

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Scotland *news*

Scotland's premier game fair

Your preview of the GWCT
Scottish Game Fair, 3-5 July



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Game & Wildlife
CONSERVATION TRUST
Scotland

Foreword



Andrew Salvesen at the Scottish Game Fair.

Little did I know that the chairmanship of GWCT Scotland would be as absorbing, challenging, stimulating and time-consuming when I took over the role in July 2013!

It has been another year of immense progress for the charity and at times quite mind-boggling how the Scottish GWCT staff can juggle so many projects at one time, and yet still find time to respond responsibly to media interest with scientific fact and practical and policy solutions. The power of social media is now widely recognised (whether one likes it or not) and the GWCT has been on the front foot, responding to those who criticise the way our countryside is managed.

The ever-changing political landscape in Scotland is challenging. I am pleased that the increasing evidence of how our members bring environmental and economic benefit across swathes of the uplands is being recognised by politicians, civil servants and the publicly funded advisory bodies.

The 'farmer cluster' approach to landscape-scale wildlife recovery is an important element of the GWCT's work and the conservation measures being undertaken across a number of neighbouring properties on Deeside – together with our demonstration sites at Langholm and Whitburgh – can provide the Scottish Government and the wider public with an understanding of the benefits of effective conservation.

None of this would be possible without the support of our volunteer committees around Scotland, members, donors and indeed bidders at the various functions organised around the regions. This past year has seen the rebirth of a number of committees and the income generation from these volunteer efforts has been outstanding. The funds raised are being carefully targeted towards projects that continue to promote the ethos of 'conservation through wise use' to those policy makers that increasingly manage our lives.

My thanks again go out to the dedicated Scottish staff of the GWCT who tirelessly work to promote the traditional ways that we manage our countryside. I look forward to meeting many of you at the Scottish Game Fair in July.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Salvesen'.

Andrew Salvesen
CHAIRMAN GWCT SCOTLAND

Some success for Langholm project

THE LANGHOLM MOOR Demonstration Project has published its seven-year review which outlines what progress this unique 10-year project in the south-west of Scotland has made to date against its key targets.

The number of nesting hen harriers exceeded the Project target for 2014 and thereby is helping to deliver the objectives of the Langholm and Newcastleton Hills Special Protection Area notified under the EU 'Birds' Directive. The moor also supports healthy populations of raptors and short-eared owls whilst black grouse numbers have also increased significantly. However, red grouse numbers have not yet recovered sufficiently to allow driven shooting and this has compromised the desired compatibility between red grouse and raptors. One of the main objectives of the project is to improve grouse production such that grouse shooting again becomes viable enough in economic terms to support moorland management.

The project, which is a joint initiative between Buccleuch Estates, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, the RSPB and Natural England, is charged with demonstrating how to resolve conflicts between moorland management for raptors and red grouse. It is also expected to maintain the hen harrier population as a viable component of the Special Protection Area, increase the populations of moorland breeding wading birds and songbirds and extend and improve the heather moorland habitat beyond its state in 2002.



Heather burning, or muirburn, is one of the management tools used to improve habitat on the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project.

Other salient points from the review are:

- The targets of expanding the area of heather and improving heather condition have both been met.
- The population targets have not been met for wading birds, despite some population increases, but have been met for meadow pipits.
- Stakeholder engagement has led to a better understanding of moorland management which integrates a viable game shooting enterprise with raptor management and practicable and acceptable options to resolving current management concerns.
- There is a strong partnership between game management and raptor conservation interests.

The report of the seven-year review of the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project is now available on the Project's website www.langholmproject.com/Project%20administration.html

Undercover agents

LAST YEAR WE started a new project at Balgonie Estate in Fife to extend our understanding of what cover crops are most beneficial to grey partridge, writes Dr Dave Parish, senior lowground scientist.

With the much-appreciated assistance of Kingdom Farming who run the farm operation, and Scottish Agronomy who run a variety of crop trials at the site, we are developing a game cover mix based on chicory that will provide reliable perennial escape cover for grey partridge. This began with a small trial plot of 2ha where we sowed chicory with either kale or mustard as nurse crops in replicated rows, which have been regularly monitored for their use by birds since September last year. In addition, this provides us with the opportunity to test various management practices, like which herbicides can and can't be used, for example. At the same time, we conducted baseline surveys of grey partridge and songbirds across the estate in preparation for field-scale trials.

