

## Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Over recent years I have become increasingly concerned about how private land owners and large estates are viewed by the public in its broadest sense - a public that embraces MSPs and MPs; Government agencies and NGOs; local Councillors and Council officers; those living in the communities that neighbour estate ground; those with whom we do business; those who use the estates for access and other recreation; our tenants (both agricultural and residential); and our staff and their families.

Every management decision which we take regarding the estates requires consultation with some of these - some proposals require consultation with all of them. I think however, that despite legislation, increasing public interest and the move towards greater transparency, we can go even further than this. That's why, some years ago, we took the decision to hold open days, produce a News Review, and generally adopt a far more open approach with those with whom the estates as businesses interact.

I have been impressed by the way in which land owners and estates in Scandinavia have, through concerted effort, investment, and commitment, significantly changed how they are perceived. In Sweden, it has taken around 15 years for land owners to gain the recognition they deserve for the contribution which they make to the economy and indeed to everyday life. They have moved perceptions from what might have been described as 'open hostility' to genuine and widespread appreciation of what they stand for and what they deliver.

In Scotland we are involved in a similar exercise, and I make no secret of that. Land owners here so often have been portrayed as difficult, obstructive and behaving above the law. True, there have been maverick individuals who

# News Review

## Bog restoration at Reidside Moss

Since the end of the 19th century, 94% of the United Kingdom's lowland bog has disappeared due to industrial peat extraction, drainage and modification. However, in recent years awareness of the importance of bogland has increased and the biodiversity that exists in these habitats is beginning to gain acknowledgment. In 2003 SNH introduced the Grampian Lowland Bog Scheme, and hopes that this initiative will encourage management that maintains or restores the water table of lowland bogs that are SSSIs.

As part of this initiative, a demonstration of bog restoration work took place at Reidside Moss, part of Seafield and Strathspey Estates, in September. On the day, owners and managers of similar SSSIs witnessed the ditch-blocking and scrub

clearance that has been undertaken at Reidside Moss as part of Seafield and Strathspey Estates' management agreement with SNH. Ditch blocking was demonstrated by Mike Stevens from the Scottish Wildlife Trust and SNH staff were on hand to answer questions.

Lynne Farquhar, SNH's Natural Care Project Officer, said

"The event was a success despite the dreich day. Owners and managers of lowland bogs came from around Aberdeenshire and from Moray and were able to directly discuss the issues. SNH greatly appreciates our positive working relationship with Seafield Estate, and we hope the event has encouraged others to join the bog scheme."



Photo, left to right:  
Peter Chapman - SNH Board Member, Gerald Banks - Buchan Agricultural Consultants, John Watson of New Pitshigo, Mike Stevens - Scottish Wildlife Trust, Andrew Norval - Seafield Estate, Grant Nicolson - Glenernie Estate, Michael Skelly - Glenernie Estate

have abused their position and neglected their obligations. In attracting criticism, they have dragged every estate into disrepute and certain 'factions' have been all too eager to promote these individual transgressions as the norm.

What we have to show, and I believe that in general land owners have accepted this, is that we will work within the boundaries set by new legislation such as the Land Reform (Scotland) Act and Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act.

In addition however, by contributing to each consultation, and as legislation is

continually refined, we can assist in producing new laws which work - laws which are practical and balanced, and which do not penalise one sector unfairly to heap unwarranted opportunity on another. After all, we should all be working towards a vibrant Scottish rural economy.

I strongly believe, as has now been accepted in Sweden, that the private land owner has a vital role to play in achieving this. It is a major challenge for all of us who own and manage private land - but we are committed to the process and to seeing it through.

## New Unimog fire fighting vehicle

Over the years staff at Seafield and Strathspey Estates have had to deal with many moorland and forest fires, particularly over the summer months. Most of these fires are started accidentally and require prompt and skilled attention by the fire services, the estate staff and members of the public. All of the estate staff are able and experienced at dealing with moorland and forest fires and have three Argocats equipped with fire fighting appliances to deal with the majority of fires.

