

# A right to a living

**E**ARLIER 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 hogs 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.

*...Continued on page 3*

## SCF chair meets with cabinet secretary

**Y**VONNE 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 LFAs.

**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



Yvonne White and cabinet secretary for rural economy, Fergus Ewing

*...Continued on page 3*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- message from our new chair
- economic conditions of crofting
- affordable housing on croft land
- animal health and welfare
- sea eagles
- genetics
- training
- ... and lots more

# Message from the chair...

Yvonne White



**W**ELCOME 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 unwavering 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 generic issues facing us all. Therefore we have an impressive and significant pool of expertise and knowledge to draw upon covering all aspects of crofting, whether it be crofting law, agriculture schemes and regulation or issues such as geese

and predation, which can result in significant economic loss and impacting livestock welfare.

It is a busy and expensive time of year. Spring calves being born, lambing on the horizon (although some of you may have started indoor lambing, either due to forward planning or maybe due to a tup called Houdini) and the price of feed and hay just keeps going up and up. Longer daylight hours are becoming noticeable, which is welcome as it means more can be done outdoors – weather permitting.

As well as our thoughts turning to lambing and calving, this year minds are also turned to Brexit and what effect it will have when taking our lambs and calves to market later in the year. At present there is no clarity whatsoever from Westminster. It has been well documented that any tariffs introduced on lamb exported to Europe will lead to significant financial issues for the sustainability of Highlands and Islands sheep flocks. The potential threat of tariffs on lambs for export combined with the threatened reduction in LFASS is obviously of great concern. Indeed you could argue that Brexit threatens the future of crofting in a way not seen before by this generation.

Some good news: at a recent meeting with the cabinet secretary for the rural economy, Fergus Ewing, and his senior officials, it was re-affirmed

that the Scottish Government is committed to maintaining LFASS at 100% until at least 2022. That said, it is doubtful if additional funding will become available, so this welcome public commitment will likely be delivered by a redistribution of the existing agriculture support budget. It was also proposed that additional funding be found to help address the geese issue in the Outer Hebrides. This may be by using the AECS budget.

Crofting is the bedrock of the Highlands and Islands and is of crucial importance both culturally and economically. Crofters are tied to the land and responsible for the landscape. In due course we pass our crofts on to our nearest and dearest family. Crofts are much sought after and crofters try to keep them in the family if possible. Therefore crofting retains a local population pool, helping keep schools, shops and even the Gaelic language alive, in addition to skills such as livestock management and sheep dog training. Take crofting away and you are left mainly with tourism, retirees and some fish farming on the coasts.

Unless the market is prepared to pay the true cost of livestock production, government support is required in order that crofting and local communities thrive. An appropriate level of support is necessary to recognise and maintain the broad spectrum of benefits delivered by crofting on behalf of the public.

For example, as well as economic and social benefits, high-quality food and livestock production and cultural value, there is biodiversity, environmental and nature conservation associated with actively managing common grazings and the low-intensity system crofting employs. Not least, there is health, not only of livestock or crops grown but of crofters themselves. Not many crofters suffer ailments associated with desk-bound jobs. Crofters tend to keep going long after most people have retired and settled into watching daytime TV.

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

## Women in crofting

**I**N 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 context for training or events. 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.





SCF chair meets with cabinet secretary

...Continued from page 1

budget is also a possibility, most of it currently being spent on goose control in Islay. Again, top-slicing the top recipients in order to redistribute to the Western Isles would be fair and sensible.

**Loans** 900 houses have been built using the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS). SCF members can find it difficult to access CHGS and the Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme (CAGS), as upfront capital is required. SG is not keen to provide loans for these schemes but the crofting bill team work should lead to banks providing loans, using a croft as security.

