

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

So much to see so much to do, if you are game for a fair old day out in Perth

The Scottish Game Fair is a true celebration of rural Scotland helping educate and debate on issues whilst showcasing game, wildlife and countryside management.

Now in its 29th year, the Scottish Game Fair is run by the charity – Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) – as one of its main annual fundraisers and is a popular highlight in the Scottish events calendar, attracting more than 30,000 visitors from across the UK to Scone Palace Parklands.

As well as providing a fun-filled day out for our many visitors, which provides vital funding for the important work we do throughout the year, we want to tell people about the Trust's work and also inform those working on Scotland's magnificent land on best practice for preserving our precious wildlife.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's flagship stand beside the main ring is a 'must visit' for all Fair goers; it will highlight the benefits of our research and how science can be readily translated into practical management advice that helps ensure a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

The theme for the central exhibit is Grass to Grouse and the various displays aim to showcase how sympathetic management of a hill-edge livestock farm can be efficient without loss of biodiversity and carefully



There is much more to Scottish Game Fair than just hunting, shooting and fishing, explains Hugh Straker

integrated with sporting enterprises. Visitors will be able to see rare-breed cattle and sheep used as conservation grazers, along with other live exhibits.

Informative displays will include an array of cover and food crops available to support land managers' shooting and conservation interests along with shrub choices for effective pheasant coverts. With legal predator control activities forever being scrutinised, GWCT professional advisors will display the latest in modern predator control techniques and trap development.

Staff from the GWCT's upland and low ground research teams will be available to discuss current projects. This year's lively Main Ring programme includes lots of favourites such as the Dog 'n' Duck Show, spectacular axe demos from Gwynedd Axemen, the Tug o' War and the ever-popular Terrier Racing.

There will also be attractions including birds of prey, pipe bands, gun dog demos, fishing demos, dog agility and much more. The Fred Taylor Memorial Trophy for Work-

ing Hill Ponies, sponsored by John Rigby & Co for the first time, makes a welcome return on Sunday too.

New for 2017, the Fair is proud to host the inaugural Four Nations International Gundog competition on Saturday 1 July.

Teams from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales are set to compete on the island in front of the large grandstand by the River Tay. Each team will run three spaniels and three retrievers and the competition is tipped to be one of the highlights of the Fair. The judges are 'A' panel judges and come from the competing nations.

The newly-revamped fishing area will include a dedicated area called The Bothy for panel discussions, presentations and Q&As with guest speakers and experts.

Writer, broadcaster and fishing fanatic Fiona Armstrong will feature in a panel discussion encouraging more women to get into angling and European and World Fly Casting Champion Hywell Morgan will be demonstrating his winning technique in the Main Ring, as well as appearing at the Bothy as part of



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prey, pipe bands, gundog demos, fishing demos and dog agility displays

the panel discussions. The popular shooting area offers a range of experiences and competitions for experts to those who have never picked up a gun before.

Under the watchful eye of the Fair's safety supervisors, you can compete in the Clay and Drone Shooting com-

petitions as well as Have a Go (safety briefing and equipment provided). Ladies' Day will return on Saturday with a fabulous prize on offer for the winner from Blues and Browns and the Junior Challenge Award will take place on Sunday.

The fantastic Food Hall is back

There will be lots of delightful goodies to make up a picnic on the day and a huge array of flavoursome gifts and goodies which you can take home with you.

The Cookery Theatre will be hosted by the Fair's very own Foodie in Residence, Christopher Trotter. This

year's guest chefs include Masterchef: The Professionals' winner Jamie Scott among others. Hugo Straker is chairman of GWCT Scottish Game Fair. Please visit www.scottishfair.com for more information, ticket prices and to book online to beat the queues.



The need to build rural resilience is essential as these times of Brexit approach

We have to embrace reform but also increase profitability, says Sarah-Jane Laing

Nestled at the heart of Scotland's Great Glen, Loch Ness Shores is an award-winning camping and caravaning site that draws thousands of visitors to the village of Foyers every year.

Opened in 2013 on the loch's south-east shore, the land occupied by the business was originally farmland before owners Lyn and Donald Forbes sought to diversify their agricultural business which they believed was becoming difficult to sustain.

Yet their decision to make that leap coincided with one of the most difficult periods imaginable for our rural businesses, with the lasting effects of the economic crash of 2008 combined with challenges

such as constitutional uncertainty and hurdles around poor mobile and broadband services.

Speaking at Scottish Land & Estates' annual conference held just last month, Loch Ness Shores' owner Lyn Forbes was one of many who reflected on what the latest challenge, Brexit, may mean for rural Scotland and the bravery required to invest in uncertain times.

Yet, above all else, the message coming from all the conference attendees was the need to build rural resilience – and give rural businesses the tools they need to unlock the entrepreneurial creativity that undoubtedly exists in our countryside.

We cannot be blind to the fact that no matter what shape Brexit takes

– hard or soft – it will be arguably most keenly felt in our rural areas, especially where farming is at the heart of many communities.

Although the Common Agricultural Policy is guaranteed until at least 2020, there is little doubt that we should expect less public money to be available to support farming in future decades. Where there may still be some funding available, we expect it to be directed differently.

That means our rural businesses, especially those involved in agriculture, must be equipped to meet the tests the countryside will face. We have to embrace positive reform but also look to increase business profitability, an issue that has long been a problem for a farming sector challenged by global commodity prices.

Larger agricultural units and new uses of technology may be the answer for some but we are simply not going to be able to continue to operate in the way that it has Aye Been Done, or we're going to get overtaken by events.

But whilst businesses need to change, there is also a requirement for politicians to recognise Scotland's needs in Brexit discussions. In England, only 15 per cent of farming land is classified as poor or 'less favoured' – in Scotland that ratio is flipped, with 85 per cent of our land less favoured. That means a far trickier set of circumstances for our agriculture – and what policy works for other parts of the UK will not necessarily work in Scotland.

One of the key strengths of land-

owners in Scotland is their ability to continually adapt but the pace of change we see coming is stark.

Speaking at the conference, Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, agreed that estates and government needed to work side by side to deliver for our rural areas, and made clear that he was continuing to pursue the not just the policy outcomes but also the connectivity tools needed, such as fibre broadband, to ensure rural entrepreneurs could unleash their potential.

In the case of Loch Ness Shores, this ability to diversify has provided an economic boost to the business but also social benefit to the local area. The village was once extremely vibrant, located near an aluminium

smelter which at one time employed 500 people. After the smelter's closure in 1967, the village went into decline and amid fears the village shop was going to close in the mid-2000s, Lyn and Donald were determined they could use their assets to help the community.

Now boasting 5-star accreditation from VisitScotland, World Host status and a Gold Green Tourism Award, Loch Ness Shores employs four full-time and four part-time staff, with a further six jobs in the summer – most of whom are employed from the local area.

Whilst not every farm can diversify, with the beauty of Loch Ness on the doorstep, the ingenuity of the Forbes family has contributed to a situation where the business and the village

feel more readily equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities that Brexit will bring. The challenge for government and rural enterprise across Scotland is to work together to replicate that outcome.

Sarah-Jane Laing, executive director of Scottish Land & Estates



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