

Crofting Commission tackles issues of crofting lifeblood

IT IS VERY heartening to see that the Crofting Commission has recently appointed a consultant – Gwyn Jones, who is known to many in crofting and who has a record of first-rate research in essential crofting matters such as common grazings and the use of SRDP – to study how subsidy support systems currently support crofting, and to put forward proposals on how it might do so in future after Brexit.

Gwyn will report in the summer. See the Commission article on this on page 4.

The Commission has also offered to help SCF in a pilot project to bring together those with unused croft land and young people looking for a croft. The intention is to trial this in the Outer Hebrides. An application has been submitted by SCF to Leader for funding.

This is an essential area that SCF and the Crofting Commission can collaborate in – getting crofts back into use and bringing young folk into crofting.

Post-Brexit agricultural support: the tide is turning

MANY SPENT the first few days of this working year in Oxford at the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

It started nine years ago with the aim of helping create a more enlightened agriculture, bringing together producers with scientists,

economists, activists and lawyers – and everyone else with a serious interest in food and agriculture. It is now considerably better attended than the industry's older Oxford Farming Conference, which takes place at the same time down the road. Videos of presentations and

papers can be found on the Oxford Real Farming Conference website.

This year, secretary of state for environment Michael Gove spoke on farming for the next generation, outlining a vision for a

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The future of crofting legislation is hanging in the balance

THE SCOTTISH Government's consultation on crofting law closed 20th November and the results are being analysed still.

The results are clearly causing some bafflement. Surrounded by peripheral questions, the thing that most respondents will have deliberated upon, and will want to know, is which route Scottish Government intends to take to reform crofting law. Options offered ranged from doing nothing to starting again with a clean sheet – rewriting crofting law.

Looking at the responses to the consultation, it is significant not so much how different options were chosen as expected, but how the

lines between options were blurred. The difference between option 2, amendment and consolidation, and option 3, restatement of law, was never very clear anyway; but option 4, a clean sheet, would at first seem to stand out from the others as something new and different, until you read the responses.

The main organisations that opted for the clean sheet, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Isles Council and NFUS, all say that they want a clean sheet with caveats; a new bill pre-populated with all that is useful in current legislation. Not quite a clean sheet, but it is heartening that they don't simply want to start again, nigh on an impossibility wrought with

difficulty and risk.

Option 4 with caveats is actually not that far from options 2 and 3, the options chosen by such organisations as SCF, the Crofting Commission, Scottish Land and Estates, Law Society Scotland and SAC Consultants, as well as legal experts Derek Flynn and Brian Inkster – wanting all that isn't useful in current legislation to be taken out, retaining good law for a new bill.

It is quite difficult to see the difference, as both approaches can achieve the same end – a crofting bill that leads to law that helps rather than hinders crofters and crofting.

Scottish Government recently

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Crofting law consultation update
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Message from the chair...



Russell Smith meets Ian Blackford MP

IN THIS EDITION of *The Crofter* we have included a survey which I hope you will take the time to complete and return.

It is designed to gather your views on what we are doing for you, our members, to make sure we are actually doing the things that are important. Without feedback from all our members we can't be sure that we are tackling the right issues – all ideas are welcome and we will feed back the results in the next issues of *The Crofter*.

The board gathers views regularly through the advisory council, local meetings and direct from individual members; but a regular survey does help us to know we are on the right track. There is also an online version (go to www.crofting.org and follow the link) and I would urge you to fill in the form online as this saves us money in postage

and time in typing in your answers.

In the last survey we recorded an overall satisfaction rating of 3.9 out of 5 and we hope to do better this time. The board did look at what members told us was important to them and we have tried to develop those areas.

The survey asks for your email address (if you have one) as more and more goes online – witness this year's IACS forms – which is tough if you don't have a decent broadband connection. And this is an issue we have raised at every opportunity on your behalf.

The reason for wanting to know your email is so we can keep in touch with you, both to let you know what is going on and to seek your views on items of immediate interest. I would especially urge you to sign up for the monthly

e-newsletter as it contains useful info on closing dates for schemes, dates of upcoming meetings and reports on what SCF has been doing.

Also look out for future online or email surveys and please answer them. It strengthens our case when talking to the government if we can say "75% of our members" agree rather than just saying "we think that most of our members agree."

Electronic communications have become more important in the last few years, but will never completely take over from local meetings – if you want to hold a meeting in your area, HQ can help you organise it and arrange for some of the board to get there to meet you and listen to your concerns first-hand.

In the board (SCF's governing body) and the council which is the advisory body to the board, we work hard at maintaining a balance of young and old, male and female, drawn from all crofting areas along with a mix of skills to give us a truly representative outlook. But this is not always easy and we welcome input from anybody who would like to be involved. We need a mix of viewpoints; and with more people we can spread the volunteer workload more evenly.

The most recent board meeting endorsed our paper on Brexit (which you can find on our website) but thought that we needed to do more to push our key demands for no tariffs on lamb and beef to the EU, continuing support for agriculture – especially for the hills and remote areas – and a replacement for the CAP that has crofting designed in from the beginning, not just added on as an afterthought.

So I met a couple of Highland MPs to push the SCF arguments and they agreed to pass on the paper to Michael Gove, UK secretary of state for the environment. We continue to lobby on behalf of our members and for all crofters.

Here's to a good lambing.

Russell Smith

A letter from the chief executive

Dear member

Last year's wet weather and this winter's snow has increased feed costs for crofters and that, along with the uncertainty of Brexit, means you will be particularly concerned with what you spend your hard-earned money on; and possibly your SCF membership comes under scrutiny.

You will see from the articles in this issue that we achieve a huge amount on your behalf as the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting. We also offer you many valuable individual benefits.

We had a spell of almost zero inflation and so have had no increase in membership subscription rates for two years. However, this has changed with inflation rising again over the last year. Clearly, as costs rise we can't continue to do so much on the money we get in, so we have to make a hard decision: do we cut back on what we do or do we charge more to do it?

I don't think that we can afford to do less. Crofting is constantly under threat and it is only by having strong representation that we can help crofting to not only survive, but thrive. The board and council have agreed, therefore, to put subscriptions up this year in line with inflation, taking full individual membership to £65 from 01 May.

I hope that 2018 will be good to you. Thank you for your continuing support and all good wishes.

Patrick Krause

Patrick Krause
Chief Executive



Heavy snow in parts of the country has made getting feed to livestock costly, difficult and dangerous, with only four weeks to lambing

Post-Brexit agricultural support: the tide is turning

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fairer agricultural system which, supported with public money, delivers more public benefit. It has brought a great deal of comment, not surprising given that it marks the potential end of a very unfair regime that, as Mr Gove says, "gives the most from the public purse to those who have the most private wealth." This paper heralded the release of an agriculture bill at the end of February – aimed at England but with inevitable repercussions on the rest of the UK.

Proposals to continue support payments until 2022 are of course welcome, as is the suggestion that in a subsequent transition period England would see the capping of maximum payments. This could quickly and easily get rid of the major inequities of the current system and has been voiced by SCF in our proposals for a future Scottish scheme.

Mr Gove has also declared his support for a theme close to our hearts, that of rural resilience: "There are any number of smaller farm and rural businesses which help keep communities coherent and ensure the culture in agriculture is kept healthy... Whether it's upland farmers in Wales or Cumbria, crofters in Scotland or small livestock farmers in Northern Ireland, we need to ensure support is there for those who keep rural life vital." Advocates of crofting have said this for decades and it is heartening to hear it coming from Westminster.

SCF of course hopes to see it borne out in Scottish policy, with the continuation of crofting support and an equitable less favoured areas scheme that compensates for hardship, replacing the current income support that, to restate Mr Gove, "gives the most from the public purse to those who have the most private wealth", a

situation that clearly has to end.

The Scottish Government Agriculture Champions, in their interim paper, seem to agree: "We have producers whose options are severely limited by their location and physical assets, but who in many cases produce food while also generating other benefits that society values – supporting the local community and economy, preventing land abandonment and depopulation, and farming in ways which protect our globally important wildlife and landscapes."

That sums up crofting very well.

They continue, "Those who are active and proactive in this role as stewards of the land should be financially rewarded." The champions conclude that, "Public-funded farm support is not an automatic right, it is an asset offered to promote self-betterment and it should be used as such."



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The future of crofting legislation is hanging in the balance

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gave a summary of the current state of play to the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Crofting:

The consultation on the future of crofting legislation reform included 14 public meetings in crofting areas and seven private meetings with stakeholder groups or bodies. Over 300 people attended these meetings. There was a good level of response to the consultation with 122 responses from crofting representative bodies, crofting lawyers and businesses. Responses that were able to be published are available to read on the Scottish Government's Citizen Space website.

51% of respondents who answered the question about crofting policy disagreed with the Scottish Government's overarching crofting policy statement. The reasons for disagreement varied, with no apparent consensus being evident: reasons given being that crofting policy should promote crofter rights and protections;

the policy statement indicated a lack of specialist knowledge on crofting law; the policy statement required simplification and that a vision statement for crofting was required.

A clear majority of respondents answering the question about crofting legislation preferred option 4 (43%) – new crofting legislation, compared to the next-most-favoured option, option 2 (24%) – amending legislation followed by consolidation. Options 3 (amendment and restatement) and 1 (consolidation only) were less preferred. There was no noticeable difference in the proportions of support for option 4 over option 2 in terms of individual responses as a group, compared to stakeholder organisations as a group.

The main stakeholders are split in their support for options 2 and 4; SCF, the Crofting Commission, Scottish Land and Estates and some lawyers favoured option 2 whereas NFUS, Community Land Scotland, HIE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Council and some lawyers preferred option 4 [with caveats – ed].

Two priority areas – absenteeism, misuse

and neglect and Crofting Commission regulatory functions and procedures – were ranked noticeably higher than all other priorities, with the issues of standard securities being the lowest-ranked of the priorities given. Even for these priorities, however, identifying the changes wanted by stakeholders is difficult, due to opposing or contradictory positions held by respondents on specific aspects.

