

News Review

Foreword

by Lord Seafield

All business enterprises which want to thrive, or even just to survive, need to keep up with modern technology as it changes, and rural estates are no exception. Standing still is not an option.

Whether it is investing in the latest computer technology or whether it is purchasing the latest state-of-the-art machinery, businesses cannot afford to be left behind. We at Seafield & Strathspey Estates are aware that business efficiency means constantly improving and upgrading what we do and how we do it.

We recognise our responsibility as land managers, landlords, employers, key players in the community, conservationists and protectors of the environment and wildlife, and we strive to ensure that the Estate businesses continue to accomplish their goals and prosper.

Those who own land have an obligation to manage that land in the best way possible, by delivering social and public benefits to the local community – jobs, housing, recreation, amenities, and health and safety, the public interest – as well as a duty to conserving the environment and wildlife for future generations.

Investment comes at a price though, so careful planning is essential to avoid throwing good money after bad and to avoid the need to renew and replace too frequently, researching the best options before committing capital expenditure.

Investing in the Future



Some examples of where we have invested recently include spending around £400,000 last year to expand our grain dryer to improve intake and storage capacity; introducing new biomass heating systems at Old Cullen and the Cullen Estate office, an outlay of over £300,000, which will not only reduce carbon emissions but will also save 70% on heating costs; purchasing a new large combine and bigger sprayers at around £336,000; and a high level of investment in our farm tenancies of £730,000 over three years. In the Estate office at Cullen we have replaced the office server, hardware and software and upgraded our accountancy software and forestry mapping systems to make them more efficient. The investment is all designed to improve the performance and productivity of our operations.

Of course investment in people is of vital importance to us, and we have an ongoing programme of skills training and Health & Safety courses.

In addition to carrying out the businesses of farming, forestry, fishing and field sports, Seafield & Strathspey Estates are also committed to investing in society, whether that is improving the habitat, educating schoolchildren about rural business and the countryside, making land available for important development or striving for sustainable, cleaner energy solutions. Our proactive approach to addressing these issues means that Seafield & Strathspey Estates continue to instigate award-winning initiatives and work with others on numerous environmental projects designed to benefit the local community and society at large.

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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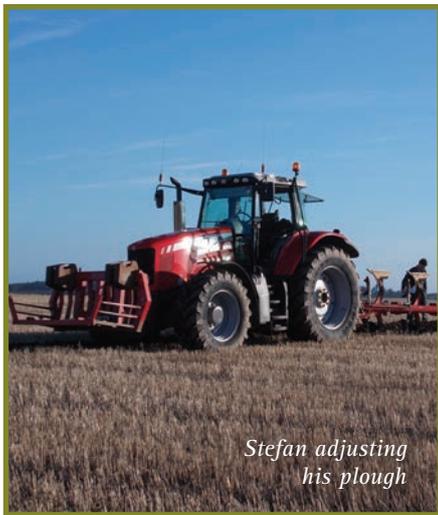
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Trophies for Tractorman

Stefan Rendall, a tractorman with Old Cullen Farms, is making a name for himself in ploughing competitions.

Although Stefan has been ploughing for many years, it is only over the last couple of winters that he has been entering ploughing matches and that initiative is paying off. This year he achieved three second places in various competitions, and in the Grampian Super Match, the culmination of the season, he won the best young farmer class.

Congratulations Stefan, here's hoping more trophies will be added to your collection in the coming years.



Stefan adjusting his plough

Fundraising for Good Causes

Three of our staff from the Estate Office at Cullen have been gamely raising money for local hospitals.

Alison Sandison (with assistance from husband Iain, who also works for the Estate), Fiona Johnston and Joyce Henderson raised over £2300, to be split between the Moray Diabetes Unit at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin and the Intensive Care Unit at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Their enthusiastic fundraising events included a Ladies Night with stalls and raffles in Portknockie and a car boot sale in the Estate Office car park.

Well done everyone!



