

SPRING 2012

# Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

Cairngorms legal challenge  
Mar Lodge management plan  
Wild land or waste land  
Native woodland expansion

# Spring 2012

**WILD LAND NEWS**  
Spring 2012, Issue 80

Magazine of the  
Scottish Wild Land Group

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Page 18



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# CONTENTS

Spring 2012

Comment from Calum	p. 4
The Cairngorms legal challenge	P.6
Mar Lodge—what now for wild deer and wild land?	p. 8
Wild land set to disappear under blanket of bracken?	p. 10
Wild land or waste land?	p. 12
SWLG response to Woodland Expansion Advisory Group consultation	p. 19
Planned windfarm on Ben Wyvis	p. 22
Book review: The Great Wood	p. 23
29 years ago: How wild is wild?	p. 26
The lost world of Dundreggan	p. 27
News	p. 28

Photo: Birch woods, Loch  
Katrine

C Brown



Calum Brown

## Comment from Calum, WLN Editor

Welcome to the 80<sup>th</sup> edition of Wild Land News! This marks a milestone not only because it's the 80<sup>th</sup> issue, but because this year is the Scottish Wild Land Group's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Established in October 1982, the Group is now the oldest charity of its kind, and still the only one to be entirely run by volunteers, and so entirely independent. Although the membership and steering team have changed over the years, the Group has been consistent in its defence of wild land in Scotland and in keeping its members informed and, hopefully, inspired through regular issues of Wild Land News.

Since the last issue we've also had our AGM, held in Bridge of Allan on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November last year, at which Rob McMorrnan stood down after three years of being the Group's Coordinator. Rob took over the running of the SWLG in response to a request from the steering team at the time for new members to help to run the group. Three years of hard work later, Rob leaves the Group stronger and larger; we owe him many thanks and wish him all the best.

Through the previous year we've seen our membership grow, sales of Wild Land News rise, and more time being given by volunteers for the Group. We've also gained two new steering team members in John Milne and George Charles, both of whom have already been busy on our behalf. That's not to say we're full, of course, and if you'd like to volunteer to help or join the steering team yourself, please do get in touch.

We'll have more on the past and future of the SWLG in editions to come, but for now we have plenty of news and opinion on as wide a range of issues concerning wild land

in Scotland as ever. Tim Ambrose starts us off with an update on the legal challenge to plans for a new town in the Cairngorms National Park. The SWLG has played an important role in helping to fund this challenge, and as we wait for its outcome we hope that we've been able to stop this terribly misguided proposal.

There's also some cause for concern at Mar Lodge, where a review of the National Trust for Scotland's management of the estate has recommended a retreat from their successful program of reducing deer densities to allow habitat recovery and tree regeneration. Mike Daniels finds the review's arguments and conclusions distinctly one-sided. As with the proposals for housing developments around the Cairngorms, economic benefits seem to be over-estimated and over-weighted in comparison to social and environmental priorities, even in our most important wild areas.

This doesn't have to be the case, of course, and the SWLG believes that there is increasing potential for new, more enlightened and beneficial forms of land management in Scotland. One positive sign is the Government's decision to expand woodland cover, and the establishment of the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group to identify the best ways of doing this. Our response to their recent consultation is on page 19, and before that Ken Brown considers the value of native woodlands managed as economic as well as environmental resources. His research on this subject suggests huge, but otherwise almost completely unassessed, scope for socio-economic benefits from what some might regard as unproductive waste land.



John Milne finds plenty to appreciate in the woodlands we have left, in his review of Jim Crumley's new book *The Great Wood*. An emotional tour of Scotland's trees and forests, the book also considers their current and future practical restoration. At the moment, one of the best examples is the work of Trees for Life at Dundreggan. After featuring this in the last issue of *Wild Land News* we have an update on survey work carried out there which has found even greater diversity on the estate than was previously suspected.

You may remember from the last issue that a huge windfarm is proposed for the estate next to Dundreggan (at Balmacaan), and Leo Sharratt writes here about efforts to prevent another being constructed on Ben Wyvis. The proliferation of windfarms has shown no sign of slowing down in recent months; it's been reported that Aberdeenshire Council received planning applications for 455 turbine schemes between January and October last year, and Highland Council received 87 in the same period. Ofgem now plans to spend £7 billion over the next eight years on power connections to carry electricity from Scottish wind and wave farms to England, with the money being raised through higher energy bills for consumers. Scottish consumers will also have to pay for

upgrades south of the border, as well as compensating windfarm operators for 'lost' subsidies when their turbines aren't operating. Incredibly, payments totalling over £1 million were made in the period between Christmas Eve and January 4<sup>th</sup> this year because it was too windy.

Unexpected help may be at hand, however. More than 100 Tory MPs at Westminster recently wrote to David Cameron to press for a reduction in the subsidies available for wind turbines and for greater weight to be given to local objections. Donald Trump, meanwhile, has threatened to stop building his golf resort and housing development on a coastal Site of Special Scientific Interest if plans to construct a nearby offshore windfarm are accepted, saying "if Scotland is going to be independent, it needs to protect its greatest national treasure, the coastline". Who says Americans have no sense of irony?

Also in this issue, we look at the implications of the recent EU ban on the main herbicide used for bracken control in Scotland and reflect on what wild land meant to the Scottish Wild Land Group when it was first set up in 1982. We hope that you'll enjoy this spring issue and be inspired to get in touch, help with the work of the group, or just get out and enjoy Scotland's wild land.

Photomontage of proposed windfarm at Ben Wyvis

L Sharratt

**a reminder from our membership secretary:**

**subscriptions are now due—remember to pay yours!**

Tim Ambrose

## The Cairngorms legal challenge

**Tim Ambrose reports on the legal challenge to the Cairngorms National Park Authority housing plans, and in particular the plan for a New Town named An Camus Mòr on a greenfield site opposite Aviemore.**

Members will know that the SWLG was an enthusiastic supporter of the legal Objection to some of the housing plans set out by the CNPA in its Local Plan which was adopted in October 2010. The CNPA is the ultimate planning authority for the National Park area, and its Local Plan sets out the specific sites which the CNPA allocates for housing and other development. Many of the conservation charities believe that the CNPA focusses far too much on housing and development, at the expense of conservation, let alone enhancement, of the natural heritage of the Cairngorms, and this Local Plan confirms the CNPA obsession with excessive housing developments.

