



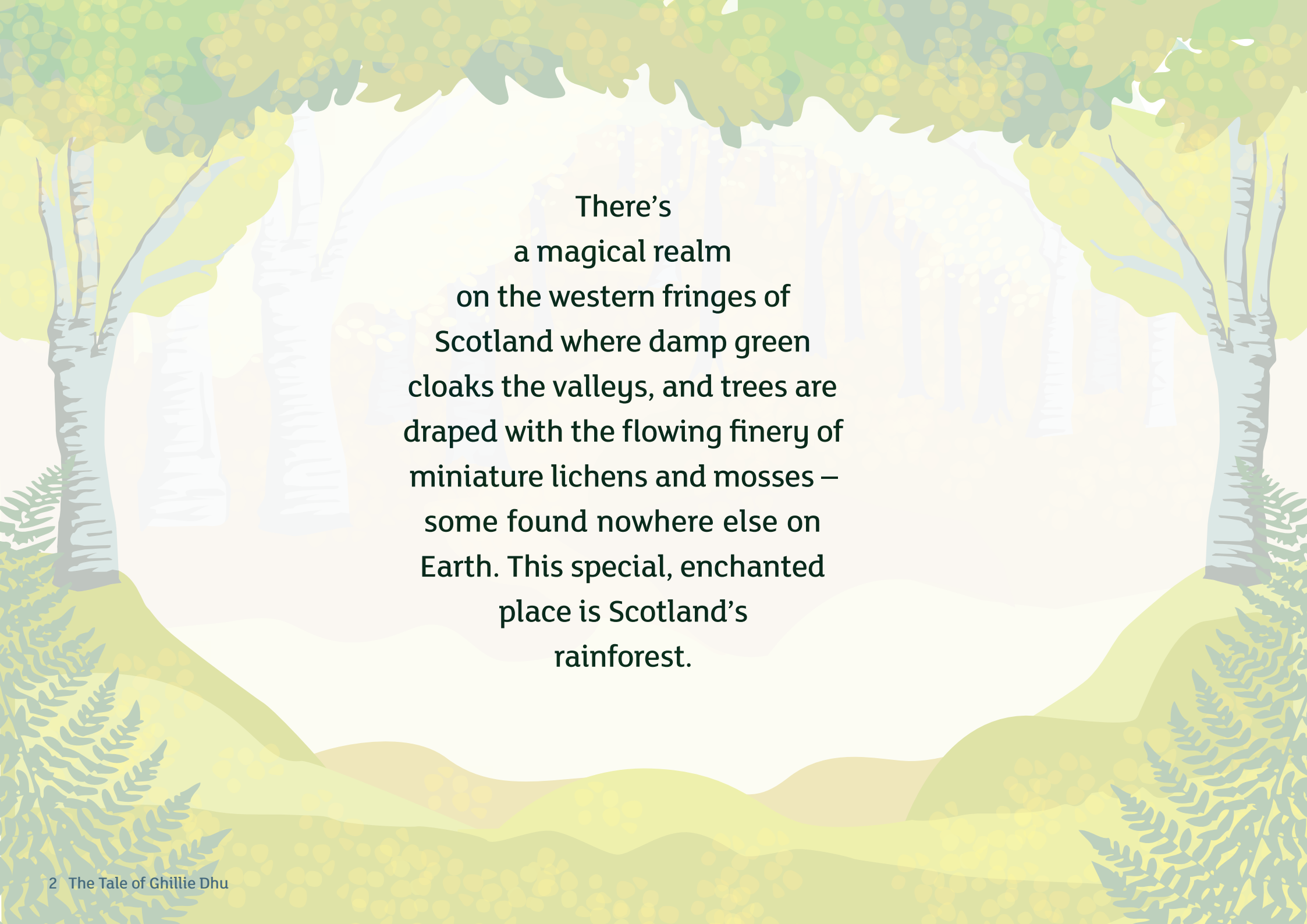
The Tale of *Ghillie Dhu*

There is a man lives in the woods,
Lives in the woods, lives in the woods,
There is a man lives in the woods,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu!

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle,
A whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Words by Claire Hewitt
Illustrated by Andrew Evans



There's
a magical realm
on the western fringes of
Scotland where damp green
cloaks the valleys, and trees are
draped with the flowing finery of
miniature lichens and mosses –
some found nowhere else on
Earth. This special, enchanted
place is Scotland's
rainforest.

