

CONTENTS

Editorial – Alison Averis	2
NWDG News	3
Notes from the Chair – Gordon Gray Stephens	3
NWDG Merchandise	4
Summer Excursion 2006: Isle of Skye – Chris Marsh	4
Report on the 2005 Field Excursion – Arran	5
Introduction – Gordon Gray Stephens	5
13 May: Holy Island – Philip Gordon	6
13 May: Whitefarland to Imachar Point – Mary-Ann Smythe	10
14 May: Gleann Diomhan – Ian Whitehead	12
14 May: NWDG Annual General Meeting – Ruth Anderson	13
15 May: <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> monster or minder? – Simon Stuart & Ruth Anderson	15
Atlantic Oakwoods Symposium, 14-16 September 2005 – Richard Thompson	17
Reports on the workshops in 2005	23
Bryophytes of western woods and heaths – Lorraine Servant	23
Articles	25
Squaring the circle: Association of Scottish Sawmillers – Nick Marshall	25
Native provenance: why does it matter? – Alison Averis	27
Alba Trees: native tree nursery – Alison Averis	29
News from other woodland organisations	30
Who's Who in the native woodland world: Part 1 – Gordon Gray-Stephens	30
List of contributors	32

Photos by Andy Acton, Ben Averis, Pauline Jewett, Nick Marshall, Mary-Ann Smyth and Susannah White.

Line drawings by Ben Averis.

EDITORIAL

Alison Averis

Here is the latest edition of the Newsletter, with the reports of the field meeting to Arran. It's good to have some new contributors here, as well as the Old Faithfuls who always seem to step in and write a report. Thanks everybody. There is the news of next year's outing to the Isle of Skye – and a chance to reserve accommodation. Please send Chris a deposit for accommodation now if you can, as B&B places are likely to be in short supply and late bookers may have problems finding somewhere to stay. There is also a big report on the Atlantic Oakwoods Symposium held in Oban this Autumn – one of the more important woodland events of the year.

Subscription forms are enclosed for those of you who don't yet pay by Standing Order. If you do pay by Standing Order, please remember to let us know if you change your address – without an annual membership form we cannot keep track of where you are, so if you want to keep receiving the Newsletter, you'll have to keep us up-to-date with your address. Please note that the membership secretary is now **Rachel Avery**.

Sadly, I've had no book reviews, articles or details of forthcoming events for this issue. Where are you all? Please keep us informed about anything going on in woodlands. All contributions are welcome, whether long and erudite or short and informal.

NEW EDITOR

By the summer of 2006 I'll have completed a three-year term as Newsletter Editor and would be happy to hand over the job to someone else. It is not especially time-consuming – a few days twice a year to assemble all the contributions, send the complete text to the printer and then send it out to members. There is an honorarium for the Editor if he or she is either self-employed or unable to do the work as part of his or her paid employment. The main problem is getting people to contribute, so the post would suit someone with a lot of contacts in the native woodland world. It's interesting work and I have enjoyed doing it. If you think you could do the job, please let me know – and be warned: if we have no volunteers then someone is going to get buttonholed at some point...

NEW PUBLICATIONS

If you have written, or co-written, a book or booklet which would interest our members, we can enclose your fliers with our mailings. This service is free to individual members. There is a charge of £20, to cover postage and packing, for organisations and non-members. We can also get books reviewed - just send a copy to the editor. Conversely, if you would like to review a particular book, please let the editor know. We are usually able to obtain a free review copy from the publisher and, if you review it, the book is yours to keep.



NATIVE WOODLANDS DISCUSSION GROUP NEWS

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

Gordon Gray Stephens

Autumn 2005 is providing those bits of Scotland that I've seen in September with a rather muted, but very fine display. Maybe an increasing realisation of the delights of autumn just comes with gray hairs!

2006 is rushing up, and this newsletter carries first details of the excursion to Skye. Chris Marsh has been working away, and we have secured Sabhal Mor Ostaig as a venue. It's a great place to as a centre for our activities, and comes with the added benefit of a pre-arranged musical session. However the down side is that we have to be there during a bank holiday weekend. This makes early booking of accommodation all the more important: Skye is a very popular island!

The response to the first consultation on the Scottish Forestry Strategy is emerging. Check the Forestry Commission's website (www.forestry.gov.uk) for updates. An initial response was presented to the Scottish Forestry Forum at the end of September, and the strong theme of spending public money to deliver public benefits bodes well for increased recognition for native woodlands in the new strategy. LINK are still hoping to find an opportunity to talk to the Rural Affairs Committee in the Autumn. There will be a second round of consultation early in 2006, and I would urge everyone to get a copy of the documents and make the case for native woodlands!

The Forestry Commission has bitten off another big mouthful of work by undertaking to change the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme at the same time as they develop a new strategy. The reason for the rush is to allow forestry grants to be more closely aligned with other land use grants through the Rural Development Regulations (I'm told that only 3 people really understand all this, and that 2 of them are mad...). This linking of grants is something that the conservation sector has been promoting for many years; now we have to ensure that the reality meets our expectations.

The combination of the Atlantic Oakwood Symposium and the Lichen Workshop during one session around Oban brought together a good crowd that I missed because I was hosting a visit by the Forestry for People Panel to Argyll on the relevant dates. Hopefully one result of the Symposium will be an increased awareness of the importance of our Atlantic Oakwoods.

At the AGM concern was expressed over the state of Arran's indigenous whitebeam population, and several members volunteered to provide time and effort to try to improve their condition. The committee were tasked to write a letter to the owner of Glen Diomhan and offer assistance and advice. This we did, but have not had the honour of a reply. However we hear that negotiations between the owner and government agencies are ongoing, and that there is a good chance that these negotiations will have a positive outcome.

Another decision taken at the AGM was to support Woods for All in their work. Woods for All works to bring people with physical and mental disabilities into contact with woodlands. Hugh Fife is working up a scheme which will take the example established with the Argyll & Bute Psychiatric Hospital and Blarbuie Woodland and see where else it can be applied in Scotland. Our support will help to deliver this work.

On a sadder note, we must mark the death of one of the people who did most to bring woodlands and people together in Scotland (including chairing the first incarnation of the aforementioned Panel, and also hosting our Group's Field Visit to Ardtornish). Andrew Raven wore many hats, and used his influence to effectively press the case for a vision of rural Scotland that many Discussion Group members subscribe to.

It's good to be able to report that we have xx paid up members. This newsletter provides an opportunity to remind you that Standing Orders are a real help for our new treasurer, Jeanette Hall, and that subs for 2006 are due. Those of you who do not pay by Standing Order will receive a membership form with this newsletter: please pay up as soon as you can. And do please remember to send the forms to **Rachel Avery**, our new Membership Secretary, and not to Jeanette!

NWDG MERCHANDISE

Bryophytes of Native Woods: A Field Guide to Common Mosses and Liverworts of Britain and Ireland's Woodlands by Carol Crawford is available direct from Carol. The cost is £6.50 including p&p. Cheques should be made payable to The Natural Resource Consultancy, and sent to Carol at 4d New Bridge Street, Ayr, KA7 1JX. There are discounts for orders for 3 or more copies: contact Carol at tnrc@aol.com for more information.

Eschenbach hand-lenses are available from Ben Averis, 2 Traprain Cottages, Haddington, East Lothian, EH41 4PY. These x10 lenses are made from solid plastic and do not steam up in the rain. They cost £19 by post - please make cheques payable to 'Native Woodlands Discussion Group'. They will also be available at the field excursion and at the Lower Plants workshops.

NWDG T-shirts are available from Richard Thompson (address inside front cover) for £10 each including postage and packing. These high-quality garments are made of natural-coloured cotton (a rich cream). They have the NWDG logo on the front and a portrait of a veteran tree on the back. The printing is dark green. Sizes available are Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large. Please make cheques payable to 'Native Woodlands Discussion Group'. These will also be available at the field excursion.

We have stocks of the following **back issues of the Newsletter**: Autumn 2003, Spring 2004, Autumn 2004, Spring 2005. Prices are £2.50 each including postage. Please order from the editor, making cheques payable to 'Native Woodlands Discussion Group'.

SUMMER EXCURSION 2006: ISLE OF SKYE

25-28 May 2006

Chris Marsh

Thinking ahead into 2006, the annual NWDG excursion to Skye is now taking shape...

Based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig (the Gaelic college) on the Sleat peninsula in south Skye, the main theme of this exciting excursion will be native woodland restoration at both micro- and macro-levels(!). The Skye and Lochalsh area has a number of ambitious native woodland projects under consideration or actually underway and the Excursion will include:

- The Kyleakin & Kinloch Hills estate (Forestry Commission) to look at new planting, regeneration and conifer removal areas to discuss landscape-scale processes and change;
- Balmacara (Forestry Commission Scotland & National Trust for Scotland) where Coille Mhor, an Atlantic oakwood which is a Special Area for Conservation, is surrounded by mature conifers. Up for debate are mechanisms for restoration that are sympathetic to lower plants and that conserve the integrity of the woods;
- A talk and visit to the High Pasture Cave archaeological excavations near Broadford where artefacts are revealing a fascinating 4000-years of human occupation, cultural use, woodland and livestock husbandry;
- A visit to private woodland enclosures where regeneration has been ongoing for a decade or so but now presents questions for future management.

The annual visit will also encompass the AGM as well as at least one evening ceilidh.

In anticipation, we have a block-booking of all available accommodation at the Gaelic college (30 single & 9 twin rooms) which attendees can reserve NOW by sending a cheque for £10 per person to Chris Marsh, 3 Achnacloch, Tarskavaig, Isle of Skye IV46 8SB, specifying whether single or twin accommodation is required. Once all these places have been reserved then 'overflow' attendees will be required to find their own digs in the area (note: it's the late-May bank holiday weekend so B&Bs will be busy).

The costs for the entire weekend's excursions and events have yet to be finalised but will be comparable with previous years (i.e. £35 per NWDG member). Gaelic college B&B fees are Single Room: £25/night; Twin Room: £20 per person per night but this would be payable at the time.

