

The Brexit clouds are gathering



THE COVID-19 pandemic is uppermost in everyone's minds, but we must not take our eye off the Brexit ball.

So much resource of the EU and UK governments is being taken up with fighting the pandemic that it is vanishingly unlikely a comprehensive trade deal between UK and EU can be concluded before the end of 2020 – and impossible for the UK governments to develop robust contingency plans for an inevitable no-deal crash out of the European Union. It was, therefore, essential that the UK government agreed to ask the EU for a two-year extension to the transition period. Industry representatives lobbied the government to do so. SCF wrote to MPs asking for their support in this.

But to no avail; the 30th June deadline passed. At the moment we have no idea what rules will be in place for next year even, only six months away. This is too important, and affects the economic wellbeing of too many people, for the negotiations to be rushed. A contingency plan must be put in place for 2021-22 and beyond.

Exports to the EU underpin the livestock trade and crofters currently have exemplary high animal welfare, traceability and environmental standards. This is not only good for consumer, animal and planet, but is our main selling point. We should not reduce these standards or allow imports that do not conform to our standards. The implication is that we should continue to shadow EU standards, if they change in the future, and the UK should agree a tariff-free trade deal with the EU before negotiating with the USA or other non-EU countries, as they are likely to put pressure on our animal welfare and environmental standards.

Similarly, we would not want to see tariffs and quotas reduced for imports of lamb or beef which would undercut our high-quality

COVID and crofting concerns

THE COVID-19 pandemic, which took hold just after the last issue of *The Crofter* went to press, has been devastating for many. A nightmare if you have been isolating in a small flat in a city with views of the next door flats and only streets to exercise in.

But what of crofts? We have access to the outdoors, feeding animals to keep you busy, and we are remote which makes isolating easier. But crofters are generally older so are more at risk.

SCF carried out a survey at the beginning of the pandemic to find out what members were concerned

about. Many saw the lockdown coming and laid in supplies in advance. Animal feed was vital back in March. Key concerns were cash flow for those with tourist businesses, access to contractors and volunteer labour, ferries for islanders and access to marts and abattoirs. A significant proportion (24%) didn't foresee any difficulties – continuing a long tradition of self-sufficiency and independence, perhaps.

So how has it worked out so far?

Supplies seem to have held up. Auctions have

...Continued on page 3

...Continued on page 3

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Crofting Commission expansion
- refocusing rural support
- reassurance from marts
- planning issues
- on the croft
- seeds
- trees
- stock worrying
- ... and much more

Message from the chair...

Yvonne White

IF CROFTERS did not have enough to contend with, we now have the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; and a probable economic recession as a consequence.

Crofters involved in tourism have seen this income stream washed away at least for the greater part of this year. However, there are compensation schemes for loss of revenue from tourism.

Many crofting businesses, being small-scale diversification, fell through the gaps – eg not having a stand-alone business account. SCF raised this issue, amongst others, in a recent on-line meeting with Fergus Ewing, cabinet secretary for rural economy. The Scottish government acknowledged that it was an issue and has since supplied further funding to help address the problem for small-scale bed and breakfast operators, of which many are crofters.

Although the seasonal cycle of crofting continues regardless, even against a backdrop of global pandemic, there have been significant changes – for instance, when selling stock. It is strange sending beasts to the mart without attending, a tradition dating back countless years. Much about sales, whether buying or selling, is about the social aspect. Exchanging news, gaining knowledge and the odd bit of gossip thrown in for good measure, all over a *srùbag* and bacon roll!

From recent experience selling cattle, (the sale was a flyer even for cast cows), the new system seems to work well. All credit to Dingwall mart and local livestock transporters. However what works for cattle may not work as well for sheep. There is a question over whether local mart sales will re-open in time for lamb sales.

SCF contacted the main highland and island mart operators to find out. The short answer is the opening of local marts is dependent on whether it is deemed safe by the Scottish government. Encouragingly, Dingwall and Highland Mart has well-organised plans in place, should local sales at the back end of the year not go ahead. Collections will be made from the Inner and Outer Hebrides and extra sales laid on. Better to be safe, and do without attending a mart, than spread or catch the deadly COVID-19.

Brexit is looming large again, with the 30th June deadline for an extension passed. COVID-19 made the threat of Brexit shrink into temporary insignificance. However, it was brought back home again with a resounding thud when the Westminster government voted against an amendment to the new agriculture bill, which would have protected both producers and consumers from food imports with lower standards than the UK's. The amendment would have seen retention of current food production standards of environment, animal welfare and food quality. Sadly the bill passed without that important amendment and is now on its way



through the Lords. The opportunity to protect the quality of our food, the environment and animal welfare may have evaporated.

Northern Ireland is exempt, as it will continue to adhere to EU food production standards. The path seems to be clearly laid out to allow imports of sub-standard food, eg hormone-fed beef. What impact on crofting and other food producers? In order to compete, our environmental, food and animal welfare standards would need to be as low as, or lower than, imported sub-standard food.

It's hard to figure out what positives the new post-Brexit agriculture bill, if passed, will bring. Are we to lose our export markets for lamb? Perhaps for crofting it is to capitalise on markets for high quality, naturally-reared beef, lamb and pork and locally-produced in-season fruit and vegetables with no air miles attached. Small, local and niche.

At SCF's suggestion, the Scottish government's long awaited *Crofting Development Plan*, due to be published later this year, will include local food production. The UK imports a significant amount of fresh food from the EU. Given the shortcomings of the current just-in-time food distribution system, coupled with reduced quantity and increased cost of imports, especially fresh food which a no-deal Brexit would only exacerbate, along with

environmental concerns, it is not only sensible we produce as much food locally as possible. It may be imperative for good health.

Crofting and environmental conservation and biodiversity are intertwined. The crofter is reliant on the land for livestock and food crops to survive. Good levels of biodiversity are reliant on good crofting practice.

Given this symbiotic relationship, the outcomes-based pilot scheme reported in this issue of *The Crofter* is most encouraging. Current schemes do not fit well with crofting's extensive type of land use. These schemes are generally highly competitive – so crofters have less chance of accessing them, given the cost of application, restriction on numbers and land type. Current schemes are set nationally not locally, so local conditions are not taken into account. They are highly prescriptive with many penalties. An outcomes approach is the complete opposite, with payment based on measurable achievements and with the ability of the crofter to adapt based on local conditions, to get the best outcome.

Everyone stay safe and enjoy the summer and hope you avoid the ferocious midgies.

SCF welcomes the additional funding for four new Crofting Commission posts in the Outer Hebrides. We look forward to the future establishment of similar posts in other crofting areas. Crofting faces unprecedented challenges and we will be co-operating with the commission in developing and strengthening our crofting communities, which have a crucial role in sustaining population in remote localities and protecting the environment.

The Brexit clouds are gathering

...Continued from page 1

local produce. This would preclude trading off tariffs and quotas on beef and lamb for an attraction in another sector – remember what happened to our fisheries. Use of Protected Indicators (PGI, PDO and TSG – eg Scotch Lamb and Scotch Beef)

and labelling should be maintained to support our industry. If the worse happens, we need a sustained campaign to buy Scottish, buy local.

Continuing support payments at a UK level have been signalled for the life of this parliament. There will be need for a UK framework agreed between all four nations, not

imposed by Westminster. Scotland can then develop its own support systems to fit its own needs, which will include a replacement for the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme based on Areas of Natural Constraint principles.

An agriculture bill is progressing through the UK parliament, but as

yet we have seen no clear strategy on what agricultural and rural development policy for Scotland will look like.

Time is running out and expecting UK industries to cope with a no-deal Brexit, having used up all reserves to mitigate COVID-19, is fantasy.



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COVID and crofting concerns

...Continued from page 1

worked well, from reports about Dingwall at least. But abattoirs not doing small lots hit businesses who sell direct. Shearers and contractors have worked away with appropriate distancing: they are mostly outdoors so the risk of virus transmission is less. Internal SCF meetings and with government have continued by Zoom or telephone where possible. The parliamentary Cross Party Group on Crofting has been cancelled and the SCF AGM postponed.

For tourism, there are reports of small businesses run from home falling between the cracks of government schemes, which is

devastating for crofters who depend on tourism income to tide them over the fallow period between LFASS payments in March and lamb sales in August.

At time of writing in early July, tourism is re-opening so there is relief for those dependent on visitors. Expansion to ferry timetables is coming. It remains to be seen if this opening up is too early. Deaths across the crofting counties have been well below the Scottish average – in the Highlands the figures are 3.5 per 10,000 (113 deaths in total) compared to 7.5 per 10,000 in Scotland and 11.1 in Glasgow – each a tragedy for those concerned, but we have done better than feared. Large areas across the Highlands and Islands recorded no

deaths due to Covid-19 so far. Now we need to guard against a resurgence.

Upcoming focus is on the big lamb sales in August and September. Lairg is planning to go ahead. Island sales “are problematic” says Dingwall and Highland Marts but they are aware of the need and have contingency plans if required. How will they work if social distancing is still in place, will we be competing to have the most striking face covering?

Crofters are resilient. Good quality food will always be needed and the environment will need to be looked after. Crofting has survived crises before and we will come through this.

Strengthening crofting

Rod Mackenzie, Crofting Commission chair, on the recently-announced expansion of their activities

BACK IN February, before the lockdown started, the Crofting Commission board met in Inverness and we devoted an hour of our meeting to sharing our visions for crofting.

Several commissioners noted the lack of a public sector champion for taking crofting forward and wondered if the commission, with more resources, could be that champion. So, in July, we were delighted when cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing announced that the Scottish government would increase the commission's budget to enable us to extend our crofting development activities.

This is extremely welcome. Although the 2010 Act removed the specific function of developing crofting from the commission, the act still gives us a general function to promote the interests of crofting, and the commissioners see this as a very important part of our role, complementing our responsibilities for regulation.

The board has many ideas about how the commission can act to strengthen crofting. As part of this, we intend to build on the existing work of our residency and land use and grazings teams, as well as to develop

better information and signposting for crofters. This board has always placed a high priority on ensuring that the precious assets of well-managed, well-maintained and occupied crofts are supported, especially in remote areas where the economy and the population levels are fragile.

