



Trees for L🌱fe

Annual Review | 2023-24

We stand at the forefront of rewilding in the Scottish Highlands. Hopeful and bold, we are committed to creating nature-rich landscapes that include and support people. Our vision is of a revitalised wild forest, providing space for wildlife to flourish and communities to thrive.

Thank you to everyone who supported rewilding in the Scottish Highlands this year. This is our annual review covering the period from 1 February 2023 – 31 January 2024.

Below you'll find our highlights and biggest achievements of the year, as well as our plans for the future. We have also included a financial breakdown, so you can see how we raise income and where it is spent.

This year, we celebrated 30 years as a charity and marked a major milestone with the opening of the world's first Rewilding Centre. We also made significant progress with our forest restoration work – publishing key findings from the Caledonian Pinewood Recovery Project and launching both the Wild Pine Project and the Tree Seed Collection Project. In October, we were thrilled to welcome television presenters Chris Packham, Megan McCubbin, and a team of young conservationists to Dundreggan as part of the new 8 Out of 10 Bats nature series.

Highlights and achievements

Celebrating 30 years

We have officially been restoring the Caledonian forest for 30 years. Since 1993, more than 5,000 people have volunteered with us, helping to grow more than two million trees and enabling the natural regeneration of many more. Supporters, local communities and stakeholders across the landscapes where we work have been a golden thread throughout these three decades. Rewilding takes time – and restoring Scotland's wild forest will continue to support people, wildlife, and climate long into the future.

Dundreggan Rewilding Centre opened

Our Dundreggan Rewilding Centre – the first visitor attraction of its kind in the world – opened in April 2023. Located just eight miles from Loch Ness, on the main road to the Isle of Skye, the centre is a gateway to the wild forest, with fully accessible trails and forest activities for all ages. Rooted in Gaelic culture and heritage, the centre welcomed over 20,000 visitors in its first year, offering immersive experiences of nature and rewilding in action. It was awarded the British Guild of Travel Writers International Tourism Award for the Best Tourism Project in the UK and Ireland.

8 Out of 10 Bats

We were thrilled to welcome television presenters Chris Packham, Megan McCubbin, and a team of young conservationists to Dundreggan as part of the new 8 Out of 10 Bats nature series. Filming took place over a week and featured live segments, topical wildlife films, engaging props, and real-time nature footage from across the UK. A public event on Saturday 21 October gave visitors the chance to meet Chris, Megan, and the team – who shared inspiring messages about how we can all help save nature before it's too late.

Caledonian Pinewood Recovery Project findings

Our landmark Caledonian Pinewood Recovery Project revealed that Scotland's surviving Caledonian pinewoods are under threat and in poor condition. This was the first major study into their health in over 60 years. The findings show that most of these globally unique pinewoods are on a knife-edge and could be the last of a lineage stretching back to the last ice age. The four-year study identified high deer numbers, non-native conifers, lack of long-term management, and the emerging impacts of climate breakdown as major threats to their survival. Read the report [here](#).



Wild Pine Project

Caledonian pinewoods are globally unique and support rare wildlife including red squirrels, capercaillie and crossbills. Yet less than 2% of the Caledonian forest, which once covered much of the Highlands, survives. Just 84 individual Caledonian pinewoods are officially recognised, and they were last documented over 25 years ago. This year, we launched the Wild Pine project in partnership with Woodland Trust Scotland. We surveyed 11 'lost' native pinewood sites to assess their condition and prioritise them for restoration.

Protecting ancient pines in Glen Loyne

Ancient Scots pines in Glen Loyne – within the Affric Highlands rewilding landscape – have been saved and given a chance of regeneration. Thanks to cooperation of the landowner, we erected 1.5 kilometres of new fencing, while also repairing, extending, and connecting existing sections. Due to the glen's remoteness, heavy-duty materials had to be flown in by helicopter. The pinewood will now be able to naturally regenerate for the first time in decades. Read more [here](#).

Tree Seed Collection Project

We launched the Tree Seed Collection Project – a collaborative three-year project between Woodland Trust Scotland and Trees for Life to enhance the availability of native trees from western Scotland. Volunteers and montane specialists are collecting seed from key areas, including remnants of Scotland's temperate rainforest. Planting trees from locally collected seed is critical in supporting the expansion of Scotland's Caledonian forest in areas where natural regeneration is not possible. Read more about the project [here](#).

Common Ground Forum

We're proud to be a member of Common Ground Forum which launched in October 2023. The network is working to move beyond the conflict that has characterised deer management in Scotland for too long. The Forum members are committed to a more collaborative approach to deer management, based on mutual respect and consensus building. Find out more [here](#).



Looking to the future – Our plans for 2024-25

Cairngorms Aspen Network

We will launch our Cairngorms Aspen Network Project in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority and Cairngorms Aspen Group to develop an exciting aspen network in the Cairngorms. Aspen is a scarce yet ecologically important tree. We will initially work on the development phase which involves mapping the location, condition and health of the current aspen trees in order to identify key sites and management priorities (e.g. fencing, growing and planting plans) for the delivery phase. The mapping will be essential for enabling an effective and strategic approach to aspen conservation. Read more about the project [here](#).

