

# SCOTTISH WILD HARVESTS ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2011



### Just two years old...

The Scottish Wild Harvests Association (SWHA) was formed in April 2009 by a handful of people, and launched at the Big Tent festival later that year. We've been involved with various public events since then, attracting new members along the way. In June 2011 we were ready for our first ever members' Gathering. This newsletter reports on that Gathering, and provides a snapshot of where SWHA is just now.

Originally conceived as a trade association, SWHA is now also emerging as a focus for campaigning & (often mutual) education, bringing together passionate and knowledgeable people from around Scotland. At the midsummer Gathering members discussed ideas for a Gatherers' Code of Conduct, the need to Cut Cutting of Scotland's productive hedges & verges, and the ways people can plant and manage land to ensure foraging for all in years to come. We rambled through an orchard full of elderflowers, swapped recipes, foraged, and made many new and fruitful connections.

The next chance to meet will be our AGM, later in 2011 - time and date to be arranged. (If you'd like to host the AGM, or would like to suggest a venue, do get in touch - [secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk](mailto:secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk))



### Who are the Wild Gatherers?

We are foragers, beekeepers, greenwood workers, basketmakers, whittlers, wine makers, artisan food producers, chefs, herbalists, essence makers, activists, seed growers, seed collectors, writers, mycologists, foresters, wild & woodland gardeners. SWHA members include people who are true professional foragers and people who are, in the best and original sense, true amateurs as well: people who are passionate about Scotland's wild resources.

SCOTTISH WILD HARVESTS ASSOCIATION c/o Emma Chapman, Secretary, 1d Powis Circle, Aberdeen, AB24 3YT

See [www.scottishwildharvests.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildharvests.org.uk) for updates, further information and membership application form

SWHA members can keep in touch using the members' egroup: <https://groups.google.com/group/scottishwildharvests?hl=en>

If you are a member but not receiving messages from the group, email [secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk](mailto:secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk)

There is also a wider mailing list for anyone who would like occasional updates of SWHA's activities and other wild harvests events and news. To be included on (or removed from) this list, email [secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk](mailto:secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk)

# THE MIDSUMMER GATHERING

## The Gathering of the Wild Gatherers, 22nd June 2011

*Foragers came from as far afield as Wester Ross, Sutherland, Argyll and Aberdeenshire. Our hosts, Perthshire's Cairn o'Mohr winery, make a range of country wines, including wild-foraged elderflower.*

The group included:

- |                                     |                       |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 5 wild- & forest-gardeners,         | 2 herbalists,         |
| 7 forage walk leaders,              | 3 beekeepers,         |
| 1 woodland consultant,              | 1 forester,           |
| 2 commercial nursery gardeners,     | 2 chefs,              |
| 1 seed collector,                   | 1 chocolatier,        |
| 1 juice manufacturer,               | 2 writers,            |
| 1 seaweed specialist,               | 4 craftspeople,       |
| 7 orchards activists,               | 7 educators,          |
| 4 crofters & smallholders,          | 1 jam & pastry maker, |
| 1 wild fruit/veg/mushroom supplier, | 1 winemaker,          |
| and one hedgelay & coppice worker.  |                       |



*Several of us had several hats. Diversity was the order of the day.*

## A celebration of elderflowers

*Our visit to the Cairn o'Mohr winery wouldn't have been complete without a tour of Ron Gillies' unique elder orchard. Brenda (B) Anderson reports:*

The majority of cuttings were taken (just below the bud) from wild bushes. They have built up a collection of 14 favourite trees. Each has its own specific attributes. Each has a quirky but self-explanatory name, based on where found e.g. 'back o' the barn'. 'Dinner Plate' is easily recognisable because of its very cream-coloured heads.

Ron & co. still enjoy heading off and picking elderflower on the hillsides, where the elder seem to grow smaller heads. This appears to give a more intense flavour. In particular elder grows well along railway lines and in amongst nettles, brambles & rosebushes. Fortunately for Ron after many years of foraging he is now immune to the sting of nettles and never feels the scratch of a well-established rosebush!

