

Crofting Register: prospects and problems

As revealed in the last issue of The Crofter, the much anticipated Crofting Register is now live.

THE NEW map-based register, maintained by Registers of Scotland, is likely to take some time to bed in.

The positives of the register are fairly self-explanatory. Defined extents of crofts and common grazings will be plotted against the OS map and shown in a clear plan. This is to be welcomed; and for the first time, definitive details of the boundaries of crofts will be available which will provide much needed certainty.

There are some criticisms; for example the extra costs and regulatory requirements fall mostly on crofters. There is a 20% reduction in fees available during the voluntary registration period, until 30th November 2013, for group registration.

With crofts being mapped potentially for the first time, it is natural that disputes could arise over boundaries. When a croft is first entered in the register, interested parties may challenge the registration in the nine-month period following registration. Depending on your viewpoint, the appeal period appears either very short (for example, if you are a neighbouring proprietor who was not notified of the registration), or if you are the applicant for registration, a rather long wait at the end of the registration process.

There are a number of triggers of registration including subsequent transfers of owner-occupied crofts, an assignation of a tenanted croft, a new letting and matters that change the land's status – like decrofting.

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Enforced abandonment of crofting stock-keeping

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS crofting stock-holders have been compelled by the European Commission and the Scottish Government into a state of enforced abandonment.

Strong words, granted, but look at the evidence.

Over the years we have been subjected to continual erosion of our entitlements and funding. Margaret Thatcher's rebate was supposed to put in place UK-specific environmental schemes. Most of that money went for other purposes so the 29% left with the EU was never drawn back, leaving Britain net losers to other states, with Scotland at the very bottom of the heap of 15 nations.

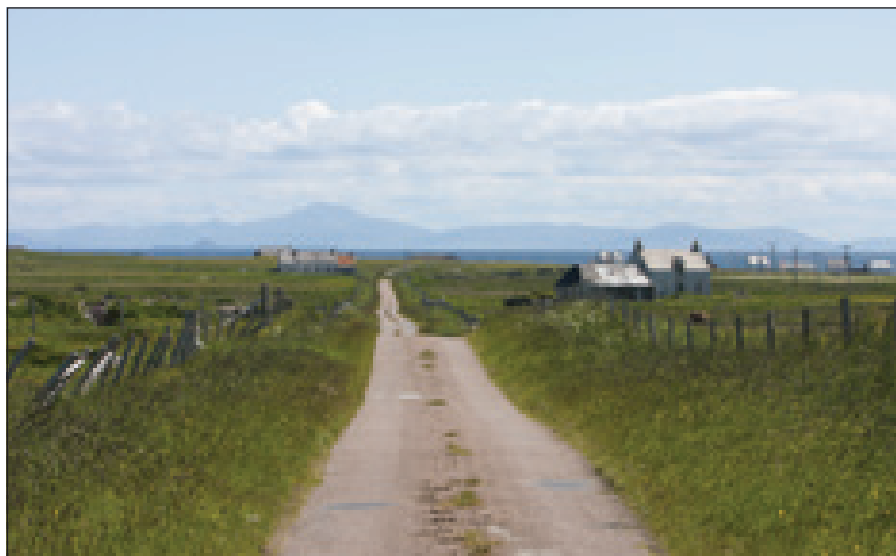
EU schemes such as the Agricultural Development Programme, Environmentally Sensitive Areas, the Rural Stewardship Scheme and now the Rural Priority Scheme

within the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) have steadily become less accessible to those in the Highlands and Islands.

As the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance became the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) pressure came from big business to make it a production subsidy, not a scheme for the truly less favoured areas. The Scottish Government accepted these conditions, despite knowing that crofters in the periphery would be poorly served, putting forward a scheme to Europe that was well outwith the spirit of the regulation. In fact the Scottish use of LFASS has been widely criticised in Europe, even by the EU auditors.

The Scottish Government decided to withdraw payments to holdings under three

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The SCF legal helpline

THE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation is very happy to announce that it can now provide a legal helpline for its members, in partnership with well-known crofting law firm Inksters Solicitors.

Members of SCF will be able to phone one Highland number to be put through to a lawyer with crofting expertise. The initial advice will be free (for around 15 minutes, which can usually solve many problems) and if the SCF member wishes to engage Inksters to undertake legal work on his or her behalf a 10% discount on the fees chargeable will be available.

Think about it. Not only does this mean that many legal queries can be answered for free, and that big savings can be gained on more protracted issues, but this is with a leading crofting law team with outlets in Glasgow, Inverness, Wick and soon in Portree. And all through one number –

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Through this partnership, the service and savings can only be available to paid-up SCF members. If you are unsure of your membership status and think you may need to take advantage of this facility, please check with HQ.

Message from the chair...



"If crofting has a future, it will be secured, and can only be secured, by crofters themselves – crofters prepared to get together in sufficient numbers to make their collective voice heard in the places where it matters." (Jim Hunter)

MAJOR CHANGES have been taking place during the past year since I took over as chair of the SCF Board. These changes are of great interest to all those who believe in crofting. At the same time, I am pleased that we have been

able to strengthen the board by appointing new members, all knowledgeable people and each active on SCF's behalf, in an area of their own interest.

Patrick, our chief executive, and the staff at HQ have been busy helping to set up meetings and we have tried to respond to all requests to attend and speak at local SCF events. We know there is a desire to learn more about the recent changes, not least because everyone with a croft is affected.

When crofting was created in its statutory form in 1886, many landlords complained that it interfered with their right to control those who occupied crofts. Crofting law was devised by a distant parliament as being for the public good. It protected the residents of remote lands from the actions of others, who generally were looking out for themselves.

Great changes have taken place in rural and agricultural matters. But the framework of

crofting, as a model of maintaining a population in rural areas by making the land available to them, has stood the test of time. That is the case put by the SCF with some success. The Scottish Government has committed itself to ensuring that crofting will continue well into the future.

Whilst investing in that framework, by continuing to provide the Scottish Land Court, the new Crofting Commission and now the Crofting Register, the Scottish Government has also made its wishes clear. Those who are to occupy crofts must accept the legal duty of residing on or beside their crofts and a legal duty of care for their land.

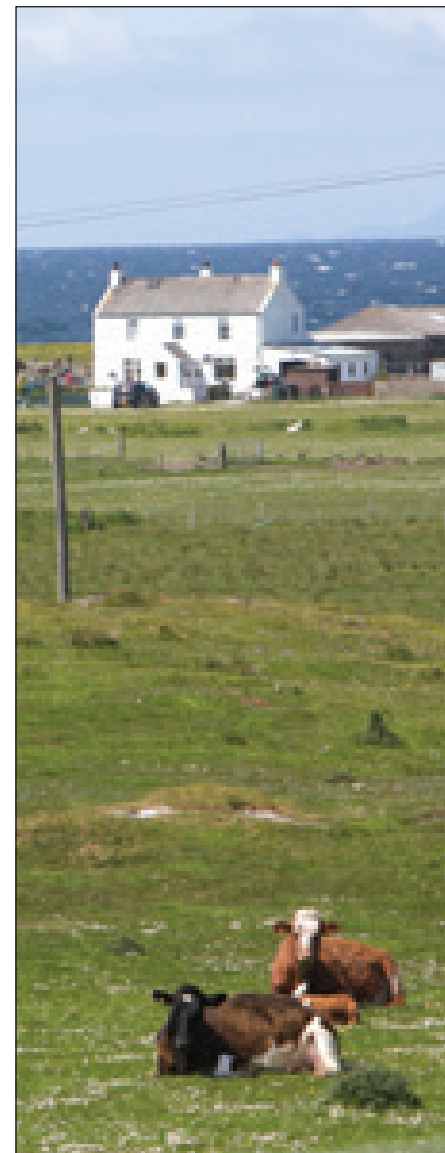
These recent reforms, however unpopular they may be in some quarters, have reinforced crofting law as being for the public good by sustaining resident crofters who are looking after their lands and dismissing the claims of others, who generally are looking out for themselves.

The Crofting Register is now in place. All crofting lands are now to be mapped. Crofters are required to take the lead. Although crofts have been given special treatment since 1886, it can hardly be the mark of a mature system that boundaries are uncertain or left open to challenge. We at SCF have been active in encouraging crofting communities to get together and map their crofts collectively. We strongly believe this will avoid a more costly piecemeal approach later.

Meanwhile, the Crofting Commission is tasked with having all common grazings mapped. Crofters neglect this great resource at their peril. We therefore propose to have common grazings as the principle theme of discussion when we gather later this year.

We can then find our collective voice on the subject and go and be heard in the places where it matters.

Derek Flynn



Our man in Brussels

Norman Leask

Enforced abandonment of crofting stock-keeping

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hectares, promising that no registered crofts with rights to common grazings would be affected. Of course these promises are in no minutes and were soon forgotten, moving more income from the north and

west to wealthy farmers in more productive parts of Scotland.

Due to the dreaded herbaceous interpretation, Scottish Government removed vast areas around seashores and hills from the eligible land category – cutting crofters' entitlements although the same numbers of sheep are grazing on the same areas.

Furthermore, they have changed the goalposts, using far more accurate maps but not giving crofters time to update their IACS maps; resulting in government officials accusing crofters of false claims and imposing crippling sanctions.

The latest anti-crofter rule that has enforced abandonment is electronic identification (EID) legislation, especially the draconian way the Scottish Government has gold plated it (driven again, one assumes, by the big businesses).

So there does appear to be a pretty strong justification for my use of "enforced abandonment", don't you think?

Update on electronic identification (EID)

We did a survey in Shetland in conjunction with Alyn Smith MEP to find out what crofters were thinking and doing about this unreasonable legislation. The European commission received the findings and a month later they accepted them and advised on some adjustments we asked for.

At the end of January MEPs had voted on amendments to the new CAP – including removing the link between electronic identification of sheep and cross compliance.

The threat of losing a percentage of the Single Farm Payment is a constant worry for any sheep producer but especially small-scale holdings struggling to survive. They are forced to use technology that they cannot guarantee will be 100% accurate for reasons outwith their control. Then if they don't achieve 100% accuracy they are penalised.

MEPs must be congratulated for taking this sensible decision. Although it still has to be approved by the full parliament, it is a significant step forward.

www.crofting.org

Crofting Register: prospects and problems

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Curiously the purchase by a crofting tenant of the croft from the landlord will not trigger a registration. A further omission is that neither sub-lets nor grazings shares will be identified.

Indeed, there has been some uncertainty over the status of grazing shares. A recent reference to the Land Court examined grazing shares and held that grazing shares could be deemed crofts, capable of being held in tenancy in their own right and assigned separately from the croft to which they are related. This decision has implications, yet grazing shares will not be identified on the register.

The effect of the register on the development of croft land (for renewables or otherwise) remains to be seen. The Section 19A Scheme for Development application to the Land Court, introduced in 2007, is becoming more widely used to develop on croft land. Part of the thinking behind the Section 19A legislation was to facilitate renewable developments. However, whilst the more traditional resumption triggers the registration process, a Section 19A will not. This may be seen as a disincentive to using the Section 19A, though in practice it is unlikely to influence thinking.

Whilst some may view the register as answering all their queries on crofts, it should be remembered that the register does not contain all the information that the Crofting Commission kept and it will take some time before the new register is fully populated. Accordingly, enquiries relating to crofts should still also be made to the Crofting Commission, rather than simply searching the register by itself.

Thanks to Calum MacLeod, a solicitor at Harper Macleod LLP in Inverness, for this article.

If you're interested in hearing more about what Calum has to say on crofting and renewables, he will be speaking at the Scottish Highland Renewable Energy Conference 2013, being held in Drumossie Hotel, Inverness, on 18 April. See the advert in this edition for more information.

Are you considering moving out of crofting?

