

News Review

Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Are there too many deer in Scotland? This question has been aired across the whole rural spectrum, from media to the Scottish Parliament, and there is no definitive answer. In some areas there may be too many deer, but in others it could be argued there are not enough. What is required is to match numbers to management objectives that take account of the available food source and all other factors.

In its latest annual report (2004 - 2005) the Deer Commission for Scotland outlined in more detail its thinking and procedures on Priority Sites, where "deer were causing significant damage to the natural heritage, agriculture and forestry, or were a danger to public safety." In addition, a number of sites for assessment were also identified - among these Kinveachy SSSI.

Kinveachy is a prime example of the interaction between natural heritage interests - in this case the Caledonian pinewood - and an important source of income generation for the estate, deer stalking. We identified a clash of management objectives several years ago, and following significant consideration, a deer management plan supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Deer Commission and the Forestry Commission was initiated to reduce deer numbers. The plan was launched by the Deputy Environment and Rural Development Minister Rhona Brankin.

This is not the estate caving in to bureaucratic pressure, but a recognition of how times are changing. Kinveachy was designated as an SSSI in 1986 for its native pine woodland, juniper scrub and associated bird life. It is also a Special Protection Area for capercaillie and the Scottish crossbill, and a Special Area of Conservation for Caledonian pine woodland and bog woodland.

Strathspey Estate walks

In a new initiative, Strathspey Estates ran a number of guided walks in March and October. The March walks - 'march on the moor' and 'riverside ramble' - were part of the Scottish Outdoor Access Festival. Those on the moorland walk led by Frank Law, the estates' Sporting Manager, enjoyed seeing red deer, mountain hare, grouse and golden eagles.

The riverside walk was led by estate Head Ghillie Lionel Main, with loads of seasonal interest including sightings of goldeneye and redshank, as well as an otterholt.

Hardy souls on the hill enjoying the October guided estate walk - despite the weather!



In October last year, two walks were promoted locally, and were staged to invite those living in the area to learn more about the surrounding countryside and wildlife. It is hoped that the initiative will continue this year with a 'River to River' route planned.

Earlier in the year, Lord Seafield also received a letter from The Ramblers' Association Badenoch and Strathspey Group commending the estate's approach to the new access legislation, the erection of new stiles over deer fences etc. Libby Lamb, Chairman of the Group wrote:

"These measures are very welcome to a walking group such as ours, especially to our less agile members."

It simply is not sustainable for the estate to expect deer in numbers for recreational stalking and a venison cheque when, publicly and politically, other objectives also apply.

At Kinveachy, we are reducing deer numbers, but there will still be both deer and deer stalking on a reduced scale. Our grouse shooting interests on Kinveachy may also benefit from lower grazing pressure. We believe we must fully embrace our responsibilities for ownership and management of an internationally important natural heritage site.

So, in answer to the question, does Scotland have too many deer, I suggest that such generalisations are unhelpful. The question must be, and all Government agencies now acknowledge this, whether we have too many (or too few) deer on a site-by-site basis.

We have recognised this at Kinveachy, and have moved accordingly, seeking to demonstrate that modern deer management must be dynamic, and that it can with time deliver benefit for all with an interest, not least the estate itself.

Kinveachy Forest – SAC

The Deer Commission for Scotland decided in January 2004 that Kinveachy SAC (Special Area of Conservation) should be designated as a Site for Assessment. A key requirement of this process was that a 'habitat condition baseline' was established against which future habitat condition trends could be assessed. This has involved the collection of three sets of data:

- determining the age profile of trees through tree increment coring.
- a tree seedling survey to provide information that will help in determining whether or not deer are causing damage to or deterioration in the condition of Natura pinewoods.
- a Woodland Profile Survey to create a life stage profile of the tree species present in all woodland types including distribution and density patterns of woodland, general condition including seedlings, basal area, canopy scope and abundance of cones.

This survey data will help the estate in making long-term decisions for the management of Kinveachy

Kinveachy Deer Management

Rhona Brankin, Deputy Environment and Rural Development Minister, announced a package of inter-agency support in August 2005 for a pioneering, collaborative management approach at Kinveachy.

The proposals for deer reduction on Kinveachy Moor aim to balance the estate's sporting interests with the area's internationally important conservation status. These proposals have been supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Deer Commission for Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland.

