

Annual Review

2025 v2

www.heathertrust.co.uk



**WILDFIRE2026
UK WILDFIRE CONFERENCE**

Why the 2026 UK Wildfire
Conference matters more than ever
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**FUTURES MOORS: SCIENCE
FOR SUSTAINABLE UPLANDS**

A pioneering research project to
quantify ecosystem services
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**PARTNERSHIP HOPES FOR
SWEET SUCCESS**

The Heather Trust and Northumberland
Honey Co join forces
p. 31



Supporting resilient moorlands through practical ecology and vegetation management.

At GVA, we're passionate about helping land managers care for moorlands and upland environments safely, sensitively and sustainably.

Our accredited teams combine practical vegetation management with ecological understanding, delivering solutions that protect biodiversity, reduce hazards and strengthen landscape resilience.

- Heather cutting
- Gorse removal and mulching
- Bracken control, cutting and rolling
- Stock fencing deer fencing
- Biodiversity net gain
- Reed and aquatic maintenance
- Fire mitigation
- Rhododendron removal and mulching

Whether improving access, creating firebreaks, or enhancing habitats for wildlife, we work collaboratively with estates, conservation organisations and infrastructure partners across the UK.

As trusted Tier 1 contractors to National Highways, we bring the same high standards of safety, efficiency and environmental care to every project, from lowland reedbeds to upland heather moors.

If you're managing land, maintaining access routes or improving habitat resilience, our team can help deliver practical, environmentally sensitive solutions.

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Receive updates, our Annual Review, and attend events



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The Heather Trust (SCIO)
Scottish Charity no: SC049374

All photos: The Heather Trust and contributors as indicated.

The views expressed in this Report are those of the authors themselves. They are not necessarily those of the Editor, or the Board of The Heather Trust.

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President's foreword

PROF DAVY McCracken, PRESIDENT OF THE HEATHER TRUST

Over the past five years I have been part of the supervisory team at the University of Lisbon for a PhD which has been investigating the potential benefits of using horses or cattle for biodiversity and ecosystem management on abandoned farmland in Mediterranean systems.

Such farmland in Portugal scrubs up quickly once grazing pressure ceases, and a major focus of the research was on whether the reintroduction of grazing could both improve biodiversity and reduce wildfire risk.

At a broad scale the PhD findings highlighted that while moderate cattle grazing can help reduce shrub fuel loads and local wildfire risk, it doesn't always result in benefits for biodiversity.

Conversely, while grazing by horses can help improve biodiversity, it doesn't – at least at the small number of sites under investigation – reduce fuel load as they

avoid many of the shrubs contributing to a high fuel load.

Ironically, while visiting Portugal in August this year I was unable to get anywhere near the study sites for the PhD due to the amount of large wildfires in the east of the country!

However, nothing in this world is ever black and white and a major recommendation from the PhD research was that there needed to be more of a concerted focus on this topic.

All of which brings me back to the UK, and how pleased I am to see the Trust putting such a strong focus on encouraging evidence-driven discussion and debate around the important role that upland land managers play in reducing wildfire risk in the uplands.

