



DURRELL

REVIVING DALNACARDOCH

June 2026

Durrell is pleased to present its vision for the future of Dalnacardoch. To restore nature at scale. To create healthier, more resilient ecosystems. To reconnect woodlands, peatlands, and rivers to create corridors for our native wildlife.

A place where local communities can participate in the land's management. To support thriving local communities through employment, along with conservation and land-based skills and training.

And to provide a new hub for visitors and sustainable tourism in the southwest of the Cairngorms National Park.

Dalnacardoch is a special place but not a well known one. Durrell was fortunate enough to become stewards of its 7,500 ha in 2023. Since then, we've established a comprehensive ecological and environmental baseline, engaged with local communities and begun to restore the landscape.

Our restoration strategy is to let natural processes lead wherever possible, with interventions informed by data collected through our survey and monitoring programme, working in partnership with Durrell's dedicated Science Team.

Our proposals aim to create a place where people who work on the land can live on the land, where local communities have a hub to take a part in Dalnacardoch's restoration, with sustainable tourism and visitor experiences designed to showcase nature's recovery in the National Park.

William Hawes

Programme Director, Scotland,
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Our masterplan aligns with the objectives of the three themes of the Partnership Plan (2022-2027)



Nature

- Increase native woodland cover from 1% to 22% through natural regeneration, supported by reducing deer densities to 2/km².
- Reintroduce native-breed cattle for conservation grazing in partnership with local farming businesses.
- Restore approximately 2,210 ha of degraded peatland over the next decade.
- Revive the heavily modified Edendon Water and create a river-wood corridor linking the Tay and Spey catchments, improving ecological connectivity at a landscape scale.



People

- Expand Durrell's established training academy model from Jersey to Scotland, helping to develop the next generation of conservationists, ecologists and land managers.
- To build accommodation for our staff whose jobs are tied to the land and the infrastructure required to deliver our objectives.
- To work with the community to provide tangible benefits to those local to and using the land.



Place

- To develop a visitor and interpretation centre that provides high-quality experiences, acts as a hub for learning and engagement, and gives local communities a place to meet and participate in decision-making.
- To create location-appropriate, small-scale accommodation that allows people to immerse themselves in the landscape while generating revenue to support viable, long-term employment.

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KEY

-  CNPA
-  Existing core path
-  Development opportunity area
- Potential Woodland restoration**
 -  Non-native plantation restored to peatland
 -  Non-native conversion to native woodland
 -  Existing native woodland
 -  Woodland regeneration
- Peatland restoration phasing**
 -  2025
 -  2026-2028
 -  2028-2036

A9

Dalnacardoch Forest

Allt à Chama Choire

Sronphadraig Lodge

Badhambiasht

Edendon Water

Allt Chualbh

River Garry

Loch an Dúin



Edendon Water restoration works
(See page 13)



Dalnacardoch Woods development
opportunity sites (See page 24)

About Durrell

Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust is an international conservation charity based at Jersey Zoo in the Channel Islands. Dedicated to preventing species extinctions, the organisation works globally to protect endangered wildlife through conservation breeding, habitat restoration, scientific research, and community-led conservation initiatives.

Founded in 1959 by author and conservationist Gerald Durrell, the organisation was built on a simple but powerful vision: a world of more diverse, resilient, and beautiful natural landscapes, where wildlife thrives and people feel a deeper connection to nature.

Saving species sits at the heart of Durrell's work, but its mission extends further, to recover threatened populations and restore the ecosystems on which they depend. For over sixty years, Durrell has led efforts that combine conservation science with practical action, addressing both the symptoms and drivers of biodiversity loss.

In its 2017 *Rewild Our World* strategy, Durrell identified the UK as a priority landscape for nature recovery.

Dalnacardoch represents a significant opportunity to realise this ambition: to design, implement and manage a landscape scale restoration programme grounded in science and delivered through hands on practice.

This approach brings together rigorous research, site-based conservation, and a strong commitment to education, training and advocacy. It reflects both the scale and potential of Dalnacardoch and the growing momentum – across policy, society and finance – behind large scale nature recovery.

Today, Durrell works globally to protect threatened species, restore fragile ecosystems, and train the next generation of conservationists. Through its integrated approach, Durrell seeks to reconnect people with nature and create a wilder, healthier and more colourful world where both wildlife and communities can thrive.

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Gerald Durrell at the gorilla enclosure, Jersey Zoo, late 80s, and in his office



Zoo keeper at Jersey Zoo



Pygmy hog tracking in Assam, India

About Dalnacardoch

Dalnacardoch extends approximately 7,500 hectares and lies entirely within the Cairngorms National Park. Located on the eastern side of the A9, 12 miles north of Blair Atholl it extends northwards beyond Dalnaspidal.

Historically managed as a sporting estate, the landscape has been shaped by centuries of traditional Highland land management. Characterised by an open, mountainous landscape, the holding is served by a single access track which follows the Edendon Water from the A9 to Loch an Dùin. Drained peatlands, fragmented woodlands and modified watercourses have reduced the ecological connectivity and resilience of the landscape.

Dalnacardoch is identified as a distinct landholding on the Roy Military Survey map of 1747 and has remained largely unchanged in its overall form since that time. The most notable change in land use over the past two centuries has been new forestry plantations, as evidenced in early Ordnance Survey mapping from 1830s.

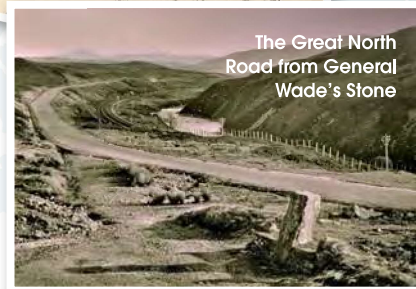
Statutory environmental designations are primarily located in the north-western part of the estate and include the Drumochter Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These designations recognise a high-altitude plateau landscape incised by steep sided corries and stream gullies. The areas are of particular ecological importance for its well-developed montane habitats, which support a diverse range of vegetation communities,



including several nationally rare plant species, as well as populations of Arctic and upland breeding bird species.

Dalnacardoch also contains features of wider historic importance, including Wade's Stone. Erected in 1729 by General Wade, this monument commemorates the construction of approximately 250 miles of military roads and 40 bridges linking key locations including Perth, Inverness, Stirling, Fort William and Fort Augustus during the 1720s and 1730s. Originally positioned on the east side of the historic road, the stone was subsequently relocated during the construction of the modern A9 to avoid its placement within the northbound carriageway.

Given its strategic location within the Cairngorms National Park and its proximity to the A9 transport corridor, Dalnacardoch presents a significant opportunity for nature-based restoration and conservation led development. The site offers potential for the application of Durrell's internationally recognised expertise in scientific research and evidence-based ecological restoration within a UK context.



**7,500
hectares**
Area of Dalnacardoch



Our 100-year vision

We will transition Dalnacardoch's management away from its historical use as a sporting estate and breathe life back into the land by restoring a resilient mosaic of native woodland, montane scrub, heath, peatland and freshwater habitats, connecting the Spey and Tay catchments with a restored river-wood corridor, resulting in thriving ecosystems and associated ecological processes.

