

The big issue: access to crofts

THERE IS recognition that succession of crofts has stagnated and the market in crofts has gone completely out of control.

Crofts are unaffordable by local or young people. An open market in crofts has been questioned for many years. In 2005 SCF said to the Scottish Parliament, "There are two camps on the nature of croft land tenure – one that sees croft land the same as free-hold, with the 'owner' being able to respond to the market and sell off what they will because it is theirs to sell; and the other seeing the tenure as the use of croft land, with a social responsibility attached and the preservation of croft land being key. Our members are inclined to the latter view."

In 2008 the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting (ColoC), after gathering evidence from all over the crofting counties, said: "Our consideration of evidence about these issues, together with the underlying public interest in crofting, has led us to recognise the importance of distinguishing between the interests of crofting, of individual crofters and of communities. Many people told us of their concern that a satisfactory balance is not being struck between individual interests and those of crofting."

The report continued: "Regulation has sustained crofting by balancing the interests of the individual against those of the wider community, now and in the future. To secure the



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public interest in crofting, and therefore its wider benefits, there must be effective governance arrangements linked to stronger, but simpler, regulation – understandable, enforceable and clearly directed to agreed policy goals. Unless there is a better balance struck than at present, giving wider interests, especially those of future generations, precedence over individual gains, crofting will ultimately disappear – and its potential

contribution to sustainable rural development will be lost."

The situation has changed since the ColoC. It has deteriorated considerably. The problem of crofts being sold off at high prices has escalated dramatically in the past few years, especially the last year. There is an urgent need to intervene. It would be reasonable to declare this an emergency. *...Continued on page 3*

New Scottish Government has plenty to do



Mairi Gougeon

SCF WELCOMED Mairi Gougeon, in her new role as cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands, with a to-do list.

SCF chair Donald MacKinnon said, "We are pleased to see a strong cabinet appointed to lead Scotland; and we welcome Mairi Gougeon as cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands. We are confident that Ms Gougeon has the experience and capacity to get to know crofting and our islands, and to take them into consideration in forming policy. We need to see all policy croft-proofed and island-proofed before it is enacted."

"There is much to be done. We have an immediate threat in the form of unbridled access to our markets for Australia's meat, which could open the doors to other countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Brazil and so on. This would be catastrophic for crofting and hill production.

And what will our post-CAP agricultural support system look like? There has been advisory group after advisory group commissioned to offer recommendations on direction of travel, but we have yet to see a plan for where we are going with this. Time is running out.

"SCF put many proposals to the parties before the election for what we would like to see the incoming government commit to," Donald continued, "and they still stand. High up with agricultural support comes the reform of crofting legislation and the National Development Plan for Crofting – both of which this government has pledged they will do in this term of office. It is essential that we get on with these things".

There are other important things included in the to-do list and SCF directors had an early meeting with the cabinet secretary to discuss them.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Sustainability, the environment and crofting feature
- National development plan for crofting

- Stock-free farming
- Rural crime
- Smart sheep

- Donald's hortiblog
- ... and much more

Message from the chair...

Donald MacKinnon

WELCOME TO the latest edition of *The Crofter* – as always it is packed full of interesting articles, news and opinion.

It was a painfully slow start to spring this year, here on the West Side of Lewis. I reckon grass growth was a good three weeks behind at the start of May. Keeping grass in front of lambing ewes was a real struggle, but it has caught up now and sheep and lambs are all looking well.

SCF has had a busy few months. We represented members' interests at numerous meetings, including at our regular liaison meetings with the Crofting Commission. We had our final meeting with cabinet secretary for the rural economy, Fergus Ewing, at the end of March. Following the Holyrood election and subsequent reshuffle, we were delighted to welcome Mr Ewing's replacement, Mairi Gougeon, to the her new role.

Mairi is no stranger to the brief, having served as a rural affairs minister in the last government – which is just as well because she is taking on the job at a very important time for the industry.

When we met the new cabinet

secretary in June, we stressed the urgent need for clarity on the future of agricultural support. This is no easy task and Mairi Gougeon will have her work cut out trying to reach a consensus amongst the various competing interests. Crofting must be well represented in these discussions. Crofting law reform was also on the agenda. We will be holding the government to its manifesto commitment to reform crofting law in this session and that work must start soon.

In February and March we held very-well-attended workshops on access to crofts. These discussions seem to have struck a chord and a working group was established to look at the issues in more detail. What keeps on coming up is the ever-increasing price of crofts and the barrier this poses to new entrants. Keep an eye out for the publication of a set of recommendations from the working group which we hope to present to key decision makers later in the year.

I can't not mention the drama of the Australian free trade deal, which has dominated headlines in recent weeks. SCF made clear



our opposition to the inclusion of agricultural products in the deal, particularly beef and lamb. What impact the agreed deal will have on crofting is anyone's guess, but what concerns me is the precedent it sets for future deals that the UK

government plans to strike with other countries around the world. We will be keeping a close eye on how these develop.

Best of luck to all our members as we approach the busy sale season; let's hope the strong trade holds up.

Agricultural support critical to crofting's economic viability

THE LAST issue of *The Crofter* highlighted what SCF was seeking from political parties in the run-up to the Holyrood elections. We can now look at what we are likely to get.

What the parties say about agricultural support is key to the economic viability of crofting and is top priority. Time is running out to develop a new system, now that we have left the EU and CAP. The quotes below are lifted from the SNP manifesto – with comments from the Scottish Greens, since they may have influence even if not in a formal coalition.

By 2025... we will shift half of all funding for farming and crofting from unconditional to conditional support and there will be targeted outcomes for biodiversity gain and a drive towards low-carbon approaches which improve resilience, efficiency and profitability. So half will be a sort of basic payment and half will be for meeting as yet unspecified targets around carbon reduction. The Greens talk about making emission reductions and climate mitigation measures compulsory.

On standards, SNP says *We will... stay broadly aligned with new EU measures and policy developments as the policy is to re-join*



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the EU after independence. Scotland will maintain our status of GM free cultivation and continue to adhere to EU standards and rules on pesticides and fertilisers. The Greens will support high farming standards.

The government will *support crofters and their communities to play a bigger role in peatland restoration and woodland creation. We will double the amount of land used for organic farming.* Peatland restoration could be important for crofting, especially on common

grazings, but we need to make sure that payment is forthcoming for peatland that has been kept in good order and doesn't all go to restoring degraded ground – in effect rewarding land managers for trashing the land in the past.

We will develop a single marketing brand for all Scottish produce – Sustainably Scottish... which will include Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb. That may not make a big difference to the price we get at auction, but the idea is sound.

There is support for crofting legislation, local food production, land reform and community buyouts, but these are the sort of issues that can get crowded out of parliamentary timetables if we don't keep the pressure up.

The Greens specifically talk about money for a land advisory service to support the roll out of climate-friendly practices, support for crofter-led wool processing, a network of mobile abattoirs for rural and island communities, qualifications in crofting in rural schools and crofter-producer co-ops. They are keen on rewilding and species reintroduction.

Lobbying and good relations with government will be vital to get the good bits adopted and the bad bits ditched on behalf of our members.

The big issue: access to crofts



...Continued from page 1

SCF held two open online workshops on access to crofts earlier in the year. The first was so oversubscribed a second had to be held, which was also fully booked. The themes most mentioned in the workshops were:

- the price of crofts is too high;
- inadequate or insufficient regulation;
- not enough crofts available to meet demand;
- lack of finance.

These themes have been discussed by a working group of SCF members. There isn't room here to go into all the main points that were discussed, but they included:

Lack of regulation by the Crofting Commission and thus no push to get neglected crofts back in use. Why do those who do not meet their crofting duties (absenteeism and neglect) not lose their crofting rights? Regulations exist that could help to resolve some of the situation, but need to be enforced. The focus has to be on how to bring croft prices down, with action that would be accepted; eg a restriction on decrofting and development and enforcement of duties.

Legal issues – there is still too much “The Crofting Commission may” instead of “The Crofting Commission will” in the legislation. If the commission finds it legally difficult to regulate, to enforce duties and prevent decroftings, the law must change.

Crofting development – involve crofting communities in their future. Talk to those who are not passing crofts on. Why are they not? There are good reasons and there have to be ways to overcome these.

Deterrents are a practical way to intervene in the market – to deter people who don't want to croft but are paying high prices to get the house or land for non-crofting purpose, eg a compulsory crofting plan and follow-up by the Crofting Commission.

Protectionism should be pushed for; eg crofts or tenancies can only be sold to a buyer who has a family connection in the area; young people and families get preference; and so on. This is done for housing in other parts of UK, so why not crofts? Crofting is a regulated system already, so it's not a big jump.

New crofts. We need the creation of new crofts, with new conditions, duties, rights. What is good for crofting should be taken into account.

Throughout discussions, the point that crofting has a social value kept emerging. The group recognised the importance of this and felt it core to what we are trying to highlight.

SCF has to take a radical but measured approach. It cannot be too soft, as this is a crisis – crofting is in free-fall. SCF will survey members with ideas. We don't have to have all the technical answers, but we need to say what we want crofting regulation to do – and challenge the commission to say what it needs to make that happen.

Commission convener resigns

AS WE went to press, the Crofters Commission announced that convenor Rod MacKenzie had resigned from his position on the CC board.

Rod is a well-known figure in the Highlands and Islands, as an auctioneer and crofter. His geniality and approachability will be missed, and we wish him well and thank him for his work on behalf of crofters.

The commission will miss his forward-looking strong leadership. A new convenor will be appointed by the cabinet secretary in due course, and this may have been announced by the time you are reading this issue.



National Development Plan for Crofting

AFTER MANY years of work by stakeholders and the Scottish Government, the National Development Plan for Crofting (NDPC) was published earlier this year.

Donald MacKinnon welcomed it, saying "There has been a huge amount of work put into this plan, by ourselves, other representative organisations, agencies and government officials, so it is really exciting to see it emerge into the light of day. It doesn't include everything that needs to be done, as I am sure will be pointed out, but let's look at this as a working document that can be modified as necessary. The point is that we have a framework now that gives the direction of travel for the development of crofting, something we can work with, a large step in the right direction. Scottish Government officials who led on this, who made it a participatory exercise and who did the leg-work getting it to publication stage, are to be congratulated for their efforts. It demonstrates that the Scottish Government does have a commitment to crofting."

"The sections in the NDPC certainly capture the spirit of the time and the intentions for the future. We are particularly enthused with the emphasis placed on crofting's contribution to population retention, climate change mitigation and increasing biodiversity, as well as its production of high-quality food. We feel that these are the important



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aspects that crofting really has a head start on.

"Crofting is coming into its time, a new era where the smaller, sustainable land unit once more has its place. We aim to see unused crofts becoming available again and passed on to the younger generation, the creation of new crofts and the roll-out of crofting tenure across all of Scotland. This is not an unrealistic aspiration."

An online members' meeting was held in May to discuss the NDPC with officials from the Scottish Government and the Crofting Commission. Participation was very good, both in numbers attending and the quality of the questions and discussion that ensued.

