



**Highland Biodiversity Forum  
MARCH 2008**

**1.0 Background**

The Highland Council area holds at least 42% of the high priority species listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which makes Highland the most important place in the UK for threatened, rare and declining biodiversity.

The Highland Biodiversity Partnership was set up to provide guidance and support to an existing network of local biodiversity groups, and to make progress on the key strategic biodiversity issues in the Highlands. The Partnership has recently welcomed Councillor Isobel McCallum, Vice Chair of the Council's Planning, Environment & Development Committee to the role of Chairperson, taking over from Councillor Ian Ross, who chaired the Partnership since its inception in 2004.

The Partnership meets twice a year to discuss biodiversity matters in Highland, whilst the wider Highland Biodiversity Forum meets annually to hear about progress and provide feedback to the Partnership.

**2.0 Summary**

The 2008 Highland Biodiversity Forum event was held at Great Glen House, Inverness, from 10.00am – 4.00pm on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008. The purpose of the day was to provide an opportunity for all those involved and interested in Highland's Biodiversity to find out more about what was happening at a Highland-wide and a more local level. 60 participants attended from a range of organisations and local groups (see Appendix One – Attendee Listing). The event was chaired by Cllr Isobel McCallum with presentations made by the Highland Biodiversity Officers, members of local biodiversity groups, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Leader 2008-13 programme.

Feedback from the event indicated that all the participants (100%) found the presentations and workshops sessions very or quite useful, with many noting the importance of this opportunity to network with other local groups, share ideas and experiences, and find out about that is happening on the ground. 71% of participants said that they intended to take action on the issues raised during the day. (See section 7 – Feedback for more details).

General comments on the day included

- “A very useful day which is worth repeating annually.”
- “Excellent and very interesting day with very relevant topics and good networking opportunities.”
- “Overall very good thanks!

- “An excellent opportunity to network and get new ideas for local group”.
- “Splendid opportunity to meet others and discuss projects happening across the Highlands.”

## **PROGRAMME**

- 10.00am     **Registration**  
*Tea/Coffee*
- 10.30am     **Welcome and Introduction**  
*Chair: Cllr Isobel McCallum, Highland Biodiversity Partnership Chair*
- 10.40am     **An Overview of the Local Biodiversity Action Planning Process in Highland**  
*Janet Bromham, Highland Biodiversity Officer*
- 10.50am     **Update on Highland Biodiversity Partnership**  
*Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer*
- 11.00am     **Morning Session: Local Biodiversity Work**
- **Cairngorms LBAP Projects Update**  
*Stephen Corcoran, Cairngorms Biodiversity Partnership*
  - **Lochaber Lever & Mulch Rhododendron Control Project**  
*Donald Kennedy, Morvern Community Woodlands & Lochaber BG*
  - **Merkinch Local Nature Reserve**  
*Debbie Maguire, greeninverness & Inverness & Nairn Biodiversity Group*
  - **Easter Ross Biodiversity Projects**  
*Kenny Taylor, Ross & Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Group*
  - **Skye & Lochalsh Japanese Knotweed Project**  
*Barbara Soutar, National Trust for Scotland & SLEF and Janet Ullman, Project Co-ordinator*
  - **Involving Local People in Biodiversity Interpretation in Wester Ross**  
*Aaron Forsyth, Wester Ross Environmental Network*
  - **Growing Native Trees Project in Sutherland**  
*Andy Summers, Highland Council Rangers & Sutherland Partnership BG*
  - **Local Biodiversity Work in Caithness**  
*Marina Swanson, Highland Council Rangers & Caithness Biodiversity Group*
- 12.30pm     **Lunch**  
*Optional 20 minute tour of Great Glen House and the surrounding area*
- 2.00pm     **Afternoon Session: Scottish Regional Development Programme**
- **Rural Priorities**  
*George Hogg, Scottish Natural Heritage*
  - **LEADER**  
*Nicole Wallace, Highland Council*
- 2.30pm     ▪   **Workshop 1: Local Nature Reserves in Highland**  
 ▪   **Workshop 2: Non-Native Invasive Species**
- 3.30pm     **Feedback**  
*Tea/Coffee*
- 4.00pm     **Conclusions and Closing Remarks**  
*Chair: Cllr Isobel McCallum*

*BG: Biodiversity Group*  
SLEF: Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum

### **3.0 Introduction**

The event was introduced by Cllr. Isobel McCallum (Chair of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership) who welcomed those present and gave a short background to the issues before introducing the morning speakers (see Appendix Two – Speakers Biographies).

#### **An Overview of the Local Biodiversity Action Planning Process in Highland**

Janet Bromham summarised the policy background to the Local Biodiversity Action Planning process, and gave an overview of progress in Highland to date:

The word “biodiversity” comes from the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The UK Government produced the “UK Biodiversity Action Plan” to recommend how this should be implemented. The UK BAP includes lists of habitats and species which are considered to be the ones most in need of conservation in the UK. Action plans have subsequently been drawn up for these habitats and species, focusing particularly on national objectives.

More recently, The Scottish Executive passed the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, which places a duty upon public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity. The Executive has also produced The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and a series of implementation plans that suggest ways of furthering the conservation of biodiversity at a Scotland-wide level.

