

SCF responds to draft ferries plan

The following is an extract from our consultation response to the draft ferries plan published by Transport Scotland at the end of last year.

FOLLOWING THE extensive consultation carried out by the Scottish Government, and the parliamentary inquiry, the draft ferries plan comes as a great disappointment.

There are a few interesting and positive developments on offer, but these are far outweighed by the general tenor of the document, revealing, in many cases, a reluctance to provide any more than a minimal level of service to communities already struggling to survive.

The draft plan represents an Edinburgh-centred view of the Highlands and Islands. It reveals a lamentable ignorance of the realities of life and work in Scotland's islands and remote mainland areas and even of the most basic geography of the region. The assumption appears to be that the only important traffic flows are to/from the central belt and/or Inverness.

However, connectivity within the region is just as important as travel to and from, if local businesses are to have the opportunity to develop and contribute to economic growth. This is especially so in the case of agriculture, where a remote mainland crofting community would be deprived of access to its abattoir service should these proposals become reality.

The importance of interconnectivity within the region has been proved beyond doubt by the success of the vehicle ferries introduced on the Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra within the last fifteen years.

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A simple goal for the new Crofting Commission board

A statement from the Commission

APRIL 2012 marked an historic moment for crofting communities, when the newly-established Crofting Commission met for the first time.

At the heart of the new Commission lies a commitment to democratic accountability and a desire to get things done.

The board of nine commissioners includes six members directly elected by crofters, in the first election of its kind. In addition, three members were appointed by the minister, Stewart Stevenson. At the time of going to press, the process of appointing a convener had still to be completed.

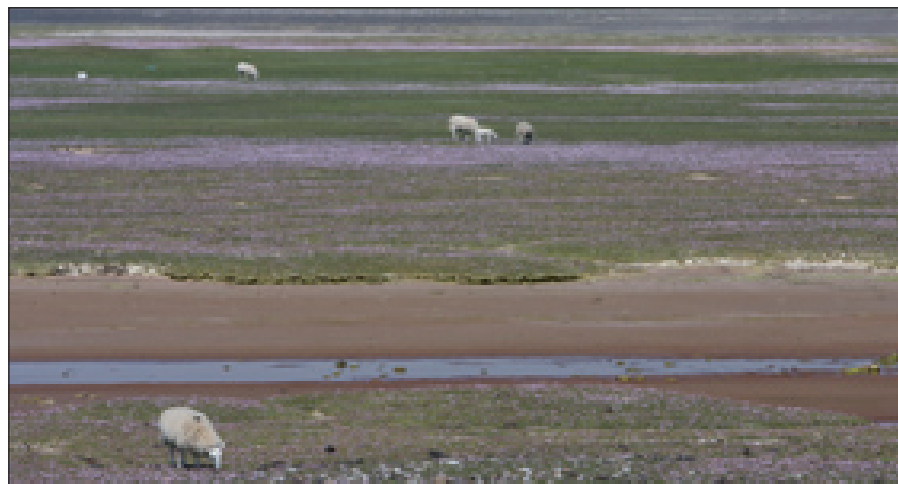
The new board comes together with a vast range of experience of crofting and land-holding. It reflects the contrasting realities of crofting, from the distinctive and different island cultures of Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles, to the assorted land pressures

of mainland areas and the varied communities of the smaller isles. Present-day crofting is a tapestry of inter-woven themes and that is clearly represented by the new Commission.

When the board met for the first time on 3rd April, they reaffirmed the importance of the panel of assessors and grazings committees. With the Commission now a solely regulatory body, the new commissioners confirmed that both the network of assessors and the unique structure of regulated grazings, with their associated grazings committees, represent an extremely valuable link between the public body and the crofting communities it serves.

One of the most pressing issues before the new board is the preparation of a plan. This is a new requirement under the 2010 Act which gave rise to the Crofting Commission. The act requires the Commission to draft a plan which it will then consult on, before submitting to the minister for approval. This will be an important

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SCF response to the recent CAP consultation

"Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the on-line questionnaire regarding CAP reform. Having attempted to fill in the questionnaire we have decided to decline the invitation.

"Whilst understanding the reasoning for wanting to get a quick response, we feel that a tick-box questionnaire does not do such an important subject justice and could be misleading. Many of the questions are ambiguous and we found that we could actually tick boxes at opposite ends of the scale whilst meaning to convey the same opinion. The lack of a place in each question to justify the tick-box answer in a

meaningful way prevents explanation and therefore the answer can be completely misconstrued.

"Therefore, lest we incriminate ourselves, we feel it is best to decline to participate in this survey. We also urge the Scottish Government to take into account that many participants may well be in the same position and have just tried to answer as best they could – having received complaints from our members this does indeed seem to be the case – and will therefore not put much weighting on their interpretation and consequent use of the consultation answers." *(a summary)*

Message from the chair...



LET ME START by recognising the success of the Let's Liberate Diversity forum which celebrated crofters' seeds and breeds at Strathpeffer in March.

This was a major international event. It was also our own

annual gathering. I would like to thank all those involved for the effort they put in.

We must now look forward to our AGM against a much-changed background in which the Scottish Government is looking to the newly-elected Crofting Commission to enforce new duties on all tenants and owner-occupiers of crofts.

As the law now stands, a croft must either be cultivated or put to other purposeful use and crofters are obliged to keep their land in good agricultural and environmental condition. This is coupled with the residency duty; that is, crofters (tenants and owner-occupiers alike) must reside within 20 miles of their land, unless there is a clear and accepted reason for them not to. Together these duties apply to no other farmer or landowner in Scotland. Perhaps they should.

New powers to tackle

absenteeism and deal with neglect and misuse will necessarily direct the Commission's attention towards regulation as never before. Each unoccupied croft will be considered a missed opportunity for people to be living in crofting communities and actively contributing to the local economy.

But, for this new regime to work, it seems obvious that there must be better opportunities for outside employment for crofters and their families to enable their communities to function; not just a wish to protect and enhance our natural environment for future generations.

It is timely to note that the Scottish Land Court is a hundred years old and that the old Crofters Commission has gone. I was pleased to attend celebrations for both.

At its last assessors'

conference the old Commission acknowledged the crisis in common grazings. These areas form the greatest part of land under crofting tenure, yet in many cases arrangements for their management have all but disappeared. The SCF seeks to support communities who wish to map their lands and uncover the potential that shared management of assets can provide. The publication of *Taking Stock**, a study of crofters' stock clubs, is just one of our recent initiatives.

There are others. And we are taking the case for supporting crofting to Holyrood and Brussels on our members' behalf.

These are difficult but exciting times. Come, join in and be a part of them.

*www.crofting.org/index.php/publications/66

Derek Flynn

Our man in Brussels

Norman Leask reports

SCF HAS been represented at various meetings in Brussels since the last Crofter.

As the EU budget for research and innovation seems the only one to be increased, we must be creative in getting some of it to work for small-scale producers.

A seminar convened by the European commissioner for agriculture, Dacian Cioloș, gave the impression that it has been ear-marked for big business. Perhaps a route in is to join with local colleges and set up cross-border research projects. Native breeds and seeds, developing local food chains and extending growing seasons using renewables are some of the many possible areas of research appropriate to crofting.

During a seminar celebrating 50 years of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), a speaker from the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture (DG AGRI) said that CAP was like a symphony changing moods and tempos. An immediate comment from the floor was: "We hope it is not a requiem for small family farms after 2014". CAP is not celebrated in the crofting counties or similar terrain in Europe as it has been responsible for the destruction

of heritage, both cultural and environmental. Various speakers emphasised the need for the European Commission (EC) and member states to support vulnerable areas, or depopulation and abandonment would result in permanent pasture in the periphery of Europe becoming wilderness.

This was an opportune moment to reinforce that a form of coupled support is essential. This may ensure that no movement of funds from the livestock sector occurs. There is a strong aspiration to 'green' agricultural support and the Commission was advised that greening could not occur without livestock.

At a seminar on promotion of European food and drink we tried to persuade officials from DG Agri to promote local food. They reluctantly agreed but I feel sure that this will soon be forgotten, with promotion of European food and drink focused on the far east – China, Japan and Korea were mentioned for trade fairs.

At the beef meat advisory group at DG AGRI, forecast beef prices were good because world producers, including EU – but excluding Australia – had reduced national herds. Some counties also had problems exporting to Europe which gave European prices a boost. No great concern was expressed by

Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) about the Schmallenberg virus.

Processors, who are not paying for it, were insistent on cattle EID being compulsory. We suggested, as we had for sheep EID, that there was no requirement for traceability until animals left the farm of birth. The next buyer or processor should be responsible, taking away cross-compliance issues or need for expensive equipment for small farmers. Marts and slaughter-houses have to take responsibility for all the EID problems now visited on us because of sheep cross-compliance checks. At this stage the Commission proposes no new legislation on animal welfare, only a more rigorous enforcement of the present rules. EC officials assured that neutral time was not being examined at present.

At another seminar convened by Dacian Cioloș, this time looking at local agriculture and short food supply chains, an array of speakers explained the importance of small-scale agriculture to Europe. John Dalli, European commissioner for health and consumer policy also attended.

An observation: at the meeting on research and innovation aimed at big business and big farmers, lunch consisted of the best of champagne, more wine than could

be drunk and the best produce and expensive foodstuffs. At the meeting on local agriculture and short food chains, believed by the Commission to only interest peasants, lunch offered a small quantity of wine to accompany the main course of smoked ling (not that there is anything wrong with smoked ling) and cheap cuts of chicken.

It made me realise how much the Commission appreciates the hard work of small-scale agriculture and its importance to the environment and the retention of rural populations.



As we went to press I have been privy to some very positive news from the Commission in Brussels on greening and more especially the permanent pasture issue.

It looks like we may have won the herbaceous battle.

SCF responds to draft ferries plan

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These have stimulated tourism, and have allowed island-based businesses to trade throughout the Outer Hebrides chain.

As we approach further constitutional change, Scotland's islands and remote mainland communities need to be seen as an integral part of the nation rather than as a peripheral nuisance. This ferries plan leads us to the disconcerting conclusion that we are viewed as the latter.

For at least sixty years, the level of freight charges to and from Scotland's islands has been identified as the main constraint to their economic development. Where RET has been piloted it has brought short-lived relief from these impositions, but that lifeline is to be snatched away.

The consultation response highlights the threat to downgrade the Tobermory-Kilchoan service to passenger only which would seriously damage crofting in Ardnamurchan; welcomes the proposal for an improved winter service for Barra; and supports moves towards a dedicated Lochboisdale-Mallaig service. SCF has backed up its consultation response with a flow of press releases and letters to politicians. The full response can be seen at: www.crofting.org/uploads/consultations/ferries2012.



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A simple goal for the new Crofting Commission board

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document, as it will outline how the Crofting Commission will discharge its functions. It will not only guide the priorities of the organisation, it will help crofters understand the basis of decisions taken and show ministers how the Crofting Commission will help achieve benefits for rural Scotland. Commissioners have pledged to consult widely on the plan this summer.

A new era in the regulation of crofting comes with a commitment from the board to act with energy, placing consistent decision-making and openness at its core. The goal is simple – to make a real and positive difference to crofters and crofting.

Concern over imbalance in electoral areas

As we reported in the last issue of *The Crofter*, the areas from which commissioners

were elected seemed disproportionate.

The SCF wrote to the minister pointing out that it was confusing that the elections for commissioners were on an area basis as it is natural to assume that commissioners represent the area they were elected by. The minister assures us (and the cross party group on crofting who also wrote to him on this issue) that commissioners do not represent areas and that the commission acts as one in the regulation of crofting.

The commissioners are: Sandy Cross, Murdo MacLennan, Kathleen Sinclair, William Swan, Susan Walker, Colin Kennedy, Ian MacDonald, Arnold Pirie and Donald Ross.

Congratulations to all and thank you for putting yourselves forward in the service of crofting. Best wishes in exercising of your duties.

Have your say

IN THIS ISSUE we introduce a discussion forum. Members are encouraged to respond, leading to an ongoing debate on matters of crofting interest. Responses should be emailed to the editor – fiona@crofting.org – and a selection will be included in the next issue.

It should be noted that the views expressed in these columns are those of individuals, not of the SCF. For example, precisely how common the sale of whole crofts as described below is not quantified, but the suggestion which follows merits discussion. Let's hear what you think.

Dear Editor

The spectacle of a good croft being sold of in its entirety for house sites by an absentee crofter is one that leaves a bad taste in the mouth, yet it is common today.

There is a rising world-wide demand for food that will only increase as the world economy comes out of recession and the economies of India, Brazil and China expand even more rapidly. Recurring drought in the south east of England may compromise further Britain's ability to feed itself and it is possible that ten years from now the economics of crofting will have changed dramatically for the better. If there is to be a crofting economy left to respond to the new opportunities, we need to be much more protective of our better land. Urban sprawl is a serious threat to our food security.

Crofters who have not exercised the right to buy, or those who bought less than five years ago, are entitled to 50% of the sale price, the balance going to the landlord. Perhaps it would be a good idea if the landlord interest

could be transferred by law to the Scottish Communities Fund. When the sale of a house site is completed half the price would go to the fund, regardless of how long the crofter had owned the land. The local grazing committee could be given first call on the money, to be used in furtherance of local croft related projects such as the establishment of community woodlands or improvements to the common grazing. If the grazings committee, or perhaps the community council, have no need for the money it could then be used to support community land buy-outs in the Assynt style. Perhaps the fund should be given a 75% share. Perhaps there should be an obligation on the crofter to spend his or her share on improving the croft.

We commend this idea to the SCF and suggest that it be put forward to the Crofting Commission and the Scottish Government as a way forward for the Highland and Islands.

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Macleod and MacCallum

Accredited specialist in crofting law launches new crofting law helpline

Macleod and MacCallum, solicitors, Inverness are pleased to announce that Gail Jamieson, partner in charge of our rural land department has been accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in crofting law.

Gail has been advising clients on a wide range of crofting issues since moving to the Highlands in 2005. Gail has over 15 years experience in rural land issues, having trained and worked in Aberdeenshire for a number of years, advising clients in relation to rural property sale and purchase, agricultural law, fishing cases, leases, and landlord and tenant disputes.