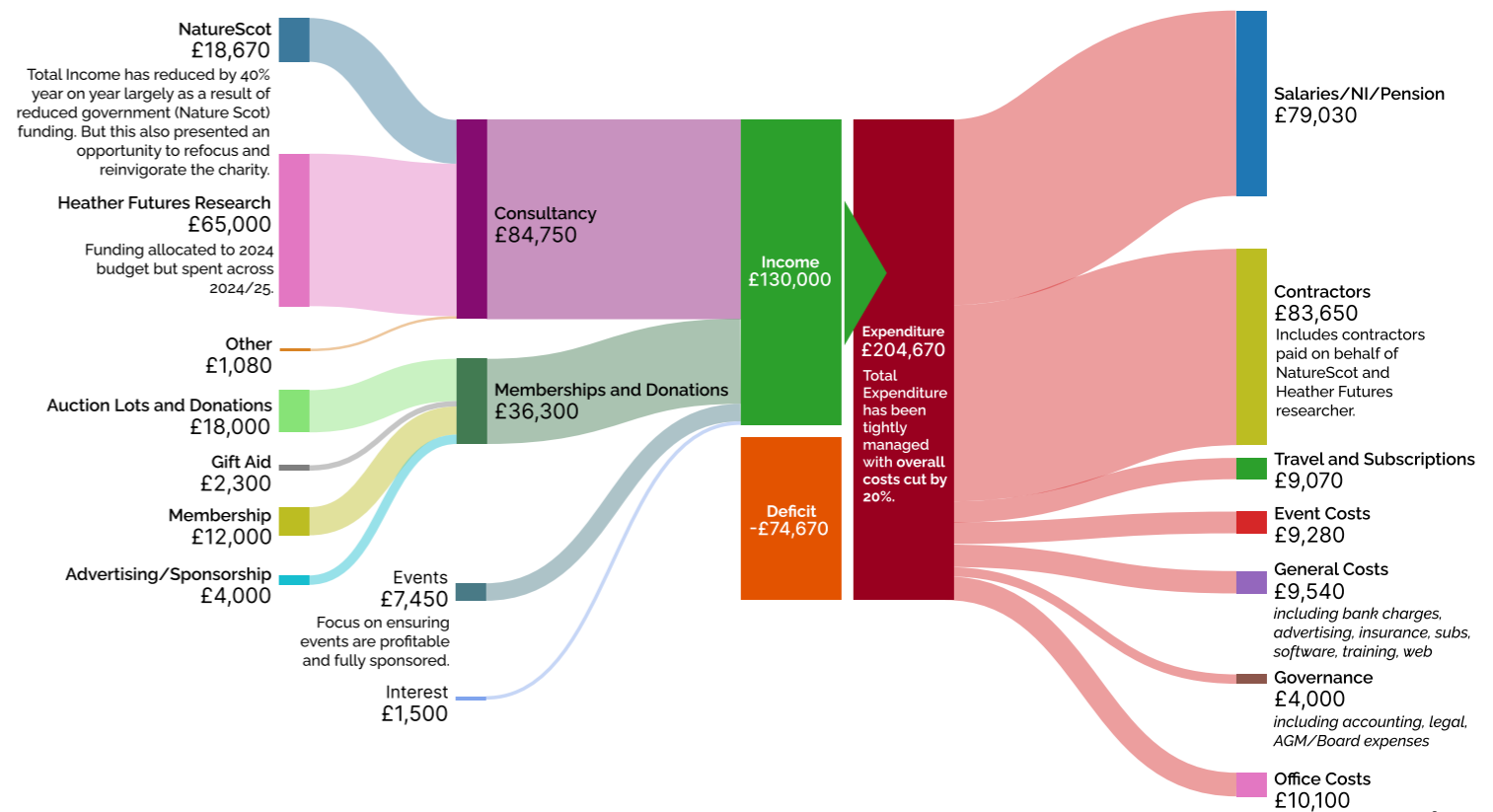
Climate change is not going to go away and will certainly continue to impact markedly on our UK landscapes.

And the experience in Portugal would suggest that we ignore the role that timely, active and effective management of fuel loads can have at our peril.

D. J. McCracken

2024 accounts

Our activity throughout 2024 focussed on streamlining costs and raising the Trust's profile and reach across the UK. Through this hard work, the Trust has generated many opportunities.



Chair's introduction

VIV GILL, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

Welcome to this year's Annual Review from The Heather Trust.

As 2025 draws to a close, it is a pleasure to look back on what has been an energetic and purposeful year for the Trust.

With our *Heather Futures* research report published in the spring, we've been able to take our message on the road – holding events across the country to share findings, spark discussion, and bring together people who care deeply about the future of our heather moorlands. As you will read in this issue, *Heather Futures* confirms that UK moorland habitats are rapidly being lost and sets out why this is happening. The impact of changing land management practices, in particular woodland expansion, is significant. However, the lively debates and enthusiasm we've encountered at our events in Scotland, northern England, London and beyond show just how many people share our passion for protecting and enhancing these iconic places.

This work has also given us valuable opportunities to engage directly with policymakers – including events at Holyrood and Westminster – as we continue to act as a strong and trusted voice for the uplands.

Alongside this major project, our team has continued to deliver a busy programme of

member-focussed events, workshops and field visits. These gatherings remain one of the Trust's greatest strengths, offering members the chance to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and see positive management in action. Whether through sharing research, supporting best practice or simply bringing people together, we are proud of the role we play in connecting the upland community.

Fundraising has also been a significant priority this year. We are enormously grateful to all those who have contributed – through donations, hosting events or their time – to sustain the Trust's activities. This will continue to be a major focus for us. Every contribution directly supports our ability to carry out research, hold events, and champion the importance of sustainable heather moorland management at a national level.

