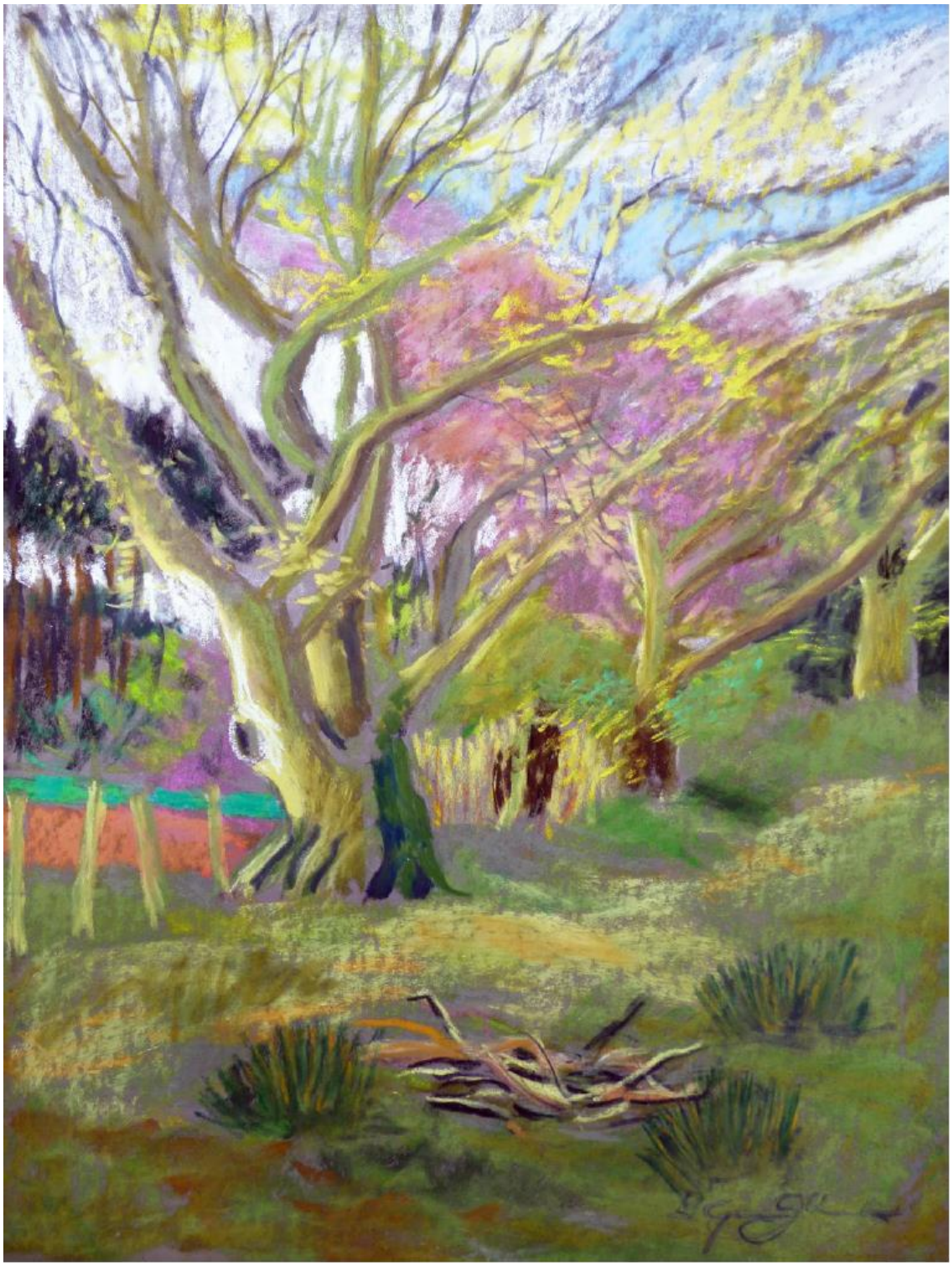
WOODLANDS
NATIVE
DISCUSSION
GROUP

NEWS-LETTER

Spring 2021 Vol. 46 (1)



Above: pastel drawing done by Gavin Johnston in 2020, of woodland near Balerno (original 40 x 30 cm)

Front cover: primrose and common dog-violet in Argyll (photo: Ben Averis)

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Contributors to this newsletter				
Name	**Email address**	**Text**	**Photos**	**Artwork**
Alison Averis	alisonaveris@gmail.com	✓	✓	
Ben Averis	ben.averis@gmail.com	✓	✓	✓
Fiona Chalmers	fionachalmers@futurewoodlands.org.uk	✓	✓	
Alan Crawford	alancrawford07@hotmail.co.uk	✓		
John Fletcher	johnfletcher@deervet.com	✓	✓	
Noel Fojut	noelfojut@msn.com	✓		
Gavin Johnston	cath.gav.johnston@gmail.com			✓
Robin Noble	robinnoble@icloud.com	✓	✓	
Gordon Patterson	gpatterson18914@gmail.com	✓		

Marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* Photo: Ben Averis

EDITORIAL

Ben Averis

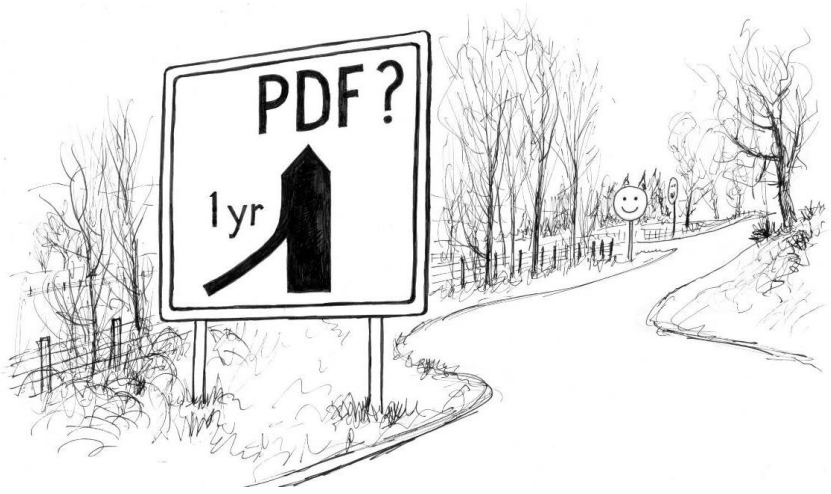
Welcome to the spring 2021 newsletter. In previous issues my editorial has had a brief summary of what's in the newsletter, but I've only now come to realize (after all these years) that by the time you're reading this page you'll have already seen the Contents page so there's no point in repeating stuff here. Oh well – I hope you find this issue of interest anyway, and as usual I thank those who have contributed to it. For the next issue (autumn 2021; deadline 15th October 2021), please email any woodland-related material, no matter how short, to me, with your contact details included. To get a book reviewed, send a copy to me at 6A Castle Moffat Cottages, Garvald, Haddington, East Lothian, EH41 4LW. If you want to review a book, please tell me; we can often get a free review copy from the publisher, and if you review it the book is yours to keep.

Best wishes to all

Ben ben.averis@gmail.com

PDF vs PAPER COPIES OF THE NEWSLETTER

As you already know, the newsletter is now issued as a PDF file by default, and printed copies have been offered this year for an additional £10 on top of the normal subscription fee. Some of you have opted for printed copies, so you'll get this and the autumn issues in that form, but it turns out there are so few wanting printed copies that the production cost per copy is actually quite a bit more than the additional £10. The committee will have to make a decision about how to resolve this, as we can't afford to continue with this arrangement in the long term. One solution would be to do it as a pdf file only from 2022 onwards. We will keep you updated on whatever the committee decides to do about this.



NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

Alan Crawford

To my mind Scotland has three overarching issues to come to terms with if we wish to improve the ecological condition and resilience of our terrestrial habitats. In some parts of the uplands, grouse moor management for driven grouse shoots limits the potential for ecological restoration, in the west of the country *Rhododendron ponticum* continues to significantly degrade our Atlantic Rainforest among other habitats, and across the country high levels of herbivore impact, primarily by deer, detrimentally affect both the condition and extent of our native woodland resource.

The Deer Working Group (DWG), led initially by Simon Pepper and latterly by Andrew Barbour, recently provided the Scottish Government with their final report. The Scottish Government accepted 92 of the 99 recommendations, though many had some degree of reflection/consideration before being formally agreed and implemented.

Among the things that stood out to me was one of the aims of the report:

'To provide a clearer vision for deer management based on public interest within the context of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis with clearer actions to deliver these aims.'

And among the recommendations:

'Scottish Natural Heritage [now NatureScot] should very substantially reduce the extent to which SNH carries out direct counts of red deer on open hill range and refocus SNH's limited resources on building up more information on the impacts that deer are having on the natural heritage, woodlands, forestry, agriculture, and other public interests in Scotland.'

'Cairngorms National Park Authority and SNH should have a much greater focus on the need to improve the management of wild deer in the Cairngorms National Park, to reduce deer densities in many parts of the Park to protect and enhance the Park's biodiversity.'

'Subject to the successful outcome of Scottish Natural Heritage's trials, paragraph 5(b) of The Deer (Firearms, etc.) (Scotland) Order 1985 should be repealed to allow the use of night sights to shoot deer.'

