

Wild Land News



Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

£1 where sold or £1 donation to Mountain Rescue/charity tin

FREE TO MEMBERS

Windfarm threats on Skye

AGM-Report

The Galloway National Park

SRN (Shared Rural Network)-
Update

Book Review: Wild Galloway -
From the hilltops to the Solway
- a portrait of a glen

Summer/Autumn 2025

WILD LAND NEWS

Issue 106

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

SWLG

www.swlg.org.uk
admin@swlg.org.uk
8 Cleveden Road
Glasgow G12 0NT
Scottish Charitable Incorporated
Organisaton No. SC051654

SWLG Convenor

Pete Ewing

Membership Secretary

Grant Cornwallis

Treasurer

Tim Ambrose

WLN Editor

currently vacant:
if interested, contact
admin@swlg.org.uk
Please send in contributions.
Individual articles do not
necessarily reflect the views of
the SWLG Steering Team.

Printed by
Printed.com



CONTENTS

Editorial	p.4
AGM Report	p.7
<i>Pete Ewing</i>	
Book Review	p.10
<i>James Fenton</i>	
It's worth reaching for the Keyboard!	
Windfarms on Skye	p.15
<i>Pete Dunn</i>	
Stop Press: Skye Highlight	p.22
<i>Pete Dunn</i>	
The Galloway National Park?	P.23
<i>Christopher Shaw</i>	
SRN (Shared Rural Network)-Update	p.26
<i>Pete Ewing</i>	
Letters To the Editor	p.28

Front cover: Stob Coire na
Ceannain, the easternmost of
the Grey Corries, from Upper
Inverroy
Left: Aonach Mor.
Photos James Fenton

Pete Ewing

Editorial

Welcome to the latest edition of *Wild Land News*, and my apologies for the delay in publication. The magazine has been without an editor since James Fenton stepped down, so the Steering Group has taken on the editor role. If any member feels they could act as editor, or contribute an article, please contact the Steering Group. We are also looking for a volunteer who could help Beryl with SWLG liaison with Scottish Environment LINK, the umbrella group of 48 conservation organisations. SWLG has been a member of LINK for many years.

The threats to wild land have never been greater – energy infrastructure, telecommunications masts, blanket monoculture sitka afforestation, salmon farms and hill tracks all detract from wildness. I am reminded of Ed Abbey's comment that growth for growth's sake is the ideology of the cancer cell. We have seen constant attrition of our last remaining wild land areas since SWLG was founded 43 years ago.

A further problem is the increasing polarisation of opinion on matters that affect wild land. Arguments over driven grouse shooting, large-scale release of pheasants, deer numbers, muirburn,

raptors, windfarms, rewilding, reintroductions of native species and even whether or not Dumfries & Galloway should be a national park all generate a lot of heat, though not always light.

I wonder why the polarisation of views is so intense. Certainly, we have more deer, more released pheasants and more windfarms compared to a few decades ago, so some of the issues have become more significant. But I do not recall such intense debate over our first two national parks. It might reflect societal changes, or social media use, or perhaps vested interests are getting more organised with lobbying.

As an example of this polarisation, Trees for Life and Forestry & Land Scotland commissioned an independent company to carry out community engagement regarding their proposal to reintroduce beavers in Glen Affric. The split in opinion was 2:1 in favour of beaver reintroduction. But a group of people attended, declined an invitation to be involved in the workshop and instead engaged directly with TfL and FLS staff. This ended in one person from the group allegedly becoming disruptive and being asked to leave.



Conival, Assynt; Photo Doris Dietrich

Perhaps ‘shifting baseline syndrome’ explains some of this polarisation: when environmental degradation is ongoing, people’s accepted thresholds for environmental conditions are continuously being lowered. Without experience of what things were like in the past, each new generation assumes the environment of their childhood is the natural and normal state, and tend to resist change. Driven grouse shooting is an example – when it was first introduced in the Victorian era, newspapers denounced the new way of shooting as an ‘unsportsmanlike practice’. Nowadays many people defend it on the grounds that it is ‘traditional’. There are many other examples – the Eiffel Tower, built as a temporary structure in the 1880s, triggered petitions against the ‘useless and monstrous’

structure, but these days six million people a year queue up to see it. It all depends on what you’re used to.

Shifting baseline syndrome perhaps explains much of the resistance to native species reintroductions. If you are a farmer who has never experienced the effects of beavers, it’s understandable you may fear the worst. Some farmers have suffered flooding of prime (grade 1 to 3.1) agricultural land on which their livelihood depends. But it only makes up 8% of Scotland. Beavers can fell and damage trees, but most of the damage is done within 20 metres of the watercourse, and of course most felled broadleaves will coppice readily – or at least they would if our deer population wasn’t unnaturally high.

Logically, people resisting reintroductions must believe that making beavers, or Eurasian lynx, or wolves, extinct in Scotland was a Good Thing. Yet if you were to ask them which of our current species they would like to see eradicated from mainland Scotland, they rarely venture an answer. This looks very much like shifting baseline syndrome. Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSIs — conservation designation where natural succession must be actively prevented) is arguably another example.

If shifting baseline syndrome is driven

by environmental degradation then that makes it even more important that we continue to campaign to protect wild land, and make sure that people — particularly young people — can experience it. Then shifting baselines might work in our favour.

To finish this editorial, the steering group would like to thank James Fenton for his sterling work on previous editions, and for putting his extensive photograph collection at our disposal for this issue. We also thank the SWLG member Doris Dietrich for helping collate the articles into the magazine.

Wild Land News Distributors Wanted!

As a small charity, we have limited resources for publicity and recruitment, and one of our main sources of new members is having the magazine available for sale in outdoor shops (usually for £1 donation to the Rescue Team tin, or any other charity tin present), a process which requires a bit of effort.

We currently have nobody covering outlets in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, so please do contact grantswlg@hotmail.co.uk for details on how it is done.

If you have suitable outlets outwith the aforementioned cities, where you think WLNews would sell, contact me now!

A Membership Secretary Writes...

Please renew your subscription, if you haven't already done so. Subscriptions last for 12 months from inception, but you cannot vote at an the AGM unless you have paid-up within that calendar year. You can use PayPal via our website, or send a cheque (to SWLG/Scottish Wild Land Group) to our Treasurer, using the form on the inside back cover of this magazine (a photocopy will do). If you are a new member, please supply an email address if you can, and also let me know if you need a copy of the current edition or not...as this saves on admin time. Thank you. Membership services queries to:

grantswlg@hotmail.co.uk

AGM Report

The Scottish Wild Land Group held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 2nd December 2024 at the Parish Hall, Bridge of Allan. Given that we were founded in 1982, I guess this must be something like our 42nd AGM – but it would involve a lot of digging in the archives to confirm this!

