

## Crofting must get support for disadvantage



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**S**CF HAS warned Scottish Government that crofting is seriously threatened by the drastic cuts to Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS), which must be reimbursed somehow.

Scottish Government has had the option for many years to switch from LFASS to the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) scheme, which SCF advocated as it would have maintained support to those who really need it. Scottish Government chose to opt out of this scheme, with the support of the farming industry lobby.

Having made the decision, knowing the consequences, Scottish Government has had several years to prepare for this and yet it has resulted in a reduction of LFA support to 80% of 2018 rates for 2019 and then potentially to cut it

to a mere 40% for 2020. Cabinet secretary for rural economy Fergus Ewing has consistently said that further proposed cuts would be unacceptable and that he will find a way to maintain them. However, this is still a real cut which could have been avoided if we had transferred to the ANC scheme as other countries have. Any further reduction will be ruinous for crofters and farmers in the disadvantaged areas.

Following several meetings with government officials and the cabinet secretary, SCF has received an assurance from Mr Ewing that the less favoured area support will not drop below 80% of the 2018 rate and those crofters on the minimum payment of £385 will retain this. It is not clear where the extra money will come from and how it will be delivered, so we will continue to monitor the situation.

## Sea eagles move up the political agenda

**T**HE CROSS-PARTY Group on Crofting met recently in the Scottish Parliament, chaired by Alasdair Allan MSP and administered by SCF.

This group is always very well attended, with over thirty representatives of organisations and individuals regularly attending. It is a very potent forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the Scottish Government to act. At the recent meeting several important issues were raised, with the main topical presentation by SNH on the conflict between crofting and wildlife – focusing mainly on sea eagles. The release of these large predators into the wild has increasingly become a problem,

resulting sometimes in devastating losses to crofters all along the western seaboard.

SCF is closely involved in trying to address the sea eagle issue through local and national management groups, and we were pleased to see the recent publication of the updated sea eagle management plan by SNH.

We particularly welcome the fact that SNH has quite unequivocally stated that healthy sheep and lambs are taken by these very large raptors. This has been long overdue and is the first time that SNH and, by implication, RSPB, who also sit on the national stakeholders' group, have so publicly acknowledged this without reservations. It is something that crofters have known for the

best part of 20 years.

Sea eagles, also known as white-tailed eagles, were indigenous to the UK but were hunted and ultimately wiped out early in the twentieth century. They were reintroduced to the west coast of Scotland in 1975 by RSPB and SNH (then known as the Nature Conservancy Council). Some would argue that the environment they were released into is not the same as that of the nineteenth century, with their food source, mainly inshore fish and small mammals, much scarcer.

Over ten years 82 Norwegian juvenile birds were released on Rum, with the first birds

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## Land for new croft entrants

**A** KEY DRIVER of land reform in Scotland has been to increase the number of people who occupy, own, manage and have a say in Scotland's land.

Two recent news items have again raised the issue of access to land for croft new entrants.

Last month HIE announced that they intend to sell the Orbest estate in Skye, which they have owned since 1997. This was a worthy project that had the intention of

creating new crofts. The legislation at the time did not allow for this so a few smallholdings now exist on the estate, which may be converted into crofts. The bulk of the estate is managed as one farm and some woodland. Is this an opportunity to create new crofts and woodland crofts?

The other news release of interest came from Scottish Government, announcing that 6,400 hectares of land have been contributed by public bodies to

create new start-up farms. Both HIE and Highland Council have lent land that is earmarked for future development, so it will only be let on short lease which doesn't encourage investment in the land. But it is a start. However, there is no mention of whether there has been consideration of the creation of new crofts.

SCF has called on the Scottish Government to create 10,000 new

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# Message from the chair...

*Yvonne White*



**T**HERE IS a rumour that it is summer time although that's not the experience on the west coast which, as I write, has seen wet, windy and cool weather conditions creep in. Thankfully the weather at lambing and spring calving was ideal.

Following a mild winter, spring lambing this year for many resulted in sturdy healthy-looking lambs, certainly on the in-bye; and the hill lambs are also looking strong. Now the cycle of sheep and lamb processing is well underway, thoughts turn to the sale price of store lambs at the mart. Selling in the open market always has its ups and downs but this year, with the shadow of Brexit looming, there is an added layer of uncertainty. The majority of lambs sold in the crofting counties and indeed Scotland are exported to Europe. Figures quoted range from 80 - 85%.

Westminster's own figures (UK Office of Statistics) show that leaving the EU without a deal would result in a 9% reduction in GDP. At the height of the banking crisis GDP was reduced by 2% and is still recovering. Leaving the EU without a deal would result in tariffs levied on goods entering and leaving the UK. Experts estimate the level of tariffs on a product would be in the region of 30-40%. Store lamb prices would reduce accordingly and animal feed and medicine costs increase. The effect on store lamb exports to the EU would be catastrophic.

Beef exports to the EU are significantly lower than lamb export volumes. More beef is sold in the UK than lamb. Unlike lamb, naturally-reared beef has a higher value in the home market. Therefore the effect on store cattle prices is likely to be less of an issue, although any increase in winter feed costs could tighten fragile margins even further. The extra layer of uncertainty caused by Brexit cannot help but have an effect on crofters' future planning and investment. Should we put up new fencing? Invest in a new shed? Many are holding back until there is greater clarity.

Future levels of LFASS payments are of grave concern. SCF along with other industry bodies has been lobbying the Scottish Government intensely, resulting in cabinet secretary for the rural economy Fergus Ewing publicly promising that the planned cut in payments by £13 million from £65 million will not happen. As it is likely there are no extra monies available to make up the shortfall, the necessary finance may come from a redistribution of other agriculture budgets.

SCF has long countenanced that if Scotland had moved to Area of Natural Constraints (ANC) terms, like other mainland European countries, we would not be in this position of waiting on tenterhooks. The importance of LFASS cannot be underestimated in underpinning the survival of crofting.

Between the threat of Brexit, LFASS reduction, lamb and sheep predation by sea eagles, geese eating crops and spoiling the machair, crows and ravens pecking out lambs' eyes and the wet, misty, damp, grey weather causing hill gathering and grass cutting problems, silage-making, polytunnel and crop-growing issues, it's remarkable that crofting not only survives but is a much sought-after way-of-life. It is not an easy option but when it goes well it can be immensely rewarding.

One piece of positive news is the announcement from SNH that the sale of goose meat is being allowed again in the Western Isles and Orkney. It is vital that this ruling is made permanent to ensure that businesses have the necessary continuity of supply.

SCF held positive talks with the Crofting Commission on the potential introduction of guidelines on grazings committees' liabilities. Grazings committees and sheep stock clubs should check whether they have adequate insurance cover. At the very least, public liability insurance is required; and more if there are sheds and fencing or indeed any planted woodland.

Following the ban by SEPA of burning agricultural plastic waste, SCF raised the matter at the Cross Party Group on Crofting. It is sensible that plastic is not burnt due to the dangerous chemical pollutants it releases. However, for such a policy to be successful burning cannot just be banned. Practical, green and cost-effective disposal alternatives need to be available. The Scottish Government states it is a world leader in its climate change timetable. Highly admirable, but when there is nothing in place to facilitate agriculture plastic waste uplift in remote and rural crofting areas, all the trumpeting about climate change leadership is naught but a hollow fanfare.

Agricultural units near population centres do have their plastic waste collected by a commercial firm. However collection from the remote areas of the Highlands and Islands is not commercially viable. So we are left with a problem of what to do with croft waste – plastic feedbags, silage wrap and lick buckets – if they cannot be burnt. Bury it, throw it in the sea, leave it littering the land, build a shed to store it in, take it to the tip for landfill and get charged commercial rates, or continue to burn?

Obviously, SCF does not condone any of these options. But it does highlight the significant lack of thought and care prior to announcing the burning ban. Crofters cannot solve the problem of recycling plastic agricultural waste. It is a prime example of where a joined-up government approach does not exist.

On the sustainable wrapping theme, SCF is looking into how to wrap *The Crofter* magazine sustainably and securely. Potato starch is used to make magazine covers which are totally compostable in home compost bins. If the cost is also sustainable, ie affordable, we can make the switch when current stocks are used up.

As you see, SCF continues to raise issues and fight on behalf of its highly valued membership. Until the next issue, wishing you a dry (but not too dry, we need some rain for the grass) summer and a good price for your animals at the forthcoming sales.

## Land for new croft entrants

*...Continued from page 1*

crofts, half of which should be woodland crofts. This is only a tiny proportion of Scotland's rural land. If we use 5ha as an average croft size, 5,000 new bare-land crofts would only account for 0.5% of Scotland's agricultural land and 5,000 woodland crofts would only account for 1.7% of Scotland's forest. And we get 10,000 more crofting families on the land.

The Scottish Farm Land Trust recently carried out a survey asking if people are interested in starting to farm. They had 1,286 positive responses, 73% of these wanting less than 20ha. A fear of insecurity of tenure was cited by 56% of respondents as a barrier to entering farming. You can see the dots joining up – the creation of new crofts is the answer.

Our feature on woodland crofts starts on page 6.



# Sea eagles move up the political agenda

...Continued from page 1

successfully breeding in Mull in 1983. Two further phases of reintroduction took place in Wester Ross from 1993-98 and in Fife from 2007-2012. There are now well over 100 pairs with the potential to breed and numbers are therefore predicted to rise radically.

Conservationists are happy to see an increase in sea eagle numbers and the further expansion of their range, but as their food source is shared ever more thinly this is likely to result in more

predation on crofters' flocks across the Highlands and Islands.

While we acknowledge the readiness of SNH to engage with crofting interests, we still have a long way to go before a mutually acceptable balance can be found between crofters managing sheep on extensive hill grazings and the conservation of sea eagles. We have had too many cases already of crofters having to abandon their use of valuable hill grazing, increasing pressure on their scarce inbye and leading to greatly increased feed bills. Yet the crofting method of extensive, low-input sheep husbandry is at the heart of the high-

nature-value farming model which is so beneficial for both upland biodiversity and reducing the carbon footprint of sheep farming in Scotland.

We are worried that the current level of support for crofters affected by eagle predation will not be sufficiently expanded to keep pace with an increase in the problem. We believe that more imaginative and far-reaching measures will need to be funded by government over the next five to ten years if crofters and farmers are going to receive the kind of effective help that will enable them to properly cope with the impacts of sea eagle predation.

## Sea eagles and empathy

John Randall comments

**HAVE BEEN** a crofter in Lewis and a member of SCF for fifteen years.

I have considerable empathy for crofting and the need to sustain its future in fragile or remote areas facing rural depopulation. However, I was disappointed at the tone adopted in the front-page story and inside article *A striking lack of empathy* in the April issue of *The Crofter* concerning predation by sea eagles. While I understand the feelings of frustration which gave rise to the articles, it is important to be realistic about what policy measures may be feasible to deal with the problems. I doubt whether a strategy of seeking confrontation with environmental bodies will be productive or is in the best long-term interests of crofting.

