18 December 2024

**THE TRUST SHOWCASES INNOVATION IN HIGHLANDS HABITAT CONSERVATION, INCLUDING SCOTLAND’S RAINFOREST**

* **The National Trust for Scotland hosted an exchange visit to Torridon with representative from Dúlra to showcase its habitat restoration.**
* **The Trust has worked with the local community in Torridon to tackle invasive Rhododendron ponticum.**
* **Inverewe manages invasive species through harvesting Rhododendron Ponticum and converting it to biochar. Biochar is incorporated into the composting process improving the soil microbial life.**

The National Trust for Scotland team in the Highlands and Islands recently hosted an exchange visit from Ireland with representatives of the Dúlra project to share learnings and showcase its vital protection of peatland and woodland, including Scotland’s rainforest. The charity also demonstrated shelter belt management and soil conservation through the innovative use of a retort kiln that produces biochar.

Based in the Irish counties of Mayo and Connemara, ‘Dúlra,’ which translates to ‘nature,’ is part of a nine-year Wild Atlantic European LIFE project. The integrated work with farmers, local communities, and landowners aims to restore and protect the Irish peat bogs and temperate rainforest from the threat of invasive rhododendron. The project’s success relies on the collective effort and commitment of all stakeholders to preserving the natural heritage of a unique landscape in the West of Ireland.

To date, the main scope of Dúlra’s work has been addressing the serious issue of the spread of Rhododendron ponticum in ecologically sensitive upland habitats, with the control efforts targeting three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Connemara, Co. Galway and in southwest Co. Mayo. The project currently employs circa 20 field operatives engaged in control of Rhododendron.

The National Trust for Scotland shares similar challenges, so the project representatives were interested in learning more about the Trust’s partnership work and its innovation around the production of biochar from Rhododendron wood at Inverewe.

The visit began in Torridon where Rob Dewar, National Trust for Scotland’s Invasive Species Project Officer, demonstrated how the conservation charity’s team has been working with the community to remove Rhododendron and plant alternative, non-invasive species. Rob explained how the Trust has led on the use of the ‘stem treatment’ and its partnership with Alliance for Scotland’s Rainforest.

Rob Dewar said: “Working with Alliance for Scotland’s Rainforest (ASR) has been a very satisfying experience as there is a wealth of knowledge within the partnership that we all share. Rhododendron ponticum is one of the major threats to Scotland’s Rainforest, and the Alliance has been able to raise the awareness of the problem. The Trust, who have been so successful in the control work of this invasive plant, has made some valuable contributions. One of these is a beautiful short film of control work within the Rainforest and this can be found on the ASR website.”

The Trust is also part of the Glen Torridon Partnership Project that aims to enhance and protect native habitat in the glen, expand areas of Scottish Rainforest, and control the threat of Rhododendron.

The Dúlra team then met Kevin Ball, National Trust for Scotland Head Gardener at Inverewe Garden, who explained how the invasive Rhododendron in the garden shelter belt had been harvested to produce biochar using a retort kiln that burns at extremely high temperatures.

The biochar is then mixed into the compost and applied back into the garden to improve the properties of the soil and lock in carbon. This whole process, including the interpretation, was selected for the initial shortlist for the RSPB 2024 Nature of Scotland Awards in the ‘innovation’ category.

Kevin Ball said: “In 2021, I was excited to bring the possibility of introducing biochar to the Trust, which could be game changing environmentally. In doing so, we have been able to manage invasive species that are detrimental to our woodland environment and reduce our carbon footprint. It’s heartening to know so many organisations and individuals are also following this line of thought to help preserve and manage their rainforests.”

The kiln was also included on a recent visit to Torridon from the Inverness Feminist Bird Club. Rory Shannon, Ranger at Torridon Estate, alongside Jess Carnegie, Community Engagement Officer, provided a tour and guided demonstration, and the group explored Rhododendron ponticum management on the estate, learning about the kiln and its benefits for the Trust.

The kiln is now on loan to the Woodland Trust Scotland, which will be producing its own biochar as part of rhododendron control at the recently acquired Couldoran property near Ben Shieldaig.

Rainforest conservation is a priority in the National Trust for Scotland’s vision to care for, protect, and share Scotland’s nature, beauty and heritage for everyone, as outlined in its 10-year strategy, launched in 2022. For more information on the National Trust for Scotland, visit www.nts.org.uk.

**ENDS**

**Editor’s Notes:**

Images: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/wv6N42Y3QW>

Please credit Karen Lindsay for the photos attached by using her Instagram handle @photography\_klindsay.

The Trust worked with filmmaker Steven Gourley to raise awareness of Scotland’s rainforest habitat and the challenges the Trust faces to protect it, which can be viewed here:

* <https://savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk/videos/v/stem-treatment-of-rhododendron>
* <https://savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk/videos/v/bydaywhhcxylpxwe46pz2l54mb53wc>

**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.

Scotland’s largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work. For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk/). The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.