

News Review

Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Welcome to the latest news review from Seafield and Strathspey Estates. While 2000 has been a busy year, it is useful to reflect in the context of future critical developments which will affect the way in which we operate.

Around the time of publication of this Review, the Scottish Executive will be publishing its draft Land Reform Bill containing its proposed legislation on communities' and crofters' rights to buy, and a right of responsible access to land and inland water.

While all who work here are hardly overcome with enthusiasm for such proposals, we would hope that in the light of extensive consultation, the views and concerns expressed by land owners and managers will have been taken into account in the draft Bill.

Rural Scotland has to move forward to have any chance of future prosperity. With farming incomes in freefall, and the desperate state of the domestic timber market, we hope that the proposals contained in the Bill will allow and encourage private land owners to promote diversification and development. We do not need more legislation which will act as a disincentive to the creation or sustaining of employment, and discourage much needed investment from the private sector.

Especially, I would hope that new access legislation recognises the necessary management constraints which may be placed on a likely 'go anywhere responsibly' approach. Farmland and forests are places of work. Woodlands, while offering tremendous opportunity for recreation - and the Estates are actively involved in many managed activities particularly in the forests of Strathspey - are working environments. Rivers and river banks require management and respect by all using them.

I do have concerns for this new Access approach. It is too easily

Anagach Woods Waymarked Paths



With one of the new boards are (l to r) Ewan Sutton, chairman of the Granttown Walks sub-committee; committee member Alison Black; Highland Council ranger Mollie Porter; Peter Beattie, Highland Council; Andrew Norval, factor, Seafield Estates

Picture: AJ McCook

Eleven miles of waymarked paths have recently been officially opened in Granttown on Spey's Anagach Woods.

The initiative was started three years ago by Granttown Community Council, the Council's ranger service for Badenoch and Strathspey, Highland Councillor Basil Dunlop, and Seafield Estates.

The project's aim was to create a waymarked path network for both locals and visitors around Granttown on Spey.

Funding and support for the initiative has come from The Cairngorms Partnership, Highland Council's leisure and planning services, Scottish Natural

Heritage, and Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise. forgotten that 'fur, feather and fin' are a valued source of employment - both full time and seasonal - on ours and many other Estates, and yet sporting tourism remains unrecognised by the Scottish Executive in any aspect of its tourism strategy. While Scotland's international image may embrace the red deer, grouse, and wild salmon, where is the commitment to the sport which secures their future? Without this there is little incentive for active management - management which benefits so many other species of flora and fauna for all to enjoy.

Similarly, the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill, if it is to reach the statute book without significant amendment, will also impact on those undertaking their lawful business or recreation in the countryside. If hunting with dogs and the use of terriers is to be curbed, this will impact on hill farmers

Heritage, and Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise.

Anne Elliot of SNH commented:

"The project has been really well done, and has already proved to be very popular. We particularly welcome such initiatives at a time when access to the countryside is being widened."

Ewan Sutton, Chairman of the Granttown Walks sub committee, said:

"The next phase will be an all-abilities route, which although initially short we hope to extend at a later date. Our ultimate aim is a network of walks which interconnect with others throughout the valley."

and sportsmen alike. The knock-on effects will be felt across the wider landscape, and the implication for the future of other country sports cannot be disregarded.

I would urge those newly appointed to the helm of VisitScotland that sporting tourism has its established place, whatever the benefits accrued from celebrity Highland weddings, castaway documentaries and Sunday night TV drama. Future access legislation, private member's Bills, and Scotland's tourism strategy must take country sports and their management into account. They are an asset for development - not to be ignored because to endorse them may not appear politically correct.

Many of those who live and work here, and on many other Estates, derive their livelihoods from them, and hope that future generations will also.

Cullen Farms: Conservation and Quality

Over the past three years Seafeld Estate's family farming partnership - Cullen Farms - has invested greatly in conservation and the development of quality throughout their farms. Utilising the latest advances in precision farming and investing in highly energy efficient equipment has been of considerable benefit to both the environment and farm produce.

In November 1997, Cullen Farms (4,470 arable acres, 6 employees) trialed high-tec precision farming methods using Soyl Systems' Global Position Satellite (GPS) technology at their Cowhythe Farm in one 100 acre park.

In this process Soyl use an ATV equipped with GPS to test a given area in a grid like fashion of 50m or 100m, depending on density required. Sixteen soil samples per sample location are taken and tested in an independent laboratory for magnesium, phosphorous, potassium and pH levels. From these results a field map is drawn up for acidity and the status of each nutrient across the area, which is then discussed with farm management and treatment application recommendations made.