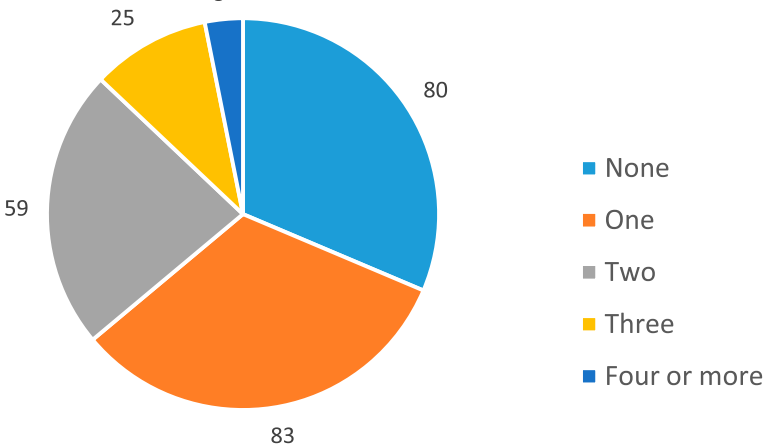
**Future crofting support** The need for future support being tailored more to the needs of crofting, possibly ring fenced, was raised as a way of protecting the numerous environmental and community benefits delivered by crofting.

**Agri-environment and climate schemes (AECS)** The cost and complexity of AECS makes entry unattractive and prohibitive for small producers. Yvonne pointed out that a one-size-fits-all agri scheme does not work for crofting. Croft-specific schemes are required, to fit crofting's uniqueness. The late Land Manager's Options scheme was given as an example that worked for small scale producers. Mr Ewing agreed AECS is overly complicated to administer. Officials will look into it. SCF will help with some real examples.

If you have been unable to access the scheme, but would like to, please let us know.

A right to a living

Wildlife Challenges to Crofting  
respondents significantly affected



...Continued from page 1

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

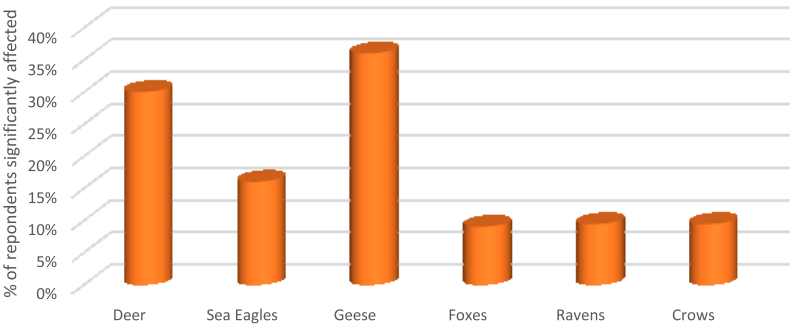
badgers can make keeping poultry impossible even if birds are caged. Foxes and badgers take lambs. Black-backed gulls and skuas can be a problem. Rabbits eat grass and vegetables.

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.

Wildlife Challenges to Crofting



Greylag geese at Keoldale, Sutherland



White-tailed sea eagle

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# Survey of the economic condition of crofting

**T**HE FOUR-YEARLY *Survey of the Economic Condition of Crofting* has just been released, covering the years 2015 to 2018. A few points emerge that are worth noting.

The majority of registered crofters are male. Experience suggests that, though the majority of crofts are jointly managed by a couple, it is the man who is registered. At the moment only one name appears on the Register of Crofts (RoC) held by the Crofting Commission, but SCF has been pushing to have this amended in the current crofting legislation reform. Interestingly, the proportion of women crofters is increasing, having doubled over the past four years.

The image of crofters being older folk is accurate, it seems. Whilst about a fifth of the population of Scotland is over 65, almost half of crofters are over 65. This also held true when

comparing crofters to the general population of specific crofting areas. And the profile has not significantly changed since 2014.

It is clearly difficult for young folk to get into crofting. The majority of crofters have been crofting for 20 years or more and there are strong family connections, yet nearly a fifth of crofting families say that no-one is working the croft, almost double the 2014 figure.

The majority of working crofts are based on livestock still though other enterprises are increasing, such as the provision of holiday accommodation and leisure activities, which makes sense with the increase in tourism we are experiencing. Apparently wood processing is on the increase, either from woodland crofts or crofting forestry. More time is spent on crofting activity now, having nearly doubled from 2014.

Despite the hours being put in, financial

rewards are low. The most common figure given on earnings from crofting activity is £2000 and this has not changed from 2014. Income from crofting has become more polarised, with a few high earners at one end and an increase to a quarter of crofters getting no income from their croft work at the other end. But this did not stop nearly 70% of crofters investing in their crofts over the past three years; and nearly half say they plan to invest in the next three years. This is a considerable show of optimism given the unstable future we face, uncertainty being the main reason given for not investing.