Advice will be put to the cabinet secretary as soon as possible. His decision will be a tough one to make, partly because options 2 and 4 are two very different approaches to dealing with the legislation but also because looking at the comments in responses, the many opposing or conflicting views mean a universally agreeable way forward for crofting legislation is highly unlikely.

A statement from the cabinet secretary indicating the chosen way forward is anticipated in a meeting of the Cross Party Group of Crofting at the end of March.

Support for crofting

THE CROFTING COMMISSION has commissioned a piece of research work into how crofting agriculture is supported.

In particular, the Commission seeks an analysis of the current agricultural and environmental support from a crofting perspective, examining any perceived disadvantages or advantages to crofting. Also importantly, the Commission wishes to examine the feasibility of some form of separate support structure that would be more specific to crofting. In this context, crofting's smaller scale, its regulatory system, its perceived benefits for community, the environment, landscape and biodiversity require consideration.

Gwyn Jones, a director of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, who has almost 20 years of experience as an agricultural advisor in the West Highlands and Islands, will undertake this work. Gwyn Jones has previously carried out research on common grazings and analysed the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme from a crofting perspective. He brings considerable knowledge, including knowledge of other European systems, and dedication to this assignment, and will focus on support for outputs as opposed to prescriptive management.

The Commission considers this work to be of particular importance in the process of developing support structures for the post-Brexit years. It wishes to ensure that crofting is specifically considered in this scenario and that its particular features and attributes are positively recognised. There is awareness that previous schemes have not been viewed as particularly crofter-friendly; being too complex, difficult to access and not tailored to a crofting scale. More qualitative evidence of this would be beneficial and help to construct more appropriate support for the future.

Gwyn Jones will examine data on CAP



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schemes at parish level, aiming to identify as best as possible those claims which relate to crofts, so as to ensure the most accurate picture possible from such official information. In addition there will be examination of how CAP measures have impacted upon crofting, and this will be supplemented by interviews with crofters, advisers and civil servants.

The Commission considers this work to be a vital part of its legislative function to promote the interest of crofting. It also has relevance to its general duty to keep under general review all matters relating to crofts and crofting conditions and to advise Scottish Ministers in that context. While primarily a regulatory body, the Commission recognises that the overall crofting system cannot simply operate by enforcement of regulations.

There is awareness that support mechanisms are important to the future of the crofting system and it is vital that these deliver to best

effect. In doing so, it makes it more feasible for the Commission to deliver its regulatory responsibilities.

Within its consultation on the review of crofting legislation last autumn, the Scottish Government stated that one of the aims of crofting policy was to assist in delivering maintained and balanced land usage and management, including sustainable small scale agriculture. This work will be of particular relevance in assisting with this objective.

The consultation document also advised that it does not include issues that, while possibly of equal or greater importance to those in crofting communities, are non-legislative in nature. The Commission is of the view that this is one of these issues that is of considerable importance to crofting communities and their future.

The research will be completed by the end of June 2018.

Crofters billed for business rates on sporting rights they do not hold



CROFTERS ARE receiving demands for payment of business rates on sporting rights that the vast majority of them do not have.

It is imperative that local authorities halt the process until this has been sorted out. SCF has received many communications from members who are very anxious over a demand they have received for payment, sometimes of very large amounts of money.

The majority of crofters are tenants and do not hold the sporting rights of the land they rent. There

will be a tiny number of owner-occupiers who do hold sporting rights, who will be liable for rates but who can apply for Small Business Rates Relief. But most do not hold sporting rights. So why are they being sent demands for payment?

Apparently the Scottish Assessors Association was charged with compiling a valuation roll, a register of business rates for sporting rights – sporting being a potential source of business income. We are told that they attempted to write to all occupiers of land, or those that they could get an address for, asking if they hold the sporting

rights. Information on the occupier of land was provided by Scottish Government, SNH and Forest Enterprise. As far as we know the Crofting Commission was not consulted.

Many crofters did not receive this request, did not understand what it was or thought it was for the landowner. Whatever the reason, if the crofter did not refute it, the assessor set a rateable value which was passed to the local authority, which issued a demand for payment.

Crofters faced with a demand for payment of rates for sporting rights need to be aware that a response to the demand is still legally due even if they do not hold the rights. If no action is taken by the crofter then recovery of the deemed debt could be put in the hands of sheriff officers, who will add their charges to the amount to be recovered.

Crofters who do not hold sporting rights should contact their assessor to let them know that they do not. They can appeal to have their details taken off the valuation roll. The local independent assessor's contact details can be found at www.saa.gov.uk/contactlists.

Crofters **must** also contact their local authority without delay. The local authority will advise on what the course of action will be. We are told that it could be paying the bill then applying for relief which could bring the bill down to zero; and so it gets reimbursed. This does sound like bureaucracy gone completely whacky. The SCF is asking all local authorities to put a moratorium on the demands with immediate effect and then sort it out.

There are very few crofters who hold sporting rights and it seems very shoddy to have issued these threatening letters wholesale instead of taking the time and trouble to identify who in fact holds sporting rights, and is therefore liable for paying the rates.

SCF is taking this issue to the Scottish Government.

Food, farming and countryside

THE ROYAL SOCIETY for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce launched the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission in November 2017.

IT IS A major, two-year independent inquiry, funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, established to consider how we can achieve a safe, secure, inclusive food and farming system for the UK, a flourishing rural economy and a sustainable and accessible countryside.

As the UK embarks upon the process of exiting the EU, it's become essential to think afresh about where our food comes from, how we support farming and rural communities and how we invest in the many benefits the countryside provides. What direction should domestic policy take us? How can we assure public health and protect natural assets

through the disruption? How can government, business and society cooperate to support our diverse farming and crofting sector, while revitalising rural communities?

This commission will convene different kinds of conversations, with the power to create new possibilities for action, mindful of the significance of the challenges ahead. Bringing together citizens, producers, businesses and academics from different sectors with diverse perspectives, we'll work together to find common purpose, to identify practical and radical solutions, and make policy proposals which can deliver what the nation needs from food, farming and the countryside.

Keep an eye on the media as there will be events taking place throughout the crofting counties.

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The devastating effects of livestock worrying

THE THIRD national livestock worrying campaign was launched in February, to raise awareness amongst dog owners.

Inspector Jane Donaldson, Police Scotland's rural crime co-ordinator, who provided this article, said, "The campaign runs until the end of May 2018, and highlights to dog owners who live in or walk their dogs in the countryside that they must act responsibly and keep their dogs under close control. We recognise that this is a particularly important time of the year when crofters are busy with spring lambs.

"While the reported livestock worrying crimes reduced last year, down from 179 in 2016 to 130 in 2017, Police Scotland remains focused and committed to reducing these incidents further."

Police Scotland advises crofters to engage with dog walkers, put signs on gateways and paths, alerting them to the presence of sheep and lambs in their fields, and offer alternative routes if possible. Warning notices can be downloaded from www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/Access-management-guidance/signs.

Many reported incidents of livestock worrying are by dogs local to the area, where dogs may be allowed to roam or are known to escape from insecure gardens.

If you know of any dogs not under control, contact the local authority dog warden who can assess the situation and consider issuing a dog control notice. These written notices can be served on owners who do not keep their dogs under proper control, and place control measures such as keeping the dog on a lead or being muzzled in a public place.

Unfortunately there are still reported incidents where livestock keepers were left with no choice but to injure or destroy dogs they caught worrying their stock. This is never a situation any keeper wants to find themselves in, and it can be done only in self-defence, for the protection of any other person, or for the protection of livestock.

Police Scotland urges livestock keepers, and anyone who witnesses livestock worrying, to contact the police on 101 or 999 in an emergency. All reported cases will be thoroughly investigated and those responsible will be reported to the procurator fiscal.



Dogs under control

Unsupervised dogs and sheep do not mix

SCF vice-chair Yvonne White considers this emotive issue.

DOGS SEE sheep as prey, or an amusing fast-moving plaything, and will chase, maim and/or kill them.

Domesticated descendants of wolves, dogs are especially dangerous round livestock when there is more than one, as their predatory instincts come to the fore and they hunt in a pack.

Although overall the number of dogs has shown no large increase, there does appear to be an increase of non-working dogs in the crofting counties. It is vital that all dogs, particularly young excitable ones, are supervised at all times.

As personal experience has shown, it is not good practice to let even a young labrador, the most popular of family pets, alone in a garden where it can jump a fence and have fun bounding about after 'white balls of fluff', resulting in a highly-stressful death for sheep and lambs.

Incidences of sheep worrying are on the increase. 2017 statistics show that insurance claims for attacks on farm animals are at a record high. In Scotland the amount claimed for attacks trebled. Why? Dog-owners can't be bothered to train their dogs or to just keep them on lead.

Spring is the worst time of the year for dogs to be roaming freely. Many city and town parks are now designated dog-free or have small dog-only areas. When dog owners with no countryside knowledge visit, or move to the country, they see open ground with no notices – or if there are notices asking them to

keep dogs on a lead at all times due to livestock in the field, they ignore them – and don't know or care if it is lambing season, or that a pregnant ewe can abort a lamb due to the stress of being worried by a dog. Sheep worrying is highly stressful, cruel for the sheep and upsetting for the crofter.

Dogs can be trained not to chase sheep and should be kept on leads at all times. People do not allow dogs to wander lead-free along a main city road with all its associated dangers, so why let pet dogs wander off the lead on open hill or inbye land with livestock?

Crofters and farmers have the legal right to shoot dogs chasing sheep; but if you do own a gun you do not necessarily have time to rush back to the locked cabinet, load it and get back to the scene of carnage in time to shoot the offending dog.

Taking pictures and reporting any incidents to the police is important. Even when the police take no apparent action against dogs identified as killing lambs (other than a verbal warning to the owner), multiple crofter statements are taken and pictures of the offending dogs provided.

Locally, two dogs worrying and killing sheep were kept indoors for a while then started worrying sheep again, resulting in further deaths. These dogs have gone on to bite a human in the leg, yet no known action other than a further verbal warning was given.

Incidents such as these are of particular concern, as dogs worrying sheep can easily turn on a small child.



