

## Access to crofts

**F**OLLOWING our article in the last issue of *The Crofter*, SCF wrote to the board of Crofting Commissioners, whose term of office is approaching completion, asking them to reflect on their watch at the helm of the crofting regulator.

In the open letter, which appeared in the press, we asked what is preventing the commission from being the effective custodian we all want, what is required to restore crofting regulation to good health?

The letter does not criticise the commission in any way, rather it asks commissioners for their opinion. It is not a secret that commissioners (and staff) feel that they are restricted by current law and a lack of resources, that they are unable to take action or make decisions that they know

...Continued on page 3

## The audit of the Crofting Commission

**T**HE 2020/21 audit of the Crofting Commission is shocking reading.

As a public body, funded with public money to carry out a public function, it falls under the scrutiny of the Auditor General for Scotland. His report concludes, in a nutshell, "The body responsible for overseeing Scotland's 20,000 crofts must improve its governance and rebuild damaged relationships between its board and managers."

This refers to the structural relationships of the organisation breaking down yet again. SCF appreciates that this setup – a board of commissioners, some elected and some

...Continued on page 3

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- adapting to climate change
- extensive grazing
- parasite treatment
- national test scheme
- croft safety
- agritourism
- ... and much more



SCF member Jo Hunt and family on climate march in Glasgow

## We cannot lose sight of the importance of food production

**S**CF HOPED that COP 26 could move the discussion on climate change beyond the bashing of agriculture that we have become accustomed to in recent years, but unfortunately polarisation of the debate seems to have continued. Writing this during the first week of the conference, we hope that agreements realising the importance of agriculture can still be reached.

Of course emissions from agriculture need to be reduced, as all sectors need to, but the challenge we face is far too important to be boiled down to cheap sound bites about cattle and red meat.

Crofters are already doing a lot of good that should be encouraged and rewarded. Yes, there is a need for change in the sector and crofting cannot sit this one out, but that change is achievable and we believe the industry is ready to make our contribution.

Many crofters already manage to produce quality livestock with minimal inputs of artificial fertilisers and bought-in feeds, both helping to keep carbon emissions low. In addition, these livestock help maintain some of our rarest and most important natural habitats.

However, as most of us produce store livestock,

we can't ignore what happens when our animals leave the croft and go to finishers all over the UK. We are reliant on an integrated agricultural system. The ability of these businesses to adapt and improve how they operate will be critical to the future of livestock production in the Highlands and Islands. In efforts to reduce the carbon emissions of agriculture, we cannot lose sight of the importance of food production.

Tinkering with production methods, while important, will not go far enough to help meet our climate targets. Land use change led by crofters and other land managers will be crucial to delivering net zero. Restoring peatland and planting new woodland will be necessary; but we don't have to choose between sheep and peat, or cattle and trees. We can have both.

Integrating livestock with these land uses could help achieve net zero, alongside maintaining and increasing the biodiversity that only livestock can support. Focusing on carbon emissions alone will leave us in danger of neglecting the biodiversity crisis which is just as pressing an issue.

World leaders need to get this right. Agriculture cannot be used as a scapegoat. We will all have to do our bit to help achieve net zero.

## Message from the chair...

Donald MacKinnon



**W**ELCOME TO the December issue of *The Crofter*, another issue packed full of interesting articles and opinion pieces.

November was dominated by the COP 26 gathering in Glasgow. SCF did not have direct involvement in the conference, but we have been engaging in the wider debate on climate emergency. We have continued to argue that, despite the rhetoric from some, livestock rearing has an important role to play in tackling the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. Rearing cattle and sheep in a traditional way, while making use of modern technology, is critical to maintaining the natural environment and Highlands and Islands communities.

In last few years the pages of *The Crofter* have had many articles about the future of agricultural policy in Scotland. We have argued that crofters and the wider agricultural industry need clarity from the Scottish Government on what that policy is going to look like. The recent announcement from the cabinet secretary about the launch of the National Test Programme is the clearest indication to date of that future direction. As a member of the implementation board set up by the cabinet secretary earlier this year, I will

continue to represent the interests of crofters and crofting and make sure that the needs of smaller producers are recognised. This policy must work for the whole of Scottish agriculture.

We were disappointed that crofting law reform did not get a mention in this year's Programme for Government; in fact crofting barely got a mention at all. However, we were heartened by the cabinet secretary's address to the SCF AGM in September, when she restated the Scottish Government's intention to deliver crofting law reform in this parliamentary session. It is crucial that the groundwork begins as soon as possible.

Plans for reform of the law are closely linked to our campaign on access to crofts. The market in crofts shows no sign of slowing, with exorbitant prices paid for crofts across the crofting counties, although some areas seem to be particularly badly affected. We will continue to highlight this issue and work with other stakeholders to try to develop solutions, including the Crofting Commission and Scottish Government.

It's hard to believe it's tupping time again. With only winter in the way, spring and lambing will be just around the corner. I hope it is kind to you and your stock and that you have a good Christmas and New Year when it comes!

# National Test Programme

**S**INCE IT became clear that the UK would be leaving the European Union, and with it the Common Agricultural Policy, SCF has been calling for the Scottish Government to provide a clear plan for the future of agricultural policy in Scotland.

The current period of Stability and Simplicity is due to finish in 2024 and the big question is what comes after that. Cabinet secretary Mairi Gougeon's announcement at the end of October about the launch of the National Test Programme does not answer all these questions, but it is the clearest indication yet of what future policy will focus on.

The announcement launched a series of pilot schemes which will be voluntary to begin with. The proposed Track 1 will aim to reach a large number of crofters and farmers across the country and will involve support for undertaking carbon audits and, where appropriate, nutrient management plans. A livestock data performance feedback scheme will also be launched, aimed at suckler beef producers.

Track 2 will look in detail at a smaller number of producers to identify how future schemes and payment structures can be developed to meet the objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting biodiversity, while supporting sustainable business practices.

Crofters reading this might not be overly enthusiastic about taking part in these voluntary schemes, but it is essential that crofters do get

involved. Participation from a good cross-section of producers will be vital to ensure that this approach is going to be suitable for crofting. It is likely that carbon audits will be a feature of future schemes post 2024. Early involvement should help make that transition easier.

This approach cannot be allowed to disadvantage smaller producers. SCF has consistently argued that for any scheme requiring work to be carried out to allow entry, the cost of

that work must be met in full, whether a carbon audit, animal health plan or biodiversity audit. It is also important that these pieces of work are not simply a tick-box exercise, but provide crofters with insights into their business and add value.

As frustrating as it is that the detail of what awaits us in 2025 is still not clear, it is encouraging to see progress being made. We now need to make sure that future schemes are designed to work for crofters and crofting.



© Claire Nicolson



# The audit of the Crofting Commission

...Continued from page 1

appointed, an executive team and a body of government officials – is not ideal for smooth functioning and really needs to be reviewed. Everyone involved must feel frustrated.

The commission is the key-stone of the much-valued regulated system of land tenure that is crofting, and we hoped that this sort of internal wrangling was a thing of the past.

It translates into a lack of achievement of outcomes, particularly those we have raised on many occasions about occupation and use of crofts. The lack of regulation is threatening the future of the crofting system. We note the comments from the commission convener and CEO that the issues are being addressed – and we wish them well in this. It is urgent.

The immediate urgency is to get the organisation working again, but it is clear that a more fundamental redesign is needed. There is a statistical rule: once is an incident, twice is coincidence and thrice is a trend.

Three times now we have seen the Crofting Commission slide into dysfunction, with strife at the top and the untimely departure of the convener. This pattern cannot be allowed to repeat. The structure doesn't work so there must be a review and return to the drawing board.

The 2020/21 audit of the Crofting Commission can be found at: [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/the-202021-audit-of-the-crofting-commission](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/the-202021-audit-of-the-crofting-commission).

## Commissioner elections coming up

Elections for commissioners will take place next April. SCF encourages members to consider standing for this important role – or encouraging someone else to. We have the valuable opportunity to have elected commissioners on the regulatory board, so please put yourself forward – crofting needs you. If you are interested please contact the Crofting Commission for information on how to stand and the election process.

Thank you.



© Martin Benson

# Access to crofts

...Continued from page 1

would be right for crofting. So we asked what are the specific areas of law that the commission can identify for reform, which would lift the legal fetters? What resources are needed to regulate and enforce duties effectively?

We have had no reply to these important questions yet, but there has been progress. At the board meeting of the Crofting Commission, a report was presented entitled *Consideration of the Market in the Assignment of Croft Tenancies*. You can find this on the commission website and it is worth a read. It gives some background detail on the emergence of a developing market in croft tenancies and various options were provided, including "The commission could ask the Scottish Government to appoint an expert panel to examine this specific issue and provide recommendations prior to the process for any new crofting legislation."

After a short debate amongst the commissioners, which included attempts to frame the issue as simply part of a global housing problem and the suggestion that crofters could take a principled stand and not sell for market price, all acknowledged that better/tougher regulation is a realistic way to help depress prices, though to do it effectively would require more resource.

The option of an expert panel was not discussed and the debate concluded with commissioners agreeing that another paper would be prepared

on what it does within current constraints. The paper will be presented at the next board meeting early in December, at which the cabinet secretary with responsibility for crofting, Mairi Gougeon, will be present.

Whether it will go further, into what changes to law and resourcing are needed to improve delivery, is yet to be seen.

## We need to know what you think

Please let us know:

- What you think about the current situation in crofting – the high prices, crofts being neglected, new entrants finding it almost impossible to get in, crofts being developed on – sometimes by companies.
- Do you think regulation needs to be tightened up? Should there be more done to ensure that crofts are used?
- Should unused crofts be passed on to new entrants as a matter of course?
- Is bringing croft (including tenancy) prices down a good thing?
- Do you have any suggestions on how to get crofting into a healthier situation?

Have your say on this important issue: email us, write us a letter, use social media or simply give us a phone.

Thank you!

**RSABI**  
Supporting People  
in Scottish Agriculture



## Help for Heating

If you're worried about your fuel bills  
and heating your home this winter  
please give us a call on  
**0300 111 4166**  
to see how we can help.



# inksters



As featured on BBC Alba,  
Reporting Scotland and  
Sunday Politics Scotland

01599 230 300  
crofting@inksters.com

croftinglaw.com  
inksters.com







T: 01806 335577  
E: info@polycrub.co.uk  
www.polycrub.co.uk  
Developed 13 years ago.  
Great for growing, storage  
or small livestock.  
CAGS compliant.

## ALLANS OF GILLOCK LTD



GILLOCK MAINS, GILLOCK, WICK, CAITHNESS, KW1 5UR  
TEL: 01955 661211

YOUR LOCAL BUILDERS & AGRICULTURAL MERCHANTS



Stockists of

### FENCING MATERIALS & GATES SHEEP & CATTLE HANDLING & FEEDING EQUIPMENT

**CAITHNESS**  
Tel: 01955 661211  
Fax: 01955 661244  
info@allans.co.uk

**ORKNEY**  
Tel: 01856 761594  
Fax: 01856 761709  
orkney@allans.co.uk

**SHETLAND**  
Tel: 01950 460417  
Fax: 01950 460013  
shetland@allans.co.uk

**INVERNESS**  
Tel: 01463 713270  
Fax: 01463 713393  
inverness@allans.co.uk



**Angus B MacNeil MP**  
Na h-Eileanan an Iar

Available for surgeries  
All enquiries welcome

Constituency Office 31 Bayhead Street, Stormoway  
Isle of Lewis HS1 2DU  
Telephone 01851 70227 2  
E-Mail angus.macneil.mp@parliament.uk



## 2022 Crofting Commission elections

**I**N MARCH 2022 the Crofting Commission will hold its quinquennial elections; electing commissioners from across the crofting counties to serve on its board. Nominations will open in January for prospective candidates to put their names forward.

The key purpose of a commissioner is to provide independent oversight of the commission and contribute to decision-making by scrutinising policies, the business plan and the performance of the commission. Commissioners also have a role in promoting the interests of crofting and advise Scottish Ministers on policy. Elected commissioners serve for five years and receive training and support to carry out their role.

The commission will hold a series of events in December and January to explain the role in more detail and answer any questions crofters may have. Full details will be advertised on the commission website and social media.

The commission benefits greatly from the mix of skills and experiences that commissioners bring to the organisation. With advances in technology, meetings are now more accessible to a wider range of crofters. If you are interested in becoming a board member, but unsure if you would be eligible, please contact the commission at [info@crofting.gov.scot](mailto:info@crofting.gov.scot).

# Crofting law reform

**S**CF EXPRESSED bitter disappointment that long-awaited crofting law reform was not included in the Programme for Government (PFG) for this year.

Given that the government stopped the progress of the crofting law reform bill in the last term of government – due to Brexit – with assurances that it would receive top priority in the new parliamentary session, and the SNP manifesto pledged they will “reform the law and develop crofting to create more active crofts,” the crofting system has been allowed to degenerate to an extent that it is now in crisis.

Preparations for a bill, or indeed any crofting-specific actions, were not included in the programme – a disregard for the crofting system at a time that this type of land tenure is needed most.

It says in the PFG “In supporting our rural and island economies, we will ensure young people have more opportunities.” Crofting could give young people huge opportunities and there are many wanting to croft but cannot get in, due to the

lack of effective regulation. The PFG also says, “To ensure a sustainable future for agriculture, we must have new people coming through.” Are these empty words?