Gordon Jackson, head of agricultural development and crofting at the Scottish Government, gave an introduction to the document, outlining its genesis and the intentions it holds. Karen MacRae, one of the Crofting Commission's new development officers, talked about how the relevant parts of the plan will be implemented by the commission.

Some of the questions in the discussion that followed:

Crofting legislation reform – does the government commit to getting a bill through parliament in this session? Are there resources to implement the plan? The commission has been given an extra £325,000 to its annual budget,

which could be looked on as a start to get things going. This can be used as justification for continued or increased resources.

Will CAGS continue? Yes. A group is looking at how to expand and make it more effective, which may include other land-based activity and possibly an advance payment.

Is the Register of Crofts accessible? Yes, online.

How will a crofting produce brand be developed? The Scottish Government food and drink department will contact SCF to work together on this.

The situation of unused crofts is desperate – communities will need to get more involved, as the commission doesn't have the resources to tackle it just by regulation. Will assessors be used more to help? Yes.

The plan needs more accountability – dates, who will do what and so on. Yes, the intention is to make the actions SMART (specific, measurable, assigned, relevant, time-bound). These can be found on the commission website.

There were concerns around lack of regulation and multiple decroftings; and the lack of commitment in the plan to create more crofts.

Many other topics were also discussed. It was an excellent session and we will run more online sessions.

Enforcement work top of the list

Heather Mack, head of crofting development at the Crofting Commission, reports on a recent survey.

OVER 400 crofters responded to a Crofting Commission survey on croft under-use and availability, providing an important insight into the most perceived reasons for unused crofts and what could be done to help tackle this issue.

The anonymous survey was posted on the Commission's website and via its social media channels and closed in May 2021. Eighty seven percent of respondents identified unused crofts as an issue in their area. Four main contributing factors were cited: crofters living away from the croft; retaining the croft as a valuable financial asset; hesitancy to assign/sublet their croft to someone outwith the family; and resident crofters having no desire to work their crofts.

Concerns were raised by 90% of the respondents that a lack of availability of crofts to new entrants was an issue in their area. Four key areas of focus were identified.

- the need for increased promotion of the benefits of making crofts available to new entrants;
- increasing the understanding amongst

crofters of regulatory options such as assignation, subletting and division that could be used to create an opportunity for others;

- the need for community pressure to see crofts well used;
- action by the commission on non-resident crofters or crofters who do not cultivate their crofts.

The feedback points to the need for a combined approach by communities themselves, us at the Crofting Commission, key stakeholders and crofter representative bodies.

The survey cites enforcement work as top of the list and essential, but educational/promotional work, combined with direct community pressure, is very important too.

We've nearly completed our recruitment for posts in the Western Isles. This includes our development and residency and land-use teams, increasing capacity to work with crofting communities and encourage the release of crofts where duties are not being met.

Demand from new entrants and existing crofters to access crofts is keenly felt by crofting communities and the commission. We all need to work together to encourage turnover of crofts, to create opportunities and increase active crofting.

Of the 410 responses received, 31% were from Lewis and Harris, 20% from Skye and 15% from Uist and Barra, with a further 9% from West Highland, 6% from South Highland and 5% from Sutherland. The remaining respondents were from Argyll and Bute, Caithness, Central Highland, Lochaber, Morar and Ardnachurch, Moray, Orkney and Shetland.



Heather Mack



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The pressing need for crofting law reform in this parliamentary term

Brian Inkster, Inksters Solicitors, look at where we are now.

THE SCOTTISH Government's plans for legislative reform of crofting were first outlined to the Cross-Party Group on Crofting on 28 March 2018 by Fergus Ewing MSP, then cabinet secretary for the rural economy and connectivity, with responsibility for crofting.

The plan back then was to take a two-phase approach. The first phase (planned to take place in what is now the last parliamentary term) would involve sorting the many existing problems encountered in crofting law on a day-to-day basis as highlighted by Derek Flynn and Keith Graham in *The Crofting Law Sump Report*, as presented to the Scottish Government on 10 December 2014.

The second phase (planned then to take place in the parliamentary term that we are now in) is

longer-term work, where Fergus Ewing asked his officials to continue with fundamentally reviewing crofting legislation to provide a solution to some of the more complex and challenging issues facing crofting, and what that might mean for how legislation is developed in future.

Phase one got underway with the formation of a bill team and much work was done with crofting stakeholders, including SCF, on formulating and agreeing how to tackle the phase one issues in a new Crofting Reform Bill. This included, in particular, a focus on four main major areas of concern:

- the definition of owner-occupier crofter;
- retaining common grazing shares with their crofts and reuniting shares that have become deemed crofts with their crofts;
- creating the ability to have joint tenancies;
- allowing crofting mortgages.

However, on 10 October 2019, Fergus Ewing

announced to stakeholders that all crofting reform work was being put on hold and the crofting bill team disbanded and moved instead to concentrate on legislative issues concerning Brexit, which had to take priority.

No work on crofting law reform has taken place since then.

The SNP 2021 manifesto was very brief in how it addressed crofting law, with the word crofting only appearing twice, but there was in there a commitment that they will "reform the law and develop crofting to create more active crofts".

The *Programme for Government* is published every year at the beginning of September and sets out the actions they will take in the coming year and beyond. Let us hope that a Crofting Reform Bill will be on that list as it clearly needs to be, given the hard work already put in to delivering it and the delays in so doing that were purely down to Brexit.

Action on crofters' duties a priority

ACCORDING TO the Crofting Commission website, tenant and owner-occupier crofters have a duty to:

- be ordinarily resident on, or within 32 kilometres of their croft;
- cultivate and maintain the croft;
- not to misuse or neglect the croft.

Misuse refers to a croft being used for something which is not considered as cultivation. Tenants require the consent of their landlord or, failing that, the Crofting Commission if they wish to put their croft to another purposeful use.

Neglect refers to the management of the croft, which should meet the standards

of good agricultural and environmental condition.

Cultivate refers to the croft being used for cultivation or put to another purposeful use. This includes horticulture, keeping livestock including poultry and bees, growing crops and planting of trees.

Maintain refers to the maintenance of the croft. To enable the croft to be cultivated it must be maintained in a fit state, except where another purposeful use is incompatible with the croft being kept in such state.

The commission clearly needs additional resources to enforce these duties. SCF has emphasised to the new cabinet secretary

the imperative to further increase the commission's budget, so that inactive crofts are freed up for new entrants and put to use which will benefit rather than stultify our communities.

This is another area that should be prioritised in crofting law reform. Shorten the time frame for redress given to absentees and those not using their crofts. The demand for crofts is pressing. Our forefathers did not fight for crofting tenure to end up with so much unused and neglected crofting resource.

Give the regulator the means to revitalise crofting. Now is the time, before crofting withers away.

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The beef about the Aussie deal isn't just about the beef (or lamb)

THE AUSTRALIA trade deal has had ample coverage, but it's the topic of the year so far – and our Scottish government had to write to the UK government on this issue numerous times.

Some people have the opinion that we need a deal, this is all part of opening up our trading with the world, why be scared of new opportunities. Change can be a good thing, opening opportunities, but this whole affair has some sinister aspects to it that cause us to feel very uncomfortable.

So what's wrong? If Australian farmers can produce meat cheaper than we can because of the scale of their operations and the climate, trading with them seems to make sense from the cheap food gets votes aspect. But food production isn't just about food – and perhaps their meat isn't cheap just because of the sunshine and vast grasslands.

We had a free trade deal with an economic community that is the largest alliance of trading countries in the world. To be part of

that community we had to adhere to specified criteria, as you would expect. In food production we have standards of animal welfare, control of the use of certain pharmaceuticals, standards of employment practice, etc, which we excelled in. There is still room for improvement, but Scotland now produces food to standards that are truly world-leading.

We banned feeding growth hormones to beef, but Australia still uses them. We banned keeping chickens in barren battery cages and sows in cramped stalls. Australia still uses these. Branding cattle with a red-hot iron and the cutting of healthy flesh away from the hind-quarters of lambs is illegal here – not so in Australia where both are still widely practiced. We have CCTV coverage in slaughterhouses to monitor welfare standards, Australia doesn't. We are working on improving animal transport conditions. In Australia cattle and sheep are trucked for very long distances and the animals are in the back for up to 48 hours with no food or water, and remember the sunshine...

It is not just about standards. In the emergency we are facing with climate change due to carbon release, does it make sense to source meat from over 9000 miles away? And what of the "united kingdom" – this deal is being brokered without consulting the devolved nations. We can see now why they wanted the internal market legislation so badly.

The lure of other countries and trading alliances is strong – to a government that has severed its free-trade agreement with the world's largest trading community. If Australia is granted a free, no limitations trade deal with UK, then any other countries or alliances we want to trade with will expect the same deal.

We produce very high quality meat in Scotland and crofting is known as the backbone of the store trade. Crofting is good for food, good for the environment and for climate-change mitigation. Crofting has maintained communities in remote rural places. Food production is about much more than food and this deal is about much more than cheap meat.



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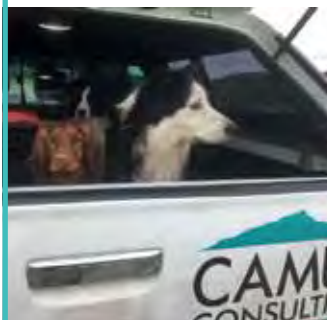
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Documenting crofting life



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We are always delighted when members share their crofting pictures with us – people, animals, crops, horticulture and landscapes.

Now we would like to ask you if you would share short – five or ten-second – videos. If you have any that you would be happy to send to us please email them to hq@crofting.org. Or why not take one with your smart phone next time something is happening on the croft?

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National Sea Eagle Panel

SCF director Yvonne White sits on the National Sea Eagle Stakeholder Panel which is convened by NatureScot and includes representatives from various key stakeholder groups including RSPB. Here she gives an update on the work of the group.

YOU MAY be a member of the sea eagle scheme.

Which level of the scheme you are signed up to will depend upon the level of data required for payment. It's a complex area as the white tailed eagle is protected by law. Whatever your views on sea eagles, the law is highly unlikely to change any time soon, if ever.

The onus is on scheme members to prove, through data collection and recording, that there is a predation issue. Obviously, predation upon lambs is caused by numerous creatures – foxes,

crows and ravens all play a part, as well as the apex predator, the sea eagle. Sea eagles also predate on foxes, but to what extent is unknown. So it can be complicated, proving predation is caused specifically by a sea eagle.

To do so entails building up data submitted by sheep producers and observations by experts in the field. The basic data we are required to record for our stock record books shows the number of lambs at various stages of the cycle and can highlight unusually high losses when compared with historic data. Then, dependent upon the level of the scheme you are in, you need to look at your sheep management in order to ensure you are doing everything practical to address unusual levels of lamb losses.

It's actually good working practice, as it's only too easy to roll along doing what you have always done. Who knows, changing something,

eg lambing in in-bye areas rather than the hill, may actually help address the issue. Of course not everyone can do this, especially many sheep-stock clubs and those with large flocks on extensive hill areas. In those cases it gets even more complicated to introduce measures to try to address sea eagle predation.

