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**Ben Shieldaig update**

7th July 2021

**With our initial survey work coming to and end, we’ll finally be able to complete our plans for the estate, and with lockdown restrictions easing, we hope to be able to meet up with more of you to discuss these and get your input. It’s great now to have Caz Austen, our new Estate Ranger, on board and already making a great contribution to the project!**

**As always, thanks to everyone for their feedback and continued support. Very much looking forward to being more in touch as restrictions allow.**

**Woodland Management and Creation**

* Our ecological baseline survey work will complete shortly and allow us to finalise our woodland creation designs. This will also enable us to produce our management plan for the estate, which we will then put out for consultation, most likely towards the end of summer. We’d love to get as much as feedback and input as possible into this so we’re planning a number of ways that it will be made available.
* As mentioned in the last update, we’ve been part of a scoping study exploring the idea of working with our neighbours to undertake a collaborative woodland creation scheme, including the above areas of Ben Shieldaig, within a large strategic deer fence. There were further delays to this however a first draft has now been completed and so we will follow up by organising a meeting with all the land managers involved to identify who might like to take these plans forward for their estates. There will then be further consultation with the local community and the local Deer Management Group.

**Deer Management**

* A drone survey took place in April 2021 using thermal imagery and counted 51 red deer on or in the immediate vicinity of the estate. A further foot count on our open ground in May, in collaboration with Kinloch Woodlands, counted 24 on the open hill, mostly on our side of Glen Shieldaig
* A Habitat Impact Assessment is currently being completed so that we have a baseline in place to regularly monitor the impact of deer on both the woodland and the open hill. This will be used to inform our deer management approach this year and the report will be made available online.
* There are still reports of deer coming into the village. We’re organising a meeting with Shieldaig crofters to see how we might coordinate deer management this year to reduce the impact the deer have, especially during the winter. We’ll continue to monitor this, and to consult locally and with the local Deer Management Group. Thanks to everyone who is keeping us updated on any deer sightings in the village.
* Our contracted stalker, Derek Ross, will be undertaking deer management again this season. As always, we’re very happy to provide carcasses to the community to distribute.

**Access & Estate Management**

* The ecological surveys for the proposed new management access track from the A896 to Loch Damh, along the boundary of our estate, along with 2 small car parks in Glen Shieldaig, will complete shortly. Along with the archaeological walkover already completed, these surveys will enable us to apply for planning permission in the Autumn.
* We’ll shortly have a new boat arriving on Loch Damh. This will enable us to better access the eastern side of the estate, to help with management and operations. Thanks to Loch Damh smolts fish farm for help and advice with this.
* We’ve been busy clearing a few *Rhododendron ponticum* on the estate. Although there are relatively few larger plants, it is important to be vigilant in stopping their spread. A big thanks to those who have been helping pull up some of the little ones when out walking!

**Engagement and Interpretation**

* Recently we launched our own Facebook page, we will be posting updates on the page of work we are doing and events we have coming up, we’d love to share posts of any local wildlife or pictures around the estate so please do share them with us [facebook.com/WTBenShieldaig](http://www.facebook.com/WTBenShieldaig)
* We have our first event of the season coming up on July 15th - a dragonfly day. We are delighted to have a representative from the British Dragonfly Society coming to teach us about local dragonfly ID and survey techniques. We have a couple of spaces remaining, get in touch if you’d like to join us.
* Later in the summer we will be running a workshop on Ancient Tree identification in conjunction with Wester Ross Biosphere. Recording Ancient Trees is a great way of getting out and discovering more about the local area and helps us to protect these amazing habitats.
* As well as this we are hoping to put on a couple of guided walks around the estate. Keep your eyes out for the posters about these.
* Another one to keep your eyes out for! Some new wildfire signs will be going up shortly, these have been developed with artwork from Ullapool High School following on from the wildfire conference held by Wester Ross Biosphere in 2020. We hope these eye-catching designs will help discourage fires and reduce the risk of a wildfire spreading into the woods.
* We are also looking ahead to next year and different events that we can put on for the community. If you have any ideas about any events you would like to attend or help us run, please get in touch.

**Volunteering**

* In June we met up with our team of red squirrel monitors to do some training on finding squirrel feeding sign with Trees for Life. We will be continuing the work that Trees for Life have been doing monitoring the presence of red squirrels around the area. We always love to hear about sightings and these can also be recorded at [Saving Scotlands Red Squirrels](https://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/)
* An important part of our woodland creation work will be using trees grown from seed collected from on or near Ben Shieldaig. Doing this gives the trees a much better chance of survival as we know that they are genetically suited to the local conditions and will be more resilient. To get started we need to collect seeds from local trees at the right time of year. We would really value some volunteers to help us with this important task in protecting the future of the woods here. There will be training in tree ID and seed collection techniques which should be good fun. Let us know if you’d like to be involved.

**Please contact us for any further information:**

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