If you have a croft you no longer use and wish to make it available to someone else, please get in touch with SCF HQ. We can help you find the right person to take it over.

The Crofting Register and mapping

AS OUTLINED in the accompanying article, the Crofting Register is open to take applications to register croft maps.

SCF is raising funds for a project to facilitate communities in sorting their maps out together rather than the responsibility falling on each individual who approaches the commission for a direction. The intention is to reduce dispute as much as possible, to make it much cheaper for each individual and to speed up the process.

If you wish to register a map of your croft, contact the Crofting Commission in the first

instance. They hold application forms and they receive your map first. If they are happy with it, it goes to Registers of Scotland for inclusion in the crofting register. The commission will notify neighbours of the lodging of the map and there is a nine-month period for objection.

If you want more information on the process contact the Crofting Commission or Registers of Scotland, who will be happy to help. If you want more information on how to map township assets, including the croft boundaries, as a community, please contact the SCF.



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Are you looking for a croft?

SCF maintains a list of available crofts, with information coming to us from landlords, estate agents and the Crofting Commission.

If you are an SCF member you can access this list to find out what crofts are available across the crofting counties. You can have your contact details added to the list so that we can notify you if a croft becomes available in an area of your choice. We can also advise members on the process of getting a croft and direct you to numerous sources of related information.

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LFA support more vital than ever?

A RECENT NFUS press release was headed *LFA Support More Vital Than Ever*. The statement is true in itself, but let's look at this a bit more closely.

The way the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) has been used in Scotland has been canny to say the least. Most of Scotland is designated as LFA in the European context. According to the European Commission: In areas designated as less-favoured, agricultural production or activity is more difficult because of natural handicaps, eg difficult climatic conditions, steep slopes in mountain areas, or low soil productivity in other less-favoured areas. Due to the handicap to farming there is a significant risk of agricultural land abandonment and thus a possibility of loss of biodiversity, desertification, forest fires and the loss of highly valuable rural landscape. You

get the picture. So it would make sense to any right-minded person that the greater the handicap the more compensation there should be. Not so in Scotland.

The payments are worked out through a complicated series of mathematical trickeries. Through a bizarre inversion of the formula that should ensure more support goes to LESS favoured areas, the highest payments per hectare are awarded to the farms on better land in the LFA. To be clear, if you are a producer in the LFA – most of Scotland – the higher the quality of your land the higher the payment you get from LFASS. Yes, strange but true.

This was criticised by bodies such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Committee of Enquiry on Crofting, not to mention the European Commission auditors. So the Scottish Government made some changes. The most notable

change for 2010 was the increase in payment rates to farmers and crofters in areas classified as fragile or very fragile – areas concentrated in the north and west of the country. However, a year later they quietly informed us that the European Commission had approved scheme changes which would apply from 2011. These included increased payment rates in the standard areas – ie the better land in the south and east.

So let's look again at what NFUS says: "With the potential for great upheaval under the CAP's Pillar 1, which will provide direct payments via a new area-based formula, the role of LFASS will grow in importance".

Could this be interpreted as "The going's getting tough with direct payments – they are going to redistribute it – so the LFASS milk cow is going to be even more important for the better off in the standard areas"?

And "The current LFASS has been a real success". Well yes, to the better-off farmers who really, one could argue, don't need public support anyway, or at least should get proportionally less from a scheme that is designed to help less-favoured producers.

The next phase of the SRDP aims to do away with LFASS to replace it with Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC). The fundamental principle cited in the stakeholder working-group looking at this support mechanism was that greater support should go to those with greater constraints. That sounds like the end of the scam when ANC comes in.

It is little wonder then that NFUS is lobbying hard to delay that day and the phrase "the current LFASS scheme must roll over in its current form until farms have adjusted to the area-payment system" takes on more meaning.



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Crofting and the SRDP

DURING LAST YEAR the SCF presented a paper to the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) on the theme of Crofting and the SRDP.

As the ensuing discussion bloomed it became apparent that the subject would benefit from a working-group looking further into this important topic. Subsequently this was formed, charged with producing relevant information on the issues for crofting in the context of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and to present recommendations for a future SRDP (2014-20) for the CPGoC to present to the Scottish Government.

Stakeholders and advisors involved are: SCF, NFUS, HIE, SLE, EFNCP, RSPB, CC and SNH.

At the last meeting of the CPGoC, Crofting Commission

convenor Susan Walker gave a presentation on the report that has been produced. The CPGoC ratified the report and it has been sent to the Scottish Government. A meeting with government officials has been arranged to follow up on this.

The report highlights the lack of uptake of SRDP measures by crofters and small-holders and contains a wealth of analytical data as background. It is recommended that a new SRDP should have: 1) an enhanced Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme and 2) a Programme for Crofting and Small Units.

Thanks to all who participated in the working-group and especially to Susan for the time she put into the preparation of the report. The report can be found on the SCF website www.crofting.org.



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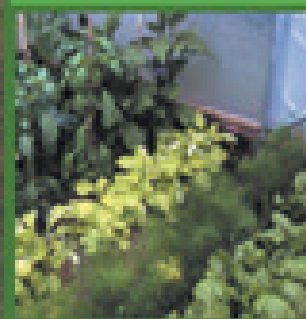
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Scottish Crofting Federation calls on land reform gurus to support creation of new crofts

IN THE SCF response to the Land Reform Review Group call for evidence, we reiterated our petition to the Scottish Government to create 10,000 new crofts by 2020 and asked the group to support this.

We have pressed the Scottish Government to set out the policies that will be put in place to facilitate rapid extension of the crofting system. This is based on a fundamental belief, not only within SCF, that in the Scottish context crofting is the model best placed to deliver the emerging policy goals for agriculture and rural development. Review of land reform in Scotland should reflect these

policy goals and so we asked the group to support our request.

The Land Reform Review Group, chaired by Dr Alison Elliot with support from vice-chairs Dr Sarah Skerratt and Professor James Hunter, has been appointed by Scottish Ministers to identify how land reform will, amongst other things, 'enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land, which will lead to a greater diversity of land ownership, and ownership types, in Scotland'.

We want to see more people on the land;

more families benefiting from a stake in Scotland and being able to take care of their own part of it. The current financial climate creates an opportunity like never before for public bodies to create new crofts for the many people who aspire to live and work in rural Scotland and we must seize this opportunity.

The vast majority of these crofts will provide a new, cost-effective means of caring for large areas of public land, but we see no reason why the private sector cannot play its part in realising this vision too, and the Scottish Government should consider land reform legislation to help enable this.



Leumrabhagh

Pairc Trust saga enters its 10th year

John Randall, vice-chair of the trust, gives this update.

IT IS NOW approaching a decade since the community of Pairc in Lewis first stated its interest in purchasing the local estate.

Other communities have since been successful and are reaping the rewards of community ownership, but the Pairc community's clear wishes continue to be denied.

For the past several years, the Pairc Trust has been pursuing a twin-pronged approach – having no option but to use the byzantine procedures of Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003; but retaining a strong preference to purchase the estate on an amicable basis from the current owner, Mr Barry Lomas of Leamington Spa.

Following extensive consultation and consideration, the Scottish Government approved the Pairc Trust's applications under Part 3 in March 2011 – the first time this has ever happened – but due to the landlord's appeal the case has had to be referred to the courts. The first part of his appeal – relating

to claimed contravention of European human rights legislation – was heard in the Court of Session in July 2012 and the judgement issued in December 2012 comprehensively dismissed the landlord's appeal.

At the time of writing it appears that the landlord has decided not to appeal against this judgement. But the other elements of his original appeal – relating to the particular circumstances of the Pairc Trust ballot and applications – still have to be heard in the Stornoway Sheriff Court at a date yet to be fixed.

Meanwhile, the Pairc Trust has been talking to the landlord over the last several months about the basis of a possible amicable transfer. But no breakthrough has yet been achieved. Only if it is possible to reach an agreement on reasonable terms which can be recommended to the community will an amicable transfer be achieved.

Having come so far, the Pairc Trust is not going to give up the struggle easily. We remain determined that one day – whether under Part 3 or through an amicable transfer – the estate will join the ranks of other community-owned estates.



Pairc ballot, November 2004

Successful woodland crofts knowledge-share programme

THE PROGRAMME of woodland crofts knowledge-share events announced in the September issue of *The Crofter* was completed as planned before Christmas – but such was their success, a further event has already been confirmed in Lochcarron, in March.

Over 60 people attended the three events held in successive months in Tighnabruaich, Gairloch and Dornoch. Each was hosted by a different partner in the Woodland Crofts Partnership working with a local group, with the theme of each event reflecting both the hosts and local priorities.

The Kilfinan Community Forest Company together with the Community Woodlands Association (CWS) started the ball rolling on a crisp October day in Argyll. As well as basic information and guidance on woodland crofts being provided (common to all three events), Ian Hepburn from Mull outlined how the community there had become the first in the country to create new community-owned woodland crofts.

Following this, David Blair from Tighnabruaich itself offered his own experiences over more than 15 years of living and working in a woodland locally. A site visit was made in the afternoon to the community forest, to view the inspirational progress to date and hear the community's own plans for woodland crofts.

Gairloch in November provided a complete contrast, not least weather-wise, although it did brighten up in time for the site visit to the Good for Ewe community growing project. Janet Miles from the GALE centre was keynote speaker on the theme of sustaining communities, with joint host SCF represented by Patrick Krause and Derek Flynn, both delivering crofting-related presentations. The question and answer session in Gairloch proved to be quite lively, questioners perhaps emboldened by the presence of a BBC Alba camera crew! The event subsequently featured briefly on An Là.

Finally, Dornoch continued the trend of increasing numbers (over 30), with some dedicated participants having travelled all the way from Ardnamurchan. Chairman for the day, Jim McGillivray of the Embo Trust, outlined their experiences in trying to establish woodland crofts, which to date had been largely frustrated by funding difficulties. Next, and agreed by all to be star of the show, was elder statesman of forestry Reay Clarke from nearby Edderton.

Reay has the distinction of having been the first person in Scotland to create a new woodland croft under the 2007 Act, the story of which he recounted along with a personal vision for woodland crofts.

Joint host the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) then concluded the presentations with a focus on housing, emphasising the support available from them for what is often a core part of any new crofting project.

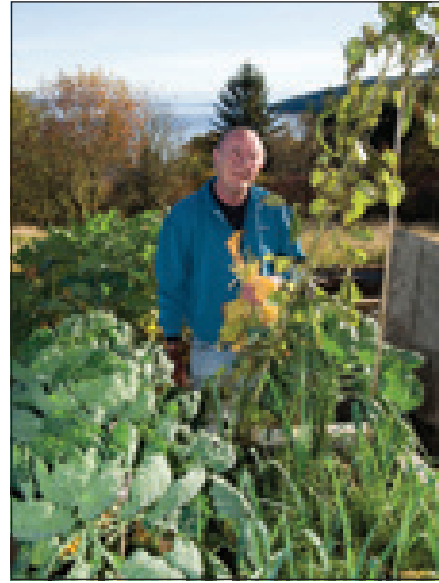
The knowledge-share events form part of a wider package of awareness-raising and promotional measures being delivered by the Woodland Crofts Partnership (CWA, SCF and HSCHT) and funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Forestry

Commission Scotland (FCS).

Other elements include a website at www.woodlandcrofts.org – in development, but hopefully live by the time you read this – a Twitter feed @woodlandcrofts, media work and importantly, a register of interest for woodland crofts, already providing very interesting and useful information about prospective woodland crofters.

Until the new website brings it all together in one place, further information on these measures including the register of interest, as well as wider information on woodland crofts, can be found on the websites of the individual members of the Woodland Crofts Partnership as well as those of HIE and FCS.

Jamie MacIntyre



Geoff Heathcote working on one of the projects.

