

## We have to restart the crofting legislation process

**L**ET'S LOOK again at the issue of access to crofts, following on from the last edition of *The Crofter*.

SCF wrote two letters to the out-going commissioners asking for their wisdom on what is needed to enable the Crofting Commission to regulate crofting effectively. We have had no official response to the letters but we are all talking, which is very welcome.

In our letters we referred to commission decisions on assignments and decroftings that we felt were inappropriate and not in the interest of crofting or crofting communities. We were told that the commission's hands are tied by law in what they can and cannot do. We realise this and we do not infer that there are decisions being made through error of judgement. The point of the list of examples we asked commissioners, CEO and staff to compile are all instances of where the law restricts sensible decisions being made. They are the only people who can do this. They have hands-on experience of these instances and the best crofting legal team that exists.

Examples of what we mean include a situation

where a croft under the tenancy of an absentee was being assigned to a family member who already has the other nine crofts in the 11-croft township. A young family sought the tenancy of

community."

Then there is the owner-occupied croft that is not occupied, or crofted, and is owned by a development company based in the central belt. The company is asking for another decrofting to put on its third holiday home. How does this situation even exist?

And the two decrofting applications by an absentee, granted by the commission, despite having noted the breach of duty prior to receiving decrofting applications. How are absentees getting to do anything to a croft when they are openly in breach of duty? The commission's response on this was "there is no statutory basis which would allow us not to consider an application for a decrofting direction from a crofter who is in breach of their residence duty." This is exactly the point we are making. The croft with two decrofted house sites is currently for sale at offers over £160,000.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. We could fill this column with examples every issue. We understand that the commission is following the

*We have to re-start the crofting legislation process as soon as possible and the commission needs to be ready with its list of amendments.*

this one, but the commission gave it to the croft-collector, despite their policy stating that "the commission may take into account the number of crofts which the proposed assignee already holds" and that their decisions are based on "the wider interests of crofting and the crofting

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## Scotland's future agriculture support regime

*The vision, the test, the ARIOB and the group of three*

**S**COTTISH GOVERNMENT published its document "The next step in delivering our vision for Scotland as a leader in sustainable and regenerative farming", setting out principles, values and objectives which "will transform how we support farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. This commitment will sit at the heart of a robust and coherent framework to underpin Scotland's future agriculture support regime from 2025 onwards."

It goes on to say "Scotland will have a support framework that delivers high-quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation and nature restoration. High-quality, nutritious food, locally and sustainably produced, is key to our wellbeing – in economic, environmental, social and health terms. We will support and work with farmers and crofters to meet more of our own food needs sustainably and to farm and croft with nature." A consultation on an agriculture bill is expected this summer.

The document lays out the government's vision for Scottish agriculture and also outlines the two-track approach to a National Test

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## Message from the chair...



*Donald MacKinnon*

particularly in Uist. What the goose problem needs is a long-term funding commitment. This is not something that is going to go away. The Scottish Government and NatureScot need to accept that.

Included in this edition of *The Crofter* are the results of the Crofting Commission election. It was encouraging to see all constituencies contested in the election and a high standard of candidates forward for election. The new commission will have plenty to deal with during this term. The recommendations from the audit are in the process of being implemented; an increased budget has seen new staff taken on, which should help deal with the backlog of regulatory applications; crofting law reform is on the horizon; and the commission will hopefully play a central role in helping identify areas that new legislation should tackle. I look forward to working with the new commission in the coming months.

Zoom and other online platforms have been really useful for SCF over the past two years. Video conferencing has allowed us to host meetings on a wide variety of topics, with members from all over the crofting counties. SCF representatives have also been able to increase and broaden attendance at meetings, which would simply have not been feasible had travelling been involved. However, while online has its benefits, there is nothing to beat a village hall meeting.

Recent well-attended meetings held in Stornoway and Balivanich are hopefully just the start of SCF getting out on the road again speaking to and hearing from members. Keep an eye out for more meetings in the coming weeks.

As we move into the busy spring period, I'd like to wish you all the best of luck with calving and lambing – fingers crossed the weather is good to us.

**W**ELCOME TO the April edition of *The Crofter*, another issue packed full of interesting features, comment and more. I hope you enjoy the read.

It's been a wild start to the year, with what has felt like near-constant gales here in Lewis. I am sure the pattern has been similar in other areas. This weather is hard on stock and crofters, but thankfully the days are stretching out and that is very welcome indeed!

Goose management was back in the news in February. Following our meeting with environment minister Mairi McAllan at the beginning of the month, the Scottish Government announced funding to reinstate island goose management schemes. While the announcement is welcome, the funding will not be enough to tackle the issue,

## Scotland's future agriculture support regime

*...Continued from page 1*

Programme to start transforming agriculture in Scotland, which will be implemented this spring.

Crofters and farmers will be encouraged to improve their knowledge of current environmental performance and efficiency in Track 1. The purpose of Track 2 is to design, test, improve and standardise tools, support and process necessary to reward farmers, crofters and land managers for the climate and biodiversity outcomes they deliver.

These are being developed with and alongside members of the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB), a group of 21 individuals and representatives of organisations, including SCF, involved in Scottish agriculture.

ARIOB is supported by the Scottish Government's academic advisory panel, as you would expect, but also a group of three called the Agriculture Policy Development Group, which assists with developing policy detail.

This group consists of a senior NFUS policy officer, representing probably the largest land-holding group in Scotland and a senior policy officer for RSPB, one of the largest individual landlords in Scotland. The third person is a retired civil servant.

You could charitably say these three individuals have a lot of experience to offer. Or you could ask why this group, two-thirds of whom are lobbyists for large land-owners with a massive vested interest in what our support system looks like, are involved in developing agriculture support policy detail.

## If it is broken...

*SCF council member Jim MacPherson on the challenges facing the Crofting Commission and the need for an urgent update to crofting legislation.*

**T**HE 2020/21 audit of the Crofting Commission was prepared for the Public Audit Committee by the Auditor General for Scotland and presented in October 2021.

The Public Audit Committee's report drew the Scottish Parliament's attention to significant weaknesses in the commission's leadership and governance arrangements. At no point has an attempt been made to determine the root cause of that breakdown.

Crofting is a creature of statute.

In November 2014 the Crofting Law Sump reported on 126 problem issues with the current statute, of which 17 were high priority. Fergus Ewing, then cabinet secretary, set up a Crofting Bill Group with the aim of correcting the most pressing problems in the then current session of parliament, with the rest of the problems

being addressed in what is now the current session of parliament.

External events intervened and the Crofting Bill Group's work ceased. To date there has been no indication of parliamentary time being found to address the 126 outstanding problems plaguing the crofting statute.

The Public Audit Committee missed an opportunity to explore the underlying cause at the oral evidence session on 2nd December 2021. The CEO of the Crofting Commission remarked that while he was steeped in the public sector, his colleagues on the board come from a small business, private sector background. They are impatient for things to be fixed quickly and they are impatient with bureaucracy – there is a little clash of cultures there.

The board has to deal on an ongoing basis with:

- If it is broken, fix it.
- Maintain it so it does not break.
- Modify it to eliminate cost of maintenance.

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# We have to restart the crofting legislation process

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law. This demonstrates that the law must be amended.

Crofting is a regulated system of land tenure. It is widely agreed that regulation of duties can help to temper the market and ensure a vibrant crofting community. It is clear that the right to assign a croft outwith the family has caused an open market in tenancies and the right to buy a croft has put crofts below the radar of regulation.

Please let us know your thoughts on the future of crofting.

- What you think about the current situation in crofting – the high prices, crofts being neglected, collected, sold for development, new entrants finding it almost impossible to get in?
- Do you think regulation needs to be tightened? Should more be done to ensure that crofts are used?
- Should we lose the right to assign crofts outwith the family?
- Should we lose the right to buy crofts?
- Should unused crofts be passed back to a third party broker to reassign?
- Is bringing croft (including tenancy) prices down a good thing for crofting?
- Do you have any suggestions on how to get crofting into a healthier situation?

We will be sending out an online survey to gauge members' views on this vital topic, but you can email us, write us a letter, use social media or simply give us a phone. We need to hear from you.

Thank you.

## fix it

...Continued from page 2

None of the above fixes can be applied to the current crofting statute without a bill in parliament.

The executive must, from an operational perspective, apply the current crofting statute, including the laws of unintended consequences embodied in the current statute.

The Public Audit Committee, at 42 in its report, welcomes the fact that the incoming commissioners will undertake training and getting this right "will be the key to ensuring that we are not here discussing similar issues again in the future." No amount of training will rectify the little clash of cultures until the problem issues with the current crofting statute are corrected by an act which simplifies crofting law and is capable of being repaired without yet another bill through the parliament.

In the lead up to the 2010 Act, was it really the intention of parliament that the trustees of a pension fund can become an owner-occupier crofter as of right?



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## Policy priorities for 2022

IT IS approaching 14 years since the (Shucksmith) Committee of Inquiry on Crofting (ColoC) made recommendations to the Scottish Government in 2008.

Despite lack of implementation of many of the recommendations, crofting is going strong. ColoC comments about crofting's wider benefits to population and biosphere are more relevant now than ever. Crofting is being recognised as the sustainable way forward for land use in Scotland; but to realise its potential, there are contextual issues that need a helping hand.

- In future agricultural support, payment for public good is crucial. Crofting families need to make a living to support themselves and invest in the croft. The market doesn't always fulfil this, due to our subsidised food policy. Crofting delivers many non-market benefits that deserve public support – climate change mitigation, enhancing biodiversity and population retention, for example. Detailed proposals of a new Scottish agriculture and rural development support system are still awaited from the Scottish Government and it is becoming a matter of urgency that they indicate what the future holds. We are told that we can expect a draft bill in the summer. We need to keep emphasising that schemes need to be croft-proofed.
- Access to crofts is important to involve more young people in crofting. This means better regulation of existing crofts, freeing up unused crofts, establishing new crofts – and amended powers for the Crofting

Commission to regulate crofting more robustly to moderate the market in croft tenancies and owner-occupied crofts.

- A priority is a bill to improve crofting law and iron out the wrinkles that make it difficult and confusing to work with. We are promised a bill in this parliament, but nearly a year has gone by with no progress whatsoever. The Crofting Law Sump was presented to the Scottish Government in November 2014 with 57 issues to be addressed. Little progress has been made. A new bill fixing anomalies and clarifying legal requirements is needed, followed by consolidation of all the acts.
- Carbon credits are set to become a big thing as we attempt to mitigate climate change. This could be a great opportunity for crofters or it could be an elephant trap – note the rise of the green lairds. The implications of what is proposed are vague and how crofters (especially common grazings) can take advantage is still unknown. Concerted work on this is essential to either reap the benefits or protect crofting from it. As with crofting, it should be regulated.
- The National Development Plan for Crofting was published a year ago. It draws together different strands of crofting into one document with a lot of good ideas. There is to be a group representing crofting interests which meets regularly and reviews progress against the actions in the plan. We will report back once it is underway.

