Existing conservation project due to begin in Auchtermuchty this autumn

03/11/2011

After considerable effort it has successfully achieved 100% funding worth nearly £62,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Fife Environment Trust (FET) and The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for three out of a five year conservation project. The Auchtermuchty Common Conservation Grazing Project will begin this autumn and will be pioneering in Scotland. It could lead the way to the Common with its rare and beautiful flowers and butterflies being a site of excellence from which other conservation groups can learn.

Auchtermuchty Common was granted a Royal Charter by James V in 1517 and is mentioned in several publications. The Common comprising approx 12 hectares holds a small but significant fragment of the 5% of lowland grassland meadow remaining in Scotland today. It is a very rare site
and was designated a wildlife site in 1997. It is home to at least 11 UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and as a lowland meadow is also a BAP priority habitat.

The funding has permitted the Trust to begin a three year conservation grazing and grassland management plan on advice from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and other bodies who regularly monitor the site. After a report completed by SNH in summer 2010 the Species Rich Grassland (SRG) was found to be in an unfavourable condition and the most efficient method of improvement would be to graze the site on a more regular basis than had been previously provided by the winter grazing project undertaken for the previous four years.

This autumn when the funded permanent grazing areas have been installed, the ‘Flying Flock’ belonging to the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) will graze the Common in rotation for most of the year in an effort to meet the encroaching scrub and willow herb head on. Without the valiant efforts of
the volunteers who aid the Trust this battle would have been lost long ago. The funding awarded to the Trust has allowed us to erect permanent grazing areas, a storage container on site and purchase specialist tools and equipment which will allow the conservation work to be undertaken in a more
effective and efficient manner and definitely less back breaking and arduous for all concerned.

The Common is also a recreational site used by dog walkers, horse riders, bird watchers, photographers, educational groups and many others or as just a safe and peaceful space to clear your head. Its multi use has made it a challenge to save an important site while allowing free access for all and the project plan has not been undertaken lightly or without great thought with this in mind.

The success of the project relies on the ongoing support of the community of Auchtermuchty. The Trust’s volunteers will still be required to undertake the work that can’t be solved by grazing and the ‘lookers’ who daily check the welfare of the sheep. The Trust is committed to helping the
community feel involved in the Heritage of their community and in taking a pride in saving this special place for future generations to enjoy. Without the generosity of HLF, FET and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation this project would not be taking place and the Common would be in danger of
reverting to scrub and this little piece of ancient meadow might be lost forever.

“We are delighted to see volunteers so fully involved in this project to restore and conserve the biodiversity of this rare expanse of historic unspoiled grassland. The community will be helping to monitor, manage and maintain the site, home to so many rare plants and species, while acquiring new skills into the bargain,” said Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland.

David Hughes Hallett, Chair of FET, said: "Fife Environment Trust is delighted to be able to contribute to this worthwhile project, benefiting the local environment in Fife".

Notes to editors

Volunteer days are an opportunity to put something in to your community, meet a diverse group of new people, enjoy the fresh air and a chat while you work, receive training in new skills, discover your environment again and if none of that is enough to entice, enjoy a nice cup of tea and home baking.

Any enquiries about volunteering, ‘lookering’ (full training given) action days or any other aspect of the Trust and the project should be made to The Secretary, Macduff Trust, c/o Auchtermuchty Community Centre, Distillery St, Auchtermuchty, KY14 7BY or email macduff@auchtermuchty.co.uk.

Further information

For press details contact Caroline on 01337 828 417 or Polly on 01337 827 173.

For grants information contact Caroline King, Grants Administrator, on 01337 828 417 or email KingCaroline1@msn.com.