



native woodlands
discussion group

newsletters 1-12

NEWSLETTER NO. 4

SPRING 1976

NATIVE PINWOODS DISCUSSION GROUP

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. Editorial	1
2. The 1976 Field Meeting	1
3. Coille Coire Chuilc	1
4. Abernethy Forest - New RSPB Reserve	2
5. Black Wood of Rannoch	3
6. Glenmore Forest (Ryvoan): New Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserve	5

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In the previous meetings of the group and issues of the newsletter the main emphasis has been on the scientific survey of the pinewoods and the formulation of conservation strategies and plans. In this and subsequent newsletters it is hoped to give greater prominence to reports on practical steps that are being taken towards promoting conservation of the pine forest remnants.

The papers of the Symposium held in Aviemore last year have now been extracted in their final form from the contributing authors and it is hoped that publication will not be too long delayed.

Some thought has been given to the future role of the Discussion Group and it is hoped that there will be opportunity for further discussion on this at the meeting of the Group which it is hoped to hold in the autumn.

It has been thought useful to attach a copy of the mailing list to this edition of the newsletter so that readers can see who currently constitutes the Discussion Group or has expressed an interest in receiving news of its discussions.

Any enquiries regarding the Discussion Group and the contents of this newsletter may be addressed to

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1976 MEETING

It is proposed to hold this in the Kinlochewe area in Wester Ross on the 7 and 8 October. Pinewoods to be visited

may include these on the Loch Maree Islands and at Shieldaig. It would be appreciated if members who hope to attend the meeting could return the form enclosed with the newsletter so that an early estimate can be obtained of the numbers likely to attend.

COILLE COIRE CHUILC (TYNDRUM PINWOOD)

It has been suggested that members would be interested to read more about the progress at this site referred to by Rawdon Goodier in his Opening Paper to the Inverness Meeting of the Native Pinewoods Discussion Group reported in Newsletter No. 2.

Coire Coille Chuilc was first notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in April 1955. References to the need to stimulate regeneration in the wood were made in 1957 by Dr Boyd, in 1960 by Dr Carlisle and again in 1965 by Dr Ward, the latter two particularly recommending the creation of fenced enclosures to reduce grazing pressure.

Nothing was done about the woodland and in 1968 Coire Coille Chuilc passed to its fourth owner since the Marquis of Breadalbane sold the estate in 1939. Major Martin Cruickshank, the new owner, recognised the importance of this pinewood relic and, initially through the Scottish Woodland Owners Association contacted the NCC to sound out their interest in assisting the Estate to fence a small part of under five acres, the resulting plot to be sown with seed collected locally from native Scots Pine. As a result of this suggestion Mr Goodier, who was then Regional Officer for the area, and colleagues from the then woodland habitat team at Merlewood, met on site in May 1970.

As a result Dr Bob Bunce produced a report in July 1970 on regeneration at Coille Coire Chuilc and five other woods in Steven & Carlisle's "southern group" visited during that May. The essence of his report was that the main requirements for successful regeneration were all present at Coille Coire Chuilc, but that although numerous very small seedlings were found throughout the wood no successful establishment was noted. Dr Bunce therefore proposed that for conservation purposes fencing alone should be adequate for successful regeneration.

Later during 1970 Major Cruickshank and Conservancy Staff, particularly David Grant, drew up alternative schemes for aiding regeneration and considered possible methods of financing the project.

By March 1971 ideas had crystallised to produce detailed plans for three sizes of enclosure depending on available finance and to seek money from the Natural Environment Research Council under section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968 for what is known as an SSSI(M) scheme with Major Cruickshank generously agreeing to match the NERC contribution.

By June 1971 the Regional Officer and Land Agent, Scotland, had put up a case for the middle sized enclosure of about 30 acres as being the best compromise with the Conservancy/NERC and the landowner each meeting half the costs.

The proposals were now subject to very lengthy delays as after the scheme was approved by the Nature Conservancy in London and passed to NERC it was found that the proposed financial contribution was above the limit currently set by the Treasury.

It was not until May 1974 that the SSSI(M) Agreement was drawn up and signed and fencing tenders received. The Agreement is that a first enclosure of about 30 acres be set up to allow natural regeneration to take place. If, after nine years, this has been unsuccessful consideration then to be

given to other methods of promoting regeneration. If regeneration is successful up to 50% of the 180 acres in the Agreement may be excluded to sheep and deer, 30 acres every nine years. The first enclosure must be re-opened for grazing on or before the enclosing of the final plot.

The fence was erected round the first 30 acre enclosure during the autumn of 1974 and later in November Regional Staff visited the wood with colleagues from the old woodland habitat team, now part of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, to discuss a programme for monitoring the effects of the exclusion of sheep and deer on regeneration.

J M Sykes and A D Horrill carried out initial survey work in mid July 1975 and the report on their work should be available very shortly, after which discussions will be held to finalise the monitoring programme for 1976.

