

Two-year project enhancing the rainforest and natural habitats near Glenfinnan viaduct

June 2, 2023



Network Rail says an industry-leading pilot project to enhance the natural habitat near the iconic Glenfinnan viaduct is making good progress with the completion of the first phase of work.

Network Rail Scotland is working with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) to improve biodiversity and to protect and restore rainforest and peatland habitats in the West Highlands.

The two-year project will see an investment of more than £300k in enhancing the rainforest and other habitats.

It's in recognition of the biodiversity lost during safety-critical lineside tree and vegetation management works across Scotland's rail network.

During the first phase of work, non-native invasive species were removed and fencing was installed to protect ancient oak-woodland from grazing animals.

Survey work is now being carried out to determine where further planting is required to supplement

natural regeneration.

In addition, fenced enclosures will be created to protect areas of vulnerable pinewood and access tracks will be created to support planting, maintenance and wildlife management.

The project sits within Scotland's endangered Atlantic rainforest zone and covers an area of approximately 200 hectares, protecting and regenerating habitats of international importance for biodiversity.

Alan Ross, director engineering and asset management, Scotland's Railway, said: "We're delighted that our partnership with Forestry and Land Scotland is contributing to vital work to protect and enhance Scotland's unique natural environment.

"In the short-term, we will see the scheme help remove threats to vulnerable and internationally important woodland and peatland habitats.

"Longer-term, it will deliver biodiversity benefits and enhance climate resilience by helping to protect, enhance and expand these unique habitats for generations to come."

Simon Hodgson, chief executive of FLS, said: "We are pleased with the progress we have made so far with phase one of the works now complete. It's a great example of public bodies working together to achieve more than either one could do alone.

"We are looking forward to working with Network Rail Scotland to deliver the rest of this important pilot project within Scotland's Atlantic Rainforest zone."

The project will include:

- Removal of non-native species across pinewood and peatland habitats. This includes invasive species which threaten the native habitats and will be completed using hand tools/equipment. (Phase 1)
- Installation of deer fencing to protect and expand oak woodland on the knoll near the railway at Drumferm. (Phase 1)
- Survey to scope native woodland expansion at Callop Woods, to determine whether enrichment planting is required to supplement natural regeneration. (Phase 1)
- Installation of fencing to protect areas of new pinewood expansion and existing habitats at Callop woods. (Phase 1&2)
- Repairs and replacement of fencing to protect a designated Atlantic oak woodland at Kinlochmoidart – part of Scotland's rainforest. (Phase 2)
- Enrichment planting to native woodland at Kinlochmoidart. (Phase 2)
- Potential enrichment planting of oak, rowan, birch and other pinewood species to support regeneration and expansion of Callop woods. (Phase 2)
- Maintenance and enhancement of wet woodland along Callop river. (Ongoing)

Photo credit: Network Rail