Gail is the only accredited specialist in crofting law in Inverness and is able to offer specialist advice to clients across all parts of the Highlands and Islands, either from our Queensgate office, or the firm's new mobile office service, which visits Portree and Ullapool on a monthly basis. For further details email mobile.office@macandmac.co.uk

Gail said: "Macleod and MacCallum has a reputation for excellence in crofting law. One of our founding partners, Jeff Macleod, was chairman of the Crofters Commission; and former partner of the firm Derek Flynn co-authored the first textbook on the subject. I am happy to continue the firm's tradition for specialist advice in this area, along with my colleagues in the department, David Findlay and Ruth MacLaughlan".

Gail was pleased to launch the Mac and Mac crofting law helpline in May, providing a free advice line for crofters. Crofters can make contact with Gail and members of Mac and Mac's rural land department to discuss their crofting law problems by calling **01463 258011** or emailing crofter@macandmac.co.uk.

The service allows crofters to call with their query, or send it in by email, with the opportunity to discuss the problem with a solicitor. The initial appointment or email reply is completely free of charge. If further advice or solicitor involvement is required, then details of the potential costs involved and timescales for completing the work can be discussed.

Mac and Mac's crofting law helpline provides a valuable service to crofters across the Highlands and Islands. Coupled with the firm's mobile office service, this makes it easy for crofters to get advice when they need it.

Implementation of the 2010 Crofting Act

Richard Frew, head of the Scottish Government crofting act implementation team, reports on progress:

IMPLEMENTATION of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 remains on schedule. Appointed and elected commissioners are now in place and addressing crofting regulatory matters following the Crofting Commission coming into being on 1 April 2012. The Commission is preparing its policy plan under new section 2C of the Crofters (Scotland) Act, as inserted by section 2 of the 2010 Act, for submission to Scottish ministers by 16 September 2012. The process for appointing the Commission convener must be made in accordance with the public appointments commissioner for Scotland's code of practice and ministers will intimate their decision as soon as possible.

Preparation of the third commencement order for the 2010 Act, relating to the new

crofting register, is on-going and the register is expected to be available for registration towards the end of this year. Registers of Scotland will consult on its rules for the register over the summer and subordinate legislation is expected to be passed to parliament after the summer recess. The Crofting Commission is also undertaking a common grazings registration project and will be contacting interested parties in due course.

In addition to providing crofting grants, meeting the full costs of the Crofting Commission and refurbishing the stud farm for the crofting cattle improvement scheme, the Scottish Government continues to support crofting by meeting the full costs of creating the crofting register, providing £100,000 towards reducing the costs of registration of groups of 10 or more crofts and a further £100,000 to enable free registration of common grazings on the new register.

Succession to croft tenancies

Important information from Eilidh IM Ross, Inksters, Solicitors, Inverness

SUCCESSION TO croft tenancies has changed significantly over the last year or so, both in cases where the crofter left a will (testate succession) and where he or she did not (intestate succession).

In either case, a croft landlord has no right to object, and an application to the Commission is no longer required.

Testate succession

It used to be the case that a croft tenancy could only be left (bequeathed) to just one person. However, the 2010 Act allows a croft tenancy to be left to either one person, or more than one person.

One person

If the croft is left to one person, the person to whom it is left (the legatee) must take the following steps within 12 months of the crofter's death:

1. Accept the bequest (if they wish to, of course) by sending a notice to the landlord of the croft.
2. A copy of that notice must be sent to the Crofting Commission.
3. These notices must be sent within 12 months of the crofter's death.

More than one person

If the croft is left to more than one person, each person to whom the croft was left must accept the bequest, and no part of the croft must remain untenanted, otherwise the bequest cannot be effected. The executor must first apply to the Crofting Commission for consent to divide the croft and then the steps numbered 1-3 above must be carried out by each person receiving part of the divided croft.

If these time limits are not complied with, the croft will then be dealt with as if the crofter had not left a will.

Intestate Succession

If a crofter dies without having left a will, or if a crofter bequeaths a croft tenancy in a will but the bequest becomes null and void (eg due to failure to accept the bequest timeously) the croft tenancy must be transferred by the crofter's executor in compliance with the same rules of intestate succession which apply if the land is non-croft land.

The crofter's executor must take the following steps within 24 months of the crofter's death:

1. Obtain confirmation from the sheriff court, which allows the executor to administer the estate.
2. Transfer* the tenancy of the croft;
3. Give notice of that transfer, including details of who it is being transferred to, to the landlord of the croft.
4. Send a copy of the notice at (3) to the Crofting Commission.

*The case of *McGrath v Nelson 2011 SLT 107* gives some guidance as to how the tenancy can be transferred properly.

The consequences of failing to transfer the tenancy within 24 months are extremely serious; after this time, the landlord of the croft may terminate the tenancy.

Although the role of the Crofting Commission is now simply to update the Register of Crofts once they have been notified of the change, guidance notes and forms to assist crofters and executors are available at www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/documents.

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Inksters can provide you with specialist advice on all aspects of crofting law throughout the Crofting Counties from our offices in Inverness and Glasgow.



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LET'S LIBERATE DIVERSITY/SCF GATHERING

Resistance is fertile in Strathpeffer

NEARLY 140 DELEGATES arrived in Strathpeffer in the east Highlands in early March to participate in the seventh agricultural biodiversity forum, Let's Liberate Diversity (LLD), organised by the SCF, Garden Organic, the UK Food Group and Practical Action, with financial support from the European Union.

Each year the international LLD gatherings bring together farmers, activists, seed savers, researchers and policy makers to discuss developments in the field and plan actions that raise awareness of threats to agricultural biodiversity. The weekend's activities in Strathpeffer also included the annual gathering of the SCF.

Delegates included SCF representatives and local crofters, as well as students and teachers from Crofting Connections schools, in Lionacleit, Whalsay, Farr and Gairloch. From beyond the Highlands came organic cereal farmers from France and Italy; smallholders from Hungary and Romania; seed savers' groups from Ireland, England, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Germany, Austria; two smallholders from Tunisia and Senegal represented African smallholders' organisations; plant breeders from Italy and Iran; a political ecologist from Hungary; two representatives from the Hungarian government; and two from SASA (Scottish Government). Last but not least, the head of the European Commission's office in Scotland was present during the full length of the event.

On Friday 9th March the program was officially opened in the excellent surroundings of the Strathpeffer Pavilion by SCF chair Derek Flynn. He was followed by the local MSP Dave Thompson, who affirmed that the Scottish Government would not change its policies against genetically-manipulated organisms.

He said: "Although landrace varieties of cereal and vegetables are painstakingly maintained each year in the islands by crofters, they are little known about. But the new international emphasis on agro-ecology suggests this may change." The MSP concluded by emphasising "the values that this forum is supporting, values of thrift, of saving and of recycling, in ways that respect the cycle of life".

The gathering also heard from Dr Zsuzsanna Bardocz, wife of Arpad Puztai, the scientist at the Rowett Research Institute who was controversially ousted from his job for blowing the whistle on the dangers of eating GM crops. Dr Bardocz, who now works for the Hungarian government on GM issues, reiterated to delegates some of the threats posed by this food technology.

Young musicians from the Crofting Connections project were enthusiastically received for their performances which introduced the part of the programme dedicated to crofting culture. Dr Annie Tindley from Glasgow Caledonia University gave an often-moving talk on the history of crofting and was followed by SCF director Marina Dennis with a well-informed and comprehensive overview of crofting today. Mary and Tommy Isbister from Shetland closed this session with a presentation of their impressive work maintaining rare Shetland breeds on their croft over the last decades.

An international round table heard Susanne Gura talking about the threat to livestock diversity posed by modern breeding practices. The political message sent out was succinctly reported the next day in the Press and Journal: "We see no place for GMO-based high risk farming in our food system," said Patrick Mulvany, chair of the UK Food Group, one of the organisers of the conference. "Most food

in the world is grown and consumed locally in production systems that are not dependent on agrochemicals and dependent GM seeds, controlled by corporations. To secure our future food, we want to defend this productive food system and food sovereignty based on farmers' own biodiverse and resilient seeds."

The Saturday programme filled the meeting rooms of Strathpeffer community centre with seven well-attended workshops, while the crofters fair and seed swap showcased Fair Isle knitters, Anderson & Co Shetland knitwear, Natural Veg Co of Inverness, Abhainn Dearg Lewis whisky, Rare Breed Survival Trust, the SCF, a potato diversity display by SASA and two tables with seeds for swapping by the Heritage Seed Library (Garden Organic) and Seedy Sunday in Brighton. A special lunch was prepared by Dede MacGillivray. Her barley risotto with mutton stew received great praise.

The closing ceremony was led by SCF employees Iain MacKinnon and Karen MacRae with piper Fergus Walker. It was based on a traditional seed blessing collected by Alexander Carmichael in the Hebrides.

Publicity and impact

The event had a big impact abroad. In Italy a series of broadcasts, podcasts, Youtube videos and printed articles about the event appeared. Radio RAI broadcasted a half hour feature on the history of crofting, its contributions to agricultural biodiversity (such as the conservation of rare breeds and seeds, the wildlife associated with extensive livestock production) and a comparison with Italian farming, which has also retained a richness of landraces. This podcast of the programme is mostly in Italian but worth listening for the excellent music: www.radio.rai.it/podcast/A42440736.mp3

Honorary membership for Jim Hunter



Jim Hunter, left, and Derek Flynn

AT THE ANNUAL DINNER in the attractive surroundings of the spa pavilion James Hunter CBE, emeritus professor of history at the University of the Highlands and Islands, first director of the Scottish Crofters Union, was presented with honorary life membership of the SCF for his services to crofting.

Jim Hunter was commissioned in the mid-1980s to undertake a feasibility study into the need for a crofters' union. Funded by the Highlands and Islands Development Board, his in-depth investigation and contact with crofters all across the crofting counties convinced him that there was a strong need for such an organisation. His report persuaded the HIDB to financially assist the set-up of the Scottish Crofters Union and a steering

group of crofters helped formulate the beginnings of the SCU.

Jim's background in journalism and as author of *The Making of the Crofting Community*, regarded as the seminal work on crofting, was crucial in the establishment of a very successful campaigning crofters' organisation. The first issue of *The Crofter* was published in November 1985, setting out the aims and objectives of the organisation.

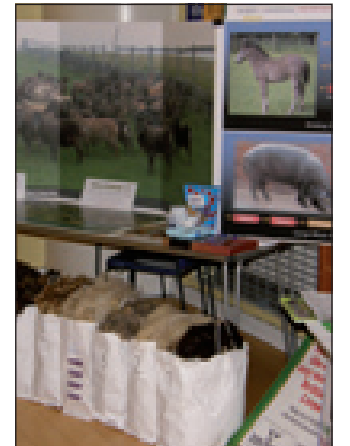
As SCF interim chair Derek Flynn commented when making the presentation, "Much of the success the SCU and SCF have enjoyed is because of Jim's early work on behalf of the union and the high profile he created for what was, at first, an upstart organisation."

We wish Jim well in his retirement.

LET'S LIBERATE DIVERSITY/SCF GATHERING



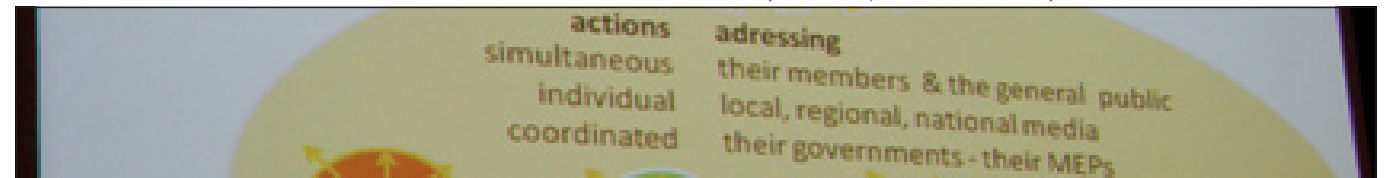
Iain MacKinnon and Margaret Bennett



Rare Breeds Trust stand



Derek Flynn, Dave Thompson MSP, Dr Annie Tindley and Dr Zsuzsanna Bardocz



Preserving rare Shetland breeds

Mary Isbister describes her and her husband's lifetime work

IT WAS IN 1976 that Tommy and I got the opportunity to take over our crofts at Burland Trondra in Shetland.

We had always been interested in the native breeds of the Shetland Islands but our first job was to build a new house and provide sheds, barns and fencing. Then it was not long before we were looking for a Shetland cow to provide milk, butter and kinned milk (a soft cheese) for our growing family. We got a shock when we realised how difficult it was to find a pure-bred Shetland cow.

Eventually we found one for sale at Walls on the west side of the islands. After a rigorous interrogation by the crofter to see whether we would make suitable owners, we became the proud owners of a cow called Dora and her bull calf. The first years of breeding proved to be very

difficult, with no fertile bulls on the island and the available artificial insemination material was old and unreliable. Eventually after years of working along with other breeders and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust things began to look up.

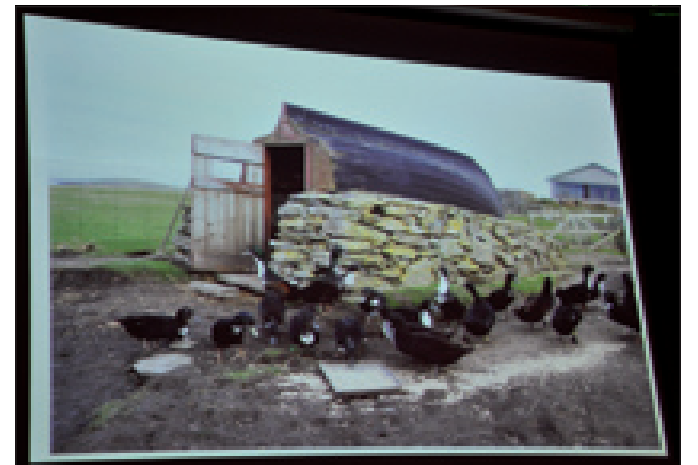
It was apparent that not only were our native cows on the critical list but all our indigenous poultry was almost extinct, so we began an urgent search to try to find native birds. We became aware of some at West Burrafirth. Their purity was in doubt, as they had been running with Khaki Campbell ducks, but we felt this was as good as we were going to find. We purchased some eggs and bred from these, keeping the best specimens – the ones that appeared closest to the old Shetland duck. Meanwhile we never gave up the search for something better.