# Crofting Commission elections 2022

**THE CROFTING** Commission elections were declared at the count in the Town House in Inverness on 18th March.

This year the duties of returning officer were provided by Mi-Voice, a specialist democratic services company. In previous years one of the local authorities within the crofting counties performed this role, but due to local government elections in early May their resources were limited this time.

The elections are governed by Scottish Government regulations, which meant that there was no option to move the date and no mechanism to introduce electronic voting as an additional means of completing the ballot. It is hoped that there will be the possibility of reviewing and updating the legislation before the next elections in 2027.

A total of 3,559 votes were cast across all six constituencies, including 13 ballot papers rejected due to an unclear first preference. From the six candidates elected, two will be continuing their term of office, two are returning to the commission after a period out of office and two are completely new members.

Later in 2022 two further vacancies will become available for government-appointed commissioners. An application pack and full details should be available in May at [www.appointed-for-scotland.org](http://www.appointed-for-scotland.org).

Malcolm Mathieson, convener of the Crofting Commission said: "The calibre of candidates was really outstanding. Many folks wanted to use skills and experiences they've developed not just in their crofting lives, but over the courses of their careers in other occupations too. It really goes to show what a wealth of talent there is within our remote rural crofting communities.

"I'd like to congratulate all involved for putting their names forward, a daunting task for many, and I especially welcome all those elected. I'd also like to thank outgoing commissioners Billy Neilson, Andy Holt, Archie MacNab and Cyril Annal.

"Over the past months the board has made an incredible effort to learn from the mistakes of the past, so we can improve our services to the crofters and communities of the future. I'm confident this new board will bring together a diverse collective experience and will work together well to improve and build on the work we have already started."

Bill Barron, chief executive of the Crofting Commission said: "It's really great to be welcoming a new mix of commissioners to the organisation. Commissioners will begin an intense few months



Counting the votes. As very few candidates were available to attend the count it was not possible to obtain photographs of them.

of training to begin with, to fully equip them with the skills to serve effectively on a Scottish non-departmental public body.

"It's vital that the new board continues to make good progress against our aims and objectives and continues to address issues that arose during previous audit reports. Providing comprehensive training and support to the commissioners to engage with this training should help us ensure that the commission can work collegiately to come to decisions."

East Highlands: Rod MacKenzie was elected at stage 2

- Kenneth Hardie (22)
- Rod MacKenzie 142
- Archie MacNab 51
- Robert Merees 89

South West Highlands: Colin Kennedy was elected at stage 1

- Colin Kennedy 170
- William Neilson 142
- Craig Ward 27

Shetland: Duncan Gray was elected at stage 2

- Duncan Gray 246
- Andrew Holt (44)
- Lauraine Manson 244

Orkney and Caithness: Donald MacDonald was elected at stage 1

- Donald MacDonald 146
- David MacGregor 26
- Peter Stewart 54

The Western Isles: Iain MacIver was elected at stage 1

- Iain MacIver – 684 votes
- John MacAulay – 557 votes

West Highlands: Mairi MacKenzie was elected at stage 2

- Gordon Drysdale (191)
- Mairi MacKenzie 532
- Marjory Robertson 361

SCF chair Donald MacKinnon commented: "Now that the results are in and we have our new commission, it is essential that the new intake and returning commissioners are given a proper induction, with their responsibilities and remit clarified at the earliest opportunity. Crofting cannot afford to have a dysfunctional regulatory body. We know that lessons have been learnt and every effort will be made to avoid a repeat of the past. SCF looks forward to working with the new Crofting Commission."

## SCF members meet face-to-face again

**IN A RETURN** to in-person events, SCF recently held meetings in Balivanich and Stornoway.

At the Balivanich meeting Donald MacKinnon and Patrick Krause were joined by Donald Fraser, head of wildlife management at Nature Scot (formerly SNH). Ferry issues meant that Mr Fraser was not able to attend the meeting in Stornoway but his Lewis-based colleagues David MacIennan and Roddy MacMinn filled in for him.

A good discussion was had at both meetings, with the first half of the session given over to wildlife management, in particular geese. The hot topic was the recent announcement of Scottish Government funding for greylag goose management, with the consensus being that the figures were nowhere near enough to deal with the scale of the current problem. This was of particular concern at the Balivanich meeting, where problems

with ravens were also raised as a serious issue.

The attention of the meetings then turned to future agricultural policy, with a presentation on progress from Donald MacKinnon. He highlighted how vital it was that crofters have a voice in these discussions and that members' views are heard. Patrick Krause gave an update on SCF's Access to Crofts campaign and crofting law reform.

The meeting in Stornoway

concluded with former SCF chair and long-standing member Neil MacLeod being presented with honorary life membership of SCF. The presentation represented a small token of appreciation for the huge amount of time, effort and dedication that Neil has given to SCF and its predecessor organisations over many years.

We hope that these meetings will be the first of many in-person meetings.



# Cross Party Group on Crofting

**SCF HAS** organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) since the Scottish Parliament was reconvened in 1999. The group is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs and for pressing the Scottish Government (SG) to act on crofting issues.

We have held two meetings since the last edition of *The Crofter*. Mairi Gougeon, cabinet secretary for rural affairs and islands, attended the first meeting. She spoke about the main issues of concern to crofting, including:

- SG commitment to crofting and recognition of its importance in rural development and cohesion of rural communities in Highlands and Islands.
- Crofting Commission development officers implementing the National Development Plan

for Crofting, working to bring inactive crofts back into use and create opportunities for new entrants.

- In 2019-2020 there were over 830 new entrants to crofting, 44% of them women, 32% aged 40 or under.
- As she said at SCF's AGM, SG takes control of geese seriously – especially greylags in the Uists. She is happy to meet with SCF, along with minister for environment Mairi McAllan, to discuss further.
- SG is committed to reforming crofting law; will continue to engage with stakeholders on what areas need to be addressed, which is known, and how to address them – consensus is sought. SG will liaise with the Crofting Commission on what reforms are needed to allow the

commission to discharge its functions.

- Agriculture policy beyond CAP will bring tough decisions, but also opportunities to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, which will be at the heart of agriculture support regime from 2025.

The main topic of the last meeting was carbon and crofting with an introduction to the topic by SCF chair Donald Mackinnon. Crofting Commission solicitor David Finlay spoke about carbon in the context of crofting tenure. Anna Sellars, senior rural business consultant, and Ben Law, senior forestry consultant, both in SAC Consulting, covered a wealth of information on carbon sequestration and the current carbon markets and trading situation.



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## Peatland skills

*With increasing world-wide focus on carbon, Becky Shaw of NatureScot considers the opportunities for crofting areas.*

**SCOTLAND HAS** over two million hectares of peatland – a unique habitat capable of storing vast amounts of carbon, a source of clean water and water storage that is also important for biodiversity, supporting a wide range of plants, birds and other species.

Much has been damaged by past drainage and management. Instead of storing carbon, it is now in such poor condition that it is emitting carbon and responsible for more than 10% of Scotland's total emissions.

We can repair and restore

peatlands, primarily through actions which raise the water table and re-establish vegetation. The Scottish Government-funded Peatland Action programme delivers on-the-ground peatland restoration, funding multi-million pound large-scale projects over multiple years and smaller community-based restoration projects.

Peatland restoration is a relatively new and growing sector. In the 10 years since the Peatland Action programme began, new techniques have been developed and refined whilst restoring more than 25,000 Ha of peatland.

With Scottish Government funds of £250m over the next 10 years ear-marked for peatland restoration,

and the likelihood that billions of funding will be required to help us reach our 2045 target of 600,000 Ha of restored peatland, this is a growing industry.

In the next three years, the intention is to significantly escalate delivery to meet these ambitious targets. This requires a rapid development of the delivery industry through training, capacity building and guidance.

Some estimates suggest that around 1,500 jobs are needed in peatland restoration over the next ten years. Skilled machine operators are a critical element of peatland restoration activity and civil engineering firms leading this work have developed specialist skills in peatland restoration techniques, operating specialist machinery in this sensitive habitat.



This developing industry will

create new opportunities for skills development and job opportunities. Working with the Crichton Carbon Centre and other partners, NatureScot is developing skills pathways and supporting training and development for peatland restoration, recognising that to support this growing industry, a range of specialist and technical jobs will be needed. In addition to highly-skilled machine operators, these include hydrologists, satellite data analysts, surveyors, ornithologists, ecologists and project managers.

There is an urgent need to upskill and develop the sector both via the existing workforce and through development of skills pathways for future entrants to peatland restoration. Peatland restoration should provide local, skilled jobs, as well as positive outcomes for nature and climate.

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

- Contributions from inactive shareholders
- Splitting the payment for the Township Bull
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You can also read our inspirational Common Grazing Case Studies from Shetland, Argyll, Uist and Caithness.



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# Greylag geese and island biodiversity



*The threat to biodiversity of the exploding population of greylag geese on Hebridean islands is sharply in focus following COP26. David Muir, a member of SCF and of the Uist Goose Management Group, summed it up well for us recently.*

**T**HE TYPE of machair cultivation and cropping carried out on Uist has high biodiversity value and, with the exception of Tiree on a smaller scale, is almost unique. This is one of the few sanctuaries for traditional crop varieties to seed, as well as rare wild plant, bird and insect life to flourish. Large quantities of storm-cast seaweed are heaped on foreshores up and down the islands ready to be spread and ploughed into the sandy soil of the machair, not only providing fertiliser and

soil binder, but also trapping carbon into the soil. Maintaining and improving soil health, as well as increasing biodiversity, were major themes discussed at COP26 in Glasgow.

Ever-increasing numbers of resident greylag geese pillage traditional corn seed as it grows and will destroy standing crops if almost round-the-clock surveillance is not kept. This seed cannot be replaced from external sources. We need to ripen and harvest at least some of it for the following year. Cattle returning to machair grazing in autumn find grass already eaten or totally spoiled by geese. Biodiversity offered by species-rich grassland growing in stubble aftermath is a feature of environmental designation on the machair.

Uist Local Goose Management Group and SCF campaigned incessantly about this

menace and sought help to cope. SNH used to fund a very successful adaptive management scheme, but funding diminished. We then received relatively small amounts of funding from NatureScot to help finance shooting, but this ceased too. The budget used to be £40,000 per year but was reduced to zero, allowing a rapid increase in the goose population to present numbers, which cannot be sustained.

It is not just crofters who have a stake in this, but also conservation bodies, the government, indeed all of us who stand to benefit from protecting our crops – given the importance of the biodiversity machair cultivation provides.

In view of discussions that took place in Glasgow, it is hard to believe that the trivial amount of funding needed to protect biodiversity from geese has been all but cut off. Is all the exclaiming of biodiversity's importance just empty words?

SCF took this issue to the Scottish minister for environment and land reform, Mairi McAllan. The response was gratifying, with the minister announcing, "I understand how serious the impacts can be for crofting communities and for the unique machair habitat and biodiversity that their traditional form of agriculture supports. That's why we are contributing up to £50,000 towards resident greylag goose control on these islands over the next two years, to mitigate the impact on agriculture and support unique and important habitats."