Inspector Jane Donaldson

TRAINING

Sheepdog handling skills in Inverness and Skye

THE START of the year is never an easy time to feel motivated to stand out in the cold for six hours solid, but that is exactly what twelve folk chose to do with their Saturday at the end of January.

SCF Training is working with Iain MacKay of Leanach, Culloden, and organised two fantastic training days for twenty people in January and February. The first was at his own place near Inverness and the second at the croft of Gemma Nicholson at South Kilbride, Skye.

Sharon MacLean, originally from Lochbroom and now working near Forres, came to the course and commended Iain to SCF training: "The training day has helped me enormously. Iain gave me a bigger understanding of my dog and how to get the best out of her. This enables me to do my job much more efficiently and with no added stress. With plenty of things to work on at home and maybe another lesson in the future, I feel much more confident and would like to aim for a novice trial this autumn. Thank you to Iain,

Lucy and SCF for an excellent day."

This season there are plenty of courses besides sheepdog training to help those with sheep. In March, Gairloch sees a pre-lamb and ewe health workshop, with two lambing courses in Muir of Ord in April and animal husbandry in June in Argyll. Looking to July we are hoping to run clipping courses as usual and have been in touch with the British Wool Marketing Board to work with them to develop a few other events aimed at crofters.

Top tips from Iain MacKay:

- Don't start training a pup for sheep work until it is about ten months old. That way you can make the training a little more challenging than for a younger pup.
- Try to train in a smaller park to start with. A long rope is handy for giving a dog freedom while the handler still has the ability to control the dog.
- A little bit of practice every day helps you and your dog.



Lots to concentrate on



Leanach Farm, looking down to the viaduct at Clava



Keen to go

TRAINING



Marion MacPherson (Skye crofter), Mairi MacKenzie, Lucy Beattie, Tegan MacKenzie

Fencing course for women

WHOMOULD have expected two dry sunny days at the end of February, and indeed the sight of twelve women constructing a strained-wire fence along the banks of the River Kanaird in Wester Ross?

The course was offered following demand from women trainees for all-female fencing and clipping courses. A crofter from Torridon wanted to do the course "because I wouldn't be one woman edged to the side as a hobbyist. This strongly appeals to me as it is specifically for women and I need to fence an area. If I had to engage a contractor I couldn't afford to fence the whole area, which would set back my plans significantly."

Tutors Brian and Carrie are both crofters themselves and have been involved in fencing contracts and training young people in a local social enterprise. The day was the first of its kind and we welcomed a visit from well-known sheep producer Joyce Campbell from Armadale, chair of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce; crofting commissioner Mairi MacKenzie; and BBC Alba broadcast journalist Maggie MacKinnon.

Attendees were delighted with the course and were able to complete a 50m stretch of stock fencing.

"I now feel confident to tackle a line of fencing – before I wouldn't have done so"

"It's great to learn with a group of women"

Patrick Krause, who leads the Women in Agriculture Taskforce training sub-group, said "The course is inspired by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce that was set up following research commissioned by Scottish Government, which identified a pressing need for more support to training for women in agriculture, including all-female training courses and courses being made 'women-friendly'.

"The research also identified other far-reaching objectives such as including women in positions of leadership. SCF has a good history of equality in its governance, having a mixed-gender board and women in the position of chair of the organisation over the years – a lesson to other larger agricultural organisations, which are specifically mentioned in the report as failing in this regard.

"The taskforce will prepare guidance on making training more accessible for women and SCF will be managing further training courses in skills areas of interest to women. All credit to Lucy Beattie and Tina Hartley, SCF training managers, for arranging the training."

All photos courtesy of Joyce Campbell. The event was held at the croft of member Duncan MacColl.



Digging the strainer hole



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Sine Soska with pup

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Lucy Beattie fencing

Women in agriculture

IT WILL NOT have escaped your notice that this February marked 100 years since women were given the vote – or at least some women were.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 was an important law because it allowed some women to vote for the very first time; and it also allowed all men over the age of 21 to vote too. So we, quite smugly, like to think that we have equality in this country.

A fascinating piece of research was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Government on Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector.

This shows that, sadly, we in agriculture do not have anything to be smug about. Numerous cases were exposed of gender inequity in the family, on the holding, in the mart, in organisations, in training; in fact in every aspect of the agricultural sector. It makes uncomfortable, though familiar, reading. The report can be found online.

Interestingly, crofting – whilst not faultless by any means – came out considerably better than the industrial farming sector. It may be that in the nature of smaller holdings, with multiple enterprises and income streams, men often

need to work away, and women actually run the croft. If you have other ideas please do let us know.

Following on from the research, cabinet secretary for the rural economy Fergus Ewing set up a Women in Agriculture taskforce, chaired by himself and Sutherland hill farmer Joyce Campbell. SCF sits on the taskforce. Our remit is to look at how best to implement recommendations from the report.

There is a long way to go, but we must have the ambition that Scottish agriculture will move steadily towards gender equality.

Take part in a kitchen table talk



Bella Crowe of the Scottish Food Coalition explains

WHAT BOTHERS you about how our food system works?

And what do you think we should do about it? Scotland is on the cusp of potentially transformative changes to our food system. Later this year the government will consult on a 'Good Food Nation Bill' – a new law to put our food on a different footing. We have heard for many years about how individuals should make better food choices, but the scale of the issues demands structural interventions.

We didn't reduce smoking by education alone. What are the changes we could make to our food system so that it is better for

people's health, for livelihoods, and for our environment too?

At the moment, it's all to play for and the Scottish Food Coalition is inviting everyone in Scotland to take part in a kitchen table talk to share your concerns for the food system and priorities for action.

There is a simple guide on the website with all the information you need to host a kitchen table talk. Get your family, friends or community around and discuss what you think are the big issues, and where your priorities for government action are.

Then fill in the simple form on the website to share your ideas. You can also fill out the form with your own views, but discussions can be a lot of fun.

www.foodcoalition.scot/kitchen-table-talks.html

LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Local slaughter for high-provenance meat

SCOTTISH EXTENSIVELY reared meat is justifiably highly regarded and it is widely agreed that the niche, high-provenance meat market is the way forward for Scottish localities and for Scotland, whatever happens regarding Europe.

Yet high-quality meat producers' efforts are stymied by having a scarcity of local abattoirs and thus compromised traceability and provenance. Animal welfare suffers, with vast transport distances, and the added cost of travelling to and from the abattoir can make direct selling unprofitable for small producers.

A crofter in the north of Skye will have to take stock for slaughter over 120 miles to Dingwall, then go home, then go back for the meat. So the animals have a three to four-hour trailer ride and the crofter drives a total of 12-16 hours.

After seven years of campaigning for a micro-abattoir on Skye, and a huge input of voluntary time and effort, the community group now has fully-costed, detailed plans and a site with planning permission. There is public money available for just such a food processing, marketing and cooperation initiative, but funding is restricted by the Scottish Government's interpretation of EU state aid rules.

Under EU rules a case can be argued for there being market failure and that the abattoir will operate as a not-for-profit service to the crofting and farming community in a fragile rural area. Furthermore, the objectives of ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare and traceability are in line with Scottish Government food policy.

Other European countries use micro-abattoirs



Romesdal Highlander

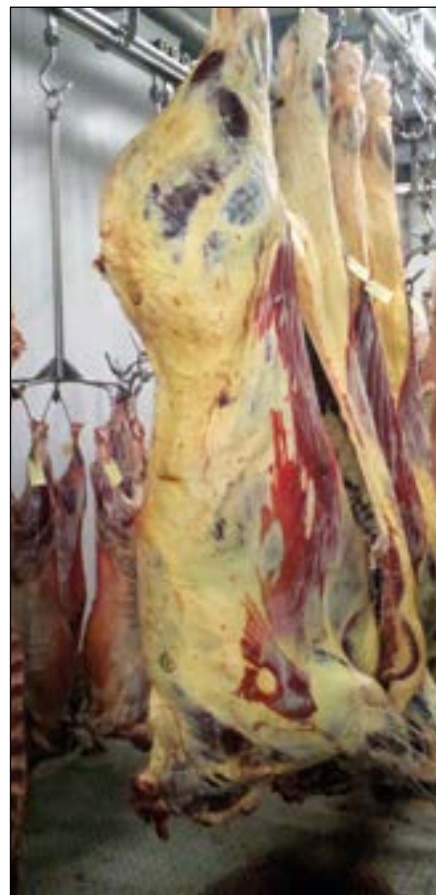
to great socio-economic effect and have a much higher density of slaughter facilities. Even prior to regulation by the EU, strict laws on the transport of animals for slaughter in Austria ensured that animals were not transported over long distances. A sense of responsibility, both for animal and small farm welfare, and a combination of numerous small slaughterhouse and meat cutting plants helped make Austria one of the leading meat specialists in Europe.

Sweden also pays a lot of attention to the distance live animals have to be transported and to the welfare of their farming communities – see the article on page 17. If other countries can make the decision to protect animals and local economies, why not Scotland?

If Scotland's quality meat industry, the backbone of Scottish agriculture, is to thrive post-Brexit, producers serving local, niche and high-quality markets must be enabled to do so. In the crofting areas that means having access to local abattoir services, derogations for local production and support from the Scottish Government. Without them, some of the country's iconic designated food products will be at risk, as well as the culture, landscape and environment of extensive livestock production.

In this issue we feature a number of members whose quality meat businesses have been hindered by lack of local abattoir provision.

The Humane Slaughter Association's position on the transport of food animals continues to be that they should be slaughtered as close as possible to the point where they are raised. This is the only way that any risk to their welfare can be kept to a minimum. As long as high animal welfare standards are in place, the Humane Slaughter Association sees value in maintaining local abattoirs, as this may help to minimise transport times.



Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems Ltd
Aberdeen AB11 5DE

Global situation

IN A SITUATION with an increasing dominance by global food supply chains, it comes as no surprise that local food supply chains are under increasing threat from financial pressures.

It is ironic that just a few years after positive talk of local food supplies became part of general media stories, the situation in the Highlands and Islands has become fragmented between wonderful fresh local food availability on the one hand and the collapse of traditional supply chains on the other.