Our heather moorlands mean so much to so many – places of work, heritage, wildlife and wellbeing. Thank you for continuing to support our work and helping to ensure these landscapes remain vibrant and valued for generations to come.

Viv Gill

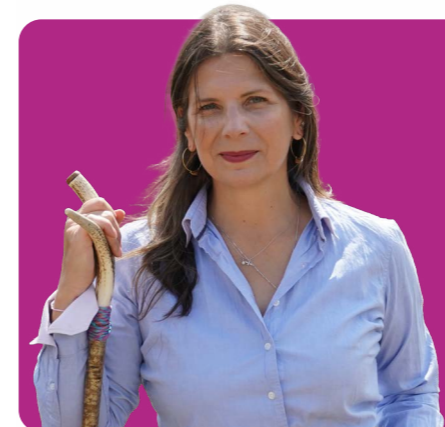


Raising a glass to valued patron

IN our 2024 Review, we paid tribute to Malcolm Hay, as he stepped back from the role of Vice-President of The Heather Trust, having provided long-standing patronage of our charity.

Earlier this year, our Director Katrina Candy met with Malcolm in his Aberdeenshire home to present him with a pair of engraved whisky tumblers as a thank you for his generous support both in time, guidance and donations.

Team highlights



Director Katrina Candy

Well, that's been a quick year – but what a year it has been! I'm so proud of what our small, yet focussed and driven team has been able to achieve, and together we have made a difference. We've delivered a calendar of great events, got stuck into some impactful policy work and utilised our *Heather Futures* research to the absolute maximum – even resulting in its contents being cited in the dialogue around the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill.

We've enjoyed audiences with many, many stakeholders throughout the UK, been on national TV (more than once) and had promising, in-depth conversations with MPs and MSPs across the political spectrum which we will be following up in the new year.

We've cemented some great collaborations with other organisations and companies, including the Scottish Gamekeeper's Association with whom we have published my fourth children's book (a personal highlight) and I'm looking forward to developing some really creative and rewarding partnerships.

Thank you for your continued support and I'm excited to build on the successes of 2025 by continuing to grow this unique and worthwhile charity.

Marketing, Events & Digital Manager Chloe Thornton

Over the past year at the Heather Trust, I've been lucky to experience so many standout moments that reflect just how passionate and dedicated our small team is. We have delivered a wide range of successful events, from launching the new *Lekkie & Brekkie* to managing my first *Spring Auction*, which featured a fantastic range of lots and raised more funds for the Trust than in recent years. We also took the *Heather Futures Roadshow* around the country, bringing our message directly to those who need to hear the importance of this research. Not forgetting our Big Day Out field trip that took place in Yorkshire, and a trip to Holyrood and Westminster for good measure! Getting out, meeting supporters, and showcasing the deliverables of this small but impactful charity has been inspiring – and with exciting new projects already unfolding for 2026, I'm confident the Trust is going to go from strength to strength.

Marketing, Events & Digital Assistant Jimmy Jr Caysip

This year has been a meaningful period of growth for me at The Heather Trust. I began last year as an intern supporting the brand refresh and have since taken on wider work across marketing, events and digital projects. Along the way, I've gained a far deeper understanding of the challenges facing UK moorlands and how they affect the environment, wildlife and local communities. Seeing the difference our projects can make has been genuinely motivating and has strengthened my commitment to the Trust's work. Looking ahead, I'm keen to continue building my skills, raise greater awareness of our causes and connect with others who share our values. I've really enjoyed being part of such a supportive team, and I'm excited to help deliver the projects and events planned for 2026.

Finance & Administration Jennifer Graham

Although many of my wins this year have been tied to HMRC and administrative work – the kind of exciting behind-the-scenes work that you don't want to read about in our Annual Review! I'm proud of the role I've played in keeping everything running smoothly. It's been great to learn more about the Trust, understand what we're trying to achieve, and see how my work supports the wider functions that help make our projects and events possible. I've enjoyed becoming part of such a dedicated small team, and I'm glad to be contributing to the strong foundations that allow the Trust to deliver its work confidently and effectively.