So whilst the majority of crofters need to supplement their croft income with off-croft employment, a significant proportion still feel that crofting gives them an input to the household that is worth getting. Perhaps crofting lends itself particularly to uncertain times.

## SCF welcomes Scottish Affairs Committee to Lewis

**S**CF 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 crofters were clear that without continued support many would simply be unable to continue crofting. The current payments system was also raised, with serious concerns on the planned reductions in LFASS in the coming years.

Then the committee, accompanied by SCF chief executive officer Patrick Krause along with directors Finlay Matheson and Donald MacKinnon, set off on a tour of Lewis crofts. First stop was North Dell in Ness and a discussion with Domhnall 'Sweeny' MacSween. Sweeny explained how he built up his diverse crofting enterprise which includes rearing sheep, cattle and pigs along with a relatively large flock of laying hens, selling much of his produce direct to the consumer or to local shops. He said that any restrictions on exporting lamb to the EU would



Left to right: Donald MacKinnon (SCF), Finlay Matheson (SCF), Pete Wishart MP, Deirdre Brock MP, Ally Williamson (crofter South Bragar), Ben Williams (committee staff member), Danielle Rowley MP, Ben Rayner (committee staff member) and John Lamont MP

be devastating for store lamb producers and encouraged the MPs to do everything they could to avoid a no deal.

Sally Reynolds in North Galson keeps a small flock of blackface ewes, 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. She is also a Scottish Land Commissioner. She stressed the importance of agricultural support to crofters and how the uncertainty for future support is causing concern in the crofting community.

Kenny and Lesley Matheson

breed pedigree Highland cattle on their croft, a successful business selling breeding stock all over the world and selling boxed beef. They highlighted some of the environmental and economic challenges that crofters in Lewis face, including the weather, limitations of the land, distance from suppliers and resulting additional costs, as well as the ever-present threat posed by greylag geese, which ruined their silage crop in 2018. Despite these challenges Kenny and Lesley, like other crofters, manage to produce a quality product from their croft.

Our final visit was to Ally

Williamson, a crofter in South Bragar. Ally gave the committee a powerful insight into the way crofters feel about the land and the deep connections that many have to their crofts. He stressed that crofters desperately want to carry on doing what they are doing but that continued financial support is essential to allow this to happen.

The committee left Lewis with a much deeper understanding of the issues facing crofters and especially their concerns about Brexit. We can now only hope that they will bear in mind the testimonies they heard when back in Westminster.



# 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 community of place that we hold so dear.

I have no envy of non-residents or of their individual wealth. I welcome all visitors to the Highlands and Islands. The income generated to the locality from tourism and the trickle-down

to the local resident population is helpful. I hope all visitors enjoy their time here amongst our landscapes, culture and people. My objection is toward the second-home and/or property investor, whose speculation is subtly changing our valued way of life. The crofting community particularly is in imminent danger from this threat.

If you agree with me, what can be done about it? Probably not much. Market-led forces are the ethos many property investors follow, to the exclusion of other human value factors. An attractive property in a spectacular setting, at a price affordable to the non-resident, but out of reach of the local. What resident wouldn't jump at an opportunity to sell off buildings or land to the highest bidder? I would not expect a resident property owner to stand on principle against this trend either, when confronted by such a dilemma to sell or not sell to an outsider.

Some years ago an old, now deceased, neighbour was one of two remaining crofters in our township. She explained her longing to see, once again, lights in the glen and reek from the lums of nearby houses. What awful loneliness she must have endured during those twilight years of her life. Thankfully her life improved slightly when others joined with my wife and I to become full-time resident crofters there. This doubtless lifted the spirits of our elderly neighbour for what was ultimately to be her final days.

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?

*Recommended reading: "Night Falls on Ardnamurchan" by Alasdair MacLean. (ISBN 9780575034600). Since its first publication in 1984, Night Falls on Ardnamurchan has become a classic account of the life and death of a Highland community.*

*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.*



Innovative designs and eco-friendly housing on Plockton common grazing land has strengthened the local community.