Preparations for this larger scale study are now well underway and approximately 6km of 4m -wide game cover strips will be sown over the next two years at Balgonie, in the central portion of the site. These strips will again be chicory and either kale or mustard, alternated across the



area, and we plan to monitor the response of songbirds and grey partridge to the extra resource. The latter will hopefully include radio-tracking so that we can precisely determine habitat use and also record mortality rates.

Both the small- and large-scale plots will be monitored for a number of years to come, and we hope to be able to show that a perennial game cover mix can be at least as good as annual and biennial mixes, but also easier for growers to manage.

Above main: A chicory and mustard mix (left) and chicory and kale mix (right) at our new crop trial site at Balgonie in Fife.

Inset: Tagging grey partridges will hopefully be the next step at Balgonie.



Getting a handle on hares

Britain's only indigenous lagomorph, the mountain hare, is currently the subject of much media and political interest.

The fact that we still commonly see hares, even in areas where there are many being shot suggests that the population may be more robust than some think. However, this cannot be taken for granted and active, sustainable management of hares must be part of the sustainable management of red grouse.

Our research over the last 10 years, together with the data collected through the National Gamebag Census (NGC), allows us to inform the debate surrounding the conservation, ecology and management of mountain hares. We established in 2008 that the Scottish range of mountain hare is not shrinking (range contraction is often the first sign of a population in trouble). This positive situation should be maintained through managers making regular and consistent assessments of hare numbers, and of numbers shot. We also encourage neighbours speak to each other and reduce shooting in areas of natural population decline to prevent replication across large landscape areas.

But we can always do better and improved monitoring methods will help us understand the effects of shooting hares,

with the NGC as a means of putting current hare bags in the context of past changes in bags. So we are again working with Scottish Natural Heritage and the James Hutton Institute to assess hare densities more accurately and thus help inform managers to develop balanced moorland health plans.

These plans can help mountain hares remain part of the sporting interest on many upland Scottish estates, where they are found at high densities, benefiting from the production of cover, food and low numbers of predators. Many moors in Scotland are home to blood-sucking ticks, which have many hosts including man, grouse, sheep and mountain hares. For grouse and sheep this can be more than just a nuisance as these ticks can carry life-threatening diseases. If enough grouse and sheep are affected the



economics of managing a moor may be severely compromised – and without management moors become of less value to mountain hares.

Our research thus suggests that hares, as a tick host, should be considered as a factor in tick disease control strategies that moorland managers use. This is because ultimately such strategies support investment in managing the whole ecosystem. The specific management priority should be a thorough sheep dipping programme and controls on the number of wild deer, which can be a very considerable tick host, before considering reducing hare numbers.

Even in this context, the control of mountain hares to prevent tick-borne disease transmission will raise concerns over the long-term conservation status of the species. We wish to see healthy, resilient populations of mountain hares on Scottish moorland and this is best achieved by positive, well-informed management. We will strive to avoid the extreme positions of possible extirpation of hares or shooting bans to protect them, either of which would probably lead to 'hares today, but gone tomorrow'.





Above: The Fred Taylor Memorial Award for working hill ponies has captured the hearts of estates and Fair visitors alike. Photos by P. Keyser. Right top: Savage Skills – returning to the fair to enthral the crowds. Right bottom: Traditional fare in the celebrated Food Hall.

Join us at Scotland's premier Game Fair 3-5 July

Ticket offers available at www.scottishfair.com

For those readers who have never visited the Scottish Game Fair, then 2015 is the year for you to head to the silvery River Tay and enjoy Scotland's biggest and best outdoor event, which focuses on all that's great about rural Scotland.

There's so much to whet the appetite, especially as this is Scotland's Year of Food and Drink, and with activities and trade stands for all interests and ages, it's time to set the satnav for Scone Palace. The ancestral home of Scottish kings is the perfect setting for the Fair and provides a fitting backdrop to the three-day event being held from 3rd to 5th July.

Where else would you see a mountain bike stunt team performing alongside horn-blowing French huntsmen?

Falcons, gun dogs, ducks, terriers, hill ponies, pipe bands and hunting hounds will also be taking their turn in the main ring and there's plenty to see elsewhere in the showground.