So reserve your accommodation through me now or take your chances in the new year. The formal Booking Form for the event will be sent out in the next NWDG mailing.

REPORT OF THE SUMMER EXCURSION TO ARRAN, 12-15 MAY 2005



Along the Whitefarland-Imachar coast

Photo: Pauline Jewett

INTRODUCTION

Gordon Gray Stephens

Steve Robertson and Pauline Jewett took on the task of organising our Field Visit when they were both working for the East Ayrshire Woodland Initiative. However, in the best traditions they both decided that they would rather live and work at the other end of the country instead. Despite the problems of taking on new and demanding jobs they managed to pull together a programme of visits and events which gave the Group a really good taste of Arran and Holy Island.

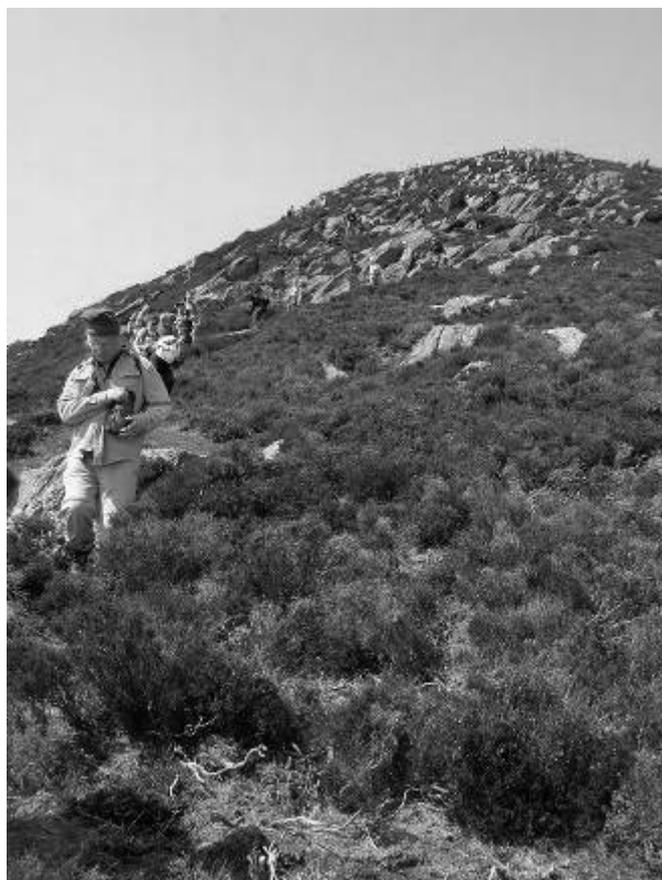
Arran has been described as "Scotland in miniature", and the Field Visit certainly saw enough to justify this. It's an island big enough to accommodate a full range of the opportunities and challenges presented by native woodland management, and the visit, in addition to

stimulating the usual level of interesting discussion, also resulted in some positive actions from the AGM.

13 MAY: HOLY ISLAND

Phil Gordon

On a bright sunny day, sustained by a mid-morning Arran Island ice-cream break, the group was ferried over to Holy Island from Lamlash on small but fast ferryboats (apart from Peter Q & Gordon G S who paddled their own canoes). We were made to feel welcome stepping onto the island by Dolka, Alec, John and Rinchen and some of the other residents from the Buddhist retreat.



On Holy Island

Photo: Pauline Jewett

Holy Island is well named, having been a place with religious and spiritual connections since the 6th century, when the Christian Saint Molaise lived on the island. In 1992 the island came into the hands of the Buddhists as an offshoot of the Eskdalemuir Samye Ling centre. The Buddhists wish to continue the spiritual history of the island, and promote and protect its environment. Management objectives and practices respect the Tibetan Buddhist ethos.

The island is small: roughly 1.5 miles long by half a mile wide, and is a dramatic sight from any direction because of the precipitous central spine of Mullach Beag and Mullach Mòr, rising to about 1000 feet. The only significant flat ground is at the southern and northern ends of the island and is the location of various buildings, including the 60-bed recently-restored farmhouse at the north end, and two lighthouses at the south end.

We took what must be the most popular walk on the island, south along the hill ridge, returning by the gentle coast path on the west side. A few hours on this unusual and dramatic island couldn't do justice to the variety of interests and issues, but that did not stop us from trying to jump to some rapid assessments of existing and future potential habitat management for the island. We were perhaps spurred on by the obvious wish of our hosts to tap the views of those present, hopefully to guide them in their management of the environment.

In addition to an attempt to summarise some of the discussion on the day, this report is the result of further input from the group following the visit. It has been written to try to draw some conclusions from what was seen and heard, at the request of our hosts.

Grazing Animals

Holy Island has a unique grazing regime, with populations of Eriskay ponies and Soay sheep, as well as Saanan feral goats. There are no deer on the island, and currently no rabbits. The ponies, sheep and goats are largely left to “self-regulate” their populations. This is an interesting concept in the absence of large carnivores or culling. The Buddhist carers do intervene to deal with obvious welfare issues, bringing over a vet when needed.

Thoughts on management

There was some disagreement within the group as to the extent to which habitats (other than new trees which are largely fenced) are being affected by the grazing pressure. Clearly in one short visit, a proper assessment is not possible, but whilst a level of grazing is beneficial, for instance in preventing the heather from moving entirely into a “leggy” phase, there was evidence that some of the more favourable grassland was under some pressure. Yet some of the heather did give the appearance of being undergrazed. An understanding of the vegetation dynamics and impact of the various grazing animals would be crucial to many of the habitat management issues on the island. This might be best undertaken by monitoring vegetation changes using transects across the different vegetation types with sample plots. The management of the grazing animals is a complex issue, and to understand the results of vegetation monitoring, it would also be necessary to understand the grazing preferences of the 3 main herbivores (see later paragraph on **Grazing Management**). It should be noted that further woodland exclosures could potentially increase stress on both the animals and the habitat.

Existing Planted & Regenerated Woodland

We were all highly impressed by the work done so far, in such a short time, to make successful efforts to regenerate and plant more native woodland, mainly concentrated on the northern end of the island. This has included a battle with the rhododendron, which is spreading from old bushes on the steep slopes behind the main Buddhist centre. The principal tree species is birch, but localized pockets of better ground have been planted with more demanding species such as ash and oak.

Thoughts on management

As was evident from a visit to Brodick Castle 2 days later, there is a strong case for zero tolerance of rhododendron within defined areas of management. This requires sustained control, and by identifying areas to undergo this management, it is possible to try to quantify and plan for the long-term work required to prevent recolonisation. Being over-ambitious in what can be achieved, or failing to sustain control, only leads to wasted efforts in the long term. Some of the group felt there to be little case for undertaking other work (e.g. thinning, pruning) meantime in these areas of gradually establishing native broadleaved woodland. There was discussion on the subject of re-introducing grazing animals into the woodland areas. The view of most of the group was that it was always going to be risky to reintroduce either the goats or the ponies. If sheep would use these areas, there is less likely to be a conflict.

Future Woodland Planting & Regeneration

The local Forestry Commission Scotland Woodland Officer Tommy McGrory accompanied us on the visit and was happy that the native woodland area was establishing successfully over the 25 hectares covered by the existing Woodland Grant Scheme. Another potential area was pointed out by our hosts near the south end of the island in an area of bracken.

Thoughts on management

Good practice to assess the potential for further new native woodland on the island requires an assessment of all constraints and opportunities. Constraints might include existing flora & fauna of open ground habitats (there were some butterfly sightings on our visit), archaeology, landscape and water. The most significant consideration, given the desire not to intervene significantly in the population of grazing animals, will be again an understanding of grazing animal requirements with regard to area of the various favoured vegetation types. Some of the group felt that a significant opportunity appeared to be the presence of remnant native woodland on the steep west side of the island which has existing species such as birch, oak, ash and rock whitebeam. Holly was seen, and this species along with juniper would be worth considering encouraging here and elsewhere on the island if they do not occur. The priority should be to protect and expand existing woodland remnants, rather than further new planting. This could include expansion of the existing regeneration area at the north end of the island (which clearly is trying already to expand even outwith the enclosure area). Depending on monitoring of regeneration and grazing, further fenced enclosures may be required. However, again this could not be tackled without an understanding of the effects on the grazing animals (e.g. increasing stress) or the habitats (increasing localized overgrazing). There has been some work in Wales on “no-fence planting” techniques (speak to Peter Quelch if you want to know more about this). Suggestions were made as to the value of creating small enclosures to plant with local seed origin trees to act as sources of future expansion by natural regeneration. The above approaches to native woodland expansion may be more appropriate or perhaps should be given higher priority than significant areas of new fenced planting, depending on the site assessments.



On Holy Island

Photo: Pauline Jewett

Access Management

Approximately 2000 day visitors come to the island every year, and possibly the same number again of people attend courses at the centre, and presumably walk out more than once across the island during their stay. Access is only encouraged along the route we took on our visit, and there is clearly path erosion on the main hill path over Mullach Mòr. On the descent to the lighthouse, the foolhardy amongst the group were gripped by the fascination of

the deep (& dangerous) crevasses by the path. This route is a great experience, with views of the animals, young woodland, and panoramic views of Goat Fell, Lamlash Bay, and the faraway Ayrshire coast. The return route along a level path past Buddhist shrines and the Christian cave and spring is a pleasant gentle walk.

Thoughts on management

The erosion on the footpath is associated with areas of more fragile vegetation and soils. On the pier as we departed, there was discussion on monitoring of the route, for instance using fixed point photography, which will give an indication of the speed and extent of further deterioration. There does not appear to be a case at present for wholesale path construction, but a combination of rerouting to less sensitive areas along with improvements over short sections may be the answer. The National Trust for Scotland employ in places what they call "the light touch", and it may be that by for instance localized drainage and placement of local materials won on site, improvements could be made as need dictates. More thought needs to be given to risk management associated with the crevasses. The rope system may actually attract the inquisitive (it did with our group) and is perhaps unsightly. Possibly a combination of boundary posts and signage may be more appropriate, although no conclusion was reached (could the path be re-routed?).