During the very dry and hot spring, summer and autumn of 2003 the estate had to deal with many such incidents, mostly accidental fires that started in the low ground for various reasons. Shortage of water was one of the main problems during that long hot summer along with certain restrictions put on the fire services about how long they could spend fire fighting during the hours of darkness. At times the dedicated estate staff were so far stretched that they were unable to cope as water had to be fetched from so far away and fighting and damping down continued all night. It was consequently decided that a specialist fire fighting vehicle should be stationed and ready on the estate at all times. A Mercedes Unimog 4x4 was purchased and fitted with double wheels, a purpose built platform carrying a large water tank was fixed to the vehicle as well as pressure pumps to fill the tank and deliver a high powered water jet.

This vehicle will be able to react to fires at very short notice and give around two and half hours of constant fire fighting without having to refill. The 4x4 is doubly useful as it can also be used as a water bowser for refilling the Argocat appliances. Estate staff were given training on use of the vehicle and also participated in training sessions reminding them of how to deal with any incidents involving fire.

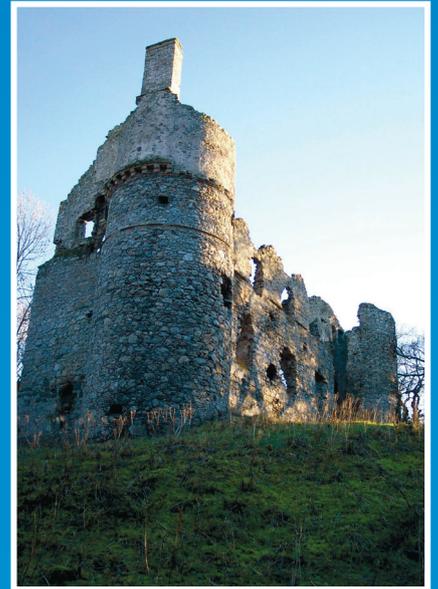
The new Unimog



## Ancient Monuments

Recent years have seen an increased number of historical sites gaining listed or scheduled status. For those unaware of the difference between the two categories, listed buildings generally still have a use today while Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), on the other hand, no longer have a 'useful' purpose but are of historical interest. The Cullen Estate has both listed buildings (from houses to bridges) and SAMs (from ruined castles to cairns).

This year additional structures have gained scheduled status, including the remains of prehistoric forts on the coast and inland, a Bronze Age burial mound and a medieval motte (castle hill). More recent structures have not been ignored and the former radar station at Crannoch Hill above Cullen has now been scheduled. Recently listed buildings include the control tower and operations block at the former Boyndie Aerodrome. The radar station, control tower and operations block were all used during the Second World War.



Boyndie Castle (SAM)



The Control Tower at the Boyndie Aerodrome

## Grouse numbers

Research conducted by the Game Conservancy Trust suggests that the number of young red grouse on moorland estates has dropped by 33% in the last year. The number of grouse estimated on the ground is calculated by counting the number of pairs on previously marked out plots in spring and then carrying out many transect counts of the grouse in summer; this gives an estimation of breeding success and an idea of what can be harvested sustainably. Such research revealed that each breeding pair had produced an average of one chick this year, compared to 1.6 last year.

Decline in breeding figures had obvious implications for the shooting season and

many estates throughout Scotland were forced to cancel or seriously curtail scheduled shooting. This situation was compounded by the terrible weather conditions of the summer months that saw many grouse chicks perish.

Frank Law, Sporting Manager, comments:

"The usual number of grouse were counted in the spring and we should have been set for a good season, but poor weather in the early summer caused high mortality among chicks."

Grouse shooting in Scotland produces a revenue of £17 million a year and supports around 1000 jobs so the decision to reduce shooting days last year was not taken lightly. However, it was felt that this was the best option in order to ensure stocks for future years.

