

News Review

Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Increasingly estates like those at Strathspey and Cullen are in the spotlight for what they do or do not deliver by way of public amenity and biodiversity.

In our last News Review I wrote about public access and the *Enjoy Estates - You're Welcome* campaign. This time it seems fitting to recap on what we are doing for biodiversity and, as you will see, it has been a busy year.

So often the finger is pointed at landowners for having a blinkered approach to habitat management, for favouring one species over another, or simply having no plan, and no cohesive, forward-thinking outlook.

Last year, Seafield Estate and Strathspey Estate were both recognised by *Wildlife Estates*, a European initiative to establish a network of exemplary estates showcasing simple principles of good management and conservation, and following the principles of the EU Natura 2000 directive.

This is a tremendous accolade for us, and we are now working hard with other organisations to further this level of commitment from other landholdings under the new *Wildlife Estates Scotland* initiative that is to be piloted in the Cairngorms National Park. This initiative will recognise estates that manage their wildlife resources sustainably with full consideration for the natural environment as well as many other determining factors.

Working with nature - for everyone



Radio tagged black grouse. Photo: Desmond Dugan, RSPB

But Seafield and Strathspey Estates are not exceptions and there are many others that are involved in wildlife and conservation projects, many under the radar and without recognition, but quietly delivering the fabulous patchwork of biodiversity that we equate with the Scottish countryside and that is so often taken for granted.

We, for example, continue to be (or have recently been) actively involved in projects on capercaillie, the Scottish wildcat, grouse, swift, deer, osprey, golden eagle, hobby, goldeneye, and the Slavonian grebe.

With partners we undertake conservation projects on the River Spey, habitat improvement initiatives on its tributaries like the Milton and Batten burns, removal of the invasive ranunculus weed, fish monitoring, pearl

mussel conservation, catch and release of salmon and sea trout, and broodstock capture.

There is the ongoing Kinveachy regeneration project, aspen woodland conservation, lowland bog restoration and many other habitat projects.

In this issue of the News Review there are more conservation stories and reports because this is a major part of what we do. It may not, like farming or forestry, deliver significant sums to our bottom line as a business, but we recognise our commitment to biodiversity and sustainability for the good of the countryside, for the good of the species themselves – whether animals, birds, fish, plants or trees – and for the good of the public, who I hope can gain considerable enjoyment and satisfaction from this aspect of our daily work.

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:

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Wildcats on TV

BBC's Autumnwatch visited Strathspey Estate on a specific quest last October to find and film wildcats - and presenter Liz Bonnin made this even more challenging because she wanted to be filmed actually sighting one! One month before the BBC visit, we positioned three camera traps to try and establish where wildcats might best be seen, and we were out with a spotlight at night on the remotest parts of the estate. We had also been told of sightings by a local farm resident and had found evidence in an old barn of rabbits being taken and eaten that suggested we might be looking in the right place.

When the BBC arrived to film, their cameraman was out all night using infrared equipment and glimpsed what he thought might have been a wildcat. We then tried to corroborate this with other evidence like droppings, claw-marks on trees and other signs.

On the next night, the whole crew went out by Land Rover with a spotlight. It was a cold, bright moonlit night with stags roaring everywhere, but after about five hours searching (by then about 1.00am) we had seen absolutely no sign. We then moved to an area about four miles away in the open with rocky outcrops where we had noticed evidence previously and were delighted at this location to get the most fantastic shots of wildcat kittens. A visit the next day also showed that grouse had been brought to them for food after a successful hunt by an adult wildcat.

BBC Autumnwatch is seen by between two and four million viewers and it is tremendous that they came to Strathspey Estate again, and that we were able to help them in their quest to broadcast these fantastic Scottish wildlife pictures to homes not just in the UK but worldwide.

