

Membership Form 2008



Please fill in your details and return to: Mary Wunsch, Secretary Highland Aspen Group, Easter Auchnagallin, Braes of Castle Grant, Grantown-on-Spey PH26 3PL

Name

Address

.....

..... Postcode

Email

Tel Mobile

DATA PROTECTION ACT: I agree that the information on this form can be entered on the HAG database, and I understand that it will not be used for any other purpose. If you are happy for HAG to pass on your details to fellow members for networking purposes, please tick in the appropriate boxes above.

Signed Date

Please select your preferred method of payment:

I am paying by **Standing Order** and have completed and signed the Standing Order form below

I am paying by cheque and enclose a **cheque** for £5 payable to **Highland Aspen Group**.

The annual membership will run from 1st June.

Please tick here if you would prefer to receive the Newsletter by e-mail rather than post.

Paying by Standing Order

NAME AND ADDRESS OF YOUR BANK

.....

SORT CODE.....ACCOUNT NAMEACCOUNT NUMBER

Please pay the **Highland Aspen Group, A/c 06001010, Sort Code 800816, Bank of Scotland, 1 The Square, Grantown-on-Spey, Morayshire PH26 3HG**

The sum of **£5 (five pounds)** annually, starting on **1st June 2008** and making subsequent payments on 1st June until further notice.

SignedDate

HAG News

Issue 3



Welcome to HAG! The Aspen hoverfly

The Highland Aspen Group (HAG) has circulated previous newsletters electronically, but this is the first printed issue, with which we are aiming to widen our readership.

The content of this newsletter very much reflects the Group's origins. HAG emerged from a conference on the biodiversity and management of Aspen held in Kingussie in 2001. It had become apparent that, despite its unique importance for biodiversity, Aspen had largely "fallen through the net" of prevailing conservation policies.

One of the main issues identified at the conference was the fragmented nature of our Aspen stands, and the need to restore networks of Aspen habitat. However, few tree nurseries were able to supply planting material of Scottish origin on a regular basis.

So HAG was constituted and applied for funding and set up a propagation unit run by volunteers at Kincaig (see page 3). The Group also holds field and indoor meetings.

If you are not a member or have lapsed, please join using the enclosed membership form. Anybody interested in Aspen is invited to join us. The annual subscription is only £5 and we need lots of members to satisfy our sponsors!

**HEALTH WARNING:
ASPEN ENTHUSIASM
CAN BE ADDICTIVE ! ■**

Hammerschmidia ferruginea is currently known to occur at only 5 locations in Scotland. By contrast, in the 1990s, it was recorded from 15 sites. The main reason for this decline appears to be a reduction in the availability of decaying Aspen wood upon which the larval stage depends. Not all Aspen stands can support *H. ferruginea*; many are too small or lack appropriate age classes or dead timber.

Because of its conservation status, the Aspen hoverfly is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species. In order to plan appropriate action, it is important for us to know as much as possible about its habitat requirements. We know *Hammerschmidia* requires fallen Aspen trees and branches of at least 15cms diameter (for sufficient decay to build up) in which to breed. Eggs are laid under the bark and the larvae feed on the decaying wood. Known sites are being actively managed to ensure a continuing supply of deadwood.



Female *Hammerschmidia* marked and released

However adult requirements were largely unknown until a recent study helped to fill this gap in knowledge. Adult *Hammerschmidia* were found to regularly visit flowering plants to feed on nectar. They depended especially on Bird Cherry, Rowan and Hawthorn, which flower sequentially through early summer. Individuals were found to have a dispersal ability of over 1km and a maximum longevity of

51 days, which represents the flight period from mid May until mid July.

At fallen Aspen, males were found defending territories that may be acting as leks attracting females. Males were observed returning daily to defend the same area, and females returned repeatedly to oviposit on the same fallen Aspen throughout the flight period. This new information illustrates the importance of fallen Aspen as, not only an egg-laying site but also a mate seeking site. It may also be necessary for a fallen Aspen tree to be large and whole to occupy many defending males forming a functioning lek. Current management of cutting up fallen trees may hinder breeding success.

Findings from the study will assist future efforts to manage habitat for *Hammerschmidia* and monitor populations. ■

Ellen L. Rotheray

Ellen conducted her research in 2006 at RSPB Insh Marshes reserve for her M Sc.