Other measures in the programme could indirectly affect crofting, for good or bad. But overall the PFG is weak on a new vision for rural Scotland and leaves crofting wanting. Whilst promoting measures to address climate change and environmental degradation, and claims to want to help young people and remote communities, the lack of direct action to tackle the crofting crisis is lamentable.

However, addressing the SCF AGM, the cabinet secretary acknowledged the disappointment felt by many that crofting law reform did not feature in the Programme for Government this year. She reiterated that she is committed to taking the reform through parliament in this session and, when pressed on the urgency of this, said that engagement with stakeholders on how to take it forward is planned.



© Martin Benson

# Re-letting of a croft by the Crofting Commission

*Brian Inkster of Inksters Solicitors reports on an interesting case.*

**A** RECENT Land Court case, *Macdonald v Kennedy and Another* SLC/75/20, concerned croft 6 Crowlsta in Lewis.

The owner of the croft, Roderick Macdonald, lived in Edinburgh, but it was always his intention to retire to the croft.

At some point he let the croft to a friend, Alick Matheson, who was aware of his intentions and could be trusted not to purchase the croft. Mr Matheson died in May 2016. The croft tenancy passed to his nephew, John Matheson, under the law of intestacy. However, when John Matheson had the circumstances explained to him by Mr Macdonald, he declined to take up the tenancy.

Time passed without further

procedure until December 2018 when the Crofting Commission wrote to Mr Macdonald, as landlord, notifying him that it proposed to terminate the tenancy and declare the croft vacant, inviting him to make representations as to that proposal. No representations having been received, in April 2019 the commission gave written notice of termination of the tenancy and vacancy of the croft with immediate effect. Mr Macdonald was required to submit re-letting proposals for the croft.

He appointed solicitors who wrote to the commission, not with re-letting proposals but with a proposal to divide the croft into two and sell both new crofts. However, that proposal did not find favour with the commission, nor could it, since in terms of section 9 of the 1993 Act, only a crofter can apply for consent

to divide a croft, not a landlord. Mr Macdonald decided to sell the croft.

With no re-letting proposals submitted, the commission had to invite applications for the tenancy by public notification. The commission let the croft to Ms Flora Kennedy.

Mr Macdonald made an application under section 23(6) of the 1993 Act, which allows the landlord of a croft which has been let on terms and conditions fixed by the commission to apply to the court for a variation of those terms and conditions. The application was opposed by the commission and Ms Kennedy on the basis that some, at least, of the variations sought were incompetent. The variations included, amongst other things, a restriction of the period of the tenancy to five years and removal of any right to decroft or purchase the croft or any part of it.

The court took the view that the commission could only let the croft subject to the statutory conditions contained in the 1993 Act and were not at liberty to vary them. The Land Court cannot then interfere as these were in effect not “terms and conditions fixed by the commission”. The only matter fixed by the commission was in effect the rent on which further written submissions were invited.

The court commented that “greater engagement with the commission would have done [Mr Macdonald] no harm.” It may indeed have avoided the unfortunate situation that ultimately befell him.

*The people involved in this case are referred to by name, as the case is in the public domain on the land court's website and records.*

# Methane as a short-lived GHG

*In the wake of COP26, SCF council member David Muir considers the measuring of greenhouse gasses.*

**T**HE RECENT farmer-led Suckler Beef Climate Group report (p91) mentions ongoing research to increase the accuracy of the current approach to reporting on and estimating greenhouse gas emissions from different sources and industries.

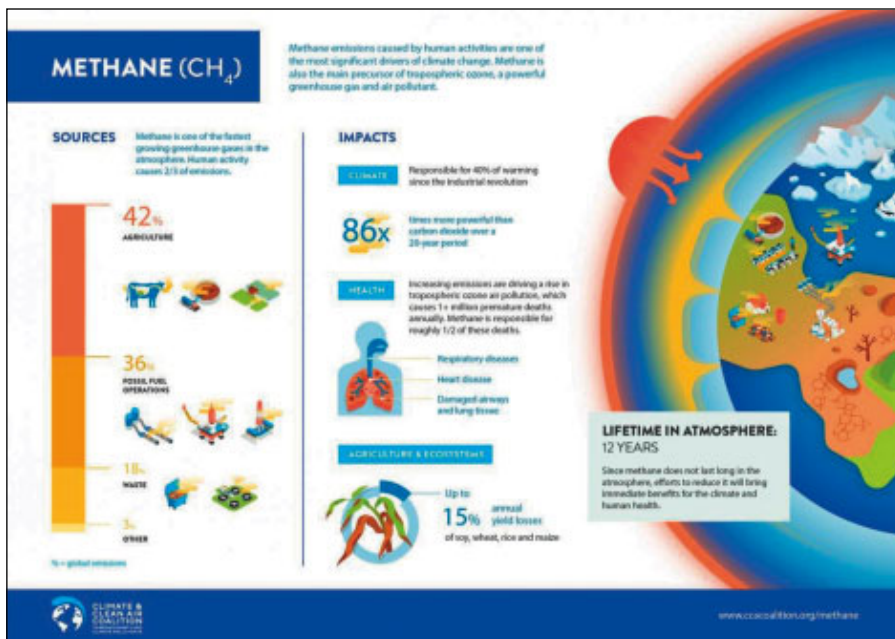
This article takes a look at what is actually meant by this and what it could mean for different methods of measuring emission of methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ) from agriculture. I am not a climate scientist, nor a scientist of any kind, and this information is purely gained from my own research.

On a global basis, methane emissions caused by humans come from three main sources: fossil fuels such as leakages from oil and natural gas systems; agricultural activities, including from ruminant livestock and rice cultivation; and, municipal waste landfill sites. Emissions are projected to continue to increase rapidly by 2030 unless immediate action is taken. Cost-effective solutions such as minimising and plugging leaks from oil and gas production and distribution sites could reduce the amount of methane in the atmosphere.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, about 28 times more powerful than carbon dioxide at warming the Earth on a 100-year timescale and 86 times more powerful over 20 years when the gas is first released. This is the accepted way methane is measured and is expressed in terms of  $\text{CO}_2$ -equivalent ( $\text{CO}_2\text{e}$ ) using a metric known as Global Warming Potential (GWP). Recent research shows this misrepresents the impact of short-lived climate pollutants, such as methane, on future warming.

GWPs can be explained as follows. If one tonne of a particular greenhouse gas traps a certain amount of heat, how much  $\text{CO}_2$  would trap the same amount? The 100-year GWP (GWP100) of methane is 28; therefore one tonne of methane released into the atmosphere creates the same warming as 28 tonnes of  $\text{CO}_2$ . This is often described as 28 tonnes  $\text{CO}_2\text{e}$  where e stands for equivalent.

This method hides the fact that one tonne of  $\text{CH}_4$  has a strong warming effect when it is first emitted, which then reduces quickly over 10 or 20 years. This is because methane breaks down naturally and is removed from the atmosphere with a half-life of about 12 years. Therefore, by



the end of 100 years, that methane is no longer causing strong warming because it has almost all been destroyed.

Using the accepted measurement of GWP100, the 28-tonne equivalent methane emission of  $\text{CO}_2$  stays in the atmosphere for centuries or longer, continuing to cause warming at nearly the same rate as when it was first released. But that is not the case for methane. This shows that emissions of  $\text{CO}_2$  are not directly related, even by the 28-multiplier, to emissions of methane, as this gas does not linger in the atmosphere in the same way as  $\text{CO}_2$ .

This "new" approach to measurement equates a pulse emission of  $\text{CO}_2$  with an increase in the emission rate of methane. GWP is typically defined to compare pulses of emissions with each other. A pulse is when a specified mass of gas is released into the atmosphere instantaneously. Over coming years the  $\text{CO}_2$  remains in the atmosphere, leading to a permanent increase in  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration. An increase in the methane emission rate also leads to higher concentrations of methane in the atmosphere, assuming the sinks remain constant, as the source is larger. This usage is called GWP\*, as it still uses GWP100, but instead of comparing two pulses (20 and 100 years) it effectively spreads the

methane emission out evenly over the 100-year time-horizon.

What does this mean for the calculation of amounts of methane produced by agriculture? Cattle emit methane as a by-product of their digestive systems, hence agriculture is a major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter. The Scottish Government is introducing carbon audits for agricultural businesses and the most common GHGs for the industry are  $\text{CO}_2$ , methane and nitrous oxide.

If methane emissions from all cattle in Scotland remain stable, this methane as a short-lived gas will not contribute to raising global temperature more than at present, as it decays in the atmosphere on a cyclical basis (GWP\*). Conversely, converting methane emissions to equivalent  $\text{CO}_2$  (GWP100) assumes the gas accumulates in the atmosphere, contributing to increasing global temperature.

Given that methane emitted from agriculture is a short-lived but powerful greenhouse warming gas and has implications for Scotland reaching net-zero by 2045, many studies, including from the Suckler Beef Climate Group, have shown how emissions can be reduced by crofters and farmers without cutting production while at the same time becoming more efficient.

## Adapting to climate change on your croft

*David Muir highlights a source of useful information.*

**T**HE FARMING for a Better Climate website ([farmingforabetterclimate.org](http://farmingforabetterclimate.org)) provides a practical guide that supports crofters and farmers in helping reduce their impact on the climate.

COP26 held in Glasgow, half-way through at the time of writing, seems to have headlined commitment to mitigation measures like reducing emissions. However, understanding the need to adapt – how croft businesses can cope and deal with changing and variable weather conditions as being experienced

now and in the future – will be important for maintaining sustainability and profitability.

On the Farming for a Better Climate website, you can find *Climate change adaptation for agriculture – Is your farm ready?* produced by SAC Consulting – and equally relevant to crofting. Anna Beswick, programme manager for Adaptation Scotland, describes it as providing "simple, practical explanations about the key challenges to consider and actions that can be taken. The case studies share valuable practical experience of adaptation action being taken in many different contexts."

The guide highlights potential risks and benefits of climate change for agriculture in

Scotland and goes on to describe the impacts of more extreme weather, such as flooding and heavy rain, drought and high temperatures, increased storminess, snowfall and extreme cold weather. It offers comprehensive checklists for preparing to reduce the negative impacts these issues may bring. There are detailed case studies where you can learn from the experience of others.

This is a very useful guide that can help you prepare the croft to be ready for often unpredictable extreme weather events. It also contains lists of resources where you can find further information.

# Commission engages with crofters to increase active croft use



The commission development team: l-r Karen MacRae, Heather Mack and Lynne MacMillan

**T**HE Crofting Commission has seen a welcome expansion to establish a crofting-community-focused crofting development team.

The new team transforms the way the commission can support and engage with crofters – and the location of the two new officers in the Western Isles means they are well placed to do so. The commission is also in the process

of strengthening its residency and land use team, with two new officers joining the team.

These two new residency and land use casework officers will contribute to the team's work on the enforcement of crofting duties. The four new appointments will expand the organisation's capacity to work with crofting communities and see an increase in active crofts.

Malcolm Mathieson, convener of

the commission board, highlighted: "Enforcement of crofting duties is a top priority for the organisation and we are committed to strengthening this important function."

Karen MacRae from Scalpay on the Isle of Harris joined the Crofting Commission as one of the two crofting development officers. Commenting on her role, she said: "I was really excited to get this role. I've worked for the North Harris

Trust for a number of years and know the local crofting community there very well.

"Crofting faces many challenges and I'm looking forward to the prospect of being able to help crofters on the ground. Whether it's bringing crofts back into purposeful use or supporting a diversification, we're here to ensure crofting's proud continuation and contribution to Scotland's rural economy."

The other crofting development officer is Lynne MacMillan from South Uist. Lynne previously spent 14 years as a business support officer with Business Gateway.

"It's an exciting time to have joined the commission, with the launch of the new development team. An important part of our role will be to help guide crofters and liaise with crofting communities to encourage croft occupancy, croft use and management of common grazings."

Heather Mack, head of crofting development with the commission, said: "I'm thrilled to have Karen and Lynne joining the commission. Their combined skills and insight into the challenges and opportunities in crofting will help build a greater understanding of the commission's role within the crofting community."

"The overall aim of the new development role is to support the strengthening of crofting on the Western Isles as well as across the Highlands and Islands as a whole."

*The development team can be contacted at [development@crofting.gov.scot](mailto:development@crofting.gov.scot).*



## Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Crofting

**S**CF HAS organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) in the Scottish Parliament since it was reconvened in 1999.

The group is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs and encouraging their support for pressing the Scottish Government to act on crofting issues.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

has agreed to accord recognition to the CPGoC for this session of parliament.

On the agenda of its first meeting we had items on access to crofts and control of geese as main topics, along with a standing item on the administration of the Crofting Commission.

Cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands, Mairi Gougeon, will attend the next meeting, at which she will speak to these issues.



**CAMUS CONSULTING**




**Experienced, solution-focused and cost effective crofting law advice.**

Elidh has a new business address at the Dingwall Auction Mart and retains her capacity to take on work all over the Crofting Counties.