This will increase the diversity of plants and wildlife, enabling the recovery of missing species, and result in a flourishing natural environment providing aesthetic and recreational values to local communities and other visitors, inspiring people to spend time in a wilder Cairngorms, whilst contributing to the local economy and livelihoods.

The site will act as a window into Durrell's work, encouraging people to connect to the nature around them as they experience conservation in action. We will draw on our 40-year history of training to upskill the Cairngorms conservationists and land managers of the future.

Dalnacardoch is Durrell's opportunity to bring our extensive international experience to our doorstep, delivering impactful evidence-led conservation for the people and nature closest to home.

Approach

Durrell is well placed to deliver landscape-scale restoration at Dalnacardoch. With over 50 years' global experience we specialise in saving species, restoring habitats, and training conservation

professionals. Analysis shows Durrell has contributed to preventing 18% of species extinctions avoided globally over the past 30 years.

At Dalnacardoch, our team combines global expertise with deep local knowledge. Two staff bring nearly 70 years combined experience working at Dalnacardoch, with extensive understanding of the landscape, its ecology and community context. Four more staff living locally, but new to Dalnacardoch, bring with them expertise in land management, community engagement, restoration ecology and programme management. Dalnacardoch now supports 5.5 FTE directly employed roles.

The team at Dalnacardoch is supported by Durrell's Conservation Science and Impact teams, who contribute to the design, delivery and analysis of our rigorous ecological and social survey and monitoring programme, ensuring our approach is data- and evidence-led, and maximise the impacts of our work for both people and nature.

Durrell's Conservation Academy has trained 6,000+ professionals from 153 countries. At Dalnacardoch, we will develop local capacity and capabilities in modern-conservation practice, integrating our decades-long nature conservation experience with innovative techniques and technologies. We will use this land to bring the vision and reality of landscape-level rewilding for people and nature to a local, national and international audience of trainees, raising the profile of the Cairngorms as a centre of conservation excellence.

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Ecological restoration at landscape scale

Durrell will restore Dalnacardoch through integrated, landscape-scale habitat and species recovery, enabled by our 100-year lease providing the long-term horizon needed for nature to recover at scale.

Our immediate priorities focus on restoring degraded peatlands and expanding native woodland, using a natural regeneration approach supported by deer and livestock management. Non-native plantations will be transformed into diverse native pine, birch, and oak woodland, while safeguarding rare

montane scrub reconnecting fragmented habitats. Our approach to natural regeneration, combined with extensive annual monitoring surveys, is pioneering in its scale, using data on tree establishment, browsing pressure, and species diversity to guide adaptive management and inform wider best practice.

Peatland restoration will rewet ~300 ha annually in a rolling programme, filling drainage channels, re-profiling gullies, and restoring sphagnum moss and cotton-grass. This will halt carbon loss, improve water retention, reduce flood risk, and create habitat for key species.

Techniques will be rigorously monitored to generate transferable knowledge.

Community engagement sits at the heart of the programme. Volunteers, schools, and local groups will co-design projects and participate in conservation, combining nature with cultural heritage and learning. This ensures communities are central to decision-making, fostering stewardship and reconnecting people with the landscape.

Longer-term priorities include restoring the Edendon Water, creating riparian woodland and aquatic habitats, and

developing an onsite Conservation Academy to share skills in rewilding, ecological monitoring, and habitat management. Economic opportunities will arise through ecotourism, nature-based enterprise, and responsible land management, supporting local livelihoods alongside ecological recovery.

Adaptive management, long-term monitoring, and co-designed community structures will ensure benefits are sustainable, creating a replicable model of rewilding that integrates people, place, and nature at scale.



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Peatland

R 4,000 ha of Dalnacardoch is peatland, with at least half of that in a severely degraded state. Historically drained to improve pasture for grazing, significant areas of the peatland are actively draining and eroding, releasing carbon into the atmosphere and drying out globally rare blanket bog habitat.

The map opposite shows the areas that have been identified as needing restoration (in light blue), the 130 ha project which was completed in 2025 (in red) and those areas currently in design and having pre works surveys undertaken for 2026 (darker blue).

We are working with the CNPA Peatland Action team to create a multi-year phased approach to restoring the extensive peatland at Dalnacardoch, with the aim of restoring ~300 ha per year.

**~4,000
hectares**
of Dalnacardoch is peatland

**~2,210
hectares**
is estimated to be degraded,
with 1,620 ha of eroded
ground, and 1,840 ha of
drained ground



Peatland restoration phasing plan



Peatland restoration 2025

In Summer of 2025 we were successful in securing a grant from CNPA Peatland Action to restore 130 ha of peatland in the east of Dalnacardoch.

Works were undertaken by local contractor Taiga Upland, starting in July and completed in October 2025. This project required different techniques using both machinery and hand labour.

The primary objective was to stabilise the existing peatland communities, prevent further erosion and degradation, and to re-vegetate bare peat across the site. In addition to this, restoration activities prevent further carbon being released, improve water quality, retain water within the peatland and enhance biodiversity.

A total of 22,695m of drainage channels were blocked and reprofiled, slowing the flow and creating pools of water. Re-wetted peatland quickly recovers, increasing insect abundance and diversity, triggering a cascade effect in the ecosystem.

We are monitoring the peatland's recovery through drone imagery and remote sensing to assess changes in surface water cover, vegetation surveys, water quality testing and monitoring water table levels using rust rods.

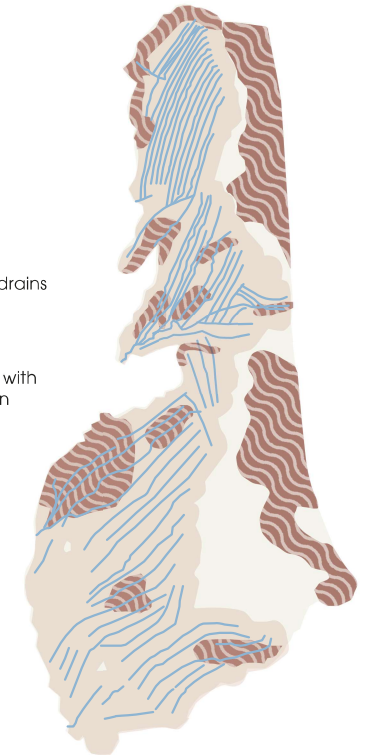


2025 completion plan

KEY

 Land drains area

 Areas with erosion



36 hectares

Area with erosion

91 hectares

Area with drains

22,695 metres

Total length of drainage channels blocked and reprofiled

Woodland

Currently, native woodland covers just 1% of Dalnacardoch, clinging on in tiny and fragmented pockets. These fragments of semi-natural woodland are all that remains of the woodland corridor that would have extended northwards all the way to Loch an Dùin and the Spey catchment. They are mostly found in the lower stretches of the Edendon Water and a small number of the other burns, where mature aspen, hazel, silver birch, downy birch and rowan flank the watercourses. As a result of herbivore pressure, palatable species are confined to these refuges within the gorges and gullies where the river flows and falls through a carved channel in the bedrock.