However, progress is being made. Although sheep producers will never be compensated for each lamb lost through predation, there is now wide-scale acceptance by the authorities, even including RSPB, that sea eagles take healthy lambs. Furthermore, the sea eagle scheme, though not a panacea, is now well established and has been adjusted over recent years by introducing varying levels in order to better reflect the position on the hill and in-bye ground for small and larger flocks.

Smart sheep for smarter farming

SHEEP FARMING systems can involve large numbers of animals, extensive grazing areas and restricted availability of on-croft labour.

Finding ways of automatically identifying sheep infected with worms using Precision Livestock Farming (PLF) tools, such as utilising Electronic Identification (EID) tags, then applying relevant treatments and preventive actions, is therefore a very attractive prospect.

Traditionally, it was believed that the best option was to treat the whole grazing group for worms with an effective anthelmintic and then move the treated lambs to clean pasture. However, sheep worms develop resistance to all anthelmintics and a proportion of the worms will survive treatment. If lambs are then moved to clean pasture, the deposited eggs will be from worms which have survived the drug and the hatched larvae will all be derived from resistant populations. This has the effect of concentrating drug-resistant worms on pasture.

Targeted Selective Treatment (TST) is by far the better option. Only the lambs which require worming treatment receive an anthelmintic. Those that do not are left untreated. When these different lamb groups are returned to pasture, the eggs deposited are from a mix of susceptible and resistant worms. This results in a reduced selection pressure for anthelmintic resistance. Published work has shown that if crofters and farmers take a TST approach



Sheep being weighed at Firth Mains Farm, with Moredun's Dr Fiona Kenyon

to worming their sheep, they treat fewer animals – saving money, reducing onward transmission of resistant worms to other sheep populations and, most importantly, reducing the emergence of resistant genes in the worms, meaning the drugs will work effectively for longer.

Mathematical algorithms based on production efficiency calculations and threshold values for timing of treatments are required for TST decisions. In order to achieve this, you need to have lambs wearing EID tags and facilities for handling and weighing. A new EU-funded project named Sm@RT (Small Ruminant Technologies) is bringing together

a network of researchers from across Europe, including those from Scotland's Moredun Research Institute and SRUC, to integrate PLF into a sector which has yet to fully exploit the use of EID tags on sheep and combine it with improved on-farm management.

Recent research used a sentinel group of sheep, designed to target whole-group anthelmintic treatment based on the weight gain of only a proportion of the flock. Monitoring as few as 20% of lambs using PLF tools was sufficient to identify when the larger co-grazing group required treatment.

Sm@RT will work with a wide range of stakeholders, including those operating well-

equipped demonstration crofts/farms (digifarms) and innovative commercial farms. By drawing upon the valuable input and knowledge of crofters and farmers and passing it on to their peers, the hope is that it will increase uptake of PLF tools across the industry.

*Dr Amy Tindall, Dr Fiona Kenyon and Prof Julie Fitzpatrick
Moredun Research Institute*

To keep up to date with Sm@RT, visit their website or social media accounts:

*www.H2020-Smart.eu
www.facebook.com/H2020Smart/
Instagram: H2020Smart
Twitter: @H2020Smart*

ON THE CROFT

Stock-free farming

Farmers For Stock-Free Farming is a Scottish-based, grass-roots movement established to inspire and support farmers and crofters to adopt animal-free farming practices, writes Sam Eccles.

THE CHANGING subsidy system and environmental pressures to reduce livestock numbers have led to increased interest in innovative opportunities to boost livelihoods. Our website (farmersforstockfreefarming.org) showcases many examples, particularly of crofters, who have found success from growing using stock-

free practices and/or from diversification and rewilding. Stock-free crofting can appear technically and economically unfeasible, but we strive to present alternative land-use practices that are viable and relevant to crofters. One promising alternative is the production of leaf protein concentrate, or leafu, made by leaf fractionation: a low-tech method of heating leaf juice which concentrates the leaves' protein and micronutrients whilst simultaneously removing many anti-nutritional components. Many plants like weeds (nettles) and green manures (grass/clover mixes) are rendered



suitable for human consumption, which could enable highly marginal lands to become much more productive and profitable. White clover (see table) is a promising contender for Scottish leafu production and can be produced anywhere where silage or hay is made. A recent scientific paper also found that gorse has great potential for leafu. While leafu is rather low in calories, it packs a highly nutritious punch. Plants studied for production so far generally contain about 50% protein and good amounts of all essential amino acids and most micronutrients, specifically β -carotene (vitamin A), iron and calcium. The case studies on our website also feature other great ideas, new and re-discovered, like hazelnut orchards and sustainable kelp crofting. Although many crofters we spoke to are doing great things with their crofts, they frequently tell us how difficult accessing funding has been for carrying out agro-ecological and stock-free practices on their crofts. We started a survey of Scottish farmers and crofters to hear opinions about adopting agro-ecological and stock-free practices and what barriers they face in switching to this. We would love to hear more voices from the crofting community and the survey only takes about 20 minutes to complete. Find it here: farmersforstockfreefarming.org/farmers-survey/.

For any questions or more information about this article (references, resources, etc.) please email me at sam@farmersforstockfreefarming.org.

Comparison of white clover leafu with common protein-rich animal foods		
Food	Protein content (%)	Grams of protein per ha per year
Dried white clover leafu	48*	384,000*
Beef steak	31 ^a	6,112 ^b (beef herd)
Lamb chop	29.2 ^a	5,411 ^b
Whole milk	3.3 ^a	36,900 ^b
Chicken eggs	12.5 ^a	175,439 ^b
Cheddar cheese	25.4 ^a	25,126 ^b

* based on a typical harvest of 8 tonnes of clover from 1ha, sourced from correspondence with Dr David Lawson from the SRUC

^a sourced from British Nutrition Foundation

^b calculated using Our World in Data's Land use per 100 grams of protein figure

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FARMERS FOR STOCK FREE FARMING

Helping farmers thrive in a changing world.

Three Roads to Stock-Free Farming

Final farming and food production future policy report published

THE LONG-AWAITED report on the deliberations of the Farming and Food Production Future Policy Group, *Recommendations to Government*, has been published on the Scottish Government website at www.gov.scot/groups/farming-and-food-production-group/ (click on the hyperlink 'most recent draft of its work').

The sixteen-strong stakeholder group, supported by top agriculture officials, was set up at Scottish Parliament instruction in January 2019. This is the 10th and final report on the group's work to develop and make recommendations around broad principles for the future of farming and food production policy. It should, with the outputs of the climate change groups, form the basis of the new Scottish agriculture policy.

ON THE CROFT

The crofter's wife



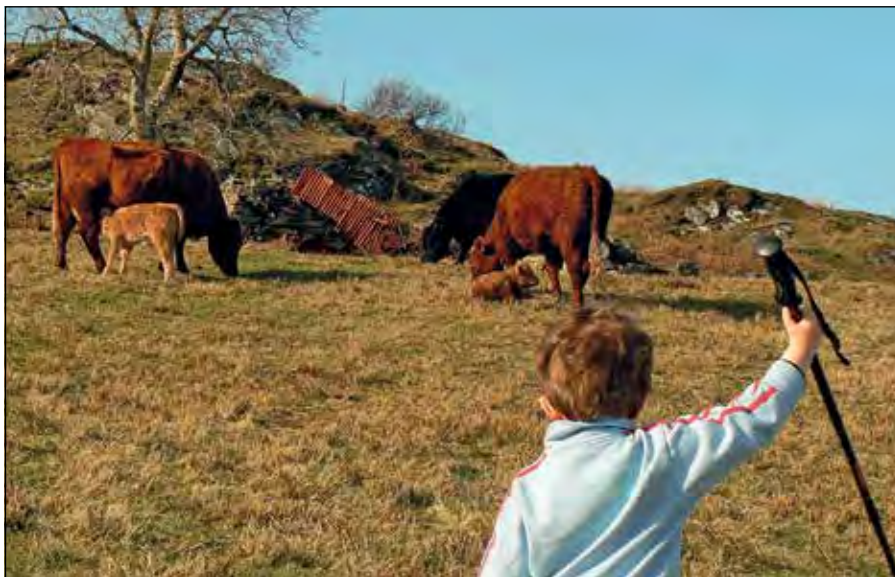
Gryff - our own Mist the sheep dog

In this issue we return to a popular column by SCF member Claire Nicolson.

BEYOND NEWS and sport, there's really not much television watched in our house.

Our youngsters are on trend in their rejection of traditional mainstream media, favouring online outlets like YouTube. We have neither the time nor the inclination to watch much of what passes as entertainment. There are, however, some exceptions... mostly agricultural! In recent years there's been a bit of a boom in this sector.

It began for us (admittedly before this trend, but I have to mention it) when the boys were wee, with *Mist: Sheep Dog Tales*, a Channel 5 show



I want to be like Daddy

whose characters remain to this day fondly and regularly quoted by each of us. If you haven't seen it, Google "Mist, Pride and Joyce" for a wonderful introduction to a farm-tastic cast of characters. It's a joy, complete with gorgeous Devonshire scenery and a glorious soundtrack.

BBC Alba's *Croft* was next, perhaps ahead of its time. *The Mart* (BBC) was impeccably timed: we had a lad that winter walking around the house in a white coat with a gavel in his hand ready to auction off anything to anyone. You dared not sniff in case you inadvertently bid on random household items.

There has since followed a host of superb and diverse viewing – from the incredibly popular *This Farming Life*, with the same lad star-struck meeting his hero, Martin Irvine, at Stirling bull sales, and a fabulous remake by Channel 5 of *All Creatures Great and Small*, to the heart-warming *Our Yorkshire Farm*, following the inspiring Owen

family through the seasons on their remote farm high on the moors.

The surprising hit this year is Amazon Prime's *Clarkson's Farm*. A winning mix of clever humour and gritty realism, this programme has really entertained – laughter, rueful shaking of heads and grimacing as forces of nature like rain, lack of rain and mud – have challenged Jeremy beyond his experience and bank balance, delighting farmers, crofters and food producers across the country, as familiar trials and tribulations are laid bare for all to see. Amongst the over-sized tractors and a calamitous farm shop opening, there's a sensitivity and humility that I, for one, didn't expect to see.

Where farming TV goes from here, I have no idea. If current offerings inspire production companies in the same way they are raising the profile of farming generally, we are in for a few more treats yet.

OFF THE CROFT

Kelp harvesting

APIONEERING aquaculture project off Skye has seen the first harvest of seaweed grown beside a salmon farm.

The harvesting is being hailed as a milestone in the use of integrated multitrophic aquaculture – where two or more organisms are farmed together – at a commercial site. The study is a collaboration between the University of Stirling, sustainable seaweed farming company KelpCrofting and fish farm giants Mowi.

Located off the island of Scalpay, south of Raasay, the study intends to determine whether siting a seaweed and shellfish farm near to a salmon farm will benefit from the organic nutrients produced by different species of marine life.

Laura Tulip, an environmental analyst, said: "This is another

important milestone at Scalpay. The team at KelpCrofting is pleased with its first harvest and while we need a control to scientifically prove that the growth and quality of the seaweed has benefitted from the nutrient enrichment from our salmon, the early signs are promising.