Fallen Aspen log where Ellen spent many a happy hour

Planting Aspen at Inshriach and Glenmore

If you're reading this newsletter then the odds are that you know what's missing from the majority of Strathspey's plantation woodlands. Some of Forestry Commission Scotland's work involves the early stages of restoring and expanding the remnants of Caledonian forest at Glenmore Forest Park and its larger southern neighbour, Inshriach Forest.

Established native Aspen is here – if you look hard enough! For example there is only one tree in Ryvoan Pass. So we've had to accept we can't rely entirely on natural regeneration to recreate a diverse native forest.

We took the decision that Aspen needed a boost and so began a working relationship with the Highland Aspen Group that has blossomed (or perhaps 'cloned!') over the last few years. This has



HAG members visited some of the Glenmore plantings in June

involved helping HAG with the propagation unit at Highland Wildlife Park.

Aspen has been planted throughout Inshriach for the last five years, initially in the southern half of the forest, adjacent to stands on the RSPB reserve at Insh Marshes.

The long term vision is that a network of Aspen stands will eventually link Insh Marshes, through Inshriach to Glenmore, on to Abernethy NNR and as far as Grantown-on-Spey. We've planted around 2500 Aspen from several clones. A potential 70

hectares has been identified through forest plans that may be suitable for Aspen planting.

At Glenmore Forest Park we've established 12 trial plots of separate local clones at 350-600 metres above sea level on the south facing slopes of Creagan Gorm. These plots will be monitored by FCS staff and Royal Botanic Gardens over the years to help increase knowledge on growth rates, associated lichens and reproduction.

Over the coming years FCS hope to work with HAG to help restore Aspen as a greater part of the nation's native woodlands. ■

Neil McInnes

Until last December, Neil was the forester at Glenmore/Inshriach. He has given unstinting support to HAG over many years. We wish him well in his new post at Dornoch. Eds.

Conserving the Dark Bordered Beauty

The Dark Bordered Beauty moth is a UKBAP Priority species which is only known from two sites in Scotland and one in England. Recent work has focused on trying to encourage the moth to colonise new clearings, adjacent to existing colonies, into which young Aspen suckers, the caterpillar's sole foodplant in Scotland, will readily establish. Excitingly last year at the Strathspey site, moths were found for the first time in two new glades created

three years ago. With this evidence and funding from the Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme up to 20 further clearings will be created over the winter to further improve the fortunes of this rare and handsome moth.

In addition, work overseen by Scottish Native Woods has commenced nearby to open up a conifer plantation that was identified as a blockage to dispersal to Aspen dependent species. The plantation

has been lightly thinned and small clearings created that will be planted up with Aspen of local provenance propagated by HAG.

Meanwhile in Deeside, also with Cairngorms LBAP funding, contractors have cleared scrub at one of the colonies, whilst local volunteers have also cleared scrub using handtools at an adjacent colony.

We believe that such a landscape scale approach is essential to the future conservation of butterflies and moths in Scotland, by enabling species to live in a series of inter-connected sites.

We are also planning to look for the moth in 2008 at other sites that have suitable habitat in both Deeside and Badenoch & Strathspey. ■

→ If you want to get involved in surveys, contact Tom on 01540 661469 or tprescott@butterfly-conservation.org

Tom Prescott

Tom is Species Conservation Officer for Butterfly Conservation Scotland

This newsletter was produced with funding from:





The role of Aspen in lichen biodiversity

Aspen was 'discovered' by lichenologists in 2001, when Brian Coppins undertook the first comprehensive survey of Aspen lichens in Strathspey with Les and Sheila Street. This first survey found species new to Britain, species previously thought extinct and large populations of species that are exceedingly rare and/or threatened in the British Isles. Their findings also confirmed for Scotland the results of earlier work carried out in Scandinavia, which had highlighted the difference between the epiphyte flora of Aspen and that of co-occurring tree species. Aspen has a

strikingly different epiphyte flora compared to pine and birch growing nearby. In Scotland's birch-pine woods, Aspen adds importantly to forest biodiversity.

Continuing survey work by Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh during 2003-2006 examined Aspen stands from across Scotland and reported about 300 lichen species associated directly with Aspen as epiphytes. Of these, 25 have an IUCN threat status and are included on the British red list. This survey work examined the way in which Aspen epiphyte communities vary between stands along a

climate gradient from eastern to western Scotland, and within-stands, between trees of different age.