Apart from the opportunity to let off steam afforded to those who have experienced problems or have little empathy towards sea eagles, it is unclear what purpose has been served by these articles. They are most unlikely to have any impact on ministers or civil servants, let alone the environmental bodies whose goodwill is questioned. This is because the SCF online survey underlying the findings seems not to have been designed to produce representative results. Responses to the survey were a tiny fraction of the crofter population (some 250 out of over 15,000) and almost certainly highly skewed towards those who wished to register complaints, apparently without any attempt at verification. Some comments strain credulity – for example, the claim that it is not unusual for a crofter

to lose 40-50 hogs to sea eagle predation. The use of emotive and confrontational language is no substitute for objective scientific analysis.

As correctly emphasised in previous SCF policy statements, the case for government financial support for crofting depends on the public benefits which crofting delivers. These include the contribution made to achieving government biodiversity targets. The status of sea eagles in Scotland is an important element of this and enjoys considerable public support. It is unrealistic to believe that the level of protection given to what is still a relatively rare species will change in the foreseeable future.

Retaining viable communities in remote rural areas is another government objective which justifies

support for crofting. However, it should be recognised that the rural economy is not only based on crofting. Sea eagles draw many visitors to areas such as Lewis, bringing important economic benefits. There is a problem in that the crofters who suffer damage from sea eagles may not be adequately rewarded for the biodiversity benefits they are helping to deliver and may not themselves benefit from the economic boost which wildlife tourists bring to their areas.

There is certainly scope for discussion on how best to address the question of how costs and benefits are distributed but this should not be at the expense of polarising the debate or undermining the strong partnership which should exist between crofting and environmental policy.

Brendan O'Hanrahan, one of SCF's two vice-chairs, responds

**WRITE** in response to John Randall's considered but critical letter above.

While I understand and appreciate the politically realistic approach recommended by Mr Randall – and indeed would argue that we in SCF are actually pursuing such a path on the subject – I would also remind him that we are first and foremost a union, which must regard its primary and overriding mission as representing our crofter members.

We very much recognise the struggle to find balance between reconciling crofters' needs and the requirement to demonstrate value to the taxpayers of Scotland – but the more this area is investigated, the more apparent it becomes that crofters do, in fact, manage their land in a way which delivers a remarkably high proportion of the natural capital in nature conservation and environmental terms in Scotland. A look at a map of the High Nature Value Farming areas in Scotland looks remarkably similar to



© Alamy

a map of the crofting counties – and that's not a coincidence.

It's important to stress that, despite the impression given in Mr Randall's letter, SCF is very closely engaged with other stakeholders in trying to responsibly address the sea eagle issue, as we explain in this issue. We strongly believe that solutions need to be found in consensus with all key interests.

Notice also that there are no SCF

representatives calling publicly for a cull of sea eagles – we accept that these birds are here to stay and, as Mr Randall rightly points out, do bring some benefits to at least some crofters involved in the tourist industry.

To his questioning the credibility of the claim that 40-50 hogs have been lost: on looking at that again, I realise that the claims of such predation actually came from a farmer, and the 'not at all unusual' as applied to crofters' loss reports would refer to aggregate lamb losses. I apologise for a misleading presentation of those predation statistics.

But the main point remains.

A small, but not insignificant, number of crofters from Lochaber to Skye to the Western Isles are experiencing levels of losses which they are really struggling with – and which are simply not sufficiently compensated for, even if the Sea Eagle Management Scheme is not strictly a compensation scheme.

I hope Mr Randall will accept that our approach to this difficult issue is both nuanced and, in fact, realistic.

## Self Build Loan Fund

*Have you been unable to obtain self build finance?*



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## Mapping service

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# New crofting law book launched

A NEW BOOK on crofting law was launched recently at a reception held in the main law library of the Royal Faculty of Procurators in Glasgow.

*A Practical Guide to Crofting Law* has been written by crofting law expert Brian Inkster.

The book is an introduction to crofting law for those with an interest in it or who may touch upon it, whether lawyers, law students, land agents, crofters, landlords or anyone else with an interest in crofting law.

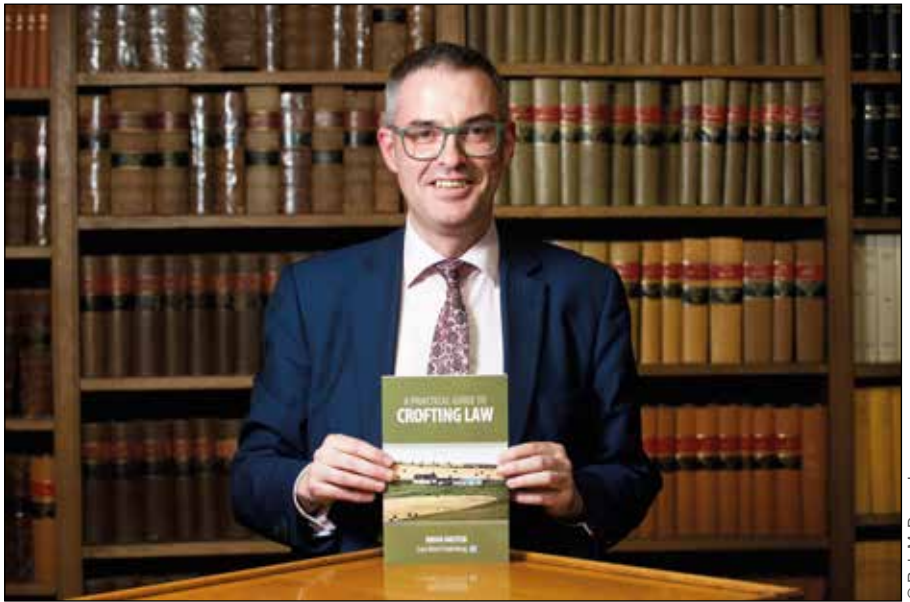
Three reasons why you should read *A Practical Guide to Crofting Law*:

- Learn why it might be a good idea to purchase your croft and the issues to navigate when doing so.
- Find out when you have to register your croft in the Crofting Register and how and when challenges to that registration can be made via the Scottish Land Court.
- Become aware of the specific succession issues that apply to crofts so you can make a will that won't leave problems for your successors.

Welcoming the publication of the book, Patrick Krause said: "This is a book that has been awaited since crofting law was formed, a book that lays out what the notoriously difficult-to-navigate sea of legislation is about. The ambition of writing a practical guide to crofting law has been achieved by Scotland's leading practising crofting lawyer.

"Brian has written this book as a travel writer would introduce us to exotic parts – setting the scene with the history and background, the introduction of the inhabitants and roles they play; the unique culture of crofting and the many unsuspected twists. It gives all the essential information needed to sail that sea of legislation and to safely visit the many crofting islands therein. It will be essential reading for crofting students and for all who want to navigate crofting law."

*The book can be ordered online with a special discount for a limited time via [www.croftinglawbook.com](http://www.croftinglawbook.com) ISBN 978-1-912687-39-8*

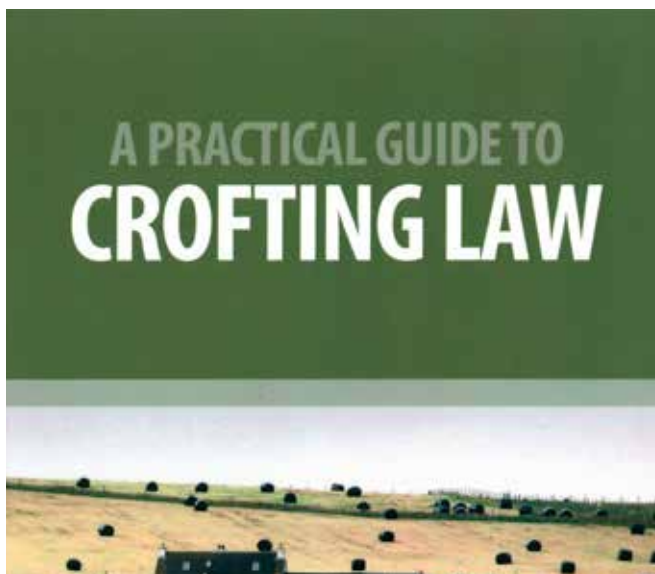


*A Practical Guide to Crofting Law* - Brian Inkster launches the book at the Royal Faculty of Procurators in Glasgow



Guests at the book launch at the Royal Faculty of Procurators in Glasgow

## SCF caseworker John Bannister reviews the book



THIS NEW BOOK is most welcome and comes with endorsement from numerous legal and lay adherents.

The complexity of crofting law is not lost on those of us who have had to deal with it on a day-to-day basis. Somewhat different to other law books published recently, it will be of immense benefit to grazings committees and crofters who may lack detailed knowledge of the subject, to dip into for primary knowledge or reassurance on earlier experiences.

All too often SCF hears of instances where lay crofting legal opinion is based on little more than flawed information passed down from a misinformed earlier generation of wannabe lawyers. I'm sure this book will overcome much of this in future.

Designed more for the lay person, without much of the detailed case law

and footnote references favoured in lawyers' textbooks, instead it gives straightforward, concise information on themed crofting topics.

This handy, understandable book contains the nuts and bolts of crofting law for the serious crofter and grazings clerk. Whilst we all relish the prospect of a new, revised Crofting Act, that still seems some way off. In the meantime, this wee book gives us the basis of knowledge in a complicated subject.

This is not a substitute for the SCF's free legal advice helpline, available for members only from Brian Inkster's own practice (01599 230 300). SCF members can obtain practical information via the SCF casework panel, along with gateway information to other organisations on crofting topics. Phone SCF HQ on 01599 530 005 or email [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org).

## WOODLAND CROFTS

# Where are we now with woodland crofts?

*Jamie McIntyre writes on behalf of the Woodland Crofts Partnership (WCP), which comprises SCF, the Community Woodlands Association, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland.*

**I**N SOME respects, creation of woodland crofts has been a slow burn, but then so too has the creation of new crofts more generally. We believe around half of all new crofts created since the 2007 Act have been woodland crofts, so they are definitely a key opportunity. In particular, woodland crofts make up the majority of new crofts created by community landowners, which has been a main focus for WCP support in the past.

Recognising the other pressures on community landowners and the urgent need to get more woodland crofts on the ground, we are extending our outlook to encourage other landowners to create them too and have had a particularly positive response from NGOs. More broadly, as well as offering targeted support for croft creation, we continue to promote the woodland crofts model in both crofting and forestry, raise



Croft house on a newly created woodland croft at Leckmelm, near Ullapool

awareness and emphasise the need for a joined-up approach across government and public agencies.

One example was highlighting the difficulty some woodland crofters have in terms of eligibility for CAGS. This issue has now been recognised, not least in the *Support for Crofting* report prepared by Gwyn Jones for the Crofting Commission; and we are pleased to report that Scottish Government has committed to addressing this when new support arrangements

are introduced post-Brexit.

This engagement with Scottish Government and others has led to the WCP being invited to join the Crofting Stakeholder Forum, allowing us to raise and discuss such issues more directly than in the past, which has been a very positive development.

Funding is always a challenge and we are particularly grateful to Woodland Trust Scotland who joined the WCP in 2014 and has provided some financial support to

it. This relationship arose through the close co-operation between the WCP and the Croft Woodlands Project, about which you can read elsewhere in this issue.

