



News Review

Foreword

by Lord Seafield

We have always seen education as a priority – at all levels. Telling people what we do and why we do it, which might be farming, forestry, conservation management, property management, fisheries, renewables, tourism or everything else we are involved in as a business, is always better than leaving them to speculate.

Our News Review is one way that we tell the public, and others who might be interested, something about what we have been doing over the last 12 months.

Engaging with schools and colleges is an area where we have been especially active. For the last ten years we have been taking parties of school pupils onto the estates both at Cullen and Strathspey either to look at specific areas of our business, or to get a more general feel about how the modern estate fits into the fabric of the countryside and indeed the overall economy.

Sometimes these initiatives have been purely our own, but more often than not we have worked in partnership with organisations such as the Royal Northern Countryside initiative (RNCI), The Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET), the education department of the Local Authorities, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, and others.

We have had school pupils aged from six to 18 come and visit us. We have had special days devoted to deer (both low ground and upland), to fisheries, rivers and streams, to trees and woodland, and to farming.

Give more importance to education



Schoolchildren learning about forestry and farming

Earlier this year we hosted a visit for over 200 pupils to Cullen to give them an insight into how we run that part of our business. You can read more about it on page 4.

It is good to see other bodies getting involved too, private and public sector – Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Forestry Commission and others. Education is no longer seen as something that someone else will get on with, but an area in which we all should be involved.

SNH has also just announced the Deer in Scotland Education Zone which it has developed jointly with the Scottish Venison Partnership, and which is hosted on the Scottish Venison website www.scottish-venison.info

This is a web-based resource, possibly the first of its kind in the UK for an animal (one already exists for the

Atlantic Salmon), with a whole education programme built on several levels and for a range of ages focusing on Scotland's deer species. It is in both English and Gaelic, and designed to deliver Curriculum For Excellence objectives. This is available for any school to use, in Scotland or further afield, free.

Education is important, from those who make our laws and sit in our Scottish, Westminster and European Parliaments downwards. If we don't tell people about our countryside, the challenges we face, why it's the way it is, and why it looks the way it looks, then who is going to tell them? It's not just a message for the rural sector – it has to permeate our towns and cities in the Central Belt too and the more of us that see this as a priority then the higher up the agenda rural affairs will be in the future, coupled with a greater degree of knowledge and understanding.

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:

Sandy Lewis, Chief Executive;
Andrew Norval, Property Director;
Will Anderson, Forestry Director,
Seafield Estate Office, Cullen, Buckie, Banffshire AB56 4UW.
T: 01542 840777 F: 01542 841413
E: mail@seafield-estate.co.uk
W: www.seafield-estate.co.uk

Frank Law, Sporting Manager,
Strathspey Estate Office, Old Spey Bridge Road,
Grantown-on-Spey, PH26 3NQ.
T: 01479 872529 F: 01479 873452
E: mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk
W: www.strathspey-estate.co.uk

Rotational felling at Cullen

The woodland of the Cullen Estate covers around 3,500 hectares, about 13 square miles. Within this area there are a range of different species and ages of trees. The Estate manages its woodland to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard, which is externally audited, and the basis of this is a ten year management plan which was last updated in 2010.

Some general figures from the plan show that 25% of the estate woodland at Cullen is under 25 years old, 22% is over 70 years old and 21% is managed for biodiversity in priority over timber production. Around 13% of the woodland will be harvested and replanted with a further 20% producing timber from thinning during the next ten years.

Much of the felling will take place around the Roughilly, Greenhill and Lurg Hill woodlands where spruce crops are reaching maturity. While no-one likes to see trees being felled or landscapes changing, the cropping of trees is an important part of woodland management and vital to the local economy, as well as producing benefits to the forest's ecosystem and providing opportunities for biodiversity management.



Farm expansion

A substantial grain store has recently been erected by the Estate at Tochieneal Farm, Cullen for the new tenant Stuart Riddoch.

In 1999 Stuart took over the tenancy of Seafield farm from his father Lewis, who is still actively involved in the business, and has now taken on the tenancy of the adjoining unit of Tochieneal, following the retirement of the Gauld Brothers.