Four trustees attended and nine other members, with apologies from a further six. The winter weather prevented several folks from attending and as a result we are looking to reschedule the AGM to the autumn because of this.

The minutes of the December 2023 meeting were adopted and approved.

As Convenor I expressed my gratitude to the Steering Group trustees, who kept the organisation running while I was deployed with British Forces South Atlantic Islands. Particular thanks go to James Fenton, who was stepping down as Editor of *Wild Land News* and as a Trustee, although he is remaining a member. Members will have noticed how well the magazine was put together during his tenure. There were no volunteers to replace him as editor. As an interim measure it was decided that the Steering Group will assemble the content. Doris Dietrich kindly offered to help format this with instruction from James, and

James has also kindly agreed to our request to use his extensive photo library for the magazine. Should any member feel inclined to volunteer for the editorship, or just to assist (you do not have to become a trustee) please let us know.

Besides publication of *Wild Land News*, the group has been active in objecting to phone mast developments in or near wild land areas. Thanks were given to trustee David Roper for sending a personal objection to the Loch na h-Earba pumped storage scheme.

SWLG is a member of Scottish Environmental LINK, the umbrella group of environmental organisations. Thanks were expressed to our representative on LINK, former convenor Beryl Leatherland, who was instrumental in the hill tracks and phone mast campaigns and through LINK enables SWLG to punch above its weight. With 48 member organisations, LINK flags up more threats to wild land than we can possibly address, so if any member was willing to assist Beryl with the LINK liaison duties, please let us know.

Tim Ambrose our treasurer circulated and explained the most recent accounts. Essentially, SWLG remains in a healthy financial state with around £22,000 in the bank. In the trustees'

experience we are far more limited by volunteer time availability than by any financial constraints. The Accounts and Report were adopted unopposed, as was the reappointment of the independent examiner.

Our long-serving (perhaps that should be long-suffering!) Membership Secretary Grant Cornwallis reported that membership was stable at around 344, with inflow and outflow being equal at around 25 per year. There was the usual problem of members not reporting changes of address, which is understandable.

SWLG is of course entirely run and funded by our membership and it was noted that this independence is a huge asset. We do not own or manage land and are not reliant on external support. Increasing the membership would increase our voice and it was noted that local grassroots campaigns against certain major developments could be a source of new members.

Pursuant to Article 77 of the constitution, all trustees retire at the AGM but are deemed to be re-elected (Article 78) unless they choose not to be reappointed, or an election is held and they are not re-elected. James Fenton gave notice of his intention not to seek re-election and no other members stood for election. The remaining trustees (Grant Cornwallis, David Roper, Tim Ambrose, Pete Ewing) were thus re-elected.

Turning to any other business, James Fenton suggested holding the AGM earlier in the year and this met with widespread support.

The possibility of using funds to contract (not employ) someone to carry out development work for a time-limited period was raised. The trustees had been actively considering this although our current thinking is not to do this at the present time.

There was discussion of the recent difficulties at the John Muir Trust with trustee resignations and financial



Kyle of Durness; Photo James Fenton

challenges. There was discussion about SWLGs independent nature and whether it might be possible to attract members internationally given that wild land in Scotland is visited by tourists from abroad.

There was an extended discussion as to whether SWLG should become more directly critical of energy policy or focus on explaining the value of wild land with a view to engaging more people in its protection. Whilst energy policy is a significant factor in the destruction of wild land, it is not the only one. James Fenton noted several current band wagons that were promoting and funding what he viewed as poor conservation ecology. Amongst these he noted the widespread planting of riparian woodland, peatland restoration, the “biodiversity crisis” and upland overgrazing as being harmful to wild land. In addition, beyond direct energy infrastructure there remains commercial forestry, forestry for carbon offsetting, phone masts and the perennial issue of access tracks.

Considering the options, focus on wider popular engagement with wild land as a good in and of itself provides a chance to engage with to all these threats. Conversely, convincing a generally disinterested populace – the majority of whom are urban, central belt – to stand up for wild land in the face of concerted mis-/disinformation campaigns from

government and vested interests is a major challenge. Focusing on the interaction of energy policy, the planning system and how they promote unwarranted public detriment for private gain, including impact outside designated wild land areas, could engage a much broader audience.

Norman McNab supported addressing energy. The Institution of Engineers in Scotland has long been concerned with the lack of a strategic plan that could substitute for the centralised planning of the CEGB that was removed when power generation was privatised. It was suggested that some of the funds held by the SWLG could be put to producing another special issue (the previous being Special Issue 83 – Windfarms Gone Wild Summer 2013) addressing the impact of energy policy on wild land. Included in this might be an analysis of the financial relationship between Forest and Land Scotland and the wind sector.

The meeting was closed at 15:30 and there was some informal discussion and networking before we headed home.

Norman’s suggestion has been discussed further in the Steering Group meetings since the AGM and we are hoping to publish a special edition on energy policy and the impact on wild land.

Dr Peter Ewing, Convenor

BOOK REVIEW

Wild Galloway - From the hilltops to the Solway— a portrait of a glen by Ian Carter

When I was asked to review a book called 'Wild Galloway', I had visions of a book extolling Galloway's wild mountain core, that area of rugged hills and lochs between the Rhinns of Kells and the Merrick which has managed to escape the fate of the surrounding land (forestry plantations and windfarms) and which has been designated by NatureScot as Wild Land Area No.1.

But the subtitle says it all: it is not about finding wildness in our remotest mountain areas, but about finding it in the

immediately vicinity of where we live. Ian Carter, who has recently moved to the Auchencairn area of southern Galloway, writes about finding wildness in his local glen, which stretches from Heston Island on the Solway in the south, northwards to the hill of Bengairn (391m), southwest of Screel. He says of the area that "there may be no wilderness left, but there is 'wildness' here in abundance."

His glen, a typical Galloway landscape comprising coastal flats, farmland,



The hill on the left is Bengairn, at the head of Ian's glen, as viewed from Rockcliffe. The hill on the far right is Screel. Photo by James Fenton

forestry plantations and unmanaged moorland: a landscape subject to Ian's thoughtful and intense scrutiny. He is observant of everything around him: farming, forestry, birds, mammals and plants. He laments some of the changes of recent years, such as the simplification of Galloway's landscapes by farmers through the removal of rock outcrops and patches of scrub from lowland pastures. He sympathises with the late Derek Ratcliffe who said that one of the 'awful problems' of the UK was "the blanketing of vast areas of the uplands with monocultures of planted non-native conifers" with the concomitant losses of wildlife. Perhaps the landscape of Galloway has suffered more than anywhere else from this, but it is still an ongoing issue as indicated by the current disputes on new Sitka spruce plantations in the Borders.

