



NEWS RELEASE

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## THE SCOTTISH FORESTRY TRUST ANNOUNCES CYRIL HART MEMORIAL AWARD WINNER

The Scottish Forestry Trust is delighted to announce that the winner of The Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award for 2026 is Sarah Watts and colleagues for their research article published in Restoration Ecology, "Why the present is not the key to past or future: moving beyond restricted relict habitat conditions to improve outcomes in mountain woodland restoration." Sarah received the Award from Dr Helen McKay OBE FICFor CEnv, Chair of The Scottish Forestry Trust's Projects and Research Committee at the Confor Dinner and Awards 2026 on Wednesday, 11 March 2026.

The Award is given to the best article or paper, based on Trust-funded research, published within a two-year period and for the 2026 Award those published between January 2024 and December 2025 were eligible. The Award is presented in memory of Dr Cyril Hart (1913 -2009), known to many through his invaluable book, **Practical Forestry for the Agent and Surveyor**, and other publications. Amongst his other proud professional moments was his receipt of Gold Medals from the Royal Forestry Society and from the Institute of Chartered Foresters. This Award aims to recognise invaluable research which delivers the widest practical benefit to the widest forestry community and the Scottish Forestry Trust are proud to offer this Award in Dr Cyril Hart's name.

Speaking at the Awards Dinner, when presented with the Award, Sarah said *"I'm absolutely delighted to receive the Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award 2026 from The Scottish Forestry Trust as recognition of the contribution that my research is providing to evidenced-based woodland management. It is particularly encouraging to have mountain woodland restoration highlighted in such a meaningful way demonstrating that our high-altitude trees are gaining much wider interest and support across the wider forestry sector."*

*Sarah continued, "My research builds on decades of inspiring action by National Trust for Scotland staff and volunteers to protect and expand threatened montane willow populations. The study challenges the assumption that the places where these populations survive today represent the most suitable environments for planting. Instead, present-day habitats may be refugia reflecting historical pressures such as long-term overgrazing, rather than the full range of opportunities available for recovery. By guiding practitioners across Scotland towards even more ambitious and effective mountain woodland restoration, we can enhance biodiversity and help build more resilient upland landscapes for the future."*

*I'd like to thank my PhD supervisors Alistair Jump, Kirsty Park, and Nadia Barsoum for supporting my research, and I am extremely grateful for project funding from The Scottish Forestry Trust, University of Stirling, Woodland Trust, Corrour Estate, Macaulay Development Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Forest Research, and Future Woodlands Scotland."*

Dr Helen McKay OBE FICFor CEnv, Chair of The Scottish Forestry Trust's Projects and Research Committee who reviewed all of the submissions said "Sarah's paper records the results of re-survey of a large sample of downy willow (*Salix lapponum*) 16 years after planting in the Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve. The results were very clear - the growth and probability that individuals had reached reproductive size were actually much greater for individuals planted in sites that are poorly represented among those of the current relict distribution of the species, justifying a much broader selection of sites for restoration. This is an excellent study, based on rigorous sampling in a difficult location. The framing of the study is excellent and the paper makes a distinctive contribution from a strong evidence base."

The winner of the Award receives a striking trophy created by Angus Clyne of Perthshire. This living trophy will be held by the recipient for two years before being returned in advance of the 2028 Award being presented. Sarah and her colleagues will also be asked to add their paper to the USB stick in the vessel and to contribute to the found objects contained within the trophy.

**Ends**

#### **Images attached**

**The C Hart Award 01\_March 2026.** Sarah Watts (left) is presented with The Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award by Dr Helen McKay OBE FICFor CEnv, Chair of The Scottish Forestry Trust's Projects and Research Committee (right).

**The C Hart Award 02\_March 2026.** Sarah Watts speaking at the Confor Dinner and Awards 2026 on Wednesday, 11 March 2026.

**The C Hart Award 03\_March 2026.** Sarah Watts collecting data at Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve.

#### **Notes for Editors**

**The Scottish Forestry Trust in 2011 launched The Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award** in order to recognise the quality and relevance of the output from the Trust funded research. The Award provides £400 to the winner along with temporary stewardship of a magnificent trophy designed by woodworker Angus Clyne from Perthshire. The Dr Cyril Hart Memorial Award is presented biennially on a two-year cycle, with the next award expected to be presented in early 2028.

**The Scottish Forestry Trust SCIO** is the leading UK Charitable Trust providing funds for research, education and training in support of British Forestry. Established in 1983 by a gifting of share capital, the Trust is a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC053147) and has a remit to provide private sector funds to support research and education throughout the British forestry industry. Since 1983, the Trust has provided in the region of £3m to 300 projects ranging from supporting post graduate education through to contributing towards industry applied research and assisting policy formulation.

**Sarah Watts** is a plant ecologist specialising in nature recovery in the Scottish Highlands. She is currently researching her part-time PhD entitled "Improving outcomes in mountain woodland restoration" at the University of Stirling, due for completion in 2026, while also working as the Conservation Manager at an estate in Lochaber. Sarah has been Chair of the Mountain Woodland Action Group since 2021. Link to University web page: [Miss Sarah Watts | University of Stirling](#)"

**The University of Stirling** is committed to providing education with a purpose and carrying out research which has a positive impact on communities across the globe. Driven by our mission to be the difference, we are addressing real issues, providing solutions, and helping to shape society.

The University has more than 17,500 students globally and employs 1,800 staff, with more than 140 nationalities represented within our community. Our campus environment is ranked first in the UK and top 10 in the world, and our sports facilities rank first in the UK and second in the world (International Student Barometer 2024, wave two), reflecting our long-standing designation as Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence.

We were shortlisted for University of the Year 2024 at the Times Higher Education Awards and are proud holders of a Silver institutional award from the Athena Swan Charter, in recognition of our commitment to advancing gender equality. We have an overall five-star rating in the QS Stars University Ratings and are ranked top 30 in the UK for postgraduate teaching and learning (Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2024). In recognition of our excellence in business education, we are accredited by AACSB International.

Eighty-seven per cent of our research has an outstanding or very considerable impact on society, with more than 80% rated either world leading or internationally excellent (Research Excellence Framework 2021), and we are ranked among the top 100 institutions in the world for our contribution to meeting 10 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. We have twice been recognised with a Queen's Anniversary Prize; for our Institute for Social Marketing and Health (2014) and our Institute of Aquaculture (2019).

Alongside partners, the University spearheads the £214 million Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal – which will deliver three major University-led projects: the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub, Scotland's International Environment Centre, and the Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub. We are also a central partner in the Forth Valley University College Health Partnership.

**Watts, S. H., Barsoum, N., Park, K. J. & Jump, A. S. (2025)** Why the present isn't the key to past or future: Moving beyond restricted relict habitat conditions to improve outcomes in mountain woodland restoration. *Restoration Ecology*, 33 (7), 70130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.70130>

Further information and photographs of the award and presentation are available from the Trust's Executive Director, Dr. Stuart Glen at [director@scottishforestrytrust.org.uk](mailto:director@scottishforestrytrust.org.uk)