'No close season to be set for males of each species.'

Time will tell how profound an impact this report will make, but a strong legislative framework on the subject is surely progress and gives grounds for hope that sustainable deer management is achievable.

At this year's Annual General Meeting my three-year term as chair will come to an end. It has been an honour to do a stint in that role for a group that has been so important in developing my interest in native woodlands and that has given me so many warm memories of a shared appreciation of special places. It has been challenging but rewarding, and I would like to take the chance to express my thanks to the rest of the committee for their support in managing the business of the group and in developing the activities of the group.

Hope we can meet in the woods again soon,

Alan

NWDG ADMIN REPORT

Alison Averis

Welcome to everyone who has joined the NWDG since the beginning of the year. We are delighted to have you in the group, and hope that we will be able to see you at an event soon.

We've currently got **188** paid-up members, compared with 185 in November 2020.

The group is in possession of **£11,323.00** of which £1,500 has been committed to the costs of producing the Proceedings for the Woodland History Conferences held in 2016, 2017 and 2018, leaving us with £9,823 in reserve. Many thanks to Kirsty MacIntyre, The Highland Bookkeeper, for auditing our annual accounts.

When I sent out the last mailshot I didn't get a single failed email attempt – the first time this has ever happened. Please help to keep things this way by **letting me know if you change your email address**, as email is now our main way of keeping in touch and sending out the Newsletter. Ideally, please can you consider letting us use an email address that doesn't change if you get a new job or if your organisation decides to rename itself. Email addresses are never divulged to third parties, even other NWDG members, without your permission. Thanks very much.

ASPECTS OF ASSYNT WOODLANDS (WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SINGLE-STEMMED POLLARDED HAZELS)

Robin Noble

I was very pleased to hear of Roz Summer's study of the hazels of Assynt, and to read her excellent report (*Atlantic Hazel Audit of Assynt and Coigach; Roz Summers April 2017 – March 2018*, available as a pdf file from https://coigach-assynt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Draft-Hazel-Report-Combined-low.pdf with a shorter summary at https://scotlandsnature.blog/2020/11/17/coigach-and-assynts-secret-hazel-woodlands/). What follows is most certainly not a criticism of any aspect of that report, but a contribution to thinking on one or two aspects; in particular, to the question of the origins of the remarkable single-stemmed, pollarded hazels. I had been thinking of following up this and a few other questions (furthering my own interest in the Assynt woodlands), so Roz's report is a welcome catalyst. Much of this interest stems from my 60-year acquaintance with the Assynt woodlands, in particular those around Glenleraig and Nedd.

While we can derive much information from the sediments from Loch Sionascaig and Cam Loch (see section 1.5 of Roz's report) it is important to remember that these have a very specific local context (i.e. the immediate surroundings of the lochs) and we should guard against imagining that they provide clear evidence for some sort of blanket coverage of the very extensive and uneven landscape of Assynt and Coigach by hazel and birch and anything else. We do not have data from enough sites to assume this.

There can be no doubt that the very complex geology of Assynt, allied to its location in the far north of Scotland (bringing with it exposure to climatic extremes), will have given rise to a mosaic of habitats, much of which will always have been wetland. Even

at its maximum extent (whatever that may actually have been) it is probably wrong to think of it as uniform, dense woodland cover. Frans Vera has argued convincingly that large herbivores advanced northwards along with the woodland species, and that their grazing created a dynamic environment, with open spaces, heavily grazed sections and regenerating areas. I see no reason why this should not have been equally true of Assynt.

There can be no doubt that the oceanic climate, and periods of climatic change, as noted by Roz (see section 4.2 in her report), would alter the nature of the soils and start to reduce the woodland cover. It is critical to note that the processes which lead to the formation of peat are virtually irreversible; in subsequent drier periods the surface of peat may dry out (allowing pine to grow), but in a subsequent climatic downturn it will rapidly waterlog and the pine disappear.

Clearance of woodland for agriculture might well have occurred in the limited "limestone corridor" when the Neolithic tombs were being built, but the lack of archaeological evidence for significant contemporary settlement elsewhere in Assynt and Coigach, i.e. to the west of the mountains, suggests strongly to me that woodlands in the Lewisian landscape would continue to be affected mostly by exposure and climate change, rather than human agency.

In any case we should guard against the idea that Assynt woodland was cleared by fire. For a start, the mature tree species of which these woods are composed do not burn at all easily (the only exception, crucially, is Scots pine, which does, interestingly, not now appear as part of the native woodland in either Assynt nor Coigach). There have, of course, been many episodes of muirburn in Assynt, throughout history - and its immediate aftermath looks terrible – but although fire will progress through these woodlands the mature trees are normally not affected. Some may be so badly scorched that stems die, but these trees generally grow again from the base ("fire-coppices"). This is only likely to happen along the edges of woodland, as there is unlikely to be sufficient combustible material (such as heather or dry *Molinia*) under the trees.

Seedlings and slender saplings may well die in severe fires (which obviously sets the wood's regeneration back and helps to limit the capacity of these woods to spread), but the mature woods do not die and would be no easier to clear for agriculture than before.

In case anyone doubts this, we experienced the perfect "test-case" when a serious fire started accidentally on an allotment at Little Assynt Field. This fire was very dramatic, spread very quickly and ripped through the mostly-birch wood of the ridge behind. It pretty well cleared the dry grasses etc. of the field layer and scorched a few saplings on the margins, but the mature trees were unaffected and now you would have no clue that the fire ever happened (unless you investigated the soil profile, where no doubt a layer of microscopic charcoal would be evident).

The idea that our ancestors would have cleared significant areas of hazel (at least until the Clearances; probably even more recently) is inherently improbable. Roz emphasises, quite rightly and importantly, that hazel is a remarkably useful tree. She says: "I don't think the ancestors could have lived here without hazel". Section 4.2 in her report (just like mine for the Assynt Crofters' Trust in 2000) emphasises the crucial point that most of the wooded areas of Assynt have survived close to the coastal

townships that were regarded as well-populated, even “congested”, by 1775. It cannot be too often emphasised that these woods survived because they were valued and used. Of course the folk living in these townships used the woods repeatedly over the centuries, as they did until recently. Exploring the coastal woods of Assynt reveals trees of all types, shapes and sizes, undoubtedly used by local people, many still showing saw-cut faces.

It would make an excellent and valuable project, building on this report and mine, to obtain funding for coring and securely dating a good selection of Assynt’s veteran trees. I got a few good dates, and Roz has made some estimates (following the suggestions of the Coppins’), but to get dates for some of the single-stem trees, whether oak, hazel, or other, would be very interesting. Peter Quelch and I, when examining specimens around Drumbeg and Glenleraig, were convinced we were seeing trees that originated before the Clearances; this would make them over 200 years old.

In any case, we know what the pre-Clearance farms of Assynt looked like. There were patches of cultivation, sometimes defined, even if only partly, by dykes or banks, but often without visible boundaries. Beside these dykes, sometimes within them, grew some valued trees; Roz illustrates hazels growing like this (page 12). Peter Quelch and I identified old, clearly managed hazels growing above the burn just below the mill in Glenleraig, but within the enclosed area of agricultural land indicated by the very obvious bank. Home (1775) describes trees growing on the “rocky baulks” between areas of cultivation, and exactly this may still be seen at that most significant site known as “Rassal Ash Wood” (down towards Kishorn); it is a mixture of patches of land cleared for agriculture (witnessed by the clearance cairns) with old hazels growing on the stony banks between and the ash growing elsewhere. This is a crucial site for the understanding of west coast woodland.

Home’s *Survey of Assynt* describes “Infield” and “Shielings”, but we know from his account that some of the latter grew crops, for instance of hay, and should really be regarded as detached parts of the Infield. Around Glenleraig I identified some of these smaller shielings by the faint presence of their “lazy-beds” and it was noticeable that few of them show much protection against grazing. As noted above, some have banks, some have (partial) dykes, and some have nothing. If grazing were heavy and uncontrolled, nothing would have grown on these shielings, they would have had no value, and Home would not have mapped them.

While they may exist in remoter locations, it is in this context of worked woodland reasonably close to the centres of population and often close to agricultural land, that the remarkable single-stem hazels are most often found. They are frequently in groups or groves; there are two such groves west of the burn in Glenleraig, I know of one between Loch Drumbeg and Oldany, and at Rassal the stony banks have a significant number of such hazels right beside the agricultural land and in no way separated from it. This looks more and more like a characteristic of an organised system of resource management (by folk who had real need of resources) than the result of some sort of casual accident of heavy, uncontrolled grazing.

Such uncontrolled heavy grazing is in any case unlikely, as surely the above discussion suggests. Red deer were restricted to existing deer forests (or nothing would ever have been grown) and roe were presumably limited through casual hunting “for the

pot". All stock spent the summer months on the hill shielings, and reference is frequently made to the fact that fairly few animals were over-wintered. Historical record, anecdote and the lack of effective protection around the infields make it clear that animals were generally herded. While there might at times have been exceptions, no township would retain any woodland if it were over-grazed for centuries. As Roz and I both noted, such tradition as remains in Assynt suggests that woodland, especially of hazel, was valued, so it is unlikely that people would have just watched its destruction.

