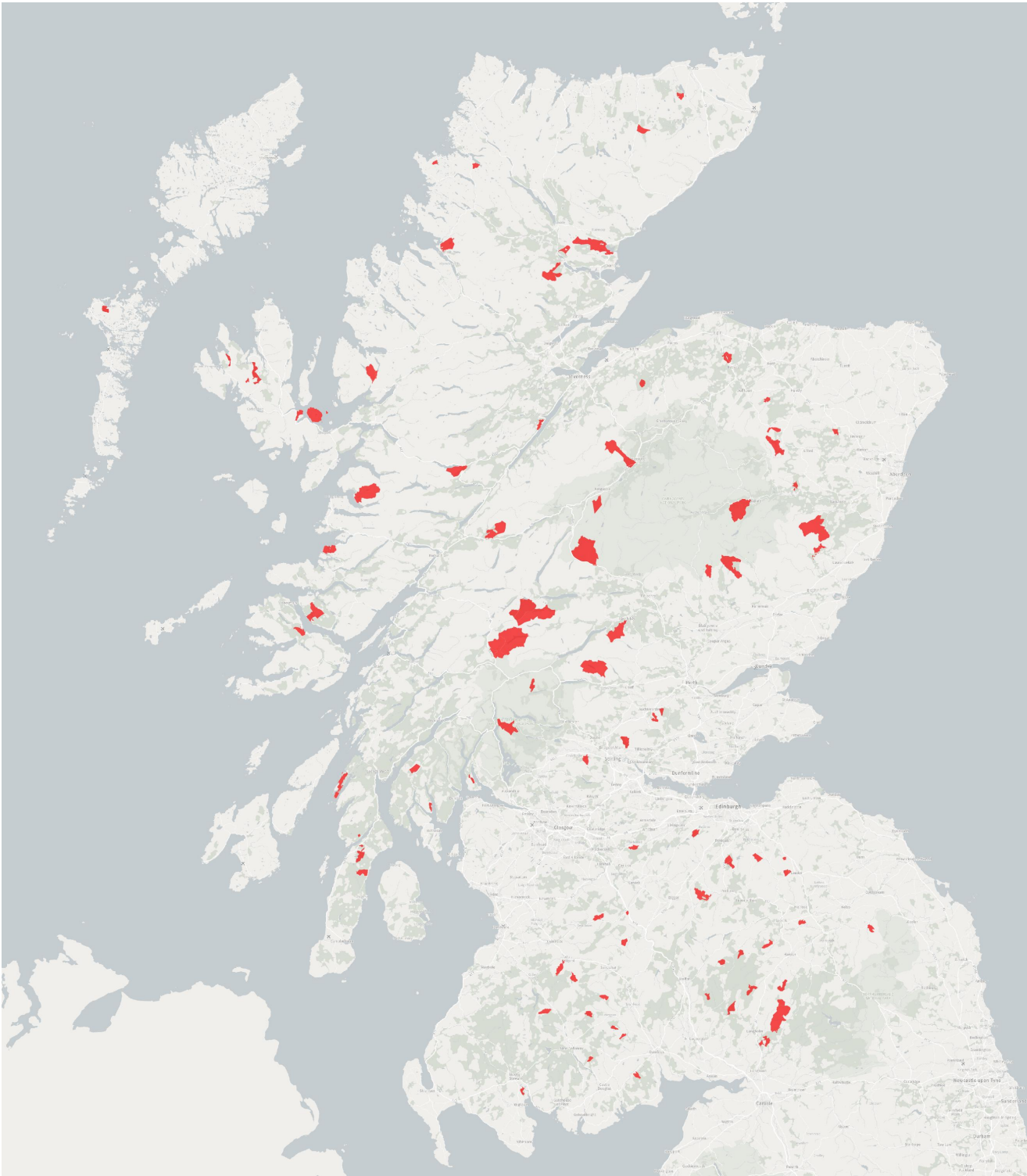


# Rural Land Sales 2020-2022



Andy Wightman

February 2024

Citation: Wightman, A, 2024. Rural Land Sales 2020 - 2022. [www.andywightman.scot](http://www.andywightman.scot)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report documents the sales of larger landholdings that took place in 2020 - 2022. It follows on from work undertaken by the Scottish Land Commission to understand the rural land market and is a contribution to furthering that effort.