This funding will allow us to create several new permanent staff positions. Back in that discussion in February, two commissioners commented that they would like to see some commission staff living and working in different crofting areas. Therefore, when the cabinet secretary asked that we use some of the funding to locate four additional staff in the Western Isles, we were happy to agree. This will enable us to develop new and better ways of working with some key crofting communities, and we hope that in future we will be able to replicate this template in other crofting areas.

That said, I also want to emphasise that whether they are based in Inverness, Stornoway, Balivanich or anywhere else, all the staff of the commission will be working for the same organisation, for fairness for all crofters and for the good of the whole of crofting. The commission is determined to see all of the crofting system thrive, tenanted or owner occupied, from the smallest to the largest croft or common grazings, and from the Hebrides to the mainland, Orkney and Shetland.



Rod Mackenzie

Crofting development posts crucial



Donald MacKinnon

SCF WELCOMED the announcement that four new crofting development posts will be created for the Crofting Commission in the Western Isles as a crucial and timely initiative.

"This is very welcome news", said vice-chair of SCF Donald MacKinnon, a Lewis-based crofter. "We have been arguing for the crofting development role of the Crofting Commission to be expanded and it is gratifying to see that the Scottish government has taken this on board and is supplying additional funding for the creation of four outreach posts.

"COVID-19 has of course had an impact on crofting; markets and transport have been severely disrupted. Crofters are resilient, but this period has been extremely challenging. With this government-funded help we hope to see crofting not only recover but emerge with new strengths – it is time to do things differently. Crofting provides the foundation for families to survive and thrive here, and with the focus on climate change and the need to use land and grow food in a more environmentally friendly way, crofting is a leading model.

"This is a crucial and timely initiative," Donald concluded. "There are huge opportunities for crofting to develop new markets and enterprises and to provide the basis for population growth. It makes sense to have the Commission staff located where most crofts are, the Western Isles, but in time we would want to see this model emulated in other crofting areas too."

If it looks like compulsory purchase...



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Martin Minton of Inksters Solicitors considers a recent high-profile case with implications for crofters.

A RECENT decision of the Court of Session in Edinburgh has overturned a previous Scottish Land Court ruling that part of Stornoway airport remained subject to crofting tenure.

The owner of Stornoway airport, Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) sought to sell part of their land to a developer for affordable housing. HIAL argued that when their predecessor, the secretary of state (who sold the land to HIAL in 2001), acquired title to the land in 1946 – with date of entry backdated to Whitsunday 1941, having occupied it since around 1940 – it was a form of compulsory purchase. Furthermore, as a result of a number of written agreements between the secretary of state and the crofters, the land court had been asked to assess the compensation due to the crofting tenants, which the land court issued for loss of rights.

Melbost and Branahuie common grazing

committee sought to assert their crofting rights over the land. They argued that the land had never been formally removed from crofting tenure and remained part of the common grazings. They argued that to have been a compulsory purchase, certain statutory requirements needed to have been met when the secretary of state acquired the land, which were not. They also argued that the written agreements referred to an interference with crofting rights, which did not amount to extinction of those rights, so that interference was temporary.

The land court agreed, finding that there had indeed been no compulsory purchase. The land court noted that the deed transferring title to the secretary of state in 1946 was not in the required form for a compulsory purchase. They commented that what exactly was being compensated for wasn't clear, and took a fairly strict view in that in the absence of specific documentation or reference to a particular statutory power, they could not assume that a compulsory purchase had occurred without clear evidence.

HIAL appealed the decision in the court of session, which disagreed with the land court's view. It was successfully argued that despite there being no specific documentation found to evidence the statutory basis on which a compulsory purchase was made, the agreements with the crofters and the fact that there was clear evidence of an assessment of compensation by the land court, the result was effectively as if there had been a compulsory purchase. The court felt that the use of the word 'interference' did not mean a temporary interruption; the compensation paid to the crofters was for future, permanent loss. The court saw no reason to withhold approval now, given the passage of time. The appeal was allowed, paving the way for the sale of the land to proceed.

Typically, to remove land from crofting tenure, there needs to be a resumption, or a decrofting, or a compulsory purchase order. As a result of this decision, it now appears that if something looks like a compulsory purchase, then it may well be found to be so.

Letter to the editor

Dear editor

The April issue of *The Crofter* sets out the way for the future of crofting.

The leading article "What is crofting development" and the article by SCF director Russell Smith promote the future of croft produce and tourism. Value added to the community will be substantial. But could also another opportunity be taken by crofters?

Allotment holders in towns have never been busier growing their own food. Crofters with small areas of unused land could make it

available for neighbours, land allotments. Transport difficulties and distances to shops and supermarkets would no longer be the problem.

Kind regards

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GAINING GROUND



Author Karrie Marshall



Zoom meeting on 6th of May



Dr David Heaney

I just need to see the smile to know this works

Gaining Ground project manager Lucy Beattie highlights social crofting case studies.

GAINING Ground was about social crofting – social, mental and physical wellbeing through working the land.

The project was aimed at crofters and smallholders in the Highland and Moray regions who were considering this as a diversification opportunity. Some people call what they do care farming, and this is perhaps the most common term. What is happening on crofts and smallholdings is care, but also support, education, learning and therapy.

"I suffer from PTSD and anxiety. Since working on the croft I have become a lot fitter, but most importantly a lot calmer. I have learned to trust people again." (participant)

Social activity on land brings benefits: crofter and client wellbeing, community and societal wellbeing. A key question explored by Dr Heaney, a social scientist who worked alongside SCF as part of the LEADER-funded project, was how social crofting can contribute to a sense of place, people and landscape in peripheral rural areas – the extent to which this concept connects crofters to communities and other innovative programmes of cultural activity.

Beyond the technical challenges of ensuring good health and safety practices on crofts,

financial challenges are apparent. Food prices in the UK are historically low – only 11 percent of income is spent on food. Supermarkets mean that consumer price expectations are low. Social benefits are not valued by the market. Additional challenges are presented when crofters face financial and structural barriers from health and social care agencies.

"Contracts are going to bigger organisations. There is always uncertainty about whether these contracts will be renewed." (case study)

"People on the ground were supportive, and high level people in Inverness, but the local district panel, district manager, integrated team leader that signs off on budget – middle management did not respond well to a small organised enterprise trying to resource from them. Front-line were very keen but middle management were saying 'can you make it cost neutral for us?' There was a lot of interest, but the manager said no. There is a close culture in NHS if you are outside it." (case study)

"Self-directed support did not work in this area. There were a lot of dynamic people in Skills Development Scotland who were moved on, and it fell away." (case study)

There is a very pressing need for a deeper level of engagement from NHS and social care agencies with crofters who provide these services, to mainstream the activity and support the vital community-led social benefit they provide.

"Social crofters need resourced, so perhaps the solution is direct social subsidies to crofts which provide social benefits, rather than trying to get contracts from hard-pressed, bureaucratic public authorities. Social crofting is not for most crofters, maybe just the socially-minded, or community-minded. Direct subsidy would help people develop these kinds of service." (case study)

Grants could be redirected to reward the public goods that crofts can deliver – good food, high animal welfare, social activity, environmental outcomes and healthy food in rural areas. Current grants reward production that has little or no social benefit. New UK post-Brexit regulations are aiming to reward farmers for delivering public goods and this could shake things up. The pandemic has underlined the importance of close-knit community care models. This pilot has shown that there is a way forward and it now needs buy-in from appropriate agencies.

"The people in the Gaining Ground case studies are all trying to do exactly what we need to do as a society. They are all undervalued. It would be of benefit if society could find ways of valuing this activity. This is the challenge, and it requires some new thinking in Scotland, to create new opportunities." (David Heaney)

The journey from croft to social care

Below are some of the questions for those with a crofting background moving into delivering care.

- Do you want to diversify?
- Are you determined to deliver social activity in a croft/farm setting?
- Do you know enough about delivering care?
- Do you want to get involved in contracting with NHS and local authorities? There are alternatives (volunteering) but they will not bring money; they will bring other kinds of resources.
- Do you have a clear business plan? Do you want people who can contribute?
- Can you make it viable? Do you need to make a profit?



The journey from social care to crofting

Below are some of the questions for those from a social care background moving into delivering care on a croft or farm.

- Can you find some land? It is well documented how difficult it is to access land, a problem across the whole crofting and farming sector.
- Can you apply your care skills in this setting?
- Do you know enough about crofts and crofting?
- Do you want to move out of traditional settings for care?
- Do you have a clear business plan?
- Can you make it viable?

ON THE CROFT

Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme review

SCF HAS inputted to the first part of the Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme (CAGS) review, asking for it to be extended to all crops and to not be means-tested.

This scheme is very important to crofters and to the local economy. It is a well-used development mechanism and provides a very valuable contribution to crofting land-based production, so that crofts can prosper and contribute to rural economies and population retention. Funding, which can be used for capital projects such as the construction or improvement of agricultural buildings, can cover all aspects of the project, including the cost of materials, transportation of materials, costs of contractors and the crofter's own labour. The total

amount of grant aid a crofter can apply for in any two-year period is up to £25,000, or a group of crofters up to £125,000.

If there has been any lack of use, as was the case some years ago, it has been because of restrictions within the scheme rules. If the scheme is designed to be pragmatic it will be well used. Indeed the budget could be increased – and every penny would contribute significantly to the wellbeing of rural communities. We therefore welcome this review and the aim of ensuring that the scheme works well.

The scheme should help any croft land-based production. In the past it was perhaps easier to classify croft work as agriculture and so call the scheme an agricultural grant

scheme. Croft production is diverse and it is Scottish government policy to encourage this, so the scheme should reflect this policy. If crofters are engaged in land-based production operations not classified as agricultural in the strictest sense, they should still be able to apply for those items currently eligible for grant aid. For example horticultural production is included and we recommend that this be widened to include growing ornamental plants. We also recommend the introduction of support to bee-keeping, forest products and aquaculture.