But Ian takes an interesting perspective: "These plantations are odd places. I find myself drawn back to them every so often, even though they don't support much wildlife. Partly it's the near-total absence of other people. If part of the meaning of 'wildness' is that humans don't have a strong influence on the land on a *day-to-day* basis, then these forests fit the bill. Here are square miles of land where, most days, there is no-one else present. True, when a new area is planted (or replanted after felling) there are bursts of activity. But after each one, the next pulse

of management won't be for another 30 or 40 years, when the time comes to harvest the trees. In the decades between planting and felling, the forest is left to itself."

This paragraph is an illustration of Ian's thoughtful introspection on everything he sees around him.

However, he is relaxed about the seeding-out of Sitka spruce from the plantations onto the remaining area of open moorland on Bengairn: "Most conservationists would wish them gone. But they add variety and structure, and as they are self-sown, they are dotted randomly across the moor. They are not natural, but at least they *look* natural. This whole area would once have been cloaked in forest. What, then, is worse: no trees, or trees of the wrong kind?" It is certainly a viewpoint, but I see two things wrong with it. Firstly, the spread of Sitka is a UK-wide problem, with the tree rapidly increasing in habitats of all types. In time, Ian's beloved moorland will be akin to the plantations he has discussed as Sitka eventually becomes dominant.

My second concern is that, throughout the book, he is in accordance with the majority view that native woodland ('wildwood') is a static entity which would be dominating the landscape if it were not for its destruction by humans over the centuries. But where is the evidence for this? What about the

conclusions of the eminent Scottish geologist, James Geikie, who, after studying tree remains in peat bogs, including the Solway Flows, concluded in 1866 that Scotland's woods had declined naturally? This does not detract from the fact, though, that the fragments of native woodland which Ian encounters in his glen are indeed very special places.

Although he perhaps thinks that, in the grand order of things, moorland should be woodland, Ian certainly enjoys stravaiging across it. "The afforested areas have their appeal (reservations aside) but the real joy of these hills, and the main reason I keep coming back, is the land that has escaped the trees. On the steepest and rockiest ground, large areas of open moorland remain. But up

here, the vegetation on these surviving patches of moor is natural; nothing has been planted. Humans have not sought to influence what grows, either directly or through the grazing pressure of domestic stock." Again, in common with many conservationists, he appears to think that natural grazing would be at a low level by saying that "in the absence of grazing this land feels wild."

But I like his approach to the absence of paths: "The lack of a path is an invitation to nowhere or everywhere, depending on your mind-set, but I love the autonomy which it brings. I walk here the way the dog walks: with intent and curiosity but without a firm plan."

He bemoans the loss of moorland waders from his glen; indeed, in my youth, I



Heston Island where Ian spent a night with the seabirds; as viewed from Rockcliffe
Photo by James Fenton

can remember breeding redshank, curlew, snipe and peewit on the lowland Galloway moors, now mostly all gone. But unfortunately it is these remaining areas of Galloway moor, which are not particularly productive for agriculture, where much of the new tree planting is now going and, of course, the wind-farms. So Ian is lucky to still have his moorland patch, albeit without waders!

He describes a night spent on the tidal Heston Island at the mouth of Auchencairn Bay, a site of abundant seabirds. But he does not take a map with him: "A map is a powerful representation of human endeavour and control ... they reduce miles to centimetres, chatty and ineffable woods to splodges of green. And they give us the idea that we can fold up a landscape and put it in our pocket. The land becomes about us." He is quoting Charles Foster here, but this illustrates how the book is full of insights such as this: not thrust upon you, but mentioned in passing as he describes the wildlife around him. In terms of maps, I find it odd that people say there is nowhere left to explore on this planet anymore because everyone has mapped everything. But if you go to an area you don't know without taking a map, or without reading guidebooks, then surely everything is new and waiting for exploration? So I am in agreement with Ian in not taking maps (or phones), but one would probably be

castigated nowadays for being reckless!

Ian very much likes to enjoy the nature around him, hypothesising that "deeper connections come, I think, from spending more than a few snatched hours in semi-wild places, and from getting as far away as possible from human infrastructure", something I am sure members of the Scottish Wild Land Group would agree with. He also argues that, because humans are part of nature, then any human-caused environmental catastrophe resulting in a loss of species, such as global warming or biodiversity loss, is just one more phase in the planet's history: it has, after all, survived previous mass extinctions. Certainly true, but if humans *are* part of nature, then everything we do is natural, and all conservation becomes arbitrary. Hence I disagree with him here because, although we certainly evolved from nature, to make sense of the world, we separate our action from nature's: we have chosen the word 'natural' to be in opposition to the word 'artificial', *i.e.* created by humans. Indeed, Ian seems to accept this when, as quoted above, he sees the vegetation of his moorland as natural because it has not been put there by humans. Making species extinct is our fault, not nature's! But, in spite of our impact on nature, Ian encourages us not to despair. His glen demonstrates that there are still places

where nature can be observed and enjoyed in spite of everything.

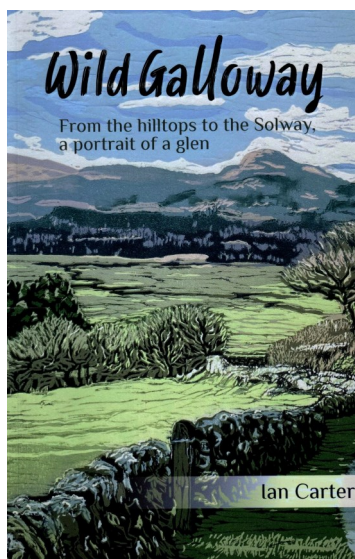
Although Ian really enjoys observing the wildlife around him, he cannot help cogitating at the same time, which is what makes this book stand out: for example, while he gains great enjoyment from watching the birds feeding at his bird table, he cannot at the same time help thinking that this large number of birds in a small place might contribute to the spread of bird diseases. Should he be feeding them at all, he ponders?

