

The Great Trossachs Forest in the first half of 2016

The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve is one of the most significant woodland regeneration projects to take place in the UK for a generation. It covers 16,500 hectares, an area the size of Glasgow, between Loch Lomond and Callander in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. The Great Trossachs Forest is a partnership project between BP, Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland and The Woodland Trust Scotland.

The following outlines a summary of the work undertaken by partners during 2015 to help deliver the aims and vision of The Great Trossachs Forest.

1) Habitat Management

To create a forest landscape large enough to support a dynamic and functional ecosystem which expands and contracts over time allowing as many habitats and species as possible to adapt and move in response to climate change.

As ever, non-native removal continues as does our conservation grazing and habitat improvement works. Of particular note of work over the past 6 months:

During the spring of 2016, planting of shrubby plants occurred at south Loch Katrine. These plants including hawthorn, will help to improve the biodiversity and structure of the connected woodlands. Weeding and remedial work has also been undertaken in our areas of new planting across The Great Trossachs Forest.

The current phase of felling the conifers on the slopes of Ben A'an has been completed with the newly improved hill path reopen to the public. Native woodland planting will start on these slopes during the late autumn.



Ashy mining bee credit Doug Shapley

A group of lichenologists and willing volunteers got together to hunt for an exceedingly rare lichen, *Pseudocyphellaria lacerata* (Inversnaid is one of two sites in the UK where it has been found). It was not found during our expedition but we did find a number of other rare species including *Pseudocyphellaria intricata* and *Norvegica*. An intrepid group of RSPB staff spent a Saturday at Inversnaid and identified a wide range of species including the ashy mining bee, river lamprey and spawning European eel.

2) People Engagement

To become a renowned focal point offering a high quality visitor experience within the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and a key destination attracting visitors from the UK and overseas benefiting local communities both socially and economically

There has been a lot going on during the first half of 2016, starting with the annual Easter egg assault course at Glen Finglas. The RSPB nature cruise in association with Cruise Loch Lomond has been spotting some great wildlife and coming soon the RSPB blog site is a piece from our media volunteer who attended a nature cruise. We have also hosted some delegates from China, the Glasgow Tree Lovers and Natural History Society, National Trust for Scotland and the author Derek Niemann.

The path network, Visitor Gateways, and natural play trail are being well used and we are receiving great feedback about them. The next phase of promotion for The Great Trossachs Path is focussing on local businesses. Promotion of the area continues apace with The Great Trossachs App and our new virtual photo tour (<http://www.thegreattrossachsforest.co.uk/trossachs/virtual-trossachs-tour/>). Work has started at the Lendrick Hill car park to create an overflow car park to accommodate the additional visitors at the site.

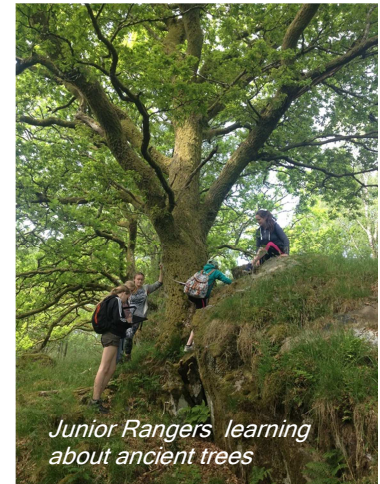
3) Life-long learning

To involve schools, universities, research institutes and volunteers providing opportunities for people to learn about cultural and historical landscapes, forest ecosystems, sustainable land management, climate change, biodiversity and wildlife.

Volunteers have been out and about maintaining the path network, monitoring wildlife and habitats and helping to man our Visitor Gateway. In the past 6 months almost 100 volunteer days have been supported bring our total to almost 400 volunteer days for the Gateways Project.

We have started planning an archaeological event at Inversnaid for the autumn. There is so much to see at Inversnaid we were literally tripping over features in the ground. This event could be the start of a bigger research project which we are really excited about- watch this space for more information.

A number of PhD projects are being undertaken in Glen Finglas and we are getting increasing numbers of requests for people to study aspects of The Great Trossachs Forest as part of their academic studies. During the glorious May weather, partners also supported the National Park Authority's Junior Ranger programme as well as a few school outings.



Our habitat modelling project continues to be discussed and reviewed. There is still support for this work to be undertaken, but a few issues have recently come to light which need to be resolved before we can start work on this.

4)Partnership Working

To be a flagship partner project setting an example and encouraging other land managers to work across boundaries to benefit wildlife and people

The positive promotion associated with becoming a National Nature Reserve continues in relation to magazine articles, on-site tours and national recognition. Thanks to Dave Anderson's work with eagles, The Great Trossachs Forest featured on this year's Springwatch (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03x4yst>). We received lots of positive comments about the feature via social media.

We have been selected as a finalist in the environment category for this year's National Lottery Awards. We have a great chance of winning- you can help support us by voting for The Great Trossachs Gateways Project at this link: <http://www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/project/great-trossachs-forest-gateways-project> Help us get the national recognition that we deserve.

The Steering Group continue to discuss the legacy of The Great Trossachs Forest- what we have achieved so far and what we would still like to achieve. We've looked at what aspects of the project will continue after this funding period has been completed and what no longer needs to be resourced.

- website www.thegreattrossachsforest.co.uk
- you-tube www.youtube.com/user/greattrossachsforest
- twitter: @TheGTF
- facebook www.facebook.com/TheGreatTrossachsForest