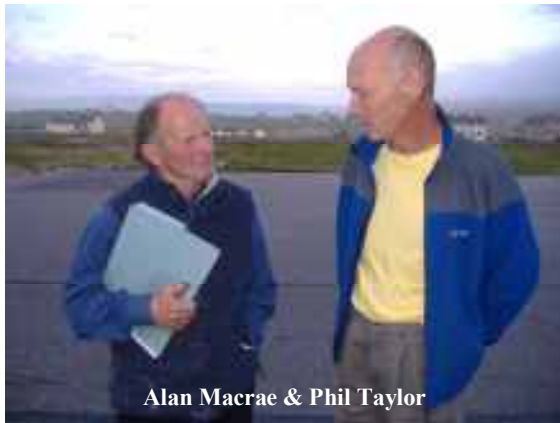


Newsletter August 2007

New coordinator for NWCPA.

The NWCPA has recently appointed Phil Taylor as its new coordinator. Phil replaces Jenifer Cameron who did this work for the first two years of the current 3 year action plan; Jenifer resigned earlier this year to take up a post in London. Phil has been appointed on a one year contract to see the current programme through to completion. Phil is a crofter from Skerry on the North Coast. He is also the coordinator for the North West Sutherland Food Link which promotes the production and sale of local foods. If you need any help, you can phone Phil on 01641 521345



Alan Macrae & Phil Taylor

Advertise your Cattle on the Association's Website

The Association's website is being rebuilt. On the new site we intend to provide a "sales page" where Association members will be able to advertise their stock for sale. We will be able to include pictures as well as the stock details. In the long term we will be trying to make connections with potential buyers from outside the area and to find a wider market for local stock. This service is free. We will also be happy to carry adverts in future newsletters.

Vice Chairman Stands Down

Robert McCall, vice chairman of the NWCPA for many years, is resigning from the committee. Robert, who keeps a herd of 36 cattle, half continental crosses, half traditional blue greys on his croft in Foindle, has been a member of the committee since its inception. He has always had strong views on keeping the right cattle for the right reasons, economics and making a herd pay being top of the list.

Robert particularly wishes to thank the founder members who did so much work in setting up the NWCPA, Alan Macrae, Ted Birchill, Anna MacConnel, Sandy Murray and Issy MacPhail.

The current committee wishes to express its thanks for his contribution to its work and would like to wish him all the best.

Foot & Mouth

As this issue was about to go to the printers the awful news came through of the Foot and Mouth outbreak in England. We all hope that this can be confined to the protection zone and the restrictions now in place will be lifted as soon as possible. In the mean time our activities will be subject to the changing situation and the need to keep our livestock safe. Our sympathy goes out to the farmers at the centre of the outbreak.

NWCPA Events

The Association in conjunction with the Crofting Foundation will be holding a series of meetings on Cattle Health Schemes. These will be held at Lochinver Village Hall Tuesday, 2nd Oct; The Rhiconich Hotel, Wednesday 3rd Oct and Bettyhill Village Hall, Thursday 4th Oct.

We will be running a cattle dressing workshop(s) at the end of September/early October, Dates and venues dependent on numbers. Please contact the NWCPA to register an interest.

Membership Renewals

Come September it will be time to renew your membership of the Association. The fee will remain at £10 for the year. The Association needs your support to continue its work of promoting Cattle keeping in the North West, and if you are not already an Association Member, now is the time to join to get the benefits of a full year.

We would also like to hear from you with any ideas about where you think the organisation should be going. We will continue to run The Fieldsman Network, put on courses, inform and lobby government bodies on your behalf, but we would like to add to the services we provide. Think about what you need and how we may be able to offer more assistance, and then get the Association working for you.



Robert McCall and his fine new bull

Need advice about cattle? The NWCPA Fieldsman's Network is here to Help

As part of its effort to support cattle producers in the far north the NWCPA runs a cattle advisory service, which we call our Fieldsman's network. We have 3 advisors covering different areas of the county, and these are employed to come to visit your holding and offer advice on all aspects of cattle keeping. If you have a particular problem that you would like help with, or if you would just like to someone to come and look over your operation, or you are looking for new ideas, then our fieldsmen can help.

