



Reforestation Scotland
January 2009



This pair of meetings was organised by Reforestation Scotland
and funded by Scottish Enterprise

Ways forward for Scotland's Wild Harvests businesses
a report on two meetings held at
Pollok Visitor Centre (Glasgow) and Abriachan Village Hall (Inverness-shire)
during November 2008

Summary

This pair of meetings in November 2008 drew together stakeholders from across Scotland's wild harvests sector. The meetings were organised by Reforesting Scotland, as the latest stage in several years of involvement in non-timber forest products and other wild harvests.

There was general agreement at both meetings that the diverse mix of businesses and activities represented at the meetings have something definite and important in common – though finding the right name for the sector is not straightforward!

The meeting in Glasgow's Pollok Park drew 20 people, who between them had a strong positive interest in forming a trade association, to make and develop useful contacts, organise events and joint marketing, develop supply chains, and provide a voice for the sector. A steering group has been formed with the intention of taking this forward.

The meeting in Abriachan Village Hall was smaller, with 10 participants, and less strongly business focused. Most participants were not involved enough in the sector to commit to a trade association, but they were still very positive about opportunities for networking with other people involved in wild harvests activities.

People at both meetings wanted to be able to keep in touch. They expressed an interest in having an egroup, a business directory (including information about course providers – especially if searchable by region), and future meetings and events.

Some of the businesses would be interested in using the Scottish Working Woods label via a suitable trade association. The strongest interest was from producers of wild venison, basketry and botanical extracts.

As well as the meeting participants, the project has made email and phone contact with a number of other interested businesses. Some expressed particular disappointment that the meetings were held in November, which for them is a peak sales period.

As a result of these meetings, a Scottish Wild Harvests egroup has been set up, and a steering group has formed to develop a Scottish Wild Harvests trade association (the exact name of the association is to be agreed during this process). It is hoped that the trade association will be launched during a seminar in Perth in April 2009.

Introduction

In November 2008 Reforesting Scotland¹ invited people across Scotland's wild harvests sector to come to either of a pair of meetings. The purpose and preparation of each meeting was the same, but one was held in the south and one in the north, to make the project as accessible as possible to as many stakeholders as possible.

Background

Reforesting Scotland began work on non-timber forest products in the late 1990s, in partnership with researcher Alison Dyke. Since 2004 we have maintained the ForestHarvest website (<http://www.forestharvest.org.uk>), dedicated to Scotland's non-timber forest products and other wild harvests, which includes an online directory of Scottish wild harvests businesses.

In 2006 in Beaulieu the “Future of Wild Harvests in Scotland” seminar showcased new research by Marla Emery *et al.*,² and established the use of the term “wild harvests” as being a better description of activities on the ground in Scotland than the overseas development term “non-timber forest products” (NTFPs). Participants recommended that Scotland's wild harvests sector would benefit from improved communication, information, research, supply chain co-ordination and representation.³ These recommendations were confirmed and clarified from the point of view of businesses by Reforesting Scotland's “NTFP Sector Research and Development Project” in 2007.⁴

These latest meetings were designed to respond to these findings in a practical way, by bringing people from a range of wild harvests businesses together, to benefit immediately from meeting each other and to consider forming an ongoing network.

Presentations

At each meeting there were presentations from a representative of the Scottish Working Woods label⁵ and the Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers (ASHS)⁶, and Alison Dyke tackled some of the legal and social issues around the use of wild resources – who has access to them, what is a sustainable harvest, the implications for land management – based on her work managing Reforesting Scotland's Sustainable Forest Harvest project.⁷ These talks formed the basis of the day's discussions.

Presentation 1: The Scottish Working Woods label

The Scottish Working Woods label guarantees woodland products made in Scotland, by businesses based in Scotland, from woodland materials harvested from Scottish trees and woodlands. It is relevant to many wild harvests products.

Auditing of the Scottish Working Woods label relies on producers who use it being members of an existing trade association, whose members already know each other and are aware of each other's activities. This obviates the need for formal inspections, thus keeping costs to a level which small and micro businesses can afford. The label belongs to its member organisations, and its use is in turn open only to members of those organisations. Currently there are just two, the Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers and the Scottish Furniture Makers' Association.

If wild harvests businesses using woodland materials belonged to a suitable group, that group could become a member of the Scottish Working Woods label and negotiate criteria by which non-timber products could qualify for use of the label.

Presentation 2: Wild harvests – an open access resource?