In the middle of one such rainforest, there is an ancient oak tree. Father Oak is home to so many creatures and plants, big and small, more than you or I could count on all our fingers and toes. There's wise old Owl, coming home after a night's hunting and Red Squirrel leaping from branch to branch. And if you look closer at the roots of Father Oak, there's wee Snail and Spider crawling about the springy mounds of mouse-tail moss.

Look closer still, past the glistening dark filmy ferns and delicate featherworts, and there you might spot a wee door – so small you may miss it. And if you opened that door and peeked inside, you would see a staircase running up the inside of the tree to a small room. It's here that a wee man called Ghillie Dhu lives.

Our story begins early one morning. It was springtime and Ghillie Dhu had been fast asleep all winter long in his cosy bed of thistledown and soft moss, but it was time for him to wake up and see how his beloved forest had fared through the winter.



Sure enough, the birds were singing, the sun was shining and the first bees humming, so he leapt out of bed, whistling as he made himself a cup of nettle and dandelion tea, which he drank from a hazelnut shell. Then pulling on his old coat, shoes and hat, down the stairs he skipped.

“Good morning Father Oak,
Good morning Owl, Squirrel and Snail,
Good morning all my friends of the forest.
Wake up! It’s springtime.”

And off went Ghillie Dhu through the greening forest, looking here and there to see that all was well and calling to everyone as he went.

**“Lichens, mosses, liverworts,
In shady woodlands grow,
On bark of trees, on stone and rock,
By gentle burns that flow.
Specklebelly and forest star,
Mouse-tail moss and earwort,
Where earth is wet and air is clear,
You bring to us great woodland cheer!”**

The sun rose in the sky and the soft rain fell. Ghillie Dhu came to a burn and decided to take a rest on a rock by some hazel trees. Nibbling at a hazelnut that Squirrel had kindly shared with him, left over from her winter store, he listened as the songbirds sang their sweet spring songs, accompanied by the humming of the bees as they danced in the sunlight.

And as he sat happily watching the forest spring to life, Ghillie Dhu gazed at the bark of one of the old hazel trees. Suddenly, his eyes focused on the script lichen that only he and the Faerie folk could read, and it said this:

**‘Come forest friends to the Faerie Mound,
Let’s feast and sing and dance around
To celebrate the returning sun,
Come join us in some forest fun!’**

The Faerie King and Queen’

“Do you know there’s going to be a springtime party?” he excitedly asked all his friends back at Father Oak.

“Twoooooooo...,” replied Owl, “but look at yooooou! The Faerie King and Queen will never allow you in the Faerie hall dressed like that!”

“Whatever do you mean?” asked Ghillie Dhu, as Squirrel sniggered.

“Well,” said Spider, “look at your clothes, they’ll need more than a stitch and a mend, Ghillie Dhu.”

And the wee man went to look at himself in a puddle of still clear water and saw that moths had been eating holes in his coat. And just look at his hat! Oh dear, the mice had nibbled it while he was sleeping. Yes, indeed, he needed a new set of clothes and if he was to go to the party, he’d have to start making them NOW!



“What shall I make first?” Ghillie Dhu asked Spider.
“Why, a new jacket,” replied Spider as she spun some fine thread to stitch his new clothes with.
“But what shall I make it from?” asked Ghillie Dhu.
“Well,” said Snail slowly, “I hear the largest lichen of the forest makes the finest coats – the brilliant green lungwort.”

So off Ghillie Dhu went and found some growing on the bark of the oak, rowan and willow.

“What beautiful shades of green it is,” he said to Blackbird as she sang her sweet song to the morning sun. “Indeed, it will make a fine coat.” So he carefully gathered just enough, then he cut and stitched, and soon had made the finest coat that you or I have ever seen.

“You’ll be needing some buttons for your jacket,” said Hazel tree as she dropped three nuts down from her branches that Squirrel had missed last autumn.

Then Ghillie Dhu took the miniature filmy ferns, pixie cups and prickly featherwort, then with the finest of stitches, decorated the hem and the pockets with them. Then when he had finished, everyone agreed it was indeed the finest coat they had ever seen in the forest.



“Now,” said Spider, “a pair of breeks is what you need.”
“But what shall I make them from?” asked Ghillie Dhu.
“Well,” said Snail, as she slowly made her way towards a tasty leaf, “I hear that oak leaves make the finest breeks.” So off Ghillie Dhu ran to the nearest oak tree.

