

# News Review

## Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Closed gates, high fences - that was the image of many of Scotland's large estates, but how much that has changed. Where to walk, ride, climb or cycle has of course been clarified by our access legislation, and it is good that Scotland's countryside is now recognised as a resource for all to enjoy. But it has to be remembered that with those access rights come responsibilities. This year Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park is proposing new bylaws, as it is perfectly entitled to do, to tackle the impacts of informal irresponsible camping along the loch's east shores. This privilege may be revoked as more and more parties choose to push their rights to the limit, to disturb nature and wildlife, to tear down trees for fires and barbecues, to leave litter in abundance and to spoil that same experience for others, and the many visitors from outside Scotland, who are drawn to the beautiful magnet that Loch Lomond should be.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has resisted going down a similar route. Our problem is not so bad, although there may be hot-spots where crowds will gather, camp overnight, and generally behave outside the law and the code that access legislation was enacted to permit.

On Seafield and Strathspey Estates we believe in responsible access, and in responsible land management. We are also pleased that the natural resource in this Family's care and trust is somewhere that people want to see and visit, and we welcome that.

## Where else can you do it all?



*Walkers on the Red Deer Rut Walk in the Dulnain Strath watching a stag holding a group of hinds.*

In addition, I expect that many would be astonished by the number of events, organised activities, and opportunities for the public to visit that are now being promoted by both large and small estates and farms all across Scotland. For the second year the Enjoy Estates website ([www.enjoyestates.org](http://www.enjoyestates.org)) is promoting an initiative called 'You're Welcome'. This lists by month and by region all the activities happening on estate properties across Scotland. On Seafield and Strathspey Estates we have Open Farm Sunday, guided walks and a number of other activities, but look further afield and the list really is all embracing. Where else will you find such a wide range of activities - Land Rover tours, Shakespearean plays, Tai Chi in the open countryside, jazz evenings, jousting, an orchid festival, pony trekking, sphereing, and more.



It's easy to forget the part that Scotland's estates play in our country's tourist business. Not just those traditional pursuits of shooting and fishing, but also activities for the whole family to enjoy, great days out, amazing walks, stunning scenery.

We want you to come, whether for events or just to enjoy the countryside, but we need to learn the lesson from Loch Lomond - access is welcome but it should not be abused.

## Wildcat camera trapping

The Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, part of Oxford University, in a joint exercise with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Estate, is trialling a wildcat camera trapping project in Strathspey. The concept, which has previously been used to record data about other endangered cat species including tiger, leopard and puma, involves 40 motion sensitive cameras set up in pairs in specific locations around the Estate.

Kerry Kilshaw, the scientist heading the project, says that so far results are promising. The traps were set at the start of February and will run into May. Hard snowy conditions have not been ideal but several images of both wildcats and hybrids have been recorded.

To increase the recording potential, the traps have now been baited with pheasant carcasses and we would ask that, if found, they are not disturbed enabling this important work into one of Scotland's rarest species to continue uninterrupted.

## Race for Life 2009

*Estate staff (left to right) Nicola Thow, Alison Sandison, Elaine Forsyth, Fiona Johnston, Lynn Trodden and Claire Smith took part in the 2009 Race for Life in Inverness.*



Six staff members from the Estate took part in the Cancer UK 5km Race for Life held at Bught Park, Inverness last May. The annual event, for ladies only, is a vital fundraiser for this leading cancer charity, and the effort raised more than £600 for the cause. Across the UK more than 3500 women take part each year, and it is hoped that another team from the Estate will take part in 2010.

## Caper on the BBC One Show

Strathspey Estate's commitment and actions to conserve the capercaillie were featured on The One Show following a planned visit by the programme in April.

Strathspey Estate has one of the largest caper populations in Scotland, with up to 31 cocks recorded on 8 separate leks in 2008, giving a total of around 124 birds, or between 5 and 10 per cent of the entire UK population.

The Estate has received grant funding for capercaillie conservation work including predator control and fencing removal, with more than 22 miles of fencing already dismantled.

Retained fencing in caper habitat has been marked with wooden droppers and barrier netting to prevent bird strikes.

The Estate has also received financial support for variable thinning in woodland to maintain wetland flushes and currently receives assistance with the cost of predator control of foxes and crows, an important factor in protecting ground nesting birds.



