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The RSPB newsletter for agricultural projects

FIELD OF VIEW

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Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)



Yellowhammers have been given a helping hand



Scotland's Nature of Farming Award
Winners, David and Morag Miller

Scotland's wildlife-friendly farmers join forces with RSPB Scotland

Welcome to the second issue of the *Scotland Field of View*. It's full of the latest on wildlife-friendly farming and our advisory and project work. There's an update about how RSPB Scotland is calling for greater support for environmental measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

Read how we have been working with UK farmers to urge Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to increase funding for agri-environment in the 2014–2020 CAP. We've taken it to the heart of Brussels.

There's a profile of the Scottish farmers who won and were Highly Commended in this year's Nature of Farming Award

(NoFA). They are examples of farmers who are doing fantastic things for wildlife, as well as producing food. In 2012, more than 17,000 people showed their support by voting for wildlife-friendly farmers, with over 7,000 votes cast in the last week.

We work closely with farmers and farming organisations to develop practical advice to help farmers maximise the benefits for wildlife within different farming systems. We detail our partnership work on Crichton Royal Dairy Farm. There's a new case study of an upland farm that exemplifies our vision for upland farming systems, which can deliver great benefits.

The Birds Directive is the EU's oldest piece of nature legislation. We update you about how our work – together with the efforts of volunteers and farmers – are contributing to delivering the Birds Directive on farmland in the UK.

We also have updates on our Futurescape programme, the Scottish Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA) results, Big Garden Birdwatch, the Black Grouse Conservation Review and feedback from you on the advice we offer.

Visit www.rspb.org.uk/farming for more information, and for a link to the farming blog



The EU LIFE+ Programme funds RSPB work which supports wildlife-friendly farming that furthers sustainable development in the European Union.

In this issue: CAP reform update • NoFA 2012 • V&FA results
• Mixing dairy farming with conservation is challenging – we're teaming up to develop new methods • Upland farming

SCOTLAND



Farmers visit Brussels to tell their side of the story

RSPB

CAP reform in Scotland

RSPB Scotland staff continue to press the case for a greener CAP but the focus of discussions remains in Europe, so efforts have been concentrated on MEPs, co-ordinated by the UK team.

Despite the final agreement on CAP being some way off, Scottish Government have been pressing ahead in developing ideas for the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP), and RSPB Scotland staff have sat on a number of working groups set up by the Government.

This representation, along with earlier work undertaken which was aimed at learning lessons from the current SRDP, has been key to making the case for much greater targeting and prioritisation in the next programme. Arguments for expanded advisory services to support Programme delivery also appear to be gaining support.

We will continue to engage in detailed discussions on overall Programme structure, schemes and options over the next few months. A formal consultation on the shape and content of the next SRDP is expected in late spring/early summer 2013.

For more information, contact Amy Corrigan at amy.corrigan@rspb.org.uk

Green Common Agricultural Policy reform – or just the *status quo*?

During 2012, EU governments and MEPs have been developing their negotiating positions on the reforms to the CAP. This includes alternative approaches to those suggested in the Commission's 2011 proposals.

The focus for many, and by far the most contentious issue, is Pillar I "greening". The RSPB views greening as a vital step to improve the environmental performance of EU farming. It is crucial if the natural resources that farmers need for food production are to be protected.

But this depends on well-designed measures in our policy. So it's imperative that things like Ecological Focus Areas are implemented in a way that raises the bar and doesn't undermine the great work already done by many farmers through agri-environment schemes.

However, despite the rhetoric, there is no guarantee that this round of reform will deliver a CAP that is equipped with the tools, and funding, to drive more sustainable and wildlife-friendly farming. There have been calls from governments and MEPs for more flexibility on greening. This could mean that any steps forward are reduced to a shuffle. There's a risk that we'll just repackage our current CAP. Agri-environment funding could be cut in Pillar II. The parallel EU Budget process (which will be decided in late 2012 or early 2013) is likely to cut the money available for CAP, potentially falling most heavily on Pillar II. This will further undermine the more targeted environmental expenditure.

A famous frog once said: "It's not easy being green" and he wasn't wrong, but the alternative is simply not an option.

Decision makers will need to take some bold steps when they finalise the next CAP during 2013. They need to make sure the policy meets the needs of farming, the environment and society. And that means strong greening measures and adequate funding for agri-environment.

For more information, contact Jenna Hegarty at jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk

Championing agri-environment at the European Parliament

Wildlife-friendly farmers from across the EU met in Brussels in March to call for greater support for environmental measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

The RSPB (as part of BirdLife International) supported eight farmers from the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Latvia to visit their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the Agriculture Committee. They told their stories about the importance of Pillar II agri-environment schemes on their farms.

