A right to a living

Earlier this year, SCF carried out a survey into the effects of wildlife on crofting, in response to a growing body of anecdotal evidence from our members about damage caused by, especially, deer, geese and sea eagles.

There is a balance to be struck here. Crofters are not against wildlife. Indeed the environmentally sensitive agricultural systems operated by crofters have meant wildlife has survived in the Highlands and Islands whereas it has disappeared in more intensively farmed areas. But deer have to be managed, geese controlled, species not introduced without due consideration.

A flourishing natural environment can bring tourism and income to crofting areas as well as lifting our sometimes-jaded spirits. And it is possible to produce good quality food in co-existence with wildlife.

But crofters also have a right to make a living and the loss of stock and grazing can significantly affect this – as our survey shows. If crofting isn’t economically viable then it will cease; and the drift away from the glens and islands will accelerate.

In addition, the stock we keep have rights too – the code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock talks about the five freedoms, which include freedom from pain and injury and freedom from fear and distress. Crofters do adjust their practices to mitigate the effects – lambing on in-bye rather than on the hill, caging poultry – but there are limits to what can be achieved by proactive management.

The on-line survey had over 250 replies and the results confirmed the scale of the problem. 30% of respondents reported significant effects of deer on their land – through eating grass, fodder put out for sheep and cattle, eating trees and causing damage. Fencing can work but is a big expense. A number of respondents replied resignedly “not yet”.

Predation by reintroduced sea eagles significantly affects 16% of respondents. Loss of lambs is the main problem but there are also reports of hoggs and ewes being hunted and killed and poultry being taken. One respondent reported attacks on a weekly basis in the summer. Others have cut back on use of hill ground because of losses.

Yvonne White and cabinet secretary for rural economy, Fergus Ewing

YVONNE WHITE, chair of the SCF, recently met cabinet secretary for rural economy Fergus Ewing to discuss crofting issues and ask what the Scottish Government (SG) will do to ensure the future of crofting. Points raised included:

LFASS and the recent announcement that next year would see a cut to 80% of the current rate with a further cut to 40% the following year. Yvonne made it clear that LFASS payments are vital for crofters, who face natural constraints such as poor-quality land and topographical challenges. The prospect of this support being drastically cut is unthinkable. It would put many crofters and sheep stock clubs out of business.

Mr Ewing said that SG is committed to keeping LFASS at 100%. Officials are looking for a workaround. An option under consideration is top-slicing the Basic Payment Scheme so top recipients are paid slightly less in order to redistribute to LFAAs.

Geese Yvonne emphasised concern over the lack of financial support from SNH for goose management, and the damage caused by wild geese to grazing and crops in the Western Isles. Population control does not cost much yet funding is being withdrawn. Including goose management in an agri-environment scheme was considered, should direct funding not be possible. Redistribution of the existing...
Welcome to the new edition of The Crofter and my first message as your new chair.

I would like to thank my predecessor, Russell Smith, for all his excellent work and commitment. It is a challenging time for crofting and agriculture generally, not least due to Brexit, and therefore a challenging time to be taking on this role. However, I aim to carry out the responsibilities and duties of chair as effectively and professionally as possible on behalf of members and hopefully follow on in the good work achieved by previous chairs. A daunting task!

Against all the uncertainties we are faced with, there is one aspect standing firm and that is the unswerving commitment and dedication to crofting of SCF’s board of directors, council and staff. Board and council members are all active crofters, with crofts located throughout the huge geographic area of the crofting counties. This geographic spread is of crucial value in informing our approach to formulating policy, as each area has its own specific issues in addition to the common ones that affect all of us. Therefore we have a collective voice to speak and there has been a delay for notification via usual channels.

In THE LAST issue of The Crofter we talked about the Women in Agriculture initiative and asked if a Women in Crofting group be appropriate: is it something women crofters would want? It could be an opportunity to meet other women crofters and to share ideas, experience, skills. It could provide a collective voice.

This is something that a bit of asking around has made us think is wanted and could be helpful. In fact, following the article several more people have been in touch expressing an interest, so we certainly have enough to start down the road to making it happen. A gathering will be arranged soon. We hoped to have it organised by now but we want one of the researchers of the original report to come and speak and there has been a delay for personal reasons.

However, it will happen soon and there will be notification via usual channels.

In summary, now is a challenging period for crofting. SCF is dedicated to fighting on your behalf, whatever the issues effecting crofting. We are here to fight your corner.

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Incursion of geese is a significant problem for 36% of respondents. The geese eat grass and crops and foul the land. The effects are especially felt in the machair areas of the Uists where a unique habitat is being degraded and traditional cropping threatened. Comments include "cannot make hay or silage", "numbers are much increased", "nothing deters them".

The survey also asked an open question about any other wildlife species. This highlighted 26 different species that affected someone somewhere. Crows and ravens attack lambs and ewes. Foxes, pine martens, mink, otters and badgers can make keeping poultry impossible even if birds are caged. Foxes and badgers take lambs. Black-backed gulls and skuas can be a problem. Rabbits eat grass and vegetables. But also, one reply commented, "Wild birds, bees and insects all combine to significantly and positively affect our croft."

The analysis shows that around a third of respondents were not significantly affected by any wildlife, about a third were affected by one challenge and about a third were affected by more than one. Eight struggling crofters replied yes to all four questions.

The point of balance, the centre of gravity, needs to be shifted so crofters do not lose out.
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‘10 YEAR GUARANTEE AGAINST UV DEGRADATION’

As featured on BBC Alba, Reporting Scotland and Sunday Politics Scotland
Survey of the economic condition of crofting

SCF welcomed Scottish Affairs Committee to Lewis

SCF welcomed five MPs from Westminster’s Scottish Affairs Committee to Lewis on a damp February morning. The committee of backbench MPs from various political parties was carrying out an inquiry into the impact of Brexit on Scottish agriculture. After several evidence sessions in London and Scotland, two attended by SCF’s Russell Smith, the committee approached SCF to help facilitate a visit to the Isle of Lewis to gather further evidence on crofting. At a breakfast meeting, fifteen local crofters outlined their key concerns about Brexit and the future of crofting. The MPs were told in no uncertain terms how disastrous a no deal scenario would be for the store lamb trade, which most crofters in Lewis rely on.

The future of agricultural support was also discussed at length. The committee was shocked to learn that without continued support many would simply be unable to continue crofting. The current payments system was also raised, with serious concerns about how it was being undermined. The MPs were also told that they would bear in mind the testimonies they heard when back in Westminster. They highlighted some of the key concerns that crofters in Lewis were facing, including the weather, ever-present threat posed by greylag geese, which ruined their greylag geese, which ruined any hope of being able to sell their eggs, selling store lambs and meat locally. Like most crofters in Lewis, Sally has a full-time job off the croft, working as a development officer for a local community land trust.

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Death of a crofting community?

Former SCF company secretary John Bannister MBE poses the question.

Is the crofting community, as we remember it, now lost under the rug of history?

There was a time when the residents of a crofting township were predominantly crofters, living and working together with other non-crofters who were residing there. They were 'the community of place'. The strength of that community lay in the people living and working there. Some townships were numerically larger than others, some just holding together in single figures - diminished by age, lack of opportunity and/or lack of generational succession.

The community might have a village hall, used for ceilidhs, weddings, wakes and such like; perhaps a kirk with its own minister, maintaining community cohesion and a spirit of togetherness. Families knew each other, had history and culture and existed in a generally tolerant, co-operative world.

Overall folk managed the affairs of their township community together: gathered stock, dealt with chores at the fank, bought and stored animal feed for winter - and other matters of their predominantly crofting life-style. Between them the community attended to broken or worn infrastructure, repairing paths and tracks, cutting grass, getting messages for the old folk and otherwise looking after the resident neighbourhood.

So, what's happening? A creeping incursion, a buying-in of property by non-resident outsiders. Houses being bought and sold as second homes (or third), or to provide self-catering accommodation; ensuring a steady income to supplement an existing salary gained elsewhere, or to enhance a pension. Investing in property and houses, almost certainly gaining value over time, would be good business.

This soon becomes a different community - a part-community of business and financial interest. The place is incidental to maximising on financial investment. What does this contribute to the community of place? The non-resident outsider often bears little or no allegiance to the people or place they have bought into, often adding nothing except to the apparent emptiness of the place. Not crofting, not community, simply business. Will they become part of the community of place? Will they become involved and communicate with residents?

The non-resident might argue that the distance from their main living, at another place, doesn’t allow them much, if any, time for that sort of relationship. Who are these people? Where do they come from? What’s their ultimate interest in hiving off their surplus wealth in this way? What community of place benefits from that sort of relationship? What aspiring young person could see any future in such a place? The trajectory of this trend will alter forever the character of the Highland community.

So, back to the original question, what's to be done? Do we simply accept this trend and give way to the onward march of market forces?

Accepting this situation is short-sighted and the precursor of a long-term malaise for our beleaguered crofting townships. I'm persuaded by colleagues to pose these questions to a wider audience, for discussion, as a subject that should be aired. Readers' opinions, resident or non-resident, really do matter. Perhaps it matters to you too.