The Cairngorms Campaign, The Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and The Scottish Campaign for National Parks are conservation charities which lodged a formal Objection in the Court of Session to four of the housing allocations in the Local Plan. These are at Carr-Bridge (where the CNPA proposes up to 117 houses in an area of natural woodland), Nethy Bridge (up to 40 houses and more industrial units in woodland), Kingussie (up to 300 houses in a large estate to the north east of the village), and, most seriously of all, at An Camus Mòr opposite Aviemore where the CNPA proposes an entire New Town of up to 1500 houses plus all the ancilliary development required for such an enormous development.

The legal costs of the case are considerable and the Cairngorms Campaign mounted an appeal for funds last autumn, to which

members and the public outraged by these proposals responded most generously. The SWLG contributed £1,000 to the appeal, and individual members contributed more. Sufficient was donated to allow the Hearing to go ahead, and the Case was heard in Edinburgh before Lord Glennie over four days from 10 – 13 January 2012. I attended the full Hearing, and was impressed by the strength of the legal arguments put forward by Sir Crispin Agnew QC for the conservation movement, but at the time of writing the outcome of the case is unknown, while Lord Glennie takes time to consider the arguments from both sides, and to write up his decision. We will publicise the judgement as soon as it is received.

The fundamental argument underlying the entire case comes from the Scottish National Parks Act 2000, which requires the CNPA to give greater weight to the first Aim of “conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the area”, whenever there may be conflict with one of the other Aims, such as that supporting sustainable development. Another strand of the argument derives from the way the CNPA completely over-ruled the recommendations of the independent Scottish Government planning Reporters following the local plan Inquiry, and the inadequate reasons it gave for doing so. Inevitably, the arguments and outcome of the case depend more upon the legal procedures which the CNPA may or may not have followed, than upon the fundamental point of principle that a New Town in a National Park should be unthinkable, but it was

clear from his questions that the Judge was analysing the arguments from both sides very closely, and we can expect a carefully considered judgement.

Whilst we were preparing for the case, time hurries on, and the CNPA published its draft Park Plan for the next Five Year period 2012 – 2017 in September, as well as a Main Issues Report setting out in more detail its planning proposals. Consultation on both documents lasted till December. We considered both of these were inadequate and gave far too much support for housing and development, at the expense of conservation, and strongly worded

responses were made, deploring the proposals for An Camus Mòr and other large housing estates. The CNPA drafts appear to make much mention of conservation, but then ruin the fine words with grossly excessive housing policies, which can only support second home owners and commuters into Inverness, at the expense of the wildlife and scenery of the Cairngorms.

We will wait to see what, if any, notice the CNPA takes of our carefully considered comments, but we are prepared to continue the fight for the Cairngorms, and the Wild Land which remains there.



Photo: Cairn Toul from Braeriach

K Brown

Mike Daniels

## Mar Lodge Independent Review – what now for wild deer and wild land?

The Mar Lodge Estate Independent Review reported in November 2011 after six months of deliberation. The report states that the review was set up by NTS due to “...ongoing tension between its various commitments and obligations and against the context of increasing public opposition to their policies at Mar Lodge Estate...” and aimed “To conduct an independent evidence-based review of woodland, moorland and deer management at Mar Lodge Estate having regard to the National Trust for Scotland’s overall objectives for the Estate and specifically fencing policy, deer culling, the regeneration of the forest and maintaining a sporting estate.”

In reality, the “increasing public opposition” was a tiny number of neighbouring landowners who felt their sport was threatened by the impact on stag numbers a reduction cull on Mar Lodge was having. Initially, their opposition was expressed through arguments that regeneration without fencing would never work in the Cairngorms. When it became clear (at Abernethy, Glenfeshie and latterly at Mar Lodge) that not only could it work, but also that the unfolding ecological restoration highlighted the impoverished state of the environment under high deer densities, the argument quickly changed to the detrimental impact that reduced deer numbers were having on the economy of the

Photo: Fencing at Mar Lodge

M Daniels



Braemar area – especially through tourism.

The tourism argument ignored three inconvenient truths. Firstly, that any recent tourism decline in the area (if there was one – credible evidence was not provided) could in part have been attributable to the global economic downturn. Secondly, that visitor numbers to Mar Lodge itself held up very well with over a hundred thousand walkers, hundreds of guests in the holiday accommodation and dozens of weddings annually. This generated hundreds of thousands of pounds for the Braemar economy, all of which occurred despite reduced deer numbers and the best efforts of those opposed to the cull publicly bad-mouthing the estate and attempting to tarnish the reputation of the area. Thirdly, that if tourists wanted to see deer near Braemar they could still see hundreds in Glenshee and Glenclunie in virtually every month of the year – all much closer and more easily accessible than Mar Lodge.

In terms of protecting and enhancing wild land the report acknowledged that the reduction target population had been achieved, resulting in ‘significant tree regeneration’ and ‘improving the condition of open-hill habitats’. In terms of being ‘evidence based’ the report was largely free of wild land and environmental context.

While focusing on the neighbours whose sport could be impacted by reducing deer numbers, little if any mention was given to neighbours with similar ecological aims (Glenfeshie, Abernethy) or those who were carrying out deer reduction culls to repair the damage done to Caenlochan glen – these were merely relegated to a footnote. Similarly while much was made of the recent reduction of deer in the area, no mention was made of the historical backdrop against which this had occurred. Figures for deer numbers in the east Grampians tell their own story:

A reduction of several thousand deer over the last few years merely stemmed the tide of a population that had more than trebled since the 1950s

Year	1953-54	1966	1975	1986	1994	2009
No. of deer	7,950	10,037	19,310	25,520	25,360	21,326



A reduction of several thousand deer over the last few years merely stemmed the tide of a population that had more than trebled since the 1950s, even after increases in the previous century. Again no mention was made of the impact these high deer numbers have had on the condition of designated sites throughout the area, nor was any suggestion made that estates with high deer numbers should be doing something to prevent them encroaching on and damaging estates with wild land and biodiversity interests.

Predictably the ‘f’ word featured prominently. While the report ruled out the use of extensive enclosure

Photo: Regeneration of Scots Pine following deer culls

M Daniels

The review demonstrates the universal over-emphasis on the social and economic pillars of sustainability as opposed to the environment

fencing on the grounds that ‘it would have a significant visual and environmental impact and that it would be wholly impractical to protect the large and diffuse areas of regeneration’, the report instead recommended ‘strategic’ fencing and proposed a route mapped through the Special Area of Conservation and capercaillie Special Protection Area! In recommending this fence the report ‘acknowledged that such a fence would not be without cost or consequences in terms of visual impact, effect on access, and potential impact on red and black grouse’. Quite.