But look at the figures behind the headline. In fact only £6,000 per year is being budgeted for Lewis and Harris, Uist and Coll and Tiree. The rest goes to Orkney farmers. £6,000 to be spent in Uist for this and next year for shooting will barely keep pace with expanding numbers, as we have seen from the most recent counts. All areas need confidence that realistic funding will be available every year, rather than the budget reducing and stopping again.

## Croft House Grant Scheme

**C**ROFTING PLAYS a significant role in the demographic of the Highlands and Islands, underpinning communities in many rural areas.

Most crofting activity is done best being resident on the croft, so on-croft housing is vital. A crofter of a bare-land croft has the right to build a house on their croft, subject to planning permission, and it has long been government policy to support house-building on (or adjacent to) crofts.

The Croft Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS) was introduced in 1986 and comprised a loan, paid back to the government over (typically) 40 years, and a grant. The average cost of building a house in 1986 was £28,000, and CBGLS met about 82% of building costs. CBGLS was closed in 2004 and replaced by a Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) which roughly combined the grant and loan, as a grant. This sounds fine except that support had not kept up with inflation. We calculated in 2008 that typical build costs exceeded £100,000 and support was around 14%

of total build costs, so a loan from a bank was still needed. Banks will not accept croft land as security, thus necessitating the need to de-croft. This is on top of the croft usually having had to be purchased with cash.

The current CHGS provides a new house grant

and an improvement grant. Following a review in 2015, the grant was increased to a maximum of £38,000 in high priority areas and £28,000 in standard areas, or 40% of improvement costs. An average three-bedroom house (100 m<sup>2</sup>) costs £220,000 to build in Skye, so the maximum grant now contributes about 18%.

We are talking to government about reviewing the scheme to account for increased build costs and it is intended that the improvement grant will be more favourable, including a big increase for energy-saving measures. More about this next issue.

This valued scheme disperses in the region of £1.5 million per year and about 80% of applications get approved. The budget has never prevented approval.

To make a good scheme better, we want to see the rates increase, of course, and see a bit more imagination in house building, including smaller, modular starter homes that are designed for extension and self-build, off-the-shelf plans, already approved by building control, timber houses and so on.



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## LOCAL FOOD

# Let's champion local food

*Crofting used to be about producing food for your family and community, writes SCF member Helen O'Keefe.*

**L**ET'S NOT romanticise it – it was about survival.

The land was poor, so there wasn't much variety and there may not have been enough land to comfortably feed everybody, but it was still about using this land as well as possible to feed yourself.

These days, it's easier to import food, via the supermarket, veg box schemes, wholesalers or even online, giving us an abundance and choice to be envied. Meanwhile, most crofting today focuses on the store livestock market – breeding hardy sheep and cattle to be fattened, or crossed with bigger breeds down south or over east.

So if we're not giving way to romantic notions of an idyllic crofting past, why should we think about trying to sell (and eat) more of our croft produce locally instead of relying solely on the store market? Here are five reasons. Maybe you can think of more?

- **Quality of food:** We are often at the end of supply chains, far from central distribution points. Fruit and vegetables, by the time they get here, are usually well past their best. Provenance is lost in long supply chains and we are often supplied with meat far inferior to what we produce ourselves on the hill.
- **Resilient producers:** With international pressures to eat less meat, a fall in demand for store livestock is likely at some point, resulting in lower prices. Subsidies are also under pressure, meaning that many traditional croft livestock businesses may no longer be viable. Direct sales to local markets is a stable alternative that also allows the crofter to keep more of the value.
- **Resilient communities:** Covid and Brexit have opened our eyes to the risks of long supply chains, particularly in rural areas like the crofting counties. Local suppliers of food reduce the effects of these supply chain shocks. Also, growing more local food (especially fruit and vegetables) and processing food locally (like butchering) creates more jobs, and more diversity of jobs in our localities, helping build more resilient communities.
- **Environmental benefits:** Shorter supply chains are usually better environmentally, with fewer plastics, fossil fuels and other energy for transport, refrigeration and distribution and less land use for storage and handling. Plus, if we croft well (agro-ecologically, even) then we can ensure that the food we are eating is not contributing to more global warming or biodiversity loss.
- **Because we can:** Others refer to our land as unproductive, saying that it's only good for rewilding or forestry. That's simply not true. We could produce so much more useful food to sustain our own communities, instead of exporting all our produce and importing everything we eat.

Not only is local food better-tasting and better for you, it should also give you a great sense of pride, achievement and community – that the area you live in and the people you share it with are producing such incredible food for you to eat.

I believe that local food is a vital part of our future – for our communities, our livelihoods, our planet, as well as our crofting culture and our connection with the land. It can be done on any scale, anywhere. The important thing is that we all get involved.



Summer fruit and veg forage



Home-grown autumn dinner



Half a Shetland sheep



LOCAL FOOD

Scottish Crofting Produce: food and drink



SCF RECENTLY received funding from the People's Postcode Trust to look into promoting the Scottish Crofting Produce mark.

The mark was established to promote produce from crofts so that crofters could make a better return on their sales. While the mark covers a range of produce (including food, crafts and textiles), this project focuses on the food and drink aspect.

Recent events including Brexit, a pandemic, supply chain issues and COP26 have all raised the importance of sustainability and supporting local produce. Crofters contribute a huge amount to this and we wish to help producers showcase their products to the growing range of consumers who are now looking more at where their food comes from and how it has been produced.

The funding enabled SCF to recruit a project co-ordinator, Beth Rose, a crofter herself who has built up several years experience in marketing and selling her own produce. The current initial work involves looking at the guidelines, criteria and materials for the Scottish Crofting Produce mark so that it is clear to all

involved. Some are being tweaked, so bear with us as changes occur. They are there to help give a better understanding of the Crofting Mark.

Webinars are planned on the mark, selling produce, case studies, etc, so watch out on our website and social media pages for training dates. It is also hoped to showcase food producers under the mark at several events this coming year, such as the Royal Highland Show and the Black Isle Show.

If you are a producer (or thinking about it) and you are an SCF member, do get in touch. Whether you sell mutton or mince, truffles or turkeys, wasabi or wedders, trout or trotters, we want to hear from you. The more producers we can gather together, the better able we are to showcase what we crofters can offer directly from the land to customers. We are looking for people to join the Scottish Crofting Produce mark to really promote the diverse way many work with nature.

To find out more, get in touch with Beth at [scp@crofting.org](mailto:scp@crofting.org) and she can answer any questions, or if you would like assistance with the application form, she would love to help.





## LOCAL FOOD

# Growing local

*Northmavine Community Development Company (NCDC) is delighted to have recently registered as certified seed merchants for Shetland kale seed, reports project worker Mark Ratter.*

**NCDC EFFORTS** – through their Growing Local project – helped secure the future of Shetland kale by working with crofters, including looking at ways to add value to such landraces. They are now selling seed to customers in Shetland and further afield.

Local crofters are encouraged to grow, collect and dry their own kale seed, before these are quality tested by Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture. Crofters sell their seed to NCDC, who

package, advertise and sell 150-seed packs to a range of local garden centres and shops in Shetland.

In partnership with Da Barn, NCDC are also now selling Shetland kale seed packs online, allowing better access for customers based outside Shetland.

NCDC have long been aware of the value of Shetland kale and equally aware of its decreasing cultivation, both within Northmavine and across Shetland. The Growing Local project provided the perfect opportunity to help conserve and celebrate this traditional hardy cabbage of Shetland.

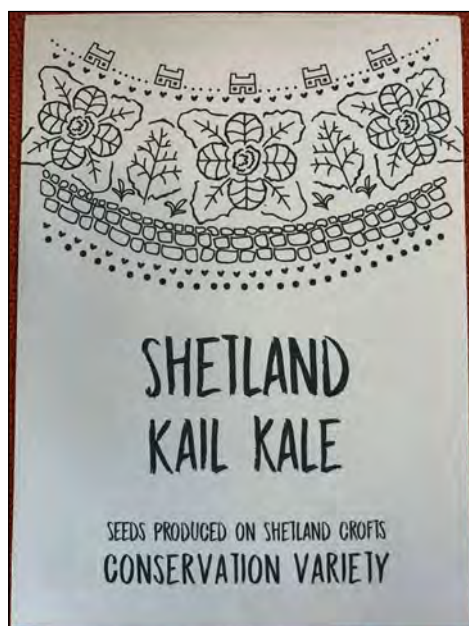
“As one of the few surviving landrace varieties of Scotland,” Mark comments, “we are well aware of Shetland kale’s genetic, cultural and

nutritional value. However, this is set against a steep decline in cultivation in recent decades. It’s heartening to see it now a registered conservation variety, backed up through the Scottish Landrace Protection Scheme in Edinburgh.”

The recent increase in the promotion and sale of Shetland kale also appears to have driven its use in Shetland’s traditional and modern cuisine. It was recently featured as a key ingredient in a cooking demonstration of reestit mutton soup at Taste of Shetland’s internationally-renowned festival. Fusion dishes which use Shetland kale – such as Shetland kale pesto courgetti – can be found in local cafes, as well as in the recipes of Shetland food vloggers.

Further afield, Shetland kale is also now featured in Slow Food’s Ark of Taste.

[www.northmavine.com/about/growing-local](http://www.northmavine.com/about/growing-local)  
Seed (£2.99/pack) can be purchased at  
<https://dabarn.square.site/>



## Cruaidh fheum air toradh ionadail ann an saoghal mi-chinnteach

**G**ED A tha prìsean air beothaichean sna fèilltean reic math an dràsta, 's e sgeul eile a th' ann nuair a thig e gu cosgaisean.

Tha e coltach gu bheil prìsean ag èirigh air a h-uile rud a bhios sinn a' ceannachd a-staigh eadar diesel, ceic, feur, dealan is eile. 'S e saoghal mi-chinnteach a th' againn an-diugh agus 's ann nas mi-chinntiche a tha e a' dol. Tha cogadh, galaran, atharrachadh sa ghnath-shìde agus mi-sheasmhachd poileataigeach gar bagairt, 's air sgàth sin, 's e biadh cho ionadail 's a ghabhas – co-dhiù bhon dùthaich seo - as sàbhailte. Ma tha sin a' ciallachadh gum feum barrachd taic-airgid a' tighinn bhon Riaghaltas, b' fhiach e. Chan e a mhàin gum feum sinn toradh cho ionadail 's a ghabhas ach gum feum an toradh sin tighinn cho fad 's a ghabhas bhon talamh ionadail.

Cha bhi e ciallach san àm ri teachd a bhith a' ceannachd ceic anns a bheil soya bho Bhrasil. Feumaidh sinn a' lughdachadh na tha sinn a' cleachdadh de thodhar gallda bhon a tha an t-uabhas emiseanan carboin an lùib a dhèanamh sa chiad dol a-mach agus an uair sin N2O an-dèidh a sgaoileadh air an talamh. Mas urrainn crodh agus caoraich a' mhòr chuid dem beathachadh fhaighinn bho ionaltradh 's e sin as ciallaiche. Ged a bhios iad a' bruchdadh methane, tha sin a' briseadh sìos gu CO2, agus le obrachadh cùramach den talamh gabhaidh an CO2 sin stòradh sa ghrunnd.

