

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Good reasons to celebrate as Royal Highland Education Trust reaches 21

Next year, 2020, will see Scotland's countryside education charity, RHET (The Royal Highland Education Trust) celebrate its 21st birthday.

RHET was established in 1999 as the educational charity of the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland working with volunteers to provide free educational activities and experiential learning opportunities for Scotland's children. Arranging farm visits and classroom education, together with the provision of teacher training and educational resources, RHET's purpose is to bring farming, the working countryside and its practices to life for young people.

Working with partners, RHET provides and delivers world-leading learning opportunities for all of Scotland's young people aged 3 to 18, in and through the Scottish agricultural environment and the countryside.

RHET aims to provide the opportunity for every child in Scotland to learn about food, farming and the countryside promoting a wider understanding of the environmental, economic and social realities of rural Scotland.

This is achieved through a number of key activities, including:

Farm visits for schools; Classroom speaker talks by volunteer farmers; Providing free educational resource materials for schools; Outdoor education events across Scotland; Competitions and projects for schools; Training farmers and teachers in the delivery of information relating

Volunteers working for the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland's charity arm teach children about food, farming and the countryside, says Katrina Barclay

to food and farming; The Royal Highland Show education programme for visiting schools and Children's Education Centre.

Working in partnership with teachers to enable real-life learning opportunities is critical to RHET's success, ensuring that resources are free to schools across Scotland, and experiences gained through RHET can be harnessed by teachers in their programmes to help deliver Curriculum for Excellence for Scotland's young people.

Fully risk-assessed farm visits combine with farmer volunteers visiting schools to discuss farming and countryside topics, as well as teacher training opportunities to ensure that both pupils and teachers are rewarded by the learning experience.

In addition, seeds and resource boxes are sent out free of charge and schools can also benefit from food journey cookery sessions.

RHET volunteers can help in many different ways, such as 'on farm visits' or other outside learning experiences. The charity also has specifically trained farmer speakers who will happily support projects on food, farming and the countryside with-

in the classroom. This is useful if a class is unable to visit a farm or more usually to give the class some background to a proposed farm visit.

Volunteer farmers take with them many different props to enhance their visit, such as samples of crops or products to games and PowerPoint presentations. However, their greatest asset is their lifetime of work and experience on the farm, which brings the whole topic to life.

Farmers and other rural volunteers also find involvement immensely enjoyable and rewarding and many have supported RHET for several years. Reinforced throughout the process by RHET staff, farmers are fully trained and prepared for almost every conceivable question they might be asked!

Each year, RHET ensures that over 70,000 children will visit a working farm, or benefit from a classroom activity focused on food and farming.

At the Royal Highland Show in June each year, RHET accommodates roughly 300 school groups on the Thursday and Friday and provides educational activities for the general public on the Saturday and Sunday of the Show. All of these opportuni-



ties are provided free of charge to primary and secondary schools across Scotland and the value is evident in the faces of awe, intrigue and excitement amongst the children who participate.

It costs in the region of £400k per annum to support the delivery of RHET services every year, so fundraising is always at the forefront of activity.

With a reason to celebrate on the horizon and the fundraising need ever present, the charity is holding its first

ever Gala Dinner on Friday 21 February 2020 to help raise funds to continue, build on and expand their fantastic work. Farmer and comedian, Jim Smith, will compère the evening, and a live auction, together with a silent auction will add to the excitement. There will be a range of 'money can't buy' experiences on offer, including with a Michelin starred chef. The RHET team are passionate about ensuring that regular and generous supporters of the charity are rewarded with an entertaining night.

In addition, it's important that the charity continues in its efforts to spread the word about the important impact it makes upon Scotland's school children.

The funds raised through ticket sales and auction lots will help enable the continued delivery of food and farming education.

