

# Growing & Harvesting Food in Community Woodlands Seminar Report

Torridon 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013



## Synopsis:

As part of the CWA Enterprising Woods project, CWA brought together community woodlands, crofters, forest gardeners, foragers and other experts to deliver a 2 day seminar covering growing and harvesting food in community woodlands. With an increasing number of community woodland groups working in partnership to create community gardens and allotments, polytunnels and community composting schemes the aim was to consider what groups could do to look at food production, what edible plants are already growing/ to grow in woodlands and how to add value or develop enterprise opportunities.

## Seminar Objectives:

The objective of this seminar was to introduce and explore options and opportunities for growing food in and around community woodlands. Topics covered permaculture, forest crofting, forest gardening, foraging, adding value to your products, developing enterprise and site visits. There was plenty of time for networking, sharing ideas and experiences and a key focus was to look at what happens next.

This seminar was for people involved in community woodlands, food growing, foraging, woodland management and using edible products. The aim was to bring people together from across the community woodlands sector to explore and to create links and actions for groups which will in turn generate further training / support requirements – either via CWA or other support agencies / business mentors etc

The aim was for participants to leave feeling inspired, brimming with ideas and the knowledge of what to do next in order to develop their ideas.

## Location:

The seminar was based at Torridon Community Centre, Wester Ross.

## Programme:

### Friday 26<sup>th</sup> April

7.00pm – 10.00pm

*Arrival at Torridon Community Centre*

An informal session for those arriving the evening before. We will be showing films, the bar will be open and bring an instrument if you wish.

### Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April

9.30am

*Arrival, teas and coffees*

10.00am

Welcome – Diane Oliver, Community Woodlands Association

A Forest Crofting Experience – Les Bates, Croft 7

10.15am

Woodland Wild Foods – Emma Chapman, Scottish Wild Harvest Association

10.45am

Forest Gardening – Alan Carter, Reforesting Scotland

11.15am

*Tea and coffee break*

11.45am

Adding Value, Storing and Preserving Produce – Sheila Wickens

12.15pm

Community Growing for Health and Wellbeing – Hugh Fife, Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise

1.00pm

*Lunch*

2.00 – 5.30pm

Site Visits

- Wester Alligin – Alligin Willows and Community Crofters Pick your Own Field
- Torridon - Croft 7

7.00pm

*Dinner at the Community Centre – must be booked in advance*

### Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April

9.30am

*Arrival, teas and coffees*

10.00am

Plenary Workshop

11.00am – 12.30pm

Site Visit to Torridon Hotel Kitchen Garden and Policy Woodland

12.30pm

*Lunch at Torridon Inn (not included)*



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## Those Involved:

### Speakers

- Les Bates Croft 7
- Alan Carter Reforesting Scotland
- Emma Chapman Scottish Wild Harvest Association
- Sheila Wickens
- Colin Blyth Alligin Willows
- Diane Oliver Community Woodland Association

### Delegates

- Andy Robinson North West Mull Community Woodland Company
- Mike Ellis Helmsdale Woodlanders
- Rona Ellis Helmsdale Woodlanders
- Laura Brickell Evanton Community Wood
- Jill Matthews Bailies of Banachie/ Reforesting Scotland
- Jorine van Delft Culag Community Woodland Trust
- Sandra Hogg Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust
- George Hogg Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust
- Davie Walker Taynuilt Organic Growers
- Andy Barbour CWA member and Glasgow Permaculture
- Kat Hume CWA member
- Cathy Fife Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
- Sheila Bates Croft 7/ Reforesting Scotland
- Thomas Kilbride Applecross Community Company
- Lesley Kilbride Applecross Community Company
- Jill Matthews Bailies of Banachie/ Reforesting Scotland
- Beth Alder Laggan Forest Trust
- George Alder Laggan Forest Trust
- Ann Barton Sheildaig

Photographs from the seminar can be found on the **CWA Flickr site** at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjEWhEmP>



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## Friday 26<sup>th</sup> April:

This was an informal session for those who were traveling long distances and arriving on the Friday evening. Croft 7 provided soups and snacks and the Community Centre opened their bar. In keeping with the theme of the weekend the soups were made from Jerusalem Artichokes cultivated and harvested from the croft and foraged nettles and herbs.