Again, the practicality of the suggestion that single-stem trees are created only by grazing needs more thought. As Roz's report shows, "typical" hazels are of the form that I call the "basket of sticks", with many stems, again typically of different thicknesses, some of which will normally be well beyond the bite of any herbivore. Over a long period of heavy grazing I suppose hungry herbivores might just strip the bark off every stem *bar one,* but this seems to me to be rather far-fetched. And even less likely is the necessity that the grazing would suddenly cease in order to let the one stem (or even two or three) flourish from then on and develop into the very substantial trees we see now. Grazing may possibly be the cause of some of the lone single-stem hazels, but it is most unlikely to have produced the ordered groups of such trees that are such a feature of Glenleraig and Rassal. Some of the single-stem hazels still show saw-cuts (frequently covered by moss), and I found one young stool with all stems visibly cut, bar one; someone was still carrying on the tradition!

While the origin of the single-stems may just possibly be still in doubt, there can be no doubt that many of these strange hazel trees were pollarded (Figure 1).

Figure 1: single-stemmed pollarded hazel in Glenleraig, Sutherland (photo: Robin Noble)

Heights may vary a bit, but at a certain height most of these trees have a point at which the single stem becomes a number of significantly smaller branches, in exactly the same way as is shown by all the other pollarded species that may be found throughout these Assynt woods. Far from being left to fade away (as the grazing hypothesis would suggest), these single-stem hazels have definitely been managed; some of us have suggested as fodder pollards used to feed stock in the "hungry gap" in the spring.

Context matters here. If the single-stem hazels are to be seen as only the product of prolonged and heavy grazing, the surrounding trees should show similar signs – they would presumably normally be multi-stemmed from the ground level. Some areas may show this; others do not. In Glenleraig, not far from the groups mentioned already, there is a remarkable single-stemmed hazel pollard that happens now to be horizontal (Figure 2). Adjoining trees are varied but there is, close by, one fine substantial and undeniable pollarded birch (Figure 3), sadly now with some storm damage.

Figure 2: single-stemmed pollarded hazel, now horizontal, in Glenleraig (photo: Robin Noble)

Figure 3: adjacent fine pollarded birch (photo: Robin Noble)

Regarding hazel coppices (see section 1.4 in Roz's report), I am not totally clear whether Roz believes that we have them or not in Assynt, but we most certainly do have coppiced trees of almost every other species (aspen is the most obvious exception to this). Just as anywhere else with historic woodland in Britain, there are many coppices. The coppiced oaks of Assynt are noteworthy and must be some centuries old. Interestingly, there are coppiced alders; most herbivores find alder really unpalatable, so it is again unlikely that these originate through grazing. Like hazel, alder is most useful; it is light and strong and does not rot in water, so it is very valuable for building wooden structures in an area of high rainfall. Archaeology has shown that coppiced alder stems were much used, for instance in the construction of the lake-dwellings we know as "crannogs".

There is no logical reason on earth why Assynt should not have coppiced hazels; I think the "hazel rings" which intrigue Roz have a good chance of turning out to be old coppices. I tend to the view, corroborated at the time of my work with Peter Quelch, that the big hazels with open space "inside" them, the "rings" Roz refers to, are in fact coppiced stools. The huge coppiced hazel on the Feadan croft (on the Achmelvich road) was the biggest I found, with some 30 big stems and a girth at the base which I estimated at some 5 metres; this must be of considerable antiquity. In this context it should be noted that a ring of apparently young oak stems found by me and Peter Quelch and suspected to be an ancient coppice was, on a subsequent visit, proved to be exactly that; it was hard to estimate its age but it was growing in poor soil and probably rather slowly; Peter thought that 1000 years was perfectly possible this far north.

In a way, the "debate" as to whether you think the single-stemmed pollarded hazels are man-managed or not actually depends on your vision of Assynt and such areas in past centuries. Was its economy impoverished? Were its lands always overgrazed (as some external commentators have suggested through the centuries)? Or does a careful perusal of Home's survey, read along with the findings from the excavations in Glenleraig by Historic Assynt (for instance), suggest something totally different? In my view the woods of Assynt and their managed trees look like the product of an organised society that survived for centuries by careful management of the available resources, despite the remote location. Yes, they were always at the mercy of the climate and external forces, but they made the best of what they had and, at least at certain periods of history, seem to have done quite well for themselves.

Finally, Roz highlights, crucially, the fact that the entire woodland resource of Assynt, so important for nature, as a potential resource for the community, and an important (and distinguishing) element in the scenery of Assynt and Coigach, is now at risk as never before because of the uncontrolled presence of countless and effectively uncounted red deer (see section 4.3 of her report). It is noticeable that she found much more damage by red deer than I did twenty years ago. This really needs addressing, but I understand that it is far from being an easy problem to solve.

Robin Noble effectively began his study of the woods of Assynt when at the age of ten he started taking photographs of the surroundings of the family cottage in Glenleraig. Decades later this collection of photographs showed significant changes in this wooded glen and he began to study these changes through time. This led to an organised survey carried out for the Assynt Crofters' Trust; he subsequently worked on woodlands for Ardvar Estate, Culag Community Woodland Trust and the Assynt Foundation while broadening his area of study and contributing to a number of books on Scottish Woodland History.

TIM STEAD – FURNITURE MAKER, SCULPTOR, POET AND ENVIRONMENTALIST

John Fletcher

Tim Stead in his workshop (photo: Maggy Stead)

Tim Stead died in 2000 when he was only 48, but he had already made a name for himself as a man whose whole life revolved around wood. His colossal exhibition pieces such as the wooden Skara Brae built in the lift shaft at the McLellan Galleries in 1990 during Glasgow's European City of Culture, or the Botanic Ash at the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1993 were huge successes. At the Botanics in 1993 he had transformed a whole felled mature ash tree into sculptures accompanied in the gallery with labels: 'Do Touch'. And people did. The tactile quality of wood was always fundamental to Tim.

For those members of the NWDG who aren't familiar with his extraordinarily original achievements, go and see his work at Café Gandolfi in Glasgow (1979), the North Sea Oil Industries Memorial Chapel in the Kirk of Saint Nicholas in Aberdeen (1989), 'The Peephole' in the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (1997), and the Millennium Clock Tower in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. That was his last piece and was created in collaboration with Eduard Bersudsky of Sharmanka, Annica Sandstrom of Lindean Mill and the clockmaker Jurgen Tubbecke.

That short list does no justice to Tim's huge body of work. Often considered a furniture maker, which he was to huge effect, he would have preferred us to think of him as a sculptor. In any case he broke down the barriers between art and craft so that even the chairs and tables are carvings which may be considered sculptures. The

tables have mounds and hollows that follow the contours of the timber. His final sculptures, 'excavation pieces', were hacked and hewn out of burrs, and the viewer is taken inside the spaces by torchlight. Only one person can look in at any time so they are deeply personal and create profound feelings of empty landscapes or Neolithic dwellings. They are not massive in size but they are massive in conception and evoke abandoned cliff settlements, temples, quarries and cities but always in the deep interior of pieces of wood.

Tim obliterated the distinction between the utilitarian and the purely aesthetic. A true iconoclast, he wholly rejected the Classical tradition, but, unlike the Conceptualists of the second half of the twentieth century, he did not see that rejection as requiring the abandonment of beauty. Like a walk in the forest, his work heals, succours, even sharpens the senses; it relaxes the observer because it is so deeply human.

It is not surprising then that Stead was an environmentalist. His complete absorption into his material – wood – meant that he always felt a need to 'put something back'. His first sculptures, created whilst a student at Trent Polytechnic and at Glasgow School of Art, used driftwood, old railway sleepers or wood that he had found in skips. And although some of his earliest furniture used pieces of wood rejected by commercial furniture makers including teak and mahogany, it was not very long before he realised that local hardwoods better fitted his vision of availability and environmental sustainability. From then on he committed himself to using only native timbers. That was a significant innovation at the time and he had to buy trees as they were felled, plank them and season them. He actively sought out timber with burrs which was not considered useful by the trade.

With the advent of Dutch Elm Disease good stocks of elm became available, and having settled in the Borders he had access to oak, ash, beech, sycamore and the whole gamut of native woods. This was the essence of Stead and it is this which makes him precious to lovers of native woodlands. In the memorial chapel at St Nicholas' Kirk the wood in his chairs is layered: walnut, elm, rowan, elm, maple, elm, beech, elm, rowan and yew to spell 'WE REMEMBER YOU'.

In 1986 Tim encouraged Rory MacLeod, Eoin Cox and others to raise funds for the purchase of Wooplaw Wood near Lauder, thus creating Scotland's first Community Woodland. In typical Stead fashion he decided to create 365 wooden axe heads, which were sold to raise money for the purchase of Wooplaw. It thrives still with weekly lessons for neighbouring schoolchildren and countless visits and events. Then in 1996 Tim founded and became chairman of Borders Community Woodland and co-founded and became a trustee of two other separate endeavours: the Borders Forest Trust and the 'Woodschool' near Jedburgh. Ed Iglehart has written how Tim bullied him and Alyne Jones into action from which arose the Southwest Community Woodlands Trust and that it and the Wildwood and Borders Forest Trust are truly *'children of Tim Stead'*.

