

FUTURESCAPES

space for nature, land for life

Cairngorms Caledonian pinewood

CREATING AN AMAZING PLACE FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

The Caledonian pinewood in the Cairngorms is a magnificently scenic landscape that has ebbed and flowed over generations between the broad straths to the narrow mountain gullies. Scotland has retained just 1% of the original Caledonian forest. Nearly 60% of what remains is in the Cairngorms, so its health and resilience is vital. Pinewoods are important within the wealth of Cairngorms land use, including timber production in plantations, shelter for stock or a calm retreat for holiday-makers wanting a relaxing walk, or a glimpse of scarce pinewood wildlife.

Linkages between fragments of pinewood are essential to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the forest for the future. Every fragment has a role to play as part of the network or potential network. Individual woodlands may be primarily managed for commercial, recreational or environmental objectives; some are in public ownership, whilst others are private. Pinewoods are integral to the landscape that local communities are part of and they make a significant contribution to the local economy.

The Caledonian pinewoods are home to a staggering array of plants and animals, many of them "pinewood specialists". We can be beguiled by red squirrels; marvel at ospreys; or wonder at the whereabouts of elusive wildcats – for which these forests are the most important site in the UK. We may even have a chance encounter with a capercaillie. Less familiar is the amazing twinflower, with its tiny flower spike, or the

strange-looking tooth fungi, some of which occur nowhere else in Britain. Our pinewoods are alive with the calls of crossbills, amongst them the Scottish crossbill, the UK's only endemic bird. This wealth of wildlife is recognised by the national and international designations that cover many of the great forests of the Cairngorms.

Bigger, more connected forests are more robust. They are better for wildlife, give more spectacular views, provide visitors with a sense of seclusion, can be managed in a more sustainable way and are more able to survive climate change. So it makes sense to think big.

OUR WORK SO FAR

Our work so far has concentrated on Abernethy where, if we allow the forest to expand at its own pace (or "naturally regenerate"), we calculate it would take 500 years or more for the pinewood to fill its natural range at Abernethy. We're trying to fast-track this, and we think we can reach our goal 300 years early!

There are great things happening with Caledonian pinewood throughout the Cairngorms by individual landowners and organisations outside the boundaries of RSPB ownership – some focusing on natural regeneration and others using planting. This all contributes to greater vitality and resilience of the woodland across the region. Only through landscape-scale action can we deliver the most benefits.