Though not strictly about the debilitating effect communities face by financial in-migration outlined in this paper, it does have parallels in the wider debate.
Sandra Holmes has worked with HIE in community asset development for over a decade. The family croft enabled her to settle in Lochalsh where she proactively supported an affordable housing development on her township’s common grazings. With a new guide about to be published on developing affordable housing on croft land, she explores the changing role of communities.

CROFTING TENURE has played a significant role in rooting and sustaining communities throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Yet many crofting communities are today in great need of housing. The good news is there are now mechanisms to ensure the housing remains affordable in perpetuity. The not-so-good news is that these are much needed, as rural depopulation is forecast to increase.

The James Hutton Institute was commissioned by Scottish Government to consider long-term population trends in Scotland’s sparsely-populated areas. This closely mirrors the crofting counties. The findings are stark. They predict a 33% reduction of the working-age population in less than 30 years. The Outer Hebrides and Argyll and Bute are likely to be amongst the worst affected.

Affordable housing in rural areas is directly related to population retention and availability of local services, especially schools and other lifeline services. However, as is too often witnessed in crofting communities, young working adults are unable to form their own households when faced with competition from more affluent immigrants and high levels of second homes and holiday lets.

Supply of affordable housing is complex and multi-dimensional. There are no easy mainstream solutions. Rural communities are increasingly the catalyst to new housing provision. Nowhere is this more evident than in crofting areas. Housing provision on croft land is not restricted to incoming crofters building their own homes. It can go beyond this to housing provision for crofter and non-crofter households.

Understandably, tensions exist on releasing land from crofting, often centred on inflated land values, speculation and concern that too much inbye is being lost. To safeguard inbye, more developments are taking place on common grazings.

Awareness of mechanisms to retain the housing as affordable in perpetuity has increased the confidence of grazings committees to consider supporting such developments.

These tensions were evident in my own township in Plockton. Land had been given up for council housing only to be sold via right to buy; many are now holiday homes. Yet there was a pressing need for affordable housing. Together with our landlord we worked with the local housing association, who went on to develop 24 affordable units on our grazings. Ten years on, it’s considered a great success and now benefits from the abolition of the right to buy.

Community-led housing is on the increase in rural areas, utilising croft and non-croft land, initiatives typically supported by enabling organisations such as Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT), Tighean Innse Gall and Rural Housing Scotland.

Some other croft land examples include:

- The North Harris Trust, working with Ardhasaig common grazings. Local housing providers developed eight units for affordable rent in 2011. Affordable plots have also been made available at the site and on other common grazings on the estate.

- Crofters in Shieldaig released land to enable HSCHT and Albyn Housing Society to create a mixed development of 15 new affordable homes.

Staffin Community Trust is acquiring grazings at Stenscholl to develop six affordable houses and two business units.

Following HIE’s research Stimulating Housing Development in the Highlands and Islands – 2017, working with SCF, HSCHT and Crofting Commission, we will shortly be publishing guidance on developing affordable housing on croft land. Packed with relevant case studies, it outlines a range of options including houses for rent, shared equity schemes, discounted plots, local letting initiatives and rural housing burdens.

Creating new housing that is affordable now, and into the future, is the single focus of the guide.

There is a wealth of experience to draw from and the guide seeks to help grazings committees and the wider community get off on the right track to strengthen their communities through access to affordable housing.

For more information and to request a copy, please email sandra.holmes@hient.co.uk.

Scottish Rural Action has produced a set of powerful videos about people living (or trying to live) in the crofting areas. Go to https://www.sra.scot/rural-homes-rural-lives-campaign-launched/ to view the videos.
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What’s happening at the Crofting Commission?

Here at the Commission there is plenty work for the teams to get their teeth into, says convener Rod Mackenzie.

While our largest team is the regulatory and regulatory support staff who deal with regulatory applications, there are also teams working on residency and land use, grazings, registration and mapping; or on vital core functions such as IT, finance, compliance, administration, policy and legal matters.

All these teams work together to make sure applications are dealt with as efficiently as possible. As a board, over the last 18 months we have delegated decision-making of some more straightforward cases to regulatory staff, within agreed parameters. This system of delegated decision-making works well only when the application is properly presented and doesn’t exceed the agreed parameters. Details of the parameters will be going onto our website shortly.

Consistent not returned their census forms. RALUT will also be contacting crofters who have not responded. We urge anyone who is in doubt about what they want to do, and how they make a regulatory application, to browse the website www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk, where there are guidance leaflets and the appropriate forms. If further help is needed, please make contact with the Commission directly.

The Residency and Land Use Team (RALUT) has escalated its work on census respondents in breach of their crofting duties, such as non-residency, cultivation and maintenance. RALUT has issued letters and received many responses, resulting in applications for consent to be absent, to assign the tenancy of the croft, to officially sublet the croft – or for owner-occupier crofters, a short-term let of the croft. It should be noted that although the assignation of a croft tenancy is a permanent transfer, official sublets, short-term lets and consent to be absent are finite and relatively short-term fixes, but they allow folk time to consider what they want to do with the croft. RALUT will also be contacting crofters who have consistently not returned their census forms.

Another very important piece of work now completed is new guidance for common grazings committees, to assist with their responsibilities to maintain and improve common grazings. Distinct from grazings regulations, it provides an aid to committees by advising on what must be in regulations and what may also be considered best practice.

With over half a million hectares of common grazings, or two-thirds of all croft land, common grazings are an integral part of the crofting system. The Commission recognises the importance of grazings committees and we declared our intent to provide support and advice for them when we set out our policy plan in 2017. You’ll find a copy of the guidance on our website at www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/common-grazings-regulations-template; or a copy can be requested directly from the Commission by emailing grazings@crofting.scot.

This board is keen and committed to keeping crofting alive, vibrant and sustainable. We acknowledge the problems that exist within crofting and there is a lot of interest and enthusiasm from all who have a stake in this sector.
CROFTER, APRIL 2019

Croft succession

There are three distinct parts to croft succession: (i) making a will to bequeath an interest in a croft; (ii) what happens after death where there is a will and (iii) what happens after death where there is no will (intestacy).

Bequest of a croft

Whilst an owner-occupied croft can be bequeathed in a will to as many people as you like, so that they would all become co-owners, the position with a tenanted croft is not so simple. A croft tenancy may only be bequeathed to one natural person; or to two or more provided that (i) each would come into the place of the crofter in relation to the tenancy of part of the croft; and (ii) no part of the croft would, were all the bequests accepted, be untenanted.

This, in effect, means the croft having to be divided into different parts. Any bequest on this basis is null and void if the Crofting Commission does not consent. If consent is given, but the division is not registered in the Crofting Register, that also renders the bequest null and void.

If a crofter does want to divide the croft as part of a bequest to more than one natural person, they should include a map in the will showing the proposed division. It would also be wise to provide for the possibility of the Commission refusing consent, and a fall-back position, to avoid the bequest becoming null and void and falling into intestacy.

An alternative is to purchase the tenancy and bequeath the owner-occupied croft to a number of future co-owners.

If a will is wrongly drafted so as not to comply with the provisions of the 1993 Act, the bequest is likely to be null and void and fall to be dealt with according to the law of intestacy. The provisions of the 1993 Act, the bequest is likely to be null and void and fall to be dealt with according to the law of intestacy.

Residency and cultivation obligations should also be borne in mind. Little point leaving a tenancy to someone who does not reside (and is unlikely to relocate) on or within 32 kilometres of the croft and/or who will have no interest in cultivating the croft.

Testate succession

Following the death of a crofter who has left a will bequeathing a croft tenancy, the legatee (beneficiary) must, if they accept the bequest, (a) give notice of the bequest to the landlord, and (b) send a copy to the Commission, before the end of a 12-month period beginning with the death of the crofter. Failure to do so renders the bequest null and void, to be dealt with according to the law of intestacy. An executor of the deceased crofter, authorised to do so by a legatee, may give the notice to the landlord and copy it to the Commission.

The tenancy is an asset of the deceased crofter’s estate, available along with other assets to meet the expenses of administration and debts of the estate. Any legatee is liable to contribute to such expenses and debts accordingly.

Intestacy

If there is no will, or a bequest is invalid or becomes null and void, the law of intestacy will apply. This may result the tenancy going to someone that the deceased crofter did not want to get it, or the tenancy having to be sold for the proceeds to be split amongst a number of beneficiaries.

If the tenancy is, on intestacy, to be transferred to one natural person, a docquet should be inserted onto a certificate of confirmation narrating the transfer and signed by the executor. Similar to testate succession, in this instance the executor must (a) give notice of the transfer containing particulars of the transferee to the landlord, who shall accept the transferee as tenant; and (b) at the same time send a copy of the notice to the Commission.

Unlike testate succession, the period required to give notice in this instance is 24 months rather than 12 months.

If the requisite notice is not given, the Commission has the power to give notice that they propose to terminate the tenancy and declare the croft vacant.

There then remains the ability for the tenancy to still be transferred, albeit after the 24-month period – with the ultimate sanction, if that is not happening, of the tenancy being terminated.

Note: The foregoing is a slightly abbreviated excerpt from A Practical Guide to Crofting Law by Brian Inkster, which will be published in April/May by Law Brief Publishing. The book can be pre-ordered now with a special 20% discount for SCF members. Just apply coupon code CRF589 online before proceeding to checkout. See full details of the book and pre-order now at www.lawbriefpublishing.com/croftinglaw.

