

## Introduction

The 2024 CWA Conference took place in the Merkinch Community Centre, Inverness on the 4th and 5th October.

Once again it was an absolute pleasure to witness representatives, from 31 member groups (right) from all over Scotland, come together over the 2 days to network, share, and support one another.

We were also delighted to welcome a number of other organisations and individuals who share our passion for community woodlands. In total, 106 day delegates attended over the 2 days.

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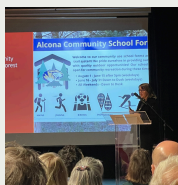


Thank you to our sponsors who helped make the Conference possible:



# Presentations - Friday + Saturday

Click on the links below to view the Conference presentations



## **Keynote Speech**

### **Growing Future Foresters: Lessons from the American Mid-West**

**Amanda Bryan.** UHI



### **Delivering the Forestry Strategy: progress supporting more people and communities to benefit from using, managing and owning woodlands**

**Dr Amy Nicolson.** Urban Woodlands and Communities Advisor, Scottish Forestry.

### **Forestry and Forestry Grant Scheme**

**John Risby.** Conservator. Highlands and Islands



### **A Year in CWA**

The CWA team shared information about their achievements over the year, including the introduction of our mentoring schemes.

- **Amy Clarkson.** Applecross Community Company, and
  - **Adrian Clark.** Evanton Community Wood
- who both worked with our professional foresters this year, briefly shared their experiences.



### **From Field to Community Forest, the funding, the fallouts and all the fun in between!**

**John Hitchcock.** SEACHange Trustee, Collieston, Aberdeenshire



### **Re-energising a Community Woodland**

**Hamish Napier, Andrew Robertson and Steve Blow.** Anagach Woods Trust.

## Workshops - Friday

Click on the links below to view available workshop presentations



[Just Add Biscuits - Youth Volunteering at Dunnet Community Forest](#)  
**Garance Warburton** DCF



[Woodland Group Enterprise and Sustainability](#)  
**Jo Slater** Just Enterprise



Community Asset Transfer - how it should work and how it actually works  
**Felix Spittal** DTAS and  
**Maria De La Torre** Knocknagael Limited



Working with the private sector  
**Piers Voysey** CWA  
- due to the nature of the workshop no presentation is available



[Fund raising for community woodland groups](#)  
**Marion MacNeil** Highland Third Sector Interface



[Bring your issues - Action Learning Sets](#)  
**Sharon Smith** CWA  
- due to the nature of the workshop no presentation is available

## Site Visit: Abriachan Forest Trust

Host: Abriachan Forest Trust

Guide: Suzann Barr

Report + photo credits: Andy Rockall CWA



11 people from conference attended the Abriachan site visit. The party included folk from Anagach Woodland Trust, Carsphairn Community Woodland, Tarras Valley and Kingussie Community Development Company.

The group was met by Suzann Barr (below left) who gave us a walk around several of the buildings that Abriachan have developed over the years they have owned the land, including their compost toilets, round house, nursery area, a bird hide and classrooms.

We also visited one of their outdoor workshop areas which had amongst other things a number of curachs (small one or two person boats with wooden frame and canvas skin) that had been made on site. Of particular interest was the gym and gym equipment made out of wood by one of the young people they work with.



### Points of interest:

- Abriachan run a formal nursery, which when started required them to bus young children from Inverness. Now parents are bringing children. The nursery is entirely outdoors, making novel use of an area of dense conifers. It is an income stream and brings considerable work not least HMIE inspections.
- Compost toilets can deal with specific numbers of people, if that number is exceeded then they become an issue, requiring attention and maintenance.
- So far as possible, do not let multiple staff have protracted periods off at the same time if it can be avoided. At the time of visit both maintenance staff were on respectively maternity and paternity leave (not together!) and this was generating a backlog of work. Observation amongst the visiting party: the more stuff you have (infrastructure such as buildings/boardwalks/toilets, signage etc) the more you have to do by way of maintenance. This should be thought about through the planning of projects.
- Inside the classroom there is a series of a few pictures from various years of their existence around each wall and now extending down the corridor. A very simple and easy way to present a record of their activity. Of particular note was a single sheet of A4 paper that had a twenty five year tally 1999 - 2023 of some of their achievements, including £3,750,000 into the local economy, 40 young people/adults now employed in land based jobs and 75% increase in species of flora & fauna recorded.

**Find out more about Abriachan Forest Trust.**



# Site Visit: Culduthel Community Woods

Host: Culduthel Woods Group

Guide: Murray Ferguson, Caroline Philips

Report + photo credits: Sharon Smith CWA



Culduthel Community Woods, located near the southern edge of Inverness and adjacent to the largest secondary school in the Highlands, is a thriving woodland established in the summer of 2022.

The site, covering approximately 6.5 hectares, was previously “ownerless” land and now comprises a mix of beech, pine, and birch trees. It has quickly become a well-used and valued resource for the local community, supported by regular volunteer sessions and enthusiastic local engagement.

During the visit, participants learned about the impressive progress made in a short time and the group’s ambitious plans for the future. Recent efforts include the installation of signage and interpretation boards, which aim to enhance the visitor experience by providing insights into the woodland’s ecology and history.

Invasive species management has also been a priority, with significant work underway to remove rhododendron and snowberry to support the health and diversity of the woodland. The group have also felled some trees to create some light in the canopy to allow for ground plating and regeneration of the woodland floor.

Another highlight was the group’s approach to meadow management, supported by the Nature Restoration Fund. This initiative focuses on improving meadow habitats to encourage greater biodiversity.