Cairn O'Mohr recently received a 3-Gold-Star award for their Elderflower Sparkling Non-Alcoholic Wine. But it's not just great beverages the elder is responsible for. The leaves when rubbed on the body help ward off the smallest blighter of them all - the midge.

Cairn o'Mohr Winery: [www.cairnomohr.co.uk](http://www.cairnomohr.co.uk)



## How many uses for nettles...?

Undaunted by the presence of so many experts, Margaret Lear of Plants with Purpose led a forage of foragers, drawing out the knowledge of the group and adding plenty of her own; there was much to discuss and taste in a relatively small area of land. Along the way she required each of us in turn to list yet another use for nettles. The Wild Gatherers rose to the test!

Plants with Purpose: [www.plantsandapples.co.uk](http://www.plantsandapples.co.uk)



# THE MIDSUMMER GATHERING

## Workshop 1: Hedges and Edges – let's campaign to cut the cutting!

*This suggestion by Ron Gillies of Cairn o'Mohr gained a lot of support during the Gathering. Fi Martynoga took notes.*

Over-aggressive cutting regimes for hedges and roadside verges lead to the loss of bio-diversity, waste of resources, and aesthetic loss. It can make a council's own bio-diversity action plan very hard to implement. Is this done in the name of EU regulations? If so, how is it that some councils operate differently?

**Edges:** Cut grass seems to invite litter because what is already there is more visible and encourages the irresponsible to jettison more from their car windows. Long grass hides it all and makes the countryside more attractive to locals and tourists alike. This time of dwindling local authority budgets seems a good moment to persuade councils to develop more intelligent regimes. They clearly have to take road safety into consideration, but judicious cutting at corners and junctions is usually all that is needed, not whole-verge mowing for miles. Contractors would need specific training about where and when to cut but with intelligent zoning of verges to take account of plant communities in addition to sight lines, this ought to be achievable.

Some estates put up notices that read, 'Please do not cut the grass'. Could we organise a similar direct action campaign – mass-produce notices, and circulate them so that anyone interested could stick them into particularly sensitive verges? Such a campaign would need good publicity in local newspapers, and the widespread promotion of the wildlife value, the 'wonderful weeds', the genuine savings that can be made, and the greater attractiveness of the summer lanes to tourists.

**Hedges:** Repeated flail mowing is bad for hedge plants, particularly species like elder which are never given an opportunity to flower and set fruit. Hedge-cutter operatives can be particularly thrown about sticking to their existing 'blitz all' methods. We came to no real conclusion about how to tackle this one, unless we simply were to make it part of a 'Cut Cutting' campaign. Everyone felt a bit more information about best practice was needed before anything can be formulated. Ron Gillies, who led the workshop, will start a dialogue with his local council and others may do with theirs...

## Workshop 2: Managing land for forageables

*With foraging on the rise, it's in everyone's interest to work to increase the foraging resource when the opportunity presents. Alan Carter led a workshop exploring some of the possibilities.*

We were a diverse group of people, with a wide range of situations where we had an interest in managing the land to increase the yield of all sorts of forageables, going from our own back gardens and allotments to large areas of community forest and wild land.

As such, the discussion ranged far and wild: I'll just try to summarise here the obstacles that people had encountered and possible ways of overcoming them.

**Lack of knowledge:** There was a lack of guidance on both species and methods for the planting and sowing of forageables. Perhaps SWHA could produce some.

**Lack of stock:** It is difficult to get hold of seed and planting stock for a lot of forageable species. Things that would be useful would include seeds and seed mixes for foraging, plug-plants of plants like sweet cicely, own-root fruit trees, currants (preferably native strains) produced as cheap bare-rooted cuttings and wild trees selected for yields of interest (like Ron's elderberries). Perhaps there is a niche here for SWHA members?

**What to do with forageables once they have been produced:** We can grow forageables in situations like community woodlands, but many users of these spaces do not know what to do with them. Hopefully SWHA and its members are helping here already.