The report aims to do two things. First, it seeks to identify large-scale land transactions over the period 2020-2022 by undertaking an empirical examination of individual property titles derived from the Who Owns Scotland project. Second, it seeks to identify some of the main organisations involved in the land market over that period.

## **BACKGROUND**

There have long been calls for improved data and intelligence on how the land market is operating. Although in Scotland we are fortunate to have long-established registers of landownership, it remains problematic to undertake any meaningful analysis of landownership due to the way in which data is captured.

Despite a commitment to establish a Scottish Land Information Service (SCOTLIS) in 2015 that would begin to address this deficiency and more, progress to date has been limited to improving online access to Land Register data and no work appears to be underway to deliver the original vision.<sup>1</sup>

### **Scottish Land Commission Research**

The Scottish Land Commission began to undertake some work to understand market trends - work that has been driven forward in part by recent land price inflation as a consequence of emerging carbon markets.

SLC work began with its 2022 Rural Market Data report which attempted to analyse land sales based on bulk data supplied by Registers of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Two further reports published in 2022 and 2023 were based on intelligence provided by land agents.<sup>3</sup> The reports reviewed the rural land market and identified trends in land values and the motivation of buyers. Neither report contained any quantitative data, however, on what specific land had been sold, where and for what price. The evidence presented was “insider” knowledge from estate agents which was of some utility but was restricted to their knowledge of the market and the sales that they had handled. On the other hand, agents were in some cases aware of the prices paid where this information has failed to be recorded in the public domain (see later for more on this).

In November 2023, the Scottish Land Commission published a second report on the land market based on an analysis of bulk data provided by the Registers of Scotland.<sup>4</sup> This provides an excellent overview not only of the land market but of the severe limitations on interpreting the data provided by Registers of Scotland. The data was abstracted from titles registered in the Land Register and from those held in the Application record awaiting land registration. Limitations to the interpretation of data included inconsistent categorisation of farmland, residential, and forestry; the inclusion of properties that were registered as leases; and lack of information on prices paid and the extent of land being sold.

### **Who Owns Scotland**

The Who Owns Scotland project was set up by this author in 1994 and first published in book form in 1996. The project then went online in 2003 with a refreshed website launched in 2009 before going into abeyance due to lack of resources in 2015. It was re-launched in 2022 and aims to identify the ownership of 75% of Scotland’s rural land. It currently documents 2880 landholdings covering 4,779,119ha which, together with the National forest Estate accounts for the ownership of 70.5% of Scotland’s rural land.<sup>5</sup>

The data is updated each year and thus, by the end of 2023, all land sales that had taken place up to the end of 2022 were accounted for. The landownership records consist of the larger

landholdings in Scotland consistent with the aim of achieving 75% coverage (identifying the 2880 smallest landholdings in Scotland would not achieve even 100ha).

This report interrogates the Who Owns Scotland data to provide an analysis of land market activity in 2020 - 2022.

## **Land Reform Scotland Bill**

The Scottish Government will be introducing a land reform Bill to the Scottish Parliament in the coming months. Proposals contained within the consultation paper include a range of new duties placed on owners of larger landholdings. The threshold for being a larger landholding was proposed as 3000ha in the consultation paper but debate since has raised the question as to whether it should be lower - perhaps as low as 500ha. Nothing was said in the consultation paper as to whether such a threshold applies only to single landholdings or to the aggregate extent of smaller ones

## **Data in this Report**

Give time and resource constraints, this paper focusses on rural land sales of over 500ha. In addition, sales of land during 2020-2022 of less than 500ha where the owner in aggregate owns more than 500ha or 3000ha across Scotland have been included as part of the study. Finally, sales to date in 2023 are published for information but not included in the analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The 2880 landholdings documented to date by the Who Owns Scotland project were screened by removing all those where the ownership is recorded in the Register of Sasines as none were sold during 2020 - 2022. All sales of land since 1 April 2003 are recorded in the newer Land Register.