"Later this year, KelpCrofting will install a new kelp farm in the waters off the south of Pabay. Located away from the salmon farm, this will give us a point of comparison to determine whether the seaweed is directly benefitting from its proximity to salmon."

Kyla Orr, co-founder and scientific director of KelpCrofting, said: "So far, we have harvested over eight tons of food-grade sugar kelp from Scalpay. It is evident that the kelp is growing rapidly with each week that passes and some fronds are



Yvonne Booth and Laura Tulip from Mowi Scotland at the seaweed pilot off Scalpay

nearly two metres long after only four months at sea. We look forward to seeing how much more this super crop can yield."

The kelp harvested during May and June is part of a collaborative Innovate UK project with Oceanium and Efficiency Technology. After each landing, the batches of kelp

are taken to Kyle of Lochalsh for chopping up, then it is transported to Oceanium's trial bio-refinery in Cheshire for further processing into nutritional supplements, plant-based protein and biodegradable packaging.

This article first appeared in the West Highland Free Press.

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Crofting



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SCF HAS organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) in the Scottish Parliament for over 20 years. This very powerful forum informs MSPs and engages their support for pressing the Scottish Government to act on crofting issues.

At the last meeting of the group the main agenda items were:

Public access to croft land: Inspector Alan Dron, Police Scotland national rural crime co-ordinator, gave the police perspective on issues caused by public access to croft land.

Crofting support: Gwyn Jones talked about a results-based approach for agri-environment support schemes and how this method is particularly suited to crofting.

There was also information from Scottish Government on the National Development Plan for Crofting, an update on the work of the Crofting Commission from Bill Barron, and our chair, Donald MacKinnon, gave a report on the access to crofts workshops that were held recently.

The Scottish Parliament is in recess at the moment and we will be holding our first meeting of the new session in September.

Public access to croft land

INSPECTOR Alan Dron, Police Scotland national rural crime co-ordinator, gave the CPGoC a police perspective on issues caused by public access to croft land.

Alan's team facilitates the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC). One of its priorities is livestock attack and distress. They are trying to raise awareness and understanding of this. Scotland is the only place in UK that refers to livestock attack and distress rather than worrying. SPARC has also been supportive of the bill on the control of dogs brought forward by Emma Harper MSP, which had its final reading in March and will be enacted around October.

There clearly are not enough deterrents to stop owners letting their dogs attack and distress livestock. It happens every day. Scotland has the lowest reported rate in UK (NFU Mutual figures) but Police Scotland also does more to raise awareness than any other part of UK. Under-reporting is an issue.

Police Scotland receives daily reports and is improving response, getting more prosecutions and raising awareness via media. This is something everyone needs to help with. SPARC introduced simplified guidance some years ago to make it easy to understand what can and cannot be done in the countryside.

There was a 13% drop in livestock attacks last year – against the previous year – and the breakdown changed. Dogs left alone all day used to be the biggest culprit but last year this reversed – understandably, with more owners at home due to Covid. A spike is expected with the easing of restrictions. SPARC is planning a national campaign in the summer.

Access is not normally a police matter – local access officers deal with this – but last year Police Scotland was inundated with reported confrontation issues – people taking access where they shouldn't and the excuse of right to roam bandied about rather than taking responsible access.



© Martin Benson

There is a lack of common sense on the National Access Forum – it is biased towards taking access and not balanced with the rights of landowners/managers. There is a need to redress the balance and raise awareness of what access actually is under the 2003 Access Act. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code book is very good but people need educating.

SPARC is increasing its influence and has met the cabinet secretary for environment regarding fly-tipping. SPARC is also making a presentation to the cabinet secretary for rural economy regarding visitor management.

As restrictions lift, how we manage visitors

to Scotland this year and years to come is key. There was a first summit in September looking at fly-tipping, irresponsible access, unacceptable behaviour, dirty camping and parking, which is a big problem, especially in hotspots such as along the North Coast 500 or tourist attractions in Skye. The increase in funding to the rural tourism infrastructure fund will help to improve facilities and infrastructure. Police Scotland is writing its own visitor management strategy.

Visitors offer opportunities, but we need to get the balance right ensuring facilities for visitors and that they behave responsibly.

SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

In this issue we look at sustainability, the environment and crofting, with contributions from a diverse range of initiatives across the crofting areas.



Crofting's environmental credentials



Oystercatchers are found on many crofts but they have declined by 38% in Scotland since the 1990s



Curlews once common on many farms and crofts are getting scarcer - The number of curlews breeding in Scotland has fallen by two thirds over the last 20 years

Reflecting on my work with various projects last year, writes Janette Sutherland, SAC Portree, I am struck by how many crofters did not feel valued for their work and contribution to the wildlife and landscape of Skye.

BLANKET MESSAGES in the media about farming being bad for climate change, wildlife and re-wilding ironically sapped the morale of high nature value crofters more than the messages' purported target of intensive agriculture.

This low morale is dangerous for crofting. Crofting systems often co-exist with, and provide niches for, many threatened species of plants and animals, critical during the biodiversity crisis. Of course there is always room for improvement, but a climate of constant criticism cannot engender positive growth and change.

The contribution of crofting must be understood and fully valued to ensure that future payment systems support the full cost of the bio-diversity work of crofters. In most situations, this will include keeping livestock in semi-natural habitats. Could we also think about bringing small areas of cropping back, where it has been missing for decades?

NatureScot's POBAS project (covered in *The Crofter* before) is testing an outcome-based

approach to rewarding crofters and farmers, depending on the benefits to nature delivered by their management.

Another weakness is the lack of good species records in many areas – for wild plants, fungi, invertebrates and bats. A new project called Species on the Edge is in its development year, looking at the diverse wildlife and endangered species on Scotland's coasts and islands.

In Skye some exciting species include the Talisker burnett moth (only found on Skye) and potentially rare medicinal leech sites. The project has also studied new records of great yellow bumblebees, suggesting this species may not be extinct in Skye. There are hopes to undertake more bat surveys to understand the island's bat populations better.

What does this have to do with crofting? Our extensive livestock systems with low use of insecticides are good for invertebrates and the animals that eat them.

This year, crofters and farmers are using nature cameras to record lapwing and other nests with the Working for Waders project. Waders benefit from crofting's low intensity, but not abandoned, grasslands, along with predator control.

Partnership between crofters and naturalists can be tricky, as there is often not a shared language; and people have to take time to see

things from others' points of view. In the most cases, however, the goals are aligned.

A good example is the Skye Crofting and Corncrake Partnership, between crofters and RSPB. Corncrakes need crofting to provide habitats. Modifications to cutting dates and methods are required. It is important the support payments make these modifications viable for crofters.

Current crofting is not perfect for wildlife, and in many ways early practices were better. However, positive collaborations, as well as appropriate financial commitments by government, should allow crofting and its associated wildlife to flourish in the future.

What can you do as a crofter?

- Keep a list of species that you see on your croft or common grazings.
- Get the habitats on your croft mapped – an integrated land management plan can support you.
- Consider applying for future agri-environment schemes.
- Get involved in shaping a new type of agri-environment scheme by taking part in NatureScot pilots, if possible.
- Get involved in local wildlife projects like Species on the Edge, so crofting expertise can work with conservationists.

SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Agri-environment support schemes: results-based pilots work

GWYN JONES, from the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, reported to the CPGoC on the results-based approach pilot project to agri-environment support schemes.

- The pilot has been funded by NatureScot and Outer Hebrides Leader.
- Payment is based on level of achievement of results or outcomes, not just obeying/not breaking rules.
- Usually based on a score-card approach, with criteria that are easy to understand and measure and replicable over a reasonable part of the year.
- Results-based payments are not appropriate on their own if things are not amenable to change; or change is likely to take a very long time.

- Results-based payments work best as part of a toolbox, underpinned by basic rules and perhaps complemented by action-based elements and supported by capital works payments – within a framework of affordable advice.
- The current agri-environment approach is sub-optimal – only delivering for some things – rules are everything. This is very un-empowering/disrespectful of participants.
- A results-based or payments-for-outcomes approach might deliver better in some circumstances; it would change the participant/government relationship and mobilise participants' skills and experience and motivate or engage them better.
- In the case of common grazings, free them up from difficult long-term consent issues.
- Proven success in other places – there are

many schemes in Ireland.

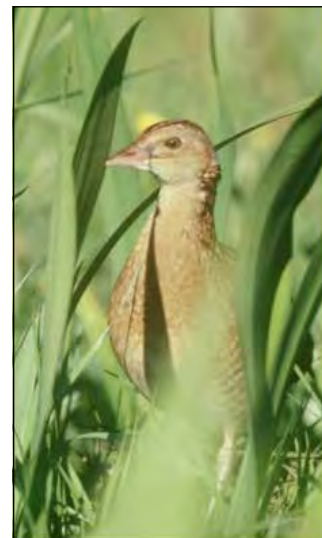
- Growing interest in EU; impetus to re-examine policy due to Brexit.
- Obvious challenges/known unknowns.
- If it will be one of the tools in the box, it needs development, especially for common grazings;

Ross Lilley, head of natural resource management at NatureScot said that the POBAS (Piloting Outcomes Based Approach Scotland) project has come a long way and is testing widely – both geographically and systemically. The score cards will continue to be tested over the next couple of years. There will be a participants' payment. This is being fed into the Hills, Uplands and Crofting Group (HUCG).

More information can be found at: www.nature.scot/doc/piloting-outcomes-based-approach-scotland-pobas-project.



Corncrake-friendly mowing by Iain Leitch



© Cliff Reddick

Every corncrake counts!

SILAGE FIELDS are normally cut for winter feed in the height of summer. Corncrakes, one of Scotland's rarest summer visitors, nest in these fields.

In spring, corncrakes are often heard calling from nettle beds, but from late May onwards they move into hay and silage fields to nest and raise broods. It's a tricky balance to ensure winter feed for animals is produced without compromising valuable habitat for corncrakes and other wildlife which rely on silage grasslands. The Skye Corncrake and Crofting Partnership, with funding from National Heritage Lottery funding, through the Corncrake Calling

project, is here to help!

Corncrakes are extremely rare, especially on Skye. For the last couple of years, only around eight calling males have returned to breed. A few decades ago, corncrakes would have been plentiful in every crofting township; the persistent rasping call an integral part of dusky Skye nights.

Corncrakes are part of our agricultural landscape and heritage. Because they nest in grasslands grown for hay or silage, it's likely to have been management changes, such as earlier and faster mowing, and the move in some areas to summer grazing instead, that caused them to disappear. An extremely small

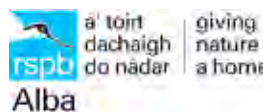
and dispersed population is left, so tracking down a mate is more difficult. Adults or chicks lost to predators will have a much greater impact than in larger, more robust populations.

RSPB's Shelagh Parlane, explains, "We can help corncrakes by mowing to let young birds and adults stay in the long grass and escape to field margins and uncut areas where they will be safe from mowers. Corncrakes and their chicks are in hay and silage fields from late May until well into September, so mowing in this way is extremely valuable all through the season. If you can delay mowing until at least August, it gives corncrakes a chance to

hatch their eggs and rear their young safely, in readiness for their long migration back to Africa."

