

## **The Braan-Almond Group (Aug 02 - Feb 08)**

We worked with four estates in the area to the west of Dunkeld in Perthshire. The overall purpose of the Group was to increase the numbers of grouse in the area. We advised the estates and coordinated their efforts to combat the spread of sheep ticks and the associated disease, Louping Ill, which is thought to be a significant factor in the reduction of grouse stocks.

The measures introduced included:

- Treatment of sheep with acaricides (pour-on treatments and dip) to kill any ticks that came into contact with the sheep;
- Reducing the number of deer that can spread large numbers of ticks indiscriminately;
- Vaccination of sheep against Louping Ill;
- Annual blood tests of a sample of sheep from each flock to monitor the level of Louping Ill; and
- Habitat management to reduce the area of habitat that is favourable for sheep ticks.

We organised regular meetings for the landowners, factors and estate staff. During these meetings the progress and issues on each estate were discussed with a view to making sure that all estates were achieving the same standards. The work was expensive and the benefits will not be revealed for several years, but there are no short cuts if tick numbers are to be reduced and Louping Ill eradicated. The driving force behind this work was the wish to see grouse shooting restored to these estates, but there will be other important benefits for the condition of the moorland and the other species that live there.