We are now hopeful of gaining some core funding for the next couple of years which will secure our work, but also allow us to explore a move to a more self-funding model. We see opportunities for the WCP in both providing a woodland crofts creation service, on a fee basis; and potentially also creating woodland crofts directly as part of the wider land reform agenda.

So what of future priorities? New woodland crofts are desperately needed. Recorded demand outstrips supply by around 10 to 1, based on the numbers (over 200) currently on our register of interest. Such new crofts can also play their part in the developing repopulation and renewal agenda – and of course offer a real opportunity for low-carbon living, an increasingly important selling point, as people mobilise to tackle the climate emergency.

Keep in touch with developments via our website [www.woodlandcrofts.org](http://www.woodlandcrofts.org) and our twitter feed @woodlandcrofts.

## Woodland creation on your croft

*Douglas Priest of SAC Consulting outlines the differences between woodland creation on a croft scale and larger-scale commercial planting, referred to in a following article by George Ross.*

**W**OODLAND creation is a great way to diversify and, done correctly, this can be a great addition to your croft. It's important to consider the reasons for planting on your croft:

- shelter for livestock
- shelter/screening for housing
- making use of less productive ground
- biosecurity by reducing nose-to-nose contact
- bank stabilisation along watercourses
- income from timber

Often in crofting areas it can make more sense to plant a native broadleaf woodland (consisting of species such as downy birch, alder, rowan, willows and, on better ground, oak and cherry) as opposed to commercial conifer



Expansion of existing native woodland by planting

(spruces, larches and pines) as the scale at which planting occurs favours the former.

Commercial forestry can bring significant income from timber. However it requires suitable access and management in order to maximise return. This is not always possible with croft woodlands due to generally smaller areas being planted. An exception to this would be planting significant areas

(10ha+) on common grazings.

Although the income from timber upon clearfell is attractive, it is worth considering that there is a restocking obligation which can absorb much of this profit from felling smaller areas of conifers; and much of the shelter will be lost. It is possible to manage conifer woodland using a continuous cover system. However this requires more management and is more

effective at a larger scale.

A native broadleaf woodland allows for much of the same benefits mentioned above. With a reduction in income from timber, it is most likely that any timber removed would be firewood, with the possibility of higher-value products depending on site suitability for more demanding species combined with increased management.

The benefits above still stand and there would be no obligation to restock the site, as traditionally native broadleaf woodlands are not managed using the rotation system as with conifers. Over time a more biodiverse woodland with a diverse age and species mix would be formed.

The Forestry Grant Scheme has an option which is targeted at small-scale native broadleaf woodland creation which covers the North and Western Isles along with all of the crofting counties. This option is capped at three hectares but boasts the highest payment per hectare of any of the options under FGS.



## WOODLAND CROFTS

## Croft woodland conference



John Risby addressing the conference

*Viv Halcrow from the Woodland Trust outlines the recent very successful event in Boat of Garten.*

**T**HE CROFT WOODLAND Project has been enabling crofters to establish their own woodlands since 2015.

People from all over the Highlands and Islands gathered at a conference to celebrate this success and look to the future. Forty two per cent of attendees were crofters, with another 18% other landowners/managers and 13% aspiring crofters.

Woodland Trust CEO Beccy Speight opened the conference, followed by Bill Ritchie and Calum MacDonald. Bill has always been at the forefront of Assynt crofters' fight for the land and its regeneration, for people and the environment. While an MP in opposition, and with Scottish Crofters Union (now SCF) advocacy, Calum was responsible for getting the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act through parliament, ensuring crofters have the right to plant and gain benefit from trees on their land.

Andrew Barbour talked about the real, tangible benefits of trees for livestock on his upland Perthshire holding. A variety of workshops and site visits gave everyone a chance to learn more and get out among some young, growing trees.

Cogle Wood, an eleven-hectare woodland croft in the Bilbster Forest in Caithness, is worked by Ros and Rab Nash. They have developed a woodfuel business called Watten Firewood and wrestled through the planning process for a dwelling appropriate to the site. The woodfuel business provides seventy per cent of their income, uses small-scale equipment and supplies the local

"There was an excellent atmosphere at the conference, which was a fantastic opportunity for woodland crofters and tree planters of all ages to get together and talk about the many issues we have in common, including housing, species selection, the deer problem or even how to become a woodland crofter. Meet-the-crofter workshops and site visits made the conference feel both accessible and informal. I'm pleased that Eleanor Garty at the Woodland Trust persuaded us to travel down to Boat of Garten for it.

"One of the highlights was the launch of the third edition of the Croft Woodlands Project's Highlands and Islands Woodland Handbook, which is proving an absolutely invaluable resource for anyone keen to deepen their understanding of how trees can benefit crofters, helping more traditional crofters diversify their businesses and even mitigating the effects of severe weather and the current climate emergency."

Ros Nash

community. They are exploring various new options including growing higher-value hardwoods and developing camping huts.

Baleveolan Croft on the Isle of Lismore has a multi-faceted approach to croft management. New areas of native woodland are being planted and a small orchard. Hens roam freely in the plantation, benefitting the trees and poultry – a useful tip for any crofter. The happy juxtaposition of tourism with everything else going on at Baleveolan was encouraging for those hoping to welcome visitors to their crofts too.

Bernard Planterose's session on woodland crofts and housing inspired Stephen Reeves to just get building with the materials available. Stephen has a lot of spruce on his croft. Compared to other timber it did not rate very highly, so he had been nervous about using it. Taking Bernard's point that the best materials are often what you have available to you, Stephen got stuck in to building a long-planned composting toilet with spruce logs and spruce boards milled using an



Lynbreck Croft visit



Fergus Ewing addressing the conference

naturally, without fencing, over large areas, since the mid-20th century. Duncan challenged us by pointing out that it is our choice to continue with current land management systems. We could change things radically if we really wanted to, improving shelter, soil fertility and overall productivity through planting trees.

*For more information about the Croft Woodland Project, please contact:*

**Eleanor Garty**  
[eleanorgarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:eleanorgarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk)  
 0343 770 5818, 07436 627176

**Viv Halcrow (Western Isles)**  
[vivhalcrow@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:vivhalcrow@woodlandtrust.org.uk)  
 0343 770 5856, 07876 217034

**Iona Hyde (Argyll)**  
[ionahyde@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:ionahyde@woodlandtrust.org.uk)  
 0343 770 5460, 07840 699427

**Fergus McGlade (Highland)**  
[fergusmcglade@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:fergusmcglade@woodlandtrust.org.uk)  
 0343 2484040, 07787 413790

*With thanks to contributors Annie Griffiths, David Shepherd, Iona and Callum Sutherland and Stephen Reeves.*

Alaskan mill.

The second day started with an address by Fergus Ewing, cabinet secretary for rural economy. The project team – from Highland, Argyll and the Western Isles – then described subjects which are particular to their area of work: training, soil fertility and methods to get trees established in challenging conditions, backed up by John Risby, Scottish Forestry conservator for the Highlands and Islands. John said, "I think the Croft Woodland Project is the most important partnership project that we are involved in in the Highlands and Islands."

The launch of the *Highlands and Islands Woodland Handbook* followed. This is covered in detail on page 8. The handbook can be purchased from the SCF website's publications page, where there is also a link to a free PDF download.

Duncan Halley, a Dundonian living in Norway and working with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, topped off the conference with an inspiring presentation about southwest Norway. Tree regeneration has happened there

## WOODLAND CROFTS



Landscape in transition: planted native trees forming a matrix of bog, woodland, scrub and heath (Coigach)



Two metre tall native grey willow re-growth one year after coppicing.

# The Highlands and Islands Woodlands Handbook

*Commissioned by the Croft Woodlands Project and launched at the conference, author Bernard Planterose introduces the content and gives a personal view of what he hopes the handbook might help achieve.*

**I**N ITS nineteen case studies, the *Highlands and Islands Woodlands Handbook* celebrates around forty years of woodland establishment and restoration in the crofting counties, including Orkney and Shetland.

These cover a wide diversity of endeavours – ranging from single crofts to community-owned, land-based projects, eg Isle Martin Trust, to major partnerships of owners, agencies and community groups, eg Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape.

The common thread is woodland management for multiple benefits including shelter for stock and horticulture, improved biodiversity, amenity and recreation, natural drainage and fertilisation, fisheries and riparian management. No matter what the primary motivation, managing existing woodlands well – and establishing new ones – makes important contributions to carbon sequestration, which is increasingly seen as a further benefit of all woodland projects.

Whilst these benefits have been recognised by

many crofters and land managers for some time, there is scope in our region for much more work at a variety of scales which, added together, could gradually create a new woodland-based economy and landscape to the benefit of all inhabitants – human, domestic and wild. The handbook puts flesh on the vision of a woodland mosaic with close integration of sheep, cattle and productive woodlands which has been forwarded recently by a number of institutions and government agencies.

There are whole areas of silviculture and small-scale land management yet to be explored in our area. The handbook accordingly devotes sections specifically to coppice, to riparian restoration, to agro-forestry and to growing high-value timber crops. To reinforce the notion that we can grow timber economically, even at relatively small scales, if of appropriate species, there is a section covering processing, markets and uses of home-grown timber.

The large subject of agroforestry is shown to encompass many combinations of agricultural, horticultural and silvicultural activity. Woodlands and shelterbelts enhance stock management in many ways by increasing nutrient supplies as well as raising temperatures locally and providing

natural drainage. Indeed they can be used to recover grazings lost to rushes by massively reducing water-logging and contributing nitrogen and other elements through leaf litter.

A section on woodland ecology is offered to help us up our game in fighting for better-tailored and more flexible support for the sorts of innovative and small-scale management described in the handbook. Understanding nutrient cycling, ongoing acidification of rainfall, soils and freshwater bodies is all necessary if we are to grow more food, restore the health of land and our economy while providing good and diverse employment.

What better way to end the handbook than with an inspiring epilogue by Duncan Halley, a Scottish ecologist who has worked in Norway for many years. He tells the story of the re-forestation of south west Norway from near treelessness 100 years ago to today's thriving, mixed farming, woodland and hunting economy.

It's a superb model for us to aspire to and one with many relevant lessons that we should be open to hear.

The handbook can be purchased from the SCF website's publications page, where there is also a link to a free PDF download.

## SCF has been an invaluable source of support



Nat's Croft on Great Bernera

*SCF member Nat Higginbottom gives a new crofter's perspective*

**A**PPROACHING the third stage of one's life (and a midlife crisis), one can only dream of landing firmly on both feet in the woods. Woods you'll have planted and nurtured with generous and kind help from the new community that you find yourself in.

I thought I would struggle to find purpose after doing the same career for over 25 years, but as I stood amongst a diverse and passionate bunch of new peers, I realised I had come home. How does a 47-year-old TV editor suddenly have this moment of epiphany? My job had been unfulfilling for a long time and I missed having a connection



## WOODLAND CROFTS

# They say you can't grow trees in Shetland

*But Andrew Hall shows you can, and it's great for croft diversification, while providing much appreciated shelter for his kye and sheep.*

**B**URRAVOE CROFT is in Brae in the north mainland of Shetland. It's a traditional 35ha croft, with Shetland and Highland kye, Shetland sheep, a couple of pigs and numerous hens. But what is not so traditional is the two hectares of woodland and two glamping cabins.