Records were then examined to identify the last time the landholding had been sold for a monetary consideration. Changes of ownership as a result of gifts and inheritance were omitted from the analysis. As will be discussed later, the consideration paid for some land has not been disclosed.

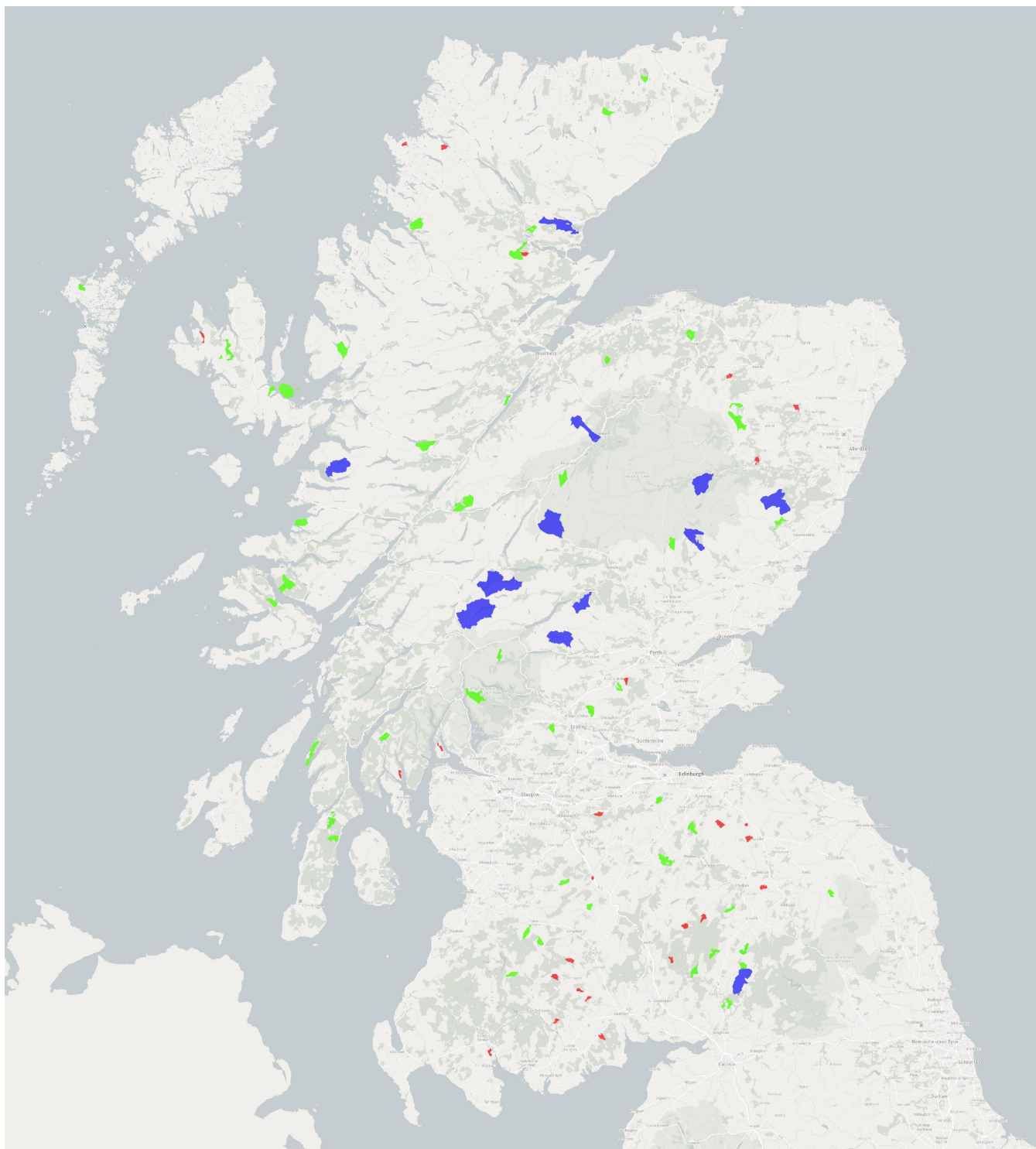
In addition, some land is known to have remained in the same legal ownership during 2020-2022 but the beneficial owner has changed. Typically this occurs when, instead of the title being sold and transferred to a new owner, the buyer acquires the shares in the company. Such transactions are not recorded in the Land Register but at least one is known and is included (and noted) in the analysis.

