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SUMMER 2023

Flying high once more

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bird recovery on the
Rotherfield Park Estate

Cutting edge science

Exploring the effects of
heather cutting on blanket
bog habitat

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Planting for carbon storage
Boosting natural capital
Brood-rearing advice

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ISSN 1757-7357 Printed on chlorine-free paper from
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On the cover

Yellowhammer. © Laurie Campbell



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WELCOME

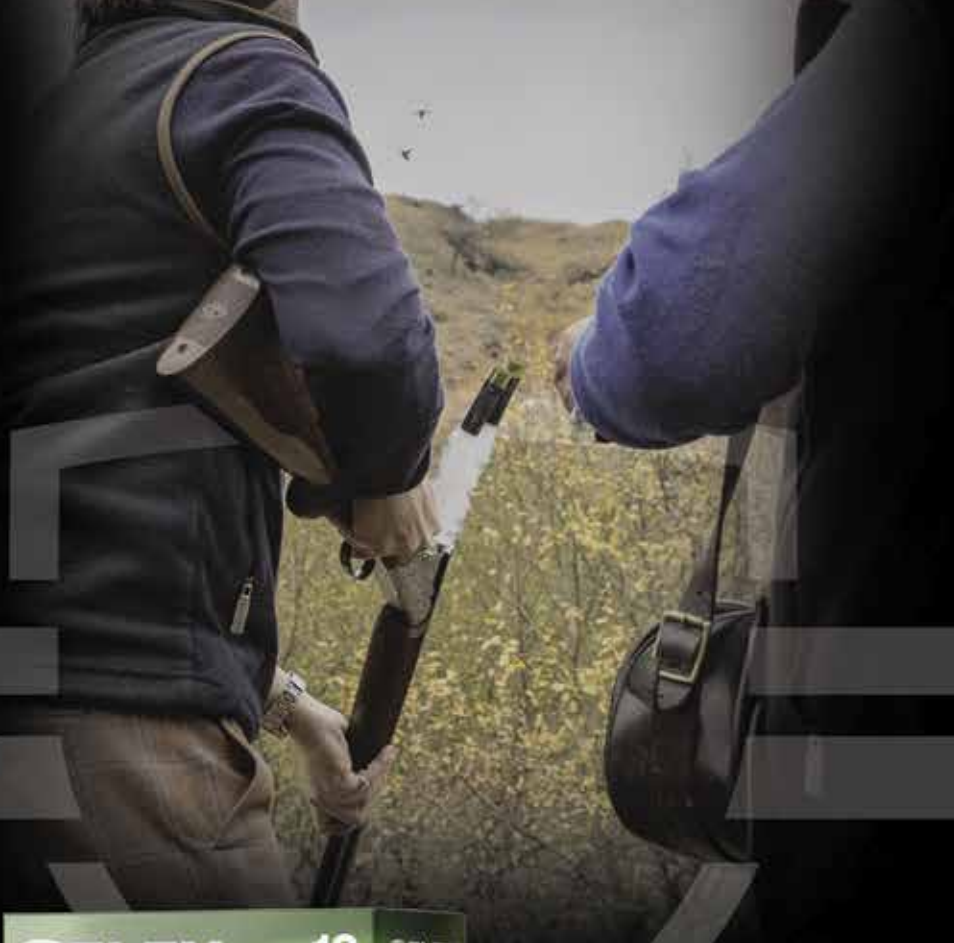
TERESA DENT CBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Summer is approaching, and with it comes Game Fairs. The GWCT Scottish Game Fair is the first on the calendar and always a very special event much loved by members. You can read what is planned for this year on page 40. The Ragley Game Fair follows soon after, with our second GWCT Welsh Game Fair taking place in September. We really look forward to seeing you at each of these events.

This year we celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Partridge Count Scheme (PCS), which began in 1933. Long-term datasets like the PCS are vital to GWCT's science and provide the backing vocals that make much of our shorter-term research sing.

It is also a reminder that 2030 will mark GWCT's centenary as an organisation and its 50th year as a charity – a momentous milestone. It makes us younger than the RSPB and the organisation that became the Wildlife Trusts, and about the same age as the British Trust for Ornithology.

The year 2030 will also be important for the Westminster Government, as it has made a legally binding environmental target to halt the decline in species abundance by the end of that year. While the Government has often fallen short of conservation goals, we hope for a different outcome. GWCT recently initiated new generation Farmer Clusters, working with farmers, gamekeepers, and moorland managers across entire catchments, to bringing them together in farmer-owned, farmer-led, co-operative Environmental Farmer Groups (see page 48). The first was in the Hampshire Avon catchment, followed by the Peak District, with four more developing. These all have their own ambitious environmental targets and operate on a very large scale, with the Avon catchment currently 38,000 hectares, with aspirations to double that. As 72% of the UK is farmed and only 8% is in nature reserves, this has the potential to make significant progress towards Government targets.



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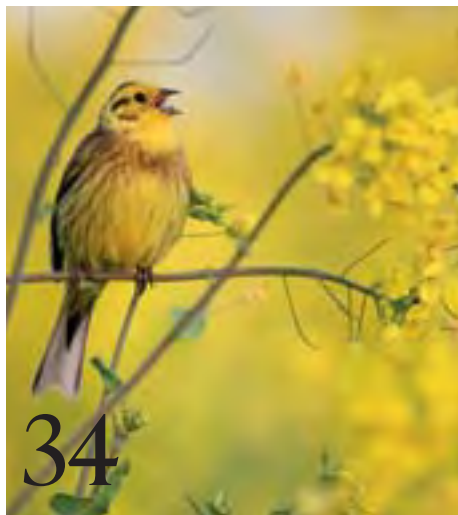
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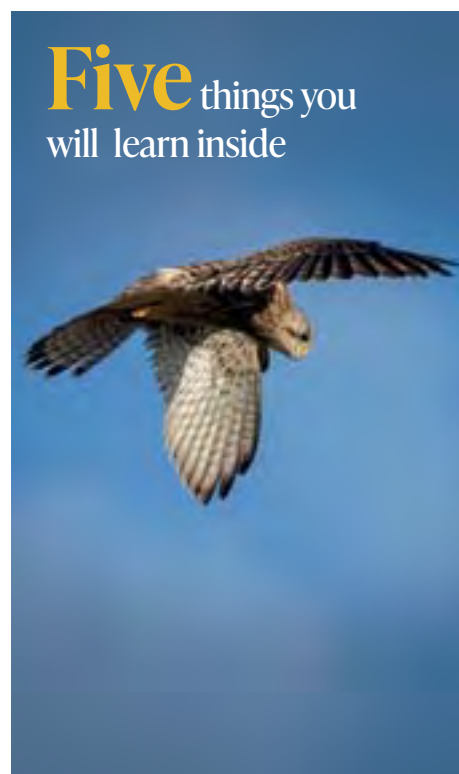
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2. The benefits of feeding willow to grazing livestock
3. Why land managers need to act now to help lowland curlew
4. How to help grey partridges and join the Partridge Count Scheme
5. How to halt the decline of farmland birds

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RESEARCH THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

SPHAGNUM MOSS

Blanket bog forms peat by compression of plant material into its lower layers. Here, in waterlogged, anaerobic conditions, decomposition is very slow and the material instead accumulates, locking up carbon and helping to retain water. *Sphagnum* mosses are particularly good at peat-forming because they like the waterlogged, acidic conditions and can thrive in a nutrient-poor environment that is unsuitable for many other plant species. There are 30 species of *Sphagnum* moss in the UK, of which approximately a third may be found on blanket bog habitat. See page 22.

IN *focus*



FIND OUT
MORE



WHY IS HEATHER BURNING IMPORTANT?

When critics challenge heather burning, they often overlook the importance of wildfire mitigation. Therefore we welcome the UK Climate Change Committee's (CCC) 2023 report and its acknowledgement that the risk of wildfire will increase significantly in future decades. The report expresses concern that there is no national co-ordinated strategy to identify and mitigate risks of wildfire in England to people, habitats, food production, property and infrastructure. Furthermore, it recommends actions to build resilience including the 'management of vegetation and fuels.' This reflects the outcomes from a GWCT-hosted wildfire workshop in January, chaired by Lord Deben, chairman of the UK CCC. The workshop reached a consensus on the need to increase understanding of wildfire's environmental, economic and social impacts, together with the need for active management to reduce the increasing risk of wildfire.

© Laurie Campbell



GWCT in the PRESS

1 Proposals to help capercaillie by giving contraceptives to pine martens divided opinion, with GWCT's Rory Kennedy appearing on the BBC, national press, and countryside magazines to explain the benefits.

2 The 10th annual GWCT Big Farmland Bird count was covered in the regional press, as well as *Farmers Weekly*, *NFU Countryside* and *Farmers Guardian*.

3 Our Fisheries team explained the impact of the Poole Harbour oil spill on migratory salmon in both the national and regional media – see page 12.

In Brief



DID YOU KNOW?

Beetle banks can hold up to 1,000 insects per square metre in winter. The humble beetle bank, designed by the GWCT more than 40 years ago, was praised in the House of Lords by the Earl of Caithness as 'a very good place for wildlife' during a recent debate.



RESEARCH THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

RASMUS LAURIDSEN

A fascination with aquatic ecology has seen Rasmus tag more than 14,518 salmon parr over 17 years

Rasmus has been working in the field of aquatic ecology and fisheries science for nearly two decades. He grew up in Denmark, where his life-long interest in rivers and fish began. "As a small boy I was fascinated by fish, but I always thought it would be a hobby!" He studied biology at university, and nearly pursued a career in physiology before a module on stream ecology captured his imagination. And so, his hobby transitioned into academia.

"THE EARLY YEARS of my career involved studying pesticide impacts on streams in Denmark, investigating invertebrate communities of high-energy rivers in New Zealand, and examining the effects of conifer plantations on stream chemistry in Ireland. I even squeezed in some maths teaching in India. Though I'm more at home on rivers, I did experience the wild forces of the ocean and a taste of commercial fishing during a month in the remote Pacific long-lining for halibut – the world's largest flatfish – which can clock in at 100kg.

"I FIRST MOVED to Dorset in 2005 to work on a PhD for Queen Mary University,

London. I was studying the effects of reintroducing salmon to a tributary of the River Frome in Dorset, after their reason for becoming extinct – a weir – had been modified to improve fish passage. This led me to delve deep into the responses and interactions of fish, plants, aquatic invertebrates and algae, which led to a lasting appreciation of ecosystems as a whole.

"SINCE MY PHD, I started working at the GWCT Salmon & Trout Research Centre at East Stoke, where I later became head of fisheries research. I lead the long-term catchment-wide study of the salmon and trout populations of the River Frome. This also includes overseeing the research into the marine part of their lives as well, as part of the SAMARCH project (see page 30).

"TOGETHER WITH MY team, we have made great progress in diagnosing the reasons behind wild salmonid population decline. There are still more answers to be teased from the River Frome, and still more in the sea, but I hope by the end of my career, populations of wild salmonids will be recovering. If not, I hope our research will have added significantly to the knowledge that might help them."



(L-R) Daniel Zeichner MP, Richard Bailey, Sir Robert Goodwill MP, Simon Lester, Mark Spencer MP and GWCT CEO, Teresa Dent.

Championing Real Wilders

Moorland managers celebrated in Westminster

ENVIRONMENT MINISTER MARK SPENCER MP, Shadow Defra Minister Daniel Zeichner MP, and Baroness Bakewell, Lib Dem Environment spokesperson, were among MPs and policymakers who met moorland managers at the Palace of Westminster for the launch of *Real Wilders*. This is the GWCT's new collection of case studies on the Working Conservationists preserving the UK's precious uplands and their wildlife. *Real Wilders* features five case studies from around the UK, as well as expert testimony from ornithologists, ecologists, conservationists and GWCT science. You can order a copy at gwctshop.org.uk.

Helping curlew in Wales

Curlew Connections Project receives £1m in funding

CURLEW CONNECTIONS WALES, a project led by GWCT Wales, has received £1m in funding from the Welsh Government's Nature Networks Fund. The project aims to prevent the extinction of curlews across Wales by working with local communities, farmers and land managers to address the causes of their decline while promoting sustainability. Curlew Connections Wales is a partnership project involving The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, Curlew Country and GWCT Cymru. The curlew is today considered the bird of highest conservation concern in Wales, with as few as 400 breeding pairs across the whole of Wales. Lee Oliver, GWCT Cymru head of projects in Wales, said: "We want to get as many people as possible involved in curlew recovery. Curlew will only remain in Wales if those farming and managing the land are given the means and support to reverse their decline."



The curlew is now considered the bird of highest conservation concern in Wales.



(L-R) Roger Draycott, GWCT, Melvin Wright, gamekeeper at Caldecote House Farm and Hugo Johnsen from Castleacre Insurance

Boost for grey partridges

East Anglian Grey Partridge Award

THIS YEAR'S EAST ANGLIAN GREY Partridge award, kindly sponsored by Castleacre Insurance, was presented to Simon Maudlin and Melvin Wright from Caldecote House Farm in Bedfordshire. Starting from a low of four pairs of partridges in 2002, their 2021 spring counts reached a fantastic 42 pairs, while their general farmland bird numbers have increased by 1,200%. This award has been presented to Simon and Melvin twice in 10 years, an amazing result and well deserved. You can read more about their work on page 43.

Thank you

In memoriam

WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL to receive donations in memory of Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Lawrence Banks, John Wimble, Edmund Thornhill, Martin Stubbs, John Simon Greenwood and Graeme Sawyer. We would like to thank their families and friends for thinking of us during such a difficult time.



Big Farmland Bird Count

Highlighting our cherished farmland birds

MORE THAN 1,700 FARMERS AND LAND MANAGERS GOT THEIR BINOCULARS OUT and took a vital snapshot of the health of our cherished farmland birds this February. A total of 149 species were recorded across more than 1.5 million acres (607,000 hectares) in all four countries of the UK. Records came in from far and wide – from white-tailed eagles on the Isle of Benbecula, to white storks in Cambridge and cirl buntings in Devon.

The birds that were spotted most often were blackbirds, woodpigeons and robins, seen on seven out of every 10 counts. Birds seen on less than one in 100 counts included species that are elusive like jack snipe and bittern, localised such as red grouse, or rare and declining like willow tit.

There were notable differences between conservation work provided by farms with shoots and those without shoots. Of the 36% of participants who said that they run a wild or released gamebird shoot, nearly half grow wild bird seed mixtures and 62% put out supplementary food for farmland birds. In contrast, of those who responded that they do not operate a shoot, 21% grow wild bird seed mixtures and 32% put out supplementary food. Find out more at bfbc.org.uk.



Willow tit was just one of the rare or declining species counted in the Big Farmland Bird Count.
© Victor Tyakht



Remember to count your grey partridges this summer and submit the counts to the PCS.

Boosting grey partridges

Find out what you can do to help

LOOK OUT FOR NEWLY-HATCHED GREY PARTRIDGE CHICKS IN JUNE, WITH THE peak hatch traditionally coinciding with Royal Ascot week. Someone who will be keeping an eagle eye out around his brood-rearing habitats is Simon Maudlin, who is successfully recovering wild greys on his 810 acre farm in Bedfordshire, where small, cost effective measures have been key to his conservation success – see page 43 *It's not rocket science* and page 53 for our guide to *Creating the ultimate grey partridge brood habitat*.

Another important element for Simon has been the ability to gauge the impact of his conservation measures by being involved in our Partridge Count Scheme (PCS). If you are interested in preserving partridge numbers yourself, and at the same time make an important contribution to the national register for the species, we encourage you to find out more about the PCS – see gwct.org.uk/pcs.

In the news

Oil spill coincides with salmonid migration

THE FISHERIES TEAM'S response to an oil leak in Poole Harbour in March was circulated to the media and also shared by the Missing Salmon Alliance. The GWCT highlighted that the spill coincided with the start of the sea-bound migration of vulnerable young Atlantic salmon and sea trout from the Frome and Piddle rivers, which flow directly through Poole Harbour. Head of fisheries Dylan Roberts was quoted in *The Guardian* (see [//t.co/XAV3gxjY3S](https://t.co/XAV3gxjY3S)) and he and Rasmus Lauridsen were quoted in coverage in 213 media outlets across the country and including several fishing titles. Outlets included *The Independent*, *Mail Online* and the *Evening Standard*, along with regional publications right across the UK.

