

Piper's Wood, Glen Ey, Braemar

Botanical survey of the extended woodland area, 2013

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Piper's Wood, August 2013; newly-erected enclosure fence line is just visible beyond

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 was then Vice-county recorder for this area and she 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 the Cairngorm Club Journal. An article by her (Salzen 2001) summarised the first decade of change. No further surveys have been undertaken since then. The Club is now celebrating 125 years and Mar estate has given 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.

In 2013, I visited the extension area three times, on 25 May, 3 August and 1 December and surveyed the vegetation here. 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. The area surveyed is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Map of Piper's Wood and extension. The extension area (surveyed in 2013 and reported here) is delineated by red lines, which show the indicative fence lines, though they are not mapped accurately. The points labelled A to F show the 10-figure GPS references and the blue lines show the distances between the points according to the GPS.

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! Appendix 1 lists the botanical species noted in the survey and Appendix 2 presents a series of photographs taken from fixed points.



Piper's Wood from the west on 3 August 2013; newly-erected exclosure fence is visible beyond.

Appendix 4 shows aerial imagery of the wood, prior to fencing the extension area. Imagery dates are not known (possibly 2005 for one image), but it provides some visual background to the future changes which will occur. The plants found in the survey (Appendix 1) 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 Piper's Wood) and in time the ground vegetation will become much taller and probably less diverse in the short term. 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 resurvey 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. Some of these can be seen in the photographs in Appendix 3. Originally in 1989, 16 large birch trees were present in the first enclosure, with other tree seedlings repressed; the regeneration after 25 years is clear in the photographs. 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 the December visit.

Acknowledgements

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References

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

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

Salzen, H. 2001. Piper's Wood, Glen Ey: the first decade. *Cairngorms Club Journal, 2001, pp.60-62.*

Appendix 1. List of the 80 species recorded in the Piper's Wood extension zone before and immediately 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

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	O
<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>	R
<i>Agrostis canina</i> sens. lat.	F
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	O
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	O
<i>Antennaria dioica</i>	R
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	A
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	R
<i>Briza media</i>	F
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	D
<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	O
<i>Cardamine flexuosa</i>	R
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	O
<i>Carex binervis</i>	F
<i>Carex demissa</i>	R
<i>Carex dioica</i>	R
<i>Carex echinata</i>	F
<i>Carex flacca</i>	O
<i>Carex hostiana</i>	O
<i>Carex nigra</i>	F
<i>Carex panacea</i>	F
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	R
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	R
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	R
<i>Cirsium heterophyllum</i>	R
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	R
<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	R
<i>Danthonia decumbens</i>	R
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	R
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	R
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	O
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	O
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	O
<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i> agg.	F
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	O
<i>Festuca vivipara</i>	O
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	F
<i>Galium verum</i>	O
<i>Gentianella campestris</i>	R
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	O
<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>	R
<i>Juncus articulatus</i>	O
<i>Juncus bufonius</i> sens. lat.	R
<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>	O
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	O
<i>Juncus squarrosus</i>	R
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	R
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	O
<i>Luzula campestris</i>	O
<i>Luzula multiflora</i>	O
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	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



Piper's Wood with fenced extension, taken from the east, 1 December 2013

Appendix 2. Photographs of the extension area taken in May, August and December 2013.

Refer to Figure 1. It should be possible to re-take many from the exact same points using the GPS references on the photograph captions or as shown in Figure 1, thus illustrating future vegetation change and regeneration. All photographs in Appendices 2 and 3 have been given to the Cairngorms Club on CD for their long-term storage, along with others not shown here. Some photo pairs in May and August are not exact matches as the fence line erected in July did not always follow the lines of marker canes present in May very closely.



Corner A: looking up line before new fence, May 2013



Corner A: looking up new fence line, Aug 2013



Corner A: view along 45 degree line, May 2013



Corner A: view along old fence, May 2013



Corner A: view along old fence, Aug 2013

Appendix 2 (continued): photos of new extension area: Corner B



Corner B: view looking SE along future fence, May 2013



Corner B: view along 45 degree line



Corner B: view looking down future fence, May 2013



Down runnel near corner B, from NO09914 85743, May 2013

Appendix 2 (continued): photos of new extension area: Corner C



Corner C: view looking down future fence, May 2013



Corner C: view looking down new fence, Aug 2013



Corner C: view looking NW along future fence, May 2013



Corner C: view looking NW along new fence, Aug 2013



Corner C: view along 45 degree line, May 2013

Appendix 2 (continued): photos of new extension area: Corner D



Corner D: view along existing fence, May 2013



Corner D: view along existing fence, Aug 2013



Corner D: view uphill along future fence line, May 2013



Corner D: view uphill along new fence line, Aug 2013



Corner D: view along 45 degree line, May 2013

Appendix 2 (continued): photos of new extension area



View up runnel from NO09850 85684, May 2013



View up same runnel from NO09850 85684, Aug 2013



View along existing fence line at NO09820 85719, May 2013



View other direction along fence line at NO09820 85719, May 2013

Appendix 3. Photographs of the existing Piper's Wood (fenced in 1989): May 2013.

These three photos are all taken on 25 May from mid-way down the fence between points D and E in Figure 1, looking in three directions.



Appendix 3 (continued) - Piper's Wood: original enclosure (1989). The top two photos were taken on 25 May 2013 from, or around, corner E in Figure 1, and the lower photo was taken from near corner F.



Appendix 4. Aerial images from Google Earth (top) and Bing Maps (bottom) showing the existing Piper's Wood and the area of the extension prior to fencing. The imagery dates are not known for sure, though the top Google Earth image suggests 1 January 2005.