A couple of films were shown in the background:

- **My Life as a Turkey** - One man's remarkable experience of raising a group of wild turkey hatchlings to adulthood. Some clips from the film are available online at [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0133r58](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0133r58)
- **Farm for the Future** - Wildlife film maker Rebecca Hosking investigates how to transform her family's farm in Devon into a low energy farm for the future, and discovers that nature holds the key. It is available online at <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/farm-for-the-future/>

## Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April:

### Welcome – Diane Oliver, CWA

Diane welcomed everyone to Loch Torricon Community Centre and the Seminar. She explained that the purpose of the seminar was to bring together people who specialise in growing and harvesting food and community woodland groups to share ideas and explore opportunities for growing and harvesting food in community woodlands. CWA hopes that more workshops and follow up work will follow from this seminar.

### A Forest Crofting Experience – Les Bates, Croft 7

This presentation can be viewed online at <http://youtu.be/lc1pF8dJdgY>

Les has been in Scotland for many years experimenting on his journey of growing and is a long standing member of Reforesting Scotland and a founding director of the CWA. Croft 7 is a family micro business and is online at [www.croft7.com](http://www.croft7.com). During his journey to date, Les has planted his own productive gardens based on permaculture and forest gardening principles, re-developed a Victorian walled garden supplying a 3 AA rosette restaurant as well as assisting with the development and running of community woodlands and community orchards. His presentation shared his experiences from all these activities.

With community ownership of land in Scotland at around 3% (which is only slightly lower than 'other than private' ownership), community owned land presents a vital opportunity in terms of growing local food and produce. In woodland groups sustainability is important, as is finding ways to engage and involve people of all ages, especially younger generations. Not all community woodland groups will want to grow food, however, all will likely have the opportunity to have food within their woodland.

Les highlighted the work of Ben Law who has been developing food growing systems and forage routes as part of a forest dwelling lifestyle. Woodland crofts are slowly being developed in Scotland and more information is available on the website [www.woodlandcrofts.org](http://www.woodlandcrofts.org). North West Mull Community Woodland Company is the first community woodland to develop land for woodland crofts and Andy Robinson, one of the woodland crofters added that he will be writing about his experiences on his blog at [www.woodlandcrofter.wordpress.com](http://www.woodlandcrofter.wordpress.com).



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Les shared examples of produce from his own forest garden which include Japanese wine berry, red filbert nuts, medlars, cherry plums etc. He emphasised the importance of growing open flowers (not double/closed ones) for bees and pollination. There are opportunities to include forest layering into community orchards by planting blueberries, quince, sea buckthorn etc. Blueberries and strawberries are a good way to start as many people enjoy them. Preventing loss of crops from pests has resulted in the use of pesticides, herbicides etc and this has had a detrimental result on bumblebees and other important insects. If an abundance is grown – one of the aims of using permaculture and forest gardening principles – then some produce can 'afford' to be 'lost' to pests, some shared and some sold on to recoup costs.

## Woodland Wild Foods – Emma Chapman, Scottish Wild Harvest Association

This presentation can be viewed online at [http://youtu.be/IHn\\_rEARqjA](http://youtu.be/IHn_rEARqjA)

Emma introduced collecting wild food as a great way to connect people to the woods, very beautiful to look at and full of flavour. It is a high grade luxury food and not just about survival. There is however, no such thing as 'food for free' and Emma went on to explain how to be careful and ensure sustainable harvesting by looking for plants that are abundant, leaving fruits and flowers to set seed and taking only what you need (nothing worse than a bowl of brambles going mouldy in the fridge because too much was harvested to eat/ process). It is important too, not to rely on regular abundance as not every year is the same, ie this year there has been a cold spring and everything is much later including the nettles which are usually very abundant by now. Each time, look for the abundant things, eg a mass of edible fungi and take only what you can use.

Ways of enhancing woodlands to encourage wild foods include utilising clear fell areas which have flowers (eg rosebay willowherb) emerging by placing bee hives in the area, introducing native wild foods eg garlic – into suitable areas, keep cutting back nettles to encourage fresh young growth, consider larger species which might benefit from some management ie American crayfish which is an invasive non-native. Again – be careful not to create too much demand if you take this forward commercially – especially if you are 'removing' non-natives.

If your woodland is a 'wild' area then attention must be paid to the WANE Act - Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011- more info at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents/enacted> which specifies what can/can't be planted in the wild. There are plenty of natives though including elder, rowan, wild garlic and redcurrant which could be planted in appropriate areas. Foraging for commercial purposes requires the landowner's permission, foraging for domestic use doesn't (unless you're uprooting plants, which always requires the landowner's permission) and where the community is the landowner this can change the dynamics as the local community can make the decisions. Food production can be incorporated into your group's woodland management plan.

