

# News Review

## Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Land reform and the review of agricultural holdings legislation have exercised the minds of many over the past year and we are now in a position where both will be brought before the Scottish Parliament before the 2016 election.

There is much romanticism and ideology applied to the arguments on either side but as a modern rural business we recognise the benefits to the Scottish economy of a vibrant and thriving rural sector. We also recognise the threats of hasty and ill prepared legislation and the likelihood of the unintended consequences that inevitably result.

If we consider the scale of agricultural holding needed to operate efficiently and effectively, then what seems to have been lost on those promoting reform is that the process of amalgamation in agricultural units has been going on steadily over time and particularly since the end of WW2 as labour has become more expensive and machinery more productive. In our own case we estimate that the average farm tenancy has doubled in size since the 1950s.

The ability to access land without owning it (and having to find the capital to buy it) is a valuable characteristic of Scottish agriculture. Those countries that are even more dominated by owner-occupation than Scotland, such as Ireland, face real difficulties with regard to the structure of their farming industry: small farms often struggle financially because of their scale but are unable to expand because of the lack of available land and the cost.

## Agricultural tenancies – land matters



Farm tenancies are therefore extremely important. They provide tenure flexibility for existing businesses and new entrants to the sector.

This is further evidenced by our own tenants who are immediately alert to opportunities for additional ground to add to their units should the Estate have any farm come back in hand. It is the participants and businesses in the industry that are constantly striving for scale and flexibility, so it seems perverse to have a Government and minority pressure groups arguing against what a large part of the industry itself sees as desirable.

As a responsible landlord it is in our interest to work with our tenants to ensure their businesses are robust and successful. We view this as extremely important at a time when we are told that, in the long-term, subsidy support levels are likely to decline. Scottish agricultural policy must

be focused on competitive businesses delivering quality products for the market. While there is undoubtedly a place for smaller units and crofts this should not be at the expense of the scale required to ensure that the Scottish agricultural sector contributes positively to the economy and employment.

It is tempting, when thinking about agricultural policy, to view the current industry structure as something that needs to be defended as if that current structure is the best it could possibly be. However, a strategic vision that puts a primary focus on allowing the market to operate must also be one that accepts change. We must ensure that any such change results in a statutory regime that is flexible, fair, unambiguous and stable. Only if we achieve that and encourage a risk-averse landowner to let his land will we be able to have a thriving tenanted agricultural sector.

CONTACT US - If you have any comment on the content of this news review, or wish to contact Seafield or Strathspey Estates on any relevant issue then you can write, or telephone our offices:

Will Anderson, Chief Executive;  
Andrew Norval, Property Director;  
Seafield Estate Office, Cullen, Buckie, Banffshire AB56 4UW.  
T: 01542 840777 F: 01542 841413  
E: [mail@seafield-estate.co.uk](mailto:mail@seafield-estate.co.uk)  
W: [www.seafield-estate.co.uk](http://www.seafield-estate.co.uk)

Strathspey Estate Office,  
Old Spey Bridge Road,  
Grantown-on-Spey, PH26 3NQ.  
T: 01479 872529 F: 01479 873452  
E: [mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk](mailto:mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk)  
W: [www.strathspey-estate.co.uk](http://www.strathspey-estate.co.uk)

## Brodies supports Scottish wildlife charity with 'Legal Eagle' sponsorship

In our last newsletter we reported on our golden eagles and our youngest chick in particular who, at only 3 and a half months old, was still with her parents and hadn't at that stage flown far from the nest.

Scottish solicitors firm Brodies LLP decided to sponsor the eaglet in support of the wildlife and conservation charity dedicated to protecting threatened and at-risk species in Scotland.

The bird of prey, now named Brodie, is one of four young eaglets satellite tagged by the Highland Foundation for Wildlife and her progress will be monitored using a GPS transmitter, allowing ornithologists to follow Brodie's life story, tracking her movements and identifying where she starts breeding when she reaches the age of four or five.

Brodies' sponsorship will cover the costs of the satellite transmitter and of downloading the GPS data to [www.raptortrack.org](http://www.raptortrack.org), a collaboration between the Highland Foundation for Wildlife, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage, the environmental charity Natural Research, RSPB and landowners in the National Park. The website, which is regularly updated with data from tracked eagles, gives ornithologists a unique insight into the life and behaviour of this iconic species.

The golden eagle population in Scotland has had a chequered history; pesticide use during the 1950s and 60s was detrimental to their breeding success. Illegal human persecution is still a serious problem in some areas, while ecological degradation in areas of the north and west Highlands has reduced food availability. A new national survey in 2015 will give the first definitive record of the Scottish population in over a decade.