Durrell is carefully reducing deer densities to bring the population of red deer down to a level that will enable natural regeneration to occur.

Woodland potential

Based on extensive tree, vegetation community and soil data, we are confident that Dalnacardoch has the potential for woodland cover to increase to ~22%. Rather than planting or fencing, we aim to create new woodland through natural regeneration by reducing grazing pressure to a sustainable level.

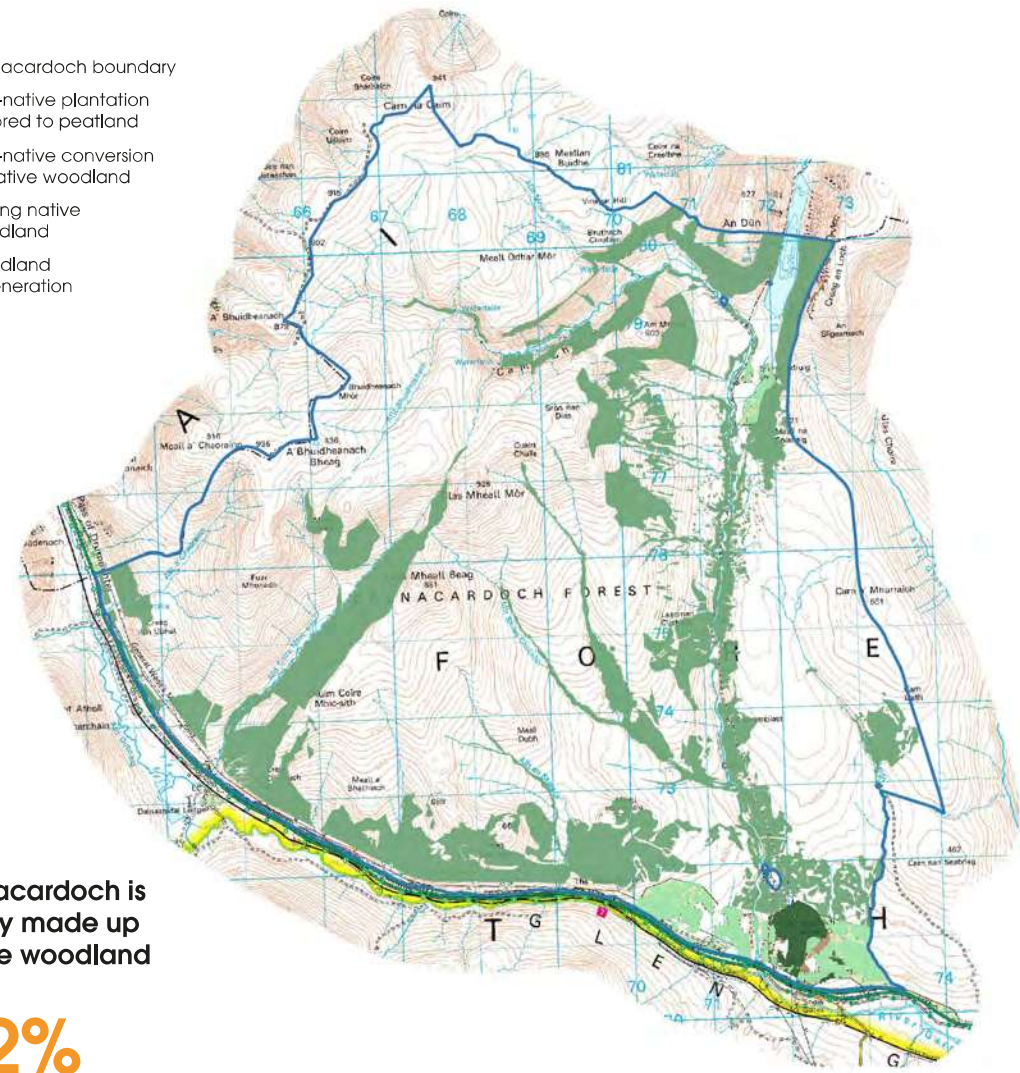
Naturally regenerated woodlands benefit from greater structural and age diversity than planted woodlands. They are naturally irregular and will develop among a wider mosaic of bog and heather habitats which together support greater abundance and diversity of wildlife. They are also more resilient to climate change, pests and disease – with trees growing where they want to, not where they are planted.



Potential woodland restoration plan

KEY

- Dalnacardoch boundary
- Non-native plantation restored to peatland
- Non-native conversion to native woodland
- Existing native woodland
- Woodland regeneration



1%

of Dalnacardoch is currently made up of native woodland

~22%

Potential woodland cover achievable through natural regeneration

Natural regeneration

Monitoring woodland regeneration and its expansion takes effort, but it is essential to understand how natural processes are working and where we may need to lend a helping hand – for example by introducing missing species or establishing small seed islands where natural regeneration is limited.

During the summer of 2025 we surveyed the Edendon Glen through a network of transects spaced 100m apart. Along these transects we recorded tree species, their height in relation to the surrounding vegetation and any signs of browsing. This showed the already massive extent of suppressed trees on Dalnacardoch, hidden from sight – their roots and stems growing, but their height and spread restricted by years of over grazing.

Having covered 123km so far, we are building up a clear picture of where the

trees are regenerating. We know which species are present, where browsing pressures are highest, and the distance these new trees are growing from the existing fragments of mature woodland.

A total of 14,775 trees were recorded during the survey, with good levels of spatial distribution up to 5000m from seed sources. 72% of recorded trees showed some degree of browsing.

Montane woodland

Dalnacardoch is a nationally important site for montane woodland, containing rare remnants of a habitat that once extended across the tops of the Scottish Highlands.

This woodland, found above 600 meters, is made up of hardy tree and plant species adapted to extreme conditions. Long-term browsing pressures have reduced these to small, isolated populations confined to inaccessible ledges and steep sided burns.

Fragmentation has likely resulted in a lack of genetic diversity within these populations, in turn inhibiting the ability of these montane willows to recover without intervention.

Historical records at Dalnacardoch dated back to the 1970's, before a comprehensive census was undertaken in 2025. The results increased records for one nationally rare species by 1,848%. Before this survey there were only 100 records for montane willows at Dalnacardoch, the survey identified over 2000.

We will be undertaking genetic analysis of samples collected in 2025 to assess the diversity of the gene pool of our populations. With that data, we can make an informed decision on whether the population needs to be bolstered by the introduction of new genetics from other remnant off-site population as part of a Highlands-wide effort to expand this precious habitat.

Tree nursery and seed stand

Thanks to funding from Perth & Kinross Council's Nature Restoration Fund, we have been able to build a tree nursery and seed stand at Dalnacardoch which is now in its final stages of completion. This will allow us to establish a seed bed to grow montane willow species as well as other key species such as Juniper and Aspen. The seedbed will allow for genetic mixing and establish a long-term seed source for Dalnacardoch and the wider landscape.