Editor’s comment: Given the strong interest in and demand for crofts from young people, we would urge members, when drawing up their wills, to consider making the bequest to a young relation or young person in their community who they know could make good use of it. Doing this sustains our crofting communities for the future.

The legal status of a common grazings committee... or

SCF council member Jim MacPherson considers a thorny issue.

Would a knowledgeable and prudent person agree to be elected to a common grazings committee with the possibility of incurring an unlimited personal financial liability?

Scotland plc cannot afford to have the potential for wealth creation inherent in crofters’ common grazings lost for lack of regulation.

The Crofters Common Grazings Regulation Act of 1891 states: crofters who share in the same common grazing may appoint a committee who “shall be charged with the duty of making regulations as to the number of stock which each crofter shall be entitled to put on the common grazing, and as to any other matters affecting the fair exercise of their joint rights therein by the several crofters,” and “The regulations so made shall be submitted to the Crofters Commission.”

In 1947 the Land Court, in the note to
Nothing on the ground suggests physical boundary deer fence. In some places the registered boundary (clearly defined by old walls). In some five metres from the actual place the registered boundary is at odds to be previously agreed, submitted grazing boundary bordering my croft. My croft has lost some 7.2% of its area to common grazing because the registered boundary is at odds with the actual croft boundary. In places the registered boundary is some five metres from the actual boundary (clearly defined by old walls). In places the registered boundary as depicted is within the physical boundary deer fence. Nothing on the ground suggests why this might be a boundary. I have gained some 1400 square metres from my neighbour’s croft, and about 2500 square metres of my landlord’s garden area (which may be decrofted), 5% in total. I feel unable to accept this extra ground.

I submitted the form for rectification of croft boundaries to the Crofting Commission months ago in an attempt to rectify all these discrepancies. It appears that there is no appetite by the Commission or RoS for rectification unless all parties are in agreement. Of the four grazings landowners, only one replied directly to my correspondence; one I don’t expect to receive a reply from; another – an otherwise respected, Scotland-wide wildlife trust which seems to have forgotten crofters are part of the wildlife too – has only recently forwarded the correspondence to its solicitors. The fourth I expect more from because some of his land may have been ‘borrowed’ by one of the other landlords and some by me: he stands to lose ground, literally.

The grazing committee is reluctant to respond (probably because of the paperwork load), and my neighbouring crofter won’t respond. I understand from a solicitor that there is no obligation from any party to respond. It seems as if the process could carry on indefinitely, or until my patience runs out.

Whilst I, a crofter with only evenings and weekends to attend to crofting matters, unable to afford a solicitor, struggle to put right these various injustices, landlords mostly employ paid staff to maintain the status quo. Where is the equality? Rub number three.

Rub number one is the biggest hurdle. At the shareholders’ meeting we amended a large paper map. Paper maps are raster maps. Utilising satellite images and other electronically generated data, RoS convert this raster map to the digital mapping system known as a vector map. At a reasonable scale the two appear the same. Zoom in closer and the two diverge, the vector showing deviations that may be unexpected.

The layperson can’t change vector maps. They can be viewed online and discrepancies may be noted, but are difficult to amend. Any croft-orientated work we submit on a raster (paper) map will be reconfigured by RoS as a vector map and, as in my experience with the apportionment, sometimes include discrepancies and additional errors. On the online RoS Crofting Register I can zoom in on the area of interest. Initially the map is raster. Zoom in and the map changes to vector. On the raster map a footpath is shown to the west of my boundary fence, on the vector map it appears to the east, on the croft.

Rub number two can be overcome, but only by dialogue. The landlord with the grazing committee, the grazing committee with shareholders, RoS with anyone who submits a map that is at odds with their records. First past the post gains the most.

Rub number three the Commission and RoS could improve upon, making extra provision for those unable to respond adequately without external assistance: technical, legal or financial. Until then we have to live with a system where the siting of boundary is left to the legal opinion and late challenges. Only when either the Commission or RoS, or both, accept that there is no appetite by the crofting community to pursue and defend actions, whether nine months or nine light years is the allowed process, whether nine months or nine light years is the allowed challenge period. The only people to benefit will be the lawyers.

Visit the RoS Crofting Register and zoom in to see the fine detail in your township. If you don’t agree, challenge tirelessly.

Where the grazings regulations have the effect of creating a business, this is a reserved matter for the UK Parliament. At the end of 2018 there was a game-changer, Mark Kershaw & Others v (1) Connel Community Council & (2) Aggregate Industries Ltd. [2018] CSOH 111.

The judge: “Noted that the court has allowed community councils to pursue and defend actions in their own name. Repelled a plea that Connel Community Council is an unincorporated association with no legal persona. It therefore cannot be sued in its own name alone for delictual damages. Noted the general rule that unincorporated associations can only be convened as parties to legal proceedings if certain individuals (usually the office bearers) are named in the instance. Any decree is only directly enforceable against them. They in turn have a claim for relief against the association’s funds. “Considered the ambit of a community council’s role. Commented on the role of insurance. Having regard to all these factors, and in particular that parliament created community councils as distinct bodies with rights and duties to act in the public interest, I conclude that they are hybrid bodies that can be sued in their own name.”

From the above, there is sufficient parallel between the case of a community council as an unincorporated association and common grazings committees. The above decision would not be binding upon the Sheriff Court or the Scottish Land Court, but could be persuasive. A knowledgeable and prudent person elected to a common grazings committee could mitigate the possibility of incurring an unlimited personal financial liability if the grazings committee carried out risk assessment and took out appropriate insurance.

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

MacKinnon v Duke of Argyll 1947 SLCR 35 at 36, observed: “The court think it right, in view of the facts in this case, to draw attention to the legal position and the duties of a grazing committee. The committee are trustees for the whole of the tenants having rights in the common grazing.”

19th February 1976, First Scottish Standing Committee – Mr Gray: I beg to move Amendment No. 90 in page 17 line 21, at end add: “A grazings committee appointed in accordance with the foregoing provisions shall be a legally constituted body.” After discussion the proposed amendment was put to division. The committee divided Ayes 7, Nos 8. The grazing committee is not a legally constituted body and committee members are the trustees for the whole of the tenants making up the unincorporated association having rights in the common grazing.

In 2009 the Scottish Law Commission (Report No. 217) recommended the creation of the Scottish Association with Legal Personality (SALP).
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See the potential in your croft

As the last edition of The Crofter outlined, writes Aoife Gould, SAC Consulting Portree, the first in this series of workshops empowered participants to look with new eyes at their derelict crofts— to see the opportunities and possibilities that they hold.

How to implement your ideas

The second workshop was a much drier (in all senses) affair, being held in the UHI campus in Portree. This session, led by Siobhan Macdonald and Ross Mackenzie of SAC Consulting, focused on the importance of having a plan for your croft business. The basics of a five-year plan were covered, with fixed and variable costs, infrastructure requirements and thinking about what return you can expect from various enterprises.

‘Play your Cards Right’ on equipment costs was used as an easy way into thinking about the costs involved in setting up a new enterprise. Groups were then tasked with taking the same basic enterprise and seeing what a little imagination and ambition could do for the figures. As we all know, crofters have to think outside the box to get the most out of their businesses.

What lies beyond the first five years?

Our third and final workshop found us in a window of perfect weather between days of snow on 2nd February, in beautiful Fiscavaig at the croft of our host and speaker, Sam Brooke. Having taken on a derelict croft almost five years ago, Sam, his wife Ingrid and their daughter Morag have put in an enormous amount of work to turn the croft around. They now boast five highland cows, a flock of about 50 sheep and an ever-increasing amount of productive land, reclaimed from dense rush and bracken cover.

Our tour began in the shed on the croft, with ‘before’ photographs of the croft displayed to give some context to what we were about to see. We then spent several hours walking over a good portion of the croft to hear how Sam had implemented his own five-year plan. There was excellent practical advice, questions and discussion from the group and top-notch baking courtesy of Ingrid.

We ended the day back in the shed getting a tour of the equipment used to turn the croft around, and a question and answer session with Sam to see what he would have done differently and what worked for him on his journey of turning around his derelict croft. We heard his plans for the future of his croft and we all left full of inspiration and admiration for the hard work put in.

We would like to thank all our hosts and participants for making this series of events really engaging and worthwhile. Any future events, as well as great resources for anyone in the process of taking on a derelict croft, can be found on the Farm Advisory Service website fas.scot.

To apply for mentoring, or for more information on FAS’s one-to-one services, please visit www.fas.scot/advice-and-grants. Alternatively, call 0300 323 0161 or email advice@fas.scot.
Donald's hortiblog

Our polytunnel covers are now in their tenth season, which is beyond their reasonable life expectation. They’ve lasted well because we’re on the east-facing, sheltered side of one of the “wings” of Skye. However, they’re well patched and tired-looking, so it’s time to think about replacement. During the winter we took advantage of a reduced price deal in order to have a cover in hand for a planned or unplanned renewal. Covering in the spring, with the growing season started and lambing under way, is not ideal unless you have no choice or have a brand new or empty tunnel, so we’re hoping that the covers will survive until the autumn.

