

5th Highland Invasive Species Forum
Nairn Community and Arts Centre
27th October 2013

Present

Name	Organisation
Janet Bromham	The Highland Council
Lynn Brydon	Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust
Kate Clarke	RSPB
Ian Collier	Forestry Commission
David Denoon	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
Duncan Donald	Wester Ross Environmental Network
Duncan Ferguson	Spey District Fishery Board
Andy Ford	Cairngorms National Park
Gordon French	The Lever and Mulch Partnership
Katy Green	The Conservation Volunteers
Jeanette Hall	Scottish Natural Heritage
Erin Hunter	Nairn DSFB
Kenneth Knott	Forestry Commission
Bob Laughton	Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Fishery Trust
Cllr Liz MacDonald	Highland Council
Rosie MacRae	Nairn DSFB
Barbara MacRitchie	National Trust for Scotland
Jenny Martin	Wildthings
Carol Masheter	Highland Environmental Network
Corrina Mertens	Scottish Natural Heritage
Judi McDonald	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
Simon McKelvey	Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust
John Montgomery	'The Lever and Mulch Partnership'
David O'Brien	Highland Biological Recording Group
Jon Orr	Highland Council
Marie Pages	University of Aberdeen
John Parrott	Coille Alba
Michael Sinclair	The Highland Council
Sarah Smyth	SNH, Biodiversity Team
Rob Thomas	The Conservation Volunteers
Jonathan Willet	The Highland Council
Dr Keith Williams	Ness & Beaully Fishery Trust

Chairman's Introduction

Welcome to the 5th HIS, thank you to everyone for attending and we are looking forward to an informative day.

Talks

The Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fishery Trust's Invasive Species Control Programme - Bob Laughton, Director/ Biologist

Bob outlined the plant species the programme was the main three are: Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed. Other species that have been identified a problematic include: New Zealand Pigmy Weed, Skunk Cabbage, White Butterbur and Bamboo species.

The project started with an extensive mapping process to give a true picture and extend of the problem and to monitor the success of the project. Some of the areas mapped are very large and inaccessible areas, tackling these sites is problematic and you must be mindful of health & safety. Tackling high visibility sites in populated areas brings the added benefit of raising profile, as people see action taking place.

The project relies heavily on volunteers which in itself brings a set of challenges. How you recruit, train and maintain your volunteer's interest, being the key issues. To help maximise funding and resources, when offering training make sure you train people that will stay loyal to the project.

Weed control chemicals have been supplied to local estates and utilising single contractors to carry out some of the programme as also helped. Weed control treatment has also been undertaken as part of the flood prevention schemes. In addition active voluntary groups have been provided with support and equipment.

What has been achieved?

- 40 hectares have been treated
- Good will.
- Press and publicity
- Weed control contract – potential providing future income and sustainability
- Mapping exercise has been nearly completed

Challenges

- Recruiting new volunteers is an ongoing issue
- Long term funding, it take 4 -5 year to interrupt seed development
- Other agents or land owners that don't engage

Other control issue the programme is tackling - Signal Crayfish and mink

Signal Crayfish - Trapping is being undertaken but it is believed to be only semi effective in tackling the issue. A study is being undertaken which undertaken to explore other more effective and viable options.

Mink Control - A Mink App has been developed which is used by volunteer, bailiff and partners to record information and sightings to allow raft and traps to be positioned effectively.

Biosecurity issues

Raising awareness of how to prevent the spread of INNS's.

SEPA – licensing

Getting people to believe that it action can be effective.

Role of the RAFTs – Rivers and Fisheries Trust

Chris Horrill, RAFTS - North Highland Mink Project Update

Aim of the project is to eradicate American Mink from the North of Scotland. The project started in 2006 after an extensive and ongoing mapping process, four genetic clusters have been identified. The map clearly shows the spread and movement thus making it possible to develop buffer zones to stop further spread. The project is focusing on eradicating breeding mink – removing the females from the population. Local organisations and volunteers are engaged to monitor rafts and traps.

What has been achieved?

- 30,000 Km sq are being covered by 1020 rafts.
- Identify that sightings are actually mink instead of ferrets or pine martin.
- Proving that mink are not in areas can be challenging (it's easier to prove there is mink present).
- 90% rafts are monitored by volunteers.
- 800 mink have been captured over in the six year period.
- 15 out of 24 catchments are effectively free of mink?
- Mapping out sensitive areas/hot spots (occupied by females) is a more effective way of controlling population numbers.
- Online data base developed by Aberdeen University. Volunteers can register raft activity and get feedback through the new research system to be kept up to date.

Challenges/lessons learned:

- Research is critical in showing patterns and preventing further spread.
- Keeping people motivated even when there is no mink around.
- Partnership working is key to the success of the project.
- Some areas are exporters of and others are importers, you cannot afford to relax surveillance in mink-free areas.
- How do you keep a project going long enough to have a significant impact – this work takes a long time.
- Ongoing cost - £40 per raft.
- Move the project away from being a project officer led project.
- Boredom setting in for volunteers - mink will be back if we are not vigilant - multi invasive species monitoring could be an option to keep volunteers engaged.
- Resource and co-ordination. Project-based funding is time limited and often difficult to secure again also momentum goes when there is a gap in funding and volunteers can drop off.
- Getting an academic support to carry out research gives independent view and evidence to show the success of your project.

Controlling invasive plants some of the challenges– John Parrott, Coille Alba

Identifying the furthest upstream source is critical and work down from there, unless you can identify the source you will continue to get spread. Try different techniques to suit the situation. The approach has to be flexible as new plants emerge as this can create new problems.

