

WILDCAT



The Newsletter of the Newtonmore Community Woodland and Development Trust – NCWDT Autumn 2021

It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of Lesley Allan, our Centre manager. Lesley had retired earlier in 2021 due to ill health and she and Paul were planning to move south to be closer to their children. Our thoughts are with Paul and family. Lesley brought enthusiasm to the Centre and played a key role in modernising its public face and developing merchandising as a means of drawing in visitors and raising much needed revenue.

Paul Allan retired from the role of Trust secretary in July, and we thank him for all his dedication and hard work over and above the call of duty. His lasting monument is the new signage project which will hopefully last another twenty years. I certainly do not want to dig any more holes in the near future!

On the subject of the Wildcat Trail, we now have permission from the relevant landowners to replace the last four remaining stiles with gates, making access easier for those less agile.

We have also said goodbye to two of our long-standing volunteers, Sue Oxley and Ali Ogden, and we wish them well in their other enterprises. As you will have gathered, our volunteer numbers are even further depleted and we are desperate for new volunteers to act as Trustees, to work in the Wildcat Centre, or to help with maintenance work around the Trails. We will have a recruiting sergeant at the AGM!

I look forward to seeing you, and thank you for your continued support.

Paul Woolrich, Chair.



Treasurer's Report.

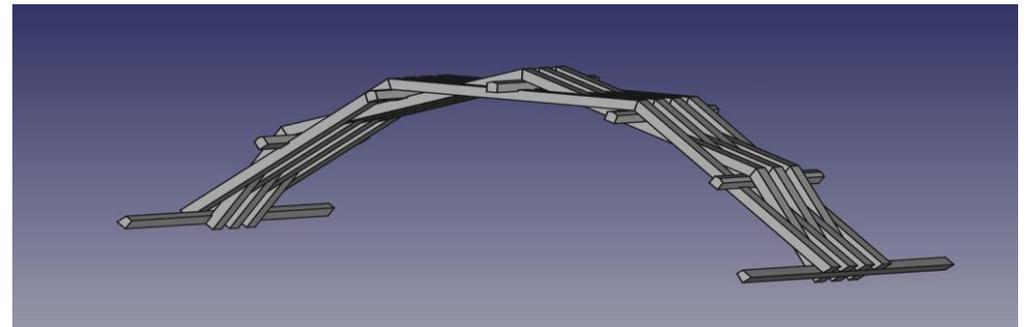
As treasurer of the Trust, I am pleased to report for the first time for a number of years, that the accounts are in good health, with sufficient reserves to keep the Wildcat Centre open and maintain the trail. The Centre now has a wider range of merchandise and with visitor numbers much higher, has resulted in one of our most successful years as regards sales. Thanks to all volunteers who did a shift in the centre especially when there were queues of people wanting in! With the surplus funds, our focus has been to invest in the fabric of the building which is ongoing, with jobs like new lights, maintaining the roof and ensuring the electrical system is up to date. We are always looking for new ideas and things that will improve the experience for visitors and local folks of The Wildcat Centre, Wildcat Trail and Wildcat Experience. We have the funds to develop these but are short of the more valuable commodity of volunteers to initiate projects and follow through. With money in the bank, we can, with more volunteer help, look at more ambitious projects to match fund grant applications.

Eric Dodd.

The Wildcat Trail - The Focus of The Trust's Activities.

Following last year's difficult decision to permanently close the Allt Lارايدh section due to large scale erosion, volunteers removed signage on that section, and the Trust is currently working with landowners and Highland Council to ensure that replacement signage via Strone Road is installed.

Plans are in hand for some substantial works over the winter, with replacement of the remaining stiles with gates, as noted in the Chair's report. In addition, we are also well advanced with plans for a replacement bridge at the golf course end of the trail. The previous bridge was not substantial, indeed was washed away leaving only stepping stones to cross the stream. The proposed replacement is a bit different as you can see from the engineering design drawing of the structure below. As always, if you would like to get involved, please let us know. This will be a major task and while we have the necessary funds in hand, more hands would be appreciated!