**Elidh Ross**  
Crofting Law Consultant  
elidh@camus.scot | Tel. 07876 513404  
[www.camus.scot](http://www.camus.scot)

c/o Auction Mart, Humberston, Ballechaul Road,  
Dingwall, Ross-shire IV15 9TP

**GROW BETTER CROPS AND PLANTS**

- Ultra low maintenance
- Winning greenhouse design
- Bracing and support kits available
- Cladding totally eliminates shadowing
- Highly responsive customer service



**keder greenhouse**

t: +44 (0) 1366 48004 | e: sales@kedergreenhouse.co.uk  
[www.kedergreenhouse.co.uk](http://www.kedergreenhouse.co.uk)

 **Buy the best. Buy Keder.**

Keder Greenhouse, Newtown, Offenham, Evesham,  
Worcestershire WR11 8RZ

**Alasdair Allan MSP**

**Enquiries Welcome**

My constituency office is closed at the moment but my team and I are working from home and can be reached using the contact details below.

E-mail: [alsadair.allan.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:alsadair.allan.msp@parliament.scot)  
Phone: 01851 700357




[www.alasdairallan.scot](http://www.alasdairallan.scot)

**Ian Blackford MP**

**Member of Parliament for Ross, Skye & Lochaber**

Future Surgery dates will be advertised in the local press

Tel: 01349 866397  
Email: [ian.blackford.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:ian.blackford.mp@parliament.uk)  
Twitter: @IBlackfordSNP  
Facebook: [facebook.com/IanBlackfordSNP](https://facebook.com/IanBlackfordSNP)  
Web: <http://ianblackford.scot>

29 High Street  
Dingwall  
IV15 9RU

**RHODA GRANT MSP**

Highland & North Western Regional MSP (Scottish Labour)

Constituents' Telephone Surgery  
(During Parliamentary Sessions)

Wednesday 1.30pm - 2.30pm

0131 348 5766

[rhoda.grant.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:rhoda.grant.msp@parliament.scot)  
PO Box 3737, Inverness IV1 1YT  
[www.rhodagrantscots.org.uk](http://www.rhodagrantscots.org.uk)




The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## CLASSIFIED ADS

Sell your unwanted croft equipment (and other stuff) for just 30p per word.

**Get in touch:**  
[ads@crofting.org](mailto:ads@crofting.org)  
or **01599 530 005**



## ON THE CROFT

# The virtues of extensive grazing



*Former SCF chair Yvonne White, who breeds pedigree Highland cattle on her croft, considers this traditional form of agriculture in the context of climate change.*

**T**HE ENVIRONMENTAL benefits of extensive grazing systems are manifold.

Less damage to land and soil, as stocking densities tend to be lower and there is no or minimal use of chemical inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides or medicines such as antibiotics, all used in copious amounts in intensive grazing regimes. Large amounts of inputs – fertiliser and chemicals – are generally required annually to grow silage and hay for animal winter feeding.

Of course, livestock need feeding in winter, as grass stops growing at 8-10° C. Winter livestock feed in the crofting counties usually entails buying in feed. This does involve a carbon footprint, hopefully offset by the minimal inputs and management of an extensive crofting system. Traditional cattle breeds require less high-protein feeding to flourish and maintain body condition than commercial cattle bred for big carcasses.

Food and nutrients consumed by livestock

grazing extensively is more natural than an intensive grain-fed system and consequently has much less of a carbon footprint. This fact needs to be shouted loud and clear to counter global emission studies which cite livestock, especially cattle, as the main culprits contributing to greenhouse gases.

Grass-fed cows and sheep are not a problem. Poultry and pigs make up 57% of soya intake in the UK, with aquaculture at 5.6% being higher than beef input. A Welsh lamb and beef association advert observes that Welsh sheep and cattle are reared only on natural resources: grass and rain.

In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland much land is unsuited to growing crops without vast amounts of chemical inputs; and land contours prevent crop growing. It is not flat arable land easily ploughed. We have copious amounts of rain at not quite the right time for bringing on grass. CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed by grass and livestock graze on grass. Result is highly tasty and nutritious beef, lamb, mutton and milk, all from a naturally-reared livestock system fed mainly on grass. Cows emit methane which is broken down into

CO<sub>2</sub> and water which then grows grass. A virtuous circle.

Most studies accusing livestock of environmental harm measure the effects of intensive cattle rearing systems, where calves and their dams are given antibiotics daily to counter the negative health effects of being housed in huge sheds, fed grain-rich diets (requiring high inputs of chemicals to produce crops) and hardly seeing the light of day.

Intensive livestock rearing has a detrimental effect on herd behavior, as family groups with varying ages are prevented from forming, unlike in extensively reared herds which allow free expression of natural behaviours. The taste and nutritional value of beef or lamb is far greater from naturally reared, grass-fed, happy livestock than that of poor beasts in an intensive regime.

Turning now to the all-important topic of soil, what occurs underground determines what happens above ground. Healthy soil in good working order supports not just livestock but insects, birds and all forms of plant life. Livestock dung is heaven for worms and other insects and indeed birds. Good soil health is not achieved by intensive grassland grazing systems with copious amounts of artificial inputs.

Good soil health requires good land management practices. Sown grassland mainly has a maximum of 10 different plant species. Extensive grassland areas with low-intensity livestock grazing can have 100 or more different species – common grazings and in-bye where fertiliser has been sparingly, if ever, used (depending on ground type and climate).

Profit margins are lower in an extensive grazing system. However, this can be offset by reduced or no requirement for fertiliser and chemicals, fewer livestock health issues and the vital fact that extensive grazing systems are sustainable and help create or maintain thriving habitats and species. Another virtuous circle.

To end with a disclaimer, this piece is purely my personal thoughts on livestock and croft land practices, not based on any academic or technical expertise. For those interested in exploring this fascinating subject further, there are many well-researched texts written from practical experience and also academic and technical agriculture papers.

## Drones could control bracken

*SCF member John W Gillies from Raasay highlights the problems with bracken and suggests a solution.*

**H**EATHER HAS always been associated with the Scottish landscape and is a food source for hill sheep, grouse and bees. But bracken, the most invasive species in the UK, is killing it.

The use of drones in the application of chemicals gives more control than helicopters. Although chemicals can be seen as harmful, application by electric power is certainly the lesser of two evils.

I recently spoke to a drone operator on this subject and he explained the ease of use, where the drone can initially map a location and colour co-ordinate the area to be sprayed. This is something that has to be used in the control of bracken.

Government must take a lead in the control of bracken by licensing drones. This in turn can eliminate the need for buffer zones of 50m near trees when helicopters are used.

I would like all agencies, NatureScot, SCF, and NFUS to put pressure on HSE to license drones for aerial spraying and control the spread of bracken which kills everything in its path.



Encroaching bracken, east side of Raasay

## ON THE CROFT

# The crofter's coo



Wold White, Wold Wonder, Wold Blimey

*With sustainability, high-quality local production and short supply chains in mind, it's a good time to look again at the Shetland cow as an ideal animal for the modern croft, writes SCF member Paddy Zakaria. Originally called the crofter's cow, the breed is as relevant to crofting today as it was in the hard days of the past.*

**T**HE SHETLAND is an ancient indigenous breed. Archaeological evidence shows that the modern type was established in Shetland by 2,000 years ago. Attributes developed over time hold the modern cow in good stead – an adaptable, easygoing, people-oriented breed, rated highly by experienced cattle keepers.

Medium sized, an adult cow ranges from 350-500 kg, light on the ground and can winter outside with appropriate natural shelter. Renowned for fertility, thriftiness,

milikness, good temperament and longevity, they frequently calve until they are 18 or 19. Bulls range from 600-900 kgs and are generally docile and easily managed.

Shetland herds excel in widely different management systems – as commercial sucklers, in niche market systems, on crofts, smallholdings and as conservation grazers on nature reserves managed by city councils and wildlife trusts.

As a suckler cow the Shetland is a surprise package. She is smaller than more common commercial breeds, causing less damage to the ground and noticeably thriftier, doing well on poorer forage. She has the second-widest pelvis of any breed – a small cow will calve easily to a continental bull like a Limousin or Simmental without incurring vet bills. She will rear a lively, fast-growing cross-bred calf that will thrive on her copious, quality milk and sell at a similar price to the



Shetland cow and calf

more input-heavy commercial calf, meaning a higher profit margin.

Chefs and butchers rate Shetland beef amongst the best, if not the best, of all native UK breeds, only little known because the breed is still low in numbers. Breeders achieve premium prices for Shetland beef and are never short of buyers.

Another attribute of the Shetland cow is a success story waiting to happen. The attribute is milk and the success story is cheese. In recent centuries the Shetland has been a dairy breed and the small amount of research into the milk shows very high levels of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), high fats and proteins and mastitis cell counts many times lower than those of other breeds. The milk is rich, with a unique flavour and Shetland calves achieve a very high daily live-weight gain.

The only commercial cheese made from the milk of Shetland cows was Wold cheese from a

small dairy in North Yorkshire. It was legendary, winning numerous awards and could not meet demand. It closed when the cheese-maker emigrated and no-one has followed in its footsteps.

A new organic Shetland calf-at-foot dairy, The Rare Dairy, is underway in Shropshire, selling milk initially and planning yoghurt. Cheese-making is just waiting for an enterprising person (a crofter?) to tap the hidden bounty of the breed and pick up where Wold left off.

Shetlands are still very much the crofter's cow. They are a worthy, under-rated, agreeable and low-maintenance native. Those who take on their custodianship will be well rewarded. They will give you profitable commercial calves, put your land in good order and give you products that can be sold in your local region.

As the Shetlanders say of their peerie coo, "a breed from the past with a place in the future".

## The crofter's wife

*Our regular column from SCF member Claire Nicolson*

**I**T'S AMAZING what you find when you're not looking for it.

I seldom visit the shore without finding something of interest – a piece of wood with unusual shape or markings, or a colourful or patterned stone, or a sea urchin from out in the bay. I'm equally happy finding pieces of pottery among the ruins of the old stone houses that provide our cattle and sheep with shelter in winter storms.

These treasures are insights into the past and connect me to the spaces I'm lucky enough to call home: croft, hill, woods and shore. I was recently astonished to discover two cast iron bedstead ends in the burn up on the croft – presumably put there to block a gap in a fence at some point and long since forgotten. It took quite an effort to free the first one. The bottom six inches or so were firmly sunk in peaty water, but with a wee bit of work I can turn it

into a screen to sit in front of our stove and prolong its usefulness. The second one was leant up against an oak tree which has grown round it.

Another interesting find, hidden in an old outhouse, was a gorgeous butter churn, very retro. It still has its Blow Butter label, English-made from the 1940s. The lid was screwed shut, preserving the wooden paddles inside, so a quick clean and a rub of the lid with wire wool, then it claimed pride of place on the dresser in the kitchen.

A larger project is a fire surround, appearing in the burn after days of torrential rain. It had been used to create the front of a culvert hidden under rhododendrons, and whilst part of it had eroded quite badly, I think the damage adds character and I intend to restore the piece and install it behind



© Claire Nicolson

our stove, though it'd make a grand entrance to a kennel, as Gryff demonstrates (see image).

That's two household items put to use outdoors when no longer required by someone two generations up the line, that I will be bringing back indoors decades later. I can't think of many things we produce nowadays that would survive that kind of usage!



## ON THE CROFT

# Staying safe on the croft



© Chris Tyler

*SAC Portree's Janette Sutherland offers good advice.*

**I**T'S A real challenge in crofting to balance the need to keep children safe whilst allowing them to take part in activities on the croft – activities which often encourage future generations of crofters.

The importance of having safety measures in place and teaching children what they can and cannot do was beautifully described by Skye farmer and grandfather Robert MacDonald of Uiginish Farm in his piece on FAS TV <https://youtu.be/44aJEQfn00>.

Research has shown that getting children

involved in identifying risks and thinking about safety is effective. To that end, along with a wider FAS team, we created health and safety information and interactive games. Go to [fas.scot](https://fas.scot) and search for child farm safety.

This year we worked with talented Skye cartoonist Chris Tyler to make three seasonal films that children and parents can watch together on lambing, livestock sales and winter. Find them on [www.fas.scot](https://www.fas.scot).

We also ran a competition this summer for children to design posters about staying safe on crofts and farms. It was encouraging to see so much knowledge about risks and ways to reduce them. All competitors receive a fluorescent tabard

to help them be seen on crofts and farms.

It is easy to miss dangers on your own croft, as you are seeing them every day. One low-cost way to improve safety would be to pair up with another crofting parent and walk through each other's crofts, including sheds and fanks, to spot hazards for children. Then you can think of ways to reduce these risks and hazards.

As crofters, if there is something that requires capital investment to ensure better safety – for example, better handling pens or a bespoke bull pen – remember that CAGS can be used to support these investments which, when you consider the risk of an accident, could be priceless.

## Croft safety advice from HSE

*To compliment Janette's excellent advice above, we asked HSE to comment.*

**A**GRICULTURE accounts for just 1% of the working population, yet accounts for 20% of workplace fatalities.

41 people were killed in agriculture in 2020/21. On average over the last five years, 33 people a year were killed working on farms – being struck by moving vehicles, killed by an animal, struck by an object, falling from height and contact with moving machinery.

HM principal inspector in HSE's national agriculture sector, Adrian Hodgkinson, said: "Agriculture is a vital part of our economy and everyone involved is rightly proud of the quality and standard of the food produced. Agriculture will continue to be a priority sector for HSE, which will be achieved through the delivery of HSE's sector plan for tackling the high rates of injury and ill health.

"There are simple safety measures people should follow to reduce injury, like remembering to put on handbrakes, fasten lap belts in cabs, make sure anyone operating a quad bike wears a helmet and receives sufficient training, don't put cows and calves in fields with public footpaths; and make sure to switch off the power to vehicles or machinery before attempting to carry out repairs. We need everyone to play their part to improve their behaviour, do things the right way and call out poor practices whenever they are seen."

