



An immense effort over five years has restored large areas of the Flow Country.



2019 was a big year for nature in Scotland. We celebrated 25 years of working in the Flow Country. The Orkney Native Wildlife Project began in earnest and BBC Springwatch spent a season in the Highlands showcasing some of Scotland's iconic wildlife. We added a new reserve, Loch Druidibeg in the Outer Hebrides, and co-ordinated the first-ever Dolphinifest in Aberdeen.

Anne McCall
Director, RSPB Scotland

Flows now flourishing

Flows to the Future was an ambitious five-year project to restore large areas of blanket bog in the heart of the Flow Country – Europe's largest blanket bog. It also connected people to this precious habitat.

In the last year, the Forsinard team hosted 13 volunteers from different parts of Europe as part of the World Heritage Volunteer programme. They took part in conservation tasks including removing over 30,000 non-native conifer saplings to help the restoration these important peatlands. An immersive art event "Below the Blanket" also took Edinburgh by storm. Held in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh during the 2019 Edinburgh Festival, it was rated one of the best outdoor art events in Britain by The Times.

Over the five years, restoration work was started on nearly seven square miles of blanket bog by removing 837.4 hectares of non-native trees from deep peat and clearing 564 hectares of non-native conifers. Visitor and research facilities were created including the Flows Lookout – an award-winning six metre-high viewing tower – a new Flows Field Centre at Forsinard and visitor information points across the Flow Country. There was also an extensive programme of school and community activities.

The £11.3 million project was carried out by the Peatlands Partnership with the RSPB as lead partner. It was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, along with many other supporters. Although this project has finished, our work to help protect, restore and celebrate the Flow Country continues. The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forest and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, The Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Third Sector Interface, The Flow Country Rivers Trust, and The Environmental Research Institute.

Success at Cairngorms Connect

Cairngorms Connect is a partnership of four land managers with a 200-year vision to improve habitats and help restore natural processes within the Cairngorms National Park.

Though the area is known for its fragments of ancient Caledonian pinewood, there are also Scots pine plantations present. Over the last year, 122 hectares of these plantations were restructured to function more naturally. Native tree species have been planted in areas to provide seed sources where they should be present but aren't, including five hectares of broadleaves in Glenmore and 550 hectares of native species on Wildland.

It was an active year for collecting baseline data of various species and habitats. This included surveying moths, songbirds and vegetation in remote and challenging locations. There was continued work on establishing relationships between the partners and engaging stakeholders, from hosting a conference to featuring on BBC *Springwatch*. In addition, the project launched an album of traditional music by a local composer Hamish Napier inspired by the woodlands of the partnership area.

At the end of 2018, the partnership of RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forest and Land Scotland and Wildland Limited, was awarded \$5 million (USD) by the Endangered Landscapes Programme for habitat restoration alongside scientific monitoring of the landscape over five years.



270
volunteers
contributed
5,500
days to help restore
the Flow Country.



184
hectares
of non-native
tree species
removed.