The farmers explained to MEPs how these schemes allow them to step up for nature, as well as producing agricultural commodities. They also

provide benefits for the environment, their businesses and society. They urged MEPs to increase funding for agri-environment in the 2014–2020 CAP and invited them to visit their farms to see these amazing schemes in action. We also highlighted the urgent need to channel CAP funding towards vulnerable High Nature Value farming systems.

Dan Skinner, one of the participating farmers, said: "I was really pleased to represent UK farmers involved in agri-environment schemes. MEPs often get told about the shortcomings of these schemes, so it was really important to tell them how fantastic the benefits of a well-run scheme can be and why

they should protect Pillar II funding in the CAP reform."

As the European Parliament plays a significant role in determining the design and funding of the next CAP, this visit was a great opportunity. It shows how farmers and the RSPB are joining forces on key issues.

We hope that these powerful messages from farmers will make sure that Parliament's negotiating position on CAP calls for adequate funding for valuable agri-environment schemes and vulnerable High Nature Value systems.

For more information, contact Jenna Hegarty at jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

RSPB Scotland continues to fight for the best deal for farmers and nature

NATURE OF FARMING AWARD SCOTLAND 2012

The Scottish NoFA celebrates and showcases the work of farmers who are doing great things for wildlife. Competition was tough and there were a number of high-quality applications, but David and Morag Miller of Geise Farm, Caithness are the overall 2012 winners. John Leith was awarded Highly Commended for his work at Backhill Farm, Aberdeenshire.

Scottish winner David and Morag Miller, Caithness

David and Morag Miller run a 49 hectare (ha) beef and sheep farm near Thurso, Caithness, managing 45 cattle and 200 sheep per year. They give environmental and economic considerations equal emphasis. Alongside careful grazing, the Millers entered an agri-environment agreement in 1999, to help create and restore the key habitats on their farm. These include areas of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): species rich grassland, wetlands, moorland and broad-leaved woodland.

The Millers have received help with their conservation objectives from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and their local conservation rangers. Species recorded include lapwings, yellowhammers, tree sparrows, dippers, barn owls and otters. In addition plant, butterfly and moth monitoring has taken place.

Working with the Local Access Forum and SNH they have promoted their work to the community, especially schools and colleges, by providing information leaflets and interpretation boards. The Millers said: "We have increased the public access by creating a network of more than 2 kilometers (km) of pathways allowing all those interested in the environment to experience and enjoy this special place."

RSPB Scotland's Advisory Manager Chris Bailey said: "The Millers' commitment to making the farm more accessible to the public is very impressive. It is a great tribute to them that most of the environmental management has been self-funded. We were very pleased to make them this year's Scottish winner of the NoFA."



Chris Bailey

If you are interested in taking part in NoFA 2013, please contact Katy Malone on 01463 228827 or e-mail katy.malone@rspb.org.uk or visit www.rspb.org.uk/natureoffarming

Highly Commended John Leith Aberdeenshire

John Leith produces high-quality malting barley on his 70 ha arable unit at Backhill Farm, Aberdeenshire. He has integrated a number of measures to enhance the wildlife on his farm.

These measures include six metre grass margins around the barley fields. These herb-rich areas have provided a nesting habitat for grey partridges. In addition, he has sown three ha of wild bird seed mix, providing seed throughout the winter for yellowhammers, tree sparrows and grey partridges. John has also helped lapwings by avoiding nests whilst sowing the spring crops, and leaving the wet unproductive areas uncropped.



Chris Bailey

Thinking *big* for nature

Scotland's wildlife is amazing, but it's in trouble. Species are dying out, climate change is affecting the environment, and pressures on land are growing. Something needs to be done to give nature space – and we're doing it, right across the UK. We've got a headstart in Scotland, with excellent nature reserves and wonderful protected areas. But they're not enough. We can't just look after nature on small pockets of land, because nature is everywhere. So that's where we need to help it. Everywhere. Right across whole landscapes. It's time to think big.

Our scheme works towards saving nature on a landscape scale, so we've called it Futurescapes.

Changing the landscape to give nature a chance to thrive is a massive task, and one that we can't achieve

alone. We're relying on land managers, local authorities, charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to band together to make the vision a reality.

There are a number of large areas which we are concentrating on, including Inner Forth, the Cairngorms Caledonian pinewood and the Badenoch and Strathspey Farmed Floodplain.

Inner Forth is a place that already supports a fantastic wealth of wildlife on its saltmarsh and mudflats. Our vision is for large-scale habitat creation across 2,000 ha around the Falkirk and Alloa area, centred on our Skinflats nature reserve. There will be a network of new wetland habitats, including saltmarshes, mudflats and

reedbeds, which will give homes and food to wildlife.

The project aims to create fantastic opportunities for people, too. New footpaths, viewing facilities, guided walks and events are designed to engage residents and visitors with the wildlife of the Forth. It will complement the Helix Project, which aims to encourage public access around Falkirk and the River Carron and historical attractions, such as the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site. Access links are good in the area, with train stations at Alloa and Falkirk, as well as core paths and the Round the Forth national cycle route.

