

Questions asked over Forestry Commission felling licence for site with two Red List species

Fears for rare bug in 'thinning' wood

By TOM RAMAGE

GRAVE concerns are being raised over timber clearing in a Strathspey wood ranked as the last refuge for an insect and a stronghold for another Red List species.

Curr Wood by Dulnain Bridge is home to the pine hoverfly and twinflower but there are concerns that both could be wiped out by work currently taking place there.

There are fears that Forestry Commission Scotland has overlooked the importance of the woods in granting a felling licence for the site

Natural history recordist Stewart Taylor, of Nethy Bridge, said: "With more heavy thinning,

clear felling and, for the first time in modern times, planting, the prospect for the woods future isn't great."

He continued: "It's a pity the attempt to buy this wood by RSPB and Plantlife back in the early 2000s wasn't successful, because the wood's importance has gone downhill since Seafeld Estates sold it at that time.

"It seems the 'sympathetic management' that forestry management specialists Bell Ingram received awards for, has gone out of the window in pursuit of profits."

The former RSPB Abernethy worker has highlighted his concerns to the forestry commission in an effort to protect the habitat, following the posting of felling signs.

Opponents to the work have claimed Curr Woods have already lost their capercaillie population due to past felling operations and now there are fears of more losses.

Mr Taylor said: "I have also been quite horrified to see many of the young, regenerating rowans within the wood being felled removing one of the main food sources at flowering time for the pine hoverfly and other insects."

He has since made FCS aware of the importance of the wood in natural history terms and asked "if their presence has been taken into account while considering the felling licence application"

He added: "With this wood being so important to several rare species I would hope consultations have taken place

with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and RSPB. In addition, Plantlife and Buglife would offer additional guidance.

Mr Taylor said one of the main reasons the fly is living in Curr Wood is because of the age and size of the Scots pine

He commented: "During one of the last major fellings the butt ends of several trees were cut up on site because they were too big for the automated sawmilling process.

"It is the age and size of these trees that is important for the fly and if the woodland is to be slowly converted into a more rapid turnaround commercial forest then the habitat requirements of the fly will be lost.

"With its long woodland



RARE SPECIES: Curr Woods is the last bastion habitat for the endangered pine hoverfly.

history, rare species and uniqueness, extremely sympathetic management is what is required and not a purchase having been made to continually maximise income.

"Sadly, RSPB and Plantlife were unsuccessful in a bid to buy this wood when it was first sold by Seafeld Estates in 2001 and the capercaillie disappeared.

"Hopefully, this felling licence application isn't going to see the ecological value of this wood

decline even further, an inevitable consequence if an intensification in timber production is to be sanctioned. The felling of the rowans alone hints heavily as this being the management objective."

Eric Hart, who lives by the woods, said: "How can Forestry Commission Scotland possibly give permission to thin and partially clear fell Curr Wood - which, according to Scottish Natural Heritage who have been studying the pine hoverfly there - is the species' only naturally occurring site? Add into the equation that Curr Wood contains the largest known concentration of twinflower in the UK.

"The wood is just regenerating from the last severe thinning that wiped out the capercaillie which were breeding there."

Seafeld Estate sold the woods to BSW Timber in 2001, and it is understood the site was then sold the following year to Henry Becker who had an interest in fungi and natural history. He sold to the current owner.

Bell Ingram's forestry manager Jim Adam did not wish to comment other than to state that formal procedures had been properly followed in applying for the felling licence at Curr Wood.

Forestry Commission Scotland was unable to contact the relevant case officer yesterday.

The IUCN Red List was founded in 1964, and lists the species at most risk of extinction.

More information can be found at <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

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WINNING DAY: Jim Adam (left) and owner Billy Martin (centre) receive praise from environment minister Paul Wheelhouse for the sympathetic management being given to Curr Woods in 2013.



THINNING DAY: Thursday saw thinning taking place in Curr Woods, south of Dulnain Bridge, as notices went up warning of impending felling.

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