© Cameron Harris/HIE



(R-L) Ronnie Macrae, Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, David Blair, vice chair Kilfinan Community Forest, Sara MacLean, Eamon King, development officer for Kilfinan Community Forest and Jamie MacIntyre.

© Cameron Harris/HIE



Eamon King, development officer for Kilfinan Community Forest, Sara MacLean, Willie McAllan, Jim McLuckie, Rhona Sutherland, Ronnie Macrae, Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, Scott Findlay, Jamie MacIntyre, North West Mull Community Woodland Company and David Blair, vice chair Kilfinan Community Forest.

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New tenants

ONE OF THE KEY aims of the Crofting Commission is to use the effective regulation of crofting to help create stronger, more sustainable communities – including those in some of the most remote parts of rural Scotland.

Commissioners are delighted to see those very regulations making it possible for young people to breathe new life into crofts throughout the crofting counties. Under the former Crofters Commission, work had begun to target crofts where the tenants had been absent for 10 years or more.

The aim was to resolve many long-standing situations and release crofts to new folk keen to get a start in crofting – folk such as Duncan McCowan from Applecross and Alexander Jappy from Brora. Duncan and Alexander are two young people from amongst the 61 new tenants to have taken on croft tenancies for the first time in the last few months as a result of the work of the commission.

For Duncan, becoming a new tenant of a croft in Applecross feels pretty natural, having been involved in the work on his mother's croft since he was a child. As well as rearing sheep, this has also allowed Duncan to gain experience with poultry, pigs and vegetable production. But his intentions for his own croft are to start with a small flock of sheep and build up from there.

Alexander, still in his twenties, is keen to take part in livestock gathering and, like Duncan, is well used to the work needed on a croft, maintaining and repairing fences, ditches and silage-making, as well as the hands-on work with animals. It is the latter element that partly drew him to take on the tenancy of a croft in Brora. With a young family of his own, Alexander thinks it is important for children to understand where our food comes from – and that it doesn't begin life neatly packaged on a supermarket shelf!

The 2010 Crofting Reform Act gave enhanced powers to the new Crofting Commission, to ensure crofts are occupied and worked or put to good use and to prevent the neglect of the land. And significantly, the act also increased the need for the commission to focus on retaining population in crofting communities.

For Crofting Commission convener Susan Walker, the priorities are clear. "When we take a decision or develop policy, we have to keep the wellbeing of the local crofting community at the forefront of our minds. We have to consider the impact our decision will have on the sustainability of that community.

"These two examples show exactly that. Duncan and Alexander have become crofting tenants, with plans to bring their crofts back into productive use. Not only that, with Duncan's main business as a builder and joiner and Alexander being a qualified mechanic, they retain vital skills within their communities. We want to see more young people entering crofting and are pleased that decisions by the commission are beginning to free up more crofts for those who wish to live and work in crofting communities."

Duty to report

ONE OF THE RECENT changes in crofting requires grazings committees to report to the commission breaches of duties of residence on, and care of, crofts; and sets out a process for doing so.

Many crofters expressed concern and reluctance at what they see as an obligation to spy on their neighbours. By way of response, the commission has been at pains to reassure that the duty to report can be used positively to develop crofting and improve the health of crofting communities. Rather than a threat, the reports could be used to create new beneficial opportunities.

The draft form of report has been discussed by assessors and their input has been incorporated into further revisions which are now out for consultation with key stakeholders. Already some inactive crofters have assigned their crofts to new tenants who are enthusiastic about revitalising the land and becoming involved in township activities.

Commission convener Susan Walker commented: "We believe that through this consultation process we can devise a form which everyone will feel comfortable with but which will also allow crofting communities to report problems to us where they choose to do so. This will encourage grazing committees and individuals to move towards greater self-regulation, by allowing them to make their own assessments of the state of their croft or of crofting in their townships and think carefully about the impact this has on their community. With this approach, there is an opportunity for us to work together to gather the information we need to enable us to raise the profile of crofting with ministers and the Scottish Parliament and to present a clear picture of the state of crofting – its value and contribution to life in Scotland and the threats and problems it faces."

At recent meetings SCF meetings on Skye, Susan Walker and colleague IG MacDonald outlined the commission's intentions to use the regulations and the reports as a positive development tool. No-one would be forced to submit information that they were not comfortable with and the opportunity for townships to self assess was an important way to strengthen communities for the future well-being of crofting.

Crofters at the meetings, held at Kyleakin and Portree, also had an opportunity to ask questions about the new mapping requirements as part of the process of entering crofts onto the crofting register. SCF chair Derek Flynn commented that this was a learning opportunity for all concerned – crofters, the commission and Registers of Scotland. Help and advice was available and SCF members are encouraged to contact SCF HQ if they need any clarification. Mapping and the new register is also discussed elsewhere in this issue of *The Crofter*.

Derek continued: "The recent reforms to crofting are intended to bring about major changes of great interest to all those who believe in crofting. As a model of maintaining a population in rural areas, crofting has stood the test of time by making the land available to ordinary people. That is the case put by the SCF with some success. The Scottish Government has committed itself to ensuring that crofting will continue well into the future. These reforms, however unpopular they may be in some quarters, have reinforced crofting law as being for the public good by sustaining resident crofters who are looking after their lands and dismissing the claims of others, who generally are looking out for themselves."



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Agro-forestry on Skye

FOREST GARDENING or agro-forestry has been a concept alive within the permaculture community for many years.

Bill Mollison and David Holmgren brought the idea into wider circulation in the 1980s with their series of books and manuals on permaculture and its application. As a practice it has been alive in many indigenous cultures who value living closely and gently with nature. One of the leading principles is to work with nature, rather than against it. Lately the practice of agro-forestry has been gaining more attention from mainstream bodies, who are noticing the potential role it can play in building a more stable and sustainable future in terms of food production and biodiversity.

Through mimicking natural systems, the forest garden maximises beneficial interactions between seven layers of plants and trees. Agro-forestry-based systems are highly resilient because of their diversity of plants and species, supporting up to 200 types of plant used for food, dyeing, medicine, coppicing and many other resources. As most plants within the system are perennials, they are resilient and more resistant to weather changes, requiring no annual dig. An agro-forestry site integrates plants, animals, landscape, structures and humans in symbiotic systems where the product of one element serves the needs of another. As

Robert Hart, pioneer of the temperate climate forest garden, says: maximum output for minimum labour.

Perhaps the largest benefit to us all is the healthy soil this type of system can nurture. Growing our own food in forest gardens doesn't mean doing away with our annual favourites; they are simply grown within a more diverse system that staves off disease by using living mulches and organic sprays and promotes the no-dig concept. Less upturning of the soil promotes micro-fungi which not only protect plants from diseases but share nutrients around the root systems and sequester carbon into the soil leading to more nutritious food, a healthier diet and a healthier earth.

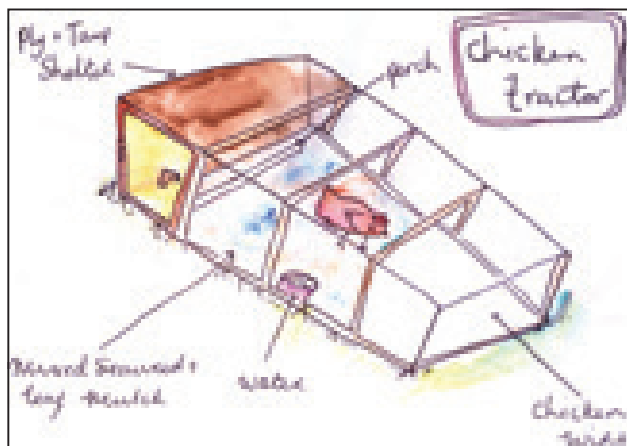
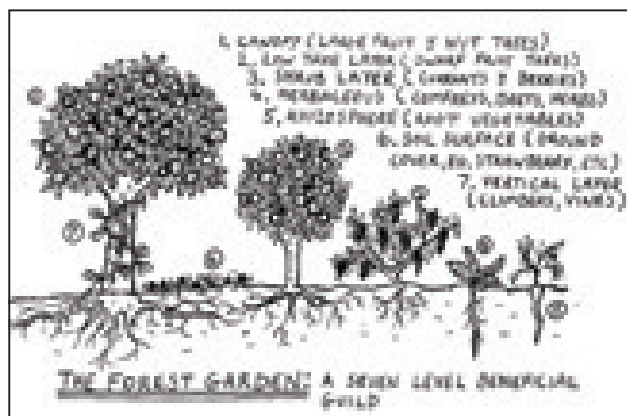
At Rubha Phoil, in Sleat on Skye, we have permaculture principles at the heart of our community. There are many elements that make up our system including food, animals, preservation of wild spaces, welcoming visitors and education. This year we are experimenting with our own system of agro-forestry. At the beginning of this project we are employing chicken tractors on site to scratch the earth and uproot unwanted weeds. The tractors stay in position for a couple of weeks where we layer in organic mulch daily to combine with the chickens' nitrogen-rich poo creating a sheet mulch which we will eventually plant through.

The mulch we are using is seaweed. Using this, we hope to nurture the rather stony earth by giving back some essential elements to build up a nutritious soil. The site is quite wet in the winter and can be dry in the summer so we have carved out a pond to capture and store the rain water for when we need it. We will slowly move the chickens around the site scraping away bracken and grass roots and making way for a new system of useful tree guilds, growing food for the growing community living, working and visiting Rubha Phoil.

Sitting somewhere between farming and forestry, forest gardening has a potentially important role in creating more local food supplies – lessening the need for import, helping us to become more self sufficient while maintaining biodiversity. By observing nature and employing some imagination along with the information base we already possess, we have a framework for positive living and positive cultivation.

For more information on forest gardening check out Robert Hart and Martin Crawford. For more information on chicken tractors check out Andy Lee and Pat Foreman. For more information on permaculture check out the Permaculture Association website or come along to see what we're up to at Rubha Phoil.

Marylou Anderson
www.rubha-phil.org.uk



Unusual discovery in a fleece

WHILE TEACHING sheep husbandry to deaf adult students at her local education college, Pauline Palmcrantz – our crofting connection in central Sweden – made a discovery. The sheep (owned by someone else) had not been shorn for a few years and needed some assistance to lamb. The photo shows the mummified body of a mouse, which Pauline found buried deep in the fleece.



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Our mission is to safeguard and promote
the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters
and their communities

Promoting your tourist business

TOURISM BUSINESSES can be an important part of crofting.

They give an opportunity to maximise the scenery, environment and remoteness of a croft, provide a valuable income stream for crofters and the workload fits in well with traditional crofting. SCF will be promoting the benefits of croft tourism to a wider audience on behalf of our members. Here tourism businesses could include B&Bs, self catering, caravan sites or activity ventures such as quad bike safaris, guided walks, fishing trips or rare breeds farms. And by banding together we can provide a top quality website at lower cost to members. Early bookings are down in some areas so we need to make use of all avenues for generating business.

We are currently revamping the website to showcase these businesses and will be launching the new site shortly. Eventually, we will also promote Scottish Crofting Produce members in the same way, giving them an outlet for their produce in a low-cost and collaborative way.

To qualify, tourism businesses will need to be based on a working croft and be run by an SCF member. The business will need to be

committed to quality and customer care and the owner must be on hand to explain and promote crofting to visitors.

The web display will consist of three photos, 100 words of text and email and web links plus a location map. Prospective customers will be directed to the owner so that you retain control of your own bookings. Eventually we may incorporate a calendar for each property. There will be a set-up fee of £40 per business.

In addition, SCF will provide promotional material for use by members, explaining crofting and the benefits it brings, which will in turn encourage customers to visit a genuine working croft. We will also promote croft holidays at the shows we attend, as happened at the Royal Highland Show in 2012. Later, we might do some joint marketing if that is what people want, which would give small operators access to (for example) newspaper advertising that would be out of reach for an individual business.

