

Environment Grant 2023-24

Final Report

Name	Philip Knott / Christine Davis
Organisation (if applicable)	Broadford and Strath Community Company
Date	27 th October 2025

Description of project:

The **Community Tree Nursery (CTN)** project was established to raise native, locally sourced trees for Broadford Community Woodland. Its purpose is to enhance biodiversity, strengthen local resilience to climate change, and connect the community with its local woodland.

Focusing on **local provenance**, the nursery ensures that all trees grown are adapted to Skye's unique environment, helping restore native woodland habitats while providing a hands-on, educational experience for local people of all ages from seed to sapling.

The project is part of a broader community vision to create a sustainable, locally driven approach to woodland restoration—linking environmental outcomes with wellbeing, learning, and social connection.

Progress to date:

Staffing and Establishment

Following an open recruitment process, **Phil Knott** was appointed **Community Tree Nursery Project Officer** in June 2024 (9.5 hours per week).

Phil has been developing the project from the ground up, establishing a clear structure, a supportive volunteer network, and a practical foundation for long-term success.

The initial months focused on building the physical infrastructure before expanding into community engagement and educational activities, followed by a regular volunteering opportunity for adults and children alike.

Infrastructure

A suitable site was selected at the **Growers Hub**, meeting requirements for biosecurity, access to utilities, and safe storage. Groundworks were completed by a local contractor in late September 2024 to a very high standard using locally sourced materials.

Key infrastructure achievements include:

- **Secure storage:** Purchase and installation of an **8ft shipping container**, craned into place with local assistance, now serving as a weatherproof and biosecure equipment store.
- **Propagation facilities:** Refurbishment of an existing **polytunnel**, including a new cover, door frames, and improved layout. It housed the first batches of young trees from hand-picked seed—an important milestone for the project.

- **Sustainable growing systems:** Establishment of modular growing beds and containers made from **recycled or repurposed materials** such as fish boxes, feed tubs, and agricultural containers. These provide flexibility, reduce plastic waste, and allow quick expansion depending on germination rates.

This design has proven resilient and highly adaptable to local weather and volunteer needs. The visible progress has also created excitement in the community, with several local groups and individuals offering materials, tools, and helping hands.

Volunteers, Seed Collection and Learning

Community involvement is central to the CTN's success. Volunteer recruitment through **events, social media, posters, newsletters, and word of mouth** has built an enthusiastic base of **around 50 participants**, representing a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

Throughout autumn 2024, Phil led a series of **seed-collecting events** across Skye, engaging both adults and young people.

Seeds were gathered for more than **15 native species**, including **Oak (two species), Downy Birch, Rowan, Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Elder, Dog Rose, Alder, Crab Apple, Gorse, Broom, Honeysuckle**, and the exceptionally rare **Rock Whitebeam**—a highlight for the team.

This work required collaboration with **National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust, Forestry and Land Scotland**, and private landowners to secure permissions and ensure responsible collecting practices.

Volunteers have also taken part in **seed processing, storage and propagation**, gaining hands-on experience and deepening their understanding of local ecology.

Since October 2024, regular **Wednesday volunteer sessions** have taken place, with a focus on the careful pricking out of Birch, Alder and Hazel saplings. These sessions are social, accessible, and inclusive—offering meaningful roles for participants of all abilities. We have attracted a number of home-schooled families too.

Environmental benefits delivered to date:

Resource Efficiency and Waste Reduction

The project has embraced a **minimal new purchase ethos**, using reclaimed materials wherever possible. Over **5,500 tree cells** were sourced from another nursery, preventing them from going to landfill, and hundreds of fish boxes and agricultural tubs were repurposed for planting.

This has eliminated the need for new plastic propagation trays, reduced the carbon footprint, and fostered a circular, community-driven model of resource use. It also helped to raise awareness of the project and inspire others to do the same.

Biodiversity

Seed collection focuses exclusively on **local provenance zones (104 and 105)** to ensure trees are genetically suited to Broadford's conditions.

This contributes directly to **habitat restoration, carbon sequestration**, and the **re-establishment of native woodland**.

The project has also helped raise awareness of Skye's remnant Atlantic Rainforest fragments, sparking new conversations about the island's woodland history and potential for regeneration.

Environmental Learning

Alongside hands-on volunteer days, Phil has delivered **eight free community presentations**—including *Trees and Shelterbelts for Crofters and Growers* and *Boosting Biodiversity with Trees and Shrubs*—reaching **over 80 attendees**.

These events, also supported by the **Highland Community Waste Partnership** and **UHI Broadford**, were quickly oversubscribed, leading to additional sessions.

In collaboration with others we held a celebratory Biodiversity Day to mark the successful first anniversary of the Community Tree Nursery, with a range of topics on biodiversity, with practical demonstrations on moths, pond dipping and many more topics. It was well attended with over 75 attendees, with wall to wall sunshine a real bonus!

Phil also delivered a presentation on **Scottish Rainforests** at **Bun Sgoil Shleite (Sleat Primary School)**, using digital magnifiers to explore lichens, mosses, and mini-beasts—an engaging way to connect young learners with their local environment.

Issues/challenges/risks encountered:

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Establishing a new community tree nursery on Skye presented both logistical and cultural challenges:

- **Timing:** Starting in summer meant the seed-collecting window was already narrow, requiring rapid site selection and permissions.
- **Weather and logistics:** Heavy winter rainfall complicated on-site work and delayed some installations.
- **Cultural context:** Skye has limited woodland culture due to centuries of grazing pressure and deforestation. Raising awareness and interest has therefore been a gradual but rewarding process.

Despite these hurdles, the project has successfully navigated each stage through **strong community collaboration**. Relationships built during this period will benefit future planting, seed collection, and educational initiatives.

Feedback and Publicity

Feedback from participants has been outstanding. Volunteers report increased confidence, new friendships, and a deeper appreciation for local biodiversity.

Comments frequently highlight Phil's knowledge, enthusiasm, and ability to make learning enjoyable and inclusive.

"Having moved to the area recently, we were delighted to attend the Growing Trees and Shrubs from Seed session with Phil... we learnt a lot and met wonderful people with shared interests."

"It was hugely informative and hands-on. I learnt how to take cuttings and propagate trees, which I've already tried at home."

“Phil is a most encouraging and knowledgeable guide—it’s certainly got me enthused about trees and native species.”

The project has also gained **regional media coverage**, including an article and photo in the **West Highland Free Press (15 November 2024)** featuring a quote from **Crown Estate Scotland**. Regular updates continue via **social media, newsletters, and the BSCC website**.

Legacy and Future Direction

The Community Tree Nursery has already become a **hub of community activity** particularly with local families, fostering pride, environmental awareness, and a shared sense of stewardship for local woodland.

Future priorities include:

- Continuing propagation and planting for an expanded **Broadford Community Woodland**.
- Expanding educational outreach to **schools, crofters, and landowners**.
- Building on volunteer skills to support ongoing woodland management, forming a local steering group
- Exploring opportunities for collaboration with other community nurseries across Scotland.

The project’s success so far reflects not only the dedication of staff and volunteers but also the vision and support of **Crown Estate Scotland** in enabling this initiative to take root for which we are very grateful.

Photos

A selection of JPEGs is sent separately – all have full permissions.