Tim and his wife Maggy first settled at Harestanes at Monteviot, near Jedburgh, where Tim started kiln-drying his timber and working in buildings that were later to become the Woodschool. A few years later, now with their two children Sam and Emma, they moved to Blainslie near Lauder and it was here that Tim began to create his greatest masterpiece inside the house which they called 'The Steading'. Over a period of several years he transformed the interior of the house into a space clad in exquisitely

worked wood. The floors, walls, ceilings and doors became uniquely Tim Stead; even the wash basins were wooden. Against this backdrop he installed extraordinary furniture, stairs, cupboards, beds redolent of brochs, wavy-edged dressers, undulating chests and a huge longcase clock that slowly marks the time.

The Steading Living Room, including the Fireplace (photo: Sean Begley)

Tim Stead had always written poetry and as his cancer prevented more physical work his writing and smaller-scale sculptures became more important to him. This substantial legacy of written work and his sculptures remains in Maggy's possession but will soon pass to the Tim Stead Trust as guardians.

Perhaps the greatest legacy that Tim left was in the very large number of artists he influenced, as well as the many imitators whom Maggy has described as 'Insteads'. It is impossible not to see parallels with Charles Rennie Mackintosh with their shared education at the Glasgow School of Art and influential furnishing of Glasgow restaurants and tea rooms. But one very major difference is that, of course, Mackintosh was an architect and designer whereas Stead worked with the bandsaw and chisel. This means that every part of The Steading was constructed by Stead himself.

When Tim died Maggy inherited the house and contents but materially not much else. The workshop was organised by Maggy as 'The Workshop of Tim Stead' and Ross Purves and David Lightly (who had worked with Tim) continued to produce furniture in the Stead manner which Maggy marketed. However, her home is in France and she eventually passed the business to Ross and Davie who carry on their own furniture making business, 'The Wood Neuk' at The Steading.

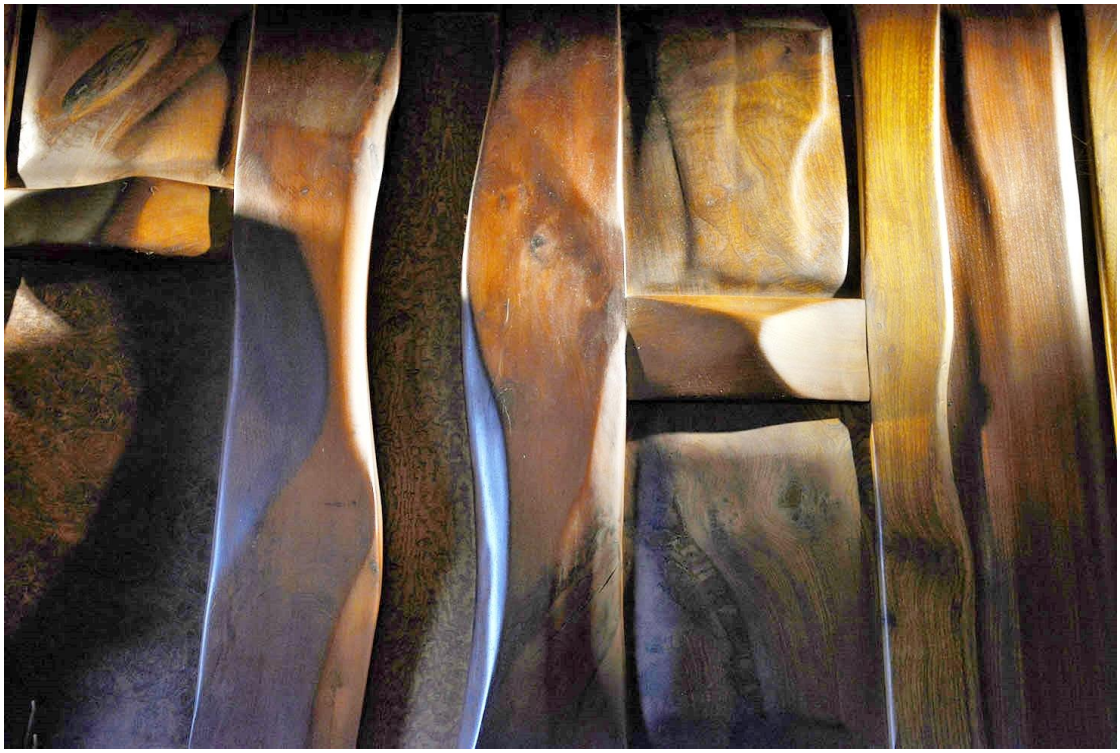
In 2015 the Tim Stead Trust was established with the objectives of purchasing the Steading from Maggy and preserving it for the nation by making it accessible to the public and researchers. Maggy agreed to donate the entire Stead archive of written material and the large sculpture collection, which has been curated but remains in storage, if a way could be found to buy the Steading. After four years of work the Steading was awarded grade A status as a Listed Building. A detailed application for support was made by the Trust to the National Heritage Memorial Fund in late 2020 but was eventually rejected and the future of the Steading and the Archive was in doubt. However, following publicity a number of benefactors came forward and to everyone's delight several trust funds and individuals made generous donations. In early 2021 a crowdfunder appeal was launched and more individuals are generously continuing to show their affection for Tim Stead's work.

Over and above purchasing the Steading for the nation and securing the archive, the Tim Stead Trust has visionary plans for the future of The Steading which will be turned into a creative hub to inspire people from all walks of life, from the small children from Wooplaw wood to students, artists, musicians and writers. Partnerships are being formed with The Borders Forest Trust and other like-minded organisations and a series of workshops and events to do with woodlands, forestry and craft skills will inspire people to think out of the box, as Tim had always encouraged people to do.

Please keep in touch with developments and enjoy the photographs and videos by visiting the website at timsteadtrust.org.

Published reading:

Explorations in Wood, the Furniture and Sculpture of Tim Stead. Giles Sutherland. Canongate (1993).
With the Grain, an Appreciation of Tim Stead. Edited by Giles Sutherland. Birlinn (2005).
'Who steers the Craft?' *Craftwork* Spring (1984).
Towers: a selection of poems. No Butts publishing (2000).
Light and Dark. No Butts publishing (2004).



Part of the Steading Fireplace (photo: Alan Dimmick)

Tim Stead with his axe heads

ITS TIME FOR A FRESH LOOK AT OUR POLICIES FOR NATIVE WOODLANDS

Gordon Patterson

Native woodlands in Scotland, and elsewhere in these islands and internationally, have received a lot of attention and action since the NWDG started up as something of a voice in the wilderness in the 1970s. But they have rather lost the limelight here in recent years which have seen a swing back to planting conifers for timber and carbon sequestration objectives as well as greater emphasis on multi-purpose mixed woods.

But with the global attention this year on tackling the twin emergencies of climate change and ecological degradation, as well as the realisation during the Covid pandemic of the value of the natural world to our human wellbeing, the time is ripe to re-invigorate our vision and policies for native woodlands in Scotland, and perhaps also elsewhere in the UK.

Where are we now?

We in Scotland have a lot of experience to draw on from all the activity of recent decades in creating, managing and restoring native and ancient woods. And we have a uniquely detailed inventory baseline in the form of the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland. A range of impressive pioneering projects have shown us glimpses of the potential for landscape-scale regeneration and restoration of semi-natural ecosystems to provide more sustainable and beneficial ways of achieving our aims for a healthy environment.

We can use all this as a basis to consider the challenges to come, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, invasive species and intermixing with planted exotic trees, and the continuing problem of excessive deer browsing, and an increasing range of uses and benefits to balance, including more interest in wood production, woodland crofts and community woods.

Despite the many achievements so far, I believe we need more clarity and urgency for our future policies for native woods.

Principles and concepts

There is still sometimes a lack of clarity even about the concept and definition of native woods, and this may have grown recently as they have slightly gone out of fashion. The terms ancient woods, broadleaved woods and native woods are still sometimes mixed up. And one can still see queries about the definition of a native wood, although this was formally set out for the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) in Scotland: *a wood where the majority of the canopy cover is made up of site native species*. There is also sometimes a connection made to cultural issues with concerns from some that the term and concept of native woods is controversial or politically inappropriate in a multi-cultural society.

The importance of native woodlands is well established in international conventions and agreements based primarily on their importance to biodiversity but also increasingly their importance for a wide range of other ecosystem services. Internationally the focus is often on 'natural forests', reflecting the tendency in many countries for more of the original forests and/or tree species to remain, contrasting to the situation in the UK where we almost wiped out our natural self-sown forests and planted a lot of non-native species.

Past, present and future natural

The risk that climate change will alter ecosystems unpredictably has focussed attention on the models suitable as a reference for creating or managing native woods, with suggestions that a more *laissez-faire* approach may be more pragmatic – for example to allow nature to determine what will grow from a broad mix of native, naturalised and perhaps selected, planted species or genotypes predicted to be adapted to future climates.

There should be room for a variety of approaches for native woods in different situations: for example this latter model could be more suited to small and heavily altered planted woods in lowland and farmland landscapes where more plantings and introduced species are already present, whilst large semi-natural woods in the uplands seem more suited to working with what we have and encouraging natural processes to work at a scale to allow adaptation.

These options and others are already in practice informally, but we don't have a clear idea of where, why and what is being done, as such things are not monitored. The choices and the science behind them also need to be presented more clearly via policy development, I think.