Bidh feum air atharrachadh sna tha sinn ag ithe, gun teagamh. Tha cearcan agus mucan gu ìre mhòr gam biadhach le grain, agus mòran dhe sin gu ruige seo a' tighinn bhon Ruis agus bho Ucràin. 's mar sin airson tearainteachd bidhe feumaidh sinn nas lugha den fheòil

“gheal” sin ithe, gràin a chur gu biadhach dhaoine, agus feòil bho chrodh is caoraich a tha ag ionaltradh air na monaidhean agus mòintichean ithe.

Tha an comann eadar-nàiseanta airson tuathanaich bheaga *La Via Campesina* ag iomairt airson uachdranas bidhe (food sovereignty) sin an còir aig gach sluagh a bhith taghadh ciamar agus cò às a gheibh iad biadh. Tha sin dol an aghaidh na tha tachairt an-dràsta agus biadh ga reic air feadh an t-saoghail gus prothaid a dhèanamh do na companaidhean mòra eadar-nàiseanta. Tha an SCF a' cur taic ris a' mholadh seo, agus bu chòir gach riaghaltas an rud ceudna a dhèanamh.

The need for locally produced food in an uncertain world.

*le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain*



## LOCAL FOOD

# The importance of crofting to food education

*In early October last year, a group of mature students from the MSc Gastronomy course at Edinburgh's Queen Margaret University visited Skye and Lochalsh as part of a module that examines food production. Tutor Stan Blackley reports.*

**T**HE COURSE is the only one of its kind in the UK, which 'uses food as a lens' through which to view a wide range of issues across culture and communication, production and politics, sustainability and systems, ethics and environment.

The course is experiential, involving field trips and site visits to a wide range of food systems, from livestock markets to Michelin-starred restaurants, community food projects to supermarket distribution centres.

Students were introduced to crofters and creelers, toured a fish farm and distillery, attended a coastal forage and film night and met with farmers and fishers, an estate manager and a number of arts organisations that utilise food in their work. The aim was to help the students understand the nature and impact of food production in the area and the role food plays in the local community and economy.

They discussed land ownership and management, population and resources, the economics of rural communities, the sustainability of inshore fisheries and aquaculture, differing approaches to agricultural production and how food not only provides an income for many in the area, but also helps to support the practice of identities and relationships, as well as tradition and knowledge.

From Carr Brae to Camuscross, they were immersed in the reality of crofting life, often sourcing produce from and sharing it with those they met, who were incredibly generous with their time and expertise.

It sounds like fun, but there's some serious, hard work involved in unpacking and understanding the complex and competing considerations of the different actors in the food system and how they influence and impact each other. In looking at crofting in particular, the students are helped to connect the many different theories and topics covered in the course, which makes crofting important to the course – a 'lens within a lens'.

As a relatively new crofter in the area, I'm now able to put the theory I teach into practice too. I also deliver related research in partnership with SCF through the Crofters' Diversity Pays! project, working with crofters, small businesses and research institutes to explore the potential for landrace Hebridean rye to be used for food production through field trials, nutritional analysis, milling and baking, malting, brewing and distilling, and more.

*More information about the MSc Gastronomy course at Edinburgh's Queen Margaret University can be found at [www.qmugastronomy.com](http://www.qmugastronomy.com).*

*More information about Crofters' Diversity Pays! at:*

*[www.crofting.org/project/crofters-diversity-pays](http://www.crofting.org/project/crofters-diversity-pays).*



The MSc Gastronomy students meet crofter, Niall Haig and farmer, Col Gordon on Carr Croft, Carr Brae, near Dornie



The MSc Gastronomy students on a coastal forage with Atlas Arts from Portree, Isle of Skye



The MSc Gastronomy students visit the Mowi fish farm on Loch Duich



The MSc Gastronomy students meet crofter, Susan Walker, in Camuscross, Isle of Skye



## FERTILISERS

SCF council member Stephen Leask looks at some ways to help combat ever-increasing prices and minimise use of artificial fertilisers.

# Feed the grass

**STRONG DEMAND** and the high cost of raw materials have dramatically increased the price of the two nitrogen-based fertilisers – nitrate  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and ammonium  $\text{NH}_4^+$ .

In 2022 these have more than doubled compared to last year, mainly due to fluctuation of world energy markets. Fertiliser price increases have been greater than gas rises and European fertiliser companies are raking in profits of up to 40%. Hopefully prices will stabilise, but with companies limiting supply to the wholesaler, costs are likely to remain high.

What can be done to alleviate the difficulties which crofters will face, where ever-tightening margins have more financially-critical impact on agricultural life? Soil testing is one vitally important key area and the testing kits are very self explanatory.

It is vital that all elements are used to their full potential. One example is sulphur, which has an important role in protein synthesis. A shortage in this macronutrient is linked with poorer nitrogen uptake. Phosphate is also important for rooting. A good, extensive root network is important for maximising nutrient uptake.

Don't forget soil pH, as this also affects development. Look to pH levels at around 6.0 to 6.5 for arable and silage grass. Potassium also helps the grass build thicker cell walls, stay healthy and strengthens the plant, so it can withstand stresses such as drought, heat, cold and disease.

Normally, if the soil is high in sand it will be low in potash; if it is high in clay it will be low in phosphorus. So by doing soil testing, we have the opportunity to reduce certain elements

from the fertiliser applied. Soil testing kits can be acquired from the Scottish Agricultural College and any reputable fertiliser supplier with Fertiliser Industry Assurance Scheme accreditation.

If somebody used 22-4-14 every year, their potash reserves should be good and if analysed moderate or high for K they could drop to 20-20-10 or even for a couple of years 27-5-5.

It is vital that the proper quantity is applied, so testing equipment is important. Also, application timing is essential. Applying fertiliser at the wrong time may result in nutrient loss, a waste of fertiliser and even damaged crops. For example, if nitrogen is applied too early, before the plant really needs it, a significant portion of the nitrogen may be lost before the crop takes it up.

Another worthwhile area to look at is to increase clover levels. A clover regeneration mix would be excellent where the pH, P and K are all good, especially for swards that usually get 125kg-250kg/ha of bagged fertiliser, as good clover sward would be capable of fixing that and more. Use white clover for grazing and red clover for silage fields. Estrogen in red clover is detrimental to cattle fertility, especially at the time of conception, but excellent feed for dairy cows at lactation time.

There is no easy fix to this problem. We have to feed the grass to increase the yield for our pastures and our silage parks. But also it is worth



looking at how we can reduce our dependency on artificial fertilisers.

It is also vital for environmental issues, as our use of fertiliser can have negative impacts on our land and waterways.

## Donald's hortiblog

**IF YOU** were ever lucky enough to go on the wee plane from Benbecula to Barra for that twenty minute flight, there was a lot to see as you flew low along the west coast of South Uist.

In winter and early spring the view was one of great industry, as you'll see big tractors with muck forks gathering huge mounds of seaweed off the beach and transporting them to be spread on the machair. Such activity has, for millennia, sustained the cropping of the light, sandy soil, allowing the growing of cereals for human and animal consumption, in rotation with grass.

This is just one example of traditional crofting methods demonstrating low-input sustainability.

The machair is a unique environment and one of a huge variety of soil types to be found in



Seaweed fertiliser on Skye

crofting areas. Go a few miles east and in complete contrast, you're into the blacklands, soils with a very different set of challenges but which nevertheless have for centuries sustained populations much greater than now. They are the norm through most of the Western Isles and northwest mainland.

Again, seaweed has a role to play in cropping on these highly organic soils, along with fallowing, grazing and a season of oats undersown with clover. Those wishing to get the most out of such soils should have a look at [www.blacklandcentre.org](http://www.blacklandcentre.org), which

has a wealth of information and corrects some of the conventional wisdom on how such land might be improved, particularly the grass crop.

The shell sand and locally-quarried lime available in many crofting areas needs to be applied with care in all circumstances. It is very easy to over-lime even highly organic soil types. Soil pH levels should be tested annually. This can be done with the simplest DIY testing kit.

Materials for soil improvement can be available on the croft or on the sea shore and are much

cheaper and, in the long term, better than bagged alternatives. An obvious starting point is the manure from housed livestock. Not so much about these days, but if a neighbour has a muck heap, or keeps horses, you can do a trade with potatoes or vegetables.

Our part of Skye has amazing soil and, if it wasn't broken up by rock outcrops and pockets of peat, I'm sure it would be rated as one of the best agricultural soils in Scotland. It does need regular supplies of organic matter which, for our wee horticultural enterprise, is easily supplied from the shore, the croft, the garden and the kitchen. Like most of Scotland's soils, it's a bit low in phosphorus – and this is our only purchased input, in the form of ground mineral phosphate. It's a slow release form of the element and has organic approval.

The most important thing is to get the soil tested and take action accordingly, but with circumspection. This is covered in depth in Chapter 4 of *Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters*, available from SCF.



FERTILISERS

# Using manures in a time of volatile and escalating fertiliser prices

Good advice from Janette Sutherland, SAC Portree

THE SUDDEN fertiliser price increase has certainly concentrated minds on the use of bagged fertiliser.

We should always try to use farm yard manure (FYM) on our crofts. It's good to recycle nutrients, great for soil health, benefits wildlife, has micro-nutrients often missing from bagged fertiliser and reduces greenhouse gasses from bagged fertiliser production.

Although I am a great advocate of using FYM on crofts, if you have been using bagged fertiliser for silage, there are a few things to consider before moving over to using FYM as the main or sole fertility input. We will go through these here, to ensure you are making the most of FYM on your croft, without having unexpected yield drops and ending up with a forage gap next autumn/ winter.

**Know your soil's current fertility level** – It's always good to match your soil's fertility levels with the inputs needed, whether that's bagged or FYM. Do a soil test, especially of all your silage fields and any key grazing fields that get bagged fertiliser applied.

**Don't forget about pH** – If your mineral soils are below target on pH, the NPK inputs won't be as effective – which is a waste of resources and significant money. Try to have a liming programme in place for mineral soils where FYM or bagged fertiliser is routinely applied. New research has shown that earthworm slime can provide crops with nitrogen. It's important we reduce soil acidity to make it earthworm friendly.

**Do a forage budget for autumn/winter 22/23** – Calculate how much forage you may need for your herd [www.fas.scot/publication/a-guide-to-feed-budgeting](https://www.fas.scot/publication/a-guide-to-feed-budgeting). Build in a buffer of 20% for poor summer weather. If you have an idea of what silage fields were yielding in the past, you could consider what fields are needed and whether any poor-yielding fields should be dropped, to ensure good targeting of FYM and any bagged fertiliser resources this year.

If there is a significant shortfall, should you consider your herd size? None of these decisions are easy. You should also get advice on any impact on subsidy if reducing your herd or flock.