However, the role of Aspen genetics in controlling the community of epiphytes remains an important unresolved issue. To what extent are differences in epiphyte communities between Aspens determined by the effect of clonality (the genetic make up of individual clones)? The role of genetic control on the epiphyte flora is now of practical concern, especially because HAG are successfully propagating trees from different Aspen

clones as part of wider efforts to regenerate Scotland's native woodlands. Research undertaken by PhD candidate Chantel Davies (in collaboration with MLURI, University of Edinburgh and RBGE) aims to pin down the role of Aspen genetics in controlling the composition and diversity of the epiphyte flora, and possibly including any interaction between Aspen genetics and the wider environment. ■

Christopher Ellis
Chris is based at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. If you want to read more, visit <http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/lichen/>



Go forth and propagate!

That was a key message which participants took away from the 2001 conference. There was a clear and urgent need to restore the Aspen missing from our native woodlands but a scarcity of local planting stock. And so the Highland Aspen Group was formed. Growing trees is a key part of HAG's mission.

So, with help from Highland Wildlife Park, Cairngorms National Park, Leader+, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission, together with the labour of many volunteers, the nursery was set up in 2006.

The yield of trees in the first year was just over 600 from six clones. In 2007 we made an earlier start with root collect-

ing effort was made to sex clones. Of the 13 clones sampled, 4 are known to be female and one male. This year, clones included some from higher altitude in Badenoch, also Deeside and the Angus Glens.

Unfortunately the yield was similar to 2006, perhaps due to low temperatures. Productivity was again found to vary greatly between clones.

In an endeavour to meet increasing demand for local provenance Aspen, we are investigating the use of micro-propagation. This should allow us to produce several thousand trees annually. We are also planning to set up a seed-orchard. Funds are currently being sought for a second polytunnel. ■



Tom Prescott joyfully collects roots from an Aspen by the River Calder

→ **Many volunteers have helped with the nursery in all sorts of ways - collecting roots, propagating plants, building outdoor frames, concreting shed floors. If you would like to help, please contact Ern on 01540 661962 or ecubed@btinternet.com**

Ern Emmett

Mapping Aspen in Strathspey

Aspen is found in many native woodlands throughout Highland, but it is particularly widespread in Strathspey. It is here that many of Scotland's rarest Aspen-dependent species are making their last stand. Even in Strathspey though, Aspen stands are typically small and scattered, and grazing is hindering their regeneration.

Many of the species which rely exclusively on Aspen find it difficult to disperse from one stand to the next, especially where the network of Aspen habitat is fragmented. In many cases, it may be possible to secure the future of these species by expanding existing Aspen stands and establishing new

stands where they are lacking.

In order to plan conservation measures for these species, efforts are being made to find out more about the status of Aspen in the strath. With funds from Cairngorms National Park, LEADER+, Forestry Commission Scotland and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Scottish Native Woods has been leading a project to map Aspen using aerial photography. A comprehensive map will allow us to identify gaps in the distribution of Aspen and take steps to link stands and reconnect habitat networks.

Over 600 sq kms were flown in May 2007 and we



© Caledonian Air Surveys

A 'hidden' Aspen stand: the bare canopy stands out from surrounding birch and conifers.

are currently interpreting the photos and compiling a draft map of Aspen. We will then visit many of the mapped stands to ground-truth the survey and collect more information. ■

→ If you would like to help with this survey work, please contact john.parrott@scottishnativewoods.org.uk or call 01456 486426.

John Parrott

'A comprehensive map will allow us to identify gaps in the distribution of Aspen and take steps to link stands and reconnect habitat networks.'

Forthcoming Events

- A conference on Aspen biodiversity and management is to be held on 3–4 October 2008 in Kingussie. We are especially pleased to welcome a speaker from Finland, Prof. Jari Kouki of the University of Joensuu who will provide an insight into the way Aspen is viewed and managed in Fennoscandia. It will also report on studies of various Aspen-dependent species (flies, bryophytes, lichens and fungi), progress on mapping Aspen stands in Strathspey, planting, propagation, and an overview of Aspen timber utilisation.

- A field event on *Managing Aspen on farms* is being planned in partnership with Scottish Native Woods and FWAG on Friday 6th June.

