

## News Release

### The demise of Scottish gin?

### Prize-giving proves tonic as Holyrood is alerted to the plight of the Juniper bush

#### How old is the oldest Juniper recorded in Britain?

Tony King, researcher for Scott Barrie MSP, knew that the answer to this Scottish Environment Week quiz is 255 years old. He will be presented with his prize – a bottle of gin – by the Deputy Minister for the Environment on Thursday 22 February at the Scottish Parliament.

Plantlife Scotland, the national branch of the leading UK charity working to protect wild plants, **launched a report on the stark decline of Juniper** during Scottish Environment Week with a competition to win a bottle of gin - aromatic Juniper berries provide the flavouring for gin.

**Scotland is the UK stronghold for Juniper** but the Plantlife report confirms that even here, Juniper is dying out because so many of the surviving populations are too old to regenerate. **Almost 70% of the 44,000 bushes surveyed by Plantlife volunteers** last year were identified as 'mature' or 'old', with only 5% classified as 'seedlings' and 25% young plants. The lack of seedlings and young plants is of particular concern and factors such as land use changes, including afforestation, excessive burning and changes in grazing habits are contributing to the plant's long-term decline.

Dr. Deborah Long, Conservation Officer at Plantlife Scotland and Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Biodiversity Task Force said: '**Juniper is an important part of our landscape and culture and one of only three native conifers to Britain, along with Yew and Scot's Pine.** At Plantlife we are doing all we can to conserve remaining populations and to find ways to secure its long-term future in Scotland. The 236 volunteers who carried out the survey have confirmed how serious the current threat to juniper is. Because juniper is a long-lived shrub, **bushes may be recorded for a long time but they are, unfortunately, in many cases functionally extinct.**'

In the past, juniper berries have been used for medicinal purposes to treat a variety of conditions including warts, gout and kidney infections. It was **once thought that a handful of berries kept in the mouth would prevent infection of the bubonic plague.** They have also been used in cooking to flavour venison, beef and cabbage. Nowadays, Juniper is most famous for flavouring gin, however the low economic and cultural value of juniper, compared to the past, is thought to be another factor in its decline in Scotland.

#### Editors' Notes

(1) Sarah Boyack MSP will present Tony King with his prize at 11.30am in the Garden Lobby of the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday 22 February. **PRESS ARE WELCOME:** to obtain a media pass contact the Scottish Parliament media office: Tel: 0131 348 5000

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- (2) **The Plantlife Juniper Report** is available online from the Plantlife Scotland website. Go to: <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/plantlife-scotland-publications.html>
- (3) **Scottish Environment Week** took place from the 5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> February in the Scottish Parliament. The gin competition ran all week as part of the Scottish Environment LINK exhibition in the Garden Lobby. Go to: [http://www.scotlink.org/LINK\\_action/environment\\_week.php](http://www.scotlink.org/LINK_action/environment_week.php)
- (4) **Scottish Environment LINK** is the network for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations. LINK has 36 member organisations spanning interests across the natural environment and associated cultural heritage and supported by around 500,000 people. Further information on LINK is available at [www.scotlink.org](http://www.scotlink.org)

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