Grazing Management

No-one in the group spoke up for having a good knowledge of the grazing requirements of the Soay sheep and Eriskay ponies. There was general nervousness at woodland regeneration in such close proximity to the goats and ponies in particular, as many of the group have first hand experience of the devastation that can be caused. Sheep are by comparison relatively benign, and would be better suited to eventual reintroduction into established woodland areas. There was a view amongst most of the group that there was value in maintaining the unique current range of grazing animals, with there being no need to make further species introductions. Many of the group felt that studies such as on Rum (ponies) and St. Kilda (Soay sheep) should be tapped into to understand grazing preferences and management of these animals.

Monitoring

There can be little doubt that monitoring vegetation, trees and footpaths will in time yield some suggestions as to future management direction. Without monitoring, snapshots in time such as the day of our visit can be misleading and give rise to the temptation to jump to false conclusions. There are many techniques from relatively simple fixed-point photography through to systematic sampling plots and systems. Making an early start on this would be more important than deliberating too long on all that could be measured. Current and historical aerial photographs could help greatly with vegetation changes in particular.

Further Advice/Contacts

Grazing Dynamics:

Helen Armstrong (Forest Research); helen.armstrong@forestry.gsi.gov.uk Tel: 0131 445 6954

Mike Smith (Independent Consultant); Mikey@ecostep.demon.co.uk Tel: 0131 477 0218

Access works:

National Trust for Scotland (run training courses: charris@nts.org.uk)

Native Woodland Management:

Peter Quelch, 6 Glengilp, Ardrishaig, Argyll; 01546 602 067 (Ardrishaig, Argyll). (Has already offered to revisit.)

Pauline Jewett, National Trust for Scotland, The Stables, Sauchen, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, AB51 7LD. Tel: 01330 830 211. E mail; pjewett@nts.org.uk

Rhododendron Management

Conclusions

Suggested Action Plan:

1. Keep on with the elimination of the rhododendron
2. Keep up the localized clearance of bracken around tree shelters
3. Consider the options for woodland regeneration on the western cliffs
4. Consider learning about the "light touch" path maintenance from the National Trust for Scotland
5. Once the trees in the current planted/regeneration areas are about 10 to 12 years old, trial the reintroduction of Soay sheep.
6. Monitor grazing pressure (look at important sensitive areas), and have a plan for stock reduction if necessary

Other Comments

It is difficult to draw conclusions from a single short visit, but we hope that some of the comments in this report will add to the existing knowledge, and help foster the obvious enthusiasm and skills of the Buddhist residents and guests of the island.

Developing an understanding of the processes at work with regard to the flora and fauna of the island, rather than following opinions of outsiders formed rapidly, is most likely to lead to appropriate management. Management clearly has to take account of Buddhist principles, but be founded on an understanding of the science (and some might say, the art) of habitat management.

We all did conclude however that the sweet potato and parsnip cake that we were offered with tea as we left the island was possibly the best cake ever made.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those that contributed to the report by discussing vigorously on the day. Many thanks also for input to this report subsequently by Ruth Anderson, Pauline Jewett, Mary-Ann Smyth and Peter Quelch.

13 MAY 2005: THE UNGRAZED RAISED BEACH - WHITEFARLAND TO IMACHAR POINT, ARRAN

Mary-Ann Smythe

Dropped on a blind bend in the sun, we slipped into the woods through willow, rowan, ash, bog myrtle, oak, bluebells and wood anemone to Robertsons' graves (no Steves). And a boulder with Wilson's filmy fern and navelwort (then came a shout: 'It's an inny, not an outy!')

We emerged blinking onto a shore of rock dragons and a strandline of sea thrift and primroses. Looking up, the cliffs were a tumble of ancient woods. Below them, a froth of bracken and a grassy margin to rocks and the sea. Strands of NWDGers drifted past kingcup, iris, bramble, gorse, eared willow, foxglove, violet murmuring 'Abandoned by farmers' 'Reverting to woodland' 'Not in a scheme'. We saw an ancient hawthorn, climbing *Corydalis* in the bracken; and little woodland and shore flowers - birdsfoot trefoil, bluebells, kingcup, pignut. A blasted hazel guarded a cave overhung with ivy and dripping onto ferns, garlic, wood anemone and a dark crescent of water – cast a wish here, and bronze age gods might answer.

Amphidium mougeotii, a thalloid liverwort, *Conocephalum conicum* (the orange scented one), maidenhair spleenwort, lady fern, hard shield fern, black spleenwort on a wall. Hay scented

buckler fern, sanicle in flower. The smell of crushed wild garlic. A cluster of bent backs in a green glade of bluebells under an ash. Lots of different *Peltigeras*.

Calls of wren, robin, raven - and green-tangled raving:
'This is like so totally *Sticta*'
'Seen this one?'
'That's herb robert and wood sorrel, it tastes nice'
'I saw a yellow butterfly'
'Is it a cormorant? We found a dead shag once..'
'Do you want a millipede on your list?'
'There's some really nice western lichens'
'Here's Lobarion lichens on rocks'
'So much richer than the gorge this morning'

Behind a hanging curtain of honeysuckle:
'This is a *real* cave' 'It's got real stalactites!'
Inside there's a rock dove nest with eggs.
Outside, there's an untidy mess of driftwood and wool on a ledge
perched high over a natural arch of fallen lime-rich slabs, grey, layered.
'There's a raven's nest up here, Iris'

Bodies sprawled on the machair and sloshing naked in the gloop
Seaweed crispy in the heat
Cool spray from a waterfall
Oaks splayed over torn rocks
Like a Victorian painting
Thick ivy roots twist up the cliff above a triangle of green fronds and celandines
'I bet someone had tatties there one day, on that little patch'

The cliffs heightened, fractured and turned inland, and we climbed a fence to the bleached shingle of a grazed raised beach and cars shimmering in the heat. 'It would have been an impossible task to have written down all the plant species we've seen' said a biodiversity specialist.



Whitefarland-Imachar coast

Photo: Mary-Ann Smyth

14 MAY 2005: WILD AND MYTHICAL ENCOUNTERS IN GLEANN DIOMHAN

Ian Whitehead

An enthusiastic group of native woodland detectives headed off determinedly through the heat-haze of an Arran May morning in search of two elusive Arran whitebeam species, *Sorbus arranensis* and *Sorbus pseudofennica*.

We followed a rough trail along the burnside, initially passing through birch scrub which slowly subsided as the more open sweeping country characteristic of the Glen began to unfold before us. It wasn't long before excited chit chat ahead announced the first sightings of dangerous wild creatures on the trail. A small group stood huddled around a rather bemused adder which was doing its very best to blend into the background and pretend that its personal space wasn't really being invaded by twenty (mainly) hairy ecologists.

Giving our reptilian friend a reasonable berth we continued our safari, encountering pockets of dwarf juniper close to the streamside. Wildlife encounters abounded and the Glen echoed with the song of meadow pipits, willow warblers and the characteristic "thwak, thwak" of stonechats. Another smaller more measly specimen of an adder was spotted as was a slow worm which quickly slunk off into the undergrowth. It was obvious that by now we were in serious deer territory given the lack of any obvious woodland or potential seed sources. From our location at the confluence of two burns our native guides pointed the way up to the Glen Diomhan National Nature Reserve where the elusive Arran whitebeams were reputed to lurk.

We threaded our way up the narrow rocky gorge watching out for Indians and for evidence of the whitebeam. And lo and behold there they were! The first elusive Arran whitebeams clinging precipitously to life from the rocky walls of the gorge itself, barely discernible amidst the tangle of rowans and boulders. The two species of whitebeam are apomictic hybrids and are able to develop without fertilisation and produce seeds identical to the parents (Armstrong 2003). *S. arranensis* arose as the result of hybridisation between the native *Sorbus rupicola* and common *Sorbus aucuparia*. *S. arranensis* then hybridised again with the *Sorbus aucuparia*, giving rise to the other species *S. pseudofennica*.

It appeared obvious to the group that these two species had remarkably survived in this remote location due to the very inaccessibility which had largely protected the trees from the attentions of peckish red deer.

We were pleased to see that further up the Glen greater protection had been afforded to the remnant woodlands through the erection of (largely) deer proof fencing which had been put up as part of a management agreement with the owner. The group applauded these efforts at conservation and there was much discussion about the benefits this would deliver for the protection and regeneration of these unique and valuable species.

It was felt strongly by the group that even greater value could be added to these measures by extending the fence line further down the glen to take in the other unprotected remnants of woodland. This might also make maintenance of the fence lines easier and would solve the problem of deer getting in through the edges of the current enclosure. Extending the width of the fenced enclosure would also ensure more effective deer proofing. In terms of the future viability of the two species the group also felt that a larger area of woodland would help to ensure protection.

The group continued this debate over lunchtime only to be distracted by news that unusual aquatic wildlife had been observed down in the burn. Apparent fleeting glimpses of pale elfin creatures frolicking in the water inspired animated discussion that the "little people" might actually have continued to exist for thousands of years in this remote enclave. A further report of a larger and more ungainly creature sighted down the glen suggested that alternatively this could be some primitive species of hominid which had evolved parallel with the development of *Homo sapiens*.

Lunch and musings accomplished we descended the Glen catching glimpses of golden eagles soaring high above on the thermals. A pleasant walk took us back down the Glen and into the world of birch and lush vegetation.

Thus ended a very pleasant morning's walk. The group felt very privileged to have seen these rare whitebeams and supported the efforts of the landowner to protect these woodlands in future. There is certainly great scope for developing this work further through incorporating more of the gorge within the fenced area. This will ensure that these remarkable trees are there for generations of native woodland devotees to appreciate in years to come; and who knows; maybe even to provide a home for the "little people" of Glen Diomhan.