While the review has no official status (it was created merely to advise the NTS Board), it demonstrates the universal over-emphasis on the social and economic pillars of sustainability as opposed to the environment. Sadly this is a common theme on wild land in Scotland today. As SNH’s new Code of Deer Management comes into effect it will be interesting to see whether the environment remains the Cinderella of sustainable deer management – left behind while her ugly sisters (social and economic) go to the ball (perhaps even at the Mar Lodge ballroom!).

Calum Brown

## Wild land set to disappear under blanket of bracken?

The EU has recently imposed a ban on Asulam, a herbicide widely used for the control of bracken in Scotland and sold by Indian company United Phosphorous Limited under the name Asulox. This has led to a storm of protest from a wide range of organisations including the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and the National Farmers Union. They argue that the ban, motivated by the danger Asulam poses to public health when used on food crops, should not apply to its use for bracken control, for which it is said to be the “one effective weapon against this highly invasive species” (the GWCT). If the ban is not repealed, or an exception made for Scotland, we are warned of a spreading tide of bracken which will envelop agricultural and wild land

throughout the country. The Heather Trust’s warning that “bracken is going to replace heather” prompted The Herald to predict “the end of Scotland’s purple hills”. The National Farmers Union of Scotland called on the UK Government to issue a national emergency authorisation for its use.

It is notable that the public health implications of spraying the herbicide over large areas of land from helicopters have barely been mentioned, even if the potential for direct contact with food crops is small. However, bracken itself is dangerous to health if closely encountered over long periods, ecologically detrimental in its out-competition of other plants and smothering of habitats, a fire risk, a threat to grazing livestock, and a

general nuisance for those working or walking in the countryside. Of these, it is clearly the potential loss of grazing that motivates much of the opposition to the ban, despite its being widely framed in terms of concern for “precious upland habitats” including National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (GWCT).

In fact, though quite specific in its effect, Asulam does harm ferns and some other plants, and SNH recommend that it either not be applied at all, or applied by hand, where these are found. They also recommend that a 250 m buffer zone be established between areas of spraying and important ecological areas, especially those with rare ferns. In England, spraying is not allowed within 160 m of watercourses. It is also important to remember that the ability of bracken (a native pioneer species) to spread over and dominate Scottish land is entirely due to human suppression of the plant and animal species that would naturally halt this process – especially trees, which shade it out, and native low-intensity grazers like wild boar and cattle which uproot and trample it. These natural controls have been undermined by economically-motivated overgrazing by sheep and deer; species which eat almost anything except bracken and are too small and light to damage it, providing a massive boost to its competitive advantage.

It is also not necessarily true that Asulam is the only effective method of preventing the spread of bracken. A study by Liverpool University, often cited to justify Asulam’s use, actually found that its effectiveness decreased steadily after the initial application, and that follow-up spot spraying of herbicides at ground level was necessary for long-term gains, which were in any case

greater under annual cutting. SNH views follow-up treatments of this kind as essential. What’s more, Liverpool University found that woodland and even heather (in contradiction to the Herald’s melodramatic headline) will exclude bracken, as long as grazing or burning doesn’t prevent them from becoming established. It’s not by chance that bracken didn’t overwhelm Scotland’s heather moors in the centuries before people, helicopters and herbicides arrived to conserve them.

It is true, however, that grazing land is a hugely important economic asset and that sheep, deer and other livestock support people’s livelihoods across Scotland. Overgrazed areas are usually more diverse and of greater ecological value than those dominated by bracken, not to mention of greater interest and value to the recreational land user. It isn’t realistic to expect clearance of bracken to be carried out by hand on a large scale, and so all reasonable options must be available. In agricultural land, Asulam may well be one, and perhaps the best, option – provided the appropriate advice and safeguards are adhered to.

In Scotland’s wild land, however, by far the better solution is to restore the natural ecology, in which bracken has always been subject to effective competition from taller plants and bulky animals. This is a case where we could solve a problem and derive additional environmental and economic benefits from actually interfering less with natural processes than we currently do – surely something that cash-strapped politicians and land managers should welcome. They certainly don’t need to spray chemicals from helicopters in the name of wild land conservation.

The Heather Trust’s warning that “bracken is going to replace heather” prompted The Herald to predict “the end of Scotland’s purple hills”

Ken Brown

## Wild land or waste land?

landscapes that betray no evidence of contemporary human activity have been modified by centuries of grazing by sheep and deer whose populations and habits are the result of human intervention

The latest issue of SNH's *The Nature of Scotland* (Winter 2011) included an item on 'Mapping Wildness' in order to protect it (p. 58) and the projected National Wildness Map for Scotland has now been published. That brief article summarised the approach. Informative as it is, it resurrects the issue of definition and associated problems. Previous discussions in WLN have focused on the indeterminacy of the concept of 'wild land'. SNH's many-faceted definition boils down to four 'qualities of wildness': *the land looks natural; there are no visible human objects; the ground is rugged and challenging, and you can't get near in a vehicle.*

In isolation, this quantum definition creates uncertainty about the bits in between. SNH's mapping approach also raises the possibility that certain kinds of development - forests of wind turbines and the associated miles of access tracks and power lines, for instance - will detract from the grandeur and sense of remoteness of the remaining islands of wildness and shrink them even further. Moreover, it contrasts with what is probably a consensus amongst members of SWLG; that what we *really* mean is epitomised by the kind of emotional and aesthetic experience of viewing a frozen sea of mountain ridges receding to the horizon from the summits of Munros. But this sense of a great and undisturbed wilderness is, of course, an illusion.

The reality is that rash of isolated scraps portrayed by SNH's map. Unfortunately, the immediacy of the threat to such high value wild areas,

