

JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

FOR
wild LAND &
wild PLACES

IMPROVING HABITATS, ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE

Land Report 2011-12

www.johnmuirtrust.org

*The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee (charity no SC002061 company no SC81620).
Registered office: Suite 1, South Inch Business Centre, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BW*

Photo: Keith Brame

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Reports compiled by: Liz Auty
Edited by: Susan Wright, Nicky McClure
Design: Inkcapp Design
Photography: Keith Brame, Don O'Driscoll,
Chris Goodman, Fran Lockhart, Sandy
Maxwell, Lester Standen, Rory Syme,
Susan Wright, Karen Purvis and Nicola Tyrrell
Cover picture: Quinag in summer,
Keith Brame

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Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

Welcome

The John Muir Trust owns and looks after around 24,500 hectares (60,500 acres) of some of the finest wild areas in the UK including Ben Nevis, Schiehallion, Sandwood Bay, part of the Cuillin on Skye, Quinag in Assynt and Li and Coire Dhorrcail on the remote Knoydart peninsula. This report is designed to highlight the work we do on the land we manage. The nature of that work – conserving and enhancing habitats and biodiversity for the benefit of landscape, wildlife and people – is guided by our Wild Land Management Standards which you can read online at www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk.

Our land management is long-term work that will be for future generations to gauge success. However, we're pleased to be delivering positive results across our properties already. Regenerating tree seedlings at Ben Nevis, and Li and Coire Dhorrcail on Knoydart, are an indication of habitat recovery, while flourishing water voles at Quinag and eagles on Skye suggest that wild land species are benefitting too. It's not all good news, of course. Reversing centuries of ecological damage is a difficult business and inevitably constrained by the actions of others.

We owe great thanks to our supporters who enable us to do the work that we do, and to our dedicated volunteers who make so much of our work possible. Last year, our conservation work parties were more popular than ever and Trust volunteers put in over 700 days of hard work throughout the year. Their help maintaining paths,

planting trees and cleaning up our hills and coastline was invaluable.

Last year also saw many people completing a John Muir Award on our properties, taking part in a range of activities including camping at Sandwood, kayaking at Torrinn, clearing drains and silt traps on the Steall meadows path at Nevis and tree planting at Schiehallion's neighbouring estate, Dun Coillich. They were just a sample of the hundreds of thousands of visitors engaging with and enjoying John Muir Trust land every year.

The Trust strives to engage as much as possible with the communities that live close to its land to deliver joint projects where possible. Our new Conservation Fund, designed to support local groups and people with sustainable and conservation-minded projects, last year supported the building of a new stalking pony enclosure on Knoydart and solar panels on Elgol community centre on Skye.

To everyone who helped and supported us in 2011, a big thank you. Here's to another year of taking positive steps towards our vision for wild land.



Mike Daniels, Head of Land and Science



Photo © Lester Stauden

Our wild land vision

The John Muir Trust would like to see the majority of the UK's wild land supporting natural habitats and species. We envision a diverse landscape of natural tree lines, sustainable numbers of grazing animals, rich flora and abundant wildlife. We see the wide open spaces, stunning views, fresh air and clean water that are so important to people's well-being, being valued and protected.

This is our vision of wild land management.
www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk

Encouraging signs of recovery

The sky's the limit when working on the UK's highest peak says conservation officer Sarah Lewis

 A lifetime would not be long enough to thoroughly know Ben Nevis, its glens and passes, and its limitless pockets of tucked away wildness. A powerful and intriguing place, it offers opportunities for action and adventure as well as enchanting spots of absolute solitude.

Unfortunately, centuries of over-grazing by sheep and deer have caused the decline and disappearance of a host of habitats and associated wildlife in the Nevis area. On top of this, around 100,000 people visit Britain's highest mountain each year and this inevitably has an impact.

As well as maintaining footpaths, removing cairns and collecting litter from the summit, we work to control deer numbers so that a range of habitats, including native woodland, can regenerate.

Facts & figures

- The John Muir Trust looks after 1,761 hectares (4,300 acres) within the Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area
- Around 100,000 people visit Ben Nevis each year
- The average height increase of tree seedlings last year was 10cm
- 21 mountain ringlet butterflies were observed
- Staff and volunteers cleared 20 bin bags of litter from the summit
- 10 carrier bags of banana skins were collected

Encouraging signs

Our monitoring in 2011 showed some encouraging signs. We checked and measured 63 tree seedlings and found their height had increased by 10cm on average – a great positive result. This amount of growth is what should be achieved where grazing is having little impact. However, with an overall height average of 49cm, they still have some way to go before they reach tree height.

Since 2008, the percentage of plots where red deer dung has been recorded has reduced from 57 per cent to 25 per cent. This is a good indication that our deer control measures are working. Over the same period, we have seen a small (but not statistically significant) increase in heather height from a mean of 12cm to 14cm. We hope these trends will continue through our management.

After a few years of really poor weather in July, the mountain ringlet butterflies had a better season. The adults only fly for about two weeks in early July and last year we saw 21 butterflies in the five transects that we monitor.

We also survey 12 plots to look at the health of juniper plants every three years. This year we found that the height and area of the plants had increased slightly, but there was no evidence of seed set or any seedlings in the plots.

Litter and bananas

Four volunteer work parties helped us collect rubbish and demolish cairns throughout the year on Ben Nevis in 2011. We cleared 20 bin bags of rubbish from the summit, plus ten carrier bags full of banana skins that went into our composter. Members of the public, including some taking

part in Three Peaks Challenge events, helped our volunteers carry the bags down to the car park.

The waste included the rather unusual find of almost 4kg of brand new 4-inch galvanised nails still in their original packet. We also found a tent and sleeping gear abandoned in the observatory ruins.

