

# Coille Àird a' Mhulaidh

## Ardvourlie Woodland

Tree planting began at Ardvourlie in 2000 as part of the Millennium Forest Programme. At 100ha it is now the largest area of woodland in the otherwise rugged and treeless landscape of North Harris.

Several native species have been planted, creating a range of habitats similar to those found in the Hebrides prior to human settlement. You will notice the patchy, mosaic structure of the woodland that mimics natural patterns by planting in the best soils and sheltered spots. This is known as *rewilding*, or restoring an area to a more natural state.

### Why are trees so important?

As the trees grow and extend their roots they suck up water, reducing soil moisture content and increasing aeration. This aids colonisation by fungi, bacteria and invertebrates that flourish, further improving soil structure, accelerating decomposition and recycling nutrients that would otherwise be locked up or washed away.

Even young trees provide cover, and their seeds and berries allow small mammals and birds to find a home. As the woodland expands and matures the improving soils, shelter and feeding opportunities will support a greater abundance and variety of organisms. Eventually woodland specialists may colonise. Imagine hearing a woodpecker on Harris?

People also benefit. Woodlands are popular for numerous recreational activities. They are a source of timber products and provide foraging opportunities for wild foods such as fungi, nuts, berries, birch syrup and game. As trees grow they also store the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide. So woodland expansion on suitable land both increases biodiversity and helps to tackle climate change.

'S e àite gu math sònraichte a th' anns a' choille seo, oir 's i a' chiad choille ann an ceann a tuath na Hearadh o chionn fhada. Tha sinn an dòchas gum bi barrachd chraobhan agus choilltean an seo anns an àm ri teachd.



### Caorann *Sorbus aucuparia*

Rowan, also known as mountain ash, is widespread throughout North Harris on crags or on islands where it is protected from grazing animals and muirburn. In spring the flowers provide nectar and pollen providing a high energy food supply for insects. In autumn its bright red berries are a vital source of sustenance, especially for migrating birds, like redwings and fieldfare. The berries are edible to humans and a good source of vitamin C, although they have a very bitter taste.

### Feàrna *Alnus glutinosa*

Alder is abundant in Àird a' Mhulaidh and can be easily recognised by its catkins which provide an early source of nectar and pollen in the spring. This species has been particularly important in the establishment of the woodland. Tolerant of strong winds and fast growing, it provides shelter for its neighbours. Alder has a symbiotic relationship with bacteria in its root nodules that fix nitrogen into the soil, thereby improving soil fertility for other tree species and plants. Alder coppices well and the wood makes excellent charcoal and gunpowder.



### Beith *Betula pubescens*

Downy Birch is well adapted to our mild, damp climate and nutrient-poor soils. It is a pioneer, producing millions of tiny seeds that are spread by the wind.

Birch stands provide the perfect conditions below them for woodland grasses and mosses, gradually improving the conditions and allowing colonisation by more specialised woodland plants. Downy birch is associated with a high degree of biodiversity including over 300 species of insect and a wide range of fungi.



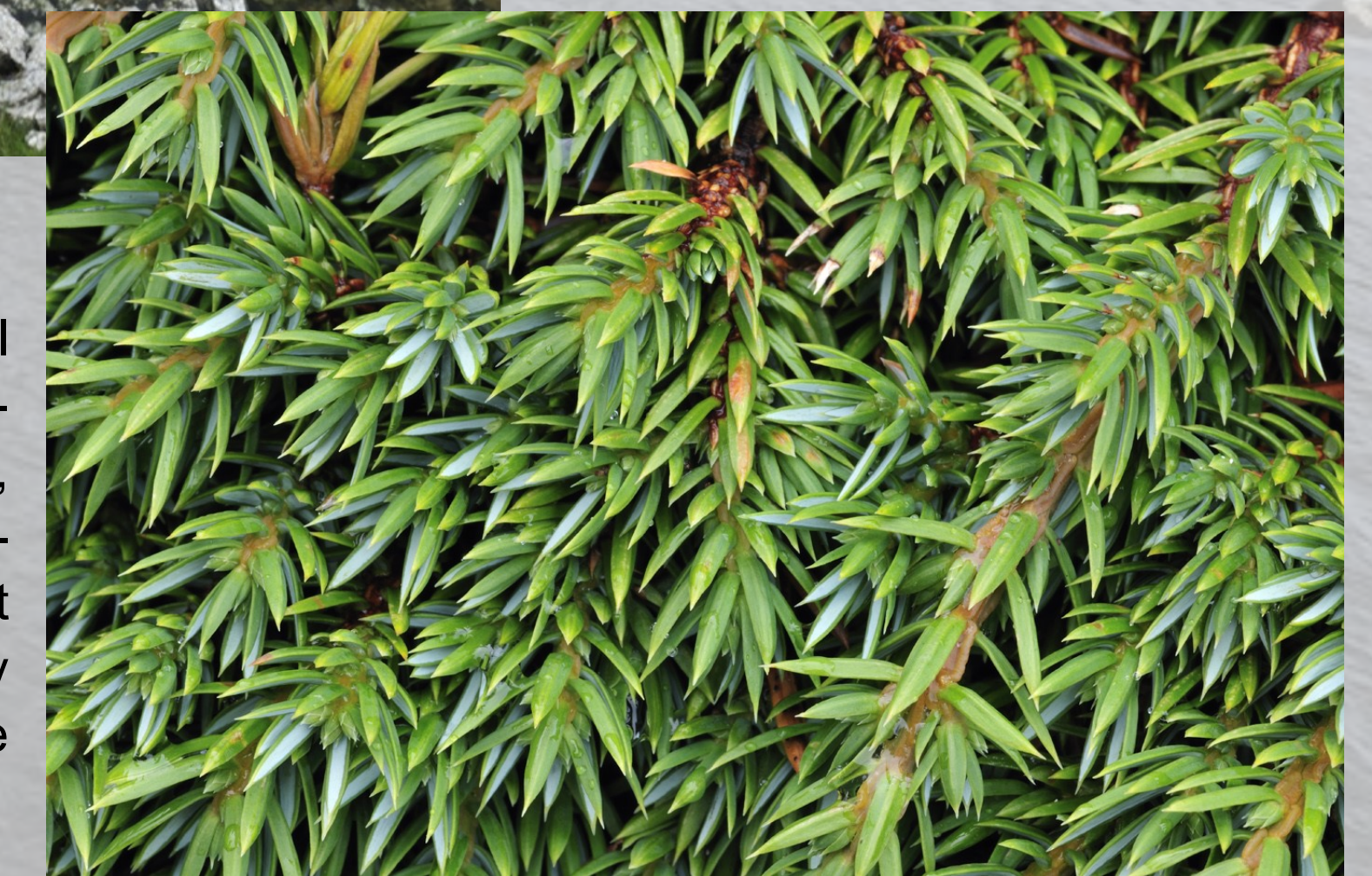
### Critheann *Populus tremula*

In Scotland, Aspen propagates via 'suckers'; new plants develop from the roots of the parent plant. It rarely produces seed. Therefore it often grows in stands of several trees that are genetically identical. In Celtic mythology, the visual effect of an aspen trembling in the wind was said to be the tree communicating between this world and the next.



### Aiteann *Juniperus communis*

Juniper is coniferous and its small prickly leaves are easy to recognise. It provides cover for grouse, is a food source for moths and provides berries for several different bird species. However, probably the most noteworthy use for the berries is in gin production!



Photographs courtesy of [www.lauriecampbell.com](http://www.lauriecampbell.com)



The North Harris Trust - protecting and enhancing North Harris' natural and cultural heritage.  
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