

Scottish Fair success

Fun in the main ring at the Scottish Game Fair; Eric Starke of Glen Prosen Estate with Mia, winner of the Fred Taylor Memorial Trophy for working hill ponies.

© Sandy Young

This year's GWCT Scottish Game Fair was a resounding success with more than 27,200 visitors. As it marked its 19th year, the Fair recorded some notable firsts – the inaugural Four Nations International Gundog Competition and 'Estates Challenge', plus the highest number of entries for the Fred Taylor Memorial Trophy for working hill ponies.

The 'Grass to Grouse' central exhibit told the story of the Trust's Auchnerran hill-edge farm, and how sympathetic management of this typically Scottish farmland can be efficient with no loss of biodiversity. We

were delighted to host the chief executive and new chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage and enjoyed a wide-ranging discussion, some of which focused on the need for practical conservation to benefit wading birds, especially curlew.

The Trust's children's area was buzzing thanks to support from the Scottish Beekeepers, and the main ring a flurry of activity, ranging from the Gwynedd Axemen to the more conventional birds of prey, gundog demonstrations, terrier racing and fly casting. As ever, the food hall was exceptionally popular.

Champions in the International Gundog competition were England (spaniels) and Ireland (retrievers) and Eric Starke of Glen Prosen Estate took the Fred Taylor Trophy with his working pony Mia, plus a rifle from competition sponsor John Rigby & Co.

Thank you to our main sponsor The Scotsman, supported by Isuzu, Clark Commercials and Macdonald Hotels and Resorts. Next year is our 20th anniversary, and we hope to make it a really special occasion. Make sure these dates, Friday 29, Saturday 30 June and Sunday 1 July, are in your diary.

Fearann Eilean Iarmain wins Golder Plover Award

The winner of this year's Golden Plover Award was Fearann Eilean Iarmain who received the award at the Scottish Game Fair, along with runners up Reay Forest Estate and Ardnamurchan Estate.

Fearann Eilean Iarmain extends through the parishes of Sleat and Strath in the southern part of Skye and is based around a network of crofts, farms and hill ground with extensive areas of regenerated and native woodland. It is home to a wide variety of birdlife including breeding populations of hen harrier, greenshank, curlew, golden plover and white tailed as well as golden eagles, and work is actively undertaken to promote the conservation of many ground nesting bird species.

The competition, sponsored by Lindsays, was extremely close and both runners-up were highly commended. Reay Forest in Sutherland is a traditional deer stalking estate that has made major investments and progress integrating woodland management with deer management. Meanwhile, Ardnamurchan Estate on the west coast has established a reputation for very high quality deer

stalking and accommodation, and has been closely involved in the development of the wider economic activity in the area.

Fearann Eilean Iarmain gamekeeper Scott McKenzie said: "The Golden Plover Award is real recognition of all our hard work. We have got a great set-up at Eilean Iarmain, and we're always trying new things. It shows what can be achieved when you work together, and we hope this award will help to really put us on the map for the future."

(L-R) Adam Smith, director, GWCT Scotland; Craig Jackson and Scott MacKenzie, Fearann Eilean Iarmain; Michael Yellowlees, Lindsays; Ian Coghill, GWCT chairman; Richard May, The Heather Trust; Simon Thorp, director, The Heather Trust.



NFUS farm visit



The NFUS Environment Committee visited GWSDF Auchnerran in June.

Auchnerran Farm opened its gates to the 12-person National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) environment committee this June. During the visit, we discussed budgeting, management and our experience gained by running the Allerton Project at Loddington, Leicestershire, as shepherd manager Allan Wright

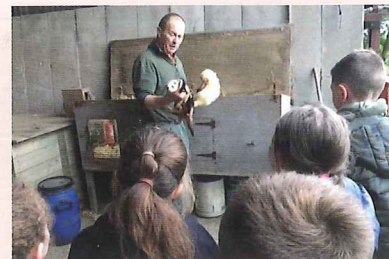
emphasised the maxim 'that it's hard to be green when you're in the red'. The committee also saw recent developments at the farm, such as the new sheep handling court, and a good number of more than 60 breeding pairs of lapwing on the farm this year.

We will keep the committee closely briefed as the farm develops. 🐣

Educating for the future

Whitburgh Farms hosted pupils from Tynewater

Primary School, Pathhead and from Elphinstone Primary School, Tranent in May who saw sheep, lambs, cattle and calves, along with samples of crops grown on the



Pupils meeting the ferrets at Whitburgh Farms.

farm. This gives the GWCT an excellent opportunity to highlight conservation issues and to demonstrate what can be done to help nesting birds against predation.

In Fife, pupils from Milton of Balgonie School revisited the Balgonie Estate where they planted a new hedge in September last year. They designed posters to alert dog walkers to this newly-planted hedge and planted wildflower seeds to encourage bees. The pupils are telling their experience as part of the 'Natural Connections Challenge' outdoor learning project and are the only primary school in Fife to have completed stage 3.

The winners of the 2016 Perth & Kinross Schools GWCT art competition had fun in the grounds of Dunkeld House Hotel taking part in a mini highland games as part of their prize. The competition was sponsored by Blackadders Solicitors, with prizes donated by Dunkeld House Hotel and Perth-based artist and sculptor Julian Jardine. The competition was also supported by Perth and Kinross Council's Education and Children's Services. 🐣

Rabbits under the spotlight in laser trial



We are trialling lasers to see if they can reduce rabbit grazing on pasture land.

Our first set of laser trials focuses on the thousands of rabbits at GWSDF Auchnerran, particularly to see if the lasers might reduce the numbers using defined patches of pasture and thereby result in less grazing pressure. In April, Andy Taylor, an MSc student from Aberdeen University, studied the rabbits' behavioural responses to the laser, with early results

suggesting that the way in which the laser was moved made no difference to their response.

To see how this translates to our pastures, we have been using trail cameras to monitor rabbit activity at several sites around the farm, each of approximately 0.5ha.

Our two autonomic lasers will be placed at two of these sites shortly, where they will be used for five days, before they are moved until all the sites have been covered. The lasers are positioned and then programmed by trained operators to ensure that they are used safely, consistently and effectively.

At the end of this work we will be able to see how patches with and without lasers compare in

terms of rabbit activity and grass height, and how these factors change within a patch as the lasers are introduced and then removed again. One very interesting question, for example, is whether the rabbits begin to ignore the

laser after a short period of time (assuming they do react to it).

We plan to run two rabbit trials this year, before focusing on deer and some of the species that might prey on breeding waders, including rats. 🐣

Edinburgh

Auction success

The Scottish Auction took place in May, on an evening blessed by glorious sunshine, at Prestonfield House, Edinburgh. Nearly 440 guests enjoyed a champagne reception, dinner and auction sponsored by Pentland Land Rover, Saffery Champness and Brewin Dolphin, with support from Highland Game, Corney & Barrow and House of Bruar.

Charles Graham-Campbell of Bonhams presided over one of

the most competitive live auctions in recent years which helped to raise more than £140,000.

Bryan Johnston, auction chairman said: "It wouldn't be possible to hold this fabulous evening without the enormous hard work of the committee who pulled together a terrific auction catalogue, and the support of our generous lot donors and our sponsors. Thank you."

The date for next year's auction is Thursday 3 May 2018.