If you find yourself stuck indoors on a cold, wet afternoon, I would highly recommend curling on the sofa with this well-written book, and to enter with Ian Carter into his glen. To enjoy his percipient observations, to learn about

Galloway's farming and forestry, to see the wildlife through his eyes, and to agree with, or challenge, his insights. I will finish with a quote of his, relating to his harvesting of wild berries on the slopes of Bengairn: "The garden's blackcurrant bushes produce a glut of fruit, enough to see us through the winter. But the bilberries offer something else: a taste of high summer in the hills."

"Wild Galloway—From the hilltops to the Solway, a portrait of a glen", Ian Carter, Whittles Publishing, 2025, £17.99

Review by James Fenton, the previous editor of Wild Land News. He is the author of the book Landscape Change in the Scottish Highlands: Imagination and Reality, published in 2024



Pete Dunn

It's worth reaching for the keyboard! Windfarms on Skye

For all who care about our landscapes, ecosystems and communities this is a challenging time. With no friends in the Scottish Government (who seem hell-bent instead on overriding local democracy) it's easy for one to become pessimistic and say *'What's the point?' 'It's a done deal'*. This is something I read and hear a lot in discussion with people who trudge along to bland local 'consultations' by SSEN and by battery and wind farm companies.

However, in the past couple of years a plethora of action groups have sprung up on Facebook, some with several thousand members. One such is the Skye Windfarm Information Group (SWIG) who, in their own words, believe that *"any further Wind Farm development on Skye should be small scale and community owned so all profits stay on Skye."* While several parts of Scotland have become magnets for infrastructure development, Skye is getting some encouraging results so far as one area resisting further encroachment.

Formed in the summer of 2023 when it was realised Skye faced planning applications for nine wind farms and a mas-

sive new overhead power line, SWIG now boasts over 1500 members. (Population of Skye c.9000). An online petition has gathered over 5000 signatures and more than £5000 has been donated to support the fight.

So far, "wins" include:

Waternish Wind Farm - plan to build 15 turbines 200m high on the Greshornish peninsula near Edinbane. Application officially withdrawn!

Ben Aketil Wind Farm - The Highland Council listened and lodged an objection to the plans to rebuild the existing wind farm with new turbines twice the height (200m). This application now heading to a Public Inquiry in the next few months.

Glen Ullinish 2 Wind Farm - Muirhall's plans to build 47 turbines 200m high on the land between Edinbane, Dunvegan and Struan have now been reduced to "only" 33 turbines following the Highland Council's objection last summer. Muirhall have now received Statutory Consultation Responses on their Additional Environmental Submission (AEI) If the Council objects again, this will head to another Public inquiry.

Skye Reinforcement Overhead Power

Line - The Highland Council objected to SSEN's plans to build a new power line with pylons up to 50m high and 15 miles of underground trenches around the Cuillin back in November 2023. While the current line does need renewal, the proposed larger line is only needed at the scale anticipated to take the power that would be generated by the proposed wind farms. We are still awaiting the Scottish Government's confirmation of a Public Inquiry.

Breakish Wind Farm - after tireless campaigning from the Breakish Wind Farm Action Group and SWIG, the Swedish developers Arise Energy appear to have

sacked their developer Lomond Energy. The timetable for the application to build 16 turbines 180m high on the hill behind the village has slipped again. Maybe, like the Waternish developers, Arise can see that they would be better spending their time and money on projects elsewhere?

SWIG are also currently fighting plans for not one but two temporary workers camps on the edge of Broadford. These would be the bases for those who would construct the windfarms and pylon overhaul. Anyone who's been there in the past few years will know that this town of 1000 or so people struggles to cope with the influx of



Pictures too can make a difference:

This is the view I would like to have had of the Fannaichs and Slioch from Little Wyvis when I last climbed it in February...

tourists – the Co-op runs out of basics and health services struggle to cope. Yet two 350-person camps are proposed for north and south of the town. Drainage and sewage will be major headaches as well as the traffic, and don't even think about trying to get a pint after a long day on the hill or bike. There are also plans to create a quay at Loch Caroy to land turbine blades at, and to set aside part of the airstrip for storage of turbine parts. These are also being fiercely contested.

Recently, Skye featured heavily in a week-long event on renewables in The National newspaper. One article is headlined "How windfarms are scarring

Skye's rural community" Unusually for this paper, government orthodoxy is being challenged as it ends with "...it is clear that the negative impacts of these projects far outweigh the benefits."

It is worthwhile and it is important to make your voice heard. The number of applications is increasing and activist groups are desperate to share the load now that Public Inquiries are about to become more frequent. The main way to support as an individual is through making your views known using the planning system, copied to your local Community and Regional Councillors (if you live in the area), Planning Committee, and MSPs. Their contact details



However the view that I got was somewhat different ...

The Skye Bridge is 35m above sea level at maximum height. A 200m high wind turbine is 5.7 times higher.





are readily available eg on [Theyworkforyou.com](https://www.theyworkforyou.com) and in relevant Facebook groups. The latter are often the place to find your points using the right planning language. Some groups offer AI support for you, making it surprisingly easy to write an erudite case. If you don't have much time, Planning departments will accept direct email comments (usually epanning@.....) as well as using the planning portal on their website. You don't have to live locally. Large developments are approved by the Scottish Government, coordinated by their Energy Consents Unit (ECU). Their email address for comments is representations@gov.scot.

It's also important to make your views known more widely. The major problem faced by activist groups who want to change government policy is the piecemeal approach to planning, even in a project that wants to stretch pylons from Caithness or Dunvegan to Dundee. It's split into dozens of individual applications – one for each leg and each substation, each attracting their own activist group. Each group essentially argues the same points: “the policy is flawed”, “Scotland will not benefit”, “landscapes and communities are being trashed” and even where development is essential, “there are alternatives – the cheapest option is the most destructive” etc. Maintaining visibility in the local and national press and hopefully on TV requires thousands to de-

mand that their voices are heard by writing letters and articles.

If you don't have ANY time, most groups and organisations are looking for money, as it takes professional representation to argue each case effectively. The John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Scotland and a number of Facebook-based organisations are working hard on fund-raising.

The progress to date on Skye and the change of emphasis of the Shared Rural Network programme (discussed in another article) are important good news stories against a backdrop of a Westminster government egging on the Scottish Government to go faster. But it's going to get harder. Several proposals to change planning law in Scotland are being floated which will reduce local democracy, principally by removing the step of a Public Inquiry in the event of a Regional Authority objection. Also, enabling developers to change plans significantly after approval with little or no challenge. More windfarms are being approved by ‘Scottish Ministers’ against the advice of their own officials and wishes of Regional Councils and other objectors. The most recent, in the Kyle of Sutherland, is to be challenged in the High Court by Highland Council.

