

Dunbeath Aspen Day leads to Aspen Propagation Project!

The historic landscape of Dunbeath Strath was our starting-off point for a fascinating day to focus on the stands of aspen on Ballachly Croft, Dunbeath. Financial support from the Scottish Agricultural College and the European Social Fund helped allow NHFT to host this day, which attracted 45 participants including a wide range of Scottish aspen experts.



From the heritage centre to the old meal mill, following Dunbeath Water upstream to the broch, the group were introduced to the features of this ancient landscape by Nan and George Bethune. Northern aspen rarely produces seed, instead producing suckering from the roots of a parent tree which produces a clonal clump around the original parent. Aspen was once an essential part of the forests which clad the straths and glens of Northern Scotland, and through an aspen propagation project it is hoped that aspen can be reintroduced to the areas where it has disappeared.

Entomologist Philip Entwistle, Dan Puplett and Jill Hodge (both Trees for Life) discussed management of existing woodlands to encourage the regeneration of aspen, whose presence is key to the survival of several species of insects and lower-plants. Under the guidance of experts Mark Banham (Highland Trees) and Ern Emmett (Highland Aspen Group) the group dug up sections of aspen roots and discussed the process of propagating root cuttings.

Following on from the Dunbeath day, NHFT was successful with a funding application to the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation Programme for a project to raise awareness and develop a supply of locally sourced aspen plants in Sutherland and Caithness. NHFT are grateful to the North and West Highland Leader+ 2000-2006 Programmes, Scottish Natural Heritage and Highland Council for financing of this Programme. This Aspen Project is a pilot for a larger, Phase 2 project which NHFT hopes to carry out over the next 2years if we are successful in obtaining funding.

For more information check: www.nhft.org.uk



North Highland Forest Trust is an independent charity giving free information, advice and support on woodland related issues to community groups, crofters and other individuals across Sutherland & Caithness

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Please help us with our future plans?
Let us know what you think, and complete our short questionnaire

For advice and further information Contact:
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Wood from the World

Ancient Crafts and Woodland Archaeology

Highland Archaeology Fortnight came round once more last October and NHFT joined forces with the Highland Council Ranger Service, HC Cultural Coordinator for Schools in Sutherland, Lairg History Society and Strathnaver Museum to run some community/school woodland archaeology events in Sutherland.

A recent edition of Radio 4's "Open Country" highlighted the archaeology which lies hidden in our woodland and forests. Aerial survey can be used to confirm the location of sites in open, non-forested land, but where there is tree cover many sites remain undiscovered. Events and activities guided by rangers, archaeologists and crafts folk add a new dimension to our understanding of the woodland landscape and the part people have played in shaping it.

Pupils from Lairg Primary explored Ferrycroft Wood, in search of the remains of the past and participated in 'time-line' activities (hunter-gathering, spear-throwing, berry picking) prepared by country ranger Ian Paterson and work experience student, Magnus, from Dornoch. Mock-ups of deer and other birds and animals were targeted, only to discover that killing the bear and the lynx resulted in a reduction of points for causing the extinction of each species! Remains of an Iron Age broch, an old boundary wall and enclosure were explored along the way, and materials collected for the afternoon felt-making workshop with artist Sarah Orr.



Coppicer Mike Ellis explaining the construction of the greenwood gate.



Mini willow hurdle making with wood artist, Gerald Short.

Rosehall Primary School and members of the community took part in the second event, a 'greenwood' workshop. Ground preparation work and instruction was undertaken by Rogart coppicer, Mike Ellis, assisted by Ian Paterson and Magnus, while local woodcraftsman and artist, Gerald Short, introduced the schoolchildren to hurdle making using willow withies. An enclosure for the school's wildlife pond was created, using traditional woodcraft techniques for the fence construction, techniques used for over 6,000 years. To round off the event and create an eerily ancient atmosphere, storyteller Bob Pegg regaled us with stories of the past inside the reconstructed Iron Age roundhouse in the school grounds. Sounds created using stones, shells, drums and horns accompanied our singing. The surrounding trees amplified the sounds and created echoes which transported us back in time - was that a wolf we heard from within the forest?

