

PIPER'S WOOD 1998

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The Cairngorm Club marked its centenary with a tree regeneration project in Glen Ey, by enclosing an area known as Piper's Wood at map reference 098857. Dr Salzen made the first botanical survey in 1989. Her article in Cairngorm Club Journal number 102 in 1991 provides a base for her subsequent reports in each journal since then.

It is only two years since my last report but changes in the vegetation are even more apparent. The most obvious is the increased growth of the 'young' birches, for they are now clearly visible from the track across the river. A less obvious change is the dispersion of herbaceous plants within the enclosure. Examples are Rockrose, formerly only on the upper bank and now spreading in the grassland, and Melancholy Thistle, formerly only on the old head dyke which has appeared by the runnel at the end of the lower bank.

The weather on my last visit in late July was typical of the summer of 1998; a dry morning with increasing cloud followed by cold wind and rain. The lack of sunshine meant that no adders were active, nor insects (in 1997 I saw Small Blue and Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterflies) but has not affected plant growth. Indeed, the abundant rainfall may have contributed to the rapid growth shown by the small birches.

TREES

Birches—14 of the old trees survive, and one almost dead. They may have ceased to produce seed as no catkins could be found in 1998. The 'young' birches are far too numerous to count. They are growing on all habitats within the enclosure except the upper marsh, and are most numerous on the grassland, lower marsh and river gravel. The tallest birch is near the upper fence and has reached nearly 2.3m in height. One on the grassland is 2.2m, others have almost reached 2m and many are over 1m.

Rowans—One old small stunted tree survives on the upper bank and many seedlings are visible especially on both banks, the lower marsh and river gravel. Most of the seedlings are only two to four years old but an older one on the river gravel has reached 1.8m.

Willows—A bush of Goat Willow in the lower marsh has reached the height of 1.8m.



Briza media
Quaking grass

Pine—A seedling Scots Pine is growing on the north end of the upper bank. Why has it not been noticed before? At four years old and evergreen it is not difficult to see. Whether its parentage is native Scots Pine by the River Dee not far away (*Pinus sylvestris* subspecies *scotica*) or a plantation pine of mixed origin, will be difficult to ascertain until it is more mature.

Notes on changes in the vegetation zones

This section should be read in conjunction with the botanical survey and map in the 1991 Cairngorm Club Journal No. 102.

D - The dyke and strip of ground above it

This still has a remarkable variety of species but is becoming wetter and more acid, indicated by the growth of *Sphagnum rubellum* hummocks and the appearance of Bog Asphodel. The Fragrant Orchid, whose production of flowering stems fluctuates widely, appeared in moderate numbers in 1997 and fewer in 1998. The old head dyke now has water running over most of its length and is becoming increasingly overgrown. Melancholy Thistle has increased and now flowers abundantly.



Festuca vivipara
Viviparus Fescue

UB - The upper bank

This is still colourful with a variety of flowering herbs, though some appear to be decreasing. There is no bare soil into which annuals such as the Field Gentian can seed. Heather seedlings are abundant and becoming more prominent.



Polygonum viviparum
Alpine Bistort

UM - The upper marsh

This very wet area between the south end of the upper bank and the grassland is now the only true marsh within the enclosure, since the lower marsh has been largely colonised by grasses. Meadowsweet flowered for the first time in 1998.

G - The grassland

This is becoming more varied in spite of the dominance of grasses, as plants seed down from the upper bank. An increase in Heath Bedstraw and Mat Grass may indicate some acidification of the soil. The croft ruins and the old dyke near the north west corner are becoming increasingly overgrown.

LB - The lower bank

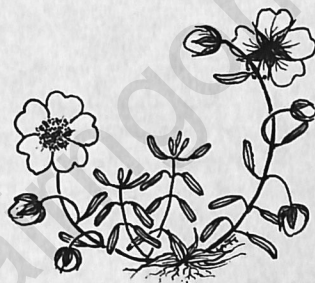
Now covered in vegetation except for a few very small patches of bare soil, and still dry. Bell Heather is still dominant but decreasing while there is more Heather and an abundant growth of white Cladonia lichen.

LM - The lower marsh

Grasses now dominate this area, Yorkshire Fog being most abundant. Wet areas remain with sedges, Meadowsweet and a fine growth of Water Avens, while Kingcup flowers along the runnel at the base of the lower bank.

R - The river gravel

This area shows the least change in vegetation and has not acquired any new species, though plant cover does appear to have increased slightly. Petty Whin flowered prominently in 1997 but has now decreased. Many small birches show slower growth than those in other habitats.



Helianthemum nummularium
Rockrose

The illustrations are of upland plants which grow in Piper's Wood. Rockrose and Quaking Grass are indicators of basic (non-acid) soils. Alpine Bistort and Viviparous Fescue show vivipary, a type of vegetative reproduction in which bulbils or plantlets are produced in place of seeds.

I repeat my appeal made in the 1996 Journal to Cairngorm Club members to send observations of flora and fauna in Piper's Wood, either to me direct or via the Secretary. This will enable a more complete and thus valuable record to be made of the development of this most interesting experiment. Observations made in different seasons could be of great interest. To date none have been received, which means that quite possibly, many records have already been lost. Heather Salzen, 25 Rubislaw Park Crescent, Aberdeen AB15 8BT Tel. 01224 324503.