We've been donning banana costumes and talking to walkers going up the hill about the effect that organic litter can have on the environment. Banana skins are a particular problem and can take years to degrade in the upland environment. There has been a great response so far to the costumes. Hopefully they'll make our important message stick in people's minds.

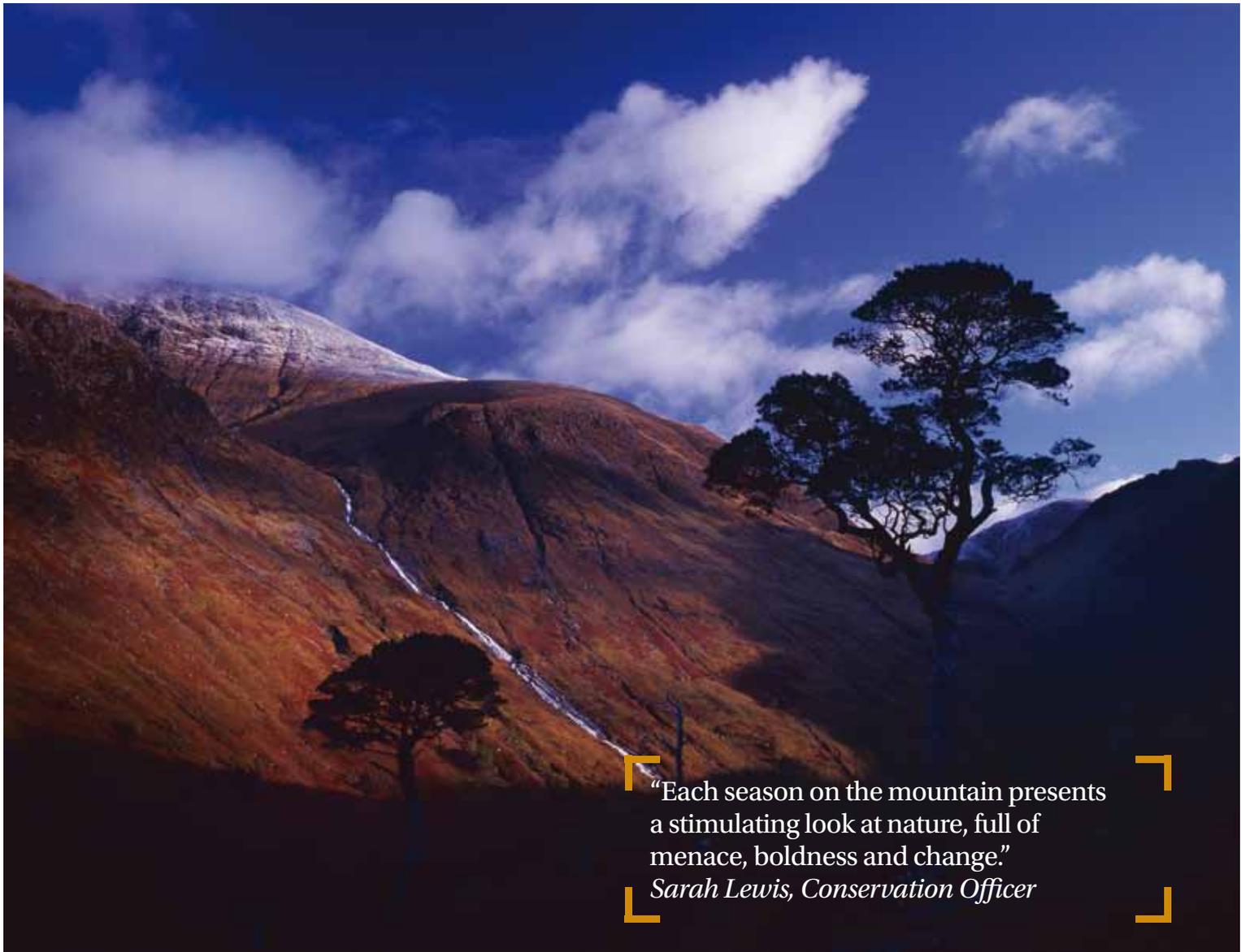
Community involvement

We began working with some new groups in the Lochaber area in 2011, encouraging them to get involved in the John Muir Award. These included Lochaber Outdoor Learning Partnership and a collective of south Lochaber schools. We are also part of the local Institute of Outdoor Learning group, looking at how the Award can be integrated further in the area.

In 2011, West Highland College used the John Muir Award as part of its HNC in Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Pursuits course. Students spent two days discovering the estate as part of their Explorer Award. George Watson's College pupils made their annual spring pilgrimage from Edinburgh. Their help clearing the drains and silt traps on the Steall meadows path is part of the conservation element of their Discovery Award. ■



Sarah is currently working towards her Level 2 Deer Stalking Certificate and began stalking on the Nevis estate last year.



“Each season on the mountain presents a stimulating look at nature, full of menace, boldness and change.”
Sarah Lewis, Conservation Officer

Ben Nevis in pictures



Wildlife spotting
CARE International donated three camera traps to capture images of wildlife on Nevis. Deer and foxes have been pictured so far but perhaps red squirrels and wild cats will follow in 2012 – let’s hope so.



Going bananas
Last year’s Banana Awareness Campaign encouraged people to take their litter off the mountain and dispose of it in a new dedicated organic waste bin at the Glen Nevis visitor centre.



Wild Writing competition
The Trust’s Wild Writing competition drew close to 400 poetic entries inspired by wild places from primary schools across the Lochaber region. Trust chairman, John Hutchison, awarded prizes at the Fort William Mountain Film Festival.



No 4 gully marker
The Trust opened a consultation on the future of No 4 gully marker and Coire Leis abseil post on the summit of the Ben. The post was vandalised and had to be replaced early in the year.