While on holiday on the isle of Foula we became aware of a single duck similar to the Shetland type. We were told that this was

the last purebred duck left on the island as the bonxie (great skua) had developed an appetite for fully-grown domestic ducks and had taken the owner's ducks one by one. He was keen for us to purchase this duck before the breed died out entirely. Tommy and I both have roots that go

back to Foula and over 40 years ago we asked an old relative how long native birds had been on the island. She replied as long as she could remember. This old lady was born in 1869, which suggests there have been native ducks on Foula for at least 130 years and

Continued on page 8



RARE BREEDS AND SEEDS

Preserving rare Shetland breeds

Continued from page 7

most likely much longer than this.

It was not long after we got the bird from Foula that we were told of another single duck, this time on the east side of Shetland, again this was the last in the line. The owner said they had been isolated on his family's croft since his grandfather's time, back to the 19th century. He was also able to tell us the whereabouts of a drake he had given to a friend. His friend, realising the importance of preserving the breed, was more than willing to sell us this drake, so with this valuable trio we started a breeding programme.

The old Foula duck only produced six eggs in her first laying season with us, but the other duck made up for it by laying about forty eggs. Both lots of eggs were set under broody hens and most were fertile. After culling out the poorest drakes we

were left with twenty young ducks. At the end of this first season we heard of a small flock of pure ducks up at the very north end of the mainland of Shetland, exactly what we needed, an unrelated strain to widen the gene pool. We exchanged a young duck with the owner and soon after this an otter took all his remaining ducks!

We have continued to breed and distribute these ducks for nearly thirty years now and have successfully sent birds as far as the south of England. They have also found their way to America and Canada. We are not too worried about a secure future for Shetland ducks now. Although the blood lines are few, as far as we're aware there seems to be no problem with inbreeding and they are proving to be very healthy hardy and fertile.

Although we have no scientific proof, we feel these ducks are of Scandinavian origin. There was

a similar type, now extinct, in the Faroe Islands and also indigenous birds of similar colour in both Sweden and Denmark, although of a larger size.

Shetland hens are also on the critical list. The local research we've done points to there being two types of old hens. The first type is a bantam-sized hen predominantly black in colour which lays a small white egg. The cockerel is coloured with similarities to certain jungle fowl. We found the last remnants of these on the island of Papa Stour. The second type is larger in size with a tappet head (tufts of feathers on the head). These hens lay a blue-green egg similar to the Chilean Araucana breed. Older generation Shetlanders called these birds "galleon hens" which arouses the imagination to believe they may have arrived in Shetland off a Spanish galleon. Two from the armada were wrecked on Shetland shores in 1588. This

theory could make a link with the South American hen which was said to have been taken from South America by the Spaniards.

We came to fear the extinction of Shetland geese. We eventually traced and acquired two pairs in England and brought them back to Shetland, but it was years before we had much success with these geese. We think that the problem may have been inbreeding and also they were reared artificially, causing them to lose their natural ability to make a nest and sit successfully for four weeks on their eggs.

Thankfully this seems now to have sorted itself out. We have been on our croft now for over thirty years and have worked it traditionally by growing old types of native crops such as oats, bere barley, black tatties and Shetland kale. We feel privileged to have spent a lot of our lives in such a beautiful place working along with our animals and nature.

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust – linking with the SCF

THE RARE BREEDS Survival Trust (RBST) was formed as a charity in 1973.

Between 1900 and 1973, 26 native British breeds of farm livestock became extinct. The initial task of the trust was to build on the living gene bank work by Solly Zuckerman, director of the Zoological Society of London; the 1968 native farm livestock survey by vet Phillip Ryder Davis and the livestock conservation work of the Royal Agricultural Society of England.

At the outset, RBST identified 24 native breeds whose survival prospects were considered critical. Due to the work of the trust these breeds are still in existence today and whilst the flock/herd sizes of many rare breeds have fluctuated over the last 40 years, no further native breeds have been lost. Indeed some Scottish breeds have increased their numbers, eg belted Galloway, beef shorthorn and Shetland cattle, Soay, Hebridean and Shetland sheep and the Clydesdale horse, through native breed conservation programmes.

Some breeds have regressed or remain at critical levels eg Boreray and North Ronaldsay sheep, Aberdeen Angus (original population) and Whitebred shorthorn cattle, making the work of RBST as vital today as ever. The modern perception of farming/

rural heritage is very mixed, so the conservation of not-commercially viable livestock is certainly a challenge, especially in Scotland, the natural home of several breeds the RBST seeks to protect.

Working with the breed societies, DEFRA and SGRPID, the trust collects and analyses breed data, published annually as the RBST watchlist, grouping breeds under five threat classifications ranging from critical to minority. Numerous genetic factors, breed populations, registrations, trends and geographical dispersions are taken into account. In total 16 sheep and cattle breeds, previously considered rare, have progressed off the watchlist since 1973, despite the foot and mouth epidemic of 2001.

Early data collection found nine sheep breeds had no recognised breed society, so the trust initiated a combined flock book incorporating the Boreray, North Ronaldsay, Castlemilk moorit, and Soay breeds. In a similar proactive move to counter the vulnerability of critically-rare breeds concentrated in small geographical areas, RBST are currently setting up reserve breeding herds in Scotland to safeguard cattle like Vaynol (the original Scottish-related White Park herd came from Blair Atholl) and Whitebred shorthorn.

To preserve genetic diversity

of rare breeds the RBST gene archive was started in 1974 and with the ongoing ReGENeration appeal has now grown to contain over 120,000 straws from over 1,000 bloodlines represented by 80-plus rare or endangered breeds. This national genetic resource is secured by RBST funding for the next 40 years, recognising that today's rare and uneconomical breeds may well hold the key to a future breed improvement.

Preservation of native breeds alone will not secure their future and the trust recognises the positive mutual benefit of linking with active conservation organisations such as SCF and Scottish smallholders. Long-term security of the breeds is only likely to be achieved through utilisation and farming with native breeds in their natural habitats. But for that trust initiated a combined flock book incorporating the Boreray, North Ronaldsay, Castlemilk moorit, and Soay breeds. In a similar proactive move to counter the vulnerability of critically-rare breeds concentrated in small geographical areas, RBST are currently setting up reserve breeding herds in Scotland to safeguard cattle like Vaynol (the original Scottish-related White Park herd came from Blair Atholl) and Whitebred shorthorn.

To preserve genetic diversity

breeds, raising awareness through education, training and collaboration with organisations such as The Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) and the Scottish Agricultural Colleges is paramount. Similarly rare and native breed shows/sales, RBST-approved farm parks – Palacerigg and Doonies in Scotland – all contribute to this knowledge transfer as well as providing a showcase for our native breeds.

It has been said that simply the presence of our native breeds in the countryside can enhance the quality of human life.

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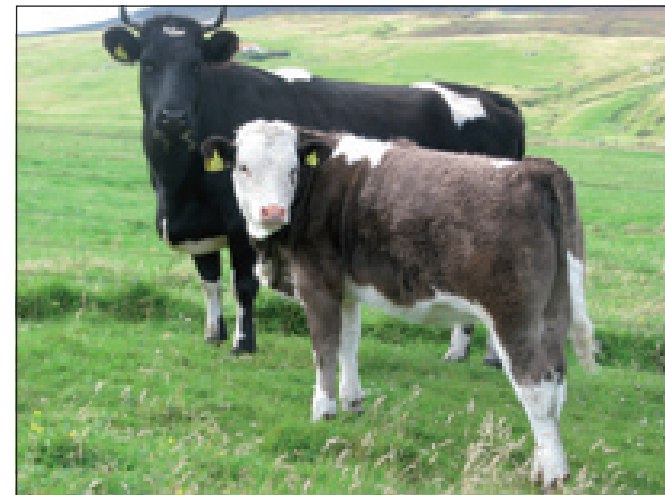
Rare Breeds Survival Trust
02476 696 551
Stoneleigh Park, Nr Kenilworth
CV8 2LG www.rbst.org.uk

RARE BREEDS AND SEEDS

Breeds from the past with a place in the future

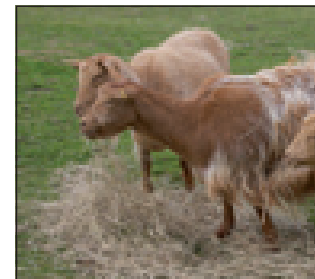


Paddy's favourite Shetland cow

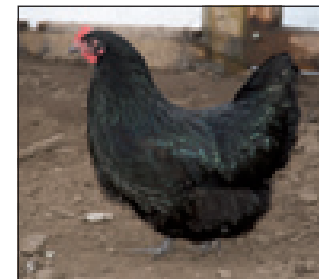


Shetland cow and cross Simmenthal calf

Rare breeds selection from RBST



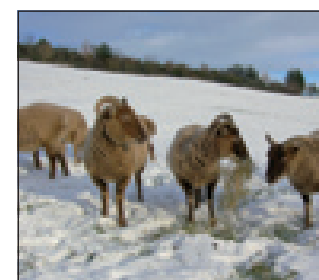
Golden Guernsey



Scots Dumpy



Vaynol



Castlemilk Moorit

ASK SOMEONE about Scotland's ancient cattle and immediately the iconic Highlander with its shaggy coat and magnificent horns will come to mind. But Scotland has two ancient native breeds of cattle.

The second, lesser known, is the Shetland, thought to have arrived with the Vikings but, arguably descended from the domestic cattle which archaeological evidence shows were established in Shetland 5,000 years ago.

In the 1980s the Shetland came close to extinction but numbers have increased more recently and, while it is still in the at risk category with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, the breed is stable and there are around 600 breeding cows in the UK. But they are little known and many people have never seen one. This is a pity because the Shetland has many strong attributes.

It is an excellent and attractive multi-purpose cow suitable for a variety of farming situations. It is hardy, thrifty, healthy and long-lived and will calve into its late teens and beyond. It can winter out and causes less damage to the ground due to its broad feet and lighter weight. It thrives on poorer keep and is a favoured breed for conservation grazing. It is an intelligent cow, well-mannered and easy to handle, possibly because of many generations of living in close proximity to humans as the ultimate house cow which kept many Shetland families alive through poverty and hard winters.

The Shetland is a milky cow, frequently multi-suckled in the past. Milk and meat contain higher levels of Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA) than other breeds and less non-beneficial trans-fatty acids. CLA is a good fatty acid that has been shown to give protection against cancer and possibly cardio-vascular disease.

A milking herd is kept in East Yorkshire and distinctive, prize-winning cheeses are produced (www.epicureslarder.co.uk). Shetland meat is also superb and some aficionados say it is the best of all the native beef and would be highly sought after if the breed were better known.

While the Shetland was the mainstay of a lifestyle that is now past, it is a versatile cow with a future in modern farming, not least of all through its strengths as a cross-breeding cow. There is debate, however, about the wisdom of cross-breeding a rare breed whose numbers are low,

but for those opposed to the cross-breeding of Shetlands there are others who claim that cross-breeding will help secure the breed because demand will increase as their usefulness becomes more widely demonstrated and better known.

While many Shetland cattle keepers nowadays are mainland smallholders who generally breed pure, Shetlanders – for whom the cow has long been an important part of their livelihood – know full well the capacity of the cow to produce excellent cross-bred calves to both native and continental bulls, such as Hereford, Aberdeen Angus, Simmental, Limousin, Charolais, Salers, Blonde d'Aquitaine and British Blue. More mainland breeders are also now cross-breeding, both to produce saleable calves and to impart hardiness, thriftiness and easy calving to cross-bred heifers to be used as breeding stock.

The great attributes the Shetland brings are the quality and volume of milk, resulting in high daily liveweight gain of calves, good mothering, longevity, easy calving (the Shetland is second only to the Jersey in pelvis width), lack of vet bills and high efficiency when comparing weight of calves with weight of cow and her food consumption.

There is plenty anecdotal evidence for the benefits of the Shetland. A crofter who used a Charolais bull last year on his mixed herd reported how much more quickly the calves from his Shetland cross cows got up and got going. Others comment on the small amount they eat. One breeder in Shetland has just wintered his two year old heifers outside on rough grass with nothing additional except glucose tubs. Others note the quick and easy births and lively, fast-growing calves. An accidental Salers cross bullock, born to a small Shetland heifer, topped the sale at Stirling mart. Others talk of the cross-bred calves that weigh as much as their mothers by eight or nine months of age.

"The Shetland coo, a breed from the past with a place in the future."

Paddy Zakaria breeds Shetland cattle on her croft in Sutherland.

RARE BREEDS AND SEEDS

Hebridean sheep



Lis Philips keeps a herd in Breakish, Isle of Skye. Here she outlines their qualities.

HEBRIDEANS ARE small, hardy, short-tailed primitive sheep, with ewes typically weighing in at around 40kgs.

Although their predecessors were multi-coloured, they are now predominantly black, although sun-bleaching can cause the fleeces to appear golden brown and with age some greying can occur. Fleeces typically weigh 1-2 kg. Two-horned sheep are the norm, although four, six or even eight horns are possible. Their black hooves are hard and resistant to rot. They are easy lambers and good mothers, typically producing twins.

When we decided to acquire a small flock of Hebridean sheep from Assynt in 2002, we were warned against them. "They are unmanageable. You will never keep them in. They jump fences like deer" Fortunately however, Hebrideans have proved an ideal breed for crofters with limited time. They willingly follow a bucket, even after months away on the common grazings and, being small and light, are easy to handle.

Hand shearing becomes less of a chore when your next candidate for a haircut is only 40kg in weight!

Another useful characteristic for the crofter-in-a-hurry is that the flock operates as one family group, saving time at gathering as they are always found together.

In other areas of Britain, Hebrideans are used for conservation grazing and our experience is that they do indeed have a beneficial effect on

pasture, browsing on purple moor grass (*Molinea*), dockens, ragwort and (in winter) rushes.

The dark fleeces have commercial value. Those from our flock are sold as knitting wool after commercial spinning by a small company in England.

Older, coarser fleeces are used around the garden as a mulch and as a slug deterrent around susceptible vegetables.

Lambing problems are a rarity, even when gimmers are crossed with larger breeds such as Texel, Suffolk or Cheviot. These cross-bred lambs mature quickly, often overtaking their dams in weight by late autumn.

Pure-bred Hebrideans are slow to mature, but the relatively high meat-to-bone ratio gives a decent return despite their small size. The meat is dark and full of flavour, with lower cholesterol and saturated fat levels than other breeds and is sought after by those who have experienced the unique flavour.