Records where ownership change was recorded in the Application record (pending land registration) and where there was no evidence of the extent acquired were removed.

The data was then further reduced by removing all sales of land below 500ha where the buyer did not, in aggregate, as a result (or already) own more than 500ha.

## **RESULTS**

In total, 79 landholdings were identified that were sold in 2020-2022.<sup>6</sup> Of these, 54 were larger than 500ha and 25 were less than 500ha but owned by owners who, as a consequence (or already) owned in excess of either 500ha or 3000ha including any sales that have taken place in 2023. See Figure 1 for locations and Table 1 for details.



**Figure 1 Map showing land sales 2020 - 2020**

Blue - land sales >3000 ha

Red - land sales 500 - 3000 ha

Green - Land sales <500 ha where owner owns more than 500 or 3000 ha

Category	2020 (no.)	2020 (ha)	2021 (no.)	2021 (ha.)	2022 (no.)	2022 (ha)	TOTAL No.	TOTAL (ha)
>3000 ha	5	23,462	1	6364	5	21,130	11	50,596
2000 - 3000 ha	5	11,881	1	2303	0	0	6	14,184
1000 - 2000 ha	3	3,461	3	3962	2	2,492	8	9,915
500 - 1000 ha	9	6,274	10	7319	10	6,274	29	19,867
<500ha *	5	1,593	12	4107	8	2,672	25	8,372
<b>TOTAL</b>	27	46,671	27	24055	25	32,568	79	103,294

**Table 1 Sales of rural land 2020 - 2022 by number and total extent (ha)**

\* only includes sales where aggregate owned by owner is over 500 ha or 3000 ha

Table 1 shows that a total of 103,924 ha of land held in holdings of over 500ha (or less than 500 ha where the aggregate owned was >500 ha) was sold in the three years 2020-2022. This represents an average of 0.45% of rural Scotland.

On average half of the land (49.3%) sold by area comprised landholdings above 3000 ha over the three years.

Table 2 breaks these land sales down by whether or not the buyer already owns land (of whatever extent) which, together with the new acquisition exceeds 500 ha or 3000 ha.

	2020 (ha)	2021 (ha)	2022 (ha)	TOTAL (ha)	% of total
<b>No other land</b>	25,195	4,794	13,270	43,259	41.9%
<b>Other land (3000 ha)</b>	19,883	15,154	16,626	51,663	50.0%
<b>Other land (500 ha)</b>	1,593	4,107	2,672	8,372	8.1%
	46,671	24,055	32,568	103,294	

**Table 2 Breakdown of land sales by whether buyer owns other land in Scotland.**

No other land = the buyer owns no other land in Scotland

Other land (3000 ha) = the buyer already or as a consequence owns over 3000 ha.

Other land (500 ha) = the buyer already or as a consequence owns over 500 ha.

As is illustrated above, 42% of the land sales were to owners who owned no other land whereas 58% of the land was acquired by owners who already (or as a consequence) owned over 500ha or 3000 ha.