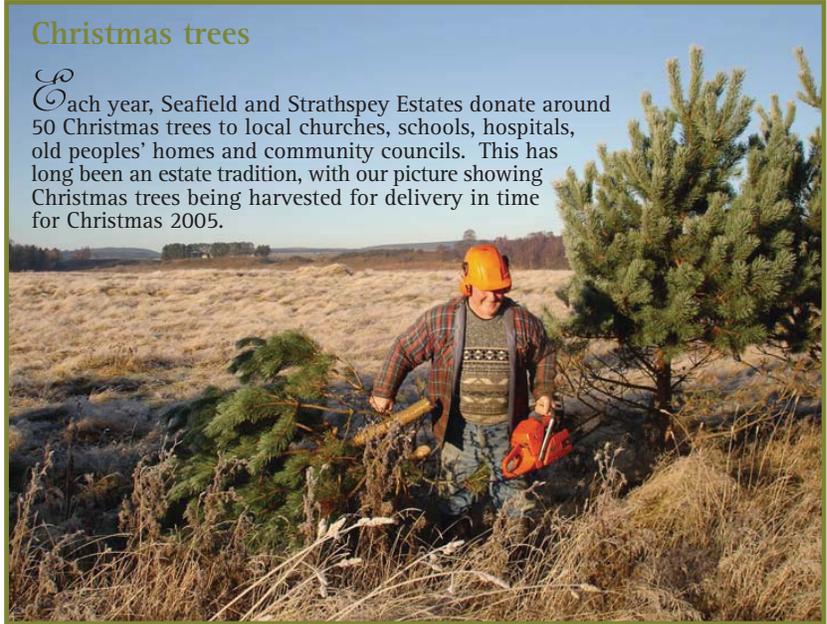
Rhona Brankin said:

"The agreement will support the development of the sporting estate into a more sustainable and diverse enterprise providing important public benefits. It marks a major step forward in working with such issues through a joint inter-agency approach."

"Seafield and Strathspey Estates are to be commended for their foresight and initiative in seeking to pioneer this approach. It will do much to improve this internationally important natural habitat over the next ten years and help inform estate management decision making around the country."

Christmas trees

Each year, Seafield and Strathspey Estates donate around 50 Christmas trees to local churches, schools, hospitals, old peoples' homes and community councils. This has long been an estate tradition, with our picture showing Christmas trees being harvested for delivery in time for Christmas 2005.



▲ At Sandend last summer, 500 metres of pipe was laid from the village uphill to a new £1 million sewer treatment plant with gravity feed back out to sea.

Scottish Water acquired ground from the estate for the treatment plant site and agreed a wayleave for the pipeline.

Our picture shows work in progress as the pipes are laid.

Findlay Sinclair

All estate staff were saddened to learn of the sudden death on Christmas Eve of Findlay Sinclair. Findlay had worked on the estate for 21 years in property maintenance, and we take this further opportunity to extend our sympathy to his family.

New deer larder

Work is about to start on a new deer larder for Kinveachy. The new larder will allow carcasses to be handled more safely and efficiently and will fully comply with new hygiene regulations. It will be situated close to the existing larder site to the rear of Kinveachy Lodge.



Juvenile tench from Loch Beag. ▲

Frank Law, Strathspey Estate's sporting manager with an orfe. ►

Photos: Bob Laughton, Spey Fishery Board

Non-Native Fish Project

Now in its second year the Non-Native Fish project in the River Spey catchment aims to reduce the number of non-native fish that can now be found in the area. Non-native species in the Spey and surrounding lochs and ponds in the Spey catchment include golden orfe, asp, and tench. An electro-fishing boom boat is used to stun and capture the fish.

The project follows a survey in 2004 by the Spey Research Trust, and is funded by the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), LEADER +, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Cairngorms National Park. Stephen Corcoran, the Cairngorms LBAP officer is urging everyone to take the right precautions to avoid introducing either non-native or diseased fish or other aquatic species. He says:

“Disease, parasites and alien species can be introduced by contaminated live bait, the stocking of lochs and ponds, fishing gear or even canoes.”

Two new leaflets have been produced to help raise awareness of the issues and combat the problem.