Preparing to re-wild

Conservation ranger Karen Purvis gets to know a place that's bursting with potential

Since taking over the management of Glenlud in 2010, we have been working to restore habitats, manage existing planted woodland and safeguard threatened species like the black grouse. About half the property is planted with non-native woodland. This is mainly Sitka spruce with smaller blocks of larch, although there are some native broadleaved species along watercourses and in small blocks around the edge of the forest.

Compact but diverse

We have been carrying out baseline surveys of the habitats and wildlife and have been in discussion with neighbours and other conservation bodies working in the area. Our intention is to prepare a full management plan for the property following consultation in 2012 and to look at establishing funding for implementing the plan to re-wild this

compact but diverse property.

Biodiversity officer Liz Auty carried out a Phase 1 survey over the summer to create a habitat map for the property, and staff have been taking note of the wildlife they see on visits to the property. So far we have recorded 210 species from the site, including 171 flowering plants (including notably grass of Parnassus and rock rose). Interesting birds spotted include bullfinches and crossbills. An amazing chorus of frogs in the ponds was a great spectacle in March, and common lizards were also spotted in the summer.

The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) hosted an event with Buglife and the John Muir Trust at the end of August, looking at invertebrate identification and management. Around a dozen IEEM members from across Scotland attended along with John Muir Trust staff and trustees.



Our immediate priority is to restore the black grouse habitat at Glenlud, which will also help the habitats of other ground-nesting birds.

Facts & figures

- Glenlud covers 140 hectares (345 acres) in the Scottish Borders
- Planted woodland covers 70 hectares (173 acres) of the property
- 20 volunteers attended the first official work party
- 171 flowering plants were recorded on site
- 19 species of moths were caught in the first moth trap

Local ecologist Reuben Singleton who runs Tweed Ecology in Peebles came down to Glenlud the night before and set up a moth trap. In all 91 moths were attracted to it representing 19 different species, not a bad haul for the first time recording here. Seven of these are on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan list including the Garden Tiger moth

Mending drystone walls

In June, the Trust's Borders members' group mended dry stone walls under the expert supervision of Donald Macdonald and Alan Wolfe. The first official work party was held at Glenlud in late October with over 20 volunteers attending from as far afield as Aberdeen, Inverness, Helensburgh, Manchester, Romney, County Durham, and even Newton St Boswells. All met in the volunteer's shelter to hear about the estate and plan the weekend. Several tasks were undertaken including further repairs of dry stone walls and removal of redundant stock fences. ■



Karen has just taken up her post at Glenlud having been a forester on the remote Knoydart peninsula.

“Glenlude is diverse and offers a range of interesting wildlife. The re-wilding of the area will be a great opportunity to involve lots of people and promises to deliver exciting educational opportunities.”

Karen Purvis, Conservation Ranger



Photo © Keith Brame

Glenlude in pictures



Comfort break

Thanks to our volunteers under the expert guidance of the Trust's Sandy Maxwell, Glenlude now has a composting toilet housed in a building made from recycled wood with a turf roof.



Give trees a chance

Some recycled deer fencing from East Schiehallion is used to make guards to protect individual trees at Glenlude.



Small is beautiful

The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Managers (IEEM) and Buglife spent a day at Glenlude trying out surveying methods such as pitfall traps, beating and sweeping to find examples of invertebrates in the vegetation.

Health of habitats improves

Property manager Lester Standen sees life returning to the rough bounds

Li and Coire Dhorrcail forms part of the Knoydart National Scenic Area and was traditionally referred to as the 'rough bounds' because of its wild terrain and remoteness.

Much of the land has been overgrazed by sheep and deer and we're working to restore what has been lost.

It's heartening that the habitat and landscape has been changing rapidly in recent years. When the Trust first purchased the estate, vegetation was sparse with only widely scattered trees on hillsides and a few remnants in ravines. The area had an open aspect dominated by boggy grasslands. It was a relatively empty landscape with little wildlife.

Today it's very different, with the grasslands at lower levels becoming a mosaic of different habitats including native woodland (such as rowan, Scots pine, oak and hazel) and heath. As the place has come to life, there's been a spectacular burst of growth with the restored habitats bringing a rich diversity of wildlife.

In spring, many species of migratory birds arrive that couldn't have lived here before without the woodland, heathland and abundance of insects to feed on. Bats, pine martens and roe deer have also colonised.

Heavy browsing reduced

We carry out annual monitoring of heathland and naturally regenerating tree seedlings. The plots are all outside fences and allow us to assess the impacts of grazing from red deer. Last year's monitoring showed good signs of improvement. Since 2008, the percentage of heathland plots showing heavy browsing has reduced from 97 per cent to 10 per cent and the mean height of heather has increased from 7cm to 10cm.

We saw an average 5cm increase in height from 2010 to 2011 for the 109 tree seedlings we measured showing that the health of the habitats is improving. The seedlings are mainly birch and rowan, with the occasional hazel and oak. We will continue the recording until the trees reach about three metres.

We also have two 1km long tree transects set up on the property. A volunteer monitored the tree transects and found no change in browsing overall. However, on one of the transects the heights of the tree seedlings showed a positive increase with 17 per cent of the tree seedlings at a height of above 30cm (as compared to 8 per cent in 2009).

