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**Game & Wildlife
 CONSERVATION TRUST**

It was a huge shock to hear of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday evening when I arrived at the Vaynol Estate near Bangor for the start of the GWCT Welsh Game Fair. Everyone's thoughts were immediately with His Majesty King Charles III and the rest of the Royal family. Then our own deep sense of loss. Her Majesty's extraordinary example of devotion to duty, faithfulness, wisdom and commitment to the UK and Commonwealth has been there for us all to see and deeply admire through Silver, Gold and Platinum Jubilees. The shock was much more to do with one's own, perhaps unexpectedly, strong sense of personal bereavement.

We went ahead with the GWCT Welsh Game Fair. That is to pass no judgement on those who did cancel events; there was no guide but one's heart and best endeavour in making such a decision. We felt that Her Majesty, and indeed our Patron, would want people to have the opportunity to come together at such a time, in a truly beautiful setting, overlooking the mountains of Snowdonia, to experience the things that we know Her Majesty loved; all the best that the countryside and country sport has to offer.

This was the first GWCT Welsh Game Fair and we hope the first of many to demonstrate the important place sustainable game management, wildlife conservation, farming and country sports have in the lives of the rural community in Wales.

The *Community Spirit* report which Sue Evans, our director for Wales, commissioned is a compelling testament. Available at gwct.org.uk/communityspirit it explains in the words of more than 400 respondents why shooting and country sports matter to them. The GWCT



A gun salute was held at the GWCT Welsh Game Fair in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, followed by a two minute silence.

is rightly proud of its scientific research, but this *Community Spirit* report is a powerful document. It humanises shooting and the people who do it in a way that politicians and policymakers should pay heed to.

With another breeding season finished, we look at the fate of our New Forest breeding curlews (see page 34), and the owls we have been monitoring as part of our barn owl project (see page 31). We also feature Andrew Hoodless, our director of research (see page 24). Andrew is one of the UK's foremost experts on waders and we are delighted to be undertaking our third 10-year breeding woodcock survey next spring with the British Trust for Ornithology. We rely heavily on volunteers to help with the count so please get in touch if you would like to help.

“all the best that the countryside and country sport has to offer”

Tom Dair

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

7 THINGS YOU'LL LEARN INSIDE

<p>1 How many tonnes of carbon are stored in hedgerows</p> <p>2 Why we need a rethink on controlled burning</p> <p>3 Where GWCT research is heading next</p>	<p>4 Whether we can have both wildlife and food production</p> <p>5 How many barn owl nest boxes were monitored</p> <p>6 The main cause of curlew nest failure in the New Forest</p> <p>7 How to make a wildlife rockery at home or on the farm</p>
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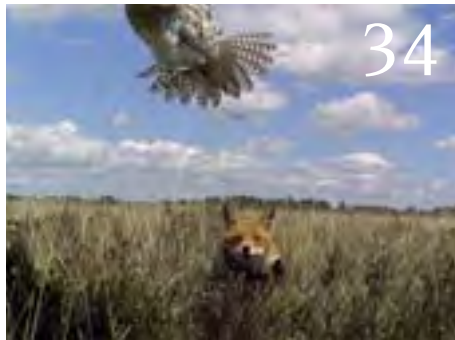
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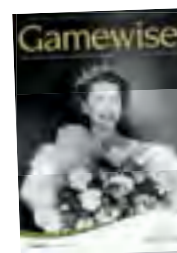
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Membership offer



Come and visit the innovative Allerton Project, our research and demonstration farm, and help us celebrate its 30th year. To register your interest please email: allerton@gwct.org.uk.

On the cover
HM Queen Elizabeth II.
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In focus



His Majesty takes an active interest in several projects and brings great experience to the role of Patron. © Lingtren.com

GWCT 'honoured and delighted' as His Majesty King Charles III takes on the Patronage held by his father for 48 years

His Majesty King Charles III takes on the Patronage held by his father for 48 years. Prior to the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, we announced HRH The Prince of Wales as Patron of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, a role he will continue as King. His Majesty follows in the footsteps of his father HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, who was involved with the Trust for 56 years, first as President (1965-1973), then as Patron (1973 until his death in 2021).

GWCT President Lord Salisbury said: "We are honoured and delighted that His Majesty has agreed to take on the role of Patron of the GWCT.

"Like HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, His Majesty has long taken an interest in the work of the Trust developing and promoting science-based game and wildlife management techniques for the benefit of biodiversity in the British countryside. We greatly look forward to working with him in the coming years."

His Majesty's interest in the countryside and farming is well-known, with a particular focus on areas of research in which GWCT scientists are playing a key role, such as carbon capture and nature-based solutions to the climate crisis. His Majesty takes an active interest in several projects in which the GWCT is involved, including wild grey partridge and curlew conservation. The recently established Curlew Recovery Partnership England was born out of two Curlew

Recovery Summits hosted by His Majesty, and its partners are Bolton Estate, British Trust for Ornithology, Curlew Action, Curlew Country, Duchy of Cornwall, GWCT, RSPB and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

GWCT Chairman Sir Jim Paice, said: "By agreeing to be our Patron, His Majesty has acknowledged the importance of our work. The GWCT recognises that wildlife needs management, and our research shows that plenty of diversity can be provided alongside commercial farming."



Teresa Dent giving evidence in parliament.

GWCT has its say on ELMS in parliament

Last month, GWCT chief executive, Teresa Dent, was invited to give the organisation's verdict on the Government's progress with its Environmental Land Management Scheme to the EFRA Select Committee in the Palace of Westminster.

Alongside witnesses from the NFU, Tenant Farmers Association, CLA, National Trust and National Parks England, Teresa was questioned by MPs on the plans for post-CAP funding and what they might mean for both farmers and the environment.

Asked by Derek Thomas, MP for West Cornwall, whether nature recovery plans can put at risk those areas that have already done a good job of developing biodiversity, Teresa was keen to highlight the importance of recognising good work that has already been undertaken.

"I think there is a risk that those farmers who have carried out good habitat provision and biodiversity work in the past, end up being rewarded less as part of some of the current opportunities, than those who haven't done as much," she said, before calling that potential situation "iniquitous and a bit unjust."

"I think it is very important that the Government scheme, which is there to cover the perceived market failures, does look at that very carefully. For instance, environmental trades which some farmers are beginning to look at are very much about additionality, but the first rule of conservation is to protect and maintain what you have."

Making reference to the GWCT's Allerton Project demonstration farm, Teresa highlighted those farms that have very little headroom

for further biodiversity net gain, so will have very limited opportunity to benefit from future biodiversity net gain trades, compared with farms that have little wildlife habitat at the moment. "We're not the only ones who have very good existing levels of habitat provision and I think the Government needs to be careful to ensure that those farmers are rewarded under the new schemes," she added.

Sir Robert Goodwill, MP for Scarborough & Whitby, moved to focus on the uplands, asking if there is any work we the GWCT had done on management of moorland and heather that would help moor managers and farmers to manage that environment.

Teresa raised the important issue of wildfire, calling for wildfire mitigation policies for upland landscapes and a better discussion on the role of prescribed burning as part of wildfire mitigation. Later Teresa was asked about wildlife mitigation by Barry Gardiner, the Labour MP for Brent North, to which she gave a precise and robust response: "The concern that exists is that if you do not manage the vegetation then you build up a fuel load. In the summer when it's hot (out of the formal burning season) you can have a layer of dry peat even on the deepest, probably wettest peatland area, then you can get a wildfire that burns into the peat. That is very damaging from a climate change point of view, as it will release a great deal of carbon dioxide. Some quite careful calculations have been done which show you would need to manage about 3% of your vegetation in order to protect 97%."

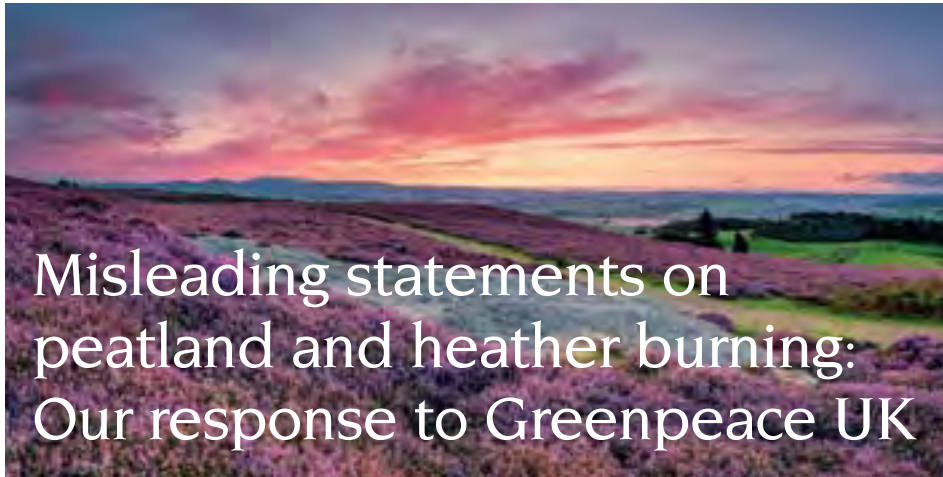
Discussing the potential to deliver biodiversity goals at scale, GWCT's experience in working with groups of farmers through Farmer Clusters came to the fore. Teresa stated: "The thing that we would be looking for in the future within these schemes, is the opportunity for farmers and land managers, possibly collaboratively at a greater scale, to put forward cohesive conservation and species recovery plans that cover quite big areas in the uplands and the lowlands.

"I think there is, in Defra's mind, scope for that to happen in Landscape Recovery, but I think it would be helpful for it to be brought into Local Nature Recovery as well. So often to achieve the type of reversal of species decline that Defra has as its target, you have to have a cohesive plan and that has to have scale. The more you can get farmers to collaborate, the better."

"The first rule of conservation is to protect and maintain what you have"

Highlighting the success of Farmer Clusters in the lowlands, Teresa presented the example of a group of farmers on the lower Avon in Hampshire who have collectively reversed the decline of lapwing and have achieved a level of breeding success that will maintain or expand the population. "There are not many places where that has happened, so we're very much in favour of this collaborative approach and very keen to see it embedded in Local Nature Recovery," she added.

A PIONEERING TRIAL set up to help rebuild the population of the endangered hen harrier in England has reared and released 13 chicks this year. Hen harrier numbers have shown continuous improvement over the past six years, coinciding with the introduction of the Government-led hen harrier recovery plan in 2016 and the availability of the brood management trial two years later. The trial has seen 34 chicks from nine broods take to the wing in total. Five of the brood managed birds have gone on to breed in the wild, adding 17 chicks to the wild hen harrier population.



Misleading statements on peatland and heather burning: Our response to Greenpeace UK

There is growing pressure from campaigners looking to make changes to shooting seasons and General Licences.

This July, Greenpeace launched a petition calling for a total ban on controlled burning in the UK uplands. In response, Teresa Dent wrote a letter to Greenpeace's interim UK executive director, Pat Venditti Esq. offering to meet to present the scientific evidence.

The response included the following comment: 'Ban peatland burning' is a misleading statement. Prescribed burns (those undertaken in accordance with the Heather and Grass Burning Code endorsed by Defra between October and mid-April when the plant material has dried out, allowing it to burn, while cold, damp conditions

underfoot mean the fire is most easily controlled) do not burn into the peat. They remove the surface vegetation through the use of controlled low severity fires that move swiftly across the surface – often termed 'cool' burns. Ironically this is supported by the comment in your article that 'Blackened spikes of dead foliage protrude upwards, embers from a recent fire'. This is the biochar, produced by the incomplete combustion of organic matter, that remains post burn and which is increasingly being considered a key component of the carbon cycle. (see page 21.)

Selling or leaving your guns? You can support the GWCT

IF YOU'RE WONDERING what to do with your guns and shooting accessories when the time has come to retire from shooting, or you are just considering making a little more room in your gun cabinet, our continued partnership with Holts auctioneers can help you and raise funds for the GWCT. Holts, the leading auctioneer of fine modern and antique guns and accessories have launched The Holts Charitable and Legacy Lots Programme.

It couldn't be simpler. Holts will handle the entire transaction, from collection to sale, and the hammer price of your items will be

donated on your behalf to the GWCT.

There are no fees for you as the vendor for this service and Holts will also help you navigate the licensing from the transfer and will make the entire process as easy as possible.

All valuation days are hosted by experienced members of Holts staff, who will be able to tell you something about the item you have brought along. To find out more, please visit holtsauctioneers.com/legacy or contact David Thurgood on 01297 306123 or westcountry@holtsauctioneers.com.

Win a day's driven grouse shooting at Burncastle Estate for eight guns

OUR GRAND GROUSE DRAW is now live. With tickets priced at just £20, you could win yourself and seven friends the chance to enjoy a testing day in search of red grouse, thought to be the most sporting bird to shoot. Find out more by visiting gwct.org.uk/grandgrouse draw.

To do this autumn & winter



© Simon Godfrey

1 Get ready for next year's bird count

The 2023 GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is fast approaching. Before next February, why not brush up on your bird ID skills or learn some more birdsong? Sign up at bfbc.org.uk for more information.



2 Attend a GWCT course

Our advisors run practical courses throughout the year on a wide range of topics including game management, biodiversity and conservation. Our best practice predator control courses are designed to ensure practitioners are operating within the law while demonstrating due diligence. Find out more at gwct.org.uk/courses.



3 Buy your Christmas presents

Although still a way off, there is plenty to get excited about in our GWCT online shop. Whether it's books, ties, badges or more, we have something for anyone who is passionate about the countryside.

We also have an exclusive range of Christmas cards (see page 38) and you'll also find a GWCT Gift Guide in with your magazine to browse at your leisure. Alternatively visit gwctshop.org.uk.

Thank you

WE ARE EXTREMELY grateful to receive donations in memory of Lady Gillian Hammick and Michael Rollinson. We would like to thank the families for thinking of us during such a difficult time.

Two new Trustees appointed

FOLLOWING EIGHT years working in advertising sales in London, Owen Williams became a professional sporting artist in 1985 when, with his young family, he moved back to his childhood home on the family hill farm in west Wales. He has been a member of the GWCT for more than 25 years and for the past 14 years has collaborated with the GWCT in woodcock research as a ringer and founder/director of The Woodcock Network. Owen gives talks on woodcock and regularly writes about the science underlying the current debate on shooting and conservation in the shooting press.

Peter Misselbrook, in the top-flight of Scotland's legal profession for over 40 years, has now retired from legal practice, although he continues as a consultant to several commercial concerns. He is a former chairman of BASC and a past president of FACE. Living in East Lothian with wife Fiona, Peter is a keen fisherman, has a gun on a small, local shoot and enjoys working his four cocker spaniels.

He sees the current climate as one of immense, potential change for the countryside with new farming support, the challenge of the climate crisis, its implications for farming and biodiversity, jobs and the rural economy. Scotland also has further land reform legislation in the offing.

He regards the GWCT's main strengths as its science and its capability to deliver results and influence change through its Advisory arm, but also to influence Government through sound science in its decision making. As well as becoming a trustee, Peter is the newly-appointed GWCT Scotland chairman (see page 42).

Caroline Drummond

WE WERE SADDENED that Caroline Drummond MBE died earlier this year. Caroline was CEO of LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) since its inception in 1991. There can be few charities that owe so much to a single individual. She literally took LEAF from a first set of principles scribbled on a piece of paper to a charity which led the way with environmentally-friendly farming and food assurance standards in the UK and 19 European countries. Open Farm Sunday, which Caroline started in 2006, was inspired and has probably done more to get people out onto farms, understanding where their food comes from, than any other event in our lifetime.

The GWCT is proud to be a LEAF partner charity and the Allerton Project was the first LEAF innovation centre. Alastair Leake, director of the Allerton Project, is on LEAF's Policy and Strategic Development Committee. Caroline and I regularly worked together on policy including advising Defra to support more bottom-up approaches to farmland conservation which resulted in the creation of Farmer Clusters.



Caroline was an exceptional individual with an unwavering commitment to sustainable farming and the whole farming community. She was a strong advocate of the GWCT and a dear friend to many. She died of cancer aged 58 in May 2022. Our thoughts are with her husband Phil Ward and daughter Gabrielle.

Teresa Dent CBE

“It’s a fascinating book and one that I would recommend for all shoots” - new Green Guide already proving popular

FOR A GENERATION of gamekeepers and land managers, the Game Conservancy ‘Green Guides’ were a revelation – giving them the guidance they needed to manage the countryside well. One of the most popular of these was *Woodlands for Pheasants*, first published in 1961 and rewritten by GWCT advisor Ian McCall in 1988.

With tree planting high on the public agenda, GWCT advisor, Alex Keeble, has rewritten the guide, refreshing it to reflect changes in best practice and bring the guidelines up to date. The book also embraces the important role good game management can have for many other species and this is reflected in its new title, *Woodlands for Pheasants and Wildlife*.

Scientific knowledge and best practice game management continue to underpin the highly practical advice on offer in the new edition. Chapters cover the design and management of

new woodland and renovation of existing woodland, as well as the financial considerations, plus advice on tree and shrub species, and sustainable gamebird releasing.

