



## Portmoak Community Woodland Group

### Review of the year, April 2019 - October 2020

The AGM was pushed back from April to October 2020 to give time for the accounts to be formally audited. This report covers the period from the last AGM in April 2019 up to this AGM in October 2020. Despite this being the age of Covid we were still able to undertake many activities, always in a Covid-secure manner.

#### **Interagency Climate Change Group visit: 30 April 2019**

we were visited by a very prestigious group of scientists: the Interagency Climate Change Group, from the government agencies Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural Resources Wales and Natural England.

The climate change scientists were looking at the capacity of UK peat bogs to store carbon and help combat climate change. They were particularly interested to see how a former commercial forestry plantation like Portmoak could be turned into a peat bog once again. There was some debate about the question of removing trees, which also store carbon, but of course the WTS, with community help, has planted thousands of trees up in Kilmagad Wood and the scientists were very impressed to see how the two sites complement one another.

Dr. Mike Morecroft, Principal Specialist, Climate Change for Natural England summed up their impressions:

*"This site is exemplary. It's a microcosm of what we need to do to tackle greenhouse gas emissions on the land: planting trees on the hill and restoring peatland, with great community engagement and benefits for peoples' physical and mental health."*

#### **Dawn Chorus: 4 May 2019**

An early start - 04:00 - but worth it. When half a dozen of us arrived, even the birds were still in their beds so instead of them waking us up like they usually do, we made a racket and got them going. Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Tree Sparrow, Sedge Warbler and the high pitched Goldcrest joined in. We had a magic hour and half with Scott Paterson, the bird recorder for Perth and Kinross, pointing out the different birdsongs and giving us loads of information on the birds and the meaning of their songs.

#### **Teachers Day: 22 May 2019**

Local children did a project to gather data about birch regen on the site - how much, how big, where. This information that they have found out will help us to plan future activities to control the regen.

#### **Woodland Trust Volunteers Day: 15 June 2019**

Volunteers from other groups spent a day with us. The Woodland Trust gave an overview of their sites in Scotland and the things that volunteers do, there was a talk about the dragonfly and damselfly species found on the Moss, and we talked about our events and work.



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#### **Chris's Place official opening: 18 June 2019**

The project to commemorate Chris Vlasto by making a play area and open air classroom has been completed and opened. The last things put in place were a beautiful green oak table and benches. Lots of children participated and played at the opening - which Chris would have loved.

#### **Birch pulling: Spring - Summer 2019**

We've made a big effort to clear birch regen on the peat dome. Up to now regen has mainly been tackled using chemicals but we're keen to see if a more environmentally friendly approach can work. Pulling out birch saplings by hand is hard work but the Portmoak team have been hard at it most weekends and there was a big event in September when outside groups including the Cadets and the Bog Squad joined in too. A really large area is now clear and we'll be looking at how well this lasts in comparison to the chemically treated areas.

#### **Damsel and Dragon flies: Summer 2019**

As our peat bog has slowly returned into its original condition, other species are recolonising. In a collaborative effort with the British Dragonfly Society a couple of ponds were dug out on the peat dome. We are expecting these to provide breeding sites which will encourage more odonata species to come to the Moss.

#### **Safety Training: Summer 2019**

We always focus on running safe events and have a well tried safety approach in place. This was supplemented by 6 of our team going on the Woodland Trust's safety course.

#### **Himalayan Balsam: Summer 2019**

This highly invasive species has been found in the water courses surrounding Portmoak Moss. Over a few weekends we have cleared out plants from most areas where it has been encroaching. This will be an ongoing effort for the next few years and controlling it and preventing its spread is crucial.

#### **Apple Day: 22 September**

This has become a bit of an institution. We picked apples from our community orchard and people bring along their own apples and they all get turned into juice - very delicious too. Apple Tree Man identifies the species that people bring along and he give great advice on everything apples. There is apple baking and apple games too. About 80 people came and had a super afternoon.

#### **Christmas Tree Day: 15 December 2019**

Another terrific regular feature in our calendar where many local families come to get their Christmas Tree. About 80 families came along and had mince pies and drinks too. Early planning: next year Christmas Tree Day will be on Sunday 13 December.



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#### **Burns Ceilidh: 1st February 2020**

There were haggis, neeps and tatties. The haggis was thrashed within an inch of its life during Bill Carr's "Address to the Haggis" (actually it got thrashed a bit further than an inch - quite a bit ended up on the walls and ceiling), and there was dancing to the fabulous Ceilidh Minogue Band. A really good community night out and as always, all money we raised goes back into our woodland projects.

#### **Orchard pruning: March 2020**

The orchard has been getting better and better, with the trees looking very healthy and producing good crops, despite our efforts to prune them within an inch or their lives. So once again, we spent a morning with saws and secateurs. We'll find out how we did later in the year at Apple Tree Day.

#### **Christmas tree pruning: March 2020**

It will all be over by Christmas. Won't it? Of course! So we went to the Moss as usual to get trees ready for Christmas - opening them out, removing splits, that sort of thing.

#### **Portmoak Bog Booklet produced: April 2020**

Bogtastic! Distributed electronically via website and Facebook and given to local children. Full launch to be post-Covid.

#### **Nature Notes: April - June 2020**

Very popular with our mailing list followers. Many contributions from them and lots of positive feedback.

#### **Birch pulling: Spring - Summer 2020**

Big effort to hand pull on the peat dome - looking really good. The Woodland Trust let the contractors loose too.

#### **HimBal: May - July 2020**

Less than previous years: earlier efforts are paying off. Put in another sustained effort to keep it under control.

#### **Treetastic: June - September 2020**

The sequel to Bogtastic.

#### **Kilmagadwood Fact Sheet completed: July 2020**

The media machine rumbles on.

#### **Apple Day: September 2020**

Cancelled. We had a Covid-secure plan, but then the rules changed to prevent outdoor gatherings.