



WOODLAND
TRUST SCOTLAND

GLEANN SHILDEAG NEWS

Spring 2025 - FREE

Photo credit: John MacPherson / WTML

MORE WOODLAND UNDERWAY!

Following the first phase of woodland creation successfully completed in 2024 at the northern end of Loch Damh, the Trust is just about to embark on its second major phase, with 330,000 trees to be planted on Gleann Shildeag in the coming months.

This will expand and buffer the existing pinewood, making it more resilient to future change and benefiting people, wildlife and the wider landscape.

The majority of trees planted will be downy birch and eared willow, pioneer species we hope will grow well in challenging conditions. There will also be large areas where Scots pine will be the dominant species (see map inside). Oak, hazel, alder, juniper and aspen will be scattered throughout. This won't lead to a blanket cover of trees but rather a mosaic of habitats, including glades, heath and bog, where a range of species can thrive.

Join us
to plant trees on
1st & 29th March!
See back page
for details

There's no doubt that Gleann Shildeag is a challenging site for woodland creation. Atlantic winds batter the hillsides and much of the soil throughout the site is nutrient-poor. The Trust is endeavouring to mitigate some of the challenges. Thanks to a fantastic local volunteer effort, almost all the seed has been collected locally from trees which are already adapted to our conditions. The use of innovative mycorrhizal pellets planted alongside some of the trees is also being trialled. All trees rely on mycorrhizae – the connection with fungi in the soil – to grow, and it's been shown that the use of pellets can give them a head start.

Given the low soil nutrient level, another important approach is the 'inverted mounding' that has been undertaken in

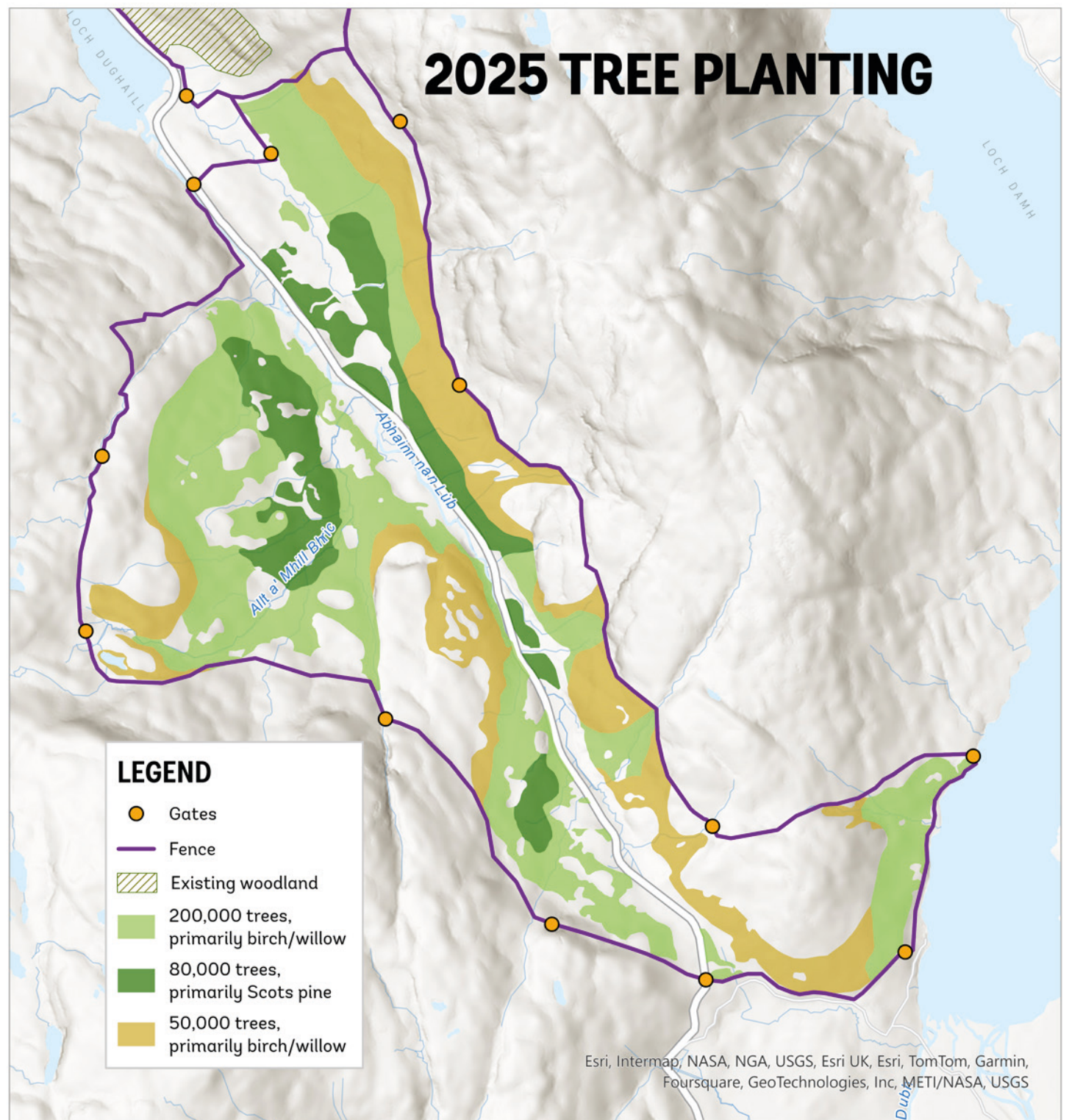
the Glen over the last few months. For this technique, a scoop of soil is taken by the excavator bucket and then turned over and put back in the hole. This creates a raised position to help with drainage in the wet conditions on the west coast and importantly, stirs up nutrients from lower in the soil which the new trees can then access. This approach does come at a cost; disturbing the soil releases carbon in the atmosphere and it can take some time before the same level of carbon is sequestered by the trees. During this time, however, biodiversity can begin to flourish, and positive ecological processes can begin.

