



Cattle grazing amongst hazel ©Sandy Coppins

## ADVISORY INFORMATION

**The Atlantic Hazelwoods are one of Scotland's most ancient woodlands. They are older by far than the Atlantic Oakwoods of Scotland, and older than some of the Caledonian Pinewoods.**

Together with Birch, Hazel was one of the earliest woody species to establish along the western edge of Scotland, as far back as 10,000 years Before Present. Pollen evidence points to vast areas of western Scotland being dominated by Hazel for hundreds of years. In that time, other plants and animals established amongst the Hazel, forming what is today a unique habitat of great antiquity. Hazel can occur as wind-clipped coastal woodland, as small to large stands amongst (or adjacent to) other woodland, or as an 'understorey' with emergent trees such as ash and oak.

### **But surely, all Hazel is coppice, so how can it be ancient?**

No, certainly in Western Scotland, Hazel was not coppiced in the English tradition. Hazel stools are naturally multi-stemmed, they grow that way without coppicing. An ancient Hazel doesn't necessarily have thick, craggy and woody trunks, although there are examples like this. Hazel will put up new shoots each spring to fill in gaps in the canopy where older stems have died or been damaged by storms, and so the Hazel stool quietly reproduces year on year.

People in Western Scotland certainly made use of Hazel in many ways, but because Hazel is widespread, they did not have to go to all the labour of coppicing entire stools, then having to protect the regrowth from grazing animals; they were able to walk in among the hazel, and selectively cut just the stems they wanted. This ensured that the hazel stand provided them with what they needed, and was also able to be used as sheltered grazing for domestic animals.

### **Why are the Atlantic Hazelwoods special to Scotland?**

The Atlantic Hazelwoods are on par with the Machair as being a unique Scottish habitat. Because of the long time that many Hazelwoods have occupied some sites (the "core" Hazelwoods), they have acquired some special features. The richness and the glory of the lichens, mosses and fungi in long-established hazelwoods has led to them being described as part of the **Celtic Rainforest**.

This is due of course to the mild, damp climate, but also the long periods where these woodlands have not undergone major interference or intensive management. There are species found in the Western Atlantic Hazelwoods that are better developed and more luxuriant than probably elsewhere in Europe. These include a number of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, such as the **White Script Lichen** (known only from Scottish Atlantic Hazelwoods) and the **Hazel gloves fungus**, also included on Scotland's Species Action Framework (SAF).



White Script Lichen *Graphis alboscripta* ©John Douglass



Hazel Gloves Fungus *Hypocreopsis rhododendri* ©Lucy Sumsion

Hazel is usually classified as “scrub”. The core Hazel “scrub” has high biodiversity importance; it is an intrinsic part of the Scottish landscape, harbouring the special lichens, mosses and fungi that are so rare and endangered elsewhere. There are instances where more recently expanded hazel will enhance existing core stands, as well as provide future habitat. These woodlands have been used by man for centuries, valued for providing sheltered grazing, as well as for the numerous uses for cut Hazel stems, and providing an enjoyable nut harvest.

### So what are the threats?

Land managers need to be aware of three key activities that could damage the hazel habitat:

- **overgrazing**
- **no grazing**
- **Coppicing**

### Action you can take ....

- Look into the possibilities offered under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) for Rural Development Contracts— Rural Priorities; hazel can be managed under the Options for Scrub & Tall Herb Communities, which allows a site-specific grazing plan to be produced.
- Seek specialist advice on your hazelwoods and identifying some of the key species of interest that may be present.
- Avoid altering current management , such as introducing coppicing or changing grazing regimes until you have sought specialist advice.



Tree Lungwort *Lobaria pulmonaria* ©Sandy Coppins

Where to go to find out more and get advice to help support your Atlantic Hazelwoods:

Scottish Natural Heritage  
 Glencruitten Road  
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Setting a sustainable grazing regime is often the key to successful management of this important habitat.