Rasmus was also interviewed on BBC Radio Solent, and ITV Meridian filmed at our Salmon & Trout Research Centre at East Stoke with the piece featuring on the lunchtime and evening news.



What the science says

How much of the UK is farmed?

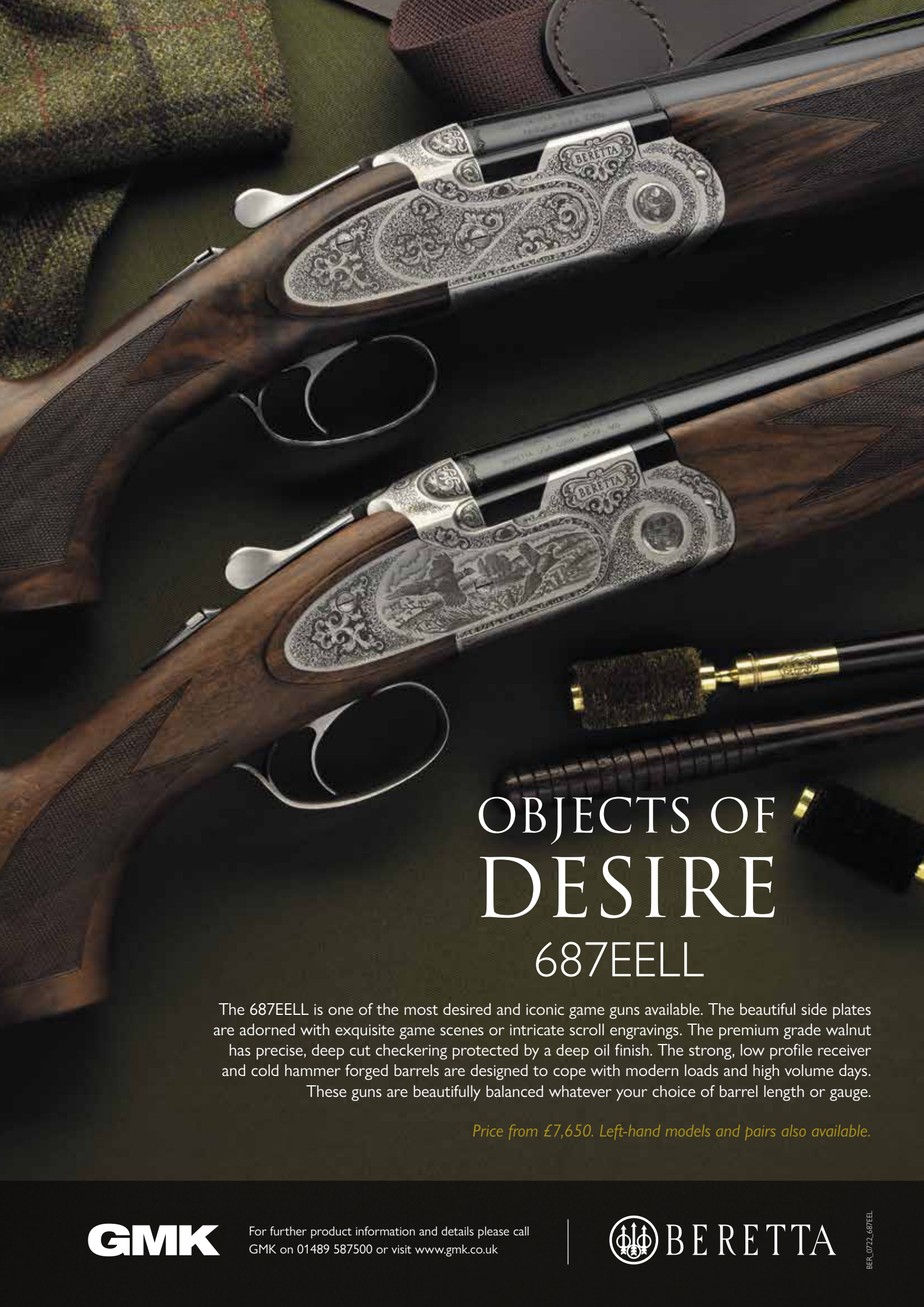
WITH THE PRESSURE ON FARMERS TO deliver food security and biodiversity, we set about finding a definitive answer to what proportion of the UK is farmed. Various figures are cited in the media, but in the UK the standard measurement is Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA). Since these records began in 1984 the UAA has fluctuated between 18 and 19 million hectares, making farmland cover over the last 40 years somewhere between 72.8% and 76.4% of the UK's land area. Today the figure sits at 72.8% of UK land area (18.1m hectares). See whattthesciencesays.org.

Bryn Parry

In memoriam

WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED BY THE death of Bryn Parry, a co-founder of Help for Heroes and a gifted cartoonist and sculptor. Based in Wiltshire, Bryn was one of the UK's most loved countryside artists, depicting rural life with a smile.

Bryn and his wife Emma founded the charity Help for Heroes in 2007, after visiting wounded soldiers in hospital and learning about their difficulty in accessing rehabilitation treatment. In addition to his phenomenal work for ex-servicemen and women, Bryn was a great supporter of the GWCT. Our thoughts are with his family.



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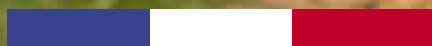


BERETTA

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AIGLE 1853



As a Union we know that family farms are at the heart of our rural economy, caring for our landscape, contributing to local communities and maintaining a very special Welsh way of life, while making innumerable other contributions to the well-being of Wales and the UK.

We have made it our mission to ensure that we have thriving and sustainable family farms here in Wales. As part of that commitment, we don't just consider food production and the people who farm the land, but we also appreciate the crucial role our environment plays in the process.

There is little doubt that some agricultural policies have had a direct impact on bird populations since the mid-20th Century. Despite efforts to enhance biodiversity and the environment over more recent decades, around a third of bird species in Wales are still thought to be in significant decline due to practices such as under-grazing.

Nevertheless, the UK's departure from the European Union enables the Welsh Government to introduce its own Agriculture Bill based on Wales' needs and requirements. How can we ensure that future agricultural policies are designed to support family farms producing sustainable food, while simultaneously improving the environment for the benefit of Wales' bird species? One way of doing this is through joining forces with organisations such as the GWCT to highlight and lobby for what is needed.

We know that a good indicator of the health of our natural environments are our farmland birds. Therefore, we were delighted to work once again with GWCT Cymru to help promote and celebrate 10 years of the GWCT's Big Farmland Bird Count (BFBC). We recently co-hosted two on-farm information events with GWCT colleagues, both of which were well attended and appreciated by our members.

Events such as these are vital to showcase the important role farmers play when it comes to looking after farmland birds, as well as helping farmers understand what they can do on their farms to protect birds. It is also a fantastic opportunity for us to learn what more can be done for farmland birds. The team at the GWCT have demonstrated great examples where declines have been reversed alongside productive farming.



HOW OTHERS SEE US

GLYN ROBERTS

Glyn Roberts, President of the Farmers' Union of Wales, gives his opinion

Biodiversity is going to play a big part in any future payments scheme for family farms here in Wales and as such, farms will need to demonstrate what they have from an environmental perspective. The BFBC is

a great way to collect such information. We have already established a great working relationship with the GWCT here in Wales and we look forward to building on that in the future. ■

We know that a good indicator of the health of our natural environments are our farmland birds

The Farmers' Union of Wales or FUW as it is commonly known, was founded in 1955 and is the only representative body for farmers that is totally focused on Welsh agriculture with no external decision making or financial influences.

The FUW's job is to advance the views of the Farmers of Wales without fear or favour, unfettered by sectional or external financial interests. 'Farming Matters' is the key slogan of the FUW, as we realise that farming matters in so many ways that are seldom realised. Not only do farms produce food but they are also a cornerstone of our rural economies.



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FLOWERING CROPS CAN PROVIDE A VAST resource of pollen and nectar for bees. However, these crops only flower for a few weeks of the year so a variety of habitats is needed.

Taking action to becoming net zero



Alastair Leake looks at how planting new hedges and trees will help store carbon and increase wildlife habitat

If we are to achieve our ambitions of becoming net zero by 2050 (or 2040 if you are a farmer) then we all need to start taking action now, and that includes the GWCT. Although there are opportunities in the grounds of our headquarters in Fordingbridge to offset some of the emissions from our offices, the greatest potential lies on our 800-acre Allerton Project research and demonstration farm. A tree planted today on the heavy land here at the farm will take at least 15 years before it starts to lock-up any meaningful amount of carbon, so we have begun to review the opportunities we have to get started on some small planting schemes. Conscious that our mission is to demonstrate that productive farming can go

hand-in-hand with nature conservation, we have looked for areas that are producing little or no agricultural produce but could deliver more for nature. For example, Railway Field, a linear field squeezed between a dismantled railway line and a country lane is surrounded by a small wood on one side and the trees which grace the embankment on the other. The fence is so decayed that the shepherd no longer bothers to graze his sheep there. So we propose to plant a new hedge on the boundary and in-fill the field with young saplings, leaving an open section for the sunlight to keep the profusion of anthills there warm.

Further down the track is Church Field, where one section at the back of the 14th century church is also surrounded by

trees. Here the sheep still graze, shading themselves in summer under a majestic lime tree which stands solitary within the pasture. This we think would lend itself to a low-density parkland type of planting. On an examination of a centuries old map, we find that this area was in fact once just that – a grazed field with parkland trees, all now long gone but for the lonely lime (see page 17).

At the top of the field known as Paradise (definitely not to do with the quality of the soil or its agricultural productivity) there is one of the last surviving elm trees on the farm. The wind is always brisk up here which has always led me to speculate that the beetles that infect elms with Dutch Elm Disease find it hard-going, but now that the surrounding elm suckers have died from the

SONG THRUSH NESTS THAT SUCCESSFULLY

produce young have a higher proportion of pasture grazed by sheep within their foraging range.



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Planting new hedges can connect habitat as well as locking up carbon. (Right) The last remaining healthy elm with a deformity in the bark.



We have looked for areas which are producing little or no agricultural produce but could deliver more for nature

disease we know that cannot be so. This area would lend itself to a small scrub plantation.

Finally, an exposed ridge between Stonepits and School Farm Top mysteriously still has a redundant concrete and wire fence, but no hedge. Replacing the fence with a new hedge would help to connect a strip which would then join the nature reserve in Launde Big Wood with our own Churchills Wood, creating a contiguous strip of habitat of nearly a kilometre.

Once our plans are drawn up we will seek the necessary grant support, but we will also register the schemes under the Woodland and Hedgerow Carbon Codes.

This will enable us to calculate how much carbon our new habitats are likely to lock up during their lifetime and trade this for the emissions from the electricity and gas used by our colleagues working at our headquarters, as well as providing some wonderful new habitat for nature. ■

Alastair Leake is director of the Allerton Project and is keen to encourage farmers to consider hedgerow and other planting schemes to help lock up carbon.



In the field



COVER CROP CORNER

WE REVIEWED THE CROPS AT THE END of the shooting season and looked at AB9 (winter bird food) areas under the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme. We decided to increase certain areas by combining two AB9 plots which will benefit the shoot and farm by allowing a larger area in which to slow flushing points and extend drives. The expansion also means that the plots can be rotated to ensure good agronomic management. We’re looking to use a combination of our two-year Take-Off Mix and one-year Campaign Mix South – both allowing a robust herbicide programme.

The GS4 (legume and herb-rich swards) plots were overseeded in June with some more legume and herb elements, ensuring that the cover meets CS requirements. A graminicide was also applied on the AB1 to stop the plot being smothered by grass.

The AB9 mixtures look great and the Campaign Mix South has had an application of post-emergence herbicide and is being inspected to ensure that pigeons are kept off the kale-based mixtures. We are now looking at the areas ready for AB15 (two-year sown legume fallow) and assessing potential areas for perennial crops around the estate which could be established after harvest, alongside AB9 cover strips to provide windbreaks/warming strips. ■

Meehal Grint

KINGS CROPS provide agronomy advice and supply seed for the Allerton Project farm’s game cover, stewardship and green cover crops. kingscrops.co.uk



We looked at the benefits of feeding willow to sheep and found that nitrous oxide emissions halved in the first three days after urination.

The wonders of willow

Chris Stoate examines the role of feeding willow to grazing livestock and the benefits it can produce

Willow is a versatile group of species that is grown on a large scale as short rotation coppice for energy, as well as carefully managed trees for making cricket bats. In the wider countryside, willows also support an abundance of wildlife.

Like many other trees, willows can also benefit grazing livestock by providing shade from intense sun, and shelter from strong wind and rain. In previous research in partnership with Nottingham University, the Woodland Trust and others, we also found that willow contained tannins and minerals such as cobalt and zinc in higher amounts than other tree species, all of which could be beneficial in the diet of grazing ruminants.

Since then, we have carried out various feeding experiments with small groups of recently weaned lambs to explore potential benefits. We knew from our previous Defra-funded research that cobalt, an essential mineral for synthesis of vitamin B₁₂, varies in its availability in grass swards both across fields, and seasonally, with lowest concentrations in grass in the summer. We tested whether feeding goat willow leaves to lambs would increase the concentrations of cobalt and vitamin B₁₂ in their blood and found that it did. So, feeding willow leaves to ruminants in the summer when cobalt availability is otherwise too low for growing lambs could improve their performance.

The tannins in willow leaves could also have some benefits, not just for sheep, but to the ecology of the pasture they graze. Anthelmintics that are used to control intestinal worms are known to have a major negative impact on grassland invertebrates, especially dung beetles which perform an essential role in breaking down dung and incorporating it into the soil.

It builds on the developing evidence base for the advantages of incorporating trees into grazing livestock systems

Together with our Nottingham University partners, we carried out a lab-based assay and an experiment feeding willow to lambs to see whether compounds present in willow leaves increased mortality of intestinal worms. In both cases, we found that it did. So willow can be used to reduce the use of anthelmintics, reducing costs to farmers, and helping to maintain grassland ecosystems.

Tannins also slow down the breakdown of protein in the rumen, and the uptake of nitrogen into the blood, and ultimately the urine that is excreted by ruminants. This could potentially reduce emission of nitrogenous gases such as nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas with nearly three hundred times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Inspired by Bangor University's research on sheep grazing high tannin herbs, we explored this issue for willow at the Allerton Project using our high-tech Gasmeter multi-gas analyser. We found that nitrous oxide emissions from urine patches were more than halved in the first three days after urination when lambs were fed willow. Work by Queen's University Belfast has indicated that incorporating willow into the diet of ruminants can also reduce enteric emissions of methane. So there is a role for willow in reducing the climate change contribution of red meat production to add to the other benefits.

As well as identifying multiple benefits of feeding willow leaves to lambs, our work has wider implications. It builds on the developing evidence base for the advantages of incorporating trees into grazing livestock systems. We still need to explore approaches to the practical application of this principle, but the need to get away from the long-established dichotomy between farmland and forestry is clear. ■

Cutting edge science



Siân Whitehead explores the effects of heather cutting on blanket bog habitat

Until recently, prescribed burning has been a widely used tool for managing vegetation on heather-dominated moorlands. It removes the tall canopy, encouraging growth of younger heather as well as opening the sward for other plants, such as cotton grass and *Sphagnum* mosses. However, following research which reported negative effects of burning on blanket bog habitat, English regulations were updated in 2021 to restrict this practice, leading to an increase in heather cutting

We found that heather cutting led to an immediate decrease in depth and structural variation of the moss layer

as an alternative means of management. This method is relatively under-researched, with only a few studies looking at its effects, and even fewer looking at those effects on deep peat habitats.

Heather cutting is relatively under-researched, with only a few studies looking at its effects, and even fewer looking at those effects on deep peat habitats.