“Father Oak, I need some new spring leaves to make a pair of trousers for the Faerie King and Queen’s party. Could you spare a few please?”

Father Oak shook his branches and down fell some soft green leaves. And Ghillie Dhu cut and stitched, and he made the finest pair of breeks that you or I have ever seen in the forest.

“And now Ghillie Dhu, you’ll be needing a new pair of dancing shoes,” said Spider.

“Well,” said Snail slowly as she finally reached the tasty green leaf, “I hear the bark of downy birch makes the finest shoes.”

“Lady of the forest,” Ghillie Dhu called to the birch, “may I take some of your bark to make a pair of shoes, please?”

And because Ghillie Dhu was always so kind and cheery, and would spin and dance about her roots, she said: “Of course you may.”

So he took the finest of birch bark, thanked the tree and made the finest pair of shoes you or I have ever seen in the forest.

“And with all that dancing, you’ll be needing a belt,” sniggered Spider. “You’ll not be wanting your breeks to fall down!”
“Try some of this hard fern,” said Snail slowly as she slid down from a leaf. “I hear it makes the strongest of belts.”

So Ghillie Dhu took the fern fronds, then twisted and plaited them to make the finest belt you or I have ever seen in the forest.

“And now,” said Squirrel, “you’ll be needing a hat. Try this!” Squirrel gave Ghillie Dhu an acorn cup – and it fitted perfectly.

“How does that look?” he asked, leaping from one foot to another.

“Ah,” said Owl as she fluttered down, “one last thing – a feather for your cap.” And from her tail she pulled out a beautiful small feather.

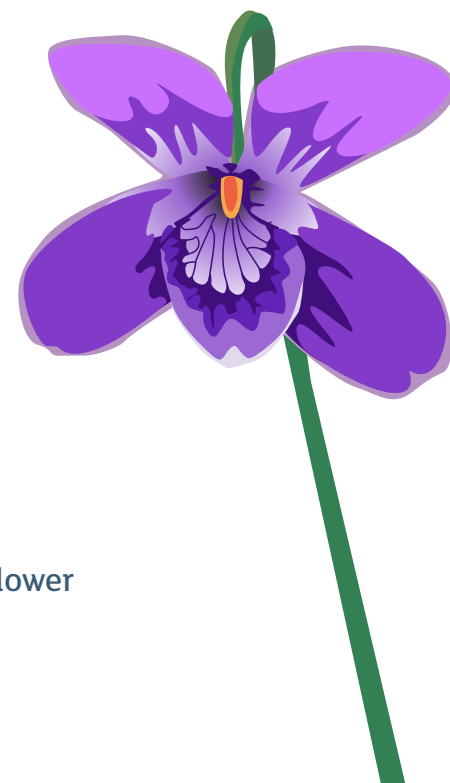
“Oh, thank you so much Owl. My hat is now the finest hat that you or I have ever seen in the forest!”

And indeed it was.

So Ghillie Dhu put on his coat of lungwort and his breeks of soft oak leaves, a belt of braided hard fern and boots of woven birch – with an acorn hat upon his head and his whistle in his pocket. And he proclaimed:

“To the Faerie Mound my feet are bound,
To welcome in the spring.”

Then he took a beautiful dog violet flower and put it in his buttonhole.



“You are the finest Ghillie Dhu in the whole of Scotland,” all his friends cried, as he did a hop and a skip and sang a cheery song to thank them all.

“Now it’s time I was going,” he said.

“Hop on my back and I’ll take you there,” said Owl.

And through the trees Owl glided so, so quietly. Ghillie Dhu looked down at the green, green forest below and his heart almost burst with happiness, for this was the place he loved the most in the whole wide world – Scotland’s rainforest!

As they came to the Faerie Mound under the rowan tree, down he stepped and in he skipped, and everyone said:

“Ghillie Dhu, what fine new clothes you are wearing, the best we have ever seen in the whole forest. Will you give us a song to welcome in the spring?”



And this is what he sang...

“There is a man lives in the woods,
lives in the woods, lives in the woods,
There is a man lives in the woods,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu!