In 2002, the Highland Council set up a partnership project to produce Local Biodiversity Action Plans, raise awareness and undertake practical actions for biodiversity through a small grant scheme. The project set up seven Local Biodiversity Groups covering the then Council administrative areas of Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Ross & Cromarty (East), Skye & Lochalsh, Lochaber, and Inverness & Nairn. Badenoch & Strathspey was already covered by the Cairngorms Biodiversity Partnership, which is now affiliated to the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Seven Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) were produced, and between 2002 and 2007 the Groups helped allocate over £170,000 to 81 community-led practical projects and awareness-raising events or initiatives.

In 2005, the Council convened the Highland Biodiversity Partnership, which comprises around 30 representatives from local groups and key organisations committed to understanding, safeguarding, restoring and celebrating biodiversity within the Highland Council area. Its purpose is to provide guidance and support to the existing network of local biodiversity groups, and to make progress on the key strategic biodiversity issues in the Highlands. The Partnership commissioned a Review of the Highland LBAPs, which had three outputs:

- A Highland Biodiversity Action Plan identifying the main strategic and pan-Highland issues facing biodiversity in the Highlands;
- A Habitats and Species Review, which identified that Highland is the most important place in the UK for rare, threatened and declining wildlife, and also that we still have significant gaps in our knowledge; and
- A series of LBAP Implementation Plans, which identified a number of biodiversity projects that could be undertaken at a local level and resulted in a funding bid for £100,000 in support of a further 24 local biodiversity projects, the ‘Communities Project for Highland Biodiversity’.

*Janet Bromham, Highland Biodiversity Officer*

## **Update on Highland Biodiversity Partnership**

Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer, reported on the activities and planned projects of the Partnership.

*Capacity building for Local Groups:* In summer 2008, Janet Bromham would be drafting a bid to Leader 2007-13. This has been a key action for the last 3 Forums and it has not been addressed sooner due to the difficulty of finding funders for such a project.

*STAG - Data sharing and utilisation:* It was noted that the HBP had agreed to let a contract, via STAG, looking at the possibilities for funding some form of data sharing partnership in Highland. The output of such a data sharing partnership would be determined by what stakeholders wanted from it and what they were willing to pay for. The contract would be let in summer 2008 and would be finished by the end of the year.

*Draft local priority lists:* These were presented to the meeting in December and had been circulated around the local groups. It was reported that these are the first step in producing lists that could be used to inform action at both the local and Highland-wide level. The lists were based on the 1995-2000 UKBAP Priority Species lists, around 140 species on it are found in Highland. This number was narrowed down by removing fish (commercial fishing is almost impossible to influence at the local level) and birds (they have a great deal of conservation action underway already). Those species remaining were vetted for the importance of their Highland population at a UK level, the opportunity for local projects to be taken forward. Water Vole and Red Squirrel were in every area's list, the Moss Carder Bee was in 6 out of 7 lists. West Coast specialities were Knotted Wrack and Hazel Gloves. The draft local lists based on the UKBAP will expand as the 2007 UKBAP Review has increased the size of the list by two and a half times. Work is underway nationally to determine each species local importance and this will inform new lists to be produced at the end of the year.

*Events Grant Scheme:* It was noted that a funding application for this scheme would be submitted in the new financial year. It will look to provide funding for local groups to disburse on events/ awareness raising events.

*Local Sources of Wildflowers:* A funding bid will be submitted in April to investigate the capacity for local nurseries to provide native wildflower seed and plants.

*Non-native Invasive Species:* A meeting will be arranged in April to discuss this issue. All key stakeholders will be invited. It is hoped that a terms of reference for the group can be agreed and also what are the key issues pertaining to NNIS in Highland. There is a huge scope for sharing knowledge and joint working on this topic.

*Scottish Regional Development Programme:* It was reported that George Hogg would be giving more details of this programme in the afternoon session. However, it was confirmed that there had been agreement between the HBP and SGRPID that once local lists are finalised they could be used to inform applicants and advisors in the management that they take forward/ approve. It was hoped that through working together local lists could be agreed by the end of the year.

*Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer*

#### **4.0 Local Biodiversity Group Presentations**

The morning session comprised eight short presentations from the Local Biodiversity Groups on projects they have been working on over the last year.

##### **Cairngorms LBAP Projects Update**

Stephen Corcoran noted that £130,000 had been provided to 44 different projects in the National Park over the last 3 years. These had included:

- Development of an Aspen Habitat Network Project
- Establishment of Grampian Barn Owl Nest Project
- Development/management of community meadow and woodland with Insh Community
- Habitat management at key dark-bordered beauty moth sites
- Pond development for amphibians and damselflies/dragonflies with Abernethy Primary
- Twenty eight training courses run through LBAP, CNPA's Land Based Business Training and Cairngorms Awareness & Pride programme
- Water Vole conservation
- Aspen project.