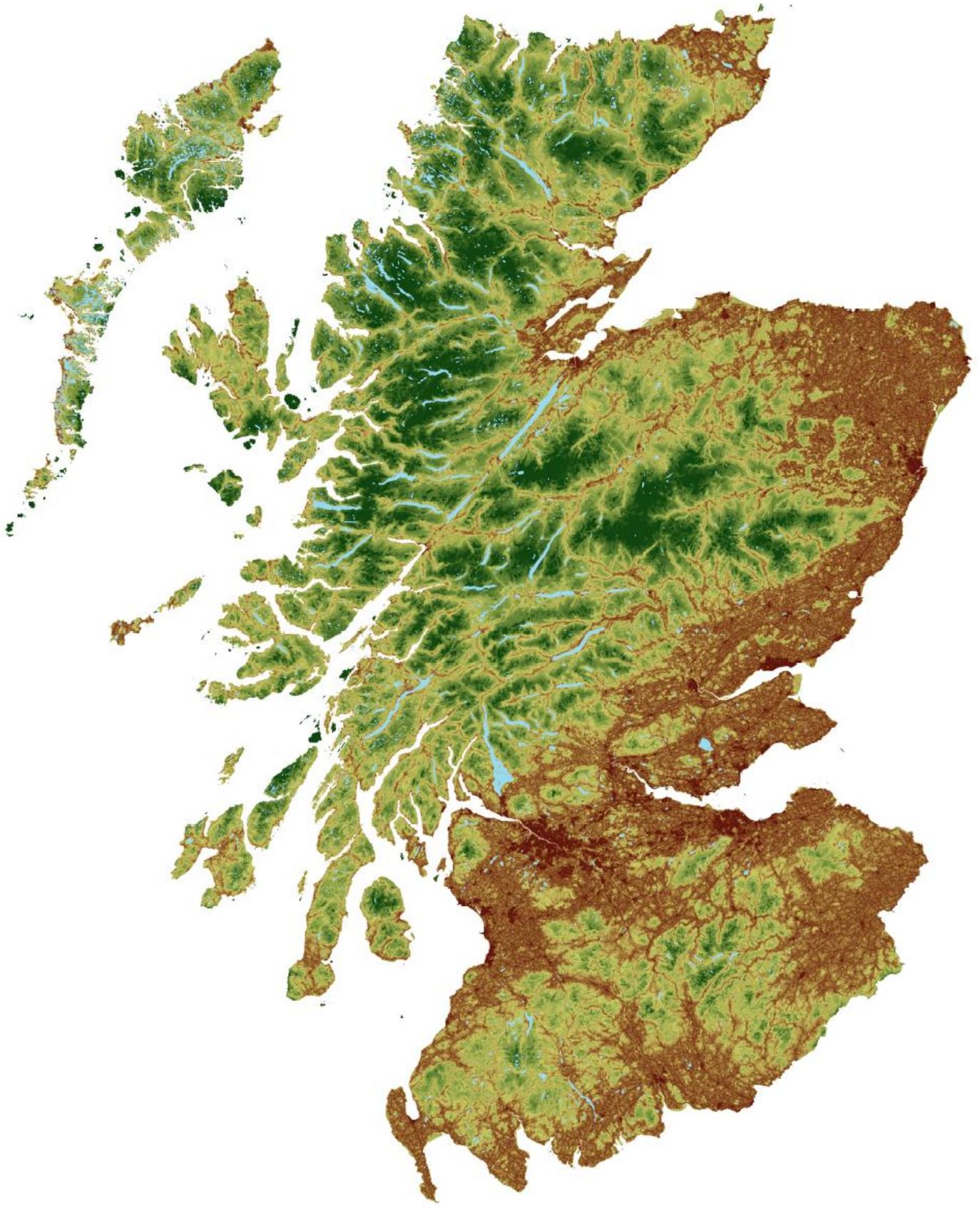
indicated by patches of dark green, is already abundantly clear. One, to the west of Loch Ness, between Glen Affric and Glenmoriston, encompasses the 4,000 hectare Dundreggan Estate where Trees for Life are restoring native woodlands; an area of high moorland that a recent press release by the conservation charity described as a 'lost world' of rare and endangered plant and animal species - some of which were previously thought to be extinct in Scotland. But that same patch of green also encompasses the adjacent Balmacaan Estate where Scottish and Southern Electricity are planning one of the UK's most massive wind factories of about 130 turbines.

As SNH are so well aware, even those dark green fragments fail to qualify as truly 'wild'. Landscapes that betray no evidence of contemporary human activity have been profoundly modified by centuries of grazing by sheep and deer whose populations and habits are the result of human intervention. Indeed, the deer themselves are stunted representatives of their species because of the absence of the vibrant woodland ecosystems they once inhabited. In the words of a former representative of the Scottish Crofters' Union, heather moorlands comprising the common grazings of crofting areas are "about as natural as a motorway embankment". That applies to many cherished Scottish landscapes. And it blurs the distinction between 'wild land' and what many regard as 'waste land' that is crying out for economic development. The point of repeating these familiar arguments is that we need a more

Photo opposite:  
The Trotternish ridge,  
Skye

K Brown





Part of a newly published map by SNH showing relative wildness in Scotland. Reproduced by kind permission of Scottish Natural Heritage.

comprehensive defensive strategy. Stipulative definitions and maps have undoubted value but they need to be supplemented by a vision that encompasses the bits in between; an approach that achieves a graduated transition from purely economic land management to the protection and enhancement of wild places. Official concern about climate change might now provide at least a partial solution to this problem if it translates into policy and does not remain a fashionable aspiration.

Of all the options for the economic development of these 'in-between' bits, the most promising must be the renewed emphasis on the restoration of Scottish woodlands. That prospect has recently been enhanced by the commitment of the Scottish Government to *"increase the amount of woodland in Scotland to help meet Scottish Government strategic objectives, particularly in relation to counteracting climate change and to stimulate economic development"*. The economic objective remains, of course, but my argument is that the management of native woodlands is one that is easily reconciled with the preservation of wild places and the enhancement of natural ecosystems. And renewed official emphasis on biodiversity, the reduction of carbon emissions as well as the establishment of economic resources offers that prospect of a smoother transition between the human and the wild. Nor is this idea as unrealistic as it might at first appear.

### **Waste land or woodland?**

Just over 20 years ago, I researched the environmental implications of the *Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1990* for the then Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. The report was fairly wide ranging, but it concluded with a series of

peer-reviewed models of different types and scales of woodland establishment on common grazings and their respective financial and job-creating potentials. There were some fairly obvious initial conclusions. For instance, in the near complete absence of an existing woodland resource, crofter-forestry initiatives would have to be grant led and the obvious source for that was the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme of the time. The WGS structure placed a financial premium on broadleaved rather than coniferous woodlands. In any case, research by the FC and the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute (MLURI) held out little prospect of successful commercial forestry initiatives of the traditional kind in such typically exposed and infertile locations. In addition, the costs associated with the operations involved in establishing woodlands favoured large rather than small projects, partly as a result of scale economies but mainly for the simple geometric reason that the high cost of fencing to exclude grazing declines relative to the increasing area under management - at least if it is roughly square.

The Scottish Crofters' Union (SCU) representatives who originally lobbied for this legislation estimated that, on average, woodland could be established on a quarter of common grazing land without detriment to normal stocking practices and the health of the agricultural enterprise. The arithmetic implied that broadleaved and/or native woodlands of 100 hectares (one square kilometer) would optimise the benefits to crofting communities. Happily, too, projects of that size would tend to be in scale with the extensive landscapes of the region. But the data of most significance concerned economic and employment potentials. Coniferous plantations of all scales up to 100 hectares would involve negative balances for the





communities concerned after the payment of all stages of the WGS. In other words, the financial sacrifice would have made them reliant on the extremely uncertain long term prospects of harvesting and selling timber. The implications for native and broadleaved woodland projects were dramatically different, however.