The bigger political picture is complex as arguments rage over economic and energy policy, planning law and local

democracy, but next year in Scotland, all MSPs are up for election. In the activist communities, some MSPs are well-known for their support for energy infrastructure and others for their ostrich poses. Very few are known to be sympathetic to landscapes, wild land and the communities they purport to represent, despite the fact that one Highland MSP recently said that infrastructure

was the issue he received the most email about. In the Highlands, the SNP lost 2 seats in the UK general election so potentially several MSPs' coats are on shoogly pegs there. This year will probably be the most significant yet in influencing our natural heritage. Making your voice heard does make a difference.



Windfarm above Loch Awe; Photo James Fenton

Royal Scottish Geographical Society: A Wild Night In

An evening of inspiration of some of Scotland's leading wildlife filmmakers, featuring Doug Allan, Gordon Buchanan, Libby Penman and Mandi Stark and more.

- **Date:** Friday 5 December
- **Time:** 19:30
- **Price:** £17.50 - £30
- **Location:** Gannochy Trust Auditorium, Perth Concert Hall, Mill Street, Perth, PH1 5HZ, Scotland

The evening features short film footage, exclusive interviews and audience Q&A. All proceeds from the event will go directly to support the charity's mission to inspire and inform people about the value of geography and to promote geographical education in Scotland.

Pete Dunn

Stop Press: Skye Highlight

The previous article has highlighted the plight of Skye, under siege from wind farm developers and SSEN. June has been a highly significant month for its landscapes and communities. The Scottish Government railroaded through an upgrade to the main power line that runs down through Skye and over to Fort Augustus. This was done outwith the established procedure of a public inquiry normally expected when the host local authority objects to a development. However, a deficit in local democracy is what we've come to expect. Whilst all agree the line needs replacement, an upgrade is only needed if there were to be more power generation on Skye; something being vigorously opposed by thousands.

The appropriateness of the first of those developments has just been thoroughly tested at a public inquiry in Portree about the repowering of the Ben Aketil wind farm. It was prefaced by a demonstration by over 50 people outside the Camanachd Hall. From impassioned pleas to respect the island's unique landscapes to skewering the nonsensical lack of planning about the

impact on Skye's traffic to risible community compensation, local people supported by experts have covered a lot of ground to expose the many weaknesses in the application. By the end, the consensus was that defence experts and public alike had made many points well and overall the process went perhaps as well as it could have. There remains one more day of evidence to be heard, in August, about the impact on raptors. The Reporter who chaired the inquiry will then retire to write his report.

This keynote battle for the importance of Scotland's landscapes within the current planning framework and energy policy was extensively covered in the national papers including a live feed in The Herald, also on STV news and now we await the decision of the Reporter.

Meanwhile, the same week, (as expected) developers have returned to submit revised plans for another 50 turbines in 3 wind farms to merge with the above and thus carpet the North of Skye with steel and fibreglass. One skirmish is over, but the battle continues...

Christopher Shaw

The Galloway National Park

The Galloway National Park has been a long time in gestation. The Galloway National Park Association was established in 2017 and boasts a substantial membership as well as over 6,000 followers on social media. It was not until formal bids for national park status were submitted and Galloway was selected for a consultation exercise that opposition started to emerge.

Primarily the opposition seems to be from large landowners, (not all of them resident in the area), farmers and forestry enterprises and a lot of the opposition is based upon misinformation. Conspiracy theorists see the renewables industry in the background because, as things stand, National Planning Framework 4 incorporates a presumption against the construction of wind farms in National Parks and Galloway and South and East Ayrshire have historically been a dumping ground for them.

Even amongst those who support the creation of a national park, there are some reservations. For some reason the name proposed if the park is created is “The Kingdom of Galloway National Park” and one wonders where that came from when it’s always been referred to as The Galloway National Park. The boundaries of the ancient

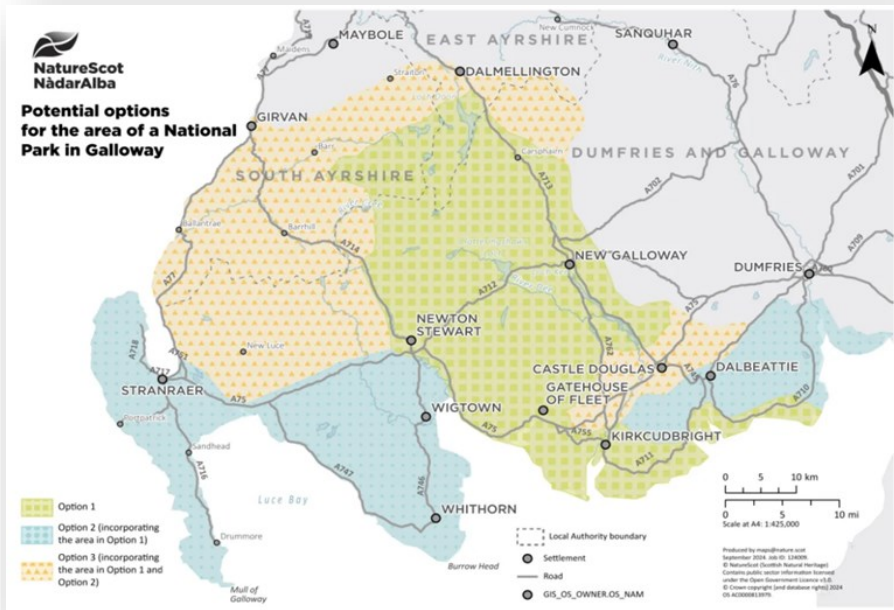
Kingdom of Galloway changed over time due to skirmishes between major and minor warlords over land, cattle, slaves etc. but broadly speaking, it was the area West of the River Annan and South of the River Clyde so there is logic to the name even if it doesn’t have broad support.

Another area of concern is the proportion of the Board which would be government appointees, diluting the local representation on what is, after all, a local initiative. When you look at the track record of the lady who has just been appointed to head up Historic Environment Scotland, who has had nearly 60 windfarm-related directorships, you can see why there is concern.

<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/IPW4JiWRmB4RuU754LD83WcDkWY/appointments?page=1>

Broadly speaking there are three proposals for the boundaries of the NP.

Option 1 is very much the central core incorporating the Dark Sky Park, The Biosphere and The Merricks which are one of only two Wild Land Areas designated by NatureScot south of the central belt.



Option 2 is the option 1 area plus the areas shown here in pale blue.