Further research is needed to find out if altering the cutting height can reduce impacts on the moss layer while still removing enough of the heather canopy

These deep peat habitats are of national and international importance for their biodiversity and environmental value. As well as supporting specialised plants and animals, they capture and store carbon and contribute to flood risk management. Most UK peatlands are blanket bogs – acidic, waterlogged habitats found in cooler, wetter upland areas – and a key feature of them is their moss layer, of which *Sphagnum* mosses form an important component. This moss layer forms a protective layer over the peat, helping to prevent its drying or erosion. The mosaic of carpet-forming and mound-forming mosses creates a hummock and hollow structure, allowing wet pools to form and creating a surface-level micro-climate that can reduce rates of water evaporation and run-off.

In spring 2021, we conducted a study of plots that had been cut that winter (2020-21) to consider the short-term effects of heather cutting on blanket bog vegetation, focusing particularly on the depth, and variation in depth, of the moss layer. We collected data from two blanket bog sites in northern England where heather had been cut in the winter of 2020/21.

We found that heather cutting led to an immediate decrease in depth and structural variation of the moss layer. On both sites, moss depth was almost 40% lower on cut plots than on control plots, while variation in that depth ('moss microtopography') was reduced by 33% on one site and by 13% on the other. While the heavy machinery used for cutting likely caused some compression of the moss layer, it was clear that cutting had 'scalped' some of the hummock-forming *Sphagnum* mosses while some of the feather mosses, which usually form a carpet close to the peat surface, had been completely removed. Regardless of the size or complexity of the moss hummock and hollow structure in the adjacent uncut areas, the cutting machinery left behind a largely flat, uniform surface.

Given how important healthy moss layers are to functioning blanket bogs, further research is needed to find out if altering the cutting height can reduce impacts on the moss layer while still removing enough of the heather canopy. We therefore started a new experiment in 2022, which is considering the effect of cut height on vegetation structure and composition. We have six study sites, all of them on upland moorland, three on deep peat (peat depth greater than 40cm) and three on shallow peat (peat depth less than 40cm). Each site has replicated experimental plots on which we measured the vegetation before cutting management was undertaken. The plots were each allocated one of four treatments: i) high cut

In Brief



HOW DO WE MEASURE RATES OF BRASH DECOMPOSITION?

WE USE LITTER BAGS, WHICH ARE LIKE GIANT teabags, to hold samples of brash collected from the plots after cutting. These litter bags, made of nylon 2mm mesh, retain the material but allow microbes and insects to access it, as well as ensuring the brash is exposed to all the weather elements. The bags are all dried to provide an initial measure of dry weight and are then pegged out on the ground, within the experimental plots, covering them with whatever thickness of brash the cutting has left. At 12-month intervals, we will retrieve a subset of the bags to dry and weigh again, giving us an annual measure of how much of the brash has decomposed.

to remove the canopy but not damage the moss layer, generating small amounts of brash; ii) medium cut, used widely for heather management in northern England; iii) low cut, which removes all the canopy and much of the moss layer as well as generating a thick layer of brash; and iv) control (no cutting). Cutting was done in December 2022 and we will now measure the vegetation annually to see how moss depth, canopy height and species composition change over time. On the deep peat sites, we will also be monitoring water table depth and at all sites we will be recording rates of brash decomposition. For more details see page 34 in the *Review of 2022*. ■

Siân Whitehead works for our uplands research team and, following the restrictions of prescribed burning, she is looking at the effects of heather cutting on blanket bog.



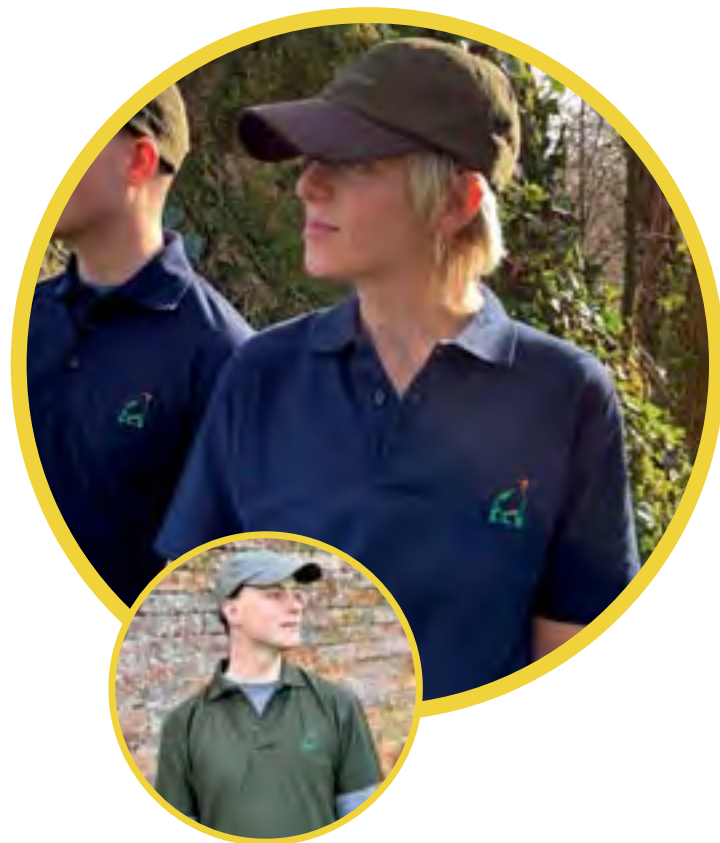
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Is time running out for curlew in the lowlands?

Mike Short looks at curlew nest protection in the New Forest but believes that it's imperative that wildlife managers act now to improve the breeding success of these magnificent birds



After two consecutive years of intensive curlew nest monitoring in the New Forest, it's now clear that foxes pose the greatest threat to curlew nest survival in our study area. Of the 41 curlew nests monitored with cameras in 2021 and 2022, 25 failed due to predation, and 17 of these were attributed to foxes. But that's not to say that lawful control of other species – like carrion crows – isn't important, for they have also been recorded preying on nests, and in other regions where fox densities are much lower, nest predation by stoats could be the biggest threat.

In the New Forest, our nest camera research shows that foxes are the principal predator of curlew nests. Our nest sample size is rather small, but with a fast-declining breeding curlew population (circa 33 breeding pairs recorded in 2022), and an expansive area of lowland heath in which to search for nests, it's the best we could muster. However, it seems our results are fairly representative of the situation in other lowland curlew breeding areas, where foxes are usually reported as the principal predator of curlew nests.

For example, in one recently published study in Breckland, East Anglia, between 2019 and 2021, up to 80 pairs of curlews were studied annually across eight different sites. Over this three-year period, 136 nests were monitored, and 84 nests failed. Of these, predation accounted for 86% of nest failures. Nest cameras weren't used to identify predators in this study, but temperature loggers in nests showed that most predation events occurred at night, and foxes were assumed to have been the main culprit. Here, the authors suggest that electric fencing could help improve nest survival by preventing mammalian predators – principally foxes – from preying on nests at night.

In the New Forest, the use of electric fencing to protect curlew nests is not a viable option. In this complex landscape, finding nests is extremely time-consuming. The birds breed on 'open access' lowland heath and wet mires, where commoners graze cattle and ponies. Fences of any description are the virtual antithesis of commoner rights, and on one private landholding where the gamekeeper urgently wanted to use a temporary electric fence to protect a vulnerable curlew nest, Natural England made his request so problematic that the fencing route can be off-putting.

As it stands, in the New Forest the only viable way of reducing fox predation pressure on curlew nests is by lawful culling, both prior to and during the critical incubation phase. Our curlew nest camera studies show that of the 17 nests predated by foxes, 11 were lost

In the New Forest, the use of electric fencing to protect curlew nests is not a viable option



There is clearly rising concern that there has been rather a lot of curlew-talking over the past few years, but insufficient action: lots of curlew monitoring, but not enough protection

during the third week of May, which coincides with increasing fox prey-food demands as cubs are reared and when most first or early-second clutches are likely to be hatching. For foxes, the extra cheeping noise that's emitted from hatching curlew eggs can give their location away, so it's a precarious time, and vital that fox predation pressure has been adequately suppressed prior to this critical stage of the nesting period.

Alongside our curlew nest monitoring work, we have been collecting predator culling records from wildlife managers across the New Forest National Park. The area involved now includes over 33,000 hectares of predator-managed land, with detailed records on fox culling effort and bag data provided by shoot tenants, gamekeepers, and Forestry England personnel. One objective of this important research is to determine what level of fox culling effort is required to improve curlew nest survival and ultimately, productivity. Although in its infancy, it is already revealing what level of fox culling effort improves nest survival, and what doesn't.

For example, during the 2022 curlew breeding season, on one management unit, seven out of nine monitored curlew nests hatched. One nest was destroyed by crows after the adults mysteriously disappeared, and the other nest was lost to a domestic dog – our first documented dog incident in two years of wader nest

camera monitoring. To say this represents impressive nest survival is an understatement, but it took a great deal of hard work.

Between 1 April and the end of May, the small team involved put in more than 200 hours of dedicated fox management work, and fox sighting rates had more than halved by the third week in May, indicating greatly reduced predation pressure. The result was at least 24 curlew chicks leaving their nest-cups but sadly, many of these perished. Understanding why chick survival in the New Forest is so poor, despite first-class legal predation management occurring right through the breeding and fledging period, is our next curlew research priority.

Although it's just a few years old, contrary to the conclusions of the RSPB's controversial Curlew Trial Management Project, the GWCT's curlew and predation research in the New Forest is showing that targeted culling of foxes (and carrion crows) greatly improves curlew (and lapwing) nest survival, which is the first-step towards generating more wild-born curlew in their natural breeding areas. Where electric fencing is not a viable management option, or where finding curlew nests is too problematic, this is what many breeding curlew populations desperately need: commitment by skilled and motivated wildlife managers prepared to go the extra mile for the birds they're trying to protect.

(Above) In the New Forest, our nest camera research shows that foxes are the principal predator of curlew nests.
© Scalia Media



Mike Short is our head of predation control research and is concerned that if we don't act soon, it will be too late for curlew in the lowlands.



In Brief

A RARE BREED? LEARNING FROM NEW FOREST CURLEWS

LAST SUMMER WE CAUGHT A FEMALE CURLEW, that we GPS tagged and colour-ringed as part of my PhD study on breeding curlew in the New Forest. Interestingly, she was already ringed, with a worn-looking ring which was damaged so we replaced it.

We thought she looked older than some of the other birds we'd handled – her bodyweight was quite low, and her bill was the longest we had measured in the Forest (146mm). At the time, she was incubating three eggs, two of which were at the point of hatching; and she returned to sit on them soon after tagging.

Whenever a previously ringed bird is found, the unique code on the ring goes back to the British Trust for Ornithology, who maintain a massive database of all birds marked in the UK.

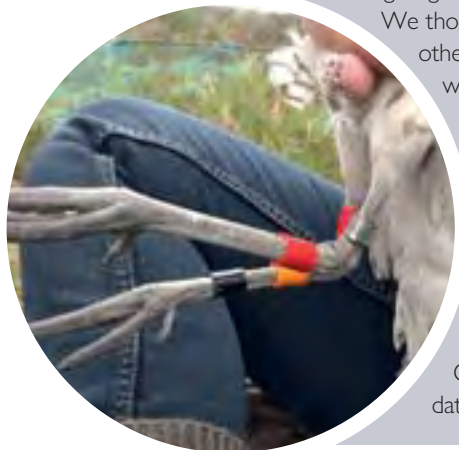
This provides a valuable insight into the longevity and movements of birds; and has contributed enormously to our understanding of the ecology and life cycles of many of our native species.

Although we anticipated that our female was at the older end of the range, we were not expecting to find out she was 30 years old and successfully hatching chicks. The current BTO longevity record for curlew stands at 32.5 years, so it's extraordinary that this bird is still breeding successfully.

From the ring number we discovered she was first ringed on Brownsea Island in Dorset, on the 30 September 1992, as a juvenile bird. As curlews are known to be extremely site faithful, it's possible she has been attempting to breed in the New Forest all her life, maybe even on the territory where we found her nest.

The data from the GPS tag showed that she made a handful of trips to Brownsea last winter, and spent the majority of her time around the Brands Bay area in Studland, a very short distance away.

Elli Rivers, PhD Student



Given the now large numbers of people involved – and new Defra funding for curlew recovery projects in the English lowlands – regional populations could stabilise and grow if the most site-appropriate predation management actions are implemented immediately. But time is running out; these long-lived birds urgently need new recruits. Head-starting curlew chicks only buys time, and is pointless unless breeding site managers address the current fundamental problems of poor nest and chick survival.

The GWCT plays an active role in UK curlew

conservation efforts through its research, advisory, training and policy work, and with the Curlew Recovery Partnership. However, through discussions with those who work on the ground to conserve breeding curlew, there is clearly rising concern that there has been rather a lot of curlew-talking over the past few years, but insufficient action: lots of curlew monitoring, but not enough protection. If curlew are to hang on in the English lowlands, then it's imperative that wildlife managers act now to improve the breeding success of these magnificent birds. ■

A giant leap forward

Sarah Bayley Slater examines the results of the SAMARCH project and the recommendations for future policy

Populations of wild Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and sea trout (*Salmo trutta*) have declined dramatically in the last two decades. Multiple freshwater factors are associated with this trend, along with a very marked decline in marine survival.

To unravel the causes of the decline the SALmonid Management Round the CHannel (SAMARCH) project collected evidence by studying salmon and sea trout on monitored rivers in southern England and northern France. SAMARCH, which took place from 2017-2023, was 69% funded by the EU Interreg France (Channel) England Programme. The project was delivered by 10 partners, five in England and five in France, directly involved in scientific research and fisheries management.

In March, SAMARCH held its final conference in Southampton. The event was a platform for SAMARCH researchers to present the results of their scientific research, and the project managers and policy officers to demonstrate how these findings are being used to inform recommendations for the protection of salmonids in the estuaries and coastal waters of France and England.

Through peer-reviewed scientific research, SAMARCH has collected new evidence on the migration and causes of mortality for Atlantic salmon and sea trout by studying the populations in five rivers in southern England and northern France, and sampling sea trout caught in the coastal environment. Studies were conducted using acoustic tracking and genetic analysis. The novel results from

Highlighting the need for these diadromous species to be recognised as a marine fish in legislation and Fisheries Management Plans

the project have further been combined with existing evidence and information to develop new population models and mapping tools to identify where managers and policymakers should focus to improve stocks.

Project delivery and outcomes

1. Improved understanding of salmonid migration, behaviour and survival through estuaries and coastal waters.
2. Recorded changes in the age and growth rates of salmon at sea.
3. Updated information on the sex ratios of wild Atlantic salmon.
4. Developed a new method for estimating salmon exploitation rates by anglers.
5. Improved salmon life cycle models.
6. Developed a genetic baseline to identify the origin of sea trout caught at sea around the Channel area, as well as map areas that are important for sea trout survival, such as migratory routes and feeding hotspots.