**NATIVE WOODLANDS DISCUSSION GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
SATURDAY 14TH MAY 2005, MCALPINE HOTEL, BRODICK
Ruth Anderson**

Welcome

Gordon Gray Stephens welcomed everybody to the meeting.

Minutes of previous AGM

These were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting (proposed Simon Stuart, seconded Mary-Ann Smyth).

Chair's Report (Gordon Gray Stephens)

The Committee had met four times throughout the year (September, December, March and May). As an action from last year's 30th Anniversary Meeting, a joint NWDG / Scottish Environment LINK policy meeting with MSPs was planned for September.

Newsletter Report (Alison Averis, presented by Gordon Gray Stephens)

As usual, two newsletters had gone out. Alison would welcome more contributions, especially for the spring edition. Anyone with reports of activities or organisations should contact her. In particular, if members wished to review new publications, Alison was usually able to obtain a free copy for this purpose.

Treasurer's Report (Tim Hall, presented by Gordon Gray Stephens)

The financial situation was as reported in the Spring Newsletter (2005), with a healthy end of year balance of £5129. The 2004 excursion had made a profit – congratulations to Steve Brown. The accounts would be going to Alison Mitchell of SNW for auditing soon.

It had been agreed previously to retain a reserve of £750. In addition, some of the current surplus was earmarked for bryophytes and lichens publications, and for the joint LINK/NWDG meeting in the autumn.

The meeting discussed potential projects which could be funded from the remaining surplus:

- a fund for an overseas study tour
- a repeat or follow-up workshop on regeneration following the successful one at Battleby (1999). This idea might be linked to forthcoming publications - (Peter Quelch, Richard Thompson, Scott Wilson)
- sponsored woodland activities for the mentally ill (possibly linked to Hugh Fife's work with the disabled)
- a woodland and archaeology workshop
- a concessionary rate (£15) for the excursion

Lower Plants Workshops (Joe Hope)

There had been four Lower Plants outings during the year (fungi, mycorrhiza, bryophytes and lichens) all with good attendance and feedback. Thanks to Joe and Rachel for organising these. Three workshops were planned for autumn 2005 (lichens, bryophytes and fungi – details in spring newsletter).

Election of 2005-06 Committee

Jeanette Hall had stood down as Membership Secretary, and Tim Hall was standing down this autumn as Treasurer. Rachel Avery had joined the Committee as Membership Secretary, and Jeanette had offered to take over as Treasurer.

Committee membership was therefore agreed as follows (proposed Donald MacLeod, seconded Mary-Ann Smyth):

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| • Gordon Gray Stephens | Chair |
| • Jeanette Hall | Treasurer |
| • Alison Averis | Newsletter Editor |
| • Rachel Avery | Membership Secretary |
| • Meg Pollock | Website |
| • Ruth Anderson | Minutes Secretary |
| • Juliet Robinson | Arty Workshops |
| • Joe Hope | Lower Plants |
| • Richard Thompson | Ordinary member |

2006 Excursion

First choice: Skye – the Committee had contacted potential organiser Chris Marsh
Other ideas: Lochaber (potential organiser Jamie MacIntyre/Ian Collier) or Highland Perthshire (Paul Schofield).

AOB

A number of the NWDG's stylish and distinguished T-shirts were still available – those wishing to avail themselves of this unique attire should contact Richard Thompson.

The Group discussed the Arran whitebeams they had seen in Glen Diomhan (the only trees indigenous only to Scotland, and native only to Arran). It was felt that the condition of the woodland, both within and below the current enclosure, could be improved, and the Committee would contact the owner offering impartial advice. A report of the excursion was also to be sent to the local paper.

Review of Scottish Forestry Strategy

The Scottish Forestry Strategy was being reviewed this year, with a 2-stage consultation process. Stage 1 would commence May/June with a series of 8-10 topic papers on the FCS website (including amongst others, industry development, climate change, rural development, social/community aspects, and native woodlands). These papers were intended to stimulate thought and debate in contribution to the second stage. Stage 2 would be in the more usual form of consultation on the draft new strategy (autumn 2005).

Following the resolution at the 30th Anniversary Meeting in 2004 that the Group might engage more actively in policy matters, a meeting was to be held in the autumn with MSPs, as a briefing opportunity to emphasise the importance of native woodlands and implications for the SFS review. This was being organised jointly with the Forestry Task Force of Scottish Environment LINK. It was noted that MSPs were usually more active on issues raised by constituents.

Hopefully, many NWDG members would be responding directly to the consultation. However, it might also be worth submitting a Group response. Members were invited to submit thoughts on the SFS to the group. To this end a new NWDG egroup would be formed.

15 MAY 2005: RHODODENDRON PONTICUM: MONSTER OR MINDER?

Simon Stuart and Ruth Anderson

On Sunday a small, dedicated if somewhat pale and dishevelled group gathered together at Merkland wood on the eastern side of Brodick Castle estate. The big deal here is NTS's zero tolerance policy for *ponticum*, and we were treated to a Before and After Spectacular. Our guide on this foray was Mr Steve Mason from the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) ranger service, who is an energetic soldier in the war against *ponticum* – it was impressive to meet a man who has weathered a 3 day conference on *ponticum* control (clearly a big subject).

Merkland wood is approximately 18 ha in size. Extensive planting was carried out from the 1760's-1820's, as part of a larger landscape design, which included woodland planting. The planting mixture included sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, European larch *Larix decidua*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, beech *Fagus sylvatica* and silver fir *Abies alba*. Most of the woodland areas still strongly reflect these plantings, though the current ash component does not compare with the high proportion of ash used in these two phases of establishment.

Rhododendron control has been ongoing for the last five years through a Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme and Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust (MFST) funding, but has been happening at Brodick for much longer than this.



Rhododendron ponticum

Photo: Ben Averis

Historically the removal of *R. ponticum* has relied on cutting and burning the bushes, often using volunteers to carry out the work. Steve stated that approximately 10 ha had been treated at £1000/ha; this kind of price is of course only possible by using volunteers (or slave labour). Recently stem injections have become the favoured control method. This entails drilling a hole of the required size in the stem and squirting a couple of millilitres of neat glyphosate into the hole. A system of marking bushes that have been treated gave a colourful appearance to the undergrowth.

One drawback with stem injection is that you are left with dead bushes standing throughout the wood, looking unsightly or, even worse, providing shelter for new seedlings or regrowth of the rhododendron. This problem is being tackled in Brodick by a firewood contractor clearing the dead bushes for sale (very pleasing, and ironically the most tangible forest product for islanders we saw on any of our visits on Arran). This does remove the unsightly bushes but leaves the ground looking like something from the Somme - everything was brown - mud, stumps, sticks, rocks, even the light, and a little smoke drifting from fires to complete the atmosphere.

The woodland has a sparse overstorey and almost non-existent shrub layer and ground flora immediately after the *R. ponticum* is removed. However, the western end of the wood which has been cleared the longest is showing good regeneration, of birch especially but with the occasional oak seedling, and an amazingly natural ground flora with blaeberreries looking as if they've never been away. Patches of *ponticum* are still appearing within this woodland, especially as until recently some large areas of *ponticum* remained along the Merkland burn. Zero tolerance means teams of folk going back over it yard by yard repeatedly – and not losing heart. Long term rhododendron control is made difficult by the eastern edge of the wood being a wall of *ponticum* at the boundary with the adjacent property.

Other works are being carried out with the FC and MFST funding - a new footpath is being put in place, but as the group found out this is not quite finished, and some minor engineering works were required to negotiate a particularly boggy piece of ground. The path has been draped carefully through the wood to show things off to advantage, like the huge chunk of mudstone/sandstone we came upon (20 or 30 feet high, and wider than that) over which dinosaurs probably tramped in steamy jungle days.... Post-ceilidh NWWDG members gazed in wonder and climbers amongst them pondered its scalability.

Other invasive species are taking advantage of the rhododendron removal to become established, two of the most abundant being salmonberry and western hemlock. The hemlock is seeding in from the Forestry Commission woodlands to the north; these are now being reshaped, but provide a seed source for a number of exotic species; western hemlock being perhaps the most pernicious.

The group did venture into the Forestry Commission woodland to have a look at the Tunbridge filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*) along the banks of the Merkland burn. The fern is found in both the NTS and FC woodlands along the burn and is supposedly one of the largest populations of this fern in Britain. It is felt that the presence of *R. ponticum* is providing the shade the fern favours and that any removal of the rhododendron will adversely effect the fern. Indeed evidence of the fern drying up in the sunshine were apparent. However, paraphrasing someone more knowledgeable than ourselves in these matters, (one Mister B. Averis) a report of March 2005 proposes that the current population of *H. tunbrigense* here has probably increased to an unnatural extent, and removal of the shade-providing exotics (mainly rhododendron but also western hemlock) will probably reduce the population but restrict the fern to a more natural distribution.

All in all a very pleasant Sunday morning stroll to blow the cobwebs (and hangovers) away before boarding the ferry back to the mainland.

ATLANTIC OAKWOODS SYMPOSIUM - 14-16 SEPTEMBER 2005

Richard Thompson

This meeting was organised by the Botanical Society of Scotland and took place in the Corran Hills, Oban. It was well attended (150 delegates) and covered a wide range of aspects including oak as a species, oakwood ecology and management.



Photo: Ben Averis

Introduction

Douglas Malcolm (President of the Botanical Society of Scotland) gave the opening address which outlined the purpose of the meeting and went on to describe the development of vegetation community classifications in Great Britain and where Atlantic oakwoods fit into these.

The aim of the symposium was to identify the extent and distribution of Atlantic oakwoods, to collate current knowledge of biodiversity and to identify existing condition in the context of historical developments and future management.

Definition and distribution

Phil Baarda (Highland Birchwoods) gave the first presentation, looking at various ways to define Atlantic oakwoods. He began with a broad definition of Atlantic woods and considered whether eastern examples such as Cawdor could be included. Various classifications were considered and a combination of mean rainfall and temperature provided the most convincing boundary of oceanicity [This included woodlands along Loch Ness which concurs with observations from Ben Averis who has described the lower plant interest of a wood in this area as comparable with woods much further west].

