

# Summer Isles

Lizzie Williams looks around the garden and then beyond



Heath Spotted Orchid by Isla Hepburn

I'm writing in my garden. Warm sunshine and just enough breeze to keep the midges at bay. Swallows are doing laps of the cottage and down on the shore an oyster catcher is muttering, though I can't imagine what there is to fret about on such a beautiful day.

It's a month beyond Midsummer, and the nights are drawing in. Coming home last night at midnight I almost needed a torch! With all this daylight, and some good rain, the Island is looking gorgeous - vibrant and verdant, buzzing with life.

The ever-regenerating woodland creeps right down to the shore, tenacious trees clinging on in uncomfortable-looking spots. Meadows deep with foliage are bursting into colour, and almost an embarrassment of orchids: Heath Spotted, Northern Marsh and Lesser Butterfly.

Six Spot Burnet moths, with black cloaks and scarlet spots, clamber about the foliage. Common blue butterflies flit around like snatches of summer sky. Purple-tinged bird droppings tell us the blaeberrys are ripe.

## Harsh Winter

The harsh winter took its toll: in the bay there is just one greylag family. Fulmar numbers are down and the terns haven't bred here. However, four eider mothers shepherd their five surviving ducklings, which isn't a bad result. Otters, seals, dolphins and porpoises have all been spotted often, but no basking sharks yet.

The diversity of wildlife on Tanera is partly due to 25 years without the nibbling of sheep, deer and rabbits. This, and the parents' other land management efforts such as tree planting, make Tanera a welcome partner in the new Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes project led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. We're excited to be part of this long-term initiative to boost the vitality of our beautiful but fragile area, for both people and wildlife.

Luckily it's not just me who's enraptured by the season's loveliness - there are plenty of holidayers to appreciate it. Families, artists, divers, kayakers, sailors, all enjoying the place in different ways, whether playing in boats, fishing, painting or just drinking coffee and admiring the view.

## Weekly Suppers

We've started our weekly suppers - a good opportunity for islanders and mainlanders to mingle, and so satisfying to fill the cafe with people happily chatting. It is a challenge to find 'good' (responsible) food. We buy as much as possible locally: salad from the Achiltibuie Hydroponicum and prawns from Coigach boats. We have venison (a healthy and 'low-carbon' meat) from the Cairngorm National Park, and now all I need is a good source of sustainably caught fish. Perhaps I should just get out there with a rod ...

A full island presents other difficulties. Pumping sufficient water keeps us on our toes. We're determined to recycle as much waste as possible but that's not easy; there's no kerbside collection! And the generator is developing an interesting sense of timing.

With our focus on helping our guests enjoy their precious holiday, we still find time to have fun, and to dream of longer-term projects. Can Tanera be a place where young people come to learn the value of a wild place and develop a respect for nature that they will take into adulthood? We're working on it ...