Young families thrive in the new houses on croft land made available by the township committee.



Affordable housing allows young families to remain and prosper in remote rural communities.

# Affordable housing on croft land

*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.*

**C**ROFTING 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

*"We now have more young families in the village, and attending the local primary and high school"*

*- Catherine Will,  
Plockton grazings clerk*

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 Ardhaisaig 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](mailto: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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Ena MacDonald's cattle in North Uist

## 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.*

**W**HILE 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. I 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](http://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](http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/common-grazings-regulations-template); or a copy can be requested directly from the Commission by emailing [grazings@crofting.gov.scot](mailto:grazings@crofting.gov.scot)

This board is keen and committed to keep 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.

## Letter to the editor

Dear editor

*As we approach Brexit day, it is clear that crofting faces significant change. Crofting will only be able to capitalise on that change if the right response, and the right leadership, is in place.*

*There are many opportunities for the crofting sector when we leave the European Union, and it is up to the Scottish government to ensure these are realised. Thus far, we have seen proposals put forward in other parts of the UK, but a complete absence of direction from the government here in Scotland.*

*We have seen an abundance of reports, advisory committees and taskforces. However well-intentioned, this activity is fatally undermined by an absence of vision*

*for what Scottish agriculture should look like after Brexit.*

*And this is problematic, because our agricultural needs are unique and require a tailored approach.*

*We need to support Scotland's crofting communities and we believe there needs to be meaningful engagement with those who work and live on crofts in order to deliver a system that truly reflects crofting in the present day.*

*We continue to believe that any new Scottish support system must be tailored around the fact that the majority of agricultural land in Scotland is "less favoured", which of course will encompass most, if not all, of Scotland's crofted land.*

*We also think that any future system must not be bureaucratic and must deliver*

*payments on time, instead of the continuing delays that many will experience at present, where some wait months or more for vital payments.*

*We also want to see a system which supports the next generation of crofters whilst at the same time allowing greater flexibility of working for those crofters who may be juggling different jobs and enterprises at the same time. Similarly, it will be important to help some plan their exit from crofting and allow them to do so with dignity.*

*Crofting is vital to the lifeblood of many rural communities in the Highlands and Islands and we want that to continue to be the case.*

**Donald Cameron MSP, shadow cabinet secretary for the rural economy (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)**

# Croft succession

**T**HERE 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.

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



Brian Inkster

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](http://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.

**W**OULD 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



# First past the post gains the most

*I read with interest Brain Inkster's article in Crofter 116, writes SCF member Steve Husband, and the challenge period for croft registrations.*

**W**HEN COMMON grazings were being registered a few years ago, the principal landlord of our common grazings called a shareholders' meeting.

All crofters concerned were invited to come and amend large-scale paper maps, as required. Rub number one: paper maps. Subsequently, in consultation with the secretary and chair of the grazing committee, the amended and agreed maps were again amended (not with malicious intent), then submitted for registration with Registers of Scotland (RoS). Rub number two: submissions differing from agreed maps.

Recently I registered my croft, triggered by my apportionment application. Six months after the nine-month challenge period ended it transpired that the common grazing boundary bordering my croft differed from what I had understood to be previously agreed, submitted and registered.

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 some 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



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have gained some 1400 square metres from my neighbour's croft, and about 250 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 that 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 grazings committee is reluctant to respond (probably because of the paperwork load),

and my neighbouring crofter won't respond. I understand from the Commission 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 fat-cats can afford legal opinion and late challenges. Only when either the Commission or RoS, or both, accept that there is the probability of technological mismatches arising from paper to digital mapping, there will be continuing appeals and rectification processes, 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 timeously.*

## the random musings of an aged gentleman of Scotland

*Mackinnon v Duke of Argyll* 1947 SLR 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).

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, *Marc 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.*

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## ON THE CROFT

# 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](http://fas.scot).



Attendees at the third workshop standing on improved land in Fiscavaig, looking at what the land looked like five years previously.



What a view! One of the stunning vistas we enjoyed from Sam's croft – showing the much improved grass.

## Croft mentorship through FAS

**F**OR MANY YEARS, Billy Matheson worked offshore as an engineer.

Wearied of the work and keen to try something new, Billy decided to move back home to Lewis and try his hand at crofting. New to the industry and in need of animals and advice, Billy sought the help of Paul Rowllston – a local livestock farmer – to be his mentor through Farm Advisory Service (FAS).