The book is priced at £17.99 and is available from our online shop gwctshop.org.uk or by calling 01425 651016.





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Successes

© Heather Wilde



FIFTY-THREE lapwing nests at our Auchnerran demonstration farm hatched at least one chick. See p43.



© Allan Hopkins



ADOPTING measures from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme has led to long-term increases in farmland bird and butterfly numbers, according to a decade-long study.



Setbacks

© Bob Brewer



NEARLY 90% of barn owls monitored by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use were found to carry rodenticide residues.



© Jude Dinham-Price



ONLY 300-400 capercaillie remain in Scotland, with 90% confined to one area of Strathspey in Inverness-shire.



Will you help us to prove what's driving nest losses?

Trail cameras are a vital tool in showing which species are predated nests, such as this rook.

We know that many ground-nesting birds are in desperate need of help. Lapwing, curlew, ringed plover and skylark are all red-listed, as are grey partridge and woodcock. Speak to those on the ground and they'll have an idea of what's fuelling their declines, but we need proof to make a difference.

To show what's really affecting these birds, we need your help. To capture what's causing these declines, whether it's badgers, foxes, livestock, crows, human disturbance or otherwise, we need cameras. Lots of cameras. Trail cameras show us exactly what is predated nests and provide vital evidence that we can share with policymakers, landowners, conservation bodies and the Government.

It's straightforward for our scientists, advisors, and the land managers we work with to assess if they have the right habitat and food provision to support ground-nesting birds. The real struggle comes with understanding what is causing nest losses. We could never afford to monitor these nests in person, waiting for a predator to strike. That's why trail cameras are such an effective tool.

Without using trail cameras, it's incredibly hard to know what's happening to these nests, and even harder to prove it to Government and bodies such as Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and NatureScot. For many of our research staff, these cameras are additional, computerised fieldworkers, showing us what happens when we're not around.

Sadly, the cameras aren't cheap. Each one costs £150, plus an extra £50 for a lock and SD card for each camera. When we're monitoring as many as 100 nests across the country in the nesting season, that soon adds up. We need as many cameras as possible to be able to catch predation incidents and report the findings.

Support our research

Visit gwct.org.uk/cameras
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A ringed plover nest being predated by a lesser black-backed gull.



Camera traps have shown the impact of carrion crows on curlew nests.

© GWCT



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How others see us

What do other organisations think of our work? This column offers an opportunity to hear their views and helps provide insights into our relationship with them. Here, Frans van Alebeek, from BirdLife Netherlands, gives his opinion



BirdLife Netherlands was established in 1899 as a result of public outrage over the killing of birds for decorating women's fashion. With 160,000 members and as a partner of BirdLife International, we now work to protect birds and their habitats locally and worldwide. Farming and hunting have always been important topics for BirdLife NL. We do not own or manage any reserves or land; our philosophy is to co-operate with partners that also strive to improve nature and a livable planet for birds and people. In demonstration projects, we co-operate closely with local and regional conservationists, farmers, hunters and landowners. For example, BirdLife NL supports a network of farmers that engage in meadow bird conservation, and we provide training for field co-ordinators in farmland bird conservation.

In general, the members of BirdLife NL are outspoken opponents of hunting. At a national level the relationship between BirdLife NL and the Royal Dutch Hunters' Association is quite 'frosty'. Thus, it is far from self-evident that BirdLife NL would be an active and enthusiastic partner in the Interreg PARTRIDGE project led by the GWCT. But both organisations cherish the common values of science and conservation evidence.

Our first contact was made by two Dutch farmland bird lovers who sought inspiration from the UK for the protection of the dwindling population of grey partridges in The Netherlands. They visited the GWCT's Allerton Project demonstration farm at Loddington and discussions with the charismatic Francis Buner sparked the idea for a European PARTRIDGE demonstration project. BirdLife NL soon joined together with Flemish, Scottish, German and Danish partners.

In the PARTRIDGE project, we have held many heated and clarifying discussions. But most importantly, we learned to appreciate each other's strengths and how to use these to ensure the best outcome. The GWCT has a top science team in farmland ecology, grey partridge conservation and some excellent GIS

“But both organisations cherish the common values of science and conservation evidence”

mapping experts. At the same time the GWCT has extensive experience in field experiments and on-farm demonstrations, speaking the language of farmers, landowners and hunters alike.

BirdLife NL excels in communications. We helped to design the visual language that established the positive 'look and feel' of PARTRIDGE. Through our network of supporters and donors, we secured considerable extra private funds to strengthen the impact of the project. Together the Dutch PARTRIDGE partners produced impressive publicity for the project's results, leading to several improvements and new measures in the Dutch Agri-Environmental Scheme.

The PARTRIDGE project will end in 2023. But, inspired by our current co-operation, BirdLife NL and other project partners are eager to formulate new co-operative projects with the GWCT, to help make our farmlands and our world a better, more beautiful place to live in, for birds and for people. 🌿

Frans van Alebeek,
Dutch co-ordinating partner PARTRIDGE

The GWCT is lead partner of a cross-border North Sea Region Interreg programme project called PARTRIDGE (Protecting the Area's Resources Through Researched Innovative Demonstration of Good Examples) that will run to 2023. Together with 12 partner organisations from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Scotland and England, the project is showcasing how farmland wildlife can be restored by up to 30% at 10 500-hectare demonstration sites (two in each country). northsearegion.eu/partridge



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Reception marks 30 years

News



Teresa Dent spoke about the Project's influence on policy over 30 years at a special drinks reception at the House of Lords.

In June, the GWCT community came together to celebrate 30 years of The Allerton Project. Kindly hosted by the Earl of Caithness at the House of Lords, guests enjoyed canapés and wine in the beautiful Cholmondeley room and terrace. The evening was an opportunity to thank all who have been involved in the Project and applaud the wonderful work of Alastair Leake and his hardworking team.

Guests enjoyed speeches from Lord Caithness, The Rt. Hon Lord Richard Benyon, Sir James Paice, GWCT chairman,

and Teresa Dent, GWCT CEO. The central importance of the Allerton Project to the wider GWCT was recognised, but more fundamentally so was its influence on policy and policymakers across the first 30 years.

(L-R) GWCT vice president Hugh Oliver Bellasis and host Lord Caithness.



Celebration of Allerton research

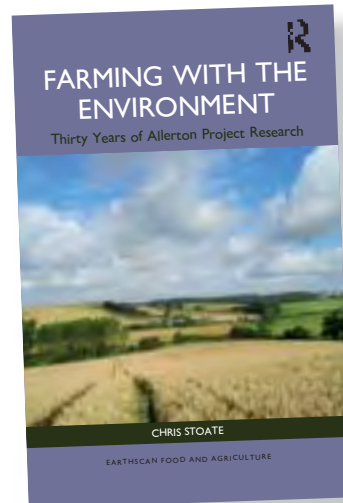
We have published well over a hundred scientific papers since 1992 and we are delighted to announce the publication of *Farming with the Environment*, a new book written by Chris Stoate, our head of research, which is a detailed account of 30 years of research.

Published by Routledge, the book is particularly timely as both farmers and policymakers seek a post-EU path that delivers our food, economically viable farm businesses and numerous societal benefits from the farmed environment. It seeks to provide the evidence base for the adoption of an integrated approach to farmland management.

Our research has subsequently encompassed topics such as aquatic ecology, water quality, flood risk management, soil management and biology, carbon sequestration, ruminant nutrition, greenhouse gas emissions, agroforestry, pollinators and crop pest predators.

This book draws on a wealth of knowledge and unveils and clarifies the complexity of a number of topical debates about current land and wildlife management.

Hb: 978-0-367-74900-2 | £120.00 Pb: 978-0-367-74897-5 | £29.99 eBook: 978-1-003-16013-7



The new book details 30 years of research.

Feeding the world while saving the planet

Maitland lecture

Alastair Leake spoke at the Institution of Structural Engineers Maitland lecture in July about 'Feeding the world while saving the planet'. The lecture was introduced to mark the service of the Institution's former secretary Major RF Maitland, who was in post for a remarkable period of 31 years before retiring in 1961.

In his welcome, chief executive, Martin Powell, said: "The board's principle is for the Institution to host a lecture on a topic of linked and general interest to structural engineers, and the climate change emergency is a subject very much on the highest Institution agenda. We recognise the immense responsibilities of structural engineers who together account for significant portions of the world's embodied carbon in their designs. We share these parallels with the agricultural sector. Our guest lecturer, Alastair Leake, has spent many years developing holistic approaches to production that maximise yields and biodiversity, while minimising environmental impacts. He is renowned for translating the practicalities of farming from his local area right through to the policy forming arena of Westminster."

In his talk, Alastair showed how productive farming and wildlife conservation could thrive side-by-side and how structural engineers and architects should work together to make better use of renewable building materials such as straw, wool and wood produced on farms.



(L-R) Jane Entwistle and Alastair Leake at the Institution of Structural Engineers Maitland lecture in July. © Stop Talking Photography

DID YOU KNOW?

OUR TRAINING COURSES are relevant to agronomists, farmers, land agents, estate owners and conservation advisors. See allertontrust.org.uk/beta.



OVER 30 YEARS we have contributed to the suite of habitat management options available to farmers through agri-environment schemes.



Carbon

The value of hedgerows

British hedgerows are currently storing nine million tonnes of carbon but there are many kilometres of hedges that need restoring. © Peter Thompson

Alastair Leake explains how our hedgerows are valuable for both carbon and biodiversity

With British agriculture committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, farmers are beginning to work out how carbon accounts can be calculated for their farms. An array of different auditing systems can be used to calculate a farm's greenhouse gas emissions – farmers just have to plug in the data, including fuel and energy usage, fertilisers, feed and sprays, and the system will calculate the emissions. Although food production does require fossil fuel usage, this can be minimised. In the arable sector, for example, our research indicates that fuel use in crop establishment can be cut by 70% through switching to non-plough tillage. Farmers have another advantage – agriculture is one of a few industries to use atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) as an essential raw material input, locking up the carbon in plants. In crop plants, this carbon sequestration is largely temporary, as the carbon is released on consumption of the crop or the breakdown of residues in the soil. However, plants growing outside the cropped area could lock up carbon more permanently – areas of woodland, buffer strips, beetle banks and hedgerows all remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it in plants and soil.

The Woodland Carbon Code was launched over a decade ago, enabling farmers and landowners to calculate the

projected carbon storage of a newly-planted wood over 100 years. Being able to assign a carbon value to different habitats will enable us to better calculate the carbon credits the farm is securing outside the land used for food production, potentially offsetting the emissions from farming.

Hedgerows: the storage potential

It is estimated that there are 402,000 kilometres (km) of hedgerows in Britain that are in good condition – that have flowers and fruits, without any gaps and tussocky perennial grasses between it and the field hedge. A further 145,000km are in poor condition, where their roots have been

“There is enormous potential for this figure to be increased by filling up gaps, restoring relic hedgerows”

ploughed, where sprays and fertilisers have encroached or where they have been over-zealously flailed. A further 26,000km can no longer be classified as hedges due to severe deterioration in their structure. Many of these hedges are found on former mixed farms

that have reverted to all-arable production, with the hedges being a relic of the previous farming system and now redundant from their role in containing livestock.

However, they are still protected by the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations, which require landowners to seek consent to remove hedges. It is estimated that British hedgerows are currently storing around nine million tonnes of carbon, valued at £63 million at base carbon prices. There is enormous potential for this figure to be increased by filling up holes, restoring relic hedgerows and allowing hedgerows to grow outwards and upwards – but we need a way to calculate how much additional carbon can be stored by doing this.

The Hedgerow Carbon Code

To create the Hedgerow Carbon Code, we looked at the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund – a grant scheme that aimed to stimulate private investment by helping environmental projects prepare for commercialisation.

The grant enabled the Allerton Project to bring together a small team of experts, led by Dr Matthew Axe, to work on a Hedgerow Carbon Calculator. Using data gathered by 'harvesting' sections of hedgerows, GWCT's data analyst, Cameron Hubbard, was able to create a matrix for calculating the carbon in a hedge by entering

OUR RESEARCH HAS taught us how best to manage soils to achieve multiple benefits, and about the management of water at the catchment scale.



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its dimensions – length, width and height. For hedges that are variable in structure, the calculator will allow the operator to vary the dimension data being entered in 10 metre sections – although in reality most hedges tend to be relatively uniform and do not require this level of resolution.

We are currently piloting the calculator and our farm is particularly testing because the hedges have been managed for the past 30 years to benefit biodiversity, so there is a wide range of hedge structures and ages to measure and calculate. It is estimated that, nationally, 60% of hedges are made up of two principal species – hawthorn and blackthorn.

Further work is needed to assess the carbon storage of other, less frequently occurring species, and to record hedgerow trees' contribution to carbon storage. To verify the results of the calculator, drone company Treeconomy is scanning the hedge density using Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR). Once the initial pilot is complete, trials will be conducted on Kellogg's 'Origins' wheat supply chain farms in Northamptonshire. Kellogg's is a partner in the project, which we hope might ultimately lead to carbon 'in-set' trading, where the wheat for breakfast cereals and the carbon credits for toasting them can be potentially traded together as a package.

Further work is also required to assess the below-ground hedgerow carbon store. Initial 'digs' indicate that around 40% of hedgerow carbon is stored in hedges' root structures, and the calculator is now able

to amalgamate this with the above-ground biomass. Further work led by Professor Pippa Chapman at the University of Leeds, also shows that the soil underneath hedgerows can store considerable quantities of carbon. Professor Chapman is examining how this store of carbon varies with soil type, hedge age and the previous management regime. Where hedges are cut frequently, it is estimated that around 90% of the small twigs cut off by the flail fall inside the hedge structure, ultimately landing on the soil surface. In time, these become embedded within the soil, building up a substantial pool of carbon. With further research, it may be possible to estimate the size of this pool and create a hedgerow soil carbon calculator.

We were concerned that the carbon agenda might eclipse the biodiversity one as farmers and landowners sought to monetise opportunities to trade carbon. However, our work is showing that there is a potential win-win with hedgerows, where both carbon storage and biodiversity can benefit simultaneously. Bigger hedges contain more carbon, but also more flowers and berries – good news for farmers and for wildlife.



Alastair Leake is head of our Allerton Project research and demonstration farm. He is keen to show how restoring hedgerows will help benefit carbon storage and biodiversity.

LATEST DEMONSTRATION FARM ADVICE



COVER CROP CORNER

You might say taking on a Countryside Stewardship agreement is a bit like a marriage. Now, that might be a somewhat melodramatic comparison, but the similarities are there. First, there's some contemplation from a distance; an air of wariness while we consider whether it has the characteristics we're looking for. Eventually, the interest grows and before long the hard yards are underway to ensure it's a worthwhile partnership that complements the wider farm; a long-term commitment that needs dedication and hard work.

Today, it's thanks to this devotion that the Allerton team now have a raft of nectar flower, legume fallow, herb-rich sward and winter bird food plots to manage; a synergy that's delivering for pollinators, farmland birds, soil, water and an abundance of curious visitors who tour the farm each year.

My colleague, Meehal Grint, has been working very closely with farm manager, Oliver Carrick, to ensure the partnership continues to deliver some great outcomes. Attention to detail, teamwork and persistence are paying off, with some stand-out features now visible after more than a year of hard graft to get things where they need to be. As they say, it's all about laying the right foundations.

Richard Barnes

Kings Crops provide agronomy advice and supply seed for the Allerton Project farm's game cover, stewardship and green cover crops.
kingscrops.co.uk



DID YOU KNOW?

British hedgerows store around

9

million tonnes of carbon, valued at

£63 million

at base carbon prices



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Fire is a good servant but a bad master

Henrietta Appleton looks at the need for a rethink on controlled burning

“Fire does so much more than western science currently understands”. This is a quote from Bill Tripp, Director of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy for the Karuk Tribe in California in a *Guardian* article from September 2020 (see *Wildfires – fighting fire with fire* gwct.org.uk/firewithfire). Given the implications of climate change for important habitats and ecosystems, the use of fire as a management tool has been gaining traction. Countries where fire suppression became the policy, such as America and Australia, are changing tack and looking to the cultural burning practices undertaken by indigenous peoples as a means of mitigating wildfire risk.

This is particularly topical in this country where a change in emphasis away from fire suppression and reduced vegetation management is urgently needed. Hotter, drier summers will increase the risk of conditions favourable for the ignition and spread of wildfire, while warmer, wetter winters will support increased biomass production (vegetation) and higher summer fuel loads. A double whammy which will only be exacerbated by the move towards less vegetation management. A recent Peak District National Park Wildfire Risk Assessment suggested that

“have accepted that human influence through the use of fire on our ecosystems has been around for millennia and that it has a role to play in our sustainable use of the natural world”

we will experience increasingly frequent (two-three times per year) periods of fire supportive weather of longer duration. These conditions are projected to double to six times by 2100 resulting in many wildfires being outside the capacity of existing firefighting systems. And this risk is very real as recent headlines of wildfires across the country from our city fringes to our uplands demonstrate. The European Forest Fire Information System data on the UK show that the cumulative area burnt is already higher in 2022 than the 2012-21 average. We are at risk of fire becoming our master rather than our servant.

