

Rural Alternatives Project: *Cultural Skills & Community Woodlands*



Case study no. 1: Woodland surveying for NTFP potential



Woodland surveys are a valuable tool for assessing the non-timber forest product (NTFP) potential of a community's local woods. A participatory approach to woodland surveying has been developed as part of the Rural Alternatives project (RAP); all four partner communities have been involved in this process, but activities at Kirkhill and Bunchrew are used here for illustration.

Non-timber forest product surveys

Non-timber forest products have both a contemporary usage and a heritage value in rural communities. Local woodlands offer solutions to local problems such as under-employment, as well as access to local foods, herbal and craft products. Methodical surveying of local woodland resources highlights the diversity of NTFPs within woodland habitats and their potential for sustainable management at local community level. Surveys combine oral, recorded and contemporary knowledge of the patterns of resource availability. This knowledge can then inform local, managed utilisation of NTFPs and the reconnection or continuance of a community-based forest culture.

NTFP surveying by the Kirkhill and Bunchrew community

Assessing local community needs

Meetings were held with local residents and land managers to assess local needs. Current and past use of NTFPs was noted along with aspirations for possible commercial ventures or diversification of land use, including for recreational use.

Transect walks

Both the formal and the informal surveys involved transect walks, using directional transects on a compass bearing through the woodland. These transect walks were favoured by the communities involved with the RAP project since they quickly gave an indication of the resources that were available and those that might be of greatest potential for sustainable management. The next step was to assess wider training needs, identifying the availability of local expertise or the requirement to recruit expertise from outside the community.



Training in survey techniques

Randomised survey techniques training was carried out over two days with local community residents under the expert guidance of Dr Alison Dyke. These techniques were then put into practice to carry out a survey of Newtonhill Wood, a small private woodland (8.14 hectares) purchased by a local family who were interested in gauging the biodiversity value of the woodland and the potential for managing it sustainably for NTFPs. One member of the family is also an active member of Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust Woodland Group, which

undertakes community management of Upper Reelig Glen Wood, a publically-owned local woodland.

Application in a community woodland

Following on from the training and experience gained at Newtonhill Wood, local community residents from Kirkhill and Bunchrew carried out both a transect walk and a full NTFP survey in Upper Reelig Glen Wood.

Informal surveying took the form of walks along main woodland paths using a “walk, talk and note” approach with a wide range of participants.

The future

The survey results will act as a foundation for monitoring of wider biodiversity as well as NTFPs, and will assist the community in its management of the wood in partnership with the Forestry Commission. The Forestry Commission are to publish a Forest Design Plan for Reelig Wood during 2008. The woodland group of Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust have made a significant stakeholder contribution to this, in part through the work carried out on the NTFP survey.



RESOURCES

- Reforesting Scotland (2003). *Non-timber forest product inventory method*
<http://www.forestharvest.org.uk/pdfs/Inventory%20Method%20.pdf>
- Dyke A. (2006). *Survey of Newtonhill Woods, 6th and 7th October 2006*
<http://www.forestharvest.org.uk/pdfs/Survey%20of%20Newtonhill%20Woods.doc>
- Church G. (2007). *Survey of Upper Reelig Wood*
- Russell M. (2007). *NTFP survey – Footpaths, Upper Reelig Wood*
- Griffiths A. (ed) (2007). *Reelig Wood Forest Design Plan – Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust Woodland Group contribution*
- SFIC (2006). *The Future of Wild Harvests in Scotland*. Newsletter of the Scottish Forest Industries Cluster, Issue 15 Summer pp 8-9
- Scott, M. (2007). *Wild Harvests*. The Scots Magazine, January edition pp 48-51
- Emery, M., Martin, S. and Dyke, A. (2006). *Wild Harvests from Scottish Woodlands*. Published by Forestry Commission, Edinburgh
[http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/pdf/fcrp008.pdf/\\$FILE/fcrp008.pdf](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/pdf/fcrp008.pdf/$FILE/fcrp008.pdf)

For further information about the Rural Alternatives Project, visit:
www.reforestingscotland.org/projects/rural_alternatives.php

For general information about non-timber forest products, visit: www.forestharvest.org.uk