	2,020	2,021	2,022	TOTAL	% of total
<b>Cash</b>	38,483	15,603	16,002	70,088	67.9%
<b>Implementation of Missives</b>	4,664	8,452	11,094	24,210	23.4%
<b>Implementation of Agreement</b>	0	0	3,747	3,747	3.6%
<b>Transfer of shares</b>	2,293	0	0	2,293	2.2%
<b>No Consideration</b>	371	0	1,725	2,096	2.0%
<b>No information</b>	860	0	0	860	0.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	46,671	24,055	32,568	103,294	100.0%
<b>Total £ sum paid</b>	£89,970,467	£145,065,331	£154,217,647	£389,253,445	

**Table 3 Sales broken down by consideration**

Table 3 reveals that 68% of the land sold was sold for a monetary consideration totalling £389.3 million. Kildrummy Estate in Aberdeenshire is the one known estate that was “sold” via a transfer of shares but remained in the same legal ownership. It is included in the analysis.

Of note is the 23.4% of land sold in “Implementation of Missives”. Section 12 of the Land Register Rules etc. (Scotland) Regulations 2014 require that certain information be entered on the title sheet of the Land Register.<sup>7</sup> These include the consideration and date of entry. The consideration is typically the sum of money being paid or such other recognised means of transfer of title (such as for love, favour and affection - typically used for gifts; for certain good and onerous causes - typically used to implement court decisions; and implementation of will - which conveys property to a beneficiary of a will).

The information entered on the title sheet as the consideration is derived from the deed presented for recording. In recent years, the phrase “Implementation of Missives” has appeared more frequently and appears to be almost wholly associated with land being bought and sold as part of forestry and carbon investments. One large sale, understood to be for £33,000,000, is recorded as being sold “in implementation of missives”. One possible reason for this formulation is to obscure the sums being paid in what is a new and emerging (and somewhat speculative) market.

Table 4 identifies all the sales of land over 3000 ha in extent.

Landholding	Owner	Extent (ha)	Consideration
Invermearan Estate	Profound UK Holdings Ltd.	7,686	£4,180,000
Glen Dye Moor	Par Forestry IV Holdco Ltd.	6,364	Implementation of Missives
Invergeldie	Invergeldie Conservation Ltd.	4,776	£20,000,000
Abergeldie Estate	Caerd Ltd.	4,703	Implementation of Missives
Kilchoan Estate	Kilchoan Estate Company (Knoydart) Ltd	4,514	£1,234,000
The Barracks Plantation	Commercial Forestry LLP	4,475	£23,500,000
Cambusmore Estate	Cambusmore Ltd.	4,464	Implementation of Missives
Kinrara Estate	Lost Forest Ltd.	3,764	£8,800,000
Auch Estate	Profound UK Holdings Ltd.	3,747	Implementation of Agreement
Glen Prosen	Scottish Ministers	3,440	£17,555,000
Urlar Estate	TOF Corporate Trustee Ltd.	3,023	£7,750,000
<b>Table 4 All sales of land over 3000 ha in 2020 - 2023</b>			

Table 5 identifies all the sales of land for over £10,000,000 (where the price is revealed).

Landholding	Owner	Price paid (£)	Extent (ha)
Shawrig Plantation	Gresham House Forest Fund VI LP	£35,000,000	839
Ramsaygrain & Rashiegrain Woodlands	Western Power Distribution Nomineeco Ltd.	£31,100,000	748
Priesthaugh Forest Complex	Gresham House Forest Growth and Sustainability LP	£28,505,800	777
The Barracks Plantation	Commercial Forestry LLP	£23,500,000	4,475
Invergeldie	Invergeldie Conservation Ltd.	£20,000,000	4,776
Dodknowes Forest	Gresham House Forest Growth and Sustainability LP	£18,500,000	322
Glen Prosen	Scottish Ministers	£17,555,000	3,440
Auchenstroan Forest	Gresham House Forest Fund VI LP	£17,350,000	483
Westloch Farm	Auchencairn Forest LLP	£13,206,450	1,030
Todrig	Gresham House Forest Growth and Sustainability LP	£12,200,000	579
Bogrie Forest	Auchencairn LLP	£10,600,000	267
<b>Table 5 Sales by value over £10,000,000 (where known) 2020 - 2022</b>			