I recently calculated that I have put covers on polytunnels at least fifty times over 30 years of crofting horticulture (most of them not ours, I hasten to add).

But I’m not about to write the definitive guide here as it would be too long. These are the top tips:

• Plan the job as far in advance as you can.
• Order any replacement parts and plenty of anti-hotspot tape.
• Have lots of timber on hand, for end frames if required, and good strong battens for fixing the cover.
• Always replace the hotspot tape, removing old stuff, cleaning the frame with white spirit, and not forgetting to cover the ridge tube.
• Remove doors, old battens and anything else attached to the end frames.
• If the tunnel has tensioning adjustments, these should be fully slackened off before you start.
• Watch the weather forecast and have enough helpers on hand, at least until the ends are secure.
• When the cover is over the frame, make sure it is centred. The centre line is not always obvious! See that there is enough length at both ends. Any writing or logos on the polythene should be legible from inside the tunnel.
• Batten around the end frames in short lengths of about 300mm, starting by tightening along the ridge.
• When tightening the sides, whether by trenching or battening to ground rails, start from the middle and work towards each end, alternating from one side to the other. Pull the slack round to secure at each end.
• Always roll the polythene on to the battens in such a way as to shed rainwater.
• If tension adjusters are fitted, lift each rib in turn and retighten, leaving the cover as tight as a drum.

Finally, like most crofters, we always try to reuse and recycle. A few years ago we were given some old polytunnel sections; and we recently acquired a redundant fish farm net. The result will be a fruit cage to protect our outdoor raspberries and strawberries from the blackbirds and starlings, all for the cost of some new clamps, nuts and bolts. More on this next time.

The long, hard road towards an abattoir on Skye

In the last issue, I reported on the long hard road towards restoring much-needed abattoir facilities to Skye and Lochalsh and contrasted the situation here with that on the Isle of Mull, writes Donald Murdie.

Since then, we have continued to make the case against the Scottish Government’s interpretation of the rules governing state aid to the project, the argument being based on market failure, animal welfare and safeguarding the culture of crofting.

At the start of the year, despite taking our case to the highest level with the support of our local members of the Holyrood and Westminster parliaments, we received the news that we could expect no easement of the forty percent limit on public sector funding. This means that, with ever-increasing costs and the ongoing Brexit bûrach, there is no early prospect of the project getting under way. However, the intention is to carry out some works on site in order to activate the planning permission.

Meanwhile the Scottish Government has announced a study into the practicality and viability of mobile abattoirs. We are sceptical about this as it was ruled out as a solution for Skye in a previous study in 2005, but we will contribute our views to the study and see if our existing plans can be adapted to provide the necessary ‘docking station’ for a mobile unit.

A mobile abattoir is not the simple answer it might at first appear. The docking station requires extensive facilities, such as lairage, waste disposal, an office for the official veterinarian and, most important, chill rooms. A carcass must be chilled at least down to five degrees C before it can be taken away from any abattoir, then it requires further chilled hanging for up to four weeks before it reaches maturity.

Meanwhile the Mull and Iona Abattoir, which has functioned for over twenty years as an industrial provident society, reports a highly successful season, so busy that business has out some works on site in order to activate the planning permission.

It is interesting to hear that in Mull cattle are usually slaughtered at 36 to 40 months and sheep at over one year, which reduces finishing costs and favours the hardy, native and traditional breeds that predominate on the island. Beef is usually slaughtered at 36 to 40 months and sheep at over one year, which reduces finishing costs and favours the hardy, native and traditional breeds that predominate on the island. Beef is

Thanks to Flora Corbett, chair of Mull Slaughterhouse Ltd, for very helpful input.
I’ve been speaking to crofters (and farmers) from the west side of Lewis to north Argyll over the last few months, writes SCF vice-chair Brendan O’Hanrahan, to try and get a picture of the current extent and severity of sea eagle attacks on sheep.

The picture isn’t pretty and the message I’ve been receiving, conveyed very forcefully, is that the problem is both getting worse and inexorably widening its area of impact.

The problem is very real, as I can testify, having seen freshly-killed lambs’ carcasses strewn over a hillside in west Skye, which is why it’s so depressing to still find crofters’ reports of sea eagle kills often treated with disbelief and scepticism from RSPB and SNH.

There are many honourable exceptions, but that we’re still encountering this attitude in 2019, when there has been academically documented evidence of live lambs being killed since at least 1999, is dismaying to say the least. I was told again and again of testimony to losses from crofters being met with a lack of respect and, as one sober witness described it, with ‘a striking lack of empathy’.

When this is combined with a failure to accept the real depth of the impacts on crofting management in the areas affected – which now stretch from NW Ross and the west side of Lewis through Lochaber, Lochalsh, Uist, Ardmairchuan and down well into mid-Argyll, with birds breeding in NW Sutherland and Orkney as well – then it’s not surprising that the crofting community has a serious crisis of confidence in the conservation establishment’s commitment to addressing this problem.

Two of the biggest gulfs that seem to stretch between crofters and conservationists are a) the reluctance to give credence to the significantly increasing frequency of attacks on hoggs and even full adult sheep, and b) failure to fully grasp the manifold costs and repercussions of ‘avoidance tactics’ to affected crofters.

The incidence of attacks on adults is clearly increasing (not mentioned in the best extant study, from 2002). Compensation levels from the management scheme, though of course that’s not what they’re badged as, have up to now mostly just been a drop in the ocean compared to the real losses of the worst-affected crofters and farmers. A crofter who loses 40-50 hoggs (not at all unusual, and there are credible reports of far higher losses from some areas) is clearly sustaining substantial monetary losses when sale and SUSSS values are considered.

Add to that SNH and RSPB’s general failure to comprehend the fundamental detrimental effects of the commonest avoidance tactic – removing ewes and lambs from the hill in summer – which leads to the loss of inbye grazing, of hay and silage, greatly increased fodder costs and the long-term loss of hefting and accumulated resistance to, for example, tick.

We urgently need to find solutions before even more crofters have their livelihoods threatened and the foundations of their management undermined. SNH, RSPB and the Scottish Government need to show that they will take this issue far more seriously than hitherto and be prepared to show far more imagination than has been demonstrated to date.
Dr Karen Stevenson, Moredun Research Institute

### Johne’s Disease in Sheep

Johne’s Disease (JD) is an infectious bacterial enteritis caused by *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (Map).

It affects all ruminants and is particularly difficult to diagnose in sheep. JD has a prolonged incubation period of two to four years and during this time infected animals show no outward signs of disease, but can spread infection to flock mates and other livestock by shedding Map in their faeces.

The only consistent clinical sign in sheep is progressive severe weight loss, which could be attributed to other chronic or parasitic diseases.

Scour is not commonly observed with sheep, although faeces may have a softer consistency. Map-infected sheep also may show an increased susceptibility to other infections.

The most reliable way to determine if JD is present in a flock is by post-mortem examination of suspected thin ewes. Blood tests to detect antibodies to Map are available, but not all infected animals will elicit a detectable antibody response. PCR or faecal culture tests may be taken:

- Cull clinical cases to prevent further spread of disease.
- Do not retain offspring of clinical cases for breeding.
- Clean lambing pens and water troughs regularly.
- Avoid feeding pooled colostrum.

Cross or sequential grazing with cattle is a risk factor for the transmission of JD. Evidence for this has come from research showing that sheep and cattle on the same farm were infected with the same strain, providing evidence for transmission between species. On mixed livestock farms measures should therefore be taken to control JD in all ruminant species present.

### Over-fat ewes

Advice from Harbro

T HANKS TO the unusually mild weather in February, many ewes have come through the winter in too good a condition.

Some farmers are concerned about over-fat ewes and how to avoid twin lamb disease at lambing. With a few weeks left before lambing, at least in some parts of the country, there is still time to address body condition of the ewes and to adjust nutrition accordingly.

Twin lamb is effectively an acute energy (glucose) shortage brought on by the massive, rapid increase in energy demanded by multiple foetuses in the weeks immediately prior to lambing. Thin ewes suffer simply by running out of energy reserves, but fat ewes effectively poison themselves by the rapid mobilisation of back fat at a rate far greater than their liver can cope with. The result is the generation of toxic ketones which further exacerbate the problem by dropping dry matter intake. The issue can spiral out of control rapidly, with ewes going off their legs and a high mortality if not treated in time.

The key with fat ewes is to understand the huge energy reserve potentially available on her back, and planning how to utilise it most effectively. Quality protein is essential. Back fat is pure carbohydrate, and when broken down in the liver creates glucose; the fat ewe needs quality protein to balance this release of carbohydrate. And this also means that by balancing with high quality protein, the ewes do not need to be overfed. Instead, a reduced supply of quality feed is more effective than high volumes of low density feed for these ewes.

Relying on the fat ewe to survive on forage alone is a recipe for disaster. She needs access to a constant supply of both quality feed and forage to protect against sudden changes in weather which often precipitate a sudden release of fat, and the onset of twin lamb. This is where feed blocks and molassed feed licks play such an important role. By providing a constantly-available source of energy, proteins and trace elements, these free-access feeds allow the at-risk ewe to consume additional energy at the time of need.