Agriculture will continue to be a priority sector for HSE. We are urging people to make safety



a priority and help us to reduce the number of deaths and injuries in the industry.

Further guidance can be found on the HSE website [hse.gov.uk](https://hse.gov.uk), as follows:

- What a good farm looks like;
- Farmwise HSG270;
- Agriculture health and safety, farming industry help and advice;
- Agriculture: Machinery – safe use;
- Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry AIS33;
- Handling and housing cattle AIS35;

- Cattle and public access in Scotland: Advice for farmers, landowners and other livestock keepers AIS17;
- Agriculture: Preventing falls;
- Safe working with bales in agriculture INDG125;
- Agriculture: Children and public safety;
- Fatal injuries in agriculture, forestry and fishing in Great Britain 2020/21.

The SCF e-newsletter has a detailed list of advice points from HSE, which lack of space excluded here.

## ON THE CROFT



**Biocell agri**  
The yeast specialists

**PLATINUM DRENCH**  
*Why use Platinum Drench?*

Our carefully designed and selected drenches are aimed at improving health and fertility in sheep and cattle of all ages.

- ✓ Improved fertility
- ✓ Increased growth rates
- ✓ Shorter lambing periods
- ✓ Increased vitality at birth
- ✓ Rams benefit from drenching one month before tupping
- ✓ Store lambs on roots, where conventional mineral is not practical
- ✓ As a stimulant to the immune system to aid recovery

Information on all Biocell products is available by telephone, email or online

Call Alec Ross:  
Biocell Agri Limited  
07718 905 625  
01776 820 647  
[www.biocellagri.com](http://www.biocellagri.com)  
[biocellagri@btinternet.com](mailto:biocellagri@btinternet.com)

## Biocell for improved nutrition

**B**ASED AT Lochans on the picturesque Rhins of Galloway peninsula, we are specialists in the field of applied microbiology in animal nutrition.

Our key roles include managing rumen function, safeguarding health through effective mycotoxin control and managing forage and slurry. We offer a comprehensive yet specialist range of ingredients for any farmer wishing to maximise returns from home-produced feeds and forages whilst exploiting the genetic potential of all livestock.

Our products are suitable for all types of commercial animals and are fully EU-approved.

Why use Platinum Drenches?

- Our carefully designed and selected drenches are aimed at improving health and fertility in dairy cows, cattle and sheep of all ages.
- improved fertility;
- increased growth rates;
- shorter calving and lambing periods;
- increased calf and lamb vitality at birth.

Additional applications:

- Stock bulls and rams benefit from drenching one month before bulling/tupping;
- store lambs on roots, where conventional mineral is not practical;

- store cattle at turnout for the grazing season;
- as a stimulant to the immune system to aid recovery – stock should still be provided with macro-minerals via powder or buckets, but the need for protected trace elements is reduced. Bought-in stock should be treated on arrival.

In situations of known deficiency – ie copper, selenium, cobalt – Platinum Drenches will provide a rapid uptake and lasting effect via storage in the muscle tissue. For dairy cows and intensive cattle there is the option of adding to the TMR Platinum In-Feed. It is recommended that it is fed over four days.



## ON THE CROFT

# Cattle housing and parasite treatment

SCF council member Stephen A Leask looks at the main internal and external parasites which impact on cattle health – lungworm, gut worms (*Ostertagia*), lice/mites and liver fluke.

**A**DULT CATTLE can be affected with lungworm if they do not build immunity as a calf. First-year grazers, depending on treatment for late-season lungworm management, are a consideration for housing treatment. If Dectomax pour-on is given in the five weeks leading up to housing, they will not need re-treatment at housing.

*Ostertagia* is the main worm to consider at housing. Select a product that covers type I and type II. Type II hibernates in the stomach lining until late winter/early spring. The main effect is scouring and weight loss.

Two types of lice cause intense irritation, leading to rubbing and scratching, poor appetite and lower growth rates. Mange mites cause severe irritation in autumn and winter, especially in housed cattle. Flypor will cover lice and mange mites.

Infection in growing cattle can depress liveweight gain by up to 1.2 kg/week. Removing fluke picked up from pasture will help cattle perform well over winter and achieve potential growth and productivity.

In late summer/autumn fluke levels increase



on pasture and newly-acquired (immature) fluke in cattle liver. As no available flukicide will kill all early immature fluke, balance the convenience of treating at housing and leaving some behind, or holding off for the appropriate waiting period so that all fluke are old enough to be killed by the product.

Treatment at housing will minimise handling/stress, but impact on growth rate from left-over fluke must be taken in to account. A later, second treatment with a different active would ensure removal. Any fluke left will still be there in spring,

resulting in pasture contamination.

Work with your local veterinary practice and animal health advisor. Check [www.nadis.org.uk](http://www.nadis.org.uk) and [www.cattleparasites.org.uk](http://www.cattleparasites.org.uk).

Remember out-wintered cattle and the more prophylactic method of treatment and increased risks from the extended grazing period, with infective stages still present on pasture during mild winters. Further treatments may be needed during January/February if later housed. Good ventilation and clean dry bedding can make a dramatic difference to welfare and productivity.

## Hill and upland sheep farmer and vet input needed for sustainable parasite control project

*Final call for interested crofters and farmers and vets to participate in a research survey by Moredun Research Institute to investigate ways to optimise parasite control in hill and upland sheep, as part of a PhD research project.*

**R**EGULAR WHOLE-FLOCK treatment with anthelmintics to tackle roundworms and liver fluke may cause resistance, which threatens control of these infections, with significant welfare and financial implications. Most research into anthelmintic resistance and sustainable control methods for roundworms and liver fluke has been on lowland farms, but little is known about the parasite challenge and anthelmintic resistance issues on hill and upland farms.

The project is working closely with nine crofters and farmers located across the length of Scotland, from the Highlands and Islands to Dumfries and Galloway, for three full production years from 2021 to 2024. Parasite burden has been assessed on each farm and information collected about approaches to internal parasite control.

Moredun is carrying out faecal

egg count to monitor pasture contamination, anthelmintic efficacy checks and to provide material for identification of roundworm species present. To develop a more complete understanding of parasite impact on each farm, more general management data such as grazing history, animal performance and economic information is also collected.

After initial data collection and analysis, customised strategies

for roundworm and liver fluke control will be proposed for each farm or croft. After discussion and agreement, these approaches will be implemented and monitored over the following two full production years. Proposed interventions will vary depending on the specific unit, production systems, goals and available resources, but may include simple measures such as ensuring effective anthelmintics are used, to altering dosing strategies.

Economic and animal performance data will be collected to analyse management and financial impact of optimised parasite control at farm level. This will develop practical recommendations on optimum internal parasite control.

To broaden understanding of parasite control challenges faced across Scotland, and make this research more applicable to a wider remit of holdings, the project is looking for Scottish hill and upland sheep farmers and large animal vets to complete a short survey. The results, in combination with data collected from the nine farms/crofts, will aid in the proposal and development of practical recommendations on how to optimise internal parasite control for these farming systems.

*Farmer survey: aimed at hill and upland sheep farmers and crofters, taking around 20 minutes to complete: <http://bit.ly/315J5iD>*

*Vet survey: aimed at large animal vets with upland and hill sheep clients, taking around 10 minutes to complete:*

*<https://bit.ly/3cQfsdy>*

*If you would like to request a paper copy of this survey, please contact Eilidh Geddes at [Eilidh.Geddes@moredun.ac.uk](mailto:Eilidh.Geddes@moredun.ac.uk).*



© Anne McLaren



## ON THE CROFT

# Pondering the importance of peat

*Most crofters know quite a lot about peatland, observes Donald Murdie.*

**WE** TRAMP over it looking for sheep and many of us rely on it to keep warm, the alternative being oil or coal.

Yes, we get it, the importance of peat, both in the context of carbon storage and the economics of crofting households. It has been simplistically stated that eighty percent of our peatland is in poor condition, mainly due to the historic drainage that has provided rough grazing and even permanent grassland.

I carefully read the article on the Peatland Code in the last *Crofter*, hoping to see how the code could benefit crofters through our common grazings and help us do our bit to conserve carbon stocks in the land we are responsible for. I emerged none the wiser. There is more clarity in the glaur at the bottom of my peat bank.

It would be good to define the peatland they're talking about. Some new thinking, based on research in Uist, helps us take a more holistic view of such land and uses the word peat for the burnable black stuff; a bog or mire to describe a growing natural landscape; and highly organic soil for past and present agricultural fields. (see book review below)

Most importantly, the code says not a word about food production, about the many generations of crofters that have made this land produce hardy, healthy, extensively-grazed livestock. In a climate emergency, the current

model of food production and distribution has to change. That is possible if the capability of our land is properly recognised. We know the value of what we have, so don't talk down to us.

In case we are tempted by the vague prescriptions of the Peatland Code, we can create carbon units. These have a monetary value and can be traded. But beware. Legally they belong to the landlord unless agreed otherwise. A market has emerged, apparently, with brokers involved in selling these units as credits to companies seeking to green-wash their businesses. The only beneficiaries I can see will be the new green

lairds currently buying up huge tracts of land in the Highlands, the expensive land agents that serve them, and dealers who profit by trading in dodgy, vacuous, theoretical commodities. A greenish bitcoin?

I can see no benefit to crofters from the Peatland Code as promoted at present. Carbon storage on peatland is viewed as an easy win. If crofters are to take part, there must be a scheme that involves us literally at ground level and from the start – and takes full cognisance of crofters' rights.



© Martin Benson

## My Land – an agricultural journey

*by Mary Norton Scherbatskoy*

**T**HIS IS a unique piece of work in many ways and works on a number of levels.

It is an account of the past, present and future of a kind of land familiar to many crofters in the islands and elsewhere, but hardly studied at all. It is a polemic against received wisdom derived from intensive agriculture; and an academic work that has earned the degree of MSc from Edinburgh University. It ends with some very profound conclusions about soil, climate and food. Indeed the final chapter is called *The Beginning*, which the author clearly sees as a call to action.

Mary took over her croft on the Uist island of Grimsay about ten years ago. The croft consists largely of what is now known as blackland; rocky, acidic and slow-draining, with highly organic soils. Until the 1960s such land had been worked and improved, but deteriorated due to a combination of population loss, perverse subsidy incentives and, in turn, over-dominance of sheep.

Mary's work takes us back to basics. How were such crofts worked, how did they support families

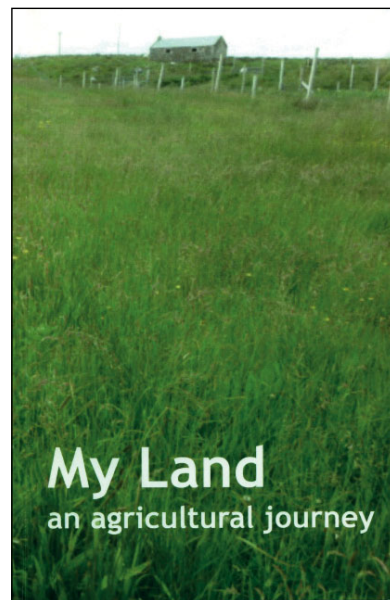
and how can they again become productive? How do we overcome the institutional prejudice of a national land-use map that writes off the potential of over half the country's landmass?

The basics of such a croft means grass. Mary started by taking a close look at all parts of her land. What had previously been improved and what had happened since? Restoration consisted of clearing drains and removing a thatch of moss and plant debris. The regeneration of native grasses was spectacular and yielded a high-quality silage crop. This in turn supported the profitable introduction of a small herd of Dexter cattle.

Mary describes failure as well as success. She says that, by trying to introduce "improved" grasses, she damaged the native sward in one of her best fields and allowed the ingress of rushes and creeping buttercup, a mistake that will take a lot of time to remedy.

All this is described in the book in great detail and it is impossible to do it justice here. Small parts are a bit technical, but it is highly readable throughout,

*...Continued on page 15*



**My Land**  
an agricultural journey



## ON THE CROFT

# Donald's hortiblog

## Use some of that wool

What do we have an excess of in the Highlands and Islands?

No, not motor homes. I'm talking bracken and wool, the former a result of land abandonment and climate change, the latter due to shocking market failure. Crofters have shed-loads of wool just now, not worth the cost of transport, while governments and campaigners are shouting "Insulate!"

While we await a bit of joined-up thinking, some of that wool can be combined with some of that bracken to make a really effective soil improver. As with any composting system, the greater the volume, the quicker the process. A metre cube is a minimum, so four single-use pallets make an ideal enclosure for that quantity (see picture). Stuffing the air spaces around the pallets with more waste wool will retain heat within the heap and speed up the process.

We make alternating layers of wool and green bracken, each layer of wool not more than one fleece thick, the more daggs the better. We also add layers of sawdust to balance the nitrogen-rich fresh bracken.

Can you use brown bracken? Yes, and it's best to put it through a shredder if possible, but it will need to be layered with green material as an activator. That's not so easy at this time of year, but seaweed will work fine for the purpose.

Cover the stack with brown cardboard, weighted down, and top it up as it sinks. It will take from six months to two years for this to break down to form rich, crumbly compost.

