

Word from the Wood

## Greenwood Workshop in Rogart

Eight keen students joined Mike Ellis, of 'Roots to Branches', for the first of a series of workshops to establish a greenwood workshop and centre in Rogart.



It has long been a goal of Mike's, to harness the enthusiasm of the increasing number of folk interested in learning more about the traditional woodworking skills, which were an important part of woodland management in the past, and are becoming more relevant again today. The workshops are creating an opportunity to learn new skills and contribute to the establishment of a workshop centre in an area of Sutherland where you can still find remnants of old coppice sites and woodland pasture. Participants learn the basic greenwood techniques of cleaving, riving and shaving and are involved in timber bridge building, making gates, hurdles, etc. **For further details on courses contact Mike Ellis 01408 641357 or mkellis7@aol.com**



### Wood Pasture Project for Sutherland

North Highland Forest Trust has been awarded funding through the Highland Council Biodiversity Programme for a wood pasture research project and will be running events to provide training in identification and survey in Sutherland.

**For more information contact:**  
**steve@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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For advice and further information Contact:  
Steve or Marlyn  
**01408 633986**  
**info@nhft.org.uk**  
**www.nhft.org.uk**

# Highland Aspen in Glenmore

Cairngorm Nation Park - 9 June 2007

Brigitte Geddes *Gearchoille Woodland Trust Ardgay*

After a refreshing cuppa, the assembled party of Highland Aspen Group delegates went straight out into the field in order to assess the success of two regeneration planting projects in the Glenmore area. The trees in one project were making good progress (at an altitude of 319 m), whereas in the other project we visited, the young trees had been attacked in their tubes by some unidentified insect, possibly leaf miner.

Regeneration planting is usually based on a minimum of seven clones in order to assure genetic quality (FC regulations). Groups of different clones are usually planted some 20 yards apart. According to FC regulations, all clone material must be documented to ensure precise provenance. Provenance is important as the objective is to select in favour of clones that are resistant to diseases such as *Venturia*, a fungus disease of the shoots (spores overwinter on the leaves).

There was some debate as to which type of reproduction is more successful: root trainers or seed distribution by wind/animals. Would seed distribution achieve a wider coverage? FC regulations do not prohibit the planting of aspens from seed; it has simply proved more difficult. It was also argued that genetic diversity is debatable, regardless of whether the method involves seed or trainers. The general consensus was that ultimately the answer lies in the analysis of clones. It seems to have been observed that if a female tree sets flowers in an aspen stand with 10 clones, these flowers probably derive from several males, thus giving wide genetic variety. Seed orchards work on the same principle.

Ern Emmett referred to a 1999 study which claimed that aspen does not flower in the far north of Scotland. It is now clear that occasionally, as for instance in Speyside in 2007, the exception proves the rule. Chris Ellis (lichenologist, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, pointed out that epiphyte diversity within a site is dependent on genetic diversity of a stand. Epiphyte diversity therefore tends to be greatest in multiclonal aspen forests.

Unlike other potential regeneration plantations, the sites visited were free from roe/red deer impacts. Some of the group wondered what might happen to young trees once they outgrow their protective tubes, as young aspen trees are the deer equivalent of caviar.

Visit to first Glenmore planting site.



After a sun-blessed picnic lunch at the enchanting Loch of the Faeries, the party visited an ancient aspen near the Pass of Ryvoan. In the afternoon there were two fascinating presentations. One by Chris Ellis on lichens associated with aspens and the other by John Parrott on the aerial aspen survey carried out recently in the Speyside area. One outcome of recent research is that woodland structure is an important criterion for diversity of lichens. Unfortunately, there seems to be a considerable time lag involved before impacts manifest. For example, species richness of lichens observed **now** depends on the extent of a woodland, as it was **150 years ago**. It therefore seems vital that woodland managers adopt a long-term strategy in order to ensure the future biological diversity, for lichens and other species/communities.



Ern girthing a single aspen at Pass of Ryvoan.

ELAV PROJECT

## ELAV Meeting in Norway March 2007

Viv Halcrow ELAV Scotland Project Officer

Very early on a frosty morning, I set off with the two Scottish members of the International Steering Group of the ELAV project, Jon Hollingdale and Malcolm Wield, for the village of Bardufoss in arctic Norway. The purpose of the trip was to attend one of the regular ISG meetings, and for me to meet the Project Officers from the partner countries of Norway, Sweden and Finland; the Iceland PO wasn't present. It also was an opportunity to see some of the district in which the Norwegian element of the project is based.