**Know how much FYM you have** – Remember you may not have as much FYM as you think and you do need to apply significant amounts. This video <https://youtu.be/GYQMkzsw3eQ> explains a bit further. In brief, to apply 10t/Ha you need to apply 1kg of FYM to 1m<sup>2</sup>.

**Know the value of your FYM** – Different livestock and different systems result in different levels of nutrients in FYM. If you want to be really accurate you can get your FYM tested, but in most situations book values should be sufficient.



Table 1: Cattle farm yard manure

nutrient	N P K		
	std value kg/t (fresh)		
	6	3.2	8
% available to crop in the first year	10%	60%	80%
25t/ha (10t/acre)	150	80	200
available to crop	15	48	160

Livestock manures also contain useful amounts of sulphur (2.4kg/t fresh), which helps maximise the efficient utilisation of available nitrogen.

In some crofting areas seaweed can be a very good resource and this practical guide can help you work out your application rates: [www.fas.scot/downloads/cropping-case-study-use-of-seaweed-as-a-fertiliser-for-grassland](https://www.fas.scot/downloads/cropping-case-study-use-of-seaweed-as-a-fertiliser-for-grassland).

Although most crofters will have a small number of hens, their FYM is very potent and could be very useful. This could be one silver lining of hen lockdown. You may have more available than in normal free-ranging years. This guide can help you plan its use: [www.fas.scot/downloads/use-of-poultry-manure-as-a-fertiliser-for-grassland-practical-guide](https://www.fas.scot/downloads/use-of-poultry-manure-as-a-fertiliser-for-grassland-practical-guide).

**Try not to panic, see what you can do in your situation** – If you had enough cattle FYM to apply 25t/Ha to all your silage fields, what is that providing to your silage crop? (see table 1) If your soils are moderate for P and K then this application would meet the crop's need for potash and phosphate. However, it is only providing a little bit of nitrogen (15kg/Ha). If you have lots of clover in your sward you may be OK. To maintain yield, most crofts would need application of some bagged N. If your fields are very low in phosphate, you would also see a yield response to adding additional phosphate.

If you have queries for your own croft, please do not hesitate to contact the Farm Advisory Service helpline or your local SAC office. The technical notes are available on the internet, or your local SAC office can post out copies if you want to learn more.

Top tips for 2022 FYM applications

- Work out what FYM you have available.
- Work out what nutrients it will provide and reduce your bagged fertiliser order accordingly.
- Think about practicalities of getting FYM spread – both equipment and weather windows.
- Like liming, it's better to apply small quantities of FYM regularly rather than large applications every so often.
- Make sure any bulky FYM or seaweed is well rotted after spreading, before you try and crop or graze the field. Leave it at least one month.
- Ensure any field middens or FYM storage meet cross compliance requirements.


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## 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.

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**Phone:** 01851 700357



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## ON THE CROFT

**J**OINT ILL IS a common disease of young lambs up to one month old, impacting between 1-2% of UK lambs in a flock (though up to 50% has been reported).

The disease is characterised by an arthritic inflammation which results in lameness, ill thrift and in some cases death. Any joint can be affected, though larger joints such as fetlocks, knees and hocks are often the most affected. Spinal joints are occasionally involved, which can bring about paralysis of the limbs.

*Streptococcus dysgalactiae* has been reported in over 80% of joint-ill cases. It is likely that the lamb becomes infected with *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* at birth or soon afterwards, either from the environment or directly from the ewe. Other isolated bacterial species include *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathie*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli* and *Actinomyces pyogenes*.

Bacterial entry is likely to require a skin wound and the navel is often implicated, as bacteria can be isolated from there in some, but not all cases. Other potential routes of infection include lesions linked to ear tagging, tail docking and castration, as well as via the lamb's mouth. The bacteria have been identified in each of these areas. Once infected, the bacteria localises to the joints via the bloodstream. Without adequate hygiene measures, an infection may pass from ewe to lamb or ewe to ewe.

Diagnosis is often based on clinical signs. Bacteria can be cultured from fluid samples taken from inflamed joints to identify the causative species and to determine antimicrobial sensitivity. This is important to ensure correct antibiotic treatments are chosen and effective against the causal pathogen. Treatment should begin as soon as possible after signs of disease, to reduce damage to joints and ensure the best outcome. Your vet will prescribe the most appropriate antibiotic.

Alternatives are required to limit antimicrobial resistance and an effective vaccine would be a great help. Early indications from vaccine development studies at Moredun and in Norway have provided promising results. Studies focus on improving colostrum quality by vaccinating the ewe prior to lambing. Antibodies are then transferred to the lamb through the colostrum, providing protection against infection during the early stages of life.

Future joint-ill control will likely require effective vaccine in combination with optimising colostrum quality, quantity and delivery, as well as targeted hygiene measures.

## Managing joint ill in lambs



Lamb with swollen stifle due to *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* joint-ill, and muscle wastage through not using the leg



### Notes:

- Oxytetracyclines are usually ineffective against *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* infection.
- For best chance of recovery, ensure that the lamb gets the full course of treatment

as prescribed by the vet (long courses of antibiotics may be needed).

- Infected lambs and ewes may need to be housed until the course has finished, as catching them for repeat dosing can be surprisingly difficult, particularly as they begin to improve.

Thank you to Beth Wells, Keith Ballingall (Moredun), Jennifer Duncan and Joseph Angell (University of Liverpool) for the original article, which you can find in the new Joint Ill factsheet on Moredun's website: <https://moredun.org.uk/resources/factsheets>

## New guidance on watery mouth

**T**HE SHEEP Veterinary Society has produced a guidance document for information on potential alternative treatments, whilst highlighting that in many flocks, antibiotics are no longer used as the first line of defence in the control of watery mouth in neonatal lambs.

The guidance can be found on the SVS website here: <https://bit.ly/3t6xbFQ>



**Sheep Veterinary Society**  
Division of the British Veterinary Association



## ON THE CROFT

# Skye and the Small Isles Wading Bird Partnership

*The Skye and Small Isles Wading Bird Partnership is being launched this spring, writes SAC's Janette Sutherland.*

**T**HE PARTNERSHIP involves crofters, farmers, membership organisations like SCF, NFUS, Nature Friendly Farming Network, RSPB Scotland and SAC Consulting, Portree. If you want to join us, please contact Phil Knott, a crofter in Sleat, Skye, [phil.knott@nfn.org.uk](mailto:phil.knott@nfn.org.uk); or myself, Janette Sutherland, [janette.sutherland@sac.co.uk](mailto:janette.sutherland@sac.co.uk).

## Why are you focusing on wading birds?

Nationally, wading bird numbers have declined a lot, for example in the last 20 years curlews have declined by 60%. In Skye we don't have good recent surveys of the populations, so we don't really know how well they are doing at rearing chicks and how secure their populations are on our crofts and farms.



Oystercatcher

Wading birds are found in many different crofting habitats from short swards to rushy pastures. Often the work we do to encourage grass for livestock, such as liming, can actually benefit wading birds, as it can help populations of earthworms and other invertebrates that they feed on. Also, carefully timed topping can improve fields for grazing and

enhance wader habitat. If you manage fields to benefit wading birds, you may be able to get support under agri-environment schemes such as AECS.

## Actions in 2022

- We will be working with the national partnership Working for Waders to use trail cameras on some nests this



breeding season, so we can understand these birds better.

- There will be increased wading bird surveys.
- We will work to encourage partnership and collaborative AECS applications in 2023 onwards.

We are keen to work with all crofters and farmers who have these birds on their ground. We look forward to hearing from you.

## Gaelic Names for common wading birds on Skye's crofts and farms

lapwing/peewit – *adharcan luachrach*  
oystercatcher – *gille-brighde*  
snipe – *naosg*  
curlew – *guilbneach*



## The crofter's wife

*Claire Nicolson shares her love of hens.*

**S**PARE A thought for hens (and other poultry) living under lockdown all winter.

My wee brood was established in 2016 with just four brown hens. Although I'd hankered after hens for a while, I suspect Himself viewed his gift of them as a test to see just how serious I was. My flock has gradually increased, now standing at 19, with a chunk of unused ground turned over to them.

Like many new ventures, there was a steep learning curve, but I've become accustomed to their needs and wants as well as indicators to health and welfare issues. I quickly discovered

that browns – more properly known as Rhode Island Reds – are perfect for me: their friendly character and endless curiosity provide comic entertainment and they are terrific layers.

With hen lockdown, it's been vital to ensure that boredom hasn't led to increased bullying or poor health. Mine are fortunate as their coops are linked by a covered enclosure, allowing them to get outside each day. However, the very wet winter meant that mud was being traipsed inside and turning even the nesting boxes into dirty, soggy, uncomfortable spaces.

After some consideration, I bought a big bale of straw, which has solved the issue and provided additional entertainment as they have a good old rummage and peck through it. I cause quite a stir as I scatter another armful. I liken their chat to old ladies at a bus stop, oohing and aahing or tutting

their disapproval at local goings-on.

Treats have helped them too. Hens are notoriously greedy but I find their generosity quite heart-warming. There may just be one hen in a coop when you toss in a handful of dried mealworms, but she very quickly spreads the word, admirably refraining from guzzling them all up before her sisters arrive.

And the joy a humble egg can deliver! I still get a wee thrill from collecting fresh, warm eggs for brunch or baking. Visitors show genuine delight when given a box. I've even posted some, with varying success; my sister was particularly thankful once for the bubble wrap I'd used, as the broken mess was well contained.

Hopefully, the housing order will soon be lifted and we can again enjoy hen antics in the great outdoors.



ON THE CROFT

Problems with missing or lost ear tags?

Dr Kate Lamont of SRUC wants to hear from you.

A NEW project starting this month aims to support crofters to improve retention rates and avoid penalties as a result of missing ear tags in sheep and cattle.

Researchers at SRUC want to hear from crofters about what makes applying ear tags difficult and what causes ear tags to fall out. Although the project is Scotland-wide, they are particularly interested in hearing from crofters and upland farmers.

What are your experiences with ear tags? Do you find locating the tag in the ear a problem? Is there a breed of cattle or sheep that seems more prone to ear tag loss? Does a particular type of fence or brand of tag tend to cause you problems? Or maybe you are unclear about when and how many animals need to be tagged; or you may think ear tagging is an unwelcome labour/cost expense which isn't a priority?

The small team at SRUC would like to hear

from as many different crofters as possible, not only those who have issues with ear tag loss, but also those who don't – what might you be doing differently?

There are lots of ways for you to have your say: a quick chat on the phone, text or email; photos; online survey, or even a site visit where you can point out what the problem is and where on the croft it occurs.

To make contact: text or leave a message – 07714 528850 (we will call you back) or email [eartagloss@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:eartagloss@sruc.ac.uk).

The project is funded by the Scottish Government, who want to know how big a problem ear tag loss is for smaller enterprises, what the causes are, and importantly, what could be done to help. Data gathered will be used to share information about how to prevent losses and avoid penalties arising from missing ear tags.

The project is being led by Dr Kate Lamont and Dr Sam Beechener.



