

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Scotland *news*



The 29th Scottish Game Fair

Your preview of the GWCT
Scottish Game Fair, 30 June-2 July

Also in this issue

- Boost for the Scottish team
- Counting on sheep
- Deterring pests with lasers
- Your complete guide to the Scottish Game Fair
- Big Farmland Bird Count
 - Snaring update
 - Latest events
 - Talking to Simon Thorp



Foreword



(L-R) Allan Wright, GWSDF shepherd manager, Adam Smith, GWCT Director Scotland, Philip Astor, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Andrew Salvesen, John Shields and Marlies Nicolai, GWCT research assistant.

I write this with my term as Scottish chairman now drawing to a close. The next person to take on this role will face many challenges around game and wildlife conservation in Scotland. It will be good news for my successor that they will be working with an organisation that I have had great satisfaction chairing for the last four years.

In the last year, your Trust has begun to address a very great challenge that faces Scotland as a whole: how will game conservation and farming work together to deliver wildlife, habitats, quality soils and water, sporting activity and income as our international and financial relationships change.

Our demonstration farm, GWSDF Auchnerran, is on Deeside but reflects the challenges of farmland and moorland shoots and farming across Scotland, and arguably across much of the UK (see page 29). Many visitors, including HRH the Duke of Edinburgh in August 2016, have reflected on the value and timeliness of this project. This practical demonstration is complemented by the work done by our Advisory Service in Scotland, an integration that I hope you will explore at this year's GWCT Scottish Game Fair.

Our research takes place across Scotland, often in collaboration with bodies such as the James Hutton Institute, Scotland's Rural College and Scotland's Moorland Forum. It underpins both our demonstration work and our advice at all levels. Mountain hares, black grouse, and game crops are some of our on-going projects that link to policies which can both benefit and challenge game and wildlife conservation. The Trust also values the information we receive from our supporters. We hope contributors to the National Gamebag Census and the Partridge Count Scheme will be joined by those letting us know where curlew are breeding in Scotland. This data will help us improve the practical conservation of this critically endangered species.

I close by saying that I will not be ending my association with the GWCT. I will be taking part in these projects as a member in the future, and I look forward to continuing to contribute to the non-executive management of the Trust in a number of roles. The work of this organisation is essential in the on-going development of game conservation in Scotland and is very worthy of your, my, and indeed much wider, support.



Andrew Salvesen
SCOTTISH COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Boost for Scottish team

WE ARE delighted to welcome the following members of staff to the team:



Sarah McDowell has joined as head of events for Scotland, responsible for all GWCT Scotland events, membership, sponsorship and PR, as well as shoot days at our Auchnerran farm. Sarah is a qualified marketer and project manager who specialises in event management.

Originally from Hillsborough in Northern Ireland, she lives with her husband Piers and two children near Edinburgh. Having enjoyed eventing and hunting in her youth, she more recently caught the shooting and stalking bug.

Before coming to the GWCT, Sarah worked in both the corporate and charitable sectors, notably working with the RSPB in the UK and Scotland, developing a new national programme of events including the Nature of Scotland Awards and Scotland's BIG nature festival.



Merlin Becker is our new policy and advisory officer and grew up in the Republic of Ireland's Wicklow Mountains. His passion for the natural world, especially heather moorlands comes from his father, a gamekeeper and sporting tour operator, who he says taught him all he knows about game and wildlife conservation. Merlin studied countryside and environmental management at Harper Adams University

and worked as a GWCT placement student at Langholm and at the Drumochter research station. He has also worked in Wales on the GWCT Uplands Recovery Project and was formerly with the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust. He has a passion for all fieldsports, especially falconry, and has a German short-haired pointer, Zilverein Fraoigh.



Fiona Torrance is our new research assistant at the Scottish Grey Partridge Recovery Project. Fiona has a zoology degree from the University of Glasgow and experience as a biologist specialising in pest management and ecological services, and as a consultant ecologist. She has also volunteered with the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative, the BTO, Scottish Badgers and the

National Plant Monitoring Scheme.