## Red Deer Rut Walk

Immediately after the end of the stag stalking season, Frank Law, Estate sporting manager, and Wayne Whitcher, head keeper, led a walk for the newly formed Boat of Garten based Am Monadh Ruadh Walking Club from Dalnahaitnach to the Eil Wood, a distance of around four miles. 13 club members came on the walk, which was conducted in the style of a stalking party being taken out onto the hill. During the day they saw red deer, sika deer, golden eagle, red grouse and whooper swans. A walking event is planned for 2010.

## Open Farm Sunday

LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) runs a national initiative called 'Open Farm Sunday'. This year Old Cullen Farms will be participating with an open day at Bogtown Farm with machinery on display, input from the Estate's forestry business, and a shooting range run by Estate gamekeepers.

The event takes place on Sunday 13 June and will run in conjunction with the Estate's neighbour, Leys Farm, where their waste recycling business will also be on display.

## Lone working and satellite tracking



Staff safety is paramount on the Estate, and lone working has always been a particular concern. Now the Estate has embraced the latest available satellite tracking technology to ensure the safety of its staff when working alone in the hills and other remote areas.

This follows trials with other systems, but certain parts of the Estate have no coverage for mobile or messaging services.

Now the SPOT tracker, which is about the size of a pack of cards, can beam a signal including a grid reference back either to office computers, or to management or family mobile phones.

The handset can also send a 'man down' signal in the event of an emergency that routes direct to the emergency services. GPS orientation also displays the position of the tracker on Google Maps. Estate staff have found that the system works well, providing a valuable safety net should an emergency arise.

## Scottish venison day for schools

*Frank Law, sporting manager, explains what happens in the Estate's deer larder to local school children.*



The Estate is planning to host another educational day for schools at Kinveachy Lodge in association with the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Highland Council Ranger Service and the Deer Commission for Scotland with up to 100 children expected to attend.

These events provide a valuable insight into Scotland's different deer species, deer stalking, habitat and conservation, and delivery of meat into the food chain. They have been followed up with in-school cookery demonstrations and venison tastings.

Similar days are to be held at Cullen for local schools on 24 and 25 May.

## Kinveachy Control Agreement Steering Group Update

Since our formal Deer Management Plan started on Kinveachy in 2004 followed by the Control Agreement in 2005, there has been continual monitoring to gauge the extent of regeneration within the control zone.

The programme was put in place to enhance the condition of the Caledonian Forest habitat within the Kinveachy Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Monitoring takes the form of an annual survey of more than 200 marked seedlings of birch, Scots pine, rowan, juniper and willow. The latest survey shows that favourable results are being achieved.

In November it was reported to the Steering Group that, between 2006 and 2009, more than three quarters of the marked seedlings were showing an increase in height, and that the reduction of grazing pressure from deer is now clearly having the required effect.

Deer counts are done five times each year over Kinveachy's 6000 Hectares, and deer population targets continue to be met. With the success to date, it has been agreed to keep deer numbers at their present level of 3 – 4 deer per square kilometre to maintain the project's momentum.

## Count and Grow

Old Cullen Farms' manager Ronnie Urquhart is coordinating a 'Count and Grow' project at Cullen Primary School set up by the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) across Scotland.

The project encourages children in schools to grow potatoes in bins or gro-bags, while their harvesting will also help with their maths!

The project has seemingly taken off with potatoes in abundance because of the classroom temperatures.

## New Estate fishing policy

For 2010, following recommendation from the Spey Fishery Board, the Estate is promoting a new Catch & Release policy, with all hen salmon to be released regardless of date.

In 2009, again the percentage of fish returned by guests rose to 80.75 per cent of fish caught whereas the Spey overall shows 77 per cent.

The 2009 salmon season closed with almost the same number of fish caught on the Castle Grant beats 1, 2 and 3 as the previous year (2009, 594 fish; 2008, 595 fish) despite fewer fish being caught early in the season.

## Tick Control

Without doubt, ticks are an increasing problem on grouse moors. Ticks are parasites of deer, hare and grouse, and spread Louping Ill, a disease that is fatal to grouse stocks as well as Lyme Disease, a serious and debilitating human illness.

The upsurge of tick numbers at Kinveachy is probably due to a number of factors including changing climatic conditions, the spread of mountain hares, and the removal of sheep in the 1990's. One established way to control ticks is to use sheep dipped with acaricide as 'mops'. The ticks attach themselves to the sheep as they graze, but are then killed by the chemical, breaking their complex life cycle.

