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GUERRILLA GARDENERS LEAVE LASTING LEGACY FOR RARE ARRAN TREE SPECIES

- **Henry Murdo and Margo McLellan have been sharing knowledge of tree growing and planting with National Trust for Scotland to help save rare Arran Whitebeam**
- **Guerilla gardener couple planted trees in secret on National Trust for Scotland land to help regenerate landscape**
- **Their story inspired the charity's Dedicate a Tree campaign to encourage support for Glen Rosa woodlands project**

A couple with a passion for the rare Arran Whitebeam has left a legacy for the island through their work to help save the native tree species from extinction.

Henry Murdo who has lived on Arran since 1968 and Margo McLellan, a native Arranach, have been working with the National Trust for Scotland to share their tree growing and planting knowledge with the next generation of green-fingered enthusiasts, after previously doing their work in secret.

Henry, a former wood cutter, and his partner Margo, a retired stained glass worker, who both share a passion for the island's landscape, its nature, and the environment, became guerilla gardeners in a bid to help repopulate the Arran Whitebeam in Glen Rosa. They would plant saplings grown in their tree nursery on land owned by the conservation charity undercover, to help speed up regeneration of the landscape that they hold so dear.

More recently, the couple has been working with the charity's head ranger on the island, Kate Sampson, to impart their experience of tree growing and planting with Trust staff, volunteers and school groups assisting with efforts to regenerate Arran's woodlands. Their exploits and inspirational story are being shared to encourage people to support the charity and the nature in its care through its Dedicate a Tree campaign.

Henry said: "When I first came to Arran to start work as an apprentice deer stalker and game keeper at 15 or 16 years old, I remember being astounded at the barren landscape. It had been destroyed completely and was devoid of trees through years of over grazing and heath burning, which had decimated the tree population.

"When I visited the Glen, I noticed a little gem of a tree, it stood out as it was isolated and had survived despite the sheep and deer, and it's what got me interested in the Whitebeam species. I was also inspired by the amazing work that has taken place at Mar Lodge Estate over the years, where the Trust has had a positive impact on the landscape by controlling the deer effectively, to help the trees recover and start regenerating naturally, which has led to a fantastic transformation up there.

"I'm a keen gardener but Margo is fantastic; we don't have any professional experience, just a love for gardening that has grown to become a passionate endeavour. We've

probably planted thousands of trees across the island. We started a small tree nursery in the garden growing Whitebeam and other trees I enjoyed by collecting seeds from the different species, even selling them to the Forestry Commission at one point because we had so many.

“The guerilla gardening started out of frustration at the lack of progress being made to protect the landscape in previous years. We did it in secret, without asking permission from the Trust at the time. Fortunately, we didn't have to do it under the cover of darkness or in balaclavas, we would just go to different parts of the island and plant some trees while we were there. We always got a great sense of satisfaction from doing it and leaving a lasting impression on the landscape.”

Margo added: “The Whitebeam are a robust species but are very difficult to grow from seed, so most of the saplings planted didn't survive, as they weren't protected from herbivores with guards for example, but we have had some success. The species was at the point of extinction with only a handful of trees left on the island, but Henry has the magic touch when it comes to growing them, when others haven't been so successful, and has left a lasting impact on the landscape as a result. Kate is always saying, 'You're the only one that can grow these from seed, Henry'.

“We're delighted at the time and dedication the Trust is putting into the landscape now, and working with Kate is amazing, as she's been there for a long time, so we've developed a good relationship with her and we're happy to help with the volunteer and school groups when we can. Henry is extremely good with an audience and he's very good at explaining to people why you want to grow trees, the importance of them and what they do for the atmosphere and soil fertility and educating kids about it, which I think there should be more of in schools.”

Henry continued: “It's always difficult to know how to get children inspired. Strangely enough, a daughter of a friend who helped us plant trees in Glen Rosa when she was about, 8 or 9 years old, is now working at the Botanic gardens and she has special responsibility for the Whitebeam. It has been lovely for me because I've known her since she was a baby. It's not through me doing anything special, just planting trees, but they can see what you're doing, and if they take it up, that's great. Most of them won't, but it only takes a few to make a difference.

“I've just been explaining to the Rangers here how to do it, but as long as trees are fruiting, they'll be self-seeding and regenerating naturally. The trees planted years ago now have lots of berries on them and are doing fine so they shouldn't need to do much, just look after them. It's really important that the Trust continue their work to help restore the landscape so we're happy to support them and talk about our experience if it makes a difference in the long term.”

The charity protects and expands woodland habitats through natural regeneration at places like Mar Lodge, and through planting, where appropriate, when natural regeneration is unlikely to succeed. This helps capture carbon, increase biodiversity, and protect and conserve native and endangered species.

Dedicate a Tree by the National Trust for Scotland helps the charity raise funds to breathe new life into our country's landscapes, by planting new trees. Members of the

public can support this work by dedicating a tree for themselves or a loved one, in celebration or in memory, to help to nurture and protect Scotland's wonderful woodlands for generations to come.

Kate Sampson, National Trust for Scotland Head Ranger at Brodick, said: "Working with Henry and Margo has been great fun and their passion for the Arran Whitebeam and trees in general is evident from all the work they've done throughout the years on the island to help rejuvenate the landscape to how it used to be. I'm incredibly grateful for their expertise, knowledge and time they've taken to share their experience with us and hopefully instil their passion in our rangers, and the volunteer and school groups that come along to help us with the planting.

"Although they have made a great difference in helping sustain the whitebeam species through their tree planting, I'd discourage other budding guerilla gardeners from following in their footsteps, both in Glen Rosa and beyond. Planting the wrong tree, in the wrong location can have a detrimental impact on the landscape. While we appreciate the good intentions it would be more practical to support the Trust through more conventional methods, such as dedicating a tree.

"By dedicating a tree to someone special, you're not only helping to save rare tree species on Arran, but also having a positive impact at our projects across the country, in the North East and at Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve in Perthshire. Dedicating a tree is the perfect present for loved ones this Christmas, that will leave a lasting impression on our landscapes and help to care for and protect Scotland's natural heritage, both now and into the future."

To dedicate a tree, members of the public can visit nts.org.uk/trees, choose from one of three projects to support and decide how much to donate to their chosen project. Those dedicating a tree will receive a personalised certificate and have the option to share their dedication in the Trust's virtual woodland, while also receiving regular updates on the woodland projects supported.

Dedicate a Tree contributes to the National Trust for Scotland's vision to deliver Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone. Its 10-year strategy, launched in 2022, outlines its vision of caring for, sharing, and conserving Scotland's natural heritage, and contributes to its conservation objectives, to stabilise and improve the condition of its estate, enable nature to flourish, and enrich Scotland's protected heritage.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Images: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/396hu672Y0>

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.