**Grant schemes and Forestry Commission rules:** Current (agro-)forestry grant schemes define hazel as a shrub! It would be useful to be able to plant smaller species such as raspberries and currants within these schemes. Most grant schemes do not allow the planting of fruit trees other than unselected native ones like blackthorn: there is no concept of anything between a forest and an orchard. SWHA could work with the Forestry Commission and Department of Agriculture to change this.

Alan Carter is a forester and a forest gardener: <http://scottishforestgarden.wordpress.com/>

# THE MIDSUMMER GATHERING

## Workshop 3: A gatherers' Code of Conduct

*From the outset SWHA has supported ethical and sustainable harvesting. With so many experienced people present, there was a chance to start laying the foundations for a SWHA Code of Conduct for gatherers.*

The focus of a code should be on ecology and sustainability, with specific techniques for specific species where appropriate. Two different codes are needed to reflect the differences of legality, practicality and scale between amateur and commercial collecting, and we should build on the codes and legislation which already exist.

A number of points were listed, in particular: never gather any 'red-listed' species (these are protected by law); avoid trampling; avoid harvesting roots (it's much more destructive than gathering leaves or fruits, and the legislation reflects this). Foraging forays could harvest roots for demonstration purposes, but only with care and always with the landowner's permission; roots wanted for sale should be cultivated. Commercial pickers are required by law to get the permission of the landowner for any harvesting they do.

Safety is a concern as well - avoid contaminated sites, and know your species. A licence for mushroom selling would help.

*Workshop notes by Charlotte Flower. ForestHarvest website has information on existing harvesting codes ([www.forestharvest.org.uk/guidelines/harvestingguidelines.htm](http://www.forestharvest.org.uk/guidelines/harvestingguidelines.htm)) and the legal position ([www.forestharvest.org.uk/guidelines/harvestingguidelines.htm](http://www.forestharvest.org.uk/guidelines/harvestingguidelines.htm)).*



[www.cairnomohr.co.uk](http://www.cairnomohr.co.uk)  
[www.charlotteflowerchocolates.co.uk](http://www.charlotteflowerchocolates.co.uk)  
[www.bualharvests.co.uk](http://www.bualharvests.co.uk)  
Beeware: 01350 727587  
[www.monica wilde.com](http://www.monica wilde.com)  
[www.wildandscottish.co.uk](http://www.wildandscottish.co.uk)  
[www.rowancottherbs.co.uk](http://www.rowancottherbs.co.uk)

## Today's specials

The lunch menu, specially prepared by Na'an of the Cairn o'Mohr cafe, included wild garlic and wild mustard soup, dandelion root bake, and elderflower sponge.

Charlotte Flowers brought meadowsweet and Scots pine chocolate thins.

Bual Harvests brought a hamper with rosehip and bramble preserves.

Beeware brought along some honey - and bees!

Juice was provided in the form of Monica Wilde's herbal power juices, and bright, sharp orange sea buckthorn juice from Wild and Scottish.

The tea breaks were enhanced by Erica Hollis's trademark mint & herb tea blend.



## Workshop 4: What do we want?

SWHA was originally conceived as a trade association, but discussions at the Gathering confirmed what SWHA's first two years of activities have shown; members don't believe that supporting business interests should be the sole aim of their association. This is a good time for a rethink, as SWHA's constitution needs updated. Advice on the legal form for a constitution is widely available, but only SWHA members can decide what they want the Association's aims to be. The Cut Cutting campaign and the Code of Conduct speak for themselves; discussions during the day also mentioned education, heritage - and, time and again, the sheer enjoyment of foraging.

At the end of the day we concluded that: **"The Scottish Wild Harvests Association exists to bring together people who are passionate about Scotland's wild resources, enabling them to pool knowledge, educate the wider public, and promote sustainable use."**

If you'd like to help work out the aims in more detail, please get in touch! - the constitution needs written in time for this year's SWHA AGM. Drafts will be shared via the SWHA website and/or e-group.

