

News from Reforesting Scotland



STAR TREE

STAR TREE is Reforesting Scotland's new project on non-wood forest products. Aiming to support rural incomes from non-wood resources, this project lets RS continue the work which launched the Scottish Wild Harvests Association (SWHA) in 2009. Lasting till October 2016, and adding an extra part-time member to the RS staff, STAR TREE is a big undertaking for us, but we are only a small part of it. We have 23 partners around Europe: universities, forest research institutes, associations, consultancies and businesses. RS will survey non-wood forest product (NWFP) businesses and resources in Scotland - something we did in a small way in 2007. This time there is more funding, more time, and the support of some top researchers, and the picture we build up will feed into a wider view of what is happening across Europe.

We will carry out action research, described by our partners as "learning by doing". Plans won't be fixed until 2014, but we are already discussing possibilities with SWHA, the Scottish Working Woods label, as well as the Welsh community woodland group, Llais y Goedwig. True international co-operation! Along with Llais y Goedwig, we will host a STAR TREE meeting and study trip in the UK. RS members and Journal readers will hear more as plans take shape.

First, we will find a handful of people to form an NWFP stakeholder group. Making links and connections, discussing and spreading new ideas - all this is natural to RS, and STAR TREE provides opportunities to do it over the next four years. This could get some long-needed conversations happening between landowners, policy makers, larger

businesses, hands-on foragers and conservation experts.

STAR TREE is EU funded, and in the famously odd world of EU rules, RS itself is both a responsible contributor and also one of the stakeholders, intended to benefit from STAR TREE directly. Projects are just a small part of what RS is and does. STAR TREE will only truly benefit RS if it furthers the vision of RS and its members. We are suddenly back to saying "non-wood forest products", after several years of the more user-friendly "wild harvests", because STAR TREE was designed, not by RS, but by academics. Between them they have years of expertise in sustainable forest use, and ideals which are excitingly similar to those of RS, but the bulk of the work will be research, and the most concrete outputs will be reports, databases, management guidelines and policy recommendations. The next four years offer great potential for Scotland's forest culture - but there are no built-in guarantees.

In the face of EU procedures, academic discussions, databases and survey protocols, the project officer, Emma Chapman, looks to the RS network to help keep the wider vision in mind! If you'd like to hear about STAR TREE as it progresses, and maybe give some useful feedback, please email startree@reforestingscotland.org

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STAR TREE's official website is at www.star-tree.eu

A truffle hunt in Catalonia

The landscape is opposite to home: the vegetation dry, the hills young and sharp. As the road winds upwards, the lines of drystone dykes are not field boundaries but the retaining walls of shallow terraces, the levelled fields covered not by grass but by winter wheat. In between there is low, scrubby woodland everywhere - Scots pine, but so different to Scotland.

We pass the first truffle plantation. This is classed as reforestation: a change of use away from agriculture. Yet it is a stark gap in the woodland. The land was stripped of woody growth, in case it harboured unwanted fungi. Specially-grown saplings, inoculated with truffle mycelia, were planted on the bare soil in straight rows, to make it easy to install irrigation pipes and to cultivate in between to suppress weeds. The electric fence surrounding the field keeps out wild boar - with their appetite for truffles!

Plantations take eight to ten years to start producing. The high price of the eventual crop drives this innovation, but subsidies enable it. Changing climate is a factor too. When they were younger, our guide says, the best truffle farmers used to hunt for truffles in the woods, but reduced rainfall over the last 50 years has lowered the region's natural truffle yield.

This was an unexpected introduction to the STAR TREE project; not foraging but monoculture. Is this even part of what we want to study? The consensus seems to be, yes. We are looking at the whole range of possibilities: innovations, potentials, what people value, and, in this case, what drives domestication. There will be 9 of these study trips around Europe - the next will be in Latvia.

Above left to right: Truffle plantations in Catalonia; A truffle hound ready for action! Photos: Emma Chapman.