He reported that a similar grant scheme was to be run in 2008/09, offering 100% funding up to £5,000 and aimed at communities, NGOs and charities. A greater emphasis would be placed on priority species and habitats. Project being developed included:

- Twinflower site management
- Wetland inventory and creation
- In-bye grassland survey
- Cairngorms Forest Habitat Network
- Wildcat conservation
- Netted Mountain Moth and Arctostaphylos heath
- Red squirrels
- UK Dragonfly Atlas
- Swifts nest and amphibian surveys

*Stephen Corcoran, Cairngorms Biodiversity Partnership*

##### **Lochaber Lever & Mulch Rhododendron Control Project**

Donald Kennedy reported on a newly-developed "Lever and Mulch" method of Rhododendron control in Lochaber.

The method had been developed by Gordon French in 2001 when working for SWT at Loch Linnhe. The Rhododendron were largely removed by hand – either by uprooted or snapped off at the base and covered with leaf litter. Over time, there was very little re-growth using this method, and with minimal follow-up work, by 2004, the site was completely cleared. This method was then used by Gordon and volunteers at Achnaha wood in Morvern. The initial clearance of 2ha was completed in a couple of months and with only a few hours of follow-up work effectively cleared the site. A training event for the method was held by SWT in 2006. The advantages of the method are:

- Effective
- Kills 90% in first clearance
- Hardly any re-growth, and what there is, is easy to deal with
- Efficient and relatively cheap, green method of control.

Information and guidance for the method is being produced for demonstration, promotion and training. It is hoped that the project findings will be incorporated into the future Rural Development Contracts as a new method of Rhododendron control. For more information contact Donald Kennedy.

*Donald Kennedy, Morvern Community Woodlands & Lochaber BG*

### **Merkinch Local Nature Reserve (LNR)**

Debbie Maguire reported that the aim of the greeninverness partnership was to improve, develop and sustain attractive, safe and accessible open space for the City of Inverness and for the health and future benefit of its communities. Working to deliver the Inverness Greenspace Strategy 2007 involved:

- Establishing, organising and co-ordinating the policy for greenspace in and around the city
- Auditing the current resource, measuring need and setting the standards for future supply and management of greenspace
- Agreeing the mechanism for improvement and sustainable maintenance in the long term

Merkinch Greenspace had initially thought about creating an LNR at Merkinch in March 2007. They had approached greeninverness, the Highland Biodiversity Officer and SNH to discuss the idea. The process of creating the LNR took just 8 months - Merkinch is the 50<sup>th</sup> LNR in Scotland and currently the only one in Highland.

A number of different partners have been involved in the project including Merkinch Greenspace, greeninverness, The Highland Council (landowner), British Waterways (landowner), Scottish Natural Heritage, Merkinch Partnership and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Inverness and East Highland. Funding was received from the SNH "Attractive Places To Live Scheme" (£10,000) and the "Community Economic Development Programme" (£10,000).

The key features of the site Merkinch site are:

- Variety of paths
- Biodiversity
- Boardwalk
- Picnic area
- Fabulous views
- Potential for visitor centre.

The LNR has been very successful so far, community support has been key and articles about the LNR have appeared in local and national press. A week long celebration for Merkinch LNR will begin on 2nd June and culminate in an open air event on 7th June 2008.

In order to progress the Merkinch LNR site the following has still to be completed;

- Community consultation
- Management Plan
- Full costings for the various elements
- Further funding raised
- Projects on site completed

Discussion and ideas for other potential LNR sites in Highland were invited for the afternoon workshop (also see this section for details of the process for developing LNR's).  
*Debbie Maguire, greeninverness & Inverness & Nairn Biodiversity Group*

### **Easter Ross Biodiversity Projects**

Janet Bromham reported that the aims of this agency-led group were to help the local community and identify and lobby for major issues in biodiversity. The group have been involved in three local biodiversity projects:

1. Community Wildlife Survey: This project aimed to give up to five groups equipment and training in wildlife surveys. The first training day (badger survey) had been held in November 2007. It was noted that currently two community groups are involved, but more groups are invited to participate – speak to Janet for more information.
2. Butterfly Survey (one of three taking place in Highland): Focusing this year on the Peacock Butterfly for which a postcard has been produced and distributed. Again, speak to JB re participating.
3. SAC Grey Partridge Project: This project aims to protect and enhance the grey partridge population of Easter Ross through increasing understanding and providing hands-on advice to farmers on the practical measures they can take.

The groups' priority for 2008 is to raise awareness, with a series of winter talks and local events to showcase the three projects later in the year.

*(Update given on behalf of Kenny Taylor, Ross & Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Group Chairman, who sent his apologies for being unable to attend the Forum).*

### **Skye & Lochalsh Japanese Knotweed Project**

Japanese Knotweed was introduced to the UK in the late 1800's and has been spreading ever since. The weed spreads via stem and root fragments rather than seeds. It is a big and tall plant that destroys local flora and fauna and it was reported that the Highlands of Scotland are in the frontline for holding back the invasion. The Countryside Act of 1981 states that it is an offence to cause the plant to spread in the wild, while the Environmental Protection Act creates a duty of care for its disposal and requires a licence for transportation – however, there are no registered sites in Scotland that can dispose of the weed. The main method of control is chemical with straying or injection into the hollow root.

