Croft Woodlands Project 2015-2025

WOODLAND TRUST SCOTLAND

Project Report **May 2025**

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“The Croft Woodlands Project (CWP) was set up in the wake of pioneering tree planters scattered throughout the Highlands and Islands, who demonstrated over many years that far from being a fool’s errand (as suggested by the sceptics), tree and woodland creation in some of the most remote and environmentally challenging parts of Scotland, is not only possible, but comes with many benefits - for landscape, agriculture, biodiversity, climate and quality of life.

The CWP aims to engage crofters and smallholders directly in planting and delivering their own woodland projects. Having now worked with several thousand people and delivered well over 1,000ha of new, small woodlands throughout the crofting counties over the past 10 years, it is clear that the CWP has been a success.

A huge thank you to everyone who has been part of the project, especially the crofters, farmers and smallholders with whom we have had the pleasure of working. The project’s success is due in no small part to their passion and commitment to restoring land and securing a future for woodlands to flourish in Scotland.

— Iona Hyde, Outreach Manager and CWP Adviser for Argyll”

Why the Croft Woodlands Project?

Following the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1991, there was a surge in new woodland planting on croft land. By 2007, approximately 11,000 hectares (ha) of forests and woodlands had been established on crofts and common grazings.

However, progress slowed dramatically over the next seven years. Between 2007 and 2014, only 600ha were planted, mainly due to the closure of the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme and the launch of the more complex Scottish Rural Development Programme.

To better understand the challenges, Woodland Trust Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland (now Scottish Forestry) ran a pilot project in the Western Isles between 2011 and 2013. The aim was to assess crofters' interest in woodland planting and identify what support they needed. The pilot revealed two key issues: crofters lacked accessible information, and there were few communication networks to promote knowledge sharing. As a result, many crofters were unaware of the benefits that woodland could bring.

Despite these barriers, the pilot generated strong interest. It clearly showed the need for more knowledge-sharing and active promotion of woodland benefits in crofting areas.

In response, Forestry Commission Scotland commissioned a follow-up study in 2014 to explore the barriers more deeply. The resulting report, 'A Study of Barriers and Possible Solutions to Encouraging New Crofter Forestry Projects' (Rural Analysis Associates, 2014), identified three key challenges:

- Cultural: Forestry was traditionally seen as the landlord's responsibility, so many crofters were unfamiliar with woodland creation and management.
- Capability and confidence: There was a widespread lack of knowledge about the benefits of trees and how to establish or manage woodland.
- Finance: Financial risk was a major concern. Most crofters and common grazings had limited funds and tended to avoid high-risk ventures. The report described this issue as "potentially a showstopper."

In the 1990s, these challenges were temporarily overcome, mainly thanks to forest management companies. These firms handled the financial and technical aspects of planting, usually delivering large-scale schemes.

But things changed with the launch of the new Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS) in 2007. Forest management companies began pulling out of crofter projects. The new scheme no longer allowed grants to be assigned directly to agents, and reduced support for marginal sites made many large common grazings financially unviable.

About the Croft Woodlands Project

In response to this decline in planting and the findings of the Barriers Report, the Croft Woodlands Project (CWP) was established in 2015. Originally it was planned to run for five years.

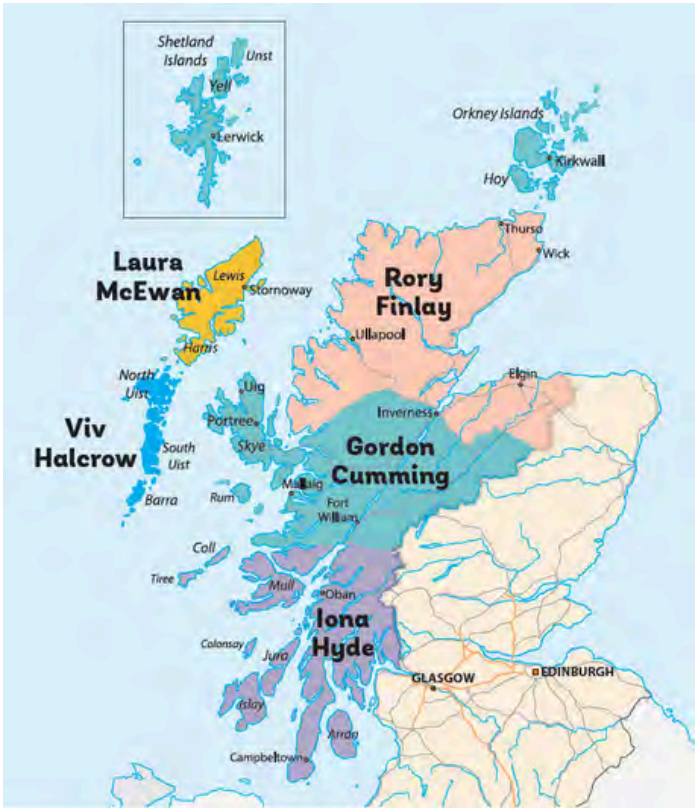
The success of the project and continuing demand for its services resulted in project partners agreeing to continue the project for a further five years until 2025.

The Croft Woodlands Project is a partnership led by Woodland Trust Scotland that aims to engage crofters and smallholders in the creation and management of woodlands on their holdings, thereby delivering multiple benefits in terms of shelter, agricultural diversification, forest products, landscape and the environment.

Initially the partnership included the Scottish Crofting Federation, Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland), Coigach & Assynt Living Landscapes (CALL), Point and Sandwick Trust and the Woodland Croft Partnership. Since its launch in 2015 however, several other organisations have joined the partnership, including the Shetland Amenity Trust, Orkney Woodlands Project, Communities Housing Trust and the Argyll Small Woodlands Co-op. Sadly the Argyll Small Woodlands Co-op folded in 2024 due to a lack of funding.

Woodland Trust Scotland employs a project manager (who is the case officer for Argyll) and four regional project officers (two of whom are part time). The Woodland Trust Scotland's Outreach Adviser for Scotland's Rainforest joined the team in 2021 and provides advice and guidance on ancient woodland restoration across Scotland's west coast rainforest 'zone' which lies entirely within the crofting counties, principally on the west coast mainland and Inner Isles, but excludes the Western and Northern Isles.

Croft counties and Croft Woodlands Project Adviser areas



Iona Hyde – Outreach Manager and CWP Adviser for Argyll (full time)

Gordon Cumming - CWP Adviser for South Highland, Skye and Northern Isles (full time)

Rory Finlay – CWP Adviser North Highland and Moray (full time)

Viv Halcrow – CWP Adviser Uists and Barra (part time)

Laura McEwan – CWP Adviser Lewis and Harris (part time)

Dee Baum – Outreach Adviser (Scotland's Rainforest) – all areas

In addition to staff employed by Woodland Trust Scotland, the Project is delivered in the Northern Isles by partner organisations Shetland Amenity Trust (Paul Goddard) and Orkney Woodlands Project (Jane Rawle).