There will also be an informal network where new operators can talk to experienced people about how to go about establishing and running a business.

So if you are interested, get in touch with HQ or phone Russell Smith on 01863 766144.



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Help for your business venture

BUSINESS GATEWAY helps new and existing businesses to grow and prosper through a combination of online support, local workshops, training, impartial advice and specialist advisory services.

Most services are free and all are available throughout the Highlands and Islands. The assistance we can give to crofters is probably most relevant in terms of off-croft or diversification initiatives where support may be required to investigate possible new enterprises, sources of market information or business models. For example we can supply information on market trends in specific sectors such as tourism or food and drink. We have access to individuals with comprehensive knowledge on IT and social media that is relevant for the growth and development of every form of business. We can access mentors for those working in the creative industries from musicians to jewellers and potters to photographers.

For young people there is additional support through the Princes Scottish Youth Business Trust, where in addition to start-up training and support there is access to small grants, soft loans and an extensive aftercare network.

Examples of diversification businesses that Business Gateway (BS) has been involved in are many and varied, including the development of self-catering holidays in redundant croft buildings; the provision of "glamping" facilities on croft land; food processing; smokeries and outdoor activities. Crofts provide the basis for a comprehensive range of economic development activities, in many cases run in conjunction with other livelihoods – part time employment, seasonal work etc. We understand the need for flexibility and the fact that livelihoods in remote marginal areas are often complex and far removed from nine to five working.

Accessing finance is crucial. We can help provide information in a manner that is clear

and comprehensible to banks, grant-awarding authorities and other potential financiers. One of the biggest problems for banks making lending decisions to small businesses is the quality of information that they receive on which to base their decision. We cannot guarantee access to a loan or a grant, but we will ensure that the information you provide is clear, concise, relevant and robust.

BS offers a face-to-face service to any business in any sector, on any matter. A builder starting out may have problems pricing and tendering for work. Our advisers can talk you through simple processes for estimates. An outdoor activity provider may be struggling with service charges and competition. BS can help with market advice and comparable businesses charges. A game larder may wish to seek market advantage over competitors with new packaging and processing techniques.

BS can help with these specialist issues.

Take your business further with Business Gateway

If you're working in the non-agricultural or horticultural sectors, have an 'off croft' business enterprise or are looking to develop an 'off croft' diversified enterprise in the Highlands and Islands, our industry experienced advisers can guide you through the issues which matter to keep your business healthy and take it forward.

Business Gateway – free, local support that's right up your street.



www.bgateway.com

Business Gateway – Skye

Slighe Gnothachais, Tigh na Sgire Park Lane, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9EP. Tel 01478 611501
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ON THE CROFT

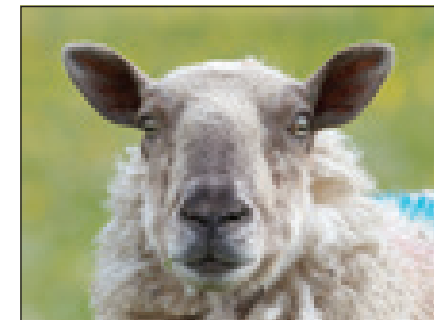
Major sheep event at Dingwall CCAGS changes

NSA HIGHLANDSHEEP takes place at Dingwall mart on May 30th. SCF will have a stand and we will be pleased to see you there for a chat.

NSA Scotland chairman Jimmy Sinclair commented: "The national sheep flock has been declining, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, and we hope this event will help reverse this decline by bringing the latest genetic, husbandry, technical and marketing information to the area and highlighting the marketing opportunities which exist for Scotch lamb both at home and abroad."

"The Highlands and Islands is an important area for the production of store lambs for the whole Scottish sheep industry and it is

vital that this key reservoir of quality lambs is nurtured and expanded to enable the meat industry to maintain critical mass."



Potential applicants should note that important changes to the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS), which include new guidance on the application of scheme penalties, the number of competitive quotations needed and invoice requirements, came into force on 01 February 2013. In brief, these changes mean that:

You cannot claim for more grant aid than you received approval for.

You must provide a minimum of two competitive quotations with your application, regardless of the costs involved.

Completion certificates are required in all claims for agricultural buildings.

These changes are in addition to the amendment to the scheme on 1 April 2011, outlined below.

In brief, those changes meant that:

Eligible applicants under 40 years of age qualify for a higher rate of grant.

CCAGS provision is extended to the entire HIE area.

The new category of short-lease tenants of an owner-occupied croft, as introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, are eligible for assistance.

CCAGS is no longer means tested.

Owners of holdings other than crofts are no longer eligible to apply for CCAGS.

Owner-occupier crofters are still eligible to apply for CCAGS assistance under the new scheme arrangements without means testing.

Updated guidance notes for applicants are available online.

If you have any questions about these changes in the meantime, please contact your local SGRPID office.

Scanning can help save costs and reduce lamb losses

Following one of the wettest years on record, when many ewes are approaching spring lambing in poor condition, experts from Scotland's Rural University College (SRUC) warn that scanning is more important than ever.

NORMALLY SCANNING results are used to show which ewes are carrying single lambs, twins or triplets. This year it will be just as important to identify ewes which are not carrying lambs. The poor grazing and diseases of 2012 have already affected conception rates, but according to SRUC sheep specialist John Vipond many more ewes than normal may lose their lambs after conception.

One risk is the Scmallenberg virus, carried by midges from the continent and already causing problems south of the border. Scotland seems to have escaped so far but the industry remains on the alert. Presently there is more concern about the effects of parasites like liver fluke and toxoplasmosis, both of which flourish in wet conditions and put additional strain on sheep already in poor condition.

Thin ewes ovulate fewer eggs and have a higher chance of re-absorbing the foetus or fewer resources to grow lambs. If the numbers of barren ewes scanned are above 4-5%, it will be important to give better attention to the pregnant sheep remaining. Conventional scoring techniques should be used to assess the condition of these ewes in order to plan remedial treatment and feeding. Strangely, even in these times there will be sheep that are too fat as well as too thin. They will each need different treatment in separate groups, as will those ewes carrying one lamb or multiples.

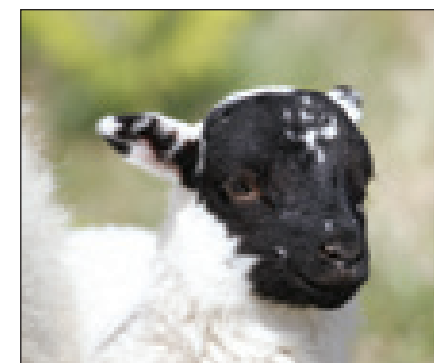
To reduce losses, make it as easy as possible for the sheep to feed and don't let old feed lie around. Thin ewes, first-time lambers and shy feeders should be given extra space.

With the upset season sheep may not be eating the usual amount of feed. Remember growing lamb(s) will press on the rumen stomach, reducing intake. Check the dry matter of the feed and encourage the intake of poor silages by adding 1/3kg per tonne of sugar beet pulp pellets or put molasses on

top. High-protein additives like distillers' dark grains can help low protein hay or straw. Any changes to diets should be made gradually.

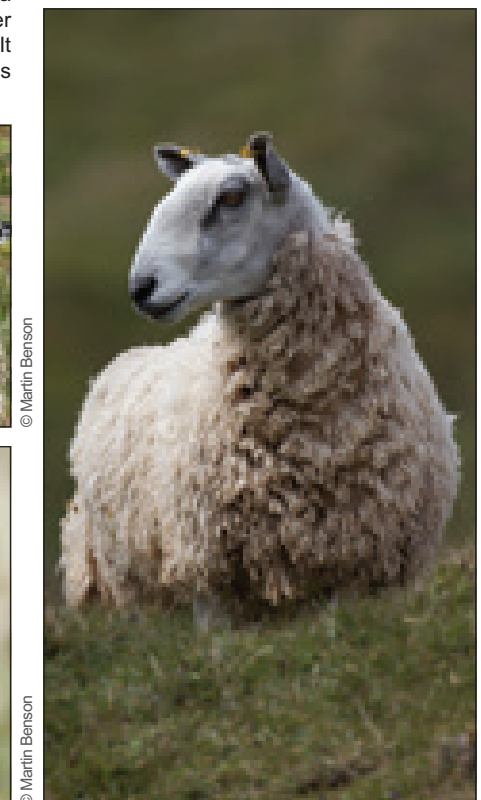
Sheep that are too fat may have been taken indoors off wet pastures. To avoid lambing problems John Vipond believes they should lose weight. Give them only the amount of silage they can clear up in a few hours, or replace silage with straw at weekends.

During the last six weeks of pregnancy around 75% of lamb birth weight is deposited. The demand for nutrients, production of colostrum and the growth of the lamb's birth coat puts a great strain on ewes' protein reserves. Supplementary protein is important for all ewes but especially thin ones. It must be digestible, undegradable protein (DUP) to be effective. John suggests feeding an extra 100g of soya bean meal per lamb carried per day for the last three weeks of pregnancy. It also provides energy, so concentrate levels can be reduced accordingly.



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ON THE CROFT

An update on OPA New rules for snaring

OVINE PULMONARY adenocarcinoma (OPA), also known as jaagsiekte, is an invariably fatal respiratory disease of sheep which can result in significant economic losses, particularly if high-value breeding rams are affected.

Recent progress in a number of research areas, however, is providing new avenues for diagnostic development.

OPA is an infectious lung cancer of sheep caused by a virus called jaagsiekte sheep retrovirus (JSRV). The typical clinical signs of OPA are that of a progressive respiratory disease and mainly occur in adult sheep but also occasionally in lambs. Affected sheep typically have difficulty in breathing, often with marked weight loss despite still eating well. A feature unique to OPA is over-production of fluid in the lungs. In some, but not all, advanced cases this fluid can be seen flowing out from the nostrils when the hindquarters are raised or the head lowered.

The virus can be spread by direct contact with secreted lung fluid or through the air, by inhalation of the infectious virus from these secretions. It can take several years from the introduction of the virus until clinical signs are seen and there is no treatment available at the present time.

Losses due to OPA may generally be around 1-3% per year in affected flocks, but can be as high as 10% in some instances. However the true impact of OPA is still unknown as the disease is almost certainly under-reported. One reason for this is that OPA renders sheep more susceptible to pneumonic pasteurellosis and this is frequently recorded as the immediate cause of death.

Sheep with early OPA tumours cannot be diagnosed by clinical examination; therefore OPA is commonly introduced into new flocks through the purchase of apparently healthy animals.

Until a reliable diagnostic test is made available, the best way to prevent a flock getting OPA is to ensure strict biosecurity measures are followed, such as running a closed flock and having appropriate fencing to avoid close contact with neighbour's sheep.

If any animals are suspected to be affected with the virus they should be isolated from the flock and a vet contacted for post-mortem examination of the lungs to confirm the diagnosis.

In cases of confirmed OPA, contaminated equipment and areas where infected sheep have been held should be disinfected.

Moredun's current priority for research on OPA is the development of a diagnostic test that can detect infection before the appearance of clinical disease. Important progress has recently been made in a number of areas providing new avenues for diagnostic development.

This article is based on an eight-page news-sheet on the subject of OPA. If you would like a free copy of this news-sheet or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact The Moredun Foundation, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, EH26 0PZ or phone 0131 445 5111, or log onto their website www.moredun.org.uk.

THE SNARES (Identification Numbers and Tags) (Scotland) Order 2012 came into force on 22nd November 2012.

This order makes significant changes to snaring legislation in Scotland. Snaring is commonly used as a means of control for some predator and pest species and must be carried out in accordance with the requirements set out in section 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

As of 22nd November 2012, a snaring operator who has successfully completed a snaring training course can apply to his/her local police station for a unique identification number which must be attached to all snares

set from 1st April 2013.