Salmon and sea trout are currently considered freshwater fish in UK policy and regulation. However, they spend a large proportion of their life in the coastal and marine environment and the conference highlighted the need for these diadromous species to be recognised as a marine fish in legislation and Fisheries Management Plans. ■

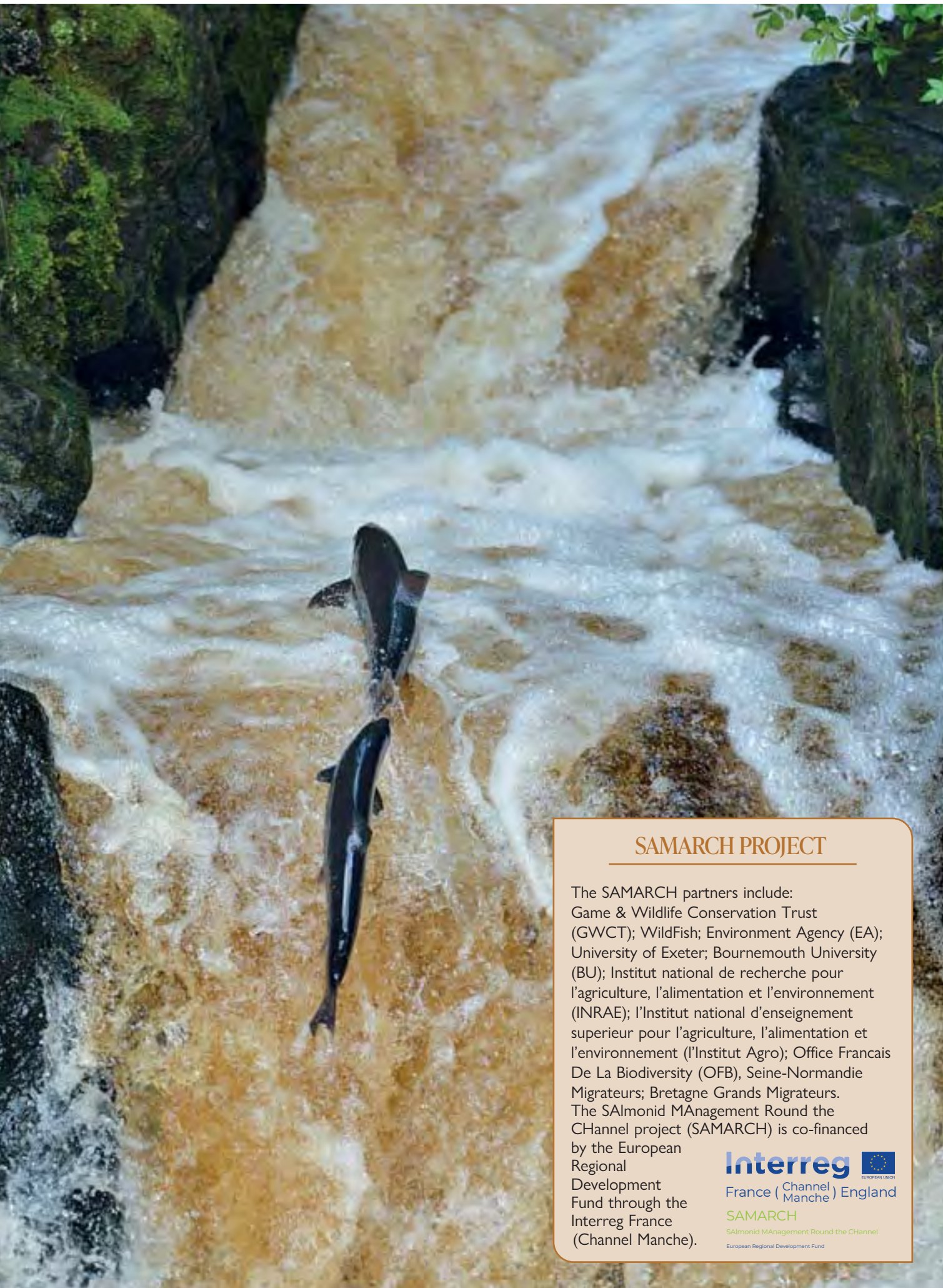
MORE INFORMATION

Videos of the conference presentations, reports and published papers are available at: samarch.org.

Most recently published paper: Artero C, Gregory SD, Beaumont WA, Josset Q and others (2023) Survival of Atlantic salmon and sea trout smolts in transitional waters. *Mar Ecol Prog Ser* 709:91-108. <https://doi.org/10.3354/meps14278>.

Sarah Bayley Slater is our fisheries communications officer and is delighted to share the fascinating findings of the SAMARCH project with our members.





SAMARCH PROJECT

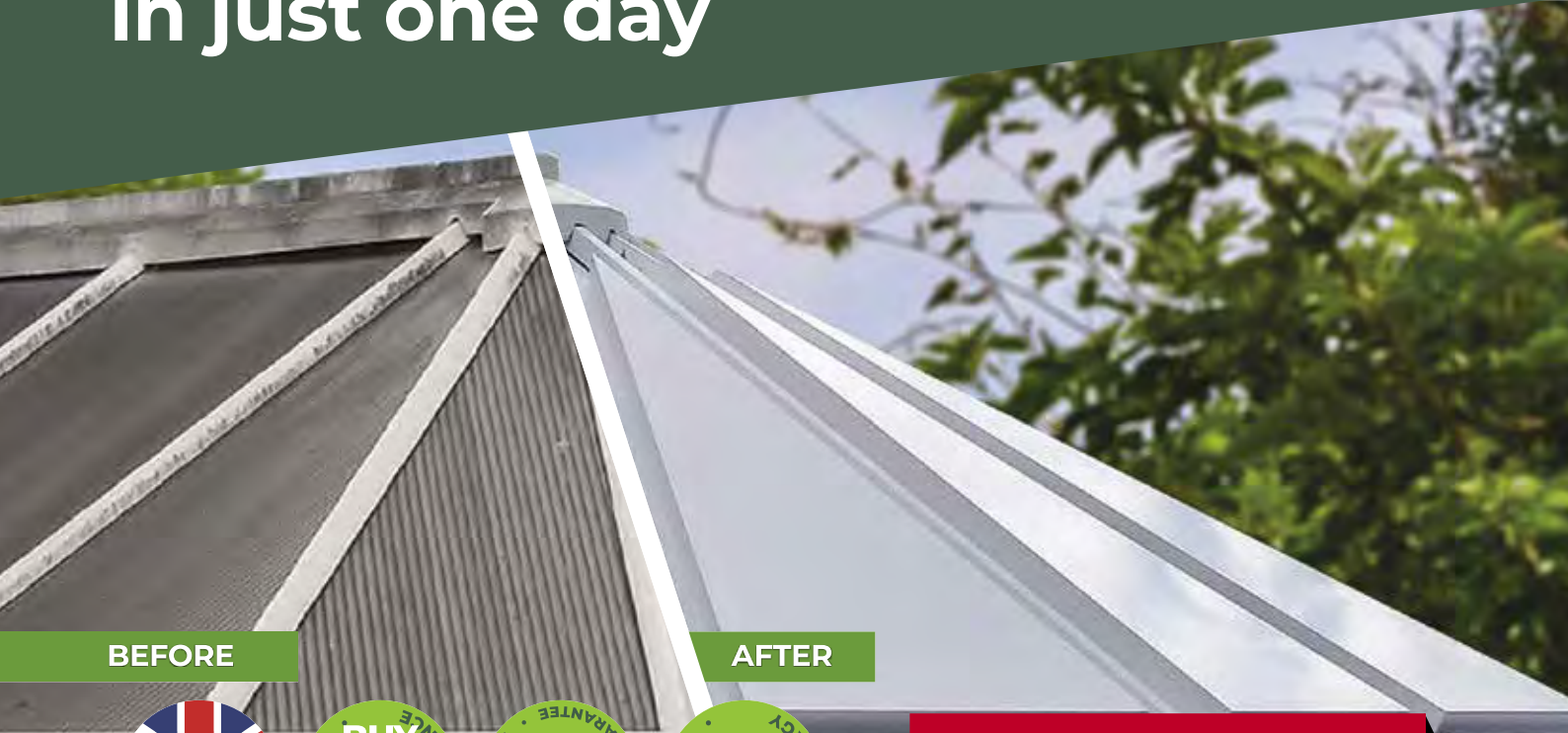
The SAMARCH partners include: Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT); WildFish; Environment Agency (EA); University of Exeter; Bournemouth University (BU); Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (INRAE); l'Institut national d'enseignement superieur pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (l'Institut Agro); Office Francais De La Biodiversity (OFB), Seine-Normandie Migrateurs; Bretagne Grands Migrateurs. The SALmonid MAnagement Round the CHannel project (SAMARCH) is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg France (Channel Manche) (Channel Manche).



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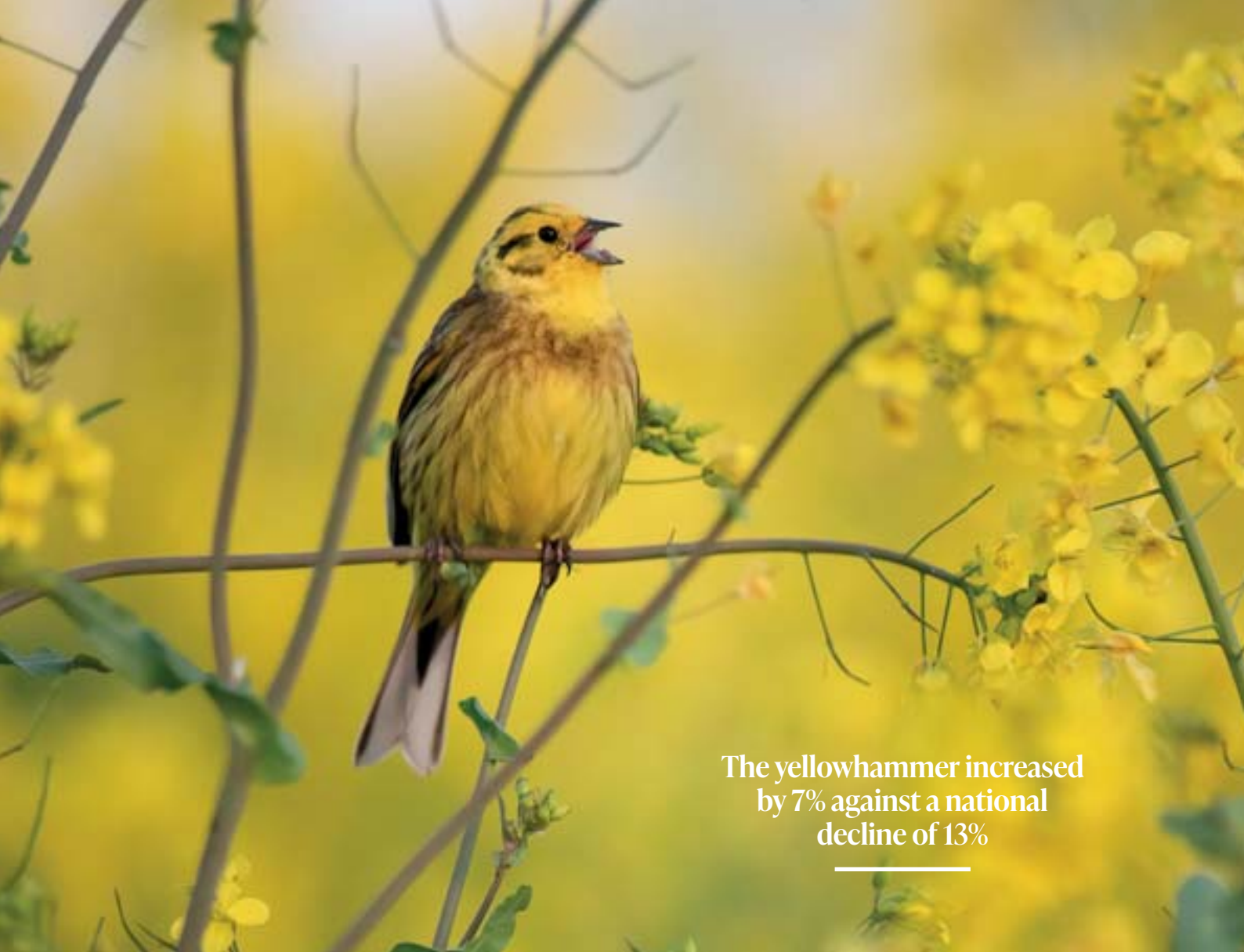
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Counting the
farmland birds
flying high
once more

Francis Buner looks at the success of farmland bird recovery
on the Rotherfield Park Estate



The yellowhammer increased
by 7% against a national
decline of 13%

This year marks the end of 13 years of bird monitoring on roughly 500 hectares (ha) of the Rotherfield Park Estate, as part of the GWCT Rotherfield Demonstration Project (2010-2020) and the PARTRIDGE North Sea Region Interreg Project (2016-2023). One of the key aims of both projects was to re-establish the red-listed grey partridge as a breeding bird in the area and then further increase its numbers. Simultaneously, both projects demonstrated how a wide range of species, in particular farmland birds, benefited from the management measures targeted at grey partridge conservation.

As with many other GWCT-led projects, the overall management strategy was based on the three-legged stool principle: good habitat, legal predation management and supplementary winter feeding. Arguably the most important of these three legs is the provision of high-quality habitat, because without it, the other two cannot deliver their added benefits. But what does high-quality habitat mean? At the Rotherfield Park Estate it meant an increase from approximately 10% wildlife-friendly habitat across the farmed area in 2010, to 18% by 2023. This happened because of the owner's passion for the grey partridge, the entry into a well-planned Natural England

Agri-environment Scheme (AES) in 2010, together with professional advice from GWCT scientists and advisors. The implemented habitat package was well-balanced and included beetle banks, wild bird seed mixes (from 2017 onwards these were all converted into advanced PARTRIDGE mixes – see page 37), cultivated uncropped margins, pollen and nectar mixes, flower-rich grass margins, extended overwintered stubbles and wildlife-friendly hedgerow management. You can read about these measures in more detail by visiting our story map: gwct.org.uk/rotherfieldmap.

To monitor project progress, we conducted annual breeding bird surveys between April-June, spring and autumn gamebird counts, nocturnal hare and owl surveys from 2017-2023, and several winter bird surveys with the help of a consultant. The total number of birds recorded during this time was an impressive 101 different species, of which 56 were regular breeders (15 of which are UK red-listed and 11 amber-listed), 10 irregular breeders, 20 passing migrants and 15 wintering guests. For an English lowland mixed farm these are quite remarkable numbers.

Given the project's focus on the grey partridge, it is particularly interesting to look at how well the grey partridge and other farmland birds more generally have

(Above) Red-listed birds, such as yellowhammers, all benefited from management targeted at grey partridge conservation.
© Oly Berriman



Francis Buner is our head of lowland wildlife recovery and is keen to show how farmland bird recovery is achievable.



Arguably even more impressive is the recovery of several other UK red-listed farmland birds during the project period, a direct result of the grey partridge’s ability to act as an umbrella species

(Above) The linnet, increased by 114% against a national trend of only +4% (2010-2020, BTO bird trends); charms of goldfinches are regularly seen feeding on teasels in the PARTRIDGE flower plots; the grey partridge population remained small but stable during the 10-year project period after reintroduction.

© Jochem Sloothaak, Ian Gould, Adrian Eugen Ciobaniuc

fares during the project’s lifespan. The grey partridge was reintroduced on the Rotherfield Park Estate using GWCT’s best practice guidelines between 2004 and 2012, after the last wild partridges were recorded in the mid-1990s. Since 2013, the average number of spring pairs was 18, and the average number of individuals in autumn was 73, with autumn stocks reaching 100 or more in 2014, 2017 and 2018. These numbers may seem low to some readers, but in the context they make perfect sense as the area is only semi-optimal for grey partridge, owing to the relatively high proportion of woodland and complete isolation from the nearest wild grey partridge population. Nevertheless, the small grey partridge population remained stable during the 10-year period after reintroduction, which makes it the first documented

case in the UK (and almost certainly in Europe), where the species has been re-established successfully from zero.

Arguably even more impressive is the recovery of several other UK red-listed farmland birds during the project period, a direct result of the grey partridge’s ability to act as an umbrella species. Notably the linnet, which increased by 114% against a national trend of only +4% (2010-2020, BTO bird trends) during almost the same period. The whitethroat increased by 68%, while nationally it decreased by 10%. The skylark increased by 34% (+3% across Britain) and the yellowhammer increased by 7% against a national decline of 13%. Another regular, red-listed breeder was the lapwing with an average of 10 nesting pairs per year, which is more than anywhere else in east Hampshire.

Wildlife friendly habitat, such as cultivated uncropped margins, accounts for 18% of the 500-ha farmland project area.



If all UK arable farmland went through a transformation like the Rotherfield Park Estate did during the GWCT's involvement, the national decline of farmland birds could be halted or even reversed for most species



(L-R) Skylark numbers increased by 34% and whitethroat by 68%.
© Markus Jenny





Habitat for partridges

The advanced PARTRIDGE mix is a variant of the more commonly known wild bird seed mix, with the difference being that it can last up to 10 years and provide year-round habitat for a wide range of farmland wildlife. It can be created by planting a strip of minimum 15 metres wide (to avoid becoming a predator trap), or as a 0.5ha to 1-ha block. The mix contains between 20-30 different plant species, most of which are native flowers. In its first year, the mix provides foraging cover including arable annual flora such as poppies, cornflowers and corn cockle, and sunflower, triticale, millet and kale for winter cover. From the second year onwards, the native perennial flowers, together with sweet fennel, chicory and perennial rye provide pollen and nectar for insects from ground level up the entire vertical structure, from early spring to late autumn. At this stage the plots also provide suitable nesting habitat for grey partridge, whitethroat, skylark, corn bunting, quail and many others, a winter food source for seed eating farmland birds, and year-round habitat for mice, voles and shrews, which in turn render the plots favoured hunting habitats for kestrels, barn owls and long-eared owls. We recommend a rotational approach to management, whereby from year two, maximum half of the plot is re-established, typically by mowing in autumn and top-soil cultivation in the following early spring. If well established at the beginning, the plot will not need resowing, but instead will regenerate itself.