© Martin Benson

A wild flower meadow on the west coast of Lewis?

At 35b Breasclete, with nothing better to do now that the tree planting is being successfully managed, what could I get up to next, writes SCF member Keith Murray.

WE HAD a small field of 0.2 Ha just begging for attention.

There are quite a number of trees already planted there, nominally on the periphery, but having seen the reported success of wildflower meadows in other localities on the UK mainland, it was worth a try.

The field is made up of a series of neglected lazy beds. As a first test we worked on the one closest to the access gate. After strimming, weed killer then scarifying, this first strip was sown in March/April 2020. We then sat back and waited.

It was quite successful for a first attempt, so an adjacent strip was sown in spring 2021. That was not so successful.

Why?

We cut corners in the preparation. So, having learnt from our mistakes, this will not happen in 2022 and we should get back to a successful flower display. However, at least the first phase continues to produce an excellent display and encourages further feathered wild-life.



Late summer 2020



Early summer 2021







WOODLAND  
TRUST SCOTLAND

# 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: Philip Formby/WTML



Scottish Forestry  
Crofting and the B-Value

Shetland  
Amenity  
Trust



Communities  
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Argyll Small Woods Cooperative



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[www.harbro.co.uk/country-stores](http://www.harbro.co.uk/country-stores)

**FOLLOW OUR FEEDS**





Kevin Sutton and Peter MacAskill on Roag common grazings woodland near Dunvegan,

© John MacPherson

# Woodland creation on common grazings

*Gordon Cummings, Scottish Woodland Trust croft woodlands adviser, Highlands and Northern Isles, highlights the possibilities.*

**W**OODLAND CREATION enquiries continue to flow into the Croft Woodland Project (CWP).

Most are individuals seeking advice for planting on their croft or smallholding, but a growing number are for larger projects on common grazings. With the biodiversity crisis and global warming regularly featuring in the news, tree planting is championed more than ever as a crucial activity for tackling these issues. Scottish Government tree-planting targets are set to increase by 50% in the next three years. And there are the carbon payments.

Woodland creation is a long-term development opportunity with the added benefit of providing timber, creating shelter, paying for fencing, improving soils and supporting other forms of diversification. It is not an option for all townships, particularly those with common grazings on poorer soils in exposed areas, but in many cases pockets of ground suitable for planting trees can be found.

Having identified a suitable area and gained landlord approval, the crofter forestry legislation allows an individual shareholder or group of shareholders to proceed with woodland creation on a common grazings. Dealing with the Croft-

ing Commission application process, the forestry grant system and gathering facts for stakeholder consultations can be stumbling blocks. However, the Scottish Forestry Forest Co-operation Grant is there to pay for such work and the CWP is here to guide townships through the process.

We have also been working on projects where the local grazings committee is supportive of plans put forward by the wider community to plant trees on their common grazings. You might expect this to be straightforward, particularly if the scheme is led by a community landlord and for community benefit. However, it can be difficult to release shareholders from the administrative burden and long-term management responsibilities associated with a woodland creation project. For example, Forestry Grant Scheme contracts must be issued to the holder of the relevant Business Reference Number (ie the grazings committee).

This spring the community of Bressay in Shetland will be planting trees on what was an area of common grazings. The supportive grazings committee and landlord resumed the ground and leased it to Bressay Development Ltd (BDL) allowing this community group to take on full responsibility for the project. BDL stated, "There is great opportunity to encourage use of the 1000-plus common grazings in the Highlands and Islands for tree planting now that sheep stocks have been reduced. This is very much in line with the



Roag common grazings crofting woodland near Dunvegan, Isle of Skye

© John MacPherson

current desire for environmentally conscious land use and should create a feeling of community ownership."

The CWP is investigating other management arrangements that will allow collaborative projects involving landlords, communities and common grazings to plant trees, whilst retaining common grazing land under crofting tenure.

The CWP team is interested to hear from readers with proposals for woodland creation on common grazings and those who would like to share their experiences of the process.



## ADVERTISING FEATURE

## Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme

Through CAGS, crofters can secure upwards of 80% funding of approved costs for eligible investments. According to the Scottish Government, 85% of applications each year are approved. To fund further improvements, a 75% increase in funding was allotted for the 2021/22 financial year for a total budget of £3.6 million.

### Grant rates

Individuals are eligible for a maximum of £25,000 of grant funding in a rolling two-year period. Group applicants are eligible for £125,000. For those individuals who meet the young crofter eligibility criteria, the grant rate is 80% of the approved costs in less favoured areas. The grant rate is set at 60% for all other crofters in the same areas.

For groups of crofters, the grant rate is set at 90% of the approved costs for young crofters in less favoured areas, and 80% for all other crofters.

# Grant Scheme improves grazing management for Isle of Lewis crofter with virtual fencing technology



**T**HERE AREN'T many in the crofting community who haven't heard of Donald 'Sweeny' MacSween, an Isle of Lewis crofter and star of the BBC Alba show "An Lot/The Croft". Since leaving his job with the local council authority in 2017 to become a full-time crofter, Sweeny has made a name for himself while making a living on a few hectares in the northern coastal community of Ness – an effort that earned him the title of 2018 Young Crofter of the Year by the Scottish Crofting Federation. Doing this has not been a simple task, requiring Sweeny to optimise output and profit margins from every bit of land he has access to by reviving unutilised crofts, diversifying into multiple food production enterprises, agri-tourism and getting creative with his end market. The result has proven successful, with his present-day enterprise consisting of 350 laying hens, four Gloucester Old Spot sows, 200 breeding ewes split between native Shetland

and Hebridean breeds, Texel crosses and Blackface, and a cattle herd of eight Scottish Highlanders.

### Using grant funding to improve grazing management

Propped up by graft, calculated risks and out-of-the-box thinking, pivotal to Sweeny's ability to make a living as a full-time crofter have been strategic infrastructural and equipment investments partially funded by funding from the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS). (see box)

Farming multiple crofts averaging 2.84 ha in size with access to 22,672 ha of common grazing on open moorland, CAGS funding has allowed Sweeny to better navigate managing stock from one extreme land allotment to another without the use of physical fencing.

With 60% CAGS funding, Sweeny introduced

Nofence to his herd in late October 2021.

Nofence is virtual fencing technology that utilizes GPS to keep livestock in set virtual boundaries without the need for physical fencing (see page 21 to learn how Nofence works).

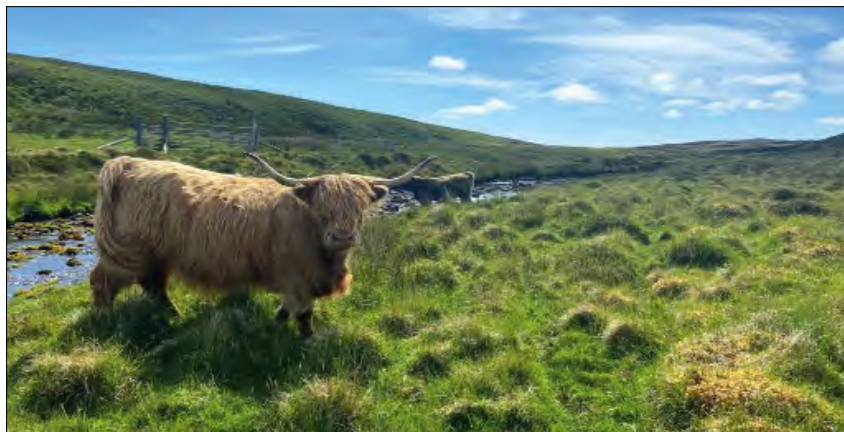
To train his cattle to learn how to graze within a virtual fence by utilizing their hearing, he turned the cattle out onto a fenced croft, splitting it in half with a single virtual boundary.

"I was surprised at how quickly they learned how to work with the audio cues to know where their boundary was and how well it kept them contained," says Sweeny. "It only took a few days for them to get it."

Once the cattle were trained, Sweeny created several virtual paddocks, some over 200 ha in area, to manage the grazing of his cattle. Since then, he's also worked with his local RSPB officer to graze crofts that have been untouched for a number of years, with little in terms of fencing infrastructure.

Areas surrounding Local Nature Reserve, Loch Stiapabhat, were also able to be grazed for the first time in decades, as livestock had been excluded due to boggy, dangerous land. "Within the Nofence app, I've been able to create a paddock on the RSPB areas, making exclusion zones inside it so cattle will avoid going into those areas," he says. One of the biggest opportunities Nofence has given Sweeny is the ability to graze land that has previously been untouched for years.

"The common grazing has so many parts that don't get grazed out properly, which is something I can achieve by being able to manage my herd's grazing with virtual paddocks," he says. "Nofence has created a huge opportunity for not only my croft management but how crofts are grazed in the future."





ADVERTISING FEATURE

# Nofence virtual fencing improves grazing management without physical fencing

TECHNOLOGICAL advancements are providing new opportunities for livestock producers as Nofence virtual grazing technology becomes widely available in the UK.

Established in Norway in 2011 for mountain grazers, Nofence has recently become commercially available to UK livestock producers after more than two years of grazing trials on British beef farms.

Utilising GPS, farmers can create virtual pastures on the Nofence app. Once livestock are turned out on the set virtual pasture while wearing a Nofence collar, GPS and a mobile data network track the animal's location and report back to

the app, triggering the collar to cue an audio signal as the animal nears the virtual fence boundary. If the animal continues to move forward it will receive an electric pulse. This sequence of audio warnings followed by a possible pulse can happen three times. If the animal breaches the virtual boundary following the third audio cue, the farmers receive a pop-up notification via the Nofence app with the location of the animal as classed as escaped. Animals can return to pasture without receiving any audio warnings or pulses.

According to Synne Foss Budal, general manager for Nofence UK, livestock trained on the technology utilise their

sense of hearing, rather than sight, to remain within a virtually "fenced" area without physical fencing.

"Data collected from more than 35,000 head of livestock with more than 149 million grazing hours, our farm trials and customer feedback has proved the technology to be highly effective. A typical farm will only have one pulse per every 30 audio cues and escapes are rare," says Ms Budal. "Nofence is also very diverse in the type of system it is suitable for, working in intensive rotational grazing, upland and conservation platforms."

**Learn more about Nofence at [Nofence.co.uk](https://Nofence.co.uk).**

**Nofence is pleased to offer a 10% discount to SCF members.**  
Your membership number must be supplied at time of order.  
*Offer subject to availability and change.*

## Crofting advice through the Farm Advisory Service

**SRDP** Farm Advisory Service

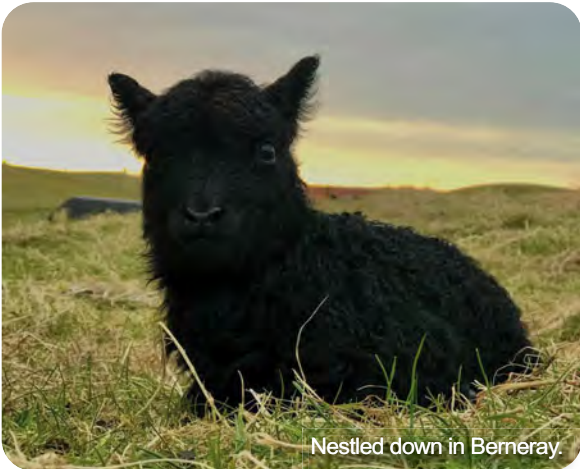
National Advice Hub  
T: 0300 323 0161  
E: [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)  
W: [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)

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.