Fire has been an integral part of some global ecosystems for millennia – both intentional (controlled fire) to manage vegetation for hunting or food production, and unintentional or naturally through accident or lightning

strike. As a result, some plants have become fire-adapted or pyrophytic, meaning that they need fire for the seeds to sprout or to reshoot as a key part of their life cycle. However, as a result of climate change even fire-adapted species are affected as they are not reaching productive maturity before the next fire occurs; increasingly, therefore, these habitats are becoming less fire resilient.

A recent paper *Reimagine Fire Science for the Anthropocene* supported by over 70 scientists, principally from the US but also from Europe and the UK, highlights that fire science is at a critical transitional moment and identifies five key challenges to its advancement. One of these is the need to embrace knowledge from past cultural practices to increase resilience to wildfire – the paper states: ‘Returning fire to landscapes and developing a culture of fire tailored to specific settings is increasingly seen as the most effective path forward’. Wildfires affect water, carbon, nutrient and climatic cycles due to their concentration of mass and energy on potentially large

Countries where fire suppression became the policy, such as America and Australia, are changing tack and looking to the cultural burning practices undertaken by indigenous peoples as a means of mitigating wildfire risk. © Avula Kodanda Raghuvveer



Henrietta Appleton is our policy officer (England) who believes we cannot afford to ignore the relevance of the lessons learnt from other fire-prone ecosystems around the globe.

(Left) Hotter, drier summers will increase the risk of wildfires, stretching existing firefighting systems. © The Moorland Association





The Native American tribe the Yurok, work closely with firefighters in California to reduce fuel load. The value of traditional burns in reducing the impact of wildfires is clear both in terms of financial cost and carbon release.
© Alexandra Hootnick (see Gamewise autumn/winter 2021); cool burns can benefit Sphagnum mosses and cotton grass by removing the heather cover without damaging the peat layer.
© Laurie Campbell

scales, and also impact human health and economic activity when at the rural-urban interface. It is this pervasive threat that has resulted in calls for a better understanding of how fire can be controlled to fight fire.

In the UK, however, the need to understand how we can use controlled fire to improve landscape resilience has become embroiled in socio-political values and scientific debate over the impacts of controlled burning. It is vital that we look beyond siloed views and learn from other fire-prone countries – many of which have a longer history of wildfire than we do. These countries have accepted that human influence through the use of fire on our ecosystems has been around for millennia and that it has a role to play in our sustainable use of the natural world. Arguably as human influence now has many more dimensions, our responsibility to understand that symbiotic relationship is greater than ever.

It therefore remains vital that reducing the risk of wildfire as part of Defra's licensing approach to controlling burning on deep peat, is actively pursued and that calls to ban controlled burning as a means of managing vegetation are resisted. We cannot afford to ignore the relevance of the lessons learnt from other fire-prone ecosystems around the globe and the increasing willingness to use controlled fire as a conservation tool.

So where does UK fire science go from here? Hopefully in a collaborative direction that takes both the positive and negative evidence from controlled burning and uses this to develop ecologically driven burning rotations that address not only wildfire, but also biodiversity and economic interests. Let us hope the politicians and policymakers are listening and are keen on exploring cultural history. 🌱

DID YOU KNOW?

A study in 2015 showed that wildfires consumed and emitted nearly twice as much carbon per hectare than controlled burns.

BIOCHAR – HIDDEN VALUE?

The historic and current production of biochar following landscape fires is not yet accounted for in UK peatland models and yet it is increasingly acknowledged as a significant sink for atmospheric CO₂.

Biochar (soot, char, pyrogenic charcoal or black carbon) is produced by the incomplete combustion of organic matter during fires. As it resists further oxidation it can store carbon for very long periods (centuries to millennia). The amount of biochar produced is influenced by weather conditions, fuel loads, fuel types and fire characteristics (such as fire temperature).

Biochar was a key factor behind the positive relationship a York University study found between moorland burn frequency and carbon storage through time. More charcoal is incorporated into the peat profile with more burning, locking away further carbon. As most studies ignore this benefit, the carbon storage potential of burning management may have been underestimated, especially in flat, wet areas of blanket bog where peat erosion is limited. Biochar also has the potential to mitigate other greenhouse gas emissions (such as methane) and may aid peatland restoration through its interaction with the soil microbiome and benefits to soil structure and stability.



Andrew Hoodless

Drawing on his experience in landmark GWCT studies, our director of research, explains his belief in the importance of science to inform conservation management and his plans to expand the scope of GWCT research



In the 33 years since joining the Trust in 1989, Andrew Hoodless has worked on key GWCT research projects which have gone on to influence policy and best practice. The Upland Predation Experiment in Northumberland, work to quantify the effects of gamebird releasing on woodland wildlife and studies on breeding waders have all had a lasting impact. At the same time, he has become recognised as a world authority on woodcock.

What impact did these studies have?

After joining as a new graduate and completing my PhD on woodcock breeding and wintering ecology – the start of my lifelong interest in the species – I went to Otterburn to set up the Upland Predation Experiment with Dave Baines, our director of upland research. This long-term research came to be regarded as a landmark study, showing clear benefits of predation control as practised by moorland gamekeepers, for species other

than grouse. Breeding success of lapwing, golden plover and curlew increased three-fold and, importantly, this translated into increasing numbers. The Upland Predation Experiment has influenced thinking on approaches to wader conservation and highlighted the role of grouse moors as breeding wader strongholds.

The work on the effects of pheasant releasing, with Roger Draycott and Rufus Sage, was spread across 160 lowland sites. With this study we showed that some typical shoot management practices, such as ride creation and sky-lighting within woodland, were generally beneficial for songbirds and butterflies. But there were some detrimental effects, especially within release pens, on vegetation and some invertebrates. This study resulted in improved guidance for shoots, such as threshold figures for pheasant releasing densities, which are now recognised as best practice.

These studies demonstrate one of the GWCT's great strengths – our research doesn't just identify problems, it



Kate Williams is our communications officer who is keen to promote the huge achievements of GWCT staff and their research.

DID YOU KNOW?

Of the 56 migrant woodcock we tagged with satellite tags in our Woodcock Watch project, migration distance ranged from approximately 900 kilometres (km) to Denmark and Norway, to more than 6,000km for Western Siberia. The average migration was around 3,000km.

One of the GWCT's greatest strengths is that our research doesn't just identify problems, it develops solutions and suggests changes to management practices, many of which go on to form future policy.

develops solutions and suggests changes to management practices, many of which go on to form future policy.

Did you maintain your interest in waders and woodcock during this period?

I carried on some wader monitoring in the Avon Valley and in 2010 I became head of the new Wetlands research team. With funding from Natural England, we began more intensive wader monitoring, which showed rapid population declines in the valley. Once we understood the key issues, we set up the LIFE Waders for Real project with EU funding in 2015. Working with the farmers and gamekeepers, we established management practices to ensure that populations would be sustainable into the future and, I am happy to say, we succeeded in reversing wader declines (see page 26).

Concurrently, my work with woodcock was showing up national declines and the need to better understand both resident and migrant birds. From 2010 we began tracking woodcock, first with geolocators then with satellite tags.

You are recognised as a world authority on woodcock. What has that work achieved?

Woodcock research is a very small world, but our results have changed the understanding of woodcock migration. The assumption, based on ringing, had been that most birds arriving to winter in the UK came from Scandinavia. However, our tracking showed that around 60% came from Russia, with some migrating more than 6,000 kilometres from Siberia.

Your long career with the GWCT makes you eminently well-suited to your new role. Do you believe such longevity would have been possible elsewhere?

What sets the GWCT apart is the breadth of research expertise, and not just in birds – we have mammal and farmland ecologists, entomologists, fisheries scientists and predation experts – and that gives us a range of research

Technology changing our understanding

The GWCT's pioneering woodcock tracking work, led by Andrew, revealed that, contrary to expectations, around 60% of the woodcock visiting Britain and Ireland came from central Russia, covering far greater distances than anyone imagined.

Previously the only way of knowing where woodcock came from was through ringing, which had suggested that most of the migrant population came from Scandinavia.

"Those long-distance birds that went to Siberia were the real eye-opener" says Andrew. "They changed the view of woodcock migration, and bird migration more widely. We know quite a lot about migrants to Africa, but there was an assumption that birds travelling east-west covered much shorter distances.

"Technology is moving so fast – now we have tagging devices as small as two grammes – and it allows us to answer questions that just would not have been possible in the past.

"This enables us to get an intimate understanding of the life of a species, whether that's a fox, curlew or woodcock. Tags allow us to gather accurate data on periods of activity and hunting routes, brood movements and favoured habitats, all of which we can use to come up with management recommendations. It's hugely exciting."

See gwct.org.uk/about-woodcock.

opportunities and a broader outlook. The interaction between teams is something I'm looking to foster in my role.

Has our departure from the EU had consequences for GWCT research?

The loss of EU funding presents the GWCT with a real challenge. Having delivered several successful EU-funded projects, including MorFISH, QuESSA, LIFE Waders for Real, BEESPOKE, PARTRIDGE and SAMARCH, it is frustrating not only to lose that source of funding but also the opportunity to continue successful relationships with partner organisations in Europe. There is still uncertainty around what will replace EU funding.

What is the solution as you see it?

I have concerns about how secure we will be if we rely mainly on income from estates for gamebird projects. With the prospect of further restrictions on game management, it is essential that we ensure the shooting community understands and continues to support our work, but I see potential for further broadening our remit in areas such as delivery of ecosystem services on farmland, catchment-scale fisheries management and wildlife management. Continued collaboration with other organisations is likely to be key to accessing new sources of funding.





Where next for GWCT research?

There is work to be done on understanding what is driving populations of common predators – the issue is much broader than the UK and gamebird releasing. There is more for us to do on farmland – we need to devise effective measures for delivering wildlife across the landscape and explore further the relative merits of options to work alongside more intensive crop management for higher yields driven by concerns over food security, versus lower input and regenerative farming systems.

Technological advances, such as GPS tags, drones, DNA metabarcoding and apps, have opened new possibilities

for answering research questions in recent years and further developments are inevitable. We must maintain collaborations ensuring access to the latest techniques and invest in expertise for processing and analysing the large datasets we produce. It's these valuable datasets that help inform future management decisions.

To what extent have we found common ground with other conservation organisations on predation control and gamebird releasing?

We have a good understanding of the impact of predation on gamebirds and some species of conservation concern – it has taken a long time to convince others. But we are making headway. In the 2000s few wader conservationists recognised predation as an issue, but recently it has been more generally accepted, if there is not yet an agreement on the level of intervention required.

The current scale of gamebird releasing is causing conservationists real concern. Although some of the arguments against releasing are misinformed or too simplistic, we think some of the concerns are justified. The GWCT won't shy away from highlighting the negatives of gamebird releasing, but always with a view to suggesting improvements to practices.

We have met little resistance from shoots to our advice to delay shooting woodcock until 1 December. Many people understand the need to change their practices to help conserve our resident birds and ensure the future sustainability of woodcock shooting. We need to reach the same place with released pheasants and partridges if shoots are to ensure their sport is sustainable.

Clearly you see GWCT research as having a role in changing behaviour?

Yes, and a key part of that is communicating our findings to the widest possible audience. When I started my career, it was all about publishing in high impact journals. That is still important in maintaining our reputation with other NGOs, universities and policymakers. But in today's social media world it is also vital that our researchers make their work accessible to the wider public, building support and profile for the GWCT.

(L-R) By tackling predation and improving habitat, lapwing breeding success in the Avon Valley increased from 61 to 105 pairs; there is lots more research to do on farmland and we will continue our work looking at regenerative farming systems.
© Bahadır Yeniceri

Waders for Real 2015-19

The GWCT had been monitoring waders in the Hampshire Avon Valley since the mid-1990s and saw alarming declines. Our research showed that declines were due to poor breeding success, with predation of nests and chicks the main issue, despite good habitat measures implemented through agri-environment schemes.

By 2015 lapwing were down to 61 nesting pairs. With EU-funding we set up the LIFE Waders for Real project and began working with 38 farmers and gamekeepers to improve habitat and tackle predation.

The project succeeded in reversing the decline, seeing lapwing and redshank populations recover through increased breeding success, with lapwing rising to 105 pairs by the end of the project. The farmers saw the merits of working together at landscape-scale, subsequently setting up a Farmer Cluster. Wetlands ecologist Lizzie Grayshon (inset) continues to monitor wader populations and advise the valley's land managers, and wader numbers have remained stable. See

gwct.org.uk/wadersforreal.



Hamish Mackie

HAMISH MACKIE SCULPTURE

LIFE IN BRONZE





Can we have it all?

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?

Is rewilding the answer for wildlife recovery? Email us at editor@gwct.org.uk

Management, management, management – oh and location too. Henrietta Appleton looks at the current direction of wildlife recovery and food production policy

Many of you will be familiar with the mantra ‘location, location, location’ in property (and the Channel 4 programme with Kirsty and Phil). In land husbandry, the mantra should be ‘management, management, management’. So why is the current direction of policy for wildlife recovery and sustainable food production moving us away from management?

It is not because the science tells us that less management means more farmland birds or pollinators or efficient crop production; it doesn't. The Allerton Project is testament to this. The management of marginal areas for nature has yielded results contrary to national declines such as a doubling of breeding songbirds and a 36% increase in moth abundance. Meanwhile the remaining areas are farmed commercially with yields comparable with regional averages for heavy soil farms.

But it could be because of previous policy failures. The trend towards re-wilding, in particular, is seen as a response to the failure of existing conservation strategies to deliver. It is 35 years since the first agri-environment scheme and 30 years since the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity; more of the same suggests continued failure. In addition, rewilding has engaged the public and become a force for change. The public views rewilding as ‘a new, exciting, fascinating concept that is more emotionally engaging and easier to understand than

abstract, technical concepts such as biodiversity’. Ironically, GWCT research suggests that the reason for failure has been over-reliance on habitat and that this, combined with reduced management and land sparing approaches, could result in policy outcomes that fail to address the need for both commercial food production and conservation.

For farmland wildlife, a GWCT blueprint emphasises the need for better and more targeted intervention as part of the three-legged stool approach – habitat, supplementary feeding and predator control. This also requires an understanding of location, such as siting insect-rich habitat close to nesting cover for grey partridges and in open landscapes where trees cannot act as perches for predators; and for predator control an understanding of fox movements or corvid territorial behaviour. This is supported by data to date which indicates that

the Entry Level Stewardship scheme merely maintains farmland bird numbers while Higher Level Stewardship, with its more targeted interventions, demonstrates a benefit. And let us not forget that since 71% of our countryside is farmed, much of our wildlife has adapted to and is dependent upon farming, but where intensification has squeezed wildlife out, we must now, through management, allow it back in. Abandonment is unlikely to achieve this.

“but where intensification has squeezed wildlife out, we must now, through management, allow it back in”

Farmers may seek alternative ways to increase food yields during periods of rising global prices – such as putting more land into production at the cost of biodiversity.
© Peter Thompson



Henrietta Appleton is our policy officer (England) who believes that better and more targeted management is needed to optimise outcomes not less.

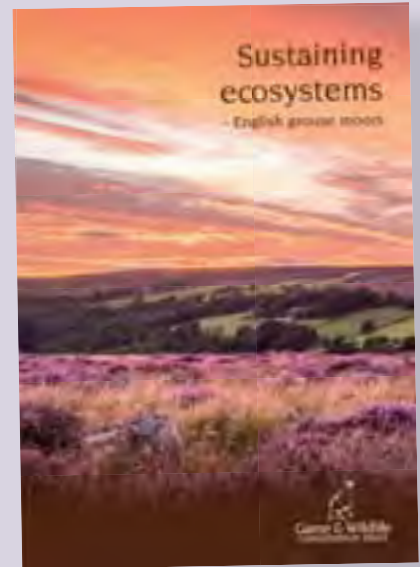
SUSTAINING ECOSYSTEMS

Our audit of grouse moors' contribution to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) targets, called *Sustaining Ecosystems: English Grouse Moors*, emphasises the extent to which demands on our uplands have increased; from food production 200 years ago to the range of 'outputs' today such as flood mitigation, carbon storage and recreation. As a result, public policy now reflects a wider stakeholder interest and in response to this is promoting alternative more extensive upland management systems, while constraining some activities on grouse moors.

However, our audit strongly suggests that best practice grouse moor management delivers a net gain in outcomes for society when considered against the 25YEP framework. This is a point that moorland managers themselves have not, until very recently, been recognising or recording. Conversely it appears that the less well evidenced alternatives do not sustain or improve this public good provision to the extent that it would be more appropriate for policy to accommodate and promote different land management systems in parallel, rather than replace a proven system with an unproven one.

The way forward is to enhance the environmental, the economic and societal benefits delivered by grouse moor management without compromising the shooting incentive which enables these balanced outcomes.

See gwct.org.uk/englishgrousemoors for more information.