The croft was in a run-down state when we bought it from the family. It took a few years to renovate the croft house and outbuildings, with our first Shetland kye and sheep reintroduced to the croft during 2005.

2005 was also a significant year on the tree-planting front. A Scottish Forestry grant allowed us to plant over 3,000 trees/bushes in 1.23ha of ground next to the croft house, with space left in the centre of the woodland for some kind of glamping cabins. The area had previously been

used for silage but there were numerous wet/boggy areas; and like most places in Shetland the site is very exposed to salt-laden wind.

We also planted hundreds of trees and bushes in our large garden next to our house, a 90 metre by 10 metre shelter belt in one of our in-bye fields; and a forestry grant enabled another 2,000+ trees in 0.81ha of in-bye land during 2017.

Another successful grant means we are currently in the process of fencing 0.91ha for a further 2,500 trees and bushes.

Planting so many trees and bushes is great for the environment and wildlife, with an amazing variety of birds visiting our croft. But in reality, this is was only possible due to the financial help received from Forestry Scotland. The grant covers new stock fencing, gates and the initial planting followed by an annual management grant for five years. If you carry out the work yourself it should result in a welcome but hard-earned surplus for the croft bank account.

All of our woodland has come on very well. I

believe the ultimate success is attributable to the planting of Alaskan willow and Alaskan poplar, which grow very well and provide much-needed shelter for the other species of trees and bushes to thrive. These Alaskan trees are classed as exotic, but trees classed as native for Shetland such as birch, rowan, hazel, and even willow really struggle with the extreme Shetland climate and nutritionally poor soil. I believe what is more important is that we plant trees most likely to survive! The establishment of woodland cover is more important than the precise species required due to some national classification.

During August 2013 we installed two glamping cabins supplied by Wigwam Holidays. The cabins are located in the 2005-planted woodland. They provide much-needed income all year round, with more than 80% of our guests local to Shetland. The success of the cabins is only possible because of the trees, allowing the croft business to be self-sufficient, without the need for support from our day jobs.



Usual comment – can't believe this is in Shetland



Glamping cabin sheltered by the trees

to the real outdoor life that I had growing up in South Africa.

Two years of research later, my wife and I decided to move to Scotland to become crofters. An offer went in on our croft in September 2018. We joined the SCF and, attending their access to crofting course, we were hooked for sure. It was a truly brilliant introduction to all that we would face. Since then I have read as many blogs and publications as I could find online, attended an SCF lambing course and the rather brilliant woodland conference.

We learnt about the difference between woodland crofts and croft woodlands, upland agroforestry, planting in difficult conditions – which we surely have on our Great Bernera croft – as well as meeting enthusiastic, energetic people with similar interests and challenges. My absolute highlight, the moment I knew trees

were for me, was Duncan Halley from Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, highlighting the differences in land use, and specifically forestry, in Norway and Scotland. I am hoping to travel to Norway to see how we might improve outcomes for both livestock and trees on our land.

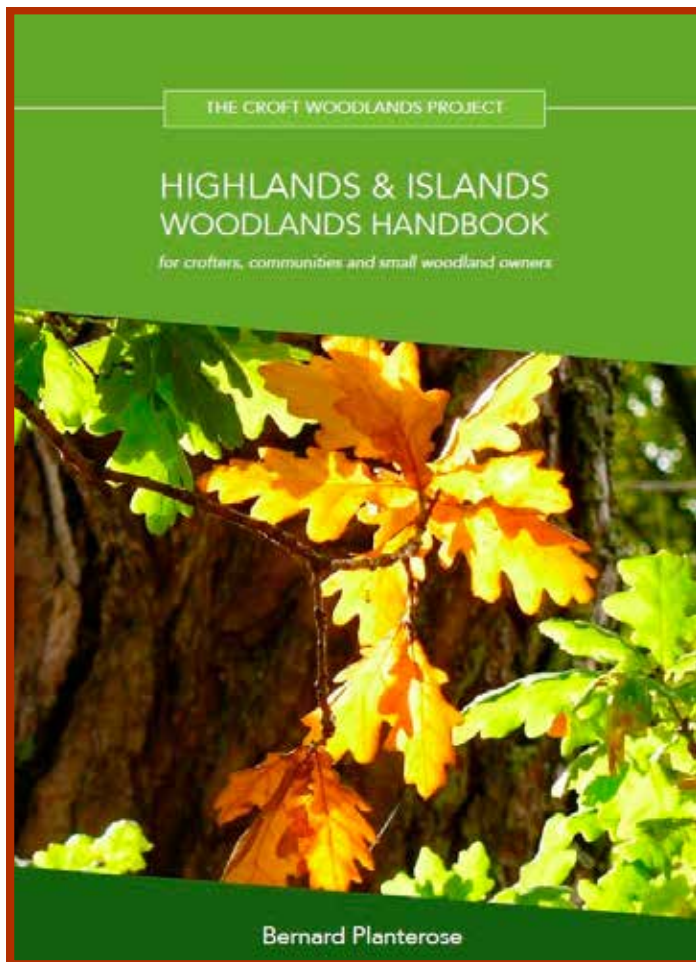
The visit to see Lynbreck Croft was inspirational too. Collaborative crofting with sustainability at its heart is our ethos and it was great to meet so many others on the same path.

As a relative novice, it will be hard; but we are realising that we have no reason to fear and only new friends to make. If we don't know something, there are answers, support and commiserations on offer and SCF has been an invaluable source of support. As our back-of-an-envelope dreams are being realised, it has become obvious that my wife and I are on complementary tracks. I will do trees and bees and she's planning to become

a legendary shepherd.

We would love to hear from you, so follow us and the reality of our crofting life through our blog [www.sunsetsdontwait.com](http://www.sunsetsdontwait.com).





**The Highlands and Islands Woodlands Handbook**, published by the Croft Woodlands Project, is a comprehensive guide to establishing, managing and utilising woodland in the varied and often challenging conditions of the crofting counties. Including case studies from crofters across the region, the advice and guidance is based on decades of hands-on experience.

Copies can be ordered from the SCF website [www.crofting.org/publications/66](http://www.crofting.org/publications/66) or from the SCF head office 01599 530005, [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org). Members of SCF or Woodland Trust: £10.00 + £5 postage, non-members: £15.00 + £5 postage

A free, downloadable pdf is available at [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/)



## Trees: improving the land and our environment

**R**ECOGNITION of the contribution that woodlands make to our environment has increased recently, prompted by awareness of our changing climate and the negative impacts of human activities.

Woodlands provide renewable raw materials, improve soil, river and air quality, while sheltering stock and enhancing our landscapes and habitats. Trees' capacity to lock up carbon is an important way to offset greenhouse gas emissions too, with the ability of our environment to sequester carbon expected to peak around 2030 – at a time when Scottish timber production will be declining due to the lack of commercial planting over the last thirty years.

Woodlands' potential has been recognised by the Scottish Government, which has announced a target for Scotland to become carbon neutral by 2040. The committee on climate change says 20% of agricultural land should be used for tree planting, and that 200,000 miles of hedgerows should be grown, to help offset greenhouse gas emissions.

This programme is underpinned by tree planting incentives. Scottish Woodlands is at the forefront, planting over 12 million trees in 2019 alone. We have managers throughout Scotland who can assist crofters, farmers and landowners to increase the area of woodlands.

Contact us at [www.scottishwoodlands.co.uk](http://www.scottishwoodlands.co.uk) or 01997 420040 for a cost-effective appraisal.



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## WOODLAND CROFTS

## An oasis of calm surrounded by a green protective wall

David Mackay of the Hebridean Ark Tree Project describes his croft woodlands.

**I**T HAS BEEN thirty years since I planted my first woodland and it was challenging at first, to say the least.

My croft is on a hill overlooking the Atlantic ocean, whose constant fury tries its very best to uproot and disrupt my woodland aspirations. What sandblasting by salt-laden winds very often exceeding 80mph doesn't achieve, constant raids by rogue sheep and rabbits finish the destruction.

That was many years ago and my croft house now is an oasis of calm surrounded by a green protective wall of mixed native woodland, punctuated by the odd North American Sitka spruce and South American monkey puzzle tree. It has an international flavour due to the abundance of leathery-leaved New Zealand and South American shrubs that were planted to shelter the young native saplings in their first few years.

My own interest in trees was due to the love of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things instilled in me by my family who worked the land sustainably over the generations; and an awareness as a schoolchild holding a perfectly preserved, large branch of hazel that surfaced whilst cutting peat for fuel – a trace of a lost Hebridean woodland that thrived on the islands six thousand years ago.

It has been so encouraging to witness the resurgence of interest in woodland creation throughout the Hebridean islands. Thanks to the excellent partnership between Point and Sandwick Trust and the Woodland Trust alongside the Forestry Commission (Scottish Forestry), continued financial support for croft woodlands into the future is a lasting legacy and growing bio-diversity on the islands.

As crofting faces ever-increasing challenges in the future, its tenacity and resilience ensures that projects like crofting forestry will make a far-reaching difference to our quality of life and that of our livestock. Our rich diversity of bird life will be able to deal with our changing climate.

At Horshader Community Development in Shawbost, the Hebridean Ark Tree Project is involved in locating what is left of the ancient aspen forests that cling on to inaccessible cliffs and small islands on exposed lochs and coasts. Free from grazing pressure and moorburns, they survive for centuries. We record these sites and extract material to propagate and grow saplings for planting in future crofting woodlands, ensuring that rare Hebridean tree numbers will grow and compliment the trees coming over from the excellent mainland nurseries, whose trees have also survived the Atlantic gales in my own woodland.

In addition to aspen, we grow rowan, hazel, birch and alder in our nursery and it is very rewarding to know that in planting and growing these trees we all do our bit in combating climate change; and that Hebridean woodlands will secure a place once again as an important species-rich environment – not a distant memory in the depths of the peat.

Horshader has nine polycrubs that look like polytunnels from a distance, but are built from recycled fish farm tubing and tough polycarbonate



Distant memory of trees



Ark tunnel where trees are being grown for croft woodlands

sheeting and can withstand gales in excess of 100mph. They are becoming increasingly popular on the Hebrides and the company Nortenergy is based in Shetland.

Seven of our tunnels are used for community allotments, where folk of all ages and gardening experience can grow plants together, alongside growing on their croft. It helps with social isolation

as folk meet and share the space.

Another tunnel is used for teaching local schoolchildren organic gardening and how easy it is to grow nourishing veg and fruit locally from seed to plate without a heavy carbon footprint. So much food is transported across the Minch by ferry, but I remember a day we grew everything on the croft.

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## WOODLAND CROFTS

## Croitean coille



© Duncan Halley

View of Hidra Island from Kleppe. Most of the woodland in this area has regenerated naturally in the last half century and is managed for multiple benefits, including venison, shelter, grazing and wood fuel. Grass patches produce silage to feed stock in the winter.