In the future, plants grown at the nursery could be used for targeted planting to bolster existing populations and/or create steppingstones between them. We will also use this facility to engage with schools, expanding our existing links through the CNPA Youth Ranger scheme, and create a community hub for locals to volunteer at the nursery and take part in wider activities at Dalnacardoch.



Before this survey there were only 100 records for montane willows at Dalnacardoch. The survey identified over 2000."

Mountain species regeneration

Species	Previously recorded	Now recorded
<i>Juniperus communis</i>	2	24
<i>Salix lapponum</i>	61	1,127
<i>Salix mysinfolia</i>	2	1,081
<i>Salix myrsinites</i>	9	40
<i>Salix phylicifolia</i>	1	19



Downy willow
(*Salix lapponum*)



Tree nursery
& seed stand



High elevation rowan

River and Freshwater

Dalnacardoch spans both the River Tay and Spey catchments, with Loch an Dùin forming the headwaters of the Spey, flowing northwards. The rest of the 41.5km of burns and rivers flow southwards into the River Garry and make up the headwaters of the Tay.

The river that bisects Dalnacardoch is Edendon Water, the artery linking these two river catchments. The river receives water from two main tributaries – Allt à Chamà Choire and Allt Chulaibh.

The entire 43km² catchment of the Edendon falls within the Dalnacardoch, providing a unique opportunity to achieve catchment scale restoration.

The lower reaches of the river flow through bedrock, meaning it is near natural and, because sections are inaccessible to

grazing animals, have remained home to remnant native woodland.

The upper reaches, however, are highly modified. The river is part of the SSE Tummel hydro scheme with multiple pieces of infrastructure on the river which date back to the 1940s. This infrastructure, along with regular maintenance, dredging and historical straightening, means the river is no longer connected to its flood plain or able to function naturally.

Restoring the Edendon

Our vision is to restore natural hydrological processes as far as possible within the constraints of hydro infrastructure whilst maintaining access through the Gaick Pass.

To help aid re-naturalisation of the upper reaches of the Edendon, we are proposing a relocation of the access track.

Currently, an access track, which goes to SSE's top dam, creates two significant pinch points at river crossings. These are susceptible to damage in high flows, create impoundments of sediment and require SSE to undertake regular dredging and sediment manipulation.

By relocating the track out of the glen and floodplain, we will be able to remove these crossings and reconnect the river to its natural channels, allowing it to shift and change, becoming a dynamic braided river system. The relocation of the access track will be subject to a separate planning application if terms and a design can be agreed with SSE.

We are working closely with SSE to make this a reality and to raise funds for the subsequent restoration activities to remove historical sediment bars, reopen channels and introduce woody debris.



By relocating the track out of the glen and flood plain, we will be able to remove these crossings and reconnect the river to its natural channels, allowing it to shift and change, becoming a dynamic braided river system."

Location of proposed works on Edendon Water





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The entire 43km² catchment of the Edendon falls within Dalnacardoch, providing a unique opportunity to achieve catchment scale restoration.”

Baseline surveys and long-term monitoring

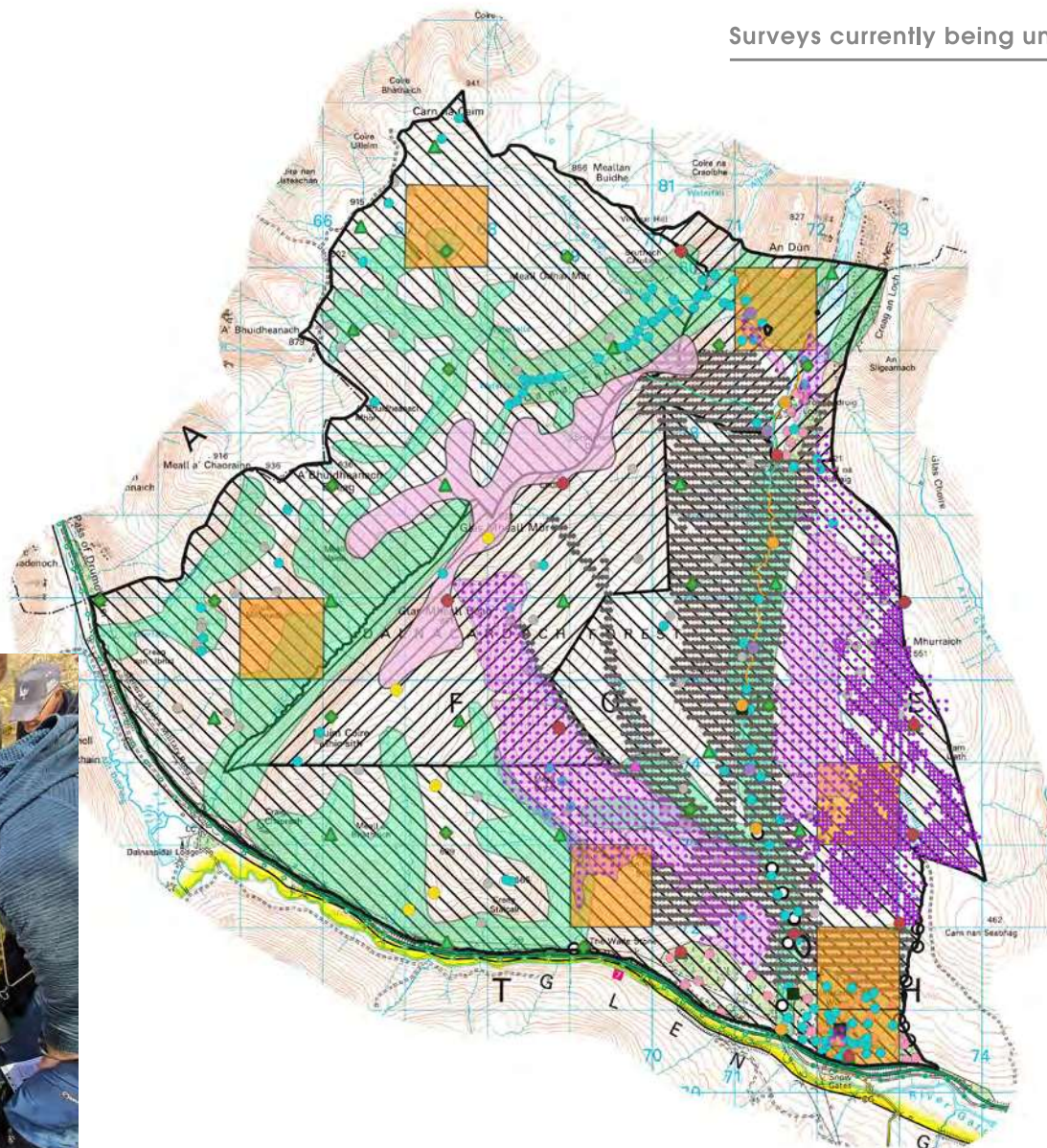
At Dalnacardoch, restoration is underpinned by understanding. Durrell is an evidence-led conservation organisation, and since taking on the management of this spectacular landscape three years ago we have invested resource in rigorous surveys and scientific research to build a comprehensive ecological and environmental baseline.