Forest production would not include woodland creation or management, for which other schemes offer assistance, rather the operations involved in processing wood as a business, for example

for construction or fuel. Aquaculture would only include the business of on-croft farming of aquatic food. In short, the eligibility of works and equipment supported should be universal across all land-based production operations.

A test on household income would be inappropriate for this scheme. CAGS is a grant to help develop land-based business and therefore household income has nothing to do with it. If the desire is to target the scheme to those who need, those with little capital reserve, then there should be up-front payments and a loan element. The scheme currently favours those with a capital reserve and excludes those with no capital – clearly not what the scheme's purpose is.

Call for participants in blackloss study



Fiona McAuliffe, a PhD student at Scotland's Rural College and the University of Edinburgh, is investigating causes of lamb loss on highland farms and crofts and is looking for participants to take part in a questionnaire study.

BLACKLOSS (the unexplained losses of lambs) can have a significant effect on the productivity of hill farms and crofts across the Highlands and Islands. There are many

different potential reasons why lambs are lost, or disappear, before they are weaned in autumn.

By collecting information about your sheep flock, as well as your experiences and opinions of lamb losses, the data produced from the questionnaire will provide an extremely valuable component of this PhD study.

Working in collaboration with Scottish Natural Heritage, it is anticipated that the results from this study will help to assist in forming potential

management strategies for the future, to reduce levels of blackloss across the Highlands and Islands.

Participation in the study is voluntary and the questionnaire should take about 20 minutes to complete. If you wish to complete the questionnaire please contact Fiona at Fiona.mcauliffe@sruc.ac.uk and she will supply you with a copy of the survey to be completed and sent back to her.



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Gardening in my slippers

When it's blowing a gale outside I am inside my Keder greenhouses, gardening in my slippers, says South Uist crofter Murdo McKenzie.

"With the Atlantic gales that batter us here, I was re-skinning my traditional polytunnel nearly every year. Now I have bought two Keder greenhouses, one for fruit and another I call the nut house."

On his croft, Murdo grows a range of fruit and vegetables, mostly for his own use, in raised beds inside his 4m wide x 14m long Keder greenhouse. Like many islanders, he contributes produce to the local church harvest festival, which is sold to raise money for Christian Aid. He nurtures four apple trees, which produce beautiful big apples with lots of flavour. He completes his fruit salad with great crops of strawberries, cherries and raspberries in season.

A keen vegetable grower, in his 6m wide x 18m long Keder greenhouse Murdo makes the most of the space with raised beds, corner pots, shelving and a gravel path for easy access. He has successfully grown several potato varieties, including Edzel Blues, Home Guard (first earlies), Golden Wonder, and Kerr's Pink. To add to the mix, he grows onions, leeks, cabbage and cauliflower and salad crops.

"I first heard about the Keder greenhouse system a number of years ago. Like many islanders, growing our own fruit and vegetables means we enjoy more variety, picked at the right moment when they are fresh, crisp and tasty. Because of our relatively mild climate due to the Gulf Stream, and long hours of daylight – up to 20 hours in the summer – we are able to grow a lot of our own produce. It's the wind and sea spray which changes all that, but fortunately, Keder provides shelter for plants, crops and the gardener.

"I love growing my own fruit and veg and Keder greenhouses make it a real pleasure. It is the gardener's choice. I have recommended Keder to friends and neighbours in North and South Uist. All agree that it has made a massive difference to their growing."

ON THE CROFT

Croft diversification and the polycrub

As we approach Brexit, writes solicitor Shona Blance, diversification becomes even more important to the sustainability of crofting. But beware of planning issues.

HAVING purchased a polycrub for growing produce, we contacted the local planning department on our client's behalf to double check the drawing required, to be told that as the proposed siting of the polycrub was going to be within 25 metres of a metalled road, a full planning application was required.

Legislation exists to reduce the high volume of planning issues that would otherwise swamp planning departments, in the form of permitted development rights and a simpler shorter prior notification process. On checking the permitted development legislation, it was clear that as the metalled road referred to was unclassified, it was not a legal requirement to ask for a full planning application and thus the advice was incorrect.

A quick follow up e-mail to the planning officer stating this resulted in confirmation that it was an unclassified road and would only require prior notification.

The prior notification subsequently submitted was rejected as invalid by the area planning manager (north): a full planning application was required as it was within 25 metres of a public road. A series of e-mail exchanges followed with another planning officer who argued that it was council policy to require a full application if it was within 25 metres of any public road. The road was classified as unclassified so was classified and thus the legislation required it and legal advice was being sought.



The planning department eventually conceded that it was prior notification and it was processed.

It is concerning that the time of crofters and planning officers and the money of crofters and other applicants, as well as the public, seems to be being wasted by the policy of demanding a full planning application when not required.

Councils derive their authority from legislation and must follow the relevant legislation if they are to operate within the law. They cannot make their own rules up. This legislation is 20 years old, so they should and do appear to know it.

A request that the council confirm they would

stop this practice, which would appear to be outwith the law, was ignored, hence this article.

So if you are faced with a similar situation, beware: each case is fact specific but seek advice from SCF, who have details of this example.

Useful websites

Highland Council unclassified roads list:

<https://bit.ly/2W2kBb0>

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (no 223 S.17):

<https://bit.ly/3gGajVK>

Letter to the editor

Dear editor

Researching the Great Forest of Caledon

Has anyone, in the recent past or from information handed down within families, come across what are known as sub-fossil remains of trees – branches, root plates or substantial logs which have been uncovered in the widespread peat deposits over any period(s) of time? This might be during cultivation, drainage, peat harvesting, road construction, road widening, realignment, etc.

I am investigating via peer-reviewed research publications and based my own career in highland forestry. I am anxious to learn from multi-generation crofters, particularly those located and working in the Outer Hebrides.

I already have some limited information, for example on a pine log dug out during road works circa 1940. These tree remains are most likely to be pine, oak, birch and alder. Aspens and willows tend not to survive very

well or for long in the anaerobic conditions of peat laid down; but the other listed trees, particularly pine, oak and birch can survive for centuries.

My research is not necessarily confined just to the Outer Isles but is also taking me up along the coastal areas of the western Scottish mainland as far as Cape Wrath, relying on the entire range of detailed 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps.

All contributions will be acknowledged. Information is most helpful if supported by Ordnance Survey six-digit map references. However, with a couple of place name references, these can soon be worked out by myself. I also hope for photographic evidence of "logs in bogs."

Not ranked in any date order but roughly geographically based:

Na h-Eileannan Siar: MacCulloch (1824) states that the peat in North Uist includes oak

with pine, alder and birch as most frequently found. Geikie (1894) states that in Lewis timber of fully grown oak, alder, birch and especially Scots pine (fir) had been found in the bogs.

Caithness – Canisbay parish report of 1726 and Robertson (1767). Digging peat in Caithness, oak and fir and very large logs were met with for the most part perfectly fresh.

Niven (1901) – oak and pine buried in moss peat (also in Lewis and Tiree)

A website is under construction: www.thegreatforestofcaledon.scot.

If anyone wishes to get in touch please do so.

Kind regards

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ON THE CROFT

Five more years for Croft Woodlands Scheme

The Croft Woodlands Project has been extended for five years thanks to high demand for its services, writes project communications officer George Anderson.

NEARLY 300 crofters have already planted over a million trees through the scheme, which is a partnership between Woodland Trust Scotland, SCF, Point and Sandwick Trust, Scottish Forestry, Coigach and Assynt Living Landscapes, Argyll Small Woods Co-op, Orkney Woodland Project, Shetland Amenity Trust and the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust.

Most of the schemes are small and well integrated with other croft activities on in-bye land. Planting trees in this manner delivers many benefits for the future, including shelter (for livestock and buildings), woodfuel for the fire, wildlife habitat, landscape diversity and an important contribution to the fightback against climate change.

"When we started out planting on crofts had reached a low point," said Eleanor Garty of Woodland Trust Scotland. "After the Crofter Forestry Act in the early 1990s, there had been a flurry of woodland creation, but by 2015 it was clear that extra support was needed to help crofters overcome the financial and technical challenges of

establishing trees in what are often very harsh conditions."

So far the drive has created 560 hectares of woodland, with another 170 hectares already lined up for planting in the coming season, helping 98 crofters to access Scottish Forestry grants and 221 to plant via Woodland Trust's subsidised MOREwoods scheme.

The project has published the Highlands and Islands Woodlands Handbook (available from SCF, see the publications page on the website); has staged a packed-out conference for 180 delegates; and developed an edible hedgerow tree-pack for school children – complete with jam recipe.

Ambitions for the next five years include doubling the planting target to 1,000 hectares and working with crofters and common grazings to make woodland part of a diversified and resilient crofting landscape.

The Croft Woodland Project has staff covering the Western Isles, Argyll and Lochaber and Highland and Northern Isles.

Email crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk in the first instance. All advice is free.

The Croft Woodlands Project is supported financially by Point and Sandwick Trust, and Scottish Forestry.

THE CROFT WOODLANDS PROJECT

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS WOODLANDS HANDBOOK

for crofters, communities and small woodland owners



Bernard Planterose





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ON THE CROFT

Planting trees in the west of Lewis

SCF member Keith Murray shares his experience of this thirteen-year challenge.

WHEN I moved to 35b Breasclete in 2006, the external boundary needed to be sheep secure before I could consider planting trees that would cope with Atlantic W/NW gales.

In the spring of 2007, I bought locally 20 plants which should survive in exposed coastal

gardens. They did, (photo1a), so additional young trees were planted in 2009/10 at the front. My confidence grew considerably when I built a 6ft windbreak fence. In 2012 I ordered eighty 60 - 90cm-high trees: oak; wych elm; hazel; bird cherry; gray willow and planted them in areas one and two, shown below.

My enthusiasm continued into 2013, ordering 170 trees – alder, hazel, hawthorn, bird cherry, sloe, oak, dog rose, gray willow, wych elm and beech. Careful planting into virgin ground takes an inordinate length of time to complete within a short timeframe (March-early May), not helped by unseasonal weather. My enthusiasm was tempered by this experience.