Predator management remains a contentious subject. However, man's interference with the 'natural order' has unbalanced the predator – prey relationship with, for example, road kill sustaining generalists such as corvids at times of year when lack of food sources would have been naturally limiting. Although rewilders would propose the reintroduction of apex predators as a 'more natural' means of rebalancing these interactions, the lack of 'control' over how these wild animals 'behave', knowledge about total prey biomass and the need for large territories may mean that the results are counter-productive. In addition, the GWCT advocates removing potential predators during nesting and brood-rearing; a defined window. Reintroduced predators could strike at any time.

Many of our iconic species are adapted to man-made ecosystems – for example the grey partridge, turtle dove, skylark and lapwing within arable systems. Rather than rewilding landscapes the GWCT believes finding space for pockets of wildness in the farmed landscape would be more beneficial and support biodiversity more broadly across the landscape and not just in hotspots. It could also

be argued that grouse moor management provides this balance through optimising both the shooting outcome with the co-benefits of other ecosystem services as identified in our recent audit (see box above).

But back to the farmed landscape. The current direction of travel in agricultural policy towards extending

'Landscape Recovery' is of concern, given recent global challenges to food supply and the need to balance multiple outcomes from each hectare of land.

The fact that management has become synonymous with intensive systems is unhelpful as multiple demands require careful management if outcomes are to be optimised. For example, the adoption of crop rotations that maximise the nutrient cycling of sequestering crops, such as clover-leys, followed by nutrient hungry crops such as first wheats alongside well placed and managed agri-environment scheme options to encourage pollinators and natural pest predators, requires a systematic approach to managing the land. It can also require some inorganic inputs but these are optimised, not maximised. Calls for reductions in inorganic fertiliser and pesticide use will result in farmers seeking alternative ways to increase food yields during periods of rising global prices – such as putting more land into production, potentially impacting on biodiversity and the environment if the land is marginal or has previously been the subject of agri-environment options.

So where does this leave conservation and food production policy? In our view neither policy should dictate a single approach as otherwise we will continue to fail to meet targets. The post second world war focus on increasing food production has arguably led us to where we are now. Targeting policy at another single outcome such as Net Zero or rewilding could generate different, but potentially as concerning, unintended consequences for our wildlife and domestic food production. What is needed is a multi-faceted policy that supports all approaches to combining nature recovery and food production including land sharing models. Can we have it all? I hope so. 🌱

Finding space for pockets of wildness in the farmed landscape would be more beneficial and support biodiversity more broadly across the landscape.
© Peter Thompson





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Enhancing habitat for barn owls



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Fledged barn owls will look for a suitable area for roosting, hunting and breeding which can vary in size from 350 hectares (ha) up to 5,000ha. An increase in food supply will usually contract the size of a home range.

Jodie Case reports on the six Farmer Clusters helping barn owls in southern England and what's next for the Owl Box Initiative

We have found that the detection rates of voles and mice, a barn owl's main prey, were highest in locations close to grass margins.
© BBA Photography



Jodie Case is our predation research assistant, focusing on predator-prey interactions to help guide management decisions.

The Owl Box Initiative was awarded Green Recovery Challenge funding in late 2020, to work with six Farmer Clusters across Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset, to help them conserve barn owls. Although not an endangered species, the barn owl is a top predator and key indicator of biodiversity health, and creating farmland habitats where their prey can thrive should, in turn, benefit barn owls and help many other species too.

Project funding provided the opportunity for our scientists and volunteers to assess 2021 barn owl nest box occupancy and breeding success across 100 farms. We observed barn owl habitat preferences by tagging 12 adult barn owls with GPS tags that track their movements and enable us to demonstrate the value of existing conservation measures. We are also looking at prey abundance and composition within various farmland habitats and diet. We hope to use this knowledge to provide management guidelines to advise on habitat measures for barn owls and how

“creating farmland habitats where their prey can thrive should, in turn, benefit barn owls and help many other species too”

those measures can help wider wildlife. Although data collected through our research is still ongoing and yet to be fully analysed, we have found from our small mammal monitoring that the detection rates of voles and mice, a barn owl's main prey, were highest in locations close to grass margins.

The Green Recovery Challenge funding came to an end earlier this year, but the project has achieved a great deal with the help of many people, and continues to do so. Work with volunteer ornithologists across project study areas monitoring nest boxes was again completed during the 2022 breeding season. A number of new GPS tags were also deployed on adults to increase knowledge in this important area of barn owl ecology. Small mammal surveys and diet analysis will also be repeated at the end of this year.

The project has also begun working with two more Farmer Clusters with a keen interest in barn owl conservation and, to support this enthusiasm, the



150

NEST BOXES MONITORED BY PROJECT STAFF AND VOLUNTEER ORNITHOLOGISTS

12

GPS TAGS DEPLOYED ON ADULT BARN OWLS

SMALL MAMMAL INK TRACKING TUNNELS WERE CHECKED

840 TIMES

141

BARN OWL PELLETS ANALYSED

40,000

HECTARES OF AGRI-ENVIRONMENT HABITAT HAS BEEN MAPPED USING A GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

To find out more about barn owls and how you can help, including how to make boxes, please go to owlboxinitiative.com



Owl Box Initiative has provided new nest boxes to the farmers to mount across neighbouring farms.

Throughout, the project has also created a platform to promote barn owl conservation measures to a wide audience through various media activities and publications, hopefully to foster a more personal connection between wildlife and the general public. Team members have continually held talks and workshops with farmers, students and community groups to build boxes and share enthusiasm and knowledge about nest boxes and advise on siting considerations. This engagement continues. It is important for the project to keep building on these relationships through the involvement of our research and by sharing existing knowledge.

We would like to thank all the farmers and land managers who have worked with us so far and all the volunteers and everyone who has supported the project.

Nest boxes have been monitored to establish site occupancy rates, breeding success and survival. This barn owl chick is being ringed under BTO and Schedule 1 licences.

Research in action... How to analyse barn owl pellets



1 A number of hours after feeding, barn owls regurgitate prey remains which they cannot digest, such as fur and bone, producing a pellet. These pellets can contain remains of up to four to five small mammals.



2 We analyse pellets by prising them apart with tweezers and using a binocular microscope. Small mammal bones are identified to species level by looking at their jaws, skulls and teeth.



3 Mice, voles and shrews can all be found within pellets. This skull was identified as a common shrew, an insectivore with five continuous upper, unicuspid teeth, with the third tooth being smaller than the fourth.

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Helping curlew under pressure

CURLEW

The UK is of global importance to Eurasian curlews. Only Russia and Finland support larger breeding populations. Significant declines have been accompanied by range contractions. Curlews need to produce 0.48–0.62 fledglings per pair per year for the population to remain stable. But reported fledging estimates are below this threshold.

We aim to determine the causes of low productivity of curlews in the New Forest, a popular National Park with ecological and geological importance. © SuxxesPhoto

Understanding why curlews are under pressure in the New Forest and how we can help the population recover is all in a day's work for the research team. Mike Short reports

Compared with some other New Forest breeding birds in steep decline – such as the wood warbler – curlews are rather lucky. Most people who know anything about conservation, know curlews are one of our most rapidly declining breeding bird species, showing a 48% decline across the UK from 1995 to 2015. The Curlew Recovery Partnership and several curlew-devoted charities have put these enigmatic waders firmly into our hearts and minds, and people are digging deep to support curlew conservation projects everywhere, to try and help them breed more successfully.

The New Forest supports one of the most significant populations of breeding curlews in southern England, and it ranks highly as one of our most 'protected' landscapes. It is classified as a Special Protection Area for its breeding and overwintering birds; a Special Area of Conservation

for its unique and diverse habitats; a Ramsar site, which recognises it as a wetland area of international importance; and 29,000 hectares of the New Forest are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in recognition of its outstanding ecological and geological importance.

However, the New Forest National Park's popularity with day visitors, its busy rural communities and proximity to two of the largest cities on the south coast, namely Southampton and Bournemouth, create immense challenges for the wading birds – including curlews – that try and breed here, and for whom low productivity is a pervasive problem. This heather-clad landscape is a world away from the relative peace and quiet of privately-owned grouse moors where curlews famously breed well; and the GWCT's research team aims to find out the reasons for the big difference in productivity.



Mike Short is our head of predation research. He is particularly interested in the impacts and management of generalist predators like foxes and carrion crows in relation to conservation of breeding waders.



A fox flushes a curlew from its nest. The eggs in this nest had hatched, and the fox ate the curlew chicks in the nest cup.

Monitoring nest and chick survival is a key element of Elli Rivers' research. All bird capture and marking is conducted under a special licence issued by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

Human activities can negatively affect wader populations in many ways. Problems associated with climate change, broad-scale habitat loss and modification, reduced food availability and recreational disturbance are all popular topics for study, but we're taking a different approach. Predation is a fundamental natural process in any ecosystem. The significance of predation as a cause of wading bird population decline is much debated, but even where habitat appears optimal – as in the New Forest – productivity is poor unless predation is somehow controlled, using lethal or non-lethal measures.

Our research team is particularly interested in understanding how human activity and access to anthropogenic food resources may drive the population dynamics of generalist predators – especially foxes

– in our region, with associated consequences for curlews and other breeding waders. This is the focus of Nathan Williams' fox PhD project that's jointly funded by

Bournemouth University. Identifying nest predators is critical to understanding the predation pressures that birds face, so in a parallel study, we're using trail cameras to evaluate the nesting success of curlews

and other red-listed wading birds in the New Forest National Park. For the 40 or so pairs of locally breeding curlews, poor chick survival is also a recurrent problem, and determining the causes of their low productivity is the focus of Elli Rivers' PhD project, also funded by the GWCT and Bournemouth University in collaboration with Forestry England.

We reported on our New Forest curlew nest monitoring work in the *GWCT Review of 2021*. Last year we placed cameras on 18 active curlew nests, and recorded 14 of them as predated (eight by foxes; three by

carrion crows; one by cattle, one by an unknown avian predator), one was abandoned and three hatched. This year, we managed to locate and place cameras on 23 active curlew nests, and again foxes were by far the most important nest predator, accounting for 10/12 predated nests, the other two destroyed by a carrion crow and a dog. Two other active curlew nests with partial clutches were predated before we could place a nest camera, which illustrates the rapidity at which new nests are lost. Curlew nest survival was much better in areas with intensive fox and carrion crow control, and we now have an accurate measure of the amount of culling effort that helped enable this. In total, across the Forest, we recorded 34 curlew chicks leaving nine nest-cups, and two other nests were abandoned. At one of these nests, we found the predated remains of a female curlew, which had clearly been killed by a raptor, possibly a goshawk or peregrine.

As well as the nine broods of curlew chicks our cameras recorded leaving nest cups, we located a further four broods, revealed by high intensity alarm-calling of

“Identifying nest predators is critical to understanding the predation pressures that birds face”





adult pairs. So, we know of at least 13 successful curlew nests in 2022, although there may have been others that we failed to detect. Assuming the additional successful nests held clutches of four eggs, and all the eggs hatched, there may have been 50 curlew chicks on the forest in 2022. Yet intensive visual monitoring of all these broods found only five chicks known to have reached fledging age, illustrating the perilously low chick survival rates for New Forest curlews.

We don't yet know the causes of such high chick mortality, especially in areas with intensive fox and carrion crow control but we speculate that a suite of protected avian predators including raven, marsh harrier, buzzard, red kite and goshawk may have been involved. If we can raise sufficient funds, our team would like to

explore the causes of poor chick survival in subsequent years.

Without this level of knowledge, it will be very difficult for Forestry England to formulate a management plan, aimed at stopping this precious population of breeding curlews from spiralling further towards extinction.

Using nest cameras we have been able to show that fox predation is the principal cause of curlew nest failure, and most are destroyed at night. (Inset) A curlew sitting on a nest that was subsequently predated.

PREDATION RESEARCH FUNDING

It costs £170,000 a year to maintain current levels of research on predation, and we'd like to do a lot more. If you can help us extend that research, please donate at donorbox.org/gwct-predation. Thank you for your support.

Research in action... How to monitor fox diet



1
Understanding fox diet
We are analysing the stomach content of foxes that were culled in areas where curlew try to breed to gain a better understanding of their diet.



2
A mixed diet
Stomach content analysis shows foxes have catholic tastes. This one had eaten an apple, a reptile, a mouse, a small bird and plenty of beetles.



3
Human food waste
However, our studies show that in the New Forest, fox diet is heavily subsidised by anthropogenic foods. This stomach contained the remains of a curry.



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Royal Welsh Show success

Our farming panel at the Royal Welsh Show discussed many topics including tree planting and carbon stocks.

In record-high temperatures at Llanellwedd near Builth Wells, the Royal Welsh Show proved a great success for the GWCT Wales team. The hot topic was the recent announcement of the Sustainable Farming Scheme with particular concern expressed by farmers on the need to have 10% of their farms covered with trees. We launched the new GWCT Wales Farming Community at the show which will provide a platform for farmers to share information on improving biodiversity; access advice and

support from the GWCT; and inform the future of agricultural policy in Wales. Kindly hosted by the Farmers' Union of Wales, the Farming Community launch included updates on projects in Wales and a panel discussion chaired by Sue Evans, our director for Wales, which debated tree planting, hedgerow management and carbon stocks among other things. We hope to encourage further similar discussions through our new GWCT Wales Farming Community – see www.gwct.wales.

Helping farmers

A prime objective of the Bro Cors Caron SMS project is to reverse local wildlife declines while also allowing farmers to farm livestock sustainably and profitably. An example of the recent groundworks which will ensure these objectives can be met is the construction of a one-kilometre-long boundary between two farms in the project. The boundary consists of a double-fenced raised bank which connects the Cors Caron National Nature Reserve (one of the largest lowland raised bogs in southern Britain) to an area of upland called Rhos Gelli-gron. In the autumn, this will be planted with a mix of



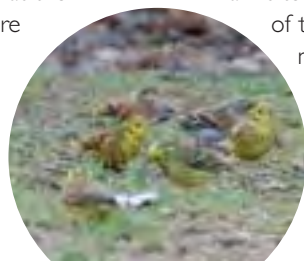
The boundary will be planted with a mix of plants.

hedgerow plants which, once established, will not only provide extensive habitat for farmland birds, but also prevent the livestock from the two farms from mixing, thus improving biosecurity measures.

Birds respond

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) is now in its second year and is revealing some good results. We established wild bird seed mixes and implemented supplementary feeding at a lowland organic dairy farm and an upland traditional hill sheep farm and are monitoring how bird numbers respond. We chose the two demonstration sites so that the practices can be replicated anywhere in Wales. We also want to demonstrate an accurate cost of using contractors for crop

establishment, as many Welsh farms lack the required specialist machinery and the payments within the future Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) in Wales need to be realistic to encourage participation. The initial results are very promising and in the first winter we found a fantastic six-fold increase in bird numbers at the experimental plots compared with the control plots. This summer's breeding bird counts are also very promising, with a two-fold increase. If Welsh farms took up these practices as part of the future SFS, they would make a huge step towards addressing farmland bird declines in Wales.



In brief

The first Welsh Game Fair took place in September.

Historic first Welsh Game Fair

THE FIRST GWCT Welsh Game Fair took place at the Vaynol Estate in north Wales from 9-11 September. The historic Vaynol Tunnels – formerly part of the Bangor and Carnarvon Railway – underneath the Welsh Game Fair venue provided a unique opportunity for shooters to put a variety of guns through their paces. More on the Game Fair in the next *Gamewise*.

BBC Radio Wales

CRUGLAS FARM (one of the farms participating in the Bro Cors Caron SMS) was recently the subject of an episode of Country Focus on BBC Radio Wales. The programme looked at how Terry Mills had been able to incorporate wildlife into this pastoral farm, and has consequently been able to record 145 different bird species. Indeed, Mr Mills' farm was the blueprint for the SMS project, which is also described in the programme. Listen to 'A farmed wildlife haven'. See gwct.org.uk/wales/videos/.

Working with schools

AS PART of our 'Cynnal Coetir' Elwy valley SMS we have been engaging with local schools in the project area regarding woodland health and resilience. Sessions were run by our education partner, The Woodland Skills centre, Bodfari, teaching children about the woodland and the wildlife living within it. We have also been out visiting schools to discuss with pupils the threats facing our woodlands and the ways we can help them.

MORE INFORMATION/EVENTS

Contact: Sue Evans 07399 296550 or sevans@gwct.org.uk. GWCT Wales, The Maltings, Cardiff, CF24 5EA.

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Walks on the wild side

A series of walks was held for farmers this summer to look at changes to the Scottish agricultural support system.



Ross MacLeod is our head of policy in Scotland, and is keen to share our research and practical experience.

Ross MacLeod looks at the changes facing Scottish farmers and how our research will help

Farmers are no strangers to change, but Scottish farm income support is set for significant transformation. Work has already started on a new agricultural bill commencing in the Scottish Parliament next year, for introduction in 2025. Preparing farmers is already under way, with the implementation of a National Test Programme bearing down on greenhouse

gas emissions through carbon audits and soil testing, as well as developing mechanisms to reward farmers for delivering positive climate and biodiversity outcomes.