So, if you are looking at ewes which are in too good condition, there is still time to help prevent twin lamb. Despite being fat, they should now be receiving low levels of high quality feed to get the rumen bugs acclimatised to the feed ingredients. By providing high quality by-pass protein, it is possible to make use of this fat safely and reduce body condition in the weeks prior to lambing. Providing b-vitamins, cobalt and UDP will all help liver function, and free-access energy licks will help protect against sudden changes in weather. As always, it is best to consult with your vet and feed specialist to plan an effective programme for your farm.

### Staggers

Early turn-out along with the flush of spring grass will also mean an increased staggers risk. Increases in the occurrences of the disease in spring are as a result of rapidly-growing grasses which are low in magnesium. It is important to ensure the best possible magnesium supplement is made available, especially to animals at increased risk, eg lactating or older cows. We have a range of buckets available with the highest availability mag sources, and it is important to be aware of this risk in the current conditions.

### Be aware of Johne’s Disease in Sheep

There is an effective JD vaccine available for sheep and goats called Gudair, which is now available in the UK. It reduces clinical disease and shedding by stimulating immunity to Map. However, it does not prevent infection so be aware that vaccinated sheep/goats may still become infected and can potentially spread disease. Vaccination of replacement lambs in flocks can be a cost-effective control measure to reduce JD. The vaccine is not recommended for use in cattle in areas where bovine tuberculosis is endemic, as it can compromise tuberculin skin testing.

For further information please contact: The Moredun Foundation, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, EH26 0PZ, Scotland Phone: +44 (0)131 445 5111 Fax: +44 (0)131 445 6235 E-mail: info@moredun.org.uk Website: www.moredun.org.uk

In addition to the guidelines for loping ill in the absence of a vaccine, as published in the April 2018 edition of The Crofter, we wish to add a qualifying statement to the article:

As this article did not cover tick pyaemia, in areas where tick pyaemia is an issue, ensure you treat lambs before exposing to tick.
Agricultural waste disposal challenge

THE SCOTTISH Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) ended exemptions for burning most types of agricultural waste on 1 January 2019.

SEPA says it engaged extensively with NFU Scotland and Zero Waste Scotland to support Scottish farmers through a simple set of online resources, including a list of Scottish recyclers “who stand ready to help farmers get plastic waste.”

However, what works for large farmers does not work for most crofters.

SCF chair Yvonne White commented: “SEPA has made the burning of animal food packaging illegal without engaging with crofters to agree robust and workable alternative solutions. Clear guidelines and alternatives to burning should have been discussed. Without a workable replacement, making it illegal can lead to burying or waste dumping.

“In the Highlands we cannot recycle much household and agriculture waste – for example black plastic food containers, plant pots, or cattle and sheep mineral lick containers – despite them being marked as recyclable. Scottish and UK governments should legislate that animal feedstuff packaging (like human food packaging) is biodegradable and easy to recycle, either by taking it to a designated recycling area or by home composting.

“People need to be encouraged and educated about the benefits of recycling, not put off by composting.

“Workable inexpensive solutions can still be put in place. Recycling is in society’s best interests, so there should be no charge for recycling other than for commercial businesses. Given the small size of most crofts, with many three acres or less, recycling charges are financially unrealistic for crofters.

“Years ago crofting townships could get a skip from the council (at no charge or for a small fee) and fill it with agriculture waste – old fencing materials, etc – and it would uplifted. It kept the local environment clean. Now skip hire is a significant expense, deterring their use.”

RPID has stated that storage recycling bins are eligible for CAGS assistance for a bale-wrap recycling bin (larger bin £240, smaller bin £80).

In order to qualify for support, the bin would have to either be associated within (sic) an agricultural building or on a hard standing area where stock are fed during the winter months.

While there is assistance towards the recycling bin, there is no assistance with the collection. A number of the waste collectors listed on Zero Waste Scotland’s website under farm plastics were able to commit to uplift from Skye, for example.

If land managers carry their own waste off site to another site for onward recycling or disposal, they need to register with SEPA as a professional collector and transporter of waste (PCT). There is no charge for registering.

HBS Ring at Tore has a member with a waste plastic compactor that can be hired out. Contact the HBS office to find out more – 01463 811603.

Innear – stuth feumail

MÁTHAIR NA ciste mine, dùnan math innearach.

Tha an sean-fhacal cho flor’s a bha e riabh, bha thios aig daone a chinne linntean gur e talamh torrish a’ bhuaid airson bàrr math, agus bàrr fallainn. An dèidh cha mhòr seachdain de shide thioram, thòisich mi air innear a chuibhleadh a-mach don ghradh leis a bhàra, agus gun teagamh tha an obair sin air diorfor mòr a dhéanaimh nam bha meadhanach. Cha robh an talamh ach bochd nuair a thog thinn an taigh còig bliadhna fìor ’s a bha e riamh, bha fhios aig daoine a chionn linntean gur e talamh fòir ar ùd, agus gun teagamh. Leis cho cas bhàith againn a bhì ann an tanca-lobbydh gu h-àrd airson feur agus sloc gu h-uile togalach a thrùdheadh, bha mi leughadh o chionn goirid no dhùnan math ann ach a-nis gheibh sinn fogharadh ann am pailteas.

Tha an obair seo a’ toirt orm cuanachadh air an innear. Bha dùnan, no mar a thear cuid, lagais, flagais no torran, cumanta, gu dearbh riatanach, aig cuil a’ bhàthach. Ach le sin bha mathachadh ga chal, a’ ruthail a-mach leis an uisge a bhiodh a’ sruthadh troimhe ann an side fhìlch. Air tìleilinn sin, tha e na bhunannachd ma ghabhas an innear cumail torram.

’S e sin a bha nam inntinn nuair a thog thinn an bàthach; an innear a chumail torram agus caiteadh a dhéanamh cho furasta ‘s a ghabhas. Mar sin thog thinn bàthach ann an stoirthe Nirribheach. Leis cho cas ‘s a tha an dúthaich sin, bidh na tuathaichean daoannan a’ togal a’ bhàthach air leathad gus am faigh iad a-staigh sna díofor ùrlarainn gu direach bhon taobh a-muigh. Lobh gu h-àrd airson feur agus sloc gu h-iseal fon bhàthach airson innear.

Sa bhàthach againn thà tha tuill ann an taobh na gruip no a’ chlais aig cùl nam bhaith a bhios gu chleachadh airson bith-gas a thrùdheadh a bhios gu chleachadh gu a h-uile togalach a theasachadh, deailan gu leòr a ghnìth, agus gu fionnarachadh airson loradh a’ bhainaigh a ghlèidheadh. Chogann an siostam sin còrr is millean no ach thà tri mile beò aca. Gabhaidh tanaicheadh-lobhaidh beaga cur air bhonn air beagan mhìltean.

’S math as fhìach beachdachd orra!

le Gabhan Mac a’ Phearsain

© Martin Benson – North Uist
Sourcing seed potatoes

It’s the time of the year, writes SCF project officer Maria Scholten, when SCF HQ receives requests for information about seeds.

WHERE CAN I get Edzell Blue?

Here are some suggestions for sourcing older or rare varieties. Information can be found in databases maintained by gene-banks or research institutions.

Last year, visiting the Black Isle Potato Day in North Kessock, I was impressed with the 60+ varieties of seed potatoes on sale. Modern, heirloom, organic – a wide range. Also on sale for £1.80 was a booklet by Alan Roman (dated 2013) with a good overview of seed potatoes and their history. The Isle of Jura potato is an early main crop type from 2002. This is a Nigel Starling/Cygnet PB variety. There are family connections in the company with Jura,” with further information about yielding, flavour and resistance types. If you are interested in obtaining this booklet, please contact me.

Another good source of information about seed potatoes is available at SASA (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture), a division of the Scottish Government agriculture and rural economy directorate. Searching for Edzell Blue (a pre-1915 potato) seed potatoes, for example, led me to contact Dr Triona Davey, head of the seed potato section. She informed me promptly that Edzell Blue had had a bad harvest last year and there was only one grower with seed potatoes for the coming growing season. An overview of seed potatoes grown in Scotland can be found on the SASA website.

Information on new potato varieties listed recently in the UK national list can be obtained under new varieties. Other information on potato varieties, with photographs of tubers and flowers, can be found on the European cultivated potato database website: www.europotato.org.

SASA provides a service to identify potato varieties by DNA fingerprinting using a growing database of over 1,000 potato varieties for comparison, including all UK national listed varieties. The SASA website also has a list of seed potato producers for the current growing season: www.sasa.gov.uk/potato-register

One of the bigger databases for seed of older varieties is EURISCO: eurisco.ipk-gatersleben.de. For example, I heard that the oat variety Pure Line was grown on Lismore. A search in EURISCO showed that this was a 1932 variety, a selection from the famous Scottish potato oats discovered near Haddington in a potato field in the early nineteenth century. It is stored at the John Innes Centre gene-bank in Norwich.

For more information about sourcing seed, do not hesitate to contact maria@gaianet.org.

Restoring Scotland’s peatlands: Ath-stèidheachadh talamh mònach na h-Alba

PEATLANDS are an inherent part of Scottish traditions. They have multiple benefits for people and nature – not just as a fuel source but as the only method of survival before other fuels became available; as regulators of water flow and quality, important in flood management, fisheries, and drinking water supplies; and as a home for rare plants, invertebrates and birds.