**T**HA SINN a' cluinntinn mu chroitean coille airson bliadhna no dhà a-nis gun mòran fiosrachaidh air dè th' annta.

Gabhaidh an cruthachadh bho choilltean a th' air an ceannach le buidheann coimhearsnachd, mar eisimpleir. Ge bith ciamar a thèid an cruthachadh, 's fhiach e smaintinn air dè na buannachdan a bhiodh annta. Dh'fhaodamaid sùil a thoirt air Nirribhidh far a bheil e cumanta beagan coille a bhith an lùib tuathanais no croite. Cha chuir na Nirribhidh craobhan air an talamh àitich, tha sin ro phrìseil dhaibh ach bidh craobhan a' fàs gu nàdarra air na leathaidean os a chionn.

'S e fiodh a tha sa mhòr-chuid de thogalaichean ann an Nirribhidh, gu h-àraid taobh a-mach nam bailtean mòra, agus 's e am prìomh adhbhar airson sin gun robh e ri làimh. Gu h-eachdraidheil, bhiodh muileann-sàbhaidh ga iomain le neart an uisge air iomadach tuathanas beag, agus bho thàinig cumhachd an dealain, chaidh muilnean a shuidheachadh ann an àiteannan far nach eil allt no sruthan. Ma tha muileann-sàbhaidh aig croit, agus craobhan air a cùlaibh, tha cothrom ann fiodh a gheàrradh agus a dheasachadh airson togalaichean. Agus ma bhios an uidheam

agus am fiodh aig croitear bidh cothroman eile a' fosgladh airson teachd a-steach.

Leugh mi o chionn ghoirid mu thuathanach ann an Valdres, Nirribhidh aig a bheil fearann 610m os cionn ìre na mara. Tha 20 mart Charolais agus 40 caora aige. Bidh na laoi agus na h-uain gan cumail agus gam biadh gu cudrom spadaidh 's iad uile a-staigh tron gheamhradh. Geàrraidh an tuathanach seo 30ha feur dà thuras sa bhliadhna don gheamhrachadh fhad 's a bhios na beothaichean a-mach air talamh coitcheann àrd sna beanntannan. Thig an dàrna leth den teachd a-steach bhon fhearann bho 79ha coille ge-tà. Sin far a bheil am muileann-sàbhaidh gu feum. Leagaidh an tuathanach eadar 100 agus 200 meatair ciùbach den choille gach bliadhna agus sàbhaidh e fiodh an dà chuid dha fhèin a chleachdas e am measg eile airson bothain do luchd-turais, agus airson gnìomhachasan saorsainneachd sa sgìre. Mar sin bidh e a' cur gu mòr ri luach nan craobhan a leagas e.

Tha adhbhar eile ann cuideachd a bhith togail ann am fiodh, agus 's e sin nas lugha de chion air an àrainneachd, seach stàilinn no concreat, rud air a bheil daoine a' fàs mothachail a-nis.

Mar sin, dh'fhaodamaid a bhith an dùil gum bi buannachd sna croitean coille ann an Alba cuideachd.

To get an idea of the possibilities with woodland crofts, it's worth looking to Norway, where farms and smallholdings often have some forest on the poorer ground. They frequently also have a sawmill and so are able to add value to the timber by cutting it into planks for building.

I read recently about a farm in Valdres, Norway which is 610 meters above sea level. The farm gets half its income by feeding the progeny of 20 Charolais cows and 40 sheep to slaughter weight, and the other half by felling 100-200 cubic metres of timber per year which is sawn in their own sawmill and either sold to local joinery businesses or used to build huts for holiday lets.

Wood is now seen to be the most environmentally-friendly building material, especially if harvested locally, so there should be opportunities for woodland crofts in Scotland too.

*le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain*

# Changes in law on tree felling

*New legislation relating on how felling is controlled in Scotland came into effect on 1st April 2019.*

**T**HE FORESTRY and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 and associated regulations made some changes to the control of felling. In addition, Forestry Commission Scotland has become Scottish Forestry and Forest Enterprise Scotland has become Forestry and Land Scotland.

From 1st April, anyone wishing to fell trees in Scotland requires a felling permission from Scottish Forestry, unless an exemption applies, or another form of felling approval such as a felling licence (including a long-term forest plan) has been issued. A permission to fell trees issued under the new regulatory regime will be called a felling permission rather than a felling licence.

To ensure continuity, changes have been limited to those where the new act requires them, or where opportunities have been taken to make improvements. Changes have been made to the situations or types of felling (exemptions) for which permission is not required. The full list of the exemptions is available on the Scottish Forestry website. The key changes are:

Clearance of windblow requires a felling permission (unless the trees are covered by another exemption).

Felling a nuisance tree requires a felling permission.

Felling trees which are up to 10cm in diameter at a point 1.3m from the base of the tree are exempt and so do not require a felling permission.

Felling trees within a Caledonian pinewood of any size, or a small native woodland between 0.1ha and 0.5ha, are not covered by the volume

exemption (which allows the felling of up to five cubic metres per calendar quarter.)

Much of the felling permission application process remains unchanged from the previous process. An application for a felling permission can be submitted via a stand-alone application, a long-term forest plan or, where it is proposed to do thinning only, a management plan. The process surrounding the assessment and determination of an application closely reflects those under the

previous regime.

Felling which is carried out on trees not covered by an exemption, permission or other form of felling approval is an offence and if convicted a person can be liable of a fine of up to £5,000 per tree felled.

*More detailed information and guidance documents can be found on the Scottish Forestry website: [www.forestry.gov.scot](http://www.forestry.gov.scot) or from your local Scottish Forestry Conservancy office.*



Harvesting in an oak wood

© Ian Collier

## When you can't see the wood for the trees

**A**N SCF member recently got in touch with HQ to enquire whether we had heard from any other members experiencing difficulties in obtaining scavenging permits from Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS).

The member had applied for a scavenging permit/licence and was advised by his local FLS office that they were all taken. After further follow-up enquiries the member was then advised by his local FLS office that they were in fact moving away from issuing licences for safety and ecological reasons. These licences have been available for many years now and can be an essential source of heating on many crofts, providing a cost-effective means of accessing firewood.

The FLS website states that scavenging licences are available, "subject to agreement with the local forest region office and payment of a fee. Customers can have access to a site for collecting on-site harvesting residues. Hand tools only are permitted. The duration of a permit is three months."

The website seems to suggest local FLS offices are making decisions about issuing scavenging licences, with the potential for an inconsistent approach across areas. This appears to be case judging by members' experiences. Some members have no difficulty getting a licence, whilst others are being refused.

SCF chair Yvonne White wrote to the CEO of FLS seeking clarification on whether there had been a change in policy and a

general move away from issuing such licences. The reply from land management director Trefor Owen began with a reassurance that there had been no change of policy regarding scavenging licences.

The letter went on to say that FLS was reviewing policy on scavenging licences, with a view to improving the administration of the process including, amongst other things, pricing. He went on to state that the availability of scavenging licences is largely governed by the availability of suitable sites, which includes assessing "practical, environmental and safety concerns"; and not all locations are suitable.

It seems FLS is moving towards an online platform which will bypass the local office; and scavenging licences may become

less common. This issue was also raised by SCF at the last Cross Party Group on Crofting at Holyrood in June, where the chair Alasdair Allan MSP requested a letter from the group be sent to FLS asking them to state their position on current and future scavenging licences.

SCF is determined to get a clear position on this matter. We will keep you informed and should have more to report in the next issue of *The Crofter* or via the monthly e-newsletter.

*Meantime it would be very helpful to hear about members' experiences in order to get a picture of the situation across the crofting counties. Email [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org) or call the office on 01599 530005.*



# Perfect storm for upland waders

SCF member George Ross, a crofter in Sutherland, offers another perspective.

**T**HE SUMMER on any Highland hill farm or croft used to be characterised by the bubbling call of the curlew, the incessant pee-witting of lapwings and the drumming of snipe, now heard less each year.

Throughout the UK the number of breeding waders is in steep decline. Curlews have gone from common to virtually extinct in parts of Ireland, Wales and southern England in less than a generation of farmers. We still have good numbers in Scotland but things are changing fast. Lapwings have declined by 57% in Scotland since 1995 and curlews by 61%.

The bulk of the remaining birds are found in the less-favoured land in our uplands, now under great threat. With reduced subsidies, increased production costs and uncertain markets, many livestock farmers are considering a switch to forestry.

Is forestry worthy of the land which we and previous generations worked so hard to reclaim and improve? Does forestry support local rural communities? Once a unit is covered in trees, the grazing and waders' breeding grounds have gone – forever. Even a small block, which may not officially require a breeding bird survey, can be damaging as it may harbour crows and foxes, with increased predation pressure on livestock and surviving waders.

Are there alternatives to this loss of marginal land to forestry? Government and wildlife organisations should come up with a plan that allows people to continue working their land in the most remote, fragile areas, so that the next generation will remain on the land and enjoy the wildlife around them.

Research on the causes of wader decline found that under-grazing in the Welsh uplands poses more threat to curlew than over-grazing. New schemes should be developed, combining the findings of various studies with livestock-rearing methods that still provide an income for the crofter/farmer but also benefit wildlife, in particular waders.

Early findings from an Icelandic study show encouraging results that may be applicable to UK hill farming. Areas of open, damp semi-natural and/or reclaimed hill in upland areas, with vegetation similar to purple moor-mat grass, rushes and heather, located close to traditional fertile hay meadows, yield the most waders.

Off-duty incubating female golden plovers travel up to seven km to find fertile land to feed. So supporting crofters and farmers to optimise the pH with lime on reseeded land near wader breeding sites for grass production will have positive effects on wildlife too.

Current agri-environment schemes are too complex, rigid and competitive, deterring the smaller units usually needing most support. Due to natural constraints they have the very best biodiversity and most to lose under forestry. It is encouraging to read that lessons have been learned since the SRDP scheme, where critical qualification points were gained if at least two hectares of new forest were to be planted.

Wader sites need an open aspect (ie no trees) and prefer level land, mainly for spotting predators; and for chicks probing associated



Lapwing



Curlew

invertebrate-rich standing water edges. Although lapwing mostly need a short sward, curlews need some rushy, tussocky vegetation. This has to be respected in designing future agri-policy.

We need to embrace the character of our unique upland units, but it's hard without the support of government and the public. The meat-buying (and vegan) public needs to learn that it is mainly because of hill farmers and crofters that the uplands are so biodiversity rich. It's because of our land management decisions over the years that we have an abundance of internationally near-threatened species.

New schemes need to be inclusive, non-competitive and not just for those good at paperwork. There could be a simple tick-box exercise on the subsidy form against fields identified as suitable for ground-nesting birds and agreeing to say one LU/ha from mid-March to mid-June and not planting trees nearby.

Support at a similar level to forestry is needed

so that management decisions can be made for the right reasons, not just for (in some cases) an easy tax-free cash crop. It is also vital for the continuation of CAGS to encourage lime application and reseeds on hay meadows and patches of reclaimed hill, particularly on the edge of moorland.

With two closely-related European curlew species suspected to have become extinct recently, my fear is that the accumulation of these new wee forestry strips all over upland Scotland will be the final nail in the curlew coffin.