Partnerships with local charities have also played a crucial role, promoting education and awareness while encouraging people to become more active in enjoying the woods. Looking ahead, there are plans to improve paths and access, ensuring the area remains inclusive and easy to navigate for all visitors.

This visit underscored the impressive achievements of Culduthel Community Woods since its establishment. It provided an opportunity to share successes, discuss challenges, and gather valuable feedback to inform future developments. The woodland stands as a testament to the power of community-driven efforts to transform and sustain local natural spaces.

Looking forward Culduthel Community Woods is looking to partner further with Inverness School of Forestry, using the woodland as a space for learning for future foresters.



**Find out more about [Culduthel Community Woods](#).**

# Site Visit: Dunain Community Woods

Host: Dunain Community Woods SCIO

Guide: John Cheadle (volunteer)

Report + photo credits: Jen Pittendreigh CWA



The tour around Dunain Community Woods was led by long-time volunteer John Cheadle, who embodies the essence of all that is great about volunteers and community woodlands. John, a retired fire officer, is one of the original volunteers since 1999, and so has a wealth of knowledge about the site and its history.

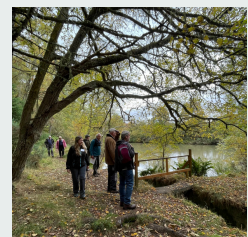
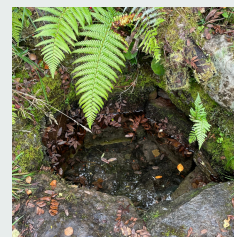
The woodland, approximately 100 acres of native hardwoods and conifers, formed part of the former Craig Dunain Psychiatric Hospital (see middle photo, right) estate. The wood supports a range of wildlife and features important cultural and archaeological sites including a wishing well and a chambered cairn (see photos). Around 30,000 people pass through the wood annually whilst using the Great Glen Way, on their way to/from Fort William.

John and his fellow volunteers (including Arthur and David who were also present on the tour) use their own tools and own fuel to maintain the woods and this section of the Great Glen Way.

A beautiful varied space - highlights include:

- amazing views over Inverness and beyond
- a chambered cairn
- a community gathering space
- a reservoir
- a wishing well
- MacGruer's Pond
- the Sycamore seat
- the 'Parliament' (the collection of benches overlooking the old hospital, where the volunteers take their breaks)
- a Children's Forest
- a Foraging Forest
- a duck pond
- a cemetery
- a pet cemetery
- a brilliant mural

Well worth a visit!



**Find out more about Dunain Community Woods.**



## Ceilidh - Friday

As is tradition, Friday night of the Conference saw a ceilidh being held, this time in St Mary's church hall, Inverness.

In a change to 2023, the 2024 Conference Ceilidh was wholly arranged by local member groups - **Culduthel**, **Knocknagael** and **Dunain** community woodland groups. Local ceilidh band **Tweed** raised the rafters to a sell-out crowd of 100, who enthusiastically danced the night away! Tweed were joined on stage by **Hamish Napier** (Anagach Woods) for a magical impromptu session at half time.

A raffle took place and coffees, teas and snacks were served at half time by the local woodland groups. A small profit made from the ticket sales and raffle went back to the local groups to support their work. Huge thanks to everyone who helped make this such a successful and fun event.



## Stallholders - Friday

Click on the images below for more information about our stallholders

**ENVIRONMENTAL**  
Standards Scotland  
Ìrean Àrainneachdail na h-Alba



## Delegate Feedback

**Did the event deliver your expectations and what did you gain from attending? (If your answer is 'No' or 'Partly' please tell us why, and how we might improve things)**

"Excellent - leaving with lots of ideas."

"Absolutely exceeded expectations. Not only did I find support, I left inspired and with a bunch of new friends!"

"Yes, it was really good. It is always just good to attend to speak to other people/ groups face to face."

"Yes, I found the Collieston presentation very interesting, the site visit was excellent and inspiring and the discussions covered several relevant and useful topics."

"Partly. It would have been great for the venue to be within or close to a woodland group you support. Also the time allowed for workshops was insufficient, and conversations had to be ended prematurely. I would have liked the workshops to involve the audience more (there was a lot of sitting and listening)."

"Yes overall it was excellent. It might be good to partners with different organisations to boost attendance at field visits - eg Community Land Scotland, Paths for all, Reforesting Scotland?"

"Mostly! I would have liked a bit more opportunity for discussion at the workshops."

"The conference more than met my expectations, it was really well organised, the venue was great, the quality of the experiences shared with people and the connections made were unique. CWA come across as a professional and very supportive organisation."

"Yes it did. It was good to reconnect with some folk from previous contacts and to learn and share experiences. What an impressive gathering of community activists."

"It was great! Yes gave me plenty to think about and always good to learn new things - School Forests in the Mid-west - very inspiring - could we 'give' local schools a piece of our Forest to 'look after' maybe."

"Yes - I have been organising trips for group members and staff to attend the CWA conference for many years and this was a great opportunity to finally meet members from Scotland and to see if there is opportunity to collaborate and share messages, case studies. It was fantastic to meet community woodland members and note the similarities and the differences too. Lots to think about going forward."

"This years event more than exceeded my exceptions. I have come away with new contacts made, inspiration for new projects and many thoughts on previous projects that can be dusted off and redesigned for future use. I left the conference re-invigorated about the work I do and eager to share what I have learnt with my Board and Volunteers."