Phil went on to describe the achievements of the two LIFE Nature projects in Atlantic oakwoods, and illustrated examples of work that had been funded such as rhododendron clearance and fencing.

The next presentation was given by Daniel Kelly (Department of Botany, University of Dublin). Daniel discussed the oakwoods of Ireland, describing their diversity and challenges for conservation. After a description of historic use and misuse of these woods, biodiversity of the most oceanic examples (particularly the Killarney oakwoods) was illustrated. Vegetation communities were then presented and contrasted with GB's National Vegetation Classification.

Current condition was discussed with particular reference to the impact of grazing and rhododendron. Concern was expressed over the condition of these woods and it was suggested that greater, more effective conservation activity was required.

Genetic history

Joan Cottrell (Forest Research, Northern Research Station of the Forestry Commission), then focussed on oak as a genus and described a study which has assessed colonisation of oak throughout Europe. Joan explained the use of chloroplast DNA to assess the spread of oak from post-glacial refugia and showed that British material originated in the Iberian peninsula. The route was through Spain and France, entering the south coast of Britain at several locations. Taking into account topography at the time of colonisation, she suggested that oak currently on the west coast of Scotland may have entered via Ireland over land bridges present at the time. Speed of colonisation was rapid (as much as 500 m per year) and there was much discussion about how this could have occurred.

Microsatellites (another type of genetic marker, found in the cell nucleus) have been used to determine the parents of oak seedlings in an oakwood and the majority had short dispersal distances.

Samantha Davies (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Heriot Watt, Edinburgh) then described a model which illustrates the influence that different seed dispersal distances and frequencies could have on spatial genetic structure. Samantha showed that genetic diversity and patchiness are both highly linked to rare long-distant dispersal (i.e. rare events of acorns being dispersed over very long distances (c.100 km)). Not surprisingly, this generated much discussion with possible explanations including squadrons of jays flying up the Corrieyairack Pass (that one from Douglas) and movement through human migration suggested by Phil Page (English Nature; Yarnier Wood). Dr John Birks (now based at Bergen University) raised the possibility that oak refugia could have been more widely distributed as suggested by recent work on charcoal macro-fossils.

Cultural History

Philip Sansum (Belfast University) presented findings from his PhD which looked at the relationship between ecological change and human use in Atlantic oakwoods. Philip's study used evidence from pollen cores taken from Glen Nant and Lower Fernoch. The hollows selected were thought to collect pollen only from within a 3 ha area and hence were likely to reflect the species composition of these woods.

Initial changes in the pollen record showed a reduction in filmy ferns and an expansion in bracken, indicating a move from old growth (sheltered high forest) to a more open woodland structure arising from the activities of medieval man. By the 17th century, tree pollen was very low. The pollen record indicated that things changed in the 18th century when frequent stand-destroying events took place (suggesting 6 harvests of coppice material from 1700 to 1850). Alder, hazel and oak pollen were frequent during this period. Birch pollen was not recorded in any quantity until coppice was abandoned, suggesting active management to remove this species. Philip concluded with the suggestion that species of Atlantic flora may be more resilient to disturbance than previously thought.

Peter Quelch then talked about the structure and utilisation of early oakwoods (examples of wood-pasture trees and use of small diameter oak in early buildings were included) and discussed the application of this knowledge to future woodland management. The models of management from the Sunart work (George Peterken and Rick Worrell's report for the LIFE Atlantic oakwoods project) were summarised, with examples given of where these may be appropriate.

Peter highlighted the need to consider ecological responses rather than trying to return to a reference point. Oakwoods were described in the context of dynamic landscapes and changing climate and use. Future composition and structure of oakwoods would change as a consequence. The issue of oakwoods as dynamic rather than fixed communities was raised several times during the symposium.

The section on cultural history was concluded by Chris Smout who summarised an account of the use of oak as a crop during the 18th and 19th centuries. Irish pioneers began to search the west coast of Scotland for oak bark for their tanning industry. This enterprise soon failed and was followed by the arrival of English ironmasters who transformed the structure and composition of many woodlands to feed the iron furnaces of Bonawe and elsewhere. Chris described the short-lived, intensive and systematic management of the woods concerned and subsequent decline in management as the charcoal and tanbark industries ended due to availability of alternative raw materials.

Present structure and composition

John Rodwell presented an international view of Atlantic oakwoods and closely defined them as NVC community W17a (*Isothecium myosuroides* – *Diplophyllum albicans* sub-community) [during subsequent discussions, John agreed that W11 should be included where it occurs in association with this type and has abundant epiphytes]. John put GB's status in perspective when he described a discussion with a Russian botanist who considered his patch to be influenced by the Atlantic. The European Vegetation Survey was used to provide a fascinating tour of other oakwood communities with illustrations of how they differ floristically. Two climatic gradients were described (with the level of oceanicity again emphasised), from east to west and from south to north. John described Atlantic oakwoods as dynamic communities within a climatic envelope. He stated that, where there is a dominance of oak, this is almost always artificial although less so in W17 communities than in W11.

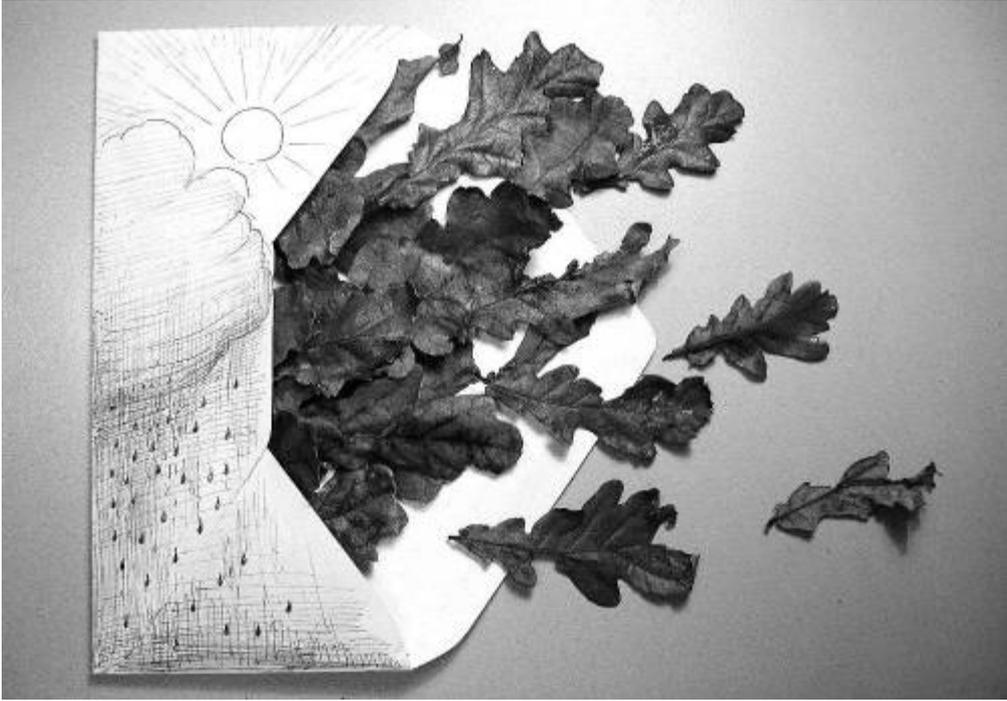


Photo: Ben Averis

Rhododendron control

Colin Edwards covered rhododendron control, describing a strategic approach at the landscape scale. The emphasis was on removing the seed source first, starting upwind. A range of control techniques were covered, including stem injection. Colin also described the development of a model of rhododendron dispersal and population dynamics.

Ensuing discussion identified that rhododendron control is a major issue in the conservation and management of these woodlands.

Present structure and composition (2)

This session summarised the value of Atlantic oakwoods for lower plants and fungi. Mary Gibby (Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh) began with a paper on fern diversity. Mary's main focus was on *Dryopteris* species. Several less well-known of these can be encountered (in some cases, quite frequently) within these woodlands. *D. carthusiana*, *D. expansa* and *D. aemula* were described.

Mary also described the ecological requirements and diversity of filmy ferns. The location of Killarney fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*) was covered in some detail. Sporophytes of this species have a very restricted distribution but the exciting story was told of the discovery of gametophytes over a much wider geographic area, including locations in the east and south-east of England (surviving under very shaded rock overhangs).

This session continued with a paper by Gordon Rothero, describing the bryophytes of Atlantic oakwoods. Global distributions were described for familiar species of liverwort (including cloud forests in southern Africa), which, in Europe, are restricted to Atlantic woods. The richness of Atlantic oakwoods in GB and Ireland was compared with elsewhere and their importance was emphasised. Species such as *Scapania gracilis* were described as being frequently encountered in western woods but very restricted elsewhere. The need for disturbance was highlighted by the example of *Sematophyllum micans* which persists on bare rocks at ground level and requires surface flushing (a photograph was shown where these conditions had been created through disturbance from deer tracks).

Gordon discussed the implications of woodland condition for bryophytes with particular reference to rhododendron. Examples were given where management plans had been prepared but not acted upon and the cover of rhododendron continued.

Brian Coppins (RBGE) then described the lichen flora. A similar picture to that of bryophytes emerged, with GB having international responsibility for 86 species, a number of which are critically endangered or near threatened.

Different lichen communities were described: acid bark species of the *Parmelium laevigatum* community, the *Lobarion* community preferring more basic bark (helpfully described by Brian as the big flappy ones!) and *Graphidion* lichens of smooth barked trees.

The value of companion tree species (e.g. hazel, ash, elm, willows) to oak was emphasised, with the requirement of some lichen species for bark with a higher pH than that typically encountered on oak. The value of the heartwood of dead oak was stressed for some species.