In addition to the superb prizes and lots on offer, the evening will treat guests to a three-course meal of delicious Scottish produce prepared by the chef team from Saltire Hospital-

ity. There will be vegetables from East Lothian, Scotch Beef from Scotbeef, Scottish Salmon, fruit from Fife and much more.

Please follow RHET on social media for regular updates about the charity and its fundraising. Facebook - The Royal Highland Education Trust. Twitter @TheRHET. Instagram @theroyalhighlandeducationtrust #RHETGala rhetgala@rhass.org.uk www.rhet.org.uk

Katrina Barclay, RHET Executive Officer

Over 70,000 children will visit a working farm, or benefit from a classroom activity on food and farming, while roughly 300 school groups visit the RHS each June



Managed moorland environment vital to many more species than grouse

Heather moorland is a national asset, often described as 'iconic' by Scots, says **Bruce Russell**

Earlier this year we set out to find out more about what the Scottish public thinks of one of its most iconic landscapes, heather moorlands. This is important on a number of counts, not least because of questions being asked about alternative uses for them such as forestry, renewables or rewilding, their main land uses currently being farming, recreation and shooting.

At the end of July 2019 the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) commissioned market research company fastmap to undertake a survey of 1,000 Scots with the response weighted to match Scottish demographics by age and gender (including those without internet access) to give us, effectively, a people's view of

heather moorland. What they told us in response was not, in our view, a surprise. Our suspicion was that an outstanding majority really do value and appreciate this resource and the benefits it brings, and we were not wrong.

Scotland's heather moorland is one of the country's most characteristic habitats. Heather, berries and grassland provide around 50 per cent of land cover of Scotland's uplands - so much so that in landscape terms heather moorland is often described as 'iconic'. We asked how positively respondents associated heather moorland with the Scottish landscape.

Heather moorland is a managed environment that provides habitat

for many upland species, birds, animals, and plant life including lapwing, mountain hares and rare bumblebees. We asked whether respondents agreed that Scotland's heather moorland is important in providing a valuable habitat for a wide range of biodiversity.

Scotland's uplands and heather moorland are a source of healthy food including Scotch lamb, game (such as venison and grouse), and honey as well as other products. We asked whether respondents recognised Scotland's uplands as a source of healthy food.

Scotland's heather moorland is a managed landscape, a cultural landscape, with management in the form of deforestation starting as early as

the Mesolithic period (10,000-8,000 BC). Management means jobs, and today the uplands provide valuable rural employment, often in remote areas, for shepherds and hill farmers, gamekeepers and stalkers, among others. So, finally we asked how important respondents thought Scotland's moorland is as a source of rural employment.

And what did we find out? That the vast majority of Scottish citizens (89 per cent) have either a positive or very positive association between heather moorland and the Scottish landscape, and that an even greater majority (92 per cent) agree or agree strongly that Scotland's heather moorland is important in providing a valuable habitat for a

wide range of biodiversity.

A lesser proportion (69 per cent) either recognised or well recognised the Scottish uplands as a source of healthy food (11 per cent did not make this connection). And a majority (73 per cent) recognised Scottish heather moorland as an important source of rural employment.

So, what are our conclusions in terms of this research? Scots value heather moorland as a managed landscape. It exists because of the work that is done by upland land managers to retain it, whether through grazing or burning, but its main economic driver and the incentive for investment in it and management of it is grouse shooting. Take that away and the heather moorland

that we have and the benefits that it delivers by way of biodiversity, food and rural employment, will diminish too.

Scotland values its heather moorland, so the results of this poll tell us. And we suspect that visitors to Scotland would have the same view. Yet the activities that maintain heather moorland are under close scrutiny at present, from the Werritty Review of grouse moor management commissioned by the Scottish Government, and the final report of the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project. Both of these will have a bearing on how we view these national assets, their value in terms of economic and natural capital, and how we use them in the future.

Our warning is that we need to be wary about what we wish for this national asset if we want to preserve it for future generations. *Bruce Russell, Director Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust*



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