New woodlands of this type, over 30 hectares, would have yielded positive financial balances when all stages of the WGS had been paid. Each 100 hectare scheme could have generated final surpluses of up to £18,000 at that point. It could also have provided full time employment, paid at the usual industry rates, for two workers for one year, followed by half time employment for one worker for 5 subsequent years. If that could have been spelled out on a regional basis, the prospects of new skilled jobs for young people could have made an important contribution in sparsely populated areas where jobs are scarce. Remarkably, a *Survey of Crofting Income 1989/90* by the Scottish Agricultural College on behalf of the SCU had suggested that many crofters derived an almost negligible income from crofting activity itself; sometimes far less than £1 an hour. On that basis, the possible income from woodland establishment and management would have assumed even greater significance. Associated with all these advantages was the potential for tree nurseries stocking locally native tree species and the long term prospect of - at least - a harvest of biomass to meet sustainable energy requirements.

Practical research by Peter Wormell on Rum NNR had long ago demonstrated the potential of such woodlands to greatly enhance biodiversity: "The wet heathlands and moorland support only a very

limited number of birds and invertebrates in contrast to the (re-established) Kinloch woods which provide habitats for a very large and diverse community" (Wormell, P., NCC, 1970, *Establishing Woodland on the Isle of Rhum, Journal of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society*, Vol. 22, No 3).

Of course, there would have been problems about the need for training, for the provision of information, advice and guidance as well as design capabilities and a proactive, inter-agency approach to crofting communities. But the overarching disincentive at that time was central government policy predicated on the miraculous intervention of the private entrepreneur, a negative view of public expenditure and extreme sensitivity to loopholes in grant schemes that could result in open ended financial commitments. So what's new?

Well, there's devolution. There's an explicit government aspiration to encourage sustainable woodland management for urgent climatic reasons, to increase biodiversity and to create new jobs. And there's the current consultation by the FC's Woodland Expansion Advisory Group on how best to achieve these aims. Perhaps a wee touch of Keynesian economic theory is in order. A resurrected version of the Woodland Grant Scheme, tweaked to meet specific regional priorities and the needs of a diverse clientèle might be just the dynamic to start filling in and actually enhancing the large Highland areas that lie between those tiny islands of 'wildness'.

Photo on previous page:  
Sgurr na Lapaich

C Brown

# SWLG response to Woodland Expansion Advisory Group consultation

**The Scottish Government recently set up the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group to look into ways of expanding woodland cover in Scotland without causing conflict with other land uses. A consultation was launched and the SWLG responded to emphasise the need for and benefits of native woodland. Here is the full text of our response.**

The Scottish Wild Land Group is a small charity established 30 years ago to campaign on issues connected to Scottish Wild Land; the only wholly volunteer-run charity of its kind. We are particularly concerned with the promotion of ecologically healthy and economically productive wild land in Scotland.

We warmly welcome moves to expand woodland cover in Scotland and the establishment of the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group. The extent of woodland in Scotland has been relentlessly decreased by human activity for several centuries, and the reversal of this trend may provide numerous social, environmental and economic benefits. We particularly hope that woodland comprised of native species will be prioritised in this expansion as this currently covers only some 4% of Scotland (MacKenzie 1999), despite being thought to have a natural range of 50%. We believe that managed and semi-natural native woodlands are ecologically essential. They are also important social and recreational assets, and their potential contribution to economic productivity and employment in rural areas has been consistently underestimated in the past.

**1. Where you see opportunities for woodland expansion that are not currently being taken up. What do you think is stopping such woodland expansion?**

We believe that the single largest opportunity for woodland expansion is in the management of native woodland as an economic resource, for biofuels, wood products, recreational resources, shelter for livestock and habitat for native flora and fauna. Expansion of native woodland managed for these diverse objectives would greatly enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services such as flood prevention and the provision of clean air and water. It would also help to mitigate the effects of climate change. Small-scale silviculture on agricultural holdings, a tradition which has been largely lost in Scotland but which continues in many other European countries, would dramatically increase woodland cover and provide direct benefits to farmers and crofters. As demonstrated by previous research (Brown, 1991), the establishment and subsequent management of new native woodlands on impoverished and underutilized common grazing land in crofting areas could contribute significantly to employment and the development of valuable new skills in small rural communities. Similarly, areas of protected woodland on sporting estates would allow for the development of networks of forested areas to support biodiversity and allow the free movement and regeneration of native species. They would also benefit estate owners by providing shelter for deer, originally a

woodland species, improving their welfare, size and value. Crucially, management objectives could encompass a range of woodland types, especially montane scrub woodlands which are currently often neglected but ecologically highly significant.

The main obstacle to woodland expansion of this kind is the recent decline in a culture of woodland management that was once pervasive in agriculture and estate management. As a result of this decline, many land managers are unaware of woodland management techniques and of the potential benefits of woodland to them. This is exacerbated by a paucity of specifically Scottish data about the economic potential of native woodland, though relatively small-scale studies have been carried out and a wealth of information is available from other European countries such as France, Slovakia and Scandinavia that could inform medium and long term woodland management strategies in this country.

Priority should therefore be given to the identification and dissemination of the economic benefits of native woodland management, particularly where it involves the diversification of agricultural and estate activities, which is widely recognized as a desirable process. A substantial amount of research may be necessary to identify the full economic consequences of this approach, while the social and environmental effects are easier to predict.

We also believe that native woodland expansion should be given priority where small areas of semi-natural native woodland currently survive, or where indicator species of ancient woodland are found. This would ensure some continuity in land cover and help to prevent further extinctions of native species, especially under the

pressure of climate change. These areas could also provide reservoirs of native species which could be connected through smaller-scale woods and through the inclusion of permanent areas of native woods in commercial conifer plantations. This latter step would increase the recreational, aesthetic and environmental values of commercial plantations, and is compatible with many of the Forestry Commission's design and management aims.

Finally, we believe that particular priority should be given to the protection and where possible expansion of Scotland's most threatened woodland habitats, including montane scrub woodland and temperate rainforest such as atlantic oak woodlands.