In Scotland, the existing farm payment system will remain, but in future up to half of payments will be made on the basis of 'enhanced conditionality', which will require farmers to demonstrate sound

environmental stewardship. NatureScot, the Scottish Government Agency, is charged with developing appropriate 'outcomes-based' payment schemes. This spring we shared our research and practical experience with NatureScot, land managers and other organisations over three 'walk and talk' events. The three walks were helpful in cementing good working contact with NatureScot staff alongside GWCT's membership of its Natural Capital External Advisory Group. This has allowed us the opportunity to build our profile as an evidence-based organisation keen to play a role in maintaining productive farming, while helping to shape the development of sound environmental support payments at both farm and landscape-scale. *RM*

The PARTRIDGE project, Fife

Our first walk with NatureScot took place at Balgonie, an arable farm and demonstration site for the EU Interreg-funded PARTRIDGE project. This initiative aims to show how farmland biodiversity can be supported using the grey partridge as a model, but also monitors impacts on a range of species. We have been advising and recording outcomes at Balgonie since 2014, during which we have seen a steady increase in grey partridge numbers, and some other farmland wildlife. The field margin flower blocks were examined at length and are one of the simple measures that have proved attractive to birds, mammals and pollinators alike. The discussions ranged from in-field management (arable margins, wildflower mixes, integrated pest management and soil health) through to broader issues such as the climate and biodiversity crises, the future agricultural funding framework, and the need to blend public and private finance.

GWSDF, Aberdeenshire

The next meeting with NatureScot took place at Auchnerran, our Scottish demonstration farm. On the eastern slopes of the Cairngorms massif, the farm is a very different agricultural environment from Fife, with the 1,500-strong blackface sheep flock driving income. We manage the sheep alongside the nationally important population of wading birds returning to the farm each spring. Here, the discussion developed around carbon audits and natural capital assessments undertaken over the last two years. We were also involved in trialling NatureScot's Natural Capital Assessment template as part of a 50-farm pilot earlier in the year. These activities prompted valuable discussion on how the schemes might be refined and implemented across Scotland, along with useful debate on intelligent management of inputs to maintain both productive farming and nature-friendly practice.

The Loch Ness Farmer Cluster, Inverness-shire

Our last walk was organised in conjunction with Scottish Land & Estates and took place on the Loch Ness Farmer Cluster in Inverness-shire, which the GWCT has assisted since start-up. At present, we don't have the same facilitation funding support that Natural England has made available for Farmer Cluster initiatives south of the border. The Scottish Clusters nevertheless retain the same classic ingredients for success as in England – enthusiasm among farmers to do more to assist biodiversity, and the tenacity of a lead farmer to galvanise collaboration.

Under the passionate drive of Fred Swift, the Loch Ness Farmer Cluster has met and progressed baseline mapping, enabling members to develop ideas for key habitats, species, and connectivity support across the Cluster area. NatureScot recognises the importance of collaborative work and has established a pilot programme for testing a natural capital approach at landscape-scale, so the presence of staff at this meeting to update and hear from both Cluster members and other attendees was timely.

GWCT SCOTLAND'S KEY ASKS

Building on this engagement, we would like to secure:

- The introduction of financial support to help Farmer Cluster start-up and facilitation across Scotland.
- Development of measures for environmental outcomes across different farming types and circumstances.
- Simple means for farmers to collect evidence of environmental outcomes, such as mobile app recording.
- A commitment that farmers who already maintain biodiversity are rewarded as equally as those who have improvements to make.





| IN SCOTLAND

Science that is relevant

New Scottish chairman, Peter Misselbrook, understands rural Scotland from both a legal, advocacy and practical perspective. A top lawyer for more than 40 years, he is a past chairman of BASC and president of FACE, a keen shot and fisherman. He also enjoys working his cocker spaniels, while his wife Fiona is an Eriskay pony breeder.

What was your first contact with the GWCT?
I've always been aware of the GWCT and been a member longer than I can remember.

Why do you think the Trust in Scotland has such an important role right now?

Our countryside is going through a period of change. We have challenges including future agricultural support, the drive to net zero, biodiversity loss and land reform. Politicians must be objective, basing decisions on sound science and we can provide those facts.

Where do the GWCT's strengths lie?

Again, in our science foremost and in our people. We have a tremendous scientific knowledge bank. Our work now has far greater relevance in promoting the balance between farming for food and for biodiversity, particularly in the light of the Ukraine crisis. We also provide practical, science-based advice, for farmers, shoots and our politicians.

Is a vibrant countryside important?

Extremely – for food, recreation and the people who live and work there. When we hear about rewilding we must caution that management is important and people matter too.

How important is education of young people?

We've made a start but should do more. The storytelling initiative at the Scottish Game Fair and the schools' art competition are a great way to connect. We must build on these.

What can be done to increase interest in GWCT in Scotland and further afield?

We must make our science relevant and demonstrate its practical applications. We must show that support for the GWCT can influence decision-making at the top level, and social media has a vital part to play in promoting our science and thinking to everyone.

ROUND-UP



Fair enjoys huge success

Scottish Game Fair

Balmoral Estate won the Fred Taylor Highland Pony trophy with Balmoral Alpine and trainee handler James Wilson.

In 25 years of attending the NFU Mutual sponsored GWCT Scottish Game Fair in the grounds of Scone Palace, this was probably one of the most relaxed yet. Trade was good and the several-deep crowd around the main ring was testament to families having a fun day out.

Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment, also spent time with GWCT staff and advisors looking at our colourful, informative central exhibit, before meeting other rural organisations. There were many highlights, not least the Fred Taylor Working

Hill Ponies championship won by Balmoral Estate with Balmoral Alpine and trainee handler, James Wilson. Rory Kennedy, GWCT director Scotland said: "This year's event was a phenomenal success, entertaining and educating thousands of visitors. We also celebrated Scotland's Year of Stories with our on-site storytelling and book festival spanning three distinct marquees and involving more than 30 speakers and authors, which was hugely popular."

Next year's Fair takes place from 30 June to 2 July 2023.

School art

The Perthshire art competition has now been running for 18 years. More recently we expanded into the Grampian and Angus regions and our current competition runs until the end of October with pupils asked to submit a piece of artwork showing their favourite species.

Prize-giving this year is a day of events hosted at Fingask Castle for all 75 winners, 25 from each region. They will also be treated to a game cookery demonstration and tasting, falconry, working dogs and an art workshop. Prizes include farm visits, art workshops with Mel Shand and Julian Jardine, and many smaller prizes of art materials, books and vouchers. See gwct.org.uk/schoolsart for more details.

Don't forget to get your entries in for the popular school art competition.



Alistair Makinson is one of several artists whose artwork will be displayed at GWSDF Auchnerran.

Auchnerran art

The new visitor centre at GWSDF Auchnerran will be hosting some stunning works of art. Among those contributing paintings and sculptures to Art at Auchnerran are Matt Duke, Owen Williams, Alistair Makinson, Ian Greensitt, Rosie Playfair, Clare Brownlow, Angus Grant, Ashley Boon, Selina Wilson and Emily Crookshank. All pieces displayed are for sale and the Trust will receive a small commission.

A 'ticky' issue

An important component of grouse moor management involves reducing environmental tick levels to improve grouse chick survival. This is especially important on areas of moorland where the tick-borne louping ill virus is prevalent.

Previous research has looked at the density of mammalian tick hosts across a range of management intensities. It was shown that more intensively managed grouse moors generally have higher mountain hare numbers (as hares benefit from predator control and heather burning) and lower tick levels (due to low deer densities and well managed sheep flocks). With full protection of mountain hares since 2021, control has stopped in Scotland, although a licence may be granted to prevent damage to forestry or for habitat restoration.

There is concern that, in the absence of management, an increase in mountain hares may lead to higher tick burdens for ground-nesting birds, even on moorland where sheep are regularly treated with acaricides.

This spring we started a five-year project to investigate the relationship between tick burdens and mountain hare abundance. Using trained pointing dogs, we searched for grouse



Tick

A new study is looking at tick burdens on red grouse and mountain hare abundance.

when chicks were between five and 20 days old. At this stage the brood is foraging for insects and is particularly vulnerable to parasitism by ticks (mainly the larvae and nymph stages). In future years we hope to do similar monitoring on wader broods.

The weather this spring was favourable so the proportion of pairs with broods was high when we visited. Almost a fifth of the broods we found had no ticks, but at the other end of the spectrum a similar number of broods had more than 10 ticks per chick. We hope this project will show whether tick control remains efficient in the presence of increasing mountain hare numbers and look forward to reporting findings in the future.



Staff

Max has been studying badger predation on wader nests.

Research boost

Max Wright from the University of Brighton, who has been conducting a Masters' research project at GWSDF Auchnerran over the summer, has now taken on the role as the new research assistant. His work at Auchnerran has primarily focused on incidents of badger predation on wader nests in relation to temperature and rainfall. In his new post he will be conducting research across a variety of ongoing projects with the goal of producing more published research.



Busy wader season at GWSDF

Another busy wader breeding season at GWSDF Auchnerran saw the return of 77 breeding pairs of lapwing, 17 of oystercatcher and seven of curlew. The season was extremely unpredictable with the first lapwing nests being found from the 2 April (almost two weeks earlier than usual). Oystercatcher appear to have nested later than usual, with no differences in breeding timings of curlew apparent. Of the lapwing nests, 27 failed due to predation and 53 hatched at least one chick. Similar reasons for nest failure occurred for both oystercatcher and curlew. Of the oystercatcher nests, nine hatched and six failed and out of seven curlew nests, only one failed. There were a number of different predator species responsible including corvids, badgers, gulls and disruption by sheep. Additionally, we even recorded a pine marten partially preying an oystercatcher nest around 500 metres away from the nearest

woodland. Corvids were by far the most common predators of wader nests identified, with jackdaws, carrion crows and rooks all captured on camera traps preying nests. Only one badger nest predation was recorded.

This year we recorded the return of seven colour-ringed lapwing and three curlew which were ringed in either 2019 or 2021. One of the lapwing broods with three chicks ringed in 2022 was spotted flying for the first time the day after they were colour-ringed, all three now hopefully contributing to an ever-growing body of research when they return to breed at the farm in future years.

Research monitoring of breeding wader populations is vital to develop a much more comprehensive understanding of the threats and challenges that these species face. This can then be used as evidence of good conservation practice and land management techniques to aid these threatened birds.

Despite the challenges of this season, this further demonstrates the importance of continued conservation work at GWSDF Auchnerran for these species amidst ever changing threats from year to year.

Fifty-three lapwing nests hatched at least one chick.



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The Conservation Manager

Richard Bailey's title describes a modern gamekeeper's role in the Peak District National Park.
By Joe Dimbleby



Estate Facts

Location: Goyt Valley, Peak District

Type of farming: Sheep

Acreage: 3,000 acres

Funding Grants: HLS

Conservation measures: Fencing, extensive grazing, heather cutting, bracken control, drain blocking, predation management, firefighting, moorland vegetation reseeded, public access management

Conservation in Numbers

4,000 acreage over which predator control is carried out

642 acres of heather cut

1,380 acres: area where drainage grips were blocked



Signs inform the public about work to improve water quality, biodiversity, tackle the climate emergency, mitigate flooding and reduce the risk of wildfires.

Richard Bailey's job title Conservation Manager aptly describes his work on the moors of the Goyt Valley, delivering a host of public goods including habitat for some of the UK's rarest wildlife. A good example is the curlew, which has declined by 64% across the UK since 1970 and is globally threatened. Like other grouse keepers in the Peak District, Richard employs measures to provide suitable nesting space for the much-loved wader and a host of other nationally declining species by restoring moorland vegetation through conservation grazing, controlling invasive bracken and cutting heather. He says: "Curlew and golden plover prefer shorter vegetation. I've got footage of us cutting in March and them nesting on that ground six weeks later. I'm also delighted that counts show most grouse moors in the Peak District did really well with their waders last year in spite of continuing national declines."

As well as being dependent on access to the right habitat, ground-nesting birds like lapwing, golden plover and curlew are highly vulnerable to predators, and predation management is essential to avoid population decline and local extinction. It is because collectively grouse keepers manage predators over such a large area that, unlike other parts of the UK, the Peak District has sustainable populations of waders. Rather than seeking to eradicate all predators, Richard's aim is to alleviate predation pressure during the breeding season. He says: "You can reduce the impact but there will always be predators. Many must come in from areas with no management and the urban areas near my patch, otherwise why am I culling the same number year on year?"

In addition to the 3,000 acres of moorland his employer Lord Derby leases from a local water company, Richard has permission from farmers on a further 2,000 acres of grazing land where he does them a service by protecting their livestock from foxes and crows. This also creates an invaluable buffer zone for the moor.

“Grouse moors in the Peak District did really well with their waders last year”

Predation management takes a huge amount of time and effort with many nights spent out alone. Richard explains: "Keepers put in long anti-social work shifts during the breeding season for the benefit of all vulnerable moorland species and the visitors who enjoy seeing them." He is concerned that public campaigns to restrict predator control are having a damaging impact on prey species. "We only use humane traps and follow best practice guidelines, but we are seeing more red tape being loaded on to what is an already highly regulated area. If the licensing system becomes too restricted, the knock-on effect will be losing an iconic species like the curlew."

Birds of prey are among the wide range of wildlife to benefit both directly and indirectly from predator control. Ground-nesters such as red-listed merlin, hen harrier and short-eared owl are preyed on by foxes and crows, and fewer stoats and weasels means there are more voles, which are a principal part of their diet. Richard is proud to have five pairs of short-eared owls successfully nesting on his beat this year. He says: "We call the area near the road where they hunt 'binocular bend' because people come from miles around to watch them. Over the years I have got to know several ornithologists very well and some interesting discussions and friendships have developed."

The owls have also benefited from a programme of reseeded moorland plants and rewetting, which Richard has overseen, using diggers to block and reprofile the grips or drains. There is a common misconception that moors are drained for grouse shooting, whereas, in fact, it was done to improve grazing and ironically it is grouse moors that began the process of filling in the channels. Richard explains: "I've got pictures of myself and Lindsay Waddell, a well-known moorland gamekeeper, installing wooden dams on grips 30 years ago to create bog



(Above) Richard Bailey on ground he reseeded with peat-forming plants including heather, cotton grass and Sphagnum.



Joe Dimbleby is our specialist writer working in the communications team.

flushes for insects.” As well as being good for wildlife, holding water on the moors mitigates the risk of flooding and encourages the growth of *Sphagnum* and other peat-forming vegetation, helping to store carbon.

Rewetting is also an important tool in the fight against wildfires, which, due to drier springs and summers, are increasingly common, doing catastrophic damage to the moors and their wildlife. Gamekeepers’ unique skillset and local knowledge mean they play a vital role in both mitigating and fighting fires. Their specialist equipment such as all-terrain vehicles fitted with water tanks and hoses allows them to access areas that would often be impossible for fire engines and, unlike park rangers, they are not restricted to a five-day week. Richard is not able to carry out controlled burns in the Goyt Valley under the terms of the lease, but he is often called on to fight wildfires. He says: “When the Saddleworth fire spread to the RSPB’s Dovestone Reserve, I was one of 20 keepers with Argocats who volunteered to help. I went back on a Sunday, which happened to be my daughter’s birthday. When we arrived, the whole place was smouldering and the RSPB warden said, ‘I’m so pleased to see you. I thought I was the only person up here.’”

At night, wind and temperature drop and dew descends, making it easier to get a blaze under control. For this reason, gamekeepers often stay to fight fires after dark, whereas on many occasions the fire service is required to pull its crews off until the morning. Moreover, local knowledge of the terrain regularly prevents disaster, as Richard explains: “One evening, I clocked some lads in a Fiesta racing away from a wooded quarry in the middle of the moor. I saw the smoke on the way home and knew they must have started a fire. I phoned the fire brigade and two colleagues, who brought an Argocat to stop the blaze reaching the moor. When the fire brigade arrived, they were going to fight it from the back, but knowing the huge fuel load ahead, we said we needed the hoses at the front, so they moved them. Due to the height of the heather and the wind direction, if it had got onto the moor, the blaze would have gone all the way to the Cat and Fiddle pub, a good half a mile away. It was great teamwork by all involved.”

Although keeping water on the moor is important in mitigating the risk of wildfire, it is futile unless the vegetation is managed too. Controlled burns carried



One of the biggest threats to breeding birds are walkers who let their dogs run out of control. Richard has put up signage across the moor to get the message across.



Without the keepers’ efforts to manage moorland through cutting and controlled burning, bracken would quickly dominate.



Blocking drains benefits water-loving plants, creates habitat for insects, supplies watering holes for birds and prevents flooding in the surrounding cities.

Wildlife Highlights



Curlew



Oystercatcher



Lapwing



Merlin



Golden plover



Short-eared owl

out by gamekeepers in winter are essential. These low-intensity fires do not go down into the peat but take off the surface vegetation, creating fire breaks and reducing the amount of combustible material or 'fuel load'. Richard says: "There is a release of CO₂ in managed burning, but it is nothing compared with a wildfire, which can often burn down into the peat, destroying huge carbon stores."