Later that year I gained invaluable advice at a local SAC tree-planting course. "Try to keep a 1m radius area around each tree weed-free for at least one to three years. It will make a difference." It does!

By 2014 trees were being planted adjacent to the shed (fig 1b) and a similar ranch-type fence (photo 2a) gave them the opportunity to survive and support future plantings in this area. (photo2b)



(1a) Front of 35b, 2008



(1b) Windbreak fence, built 2012



(a) Fenced Areas 2007



(b) Fenced Areas 2019



(2a) Boundary fence adjacent to shed



(2b) Area behind solar panels

Subsequently, within each area, planting has continued along with the crucial work of undergrowth clearance and path development. But the real pleasure has been the creation of

birdlife and micro-climate.

Future plans will extend the neglected planting in the 0.2Ha field (photo 4a), creating wind-break areas that will enhance crop growth similar to the gains made in area 4 for raspberries (photo 4b). A polytunnel and raised bed are planned for the area adjacent to the solar panels (photo 4c), where this spring 50 hawthorn/blackthorn were planted by the right-hand boundary fence.



(4a) 0.2Ha field in fig.1 (b)



(4b) successful raspberries area 4 fig.1 (b)



(4c) Planned site for polytunnel and raised bed.

Photos 4 (beyond 2020)



Micro-climate 2020



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REFOCUSING FUTURE RURAL SUPPORT

New route for agri-environment schemes?

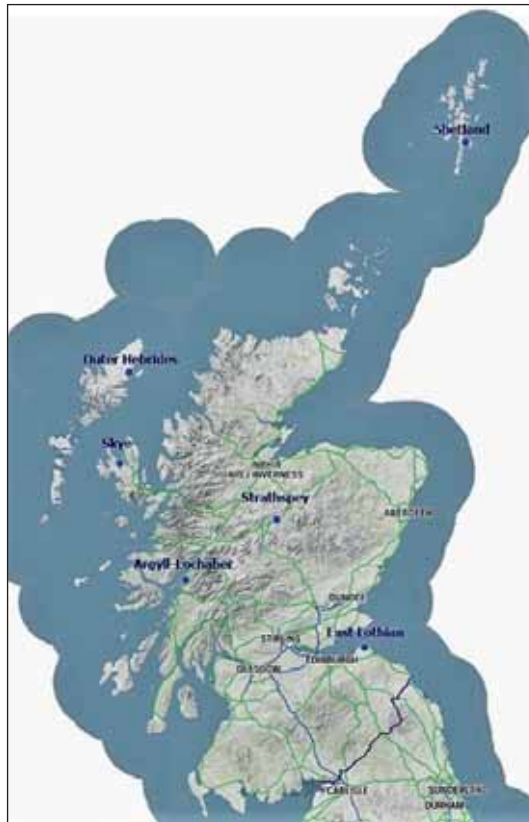
SNH agriculture policy manager Ross Lilley introduces an outcome-based approach to agri-environment schemes (POBAS), an SNH-led project exploring an innovative approach to delivering environmental outcomes on farm and croft land.

THE PROJECT is part of SNH's broader natural capital pilot programme, which aims to test natural capital and outcomes-based approaches to inform future rural policy.

Refocusing future rural support around investment in natural capital can not only help land-based businesses contribute to restoring nature and reducing our country's contribution to climate change, it can also help to make these businesses more resilient, support long-term jobs and strengthen Scotland's green brand.

Working in partnership with SRUC, The Farm Environment Ltd, Shetland Amenity Trust/RSPB and the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP), the project has engaged with approximately 50 farmers and crofters in six areas across Scotland – Argyll, Skye, Strathspey, Outer Hebrides, Shetland and East Lothian.

Drawing its inspiration from pioneering projects in other countries, this new approach aims to be simpler, crofter-led



and locally targeted, moving away from the rules-based approaches used in the past. It involves developing a score card system relevant to the local landscape which assesses habitat quality and current management. The idea is that payments would be linked to the scores – the higher the score, the higher the payment.

Phase 1 involved a series of workshops in each region to explore, with participants, the payment-by-results concept. It identified outcomes that could be delivered in different farming conditions and developed score cards for measuring quality of outcomes in relation to potential payments. Outcomes explored in the crofting areas include:

Argyll/Lochaber: upland habitat mosaics;

Skye: inbye croft diversity based on mixed livestock semi-natural grassland management;

Shetland: peatland quality and wader habitat;

Outer Hebrides: machair and peatland common grazings.

All projects propose to complete the first phase this year. With positive feedback from participating farmers and crofters, the project is moving into phase 2 to trial how a payment-by-results scheme can work on individual farms and crofts.

Getting the measure right is just the start

It's been a huge pleasure and privilege to be involved in these first steps towards a more outcome- or results-based way of rewarding crofters for the wider benefits of their work, writes Gwyn Jones of EFNCP.

AS ANGUS McHattie reported from the Burren in issue 107 of *The Crofter*, schemes taking this approach have been tried and tested with real farmers in Ireland since 2004. One of the most gratifying things last year was to be able to bring Burren farmer Michael Davoren and hen harrier project ecologist Ryan Wilson-Parr over to share their experiences with groups of crofters and farmers in Argyll, Skye and Shetland and to take my SAC Consulting and SNH colleagues over to Ireland to see their projects on the ground. They've shown what's possible and that people like it. If they can do it, so can we.

This year I'm still involved in Ireland, trying to work out how those projects, and others being run as local innovations as part of their European Innovation Partnership implementation, can be somehow



Burren, a limestone-based karst landscape

mainstreamed – how they can 'inform the next RDP', to use the department's words.

One thing that's becoming really obvious is that getting the management and means of scoring right, while essential, is only the start of developing an approach which really works. The project team

there are also advising, cajoling, making collaboration possible, experimenting, demonstrating, monitoring and of course telling others about the work.

If this is true on farms, how much more on small crofts, and especially how much more on common grazings? As some of you

know, I've been trying get funding together to look at the opportunities and potential impediments of this approach on grazings for some time. I'm really grateful to LEADER Innse Gall and SNH for making this possible. It's just a small project, but these are the kind of questions we hope to explore further in it.

REFOCUSING FUTURE RURAL SUPPORT

Can a results based agri-environment scheme work for crofting on Skye?

At the start of the phase 1 project in Skye, I was really not sure of the answer to the question, says SAC Portree's Janette Sutherland. But after a series of three meetings, and participating crofters' feedback, I am closer to saying the answer is "yes!"

THESE THREE meetings in phase 1 were: the Irish experience, with guest speakers from the Burren and hen harriers projects; testing score cards in croft fields in Skye; and discussing payment rationales.

At our first meeting we explored what public goods are in a Skye crofting context. The discussion covered a broader range than just environmental public goods, including those that some might not consider to be of public value, such as animal health and welfare and food security. All close to the hearts of crofters. There was lively discussion on how high nature value farming and crofting embraced these and, although the project is focused on environmental outcomes, these were important considerations to take into account when exploring how a scheme might work in a crofting context.

"A very interesting project concerning potential future land-use support. It's about how to strike a balance between agricultural production and the environment, keeping in mind the concerns and needs of the greater public good."

~ Yvonne White, SCF chair ~



Skye group test out score cards in the field

At the second meeting the score cards were demonstrated, after testing by an SAC ecologist in various croft units in Skye. The Skye crofters found them easy to understand and use, despite the non-optimal season to be assessing both indicator species and structure. The colour indicator species crib sheets were well received.

The final meeting aimed to illustrate how the payment rationales and calculations could be designed to complement the score card(s) which were tested on Skye inbye croft grasslands. In a results-based scheme we discussed how payments increase with higher scores and why the demands of cross-compliance might mean that very low scores receive no payment.

Crofting units, herds and flocks can often be smaller than average. We discussed the concept of depression, ie paying more for the first hectares or livestock units, specifically situations where this is justifiable and where it is not.

I am very grateful to the crofters who participated in phase 1 and look forward to hearing what phase 2 will discover.

© Janette Sutherland, SAC Portree

Developing a results-based scheme in Shetland

Nathalie Pion, RSPB Scotland, outlines the project in Shetland.



Curlew chicks, South Mainland, Shetland

DISCUSSIONS on future agri-environment schemes started in Shetland two years ago, when a group formed bringing together agricultural and conservation stakeholders to look for ways of supporting both agriculture and the environment in a place where high nature value farming is widespread.

Learning about the successful Burren experience from Irish farmer Michael Davoren in a public talk last September inspired local enthusiasm for the results-based approach. A series of workshops in partnership with the POBAS project followed.

These gave interested farmers and crofters an opportunity to think about local environmental outcomes and how they could be measured. They identified wader habitat, peatland and crofting landscape mosaic as priorities. Now progress is underway to develop the approach.

On the hill, with support from SNH's POBAS project, RSPB Scotland staff worked with the local peatland action officer and crofters engaged in peatland management to create a

first version of a score card for blanket bogs. With further testing on the ground to improve it, the score card could guide management of the habitat in the future.

On inbye land, 10 crofters and farmers across Shetland have been busy surveying waders and their habitats on their own land. They are taking part in the 10-month ParkLife project, led by Shetland livestock marketing group, with RSPB Scotland providing monitoring support.

Participants have been collecting valuable information on wader activity and vegetation length, field wetness, plant diversity, management practices and predators during the breeding season. They are building a clearer picture of how farmland waders are doing; and shaping a wader habitat score card that works for them. They are also experimenting with new ways of monitoring farmland wildlife and helping define how agricultural and environmental management can be integrated.

The hope is that adopting a results-based approach, with land managers involved in designing a scheme that they identify with, could bring a fresh energy to Shetland crofting communities and lead to an increase in agri-environment scheme uptake in Shetland.

© Nathalie Pion

REFOCUSING FUTURE RURAL SUPPORT

Outer Hebrides – shared steps for common grazings



Crofter moving cattle on machair, North Uist

This is a project led by EFNCP, funded by Outer Hebrides LEADER and SNH, explains Robyn Stewart of EFNCP.