Scottish Wildcat. Photo: Nick Law



Radio tracking golden eagles

The progress of our two Strathspey Estate golden eagles, Strathy and Cullen, can now be followed with other birds on the RaptorTrack website. RaptorTrack is a joint working project with the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), the Highland Foundation for Wildlife, the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), RSPB, and land managers and estates across the Cairngorms National Park.



Frank Law (left) Sporting Manager, and Wayne Witcher, Head Gamekeeper, with one of the eaglets. Photo: Roy Dennis

The aims of the RaptorTrack project are to raise awareness of raptor species within the National Park, to gain information on raptor movements in the Park, and to raise awareness about and act as a deterrent to wildlife crime.

In June 2010 two young eaglets from a tree eyrie on the estate were ringed and tagged by Roy Dennis of the Highland Foundation for Wildlife. Two other young eagles from other locations in the Park were also fitted with transmitters at around the same time.

Their movements can be tracked on the web and you can follow their daily progress on www.raptortrack.org where there is also a commentary of their movements.

The estate has also been undertaking a supplementary feeding programme for golden eagles for the last two years, deliberately leaving deer carcasses on the hill for them to feed on.

Wildthings! visit

This report from Wildthings!

In November 2010, Strathspey Estate gave ten teenagers from Charleston Academy, Inverness, a fantastic day to remember. These ten young folk had come away for five days with Wildthings!, an environmental education charity based in Moray, to learn some bushcraft skills, winter navigation and woodland conservation, as well as Mesolithic crafts for their Intermediate Bushcraft course and John Muir Explore Award.

As part of this five day programme, Strathspey Estate provided the group with the unique opportunity of learning about how the estates manage their deer as well as joining head gamekeeper Wayne Witcher, in the deer larder to learn about skinning a roe deer.

Then, back at their base at Glenmore, the teenagers learned about the different parts of the deer and how they have been used historically. They processed the skin and, over a few days of hard, smelly work, they made some wonderfully soft and smooth buckskin. A few buttons were then made from the deer antlers and, with some decorations from various bones, the group produced some fantastic pouches.

All this hard work was generously rewarded with five different types of jerky that the group had made from the deer that they had skinned in the larder!

Wildthings! Would like to thank Strathspey Estate for their generosity of spirit in sharing their experience and skills with the teenagers. It truly was a day to remember!



Wildthings! in the deer larder.

Easter and Wester Gallovie let

The adjoining farms at Easter and Wester Gallovie, Dulnain Bridge, Grantown on Spey have been let to a young farmer from the local area, but new to the estate.

The two holdings amounting to 568 acres (230 hectares) have been let on a 15 year Limited Duration Tenancy (LDT) commencing 28 May. The two stock rearing farms have a good balance of arable, permanent pasture, rotational grass, and rough grazing/heather hill.

New hide at Avielochan

Billing itself as 'The UK's Wildlife Hotel', we have been working with the Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey to provide a new hide for birdwatchers at Avielochan. The purpose-designed timber hide constructed by the hotel on estate ground is for use by their guests and also incorporates single-level disabled access from immediately adjoining parking.



The view from the new hide.

Avielochan is a paradise for bird watchers, offering sightings of Slavonian grebe (of which only around 22 pairs nest in Scotland), red throated divers, goldeneye ducks, willow warblers, little grebes and tufted ducks as well as many other species.

The Hotel has its own Bird Watching and Wildlife Club and is a major and proactive player in the wildlife tourism sector in NE Scotland.

Estates put health and safety first

Croner Consulting is long established as health and safety consultant to both Seafeld Estate at Cullen and Strathspey Estate. Croner's twice-yearly visits keep us apprised of relevant health and safety issues particularly since our businesses operate in three of the most high risk areas in terms of health and safety - construction, forestry and farming. Health and safety monitoring is also an essential part of the estates retaining their UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) accreditation.

We undertake an ongoing programme of training, monitoring, risk assessment, supplier/contractor certification, and information exchange with other similar businesses and representative organisations to ensure that our systems are effective, current and fit for purpose.

