

FINDHORN HINTERLAND TRUST DUNE RESTORATION PROJECT - FAQs

Q: Why are you removing all the gorse? This is an important habitat too!

A: We are only removing carefully selected areas of gorse, to make maximum biodiversity benefit for extremely rare species and habitats. While gorse is a valuable habitat, in places it is replacing far more valuable habitats. These habitats support species which are threatened with extinction if action is not taken urgently.

Q: The dunes are rewilding, why do you want to interfere with this natural process?!

A: Gorse and tree growth on the dunes is not natural. It is the result of previous human actions - mainly house building and tree planting – which has resulted in reduced windspeeds. This has allowed scrub to spread quickly, so that natural, rare and fragile sand dune habitats and species are now threatened. We aim to open-up the scrub to truly natural, wind-driven, processes, rejuvenating the dune ecosystem. We are carefully targeting our action to benefit key habitats and species. Gorse and woodland will continue to develop elsewhere on the dunes. We are not alone in undertaking this urgent conservation work. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Europe's largest nature conservation charity), Forestry and Land Scotland (the government agency responsible for the national forest estate), and the charity Butterfly Conservation all have dune restoration projects on the Moray Firth.

Q: What's the point of doing this work if the gorse is going to take over anyway? Its a losing battle.

A: National biodiversity interest - lichens and insects - are under threat of extinction. We know what the problem is. We can do something about it. If we don't the problem will get worse. We are in a biodiversity crisis and feel that, as custodians of the land, we have a responsibility to protect high priority species and habitats. Increasing the flow of wind through the area will help to slow the spread of gorse and trees. Its an ongoing issue. We are just starting. But even if we do this project and nothing else, there will be immediate benefits for priority wildlife over the medium term.

Q: Why should I care about a few moths and lichens? There are far more important things to worry about!

A: Findhorn Dunes are of national importance for rare wildlife. Some species are found at only a handful of sites in Scotland and are under threat of extinction. We are in a biodiversity crisis and feel that, as custodians of the land, we have a responsibility to protect high priority species and habitats. We believe that all species and habitats are integral to the web of life, upon which we as humans also depend.

Q: How can you justify the use of large machinery to take out gorse and trees in a climate crisis?

A: The climate crisis is of central concern to all who are involved with ecology and the health of our environment. There is also a biodiversity crisis, of equal importance, however. This project is a response to the biodiversity crisis. The latest State of Nature report <https://stateofnature.org.uk/> highlights the urgent need for restoration of rare habitats. Findhorn dunes contains species which are at risk of extinction in the UK due to habitat loss. We are already controlling scrub by hand on the dunes, but the extent of scrub cover on the dunes is such that it will not be possible to restore the sand dune ecosystem without the use of machinery. The climate impact of removing trees and fuel used by the machinery is considered to be of on-site significance only in terms of climate change, in contrast to the national biodiversity interest of the Findhorn Dunes. It should be emphasised that FHT has planted more than 5,000 trees in its woodland area.

Q: What will happen if this work isn't done.

A: Areas of priority sand dune habitats and their associated threatened species will be lost and the overall health of the wider sand dune ecosystem will continue to decline.

