



Community Ownership and Biodiversity

Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company Scottish Borders

Acquired by the Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company in May 2021, the historic Ettrick Marshes near Selkirk is home to one of the largest wetland restoration projects in Scotland – with a wildness far removed from the more managed landscape all around.

About Ettrick Marshes



Hidden away in the upper reaches of the Ettrick Valley, the sprawling Ettrick Marshes provide a dynamic and gloriously wild contrast to the commercial forestry and managed moorland that dominate the surrounding landscape.

Spilling out over the floodplain of the River Ettrick, the marshes are one of the finest examples of floodplain forest anywhere in the UK. Here, birch, willow carr, aspen and other native woodland edge a mosaic of marsh and open water, all packed with classic floodplain plant communities – reeds, rushes, grasses, bilberry and bog mosses.

This dynamic half-land provides habitat for many other species: otters and red squirrels, water voles, water rail, fishing ospreys in the breeding season, rare butterflies such as the Scotch argus and almost 80 different species of smaller bird.

As well as having immense ecological value, it is a landscape with function as well as form: healthy wetland slows and holds the flow of water, so reducing the risk of flood damage further downstream – a valuable nature-based solution to the challenges of a changing climate.



Reeds



Rushes & Grasses



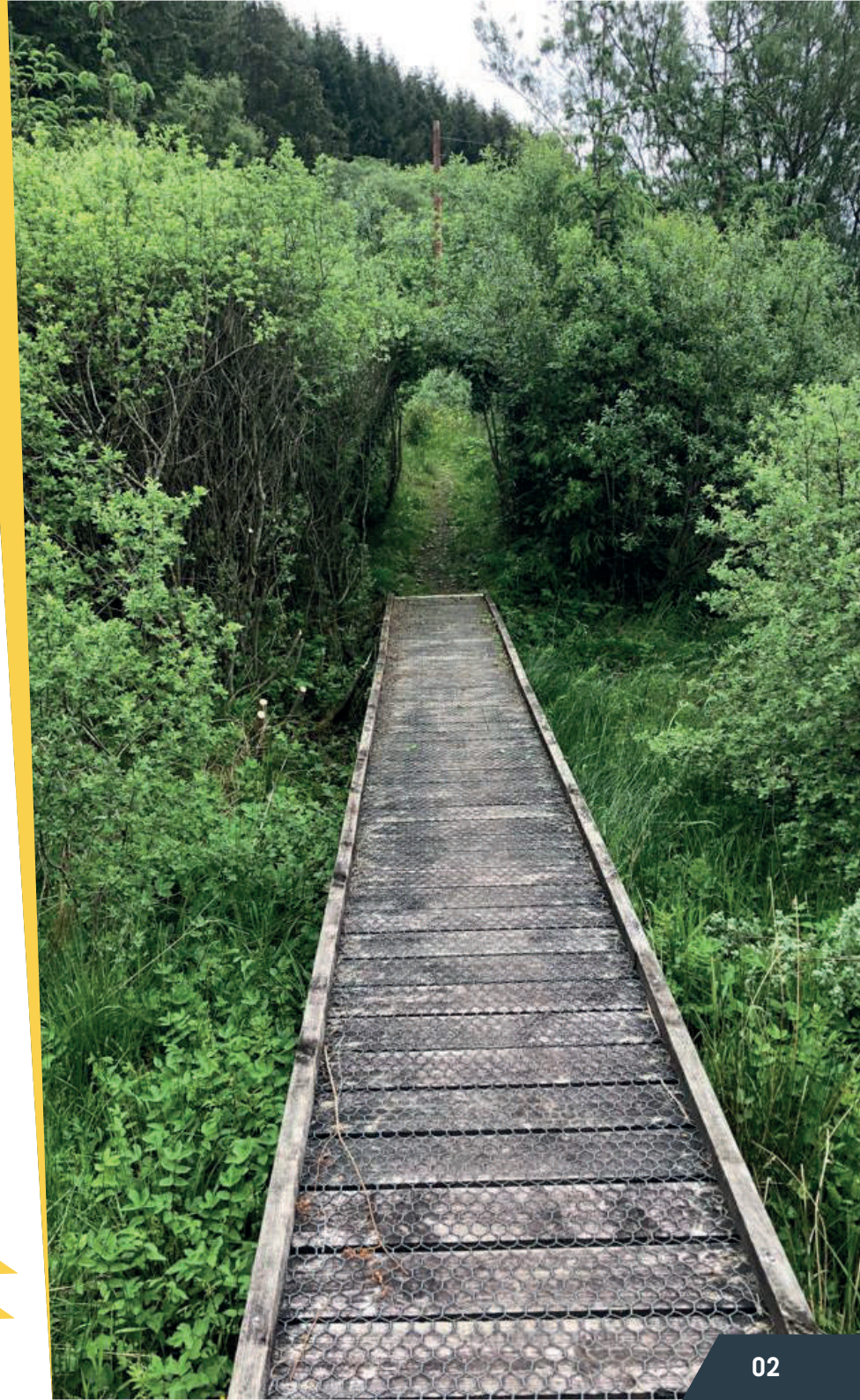
Bilberry



Bog Moss



Ettrick Valley, one of the finest examples of floodplain forest anywhere in the UK.





About Ettrick Marshes



