

Teachd an Tìr

The Bounty of the Land

SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE
DUALCHAS
NADAIR
na h-ALBA

Reporting on the work of Scottish Natural Heritage in the West Highlands and Western Isles

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ATLANTIC RESERVES NOW MORE ACCESSIBLE

Scottish Natural Heritage has produced leaflets about the four Western Isles National Nature Reserves to help make them more accessible to the public.

With three of the four NNR's located out in the Atlantic to the West of the Hebrides, visiting these areas can be a problem for most people. The free colour leaflets explain the history and the natural history of the NNR.

Leaflets about Loch Druidibeg in South Uist and St Kilda – the most visited of the four Hebridean NNRs – were published a few years ago. Now with new, matching leaflets about Heisgeir or the Monach Isles off North Uist, and Rona/Sula Sgeir,

the set is complete.

All four leaflets are fully bilingual – in Gaelic and English – with a handy map of the Reserve, colour photographs and an account of the human history and wildlife. They have all been written by John Love, an area officer based in the Uists, who has visited all four reserves many times.

He said: "Rona, which lies 45 miles north east of the Butt of Lewis has always been one of my favourite islands. I first visited it in 1971 and have been back six times since. I first heard about it, and its smaller neighbour Sula Sgeir, as a schoolboy, from James Macgeoch who had been the Nature Conservancy's honorary warden. He made a classic film of the guga hunt back in the 1950s and had long fostered my interest in birds.

"The rare little Leach's petrels which breed in Rona have always been a special interest of mine, and one bird I ringed in 1972 was re-caught, still nesting there, thirty years later!

"I have since visited many islands in the north and west but had to wait until 1994 before I got to the Monach Isles. Being a bit of Uist machair marooned four miles offshore, they are in stark contrast to the other outlying NNRs, but stunningly beautiful. Abandoned in 1945, they are still dear to the hearts of many Uist folk, some of whom are only too happy to reminisce about living there. That is now an all-too-rare experience for many deserted islands."

David MacIannan, area manager for the Western Isles, added: "Three of our NNRs are remote and

difficult to access, so SNH has to be innovative about how we can bring them closer to the general public. There is an SNH website dedicated to all our NNRs (www.nnr-scotland.org.uk) and we assisted the National Trust for Scotland establish another devoted to St Kilda (www.kilda.org.uk)."

"The Monachs and Rona/Sula Sgeir are in many ways more remote than St Kilda so the new leaflets will doubtless prove a popular first point of contact for many folk keen to explore these fascinating islands."

The leaflets are available free from the SNH offices in Stornoway and South Uist, and will also be offered to local outlets such as the tourist information offices and heritage centres.



The Monach Isles. Ceann Iar beach with Shillay lighthouse behind.



NEW PREDATOR PROBLEM FOR HARRIS?

With mink, hedgehogs and ferrets threatening wildlife in the Outer Hebrides in recent years, a potentially new predator has appeared on the scene.

Although foxes have occasionally been reported from Lewis and Harris, a fox seen in Harris earlier this year is the first confirmed sighting.

The animal was spotted by zoologist Dr Sugoto Roy of the Hebridean Mink Project. He watched it for 15 minutes while it foraged near the Urgha end of the Urgha-Rhenigidale footpath, by the road from Tarbert to Scalpay. It then disappeared into the hills.

Any island is particularly vulnerable to new species being introduced and the Outer Hebrides is no exception. These islands have huge colonies of ground nesting birds – gulls and terns, waders, corncrakes and corn buntings are all potentially at risk.

Like the hedgehog, the fox is indigenous

to the British mainland and some of the Inner Hebrides, but does not naturally occur in the Western Isles.

The Uist Wader Project is currently addressing the problem of hedgehogs which pose a particular threat to machair waders in Uist. In South Uist, the Hebridean Mink Project seems to have successfully wiped out another undesirable alien – the American Mink. See pages 2 and 6 of *Teachd an Tìr* for further information on these projects.

It is feared that the establishment of an island fox population – another non-native mammal – would pose risks to native birds and domestic poultry, as well as presenting a threat to lambs.

Anyone sighting a fox in the Western Isles is urged to contact Scottish Natural Heritage on 01851 705258. It would help to have sightings reported at the earliest opportunity, to give the best chance of taking effective action.

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Bun-sgoil Shleite

Glen Roy NNR

HELPING PROTECT SCOTLAND'S FOSSIL HERITAGE

The Scottish Fossil Code will be the first national and fully comprehensive palaeontological code in the world, when it is launched next year.

It is an opportunity to help consign irresponsible fossil collecting to history whilst simultaneously promoting responsible collecting and continuing the amateur collecting tradition. This should help ensure further discovery of spectacular fossil finds.

Responsibility for developing the Code has been vested in SNH through the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Designed to foster responsible collecting

habits, the code will provide advice on best practice in the collection, identification, conservation and storage of fossil specimens found in Scotland.

It is seen as an additional means in the effort to curb the damage being inflicted upon Scotland's palaeontological heritage and it offers a wonderful opportunity for raising an awareness of Scotland's tremendous fossil heritage.

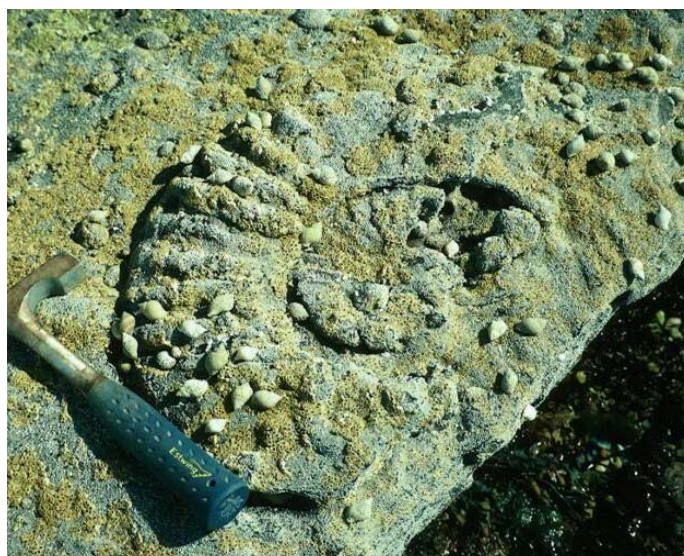
It will also contain information on activities that are likely to damage fossil resources; the circumstances in which fossils should not be removed from land; and the manner in which fossils removed from land should be kept or otherwise

treated.

SNH will publish the Code, promote an awareness and understanding of it and review it from time to time.

The 'Fossil Code Working Group' (FCWG) which is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds have been helping SNH draft it. They have all been involved in Scotland's palaeontological heritage and include amateur and commercial collectors, museum curators, academics and landowners.

The draft Code will be ready for public consultation in the summer of 2006 and it is hoped that it will be launched by Easter 2007.



A barnacle-covered fossil ammonite on Skye

FOSSIL FACTS

- Scotland's fossil heritage spans at least 800 million years;
- Some of the earliest amphibian, reptile and mammal remains have been found in Scottish fossils; and
- Rocks in Scotland have yielded the world's oldest known vertebrate, some of its oldest known plants and insects and the smallest ever dinosaur prints!

See page 7 for more information on fossil collecting and the damage it can cause....