Why create a Futurescape here? Well, the Firth of Forth's mud may look boring, but it's rich in nutrients, so lots of small worms and shellfish live in it. These creatures are food for internationally important numbers of waders, ducks and geese, especially



Laurie Campbell (rspb-images.com)

The Firth of Forth bristles with industry and farmland, but still has great potential for wildlife

To enter your farm in 2013 visit www.rspb.org.uk/farming



David Kraer (rspb-images.com)

About 99% of Scotland's wonderful native pine woodland has been lost, and RSPB Scotland is determined to make sure the remaining fragments are in the best possible condition for people and wildlife to enjoy

in winter. But this area has a long history of industrial and agricultural use, and valuable habitat has been lost over the centuries. There are new pressures from development, climate change and disturbance to the birds using the Forth, so there is a need for action on a large scale to protect this rich natural heritage. In addition, we need to grasp exciting opportunities for sustainable flood management and climate change mitigation.

The Inner Forth's rich history has created a landscape with many areas of reclaimed and brownfield land, so there's great potential for habitat restoration. The possibility of restoring individual sites is often limited by their potential for development, and if they are not protected they could be lost.

RSPB Scotland and its partners have carried out a feasibility study into the potential for restoration, and several sites were found to have exciting possibilities. The ultimate aim is to create a network of habitats through the Inner Forth. It's our best chance to allow wildlife to thrive. Water Framework Directive aims will be met too, with sustainable flood mitigation measures. The sites are agricultural, but near the dominant industrial areas, so spectacular wildlife is likely to be found in the heart of an industrialised landscape.

One example site is the RSPB Skinflats nature reserve. This project has transformed farmland behind an old sea wall into a new wetland, where spectacular estuary birds can be found roosting and feeding. As we restore more sites, they will form a new network of wetland habitats in the Inner Forth area. We want the wildlife in the sites to be able to reach out

across the countryside – it's important that the sites don't sit in isolation. We need to make sure they are surrounded by farmland that supports enough suitable habitat to allow wildlife to cross from one wetland area to another.

It's not all about wildlife: we need to find out how local people would like the area to be managed, and how they'd like to be involved.

If you want to work together with us, making the Inner Forth better for people and wildlife, please contact Inner Forth Futurescape Officer, David Anderson, at david.anderson@rspb.org.uk or call him on 07725 216483.

The Cairngorms Caledonian pinewood is a magnificently scenic landscape that has ebbed and flowed over generations between the broad straths to the narrow mountain gullies. Just 1% of the original Caledonian forest is left, and 60% of that surviving area is in the Cairngorms. As so little remains, its health is vital. Pinewoods are important for timber, as shelter for stock, a calm retreat for holidaymakers and walkers enjoying a glimpse of scarce pinewood wildlife.

The woodland is broken up, with some very large areas, and some smaller sections. Zones may be managed for commercial, recreational or environmental objectives; some are in public ownership, others are private. But every fragment of woodland, and every linkage between them, has a role to play as part of the network.

The Caledonian pinewoods are home to a staggering array of plants and animals, many of them "pinewood specialists" and particularly rare – red squirrels, twinflowers, ospreys, capercaillie, tooth fungus, wildcats (for which these forests are the most important site in the UK) and our only endemic species, Scottish crossbills. This wealth of wildlife is recognised by the national and international designations that cover many of the great forests of the Cairngorms.

Bigger, more connected, forests are more robust and resilient. They are better for wildlife, give more spectacular views, provide visitors with a sense of seclusion, can be managed in a more sustainable way and are better able to survive climate change. So it makes sense to think big.

Our work so far has concentrated on Abernethy where, if we allow the forest to expand at its own pace (or "naturally regenerate"), we calculate it would take 500 years for the pinewood to expand to its natural size. We're trying to fast-track this, and we think we can reach our goal 300 years early!

There are great things happening with Caledonian pinewood throughout the Cairngorms by individual landowners and organisations outside the boundaries of RSPB Scotland. This all contributes to greater vitality and resilience of the woodland across the region. Only through landscape-scale action can we deliver the most benefits.

What's next? Well, we're keen to make sure everyone who has an interest in the forest can influence what happens in the future. Initial discussions suggest an underlying positive attitude and desire for pinewoods to continue and be enhanced. Some areas will be managed for timber, deer, grouse, recreation or conservation; some will have a very small pocket of land where pinewood could establish, others will plant or allow natural regeneration.

Only by working in partnership with other organisations and individuals, with a shared vision, can we hope for a truly connected and fully-functioning Caledonian pinewood.

Please get in touch with us, whether you are a farmer, landowner, community organisation or individual. You may have an area of ground that could be enhanced, be looking for advice, interested in volunteering, want a presentation or just to discuss the project and where there may be a mutual interest. Together we can make the Cairngorms Caledonian Pinewood Futurescape even better for people and wildlife.

