

Volunteers collect 2.2 million rare seeds to boost ancient native woodlands and rainforest across Scotland

Wednesday 12 June, 2024

In a boost for restoring Scotland's native ancient woodlands and temperate rainforest, a Trees for Life and Woodland Trust Scotland initiative to increase the country's availability of rare native tree seeds has smashed its first-year target by collecting more than two million seeds.

A team of more than 80 volunteers has collected 2.2 million seeds since last August, in the first season of the three-year Tree Seed Collection Project – enabling 1.5 million trees to be grown for rewilding across Scotland, hugely exceeding an initial target of 500,000 trees.

The project focuses on rare tree species from Scotland's surviving fragments of ancient woodland, including on Skye, the Western Isles and Orkney, and west coast temperate rainforest.

Many of the tree species have unique genetics, dating back to the end of the last Ice Age, which need preserving. With the trees often in remote locations, the new network of volunteer seed collectors is creating access to local woods and local knowledge.

“Seeds are the unassuming beginnings of life, offering us a symbol for hope and the future. This project is preserving genetically precious and rare species – in turn helping restore native ancient woodland and rainforest, and providing homes for wildlife from wood ants to pine martens,” said Roz Birch, the Tree Seed Collection Project's Volunteer Coordinator.

“It's inspiring to witness the passion of the amazing volunteers who are making this 'citizen science' rewilding project so successful, as well as their joy at knowing the seeds they collect will benefit rewilding to tackle climate breakdown and biodiversity loss.”

By working alongside tree experts, the growing volunteer team has allowed the project to source seeds from a wide range of rare species including aspen and juniper, while also addressing Scotland's shortage of other native trees with traceable local provenance.

Once collected, seeds are processed and tested, then sent to nurseries for sowing and growing on. The young trees will be available for planting at sites across Scotland this autumn – including Woodland Trust Scotland projects to restore Scotland's rainforest, and Caledonian pinewoods at sites in Argyll and Bute, Lochaber, and the Trossachs.

The Trusts' Croft Woodland and MOREwoods schemes – which help crofters, smallholders and common grazings associations manage and plant woodlands – will also benefit, as will a 30-year landscape-scale project to establish new native woodlands and restore remnant rainforest in Assynt.

Where natural regeneration is impossible due to a lack of seed sources following deforestation, tree planting is critical for Scotland's threatened Caledonian forest, of which less than 2% remains. Trees for Life volunteers have now planted more than two million trees at dozens of sites across the Highlands, restoring this unique habitat which supports wildlife including red squirrels, capercaillie and crossbills.

Trees for Life welcomes enquiries from anyone interested in becoming a tree seed collection volunteer across western and northern Scotland. Volunteers receive training and equipment for collecting and short-term storage of seeds. For details, email Roz Birch at roz@treesforlife.org.uk.

The Tree Seed Collection project is funded by Woodland Trust Scotland, thanks to support from players of People's Postcode Lottery and other supporters; and by supporters of the Trees for Life Wild Seed Appeal, along with the BrITE Foundation, Clean Planet Foundation and Ella's Kitchen.

Scotland is currently one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. As members of the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, both Trees for Life and Woodland Trust Scotland are urging people to sign the Rewilding Nation Charter at www.rewild.scot/charter – calling on the Scottish Government to declare Scotland a rewilding nation, committing to nature recovery across 30% of land and sea.

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