The Scottish Wild Harvest Association can be found online at [www.scottishwildharvests.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildharvests.org.uk)

## Forest Gardening – Alan Carter, Reforesting Scotland

This presentation can be viewed online at [http://youtu.be/9I\\_RBLVjrzs](http://youtu.be/9I_RBLVjrzs)

Forest gardening is a system of cultivation and Alan's presentation was based on his own experience. The system mimics forest structure and the productive woodland edge with the aim being to fill all the niches and a key feature is the diversity. Alan ran through a variety of plants suitable for different situations. A forest garden works best if you are able to visit it on a regular basis – there will generally always be something ready to harvest and it helps prevent the 'glut' feature of growing annual fruit and vegetables in a more traditional style.



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The forest structure is based on high forest with closed canopy – most of the action here is 40feet up; gaps letting more light into an area; glades – creating an area of almost permanent sunlight and forest edge – the link with open heathland. The idea with this form of growing is to fill all the niches – a forest garden is moderately self-maintaining and a lot less weeding than traditional monoculture once it is established. A key feature of forest gardening is the diversity and range of plants – salads picked from a forest garden can contain 20 different varieties of plants.

Alan outlined a range of the plants he grows in his small scale forest garden which is in a council allotment in Aberdeen. He has found that the allotment is still as productive as it was before he started using forest gardening principles but now it is a total wildlife haven, with a greater variety of plants. His blog 'Of Plums and Pignuts' contains a list of plants grown at his allotment plus lots of other information - <http://scottishforestgarden.wordpress.com/>

## Adding Value, Storing and Preserving Produce – Sheila Wickens

Shelia brought a variety of tasty treats for folks to try as well as a range of relevant books and her dehydrator. Preserving and storing food enables you to overcome some of the issues presented when you do have a glut of produce. When thinking about what to preserve and what to grow consider what you like to eat, do you have space in your garden/ allotment/ growing area to produce an abundance of something or should you grow less of one thing/ more of another/ more of a range? Preserving also allows you to benefit from years which are great for one thing eg damsons - they may not fruit profusely again for a few years. It also ensures that you know what you are eating.

Preserving is a great way of adding value to produce and the results make great gifts. Sheila provided detailed handouts which covered jams, chutney, drying and bottling; freezing and storing; recipes (including the one for making mango style chutney from plums); and starting wine making.



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## Community Growing for Health and Wellbeing – Hugh Fife, Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise

This presentation can be viewed online at <http://youtu.be/GSW7FEFD8oA>

Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise (BWE) is based at the Argyll & Bute Hospital which celebrates 150 years this year and is surrounded by policy woods with a new community hospital across the road and within easy walking distance from the centre of Lochgilphead. BWE manages the woodlands on behalf of the NHS for the benefit of patients, the local community and general public. Initially their main focus was to work with people suffering from poor mental health and they now also work with outreach clients, criminal justice services, dementia patients and the wider community with lots of open days and guided walks. The team also now take on contracts eg pathwork for the local authority and other organisations. Making compost is also a core activity – recycling cardboard and non-sensitive shredded papers from the hospital, leaf litter, grass cuttings etc.

Another of the key activities at BWE is growing plants for sale and to plant in the wood. The site was planted in the 1860s and is home to a wide range of natives and exotics and the team collect seeds and plants from across the woods. BWE has access to wider woods where they can gather hazel nuts – they find that most of the people gathering the nuts have never eaten a wild hazel nut before – so they eat a few, plant a few and have since replanted out seedlings. BWE encourage local people to come along to open days and participate in guided foraging walks, drink currant juice made from blackcurrant bushes from the woods and eat apple jam (again from apple trees in the woods) on pancakes. The fruit bushes and trees are remnants from when the hospital had its own farm and produce gardens – these were worked by residents of the hospital – this could be argued as slave labour but in reality it gave people a purpose and a reason to be outside. BWE aim to recapture the benefits without the slave labour aspect ☺

BWE now has access to some field space to experiment with growing Argyll provenance potatoes and are currently researching old farming practices. A horse team will be along in the near future to remove timber and then plough the area for potatoes. Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise can be found online at <http://www.blarbuiewoodland.org> and [www.facebook.com/pages/Blarbuie-Woodland-Enterprise/305698996135299?fref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Blarbuie-Woodland-Enterprise/305698996135299?fref=ts) /