Elm removal

The insidious Dutch Elm Disease which devastated England's countryside in the 1970s has been slowly creeping north and, despite a seeming respite in its advance in the 1990s, it has finally taken hold in the north of Scotland.

It is mainly the coastal areas which are affected and Seafield Estate has been losing elms since 2007, but the numbers have been increasing year on year.

In 2007 there were twelve trees that had to be felled, but last year there were 50, with many more showing signs of the disease. If it continues to spread at this rate then it is likely that the majority of mature elm

will vanish from the landscape in the next 10-15 years.

Instead of waiting for this to happen, the Estate is putting together a proactive programme to deal with the problem by removing the elms in a planned, structured manner, there will be bio-diversity benefits plus the project will be able to generate funds to replant more trees. The programme of removal is likely to take several years, and work will commence later in 2012 along the main drive at Cullen.

Elm disease is only one of the threats to woodland, and the Estate remains ever vigilant regarding the potential problems of pests, diseases and climate change which endanger our forests.

Farm manager commended for good farming practice

Ron Urquhart, who runs the 4910 acre in-hand farming businesses of Seafield and Reidhaven Estates, was commended in the Royal Northern Agricultural Society's 2011 Good Farming Practice awards. The aim of the awards is to promote, encourage and recognise exemplary farm business management.

Despite bad weather and the vast scale of operations creating challenging conditions for the harvesting of spring and winter barley, winter wheat, carrots, potatoes, oilseed rape and grass, Ron's meticulous planning meant that not only did the harvesting get done but the winter crops were sown as well. Judge David Brown said that he was impressed by the sheer scale of the arable enterprise and by Ron's great attention to detail and added "He's doing a fantastic job and the business is very well run."

Additional grain storage was required for the enlarged operation and this was erected by the estate in time for the 2011 harvest.

The new shed has been built within the attractive courtyard of the original part of the Tochieneal Steading. After demolition of an array of small sheds, the new grain store has managed to incorporate the original high stone courtyard walls, enabling the shed to fit attractively within the original steading footprint and blend in with the scale and character of the adjoining buildings.

Golden eagles - keeping tabs

As part of the RaptorTrack project to raise awareness of birds of prey and to give a unique insight into their movement, three of the Strathspey Estate's Golden Eagle chicks have now been fitted with satellite transmitters.



Calluna feeding on a deer carcass

In order to help to conserve a species it is imperative to gain as much information as possible about them. Satellite tags make it possible to remotely identify where birds are going. Their progress and the progress of other birds can be followed by the public on the RaptorTrack website (www.raptortrack.org).

Strathy, our male golden eagle, was ringed and tagged with a transmitter as a chick near Aviemore in June 2010 on Strathspey Estates. A female chick from the same nest, named Cullen, was also tagged. The movement of the two golden eagles was watched closely but sadly last September Strathy disappeared. The website mapped his movements until then but the transmissions suddenly ended. Strathy is now missing presumed dead.

A female chick named Calluna, was born in a different eyrie to that of Cullen and Strathy and was satellite tagged in July 2011. We are keenly following the progress of both Calluna and Cullen.

The prevention of wildlife crime has been identified as an objective in the Cairngorms National Park Plan and this project is a response to raptor persecution. In the past it has been very difficult to determine the perpetrators of wildlife crime. The fitting of satellite tags allows the birds' last known movements to be identified, which has led to several cases of wildlife crime being detected. The latest good news from the Estate is that the Eagles have again bred successfully and a further two birds have been tagged.

The information gathered from the movement of these birds will also help inform the planning process of wind energy generation both inside and outside of the Cairngorms National Park.

Capercaillie repatriated

There may be as few as 1200 capercaillie surviving in the Highlands, and one recently managed to lose its way and move into town!

Instead of living in the pine forests where it belongs, it moved into the urban environment of Nairn and for months it was regularly seen in people's gardens, causing a fair bit of concern - from nervous locals and also for the welfare of the caper.



Caper back in suitable habitat

Born in Moray, it is believed the young bird became separated from the few remaining birds in this area and as it was finding food was in no hurry to leave the town. It was spotted foraging for food in gardens, car parks, industrial estates and even among the traffic on the road, where it experienced a few near misses.

