The Botany of the Piper's Wood Extension, Glen Ey, 2013

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Mr Ian Francis, Vice-County Recorder, South Aberdeenshire, for the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland, was asked by the Club to undertake a baseline survey of the newly fenced-off area above Piper's Wood, which the Club established in the late 1980s. The main text of his report is reproduced below in slightly edited form. A full version of the report, which contains a number of Appendices with photographs, is available on the Club's members-only Forum, or from the Club Secretary.

Introduction

In 1989, an area of 1.7 ha (4.3 acres) was fenced off to begin a woodland regeneration project at Piper's Wood in Glen Ey, on Mar Estate near Braemar (NO098857). This marked the centenary of the Cairngorms Club. Originally this enclosed around 16 large birch trees, which were to act as seed sources. The background to the project is given by Martin (1991). Dr Heather Salzen, then Vice-County Recorder for this area, undertook a detailed botanical survey of the site in 1989 before regeneration began, and recorded 88 species of plant (Salzen, 1991). She made further surveys in 1993, 1996 and 1998, all of which were published in this *Journal*, and a further article (Salzen, 2001) summarised the first decade of change. However, no further surveys have been undertaken since then. With the Club celebrating 125 years in 2012, Mar Estate gave permission for a further enclosure adjacent to Piper's Wood. I was invited to undertake a baseline botanical survey of the new area prior to enclosure so that this can be followed up over subsequent years, (see map page 271).

In 2013 I visited the extension area three times, on 25 May, 3 August and 1 December, and surveyed the vegetation. I also visited the existing regenerating Piper's Wood and made a few notes, though the aim was not to resurvey this part. This report summarises the general baseline state of the extended woodland

area in terms of a brief description, numerous photographs and a comprehensive plant list for the newly-fenced area.

Survey results for the extension area

The extension area is largely dry tussocky grass-heath, dominated by Heather at around 60% cover, with dry and wet acid grassland covering c.35%. This is composed of *Agrostis-Festuca* communities with a high sedge component. Several runnels cover c.5% of the area – these are rocky and sedge-rich. There are scattered rocks across the area. The area is heavily grazed by deer and only c.15 very small Birch (*Betula pubescens*) seedlings were found in the extension area, near the main runnels up hill in the east. This provides a very clear baseline against which to assess future tree colonisation!

Aerial imagery of the wood, prior to fencing the extension area (imagery dates not known but possibly 2005 for one image), provides some visual background to the future changes which will occur. The plants found in the survey (see list below) total 80 species. Most notable amongst them was Field Gentian *Gentianella campestris*, which was also noted by Heather Salzen in the original Piper's Wood area. No other particularly uncommon species was found, though the flora is quite diverse, and there are a number of species present which indicate base-rich influence, especially associated with the runnels. Some of these were sedge-rich and visually attractive, especially those along the old fence line. The general sward height was low, which is not surprising given the presence of large numbers of deer for much of the year.

It is certain that, in the absence of deer grazing (now excluded), these open, flower- and sedge-rich flushes will become overgrown (as happened in the existing Piper's Wood), and in the short term the ground vegetation will become much taller and probably less diverse. As tree species colonise and woodland plants become established, the balance of the vegetation will change, with the arrival of new species, as happened in the original enclosure, and documented by Heather Salzen.

The existing Piper's Wood

I did not undertake any re-survey work in the existing woodland. However, the area was visited briefly, and three small live Scots Pines (each c.4m high) were noted in the enclosure, along with 8 large live Birch trees and several large dead birches. Originally in 1989, 16 large birch trees were present in the first exclosure, with other tree seedlings repressed; the regeneration after 25 years is clear. By 2001, 11 large birches were present, and four small Scots Pines (Salzen 2001).

Observations of fauna in 2013

On all visits, the following species were seen:

In the extension area: Meadow Pipit, Small Tortoiseshell, Toad.

Present in or over the surrounding area: Common Sandpiper, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Willow Warbler, Chaffinch, Snipe, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Raven, Kestrel, Golden Eagle.

Moles, Mountain Hare. Red Deer – 20 nearby on May visit, 70 hinds plus young present nearby on August visit, 92 seen on December visit.

References

Martin, E. 1991 Piper's Wood tree regeneration project. *Cairngorm Club Journal*, Vol. 20, no. 102, pp. 7-8.

Salzen, H. 1991 Piper's Wood, Glen Ey. *Cairngorm Club Journal* Vol. 20, no. 102, pp. 9-17.

Salzen H. 1993-1998. Three further update reports published in the *Cairngorm Club Journal*.

Salzen, H. 2001. Piper's Wood, Glen Ey: the first decade. *Cairngorm Club Journal,* Vol. 21 no. 106, pp.60-62.

List of the 80 species recorded in the Piper's Wood extension zone before and immediately after the erection of the exclosure fence in summer 2013.

The 'DAFOR' scale is used below – a subjective assessment of the relative abundance of the different species in the area: D = Dominant; A = Abundant; F = Frequent; O = Occasional; R = Rare

Achillea millefollium	O	Achillean ptarmica	R
Agrostis canina sens. lat.	F	Agrostis capillaris	O
Anemone nemorosa	O	Antennaria dioica	R
Anthoxanthum odoratum	A	Betula pubescens	R
Briza media	F	Calluna vulgaris	D
Campanula rotundifolia	O	Cardamine flexuosa	R
Cardamine pratensis	O	Carex binervis	F
Carex demissa	R	Carex dioica	R
Carex echinata	F	Carex flacca	O
Carex hostiana	O	Carex nigra	F
Carex panacea	F	Carex pulicaris	R
Cerastium fontanum	R	Cirsium arvense	R
Cirsium heterophyllum	R	Dactylorhiza maculate	R
Dactylorhiza purpurella	R	Danthonia decumbens	R
Deschampsia flexuosa	R	Drosera rotundifolia	R
Erica cinerea	O	Erica tetralix	O
Eriophorum angustifolium	O	Euphrasia officinalis agg.	F
Festuca ovina	O	Festuca vivipara	O
Galium saxatile	F	Galium verum	O
Gentianella campestris	R	Helianthemum nummularium	O
Hypericum pulchrum	R	Juncus articulates	O
Juncus bufonius sens. lat.	R	Juncus bulbosus	O
Juncus effuses	O	Juncus squarrosus	R
Lathyrus pratensis	R	Lotus corniculatus	O
Luzula campestris	O	Luzula multiflora	O
Molinia caerulea	F	Nardus stricta	O
Narthecium ossifragum	F	Pedicularis palustris	O
Pedicularis sylvatica	O	Persicaria vivipara	O
Pilosella officinarum	O	Pinguicula vulgaris	O
Plantago lanceolata	F	Polygala serpyllifolia	O

Potentilla erecta	F	Prunella vulgaris	O
Ranunculus acris	F	Ranunculus flammula	O
Rumex acetosa	O	Salix repens	F
Saxifraga aizoides	R	Senecio jacobaea	R
Solidago virgaurea	R	Succisa pratensis	F
Taraxacum agg.	R	Thymus polytrichus	O
Trientalis europaea	R	Trifolium pratense	R
Trifolium repens	R	Triglochin palustris	R
Vaccinium myrtillus	O	Vaccinium vitis-idaea	O
Viola palustris	O	Viola riviniana	O

Map of Piper's Wood and extension. The extension area (surveyed in 2013 and reported here) is the clear area to the right of the established wood. The points labelled A to F show the 10-figure GPS references.