Reforesting Scotland's Sustainable Forest Harvest project addresses the recommendation of the 2006 Beaulieu seminar that guidance and procedures on monitoring harvests of Scottish wild products should be developed. The project is bringing together groups of species experts, harvesters, buyers, NGOs and government agencies, and is focusing specifically on fungi, sphagnum moss and tree lungwort.

Research suggests that wild products are considered by most people to be public goods (belonging to everyone), though with a strong awareness of responsibility on the part of harvesters. This is a disincentive towards managing to maintain or enhance wild harvests, as harvesters have no part in management decisions

and landowners are not guaranteed the benefit of the harvest. The legal situation is complex. Harvesting for private use is generally acceptable under common law (with exceptions); harvesting for commercial gain requires the permission of the landowner, but this is routinely ignored in various circumstances.

Project manager Alison Dyke suggests that the right approach to encouraging sustainable use is to view harvesting as a privilege with responsibilities attached; to open a dialogue between stakeholders; to provide guidance to those harvesters who are receptive to sustainability messages; and to incorporate harvesting and management guidance into forest certification. The role of a trade association would be to provide a route for communication between government agencies and a disparate group of businesses – ensuring that business interests are represented – and to enable a sustainability element to be incorporated into product labelling.

Presentation 3: The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers (ASHS)

Maggie Birley (20th November) and Betsy van der Lee (26th November) gave us a vivid picture of the experiences and advantages of belonging to a trade association.

Membership of ASHS enables joint trading activities – buying large parcels of timber together (too much for any one small company's cash flow to accommodate), filling large orders together, or passing on orders which are another member's speciality or in another member's part of Scotland – keeping the business within Scotland. ASHS organises training and information events, and joint marketing & awareness raising at public shows.

ASHS provides a collective voice! It's very easy for government to talk to big business. Big businesses have the resources to make it easy. With small and micro businesses it's much more difficult – unless they work together.

Above all, there's the connection, communication and camaraderie with other people running small businesses: this helps practically (other people are addressing and solving similar problems – insurance, building standards, new equipment...) but also on the human level, decreasing the sense of isolation that can come with running a small and specialised enterprise. Having colleagues makes a big difference. There is more than enough work; bringing more people in to the sector has made it more robust; larger businesses now trust the Scottish timber industry to supply what they need.

The meeting at Pollok Park Visitor Centre, 20th November 2008

Twenty people attended the meeting at Pollok Park. In our various roles we represented:

the Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers
a berry drinks manufacturer
a bulb and moss harvester
the Community Woodlands Association
coppice workers
course providers
an environmental arts specialist
fine food manufacturers and retailers
Forestry Commission Scotland
Glasgow Woodland Unit
a greenwoodworker
herbal products and plant extract businesses
holiday accommodation businesses
an independent hardwood sawmiller
organic farmers
a private estate
a regional product label
Reforestation Scotland
a regional park ranger service
the Scottish Basketmakers' Circle
the Scottish Moss Collection, Bulb Collection and Wild Mushroom Codes
the Scottish Working Woods label
a sitka spruce-based product range
a snowdrop-based tourism business
a thatcher
VisitScotland
wild food foray leaders
a wild game supplier
woodland owners
wild food writers

As well as the presentations we had a site visit, to find out more about Pollok Park and the work of the Glasgow Woodland Unit.⁸ Glasgow has a large area of woodland – a higher proportion, by area, than Scotland as a whole – and the Woodland Unit has a keen interest in finding uses for woodland products.

Discussions at Pollok Park: The Scottish Working Woods label (SWW)

- Could the label be used for venison? It would be impossible to guarantee that a deer had spent all of its time within woodland – but a precedent exists, because the Forestry Commission sells wild venison certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the first non-timber forest product from the UK to be entitled to carry FSC certification. The gut reaction of those present was that venison could come under the SWW label – provided an appropriate trade association produced a set of criteria, and then reached agreement on these criteria with other members of the SWW board.
- Someone expressed concern that use of the SWW label would require “two years of waiting and loads of money”. No – currently the fee for use of the label is set at £20 per year (plus you need to be a member of a trade organisation which is part of the label scheme). As for waiting time; applications are processed at the next SWW label board meeting, so as the board meets every 3 months the label should be useable within 3 months of a successful application.
- Assessment of whether a business/product meets ethical criteria? This is based on the fact that people working within any given field in Scotland rapidly get to know each other. The ethics of a business applying to use the label are assessed on a basis of trust and personal reputation.
- With the trade in snowdrop bulbs, for example, it's quite easy to judge: the snowdrops which are

ethically produced are those which are harvested with the permission of the landowner. There is a huge illegal trade.