Cutting rather than burning the heather has serious drawbacks. It is much more expensive and uses a lot of fossil fuel. Tractors turning on wet moorland can seriously damage and expose the peat, and the cuttings left on the ground pose a big fire risk. Richard explains: "The best thing about cutting is you can do it in all weathers. On the downside, you get a lot of trash. We've tried to collect it in hundreds of dumpy bags, but the damage caused in extraction by tractor and trailer was too much."

Keeping a look out for wildfires is one of many ways in which Richard's role is similar to a warden in the park. The vast majority of visitors behave responsibly, but gamekeepers have their work cut out clearing up after fly-tippers, preventing illegal off-roading and tackling wildlife crime. He says: "We have a good relationship

with the rural crime team, who really appreciate our assistance. Last year, Peak District gamekeepers, through their observations, helped the police track down a prolific egg thief with several clutches of eggs including a peregrine falcon's."

Another growing problem is posed by commercial dog walkers, bringing packs of dogs up on to the moor to let them run free, with potentially disastrous consequences for breeding birds. Richard has designed signs to inform the public about what bird species are present and why it's so important that dogs are kept under close control, particularly in the spring and summer. He says: "Over the years I've developed a good rapport with many dog walkers. They now understand the risk at nesting time and some actually report concerns about dogs off the lead."

As well as chatting to members of the public on a daily basis, Richard's role as co-ordinator for the gamekeepers' Peak District Moorland Group includes visiting schools, organising tours for local groups and giving talks at events. He says: "I love showing people the wildlife and what we do to protect it. When our local MP came to visit, we had only walked 10 minutes from the road when we found a curlew nest with a sitting lapwing just 10 yards away from it. On the same small area, we saw a recently fledged meadow pipit nest and a brood of red grouse. It was simply fantastic."

It's easy to forget that all this work comes at no cost to the taxpayer. The Crag Estate funds three full-time gamekeepers and yet the grouse moors are far from a commercial enterprise. 2021 was a disastrous breeding year for the estate, with the whole shooting season restricted to one small day. Richard says: "Someone looking at my job from outside might liken it to running a privately-funded nature reserve, which the public can enjoy for free. The few days of shooting we have each year are the driver, and they are always very special for the community. I still wear my tweeds, but my new badge of Conservation Manager, I hope, helps people begin to better understand the modern keeper's vital role in looking after our wonderful Peak Park and its wildlife."

Unlike cool burns, which only affect the surface vegetation, wildfires destroy the peat. (Inset) As the risk of wildfire grows, gamekeepers will be increasingly relied on to fight it.

Wader predation

Dr Marlies Nicolai

GWCT Research Assistant on the Game & Wildlife Scottish Demonstration Farm (GWSDF)



When the GWSDF was established in 2015, we were fortunate to inherit a thriving wader community including lapwing, curlew, oystercatcher and snipe. This wader stronghold is a result of preferable habitat in the form of a neighbouring grouse moor, hill-edge grazing pastures, low intensity farming and legal predator management by gamekeepers, a similar situation to the area Richard Bailey looks after in the Peak District. The management has positively affected not only grouse numbers, but all ground-nesting birds. However, since April 2020, there has been a reduction in predator control due to the banning of Fenn traps for controlling stoats. This may have contributed to a sudden decline in wader breeding success as there has been an anecdotal increase in stoat sightings and nest survival dropped markedly from 2020 to 2021. Lapwing nest survival went down from 66% to 11%, oystercatcher 77% to 30%, and curlew 100% to 13%. These declines are likely due to a combination of factors also including weather, food availability and increased predation by badgers. However, during 2022, predator control efforts have been monitored more intensively to try to establish the impact on waders of the reduction in trapping. The need for such research indicates the importance of the gamekeeper's role in wader conservation.





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F3 Custom Grade III Pair, 12 Gauge, 30" Barrels, Flush fitting multi chokes, Flat tapered ribs, Deep hand engraved scroll sideplated actions, Barrel selectors, Adjustable triggers, Palm swell giving additional comfort, Matched pistol grip stocks with stunning wood, Complete in double case.



New Browning Pair

£69,500

B25 D5G Factory Pair, 12 Gauge, 30" Barrels, Fixed choke 3/8 & 5/8, Narrow game ribs, Three piece forends, Numbered I & II in Gold, Deep scroll engraved actions, Barrel selectors, Auto safe, Teardrops for added luxury, 14 3/4" Rounded semi-pistol grip stocks with dark figured wood, Handle exquisitely, Double presentation case.



New Miroku Pair

£12,400

MK11 Running Number Pair, 12 Gauge, 30" Barrels, Flush fitting multi chokes, High performance steel proofed, Narrow game ribs, Gamescene engraved sideplates surrounded with a deep detailed scroll, Barrel selectors, Auto safe, Teardrops for added luxury, 14 7/8" Matched pistol grip stocks with dark well figured wood, Oval initial plate for personalisation, Very fast handling.



New Perazzi Pair

£32,000

MX20 SC3 Running Number Pair, 20 Gauge, 30" Barrels, Fixed choke 3/4 & full, Narrow game ribs, Hand engraved action depicting a deep scroll pattern, Barrel selectors, Auto safe, 15 1/4" Matching pistol grip stocks with well figured wood and oil finish, Effortless feel.



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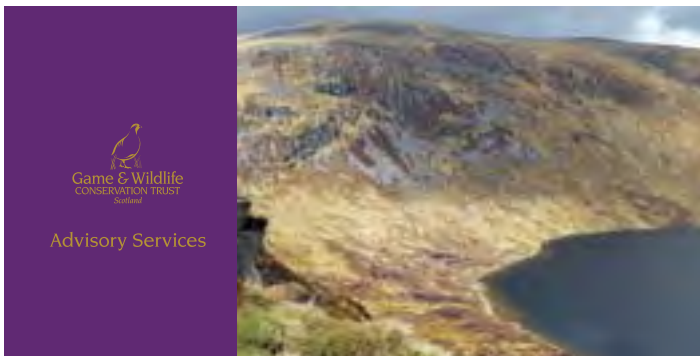
Shooting and conservation

The latest news, advice and events



Boost for Scottish Advisory

A well-known face to many, we are delighted to announce that Marlies Nicolai, former research assistant at our Auchnerran demonstration farm, has moved to GWCT's Advisory Services and will be a valuable addition to its capacity throughout Scotland.



Find out about the complete range of services and advice on offer.

GWCT Advisory Services in Scotland goes glossy

Setting out who they are and what they do so well, GWCT Scotland Advisory Services has launched a new, eye-catching brochure promoting its work in succinct words, pictures and testimonials. The brochure explains the range of practical services and advice on game and wildlife management, including wildlife and habitat surveys, biodiversity appraisals, best practice predator control and sustainable gamebird management for both upland and lowland shoots, farms and estates. It also outlines the Trust's data management and reporting work using the Epicollect5 platform on mobile phones for the collection and maintenance of game and wildlife management records, linking this into a range of map-based analysis and reporting. For further information or for a copy of the new brochure please contact our Scottish office on 01738 551511 or scottishhq@gwct.org.uk.



Allerton Project Shoot, Loddington

Navigating the choppy waters of running a shoot has never been described as simple, but these past few years have been particularly challenging. Many shoots are struggling to obtain poults this season due to avian influenza and either packing up completely, or running at significantly reduced capacity. As we source our birds from the UK, we were fortunate to receive our poults at the beginning of August. As in previous years, we tagged half our poults and 1,300 were reared with perches and 1,300 without. Our game covers have grown well and provide essential habitat for game throughout winter and spring. In February our gamekeeper, Matt Coupe, recorded a covey of 19 grey partridges, which have been largely absent from Loddington in recent years. Hopefully our habitat will be attractive enough to encourage some to stay, and we will see some on the ground this autumn. Producing wild game broods is our ultimate goal as it demonstrates that each essential pillar of habitat, predation control and food resources is in place.

GWSDF Auchnerran Shoot

Our improved feeder management regime implemented in 2021 and the presence of fodder crops in proximity to the game crops helped the birds through the long, cold winter providing substantial amounts of cover and overwinter feed. The adjacent fodder crop to our central game crop included large quantities of fat hen, which is a persistent weed, however, its seeds provide a very good food source for both gamebirds and songbirds. The game crop seed mix sown was the KALBI Kings Alba Mix supplied by Kings. It is a wild bird seed mix comprised of fodder radish, Kings kale rape, phacelia, spring triticale, spring barley, utopia and vitasso brown mustard. The establishment of these game crops is fundamental to the shoot and the health of resident bird populations. In addition to the supplementary provision of feed for gamebirds, the duck flying pond present on the farm was fed with barley through the winter and encroaching trees and shrubs were removed to open up the pond to attract waterfowl such as mallard, teal and wigeon. Come December 2021, a number of mallard and a few teal had returned to the pond. As a result, we may be able to offer one or two duck flying evenings as part of our shoot programme in the upcoming season. 🦆

OUT AND ABOUT... this autumn

PLANT TREES especially species such as holly, rowan and hawthorn as they attract a variety of birds and wildlife.



WATCH OUT for woodcock. Migrant birds begin to arrive from October.



ATTEND A GWCT course. Our advisors run practical courses throughout the year on a wide variety of topics including game management, biodiversity and conservation. Our best practice predator control courses are designed to ensure practitioners are operating within the law while demonstrating due diligence.

ENSURE YOU HAVE a best practice muirburn plan in place before burning this season which identifies when, where and how muirburn management should be delivered, as well as how to mitigate risk. GWCT Advisors can help with this.

CONSIDER TAKING A Biodiversity Assessment. This helps farms, estates and wildlife managers highlight where current management is benefiting biodiversity, identify where there is potential for negative impacts on wildlife, and promote practical solutions and remedial actions.

THE GWCT HAS been utilising the Epicollect5 platform to enable farmers and gamekeepers to take ownership and unlock the potential of their own data providing insights into predator and habitat management, as well as the conservation of key species, such as wading birds, mountain hare and black grouse.

Biodiversity tool

How to... assess shoot biodiversity

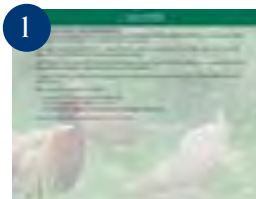
In partnership with PERDIX, the GWCT shoot biodiversity tool was developed to provide users with a quick and easy way of assessing key biodiversity indicators (woodland biodiversity, farmland birds, wild pollinators and ground-nesting waders) on their shoots.

The calculator is based on GWCT science on the ecological consequences of gamebird releasing and management, and Defra habitat provision targets to sustain farmland birds and wild pollinators. This tool is free to use and will help land managers to improve the overall habitat matrix of a shoot to aim to achieve a net biodiversity gain. Find out more at gwct.perdixpro.com.

DID YOU KNOW?
The shoot biodiversity tool is free and easy to use.



Alex Keeble is our advisor for central England and is keen to use his experience as a gamekeeper to show how everyone can help biodiversity



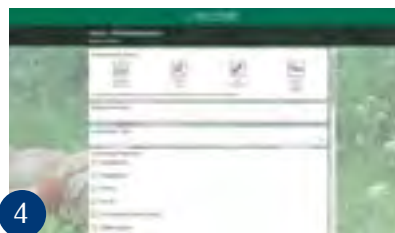
1 The initial screen explains the information needed. Knowing the amount in hectares of certain habitats and understanding the current environmental schemes will help you complete the survey.



2 Clicking on 'About' will explain the scoring system of the tool and how to use it. A traffic light system will score each biodiversity indicator and allow users to assess which areas need improvement to deliver a biodiversity net gain.



3 To create a shoot, click on 'My shoots' and click on the + sign. A new shoot can then be added including the county and name, and then saved.



4 To start click on the shoot name and click on the + sign. This will enable you to log habitat and game management practices. If you are unsure of the answers, you can save the shoot and return later to add the details.

5 Once completed, your score for each biodiversity indicator will be shown. Scores are based on a simple traffic light system:

Green ++ Shoot is likely delivering a significant biodiversity net gain in this biodiversity indicator.

Green + Shoot is likely delivering a biodiversity net gain in this biodiversity indicator, but with potential to deliver even more.

Amber = No indication that game management activities are having a positive or negative impact on biodiversity in this biodiversity indicator.

Red - Potential negative impact – seek further information to find out why a red indicator has been calculated. Work may need to be undertaken over the next 12 months to ensure game management activities do not have a negative impact on this biodiversity indicator.

Red -- Likely negative impact – seek advice to understand why a negative biodiversity indicator has been calculated. Adjustments to management will likely be required to ensure game management activities do not impact on biodiversity.

Find out more at gwct.perdixpro.com.

FIND OUT MORE

For more advice ring 01425 651013 (England/Wales) or 01738 551511 (Scotland) gwct.org.uk/advisory

COUNTING MOUNTAIN hares is best done in the early winter when their coats start to turn white.



PARASITIC WORM tests should be carried out in red grouse to justify the use of medicated grit.



FILL UP feeders. Winter and early spring are the most important times to feed birds.

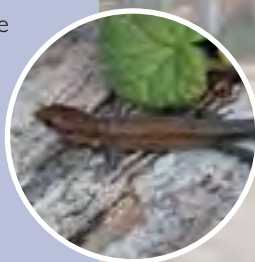


© Peter Thompson

A rockery with sunny flat surfaces, lots of flowers and damp shady crevices will benefit all sorts of wildlife. Lots of us have got a pile of rubble, flints or old bricks hanging around the back garden or farmyard, so why not put it to good use and bring out your creativity at the same time.

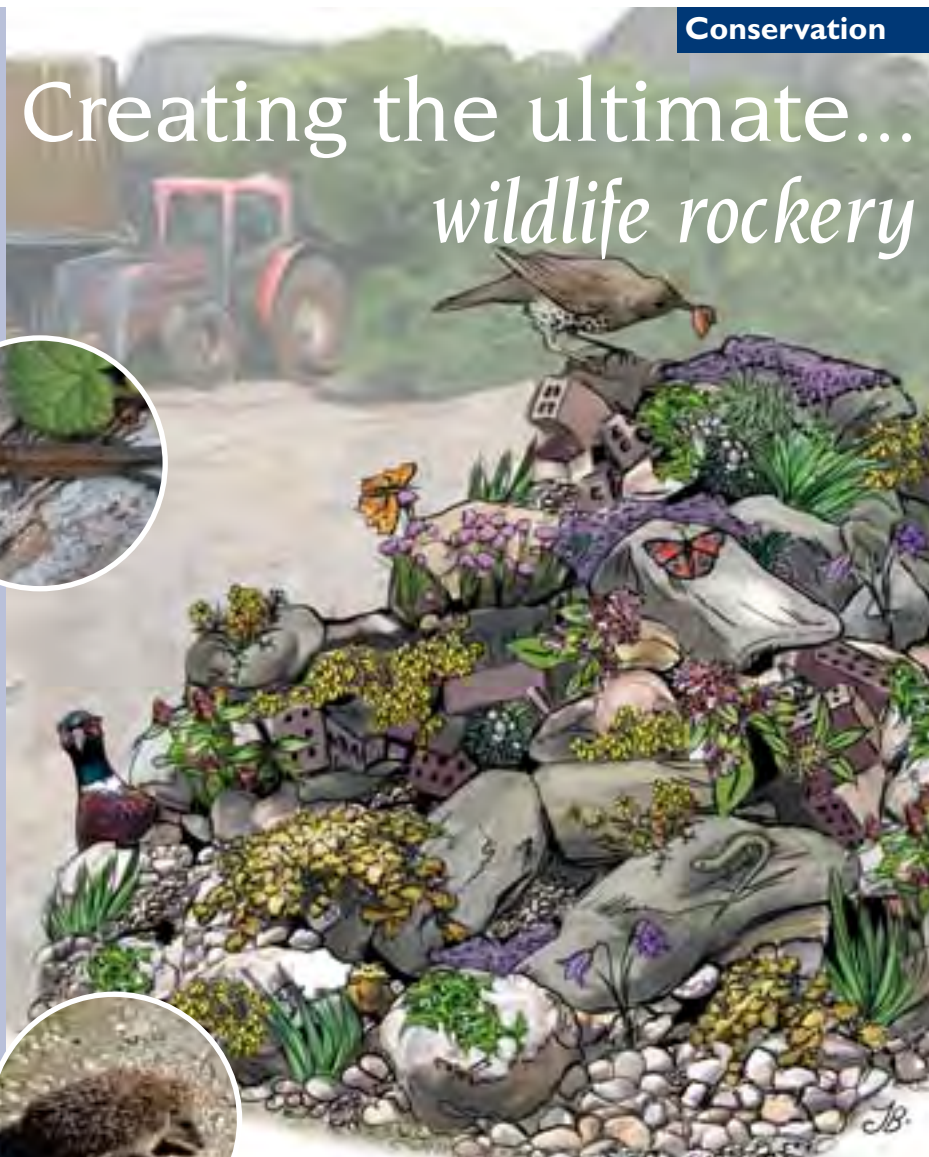
Species that will benefit

- Bees, hoverflies and butterflies will use it to collect nectar and pollen, and warm up on the stones in the morning or after rain.
- Beetles, spiders, woodlice and other insects will hide in the gaps and attract birds.
- Hedgehogs, thrushes and frogs will hunt slugs and snails in the damp areas.
- Lizards (inset) will bask on the rocks and catch prey hiding in the cracks.