This project will identify key locations from which to eradicate the knotweed in an effort to halt its spread in Kyle of Lochalsh and Skye.

*Barbara Soutar, National Trust for Scotland & SLEF and Janet Ullman, Project Co-ordinator*

### **Involving Local People in Biodiversity Interpretation in Wester Ross**

Jonathan Willet reported that the WREN has been facing a problem of capacity. As with many local groups, management and co-ordination often depends on one person. Lloyd Gudgeon has been acting as secretary, but with a funding cut, cannot give so much time to WREN, leading to concerns about the groups' future. However, it was hoped that funding would be available for secretarial support this year – and that they would have good news for the next forum.

However, the group have been involved in a number of projects, including:

- Fisheries awareness days
- Producing a Wildlife Year Book

- Rob Dewar (NTS) has been producing a series of Invasive Species Fact-sheets (for the whole of the Highlands)
- Producing posters for Biodiversity in Wester Ross
- Holding a Biodiversity Day on 24<sup>th</sup> May – promoting WREN equipment which is available to the local community.

*(Update given on behalf of Aaron Forsyth, Wester Ross Environmental Network Chairman, who sent his apologies for being unable to attend the Forum).*

### **Growing Native Trees Project in Sutherland**

Andy Summers reported that Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Group had several projects on stream, including the Growing Native Trees Project. It was noted that Sutherland holds 74,200 hectares of woodland and has just over 8% of its land covered in trees (the lowest in Scotland). The project aims to bring 1000ha of native woodland into management, and expand the native woodland area by a further 1000ha through natural regeneration.

To encourage and inspire local schools and the wider community to get involved, the project invited a Puppet Show “The Man who Planned Trees” to visit local schools to raise awareness. The children also got involved in practical skills – collecting, growing and eventually planting out seeds. Overall, the project has been highly successful with 11 primary school and Kinlochbervie High School participating (over 300 children). Contact Andy for more information.

*Andy Summers, Highland Council Rangers & Sutherland Partnership BG*

### **Local Biodiversity Work in Caithness**

Marina Swanson reported that CBG were undertaking a number of Ranger led projects.

1. The group were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 3-year wildlife flower/habitat enhancement project to help reverse the decline of three wildflower species in Caithness: Oyster plant, Scottish Primrose and Kidney vetch.
2. Schools Biodiversity Competition (a 3 year project which is due to end in May), aimed to engage with primary school children throughout Caithness to increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity using a biodiversity themed competition - six schools have participated.
3. The Wildlife Boxes project aims to build a range of wildlife boxes for distribution around Caithness over 3 years – last year the project focussed on Barn Owl boxes, and this year (year 2 of the project) will deal with Swifts and Bats.
4. A children’s Biodiversity Display has been created to upgrade children’s room at Seadrift by creating an art project from recycled materials.
5. Water vole monitoring: Baseline surveys were carried out in 2005/6 and then a sample of sites monitored were in 2007 to detect changes in occupancy.
6. Identification of important Biodiversity sites –with drop in sessions around county to gather information of biodiversity from local people. More of these specialised sessions planned are planned.
7. North Aspen Woods – survey of Aspens on Dunnet Head as part of North Aspen woods project led by North Highland Forest Trust. The objective was to record aspen refugia on Dunnet Head. Aspen found at 25 locations (16 on cliff top & 8 inland).

For more information of these and any other projects, please contact Marina or David Glass.

*Marina Swanson, Highland Council Rangers & Caithness Biodiversity Group*



## 5.0 Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoon, participants heard about new funding opportunities via the Scottish Regional Development Programme (SRDP) 2007 -13, which involves a number of different schemes. Those most relevant to biodiversity are Rural Priorities and LEADER.

### **Rural Priorities** (*George Hogg, Scottish Natural Heritage*)

George Hogg reported that the SRDP key outcomes are business viability and competitiveness; environmental improvements (water/ climate change/landscape and biodiversity) and thriving rural communities. These are divided into a fairly complicated series of guidance, national and regional priorities, packages and options.

FOR EXAMPLE The National priorities include:

- contribute to improving the competitiveness of rural land based businesses (7)
- **biodiversity (5)**
- landscape (2)
- built & cultural heritage (1)
- water & soils (5)
- adaptations to climate change (4)
- public access (1)
- diversification of rural enterprises (5)
- thriving rural communities (2)

For biodiversity, these 5 national priorities are:

1. A halt in the loss of biodiversity and reverse previous losses through targeted action”
2. The special features on Scotland’s nationally important nature sites (SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites) being in ‘favourable condition’ (95% by 2010.)
3. Viable populations of rare and/or endangered species, through improved conservation of the 32 species listed for priority action in the Species Action Framework for Scotland, and through targeted action identified in priority Species Action Plans.
4. Reduced threat from non-native species, through action to eradicate or control target species.
5. Increase in the area of connected natural habitats and ecological features.

