



SOS Puffin

A Scottish Seabird Centre Habitat Restoration Project



A grateful Craigeith Inhabitant



Project worker taking mallow stems for composting

This is a community-inspired partnership project, benefiting the local community and environment as well as visitors, by restoring biodiversity at local wildlife sites of international importance.

In 2001, the island of Craigeith was home to over 20,000 breeding pairs of puffins. By 2006 the population had plummeted to fewer than 2,000 pairs, due to invasive tree mallow, an alien shrub which gradually coated the island, choking the burrows and preventing the birds from breeding. In collaboration with Aberdeen University, we decided that an ongoing, volunteer-led effort should be set up to clear the mallow from the breeding areas. We installed two remote-controlled cameras to monitor the project. The live pictures, controlled by visitors, are beamed back to the Centre and are also available as webcam feeds on www.seabird.org.

The preferred solution was to physically cut the plants down. It was discovered that if the stem was severed close to the ground, the plant would not regenerate. Furthermore, if piled up away from the breeding burrows, the tree mallow composted successfully and rapidly. The problem lay in its scale: we needed volunteers, equipment and transport. Viridor, a landfill company, stepped in. With a grant of £235,000, we were able to fund a direct and sustained attack on the tree mallow. The volunteers working on the project have now cleared large areas being and a slow but significant rise in the puffin population has been noticed. We will not be able to eradicate the tree mallow altogether but by maintaining the volunteer effort, we will be able to control the shrub and, most importantly, keep the breeding burrow areas clear. This project has had enormous resonance with the local and wider community and the response to our call for volunteers has been impressive and gratifying.

As a long-term project, it is essential that 'Save Our Puffins' is financially viable and the *Naturesave* grant has been used to buy vital replacement cutting and safety equipment. The project proves that well-resourced, well led local initiatives can have enormous positive effects on matters of international interest. Our education staff have a practical story to tell to the 5,000+ students who receive environmental education each year and allows them to see first hand the effects of climate change.

Since the project began in 2007 nearly nine hundred have helped out, with many coming more than once. With the help of volunteers and funders like *Naturesave* we will beat the weed!