

# Cormonachan Wood 2019

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## Introduction

A meeting was held on 13<sup>th</sup> march at Cormonachan wood between Douglas Locke (Secretary, Cormonachan Woodlands Association) and Angus Bevan (on behalf of the Woodland Trust), to discuss the on-going woodland restoration and to identify areas where the Woodland Trust could offer further advice and assistance.

## Restoration progress

### 1. Invasive species control.

Effort has been concentrated on three main areas as shown on the map.

All of the mature Sitka spruce from zone 1 have been felled, with the large diameter timber being retained as deadwood habitat. Most of the brash has been burnt, with a proportion retained in piles to provide invertebrate habitat. Dense shade has been lifted from considerable areas of ground, which has not yet been colonised to any great extent.

Rhododendron control has been on-going in zone 2, around the margins of dense infestations, and the core population in zone 3 has been largely removed. Control has been delivered by cutting growth down to a low level and the application of herbicide. Several members of the Cormonachan Woodland Association and staff from the Ardroy outdoor education centre have received guidance in rhododendron control from staff from the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National park, and no further guidance is required at present. No tree seedling regeneration is evident in the cleared areas, though numerous native tree saplings have been released from competition.

### 2. Deer management.

Carrick farm, which own the recently clear-felled plantation forest to the south of Cormonachan Wood, have extended their cull, and removed 300 deer over the last two years.

The reduction in browsing pressure is evident in the high rate of basal shoot survival on the hazel stools, the unbrowsed shoots from previously checked holly saplings and the appearance of epicormic growth at low levels on some trees.

Browsing pressure is still modifying the vegetation over much of the woodland; the extremely vigorous tree regeneration and ground flora within the deer-fenced part of the woodland provides a contrasting example of undisturbed vegetation.

### 3. Provision of access.

The path network has been extended to provide access to a wonderfully situated contemplation shelter, and permission is being sought to develop access to the southern part of the woodlands. This extension will greatly facilitate the management of this area, and the increase in traffic will discourage deer to some extent.

No mature native trees will be felled during path construction, but approximately 90 mature Sitka spruce at present scattered through the woodland will be removed. The reduction in shade will considerably increase the area of ground available for recolonization by native species, and there are varied seed sources nearby.

## **Management suggestions**

### **1. Open ground management.**

Open ground has been exposed in several places by the removal of mature conifers and rhododendron. Some management will be necessary to ensure that colonisation by desirable species is successful.

- Bracken is capable of rapidly spreading over open ground, and will greatly reduce levels of regeneration. Breaking down bracken that is invading open areas in the early summer will greatly reduce its rate of spread and allow tree regeneration to become established. “Bashing” has the advantage over cutting, in that small tree saplings are less likely to be damaged.
- Invasive species are likely to be among the most successful colonisers of open ground, and should be monitored
- Some degree of ground disturbance will help with recolonization, particularly where conifers have been removed and the ground is covered with a thick layer of needles
- Temporary, light-weight deer fencing could usefully be erected around some of the cleared areas. The complete removal of browsing pressure would allow regeneration to proceed unchecked, and palatable species that are usually preferentially browsed would particularly benefit.  
(<https://www.harrodhorticultural.com/deer-fence-netting-pid7518.html>)

### **2. Utilization of brash.**

Considerable volumes of brash have been generated through the felling of Sitka spruce, and clearing for the proposed path will produce much more, with the work taking place over a diffuse area.

Burning the brash is undesirable in this situation, as numerous fire sites will be necessary owing to the distribution of the debris.

Brash can be usefully managed in the construction of “dead hedges”, which provide long lasting invertebrate habitat and a partial barrier to herbivores, as well as creating a variety of micro-habitats through the provision of shelter, shade or sun traps.



*Dead hedge construction*

### **3. Enrichment planting.**

Some tree planting may prove necessary to re-establish woodland conditions in cleared areas or in bracken dominated ground. Planting should be protected from deer damage, either by using tree guards or fencing.

A variety of species would be appropriate depending on the soil conditions: fertile soils will support ash and Wych-elm, while poorer soils would favour oak and birch. (Birch has the advantage of rapid growth, providing shelter and light shade in a fairly short timeframe.)

Aspen would provide an attractive addition to the diversity of the woodland, and should be planted within the deer fenced compartment as it is highly palatable. Aspen establishes readily in poor or damaged soils, and provides rapid cover on clear-fell sites.

Consideration should be given to existing seed sources when planning re-planting, and priority given to species without effective long-distance seed dispersal mechanisms, such as oak and hazel.

### **4. Invasive species control.**

*Rubus spectabilis* (Salmonberry) is becoming established over the clear-fell site in the south of the woodland. This species spreads by runners and berry, and can become dominant over wide areas.

Control measures taken at this time could prevent a rapid increase in the areas affected, and should possibly be prioritised over rhododendron control this season.

# Cormonachan Wood

2019



Cruach nam  
Miseag

Zone 2

Zone 1

Jenny's Bay

Cormonachan  
Burn

Cormonachan Wood

Salmonberry

Cedarwood  
Lodge

Cormonachan Glen

Zone 3

0 250 500 750 1000 m

Glac An  
r. Spilich