Scottish Government  
Riaghaidhais na h-Alba  
gov.scot



Nestled down in Berneray.

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

# RSABI – 125 years supporting people

**T**HIS SPRING, RSABI will be celebrating its 125th anniversary and is encouraging crofting communities to help raise awareness of the services it offers.

RSABI provides emotional, practical and financial support to people involved in Scottish agriculture, including crofting. This support is wide-ranging and includes help to access and pay for private counselling sessions for those struggling with their mental wellbeing, providing grants to help with heating costs and liaising with third parties to help resolve issues.

Carol McLaren, RSABI chief executive, explains: "As we enter a milestone year for RSABI, our thanks go to those who support our work in so many ways. Whether taking part in a fundraising challenge, becoming a member of our supporters' schemes, or a trustee on our board, the goodwill is greatly appreciated. The tremendous support from people and businesses in the agricultural community is so important to RSABI and underpins the success of the organisation."

"There will be times of change in the years ahead. It is vital that people know, whatever is around the corner, RSABI is here for them, as we have been for 125 years."

RSABI's helpline is open every day of the year and an outbound helpline service is also offered, with regular calls to those feeling isolated or going through a difficult time.

The RSABI team provides confidential support on a wide range of issues – everything from money worries to succession. They often work with people who have been



Carol McLaren

affected by ill health, bereavement or accident.

Ms McLaren continues: "We know there are people who could benefit from our support, including younger people, who for some reason hesitate to reach out to us. We are looking at steps to address this and will be launching an enhanced helpline service to extend the channels we use to engage with people – young and older – to make it even easier to contact us at any time of day or night."

"When you contact RSABI you will find the response is compassionate and understanding. For those in need of help, our team of case officers will find a way to make life feel less overwhelming. Our service is always confidential, always friendly and always understanding."

"If you are in difficulty, or worried about a friend, family member or neighbour, please share our number, or contact us on 0300 111 4166. Don't hesitate."

## Help, so you're not alone

*Rachel Cackett, executive director of Samaritans Scotland, writes for The Crofter*

**I**T'S GOOD to talk. It's great to be heard as well, especially in those difficult moments when we're struggling and it feels like life is just a little too tough.

It's harder still if we're far from the crowd, with someone else to lend a sympathetic ear not always close at hand. It's easy to feel isolated when trusted friends or family aren't on our doorstep. Sometimes, when pressures are building up, even the closeness of the crofting community may feel out of reach.

At Samaritans Scotland, being there to listen whenever people need us is at the heart of what we do every hour of every day – through our freephone and email helplines and online support.

Our recent survey of those living in rural

areas found many had felt more isolated during the past two years because of the Covid pandemic – and frequently hit roadblocks in seeking assistance when they needed it.

Some told us they felt expected to be self-reliant and keep their problems to themselves. Others flagged up the stigma which still surrounds mental health – which put them off asking for help – or weren't aware of where to get support.

We know that men especially don't always feel comfortable asking for help from friends and family, from GPs or from other people who might offer support, like Samaritans.

That is why we recently launched our Real People, Real Stories campaign, focused on men living in remote and rural Scotland, with support from the Scottish Government and The NFU Mutual Charitable Trust.




## Help for Heating

**If you're struggling to heat your home or worried about household energy bills get in touch with the RSABI team to see how we can help. We provide support to people involved in Scottish agriculture.**

**Call 0300 111 4166 or email [helpline@rsabi.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rsabi.org.uk)**



Registered  
Charity  
SC009828



Rachel Cackett

The campaign shares the real voices of men who have overcome struggles and found hope. At its heart is a simple message. If you are a man in a rural area struggling to cope, you aren't alone. Other men have faced issues just like yours and reaching out can make all the difference in the world – it did for them.

Every ten seconds, we respond to a call for help. Our 24-hour free listening service is anonymous and non-judgemental. We let people talk openly and honestly, even when they feel unable to speak with those closest to them – to ease the burden, before they reach a crisis point.

**Call Samaritans free 24/7 on 116 123, email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), or visit [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) for online self-help tools and information.**



## MEMBERS PAGES



## SCF Annual General Meeting, 2pm on Friday 15 July

SCF's AGM will be held via Zoom on Friday 15 July 2022, to pass resolutions 1-3 below. The AGM will be followed by speakers Malcolm Matheson and Bill Barron, convener and chief executive respectively, of the Crofting Commission. The meeting room will open at 1.45pm to ensure a prompt AGM start at 2pm. The company business part of the AGM will take place before the speakers. After their presentations, there will be the opportunity for an open floor session.

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

**Resolution 2** – To appoint auditors proposed by the directors; or to re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, as independent examiners of the company accounts.

**Resolution 3** – To amend as follows articles 10.11(a), (b) and (c) of SCF's Memorandum and Articles of Association, to clarify the number of years a chairperson remains on the SCF board. Article 10.11(a) will become Article 10.12(a). Articles 10.11(b) and 10.11(c) will become Article 10.12(b).

**10.12(b) A director shall ordinarily serve two consecutive years as chairperson. This period may be adjusted with agreement of the chair and the board. The time served as chairperson does not count towards the maximum time served as a director permissible as per Article 10.11. If willing, and agreed by the board, the retiring chairperson may complete any outstanding time as director subject to Article 10.11.**

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

If you are unable to attend the AGM, a proxy form is enclosed with this issue. For members receiving *The Crofter* digitally, the proxy form will be emailed to them. We encourage members to return their proxy forms by email, as this saves SCF funds and helps keep subscriptions down.

Follow us  
on Twitter

@ScotCroftingFed



## Speaking up for crofting

THE MOST important work the SCF does for its members is representation.

We are the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters and crofting. We do this by putting forward the crofting perspective in stakeholder policy groups, government round-tables, meetings with officials and politicians, responses to consultations and public policy statements.

We attend somewhere around 30 regular groups and policy meetings and SCF staff and un-paid officials clock up hundreds of hours putting forward the case for crofting on your behalf.

Some consultations we have responded to recently are, for example, the Islands Bond; the Internal Market; Agricultural Transition in Scotland and Local Food for Everyone. We publicise our work in *The Crofter*, in our monthly online newsletter, in news releases, regular columns in journals, on TV and radio and on social media.

Our voice is strong, but can always get stronger with more members. Let your neighbours know that SCF is standing up for crofting and that we need all crofters to speak with a collective voice. Persuade them to become members if they are not already.

## MEMBERS PAGES

# Plan for your croft's future and crofting's future

**A**S WE get older, it's very important to ensure that our intentions for the croft's future are set out clearly, as shown in the article below.

It's not enough to think that it will all sort itself out through the family. It's vital to make a will so that your intentions are fulfilled. A solicitor familiar with crofting law will set out your wishes coherently, so that the croft goes to the person you want to carry on your stewardship of the land.

If there is no will, intestacy can result in a complex situation which may end up with the croft going out of the family and even out of crofting altogether. The Crofting Commission website has a section on this topic which is very helpful: <https://crofting.scotland.gov.uk/succession>.

A preferable option is to pass on your croft while you are still around to offer guidance to the new crofter. So many keen young folk are desperate to get a croft to work. They are the future of crofting.

The longer land is neglected, the harder it is to win it back into production and the commission is tightening up on unused crofts. When we find it difficult to keep things going, the croft can be assigned or sublet. You can decroft your house and garden and continue to live there, or if you have an alternative option the croft house can go with the croft. If you own your croft you can transfer ownership or make a short-term let.

Look on the commission website for good advice on how to proceed with all these options.

Another aspect is a legacy. If you have assets and maybe no family to benefit from



© Shirley Grant

them, please consider making a donation to the only organisation which works so hard campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting. It's a straightforward matter to add a clause to your will specifying a proportion

of your estate to be passed on to SCF. Your solicitor will guide you.

Such a generous gesture would immensely help SCF's work to achieve a positive future for crofting.

## Succession to crofts and time limits

*Brian Inkster, Inksters Solicitors, illustrates the complexities of croft succession when the crofter has not made a will.*

**A**LAND Court case, Mark Pattinson v John Miller Matheson, SLC/6/20 & SLC/7/20, 23 September 2021, highlights the importance of adhering to time limits and procedures when it comes to the succession of a croft.

Following the death in 2012 of the crofting tenant, Angus Tuach Matheson, under the law of intestacy (there being no will) his son, John Miller Matheson, was entitled to succeed to two crofts in Shieldaig.

In 2014 John Miller Matheson intimated to the landlord, Mark Pattinson, that he had succeeded to the crofts. However, he had not actually taken the steps necessary to do so. These steps were to (a) be appointed executor dative on his late father's estate through the Sheriff Court; (b) obtain confirmation to the estate through the Sheriff Court; and (c) sign a docket transfer on a Certificate of Confirmation as executor transferring the tenancies to

himself as an individual.

Those steps were eventually taken in 2018/19. Whilst notice was issued to the landlord on 4 June 2019, the actual docket transfer was not signed until nine days later on 13 June 2019.

Whilst the Crofting Commission appeared to be satisfied that the appropriate formalities had been complied with and the crofts were then registered in the Crofting Register with John Miller Matheson as tenant, the landlord, Mark Pattinson, was not so satisfied.

The landlord advised that he was not agreeable to the time limits for succession to the crofts (24 months) being extended and was asking the Crofting Commission to take steps to declare the crofts vacant. The landlord served notices purporting to terminate the tenancies.

The entries in the Crofting Register were then challenged on the basis that John Miller Matheson was not the tenant of the crofts. Thus, the matter was now brought before the Land Court.

The Land Court held that the 2014 notice

was invalid for two reasons, (1) it was not given by the executor; and (2) it was not preceded by any form of transfer of the deceased's interest.

With regard to the 2019 notice, when served, the transfer had not taken place. So this notice was also held to be invalid and the landlord was entitled to serve notices terminating the tenancies.

The Land Court added the following postscript to their decision: "This is a hard case and another reminder of the importance of dealing with croft tenancy transfers timeously. We do not know why the applicant decided to terminate the tenancies and he is not required to tell us, but he obviously had his reasons. The effect of his decision on the respondent must, however, be considerable and... the loss of two family crofts is a heavy penalty to pay for delaying to deal with formalities and then, when they eventually were dealt with, the simple mistake of serving the notice before the transfer had taken place."

This decision has been appealed and we will update you in *The Crofter* when the decision on the appeal is issued.





Ronnie Campbell



Ronnie in Cille Chorill church

© Ronald MacEachen, Europe Tours with Sandy Travel (based in Nova Scotia)

# Ronnie Campbell

**R**ONNIE CAMPBELL of Bohuntin, Glen Roy, prominent in the formation of the Scottish Crofters Union as its first vice-president, died aged 90 in early January.