# WILD HARVESTING & HERBAL MEDICINE

## Traditional herbs, new legislation

*There's more to wild harvesting than food. Herbal medicine, once the epitome of locally-sourced healthcare, is facing uncertainty as new, untried legislation comes into force. SWHA member and medical herbalist Erica Hollis MNIMH introduces some of the issues.*

There have been several changes in legislation recently that affect the supply of herbal medicines to the public. Products that had previously been freely available in health food shops, chemists, supermarkets and market stalls must now be registered with the MHRA (medicines and healthcare regulatory authority) – a process that involves producing evidence of use and safety data in rather longwinded reports that are costly to write. As a consequence, the products that are getting registered tend to be made by the big pharmaceutical companies and are pretty far removed from the simple herbs themselves.

The other route for obtaining herbal medicine is from a medical herbalist, who can only supply herbs after a one to one consultation 'in a place from which the public can be excluded' (which rules out market stalls). Currently there is no definition of such a herbalist - anyone can call themselves a herbalist and supply herbal medicine after what may be a very cursory 'consultation' - but this is also changing and next year bona fide herbalists with degree-level training are to become statutorily registered.

Herbs that are more culinary than medicinal are also still freely available as long as one does not make any health claims for them! However there is no list of either culinary or medicinal herbs as the MHRA is going to decide on a case-by-case basis – not very helpful.

While these changes are all apparently made for the protection of the consumer one has to ask where patient choice has gone and wonder why, at the same time, the range of pharmaceutical drugs available off prescription has recently been greatly widened. I leave you to draw your own conclusions.

All the more reason then to partake in herb walks (forage walks lead by local herbalists), which will enable you to find out more about the medicinal properties of the herbs that grow around us and also to get to know your local herbalist(s) better should you need more expert health advice in the future. For the herbalist, too, there is always the opportunity to learn more as participants often come up with old family knowledge about the wild herbs.

*Erica Hollis offers consultations in Herbalism and Aromatherapy, and leads herb walks in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire*

[www.rowancottherbs.co.uk](http://www.rowancottherbs.co.uk)

01651 862359

[herbalist@rowancottherbs.co.uk](mailto:herbalist@rowancottherbs.co.uk)



*The Rowancott herb garden.  
Photo by Vilma Mcadam.*

*We were drinking some of Erica's mint and wild herb tea blend during the tea breaks at the Gathering. It's a very fine brew, and usually contains nettles and ground ivy.*

**PLEASE NOTE: "ground ivy" is a common wild herb, Latin name: *Glechoma hederacea*. It should never be confused with ivy (*Hedera helix*), which is poisonous!**

A good summary on the recent changes can be found at [http://ehpta.eu/medicines\\_legislation/index.html](http://ehpta.eu/medicines_legislation/index.html) .

Details of the regulatory process for registering a new herbal medicins can be found at <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/Howweregulate/Medicines/Herbalmedicines/PlacingaherbalmedicineontheUKmarket/TraditionalHerbalMedicinesRegistrationScheme/index.htm>

# WILD HARVESTS EVENTS



**20th August, Falkland, Fife:** Wild Harvesting Day. Wild food feasting & foraging. Details on [www.centreforstewardship.org.uk/events.htm](http://www.centreforstewardship.org.uk/events.htm)

**22nd August, Scottish Crannog Centre, Loch Tay:** 'Living the Iron Age'. Activities include chopping firewood, lighting fires, food processing, cooking, and dugout canoeing. Other forthcoming Crannog Centre events include:

**13oct11 Cran-Apple and Cider Festival;**  
**16oct11 Fungi, Food and Fire;** **13nov11 World of Wood Fair;** **20nov11 Autumn Harvest Food & Drink Fair** (including seasonal wild food).

More info at:  
[http://www.crannog.co.uk/docs/crannog\\_centre/events\\_diary.html](http://www.crannog.co.uk/docs/crannog_centre/events_diary.html) or phone 01887 830583

**28th August, Wooplaw Woods, Scottish Borders:** Fire, willow, whistles and spoons at - FREE. There's something on at Wooplaw every last Sunday of the month throughout the year - even Christmas Day! For more info see [www.wooplaw.org.uk](http://www.wooplaw.org.uk)