▲ Golden orfe. Photo: Bob Laughton, Spey Fishery Board



Pearl mussels in the Spey

Reintroducing freshwater pearl mussels to a secret site in the Cairngorms National Park.



Photo: CNPA

In a joint project with the Cairngorm National Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Spey District Fishery Board, and estates, including Strathspey Estate, the pearl mussel, a globally threatened species, has been reintroduced under licence at secret places to certain tributaries of the Spey where populations have previously been lost. It is hoped that they will again thrive.

Freshwater pearl mussels were given full legal protection in 1998, and it is an offence intentionally to kill, injure or disturb them, or to damage their habitat.

One reason for their drastic decline in numbers has been criminal activity.

The mussel has an important part to play in the ecology of rivers, with each able to filter about 50 litres of water a day. James Butler, Director of the Spey District Salmon Fishery Board, said:

“Healthy rivers mean healthy fish stocks, so the pearl mussels’ presence in the Park is likely to be good in the long term for salmon fisheries which contribute £11 million to the Strathspey economy alone.”

The project is funded by the Park Authority, the Cairngorms LEADER + programme, SNH and the fishery boards.

DCS visit to Kinveachy

A site visit was arranged in June 2005 to discuss the estates’ new management programme at Kinveachy, with other issues covered including sustainable rural development, collaborative deer management and natural heritage (Natura) objectives.

The day-long visit included presentations by Professor John Milne, Chairman of the Deer Commission for Scotland (DCS), Iain Hope (Deer Officer North East, DCS), Bob Dunsmore (Forestry Commission Scotland), George Hogg (Scottish Natural Heritage) and Kenny Kortland (Capercaillie Project Officer). Around 30 guests attended the event coming from the estate, DCS, SEERAD, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Carrbridge Community Council, Monadhliath Deer Management Group, RSPB and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association.

Tick Control



Grouse chick with ticks. Photo: Game Conservancy Trust

The increasing number of ticks (*Ixodes ricinus*) on Kinveachy and Foregin and their effect on grouse numbers is of ongoing concern. The estate held a briefing in October to highlight the problem and discuss how to plan the way ahead.

Over the last 20 years tick numbers have been on the increase, as have the number of ticks carrying infections, and the strains of the diseases that they carry have become more dangerous as they build up resistance to remedies.

Two illnesses that affect grouse on the moors are Louping Ill and Tick Pyaemia. With Louping Ill, this is spread rapidly and can be fatal to red grouse. With Tick Pyaemia, grouse may not be killed immediately but they are severely weakened so that birds can die within 48 hours due to cold or lack of food.

Tick numbers are thought to be increasing due to a range of factors such as climate change, and a combination of habitat, location and hosts giving rise to 'hot spots' which can act as a reservoir for the insect across a far larger area.

Ticks are carried on domestic and wild hosts, and in a moorland situation these can be deer, mountain hare, sheep or grouse.

For the estate, a number of strands were identified in the struggle against the tick, which affects not only grouse but also a number of other key bird species. Further action is being considered by the Estate.

Bert Taylor

Bert Taylor, Woods Foreman, and the longest serving member of the estates' staff, retired in October 2005 after completing 35 years of service. Everyone who worked with him wishes him a long and happy retirement.

Peter Fair

An unassuming estate field near Buckie appears at first glance to be no more than rough grazing with an assortment of gravel tracks.

For one week of the year however, in July, the area is transformed into the Peter Fair, a popular fairground event with a history going back beyond 1686 when it was first mentioned in Kirk records. Originally known as Rathven Market for traders of basic household goods, it developed into horse and cattle sales as well as a 'feeing' market for harvest labour. In addition there were always side shows but as a past extract from the Banffshire Journal indicates:

"Gone now too are the dancing boards, the dancing girls, the marquee dance, and the boxing booth and in their place have come larger pieces of machinery".

These rides now include enticing names such as Super-spin, Bomber, Jumping Frogs and Top Gun!

Many years ago the fair was managed by the Estate, but it is now organised privately by members of the Showman's Guild of Great Britain.

The field has also been rented out for other events over the years and last summer a travelling Stunt Show performed for an evening with display motor bikes, stunt cars, monster trucks and even a human cannonball.



Car crushing monster truck at the Stunt Show



Peter Fair

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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