Facts & figures

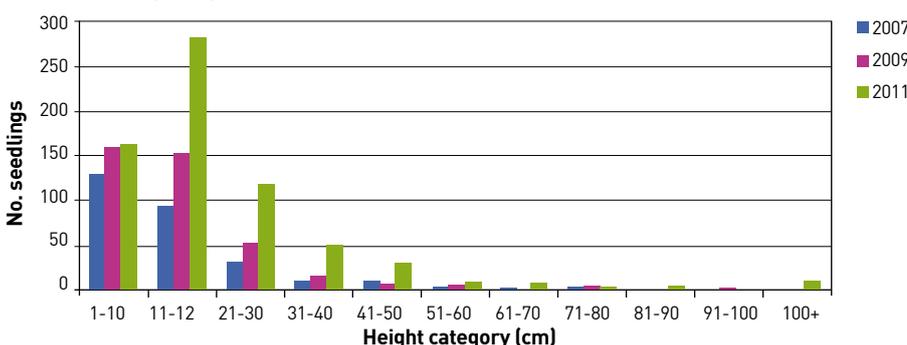
- The Trust looks after 1,243 hectares (3,101 acres) on the north-eastern slopes of Ladhar Bheinn on the Knoydart peninsula
- The average increase in height observed in tree seedlings last year was 5cm
- The average increase in height observed in heather since 2008 was 3cm
- Only 10 per cent of heathland is now showing signs of excessive browsing
- The People's Postcode Lottery contributed £6,265 towards the cost of purchasing a boat

Access improved

Thanks to an award of £6,265 from the People's Postcode Trust, a grant-giving charity funded entirely by players of the People's Postcode Lottery, we were able to purchase a boat to access Knoydart. It takes just five minutes to get to the property by boat from Arnisdale or else access is a nine-mile walk along seven miles of footpath and a further two miles of rough ground.

We make about 80 crossings a year to transport staff, volunteers, tools and equipment. Having our own boat is a big step forward. It makes us less reliant on the transport options offered by third parties and will cut down on the time volunteers have to spend walking in to the property. ■

Tree seedling heights recorded at Li and Coire Dhorrcail Transect



Lester has been involved with the Trust since 1992 when he planted some of the original tree seedlings on Knoydart that are now full grown.

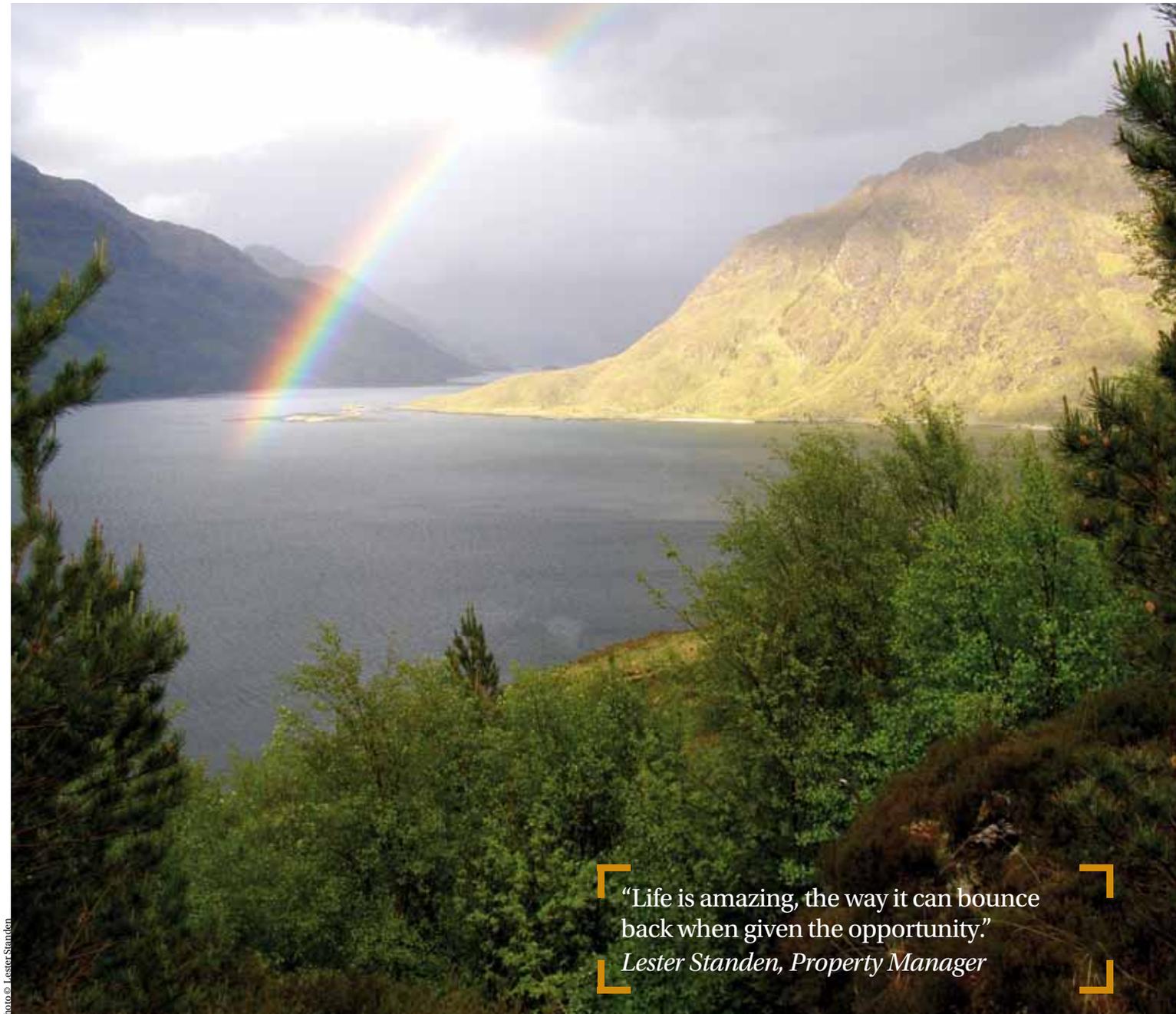


Photo © Lester Standen

“Life is amazing, the way it can bounce back when given the opportunity.”
Lester Standen, Property Manager

Li and Coire Dhorrcail in pictures



Work party success
In April a work party of volunteers walked in from Kinlochhourn, enjoying great weather as they carried to the shore the wire and stobs from the deer fence taken down last year.