THE AIM is to develop a results-based approach to agri-environment schemes which rewards traditional crofting management and acknowledges delivery of public goods in the particularly challenging context of common grazings.

The intention is to feed into the national process of developing post-CAP support, with our results complementing those from Skye and Shetland for croft inbye and apportionments; and from Argyll for upland grazings.

Crofting has long shaped the landscapes of the Outer Hebrides and traditional management coexists with, and plays a role in maintaining, internationally rare and important habitats like blanket bog and machair. In turn these habitats provide us with numerous public goods including carbon storage, climate regulation, fresh water and biodiversity. Although common grazings cover a massive 71% of agricultural land in the Outer Hebrides, their use has steadily declined over recent years.

Working with graziers and common grazings committees during the design and testing stages, our project involves developing a score card system relevant to the diversity of grazings in the Western Isles. This is key to producing a viable alternative to current agri-environment schemes which works financially, practically and socially.

Unfortunately, we had only held community meetings in Harris and Barra before COVID-19 intervened. So for the past few months we have been depending on input at a distance from individuals contacted prior to lockdown and on the support of the steering group members: Sally Reynolds, Carloway Estate Trust, Donald MacKinnon, SCF and Johanne Ferguson, SNH, to provide advice and input as we prepare for the gradual opening up of society.

We are grateful to LEADER and SNH for being flexible and allowing us a three-month extension – so all being well, the coming months will see us coming to a common grazing near you.

“Imminent changes to the agricultural support system make this a more important time than ever to be discussing what future environmental schemes should look like. New schemes must be easily accessible, they should reward crofters for the environmental work we already do and encourage change where necessary to achieve desirable outcomes. The innovative, bottom-up nature of the work being carried out across the crofting counties to develop results-based schemes is most welcome.”

~ Donald MacKinnon, SCF vice-chair, Lewis ~



Gathering on the moor in Arnol in February, Lewis



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ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog



Asparagus ferns growing strongly

LIFELONG learning has become a bit of an overused neologism, but in the world of the crofting horticulturist it has the ring of truth. Here are just a few of the lessons learned this season so far.

The saga of the polytunnel cover

Alas, we procrastinated in the autumn over the cover replacement. Too much going on, usual excuses. The tired, patched, ten-year-old cover was stripped off around the new year to allow the weather in to clear out some pests and wet the ground. The end frames were repaired and the hot-spot tapes replaced, so all was ready to go. A rare calm, dry day early in March before lockdown took place allowed us to get the new cover on with the generous help of neighbours. So far, so good, but the very hot weather at the end of May revealed the problem. The cover went on at about eight degrees, and now the temperature was 20

degrees higher, so naturally the polythene had stretched and was flapping about. The battens had to come off and the whole thing retightened. Luckily the cover was fixed to a timber base rail and not trenched into the ground. Anyway, it's sorted now, but the lesson learned is don't cover a polytunnel on a cold day unless you have absolutely no choice – and if you do so, expect to have to retighten.

Wet the strawberry leaves

Most Scottish strawberries are now grown under plastic, either temporary or permanent structures. This is to extend the season and to allow picking in the dry, which is demanded by the supermarkets in order to extend shelf life and ensure consistent supply.

Like most crofting horticulturists, we mainly grow off our strawberries in the ground under cover, and this increases the risk of pests, notably the very nasty red spider mite. This creature is happiest in dry

heat. It has taken us a while to realise that strawberries do not suffer at all from getting thoroughly wet, and a good blast of the hose over the foliage each evening has proved a fair deterrent to the spider mite, while not troubling the bees and other pollinators or damaging the fruit.

Give asparagus a chance to recover

Received wisdom is that asparagus can be cropped until the longest day. This might well be the case for outdoor crops down south, but protected crops will have started producing a few weeks earlier, so eight weeks of cutting should be the absolute maximum. We have found that, following this regime, the following year's crop is stronger and more plentiful. The taller the ferns can grow, the more nutrition and energy there is to go back into the crowns as the ferns die back, and this pays off the following year.

Reassurance from marts

SCF CONTACTED Dingwall and Highland Mart and United Auctions seeking clarity on livestock sales in the coming months for the islands and remote highland areas.

Concern had been raised that should the COVID-19 restrictions affect local sales, for example in Portree and Lochmaddy, members would need timely guidance to ensure alternative arrangements were in place. We received reassurance from Dingwall and Highland Mart, reiterating their commitment to their island marts and crofting in general. They were in continuing dialogue with the Scottish Government and that they had a number of contingency plans in place.

- Cal Mac stated that livestock will have priority on all ferries. Numerous livestock haulage companies have also been contacted and plans are in place for a regular service from Inner and Outer Hebrides.
- There is a precedent with the Lewis and Harris crofters group consigning stock to Dingwall on a regular basis throughout the back end, as has happened over a number of years.
- A number of extra sales would be added at Dingwall, with all customers having access to any sale they feel would suit their stock. As always, auctioneers would be available to advise.
- Plans are already in place for two extra lamb sales in August.
- As owners of Portree mart, they would be happy



© Claire Nicholson

for it also to be used as a collection centre.

- Representatives from North Uist and Lewis auction marts have been contacted and if required the island markets could be used as collection centres.
- Discussions are ongoing with the Scottish

government on lairage facilities at Dingwall and they hope for some derogation regarding field usage.

- Safety and well-being of customers and staff will play a major part in the ultimate decision on their back end island sales programme.

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ON THE CROFT

Nematodirus: an evolving threat?

Advice from Moredun Research Unit

CONTROL OF *Nematodirus battus*, a gut roundworm which threatens the health and welfare of sheep throughout the UK, is becoming challenging with the emergence of drug resistance and increasingly variable infection patterns.

Acute *Nematodirus* infections are typified with diarrhoea and dehydration in lambs, resulting in poor growth rates and mortalities each year. Acute disease occurs in response to the ingestion of massive numbers of larvae, which occurs when eggs hatch on pasture all at the same time.

Nematodirus is typically considered a spring infection in young lambs. However, in a recent questionnaire survey, half of respondents observed clinical signs outside the usual spring window (summarised in Figure 1). Changes in climate and worm egg hatching behaviour are believed to have led to this second hatching event in autumn.

Although variable hatching may make predicting the timing of infection more difficult, there could be a hidden positive. Larval numbers on pasture distributed more evenly throughout the year could

result in milder clinical signs, reducing the likelihood of losses. At present, spring lamb infection still remains an important transmission route for the parasite and online risk maps such as that hosted on the SCOPS website (www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/) can help identify risk periods on croft or farm.

Control of *Nematodirus* infection is heavily reliant on white drenches (benzimidazoles; 1-BZ). White drench resistance emerged quickly in other roundworm species, reaching a high level in many parts of the UK. Despite repeated use of these drugs for almost 60 years, resistance has only recently emerged in *Nematodirus*, without an obvious explanation for the delay.

A large study of UK commercial farms indicated that white drench resistance in *Nematodirus* is at a very early stage. The findings are summarised in the graphic below. Resistance to these drugs could increase in the future; however, white drenches will still be effective against *Nematodirus* in spring on the vast majority of crofts. This is important. By continuing to use white drenches in spring to control *Nematodirus*, we can protect the effectiveness of other drug classes for use later in the grazing season

to treat other roundworm species.

Information on *Nematodirus* and other livestock diseases is available on the Moredun website (moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/nematodirus). Our continued research will improve the understanding of livestock diseases and help develop sustainable control strategies for healthy, productive stock. Our work was supported by Animal and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB) and the Scottish Government.

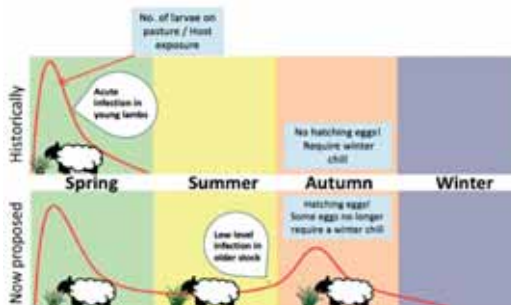
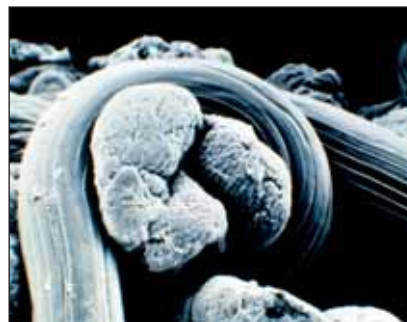
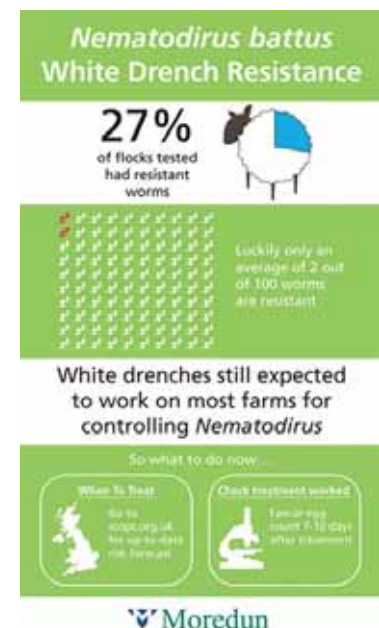


Fig 1 Historical perception of seasonal *Nematodirus* infection compared with recent observations



A microscope image of *Nematodirus battus*



Infographic highlighting white drench resistance

Call for evidence on stock worrying

THE SCOTTISH Government's rural economy and connectivity committee seeks to strengthen and update the law on livestock worrying and is inviting views on the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

The bill consists of five main proposals:

1. Increasing penalties

Imprisonment for up to six months, a fine of £5,000, or both. It also allows the court to disqualify convicted persons from owning or keeping a dog, or preventing them from taking dogs onto agricultural land where livestock is present.

2. Increased powers

- to seize a dog from land, to identify the dog's owner;
- to seize a dog from land, to gather evidence;
- to enter premises to seize a dog, with or without a warrant;
- to take a dog to a vet, where a dog has been seized as evidence.