Pure bred lambs sold in September from the croft can tend to make low prices, but this needs to be balanced against the number of lambs bred and the low feeding costs year round.

A further benefit from the breed is longevity. Our oldest ewe is now 17 years old and has been retired from breeding after producing 14 sets of twins and triplets.

In 1973 the Rare Breeds Survival Trust identified Hebridean sheep as being at risk. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such is their new-found popularity that they are no longer regarded as a rare breed and have returned to their native isles, with flocks in Uist, Mull, Coll and Skye.

Highland cattle

"Oh look! Aren't they cute!" and click goes the camera.

Some people are taken aback when they ask Highland cattle breeders what they do with them and are told that they end up in the food chain like all other cattle. "We thought they were all pets." No doubt they are the most attractive of all breeds, but there is more to them than a pretty picture.

Highlanders come in six colours – red, yellow, dun, black, white and brindle. They live a long life and, here in North Uist, very recently a 20-year-old had a calf and a 22-year-old produced a calf a few years ago. They are easy calvers and in the last 20 years we've only had three problems requiring vet assistance. These were because the calves were dead inside the cow.

The heifers go to the bull at three years old.

Despite their horns, the majority have a lovely nature, but naturally there are exceptions. Newly-calved cows have a powerful maternal instinct and should not be approached by strangers and definitely not by dogs. If handled at a young age they remain docile and if they are treated kindly they respond and there remains trust between man and beast.

They are a hardy breed but do like a dry bed even more than shelter. They have a double coat of hair – a short inner one to keep them warm and a long one to keep them waterproof. During the summer they love to graze on rough grass and short heather, with access to a loch to cool off.

We have one reseeded hill field where clover and rich grass have destroyed the heather. When the cows are put there they graze eagerly for about three days and then will swim across the loch to get back to the moorland. Only an electric fence will stop them. They have the ability to convert poor grass to succulent beef.

As they spend the summer on hill ground they are immune to ticks.

The cow is very milky and research has shown that the milk has more butterfat than the dairy Jersey. I have milked many and you need very little cream to churn a pound of butter.

Why don't more crofters keep Highlanders? In the 70s

when the cattle market wanted weaned calves and they were sold by weight and grade, the slow-maturing Highlanders couldn't compete. To satisfy this market the mature breeds were replaced by huge continentals. Since then many calving problems have arisen. Hill grazing, specially moorlands, were not good enough for these big-appetite cattle and they are too heavy for soft peat ground. Despite environmental schemes, short-sighted policy-makers will not support moorland grazing and then they wonder why ticks, bracken, rushes and overgrown heather are causing major problems for other species.

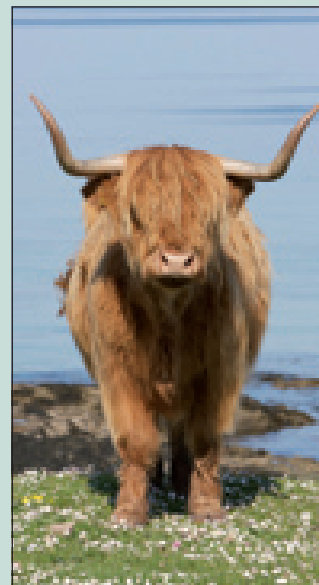
It's ironic that commercial farmers are reluctant to breed them and recently we have exported Highland heifers and bulls to Germany, Estonia, Spain, Switzerland and Italy.

A wise cow

Three years ago a heifer calved a deformed calf that couldn't get up for three weeks. Without help the calf couldn't suck. This young cow had never been handled but she allowed me to put her teats in the calf's mouth to get it started. She was on open ground on Vallay Island and twice a day she would follow me away from the herd and stand there while I supported the calf to let it get the milk. She has had two calves since then and is awaiting number four and I can't put my hand on her. Obviously she doesn't need me.

What an amazing maternal instinct and trust in human intervention.

Ena Macdonald



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RARE BREEDS AND SEEDS

Oat diversity

AMULTITUDE OF CROP names is testimony of a long history of cultivation.

The remarkable thing about the crofting areas is that for oats, the types and classification used in seventeenth century Scotland are still in use today: grytt oat and small oat have become big oats or coirce mor and small oats or coirce beag on the Uists. The scientific names are *Avena sativa* (*Avena* = oats, *sativa* = cultivated) and *Avena strigosa* (*strigosa* = bristled). Shetland has moved on to a classification of Scottish oats and Shetland oats or aits for small oats.

Crop historians think that oats moved into Europe as a weed of wheat and barley and was domesticated (tamed) in central Europe. As a consequence, oat is very much a crop of cool and moist environments. More varieties of oats were grown than today: wild oats, white oats, black oats and red oats, naked and hulled types. Most of these old landraces (historical, local varieties) have disappeared; many without trace

Pigs

IT IS OFTEN SAID that 'your pig is your best friend' or 'you can tell your troubles to your pig'.

So why does the poor old pig always seem to be a somewhat unloved beast and have the erroneous reputation of being one of nature's muckiest breeds, when they are such productive and resilient animals, whose contribution to both our rural/farming heritage and the food chain are probably taken for granted by most of the public.

The origins of British pedigree pigs are not always clear. Most of today's breeds are descended from crosses of the long-legged indigenous type and the smaller, fatter breeds imported from China, which started around the end of the 18th century. As a consequence, in the early 19th century selective breeding using established native breeds in different regions, such as Berkshire, Essex and Wessex generated around 16 traditional breeds, each of which had specific characteristics suited to its individual regional market. On the larger production front further crossing with the imported breeds produced commercially-viable bacon and pork.

By the mid-50s traditional breeds were struggling to compete against the rising tide of imported bacon and pork. The Howitt Report of 1955 added a further blow when it identified the large white, landrace and the Welsh as single-type breeds to form the basis of the future pig industry. Over the next 20 years traditional pig-breeding populations declined dramatically to dangerously low levels and breeds such as the Lincolnshire curly coat, Cumberland, Dorset gold tip, small white, Ulster white and Yorkshire blue and white all became extinct. Other traditional breeds like the Essex and Wessex saddlebacks were amalgamated, the Oxford sandy and black was brought back from the very brink and in 1973 when the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) was formed one of its first actions was to import boars of four breeds from Australia, including Tamworth and Berkshire, to ensure

but some seeds are conserved in genebanks. The UK has a decentralised genebank system and the small grain collection held at JIC in Norwich is one of the largest for corn. It holds oats such as potato oats discovered in a potato field in East Lothian in early nineteenth century.

The Scottish Government at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) has a collection of seeds of heritage varieties. The database can be found on <http://agricrops.org/menu.php>. Information on breeder and parentage is available. Several varieties from the former Scottish-based seedhouse McGill and Smith Ltd are stored: Ayr bounty, Ayr commando, Ayr grenadier and Ayr line, as well as the very old Sandy, discovered in 1824 by a farm worker named Alexander. Unfortunately, seed is only available in very small quantities and under certain conditions.

Outside genebanks – *in situ* – surviving historical varieties are the very rare Murkle

oats, a black-seeded big oat. Very few crofters on Orkney and Shetland have seeds, but the agronomy institute on Orkney had some in cultivation.

Entirely unique is the survival of small oat. The crofting counties represent one of the few areas in Europe with surviving indigenous varieties. The oat field trial on Benbecula 2009-12 showed differences in heading dates, maturity, strength of the straw, tillering and seed weight between Hebridean, Orkney and Shetland oats. Genetic fingerprinting confirmed the distinctness of the Scottish gene pool in comparison with European and South American small oats.

The unique machair growing conditions of coirce beag make it a crop with very special traits. Hopefully its large genetic diversity will give it sufficient buffering capacity to adapt to the changing climate. Uist seed production deserves all the support it requires to keep coirce beag going!

Maria Scholten

the survival of these breeds. Although this emergency action proved successful it took several years for the RBST to ascertain the true status of the traditional pig breeds and establish a conservation plan and gene bank for this unique genetic heritage.

Today, a small number of pig breeds, eg British landrace, large white, Pietrain and Duroc dominate the modern intensive-rearing systems which cater for the masses and it seems it is now down to small extensive system pedigree pig keepers and smallholders/crofters to safeguard the future and diversity of British native pig breeds. There are no traditional Scottish pig breeds.

At the top of the RBST watchlist are the British lop, large black and middle white breeds, all classified as vulnerable with only 200-300 registered breeding sows in Britain. These pigs are all docile, easily managed with excellent maternal qualities and produce succulent quality meat. The large black is also particularly hardy.

Classified at risk with between 300-500 registered breeding sows are the Berkshire, Tamworth and Welsh breeds. The former two breeds are considered our oldest pedigree and pure-bred pigs with links to the old English forest pig. Records also show the troops of Oliver Cromwell's army enjoyed the Berkshire's bacon. The Berkshire is a noted outdoor high-quality porker whilst the

Tamworth loves woodland and rough pasture and is an inquisitive and active roter. Both are hardy and produce average litters of 8-10 piglets. The Welsh is an indigenous white lop-eared breed, producing good lean meat.

The British saddleback, Gloucester old spot and Oxford sandy and black breeds are noted as minority with 500-1,000 registered breeding sows in Britain. All are victims of white pig discrimination in the past – but are hardy, resistent-to-sunburn, outdoor-system pigs now favoured for conservation grazing, whilst producing particularly tasty pork chops, sausages and bacon.

Now, if none of the above win your vote for a new best friend then you could always consider a mangalitz – the woolly pig of Austria, Germany and Romania. It is not quite a replacement for the Lincolnshire curly coat but it is carving out a niche in the specialist food market.

Traditional pig breeds still have a lot to offer and can certainly pay their way for the croft-sized operation. They are an integral part of our farming heritage that should not be lost, so if you considering pigs, take a good look at the the traditional and rare breeds and then breed it, to eat it and conserve it.

Further information is available from the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, the British Pig Association or the Scottish Pig Keepers Association.



Saddleback



Tamworth

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A' seasamh nan còraichean agadsa – standing up for you

RARE BREEDS AND SEEDS

Boreray sheep

ONE OF THE least-known but most interesting sheep in the UK is the Boreray.

They were the domestic sheep of the people of St Kilda prior to their evacuation in 1930 from their remote island home, some 40 miles west of the Outer Hebrides. The Boreray is the rarest sheep in the UK, being the only sheep in the critical category of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust's watchlist, which means that there are less than 300 registered breeding animals in the country (but see comments below about the feral flock on Boreray).

Sheep were a part of the St Kilda landscape for a very long time, but it was from the time of the first published accounts of St Kilda in the late 17th century that we know about the type of sheep that was kept domestically by the St Kildan people. Early commentators note the sheep to be mostly white, differentiating it from the now better-known wild sheep of St Kilda, the Soay, which was present on St Kilda from at least the time of the Vikings and possibly much earlier.

Rev Kenneth Macaulay, who visited St Kilda in 1758, commented on the fertility of the domestic sheep, noting that in the course of thirteen months a single sheep had added nine further sheep to the flock. "She had brought three lambs in the month of March, three more in the same month the year after, and each of the first three had a young before they had been thirteen months old." At the time of the evacuation, the St Kildans' sheep were known as blackface but in order to differentiate them from the modern Scottish blackface the name Boreray was later applied, after the small, inaccessible island of Boreray where the sheep were kept and where a feral flock still survives.

The Boreray is quite unlike the Soay. It was the product of cross-breeding with an early blackface and the now-extinct Scottish tan-

face. In appearance it is somewhat like a small blackface, most sheep being white (cream or light smoky grey) with dark grey, brown or black markings on legs and face and usually with dark shadowing on the rump/tail and around the neck. Colouring is not uniform and wide variations are possible. Usually both ewes and tups are horned, the tups carrying spectacular corkscrew horns, but occasional specimens are polled or scurred (small, misshapen horns).

Boreray island is currently inhabited by an entirely feral population of the sheep, descended from those left behind in 1930. They have been virtually undisturbed for 82 years. Those people who have been lucky enough to sail around Boreray will have seen the sheep perched on tiny ledges on the precipitous cliffs and the population is healthy and stable, numbers (counted by binoculars from the main island of Hirta) remaining at roughly the 400 reported by Martin Martin in 1697.

In the only intervention since 1930, six sheep were taken off Boreray in the 1970s and



Paddy's Boreray ewes

brought to mainland Scotland. All Boreray here are descended from these six sheep as no more have been removed from the island since. Despite the small gene pool, and the inevitably high level of inbreeding, there are no hereditary problems in the mainland breeding population. Indeed, there is regional variation in the type, due to isolation, noticeable for example in the north Scotland flocks.

Boreray sheep are not just an anachronism. There are many reasons for preserving them. On the one hand they are a fascinating sheep, tied up with a group of islands and a people that have a unique place in Scottish history. No-one thinks of St Kilda without a strong emotional response. But they are also a very useful sheep for the present and the future. As an exceptionally hardy Scottish native, Borerays can be kept on marginal land with minimum maintenance; they are ideal conservation grazers; they are long-lived and lamb easily; they appear to have a natural resistance to fly-strike and footrot; and the meat has an exceptional flavour. The wool is fine and soft. The fleece is often cast so fleeces are small, but a project was carried out recently whereby Boreray wool was collected from all over the country and when carefully spun it produced the finest lace-weight yarn, worthy of a premium price.

Cross-breeding is also a possibility, although it has not been systematically tried. While purebred crossing is unlikely to be commercial the Boreray – as has been done with some other natives – could be used as a first cross and the resulting lamb put to a terminal sire, the Boreray thus contributing hardiness and thriftiness to a lamb with commercial potential.

Paddy Zakaria breeds Boreray sheep on her Sutherland croft.

Protection of seeds

Maria Scholten, SCF Farmers' Seeds project manager, gave a presentation on the importance of protecting the sovereignty of seeds, especially of native species, to the Scottish Parliament cross party group on crofting.

IN SCOTLAND local varieties have survived such as bere, small and Shetland oat, Shetland cabbage and several heritage potatoes. Hebrides and Shetland are some of the few places in Europe where indigenous varieties of this rare oat are still grown.

Survival of local varieties depends on local seed production because the seed is not on the market. Conditions of local seed production and dissemination are informal.