Some think more trees means more environmental benefits. They may not realise the impact of afforestation in the wrong place on our native wildlife and our hill farmers and crofters. Some sheep farmers worry that afforestation opens the door to re-wilding extremists.

Curlew and crofter survival is in our hands. Support crofters and they'll selflessly aid biodiversity.

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Siar faodaidh sibh a cleachdadh na seòlaidhean a leanas:*

**Address/Seòladh:**

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Stornoway  
Isle of Lewis  
HS1 2DR

**Telephone/Àireamh-Fòn:**

01851 700357

**E-Mail/Post-Dealain:**

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# New senior management at the Crofting Commission

**A**T THE END of March this year we said goodbye to our deputy CEO, Donna Smith, which left a big gap in the management team.

Donna had a wide range of responsibilities and in order to fill the gaps we recruited two new people, one to head the operations and workforce and one as head of digital and improvement.

Heather Mack took on the role of head of operations and workforce at the end of April. Prior to this she had worked at the Commission for seven years in the roles of geographical information systems (GIS) officer and GIS and registration manager.

Heather's new role gives her responsibility over the operational teams involved with the processing of applications within the Commission. This includes the regulatory team, the croft registration team and the corporate services team. Processing regulatory and croft registration applications is a major responsibility of the Commission and has evolved considerably following the introduction of the map-based crofting register which is held by Registers of Scotland.



Heather and Aaron

Most regulatory applications to the Commission require to be accompanied by a croft registration application; or if the croft is already registered, an additional application is required to update the crofting register. Croft registration has also brought up complexities such as differences between croft boundaries and ownership boundaries, which often need to be resolved prior to registration.

Overseeing the processing of applications is the main part of Heather's role and she will be focusing on working with colleagues to improve the operational processes within the organisation.

We welcomed a new face as head of digital and improvement. Aaron Ramsay joined the Commission in June as a transfer from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) in Inverness, where he worked for 13 years. Throughout his time at DWP Aaron covered a range of roles from debt management and universal credit to project work for the permanent secretary and roles taking him to the cabinet office, Whitehall and beyond. As the new head of digital and improvement within the Commission, Aaron's role will include working with the team to identify opportunities to improve our service offering and to facilitate the introduction of new business models such as taking our application processes online and offering more options for our customers who wish to self-serve.

So, if you happen to come across Heather or Aaron at meetings, please say hello.

## Women in crofting



Left to right: Dorothy Pritchard, Beth Rose, Maggie Chisholm, Robin Haig, Sandra Lindsay, Sarah MacRae, Cara Cameron, Ailsa Strange, Tina Hartley, Lucy Beattie, Helena MacDonald and Maria Scholten

**S**CF'S OPEN meeting for women in crofting, focusing on knowledge, education and development, was inspired by the Federation's involvement with the Scottish Government Women In Agriculture Taskforce.

The taskforce is chaired by Joyce Campbell from Caithness and Fergus Ewing MSP, cabinet secretary for the rural economy. Patrick Krause represents SCF on the taskforce and sits on the training sub-group.

The taskforce was set up following the publication of the 2017 Scottish Government Report *Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector*. Its aim is to ensure the long-term

sustainability and resilience of Scotland's rural economy, by giving women access to the same development opportunities as men in this sector.

The report highlights that 42% of people living and working on an agricultural unit in Scotland are female. Yet it was found that a number of women across the sector have experienced direct gender bias and unconscious bias in many aspects of their working life. The taskforce seeks to engage with these findings and embrace gender equality in the workplace for all who are involved in Scottish agriculture.

We welcomed 18 women to the SCF's women in crofting meeting, examining the findings of the

report and looking at key questions for crofting:

- Why women in crofting?
- What is our purpose as a group?
- What will the women in crofting group aim to do – lobbying, training, development etc?
- What format should the group have?

A summary of Professor Sally Shortall's 2017 report notes that women often have key roles in agriculture. However this is often understated or in some cases invisible. It was noted that historically women in crofting have had a voice, notably Màiri Mhòr nan Òran whose active support for the land reform movement during the Highland Clearances brought about change. Yet, only three women gave evidence to the Napier Commission in 1883.

Bringing this into a modern-day context, the group discussed the present-day challenges that women in crofting face. From the day-to-day responsibilities of child or elderly care, feeding stock, working a day job and doing IACS forms at night to wider, systemic issues: facing prejudice or "snidy comments".

At a strategic level the group discussed the future of crofting in the current political climate. Many of those present felt concern for the future: "How can we plan for succession for our daughters and sons when we have very little idea of the future?"

Dorothy Pritchard, chair of Melness Crofting Estate, said "I have major concerns about Brexit. It could be a second Highland Clearance. Livestock producers could be facing the financial backlash from tariffs imposed in the event of a no-deal and as crofters we feel we are not being listened to."

The group hopes to meet again and asks that all those who are interested contact SCF HQ in the first instance.

## ON THE CROFT

## Donald's hortiblog

**A**T LEAST twenty years ago in Lewis we took part in alternative cropping trials for crofters, run by the SAC (as was).

These trials proved, not surprisingly, that it was perfectly possible to grow a wide variety of vegetables and fruits on the island. The trials were the catalyst for the formation of Lewis and Harris Horticultural Producers and the start of the weekly Stornoway produce market. Both these institutions continue to thrive today and you can see them on Facebook.

Our part in the trial was to grow raspberries in one of our polytunnels. This proved highly successful at first. Our mildly acid soil enriched with seaweed seemed very suitable and crops were heavy. However, we now know that permanent crops in a protected environment have an increased pest and disease risk, in this case red spider mite. This creature, barely visible to the naked eye, forms tight webs over leaves and flowers and literally suffocates the plant. Treatment is difficult; and the only option for organic growers is a biological control, which is expensive and doesn't always work.

To cut a long story short, we had to give up on the rasps and clear them out of the tunnel. In the exposed conditions of the west of Lewis, establishing them outdoors



Fruit cage

was not an option. Here in Skye, we made another attempt at polytunnel rasps, growing them in pots (reclaimed sheep lick buckets) which could be moved outside after cropping to prevent a carry-over of pests. This didn't work either, due to the difficulty in sourcing a decent quality, organic compost.

Hence our new fruit cage (pictured) which is made almost entirely from reclaimed materials; old polytunnel parts, a fish farm

net, tyres and ropes off the shore. Outdoor soft fruit is perfectly feasible on the west coast if you have the shelter and soil for it. I'm not so sure if it's possible in Shetland, or the west side of the Outer Isles, but I'm happy to be proved wrong.

We are growing Autumn Bliss raspberries, which are extremely hardy and productive, fruiting on the current season's growth. We continue to grow some indoor strawberries for an early crop, and

these are not immune from the dreaded spider mite. However the pest can be controlled by keeping the leaves wet, and cutting the plants back hard as soon as they finish fruiting.

Also let's not forget blackcurrants, gooseberries and rhubarb. You would very often see these around the croft house, where their value for jam-making has always been appreciated.

## ILMPs: helping crofters be successful in a competitive environment

**A** COMMON MISCONCEPTION surrounding Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) is that they are not applicable to smaller businesses.

This is not the case. Regardless of farm size or business stage, the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) can help crofters access up to £1,200 worth of grant funding for an ILMP. This will enable you to commission an expert adviser to undertake an independent and confidential assessment of your crofting business – producing an ILMP that provides a clear, practical, step-by-step action plan to help achieve business goals and increase the profitability and sustainability of the business.

An ILMP will identify opportunities to make cost savings and explore the potential to develop competitive advantage or technical excellence in

*“It helps you understand what business opportunities are available to you and how best to go about developing your business.” Fergus Laing, Grantown-on-Spey, FAS ILMP grant recipient.*

areas where the business is strong or has growth potential.

The assessment is flexible and typically includes:

- a review of business strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities and threats as they relate to an individual crofter's vision for the future;

- a basic habitats, biodiversity and conservation assessment;
- a financial performance analysis;
- a cross-compliance assessment to highlight where there may be risk areas for the business.

ILMP funding covers 80% of the total costs of the assessment. The remaining 20% and VAT is covered by the participating business. Costs are proportional to business size (ie an ILMP for a smaller business may cost less, thus the 20% covered by the business will be a smaller contribution).

To apply or for more information about FAS services, please visit [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot), call 0300 323 0161 or email [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot).



## ON THE CROFT

# Antimicrobial use and resistance: a UK sheep industry perspective

**M**ONITORING antimicrobial usage in farmed animals is widely acknowledged as critical because of increasing concern surrounding antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Antimicrobial usage is normally expressed using the European methodology by the metric of total mass of antimicrobial active ingredients per Population Correction Unit (mg/PCU). PCU takes into account the animal population as well as the estimated standardised weight of each animal at the time of treatment with antimicrobials<sup>1</sup>.

A programme for the surveillance of antimicrobial use continues to be developed in the UK.

The latest UK veterinary antimicrobial resistance and sales surveillance report conveyed that a total quantity of 282 tonnes of active ingredients of antimicrobials was sold within the UK for the entire food-producing animal species, representing a total 37 mg/PCU.

The sheep industry in the UK is the largest in the EU and is also the largest single sector of UK livestock agriculture, representing 39.8% as calculated by PCU. The level of antimicrobials used in the sheep industry is believed to be low (<1% of all antimicrobial sales to food-producing animal species).

The margin for reduction is limited. For example, despite the reduction in sales between 2012 and 2017 of 192 tonnes (48.5%) in the total antimicrobial sales indicated for food-producing animal species only, no significant variation in antimicrobials sold in the sheep industry was observed in the UK.

These figures need to be interpreted with caution. For example, it is not possible to easily distinguish usage between sheep and beef cattle from practice management data. The sheep and beef industries are often interlinked but work is currently ongoing by UK government through the veterinary medicines directorate to try separating out which multi-species antimicrobials are being used in beef and which in sheep.

A study conducted in 207 sheep-only farms in the UK indicated that average antimicrobial levels are relatively low in comparison with the whole country's antimicrobial usage, but results did show a wide variation between farms. This study included farms across Scotland, England, and Wales, with a mixture of flock types: hill (18); upland (25); lowland (164) and management systems: organic (11); conventional (196).

- In total, 80% of all antimicrobial usage occurred in 39% of flocks.
- Lowland flocks were prescribed significantly more antimicrobials than hill flocks.
- Injectable antimicrobials represented 82% of the total active ingredient.
- 65% of antimicrobials were prescribed for the treatment of lameness.
- Oral antimicrobials were prescribed to 49% of the flocks.
- Oxytetracycline was the most commonly prescribed antimicrobial, followed by



© Martin Benson – Isley

penicillin-type, aminoglycoside, lincomycin and macrolides.

- Analysis of the disease for which each antimicrobial agent was prescribed was only possible for 24 flocks from one veterinary practice. Data collected showed that lameness accounted for 65% of antimicrobials prescribed and, oxytetracycline was the most commonly prescribed antimicrobial agent, accounting for 63.5%, followed by penicillin-type (26.8%). Treatment associated with lambing events (including dystocia and prolapse) was reported as the second reason for prescribing antimicrobials.