Scotland’s peatlands are also our largest store of carbon on land, approximately 1.7 billion tonnes, which attracts a lot of interest in their potential role in tackling climate change. If we lost all the carbon stored in our peatlands, it would be equivalent of more than 140 times Scotland’s annual greenhouse gas emissions.

When peat is exposed, drained and eroding, carbon dioxide and methane is released into our atmosphere. By restoring peatlands, their carbon stores can be preserved, to begin actively sequestering more carbon from our atmosphere.

The Peatland ACTION project started in 2012, led by SNH with funding from the Scottish Government, to help restore our peatlands. This is our primary aim, but we recognise the importance of Scotland’s peat, particularly in crofting communities. The project would like to start an open conversation with crofters and common grazing committees. In the Outer Hebrides we have recently employed a new Peatland ACTION Project Officer, Ben Inglis-Grant, who is hosted by Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh (Carloway Estate Trust).

To start this conversation, a guide to traditional peat cutting practices will be launched this spring, which will explain how peat banks are cared for in a manner that will promote the peatland restoration process for many generations to come.

We want to hear what makes peatlands important to you and give you the opportunity to share your views about the future of peatlands in the Outer Hebrides. Ben will be attending a variety of events over the coming months across the islands.

Contact him direct at Carloway Estate Trust office at Carloway School, 01851 643 481, email: ben@carlowayestatetrust.co.uk. For enquiries across Scotland please email peatlandaction@nature.scot or telephone 0131 316 2691.
Livestock genetic monopolies are preparing for genome-edited meat

The Roslin Institute recently asked in a survey whether people would buy gene-edited meat if it cost less than conventional meat. The argument is: should European consumers reject gene editing, if it could tackle poverty in Africa? The Roslin Institute has revised a claim that many African civil society organisations (CSOs) rejected long ago. Gene editing is seen by CSOs as just another GM technology, while Africans should not be fed what others reject for good reason.

A Cameroonian researcher, however, is cited by Roslin Institute as believing that gene editing should be used if it can, e.g. to tackle African swine fever. African swine fever virus (ASFV) is endemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Warthogs are resilient to the infection, but the virus causes major damage in pig farming. It has recently been introduced to Eastern Europe, from where it is rapidly spreading to Western Europe as well as China. A genetic difference has been detected in the warthog, and the domestic pig protein sequence has been edited accordingly. Proof of resilience of the gene-edited pigs to ASFV is still lacking. The Roslin collaborates in editing the genome of pigs for resistance to the porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) virus, a disease that costs the pig industry more than €1.5 billion each year. CRISPR CAS (a system that confers resistance to foreign genetic elements) was used to remove a section of the pig genome that the virus attaches to. An important partner and funder of this research is the world’s largest provider of pig and cattle genetics, Genus plc. With the gene-editing company it co-founded, RenOVaTe Biosciences, it produced the first-generation gene-edited pigs.

The company is increasingly investing in genome editing; £5.0m in 2018. It had patents issued in the US and Europe. In cattle, Genus plc aims at improving resilience to bovine respiratory disease by editing beef and dairy embryos.

However, according to a 2018 decision of the European Court of Justice, gene editing must be regulated in the same way as genetic modification. Genus plc is therefore engaging with EU regulators and consumers for support to deregulate genome editing. Similar efforts are being made by plant genetics industry such as the global seed market leader, Bayer AG.

Who is Genus plc?

Genus plc is a global livestock genetics market leader based in Basingstoke, Hampshire. With sales of almost half a billion pounds in 2018, it is a medium-sized company compared to Bayer with £34 billion. However, global market shares are comparable, as well as business and lobbying strategies, with a similar devastating global impact on environment, genetic diversity and smallholder farmers.

Genus plc was funded in 2005 by integrating the world’s largest cattle breeding company, ABS, and the world’s largest pig breeding company, PIC. Since then, Genus plc has continuously taken over other cattle and pig breeding companies or parts of them, the latest being Hermitage (Ireland) and IVB (Brazil). The strategy to develop proprietary business approaches does not only include patents. Since industrial pig farming is financially very risky due to disease outbreaks, Genus plc has divested most of the pig multiplication and keeps only pure lines.

Contractual arrangements allow Genus plc to buy back young animals with promising genetics. Weight gain and feed intake data are recorded for each animal on its ear tag and belong to Genus plc. Genus plc is now planning a similar proprietary system for dairy genetics, by giving buyers of dairy cattle semen or embryos early access to elite dairy genetics in return for the option to buy progeny at pre-set prices and breeding rights to bulls. This way, Genus plc is exploring new proprietary traits. Royalty income is a main driver of Genus’s growth.

Other market leaders in livestock genetics

Poultry breeding companies control an exceptionally large global market share. Between 1989 and 2006, the number of poultry breeding companies shrunk from a dozen to only four global companies.

Layer hen genetics: The Erich Wesjohann Group (EW Group) controls two third of the world market for white layer hen genetics, while brown layer hen genetics is dominated by Hendrix Genetics.

Broiler genetics: The same two companies engaged in layer hens, EW Group and Hendrix Genetics, share the world market for broiler genetics with Groupe Grimaud and Tyson.

Turkey genetics are sold only by EW Group and Hendrix Genetics since the third competitor, Willmar, was bought by the EW Group.

Leading poultry companies grew further by integrating other animal species. In addition, most livestock genetics companies are involved in veterinary pharmaceuticals. The Erich Wesjohann Group bought the world market leader in salmon genetics, Aquagen. Hendrix Genetics expanded its business from poultry to pigs, and later to salmon and trout by acquiring respective breeding companies. Groupe Grimaud first bought shares in Monsanto’s former pig genetics business Newsham and later acquired other pig breeders. Groupe Grimaud also invested in shrimp and rabbit breeding.

All of the livestock genetics market leaders are family-owned companies with the exception of Genus plc. Thus, unlike listed companies, regardless of their global market power, they do not have to publish any company data. Decisive developments regarding the future health of our planet lie in their hands, without the public having any right to information.

Furthermore, access to the genes and associated knowledge is becoming increasingly exclusive.

About the author: Susanne Gura is a policy analyst and author of publications about agricultural biodiversity, climate change and corporate concentration, in particular livestock genetics. Since 2009 she chairs the largest German seed savers’ association VEN. One of her publications is “AGROPOLY: A handful of corporations control world food production” – a brochure that shows in brief how industrialisation and concentration in the global food sectors undermine sustainable food systems and food sovereignty. www.econexus.info/sites/econexus/files/Agropoly_Econexus_BerneDeclaration.pdf
Skills Boost coming to an end

WE ARE in our last quarter of events for this project.

Thanks so much to all who have supported Skills Boost – from the funders: Scottish Government, HIE, Nature.Scot and the Woodland Trust – to tutors, venues, local course directors and some 1,400 attendees who have trained on our Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost project since 2016.

We are now designing a plan for a new training project and would really like to hear your views. Also, if you have trained with us and wish to be a case study, please email training@ crofting.org.

Tina Hartley, Lucy Beattie and Ailsa Strange
SCF training team

Hope for the future of crofting

Ailsa Strange, training administrator, describes the encouragingly wide interest in learning about crofting.

I HAVE BEEN part of the SCF training team for just under a year now and particularly enjoy working with those keen to attend the Access to Crofting Toolkit courses.

They come from different backgrounds and all walks of life. The course has proved very popular with those who are new to crofting and looking for basic knowledge to help them get started, but also with successors taking over crofts from parents or grandparents.

Their crofting experience ranges from none at all to “No direct crofting experience, but I have kept poultry and grown my own vegetables on a small scale for over 20 years” to “Just taken over the family croft, where I grew up helping my father and grandfather.”

I have enquiries most weeks about this course and people are willing to travel some distance to attend the weekend of training, recently including journeys from Birmingham to Achiltibuie, Norfolk to Strathpeffer and Lochgilphead to Moray.

At the SCF Celebrating the Spirit of Crofting event last October, we celebrated 20 years of training. The access course has been part of the training throughout, developing and changing to suit. Over the last few years a group of expert tutors has been brought together, the dream team, who between them cover all different aspects of crofting.

I deal with enquiries, enrolments and evaluation of the courses – so I see the progression from initial interest to, for some, beginning to work their land or even buying a croft. Initial reasons for doing the course vary from “I want to gain a better understanding of what crofting involves and what opportunities there are for me as a young crofter,” to “I have now owned my croft for 14 months and have 26 chickens, seven pheasants and two goats but would like to expand to farm pigs and chickens for meat.”

When asked what they are most looking forward to about the course, many people say they are keen to meet other like-minded people and also to learn from others’ experience.

The positive feedback on the evaluation forms is testament to the skill of our tutors in passing on their knowledge and experience. One student summed it up, saying “I felt encouraged that the other attendees, as well as all the course tutors, shared with me a resolute and undeniable love for the land and its communities.”

Despite the challenges, there seems to be hope for the future of crofting.