Ruth Highley is a student field assistant at the Game & Wildlife Scottish Demonstration Farm at Auchnerran. She is studying at the University of Leeds, reading Ecology and Environmental Biology. She grew up in the Lake District, spending summer holidays on the west coast of Scotland. This led her to become involved with conservation projects in Glencoe

with the National Trust, and at Loch Gruinart, Islay with the RSPB before landing the role with the GWCT, which forms the industrial placement year of her degree.

Counting on sheep in Scotland

Hill sheep farming is not popular with some contemporary commentators on the environment. They say it denudes natural habitat, triggers soil and water problems downstream and demands subsidy payments to keep the sheep and the farmer in place.

And yet for many it is, alongside keeping, stalking, fishing, forestry and tourism, an economic and social driver for many rural hill edge and hill areas in the UK. It produces world-class lamb and the wool for our tweed. When integrated into these activities it is an effective and useful way of managing semi-natural habitats like moorland and thus supporting wildlife like wading birds and black grouse. And of course, sheep farming is a pre-requisite for a 'sheep mop', that unique way of controlling ticks on moorland that carry disease to animals and people alike.

Better understanding these differences of opinion is one reason why in November 2014 the Trust took on the management of a Scottish hill farm, the Game and Wildlife Scottish Demonstration Farm (GWSDF) Auchnerran. The same objectives apply at the Allerton and Auchnerran projects: a profitable farm using game shooting and farmland conservation practices to deliver habitats, wildlife, clean water and healthy soils. We are tenant-farmers at Auchnerran, working with barley, rotational grass and forage turnips, permanent grass and rough grazings. The 'engine room' for Auchnerran is black-faced sheep, and our aim is a 1,500 ewe flock on 5,000 hectares of farm and moor.

If a sheep flock is to be a net benefit to our hills it needs to be productive on low



The relationship between sheep farm and heather moor is a key facet of the project at Auchnerran.

inputs and manageable so that its relationship with habitat and land can be constantly adapted. To this end we have focused on sheep health (nutrition, disease) age-structure and behavioural problems in the hefted sheep flock. Improving sheep nutrition over winter was critical because there has been historically very low productivity. But for each farming activity there is an environmental benefit. Two examples are: we grow grass for silage and grazing, and forage turnips. So far we have spread 610 tons of lime on the farm, primarily to improve the soil conditions, but which new research suggests could benefit the wading birds' ability to feed. Nevertheless, we hope it improves our farming as well; this year's 147% scanning rate is impressive, almost too much so if we are to manage our grass (and thus winter stock of silage) effectively.

Secondly, in the spring, the hogs (last year's lambs that grow on for a summer before going to the ram this autumn) are turned out to graze the 5,000 hectare heather hill of Dinnet grouse moor, saving us feed costs. They'll be going out treated against an early tick rise and will graze an area well known for its curlew and black grouse, keeping the grass and heather from becoming too rank at this critical lekking and breeding period.

The relationship between sheep farm and heather moor is a key facet of this project. Both benefit from each other and demonstrating the nature of those benefits is critical to the long-term success of the project. As we face the challenges of Brexit and agricultural subsidy reform, the Trust is well placed to contribute to the debate about how we maintain our landscapes, game and wildlife on the hill edge.

Deterring pests with lasers

As reported in the last *Gamewise*, we are undertaking the LIFE Laser Fence Project at Auchnerran. It runs until March 2020 and is led by Liverpool John Moores University in conjunction with partners in Spain and the Netherlands.

The project deploys technology that is already in use in Europe, where lasers are successfully used to deter birds at sensitive sites, such as at airports. The project aims to understand whether lasers can be used to deter and disperse pest and predatory mammalian species such as rabbits, rats,

weasels, stoats and foxes. If successful, lasers may provide an alternative to the use of chemicals on the farm to prevent damage by rodents to land and crops.

We have started by identifying where we can most effectively use this technology. Camera traps have been set up to ascertain the routes and pathways used by certain species, with track tunnels placed nearby. Across both methods we have so far recorded pine marten, fox, badger, otter, rabbits and deer. In addition, and before we set up our fixed laser units, we have been

using portable, hand-held devices, which are the size of a large torch, to begin testing around field and woodland edges.