Successful completion of the snaring training course will provide an indication that the applicant has sufficient knowledge and experience to use snares responsibly and within the legislative requirements.

The identification numbers and tags will make snaring operators more accountable for their actions as the identification number and tag will help identify the individual snaring operator.

Further information about the training courses and the use of identification numbers and tags can be found at www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2012/161/contents/made.

Machair LIFE+ project legacy

CONSERVING SCOTTISH Machair LIFE+ project is a partnership between SNH, RSPB, the Comhairle and SCF, co-funded by EU LIFE+.

Now in its final year, the project wishes to build on the successes of its previous work. A meeting in January in Benbecula was attended by around 50 people, including representatives of the island estates. A questionnaire was given to all attendees and has been sent to crofters on the project mailing list. If you would like to voice your opinion, please request a questionnaire at the Machair LIFE+ office: 01870 – 603361 or e-mail info@machairlife.org.uk

On the agenda were three components of the legacy: seed security; machinery legacy and goose management.

What is unique about Uist corn? Local varieties and local seed production; small oat, a rare crop at European scale; Uist barley, the oldest cereal grown in Britain; and the use of mixtures. Matt Topsfield, project advisor for Machair LIFE+ and Maria Scholten, consultant for the project, will work on extra measures to secure more Uist seed, especially Uist barley.

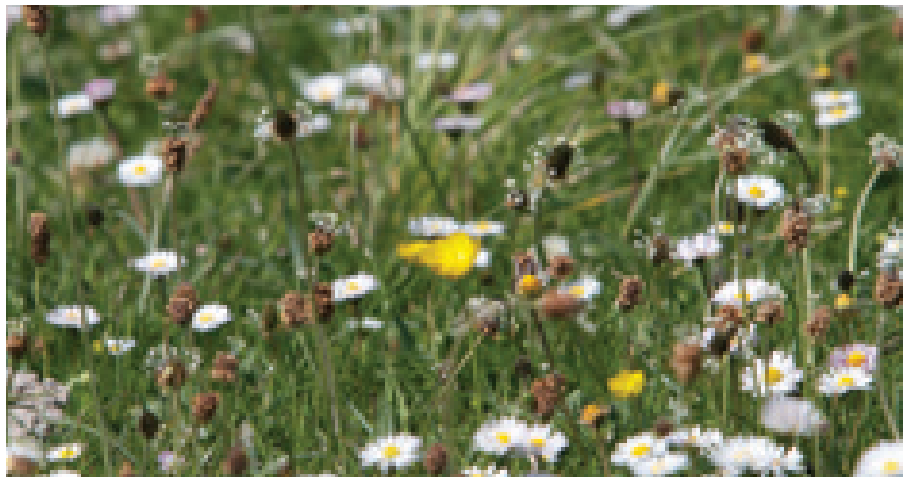
In 2010-11, Machair LIFE+ purchased machinery to service all its management agreements. These include a Class Arion 410 tractor, Marshall Vesuvius Vantage seaweed spreader and an Alvan Blanch mobile seed dryer. In keeping with EU funding requirements and to ensure the machinery remains on the

Uists after the end of the project, post-project use for machair conservation purposes needs to be formally organised. Three options were presented by project manager, Rebecca Cotton – an islands machinery ring; a community trust to manage the machinery; and an education course in which students can practice crofting conservation techniques. The third option seemed to get most approval among the audience.

The hottest item on the agenda was left to the last. Earlier, the pressing question from the audience was the threat of geese to seed. This problem is urgent, as Scottish Government has stopped or reduced financial support for all geese management schemes. Goose numbers on the Uists are at around 10,000 and do not seem to be falling. The new pilot three-year adaptive management trial scheme, to be run by SNH, is widely seen as insufficient on its own to secure crops and seeds. The general feeling among crofters and conservation organisations is that an interim protection scheme is desperately needed until the results of the trial can be tested.

The future after Machair LIFE+ looks bleak for Uist corn. In this regard, the best one-liner of the evening was: The Uists needs an RSPB for its seeds!

*Maria Scholten, lochdar, South Uist and the Machair LIFE+ team.
www.machairlife.org.uk*



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ON THE CROFT

Active crofting's wildlife and financial dividend

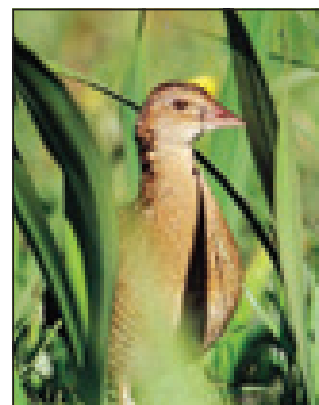
WE HAVE previously discussed in *The Crofter* how crofting is an example of High Nature Value (HNV) farming – a low-input low-output system that provides many benefits for wildlife.

A partnership established in spring 2009 between crofters, the Scottish Agricultural College, the RSPB and the SCF has shown many benefits for crofters and wildlife, including financial.

The primary aim of the Skye Crofting and Corncrake Partnership (SCCP) is to provide support for Skye's high-nature-value crofting systems, with a particular focus on corncrake habitats. This species is found in only very few parts of the UK, with the strongest populations occurring on the Hebrides. Skye still supports a small but significant population; but it is under threat. The correlation between the occurrence of breeding corncrake and land managed under crofting is extremely strong. In part that is because small, low-intensity units provide the mosaic of



Dunhallin grasslands



Corncrake in iris

grassland and tall herb habitats that breeding corncrakes require from their return to Scotland in spring to their departure in late summer. In Skye, these habitats occur primarily in Waternish and Trotternish; and these are target areas for the SCCP.

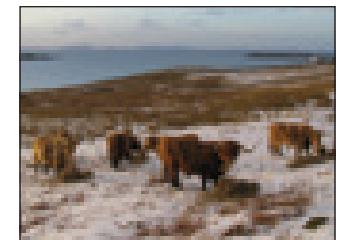
The initial focus of the partnership was to maximise the benefits of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) in providing funds to support crofting systems while establishing or maintaining best practice for corncrakes. That initiative has been successful, with over one million pounds of funding secured for habitat management. The partnership is now expanding its remit to include projects aimed at improving grassland quality that are not dependent on agri-environment funds.

The partnership has supported the submission of over 50 Rural Priorities proposals, which will provide more than £1 m of support to habitat management on crofts in Skye over the life of the SRDP programme. These plans cover more than 220 ha of inbye.

The partnership has also provided input into research projects. The next one to be completed in spring this year is to soil sample areas. This will enable a greater understanding of grassland quality where corncrakes are found and suggest options for enhancing habitat. Some readers may be contacted shortly to see if they are interested in taking part.

If you would like to take part in any SCCP activities please do not hesitate to contact Alison MacLennan RSPB (01471822882) or Siobhan Macdonald SAC (01478612993).

Janette Sutherland SAC



Dunhallin cattle

© Willie MacCallum

An Tuirneap

TUIRNEAP/tuineap/snèip/nèip – tagh an t-ainm a thogras tu, ach 's e brassica napobrassica a tha mi a-mach air an seo – biadhach a nì feum mòr ann a bhith geamhrachadh crodh.

Tha fhios again uile cho math 's a tha feur a' fàs an taobh an iar thuath de dh'Alba. 'S e an duilgheadas, a ghleidheadh airson a' gheamhraidh. Ma tha e furasta silage a dhèanamh tha sin gasta, ach uaireannan chan eil, no tha gu bhith cosgail. 'S math a b'fhiach e mar sin cuimhneachadh air an tuirneap bhochd. Tha obair na lùib gun teagamh, ach chan eil an obair sin a' crochadh uiread air an t-side 's a tha obair feòir de sheòrsa bith.

Feumaidh an talamh a bhith air obrachadh gu math airson fras tuirneip a chur, talamh dearg mas urrainn, agus ma tha inneal air an tractor a nì pronnadh 's e sin as fheàrr. An dèidh do na plantraisean tuirneip a nochdadh feumaidh an tanachadh, agus ma tha sgioba agad tha an obair ga aotramachadh agus bidh spòrs ann eadarra. Ma tha caraidean a' fuireach bhon bhaile mhòr, còrdaidh obair mar sin riutha! Chan eil ann an dèidh tanachaidh ach an grunn d a chumail glan gus am fàs na bàrran mòr gu leòr airson na luibhean a mhùchadh. Tha an tuirneap a' cinntinn gu anmoch

sa bhliadhna, gu dearbh bha an tuirneap againn fhathast a' fàs aig àm na Nollaig an uiridh. Ghabhadh beathaichean a bhìadhach le bhith gan leigeil a-staigh don achadh, ach leis cho fliuch 's a tha an talamh buailteach a bhith aig deireadh na bliadhna, tha e nas ciallaich a bhith togail an tuirneip agus ga toirt dhaibh ann an àite cruaidh, no sa bhathach ma tha iad a-staigh. Tha sgian shònraichte le cromag oirre airson tuirneap a thogail, agus tha sin a fàgail an obair sin nas fhasa. Feumar cuimhneachadh ge-tà an cudrom iongantach a th' ann an lod tuirneip; bha bliadhna ann a b'fheudar dhomh-sa treilear làn tuirneip a thrèisinn air bruach air nach faigheadh an tractor greim gu leòr airson dìreadh. Thug mi fad latha le bara-roth gan toirt dhachaidh!

'S e an dòigh as fheàrr a bhith gam biadhach, an cur tro ghearradair. Tha na seann "root cutters" rim faighinn fhathast, chaidh an dèanamh gu trom làidir às iarrainn tiugh. Bheir beagan mhionaidean de rothaigeadh biadhach a chòrdas gu mòr ris a' chroth. Ged a tha cuid de luchd saidheans ag ràdh gur e dòigh chosgail a tha san tuirneap a bhith biadhach uisge, cha rachainn le sin idir, nì uisge mar sin diofar mòr dhaibh!

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain



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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Keeping you informed and included

Newsletter and Facebook

As many members now are able to access internet and emails, we have been sending out monthly newsletters to all those who we have addresses for. The most recent one had information on SRDP deadlines, our submission to the land reform review group, the introduction of mandatory BVD testing for breeding herds, consultations and forthcoming SCF meetings. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please email hq@crofting.org. We also have a Facebook page which can be used for keeping up to date with meetings and press-releases. You can also join in with discussions on our activities.

Structure review reminder

Along with the last edition of *The Crofter* you received a page where we posed a number of questions about the overall SCF structure. Thanks to all those who have taken the time to respond so far. We will be reporting the findings later this year.

As a reminder, the questions we posed were:

- Is it time to move away from the current two-tier system?
- Do we need to redefine areas and branches by postcode rather than parishes?
- Do we just leave things as they are?

If you would like more information about these questions or have any comments please get in touch with the HQ team.

Posters

Also in the last edition of *The Crofter* we sent out an A5 poster with a request that members

put it up in their local area to help increase awareness of our organisation and the work that we do. If you have put your poster up or have seen it locally please let HQ know.

Shows

SCF will have a presence at a number of agricultural shows this year. The first will be Highland Sheep on 30th May at Dingwall mart. We will also have our usual stand at the Royal Highland Show on 20th to 23rd June and we will be at the Black Isle Show on 30th July and 1st August. Please come along and visit, have a chat about what we are doing, or even volunteer to help out for a couple of hours.

