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**Ben Shieldaig update**

12th March 2020

**Woodland Management and Creation**

* Trees for Life Woodland Services (TfL) are still working on baseline surveys. The Phase 1 habitat survey, archaeological walkover, and CPI report have all now been completed. The peat depth survey is largely complete, but still needs some ground-truthing. The Ecological Site Classification (ESC) survey is still to be carried out. Breeding Bird and Vantage Point surveys began in January and will carry on until July.
* We’re using the results, as they come in, to refine our plans for areas of possible woodland creation through both natural regeneration and new native planting. The main areas for planting will likely be the corrie in the north east of the site and the western and south western slopes of Ben Shieldaig along Glen Shieldaig. In this way the designated woodland on the estate could be extended southwards though it is important to note that the ground is in quite a challenging condition so will take some time for substantial numbers of pine to establish.
* On our behalf, Trees for Life are aiming to undertake a scoping study to explore the idea of working with our neighbours to undertake a collaborative woodland creation scheme within a large strategic fence. This will be due to start later in March and should report back by July.

**Woodland Trust base**

* With the community association, we’re currently exploring the idea of a shared plot at Baile Shuas which would enable the community to potentially develop some affordable housing whilst providing us with a space for an office. This approach could benefit both sides though it should be noted that there may be constraints regarding access/parking and having enough room for a shed. We’re continuing to explore other options too, including a site at the end of Loch Dughail at the edge of the pinewood.

**Deer Management**

* 4 hinds and a calf were culled within the fence in February by a professional stalker. 2 of the carcasses were donated to the community – many thanks to those who helped organise and prepare the meat on everyone’s behalf!
* As part of our overall management, our Deer Management Plan will be completed in the coming months, once we’ve confirmed our woodland creation areas and fence lines.
* The South West Ross Deer Management Group are seeking to do a coordinated spring deer count across all the estates to produce as accurate a count as possible. The week of 6th April has been put aside for this, with the 20th of April as a foul-weather back-up. **If anyone is interested in helping out with the count on Ben Shieldaig (and potentially our neighbouring estates), please get in touch.**

**Access & Estate Management**

* We had initially planned to draft our Management Plan for the estate to have ready for consultation in June however this may be delayed by a month or two as we wait on the results of the above scoping study and confirm what our approach to woodland creation in the area is likely to be.
* We are currently looking to put in a new 4x4 management access track from the A896 to Loch Damh, along the boundary of our estate. Some suggestions were made as to whether the existing quad track by the Balgy river might be made available and upgraded however from initial surveying of the area the ground is extremely boggy, and upgrading would negatively impact a lot of the archaeology in the area.
* We are also exploring putting in a small car park at the existing layby by Loch Dughail, at the edge of the pinewood. We would like to use this as a way for visitors to access the pinewood and will be exploring options for low-impact paths or way-marked trails to help people experience the site.

**Engagement and Interpretation**

* Thanks to those who came to the community update meeting on 20th February, and for all your feedback and suggestions. It’s also been great to chat with people at ‘Strupag’ each month.
* The local survey for feedback on how the community value/use Ben Shieldaig and future management should be received 57 respondents – a fantastic response with some great ideas! This will help guide our approach and will be incorporated into our management plans.
* We met with Shieldaig primary school to discuss future collaboration and possible tree/shrub planting in school grounds. There will hopefully lots of opportunities for engagement and outdoor learning.
* As part of our interpretation planning, Rachel Hunter, Heritage Consultant, visited on 3rd & 4th February and facilitated a workshop with WT staff and local community members. This will feed into an Interpretation Plan which will be ready in April 2020.
* Our trail cameras are still capturing good footage, which is being used on social media. **Our red squirrel footage received over 43,000 views and 1,000 shares!**
* We’ve offered some support towards repairing the village toilets.
* Some events are being organised for this year, all free but some with limited spaces. Dates/details still to be confirmed for some:
  + **Red Squirrel monitoring walk** (see below) – Saturday 4th April 2020
  + **Guided summit walk**, in collaboration with Jenny Grant, Highland Ranger – 27th May 2020
  + **Highland Biological Recording Group** visit, with opportunities to learn more about some of the amazing species we have here – June 6th 2020
  + **British Dragonfly Society visi**t and monitoring workshop – June 23rd/24th 2020
  + **Self-led Squirrel Trail**, family event led by Jenny Grant – July 2020
  + **Foraging guided walk** and event led by Jenny Grant – Sept 2020
* We would like to change the name of the estate to the Gaelic spelling, **Beinn Shieldaig**, which would be more in keeping with local history and heritage. We would appreciate any feedback on this idea!
* As our plans for the site develop, there will be a number of other opportunities to engage with us and feedback throughout the year. We are happy to discuss our plans at any time – please get in touch. collaboration with Highland Highlife’s ranger.
* Please look for ‘Malcolm Turner’ on if you would like to connect on Facebook. I have joined the Shieldaig Community Association page so should be easy to find.

**Volunteering**

* In collaboration with Trees for Life, a Red Squirrel Monitoring event was held on 20th February. As a result of this, a training event will be held on 4th April to help people identify squirrel activity and then monitor and record whilst out walking. More details will be available shortly. We hope to build on this for more ‘citizen science’ recording of other wildlife in the future.
* **On top of this, we would really appreciate if anybody has time and availability to volunteer with us to carry out a more detailed monitoring project on red squirrels and other species (both flora and fauna!) on the estate and in its surrounds. Please get in touch on the details below if you are interested in helping out**

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

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