Gaining Ground – a new social crofting initiative

THE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation is running a pilot project – Gaining Ground. The project is based on the idea of social crofting/care farming and the concept of green care, ie the promotion of social, mental and physical wellbeing through working on the land. The project will be aimed at crofters and smallholders living in the Highland and Moray regions, some of whom have expressed an interest in developing a formal network and who are looking for support on how to enter this new labour market as a diversification opportunity.

LEADER funding will be used to build capacity for crofters to develop new skills, allowing them to confidently consider the option of green care as part of their overall business model. The project will give SCF an opportunity to scope crofters and smallholders who currently provide services and look in detail at their voluntary or business models.

The benefits of social crofting and farming are wide-ranging: social: inclusivity, opportunities for people with additional support needs, community engagement, reducing crofter/smallholder isolation;

health: therapeutic interaction with animals and land, well-being and physical fitness;

economic: increased productivity of land, employment opportunities, better-value packages for social health and welfare agencies, opportunity for agricultural business diversification.

Initially we are gathering a list of interested persons who would like to be informed of events associated with the project. Please get in touch to register your interest by emailing the Gaining Ground administrator Ailsa Strange, training@ crofting.org.
Should we put the tups out?

Scottish Crofting Federation recently held crofting meetings in Lewis and Shetland which had as their theme ‘Threats to Crofting’ and followed these by organising a visit of the UK parliament’s Scottish Affairs Committee to Lewis. A very encouraging turnout and intense degree of engagement at the meetings keenly illustrated the high level of concern amongst crofters. SCF vice-chair, Donald MacKinnon, based in Lewis, commented that meetings such as these, with nearly 100 attending in Stornoway, for example, “demonstrate the fierce commitment to crofting still out there and the continuing strength of crofting culture in places like Lewis and Shetland. SCF will continue to lobby hard on these issues on behalf of our members.”

SCF director Eleanor Arthur, in Shetland, added “Although Brexit fatigue had clearly set in, there was great concern about the possibly catastrophic loss of EU markets, particularly in Shetland, which exports a high proportion of its lambs.”

One SCF member commented that “Whether for or against Brexit, solutions have to be found very quickly…or we just won’t put the tups out!”

There was also widespread concern about the announced reduction in LFASS payments, with scepticism that the Scottish Government can maintain its commitments to retain these payments at 100% of existing levels. “How can we depend on these people, the same people who told us three years ago that the IT system was fixed?” was a sentiment expressed at a Shetland meeting.

There was, however, some optimism about the potential for moving the emphasis in the sheep sector towards high-quality heather-fed, high-welfare, naturally-reared stock which could open up new markets and command higher returns. There was a readiness to explore new markets, particularly on Shetland, although this would require stability in the current industry and its support systems to allow such transitions to be made.

It was felt that the imminent redesign of the Scottish agriculture support scheme should be seen as an opportunity, but that voices from the crofting areas needed to be heard loudly at national policy level, otherwise the new system would again be dominated by the larger farming interests on the eastern and southern mainland. SCF will concentrate much of our lobbying for the new agricultural support system on achieving drastically simplified and more accessible agri-environment schemes that will reach a much higher percentage of crofters – ideally with some locally-led inputs and involvement.

It cannot be emphasised enough that crofting is more than simply agriculture. It is the linchpin which sustains communities and safeguards the environment. This message was made very clear to the MPs of Scottish Affairs Committee, and visiting crofts really demonstrated this.

Vocal concerns were raised on both islands about damage to grass and crops from geese. There was dismay at the prospect of the existing limited goose management schemes in the Western Isles being deprived of all their current funding and a strong feeling that SNH and the Scottish Government urgently need to find a solution to fund ongoing goose management – which Lewis shows can be successful for very little cost. SCF chair Yvonne White raised this issue personally with cabinet secretary for rural economy Fergus Ewing in a recent meeting.

Increasing predation of sheep, both lambs and adults, by white-tailed eagles on Lewis and Harris was raised. Crofters are particularly vexed that no heed seems to be taken of this issue. It is recognised that it is a difficult problem to fix but something must be done or crofters will cease to put out the tups.

Alan Jamieson, who died aged 86 earlier this year, will be well remembered by older members of the crofting community in Harris and Lewis for the part he played in delivering the highly successful Crofter Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS) in the islands.

Alan was born into a crofting and fishing family on the island of Burra in Shetland. Long before it was linked by a bridge, it was a remote and self-sufficient community. He quickly acquired the skills and accomplishments that were essential in such a place: handling a boat, fishing, livestock husbandry, growing vegetables, playing the fiddle and swimming in open water.

On leaving school he started an apprenticeship in joinery but was called up to do his national service in England. During that time he began his studies in building construction at evening classes and after demobilisation he went on to study at the Heriot Watt.

After a spell working for the National Trust, Alan joined the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and started his work at the Stornoway office in the early 1960s. Here his enthusiasm for traditional music led to his meeting Alma Kerr, the renowned Gaelic singer and Mod gold medalist. They married in 1964 and had two sons. In his early days in Stornoway, Alan was a driving force in raising funds for the town’s first swimming pool. He and Alma, along with other musicians, were regular performers at ceilidhs and dances throughout the islands and beyond.

When he retired from the department as master of works in 1992, Alan and Alma continued to work their smallholding in Sandwick, keeping hens and a flock of Shetland sheep, growing vegetables and cutting the peats. They remained active in the traditional music scene, fishing and sailing. Alan always retained his keen interest in the natural world and in the land. He had been a loyal member of SCU and SCF since the founding of the Union in 1984.

As the minister remarked at his well-attended funeral service, his was “a life lived to the full”. Our condolences go to Alma, Douglas and Rodney in Stornoway and to the family in Shetland.
Croft woodlands conference – a future with trees on crofts and smallholdings

Places filled up fast for a two-day croft woodlands conference at Boat of Garten community hall on 9th and 10th May.

The event will celebrate nearly thirty years of croft woodlands since the Crofter Forestry Act of 1991, as well as four years of the Croft Woodland Project. It will provide crofters and smallholders with insights into the benefits of trees; and practical information on planting and managing woodland.

Fergus Ewing MSP will address the conference, which will be opened by Becky Speight, CEO of the Woodland Trust. The keynote speaker will be Duncan Halley from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, who will talk about woodland regeneration in south west Norway, an environment with strong similarities to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

At the heart of the conference will be the narratives of people from across the Highlands and Islands who have planted trees for a purpose – integrated with livestock management, sheltering land-based enterprises, providing raw materials and forest products and boosting local biodiversity.

Framing this experience will be contributions from experts on a range of topics, including upland agro-forestry, mycorrhizal fungi, establishment ‘on the edge’, woodland flora and woodland crofts and housing.

The event will include a site visit to Lynbreck Croft, home of an innovative high-nature-value crofting enterprise run by the winners of the Scottish Crofting Federation’s best crofting newcomer award in 2018.

The conference will also see the launch of a new, comprehensive guide The Highlands and Islands Woodland Handbook.

The Croft Woodland Project was set up in 2015 to support crofters and smallholders in the crofting counties to plant and manage woodlands. In three and half years, the four-strong team of advisers has received nearly 1,000 enquiries from people who want to build trees into their land management practice.

Please note, this conference is now FULLY BOOKED. To add your name to the waiting list, please email eleanorgarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk.

Woodland crofters Ros and Rab Nash run a firewood business at Cogle Wood Croft in Caithness.
Hiraeth

In the last issue Rebecca Cotton gave us her Uist croft and nature notes. This time we have Rebecca’s friend and house-sitter Sue Shields, sharing her painterly perspective.

The Welsh word hiraeth means longing to be where your spirit lives.

Perhaps an overly-romantic indulgence but one I have felt with regard to Uist. This January was my second visit, the first being in the summer of 2017. On both occasions I was struck by the island’s colour, which to me is red in June and silver in winter. And it’s winter I want to write about.

As a visual artist particularly interested in landscape and the people within it, North Uist with its island edges like the setting of a precious stone is complete, contained and aesthetically perfect. That edge keeps its daunting neighbour in check and I am glad for it; though when walking towards the beach at Scolpaig, I could see the breakers burst over the top of the fields. The Atlantic’s contrasts are never better seen than at Malacleit, where the burnt rust of the peat and the startling turquoise alter on turning the corner towards Udal where the sea rages and rolls, disregarding scale, weight and breath. Those tides continue to worry and baffle me.

On Baleshare I walked through a portal of shimmering white light, all reflection, snow, sun and sand. I looked at my hands and they had become alabaster, glittering and silver in the platinum landscape and all about was the sea stretching from a liminal space somewhere past the Monach islands and beyond. This winter light was something I had not anticipated. On a drive towards Eriskay the road was punctured by brilliant puddles, fields trimmed with snowy perimeters and buildings shimmering between telegraph poles and flitting murmurations. So after this monochrome landscape I was not expecting the fire and brimstone of the garden woods at Loch Eynort. No wind, no sound, just the golden rust and tones of hills one behind the other.

I am not ashamed of my hiraeth. Sitting back in my studio in rural Cambridgeshire, it’s a welcome curse, but with the impetus to have me sailing back to wonder at the wind rushing down the machair by Borve, collect stories and wander through histories made by all the people who have left their marks on the land.

If I was in need of solace, magic and searching for either gods or unicorns, I’d surely find them here.