For more information, e-mail Cairngorms Futurescapes Officer, Hebe Carus, at hebe.carus@rspb.org.uk or ring her on 01540 661518.

The Badenoch and Strathspey Farmed Floodplain is one of nature's gems. This Futurescape nestles between the Cairngorm and Monadhliath mountain ranges, and its Gaelic place names capture the wet essence of the landscape: Srath (now Strathspey) means "valley through which a river runs"; while Badenoch was once Bàideanach "the drowned place".

For several hundred years, humans have been attempting to tame the River Spey to create farms on the fertile floodplain. Wet grassland, meadows, fens and marshes are still a feature of the landscape where it has been left untouched, or if drainage has not been successful. Melting snow and prolonged rainfall often trigger floods, and the low-lying farmed areas are often under water, and enjoyed by nesting waders. The range of habitats here is so varied and extensive that it is one of the most important inland sites in Britain for breeding waders, including lapwings, redshanks, snipe and curlews.

There are grasslands, wetlands, arable mosaics of the floodplain and tributaries of the River Spey in this Futurescape. The richness of the area is reflected in the many conservation designations that apply to some or all of it, including its designation as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar treaty. Other designations are SSSI, Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and National Nature Reserve (NNR).

At the heart of the Futurescape is the RSPB Insh Marshes reserve.

This covers about 1,000 ha of the River Spey floodplain between Kingussie and Kincaig. Here, the unique wetland habitats contain many rare and endangered species of wildlife, including more than 500 pairs of breeding waders, and the focus of reserve management is their conservation. The area is grazed in partnership with local farmers, and rank vegetation is cut on rotation and scrub cover reduced.

Off the reserve we continue to work for the important populations of breeding waders, by supporting the health of the farmed floodplain environment, while maintaining viable levels of agricultural productivity.

We work in partnership with farmers, landowners and farm agents, as well as SNH and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Fully integrating the needs of everyone interested in the land is absolutely vital, and the farmed landscape must be protected and enhanced – this is fundamental to the Futurescape approach. Each piece of land does not need to deliver all benefits (social, economic and environmental), but the landscape as a whole does. RSPB Scotland is keen to talk to all potential partners and stakeholders.

Surveys of the breeding wader population will build on the last decade's research into the reasons for declines in certain species. We'll also be monitoring the response to positive action.

Please get in touch with us, whether you are a farmer, landowner, community organisation or an individual. You may have an area of ground that could be enhanced, be looking for advice, interested in volunteering, want a presentation or just to discuss the project and whether there may be a mutual interest. Together we can make the Badenoch and Strathspey Futurescape an even better for people and wildlife.

For more information, e-mail Cairngorms Futurescapes Officer, Hebe Carus, at hebe.carus@rspb.org.uk or ring her on 01540 661518.

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit www.farmwildlife.info

Soils and grassland

Twenty RSPB Scotland staff learned about soil and grassland management at a training course run by lecturers from Scottish Rural College (SRUC) at Kingussie.

Advisory, reserve and conservation staff spent two days in September discussing how to apply the lessons they had learned to help farmers and crofters manage their grassland for specific species.

It's difficult to over-state the case for good management of grassland, because it provides vital breeding and wintering habitat for birds across Scotland, including geese (primarily during the winter), corncrakes (during the summer), lapwings, redshanks, snipe and choughs. Well-managed grassland supports large populations of insects, including earthworms or leatherjackets, and some seeds. These are very important sources of food for birds.

Understanding the implications our advice can make to the management of soil and grassland is essential, especially if we are to help nature – and equally the

farmers and crofters. The management of grassland will vary dependant on the species that is targeted. For example, corncrakes need radically different grass and vegetation structures to waders. Corncrakes prefer tall plants, at least 20 cm high. This gives them the cover they need, as well as a place to find food when they arrive back from Africa in April and May. Waders need a different structure. They need a shorter sward of around 5 cm, especially during the breeding season.

The team discussed the best ways to establish and maintain an appropriate grazing regimes, such as: "is it better to use cattle, sheep, ponies or a combination?" Other questions included were: "is it more appropriate to use native breeds rather than non native", and: "what was the appropriate stocking density to achieve the conservation outcome?" The two days have given us a lot to think about, and will hopefully lead to more informed discussions.

Contact Chris Bailey at chris.bailey@rspb.org.uk for more information about grassland and soil management.

Starlings were recorded regularly during V&FA surveys



Ray Kennedy (rspb-images.com)



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Grazing regimes make a huge difference to wildlife species, so here on Oronsay a "corncrake corner" has been created, to allow iris, cow parsnip and nettles to grow

V&FA results for Scotland 2012

Over the last ten years, volunteers have conducted surveys all over Scotland for the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA). This year, 95 volunteers have visited 116 farms. The average number of bird species per farm was 29, and the largest number of species recorded on a single farm this year was 65.

