

WOODLAND

Cairngorms Aspen Project

Working with landowners to secure the future of Badenoch and Strathspey's nationally important aspen stands

Aspen woodlands support many rare invertebrates and plants, and add a vibrant splash of colour to the landscape. With input from conservation specialists, local volunteers and agricultural advisors, the project has been helping to manage 38 aspen woodlands and monitor a further 66 sites. Over the last five years, the project has planted over 1,600 aspen trees and protected at least 4,000 more by managing grazing levels.

Securing tree regeneration

Many of the strath's aspen woodlands are situated on farmland, where they provide shelter for livestock as well as a unique habitat for wildlife. However, aspen is highly palatable to all herbivores, and regeneration is often scarce. The project has erected a variety of small exclosures and protected individual trees to secure a safe future for the next generation of this valuable source.

Planting new stands

Aspen has been planted in four sites throughout the strath. Although the number of trees is relatively small, aspen will sucker freely when conditions are favourable. In time, this process of regeneration can rapidly give rise to a substantial area of woodland.

Priority has been given to planting in areas where aspen is absent. As new aspen woodlands become established in these gaps, they will provide 'stepping stones' to improve connectivity, and facilitate the dispersal of aspen-dependent species.

Because aspen rarely flowers and sets seed, growing sufficient aspen of local origin for planting is an ongoing challenge. Nurseries are producing limited numbers by collecting roots and propagating suckers in a misting unit. In a bid to increase the quality and quantity of planting material, the project is helping to establish several orchards to produce local-origin seed.

