



Word from the Wood

A Newsletter for Woodland Managers & NHFT Members – and all who are interested in woodlands

Issue 17 Summer 2009

WE'RE BACK The format has changed a bit, but we hope it will keep you updated on what we are up to and how you can contact us. We have been a bit selective with our What's On section...the events shown are all a bit woody.

Whats on

Sat 1st Aug - Loch Fleet Nature Reserve open day.
10am-4pm.

All day wildlife activities on the National Nature Reserve. Nathan McLaughlan, SNH, Tel: 01408 633602. Littleferry car park, Loch Fleet, Golspie. NH 807 957.

Sat 8th Aug - Dunnet Forest Open Day. 12-4pm. Family fun day. Admission free.

Chainsaw carving demo, recycling demo, log hauling demo, kids fancy dress with a forest theme, novelty dog show for kids under 12, music, stalls, storytelling & donkey rides.

Thurs 13th Aug - Carbisdale cycle. 11am-2pm.

A family friendly route along forest paths that wind through this lovely forest. A joint FCS/ Highland Council ranger event. Carbisdale Forest car park. NH 575 955.

Wed 19th Aug – Dunnet Beach, Dunes and Forest Evening walk. 7.00 pm.

A walk on the beach through the dunes and into the local community woodland to get to know this fascinating area and its varied habitats. No dogs. HC Ranger event. Tel: 01847 821531 or 07748 574651. Meet Seadrift Centre. ND 219 706.

NHFT too has undergone major changes over the last year not only in projects and funding, but also in the staff. Our small team, based in Golspie, is led by Forest Trust Manager, Steve Robertson, and includes two new part time NHFT employees, Sasha Saunders, Project Support Officer (left) Pat Rae, Woodland Biodiversity Officer.



Finally we are upgrading various sections of our website ...so watch this space: www.nhft.org.uk/.

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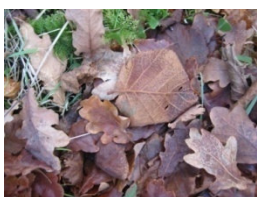
THE FAR NORTH WOODLAND BIODIVERSITY PROJECT

As many of you already know, this is currently NHFT's main project and the one which takes up the major part of our time. Launched last November it will run through to August 2011 thanks to the £250,000 funding from The Tubney Charitable Trust, The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, The Robertson Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland.

The Project aims to conserve and enhance key woodland habitats within Sutherland and Caithness, whilst at the same time providing a boost to the local economy and contributing positively to climate change mitigation. In particular, NHFT will provide advice and direct support to local people in accessing the significant funding opportunities that are available within the Scottish Government's Rural Development Programme (SRDP). We want to ensure that a fair share of this financial support is injected into the economy of Sutherland and Caithness.

We have a good starting point for wildlife and woodland resources in the far North, with woods managed by a whole range of public and private land owners and managers.

These include Upland Birchwoods, Oakwoods, and Wet Woodlands as well as Ancient Wood Pasture sites, rich in soil and plant biodiversity as well as in the living archaeological and cultural significance of their ancient birch pollards.



However, many of these habitats exist here at the very margins of their UK distribution, often in a fragmented state and extremely vulnerable to even minor local disturbance. The pressure from over-grazing by wild and domestic animals is in many cases a major threat. Climate change could represent the last straw.

The project is also promoting the carbon storage benefits of healthy woodlands and soils, and the equally important productive potential of woods in the Far North. Species such as birch, alder, ash, oak and even hazel can play a part in lessening the impact of importing fossil fuels to the North through well managed short-rotation, or coppice, broadleaved forestry.

Many marginal agricultural sites have the potential for high quality woodland establishment, producing at the very least an effective and relatively affordable fuel source. Some could further be enhanced by re-introducing managed grazing, benefiting both biodiversity within the woods, and increasing, rather than reducing, the production of affordable, high quality local food.



NHFT works in partnership with a wide range of local groups, organizations and forest businesses, supporting them with their own work. Groups already on board include both the Sutherland and the Caithness Local Biodiversity Action Groups, several Community Woodland Groups and Crofter

Common Grazings, as well as Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Crofters Commission.

We have three project target areas: The key one is **“SRDP and UKBAP Delivery - Biodiversity-rich Woodland Management”**. Currently we are providing major support to several new schemes that are seeking SRDP funding, including schemes in Assynt, the far North West, East Sutherland and in Caithness.

We are always keen to hear of any new sites with potential.

The second target area is **“Woodland Management Priorities”**. This naturally overlaps considerably with the last, and aims at increasing Habitat Networks and Riparian Woodlands, Coppice Forestry, and Wood Pasture and Management for Fuelwood. For example, the NHFT commissioned a “Far North Aspen Woods Survey”, which was carried out by Scott McG Wilson in 2008/9. This study is complete and has been recently issued. That report made recommendations on possible future locations that could be

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Whats on (Cont).

Fri 21st Aug - Batty about Bats! 20.45-22.00. Walk up Dunbeath Strath to see if we can find any bats. HC Ranger event. Tel: 01955 607758. Dunbeath Heritage Centre. ND 162 294.

Tues 25th Aug - Simply Batty. 7pm-9.30pm. Construct your own bat roosting box with help from the ranger and Forestry Commission Scotland. Later join them at a small local bat roost to see the midge munchers emerging. No dogs. Borgie Log Cabins. NC 663 565.