Having previously revived the Lochaber Crofters Union, first formed in 1938, with the late Sandy Kennedy (Blarmachfoldach), he was part of the steering group that founded the pan-Highlands and Islands SCU in 1985. He served on the union's first council and, as Lochaber area president, oversaw the formation of branches in Ardnamurchan and Sunart, and Mallaig and Morar districts as well extending the existing Lochaber branch. In addition, he assisted the development of SCU representation in Badenoch and Strathspey.

Born in 1931 at a time when spoken Gaelic was still current in Brae Lochaber, Ronnie Campbell absorbed that relationship between land, language and culture and it remained a noticeable feature of his life. Reflecting on the relationship between land and culture, Frank Rennie, the first SCU President, recalled an early SCU council meeting in Durness which Ronnie attended. Meeting a local crofter afterwards and on hearing where Ronnie was from, the man recited some verses of a Gaelic song, composed more than two hundred years ago, about Glen Roy. Ronnie

later observed that such connections were what made crofting so distinctive.

His life as a shepherd began on the estate at the head of Glen Roy, but is more associated with the crofter-owned sheep stock clubs

*Born in 1931 at a time when spoken Gaelic was still current in Brae Lochaber, Ronnie Campbell absorbed that relationship between land, language and culture and it remained a noticeable feature of his life.*

of Galmore and Bohuntin. Both of these derived from older joint-tenancy club farms in the nineteenth century and at the time of the Napier Commission in 1883 were reportedly running 5000 sheep between them. He crofted in Bohuntin from the 1960s onwards and was Bohuntin's grazings clerk and sheep stock club secretary for many years. He also provided a fox control service for the Brae Lochaber Fox Club and was a Crofters Commission assessor.

Ronnie was a fine sportsman, excelling at badminton and shinty; playing the latter

competitively from the late 1940s into the 1970s. He captained one of Lochaber Camanachd's most celebrated teams to honours in the 1960s. He was a prominent figure in the crofting and agricultural community of Lochaber for much of the second half of the 20th century. He was also significant in the social and cultural life of the Brae Lochaber community, connecting generations with his knowledge of local families, history and folklore. He was sought out by descendants of Brae Lochaber emigrants to Nova Scotia and Australia when visiting the area.

In 2002 Ronnie featured in the Gaelic programme *Na Drobhairean* in which he recalled his involvement the last time away-wintered hogs made their return on-hoof in 1949. Their train journey terminated at Newtonmore and they were then shepherded over two days via Laggan through to Glen Roy.

He also expressed certainty that people would return to the glen and that land would again be cultivated. Over 50 people were resident around the head of Glen Roy in the 1880s, while less than a handful reside there today.

As a distinctive light, connected with its social and cultural past, goes out in Glen Roy, its future, whether re-peopled or re-wilded, "is still to be won".

JT





Agnes wearing her BEM medal at the presentation ceremony in 2013. Back row l-r: Malcolm Bell convener Shetland Islands Council, Richard Briggs, Norman and Evelyn Leask, Pauline and Dean Gilfillan, Lord Lieutenant Bobby Hunter; Front row: Mary Graham, Agnes, her husband Davie, his sister Georgie Arthur.

# Agnes Leask, 1934-2021

*Crofting lost another great stalwart just before Christmas. SCF member Jackie Syme remembers her good friend.*

**F**IRST met Agnes Leask in 1995 at the Shetland Dog Club, not long after I moved to Shetland. Despite our very different backgrounds we soon became firm friends until her death.

Agnes was very good at training sheepdogs and helped me to train our young bitch and several subsequent dogs, two of which were bred by her. Unusually, she liked to take her sheepdog puppies to the club for socialisation and obedience training.

As a newcomer to crofting, I found her tales of old crofting ways fascinating, but quickly found that, while Agnes had the greatest respect for the old ways, she was very forward thinking and never afraid to try something new. She was an enthusiastic participant in many schemes bringing money into crofting.

Agnes was a great help to me and one year gave me a Shetland ram as a Christmas present. He was a very good ram and still whole-mouthed when he died at 11 years old.

Agnes was passionate about native Shetland breeds and her family had had Shetland house cows. She advocated not selling Shetland pony breeding stock outwith Shetland except in special cases. She thought that following the example of Icelandic pony breeders would help maintain the



purity of the breed.

She was a very active member of the Scottish Crofters Union (now SCF) and was the Shetland president for many years. Of course she got me involved and I attended several SCU conferences.

She was never afraid to stand up and question eminent political figures and to say her piece. She seemed to know absolutely everyone and

introduced me to quite a few politicians. Agnes was very keen to explain that historically in Shetland women were more involved in crofting than their men, who often worked away.

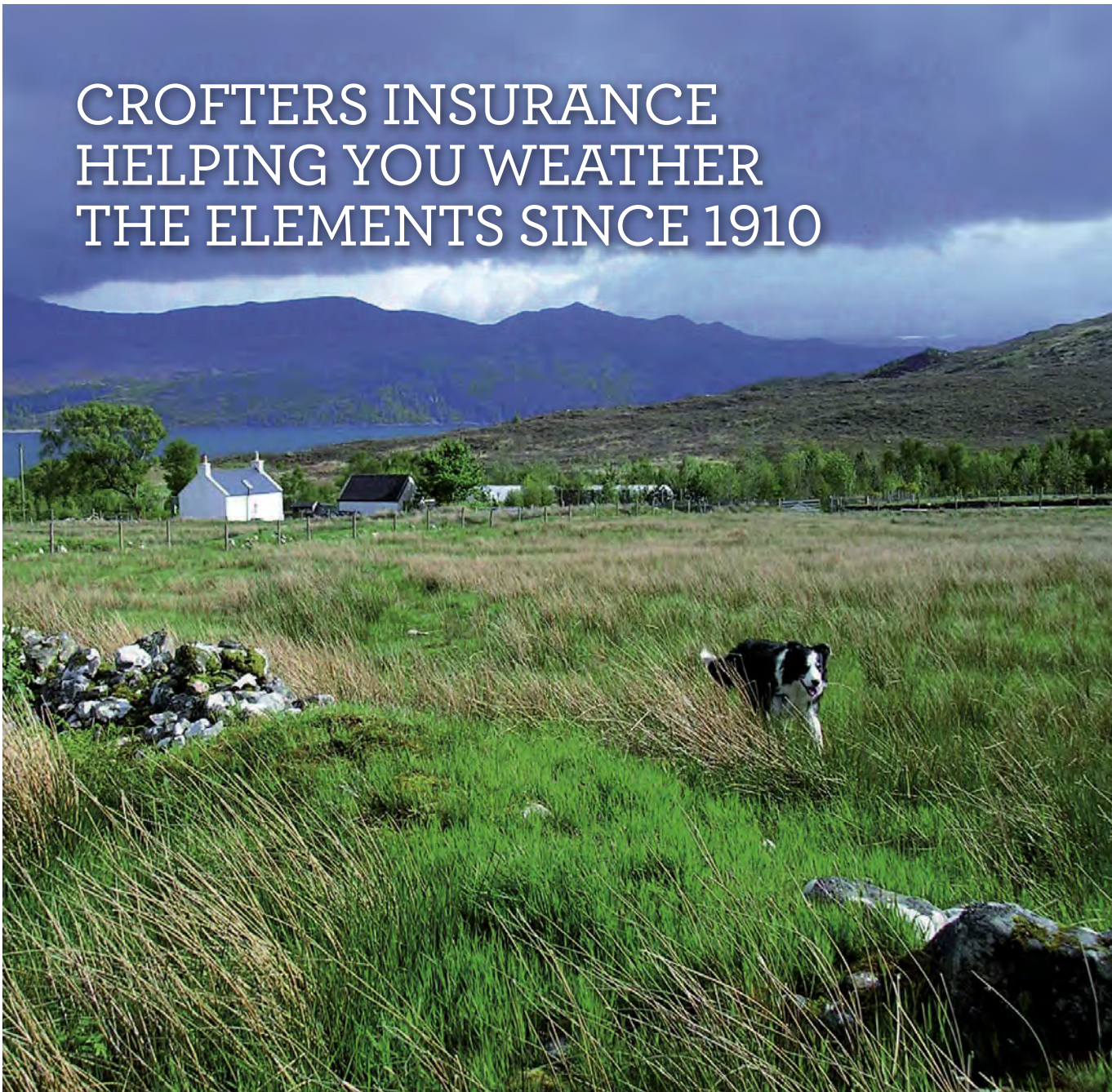
Agnes was awarded the British Empire Medal in 2013 for her services to crofting and I, for one, was very proud of her.

SCF lobbyist Norman Leask relates that in Brussels, Struan Stevenson MEP asked after Agnes and if she was still showing her dogs. He'd been canvassing in Shetland and called at her house in Cott, Weisdale. He knocked and a voice shouted for him to come in. He entered and saw no-one, but the voice said she was in the bathroom straight ahead. With some trepidation Struan entered, to find Agnes bathing a dog for a show. The gist of the conversation that followed was that he needed her vote and she needed a hand to wash the dog. Both parties got what they needed.

Surprisingly Agnes never learned to drive, but she and her husband Davey were well known around Shetland in their Reliant three-wheeler. When Davey gave up driving, a young friend of mine bought it. It was put to Aith garage to see what was needed for its MOT. Some welding to the chassis was required, but unfortunately the mechanic managed to set the fibreglass body on fire and the old Aith garage burnt to the ground. Agnes, they broke the mould when they made you. I shall miss you greatly.



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# Honorary life membership for former SCF chair Neil MacLeod

**O**N BEING notified of the well-deserved award, Neil responded: "I was stunned to learn that the board and council of SCF were intent on honouring me with life membership. I feel humble and extremely grateful that you have considered me worthy of a very prestigious award.

"For the many years I have been involved in crofting, my time spent with SCF leaves me with some memorable highlights – in particular the harmony, friendship and a common aim to represent crofting and convince those in authority that crofters knew best what was required to sustain and enhance a unique system which has stood the test of time.

"The only downside is that while SCF punches above its weight and does an incredible job with limited resources, this has unfortunately not translated into an increase in membership which would be well deserved.

"I remain totally committed to SCF and will continue to further that interest, especially amongst younger folk, for as long as I am able."



Patrick Krause presents Neil with his life membership certificate.

## SCF Young Crofter Award

**S**PONSORED BY The MacRobert Trust, The SCF Young Crofter Award celebrates the achievements of our younger crofters who in all their different ways are creating a future for crofting.

The winner receives a Young Crofter Award quach, £500 and one year's free SCF membership. It is open to all young crofters aged 40 and under.

We would normally make the

award early in the year, but due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, our board of judges has decided to postpone the selection to the autumn of this year.

Meanwhile if you would like to nominate a young crofter in your community please let us know. Nominations already received will of course be carried forward and we will publicise the award nearer the time to encourage you to nominate.

*giftaid it*

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