## Compost from the bag

Most growers need to buy commercial compost as a seed-sowing medium and most will have given up peat-based products. The



stuff on the market has always been of highly variable quality – and the materials that manufacturers have substituted for peat have made it even more of a lottery. Typically these might be coir, composted municipal or forestry waste, or a combination of materials. We have found them to be very poor on the whole, despite their claims to being organic and sustainable. They can contain quantities of stones, bits of wood and even fragments of plastic – and that's just what you can see.

New to the market is commercial, organic, wool-based seed compost and we decided to give it a try. First impressions are that it is much superior to the alternatives. It gives good germination and water retention and produces healthy strong plants. It's not cheap, but it's a case of getting what you pay for.

## My Land – an agricultural journey

...Continued from page 14

with lots of illustrations. Like all of the many projects Mary has undertaken in Grimsay and elsewhere, it is the result of painstaking research and minute attention to detail. In fact, for those interested in our soils and making the most of what we have, it's a page-turner.

*My Land – an agricultural journey is available from Ceann na h-Airigh, Grimsay, North Uist HS6 5JA or [info@grimsay.org](mailto:info@grimsay.org), price £12.00 including postage. Cheques payable to Grimsay Community Association.*

Reviewed by Donald Murdie

## Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters and other small producers in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland

As an essential tool for crofters and others, this handbook provides advice on sowing and planting times in soil and climatic conditions from the Mull of Kintyre to Mull of Galloway. It offers ways of building and maintaining soil fertility and methods to control pests and diseases, favouring low-input, sustainable and organic methods.

It looks at available machinery, polytunnels and other structures for protected growing; marketing and adding value; availability of grant schemes; and forming groups for mutual support. There is guidance on specific crops and case studies on established growers.



Member's price **£15**  
includes post & packing within the UK

The books can be purchased online at  
[www.crofting.org/product-category/books-and-cards](http://www.crofting.org/product-category/books-and-cards)

or call HQ on  
**01599 530005**

# Crofting advice through the Farm Advisory Service



National Advice Hub  
T: 0300 323 0161  
E: [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)  
W: [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)

**Call the Farm Advisory helpline for up to half an hour of free advice on all crofting and agricultural matters, available for all crofters and smallholders, whether new starts or old hands!**

**And for advice tailored to your croft and situation, benefit from an annual subscription with SAC, part-funded through the Farm Advisory Service, for £74.90 plus VAT (£89.88) for two hours of advice, newsletters and updates.**



Scottish Government  
Registration no 1-A100  
[gov.scot](http://gov.scot)



Contact your local SAC office or the free FAS helpline for independent, unbiased, local and up-to-date advice.



## Trees for the crofting community

Trees are a valuable source of woodfuel and provide important shelter for your livestock, crops and buildings.

The Woodland Trust offers free planting and woodland management advice to crofters, common grazings and small holders.

Find out how useful trees are.  
**Get in touch.**

Image: Nick Spry/WTML



07840 888427



[crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk)



[woodlandtrust.org.uk/croft-woodlands](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/croft-woodlands)



## ON THE CROFT

# Trees for common grazings



Before the woodland

*In the Western Isles, writes Viv Halcrow of the Woodland Trust, opportunities for tree-planting on common grazings may seem limited.*

**T**HE GROUND is often very poor: unimproved rough grazing with extensive deep peat and rock exposures.

Combined with the challenges of establishing trees in a climate of extreme wind and heavy rainfall or periods of drought, the difficulties are obvious. But with care, hard work and patience, it can be done. There is an inspiring example immediately south of Tarbert in the Isle of Harris.

In 2011, Direcleit and Ceann Dibig townships worked hard to secure funding and to plant 25 hectares of common grazings with 50,000 native trees: Allt na Creige Woodland. The woodland sits on north-facing slopes immediately above Sir E Scott secondary school, on the western edge of Tarbert. Some of the ground had historically been worked for cultivation; the remains of lazybeds can be seen in old photographs. These areas had slightly higher soil fertility and better depth



A recent view

of soil, enabling trees to establish.

Local contractors were used for the scheme. Ground preparation was carried out by excavator – no small feat on these steep slopes and rough ground. Large turfs, approximately 60cm square, were turned over soil-side-up to create planting mounds. Due to the terrain, steeper sections had to be mounded by hand. Deer fencing was not required as deer were not present in south Harris at the time. Stock fencing was tricky enough, with steep slopes to 45 degrees, undulating lazy beds and soils too thin to support fence posts and strainers.

Digger drivers and fencers worked together to overcome these issues. Banking was created by digger as a foundation for the fence where required. Contractors, school children and local folk planted robust native species: downy birch, pockets of alder, rowan and willow, with Scots pine where soil conditions were better.

A walking route was established through the woodland, giving walkers excellent views across the area. Short accessible walking routes like

this, close to towns, are popular with locals and visitors. Allt na Creige Woodland's convenient location behind Sir E Scott school has led to it being well used by the rural skills and outdoor learning pupils, under the guidance of teacher Rory Miller. They have plans to improve access in the area. It is seen by the school as a very valuable resource for their work.

Local crofter Alice Read was the driving force behind the woodland development and was delighted with how well the fencing, ground preparation and planting progressed at the time. She is even more delighted now the trees are thriving and adding a visual element to the landscape as well as biodiversity, recreational and educational gains.

This shows what can be done with determination – to secure funding, employ local problem-solving contractors, take advice, involve the wider community and plant the right species in the right places. Ten years on, the healthy varied young woodland is a testament to everyone's hard work.

## New Scottish Coppice Network launched

*This year Reforesting Scotland launched a Scottish Coppice Network to promote and support development of coppice and coppicing across Scotland, reports SCF member Al Whitworth.*

**C**OPPICING is the act of repeatedly felling trees at the base and allowing them to regrow, providing a sustainable supply of small-diameter timber. Most of our native broadleaved trees in the UK coppice well. Once very common in Scotland, a huge industry existed around oak coppice to create charcoal for smelting iron. In other crofting counties willow and hazel were highly valued for basketry, creel-making, thatching spars and agricultural products, though the scale of these industries doesn't appear to have matched that of England.

South of the border, coppice is

enjoying resurgence, as people look to sustainable and locally sourced products once again. The Scottish Coppice Network aims to build on this and is affiliated to the National Coppice Federation, which provides support, training and marketing to members.

Modern coppicing has evolved, with some worthwhile opportunities for croft diversification. The excellent *Highlands and Islands Woodland Handbook* (available from SCF HQ) has an entire chapter on coppicing and some great advice. One of the main benefits on a croft scale is a cutting cycle which can be as short as a few years, providing a fast return on the invested time and effort in planting a small woodland.

Woodfuel production is an ideal candidate for coppice management. Trees such as alder, birch, sycamore and hazel can be cut on a rotation of around 10 years for logs. Hybrid willows

can be grown to provide logs on a much shorter rotation of around four years and many crofts are experimenting with this. Woodchip is also gaining a lot of attention at the moment, with its potential to be used as mulch in horticultural systems, particularly as ramial chipped wood and as a base for locally-made composts. Fast-growing species such as willows and alder grow well on poorer soils and are ideally suited to chipping.

Traditional coppice products are well worth a mention too and have the potential to generate a small income for the croft. Basket-making continues to gather momentum in Scotland. People are also looking at local products for gardens, such as beanpoles and peasticks – usually made from hazel. There is also substantial potential for local charcoal for the tourist market.

We're excited to see how this



Willow regrowing from a cut stool

network evolves and held our first Scottish coppice gathering near Ullapool in November. We'll also be organising a number of skills events and training over the coming months and years. If you're interested in finding out more, head to the Coppice Network page at [www.reforestingscotland.org](http://www.reforestingscotland.org) or join our Facebook group.

## ON THE CROFT

# Charity tractor run enjoys record turn out



© Sean Mackay

SCF council member Marcus MacDonald reports on a popular event.

**S**ATURDAY 28th August saw tractors, drivers and spectators from across the north gather at Lochinver harbour for the annual charity tractor run in memory of local crofter Euan Macrae.

Machinery to cater to all tastes was on show, from modern high-horsepower contractor-owned tractors to more vintage pairings of operators and machinery. A good showing of marques and conditions, ranging from peat spec to concours, made up the record 75 tractors taking part on the day.

The run left the harbour and took the main road east before heading north over Skiaig, then followed the single track road to Drumbeg where a fantastic spread of refreshments at the school was well received. The convoy continued to Culkein Drumbeg to pass Euan's home before heading back to Lochinver via a short stop at Stoer Green.

Organiser James Morrison said: "I am delighted that an idea that came into my head the night of Euan's passing has turned into this. We hope to be back next year with the same format and run another great event, with as many turned out as possible for such a great cause. A huge thanks go to all those preparing, helping on the day and

supporting the event, we couldn't do it without you."

The event is held in aid of Macmillan Highland, in recognition of the care Euan received at the Raigmore Macmillan Suite, and in support of the invaluable work Macmillan Highland carry out supporting cancer patients and their families throughout the region.

James, along with friends and fellow organisers Matthew Bulch and Joe Mackay, made the pledge to cycle the route if the sponsor money raised from the 2021 event passed the previous record of £12,000. A steady stream of donations saw that threshold broken and the trio duly set off on 30th October to complete the 39-mile route by bicycle, a mode of transport with which they were not so familiar.

It would be fair to say that none of the three are keen cyclists, but perseverance and good humour saw them complete the circuit and return to Lochinver with no breakdowns, mechanical or otherwise.

Providing regulations on gatherings allow, next year's event promises to be more of a social occasion. Any readers of *The Crofter* who would like to take part will be most welcome.

If you would like to donate, stay informed or attend next year's event, follow the Sponsored Tractor Run (Lochinver) page on Facebook. Contact details are available on that page.

## Buachaillean aig COP 26?

**L** EUGH MI sna pàipearan naidheachd gu bheil buidheann de bhuachaillean bho World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples gu bhith tadhal air a' choinneimh mhòr COP 26. Saoil carson? Nis mun àm a leughas sibh seo, bidh COP 26 seachad, agus sinn uile ann an dòchas mòr gum bi ceannardan an t-saoghail air an cothrom mu dheireadh a ghabhail airson lùghdachadh a chur air teasachadh na planaid. Chan eil sion a dh'fhios agam aig an lre seo dè thèid aontachadh ach bha mi toilichte a' leughadh gum bi na buachaillean seo a' tarraing aire air na buannachdan bho chroch is caoraich air feurach farsaing.

Tha e coltach nach eil ach àite glè bheag aig àiteachas agus biadh sa choinneimh mhòr COP 26. Is aithreach leinn uile sin, chan ann a-mhàin 's gun cuir siostaman bidh a-mach suas ri cairteal nan eimiseanan iomlan an t-saoghail, a dh'fheumas sinn lughdachadh, agus feumaidh sinn sin a dhèanamh ach tha cothroman ann cuideachd, thèid aig an talamh an t-uabhas carbon a stòradh.

Cha tachair sin le àiteachas nan gnìomhachasan mòra ge-tà. Gun teagamh sam bith nuair a bhios beòthaichean gan cumail ann an stait nach eil idir nàdarra, crodh gam biadhach le gràn agus soya, mucan no cearcan gan dinneadh ann an "factaraidhean" no achaidhean gan treabhadh biadhna an dèidh biadhna gun sguir, bidh carbon a' falbh don adhar, bidh bith-iomadachd ga lùghdachadh agus cha bhi an toradh fallainn.

Chan fheum àiteachas a bhith mar seo, tro chleachdaidhean seasmhach gabhaidh eimiseanan lùghdachadh, gabhaidh carbon tarraing bhon adhar agus aig an aon àm, gheibh nàdar cothrom agus gheibhear toradh de bhiadh fallainn. Tha gnath-shìde, nàdar agus slàinte dlùth-cheangailte ri chèile agus chan eil e ciallach an cuir ann an cròithean fa leth. Gu dearbh, dh'fhaotainn dol nas fhaide na sin agus a ràdh gum bu chòir dhuinn gabhail ris an t-siostam-bhìdh mar chrois-rathaid far a bheil dualchas, àrainneachd, slàinte phoblach, eaconamaidh an t-saoghail agus teicneòlas a' tighinn còmhla.

A' tilleadh gu adhbhar COP 26, emiseanan CO2 a ghearradh gu mòr. Tha e coltach gur e talamh feurach as fheàrr a stòras carbon agus gu bheil sin nas èifeachdaich buileach ma tha am feur ga ionaltradh le beòthaichean. Tha toradh a dh'itheas sinn an uair sin a' tighinn bho lusan nach urrainn dhuinn ithe 's na beòthaichean a' meudachadh stòras carbon an fhearainn.

Mar sin, tha mi an dòchas gum faigh na buachaillean èisteachd aig COP 26!

Indigenous pastoralists at COP 26 and the benefits of extensive grazing.

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain



# Reclaiming Our Land

by Rob Gibson

*Derek Flynn salutes a hero of Scottish land reform.*

**W**HY DO so few Scots own land in Scotland? Why is it that we are so detached from it? Huge tracts of our countryside are in the control of a landed elite. As the title of this book suggests, something should be done.

Reclaiming Our Land does two things and it does them both well. Rob Gibson was an SNP MSP from 2003 until 2016; but his activity as a land reformer has been life-long. That's what makes this book of special interest to those who believe in land reform.

Firstly, it provides a personal account from someone who has committed himself to campaigning and educating others on land matters. This, as some of us know, results in hostility from powerful interests. Rob did not shy away from confrontation and chose a political career, spending his student vacations campaigning for crofting (think Glendale and Strollamus), then eight years on Ross and Cromarty district council, before being elected to the Scottish Parliament in 2003.