## Tackling antimicrobial resistance

AMR is considered to be one of the greatest threats to human health. Antimicrobial use in food-producing animals is known to contribute to the global burden of AMR. Taken overall, and considering those pathogens of particular importance and interest in human medicine, lower levels of AMR to several antimicrobials were generally observed in sheep than in other food-producing animals. For example, studies conducted by Moredun Research Institute and Scotland's Rural College have detected, in general, low to very low levels of AMR in Scottish sheep farms.

Despite the current evidence of low-use of antimicrobials in the UK sheep industry, the sheep industry must take this issue seriously.

Good practice guidelines have been published: *RUMA (2018) Targets task force: one year on and SVS (2017) Good Practice Guidelines 2017*. These guidelines contain important messages for the responsible use of antimicrobials by sheep farmers and veterinary surgeons in an easy-to-read format; and include practical flock management principles that will be useful to sheep vets and producers.

A coordinated surveillance program is needed to monitor antimicrobial sales for the sheep sector to tackle the emergence and spread of AMR. Disease prevention is at the forefront of tackling these issues and the industry needs to work together with a concentrated campaign to reduce endemic disease requiring antimicrobial usage. Suggested areas to focus on would be low-ground flocks and flock health planning to target areas of concern, including lameness and diseases associated with lambing and young lambs.

Authors: Nuno Silva<sup>1</sup>, Carol Currie<sup>1</sup>, Roger W. Humphry<sup>2</sup>, and Beth Wells<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Moredun Research Institute, Pentlands Science Park, Penicuik, U.K.

<sup>2</sup>Epidemiology Research Unit, SRUC (Scotland's Rural College), (Inverness campus), Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), Kings Buildings, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JG, U.K.

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## TRAINING

# Gaining Ground is off the ground

*Project officer Ailsa Strange reports*

**G**AINING GROUND, SCF's new project, is up and running, funded by Highland and Moray Leader.

The first event took place at Glachbeg Croft where thirty-five people gathered to share their experiences of, and interest in, providing opportunities for people to benefit from working on the land and with animals. Attending were crofters, smallholders, teachers, support organisations, parents and academics.

Caroline Matheson shared the history of Care Farming Scotland, now part of Social Farms and Gardens. She observed that the focus has moved from farming to wellbeing and feels that the size of a provider doesn't matter, "the people delivering the service are the important bit". Caroline thinks now is the right time for green care to grow.

Karen Davidson from Social Farms and Gardens explained their role and acknowledged the work done by Caroline. They are keen to work with the Gaining Ground project to ensure a case is made for a uniquely Scottish model in care farming.

Becs Barker then talked about her organisation Community Contacts, which offers impartial support and advice for people living with disabilities or long-term health conditions. Becs said "Self-directed support (SDS) is a philosophy for giving people control." SDS ensures that people who are eligible for support are given the choice over how their individual budget is delivered to meet their agreed health and social care outcomes. Austerity has led to reduced eligibility for these payments.

Chris Ritchie from Moray Wellbeing Hub (MWH) talked about their engagement with single-handed farmers needing support and social contact. Fellow MWH champion Nina Macaulay shared her personal experience of the benefits of working on farms and crofts.

Katie Webster from Breezy Croft gave a frank account of her successes and struggles setting up a social crofting business. She gave some wonderful examples of service user experiences but also emphasised that there are clear barriers from service commissioners.

An inspiring guided tour of Glachbeg with Bob Bull followed a short introduction on his tailored support for individuals. He sees his croft as a toolbox of resources to be used in different ways for different people.

Three smaller groups looked at how social crofting can work for crofters, service providers and people using services. A common theme was the need for more networking opportunities that also include commissioners of services.

The next Gaining Ground event is planned for Moray during September. To find out more, please visit our Facebook page or email [gainingground@crofting.org](mailto:gainingground@crofting.org).



At Glachbeg Croft



Croft tour





## TRAINING

# Skillsboost project finishes on a high note

SCF training manager Lucy Beattie reports

**T**HE SCF training team ran its last event at the NSA Highland Sheep event in Caithness at Sibmister Farm, a stunning venue with striking views over the Pentland Firth.

The Skillsboost project started out in July 2016, following SCF's successful bid for a three-year training project. With generous funding from the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund, which is an SRDP initiative, and further financial support added by HIE and SNH, SCF delivered a variety of practical, hands-on courses as well as classroom-based events for new entrants and established crofters.

- 1792 training days
- 1646 participants

The Skillsboost 2016-2019 project exceeded targets across the board and achieved 137% of target attendees from the projected target attendance at the outset of the project.

Events ran all over the crofting areas of Scotland from the Butt of Lewis to Barra, Shetland to Argyll, Moray to Skye. There was even a strained-wire fencing course hosted on the Isle of Lismore. Some events were not without their weather challenges, for example the Lewis Access to Crofting Toolkit course over-ran when three of the tutors were stormbound in Stormoway until Calmac gave the green light and the MV Isle of Lewis lurched into service two days later.

The key learning point from the courses across the board has been that a supportive funding regime helps crofters access training. This training project has helped people overcome remote and rural geography challenges by being able to deliver demand-led training in local venues at an affordable price.

During this time Tina, Lucy, Donna and Ailsa, the training team, could not have run such a successful project without the support of SCF HQ staff, board and council members as well as the many crofters who helped either as crofter tutors, venue hosts or attendees.

What are the next steps? It's evident that there is strong demand for training. With over 2000 interested folks on our books there is a clear need to develop more training for crofters. This is something that SCF strongly supports as a grassroots movement.

If you would like to lend your support, comments or suggestions for a new training programme, then please get in touch: [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org).



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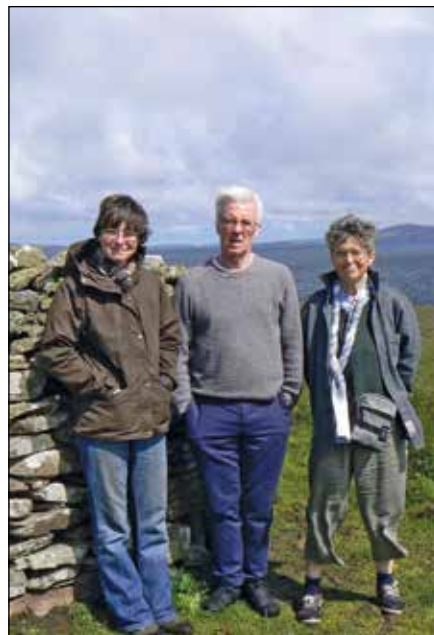
## Researching new supply chains for landraces



Kale yard on the North Mainland



Alma showing how to pull Shetland cabbage seedlings for transplanting from crub to kale yard



Project team at derelict crub near Cunningsburgh

© Alex Dodge



Plantiecrub inspection in Waas with Tom Christie, SASA, (left) Alma Duncan, crofter in Walls, (middle) and Aurore Whitworth (right).



Hebridean rye grown at the cereal testing sites of SASA at Gogarburn, near Edinburgh, mid-June. The rye was sown early April and had 30% headed mid-June.

*Project manager Maria Scholten on a new SCF initiative*

**T**HE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation has secured funding from the European Social Fund / Scottish Government for a twelve-month project called Crofting Diversity Pays!

In three crofting areas new supply chains will be explored and tested, aiming at adding value through research and advice and ultimately generating more income from landraces maintained by crofters. This is a timely project, with protests on the streets against the threat of species extinction. This project's environmental aims are very simple: prevent the extinction of landraces such as Shetland cabbage and keep crofters' diversity alive by creating new opportunities for revenue from landraces.

Institutional partners for the research component of the project are Queen Margaret University's MSc in Gastronomy and Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA).

Queen Margaret University's researchers will work with crofters, artisan bakers and Golspie Mill to test the Hebridean rye landrace



against comparison varieties and to investigate marketing and supply chain development. SASA's cereal section will grow, record and harvest the Hebridean rye landrace as a backup for experimental growing in Lochaber. Uist crofters are involved as advisers on the landrace. Nutritional analysis of the flour, milling tests and a baking test involving several artisan bakers will be part of the work. Fort William's general public will be able to taste rye loaves made from locally-grown rye later this year.

The second landrace in the project is the old Shetland cabbage. SASA's vegetable trial section is tasked with technical preparation for registration of Shetland cabbage as a conservation variety to enable selling the seeds.

Field work on Shetland was launched in June.

A team visit comprised Tom Christie, head of variety testing at SASA; Aurore Whitworth, crofter and former inhabitant of Shetland who started the Shetland Seed Library, which can be accessed at the Peerie Shop Cafe in Lerwick; and Maria Scholten, interested to reconnect with Shetland cabbage growers after earlier fieldwork in 2006. In three full days, meetings took place with a dozen crofters on the North Mainland, South Mainland and in Waas (Walls).

It was heartening to meet young Shetland cabbage enthusiasts at Aith school and we plan to stay in contact and support the school in growing and seed saving. The project was greeted with positive responses from crofters, who without exception thought it was worthwhile to try to secure survival through a marketing campaign and attract younger crofters to step in. Another major aim of the trip was checking the technical requirements for registration of the cabbage on the croft and in the crub.

This also ended on a positive note and a first milestone achieved: after the visit the application was submitted and we are waiting now to see the registration confirmed.



## HERITAGE SEEDS

# Celebrating Nordic heritage grains

*Adam Veitch, SCF member and participant in the UK and Ireland Seed Sovereignty Programme, reports on the recent European Diversity Cereal Festival held in north Denmark.*



**T**HE EVENT was co-organised by the CEreal REnaissance in Rural Europe the Nordic Heritage Cereal network, and Let's Liberate Diversity! (LLD).

Preserving biodiversity is more urgent than ever. Just a month ago the global report on biodiversity, published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services gave a stark warning that vanishing biodiversity "constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world." Crofting agriculture is well placed to lead the way in regenerating biodiversity in Scotland – because crofters are already familiar with low-input, low-intensity mixed-use farming, in contrast to large conventional mono-crop agriculture.

Similar to the previous LLD

event *Crofters' Breeds and Seeds* in Strathpeffer in 2011, the Denmark festival was a mixture of workshops, markets and local food. Held at an organic college, there were impressive field demonstrations of diverse heritage grains; and through it all was woven that shared common purpose of changing the way we do grain.

In geographical irony, I had travelled 1300 miles by rail from 56 degrees north in Lochaber to arrive at the same 56 degrees north in Aarhus, Denmark. But there was more than just shared latitude – there was a strong sense of shared endeavour. Many participants, farmers, bakers, brewers, millers and researchers were from our Nordic neighbours Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. I was struck by the similarities of



their topography, climate, food and culture with ours.

And this is the core reason I had come – to continue re-claiming that lost crofter skill of small-scale grain production. I left with a vigour

to rebuild that biodiversity in the forgotten grain fields of my own area and with a suitcase stashed with heritage rye seeds from our Nordic neighbours to continue the work on reintroducing grain growing.



## One-to-one advice and grant support for Scottish crofters

**Helping crofting businesses to be successful in a competitive environment**

Regardless of land size or business stage, the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) can help croft owners across Scotland to increase the profitability and sustainability of their business through Government funding for one-to-one advice, worth up to a total of £3,200.