The slow and chronic loss of abattoir facilities in the north has in part been facilitated by oversupply of large facilities further south, and their ability to manage low unit costs of handling cattle and sheep. Any abattoir is an expensive facility, and livestock haulage south is, at the moment, very competitive. Wider social and environmental costs do not enter short-term decision making.

The overall problem for northern producers with small numbers of cattle and sheep is that the producer is paying those transport costs, typically into markets where their livestock are seen as less attractive to buyers than finished cattle from further south. The irony is that the quality of the meat from the more extensively reared livestock in the north can be very good, and demand for product in the north from locals and the tourist trade has great

potential to grow.

The facts are that extensively-grazed livestock, consuming a wide variety of plants, produce meat that is relatively high in omega-3 fatty acids and relatively low in omega-6 fatty acids compared with intensive grass and cereal-based ruminants. These are positive attributes of meat for human nutrition. The crofting system also has a low input of fossil fuels compared with many systems, at least until the livestock are put into a wagon for a long trip south. The land management aspects of Highland production can also be positive. But current thinking for many would be that Highland production is not efficient.

How do we define efficiency?

We know that many people, and much time and money, have been spent on the debates and the sometime provision of processing facilities in the Highlands and Islands. The present situation does not support crofting livestock. Is there a need to push the debate harder from a strategic point of view? Centralised facilities in the hands of major companies may produce low unit costs, but as the Scottish pig and poultry sectors know, the risks from external sources are high.

LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Seven years on, Skye Abattoir sees light at the end of the tunnel as it prepares to launch a major funding drive

A LOCAL VOLUNTEER group has successfully registered Skye and Lochalsh Micro Abattoir Limited as a community benefit society regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and is seeking pledges of financial support before launching a community share issue as part of a major funding drive.

The project is at a "shovel ready" stage, with detailed planning approval in place and an application for a building warrant submitted.

Speaking on behalf of the society, interim chair Donald Mordie said, "We have reached a hugely significant stage in the delivery of our project. The successful registration with the FCA is crucial as we seek to reinstate a service that will empower our local crofting and farming communities to re-energise and re-balance traditional production and local meat supply.

Our next steps are to begin a fund-raising drive and we hope that the community of Skye and Lochalsh will invest in and benefit from our society.

"By registering as a community benefit society with charitable status, members of the Skye and Lochalsh community who have an interest in animal welfare and local meat production, and who are keen to support the environmental and welfare benefits of shorter food supply chains, can support us by investing in community shares.

"A community share issue is a relatively small but essential portion of the funds required for



our project. We aim to raise £200,000 out of a total £1.6m through our initial share offering. A successful share issue will demonstrate the

local support for the project and act as leverage for the other funders, as well as enabling the delivery of key milestones in the capital build plan."

It is anticipated that the funds raised from the community share issue will be allocated to purchase the site and carry out preliminary works. If the total project funding requirement is not reached, all money invested through the share issue will be returned.

The term community shares refers to withdrawable share capital; a form of share capital unique to co-operative and community benefit society legislation. This type of share capital can only be issued by co-operative societies and charitable community benefit societies. As with all investments there is an element of risk.

Community shares have been used to save local shops, finance renewable energy schemes, transform community facilities, support local food growing, and build stronger, more vibrant, and independent communities. Since 2009, almost 100,000 people have invested over £100m to support 350 community businesses throughout the UK.

Skye and Lochalsh Micro Abattoir Ltd is now seeking to log notes of interest and pledges from groups, individuals and businesses by registering an interest through the Skye and Lochalsh Micro Abattoir website <http://skyelochalshabattoir.com/sign-up/>.

Small-scale production of beef and lamb in western Scotland

IN LIGHT OF a rising population and an increasingly resource-constrained world, it is important to understand how small farms can contribute towards supplying the demand for food and nutrition security.

Researchers from the James Hutton Institute invited small producers and other interested parties in Oban to discuss how food is distributed from crofts, the challenges farmers face and possible measures to address them.

Many crofters in Argyll produce cattle and sheep, the majority of which are sent to the east coast and further south to be finished on farms where the grazing season is longer and supplementary feed costs are lower.

Participants, even though they felt that there were opportunities for increasing production levels, voiced constraints including red tape in grant applications; difficulties in accessing a local abattoir; and the high cost of overwintering animals. In addition, time constraints and age-

related issues were also discussed.

Little locally-produced meat is supplied directly to hotels, retailers and consumers within the region. Participants felt that local food consumption should be promoted through education, particularly of school age children, as the younger generation is thought not to know how to deal with "real" food.

Nevertheless, they also thought that BREXIT constitutes an opportunity to revisit Scottish Government policy and rebalance the food system in favour of small local producers and consumers.



The meeting took place within the scope of the EU project SALSA – Small farms, small food businesses, sustainable food and nutrition security. Visit the project website and sign up for updates: <http://www.salsa.uevora.pt/en/stay-informed/>



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LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Great meat is all about on-the-plate quality – and a nearby abattoir

Like every crofter in Scotland, writes Brian Cameron from Elchies, Craigellachie, there's always another job to do – then there's the jobs on the farm.

DIVERSIFICATION HAS been the watchword of crofters for more than half a century and Elchies exemplifies that perfectly.

In addition to a busy accountancy practice and a sports consultancy business, Brian Cameron and his wife Julie run one of the UK's largest goat meat enterprises.

"In total we farm around thirty-seven acres in croft-sized small fields. We started from a belief that great meat is all about 'on-the-plate' quality and that supermarket meat often falls short in wholesomeness and palatability. We wanted to market something better. Being traditionalists, we started with sheep and found our hogget and mutton sold particularly well.

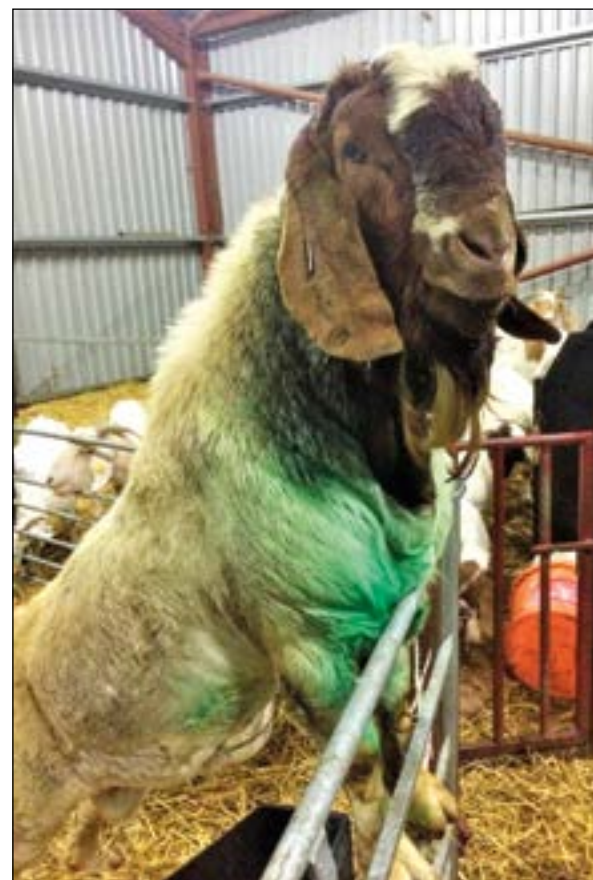
"Although we still supply this to a dedicated group of customers, our venture into goat meat has been an epic journey. This year we will supply around 350 carcasses into a 50:50 mixture of direct/indirect retail and restaurants around the UK. Social media has been our sole marketing platform and has secured us regular customers from locals in Aberlour to Michelin-star restaurants in London. The real value

of social media is that it makes each individual a personal customer".

Goat meat is the most-eaten red meat in the world and, as well as its great taste and texture, it is a very healthy alternative, being lower in fat, cholesterol and calories, weight for weight, than chicken, yet with higher levels of iron, potassium, proteins and Vitamin B and B12 – in short, a truly wholesome meat.

"In ten years our knowledge of Boer goats – the Aberdeen Angus of meat goats – has grown immeasurably and we have developed practices that ensure absolute on-the-plate quality. For example goats are stressed by travel, and stress at slaughter time causes a rise in pH levels which in turn damages meat quality.

It is important to ensure that abattoir trips are short in distance – published research suggests less than one hour – and relatively stress-free. Another problem is cold-shortening due to the lack of subcutaneous fat on goats. Caused by rapid cooling post-slaughter this makes the meat tough and stringy. Over the years we have worked with Scotbeef of Inverurie to optimise the whole slaughter process to avoid these problems. Without an abattoir within an hour's travel and the ability to respond to these specific needs our business would fail."



LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Can we really keep it local?



We started our crofting journey two years ago after purchasing a semi-derelict croft on the edge of a windy hill in the Cairngorms National Park, writes Lynn Cassells.

OUR PLANS FOR Lynbreck are ambitious and extensive – we may be little but we're aiming high. We're surfing the wave of nature-friendly farming with a goal to provide the highest-quality produce. But in a consumerist world where cost and ease of purchase rules the roost, we need to shout out loud about that added value we can offer.

Added value for us comes from what we can harness directly from nature. It comes from the healthy, untilled soils that grow the nutritious plants which our livestock graze on. Added value also comes from a life where our animals can live without fear or stress and can express their natural instincts, which we use to manage, restore and maintain the health of our land.

We celebrate integrating our habitats under one whole farm unit – we see all of this too as adding value. Our cows will be only grass fed and we're transitioning to organic pig and hen feed. We're working towards a model where we butcher our own animals and cure and smoke our own meat, again adding value all the way.

We spend hours of our lives promoting Lynbreck on social media. We have our own logo, business cards, bespoke produce labels and a website. We deliver direct to customers, taking the time to chat and explain where our produce comes from. Excellent customer service is what we aim for. We want to work more closely with other local producers like us – supporting and promoting each other, sharing time and equipment, knowledge and experience. All the time, adding value.

But adding all this value gives us challenges. Organic feed and food processing equipment is expensive. Working two jobs to make life pay outside of crofting is tiring and time-consuming.

We have years ahead of us before we can see a real profit margin, all the time investing any spare money we have into building our business.