Current EU seed legislation restricts marketing of seeds to officially registered varieties on the condition that these pass tests of distinctness, uniformity and stability. Local varieties usually do not meet these requirements and their seed dissemination falls outside the existing regulations.

Some governments in Europe, however, have taken steps to create derogations on EU seed regulation in order to protect local varieties. In Austria the ministry of agriculture has welcomed the activities of farmer seed-savers' groups

and allows the sale of small quantities of non-commercial seeds not included in the European Common Catalogue. Swiss seed law has also created legal space for local varieties.

The Scottish Government has an excellent *ex situ* conservation plan in place through the Scottish Landrace Protection Scheme at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA).

In contrast, the conservation carried out by growers on location or on farm, *in situ* conservation, is not covered by a SG policy or program on plant genetic resources. It should be noted the EU Directive 2008/62 on conservation varieties has seen very little uptake by local variety growers and fails its objective of protecting threatened plant genetic resources.

International treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, and especially the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), aim at conservation of plant genetic resources such as local varieties. In particular ITPGRFA commits all national governments (in the UK the devolved authorities) in Article 6 to promote the sustainable use of plant genetic resources; to support and promote local varieties and supporting research; and to adapt regulations. Article 9 is relevant as well: to protect traditional knowledge; to confer

the right to farmers to share in decision-making as regards plant genetic resources and to remove any limits to farm-saved seed.

We would like to see SG follow the enlightened seed policy of other countries such as Austria and SG is requested to create derogation in Scottish implementation policy on seed legislation for local seed production and small-scale distribution of local varieties.

There are four reasons for this:

1. because of Scotland's commitment to implement international treaties such as ITPGRFA;
 2. because of the importance for the future of farm conservation of these resources on the islands;
 3. because of the agricultural biodiversity value of these ancient crops;
 4. because they form intrinsic component of HNV farming systems and wildlife conservation.
- Furthermore, the Scottish Government is requested to include local varieties and their seed production and seed exchange in the next phase of the SRDP.

Following Maria's presentation the cross party group agreed that a letter will be sent from the group to the cabinet secretary urging that Scottish seeds be protected.

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Latest on small abattoirs project

A YEAR AGO SCF formed a working group to attempt to establish an abattoir for the Skye and Lochalsh area.

Parts of that area are three and a half hours by road or a two-hour ferry journey away from their nearest slaughterhouse. What the working group envisaged was a facility of appropriate scale, community-owned and co-operatively run with a flexible operating plan capable of responding to seasonal demand.

Tenders were invited for production of a fully-costed project complete with recommendations for a business and operational plan and funding proposals. Five excellent tenders were received and, after very detailed and difficult consideration, the work was awarded, subject to funding,

to Scottish Agricultural College. At the time of writing we await the outcome of a SRDP application to fund the preliminary work.

Meantime, with a view to establishing the demand in more detail, a questionnaire was sent out with the last Crofter to SCF members in Skye and Lochalsh and also to all SAC subscribers in the area. Out of the sixty five responses received, 63 people said they would make use of an abattoir in the area.

The two negative respondents could see no point in having an abattoir in an area where the predominant output is store livestock. 52 people said they would use the facility for sheep, 28 for cattle and 24 for pigs. If there was an abattoir, 52 people would send more animals for

slaughter and three said they might do so. 23 would increase their stock numbers and 13 might do so. 30 would consider other species such as pigs, 12 might and 15 would not. Seven would increase their local sales of meat, 27 would start selling locally and a further 14 might do so.

There was all-round support for other benefits that could be offered by a local slaughterhouse, such as flexible hanging time for carcasses, a butchery service, vacuum packing and labelling. There was also strong interest in training in stock finishing and marketing and support for co-operative selling. One respondent mentioned the need to ensure that "we get back what we put in" and total traceability would, of course, be one of the benefits of a local service.

The industry throughout Scotland was shaken at the end of March by the news that the Orkney abattoir was to close. This led people to ask, perfectly reasonably, that if an abattoir could not survive in an island group with 30,000 beef cattle, how could one be justified in Skye? What is proposed here is something on an entirely different scale and business model, not an industrial meat plant. If the consultants say it won't stack up, then it won't go any further.

If it does become reality, and the questionnaire results are very encouraging in that direction, the plans and business model will be made freely available to groups of producers in islands and other areas that are currently remote from abattoir facilities.

Innovative growing in the Uists

Sustainable Uist is a community organisation which promotes sustainable lifestyles in the Uists.

In April 2010 it was awarded funding from the Climate Challenge Fund for a series of carbon emission reduction projects.

The food economy of Uist has been transformed within a few decades from 90% self-sufficiency to 95% dependence on imports. Because of the islands' remote location, the resulting food miles and CO₂ emissions are amongst the highest in Britain. The Sustainable Uist local food project aims to reduce this dependency by 50% over the next two decades by promoting the production, processing and retailing of a wide range of foods from the islands.

A survey of Uist households in 2009 found that 75% of families would like to grow their own produce, but didn't, because they thought conditions were too difficult. The Horticulture Education and Research Project set out to persuade more residents to grow their own vegetables. A series of demonstration crop trials were established with associated education and training work. A half-acre field on machair land at Lionacleit was fenced and cultivated in May 2010. The trial design included a series of 10 plots. On each plot the same 50 varieties of vegetables and salads were grown using different wind protection and fertilising methods.

Successful trials results from 2010 were repeated in 2011, so that ideas developed for improving

crop results through action on protection, soil fertility and seasonality could be confirmed. Some of the crops which failed in 2010 were repeated using different techniques. The results provided husbandry techniques for growing a wide range of crops for a good part of the year. They were good enough to demonstrate that it would be possible to grow these crops at a commercial scale. A few vegetables – particularly some types of beans, spinach and squashes – seem to be just about impossible to grow outside in the local conditions.

During 2010-11 the project carried out a novel protected cropping experiment using LED lighting to extend day length for winter salad crops. A 100m bespoke greenhouse was built by local craftsmen. A polytunnel

would not have been suitable for the extremely exposed conditions, so a very robust frame was constructed using local timber and clad with glass-reinforced plastic sheeting. Growth rates of 25 different vegetable and salad crops were tested using low-voltage lighting powered by a small wind turbine.

During winter 2012 the experiment was repeated on a larger scale. It was hoped to raise 2,000 lettuces between September 2011 and April 2012, to see if it is possible to avoid importing winter salads to the Hebrides from southern Europe, which generates around 1kg of CO₂ for each lettuce.

In April 2011 a small-scale repeat of the 2010 vegetable field trials was carried out on peat-based rather than machair

soils. Peat soils in Uist have a pH of 5 (compared to around 8 on the machair) and an organic matter content of nearly 60% (compared to 3% on the machair). They are also often persistently waterlogged.

Sustainable Uist's work represents the most comprehensive and thorough research ever carried out into vegetable production in the Outer Hebrides. The main trial site is on very exposed machair land, which is in itself a challenge. The machair has been cultivated since pre-history, and in modern crofting is worked as a system of one year cereal cropping fertilised with seaweed and two years fallow. Small areas of potatoes are grown; but general vegetable production is an innovation.

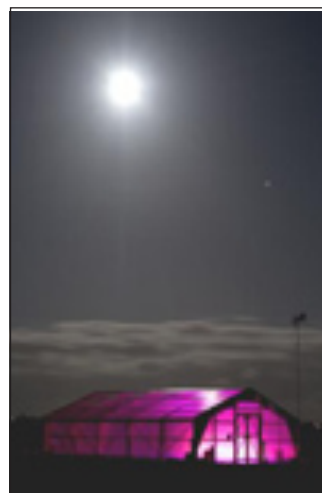
Other innovations are purpose-built greenhouses for the almost-unique degree of wind exposure experienced on the west coast of the Outer Hebrides and the use of wind-powered growing lights. The project carried out comparative trials of similar crops on peat-based soils and these will be invaluable for those working in that familiar crofting environment.

A legacy of the projects is a vegetable box scheme, established to bring together existing producers with consumers and it is hoped that a farm shop will open in Benbecula selling a range of produce from the islands.

Comprehensive descriptions of the projects, reports and technical data, including plans for the purpose-built greenhouses, can be found at www.sustainableuist.org/vegetable-trials.



Show-quality red cabbage



Greenhouse at night

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Horticulture handbook soon to be published

IN 2009 THE Scottish Government published Scotland's first national food and drink policy.

An action point from that policy is to provide advice and funding to local producers to help them develop markets for their products and encourage the growth of farmers markets, farm shops and local food initiatives.

The publication of *Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters*, currently at the final editing stage, is very much in tune with the government's vision on local food. This will be the definitive reference book for growers of vegetables and fruits in the challenging conditions of the crofting counties. The main chapter headings are these:

- crofting horticulture – past, present and future;

- patterns of crofting horticulture;
- growing conditions and how to manage them;
- protected cropping;
- fruit growing;
- marketing.

There will also be sections on machinery, grant assistance, advice services, suppliers of materials, producer groups and organic production. The principal authors are Dr Audrey Litterick, formerly of SAC and well-known to many crofting horticulturists; Calina MacDonald, presenter of *Ann's a' Gharradh* on BBC Alba; and John Bannister, market gardener and tree nurseryman in Skye.

Many people remain sceptical about the practicability of growing a range of vegetable and fruit crops given the soil type and exposure

of many crofts. This book will show that it is not just possible, but can be done very successfully and bring in a worthwhile income for the croft.

As we say in Chapter 2 of the book, "The crofting community of the future will be self-sufficient in food, energy and skills. Population will be stable and age-profile will be balanced. All crofts will be occupied and worked and new crofts will be created where there is the demand. Hill grazings will be managed with sustainable levels of livestock. Communally-owned woodland will provide timber and fuel.

"That is the ideal. Despite the progress made in recent years it remains difficult to find fresh, local produce in many parts of the Highlands and Islands. If you want

some prawns or a lobster, you need to know a fisherman. Likewise, if you want some local strawberries or a cabbage you need to know a grower. This suggests that demand continues to exceed supply. If we are to move towards a low-carbon economy, communities at the periphery will need to re-acquire the capacity and skills to produce their own food. The will is undoubtedly there."

Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters will help to translate the will into reality. We hope to launch the book at the Royal Highland Show, so it will be available from the end of June.

The publication is assisted by the Scottish Government, the European Union, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation

Grazings committees under threat

RECENTLY A grazings clerk contacted SCF to say that, in view of the burdens of new legislation being placed on grazings committees, his committee had decided not to submit its registration to the Crofting Commission.

This is a very worrying, if perhaps understandable, situation. The Commission informed its assessors' conference last year, whose theme was Crisis in Common Grazings, that no fewer than forty-two per cent of common grazings were without a properly-appointed committee. This means that their grazings regulations are unenforceable.

The conference highlighted

the well-known issue of loss of hill stock leading to underuse or abandonment of common grazings in certain areas. An action point was for the Commission to make better use of its assessors network to look into common grazings with no committee in office. What is the cause and what could be done to rectify the situation?

A number of things were concerning our above-mentioned grazings clerk. The committee is obliged to pay for two weeks' advertising in the local press of their statutory three-yearly meeting and advertising in the local rag is now very costly. The 2010 Crofting Reform Act obliges committees to

report on the condition not only of the common grazings, but of each individual croft in the township. This will make it harder than ever to get people to come forward to serve as clerks or committee members. It comes at a time when there is no support or training on offer to help committees carry out their duties. Bring back the grazings officer!

It is also a time when grazings shareholders need proper representation. Our common grazings have always been taken for granted. Now they have the capacity, through renewable energy development, to generate substantial income for crofters. Other parties are looking enviously

at the development potential of our land assets.

It may be easier than people think to form a grazings committee, but someone has to take the lead. Last year, at the behest of a keen young crofter, we attended a meeting of grazings shareholders on a small island which had been called to form a grazings committee after a lengthy period of abeyance. Of the forty crofters, fifteen attended, which was roughly indicative of the level of activity. Of these, no fewer than eight volunteered to serve on the new committee and were keen to make the best use of their land assets.

It can and must be done.

POSSIBILITIES OF FUNDING THROUGH LMO (TRAINING)



Shearing Courses

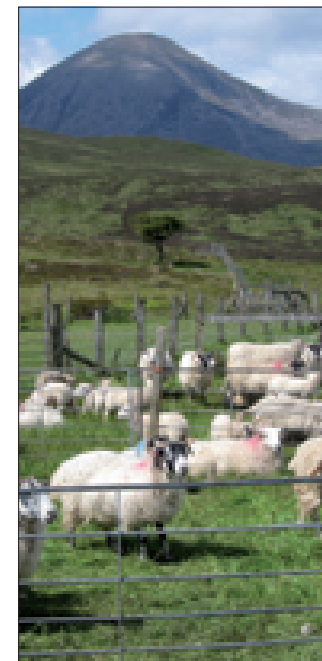
British Wool Marketing Training offer a range of shearing courses including Beginner, Refresher & Advanced arranged throughout Scotland.

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or email: donnamackenzie@britishwool.org.uk

Course details available on britishwool.org.uk



Quality is important

PAST CHAIRMEN don't retire after completing their term in office. They just become more involved in other spheres, or so my wife tells me! That is certainly my experience. Two of the committees I am proud to serve on are Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) initiatives, from which I derive a great deal of satisfaction in representing and promoting the crofting cause.

Firstly, I sit on the TAC committee which is the technical audit committee for sheep and cattle. Run by Scottish Food Quality Certification at Ingliston, it is made up of farmers, auctioneers, feed merchants, abattoir and meat wholesalers, processors, technical experts, a senior assessor and representation from SSPCA.

All are well acquainted with the diverse nature of stock husbandry and have a wealth of experience which they bring to committee. It must be remembered we are all food business operators since January 2006! We have a duty to take appropriate steps to ensure that we comply with farm assurance, which has been a feature of the Scottish red meat industry for over 20 years. It provides consumers with assurance of wholesomeness of the food they eat.

We are tasked with the oversight of 42 self-employed assessors who annually visit and audit farms and crofts from Shetland to the Borders. These personnel are vastly experienced, supervised, shadowed and audited before being given approval to inspect farms and crofts. One assessor is even a fluent Gaelic speaker. Their annual visit should be looked on as an opportunity, ensuring that everything is in order, avoiding any potential risk to support payments one may receive. Annual assurance visits are core to the overall

consumer assurance scheme and underpin the Scotch/ specially selected brands. They are also a means of making sure all legal requirements are in place.