The table below summarises some of the most interesting results.

Skylarks, starlings and lapwings were recorded regularly across the country. As farming systems, landscapes and habitats are incredibly variable across Scotland, these results are not a comparison between regions, but a snapshot of what was recorded in each.

Besides these results, there were some other exciting finds, such as golden eagles and red-throated divers on Lewis, red kites on the Black Isles,

Slavonian grebes on Strathspey, black-tailed godwits in Lothian and marsh tits in the Borders.

For more information about V&FA surveys, please visit www.rspb.org.uk/farming and click on the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance link.

	East Scotland	Orkney and Shetland	North Scotland	South and West Scotland
Corn Bunting	0	0	0	2
Cuckoo	15	0	18	22
Grey Partridge	30	0	6	38
Kestrel	33	0	15	33
Lapwing	33	71	26	36
Linnet	52	5	35	62
Skylark	67	90	32	64
Starling	63	100	62	82
Tree sparrow	37	0	6	24
Yellowhammer	70	0	35	64

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit www.farmwildlife.info

Protecting farmland birds through the Birds Directive

The Birds Directive 1979 provides protection for all wild birds in the EU. All the elements of the EU LIFE+ funded project have contributed to improving the conservation status of farmland birds, the fastest declining group of birds in the EU.

Bird surveys by volunteers have enabled farmers to know what special birds they have on their farms so that they can target their conservation efforts towards them.

The follow-up advice has encouraged many farmers to enter agri-environment schemes targeted specifically at improving the quality of wildlife habitats on the farm. The NoFA, demonstration farm visits and case studies of wildlife-friendly farmers have raised awareness of what farmers can do, why they do it and

how to get the best from their efforts. The feedback from farmers and volunteers is helping us to determine how best to take this work forward into the future.

The RSPB believes that the Birds Directive is key to ensuring the UK and the EU play their part in halting biodiversity loss by 2020.

So what exactly does it do?

- Member States are required to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for threatened species and all migratory bird species.
- The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 consolidated and amended existing legislation to implement the Birds Directive in Great Britain. This banned activities that directly threatened birds, such as

deliberate killing, destruction of their nests or taking of their eggs.

- Rules were established to limit the number of species that can be hunted and the periods during which they can be hunted in order to protect them during periods when they are particularly vulnerable, such as migration and during the breeding season. It also defined rules on hunting methods.
- EU Species Action Plans were established to help the most threatened species recover.

The LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment. Our agricultural projects and advisory work are currently funded by LIFE+, which raises awareness of the needs of farmland birds and the implementation of the Birds Directive among farmers and the public. For more information, go to the RSPB website and search for Birds Directive.

Telling the story of upland farming

This year, we've launched a case study of Tarnhouse, a hill farm in the north Pennines. It exemplifies the RSPB's vision of how upland farming systems can deliver a host of benefits for society. The farm has 92 suckler cows and 500 breeding ewes, and is managed by tenant farmer John Errington. It's part of the RSPB Geltsdale reserve.

Through sensitive land management, the farm provides many benefits alongside food production. Some of the UK's most important habitats and species are dependent on the grazing systems chosen here. The farm is making a major contribution to the conservation of vulnerable upland soils, to carbon stewardship, water quality improvements and to flood risk management. Several land management changes have been made over the years to benefit farm wildlife. They include an increase in cattle grazing and a reduction in sheep numbers. Blue grey and Aberdeen Angus cattle, and Scottish black faced sheep, have helped restore a range of important upland habitats. Iconic species such as black grouse, lapwings and curlews are all benefiting from the change. In the case of black grouse, numbers have increased spectacularly, at a time when numbers across the north Pennines have nearly halved.

The case study highlights some of the threats to extensive livestock systems such as those in place at Tarnhouse. Stand-alone agricultural activity on upland livestock farms is often economically fragile.

The public benefits provided at Tarnhouse are underpinned by agri-environment schemes, but this important funding stream is vulnerable in the 2014 CAP reform. The political focus on so-called "sustainable intensification" poses particular issues for extensive livestock systems. Claims that extensive systems are less efficient and carbon-friendly than intensive livestock systems often fail to take account of the full range of benefits and costs that different farming systems convey.

The case study uses carbon footprint tools currently available to the farming industry and illustrates the dangers of focussing on just a single type of analysis, particularly those which ignore the importance of wider carbon stewardship, such as the carbon locked up in soils.

If you would like details, or would like to visit Tarnhouse, e-mail Gethin Davies at gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk

Making space for nature alongside producing milk

This spring we started a project with some of the dairy farmers who supply milk to Tesco. We want to find practical methods that farmers can integrate into their systems to help wildlife.

We started with bird surveys of farms through the V&FA. Once we know what birds are on a farm, we can follow up with a visit to the farmer, so we can work out potential land management options.

