



Scots pine overlooking Loch Affric, Glen Affric National Nature Reserve

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REWILDING SCOTLAND

One million trees and counting: celebrating 25 years of eco-restoration

This year, Trees for Life – one of Scotland’s leading conservation volunteering charities – celebrates its 25th anniversary. Described by the writer George Monbiot as “the most ambitious rewilding project in the UK”, the award-winning charity aims to restore the ancient Caledonian Forest to the west of Loch Ness and Inverness to a wilderness area of 1,000 square miles. The Caledonian Forest is Scotland’s equivalent of a rainforest. It once covered much of the Highlands, in a wild landscape of mountains, lochs and rivers. But following centuries of deforestation, only a fraction of the original forest survives. Through its reforestation project, Trees for Life hopes to reverse this trend.

Since 1989, Trees for Life has now planted more than a million trees, and it has pledged to establish a million more, through planting and natural regeneration, by 2018. Already volunteers have created 10,000 acres of new forest, and in these emerging habitats a complex web of life is renewing itself.

“We are the last generation with the opportunity to restore this special place and its unique wildlife,” says Trees for Life’s Executive Director, Alan Watson Featherstone. “We have a chance to re-establish world-class wild landscapes in Scotland that are rich in wildlife.” This habitat restoration is making a huge difference to the special wildlife of the

Caledonian Forest, including the strawberry spider, red squirrel, osprey, wood ant and black grouse.

One area that is particularly rich in biodiversity is Dundreggan Conservation Estate, Trees for Life’s flagship forest-restoration project in Glen Moriston. Bought by the charity in 2008, Dundreggan has been described as a “lost world” because of its huge range of rare and endangered species discovered. Biodiversity surveys carried out there in recent years have revealed almost 70 priority species for conservation, as listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and 10 species that had never been recorded in the UK before. One of those species, the sawfly *Nematus pseudodispar*, is extremely rare throughout the whole of Europe.

The Caledonian Forest is Scotland’s equivalent of a rainforest

But this project is not just about places and wildlife – it’s about people, too. The charity’s reforestation work is carried out almost entirely by volunteers, with opportunities for people from all backgrounds to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of positive activity in a natural environment. Volunteers can become involved by joining a Conservation Week – voted one of the Top 10 Conservation Holidays worldwide by *BBC Wildlife* magazine in 2009 – or a Conservation Day. Some activities are specially designed to benefit disadvantaged people, such as those with mental health or mobility problems.

As well as helping to restore Scotland's natural environment and addressing global deforestation, volunteers have a chance to learn new skills and gain knowledge and confidence in carrying out ecological restoration work – through planting trees, removing non-native species or conducting biodiversity surveys. Spending a week among the forests and mountains of the Highlands often touches people profoundly, and volunteers frequently report a sense of fulfilment that comes from knowing their work will bear fruit long after their lifetime. Natalie Allain, who volunteered in Glen Affric, said: “My experience volunteering with Trees for Life was nothing but positive. I have come away with a new love for the Scottish Highlands, a heightened respect for the majesty of trees and some great new friends.”

Trees for Life also offers the opportunity for families, groups and organisations to sponsor groves of trees, celebrate births, weddings and other special occasions, or offset carbon emissions. As we go to press, the welcome news is that Trees for Life has just been awarded £50,000 as part of the People's Millions lottery funding.

www.treesforlife.org.uk

With thanks to Penny Bunting for this article.



Planting at Dundreggan by Emma Gilmartin

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THAILAND'S GREEN ISLAND

Redressing the impacts of tourism

It's always distressing when visiting some of the world's most beautiful holiday destinations to find that the very things you've come to see – the rainforests, coral lagoons and seascapes – have been devastated by the tourism industry. It's often the case that a short walk from the glossily advertised 'pristine' beaches there are roadside rubbish tips where plastic waste is discarded or burned, lakes and rivers that are polluted and infested with litter, and rampant deforestation continuing unabated to make way for yet more villas and swimming pools.

Koh Samui, located in the Gulf of Thailand, is a case in point. It is one of the country's most popular tourist destinations, with over a million people visiting the tiny island each year, but it has struggled to balance the impact of tourism with the conservation of its abundant natural assets. With increasing visitor numbers, Koh Samui has experienced incredible strains on its local infrastructure and natural resources, prompting concerns over resource scarcity, most notably water, and reliance on an energy supply from the Thai mainland. However, Koh Samui Municipality is determined to address these issues, and recently it took action to move beyond the unsustainable

development practices of the past by launching an exciting and ambitious initiative to transform the island into Asia's foremost sustainable tourism destination.

The Green Samui initiative is being masterminded and fast-tracked by the mayor of Koh Samui, Ramnate Chaikwang, who values the economic and social benefits of environmental sustainability. “We recognise the importance of clean energy, sustainable transportation, waste management and water efficiency to our island and our economy,” he says, adding: “We ... expect to be able to assist other key locations around the Kingdom of Thailand once our work is complete, helping to show them the way forward.”

The Municipality will develop 'roadmaps' in the four key areas of waste management, water management, sustainable transport and energy. These will provide Koh Samui City Council with prioritised actions and timelines for delivery, paving the way for the creation of a truly sustainable infrastructure over the coming decade, with many of these improvements expected within two years.

This visionary approach signals a much-needed shift in tourism in Thailand, an undoubtedly beautiful country that is sadly at risk of becoming a victim of its own success.

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