

# Encouraging the green shoots of conservation with the next generation

There were once days when, from a very young age, you would have had a fishing rod thrust in your hand, and if not a fishing rod, then a bamboo cane, a piece of string, a bent pin and a worm.

For many children the connection with countryside seems largely to have been lost. Despite much better access, countryside knowledge is at best scant and at worst non-existent.

The farming sector has grasped the nettle, making the connections, forging links, taking schoolchildren to see where our food comes from – all credit to the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET), the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative, LEAF Open Farm Sunday and others.

But we are rapidly approaching 2022, the most likely date for the next farm support regime to kick in. This will increasingly find farmers farming not mainly for food, but also for the environment, for nature, and for the public interest. We need to start telling youngsters about this.

The importance of crops for wildlife, of beetle banks, of field margins, of hedges, of farm woodland, of ponds and bog, will all take on extra significance in modern farming.

Neighbouring farmers working together may become more commonplace; this should enable scale and focus to deliver better results. Among the wildlife that can benefit, or that can trigger far wider benefits, is game. Farming for the

**Iona Laing details the work of engaging youngsters with countryside management and game sports**

success of game species, which can provide an alternative income stream or a source of recreation, will bring benefits for a wider range of birds and animals – songbirds, small mammals, bees, insects and invertebrates.

Spreading this knowledge at an early age is important. So, what is the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust doing about it?

Our work with youngsters was expanded this year at the GWCT Scottish Game Fair at Scone Palace. Visitors aged eight to 21 were able to take part in the Junior Macnab challenge, a new event devised by the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group and GWCT, involving virtually hunting rabbit and pigeon, and fishing for trout.

The event, which attracted 200 entrants over three days, was designed to encourage youngsters to think about taking up shooting and fishing and being active and engaged with the countryside.

It was sponsored by the Scottish Youth and Countryside Education Trust and supported by BASC Scotland and the Game Angling Instruc-

tors Association with prizes donated by Decathlon Sports.

In The Covey, our education area, there was hands-on science, storytelling, and arts and crafts aimed at the next generation of young ecologists. As well as activities and 'have-a-go' opportunities, there were exhibits featuring moths, hatching quail chicks and ferrets, microscopes to explore the farmland underworld, and a special display highlighting the habitat of the grey partridge. Artist Julian Jardine held ceramic workshops, there was also a scavenger hunt and the butterfly bog squad!

We also organise school visits to our PARTRIDGE demonstration sites at Whitburgh and at Balgonie.

In Fife, children from Milton of Balgonie school planted 500 hedge plants two years ago to create new habitat for gamebirds and songbirds and have been visiting since then to see the fruits of their labours.

At Whitburgh Farms straddling the East Lothian/Midlothian boundary, visits have been organised for Tynewater Primary and Elphinstone Primary schools to learn about the envi-



↑ Budding young ecologists taking part in the GWCT's Junior Macnab Challenge

ronment. We have also held a children's art competition for the last 14 years. Aimed at pupils across Perth and Kinross it runs in conjunction with Perth and Kinross Council's education and children's services and RHET. Pupils are encouraged to create a piece of art depicting a game

or wildlife species from anywhere in the UK relevant to the Trust's conservation work.

GWCT also hosts a Young Shooters' Day at our demonstration farm at Auchnerran, Aberdeenshire, for boys and girls aged 12 to 15, which covers tuition and clay shooting, con-

servation skills, game management, and preparing game for the table. The course is on 22 August, with places still available. See [www.gwct.org.uk/events/calendar/](http://www.gwct.org.uk/events/calendar/) for more details.

The future prosperity of the countryside might rest now with our farmers, land, game and wildlife

managers, foresters, politicians and others.

But it also rests with our youngsters, who can learn from an early age to enjoy it, to want to work in it and with it, and to see it prosper.

Iona Laing, education and events officer, GWCT Scotland.



Trees are an important part of the economy – and planting more is a no-brainer

Stuart Goodall is encouraged by policies for the future of wood

I have the privilege of travelling across the UK and seeing how Government attitudes to forestry are developing and playing out – and it is clear to me that Scotland is well ahead. Scotland leads in its understanding of how important forestry and wood processing is to the economy and to the environment and it leads in implementing policies to deliver more forestry and the greater use of wood.

The Scottish Government is now developing a new forestry strategy, the first in over a decade, and that provides the perfect opportunity to set a future direction to build on the progress made so far. In doing so, there are a few recent events it should bear in mind.

The sector continues to attract

considerable investment, with the £90 million-plus recently committed by Norbord at Inverness continuing a trend that has seen hundreds of millions of pounds invested in the wood processing sector in Scotland over the last decade.

It is worth remembering that the wood processing sector is dominated by family-owned businesses, businesses that are committed to investing in Scotland, with long-term secure employment.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC), the UK and Scottish Governments' independent adviser on tackling climate change, has just identified, again, that tree planting is an increasingly vital part of meeting our ambitious climate change targets. It now recognises that using

wood from our forests will play a key part in that as well – growing trees lock up carbon and using wood in our houses, kitchens, bedrooms, decks and gardens, locks that carbon up while new trees are grown to replace those that have been harvested.

It spoke with a special adviser to a UK Government minister recently who had read the CCC report and who described increased tree planting as a 'no-brainer'.

Those who know me, will have heard me evangelise about how trees and timber can be the economic activity and premier building material of the 21st century – infinitely renewable, versatile, designed for a low-carbon economy and embracing environmental benefits at every stage from forest to home. Let's embed that

for future generations with a forestry strategy that we can all be proud of.

The current Scottish Forestry strategy dates from 2006 – when the Scottish Government was known as the Scottish Executive, Labour's Jack McConnell was First Minister, Ruth Davidson was working for the BBC and England lost to Portugal in the World Cup quarter finals – so there has been progress....

Since 2006, of course, we have had both the Scottish independence referendum and the Brexit vote. The decision to leave the European Union has huge implications for countryside policy, in Scotland and the wider UK.

While the EU has many advantages for business and Scotland clearly voted to remain, the consensus

among the countryside lobby is that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has not always been good for Scotland – and if Brexit means anything, it gives an opportunity to redesign how we support Scotland's rural industries in future.

With demand for timber and wood products at an all-time high (and growing) and with the UK the second biggest net importer of timber products in the world (after China), it's time to look again at how much forestry and woodland Scotland needs in future.

Projects like the Forestry Commission's Sheep and Trees and Confor's own Farm Forestry publication show how tree planting can benefit our hill farmers by providing

shelter for livestock (and healthier animals as a result) and a diversified long-term income.

We have the opportunity to set the direction of travel for Scottish forestry, perhaps for 50 years or more.

It is vital that we grasp that opportunity with both hands and leave a meaningful legacy for future generations. They will thank us for that.

Stuart Goodall is chief executive of Confor: promoting forestry and wood.



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