Now managing a small croft, Billy reflects on his mentoring experience and what he got out of it...

### How did you get started in crofting?

"I knew I wanted to do something different, but I didn't really start off with the intention of having sheep. I had bought a croft and knew I wanted to draw on others' experience to grow my business, so I went with the most popular business type for the area I'm in, keeping sheep."

### How did you find your mentor?

"Through a neighbouring crofter. I was interested in Hebridean sheep in

particular and Paul is well known on the island for being very experienced with that breed."

*I would make it compulsory to have mentoring.*

### How did your mentor help you?

"With absolutely everything. I can't thank him enough. He broke things down like nutrition and body scoring – so I would know how to categorise the sheep and judge if they're healthy. He helped me with practical skills like how to check teeth, eyes and the general physical condition of the sheep. How to trim hooves and do drenching. He really covered all aspects of animal husbandry. I even learned how to put a splint on a broken leg."

### How often did you meet with your mentor?

"We mixed and matched depending

on what we were doing. Sometimes I went to his farm and sometimes he came to the croft.

I think he spent roughly five full days with me in total. You're allocated four full days with your mentor, but Paul was always happy to help and definitely went over the allotted time. If I needed help or advice with something, it was great knowing I could just ring him."

### What benefits do you anticipate for your business as a result of mentoring?

"Longevity, I think. It has enabled me to forward plan. Buying sheep is easy, but without the knowledge of how to care for them properly, the business won't last. Mentoring gives you a foundation to build from, to form a proper business plan.

Having sheep doesn't scare me because I know I'll be prepared to deal with whatever problems arise. Paul knows how to run a successful business. It's his livelihood, so



Billy Matheson

learning from him means I know what I need to do to be successful."

### Would you recommend mentoring to other crofters?

"Yes, absolutely. I would make it compulsory to have mentoring. People shouldn't be allowed to keep livestock without proper training. But even if you don't have animals, if you're doing some kind of cropping – I couldn't not recommend it. Why would you say 'no' to four days of free learning with someone who has knowledge and experience in the area you want to work in? It's a no-brainer."

*To apply for mentoring, or for more information on FAS's one-to-one services, please visit [www.fas.scot/advice-and-grants](http://www.fas.scot/advice-and-grants). Alternatively, call 0300 323 0161 or email [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot).*

## ON THE CROFT

## 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 very long. These are the top tips:



Polytunnel ready for new cover using the trenching method. New end frames fitted and anti-hotspot tape applied.

- 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.*

**S**INCE 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 bürach, 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 had to be turned away on occasion. As we found on a visit to Mull last autumn, the presence of a slaughterhouse adds a huge amount of value to the islands' agricultural output and stimulates a vibrant local food economy.

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 hung for three weeks.

Despite this success, the economics of a small abattoir will always be challenging. Margins are tight and costs are ever-increasing, especially for waste disposal. Retaining skilled staff relies on availability of housing, and that is at least as much an issue in Mull as anywhere else on the west coast.

If the Scottish Government is serious about retaining and enhancing the capacity to bring to market the superb produce of the islands and the remote north west mainland, these are matters that it surely must address.

*Thanks to Flora Corbett, chair of Mull Slaughterhouse Ltd, for very helpful input.*



Mull and Iona Abattoir



## ON THE CROFT

# A striking lack of empathy

*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.*

**T**HE 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



© Skybirds

stretch from NW Ross and the west side of Lewis through Lochaber, Lochalsh, Uist, Ardnamurchan 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 hogs 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 hogs (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.



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Na h-Eileanan an Iar

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The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA**

If anybody would like to meet with Alasdair Allan, Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Western Isles, he can be contacted using the following details:

*Ma tha duine sam bith ag iarraidh coinneachadh ri Alasdair Allan, Ball-Pàrlamaid na h-Alba airson nan Eilean Siar faodaidh sibh a cleachdadh na seòlaidhean a leanas:*

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## ON THE CROFT

# Be aware of Johne's disease in sheep

Dr Karen Stevenson, Moredun Research Institute

**J**OHNE'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 detect the bacterium, but as many sheep are low shedders and shedding can be intermittent, a negative result does not guarantee freedom



from infection.