Vintage vehicles, gnat shooting, clay shooting, a 4x4 agility course, fishing tuition and competitions, scurry and gun dog tests, a children's activity area, and the celebrated Food

Hall are all easily encompassed in one fantastic day out.

As one first-time visitor described the fair in 2014: "The Scottish Game Fair was how a game fair should be: lots of game – live, stuffed, cooked, painted, sculpted and talked about.

The show has a wonderful, warm relaxed atmosphere, with a distinct Scottish identity. I strongly recommend that anyone interested in rural pursuits and something a little different considers a visit to the fair in 2015."

Fishing for All

The mighty River Tay is internationally renowned for its salmon fishing and is regarded as one of the best salmon rivers in the United Kingdom, indeed in Europe. Anglers come to her banks from all over the world, perhaps to try their luck and breaking the record for the largest ever rod-caught salmon in the UK? Miss Georgina Ballantine caught the giant fish in 1922, weighing 64lbs, and this remains the British record. In celebrating this rich history, the Scottish Game Fair provides all an angler could dream of in terms of equipment, advice, tuition and opportunities.

Fishing competitions and instruction on the Tay, fly-tying advice and workshops on the river bank, clothing and equipment, boats, books, fishing breaks, have-a-go activities and advice, river maintenance and related fishing organisations.

The fair is also delighted to host Get Hooked on Fishing this year – an angling charity which helps provide positive opportunities for young people, their families and communities.

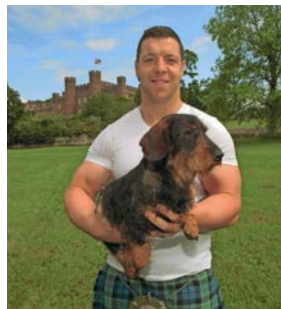
GHoF will be providing free have-a-go sessions for beginners, top tips sessions for more experience rods, and fishing fun fair games for all to enjoy. The aim of GHoF is simply to get more people fishing more often, and what better venue than the fair to encourage uptake in this sport?



Get a taste of Scotland in the Food Hall

The Food Hall will be making the most of 2015, Scotland's Year of Food and Drink, with over 50 producers providing a true taste of

Above: Get Hooked on Fishing will be offering free have-a-go sessions encouraging more people to fish more often.



Left top: Lots of fun for two and four-legged friends at the Scottish Game Fair. Right top: The Fife Foxhounds – a traditional spectacle in the main ring. Right bottom: Scottish rugby prop Alasdair Dickinson and Bramble the Teckel enjoyed the fair in Scone Palace parklands.

Scotland. New Scottish traders will be found amongst our favourite food stalls selling tablet, smoked salmon, lobsters, fresh salads and dressings, and providing the contents for the ultimate picnic!

To help promote awareness of Scottish producers, the Cookery Theatre will be focusing on those found in the Food Hall. We are pleased that Christopher Trotter will be our 'foodie in residence' throughout the fair, preparing dishes based on what you can find in the hall and working with other invited guest chefs to inspire you. Christopher will be making full use of the theatre area with cookery demonstrations and food tastings over the three days including whisky/wine pairings, a baking competition and 'game on' taste tests. Check the website before you visit for timings.

Learn more about the Trust's work in Scotland

The Fair provides GWCT Scotland with an ideal platform from which to educate people

Christopher Trotter 'foodie in residence'



from all walks of life about Scotland's natural heritage and presents an excellent opportunity for all to engage with the countryside. The event allows visitors to discover more about the importance of conservation, Scotland's game and wildlife management and sports not least via the main GWCT exhibit which will be delivered with partner organisation the World Pheasant Association. Many breeds of pheasant, partridge, grouse, black game, ptarmigan and the majestic and endangered capercaillie will form a live exhibit. It's a chance to see, up close, some of these fabulous birds and learn more about their ecology. Our practical, detailed and colourful game and wildlife conservation crop display should stimulate lively discussion on shoot management and CAP greening issues.

Tickets

Friday 3, Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 July 2015

Save 10% on the gate price by booking in advance online (NB – offer ends midnight on Thursday 18th June)

£19 – adult gate price; £17 advance

£5 – children gate price (under-5's free); £4.50 advance

£40 – family (2 adults, 2 children); £36 advance

Car parking £4.00 on the day. Free for GWCT Members

Fair and Scone Palace combined tickets also available.