In the case of Cowhythe, the resulting field map allowed problem areas to be specifically treated, for example a 25 acre area with unsatisfactory pH levels. Savings were immediately identified with lime application to just specific problem areas, creating savings of almost 70 tonnes on this area alone whilst producing more even yields across the fields. The GPS method also provided the benefit of precision fertiliser use, reducing unnecessary pollution to the local environment. These methods have now been used for the past three years with visible results, and the cost of the services offset by conserved resources.

Replacement of two grain dryers at Bogtown Farm last year has also contributed to Cullen's more energy efficient output - producing 7,670 tonnes of cereals in 2000. The new Alvan Blanch DF/22000 'S' type grain driers are highly efficient, with up to 30% saving in energy consumption, as well as versatile with each drier handling 22 tonnes of grain per hour.

The quality of our grain production was recognised by the Institute of Brewing in 2000, with Seafeld Estates awarded first place in the Highland and Grampian division of the malt barley championship. Investment in the latest technology appears to be paying dividends for Cullen Farms - with high quality yields, energy and resource conservation and reduction in environmental pollution.

Estates Woodland now certified



Seafeld and Strathspey Estates have achieved certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS). The scheme, now in its second year, has been implemented to encourage timber producers to demonstrate that their product comes from a sustainable resource. Compliance with the scheme involves adhering to strict standards of forest management, including planning and replanting.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international organisation established to promote sound management of the world's timber resource, following the 1992 Rio Convention. In the UK, certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme achieves recognition by this international body.

Items covered under the UKWAS scheme include:

- ensuring all timber operations comply with the law
- the drawing up of detailed forestry management plans
- ensuring that all operations are well planned and to the highest environmental standards
- ensuring responsible use of chemicals
- managing native woodlands to ensure that they are protected for the long term
- managing woodland to take account of local communities
- protecting the forest workforce

Seafeld and Strathspey Estates manage approximately 11,500 hectares of woodlands, and UKWAS certification demonstrates the Estates' commitment to sustainable forestry incorporating biodiversity and an improved ecosystem.

Study undertaken on Spey to control spread of Ranunculus

Infestation by the invasive weed Ranunculus, which was first identified in the Spey in 1979, has now reached such levels that proprietors are looking to increased measures for its control. While hand pulling can be highly effective, although labour intensive, cutting is illegal since this simply allows the weeds self-rooting stems to disperse and colonise other parts of the river as it floats downstream.

Last June, a controlled test was undertaken for chemical control of Ranunculus, using a product called Midstream. Castle Grant Fishings were identified as a suitable site to run the test undertaken by SEPA in conjunction with NOSWA and Scottish Natural Heritage.

While results from the test were not as effective in terms of control of the plant as it had been hoped they would be, monitoring showed that Midstream did not unduly affect the quality of the water. The Estate is currently considering whether to seek permission to repeat the exercise in April next year.

Edward Mountain, a member of the Spey Fishery Board says:

"Infestation has now reached levels that we really have to ignore the presumed benefits to salmonids and lampreys and act to prevent further spread. This plant is not native to the river, and is tremendously invasive. I would encourage all proprietors to

monitor the spread of this weed and take steps for its control as appropriate acting within the Spey Board's current guidelines."

Habitat improvement project for Forest of Spey birchwoods

In a joint initiative between Seafeld and Strathspey Estates, a number of its tenants, the Forest of Spey Project, the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Scottish Agricultural College, trials are taking place to improve the habitat value of birchwoods in the Forest of Spey, while maintaining their use for livestock shelter and grazing.

Three Estate tenants at Avielochan, Granish and Glebe of Deishar have joined a pilot scheme which extends over some 60 acres of birch woodland. The objective of the scheme is to produce a greater variety of ground vegetation under the woodland canopy by managing cattle in different grazing patterns. Natural regeneration of the woodland is also intended, by allowing seedlings to establish on ground broken by grazing cattle. Selective felling will also create areas for natural regeneration.

Dennis Torley of The Forest of Spey Project said: "These trials will demonstrate how farmers can become involved in the management of woodland for timber production and nature conservation in a way that complements existing farming practise. They take forward the objectives of the Cairngorm Partnership's strategy for both woodlands and agriculture."

The two females fitted with radio-transmitters in 1999 returned to their nests on Strathspey Estates near Carrbridge last year. One wintered in Spain, which is very unusual and possibly a sign of global warming. She left Spain on 6 March, crossed the channel near Guernsey on 1 April and was back home on the 6th. The other female wintered in Senegal, and set off home on 28 March. She crossed into Europe on 7 April and was back on the 22nd after travelling 5157 kilometres in 25 days.