### Site Visits:

#### Alligin Willows – Colin Blyth

Colin explained the history of the site – which began with hens and egg production and willow and has now moved solely to willow cuttings. Colin sells rods both locally and across the wider area mostly for hedging and windbreaks. He does have some willow for basketry but it is mainly Viminalis that he grows. Alligin Willows are online at [www.alliginwillows.com](http://www.alliginwillows.com)





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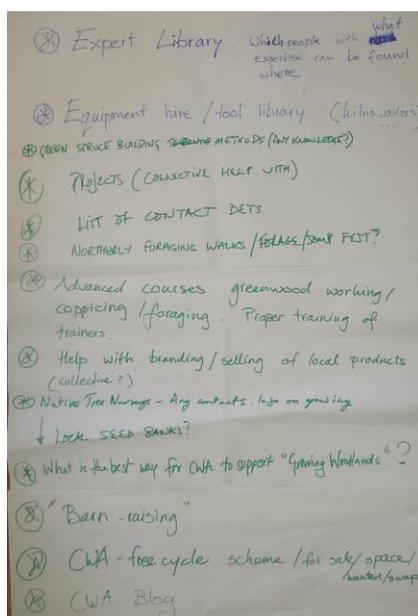
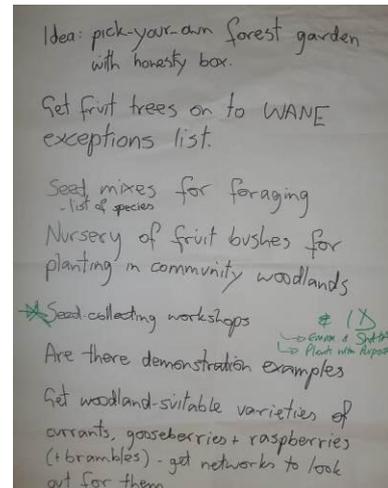
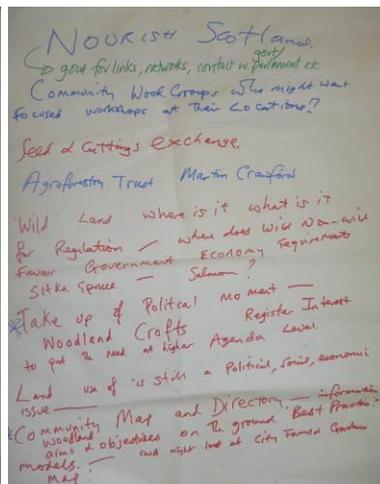
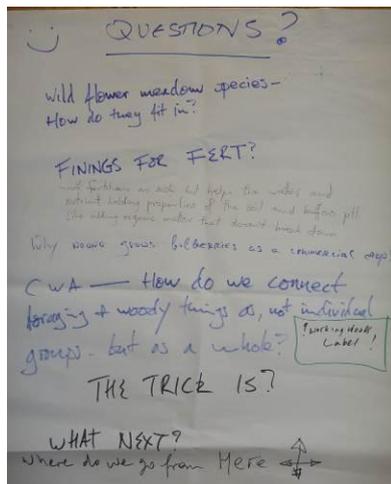


To date he has created raised beds, planted fruit trees and bushes and a nursery for other plants. One end is used for poultry and is waterlogged so they are encouraging wetland wildflowers with ponds down outside the chicken and duck pens.



## Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April: Plenary Workshop

The group gathered to discuss ideas and questions from the weekend's presentations and site visits. See flip charts below for more info.



One of the key points to arise was lack of demonstration and example sites. It was agreed that focus should be placed on developing sites and mapping any information out there.

Actions and ideas for follow up included:

- Making the most of training courses – eg proposed SWHA/SWT ID training – link for CWA members, more links with the Nourish Scotland training programme
- Emma handed round leaflets about the Scottish Working Woods Label (more info on [www.scottishworkingwoods.org.uk](http://www.scottishworkingwoods.org.uk))
- Laura offered to undertake research visits and produce write ups
- Monimail Tower Project could be a potential example site
- There is a hazel nut producing site near the Apptreeman nursery
- Photos of the fruit bushes growing in Culag woods



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## Feedback:

All were satisfied by the location, catering, organisation and facilities on offer rating all of these as 'very good' or 'good' with one exception of 'fair' for organisation, catering and site visits. All participants felt the event met their expectations.