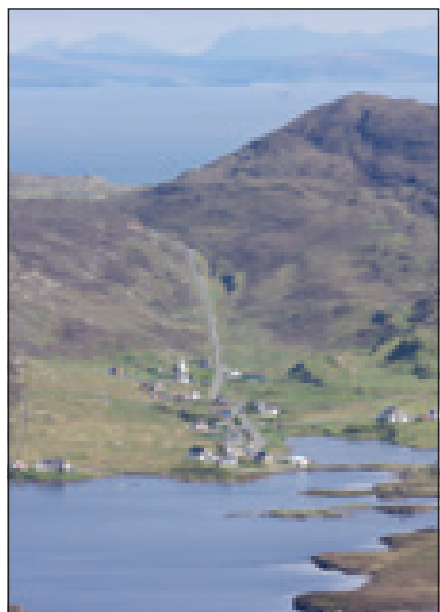
Consultations

A number of members have responded to the request for help with formulating responses to consultations. In addition to major consultations such as land reform and the Crofting Commission plan, there are a number of smaller consultations that may have an influence on members which we need your help with.

One example of a smaller consultation to which we responded was land fill tax, which is being devolved to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has a vision for a zero waste society, but what affect will this have on crofters? While we agree that it is important to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, we feel that any changes to landfill tax could potentially unfairly penalise areas that do not have other suitable and affordable alternatives.

One current consultation we would like your help with is the proposal for licensing air

weapons. The consultation is only open until 15th March, so if you use an air weapon please let us have any comments promptly if you want them included. The consultation seeks to define "legitimate use", which will cover pest control, sets out the process of applying for a certificate and also the fees associated to the application. We would like to hear from you if you use air weapons for other purposes or have any comments about the licensing process and associated fees. Please email karen@crofting.org or write to her at the HQ address.



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go online at
www.crofting.org

giftaid it

YOUR GIFT AID DECLARATION

☐ I agree to the SCF claiming tax under the Gift Aid scheme on all my donations and subscriptions until I advise otherwise. I confirm that I am paying an amount of UK income and/or capital gains tax that at least equals the amount the charity will reclaim in each tax year (currently 25p for every £1 that I give).

☐ I am a non-taxpayer and therefore do not qualify for Gift Aid.

Membership No:

Date:

Name:

Signed:

Email:

Gift aiding your membership subscription – what does it actually mean?

The government operates a scheme called Gift Aid which allows charities to claim the basic rate tax on every pound donated. As a registered charity we are able to claim Gift Aid on your membership subscription. This means for an individual membership, we can claim an additional £11.75 from HMRC on your subscription at no extra cost to you.

Am I eligible to sign up for Gift Aid?

If you are a UK tax payer, yes. Even if you are not employed, you are still eligible if you are paying tax on any of the following:

- personal or occupational pension;
- stocks and shares;
- bank and building society savings accounts;
- rental income;
- overseas and UK investment dividends.

I'm a pensioner. Can I still use Gift Aid?

If you pay tax on a pension plan or savings account or pay capital gains tax if you sell property or shares, you are still eligible for Gift Aid.

Does it matter how much I give?

No. There is no upper or lower limit to Gift Aid. We can reclaim the tax on any amount. And remember, for every £1 you give, we can reclaim 25p from the taxman.

Will I have to fill in a Gift Aid declaration again?

No you won't. This single Gift Aid declaration will cover any donation you have made to the SCF in the past four years and all donations you make in the future.

I've completed a declaration for another charity. Do I need to complete another one for the SCF?

Yes. You have to complete a separate form for each charity you want to benefit from Gift Aid.

Will it affect my current tax liability?

No. We will make the claim to HMRC on the tax you have already paid on your donations. This will not affect the tax you pay in any way.

Will I have to complete more forms?

No. Once you have completed the Gift Aid declaration there are no more forms for HMRC to complete.

Is it really that easy? What's the catch?

There really is no catch. You just complete the declaration and we claim the money from the government without it costing you a penny.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Legacies

LEAVING A LEGACY (an amount in your will) to the Scottish Crofting Federation can be one of the most lasting gifts anyone can make to crofting.

The funds received from legacies enable the SCF to continue its important work supporting, promoting and representing crofting, safeguarding it for our children and for future generations.

For most people, of course, providing for their family and friends is their priority. However once family and friends have been taken care of even a small gift from the remainder of your estate can make a big difference to our work. A gift does not have to be in the form of money either; you could choose to leave a specific item, property or shares in your will.

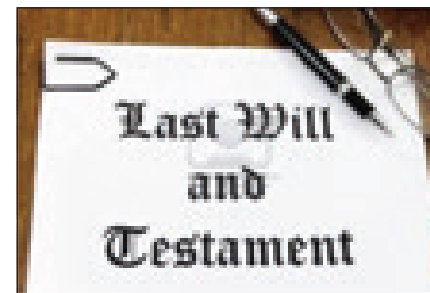
There are several ways to leave a legacy to SCF.

Pecuniary gift or specific gift

Leave a specific sum of money or a specific item.

Residuary gift

Once all other bequests, costs etc, have been deducted, you can either leave the remains of the estate to the SCF or divide the residuary into percentages between several people or organisations. The advantage of a residuary gift is that it is not a fixed amount and so it will reflect the value of your estate. It also ensures that all of your estate is distributed and so does not fall under the intestacy rules.



Making a will

It is not expensive to make a will, but the cost will vary according to its complexity.

We recommend that you seek the advice of a solicitor who will be able to advise you on the different types of gifts and the tax implications of your decisions. Leaving a gift in your will can reduce the taxable value of your estate so that it is valued below the nil-rate band and then no inheritance tax is payable on your estate. The SCF team is not qualified to provide legal or financial advice but we can provide contact details of solicitors who provide this service.

Changing your will/adding SCF to your will

If you already have a will, the simplest way to make relatively minor alterations or additions is by making a codicil. This is an instruction that is kept with your existing will and which your solicitor will help you draw up.

If you do decide to make a gift in your will you don't need to tell us, but if you do we would like to thank you for helping us safeguard the future of crofters and their communities.

Former SCF chair bequeaths £2,000



THE PREVIOUS article suggests ways in which you could make a contribution to the future of crofting by remembering SCF in your will.

Someone who did just that is the late Donnie MacLennan

from Stornoway, a past president of the SCF. Donnie passed away in June last year after a long illness. His son commented that having served as president of the SCF and having spent most of his life as a crofter with a passionate commitment to the crofting community and its way of life, his father made a number of bequests to help that community.

Donnie MacLennan bequeathed £2,000 to be used to help the SCF grow and support the crofting community. We are extremely grateful to him for this generous gesture.

Have you read about
gift aid on p16?

Local meetings

WE HAVE HAD unprecedented turnouts for SCF local meetings which have been taking place over the winter months in many diverse locations.

We have had speakers on crofting law, the crofting register, community mapping, CAP reform and Crofting Commission activities, amongst other topics of concern, in response to requests from our members. Evenings have also been full of the usual good crofting craic.

We also invite non-members to attend as we

hold open meetings and we hope that those who attended will consider becoming a member of the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters.

Thanks to all who turned out and to the speakers – and thanks in advance to those who will turn out as the programme of local meetings continues!

Let us know if you want one in your area and we will endeavour to make it happen as soon as is practical.



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Letter to the editor

Dear editor

Thank you very much for *The Crofter* number 95 which we read with great interest. We were very pleased to know there is an active scene in Scotland for the preservation of rare breeds and varieties.

In our project, Feral Populations in Europe, we discovered several feral populations in Scotland: not only the Boreray sheep, but also the seemingly very robust cattle on Swona which have existed there entirely free since the 1970s.

If you have information about these or other feral populations in Scotland we would be very grateful if you could enter these into our database which can be viewed at www.agrobiodiversity.net/regional/index.htm Topic Networks Feral Populations

Waltraud Kugler
Project director
SAVE Foundation

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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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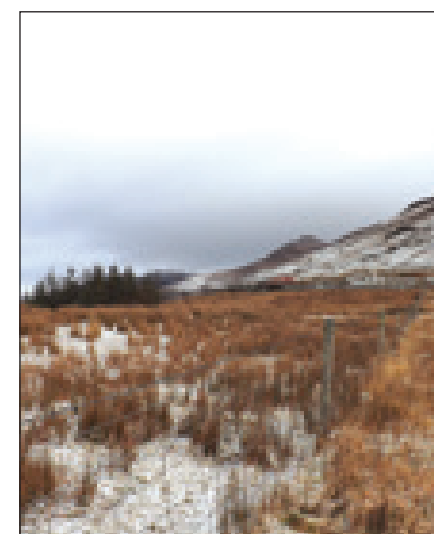
Trials and tribulations of building a house on a croft

Often SCF HQ receives phone calls from members asking about how to go about building a house on their crofts. Karen will usually answer, as she is going through the process herself. Here's her story so far.

WORKING WITH THE SCF over the last few years, I have gained a good knowledge of the trials and tribulations of building a house on croft land – or at least trying to. All this knowledge is proving very useful, as my husband and I are now fortunate enough to be in a position to be able to build our own house on the croft.

We started back in 2011 when our local drawing and design agent applied for pre-planning application advice, a free (for now) service provided by The Highland Council. We knew that in the 2007 local housing plan our croft had been zoned for future housing, despite the fact that the grazings committee objected to this in the initial consultation. This apparently both helped and hindered our application.

As we feared, the response three months after a site visit advised that they could not support our proposal as it did not comply with the objective of the local plan. Adding: "It is important to note that land for multi-house developments is extremely scarce." I found it difficult to understand how a croft could have been zoned for housing in the first place and how it was possible that there was advantage given to a large-scale development over the wishes of the registered crofter? Having



discussed this response until we were red in the face we decided to take our application to the next stage regardless.

Getting plans drawn up was one of the fun bits which I looked forward to for a very long time. We were finally ready to apply for planning in principal, or outline planning, in May last year. We took on board some of what was said in the initial advice, for example changing the access a little so it didn't have a negative impact on any development of our croft, in case this was to occur in the future. It still raises my blood pressure thinking about it.

Six months later after a lot of correspondence between – and help from – the new planning officer and a letter from the local housing association stating that they did not wish to acquire the croft for future development, we were finally granted outline planning permission. Two weeks later we sent in our full planning application and are now waiting with fingers and toes crossed.

In the meantime we have been looking at the various other things still to be done – the building warrant, water and electricity connection forms, costs and so on. We've also got the form for the Croft House Grant Scheme, all 20 pages of it, which has to include a five-year business plan.

I guess the silver lining in all these time-consuming applications is that we are managing to save more money to go towards securing a mortgage – and don't even get me started on those!

Crofting Commission board meetings

Commission board meetings are usually held in public, enabling people to observe Commission decision-making and allowing Commissioners to meet crofters. We encourage members to go along if they have time.

The schedule for 2013 is:

6th March
8th May
12th June
7th August
11th September
6th November
11th December

The meetings are all on a Wednesday at Great Glen House, on the hill just to the west of Inverness. Although these are public meetings, it is probably best to let the Commission know that you wish to attend.

Alistair Campbell

CROFTING LOST ANOTHER stalwart in February with the death of Alistair Campbell from Ebost in Skye.

Alistair was involved in the setting up of the Scottish Crofters Union Dunvegan branch and was Skye and Lochalsh area president for a number of years, contributing his experience of union work with BT and thorough knowledge of Cheviot sheep.

Alistair was born at Ebost West in 1931 on the family croft and, on leaving school at 17, followed in his father's footsteps and went to sea, joining the Royal Navy in which he served during the Korean war. In 1956 he joined the merchant navy, spending the following 10 years sailing to all parts of the globe, a part of his life that he thoroughly enjoyed. Whenever possible he signed off in the springtime to be home to help with croft work at the busiest times.

Always interested in anything to do with

sheep, Alistair spent many years as secretary of the Dunvegan sheepdog society as an active committee member, eventually becoming president of the Dunvegan show committee.

He joined the local auxiliary coastguard and had many adventures on training exercises with them. As a result it was nothing for him to abseil down the cliffs at the back of Tarner Island to rescue a sheep that had eaten her way down narrow paths and couldn't climb out again.