Funding

- Funding is not being delivered in a strategy way e.g. neighbours need to work in partnership.
- Grants are related to the method not the outcomes. No incentive to use the most cost effective methods. The SRDP Rhododendron control payment for cut and burn is £4,500 -

£9,500 higher rates of grant on difficult terrain. Stem injection, is effective and it is easy to see what plants you have missed but it receives a much lower rate of grant.

- The SRDP grant gives 5 years to eradicate Rhododendron but this is impossible given seed life is 7 years.

Issues

- Why we are controlling plants?
- Getting people to recognise and understand the issues. Main species are starting to naturalise and we need to recognise when they are becoming a problem.
- If you remove one weed do you just make way for other another to move in?

Choosing your method - Rhododendron:

- Containment instead of eradication is sometimes they only option on inaccessible sites
Recovery of a site after removal to get it back to what it was.
- Cut and burn can cause erosion and shock and environment at the sudden change it is still not known how much some species remove nutrients from the soil
- Stem injection works better on live plants, not so effective on cut stumps as the plant does not draw down the herbicide into the root system. Leaving the timber standing, can act as barrier to stop the seed setting. Stem injection and leaving the standing timber allows some nutrients to go back in to the site it direct
- You need to use a variety of techniques to suit the situation.

Highland Rhododendron project update – Jonathan willet

The Forestry Commission set the ambitious target to eradicate Rhododendron from the National Forest Estate in 15 years. This has help to change attitudes regarding the controllability of Rhododendron; it is now seen as something that can be achieved on a large'ish scale.

In Highland areas have been mapped and zoned. Four priority areas have been identified and some action has taken place. Taking forward further action in these zones depends on funding being available, currently it isn't. When funding was available there was some initial reluctance for landowners to apply for funding however this was overcome and so the sudden removal of SRDP funding effectively killed the momentum that was building.

Future land management is the big issue on moving forward. A SNH Handbook on the Species Action Framework is soon to be published; one of its chapters will contain the lessons learned from the invasive species projects it took funded.

National Rhododendron publication see:

[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/acriticalreviewofrhododendroncontrolAugust2013.pdf/\\$FILE/acriticalreviewofrhododendroncontrolAugust2013.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/acriticalreviewofrhododendroncontrolAugust2013.pdf/$FILE/acriticalreviewofrhododendroncontrolAugust2013.pdf)

A contract for a new strategy to control Rhododendron has been issued. Research is being undertaken on advantages and disadvantage of clearing, a recovery study looking at the impact of different techniques and also site restoration.

Highland Squirrels - Ian Collier

Update

Red Squirrel of the Highlands Website will be continuing though the project funding has come to an end.

The good news is still no breeding greys confirmed in Highlands despite a number of sightings no evidence has actually been found. Panic bags are still available at key sites. If a sighting is reported feeders with a camera pointed at them are used to confirm if there are greys in the area. Squirrel nest boxes are not pushed as they become easy prey for Pine Martins. Pine Martins appear to reduce greys but this has not been proven.

In Aberdeen it appears that control efforts have been effective in reducing the number of greys. Surveys show a steady fall in grey captures and a rise in reds. For Red Squirrels strongholds (part of the Scottish Squirrel Strategy) see this [map](#).

Translocations have taken place in Dundonnell 2010 and Strathcarron (near Ardgay) 2012, moving Red Squirrels from Speyside to suitable habitat with no squirrels. The Dundonnell translocation has been a great success and it is hoped the Strathcarron one will be too.

Increasing the number of volunteers is a future priority; their key role will be to raise awareness to public to report sightings of greys. Lead area volunteers covering all of Highland can be contacted via <http://www.redsquirrelsofthehighlands.co.uk/>

Duncan Donald

New plants to be concerned about are the smaller plants. Buttonweed is starting to cause concerns near Achiltibuie. It favours bare ground; it produces lots of very small seeds which can be easily transported on footwear. It excludes other plants. It likes areas that are heavily grazed and it does not just appear in coastal areas.

In 2005 it was first recorded, likely to have come in through crofting treatments. How do we stop the spread and what treatment will be effective. Research is required. It's very invasive and may start spreading rapidly.

Simon McKelvey Cromarty Non-native species - RAFT

The aim of project is to prevent the spread of non-native species and to develop a network of volunteers. Survey work was the start of the process, areas were mapped using GPS and this started at the top of catchments and worked down towards the Sea.

Update

Hand held PDA systems are used out on site. This cuts down duplication of recording and allows all data to be logged and recorded on site. Monitoring sites and recording the effectiveness of treatment is now happening on-site. A website will be developed to allow the public to add sightings and see what is being done in an area making it a 2-way process. The Trust are having good success with Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed treatment but the areas these plants cover are not large. Rhododendron was a major problem on some catchments, the Orrin has been cleared and funding was secured for tree planting to assist with site restoration.

Biosecurity planning is in place and tested out when Perch had been introduced to a pond in Strathpeffer which was an important site for Great Crested Newts

Awareness raising signs and leaflets are also an important part of the project.

Mink project – Mink officers now work for the fisheries trust and manage and support an extensive network of volunteers. The volunteers also record sightings of other species i.e. Otters and Water Voles.

Useful links

New Scottish Biodiversity Strategy <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/5538>

Apps - Plant tracker <http://naturelocator.org/> aqua invaders is about to be launched and sealife tracker available for I phone at the moment – it should be coming out on android soon.

Site visit on the River Nairn



View from bridge on River Nairn of an INNS treated site



Mink trap with an Otter print