Janette Sutherland of SAC said: "The Corncrake Calling project provides funding to compensate crofters and farmers for delaying mowing. If this is not an option for you, then corncrake-friendly mowing – mowing from the centre outwards – is also funded. Whenever you mow, this method can make the difference between life and death for corncrakes and other wildlife."

Contact Shelagh Parlane, RSPB Scotland Corncrake project officer for Skye on 07771545409, Shelagh.parlane@rspb.org.uk.



SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Donald's hortiblog

YET AGAIN, the growing season turns out to be strange and unpredictable. One thing is certain: it's a late one, due to a very cold and dry spring and early summer.

But in keeping with the theme of this issue, environment and conservation, I'm looking again at the benefits of trees and hedges. This is not a question of trees or livestock, it's about trees and livestock, and creating conditions benefitting a whole range of crofting activities.

When I took over the croft in Lewis over thirty years ago, the first things I did were to erect polytunnels and plant shelter belts, both of which were viewed with a fair degree of scepticism by neighbours. In a quite short number of years, a micro-environment was created amongst the unpromising peat and rock on the shore of Loch Roag.

Here in Skye we were lucky enough to inherit an area of quite well-established woodland. We have gradually developed and extended it over twelve years, with trees of island provenance sourced from Kylerhea. We have used a steep, poor part of the croft to try and restore a fragment of the native aspen, birch and hazel wood that once covered this part of the island.

As well as sheltering our polytunnels and outdoor cropping, our wee woodlands provide a variety of habitats for birds, mainly the common and garden species, and for invertebrates. In return, this balanced food chain ensures that pests on our crops are kept to a manageable level, allowing us to maintain our "free from pesticides" status. We also have the pleasure of watching scores of fledglings emerge at this time of year.



As growers, we all need to look after the bees. We give them a helping hand by leaving some of the previous season's brassica crops to go into flower in the spring and this attracts them to pollinate our early polytunnel strawberries, peas and beans. We leave some uncut and ungrazed areas to keep the bees and other good bugs going throughout the season.

Favourite wild plants include marsh marigold,

meadowsweet, knapweed and red and white clovers. In hedges, we have flowering shrubs, including escallonia, cotoneaster, wild rose and rosa rugosa (hope no one from SNH is reading this!) and these are buzzing with many species, including a neighbouring crofter's honey bees.

The picture is a view over the croft on a typical Skye summer day a couple of years ago.

A' lùghdachadh CO₂ – dè ghabhas dèanamh aig an taigh?

THA FHIOS againn uile gu bheil cruaidh fheum air lùghdachadh an uiread de CO₂ a tha sinn a' leigeil a-mach don adhar.

Ged a tharraing Aithisg Stern ann an 2006 aire ris a' chron a ni atharrachadh sa ghnath-shìde air an eaconomaidh, bha riaghaltasan slaodach ann a bhith toirt feart oirre. Ach an-dèidh co-labhairt mhòr Pharis ann an 2015, agus sreath de rabhaidhean bhon IPCC, tha na cunnartan mu dheireadh thall a' nochdadh sna naidheachdan agus tha riaghaltasan a' dùsgadh. 'S ann glè ghoirid a tha an ùine a th' againn airson atharrachadh ge-tà, a rèir "an t-saidheans" feumaidh sinn eimisean CO₂ a lùghdachadh leis an dàrna leth

taobh a-staigh 2030 airson an cron as miosa a sheachnadh air an t-side. Feumaidh seo tionndadh mòr ann am beatha dhaoine agus feumaidh riaghaltasan oidhirpean mòra a dhèanamh airson sin. Ach faodaidh gach duine againn ar cuid a dhèanamh.

Mar eisimpleir, tha an cumhachd a thèid gu teasachadh nan taighean againn a' tighinn gu ìre mhòr bho ola, ach tha dòighean eile ann nach cuir CO₂ a-mach don adhar. Chuir sinne panail-ghrèine air mullach an taighe a bhios a' teasachadh an uisge. Bheir am panail dhuinn pailteas uisge teth air latha grianach agus beagan blàths san uisge air latha sgothach. Gheibhear taic-airgid bhon Riaghaltas an-dràsta airson

panailean uisge (Renewable Heat Incentive). Tha cuideachd panailean "photo-voltaic" againn a bheir dhuinn dealan, 4kw nuair a bhios a' ghrian a' deàrrsadh. Ged a tha na siostaman panailean PV nas cosgaile na panailean uisge, (mun cuairt air £5-6 mìle, seach £4 mìle, agus chan eil taic-airgid ri fhaighinn) bidh cunntas an dealain nas ìsle.

Nuair a thig e gu teasachadh an taighe gabhaidh teas a thoirt bhon adhar, bhon talamh no bho bhith a' losgadh fiodh nach cuir a-mach barrachd CO₂ na bhiodh e co-dhiù nuair a ghrodas e. 'S e stòbh a losgas pealaidean fiodha a th' againn a-nis 's e gu math èifeachdach.

Gabhaidh càraichean dealain

ceannachd a-nis agus mas urrainn dhut an teàirdseadh bho thùs dealain "uaine" chan eil na mìltean air an rathad a' cur CO₂ a-mach idir. Ach tha iad cosgail.

'S e tractar dealain tha mise ag iarraidh, 's mi am beachd a theàirdseadh bhon phanail PV. Gheibhear tractor dealain 25hp bho Farmtrac ach chan eil sin mòr gu leòr. Thig iad, ge-tà, tha fear 40hp aig Solelectrac ann an California – shaoilinn nach fhada gus am bi an leithid gan reic an seo.

Some thoughts on how we can reduce CO₂ emissions around the house and croft.

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain

SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Helping recycle plastic waste

Cathryn Baillie, SCF and Skye conservation officer for the John Muir Trust, shows how the trust is facilitating plastic waste disposal.

FOR CENTURIES crofting had only a positive effect on the land, working in harmony with nature and always improving the place for the next generation.

Now that has changed. We often fight against nature and rely on un-natural materials that do not break down and give back to the land. Yes, it has made some aspects of our lives easier, but at what cost?

The John Muir Trust (JMT) is a conservation charity dedicated to the protection and repair of wild places. The trust is also a significant landowner on the Isle of Skye, with a responsibility to its crofting tenants and an opportunity to help them reduce their carbon footprint.

There is so much that needs to be done, but we have to start somewhere. For us at JMT that was to offer our crofters an alternative to sending their plastic waste to landfill. It might not be much, but it is a start. We hope that if we all take small steps in the right direction, then together we can try to halt climate change and reverse the damage that

we have done to our planet, improving the land for future generations the way crofters always have.

We began collecting agricultural plastic waste from our crofting tenants at the beginning of this year and have so far collected over one tonne of waste silage wrap and feed bags. We will continue to collect and store the waste plastic until we have enough to merit transporting it to a recycling centre where it can be remanufactured into useful items like outdoor furniture and fence posts.

Our crofters were struggling to deal with the plastic since the ban of on farm burning came in. The only real options were to dispose of the waste in their domestic wheelie bins or drive the 70+ miles round trip to the local tip, where they would be charged to dispose of it. They are grateful to have been given an alternative option that is better for them and for the planet.

We were lucky to have been awarded funding from the Scottish Government's Community Climate Asset Fund and the William Grant Foundation, which enabled us to purchase the necessary equipment and pay for the running costs of the scheme. We hope that our small project will inspire others to take similar action.



Community Climate Asset Fund

Keep Scotland Beautiful

Scottish Government
Rural Affairs
gov.scot

Skye Community Litter Project



THESE IMAGES show some of the good work done by the Skye Community Litter Project.

Participants agree to regularly clear an area of their choice and a map is kept showing where the rubbish came from. Hundreds of bags of rubbish have been gathered and the work continues.

One thing that has been working well for a lot of volunteers has been hooking up with local crofters to use old feed bags for litter collection (when volunteers don't have their own) and this helps save using yet more new plastic.

Find their Facebook page to learn more.



SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

The importance of peat



© Forest Carbon

First Peatland Code restoration at Dryhope 2017

Sarah Proctor, of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK Peatland Programme, explains.

PPEATLANDS ARE powerhouses of carbon storage, storing a third of the world's soil carbon, yet covering just 3% of the global land surface. Here in Scotland peatlands cover more than 20% of the land area, making us one of the top ten countries in the world in terms of peatland extent.

Whilst the benefits that peatlands provide extend far beyond carbon storage, it is a feature that can be robustly measured and one which has been brought into sharp focus in recent years. As long as peatlands remain saturated, with the water table within 10cm of the surface, they remain essentially carbon neutral. Unfortunately, 80% of peatlands in the UK are not in a stable state and are rapidly losing their carbon store as, among other things, oxidised carbon – CO₂. Damaged peatlands are currently responsible for 4% of the UK's total annual greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to over half those of the air transport sector.

Peatland restoration can rapidly reduce carbon emissions from a site and is increasingly recognised as a climate mitigation tool for the UK. Not only do peatland restoration actions provide an achievable way to reduce avoidable emissions, they can simultaneously benefit these unique habitats, the biodiversity they contain and the services they undertake for society – filtering our upland water sources and slowing the flow in

**PEATLAND
CODE**



flood-prone catchments.

Landowners who wish to restore their degraded peatland can use the Peatland Code to help fund the restoration and ongoing management costs of a project, providing eligibility criteria are met. The Peatland Code is a mechanism for quantifying emissions reductions from peatland restoration – a certification standard for peatland restoration projects marketing their climate benefit.

Undertaking peatland restoration using the Peatland Code creates verified carbon units (1 carbon unit = 1 tonne of CO₂ equivalent) which can be sold to fund the restoration and management of the degraded peatland. Crofters can take a project forward, with the landowner's permission. Legal ownership of carbon units rests with the landowner unless agreed otherwise.

To ensure the restoration work achieves its objective to move the peatland into a condition in which it emits less carbon and that this change is maintained, the Peatland Code has checks and balances in place over the lifetime of a project, the minimum of which is 30 years. This also provides assurance to buyers that their carbon

unit purchases will result in a climate benefit that is permanent, additional and verifiable. It also provides confidence for buyers wishing to purchase carbon units up front (ie after a project has been developed under the Peatland Code but before restoration has been delivered), which in some cases provides the capital funding that enables the restoration work to occur.

The Peatland Code certification standard is managed by the IUCN UK Peatland Programme, which is responsible for ensuring that projects are independently validated and verified. Peatland Code projects are hosted on the UK Land Carbon Registry, which records transactions and provides a public and transparent picture of UK-based carbon units.

Project developers may be contracted to help develop a project. Those wishing to purchase carbon units from this voluntary carbon market may wish to work with a broker. Project developers, restoration delivery agents and brokers all operate outside the remit of the IUCN UK Peatland Programme.

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SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Sustainability works both ways



Scottish land use strategy

THE THIRD edition of the land use strategy, *Land use – getting the best from our land: strategy 2021 to 2026* – was published in March.

The Scottish Government said: “Scotland’s third land use strategy sets out our vision, objectives and policies to achieve sustainable land use. The strategy covers the next five years and aims to provide a more holistic understanding of our land, the demands we place upon it and the benefits we get from our land.