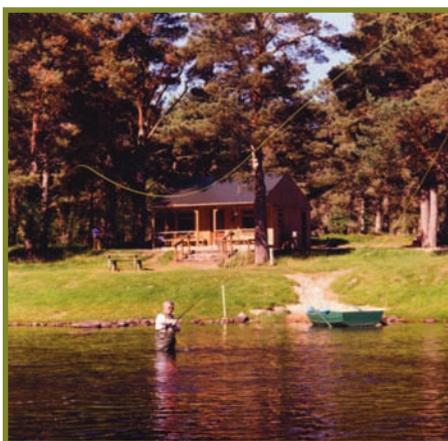
Catch and Release

To safeguard against fish being incorrectly handled during the catch and release process, especially where anglers are not accompanied by a ghillie, Best Practice Guidelines are being prepared in an initiative for a number of rivers across Scotland. This is important because fish damaged or injured during catch and release may have their ability to spawn hampered.

This initiative is led by a number of Salmon Fishery Boards including Spey, Tweed, Annan and Esk, with the Spey Fishery Board being represented by Lionel Main, Strathspey Estate's head ghillie.

The River Spey's reported catch and release statistics for 2010 were 81 per cent for salmon and 68 per cent for sea trout, and the estate is pleased to report that its own figures exceed this with 85 per cent of all salmon and grilse caught on Strathspey Estate water being released, and 75 per cent of all sea trout.

It is intended that as well as printed Best Practice Guidelines for catch and release a DVD may also be produced to be made widely available.



Hobby nest on Strathspey Estate

Hobbies were first found to be breeding successfully in Strathspey 10 years ago, and last year a nest was identified and discovered to be home to well-grown young. Although mobbed by the male and female hobby in the process, the three chicks were taken and successfully lowered to the ground in a special bag to be ringed and measured.

Intelligent Sport® UK Challenge and BG Energy Challenge 2010



Photo: BG Energy Challenge

A popular venue for orienteering events of all levels, Strathspey Estate was a natural choice for parts of the 2010 Intelligent Sport® UK Challenge and 2010 BG Energy Challenge that took place at Loch Vaa last year.

The Intelligent Sport® UK Challenge is the UK's 'biggest and most infamous team development event,' and 'the ultimate team building exercise for all businesses.' Up to 120 corporate teams took part over three days and raised money for the NSPCC.

The BG Challenge involved 40 teams from the energy sector taking part in a number of mental, physical and strategic challenges also over three days. Between them the two events raised over £500,000 for selected childrens charities.

Competitive activities included cycling, orienteering and construction in a series of challenges that tested the skills and stamina of participating teams to the limit day and night.

Sir Geoff Hurst MBE, President of the charity SPARKS, and Ambassador of the BG Energy Challenge, as well as competing in the event himself, said:

"I'm delighted to support the BG Energy Challenge and thoroughly enjoyed the whole weekend. The sense of achievement of all the teams was fantastic."

The largest chick, a female named Aeshna, was also satellite tagged.

The name Aeshna was chosen as this is the scientific name of the larger dragonflies that are a favourite food of young hobbies.

Their nest also contained sand martin and swallow feathers and part of a bat wing, all of which form a part of the diet of this wonderful and rarely seen falcon.