This will be a two-way process: we generate ideas based on the needs of the wildlife living there, and listen to farmers' thoughts on the pros and cons of fitting the ideas into their system.

Dairying is a challenging sector for integrating measures to help wildlife.

Making space for nature within the farmed area, especially within grassland, is particularly tricky: the focus on high productivity and efficiency invariably means leaving less behind for wildlife.

There are fewer options available in agri-environment schemes to suit dairy farmers, and the economic pressures have been unrelenting over recent years.

Dairy farmers have been declining as fast as some of our farmland wildlife. In the past ten years alone, the number of dairy farmers has halved in England and Wales, and fallen by a third in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

But our advisory staff around the UK have worked with many dairy farmers

who have gone out of their way to help wildlife alongside running productive dairy enterprises: farmers like Robert Kynaston from Shropshire who was one of the NoFA finalists last year. We will be building on the experiences of these farmers in developing our ongoing work with the dairy sector.

This project is part of a new partnership between the RSPB and Tesco called Together For Trees. It aims to reduce the environmental footprint of commodities from tropical forests, as well as making supply chains more sustainable.

If you would like more details, please e-mail Gethin Davies at gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk



David Morris

All wild birds, including tree sparrows, are protected under the Birds Directive

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit www.farmwildlife.info

Advice at agricultural shows in 2013 and online

Here is a list of some of the agricultural shows and events we will be attending across the UK in 2013. As always, staff will be on hand to answer any questions you have on wildlife conservation. Do come and visit us.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please visit www.farmwildlife.info as this website hosts a discussion forum to ask questions or post ideas, case studies of farmers adopting novel management to boost wildlife on their farm and an agricultural events calendar for farmland wildlife conservation.

- Balmoral Show, Balmoral Park, Maze Long Kesh, Lisburn 15–17 May
- Cereals, Boothby Graffoe, Lincolnshire 12–13 June
- Royal Highland Show, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh 20–23 June
- Livestock 2013, NEC, Birmingham 3–4 July
- Royal Welsh Show, Llanelwedd, near Builth Wells 22–25 July

RSPB training events

Each year, the RSPB runs training courses on getting the maximum wildlife value out of Environmental Stewardship on arable farmland and livestock farms.

Courses on “How livestock farming can integrate the needs of farmland wildlife” will be held at these venues:

- Great Wollaston Farm, Shropshire 24 April 2013
- Duchy College, Cornwall October 2013 (to be confirmed)

For details of the courses, visit www.rspb.org.uk/conservationtraining

Crichton Royal Dairy Research Farm to become an exemplar for wildlife-friendly farming

The Crichton Royal Dairy Research Farm in Dumfries will become an exemplar for wildlife-friendly dairy farming, following a partnership between Scotland Rural College (SRUC) and RSPB Scotland. The organisations will work together to increase wildlife on farms, focusing on birds, butterflies and wild flowers.

The farm is a Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) Innovation Centre, and the partners’ work reflects LEAF’s aim of helping farmers work to high environmental standards. The partnership will develop simple and cost-effective methods of boosting wildlife on farms. The aim is to show methods that do not affect the farm’s profit and to encourage other pastoral farms to develop these methods.

Since SRUC and RSPB Scotland began their joint work at Crichton, there has been an increase in numbers of birds on the farm. Through V&FA, bird species have been recorded, and RSPB staff have delivered on-farm advice. As a result, management of hedgerows has improved, specific crops have been sown to attract overwintering birds, and nestboxes for tree sparrows have been installed. The programme will build on these ideas and trial new techniques.

Dr Dave Roberts, Head of Dairy Research at the SRUC, said: “I am very pleased that we are building on our 10 years of very successful work with RSPB Scotland at Crichton. The focus of our renewed partnership will be on how we can make relatively small changes to farm management practices, to have a big effect on bird species and other wildlife.”

Stuart Housden, Director of RSPB Scotland said: “Scotland’s farms are home to a wide variety of stunning wildlife. Sadly, some of these species such as kestrels, lapwings and yellowhammers are in need of urgent help. By working closely with SRUC we hope to develop simple low-cost solutions that dairy farmers and other producers can apply on their land, reversing the fortunes of declining species in the wider countryside.”

SRUC and RSPB Scotland have been working together for 10 years, but they have now signed a Memorandum of Agreement which formalises the partnership.

For more information contact Chris Bailey at chris.bailey@rspb.org.uk

Big Garden Birdwatch a success

Thank you to everyone who stepped up for nature by taking part in this year’s Big Garden Birdwatch. Now in its 33rd year, this was the second biggest Birdwatch ever, with an incredible 592,475 people getting involved. Over nine million birds of 73 different species were counted over the course of the Birdwatch weekend.

House sparrows top the list for the ninth consecutive year. However, their numbers are much lower than they were back when the survey began in 1979. They were seen in over 60% of gardens, with an average of four per garden, compared with 10 per garden in 1979.