Auchnerran makes an eminently suitable location for this work because a range of pest and predator species have different impacts on the farm and its biodiversity. Rabbits for example are attracted to the grass that we are systematically improving to increase the quality of our sheep flock. The plentiful wader populations, including lapwing, curlew and woodcock, are also susceptible to loss of their clutches of eggs to predation.



30 June - 2 July
 Scone Palace Park-lands, Perthshire
 For more information on the programme, events and all available ticket packages, please visit www.scottishfair.com

Still game for the 29th Scottish Game Fair

The 29th Scottish Game Fair has a packed programme with events for all the family and promises to be a superb day out.

© Rob McDougall, Sandy Young

Now in its 29th year, the GWCT Scottish Game Fair (www.scottishfair.com) is one of the Trust's main fundraisers and a popular highlight in the Scottish events calendar, attracting over 29,000 visitors from across the UK. This year's programme includes an array of main ring favourites such as the Dog 'n' Duck Show, spectacular axe demos from Adams Axemen, the tug o' war, the ever-popular terrier racing and the Fred Taylor Memorial Trophy for Working Ponies. Visitors can take part in several competitions including fly casting, gnat and clay shooting and the gundog scurry.

Gundog, fishing and shooting areas

New for 2017 is the inaugural Four Nations International Gundog competition held on Saturday 1 July. Teams from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales are set to compete on the banks of the River Tay. Those with a four-legged friend are very welcome at the Fair and can come and take part in the scurry or visit the World of Gundogs area.

The newly revamped fishing area will include panel discussions, presentations and Q&As, with guest speakers including writer, broadcaster and fishing fanatic Fiona Armstrong. There will also be fishing demonstrations and competitions on the



The Fair offers unrivalled access to some of the finest clothing and equipment.

banks of the River Tay, with casting clinics and fly dressing demonstrations.

The Fair's shooting area offers a range of experiences and competitions for experts including the drone shooting competition, to those who have never picked up a gun before.

Fabulous food and outstanding shopping

The popular food hall and cookery theatre is sponsored by Macdonald Hotels, who will have its award-winning chefs demonstrating lots of great cookery and baking techniques and ideas. The cookery theatre will be hosted by The Fair's very own Foodie in Residence

Christopher Trotter; he'll be creating lots of delicious recipes using the best of local produce. The offerings from over 40 exhibitors include smoked fish, condiments, spices, cheeses, baked goods, fudge and sweet treats; all washed down with a choice of gin, beer and whisky.

Offering unrivalled access to some of the country's finest crafts, clothing, equipment and sporting goods, the Fair is delighted to welcome over 450 traders, all exhibiting in the stunning grounds of Scone Palace.

GWCT main stand

The Trust's flagship stand is located beside the main ring and will highlight the benefits of our research and how science can be readily translated into practical management advice that helps ensure a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

The theme for our central exhibit is 'Grass to Grouse' and the various displays aim to showcase how sympathetic management of a hill-edge livestock farm can be efficient without loss of biodiversity and carefully integrated with sporting enterprises. Come and see rare cattle and sheep breeds used as conservation grazers, along with other live exhibits. Informative displays will include an array of cover and food crops available to support land managers' shooting

and conservation interests along with shrub choices for effective pheasant coverts. With legal predation control activities under scrutiny, our professional advisors will display the latest in modern predator control techniques and trap development and our research staff will be available to discuss all our current projects.

Wee Beasties marquee

There is set to be a hive of activity in the GWCT's Wee Beasties marquee during the Fair. We are inviting visitors to learn all about honeybees and pollination. Experienced beekeepers will be on hand to answer questions and we'll have a live observation hive where you can spot the queen bee. Observe how to make a skep and possibly have a go yourself; children can also make their own beeswax candle.

Wildlife sculptor Julian Jardine, and the Royal Highland Education Trust will also be running a variety of free workshops for children including clay model-making and having a go at pressing their own oil. You'll also find the GWCT shop with its ever-popular range of Christmas cards, ties and toys on sale.