We flew from Aberdeen to Oslo, into the rising sun, and then on to Bardufoss. Flying almost the whole length of Norway in clear weather gave an excellent view of the extent of forest cover, while further north wooded areas were punctuated by dramatic snow-covered mountains.

I knew that Bardufoss had a military base, but wasn't prepared for the big NATO exercise taking place—it was far from peaceful! The landscape is stunning though, the village lying in a glen surrounded by 1600m hills and extensive birch-dominated forest reaching a natural treeline at 600m. Scots pine occurs sparsely among the birch on lower ground, with willow, alder and aspen. There is so much birch, of good size, that 100,000 tonnes are harvested annually for wood-chip to power heating systems and yet there was no evidence of management. Although only 30km from the sea, there seemed little maritime influence and it felt to me akin to Strathspey or Deeside. It was cold, clear and sunny, with waist-deep snow – wish I'd taken my skis!

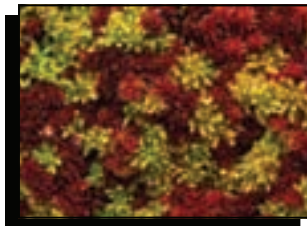
That afternoon, we enjoyed a walk up a nearby hill with the other Project Officers and ISG members, getting to know each other and discussing the progress of the ELAV project in our countries. I noted tracks of red fox, mountain hare and wood mouse in the snow; there are no red deer in this area with its long, snowy winters. Moose and reindeer occur; some of our party saw two moose, but the only sign of reindeer was a van full of skins for sale in the village square on Saturday! Many of the birches were bent down to the ground by the weight of snow, something I have seen before only in Strathspey after one memorable 40cm snowfall. It was unsurprisingly quiet for birds, but raven and hoodie crows were seen and in the village there were great tit, greenfinch and large numbers of magpies.

On the second day all the ISG members assembled in the Kummunehuset (local authority) building in Setermoen, the county town of Bardu district. Progress of the ELAV project in all partner countries was discussed, as well as plans the final conference to be held in Sweden in late October. Malcolm, Jon and I enjoyed a snowy walk on Saturday, where we noted the pleasing, well-kept wooden houses, painted in a range of subtle colours. After poking round the (fiendishly expensive) shops, we had plenty of time to discuss the way forward for the ELAV Scotland project, before the long journey home on Sunday.

# Spiders, sphagnum & sore throats

**Andy Summers Highland Council  
Countryside Ranger for Assynt**

*Sphagnum Papillosum & Capillafolium*



The other day I swallowed a spider. I don't know why I swallowed a spider. I think it just fell into my mouth while I was pushing through some dense bushes. I didn't mean to and it is not something I do very often. However I learned recently that swallowing a live spider is an old Highland remedy for whooping cough, curing hiccups and many problems caused by muscular spasms. The spider has to be alive when swallowed otherwise it doesn't work. Apparently modern medicine has proved that there is something in spider venom that can slow down muscular spasms and indeed is used in the treatment of strokes which can be caused by muscular spasms in the brain. I suppose that explains why the spider has to be alive so it can spit out its venom before dying.

I learned this from a very informative walk through the woods with Mary Beith. It opened up a whole new world where the trees, the woodland plants growing under the trees, the lichens and mosses growing on the trees and even spiders living in the tree bark had an important use for the people of the Highlands. A woodland could be like a natural larder full of medicines, food and other uses depending on your knowledge. It is sad that we have lost a lot of that knowledge.

Did you know for example that Highland folk were the first to invent disposable nappies? Sphagnum moss that grows everywhere in our damp climate has an uncanny ability to absorb 12 times its own weight in water. If dried in sun it can also be used as a wound dressing. In 1815 at the battle of Waterloo somewhere in a bog in Belgium such were the casualties that both sides ran out of dressing and it was the Highlanders that advised they start using sphagnum moss. Many lives were saved.

The Elder tree apparently is a pharmacy all to itself. Elder flowers and birch bark were boiled together in spring water which was strained and drunk as a tonic. Elderflower water also made a good tonic. The leaves were crushed into an ointment for wounds and burns. The powdered bark was a laxative and the roots and even more powerful laxative. Even a fungus that only grows on Elder trees makes a good gargle for sore throats.



Cobwebs on the woodland floor

This and many more wonderful facts can be found from Mary Beith's book **Healing Threads**, 1995. Also "**A'chraobh - the tree**" is a truly lovely book

and part of the community based project at Borgie Forest, where Mary explores the origins of the ancient gaelic tree alphabet and the traditional significance of each tree in Gaelic culture.