Iain Sandison presenting cheque to the Moray Diabetes Unit

Eaglet Without a Name

As part of the Highland Foundation for Wildlife's study of Golden Eagles, which uses GPS satellite transmitters to examine their cultural behaviour and track their travels and whereabouts, the Estate now has four healthy eagle chicks flying around. Three of these have working transmitters (one fell off after 4 years as normal). According to Roy Dennis MBE, ornithologist and director of the Foundation, these are high quality chicks bred from a "really good pair of eagles on the Estate." To ensure plenty of food for the eagles, the Estate leaves two red deer carcasses per month on the hill from November to February to supplement their diet.



The latest chick is only 3 and a half months old, and doesn't have a name yet. Although tagged already, she is still with her parents and hasn't flown far from the nest.

It costs £3000 for a transmitter and a further £700 a year to run, so the Foundation is always grateful for any donations towards its work. If there is an organisation or individual who would like to sponsor the new eaglet, then there is an opportunity to give the chick a name and have it promoted on the website and through other media.

Success for Tree Regeneration Project

Conservation work has been taking place over decades to protect and expand native Scots pine woodlands (officially voted as Scotland's National Tree) and our regeneration project at Kinveachy Forest, which covers more than 2800 hectares, is proving to be a success.

Two recent reports show what can be achieved over a relatively short time scale by committed and determined management of deer numbers. Reducing deer numbers to sustainable levels since 2005 has resulted in widespread tree regeneration, helping to secure the future of this nationally important woodland.

If the deer population remains at its current level, a small but significant proportion of the Scots pine seedlings will have grown tall enough to escape browsing by the end of 2018, about 27% will have escaped by end of the 2020 growing season, and about 45% will have escaped by 2027.

Will Anderson, Forestry Director at Reidhaven Estate said "By its nature any work to regenerate woodland takes time. We are pleased that the recent surveys show such a positive response in seedling growth and recruitment; this is recognition of the considerable commitment from the estate and particularly the efforts of our stalkers who have been pivotal in achieving this result."

George Hogg, SNH's South Highland Unit manager said: "This shows what can be achieved by committed management by a landowner, with support from both the Forestry Commission Scotland and ourselves."

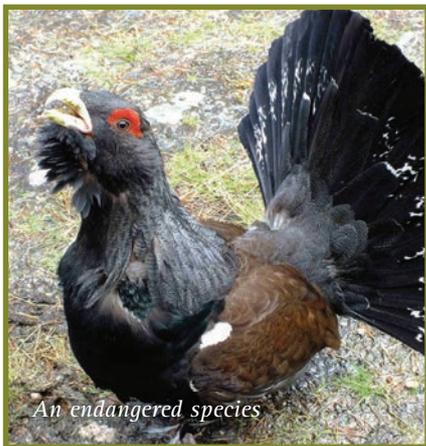


Working together for Boat of Garten

The Estate, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, a property developer and the local community have been working together to find a solution to marry the demand for affordable housing within Boat of Garten woods and the need for forestry management and protection of Capercaillie.

The impact of additional housing, increased population and additional recreational use of the woodland had to be considered in relation to disturbing the vulnerable and endangered Capercaillie, which are found in Scottish native pinewoods.

With seemingly opposing interests for the best use of the woodland surrounding Boat of Garten, the relevant parties have been collaborating for the last two years to find a harmonious plan which will be acceptable to all. This has included woodland mitigation work by Seafield Estates, heightened public awareness, involving the community, signage, providing a ranger, designating dog walking routes and carrying out surveys to assess the usage of the area. Last year, in a period of only two weeks, there were 558 walkers, 57 runners, 80 cyclists and 313 dogs.



An endangered species

Also, as part of the CNPA's Land Management Forum, and in conjunction with Scottish Land & Estates, a 'walk and talk' meeting took place at Boat of Garten at the end of April to explain the difficulties in arriving at a solution.

This consisted of a presentation in the village hall to demonstrate how development and conservation can work in tandem and was followed by a walk around the adjacent woodland to see what had been achieved.