3. Powers to authorise inspecting bodies and appoint inspectors.

4. Extending the definition of livestock

In addition to cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses and poultry, the expanded definition includes camelids, ostriches, farmed deer, buffalo and enclosed game birds.

5. Renaming the offence in terms of either attacking or worrying livestock.

Full details can be found at <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/115425.aspx>

Comments are invited on the following areas:

1. Your experience of livestock worrying. What is the scale of the issue?
2. Does legislation need strengthening? Does the bill do this? Is it the best way?
3. Your views on the increased penalties.
4. Would disqualifying convicted persons

from owning or keeping a dog, or taking a dog onto certain types of land, assist in reducing the number of livestock worrying instances?

5. Your opinion on extending the types of livestock and type of agricultural land covered by livestock worrying.
6. Your views on appointing inspectors, other than police, to investigate and enforce livestock worrying offences.
7. Comments on expanding powers to seize dogs, enter premises and take a dog to the vet.
8. Does the bill adequately balance the rights of dog owners and the rights of livestock farmers?
9. Anything else that should be included or excluded.

You can respond to this call for evidence until 28th August to: rec.committee@parliament.scot. Hard copy responses may be sent to: Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, T3.60, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP.

ON THE CROFT

The hills are alive

While the spread of COVID-19 has been a worldwide tragedy, out of every disaster there is hope of something positive, writes SCF member Cheryl McIntyre, who is secretary of North Talisker sheep stock club.

PERHAPS now more than ever, society is rediscovering the need to be self-sufficient.

The news stories of flour shortages as folk have a go at baking bread at home; seed and compost sold out as grow-your-own takes hold; even orders for laying hens are through the roof as the importance of having short supply chains

and food to hand becomes clear.

Crofting has a big part to play in this. While inbye land (with improvement) can be used for growing all sorts, much hill land in the crofting counties is unable to support large-scale arable production, but that doesn't mean it is not productive.

Sheep and cows grazed at low stocking density are the best way to use this land to help with Scotland's food security and food sovereignty – eating what's most appropriate for your environment. Sheep stock clubs and active common grazings are working hard, as always, playing a vital part in keeping Scotland's food

production going and supporting the economy along the way. A big thanks to all the contractors that have adapted their working to keep things going, especially Charlie and the team at Harbro, Portree for ensuring agricultural feed and equipment were available throughout.

If your township does not have a common grazings committee in session, there is funding available through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme to help with the costs of setting one up.

As restrictions ease, it would do us all well to remember who was there working away in our own communities in a time of need; and as a great way to say thanks – shop local, eat local.

Bainne nam bò

DÈ SEÒRSA de bhainne a dh'òlas sinn? "Ged a tha buaidh bheag air an àrainneachd aig bainne bho lusan, chan ionann sin agus an cron mòr a bhios bainne nam bò a' dèanamh air an àrainneachd". Sin a tha mi leughadh fad is farsainn sna làithean seo. Bha mi sgriobhadh beagan an turas mu dheireadh air an aibheiseachadh a tha ga dhèanamh air buaidh methane le mòran de luchd-rannsachaidh an-dràsta – agus iad nan daoine a bu chòir a bhith na bu toiniseil. Ach bho rug na trì mairt againne sa Ghiblean bha adhbhar agam a bhith meòrachadh air a' bhuannachd bho bhainne agus toradh a' bhainne bho chroth.

'S e gu bheil tuilleadh 's a chòir de bhainne aig a' chroth Shealtainneach againn do na laoi gh sna ciad 8-10 seachdainean, 's mar sin bidh mi a' bleoghann a' chòrr gach madainn agus ga chur am feum san taigh. Chan e nach e saothair a th' ann. Tha e furasta gu leòr nuair a bhios iad fhathast sa bhathach, ach aon uair 's gu bheil iad a-mach air a' mhonadh tha cùisean eadar-dhealaichte. Gu fortanach, chan eil am monadh againn cho mòr sin, agus tha rathad a' ruith air an taobh thall. Ma bhios an croth thall, thèid mi mun cuairt an sin le basgaid feòir agus cana airson a' bhainne, cuiridh mi mart ann an faing bheag agus bleoghnaidh mi i. O chionn goirid fhuair mi trèilear airson a' bhaidhsagail agus a-nis bidh mi siubhal le neart mo chuirp.

Mar sin, bha suas ri galan bainne againn gach latha. Bha sinn a' togail an uachdair dheth agus a' dèanamh im dheth. Ged a bha sinn ag òl bainne, a' dèanamh yoghurt, agus ag ithe càis macaroni cho tric 's a ghabhadh, bha fhathast tòrr air fhàgail. B' e an ath cheum, ma-tà, càis a dhèanamh agus le fiodhan air iasad, thòisich sinn air a' ghnothach sin, gnothach a shoirbhich gu an ìre 's gu bheil preas làn càis a-nis againn.

Abair toradh bho mhonadh bhochd. 'S ann truagh dha-riribh a bhiodh am beathachadh as aonais nam mart!

A consideration of the value of the surplus milk our Shetland cows have when they first calve – the food value from poor grazing compared to plant-based milk.

Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain



Feeding the ewes at lambing



Setting the rich milk



Shetland cow and calf

ON THE CROFT

Seed Sovereignty Programme into second phase – and continuing in crofting areas

THE UK and Ireland Seed Sovereignty Programme run by the Gaia foundation has been awarded funding for a second phase, which started on 1st July.

The focus remains on rolling out training on seed production and strengthening seed networks across the UK and Ireland. The team was increased to seven coordinators, in Wales, Ireland, England and two in Scotland – one for central Scotland and one for the Highlands and Islands.

The continuation in crofting areas is the result of successful uptake from the start, with a crofter-to-crofter visit to Uist late 2018; the

experiments in intercropping legumes and heritage grains last year with well-attended events on Lismore and at the Shielling Project. Early this year, barley researchers at James Hutton made bere seeds available; and in a race against lockdown, seeds have been sent out to some but not all of aspiring and mostly new bere growers.

Lismore will see another grain intercropping season with several grains being tested. New this year is Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape project. It was a relief that a bag of bere seed had arrived during lockdown. Sowing on their demonstration croft was captured in a short

video clip on YouTube under Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Broadcasting bere and commercial barley.

The 2020 season meetings opened with a ZOOM interview with Neil MacPherson about bere growing on Benbecula. The second ZOOM meeting was a virtual tour of grain growing crofts on Lismore, Coigach and in Lochaber. The next talk will be about landraces in Finland.

For further information, visit www.seedsovereignty.info, or phone Maria at 07720634343, or email maria@gaianet.org if you wish to attend future grain chats on Monday evenings.



Sowing in Coigach



Fava bean, lentil and pea plots sown on 20th May this year

Small-scale growing ideas



GROCYCLE is an innovative social enterprise whose website has lots of useful information on the most profitable crops for small farms, some of which could be new income sources for crofters.

- growing mushrooms
- growing microgreens
- market gardening
- permaculture
- forest gardening
- aquaponics
- hydroponics
- soft fruit / fruit trees
- micro dairies
- small-scale meat farming
- herb growing
- beekeeping
- chickens and eggs
- christmas tree farming
- snail farming
- fish farming
- slaughtering / butchering
- corn maze
- petting zoo

<https://grocycle.com/small-scale-farming-ideas/>

Funding for seed saving groups

THE COMMUNITY Seed Bank Academy provides funding, training and exchange sessions organised by European seed initiatives. These can be small and informal.

The funding is £1800 (2000 euros) and is meant for the following thematic areas for training or information events: climate change adaptation; management of seed collections; breeding and propagation techniques; seed multiplication and variety assessment; sustainability of seed collections.

The project runs until the end of 2021.

More information, examples and resources on seedbanks and application guidelines and forms at: <https://academy.communityseedbanks.org/en/academy/news>.

With quite a few local seed saving groups and seed saving individuals throughout the Highlands, the funding could be an opportunity for joining the networks. If you are interested, wish some input to develop an idea or help writing an application, please phone Maria at 07720634343.

ON THE CROFT

What it's like to create a new croft?



SCF members Katie and Mark share their experience.

WHEN WE started looking into getting our own slice of Scotland, the prospect was a mere dream.

The notion of having our secluded wee field in a glen was a total fantasy until we started talking to our local estate owners. It was only after looking at small sections of land with big price tags that we started to get creative. Thankfully the estate manager allowed us

access to their maps to use for an exploratory stomp around.

After meeting with Achnacarry estate, they allowed us to see what areas they managed and graciously let us seek out our spot. We then started navigating around Lochaber seeking our dream. It didn't take us long to arrive at our final location, a stunning and remote glen amidst the mountains with its own wee sheep fold and ruins. Dating back to around 1747, Achnaherry township was originally built by a Cameron of Fassfern. Later the families



were cleared and then the houses abandoned in 1860.

To reinstate a croft on this land is an honour. To be given this chance to create a business and a home is a dream fulfilled. However, this venture comes with a mountain to climb. With no house, running water, electricity and the nearest mains five miles away, we have no option but to be off-grid. Although it's going to be a big task, we won't let it stop us and neither should you.

Becoming a crofter, or being a crofter, is like sorcery or trying to find

the light switch in the dark, but you find it eventually. Do your research, turn up to crofting workshops, work hard and get inspired. That's how we managed to get this far.

By the time you read this, we should have found our way onto the land, in our caravan, getting ready to welcome the livestock, planting trees, building our polytunnel, croft house and shed. We hope to eventually welcome people soon, so if you croft or have an interest, get in touch and pay us a visit.

@achnaherrycroft

SNH staff croft visit

Rae McKenzie, SNH policy and operations manager, reports

IN MARCH, a few weeks before lockdown, Scottish Natural Heritage staff from across Argyll and the Outer Hebrides held a team meeting on Skye.

The meeting, held roughly every second year, brings together a dispersed team of staff. An important part is getting out and about, meeting local people, exchanging knowledge and ideas and developing positive working relationships. Part of the Skye meeting involved a site visit to Kingsburgh, to meet Yvonne White of SCF and to discuss crofting and wildlife management, whilst taking the opportunity to have a lovely walk in a beautiful location.

