

## What is the Peatlands Partnership?

The Flows to the Future Project is an initiative of the Peatlands Partnership, a group of organisations who work together with land managers and communities to promote the sustainable use of the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland. The Steering Group for the Project comprises RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Environmental Research Institute (UHI) and the Highland Council. Other members of the Partnership include: the Flow Country Rivers Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland, the Highland Third Sector Interface, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Plantlife International. It is chaired by Professor Stuart Gibb, ERI.

## Trees are great for the environment aren't they, so why cut them down?

For thousands of years the Flow Country's blanket bog was a naturally treeless environment, with only small areas of deciduous native woodland occurring in river valleys and on shallower peat. Peatland restoration by the RSPB, Forestry Commission Scotland and other landowners is removing plantations of non-native conifers on deep peat.

These plantations do not support as much wildlife as an equivalent area of undamaged blanket bog. The dried out ground no longer supports peatland plants and peat stops forming. Peat formation locks up carbon in the ground, contributing to combatting climate change. Restoration enables peat formation to start again.

Restoration of the peatland is a complex process:

- Harvesting machines cut down trees and separate useable timber from brash (branches and waste wood).
- Brash is shredded; some timber is made into pallets and fence posts, but most is poor quality and becomes biomass fuel.
- The forestry drains and furrows are blocked to stop water draining from the peatland.
- Water levels rise. Peatland plants, which depend on high water levels, and other peatland wildlife, will start to recolonise even within a year, although full recovery takes much longer.
- Young conifers grow from seeds left by the removed trees and must be taken out.

## Do you manage land in the peatlands?

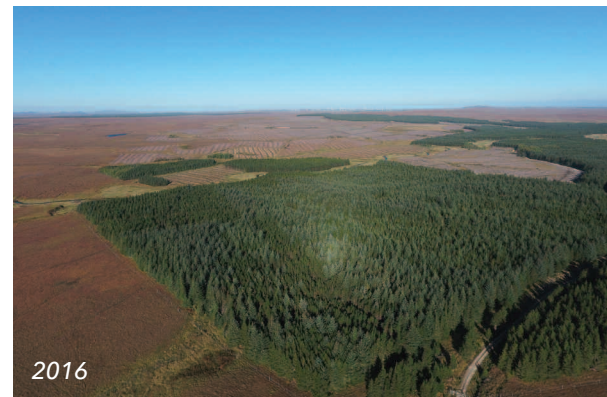
For free advice and assistance with restoration plans and funding applications for peatland in the Flow Country contact the **Project's Advisory Officer**

**Gearoid Murphy** at [Gearoid.murphy@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Gearoid.murphy@rspb.org.uk)

We would appreciate your feedback on Facebook, Twitter or via our website.

 @TheFlowCountry  The Flow Country  @TheFlowCountry

[www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk)



2016  
Peatland restoration in progress in Dyke plantation

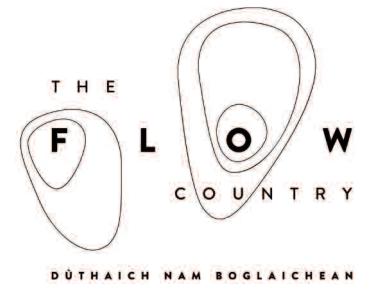


Early 2018



THE MORE YOU LOOK THE MORE YOU SEE

# THE FLOW COUNTRY



## Hello!

Welcome to our annual newsletter where we share highlights of another exciting year for the Flows to the Future project. This newsletter is also an invitation to enjoy and appreciate the unique landscape that we live in. Join us for an event, let yourself be amazed by the vastness of the Flow Country from the top of our Lookout Tower or volunteer with us for the full Flows experience.

Please read through the newsletter and then do get in touch, follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, or check out our website.

**But for now - happy reading!**

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## Pause and enjoy the Flows

Work is underway to install new interpretation boards and seating in the Flow Country. Each site has been chosen because of its panoramic views and will be ready early in 2019. They will be at Moine House, Cnoc Craggie, Crask and Loch Rangag. In addition, there will be an information point at the start of the Forsinain Trail. We will be organising events to promote these locations in the Spring.



## Could the Flow Country become Scotland's next World Heritage Site?

This remarkable habitat could join the Great Barrier Reef and the Grand Canyon as one of the most important natural sites in the world. Find out more at [www.theflowcountry.org.uk/world-heritage-site/](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk/world-heritage-site/) and keep your eyes peeled for drop-in events in 2019.





# Learning on the Flows

There is a new Learning and Public Engagement team here at the Flows to the Future Project. Hilary Wilson and Beki Pope have joined us as Learning Development Officer and Communities Officer respectively.

A wide range of activities are taking place across the Flow Country. Recent examples include visits to and from primary and secondary schools, youth groups and community groups, our annual Dark Skies talk with the Caithness Astronomy Group, events at local museums and the Caithness county show. School activities vary with the seasons and topics being studied. Heading towards Christmas pupils will learn about the importance of peatland restoration and will decorate conifers removed from deep peat. We are working with artists to develop new approaches to the stories of the Flow Country. This has included a recent exhibition by Hannah Imlach and Shaun Fraser at the Thurso Gallery.