Option 3 is the previous two options plus the areas shown here in pale orange. What area should be incorporated into the national park was one of the questions in the consultation which has just closed.

So far, South Ayrshire Council have voted to support the creation of the national park, East Ayrshire Council have yet to consider it and Dumfries and Galloway Council have kicked the can down the road claiming they don't have enough information to make a decision. In my jaded view this is more indicative of the state of D&G Council than anything else.

If one assumes that the outcome was ultimately a go-ahead, there are still a number of concerns on the horizon.

The Scottish Government under pressure from Westminster is currently reviewing potential amendments to the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), which may allow renewable energy projects, including wind turbines, to be considered within newly designated National Parks. However, it is important to highlight that this proposal has emerged from a limited consultation process, (only 3 weeks) with approximately 50 responses received across Scotland because most people didn't even know the consultation was happening.

Hands off our Hills comment; "This limited engagement raises concerns about the transparency and inclusiveness of the process. Any amendments to a National Framework such as NPF4 should follow established procedures, ensuring broad consultation, full transparency,

and adherence to proper regulatory guidelines. This includes allowing for thorough public and stakeholder participation, ensuring that all voices are heard, and that the changes reflect a comprehensive and balanced approach to national planning, this doesn't seem to be the case in this instance."

There is also concern about comments from the Westminster Energy Secretary about Scotland becoming the renewables powerhouse of the UK. What this really means is that Scotland will enjoy all the downside of renewable generation whilst any benefits will accrue to England.

Of course, with the precarious majority in Holyrood, one wonders whether the

forecast outcomes can be achieved. Clearly there will be more news to come.

UPDATE: Since the writing of this article in February 25, the Scottish Government has recently been minded not to proceed with this proposal, but we are publishing the article anyway, as it may well return.

Stop Press: For further important background on the Galloway National Park saga and intrigues, please read the information from Action to Protect Rural Scotland www.aprs.scot/news/how-misinformation-brought-down-a-national-park/



Galloway mountain core; Photo James Fenton

SRN (Shared Rural Network) Update

There has been a major advance in the mobile mast saga with which many readers will be familiar from previous editions of SWLG News. As suggested in the article on windfarms on Skye, there is a value to challenging proposed developments and policy.

Some background - the previous Westminster Government set aside £500m for the Shared Rural Network (SRN) programme to enable mobile network operators (MNOs) to erect mobile masts in previously uncovered areas (Total Not Spots). MNOs were also encouraged to do more mast sharing but their failure to agree has sometimes led to some superfluous applications in areas with coverage by some MNOs but not others.

Sitting in London or wherever, it perhaps seemed obvious to site new masts in Not Spots and this led to many applications in Wild Land Areas and other sites with no habitation, but they justified them by saying that walkers and emergency services would benefit, as well as enabling further economic development in the area. However, organisations like Mountaineering Scotland, the John

Muir Trust and around 40 other organisations disagreed and in coalition, tried to persuade the Science and Technology Minister that local people were not being consulted. They pointed to the lack of need and that sometimes locals were objecting, either on the grounds that they didn't need one as there was already coverage, or on visual and environmental impact.

Mountaineering Scotland helpfully provided a "red" list on its website for objectors and a Facebook group also sprang up. Soon, a small but dedicated band of objectors had each written dozens of objections all saying more or less the same thing for each application – visual and environmental impacts not justified, no local needs analysis, modern mobile phones could link to satellites etc. It has become something of a cat and mouse game as applicants tried various ways to get applications past over-burdened planners and objectors became better at using planning legislation to stop them. Many applications have been withdrawn and others refused, including one that especially exemplified the dogma of

applicants, in the UNESCO World Heritage Flow Country. Many more seem to be on hold in the planning system.

The coalition, together with many emails from individuals to MSPs and MPs had limited success until a change of government in Westminster last year. Finally, a few months ago after a new push, two new Highland MPs met Chris Bryant, the Minister responsible. He was sympathetic and agreed that local communities needed to be consulted to

make best use of the money. He even said that some civil servants would venture out of London to find out what locals want by way of mobile coverage (or words to that effect!) A few, usually incomplete applications are still trickling in under the old dogma but it is to be hoped that MNOs will have got the message. There are still plenty of rural communities and major roads with poor coverage that hopefully now will receive more attention instead and taxpayers will get better value for money.

Most Recent Developments

The UK Government has recently announced that the TNS part of the SRN programme has been substantially reduced. There will now only be an additional 44 masts built, down from the original estimate of 315 masts.

This is a very significant win for the coalition of communities, charities

and landowners who have locked arms and spoken with one voice to protect and defend wild places and demand that arbitrary geographical target coverage be dropped so that the money be directed to rural community coverage instead.

Here is the breakdown of the 44 proposed masts by local authority:

LPA	Number of Masts	Planning Approved
Highland Council	18	15
Argyll & Bute	10	9
Perth & Kinross	8	4
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park	5	1
Stirling	2	2
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	1	1 and Live

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wild Land Crisis

I have been a sympathetic but non participatory member of SWLG for some years and have often been inspired by the essays in the newsletter. I am not a scientist but my opinions have been formed on long walks through the highlands and on long days planting trees, digging ditches or renovating old buildings into treasured dwellings. I am an ex- forestry commission employee, a retired building contractor, a main contractor on various green energy projects around Strathdon, hillwalker, bird watcher, crofter and horse logger. The landscape and mountain environment has been my life and living for over forty years. I look at things now and am often enthralled but now equally often horrified.

I have written this essay basically agreeing with Dr Fentons article on Bandwagons in issue 105.

Unfortunately due to profound deafness I was not able to attend the AGM but I wanted to make a contribution to the discussion and hereby throw this essay into the melting pot for possible discussion. I suspect my views may be considered controversial, radical or mad!

As every decision regarding land usage, conservation, population and money is grounded in politics and economics, this has to be the route to change. However, maybe the bandwagons have already beaten the perpetrators of wisdom.

The discussion on wild land has reached a crisis point; there is awareness of a loom-

ing disaster. Every bandwagon wants to do the right thing their way, be it re-wilding, reforestation, green energy, carbon offsets or whatever. Here is an almighty explosion of interests driven by ill informed do-gooders who all disregard the fact that for nature, landscape, and the human inhabitants of it the best form of management is no management at all: leave it alone!

The land is overwhelmed now by over management and marketed for profit, for tourism, for convoys of camper vans or sports cars on the NC500, it is ploughed up for trees of dubious quality, the hilltops are adorned with communication masts and wind turbines, the water is channelled, pumped, tunnelled and dammed. The wildlife is in retreat as is the indigenous population of caring humans.