Yvonne represents SCF on the Sea Eagle National Stakeholder Group and provides valuable crofting input which helps oversee delivery of the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan and the Sea Eagle Management Scheme. Yvonne

took us through the history of the croft and the area, making many connections between the agricultural activity, the wildlife it supports and the cultural and community aspects of crofting.

The visit to her croft was an excellent opportunity for a wider group of SNH staff to gain a better understanding of the crofting business, the impacts that sea eagles and other wildlife have on the croft and the ways in which Yvonne and the sheep stock club try to manage these impacts. In addition to the difficulties presented by managing a sheep flock alongside sea eagles and other predators, we discussed the current difficulties of running a croft with the uncertainties around longer-term agricultural support as a result of leaving the EU.

We left with an increased awareness that crofters' valuable role in managing land has multiple benefits – not simply in terms of agriculture but also in relation to the environment, culture and the



SNH visit to Yvonne White's croft, Kingsburgh

economy of fragile rural areas. Understanding the challenges and constraints within which we all work is key to working together to solve some of the issues we face.

We are very grateful to Yvonne for hosting us.

To find out more about the Sea Eagle Management Scheme visit www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-wildlife/sea-eagle-management-scheme or email seaeaglescheme@nature.scot

MEMBERS PAGES

Crofting needs SCF

SCF, like all organisations, has had to adapt to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, writes SCF vice-chair Donald MacKinnon, a young crofter.

STAFF HANDLED the situation well, and continued to deliver a fantastic service to members. Staff and volunteers were already used to using technology for internal and external meetings. This has helped with adapting to a new way of working in recent months. However, no amount of technology can replace the summer shows and events that SCF attends every year. These highlights of the SCF calendar will be sorely missed this year, not least because they give us a chance to catch up with members from throughout the crofting counties and beyond.

The summer shows also provide a valuable opportunity to recruit new members, something that will not be possible this year. With this in mind, we need your help to encourage new people to join SCF. Members are at the heart of the organisation. You are our eyes and ears on the ground, highlighting issues and helping to shape SCF policy. Membership subscriptions fund core SCF activity. Without this income we simply would not be able to function effectively. Recruiting new members is essential to ensuring the long-term future of SCF, both financially and as a campaigning organisation.

With so much uncertainty surrounding the future, effective representation for crofters and crofting is as important as ever. Whatever your opinion on Brexit, it is undoubtedly going to bring fundamental changes to trade and subsidies. As big decisions are made in the coming months and years, crofters need their interests to be represented at all levels.

The climate emergency is a real threat to us all. Along with the wider agricultural industry, we need to better understand our contribution to it. We also need to promote the incredible benefits that crofting brings to our environment and the opportunities to do more. This is something that SCF will continue to highlight.

Crofting needs SCF more than ever at this critical time and SCF needs members. A membership form has been included in this issue of *The Crofter*. Please pass it on to someone today.



Donations

EARLIER THIS year SCF received a donation from a well-wisher in America.

His request was that we use it to further our contribution to crofting law reform. Our donor's kindness and support is greatly appreciated and it is very heartening that people recognise and value our hard work.

Any donation is a bonus. We recently received a modest but always welcome one from an SCF member. If you would like to assist SCF's work on behalf of crofters, we would be delighted to hear from you. Just get in touch with HQ@crofting.org or visit our donations page on the SCF website.

It's also possible to make a bequest to the Scottish Crofting Federation in your will.

As a charity, and the only organisation campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting, we rely on the generosity of our members and supporters to sustain our work.

Spread the cost

Did you know that you can pay for your membership subscription in four instalments?

If you pay your subscription by direct debit you can choose to pay quarterly rather than once a year. If you currently pay by cheque or bank transfer and switch to direct debit payment you can also choose to pay quarterly and qualify for a 15% discount in your first year for switching to direct debit payment. Just call or email us and we can do all the paperwork for you.

If you currently pay by Direct Debit, cheque, Paypal or bank transfer and would be interested in switching to a quarterly direct debit payment, please email hq@crofting.org or give us a call on 01599 530005.



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MEMBERS PAGES

Lockdown ways to keep up to date on crofting

Advice from Siobhan Macdonald, SAC Portree

YOU MAY have seen adverts for webinars, online meetings and heard of Zoom, Skype and Webcast. Here we cover what these are, and how easy they are to join.

Because of lockdown, many events and meetings are held online. There are advantages – no need to travel, usually free, and you can watch in the comfort of your own home; and disadvantages – it's easier to engage in conversation and ask questions at a face-to-face meeting, or see new ideas on the ground.

In the Highlands and Islands poor broadband can make joining online events impossible or frustrating. However, if you have broadband or a 3G or 4G signal and you have a computer, smartphone, tablet, or iPad, you can watch webinars, listen to podcasts or join in online meetings. You don't need a webcam.

Online meetings, eg Zoom, Teams, GoToMeeting or Skype are all ways to hear, and perhaps see, other folk in one online meeting. These are good ways to discuss a topic or see other people. For example, the Lochalsh community response team recently held an excellent Zoom meeting on growing veg on crofts. We could see the presenters and their crofts, and some of the folk watching also had their webcams on and joined in discussions.

Webinars, eg GotToWebinar or Webcast are video conferences online, usually with a presentation, which you watch live or recorded. If you want to see what a webinar looks like, try this one – go to YouTube and search for WIA Sheep and Cattle Nutrition Starter Session.

Podcasts are audio recordings and can be listened to at any time. They are great ways to catch up when you are doing something mundane, like driving. You will need a smartphone with one of the podcast apps and internet access to download them onto your phone, but once downloaded, you can listen anytime.

VLOGS are video blogs/diaries, usually in a series, which you can watch anytime. Try searching YouTube for 'grazing VLOG Bute'.

Check the FAS.Scot website for more webinars and online meetings and podcasts, as well as QMS, Soil Association, Crofting Commission and SCF.

SCF AGM



THE SCF AGM, due to take place on 17th July, had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

We plan to convene the AGM by Zoom on 10th September. Members wishing to attend must inform SCF HQ no later than 8th September, so that log-in details can be emailed to you.

For those unfamiliar with Zoom, it is a video conferencing facility you connect to on your computer. It has been greatly used by families and organisations, businesses and parliaments during lockdown. You do need a good internet connection and a computer or laptop with a built-in camera and microphone.

If you don't use computers you can join the meeting by phone – but you still need to let HQ know in advance.

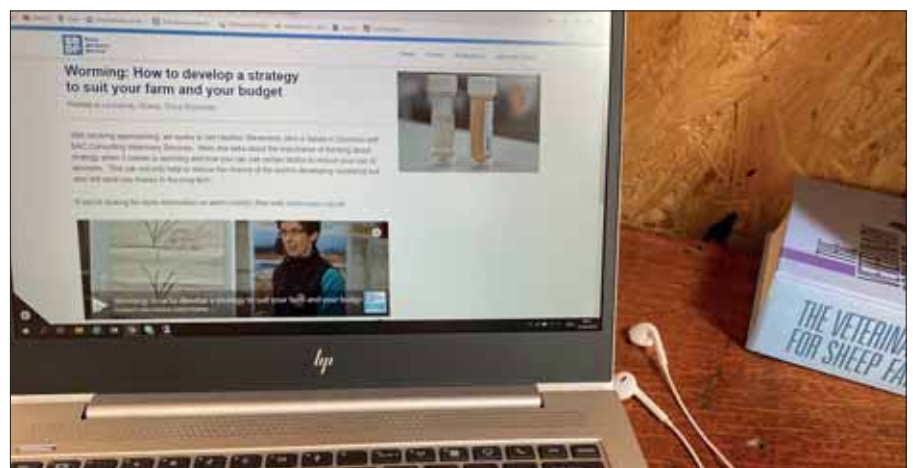
If you can't participate and want to use a proxy, please use the proxy form included in the last issue of *The Crofter*, or contact SCF HQ.

The meeting will be followed by guest speaker Ian Davidson from Scottish government, who will talk about the Scottish Land Matching Service.

Remember, you must notify SCF HQ in advance if you want to be at the Zoom AGM.

Agenda:

1. To approve the minute of the AGM of 19th July 2019 and matters arising.
2. Chair's report.
3. To receive the company's accounts and the directors' and auditors' reports for the year ended 30th November 2019.
4. To re-appoint director Donald MacKinnon under Article 10.6, whose term as director end as of the date of this meeting, to serve until AGM 2023, the anniversary of his re-appointment and the maximum period allowed under Article 10.11.
5. To ratify as a director Jonathan Hedges, previously co-opted onto the board in August 2019.
6. To appoint auditors proposed by the directors, or to re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants.
7. To approve the following amendment to the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association. Remove Clause 6.8, as no longer relevant.
6.8 A vote given or poll demanded by proxy or by the duly authorised representative of an organisation admitted to membership under clause 2.3(d) or (e) above shall be valid notwithstanding the previous termination of the authority of the person voting or demanding a poll unless notice of the termination was received by the company at the office or at such other place at which the instrument of proxy was duly deposited before the commencement of the meeting or adjourned meeting at which the vote is given or the poll demanded or (in the case of a poll otherwise than on the same day as the meeting or adjourned meeting) the time appointed for taking the poll.
8. AOCB



MEMBERS PAGES

Staff changes

IT IS always very sad to say goodbye to a member of staff.

Barbara Thayer has been working for SCF for nine years, looking after our financial administration with scrupulous efficiency. "Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves" would be an appropriate adage and Barbara certainly knew where every penny was. This is essential for any business, of course, but there is a very strong extra motive with a membership organisation.

Barbara has retired from this job and the responsibility has been taken up by Erin Matheson, who we welcomed in a previous edition of *The Crofter*.

Happy retirement Barbara.



SCF staff past and present – l-r Suzanne Gill, Barbara Thayer, Sandra Lindsay, John Bannister (volunteer), Tina Hartley, Ailsa Strange, Patrick Krause, Lucy Beattie, Katrine Fogt

Ailsa amongst crofters

SOME OF you will have met me, some might know my name.