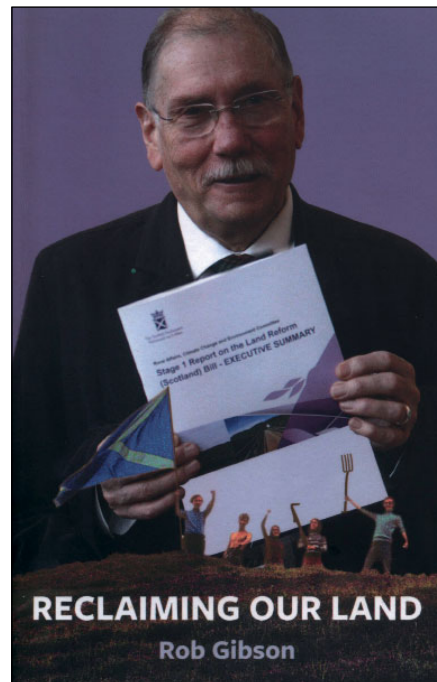
Secondly, he recounts political progress from devolution to his time as convener of the

rural affairs, climate change and environment committee (from 2011 to 2016) which succeeded in bringing a major piece of legislation, the Land Reform Bill, through the parliamentary process. The detail of many struggles is laid bare and this record of them will stand as a valuable research tool for both students and activists.

Retiring on a high, and described as an exceptional convener, this "habitually maverick" politician progressed the issue which he had championed for decades, when Holyrood overwhelmingly passed the 2016 Land Reform (Scotland) Act by 102 votes to 14. Of course, the Tories and landowning interests were to decry these radical measures, but the direction of travel of the Scottish people was now made abundantly clear.

This is much more than a personal account, for Rob recalls other campaigners from the past and provides, from his own experience, examples of how progress might be made. His previous books include *The Highland Clearances Trail* (first published 1983 and regularly reprinted; a new, expanded edition is in preparation). As a longstanding affordable guide to historical grievances in the Highlands, it indicates clearly where Rob's motivation came from.

But this new book on his own more recent past has relevance for everyone in Scotland.



Rob Gibson, *Reclaiming Our Land*  
(Highland Heritage Educational Trust 2020)  
To purchase, email  
[robgibson273@btinternet.com](mailto:robgibson273@btinternet.com)  
Price: £11.99 plus £2.00 postage.

# A Long and Tangled Saga

by Bob Chambers

*The story of the Pairc Estate community buyout*

**T**HIS BOOK recounts the long and winding road travelled by the Pairc community in Lewis, arriving finally at ownership of their land.

The Pairc Trust commissioned Bob Chambers to write this book, but the author's thorough and objective research provides an independent and dispassionate account, detailing the considerable challenges faced by the people of Pairc from December 2002, when they became aware of proposals for a large wind farm on the estate, to December 2015 when their determined efforts finally came to fruition.

The structure of the book provides a timeline, with chapters highlighting the setbacks, decisions taken and achievements at each point of the process.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the people of Pairc suffered the fate of many across the crofting areas – clearance from the lands they had worked for generations to make way for sheep, which were more profitable for the landowner.

Bob Chambers observes that this emotive history, so familiar to many of us, was one of the sustaining reasons for the determination of trust directors and the community of Pairc to see through the machinations of landowner Barry Lomas and persevere in overcoming the many hurdles placed before them over

the protracted acquisition process.

The community initially discussed with the landowner a voluntary transfer of the land. Discussions were frustrated by the anticipated value of the proposed wind farm development, on which Lomas – understandably – wished to capitalise. Complex legal issues had to be thrashed out, taking considerable time.

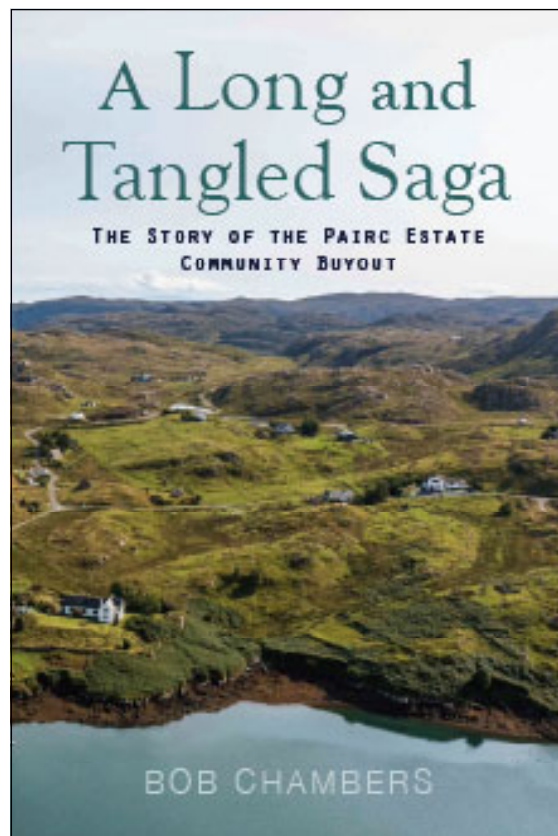
Due to the landowner's procrastinations, the community decided to move to a ground-breaking hostile take-over of the land – made possible by the Land Reform Act of 2003 – the first time such action had been implemented. In the end, a hostile bid was not required, but its demanding and convoluted process was thoroughly worked through.

The achievements of the Pairc Trust have significant importance in the wider land reform process and many lessons have been learned, some now adopted into current law. For any groups considering a community buy-out, this is essential guidance.

Beautifully illustrated, the book is a very readable account of a complex and difficult journey which ultimately reached a satisfactory destination. The community has benefited from the dedication and determination of a small group of volunteers who gave years of their life to the cause.

Available from Acair – [www.acairbook.com](http://www.acairbook.com). ISBN: 978-1-78907-111-5

*Reviewed by Fiona Mandeville*



## Have you seen our helpsheets for Common Grazings?



National Advice Hub  
T: 0300 323 0161  
E: [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)  
W: [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)

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.



Scottish Government  
Registration no 1-A100  
gov.scot



visit [www.fas.scot/discussion-groups/common-grazings/](http://www.fas.scot/discussion-groups/common-grazings/)



## THREE STEP 1>2>3 SHEEP NUTRITION SOLUTION

### Feet & Fertility

Improve conception rates and combat foot issues  
Feed Spring to Autumn



### Energyze Forage Booster

Energy and nutrient support for the early stages of foetal growth and development

Feed Autumn to Winter



### Energyze Vitality

Aids prevention of twin lamb disease. Improves colostrum quality. Helps produce strong, healthy lambs

Feed late Winter to Spring



Contact your nearest Harbro Country Store for details:  
[www.harbro.co.uk/country-stores](http://www.harbro.co.uk/country-stores)

FOLLOW OUR FEEDS





# Social crofting is part of the wellbeing economy



Lucy Beattie, SCF member and PhD student, explains.

**W**HEN YOU hear the words wellbeing and economy in the same sentence, you'd be forgiven for thinking they may not go hand in hand, due to the disconnect between the money-driven nature of economics and its relationship with more nuanced aspects of people and society.

Research in the *Journal of Rural Studies* indicates that crofting and crofting communities are vital to underpinning the wellbeing economy. *Spaces of well-being: Social crofting in rural crofting* sets this out using case studies from SCF's Gaining Ground project, funded by Moray and Highland LEADER.

Case studies, data gathered at SCF-facilitated events and crofter-led discussion groups in Moray and Highland were written up by the late Dr David Heaney. This paper is an important distinction for crofting, as social crofting is defined and discussed in the context of real-life practice.

The key findings look at the delivery of social crofting activity and reveal characteristics which set the model apart socially and economically from the more

mainstream activity of social or care farming.

Social crofting brings crofter wellbeing, client wellbeing, community wellbeing and societal wellbeing. Farming and crofting can be a lonely existence, especially as communal work activities have dwindled. Participants noted the

sections of society to connect to new ways of being – but importantly, focuses on bringing in sections of society experiencing the most social exclusion. In rural areas this is often younger people, older people and those with disabilities, alongside crofters

direct relationship to local NHS or social services; other arrangements were much less formal. All models deliver exceptional outcomes for attendees. However, there are barriers.

Social crofts face challenges of core funding, volunteer fatigue, worries about health and safety, paperwork and form filling. The social crofting network meetings had a great level of support and it is clear there is a need for this network to continue and grow the status of social crofting, to bring it into everyday community activity where needed.

The findings integrate well with existing research into social farming. Recommendations would be to focus on creating the right conditions for social crofting to flourish across the Highlands and Islands, perhaps through policy or agricultural support packages.

As spaces for wellbeing in Scottish rural communities, social crofts can address some of the need for, and interest in, green care. Social crofting is an innovative form of rural development and crofting diversification.

*Russell, Z, Beattie, L and Heaney, D, 2021. Spaces of well-being: Social crofting in rural Scotland. Journal of Rural Studies.*

*“Social crofting denotes using crofts for the purpose of improving health and wellbeing through social care, similar to social or care farming, which are interchangeable terms describing a diverse set of practices that bring together healthcare provision and agriculture within a broader umbrella of green care”*  
(Russell et al, 2021)

benefits of working with social crofting attendees on tasks such as gathering, fencing and harvesting vegetables.

- It generates community wellbeing with potential to overcome conflict within communities, through creating a shared sense of belonging and purpose.
- It offers opportunities for all

themselves as residents of areas with a lack of local services.

- As a therapeutic space, social crofts generate positive outcomes for participants with a range of needs, evident in the diversity of participants benefiting from participation on a social croft.

Some case studies were established social crofts with a

## AGRI-TOURISM

# The role of agri-tourism in croft diversification



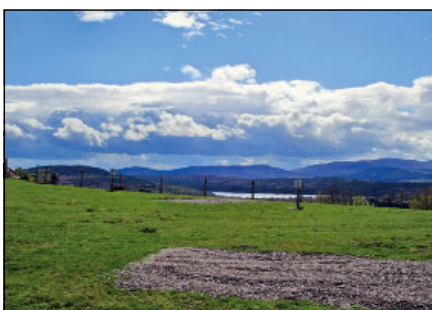
Fossil Cottage



Armadilla



Robin's house



Caravan site at Achue Croft



Wildlife croft

**C**ROFTING IS a part time occupation, so diversification has always been important, but more crofters now aim to build businesses on the croft rather than take full time jobs elsewhere.

SCF ran an online seminar on agri-tourism for crofters. A good turnout of new and experienced crofters heard the stories of others and learned of their successes – and failures.

Fiona talked about the changed standards people expect from B&B and self-catering and the explosion in the number of places available in her area. She advised concentrating on weekly bookings to reduce the work involved in changeovers and not to rely too heavily on Airbnb, which can be controlling. She also talked about her earlier experiences with a bunkhouse and her family's croft B&B. [www.fossil-cottage-skye.co.uk](http://www.fossil-cottage-skye.co.uk).

Russell discussed small caravan sites. If you can get the site right then initial set up costs can be kept down. The income is steady, if not spectacular. A big plus is not needing planning permission if you work through recognised organisations such as the Caravan and Motor Home Club, who can also provide advice. But you do need to install electricity, water and waste disposal. Any tourism venture can be very tying since you have to be there to take bookings and welcome guests every day.

[www.achuecroftcottage.co.uk](http://www.achuecroftcottage.co.uk)

Janette Sutherland of SAC described their leaflet outlining how to set up "airighs" for motor-home stopovers and the pitfalls around waste disposal and muddy fields. The leaflet and advice are available from SAC. The work was funded by the Universities Innovation Fund.

<https://bit.ly/3c3i7k2>.

Phil described how he named his Wildlife Croft to brand the business, majoring on their own produce and local wildlife on and around the croft. He talked about slow tourism, combining nature escapes with comfort and stressing that support for the property is support for their ecological aims. "Our wildlife branding and marketing has been hugely successful and I feel as crofters it is untapped potential." [www.wildlifecroftskye.co.uk](http://www.wildlifecroftskye.co.uk)

Robin had taken a semi-derelict croft house used as a feed store and byre, cleaned it out and successfully started letting with no electricity, no water, no inside toilet. She renovated over lockdown, so the roof no longer leaks, but deliberately left it without water or cooking facilities. The back-to-basics strategy has been successful. But advertising must be honest, so that visitors know what they are coming to and are prepared. [www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/14318713](http://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/14318713)

Liz is planning an up market development of three tourist cabins on her croft. The family's research, including visiting trade shows, showed that going to the top end of the market for accommodation and the surrounding environment costs more to set up but should mean higher returns. The hope is that the local community can get involved in the ecological side.

Helen had used volunteers through WOOFing to develop the croft. She now combines self-catering accommodation with her own massage therapy and wildlife walks through the woods that volunteers helped plant. Peace and quiet is part of the offering for guests.

"We have been running our croft for 23 years, with cattle and vegetable production, welcoming visitors to our two croft dwellings, restored using

recycled materials where possible. Our aim is a place of healing and wonder in a sustainable environment." [www.edinbane-self-catering.co.uk/stepsonthecroft.com](http://www.edinbane-self-catering.co.uk/stepsonthecroft.com)

New ventures require investment and the effects of Covid have made estimating future income difficult. There has been a large increase in visitors to the Highlands and Islands in 2020 and 2021, as foreign travel was cut back. There is no consensus whether the high visitor numbers will continue or whether returning European visitors will maintain traffic. More planning applications going through will boost supply of accommodation but could affect occupancy rates if demand does fall.