At Lynbreck, we are lucky to live a 10-minute drive from our nearest abattoir. We know our good fortune compared to crofters on the isles and more remote areas. But for us, the ability to slaughter on site or at a local set-up more suitable for small scale producers is a priority service we want as well.

For all of us who really care about the life and death of our animals, long journeys as a result of closed abattoirs to larger commercial set-ups is far from ideal. It takes away value and that is unfair.

All of these challenges aside, we feel positive about the future and proud to be a part of the crofting movement. We want to work with others like us to make the little people the ones with the loudest voice for the naturally-added-value produce crofting can provide.



LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Direct selling challenges

Cara Cameron outlines her experience.

HIGHLAND CROFT Produce, based near Loch Shin, Lairg was established in 2006.

We made the decision to produce lamb and sell direct to the consumer, with the aim of a true field-to-plate idealism. Lamb prices were at an all-time low and we had to find a way of ensuring our croft enterprise would be sustainable, but would also add value to our croft and our community.

It was always our aim to provide consumers with lamb all year round, by installing a walk-in chiller/freezer room. When we considered the cost implications, it was not a viable option until we could produce enough lamb to sustain the costs. We had a dilemma on our hands. Our business was thriving, but our hands were tied because we could not afford to install the facilities we needed to grow the business. Without the facility our business was being held back in terms of growth. Funding, no matter how we tried, was never available; agencies could not see the value in our products so would not support us.

We scaled back to seasonal lamb, reared and slaughtered then butchered and delivered, using our nearest slaughter-house and butcher facility, which was 45 miles each way. This worked well for a number of years, but then we started to get

customer feedback that the butchering was not up to previous quality. So started the next hurdle.

How could we continue to market our product as being of the best quality when the butchery was letting us down? In addition, livestock movement rules had changed. As we lived more than 40 miles from our local abattoir, we now had to sit a test to show we were competent to move our livestock safely. How many more barriers do we need to face?

I looked into a mobile abattoir and butchery facility. Moving livestock from its holding, with some crofters travelling up to two hours to use the only abattoir we have north of Inverness, was surely not great for animal welfare – let alone the crofter's purse.

After many discussions, and persuading a local councillor to join me in my efforts to establish a mobile system, we started a Facebook Highlands and Islands mobile slaughter house project page, to gauge the interest from crofters Highland-wide. To my surprise it did not take long before we had interest coming from Moray and other areas south of the Highlands.

It seemed I had found the answer to everyone's problems. But how do you progress such a big project, with a lot of time and effort, but no funding? The project has not progressed in a number of years, but I am still hopeful that someone will see

the value in such a project and will approach me with the support we need.

This project will, I'm sure, enhance so many croft businesses and address the issue of time and animal welfare.





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LOCAL ABATTOIRS FEATURE

Sweden triples numbers of abattoirs since entering the EU in 1995

OUT OF Sweden's 10 million citizens, 170,000 people are involved in agriculture on a full or part-time basis and agricultural businesses account for 1.2% of the labour force.

There are still 63,000 active farms, half the number in 1970. Horses are nowadays more numerous than the 300,000 dairy cows. On top of that 200,000 beef cattle make up a total number of all classes of cattle to 1,500,000. Pigs number 1,400,000 and sheep 600,000. All spread out in a vast and sparsely-populated country which has had one of the fastest urbanisation rates in the world.

In the late 80s and early 90s, when Sweden was adapting prior to membership, the EU slaughter industry was heavily subsidised and strictly controlled by quotas. The overall political goal since the 60s had been to have farms occupying the family and providing an income equal to that of an industrial worker.

Following entry to the EU in 1995, there were approximately 50 slaughter plants. The agriculture sector saw radical change, as the old system of farmer-owned co-ops faced hard and rapid restructuring with an attendant loss of farmer-owned capital investment. The proposals to slim down and centralise abattoir services raised fear and questions all over Sweden and ignited many private operations to try and establish local slaughter facilities.

The country stretches from beyond the Arctic circle to the grain-growing plains in the south, a distance of over 2,000 km, with huge variation in climate zones, the middle and north favouring grazing. In the 90s many abattoirs closed and government plans were for a handful of plants which were to be located close to the grain-growing areas, as at that time grain-fed meat was seen to be the way forward.

In many places farmers who saw great potential in what they were producing came together to form their own slaughter business, promoting local production and aiming for a quality market. Despite the fall in the number of farms, the slaughter industry is now well established with approximately 150 EU-standard abattoirs of all sizes for domestic stock, with a total of 283 listed facilities, the balance dealing with wild livestock such as reindeer,



Deep-frozen dairy farm in Dalarna



Swedish Red Poll and Fjellko waiting for home-produced haylage



Swedish Red Poll cow and May-born calf

moose and other small game.

The location of the plants now better reflects the best areas for natural-pasture-produced meat, with attendant rural development spin-offs, but it has been a long hard walk.

Siljan Chark is a shareholding company. The former agricultural co-op owns 39% and the balance is held by other local interests. 47% is farmer-owned, by the 120 individuals who gathered the €150,000 needed back in 1992 to save the local abattoir, contrary to advice provided. The nearest alternative was some 11 hours travel time away. Today this business has more than 100 employees, including 35 skilled butchers, with a turnover of 20 million euros and a good reputation, selling the well-recognised meat brand "Love Locally" throughout the country.

"... many small-scale slaughterhouses have grown in strength and have now tripled in number since entry to the EU."

Another example is a one-man business who fought for nine years to establish his own farm slaughterhouse. The main issue for him was where the toilet facilities were located. Food and safety regulations would not allow the use of the existing farmhouse facilities and wanted a separate fully-equipped staffroom. Pointing to the 5,000 working-farm-sized slaughterhouses in Austria, he finally won his case. From there many small-scale slaughterhouses have grown in strength and have now tripled in number since entry to the EU.

With good abattoirs, there is a good future for specialised niche production, such as indigenous breeds, special cuts, long-maturing systems and traditional techniques of preserving meat – all adding value to the local economy and increasing the viability of even small-scale farms.

*Angus McHattie
Breakish, Skye*

*Pauline Palmcrantz
Siljansnas, Dalarna, Sweden*

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ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog



A hungry year

As we all know in these days of climate instability, every year is different for the crofting horticulturist.

At the time of writing at the end of February, a typical long, dark, wet winter here in the northwest has given way to stunning days of clear, dry weather with night frosts and low daytime temperatures despite the glorious sunshine. So the start to the growing season looks like being late. This is in total contrast to last year when we were picking asparagus at the start of March.

One of our main summer crops is tomatoes. In order to be successful this far north, they need an early start to ensure cropping from late June onwards. They are sown in a heated propagator on a windowsill in the house in as much sun as available, and this year we are two weeks later than usual. Given a halfway reasonable year, they will catch up.

It's turning out to be a hungry year, as everyone will know from their hay and feed bills. The small rodents that inhabit one of our polytunnels are no exception. We made an optimistic early sowing of peas in pots on the propagating bench. The next day, every one of a hundred and seventy seeds had been neatly excavated and removed, which was an impressive night's work for a small creature. That wasn't all. The animal also dug up our leek seeds. So, start again, but with sheets of glass placed over the pots.

Raspberry canes arrive

We have just taken delivery of a quantity of bare-rooted raspberry canes. Given the weather conditions and the general pressure of winter work, the site for these plants was not ready. This is not too great a problem as they can be heeled in for a couple of weeks inside a polytunnel. The rasps will be planted outside, as we have found

that they are highly susceptible to pests when grown under cover. They will need a well-drained, rich, neutral-to-acidic soil, as well as post and wire supports. Because I am impatient, we have ordered a primocane, or autumn-fruiting, variety – which produces fruit on the current season's growth. With the summer-fruiting varieties you have to wait an extra year.

All outdoor soft fruit is very popular with blackbirds and starlings, so protective netting is a very good idea. The plan is to re-use the skeleton of an old polytunnel and cover it with green horticultural netting or mesh, which will give a degree of shelter as well as bird protection.

SCF's publication *Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofters* gives in-depth information on soft fruit growing in the Highlands and Islands in Chapter 7.

Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters



Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters

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ON THE CROFT

SNH outline action plan for control of geese in Outer Hebrides

AT THE SCF meeting in Benbecula last November, where crofters gave their views on wild geese to senior SNH staff, a list of essential actions required to stop the imminent catastrophe was composed and this was sent to the Scottish Government's National Goose Management Review Group (NGMRG). It comprised:

- reinstate goose population control scheme immediately;
- redistribute funds to protect this internationally-acclaimed habitat;
- redeploy SNH staff at key times;
- look at more effective methods than just shooting;
- input Uist situation to SNH policy report;
- update law – make it fit for purpose.

SNH was asked by the NGMRG chair to come up with an action plan. In January the proposals below were sent to the Uist goose management group by SNH.



Additional counting and population monitoring

Monthly counts are being undertaken in Uist to coincide with international count data. These, along with roost counts and tagging of barnacle geese, will enable us to understand the movements of barnacle geese between islands and ensure that any scaring activity can be assessed at a population level to comply with legal requirements.

Further analysis of bag limits following winter count

We have undertaken additional analysis of the bag limit, taking account of recent count data, and will be aiming to issue an additional licence to support scaring to address serious agricultural damage in January.

Additional non-lethal scaring equipment/activity

Laser and audio scaring equipment is being tested on North Uist. Laser equipment has not proved wholly effective where currently deployed, but it will be tested further over the coming months. If either of these options proves effective we will seek funding for more equipment to be deployed in crofting areas.

The reaction from the Uists goose management group is that £8,000 is barely enough to maintain the current population of 5000; it will not be enough to reduce the population. The last year of the government's adaptive management goose population control scheme was funded at £40,000.

An SCF representative from Benbecula will be meeting with the cabinet secretary for environment, Roseanna Cunningham, and Western Isles MSP Alasdair Allen, to discuss this issue.

Greylag geese

Additional resources to support population reduction and study on future funding options

SNH has increased support for population control to £8,000. We will also explore providing staff support for some additional control in spring, ahead of the breeding season. Support for practical control will continue over next winter, with additional funding for population monitoring. We have committed to fund the total cost of the study into future management options for local management of greylag geese. This will explore the opportunities and obstacles to self-funding this work in future.