If JD is diagnosed or suspected on the farm, there are a number of control measures that can 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 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.

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 be 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](mailto:info@moredun.org.uk)  
Website: [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk)*

*In addition to the guidelines for louping 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.*

## 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.



## ON THE CROFT

# Agricultural waste disposal challenge

**T**HE 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 sorted.”

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 making it almost impossible for them to do the right thing. Legislators need to look at best practice in other countries and implement a modern recycling scheme. For instance, in Germany all plastic containers are recyclable.”

“Workable inexpensive solutions can still be put in place. Recycling is in society’s best interests,



© Martin Benson – North Uist

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 be 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 uplifting 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

**M**ÀTHAIR NA ciste mine, dùnan math innearach.

Tha an sean-fhacal cho fìor ‘s a bha e riamh, bha fhios aig daoine a chionn linn-tean gur e talamh torrach a’ bhunait airson bàrr math, agus bàrr fallainn. An dèidh cha mhòr seachdain de shìde thioram, thòisich mi air innear a chuibheadh a-mach don ghàradh leis a bhara, agus gun teagamh tha an obair sin air dìofar mòr a dhèanamh thar nam bliadhnaichean. Cha robh an talamh ach bochd nuair a thog sinn an taigh còig bliadhna fichead air ais ach a-nis gheibh sinn fogharadh ann am pailteas.

Tha an obair seo a’ toirt orm cnuasachadh air an innear. Bha dùnan, no mar a their cuid, lagais, flagais no torran, cumanta, gu dearbh riatanach, aig cuil a’ bhàthaich. Ach le sin bha mathachadh ga chall, a’ ruith a-mach leis an uisge a bhiodh a’ sruthadh troimhe ann an side fhliuch. Air tàilleamh sin, tha e na



bhuannachd ma ghabhas an innear cumail tioram.

‘S e sin a bha nam inntinn nuair a thog sinn am bàthach; an innear a chumail tioram agus cairteadh a dhèanamh cho furasta ‘s a ghabhas. Mar sin thog sinn bàthach ann an stoidhle Nirribheach. Leis cho cas ‘s a tha an dùthaich sin, bidh na tuathanaich daonnan a’ togail a’ bhàthaich air leathad gus am faigh

iad a-staigh sna dìofar ùrlaran gu dìreach bhon taobh a-muigh. Lobht gu h-àrd airson feur agus sloc gu h-iseal fon bhàthach airson innear. Sa bhàthach againn tha tuill ann an taobh na griup no a’ chlais aig cuil nam beathaichean agus chan eil ann ach am buachair a sguabadh tro na tuill gus tuiteam san t-slochd fodha.

Dh’fhaodadh buannachdan eile a

bhith ann bho innear cuideachd. Tha dòighean ann an teas bhon innear a’ cur am feum, no nas buannachdail buileach, bith-gas (methane) a chruthachadh. ‘S e pròiseas nàdarra a tha seo, ga dhèanamh le bacteria ann an tanca-lobhaidh – ‘s e sin tanca far a bheil innear ga briseadh sìos as aonais èadhar.

Bha mi leughadh o chionn goirid mu thuathanas mòr san t-Suain far a bheil tanca-lobhaidh ga bhiadhadh le innear bhon chroth airson bith-gas a chruthachadh a bhios ga chleachdadh gu a h-uile togalach a theasachadh, dealan gu leòr a ghinintinn, agus gu fionnarachadh airson toradh a’ bhainne a ghlèidheadh. Chos an siostam sin còrr is millean not ach tha trì mìle beothach aca. Gabhaidh tancaichean-lobhaidh beaga cur air bhonn air beagan mhilltean.

‘S math as fhiach beachdachadh orra!