Just over 20 years ago, Ettrick Marshes was the site of one of Scotland's earliest 'rewilding' projects when then leaseholder Borders Forest Trust restored the floodplain habitat. The conservation charity removed Sitka spruce, planted native broadleaves and created a network of paths, boardwalks and bird hides.

Over time, however, this infrastructure fell into disrepair and paths became blocked by windblown trees, meaning access to the site was no longer possible.



It was not until May 2021 when, with support from South of Scotland Enterprise, the Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company (EYCDC) acquired the site from Forestry and Land Scotland that it was once again restored and able to welcome visitors.

The approach ever since has been to adopt a light touch.

It is a rare habitat and a wild one too and our ambition is for it to remain that way. We will maintain some of the more open areas but really it's about keeping the paths open and letting nature take its course.

*Vicky Davidson,
EYCDC Coordinator*



Restoration work

It is fair to say that the first six months of EYCDC's ownership of Ettrick Marshes was a busy time for forest ranger Tommy Bryson and junior ranger Mitchell Hobbs.

The pair restored four miles of trails, repaired areas of raised boardwalk and bird hides, constructed nest boxes, cleared trees and built new bridges and benches so that the marshes could once again be enjoyed.

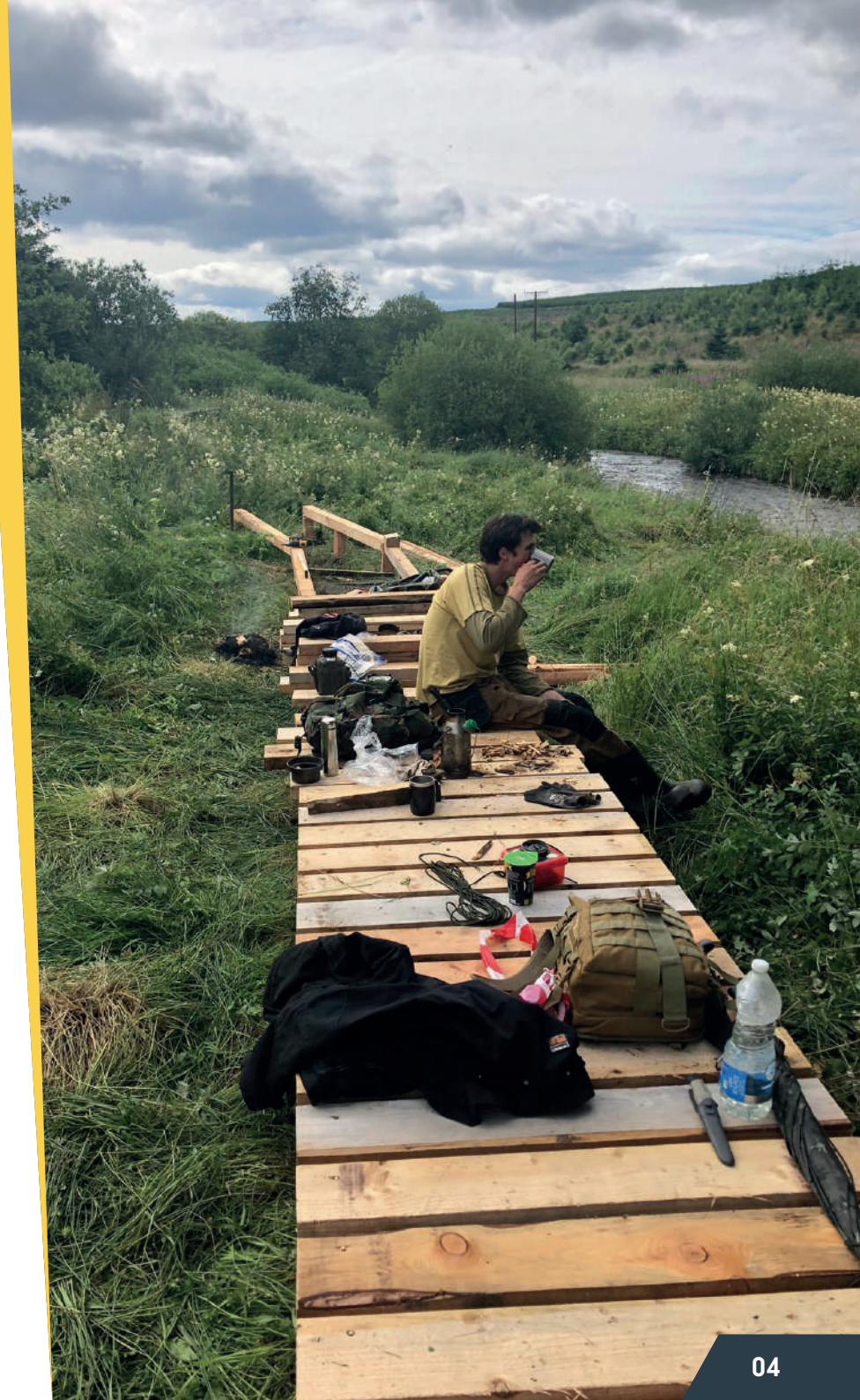
But the area is not just about the marshes. In all, EYCDC took ownership of 53 hectares of land that included an area of ancient woodland and four hectares of commercial timber in neighbouring Gamescleuch Forest.