Revised population thresholds

We have proposed a reduced population target from 3,600 – 4,400 down to 1,800 – 2,200. We believe a population of this size could be maintained with reduced shooting effort and would substantially decrease the impact of geese on crofts.

Work to explore expanded goose sale

We will be working on options for expanding sale of goose carcasses in 2018. This will initially look at how increased marketing online can be supported, but will investigate what controls would need to be in place to support long-term extended sales.

Barnacle geese

Independent assessment of damage

We will shortly be setting a contract to independently review the damage caused by barnacle geese, to allow a full assessment of the economic impact on crofting activity. We will seek input from the local group in preparing the contract specification to ensure that it captures the full range of impacts.

Join the Sea eagle management scheme

Ross Lilley, Oban-based operations manager for SNH, who facilitates the sea eagle management scheme, gave us this update.

CURRENTLY THERE are two active local sea eagle management stakeholder groups, one covering Argyll and Lochaber and one covering Skye and Lochalsh.

A number of members of the Skye group left recently and the intention is to seek some new members before holding the next meeting. We are working with the other stakeholders on the group to do this and our intention is to target some of the crofters we have been working closely with on trialling management techniques. They will be able to bring their experiences to the group.

At the start of the scheme there was a meeting of a group in Gairloch, but it has not met again, although we have been dealing with individual applicants to the scheme from the Gairloch area since then.

We would be happy to meet with other groups if the need arises. Meantime, we encourage crofters and farmers to contact their local SNH office if they are experiencing sea eagle issues and then we can offer them individual support under the scheme.

There is a national stakeholder group comprising representatives from the key organisations and includes the chairs of the local stakeholder groups.

ON THE CROFT

Common grazings committee structures

SCF council member Alistair Danter explores the options and challenges.

THERE ARE over 1000 common grazings in the crofting counties covering just under 600,000 hectares, while the number of actively-managed grazings with committees in place is around 50%.

SGRPID refers to the committee's structure as a business, but as part of the registration process the clerk's national insurance number is recorded. The legal definition of current grazings committee structure is probably closer to an unincorporated voluntary association. A degree of strength is given once formal regulations are adopted. However, there are still significant gaps in the legal structure given that: a) we are in the 21st century and b) opportunities potentially available for common grazings committees to carry out local development initiatives require more than an unincorporated body.

Traditionally, common grazings committees dealt with the management of the grazings for agricultural purposes linked to livestock production and peat digging. The introduction of crofter forestry schemes took this a step further, although the activity was still very much a primary economic



© Martin Benson – Northton, Isle of Harris

initiative carried out within the context of the local socio-economic environment. Developments towards the end of the 20th century opened up the opportunity of other non-agricultural uses, most notably in the area of renewable energy. Other developments have included affordable housing, tourism initiatives and deer management schemes.

In the face of these new development opportunities the existing structure is not really fit for purpose, as the liability of committee members in an unincorporated voluntary association remains total. Using an unincorporated association

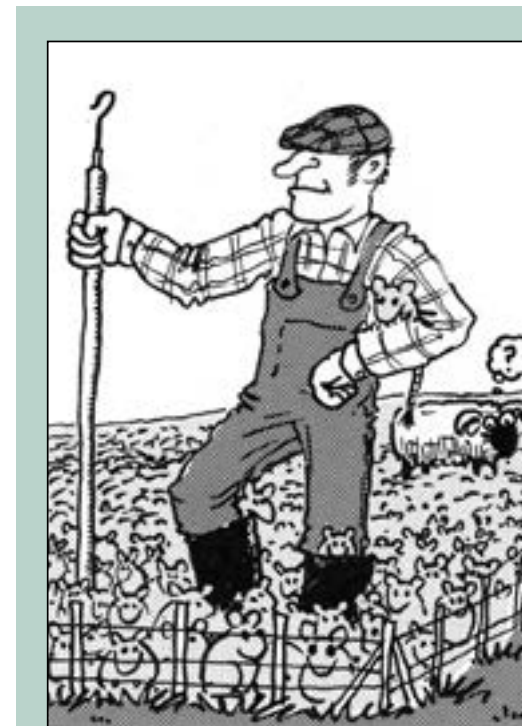
as a structure for a committee wishing to develop a renewable energy scheme, where the risks and relationships with outside bodies are complicated, would not be advisable – as unincorporated groups cannot hold property in their own name, enter into contracts or undertake legal proceedings.

Taking the wider perspective, voluntary associations form part of the third sector, one that has grown significantly since the 1970s in the UK, having taken over the running of activities and initiatives that were previously considered the role of local or national government. Along with this evolution is the development

and use of a variety of legal structures that can be used to protect and support individuals involved in a more complicated economic activity. This is referred to as becoming incorporated. Incorporated groups can hold property, employ people, take loans, defend and/or take legal proceedings. Becoming incorporated effectively gives the organisation a legal entity of its own that is separate from the individuals involved in the organisation.

Current options for incorporated structures include charitable trust; company limited by guarantee; Scottish incorporated charitable organisation; community interest company; industrial and provident society; and friendly society. Each has its own specific attributes and groups should seek legal advice before adopting any particular structure.

While becoming a regulated common grazings committee is a positive step, there are further considerations required if a committee wishes to engage in development activities beyond simple grazings management. It is to be hoped that the proposed ongoing review of crofting legislation will consider the legal structure of common grazings committees, as their development potential is significant.



© Chris Tyler

Rabbit control

Dear editor

I represent a group of close-knit, like-minded friends with a passion for catching rabbits in the traditional manner, using ferrets, nets and well-disciplined dogs. We are normally six in total, with an average age of fifty and collectively we have in the region of two hundred years' experience of rabbit control between us. We do not profess to be professional, nor do we do this for any financial gain.

We consider ourselves an effective resource when it comes to thinning out high populations of problematic rabbits. In the past we have helped land owners under the threat of compulsory gassings from DEFRA, by clearing over one hundred rabbits a day. We are prepared to travel anywhere in the UK and in particular Scotland, where we have been fortunate to experience much good hunting in the past.

We normally dedicate one week each year, usually in late autumn, for our trips. These have to be planned well in advance to enable us to consult with land owners/tenants to determine the extent of their problem, book time off of work and arrange suitable accommodation. All members of our group have the utmost respect for the land on which we hunt and all accompanying dogs are 100% steady with all forms of livestock. To enable our services to be noticeably effective, the resident rabbit population needs to be sufficiently large enough to be causing land owners or tenants real problems that warrant the rabbits being culled.

We consider ourselves to be genuine, respectful and friendly people with an overriding passion for our hobby and feel that if our services could be valued by any crofters experiencing genuine rabbit problems, we would relish the opportunity to prove our worth.

SCF HQ has our contact details.

ON THE CROFT

New ideas for grassland

There is considerable excitement surrounding new digital, precision technologies being developed for agriculture. However, there are other aspects of production from grassland that are open to some new thinking and David Lawson, grassland specialist at SRUC, considers a few of these.

IN THE November issue of *The Crofter*, Janette Sutherland of SAC Consulting (part of SRUC) reported on trials being carried out on Skye to look at the potential for using a coated-urea, slow-release nitrogen fertiliser on grassland. The aim is to encourage a greater, more gradual uptake of nitrogen by the grass and reduce nitrogen loss by leaching.

Initial grass growth results in 2017 from the slow-release fertiliser were encouraging when compared to ammonium nitrate. Further trials are planned during 2018 to assess the cost benefit from using the product.

The Skye Grassland Group is funded by Universities Innovation Fund, from Scottish Funding Council.

On the Isle of Lewis, trials are currently being undertaken to re-assess grass and clover species sown on peat soils on the west coast of the island. On such soils the traditional perennial rye grasses can struggle to retain a presence in a grass sward. Through funding from the Lewis Endowment Fund, we are testing grass species that are more tolerant of wet soil conditions, such as timothy and reed canary grass.

Timothy is already used as part of many grass seed mixtures in Scotland. Reed canary grass varieties are used in many parts of Canada and in Scandinavia as a forage grass for wet, acidic soil conditions. In addition, on Lewis, birdsfoot

trefoil is being trialled as a legume species which can tolerate more acidic soil conditions than the more traditional white clover.

At a more fundamental level, the concept that meat, milk and wool are the principal outputs from grassland is being challenged. Grass contains protein, sugars and fibre along with a number of other potentially useful products such as silica. In the 1940s a considerable amount of research was carried out in the UK to extract grass protein for feeding to poultry and pigs.

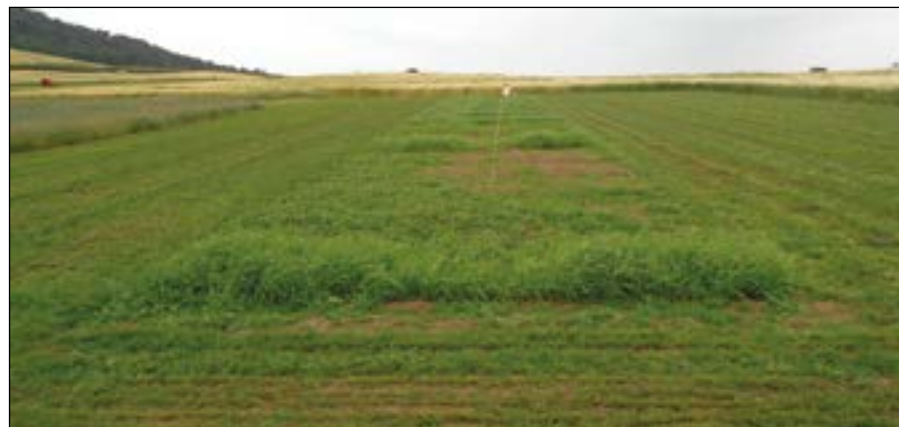
Interest in grass protein declined as the cost of imported soya and other plant protein fell. However, there has been a recent resurgence in interest and we are currently investigating the potential for extracted grass protein as a feedstock for aquaculture and for poultry production.