Tongue Community—Glebe Wood

NHFT's Community Development Forester, Steve Robertson, is assisting Tongue Community with their plans for developing Glebe Wood as a community resource. Steve, Paul Castle (HC Country Ranger), Stuart Mingham (Youth Worker) and some local youngsters took part in a walk over survey and clean-up session last December.



Steve, James Beattie, Carly Mackay, Paul Castle and Stuart Mingham at Glebe Wood Clean-Up



Tree Nurseryman, Mark Banham at Tongue Primary School

Earlier in October Tongue Primary School, which borders the wood, set up a tree nursery in the school grounds under the guidance of nurseryman, Mark Banham, and the North Sutherland Country Ranger, Paul Castle. Paul will be working with the school and the community with a tree project, as part of Highland 2007, and continue to support project work in Glebe Wood.

The nesting instinct (or how to make a house from a plank of wood)

Ian Paterson *Mid Sutherland Countryside Ranger*

What do our native woodland birds need in order to thrive? Three things I suppose; food, shelter and a mate. A mate they can sort out easily enough by themselves. Food, particularly if they are insect eaters, surely can't be a problem judging by the numbers of insects that either want to eat me or everything I try to grow in the garden! But shelter, or more precisely, the lack of a decent nest site can seriously hinder their breeding chances.

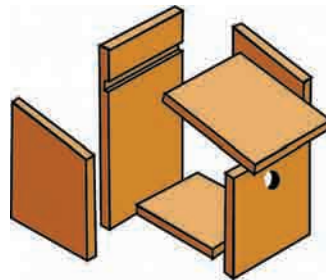
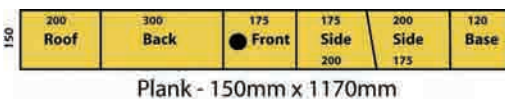
Our native woods certainly provide sufficient opportunities for hole nesting birds. The short lived birch is of particular importance in providing a steady stream of rotting standing timber with holes aplenty. The commercial plantations are not so accommodating because the trees are never left to become old and interesting.

A number of bird species which are declining nationally such as the house sparrow and spotted flycatcher can benefit from a good nest box. Place one or more in your garden and delight in the residents picking sawflies off your fruit bushes or aphids off your roses!

Making your own nest box is not difficult to do and can be very rewarding. The most commonly used type in gardens is the small-hole nest box, suitable for Blue, Great or Coal Tit. If you fill it full of sawdust and you live near Scots Pine you may be lucky enough to attract Crested Tit. If the entrance hole is made slightly larger, House and Tree Sparrows may move in. Replace the hole with an open front and it may be used by Robins, Spotted Flycatchers and Pied Wagtails.

Make it out of wood, hardwood naturally lasting longer than softwoods. The wood should be at least 15mm thick to provide sufficient insulation. Treat the outside but not the interior with a water based preservative. Hole sizes for the different species are:

- Blue, Coal and Marsh Tit 25mm or larger.
- Great Tit and Tree Sparrow 28mm or larger
- House Sparrow 32mm



Put your box in a quiet place out of the reach of cats, between two and five metres up a tree, fence or wall. Try to face it between north and east, as this prevents the box from overheating. Tilt the box forward slightly so that driving rain hits the roof and does not enter the box. Do not put a perch on the front of the nest box, as this is not necessary for the birds and may give predators a foothold. (I once saw a stoat climb 15 feet up a tree to remove starling young from a hole in a Scots Pine)

Put different types of box in different places around the garden. For instance, put open-fronted nest boxes low down and hide them well in vegetation to attract robins and wrens.

Once you've sorted the garden birds out what about a box for a tawny owl or, if you are by water, goldeneye? Do you have a high gable end where you could mount two or three boxes for swifts? What about kestrels, barn owls, bats..... The two sites below have simple bird box plans for a number of species. Happy sawing, you really can make a difference!