**2. Examples of where woodland management comes into conflict with other land management objectives. We are particularly interested to hear where current regulatory and consultation mechanisms do not seem able to prevent such conflict.**

Woodland management suffers from apparent conflict with several other land management objectives. In particular, the management of sporting estates tends to prioritize high deer densities for immediate sporting purposes over the longer term benefits of responsible woodland conservation and management. The sparse and impoverished nature of so many native woodlands in Scotland, and in the Highlands and Islands in particular, has tended to encourage such short-term approaches to land management on many estates. Ironically, one consequence has been a relentless depletion of the woodland resource to the detriment of the welfare of the red deer population. There is also, of course, the important local, national and international public interest in protecting and enhancing healthy, natural environments. The conflict

between these interests is not adequately addressed by current regulatory or consultation mechanisms.

### **3. The way that conflicts between woodland expansion and other land management objectives could be better resolved in future.**

Conflicts between woodland expansion and other land management objectives could be resolved through research, dialogue and leadership from government bodies, the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage in particular. Government leadership in the form of grants and other forms of financial aid, as well as advice and initiatives to develop the relevant knowledge and skills, will be essential given the long-term nature of investment in the future of woodlands. We believe, however, that a stronger commitment by government to the longer term will have the very significant social, environmental and economic benefits outlined above.

Conflict between existing environmental values, access regulations and woodland expansion should be avoided. Newly created or expanded woodlands should be carefully sited and, where relevant, designed to maintain or improve existing environmental and landscape value. The Forestry Commission and other

bodies already have considerable expertise in these matters. Public access points should be provided in line with the Land Reform Act and to allow maximum social and recreational benefits of new woodlands. In addition, the gradation of woodlands managed for landscape and biodiversity, and others managed as productive resources, has helped to resolve conflicts in many other countries (e.g. North America). The designation of 'core' woodland areas for conservation with surrounding buffer zones in which increasing level of economic management occur, linked by corridors, is widely recognized as delivering maximum environmental and socio-economic benefits. This is particularly true under environmental change (e.g. Briers 2011).

#### References:

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Photo: Andy Gibb



Leo Sharratt

## Planned wind farm on Ben Wyvis

Ben Wyvis, the only Munro in Easter Ross, is under threat. Falck Renewables (an Italian outfit) and Coriolis Energy are proposing to erect 17 x 126.5 metre wind turbines on Cnoc nan Each and Meal na Speirig, which lie prominently on the lower slopes of "the Ben". That such a site should be envisaged is a sure sign that the provision of land based wind farms in Scotland has already reached saturation point. It might be added that the manufacturing processes for land based turbines take place in Denmark, Germany and Norway, whereas off-shore hardware can and is being produced in Scotland itself. The focus is rapidly changing in favour of off shore wind farms and the economic viability of land-based wind farms is now in doubt.

This development would vandalise one of Scotland's finest panoramas - Ben Wyvis is spectacularly visible from the A9 as it crosses the Black Isle and Cnoc nan Each and Meal na Speirig are prominent foreground features. Together with the existing wind farms at Novar and Beinn Tharsuinn, the almost-complete Novar 2 and the 43 turbine proposal for Strathmorie (on the flanks of Carn Chuineag), this proposal would contribute to a serious cumulative impact. Were this proposal to be sanctioned we would be faced with a "ring of steel".

Objections to on shore wind developments are now much more than the mere 'nimbyism' that we are accused of by associated business and political interests. Alex Salmond's denials of the impacts of wind farms on tourism are based on a report written in 2008 when there were only 25 wind farms in Scotland. Millions of tourists travel to Scotland for its undisturbed wild landscapes - our open spaces are

unique in Europe. National & international visitors use the A9 over the Black Isle and many folk (including Prince Charles) stop to admire and to photograph Ben Wyvis on the start of the descent to the Cromarty Firth. Ben Wyvis, with this particular foreground, is superbly visible from many parts of the Black Isle, Dingwall, Muir of Ord, Beaulieu and even Inverness itself some 20 miles distant.

Who will benefit from this proposal? The Italian developers and absentee landowner respectively stand to make £9million and £200,000 annually, and we, the citizens of Scotland, will pay for this through subsidies that are added to our electricity bills. Some local community benefit would be likely but would hardly compensate for the catastrophic environmental damage which this proposal would cause in both the long and short terms. The plight of local landowners whose properties are already being seriously devalued by these proposals is being studiously ignored, and the consequent environmental impact, obvious to local people, is being deviously misrepresented.

Prior to the formal planning application due in February or early March 2012, a petition will be mounted throughout the area and, this being a matter of national and not only local interest, you are urged to sign up. Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, as many people as possible are urged to write individual letters of objection - as soon as the application reference number is known the details can be had from me. The intention will be to present this petition to Highland Council as part of the objections to this application.

**For further information on how to object, please contact Leo Sharratt at [leo@swordale.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:leo@swordale.eclipse.co.uk)**

John Milne

## Book review: 'The Great Wood' by Jim Crumley

It is some years since I came across a copy of Jim Crumley's book 'Gulfs of Blue Air: A Highland Journey' in a secondhand bookshop in Prince Edward County, Ontario. Ever since then I have kept his books to hand as an invaluable resource when I contemplate our relationship with nature and the place in our psyche of the land in which we evolved, issues generally ignored in a culture in which material consumption almost alone determines how we shall live.

I was thus delighted when I came across Jim Crumley's latest book 'The Great Wood' in Waterstones in Oban. Delighted and not at all disappointed once I had finished my first reading of this 173 page paperback published by Birlinn in 2011. Spending as much of my time as possible as I do in Upper Glen Lyon I can even forgive his limited passing reference to that most wonderful of glens given that he starts his journey round the remnants of 'The Great Wood' with some highly imaginative and informative reflections on the Fortingall Yew on the approach to Glen Lyon. Furthermore his final paragraph in the final chapter returns to that Yew "arguably the most important growing thing on earth...the one tree in all the land that may well be truly immortal".

Those of you who know and appreciate this author's writing will understand that he is a poet, communicating, in his prose as well as in his poetry, meaning and significance by means of poetic expression. It is one thing to describe nature using the language



Photo: C Brown

of "fact" and statistic alone: it is quite another to use creative language, symbolism and metaphor, in other words, poetry. By using the power of poetic prose he describes not only the history of Scotland's wildwood but his vision of its future, correcting along the way that which he believes to be mistaken in so much of traditional thinking about the nature of the wood.

His journey takes us from Fortingall down to Glen Finglas before striking out westwards to the Sunart Oakwoods, representing "our oceanic wood...coastal scraps of hazel woods that are among the least disturbed patches of woodland anywhere, and may be the only places left where we can look the original wildwood in the eye". In addition to the foregoing he devotes a chapter to each of Strathfillan, Glen Orchy and Rannoch, Rothiemurchus and Strathfarrar taking us along the tracks he knows so well and loves so much.