**August 2011 onwards:** Plants With Purpose & Appletreeman: courses and events on plants for pollinators, herb growing, fruit identification, orchard maintenance and more, in Perthshire and far beyond. Details on <http://plantsandapples.co.uk/#/happenings/4541045877> **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN BUD GRAFTING** to learn bud grafting, August 2011, Bankfoot, Perthshire - 01738 787278 email@plantsandapples.co.uk

**August-October 2011, Aberfeldy then Peebles:** Woodlanders exhibition. The Woodlanders book celebrates Reforesting Scotland's vision for a restored landscape supporting a woodland culture in Scotland; it features a range of Scotland's wild harvesters. More details on [www.reforestingscotland.org/projects/woodlanders.php](http://www.reforestingscotland.org/projects/woodlanders.php) and [www.reforestingscotland.org/news.php](http://www.reforestingscotland.org/news.php)

**11-17th September 2011, Isle of Tanera Mor, near Achiltibuie:** WEEK-LONG FLORA, FAUNA AND FORAGING COURSE, exploring the wildlife of the Island, with experiments in ethnobotany - revitalising old uses of plants such as making dyes, weaving and of course foraging. Very few venues offer a whole week's foraging experience, with accommodation & great home cooking. More information at: [www.summer-isles.com/flora-fauna-foraging.asp#Weeklong](http://www.summer-isles.com/flora-fauna-foraging.asp#Weeklong) or phone 01854 622252

**24th September, Buy Design Gallery, Ancrum, Scottish Borders:** Stool-Making Day. A brilliant start for anyone wanting to know how to make their own green wood furniture or work with green wood and willow. More information at: <http://www.buydesigngallery.com/weekend-workshops.html> or phone 01835 830718

**25th September, Wooplaw Woods, Scottish Borders:** Fungal Foray - FREE. For more info on Wooplaw's regular last-Sunday-of-the-month events see [www.wooplaw.org.uk](http://www.wooplaw.org.uk)

**25th September, Lochore Meadows, Fife:** Wild Food Day - foraging 10am-12noon; fungal foraging & recipes 1-4pm. **15th-16th October:** Apple Weekend - cider making, FREE apple juicing & apple ID. **5th-6th November:** Green Woodcraft & Bushcraft. **10th-20th November:** Hedge-laying. To book places and for further information: 01592 656080 / [www.fifecoastandcountrysidetrust.co.uk](http://www.fifecoastandcountrysidetrust.co.uk)

**7th-9th October 2011, Croy, Lanarkshire:** Reforesting Scotland Annual Gathering. Meet the network of people whose vision of restored forest cover & culture in Scotland led to the formation of SWHA, among many other things. This year the Gathering is in the heart of the Central Belt, finding out about post-industrial reforestation and renewal. Buildings tour, speakers, Thousand Huts campaign, local visits, ceilidh & more. [www.reforestingscotland.org](http://www.reforestingscotland.org) for details and booking form.

**October? November? Somewhere near you? SWHA AGM AND FUNGUS FORAY** - venue and date yet to be decided. This will be the next chance to meet up with other SWHA members & explore places & themes of interest. If you'd like to be involved with helping make this happen - maybe you'd like to make sure it happens at a venue near you! - please get in touch: [secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk](mailto:secretary@scottishwildharvests.org.uk)

*For courses, contact the organisers to book a place as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.*

*If you would like your event listed in future SWHA news bulletins do get in touch and we will do what we can. The event must be either run by SWHA members or free to the general public, or both.*

## Midsummer recipe: Herbal power juice

1 shot juiced Clivers (aka Cleavers, Sticky Willy, Goosegrass. Use leaves & stems)

1 glass pear or apple juice

A dash of lemon juice

*More info on Monica Wilde's blog: [www.monica-wilde.com](http://www.monica-wilde.com)*

*The hand-cranked juicer can be bought here: [www.ukjuicers.com/lexen-healthy-juicer](http://www.ukjuicers.com/lexen-healthy-juicer) (link requested several times at the Gathering!)*

## Thanks for the photos:

Alan Carter (pages 1,2,4,6)

Ebby Sigmund (page 1)

Dan Gates (page 1)

Emma Chapman (page 1)

Charlotte Flower (page 4)

Erica Hollis (page 5)

Vilma McAdam (page 5)