



# Ross-shire Journal

## Rare lichen found in Ross-shire

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A RARE lichen previously thought to occur only in Alaska, Oregon, Chile, New Zealand and Tasmania has been found thriving in Ross-shire.

The discovery of *Micarea prasinella* flourishing thousands of miles from its known locations has surprised lichen experts who are now reassessing their understanding of the species and its distribution.

The black beaded lichen was spotted during a field survey of the Dundonnell estate by Scottish Natural Heritage's lichen expert Dave Genney who immediately recognised it as something out of the ordinary.

Dave said: "This very neat looking lichen caught my eye with its dark green velvety carpet, dotted with shiny black fruits. It was growing on woodland mosses and liverworts among tree roots at the top of a rock step bellow a larch tree. Its location at the top of the rock step probably protects it from over shading by bracken and from trampling. I didn't recall ever having seen a photo of it before so I collected it because it looked distinctive enough to identify"

Dr Brian Coppins, senior lichenologist at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) was also on the Dundonnell trip, and was able to identify Dave's lichen straight away, as he remembered seeing it when he was looking at lichens in Chile.

"I was amazed to see this lichen that I had only seen previously on an expedition in the Chilean rain forest in 1986," Dr Coppins said. "It is rare to find a new species to Scotland, but to find a new species to Europe is fantastic!"

The chance find came about following a survey invitation by estate owners the Rice family to a team comprising SNH, the British Lichen Society and RBGE.

Donald Rice said: "We are thrilled that this important discovery has been made at Dundonnell. It has been known for some time that the woodland fauna and flora is unusual for its latitude, but without a thorough scientific assessment it has not been possible to place it in a wider context. The world-class experts who made this discovery also found many other rare lichens and bryophytes, and it has been exciting to have been involved in the commissioning of the survey. When the full assessment is published it will enable us to manage the estate more effectively for its lower plant life."

"Scotland has extraordinarily rich lower plant life, and thus an international responsibility to protect it. We hope that this discovery will encourage others to look, to find and to enjoy this heritage."

The extension of the distribution patterns of this lichen to Scotland throws up fascinating new questions about the way Scotland's plants and lichens have evolved, moved and colonised the landscape through time. Although the new species has a scientific name it has as yet no common name and Dave Genney and his colleagues are keen to encourage the public to come forward with name suggestions.

"The discovery of this lichen is another reminder of the wonderful biodiversity to be discovered and enjoyed in the highlands of Scotland. It would be only right to choose a name for it reflecting the unique character and Gaelic tradition of the west highlands and we welcome all suggestions."

The announcement coincides with SNH's [Scottish Biodiversity Week](#) (May 19-25) which encourages people throughout Scotland to explore their own surroundings and get to know the nature and wildlife on their doorstep.



*Micarea prasinella* - an unexpected discovery