Regenerating trees
Native woodland, including rowan, scots pine, oak and hazel, is starting to take hold in Knoydart thanks to the absence of sheep and effective deer control.



Stalkers path progresses
Volunteer work parties continued work on the stalkers path in Coire Dhorrcail, working alongside footpaths officer Chris Goodman to rebuild sections that have been washed away and destroyed over the years.

Supporting important species

Property manager Fran Lockhart is forever in awe of this beautiful and wild part of Assynt

From the highest point at the summit of Sàil Gharbh, down to the north side of the estate where the mountain has its feet in the sea, Quinag is a spectacular place. In summer, the crags and corries echo with the sounds of wrens and the haunting notes of the ring ouzel, while down at the shore, seals, sea trout and thrift can be found.

We work hard at Quinag to prevent landscape damage and erosion, maintaining the mountain path to the range summit and restoring habitats that have been damaged by centuries of burning and overgrazing. These support important species such as otters, red deer, pipistrelle bats and water voles.

Habitat improvement would give the ancient Ardvar Woodlands – a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – a chance to expand naturally. However, the effectiveness of our deer management is constrained by management approaches elsewhere.

Slow progress

We're disappointed that the Ardvar Woodlands is currently in unfavourable condition, and we are working with Scottish Natural Heritage and our neighbours to try to resolve this. However, progress is slow and the habitat monitoring is yet to

show any benefit.

We record 77 marked seedlings on Quinag every year. Between 2008 and 2011, the tree seedlings only increased in height by an average of 4cm (not statistically significant). We hope to see a greater positive change soon. On the heathland plots, the height of heather has also only shown a small increase since 2008 – from an average of 19cm to 21cm in the 31 plots recorded.

We also have 1km transects set up at this property to look at the regeneration and growth of tree seedlings. The proportion of seedlings browsed and the proportion of seedlings over 30cm tall had not increased since 2009. We now plan to revisit these every five years.

We revisited our juniper plots in Quinag in September. They were last monitored in 2008. Overall there was no significant change, but it was encouraging that some plants were producing berries and the seedlings recorded previously were still in the plots.

Exclosures built

Two work parties built three 10-metre squared exclosures using deer fencing that was recycled from East Schiehallion. The exclosures will demonstrate the potential for natural regeneration of trees and other

Facts & figures

- Quinag covers 3,699 hectares (9,140 acres) in the Assynt National Scenic Area
- The property comprises the three peaks of Sàil Gharbh (rough heel), Sàil Ghorm (blue heel) and Spidean Coinich (mossy peak)
- At 808 metres, the summit of Sàil Gharbh is the highest point
- Between 2008 and 2011, heather achieved an average growth of 2cm
- The average growth achieved by tree seedlings during the same period was 4cm
- Volunteers built three exclosures in 2011 to demonstrate the potential for trees regenerating without the pressure of deer browsing

species without the pressure of deer browsing.

Volunteers also spent a day working on path maintenance in April. Hardly any touch up work was required on a new section of path leading on to the shoulder at Spidean Coinich, so work concentrated on repairing the path that leads out of the corrie as well as cleaning the ditches.

In July some work was needed on the high level path up Sàil Gharbh. Several new anchor bars (which prevent the path slipping downwards) were added and a section of turf lined ditching deepened to improve the drainage on the path. ■

Monitoring the growth of tree seedlings



2008



2009



2012



2011



Fran is working with Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project partners on a deer festival to promote venison.



Photo © Keith Braine

“I can never spend too much time on Quinag. It’s a special place among the unique and stunning landscape of north west Scotland.”

Fran Lockhart, Property Manager

Quinag in pictures



Holly bush spotted

Fran Lockhart photographed this lone holly bush hanging on in one of the foothills of Quinag despite years of relentless grazing that has removed the woodland in which it should be thriving.



Summer visitors

During the summer months, ring ouzels join the ptarmigans (pictured above) in upper corries and rocky places around our property at Quinag.



Monitoring training day

Trust staff joined with partners from the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project to spend a day learning about impact monitoring on our land.

A mixed picture

Conservation officer Don O’Driscoll discovers endless wonder on the golden shores of north-west Scotland

Sandwood is special in so many ways. Cathel Morrison, our former Sandwood manager of many years, says: “Beguiling, belittling, bewitching, boisterous, balmy and beautiful – often all on the same day. It’s always blessed but never boring.” The property is designated a Special Area of Conservation and we work to protect and restore the wild character and landscape of Sandwood Bay, Sheigra, Oldshorebeg and Oldshoremore machair, the coastal cliffs and the surrounding area.

Our work includes protecting the area’s peatland – an important wildlife habitat and carbon store – and machair, a prime habitat, unique to the north western fringes of Scotland and Ireland, which contains more than 200 species of plant including eight orchids. We also maintain footpaths and carry out wildlife monitoring, deer management and beach cleaning.

Key importance

Our monitoring of man-made erosion on the sand dunes in 2011 found no significant changes. We have been monitoring the colonies of seabirds at Sandwood for 15 years. Unfortunately

numbers have shown a continual decline, most likely due to the failure of the fish stocks on which they are dependant (see graph below).

Following a full survey of water voles in 2006 and 2007, we annually revisit core areas for the voles and record any signs and sightings. In 2011 we found that some of the usually occupied patches did not have voles. This may mean that mink are moving into the area so we’re putting out mink rafts to check for presence of this invasive species. We’ll see if we record any in 2012.

