

Reserves Enhancement Programme 2001–2006

Managing and maintaining Scottish Wildlife Trust's (SWT) 123 reserves for the benefit of people and wildlife is a challenge and takes constant investment.

The Reserves Enhancement Programme was a five-year, £5.1 million programme focusing on SWT's wildlife reserves. The programme ran from 2001–2006 and was delivered on schedule and on budget.

Our warm thanks go to all our funders and partners including:



- Royal Commission of Historic and Ancient Monuments in Scotland
- Keir Minerals Ltd • Angus Environmental Trust • Forestry Commission
- Dulverton Trust • Highland Council • Perth & Kinross Quality of Life Trust
 - Albert George and Nancy Caroline Youngman Trust
 - Scottish Mountaineering Trust • Forward Scotland
 - South Ayrshire Waste & Environment Trust
 - Chevron Texaco • Angus Council
- Cadogan Charitable Trust • Garfield Weston Trust • Murton Trust



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Objectives

- To ensure long-term sustainable management of SWT reserves
- To conserve and enhance the natural, historical and cultural value of reserves
- To improve access to reserves by enhancing visitor infrastructure
- To increase enjoyment by developing interpretative facilities
- To enable SWT to manage reserves with assistance from local volunteers
- To maximise the consolidation of reserves through improved tenure and investment
- To demonstrate good conservation land management practices
- To record, interpret and utilise heritage data through effective data management



Community support programme

• Building volunteer capacity

The main focus of this was to enhance SWT's volunteer programme. This involved developing policy and insurance cover, using new software for updating volunteer profile information obtained from a skills survey, and increasing recruitment and retention of volunteers with the aid of promotional literature, newsletters and training.

• Visitor management

People counters were purchased and training delivered on Visitor Quality Standards.

• Communication and lifelong learning

The benefits of wildlife reserves were actively promoted to the wider community through reserve open days and the production of a guide to reserves and visitor centres.

Lifelong learning resources were developed and Wildlife Watch, SWT's junior wing, assisted.

Capital works programme

This programme formed the core of the project and encompassed work on 95 of SWT's wildlife reserves.

• Management planning, surveying and monitoring

This included commissioning surveys and reviewing SWT's reserves management planning process. Specialised software, Countryside Management System (CMS), was also introduced.

• Practical management work

A wide range of practical reserve management tasks were undertaken and assisted through the purchase of equipment including chainsaws, power-scythes and bailers.

• Public access and education

This part of the project reviewed the status and potential of each reserve in terms of public accessibility. As a consequence, access infrastructure (paths, waymarkers and hides) was improved on 52 reserves. Education on reserves was enhanced by a new range of interpretation ranging from signage and leaflets to displays at visitor centres.

• Heritage building projects

Important buildings and structures on some reserves were renovated and restored.



Community support – selected achievements

- 10,023 volunteer days recorded and 50 training courses attended by 252 volunteers
- A Volunteer Photography Project provided more than 2,500 images by 34 photographers covering 44 reserves

Conservation grazing programme

• Lowland reserves - Flying Flock

This pilot project tested the viability of SWT managing its own sheep stock for conservation grazing of grassland reserves. A shepherd was employed and a flock of sheep and basic equipment necessary for their handling, care and transportation purchased. The impact was carefully monitored.

• Large upland reserves

An advisor was employed to co-ordinate the approach to grazing on SWT's large upland reserves, and also to contribute to national groups and fora including the Grazing Animals Project (GAP)

• **Review of land tenancy options** in light of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.



Conservation grazing – selected achievements

- A flock of 320 native sheep used to graze eight lowland sites
- Secured future funding to continue the Flying Flock programme
- Publication of *Conservation Grazing on SWT Reserves*

Capital works – selected achievements

- 154 site surveys on species, archaeology and hydrology with over 33,500 records entered into RECORDER for dissemination to the National Biodiversity Network
- An electronic mapping system established recording reserve boundaries, physical features and habitats
- Access improved on 52 reserves with 63 km of paths enhanced or installed, seven car parks upgraded, 16 benches installed and 13 bridges built
- Major upgrade to three visitor centres, six bird hides constructed and over 200 signs, interpretation panels and waymarkers designed and erected
- Over 330 hectares of meadow, woodland and wetland habitats managed, and new wetlands created on six reserves
- 60 km of boundaries established with 7.7 km of dyke built or maintained and 52.6 km of fencing erected
- Volunteer facilities enhanced at Handa Island, Loch of the Lowes and Falls of Clyde

Funding

The major funder for the Reserves Enhancement Programme was the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) who provided £3,691,000. £937,550 of external funding was raised and the remaining £501,134 given in kind by volunteer efforts.

What next?

The Reserves Enhancement Programme provides SWT with a solid foundation of investment and expertise from which to progress. The SWT Vision (2006) recognises the value of the reserve holdings as demonstration sites and as local focal points for wildlife and people.

The maintenance and expansion of the completed works are included in SWT's Five-Year Plan.