ABERNETHY FOREST - NEW RSPB RESERVE

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have recently purchased some 1520 acres of Abernethy Forest. This reserve lies entirely within the Grade 1 site identified by the NCC in the Nature Conservation Review. Included is some 500 acres of established pinewoods as well as moorland, marsh and the two lochs of Garten and Mallochie. Of the woodland, about 100 acres have been commercially planted in the past but the remainder is native pinewood of various ages including extensive stretches of large, old trees. The woodland areas merge into bog with scattered pine and thence to mire with dry moraines carrying pine and birch.

Needless to say this reserve is one of great diversity with a corresponding richness of wildlife. Birds breeding include osprey, goosander, capercaillie, black cock, crossbill, siskin, crested tit and golden plover with greylag geese and whooper swans present in winter. Red and roe deer and red squirrels are common while otters

and wildcat occur. The plant communities in the different habitats are also important and varied.

A full-time warden will be appointed to this reserve and decisions on future management will not be made until the warden has had sufficient time to properly assess the area. However the aims of management will undoubtedly be to maintain and improve the existing important wildlife habitats with particular emphasis on the pinewoods. Advice will be sought from the various bodies with a particular interest and expertise in this field. As far as visiting is concerned, it is not possible at this stage to state what facilities will be available but it is envisaged that access will continue much as at present. Basically the intention will be to improve the area for visitors but only where this can be arranged without prejudice to the wildlife.

BLACK WOOD OF RANNOCH

Introduction

Following the Pinewoods Symposium in 1975, the Newsletter No 3 provided a number of conclusions to that meeting, including recommendations on appropriate conservation measures. The purpose of this short note is to describe briefly the way in which several of these measures have been implemented on a key pinewood area, and to sketch the background which led, on 17 November 1975, to the signing of a formal Agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council establishing a Forest Nature Reserve over the Black Wood of Rannoch in Perth District.

History

The ownership of the Black Wood is known from at least 1389, and the first documented exploitation was in the 17th Century when there was extensive felling, and it is especially interesting to note that for a period, the wood passed to the State Commissioners for protective

management. Following resumption of private ownership, heavy exploitation continued up to the end of the 19th Century and subsequently in the Second World War, the Canadian Forestry Corps removed much of the best timber over almost the whole woodland area. The Forestry Commission acquired the site in 1947, but it is worth noting that the Scottish Wildlife Investigation Committee had in 1946, identified the Black Wood as a nationally important scientific site, although it was not until the 1950s that the area was statutorily notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 by the then Nature Conservancy. Subsequent felling and replanting with Black Wood pine stock has been carried out by the Commission over part of the wood, in addition to establishment of exotic conifers south of the main pinewood area.

Research and Scientific Interest

The history of discussions and negotiations between the organisations and individuals concerned up to 1975 is long and complex. During this period, however, useful survey and research work was carried out, under the aegis of the Nature Conservancy and the Forestry Commission, much of this concerned with the entomology of the birchwood associated with the pine forest, which has been studied intensively since the 1870s. Special reference is in fact made to this interest in the Final Report of the Scottish National Parks Committee and the Scottish Wildlife Conservation Committee (1949) although the main birchwood lies outwith the current Agreement. The first systematic ecological study of the area was that of Stevens and Carlisle in 1959, and in 1972 the National Review of Sites for Nature Conservation confirmed its value as the largest and one of the most important remaining examples of Caledonian pine forest in the Southern Highlands of Scotland, with a very diverse structure, and a variety of tree and shrub species other than pine; birch, juniper, willow, hazel and rowan. In addition the Forestry

Commission's research reserve area represents a relatively unmodified zone, especially protected from more recent disturbance elsewhere.

In 1974 a detailed survey of the status of the various pine and birch stands, including an analysis of stem size distribution and stocking was organised by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology from Merlewood Research Station and together with a comprehensive conservation policy and management statement prepared by Dr R A H Smith of the Nature Conservancy Council, provided the basic framework for the discussions which followed between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council on the Forest Nature Reserve proposals.

The Management Agreement and Plan

The aim throughout these discussions was to secure agreement on the future management policy for the Black Wood of Rannoch, with the object of ensuring the conservation of the native pinewood and natural birchwoods together with their associated flora and fauna. The ecological importance of the Black Wood has of course been recognised by the Forestry Commission from the time of the first acquisition in 1947, and the perpetuation of the native pinewood has been accepted as the major objective for more than 20 years. The area covered by the plan forms part of a much larger area (approximately 2340 ha) designated by the NCC as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, which includes land outwith Forestry Commission ownership. The period of the plan is for 10 years in the first instance, although it is envisaged that the portion of the Black Wood involved will continue as a Forest Nature Reserve subject to agreement on the plan for succeeding periods of 10 years.

The principal object of management is to maintain the character of the Black Wood, and to produce in the long term, a self-perpetuating pinewood as it may have been in the 15th Century before exploitation began, not necessarily of pure pine, but

with a stocking of birch, rowan, and other native species in places as well as open bog areas. Secondary objectives include the protection of genetic purity. Protection of part of the area from undue interference, the need to maintain a diversity of habitat and associated flora and fauna, and to utilise the area for research into the pinewood ecosystem.