Table 6 shows the most prominent buyers of land who, whilst they did not acquire landholdings of over any potential threshold to trigger the proposed duties in the forthcoming land reform bill (whether 500ha or 3000ha), did either already, or as a consequence of their acquisition, own land that exceed either of these thresholds.

Owner	No. of acquisitions <500 ha	No. of acquisitions 500 - 3000 ha	Total ha acquired	Total ha owned as at 31 Jan 2024.
Gresham House	7	7	7,987	53,783
Foresight Group	5	1	2,518	8,096
Auchencairn Forest LLP	2	3	3,598	10,612
Commercial Forestry LLP	1	2	5,386	5,386
Scottish Ministers	2	1	1,303	7,465,000
Highlands Rewilding Ltd.	1	2	2,273	2,273
Trustees of The Forestry Carbon Sequestration Fund	2	1	1,734	1,734

**Table 6 Buyers of smaller landholdings whose aggregate ownership is greater than 3000 ha**

So, for example, Graham House acquired 7 holdings of less than 500 and 7 of between 500 and 3000 ha which, depending on the final threshold, would not trigger the relevant duties despite the company owning 53,412 ha of land.<sup>8</sup>

Scottish Ministers were also acquiring smaller parcels of land despite being Scotland's largest landowner. All of the owners in this list are engaged in forestry or the carbon market illustrating how prominent this market is among those who already own large areas of land in Scotland but are continuing to acquire more.

## DISCUSSION

This report derived its information from examination of individual titles for the period 2020 - 2022 and the information does not therefore rely on any assumptions or interpretation of imperfect data. It may inadvertently omit some sales but this is considered unlikely among the larger landholdings which have all been individually checked in relation to the last change of ownership. The only known landholdings of over 500ha not yet incorporated in the Who Owns Scotland project are those that remain in the Register of Sasines and which as a consequence cannot have been transacted in 2020-2022.

The results do confirm the conclusions of the Scottish Land Commission's 2023 Rural Land Market report by its data analyst, Hanna Wheatley (See Table 5 below).



Extent (ha)	2020 SLC	2020 WOS	2021 SLC	2021 WOS	2022 SLC	2022 WOS	TOTAL SLC	TOTAL WOS
500 - 1000	9	9	8	10	10	10	27	29
1000 - 2000	4	3	2	3	3	2	9	8
2000 - 3000	3	5	2	1	2	0	7	6
>3000	5	5	1	1	2	5	8	11
TOTAL	21	22	13	15	17	17	51	54

**Table 7 Comparison between SLC data\* and data in this report highlighted in yellow.**

\* Derived from Table 5 in Wheatley, H., 2023 Rural Land Market Report. Analysis of land sales data 2020-2022. Scottish Land Commission.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents the data and is not intended to present any conclusions. Yet one observation is worth making.

The overwhelming majority of sales of large scale landholdings in 2020-2022 have been by organisations engaged in “natural capital” markets and investment. The report does not publish the information on who is behind the companies involved but they are almost all financial organisations ranging from asset managers such as Gresham House through to TOF Corporate Trustee Ltd. which is the corporate trustee of Oxford University Endowment Management Ltd. which manages funds owned by the University of Oxford.

The sales identified thus confirm the trend in recent years towards institutional acquisitions of Scottish land focussed on monetary returns from the financialisation of nature.

