

P04 High Value Open Habitat Survey



Project Overview:

This project undertook to obtain more information on a range of upland habitats in the Assynt area through a habitat survey informed by aerial photographs. This information will then be used to inform better overall landscape planning, including for woodland expansion (identifying areas for habitat restoration, and areas of regeneration of seedlings or bonsai), but also to promote better awareness of these habitats, and habitat networks among land managers, the local population and visitors.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Scottish Wildlife Trust, NatureScot

Also involved: Assynt Foundation, Northwest Highlands Geopark, Assynt Field Club, Alex Scott (Isle Martin trust, formally SNH) and Eisg Brachaidh Estate.

Project Location: Glencanisp, Assynt (Annex 1)

Project dates: November 2019 – January 2021

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Digitised Ferreira survey polygons and meta data	1	1	Digitised survey
User-friendly coloured maps – in forms which are more widely accessible than is currently the case – in both graphic and shapefile (ESRI GIS) form.	1		Digitised map incorporated in the Habitat Map of Scotland (HabMoS) and will be available for public download.
Converted databases using NVC and incorporated into the Habitat Map of Scotland (HabMoS)	1		Ferreira meta data digitised and added to each polygon.
Awareness-raising outputs: digital format interpretation report to make survey data accessible, and outputs displayed in a public display at the Glencanisp Deer Larder	1		Ecologist preparing interpretation, printed on panels and installed in the old deer larder. 25/05/2021 NLHF agreed to replace walks and leaflets with digital interpretation report and interpretation
Showcase the upland mapping methodology	1	1	1 virtual talk given to Assynt Field Club on 20 th May 2021.
Open Habitat survey of approximately 60km ² to identify high value habitats	1	1	Survey complete

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained.
Y	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped. 60km² habitat mapped.
Y	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage. Technical survey interpreted to be more readily accessible to the public.
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. Habitat survey will be the basis for further land management going forward.
	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage.
Y	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites. Interpreted technical report to be displayed in the Old Deer Larder information point.
	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset.
	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits.

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

Baseline Mapping of Glencanisp

The mapping of almost 60km² of habitat is a monumental task that has created a base line for the habitat and complimented other habitat work in Assynt, filling in a large hole in the habitat map of Assynt and the Glencanisp Estate.

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

The project as identified key species, such as montane willow, that will need further investigation. The habitat map will complement the future plans for deer management, woodland expansion, and possibility of peat restoration.

The interpretation report will take the survey and interpretate it in terms of the previous surrounding surveys, and national records of sightings to be more accessible to the public and the Assynt Foundation.

Additional work was funded for reports on the Gaelic place names, land use and geological influence of Quinag estate which was also part funded by P12 Community Grant Scheme.

What difference has this project made to People?

The survey area was previously un-surveyed, and the habitat survey will underpin any further land use management of the surveyed area. There are opportunities for woodland expansion and peat restoration and the technical habitat survey will inform and future plans. The survey has also provided data to that will be incorporated in the Habitat Map of Scotland.

“Colin couldn't get close enough to collect specimen, but he has some good pics. Thinks we may have to send couple of climbers up there to make roped descent to actual specimens; in spring for catkins and summer for leaves! May be tea-leaved willow *Salix phylicifolia* or whortle-leaved willow *S. myrsinites* (as on limestone), or something even more exciting.” Assynt Field Club

“They [the contractors] agreed there was an advantage to having pre-defined polygons to survey from the segmentation (so this is a method we'd consider applying again), but the process had captured too much detail in places (i.e. too many polygons to classify) so we'd have to tweak the algorithm a bit to simplify the output.” GIS & Observation Analyst

Useful Links

<https://www.environment.gov.scot/our-environment/habitats-and-species/habitat-map-of-scotland/>

<https://www.assyntwildlife.org.uk/assynt-wildlife-publications-list/quinag-wildlife-project-2020/>

Future Plans and Legacy

The survey will inform future land management decision not only by Assynt Foundation but also NatureScot, and reside in the Habitat Map of Scotland. As a baseline survey it will retain importance through the decades to come as the first comprehensive habitat mapping, historical record.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. Collaboration with agencies can leave the impact of the projects
2. Utilising experience of local and national experts achieved great outcomes
3. Experienced contractors are required to achieve such a large survey area

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. When initial lead partner withdrew the project lead needed to be taken by CALLP staff
2. CALLP staff did not necessarily have the required skills to direct the project
3. Early tendering is required to ensure availability of contractor

Funding Partners



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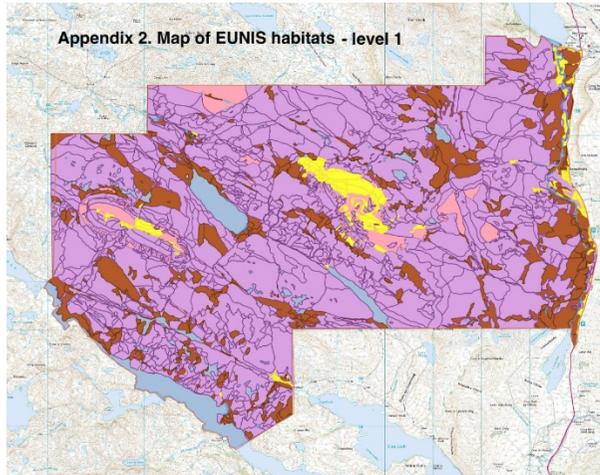
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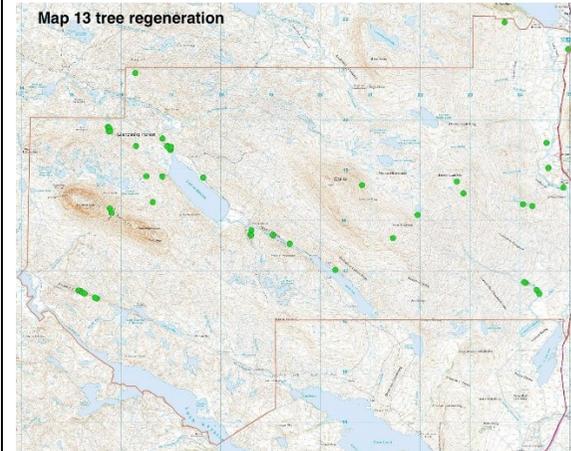
NatureScot

Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

Photographic Evidence



Final UNAIS classified Habitat Survey Map © Colin Wells



Map from Survey Report identifying locations of tree regeneration © Colin Wells



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Annex 1: Map of area covered by the Habitat Survey