- Will a label based on reputation, on belonging to an association, limit opportunities for entrepreneurialism to those who belong to existing in-crowds? No – the experience of ASHS is that forming an association, and getting to know your peers better, leads to the breaking down of such barriers.

Discussions at Pollok Park: Wild harvests – an open access resource?

- Research suggests that most people have their own patch for harvesting from, and feel a strong sense of ownership of it – but this isn't always the case. Near to mushroom buying stations, you get local lads, often with alcohol problems, who just want the maximum number of mushrooms to sell, now.
- Gathering moss in bulk quantities is hard work, so the gangs tend to consist of people who are desperate for work. Very similar situation to winkle pickers, with similar problems. Criminal gangs and money laundering have been elements of some cases of illegal moss harvesting.
- Seashore – one complication in terms of including the shoreline in a wild harvests group is that there is different legislation for the coast than for land and tide.

Discussions at Pollok Park: The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers (ASHS)

- What's the membership fee? On joining you buy a non-refundable £100 share, and after that you pay a £100 per year. At first the fee was much higher than that, but this was a big barrier to getting people to join.
- ASHS members have to be Scottish businesses, but there is no size limit – they don't have to be small or micro businesses.

Discussions at Pollok Park: Networking and trade association

The original intention had been to spend the final session discussing possible ongoing networking activities, and asking whether participants thought they might be of interest. However, by the end of the morning sessions it was clear that the businesses present were positive about going ahead with formation of a trade association, which could then undertake such activities in its own name. The people present had sufficient interests in common that they wanted to keep in touch as a group, and valuable connections were being made.

- There was discussion as to what an association might be called. “Non-timber forest products” is definitely unhelpful. “Wild harvests” is ambiguous, but possibly the best we have so far. “Natural products” got a very positive response. Finland has an association of “nature-based enterprises”.
- There was a clear consensus that the association should be specifically for Scottish businesses.
- Size of business? There should be no limit – any size of business should be able to join.
- Landowners should be able to join, as well – for example, representatives of Forestry Commission Scotland and of a private estate were present at the meeting.
- There's a need for a directory of businesses.
- There's a need for a collective voice.
- There is a need for supply chain development – the lack of this is a huge problem for development of the sector. There need to be mechanisms for putting people with resources in touch with people who have a use for them. There's also a need for research, e.g. into how to transport perishable wild foods. There is no intellectual property in wild harvests, and therefore no motive for private companies to invest in research. There is an opportunity here for Scotland, but individual companies can't get access to research and development funding.
- In Finland there is a very good example – the association of nature-based enterprises. Most are connected with tourism.
- Finland also has the Arctic Flavours association – brilliant name – which does a huge amount of communicating with government over regulation, industry standards, sustainability. It has a strong

focus on food, diet and health.

- A relevant example in Scotland is that the Berry Scotland campaign is currently looking to set up a Scotland berry growers group. Restaurants can't get hold of Scottish fruit, most of it goes outwith Scotland. There is potential for more of the berries to be eaten by Scots – including Scottish children – with the attendant health benefits. Scotland is a dispersed market – the population is distributed around a wide area – so the berries need processed.

A show of hands during the final session indicated that a clear majority would be interested in joining a trade association. Two people volunteered then and there to be part of a steering group to take things forward, others said they would consider doing so. A provisional timescale was agreed – there will be a major wild harvests seminar in Perth in April 2009, and meeting specifically for businesses will be part of that. If a constitution can be devised and circulated in time, a trade association could be launched at that meeting.

Participants also indicated that they would like to be able to keep in touch with each other via an egroup. It was agreed to name this “Scottish Wild Harvests” at this stage, but that further discussion about naming would be needed before formation of a trade association.