Scotland's Pinewood Conference

Around 6000 years ago, Scotland was covered in an estimated 1.5 million hectares of native Caledonian pinewood. Today, only small and isolated fragments of this life-supporting habitat remains, scattered across the Highlands. We'll be taking part in Scotland's Pinewood Conference 2024 – the first conference of its kind for 20 years – which will be held in Fort William on 28 and 29 October. The conference will bring together 160 experts, landowners, managers, and enthusiasts who are interested in Caledonian pinewoods to examine how landscape scale management can lead to ecosystem recovery, focusing on western pinewoods.

Black grouse surveys

A new community-focused programme of black grouse surveys will be launched by the Affric Highlands initiative and RSPB Scotland, working together with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and local landowners. The project builds on previous surveys by RSPB Scotland in the area since 2007 and includes a team of volunteers for the first time. Black grouse are an important indicator species for ecosystem health, and use a wide variety of habitats for feeding, shelter, nesting, lekking and rearing chicks. But the spectacular birds have suffered long-term UK-wide decline, due to threats such as habitat loss and intensive land management. Find out more about Affric Highlands [here](#).

Red Squirrel Reintroduction Project

The Scottish Highlands are the largest remaining stronghold for red squirrels in the UK, home to around 75% of the population. However, this population has traditionally been confined to the central and eastern Highlands, and red squirrels remain absent from much of their former range in the northwest. Since 2016, we have been working to reintroduce red squirrels to areas of their former range, with two new release sites planned for 2024: the remote Drimnin Estate overlooking the Sound of Mull, and Ratagan on the Glenelg peninsula. Find out more about the project [here](#).



Finances

Take a look at how Trees for Life invested in rewilding this year.

Income

Donations £1,297,000

Thousands of supporters from around the world give regularly to Trees for Life. Many hundreds more show their support for the future of Scotland's wild forest through generous one-off donations, by giving to our appeals, donating Gift Aid and leaving legacies. Trusts, foundations and businesses also provide valuable support for rewilding through flexible, unrestricted funding.

Trusts and foundations £759,000

Grant givers who share our vision for a revitalised wild forest in the Scottish Highlands. These funders make much of our work possible. We remain very grateful for their continued support and partnership.

Businesses £606,000

Businesses of all sizes support Trees for Life, supporting their ESG strategies, CSR commitments, and bringing their teams closer to nature. We partner with organisations that share our common goal of giving back to nature. Whether through advisory services, Business Partnerships, corporate sponsorship, or by supporting woodland creation, businesses help make rewilding happen.

Gifts and products £449,000

People from all walks of life support rewilding by volunteering on our Rewilding Weeks, growing and dedicating trees with us, and buying our ethical merchandise. We also generate income from private tree sales at the nursery, and from our own Dundreggan venison.

Other £76,000

When it's not being used by volunteers during Rewilding Weeks, the rental of Athnamulloch Bothy in Glen Affric generates a small income. Bank interest from our carefully managed savings also provides a return.

Rewilding Centre income £384,000

Visitors to our Dundreggan Rewilding Centre support rewilding eating in our An Nead café, staying at our An Spirid accommodation, buying merchandise and taking part in residentials, workshops and activities.

Total income £3,571,000

Expenditure

Involving people £523,000

Engaging people from all walks of life in rewilding is a vital part of our work – from volunteering and employment opportunities to community engagement programmes. Our volunteer Rewilding Weeks and Rewild and Recover Weeks are key ways we involve people directly in hands-on rewilding efforts.

Rewilding Dundreggan £805,000

Dundreggan is set within 10,000 acres of the Scottish Highlands. Trees for Life has been rewilding the estate since 2008, restoring native woodland to create a rich, biodiverse landscape. It's the home of our education programmes, community outreach, and Dundreggan Rewilding Centre.

Practical rewilding £598,000

Every year we help return native wildlife, plants and trees to the Highlands. From creating new populations of red squirrels, to propagating rare tree species in the nursery, this is the practical rewilding needed to create a more nature-rich future.

Collaborative rewilding £727,000

Working with others means our rewilding work can have a greater impact – from influencing national policy with the Scottish Rewilding Alliance to delivering large-scale, long-term and strategic nature restoration through collaborative projects with partners like Affric Highlands, other charities, landowners, public bodies, businesses and communities.

Raising funds £402,000

This includes our work to enable supporters to help save the Caledonian forest and its wildlife through donations, appeals, merchandise and applications for grant funding.

Total expenditure £3,054,000



Thank you to all our many brilliant supporters who have helped make our work possible this year. Your continued support of rewilding makes us all incredibly hopeful for the future and what can be achieved for nature, people and climate when we work together.

Image credits

Dundreggan Rewilding Centre © Paul Campbell Photography

Glen Loyne © Trees for Life

People under oak tree © Paul Campbell Photography

Dragonfly © Paul Campbell Photography

Income and expenditure figures were extracted from the draft accounts prepared for audit for the year ended 31 January 2024. Full audited and unqualified accounts can be obtained from Companies House or by applying to our head office. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1k.

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