A couple of themes emerged from the presentations and discussion.

One is that crofting has a story to tell about heritage and history as well as links to the land and nature – eating local produce, seeing starry skies, observing bugs through a magnifying glass, living a life without all mod cons. This story draws tourists to stay with us and spend money in local shops and restaurants. We crofters need to take the time to tell the story and educate visitors. This gives financial benefits in the short term and builds long-term support for crofting.

The other theme was looking around at what we have and developing these assets for the benefit of visitors. It might be the view, the environment or an old building that can be converted, or a skill you have that others might appreciate. And the presenters showed this can be done carefully, thoughtfully in a way that doesn't damage the thing you are trying to promote. We are preserving what is good for the benefit of us, our guests and future generations.



## AGRI-TOURISM

## Uig sheiling



Reasort Estate staff delivering roofing materials by argocat

*Roddy Mackinnon, UDT development officer, describes an innovative community project*

**I**N EARLY 2020 the Uig Development Trust (UDT) secured grant funding from the Craignish Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to renovate a sheiling on Mangersta common grazings.

A sheiling, as many readers will know, was a rough hut built out on the moor where residents of nearby villages would come and live through the summer months, to graze their livestock. This sheiling was last used in the 1940s and had largely collapsed.

Popular suggestions in a 2019 community consultation – to develop local walking routes and renovate a sheiling or blackhouse – became noted objectives in the Uig Development Plan. The main aims are to bring an unused, dilapidated building back into use to provide visitors with alternative accommodation, to encourage exploration of the moorland and hills and to support ongoing sustainable community development.

The funding was used to cover the cost of materials, with all labour carried out by local volunteers who repaired the drystone walls, rebuilt the chimney, reinstated the roof and laid a new stone floor. Forthcoming work includes constructing an adjacent compostable toilet shelter and installing a small stove.

Benches inside the building will fold out to provide a hard sleeping surface for up to four people. These have been repurposed from a former church meeting-house in Mangersta. The project is being managed by UDT, who have oversight of the plans and finances and provide support to the volunteers.

The sheiling will be ready for use in midsummer 2022 and will be open all year round. Visitors will be asked to book in advance via an online booking system with a suggested donation of £20 per person per night. Profits will be reinvested back into the community through UDT, with a 10% donation to Mangersta grazings committee at the end of each financial year, as a thank you for their ongoing support.

If successful, UDT and North Harris Trust have set an aspirational long-term ambition to create a network of sheilings from Uig to North Harris, further opening up the west side of the island to longer-distance walkers.

UDT would like to express its gratitude to Mangersta grazings committee, Reasort Estates, Craignish Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for their continued support.



Fairy Glen, Isle of Skye

© Neil Howard

## The impact of tourism on rural livelihoods and environments

*MSc student Lucy Shearer outlines her research findings on the Isle of Skye.*

**T**HE ISLE OF SKYE has experienced mass, unregulated tourism growth, detrimentally impacting the island and its inhabitants.

This phenomenon is not confined to Skye; it is a global issue with global consequences. Following decades of near-unregulated expansion, tourism has reached a tipping point in many regions, causing more harm than good to the environment and local residents. This is known as overtourism.

As the tourism industry has grown, so have environmental concerns. Inundated local infrastructure; limited access to popular attractions and destinations; increased cost of living and lack of affordable housing; increased road congestion and pollution; depletion of natural resources and environmental erosion are some examples of the negative effects. My interview participants noted how land erosion and degradation, pollution, litter and disturbance to wildlife have all increased with tourism.

Not only does overtourism have a detrimental environmental impact, but some local residents also perceive it as a threat to a host destination's cultural heritage. Skye is a traditionally Gaelic society. However, its speakers have declined significantly over the last century and the Gaelic culture has suffered. Cultural changes are inevitable in an era characterised by modernisation and globalisation. On Skye, the tourism industry and its many consequences have accelerated cultural change to the point where elements of the island's culture and heritage are almost unrecognisable.

Participants mentioned increasing levels of immigration to the island as a contributing factor. Affluent newcomers relocate to Skye in search of tourism-based capital, purchasing and operating a holiday let. The crofting community on Skye is seeing an increase in the number of newcomers purchasing crofts yet showing little interest in

participating in common crofting activities, instead using the land to build tourist accommodation or other tourist-based capital endeavours. This has intensified the housing crisis, with an increase in the number of second homes and holiday lets leading to a lack of affordable housing and subsequent emigration of younger, less-wealthy, native islanders.

Visitors have been coming to Skye for years to explore the environment, culture and heritage. Participants noted that traditional travel experiences have been replaced by the notion of tick-box tourism, enabled largely by mass media culture. A tick-box tourist tends to travel around a host destination rapidly and with purpose; to tick off mainstream, must-see locations and document the experience on social media. This type of tourist is susceptible to overlooking the finer nuances of a destination's history, heritage, and culture.

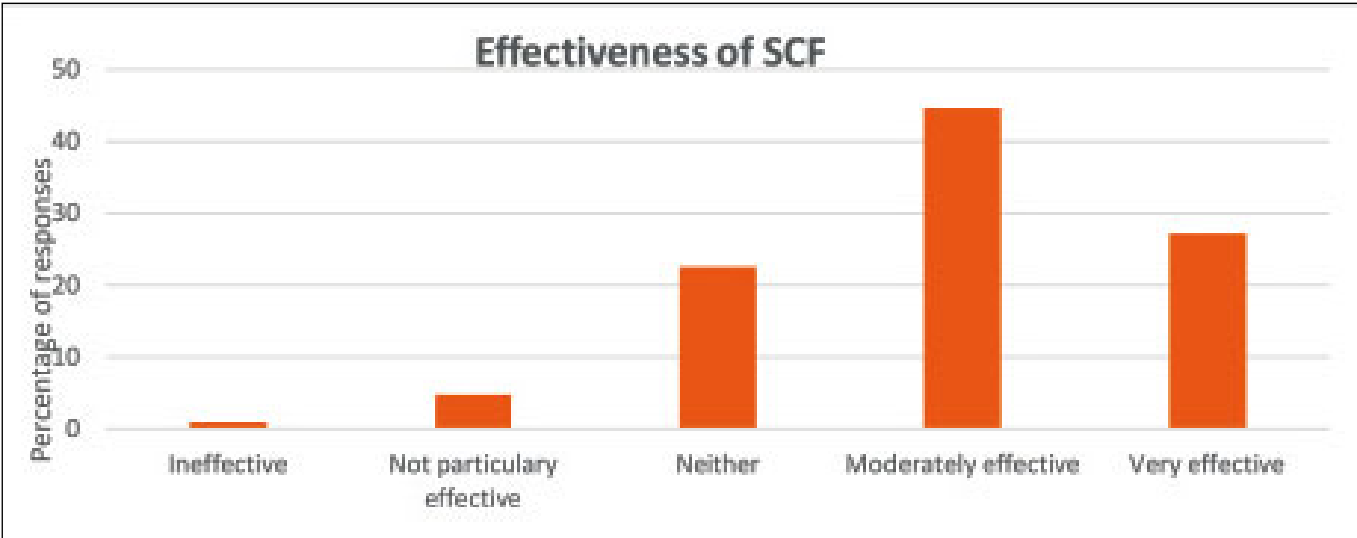
Skye faces a real dichotomy. While unregulated mass tourism has many negative consequences, a large percentage of islanders rely on the tourist economy for income. Overdependence on tourism can result in a slew of social issues and, as an economy, it is vulnerable to external variables – the COVID-19 pandemic being a recent example.

To reduce overdependence and subsequent social issues such as outmigration, Skye must transition from a tourist-based economy, as it has been for many years, to a diverse and sustainable economy that provides more opportunities for people to return.

More emphasis should be placed on knowledge sharing between residents and visitors, as well as the phrase "Leave No Trace". The solution is not to attack tourism, but better manage the industry. Residents' rights must be prioritised over the economy to achieve a healthy balance and to ensure that residents are beneficiaries, not victims, of tourism's success.

[lucyshearer20@hotmail.com](mailto:lucyshearer20@hotmail.com)

MEMBERS PAGES



SCF membership survey

**T**HANK YOU for replying to the membership survey that came out a couple of months ago. The chair and board need feedback from you, our members, to see whether we are doing the right things – and we take your comments seriously.

The headline figure is that you still rate the SCF as an effective organisation, even through the pandemic which curtailed meetings and training to Zoom or Teams. 72% of responses rated SCF as moderately or very effective. Less than 6% thought we were ineffective or not particularly effective. This is consistent with the two previous occasions we have asked the question in the past eight years.

The advantage of online meetings is that more people can attend and give their input than would be possible if travel to Edinburgh or Inverness was required, but they do lack spontaneity.

*The Crofter* and information on crofting and policy issues are all highly valued by yourselves.

Political lobbying is considered essential by four out of five members. The e-newsletter and website are also valued but the social media output divides opinion – as does social media to the population in general. Around half of respondents have found training provided by SCF useful to them personally.

When we asked about other services, most replies were about doing more of the things we are already doing, like local meetings, lobbying, disseminating advice, or discounts. The board will look at the suggestions and see what we can do better.

Opportunities that you see for crofting are about local food production, conservation and climate change mitigation – but only if crofts can be made available to young people who want to work the land and they get the support they need. There is a fair amount of pessimism out there, with scepticism about government commitment and the role of the Crofting

Commission. Arguments for and against re-wilding and Scottish independence come up regularly.

A lot of responses saw threats around the market in crofts, unused crofts, young people not being able to get into crofting and regulation. The future of agricultural support was also seen as a threat by around half of replies. Brexit and re-wilding were seen as less of a threat. The “Other” category mostly amplified these points but also included loss of croft land to housing, lack of regulation, affordability, multiple croft ownership, land ownership, lack of employment opportunities and lack of young people.

That is a flavour of the responses; thank you again for replying. The board tries to take positions that reflect the membership at large, not always straightforward when divisive topics like re-wilding come up or when new opportunities like carbon credits arise and we have to evaluate their impact on our members.

**SCF membership subscription**

**Y**OU MAY recall that our policy is to keep SCF subscriptions up with inflation. Our costs rise with inflation, as everything does.

Last year we decided to waive the increase, as the board felt that members were having a difficult enough time as it was with lock-down. This year we really have to have an increase. The inflation rate over the past year averaged 3% (Office of National Statistics) but we will keep it below that, at 2.25%.

This means that, as of 1st January 2022, our membership subscriptions will be:

Individual membership	£68.00
Joint membership	£102.00
Associate membership	£204.00
Young crofter membership	£34.00

If you pay quarterly this is (per quarter):

Individual	£17.00
Joint	£25.50
Young crofter	£8.50

And remember, a full year’s subscription costs you about the same as one tank of fuel for your vehicle – amazing value!

Thank you very much for your continuing support of the voice for crofting which, as you will see from articles in this edition, is needed more than ever.

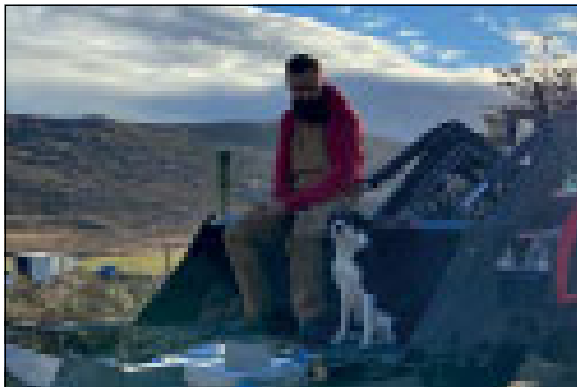
**Follow us on Twitter**

**@ScotCroftingFed**



## MEMBERS PAGES

# Meet our new council members



**Marcus MacDonald** – I am from the crofting township of Strathkanaird, just north of Ullapool. I am a merchant seaman and together with the family run a small flock of Cheviot ewes and a herd of native-breed cattle, along with some very free-range laying hens. I agreed to join the council because I believe that SCF will always have the best interests of the crofting system at heart. I believe that strong representation and united action is more important now than at any time in recent history. Crofting has so much to offer our culture and communities, but needs stronger protection to continue as the system of land use we know today. I will do my best to assist the board and council in any way I can on behalf of our members.

**Rebecca Robson** – My partner and I bought the tenancy of a croft in our village on the west side of Lewis last year. We both grew up in crofting communities and our families have crofts and livestock. Our croft is 17 acres and we are just starting out. We have five cows grazing it and have had our first silage crop baled. We are in the middle of a CAGS application to sort out derelict fencing. Our village is pretty traditional, so we get loads of advice from the other crofters. We are interested in innovative crofting ideas as well as carrying on the traditions. We have small children who are enjoying the outdoors work. So far, I've learned far more from SCF than I've contributed, but happy to be on the council just the same!



**Stephen Leask** – I was brought up on a farm, and involved in the Shetland crofting community from childhood. When I left school I worked on a farm in Caithness doing a course as a new entrant. I was Shetland regional manager for Harbro. The job entailed being an animal health and feed advisor; and advisor for agricultural chemicals, fertiliser etc. I became a Shetland Islands councillor in 2017 and now work part-time for Harbro as advisor and consultant. I set up the agricultural forum with the council, to add more focus on the importance of crofting and farming in Shetland.