It is worth noting in passing that in England and Wales there are also similar issues, but possibly there seems less interest in 'native woods' as the focus is more on broadleaved and ancient woods, and there is perhaps a higher acceptance of intervention now because of the perceived degree of past intervention.

Of course, as our knowledge of Scotland's history increases it reveals more use of woodlands and more intervention than was previously believed, which could change perceptions of what we are trying to conserve and why.

Quantity and Quality

Action for native woods has been increasing since the 1980s but has perhaps flatlined somewhat as the pendulum has swung back towards planting introduced conifers and hitting new planting targets.

Yet there are still around 3000-5000 hectares of native species woodland being planted annually in Scotland, and much new work is still being started in existing native woods to restore their condition.

However it is not yet at a rate that would be needed to make a dramatic improvement, given that NWSS showed, when it was published in 2014, that over half of native woods were not in satisfactory ecological condition. Recent data from protected areas suggests that improvements there had stalled pre-Covid, and reduced deer culling during Covid will probably not have helped.

I think the ***quality and sustainability*** of much of the new native woodland being created also needs to be questioned and improved, so that species are better matched to sites and site-native species are more fully represented. Although I don't know of hard evidence on this (is there any being collected?) my impression from what I see is that native woodland planting has reverted to more of a plantation style in recent years, with greater use of regular and rather simple species patterns, blocks of equally spaced trees, and more use of ploughing.

These shifts may have been driven by the aim of building in (wood) productive potential, demonstrating value for money as a woodland and simplification/cost reductions driven by lower grant incentives for new native woodlands in the present grant scheme. In 2013/14 a study funded by Forestry Commission Scotland found that quality was often below what was looked for in these aspects, even before the new grant scheme came in.

The future of these new native woods is in doubt too once the establishment-phase fences and tree shelters decline; how can they be managed to acquire more of the native woodland ecosystems we aspire to? Will many of them become deer or pheasant shelterwoods with a few relatively hardy tree species?

And the elephant in the room is that almost all new native woods are being planted, and we have very little information on the genetic basis of the planting stock. So despite the fundamental importance of encouraging adaptation through natural selection, hardly any public money is being used to promote expansion of native woodland by natural regeneration.

What is our current policy for native woodlands?

There is no published policy for native woodlands. Most elements we might look for exist in some form but they would have to be filtered out and collated from various sources, and we would find many aspects are dated and do not necessarily fit together. *I don't think this is good enough as an expression of what we aspire to for this important and most biodiverse of our terrestrial ecosystems.*

At the moment the Scottish Government prefers policy statements to be for higher level broad topics and not for more specific ones such as native woods. We have an Environment Policy and Land Use, Forestry and Biodiversity Strategies, with the latter set to be revised imminently. These documents include some relevant principles, broad targets and also some specific actions in implementation plans. Targets and actions relate to creating new woods, restoring plantation on ancient woodland sites and improving condition of current native woods, especially those on designated sites. Developing habitat networks and landscape scale restoration also get some encouragement.

Below these documents much reliance is placed on the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS), which is often presented as the answer to questions of 'what, where and how'. However it is not meant to set out priorities and policy choices. Rather it presents a structured menu of good practice 'musts' and many 'should considers', to be applied across all forms of forestry in the four countries of the UK.

In addition to the UKFS, a lot of relevant 'good practice' guidance which was developed for native woods in the first phase of enthusiasm in the 1990s through to 2014 or so has not been revised and is not available, or remains if you look for it but seems to have an uncertain status now. I declare an interest and bias here as I wrote quite a lot of it! This includes guidance on creating new native woods, managing semi-natural woodlands, restoring ancient woodland, seed sources for native species planting, developing habitat networks, and the use of data from the NWSS. There is a need to take stock and signpost or update this body of work.

The current somewhat 'pick and mix' policy approach for native woods may work well for individual cases, although that is hard to prove without published monitoring data against clear measures of success. But I think we currently lack a discussion and agreed answers to many important questions about our approach to native woods. Here are a few I can think of and no doubt readers may have others.

What do we want our native woods for; what objectives are suitable or priorities in different situations?

How important are native woods in locking up carbon, and should this objective take priority over others in creating and managing them?

Should all semi-natural woods be managed for natural regeneration, and if not, what exceptions should be permitted?

How to deal with introduced species of trees and other non-native species in different situations, including ideas such as substitution of diseased ash with sycamore. What

should be done about the large potential impact of planted tree species such as Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine which are gradually developing a bridgehead in many native woods and on moorland ready to invade semi-natural places more strongly in future?

Are we serious about really tackling major existing invasive species like rhododendron at a landscape scale or are we just going through the motions until we accept defeat?

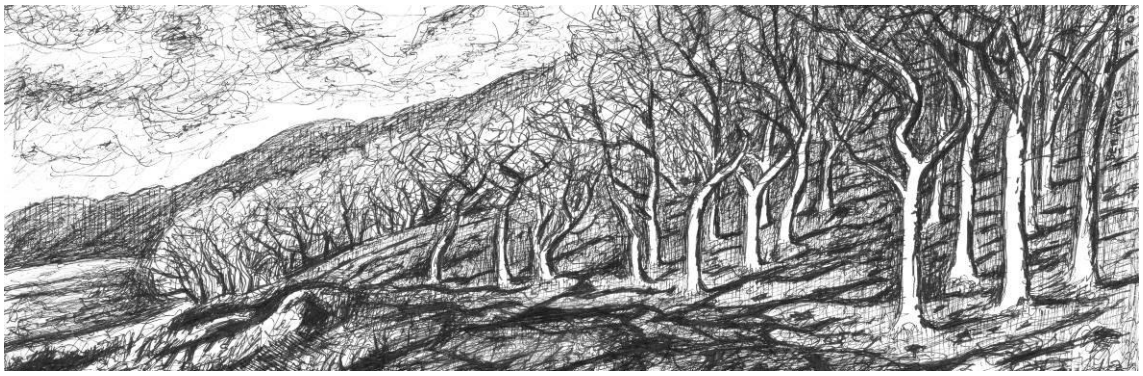
How do we get native woods of sufficient scale and management that can allow future sustainability as fully developed native woodland ecosystems, rather than mixed woods of exotic and native species?

Where are national priorities for developing native woodland habitat networks or core areas?

Where should we have expansion or creation of native woodlands as priority, or the only type of wood to be created? How much should be planted and how much regeneration? How to achieve this?

What should be the role of Landscape Scale Ecological Restoration (or various forms of 'rewilding') that may be achieved over longer timescales, and often without specific outcomes in terms of stocking density and composition, often as part of broader ecological restoration projects? What mechanisms are needed for these to succeed in the long term?

What is our strategy for conservating the genetic resources of native tree populations and native woodland ecosystems more widely? In particular, how should we encourage natural selection adaptation in semi-natural tree populations, e.g. by using the pan – European EUFORGEN approach to defining and managing 'genetic management units'?



A new vision for native woods

The time is right to take a fresh look at all this, with the United Nations Decade of Ecological Restoration, campaigns for rewilding Britain and Scotland, and the UK hosting the Climate Change convention in Scotland this year.

We also have to deal with big challenges of a political and economic nature domestically with the interplay of Covid and Brexit impacts and the contesting agendas of Holyrood and Westminster governments, following the UK's controversial

Internal Market Act. The control and direction of resources for agri-environment and land use policies may be a notable area of tension.

But what we really need for native woodlands to flourish is a combination of long-term vision, priorities, policy guidance and a delivery programme that must include developing or refreshing good practice guidance, training and resources for action on the ground. Let's call it here '***Scotland's Programme for Native Woodlands'*** - not much to ask!

Of course a distinct package like this for native woods must sit within the broad framework of higher level strategies for land use, environment, forestry and biodiversity.

Perhaps the first step should be one of collating existing components together and identifying what needs to be done.

I hope this personal take on native woodland policy may stimulate discussion and other ideas.

…concerns from some that the term and concept of native woods is controversial or politically inappropriate…

THE WOODS AND THE WATER

Alison Averis

In 2001 I had a contract for a vegetation survey of the John Muir Trust land in Knoydart, including the hill of Ladhar Bheinn together with the slopes of Lì and Coire Dhorrcail where there is a programme of restoring native woodland. It was arranged that I would stay at Arnisdale, on the north shore of Loch Hourn, and be taken across the loch each day by Len Murray, who at the time operated a small ferry for the JMT.

This ferry actually consisted of a 12-foot open wooden dinghy with a single outboard motor, and some of the trips over the loch were extremely exciting and involved bailing with a bucket as we went. However, the first day was misty and still, with the sea slicked down like oiled satin. As we approached the farther shore Len indicated the remains of houses at the former crofting township of Lì – Knoydart had a population of almost 1000 by the middle of the 19th century – on a loch-side terrace at the foot of a slope clothed in huge multi-stemmed hazels. He pointed out the small stone slipways and launching points built by the previous inhabitants, now visible only from the sea, and as the fragrant breath of the new birch leaves streamed out over the water, Len cut the engine and we drifted in silently over the glassy water on to a sparkling beach of pure garnet crystals. I looked up at the green cascade of new woodland: a hanging garden of trees mounting the crags and ledges; and had a sudden desire to find a way to look at woods from the water. A way to get some insight into the lives and culture of our seafaring ancestors for whom the roads were the lochs and seas, and boats the main means of moving through a landscape.