Those who attended heard from representatives of Seafield Estates who spoke about issues which affect the planning for a housing development and how important it is to conserve the environment, protect the wildlife, particularly the capercaillie, and involve the local community to ensure that people are made aware of sensitive countryside issues and act responsibly – especially in relation to walking dogs.

The meeting reported that the campaign to raise awareness of the vulnerability for breeding Capercaillie has shown positive outcome, and that dog walkers, both local residents and visitors, have modified their behaviour and demonstrated a responsible attitude.

Mosquito Coast

From a tiny airfield on the Banffshire coast, airmen from the UK, Canada and Norway flew hundreds of missions during World War 2, destroying enemy boats and submarines in the North Sea.

On 9th January 1945, only a couple of months before the end of the war, a 23 year old Canadian pilot nearing the end of his posting to RAF Banff Strike Wing at Boyndie was assigned, instead of combat that day, to test fly a Mosquito aircraft with a new tail section.

Sadly the young airman and his 32 year old mechanic were both killed when the aircraft nose-dived and crashed near the airfield.

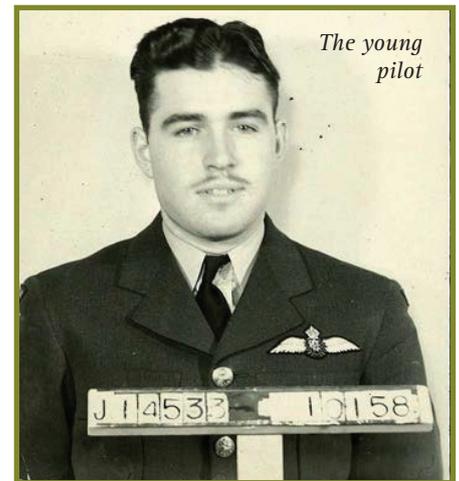
The pilot, Flight Lt Donald B Douglas, was buried with full military honours at Banff Cemetery, and Leading Aircraftman Gerard Robbins was buried in his home town of Dundee.

That might have been the end of the story but for Craig Anderson, an occupational nurse from Aberdeen with an interest in aeroplanes and history who, over 60 years after the accident, was curious to visit the old Banff airfield in 2008.

There he learned that a propeller had been unearthed by chance in the 70s and, intrigued, he decided to start his own investigations. His aim was to research the cause of the crash (reported at the time to have been pilot error), excavate what was left of the plane (long since buried under trees), protect the finds from would-be treasure hunters, and pay tribute to the young airmen by erecting a monument on site.

Now in 2014, after two authorised digs at the crash site, where Seafield Estate felled a dozen trees to assist the process, all the aircraft remains which survived the impact and the subsequent fire, have been recovered and cleaned, awaiting display. Craig Anderson's findings also revealed that the crash was due to an aircraft fault not a pilot error, and over the last few years he has been painstakingly tracing relatives and family of the airmen.

Craig hopes to come back to Banff later this year to place a memorial plaque with both the airmen's names on the site, and he is also planning to donate his discoveries to museums in Banff and elsewhere in Scotland.



The young pilot



Seafield Talks

Towards the end of last year the Estate held another in the series of talks for the Cullen farm tenants.

This time we were pleased to welcome WM Lindsay, grain merchants, who this year celebrate 150 years in business.

We are very grateful to Andrew Lindsay and Andrew Stephan for providing very informative presentations on the outlook for national and local markets for malting barley and other cereal crops.

New Church Hall at Rathven

Rathven Church dates back to 1794 when it replaced the nearby historic Kirk, and associated graveyard, of St Peters.



The new church hall

Five years ago the Church approached the Estate about an adjacent site with a view to constructing a new Church Hall and Lord Reidhaven offered the site as a gift to the Church.

Since then the project committee, led by Sandy Thomson, the Fabric Convenor, dealt with numerous troublesome design and planning issues, including the presence of a Scottish Water main. However, with stalwart commitment and forbearance, the congregation has seen the project through to a happy conclusion and the construction is now finished. The new Church Hall provides spacious accommodation, with hall, toilets and kitchen and improved facilities for the Sunday School, Guild and social events, which have included a series of strawberry teas this summer, that have been very well supported by the local community.