How to build your rockery

1. Find a sunny spot.
2. Put down some slabs or a fabric weed membrane if your rockery will be low in height.
3. Pile up densely with big rocks and rubble to the desired height, throwing in handfuls of gravel, grit and compost as you go to stabilise it.
4. Finish with an outer layer of angular rocks, leaving pockets of gritty soil and gravel, and nooks and crannies.
5. Arrange the sunniest rocks so there are flat surfaces for animals to bask on and rotate any bricks with holes to face outward.
6. Put your chosen plants in the pockets between the rocks, surround with gravel and water well. Plants should go in during autumn or early spring.



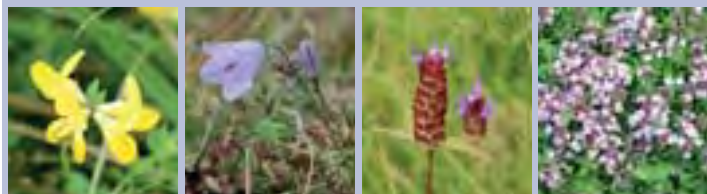
Conservation

Creating the ultimate...
wildlife rockery

What to plant

Ideal plants include: Kidney vetch, wild thyme, bird's-foot trefoil, selfheal, wild marjoram, harebell, thrift, rock rose, heather and stork's bill.

(L-R) Bird's-foot trefoil, harebell, selfheal and wild marjoram. (© Peter Thompson).



Top tips

- Spread a layer of natural yoghurt on the stones to give them an aged and characterful appearance, and encourage the growth of lichen.
- When building the base, bury a sturdy crate with an entrance hole to create a hedgehog den.
- Build the rockery near to a pond. Newts and frogs hibernate in crevices and toads burrow under the rocks.

If you make a wildlife rockery, please send us a picture. 📷

FIND OUT MORE

For more advice on how to improve biodiversity on your land please contact our advisory team on 01425 651013.



Pheasants



Mike Swan is our senior advisor who is keen to help everyone increase biodiversity in the countryside.

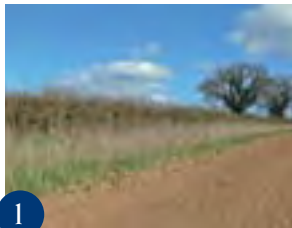


Focusing on wild pheasants

Feeding wild pheasants through late winter into spring will help breeding success. © Peter Thompson

Once upon a time most of the pheasants shot in the UK were bred naturally in the hedgerows and woods. For those who are keen, it is still possible to encourage wild breeding,

and in doing so, shoots will automatically be helping lots of other wildlife including woodcock, song thrush, grey partridge, corn bunting and yellowhammer. GWCT science tells us lots about how to do this.



1 Tussocky grass margins offer favourite nesting sites, so do not cut them more than you need, and never between the end of March and mid-July.



2 Unharvested cereal strips and cereal-rich winter bird seed mixes are ideal for insects and are great brood-rearing habitat. Two-year mixes offer important food and shelter in early spring.



3 Foxes are a key predator of nesting pheasants, and control through the nesting season is essential for good results.

DID YOU KNOW?

GWCT research has shown that where pheasants in the wild are fed wheat in late winter and spring they produce twice as many fledged young per hen as on unfed sites. This is part of the reason why the Code of Good Shooting Practice says that we must feed until late May.



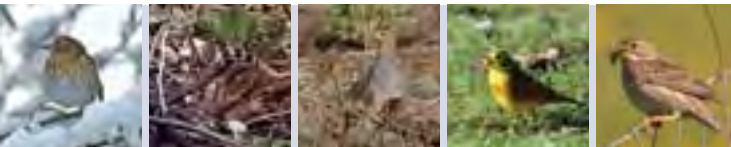
4 Crows are an important nest predator of pheasants, and although you can control them in Scotland, the General Licences for England and Wales no longer allow control for them alone. However, crows can still be controlled for the conservation of birds of conservation concern, thereby also benefiting pheasants.



5 Glades and wide rides in woodland can offer both nesting sites and brood-rearing cover. They also offer pheasants sun and shelter in winter.

(L-R) Song thrush, woodcock, grey partridge, yellowhammer, corn bunting. (© Peter Thompson).

THIS WORK ALSO BENEFITS:



BFBC

GWCT
BIG FARMLAND BIRD COUNT



Yellowhammer

Habitat: Prefers a mixed farming landscape with well-managed hedgerows and scrub. In winter they favour winter stubbles, natural regeneration, game cover, livestock farmyards and feeding stations where grain cleanings have been left out for finches, sparrows and buntings.

Food: Adults feed on a wide range of plant seeds. These include dead nettles, groundsel, sorrel, cereal grains, millet and annual plant weed seeds foraged from stubble fields. They will feed on spill from game hoppers and will also take insects in the breeding season. Chicks are dependent upon insects for the first week of life.

Nesting: Yellowhammers nest on or close to the ground in short (less than two metres), dense hedgerow, field margins with long grass, scrub and woodland edges. They particularly favour dense hedges next to ditches, avoiding woodland. They breed from early spring through to late August, which makes them susceptible to early hedge trimming during/immediately after harvest.

Song/call: Si-si-si-si-suu – often described as ‘a little bit of bread and no cheese’.

Beneficial management

- Aim to ensure a year-round source of food. Field margins, winter stubbles and wild bird-seed crops will provide winter seeds for adults. Field margins, fallow and unimproved grasslands provide rich insect foraging areas for chick food. Supplementary feed in winter until late May.
- Adopt a range of trimming styles and hedge types around the farm and have short, dense hedges as well as taller, untrimmed ones.
- Extended field margins around arable fields will provide additional habitat and allow more sympathetic timing of hedge cutting.

MORE INFORMATION

Farmers and gamekeepers are vital in helping to ensure the future survival of many of our most cherished farmland bird species, but frequently their efforts to reverse bird declines are largely unrecorded. We believe our Big Farmland Bird Count will help remedy this. bfbc.org.uk

BFBC is sponsored by NFU

© Tone Trebar

© Peter Thompson

Biodiversity Assessments

A silver lining for Scottish shoots



Reviewing your shoot's structure over a quieter winter, can identify many opportunities.

Shoots across the eastern side of Scotland and northern England are reeling from the combined impacts of the pandemic, the brutal gales of last winter and now bird flu. What next, some dare question?

There are many lowland shoots which have yet to clear the devastation wreaked by storms Arwen and Corrie and now, in the wake of bird flu and absence of partridge and pheasant poults, have had to cancel any hope for shooting this season.

However, tough times can also bring opportunities. Shoots can benefit from a quieter winter by reviewing their structure to identify where improvements can be made through creating and enhancing gamebird habitats, perhaps moving release pens onto fresh ground, enhancing flushing points and striving generally to boost biodiversity across the board.

The difficulty for managers is they are sometimes so close to the product that they cannot see the wood for the trees. Therefore, seeking external help can make the world of difference.

The GWCT's Scottish advisors are well placed to impart professional advice, based on many years of practical experience working with shoots over the length and breadth of Scotland, encompassing every conceivable environment. In fact, it's stunning how just a few small innovations by an experienced eye can make a huge difference to your shoot.

Compared with 20 years ago, the demands placed on lowland shoot managers are diverse. Providing testing, high-flying birds at low cost remains a core objective for many, but today the effective management of disease and maximising wild productivity from released birds are increasingly important.

Our Biodiversity Assessments are tailored to the individual requirements of each estate, farm or shoot, providing a qualitative ecological appraisal of habitats and their condition while identifying areas of good practice and making recommendations for future improvements.

With more than 80 years of providing advice on lowland game management to thousands of shoots in the UK and abroad, we are uniquely positioned to provide a package of up to date, targeted advice. A few well thought out changes can soon pay for themselves both in terms of productivity and quality of the shoot, and by enhancing the capital value of the land. The cost of a GWCT visit is around 15-20 extra birds in the bag. 🦌

MORE INFORMATION

For further information please contact:
Hugo Straker on 07713074147 or email hstraker@gwct.org.uk.
Nick Hesford on 07896006322 or email nhesford@gwct.org.uk.

Training

Face-to-face advice

Our team of well-respected advisors can provide a visit to your farm or estate to advise you on any game and wildlife issues that are specific to you and your land. Our advisors have a wealth of experience having surveyed millions of hectares and their advice is based on the GWCT's renowned research. We also provide audits for biodiversity offsetting projects.

advisory@gwct.org.uk or 01425 651013.

BASIS Certificate in Game Management - Lowland

11-13 October • Allerton Project, Loddington, Leicestershire • £748 inc' VAT

This certificate is designed to encourage best practice across the game management sector, while providing qualified individuals with a professional accreditation that demonstrates assurance of high standards of practice to employers, customers and the general public. Aimed at everyone running a shoot, the course will cover predation control, gamebird releasing, shoot and land management, game crops and industry regulation. *(The days can be taken separately, but the whole course must be completed in 12 months).*

gwct.org.uk/basisgm 01425 651013.

Bespoke courses to suit your needs

Topics on request (can be delivered online)

Please contact our advisory team to arrange:

gwct.org.uk/courses or 01425 651013.

For Scotland 01738 551511.



MORE INFORMATION

For more advice please ring our specialist advisors on 01425 651013 (England), 07741 902021 (Wales) or 01738 551511 (Scotland) gwct.org.uk/advisory



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C656x Best Drive of The Day



C657x Night Watch



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C658x Snow on Snow



C662x The Explorers



C660x Christmas is Coming



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Countywise

Your update on county events and fundraising

Bedfordshire

Fantastic Four launch

Always a popular evening is the **shoot walk** and members enjoyed a tour of Andrew and Sam Philips Northwood End Farm with Alastair Leake and Tim Furbank from Oakbank. Thank you to sponsors Robinson Hall, Ellacotts, Tuckwell and Oakbank.

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire are launching the **Fantastic Four Raffle** with the fantastic prize of a day's shooting for eight guns to shoot one drive across four estates – Luton Hoo, Lilley Manor, St Paul's Walden and Kings Walden. Please contact Julia Barnes julia@barnesfarming.com.

Buckinghamshire

Hampden clays

Guests enjoyed a spectacular day's shooting at the **simulated game day** at Hampden House, kindly hosted by the Oliver Family. Sponsored by Hampden Group and Hampden Bank & Co, guests were treated to challenging clays provided by E J Churchill followed by lunch and an auction which raised £40,000.

George Eaton's Rectory Farm was the venue for the joint farm walk with Northamptonshire. Guests heard about conservation farming incorporated in stewardship options and woodland management.

GCUSA

36th auction

Game Conservancy USA's **36th auction** in support of the GWCT will be held on Tuesday 6 December at the University Club in Manhattan. The GCUSA trustees are pleased to welcome Teresa Dent, GWCT chief executive, as the evening's guest speaker. The cocktail reception is complimentary to GCUSA and GWCT members; reservations required. For more information please contact Robyn Hatch, director GCUSA via email at info@gcusa.org or by phone (203) 661-5959. gcusa.org.



Cambridgeshire

Clays and walks

A competitive **clay day** saw a challenging and thoroughly enjoyable day's shooting. This was followed by a fascinating **farm walk** at Newton Manor Farm hosted by George Hurrell. Generously sponsored by Harlow Agricultural Merchants, Hardcastle Burton, Ashton Legal and Oakbank along with Pinksters, guests discussed farming conservation alongside commercial farming, incorporating a well-run shoot. The evening culminated with a refreshing gin cocktail from Pinksters.



Competitors enjoying the clay shoot.

© Helen Tinner Photography

Warter Priory success



The hugely successful Warter Priory day shoot culminated in the popular Bushbeater's Ball; Sophie Dingwall (far right) receiving the £135,000 cheque from Warter Priory on behalf of the GWCT.

© Driffield & Wolds Weekly

Warter Priory Estate raised an incredible £135,000 over three days in May with a **clay pigeon shoot**, culminating with the popular Bushbeater's Ball. More than 80 teams competed and enjoyed a champagne reception, superb lunch, raffle and auction, with generous prizes awarded by Frank Croft and Mike O'Neill. The top auction lot sold for £22,500; a four drives day in East Riding kindly donated by the Garton Shoot

Syndicate, Edward Fisher's Huggate, Millington Shoot and Warter Priory. The Bushbeater's Ball, organised by Dorothy Brighton, saw everyone dancing into the early hours to brilliant band The Ordinary Men. Thank you to Warter Priory for selecting the GWCT as their chosen charity and for all their hard work. Thank you to headline sponsor GSC Grays and stand sponsors Hull Cartridge, William Scruton Ltd and McClarrons Insurance and to all the auction lot donors.

Essex

Miles wins and Boyton are perfect hosts

Chris Collins hosted the GWCT on the Harlow Agricultural Merchants stand at the **Essex Young Farmers County Show** in May. Thanks to HAM's generosity and Ollie Stolworthy's hard work selling 200 tickets, Miles Leader was the lucky winner of a £100 voucher generously donated by Jacks Outdoor Wear.

Chris Philpot hosted the popular **clay day** at Boyton Hall Farm in June with 52 teams competing. Thanks to generous bidding, £39,000 was raised; with a percentage going to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust and Prostate

Cancer UK. Thank you to sponsors Strutt & Parker together with several local firms, Ed Rout and the committee for a wonderful day.

Essex winners. (L-R) Jonty Armitage, Edward Rout, Paddy Downing and Charlie Micklem.



© Helen Tinner Photography

COUNTYWISE - GET INVOLVED



Gloucestershire

Glorious weather was enjoyed at Campden House.

Seamless Campden

In June 150 guns met at Campden House Estate, kindly hosted by the Smith family. The sun shone and guests enjoyed a seamless **day of shooting**, run by Honesberie Shooting. Thank you to Henry Bonas Events and his team, the day raised more than £48,000. Thank you also to the sponsors Ashbridge Partners, Lycetts, Forsters, Smith & Williamson, Perdix Partners and Woldon Architects.

Hampshire

Down at the river

Roger Harrison kindly hosted a second **riverside walk** at Itchen Stoke Mill where guests benefited from Mike Swan's extensive river life knowledge and Roger's history of both the mill and the ancient water meadows. Thank you to sponsors CKD Property Advisers.

The **'Get Hooked on Field Sports' raffle** offers the opportunity for a parent and youngster to experience decoying pigeons, guided fishing and deer stalking and a session with a Michelin starred chef to learn how to prepare and cook their bounty. For more information please contact Fleur Fillingham ffillingham@gwct.org.uk.

London

Call to arms

The **Greater Exmoor Shooting Association** community joined together in April at Christie's for an evening hosted by GWCT trustee Preben Prebensen. Sponsored by the Hollam Estate, the evening was an informative call to arms for the many friends of shooting and shoot owners across Exmoor to support the GWCT in its scientific research, with Teresa Dent sharing her thoughts on the potential for shoots to deliver net biodiversity gains. The evening was a huge success raising just under £40,000.

(L-R) Christina Williams, Preben Prebensen, Teresa Dent



EVENTS

Still going strong

No one is quite sure how long land agents BTF Partnership have been organising the **clay shoot**, but records date back to the late 1980s. The event grew and this year was held in a spectacular valley setting, high in the North Downs at Harrietsham with the Swampies team successfully defending their title for the second year. The popular auction raised more than £21,000, which brings the total fundraising for the event over the last 10 years to £126,000.



Kent

Swampies, the winning team for the second year in a row.

Are you ready for the **Kent MacNab Challenge**? Enter for the opportunity to win the ultimate wild sport for two guns to include trout fishing, fallow buck stalking and shooting partridges over pointing dogs. Guests will also receive a memorable record photography book. Please contact Fleur Fillingham ffillingham@gwct.org.uk.

Lancashire

Going lead-free

GWCT and BASC teamed up for a Sustainable Ammunition Workshop on Grosvenor's Abbeystead Estate, by kind permission of the Duke of Westminster. Chairman Nick Mason explained that the event was to show the practicalities of using lead-free shot and give everyone the chance to try some of the products on the market. The evening rounded off with a talk from Rob Foster on the rich



Testing lead-free shot at Abbeystead.

biodiversity present on Abbeystead's diverse moorland, low ground and river habitats and the ongoing work to maintain and improve this for future generations.

Leicestershire & Rutland

Celebrations

As part of the Allerton Project's 30th anniversary celebrations it seemed fitting to hold our **estate walk** on home turf, at Loddington. More than 40 guests, led by Roger Draycott, took a walking tour around the farm followed by a lamb wrap supper provided by Launde Farm Foods. Thank you to sponsors Brown and Co, Chandlers and Farmacy plc. If you would like to visit the Allerton Project, please contact Lottie Meeson on cmeeson@gwct.org.uk.