Because Kinveachy is a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Estate has needed agreement from Scottish Natural Heritage.

The Estate has been successful with a bid for Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding to re-fence parts of the hill and some in-bye ground for over-wintering, and to fence out regeneration areas.

Starting in 2009, one of the Estate's tenant farmers and his son have been running 1000 sheep in two flocks on the hill, and it is hoped that this will have a positive effect in reducing tick numbers.

Sea Trout catches on the Spey rose slightly (2009, 2022 fish; 2008, 1629 fish) but are still well below the 10 year average of 4590. Spey Board policy now is that anglers retain only one fish of takeable size per day.



## It's been some winter!



Everyone in Scotland has suffered an extreme winter - initially very wet, then a lot of snowfall and very cold.

The end of October 2009 was very wet and the ground already saturated before the prolonged, unprecedented rainfall of early November. The worst flooding brought damage to bridges, farm roads and fencing - and consequent significant disruption.

Heavy snow then arrived the week before Christmas, and further snow towards the end of December over Speyside and Keith in particular. This weight and persistence of snow has not been seen for many years and a number of older farm buildings lost their roofs or collapsed under it.

Snow damage was further compounded by frozen pipes and a continual struggle for farmers to get feed to their stock. In March, temperatures in Strathspey were still being logged at minus 17 degrees, and diesel was freezing. The last few days of March saw two feet of snow in Strathspey. The arrival of Spring has not been before time!

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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## Seafield and Strathspey Estates Land Portfolio being marketed for rural housing needs

With agents DTZ, the Estates have launched an initiative to attract early interest from developers in all the zoned development land across their holdings in both the Strathspey area and around Cullen.

The total portfolio amounts to some 52.78 hectares (130 acres) of development land, with a capacity for around 460 houses.

A number of the sites are unique, representing the only opportunity for additional housing within certain settlements, some enjoying spectacular locations.

In relation to the sites in the Cullen, Portknockie and Findochty areas, Mark Cross, Principal Planning Officer, Moray Council, commented:

"Seafield Estate is the principal landowner in this area, and the release of these landholdings is important in allowing continued growth in these communities. These former fishing villages are attractive locations. The sites are all designated for residential development in the Local Plan, and represent excellent opportunities.

"The Council is working with the Estate to prepare development briefs for these sites, as a means of promoting interest and awareness of their availability. This will provide assistance and guidance to prospective developers on what form the developments should take, and hopefully ensure a successful planning application."

## New website for Strathspey Estate

Strathspey Estate has a fresh new-look website, with a host of information about the Estate, its history and wildlife. It also focuses on fishing, sporting and renting estate properties for sporting, corporate or holiday use, and allows for availability to be checked online.

The website also has loads of 'gallery' pictures of Kinveachy Lodge, Inverallan House and Wester Lettoch, as well as Estate views and activities shot on location in 2009.

## Delliefure Natural Burial Ground in the news



The natural burial ground on Strathspey Estate at Delliefure, Grantown on Spey, has been much in the news for all the right reasons in the last 12 months.

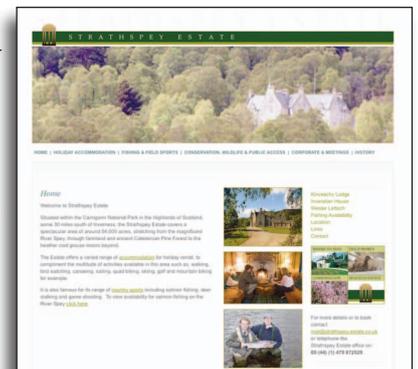
The site which is operated by Native Woodland Ltd was awarded Runner Up prize in the Cemetery of the Year Awards 2009. All burial sites participating in the awards were assessed on a number of criteria including maintenance, design, memorial choice, and involvement with the local community.

Awards Administrator Elisabeth Edvardson said:

"The Cemetery of the Year Awards endeavours to increase public awareness of the importance burial sites can play within their communities.

"It is our aim to give our nation's burial sites and the people who ensure they are kept in good condition the recognition they deserve, and celebrate those sites that make a valuable contribution to their local area."

The Delliefure site also featured on the BBC2 programme It's Not Easy Being Green, and was promoted at the Scottish Green Party Conference in October 2009.



Visit the new site at:  
[www.strathspey-estate.co.uk](http://www.strathspey-estate.co.uk)