Working alongside other experts, also restoring nature across the Highlands, we have designed a monitoring programme to measure change against our restoration objectives and inform data-led interventions.

This plan shows the number and diversity of surveys being undertaken. It's this information that will help us communicate our impact over the next 100 years.



Surveys currently being undertaken across Dalnacardoch



KEY

- Dalnacardoch boundary
- BeeWalk Transect – Am Meadar
- Fix Point photography
- ▲ Weather station
- Air temperature logger
- Water temperature logger
- Riverfly monitoring location

- Passive recording**
 - LJMU 360 camera points
 - ◆ Trial cameras deployment
 - ▲ Trial camera & audioMoth deployment

- Peatland surveys**
 - Areas of peatland surveyed in 2025
 - Peatland survey points
 - BioScan – monthly invertebrate survey

- Bird survey**
 - Waterway breeding bird survey
 - Breeding bird survey
 - Montane bird breeding survey

- Woodlands**
 - Recorded mature aspen
 - Regeneration transects – completed 2025
 - Montane woodland survey

- Herbivore impact assessment**
 - HIA open habitat
 - HIA woodland

- NVC survey**
 - NVC survey area 2025
 - NVC survey area pre-2025

Freshwater survey

We have set up a monthly River Fly survey on the Edendon to monitor the change in aquatic invertebrates in response to future restoration of the freshwater habitat and the wider catchment. This is part of a national scheme called Guardians of River (BugLife) and uses the community composition and abundance of particular groups to infer water quality and habitat condition based on their ecological needs and tolerance of pollution.

We have also installed two temperature loggers within the Edendon system, which record the water temperature every 5 minutes. These will enable us to look at how the climate resilience of the river system is improved through increased tree cover and therefore shading which will help to limit large fluctuations in temperature. Reduction in water temperature will have a wider positive impact on the success of Salmon spawning in the wider river catchment.

In-house drone surveys

Thanks to Durrell's extensive expertise in the use of drones for conservation, we can undertake repeat in-house surveys to inform restoration plans and monitor impact of restoration interventions over the long-term. We can generate accurate up-to-date fine resolution aerials and digital surface models, as shown below. Drone surveys have been used in development of peatland restoration plans and to inform woodland creation.

BioScan

Dalnacardoch is 1 of 100 sites across the UK to be part of the Tree of Life BIOSCAN project, which is studying the genetic diversity of 1,000,000 flying insects. The resulting data will provide information about species diversity and provide a

foundation for DNA-based biomonitoring in the UK. For us, it provides detailed information about the flying insects at Dalnacardoch, which can be difficult to ID in the field, and will track changes over time.

Each month we undertake the monthly deployment of malaise traps at two locations which we established in May 2024, expanded to three sites in Jan 2026. Over the last 12 months we collected 3,384 insects which have been individually potted into the well plates shown below and sent off to Sanger Institute to be meta barcoded (identified through their DNA). We have received the analysis from the samples collected in early in 2024 recording 172 insects down to species level and group across 11 different groups.



Ranger Douglas Carchrie undertaking water sampling on bog pools as part of a research project with Leeds University

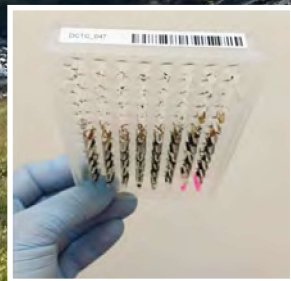


Drone surveying at Edendon Water



Restoration manager Sam Buckland checking a malaise trap used to collect flying insects to contribute genetic information to the BioScan project

3,384 insects
have been collected over
the last 12 months



Thanks to Durrell's extensive expertise in the use of drones for conservation, we can undertake repeat in-house surveys to inform restoration plans and monitor impact of restoration interventions over the long-term."

Species recovery

Survey and monitoring at Dalnacardoch has been designed to establish a robust ecological baseline, providing a clear understanding of current habitat condition, extent, and species presence. This baseline will support long-term assessment of the impacts of land management changes and targeted interventions.

A comprehensive monitoring framework is now being implemented, incorporating a suite of indicators to track ecological change over time. These include annual breeding bird surveys; seasonal monitoring of aquatic invertebrates; monthly terrestrial invertebrate sampling; and fixed vegetation quadrat assessments. In addition, targeted species monitoring is being undertaken for key indicator species such as Black Grouse (lek counts) and Hen Harrier, enabling evaluation of species-level responses to habitat change.

Ecosystem function is also being measured through the deployment of environmental loggers (e.g. water depth and temperature) and regeneration transects to assess woodland establishment and changes in vegetation structure.

Several research projects are currently underway across the site, and there is a strong ambition to develop further academic partnerships. Future research will focus on the social, economic, and ecological outcomes of landscape-scale management at Dalnacardoch.

Baseline survey work undertaken in 2024 recorded 366 species of plants and

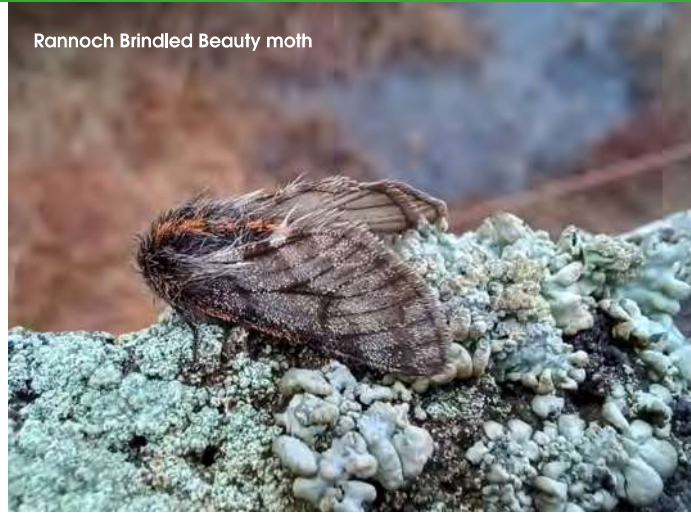
animals, 2025 data is being analysed. Initial identification of focal species has been informed through engagement with the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and NatureScot. At present, habitat condition, extent, and landscape connectivity are recognised as key constraints to the reintroduction or translocation of certain species in the short term.

The long-term ambition is to enhance populations of rare and threatened species, restore those currently absent, and contribute to wider species recovery objectives within the Cairngorms National Park.