Exclusive benefits for members

GWCT members enjoy a designated forward car park. Those registered in Scotland will receive a Fair information pack enclosing their car park pass and informing them of our members' welcome marquee. We will be delighted to greet you here and provide you with your official swingtag to allow you and your guests entry to the Members' Enclosure. At the Main Entrance those who have purchased tickets online will have them scanned in the fast access lane. There will also be a special members' lane for those purchasing tickets on the day. If you reside outwith Scotland and have not previously registered for this mailing, then please telephone 01738 551511.

Members also benefit from the excellent restaurant facilities and comfortable surroundings of the Member's Enclosure where Saltire Catering will be providing us with delicious food and bar facilities throughout the day. Just display your member's badge at the entrance and we will be delighted to welcome you and your guests.

Would you like to be part of the team delivering the Scottish Game Fair?

We are seeking volunteers to enable the continued success of this fantastic event. There will be a variety of roles to suit all abilities, such as assisting with the gun dogs, meeting and greeting, and site set-up. Each volunteer will gain free entry to the fair with the opportunity to meet other like-minded people. This experience will be a great addition to any CV and it is a fantastic chance to be part of Scotland's best outdoor event. For more information, please contact Mike Kirk, email: mikek39@hotmail.com

Save the capercaillie

Since the mid-1970s, the UK capercaillie population has fallen from 20,000 birds to 1,285 individuals, which are confined to native pinewoods in a small area of Scotland. The capercaillie is under real threat of becoming extinct – for a second time.

It is not yet fully understood why these reductions in numbers and range have occurred, but we know reasons include wet weather around hatch time in June, habitat deterioration, predation and collisions of fully grown birds with deer fences. The main conservation aim is to stabilise numbers within the core range in Strathspey and then to increase the population size and expand the range, thus recolonising previously occupied forests. To do this the breeding success and survival needs to be enhanced.

The first priority in improving capercaillie numbers should be the encouragement of native pinewood regeneration by carefully expanding this habitat in places that do not compromise other important land uses. However this management is unlikely to provide short-term benefits. Capercaillie breeding success can vary markedly between years in relation to weather in June when chicks hatch. Therefore it is important to ensure high breeding success by reducing predation pressure, particularly in years of good weather. This priority, to identify the interactions between capercaillie and their predators, was highlighted as a conservation issue by the Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Group in 2010.

Analysis of the most recent data shows that, in addition to weather variables, crows, and to a lesser extent pine martens, impact on capercaillie breeding success and that foxes are implicated with lower adult survival. Repeated GWCT surveys in 1995 and 2009, across 11

Scottish forests supporting capercaillie, have shown that fox and pine marten had increased 2.2 and 3.9 fold respectively but indices of carrion crows and raptors had remained similar. The role of predation needs to be fully understood so we can effectively help the capercaillie.



“The capercaillie is under real threat of becoming extinct – for a second time”

So should we be considering the removal of pine marten from capercaillie forests right now? The GWCT believes that the predation control focus should remain on reducing the numbers of foxes and crows. However, if this fails to bring about the desired and needed increase in capercaillie breeding success, then a licensed experimental non-lethal pine marten removal study should start and could form part of a wider re-introduction programme for this mammal, which itself is recovering from near extinction in the early 1900s.

Options about how best to reduce predation pressure are being investigated with potential project partners Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).

The full article on capercaillie by GWCT is published in the May issue of The Field.

Top: © Laurie Campbell

Are fish affected by beavers?

POPULATIONS OF RE-INTRODUCED and escaped Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) currently exist in England and Scotland, and concerns have been raised that beavers, and more specifically the dams that they construct, may negatively impact populations of migratory fish, particularly salmon and trout, due to impeding their movements and fragmenting important habitat.

There is currently no information available on impacts of beaver dams on the movement of fish in the UK, but scientists at the University of Southampton in collaboration with the GWCT, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Salmon and Trout Association aim to close this knowledge gap.

PhD researcher Robert Needham is currently in the north of Scotland, having embarked on his second field season, and is using telemetry to assess the ability of trout to pass a series of beaver dams in both the upstream and downstream directions. “To date we have tagged 209 fish and have tracked individuals that have successfully passed the dams to their spawning grounds,” said Robert.