All the Fieldsmen are experienced cattle producers, all have their own stock, and years of experience. They are;

George MacLeod (below) is a Migdale crofter and a professional livestock contractor. He keeps a Suckler herd on his croft which along with his neighbours is part of a Farm Assured scheme run by Q.M.S



Roddy Watt farms at Borralan near Ledmore, keeping suckler cows and bringing on young stock for breeding and beef for local consumption. He has a S.D.A. from Aberdeen and lifelong experience with livestock.

A message from Donald Clarke

I am the NWCPA Fieldsman for East Sutherland and Ross-shire. I took on this job because I enjoy working with cattle, have helped a couple of crofters get started and felt I would like to pass on what I have learnt over 30 years. We took up the Tenancy of the Rhanich, Edderton thirty years ago with one cow and 600 B.f ewes on 31 acres of inbye and extensive hill grazing. The cows now number 35 plus replacement heifers. I realised that if I wanted saleable calves I needed cows with milk to turn the heather and rushes into beef. To achieve this I have concentrated on dairy x beef breeding, initially Hereford x Friesian, now Limousin x Friesian, using a good Limousin bull. Cows are bought as baby calves and reared up. This gives me very quiet cows with good tick resistance, several of these cows can be hand milked and we always have fresh milk and butter.

Donald Clarke (below) is a tenant farmer at Edderton. He keeps a herd of 40 cattle as well as sheep. He raises store cattle which he sells at 15/18months. Donald has 30 years experience in stock keeping, knowledge of all the common breeds and enjoys sharing this knowledge with others.



This service is free to NWCPA members, and as an introductory offer, we will provide a one off free consultation to non members. You don't have to own cattle to use this service; if you are considering starting with cattle then the Fieldsmen will be happy to talk you through the options open to you and give you advice on support schemes.

The Fieldsmen can offer advice on all aspects of Cattle keeping. If you would like to use this service or learn more about it, in the first instance call Phil Taylor on 01641 521345, or email info@nwcpa.org.uk,

From the NWCPA point of view I would like to make two points; I think we have to promote cattle production as being environmentally beneficial. If even half the crofts and farms in the Highlands had a few cows summer grazing the Straths and hillsides, the effect on wildlife would be enormous. The second point is that the north should be a reservoir of breeding stock for suckler herds further south. Whatever breed of cow we keep, Highlanders, Shorthorns or Simmentals, we can supply the bulling heifers for further down the valley. We have the space to grow out these heifers and there is an excellent demand. Big herd owners should not have to be sourcing heifers from Ireland when we can supply traceable healthy stock locally. So anybody who is thinking about cattle or who has cows but wants to talk breeds/health/feed/handling systems or economics, in fact anything to do with cows, just give myself or the NWCPA a ring. I have not got all the answers but I certainly have plenty of ideas.

Sandy Murray on The Croft Entrants Scheme

Active crofts are the heartbeat of a rural community, underpinning local jobs, providing housing, protecting the environment and contributing to the economic and social well being of the community, more young people in the area can help retain local schools and shops.

The aims of the Scheme are

- To identify suitable would be young entrants to crofting
- To facilitate entry into crofting of suitable young entrants
- To provide financial support and guidance to young would be entrants to establish themselves in crofting
- To stimulate and encourage an innovative approach to crofting development
- To seek to make crofts available to new entrants by encouraging elderly or inactive crofters to make their crofts available for more active use
- To reverse population decline and to improve the age structure in fragile communities in crofting areas

I have been the part time Project Officer operating the scheme since its start in 1993 when it was run by Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise and am now on a contract with

the Crofters Commission covering Caithness Sutherland and Orkney.

There is an increasing number on the interest list held by the Crofters Commission and this is reflected in our own area with the interest and number of applications for the 3 croft's advertised for let by SEERAD in Strathnaver.

Since 1993 I have seen some 130 young people taking over crofts under the scheme and bringing new ideas and enthusiasm into the crofting communities, and with family assignments have seen the next generation gaining assistance for croft housing and staying in the area and working the croft.

There is an incentive payment available to the outgoer based on the potential stocking and cropping of the croft. It can also assist in the legal fees involved in purchasing the croft house site and garden ground. The new entrant is eligible for a management payment for the creation and implementation of a development plan for the croft.