Fri 28th Aug - Moth Night. Meet 7.00 pm for slide show at Seadrift then set off for the forest at 8.00 pm to join the rangers in setting traps and making sugar ropes to draw in the moths. Empty traps the next morning at 10.00am, Seadrift. Tel: 01847 821531 or 07748 574651. ND 219 706.

Tue 1st Sept - Fungi, fruits and nuts, Lochinver. 11am-3pm. Discover how fungi operate as nature’s recyclers you explore the lovely Inver woodland river walk. River Inver bridge, Lochinver. HC Ranger event Tel:01571 844654. NC 096231.

Sun 13th Sept - Fungi Foray and Natures Larder. 10.30am. Discover how fungi operate as nature’s recyclers within this coniferous woodland. Then have lunch at Seadrift and see what else there is in nature’s larder. Dunnet forest entrance. HC Ranger event. Tel: 01571 844654. ND 221 699.

targetted to enhance the network of aspen sites in Caithness and Sutherland.

The third target area is “**Capacity and Resource Building**”. “Capacity building” relates more to training events and the developing demonstration sites. e.g. we are working closely with the Embo Trust to help develop their aspiration for Forest Crofts. We will report more on that in our next newsletter. The “Resource building” theme is aimed at protecting and expanding the existing tree gene pool in Caithness and Sutherland. This can be done through developing a plant resource derived from isolated populations of key species (e.g. hazel/ aspen/ juniper/ blackthorn/ hawthorn/ oak/etc), and working with groups to develop their own local nursery resources. A co-lead in this is Mark Banham at Birichen near Dornoch. His tree nursery specialises in growing trees from locally collected seed. We have worked with him in developing a supply of Aspen that has been grown on from root suckers collected from suitable sites in 2007 and again earlier this year.

A last word about “biodiversity” – if any of you are in doubt about just what that means, just how important it is for all of us, and how you can assist further (as well as planting woodlands!), then take a look at the websites of three groups with whom we work closely: A really good information source with a Highland Focus is: <http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/>. The main Caithness link is <http://www.caithness.org/nature/biodiversity/>, and for Sutherland it is: <http://www.sutherlandpartnership.org.uk/Landscape-and-Biodiversity-g.asp>.

HIGHLAND BIRCHWOODS LINKS WITH NHFT

Highland Birchwoods is working with local community groups, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highland Council, the Sutherland Partnership, North Highland Forest Trust, and the Woodland Trust to develop and secure a funding package which will deliver a range of projects to South East Sutherland in 2009/10.

These small, community-led environmental projects are related to the woodlands around Rosehall, Lairg, Golspie, Brora, Dornoch and Bonar Bridge and will:

- Add to the biodiversity of local woodlands
- Improve and encourage access to local woodlands
- Increase the local capacity to develop future woodland projects by providing training and learning opportunities

By bringing together SE Sutherland’s key environmental stakeholders, this initiative will forward community development by establishing and strengthening links and fostering a collaborative approach to the management and promotion of local woodlands.

For more information, contact Julie Paton at Julie.paton@highlandbirchwoods.co.uk

PTO to see our mystery contributor...

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Tips by Underhill

Making your own charcoal

Charcoal has many uses apart from fuel for BBQs. The finings (dust/small particles produced when making charcoal) when added to compost will sweeten it. Spread around your veggie plot it will deter slugs and snails which don't like to travel over it, and last but not least, spread over acidic soil/ground it will improve the pH – I could go on and on about its other uses in filters and filtration schemes....

So... how to make the stuff without buying an expensive kiln? Simple, we use an oil drum and here's how:

Firstly acquire an empty oil drum in good condition i.e. no holes in it and using a cold chisel make five 2 inch holes in one end, remove the other end completely leaving a ledge, this will serve to rest the lid on that you have just cut.

Place the drum open end upwards on some bricks to allow airflow to the holes that are in the base. Start a fire in the drum using paper, small bits of wood, in fact anything that will get a fire going! Light the fire and once it is going well load branchwood randomly to allow airflow until the drum is full (*tip*: keep the pieces to a fairly even diameter, placing the larger pieces at the bottom where they will have a longer char).

When the fire is hot enough not to go out, restrict the air access around the base by using soil piled against it but leaving a hand width gap. Put the lid back on but leave a small gap by placing a stick between the lid and the top of the drum to allow the smoke to exit.

You should now be seeing dense white smoke (this is the moisture being burned off), bang the side of the drum from time to time to settle the wood down, this will create more white smoke.

When the smoke turns from white to a wispy blue, shut everything down (this is when the wood itself is starting to combust) seal the base and place the lid firmly on its ledge, make this airtight by using either soil or preferably sand, the burn will then take between 3 and 4 hours after lockdown.

Go and have several beers, cook food, sleep and 24 hrs later tip the drum over onto a sheet, the resulting black gold can then be graded and packed!

CALLING ALL LAND MANAGERS AND OWNERS

If there are any other community groups, crofters, and individual land managers interested in developing and enhancing biodiversity-rich woodland habitats on their land – then please get in touch with us. We may not always be able to take on the full task of securing funding and managing the work for you, but we can, and do, provide free impartial advice, and importantly can put you in touch with other specialist businesses who have more resources than us to provide you with direct assistance.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CALL 01408 633986 OR EMAIL EITHER

steve@nhft.org.uk, pat@nhft.org.uk or sasha@nhft.org.uk

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