Summary of project costs 2015-2025
Phase 1 June 2015 to June 2020 and Phase 2 July 2020 to end June 2025

Expenditure £	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Communications and delivery of training and events	£72,548	£20,306	**£92,854**
Staff costs	£517,310	£679,228	**£1,196,538**
Forestry Grant Scheme costs (including agents fees, bridging loan fund, Orkney and Shetland consultant support and top-up funds)	£205,995	£361,797	**£567,792**
MOREwoods and free tree packs	£267,767	£416,219	**£683,986**
Nursery and community support	0.00	£6,212	**£6,212**
Total	**£1,063,620**	**£1,483,762**	**£2,547,382**

Income £	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Grants	354,737	828,740	**1,183,477**
Contributions from landowners	84,141	128,805	**212,946**
Corporate donations	41,280	310,508	**351,788**
Donations	164,157	120,654	**284,811**
Total	**644,315**	**1,388,707**	**2,033,022**

Addressing the Barriers

Cultural

The basis of the project is provision of free advice and support to crofters, common grazings committees, smallholders and communities within the crofting counties. Advisers carry out site assessments, offer technical advice and assist with access to funding. Advice mainly focuses on new woodland planting but also includes the management of existing woodland. One Adviser provides specialist advice and guidance on ancient woodland restoration and expansion in Scotland's rainforest zone.

Where a site has clear potential to succeed as an application to the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), the CWP engages an independent forestry agent to develop a funding proposal on behalf of the crofter. This is a part-funded service whereby the CWP pays 80% of agent fees and the crofter contributes 20%. In the Western Isles, due to additional support from Point and Sandwick Trust, agent fees are paid in full by the CWP.

Total FGS schemes 2015-2025	Number of schemes	Hectares
Planted	150	**846**
FGS contract but not yet planted	12	**37**
FGS application in progress	25	**128**
Total	**187**	**1,011**

Credit: Iona Hyde / WTML

Forestry Grant Scheme, 2024: Ranish, Isle of Lewis, planted in 2020

Credit: Gordon Cumming / WTML

Forestry Grant Scheme, planted 2024: Graven, Shetland

Small sites, or sites which are suitable for woodland creation but don't fit the FGS model, are offered help through the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme. The CWP has adapted the general MOREwoods offer to deliver schemes appropriate to the crofting counties. MOREwoods provides trees, tubes and stakes (and their delivery to site) at reduced costs to the crofter but does not assist with fencing or site preparation costs. The current CWP rate of support through MOREwoods is 75% with the crofter paying the remaining 25%.

MOREwoods 2015-2025	Number of schemes	Hectares
Planted	488	165

Credit: Iona Hyde / WTML

MOREwoods October 2022: Ardailly, Isle of Gigha, planted December 2019

MOREwoods also provides support for the planting of hedgerows. A summary of hedgerow schemes supported through CWP is shown below.

MOREhedges 2015-2025	Number of schemes	Kilometres
Planted	97	21

Credit: Sam Brooke

MOREhedges: Tain, planted spring 2025

Credit: John Dickson

MOREhedges, May 2025: Scalpsie Farm, Isle of Bute, planted December 2020

Other Grant Support

Advice and assistance with accessing other appropriate sources of funding, e.g. the Crofters Agricultural Grant Scheme and the Nature Restoration Fund have also been provided.

In the past ten years the Croft Woodlands Project has received 2,255 enquiries and advisers have undertaken 1,965 site visits.

As well as helping woodland creation, CWP provides advice on the management of existing woodland and has assisted with FGS Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) and Sustainable Management of Forests (FMS).

Woodland management	Number of sites	Hectares
Advice given	315	1,743
FGS WIG/SMF	33	367

Additional support and assistance has been provided to community groups, NGOs and charitable trusts regarding woodland restoration and expansion, particularly ancient woodland restoration. The Outreach Adviser – Scotland's Rainforest, has worked closely with communities across the west coast on projects and proposals to restore the rainforest and advised partners in the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest to support landscape-scale restoration projects.

Capability and confidence

A lack of capability and confidence to plant and manage woodland was identified in the Barriers Report as one of the main reasons that crofters were reluctant to create new woodland. Traditionally on tenanted crofts, trees and woodland were owned by the landlord so there was no incentive to plant or manage trees. By the time this changed with the 1991 Crofter Forestry Act, trees and woodlands were absent from many crofts and common grazings, and the skills and knowledge to plant and manage them had disappeared from many communities. To address this, the Croft Woodlands Project has been involved in the delivery of a wide range of practical training events, workshops, community events and knowledge sharing.

Credit: Staff / WTML

Tree planting demonstration, Fiscavaig, Skye

Events initially concentrated on woodland creation skills and knowledge, and ranged from practical workshops on planting, fencing and ground preparation to more targeted workshops on, e.g. seed collection, propagation and growing. As interest in the project and the benefits of tree planting became more widely appreciated we experienced demand for a wider range of skills, and so provided workshops and training on, e.g. riparian planting, coppicing, assessing the value of hardwood trees and integrating trees into farms.

Credit: Neil Donaldson / ASWC

Growing Trees from Seed Workshop, hosted by Taynuilt Trees, 2021

Credit: Iona Hyde / WTML

Growing Trees from Seed Workshop, hosted by Taynuilt Trees at Kintaline Farm, Benderloch, 2019.

Engagement with communities and schools throughout the crofting counties has also been an important focus of the project. Events to plant community tree packs and hedgerow jelly packs have been held from Shetland to Islay. The First World War Centenary Woods initiative, run by the Woodland Trust to create living memorials to those lost in WW1, struck a chord with many communities particularly in the islands and along the west coast where communities not only lost many of their own to the war but were involved in the rescue and recovery of naval military personnel from conflict at sea. A total of 27 Centenary Woodlands were planted by communities within the crofting counties through the initiative.

Credit: Staff / WTML

Islay community planting Centenary Woodland at Bruichladdich

With growing interest in woodland management and expansion particularly in the rainforest zone, additional training and support was provided by the project to land managers and communities within the temperate rainforest zone.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, training moved online. Several successful and well-attended courses were delivered, including 'What is Ancient Woodland?' and 'Trees & Farms - Crannich Farm, Isle of Mull'. Online events reached a wider audience and were attended by people from across the UK and sometimes overseas.

Much of the training delivered over the ten years has been in collaboration with other project partners and conservation NGOs to pool resources and skills.