Both females reared two youngsters last year. I managed to re-catch one female in July and changed her transmitter for a new one. She set off on 10 August, stopped in the Borders for 5 days, and was back at her Spanish reservoir on 27th - a journey of 2800 kms in 17 days. She's still there. Her old mate died and she was joined by a new male which I caught at Rothiemurchus fish farm on 12 August; he left on the 30th, and with a continuous migration he reached his wintering site in Senegal just 21 days later.

Even more interesting are the journeys of the young birds which

News from the radio tracked Ospreys

Roy Dennis MBE, the Scottish Osprey expert, who has worked with Ospreys on Seafield and Strathspey Estates for the past 40 years writes:

navigate to Africa on their own. I fitted a radio to one of the two chicks of the female which wintered in Senegal. This bird's journeys have been amazing! He left Carrbridge on 10 September and crossed from Stranraer to Ireland that evening; departing Ireland at midday on the 12th he flew directly over the Atlantic Ocean to NW Spain - an incredible journey of 1008 kms in just 36 hours. He rested in Portugal until 30 September when he flew out over the ocean again for 700 kms to Casablanca in Morocco; he continued another 500 kms southwards along the Atlas Mountains the next day, and reached Senegal on 8 October, just 140 kms from his mother's wintering place. His journey was 5300 kms in 29 days, including the 14 day stop-over.

A new young pair of Ospreys nested near Carrbridge this summer and produced

one late chick. I ringed it on 5 August, when I found that it was snagged to the nest with nylon fishing line and was not a particularly strong chick. But how wrong I was proved to be. It was still at its nest on 29 August, but was east of Winchester on 5 September and near Aachen on the Belgian/German border on the 14th. Here it remained until late November. This was most unusual behaviour.

Then suddenly its radio reported from near Lyon on the River Rhone in France and 10 days later, at the next transmission, it was actively migrating over the centre of the Sahara Desert in southern Algeria. In December it was on the border of Mali. Interestingly, a 1999 chick from Carrbridge, translocated to Rutland Water as part of the reintroduction project, also crossed the Sahara and wintered in Mali on the River Niger.

Our research on these Ospreys is bringing us much new information on their migrations and the importance of their stop-over wetlands and wintering places. It is vital for Osprey conservation in the long term, and I am very grateful to Strathspey Estates for their continuing interest and support.

Capercaillie high on Estates' priority list

Seafield and Strathspey Estates are in the front line in the bid to conserve one of Scotland's largest game birds, the Capercaillie.

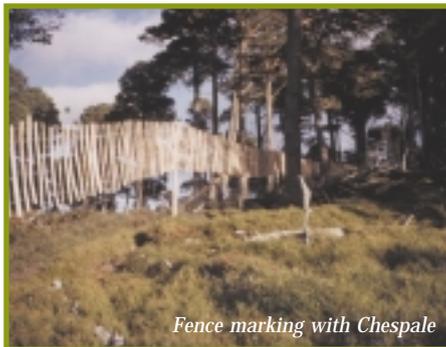
Nearing a population of 20,000 in the 1970s, last year's SNH/RSPB survey estimated as few as 1000 capercaillie remaining in Scotland. With this small population spread across Strathspey, Deeside, Moray and Perthshire declining at the rate of around 16 per cent per year, the largest member of the grouse family could be extinct in Scotland in less than a decade. With the majority of capercaillie on private estates, the efforts of land owners are fundamental to the survival of this famous Scottish species.

The woodlands of Seafield and Strathspey Estates support a significant proportion of Scotland's remaining capercaillie population, in terms of numbers and density of birds. They fare better here compared to other areas of Scotland, due to large areas of woodland which are predominantly Scots Pine - a preferred feeding choice.

Kenny Kortland, RSPB Capercaillie Project Officer, says:

"The extensive areas of Scots Pine forests which are managed by Strathspey Estates provide valuable habitat for

capercaillie in the area. These mainly commercial forests are well kept, and forestry operations take capercaillie into consideration, with lek sites for example being avoided in the Spring."



Fence marking with Chespaie

Dense tree canopy cover inhibits the growth of ground vegetation, making large areas of commercial forest unsuitable for the birds, with its lack of brood habitat, shelter and food. Thinning of woodland is necessary to help vegetation growth, but this can also result in increased numbers of deer, and overgrazing. Deer fencing has been extensively used to restrict deer movement, but studies have shown that this fencing is responsible for a significant number of strikes by capercaillie.

Seafield and Strathspey Estates have removed 41,500 metres of redundant deer fencing over the last three years. In addition the Estates have marked almost 9500 metres of fencing over the same

period with the recent programme of fence work being partly funded through the Forestry Commission Challenge Fund. The Estates are also trialing 2,300 metres of 900mm Chespaie for fence marking as an alternative to the usual orange plastic netting.