*le Gabhan Mac a’ Phearsain*

# 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.*

**W**HERE 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/Cygnal 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](http://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](http://www.sasa.gov.uk/potato-register)

One of the bigger databases for seed of older varieties is EURISCO:

## THE EUROPEAN CULTIVATED POTATO DATABASE

### Isle Of Jura

Higher Taxon	Solanaceae
Genus	Solanum L.
Species	Solanum tuberosum L. cv. Isle Of Jura
Parentage	Navan x 81 C117-13
[Pedigree History <a href="#">↗</a> ]	
Breeder	Cygnal PB
Breeder Agent	Cygnal PB Ltd

### Images



Europotato website screenshot

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](mailto:maria@gaianet.org).*

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



**P**EATLANDS 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 the 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 forming peat again, helping to take yet 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](mailto:ben@carlowayestatetrust.co.uk). For enquiries across Scotland please email [peatlandaction@nature.scot](mailto:peatlandaction@nature.scot) or telephone 0131 316 2691.*



# Livestock genetic monopolies are preparing for genome-edited meat

**T**HE 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 revived 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, eg 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



Unedited bull and calf



Cheryl's dwarf piglets



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 shrank 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](http://www.econexus.info/sites/econexus/files/Agropoly_Econexus_BerneDeclaration.pdf)*



## TRAINING

### 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](mailto:training@crofting.org).

*Tina Hartley, Lucy Beattie and Ailsa Strange  
SCF training team*



Blade shearing at Leckmelm



Fencing at Achnacarnin



Sheepdog training

## 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.



Planting salad seeds, Strathpeffer



Certificates for course graduates

## Gaining Ground – a new social crofting initiative

**T**HE 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](mailto:training@crofting.org).



## TRAINING

# 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



A good turnout at the meeting

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



**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.

Alan was closely involved in designing the seven styles of bungalow that crofters were supported to build through CBGLS. That scheme brought about a vast improvement in the quality of rural housing in the islands. Alan's area mainly covered Harris; and new house building in the Bays helped to retain a working crofting and fishing community in that challenging area. Alan was strict on standards of work but would go the extra mile to ensure that crofters got the maximum possible benefit from the scheme. He was always willing to roll his sleeves up on site and demonstrate the right way to do the job, especially for those doing self-build.

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.

**P**LACES FILLED up fast for a two-day croft woodlands conference at Boat of Garten community hall on 9th and 10th May.

and practical information on planting and managing woodland.

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.

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*.



Woodland crofters Ros and Rab Nash run a firewood business at Cogle Wood Croft in Gaithness



### Newly planted hazel

*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 [eleonoragarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:eleonoragarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk)*

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or email [crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk)

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# 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.*

**T**HE 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,



Milton, South Uist

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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## MEMBERS PAGES



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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



## MEMBERS PAGES

# Would you like to help form SCF policy and help your fellow crofters?

**T**HE 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](mailto:fiona@crofting.org), or chief executive Patrick Krause [patrick@crofting.org](mailto:patrick@crofting.org).*



SCF AGM in Newtonmore

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## MEMBERS PAGES

# Members' support service – can we help you?

**M**EMBERS 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.



© Martin Benson – Tires

## A letter from the chief executive

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 to 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*

Patrick Krause  
Chief executive



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## MEMBERS PAGES

## Eleanor returns to the board



**W**E 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](mailto:hq@crofting.org) with i-croft as the subject

## Tendering for SCF website development

SCF is undergoing a digital review, with the aim of upgrading our digital profile and data management. This will involve designing and developing a new website with potential for peripherals such as a CRM. If you have the skills and may be interested in tendering for this, look out for more details in future editions of our e-newsletter.

## 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.

12th June	*NSA Highland Sheep Show, Thurso
20-21st June	*Royal Highland show, Ingleston.
19th July	Tiree Show, Crossapol, Isle of Tiree.
20-21st July	Caithness Show, Thurso.
20th July	Sutherland Show, Dornoch.
27th July	Nairn Show, Auldearn.
1st August	*Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord.
Date to be arranged	Dunvegan Show, Isle of Skye
3rd August	*Isle of Skye Show, Portree
7th August	Isle of Arran Show, Lamlash
7th August	Hope Show, Orkney
8th August	Dounby Show, Orkney
8th August	Islay Show, Bridgend
10th August	Orkney County Show, Bignold Park
10th August	Mid-Argyll Show, Lochgilphead
11th August	Sunart Show, Strontian
14th August	Isle of Bute Show, Rothesay
24th August	Lochaber Show, Torlundy



## How to contact us

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