Artists in action

Each year we welcome a selection of talented artists and this year we are delighted to host:

- **Teresa Davis** who paints and lives in Somerset, near the Quantock hills. A keen sportswoman and photographer, she draws on country pursuits for her art, from fishing and shooting to stalking and hunting. Teresa is the Scottish Game Fair's Artist in Focus for 2017.
- **Andrew Ellis** who lives near Weardale in the Pennines where he draws inspiration from the grouse moors. He specialises in gamebirds, wildlife and in particular, birds of prey. He has also travelled extensively in Africa, America and the Middle East and painted many species native to those countries.
- **Coral Rose** who is based in North Yorkshire where she captures a variety of country species and scenes, inspired by the countryside on her doorstep.
- **Fiona Dean** who is based in Edinburgh and is a taxidermist, incorporating both traditional and conceptual pieces. 🐾

Come and join us
 New ringside attractions
 Excellent shopping
 Sumptuous food
 Relaxed atmosphere
 Capturing the essence of
 Scotland's natural heritage
www.scottishfair.com



Exclusive benefits for members

Members registered in Scotland will receive a Fair information pack informing them of our members' welcome marquee and entry lane at the pedestrian access to the Fair.

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. If you reside outwith Scotland and have not previously registered for this mailing, then please email scottishhq@gwct.org.uk

Meet and greet service

Visitors living the high life can also benefit from the Fair's meet and transfer service from Perth Airport at Scone. Those arriving by plane or helicopter will be met by a Fair representative with a welcome pack. Upon arrival at the Fair, visitors will alight at the entry gate and be able to enjoy a refreshing glass of champagne or soft beverage in our members' enclosure. After embracing the convivial atmosphere, excellent trade stands, fabulous food and trying their hand at the many activities on offer, guests will be transported back to the airport. This VIP package must be booked in advance by contacting info@scottishfair.com or ring 01738 554826 by Wednesday 28 June.

**The GWCT Scottish Game Fair
 Friday 30 June, Saturday 1 July
 and Sunday 2 July at Scone
 Palace Parklands, Perthshire.**

Advance tickets

Save 10% on the gate price and fast track entry by booking in advance online. Advance prices end at midnight on 16 June. Fast track entry is available with all online ticket purchases thereafter.

- £20 – adult price; £18 advance
- £5 – children (under 5's free); £4.50 advance
- £42 – family (2 adults, 2 children); £38 advance
- Standard car parking £4 on the day or Gold forward parking £15 online; £12 in advance
- Combined Fair and Scone Palace tickets are also available

www.scottishfair.com

Chaffinches top the poll



The chaffinch was recorded as Scotland's most seen farmland bird.

As reported on page 18, the GWCT's Big Farmland Bird Count encourages farmers, gamekeepers and land managers to spend half an hour on one day in February identifying and counting the birds on an area of their farm.

This year the chaffinch was recorded as Scotland's most seen farmland bird (up from fifth last year), pushing the blackbird down to second place.

In terms of the most abundant species counted in Scotland, woodpigeon, barnacle goose, pink footed goose and rook were recorded in the largest numbers. Starling, a Red List species, made up the top five most abundant.

Dr Dave Parish, our senior scientist, said: "It's really exciting to see so many people once again taking part in the count, with many who took part from the outset submitting results every year, and demonstrating that farmers and gamekeepers have a long-term commitment to conservation management.

"These results continue to provide very useful data. Much of our work including our Whitburgh and Balgonie Projects, and at our demonstration farm at Auchnerran on Deeside, focuses on encouraging, maintaining and enhancing healthy populations of farmland birds, whether these are game species, waders or songbirds, and providing advice to farmers, land managers and to Government regarding suitable measures to achieve this, based on science. The Big Farmland Bird Count is a great way of measuring the health of those farmland bird populations and giving us another important opportunity to engage with those managing the land."

The GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is sponsored by BASF and delivered in partnership with the FWAG Association and LEAF, with support from the NFU and CLA.

