

October 2023

Community and Rainforest Engagement Week (CREW)



Glenuig, Moidart

6-13 October

By Pupak Haghghi

CREW Chronicles

Our 3rd week, 2023

Coming Together

A long awaited week arrived. We gathered in Glenuig, in the welcoming comfort of Viking Cottage. We gathered from as far away as Japan, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Totnes, Eakring, Forres, to be here for this week. Our intention being to give the Atlantic Rainforest a helping hand to recover and regenerate. Arriving at Viking Cottage, we entered into our community-making process by choosing where we'll sleep, who we share our personal space with, or not. Quickly dinner was made and shared. Then we laid down on the floor, ie, those who could, with some spreading out on the sofa, listening to the word of Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder, reading the last minutes of her piece, *Speaking Wind-Words*. This was our portal to enter the space between us.

Action for Rainforest Revival

In our week together :

- * we went to the oakwood behind Glenuig Hall to erect tree-guards made from rhododendron branches and woven brambles. Our little tree-guards were put around the young saplings to protect them from deer



grazing. Looking carefully at the forest floor, there are no saplings growing to more than ankle height, which means no baby trees survive to become a future forest. For this reason, protecting the young saplings is an imperative.

* We carried bags with us to collect acorns from this woodland. This was a mast year. The acorns were raining down in thousands from the oak trees. We collected tens of thousands of acorns as we walked, made wig-wam-tree-guards, and enjoyed the magnificence of this glorious woodland.

* As well as collecting acorns from the Samalaman woods, we made a journey to Beasdale to collect acorns from this original rainforest. Beasdale is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated by the European Commission. We chose to go there to collect acorns to diversify the base of the genetic material for the oaks we will be growing and planting. Again we collected thousands of acorns because of their particular abundance this year.

* Now that we had bags full of acorns, we thought it would be best to plant them directly where they will grow, rather than growing them in a nursery, to be planted a few years down the wheel of time. Consulting with Robert, he guided us to a couple of sites on his estate. Fortunately Rob Pedley was with us. As a focaliser and guide for Trees for Life weeks, he knew how to imitate the jay bird to plant acorns. With his excellent tutorage, we planted acorns, like the jay. This was a very enjoyable activity (for me). I got to touch the soil with my bare hands, feeling the different textures, moisture content and fertility of the land with my own fingers. Thus I learned to



discern where to plant (and where to avoid) all the precious acorns in the ground.

Our acorn-planting was a spontaneous decision in the moment of abundance. We went with the flow of what was present there and then, to take the right action. We planted the acorns inside a fenced area, but since then I realised the fence may have some faults. A couple of goat escapees were



sighted, as well as a bunch of deer inside the fence. We therefore need to plan for smaller fences inside the big fence to protect the acorns we planted this autumn.

* We engaged our hands with the ever-necessary task of rhododendron removal. We focused on two areas, the Samalaman Wood, and the area above the Balachan building on the A861. In particular an enormous rhododendron bush was removed from the oakwood which took the combined efforts of 5 people. With this giant plant removed, the headland woods are now clearer of the invasive rhododendron. Of course no place in the Highlands would ever be completely clear of the rhododendron, but it is a matter of degrees. This headland now stands a chance of being relatively clear if the residents of the hamlet remain vigilant and on the look out for the small invasive plants popping up here and there. Removing rhododendrons by the root is much easier when they are younger.



Ecological Literacy

We learned about the right timing of acting for forest restoration. This being a mast year for acorns, it was evident how nature was expressing itself. We aligned ourselves with nature the best we could by collecting acorns and planting them where the presence of oak trees is lean.



It occurred to us that we need to increase our ecological awareness about who lives in the forest, in terms of which species of mosses, lichens, mushrooms, insects, birds, mammals. We need to learn about their particular habitat, needs, and seasonal behaviour so we can act in accordance with their nature. For this reason, we are planning for an event in March in Glenuig to increase our ecological awareness as a community, so we can align our actions for the rainforest in concordance with nature and with each other.

Insights

A few insights we gained from this week include :

- * Community living deepens our humanity. Over a week of living together in a shared cottage, we became a small community. In this setting we had opportunities to refine our humanity by sharing our time, gifts and talents.
- * Our inner lives matter. When we engage with nature to give it our hands for regenerating wild places, nature gives something back of equal value. This comes as a sense of connectedness, a wholeness.
- * Nature responds to love. Our motivation to engage with the community and rainforest in Glenuig had been to restore nature in this unique place. Nature has awareness. It awakens us in moments of reciprocity. A natural connection has been woven between our participants and the genius loci of Glenuig.