If resources permit, the author will conduct further analysis of the land market in relation of transactions got between 200ha and 500ha and seek to public this later in 2024. A fuller analysis of who owns Scotland, updating the author’s 2010 statistics is also planned for early summer 2024.<sup>9</sup>

A similar report will be published in early 2025 examining the land market in 2023. Meanwhile, as research continues on transactions conducted during 2023 (which will not be complete until the end of 2024), Table 8 illustrates those know about to date identified on the same basis as those analysed above for 2020 - 2022.

Landholding	County	Extent (ha)	Owner	Consideration
Dalnacardoch Estate	Perth	7551	Tellus Ltd.	Implementation of Missives
Bràigh Raithneach Estate	Perth	5317	Bràigh Raithneach LLP	Implementation of Missives
Blackburn and Hartsgarth	Roxburgh	4588	B&H Conservation Ltd.	Implementation of Missives
Comer	Stirling	2339	Comer Farm Ltd.	Implementation of Missives
Morefield	Ross & Cromarty	1914	Summer Isles Enterprises Ltd.	£1,500,000
Tayvallich	Argyll	1410	Highlands Rewilding Ltd.	£11,131,950
Glenuig	Inverness	1359	Robert & Marion Clegg & Alasdair & James Begg as Partners of & Trustees for Firm of Forsay Caravans	Implementation of Agreement
Birkcleugh & Nether Whitecleugh	Lanark	506	Qarlbo Scotland Ltd.	£3,100,510
Bedehouse	Aberdeen	380	FSFC Company 1 Ltd.	£3,400,000
Lagg and Loch Poll	Sutherland	250	Loch Assynt Lodge Estate Ltd.	£1,250,000
<p><b>Table 8 Transactions so far identified in 2023 on the same basis as Table 1</b></p>				

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> See Wightman, 2023. ScotLIS 3 - a critical tool for Scotland. David Hume Institute, Edinburgh.

Available at [https://andywightman.scot/docs/SCOTLIS\\_2023.pdf](https://andywightman.scot/docs/SCOTLIS_2023.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> McMorran, R., Thomson, S. and Glendinning, J. (2022) Rural Land Market Data Report. Scottish Land Commission, Commissioned Report.

Available at [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62baf1c63b6e6\\_20220628%20Rural%20Land%20Market%20Data%20Analysis%20Report.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62baf1c63b6e6_20220628%20Rural%20Land%20Market%20Data%20Analysis%20Report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> McMorran, R., Glendinning, J and Glass, J. Rural Land Markets Insights Report. Scottish Land Commission, Commissioned Report.

Available at [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62543b9498bb1\\_Rural%20Land%20Market%20Insights%20Report%20April%202022.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62543b9498bb1_Rural%20Land%20Market%20Insights%20Report%20April%202022.pdf)

and

Merrell, I., Pate, L., Glendinning, J. and Thomson S. (2023) Rural Land Market Insights Report 2023. A report commissioned by the Scottish Land Commission.

Available at [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/645cda7a2ba61\\_Rural%20Land%20Markets%20Insights%202023.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/645cda7a2ba61_Rural%20Land%20Markets%20Insights%202023.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Land Commission, (2023), Rural Land Market Report. Analysis of land sales data 2020 - 2022. 2022.

Available at [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/65644f2d6ed20\\_Rural%20Land%20Market%20Report.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/65644f2d6ed20_Rural%20Land%20Market%20Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See [www.whoownsscotland.org.uk](http://www.whoownsscotland.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> Where available, the qualifying date was the date of entry. Where this is not available, the date is the date of registration which will be some days, weeks, or even months after the date of entry.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2014/150/regulation/12/made>

<sup>8</sup> The total extent of ownership of land by Gresham House is a provisional figure based on Who Owns Scotland data at 31 January 2024 and will be updated later as part of a more comprehensive analysis of who owns Scotland 2024.

<sup>9</sup> See Wightman, A (2010) The Poor Had No Lawyers. Who owns Scotland and how they got it. Birlinn, Edinburgh. Chapter 12.