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his hat is made from an acorn cup,
an acorn cup, an acorn cup,
And his hat is made from an acorn cup,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his coat is made from lungwort, lungwort, lungwort,
And his coat is made from lungwort,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his buttons are made from hazelnuts,
hazelnuts, hazelnuts,
And his buttons are made from hazelnuts,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his breeks are made from oak leaves,
oak leaves, oak leaves,
And his breeks are made from oak leaves,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his belt is made from ferns, ferns, ferns,
And his belt is made from ferns,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

And his shoes are made from birch bark, birch bark, birch bark,
And his shoes are made from birch bark,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.

Chorus

And he plays upon a whistle, a whistle, a whistle,
And he plays upon a whistle,
And his name is Ghillie Dhu.”

Long into the starry moonlit night, the Faerie folk danced, sang and feasted. And the forest echoed with the merry music. As the sun rose, Ghillie Dhu homeward went with a spring in his step and a whistle on his lips.

So on a summer's day, if you find yourself walking along the forest path, take a wee rest in a mossy nest – that's best! And as you lie there, listen and you'll hear the bees buzzing, the birds singing and the trees speaking softly to one another. Maybe if you close your eyes, you might hear the Ghillie Dhu singing his cheery song in the place he loves and protects fiercely – his beautiful green rainforest. And then maybe, when you open your eyes and look down close into the soft green mosses and secret places, you'll catch a glimpse of him, lichen clad, as he dances from mossy rock to green, green bough.



Secret, miniature residents of Scotland's rainforest featured in the story

The bryophytes (mosses and liverworts)

Slender mouse-tail moss ► *Isoetecium myosuroides*

This moss grows on boulders and tree trunks, particularly on oak trees in the rainforest. Looking at it closely, it resembles a small tree itself, being unbranched in lower parts and branched above. Individual leaves have a finely tapered tip – maybe reminiscent of a mouse's tail?



c.1.5 x actual size



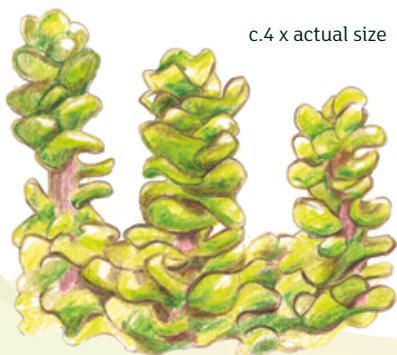
c.4 x actual size

► Prickly featherwort *Plagiochila spinulosa* (a liverwort)

The featherworts, like other liverworts, are moisture loving and very delicate, drying out easily and becoming dormant. However, like many of the mosses and liverworts, they can spring back to life within minutes of becoming wet again. This is fun to watch under a microscope.

► Western earwort *Scapania gracilis* (a liverwort)

This is one of the most common liverworts of Scotland's rainforest. It is medium-sized and forms compact mats with small, rounded upper leaves, similar to little 'ears'.



c.4 x actual size

The lichens

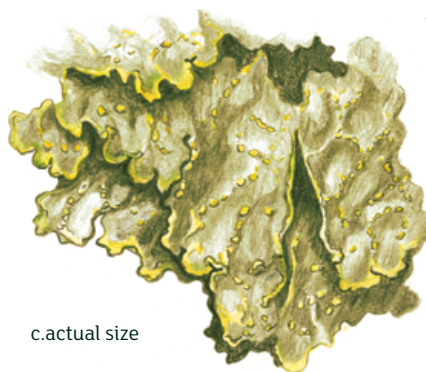
Lichens are grouped into three categories of shape: leafy (foliose); shrubby (fruticose); and smooth/crusty (crustose), which are very closely attached to the substrate.

► Tree lungwort – *Lobaria pulmonaria* (a leafy lichen)

The lobes of this large leafy lichen look like the shape of human lungs, so much so that medieval doctors used this lichen to treat lung disorders.



c.6 x smaller than actual size



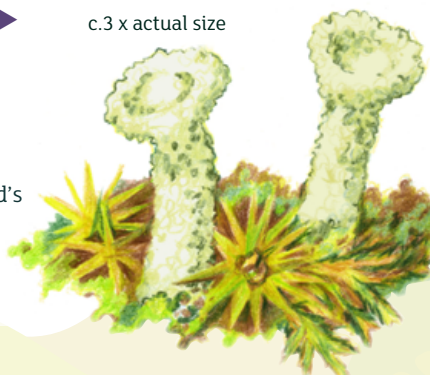
c.actual size

► Yellow specklebelly – *Pseudocyphellaria crocata* (a leafy lichen)

Lichens are good indicators of air quality because they are very sensitive to air pollution, such as sulphur dioxide. Shrubby and leafy lichens (such as yellow specklebelly) are the most sensitive and you see few of these lichens in urban areas. This is another reason why Scotland's rainforest is so special – you'll find many types of lichen there, meaning the air is pure.