We expect growth rates to be slow. Patience and commitment will be essential to successfully establish this potential

rainforest (not least to ensure it remains free from deer until its mature enough for the fences to come down.) Reasons to be hopeful are all around, from looking at the success of other new woodlands, such as at Kinloch Woodlands or Beinn Eighe NNR, to the signs of small saplings regenerating on the open hill, where free from grazing pressure.

The Trust would love for you to be a part of this, so please come along to one of the planting events organised and help us create the woodland of tomorrow.

Image bottom: Map of Phase 2 planting area





NURSERY PLANS TAKE ROOT

One year on and progress in the new tree nursery at Couldoran has been remarkable, thanks to Ann Barton, the tree nursery manager, and an army of willing volunteers. In 12 months, a sad and forgotten waste ground has been transformed into a fabulous facility where over 10,000 trees were nurtured in 2024.

Among the highlights were the 14,000 eared willow seedlings that shot up rapidly from the seed collected by volunteers in June. There was also success with trickier species such as aspen and juniper with 1,000 juniper cuttings now (very) slowly taking root.

The year was not without challenges; Scots pine seeds proved particularly difficult to germinate, reducing expected numbers. We've learned a lot however and are planning trialling different interventions in 2025.

For 2025 the goal is to increase the variety and number of seeds sown. We're aiming to produce 20,000 saplings by the autumn and will be expanding our range to include some of Scotland's rarer, montane tree species too. The nursery will continue to experiment as it develops, including trialling the use of biochar, a soil additive created from dead *Rhododendron ponticum* stems. This is all going to be a massive help in realizing our plans to expand woodland and restore habitats on Gleann Shildeag.

Get involved

Volunteers are critical to the success of our tree nursery. We run regular volunteering days every Tuesday from 10am to 3pm. Please come along and join in. Tasks vary from grading trees, watering, and weeding to pricking out 1000s of seedlings. No experience

Image top left: Volunteers help prick out willow seedlings

Images right - Top: Nursery before work started

Middle: Nursery in autumn

Bottom: Willow and Scots pine seedlings

required! At certain times of year we also need help collecting birch, hazel and other tree seeds. It's good fun. Why not give it a go?