I have been working for SCF since March 2018. Firstly, as admin support to the training project, then as part of the Gaining Ground project team. The Gaining Ground project is now finished.

It has been a learning curve for me, coming from a non-agricultural background, but having lived in Ullapool for many years I was keen to have some connection with the crofting community. My previous job, 14 years in a school nursery, gave me some of the skills required. Lucy and Tina from the training project and Sandra and Barbara from HQ, amongst others, helped me learn much more.

Involvement with the training project was a great place to start, as I spoke to many established crofters and new entrants interested in learning new skills themselves. Through administration of the courses and attendance at a few, I began to understand the basics about the crofting system

and appreciate the importance it has within communities for many reasons.

The Spirit of Crofting event in Moray in 2018 was a highlight in terms of meeting a wide range of people, all interested in creating a life which includes crofting in some form or other. The Gaining Ground project flowed nicely from that, looking at the potential diversification of crofters into 'green care'.

Along the way I made many friends and learnt how important the outdoors and involvement in agriculture can be to people, particularly in relation to good mental health.

The last few months have been strange and worrying for us all and as I write it seems clear that the journey out of a pandemic is going to be slow and difficult. I hope to continue to do some project work for SCF and I am sure that appreciation of the slower, more down-to earth-life that crofting can offer will continue to grow.

Ailsa Strange, July 2020

100 Club closure

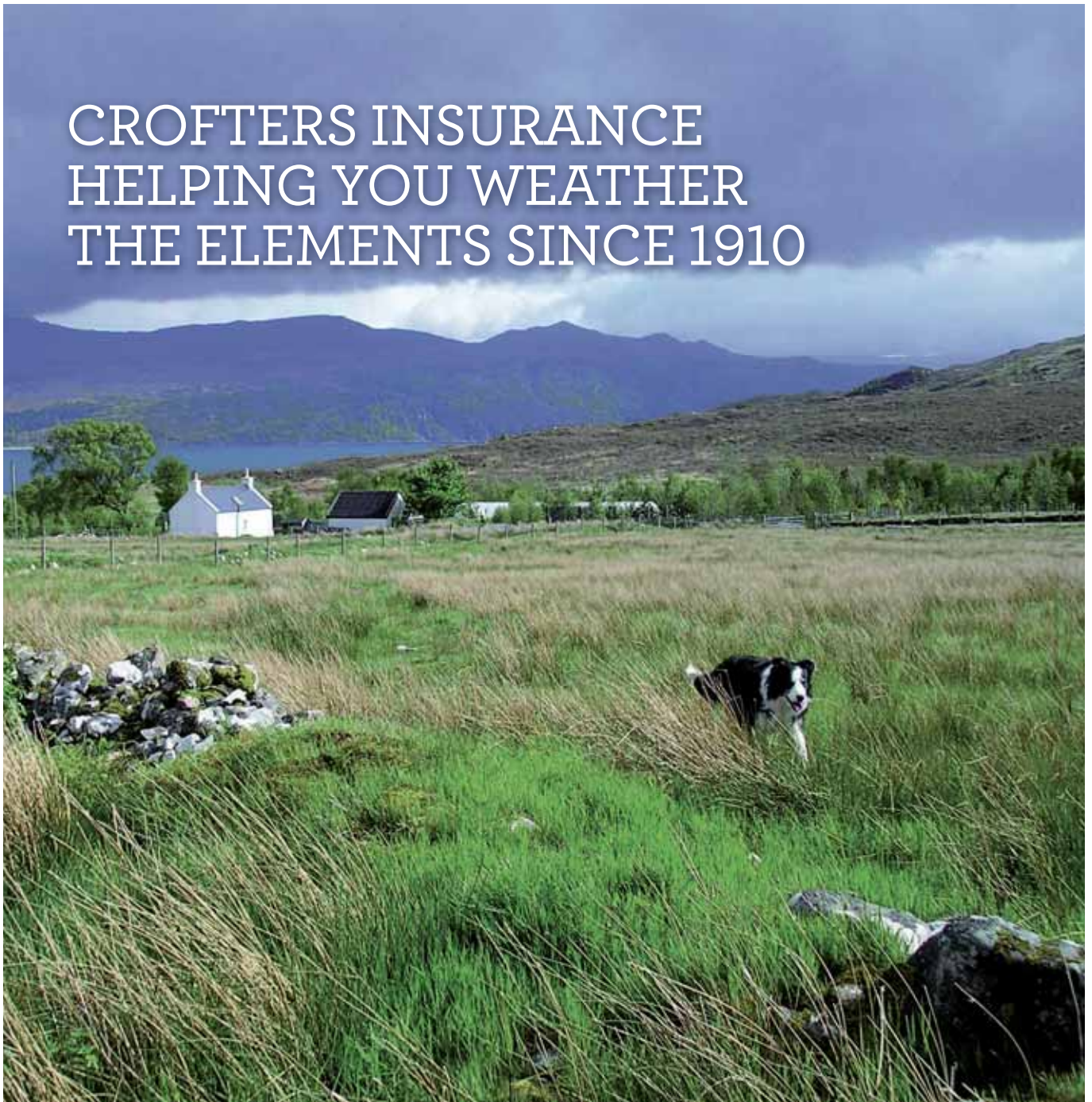
IT IS WITH great regret that we have had to close the SCF 100 Club.

We experienced unforeseen administrative difficulties, and combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reluctantly had to call it a day. We realise this will be a disappointment to those of you who supported it, as it is for the SCF staff and board.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who purchased tickets, for your support of SCF through your membership and your commitment to the additional funding the 100 Club would have provided for membership development, training etc.

All refunds have now been processed and you should have received your refund by now.

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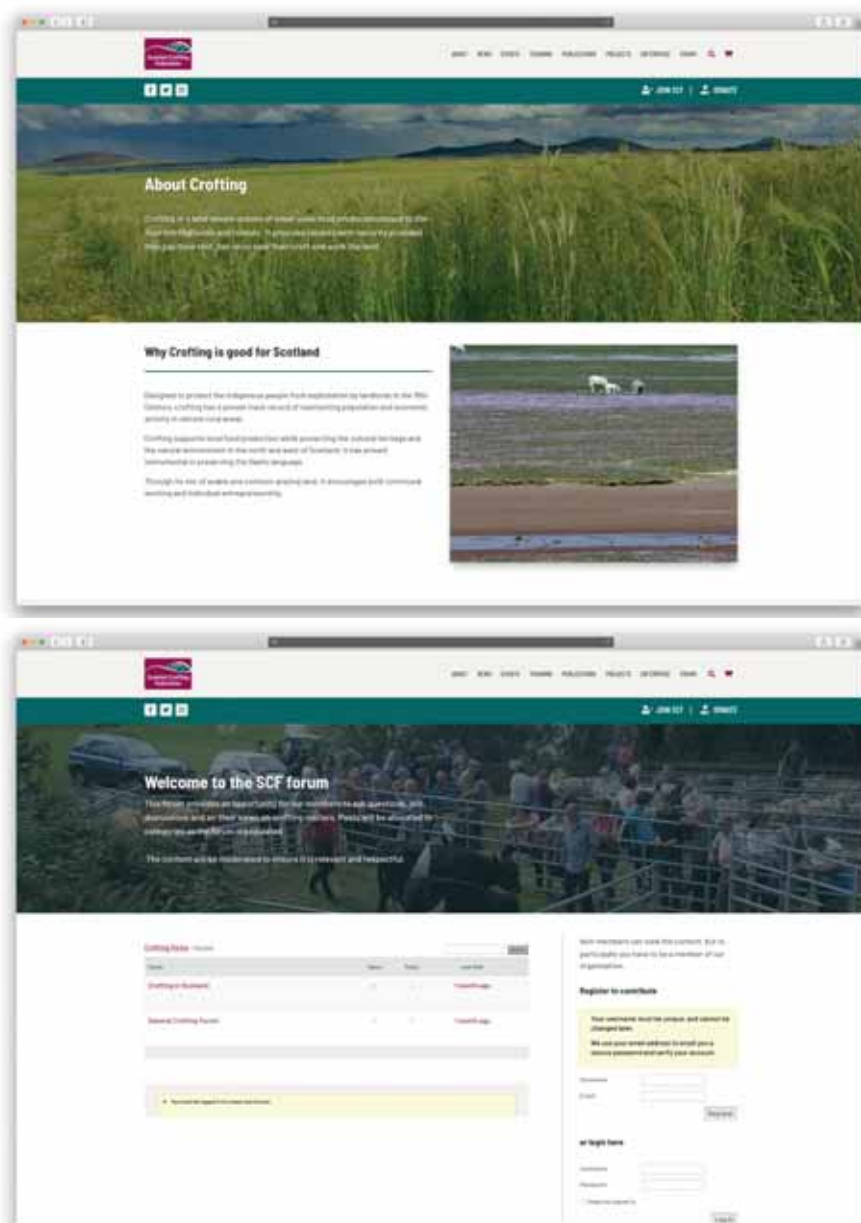


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New look for SCF website



OVER THE past few months in lockdown we have been working on an improved SCF website.

By the time you receive this issue of *The Crofter* it should be live at www.crofting.org. We have a refreshing new look and a simple-to-navigate structure. And an updated logo has been part of that work.

We have introduced a crofting forum on the website where members can discuss matters of interest and concern on crofting. The forum will be moderated and while anyone can view the discussions, only SCF members may contribute. We hope you will find it useful.

Our thanks to Vanessa and Chris at Lumberjack Digital for their hard work on this project.

SCF e-newsletter

SCF monthly e-newsletter is a great way of getting all the latest crofting-related info all together in one place, including training, deadlines, funding, news, ideas and opportunities.

We are always happy to receive any items from members, including photographs, activities and events that they would like to share with other members. Just send the details to hq@crofting.org.

If you don't currently get the e-newsletter and would like to start receiving a copy, just get in touch with hq@crofting.org or call 01599 530005.



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