Following his retirement from crofting he maintained his interest by keeping a critical eye on his nephews and helping out at fairs. Only last year he was gathering sheep ... no longer on foot, but both he and Nan, his dog riding on the quad bike.

His health over the last few years was a cause of great frustration to him.

All Alistair's former colleagues at SCF send Moira and the family sincere condolences.

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A nostalgic day at Daviot Glasshouse revival

A STUBBLE FIELD on Daviot Estate was the perfect venue where, on January 5th, members of Strathnairn Farmers' Association replicated a once-familiar farming scene from a bygone era.

Around fifty enthusiastic spectators and helpers gathered to see and hear, some maybe for the first time, vintage machinery used to thresh sheaves. This rarely-seen type of demonstration was intended to show how the travelling threshing mill worked at farms, with neighbour helping neighbour, until the late 1960s.

The two oat stacks containing around five hundred and fifty sheaves had been built in readiness for a feature to be staged during last year's working vintage rally and display. Bad weather caused cancellation of the event, but the stacks remained available and in good condition despite the weather.

Work began after the traditional dram was partaken and the tractor also suitably fuelled up. Soon the distinctive hum from the drum and clatter of the shakers could be heard – music to many ears.

The mill, a pre-war machine made by Allan Brothers of Aberdeen, was belt driven from



the pulley on a 1954 David Brown 25D. Both are owned by local enthusiast, John MacLeod. John's son Rory, a keen enthusiast and restorer himself, can be seen driving the mill to the venue.

Although Kenny Munro's baler was powered by his modern, high powered tractor, Watson Munro's 1957 International B250 stood by, ready for action if required. Work continued without falter until the last sheaf was threshed. The old machinery, like the millmen, had worked faultlessly.

Everyone agreed how successful, rewarding and nostalgic the day had been and, although the demonstration was principally intended as a practical one, an element of social history was also evident.

Another opportunity to see a similar demonstration will be available at this year's working vintage rally and display. Plans are already in place for this event to be held at Daviot Estate.

Apart from the threshing, many other vintage farming methods will be featured, along with heritage and craft stands, working craftspeople, working and static tractors and much, much more, evoking fond memories for the older generation, being informative and educational for the younger set, whilst always providing a great day out, amidst fine scenery for everyone.

You don't have to own a tractor to be there!!

Ray J Smith January 2013
www.daviotvintage.co.uk



Pete Bevington, chair of Transition Shetland, describes an innovative project in Shetland.

THE FIRST STEP towards reviving the huge glasshouse in Tingwall is being taken with the help of a £10,000 lottery grant.

Local community action group Transition Shetland is hoping to help bring the building back to life after it has lain dormant for several years. The group plans to appoint consultants to carry out a study into the feasibility of running the glasshouse as a community venture, making it available to individuals and groups to grow fruit, vegetables and other plants under glass.

They said the time was right to bring the glasshouse back into use with the growing interest in local food production and the popularity of polytunnels throughout the isles. The study will examine the condition of the building and gauge the level of community support to take the project forward.

The idea was developed by Tingwall and Girlsta Development Association co-

chairman Pete Glanville, who is a member of Transition Shetland and has been closely involved in the lottery bid. "We are extremely pleased to have received this grant from the Big Lottery Fund," he said. "It is a major contribution towards turning the Tingwall glasshouse into what it was always meant to be, a viable and vibrant centre for growing."

Pete Bevington added: "A lot of people have been asking about this building and there is a clear desire within Shetland to see it being used productively. If we can demonstrate there is sufficient local interest to take this forward, then we believe it could become a real asset to this community – a real Garden of Eden in the north."

Transition Shetland has been meeting for more than two years to discuss how the islands should approach a future that holds twin threats from climate change and peak oil. It holds monthly meetings, which are open to the public, at Islesburgh community centre, where topics have ranged from growing food and tackling waste, to transport and energy.



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Calum will be speaking at our Scottish Highland Renewable Energy Conference (SHREC) together with a host of other experts on topics that matter to you; crofting and renewables, where to source funding, and environmental and planning issues.

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I thought readers might be interested in my renewables journey over the last two and a half years, writes Norman Leask.

SOURCING THE funding, getting all the permissions, building the foundation and laying the cable left me in a state of anticipation.

With ground works successfully executed it was very exciting to watch the erection of the turbine, the first turning of the blades and the start of our production. With no local spares or expertise, we needed to train some residents.

Proven machines are relatively simple, so six of us were trained by Proven. Equipment was bought to enable servicing and the basic problem parts were stocked. Then a structural failure was found in the main shaft of the 35/2. Although it continued to produce at 1.5 times the expected rate, it had to be shut down. Proven had not insured their guarantee so the easy option was to go bankrupt, taking down some of the companies exposed to their warranties.

To cut a long story very short, with the help of Jean Urquart MSP a shaft was developed that passed all the tests and was fitted to the otherwise excellent P35/2.

When I was being sold the 35/2, although the salesman said it would be much quicker, I expected a six to seven-year payback for the outlay. After 30 months, even with the breakdowns and servicing and replacement spares, I have produced 100,000 units and been able to supply our home with free electricity which I am using to keep my old weary bones as warm as toast in a place where fuel poverty is worst.

Micro-renewables are a good idea, but improved quality and supplier training are required. Check up on suppliers and their supplies. Speak to people who already use the equipment you are considering.

If the government gets behind it properly, this is one way that young people can afford to stay in the periphery. I continue to strive for funding for the infrastructure and still be eligible for FIT.

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

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TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Rural skills

THE HIGHLANDS and Islands is an amazing environment and many people have an increased sense of personal responsibility and involvement towards conserving this environment for future generations to work in and enjoy.

Careers within the land sectors are changing; but there are opportunities and it can be a rewarding, if challenging area in which to be involved.



West Highland College UHI is relaunching its full-time Rural Skills National Certificate based in Broadford on the Isle of Skye. This one-year course is suitable for anyone who would like to work outdoors and make a difference to the environment around them. Students will be introduced to a range of areas in which to develop and to help them reach their full potential. The course has a balance of practical and theoretical units and students will acquire a good range of skills.

The course will be delivered by Angus McHattie, a well-known crofter used to working in the local community. This course, and its associated industry-approved training, will complement training opportunities offered by the Scottish Crofting Federation and dovetail with the Crofting Year programme offered in conjunction with the National Trust for Scotland at Plockton High School.

The college is looking forward to providing opportunities for learners to progress in the rural skills sector and to offering a range of certificated short courses aimed at providing skills and knowledge that the industry requires and the community wants.

For further information contact West Highland College UHI in Broadford on 01471 822 622 www.whc.uhi.ac.uk

Minister for learning meets next generation of Scotland's crofters

THE LAUNCH of Crofting Connections Phase 2 in January at Plockton High School was addressed in English and Gaelic by minister for learning Alasdair Allan, MSPs, councilors, pupils, teachers and local crofters.

Phase 2 has received funding from the Scottish Government, Heritage Lottery Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to continue to work with existing Crofting Connections schools and to offer the project to 100 more schools in the crofting counties.

Many people contributed to the success of the launch. Highlights included music from Plockton's centre for excellence in traditional music and an excellent crofter's lunch from Highland Council catering team, assisted by Plockton hospitality students, with a closing address by Margaret Bennett, patron of Crofting Connections.

We are very pleased that Plockton High will be joining the project in May.

For more information, see www.croftingconnections.com or contact project manager Pam Rodway 01309 676566 or 07917 230124 info@croftingconnections.com



Alasdair Allan with the pupils from Lochcarron and Whalsay schools

SCF training programme

The incredibly popular SCF skills training programme, including the entry-level foundation courses, have been delayed due to finding funding to support the offer already in place from the Skills Development Scheme. But it looks as though we are nearly there and we hope to have them up and running again soon.

Thank you for your patience.

The Crofting Year comes to Plockton

THE NATIONAL TRUST for Scotland at Balmacara has been working for over ten years to help promote crofting, writes *Iain Tumbull*, and to actively and directly encourage the continuation of traditional crofting agriculture on this 6,300 acre estate, 75% of which is under crofting tenure.

It is an area of great scenic beauty but is also designated as a fragile area due to its small community and limited services. The trust's main reason for supporting crofting is its belief that the landscape and associated cultural and natural heritage features are largely derived from, and dependent upon, the activities of the resident crofting community, past, present and future.

This cultural landscape is truly unique and features an intricate mosaic of moorland, woodland, small villages and oases of greener croft land, all set against a stunning backdrop of the Inner Sound and unspoilt coastline and islands. The crofting agricultural activity is absolutely key to maintaining

the balance in the landscape, supporting a strong cultural tradition, including the Gaelic language, song and music and a wide diversity of plant, mammal, bird and insect species.

Against this background the trust started its crofting support work by establishing eight new crofts at Balmacara Square as part of the £1.7 million Balmacara Square restoration project in 1999-2000. These were the first new crofts to be created in over 80 years according to the Crofters Commission, and paved the way for new legislation from the Scottish Parliament to make this process simpler. This was followed by the Traditional Croft Management Scheme which was introduced in 2006 to provide direct financial support to crofters undertaking traditional crofting agricultural activities; and we have an open project to continue it for a further four years at least, subject to funding.

Now the trust is working with local crofters, Plockton High School, the University of the Highlands and Islands – West

Highland College and Lionacleit High School on Benbecula – to develop a course in crofting for pupils aged 14-17. The aim of this project is to provide the next generation with a good practical foundation in crofting skills and such a course does not currently exist in our area. The programme will commence in May 2013 and funding has been secured for five years thanks to a generous donation from long-term patrons of the trust from New York and a grant from the Ernest Cook Trust.

The course, based heavily upon the Crofting Year course that

has been running at Lionacleit for six years, will take two years to complete, with students gaining a Level 5 National Certificate in Crofting – an SQA-recognised qualification. The course will be very practical with at least one session each week on the croft and with several trips to appropriate external sites, eg the abattoir and mart at Dingwall; the West Highland Dairy to learn about cheese making; and each year students will be expected to undertake an enterprise unit to explore the business potential of some crofting activity of their choice.



Silage making at Duirinish



SAC Agricultural & Conservation Consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our team of renowned specialists. We can assist crofters with business advice on a range of topics to improve profitability including:

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- Enterprise planning
- Comprehensive assistance with IACS, LMO, RP, CHGS and CCAGS (agricultural buildings, hard standings, drainage, grassland improvement, handling equipment, fences and access tracks are examples of eligible expenditure under CCAGS)
- Completion of Assignations, Decrofting and Sublet applications
- GPS croft maps for Crofting Commission or SGRPID
- Operational Needs Assessment to support planning applications
- Livestock record keeping and pre-inspection checks
- Grassland and crop advice including soil analysis, fertiliser and reseeds
- Livestock feed analysis, rationing and animal health planning
- Horticultural advice
- Agri-environment advice
- Forestry scheme implementation and management
- Diversification opportunities
- Marketing advice
- Renewable energy feasibility studies including wood fuel heating systems

Contact your local SAC office:

Balivanich 01870 602336
Campbeltown 01586 552502
Inverness 01463 233266
Kirkwall 01856 872698
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Kingspan Environmental

A friendly listening ear

It's a conundrum, writes Karen at RSABI's Gatepost service.

READ ANY TEXT on improving your mental health and you'll find advice telling you that outdoor exercise, particularly in the countryside, is a great way to boost your mood and maintain good mental health.

This is true of course but, as we hear time and time again at Gatepost, the story is more complicated for who those live and work on the land. There are many positives – space, beauty, fresh air, close contact with nature and animals – and many find these indispensable parts of a good life, well lived. They are the blessings counted when things get tough.