To achieve these objects, the Reserve has been divided into three management areas as follows:-

- (i) Non-disturbance area (121 ha) - Where the main objective is to preserve an example of relatively unmodified native pinewood.
- (ii) Minimum disturbance area (106 ha) - Where the main objective is to ensure adequate re-stocking of native pine with an area class structure better suited to ensure perpetuation of the forest.
- (iii) Conservation area (624 ha) - Where the main objective in the long term is to replace the existing non-native species with Scots pine of Black Wood origin, utilising natural regeneration wherever possible.

One of the most important effects of these proposals will be the virtual trebling of the present native Scots pine area within the Black Wood to approximately 851 ha. The Forestry Commission will continue to be responsible for all management, including the implementation of the agreed plan, while the Nature Conservancy Council will have access to the area for survey and monitoring. Both organisations will meet annually to review progress on this plan which must be regarded as experimental at this stage.

Conclusions

The establishment of a formal Forest Nature Reserve over the Black Wood of Rannoch more than 28 years after its

official recognition as a nationally important scientific area and acquisition by the State forest authority, represents a milestone in conservation of our native pinewoods. This long period of gestation has also been one in which there has been demonstrated a progressive change in attitudes on the part of scientists and foresters alike, and without which an agreement such as this would not have been possible. Among the more important changes has been an increasing sense of urgency on the part of scientists regarding the need to offer practical conservation proposals and, on the part of foresters, that there are certain areas which should not be subjected to standard silvicultural practices.

There are still differences of opinion on management requirements between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council, and these are explicitly acknowledged in the Management Plan for the Black Wood, and it is for this reason that the plan is intended to be amended in the light of our joint experience in following years. It is incidentally very salutary to note in the historic records going back several centuries a whole series of arguments from one quarter or another on the reasons for regeneration failure, and rejuvenation measures thought necessary! More important than these differences however the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council in their protracted discussions on this pinewood, have consistently agreed on first, the scientific importance of the site; secondly, that conservation objectives should be paramount, and finally, that an unambiguous statement of intent is required for future continuity of management. Above all, the Commission and the Conservancy believe that the Black Wood of Rannoch Forest Nature Reserve has established a feasible framework within which practical conservation prescriptions can be implemented.

GLENMORE FOREST (RYVOAN): NEW
SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST RESERVE

The old track into Glenmore Forest - once

a shooting estate with a large lodge but now the Forestry Commission Queen's Forest through which pass the roads from Aviemore to the ski slopes - left the Speyside Road at Nethy Bridge and followed Strath Nethy, through the Abernethy Forest and Forest Lodge, then climbed over the Pass of Ryvoan, where the Ryvoan Bothy stands, then finally descended the short Glen of Ryvoan, past the Green Lochan to the Glenmore Lodge. The lands along the old track, a favourite route of walkers, have retained their natural character in contrast to Glenmore with its many changes. The Trust has now taken over the pine lands in the Glen of Ryvoan from the Forestry Commission as a wildlife reserve, by agreement for an initial period of 21 years. Both sides of the glen have been included in this major 300-acre reserve which has many natural features of interest and quite a lot of history.

The pinewoods are both typical and also, in parts, quite remarkable. In the survey of pinewoods Ryvoan was included in the Glenmore site. Much of it was of the "eastern type", mainly of pine with some birch; the range of habitats was also eastern in character with heathery slopes predominating. However, a broad band of the woodland, on the north side of the valley, lies over base-rich rock and this is reflected in the unusual richness of the flora. Here Scots pines, mixed with Birch and some Willow, stand over a shrub layer of Juniper which in turn gives cover to many broad-leaved herbs, some of which are rare and others, such as Muscatel and Woodruff, are unusual in pinewoods and more reminiscent of broad-leaved woodlands to the south. Despite browsing by Red deer (hinds in summer plus stags in winter) and sheep, from which the dense Juniper provides some protection, there is some pine regeneration. When the Pinewoods Symposium visited the site during last year, Dr A Carlisle noted particularly the vigorous regeneration in the vicinity of the Green Lochan that had come in since the time of his original survey. The Trust's main aim will be to encourage and care for regeneration; some

fencing may be needed but would have to be arranged so as not to reduce the attractiveness of this unusual valley.

In the bed of the valley stands the ruin of a kiln used for burning lime from the base-rich rocks of the northern slope. Also, below a flat expansion of the valley floor, the remains of an earth dam can be seen. This was used to impound water which was then released to flush pine logs down to the River Spey when the local forests were heavily exploited in the 1700s. The recent symposium was informed that Char and also fairies occurred at the Green Lochan. The latter, if they proved to be a management problem, being reputedly immortal, could be difficult to deal with.

This woodland, so noteworthy botanically, also has its complement of pinewood birds and animals - Crossbills breed regularly and Crested Tits have been recorded. The reserve was first suggested by the Hon Douglas N Weir, Aviemore Area Representative of the Trust.