Scottish top 20

1. Chaffinch (+4)
2. Blackbird (-1)
3. Robin (=)
4. Woodpigeon (-2)
5. Pheasant (-2)
6. Blue tit (-2)
7. Buzzard (-1)
8. Jackdaw (+2)
9. Carrion crow (=)
10. Rook (+5)



11. Wren (+2)
12. Great tit (-3)
13. House sparrow (-11)
14. Coal tit (=)
15. Dunnock (-3)
16. Tree sparrow (+1)
17. Starling (+1)
18. Yellowhammer (=)
19. Common gull (+3)
20. Goldfinch (+20)

Keeping up-to-date with snaring

The report to Scottish Government by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on the use of snares in Scotland was published in March. This meets the requirement for the regulation of snaring to be reviewed every five years. The main thrust of the report is that current legislation is working and that no fundamental changes are needed. However, SNH does recommend some changes with regard to fox snares and to the Code of Practice. These proposals are as follows:

Hardware

- Require each snare to have at least two swivels – this follows the findings of research by Defra and the GWCT to further minimise risk of a snare breaking should a single swivel become clogged with vegetation with resulting welfare issues.
- Require the stop position, which determines the minimum noose size, to be 26 centimetres from the running eye – this follows research by the GWCT to identify the optimal stop distance whereby hares are more likely to escape while not affecting the retention of foxes.

These hardware changes would bring Scottish snaring practice in line with the recently published Codes of Practice in England and Wales (2016).

Other proposals in the report include:

Training

- Standardising attendance methods and 'pass' criteria.

Code of Practice

- Clarifying authority and responsibility where another person is required to provide 'sick cover' for the original operator.

Record-keeping

- Implementing a maximum period for updating snare records – SNH is proposing within 48 hours.
- Reducing the time allowed to produce snare records for inspection. This currently allows 21 days, but the proposal is to reduce this to 'immediately' when requested by police on location, or otherwise to be produced at a police station within seven days.

Penalties on conviction of an offence

- Introduction of the power of disqualification for a snaring offence,

although it is not clear how this would operate, how long disqualification would last, or whether there would be a system of appeal.

Overall, the report found that snaring-related incidents had reduced and therefore further changes were not required. Any changes to come from the review will be delivered through the Snaring Code of Practice.

Next steps are likely to include consultation with the Snaring Technical Assessment Group (TAG) and possibly wider public consultation.

Changes to fox snares, such as the introduction of a double swivel and change to stop position, will require amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act which could take time.

We do have concerns over the sanctions being proposed and these will need careful discussion and consultation. It would certainly be wrong if very minor mistakes, as opposed to blatant abuses of the Code, could result in disqualification. We will need to wait and see the detail, but will ensure that members are kept informed.

Glasgow



Diary
For a full list of
events taking
place near you
please see
page 54

More than 235 guests enjoyed a hilarious live auction conducted by comedian Fred MacAulay.

Oran Mor dinner raises £55,000

Guests filled Oran Mor in Glasgow for the annual West of Scotland dinner and auction in March. A Sloegasm reception was followed by a superb dinner with whole beef fillets, generously donated by Scotbeef, carved at the tables. Raffle tickets for a pair of beautiful

diamond earrings very kindly donated by Eric Smith Jewellers, sold like hotcakes.

After dinner guests enjoyed a hilarious live auction conducted by comedian Fred MacAulay and enthusiastic bidding ensued in both the live and silent auctions. This very successful and enjoyable evening raised

in excess of £55,000 for the GWCT. Thanks must go to David MacRobert and his terrific committee for all of their efforts to make the event such a success, and to the dinner's sponsors Turcan Connell, Chiene & Tait, Graham Mackinlay Gunmakers and Macleod Lettings for their generous support.

Ayrshire

Carnell Cup clay shoot



Teams of five guns have been invited to enter the Carnell Cup clay shoot competition at Carnell Estate by Kilmarnock, on Sunday 11 June. This event has always been a tremendous day and places are likely to be snapped up quickly. Teams will enjoy three simulated drives around the estate in the morning, followed by a drinks reception, lobster and roast beef lunch and presentation of the prizes before a small auction.

Highland

Highland fling

Over 65 highlanders gathered at The Storehouse, Evanton, near Inverness for GWCT's most northerly charity auction. The catalogue included 'money can't buy' lots – accessing enviable never-before-on-the-open-market salmon fishing, duck flighting and stalking. Chairman of 10 years and auctioneer Chris Swift created some additional excitement by providing the rather unique lot of 'an evening's beaver watching' – and a bidding war ensued.

