



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Still Delivering the Goods

Case Study 14



PLANNED

Saving Morvern's Rainforest Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest



Photo: Colin Prior

Read the full report, with the 15 case studies here:

<https://www.scotlink.org/publication/still-delivering-the-goods/>



Background

This is one of a number of projects being co-ordinated and promoted by the **Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest**, a voluntary partnership of more than 20 organisations that are all committed to collaborative action for the temperate rainforest habitat found along the west coast. Led by RSPB Scotland, this project aims to enhance and restore important areas of rainforest on the Morvern peninsula, one of the most defensible and practical areas in Scotland for large scale rhododendron eradication.

The Morvern peninsula is an area of land of around 200 square miles which is bounded by Loch Sunart, the Sound of Mull and Loch Linnhe. This means that if rhododendron is cleared, it will be difficult for it to re-invade. This project will demonstrate best practice for clearing this invasive species with the scale and long-term maintenance required to produce long-lasting results.

Morvern's supportive community and forward-thinking landowners also provide a positive environment in which to apply grazing measures to enable woodland expansion. The ethos of this project is to bring local benefits, with the aim of locally employed project and eradication teams, generating eight direct new jobs, as well as promoting the rainforest as a visitor destination. Overall, the project represents a great model for green recovery – restoration of habitat and sustainable local livelihoods.



Project aims

The project will:

- Create a shared vision for the restoration and enhancement of Morvern's rainforest using an ecological network approach that helps plan and target conservation action.
- Create four new posts to deliver habitat improvements, project management and administration, locally employed by RSPB Scotland.
- Eradicate *Rhododendron ponticum* from target Special Areas for Conservation (SACs), as well as the wider landscape and buffer zones around these sites via a locally based works team of four (additional to those above), which will provide training opportunities and the potential to leave a legacy enterprise.
- Provide information and support for appropriate grazing management that allows woodland restoration and creation.
- Improve the resilience of the rainforest habitat through woodland expansion and connection, including establishing a local tree nursery.
- Inspire people living in and visiting Morvern about the rainforest through a programme of interpretation, citizen science and arts activities.
- Carry out engagement activities with local communities and schools, including youth training (such as a trainee post each year) and dissemination of culturally based folklore.
- Be part of Scotland's 'Green Recovery' – providing rural jobs and involving local people with the aim of securing a legacy that sustains nature as well as local economic benefits.



Project Timescale

On the ground implementation is anticipated to start in August 2021 and continue until June 2026.



SBS Objectives

The aims from the *2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity*:

1

To protect and restore biodiversity on land and in our seas, and to support healthier ecosystems.

Scotland's rainforest is an international important habitat, for its assemblages of lichens and bryophytes. This project focusses on two SACs which contain globally rare epiphytic lichens, restricted in the UK to this part of Scotland. However, both SACs are in unfavourable condition due to the threats that are prevalent across the remaining 30,000ha of this habitat type: primarily invasive species and herbivore impact. This project will be an exemplar of how to restore this habitat.

2

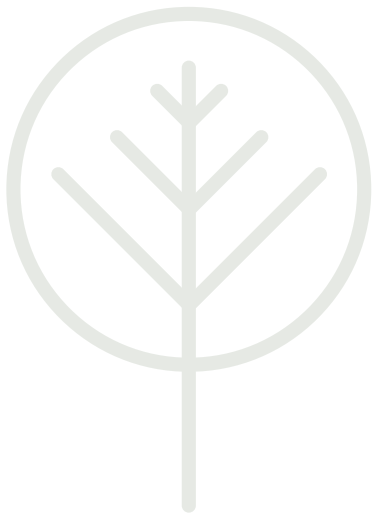
To connect people with the natural world, for their health and wellbeing and to involve them more in decisions about their environment.

Interpretation will promote the special nature of temperate rainforests and allow people to access them in a sensitive way. Work with the community and schools on cultural stories, songs, poems, and artworks will create a rainforest resource based around folklore (past and present). Free advice to landowners will enable them to assess the best way to address issues for their woodlands. Traineeships and voluntary opportunities will provide further connections to nature.

3

To maximise the benefits for Scotland of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

Saving Morvern's Rainforest has been identified as a priority project for the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest. This is a flagship project for the Alliance, its first landscape scale rainforest restoration project. The legacy aspect of a community based post-project works team will illustrate local sustainable green growth.



Project Summary

Saving Morvern's Rainforest is a £3.8 million project led by RSPB Scotland which aims to enhance and restore rainforest habitat on the Morvern peninsula, focussing on Special Areas of Conservation. Temperate rainforest is a globally important habitat, and Scotland has the best examples in all of Europe. It is an Annex 1 habitat under the Habitats Directive.

As well as restoring rainforest habitat by eradicating *Rhododendron ponticum*, encouraging natural regeneration and planting native trees, the project will also create local jobs; engage the school and local communities; improve access and understanding of rainforest habitat for local people and visitors; and work closely with land managers and community partners to ensure it has a lasting legacy, including a native tree nursery.



Climate Impacts

Restoring and expanding Scotland's rainforest is a nature-based solution, as it provides a long-term sink for carbon; and can act as a natural system that soaks up groundwater and stabilise slopes in the face of the predicted increased intensity of rainfall within the area. Carbon storage within the native woodland created/restored will offer a large, long-term forest carbon store through the planting/regeneration of slow-growing deciduous trees.

Rainforest expansion and ensured regeneration within woods will enhance the resilience of existing rainforest landscapes an important adaptation measure for its unique associations of epiphytes, delivered through its biodiversity focus on native old-growth woodlands.

A recent **report** for RSPB Scotland highlighted the benefits of good quality woodlands for climate and nature.



People Information

Direct employment: The project will create eight new posts:

- Four new posts to deliver project management and administration, habitat plans and improvements, locally employed by RSPB Scotland.
- A work party of four further posts will eradicate *Rhododendron ponticum* from target Special Areas of Conservation, as well as the wider landscape and buffer zones around these sites. The work of this team will be supplemented by contractors.

The latter posts are intended to be continued after the project finishes to leave a legacy enterprise which will ensure that the area remains rhododendron-free and has the potential to expand out in terms of rhododendron control from the core project areas. Further traineeships will provide skills and foster careers within sustainable native woodland conservation.

Wider engagement: The project also involves capacity building of local organisations/partnerships to maintain project outcomes and encourage community investment in long-term stewardship and conservation of woodlands. The project will also provide indirect benefits to the local service economy through tourism, through promotion of the rainforest through interpretation and access.



Successes and achievements

The project has yet to start. However, preparation of the project proposal and fundraising has already considerably raised awareness of the issues the project seeks to address.



Issues and challenges

The most significant challenge to date has been the securing of funding to get the project 'off the ground'. This is the third attempt to find funds to support this project – the first of which was in 2016. The more the project is delayed, the worse the rhododendron problem becomes, and the more expensive it will be to restore this globally important habitat.



Funding

Saving Morvern's Rainforest is a £3.8 million project led by RSPB Scotland, working with several partners in the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest. It has successfully reached Stage 2 in the LIFE funding bid process, and the next stage application is currently being prepared. If successful, LIFE will provide £2.3 million funding towards the project.

RSPB has committed £440,000, the maximum available in the current circumstances, and a further £560,000 has been pledged by partner organisations and others. This leaves a £500,000 gap, or £100,000 per annum over the five-year project, which needs to be filled.



Further information

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2019/05/state-of-scotlands-rainforest/>
<https://savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk/>
<https://savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk/asr-projects/saving-morverns-rainforest>