Much has been said in the media about beaver impacts – negative and positive – and the GWCT looks forward to following this project as it unravels this new conservation issue.



A beaver dam has unknown impacts on the movements of fish in the UK.

Spreading the message across the world

Senior Advisor Hugo Straker hosted an international party of students at his local East Lothian shoot at the end of February. Glasgow University final year undergraduate veterinary students from the UK, US and Botswana attended as part of a wildlife and livestock management course. The group discussed wild grey partridge management on a farm that hosts a reared pheasant shoot with



the main focus on bird welfare. The students were led by Professor of Production Animal Health Nick Jonsson – a former mixed veterinary practitioner from Australia.

Highland Fling

A SUPERB £20,000 was raised at the end of March from the GWCT's Highland Region Auction at The Storehouse, Evanton. The catalogue had 35 sporting lots which all sold well, the two most popular being the walked-up grouse days, kindly donated by Glenmazeran and Phones estates. Many thanks to the two main sponsors, Saffery Champness and CKD Galbraith, plus Grahams of Inverness for great support and top prizes.

Doubled up in Glasgow

THE SECOND WEST of Scotland Dinner was twice as good as last year's inaugural event in that the number of attendees, auction lots and profit had all doubled. Held at the long established game restaurant The Ubiquitous Chip in Glasgow at the beginning of March, 120 guests enjoyed 'Sloegasm' cocktails before a delicious game dinner. The auction was conducted by TV and radio comedian and presenter Fred Macaulay, who also had everyone doubled up throughout and brought the total raised on the night to £28,000. Grateful thanks must go to Fred, lot donors, our sponsors Savills, Turcan Connell, Sotheby's and Chiene and Tait, The Ubiquitous Chip and West of Scotland chair David MacRobert and his committee.

Media columnist Claire Zambuni and broadcaster and comedian Fred Macaulay at the GWCT's West of Scotland dinner (photo courtesy Scottish Field)



First time in Fife

THE FIFE COMMITTEE held its inaugural Dinner and Auction in February at Kilrie Granary near Kirkcaldy by kind permission of Mr and Mrs John Drysdale. A sell-out crowd of 80 enjoyed a champagne reception, generously donated by David Stanistreet, followed by a venison and pheasant dinner provided by members of the committee. GWCT Director Scotland Dr Adam Smith launched the new Kingdom Agribusiness Grey Partridge Trophy before handing over to Dugald Hamilton, a wonderful



Edward Baxter, Fife regional chair Douglas Williams, Adam Smith and Sam Parsons (Photo courtesy Walter Neilson, Fife Free Press).

auctioneer, who provided super entertainment and pushed the total for the night to £13,000. Guests were offered lifts home by our kind sponsors Fife Mitsubishi and Fife Isuzu.

New faces at GWCT Scotland

GWCT SCOTLAND HAS welcomed a few new faces over recent months in the shape of research assistants and placement students who are working on a wide variety of projects.



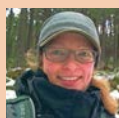
Leyla Hernandez – Leyla Hernandez is an intern from Merca University, Spain, and is with GWCT Scotland until July. She is helping with our work in southern Scotland, particularly focusing on birds of prey.



Annie Holdstock – Annie Holdstock is a placement student from Cardiff University who will be with GWCT Scotland for a year, finishing in September. She is helping with our grey partridge work at Whitburgh Farms, conducting a project on raptor abundance and distribution.



Kayleigh Hogg – Kayleigh joined the uplands research team in March as a senior research assistant. She has most recently been studying for her PhD estimating population densities of deer and testing for pathogens at Queens' University, Belfast. She will be an integral part of the team collecting the core long-term data on red grouse and developing our research related to red grouse and other moorland wildlife, including mountain hares.



Anna McWilliam – Anna McWilliam is a research assistant on our Scottish Grey Partridge Recovery Project working in Fife and the Lothians. She comes to eastern Scotland after having worked at Langholm. Anna will be studying partridges as well as a suite of associated wildlife.