Enormous thanks to our supporters for generously providing excellent lots, our sponsors Saffery Champness and CKD Galbraith, and our loyal members for attending and making the evening such a success. The total amount raised was over £19,000 towards the Trust's work in Scotland.

Grampian

Grampian success

More than 150 friends, new and old, met at Lochter Activity Centre for the Grampian region's annual sporting auction and social evening this April. Guests enjoyed a complimentary drinks reception and sumptuous buffet, with Lochter's chef producing an outstanding spread showcasing the very best of all things game. Incoming chairman Ruairidh Cooper and his team raised a superb £43,780. Thank you to all those who generously donated lots, raffle prizes and our sponsors, and to those who came and supported.

Talking to Simon Thorp

GWCT in Scotland has a huge amount of crossover with the work of Simon Thorp who, among other positions, is Director of The Heather Trust, and Director of Scotland's Moorland Forum. So what's taking up his time right now, and where are the areas where he and the Trust work closely together?



Formed 15 years ago, Scotland's Moorland Forum has been crucial in bringing together all with an interest in Scotland's uplands. Chaired by Lord Lindsay, its current workload includes Principles of Moorland Management, a suite of guidelines to promote best practice. Under this banner falls management of mountain hares, worm control in grouse and heather cutting. Simon says: "For mountain hares we are producing, following consultation, draft guidance for management – effectively a practitioner's guide encapsulating the best current thinking that there is. GWCT is leading the group that is developing this guidance which, even when complete, won't purport to provide the final answers but continue to encourage sensible debate. The intention is that all the guidance will respond to change, for example to regulations, new techniques and to reflect new research such as the joint work currently being undertaken by the GWCT and the James Hutton Institute.

"Worm control in grouse also has historically raised concerns in certain quarters, over-use of medicated grit, withdrawal periods, and unsightly grit mounds. Again this work, led by the GWCT, will present the best current options and be made available to practitioners, agencies and others.

"Heather cutting guidance will provide a summary of techniques and promote cutting, for example into narrow strip matrices, as practised in north-east Scotland and the Peak District, as an additional tool to burning, used alongside burning or where conditions or policy do not allow burning to take place.

The result of cutting properly is a mix of long and short heather of different ages and, importantly, a reduced fuel load for wildfires."

Simon has also just concluded production of the Muirburn Code that will be launched this summer. "It's a Government-funded project and a major piece of work," he says. "It will be available online and has had to reconcile a lot of different and sometimes conflicting interests, but I think we have achieved a good balance. Heather cutting has also been promoted as part of muirburn. The website www.muirburn.org.uk will also be updated with graphics, images and video."

Working for Waders has evolved out of Understanding Predation, a project that concluded in spring 2016. "We are seeking to develop a different approach," he says. "We want to attract engagement from all sectors and harness local knowledge alongside scientific research and monitoring,

"We want to attract engagement from all sectors and harness local knowledge alongside scientific research and monitoring..."

to address the decline of wader populations that Understanding Predation confirmed. We have found that practical management knowledge is often closely aligned to science, but not always exactly. For us it's about showing direction without excessive

leadership, and it's a real priority if we are going to halt the on-going and startling decline in our wader species."

As for the Moorland Forum itself, where do its strengths lie? Simon says: "The Forum has brought debate together, often on very sensitive topics, engaging with a whole range of individuals and organisations, some with widely differing views. It has been very good at lowering the temperature and preventing war by press release! It has done well in delivering integration, co-operation and compromise and has the confidence of the Scottish Government."

With all that crossing his desk, what about the Heather Trust? Simon says: "Again there is tremendous breadth of workload both in terms of issues and geography and our annual auction every May, the Country Market and Sporting Sale, helps us to fund our activities and attracts support from all over the UK.

"Our mixed bag of responsibilities and projects cover, for example, heather beetle, bracken control, the English Upland Stakeholder Forum, the England and Wales Wildfire Forum, the Uplands Management Group – we have a grazing management project running on Exmoor – and the Powys Upland Project which is funded by the Welsh Government. It's broad-ranging and it's never dull.

"The Heather Trust's work washes over a lot of other upland activity in Scotland and on certain projects, like the Golden Plover Award, we are working very closely in partnership with the GWCT." 