After weeks of trying to catch him, and with help from RSPB, SNH, local residents and wildlife conservationist Roy Dennis, the caper was successfully caught and moved to a more appropriate habitat. He was released into the pine forests of Strathspey Estate at Kinveachy and has been spotted since enjoying his new surroundings. As soon as he was released he headed for the top of an old Scots Pine and starting to feed on the needles! Experts say it appears in good health.

Everyone is now hoping that he will go on to breed and increase the capercaillie numbers in the Highlands.



Dulnain tributaries restoration project

As shown by local events in recent years, flooding can have devastating consequences on people's lives and livelihoods as well as having damaging effects on the natural environment. It is now recognized that if we can address individual site issues that contribute to flood flows then we can hopefully reduce the overall impact when it does flood. These sites are often many miles upstream of where the flooding actually occurs.

The Spey Catchment Initiative, in partnership with Seafield Estate and the Spey Fishery Board, is currently undertaking a project to restore two straightened sections of burn on the Dulnain tributary. These burns were originally straightened for agricultural gain however, this is now believed to be detrimental to both natural flood management and fish spawning grounds. Over the winter a study has been undertaken to understand the river's natural process and come up with a practical solution to return its course to a more natural state. It is hoped that this will reduce the current need for regular management intervention and reconnect the river to its natural floodplain.

Wildcats on the estate

In the winter of 2009/2010, the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), part of Oxford University, in a joint exercise with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Strathspey Estate, carried out a pilot study to determine how successful camera traps, remote cameras triggered by heat and motion, would be at detecting the Scottish wildcat. The study was a success, with 13 different individual cats, 4 of which were wildcats, picked up on camera across the estate. Since this pioneering project was carried out, camera traps are being increasingly used by other researchers to detect this rare species.

Last year Kerry Kilshaw, the scientist heading the original project, returned to the estate to carry out further camera trapping and to look at prey abundance in relation to wildcat occurrence. Prey abundance involved small mammal trapping across different habitats in the estate. Small traps were baited to attract small mammals such as voles and mice, which are then weighed and sexed and then released again to get an idea of the number of different individuals and species across different habitats. In addition, rabbit surveys were carried out across the estate.

The occurrence of small mammals was detected in two of the four main habitats surveyed (coniferous forest and grassland). A higher abundance of small mammals was detected in coniferous woodland (young plantation rather than mature) and the following species were captured; common shrew, bank vole and wood mouse. Rabbits were found only in the grassland areas which had a good covering of gorse.

According to the results there was evidence of a healthy prey community in the estate supporting the presence of small and middle sized predators. The study also suggested that habitat heterogeneity, namely the presence of young coniferous and grassland patches, can significantly benefit small mammal diversity and consequently the abundance of carnivorous species that prey upon these species, like the Scottish wildcat.

Windfarm now generating clean energy

After years of preparation and construction, the windfarm at Muirake was completed at the end of last year and officially opened early this year. The two turbine development, which is partially owned by Lord Seafield, is now generating a total of 4.6 megawatts, which feeds enough clean energy through the national grid to meet an average consumption of around 4000 households.

The windfarm was built by German specialists Vento Ludens and is the company's first installation in Scotland. It is the culmination of four years hard work against challenging conditions.

This is the second successful windfarm on Seafield Estate and it is hoped that more will be able to be built in due course.

Schoolchildren fascinated by farming and forestry

More than 200 primary school children from six schools in the north east of Scotland spent an exciting day at Home Farm, Cullen in June, where staff from Seafield and Strathspey Estates explained the work they do with farming and forestry, including arable, livestock, deer, woodlands and wild birds, and allowed the curious kids to enjoy a hands-on experience with the equipment.



The Estate showed them state-of-the-art machinery including a tractor with GPS control and a brand new combine harvester delivered the previous day, which the pupils were keen to examine close up. Farming staff from Old Cullen Farms assisted by estate tenants and SAC demonstrated crop spraying, ploughing and a quad bike fitted with GPS technology. The youngsters were also taken into the fields to see the growth of spring and winter barley, oilseed rape, and were introduced to some farm livestock. The forestry harvesting machine, supplied by Colin Thomson of CT Harvesting, and which cuts trees, strips the branches from them and cuts the trunks into logs, was a big attraction.