Blue tits have overtaken blackbirds to take third place, with an overall increase of 21% since 1979. Goldfinches are also up one place to number seven this year. This colourful bird has been steadily increasing in UK gardens and first reached the top 10 in 2008.

This year’s results have also shown that starling numbers are at an all time low since the survey began. Starlings have been on a downward trend for the past 25 years and have declined by almost 80%. In 1979, the average number

of starlings seen in UK gardens was 15. This year, that number fell to its lowest ever with an average of just three starlings seen per garden.

These declines are being mirrored across much of northern Europe too, and because of this drop in numbers, the species is red-listed as a bird of high conservation concern. We’ve been monitoring this decline and research is already underway to find out more about the disappearance of these birds. Possible reasons could include changes in their feeding habitats and changes beneath the soil reducing their insect food.

After an unseasonably warm winter across much of the UK, many people weren’t seeing the levels of bird activity in their gardens they usually would at the end of January. Our garden birds are much less dependent on us for food when there are plenty of berries, insects and seeds for them out in the wider countryside.

In 2013, the Big Garden Birdwatch takes place over the weekend of the 26 and 27 January 2013. Please join in and help us make it even bigger!



Ernie James (rspb-images.com)

The quest for simple, low-cost methods of wildlife-friendly dairy farming has been taken up by RSPB Scotland and Scotland Rural College

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit www.farmwildlife.info

Farming project offers helping hand to threatened wading birds

A farming project is helping to improve the status of breeding waders in Scotland. The Wader Friendly Farming Initiative (WFFI) encourages waders to breed through conservation management of farmland habitats. It covers over 2,000 ha of farmland, to help conserve key Scottish waders, including lapwings, redshanks, curlews and snipes. Numbers of these species have dropped significantly in recent years.

It is a Scotland-wide partnership project involving RSPB Scotland, National Farmers Union of Scotland (NFUS), SRUC, the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Scottish Ornithologists'

Club, and individual farmers in Scotland. In March 2012, representatives from the partners met at a Clyde Valley farm to view the project.

The upper Clyde contains one of the densest breeding wader populations in Scotland. Since 2009, 38 farms have entered into Rural Priorities agreements to help waders in the area, through collaborative work. Similar projects operate in Strathspey, Caithness and Grampian, with more due for other parts of Scotland.

NFU Scotland President, Nigel Miller, said: "These waders are part of our heritage and provide a pleasant

distraction from cultivation and sowing for those working on many farms. The activity in the Clyde Valley and around the country shows that many farmers are already taking positive action to protect these popular birds. Working together with the RSPB, we can outline to all farmers the simple management changes that can support and increase wader numbers on farms."

Sign up for the Wader Friendly Farming Initiative by visiting www.rspb.org.uk/waderfriendlyfarming or for more information, contact Chris Bailey on 0131 317 4100.



Nigel Millar and Toby Wilson at the Clyde Valley Wader Friendly Farming launch event

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



Lapwings are among the species which will benefit from good grassland management

Black Grouse Conservation Review Project

There's been a significant long-term decline of black grouse across the UK. In 1995-6 there were 4,719 displaying males. A decade later, there were just 3,344. We're monitoring to find out what's going on, doing research to find the best way forward, and putting positive conservation measures in place. The black grouse Scottish Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP) group is committed to stemming losses by setting targets for population recovery and range expansion – so more black grouse, in more places. The conservation review project was set up and funded by the RSPB, SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT). Its aim is to assist conservation efforts for this special bird by giving an understanding of the breadth of black grouse work across Scotland. The project has produced three reports, which are summarised below.

Report 1: Black Grouse Monitoring Review

Surveys carried out in Scotland between 2000 and 2011 were recorded and results compiled. The report highlighted that between 2001-11 an estimated 16,855 km² (50%) of the 1988-91 breeding grounds, as shown in bird atlases as black grouse range in Scotland, has been surveyed for lekking (or displaying) males. There have been a number of annual programmes, mostly run by local volunteer study groups, plus additional irregular or one-off surveys.