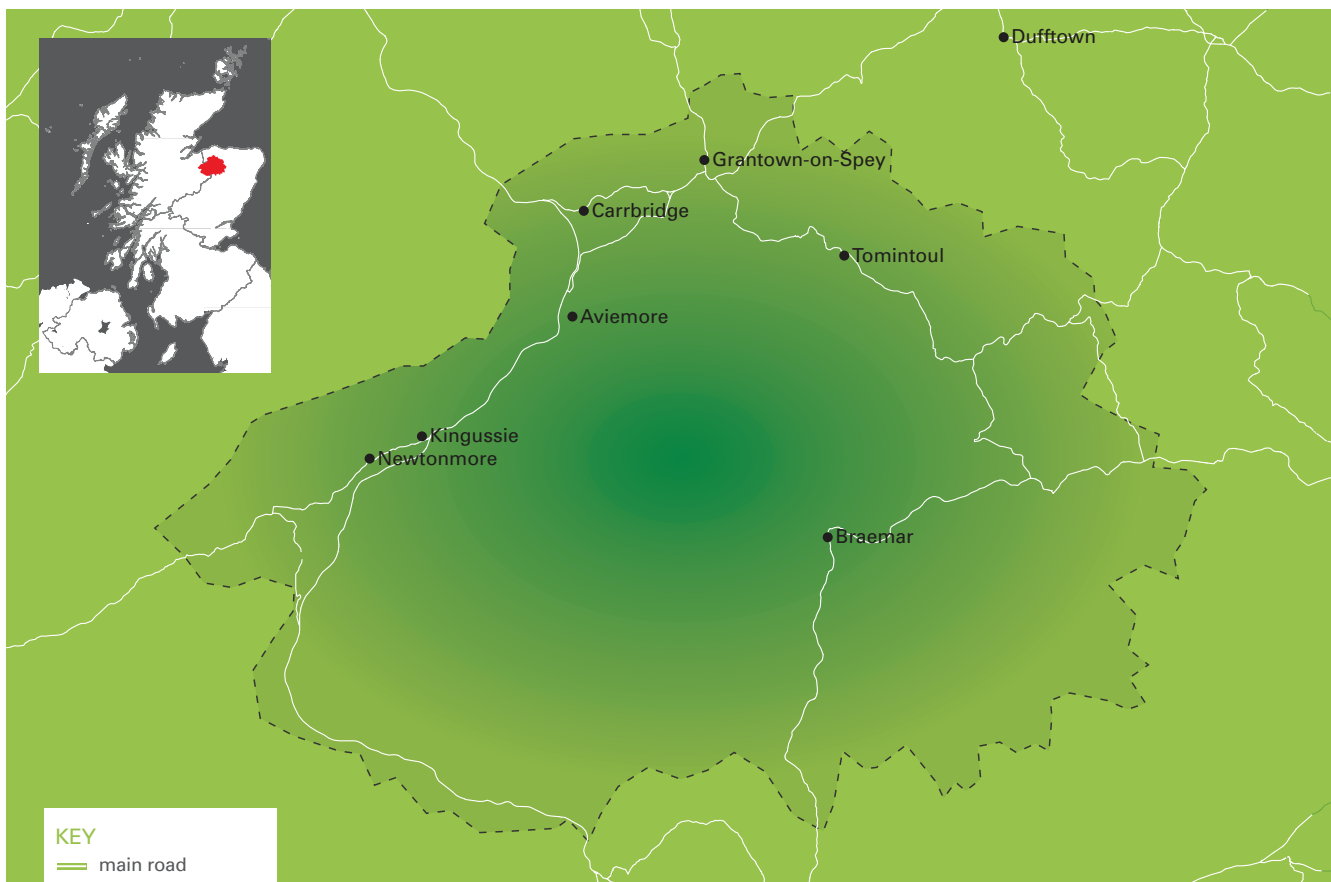


CONSERVING THE CAPERCAILLIE

Capercaillie are woodland grouse, confined to native pine forest and some commercial conifer plantations. Their needs are not straightforward as they require vast expanses of suitable habitat. Males are black, huge and unmistakable, especially so when they gather to perform their mating ritual at traditional lek sites. They spend a lot of time feeding on blaeberrries on the ground, but may also be found in trees, feeding on pine needles. The UK capercaillie population and range has declined rapidly, and the species is now at risk of extinction. Conservation and restoration of the habitat is essential if they are to thrive once more.



RSPB Abernethy National Nature Reserve



“ Strathspey forests are essential for the survival of capercaillie in Scotland. Indeed, well over half the Scottish population is now found here. The expansion of individual forests – and forging links between them – will be crucial to providing the extensive habitats these birds require. ”

Dr Pete Mayhew, Chair, Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Group

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are keen to involve all interests. Initial discussions suggest an underlying positive attitude and desire for pinewoods to continue and be enhanced. Land holdings may be primarily managed for timber production, deer, grouse or conservation. Some may be well advanced with planting or regeneration projects or only have a very small pocket of land where pinewood could establish. Others may manage for recreation, a multiplicity of uses or have ambitions regarding their pinewood, but are facing barriers to realising their goals.

By working in partnership it is anticipated that the pinewood network as a whole will deliver more benefits for all. Only through partnership working and a shared vision can we hope for a truly connected and fully functioning Caledonian pinewood.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Please get in touch with us, whether you are a farmer, landowner, community organisation or individual. You may have an area of ground that could be enhanced, be looking for advice, interested in volunteering, want a presentation or just to discuss the project and where there may be a mutual interest. Together we can make the Caledonian pinewood Futurescape even better for people and wildlife.

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