Secondly, the Scottish sheep strategy is another QMS initiative with which I am closely involved. The purpose of this initiative is to help the Scottish sheep industry become more profitable through better genetics. Farmers and crofters in the Scottish sheep sector have been relatively slow in using known superior genetics as a tool to help improve the profitability of the sheep enterprise on their holdings. The advisory group of which I am part decides how best we can get the message across to crofters and farmers that using tups with known genetic potential will make more money for them. The strategy is continually running commercial trials to prove the benefits of using tups bred using a sensible mix of stockmanship, science and experience.

One of the farms which is hosting a two year trial for the strategy is the Morrisons' farm at Dumfries House, which is also the venue for Scotsheep this year on 6th June. The strategy will have a prominent stand at the event as well as showing the financial advantages for the 2011 lamb crop. We will have a live display of the ewes and lambs involved in this year's trial. If you manage to get to Scotsheep be sure to come and meet us all on the stand.

It is imperative that crofting has a strong voice on the rural and agriculture forum. To quote my predecessor and good friend Norman Leask, "If you are not at the table you will be surely on the menu".

Neil MacLeod

Deer farming opportunities to fill venison vacuum

SCOTLAND CANNOT produce enough venison – either from stag and hind culls or from existing commercial deer farms – and imports have continued to push the UK market onwards and upwards.

In 2011, Scotland's quality-assured game dealers were 25,000 red deer carcasses short and imported the equivalent to meet contracts.

Scotland produces around 3500 tonnes of venison yearly, the majority from wild red deer, but the cull is declining. SNH reports a reduction from 67,300 in 2001/02 to 56,300 in 2010/12, but the retail market for venison grew from £36 million in 2006 to £43 million in 2009 and that growth trend continues.

What can be done to increase domestic production to capitalise on opportunities from a buoyant UK venison market showing no signs of easing?

Sourcing more venison from red deer from the wild is unsustainable. Alternatives to meet UK market demand are to import increasing volumes, or to expand Scotland's fledgling deer farming sector.

New Zealand produces more than five times more venison than Scotland. Deer farming in mainland Europe and England, on the back of a strengthening market, is growing faster than in Scotland.

Deer farming is possibly well suited to the crofting counties. Deer are already a valuable revenue earner from stalking, deer management and venison. As a shared resource, the prospect of deer-farming enterprises, possibly running deer on common grazings, presents a potential opportunity.

Nationally, it is hoped to grow Scottish venison production by at least 30% over the next 10

years, increasing the number of deer farms from 25 currently to 400 plus, producing an additional 1000 tonnes of venison. A number of larger-scale enterprises could reduce the total units needed. In New Zealand well-laid-out deer farms running 1000 hinds are managed by just one stockman.

A task group has been formed to address the challenge. That group, led by Scotland Food and Drink, comprises NFUS, SAOS, SAC, the Scottish Government, James Hutton Institute and The Scottish Venison Partnership.

Its work programme includes more research to better understand the market and future demand; setting up a number of monitor units to gather data; and discussion with government over whether more support can be channelled to help new deer farming enterprises. Current support includes the SRDP Rural Priorities option: diversification of rural enterprises, listing deer as eligible. In addition there is currently LFA support of up to 50% of eligible costs (or 40% for non-LFA). The Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme could possibly provide assistance for costs including fencing, buildings, gates, handling crush and other capital outlays.

Venison has been eaten in Scotland as healthy food since time immemorial, with hide and horn being put to good use too. Scottish history and archaeology has no shortage of evidence of deer drives, rounding up and enclosing deer – before domestic livestock in any numbers were a consideration. This could be the time for history to repeat itself?

Further information from The Scottish Venison Partnership 0131 445 5570, mail@scottish-venison.info www.scottish-venison.info

Linked holdings – don't get caught out

A member recently contacted head office to say that he had been caught out in an inspection by SGRPID because his 'linked holdings' had expired.

It is a legislative requirement that all cattle moves on and off a holding (CPH), or between herds, must be notified to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) within three days. The only exception to this is if a BCMS link exists between the holding the animal moved from and the holding the animal moved to.

There are two types of links:

- shared facility link – used to link holdings where facilities are shared on a

permanent basis and where movements are frequent;

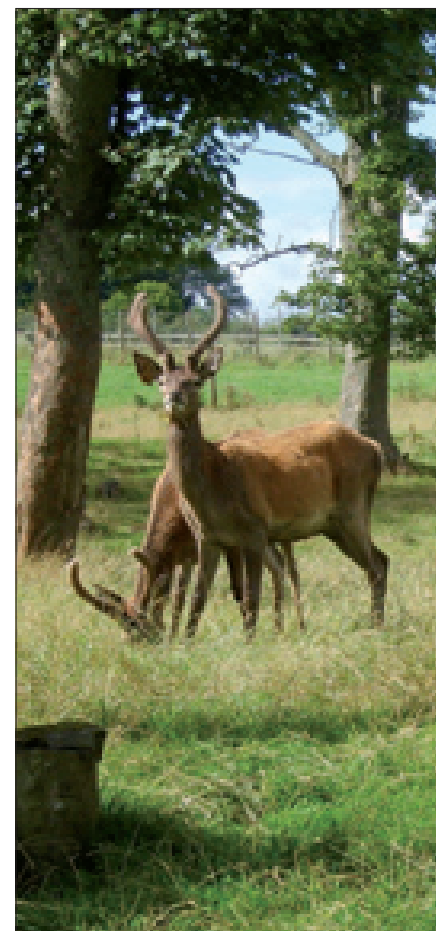
- additional land link – used to link holdings on a temporary basis (less than 365 days) eg seasonal grazings, winter housing.

Although linked moves do not need to be reported to BCMS, the movement must be recorded in the herd register.

A link between holdings, arranged with BCMS, is only a dispensation for reporting movements to the cattle tracing service; it does not mean you need not keep a record of the movement. If the link is to cover a temporary grazing let on somebody else's

land, then the record of movement should be kept in your holding register. You need to do this so that there is always an up-to-date record of where the animals actually are. The main point to bear in mind is that holding links must be renewed annually with BCMS.

For sheep, movements within the township and to and from the common grazings do not need to be reported or recorded, unless there is a change of ownership, but all movements outwith the township need to be recorded in the flock register and reported to Scottish livestock movement unit.



Venison offers opportunities for crofters

Brian Eadie designs and makes animal tags and has done so for 20 years.

His company Roxan introduced the first commercially successful automatic sheep tagging system in the world (Adamic) 10 years ago. They have now developed TagFaster, a modern tagging system designed around the use of EID tags.

TagFaster offers convenience, accuracy and performance.

The tags are delivered in 20-tag strips. It's easier to tag and double-tags are organised in sets of alternating colours. All variants of TagFaster tags are automatically applied and the tags are under cover, clean and protected from tangling in wool. It is very easy to tag either left or right ear in the correct position. Load the gun once and you have 10 animal's worth of double tags, or 20 slaughter animals. They can also be fitted with a free hand-plier.

Each TagFaster tag is colour coded – you know where you stand in any sequence – even single slaughter tags have a black tip to differentiate them from twins. Double tagging mistakes are completely avoidable.

TagFaster tags are the lightest EID tags making the smallest piercing. Ideal for young lambs and small breeds, they are spacious and soft-edged and the high-performance electronics are permanently moulded into the plastic. They are the best-reading high volume sales tags in Scotland.

Tag legislation is changing to allow for a

new year-colour coding on Roxan tags.

Original DEFRA legislation required purely yellow electronic EID sheep tags. Roxan realised that under this scheme all ages of breeding sheep will be wearing yellow tags. If the non-yellow year-colour tag is lost, there would be no simple visual method for identifying the animal's age. Yet it is very sensible to use two colours so that the EID tag is obvious.

Roxan designed TagFaster EID tags with an additional coloured patch. This was not strictly legal but after consultation DEFRA decided to change the law in favour of this useful innovation.

The Roxan coding system provides a visible year-colour patch on the predominantly yellow EID tag. TagFaster has six year colours. The TagFaster applicator delivers 10 twin tag sets in alternating colours, or 20 single batch tags always with black tips to indicate short life animals.



For additional information on this and more tag-innovations, call Roxan on 01750 22940 or email sales@roxan.co.uk.

Roxan's web site is www.roxan.co.uk

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ON THE CROFT

Thirty years of change on the machair

Robin Pakeman reports on a recent re-survey

HAVING SUGGESTED an article for The Crofter, the realisation came that the readers are likely to know far more about the subject than I do. In reading through my first draft of this article it felt like me coming into your living room and saying you've changed the wallpaper. However, by metaphorically doing this for many living rooms of crofters and farmers across the machair, I hope the information may be of interest.

During 2009 and 2010 I led a team of researchers that carried out a botanical re-survey of most of the major machair areas around the islands (Islay to Shetland) and the north coast looking at changes that have happened since the original survey in 1976. Unusually, one of us also went around and interviewed land managers (crofters, township clerks and farmers) for the relevant areas – so thank you to all those who gave us access and spent the time filling us in on land management changes since the 1970s.

The survey confirmed many concerns about machair management and biodiversity. In the areas dominated by crofting, arable cropping has largely

become confined to the Uists (South Uist up to Berneray); ploughing depths have deepened; there is greater reliance on inorganic fertilisers; stock numbers have fallen; and hay-making has largely been replaced by silage-making.

What was surprising was the substantial reduction in the use of common grazing on the hill, with many beasts spending the summer on in-bye land. Much of this change has been driven by a fall in the number of active crofters by around a half between the surveys. In contrast, land use has been more static in the farmed area; intensification had largely happened before the first survey took place in the 1970s.

The changes we noted have had an impact on the vegetation. Declines in diversity were usually associated with a reduction in management activity – and this was restricted to the areas dominated by crofting (Barra, Harris, Lewis, north coast and North Uist). Some other areas showed evidence of nutrient enrichment or potential overgrazing – Islay, Sanday and Shetland. Coll, Colonsay and South Uist appear to have been the areas with the greatest stability in land use and biodiversity.

Looking at the results as a

whole, two conclusions come to me. Firstly, the narrow focus of conservationists on what could be termed the core part of the machair, the grasslands and cropped areas, may have been misplaced. The biggest land use changes have occurred inland – on the in-bye and hill. Machair grassland continues to be used for winter grazing whatever else is going on. Conservation efforts should focus on the whole land use system.

Secondly, whilst there is continuing debate on the effectiveness of agri-environment schemes, they are unlikely to have a big impact in the crofting areas

unless some way of counteracting the fall in active crofters is found. The machair landscape does enthuse us conservationists, but we shouldn't forget it is a landscape created by the interaction between both the rare Atlantic conditions and the activities of those who live and work on it.

The study would not have been possible without funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Scottish Government. For further details please contact me: robin.pakeman@hutton.ac.uk or at the James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen, AB15 8QH.



Tapeworm infections in sheep

ALTHOUGH MANY flock owners worry about the effects of the sheep tapeworm *Monezia expansa* in their sheep due to the obvious presence of expelled tapeworm segments in sheep faeces, this tapeworm is not thought to result in any economic losses.

Few flock owners will be aware that the larvae of dog tapeworms can cause considerable losses to the sheep industry. There are four main adult tapeworm species that infect dogs and whose larvae can cause loss of production and sometimes death in sheep.

- the thin-necked bladder worm
- the sheep bladder worm
- the gid worm
- the tapeworm that causes hydatidosis.

All of these tapeworms have the domestic dog as the final host. Sheep are infected by the larvae of these tapeworms and as the larvae must be ingested by dogs in order to complete its lifecycle, the larvae travel to the muscle and major organs of the sheep they infect, causing considerable damage in some cases.

At present, detected infestations are rarely traced back to source. Consequently, all sheep producers should be aware of these problems and how they can be avoided. Production losses in sheep include:

- **mortality**
Severe infestation of the larvae of the dog tapeworm (the thin-necked bladder worm) occasionally causes death from traumatic hepatitis as larvae migrate through the liver of lambs or goat kids before forming cysts.
- **poorer livestock performance**
Heavy infestations of dog tapeworm larvae in lambs can cause haemorrhages and peritonitis. Moderate to heavy infestations can cause loss of appetite leading to longer finishing periods, increased feed costs and the risk of failure to reach target specifications. Infested sheep may also become weak, leaving them open to other infections.
- **losses from carcase and offal condemnations in slaughterhouses and cutting plants**
Carcasses only lightly infected with the larvae of the dog tapeworm

(the sheep bladder worm) can be trimmed and passed for human consumption. Heavily infected carcasses are condemned. Sheep livers infected with the larvae of the thin-necked bladder worm have cysts and scars and are condemned at slaughter.

- **increased disposal costs of infected tissue at the slaughterhouse or cutting plant.**

Control and Treatment

Treating an animal infected with adult tapeworms is very simple. A benzimidazole drench is very effective at treating sheep infected with the adult sheep tapeworm *M. expansa*, and Praziquantel can be used to successfully treat dogs that may be infected with adults of any of the four common dog tapeworms named above.

However, there is no treatment available for sheep infected with the larvae of dog tapeworms. Effective control of these tapeworms and their larvae depends on an integrated control programme involving both dog owners and sheep farmers.

It should be noted that most

tapeworms and tapeworm larvae found in sheep pose no health risk to humans.

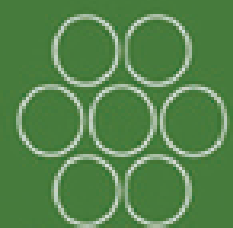
Humans can become infected with the larvae of the tapeworm that causes Hydatidosis through contact with infected dogs or dog faeces. This can result in serious disease in humans, particularly children.

If you would more information about controlling tapeworm and tapeworm larvae in sheep, including a free 12 page newsheet, please contact Maggie Bennett at The Moredun Foundation, phone 0131 445 5111 or email info@moredun.org.uk.



M. expansa in sheep faeces. *M. expansa* rarely causes health problems in sheep and can be easily treated – unlike the larvae of the common dog tapeworms.