## Farm talks

State farm tenants have continued to participate in a series of informative talks over the past year. In the spring at Cullen, Peter Cook, formerly of the SAC, provided an illuminating assessment on ongoing CAP reform and its implications for a typical farm in the north east. Peter has an engaging style which is always well received by his audience and this talk was no exception.

Later in the spring in Grantown, David Leggat, who is Director of the UA Group and was previously President of the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, gave a comprehensive talk on a wide range of issues including the future direction of the UA Group, CAP reform, his visits to other stock rearing countries and the future of the auction system. In December talks were given by Graham Haughs and David Scrimgeour of the SAC offices at Turriff and Inverness respectively, who provided updates on the new Single Farm Payment (SFP) arrangements

The Estate is delighted to welcome such prominent figures and all those who attended past talks have appreciated the opportunity to hear expert opinions on such topical issues.

## Dava Way extended

The Estate has recently concluded an access agreement with the Dava Way Association to create, improve and maintain a section of the route through estate land; this will extend the path by around seven miles. The Dava Way is a waymarked trail between the towns of Forres and Grantown on Spey. It is an extremely pleasant walk with majestic views across the shire counties of Nairn, Inverness, Moray and Aberdeen. On an especially clear day there are views across the Moray Firth to Ross and Cromarty, and Sutherland. As well as beautiful scenery there are also a great deal of interesting sites along the route; shortly after leaving Forres there is the Dallas Dhu Distillery which is now a museum owned by Historic Scotland, and further along the path you will come across the Dive Viaduct, a listed monument.

David Binney of the Dava Way Association said:

“The agreement with Seafeld Estates to cross the Dava Moor and descend into Grantown-on-Spey not only re-opens the historic route between Grantown-on-Spey and Forres, but also creates the option of a circular route along the Dava Way, Speyside Way and Moray Coastal Path. We hope that this will become a valued amenity for locals and visitors alike.”

## Whitehills flood prevention

Heavy rain in the village of Whitehills has meant that villagers have been plagued by flash floods in recent years. To combat the devastating effects of flooding a new scheme has recently been completed by Aberdeenshire Council on Estate land. The new construction is designed to contain any sudden build up of floodwater in an interceptor ditch and embankment; the water is then channeled into a holding lagoon allowing it to drain away slowly by pipe into the sea at a manageable rate.

The design of the scheme has ensured that loss of agricultural land and effect on the landscape has been minimal. The design seems to be coping with the worst of the weather so far and we hope that this is now an end to the problem.

## Caper Life Update



The third year of the Caper Life Project has now come to an end for our two part-time gamekeepers. Although 2004 has been a slightly disappointing year for Capercaillie and black grouse breeding, there have still been some noteworthy gains since the project began three years ago. Bird numbers are now around 2000; this is in marked contrast to reports in 1998/99 when the figure was approximately 1000 and the species was in decline. Kenny Kortland, RSPB Capercaillie Project Officer, comments:

“The Capercaillie population has stabilised for the time being and may even have increased to some extent”.

Moreover, in a recent report Kenny noted that the majority of Capercaillie are now to be found in Strathspey - something of which the Estate is extremely proud.

Unfortunately, the wet summer and the particularly cold weather hampered the project in 2004. Despite such setbacks all involved hope that continued efforts will secure the future of one of Scotland's most magnificent birds.

## Boyndie Wind Farm Approved

After a long and thorough consultation process, Seafeld Estates are leasing the Boyndie Aerodrome to Boyndie Wind Energy Limited. RDC Scotland Ltd, in partnership with Falck Renewables, hope to begin construction of seven 113 metre high turbines with a view to commencing electricity generation in June 2005. Construction costs are expected to total between £10 and £15 million. Both companies are established in the renewables industry; in 2002 RDC Scotland Ltd received the British Wind Energy Association's 'Windfarm Developer of the Year' award. Falck Renewables is an Italian company with projects in Spain, Italy and the UK. An exhibition of the plans was mounted in Whitehills by the developers who have been instrumental in easing local fears about the forthcoming project. No objections to the wind farm were lodged with the Council and an opportunity to express concerns was available in the form of a questionnaire which resulted in members of the public voting 18-2 in favour of the scheme.