- <http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/nature/birds/birdbox.htm>
- http://www.londons-swifts.org.uk/simple_swift_box_1.pdf



A Word from the staff at NHFT

The last few months have been a busy time for NHFT. In addition to supporting groups and individuals involved in community woodland and forestry projects, the staff team are working towards the next three year project. As described in this newsletter and on our website we have carried out a wide range of training events ranging from tree growing and management to woodland archaeology. We have also continued to be involved with advising and supporting groups in developing such things as woodland management plans or even plans to create new forest crofts. However, we are well aware that we are unable to meet the full demand for our services across the two counties. We have as a result raised further money to allow us to employ additional help this year and will be looking to recruit for that work soon. We are also currently working hard with an external consultant to develop a new business plan and funding support. This will allow us, hopefully, to create an organisation even more able to fully support community forestry needs across the North. Your help in highlighting what your needs are and what you'd like this (your) organisation to look like, would be most appreciated. The enclosed questionnaire provides one means by which you can contribute to this process.

Thanks for your help.

ELAV Scotland visit to Finland

The ELAV project is an international initiative concerned with regenerating rural areas through community-led forest planning.

In late May of this year, four interested people from southeast Sutherland will have the fantastic opportunity to take part in a four-day visit to an area of east Finland, to find out more about forest planning in practice, and other issues. People taking part in similar visits to Sweden and Norway last year had very interesting and enjoyable experiences.

This trip is open to anyone and is almost fully financed (participants pay only £50 towards costs). To register your interest and for more information, please contact **Viv Halcrow**, ELAV Scotland Project Officer **01408 635386**

ELAV PROJECT

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This project has now been running for one year. I recently started in the post of ELAV Scotland Project Officer, Ailsa Spindler having moved on to another job. I now need your help to work out where ELAV can be of some help to you, your project or your community. To introduce myself, I have spent the past 12 years working as a freelance ecologist, specialising in survey and monitoring of native woodlands and montane plants and working throughout the Highlands from my home near Ullapool. I understand the challenges of living and working in a relatively remote situation, and I'm very interested in the benefits that the ELAV project could bring to people living in rural Sutherland. You'll be hearing more from me about the ELAV project over the coming months, and I look forward to meeting many of you in the near future.

Viv Halcrow

P.S. See panel to right for this year's best interactive jaunt to Scandinavia! It could be you....

News from the Board

My first contact with the North Highland Forest Trust took place in 2001. As a Grazings Clerk I needed specialist help in exploring the feasibility of a native woodland project on our common grazing. I discovered that the Trust was able to give just this sort of support and we very soon had a site survey and an expert assessment. Although that particular scheme did not go ahead I realised that the Trust was performing a valuable service to communities in the north. I needed no persuasion to become a member from that point and I was pleased to be appointed as a director at the 2006 AGM.

The day of the AGM was also the 'Aspen Day'. A memorable event! Experts to learn from, interesting trees to examine, great hospitality from the people of Dunbeath and even sunshine.

Although I cannot claim any expertise in forestry I have always planted a few trees year by year in unproductive corners of my croft at Brough. I am now getting useful firewood from trees I planted 35 years ago. So it is possible to grow your own 'carbon-neutral' wood fuel – even on the north coast - if you are willing to wait!

I join the board at an exciting time as we embark on the production of our new business plan. During this process we shall map out the projects and other activities which will deliver our aims for the next three years together with the all-important funding plan to provide the necessary finance to make it all happen. If you have ideas to contribute please let us know – contact Steve, Marlyn, Christine or any board director.

David Glass



David collecting aspen roots in Caithness

North Highland Forest Trust is an independent organisation giving free advice and assistance to groups in Sutherland and Caithness, involved with sustainable development and management of community forestry and woodland.

Funding Opportunities

Awards for All

This fund has now increased to £10,000 maximum www.awardsforall.org.uk

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Education, environment and social change

www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Tel: 020 7297 4722

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Local capacity building

www.gulbenkian.org.uk

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Young people arts and education

www.phf.org.uk

Future Builders

Social enterprise business ventures.

www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

European Union Prize For Cultural Heritage

e.g. cultural landscapes

www.europanostr.org/lang_en/0260_activities_eu_awards/

SCVO Funding info and Funder Finder Software.

www.scvo.org.uk/scvo/Information/

Tel: 01463 251729

Further information on all of these from our office.

Alba, Main Street, Golspie, Sutherland, KW10 6TC

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Useful Web Links

www.community-woods.org.uk
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www.forestry.gov.uk
www.woodland-trust.org.uk

www.swt.org.uk
www.btcv.org

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