

HIGHLAND ASPEN GROUP

The Highland Aspen Group (HAG) is a membership organisation of enthusiasts, both academic and practical, who are keen to improve the future for Aspen in the Scottish Highlands. Those involved include woodland ecologists, botanists, mycologists, lepidopterists, foresters and practical volunteers. Copies of the Constitution are available to any member requesting one.

The work covers gathering information about Aspen stands and their associated plants and animals across the area, and developing thinking about their management and history. A nursery has been set up to propagate local provenance native woody plants, in particular different Aspen clones to ensure the availability of this material for planting in the National Park and adjacent areas. Other species which also have depauperate populations will be propagated.

HAG produces occasional Newsletters and holds field meetings at least once a year. Communication is usually by email, except for folk without it. The AGM is held in May. The annual subscription runs from the day after the AGM.

For more details please contact the Secretary Mary Winsch 01479 870247 or the Chairman Ern Emmett 01540 661962.

Aspen, Populus tremula

The aspen tree is a key component of natural boreal forests. The distinctive trembling leaves are one of the last to burst in spring. It is dioecious (trees are either male or female) and clonal; the clones can be distinguished in spring and autumn by the time and colour of leaf burst, autumn colour and leaf fall

It forms suckers so that a clump of trees may represent only one clone and that possibly a relic of post glacial Britain. It flowers sporadically and spreads when seed is produced. It can grow to 20m but 10m is more usual in Scotland. The wood is the hardest of any native poplar. It is highly palatable to stock, deer and rabbits and beaver but can be very persistent despite this. Along with other 'non-useful' trees it has been removed from woods in favour of timber trees so its distribution is more restricted than is natural.

The aspen is host to many specialist species which indicates a long ecological association. Aspen can be used as one of the indicator species of ancient woodland. There are 14 specialist moth feeders and 14 rare saproxylic flies dependant on aspen. The Dark Bordered Beauty moth caterpillar, *Epione vespertaria* feeds on young suckers. The Aspen Hoverfly, *Hammerschmidtia ferruginea*, depends on dead wood.

The Aspen Bracket Fungus, *Phellinus tremulae*, is the commonest source of death. There are other interesting wood-decaying fungi and a shoot blight, *Venturia macularis*, which causes the young shoots to blacken and die back. Aspen bark is more basic and nutrient rich than other native species so is host to many interesting and rare lichens and mosses.

An article *Aspen, Britain's missing link with the boreal forest* by Peter Cosgrove et al appeared in *British Wildlife* magazine no.2, December 2005, vol.17, pp 107-115.

www.treesforlife.org.uk hosts an Aspen Information Resource which has articles about aspen, the associated plants and animals, propagation, mythology and folklore.