Taking the first National priority for biodiversity above, “A halt in the loss of biodiversity and reverse previous losses through targeted action”, the Highland Regional Priorities under this heading are:

- Outwith Cairngorms National Park - Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats.
- Within the Cairngorms National Park – Cairngorms List of Priority Habitats and Species.
- Action to interpret or raise awareness of Highland biodiversity.
- Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

The Application Process for funding involves:

- Scope proposal against guidance, priorities, packages & options
- Submit outline proposal as ‘Statement of Intent
- Case Officer provides feedback including red/amber status
- Work up & submit application with outcome plan(s) & specialist advice
- If deemed competent & valid, scored by case officer & assessed by the Regional Priorities Action Group on contribution to regional priorities, value for money and management of risk

**LEADER 2007-13** (*Nicole Wallace, Highland Council*)

LEADER is an EU Fund which aims to promote economic and community development within rural areas. A funding bid was submitted on 14th November 2007 by the Highland Wellbeing Alliance with Highland Council as Lead Partner. A decision is expected shortly. The project will cover the Highland Council area except for settlement development area of Inverness and Cairngorms National Park.

The new programmes themes are:

- **Revitalising communities**  
Rural community capacity  
New markets and products
- **\*Progressive rural economy**  
Conservation of the rural environment

The aim is to enable people in the Highlands to realise their ambitions to live in communities where they can fulfil their personal, social and economic potential

65% funds will be allocated to **ACTION 1** - covering

- Development Planning and community capacity
- Culture and Heritage
- Training and learning opportunities
- Access to activities, facilities and services
- Land, environment and access
  1. development of crofting community and land access initiatives
  2. implementation of the core paths plans
  3. biodiversity related projects
  4. community archaeology projects
  5. environmental interpretation projects
  6. marketing support initiatives
  7. improvements to designated sites
  8. environmental education and facilities
  9. recreation facilities in the countryside or forest
- Renewables
- Tourism
- Social enterprise and micro businesses

15% funds will be allocated to **ACTION 2**

Reflect the broad development issues, themes and actions identified in the strategy

Transregional activity – 50% funding support available

Transnational activity – 70% funding support available

Up to 20% funds will be allocated to **ACTION 3** - Administration

**Who can apply?**

It is assumed that the same assessment criteria as previously (meets aims of strategy, sustainable, community benefits, innovative, VFM etc) will apply and that the same range of people can apply for funding (constituted groups, charities, NGO's, Public sector, private sector etc ). The Leader funds are £6.8 million and convergence £9.5 million giving a total £16.3 million. The total programme value is £32.6 million.

### **Delivery process – Highland**

- Strategic LAG (Local Action Group ) - At least 50% from private , community sector and 50% from public sector
  
- Area/local groups - The delivery methodology involves the Strategic Lag working with 9 local community planning groups in the Highlands in developing local projects for funding. Nine local groupings have been identified, each at different stages of development:
  1. Caithness
  2. Sutherland
  3. Easter Ross (Alness, Invergordon, Tain and the Fearn Peninsula)
  4. Dingwall, Seaforth and Black Isle
  5. Wester Ross
  6. Skye
  7. Lochaber
  8. Rural Inverness
  9. Nairn

### **Conclusion**

These projects are newly launched and detail still being finalised, but for more information and guidance visit [www.scotland.gov.uk/srdp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/srdp) or contact Nicole Wallace or George Hogg.

## **6.0 Workshops**

Two workshop sessions were held, looking at two key issues: Local Nature Reserves in Highland and Non-native invasive species. Delegates had the opportunity to participate in both workshops.

### **6.1 Local Nature Reserves in Highland**

**Background:** With the development of the Highlands first LNR at Merkinch, Inverness, ideas and suggestions were sought from the group on other potential sites. It was noted that community support was a vital aspect of the designation process which involves the following steps:

1. Decide on area to be LNR
2. Approach the site's landowner to see if they are happy with its potential designation
3. If they are, prepare site selection statement
4. Produce a map of the site
5. Establish ownership of site
6. Form local management group
7. Prepare LNR management statement
8. Consult with SNH
9. Legal agreements signed (if required)
10. Local Authority make the declaration
11. Sign LNR declaration
12. Public Notice displayed for 14 days
13. Site is then designated as LNR

Once designated;

1. Write three year management plan
2. Hold opening/launch event
3. Deliver the management plan
4. Source further funding
5. Enjoy your LNR...

#### **Workshop Feedback:**

Suggested locations for LNR's included:

- Dunnet Sands, Dunnet
- Milton Community Woodland
- Ardgay Woodland (Gerrachaille) – although could be ownership issues
- Maggies Wood (Docharty Community Association).
- Muir of Ord ponds

It is noted that LNR's could also have SSSI designation, but that the key feature for the LNR was community involvement and support. Landowner support was also key.

## 6.2 Non-Native Invasive Species

**Background:** The spread of non-native, invasive species has been identified through the Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the Highland LBAP Review as one of the key issues facing biodiversity across the area. The Partnership is in the process of forming a Highland Non-Native Invasive Species Group comprising the main partners working in this area to hear about progress to date, and then identify gaps and priorities for future work. It is hoped that the results of the workshop will help guide the work of this Group.

