

SCTEAG meeting, 10th June 2019: Minutes

Present: Peter Roberts, Tim Godfrey, Roger Cottis, Alan Drever, Catherine de Vries, Chris Pendlebury, Dorothy Jackson (minutes).

Apologies: none

1. Minutes of the last meeting approved for forwarding to SCT.

2. Updates on summer programme

Bat event: provisionally Saturday 24th August in the evening. Roger will give a short presentation before leading a walk with bat detectors. Children welcome.

The moth event was called off due to bad weather. Phil will email if another opportunity is available. Roger to contact Phil re trialling a battery-operated moth trap at Kinloch.

Night walks: Roger will inform SCTEAG as and when he has time. Children will be able to practice using the bat detectors. SCTEAG to pay for new batteries for the detectors.

Beach cleans: It proved difficult to involve the school due to finding suitable dates. Catherine to develop further ideas e.g. at Point of Sleat, and possibilities of boat access.

SSSi: The underwater drone (ROV) was successfully tested in Loch Slapin, with discovery of a hitherto unknown large sea grass bed. Fauna & Flora International may provide technical help with transferring data to maps. William Grant, who have been supporting the ROV project, are favourably disposed to receiving an aquaponics proposal, building on the land assets at Tormore, with a water supply (96% of water is recirculated) and electricity supply via the grid/hydropower scheme. Feasibility study needed, including technical aspects and local market demand. SSSI does not have manpower to run the project, so would need someone else to commit to managing the project. Alan, Chris and Tim to brief SRL in first instance.

Winter talks: Well received and generally good turnout. However, attendance from SMO was disappointing at John Phillips' excellent talk on Gaelic in the Environment.

3. Tormore

General updates: The path network now just needs maintenance and a few more walkways to be installed. The interpretative panel at the fank will be installed in time for the solstice celebration on Sunday 23rd June.

Hydro project and planting plans for community areas in the forest: Information was received from Community Shares Scotland on funding the project via a community share issue, rather than a commercial loan. Suggest SCT/SRL organise a public meeting to introduce the project to the community and see if anyone in the community will take on promoting the share issue, as there is currently no capacity amongst existing volunteers.

A meeting with the contractors is scheduled in August to identify which areas to be protected during construction.

Community planting: seedlings are being produced in the polytunnel, led by Polly. Planting out possibly next year.

Peat restoration project: Following felling of trees on the peat areas, Lucy Ballantine (Peatland Action Trust) did not manage to submit the next funding application on SCT's behalf before the deadline.

Funds are needed for carrying out the peat restoration work (including drain blocking) and a person to oversee the peat restoration project. It is hoped that SNH will increase the size of the fund, which is oversubscribed, so that Lucy can reapply.

4. Ideas for environment information leaflets

James Merryweather kindly put together a proposed leaflet outline listing the various beaches on Sleat and why they are worth visiting. It was felt more detail would be needed on how to access the beaches without inconveniencing land owners/tenants, leading to a discussion of the intended audience and how much natural history content was needed. There were concerns that encouraging tourism to all our beaches could cause environmental damage, as is happening elsewhere in Skye. Possibilities of interpretive panel(s) at key sites were discussed. These could help to inform tourists about wildlife in specific locations and also explain potential harm caused by visitors e.g. dogs disturbing ground nesting birds. To be revisited in the Autumn.

5. White tailed eagles update

Crofters have now recognised that removal of the nest tree, or the whole block of trees, will merely displace the WTEs elsewhere. During a meeting with SCT's WTE subcommittee, Ian MacLeod of SNH, said that there is no single solution due to the variability of situations, that WTEs are a small part of the problems facing crofters and SNH does not see itself as the lead on this but this is for the stakeholder group. SCT should organise contact with the local stakeholder group to encourage them to register with SNH who will visit the sites to assess damage. However, Camard farm is, as far as SCTEAG is aware, already part of the SNH trial farm scheme.

SCTEAG members reiterated that verified data on predation pressure on Sleat is still lacking, hindering the process of finding the right solution. A nest camera is needed to help inform data on lamb predation, carcasses should be sent for independent assessment by the Scottish Agricultural College, and diversionary feeding should be trialled.

As information from the various sources is contradictory, a list of questions will be compiled for the SCT Chair (who is liaising with the local stakeholder group), the answers to which will assist the SCTEAG in its understanding of the current situation so that it can offer an informed opinion.

This year's nest is in a position that is hard to monitor. One chick was probably hatched but is thought to have died. If so, this would provide a useful control to monitor lamb losses when there is no WTE breeding. [Update: a six- to seven-week old chick was reported on the nest on 18th June.]

It would appear that the Trust Newsletter article on WTEs was poorly informed and unbalanced. Peter to look into it.

6. Initial ideas for next winter programme

- Phil Knott talk on his experiences as an international wildlife tour guide. Alan to approach Phil.
- SSSI update
- Tormore update evening
- Community planting day
- Climate awareness talk/event
- Something on plastic – possibly linking with Broadford group

7. AOCB

Ash dieback has now reached Duisdale SSSI woodland, which is linked to Kinloch and Kyleakin hills. Roger to send further information to the group.

8. Date of the next meeting

Mon 19th August, 7.30 pm, SCT offices.