Buckie High School pupils find out more about deer

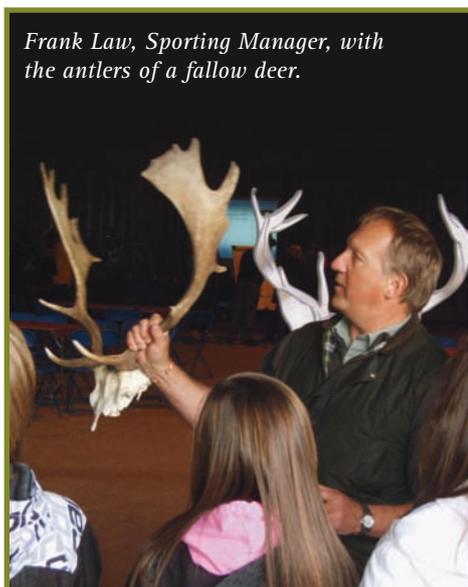
The entire first year from Buckie High School attended a day about 'Deer and Venison' hosted by Seafield Estate and the Deer Commission for Scotland (now a part of SNH) at The Home Farm, Cullen. The day was designed to increase understanding among students of deer, their management, the value of venison in financial terms and as a healthy, locally produced food, and their interaction with other aspects of estate management activity.

The youngsters learned to identify different types of deer and were shown how the deer manager goes about his work - in this case culling roe deer, and the safety measures needed when using a high velocity rifle in a farm environment, with particular emphasis on placing the shot for a clean kill.

They were shown a skinned deer carcass and all the cuts of meat were explained.

Malcolm Schofield, Buckie High School PE teacher, who led the visit, said:

"This has been a fantastic opportunity for all the children from the local area. The natural tendency here is to look to the sea, and particularly offshore for knowledge about what goes on around us, and possibly for work in the future. It's a tremendous way to show these youngsters what goes on in the countryside around them. Within the *Curriculum for Excellence*, sustainable living is important and this demonstrates that in a real life situation."



Frank Law, Sporting Manager, with the antlers of a fallow deer.

Seafield Estate Open Farm Sunday at Bogtown Farm, Portsoy

Members of the public were able to find out what happens on an arable farm when Bogtown Farm, Portsoy, Banffshire opened its gates on Open Farm Sunday last year.

Open Farm Sunday is the national farm open day, co-ordinated by LEAF - Linking Environment and Farming.

Visitors were able to see machinery displays and equipment from both past and present, and displays of associated local agricultural businesses including the Glenglasshaugh Distillery and Grampian Oat Products.

There were also exhibits from the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI) and the estate's forestry and gamekeeping departments as well as a 'factfinder' quiz.

The estate gave hourly bus rides to neighbouring Ley Farm (courtesy of Messrs Gray) where visitors were able to see the farm's composting enterprise which diverts Aberdeenshire Council's kitchen and garden waste away from landfill and converts it into a useful agricultural product.

Seafield Estate ground gives up historical finds - old and new

So much of our history remains buried in the ground, but keen metal detectorists and archaeology enthusiasts succeed in bringing some of it to light. In this respect 2010 has been an exceptional year, the most notable find being a medieval buckle discovered by an enthusiast close to Castle Hill, Cullen. The piece dates from between 1200 - 1300 and is now on view in Elgin Museum. It is notable because of its zoomorphic design that includes mythical and fantastical winged creatures, or wyverns, and it still carries the remnants of tinning, or thinly coating iron or steel with tinplate.

A report in October last year from one metal detectorist who keeps in close contact with the estate and informs us of all his finds reads: 2 musket balls, 1 pistol ball, 1 rifle bullet (1830s), 1 large shoe buckle, 1 horse harness buckle, 1 heavy horse reins guide, 1 pocket watch

Speyside Black Grouse Study Group

Strathspey Estate is a founder member of the Speyside Black Grouse Study Group, other partners being the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and RSPB Scotland.

The aims of the group are to bring together land managers, key organisations and individuals with an interest in black grouse in Badenoch and Strathspey; to undertake an annual monitoring programme of known and potential lek sites; to encourage members to undertake positive management of black grouse; and to help raise awareness of problems facing the birds at a local and national level.

The group reported in its latest annual update that the black grouse population in Strathspey has held up well despite two very severe winters, and a good breeding season in 2009 has boosted the population by some 26 per cent with 511 cocks recorded at 106 lek sites. The Cairngorms National Park is an important area for the black grouse population in a national context.



Photo: Desmond Dugan