### Workshop Feedback:

Both groups identified a number of different non-native species and a number of projects undertaken to control or eradicate invasive non-native species (listed below). They raised the following points:

- different problems and issues are faced in different areas, therefore different solutions are needed
- need to take partnership approach to identify scope of problem, take a step back and address on a species by species basis
- queried if some species should now be accepted? – clearly define non-native
- need to focus on the species listed in SNH’s Species Action Framework as these are the ones most likely to get funding
- need to set realistic targets (control or eradicate?)
- awareness raising may be more effective than direct control projects
- raise awareness of invasive species with the public/ garden centres, promote “responsible gardening”, produce gardening leaflet, involve TV gardening programmes & stop garden centres stocking ponticum
- raise awareness of legal issues surrounding invasive species (illegal to fly tip)
- create “red list” of invasive plants (could prioritise by degree of invasiveness, level of threat to native biodiversity, & the cost / benefit of control measures)
- catchment - integrated approach working with landowners
- need for emergency contact lists
- need for training/ identification of species
- focus on aquatic invasives (cf Plantlife Alert Project (1/2 dozen species), raise awareness of pond aerator species eg *crassula helmsula*)
- produce guidance (eg in sustainable design guidelines) and make compliance a planning condition
- question asked whether we ought to include native species (eg gorse, ragwort)

### Current Projects

- Cromarty Firth Fisheries Board & Trust – surveying to look for Signal crayfish, mink and several species of invasive plants
- BTCV Green Gym – Himalayan Balsam bashing on the banks of the River Orrin
- SNH & SNW – Survey of Rivers Enrick & Coiltie found 50 non-native species inc J knotweed, H balsam & sycamore
- Land managers in the Nairn catchment – experiencing problems with giant hogweed
- Sunart Oakwoods Initiative & SNH – undertaking mink trapping and a Rhodie survey
- Aerial survey of Rhododendron at Ardnamurchan and Knoydart

- RSPB & Balnagown Estate - Giant hogweed control
- Newtonhill Community Woodland – Japanese knotweed control
- SNH – Wester Ross Rhodie Survey undertaken 10 years ago
- RSPB – controlling Spartina at their Udale Bay Reserve
- Various estates have tried to control invasives eg Rhodies through WGS on a piecemeal basis

A meeting of the Highland Non-Native Invasive Species Group was proposed for April/ May 2008 and several participants were interested in being part of this.

## 7.0 Event Feedback

Delegates were asked to complete and return feedback forms at the end of the event. Twenty-eight completed forms were returned - representing 47% of all attendees.

### Timing

#### 1. Do you think this is a good time of year to hold this event?

	2007 (APRIL)		2008 (MARCH)	
	Number	%	Number	%
YES	19	83%	27	96%
NO	3	13%	1	4%
D/K	1	4%	0	0%
TOTAL	23	100%	28	100%

The majority of attendees (96%) felt that March was a good time of year to hold the event (this was a more popular date than April which had been supported by 83% on participants in 2007). The only suggestion for a better time of year to hold the event was “even earlier – mid Feb”.

#### 2. Is a Saturday event better than a week-day event?

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
YES	14	61%	25	89%
NO	9	39%	2	7%
EITHER	0	0%	1	4%
TOTAL	23	100%	28	100%

89% of participants preferred a Saturday for the event.

#### 3. Do you have any comments on the timing of the day itself?

- “10 mins is too short for presentations. There should be time for questions after each talk eg 15 mins talk and 5 mins questions - 20 mins.”
- “A bit more time for workshops and questions would be good.”
- “About right.”
- “Fine.”
- “Fine.”
- “Good short bursts of information – lunch period too long.”
- “Is annual event frequent enough?”

- “Lunch break was too long. One hour is sufficient this allowing more time for the afternoon. No need for tour round Great Glen House.”
- “Morning session (after 100hrs) bit rushed.”
- “Ok for me, but I live relatively near to Inverness.”
- “Start later.”
- “The timing was fine.”
- “Timing is fine. Would it have been possible to close the light wells immediately above the screen?”
- “Well set out – workshops maybe a bit short but did give the opportunity to do two – more like brainstorming sessions.”

## **Organisation**

### **4. How would you rate the organisation of the event?**

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	8	35%	23	82%
Good	13	56.5%	5	18%
Average	2	8.5%	0	0%
Poor	0	0%	0	0%
Total	23	101%	28	100%

All of the attendees (100%) rated the organisation of the event as excellent or good, with 82% rating the organisation as excellent. This was a significant increase from 2007.

### **5. Did you feel that you received all the information you needed for the event?**

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
YES	20	87%	27	96%
NO	1	4%	1	4%
N/R	2	9%	0	0%
TOTAL	23	100%	28	100%

96% of participants felt they received all the information they needed for the event. All participants were supplied with a map and postal location for Great Glen House in advance, but it was noted that more detailed instructions would have been helpful.

Comments included:

- “The map included was useless! The Paperwork I received did not give a street name for Great Glen House either.”
- “Verbal route directions to Great Glen House would be useful as well as a map.”
- “Excellent – better instructions to find the place.”
- “More detailed location map may have been useful.”
- “Directions to venue would have helped”.