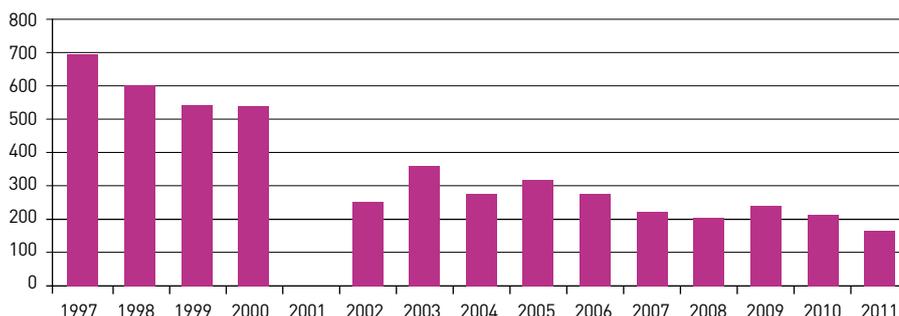
We recorded a few great yellow bumblebees this year at Droman. The bees rely on good habitat with lots of flowers for their food source so this is a good sign. Grazing by rabbits can be a problem, and we’re working to control their numbers and hopefully enhance the habitat for the bees and other insects that live there. Our colony of overwintering barnacle geese remains stable. The severe storms over the last few winters have resulted in the geese grazing on the inbye croft land more regularly.

Beach cleaning action

Over the year groups of volunteers carried out some landscaping around

Fulmar population over time

Sandwood Estate Seabird Monitoring – Mean Fulmar Numbers 1997-2010



Facts & figures

- Sandwood is made up of 4,703 hectares (11,621 acres) of wild and crofted land just a few miles from Cape Wrath
- Our overwintering colony of 65 barnacle geese remains stable
- Three drums of engine oil and seven sacks of plastic rubbish were collected by Explorer Scouts
- The Trust’s Conservation Fund gave support to two crofters attempting to introduce more biodiversity on their land at Sandwood
- Local provider Cape Adventure, based at Loch Laxford, delivered 300 John Muir Awards last year
- 11 people joined the John Muir Trust after engaging with the Wild Land Awareness team at Sandwood

the section of new path built last autumn by contractors. In June, we took some pupils from Kinlochbervie school on a wildlife walk around Oldshoremore. We also supported 11 Scottish Agricultural College students as they completed their Explorer Awards.

In July, a group of eight Explorer Scouts from Milnathort and their leaders did a beach clean at Sandwood Bay as part of their John Muir Award, spotting wildlife such as mountain hare and the tracks of otters. A Duke of Edinburgh Award group also did a beach clean at Sandwood during the summer and collected 16 trailer loads of rubbish. ■



Eagle-eyed Don divides his time between Sandwood and Quinag.



“Our plans for Sandwood include monitoring the habitats here so that the native biodiversity, including water voles and great yellow bumblebees, can thrive.”
Don O’Driscoll, Conservation Officer

Sandwood in pictures



Sandwood wildlife watch

There have been all sorts of interesting sights at Sandwood over the course of the year. Scale insects were found on creeping willow by the shore. This was the most northerly recording of these so far in the UK. In March, whooper swans visited as they made their way north, with 25 calling on Loch an Larach. Two puffins were sighted swimming in Loch Clash later in the year, as well as an otter eating a flat fish.



Beach combing

Sometimes the sea washes up reminders that life is fleeting. Last year, we found a dead young Minke whale on the beach, the remains of a leatherback turtle (pictured above), and 28 dead starlings that had been blown off their cliff roost in a dramatic storm at the end of the year.



Scouting around Sandwood

Eight explorer scouts from Milnathort achieved their John Muir Award by discovering the beauty, solitude and biodiversity of Sandwood. They explored the area by journeying through the tree-free boggy moorland to the north coast and conserved it by cleaning the beach and practising minimum impact camping.

A popular Munro route heals

New path to the rocky ridge is a great success says property manager, Sandy Maxwell

 Schiehallion is a popular Munro and around 20,000 people ascend the summit every year to be rewarded with fabulous views across Loch Rannoch, the wilds of Rannoch Moor and the hills of the central Highlands as far as Glencoe. The Trust built the main path in 2002 using locally sourced materials and maintains it regularly using volunteers.

Long-term process

On East Schiehallion, grazing impacts come from wild red deer and also sheep that stray from neighbouring ground. We are in a long-term process of trying to reduce deer numbers impacting on the estate and sheep incursions. Encouragingly a stalker on the neighbouring Kynachan Estate is starting an annual deer cull.

We carry out annual monitoring of heathland, lime-rich flushes and naturally regenerating tree seedlings. However, since 2008 we have seen no changes in the heathland or marked seedlings, when we would hope to see some positive changes here.

For the flush plots we have seen no major changes and these are generally in good condition with limited damage from hoof prints and tracks. These fragile habitats are sensitive to trampling and are monitored by volunteers.



Flush plots are in good condition with limited damage from hoof prints.

No positive change

We also have 1km transects set up to look at the regeneration and growth of tree seedlings. All the trees along a 1km long and 2 metre wide transect are measured and checked by dedicated volunteers for browsing damage. In line with the results for the marked seedlings, we saw no positive change since the transects were last recorded in 2009. If our deer and sheep management plans are effective we would hope to see positive improvements.

SNH carried out site condition monitoring of the Site of Special Scientific Interest during the year. The montane assemblage is made up of a mosaic of habitats influenced by the calcareous limestone rocks that outcrop on the mountain. The habitats across the site met their targets for favourable condition.

Volunteers are also visiting East Schiehallion every year to record mountain ringlet butterflies, wolverines and black grouse leks. Mountain ringlets and wolverine signs were recorded this year but in low numbers, while black grouse were in good numbers.