Benefit from:

- expert advice tailored to the specific needs of your business;
- subsidised access to specialist support;
- an understanding of how you are performing compared with similar crofts;
- one-to-one mentoring guidance from an experienced crofter or farmer in your chosen sector.

To apply for support or for more information, contact: [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) | 0300 323 0161 | [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)



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## MEMBERS PAGE

## Welcome to our new members

SCF is always delighted to welcome new members.

We appreciate your support for our work on behalf of crofters and we know you will find SCF membership useful in many ways. If we can help you with anything, please do get in touch with SCF HQ on [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org), 01599 530005, quoting your membership number. We can put you in touch with local contacts and direct you to sources of information on a multitude of crofting matters.

While we are always there to help our members, we hope you will also be willing to get involved in our work and policies. We are always looking for more people to network, share knowledge and experience. There are opportunities to become a local contact; and in due course an SCF council member, then potentially board member.

SCF's council are experienced crofters who advise the SCF board. The board, also comprising experienced crofters and others with relevant backgrounds, has governance of SCF.

As Angus MacRae, a distinguished former SCU (forerunner to SCF) president said: "Ask not what the SCU can do for you, ask what you can do for our organisation."

Welcome once again. *Fàilte* in Gaelic. We look forward to meeting you and hearing from you. Look out for SCF meeting announcements by email and in the local press.



## SCF household membership

**S**CF HAS always had a joint membership which is offered at 1.5 times the individual membership rate and gives two people residing at the same address access to SCF's services.

We are extending this to all members of the household. Household membership is available to all those living at the address held on the SCF database and any others who are in full-time education who normally live at that address.

Each household member can enjoy membership benefits such as the monthly e-newsletter; a digital copy of *The Crofter*; other

information emails sent out from time to time; surveys to inform the direction of SCF; SCF's membership information service (a general crofting helpline); and the SCF legal advice line which covers matters of crofting law.

From a company perspective, only the original member has voting rights.

The subscription for household membership will be the joint rate of £99.75 (ie 1.5 X individual rate).

Should you wish to take advantage of this offer, a quick phone call to SCF HQ with your household members' details (name, email, DOB) is all that it takes.



Russell Smith, Brian Inkster and Rhona Elrick at the Royal Highland Show



Derek Flynn giving advice

# What is the Peatland ACTION project?

Ben Inglis-Grant, project officer, explains

**T**HE PEATLAND ACTION project provides advice and funding to landowners and land managers looking to restore their peatland habitats, from conception of a project through to the practical application of restoration techniques. The project was established in 2012 and the team has developed substantial independent and impartial advice on peatland restoration work, having worked on over 200 sites across Scotland.

It is estimated that of Scotland's 1.8 million hectares of peatlands, roughly up to 80% are damaged, contributing to climate change as they release carbon when the peat is exposed. When they are restored, peatlands capture carbon through the active process of peat formation. This is why the Scottish Government has set a goal to

restore 250,000 hectares of damaged peatland by 2030, in part to be delivered through the Peatland ACTION project; and recently pledged a further £11 million to peatland restoration this year.

As most damaged peat bogs have been drained, the crucial aspect is to stabilise water levels to enable peat-forming plants to grow. We can do this in several ways, including peat dams (picture 1) or creating bunds to slow the travel of water across a peatland system.

Bare peat is another concern that is seen across our bogs covering vast areas of Scotland. Commonly known as peat hags (picture 2), these formations release greenhouse gases as the peat dries out. We can re-profile these hags to re-establish vegetation so the peat is then protected and is no longer lost in the wind or heavy rainfall, reversing the release of greenhouse gases.

There are a number of benefits to peatland

restoration, the main one being the environmental benefits of carbon capture, but wider benefits include improved local water quality – as less peat particles are washed into our rivers, lochs and drinking water catchments. Peatlands are also internationally important habitats for wildlife and are iconic and culturally significant landscapes in Scotland.

My role as project officer is to be a point of contact to provide advice and guidance to anyone considering peatland restoration. I can help with the application process, through to consideration of the preservation and restoration of our peatlands.

To find out more please visit our website: [www.nature.scot/peatlandaction](http://www.nature.scot/peatlandaction) or contact me directly, if you are based in the Outer Hebrides, by email [ben@carlowaystatetrust.co.uk](mailto:ben@carlowaystatetrust.co.uk) or telephone: 01851 643 481.



Peat dams after construction



Peat hag with volunteer for scale

## One year on from Garbh Allt Community Initiative buy-out

**I**T IS NOW over a year since the landmark buy-out which saw the Garbh Allt Community Initiative (GACI) take over a three-thousand acre estate south of Helmsdale from Sutherland Estates.

The past twelve months or so have seen the new organisation creating jobs, beginning work on a unique archive and attracting members from all over the world.

In a part of the Highlands where jobs are scarce, GACI has already taken on two part-time development officers and plans to employ a third member of staff later this year.

A range of projects is being developed, to create long-term, sustainable business projects and jobs, including capitalising on increased tourism from the North Coast 500 route and working with the people behind that venture, making the most of the land, natural

environment and assets.

Shortly after the land sale was completed, Sutherland Estates donated all the records they held for the GACI area. The nine boxes of records are unique, not only because they are original papers dating back more than two centuries, but because they comprise an incredible range of documents depicting everyday life in the townships, including rental records, ground-officers' reports, hand-written fair rent applications and even a collection of wills.

These invaluable documents, combined with the background knowledge of the directors, will give visitors, whether they visit in person or online, a vital link to their ancestral home and to those living on the GACI estate now.

The GACI archive has already received its first donation. Associate member, Hugh Green, whose ancestors were cleared from Kildonan to West

Helmsdale, has given the archive a set of digital copies of the Strathspey Herald, the newspaper founded and edited by his grandfather Alexander Tulloch, as well as a selection of records relating to Sutherland history.

GACI has been very successful over the past year in attracting new members. Because of the area's Clearances and Land League history, the buy-out was the focus of attention from all over the world. As word about the take-over spread, new associates joined, not just in Helmsdale and other villages in Sutherland, but descendants from the GACI townships from as far afield as Toronto and Vancouver also signed up.

Garbh Allt Community Initiative is all about reviving the wider community, not just the crofting townships, and the GACI directors and staff hope that some of their ventures will start to bear fruit in the next year.



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# Cycling to support Myeloma UK

**T**WO SUTHERLAND women, Fiona Macleod and Sheena Millard, are currently trying to fit cycle training into their lives in preparation for the London to Paris Myeloma UK charity ride in September this year.

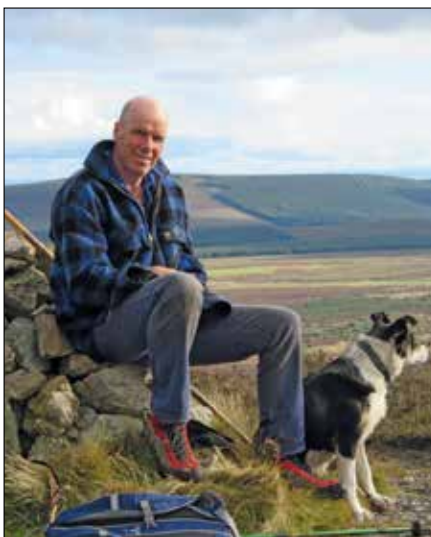
They want to raise awareness of myeloma, whilst fundraising for much needed research by doing this challenging cycle of 500km in four days, in memory of their husband and dad respectively.

Sheena lost her dad, Bob, to myeloma in November 2016 after a slow deterioration to his health, with myeloma being diagnosed after almost two years of ill health. He received some treatment followed by some positive results, but died nine months after diagnosis. Fiona lost her husband, George, suddenly in October 2018, with myeloma only being diagnosed around the time of death. He had suffered extreme back pain for around a month prior to his death.

Both men were relatively young. George had just turned 57 and Bob was 72. They were both previously fit and healthy and keen on outdoor life, with George running a croft at 185 Migdale, Bonar Bridge and Bob a retired keeper living in Wester Rarichie, near Balintore.

Myeloma is an incurable blood cancer and relatively uncommon. It affects plasma in the bone marrow causing bone pain and fractures, as well as kidney damage. The most common symptoms include bone pain, recurring infection, kidney damage and fatigue.

Although myeloma is incurable, with early diagnosis and current treatments such as stem-cell transplants, patients can live a normal, active life for many years. Some of the cyclists taking part in this year's event have myeloma, but have



George Macleod

undergone treatment and have worked hard to become fit enough to take on the challenge.

Both Bob and George had symptoms of myeloma but, sadly, neither of them had an early diagnosis, with symptoms just being put down to their work and age.

Sheena and Fiona are both very aware that if Bob and George had received earlier diagnosis and treatment they may well be alive now and are keen for this not to happen to others.

*To see their personal stories or to donate to Myeloma UK, visit their Just Giving pages on: [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/fiona-macleod19](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/fiona-macleod19) [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/sheena-macbain1](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/sheena-macbain1)*



Bob MacBain

## Representation of SCF members

**S**CF IS dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting.

We are the only organisation whose work is solely on behalf of crofters. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes by SCF staff and officials to ensure the interests of crofters are being represented.

Some of the regular meetings representatives of SCF have participated in over the last quarter include:

Meetings with MSPs and cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing; Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group On Crofting; regular meetings with Scottish Government and agency officials on issues such as LFASS, Croft House Grant Scheme, crofting law; Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholders Group; Crofting Bill group (crofting legislation reform); Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum; regular liaison meetings with Crofting Commission; Farming Advice Service Steering Group; SRDP Monitoring Committee; Leader Advisory Group; National Rural Mental Health Forum; Woodland Crofts Partnership Steering Group; Community Land Scotland conference; National Goose Management

Review Group; National Sea Eagle Group; Deer Management Round Table; and the Women in Agriculture Taskforce. Plus many more!

We also had very-well-attended stands at Highland Sheep 2019 and at the Royal Highland Show and will be at the Black Isle Show in August.

Agricultural policy post-Brexit talks have taken place with Scottish Government and agency officials. SCF is a member of Food Coalition Scotland, a group of organisations working on the Scottish food policy bill and of the UK Food Group, working on UK food and farming policy.

It is essential that the voice of crofters is heard in these policy meetings. It is all too easy for crofting to be bypassed, for policy to be formed that is not croft-proofed. No one else does or can represent crofters as SCF does – being **the organisation set up by, governed by and only representing crofters**.

SCF is keen to hear from members on the effects of predators and pests, CAP payments, other SGRPID issues and Crofting Commission matters so that we can pass on your concerns to the relevant government agencies or stakeholder groups.

  
**Scottish Crofting Federation**  
rooted in our communities

### How to contact us

Postal address and registered office

**Scottish Crofting Federation Headquarters**  
**Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX**

**General enquiries and membership:**  
[hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org)  
01599 530 005

**Training:** [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org)  
01854 612 220

**The Crofter:** [fiona@crofting.org](mailto:fiona@crofting.org)  
Fiona Mandeville, editor

**Advertising:** [ads@crofting.org](mailto:ads@crofting.org)  
Fiona Macleod  
01863 766386

**SCF legal helpline:**  
01599 230 300

visit [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)  
for full contact details

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