If you feel you want more information or a visit to chat about the scheme you can get me on 01641571219 or email me at sandy.murray2@btinternet.com Or drop a note to Sandy Murray, Achumore, Forsinard, Sutherland, KW13 6YT

Sangomore crofters Rural Stewardship Scheme.

It has often been said, and sometimes confirmed, that crofters in plural cannot agree on things. At Sangomore, Durness, however, this 'old wife's tale' has been proven otherwise. In the first of its kind, four crofters from Durness (Karen Campbell, Valerie O'Brien, Jack Macpherson and myself, James Mather) successfully entered into a Rural Stewardship Scheme under a joint application in September 2005. The scheme runs for a five-year period with an option to renew. Each individual's RSS is carefully tailored to ensure the enhancement of existing land resources principally for the benefit of corncrakes and bees, but importantly, where appropriate, to fit around the current crofting activities.

In recent years, actively crofting land has become less attractive with erratic weather and poor prices for wool, sheep, cattle and other traditional produce. The result of this is that land use is slowly changing from traditional crofting methods to permanent impoverished grassland, or in the extreme, land being taken out by de-crofting to be sold for other purposes. Any encouragement to retain and improve good quality in-bye, sustain traditional crofting methods and the additional industries that this supports, is most welcome.

As part of their remit to enhance the habitat for corncrake and the great-yellow bumble bee in Durness, RSPB Scotland were able to assist with both the application paperwork for the scheme and to carry out practical works like



fencing, ploughing, sowing etc. This has proved invaluable to the Sangomore scheme providing a significant resource which, in turn, makes the scheme even more financially and logistically viable.

The mechanics of the scheme in Sangomore vary. At the bottom of the crofts, areas near the watercourse have been fenced off to protect water margins and already there is an array of wild flowers like birds foot trefoil, devils bit scabious and knapweed to name only three. At the top of the crofts, other areas are fenced to provide permanent early and late cover for breeding corncrakes and hibernating bees. The main parts of the crofts are split between grassland managed for corncrakes, where a late hay or silage crop is taken off, and an area of wild bird and bee

cover crop. The cover crop is sown with a mix of flowering plants (like phacelia and red clover) for the bees, brassicas (like kale and fodder radish) as cover for the corn-crakes and seed producers (like mustard and linseed) for wintering finches. These areas are protected from stock and not harvested or grazed. After a three year cycle, they are ploughed in using the remainder of the crop as green manure and planted out with a permanent late maturing



Bird & bee cover at Sangomore, Durness

grass mix thus completing a full re-seed. We have seen some success already with the return of a corncrake in May this year, regular foraging bumble bees and there is a strong natural growth of indigenous wetland flowers and herbs. For my own part, it has been possible to re introduce cattle to the croft through the scheme and continue in a positive vein, actively crofting. Land management contracts are set to take over from RSS in the near

future offering further possibilities for the RSPB to work along side crofters in the North and West. If you are interested or would like any information on how the work at Durness is progressing please do get in touch with me, James Mather, Sangomore, Durness through the usual channels, or alternatively contact Kenny Graham at the RSPB Golspie Office 01408 634 404.

A potential opening

A group of crofters on the North Coast have formed a relationship with a Perthshire Finisher and Retailer that has seen cattle purchased directly from the crofts at good market prices, commission free and with little to pay for transport.

John first came to appreciate the local cattle when he was holidaying in the area; he approached the neighbouring crofter and agreed to take a few cattle for a trial. He was so pleased with the way the hardy hill cattle fattened up on the lush lowland grass that he set up the regular arrangement with the North Coast group. Dealing with a group rather than individuals has allowed him to take sufficient numbers in a batch to make the arrangement profitable for all involved.

John has now approached the NWCPA with tentative proposals to take a larger number of cattle, and from a wider area. He also has contacts with other finishers who might be interested forming similar ventures. As a tentative beginning, John has asked the Association to compile a list

of producers with details of the stock for sale, who would consider selling directly to him or colleagues. He is looking for stock out of continental bulls, no highlanders, but he would consider highland crosses provided they had been de-horned.

If this is of interest to you please get in touch with the Association before the 14th September.



North West Cattle Producers Association

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