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**Ben Shieldaig Update**

14th April 2020

**COVID-19 Update**

Donnie Chisholm, Site Manager, is on Furlough Leave from 6th April 2020. This will be reviewed every 4 weeks as the current situation becomes clearer. My contact details are at the bottom of this page, should anybody like to get in touch.

All survey work on site has been postponed until further notice. We are currently working out how this might impact our proposed timescales for having a management plan in place and the implementation of any woodland creation. We’ll keep everyone updated as the situation develops.

All planned events until 31st May 2020 have been postponed until further notice. This includes:

* Guided Squirrel Walk, 4th April 2020. Led by Trees for Life, it is hoped that this will take place in the summer/autumn. A more detailed monitoring project will be developed in the coming months
* Guided Summit Walk, 27th May 2020. Led by Highland Highlife Ranger, this has been cancelled and may not take place again until 2021.

There are events in June – visits and walks with the Highland Biological Recording Group and the British Dragonfly Society – however, given the situation, these will likely be postponed too.

**Tree Safety Works**

Every two years, The Woodland Trust undertakes a thorough tree inspection of every tree within a tree length of all roads and properties. The Trust acquired Ben Shieldaig in March 2019, and an initial tree inspection was carried out shortly after.

A further Autumn tree safety inspection at Ben Shieldaig was carried out on the 4th October, and 29th October 2019 by Donnie Chisholm. As this was Donnie’s first tree safety inspection, a second opinion was sought to help confirm a number of potential issues that were identified. Due to periods of leave, this second opinion was not obtained until 4th April 2020.

Confirmed by second opinion, we would now like to remove, or remove branches from, 13 trees that are showing signs of failure in the coming years. Trees will be cut leaving high stumps if possible, new rot holes will be created, and fallen dead wood in an effort to provide some new habitat for some of the notifiable features on the site. Cut material will be left on site if it can be hidden from the road-side view, otherwise material will be removed to enhance public safety.

Consent has been approved from SNH for this tree work within the SSSI. We will also make sure that the licensed contractor we use adheres to our new specification, ‘COVID-19 – Working Practices’ in their Operational Risk Assessment. This will outline how the contractors must implement a number of measures including travelling separately, following social distancing rules, not staying overnight, and avoiding the public.

The trees have now all been marked. We aim to carry out these works within the next month causing as minimal disruption as possible. Traffic control will likely not be needed during felling operations however if this will be required then advance notice will be given. Please get in touch if there is any further information you require on this undertaking.

**Wildfires**

We’re conscious that the next few months are at higher risk to wildfires in the area, though this might be mitigated somewhat by the reduced visitor numbers. Nevertheless, we’re working with Kinloch and Applecross to install warning signs at strategic points in the area when the fire risk is high. Whilst I will try to get out on site when possible, we’d be really grateful if people could keep an eye out for potential fire danger when the risk is higher.

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