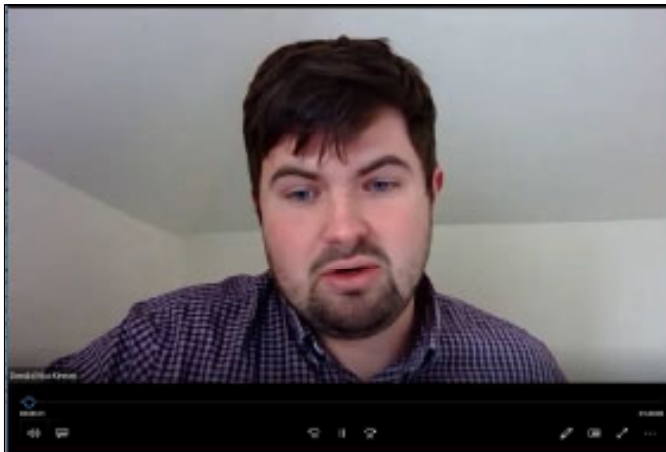
**Karen MacRae** – I live in Dornie with my young family. Some folk might remember me working for SCF a number of years ago. I now work part-time with the local community trust. I have an interest in local food and community ownership and I have enjoyed taking part in SCF's access to crofts working group. We were fortunate to be able to build our home on my husband's family croft. It is a traditional set up, selling store lambs and calves, mainly run by my husband and father-in-law. We have some ideas to diversify activities on the croft which I hope to have time to take forward in upcoming years.



**Jamie McIntyre** – I am a freelance forester and community development worker based in Ardnamurchan, though most of my time is spent supporting the Woodland Crofts Partnership (of which SCF is one of four partners). I've long had an interest in smaller-scale, rural development forestry and in particular family forestry models such as woodland crofts and woodlots. I was for a time woodland crofts officer for HIE/FCS when the model gained official support following the 2007 Crofting Reform Act, but have been self-employed for the last ten years. My wife was raised on the family croft and we have four children, with two still in school. In my spare time I am involved in various community projects including a hydro scheme and a community-owned school building.

## MEMBERS PAGES

# SCF annual general meeting



Donald MacKinnon, SCF chair



Mairi Gougeon, cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands

**T**HE SCF online AGM on 6th October 2021 was attended by over 30 people.

Mairi Gougeon, cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands, was keynote speaker. Delegates welcomed her assurances of crofting's value, continued government support and commitment to reforms strengthening the future of crofting.

The cabinet secretary gave an upbeat address, tackling members' concerns and reaffirming previous government commitments. Enforcement of crofters' duties is a key issue, to ensure occupation and use of crofts, creating further opportunities for new entrants to crofting. In addition to increasing the Crofting Commission's residency and land use team, and on-the-ground presence through new development posts in the Western Isles, the government is taking action on its own crofting estates to enforce duties and create opportunities for new entrants.

Ms Gougeon agreed that an appropriate balance must be found between public interest and private property rights. She acknowledged the disappointment felt by many that crofting law reform did not feature in the Programme for Government this year. She is committed to taking the reform through parliament in this session. When pressed on the urgency, she affirmed that engagement with stakeholders was planned to take this forward.

Withdrawal of funding to manage the control of goose populations, especially in the Western Isles, was raised as a matter of great concern. The cabinet secretary suggested a meeting between NatureScot, environment and land reform minister Mairi McAllan and SCF to find an appropriate solution to this problem.

Ms Gougeon acknowledged crofting as a low-impact agricultural system that has great potential in contributing to the government's priorities on climate change, biodiversity and community resilience. There is great potential for income and employment in areas such as woodland expansion, peatland restoration and the development of local food networks.

A presentation from John Kerr, Scottish Government (SG) head of agricultural policy, followed. He outlined how land, agriculture and the rural economy are at a crossroads, post-Brexit, with significant changes driven by climate, biodiversity, international trade and UK relations sometimes pushing in different directions. SG is in the process of resetting policy objectives for agriculture and land use in a Scottish context. There is huge complexity in how we use our land and the communities it supports, so maintaining productive dialogue is essential. Key challenges and issues:

- realigning the agriculture sector to meet climate targets and enhancing biodiversity;
- addressing the needs of the rural economy and communities, to capitalise on a green future;
- designing and developing new agencies – Scottish Vet Service and Scottish Food Agency – which were manifesto commitments;
- EU alignment, borders, trade and UK relations.

The transition needs to be planned, with necessary systems to support delivery. SG is committed to continue support for crofting, as part of the social fabric of rural communities, with a key role in maintaining and enhancing Scotland's natural capital.



In his chair's annual report to the AGM, Donald MacKinnon said:

"It has been another strange year for all of us, but SCF has continued to represent members' interests at several levels. The move to online meetings has helped democratise access. From across the Highlands and Islands, we have been able to join meetings that in normal circumstances would have taken days to attend.

"SCF representatives participated in various groups including LEADER local action groups, QMS, local and national goose, deer and sea eagle management schemes and various Scottish Government groups on agricultural policy. We continue to meet regularly with government and opposition politicians and government officials. We have regular liaison meetings with the Crofting Commission and SCF provides the secretariat for the Scottish Parliament's cross party group on crofting.

"Outwith the CAP, we have an opportunity to redesign our agricultural support system to make it fit for the future. It must work for crofters and crofting and SCF will maintain our engagement with

policy development to make sure this is the case.

"The market in crofts is out of control – with few affordable opportunities for young, new entrants. We will persist on this issue and stimulate discussion. Linked to this is the urgent need for crofting law reform, which we are urging SG to begin without delay.

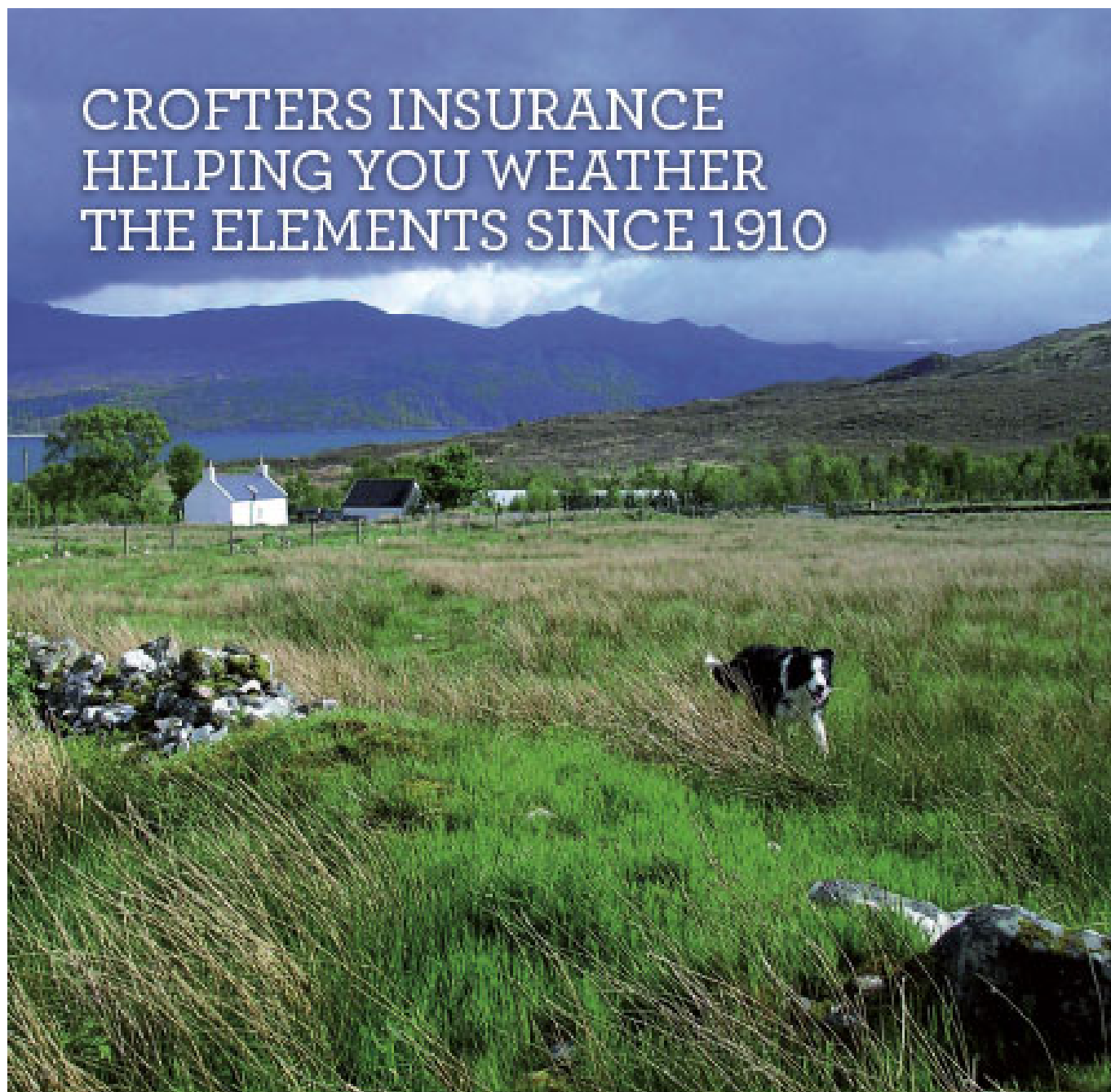
"Projects are an important part of SCF's work. We have been really pleased to be able to restart our training programme with SG support. We are continuing our quest for additional funding opportunities to extend the offering. Crofters Diversity Pays! has entered a second phase, again thanks to SG funding.

"SCF's finances are in a stable position, testament to the careful stewardship of the organisation by current and previous board and staff members.

"Crofting has an important role to play, in uncertain times. With appropriate financial support and reform of the law, crofting can play its part in tackling the climate emergency, continuing to support biodiversity and reverse the trend of depopulation. SCF will continue to argue this case."



# CROFTERS INSURANCE HELPING YOU WEATHER THE ELEMENTS SINCE 1910



## NFU Mutual

INSURANCE | PENSIONS | INVESTMENTS

Find out more by contacting  
your local NFU Mutual branch  
at [nfumutual.co.uk](https://nfumutual.co.uk)

It's about time<sup>®</sup>

The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited (No. 1119824) Registered in England. Registered Office: 2nd Floor, 100, The Quadrant, London, W1A 0AB. Authorised by the Financial Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Member of the Association of British Insurers. For a really good looking person, telephone calls may be recorded for training purposes.

# Appreciating our young crofters

**S**CF IS once again ready to acknowledge the contribution of young crofters, through the SCF Young Crofter of the Year award, with the continuing support of the MacRobert Trust.

Last year's winner, Helen O'Keefe in Elphin, said "The Young Crofter of the Year award has been a great way to share the message about how important crofting is, especially for our communities. It brought a lot of publicity, which was a bit daunting and took some extra time, but it's been great for wider public exposure of the croft, as well as my other businesses – the tearooms and our local food hub. This year was very busy with normal life starting up again, but I'm more motivated to work on these things, to live up to the award I've been given."

Nominations are now open for this year's award. We want to hear from you, either by nominating someone in your community, or you can enter yourself. The winner will receive £500 and the engraved

Young Crofter quich.

The judging panel look for individuals who are crofting in a sustainable way, using traditional and/or new ways of working and who are active in their crofting community. You can download the nomination form at [www.crofting.org/about-scf/young-crofters](http://www.crofting.org/about-scf/young-crofters).

The award provides an opportunity to highlight crofting as a way of sustaining communities and a unique land-based culture. With the support of the MacRobert Trust, we recognise the role young crofters play in securing the future for crofting and their communities.

Nominations are open till January 31st.



THE MACROBERT TRUST



## Christmas shopping!

### Highlands and Islands Woodlands Handbook

This guide for crofters, communities and small woodland owners, published by the Croft Woodlands Project, is a comprehensive guide to establishing, managing and utilising woodland in the varied and often challenging conditions of the crofting counties. Written by Bernard Planterose, and including case studies from crofters across the region, the advice and guidance is based on decades of hands-on experience.

**Members' price £15**



### Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofters

Now its second print, this guide for growers in the challenging conditions of the crofting areas was written by experienced crofters and horticultural experts with specialist knowledge of crofting conditions. Principal authors are Dr Audrey Litterick, a horticultural consultant well-known to Highland and Island growers; Calina MacDonald, presenter of Anns a' Gharradh on BBC Alba; and John Bannister, crofter and market gardener in Skye. The book is a comprehensive and definitive guide to horticultural production in Scotland's islands and on the western and northern seaboard.

**Members' price £15**



(prices includes post and packaging within the UK)

The books can be purchased online at [www.crofting.org/product-category/books-and-cards](http://www.crofting.org/product-category/books-and-cards) or call HQ on 01599 530005.



## How to contact us

Postal address and registered office:

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

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

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

**The Crofter:**  
Fiona Mandeville, editor  
[fiona@crofting.org](mailto:fiona@crofting.org)  
01471 822 297

**Advertising:**  
Erin Matheson  
[ads@crofting.org](mailto:ads@crofting.org)  
01599 530005

**Crofting law helpline for SCF members**  
01599 230 300

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

Company Number SC 218658  
Charity Number SC 031919

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information printed in this publication, SCF cannot accept liability for errors or omissions. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the SCF.