Kenny Kortland says:

"We have to take initiatives such as this to give one of Scotland's most magnificent birds any chance of survival, and Seafield and Strathspey Estates are working very closely with RSPB, SNH and the Forestry Commission to try and secure their future in the forests of Speyside."



Picture: RSPB

Royal Highland Show 2000 - Working Estates Exhibit



On duty at the Highland Show (l to r): Frank Law, sporting manager; Ronnie Wilson; Sandy Cruickshank; Colin Stewart; Alastair Lyon; Iain Paterson; Peter Ferguson; David Olds; John Brownlie.

Seafield and Strathspey Estates were partners in the Working Estates exhibit which was staged at last year's Royal Highland Show, in conjunction with the Scottish Landowners' Federation.

Other participating estates were Buccleuch, Dalhousie, Dunecht, Drummur Castle, Ormsary, Kincardine, Roxburgh, and Strathcathro.

The exhibit, which was extremely popular, was designed to impress that much of what is seen in Scotland's countryside is there for a purpose, and the result of generations of management. It emphasised that today's Estates are modern family businesses bringing many benefits and providing considerable employment.

A nine strong team from Seafield and Strathspey Estates' sporting department took their turn in staffing the display, meeting the public, and answering their questions about the workings of a modern estate.

900th salmon for Castle Grant angler

A visitor to the Castle Grant Fishings last summer hooked his 900th salmon on Strathspey Estates' water. The 8lb fish was caught in July last year by Mr David Croft using a 1¹/₄ inch tube fly.



He is pictured here holding his fish with (left to right):

Lionel Main, ghillie, Strathspey Estates; Mrs Joan Cunningham; Gordon Jeffrey; Skene Walley, Mrs Walley; Mrs Fiona Middle; John Middle; Mrs Jill Jeffrey.

Habitat improvement on Milton Burn

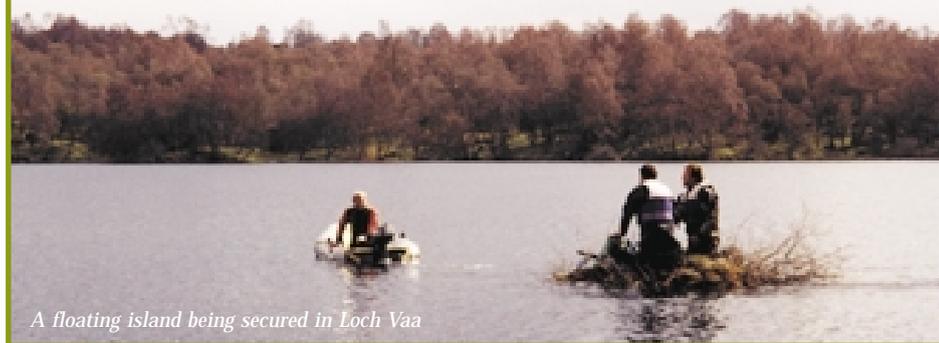
Habitat improvement work has been carried out on the Milton Burn at Castle Grant, a tributary of the Spey, thereby adding to the number of bankside and in-stream improvement projects which have been undertaken on Strathspey Estates in the last 18 months.

At Milton Burn, over a length of some 300 metres, conifers have been cleared back from the banks to around 20 to 30 metres, while native broadleaves, willow and alder, have been left. It is hoped that more light, and an improved food supply from improving bankside vegetation will encourage fish to use the burn in greater numbers, and to run further upstream to spawn.



A section of the Milton Burn after bank clearance work

Help for Slavonian Grebes



A floating island being secured in Loch Vaa

The Estates have been involved in a project to protect one of Britain's rarest and most beautiful breeding birds, the Slavonian Grebe. The entire breeding population which now numbers only 50 pairs is restricted to the Great Glen and around Aviemore.

Grebes nest in the sedge around the edges of small lochs, feeding on minnows and sticklebacks. At Loch Vaa outside Aviemore however the water level on the loch last summer had dropped to the point where the birds' nesting sites in the cover of willows and fallen trees were high and dry.

With RSPB, Strathspey Estates staff

created two artificial islands from polystyrene, covered with netting, moss, heather, sedge and willow, and these were towed out into the loch to provide alternative sites.

Says Colin Crooke of the RSPB:

"We took this initiative at Loch Vaa, because Slavonian Grebe numbers are dwindling for a variety of reasons, and we have to give the birds every possible chance to breed successfully."

Although no nests were recorded on the mock islands last year, the estates will repeat the exercise this year in the hope of encouraging grebes back to Loch Vaa.

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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