Other interesting observations include the woodlark, with one pair recorded breeding irregularly (ie. not every year) until 2018, but breeding annually with slowly increasing numbers since 2019, reaching four pairs in 2022. A new breeder altogether was the stonechat (one to two pairs since 2019), previously only recorded as a winter guest or passing migrant.

Anecdotal highlights include a singing icterine warbler in spring 2018 and a singing corn bunting in 2021, although neither stayed on for the breeding season. Singing quail were recorded in 2010 and again in 2022. During most winters, at least one hen harrier could regularly be observed hunting the strips and blocks of wild bird seed mixes, and one winter a great grey shrike was present for several weeks. A further highlight is the presence of all UK owls, with barn owl, tawny owl and little owl breeding regularly, and short-eared owl and long-eared owl recorded as regular winter guests, especially in the area with the highest amount of advanced PARTRIDGE mixes. The area also hosts the

highest known number of wintering woodcock in Hampshire, as well as a very healthy local breeding population.

Overall, I think it is fair to say that if all UK arable farmland went through a transformation like the Rotherfield Park Estate did during the GWCT's involvement, the national decline of farmland birds could be halted or even reversed for most species. ■

MORE INFORMATION

Why not try our grey partridge or farmland bird conservation package on your own farm or better, across a Farmer Cluster? Unsure how to do it? Contact us to receive tailored professional advice to help you recover your local farmland wildlife. Email Francis Buner fbuner@gwct.org.uk or contact our advisory team by email advisory@gwct.org.uk or ring 01425 651013.



A new consultation is proposing to licence gamebird releasing in Wales.
© Piotr Krzeslak

Public consultation launched

Proposal to licence gamebird releasing in Wales

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES (NRW) LAUNCHED A 12-WEEK PUBLIC CONSULTATION in March, proposing to licence gamebird releasing in Wales by moving pheasants and red-legged partridges to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. We have made it clear that we prefer self-regulation and have found little evidence to suggest that released gamebirds harm the environment. To create a broader picture, we conducted a survey to demonstrate compliance with the Code of Good Shooting Practice and stocking densities. However, if NRW proceeds with the licensing proposal, it is reassuring to know that it will use GWCT's sustainable releasing guidelines, which are based on peer-reviewed science, as the basis for its licences. These guidelines are endorsed and supported by all countryside organisations and underpin sustainable gamebird management in the UK. For more information see gwct.org.uk/sustainable-releasing. The consultation can be found at gwct.org.uk/nrwproposal.

GWCT Welsh Game Fair

Countdown to the Welsh Game Fair

THE GWCT WELSH GAME FAIR WILL RETURN FOR A SECOND YEAR FROM 9-10 September, to the Vaynol Estate in Bangor, North Wales. Following its success in 2022, the two-day event will again include the main ring, gundog scurries, a shooting line and fishing demonstrations. New attractions include a Heritage Village, Conservation Village, Fishing Village, Wellbeing Village and Carbon Zero Village that will showcase everything Wales has to offer. From 'have-a-go skills sessions' to sensory tours, there promises to be something for everyone. Buy your tickets at welshgamefair.org.

MORE INFORMATION

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



Ringing woodcock

Determining origins

THE FIRST SEASON OF THE PEN LLŶN woodcock project, part of a five-year initiative, ended successfully. Woodcock were ringed on three estates, and foraging surveys using thermal binoculars were conducted twice on each estate. A new survey method using a drone-mounted thermal camera was also tested. More than 300 woodcock wings were collected from local and Welsh shoots to conduct stable isotopic analyses to determine the birds' origin in Wales and the project has been well supported by the shooting community.

Impressive bird counts

THE WELSH FARMLAND BIRD INITIATIVE has yielded impressive results. The project investigated the benefits of wild bird seed mix (WBSM) cover crops and supplementary feeding to farmland birds on two livestock farms in north Wales. Winter surveys showed a six-fold increase in birds in WBSM areas compared with control pasture areas, and breeding bird surveys showed a two-fold increase. Insects used as chick food saw increased diversity and abundance, and butterfly numbers tripled. These results highlight the importance of conservation measures for small farmland birds, such as linnets and chaffinches, which are currently red-listed and amber-listed respectively in Wales.



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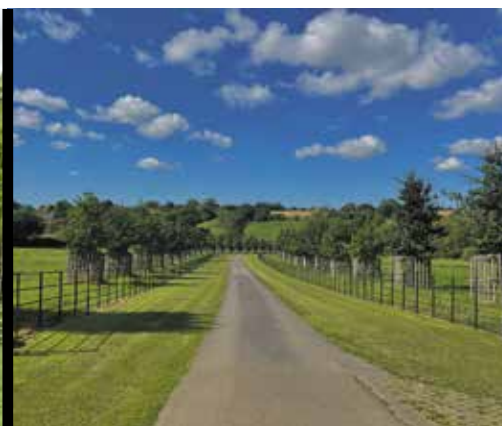
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Budding artists

Entries open for the GWCT art competition

IN AUGUST, THE 2023 GWCT ART competition opens to pupils in Perth & Kinross, Angus and Aberdeenshire. Entrants must submit artwork depicting their favourite British game or wildlife species. At the 2022 prize-giving event held at Fingask Castle, children participated in various activities such as art workshops, gundog demonstrations and farm visits. Falconry displays and a slow-cooked venison feast were also featured, and prizes, including farm visit vouchers from the Royal Highland Education Trust, were awarded.

Lars Rattray's painting of a pheasant.

GWCT Scottish Game Fair

A fun-packed fair on offer this summer

THE GWCT SCOTTISH GAME FAIR IS RETURNING TO SCONE PALACE, PERTHSHIRE, from 30 June to 2 July. The fair will feature a variety of displays, demonstrations and have-a-go attractions related to fishing, ferrets, falconry, guns, gundogs, and game cookery. It is Scotland's largest and longest-running Game Fair, and it raises awareness of conservation issues while supporting the GWCT as a fundraiser. Visitors can also enjoy Nick Nairn's game-based menu at his riverside restaurant, and live cooking demonstrations.

The main ring will host a range of events, such as pipe bands, gundogs, falconry, Highland dancing, dog agility and lumberjacks. The Highland Pony Society is celebrating its 100th anniversary and launching a commemorative hardback book, with the breed featuring in the main ring and the Fred Taylor Trophy for Working Hill Ponies taking place on Sunday.

The Fishing Village will provide expert casting demonstrations and one-to-one lessons, and Gunmakers' Row, sponsored by Pulsar, will showcase a variety of new and used shotguns, rifles, airguns, optics, accessories and clothing. Mordor Gundogs will host the World of Gundogs, and the Four Nations International Gundog Competition, sponsored by Kronch dog food, will take place on Saturday. Lastly, visitors can shop for artisan food, country clothing, footwear and accessories from more than 400 exhibitors. For more information visit scottishfair.com.

Listen to the Land

The GWCT Scottish Game Fair is bringing back its engaging talk series, 'Listen to the Land', chaired by Linda Mellor. Speakers include game chef Tim Maddams, discussing his new game shooting model; Amy Rankine, speaking on foraging and wild food; farmer, conservationist, and author Patrick Laurie; Tom Turnbull, chairman of the Association of Deer Management Groups, offering advice on maximising your stalking experience; and award-winning author and singer Malachy Tallach, among others.



Effervescent chef Nick Nairn returns with his riverside restaurant.



Felix Meister won the Higher Education category of the 2023 Lantra ALBAS awards.

Top award for Felix

GWCT research assistant wins ALBAS award

GWCT FIELD RESEARCH ASSISTANT Felix Meister has won the Higher Education category of the 2023 Lantra ALBAS awards, while studying Game and Wildlife Management at Borders College. The ALBAS recognise accomplishments in land-based business and aquaculture. Felix's lecturer, Garry Dickson, praised his work ethic, communication skills and attention to detail on written projects.

New address for Scottish HQ

GWCT SCOTLAND HQ HAS MOVED from Perth to the Hopetoun Estate, South Queensferry. Rory Kennedy, director, Scotland, said: "The opportunity arose to re-locate and while Perth had its advantages there are equally many positives about being situated on the edge of Edinburgh, close to main transport links and to the heart of policy making in Scotland." Details for GWCT's new Scottish HQ are: Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Hopetoun Estates Office, South Queensferry, EH30 9SL. T: 0131 202 7670. E: scottishhq@gwct.org.uk.

The high-quality habitat at Balgonie will remain for a new project that will show how productive farmland can co-exist with biodiversity measures.



© Stuart Sutherland

Farming and biodiversity

Legacy of PARTRIDGE project secured

THE EU INTERREG PARTRIDGE PROJECT IS ENDING IN SCOTLAND THIS YEAR, BUT A new project, PepsiCo FAB (Farming Arable Biodiversity), has secured co-funding for two more years. It will work with six farmers across Fife and Angus to show how productive farmland can co-exist with biodiversity measures. Partners include PepsiCo, GWCT, Scottish Agronomy and NatureScot, who will test new tools for future agri-environment schemes. The project builds on PARTRIDGE's achievements, with most of the high-quality habitat at Balgonie remaining. Project facilitator, Fiona Torrance, said: "This project will ensure that we can take the approach we have developed during the PARTRIDGE project and scale it up so that we can demonstrate its potential across Scotland."

Waders return

Waders return to our Scottish demonstration farm

THE WADERS AT GWSDF AUCHNERRAN are keeping us busy and at the time of writing we had 52 lapwing, 16 oystercatcher and three curlew nests. So far, 20 lapwing nests have hatched, with a maximum of 55 chicks initially hatching. However, we estimate that only around 30 of those lapwing chicks are still alive. 2023 has proven to be a challenging year for lapwing, with 20 lapwing nests failed already (compared with a total 28 failures in 2022). Of these, 12 have been predated, with a range of different predators responsible, including corvids, foxes and even a pine marten. We look forward to providing an update in the next *Gamewise*.





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It's not rocket science

Grey partridge conservation projects are often associated with great estates, but Simon Maudlin and Melvin Wright proved it can be done on a smaller scale. Joe Dimpleby reports

Project Profile

Location: Biggleswade, Bedfordshire

Type of landscape: Arable (winter/spring wheat, onions)

Acreage: 810 acres including arable 616 (largest field 44), grassland 70, woodland 30, conservation measures 94

Percentage in conservation: 11.5%

Conservation focus: Soil health and fertility

Conservation measures: grass margins, field corners, floristically-enhanced margins, nectar flower mix, beetle banks, wild bird seed mix, low input spring cereal, overwintered stubble, low depth cultivation, game cover, supplementary feeding, hedge planting, woodland management, predation management

Funding grants: HLS, ELS





Bedfordshire may not be a county that springs to mind in connection with wild grey partridges, but Simon and his brother Richard have successfully re-established the species on their family farm in Upper Caldecote, alongside an intensive arable farming operation. Starting from a low of four pairs of partridges in 2002, they reached 45 pairs by 2021 and general farmland bird numbers have increased by 1,200%. For a red-listed species that has declined by 95% since 1970, largely due to the intensification of agriculture, this is an astonishing achievement and stands as a beacon of hope for the UK's disappearing biodiversity. What's remarkable is that it all began with a straightforward and inexpensive combination of grass margins round field edges, hedge planting and predator control.

Since the '60s, Caldecote House Farm and several neighbouring farms had been operating as market gardens with a mosaic of crops providing year-round food and shelter for a thriving partridge population. But from the late '90s onwards, vegetables were replaced by cereals. By 2002, the ever-larger fields were being ploughed to the boundary and left barren, especially from January to March before a spring crop was sown. This meant few nest sites and little protection from predators and weather. At



Caldecote, the dwindling population of wild greys retreated to a single area round a copse in the middle of the farm.

Change came in 2003 when cross compliance rules required an uncultivated margin two metres from the middle of every field boundary as a condition of receiving the Common Agricultural Policy farm subsidy. Simon said: "We improved the few hedges by ploughing right up to them, then sowing the base with tussocky grass. We also made sure the field edges were graded, so partridge chicks didn't get stuck in the ruts. As soon as the margins were established, the partridges started to expand their range across the farm and numbers increased."

Another simple measure they instigated was hedge planting with 4.7 kilometres (km) of new hedges, with the farm boasting around 9.4km in all. In 2006, financial support came through Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), that paid for income lost from taking land out of production including field corners, wild bird seed plots and over-wintered stubbles. Simon said: "ELS was the saviour really. Without it we would probably have lost the partridges."

Alongside hedging and the ELS measures, Simon controlled foxes and crows with the help of his friend Melvin Wright. When Melvin stepped up predation management from 2006-2007 it precipitated a marked improvement in partridge numbers. The intention was not to eradicate predators, but to alleviate the pressure

(L-R) Melvin Wright and Simon Maudlin in one of Caldecote's low-input cereal strips. (Top) Signs are essential to remind walkers that they risk destroying nests in the breeding season.



Joe Dimbleby our head of communications is keen to show that grey partridge success can be achieved with hard work and dedication.

Excellent habitat including grass margins and 9.4km of hedges has helped grey partridges flourish. The shoot pays for 12 tonnes of wheat put out in hoppers (inset) for the birds.



In all, 11.5% of the farm is now in conservation measures, but with minimal impact on production

on farmland birds during the breeding season. He said: "If you don't have the habitat, you are wasting your time with predator control. Equally if you really want to get your numbers up, it's essential."

The predator control season lasts from February to July, which Melvin fits in around a normal workday. He said: "Grey partridge conservation is not rocket science but you need to be motivated. I'm passionate about the partridges and I love seeing all the wildlife that comes from their conservation."

The farm won the Purdey Award for Conservation in 2011 and that year it achieved an impressive autumn count of 375 wild grey partridges. In 2012, the farm entered a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement alongside the ELS. This helped to fund more conservation measures and, importantly, increase the width of the buffer strips with the addition of four and six metre margins. Simon said: "The HLS scheme allowed us to increase our options, boosting the biodiversity significantly. We made sure all the conservation areas were easily distinguished from the arable crops so they weren't damaged by farm machinery, especially drift from insecticide applications, which would have a knock-on effect on breeding success because there would be fewer insects for the chicks."

In all, 11.5% of the farm is now in conservation measures, but with minimal impact on production. Simon explained: "We took in all the wet corners, the bits near woodland, and squared off the fields, which makes it easier to operate large machinery. These days with precision farming there are more odd bits of land that can be managed for wildlife." Next to the field corners, Simon

sows areas of maize, wild bird seed mix and low-input cereal side by side in a rotation, to keep the soil healthy, reduce the weed burden and provide a variety of habitat.

The ever-increasing efficiency of modern farming leaves very little grain on the ground, so the seeds in the cover crops are vital to sustain the farmland birds through the hungry gap. Melvin also aims to have one feeder per pair of partridges, and they are kept topped up until the

90 years and counting

Neville Kingdon
GWCT scientist



The GWCT would be delighted to see more farms and estates embark on fantastic partridge projects such as Caldecote. We would also encourage farms of any size, with or without shoots, to join the Partridge Count Scheme if they have any number of resident wild birds. The PCS, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary, is free, and participants need only count their partridges once in spring and again in autumn. In return they receive advice, invitations to events and a newsletter. With the dramatic decline of British wildlife, the scheme is more important than ever. To join, visit gwct.org.uk/pcs or for more information please email pcs@gwct.org.uk.