Amy Withers – Amy is undertaking a year-long placement with the uplands research team as part of her Biological Sciences degree at the University of Birmingham. She will experience a range of projects including counting grouse worm burdens, lamping mountain hares and monitoring habitat and predator indices in capercaillie forests.



Alison Espie – Alison Espie is our new research assistant in the Howe of Cromar, Aberdeenshire where she is helping with a broad range of baseline surveys as part of a large environmental audit. She will be working on birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates at one time or another! Alison is local to the area and has valuable, long-established links with local farmers.



A grand day out

Claire Whitehorn explains how persistence paid off to give one lucky GWCT member the day of a lifetime

Hampshire farmer Lindsay Marshall has religiously bought raffle tickets from the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust each year for more than 30 years. It never occurred to him that he might actually win anything. When he received a phone call from the Grand Grouse Draw organiser Hugo Straker in December 2013 telling him he had won for himself and eight friends a day's driven grouse shooting on Scotland's fine Garrogie estate with all associated accommodation and hospitality, he took some convincing that this wasn't someone playing a trick. It wasn't. "Happy Christmas!" said Hugo.

Lindsay personally issued the eight invitations and eight times experienced again, vicariously, delight and surprise at his luck. It turned out that three of the nine guns, including Lindsay, had been grouse shooting before but not for some time, and the rest had always meant to.

When the nine guns and supporters finally drove over staggeringly beautiful moors past blue and shining lochs to Whitebridge, they were met with blazing sunshine.

The Whitebridge Hotel provided warm

hospitality, small acts of kindness, outstanding country cooking and allowed dogs to treat the place like home. Soon the party was beginning to feel that they'd won not one raffle but three. The weather raffle, the hotel raffle and, finally, the grouse raffle.

The Garrogie estate is owned by the Connell family, who warmly welcomed the guns at the lodge. As they arrived they could see a long line of beaters' vehicles already snaking up the hillside. Surprisingly, some of the beaters were violinists from the great orchestras of Europe who for many years have enjoyed spending their summer holidays stomping across this wild terrain in the fresh air.

Soon the convoy was threading its way up slopes that felt practically vertical. From time to time it passed a group of birds chattering to each other at the trackside. Then they took off suddenly and simultaneously like small, speedy, low-flying arrows. Mr Connell Senior smiled. The grouse count was already beginning to look like a gross underestimate. He said: "You don't know how happy it makes me to see so much grouse."

Stopping at the top of nowhere, 360° of moor stretched as far as the eye could see. Underfoot was a treacherous combination of heather, boggy peat ravines known as hags, small rivulets and hummocks of flora.

The guests stumbled into hags, tripped over heather, slipped into water and had to be dragged up steep sides as they looked for their pegs, well-camouflaged in their butts of peat

and heather. Guns who had asked for guidance on their first grouse shoot were joined by a Connell or our good-natured organiser, Andrew Dingwall-Fordyce. After much discussion about safety, they were finally all at the ready. Listening to the moors' deep, deep silence they waited. And then...

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a host of tiny Exocet missiles flew towards the butts. The beginners quickly learned the rules. The beaters appear in a line on the horizon and, as soon as they are 200m away, a horn blows and you turn and fire at the grouse as they are driven over you from behind. Easy, eh? No. But by the end of the first drive all nine guns were addicted.

There were four drives that day and when the Connells invited us all for a slap-up home-made tea afterwards, no one could stop smiling, not even the dogs. Norman Stoddart, the patient and kind gamekeeper who ran the day so efficiently, announced that we had shot an almost respectable 86 and a half brace.

After that, dinner was an even jollier affair. I surveyed the happy faces around the table, not least that of the lucky winner, and it seemed that everyone involved had conspired to deliver a prize none of us would forget.



Your chance to win

The 2015 Grand Grouse Draw has just been launched and it is a very special opportunity to win the ultimate sporting challenge – a day's driven grouse shooting for eight guns during the 2016 season over Horseupcleugh grouse moor in the stunning Lammermuir hills, Berwickshire. The fortunate winner of this draw will be able to invite seven friends to enjoy the most memorable, exciting and fully challenging sport on offer with very comfortable accommodation in the estate's own beautifully appointed shooting lodge on the edge of the moor. Find the Grand Grouse Draw leaflet included in your mailing to apply for tickets or email: gwctscottishdraw@gmail.com