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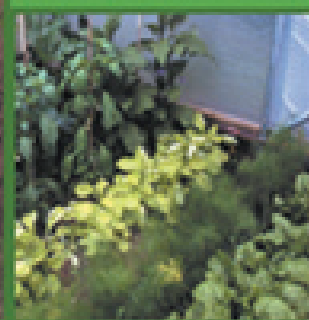
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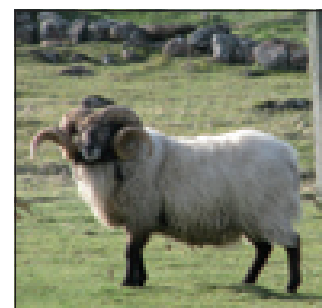
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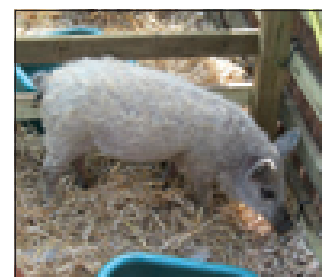
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SRDP

THE Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) is being re-designed for the next phase, which is supposed to start at the beginning of 2014.

Eight working groups have been set up to cover aspects of SRDP: areas of natural constraint, rural economies, Leader, agri-environment, animal welfare and plant health, advisory service, forestry, monitoring and evaluation, with a mix of Scottish Government (SG) officials and representative organisations. Crofting is represented on the appropriate working groups by the SCF.

SCF put forward a proposal to have a crofting-specific programme, an enhanced CCAGS which would encompass some of the crofting-friendly elements of Land Managers' Options and Rural Priorities. Our argument for a programme ring-fenced for crofting is that crofting is the only sector which is regulated. A sub-group of the cross party group on crofting was formed to take the interests of crofting forward to the SRDP programme manager. There will be another meeting after the working groups have finished.

The aim is to have a draft for the next SRDP by the end of 2012 and a consultation in February 2013. Meeting the deadline of end of 2013 for the new programme is the intention but whether the new programme will come into effect in 2014 is uncertain. UK and Scottish governments have put in proposals for transition and bridging to ensure the SRDP continues even if CAP 2014 isn't implemented in time.

There are concerns about the complexity of the present SRDP. The committee for rural affairs will meet to discuss this and will put out a consultation. The SG is aiming to reduce complexity; the ambition is to not have to use advisors for the simpler, lower-cost applications. It wants a customer-focused approach.

Pairc Trust

Vice-chair John Randall reports on the progress of this historic community buy-out attempt under part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

THE LANDLORD'S APPEAL against the Scottish Government's decision of March 2011 to approve our applications to buy the Pairc Estate is slowly going through the courts.

The next step is a hearing in the Court of Session in July (postponed from March 2012) into the landlord's claim that the land reform legislation of 2003 was inconsistent with the European Convention of Human Rights. If the landlord's claim on this point is not upheld, the remainder of his appeal (relating to the particular circumstances of the Pairc Trust's ballot and applications in 2009 and 2010, respectively) will return to the Stornoway Sheriff Court for a judgement. No time-scale for a resolution of the legal process is available.

Meanwhile, Pairc Trust engaged in confidential discussions with the landlord in the months leading up to Christmas 2011 about the possibility of a voluntary transfer of the estate. No breakthrough was achieved and we have not heard from the landlord since Christmas, although we remain open to further discussions.

The full history and an opportunity to support the people of Pairc can be found on www.pairctrust.co.uk.

Woodland expansion

THERE IS ESTIMATED to be 1,342,000ha of woodland in Scotland, amounting to around 17% land cover.

In a series of policy statements the Scottish Government has committed itself to the expansion of woodlands. The Scottish Forestry Strategy has an aim to increase woodland cover from 17% to 25% in the second half of this century. This would involve the creation of some 650,000ha of new woodland. Proposals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions include a policy of increasing woodland creation to 10,000 ha per year over the next ten years.

In August 2011 the government set up the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (WEAG) "to provide advice to the cabinet secretary on identifying more closely which types of land are best for tree planting in the context of other land-based objectives and promote good practice and local processes in relation to tree planting so as to secure multiple benefits."

In our representation to WEAG, SCF indicated that crofters have already created around 10,000 hectares of new woodland under the crofter forestry scheme, that well-designed woodland can enhance grazing lands by providing shelter as well as future economic benefit and that there is scope

for more woodland creation on croft land. We pointed out that there are obstacles, including the complexity of the SRDP process and issues of cash flow under the current grant regime. We also recommended that consideration should be given to support for the creation of pastoral woodlands with lower-density planting over a wider area.

Among the big issues facing WEAG are concerns over the loss of whole farms being converted to woodlands, the cumulative impact of woodland expansion on the hill farming sector and the possible loss of livestock production and the downturn in the annual planting rate over the past few years.

WEAG will submit its recommendations to the cabinet secretary in June 2012 and we are pushing to include specific recommendations that there should be sub-regional land use strategies to make sure that woodland expansion is integrated with other land uses, that access to high-quality advice and to grants should be simplified, that there should be more frequent staged payments to help with cash flow and that SRDP2 should make use of the agroforestry measures under rural development regulations to be able to fund the creation of pastoral woodlands which combine grazing and shelter.

Connecting coastal communities

A PROJECT CO-ORDINATED by SCF which looks at connections between the sense of place felt by island fishermen on Barra in the Western Isles and on Arranmore off the west coast of Donegal has made progress in recent months.

Two trips have been made to both islands for conversations with older fishermen and several of these conversations have since been transcribed, giving researchers a great deal of the practical place-knowledge held by the fishermen which links them to their island and its waters.

The project workers – SCF member Iain MacKinnon, Scottish Association for Marine Science researcher Ruth Brennan and artist Stephen Hurrell – are now in the process of writing up their report, which will articulate some of the connections that they have found. This report is due to be ready at the end of May.

These range from concerns among older fishermen about the long-term effects of some forms of technology on the sustainability of fishing to other lighter connections. For instance, in Uist and Barra it is not uncommon to hear islanders talking about going 'down' to the north and 'up' to the south – the renowned Uist piper Fred Morrison even named a tune 'Up South'.

In one of the project interviews, a Barra fisherman described a journey he took up the island, travelling from north to south.

The same sense of direction was discovered on Arranmore where one of

the older fishermen said that as a young man he used to fish down to Malin – which is to the north of Arranmore – and up as far as Mayo – which is to the south.

The CCC research teams wonders whether such a sense of direction might be natural in a culture in which maps (where north is up and south is down) were not the primary source of travel information. Instead – as the wealth of information carried by the older fishermen testifies to – much of the knowledge needed to ensure safe passage at sea was held in the head. It may be that the sun, as a point of reference, was looked up to – and for the Gàidheal, when it appears at all the sun is generally in the south of the sky.

Traditionally, the sun has been venerated by our two crofting cultures – Gàidheal and Norse – and a host of practices, among them a custom of only turning boats sunwise – ie following the course of the sun – made in relation to the sun. The hope is that working sunwise at the outset will help to ensure the wellbeing and success of a venture.

Indeed, it is even rumoured that during the excellent dinner, hosted by the Scottish Office of the EC at the recent international Let's Liberate Diversity gathering in Strathpeffer, two members of the SCF – believed to be a Shetlander and a Skyeman – were insistent that wine and condiments could only be passed around their table sunwise.

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MEMBERS PAGES

Importance of young people to future of crofting

THE GOVERNMENT has said that crofting makes a significant economic, social and environmental contribution to remote rural areas and provides a secure base for the development of small businesses and maintains and supports a range of unique habitats.

A study commissioned by HIE in 2009 highlighted that the general demographic profile throughout the Highlands and Islands is classified as old and ageing. The Shucksmith committee in its research into the future of crofting provided some quantifiable evidence to support the need for more young crofters. A survey of crofters and non-crofters asked respondents about the importance of young people in making a thriving crofting community. 75% of respondents said that a community with young crofters is very important.

SCF has identified, through its work with crofters and crofting communities, that there is a lack of support for young people who are crofting or are interested in crofting. Young people are vital in ensuring a vibrant future for crofting and rural communities. A recent documentary for BBC ALBA also provided repeated evidence that there is a need and desire in crofting communities for more young people to become active in working the land. Many of the contributors commented on this need:

"I'd like to get some land. I can see plenty of land that isn't being utilised. There are also plenty of crofts that are for sale but I can't afford £20,000-£30,000 or even £50,000 to buy a croft. I find it very frustrating that there isn't a system in place for people like me who'd like a croft, considering the number that aren't in use." Duncan MacKinnon from Lewis, a young landless stock keeper (an agriculturalist without a croft).

"Three young people have taken over crofts in Camuscross on Skye and they are all utilising them. They are very keen crofters, so that makes a change. That's the problem with crofting. Young people aren't getting a chance. When crofts do come on the market they're too expensive for young people to buy. It's quite disappointing when you see perfectly good arable land being used for house sites." Susan Walker of Camuscross, Crofting Commissioner.

"I was keen to do the crofting course because we have a croft and my father is getting old and wasn't doing much with the sheep. So I became interested and wanted to learn about dealing with sheep and cattle. When I leave school I want to keep the croft and have sheep and cattle and also grow corn and vegetables. There are five in the class from North and South Uist and we're all interested in crofting. We all want to keep working the crofts after leaving school. I learn how to grow crops and also about animal husbandry. It will be of benefit in the future when we need to give more consideration to localised food production." Pàdruig Moireasdan of Grimsay, student on the crofting course at Sgoil Lionacleit.

The SCF recognises a need to get young people thinking about crofting and reconnected with the land and their cultural roots. As well as being a partner in Crofting Connections, SCF is proposing to hold a participatory conference for young crofters. It will give them an opportunity to share the struggles they face in their communities and in the wider crofting context. Crucially, it will also give them a chance to share their hopes and aspirations for the future. In consultation with young crofters it has been made very clear to SCF that younger people feel they need to meet and exchange ideas, create opportunities for learning and build confidence and self-esteem to ensure a vibrant future for crofting.

Editor's note:

We encourage young people keen to get a croft to have the confidence to ask around locally and try to persuade inactive crofters to give up the land they don't use, to make it available to those who want to work crofts. Local people should be committed to seeing crofts put to good use by young would-be crofters from their own communities. Of course some tenants and croft owners do not live locally and can be hard to contact. This is where new Commission policy comes into play. And with the SCF's register of interest, there is now a mechanism to make the process of croft availability more transparent.

Register of interest in crofts

THE REGISTER of interest in crofts was created at the end of 2011 when the Scottish Crofting Federation saw a vital missing link between those who are looking for crofts and those who have crofts available. SCF receives regular calls and emails from people looking for crofts. We have standard advice which can be given to all who enquire. However, we have now gone a step further and as part of our membership benefits we hold a list of people interested in acquiring a croft.

How it works

Members who wish to be on the register of interest can contact HQ to request the form which needs to be completed. This is so we can easily track those who are interested and also what area or areas they are particularly interested in.

The Crofting Commission has helped us publicise this list and has agreed to inform us when they are made aware of any available crofts created through the vacant crofts initiative. They also include our details in any letters they send to landlords of these vacant crofts; and in information sent to absentees who may be looking for a suitable person to assign the croft to; and to owner occupiers who are not meeting the statutory duties and

may need to let their crofts.

As well as receiving this information from the Commission we have already made a number of contacts with landlords and community-owned estates. We will be expanding our network by contacting grazing clerks, assessors and estate agents over the next few months so we are made aware of a large majority of available crofts.

Over half of crofts assigned are to family members and a large proportion of the remainder are assigned to someone that the crofter knows. However we still see a good number of crofts, both tenanted and owner occupied being sold on the open market. As many people know there are no restrictions on the amount that a croft can be sold for and so this often leads to the highest bidder getting the croft. Sadly, in some cases this is of no benefit to the crofting community.

One of the aims of the register of interest in crofts is to allow people with a genuine interest to have easier access to knowledge of available crofts. If you are considering giving up crofting and do not have anyone who will be able to take up crofting and meeting the statutory duties then you should also consider using the list to find a suitable successor.

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MEMBERS PAGES



NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NAME OF COMPANY: Scottish Crofting Federation

COMPANY No: SC 218658

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

NOTICE is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Scottish Crofting Federation will be held in the Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness on Thursday, 28th June 2012 at 2.00pm, to consider and, if thought fit, to pass the following resolutions.

1. To receive company's accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th November 2011. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting or on request to the registered office.

2. To elect persons proposed as directors.

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

4. That we, being members of the company, who at the date of this resolution would be entitled to attend and vote at general meetings of the company resolve that the directors of the company be given authority to:

i. establish or re-establish, as the case may be, groups of its members within designated post-code sectors of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland;

ii. subject, in each such case, to the group approving and adopting, by simple majority, its own written constitution, comprising its identifying name, aims, objectives and procedures;

iii. the board of the Scottish Crofting Federation at its sole discretion may approve or otherwise such group or groups to affiliation within the Federation, as it sees fit.

By order of the board of directors.

Company secretary: John Bannister
Date of notice: 11th May 2012

As if by magic, they appear!

Company secretary John Bannister explains how to nominate a potential SCF director

SUCH IS THE apparent mystery surrounding the process of appointing a director to the SCF board that I have been asked to explain how this magic works.

There is a democratic and open process for this most important voluntary role. The procedure is laid down in article 10 of the company's articles of association and a brief explanation is timely with the SCF's AGM now on the horizon.

Article 10.2 "a director needs to be a member of the company." The articles set out the options for ordinary members to make appointments for directorships, under the following sub-paragraphs:

Article 10.6(a) "he/she is proposed by the area representatives' council..." Directors may, at their discretion, appoint one or more members

recommended by the council and may seek proposals from council to fill vacancies.

Article 10.6(b) "not less than twenty-one clear days before the date appointed for holding the meeting, notice executed by ten members has been given to the company of intention to propose that person for appointment..."

A form is available from HQ. This can be an initiative taken by a particular member, to find ten other members willing to support him/her and giving their signature to that effect. Any member may initiate this same process (same form) of obtaining members' signed support in favour of another member who is willing and whom they feel strongly would serve the membership well.

Article 10.6(c) "he/she is recommended by the directors." This article is used when there are either no member nominations or insufficient to fill any vacancies. An appointment made this way has the added safeguard of being

ratified by members at the next AGM.

For sound democratic balance, article (10.7) allows any member to nominate him/herself for appointment "not less than twenty one clear days... notice executed by a member... has been given to the company... to propose that person for appointment."

In summary, under article 10(a) the area representatives' council should be aware of suitable members from among their own number or in their respective branches, while under 10(b) a group (not less than ten) of ordinary members can put forward their own candidate.