This book is not only a joy to read, it is informative, hopeful, a guide and encouragement to all those who already share Jim Crumley's passion for our native trees



Personally I found his word picture of Strathfarrar to be singularly reflective of the memories I have from my visit there some three years ago: his power of description is revealed when he suggests that we can only "marvel and...admire the power and the beauty and the rightness of native trees in a native setting. I think, for example, of Glen Strathfarrar in late October, where the beauty comes at you in waves and puts an ache in your heart." No photograph or even painting could ever communicate that range of emotion.

Although Jim Crumley heads up one of his chapters, with every justification, "A Lament For The Trees" he is optimistic about the future of our Scottish Woodlands; many examples are to be found not only of the "eagerness with which this rugged land responds to trees, and to the slightest encouragement from the human race" but of the challenge being accepted on behalf of the said human race for instance by the Woodland Trust in Glen Finglas and by the local community in Sunart where "it is our very own era that has resolved to give the oakwoods a future, to put them back at the heart of community life, to forge a new pact with nature, to give back where so much has been taken from nature for so, so long, to restore as much old oakwood cover, as is humanly possible".

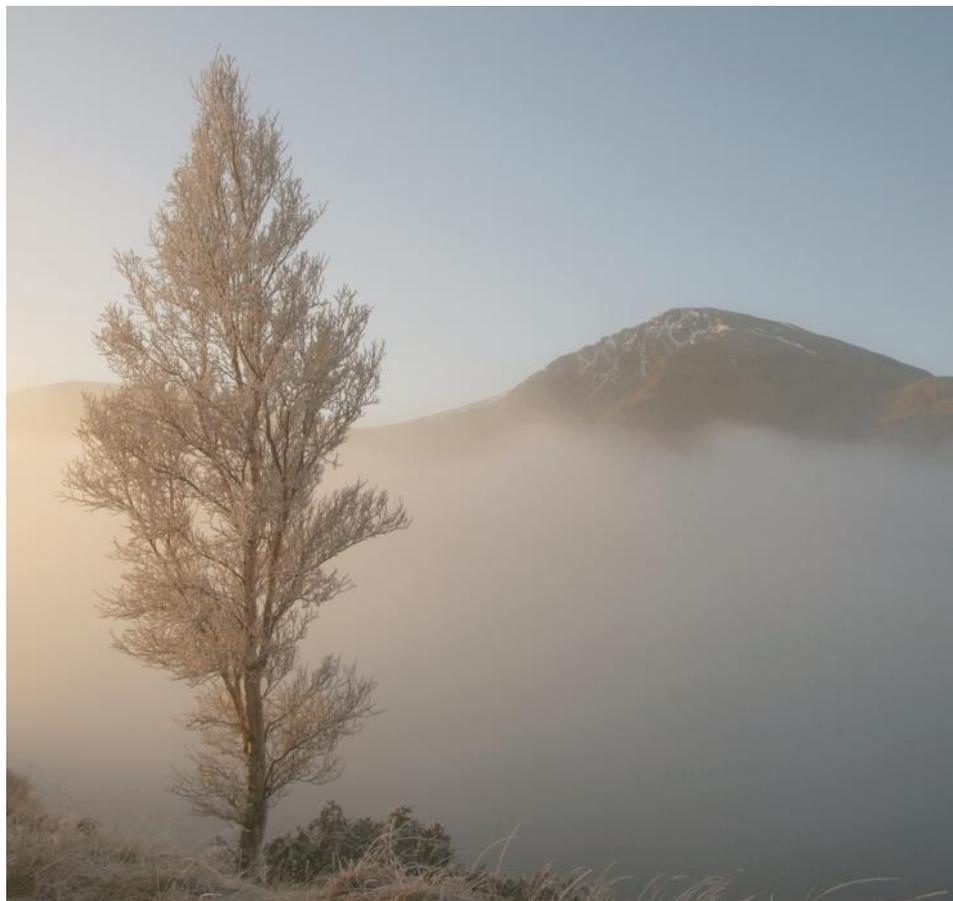
This book is not only a joy to read, it is informative, hopeful, a guide and encouragement to all those who already share Jim Crumley's passion for our native trees and an invitation to others to join in our determination to "safeguard and enlarge the woodland strongholds, those surviving enclaves of trees that bridge the chasm of the

millennia by their very survival in the very landscape where their first elephant-slow march across the land set down their earliest ancestors. And then, if only we could connect them up with patches of new forests."

Here we have a call to "our imagination...our daring...our vision" and inevitably our wallets which is surely difficult to resist, a call to make up for "centuries that have been characterised...by crimes against the landscape, against trees, against all nature", crimes which many, including the Scottish Wild Land Group, assert continue to be committed in the 21st century. This is indeed an important book from a bard whose role is to inspire and heal, linking the healing of our landscape, trees and all nature to that of our communities.

Photos: *opposite* Andy Gibb

*this page* K Brown



Jim Crumley

## 29 years ago: How wild is wild?

In issue 1 of *Wild Land News*, published in the spring of 1983, Jim Crumley wrote about the nature of wild land and what it meant to a group set up in order to protect it. It's an argument that bears repeating, so here is Jim's original article nearly 30 years later, in our 80th issue. We'll be hearing more from Jim himself in the future, and any other responses are welcome.

'Wild' is the word that matters. It is the rallying cry of outraged conservationist extremists and the red-rag-to-a-bull word for a number of councillors and developers, a four-letter word meaning desert. To the Scottish Wild Land Group it means neither. We recognise that in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there is little of our land – if any at all – which is utterly wild, and that there are long and justifiably bitter Highland and Lowland memories fuelled by 'human desert' policies.

What we mean then, is land which can be allowed to remain as primitive and untamed *as humanly possible*. We mean land which is sufficiently commanding for the impact of its landscape, sufficiently free of the influences of urbanised humanity, to evoke feelings of rare and rich freedom.

Where such areas exist, we believe that it is beyond question they should remain as they are, unless the natural course of events might make them more primitive. Too much has been irreversibly destroyed and too little is left intact not to be worthy of a policy of environmental kid gloves. That does not mean a no-people, no-development desert, for people should be part of that landscape, but if humanity insists on stringent safeguards for the architectural eloquence of its finest urban period pieces, how much more worthy are

its finest mountain landscapes of its safeguards as period pieces of the ages?

Such land is in our care. The question is whether we care enough about its wildness or whether we insist on taming it. The Scottish Wild Land Group believes that the finest – yes, the wildest – of our landscape should be beyond such considerations, both for the sake of the landscape itself, and for our own sakes, as Gavin Maxwell has suggested:

*"For I am convinced that man has suffered in his separation from the soil and from the other living creatures of this world; the evolution of his intellect has outrun his needs as an animal, and yet he must still, for security, look long at some portion of the earth as it was before he tampered with it".*

It may be now that there is no such untampered land in Scotland, but there is still good cause for not tampering further with the wildest that we have, because, as George Mallory said of someone else's landscape, it is there.