But things do get tough at times; rural living has never been entirely idyllic and it's not stress-free. A bad storm or a poor lambing can swing joy into heartbreak all too easily. There's no immunity from life's knocks such as bereavement and sickness. In crofting many people will be juggling other work as well. There is greater poverty in rural areas and making an income from a piece of land is probably the riskiest business venture there is, with so many variables – weather, pests and diseases, changing regulations and market fluctuations both local and global affecting profit and expenses. The price of feed is crippling many livestock holders right now. The uncertainty of not knowing whether your produce will make enough to pay the bills is enough to cause many a sleepless night; and if the bank is knocking on your door at the same time, the stress can become acute.

Many people working on the land spend long hours

alone. In good times this can be a luxury, especially if you naturally enjoy your own company. But if you're someone who thrives on companionship then loneliness can affect your mood and anxieties tend to seem bigger when you're on your own. People describe worries and negative thoughts going round and round like a treadmill they can't get off. This is where talking to someone can really help, and if you don't have anyone near you to confide in, or you're trying to protect your loved ones from your worries, then calling a helpline like Gatepost is another option.

Long term stress can affect your health, from your sleeping pattern to your blood pressure – and you can end up living with chronic symptoms such as nausea, headaches or low mood as if they are normal. The fact that rural folk tend to be very resilient means that people often go on coping alone for a long time before they think to ask for help. The GP is a good starting point, or you can ring Gatepost for more information.

Gatepost is run by RSABI and offers a friendly listening ear and sounding post at times of stress or distress. We also have a large database of sources of practical help and advice should you need it, from debt management to health and family issues. We're dedicated entirely to the land-based occupations in Scotland and our staff have a good understanding of the pressures involved, but you can call about anything that's on your mind, whether it's to do with crofting or not. Calls are confidential – you don't even have to tell us your name if you don't want to.

Call 0300 111 4166
Monday–Friday, 9-5. Or email gatepost@rsabi.org.uk

Rural mental health in south India

Lorna Murray spent November and December in south India, where she had the opportunity to learn about what is being done to help the rural population. In this article she offers some thoughts based on two very different experiences.

Day with a community health team

Accessing any form of health care is a major problem throughout India, except for the rich.

For the majority of rural Indians, accessing care is often impossible. Living far from any bus route, how can they get there? A day away from work means no daily wage, so no meal for the family that evening.

The community health team in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, is doing what it can to help people living in villages far from the town by making visits to families identified by community leaders as in need of help. The problems faced are enormous. What to do when medicines are required: all treatment has to be paid for, but often there is no money to spare. How to offer even basic health care advice: encouraging a change of diet would be cruel to a family solely dependent on what the local ration shop does out.

In one home we visited, a mother has tied her psychotic daughter by a rope round her waist. The family is praised by the visiting psychiatrist for this. They can afford no medicine and they live close to fast-moving traffic on the main highway to Chennai. The alternatives to tying her up are injury or death on the highway or rape by a passing lorry driver, with the additional likely consequence of contracting HIV-AIDS. By keeping her safe in their home and sharing their food with this unable-to-earn family member, they are showing compassion for her in the only way they can.

Visit to Syrian orthodox seminary

I am talking to young men training to be priests.

Discussion has turned to the problem of suicide: a huge issue in rural India, with farmers particularly at risk. The students are surprised to hear that, in Scotland also, suicide in rural areas is worryingly high and ask me why. I tell them about isolation, poor public transport, the lack of locally-based resources. A student comments: "That sounds just like here".

Indeed, there are many similarities between the problems faced by rural Indians and people living in remote parts of Scotland.


What we do not have here in Scotland is having to make the choice between feeding our family or using hard-earned money to pay for health care, or many other forms of support. In that, we are privileged; but we can learn much from the resourcefulness of people who are forced to make such a choice.

Our awareness of the difficulties faced by rural Indians can inspire us to consider innovative ways of caring for and supporting people living in isolated parts of our country. We could also use this awareness to challenge more strongly our urban-based leaders to improve access in rural areas to those services and facilities that are available in Scotland, to ensure that nobody living in our rural areas is denied the care or support they may need.

Lorna Murray
Email: revrat1999@yahoo.com



At the seminar



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Calls cost the same as calls to 01 and 02 numbers. GATEPOST derives no income from calls.

rsabi

Decrofting and letting applications where a croft is owned by more than one person

THE CROFTING COMMISSION has recently announced a policy clarification.

There was uncertainty in situations where owners hold separate title to distinct parts of a croft, as to whether an application to decroft or let could be:

- made separately by an individual owner in respect of the distinct part of the croft they own, or

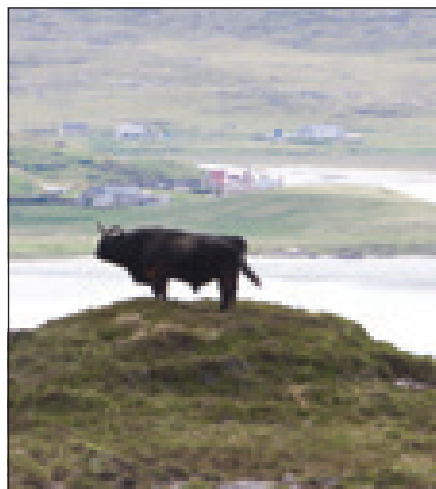
- if such an application has to be made by all the owners of the croft in their capacity as, collectively, the 'landlord' of that croft.

The Crofting Commission took the view that it was essential to have a clear policy on this issue. Therefore, in order to clarify the situation, it sought and obtained legal opinion on the practice of accepting applications

submitted by only one of the croft owners where the croft is held in multiple separate ownership parcels.

The matter was discussed at the commission's December board meeting and commissioners agreed to adopt a policy that all decrofting and letting applications in respect of crofts with multiple owners must be submitted by all the owners, in their capacity collectively as the 'landlord' of the croft, even in those cases where the application related to a part of the croft held in title by only one of their number.

Any application received in future from one of the owners, where a croft is held in multiple ownership, will be considered invalid and returned on the basis that the application was not submitted by the landlord of the croft.



© Martin Benson

Places of Possibility

Property, Nature and Community Land Ownership

PROFESSOR Emeritus at Carleton University, Ottawa and honorary professor at the University of the Highlands and Islands, Fiona Mackenzie has carried out in-depth qualitative research on the Isle of Harris.

To maximize the efficiencies of land ownership, the market-driven approach of neo-liberalism would have it placed entirely in the hands of the private sector. Places of Possibility reveals how community land ownership can open up the political, social, environmental and economic terrain to far more socially-just and sustainable possibilities.

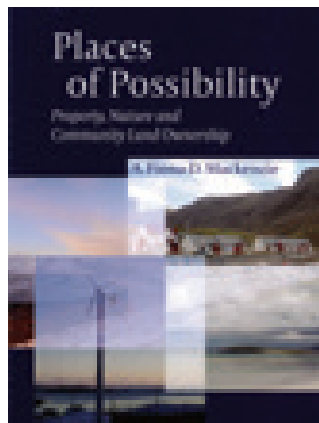
Drawing on comprehensive qualitative research carried out in the Outer Hebrides, Fiona Mackenzie argues that these possibilities are created through the disruption of prevalent norms of property and nature. The author shows how current land reforms taking place in the islands are revealed to be places of possibility where neo-liberal norms of enclosure and privatisation – and of a nature separate from the social – are unsettled with community land ownership. With a careful balance of original theoretical insights and intellectual rigour, Places of Possibility reveals the rich political possibilities of community land ownership and its place in the twenty first century world.

"In this splendid book Fiona Mackenzie provides an excellent analysis of the principles and

practice of community land ownership, an idea which is transforming the landscape of the Scottish highlands. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in the Hebrides and a very wide range of interdisciplinary references, she adds depth and clarity to our understanding of this profound shift in Scottish society." Ewen A. Cameron, University of Edinburgh.

"Because Fiona Mackenzie has spent a lot of time in the area, she has got to grips with the Highlands and Islands experience of community ownership in a way that no other academic author has done. Mackenzie has much to say that is novel, perceptive and important, while her background and experience enables her to bring a range of theoretical perspectives to bear on her subject matter." James Hunter, University of the Highlands and Islands.

To purchase the book with a 20% discount, enter promotion code VB782 at the checkout when ordering online at www.wiley.com.



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I also can provide advice on pedigree and commercial animals. Whatever your requirements for breeding for quality meat production and your location requirements, I can help. I can also source your preferred terminal sires.

I have a strong belief in the capability of west coast crofting areas to produce hardy stock utilising good native and traditional breeds on your hill grazings, producing the required quality for specialised markets.

I am also keen to work with a group of crofters or townships to establish a high-quality nucleus herd of suckler cows of uniform breeding and also for a finishing unit to be set up and would like to hear from anyone that would be interested to work with me on these projects. This would be an excellent opportunity for those who wish to increase their cow numbers. There is also a good demand for good quality healthy breeding stock and also for the end product (meat).

This is the time to be putting on more breeding stock of cows and ewes as numbers are decreasing and with the human population increasing, quality food will become scarce and expensive. There are always customers for good quality stock and I am in full support of your local abattoir and local branding of meat as a means of getting recognition for the quality of west-coast stock and products and achieving added value for the producer as with the centralising of abattoirs

My services are as individual as my customers so I invite you to get in touch with me for a friendly, informative chat to discuss your livestock requirements.

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The SCF gathering 2013



THE THEME for this year's gathering is to be common grazings.

This is a huge resource that crofters have and some good speakers and discussion could help to focus minds on how to get better support to our grazings and sow seeds of ideas on how to use grazings in traditional and in more innovative ways. There are lots of topics. For example:

grazing – support to individuals, support to collectives, (CAP, SRDP), use of stock clubs;

environment – management of grazings for carbon sequestration, increasing biodiversity, water purification;

energy – cutting peats, micro-generation schemes, wind-crofts and wind-farms, home and community schemes;

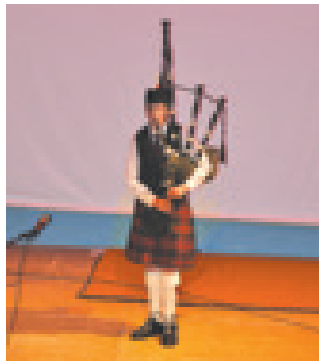
homes – housing on croft-land, affordable housing, planning;

regulation – common grazings regulations, regulated grazings,

use and abuse of apportionments, deemed crofts;

collaboration – communal working, use of grazings for community benefit, common land use elsewhere.

And there will be more. Subject to funding, we intend to hold it in September and a suggested venue is Stornoway, though this is to be confirmed. We will have more detail in the next issue of *The Crofter*.



Honours for crofting women

The Queen's new year's honours list recognised the achievements of three women who will be well-known to many members.



Agnes Leask from Weisdale in Shetland was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to crofting in Shetland. Over the years, since the launch of the SCU in 1986, Agnes has been a stalwart SCF local branch representative and area president.

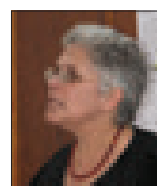
Still working her croft at age 78, Agnes advocates the importance of high health status for crofters' stock and was involved in attaining scab-free status for Shetland sheep.

All her old friends at SCF and throughout the crofting counties congratulate Agnes on this well-deserved award.



Jessie MacNeil from Barra is another long-standing SCF member and crofter who has been involved in the SCU and SCF since the early days. Jessie received an MBE for her services to the community.

Jessie was head of Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay and worked for Barra and Vatersay Council of Voluntary Services. In this role and as a branch official, Jessie has personally helped many members of her community, just as Agnes has done in Shetland.



Pam Rodway received an MBE for her services to sustainable food production and education. Pam will be known to many members for her work with the innovative and popular Crofting Connections project, which encourages and facilitates schools in teaching youngsters about crofting in a practical way.

Pam's background lies in organic farming and artisan cheese-making. As a founder board member of Slow Food UK, she helped organise the Slow Food UK Congress at Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Isle of Skye in 2005.



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