It's not like the big estates here. Everything is done on a shoestring, and it shows it's possible

end of May. In addition to five tonnes of seed funded by the HLS agreement, 12-15 tonnes of wheat is paid for by the small family shoot, which has been going since the 1960s. Pheasants and red-legged partridges are released, but never greys to avoid them interbreeding with the wild stock.

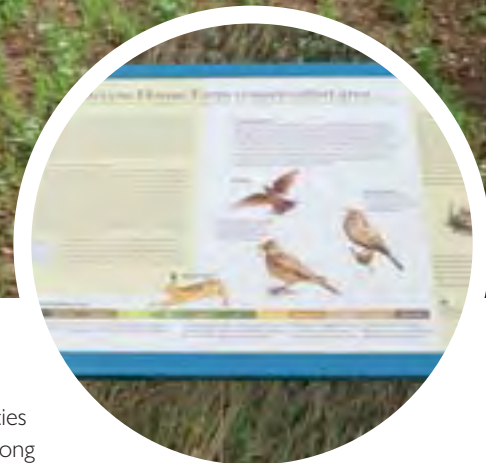
A strict quota of wild birds is harvested only when the autumn counts are high enough to ensure a sustainable population, and they are never shot later than the end of November to avoid taking birds that have paired up.

Caldecote House Farm exemplifies how small, cost-effective measures can hold the key to conservation success and that it's often about timing. Simon waits until the second week of August to cut the first three metres of any grass margin, giving late clutches a chance to hatch. These vital second broods often result from a pair losing their first nest, due to predation or poor weather in May/June. He said: "We aim to have at least one conservation measure in every field at all times, so the birds never have to spend too long finding food or shelter."

The devil is equally in the detail when it comes to the farming operation, which is contracted out. Melvin said: "These days we don't like two large combines working in the same field as it increases the chance of wildlife being accidentally killed. We also try to avoid night-time harvesting when young broods are more likely to be roosting in the crop."

Caldecote joined the GWCT Partridge Count Scheme (PCS) in 2003 and as well as making an important contribution to the national register of the species, annual counts make it possible to gauge the impact of new measures or changes in farming. Mel said: "I would strongly recommend joining the PCS even if you only have a handful of pairs on your land. Counting's pretty easy once you've done it a few times and you get to know where the birds will be."

Because grey partridge are an indicator species, the counts reveal the health of a farm's ecology in general. If they are doing well, so is everything else, and Caldecote is a fabulous example of this principle. Brown hares are



abundant, and among the many species counted on the farm are red-listed song thrushes, corn buntings, linnets and yellowhammers.

Simon and Melvin's enthusiasm and commitment are inspiring. If what's been achieved at Upper Caldecote was replicated across the UK's intensive arable farms, it would reverse the national decline of the grey partridge and much of the UK's biodiversity besides. Looking ahead, Simon is keen to extend the HLS agreement then move to the new ELMS schemes. He said: "We learnt a lot as we've gone along but there's good advice for those starting out. For us it's always been the GWCT and its Allerton Project demonstration farm."

Mel added: "It's not like the big estates here. Everything is done on a shoestring, and it shows it's possible. There's nothing like seeing a covey of young partridges and knowing they have got everything they need to survive to adulthood. There aren't many places where you can see that now. The challenge is getting the word out to others and encouraging them to have a go." ■

Simon sows maize, wild bird seed mix and low-input cereal side by side to provide a variety of habitat. Information boards (inset) near footpaths explain the wildlife conservation work to the public.

Wildlife Highlights



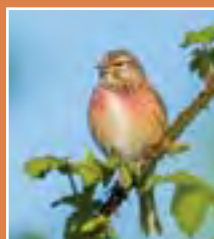
Lapwing



Skylark



Brown hare



Linnet



Corn bunting



Yellowhammer

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Joining forces

Natural Capital Advisory enables farmers to achieve fair financial reward for the services they are providing

As reported in the last *Gamewise*, GWCT announced the launch of its new commercial subsidiary – Natural Capital Advisory (NCA). The business sits alongside the long-established Game & Wildlife Advisory Ltd, which in turn provides NCA's biodiversity auditing and monitoring services.

NCA has already become a key point of contact in the natural capital sector thanks to the GWCT helping farmers to set up the Environmental Farmers Group (EFG) in the Hampshire Avon catchment and Peakland Environmental Farmers (PEF) in the Peak District, as well as its work with industry and Government institutions, such as the Green Finance Institute. Managing director, Christopher Sparrow's rural portfolio background, has helped NCA to provide the commercial guidance necessary to secure the EFG and PEF's initial bids for green funding, as well as securing the first of the natural capital trades that we feel will soon fuel this marketplace.

Teresa Dent, GWCT's chief executive, said: "The new co-operatives are an evolution of the Farmer Cluster model invented by the GWCT 10 years ago, and build significant scale onto the principle that by working together on a landscape scale, neighbouring farms can achieve the environmental outcomes society wants to see. Given farmers manage 72% of the UK landmass, they will be critical to delivering the Government's now legally-binding national environmental targets."

Funding for new catchment-scale conservation projects run by the farmer-led EFG and PEF will be a blend of public and private funding brokered by the NCA. This initiative allows individual farmers, who would otherwise struggle to take advantage of green finance (due to their small scale), to navigate complex emerging natural capital markets. In NCA, investors now have a single point of contact representing a large group of landowners, and collectively farmers have the power to negotiate fair financial reward for the ecosystem services they provide. Furthermore, thanks to their land management expertise they offer value-for-money environmental gain with public and private investment supporting rural communities rather than going to outside agencies.

NCA is currently providing environmental biodiversity baselining services to farms and estates. These will give farms and estates a detailed understanding of the current value of biodiversity and potential opportunities

This delivers value-for-money environmental gain with public and private investment supporting rural communities

for improving their natural assets, and they are essential for landowners to be able to tap into environmental trades and offset markets. Roger Draycott, our director of advisory, who leads the team of GWCT ecologists carrying out biodiversity audits said: "NCA is a natural progression of the GWCT's advisory work helping private land managers increase biodiversity on their holdings. It's right that the Trust should be helping farmers and game managers capitalise on the current drive for nature recovery through a new business model better equipped to meet the challenges of an emerging market. Identifying new sources of funding for land managers is critical given the imminent ending of the Basic Payment System."

The fact that NCA can draw on the GWCT's research and the Allerton Project research and demonstration farm at Loddington (see page 17), guarantees investors high quality cutting-edge environmental services. A good example is the establishment of GWCT's new UK Hedgerow Carbon Code, which is based on a metric developed by the Allerton Project in association with Defra. NCA is well placed to establish other national registries to underpin natural capital trading and is working with a range of partners looking at how best to measure carbon capture, soil and water quality improvement and increased biodiversity.

NCA recently completed its first nutrient neutrality trade on behalf of the EFG in the new Government-regulated developer market, which is a great milestone for the company. Looking ahead it sees the greatest long-term opportunity lies in partnerships with the corporate and supply chain sectors. There will be a growing need for large companies to report and, in time, mitigate their impact and dependence on the natural environment in which they operate – often referred to as Environmental Social Governance or ESG. NCA is uniquely placed to facilitate this by overseeing the design, finance, execution and monitoring of large-scale conservation projects. ■



James Howard is a member of the Peakland Environmental Farmers group.

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to find out more or to speak to someone at NCA, please email: nca@gwct.org.uk or contact us on 07458 147154. naturalcapitaladvisory.co.uk



ENVIRONMENTAL FARMERS GROUP (EFG)

The GWCT has helped facilitate the EFG as a farmer collaboration in the Hampshire Avon River Catchment. Lead farmers from environmental Farmer Clusters across the region came together to join forces and create a 'Supercluster'. The aim is to deliver environmental change over a larger scale and achieve fair financial reward for delivering this change.

As of the beginning of April, EFG has more than 100 subscribing members covering nearly 43,000 hectares (ha). It has recently completed its first trade worth c. £1m and has a further trading pipeline of £11m. The group is going from success to success and was recently used as a case study in the UK Government's Green Finance Strategy.

PEAKLAND ENVIRONMENTAL FARMERS (PEF)

PEF grew from groups of local farmers and organisations in the Peak District area who wanted to build an equivalent model to the EFG in the upland environment. The group sees a need for a farmer-led organisation in the area which can take advantage of the emerging natural capital sector to deliver environmental change at scale in the Peak District.

Importantly, farmers want to deliver this change hand-in-hand with farming. That is why the group has been meeting since summer 2022 and now has nearly 70 farmers signed up covering more than 34,000ha. Its launch was widely reported and its success and ambition was highlighted by NFU President, Minette Batters, in her NFU conference speech.

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In Brief



GAME 23 success

GUESTS ENJOYED GAME 23 IN MARCH where the latest topical issues of interest to everyone in the game management industry were discussed. GWCT speakers included Julie Ewald, who examined the history of the National Gamebag Census and highlighted the importance of long-term data sets. Rufus Sage and PhD student Nathan Williams explained the latest GWCT research on foxes and gamebird releasing and stressed how it was important to wait for the science. Advisor, Matt Goodall, gave an update on Natural Resources Wales consultation on gamebird releasing. Scottish advisor, Nick Hesford, spoke about the EpiCollect5 app (see page 52) to collect a range of species, habitat and conservation action data directly from land managers.

Avian Influenza was covered by Ian Jones from Hafren Veterinary Group and Tim Weston from the NGO, and Spike Butcher spoke about the joint efforts of Aim to Sustain.

In conclusion, Roger Draycott emphasised how important the GWCT's research-informed, evidence-led practice is to support sound, practical game and wildlife management in the countryside, especially in forming future policy. For a full report see gwct.org.uk/game23report.

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Around the shoots

Innovative research in practice

Allerton Project Shoot, Loddington

Spring has been a busy time in the woodlands on the shoot, with some much-needed habitat management being undertaken in most of our pens. Young trees that were planted 20 or 30 years ago have now grown too tall and many pens have become too shaded. Significant amounts of timber needed removing to provide the ideal one-third open space, one-third shrubby cover and one-third roosting habitat that pheasants love. This will continue over the next few years, with cut material either being removed and sold as sawn timber if good enough quality, or chipped and used to fuel the Allerton Project visitor centre. Some brash will also be left in piles to encourage bramble and other ground cover where shrubby cover is lacking. Ensuring good quality habitat and proper stocking densities within pheasant pens helps minimise stress and risk of disease spreading through newly-released birds, and helps ensure better quality pheasants for early season days.

GWSDF Auchnerran Shoot

Game crops on the farm were sown in May with the KALB1 Alba mix provided by Kings Crops. These game crops provide an essential habitat and food resource for gamebirds and songbirds, particularly through the winter months. At GWSDF, the game crop fields are also favoured by a relatively unusual group of birds; the waders. Each year, lapwing, oystercatcher and this year, a curlew, utilise the fields for nesting. As crop growth is non-uniform due to the continual pressure from rabbits, bare areas of ground are present, especially once the game crop has died back in the spring. Lapwing and oystercatcher appear to favour these bare ground areas as nesting sites. This year, across 3.7 hectares of ground utilised for game crops, nine lapwing, four oystercatcher and one curlew have nested. Particular care is taken when planting the game crops to avoid disturbance and damage to nesting sites. Nests are marked so agricultural machinery can easily avoid them, and in the event chicks are present before ploughing, they are located and moved to a neighbouring field. Overall, the establishment of game crops has significantly increased the abundance of biodiversity on the farm.

On the ground



CREATE WET AND MUDDY patches in areas which would normally hold water for the benefit of insects, birds and mammals.



This summer

CHECK HEDGES AND TREES PLANTED

in recent years. Remove guards from dead trees recording the numbers in preparation for replanting next winter, and from established trees before they restrict growth.

OUR TEAM OF ADVISORS ARE BUSY

carrying out habitat audits, assessing the current condition of the habitats on farms and estates, we are using our knowledge and experience to calculate the potential of the habitat to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). In November, all new building developments will have to prove that they are compensating for the loss in habitat which occurs as a result of the development, plus deliver an increase of 10% through habitat creation or enhancement. It is expected that much of the delivery of this habitat creation and enhancement will occur on farms and estates through the trading of BNG units. If you are interested in commissioning an audit to assess the potential of your land to deliver BNG and the potential revenue it could generate, please contact our Advisory Service advisory@gwct.org.uk or 01425 651013.

ATTEND A GWCT BEST PRACTICE

course. Keep up to date with the changes in corvid control, tunnel trapping, fox snaring and game management. Strive to be the best in the industry.



Evidence gathering has got much easier with the Epicollect5 app.

HOW TO...

get the most out of data

Increasing concerns about the potential ecological consequences of how our countryside is managed mean that there is, now more than ever, pressure on land and wildlife managers to demonstrate evidence of sound management. The use of mobile apps means that evidence gathering is now as easy as clicking a button. However, apps can collect a wealth of information and getting the most from your data can be challenging. Here are our top tips:

1. Choose the right App. The GWCT uses Epicollect5 at our Scottish demonstration farm to record predator control and help efforts to protect wading bird nests. This work has led to developing a range of best practice recording options for use by farms and estates.

2. Get the best training. Through our Advisory Service, we offer a bespoke advice, training and reporting package to help land managers demonstrate evidence of best practice management through mobile app recording.

3. Start recording. The more you record, the more you will get out of your data. Using the Epicollect5 platform, we provide land managers with an easy-to-use method of collecting and maintaining records on all aspects of game and wildlife management.

4. Talk to us. We can help work out your requirements and put in place a recording package to suit your needs. Please contact Nick Hesford (nhesford@gwct.org.uk) or Marlies Nicolai (mmicolai@gwct.org.uk).



DID YOU KNOW?

The EpiCollect5 app can collect a range of species, habitat and conservation action data. Edward Deming once famously quoted: "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion."

DID YOU KNOW? If you are planning to establish a winter cover crop before a spring crop, you should leave an unharvested strip of cereals as winter bird food before returning the land to the normal rotation in the spring.



FOR MORE ADVICE – book a visit or join one of our courses. Get in touch: 01425 651013 (England/Wales) or 0131 202 7670 (Scotland). gwct.org.uk/advisory



CREATING THE ULTIMATE...

Grey partridge brood habitat

(L-R) An extended overwintered stubble, a gamekeeper track, PARTRIDGE mix and a beetle bank far right, with some bushes on it.

Everyone knows that partridge chicks need lots of insects to feed on; what is less well understood is that these need to be soft, squidgy, slow-moving larval forms that are easy to catch. They also need them within easy reach, in an environment with overhead cover where the parents feel safe. The chicks themselves also need to be able to move around easily, without getting soaked by wet vegetation. There are several options available to achieve this.

The classic conservation headland

This was invented by the GWCT more than 40 years ago. It is simply the headland of a cereal crop which receives no insecticides, or herbicides, and usually no fertiliser. The growing crop provides cover, and the broadleaved weeds underneath are the host plants for the creepy crawlies.

Unharvested cereals (AB10)

This Countryside Stewardship option is the perfect copy of a conservation headland, going on to offer a winter food source to a range of other farmland birds like corn buntings and yellowhammers, as well as partridges.

What is less well understood is that insects need to be soft, squidgy, slow-moving larval forms that are easy to catch

Winter bird food (AB9)

The winter bird food option of Countryside Stewardship can also be a great brood habitat so long as it is dominated by cereals. Plants like mustard, fodder radish and linseed can be added to make up the necessary mix.

Enhanced overwintered stubble (AB6)

Leaving unsprayed overwintered cereal stubbles to naturally regenerate until the end of July creates extensive areas of weedy cereal habitat that is great for broods, as well as offering an undisturbed refuge for hibernating insects. For more information see gwct.org.uk/greypartridge.



Unharvested cereals make good partridge brood habitat and offer a winter food source to a range of farmland birds.

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





Turtle doves need shallow access to clean water so that they can feed their chicks.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT...