The day, which was organised by the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative and sponsored by the Mains of Loriston Charitable trust, Seafield Veterinary Group and Aberdeenshire Council, was voted a huge success, with the youngsters enjoying themselves thoroughly. At the end of the day the children took home goody bags filled with freshly harvested vegetables as well as a better understanding of rural life.

Land management is a highly specialist operation providing not only food, but conserving the environment. By seeing at first hand the diverse and challenging aspects of maintaining the land, youngsters can learn and appreciate something of the important economic, conservation and social responsibilities of running an estate.



Bob Moncrieff and son William

Tractor run for charity

Forty three vintage tractors set off on a sunny dry day in May on a thirty two mile road run to raise funds for 'Friends of Anchor', the charity which aids treatment, support and care for cancer and haematology patients in the northeast.

The Deveron Valley Road Run, which included tractors of all types and makes, including a petrol/paraffin grey Fergie, a Ford Dexta, David Brown, an Allis Chalmers etc, started near Aberchirder and passed through Cornhill before an off-road section on the Seafield Estate passing through Newmills of Boyne, courtesy of tenant Jimmy Beattie and along a section of the old Banff railway line before getting back onto tarmac and along to Durnhill and Bogtown.

The tractors climbed another off-road section through Arnbath Farm, courtesy of tenant Charlie Gray, and down to Portsoy harbour for lunch. In the afternoon the tractors continued along the coast to Whitehills before heading inland back to the starting point. The event raised over £2500 from donations and entry fees.

Chairman Davie Myles (who drove a Ford 8210) said it was a very successful day. "The weather was very kind to us and we only had one breakdown - a Forsdon Major with fuel problems. We would like to thank Seafield Estate and their tenants for their help and kindness in allowing us to use their land for the off-road sections."



Woodland regeneration at Kinveachy

Last summer a survey was carried out to assess the effects of a red deer reduction programme on woodland regeneration, which was implemented in 2005 within the Kinveachy SAC (Special Area of Conservation).

The survey took place within a selected area of the SAC, covering 1219 ha (3012 acres). The impact of browsing and other factors which affect regeneration were assessed in 638 plots equally spaced across the whole survey area.

In total nearly three quarters of a million seedlings and saplings were considered to be present across the survey area, split almost equally between small seedlings and established seedlings, which are taller than field layer vegetation.

Results showed that there has been a real increase in regeneration since 2005 and that there were varying degrees of success - due to factors like ground vegetation, waterlogging, altitude and others, acknowledging that deer browsing is only one factor which affects regeneration. However the findings overall prove that the current forward-thinking deer management regime implemented by the Estate should be retained to ensure the establishment of this new generation of trees.

The work has also highlighted the need to investigate additional ways of encouraging regeneration in areas where it is currently absent, in order to create the desired native woodland structure.

The project was recently commended in Scotland's Finest Woods Awards and sporting manager Frank Law was presented with the award on behalf of the Estate by Dr Jean Balfour at the Royal Highland Show in June.



Strathspey farm's new tenant making a difference

For generations Easter Tulloch remained in the Cameron family, passed down from father to son, but before elderly bachelor James Cameron passed away a couple of years ago without any children or dependants, it was his wish that the tenancy would go to Bob Moncrieff.

Although working full time with the RSPB, Bob as a neighbour and friend helped James out when he was less able to look after the farm - as well as helping others in the Tulloch neighbourhood - gaining experience of farming and livestock, and becoming part of the community along the way.

Bob himself was keen to take over the holding and get it up and running again. When the time came for the Trustees to decide whether to amalgamate the farm or put it on the open market, it was felt that Bob, who has a young family, and who is popular in the area, would be an ideal new entrant for the tenancy.

The Trustees provided a new farm building, with assistance from SRDP, and Bob on his part has reseeded, refenced and gradually built up livestock numbers. Bob admits that this was harder work and more costly than envisaged but the farm is becoming fertile again and Bob is looking forward to reaping the rewards of his investment and hard work.