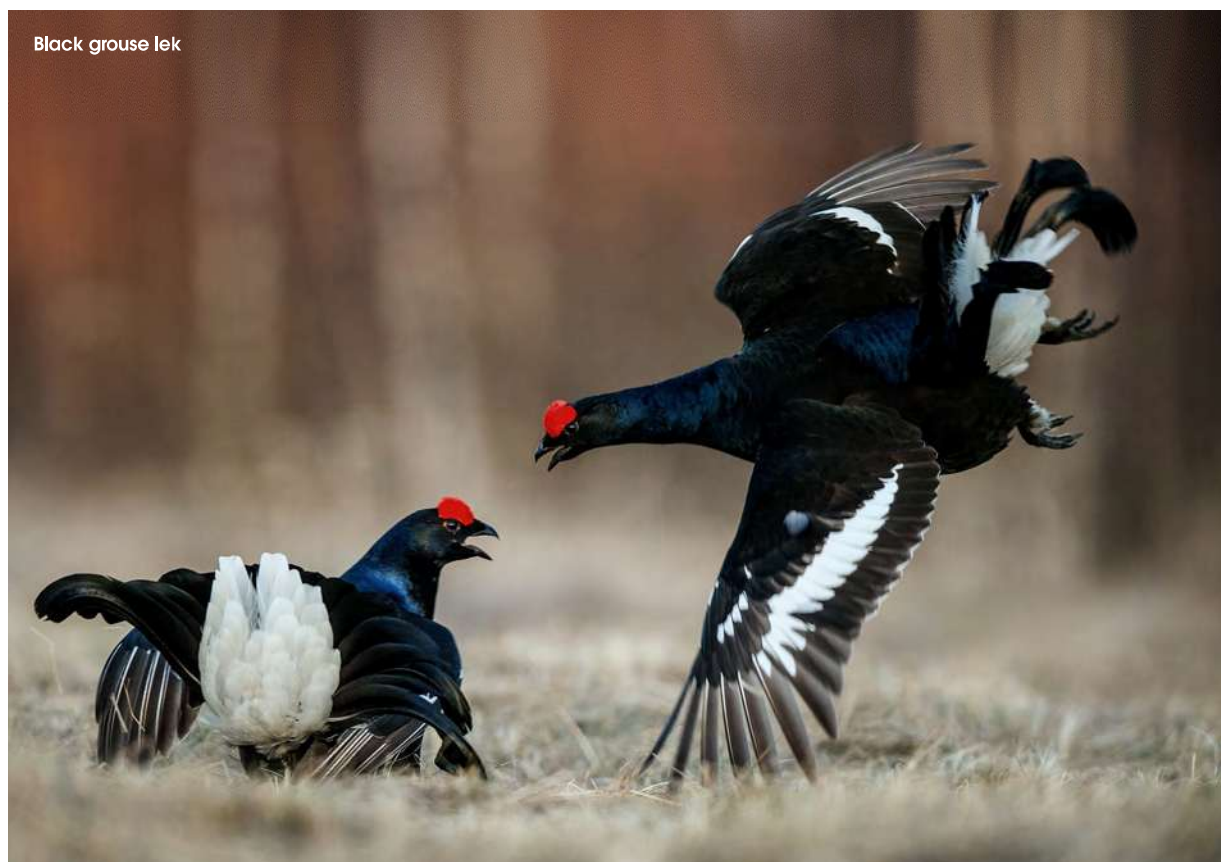


Blueberry bumblebee

Rannoch Brindled Beauty moth



Black grouse lek



366

species of plant and animal have been identified across Dalnacardoch, including 11 mammal species and 172 insect species

Current species records

- **Black-throated diver:** Pair breed on Loch an Dùin, fledged one chick in 2025
- **Hen Harrier:** No breeding pairs currently but found on neighbouring estates so likely to expand to Dalnacardoch
- **Black Grouse:** Five leks with seven, four and two males, as well as two with a single male
- **Mammals:** 11 species recorded, including water vole, otter and pine marten
- **Aspen:** Site-wide mapping complete, some individuals flowered this spring
- **Aquatic invertebrates:** Long term monitoring of river invertebrates underway
- **Insects:** 172 species recorded, including Hairy Wood ant
- **Vascular plants:** 88 species recorded across 32 quadrats, 150 quadrats to be monitored over a 5-year period



Black throated diver



Stonefly



Pine marten



Small Pearl-bordered Frillfly

Hairy wood ant (*Formica lugubris*)

One of three "true" wood ant species in the UK, the Hairy wood ant is currently the only wood ant that we have recorded on Dalnacardoch. Wood ants are large black and red ants that build thatched mounds, sometimes reaching impressive sizes. An adaptation to living in cooler temperate climates, the thatched mound acts as a solar panel and sanctuary for the reproductive queens and their brood. This species exists as nest mounds with multiple queens and colonies can comprise of several inter-connected mounds.

Wood ants are considered a keystone species of forest ecosystems; influencing the whole food chain and interacting with a huge range of other species. Existing in huge numbers (there can be 100,000s in a single dome), they are both predator and prey, while their warm, dry nest mounds provide shelter for approximately 100 specialised invertebrates. Their nests play a significant role in soil community structure and nutrient cycling and the ants are also involved in distribution of seeds throughout the forest.



Grazers and browsers

Deer management

Located on the western side of the West Grampian Deer Management Group, Dalnacardoch has historically been managed as a sporting estate since the 12th century, being part of the wider Forest of Atholl.

As native species, red and roe deer play a vital role in a functioning ecosystem at Dalnacardoch. They recycle nutrients, disperse seeds and create microhabitats through trampling and wallowing. At sustainable densities, deer shape vegetation structure, helping to maintain habitat diversity. However, when populations become unnaturally high, excessive grazing suppresses plant growth, prevents natural regeneration and disrupts ecosystem balance.

At Dalnacardoch we practice responsible deer management, reducing grazing pressure to support the natural regeneration of missing native woodlands and healthy ecosystems.

Our deer management is informed by herbivore impact assessments and regeneration transects. This, along with regular deer counts, allows us to monitor not just the numbers at Dalnacardoch but also areas of higher impact on vegetation recovery.

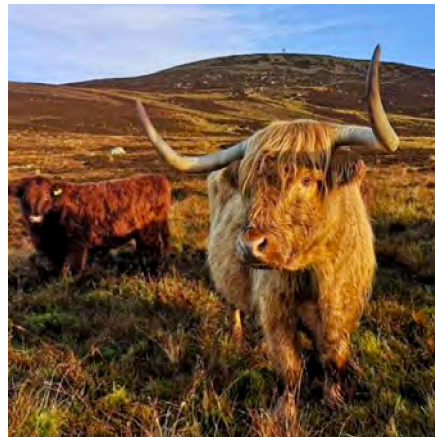
The March 2026 helicopter confirmed that the deer population on Dalnacardoch had been reduced from 12/km² to 6/km². Our target density, set at a level where vegetation can recover sufficiently to achieve our objectives, is 2/km² by the end of 2028.

Highland Ponies

The Highland Pony is on the Rare Breeds Survival Trust's UK Native Horse & Pony watchlist as being "At Risk" indicating the need for conservation efforts to ensure the Highland Pony's continued existence and the preservation of its unique characteristics.

The breeding and use of Highland Ponies has had a major role on Dalnacardoch for many years, and they are an important part of Scotland's history and heritage.

Durrell is continuing to forward the importance of breeding this special Native pony and hope to involve them in roles of Education & Restoration in future. We have a small herd of three ponies at Dalnacardoch, with a young filly arriving in May 2025, born to Sophie of Dalnacardoch and sired by stallion Balmoral MacLeod.



