improve, protect and manage habitats, species and landscapes. It will encourage participants to think about the future of common grazings and how they contribute to creating better places to live, work and visit.

For more information about booking your place at this year’s gathering please see the flier enclosed with this edition of The Crofter or contact HQ.

How to contact us

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Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

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SCF legal helpline: 01599 230 300

visit www.crofting.org for full contact details

Company Number SC 218658 Charity Number SC 031919

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