“Ten years on from the publication of Scotland’s first land use strategy, considerations as to how we own, use and manage our land have never been as urgent and relevant as they are now.

“Much has happened since the publication of the last land use strategy in 2016, including of course the current Covid 19 pandemic that is impacting on our lives in so many ways. But the twin global climate and biodiversity crises are as pressing as ever – and the Scottish Government remains determined and committed to playing its full part in combating these issues.

“Our land can provide the vital platform to help us realise our many ambitions. In this, our third land use strategy, we provide an overview of Scottish government actions that are currently being taken and look to set out the kind of changes that will be required to achieve sustainable land use. If we are to leave a legacy of sustainability for future generations, these changes must engage beyond the land itself to all of us that call Scotland home.”

You can find the document on the Scottish government website at: <https://bit.ly/3qWpArG>, or contact your local department office.



In a previous issue of The Crofter, SCF member Cheryl McIntyre reported on a hydro scheme established by the North Talisker sheep stock club, of which she is secretary. Here she gives an update, reflecting on the contributions to the local economy made by the hydro scheme, compared to the sheep stock club.

INSTALLATION of the North Talisker hydro scheme started in September 2014, when full planning permission was granted. By March 2021 the scheme had generated over 1,145,196 kWh, giving an annual average of approximately 225,000 kWh. The main loan was paid back in 2018 and the envelopes in the picture show the last batch of smaller lenders being paid back.

This is a fantastic success story – not only for the future of the North Talisker sheep stock club, which is by far the largest in the crofting areas with its 64 shares, but also for its significant contribution to the environment. Enough energy is generated by the scheme to power approximately 50 households per annum and this displaces about 70,000 kgs of CO₂ annually.

The scheme could not have happened without the support of the local community. Of the 20 small lenders, 18 were local to Skye and 13 are shareholders in North Talisker common grazings and sheep stock club. The committee is very grateful for these contributions and is researching future diversification projects.

The scheme would not have happened at all without the vision and colossal amount of work

put in by the previous clerk Elma MacIver and the committee. Thank you, Elma, on behalf of all at North Talisker.

In terms of sustainability the hydro is a win. But it doesn't exist in isolation. Taking the bigger picture of the sheep stock club and common grazings, where the hydro is located and operates alongside – the nature of what sustainability really means is twofold.

With the hydro scheme it is easy to understand how renewable energy is sustainable, but it only takes a few people to run and maintain. Much of the initial construction was by contractors who came in from away. Compare this to the sheep stock club which employs many local folk, buys from local companies and uses local contractors. This is a whole other more meaningful type of sustainability for rural communities.

The hydro maybe creates 0.25 of a FTE post per year for all associated operations combined and relies on off-island engineers for service. The sheep stock club is a massive employer which supports other local businesses and contractors. Both have similar turnovers, but the accounts for the sheep stock club take up four bursting ring-binders per year, while the hydro has a modest one.

Thinking about the local multiplier effect where every £1 spent locally could have a x3 multiplying effect, recirculating in the local economy, it's great that the hydro can now feed funds into the sheep stock club and local community to keep active crofting and associated local businesses thriving.

SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Solar panels in Breasclete, Isle of Lewis



At the beginning



View of the array, January 2021

SCF member Keith Murray shares his experience.

BACK AT the beginning of the 21st century much was being made of installing solar panels on the roofs of houses.

A financial incentive was being offered to house owners who took up this CO₂ reduction idea and there is plenty of evidence of that dotted about Scotland. However, 116mph winds recorded in Carloway back in January 2005 suggested that roof-mounted solar panels were perhaps not the greatest idea for my croft house on the west side of Lewis.

I started to explore the option of ground-mounted units. Would they be able to cope with the vagaries of the Outer Hebridean gales, particularly in the winter?

In 2014 I found the option was possible – suppliers claimed their ground-mounted units would withstand +130mph. I approached a supplier. Armed with their quotation, and with the recommended local renewables contractor, I had a 4kW array installed on an area to the east of the house, commissioned in March 2015.

Of course there were incentives back then –

- (a) a feed in tariff
- (b) export to the grid and
- (c) electricity savings.

The renewables contractor estimated that would be around £650/annum.

In addition, I was sure that my experience with growing trees to create a wind break (*The Crofter*, 2020) would be a just-in-case safeguard, particularly in the early years of the installation. A belt-and-braces approach of ranch-type fencing was built while the young trees matured.

The successful production of electricity and the annual revenue generated has more than met the early estimate quoted and still gives a better return than money sitting in the bank. Unfortunately, many who might consider this option in 2021 do not have the financial incentives being offered six years ago. A pity really, as the system has exceeded my expectations; and in a small way I feel I'm contributing to a sustainable future.

Your Feed In Tariff payments				
Payment Type	% Split	kWh to be paid	Tariff rate	Payment amount
01 Apr 2021 – 31 Jun 2021				
Generation	100.00%	1078.34 kWh	at 14.3p	£154.20
21 Mar 2021 – 31 Mar 2021				
Generation	100.00%	144.65 kWh	at 14.13p	£20.43
01 Apr 2021 – 31 Jun 2021				
Deemed Export	100.00%	539.17 kWh	at 5.67p	£30.03
21 Mar 2021 – 31 Mar 2021				
Deemed Export	100.00%	72.32 kWh	at 5.5p	£3.97
Total Feed in Tariff payment this period				£208.63 credit
Total for your account				£208.63 credit

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Visit the Common Grazings section of the Farm Advisory Service website to read up on 12 Common Grazing Dilemmas and how to tackle them, such as

- Contributions from inactive shareholders
- Splitting the payment for the Township Bull
- Who is responsible for fences?

You can also read our inspirational Common Grazing Case Studies from Shetland, Argyll, Uist and Caithness.



SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Promoting sustainability and a greener future



The first pipeline delivery arriving on the island

Earlier this year Raasay Community Renewables successfully raised £650,000 to fund the construction of two run-of-river micro hydro schemes on the Isle of Raasay. Director Ross Gillies gives an update on progress.

THE TWO turbines, with a combined rating of 137kW, will provide an annual income for the local community over the next 20 years, starting at roughly £6,000 in 2024 and rising to around £28,000 annually by 2031.

The interest in building a hydro scheme has been ongoing on Raasay since 2014. Primarily driven by volunteers, the project has taken many twists and turns since the idea was first proposed. In 2019 the project seemed dead in the water, but additional support from the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme and a £300,000



The directors

grant from the SSE Sustainable Development Fund in early 2020 provided a much-needed boost that has enabled the project to be realised.

A community benefit society was formed in mid-2020 to steer the project through development and construction. The new society's board consisted of Rosie Macleod, Ross Gillies, Ross Camilli and Artemis Pana. With the help of an HIE-funded local development officer, Elizabeth MacLeod, and Community Shares Scotland, all that remained was to raise the £650,000.

In January 2021 a crowd-funder was created to raise the remaining capital to build the project. In seven weeks the money was raised, with roughly 400 investors from around the world engaging and supporting the project financially through purchasing shares in the community-owned scheme.

Whilst the crowd-funder was running, the board worked with Forestry and Land Scotland on a community asset transfer, in addition to the Department of Agriculture, the local common grazing committee and a private landowner, to secure the required leases.

The construction phase began in July 2021 and will be project managed and constructed by BluEnergy. The two schemes will be completed and commissioned by September 2022 to meet the feed-in tariff scheme deadline.

Through generating and selling the electricity to the national grid, we will receive income for a community benefit fund. This income will allow the community to fund projects with a view to promoting sustainability and a greener future.

It gives our small island and its community of 170 a bit of self-reliance and autonomy whilst promoting an awareness of the environment and our energy usage.

A key driver for long-term sustainability

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn shows how its wind turbines benefit local crofting communities.

GALSON ESTATE, 56,000 acres of land in the most north-westerly part of the Isle of Lewis, was acquired by the community in January 2007 and is now managed by Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust), on behalf of the residents of 22 active crofting townships.

In the early stages of the buy-out, renewable energy was identified as a key driver for long-term sustainability and a detailed wind energy study for three turbines was undertaken between July 2005 and May 2006.

A preferred site was identified in the village of Baile an Truiseil, around 21km (15mi) north-west of Stornoway. Long-term mean wind speed at the site is significantly above the UK average. Importantly, the site is near to suitable electricity grid capacity, which reduced

capital costs, lowered borrowing and maximised returns for the community.

Planning permission and a grid connection agreement were secured over 2008-2010. Over the same period, negotiations were held with the grazings committee to set out lease terms, including annual rentals. The footprint areas were temporarily removed from crofting tenure using Section 19A of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.

A first wind turbine was successfully installed in autumn 2013, financed primarily through a loan from the Co-operative Bank, based on feed-in tariff support. Attention then turned to financing and installing another two turbines. As the Co-operative Bank was unable to lend again, Triodos Bank stepped in to enable the development to progress.

There was a requirement for a community contribution towards the capital costs and a share offer was chosen as the preferred route. By February 2015, a total of £705,800



Galson turbines

from 167 investors had been gathered by Urras Energy Society, a legal entity specially set up for the offer. This secured the bank loan, resulting in the turbines being installed in the summer of 2015.

The three turbines are operated by Galson Energy Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Urras Energy Society, and are forecast to produce 8,871 Megawatt hours per annum in total. Actual performance has tended to be slightly in excess.

Surpluses from energy production are passed to Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn for distribution in accordance with its 2017-37 strategic plan. The plan's priorities include care and wellbeing, tourism, crofting/land use and community cohesion activities.

Turbine investors receive an attractive return over a twenty-year period, at the same time helping to create a sustainable future for the community.



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SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING

Establishing new woodlands on Eigg for amenity and sustainability

The Croft Woodland Project has been working with the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT), community owners of Eigg, to help deliver a new native woodland on the island. Iona Hyde from the Woodland Trust (WT) reports.

WITH A number of woodland projects planned on the island over the next few years, IEHT established a community nursery in 2017. All 17,500 plants for the new 12.8ha native woodland were supplied by the Eigg Nursery, grown with seed collected from the island. Species planted include downy birch, hazel, rowan, oak, wych elm, alder, willows and hawthorn.

The project was managed by Eigg Nursery manager Tasha Fyffe, who overcame a number of major challenges to deliver the project on time, not least that the planned volunteer labour arranged to plant the woodland was cancelled due to the pandemic. Following fencing of the site by an Eigg contractor, a trial planting in March 2020 was undertaken during the first UK national lock-down.

Tasha, with a few helpers, graded and packed the plants at the nursery, then carried all of the planting stock with tools and materials to the planting sites. With no road access, all site

preparation was undertaken by hand too.

By January 2021, lessons learned from the trial planting had been addressed. Changes for the second phase of the project included employing the services of an Argocat and driver. As Eigg remained closed to visitors during the pandemic to protect the community, local residents were employed and trained to help deliver the project on the ground.

WT's Croft Woodland Project provided on-going advice, helped secure grants approval and provided a loan to bridge the financial gap between outgoings prior to the woodland creation grant being paid by Scottish Forestry.