Large mammals (megafauna) have a crucial role in functioning ecosystems, creating a landscape with a mosaic of open habitats, scrublands, scattered and more extensive woodlands."



Conservation grazing

Large mammals (megafauna) have a crucial role in functioning ecosystems, creating a landscape with a mosaic of open habitats, scrublands, scattered and more extensive woodlands.

Herbivores that primarily eat grass and other herbaceous plants and are known as grazers. Species that eat parts of woody vegetation, soft shoots and tree leaves are known as browsers. This difference in diet, digestive tract, behaviour and size means they shape their surroundings in distinct ways, and through increasing the diversity and assemblage of grazers and browsers at the right levels, we will see an increase in structural and species diversity across the Dalnacardoch.

Europe's original wild cattle, the Aurochs, have long gone extinct, introducing native domesticated cattle can act as a proxy, filling the vital but empty ecological processes that drive a dynamic and diverse landscape.

Cattle grazing will increase diversity within existing woodland, creating variation in the species that grow, ensure dominant species don't take over, increase structural diversity through disturbance, and create pathways through dense vegetation, which has been seen to benefit a range of declining species, such as the Capercaillie in areas that they are still found.

We hope to introduce native breed cattle to Dalnacardoch in 2026, working in partnership with local farmers. Durrell will determine the cattle's movements and grazing patterns as part of a trial to understand the ecological impacts of their presence in mature and semi-mature woodlands, and on the open hill. We will use non-grazed control areas in each habitat type to measure the outcomes.

Our community

Our approach at Dalnacardoch is rooted in delivering meaningful, long-term community benefits alongside ecological restoration, supporting a Just Transition that integrates environmental, social, economic and cultural value. We are developing a new model of engagement that broadens participation, improves transparency and ensures that restoration delivers tangible, place-based benefits.

This approach brings together the collective expertise of Durrell, the Scottish Land Commission, the Cairngorms National Park, local communities, businesses and neighbouring estates to support long-term outcomes for people, place and nature.



Dalnacardoch aims to deliver equitable and lasting benefits that strengthen community resilience and connection to the land."

Community benefits

A key component of this work is our participation in the Scottish Land Commission and CNPA's *Community Benefits from Nature* pilot. Through this, we are establishing a structured process for partnership working to identify and deliver benefits linked to nature restoration. These may include local employment, skills development, enterprise opportunities, access to land, in-kind support and funding.

We will host facilitated workshops bringing together local residents and organisations to explore these opportunities in practice, introducing the *Community Benefits from Nature* framework and creating space

for participants to share ideas, identify priorities and shape how benefits are delivered. Participants will also help inform the design of future engagement, ensuring it is inclusive and responsive to community needs.

This process will form the foundation for a co-designed Community Benefit Plan, developed through ongoing collaboration with the community and key stakeholders such as Blair Atholl and Struan Community Council. Through this approach, Dalnacardoch aims to deliver equitable and lasting benefits that strengthen community resilience and connection to the land.



Scottish Land Commission
Coimisean Fearainn na h-Alba



Access to nature

Improving access to, and connection with, the natural environment is a key priority at Dalnacardoch. Our approach focuses on creating inclusive opportunities for people to experience and engage with a recovering Cairngorms landscape.

Access is being developed through a programme of on site events, volunteering opportunities and community activities that encourage direct engagement with Dalnacardoch. By bringing people onto the land, we aim to foster a stronger sense of connection, ownership and shared understanding of the restoration process.

This is supported by a commitment to transparent and accessible communication. Dedicated digital platforms, including the "Durrell at Dalnacardoch" Facebook channel, provide regular updates on activities and opportunities for involvement. In parallel, an interactive website, currently in development, will act as a central hub for engagement, enabling communities and stakeholders to explore the site, understand long term plans and monitor progress in an accessible way.

Looking ahead, we will continue to expand and diversify access opportunities through guided activities, interpretation, signage and community events, ensuring that access supports both public enjoyment and the long term goals of nature recovery.



Training

Durrell at Dalnacardoch represents a special opportunity to address the significant skills and training gap in the Cairngorms National Park and surroundings in rewilding, progressive-land management practices, and other hard and soft skills needed in a changing world. We will enable upskilled trainees to take advantage of employment in sustainable careers, resilient to the changing world of Highland land-management, whilst supporting the wider objectives of the CNPA's Partnership Plan.

While existing college and university courses provide an excellent grounding in traditional land management, there is an opportunity to complement this provision with practical training focused on the challenges of the future. Programmes centred on nature recovery, restorative land management, ecological surveying and the application of new technologies will help equip the next generation of land managers with the skills needed to steward Scotland's landscapes in a changing climate and policy environment.

Our accessible blend of practical and soft skill training, derived from our 40 years of experience in running our Conservation Academy, will be infused with 50 years of international community-centred nature conservation learnings, and the land-management experience of our staff at Dalnacardoch. We will target a range of participants, including existing land managers, new entrants to the sector and members of local communities as well as national and international trainees using the Cairngorms as an exemplar of how large-scale nature restoration can work for people and nature. It will focus on building skills in areas such as ecological restoration, intensive species recovery, ecological monitoring, emerging technologies and the soft skills required to lead and integrate change with peers and stakeholders.

Durrell's holistic and data-led approach to conservation training allows us to be sure that our training will effectively address the evolving needs of the CNPA and its communities.



“

We will enable upskilled trainees to take advantage of employment in sustainable careers, resilient to the changing world of Highland land-management, whilst supporting the wider objectives of the CNPA's Partnership Plan.”

Engagement

Our approach to engagement at Dalnacardoch focuses on enabling meaningful, ongoing participation in the design and delivery of the restoration project. We aim to create inclusive opportunities for individuals and communities to contribute their knowledge, shape priorities and remain actively involved over time.

This will be delivered through a structured programme of community events, workshops and collaborative activities. These will provide space for dialogue, feedback and co-design, ensuring that engagement is not one-off but embedded throughout the life of the project. The Community Workshops represent a key step in this process, helping to establish shared priorities while also informing how future engagement is structured to remain accessible and relevant.

We will continue to work closely with local groups, organisations and partners to widen participation and ensure a diversity of voices is represented. Particular emphasis will be placed on creating opportunities that include different ages, interests and levels of experience, supporting both informal involvement and more sustained participation.

Through this approach Dalnacardoch will foster a collaborative relationship with communities, supporting active involvement in the stewardship of the land and strengthening long-term connections between people and place.



CNPA Junior Rangers

We hosted the CNPA Junior Ranger Partners early in 2025 to discuss how Dalnacardoch can be involved and to take part in their annual planning meeting. Durrell is now a formal partner in the award-winning programme and since then we have assisted the Junior Rangers at their camp out in Blair Atholl with a moth trap event, hosted the group on site twice and taken part in a co-design workshop with the Rangers to design the 2026-2027 programme. The group will be at Dalnacardoch throughout the year helping with non-native Sitka spruce pulling, fence removal and working in our newly established tree nursery helping to grow rare mountain willow species.



