

## **Success of Woodland Crofts Knowledge Share programme leads to further events**

The programme of woodland crofts knowledge share events announced in the September issue of *The Crofter* was completed as planned before Christmas – but such was their success, a further event has already been confirmed (in Lochcarron, in March).

Over 60 people attended the three events held in successive months in Tighnabruaich, Gairloch and Dornoch. Each was hosted by a different partner in the Woodland Crofts Partnership working with a local group, with the theme of each event reflecting both the hosts and local priorities.

The Kilfinan Community Forest Company together with the Community Woodlands Association (CWA) started the ball rolling on a crisp October day in Argyll. As well as basic information and guidance on woodland crofts being provided (common to all three events), Ian Hepburn from Mull outlined how the community there had become the first in the country to create new community-owned woodland crofts. Following this, David Blair from Tighnabruaich itself offered his own experiences over more than 15 years of living and working in a woodland locally. A site visit was made in the afternoon to the community forest, to view progress to date (inspirational!) and hear the community's own plans for woodland crofts.

Gairloch in November provided a complete contrast, not least weather-wise, although it did brighten up in time for the site visit to the Good for Ewe community growing project. Janet Miles from the GALE centre was keynote speaker on the theme of 'sustaining communities', with the joint hosts (SCF) represented by Patrick Krause and Derek Flyn, both delivering crofting-related presentations. The Q & A in Gairloch proved to be quite lively, questioners perhaps emboldened by the presence of a BBC Alba camera crew! (the event subsequently featured briefly on *An Là*)

Finally, Dornoch continued the trend of increasing numbers (over 30), with some dedicated participants having travelled all the way from Ardnamurchan. Chairman for the day Councillor Jim McGillivray of the Embo Trust outlined their experiences in trying to establish woodland crofts, which to date had been largely frustrated by funding difficulties. Next up, and agreed by all to be 'star of the show', was elder statesman of forestry Reay Clarke from nearby Edderton.

Reay has the distinction of having been the first person in Scotland to create a new woodland croft under the 2007 Act, the story of which he recounted along with a personal vision for woodland crofts. Joint hosts the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) then concluded the presentations with a focus on housing, emphasizing the support available from them for what is often a core part of any new crofting project.

The Knowledge Share events form part of a wider package of awareness-raising and promotional measures being delivered by the Woodland Crofts Partnership (CWA, SCF &

HSCHT), and funded by Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). Other elements include a website at [www.woodlandcrofts.org](http://www.woodlandcrofts.org) (in development, but hopefully live by the time you read this), a Twitter feed @woodlandcrofts, media work, and importantly, a Register of Interest for woodland crofts, already providing very interesting and useful information about prospective woodland crofters.

Until the new website brings it all together in one place, further information on these measures including the Register of Interest, as well as wider information on woodland crofts, can be found on the websites of the individual members of the Woodland Crofts Partnership as well as those of HIE and FCS.