Birch and oak, Eilean Righ, Loch Craignish (photo: Alison Averis)

I went home with a dream, and it remained a dream for seventeen years. Through all those years the dream was kept alive by that memory of the scent of the birch trees drifting out over the sea; that elusive, evocative scent that I swear would bring me back to life from a near-death experience. Nor am I the first to have that thought. In Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland* (in 1803) she mentions the boatman who ferried her and her brother William along Loch Katrine to the Trossachs telling them, " … it was pleasant and very halesome on a fine summer's morning to sail under the banks where the birks are growing."

Pushing the boat out

Five years ago we moved to a house within walking distance of a small reservoir-loch and a short drive from two more. Now there was a chance that the dream could come true. After weeks of research, I decided to get a good-quality inflatable kayak. Shorter and wider than a typical touring or ocean-going kayak, inflatable boats have the disadvantage of being comparatively slow (though they can go as fast as a rigid boat of the same size) and are not suitable for extreme white water, big surf or exposed sea crossings. These minor shortcomings paled into insignificance when set against the two great advantages of inflatables: they are very stable and almost impossible to capsize; especially important as I go alone; and, best of all, they are easily portable. Mine packs away into a rucksack leaving space for all the rest of the kit: buoyancy aid, spray-deck, pump, paddle and shoes – and then I can carry it to places where you couldn't easily get a rigid kayak. I bought it in November 2017. There then arrived the most severe winter in this part of the country for 35 years. I didn't actually push the boat out until May 2018.

When I did, on a quiet spring evening, it was everything I'd dreamed of. On that first trip to the nearest loch I paddled out to look at some of the fragments of woodland that still cling to the steep banks, and on a stretch of the shore that isn't visible from any of the surrounding paths and tracks there was a great sheet of bluebells (wild hyacinth) in young bracken, their scent sweet and intense in the soft evening air. In south-east Scotland bluebells are strongly associated with ancient woodland: here was an unsuspected, unexpected fragment of the distant past, right on my doorstep. A day or two later, paddling at another site, I came upon an equally unexpected stand of aspen, the new leaves shimmering golden-green in the sunlight and reflecting the dazzle of the water below.

Rather than speeding heroically across open stretches of water, I've been sliding the boat into sheltered inlets overhung with flowering trees; the song of willow warblers falling like raindrops into the silence; cuckoos and curlews and lapwings on the hills beyond. Deer browsing at the shore barely lift their heads: on the water I'm not seen as a threat but just part of the scenery. It's an intoxicating experience to be at the boundary between air, land and water; spaciousness and intimacy at the same time. And even the smallest patch of woodland looks wild and beautiful from the water.

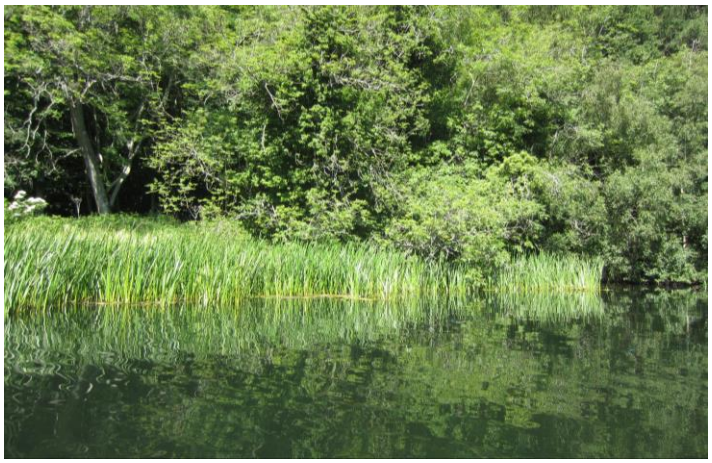
Aspen, Whiteadder Reservoir, East Lothian (photo: Alison Averis)

Oak on the water

The part of Scotland that is now East Lothian was almost entirely cleared of trees by the late Iron Age, which is why the former coal-mining industry in the region dates back to Roman times, and why only about 2% of the county is now native woodland. It is also why we had only twelve potential attendees when I tried to organise an NWDG Excursion here in 2008. However, among this 2% are some fragments of ancient woodland, one of which is Pressmennan Wood, which covers the slopes of a narrow glen running east-west. Legend has it that Pressmennan oaks were used in the building of the Great Michael, which at the time of its launch in 1511 was the largest ship ever constructed. Though there is no direct evidence for this, Timothy Pont mapped Pressmennan in the late 16th century as an enclosed woodland, suggesting it was being protected from grazing and therefore valued as a source of timber. It's still here and the canopy is still largely of oak, although there are also non-native species on the southern side of the glen, including beech, rhododendron introduced in Victorian times, and conifers planted by the Forestry Commission in the 1950s. In 1988 these southern slopes were acquired by the Woodland Trust Scotland and the native woodland is being restored. There's a good series of paths running through the woodland, but the wilder, steeper ground is largely hidden from them.

In the bottom of the glen lies an artificial loch, constructed by damming the downstream end in 1819. It's known as Pressmennan Lake: one of a small number of Scottish water bodies known as lakes. A kayak trip here would give me a great view of the hidden parts of the woodland, including a wooded island. This was where the portable, inflatable boat came into its own, as the launching site nearest to the car park proved to be a 15-minute walk along a muddy path under overhanging trees and necessitating a scramble over fallen trunks.

The boat was soon out of its bag and inflated, and I paddled into a different, primeval-feeling world. The steep slopes clothed with oak, birch, rowan and hazel rose directly from the water's edge, entangled with fallen trees, dense thickets of young trees, brambles and bracken. Honeysuckle climbed into the canopy and spread a cascade of fragrant golden flowers. Under the trees were tall swards of heather and blaeberry, thinning out to open glades of ferns and flowers. There were wet woodlands too, with the birches and willows extending out into the shallow water and then giving way to swamps of sedges and water horsetails, jewelled with iridescent newly-emerged common blue damselflies.



Hazel and willows, Pressmennan Lake, East Lothian (photo: Alison Averis)

Apart from a pair of dodgy-looking fishermen trying to conceal themselves on the far bank it was a silent and secret place, with the branches of oaks, ashes and hazels sweeping down in a green fringe against the dark water. But having evaded the fishermen I found myself heading for trouble of a different kind. As I approached the island with its dense stand of birches, I noticed a disturbance in the undergrowth and two swan necks came into view. Mr Swan got into the water in a business-like manner and paddled determinedly towards me, while Mrs Swan and seven cygnets lurked in the background. I made a hasty retreat: the combination of an inflatable boat and an angry bird was more alarming than that of an inflatable boat and fish-hooks.

The trip was hard work on a windy afternoon, but the impenetrable tangle of undergrowth in the surrounding woods would have been far harder to get through, and it was easy to see why our ancestors used boats whenever they could.

The lonely sea and the sky

For years I dreamed of my first sea-kayaking trip. It would be a windless, golden day in late May. The water would be like translucent blue-green glass; fathoms deep over white shell-sand and whispering in to a quiet shore. There would be birch trees glittering in spring sunlight and full of singing birds; the air would be scented with bog myrtle and bracken and bluebells; a cuckoo would be calling; there would be a blue horizon of high hills still patched with snow.

Needless to say, it wasn't like this at all.

The scene was the Tay estuary; the sea grey as porridge and full of confused, lumpy waves. Water from the largest river in the country was pouring east at 175 cubic metres a second and meeting the incoming tide flooding west, while a brisk wind blew across the estuary at right-angles to both current and tide. A hundred metres offshore was a stretch of particularly boisterous water, and I had visions of the boat rotating in this, upside down, possibly with me still in it. To the north the sunlight shattered into a thousand pieces off the windows of Dundee.

There were still trees, though: a fringe of deciduous woodland along the southern shore. As I battled along in the wind, trying to steer a straight course through the steep and confusing waves, I reflected that this was probably far closer to the everyday experience of our ancestors: struggling along inhospitable coastlines in a small boat with a wet bum and a face full of sea-spray.