The iconic purr of the turtle dove

© Helge Sorensen

I am very lucky to see the iconic turtle dove every year, as it forages and nests in and around the Allenford and Martin Down Farmer Cluster. But this is a rare experience for many nowadays as the UK's smallest native dove is the fastest declining bird species and is threatened with global extinction. There are four main factors associated with this decline: loss of suitable habitat in both the breeding and non-breeding range, the availability of clean accessible water, unsustainable levels of hunting on their migration and nest predation and disease, leading to turtle doves producing half as many chicks as they were in the 1970s.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

1. Leave weedy cultivated margins and plots or supplementary feed as the turtle dove's diet is made up exclusively of seeds (such as chickweed, fumitory). They feed in open habitats, commonly on arable and mixed farmland, on wild arable plant seeds and cropped grains. In areas of permanent pasture, scatter some small grains eg. oilseed, on tracks and bare ground.
2. Provide nesting habitat including thick, thorny hedgerows and scrub, such as hawthorn, and climbers such as honeysuckle.
3. Turtle dove chicks are fed a 'crop milk' of water and seed, so it's important to provide

summer-long clean water sources with walk-in access. Seek technical advice before creating a pond – advisory@gwct.org.uk.

4. Turtle dove nests are extremely vulnerable to generalist nest predators eg. magpies. Undertake legal predation control during the breeding season.

Megan Lock is farmland biodiversity advisor, national lead for Farmer Clusters and facilitator for two Farmer Clusters within the Martin Down Supercluster.

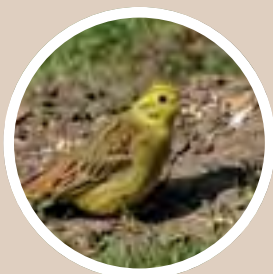


THIS WORK ALSO BENEFITS

Corn bunting



Yellowhammer



Lapwing



Turtle doves migrate

5,000

kilometres from Africa to England every April, leaving by September

© Marcin Perkowski, Peter Thompson

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Countywise

Your county events and fundraising update

BEDFORDSHIRE

Don't miss the Fantastic Four

DON'T MISS OUT ON A TICKET FOR THE **Fantastic Four** raffle to win a day's shooting for a team of eight guns, on four spectacular drives across Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire: Kings Walden, St Paul's Walden, Lilley Manor and Luton Hoo. Tickets cost £200 each and are available at gwct.org.uk/fantasticfour23.

The shoot walk on the 15 June will be at Richard Kendall's Millow Bury Farm, Dunton. With generous sponsorship from Robinson Hall, join us for a delicious hog roast, salad and scrumptious pudding. Tickets cost £20 – please contact Julia Barnes julia@barnesfarming.com.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Gundog and clay shoot days

Chiltern Gundog Society is running a **gundog day** on 25 June at Moreton by kind invitation Messrs. M & R Redman. Classes will include novice working test and novice dog/novice handler. For more information please contact chilterngssecretary@gmail.com.

The Three Challenge Flush will take place on 9 September at Tittershall Lodge **clay shoot** and includes teams of four, shooting three stands of 100 bird flushes. Cost per team is £500 to include refreshments and lunch. Please contact Gay Wilmot-Smith gwilmotsmith@gwct.org.uk.

CHESHIRE

John Whitfield - 'Whitters'

THE CHESHIRE COMMITTEE AND shooting generally lost a stalwart friend, John Whitfield, who sadly passed away on Sunday 18 March. John had not been well for some months although he never lost his sense of humour, nor his hopes of continuing to enjoy his shooting friends' company and his shooting interests.

John had been a committee member for 30 years, always adding constructive ideas and energy to discussion. John's considerable efforts and energy raised the best part of £100K for the GWCT from setting up the clay shoot at the

West Midlands Shooting Ground at Hodnet. The numerous teams present all appreciated John's dry humour, his self-deprecating wisdom and his skilful way of issuing fines for misdemeanours, known only to John.

John ran a partridge shoot at his home at Birchcliffe for 30 years, introducing many guns to sporting birds, which he described as an armed luncheon with wines of rare quality, often in magnums. Those lucky enough to join him always appreciated the company of a man of immense generosity, ready wit and engaging company.



gwct.org.uk/events

CAMBRIDGESHIRE



(L-R) Jenny Mallindine, David Ramply, Diana Wright, Bob Mallindine, Janice Topham, part of the winning team.

Ramp it up win

THE WINNERS OF THE CAMBRIDGE quiz evening was 'Ramp it up'. With quiz master Tim Furbank, it was a fun and competitive evening at the Cambridge Rugby Club, kindly sponsored by Bidwells.

Join us for the **shoot walk** on 26 June at Kingston Wood Estate at 6pm. Tickets £20 per person and will include a light supper and drinks. To book please visit gwct.org.uk/kingstonwoodwalk or contact Sam Topham sam@caldecotemanor.co.uk.

DERBYSHIRE & S YORKSHIRE

Really Wild dinner

AFTER THREE YEARS OF ABSENCE THE fabulous **Really Wild dinner** returned to Thornbridge Hall near Bakewell. Some 130 guests enjoyed a wonderful evening, kicked off by a fizz reception kindly sponsored by TecSec. They then enjoyed abundant game-themed canapés and a three-course dinner provided by Isjoutside caterers. The auction was conducted by Stephen Salloway and raised more than £30,000. None of this could have happened without the generosity of the auction lot donors and some very keen bidders.

CORNWALL

Caerhays clays

CAERHAYS CASTLE WILL ONCE AGAIN be hosting its clay shoot on the 26 August in the castle's famous gardens. A BBQ and bar will be running to keep your energy up, so you can bring those clays down. Prizes will be awarded to those with the highest scores. See page 61 for details.

DEVON

Don't miss out

THERE ARE TICKETS STILL AVAILABLE for the Devon High Four raffle. Limited to 250 tickets the winner will win a chauffeur driven day for eight guns shooting a drive at Ugbrooke, Ashcombe, Berry Pomeroy and Lyneham. See gwct.org.uk/devonhighfour before entries close on Friday 30 June.

A shoot walk will take place at the stunning Castle Hill estate on Thursday 6 July. Our advisory team will be guiding the walk and giving guests a rare insight into the estate. A delicious BBQ will round off the evening, complete with bar. Winslade Manor near Exeter will host the dinner and auction on 29 September. The evening will showcase a stunning game-themed menu along with an auction filled with unique lots. Please contact smiddleton@gwct.org.uk.

ISLE OF WIGHT

Come and join us

GWCT WILL HAVE A STAND AT THE Royal Isle of Wight county show on the 8/9 July. Come and see what's happening on the island with the Environmental Farmers Group and the Farmer Cluster Group.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Join in the debate

COME AND JOIN US AND HEAR FROM leading figures on the latest challenges facing the game and wildlife management sector. This discussion panel evening, chaired by Sir Jim Paice, will take place on Thursday 13 July at Heygates Mill, Northamptonshire. For further information please contact Gay Wilmot-Smith gwilmotsmith@gwct.org.uk.

ESSEX

Sporting Ball

A GAMEKEEPERS EVENING WAS HELD AT Saffron Walden Rugby Club in February and the Sporting Ball in March. The aim of the Gamekeepers evening was to discuss Avian Influenza and the forthcoming implications for shoots, including a panel with representatives from the GWCT, NGO and BASC. Marsden's Game Feeds also spoke about rising feed costs.

The Sporting Ball took place in the wonderful setting of Braxted Park. The event was well attended and BASC guests also brought their shooting simulator which was hugely popular. Auctioneer, Tim Trembath, did a fantastic job and helped raise £21,950. A surprise auction lot offered on the evening by Duncan Clark for a day's shooting at Braxted Park, contributed greatly to the total amount raised. Thank you to all of those who generously donated auction lots for the evening. Look out for the clay day at Coptfold Hall, Margaretting on Friday 9 June.



Guests enjoying the Sporting Ball at the stunning Braxted Park.

HERTFORDSHIRE

Fantastic four and Escoffier game

FINAL TICKETS ARE ON SALE FOR THE Fantastic Four Raffle, to win a day's shooting for a team of eight guns on four spectacular drives across Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire: Kings Walden, St Paul's Walden, Lilley Manor and Luton Hoo. Tickets cost £200 each – strictly limited to 200 tickets. Tickets are available online at gwct.org.uk/fantasticfour23 or contact Julia Barnes at julia@barnesfarming.com.

Join us for an Escoffier Game inspired

lunch on Friday 6 October at the Westminster Kingsway College, London. Boasting an alumni of chefs which include Jamie Oliver, Antony Worrall Thompson, Ainsley Harriott and Sophie Wright, this GWCT lunch could be cooked by the next Michelin-starred chef. Tickets cost £75 and include welcome drinks and canapés, followed by a three-course meal with raffle and auction. Please contact Gay Wilmot-Smith gwilmotsmith@gwct.org.uk.

GCUSA

Mashomack winter fundraiser

GCUSA HELD ITS ANNUAL WINTER FUNDRAISER AT THE MASHOMACK PRESERVE Club in March. Trustees attending included: (L-R) C Conger, H Mainelli, R Hatch (Director), D Dewbrey, J Nolan, J Cahill, M Rickabaugh, J Baker, B Sargent and W Winget. The GCUSA trustees are pleased to announce the election of three new trustees to the board: James Baker of New York, NY; Daryl Dewbrey of Darien, CT; and Jack McCarthy Jr. of New Canaan, CT.

GCUSA's annual Members' Reception and New York Auction is scheduled for Tuesday 14 November at the University Club in Manhattan – all GCUSA and GWCT members are invited to attend. For more information email info@gcusa.org.



KENT

Wonderful wilderness

AROUND 3,300 ACRES OF WONDERFUL wilderness is at the heart of the Merrick family run farm at Elmley. Our visit in early February saw tens of thousands of lapwing, golden plover, teal and widgeon, scattered by the occasional marsh harrier. The continual work in enabling nature to flourish alongside restoring the rich historical heritage of Elmley was apparent everywhere you looked. Thank you to sponsors CLM.

The Kent McNab Challenge raffle, including trout fishing, buck stalking and partridge shooting over pointers will be drawn at the BTF clay day on the 30 June.



© Robert Canis

We are working on a packed diary of events with the Kent and Sussex countryside day on the 20 August and much more.

NORFOLK

Testing knowledge

AN INAUGURAL QUIZ NIGHT WAS HELD AT THE ROSE AND CROWN IN HARPLEY. A full house of 50 participants answered some challenging questions, while enjoying a game pie meal and a drink. On Wednesday 28 June we will be hosting a midday drinks reception for members on our stand (shared with Durrants Ltd) at the Royal Norfolk Show. We will also be holding the draw for the Norfolk Big Four Shoot, a magnificent opportunity to shoot on four different Norfolk Estates on the same day. Tickets are available gwct.org.uk/norfolkfour or contact James Alston jta@honingham.co.uk.

LONDON

Le Gavroche success

IN MARCH, WE HOSTED THE 17TH sporting dinner and auction at Le Gavroche. The evening started with an intimate welcome by Michel Roux Jnr. who took guests through the sumptuous five-course dinner and wines. The menu included stone bass and smoked eel tartare, pigeon turnover,

Michel Roux Jnr hosted the 17th sporting dinner and auction at Le Gavroche.



roasted venison loin, a chocolate opera cake, and petit fours with Graham's port to finish. Charlie Thomas from Bonham's hosted the live auction and together with a luxury raffle raised £60,405. Thank you to all our members and donors, Lincolnshire Game and Sebastian Riley-Smith from Smith & Taylor.

In March we hosted the inaugural Women Who Work In Fieldsports network event in London. The network was founded by Louise Clutterbuck from the British Game Assurance along with Vanessa Steel and Iona Campbell from the GWCT. The evening was an 'In Conversation' with Alexandra Henton, Editor of *The Field*, and Claire Zambuni, Founder of Zambuni Communications. They spoke about their experiences within the fieldsports sector and beyond. There was a fantastic turnout and the night was a huge success. We are grateful to our sponsors Corney & Barrow.

NORTHUMBERLAND



Keen conservationist Charlie Bennett.

Boosting biodiversity

CHARLIE BENNETT, OWNER OF Middleton North Estate will be hosting and sharing his knowledge about investing in a large biodiversity project on 8 June. Over three years they have added new habitats and improved existing ones, as well as producing food, which has created a haven for wildlife and game. Kindly sponsored by Womble Bond Dickinson and Lycetts, tickets cost £30 to include a barbecue. Please contact Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.

YORKSHIRE

Shoot walks

ON 28 JUNE, STUART STARK WILL HOST a walk in the heart of the Vale of York at Fridlington Farms, alongside keeper Charlie Garbutt, and GWCT advisor, Jennie Stafford. This is an opportunity to hear how wild bird rearing has been successful due to an extensive conservation programme for which they won the Purdey Bronze Award for Conservation in 2020.

On 29 June, Neil Colver will host a walk on the Skelton Estate with Dave Newborn, GWCT consultant. This is a superb location where moorland management will be discussed and Colin Gibson will give a short insight into the barn owl population. For more information please contact Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk. Kindly sponsored by Strutt & Parker, tickets cost £30 each to include refreshments.

The stunning views on the Skelton Estate.



SUSSEX



A gundog working test is one of many events taking place this summer.

Summer events

JOIN GWCT SUSSEX FOR AN ACTION-packed summer. The Firle Estate in the outstanding South Downs is the venue for a **shoot walk**, followed by George Butler's **40th shoot evening** and auction in August. A **gundog working test** featuring retrievers, spaniels and HPRs to find the top team/ dog will take place on Sunday 6 August. Finally teams from Kent and Sussex will be challenging you to a **countryside day** on the 20 August for all the family. See diary for details (page 61).

WILTSHIRE

Walks, clays & drinks

AN ALL-SENSES EXPERIENCE IS THE order of the day for the Chalke Valley **farm walk**, with diverse habitats supporting butterflies, wildflowers, insects, mammals and birds. Barbury Shooting School is hosting a sporting **clay event** on 19 July, with the emphasis on discounted junior teams. An autumn **drinks party** and auction, with a flight in a Tiger Moth on offer, is also being planned. See diary for more details.

Biodiversity will be a hot topic at the Chalke Valley farm walk.



SCOTLAND

A record breaking year

ONCE AGAIN, THE WEST OF SCOTLAND committee held its **annual dinner** at Òran Mór and it was another record-breaking year. After a fantastic drinks reception provided by Kinrara Gin and freshly served oysters, the guests were treated to a delicious three-course meal with fantastic fillets of beef carved at the table. Fred Macaulay hosted the evening magnificently, and the silent and live auction raised more than £100,000. Thank you to sponsors Graham Mackinlay & Co Gunmakers and A-Plan Insurance, along with all the suppliers, donors, guests and committee members, without whom the event couldn't happen.

The GWCT Scottish auction and dinner was held on Thursday 4 May at the fabulous Prestonfield House Hotel and raised a fantastic £150,000. A huge thank you to our generous sponsors Saffery Champness, Pentland Land Rover, Invenergy and to Prestonfield House for their continuing support. The lots in the catalogue accounted for more than £130,000 raised through



Guests enjoying the drinks reception at Òran Mór.

the silent auction and live bids on the night – with more from the raffle. Huge thanks to auctioneer Charles Graham-Campbell, energetic and persuasive as ever, and to our hard-working auction committee under the new guidance for 2023 of Tim Wishart and Lois Bayne-Jardine.

WALES

Dovey Valley shoot

SIXTY PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED A CLAY shoot at Dovey Valley Shooting Ground in Ceredigion, mid-Wales. The event comprised 10 teams of six, shooting a total of 100 birds across 12 stands of varying difficulty. The winners received prints donated by artist Owen Williams and the day raised a fantastic £703.

Sue Evans, our Wales director, said: "The work of our regional committees is invaluable in raising awareness about the importance of the GWCT's work for conservation, as well as raising vital support for GWCT Cymru, promoting awareness and fundraising. We're grateful for all the committees' hard work and support."