Sandy Thomson has been the main liaison throughout with the Estate, and he is keen to acknowledge the sincere appreciation of the Church for the gift of the land by Lord Reidhaven.

Country House Lifestyle

Historically Inverallan House was used by Strathspey Estate for private fishing parties and latterly by sporting groups, but now this magnificent residence is available to the public, for those who wish to enjoy the ambience of a country house for a night or simply for a delicious meal in elegant surroundings.

Set within its own grounds on the banks of the River Spey, the 18th century Inverallan House, with its roaring fires, brooding oil paintings, cosy snugs, tartan carpets and festive atmosphere, was named by The Times Travel Supplement as one of the 20 best houses for Hogmanay. Previously the house could only be booked by parties of up to 15 people but now Inverallan can be booked privately and exclusively by groups of six or more for lunch or dinner as well as overnight stays.

The house, which is decorated to a high standard in traditional country house style, comprises seven spacious en-suite bedrooms, including a family suite. Public rooms include

a reception hall, drawing room, TV room and dining room.

Dinner, which is £30 a head for three courses with tea or coffee, must be booked from a menu at least three days in advance, heightening the anticipation for the diner and giving the excellent catering staff the opportunity to produce their best. Guests are also invited to take their own wine and this offers them the chance to match this with the food they have chosen.

Inverallan is perfect for those who just want to relax amid spectacular scenery and wildlife, for which Strathspey is famous, but as locals know, there is also excellent salmon and sea trout fishing as well as opportunities for a number of country sports, hill-walking, cycling, skiing, and birdwatching. So whether you want a meal out, a relaxed business get-together or a weekend break in charming, comfortable, luxurious surroundings, then make a reservation quickly.

To check availability or make a reservation, contact 01479 872529 or mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk



Inverallan House



Health and Safety

We have been working for over a year with our newly appointed Health & Safety consultant Andrew Green from Greens of Haddington.

At the outset, Andrew conducted a thorough audit of all working practices across both Estates and produced a Report with recommendations. These recommendations are being actively implemented. In addition, a new Health & Safety Manual for each department has been produced and every member of staff has his/her own copy for ease of reference and advice.

We are delighted that this new partnership has bedded in so enthusiastically and efficiently.

Woodland Planting

Our contractors have been busy over the winter and spring preparing ground and planting and protecting young trees to replace those we have harvested.

Around 80 hectares have been restocked at Cullen using over 200,000 plants. Although the ground cultivation and some of the fencing work can be done by machinery, every one of the young trees is planted by hand.

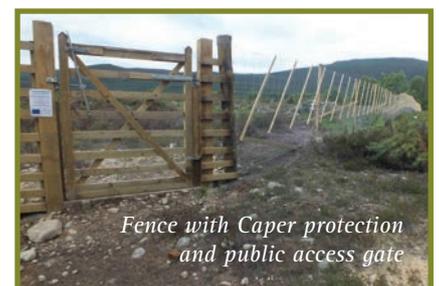


Scarification to allow natural regeneration

In Strathspey we have planted 30 hectares of native Scots pine and birch woodland with 68,000 plants. This included 2,500 metres of new fence to protect the young trees from deer. The fence design includes wooden droppers between the posts to make it visible to Capercaillie and protect against accidental collisions which might kill or injure the birds.

Although some sites require trees to be planted there are occasions when using seed fall from existing trees is best. This still needs the ground to be cultivated to provide the best conditions for seed to germinate and we have worked on three sites covering a total of 48 hectares. One of the areas, at Loch Vaa, featured in the last News Review when we reported on the timber harvesting. We have now come full circle and are preparing the site for the next crop.

The whole process, from seed to mature tree, provides employment for local nurseries, ground preparation, road maintenance, fencing and planting contractors all of which are supported by the harvesting and processing of timber that, when managed sustainably, will also support important species and habitats and produce opportunities for recreation and amenity, as well as valuable economic benefits for the Estate, local communities and the rural economy.



Fence with Caper protection and public access gate