



GOING WILD WITH £90K

The Scottish Wildlife Trust have welcomed a grant of almost £90,000 for specialist tree work at Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve.

The £86,796 funding comes from WREN, a not-for-profit business that awards grants for community, biodiversity and heritage projects.

It will be used to thin non-native woodland, control invasive species, plant native trees and hedgerows, and create wildlife habitats.

Cumbernauld Glen manager Duncan Clark said: "This will help us continue our long-term plan to increase the amount of native woodland within Cumbernauld."

HARDROCK CHALLENGES

Two duathlons take place in the Borders on October 6 and 7.

On the Saturday, the Junior Hardrock Challenge comprises a run and mountain bike in Dalbeattie Forest. There are different routes and distances for a range of ages and competitors can enter solo or as part of a team. Cost per participant is £5.

On Sunday, it's the turn of the grown ups with the Dalbeattie Hardrock Challenge. The duathlon includes a 10-mile trail run then a 16-mile mountain bike ride. Enter solo or as a team, with the cost per person at £18.

Closing date for entries for both races, organised by Dalbeattie Community Initiative, is September 30.

■ See www.dalbeattiehardrockchallenge.org

GEAR OF THE WEEK

Jöttnar Thorsen Light Down Jacket

If warmth and weight matter, the Jöttnar Thorsen Light Down Jacket could be for you. The jacket is stuffed with ethically sourced 850-fill "power" goose down.

The down is water-repellent and stays dry 10 times longer than untreated down. The water repellency won't wash out and is free of harmful fluorocarbons. The outer is made from a rip-stop fabric that also resists the wet.

The Thorsen features stretch technical cuffs for extra warmth and a stuff sack for easy carriage. Hoodless jacket comes in male and female fit in range of colours. It's priced £250 at www.jottnar.com



VERSATILE Use mushrooms in salads, soups or casseroles



Have you tried?

HEALTH & SAFETY Make sure produce is not poisonous

Raid nature's larder

AUTUMN FORAGING

What is it?: Searching for and harvesting wild foods. Autumn is a particularly good time to hunt for countryside produce.

Tell me more: On hills, in woodlands and hedgerows and at the beach, you'll spot a colourful bounty of edible gems.

Autumn brings fat and juicy berries; trees laden with apples and plums; and undergrowth rich with mushrooms. Other wild produce includes guelder rose berries, nettles, hazelnuts, rose hips, rowan fruits, seaweeds, wood sorrel and pine needles.

How to get started: While many wild foods are safe to eat, many are poisonous. Join a wild food foraging session. Experts can guide you to the best places for wild produce and show you what's good to eat and what's not. Mark Williams, of Galloway Wild Foods, leads foraging walks year-round.

He said: "Foraging is a great activity for all ages, especially in late summer and autumn. There are so many amazing foods to find in our Scottish countryside.

"Care must be taken over what you forage for so you avoid toxic plants. Also, we teach people how to protect our natural environment from over-foraging."

Other tips for success: Use a guidebook to identify tasty wild produce, such as *The Thrifty Forager* by Alys Fowler or the Collins Gem version of *Food for Free* by Richard Mabey. There are plenty of online guides too, such as one by the Woodland Trust. See www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Also remember to wash your foraged items and check for bugs.

What kit do I need?: A pair of scissors, or a good pocket knife; a collecting container such as a reusable shopping bag; walking boots or shoes, long-sleeved top and trousers; gloves in case there



BERRY TASTY Make jam with blackberries or enjoy pickled on toast

are nettles or thorns; a notebook to keep track of great locations.

Who is it for?: All ages.

Mark said: "Children and adults enjoy foraging and it's a good way to enjoy spending time outdoors together. Children rarely notice how far they walk when they are on the look out for foods."

When can I do it?: All year, but autumn is a very good time.

Cost? It's free to forage yourself, while prices vary for foraging courses and walks.

Anything else to do?: Enjoy food foraging on a bushcraft weekend, a canoe adventure, a gourmet day or as part of a wild booze walk. Walking routes website and app, www.viewranger.com, details a number of walks in Scotland.

Wild food recipes: The choice is vast but here are a few to try.

Horse mushrooms: Delicious in winter salads, soups or casseroles.

Ceps: Cook freshly picked ceps with cooked and sliced potatoes in olive oil with butter and fresh, crushed garlic (wild if possible). Stir in chopped fresh parsley and a squeeze of lemon juice. Serve with grilled meat.

Wood sorrel: A good source of

vitamin C, this will brighten up a winter salad or add a citrus zing to a dish. Wood sorrel also works well as a garnish for fish.

Sloe berries: Traditionally picked after the first frosts, sloe berries make the basis for a delicious gin liqueur. Pick earlier and freeze for a similar outcome.

Kelp seaweed: Wrap fillets of fish, chicken, venison or beef as tightly as possible in fresh seaweed. Set oven lower than normal and allow fish or meat to cook slowly, for longer. The kelp keeps the contents moist, locks in flavour and adds seasoning.

Pickled brambles: Jams and jellies are a great use of brambles, or try pickling them. For every 1kg of blackberries, boil 500g of granulated sugar in 250ml of white wine vinegar. Add the berries and simmer until just soft. Take out the berries and put in sterilised jars. Boil the syrup until it's thick and pour over the fruit. Seal and store for at least a week. The pickled berries are great with cheese on toast. For more recipes see www.gallowaywildfoods.com, monicawilde.com

Contacts: www.gallowaywildfoods.com; backcountrysurvival.co.uk; monicawilde.com