The meeting at Abriachan Village Hall, 26th November 2008

Ten people attended the meeting. In our various roles we represented:

ASHS

basketmakers

a birch craftworker and demonstrator

a botanical extracts manufacturer

the Community Woodlands Association

Forestry Commission Scotland

a herbalist

a log-grown mushroom supplier

Reforestation Scotland

the Scottish Basketmakers' Circle

Scottish Native Woods

the Scottish Working Woods label

a timber fabrication & joinery enterprise

a tree nursery

a wild food supplier

a wild food writer

woodland owners

We were also joined for part of the afternoon by our host, Suzann Barr of Abriachan Forest Trust,⁹ who introduced us to just a few of the stunning structures and interesting activities in the woodland just down the road from the village hall where our discussions were taking place. The scant hour we had for the site visit was nowhere near enough to hear about all that's happening at Abriachan.

There was lively discussion throughout the day, both during group sessions and one-on-one during the tea breaks, lunch and the site visit. Some specific points were raised about the Working Woods label, but otherwise discussions all tended towards the same general themes.

Discussions at Abriachan: The Scottish Working Woods label

- Not relevant to non woodland products.
- Can it be used by our customers? - would like to know more. There's an issue of chain of custody, if the label is used by companies at different stages of the supply chain.
- It's of potential interest in particular for basketmakers. It could be accessed through the Scottish Basketmakers' Circle, or by using a Wild Harvests trade association as an umbrella group.

Discussions at Abriachan: Networking and trade association

The group were very positive about the benefits of networking, less sure of how relevant a full trade association would be to them. The mix of people was very different to that at the Pollok meeting, with fewer who were currently running full-time wild harvests businesses. Some said explicitly that it was not for them to say that there should be a trade association, because they themselves were employees of relevant organisations, rather than running businesses themselves.

- Interesting because we own a piece of woodland.
- I wanted to “see what's happening”.
- “Face-to-face contact is better than email.”
- “Meetings need to be at least quarterly – anything less isn't networking.”
- Meetings at different people's places – has worked well for ASHS members.
- There needs to be more awareness generally about Scotland's non-timber forest products and wild harvests, more events highlighting them.
- If setting up a trade association, it's “better to have a small core committee” who all have specific jobs to do. I don't want to be involved in this personally – but it would be interesting to come along

to future events.

- We are setting up a Scottish herbalists' guild – there's potential for links between this and a wild harvests group, as some of the herbalists wildcraft some of the herbs they use.
- An association should be loose, to reflect the diversity of businesses and activities involved, and because different people will want to be involved at different levels.
- How to define what is and what isn't “wild harvests”? Maybe it's to do with habitat, and habitat management. This makes sense of including coppiced woodland, or cultivating native species within their natural environment, whilst excluding e.g. raspberries – a native species – when they are grown very intensively. In Finland, a family will have their own patch of woodland, which they “tend” e.g. to maintain or increase the berry harvest.
- It would be great to have a directory of people providing courses and demonstrations, for when we are organising seminars, outdoor workshops etc. – especially if it showed who is available in different parts of Scotland.
- It would be good to have local/regional meetings and networks – easier for people to come along, as there's less travelling, and useful for building working relationships.

Participants wanted to be able to stay in touch with each other. They asked for their contact details to be circulated to each other, and expressed an interest in a wider Scottish Wild Harvests egroup and in future meetings and events.

References & sources of further info

1. Reforesting Scotland is a membership, campaigning and project-based charity: www.reforestingscotland.org/
2. Marla Emery, Suzanne Martin & Alison Dyke (2006) *Wild Harvests from Scottish Woodlands: Social, cultural and economic values of contemporary non-timber forest products*, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh
[http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/pdf/fcrp008.pdf/\\$FILE/fcrp008.pdf](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/pdf/fcrp008.pdf/$FILE/fcrp008.pdf)
3. Ruth Anderson & Emma Chapman (2006) *The Future for Wild Harvests in Scotland: Report of a seminar on Non-Timber Forest Products, Beauly, 10th and 11th May 2006*, Scottish Forest Industries Cluster
<http://www.forestryscotland.com/pages/displaypressrelease.asp?pr=171&loc=latest&home=true>
4. Jake Paul & Emma Chapman (2007) *Scottish NTFP Sector Research and Development, Project: Final Report*, Reforesting Scotland
5. The Scottish Working Woods label: <http://www.scottishworkingwoods.org.uk/>
6. The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers (ASHS): <http://www.ashs.co.uk/>
7. Reforesting Scotland's Sustainable Forest Harvest project:
http://www.reforestingscotland.org/projects/sustainable_forest_harvest.php
8. The Glasgow Woodland Unit: <http://www.glasgowwoodland.org.uk/CWUindex.html>
9. Abriachan Forest Trust: <http://www.abriachan.org.uk/>