### *Delegates wanted to attend the seminar because:*

- I was invited to speak on preserving and 'growing and harvesting' is a topic close to my heart
- To learn about possible opportunities for the Trust to develop in Ullapool
- To discuss ideas about developing community-owned forest land
- To learn about possibilities for community woodlands
- To meet people interested in similar things and doing similar projects in Scotland
- Want to encourage more local food growing
- Putting across our own message of mental health and health and wellbeing to others and learning from others about planting and growing
- To learn about growing non timber things/ products in woods
- To meet likeminded people for inspiration
- Find out more about the Community Woodlands Association, see the area around Torriddon and learn from people making a living from woodlands
- Connect with likeminded people
- To further my understanding of the topics
- Interested in wild foods growing in a 'managed' environment
- Meet people, improve skills and gain knowledge
- Long standing interest
- To pursue forest gardening in plans for my own eventual woodland croft
- To find out more about the working of the CWA

### *Delegates felt that they gained the following benefits:*

- Lots of new information and sharing of enthusiasm, lighting a spark and firming ideas for activities in own woods
- Networking with likeminded people and visiting sites of people who are already doing some of the ideas promoted
- A better understanding
- Connected with likeminded people
- Met some amazing people, great experience, great ideas, some cuttings from rare edible plants which I hope to grow in the permaculture harvest
- Networking
- Meeting people from other groups
- Great shared learning experience and learning opportunity
- Meeting new people and inspiration for my woodland croft
- Many ideas, sources of information and people contacts
- Lots of ideas, information and contacts
- Inspired by other speakers and their experiences, happy, feel good gathering of likeminded folk
- Broader awareness
- Seeing everyone again, new connections, jam session!
- More opportunities for discussion

### *Delegates will use their skills, ideas and experience gained by:*

- Discussing them with colleagues and my local community garden group
- Passing them on and implementing in own woods and garden
- Using them in my own life and sharing with those interested locally
- Planting up on my own land
- Encouraging more local food growing
- Forming my own permaculture group to open stalled spaces, considering crofts offered by the Crofting Federation in the Torriddon area
- Too early to say
- Obtain and plant a cherry plum
- Expanding our ideas for food growing within our woodland
- Continuing to engage with participants where possible
- Lots of information about growing plants in woodland environment
- Reporting and feeding back to Laggan Forest Trust
- Continuing with ongoing network
- Share with my local community wood, incorporate into personal future plans
- Put them into practice



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*Delegates would like CWA to:*

- Follow up in other parts of Scotland
- Courses about growing fruit in woodlands with more detailed advice
- Create a directory/ mapping of what woodlands are doing, want to do, aims and objectives
- Focus toward CWA groups that want to take up food growing and harvesting in their moods – models
- Practical workshops at community woods already growing and producing
- I could write an essay about this – not enough space!
- Networking
- Encourage more dialogue between likeminded groups local/ national – RS, SWHA etc to establish more edible woodland options
- More in depth courses on the subject
- Hold more networking events, more advanced courses, 'intranet blog' for online discussions/ networking
- Hands-on courses on the subjects that were spoken about (foraging, forest gardening enhancing forests)
- More advanced courses
- Permaculture, other economic opportunities for community woodlands
- Annual gathering
- A map of who is doing what and where
- Pursue the WANE exceptions
- Identification of woodland plants, edible and otherwise
- Seed collection of trees/ flowers/ shrubs/ fruit species for woodland

*Delegates would recommend others to take place in a similar event, because:*

- Very informative
- Enables grass roots involvement
- Brilliant venue, great people
- CWA networking and events are very important in helping groups develop
- Shared experience, learning
- Much to learn
- It's always good to exchange ideas with like minds
- To learn who is doing what and how

*Other comments included:*

- Les needed a longer slot in the programme!
- It would have been good to see all sites listed in the programme. Keeping to time for the sessions in the morning would have been great too , just so that speakers didn't need to rush/ leave bits out
- It could have been longer – scope for more depth
- More choice in the evening meal – it was not great value
- Nice friendly relaxed atmosphere, loads of encouragement and great ideas. Amazing location!
- A need to control time of speakers - Timekeeping could've been better
- Good to have a blank canvas to work on – no large projects in very local area
- Varied and informative
- Seminars were well prepared, thought out, challenging and inspiring. Well done to all
- I would be interested in actual examples of people/ groups growing food in woodlands

