

THE HARVEST AND TRADE OF MOSS IN SCOTLAND

A study by Sam Staddon for her Masters dissertation at the University of Edinburgh, August 2006

Aims of the study

- To discover the extent of the wild moss harvest in Scotland
- To examine the trade in moss and estimate its value to those living in Scotland
- To consider issues of sustainability, management, legislation and control

Introduction

Moss is harvested from a variety of habitats around the world and traded commercially as 'flat moss', 'bun moss' and 'sphagnum' for use by florists and garden centres in the UK for wreaths, hanging baskets and arrangements. Moss harvested from non-native conifer plantations is considered a 'non-timber forest product' (NTFP) and it is thought that sustainably harvesting NTFPs can allow money to be made from forests at the same time as conserving them.



Bun moss in its natural habitat

Methods

Three-hundred and eight harvesters, traders, landowners, community woodland groups, conservation bodies, bryologists (moss experts) and informants on the illegal moss harvest were contacted, of which 63% responded. Questionnaires and structured interviews were conducted either over the phone, by post or by email.



Moss in its man-made habitat

Results

- The study was carried out between June and August which meant that it did not coincide with moss harvesting, making it difficult to contact many harvesters, who are therefore unfortunately under-represented in the results.
- The results of the study indicate that 6 commercial moss harvesting enterprises and numerous individuals are involved in the harvesting of wild moss in Scotland. In addition 6% of florists and 17% of garden centres harvest their own moss supplies from the wild. There are thought to be as many, if not more, illegal harvesters as legal ones (see over the page for explanation of legality).
- 15 common species are harvested, mainly from conifer plantations in the south of the country at Christmas and spring time. Illegal harvesting of *Sphagnum* moss from peat bogs also occurs.
- The harvest and trade of Scottish wild moss is worth approximately £0.5 million a year and supports 125 jobs, split evenly between legal and illegal harvesters. On average very little money is made by landowners through permit fees.

Discussion

This study concludes that although the trade in moss has decreased dramatically over the last 10 to 20 years, opportunities exist for Scottish wild harvested moss to replace imports from the EU and New Zealand.

In order to build confidence in Scottish moss traders' and consumers' concerns over sustainability and the legal status of harvesting need addressing.

The forthcoming 'code of conduct' for moss harvesting is welcomed but studies to determine the ecological sustainability of the harvest are also needed.

Recommendations

- Feedback to all who took part in the study
- Full-scale sustainability study of harvest required
- 'Marketing campaign' with the 'facts' of the harvest & trade for moss traders and consumers
- Tougher penalties for harvesting illegally from peat bogs

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Sphagnum moss

LEGALLY HARVESTING MOSS

Cases of illegal moss harvesting damage the reputation of the legal harvest. By ensuring that moss is harvested legally, it will help to develop trust in the trade of mosses harvested in Scotland.

- Under the *Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981)* if you are harvesting moss from someone else's land you must have their permission (a) if you are going to sell it commercially, or (b) if it involves up-rooting the whole plant
- Under the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003* harvesting moss for commercial sale without landowner permission is now a criminal offence
- It is illegal to harvest any of the 28 species of moss listed in *Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981)*



Brachythecium rutabulum a common species in 'flat moss'

SUSTAINABLY HARVESTING MOSS

By doing these things the harvesting of moss can be done on a sustainable basis, allowing money to be made from forests at the same time as conserving them, not just for now but into the future.

- Moss should only be harvested from non-native conifer plantations; NEVER FROM PEAT BOGS
- Bun moss or *Leucobryum juniperoideum* should not be collected as it is rare in Scotland and the hummocks of moss can be up to 70 years old and will thus take a long time to re-grow
- When harvesting moss in plantations leave roughly 50% of the moss behind to grow back and only harvest from the same spot every 3 to 5 years
- Take care not to damage or disturb the surrounding environment and wildlife when harvesting moss

For more information visit...

The website dedicated to non-timber forest products in Scotland www.forestharvest.org.uk

The *Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981)*
<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3614>

The *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003*
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/20030002.htm>

Contacts

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