

Native Woodlands: Caledonian Pinewoods – Alexander Burnett MSP

[Red Squirrels chirping, calling and squeaking]

These shrill chirps and squeaks aren't made by a bird, but one of Scotland's iconic mammals – the red squirrel.

Hello, my name is Alexander Burnett and I am the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Aberdeenshire West, and I am also the Nature Champion for the Red Squirrel.

Red squirrels need woodlands to survive and they can be found in coniferous, broadleaved and mixed woodlands. They are also present in one of Scotland's most iconic landscapes, the Caledonian pinewoods, where Red Squirrels adapted to prise open pinecones and feed on their seeds.

Caledonian pinewoods are iconic and unique woodlands in Scotland, characterised by their dominance of Scots pines and absence of other large conifer trees. Scotland's ancient pine forests have unique structures, featuring large, dispersed veteran trees. Other tree species present in the understory below the pines can include juniper, birch, willow, rowan and aspen.

These ancient forests are not only home to the majestic pines, but also to a remarkable array of iconic species, including the black grouse, capercaillie, pine martens and Scottish wildcats, as well as rare wildflowers, like twinflowers, and lichens and fungi.

Scotland's Caledonian pinewoods are also home to a diverse array of invertebrate species. From the rare pine hoverfly and aspen hoverfly to longhorn beetles, these woodlands offer a sanctuary for insects that thrive amidst the decaying deadwood. Look closely enough and you can find the industrious Scottish wood ants building huge nest mounds out of pine needles and playing their part in the forest ecosystem.

Unfortunately, Caledonian pinewoods have greatly declined, with only a fraction of their former extent remaining. Overgrazing, tree diseases, and climate change threaten these remarkable habitats and the wildlife they support.

Most of Scotland's Caledonian pinewoods are now concentrated in a few locations, with less than 100 sites totalling around 18,000 hectares remaining, a mere fragment of their past extent. We must protect and restore these ancient woodlands to ensure that these magnificent landscapes, and the species they support, continue into the future.