

# Nature markets and the future of crofting in the Western Isles at University of Glasgow on FindAPhD.com

4–5 minutes

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## Project summary

**Aim:** To explore, together with crofting communities, the future of crofting when thriving within a ‘net-zero and biodiversity positive society’ and what role nature markets (carbon and biodiversity) could play in building sustainable pathways for culture and environment in rural Scotland.

**Rationale:** Extensive areas of land, prime for nature-based solutions and opportunities for carbon sequestration and biodiversity recovery, are found in Scotland, including peatlands and sensitive habitats such as machair. Nearly one-third of Scottish peatlands are held under crofting tenure. Crofting tenure is a unique form of land use, involving a complex set of legal relationships. As nature markets are developing, the issue of how to legally and practically administer these markets in a crofting context is arising. Beyond the legal challenges, research to date has identified socio-cultural issues and knowledge gaps that are blocking nascent carbon market ‘opportunities’ from being adopted (1). Narrowly focusing on carbon, and designed to principally cater for single landowner/user landscapes, the UK carbon market infrastructure in its current form is not fit to support a just transition (2-4). Working closely with the crofting communities in the Western Isles, this project will explore the legal, environmental and socio-

cultural considerations determining the efficacy of nature market mechanisms in Scotland, and collaborate with these communities to co-imagine and co-design future pathways, potentially beyond market mechanisms.

### **Objectives:**

1. To understand the perceptions (positive/negative) and lived experiences of individuals in crofting communities, through interviews and focus groups, of nature markets and market mechanisms in Scotland, such as the Peatland Code.
2. To perform a thorough review of current and evolving nature restoration and carbon sequestration mechanisms, both market- and non-market-based (e.g., via agricultural schemes), in Scotland.
3. Based on results from objectives 1 and 2, to perform a SWOT analysis of current nature market and non-market mechanisms of relevance to crofting communities.
4. To co-design, with key stakeholders, a framework for delivering funding and benefits to communities for nature restoration and carbon sequestration activities.

### **Student Profile**

This project will appeal to a student who is motivated by interdisciplinary and community-engaged research at the intersection of ecology, law, and social science. It suits someone who is deeply interested in rural sustainability, net-zero transitions, biodiversity recovery, and the lived realities of agricultural communities. A strong candidate will be comfortable working qualitatively with people - conducting interviews, facilitating focus groups, and building trusting relationships - while also being able to synthesise complex policy, legal frameworks, and environmental science.

The project is ideal for a student who values co-creation, collaboration, and participatory research, and who is eager to help design fair and practical approaches to nature markets and/or

alternative funding mechanisms. Curiosity about how nature-based solutions intersect with land rights, cultural heritage, and socio-economic justice will be essential. The work will suit someone who can think critically, navigate contested debates around carbon markets and restoration finance, and analyse multi-scalar impacts on communities and ecosystems.

Self-motivation, initiative and strong communication skills are key, as is an openness to learning across disciplines. The project particularly suits a student who wants their research to be applied, place-based, and capable of shaping real policy and land management decisions in rural Scotland.

### **Supervisors**

Jill Robbie, Primary Supervisor, University of Glasgow

Cornelia Helmcke, University of St Andrews

Jemma MacVicar, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust, Lewis, Western Isles)

Shona Morrison, Community Land Outer Hebrides (CLOH)

Lydia Cole, University of St Andrews

### **How to apply?**

For more details on the application process, and to apply via the NETGAIN online application form, please visit [the NETGAIN website](#). The deadline for applications is **Friday 30 January 2026**.