This session was concluded by Roy Watling who described the fungi of western Scottish woodlands. Roy contrasted the value of oak in terms of its associated species to that of beech (oak being comparatively poor with beech supporting 80% of fungi associated with trees in GB). The importance of birch and hazel was stressed, with oak/birch/hazel woods generally being much richer than woods dominated by oak. Roy considered that there was a lack of knowledge about fungal communities in Atlantic oakwoods and stated the importance of reliable records from field naturalists, backed up by taxonomists.

Faunal relationships

Steve Palmer (CEH Banchory) discussed the impact of deer in Atlantic oakwoods, focusing on studies that were carried out under the LIFE Atlantic oakwoods project. Steve and colleagues have returned to some of these experiments to assess progress of regeneration following increased deer control. Pellet group counts indicated that there were fewer deer; however, growth of seedlings showed mixed results. Fencing made a substantial difference to height growth and in many unfenced plots there was minimal to negative height growth. In some sites, survival was high despite continued browsing and in one site, hazel put on substantial height in unfenced plots.

The architecture of the seedling was thought to make a difference, with birch and rowan surviving by growth of shoots from the base of seedlings whereas hazel and oak were generally more vulnerable as seedlings due to the whorl of leaves on the top of the stem. Experiments were undertaken to assess whether oak saplings planted into brash were less vulnerable to browsing. Results indicated that this did not offer protection although it was difficult to simulate natural regeneration as planting of transplants was problematic.

Arjun Amar then presented results of a survey to examine the population changes of characteristic birds of Welsh and Scottish western oakwoods (redstarts, pied flycatchers, wood warblers and tree pipits). The survey spans the last two decades. Overall, it showed depressing results with substantial declines in wood warblers and tree pipits and declines in redstart in Scotland. An increase in vegetation cover was shown in lower height bands (understorey) and this accords with results from the Bunce plots. This is thought to be the most important factor leading to declining populations although the same population trends have been recorded elsewhere throughout Europe and it is possible that, as these species are all migratory, factors associated with their wintering grounds may be involved.

The final presentation in this session was given by Alistair Sommerville (Biodiversity Solutions). Alistair described the value of woodlands in general for invertebrates and looked at some specific species associated with oak. The value of all components of a woodland was illustrated, from leaves, canopy branches, deadwood and sap runs to nectar sources, leaf litter and associated fungi. Important functional species were illustrated (e.g. millipedes being particularly important for leaf litter breakdown). The habitat requirements of the chequered skipper butterfly were described, emphasising the importance of clearings for invertebrates and regional differences in habitat suitability (in this case, focusing on climate and geology).

Conservation/ Management policy

Jonathan Humphrey (NRS) discussed the role of forest habitat networks in reversing habitat fragmentation. This was brought to life very effectively through the use of Robbie and Callum Humphrey (Jonathan's sons) and their normal foraging habitat (Tesco). The image of Jonathan's brother's car stranded on the slipway awaiting the Armadale ferry represented a species isolated by an impermeable habitat (the sound of Sleaford!). Never a dull moment...

Mull was presented as a case study to show how the landscape ecology tool *BEETLE* can be used to determine a functional habitat network. Focal species with different dispersal distances were selected (marsh fritillary butterfly, *Pseudocyphellaria norvegica* (a *Lobarion* lichen) and the song thrush). The effect of randomised new native woodland was shown on the future land cover of suitable habitat for each species selected.

It was my turn then to discuss work that Joe Hope and I are doing in Glencripesdale (south side of Loch Sunart) to assess the impact of clearfell of Sitka spruce plantations on ancient woodland communities (e.g. mature oaks and associated epiphytes) in Planted Ancient Woodland Sites. The first part of my talk concentrated on the condition of epiphytic lichens on remaining native trees prior to the felling of the plantation. A number of possible outcomes from clearance of plantation trees were considered, including potential reduction of *Lobarion* species in more open plots as bryophyte mats dry out and increase in lichen abundance in more restricted plots as light levels increase. I also summarised work that

Richard Marriott has undertaken on molluscs which so far shows that, prior to Sitka felling, there are similar numbers of species in ancient woodland remnants as in more extensive ancient semi-natural stands and fewer numbers of species (nevertheless more than we expected) in areas dominated by plantation trees without ground flora.

The second aspect of my presentation discussed the need for alternative silvicultural approaches to restoration and options in the uplands. The talk concluded with a brief look at monitoring for management needs.

Max Hislop (NRS) followed with a thought-provoking series of questions about what we considered to be the community, why and how we might engage with them. A series of “soft” and “hard” reasons for the community to get involved were presented. These ranged from landscape aesthetics to the potential to provide sustainable employment. This conceptual presentation provided a useful basis for the second half of the double act which was presented by Jamie McIntyre (Forest Enterprise, Lochaber).

Jamie presented a view from the Loch Sunart Oakwoods Initiative and showed how local people have benefited from conservation management. In return, we were shown how the woods have benefited from rural development. An abiding image was provided of a local man, who, after attending a woodland extraction and utilisation event, was inspired to purchase a Wood Miser and is now earning his living from sustainable and beneficial oakwood management.

The symposium was concluded by a discussion led by Rob Soutar. He structured this into three themes: culture, conservation and research. The main issue discussed under culture was making people more aware of the special value of Atlantic oakwoods and the possibility was raised of forging stronger links with bodies concerned with Celtic culture. The issue of whether to use the term “Atlantic woods” rather than “Atlantic oakwoods” was debated. Several considered that this was the right approach, particularly for promotion to a wider audience. Others felt strongly that this would be incorrect as it would lose the distinction that we had been striving hard to define over the last two days.

The main concern under conservation was to bolster existing woodlands through an effective habitat network and to allow for dynamic processes whilst maintaining the special qualities discussed [It would have been useful, sometime during the symposium, to discuss the impact of different levels of intervention on these special qualities. Nevertheless, principles that arose during the proceedings will make this easier to debate in the future]. There was particular concern about making management planning more effective to achieve favourable condition over a greater proportion of the resource.

Under the research theme, the main issue was to maintain a high calibre of taxonomists and to gain a greater understanding of Atlantic oakwood specialist species in groups such as invertebrates and fungi.

Douglas Malcolm rounded up the symposium and included a short tribute to Peter Quelch on the eve of his retirement. We were asked to show our appreciation of Peter’s contribution to the native woodland world and our applause persisted for some time.

Three important players working away in the background were Pat Cochrane, Shiela Wilson and Liz Poulson. It is a credit to Douglas that, in spite of three speakers calling off at the last minute (for reasons beyond their control) the symposium was considered to be a resounding success.

Field trip to Glen Nant and Bonawe Furnace

Friday saw 83 delegates head out to Glen Nant Atlantic oakwood. Yours truly was in charge of timekeeping and it was difficult breaking up fascinating discussions to move folk on to the next stop. These discussions focused on the need, or otherwise, for management intervention, stand dynamics at the landscape scale and deer control.

Everyone was very well-behaved and I only got near to confiscating hand lenses on one occasion! The relevant speakers discussed lichens, woodland structure, bryophytes, fungi, evidence from pollen data and deer impacts. Additional talks were given by Bob Black who described detailed monitoring of an enclosure plot, by Ruth Mitchell who reported the effect of nitrogen deposition on lichens and Andy Chadwick who showed us some of FE's PAWS restoration. Rather like the hotelier in "Local Hero", Bob and Peter reappeared as members of the Argyll Green Woodworkers to demonstrate charcoal burning and use of adze, side axe and a stock knife. Apart from a short shower of rain (which was timed to coincide accurately with lunch), the sun shone and the midges stayed away. The day concluded with a relaxed tour around Bonawe furnace where the size of the charcoal sheds put everything into perspective.



*At Glen Nant
White*

Photo: Susannah

REPORTS OF WORKSHOPS IN 2005

MOSSES AND LIVERWORTS OF WESTERN WOODS AND HEATHS, 6-8 OCTOBER 2005 (LOWER PLANTS GROUP GO MOUNTAINEERING)

Lorraine Servant

You may have noticed that the lower plants section recently advertised a course to look at mosses and liverworts *outside* woodland. There was no doubt some consternation about this surprise move, and murmurs of a worrying time ahead. Had the NWDG lost direction? What sort of NWDG members would want to participate in such a splinter group?

The workshop was based at the SNH volunteer centre at Anancaun, Kinlochewe. There were eleven participants with a wide range of experience in bryophyte identification, from

complete novices to the workshop regulars. Our tutor was Ben Averis, and some of the regulars were also on hand to help the beginners if and when they looked perplexed. Thursday evening was kicked off with a poem recited by Ben, which he wrote specially for the occasion (see box). This set the tone for an informal yet very informative two days of bryologising. During the evening's discussions it also became clear that we would in fact visit a woodland at some stage during the workshop. Phew!

Friday was a bright and breezy day and the group walked part of the way up Beinn Eighe on the old pony track. This bit of mountaineering brought us to an altitude of about 350 m, at the lower end of the area where the 'northern hepatic mat' can be found. The northern hepatic mat is a liverwort dominated community almost restricted to the mountains of north-west Scotland. At first glance most of us probably wouldn't have noticed anything special about this bit of heath, but once we got down on the ground with a hand lens a whole new world of colourful liverworts was revealed. We found an abundance of liverwort species here, such as *Scapania ornithopodioides*, *Mylia taylorii*, *Plagiochila carringtonii*, *Bazzania pearsonii* and *Mastigophora woodsii*. We also saw the liverwort *Herbertus borealis*, which was much more conspicuous as there is plenty of it and it is up to 20 cm tall and a bright orangey brown colour. This was a real treat for the spotters as at least three-quarters of the global population of this liverwort occurs on Beinn Eighe alone, the only other sites for it being in three places in south-western Norway. It was also a treat for the beginners as this liverwort was so distinctive that even I could tell the difference between it and the more common species, *H. aduncus*! There was also juniper up there, plus we visited one of the few places where the northern hepatic mat gets down into the upper reaches of woodland. We all agreed this justified the foray onto open ground.