Since 2015, the CWP has organised and delivered 75 training events attended by almost 1,400 participants. CWP advisers also contributed to events organised by partners, such as Scottish Forestry's Integrating Trees Network, the Soil Association's series of agroforestry events and Scottish Crofting Federation roadshows and training events. We have collaborated with Scottish Agricultural College Consulting on multiple Farming Advisory Service Rural Roundup podcasts, and recently a FAS TV episode on woodlands on crofts. The CWP team has a regular column in Scottish Crofting Federation's magazine 'The Crofter' and has contributed to a variety of other publications over the years to promote woodland creation and management on crofts and smallholdings.

The CWP organised a Croft Woodlands Conference in Boat of Garten in May 2019, in partnership with Scottish Forestry. The conference, held over two days, combined a series of talks and workshops on a variety of topics (from agroforestry to mycorrhizal fungi, and woodland crofts to croft diversification), with field visits to a mix of crofting and woodland enterprises. The event was fully booked in advance, with 180 delegates. It included the launch of the Highlands and Islands Woodland Handbook by Bernard Planterose, commissioned and published by the CWP.

> For me, one of the biggest highlights of the Project was the Croft Woodland Conference in 2019. We'd already had four years at full stretch responding to enquiries and visiting sites, but to be in that hall filled to capacity and buzzing with excitement really brought home the scale of enthusiasm in the crofting and smallholding communities.
>
> The Croft Woodlands Project felt like an initiative that happened at just the right time. We had crucial support from Scottish Forestry and from people across the Highlands and Islands who had been campaigning for and planting trees on crofts since the Crofter Forestry Act in the 90's. There are now new champions for Croft woodlands, and growing expertise on integrating them into crofts for a range of benefits. I can't see that enthusiasm waning any time soon, as long as there is sufficient financial support to make small-scale tree planting viable.
>
> — Eleanor Garty, Croft Woodlands Project Manager, 2015-2020

Finance

The Barriers Report highlighted access to finance as one of the key issues for the delivery of forestry projects on crofts (FGS grants are paid in arrears once works are completed). To ease cashflow problems, a Croft Woodlands Bridging Loan Fund was established in 2017. The bridging loan scheme is administered by our partner the Communities Housing Trust and offers interest-free bridging loans of up to £6,000 (from an available fund of £60,000) to pay for the establishment costs of FGS schemes. The loans are repaid from the first FGS claim. Since 2017, the Communities Housing Trust has provided 23 loans through the bridging loan scheme.

In 2021, Scottish Forestry introduced the Small Woodland Loan Scheme (SWLS) to assist with the delivery of schemes under 50ha, offering a 50% upfront payment on approval of an FGS contract for capital items of up to a maximum of £40,000. Crofters can use the CWP bridging loan with the SWLS and access both loan schemes if necessary.

Beyond the Barriers

Over the past ten years, the CWP has started and supported a wide variety of woodland initiatives and projects throughout the crofting counties.

Hedgerow Jelly and Community Tree Packs

In 2017, as part of the Scotland's Natural Larder initiative, the CWP teamed up with NatureScot, Scottish Crofting Federation and Pam Rodway, Moray organic farmer and environmental education enthusiast, to offer schools and community groups in the Crofting Counties the opportunity to apply for Hedgerow Jelly Packs.

The packs provide enough hedgerow plants to create a small section of hedge and include teaching resources about hedge biodiversity, responsible foraging (in Gaelic and English), instructions on how to plant and care for the hedge and a poster with Pam's hedgerow jelly recipe.

In the Northern & Western Isles where the harsher conditions mean that many of the species in the hedgerow jelly packs may not thrive, custom community tree packs are offered instead. The packs are made up of locally grown native species. In the Western Isles, free community tree packs have been offered since 2016/17. The success and popularity of these packs led to the offer being extended to the Northern Isles in 2022/23 planting season.

Hedgerow Jelly and Community Tree Packs	Number of packs
Western Isles	48
Northern Isles	45
Hedgerow Jelly	251

Western Isles Native Woodland Survey

The Western Isles Woodland Strategy was published by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in 2004, in collaboration with the then Forestry Commission Scotland (now Scottish Forestry) and the Local Biodiversity Partnership. The Strategy initiated the collation of all available data on remnant native woodlands throughout the Western Isles. Surveys of 50 sites were conducted and from this information, fourteen key sites for management were identified, from Lewis to Barra. Information from the survey was collated into the Western Isles Native Woodland Restoration Survey Report (published by SNH and the Comhairle in 2007). Whilst the size of the woodlands identified were small in a national context (ranging from 0.25ha to 20ha in size), they are very important at a regional level, especially as a source of local provenance seed. To date, only two sites identified in the Survey & Restoration report have had work undertaken to protect or expand the existing woodland.

In the eighteen years since the original survey was carried out, land management, the pattern of land ownership and grazing pressure has changed significantly in the Western Isles. This has likely had an impact on the remaining native woodland remnants and their potential for natural regeneration. Recognising this gap in our knowledge, in 2022, the CWP began the first phase of a project to resurvey the original sites identified in the 2007 survey. It was extended to include new sites known to the Western Isles CWP advisers but missed from the original survey. The main purpose of resurveying is:

- to inform future management and restoration of the remnant native woodlands.
- to establish a register of the location of native tree species that produce seed so that we can collect local provenance seed in future.

The survey report will incorporate management recommendations which the CWP hopes to develop into woodland restoration projects with landowners and crofters. Knowledge of native seed tree locations will be invaluable for the tree nurseries in the Western Isles.

The 2022 survey was undertaken by a consultant, working with the CWP Advisers to survey some of the larger and more remote sites in Lewis and Harris. The second and final phase of the survey will be undertaken in summer 2025 by a local consultant based in Harris working with the two Western Isles Croft Woodlands Advisers. The full report will be completed in winter 2025/6.

Credit: Steve Liddle

Grimshader Aspen Site, Western Isles Native Woodland Survey Phase one

Tree Nursery Support Project

The importance of matching local provenance trees with sites to maximise survival and establishment has been a cornerstone of the CWP. From the start, procurement of suitable provenance planting stock was a challenge. Particularly at the outset the project when few suppliers were growing stock from the more remote provenance zones, and those that did, were producing small numbers of trees that were in high demand. Interest in growing trees at a small-scale has increased over the past ten years with new, small-scale tree nurseries establishing throughout Scotland. Many of these new nurseries are focussing on growing seed from more 'niche' species and from the more remote seed zones. These suppliers are an important asset to the CWP and the tree supply industry, ensuring suitable provenance and local growing conditions essential to the biodiversity value and sustainability of future woodland schemes of the CWP and others.

To support the growth and development of these small local businesses, Woodland Trust Scotland set up a Nursery Support Project through the CWP which ran from 2020–2024. The project employed a professional horticulturalist to provide free advice and guidance to small-scale tree nurseries throughout Scotland. He had a particular focus on businesses in the west and north of Scotland supplying tree stock for the CWP and other tree planting projects within the 100 Region of Provenance (which includes most of the Crofting Counties and rainforest area). As well as advice, nurseries were offered the opportunity to trial new products such as peat-free growing medium, growing from mini-plugs and using alternative re-useable seed trays. The contractor helped several nurseries apply for grants to expand and increase their production via the FGS Harvesting & Processing Option. Financial support was also offered to assist with upscaling production and improving efficiency and sustainability to achieve accreditation through the Woodland Trust's UK & Ireland Sourced and Grown (UK&ISG) assurance scheme. This allows the Woodland Trust to procure trees from those nurseries and provides assurance of growing standards for other buyers. The network of small tree nurseries throughout the north and west of Scotland have become invaluable to CWP over the past few years and are increasingly providing stock for CWP planting schemes.

The CWP Advisers, particularly those responsible for the Western and Northern Isles, have worked very closely with tree nurseries on the islands. A newly established community nursery in Benbecula is the result of CWP Adviser effort and finance invested by CWP. The CWP Adviser for the Northern Isles has worked closely with University of Highlands and Islands on a business plan to fund the development of a nursery at the Kirkwall campus as well as a student training programme on tree nursery techniques.

Credit: Findlay MacLellan

Volunteers and small-scale growers at Uist Nursery training event

Volunteer Seed Collection Project

Developed to address the shortage of local provenance planting stock in the west of Scotland for Woodland Trust planting schemes, the Seed Collection Project recruits and trains volunteers to collect seeds from wild trees. Seeds are then sent to participating UK&ISG tree nurseries for propagation and growing, and sold to the Woodland Trust and other buyers to improve the range of species and provenances of native trees available for planting in the more remote parts of Scotland.

The CWP is working closely with the Seed Collection Project to help co-ordinate collections with local volunteer groups and identify likely future stock needs so that seed collections can be tailored to collect the seed required.

Whilst the project ran as a pilot and was managed by Woodland Trust Scotland from 2020-2022, it is now managed through a partnership between Woodland Trust Scotland and Trees for Life.

Credit: Robin Reid / WTML

Seed collection at Crobeag, Lewis

Smarter support for croft woodlands

Close working between Scottish Forestry and the Croft Woodlands Project team has resulted in multiple positive outcomes for small woodlands on crofts and smallholdings throughout the crofting counties:

- Croft Woodlands FGS Small Woods (<5ha) operational plan for woodland creation to fast-track grant applications for croft and small woods.
- Successful use of co-operation grants to support the development of landscape-scale collaborative projects between two or more crofters through the Forestry Grant Scheme.
- Extension of the Western and Northern Isles planting grant option to suitable sites in all the crofting counties.
- Recognition of hazel as a 'tree'/Atlantic hazel as a woodland type for grant aid in the west coast.

> The [Croft Woodlands] Project is the most effective mechanism in Scotland for bringing forward small woodland creation applications and I think it is the most important partnership project that we are involved in in the H&I
>
> — John Risby, Scottish Forestry Conservator H&I (2019)

Partners and funders

Over the last ten years, the CWP has been supported by a number of partners and funders without whom we would not have been able to deliver the project. Generous financial support has been provided by Point and Sandwick Trust, Scottish Forestry, players of People's Postcode Lottery, TK Maxx and Heritage Lottery Fund (phase 1). The Orkney Woodland Project and Shetland Amenity Trust have supported the delivery of the CWP in the Northern Isles. The Communities Housing Trust has taken on all responsibility for administering the Croft Woodland Bridging Loan. The Scottish Crofting Federation and Argyll Small Woodlands Co-op assisted with the delivery the CWP training programme. Many others have provided guidance and support including The Woodland Croft Partnership, Community Woodland Association, NatureScot, Crofting Commission, Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership, National Farmers Union of Scotland and Cairngorms National Park. The CWP has also received several generous donations from individual supporters. Thank you all for the support.

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Case study 1

Making land more productive

Locheport, North Uist

When we moved onto the croft in 2018 there was an area of about three acres that we were unsure what to do with. It was very wet with a small, congested stream running through it, and an area of floating bog surrounded by more exposed peat and heather. It wasn't suitable for livestock, but we wondered if it might be a good area to plant some trees.

Planting trees had been one of our main goals when taking over the croft. We were keen to increase the biodiversity of the croft, create shelter and turn an otherwise unproductive piece of land into a thriving and diverse habitat for birds and invertebrates. But we really didn't know what to plant or where.

Our concern was that it was too wet and too rough with heather, but a visit from Viv Halcrow of the Woodland Trust assured us otherwise. She was invaluable in helping us to make a plan and apply for grant funding to plant almost one hectare of willow, birch and alder.

Once the funding was in place, we set to work clearing the blocked stream and erecting deer fencing around the site in the summer of 2020. We did this ourselves, having learned techniques while stock fencing half of the croft the previous year. It was a challenge due to the rough terrain, with many parts of the site only accessible by wheelbarrow. But as the Covid19 pandemic closed the world down around us, being able to keep on working by ourselves was a huge bonus. As was having a pair of primary school-aged helpers at home to plant the 3,000 trees. Our 10-year-old twins made a surprisingly efficient team, one handing out trees and one handing out canes and vole guards, as we dug into the frozen mounds with an old kitchen knife over the course of several weeks in January and February 2021.

We were keen not to plant in neat rows, and the results have created a very natural feel. Four years later, we couldn't be happier. Areas of the planting have come along faster than we could ever have hoped, and summer 2023 saw the first trees growing taller than us. Some of the alder are already producing seed. Other, more exposed parts have had to work a lot harder. But that was to be expected, and we are looking forward to seeing every part of the forest grow over the coming years.

We have added other native species in addition to the initial planting of willow, birch and alder, including juniper, crab apple, dog rose, rowan, wild garlic and foxgloves. We have also experimented with keeping a handful of geese and turkeys in the forest and have seen a huge benefit from the geese keeping the grass short around the trees, and the turkeys contributing to the management of the more voracious caterpillars, with both species returning fertility to the soil.

The benefits have been:

- Improvement to the land: flooded areas have dried out as the trees have grown.
- Increased biodiversity: more birds visit, from songbirds to birds of prey.
- Increased connection to the land: our whole family was involved in planting and is invested in the future of the trees.
- It's an increasingly sheltered area.
- It has inspired friends and neighbours to plant trees on their own crofts.

Crofter Cara Forbes

Credit Cara Forbes

Locheport

Case study 2

Sheltering school grounds

Daliburgh, South Uist

Daliburgh Primary School sits in a stunning but very exposed location, offering little natural shelter for pupils, staff, or local wildlife.

Historically, the school grounds had limited diversity, partly due to heavy deer browsing. The only trees present were a small, overgrown, boggy patch of willow.

To improve the environment, the Croft Woodlands Project supported four rounds of planting over six years, covering various areas around the school grounds. Tough, native tree species were planted by the school community, with individual rabbit guards used to protect the saplings - offering both physical protection and shelter from the wind. The guards made weeding and maintenance more challenging however.

The benefits have been significant. Pupils now enjoy enhanced outdoor learning opportunities. Increased birdlife has brought more interest to the playground and sports pitch. The children collaborated and worked hard together on the planting efforts.

Over 1,200 saplings were planted during four major planting events, with strong support from parents, pupils and the wider community at each stage.

The new tree areas are now used much more often by pupils for outdoor activities and play.

Free tree packs have also been welcomed and planted by pupils at Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath (Isle of North Uist), Lochdar Primary School (Isle of South Uist) and Castlebay School (Isle of Barra).

In March 2025, 200 trees were planted at Balivanich Primary School on the Isle of Benbecula. This latest effort was coordinated by Sam Minty, formerly Head of Daliburgh Primary and now working at Balivanich School. Parents, staff, and community members assisted the children in planting trees, adding fertilizer and installing rabbit guards.

Credit: Sam Minty

Daliburgh Primary School

Today, during break times, children are making much greater use of the planted areas. As the trees grow and offer even more shelter, they will become increasingly attractive places for exploration, play, and wildlife discovery.

In a windy environment like South Uist (and across Benbecula, North Uist and Barra), sheltered outdoor areas are especially valuable. They not only encourage greater outdoor activity but also deliver significant physical and mental health benefits for children and adults alike.

> We have quickly gone from no trees at all to over 1,000 planted. We can already see the difference in the landscape, the wildlife and the shelter that the trees offer. The work in Daliburgh has spread to the other local primary schools, who have seen the benefits to our pupils that wooded areas can offer. We cannot wait to see how the areas will develop over the coming years!
>
> Former Head of Daliburgh Primary School, Sam Minty

Credit: Sam Minty

Daliburgh Primary School

Case study 3

Farm riparian woodland restoration with a 3D fence

Balliefurth, near Nethy Bridge

Abby and Patrick Harris, owners of Balliefurth Farm near Nethy Bridge in the Cairngorms National Park, undertook a project to restore 1.7km of riparian woodland along the River Spey. Their 160-hectare farm supports a diverse mix of livestock including 60 suckler cows, 270 breeding ewes and free-range broiler chickens - that graze the species-rich floodplain grasslands and wetlands, which also host wildfowl and breeding waders.

The farm is surrounded by native birchwoods and Caledonian pine forest. However, the riverside's remaining alder woodland is in decline and unable to regenerate due to grazing by livestock, roe deer and hares. Recognising the ecological and agricultural benefits, the Harrises saw an opportunity to restore the riparian zone to improve farm resilience and biodiversity.

They identified several key benefits of riparian woodland:

- Trees stabilise riverbanks with deep roots, reducing erosion and soil loss.
- Vegetation slows surface runoff and enhances water infiltration, lowering flood risks.
- Wooded areas offer shelter and shade for livestock and provide alternative fodder sources.
- Willows have natural therapeutic properties that can reduce livestock parasite loads.

To facilitate regeneration, livestock had to be excluded from the riparian strip. Standard deer fencing was not feasible however, due to flood risks and cost. Tree guards were also unsuitable, as plastic could be swept downstream during high-water events. Moreover, the linear shape of the project and inability to use conventional fencing made it ineligible for Scottish Forestry grants, which favour larger, enclosed planting areas with lower fencing costs per hectare.

Instead, a custom 3D fencing system was installed. The main 1.2m stock fence included two electrified top wires. A secondary offset electric fence, placed 1m away and carrying two scare wires at 40cm and 90cm, deters deer. This design exploits deer’s poor depth perception, reducing jump attempts while minimizing visual impact, bird strike risk and flood damage.

The fenced area covers 6.2 hectares (ha), with natural regeneration encouraged over 2ha and 1.8ha planted with 4,100 native broadleaved trees, including silver birch, alder, aspen, sessile oak, bird cherry, hazel and three willow species—goat, grey and eared. All trees were 20–40cm cell-grown and sourced from the local seed zone 201. Community volunteers helped plant the trees during a Woodland Trust event.

This project highlights the challenges of securing grant funding for narrow riparian schemes, because Scottish Forestry criteria require minimum widths of 15m and full exclusion of deer and livestock. These restrictions often limit support for valuable small-scale projects like this one.

> “Right from the start we found this to be a very positive project greatly assisted by Gordon Cumming’s (Croft Woodland Adviser) input who guided us through the whole process. The project will improve biodiversity on the farm, alleviate flooding, stabilise the riverbank and provide some fodder for our animals. We hope to extend planting within the fenced in area in the future. Thank you to the Woodland Trust.
>
> Patrick and Abby Harrison”

Credit: Gordon Cumming / WTML

Riparian planting

Credit Gordon Cumming / WTML

Planting event and 3D fence

Case study 4

Bringing birdlife and shelter back to a place whose name signals a lost ancient woodland

South Bragar, Isle of Lewis

The crofts in the village of Bragar are typically very narrow and very long. This presented a problem in terms of aesthetics and how the trees would sit in the landscape. The prospect of a 'postage stamp' block of trees was off putting to the recipient so after discussions with his neighbour they both applied to the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme at the same time and planted to span both crofts.

As the trees have grown, they sit naturally in the landscape with no noticeable croft delineation and are performing exceptionally well, improving the difficult ground and providing shelter for livestock while bringing in a diverse range of previously absent bird species.

"The area covered is around 1.5 acres, on old waterlogged lazy beds/feannagan on a low-lying area of the croft half a mile from the sea, facing north where the sheep didn't graze. The area is known as Lag Ordal/The hollow of Ordal (my Norwegian friends tell me that 'Ordal/Årdal' means the Glen of the Alder trees). The glen is also unusual in still retaining its 'Willow Gardens' - square drystone walled enclosures for producing withies for creel making.

The purpose of the trees was to provide shelter for sheep and increase biodiversity in the area but also to potentially restore woodland to an area whose place name suggests was probably wooded in Norse times.

Since the original planting in 2018 I have added Scots pine, biomass willow, Briar rose, birch and fruit trees mostly grown from collected seed stock or willow sections. The woodland is now so well established that I need to cut back certain areas to create a path and the willow produces a crop of withies every year that I use for basketry and raised beds.

Since the woodland has established, I have noticed a significant increase in birdlife in the area, in particular hen harriers, stonechats and last year a short-eared owl using the woodland. This winter I found nests in the trees. The woodland is also used by otters as part of their territory on the croft.

Crofter Jon MacLeod"

> I stood on the site late last spring with the trees well above head height - a remarkable achievement. I've never seen so many redwings. I think all the redwings in Lewis have congregated for a ceilidh in this South Bragar oasis.
>
> Croft Woodland Adviser Laura McEwan

Credit: Murdo MacLeod

Woodland oasis

Credit: Murdo MacLeod

Crofter Jon MacLeod

Case study 5

Less work, more wildlife and early inspiration

Barbaraville, Easter Ross

Ann MacLeod was one of the early inspirations behind the Croft Woodlands Project. In 2011 she contacted the Woodland Trust for help creating a new woodland on her croft beside the Cromarty Firth.

"There wasn't a tree to be seen," she recalls.

Now, it's a different story.

With help from Woodland Trust Scotland, Ann applied for funding from Scottish Forestry. At the time, she and her husband Auley had sheep and chickens, but had moved on from keeping cashmere goats after the market declined. They were looking for a less labour-intensive use of the land. "Trees give us oxygen and unlike sheep, they don't run away," said Ann.

By 2012, funding was secured and a local contractor planted trees across 90% of the croft. Although some oaks died in the first winter and birch trees blew over, most species thrived. Ann especially values the hazel trees for their nuts and has added more trees over time, raising rowan, blackthorn and elder from seed. A few ash trees, planted before ash dieback, became widespread and still appear healthy.

The croft includes a 6m-wide circular path and a central ride aligned east-west, ideal for insects, birds and bats. The trees were planted into existing grass and spot-treated for weeds for the first two years. Since planting, growth has been "phenomenal," helped by years of prior fertilisation. A 1995 photo of their daughter standing in treeless fields shows the scale of transformation.

As the woodland matures, grassy vegetation is giving way to woodland flora. Ann and Auley planted snowdrops, foxgloves and bluebells. Wood anemone and honeysuckle have appeared naturally.

Rabbit guards protected the young trees, but as the guards break down, new shoots—especially on hazels—are being nibbled. “There weren’t many rabbits at first; sheep seem to put them off. But once the trees offered cover, we saw more,” said Ann.

Ann and Auley still keep hens - Rosecomb, Rhode Island, Serama, and Menorca breeds - plus a retired greyhound and a spirited cat. The hens are currently confined due to bird flu, but when free, one cockerel enjoys rowan berries. “Crab apples are too hard for their beaks,” Ann noted.

The woodland has delivered what they hoped for: less work, more wildlife and privacy. “Once the trees are in, there’s less upkeep. The paths are shaded now - Auley might not even need to strim this year,” said Ann. “And we get firewood and shelter. We even plan to try tapping the birches for whisky water!”

The Croft Woodlands Project, launched two years after Ann’s initial effort, continues to support crofters like her in planting native woodland across the Highlands and Islands.

Credit: John MacPherson / WTML

Picture from 1995 showing treeless fields before planting

Credit: John MacPherson / WTML

Thriving woodland

Case study 6

From clearfell to woodland croft

Langamull, Isle of Mull

In 2007, the North West Mull Community Woodland Company (NWMCWC) bought Langamull plantation on the Isle of Mull through a community buy-out. This enabled the creation of nine new woodland crofts. Andy Robinson took over Croft 1 in 2014. At the time, it was a 2.5 hectare (ha), unfenced clearfell site. He began the challenging task of clearing brash, removing stumps, and repairing damage left by heavy machinery—creating space for a garden, caravan and storage unit.

The croft came with a restocking requirement. Andy's early efforts to replant native broadleaves—protected with brash piles—failed due to pine weevil damage. In the UK, pine weevils are often controlled with neonicotinoid pesticides, but these chemicals are now avoided due to their harmful environmental effects. Andy opted instead for a sustainable solution: time. Pine weevil populations naturally decline a few years after felling.

While waiting, Andy explored funding options for fencing and replanting. Woodland crofts don't qualify for the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS), which focuses on agricultural productivity. As a clearfell site rather than a woodland creation site, his croft was only eligible for a limited restructuring grant of £550/ha under the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). To apply, Andy first needed an approved management plan. At this point, he reached out to the Croft Woodlands Project.

Working with a CWP adviser, Andy designed a restocking plan: 80% of the site would be planted at 1,600 stems/ha with native broadleaves, sourced from the Woodland Trust's Morewoods scheme and trees grown by Andy from local seed. After approval by Scottish Forestry, Andy installed the deer fencing himself, while continuing to work as a builder. Fencing was completed in autumn 2019; planting began that December.

Voles and rabbits made protective tubes and stakes essential. The Woodland Trust covered 90% of the costs for trees, guards, stakes and delivery. Andy, helped by friends, completed planting in spring 2020, introducing around 3,300 native trees including birch, hazel, oak, willow, alder, rowan, wych elm, hawthorn, wild cherry and Scots pine. He later added more species such as aspen (from local clones), field maple, honeysuckle, dog rose and whitebeam.

In just five years, many trees are thriving and producing seed. Ground vegetation has flourished, attracting diverse invertebrates—especially bumblebees and beetles, which aid decomposition and soil regeneration. Andy plans to gradually reintroduce more native species and, eventually, low-intensity grazing once trees grow beyond browsing height, creating a more natural woodland ecosystem.

Without the Woodland Trust's support, restocking would have taken years and delayed the launch of Andy's Woodland Crofter nursery. Now profitable, the nursery produces 30,000 native trees annually. It's part of the Woodland Trust's UKISG assurance scheme and supplies planting schemes across Mull, including projects funded by Woodland Trust and Scottish Forestry.

> "Working with the Woodland Trust allowed me to achieve my goal of replanting my croft with native trees much more quickly. The help with the design plan and supply of the trees was especially valuable."
>
> Crofter Andy Robinson

Credit: Andy Robinson

Pre-planting 2018

Credit: Iona Hyde/WTIL

Summer 2024

Credit: Andy Robinson

Andy Robinson in his tree nursery

Case study 7

Front-loading finance to make it happen

Flichity, Highland

In Spring 2023, Angus and Margaret Mackenzie completed planting 5,000 native trees to create 3.95 hectares (ha) of woodland beside the Old School at Flichity, following over a year of planning and financial coordination.

Cashflow was the primary obstacle—overcome through strategic use of interest-free loans from the Croft Woodlands Project and Scottish Forestry.

Although the site had ideal conditions—sheltered and with good soils—the project faced several complications. The 5.4ha field contained a scheduled ancient monument, overhead powerlines, a wind turbine, solar panels, existing woodland and fen habitat. Plans by Highland Regional Council to widen a nearby road added further complexity.

Multiple agencies—Historic Environment Scotland, Highland Regional Council and Scottish Forestry—were consulted to ensure the proposal complied with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) and would not interfere with other interests. A woodland creation plan was developed, which included 655 meters (m) of 2m-high deer fencing with rabbit netting and vole guards. The estimated fencing cost alone was £12,300 (excluding VAT).

Though the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) would cover establishment costs, all work had to be paid upfront. Angus, not VAT registered, needed to find £23,000—including £4,600 VAT—before being eligible for reimbursement.

The CWP Adviser supported Angus by designing the woodland, estimating costs and handling stakeholder engagement. Before committing, Angus had a clear view of the process, costs, projected income and funding timeline.

The total cost was £23,000. The establishment grant would reimburse £17,000, leaving Angus with a £6,000 shortfall. To secure the grant, a Woodland Agent (appointed by the Woodland Trust) submitted the FGS application. Angus contributed 20% of the agent's £1,200 fee. The resulting contract secured the full £23,000 grant offer.

To cover upfront expenses, Angus secured two interest-free loans: £8,600 from Scottish Forestry's Small Woodland Loan Scheme (SWLS) (which provides up to 50% of approved capital items) and £6,000 from CWP.

With financing in place, Angus managed the project himself and submitted all required grant claims. The loans were repaid in July 2023 when the grant funds were received, about four months after the planting was completed.

The area, now protected by deer fencing, has been planted with native broadleaf trees and some Scots pine. The woodland is developing well and has been validated under the Woodland Carbon Code. The Woodland Trust will continue to support the project through its Woodland Carbon Offer.

> "Without the involvement of Gordon and the Croft Woodlands Project, this would not have happened. They guided me through the FGS grant application, as well as helping source the trees and obtaining SWLS and Croft Woodland Scheme loans.
>
> Crofter Angus Mackenzie"

Credit: Gordon Cumming / WTML

Flichity, Highland

Case study 8

Surviving the sea's salt spray

Milltown Common Grazings, Applecross

In late winter 2024, Milltown Common Grazings (CG), located on the exposed west coast of the Applecross peninsula, successfully planted 8 hectares (ha) of native woodland with support from the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). This project was enabled under the Crofter Forestry Act, which allows crofters to apply for permission to establish woodlands on common grazings.

The CG submitted both a Crofter Forestry application and an FGS application with help from the Croft Woodlands Project (CWP). CWP funded essential survey work and covered 80% of the forestry consultant's fees. The project area fell within an existing strategic deer fence, which meant only stock fencing was needed to keep out livestock, reducing overall costs.

Due to the peninsula's exposure to strong, salt-laden southwest winds, establishing trees here posed significant challenges. Salt spray narrows the range of suitable tree species, and factors like stocking density, ground preparation and careful plant handling were crucial to success.

Tree provenance was also a key consideration. Applecross lies in seed zone 105, so trees were sourced from this zone or similar west coast zones to ensure adaptability to local conditions.

Growth in these exposed environments is typically slower than in sheltered locations. Therefore, the planting strategy focused on maximizing early survival. For 3ha, the team used the Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles (NWI) option. This scheme requires a high stocking density of at least 3,000 trees per hectare, which creates mutual shelter and aids establishment. The remaining 5.23ha were planted under the Native Upland Birch (NUB) option, which starts at 1,600 trees per hectare and can be naturally thinned to 1,100 by year five.

Invert-mounding was chosen as the ground preparation method. This involves lifting a scoop of soil and flipping it upside down in the same spot to create a vegetation-free planting area. Unlike traditional hinge mounding, it doesn't leave hazardous pits across the site, improving safety and future accessibility for visitors.

Special care was taken in micro-siting each tree species, ensuring they were placed in the most sheltered and suitable spots available for that species. This attention to detail will improve survival rates and long-term woodland health.

With the fencing, preparation, and planting complete, the woodland is now entering its first full growing season in 2025. It will be the first opportunity to assess how well the young trees are adapting to the harsh coastal environment.

Credit: Bruce Taylor of Brambletree Management

Invert mounding

Credit: Bruce Taylor of Brambletree Management

Tree provenance was a key consideration

Credit: Bruce Taylor of Brambletree Management

Each tree species was micro-sited

Case study 9

Towards nature regeneration

Caorann Croft, South Clunes, Highland

In May 2021, Alan Simpson and his family purchased Caorann Croft, a 10-hectare (ha) property with improved in-by land around the old croft house and a mix of established and regenerating woodland. At the time, the croft had suffered years of neglect. Seasonal cattle grazing and significant browsing by red, roe, and sika deer, along with feral goats, had led to overgrazing. Gorse and bracken had taken over large areas.

Caorann Croft sits above a steep wooded gorge designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), recognized for its lichen communities, upland mixed ash woodland and green shield-moss. The gorge woodland is also recorded in the 19th-century Ordnance Survey and the Ancient Woodland Inventory.

Alan's first priority was to reduce browsing pressure. A new deer fence was essential to exclude deer and goats and enable future land management. Once fenced, new stock fencing allows him to manage livestock on the in-by land while keeping them out of the woodland.

Supported by the Woodland Trust's Croft Woodland Project, Alan applied for a Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). This part-funded the deer fence and enabled 4.83ha of woodland to regenerate naturally. Native species such as Scots pine, birch, whitebeam, hazel, willow, alder and juniper have begun to establish. A woodland management plan, a requirement of the grant, was also developed.

Under the current 10-year management plan, livestock are excluded from the woodland to allow natural regeneration. However, seasonal grazing may be introduced in the future as a biodiversity management tool, guided by Herbivore Impact Assessments and a Woodland Grazing Management Plan.

Natural regeneration was chosen over planting, aligning with FGS guidelines as suitable seed sources exist. This approach encourages the spread of the adjacent ancient woodland onto the croft.

Although Scottish Forestry supported the project, funding limitations are a major challenge. The FGS offers £9.50 per metre for deer fencing under the WIG option, but actual costs were significantly higher. Alan had intended to build the fence himself to save money but ultimately hired a local contractor at £16 per metre (excluding VAT) due to time constraints.

In addition to fencing support, the scheme provided £600 per hectare for new woodland creation. Still, Alan had to make a substantial personal investment to make the project viable. While he is grateful for the support from both the Woodland Trust and Scottish Forestry, he acknowledges that the upfront costs could deter others from similar initiatives.

The deer fence was completed in winter 2024/25, and 2025 will mark the first full growing season free from browsing pressure—laying the foundation for a thriving, naturally regenerating woodland.

Credit: Alan Simpson

Deer fencing to exclude deer and goats

Credit: Alan Simpson

Adjacent woodland providing seed source

Credit: Alan Simpson

Natural regeneration of trees

Credit: Alan Simpson

Natural regeneration of trees

Case study 10

Collaborative riparian restoration for climate resilience

Strath Halladale, Highland

The Halladale River, in the far north of Scotland and flowing through the heart of the Flow Country, has been highlighted by Marine Scotland Science (MSS) as a river that will suffer in the future from rising water temperatures due in part to its orientation and water volume/flow rate which can be much reduced during summer months. Salmonoids present are extremely sensitive to changes in water temperatures with thermal stress becoming a problem above 23°C (a limit already being reached regularly in the summers) and mortality occurring above 33°C.

In the spring of 2020 and in collaboration with MSS, a river temperature monitoring program was rolled out across the Halladale catchment with 11 temperature loggers placed across 14 miles of river. These data loggers record the temperature every 15 minutes with data downloaded biannually which can then help guide management strategies for areas most affected by rising temperatures as well as creating long-term data sets.

One such way to mitigate against these rising temperatures is through the planting of broadleaf, native trees in the riparian zone of the river to create shade. This has the added benefits of increasing woody debris and mixed leaf litter that provide additional food for invertebrates while root systems can also stabilise banks, binding soil together to minimise erosion.

A large section of the lower Halladale catchment is enclosed with deer fencing and, in many places, there is native woodland cover in the riparian corridor with natural regeneration occurring. As you move south, upstream and out of the deer fenced area, this is not the case and the river for the most part has little tree cover and subsequent shade.

River manager Reuben Sweeting from Strath Halladale Partnership (SHP) has worked in collaboration with Woodland Trust Scotland's (WTS) Croft Woodlands Project team in initiating a project to increase native woodland cover along the Halladale and tributary burns. With multiple landowners and users along the catchment, one of the aims has been to highlight the wide range of benefits and importance of planting native broadleaves in the riparian zone.

"In doing so, not only have trees been planted but so too have 'seeds' of ideas for similar projects by neighbouring stakeholders."

In spring 2022, 950 native trees were planted along three sections of the bankside in the lower Halladale catchment.

"While these plantings were of relatively small numbers of trees they were of high ecological value and in the future will provide direct shade, along with a range of other benefits to over 1km of water courses."

Additional planting has continued each year, the most recent a challenging project in spring 2024 where 6 stock-fenced enclosures were erected on the banks of the Upper Halladale River, an area with high deer density, and planted with a total of 555 native trees. Species planted include alder, aspen, willow, downy birch and rowan. The trees were planted with bio vole guards. The trees, guards and fencing materials were fully funded by WTS, and the labour and ongoing maintenance were supplied by SHP.

Fencing in a riparian setting can be difficult due to the risk of damage when the river is in spate, so a great deal of thought was put into the design of these enclosures. 'Sacrificial' stock fence was erected upstream of each of the enclosures to help catch debris and protect the trees and enclosures while they establish. This 'sacrificial' fence has proven to be a great help and was well worth the small additional investment. Reuben's in-depth knowledge of the river was crucial as this allowed locations to be selected that had suitable mineral soil, were least likely to flood in times of high water and crucially were positioned to ensure subsequent trees would bring the desired range of benefits to the river system.

Credit: Reuben Sweeting

Aerial view of exclosure and sacrificial fence

Credit: Reuben Sweeting

The sacrificial fence is doing its job by protecting the main enclosure and catching debris

Case study 11

Birth of a woodland powerhouse

Isle of Eigg, Inner Hebrides

The Isle of Eigg, managed by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT) since its community buy-out in 1997, has steadily expanded its commitment to woodland restoration and creation. A major step forward came in 2017 with Scottish Forestry's approval of a 20-year Long-Term Forest Plan covering 250 hectares (ha) of community-managed woodland, including 70ha of commercial Sitka spruce.

A turning point came in 2018 when a small community tree nursery was established by local resident Tasha Fyffe. Drawing on her upbringing and hands-on knowledge, she began collecting seed from local woods to produce trees for woodland restoration and new planting. The nursery started modestly but would grow significantly over the following years.

The absence of deer, and low livestock numbers on Eigg, created ideal conditions for natural regeneration. A visit from Highland Conservator John Risby led to contact with the Croft Woodlands Project (CWP). In 2019, with guidance and support from CWP, IEHT successfully gained approval for 12.74ha of new native woodland at Sandamhor through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). A combination of site survey and desk study helped tailor the planting scheme around archaeological sites and deep peat, allowing for open space and habitat diversity.

Upfront funding was a challenge due to FGS payments being made in arrears. The Woodland Trust provided a bridging loan, which made implementation feasible. After fencing by a local contractor, trial planting of 4,000 trees began in March 2020 using nursery-grown stock. Although vole damage was a setback, the trial highlighted logistical challenges and prepared the team for larger-scale planting.

Covid-19 disrupted volunteer plans for the main planting phase. With Eigg closed to visitors, Tasha and IEHT had to rely on local help, eventually hiring two residents to complete planting by February 2021—one month ahead of schedule. This effort expanded the nursery's role, with production increasing to offset supply chain uncertainties. Eventually, the nursery grew to supply not just Eigg but also other Small Isles and mainland projects.

In 2024, IEHT secured a 40% FGS Harvesting and Processing grant for a second polytunnel, boosting nursery output by 20–25,000 trees annually. The nursery now supplies native planting stock to the Croft Woodlands Project, with 2,200 trees sent to the Uists in March 2024 alone.

Carbon sequestration from the new woodland—estimated at 3,438 tonnes CO_2e over 100 years—has been registered under the Woodland Carbon Code. Income from early carbon unit sales, managed by the Woodland Trust, has already exceeded £38,000, funding further projects on Eigg.

Today, Tasha is recognised as the local "tree expert." The nursery supports restoration of productive plantations and native woodland projects alike. IEHT now employs a part-time Woodland Officer and is actively exploring new planting opportunities as the Long-Term Forest Plan approaches renewal in 2028.

> "We're proud to be growing native trees from Eigg seed for use across the islands.....Keeping things local, sustainable and biosecure is vital as we look to the future."
>
> Local resident Tasha Fyffe

Credit: Eigg Adventures

Planting new woodland

Credit: IEHT

Tasha in tree nursey

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The Woodland Trust Scotland, South Inch Business Centre, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BW.
woodlandtrust.org.uk