Will Anderson, Chief Executive, Seafield and Strathspey Estates, said:

"We have enjoyed a long and very positive relationship with the Highland Foundation for Wildlife in supporting the valuable conservation work it carries out to protect osprey and golden eagle populations on the Strathspey Estate. We are delighted that Brodies has thrown its weight behind this conservation project by sponsoring Brodie the eaglet and, in so doing, helping to increase our knowledge and safeguard the future of these birds which have been part of the fabric of the Highlands for thousands of years."



## Seafield & Strathspey Estates sponsors Grantown 250

Seafield & Strathspey Estates have a long history and the family was instrumental in the founding of Grantown on Spey.

The family name of the Earl of Seafield is Ogilvie-Grant. In 1765 James Grant had a village marked out in lots on a barren moor. He was affectionately known as 'the good Sir James' after he responded to a severe crop failure and famine in the late 1700s by selling his fine Edinburgh townhouse to buy and distribute grain among the starving of Strathspey. The village was named after him.

It seems only fitting then that the Estate should become a major sponsor of a festival which marks the 250 year anniversary of Grantown.

Grantown 250, which is co-ordinated by the Grantown Society, will involve the whole community. Happening between 21st and 28th June this year, the festival is a celebration for local people, but it also aims to attract visitors from the whole of the UK and abroad with its packed programme of exciting activities and attractions.



Focusing on seven themes: heritage, environment, tourism, trade, music, food and sport, there is something to suit everyone, whether as a spectator or a participant.

Among the many events on offer will be sporting demonstrations, competitions and challenges including cycling and golf; food and drink celebrations including gala dinners, banquets, buffets, barbecues, tastings and a historic pub crawl; musical performances featuring all genres from jazz to pop, gospel to folk and country to classical, with hotels, bars and cafes alive with music. Farming and forestry will be represented as well as old crafts such as woodworking, weaving, needlework and costume. Visitors can also enjoy a spectacle of flowers, drama and fashion, films, exhibitions, quizzes and history. Many of the events will be in period costume.

The aim of Grantown 250 is to provide information, interest and entertainment for all, while providing a boost for the Grantown economy and to leave a lasting legacy for the town.

The Estate is very proud to be involved in the event and wishes all involved a huge success.

[www.grantown250.org](http://www.grantown250.org)

## Top Tup

Congratulations to Robert McDonald, the Reidhaven Estate tenant at Castle Grant Home Farm, Grantown, who achieved the top price at the Dingwall Hill Ram Show and Sale in October 2014 with a two shear (born spring 2012) North County Cheviot ram bred on the farm, at a figure of £5000.

Robert has been breeding North County Cheviot Tups for 30 years but has only relatively recently been selling through the ring rather than privately. Notwithstanding this success, it does not threaten his overall top price of £17,000 achieved at Lairg in 2012!



## Silage Success

Well done to Kenny Christie, the Seafield Estate tenant at Easter Whyntie Farm, Banff, who won the 2014/2015 Baled Silage Competition run by the North of Scotland Grassland Society. It was the second cut taken from a 24 acre field run in a five year rotation alongside malting barley.

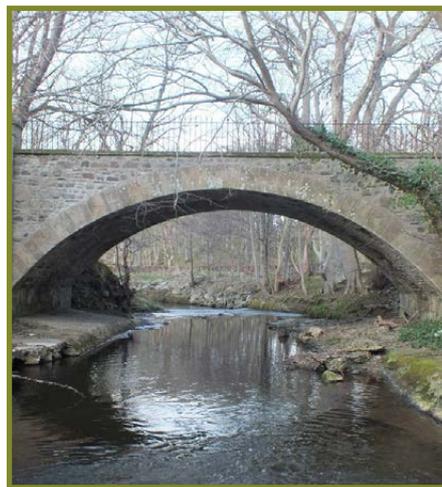
“Good silage is important as it forms the main part of the diet for store bullocks bought in for fattening” said Mr Christie, who added: “The key for me is going for quality silage and not a bulk crop, as the better your silage the better your stock will do on it.”



## Historic Built Heritage

The Estate has over 40 bridges, with many being traditional stone arches of considerable age. We have a programme of maintenance on these structures and this year we are cutting back vegetation and re-pointing the stonework under the supervision of Allister Smith, our Clerk of Works, and with the help of local contractors. It is testament to the skills of the original builders that most of these bridges are in good order and still able to cope with modern vehicles and loads. The maintenance work will preserve and protect the bridges and allow them to continue in use for many years to come.

We will also continue with removal of Ivy from the walls of the Cullen House Garden, a task that will preserve the stonework and once again reveal the real beauty of the walls.