This has happened before with the desecration and development of the great American West and the exploitation of resources in vulnerable areas by generations of European colonisers, be those resources minerals, gold, diamonds or slaves. The desecration of the Scottish Highlands is another step on that same path.

There is a distinct lack of joined up thinking between the "experts" in each field of interest in the resources of OUR country. All projects are ultimately motivated by money or the search for it. All land is viewed as a resource from which money can be extracted. So where does this money come from? This is a big question in this age of austerity when essential public

services are starved of funding. However, in spite of this there appears to be an allocation of money for projects: to the lay person, this source is a deep mystery!

This quest for money and resources is driven by the human need for expansion and growth in turn driven by the needs of an overwhelmingly large population. The human population of this planet is far too large. The evolution of Homo Sapiens continues to make them successful but within a limited environment. This environment can no longer support the numbers of humans competing for space within it. As the trend in human nature is to evolve and to advance there is no hope of a reduction in consumption or in exploitation of resources. This consumption is more likely to increase, therefore the only way to preserve the remaining resources including the consumption of wild land is to reduce demand by drastic population reduction. This needs to be done very quickly to reduce over crowding and consumption. The planet needs universal compulsory birth control. A ruling for one child per couple would reduce numbers in one generation and could be managed appropriately after that. This solution provides a better result than that proposed by Prof. Brian Cox who advocates expanding beyond planet Earth to colonise another world. This would inevitably spread the human capacity for consumption and pollution far beyond our present boundaries. It was tried before with the deportation of convicts to Botany Bay in the 18th century.

Other solutions that come to mind are equally hard to implement but are worth considering. Dramatic changes to concepts of land ownership and usage would be revolutionary but effective. Among simpler possi-

bilities lie the following suggestions in no order of priority:

1. All forestry grants should be stopped forthwith
2. Fencing should be subject to planning permission
3. There should be massive investment in wave power
4. There should be investment in offshore wind turbines.
5. There should be no further investment in onshore hydro electric power.
6. The export of power to England should end.
7. Small scale wind and water power schemes for the benefit of rural local communities should be encouraged.
8. A return to small scale farming in remote areas should be encouraged
9. Woodland crofts should be encouraged.
10. Driven shooting should be banned but walked up shooting should be encouraged.
11. Tourist quotas and taxes should be introduced.
12. All fishing quotas should be subjected to strict conservation measures.

The perception of land as an asset to make money from needs to be consigned to history. However in the same vein the bandwagon solutions that echo the story of the old woman who swallowed a fly need to be adjusted to suit reality.

On a more immediate level other issues involving wild land usage include:

1. Failed plantations, which are grant aided and established by ploughing, fencing, planting, tubing, and then abandoned with no maintenance. This means land



Ben Loyal, Photo James Fenton

destroyed and money wasted. Tube plantations in particular are a disgrace where the tubes are left to strangle the trees that they were meant to protect.

2. Moorland: Is not moorland a forest in miniature? Heather is a woody semi-prostrate shrub or small tree and a heather moor frequently contains other similar woody shrubs such as blaeberry, willow, juniper, birch. It is prostrate because the soil type, climate, wind, precipitation favour this height of vegetation. Why plough this up to plant big trees which fall over in the wind, this is crazy. Likewise we should not plant trees on farmland as this produces essential food.
3. Shooting: I am concerned that legislation to bring grouse shooting under more control is a double edged sword. This legislation has been rightly welcomed by naturalists and conservationists but for the estate owners who are possibly already struggling to make ends meet due to rising costs and reduced profitability there may be a temptation to abandon sport shooting in favour of forestry or turbines being a more secure way of achieving a return from their land as-

set. Therefore walked up shooting should be encouraged to reduce the impact, reduce costs, make the sport more meaningful to the client and increase their sense of achievement.

Here follow some local (North East) examples of estates changing their policies to suit the economic climate and maintain their own viability with little regard to environmental impact.

Glen Dye estate recently changed hands. The new owners propose planting the whole grouse moor for carbon offset purposes. This is a grant exploitation scheme to make money which will destroy a large area of moorland.

Tillypronie estate, once one of the best grouse moors in the area recently bought by a hedge fund manager. The land has been completely sterilised in a massive "tidy up" job. The art of the hill track and grouse butt has been brought to perfection by utilising a gigantic borrow pit for hardcore and extracting thousands of tons of crushed rock. All the estate houses have been renovated to a high standard but all sit empty, there is not a tenant to be seen. Even the high grouse numbers of the past seem to have evaporated along with the mountain hare and various predators.

Dunecht estates propose to build a wind farm on the Hill of Fare. Locally this is very controversial and deemed to be highly damaging to the image of Deeside. However, if allowed to go ahead this development would guarantee the viability of the estate for generations to come while completely destroying the summit plateau of the hill, another fine moorland habitat.

Abergeldie estate has also recently been sold having been in the hands of a fairly benevolent laird for a long time. Now the new owner intends to create a highly marketed hunting zone to become the playground for the very rich. Also the intention is to build a new mansion house at the ruinous farm of Bovaglie, several miles off road and requiring the installation of all services and access roads. It is of course locally controversial and detrimental to the wild land aspect.

Cabrach estate has long been controversial in its policies and management but is now behind the massive Dorenell wind farm near Dufftown. Here there are 57 turbines that are 126 metres high and so another area of extensive wild land is destroyed.

There will be many other estates that fall into this category, changes to the basis of land ownership are drastically needed and land usage needs to be strictly controlled. These are highly charged political moves and I am well aware that my philosophy is revolutionary in concept and therefore pie in the sky but maybe some of the points are worth thinking about.

I conclude with a quotation from the eminent ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson in 1962.

"I realise that we have got to fight like hell in the years to come and that we have been playing at conservation, most of us. I for one am going to become a very nasty fellow as the years go on because I see the disintegration in so many ways. We have got to become far more militant and I am afraid that biologists as a whole have got to be more aggressive from now on. The bastards who are destroying America are very aggressive as you know"

This was written at the start of the campaign against the use of DDT. This campaign as we know was eventually won. Can we win or are we up against the wall?"

Tony Comerford

Invasive Sitka

I have picked up on an article by James Fenton in *The Wildland News* Autumn 2024 and on a book review by Tim Ambrose in Spring 2024

Problems relating to current tree planting practices are truly a landscape and biodiversity disaster – but have been proceeding for many years. The Woodland Trust was founded in 1972 and its ethos was planting trees everywhere – with some strange and unfortunate results. Since then it HAS become more sensitive, but in the beginning “the trees are good” mantra dominated with the result that some fine species-rich grassland and bog habitats were ruined. I had thought that the Woodland Trust has matured since its beginning, but reading articles in your magazine it would appear that it has not!