→ If you would like to attend either of these events, please e-mail john.parrott@scottishnativewoods.org.uk or tel. 01456 486426

This Newsletter is published by Highland Aspen Group.
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John Parrott: john.parrott@scottishnativewoods.org.uk
(01456 486426)

Activities during 2007

Apart from the activities reported elsewhere in this newsletter, HAG helped to secure some press coverage for Aspen this year. Members gave interviews for BBC Radio Scotland's Out of Doors and BBC TV Scotland's Landward programme.

On June 9th, about 20 HAG members gathered at Glenmore Lodge. The weather was clement, a lucky day in a disappointing summer. We first visited some groups of Aspen planted in Glenmore Forest Park. We heard from Chris Ellis how these plantings of known clones from different parts of the strath might shed light on the role of genetics in colonisation by lichens. We look forward to returning in 50 years time to see the results!

We had lunch at Lochan Uaine and climbed the lower slopes of Meall a Bhuchaille to see the only known Aspen clone in Ryvoan. The main stem is



HAG folk admire the Ryvoan veteran

magnificent, and looks very much at home nestling among fine old Caledonian Pines.

We arrived back at Glenmore for the AGM and presentations by Chris Ellis on the lichen research and John Parrott on the ongoing aerial survey. ■



BBC's Lindsay Cannon interviewed HAG members for Radio Scotland

ASPEN IN SCOTLAND

biodiversity and management



The Second Scottish Aspen Conference Boat of Garten, Fri 3rd – Sat 4th October 2008

Highland Aspen Group is hosting this event as a follow-up to the conference held in Kingussie in May 2001. The 2008 conference will present the progress made during the last seven years in various areas of research into aspen and its dependents, much of it significant and exciting. It will also explore aspects of managing aspen as part of Scotland's woodland resource.

Guest speaker Professor Jari Kouki of the University of Joensuu in eastern Finland has been invited to provide an insight into how aspen is regarded and managed in continental boreal forests.

Topics covered, either as short presentations or posters will include:

- Mapping Aspen distribution using aerial photography
- Mapping the newly discovered Aspen Bracket Fungus
- Mapping aspen-dependent bryophyte species
- Natural history of the Aspen Hoverfly
- Developments in the study of Dark-bordered Beauty moth
- Research into the lichen communities associated with Aspen
- Monitoring epiphyte colonization of newly planted Aspen
- Aspen timber utilisation
- Developing Aspen habitat networks in Strathspey
- Aspen growth rates
- Developments in propagation techniques

The Friday programme will include indoor presentations at the new Community Hall in Boat of Garten. After a buffet lunch, there will be a short field trip followed by poster sessions. A plenary discussion session will complete the programme before a conference meal in the evening. A number of field trips are programmed for the Saturday. Transport will be provided for field trips. A detailed programme for the conference is in preparation and will be sent to delegates nearer the time, but feel free to contact John Parrott or Ern Emmett if you have any questions.

The fee for attending the conference (including transport for field trips and tea/coffee twice and lunch on Friday) is £20 per person, payable on booking or **only £15 if you join HAG by standing order**. The (optional) conference dinner will be approximately £20, including wine. Please indicate on the booking form if you would like to take this meal and attend the Saturday visits using the tick boxes, so that we can cater accordingly.

Conference proceedings will be made available to all delegates after the event.

Please complete the slip below, attach a cheque and post to Mary Winsch, Easter Auchnagallin, Braes of Castle Grant, Grantown-on-Spey PH26 3PL

Enquiries to ecubed@btinternet.com or john.parrott@scottishnativewoods.org.uk

Aspen conference, Boat of Garten, 3-4 October 2008		
Please reserve place(s) at the conference (PLEASE PRINT)		
<i>name(s)</i>	<i>organisation (if applic.)</i>	
<i>address</i>		
<i>e-mail</i>	<i>tel</i>	
Conference fee please pay now on registration	20.00	
OR Reduced fee (if joining HAG by S/O)	OR	£.....
	15.00	£.....
I wish to attend the conference dinner and include a £5 deposit <input type="checkbox"/>	~ £20	£.....
I wish to participate in the Saturday field visits <input type="checkbox"/>		
Please send me details of local accommodation <input type="checkbox"/>		
I enclose a cheque made payable to "Highland Aspen Group" for	 £