## Sandy Lewis retires as chief executive of Seafield & Strathspey Estates

Sandy Lewis joined the Estates in 1977 as Estate Accountant and was responsible for the management of financial systems and accountancy staff. He worked through the introduction of computerised accounts and managed the computer systems within the office, writing many of the programs himself. He took up the position of Chief Executive in 1996 and has successfully steered the business through some difficult times, seeing the results of his hard work in the robustness and successful performance of the various departments that comprise the Estates today.

The respect he earned from staff was demonstrated by the number who wished to attend and contribute to his retirement presentation.

Sandy will retain a consultancy role with the Estates, including representing them on a number of committees where his knowledge and experience are invaluable.

Sandy and his wife, Nancy, hope to spend more time with their grandchildren and touring with their motorhome – not necessarily in that order!



## Will Anderson is new Chief Executive

Will Anderson is a Chartered Forester with over 30 years experience in forestry and land management, mostly in the north and northeast of Scotland. He started as a contractor before attending forestry college and qualifying in 1989.

Prior to joining Seafield & Strathspey Estates, Will worked on the Glenlivet Estate and was a forestry manager and forestry consultant for two firms of chartered surveyors. He has held the position of Forestry Director at Seafield & Strathspey Estates since 2007. Also involved in forestry industry representation, he holds several committee posts including a Confor directorship and acting as their North Scotland Regional Chairman.

On his taking over the role of Chief Executive, Will said “I am very much enjoying the challenge of this new position and although Sandy is a hard act to follow, the support I have received from the management and staff has helped tremendously in the transition.”

## Arrivals and Departures

We have had a number of staff changes in the past year with Mike Ridley retiring and Stefan Rendal leaving to return to his family's farm. Donny Ness, an experienced local farm worker, has joined Old Cullen Farms. Mairi Meiklejohn is our new Property Assistant. Her background is in estates and facilities management having worked for Fife Council and the Ministry of Defence. Anna Beadle is the new Estate Accountant, taking over that role from Sandy Lewis. Anna has worked for a number of large companies and has run her own successful business before relocating to Moray with her husband and family.

## Lionel turns the tables

Lionel Main, Head Ghillie at Grantown, was a joiner by trade before becoming a ghillie and has used his skills to repair the various wooden boat sheds and fishing huts on the Estate. He also has an eye for superior timber and has selected specific parts of larch trees that have been felled on the Estate to make tables and benches which are of superb quality.

Pictured here are some examples of his handiwork.



## Old Grantown Wood

While much of our conservation work is centred around animals and birds, we do not overlook the smaller and less obvious plants. In Old Grantown Wood, near Castle Grant, both Twinflower and the even rarer One Flowered Wintergreen were being threatened by expansion of Rhododendron.

In a partnership with The Cairngorms Rare Plant Project and the charity Plantlife, the estate has cleared back the Rhododendron to protect these species. Work will continue to control the Rhododendron regrowth over the next two to three years to allow the Twinflower and Wintergreen to expand and enable the recovery of the other, more common, pinewood ground flora.



## Tight Lines

Gordon Smith, one of our keepers at Cullen, is a keen angler and has had success before but last year he excelled himself. On the final day of the season on the River Dee, in the Trees Pool at Birse, he caught a fish measuring 46 inches which was estimated at 37 lbs. It was witnessed by the Ghillie, Doug Murray, before being safely returned to the river. On the opening day of this season Gordon was presented with the Park Trophy for the heaviest fly caught salmon on the Dee in 2014.



## Pupils hooked on salmon project

Local school children help to hatch, look after and release juvenile salmon as part of the popular 'Salmon in the Classroom' programme run by the Spey Foundation.

This year three schools were selected to take part: Knockando primary; Cullen primary and Aviemore primary. Each class began the programme by taking part in an interactive lesson on the River Spey, the ecosystem and the lifecycle of the Atlantic salmon. Polly Burns, Assistant Biologist and co-ordinator of the Spey Foundation's education programme said, "All the classes were attentive and listened really well, asking some brilliant questions, particularly when the time came for them to be released."

The classes were introduced to their salmon eggs, and given detailed instructions on how to care for them to ensure their survival at the release stage.

When the eggs hatched into alevins; the stage when the fish still have their egg sacs which provide nutrition, it was time to release the salmon into the local burn, where the alevins could mature in the wild.

Pictured are the pupils from Aviemore's P5 class whose salmon were released into the Milton burn.

In June the pupils will be given an opportunity to return to the area of the burn they stocked and see how much the fish have changed and grown.



Photo by P Burns