In the absence of nominations the board can, under 10(c), recommend (co-opt) a member. An appointee may have skills and attributes specially needed by the board at that time – eg a background in business, law or finance. The appointment is approved, or not, at the next AGM by ordinary members present. Any nomination

made under article 10.7 (self-nomination) has to be formally approved by the AGM on the stipulation that there are vacancies on the board.

The board is presently minded to increase its number from six to nine directors, spreading the responsibility and efficiency of running the charitable company. Directors meet quarterly face-to-face, two of these meeting jointly with the area representatives council. At other times business is conducted by teleconferences and email.

If the challenge and satisfaction of becoming a director of SCF appeals to you – and you have the time to devote to it – please get in touch (personally/telephone/email) with Derek (chair), Patrick (CEO) or me (company secretary) at HQ. No previous experience as a director is required. Common sense is a very useful asset as is, of course, some knowledge of crofting. All enquiries from members are most welcome.

TRAINING

Entry level crofting induction courses

WE HAVE NOW run 19 entry level courses during the last 18 months, with over 300 people completing the course, which is a great demonstration of the ongoing interest in and demand for access to crofting.

In addition to learning about the topics in the synopsis, many of these courses have also generated strong links between the participants, which we are keen to support in further activities such as forming SCF local groups, arranging talks, programmes and future training courses.

A number of the courses were

in areas where they have never taken place before and we are keeping a note of ongoing interest for future courses. If you would like to attend the entry level course in your area please get in touch and we will try to respond to the areas with greatest demand. Our newest 'southernmost' course concluded in Kilmartin, Argyll at the end of March and the local course director Julia Hamilton has kindly provided the following course report.

Training award

As noted in the last Crofter, we are awarding a prize to the participants who have attended the greatest number of courses

throughout this pilot phase of the training programme. Two winners of the prize of £50 Harbro gift vouchers have been identified.

The award for the young crofter (under 40) attending most courses goes to Robbie Pancic of the Isle of Skye.

The overall award goes to Alison Westlake, who has attended five courses and was delighted to receive the prize, saying: "I have really enjoyed all the training days and very much value and appreciate the opportunities for learning that they have given. I have been impressed by the high standard

of teaching and the expertise of the tutors. Attendance on these training days has really helped me generate ideas and confidence concerning the working of my own croft."

Congratulations to both Alison and Robbie and thanks to everyone who has attended, supported and provided feedback on the training courses throughout the last year. We hope to have a new programme of training up and running over the summer.

For more information on any element of the training programme please contact Su Cooper: training@crofting.org

Successful course in Mid-Argyll

THERE ARE relatively few working crofts in Mid-Argyll and Kintyre, so acquiring a croft is not going to be easy for some of the students who enrolled on the crofting entry level induction course at Kilmartin House Museum.

This is the first year that Kilmartin House Museum has organised and delivered the course for the SCF. Having already been involved since early 2010 supporting local

schools who are participating in the Crofting Connections project, the museum especially wanted to facilitate a course for adults, particularly local people who had already shown an interest in crofting and had enquired about courses.

Once word got out about the course, the places soon filled and we had to add names to a waiting list. Kilmartin is situated 28 miles

from Oban and 56 miles from Campbeltown and some students travelled quite a distance each week. Four students traveled down from the Oban area and one student travelled up from Campbeltown. The majority of tutors were also based in the Oban area, so there were a lot of miles covered over the 10 weeks.

Of the 13 students, four had rented land and kept livestock and a further student had land only; the remaining students all wished to rent or own a croft in the future.

Evaluation and feedback about the course from the students highlighted the fact that the majority had found the course an invaluable source of information. They had gained knowledge and understanding not just on the history and progression of crofting but of modern day crofting issues, especially in this challenging economic climate. From trying to grasp the minefield of rules, regulations and legislation, on

a lighter side they got an insight into a typical day for running a bed and breakfast – not for the faint hearted!

The course began at the end of January and finished on the evening of March 29th. Joining the students for the presentation of certificates were Dr Sharon Webb, curator and director of the Kilmartin Museum, Mike Russell MSP, cabinet secretary for education and life-long learning, who presented the award certificates, Su Cooper training manager for SCF and some of the tutors.

All of the students were keen to stay in contact with one another and will meet up again some time in the near future when we hope to start a programme of practical courses.

*Julia Hamilton
Education and outreach officer
for cultural and natural heritage
Kilmartin House Museum and
Campbeltown Museum*



Treabhadh

AN DÈIDH beagan sheachdainean de shìde thioram, agus an talamh mu dheireadh thall a' call na fliuchad a th' air a bhith gar sàrachadh fad a' gheamhraidh, tha mi faicinn tractair a-mach an siud 's an seo aig obair an earraich, agus 's e a' chiad phàirt dhith sin an treabhadh. Thug an sealladh sin smuain no dhà gu m' inntinn mun obair aosta seo.

Nuair a thèid an crann sìos don talamh, tha an sgian a' geàrradh dìreach, tha an soc a' geàrradh tarsainn, agus thèid an sgriob a thogail agus a thionndadh leis a' bhòrd-ùireach. Seo am prionnsabal airson cha mhòr a h-uile crann-

treabhaidh a chaidh a chur am feum sa Ghaidhealtachd bhon 18mh linn gu an latha an-diugh. 'S ann air dà adhbhar gu sònraichte a tha sinn a' treabhadh; a' chiad fhear, airson casg a chur air luibhean le bhith gan cur fodha, agus an dàrna fear, airson an talamh a bhriseadh gus a dhèanamh freagarrach airson sìol a chur.

Nuair a thèid an treabhadh gu math, 's e obair air leth tlachdmhor a th' ann, agus ma thèid a dhèanamh gu grinn, tha e an dà chuid taitneach don t-sùil agus nas fhasa a h-uile obair eile dhèanamh. 'S ann air tàilleabh sin a bhios duais aig co-fharpais treabhaidh

airson iomaire rèidh "the levellest rig on the field", Bliadhna no dhà air ais, bha a' bhean agam a' cur iomradh anns a' phàipear ionadail mu na duaisean aig tè de na farpaisean seo. Chaidh am fiosrachadh a chur thuice ann an làmh sgrìobhadh nach robh cho grinn ris an treabhadh an latha sin. Cha robh i dèanamh a-mach cuid de na bha sgrìobhte. Nuair a nochd am fiosrachadh sa phàipear, bha iomradh air duais airson "the loveliest rig on the field" Ach, dh'fhaoidte nach robh an dà thuirisgeul sin cho fada bho chèile co-dhiù!

Bha e na bhrosnachadh gun robh

latha-trèanaidh airson treabhadh sa bhaile againn an uiridh air an robh 15 duine. Chaidh a shealltainn dhuinn ciamar a sheatas tu an crann gus sgriob ghrinn a thionndadh agus ciamar a chumas tu an sgriob sin dìreach. Tha e tràth fhathast, ach tha mi an dòchas gum bi crann no dhà a bharrachd ga chur san talamh sna bliadhnaichean a tha romhainn, talamh a bha uair tarbhach agus a dh'fhaodadh a bhith a rithist.

'S e an t-ullachadh a nì 'm buileachadh
À treabhadh thig na sguaban
À sguaban thig na h-adagan
À adagan na cruachan

Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

Bullrushes to gold rushes

Calum MacDonald makes the case for crofting wind farms

CROFTING is at a crossroads. Is there is an economic future in tilling the land and tending livestock?

Villages are getting older, grazings committees struggle to be quorate and land and fencing are being abandoned to indifference.

But crofting communities are sitting on a financial and economic gold mine in their own common grazings – in the enormous financial potential wind-farming can bring. Common grazings can become an engine for social and economic development across the Highlands and Islands.

This is not a pipedream. With confidence, determination and the right support crofting communities can harness wind power to bring in millions of pounds to benefit their areas. There are real-life examples being built right now.

The three turbines of the Beinn Ghrideag wind farm, being built by Point and Sandwick Power on common grazings land in Lewis, will generate a net income of around £1 million a year from 2013 onwards. Because Point and Sandwick Power is community-owned, every penny of that profit will be re-invested

to promote economic, social and cultural well-being in the area.

Why aren't more crofting communities unlocking the millions of pounds of potential in their common grazings? The answer is because of the perceived financial, technical and legal obstacles in the way of development. These obstacles are not as daunting as they appear. They can be overcome by any interested grazings committee or community organisation.

The Highland and Islands is the windiest region in Europe and a mecca for developers. A rule of thumb for the net profit from a wind turbine is £100,000 per MW a year. In the Highlands it can be substantially higher, but let's use that figure as a guide. The Beinn Ghrideag scheme has three turbines, each 3MW in size, giving an annual net income of £300,000 per turbine or £900,000 for the wind farm as a whole. These are the net figures per year, after building and operating costs have been deducted.

Compare that income to the community benefit fund offered by conventional wind farm developers to win local support as part of the planning process. The best of these payments is just over £5,000 a year per MW. If the Beinn

Ghrideag wind farm was being built by Eon, EDF, Amec or any of the other companies now active in the Highlands, community income would be a maximum of £50,000 a year, instead of £900,000 a year. The first of these sums is useful but the other, the community-owned route, can change crofting communities forever.

Imagine a typical 10-turbine wind farm in the Highlands. Developed conventionally, the best-model community income would be £150,000 a year. Developed through community ownership, perhaps by two or three crofting townships sharing common grazings for this purpose, community income would be £3 million a year. Multiply Beinn Ghrideag across ten communities and you have £9 million coming into the local economy. Other communities have already shown the way.

First, contact Community Energy Scotland (CES). They will advise, support and finance you through the rest of the development process, so that it can be done at no cost or risk to the grazing committee kitty.

To build your wind farm, of course, you will have to take on a commercial loan, some £14 million in our case with Beinn Ghrideag. That is a huge amount

of debt but, like the equally-large borrowing of community-run housing associations, it is borrowed against the assets of the wind farm, not against individuals, so carries no risk to a grazings committee or shareholders.

People are also daunted by technical and legal issues. These will be handled for you by specialist consultants, of which there are many in Scotland. These costs too can be paid for by CES and related sources of funding.

There is no excuse for large multi-nationals driving most wind farm development in Scotland, other than an abject failure of political imagination and will. Denmark has more onshore wind farms than any other country in Europe. About half are community-owned in one form or another. It is not rocket science. Other countries do it.

Determination and a large degree of community unity are essential, but where others have failed, the crofting communities in the Highlands can still succeed.

Calum A MacDonald is the development director of Point and Sandwick Power. He was previously MP for the Western Isles and a minister in the Labour Government.

Renewables

– Norman Leask reports

THE Scottish Government agri-renewables strategy working group has had two meetings recently, giving us the opportunity to air our concerns to the officials dealing with Scottish renewables policy.

Some of the main problems identified were:

- the lack of grid connections and/or an excessive charge to connect;
- difficulty in getting planning permission;
- difficulty in obtaining capital to fund a project;
- lack of government or watchdog control on provision of services and hardware (untrained and unscrupulous companies selling equipment, untrained fitters, hardware not being designed and built to marine standards, lack of protection against suppliers winding-up, and so on);
- lack of appropriate facilities for storage of power produced.

We did also suggest some solutions such as:

- funding from the proposed green bank or CCAGS in the form of a loan repaid by the Feed In Tariff (FIT);
- a one-stop shop to support those interested in investing in micro-renewables;
- further development of storage technology such as the hydrogen cell and storing and retrieving from the grid (as in Belgium);
- having the connection charge paid for by the power company (as in Germany);
- training schemes for all involved in micro-renewables.

As well as producing green power, additional advantages of renewables are seen as creating employment, especially in the rural areas, helping rural business creation and diversification and helping to alleviate fuel poverty, which is getting worse in rural Scotland).

We are pressing the Scottish Government for a fair FIT to suit the type of micro-

renewables chosen by the individual, suitable for the climatic conditions of the uplands and islands of Scotland.

The SCF requires a new director on the board with particular knowledge and interest in renewables. If you have those skills and would be willing to help crofters bring the benefits of this technology to the Highlands and Islands please let us know.



Norman's windmill at Snarraness, Shetland

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Orkney's Crofting Connections

KIRKWALL town hall was the venue for a gathering of Orkney schools involved in the Crofting Connections project in March this year.

Crofting Connections is a three-year project launched in August 2009 by the SCF and the Soil Association Scotland to give children from remote rural communities throughout the Highlands and Islands an opportunity to learn about crofting.

The aims of the day, which was sponsored by Orkney Islands Council, were to bring schools together to share good practice, showcase the range of Crofting Connections activities in Orkney schools and explore crofting past, present and future in the context of work, culture and the natural environment.

Leslie Manson, executive director of education, leisure and housing, began the day with an introductory address, followed by a speech by Liam McArthur MSP. Upstairs a colourful

and tactile exhibition showed examples of work by the six Orkney schools involved in the Crofting Connections project. Children enjoyed the opportunity to share and speak about what they had done.

Everyone then gathered for a Taste of Orkney lunch – an impressive buffet showcasing a delicious selection of Orkney produce including bread, beremeal bannocks, meat, seafood, cheese, vegetables, preserves, ice-cream and honey, at which producers helped with serving and giving tasters.

In the afternoon children had a choice of a rich variety of workshops, from visiting and learning about the earl's kitchen at Earl's Palace with Emily Velzian to making items out of straw with Neil Leask from Corrigall Farm Museum. There was also the opportunity to learn about soil types in Orkney with Jason Owen from the Hutton Institute and about seafood in



Orkney with Catriona Frankitti from Seafood Scotland.

Other workshops covered milling and baking using traditional cereals and craft, music, felting and storytelling. Running parallel with the workshops was a discussion group for teachers with presentations by the teachers and a lively panel discussion on crofting past, present and future in Orkney. On the panel were crofters, farmers, those involved with the environment, economic development and heritage and representatives of the Scottish Agricultural College and the

department of agriculture in Orkney.

Head teacher Susan Robertson from Stronsay Junior High School said after the event: "This is the third Crofting Connections event we have attended and once again the pupils thoroughly enjoyed it. They enjoyed tasting Orkney produce – some of which they hadn't tried before – and learned new skills in the felting and soils workshops. Thank you to the workshop leaders and to all involved in the organisation of this showcase event."

Helga Tulloch



Crofting Connections is funded by:



SCF AGM

The SCF AGM will take place on
Thursday 28th June in Inverness.
Full details on page 24.



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