Teams taking part in the popular Dovey Valley clay shoot in stunning surroundings.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

For a full listing see gwct.org.uk/events

JUNE

- 8 LONDON** clay shoot, Holland & Holland, Northwood, Iona Campbell icampbell@gwct.org.uk.
- 8 NORTHUMBERLAND** farmland walk, Middleton North Estate, Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.
- 9 ESSEX** clay day, Coptfold Hall, Edward Rout edward.rout@struttandparker.com.
- 12 WILTSHIRE** Chalke Valley walk, Stoke Farm, Stoke Farthing, Fleur Fillingham ffillingham@gwct.org.uk.
- 15 BEDFORDSHIRE** shoot walk, Millow Bury Farm, Julia Barnes julia@barnesfarming.com.
- 15 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE** clay shoot, North Lodge Farm, Widmerpool, Lottie Meeson cmeeson@gwct.org.uk.
- 26 CAMBRIDGESHIRE** shoot walk, Kingston Wood Estate, Sam Topham sam@caldecotemanor.co.uk.
- 26 CUMBRIA** Lingholm shoot walk, Portinscale, Keswick, Sarah Peck peckies@aol.com.
- 27 SUFFOLK** shoot walk, Euston Estate, Euston Hall, Thetford, neilgraham2@hotmail.com.
- 28 E YORKSHIRE** shoot walk, Fridlington Farms, Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.
- 28 SHROPSHIRE** Lakeside evening, Upper Shadymoor Farm, Stapleton, Dorrington, Shrewsbury, Joy Fox joy@shadymoor.co.uk.

- 29 N YORKSHIRE** shoot walk, Skelton, Skelton in Cleveland, Saltburn-by-the-Sea, Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.
- 30 KENT** BTF clay day, Ashford, Kent, Fleur Fillingham 07860 879377.
- 30-2 SCOTLAND** GWCT Scottish Game Fair, Scone Palace, Perth, scottishfair.com

JULY

- 6 DEVON** shoot walk, Castle Hill Shoot, Filleigh, Barnstaple, Sam Middleton smiddleton@gwct.org.uk.
- 8 LONDON** summer dinner & auction, Cavalry & Guards Club, Iona Campbell icampbell@gwct.org.uk.
- 8/9 ISLE OF WIGHT** county show, Newport Road, Cowes, Fleur Fillingham 07860 879377.
- 12 SHROPSHIRE** conservation walk, Pool Farm, Smethcott, Church Stretton, Tim Main timmain26@gmail.com.
- 12 NORFOLK** shoot walk, Breckles Grange, Lee Pilkington l.pilkington@netcom.co.uk.
- 19 WILTSHIRE** clay day, Barbury Shooting School, Barbury Castle, Swindon, Fleur Fillingham fillingham@gwct.org.uk.

AUGUST

- 6 SUSSEX** gundog working test, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, Fleur Fillingham 07860 879377.



© Two by two Photography

- 20 KENT/SUSSEX** countryside day, Buckhurst Estate, East Sussex, Fleur Fillingham 07860 879377.
- 26 CORNWALL** clay shoot, Caerhays Castle, Sheila Tidball sheila@caerhays.co.uk.

SEPTEMBER

- 18 LONDON** wild & British dinner, Sussex Restaurant Soho, Iona Campbell icampbell@gwct.org.uk.
- 19 CUMBRIA** pub quiz, The Royal Yew, Dean, Workington, Sarah Peck peckies@aol.com.
- 22 SUFFOLK** clay shoot, Eriswell Lodge, Brandon Road, Brandon, georgeT@sentry.co.uk.
- 27 NORFOLK** drinks party, Cromer Hall, Hall Road, Cromer, justin@dngradyandsons.co.uk.
- 28 LANCASHIRE** dinner, Inn at Whitewell, Forest of Bowland,

- Nick Mason nick.mason@davis-bowring.co.uk.
- 29 DEVON** dinner, Winslade Manor, Clyst St Mary, Sam Middleton smiddleton@gwct.org.uk.

OCTOBER

- 6 NORFOLK** clay shoot, Mid Norfolk Shooting Ground, Fakenham Road, Taverham, office@hardyagronomy.co.uk.
- 12 CHESHIRE** dinner & auction, Manchester Tennis & Racquet Club, Manchester, Pippa Hackett phackett@gwct.org.uk.
- 19 NORTHUMBERLAND** dinner, Northern Counties Club, Newcastle, Sophie Dingwall sdingwall@gwct.org.uk.

We advise checking with the organisers before attending any of the events listed.



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MULBERRY AND LEMON CAKE

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

If you have ever picked ripe mulberries straight from the tree, you will know how much these very moreish, sweet, yet pleasantly tart, fruits stain your skin. The soft berries of the black mulberry (*Morus nigra*) bleed juice the moment you pinch them with your fingers. I guess that's why it's difficult to find mulberries in shops and farmers markets, for their juiciness can make it tricky to make them look 'presentable', at least to the shopper who prefers immaculate looking fruits clad in plastic.

Mulberries ripen from August, by which time the blackberry-like fruits turn a deep crimson red to purple colour. Don't be tempted to harvest them when they're firm and bright red as they will taste unpleasantly sour. Because ripe mulberries are so sweet and juicy, they can become a magnet for hungry wasps so do watch your fingers.

For me, mulberry and lemon is one of the finest fruit-flavour combinations, and this simple yet decadent sticky cake is one of the great garden gifts of high summer.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8)

150g ripe mulberries
1 unwaxed lemon
125g soft butter
175g caster sugar
175g self-raising flour
2 free-range eggs
100g granulated sugar

METHOD

- Grease and line a nine-inch round cake tin with non-stick baking parchment paper.
- Cream the soft butter with the caster sugar. Whisk the eggs and sift the flour, and gradually add both to make the batter. Finely

grate in the lemon zest and beat everything until smooth.

- Pour the cake batter into the baking tin and sprinkle over the mulberries.

- Bake the cake in a medium-hot oven (about 180°C) for 25 minutes until golden.

- Meanwhile, squeeze the lemon juice into a saucepan and heat gently with the granulated sugar to make a syrup.

- Remove the cake from the oven and pierce the surface with a metal skewer. Gradually pour over the lemon syrup, letting it drain into the cake.

- Leave the cake until it's just warm and serve with a big dollop of crème fraîche. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

- The black mulberry is grown and cultivated across the globe, but it originates from the mountainous areas of Mesopotamia and Persia.
- In the 17th Century, King James I imported thousands of black mulberry trees into Britain to aid the cultivation of silkworms, but his enterprise was wholly unsuccessful as silkworm larvae actually prefer to dine on the leaves of the white mulberry tree.
- Tree sap from the black mulberry has been used by indigenous people to treat fungal infections of ringworm.



Mike Short is our head of predation control research. He is passionate about wild and home-grown food, and here shares his enthusiasm for tasty ingredients.



A tailored approach as opposed to a one size fits all is best

Bright Seeds work closely with landowners, farmers and gamekeepers, supplying conservation and game cropping throughout the UK and Europe. It advises on stewardship and conservation scheme compliance, and specialise in wildflowers as well as the establishment of native wildflower meadows. Bright Seeds believe countryside stewardship should be outcome focused and recommend a tailored approach as opposed to a one size fits all.

Bright Seeds recognise the importance, where appropriate, of land managers working together. It welcomes the introduction of Countryside Stewardship (CP) Plus, believing its less prescriptive and more flexible approach puts those who know and tend the land in the driving seat.

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How J.S Wright & Sons adopt a responsible approach to willow tree and cricket bats

For more than 125 years, the name J.S. Wright & Sons has stood for integrity and professionalism. What started in 1894 from an approach to supply willow trees to make cricket bats for W.G Grace, has seen the company grow to planting 30,000 trees across Britain every single year.

J.S. Wright & Sons has seen the range of benefits of planting a willow plantation to enhance the game shooting on a farm or estate. Director Oliver Wright explained: "Once the trees are semi-mature, the birds should be able to fly over them while we carry out selective felling when they are mature so the whole landscape is not changed at once. We also make use of the undergrowth that can be allowed to grow under the trees for game and wildlife habitat, and willow trees planted along riverbanks can enhance habitat and sure up the banks from erosion."

Trusted by landowners up and down the country, the company's reputation for planting and maintaining willow trees is renowned and ultimately leads to the production of the finest cricket bats used by some of the most famous players and teams in the world. But trust and reputation doesn't just happen overnight. It comes from decades and decades of showing responsibility. Identifying the right land for planting and evaluating carefully what is already living on that land are always at the forefront of any projects.

Oliver added: "We are always acutely aware of our responsibilities when it comes to sensitive sites. Every possible wildlife is taken into consideration when our team is on the site and carrying out risk assessments. Our aim is to always enhance or protect any form of wildlife. We see more wildlife in a willow plantation than anywhere else – including snakes, owls, woodcock and deer. So we won't fell any tree during bird nesting season and we always check for any ground-nesting birds."

J.S. Wright & Sons pride themselves on their passion and professionalism of the craft and their long-standing relationships with landowners over decades and decades. "We treat every client the same, whether they own one acre or thousands of acres, and we look after your land as if it was our own."

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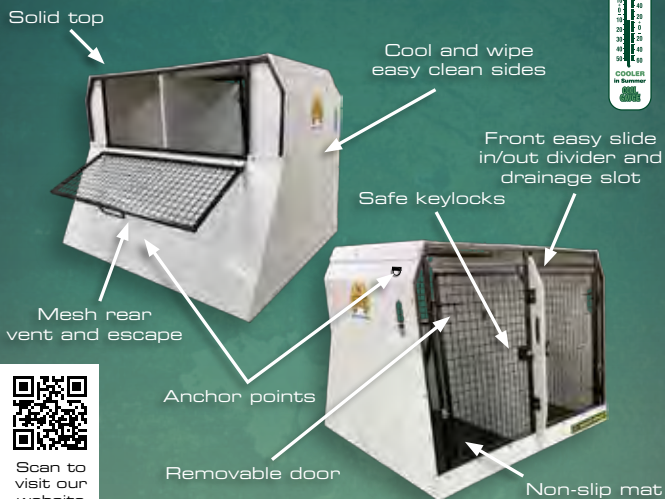
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THE FINAL WORD

JAMES MORGAN

A team approach has resulted in an abundance of wildlife at Longford Estate

James Morgan has worked as the gamekeeper at the Longford Estate in Wiltshire, for 20 years running the family shoot. It covers approximately 5,000 acres and is a mixed pheasant and partridge shoot. The estate is a proud member of the Allenford Farmer Cluster, which is also part of the Martin Down Supercluster.

What's the best advice you've been given?

To work closely with the farm. Gamekeepers and farm managers can have a tricky relationship at times but if you work together, it has huge benefits for the shoot, the farm and wildlife.

What motivates you?

As a solo gamekeeper, you've got to be very self-motivated. The spring mornings and late summer evenings are some of the best times

to be outside, especially with the abundance of wildlife we help protect and conserve. I'm very lucky to work on such a lovely estate.

What do you think the relationship is between shooting and conservation?

Shooting and conservation go hand in hand. Shoots across the country do a huge amount for conservation through having a great understanding of wildlife and their overall needs to thrive. This can include planting hedges, managing and planting woodlands, mixed cover crops, predator control and much more. Conservation and habitat creation is the backbone of any good shoot.

Why is the GWCT's research important?

The GWCT has been a massive inspiration to me throughout my career. It's important to support the Trust because it is an

unbiased organisation that uses scientific research to help fight our corner and help people understand the benefits of shooting and conservation. You can't argue with the science whatever it proves.

Who has inspired you?

Peter Thompson, former GWCT biodiversity advisor, was instrumental in working with the farm and Natural England to create the conservation area we have today when the estate moved from Higher Level Stewardship to Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship. His knowledge and passion for wildlife motivated and inspired the whole team.

Why is it important that gamekeepers and farmers monitor the wildlife they have?

It's hugely important as it provides great insight into the wildlife that's thriving on their land. It also helps build up a picture so they can see what needs a helping hand, as well as monitoring conservation successes.

Why did you join the Farmer Cluster?

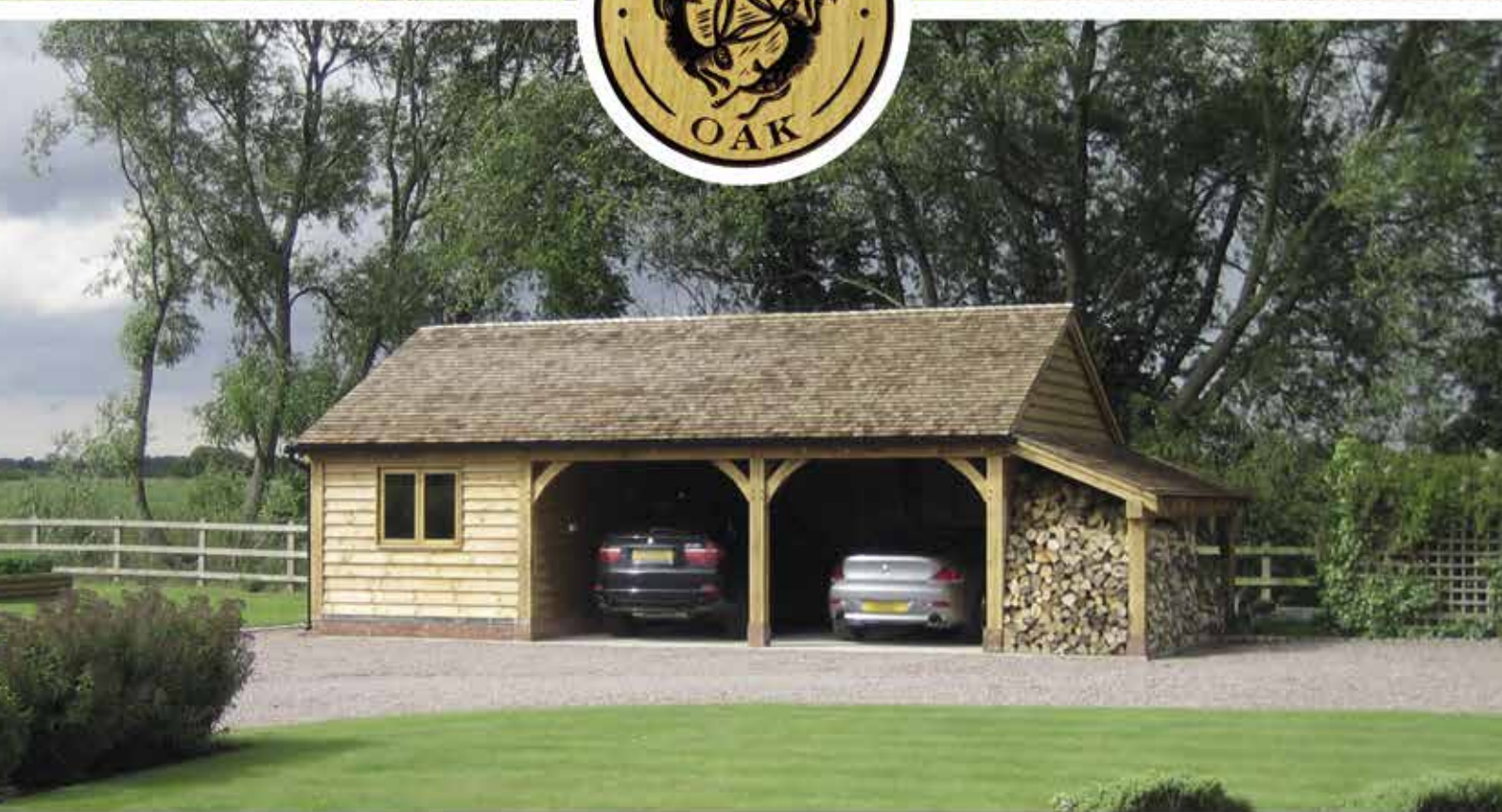
The Allenford Farmer Cluster is a fantastic opportunity for us as an estate to work closely with tenant farmers and neighbours to help create joined-up wildlife habitats and corridors across the whole estate, and beyond, to increase biodiversity. We also have an excellent facilitator Megan Lock, the GWCT's farmland biodiversity advisor, who helps guide and advise the farmers in the cluster.

How do you see farming (and shooting) changing in the next 10 years?

I think the farming industry is always changing, with the aim to become as sustainable as possible. Even with the huge challenges' farmers face, they do an incredible job producing the food that feeds us as a nation, and at the same time managing and creating habitats for wildlife. There will always be a place for shooting, and it would be a sad day if gamekeepers were no longer on the land. I believe shooting as we know it will become more regulated, but I hope that it doesn't destroy all the important conservation work that gamekeepers do across the countryside.

What is your favourite species?

Corn bunting. Their call is unmistakable and we have them in abundance. ■



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