Firth of Tay (photo by Elen Averis)

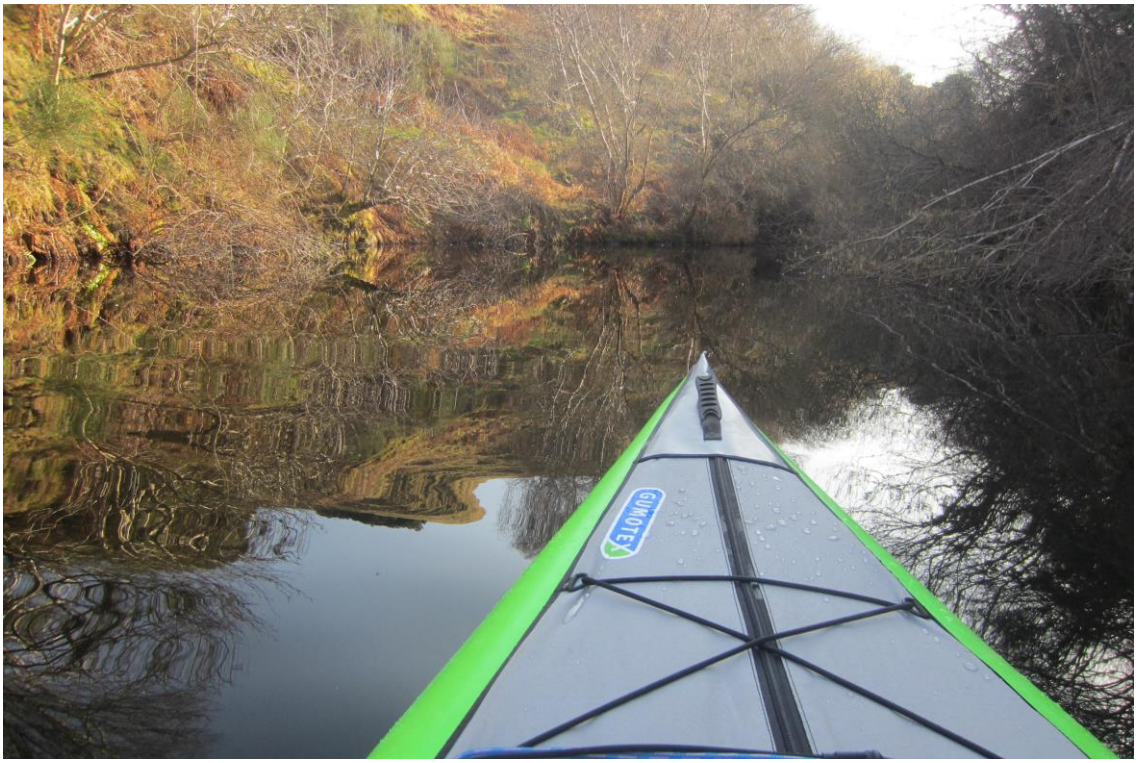
And it was still breathtakingly beautiful, with the sea shining like mercury under a vast blue and silver summer sunset sky.

Yon bonny banks

Looking at woods from the water is all I had hoped for, whether it's green and gold groves on sheltered, gentle shores or vertical woods on rock ledges; wind-battered, crouching against the cliffs, gnarled by the wind. But though I have paddled on lochs from Lomond to Assynt, the most special place is still the closest one of all, just ten

minutes' walk from the house. One of the almost-lost woodlands of East Lothian, on slopes dropping all but sheer to the water. I float into hidden inlets, drifting over the drowned glen of the Thorter Burn. Before the dam was constructed in the early 20th century this piece of ground was a confluence of deep-cut ravines. There are tree symbols on the 19th century maps, and woodland shown in the area as far back as 1630, but despite all the changes through the centuries woodland survives here still: birch, hazel, rowan, willows; a single oak with its branches reaching out over the water; a few elms, ash, hawthorns, blackthorns; a tangle of honeysuckle and wild roses. In spring it is a vision of bluebells, primroses, stitchwort, celandine, with bracken fronds unrolling in the warming air. Here is my place of peace, in the breathless quiet of early morning; at the bright noontide; in the still of evening …

This article is based on a series of posts I wrote for the NWDG Facebook page in 2018.



Thorter Reservoir, East Lothian (photo: Alison Averis)

FUTURE WOODLANDS SCOTLAND – NEW £2M FUND LAUNCHED TO BOOST SCOTTISH NATIVE WOODLANDS

Fiona Chalmers

Land managers in Scotland can now apply to a £2m fund to help create and restore native woodlands across the country.

The Future Woodlands Fund (FWF), managed by the charity Future Woodlands Scotland (FWS) is aiming to plant one million trees across Scotland during an initial three-year pilot phase starting in 2021 and sequester an estimated 235,000 tonnes of carbon by 2080.

In addition to supporting natural climate solutions, the charity also aims to enhance biodiversity, boost the rural economy and provide wider access to woodlands for communities.

Tim Hall, chair of Future Woodlands Scotland, said: “This new fund will pilot an incentive-based approach to encourage landowners to establish new native woodland and restore ‘ghost’ or degraded former native woodlands that have high ecological potential.

“The Future Woodlands Fund is intended to help land managers overcome financial and cultural barriers to deliver nature-based solutions to climate change and social benefits across Scotland.”

Any land manager in Scotland may apply to the fund provided their proposed project has a minimum size of 3 hectares and a maximum of 100 hectares.

Working alongside the established Scottish Government’s Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), the FWF will cover the costs of an application to the FGS, offer landowners area payments of £100/ha per annum for 20 years, and will provide advice on potential bridging loans for project implementation.

All the projects will be registered and validated in the UK Woodland Carbon Code by FWS at no cost to the land manager.

The fund has been made possible thanks to the backing of BP, who have supported the regeneration of native woodlands in Scotland for more than 20 years.

Tim Hall added: “We would encourage anyone who might be interested in this scheme to look on our website where they will find more information and application forms. We are keen to assist in any way we can and to make the process of establishing native woodland as straightforward as possible.

“We’re extremely grateful for BP’s support for native woodland projects in Scotland. We will review and assess the impact of this new pilot with a view to developing an ongoing programme with increased financial investment from existing and new

corporate partners. This could create even greater incentives for landowners to play their part in delivering nature-based solutions to climate change across Scotland."

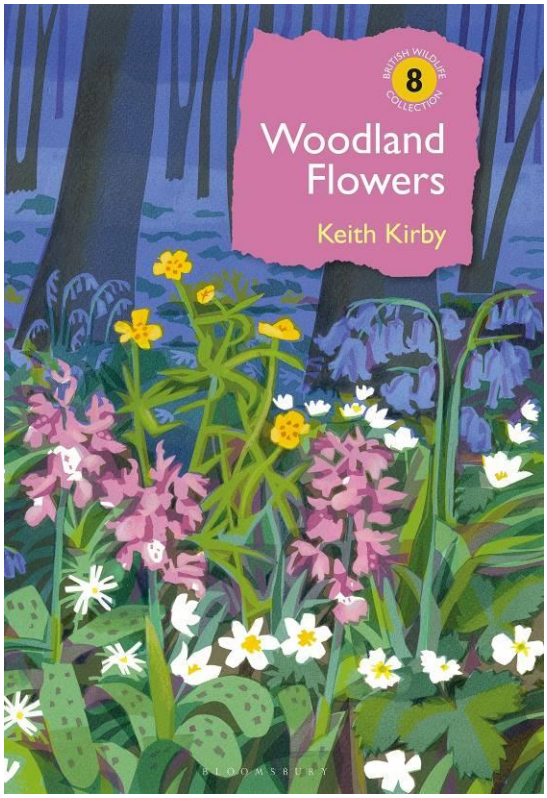
Giles Mackey, Health & Safety Executive and carbon manager at BP North Sea said: "BP is proud of our long-established partnership with this charity and look forward to seeing how this new approach with landowners can help create even more valuable native woodlands in Scotland.

"BP is aiming to be a net zero company by 2050 or sooner, and is in action to deliver this ambition across our business. While natural climate solutions can help as part of the response to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, BP's policy is to reduce our operational emissions at source and not to rely on carbon offsets. All carbon credits generated by this scheme will therefore belong to Future Woodlands Scotland to re-invest in future projects and help Scotland reach its net zero goals."

For more information and to complete an application please visit www.future woodlands.org.uk or email: fionachalmers@futurewoodlands.org.uk

FWS also have a Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/futurewoodlands

BOOK REVIEW: Keith Kirby, 2020, *Woodland Flowers: Colourful Past, Uncertain Future*. Bloomsbury Wildlife. Hardback £35, 400pp, numerous colour illustrations.



Review by Noel Fojut

Keith Kirby is one of NWDG's most distinguished members, and has distinguished himself still further with this well-structured, accessible and beautifully presented volume.

This is not a field handbook or a reference volume, though there is much in it which the reader will come back to, time and again. It is primarily a narrative, which leads the reader through a clearly structured account. Beginning with a close look at how and when our woodland plants established themselves and have since responded to changes over time in climate and disturbance, it looks at the emergence of different types of woodland and their typical plant assemblages. The influences of soils, seasonality and grazing are addressed, as is the arrival and increasing impact of humans. A number of species are selected for special treatment, to illustrate general principles. The closing chapters deal with the emergence of conservation and the changing priorities applied to our woodlands, ending with a look at the present scene and some possible futures.

Cross-cutting and enriching the logical narrative structure is a lively sub-text, with a series of anecdotes including tales of pioneering woodland botanists and also reminiscences of the author's own woodland journey. This material is judiciously selected and carefully deployed, much as moths use pheromones, to draw the reader into an ever-closer engagement. The personal touch is carefully rationed and deftly handled, avoiding Ancient Mariner tendencies (although those who have heard the author speak will recognise his quiet, authoritative and entertaining tones).

While the volume is, naturally, focused on the flowering species found in and around British woodland and hedges, there is much of wider woodland interest. Highlights for me included a lucid exposition of the competing theories about British woodland dynamics prior to human intervention, an explicitly Shakespearean take on the development of the conservation movement, and some thoughtful – and thought-provoking – comments about how the utility of ancient woodland indicator species tends to vary with geography and individual site history.

The target audience is the intelligent reader rather than the expert: those who are already interested enough to care, and want to know more. But such is the breadth of the author's knowledge and experience that even dyed-in-the-wood specialists will find fresh perspectives and excellent examples. As a non-expert with a long-standing interest, I found this book helped me to digest and integrate my rather chaotic store

of random bits of knowledge, half-absorbed from general reading, teach-yourself botany and years of attending NWDG excursions and conferences.