Particularly prevalent is the belief that trees cannot grow unless the land is

ploughed into ridges or turned over into “dollops” – true for sitka but not for appropriate native species. Not only is this kind of stupid (how did woodlands ever grow before we came along to plant them and cover them in plastic tubes) and interferes with the natural drainage and soil structure, but it also prevents access to the countryside, as louping over deep-ploughed ridges is tedious- to- dangerous and stumbling around dollops is equally “challenging”. But one of the worst results is the total unsuitability of many of the species – planted in accordance with an off-the-peg forestry “mix” (hawthorne/ alder/birch/rowan/oak/willow) regardless of the terrain. Thus I have seen species-rich wet grassland planted with rowan/ hawthorn in the mix and upland heather moorland planted with willow / alder/ hawthorn. The stupidity stuns!

But crucially the topic of invasive sitka (I digressed) is significant and important.

Once upon a time (in 2016) I tried to ask the question in particular with regard to sitka invasion on Conic Hill at Balmaha. SNH – as it was – and now Natscot (who- ever thought up that glottal stopping ti-

tle?) - guardian of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2012 managed to evade or fudge the issue until I gave up. Finally a kindly person in the Forestry Commission (as it was – now Forest and Land Scotland) pointed out that it was because Sitka is a commercial crop and thus exempt from the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2012. I had wanted to know if the owners of adjacent forestry plantation could be held responsible for removing invasive sitka outwith their plantation – as they would have been if it was rhododendron ponticum or Himalayan balsam.

So there you are... if you can make money out of it it's just fine to cover the landscape with a non-native invasive species. Only if no-one profits from it is it an offence.

[The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2012 makes it an offence to plant, or otherwise cause to grow, a plant in the wild at a location outside its native range]....unless of course it is sitka or Norway spruce or any other profitable species. Look out too for Western hemlock which self-seeds remarkably well.

As a result of writing this I did a bit of Googling and found an awful lot of white-washing on sitka spruce – even on websites of organisations which should know better! Only Sinn Fein seems to be standing up against it! There seems to be a growing and vocal opposition to sitka plantations in Ireland. If only we could get one here! It is the phone mast saga all over and the underlying factor is grabbing money from grants. It is just that “carbon capture” replaces “connectivity”!

Clare Darlaston, Glasgow



Invasive Sitka on Conic Hill, November 2016



We Urgently Need Your Help to Protect Todrig and Whitslaid



The Upper Alewater Conservation Group and Lilliesleaf, Ashkirk and Midlem Community Council (LAMCC) are deeply concerned about the impacts on nature, landscape and local communities posed by proposed Sitka spruce plantations at Todrig and neighbouring Whitslaid, totalling more than **11 square kilometres**. We need community support.

We believe that as a minimum an Environmental Impact Assessment should be carried out with full community consultation – we are challenging the decision not to do so by a process of Judicial Review.

If we don't act this will lead to the permanent loss of this unique rolling moorland landscape in the Scottish Borders, which provides a natural habitat for wildlife and supports extensive ecosystems. It will be replaced with a monoculture of Sitka spruce trees with very limited biodiversity value (pictured above at Stoba).

Assisted by Restore Nature, the community have now been successful in gaining permission by the Lord Ordinary for a judicial review – we urgently need your help to proceed with this case – Please scan the QR code or google Todrig, Judicial review to visit the Crowdfunder site. Funds raised go only to pay the required legal fees.



Northern brown Argus Butterfly- classified 'Vulnerable'



Black Grouse – 'red listed'

CAMP | HIKE | RUN | PADDLE | CLIMB | BIKE | SKI | BOOT FITTING



Geared up for the outdoors

**Your Adventure Specialist
since 1962**

VISIT OUR STORES IN
ABERDEEN | AVIEMORE | DUNDEE | EDINBURGH
GLASGOW | INVERNESS | PERTH

f @tisoonline

IMAGE @EDDIEFITZ7

Membership request

I wish to join SWLG: Individual £10 Two at same address £15
 Corporate £50 Reduced £5 (Senior Citizen, unwaged, under 18)

Name (s):

Address:

.....

..... Postcode:

E-mail:

I wish to pay by Standing Order and have set this up with my bank online

I wish to pay by Standing Order and have filled in the form below

I wish to pay by cheque (Please make payable to SWLG and send it along with this form)

I have included an additional donation to the Scottish Wild Land Group of £

I would like to receive free copies of Wild Land News:

By e-mail (this helps us keep our printing, postage and carbon footprint costs to a minimum)

By post

By completing and returning this form you are agreeing that the Scottish Wild Land Group can hold the above information on its database for use by the organisation only; the information will not be divulged to third parties. The Group's data protection policy is on its website: www.swlg.org.uk

To the manager of

Please pay SWLG the sum of £ annually until further notice, starting on

Please debit my account: Sort code: Account number

This supersedes any existing order in favour of SWLG

Signed Date

FOR BANK USE: Payee sort code: 83-15-18 Account no.: 00257494

Gift Aid your subscription

If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase the value of your subscription to the SWLG by 25% by Gift Aiding it. This costs you nothing. In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my subscription of £ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to the Scottish Wild Land Group.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signed Date

Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, or if you change your address, or if you no longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains. If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you should include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please post this form to: Tim Ambrose, SWLG Treasurer, 8 Clevedon Road, Glasgow G12 0NT

Join us, share in our work and help to protect Scotland's wild land



Scottish Wild Land Group

Working to protect Scotland's species, environment and landscapes



The objects of the Group are:

- (a) To promote the conservation of wild land in Scotland;
- (b) To promote public awareness of the problems facing wild land in Scotland;
- (c) To promote and encourage the implementation of good planning policies;
- (d) To co-operate with other bodies to promote the foregoing objects.

We campaign for:

- ✓ Protection and promotion of Scotland's wild land
- ✓ Safeguards against inappropriate wind farm and other developments
- ✓ Environmentally-sensitive land and wildlife management
- ✓ Planning controls on the spread of hill tracks
- ✓ Restoration of rare and missing species and environments
- ✓ Connection of habitats and protected areas to allow ecological recovery and species movements

We are Scotland's oldest and only volunteer-run wild land charity

SWLG is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, number SC051654

Join us today at www.swlg.org.uk



Find us on facebook