Plenty of wildlife

The first work party of the year at East Schiehallion got off to an excellent start. Volunteers carried out cross drain and water bar clearing and constructed a few new anchor bars higher up the path. It was a lovely clear day with plenty of wildlife on view including ptarmigan and mountain hares.

During the year other volunteer work parties helped to install two new people counters, cleared the silt traps on the path and removed some new cairns that had been created near

Facts & figures

- East Schiehallion covers an area of 915 hectares (2,260 acres) and forms part of the designated Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area and Schiehallion Site of Special Scientific Interest
- At 1,083 metres (3,547 feet) in height, Schiehallion is Scotland's 57th highest mountain
- 20,000 people ascend the summit of Schiehallion every year
- Two people counters are installed on the path to record visitor numbers
- 25 people attended the open property meeting held in Rannoch in October

the summit.

Last summer a visitor to Schiehallion found some markings close to the summit. On one work party we were fortunate to have an archaeologist among the volunteers who was able to identify these as imitations of pre-Roman designs, confirming they are relatively recent graffiti.

During the year Pitlochry High School completed a Discovery Award, with 53 pupils tree planting and carrying out fence maintenance work in the Dun Coillich Community Woodland area next to Schiehallion. ■



Sandy is always impressed by the number of Trust members and supporters who take part in the practical conservation work he organises each year.



“Our volunteers work hard each year to maintain the new path and carry out restoration work to the line of the old path. The old line is recovering really well, which is great to see.”

Sandy Maxwell, Property Manager

East Schiehallion in pictures



Recycling old fencing
Trust staff take down a deer fence as part of their John Muir Award. The fence was recycled on Quinag.



Wilderness Scotland pitches in
Wilderness Scotland, a corporate supporter of the John Muir Trust, organised a work party on East Schiehallion in September to carry out path maintenance.



Path work
Volunteers worked hard on maintaining the path, clearing out silt traps and helping to make the transition from the built path into the rocky ridge path clearer for people not familiar with the area. They also carried out some spot turfing in the higher sections of the old path line to help heal the old scar.

A more natural landscape

Property manager Ally Macaskill reports from the green heart of the Cuillin

 Dramatic mountains, rugged coastline, beautiful woodland and important peatland – our Skye property is all this and more, taking in the crofting townships and communities around Strathaird, Sconser, Torrin and Elgol. The area is home to otters and golden eagles as well as native woodlands of hazel, aspen and ash.

The Trust is working to improve habitats and encourage a more natural landscape by reducing the grazing pressure from deer and sheep, restructuring commercial exotic woodlands to native woodlands and controlling non-native invasive plant species. We also maintain footpaths and clear litter.

Encouraging signs

On Strathaird, we carry out annual monitoring of heathland and naturally regenerating tree seedlings, which include birch, rowan, willow, ash, holly and hazel. Encouragingly, the tree seedlings have shown an average increase in height of 39cm between 2008 and 2011. Over the same time period, for 22 heathland plots, there was no change in the mean height of heather (around 22cm) and no change in the browsing (which remains very light). We also set up some new blanket bog plots this year, and plan to put in more in 2012 so that we can monitor this key habitat.

Sprucing up the area

In mid-May volunteers pulled out thousands of spruce seedlings from the felled area at Ringell, cleaned the beach at Camasunary and took down redundant deer fencing. In August, a work party pulled up more spruce producing large piles in an area

where the regenerated native trees are coming along well.

The same party cleared the shoreline from Elgol around to Luig Mhoir as far as Eilan na h-Airde, carried out some maintenance on the Blaven and Keppoch paths and cut down rhododendrons close to the Sligachan Hotel. In September, work was carried out on the low level path from the Blaven car park to Keppoch, and on the highest point of the track from Strathaird to Camasunary.

We are working hard to enhance habitats and ecosystems and the wealth of wildlife that is already here is reflected in the range of sites that receive protection for their important wildlife. We worked with local staff from Scottish Natural Heritage to identify action to bring these sites into top condition. Our estates on Skye support a wealth of fascinating wildlife from close to 300 species of mosses and liverwort, the arctic alpine plants on limestone outcrops and juniper heath, to the otters that thrive along the coast and the golden eagles that soar over the mountains.

Community support

This year our Conservation Fund supported five projects on Skye. The funding gave the Blue Shed Café on Torrin a new noticeboard; helped to develop a Torrin Common Grazing Management plan to protect areas of hazel woodland and limestone pavement; contributed to the cost of photovoltaic panels on the roof of Elgol Community Hall; supported a peatland restoration project at Drinan; and provided day trips to help Portree High School pupils gain their Explorer Awards.

We ran a half-day John Muir Award training session at Broadford

Facts & figures

- Trust land covers 12,044 hectares (29,761 acres) on Southern Skye
- Over 80 per cent of our property lies within the Cuillin Hills National Scenic Area
- The average increase in height for tree seedlings between 2008 and 2011 was 39cm
- Local school children helped build a new stone gateway at Sligachan as part of their John Muir Award
- We installed a new log-fuelled boiler at our office in Strathaird, helped by a grant from Community Energy Scotland
- The Trust's Conservation Fund supported five Skye-based projects last year

Primary school in September. In the summer, 18 pupils from Auchtertyre & Loch Duich primary schools visited Torrin Outdoor Centre as part of their Discovery Award taking part in a variety of activities including orienteering, caving, and kayaking, and wildlife spotting on the seashore. ■



Ally brings years of deer stalking experience to his new post on Skye – most recently stalking on estates in Glen Lyon.

“Our Skye estates combine fantastic mountain and coastal scenery with a wealth of wildlife. It is a privilege to be involved in conserving this spectacular landscape.”

Ally Macaskill, Property Manager

Skye in pictures



Monitoring training

We ran training for staff and volunteers on identifying wildflowers and habitat monitoring techniques, including heathland monitoring.