► Pixie cups – *Cladonia* sp. (a shrubby lichen)

You can easily see how these lichens get their name, as they look like miniature goblets. However, there are many species of pixie cups found in different habitats other than Scotland's rainforest. One type is called 'British soldier', due to its bright red fruiting bodies, making the lichen look like a little 'redcoat' soldier!



c.3 x actual size

The ferns

Wilson's filmy fern ▼ *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*

Filmy ferns are a real gem of Scotland's rainforest. They are so small that they are overlooked and mistaken for bryophytes. Take a closer look and you'll find a perfect translucent fern in miniature. Only two species are resident in our Scottish rainforests, but Wilson's filmy fern is most easily recognised by the veins reaching right to the end of the fronds.



c.2.5 x actual size



c.6 x actual size

▲ Script lichen – *Graphis* sp. (a smooth lichen)

The black 'writing-like' marks on this lichen are actually the fruiting bodies of the lichen. They produce spores which are 'shot' out into the air to assist reproduction.

The size gauges are correct when page printed at A4

Large residents of Scotland's rainforest featured in the story

The ferns continued

▼ Hard fern *Blechnum spicant*

This leathery fern has two types of leaves or fronds. The fertile fronds stick up straight and are long and narrow with spores on the back. The sterile fronds, without spores, arch outwards. The fronds are rigid to the touch, hence its name.



The flower

► Dog violet *Viola riviniana*

Historically, the term 'dog' was given to wild flowers that were unscented and this flower is no exception. The ancient Greeks recognised violets as a symbol of fertility and love, and used them in love potions.



The trees

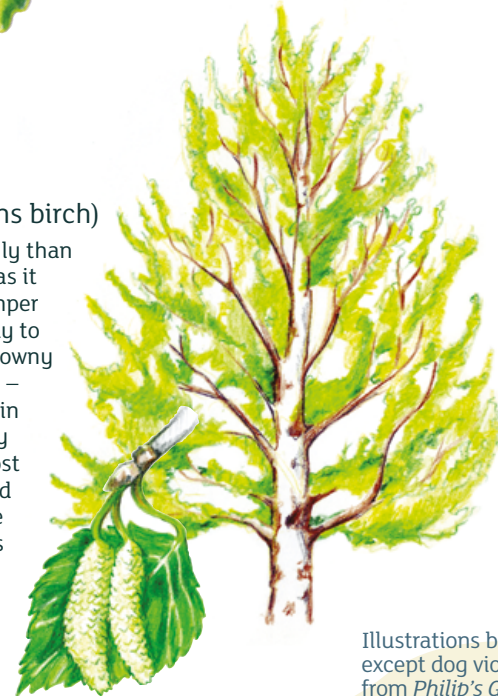
► Sessile oak *Quercus petraea*

Gaelic: *Darroch/Dair*
Oak is the classic tree of Scotland's rainforest and supports a rich diversity of species. This includes bryophytes, lichens, ferns and fungi, which in turn provide shelter and food for invertebrates and birds.



► Downy birch *Betula pubescens*

Gaelic: *Peithbhog* (*Beith* means birch)
Downy birch is found more commonly than silver birch in Scotland's rainforest, as it is a species that can endure the damper soils in the west of Scotland. One way to tell these two species apart is that downy birch has 'fur' covering its new twigs – hence its name. You are most likely in a birch forest if you see bright red fly agaric toadstools, as this fungus most commonly associates with birch, and provides water and nutrients for tree growth. The trees provide the fungus with sugars in return.



▲ Hazel *Corylus avellana*

Gaelic: *Coll/Calltuinn*
The hazel has great significance in Celtic mythology, being known as a giver of knowledge. In Highland rituals, it was believed that hazelnuts put on the fire could provide answers to important questions by the way they burned or jumped. A more practical use for ground hazelnuts was as a source of flour for bread.

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For 30 years, Plantlife has had a single ideal – to save and celebrate wild flowers, plants and fungi. They are the life support for all our wildlife and their colour and character light up our landscapes. But without our help, this priceless natural heritage is in danger of being lost.

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