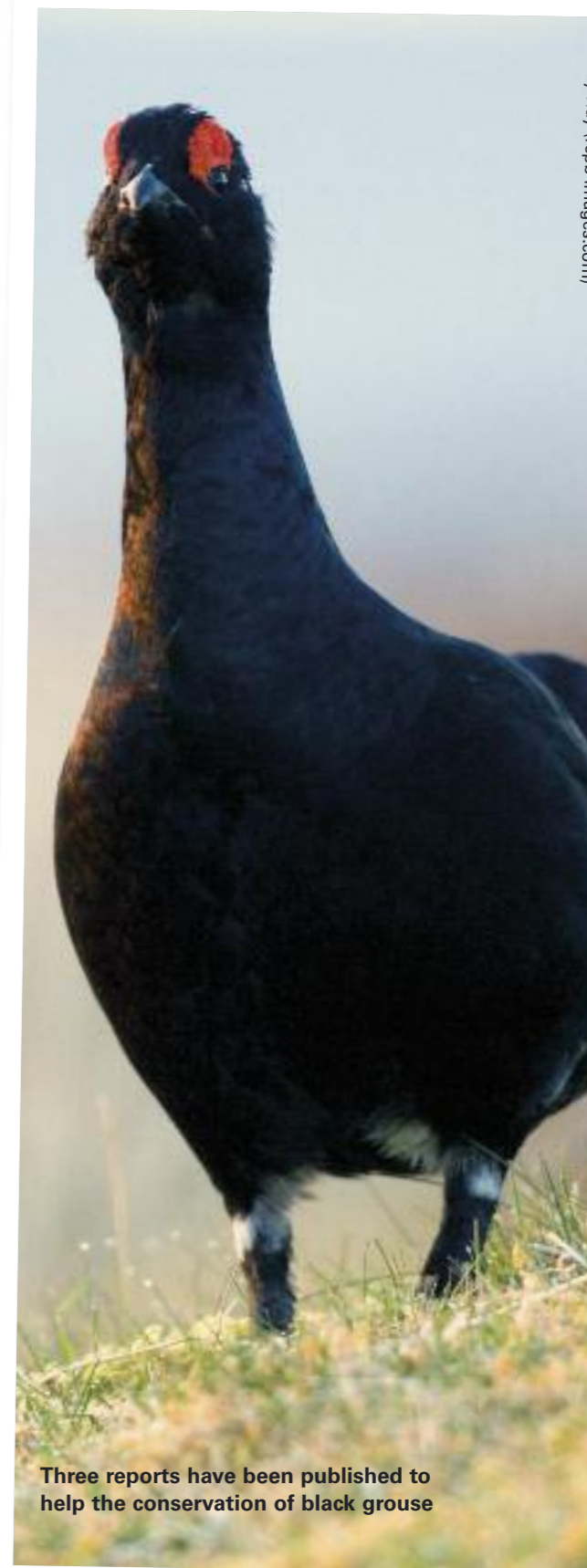
Report 2: a review of Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) spend

Rural Priorities (RP), part of the SRDP, is one of the key mechanisms for delivering black grouse management. The report highlighted that £8 million was spent between 2007 and 2011 via the dedicated black grouse package. The package has many options, including creation and management of woodlands and moorland as well as in-bye management and predator control. The highest concentration of spend occurred within south east Scotland, the region of greatest black grouse declines.

Report 3: a review of conservation effort

Most black grouse in Scotland are on private land, so a number of recovery projects are designed to help landowners. The projects work alongside management on nature reserves and the forest estate. There have been five black grouse projects in the last five years to provide targeted management advice to land owners and managers. The report highlights that some of these projects are unlikely to continue without additional funding.

For further information, please contact Black Grouse Project Officer, Robert Hawkes, at robert.hawkes@rspb.org.uk for more information.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Three reports have been published to help the conservation of black grouse

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit www.farmwildlife.info

What do farmers think of the V&FA?

Feedback from farmers about the V&FA allows us to review and make improvements so it continues to be beneficial for all involved.

Each year, questionnaires are sent to farmers who received a survey the year before last. This allows for any advice and management techniques to be put into practice.

The questionnaires from farmers who replied in 2011 show that:

- 98% found the laminated map useful
- 97% felt that taking part in the V&FA was a worthwhile experience
- 88% have put the farmland bird management guidelines that accompanied the map into practice
- 84% had species on their farms that they had not previously noticed
- 65% reported they were more aware of policies such as the Birds Directive.

And what do volunteers think?

The questionnaires completed by volunteers who took part in the V&FA in 2011 show that:

- 97% enjoyed participating in the V&FA
- 97% felt the training they received was either good or excellent
- 97% were satisfied with the level of support they received
- 82% felt their understanding of farmland birds and conservation had improved
- 75% reported that no problems were encountered during the surveys
- 70% reported that they were more aware of policies like the Birds Directive.

Keeping you informed

The RSPB is always updating its systems and processes for storing information. Farm information and other details that you give us will be held by the RSPB on paper and electronically. All details will be kept confidential. We will not make your name, address or any other information available to external

organisations without your permission. The RSPB is continually finding new ways to help farmers conserve wildlife. We may wish to contact you from time to time with such information. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way, please contact project staff in your area – contact details below.

The Birds Directive

The Birds Directive aims to protect biodiversity in Europe. The work described in this newsletter promotes the importance of the Birds Directive in conservation

management on farmland, creating a positive profile through promotional activities. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm

GET MORE INFO www.rspb.org.uk or e-mail: v&fa@rspb.org.uk

Please contact project staff at the following RSPB offices:

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.



We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

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