Gateway opens

Thanks to workers including John Muir Award participants from Portree High School the gateway to the Black Cuillin at Sligachan has opened. This will be the location for a sculpture of the pioneer climbers John Mackenzie and Professor Norman Collie.



Volunteers clean up beach

Camasunary Bay faces south-west towards the current running between Rum and Eigg and prevailing wind and it is a magnet for marine litter. Volunteers helped collect an estimated 230 cubic metres of plastic rubbish.

Better together

We work with a number of like-minded organisations in pursuit of our wild land management vision. Here's who we worked with in 2011

North Harris Trust

A number of large access and interpretation projects were successfully completed in 2011. These included repairs to hill paths at Langadail, Urgha and Ulladale. North Harris Trust is now well on the way to completing repairs to the estate's entire network of paths and tracks – most of which had been neglected for decades before the land came into community ownership in 2003.

We have also been supporting the North Harris Trust habitat monitoring. There are ongoing discussions with SNH about how best to manage the area's deer herd to protect the numerous designated sites on the estate.

Our volunteers attended two work parties at North Harris this year. In June they spent a week clearing the coastine, tackling gunnera and other invasive plants, clearing culverts and opening up ditches. In July another work party cleared rubbish from Bagh Theilnis beach, filling five one-ton helicopter sacks.

In September, we helped organise and run the inaugural Harris Mountain Festival, which proved very popular with visitors and locals alike.

Nevis Partnership

The year began with a major Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Programme funding bid, which was rejected at the final meeting last year. Another application was submitted in February 2012 and the results will be announced this July. If successful, the application will secure almost £4 million of investment across a wide range of projects in the Nevis area over a period of six years, including an 18 month fully funded development phase.

Meanwhile, work continued on developing an integrated management approach for the Nevis Area, with the Integrated Management Working Group submitting a LEADER application to assist with funding. Other projects included new interpretation boards for Glen Nevis. These boards now provide information in a joined up manner, thanks to input from several of the partners.

Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project

In 2011, a group of land managers launched Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape (CALL), the largest habitat restoration project of its kind in Scotland. The partnership comprises the Scottish Wildlife Trust, John Muir Trust, Assynt Foundation, Culag Community Woodland Trust, Eisg Brachaid Estate, and Tanera Mòr – a mix of community bodies, conservation organisations and private landowners.

These partners have joined forces to work together to deliver an aspirational 50-year plan to bring woodland connectivity, species-rich flora and fauna, and economic prosperity to the Scottish uplands. The partnership aims to develop projects that have both environmental and social benefits for the area. A project manager and a tree nursery manager have been appointed to drive forward different aspects of this project.

Galson Trust

The Galson Trust was busy in the north of Lewis in 2011. We continued to provide management support to its ranger, who ran a programme of walks, events and environmental education initiatives before leaving at the end of the year.

Galson is focusing primarily on economic development projects including a community wind power project and tourism initiatives. We helped them design a number of interpretation projects over the last year, including panels at the Butt of Lewis and Clach an Truisel – the largest single standing stone in Scotland.

Our volunteers spent a day in July building a stone plinth next to the lighthouse at the Butt of Lewis. This will hold an interpretation panel explaining some of the local wildlife and geology.





Photo © Keith Branne



The Trust's conservation officer Don O'Driscoll, pictured on the left, helps with a CALL seedling survey.

Photo © Assynt Foundation

West Harris Trust

This new prospective partnership is still to be formalised but offers exciting potential. The West Harris estate was bought by the community in 2010. It covers some of the most spectacular landscapes in Europe, including the magnificent coastal townships of Luskentyre and Scarista. The West Harris Trust is keen to work with us on future environmental projects having collaborated closely with us last year over a potential community purchase of the island of Taransay.

Corroul

Our staff provided refresher training before estate staff carried out an ambitious programme of habitat and species monitoring this year. Corroul's deer management programme is beginning to show positive impact in the habitat data recorded. Black and red grouse surveys were carried out, while a dotterel survey was conducted as part of a national survey.

A conservation work party at Corroul focused on paths, and woodland and loch side rubbish clearance. Path work included maintenance on the old 'Road to the Isles' path, the track to the south of Loch Ossian and the path from Ossian to Lubnaclach, with several new piped culverts installed. Old culverts were re-opened and several hundred metres of ditching was dug out. More of the old birch wood to the south of Loch Ossian was hand weeded of small self seeding spruce, as was a new plantation to the east of the Corroul Lodge.

An ambitious forest plan to re-structure over 1,000 hectares of commercial forest to a much more wild land and wildlife friendly native woodland mix is being consulted on. The initial phases will see felling of commercially valuable timber and re-stocking with a mixture of commercial and native species.

Carrifran

Our partnership with this exciting re-wilding project in the Borders was re-invigorated with a Trust members visit around our AGM and the presence of a staff member on the ecological advisory group. Several of the volunteers on the weekly Carrifran group are now involved in volunteering on our Glenlude property.

Knoydart Foundation and Knoydart Forest Trust

The Knoydart Foundation made two successful bids to the Trust's Conservation Fund. One was for a new pony paddock, which involved the reinstatement of a pony enclosure for highland ponies used for deer carcass extraction. The other was to help create a Knoydart Woodland Sculpture Trail in the woodlands around Inverie. Sculptures were made with natural materials based on the theme of nature and wildlife.

In April, a large group of Trust volunteers spent a week on Knoydart based at Inverie. They helped the Knoydart Forest Trust and the Foundation comb the hillside above Inverie for any rhododendron seedlings that have escaped previous work parties or seeded in the last year. The programme of rhododendron control is definitely showing results as the burst of diverse plant and bird life in the woodlands shows. There was also a major beach clean undertaken around the village as well as some work on the community vegetable garden.

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