## The Presentations

### 6. How useful did you find the presentations and update sessions?

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
Very useful	18	78%	21	75%
Quite useful	5	22%	7	25%
Not useful	0	0%	0	0%
Total	23	100%	28	100%

All the participants (100%) found the presentation and updates sessions very or quite useful. Many participants rated this as the most interesting and useful part of the day (see comments in section 10 below).

## The Workshops

### 7. Which workshop did you attend?

All the participants were able to attend both workshops – Local Nature Reserves in Highland and non-native invasion species.

### 8a. How useful if you find the workshop (overall score for both workshops)?

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
Very useful	12	52%	8	29%
Quite useful	10	43.5%	17	61%
Not useful	1	4.5%	1	4%
N/A	0	0%	2	7%
Total	23	100%	28	101%

Although 90% of participants found the workshops very or quite useful, many participants felt that it would have been useful to have extra time allocated to these workshop sessions. (See comments in section 9 and 11 below).

### 9. Are there any additional points you would like to make about the workshops?

- “A bit more time for workshops and questions would be good”.
- “Again – but rushed. Pity WREN not present – would love to know how they are spending their £11,200.”
- “Biosphere reserves to be given priority by Scottish Biodiversity Forum”
- “Didn’t have much background info on LNR, therefore difficult to discuss fully.”
- “Good introduction to biodiversity in Highland area and progress report. Excellent that all these positive activities are happening.”
- “Good to have opportunity to attend both.”
- “Great opportunity to network and find out what other LB groups are doing.”
- “Insufficient time for the workshops – too rushed.”
- “More interested in non-native species – too short.”
- “More time – shorter lunch.”
- “Workshop times were too short compared to presentations”.
- “Workshops not along enough to reach any conclusions,”
- “Would have been better to attend only one for twice the time.”



## **The Day Generally**

### **10. What part of the day did you find *most* useful, and why?**

- “A.M (*morning sessions*).”
- “Developing information on Local Nature Reserves, networking, meeting people.”
- “Everything (apart from SRDP).”
- “Hard to say but possibly the reports on local biodiversity work.”
- “I found the general morning sessions very informative as I had no idea if the range of current activities. It will be very useful too having access to the library at Great Glen House.”
- “Introduction as an intro to the whole biodiversity organisation.”
- “Knotweed, LNR, SRDP (good background and update). Workshops were also very useful.”
- “Learning about local actions taken.”
- “Meeting like-minded people who care about the native flora and fauna and animals of Scotland/Highlands.”
- “Morning session – more detail of specific projects.”
- “Presentations from local groups.”
- “Presentations of local biodiversity work.”
- “Session on local work (am) - good examples of best practice, especially contributions by Summers and Swanson. Maguire’s also interesting – more time needed for this.”
- “Some of the local group reports – rhoddie in particular. SRDP/Leader. Lunch – meeting people.
- “SRDP and Leader presentations.”
- “SRDP and Leader updates – need to know!”
- “Talks on local BD work as useful to hear what is happening in other areas.”
- “The earlier talks because they were focused and informative.”
- “The update of the Partnership – useful to hear progress. Also the local work presentations – very interesting to hear what is going on on the ground.”
- “Update on projects from around the Highlands. SRDP and Leader funding.”
- “Updates from local groups.”
- “Updates from other groups – idea of what others are doing and how we might achieve more.”
- “Updates on area projects – to hear what’s been going on.”
- “Workshop on invasive species and presentation on Japanese knotweed.”
- “Workshops – although all useful.”
- “Workshops and lunch/networking.”
- “Update on local groups – useful information on what is happening on the ground.”

### **11. What part of the day did you find *least* useful, and why?**

- “All parts relevant.”
- “All useful.”
- “All was very useful - good range of topics discussed.”
- “Discussion on LNR as didn’t see the merits.”
- “Even harder to say – and I won’t!”
- “Feedback session. We’d all been to both workshops.”
- “LNR workshop not that relevant at the moment.”
- “LNR workshop.”

- “None.”
- “Non-native species workshop – didn’t really learn much.”
- “PM a) So far no problem with invasive species b) Deep-seated distrust of designations on local community.”
- “Rural priorities.”
- “Scottish Regional development Programme – much too detailed with complicated slides – could have been simplified.”
- “Session on strategic issues (pm) dreary!”
- “Some of the speakers early on were hard to listen to especially for those of us sitting at the back.”
- “Strategic biodiversity issues session – not relevant to myself (but possibly of interest to some of the delegates).”
- “The general biodiversity stuff.”
- “The Scottish Regional Development Programme – but not because of contents, I think a theoretical issue like that should not be addressed directly after lunch when people are tired.”
- “The workshops.”
- “Wasn’t anything least useful – it was all relevant.”
- “Workshop – not enough time. People starting from very different levels of understanding/ perspective.”
- “Workshops – they were less well structured and participants were getting tired. It might have been better to ask attendees to answer a questionnaire beforehand and discuss results at the workshops.”
- “Workshops – too much to cover in a short time for the invasive species.”