It was back onto more familiar territory on Saturday with a visit to the woodland at Tollie Bay, at the NW end of Loch Maree. This is a broadleaved woodland with an exceptional range of oceanic mosses and liverworts in a small area. Just as well because it is also very bouldery and we wouldn't have wanted to clamber too far! There is a large cliff to the south of the woodland, which makes it a cool and shady spot. We found a lot of *Scapania gracilis* growing all over the rocks along with other liverworts such as *Bazzania tricrenata*, and we were lucky to find the nationally scarce species *Plagiochila atlantica*. We also got the chance to examine three species of *Hylocomium* growing on the same boulder. It even stayed dry until lunchtime.

Thanks very much to Joe for sorting out the arrangements for the course, to the SNH staff at Kinlochewe for allowing us to use the volunteer centre, and of course to Ben for his tuition.

*Well, once again it's mosses time! Just hope the sun is gonna shine
Remember when we had that rain? Cor blimey – don't want that again!
Yeah OK, it's what they need – a bit of water helps 'em feed
Perks 'em up, like you and me. We boil the kettle, drink some tea
Actually, coffee I prefer. 'Would you like some sugar, sir?'
'No thanks'. But then I stop and think: 'Now that would be a different drink!'
Yes, always keep an open mind. Never know what you might find
That rubbish on the radio: just listen a while – you never know
The food that you're about to waste, might be alright – let's have a taste
(Unless it's Colman's mustard though, for which my answer's always 'NO!')
The guy you called a plonker, well – if you don't really know him, how can you tell?
And other folk who first seem fine, but cannot pass the test of time!
The dog which chases, snapping and snarling – talk to it nicely and it's quite a darling
Rocks we thought were pretty bare: look close – there's plenty growing there
A rare and special kind of moss on a quartzite slab in Wester Ross
See – coffee, radio, food and stuff leads back to mosses right enough!
And we may spot that moss so rare if I can just remember where
I made that special find so new, not known before around Kinlochewe
I shouldn't really tell you this, but such a big moss you couldn't miss*

*It wasn't really very clever to find it there for the first time ever
So once again it's mosses time! Have I said that already? The very first line?
Well, so I have, but anyway, it's with these words I'd like to say
It's good to be back, six years in a row with such nice folk I've got to know
Just hope the sun is gonna shine and I can find that moss of mine*



Looking at ~~weeds~~ heaths on the NWDG bryophyte workshop

Photo: Andy Acton

LICHEN WORKSHOP, 16-18 SEPTEMBER 2005: CONNELL, ARGYLL - a report of this workshop will be given in the Spring 2006 Newsletter.

ARTICLES

SQUARING THE CIRCLE - ASSOCIATION OF SCOTTISH HARDWOOD SAWMILLERS

Nick Marshall

How many times have you been told "A woodland that produces timber is a woodland that'll be looked after"? While it may not be entirely true in several ways, it is certainly true that very many native woodlands have been lost because their owners saw no income from timber. At the moment native woodlands are well protected but how long will this last? And how to encourage the expansion of native woodlands in a future of much more limited grant funding?

One part of the answer must be a thriving homegrown hardwood industry. The traditional homegrown hardwood milling sector had all but disappeared by the 1990s, but, since the 1980s, a number of micro-businesses have sprung up, exploiting technical developments and reduced costs of small-scale and mobile sawmills and cheap, low-tech kilns.

It's been a long struggle for many, having to create a market for their sawn timber, fight against the anti-homegrown prejudice and compete with cheap imports. However, recent years have seen a turnaround, with most of the small sawmills seeing orders increase and many investing in new equipment and taking on more staff. There are now more than 30 small sawmills operating in Scotland, mostly cutting homegrown hardwoods, but also high quality softwoods (especially Douglas fir and Larch), and some even pine and spruce.

While the marketing efforts of the individual businesses have contributed to this, several other factors have undoubtedly helped:

- The work of the Scottish Hardwood Timber Development Group, set up by the Forestry Commission

- The increased profile and environmental credentials of homegrown timber resulting from timber industry awareness campaigns
- The establishment the Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers (ASHS)

ASHS members include 18 sawmillers across Scotland. All specialise (though not exclusively) in homegrown hardwoods, and the high-quality end of the market. The organisation was set up in 1999, to promote Scottish hardwood products and to help co-operative sales among members. Individual sawmills cannot access some markets because of their small production capacity, and co-operative sales were seen as a way of breaking into larger markets.

ASHS has received grant funding from the Forestry Commission, Scottish Enterprise and the EU, allowing the creation of a new website, presence at events such as Woodfair and new publicity material. This has led to better contacts with architects and other wood users and increased public awareness of the quality and benefits of homegrown timber.

ASHS members (and other small sawmillers) can help native woodland owners and managers. They can buy your logs, including small and mixed lots and unusual logs. They can come to your woodland or yard to saw on contract for you. They can provide you with sawn timber, green or kiln-dried, for your building, fencing, or other timber needs.

To find out more, email co-ordinator@ashs.co.uk or visit the website at www.ashs.co.uk

NorBuild

Based in Moray and currently employing five full-time staff, NorBuild Timber Fabrication Fine Carpentry has been trading as a limited company since 1998 when it brought together the skills of Highland based mobile sawmiller and Scottish hardwood flooring manufacturer Tony Oakley with those of Forres based Norwegian builder and master craftsman Sven Skatun. The company was set up to promote Scottish timber and to demonstrate that investing in local materials and workforce pays not only economic, but also social, cultural and environmental dividends in the longer term. The company produces a wide range of structural, finishing and joinery quality timber components as well as staircases, doors and worktops in solid wood. Extensive knowledge of how to work with wood combined with the scale of the business enables NorBuild to be flexible and innovative in its approach. NorBuild offers a prototype development service, manufactures sectional buildings, timber lighting columns and street furniture and undertakes commissions for any specialist requirement in wood.

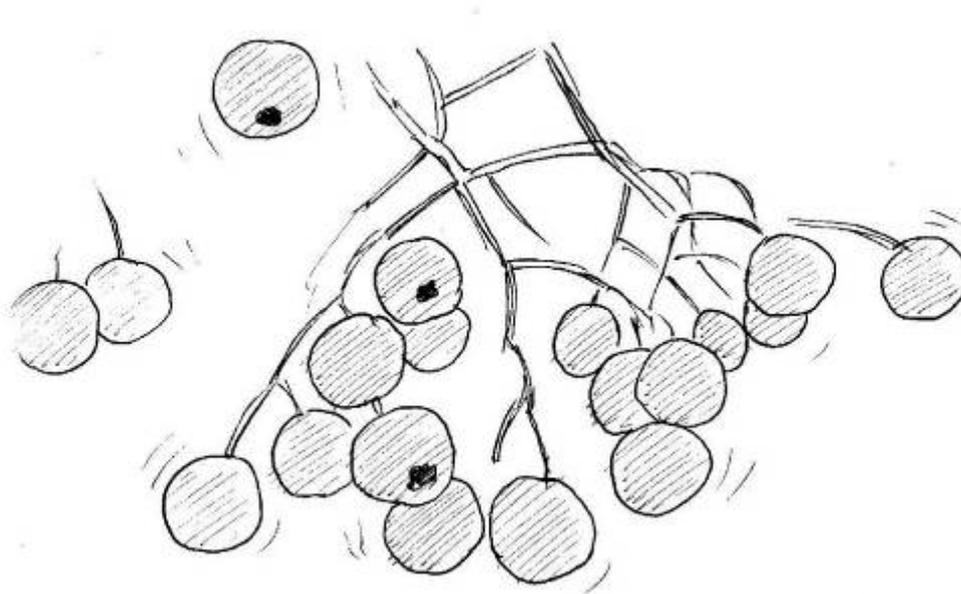


Photo: Nick Marshall

NATIVE PROVENANCE: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Alison Averis

Years ago, if you wanted to plant a tree you planted one – and you didn't think too hard about where the tree came from, or where its seed was collected. More recently, people have decided, quite rightly, that if you are planting native trees it is important to plant ones which have been grown from seeds collected in the local area. This is partly to maintain the genetic variation which exists in different parts of the country, and partly so that the trees you plant are likely to thrive where they are planted. It seems intuitive that a tree from the south-west of England may not do very well if it's planted in north-east Scotland – but have you ever wondered how these genetic differences are actually expressed? The four photographs on the next page show one type of variation. All these trees are rowans *Sorbus aucuparia*. All were photographed in East Lothian on the morning of 30 April 2005.



Tree 1 is a local, native rowan growing in Pressmennan Wood: a woodland owned by the Woodland Trust and administered by NWDG ex-treasurer Tim Hall. The other three trees are in our garden, which is about 50 m nearer sea-level than Pressmennan Wood and about three miles north of it. None of these are locals. Tree 2 was handed out by Scottish Natural Heritage as a freebie at their stall at Salen Show on the island of Mull. It was actually grown just north of Oban in the tree nursery owned by Peter Wormell, one of the founder members of the NWDG. Tree 3 came from NWDG member Donald Kennedy's tree nursery in Morvern, and was given to us as a present in return for supper and a bed for the night. Tree 4 came from Shildaig in Wester Ross, and I'm afraid to say that I nicked it from a roadside verge where it had been decapitated by a grass-cutter and clearly wasn't going to reach maturity.

The difference in the time of coming into leaf is obvious. The leaves on the local tree are well expanded. The trees from Oban and Morvern are not so far out, though the one from Oban is slightly more advanced than that from Morvern. The tree from Shildaig is well behind the others. These differences are consistent every year. The two trees from Argyll come into leaf about ten days later than the local rowans, and the one from Wester Ross is a week or ten days later still. The tree from Wester Ross has been in my garden since 1990, the Morvern one since 1994 and the Oban one since 1995, so these are plainly inbuilt, genetic differences and not responses to day length or temperature at the place where they are growing now. It certainly looks as if the trees are set up to come into leaf when spring begins in the part of the country where they originate. This means that they can thrive further south – but if the East Lothian tree or its seeds were planted in the north-west Highlands, the leaves might come out too early and be damaged by frost, snow or cold winds.