Setbacks

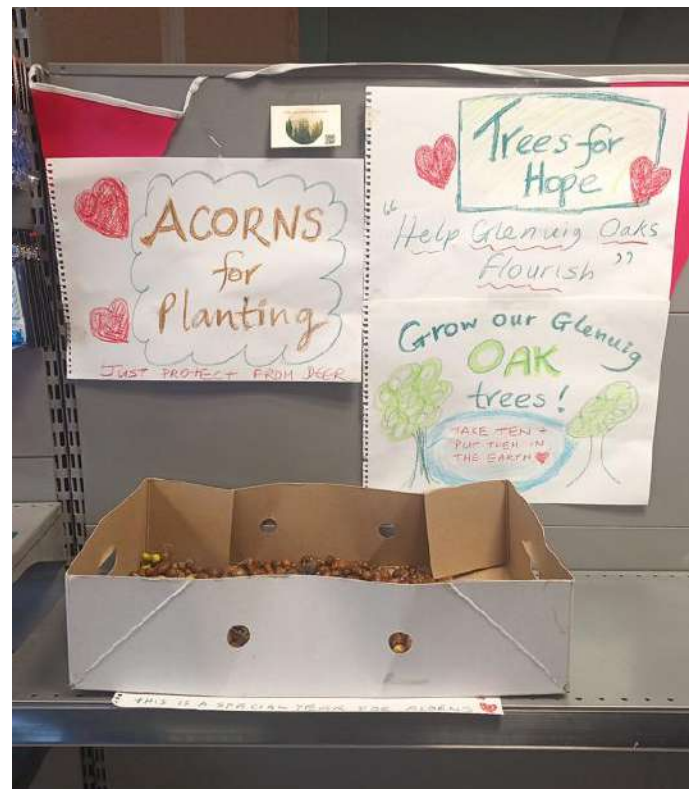
- * Illnesses. A number of our participants experienced various illnesses during the week. Some of these setbacks could have been avoided with better clothing.
- * Potential danger of deer-grazing the young oaks in spring. We need to plan for fencing.
- * Lack of financial support. Our application to the Royal Bank of Scotland for a £3000 grant for two CREW weeks was turned down. We are therefore financially compromised for this week. Securing the necessary funds would help us greatly, especially having a paid position for the focalisers of the week.



Miracles

When we planted the acorns from Beasdale on Glenuig Estate, I said a little prayer for the oak trees to once again cover the whole land where the Atlantic Rainforest needs to be. This is a big stretch of land.

An event during the week opened a door to future possibilities for my prayer to become reality. The Singing Kettle, a children's sing-song group had their Halloween show in the Glenuig Hall. We had our 'queen of miracles' Dorota Owen with us. Put the two together and we have prayers answered. Dorota approached the MC and asked him to announce to the children to each take 10 acorns home with them and plant them in a pot. She then made beautiful signs and put them with the acorns. By the end of the show, when all the children and their parents left, all the acorns went with them too.



Acorns at the Zero Waste shop in Mallaig

This was the beginning of a grand idea. What if the school children of the area could become our tree-growers? The forests after all will be their future.

A number of events then dominoed towards this possibility. A couple who were at the Singing Kettle approached Dorota. They were of Polish-Scottish mix, just like her. They had just opened a zero-waste shop in Mallaig. Inspired by the idea of the rainforests returning to where they need to be in the West Coast, they filled their own bags full of acorns and put them outside their shop, encouraging their customers to get engaged in forest restoration.

We then got inspired to put a box of acorns in the pub. Dorota made some signs especially for this purpose. On our last night of the week, we all went to the pub. Dorota's poster became a centre for our conversation. Somehow it inspired Jordi, the bar-tender at the time, to suggest he could get in touch with the schools in Mallaig and Acharacle to encourage the teachers and pupils to become tree-tenders. It felt like the idea is popping like fire-crackers in the sky.

I am aware that grounding the idea takes a little more than a few phone calls. In fact it needs tending to with much care. So I have nominated Dorota to be our Tree-Children ambassador.

I am honoured to say she has accepted this role. So miracles are on their way with Dorota as our Tree-Children ambassador, and the local shop-keepers, bar-tenders, little tots and their parents as our friends and allies.



Dorota Speaking about Trees for Hope in Findhorn

A Culture of Learning and Sharing

So our week came to an end on the 13th of October. Earlier in the week, we heard something about an attack on Israel, and a retaliatory attack back. But we were wrapped up in our own world, with so much to share and to learn.



By the end of the week we had played a number of Miracle Games with Dorota and Adam, did a writing workshop with Akira, listened to beautiful streams of music by Pasha, danced African beats with Sami, enjoyed marvellous raw salads by Lucie, were fed exquisite home-made dishes by Dorota, and participated in Goethian Observations lead by me. We were fully immersed in a culture of building relationships and sharing our gifts. I learned how to recognise magic mushrooms from the younger people in the group. We all planted acorns like jays, with thanks to Rob. We decided to call ourselves the Rainbow Ecotone. Our week was blessed by the worst storms of the year in Scotland and exquisite rainbows for days on end.

Here are Rob Pedley's words of wisdom, descended on him during a sleepless night in Glenuig.

Despair, action, hope

Last night I woke about 3am thinking about the world.

Always a mistake.

I lay awake for hours, clawed by despair. My old familiar enemy.

The problems we face are so big. The solutions so hard.

And I am expert at finding reasons to do nothing. And despair.

I can't reach up and pull billions of tons of greenhouse gases from the sky.

So I do nothing. And despair.

I can't bring a family of wolves to protect the seedling trees of this woodland from deer. So I do nothing. And despair.

I love nature and want to help but nature is an idea and I don't know how to help an idea. I love this wild woodland but how can I look after a great big forest? I love this

tiny tree seedling. Just two leaves but full of life and hope and that's easy to help.

I'll make a little guard of sticks and bramble to keep a deer's nose away.

It's a tiny insignificant action but every action has consequences.

The one I'm hoping for is a hungry deer choosing something else to eat, but perhaps there will be others too.

Perhaps someone walking by will see my odd bramble creation and feeling curious, start to think about the health of the forest.

Perhaps they will chat about it in the pub.

Perhaps they will have some better ideas for protecting the trees.

Perhaps they will talk about predators to keep the deer moving.

Perhaps, years from now, in a public consultation about reintroducing wolves all the people from the pub that night will vote yes.

Perhaps my tiny action did help bring a family of wolves to protect this forest.

Even a tiny action can be a cure for despair.