The Trust has now begun the task of updating the Wildcat Trail Guide, stocks of which are running low. We aim to have the new guide ready for the 2022 season, and it will reflect changes such as closure of the Allt Lارايدh section, but we also hope to incorporate more local information for visitors with a contemporary look.

Wildcat Centre Report.

As Covid restrictions began to ease, we were finally able to open the Centre in May 2021. Our season since, though shorter than usual, has been very rewarding. The village has seen a great influx of visitors both staying and passing through, and Wildcat Experience packs and Wildcat Trail guides have been flying off the shelves. Our investment in a contactless payment system proved to be a great decision. It also made stock counting much easier! Thank you, Visit Scotland, for your post-Covid support on this. Many thanks to our friends at the Highlander Hotel, Balavil Hotel, Post Office, Antlers, The Wild Flour and The Glen Hotel, for keeping packs for sale when the centre is closed. As the season progressed, our range of merchandise was further broadened. We now stock a number of items made locally in Newtonmore, and we have also added to our ranges with woodland themed items, greetings cards, and added a "Crafting Corner" for our very youngest visitors. Please come and see for yourselves, and encourage everyone to visit and see what we now offer.



Pictured above is our new contactless payment system, and some of the new items we now stock at the Wildcat Centre.

The Wildcat Experience.

Following a lull in activity due to Covid, 2021 has seen a number of cats visiting our vet for some TLC, while several others have been relocated following adoption by their new owners. We have an on-going programme of maintenance to deal with though currently a bit of a back log of repairs and repainting. If anyone thinks they could contribute, please let us know, especially those with an artistic flair. Thanks to our friends at Kingussie High School, Jean Noble and Paul Allan for their efforts in maintaining the cats and helping Newtonmore keep its unique visitor attraction.



Saving Wildcats at The Highland Wildlife Park.

We are excited to be developing our relationship with the folks at Kincaig. They will be attending our 2021 AGM to do a presentation on their work. Meantime they say:

Saving Wildcats (#SWAforLife) is a European partnership project dedicated to Scottish wildcat conservation and recovery, that aims to prevent the extinction of wildcats in Scotland by breeding and releasing them into the wild. Building on the work of Scottish Wildcat Action, the first national conservation plan for wildcats, Saving Wildcats has established Britain's first large-scale dedicated conservation 'breeding for release' centre for wildcats. This conservation breeding for release centre is based in a quiet location at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's Highland Wildlife Park.

Following a pre-release training programme to prepare for life in the wild, Saving Wildcats aims to release 20 wildcats each year, potentially in an area within the Cairngorms National Park. Currently, there are several wildcats that have arrived at the conservation breeding for release centre at the Highland Wildlife Park. We will be breeding these cats over the upcoming breeding season, and come Spring 2022, we hope that some kittens will have been born.

We are currently working hard to secure a future for Scotland's wildcats. Over the past few months this has involved conducting fieldwork in the Cairngorms National Park to establish prey availability in potential release sites, as well as building our pre-release enclosures in the Highland Wildlife Park. We have also been doing a lot of routine work that includes looking after the wildcats in our care, which is done by a team of dedicated keepers and veterinary professionals.

If you'd like to learn more about the project, please feel free to visit our website (www.savingwildcats.org.uk) or email us at wildcats@rzs.org.uk

Acknowledgements.

The NCWDT's work is reliant on public and personal funding, and from the sale of merchandise at the Wildcat Centre. We are grateful to everyone who has supported us especially over the last difficult 18 months.

Annual membership of the Trust is still only £10.00 per person and can be paid at the Wildcat Centre.

AGM – Open to Members and Non-Members.

The NCW&DT's AGM is being held in The Village Hall on Monday 15th November 2021. 9th April at 7pm. We would like to recruit more Trustees and we can do so at the AGM.

This year, our AGM will be preceded by a presentation from one of the project officers from The Highland Wildlife Park to tell us about progress on reintroducing Scottish Wildcats. This is sure to be very interesting so we are opening the meeting to members and to anyone else that would like to come along.

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