For such a process to be financially viable it is important that all components are marketable. So high-value markets are needed for the fibre and soluble sugar, after the protein has been

extracted. Through funding from the Scottish Government RESAS division, we are already looking at these; and it isn't beyond the bounds of possibility that in the future your dram will be coming from grass!



Reed canary grass in SRUC trials



How can crofting landscapes deliver for pollinators?

Gillian McKnight of SAC explains

THE CROFTING counties, especially the north west and Outer Hebrides, are a stronghold for two rare bumblebees, great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) and the large carder bee (*Bombus muscorum*).

Bumblebees are important pollinators for many wild flowers, so are a significant part of the food chain. If you have a vegetable patch on the croft, the bumblebees may be helping you with your tomato and raspberry crops.

Traditional crofting practices, notably resting of grassland and machair over the summer for cropping, are ideal for these pollinator species: a period of no grazing encourages flowering, which provides nectar and pollen sources. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust has found that the best crofting practices for bumblebees are silage-making and winter grazing.

However, with changes in crofting practice such as more grazing on the inbye over the summer, reduced species diversity in grass fields, and less hay and silage cutting, these important bumblebees are now needing help.



Bombus muscorum

Crofters can help bumblebees survive by ensuring that there is enough food for the bees through the spring and summer by reducing or removing grazing on species-rich grasslands and machair habitats.

Crofters can also restore these habitats by overseeding with a suitable mix which has been shown to increase the number of foraging bumblebees.



Bombus distinguendus

Crofters in a corncrake scheme can sow red clover and knapweed into early and late cover for corncrakes, to make these areas more attractive for bumblebees.

Hedges with flowering plants and native species eg hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, holly, ivy, wild

roses, honeysuckle and crab apple provide a rich and varied source of food as well as cover for nesting and for hibernating queens. Hedges can be supported under agri-environment schemes or CAGS.

Wetlands and ponds are also important habitats for bumblebee food sources such as cuckoo flower, lady's smock and wild mint. If you don't have these habitats on your croft, you can create a new habitat such as a pond.

We wish you all the best in your endeavours to make your crofts a bit friendlier for bumblebees. If you require further advice please do not hesitate to contact the FAS advice line.

For fuller information please see the *Farm Advisory leaflet '10 Steps to Helping Pollinators on Small Units'* www.fas.scot/downloads/10-steps-helping-pollinators-small-units. If you would like a paper version of this please call the FAS helpline on 0300 323 0161.

ON THE CROFT

Guidelines for louping ill in the absence of a vaccine



© Moredun

LOUPING ILL vaccine, successfully developed and initially produced at Moredun in the 1930s, has become temporarily unavailable.

The low stocks of vaccine left have been allocated to vets in areas where louping ill is highly prevalent. The absence of this vaccine is likely to have a major impact on hill sheep farms and grouse moors where louping ill is present. Moredun, along with collaborators from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, MSD, Elanco and Livestock Health Scotland, have produced best-practice guidelines, which can be downloaded from our website: www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/ticks-tickborne-diseases.

Louping ill is a disease caused by louping ill virus (LIV) which is transmitted by ticks and principally seen in sheep and red grouse. Ticks become infected when they feed on a host animal with high levels of LIV in their blood and these high levels

only occur in sheep and grouse for a maximum of five days following infection. Adult sheep which are vaccinated or previously exposed to infected ticks tend to be immune. Lambs of such ewes are protected for the first two to three months of life by colostral antibodies, as long as the lamb receives enough colostrum after birth.

However, it is worth noting that this is not the case for tick-borne fever (TBF) where protection is not derived from maternal antibodies. LIV and the agent of TBF can be transmitted by the same tick or by different ticks present in the same habitat, giving rise to co-infections. Exposure to LIV and TBF concurrently in an unprotected sheep will usually result in neurological symptoms and death. As well as these co-infections, stress associated with handling, dosing and vaccination can lead to symptoms of louping ill being displayed.

Liaising with your vet to develop a working tick-control plan for your individual croft and circumstances is the first point to consider. Further important points for the management of sheep flocks in the absence of a LIV vaccine are shown below.

- Effective tick control is essential in high-risk areas, to reduce tick numbers and hence LIV, and if aiming to reduce tick on other species.
- A high-risk area could be considered as one where the total tick burden on an untreated sheep is greater than 20 and LIV prevalence within the sheep flock is greater than 10%.
- Expose young lambs to tick in the spring to ensure exposure to TBF while lambs are protected against LIV by maternal colostral antibodies.
- Ideally undertake this exposure

away from core moorland, if there is a red grouse management interest.

- If you lamb in-bye and later put lambs to the hill, remember they may not have been exposed to tick or LIV.
- Weigh up the benefits of minimising disturbance and handling of sheep when ticks are most active – ie temperatures over 7°C and in the peak times of spring and autumn.
- Weigh up the benefits of frequent acaricide treatment against the stress of gathering – eg is the hill high or low risk for tick/LIV?

Advice on treatments for tick control, including in young lambs and tups, along with factors impacting on the efficacy of tick control treatments, biosecurity tips and wildlife and habitat management, is also included in the best-practice guidelines. It is hoped that this document will help best-practice decision-making while the vaccine is unavailable.



Drèanadh

CHAN ANN dìreach air tàilleibh na droch shìde gu bheil mo smuaintean a' tionndadh gu drèanadh, ged nach fhaca mi riamh an talamh cho fliuch 's a tha e an gearradh seo.

'S ann a bha am baile a' bruidhinn air sgeime drèanadh fad bhliadhnaichean agus coltas ann a-nis gu bheil e dol a thachairt. Na dhèidh sin ge-tà 's e an t-side fhliuch an t-adhbhar gun robh againn ri seann drèana cloiche fhosgladh gus tuil uisge a leigeil troimhe. Bha mi an toiseach a' glanadh dig a bha tachdte le bliadhnaichean de dh'fhàs agus poll. Bha an t-uisge bhon dlùg seo

ga thoirt gu ruige allt tron t-seann drèana cloiche a dh'ainmich mi. Ach is beag an sruth a bha tighinn a-mach as!

An dèidh latha de dh'obair a' glanadh le gràp agus ràcan, lìon an dig gu a beul le uisge, cha robh gu leòr a' ruith bhuaiepe. B' fheudar dhuinn tionndadh gu an spaid agus cladhach sìos don drèana chloiche gus fheuchainn ri an sruth a mheudachadh. Dh'fheuch mi na slatan glanaidh a-staigh bhon cheann-shìos an toiseach ach bha againn ri dà tholl a dhèanamh na b' fhaide suas airson sruth ceart fhaighinn. Ann a bhith briseadh a-staigh don "phìob" chloiche sin, thòisich mi air meòrachadh air an

sgil 's an obair a bha an lùib nan drèanachan seo. Chan e a-mhàin an obair-chloiche fon talamh ach cuideachd an co-obrachadh eadar croitearan nuair a bha drèan a' ruith thar nan lotaichean, mar a tha tachairt air taobh eile na croit again.

An robh barrachd ùine aig daoine sna làithean sin? No an e dìreach gun robh barrachd dhaoine an sàs ann an croitearachd, agus le cinnt, bha barrachd spèis aca don fhearann. Dh'fheumadh barrachd spèis a bhith aca; bha e a' cur biadh nam beòil.

Ged nach eil uiread a' tachairt air na croitean an-diugh, bidh daoine a' tighinn còmhla airson

gnothaichean nam monaidhean 's a chùl-chinn, agus tha taic-airgid aig ìre àrd (80% bho CAGS) ri faighinn airson nan gnothaichean sin. 'S iongantach an diofar a ghabhas dèanamh le bhith faighinn cuidhteas uisge seach e bhith na làighe agus an talamh bog fliuch fad na bliadhna. Cuidichidh drèanadh ann a bhith lughdachadh luachair, lus a tha a' dol na phlàigh fad is farsaing.

Tha an coltas ann gu bheil an aimsir a' fàs nas fliùiche, 's mar sin bidh barrachd feum air drèanadh san àm ri teachd.

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

ON THE CROFT

Croft-friendly woodland planting grant now available throughout the crofting counties

Eleanor Garty of Woodland Trust Scotland reports

THERE'S A host of reasons to plant trees on crofts – to improve wildlife habitats, to produce firewood, to reduce run-off, to restore degraded soils, to improve biosecurity, to leave a legacy for future generations – but the most-often cited reason is to create shelter.

But how to get a woodland growing well in a breezy spot?

One key factor is planting at high density, so the young trees give each other mutual shelter. Another is tree choice.

Broadleaves provide a permeable barrier that slows the wind over a long distance, without causing eddies. Conifers offer good shelter in the early years, and are ideal where very sheltered conditions are needed over a short distance. Their big drawback is a tendency to blow over when they reach a critical size.

Often, the best of both worlds can be achieved with a combination of broadleaves and conifers,



Tree planting on Islay. The Western and Northern Isles woodland planting grant is now available for exposed sites in the mainland crofting counties and on the Argyll Islands.

the latter being thinned out progressively, as the shelterbelt matures. Species choice will be dictated by the soil and site. Native trees like birch, willow, Scots pine and alder are always preferable, because of the vastly greater contribution they make to biodiversity, but there can be a case for some hardy non-natives in the toughest conditions.

This approach to planting is accommodated within the forestry grant scheme Northern and Western Isles Woodland Creation option. Until

recently, however, the option was not available to crofters on the mainland and in the Argyll Islands. In a welcome change, the option has now been extended to the whole of the crofting counties, for use on exposed sites where it is likely to produce a significantly better result.

There are some limitations – the maximum area that can be applied for is 3ha – but it's a big boost for crofters who want to integrate small woodlands with grazing, horticulture and other croft activities and reap the multiple rewards that trees will deliver for generations to come.

For details of the Northern and Western Isles Woodland Creation option see www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/forestry-grant-scheme/woodland-creation/native-broadleaves-northern-western-isles.

For free advice on planting and managing woodlands on crofts contact the Croft Woodlands Project crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk, tel 0343 770 5847.

Trees for the crofting community

Trees provide important shelter for your livestock, crops and buildings and a valuable source of woodfuel for you.

Free advice and support to help the crofting community plant trees and manage woodland is available.