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Friday 19th July 2019

The AGM of the Scottish Crofting Federation will be held at the Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness, at 2.00pm on Friday 19th July 2019, to consider, and if thought fit, 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 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.

3 To elect, or otherwise, persons previously proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq) and/or ratify the appointment of co-opted director, Eleanor Arthur.

4 To approve the following amendments to the company’s Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Remove Article 5.5, Proceedings at AGMs (to bring into line with 10.2) and renumber the following clauses, currently 5.6 to 5.14. These now become 5.5 to 5.13.

- Article 11, Disqualification and removal of directors
  Add 11.1.g) a majority of directors require a director to retire for reasons of incompatibility with the purposes of the company.

- Article 17, Council of Representatives
  17.1 The directors shall, at their discretion, appoint persons from which they can establish a Council of Representatives [known simply as the council], consisting of advisers and member group representatives, on such terms and conditions as to membership, structure and operation, as they consider appropriate. The purpose of the council is to assist the directors in their organisation and conduct of the company’s business, to provide a forum for discussion on matters relevant to the company and to enable the directors to achieve the objects of the company. (no change)
  17.2 An advisor need not be a member of the company, (no change), though a council member must be (new)
  17.3 The maximum number of council members will be 20 (new)
  17.4 There is no limit to the length of time a council member may serve, with the proviso of 17.5 as follows: (new)
  17.5 Removal of council member (new)
    The office of council member shall be vacated if:
      a) he/she ceases to be a director by virtue of any provision of the act or he/she becomes prohibited by law from being a council member; or
      b) he/she becomes bankrupt or makes any arrangement or composition with his or her creditors generally; or
      c) he/she is, or may be suffering from mental disorder and either:
        i) he/she is admitted to hospital in pursuance of an application for admission for treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983 or, in Scotland, an application for admission under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, or
        ii) an order is made by a court having jurisdiction (whether in the UK or elsewhere) in matters concerning mental disorder for his or her detention or for the appointment of a receiver, curator-bonis or other person to exercise powers in respect to his or her property or affairs; or
      d) he/she resigned his or her office by notice to the company; or
      e) he/ she shall for more than six consecutive months have been absent without permission of the directors from meetings of council members held during that period and the directors resolve that his or her office be vacated.
      f) he/she ceases to be a member of the company.
      g) a majority of directors require a council member to retire for reasons of incompatibility with the purposes of the company.

By order of the board of directors

Company secretary: Fiona Mandeville
Date of notice: 31st March 2019
Would you like to help form SCF policy and help your fellow crofters?

THE SCF’s board and council jointly set SCF policy; the council advises the board.

We would like to increase the number of council members from across the crofting counties. Council membership is by invitation of the board.

We are looking for committed crofters, and others with relevant experience, who would be able to attend two meetings of the board and council in Inverness each year and generally have time to be involved in local issues and join SCF focus groups on topics of concern as they arise.

For example, SCF has an agriculture working group which mostly meets by teleconference and discusses SCF policy on general agricultural industry and agricultural support matters. We use teleconferencing as much as possible due to the distances people have to travel and to minimise time demands. Otherwise, interactions are frequently by email.

We would expect all candidates to have an understanding of life in crofting and rural communities. Beyond that, we would look for skills or experience in crofting-related areas such as croft management, crofting law, crofting training, crofting development, practical finance or business experience, IT, fundraising, charity law, agri-environment, woodland crofting and, most importantly of all, a wish to work with and for our communities. Simply being an active crofter gives you an insight into these issues.

These areas of expertise contribute to SCF’s commitment to sustaining and developing crofting as well as representing crofting’s interests to policy-makers in the Scottish and UK parliaments and relevant public agencies such as the Crofting Commission, SNH or HIE.

We aim to have a gender and age balance, so we will particularly welcome younger and female members. In addition, we wish to have a good geographical spread across all the crofting areas. Naturally, council members will be members of the Scottish Crofting Federation.

If you are interested in joining the SCF council, which gives you the opportunity to participate in forming SCF policies and contributing to the preservation and enhancement of our important way of life, we will be very pleased to hear from you.

For further information please contact SCF company secretary Fiona Mandeville – fiona@crofting.org, or chief executive Patrick Krause patrick@crofting.org.

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MEMBERS regularly get in touch with SCF HQ with a wide range of enquiries.

As a member organisation, we are here for our members and will do what we can to help. Details are sent out in confidence to our caseworkers – volunteers from the board and council with years of crofting experience. Some issues from the last few months are outlined below.

There is confusion and misconception about croft development projects and the necessity for planning consent. A member keen on diversifying, and looking for a regular source of additional income, wanted to site a couple of holiday pods on the croft. The member was disappointed to find that planning permission were required, as both a hard standing and waste water drainage was necessary. If the pods or similar structures (dependent on size and non-permanent nature) could be removed from the site each year between October and March, planning consent would be unnecessary. If in doubt, contact your local planning officer about your plans.

Recent calls indicate that the distressing issue of sea eagle attacks on livestock appear to be increasing. Members are suffering financial hardship and are upset when lambs and ewe hoggs are lost or severely injured. To add insult to injury, members are not being believed by the relevant authorities. This is difficult to accept when you have been working with sheep for most of your life.

SCF director Brendan O’Hanrahan raised this on behalf of our members at the cross party group on crofting last month. We are gathering information and photographic evidence, as reported in detail on pages 1 and 15. SCF attended the national sea eagle stakeholders’ group last month and a meeting with SNH is to follow. Photographic evidence is desirable in support of SCF’s case, so please get in touch with HQ if you have photographic evidence of sea eagle attacks on livestock.

The ban on the burning of plastic bale wrap, introduced on 1st January, and the practical problems associated with the disposal of bale wrap and plastics (feed licks) is beginning to challenge our members, who confirm that it is difficult to find a collection or recycling solution in the more remote areas.

SCF is investigating options and is in discussion with a recycling company. SCF council member Jonathan Hedges was advised by his local RPID office that collection bins are eligible for a CAGS grant. However, the uplifting of the contents remains the problem! Let HQ know your experience.

Other recent issues include croft succession, resumptions, damage by bulls, access issues, vacant crofts, rent enquiries, SSSI designations and the purchasing of croft houses.

Finally, remember that if the issue is of a legal nature, the FREE legal helpline, provided by Inksters Solicitors, is exclusively for SCF members and is always worth a call.

Members’ support service – can we help you?

Dear member

The uncertainty of Brexit means that you will be particularly concerned with what you spend your hard-earned money on and naturally you will be scrutinising expenditure, including SCF membership.

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.

With inflation rising again over the last year, and costs therefore rising, 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 a strong voice for crofting is essential. This will be even more critical over the next few years as life outside the European Union unfolds. It is only by having strong representation that we can help crofting not only survive, but thrive. The board and council have agreed, therefore, to put subscriptions up this year in line with inflation, a rise of £1.50. This takes full individual membership to £66.50 from 1st May.

I hope that 2019 will be good to you. Thank you for your continuing support and all good wishes.

Patrick Krause
Chief executive
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**Eleanor returns to the board**

We are very pleased to welcome Eleanor Arthur from Shetland back onto SCF’s board. Eleanor is a former SCF chair and her experience and practical approach will be a great help to colleagues.

**STAY UP TO DATE**

Have you received your SCF e-newsletter recently? If not, please email hq@crofting.org with i-croft as the subject

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**Agricultural shows**

The following is a list of this year’s Highland and Islands shows notified to SCF. It is not definitive. If any member is aware of a show anywhere in the Highland and Islands not already mentioned, please let Sandra at HQ know so it can be circulated. Events marked * are shows where SCF expects to have a stand. As always we would like to have a presence at most shows and invite volunteers to man our stand. Offers of help are most welcome – speak to Sandra at HQ.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Show</th>
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<tr>
<td>12th June</td>
<td>NSA Highland Sheep Show, Thurso</td>
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<td>20-21st June</td>
<td>Royal Highland Show, Ingliston.</td>
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<td>19th July</td>
<td>Tiree Show, Crossapol, Isle of Tiree.</td>
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<td>20-21st July</td>
<td>Caithness Show, Thurso.</td>
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<td>20th July</td>
<td>Sutherland Show, Dornoch.</td>
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<td>27th July</td>
<td>Nairn Show, Auldearn.</td>
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<td>1st August</td>
<td>Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord.</td>
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<td>Date to be arranged</td>
<td>Dunvegan Show, Isle of Skye</td>
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<td>3rd August</td>
<td>Isle of Skye Show, Portree</td>
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<td>7th August</td>
<td>Isle of Arran Show, Lamlash</td>
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<td>Hope Show, Orkney</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th August</td>
<td>Mid-Argyll Show, Lochgilphead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th August</td>
<td>Sunart Show, Strontian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th August</td>
<td>Isle of Bute Show, Rothesay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th August</td>
<td>Lochaber Show, Torlundy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**How to contact us**

Postal address and registered office

Scottish Crofting Federation Headquarters
Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

General enquiries and membership: hq@crofting.org
Tel: 01599 530 005

Training: training@crofting.org
Tel: 01854 612 220

The Crofter: fiona@crofting.org
Fiona Mandeville, editor

Advertising: ads@crofting.org

SCF legal helpline: 01599 230 300
visit www.crofting.org for full contact details

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