

The Keeper of The Forest

Freja MacDougall



A symbol of immortality, royalty, spirituality and fertility, the Scots pine (*giuthas-Albannach*) has long held a special place in many cultures. Before arriving on our shores at a time when world population was essentially stable at around 5,000,000 and people were living scattered around the globe in small hunter-gatherer bands, the Scots pine was already a celebrated emblem in Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and Eastern Siberia. The Buryats, a Mongolian people, named pine groves 'Shaman Groves' which were to be approached in silence and reverence, respectful of the gods and spirits of the woods. The Romans and the Druids both worshipped the tree during equinox and solstice celebrations, the Druids went as far as to decorate the glades of Scots pine with lights and shiny objects; a ritual that could easily be associated with our very-own latter-day Christmas tree customs.

For a tree of such stature and reverence worldwide human civilisation, grazing and the Scottish climate becoming wetter and windier really threw a spanner in the works for *Pinus sylvestris*, slowly but steadily the once dominant tree species began to suffer under these pressures. Remnants of the vast Caledonian Forest are scattered across the Highlands of Scotland, Glen Nevis being one of these sites. These pockets of native pinewoods have become the subject of various restoration projects and despite the drastic reduction in tree cover over the years, the future of our forests looks better than it has in centuries.

The area of highest biodiversity value within Glen Nevis is the Caledonian pinewood, something recognised in the Nevis Landscape Partnership's Pinewood Restoration & Future Forests projects. For

the last few years, with the help of numerous partner organisations and hardy volunteers, a great deal of work has gone into the conservation of the native woodland in Glen Nevis through various measures. One of which is the felling of non-native conifers to enhance the habitat for fledgling Scots pine trees.



In a move that may seem counter-intuitive to some, we must remove trees to make trees! Sitka spruce comprises 45% of the total land and 67% of the current woodland area we are looking to improve in Glen Nevis, statistics that the humble Scots pine cannot compete with. Felling non-native Sitka will give our trees a fighting chance at survival and vastly improve the biodiversity of Glen Nevis. A handy by-product of these felling measures, especially at this time of year, are bonnie-looking Christmas trees.

We therefore extend an invitation, along with our partners Forestry Commission Scotland, to everyone who would like to get hands-on about conservation to come and chop down your own Christmas tree this winter and do a bit of good for Glen Nevis.

9th December
Festive Felling!
Glen Nevis

10th December
Christmas Crafts
Ben Nevis Visitor Centre

(01397) 701088

www.nevislandscape.com/events
www.facebook.com/nevislandscape
info@nevispartnership.co.uk