The project will be managed in such a way that it will have minimal impact on the surrounding area and it will also be of benefit to the local community. One of the main concerns expressed by local people was the possibility of damage to roads and infrastructure. However, councillors have received a road bond from the developers guaranteeing that all damage will be reinstated. To ensure that the local community is continually consulted, the developers will hold meetings with residents, landowners and tenants and Council officials every six months. Furthermore, at the end of the wind farm's 25-year productive life the entire area will be completely restored.

Careful consultation and negotiation means that the local community will also benefit from the wind farm development. The primary bonus for local residents comes in the form of an annual payout negotiated by the Whitehills District Community Council and local councillor Jeanette McKee - this could be as much as £500,000. As well as financial rewards the wind farm will generate enough clean and environmentally sound energy to supply around 8500 homes; this is equivalent to Banff, Whitehills, Portsoy and all of the nearby rural areas.



Temporary trial masts at the new wind farm site

## Cullen Open Day a success

An open day was held on 29 May in the grounds of the Seafield Estates office, Cullen. The event was staged to give both local residents and visitors an insight into the workings of the Estate, and this year was part of a broader initiative by the Scottish Estates Business Group with a number of Scotland's large estates holding similar events across the country.

A range of exhibits and displays covered just about every aspect in which the Estate is active including agriculture, forestry and country sports. In addition a number of other organisations and businesses with whom the Estate is involved also staged displays to complete the picture. Other organisations present were The Portsoy Angling Association, the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative with its Countryside Classroom on Wheels, Grampian Country Pork, and the Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group.

The Estate's sporting department offered rides on Argocats, ran an air rifle range, and also constructed an impressive taxidermy display showing many of the animals and birds which can be found on the Estate.

More than 300 people attended the event - all of whom were able to sample from the barbecue the Estate's own venison burgers, and pork steaks supplied by Grampian Country Pork.

Here are some facts about the Estate which visitors could discover:

- The main species of tree grown commercially on the Estate is the Sitka spruce.
- 10,000 alevins (baby sea trout) were put into the Boyne Burn in 2004 by the Portsoy Angling Association.
- Estate farms supply 20,000 pigs each year to Grampian Country Pork.
- A new Argocat costs £15,000.

- Birds of prey found on the Estate include buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks.
- The Estate's in-hand farming operation at Cullen produces 5,000 tonnes of malting barley, 1,800 tonnes of winter wheat, and 200 tonnes of oil seed rape (producing 80,000 litres of cooking oil)!



Above: Lord Seafield (right) with the winners of the 'factfinder challenge' - David Sellar with son Scott and daughter Fiona

## Brian Findlay retirement



Brian Findlay, an estate joiner, one of the longest serving members of staff, has retired after 39 years of service. Everyone who has worked with him wishes him well.



## Water supply upgraded

In partnership with Aberdeenshire Council, a new 900-metre water mains extension costing £20,000 has been laid at Brodiescord, Portsoy. This extension will serve a number of Council and private houses which presently use an Estate supply. This supply is typical of a number of supplies on the Estate, rising on hill ground and piped underground to farms, fields and houses over distances of up to seven miles. While the programme of mains connections, where feasible, is ongoing, it will be a lengthy process given the cost implications.

## 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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## Spring Fling Photo Competition

In conjunction with the Banffshire Advertiser a photographic competition was run by the Estate with the theme 'Spring Fling'.

Aspiring photographers were invited to submit photographs which captured the nature of springtime with £200 worth of photographic equipment as first prize and £25 each for the two runners up.

Winner, with a photograph of Findlater Castle was Kevin Macintosh of Huntly [pictured left with Sandy Lewis]. The runners up were Matthew Henderson of Deskford and Cameron Cunningham of Braes of Enzie.