Now that the site is planted, WT will assist IEHT with the sale of carbon sequestered from the site. WT registers the carbon units on the Markit registry and passes them on to companies wishing to offset their carbon footprint, risk assessed to ensure that they are ethically compliant with WT standards. IEHT will then invest the income from carbon sales into further woodland and community projects on Eigg.

For more information on IEHT and the tree planting project, see <http://isleofeigg.org/ieht/> and for the croft woodland project, email crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk.



Planting trees on Eigg

© Eigg Adventures



Eigg Nursery polytunnel summer 2020

© Tasha Fyffe

Sustainable willow growing offers hope for the future



Catherine and Pascal Davis harvesting willow, Eigg

Dr Fiona Macpherson, project co-ordinator, explains

SERIOUS conservation and environmental challenges are posed by the issues of plastic in the oceans and the entanglement of whales and dolphins in "ghost" fishing gear. According to a Greenpeace 2019 report, 640,000 tonnes of the 12 million tonnes of plastic released annually into the oceans comes from this fishing debris.

Kilcheran, a social enterprise focused on sustainability issues, is running a project supported by Historic Environment Scotland to explore the feasibility of replacing this modern fishing gear with

compostable willow baskets, to start addressing the problem.

Working in consultation with artisan basket weavers and willow growers around Scotland, information is being gathered on all aspects of recreating a once-thriving fishing basket weaving industry in Scotland. Lessons can be learnt from the past to develop more sustainable practices and sustainable livelihoods for the future.

Prototype willow lobster creels are being tested on Muck by lobster fisherman Sandy Mathers. These are being assessed alongside modern creels and the design optimised. Creel-making workshops are planned in August to expand the basket weaving expertise available, followed



Pascal making a lobster pot, Eigg

by more extensive fishing trials.

An important part of the feasibility is to explore how to increase production of coppiced willow for making these baskets, to potentially fulfil future need. Catherine and Pascal Davies, experienced crofters, willow growers and basket-makers from Eigg, are involved in making the first prototypes for this project, utilising their own willow and artisan skills in basket weaving.

They commented: "Recent demand for basketry and more sustainable local products coupled with the potential of this project will increase the market for willow. Diversification is essential for the future of crofting and willow growing is an easy and viable option.

Crofters who want to diversify should be encouraged to explore this further."

Kilcheran has initiated dialogue to examine ways in which crofters can be supported in the growing, preparation and marketing of willow species, as currently there is no support available. An important element of this feasibility is to gather information relating to the interest in the crofting community to either increase their production, introduce new marketable species or to start a new willow-growing opportunity.

Kilcheran would like to hear from crofters who would like to be part of this initiative – fiona.macpherson@kilcheran.com.

SUSTAINABILITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CROFTING



Alder copse at Lynbreck croft

© Woodland Trust

Grants for woodland creation and management

THE MAIN source of grant funding in Scotland for woodland creation and management of existing woodlands is the **Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS)**.

Woodland creation: grants of up to £3,600/ha are available for planting new native woodlands within a target area, which includes much of the Highland region. For small woods (<3ha) on exposed sites in the crofting counties, grants of up to £6,720/ha are available. In addition, where deer fencing is required, this can be supported at a rate of £7.60/m with a high-cost deer fence of £9.90/m, available over much of Highland. New woodlands may also be able to attract additional carbon funding from private investors through the Woodland Carbon Code – <https://woodlandcarboncode.org.uk>.

Care needs to be taken when considering ground for planting, to identify and address any constraints, eg peat deeper than 50cm cannot be planted, and to ensure that the site is capable of establishing woodland to the standard required under FGS. It is also worth considering if the site could produce timber.

The FGS capital grant is usually claimed in two stages – after the fence has been constructed and after the planting is complete. It is paid directly to the business reference number usually within three months of the claim. The annual management grant is claimed each year on the common grazings' single application form and is paid a year in arrears. Early contact with a professional forester, the Croft Woodlands adviser or your local Scottish Forestry conservancy is recommended to discuss potential sites. Progressing woodland expansion on common grazings will also require a crofter forestry application to the Crofting Commission – www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/crofter-forestry.

Natural regeneration establishment: FGS can

provide grant support of £300/ha for establishing new natural regeneration, with an expectation of a minimum stocking density of 400 trees/ha at year five. Fencing and deer management grants are available in conjunction with this funding to encourage and protect emerging regeneration.

Woodland improvement grants and sustainable management of forests: To support the management of existing native woodlands, FGS offers a range of woodland improvement grants to fund capital spend on activities to improve the condition of woodlands and annual management grants of £25/ha to support the costs of deer management and monitoring in native woodland and £43/ha for livestock exclusion.

Forestry co-operation grant: Common grazings can access grant support of up to £10,000 from the FGS forestry co-operation fund to investigate opportunities for larger-scale woodland creation or the management of woodland. This can be wholly within a common grazings or in cooperation with neighbours. A grazings committee or sheep stock club, or a third party on their behalf, can apply for a co-operation grant. A facilitator will need to be appointed (usually a forestry agent) to lead the project. To be eligible for the co-operation grant, a common grazing will require a grazings committee and at least four participating shareholders, or a sheep stock club with at least four members. The fund can be used, for example, to assess the condition of existing native woodlands and identify future management such as woodland regeneration, or to identify areas suitable for woodland creation. Funding supports feasibility and site survey work, to produce and submit a project plan to Scottish Forestry. The committee or sheep stock club, or individual crofters, can then apply separately to FGS for funding to

deliver the actions identified in the project plan.

FGS is a competitive grant scheme and there is high demand for funding. Applications will be assessed and scored by your local Scottish Forestry team and early dialogue with your local conservancy is recommended to establish funding availability. Contact details for SF conservancy offices can be found at <https://forestry.gov.scot/about/local-offices>. Details of FGS grants can be found at <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/forestry-grants>.

Croft woodland project: Woodland Trust's Croft Woodland Project (CWP) can also provide assistance with creation of new native woodlands. Croft woodland advisers will visit the planting site to assess its suitability for planting, discuss objectives and options for funding with the crofter and design a planting scheme. The CWP can assist with accessing FGS funding if appropriate or can fund schemes through the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme, which can pay for the creation of new native woodlands on areas of land as small as 0.1ha by providing the trees, guards and stakes. For this the CWP pays 60% and invoices the crofter for 40% of the costs. Hedgerows can also be funded on the same rates through the MOREhedges scheme on appropriate sites.

Bridging loans are available to help with the delivery of approved FGS schemes through CWP and Scottish Forestry's small woodlands loan scheme.

More information is available from crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk.

The Highland and Islands Woodland Handbook produced by the Croft Woodlands Project contains a wealth of information on planning and developing woodlands:

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/44068/highlands-and-islands-woodlands-handbook.pdf.

TRAINING

Crofting Resilience in Transition

The end of March saw completion of another successful SCF training project, funded by Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), writes SCF training manager Tina Hartley.

THE AIM of the project was to deliver on-line training based on demand-led evidence of need that had arisen as a direct result of COVID 19 – training which would support the promotion of diversified activity for short-term economic recovery; and growth of innovative practice at a very localised community level.

We did what SCF does best, the provision of demand-led, vocational training. Demand allowed us to offer 25 training events, five more than originally planned, and 243 training places, 43 more than originally planned. Working with a wonderful group of tutors, course content included preparing for staycations; virtual sheepdogs; how to start a community food hub; crofting the brand; fantastic food from local producer markets; income from small-



Gerry and Joe

scale growing; turkey production for Christmas; Instagram marketing for your business; and beekeeping for beginners.

A few things made us smile along the way. In particular, 11-year-old sheepdog Joe, who along with his owner Gerry, attended our virtual sheepdog event. Joe was intent on listening to our tutor's sheepdog commands with ears pricked – he sat alert and watching for the whole two hours!

We received some fantastic feedback and wanted to share a few comments:

- "Nice friendly and professional feel to the evening's online course. Very well chaired and introduced."
- "The course was really useful, the course for me was to help me decide whether to have bees or not and it is now definitely part of my plan."
- "Just to say how much we enjoyed it. Young Rannoch was glued to the whole thing and can't wait to find our mentor now!!!"
- "I really enjoyed the course. You said that you are looking for new funding, is there anything one can do to support?"

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders, HIE, and also our tutors who did a terrific job – Fiona Campbell (ASSC), The Green Bowl, Braehillor Sheepdog Handler Training, Exclamation Marketing, Russell Smith and Beth Rose, Lucy Beattie, Elchies, Dr Audrey Sinclair and Transition Turrifield.

Watch this space – the SCF training team hopes to be back very soon.

West Highland College UHI Rural Skills course success despite pandemic



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agus nan Eilean
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Countryside Ranger students out on practical tasks

Cheryl MacRae of WHC UHI reports

LECTURING staff adapted and delivered theory sessions using the college's long-established online classroom learning environment. Practical sessions in subjects such as dry-stone walling, quad biking etc were adapted to include appropriate social distancing and other safety measures and, being held outdoors, could largely continue with the minimum of disruption.

"We are more delighted than ever that all of the students who

completed the course achieved their qualification – it's a testament to their resilience and determination and they definitely deserved an end of year celebration this year," said the college's head of curriculum, Adam Robertson.

The crofting course is designed to provide the practical skills and industry-approved certification needed for those leaving school, taking on a croft or choosing land-based industries.

Cheryl McIntyre was a student on the very first rural skills course at the college in 2011. "Ten years

on," she said "I'm lecturing on the very same course, one day a week. It covers a wide range of useful practical skills with industry-approved certification: chainsaw use, quad bike riding, polytunnel building, dry-stane dyking, animal husbandry, fencing, gardening, crofting, brush cutting, pruning, identifying plants, estate maintenance, ecology, forestry, field trips galore and helping with local community projects."

For those who don't see crofting as a career, but are interested in working on the land, whilst

the rural skills course is centred around Broadford and Skye, in 2020 the college launched a new NQ countryside skills course with ranger training in Fort William. It delivers practical training, working alongside land-managing organisations in the Nevis area, under the umbrella of Nevis Landscape Partnership.

This year, the college is delighted to announce that some of its students will benefit from a pilot scheme which will initially see two trainee seasonal ranger posts at national nature reserves across Scotland. Placements commenced in June 2021, with students based at an area office, working with reserve staff at a number of reserves.

West Highland College UHI is one of 13 academic partners of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Our 10 college centres are located throughout Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross, offering a wide range of further and higher qualifications from access to degree and postgraduate levels. Our highly successful school of adventure studies has its home primarily in Fort William, with a further base in Broadford, Isle of Skye.

For further information contact cheryl.macrae.whc@uhi.ac.uk 07774799556

The Changing Outer Hebrides: Galson and the Meaning of Place

FRANK RENNIE was first president of the Scottish Crofters Union in 1986.

In this new book he presents a fascinating and intimate account of the interrelationship between one small island village in the Hebrides and the wider world, from the formation of the bedrock three billion years ago, to the predictable near-future.

Social history is interwoven with the natural environment to consider the meaning of special places. Through the Iron Age and the clearances to contemporary events of community land ownership, the book challenges the perception that this is a remote place, isolated at the edge, but instead is crucial to our contemporary relationship with the land.