Rowans in East Lothian, photographed on 30th April 2005 (see previous page)



Tree 1 (an East Lothian native)



Tree 2 (from Mull)



Tree 3 (from Morvern)



Tree 4 (from Wester Ross)

Photos: Ben Averis

ALBA TREES: NATIVE TREE NURSERY

Alison Averis

This visit to Alba Trees was organised for its members by the Dunpender Community Woodlands Trust on 23 April 2005. Since this is my local Community Woodlands Trust I went along – and thought NWDG members might be interested to read about this large tree nursery. Many thanks to Kevin Shearer of Alba Trees for showing us round and explaining the workings of the business.

We visited Alba Trees on an incandescent April morning. The East Lothian countryside is particularly gorgeous in the glamour and dazzle of early spring, with the rape-fields breaking into yellow squares in the verdant carpet of wheat and barley. At the small village of Gladsmuir you turn down a narrow lane between high hawthorn hedges and, after about half a mile, a track leads off through woodland. Hidden here, behind an unassuming signboard, is the largest tree nursery in Europe, sending out seven million trees a year and employing 48 outdoor staff. It's obviously a busy and successful enterprise, but because everything is done on a large and commercial scale, Alba Trees cannot provide the same personal, individually-tailored service as can the smaller tree nurseries such as those run by one or two of our members. It's not a place you would go to buy a single rowan tree to plant at your gate, or even a small assortment of trees for a garden hedge or field shelter-belt.

In the room-sized fridge of the seed store we looked in awe at the four or five million potential trees waiting in polythene bags. Seed is gathered all over Britain. It is collected by hand by local people, always with the permission of the landowner. At some sites there may be only two or three parent trees, and the work of collecting is immensely labour-intensive. A bag of pine seeds from the west Highlands about the size of the bag of pine-nuts you'd buy for about £2.50 at your local wholefood shop is worth about £4500 by the time it reaches the nursery. The well-known fickleness of trees in setting seed means that in some years there are hardly any seeds; in others there are millions, so the supply is erratic. This can make planning difficult, as all sales have to be considered two or three years in advance.

The seeds are started in polytunnels: gigantic structures covering almost a third of the 13.5-acre site; their moon-white skins taut in the sunlight. A small garden polytunnel is a pleasant place to be, but these are polytunnel palaces. Inside them the air sparkles with oxygen, and you feel that the miniature forests of baby trees can't help but grow like beanstalks in this clean, welcoming, fragrant moist air. Even so, some of the cells in the seed-trays were empty because not all seeds germinate: perhaps one in three birches and only one in five oaks, for example. Seeds are tested and the numbers sowed in each seed-tray adjusted accordingly. Most of the trees are grown in peat-based compost with a slow-release fertiliser which will continue to feed them for about 18 months after planting, but Alba Trees will grow trees organically in coir-based compost if customers ask for it. When the trees are a few weeks old they are pricked out into the containers in which they will grow until they are sold, and moved outside. They grow in massed blocks of the individual species, raised on low metal pallets to keep them off the ground so that their roots don't escape from the pots – imagine lifting them all if they had spent two years growing into the soil! The whole effect is unbelievably beautiful: trays of young trees laid out in all their infinite shades of green from the near-black of hollies to the cool silver-greys of willows; from the ochre-gold of oaks to the emerald of the tiny hawthorns unfolding their first pleated leaves. It looks like a colour-chart of all the natural greens in the world.

Almost all of the trees here are natives, though Sitka spruce is grown for commercial forestry and some conifers for the horticultural trade. It's not all trees, either. Four to five thousand wild flower plants are grown each year and there is a huge trade in *Phragmites australis* – the common reed – which is used for water purification, especially around factories and coal mines. This is done by planting *Phragmites* in terraced beds of gravel, and as dirty water from the factory or mine makes its way down the series of terraces, chemical contaminants are absorbed from it by the roots of the reeds. *Phragmites* for this purpose is not confined to industrial sites: the sea lions at Edinburgh Zoo have their water treated and recycled in this way.

Alba Trees have their own borehole which will provide 36,000 gallons of water a day. In fact, almost all of their water is recycled. Drains from the polytunnels and growing areas lead to a purpose-dug reservoir six feet deep and this, with its fringe of *Phragmites* and other wetland plants, looks like a natural pond.

The nursery is surrounded on three sides by tall woodland and shelter-belts of trees, all in the first flush of their spring foliage and spilling over with the songs of chaffinches, chiff-chaffs, song thrushes, wrens and robins. To the south the fields rise gradually to the distant blue views of the Lammermuir hills. Rabbits come in from the fields, and deer and squirrels from the woods. You'd think it would be like an eat-all-you-can buffet for them, with the tender young trees all laid out ready on tables, but although the rabbits are fenced out where possible, the wildlife obviously doesn't do enough harm to be a problem and is tolerated.

NEWS FROM OTHER WOODLAND ORGANISATIONS

WHO'S WHO IN THE NATIVE WOODLAND WORLD, PART 1

Gordon Gray Stephens



This is intended to provide a personal perspective of the various individuals and organisations who talk about native woodlands in Scotland. This part deals with the policy level, with plans to look at organisations

Policy Level

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Scottish Executive Forestry is a devolved matter. Rhona Brankin is the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development. This puts her in charge of Scottish forestry, among a number of other subjects and organisations.

Forestry Commission Scotland National Committee

The National Committee for Scotland is responsible for giving strategic direction for Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. FCS reports to this Committee, which includes representatives from the economic (Martin Gale), environment (Simon Pepper) and social (previously Andrew Raven) sectors, as well as Richard Wakeford (SEERAD head), Dr Macintosh and other senior FCS staff members.

Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Forests and Forest Products

This group was established in 2004 and meets at Holyrood. The Group is chaired by Helen Eadie, MSP, with secretarial support from Catriona Prebble, Scottish Forest Industries Cluster. It is open to MSPs and representatives of the environmental, social and economic tiers of forestry. The environment representation is provided by the LINK Woodland

Taskforce (see below). Cross Party Groups are formed of back benchers with a particular interest in a subject, and are intended to cut across party boundaries. Most of the MSPs who have attended represent constituencies which contain substantial timber processing plants, and countering the dominance of this sector of forestry can be a challenge.

LINK Woodland Taskforce

Environment LINK is a membership body for environment Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), who seek to find common ground, so that they can increase the impact of the environmental lobby. Much of the work is done through small groups, of which the Woodland Taskforce is one. Flavia Piggot, Woodland Trust (WT), chairs the group, with Tim Hall (WT), Mike Broad (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), Jonathan Wordsworth (Council for Scottish Archaeology), Kristen Olsen & Rachel Avery (Reforestation Scotland) and the author, among the main contributors.

Native Woodland Partnership for Scotland

This body was set up to monitor the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plan targets, and has since grown to include an overview of the Woodland Survey, and to provide the most obvious forum for open discussion between the executive and NGOs. It is also providing a home for the single most expensive native woodland project yet: the native woodland survey which Zoe Laird will tell us about in the next newsletter. It is chaired by Gordon Patterson, Forestry Commission, and includes other FC staff such as Richard Thompson and (now ex-FC) Peter Quelch. SNH are represented by Kate Holl, Duncan Stone and Jeannette Hall. Donald Bailey represents the Scottish Executive, along with Craig Campbell from NFU. Members of the LINK Woodland Taskforce also feature heavily.

Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme Users Group

The SFGS Users Group is the interface between the main woodland grant provider (FCS) and representatives of the woodland world who use the grant. Tim Hall is the sole environmental sector representative (as a LINK member), but the author sneaks in to represent the social sector. This is the Group who made the final decision on the review of the SFGS which resulted in the rate for native woodland management works being standardised at 90% (although I'm sure the number crunchers in FCS had a major say!). It is chaired by Dr Bob Macintosh, FCS, and includes representatives from every FC Conservancy, Alan Hampson (Scottish Natural Heritage), Craig Campbell (National Farmers' Union), Robert Patton (Highland Council), and various private sector representatives.

Regional Forestry Forums

There are 5 regional forums, one for each conservancy, with membership selected by FCS from an open application process. These bodies were set up in 2004 and are to have a major influence on Scotland's distinctive forestry regions. Representatives are drawn equally from the environment, social and economic sectors, with a chairman selected from the membership by FCS. Environment representatives do not always include someone with a particular native woodland track record; however, South Scotland includes Roddy Fairley, Peter Hopkins and Chris Badenoch, Central Scotland has Tim Hall and Meriel Young, Perth & Argyll includes Chris Smout, Lucy Sumsion, and Rick Worrell, Grampian features Una Urquhart and Ian Francis, while Highland has Diana Gilbert and Dick Balharry.

National Forestry Forum

This contains 3 members of each Regional Forestry Forum in addition to a number of other national groups which would not otherwise be represented. It is chaired by the chair of the FCS National Committee, and includes an even representation of the three sectors. LINK Woodland Taskforce provide national representation. There is also a Forestry Forum Annual Meeting, which is open to all with an interest in forestry.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Ruth Anderson: *see inside front cover*

Alison Averis: *see inside front cover*

Phil Gordon, Balwhomie, 23 Gray Street, Perth, PH2 0JL

Gordon Gray Stephens: *see inside front cover*

Chris Marsh, 3 Achnacloich, Tarskavaig, Isle of Skye IV46 8SB

Nick Marshall, 64 The Causeway, Duddingston Village, Edinburgh, EH15 3PZ

Lorraine Servant, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Governor's House, The Parade, Fort William, PH33 6BA

Mary-Ann Smythe, Balmaclellan Farm, Castle Douglas, DG7 3QS

Simon Stuart, 77 Gartmorn Road, Sauchie, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3PA

Richard Thompson: *see inside front cover*

Ian Whitehead: consultants@eamonnwall.co.uk



Bluebells on Arran, 2005

Photo: Pauline Jewett