Get in touch with your local croft woodlands advisor and find out how useful trees are.

WOODLAND TRUST SCOTLAND



0343 770 5847

crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk

woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant

MEMBERS PAGES

Company secretary

The SCF company secretary will be vacating his position at the AGM in 2018. Any person, whether member or not, can apply for this voluntary post. There will be a hand-over period in the lead-up to the change.

Applications should be made to the chief executive at HQ. As yet, no closing date has been fixed but the position will become available not later than June 2018.

Details of the role can be obtained from the present company secretary, John Bannister, through SCF HQ, or by email to johnbannister@crofting.org. He will be pleased to discuss this with you.



Registered as a Scottish Charity No SC 031919

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, 15th June 2018 at 2.00 pm 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 2017. 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, or otherwise, persons previously proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq). and/or ratify the appointment of co-opted director, namely: Ms Robin Haig
3. To re-elect director Russell Smith under Article 10.10, whose term as director ends as of the date of this meeting, to serve until AGM 2021 being the anniversary of his appointment and the maximum period allowed under Article 10.11.
4. To appoint accountants/auditors proposed by the directors, or re-appoint Ritsons, Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR as independent examiners of the company accounts and authorise the directors to pay their remuneration.

By order of the board of directors.

Company Secretary: John Bannister

Date of notice: 2nd April 2018

Agricultural shows 2018



John MacKintosh, Russell Smith, Rhoda Grant MSP and Patrick Krause at the Royal Highland Show

I F YOU ARE involved in planning an agricultural show anywhere in the highlands and islands, please let us know.

Free publicity through *The Crofter* could help your show's public footfall. If you would like to attend a show and look after a stand as our representative, please get in touch and let us know when your show (if not shown below) is to take place.

Those we know so far are here, but the list does not include the small, local shows which many members attend and enjoy on a regular basis. They are also of interest to us. Anyone willing to do this will, of course, be loaned the necessary equipment (within available SCF resources) to put on a good display. Our visibility at shows is very important to our members but relies on our local people to do it.

What we know so far:

Date(s)	Name of show
Thursday 21st– 24th June	Royal Highland Show, Inverness, Edinburgh
Friday 20th July	Tree Show
Saturday 21st July	Sutherland Show, Dornoch
TBC - usually late July	Dunvegan Show, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye
Thursday 2nd & 3rd August	Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord
Thursday 2nd August	Arran Show, Lamlash, Isle of Arran
Friday 3rd August	Kintyre Agricultural Show, Campbeltown
Wednesday 8th August	Bute Agricultural Show, Isle of Bute
Thursday 9th August	Grantown Show, Grantown-on-Spey
Thursday 9th August	Islay Show, Bridgend, Islay
Saturday 11th August	Orkney County Show, Kirkwall, Orkney
Saturday 11th August	Mid-Argyll Show, Kilmory, Lochgilphead
Saturday 25th August	Lochaber Show, Torlundy
Saturday 25th August	Lairg Crofters Show, Lairg
Saturday 4th August	Skye Agricultural Show, Portree

Please inform HQ of any shows not shown, or your willingness to man an SCF stand at any one of those listed.

MEMBERS PAGES

Assynt milestone celebration

2018 IS an important milestone in the history of community land ownership, as it was 25 years ago that the Assynt Crofters' Trust formally took possession of the North Lochinver Estate, on 1st February, 1993.

To mark this anniversary, the trust is organising a week-long celebration of Crofting – Past, Present and Future, from 30th June to 6th July 2018.

Speakers including Alistair Mackintosh and Anne-Marie Fyfe are scheduled to appear. Judith Napier's definitive biography of Allan MacRae, one of the founders of the trust, will be launched on Wednesday 4th, during a day that will be a celebration of his life. The day will include the Scottish Crofting Federation holding a debate and discussion around one of Allan's well-known quotes.

Other planned events include a hill race, an all-abilities fishing competition, a creative writing competition involving local schools, a series of workshops based on the archaeology of Clachtoll Broch, sheepdog handling, sheep shearing, working with wool and a photographic competition to be judged by Robin Gillanders, whose portrait of Allan MacRae now hangs in the Scottish Parliament.

There will also be a series of music events – a ceilidh to mark the launch of the trust's new boat for the disabled on Loch Drumbeg and also a



mini-fèis where budding musicians can come along to join workshops with local musicians Rory Matheson (finalist in Young Scottish Musician of the year), Anna Buxton and Kim MacLennan, to improve their performance and skill. The three young musicians will also be performing a concert to launch their very first CD.

The week of celebrations will culminate in the Fèis in the Fank – an all-night festival of Scottish music with Blazin' Fiddles, Skerryvore, Rory Matheson, Kenny John and the Skala Ceilidh Dance Band, James Graham, Traligill and 2+1. The fèis will truly be a night to remember.

For further information and to buy tickets, go to www.theassyntcrofters.co.uk – or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/25thanniversarycelebrations. Alternatively you can email Leigh or Seonaid at act25years@mail.com and we will get back to you just as soon as we can.

As part of the celebratory week a photographic competition is being held.

Photo Competition – Aspects of Assynt

Judge: Robin Gillanders

Final date for entries: 4th June 2018

Entry price: £2.50/photo max 4 photos (cheques to Assynt Crofters' Trust)

Categories:

- Crofting life
- Wildlife
- Hills and Lochs
- The sea

All photos must be taken in Assynt, and must not have been entered in any other competition or printed in any public material.

Maximum of four entries per individual.

Format for submission: Printed max A4, min A5.

Age groups:

- Under 16
- Adult over 16

Prizes:

Best photo in each category and age group will win a stalking photo day.

Prize giving:

Prizes will be awarded during the evening of 4th July 2018 and will be presented by Robin Gillanders.

Submissions and entry fee to be sent to: Assynt Crofters Trust Office, Stoer, Lochinver, Sutherland, IV27 4JE, to arrive no later than 4th June 2018

His Bloody Project

by Graeme Macrae Burnet

This is a book I can thoroughly recommend, writes SCF company secretary John Bannister, an emotional read for the crofting aficionado by a writer who was listed for the Man Booker prize in 2016.

IT COMES at a time when crofters in the Highlands and Islands are once again reflecting on proposed changes to crofting law; an opportune time to mull over the legislation crofters won and still have today.

This book is a novel, but no less absorbing for all that. Set in 1869, it has historical detail focusing on that period of crofting history immediately preceding the Napier Commission of 1883 and the all-familiar maxim given to the committee of enquiry: "Go listen to the crofters," and the advent of the revolutionary Crofters' Act that followed in 1886.

Readers may recall that this first act established our now-familiar crofters' rights. The right of security of tenure; the right to grant succession of the croft; the right to compensation for improvements made; a right (unique then, among tenants generally) not to be removed from their crofts – were enacted at a time when landlords held sway over all else. The Crofters Commission and a land court with powers to fix a fair rent were also part of that original blessed act.

The plot describes the typical crofting family

daily life of the day, which indirectly gave rise to the above act. The lifestyle of the crofter's hapless young son is at the centre of this account. His destitute father and his twin baby siblings, whose meagre lives are stretched to breaking point by the constable and his perfunctory enforcement of so-called regulations, is nothing short of bondage. The constable purports, without any sense of guilt, to serve the interests of his master – the estate factor.

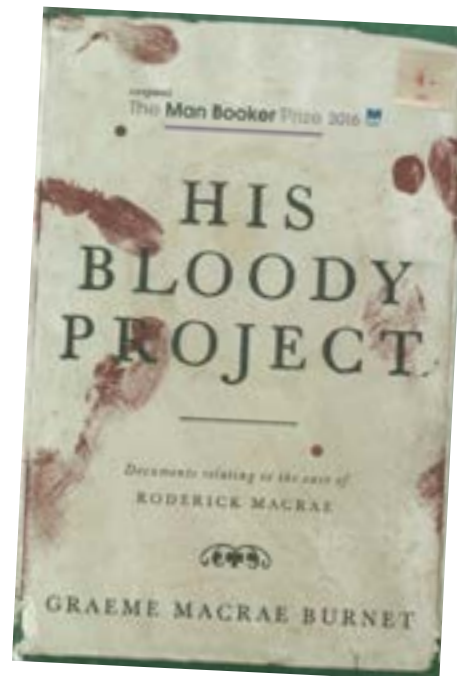
One will empathise and hackles will surely rise at the behaviour of those in positions of power over the troubled people depicted here – "How dared they?" readily comes to mind as one turns the pages that follow.

The book is written as if the reader were a spectator in the very court room where the graphic detail of the events leading to the bloody prosecution takes place and of the key character during the indictment for the most heinous of crimes.

I liked it very much, despite the harrowing account, having become consumed by the sympathy one feels towards the erstwhile, down-trodden figures portrayed. It's a book which will not disappoint. Crofting family members and historians alike will relate to this story at a time and place not too distant from our present.

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Graeme Macrae Burnet 2015



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Donald Linton (center), at an early SCF Council meeting, Angus MacRae to his right, then Alistair MacIver, with Fiona Mandeville on the left. Can you identify any of the others?

Donald Linton

SCF lost another stalwart in March.

DONALD LINTON, from Glencruitten, Oban, was involved in the SCU since its inception in 1986 as a local branch chairman and council member. Donald was always a great champion of crofting and crofters. A sheep breeder and mart herdsman, haulage contractor and tourism provider, Donald had a huge knowledge of crofting and was a source of advice and information for many. He was an assessor for the Crofters Commission for many years. Outspoken and popular, Donald was well-kent throughout the crofting areas of Argyll and beyond. He will be missed by many.

All at SCF who knew Donald send their condolences to his family.

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Farewell and hello

SADLY, WE are saying goodbye to Donna Williamson, fondly known as the "spreadsheet queen". Donna has been a valued member of our training team for a number of years now and will be missed by us all. We wish her the best of health and no doubt she will return to the SCF family in the not too distant future.

As Donna leaves us we say a big hello and welcome to Ailsa Strange, who will be based at our Ullapool training office with Tina and Lucy our training managers. Ailsa joins us on 19th March and looks forward to administering the Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost Project 2016 – 2019.



Donna Williamson



Ailsa Strange



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