**12. Will you or your organisation be taking action on any of the issues raised today?**

	2007		2008	
	Number	%	Number	%
YES	13	57%	20	71%
NO	5	21.5%	4	14%
N/R	5	21.5%	3	11%
D/K	0	0%	1	4%
TOTAL	23	100%	28	100%

71% of participants said that they would be taking action on the issues raised, an increase of 14% on the previous forum. Issues to be addressed included:

- “Adapt management, provide habitats.”
- “As individual, my aim was to collect material I can use in my newspaper column; to raise awareness, I hope. As rep from Inner Moray Firth Members centre of Scottish Wildlife Trust, again ideas for future talks and possibly outings. I found material and ideas a-plenty.”
- “Don’t know yet.”
- “Hoping to develop/start more biodiversity projects in Wester Ross.”
- “I will report back to the TDFC Committee and then will decide whether we take anything forward.”
- “I’ll be following up several leads.”
- “Ideas from other areas to local group. Take draft guidance to planners to local area staff. Ideas and info on SRDP to local group.”
- “Invasive species.”

- “LNR promotion through Greeninverness.”
- “Make people more aware of opportunities and problems in own locality. Act personally to destroy invasive species in own garden.”
- “Networking and contributing to a range of the projects and issues raised – rhododendron, knotweed, water ives, twinflower, aspen, FHN etc.”
- “Networking –training days and possibly rhododendron control.”
- “Non native species.”
- “Not at the moment, but may wish to do so in the future.”
- “Produce short report and issue around the group. Look for local projects.”
- “Raising at local ward business meeting (Black Isle Ward).”
- “Think about potential LNR areas.”
- “Will be involved in invasive species group.”
- “Will be thinking of possibilities of a local nature reserve in Lochaber area.”
- “Will find out about aspen seed orchards and use by otters of rhododendron plants.”
- “Will look at invasive species.”
- “Woodland management, species work.”
- “Writing summary for CWA members.”

**13. How can the Highland Biodiversity Forum help and support you further with this issue?**

- “Funding? Community networks.”
- “I know whom to contact for further info.”
- “I would know who to get further information from (re LNR’s).”
- “Information on meeting and feedback.”
- “Invitations to meeting (*delegate to be added to mailing list*).”
- “It is useful to know what support exists and is available.”
- “Keeping us up to date with changes to funding applications etc.”
- “Point CWA members in direction of advise – grants, the law etc.”
- “Providing details of projects and contacts via forum, web, email etc.”
- “Provision of reports and updates – can these be emailed out?”
- “Spread the word re “Lever and Mulch” rhododendron control.”
- “Support for projects in sourcing funding and ideas. Providing info and advice to local groups and co-ordinating Highland wide link to national.”

**14. Are there any other things that you would like to see from the Highland Biodiversity Forum?**

- “Issue of Newsletter.”
- “Keep up the good work.”
- “Maybe more of a structured debate on an important issues rather than workshops?”
- “More positive action process.”
- “More regular info sharing.”
- “Not really – it is already doing a good job.”
- “Reporting of activities and outcomes in other areas of UK and abroad in the biodiversity scene.”
- “Some (scientific) input about recent findings on severity/ impact of invasive species and solutions/ biodiversity in general.”
- “To support the concept of a Kyle of Sutherland Biosphere Reserve.”

**15. Do you have any general comments/suggestions about the event or any follow-up events that you think are needed?**

- “A very useful day which is worth repeating annually.”
- “Allow more time for presentation/discussions of local actions and concerns. Twice a year enough for busy people but very helpful to meet physically from across Scotland.”
- “Day too crowded, but good.”
- “Don’t base nearly all in Inverness – rotate venues?”
- “Excellent and very interesting day with very relevant topics and good networking opportunities.”
- “General format good and no radical change needed.”
- “Highland Biodiversity News useful.”
- “I’d like to give a brief presentation on biosphere reserves at next meeting. I need help to communicate with the Scottish Biodiversity Forums – they just will not acknowledge the badly needed reform of SNH approach to BR’s.”
- “I’m disappointed to receive so much unnecessary paper. I’ve now got 2 print outs of the programme and one by email and a lot of other guff which will all end up in recycling – we don’t really need all this stuff.”
- “Overall very good thanks! Some tables in atrium for display materials and leaflets. Good to have a selection of fairly short presentations like today. Perhaps leave tea until after conclusion?”
- “Proceedings with speaker’s summaries would be useful. An excellent opportunity to network and get new ideas for local group. More time for questions – shorter lunch? An excellent programme. Tour of Great Glen House a good touch.”
- “Splendid opportunity to meet others and discuss projects happening across the Highlands.”
- “Venue was excellent – better than previous ones.”
- “Would be good to have field visit forum to see what’s happening on the ground.”

**8.0 Conclusion**

Overall, the event was highly successful – creating an opportunity for groups to share knowledge and experience and to find out about new projects and funding routes. All the participants (100%) found the presentation and updates sessions very or quite useful, while 90% of participants found the workshops very or quite useful. Over half of the participants (71%) said that they would be taking action on the issues raised as a result of the event.

For 2009, feedback suggests:

- more time is devoted to the local presentations with opportunities for questions after each speaker;
- structured discussions instead of workshops;
- possible change of venue (outside Inverness); and
- reducing environmental footprint – ie more invitations by email, less paper in delegates packs.

**Rowan Tree Consulting  
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