

The Applecross Trust



Fact Sheet 10

Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)

Common juniper has the largest geographic range of any woody plant in the world, and although it is not considered threatened at an international level it is at a national level, with Britain, especially England, showing a substantial decline in both distribution and size of colonies.

In the Highlands juniper is more abundant in the drier, eastern part of the country, particularly the erect shrubby form, *Juniperus communis* ssp. *communis*, while some of the best examples of prostrate juniper, *Juniperus communis* ssp. *nana*, can be seen on Beinn Eighe.

Juniper is a slow growing evergreen shrub or small tree in the cypress family. Because of its dense cover of prickly needles, juniper provides a good nesting site for birds such as the goldcrest or song thrush and it is also important in providing winter cover for black grouse, especially in the east.

The berries are eaten by birds such as fieldfare, which also distribute the seeds. The foliage is eaten by red deer and rabbits, although there are very few rabbits in Applecross now. Nationally however it is thought that the current high populations of red deer and rabbits has contributed to the decline of juniper, along with moorland burning which limits regeneration.

Juniper is perhaps best known for its use in flavouring gin. The flavoured oil is extracted from the berries although the berries themselves can also be used to flavour meat dishes. Projects in the Borders have focused on increasing local juniper populations with ideas of supplying native juniper berries to the Edinburgh Gin Company.

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