We had amazing weather for the **clay shoot** at Prestwold Hall by kind permission of Edward and Lisa Packe-Drury-Lowe. Twenty-three teams competed over four 100 bird flushes run by the excellent



CNA Sporting the winning team at Prestwold Hall.

Honesberie Shooting, then enjoyed lunch helping to raise a fantastic £12,000. Thank you to sponsors Mather Jamie, Davidsons, Howes Percival and Bentley Leicester. The winning team were CNA Sporting who also generously donated an auction lot. Next year's event will take place on 18 May.

Northumberland

A feast at Swinburne

Twenty-four teams competed in the **clay pigeon shoot** and lobster lunch in the beautiful parkland surrounding Swinburne Castle, by kind permission of Dick and Zoe Murphy. A feast of lobsters and beef

for the 140 guests was followed by a lively auction conducted by Fred Wyrley-Birch which helped raise £19,833. Thank you to Georgie Kenny and Hugh Cheswright and sponsors Savills, Lycetts and Womble Bond Dickinson.



(L-R) Kevin Bowes received a Life Fellowship from Sir Jim Paice; a visit to Watatunga Wildlife Reserve was enjoyed by all.

Thank you Kevin Bowes

Carlo Fountaine hosted a **shoot and conservation walk** on his beautiful estate at Narford in July, led by Roger Draycott, Carlo and his wonderful Narford Hall Team. Sir Jim Paice, GWCT chairman, presented Kevin Bowes with a Life Fellowship in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to the countryside and the GWCT, and especially raising nearly £400,000 in sweepstake contributions. Thanks to sponsors Brown & Co.



EVENTS

Norfolk

We received a unique invitation from Edward and Anna Pope to hold a fascinating **farm walk** at Watlington Hall in June looking at reclamation and remarkable restoration work after gravel extraction. Guests were then treated to a fascinating private tour of Watatunga Wildlife Reserve – an experience like no other.

We were also delighted to see members and their friends at our stand at the **Norfolk Show** in June.



COUNTYWISE - GET INVOLVED

Nottinghamshire

North Lodge Farm hosted the popular game day.

Simulated game

A full house of 25 teams took part in a simulated **game day** in June. Shooting four stands of challenging 100 clay flushes over the beautiful North Lodge Farm, the day was run by Honesberie Shooting and by kind permission of Chris and Julia Butterfield. A delicious game lasagne lunch was followed by an auction conducted by Ian Walter, which raised a fantastic £30,000. Thank you to sponsors Evenbrook, RH Commercial Vehicles, Fred Sherwood Transport, Horizon, Stratstone Land Rover and Openfield.

Charity clays

The fourth Wykeham **clay shoot** held in May this year raised more than £50,000 with the proceeds split between Ryedale Special Families, the GWCT and Scarborough & Ryedale Mountain Rescue. Hosted in the grounds of Wykeham Abbey, 40 teams took part, and then enjoyed a champagne reception, lunch and an auction.

Thank you to Wykeham Estate and all the auction lot donors. Next year's event will take place on 25 May, so for more information please contact james.stephenson@dawnay.co.uk.

The **shoot walks** were well attended at Egton and Swinton. A special thank you to sponsor Strutt & Parker and to Ollly Foster and Mark Masham for hosting and organising the walks which were enjoyed by all.

Teams of up to six are invited to the Masham **pub quiz** on 10 November at the White Bear, Masham, kindly sponsored by T & R Theakston and Knight Frank. The evening includes supper and a vermin auction. To book please contact Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.



N Yorkshire

(L-R) Caroline Shepherdson, Ryedale Special Families, and Sophie Dingwall, GWCT.

Scotland

Lochter success

A great crowd enjoyed the **Grampian auction** at Lochter Activity Centre in April and once again enjoyed a fantastic spread of food. The auction was superbly run by Colin Slessor of ANM, with special mentions to Tulchan Estate and Brian Carnegie whose lots raised more than £10,000, helping towards a record amount of £45,887. Thanks to sponsors Brewin Dolphin, Omni Surveys and Savills.

Staffordshire

Stunning Bagots Park

It's a long way into Bagots Park, but visitors to the **shoot walk** were treated to stunning scenes, a tribute to the work and foresight of the Dale family, both as a working farm and a shooting estate which closely follows GWCT research and advice. David and Carol Dale took over the estate from the Bagot family and have revitalised the economics, improved the woodlands and created habitat for song and wild birds. Guests were treated to talks by Matt Goodall, David Dale and an extraordinary duck whistling demonstration by Sam Sayte.

The stunning scenery at Bagots Park.



Northamptonshire

Jubilee clay day

The Jubilee weekend celebrations started with the **clay day** run by Richard Wright and his team.

Highly competitive, with a variety of drives including driven boar, the competition was enjoyed by all. Courteenhall hosted a magnificent simulated **game day** sponsored by Carter Jonas, Saffery Champness, Kings and Oakbank. Challenging clays plus a sharpshooter rifle stand, saw John Linnell and his team emerge victorious.

The county joined forces with Buckinghamshire for a **farm walk** on George Eaton's Rectory Farm where guests looked at stewardship options, including new schemes, trial plots and woodland management.

Oxfordshire

Kingston Blount

Teams enjoyed the successful **clay shoot** held by kind permission of the Kingston Blount Estate. The Briggs & Stone team won the corporate competition and Kingston Blount Estate won the shoots/friends competition. William Powell kindly ran a side by side stand which was won by Harry Sheppard and the pool shoot was won by Charlie Bull. Thank you to sponsors Savills, William Powell, Perdix Partnership, Oxford MediTech Ltd, SLURP and Keepers Choice.

The Kingston Blount Estate winning team.





Sir Jim Paice and Charlotte Marrison drawing the raffle.

Shropshire

Raffle winner

The winning ticket for the **shoot raffle** was drawn by Sir Jim Paice and Charlotte Marrison, in July at the Game Fair. The lucky ticket was held by Grahame Whateley from Worcestershire, who wins a fantastic day's shooting on four outstanding drives in Shropshire.

Wales

A wealth of events

A variety of events have been held this summer. The Powys committee, chaired by Tom Till, hosted a hugely successful **clay shoot** at Maesmawr Hall in glorious sunshine. Later in May, south-east Wales hosted a **game management walk** at Penllyn Estate. Presented by Matt Goodall, the evening was a success with policy debates remaining at the forefront. Finally, June saw Cerdigion host a **soil health** event at Dyffryn Arth. Organised by Jon Lougee, the event saw lots of valuable and new research being discussed. Guests then enjoyed a pint and game burger. Wales looks forward to many more events next year, including the popular Cefn Tilla clay shoot.

Look out for more walks next summer.



Dealing with designations

Suffolk

James Foskett generously invited guests for a **shoot walk** on the Sutton Estate in June. A unique and stunningly beautiful corner of Suffolk, the estate includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest and is bounded on the west by the River Deben, which is a Ramsar site, being an area of wetland of international importance. The recent policy changes and consultations regarding

the release of gamebirds within the vicinity of such sites has presented challenges but Roger Draycott, director of advisory, led the walk and explained how the GWCT Advisory Service can help. The evening was rounded off with a delicious meal thanks to sponsorship by Wolton Engineering, Sutton Hoo Chicken and Birketts LLP.

Sussex

Knowledge is power

Holbeam Wood Farm was the venue for the **shoot walk** by kind permission of James Mulleneux, in the rolling hills of the High Weald AONB. The farm is divided into permanent pasture, arable, woodland and an area of ancient semi-natural woodland owned by Bellhurst Nature Conservation Trust. James' advice for successful conservation is: 'Your heart must be in it and the more knowledge you can get the better, that's why the GWCT is essential because you can't argue with the science'.

Flindt, a Hampshire farmer, well known author and feature writer for *The Field*. Thanks to everyone who supported the auction helping to raise a substantial amount.

George Butler's **39th shoot evening** and auction was held at the South of England Showground with guest speaker, Charlie

Guests enjoying the shoot walk at Holbeam.



Warwickshire

Foxcote returns

The **clay shoot** held at the Foxcote Estate, Ilmington in May, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Wexner, enjoyed fantastic weather with 27 teams shooting five one hundred bird flushes laid out by Honesberrie Shooting. Teams were transported by Lister's Land Rover and Dom Hill Machine Services Limited, with Three Shires Trailers the eventual winners. Jasper Fielding then auctioned a marvellous array of lots raising £26,500, with the headline lot of a full day's shooting at Foxcote making £15,000. The day raised more than £30,000 with a donation to the



The fantastic topography at Foxcote made for challenging clays.

Children's Bone Cancer charity. Thank you to sponsors Carter Jonas, Mackenzie Chapel and Lycetts. Also to Bloomfield Print and Design and all the auction lot donors.

Diary

Dates are correct at time of going to press. We advise checking with the organisers before attending any of the events listed. For a full listing see www.gwct.org.uk/events

October

- 13 **CHESHIRE** sporting dinner, Manchester Tennis & Racquet Club, M3 7AQ, Pippa Hackett phackett@gwct.org.uk.
- 14 **CORNWALL** dinner, Hotel Bristol, Newquay, Sheila Tidball sheila@caerhays.co.uk.

November

- 3 **LINCOLNSHIRE** quiz night, Doddington Hall, Lottie Meeson cmeeson@gwct.org.uk
- 8 **LONDON** ball, The British Museum, Vanessa Steel vsteel@gwct.org.uk.
- 10 **N YORKSHIRE** pub quiz, White Bear, Masham, Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.

- 17 **CUMBRIA** Levens kitchen quiz, Levens Kitchen, Kendal, Will Johnson wjohnson@weatherbyshamilton.co.uk.

January

- 27 **DERBYSHIRE & S YORKSHIRE** Really Wild Dinner, Thornbridge Hall, Baslow Road, Ashford-in-the Water, Lottie Meeson cmeeson@gwct.org.uk.

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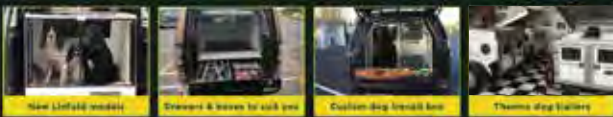
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Pheasant stuffed with wild mushroom

Mike Short shares his passion for wild and home-grown food



Mike Short is our senior field ecologist specialising in mammal research. He is passionate about wild and home-grown food, and here shares his enthusiasm for tasty ingredients.

Barbequed spatchcocked pheasant is delicious when stuffed with mushrooms.

“it is critical you don't eat anything unless you are 100% sure that it's edible”

Barbecues aren't just for summer, so how about firing up yours, spatchcocking a pheasant and stuffing it with delicious wild fungi? The bay bolete (*Imleria badia*) is one of my favourite autumn mushrooms and other than its flesh having a slightly softer texture, it tastes very similar to the much sought-after penny bun (*Boletus edulis*) more widely known as porcini or cep.

Bay boletes are a common species and can be found growing in coniferous and mixed woodlands from August through to November, which makes them a perfect seasonal match for a young, plump hen pheasant. As with all wild mushroom foraging, to avoid an upset tummy or worse, it is critical that you don't eat anything unless you are 100% sure that it's edible. Bay boletes have a distinctive chestnut-brown convex cap, and the tubular yellow gills will rapidly stain a

green-blue colour if you bruise them with your finger.

If you don't fancy the idea of going 'shrooming, then use dried porcini mushrooms instead. This type of mushroom stuffing is known as 'duxelles' and although its more commonly used for pastry dishes like beef wellington, it works well with wild gamebirds too, as the butter content helps keep the flesh deliciously soft and moist as it cooks over the hot coals.

Ingredients

- 1 x hen pheasant, carefully plucked and spatchcocked
- 1 x large banana shallot
- 1 clove garlic
- 200g fresh bay boletes, or use 25g of rehydrated dried porcini and 150g of field mushrooms
- 75g butter
- Handful of fresh winter savory (or thyme) leaves stripped from the stalks
- Salt and pepper

Bay boletes are common and can be found in coniferous and mixed woodlands.



Method

1. Wipe the bay boletes and finely chop. If using shop-bought mushrooms, treat the same. Finely chop the shallots and garlic and along with the winter savory, cook everything in the butter gently for about 10 minutes, until soft. Season with salt and pepper and stir. You're aiming for a spoonable pâté-type consistency, so if necessary, blitz the mixture in a food processor to achieve that.
2. Pluck the bird and using a pair of poultry shears or sharp scissors, cut the pheasant along either side of the backbone and remove it. With the breasts facing upwards, splay the legs slightly and push down with the heel of your hand to break the breastbone and flatten the bird.
3. Lay the pheasant flat, inside of the carcass facing down, and carefully prize the skin away from the breast and leg meat, taking care not to damage it. Spoon the mixture underneath the skin ensuring an even cover. Secure the skin with a few cocktail sticks.

4. Lay the pheasant skin-side down, on a medium-hot and oiled barbecue and cook for 10 minutes until the skin has browned evenly. Turn the bird over and cook for another 10-15 minutes or to your liking, but don't let it overcook. Rest for five minutes.
5. This dish is great with dauphinoise potatoes, sautéed chard and a large glass of decent Pinot Noir red wine. 🍷

DID YOU KNOW?

- If you're new to foraging for wild mushrooms, I suggest reading the advice given here: wildfooduk.com/mushroom-guide/
- It's rare to find bay boletes growing on chalky soils.
- A spatchcocked gamebird cooks much faster than a whole trussed and roasted bird, so the meat stays moister. Be inventive with your wild game.



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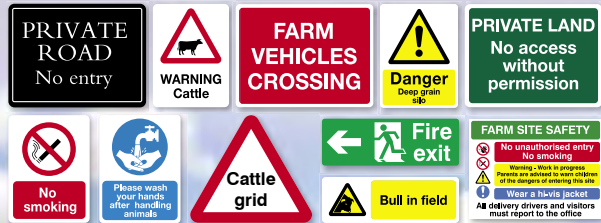
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Gareth Wyn Jones is a strong advocate for a multi-outcome approach to managing the Welsh uplands and believes we should all do more to bridge the gap between town and country

About Gareth

Gareth Wyn Jones runs Tyn Llwyfan farm, near Llanfairfechan, Conwy, north Wales. In 2006, 22 of his neighbouring sheep farmers in the Carneddau mountains set up the first ever plc grazing society in the UK supported by the Snowdonia National Park, EU and Countryside Council for Wales. Gareth manages in partnership with his family, 2,000 acres of rented and owned hefts, and is a strong advocate for a multiple outcome approach to managing the Welsh uplands, integrating livestock farming with biodiversity restoration and climate change mitigation. He is a founding member of the recently launched GWCT Wales Working Conservationists: Farming Community.



Wyn Jones in a minute

- Favourite food?** Roast with Welsh lamb.
- Last book you read?** *Sacred Cow* by Diana Rodgers and Robb Wolf.
- How do you relax?** Shooting, training dogs and cooking.
- Favourite place?** Carneddau Mountains.
- Most inspirational person?** James Rebanks.
- Favourite bird?** Chough.



What inspired you to set up the grazing society?

It was important to bring everybody together to decide gathering dates, problems of under-grazing or overgrazing and to involve outside organisations and guests to help, inform and support the community of farmers as well as securing funding from the EU.

How has it benefited wildlife?

Keeping flocks off the mountains in the winter has resulted in a huge improvement to the peatland, its biodiversity and the amount of carbon it can absorb. But it's not only overgrazing that has a negative impact, some areas have been under-grazed and become overgrown.

What role do the native Carneddau ponies play as they graze your land?

Cattle, sheep and Carneddau ponies managed by the farmers play an important part in soil health, regenerating rare plants and increasing insect life which is essential to maintaining bird populations, including our local chough colony.

mountain which has led to an increase in hares and rare ground-nesting birds such as curlew and black grouse.

You are a great advocate for livestock farming, what would you say to those who say we should reduce meat consumption and remove sheep off the Welsh uplands?

There's a lot of pressure from environmentalists to stop livestock farming and I think it's wrong. Cattle are a priority for our soil health and fertility as well as giving us top quality protein and from sheep we get a bonus in wool, which we should be making much more use of.

What do you think of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme?

There are lots of things to work on. In Wales we are debating what our farming future will look like. The White Paper has many challenging proposals that need to be discussed and addressed.

What advice would you give environmental policymakers?

Talk to individual farmers and find out where best to spend taxpayers' money to protect the environment and produce affordable food. We are at a massive turning point, it's going to be difficult, but it has to be done right.

You have a big following on social media how important a campaigning tool is this?

We as an industry need to reconnect with the people that live in cities. Bridging the gap can be done by farmers and country people on social media.

Why should people support the GWCT?

Every person who shoots should be a member of the GWCT as its research is the strongest defence against those pushing for further restrictions on game management.

Why did you join the new Welsh Farming Community network?

It's bringing like-minded people together to share information and stories about sustainable, countryside management.

How important is predation management as part of looking after upland biodiversity?

As well as habitat improvements the grazing society funds the control of foxes on the

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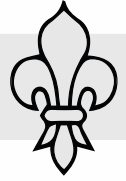
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