Frank Rennie is professor of sustainable rural development at Lews Castle College of the University of the Highlands and Islands, where he works on human ecology, rural issues and education. He has published more than 30 books in Gaelic and English. Also a crofter, he has strong roots in the landscape and community.

John A Love, author and naturalist, commented: "This is a remarkable and intimate portrait of Galson crofting township in all its



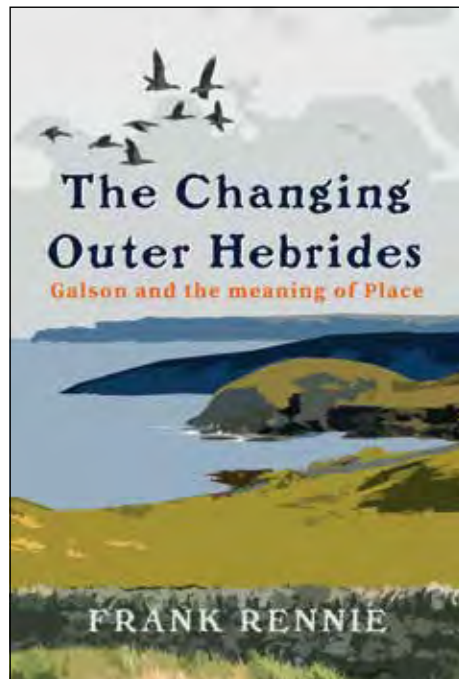
varied aspects, encompassing not just the whole island of Lewis, but the Hebrides, the Highlands, and indeed beyond. Frank Rennie reveals a deep and diverse experience of his home turf (and its highly successful community buy-out) to weave an innovative, cohesive and thought-provoking narrative. It is thoroughly researched and delivers a unique, eloquent approach to local history, set in a wider context of a sense of place."

Madeleine Bunting, author of *Love of Country, A Hebridean Journey*, said: "This is a book of deep and compelling beauty. Rennie has brought a lifetime of scholarship and personal experience to the task

of describing and explaining a few square miles of North West Lewis and in so doing, opens the readers' minds to an astonishing richness which can lie hidden and unknown to our careless feet and ignorant eyes. Full of love and a passionate attentiveness, this is a book to inspire, and urgently remind us of the power of a patient commitment to place. The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote in his much-quoted essay, *The Parish and the Universe* that, 'To be parochial a man needs the right kind of sensitive

courage and the right kind of sensitive humility.' Rennie has both, and this book has much to teach all of us. I hope through Rennie's guidance many, many readers come to know and love his home."

The Changing Outer Hebrides is published by Acair Books.



Landscape and literature

What is the connection between a crofter and a writer of historical fiction, asks Skye author Liz MacRae Shaw.

THE CONNECTION is being rooted in the landscape, a link that has existed for centuries and still thriving today. This inspired me to write my first novel, *Love and Music will Endure*, about Màiri Mhòr nan Orain, (Great Mary of the Songs), Skye poet and political campaigner.

Mairi was born into a crofting family in Skeabost in 1821. Her writing resonates with the beauty of the natural landscape, of the sun rising on the slopes of the Storr and driving away the darkness while the lark sings high overhead. There are also references to celebrations – winter weddings and ceilidhs where the only lantern was a burning peat. She describes preparations for winter at Martinmas, a time for making heather ropes and rush bags, of preparing barrels of potatoes and salted meat.

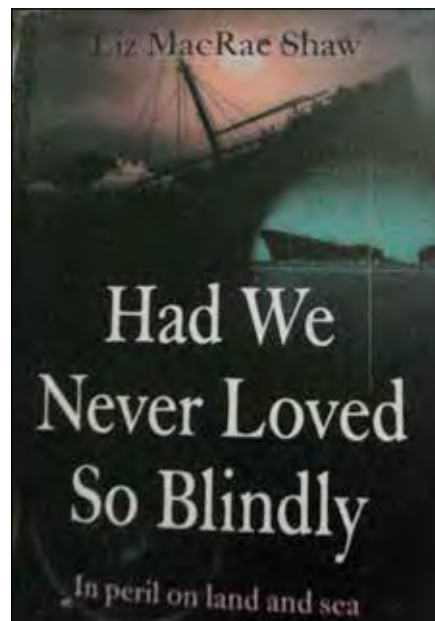
Her powerful voice was only unleashed in middle age when she was working in Inverness and falsely accused of stealing from her employer. Her rage and despair poured into songs about her fellow Highlanders driven from their homes. Through force of character

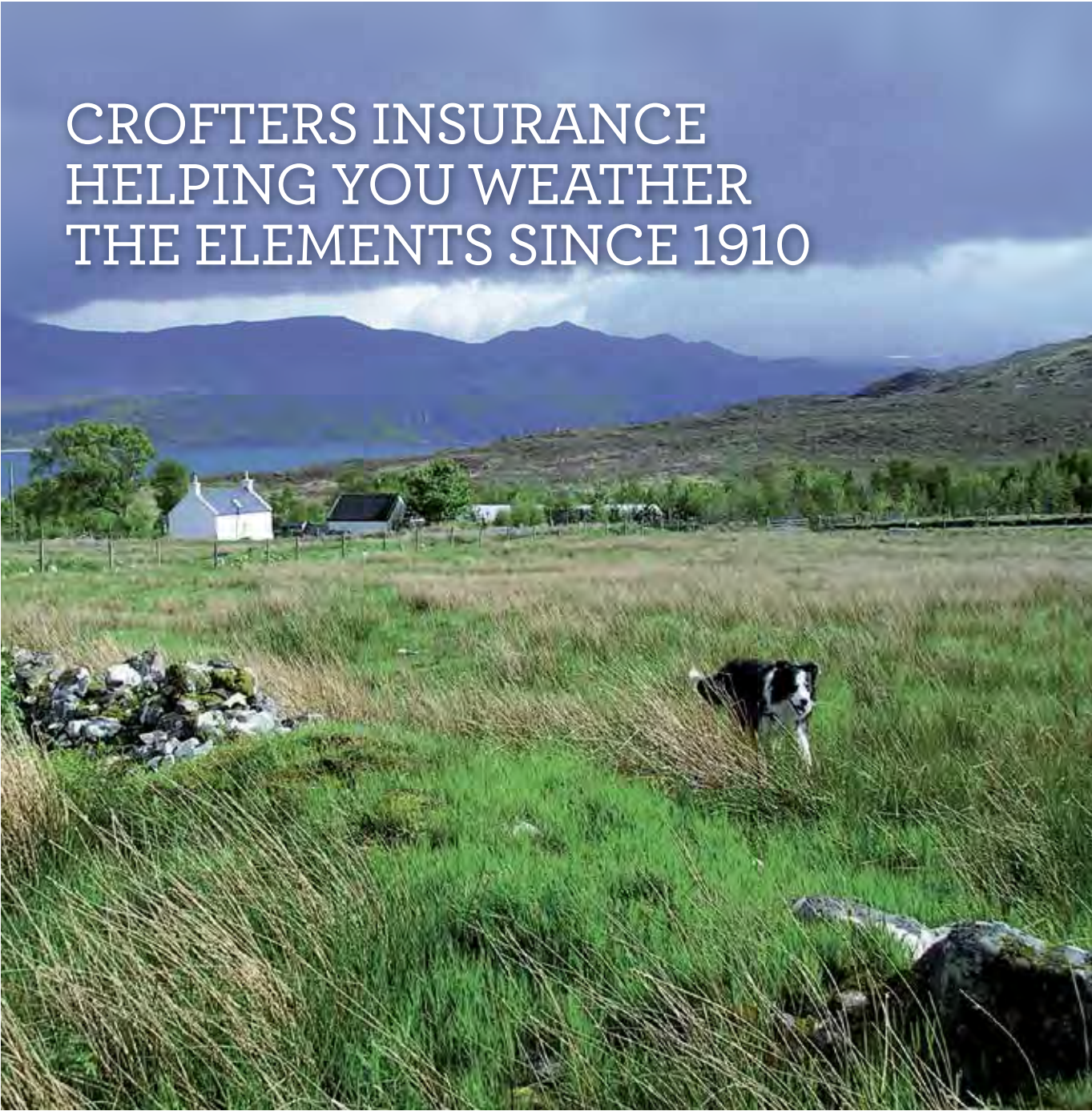
she overcame the barriers of background, class and gender to become their champion and inspiration. Finally, she returned home to Skye where she had to face up to the failures of the campaign for crofters' rights and the disillusionment of the returning exile.

The theme of landscape runs through my later books. One of the characters in *No Safe Anchorage* is Captain Henry Otter, who spent many years in the 19th century surveying Hebridean waters. He took great care in recording Gaelic names accurately and with his wife Jemima helped the people of St Kilda who were suffering from high levels of infant mortality. In gratitude at the survival of their daughter, Anne and Norman Gillies named their daughter Mary Jemima Otter Porcupine (the last name being Captain Otter's ship!)

My latest book, *Had we never loved so blindly*, set during the Second World War with a strong Highland theme, is, like the others, available in local bookshops, on Amazon and at uk.bookshop.org/shop/CarminaGadelica, or from me directly at lizmacraeshaw@outlook.com

I have three copies of *Had we never loved so blindly* available for the first people to e-mail me with the source of the book's title.





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Highland volunteers sought for new study

THE UNIVERSITY of Glasgow has launched a new study aimed at understanding how social relationships relate to health and wellbeing in Scotland – and they need help from Highland residents.

Researchers are seeking participants to take part in an anonymous, online survey. The short survey will only take around 15 minutes to complete and all responses will be completely confidential. To take part, you must be aged 16 or over and live in a rural Highland community of less than 3000 residents.

To learn more about the study and take part, access the study link at:

<http://bit.ly/connectionsstudy>.



Helen O'Keefe, Young Crofter of the Year 2021

Nominations for SCF Young Crofter of the Year will open again in November.

Look out for details in the next edition of *The Crofter* and on our social media.

Social Connections, Health & Wellbeing in Scotland Study

We are looking for...

- Adults aged 16 and older
- Who live in either Glasgow or the rural Highlands

To take part in a confidential survey aimed at understanding how social relationships relate to health and wellbeing.

Participants will be entered to win a £50 voucher in exchange for their participation.

For more info, see bit.ly/connectionsstudy



MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit



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Annual General Meeting

SCF's AGM will be held via Zoom on Wednesday 6th October 2021, to pass resolutions 1-3 below.

The meeting room will open at 11.15am to ensure a prompt start at 11.30am. The company business part of the AGM will come after the speakers and discussion, followed by the opportunity for an open-floor session.

Mairi Gougeon, new cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands, will address the gathering at 11.30am and John Kerr, SG head of agricultural policy, will talk about agricultural policy and take questions.

Resolution 1 – To receive the company's accounts and the directors' and auditors' reports for the last financial year. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and can be provided in advance on request.

Resolution 2 – To ratify the appointment of any new directors recently co-opted onto the board.

Resolution 3 – To appoint auditors proposed by the directors, or to re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, as independent examiners of the company accounts.

If you wish to attend the AGM, you must register with SCF HQ in advance by email, so that Zoom log-in details can be provided.

If you are unable to attend the AGM, a proxy form is enclosed with this issue.



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