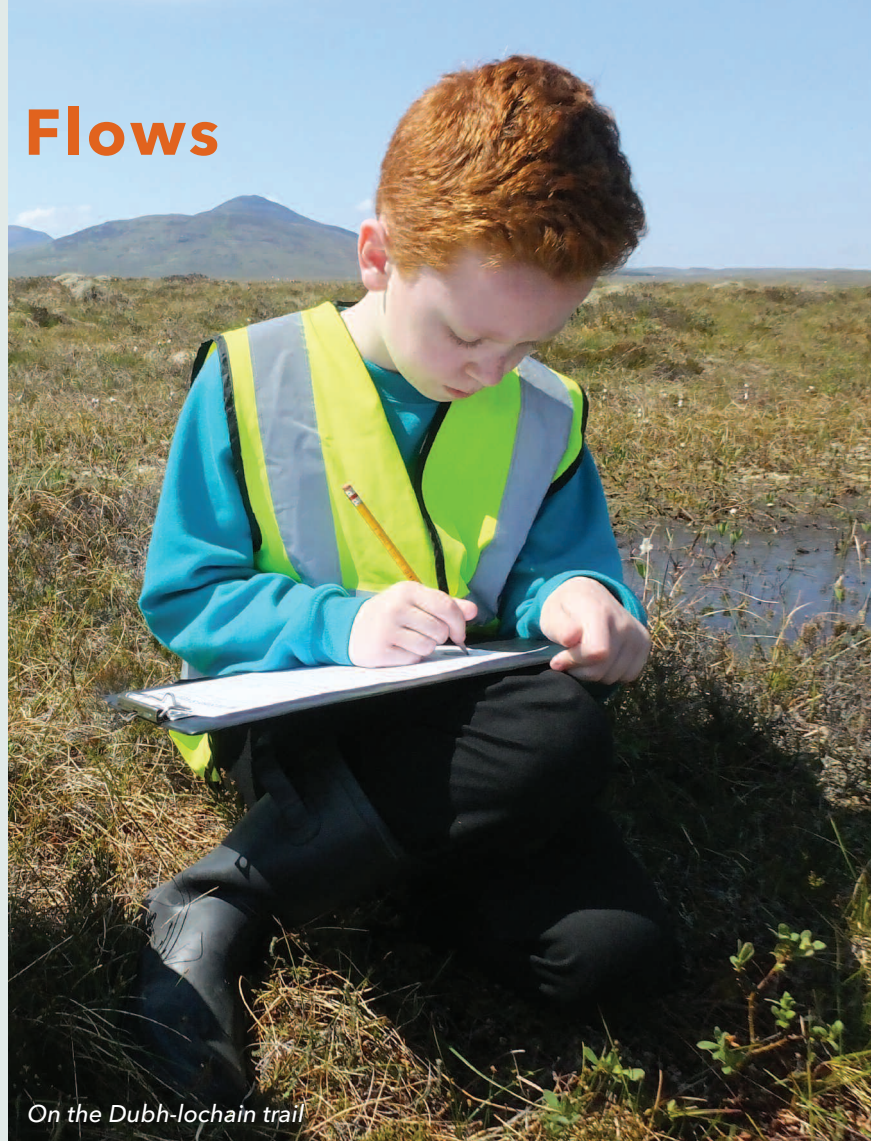
Already in place for next year are events that focus on the history of Forsinard, with a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Jellicoe train and a community archaeology event. We are also holding an exciting multi-media event at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh with Cryptic, who are internationally-renowned. We will also be promoting the Big Schools Birdwatch.



Fun at Annan Museum alongside our touring exhibition



All smiles in the Flows Lookout Tower



On the Dubh-lochain trail

Please contact us on **01641 571225** or email [hilary.wilson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:hilary.wilson@rspb.org.uk) or [beki.pope@rspb.org.uk](mailto:beki.pope@rspb.org.uk) to get involved and keep an eye on our website and social media for upcoming activities.



Hazel anemometer by Hannah Imlach

# Volunteering is rewarding at Forsinard



*'The staff were wonderfully welcoming but also very informative. And even in not ideal weather everyone was in high spirits and the staff made every task fun!'*

Volunteers are vital to the running of the RSPB's reserve at Forsinard Flows. Luckily, we have a dedicated team of local volunteers who help with conservation tasks, in the visitor centre, and with office jobs.

We cater for all ages, from young people gaining work experience, to retirees using their expertise or extending their skills. Forsinard is the only RSPB reserve to offer residential working holidays, where groups of volunteers join us from across the UK to help with essential conservation work. We also host longer term residential volunteers, who are often developing skills for a conservation career.



Previous volunteer Naomi Parker says 'The staff were wonderfully welcoming but also very informative. And even in not ideal weather everyone was in high spirits and the staff made every task fun!'

Please get in touch if you are interested in volunteering, it's a great way to get involved in the Flow Country. Travel expenses will be paid and training and support given. Your time will be invaluable to us.

Contact the RSPB reserve at [forsinard@rspb.org.uk](mailto:forsinard@rspb.org.uk) or phone **01641 571225**.

*Photo by Neil Cowie*