As with the earlier volumes in the Bloomsbury Wildlife series (which began life 10 years ago under the British Wildlife Publishing imprint), this is a handsomely-produced volume: quality paper, securely bound, with clear typography and stunning colour pictures, plus an abundance of charts, graphs and diagrams. Not cheap at £35, but definitely good value for money – not least for the fun of spotting some familiar names, faces and places.

For those who'd like to know a little more about the author and the book, there is a short interview at: https://www.nhbs.com/blog/woodland-flowers-interview-keith-kirby

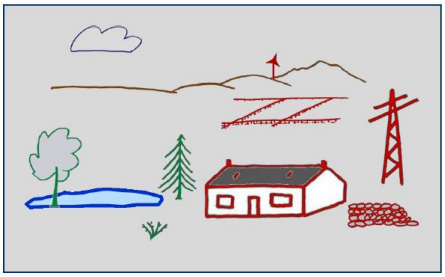
BOOK REVIEW: James Fenton (November 2020); Introduction to Landscape. 53 pages. PDF file downloadable at:

https://www.fenton.scot/ecology/Introduction%20to%20landscape%20-%20J%20Fenton%20-%2013%20Nov%202020.pdf

Review by Ben Averis

This is a great introduction to landscape! The subtitle "A guide for the non-specialist to aid the understanding, assessment and future planning of rural landscapes, with a focus on Scotland" summarizes its content well. The document is in five sections: Describing Landscapes; Landscape Change; Assessing Landscapes; Perceptions of Landscapes; Planning Future Landscapes.

This is a subject so big and varied that the thought of writing a guide to it seems a daunting prospect, but James has done it in a way that is very clear, understandable and interesting throughout, and allows those five different sections to be clearly relatable to each other. All text is accompanied by visual material, the building blocks of which are eleven symbols, each illustrating a particular component of the landscape: →



One might think eleven is too small a number of components, given the complexity of landscapes, but they are well chosen and presented, and this whole approach to looking at landscapes makes a lot of sense.

This document not only serves as a guide to ways of looking at, describing, assessing and understanding landscapes, but also as a reference to the systems and language of landscape description, assessment and so on used by NatureScot, the European Landscape Convention and others. It also combines the relatively objective process of describing and mapping landscapes, studying their changes over time and identifying aspects of regional distinctiveness (sections 1-2), with the more subjective process of assessing their quality and appeal, noting that different people perceive the same landscape differently (sections 3-4). Section 5 (Planning future landscapes) looks at the integration of those objective and subjective elements into a coherent way of making decisions about how best to look after landscapes in the future.

There's something really neat about the way this document takes such a huge and complex subject – or, indeed, a number of subjects, each one complex in itself – and presents an understanding of the integration of all these different elements, components, approaches, and so on, and does so in such a well-thought-out and well-designed visual way. It encourages us to look for and be more aware of the various components of our landscapes, the inter-relationships between those components (at various scales) and the need to consider a range of different approaches from different people. A valuable resource to anyone with an interest in landscapes.

OTHER NOTES, ETC

Rainforests in England. Guy Shrubsole has a project to identify temperate rainforest sites in England. See his website at: https://lostrainforestsofengland.org/ or find him on Twitter: @guyshrubsole He'll be interested to hear from you if you know of sites in England that are likely to be temperate rainforest habitat (western woods, typically with a good abundance and diversity of mosses, liverworts, lichens and ferns). Photo: Wistmans Wood, Devon (copied from Guy's website).

Art exhibition in East Lothian. The Society of Scottish Artists – including NWDG member Gavin Johnston – are presenting an exhibition titled *Insectarium: fascination and fear* at the Donald Watson Gallery, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian, from 3rd June to 25th July 2021. With this title there should be something relevant to woodland. More on the gallery website https://www.the-soc.org.uk/

A wee poem of big mosses *(by Ben Averis)*

In wetlands, or on woodland floor
Polytrichum is the king
For sheer size it has to score
The top positioning
The government could make it law
That everyone will sing:
"The biggest moss we ever saw!
A monster of a thing!"

But there's an even bigger one
Down under, on the other side
To see it would be so much fun
I think we'd all be goggle-eyed
In forests under southern sun
Dawsonia has place of pride
So we concede – their moss has won
A victory well justified

How do *you* pronounce *Polytrichum*? If you put the emphasis on *"i"* then for the right rhythm we need "the" in the second line of this poem, but if you put the emphasis on "y" (as I do) then it's best without "the". I think more people emphasize "i" than "y" but I'm not sure. Please tell me (ben.averis@gmail.com) how you say it, and I'll put the poll results in the autumn issue of the newsletter. Thanks in advance!

NATIVE WOODLANDS DISCUSSION GROUP CONSTITUTION

Name: The organisation shall be the Native Woodlands Discussion Group.

Aims and objectives: To encourage interest in native woods, their ecology, management and history.

Activities:

- Organise at least one Field Meeting with related discussion each year.
- Organise Workshops on subjects suggested by members.
- Organise Conferences, Seminars or other Events as approved by the membership.
- Issue Newsletters with an emphasis on members' contributions.
- Maintain contact with like-minded organisations through the membership.
- Undertake any other activities deemed appropriate by the membership.

Membership: Open to any interested individual. No corporate membership. Subscriptions shall be set by the committee, with approval of the membership, according to the following categories: (a) Individual, (b) Family (1.5 x full rate) or (c) Concessionary (0.6 x full rate). Membership will cease 18 months after payment of an annual subscription. The committee will advise the Field Meetings organiser for the year of the fee for attendance of non-members at the Field Meeting.

Officers/committee:

a. The group elects a committee. The committee shall co-opt or appoint such officers as are considered necessary. Officers will be eligible to vote at committee meetings.
b Committee members shall serve for three years, but shall be eligible for re-election.
c. Chairperson nominated by the committee and endorsed by the Annual General Meeting.
d. All members are free to attend committee meetings.

Accounts:

a. The financial year shall be the calendar year.
b. The treasurer will keep accounts and present a financial report by 15th March each year. The accounts shall be independently audited by a competent person before presentation.

Annual General Meeting: To be held on a date determined by the committee. Notification of that meeting shall appear in the newsletter at least one month prior to the AGM. Business at the AGM shall be determined by a simple majority (except changes to constitution which shall require a two-thirds majority of those members present). Family membership entitles up to two votes if both are present. The chairperson and the treasurer will each submit a report at the AGM.

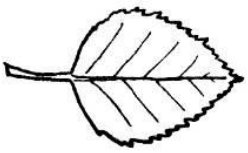
Meetings: The committee shall organise or authorise any member to organise such meetings as considered desirable.

Publications: The committee shall approve such publications as are considered desirable, and which carry the group's endorsement.

Current subscription rates: Ordinary individual: £20 per year (£18 if paid by Standing Order). **Family:** £30 per year (£28 if paid by Standing Order). **Under-25s:** £12 per year (£10 if paid by Standing Order). For 2021, for all subscription rates please add £10 per year if you want newsletters in printed form. **Subscriptions should be sent to:** the Membership Secretary (Alison Averis, 6A Castle Moffat Cottages, Garvald, Haddington, East Lothian, EH41 4LW; tel: 01620 830 670 / 07387 970 667; email: alisonaveris@gmail.com). There is a £2 annual discount for those paying by Standing Order (shown in the above figures): please ask for a form.

CURRENT NWDG COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS

CHAIR	**Alan Crawford**	Email: alancrawford07@hotmail.co.uk	
MINUTES SECRETARY	**Noel Fojut**	Email: noelfojut@msn.com	
ADMIN*	**Alison Averis**	Email: alisonaveris@gmail.com	Tel: 01620 830 670 / 07387 970 667
NEWSLETTER EDITOR	**Ben Averis**	Email: ben.averis@gmail.com	Tel: 01620 830 670 / 07767 058 322
WOODLAND HISTORY	**Mairi Stewart**	Email: mairi_skye@hotmail.com	
SOCIAL MEDIA	**Coralie Mills**	Email: coralie.mills@dendrochronicle.co.uk	
	Gwen Raes	Email: gwendolynraes@hotmail.com	
	Sam Guthrie	Email: sam.g.guthrie@gmail.com	
MEMBER	**Gordon Patterson**	Email: gordonpatterson@blueyonder.co.uk	
MEMBER	**Fiona Chalmers**	Email: fi@fionachalmers.co.uk	
MEMBER	**Alan McDonnell**	Email: alanm@treesforlife.org.uk	



** Admin = Treasurer + Membership Secretary + Website Editor*

NWDG WEBSITE: www.nwdg.org.uk

Facebook: **https://www.facebook.com/groups/NativeWoodlandsDiscussionGroup/**
or search on 'Native Woodlands Discussion Group'

Twitter: NWDG @**TheNWDG**

Woodland seen from the water, while kayaking. Balmaha oak woods, Loch Lomond (top) and birches by Loch Assynt, Sutherland (bottom). Photos by Alison Averis.

www.nwdg.org.uk

Clockwise from top: moschatel, lesser celandine and herb Robert. All in East Lothian in April 2021 (photos: Ben Averis)