



## **SAC Conservation Services Newsletter**

### **Issue No 3. Winter 2011/12**

#### **Woodfuel- Turn up the Heat**

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) was launched on 28<sup>th</sup> November (for non domestic users). The RHI is a fixed payment for the renewable heat you generate yourself from Biomass boilers for example and woodfuel is the perfect environmentally sustainable resource to use. Many of our woodlands are under-managed and the RHI may provide an incentive to look again at woodland management. Woodfuel burning properties vary depending on the tree species used. Ash for example provides good firewood. It burns well due to its oil content. Beech too is an excellent firewood and if well seasoned burns slowly producing a lot of heat. Birch has similarly good burning properties as does Douglas fir. More information on the RHI can be found at [www.rh incentive.co.uk](http://www.rh incentive.co.uk).

#### **Scottish Rural Development Programme – Rural Priorities**

The next Agri-environment application round dates will be 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012 for a Submitted plan and 15<sup>th</sup> June for a Committed plan. The decision making group (the RPAC) will sit in late September for schemes beginning 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. It is uncertain at this time whether there will be another agri-environment application round. The scoring criteria has changed which puts emphasis on scoring applications more highly (under additionality) if they can show that the work would not go ahead without SRDP funding. Competition for funding is high. More information on the scheme can be found on the Scottish Government website [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk) or by contacting your local SAC Consultant.

#### **Bracken Control**

In response to the Asulam ban (the chemical most commonly used for bracken control) a Bracken Control Group has been established which is co-ordinated by the Heather Trust. As it stands, the sale of Asulam will be banned from 31<sup>ST</sup> December 2011 and all stocks must be used up by 31st December 2012. The implications of the ban have significant agricultural and environmental consequences. Other methods of physical control are possible (cutting, rolling, trampling etc) but these are limited by ground conditions, accessibility and steep slopes. Other chemicals (such as Glyphosate) can be used but Asulam is key, as it is a selective weed killer which is less damaging to other plants. There is much support in the UK for the ban to be overturned or for emergency powers to be employed to allow an annual 3 month application window to be observed. The debate can be followed at [www.brackencontrol.co.uk](http://www.brackencontrol.co.uk).

## **Good Agricultural & Environmental Conditions (GAEC)**

SAC has produced a user friendly summary of GAEC requirements which can be found on the SAC website at [www.sac.ac.uk/crosscompliance](http://www.sac.ac.uk/crosscompliance). The system is called CcELIS- Cross Compliance Electronic Information System and lays out in easy to follow steps what each of the GAEC requirements are. It is important to keep abreast of these standards if you wish to avoid a penalty or reduction in grant scheme payments. All the land management requirements are based on the sound use of natural resources.

## **Land Managers Options (LMO's)**

It may only be early winter just now but it could be worth giving some early thought to what you could do with your LMO funding allocation for next year. In arable areas, wildbird cover and field margin options could provide real benefits for farm wildlife (and income). Planting up small field corners to create a network of small woodlands around the farm may be another valuable addition to the property. Please contact your local adviser for more advice.

## **SAC Conservation Services**

SAC Consulting offers an ecological advisory service. Our accredited consultants all have Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv) and MIEEM status. In addition to SRDP conservation and woodland applications we undertake a whole range of environmental survey work including: Phase 1 Habitat Surveys, Breeding bird surveys and surveys for protected species such as Badger, Otter and Water vole. If you wish to enquire about any of these services then please contact the SAC office.

## **Farm woodland planting**

Woodland planting grants may be available if you are considering creating new woodlands. 1ha of native woodland planting for example can attract £2,450.40/ha planting payment. This is paid as a lump sum after planting. A £218.00/ha maintenance payment is paid annually for 5 yrs after planting. In addition £160/ha-Farmland Premium (Arable or Improved grassland) or £60 for unimproved grassland may also be payable for 15 years.

## **Looking after our winter migrants**

Many of the birds we are used to seeing around the farm are resident all year round and some come here for the winter to escape more severe weather conditions elsewhere. A simple way to provide food over winter is to leave stubbles until spring or by providing supplementary food through laying out seed or by providing areas of wildbird cover plots. Another way is to plant berry/fruit bearing trees such as Rowan, Whitebeam, Hawthorn or Crab apple. Planting hedgerow trees and small copses with shrubs that fruit can be relatively cheap and hugely beneficial. Flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing particularly enjoy the late harvest provided by such shrubs. In arable areas where autumn sown crops are more common than spring sown crops, the food provided in hedgerows may be all that sustains the birds through the winter. Why not aim to plant a number of new berry bearing trees around the farm each year. Suitable places could be in short gaps in existing hedgerows or on an area of under utilised land near the steading. Just 20 fruit trees planted each year would make a huge difference to song bird numbers.

## **Seasons Greetings**

SAC Conservation Services would like to wish you a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

## **Contact details**

Conservation advice can be obtained by telephoning 01835 823322, by e-mailing [Derek.Robeson@sac.co.uk](mailto:Derek.Robeson@sac.co.uk) or by writing to SAC, Greycrook, St. Boswells TD6 0EU.

**Derek Robeson, SAC Conservation Services.**