Steve at NHFT Forum - Laid, North West Sutherland

## A Word from the staff at NHFT

The NHFT staff team were delighted with the response to our consultation questionnaire. Your comments and views are essential to the future direction of the organisation and we are working hard to access funding to create opportunities for training, development and support over the next 3 years. Our local woodland and timber resources have an important role to play in reducing our carbon footprint in the North. Training and job creation for young adults with an interest in rural skills is also key to the development of healthy local economies within Caithness & Sutherland.

NHFT has participated in a number of events over the last few months, including the Scottish Archaeology Fair in Strathpeffer and The Touchwood Festival in Dingwall. There is a growing interest in woodland as part of our cultural heritage, ancient pollarded trees testify to woodland grazing practices of the past, while field experts consider how we should, or should not, preserve this landscape. Would the re-introduction of woodland grazing help to create healthier habitats for sheep and cattle, while increasing the biodiversity value to the environment? Let us know what you think and don't forget we are here to help you with information, advice and support.

**Steve & Marlyn 01408 633986**

## Innovative Furniture Design

Six Cities Design Festival—Eco House Design Exhibition  
Inverness 17 May to 3 June 2007



From Neptune's Chair made of rough branches....



to furniture made from recycled barrels

## ELAV Scotland Project

Community consultation is still ongoing, with talking to individuals and groups, and attending meetings and events to try to find out what ideas local people have for the woods. If you know of any particular folk or groups I should get in touch with, please let me know. I am trying to keep the ELAV project in people's minds through regular articles in the local paper, and posters distributed locally.

Family events are being planned for **Ardgay, Golspie, Lairg and Rosehall** to bring people together and discuss ideas for woodlands and forestry in East Sutherland.

For more information contact  
**Viv Halcrow 01408 635386**

## News from the Board

Based in Rogart as a self-employed greenwood worker and coppicer I had been aware of the existence and activities of the North Highland Forest Trust and indeed worked with the Trust on various projects from time to time. Many of my interests and concerns regarding the plight of our woods, woodland skills and the potential to develop our woodland resources dovetailed with the aims of the trust, not least of them being a remit to enhance our woodland culture. I was happy to become a director in January 2007, more so given the exciting times we now live in.

The wheel is slowly turning, I can remember a time when greenwood crafts were all but redundant, management of woodland poor or non-existent and the concepts of environmentalism and conservation barely spoken of. Today, thankfully, that is changing, children are now being taught and encouraged to take an interest in their environment and its biodiversity and to value their woodlands as a community resource. The trust is rightly engaged in developing and enhancing community involvement in all aspects of woodland culture from education, the learning of woodland crafts to sustainable management, planting and providing know-how and support. In Sutherland we now have a woodland "school", a place where hands on greenwood skills can be learned and practised and aspects of woodland management to be taught, it is an example that could be repeated throughout the North.

My background as a woodland worker is firmly rooted in those skills being part of the working countryside; it is a tradition that goes back thousands of years and is just as relevant today to our quality of life. These are exciting times, the potential to reconnect to our woodland heritage is enormous, the more of us who embrace it the quicker it will come about, joining the trust would be a start.

*Mike Ellis*



**Mike at work on a timber panel**

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

**Money for Planting Trees this Winter– get it while it lasts!**  
£3 million woodland creation scheme for forestry and biomass growers to help tackle climate change.  
[www.forestry.gov.uk/woodlandcreationscheme](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/woodlandcreationscheme)

**Awards for All**  
This fund has now increased to £10,000 maximum [www.awardsforall.org.uk](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk)

**Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**  
Education, environment and social change  
[www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk](http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7297 4722

**Future Builders**  
Social enterprise business ventures.  
[www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk)

**European Union Prize For Cultural Heritage**  
e.g. cultural landscapes  
[www.europanostra.org/lang\\_en/0260\\_activities\\_eu\\_awards/](http://www.europanostra.org/lang_en/0260_activities_eu_awards/)

**SCVO Funding info and Funder Finder Software.**  
[www.scvo.org.uk/scvo/Information/](http://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**  
Tel: 01408 633986 [info@nhft.org.uk](mailto:info@nhft.org.uk)

### NHFT Publications paper policy

North Highland Forest Trust uses 100% British post consumer waste recycled paper called Evolve Office and our limited run publications are printed locally by Voluntary Groups—East Sutherland.

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### Useful Web Links

[www.community-woods.org.uk](http://www.community-woods.org.uk)  
[www.reforestingscotland.org](http://www.reforestingscotland.org)

[www.snh.org](http://www.snh.org)  
[www.rspb.org](http://www.rspb.org)

[www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)  
[www.woodland-trust.org.uk](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk)

[www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk)  
[www.btcv.org](http://www.btcv.org)

### The North Highland Forest Trust is funded by:

