

Livestock in Woods

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2005

WEST HIGHLAND WOODLAND
GRAZING PROJECT

Having a “look see” around grazing sites in Argyll & Lochaber—2004

The West Highland Woodland Grazing Project was established in January 2004 and just after that we organised one of our first events, the Woodland Grazing Stakeholder Workshop held at Stonefield Castle in Argyll. One of the main outcomes from the workshop was the recognition of the biodiversity benefits of woodland grazing and a rallying call for a more integrated and holistic approach to farm and woodland management.

The need to identify appropriate management regimes for woodlands that recognises the role of livestock and the conservation benefit that they deliver has been established for some time now. However, what has not been in place is the policy and grant mechanism to support it. Delegates at the workshop called for the introduction of a grant scheme that would deliver managed woodland grazing.

One year on we now have that opportunity! In November 2004 Scotland's Forestry Minister, Lewis MacDonald, announced the establishment of three new pilot stewardship grants, to promote the sustainable management of farm woodlands. One

of these new stewardship grants will be for the sustainable grazing of woodlands. The Forestry Commission Scotland, in collaboration with the West Highland Woodland Grazing Project, is currently looking at how this grant could be piloted in Argyll and Lochaber in 2005.

During 2004, as part of the West Highland Woodland Grazing Project, I was fortunate to have an opportunity to have a “look see” at what was going on in a number of woodlands, throughout Argyll and Lochaber, where woodland grazing was either taking place or had been. I visited nearly 20 sites, which ranged in size from the 22 ha SWT Shian Wood Wildlife Reserve near Benderloch to the extensive Oak woods that form part of the Loch Etive Woods SSSI, each wood often being in excess of 200 ha!



Luining cattle grazing Coille Nathais SSSI—Oct 2004

In addition I went to Mull to visit windswept coastal hazel woods and north to Fort William to the crofting communities of Camusnagul & Achaphubuil to see how they are managing their woodlands to benefit the rare Chequered Skipper Butterfly. There were semi-natural woodlands where cattle were grazing to create regeneration niches for seedlings to become established and commercial conifer plantations where cattle were maintaining important open space and wetland areas.

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Whilst visiting these woodland sites I also had the opportunity to talk to the farmers and crofters involved in managing them. Many identified tangible benefits to them of woodland grazing, such as access to shelter and grazing; keeping bulling heifers away from stock the bull; managing young stock; creating local employment and having a positive impact both “upstream and downstream” within the rural economy and generally maximizing farm incomes. Equally the conservation managers and foresters were also able to identify the benefits that managing woods with livestock can bring, such as maintaining a mosaic/diversity of habitats and maximising biodiversity; controlling rank ground vegetation i.e. bracken, brambles; creating niches for native woodland regeneration; benefiting particular species e.g. Butterflies (Marsh Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Chequered Skipper), dragonflies, lower plants (lichens, bryophytes and fungi), Medicinal Leach, Black Grouse etc; and controlling thicket birch regen without having to use mechanical means (i.e. a cost saving).



Thicket birch regeneration on an un-grazed clearfell site on Loch Awe side, Argyll—Oct 2004

Many managers, however, also identified a number of disadvantages to managing livestock in woods, such as difficulty in finding and seeing stock, especially at calving time; high labour input particularly when associated with too few animals in large areas; acorn poisoning; access on to sites can be difficult; some short-term restrictions in grazing; complicated management regime compared to previous simpler system; extra cost of stock fencing; water supply difficult to maintain (particularly on small sites <50ha); and poor quality grazing (often found in wooded sites) can reduce livestock productivity as compared to being reared on improved grassland.

When considering woodland objectives a number of additional disadvantages were also identified such as some regen suppressed particularly the

lack of oak regen becoming established as saplings; the range of tree species regenerating is limited i.e. lack of species other than just birch; can compromise timber production and when undertaken in a working conifer plantation, with ongoing harvesting operations, some extra fencing may be required.

One of the most interesting aspects of the year was to find out more about the role of pigs and wild boar in woodland restoration. I visited Chloë Randall at Dunlossit Estate on Islay, where they are using pigs extensively to manage a wide range of habitats including restock sites after harvesting of the conifer crop. In this newsletter you will see two articles where wild boar are also achieving astounding results. The West Highland Woodland Grazing Project would like to find out more about the use of both pigs and wild boar and this is an area we hope to develop over the coming year.



Large Black pigs on Dunlossit Estate Islay (Photo Chloë Randall)

So my “look see” involved visiting some outstandingly beautiful places, meeting many extremely interesting and knowledgeable people and seeing cattle, sheep and pigs all working away. Hopefully much of what we have learned will help to inform the development of the new SFGS Stewardship Grant for woodland grazing over the coming year. I would like to thank all the farmers, crofters, foresters and site managers who let me visit their woods and gave me some of their invaluable time and also to thank Bob Black, Gordon Gray Stephens and Ruth Anderson who shared with me their extensive knowledge and accompanied me on some of the site visits – their company was much appreciated!

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WILD ENNERDALE

Wild Ennerdale - low input land management on a large scale in England

Ennerdale is a remote valley on the western fringe of the Lake District National Park. 'Wild Ennerdale' developed from discussions between the three main landowners in the valley (Forestry Commission, National Trust & United Utilities) regarding ways in which the organisations could work better together by sharing resources and working towards a common vision.



A formal agreement was signed in 2002 with a vision to "allow the evolution of Ennerdale as a wild valley for the benefit of people, relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology".

The partners consider large herbivores a missing 'natural process' in much of the upper part of the valley. Sheep and deer, neither of which creates the 'dynamic disturbance' which the partners feel is necessary to provide opportunities for the valley to develop through natural processes, are the current grazers and browsers.

The proposal to introduce cattle is planned as a phased approach with an initial 'pilot site' covering 145 ha on the south side of the valley. The site incorporates a range of habitats and terrain and has good access to water. Existing boundaries can be

utilised and at present there is no grazing tenant, with land owned by the Forestry Commission. Discussions remain ongoing between the partners, DEFRA, English Nature, GAP and a local farmer regarding ownership and management, along with considering how the proposal best fits within the new Single Payment Scheme, Environmental Stewardship Scheme and/or other grant schemes which may be available. Other issues such as stocking densities, animal husbandry, costs, public access/safety, legal requirements and monitoring are all part of the planning process. Highland cattle are the favoured breed of cattle to introduce, primarily due to their hardiness and adaptability to living outdoors on mixed vegetation, but also because historical documents show that Highland cattle were present in Ennerdale during the mid to late 1800's.

The partners' aspirations are to develop (over time) an extensive grazing regime in the valley, whereby animals have greater freedom to roam and are less restricted by fences, walls and tenancy boundaries. How feasible this in practice will depend on lessons learned from the pilot site, advice from experts, local community support and adaptability of the animals.

Timescales are uncertain at this stage, determined primarily by funding available and the need to ensure that all aspects of the proposal have been carefully considered and the appropriate organisations involved. That said however, we hope to have cattle on the pilot site within the next 12 - 18 months. English Nature will shortly be producing a research report on near natural grazing schemes in which Ennerdale will feature as a case study.

For more information contact Rachel Yanik or visit the partnership website at:

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WOODLAND MANAGEMENT – THE WILD WAY

Ernest Smart and Lucinda Spicer have been wild boar farmers since August 2002. Their herd started life on clear fell ground in commercial forestry in Moray and since then has foraged through:

- Thinned standing conifers in commercial forestry;
- Gorse, scrub, heather and bog in hill environments;
- Rough pasture;
- Ancient Caledonian pine/birch/willow areas.

The herd is operated in large fenced areas on a rotational system, with animals in family groups moving on regularly to allow regeneration of the land, in the process separating young from breeding stock and sorting by gender for finishing.

This article aims to highlight some of the issues in using wild boar on wild ground – both the positives and the negatives. In the right situation, the partnership of undomesticated livestock and natural habitats can be very beneficial. However, the right management regime is everything to a successful outcome and losing control can lead to disaster.

So, first the positives:

Wild boar of all ages are very active and will work rapidly through a large area, taking off the ground cover of grass, moss or heather to get at the fauna underneath. They will not often disturb young trees, juniper, gorse etc in this first phase but will dig up bracken roots as part of the excavation. The earth will be exposed and aerated, leaving a fertilised seedbed. We have seen recolonisation give a rich variety of grasses, herbs, reeds, flowers etc compared to the original ground cover.



The boar excavate springs, watercourses and wallows and make earthy hollows to lie in – this improves the diversity and alter the drainage of the habitat left behind, with many pools created for invertebrates, frogs, newts, insects etc and a greatly increased wildlife count. This, together with the supplementary feeding given, attracts more bird life into the area. Loose sticks, logs and other vegetation are piled up by the boar to create nests, giving additional cover for wildlife after the boar move on.



Boar are extremely hardy and disease resistant, needing no artificial covered shelter; a dry sleeping area is required for the group's "sleeping pile" and farrowing sows require natural vegetation or straw to build a nest for their young. On exposed sites with little tree or scrub cover, a wind break is appreciated and may be dictated by welfare requirements; boar will dig their own hollows into the hillside for shelter if they do not fancy the location of existing arrangements. In wet weather, they will dig down below the waterlogged surface to find dry earth to lie on – hence the hollows that are left behind when they leave.

Left on a site for long enough, breeding sows will demolish the upper parts of gorse and broom for nesting material, but seem to leave taller, less scrubby species such as willow, birch and juniper alone to provide cover.

And now for the negatives:

As for any farm animal, there are welfare and regulation considerations. These include licensing by the local Council to keep Dangerous Wild Animals. This involves Council approval of fencing and management arrangements and an annual inspection.

Strong fencing with an electric wire at snout level is essential; this must be well maintained. Sufficient land to move the boar on and separate them into young and mature animals, plus a plan for doing this regularly, is again an essential; boar

are highly intelligent, and can be accustomed to the moving/sorting process. Site layout is key to this being manageable.

If left on land too long they will damage favourite scratching posts, in the shape of trees with ridged bark (oak or mature Caledonian pine are particularly attractive). If they are kept at too high a density for too long they will dig up small tree seedlings and shrubs through their foraging. Rather terrifyingly, telegraph posts can be rocked in the ground and walls flattened. Smoother barked species such as birch and willow seem to remain undamaged.

In Summary:

Overall, boar can change the landscape and vegetation dramatically and quickly compared to other forms of livestock occupation. To increase biodiversity and land fertility, perhaps as preparation for natural regeneration of woodland or a planting program (we now have an orchard growing on land prepared by boar, that we hope will gain organic status in due course) they are a good choice. However, for habitat maintenance they may not be the right choice unless kept at very low density. This carries the risk of them reverting to their natural "wild" behaviour; separation of animals for meat and managing the family group becomes impossible.

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Lucinda and Ernest often have stock available for sale and are happy to give advice to farmers, crofters, foresters and land managers who are considering either farming wild boar and/or using them as a management tool.

The Guisachan Wild Boar Project involves setting up trials, using farmed wild boar, in mixed pine and birch woodland on the fringe of the Glen Affric pine reserve (Inverness-shire). The trials are due to start in March 2005. The project aims to measure the impact of boar on bracken vigour, on existing young trees and on tree seed germination. We will also aim to evaluate the financial constraints and possibilities associated with grazing the boar in woodland. The boar will obtain natural forage but will also be fed once daily with commercial sow cobs.

The trials

Two 10 -12 ha enclosures have been erected. The upper enclosure has been partitioned with electric fencing into two 0.5 ha lots. Back ground monitoring has been undertaken with guidance from Forest Research and MLURI. Four sows will go into each lot so there is replication. After 6 months, temporary electric fencing will be used to move the sows into a fresh 0.5 ha plot and the vegetation in the 'after boar' plots will be monitored over the next 3-4 years. The plots can be increased or decreased in size as necessary. A boar will be run with the sows in the autumn rut.

Boarlets will be moved down to the lower enclosure at 4-5 months in age. The lower enclosure has stands of dense bracken cover. Here the impact of young boar on bracken vigour will be particularly monitored. The enclosure will be divided into 4 lots allowing replication for two different boar densities. There will be a continuous presence of boar for between 2-4 years, of animals aged between 4-12 months.

Funding

The Guisachan Wild Boar Project is a local initiative working in partnership with Trees for Life and aided by Forestry Commission Scotland, Forest Research and MLURI. The project is being financed by the European Union-funded Leader Plus Programme and HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise). The project is supported by a large number of individuals from the surrounding community e.g. farmers, land owners, teachers, restaurant owners, individuals involved with local tourism and other residents who are just interested to see the boar.

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NTS UPLAND GRAZING CONFERENCE

On 16th February the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) hosted a conference at the Scottish Natural Heritage Battleby Centre on *The Role of Large Herbivores in Shaping the Upland Landscapes of Britain*. This is obviously a topical issue as the 160 places were soon taken and we were turning people away.

The conference was organised by Richard Luxmoore and myself, Nature Conservation Advisers for the National Trust for Scotland, as we felt that large herbivores are largely seen as a problem in the uplands rather than an intrinsic component.

The Dutch ecologist Frans Vera gave the opening presentation, outlining his theory that, in natural systems, lowland temperate Europe would not be closed canopy forest but an ever-cycling mosaic of grassland, scrub and woodland (see his book *Grazing Ecology & Forest History*, Cambridge University Press, 2000).



Frans Vera & Konik ponies in the Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve, Holland — Feb 2005 (Photo by Hans Kampf, www.grazingnetworks.nl)

Keith Kirby, English Nature's woodland specialist, in the next presentation, questioned whether this would have been the case in lowland Britain, and said that he thought that the jury was still out on the issue.

David Bullock from the National Trust gave a presentation on what would have been the indigenous large mammals in Britain, concluding, in upland Scotland at least, that red deer would perhaps have been the only significant large herbivore - the area perhaps not fertile enough for large populations of aurochs (original wild cattle); there was debate as to whether wolves would have kept population down, but it was certainly thought that the wolves would have affected the distribution of deer.

Jos Milner who carried out the Letterewe study in Wester Ross (see Milner, J., Alexander, J, Griffin, C., 2002. *A Highland Deer Herd and its Management*, Red Lion House, London.) concluded that an unregulated herd of deer would stabilise at about 20 deer per sq km averaged over the whole estate, which contrasts with the 4-8 per sq km necessary to allow woodland regeneration; in practice the density of deer will vary, so that in the woodland area the density may be higher than the 20 per sq km. She concluded that, to allow regeneration of the Letterewe oakwoods deer exclosures were the only option if the owner wished to continue at least some stalking; i.e. reducing deer numbers to allow some oak regeneration would have resulted in a very low deer population.

We heard from Mike Daniels, Deer Commission for Scotland, that, if reported to them, "damage to the natural heritage" was something the Commission would have to act on. They have engaged consultants to help define what is meant by damage to the natural heritage. In the discussion that followed, although the issue of damage to trees was aired, there was barely time to consider the wider aspects of damage.

Tony Waterhouse, Scottish Agricultural College, outlined the bureaucracy that all farmers have to face, including, if they want subsidy, the new duty to maintain land in "Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition" (GAEC), rather than having to keep an agreed number of livestock; farmers will have to ensure that their eligible land is not permanently removed from farming, hence, although it might temporarily bear scrub, it would not be allowed to revert permanently to woodland. It was mentioned that undergrazing could be a problem as well as overgrazing, but it seems to be the case that we will have to learn as we go along about how one determines whether a piece of land is in GAEC. There was concern that some of the habitats that require grazing, such as wood pasture, may suffer as a result of the removal of livestock.

There still appears to be a lot of uncertainty about what is meant by "damage to the natural heritage" and "Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition" but hopefully the conference drew attention to the need to develop clearer thinking on these issues. Likewise, no consistent view emerged as to the role of large herbivores in the uplands. A lot of discussion still needed!

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GLEN GARRY WOODLAND GRAZING PROJECT SITE VISIT

On February 17th, the day following the Battleby conference on woodland grazing organised by NTS, Frans Vera was invited by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to see the Glen Garry woodland grazing project 14 months on. The project involves Highland cattle grazing of two enclosures (220 and 176ha) of mixed pine/birch woodlands with open areas following clearance of spruce.

The amount of dry bulk feed has been reduced to encourage the cattle to eat the vegetation – and they have been seen to have a much more varied diet than first thought. While there we witnessed cows browsing heather. The effect of trampling and grazing has been very widespread over the site, with beasts visiting all areas and stand types. Niches for new tree seedlings are being constantly produced, existing birch saplings are being thinned out and grassy riparian zones are being created. There is no doubt that the ecology of the grazed enclosures will be developing very differently from the normal ungrazed stands. The long term aim of the project is to understand and monitor such changes and decide the best treatments for similar situations in the future.

So far the aim has been to raise beef cattle over four years, then sell them into the food chain, and start from scratch again. But Frans Vera discussed the possibility of allowing the herd to become wild in the future. Rather than have a even aged group, aim for a more diverse age structure with a proportion being veteran cattle, as they lead the group well (hefted) and know what to do in adverse weather etc. Vera stressed the changing behaviour of a mixed age and sex herd, for example the bulls become more solitary and ranging higher up the hill, while the females stay together on lower land. The young males often stay with the females till year 4 before leaving and establishing new herds. These behavioural changes cause significant ecological effects on the grazed land.

Other discussions ranged over the following:

- Developing in time two models of woodland grazing, one for 'conservation' which the public may not like (involves letting cattle die etc and lack of treatment/vets etc) and a second 'more commercial approach' as at Glen Garry where the emphasis of management is upon animal welfare (vets & treatment of the cattle) and the production of saleable meat etc. However buying new calves cost more money now than previously, and less likely to get that money back when you come to sell them on.

- The Glengarry cattle are still very domesticated due to the use of supplementary feed etc and followed the cars around the site. However they can cover much ground at a surprisingly fast pace!
- Vera felt it was very important to carry the vets along with these new trials, so that they become familiar with and help solve the inevitable animal welfare issues likely to arise along the way. This is certainly what has happened in the Dutch trials on nature reserves.
- Handling pens have been erected for staff and animal safety during vet checks etc.
- Treatment for roundworm is being administered, no longer require treatment for fluke as they've been no problems
- The idea of fencing off the whole hill was suggested by Roy Dennis, in view of the extensive FC land ownership between Lochs Garry and Arkaig, and developing really extensive hill and forest grazing systems.
- Combining the enclosures and increasing the land to be grazed.

Overall Vera felt it was very good to have projects like this to encourage and give others confidence to do similar. There was discussion about sharing knowledge, experiences, and possible staff exchange visits especially on the practical husbandry and animal welfare aspects.

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THE SWT "STAFF GRAZING FORUM"

Many Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) staff have responsibilities for grazing animals on their different suites of wildlife reserves across the country.



These range from annual short-term grazing lets with a wee bunch of coos to rumple through an Argyll woodland; or across a Galloway saltmarsh for a few months at the back end of summer, maintaining & improving egg-laying or nectaring plants for flashes of fritillary or waves of Holy-grass for skeins of Barnacles; through to long-term farm partnerships over large upland sites with wide ranges of habitats & lots of special species – bryophytes, lichens, orchids, arctic-alpines, pearl-mussels, pine-martens, bogs, bugs beasties, birds & bees. There are massive expanses of wild crofting land with many purposes and objectives (and hill sheep, and red deer); there's "farming for flowers" with Roy Harris in Orkney and there's our set of five grassland reserves in Fife that are grazed in rotation by the only stock that we actually own ourselves... the 'Flying Flock'.

In fact, eleven of the Trust's "Conservation Managers" (CMs) have sites that are grazed by farm animals, one way or another. We have two (time-sharing) "Conservation Shepherds" who manage the Flying Flock hands-on and day-to-day. SWT rollicked with three Tamworth sows for three summers in a woodland regeneration enclosure at Rahoy Hills reserve in Morvern, some years ago. I was heavily involved in that project, and now assist CMs covering our upland sites in the West... so that makes fourteen of us with a direct interest in 'Conservation Grazing' as an important subject of interest. Add to that some senior & policy staff and folk who need to know what's going on across the country... and you have the mailing list for SWT's new "Staff Grazing Forum".

We first met in Sept 2004 and established *raison's d'etre* and various aims for the group. It's mainly to share and exchange information and experience of practical issues, but also to collate (audit) just what we are doing with conservation grazing, overall as an organisation. Through that, we hope to standardise as best we can (& where appropriate) use of "Best Practice" in practical grazing management on reserves, as well as to streamline more beurocractic (and policy) aspects - such as lets & leases, setting rents, use of support schemes,

record-keeping, monitoring methods, use of herbicides & pesticides, etc.; support each other in the production of management-plan reviews, various reports, booklets, guidelines, demonstrations and the like that are planned under our latest Corporate Strategy; keep ourselves 'up-to-date' on changes in legislation and their implications; arrange & ensure that appropriate training is available (for staff & members/ volunteers)... and of course treat each other to the odd site-visit and share the delights of getting out and breathing some fresh air in the generally stunning surroundings that our grazing animals enjoy, and with which we are all privileged to be involved. On a visit to Garnock Floods Reserve (in Ayrshire), after our last meeting in early February, we all got blinded by a Kingfisher (my first ever!) in crystal winter sunshine. A flash in the pan? I think not... they're even getting to Morvern these days, I believe! A happy flashback, though, whatever. Bright as blue can ever be.

We hope members of the forum will be able to both visit other types of grazing sites and projects managed by others, as time goes by, and even play host on occasion to colleagues in other organisations and folk involved in other grazing programmes. We'd like to be able to show off some of our sites! We also want this to be a forum for exploration and discussion of new ideas, and to lead towards the development of new ventures into the wonderful worlds of grazing animals, wildness, wetlands and woods.

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Shian Wood SWT Wildlife Reserve, Argyll—part of Shian Wood is seasonally cattle grazed by the neighbouring farmer to maintain open space for Marsh Fritillary butterflies

DALNAVERT FARMING CO-OP

Dalnavert is located just outside Kincaig, south of Aviemore. The Dalnavert Community Cooperative was formed in 1981 with the object of managing the land in a sustainable way. The Co-op has served as one of the models for community land management (see Social Land Ownership Case Studies, vol 1 Inverness, Scotland). The main activity of the agricultural development at Dalnavert has been the formation of a suckling herd of Aberdeen Angus, while managing the land so as to maintain ground cover along the strips of land by the rivers and burns. We had been aware of the need not to overgraze and in 1999 the opportunity arose to discuss a tenancy on Forest Enterprise land at the Feshie junction with the Spey and in the adjacent forest. This provided us with the chance to demonstrate that sustainable management, with improvement in biodiversity, was possible with careful grazing. The outline plan was prepared following discussion with Forest Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage.

In order to achieve continuing sustainability the farm was entered for organic status, and is now fully certified. We have proved that there is a local demand for our produce. So far we are the only organic Aberdeen Angus producers selling to local people and to hotels in Badenoch, and demand currently exceeds available supply. We believe that this project can demonstrate the scientific and sustainable agricultural interests of increasing biodiversity, and of improving the carbon dioxide uptake of the forest by improving nutrition of the forest floor (see Fertile Forest Experiments, Davidson and Hirsh 2001, Nature 411, 431- 433).

The people, the business and the environment at Dalnavert— the model constitution for a community cooperative at Dalnavert was prepared with the assistance of the department of law at University Strathclyde. A shareholding Company was formed and the ownership of a house was linked to shares in the land. With sustained effort and improved expertise the operation is now a successful one. The core businesses of an organically managed herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle with the ability to overwinter calves in the forest and the added value of selling produce locally now needs to be managed for long-term sustainability.

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BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SCOTLAND have recently produced two new leaflets on the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the Chequered Skipper butterflies.

Both leaflets give useful information on the life-cycles of these important woodland butterflies in addition to tips on identification, the type of habitats you will find them in and advice on appropriate management.



The Pearl-bordered Fritillary is predominately associated with the edges, or open spaces within, south-facing woodlands with a mosaic of light bracken and violets.



The Chequered Skipper is even more restricted in its distribution and its entire UK population occurs in Lochaber and north Argyll. Again this species is associated with the edges or open spaces within, damp woodlands normally below 200m (600ft). Sites are usually dominated by the caterpillar's main foodplant, purple moor grass.

Populations of both these butterflies have declined where deer and livestock have been excluded under woodland regeneration schemes resulting in a loss of important open space and nectar plants. Light deer browsing or stock grazing is important, though higher levels of grazing, particularly by sheep in early spring, can be damaging.

To get copies of both these leaflets or for further information contact Butterfly Conservation Scotland Tel: 0870 7706151 or email: scotland@butterfly-conservation.org



Over the last 2 years English Nature has started an exciting project to see how free-ranging cattle and other large herbivores could be used to create and maintain wildlife-rich mixed landscapes of woodland, scrub and open grassland or heath.

As part of the wood-pasture and parkland Habitat Action Plan English Nature is encouraging the restoration of grazing in sites where it formerly occurred - for example at Epping Forest (Essex), Savernake Forest (Wiltshire) and Sherwood Forest (Nottinghamshire). However is this just maintaining an artificial system, albeit for sound nature conservation and historical reasons?

The work of Vera and his colleagues has shown that rich mixed landscapes can be created and maintained now on a big scale by using free-ranging cattle and other large herbivores. The 5000 ha reserve at Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands is an example of this. Could such an approach be adopted under British conditions?

Part of this project is concerned with the future use of large grazing animals as part of conservation management of existing wood-pastures but also of new mixed landscapes. We will be looking at questions such as what types of animals are best, at what densities and such like, building on the work of the Grazing Animals Project.

An important difference between this and many other conservation grazing studies is that we are not just looking at how to keep open grass or heath open: we expect under the sorts of grazing regimes considered that open areas will go to scrub and trees, but sufficient tree-ed areas will open up to keep a dynamic mosaic present.

The conservation agencies have been exploring the idea of less intensive forms of forestry - 'new wildwoods' - as part of the response to changing social and economic conditions (CAP reform, depressed timber markets, increased interest in environmental benefits of woodland). There are landowners, both private and state, who are seriously interested in looking at free-ranging grazing systems as an option in the management of large sites, and there are potential sources of funds. There is a web based discussion forum for the project at: <http://forums.ceh.ac.uk:8080/~naturalised-grazing>

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The Grazing Animals Project (GAP) is a UK-wide partnership of twenty-six organisations working to help graziers, grazing managers and advisers deliver biodiversity targets, as part of integrated, viable and sustainable conservation grazing schemes.

It brings together interested parties from the nature conservation, agriculture and livestock industries, as well as those involved with landscape and heritage conservation, recreation, and rural economies, in order to deliver environmental, economic and socially sustainable grazing systems that will help to secure biodiversity objectives within a rejuvenated countryside

Working with farmers: GAP is particularly keen to find ways of integrating the business and husbandry skills of practicing farmers with the ecological expertise of conservation staff in securing many key biodiversity targets. Local Grazing Schemes (LGS) form GAP's core strategy for achieving effective collaboration between the two sectors. Each LGS is a locally based partnership comprising conservation partners and key individuals from the farming community who have found ways of working symbiotically together, something that may have seemed unachievable previously. This can only be achieved with:

- An appreciation of the farmer's need for the whole system to be economically viable and fully sustainable in human and social terms.
- Willingness to adapt the farming system in terms of its intensity, structure and style to ensure that biodiversity targets are fully met.

For more information about GAP and the publications and services it provides (most of which are free), visit our web-site at: www.grazinganimalsproject.org

For further help, to receive a free copy of GAP News or join any of the email discussion forums that allow members to share views and information on a range of conservation grazing topics contact The GAP Office Tel: 01636 670095. Fax: 01636 670001. E-mail: enquiries@grazinganimalsproject.info.

Or contact the Local Grazing Scheme Coordinator for Scotland Bill Grayson, Tel: 01524 761347. Email: billgrayson@farmersweekly.net.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Of interest to many site owners and managers is the important issue relating to animal welfare. New Animal Welfare Regulations (not yet enabled) may have possible implications for grazing animals in woodlands.

The welfare requirements of livestock being kept in woodland do not differ in any way from those kept in more conventional (by the standards of the last fifty years) systems. However, there is a possibility that surveillance of livestock may present problems and there may be hazards associated with a woodland environment (particularly if on a previous commercial forestry site where conditions are quite different to those normally present in the field/shed environment).

In particular, the requirements of the DEFRA/SERAD-approved Welfare Codes apply to such stock and this includes the need to provide "appropriate" surveillance of stock. What is appropriate has been argued in Court on a number of occasions. Essentially, if a welfare problem occurs and it can be demonstrated that this could have been prevented by different or better surveillance, then this may well be persuasive to the Court's decision. The defence is likely to be in the invidious position of attempting to demonstrate that the management of the stock was reasonable and appropriate.

While much woodland grazing is to utilise naturally regenerating systems in semi-natural woodlands, a great deal of interest has also been shown in the possibility of utilising commercial forestry ground. While this is very reasonable, it

should be noted that commercial forestry is not structured with animal welfare as a consideration and the role of deep-ditch drainage (whether in grid or "dollop" planting systems) was never developed with grazing animals in mind.

The EC has passed the necessary Regulations for the new consolidated Welfare legislation, which is likely to take the form of Welfare (Scotland) Regs. However, the enabling legislation has yet to be enacted by the Executive. When this happens, there is likely to be a much greater personal and business liability relating to the keeping of animals and it should be noted (by horse keepers for instance) that these regulations will be much wider in scope than previous welfare legislation.

While not wishing to create obstacles in the way of better and more flexible management of land, I feel it is important that landowners consider the possible implications of what may be a new system of stock management to them and to their staff.

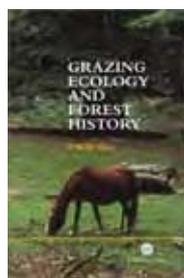
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EDITORS NOTE: Many people wonder why "Naturalistic Grazing Schemes", like the Dutch one at Oostvaardersplassen, can be set up and yet in the UK there is a perception that this approach is unacceptable. A useful document "Ethical Guidelines" is available on a Dutch website run by Hans Kampf about ecological networks & grazing animals www.grazingnetworks.nl — under "Grazing & grazing animals" there is a section on Animal Welfare.

A History of the Native Woodlands of Scotland, 1500—1920 — T C Smout, Alan R MacDonald & Fiona Watson (Edinburgh Univ. Press 2004 ISBN 0-7486-1241-6)

This recently published book, contains a chapter demonstrating how every wood in Scotland was until comparatively recently grazed, so a "wood pasture" in some sense, and how this was often the most important use of the wood. It covers both the uplands and the Lowlands, but emphasises the dominance of this use in the uplands. Cattle, horses, sheep and goats were all involved, but despite mechanisms of control, over-grazing could certainly occur, even 2-300 years ago.

The book is expensive at £60, but anyone who e-mails tcs1@st-andrews.ac.uk with their postal address can get a discount offer for the book at £45 from Chris Smout.



Grazing Ecology and Forest History — F.W.M. Vera (Cabi Publishing ISBN: 0851994423)

Vera's seminal work challenges the traditional view that a climax vegetation covered the lowlands of Central and Western Europe before humans intervened to develop agriculture. Vera proposes an alternative theory that species composition and succession of vegetation were governed by large herbivores, creating a park-like landscape consisting of grasslands, scrub, solitary trees and groves.

For those of you who have not yet read this book it can be ordered at www.amazon.co.uk priced £55.00

2005 Annual Meeting of the Farm Woodland Forum

Ecosystem services of farm trees

Wednesday 29th June - Friday 1st July 2005 (midday to midday)
University of Wales Conference Centre at Gregynog, Powys, Wales.



The 2005 Annual Meeting of the Farm Woodland Forum will look at how trees can contribute to key ecosystem service functions, such as flood risk management, provision of clean water and the maintenance of biodiversity. There will be field visits to the Pontbren initiative, a grassroots group of farmers developing more sustainable agriculture in mid-Wales, whose collective strategy includes increasing tree cover, as well as to other farm woodland initiatives in the area, including activities of Coed Cymru (Welsh Woods) and a wood pasture site managed by the Countryside Council for Wales.

Programme

The meeting will consist of two half-days of presentations by various guest speakers in addition to site visits to the Pontbren farmers' group and other farm woodland initiatives in the area e.g. University of Wales Bangor, Coed Cymru and Countryside Council for Wales.

To join the Farm Woodland Forum or to find out more check out the website: www.agroforestry.ac.uk

For further information on the 2005 Annual Meeting please contact the Local Organiser :

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WEST HIGHLAND WOODLAND GRAZING PROJECT

This newsletter has been produced by the West Highland Woodland Grazing Project (WHWGP). The Project was set up in January 2004 as a partnership under the umbrella of the Argyll & Bute Biodiversity Partnership. Funding Partners involved are Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) WHELK Leader+, Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) along with project management support from the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Scottish Native Woods (SNW).

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