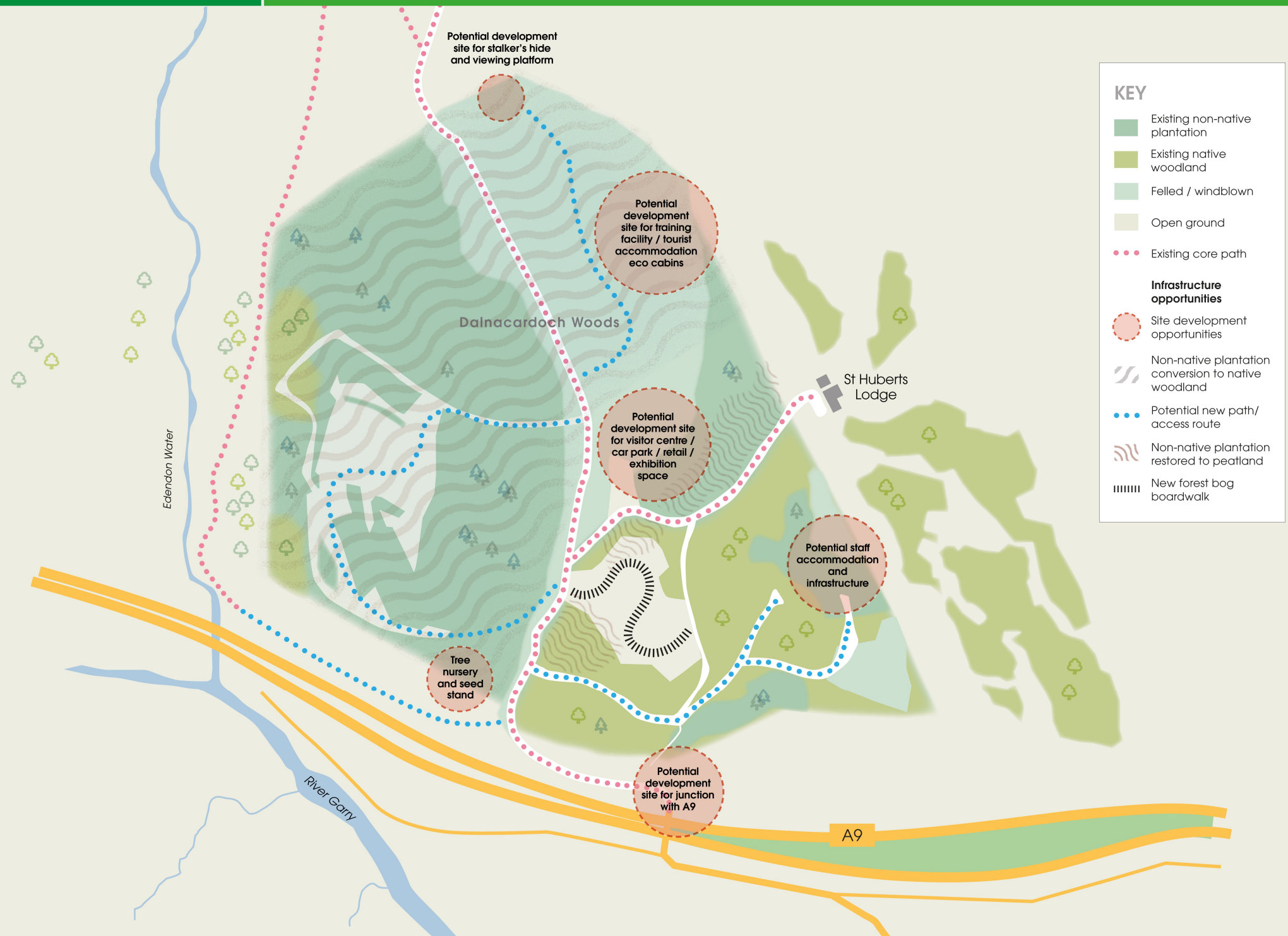
'Mostela' box in situ

Breadalbane Men's Shed

We worked with the local 'Men's Shed' to design and build some 'Mostela' boxes. These boxes are designed to hold a trail camera and entice stoats and weasels to enter the box so that pictures can be captured. These have now been placed out on the site so that we can get a good understanding of the population and behaviour of these small mustelids. We have plans to continue working with the skilled carpenters at the Shed to build other items of survey equipment.

Community events

To date, we have hosted two drop-in sessions in the Blair Atholl village hall, where locals can pop in to learn more about Durrell, meet the team and see what our objectives and plans are for Dalnacardoch. It is also an opportunity to learn from the community and to have open discussions about any concerns they may have. We also hosted our first Community Open Evening at Dalnacardoch in May where members of the community were able to see the site first hand, speak to the team about the projects underway and to build relationships. These have proven to be hugely valuable so far and we have two further events planned throughout 2026 along with workshops to co-create a community benefit plan.



Staff accommodation and other operational infrastructure

Durrell currently employ 5.5 FTE directly at Dalnacardoch, increased from 2.5 FTE directly employed while managed as a sporting estate.

At least three of those roles are tied to land, requiring presentism and irregular hours.

Currently, Durrell rent two houses, a deer larder and pony stabling retained by the previous owners on the south side of the A9.

The masterplan proposals include the development of residential accommodation for staff, providing security of tenure in energy efficient, sustainably built homes.

In addition to accommodation, associated infrastructure required to deliver on our objectives would also be developed. Specifically, a deer larder and Highland Pony stabling.

The proposed staff accommodation takes reference from a range of contemporary modular examples, illustrated below:



Example deer larder



Visitor and community engagement centre

To provide a focal point for visitors the masterplan proposal includes a visitor and community engagement centre.

The proposed visitor and community engagement centre will support the objectives of the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan by providing a high-quality destination that enables people to learn about, experience and participate in nature recovery. The development will help connect visitors with the wider landscape, providing interpretation and access opportunities that enhance understanding of the National Park's special qualities.

Together with the proposed accommodation and training facilities, the development will contribute to the Park's ambition to be a place where people want to live, work and visit, while supporting a sustainable rural economy and engaging people in the transition to a net-zero, biodiversity-rich future.

The space will blend a small food retail offering – potentially run in partnership with a local business – and a visitor centre space for interpretation on Dalnacardoch's restoration.

The proposed visitor centre takes reference from a range of contemporary modular examples, illustrated below:



Tourism: self-catering accommodation

The masterplan proposal includes the development of small, bespoke, cabin-style self catering properties.

The proposed self-catering accommodation will provide a high-quality, low-impact tourism offer that enables guests to immerse themselves in the landscape and experience the special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park at first hand.

Integrated within a wider programme of habitat restoration and nature recovery, the accommodation will encourage longer stays, support local businesses and provide opportunities for visitors to engage with conservation, learning and outdoor recreation.

The development will contribute to the National Park's ambition to deliver sustainable tourism that benefits nature, people and the local economy, while generating income to support the long-term management and restoration of the estate.

The proposed self-catering accommodation takes reference from a range of contemporary modular examples, illustrated below:





DURRELL

THANK YOU

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