Later this year, EYCDC plans to fell the commercial timber and replant it with broadleaved species. And with Forestry and Land Scotland also looking to replant an adjoining section of forest with a mix of native species, the woodland that fringes the marshes will, in years to come, extend far up the hillside.

Local residents have been especially pleased that the bulk of the trails are now open again.

The boardwalk and paths had originally been installed as a community asset, so they had been missed.

*Vicky Davidson,
EYCDC Coordinator*



Wetland wonders

As well as the lush combination of land, water and riparian woodland, it's the sheer variety of life at Ettrick Marshes that is such an attraction.

Members of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club are regular visitors, with one of the great prizes being willow tit – a species that has been heard but not yet seen in and around the marshes.

Areas of ancient birchwood and wet willow habitat are a hotspot for moths too. The most recent moth-trapping in summer 2022 added 33 species to the list of moths found in the area, including one real rarity – *Apotomis infida* – for which Ettrick Marshes is now the only known location in the UK.



Apotomis infida – for which Ettrick Marshes is now the only known location in the UK.

We know quite a bit about what's here but there is so much more to learn. We would like universities and ecological groups to come and conduct research and monitor how the habitats are changing.

*Vicky Davidson,
EYCDC Coordinator*

In the meantime, and for non-specialists, EYCDC rangers help interpret the landscape and its wildlife on weekly guided walks during the summer, as well as giving talks to local communities.





Project timeline

Since its creation in 2010, EYCDC has led a number of milestone projects:

- * **2015** – Opening of Ring of the Loch, a circular walk around St Mary's Loch in the Yarrow Valley
- * **2019** – Opening of the re-established Captain's Road, an ancient hill road linking the upper reaches of the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys
- * **2022** – Community purchase and transformation of the old Kirkhope Farm steading into five affordable houses and seven energy efficient workshop units

School days

A community development company with a wide remit, EYCDC is based at the disused former Ettrick school, closed in 2012 and now managed by the community.

Today, the old school is also home to a permanent James Hogg exhibition, which celebrates the life and work of the celebrated 'Ettrick Shepherd', as well as a popular E-bike hire operation.

Photos on p2-4 were taken by EYCDC
Photos on cover and p5-6 were taken by Richard Rowe
For much more on EYCDC, visit
www.ettrickandyarrow.org.uk