If humanity insists on stringent safeguards for the architectural eloquence of its finest urban period pieces, how much more worthy are its finest mountain landscapes?

Calum Brown

## The lost world of Dundreggan

Recent surveys have identified a host of rare and endangered species at Trees for Life's Dundreggan estate near Inverness. Already known to be home to over 60 species of conservation priority, the 10,000 acre estate now boasts the first Scottish record of at least one species of sawfly, the second-ever British record of a waxfly species, and several species of spider, crane fly and dragonfly that are listed in the UK's Red Data Book of endangered species. There are now known to be at least 120 species of sawfly alone on the estate.



The floral diversity of Dundreggan, featured in the previous issue of *Wild Land News*, is also exceptional. With these new discoveries, it is rapidly becoming an exemplar of what well-managed Scottish



environments can look like, and the range of biodiversity they can support. Alan Watson

Featherstone, though already very familiar with the estate, has said he is astonished by the richness of life being found there, and that "the secrets slowly being revealed on this Highland estate suggest that we have much more to learn about the true extent of Scotland's biodiversity".

This is undoubtedly true, and should give pause for thought for all those who would surrender our ecological capital for short-term profit. The similar environment of the neighbouring Balmacaan estate, like many others, is set to be sacrificed to gigantic turbines, tracks and concrete foundations that will do little good for anyone except the stockholders and owners of large power companies. Clearly this should not be the extent of our ambition for Scotland's remarkable and largely unexplored environmental potential.

Photos: *top*—Azure Hawker dragonfly at Dundreggan, K Brown

*left*—larva of sawfly (*Amauronematus* sp.) feeding on dwarf birch on Dundreggan., R Bunting

*bottom* – Longhorn beetle at Dundreggan, K Brown



**For more information on the recent surveys and other developments at Dundreggan, go to [www.treesforlife.org.uk/dundreggan](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk/dundreggan)**

Holly Deary

## News

### *Wild Land Management Standards website launched*

January, 2012 saw the launch of The John Muir Trust's new Wild Land Management Standards website ([www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk](http://www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk)) which will illustrate the principles upon which the Trust's management of wild land is founded. The website will act as a handbook for land managers who are interested in improving habitats and wildlife in a natural way and provides management plan template and links to other useful online resources.

### *Allt Duine Wind Farm proposal rejected*

Highland councillors have rejected the recent Allt Duine wild farm proposal in the Monadhliath Mountains. The RWE Npower Renewables proposal was for the construction of 31 turbines and would have had a drastic effect on the wild land quality in that region. Formal objections were lodged by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, John Muir Trust, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks. The application will now face a full public local inquiry.

### *Wilderness on the EU Agenda with Pan Parks*

A recent policy conference, 'Protecting Wilderness in Europe', took place at the end of January at the European Parliament in Brussels where nearly fifty delegates attended to discuss opportunities

for enhancing the protection of Europe's wilderness. Outputs from the conference called for actions such as the protection of wilderness through the implementation of relevant actions of the European Biodiversity Strategy through national strategies.

### *Scotland takes the lead on mapping wild land*

Scottish Natural Heritage has recently published a series of maps detailing relative wildness in Scotland's landscapes. These are intended to replace the old 'areas of search for wild land' map. These maps are intended to aid local authorities in making planning decisions which safeguard wild land. The maps were constructed using a method developed by the Wild Land Research Institute at the University of Leeds, on which more information can be found at: [www.leeds.ac.uk/info/125079/consultancy\\_and\\_problem\\_solving/1633/parts\\_unknown\\_measuring\\_wildness](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/125079/consultancy_and_problem_solving/1633/parts_unknown_measuring_wildness)

Future work will go on to identify areas of particular high wildness value, which will support the Scottish Government's policy of safeguarding areas of wild land character. To view the maps visit: [www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/](http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/)

### *Land Use Action Plan Published*

The Scottish Government has recently published an action plan which sets out how the proposals from the Scottish Land Use Strategy will be delivered. The original

strategy detailed thirteen proposals. This action plan now takes each proposal and sets out key partners, deliverables, milestones and risks associated with it. A copy of this action plan can be found here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/12/19161736/0>

### *Scottish campaigners ambition to revive hutting*

A new campaign launched, called 'A Thousand Huts', aims to make 2012 the year of 'hutting'. With a largely Scandinavian origin, hutting puts city-dwellers back in contact with nature by promoting low-impact, ecological living. Gerry Loose of 'Carbeth Hutters' is a leading member in this campaign to revive the hutting way of life, and along with other hutters, landowners and environmental activists will launch a new Scottish Hutting Federation who will campaign for legal rights for occupation and tenure for hutters.

### *Calls to bury Beaully-Denny line rejected*

Ministers have recently announced their decision to reject calls to bury part of the Beaully-Denny line underground which aimed to reduce the visual impact of 50 meter-high pylons in the Stirling area. It is understood that this 600 pylon network, which Ministers approved in January 2010, will have a catastrophic effect on a number of Scotland's iconic landscapes but Ministers have told Scottish Parliament that putting the line underground is not feasible and would cost an estimated £263 million.

### *Wild Land online survey goes live*

Scottish Natural Heritage, Loch

Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and The Cairngorms National Park have launched a survey with MVA Consultancy to enable them to better understand public opinions and perceptions of wildness and wild land in Scotland. The results are intended to aid them in refining the mapping of wild land that they have done across Scotland. The survey closed on Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> of February and should yield some interesting results.

### *Geo Magazine 'Rewilding Europe' cover story*

Anke Sparmann, author of GEO Magazine, has raised the profile of rewilding in 11 countries, from Brazil to Slovakia, as her story of a journey across a host of European nature reserves hits the press. Anke takes her readers on a tour of a number of 'Rewilding Europe' project areas, including the Eastern Carpathians in Poland and Western Iberia in Spain, while she recounts the astonishing comeback of a number of mammals and species under the heading of rewilding.

### *MCoFS members urged oppose windfarm development*

Mountaineers have been urged by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland to stand up and be counted for in the opposition of a windfarm development near Loch Shin, Sutherland. Were the twenty-two turbine proposal by WKN Windkraft Nord to be successful the turbines would be visible from many of the iconic mountains of the North West, including Ben More Assynt, Ben Hope and Quinag. MCoFS Director of Landscape and Access appealed to all members to submit a written objection by the 15<sup>th</sup> of February.



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