For more information on getting involved contact cazausten@woodlandtrust.org.uk



Gleann Shildeag latest

- At the time of writing, an offer has been accepted on the sale of Couldoran House to a private buyer who wishes to use the home as their primary residence and to explore running a number of activities such as dark skies and writing workshops. Sadly, the Trust will lose the house as a base for its activities, but looks forward to working alongside the new owners. There will be a temporary office in place whilst the Trust explores a longer-term solution.
- Unfortunately the affordable housing project the Trust was scoping around Couldoran House, is not currently economically viable. After a long feasibility study process, run in tandem with the Communities Housing Trust, whom it was

hoped would take the project forward, the development and build costs project are too high. Lack of housing is such an important issue so, whilst this proposal will take a back seat for the time being, the Trust will still be very interested in exploring opportunities should they arise.

- The Trust will shortly be bringing out a revised management plan for Gleann Shildeag and would love your feedback on the draft of our plans for the next 5 years. Keep an eye on our web page (search Woodland Trust Gleann Shildeag) for our draft management plan. Join us on 15th April, in person or virtually, to go through the plan in more detail.

Local skills project takes to the skies

One of the biggest threats to Scotland's rainforest is the density of red deer in the wider landscape, and the impact their browsing has on the rainforest fragments that remain. Whilst this impact is clear, it can be difficult to assess the scale of the problem, and to gather data on numbers and movements to help with management. Helicopter counting is prohibitively expensive with a high carbon footprint and, whilst traditional 'foot' counting techniques can help, they often underestimate numbers. Thermal-imaging drones have therefore become an essential tool for tracking deer and informing management on many estates, including Gleann Shildeag.

The Glen Torridon Partnership, of which the Woodland Trust is a founding member, has recently received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to explore opportunities in local communities to develop skills which can be used for the restoration and future management of rainforest.

In consultation with local stakeholders, including the region's two deer management groups, opportunity we identified was

training a group of residents to use thermal drones to support land management. The theory being that once qualified, local teams can work together to undertake deer counts and other wildlife monitoring over large areas. Four residents have now completed the first phase of a bespoke training programme and over the next six months will undertake a second phase where they develop their skills and learn to work together as a team. On completion of the training the participants will be able to take on contracts for landowners and managers in the surrounding area.

Drones aren't just useful for deer counts. They are being used to identify and monitor invasive species e.g. *Rhododendron ponticum* and wild boar. The data they collect is being used to influence an increasing number of land management decisions. So in the future there will be many ways that the new team can put their skills to use, generating income locally whilst helping to protect the rainforest.

There's still spaces available for this programme so if anybody is interested in joining up and becoming a certified drone pilot, please contact:
malcolmturmer@woodlandtrust.org.uk



Image left: Getting a drone ready for take off

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Community Tree Planting Days

Saturday March 1st

10am - 12:30pm

More details - <https://bit.ly/3DDFg8v>

Saturday March 29th

10am - 12:30pm

More details - <https://bit.ly/4OY2rc2>

Management Plan Consultation

Tuesday April 15th

Drop In

3pm - 6pm

Shielaig Village Hall

Online

6:30pm - 7:30pm

See Facebook for details

Pinewood Guided Walks

Tuesday June 24th

Saturday August 16th

Start 10:30 lasts approx 2 hrs

Balgy Guided Walks

Tuesday July 22nd

Saturday September 27th

Start 10:30 lasts approx 2 1/2 hrs

Hazel Collection

Thursday September 18th

(Date subject to change)

For more information on any of the events contact cazausten@woodlandtrust.org.uk

 **WTGleannShildeag**
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk


WOODLAND
TRUST SCOTLAND


**PEOPLE'S
POSTCODE
LOTTERY**

POSTCODE
GREEN
TRUST