OFFICE BEARERS



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Viv Gill



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Dr Colin Shedden

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Robert Benson



Hamish Waugh



Richard Cooke



Roger Burton



Dr. Emily Taylor



George Dodds



Dr. Andreas Heinemeyer



A 360° perspective of our uplands

Bringing together expertise to secure the future of our moorlands



Pictured (l to r): Edward March-Shawcross, Matthew Colston, Geoff Eyre, Andreas Heinemeyer, Katrina Candy, John Clarke, Rosie Snowden, Viv Gill



Pictured (l to r): John Clarke, Edward March-Shawcross, Rosie Snowden, Geoff Eyre, Andreas Heinemeyer, Matthew Colston, Katrina Candy, Viv Gill



The event reflected the diversity of the uplands themselves – welcoming over 40 attendees from land managers and conservationists to researchers and policy specialists.



CHLOE THORNTON, MARKETING MANAGER AT THE HEATHER TRUST

Our *Big Day Out* offered a fantastic opportunity to bring people together to explore the many challenges and opportunities within upland management. Held at Goathland Village Hall in the North York Moors, the event welcomed over 40 attendees, from land managers and conservationists to researchers and policy specialists, for a day of learning, discussion and connection.

The event's itinerary reflected the diversity of the uplands themselves. Rosie Snowden joined us from the Yorkshire Peatland Partnership, and spoke on the development of peatland restoration sites, and Edward March-Shawcross from the North York Moors National Park, who helped coordinate the event, offered valuable local insights on work carried out on the National Park in recent years. Geoff Eyre, a leading figure in moorland restoration, shared his pioneering experience from the Peak District, while John Clarke of the National Gamekeepers' Organisation introduced their new Wildfire Risk Index - a practical tool designed to help land managers and keepers assess and respond to wildfire risk.

Further discussion came from Matthew Colston, who provided an update on tick management and the current status of the Louping-ill vaccination. Attendees also experienced a 'walk and talk' out on the moorland as part of the day. Andreas Heinemeyer, a leading scientist from York University and Trust board member, joined Ed March-Shawcross, as they explored research findings, the importance of adaptive management, and how policy decisions impact those working directly on the land.

The event captured what The Heather Trust stands for; collaboration, dialogue, and the exchange of knowledge to support sustainable upland management. Our sincere thanks go to the Goathland Village Hall committee, the North York Moors National Park, and everyone who contributed to making the day such a success. *The Big Day Out* was a reminder that meaningful progress comes from working together and learning from one another to secure the future of our uplands.



2025 has proven to be another challenging wildfire season across the whole UK

New Perspectives, Shared Solutions

Why the 2026 UK Wildfire Conference matters more than ever



GARETH CLAY, VICE-CHAIR OF EWWF

With the largest burned areas on record, 2025 has proven to be another challenging wildfire season across the whole UK, including several major events, such as Dava and Carrbridge in the Scottish Highlands, Langdale Moor in the North York Moors, Holt Heath in Dorset and in the Mourne Mountains in County Down.

For over 20 years the biennial UK wildfire conference has been an opportunity to come together as a wildfire community, to reflect on lessons learnt from recent wildfire seasons, discover the latest insights from research and practice, and to develop shared ways of working for the future.

We're pleased to announce that the next UK conference will be held at Headingley Stadium, Leeds, on 10 - 11th November 2026 - returning to northern England for the first time since the 2011 conference in Buxton. The event will be organised by The Heather Trust on behalf of the hosts, the England and Wales Wildfire Forum.

The conference theme will be 'New Perspectives, Shared Solutions' reflecting two guiding principles for the event.

- As the wildfire risk evolves, we are likely to see new challenges in the UK such as fires in previously unaffected landscapes or with novel fire behaviour, or where the resulting environmental, social and economic impact may require new forms of recovery. We need to ensure new voices and new ways of understanding wildfire are included in tackling this challenge.
- Working together to deal with wildfire has never been more important. Through collaborative approaches to sharing knowledge and working across disciplinary or organisational boundaries, we will ensure a shared vision for the future.

Regardless of whether you are a regular attendee or if you've not attended the conference before (or haven't been for some time), 2026 will be a great opportunity to build your network or to renew old connections. For further details, check the conference website for regular updates.

ukwildfireconference.co.uk



Taking important strides in 2025

Inside the Wader Conservation Plan and the drive for practical solutions



DAVE PARISH, CHAIR OF WORKING FOR WADERS

This has been an important year for Working for Waders - a partnership of organisations and individuals striving to help conserve Scotland's breeding wading birds.

We continued with our educational activities, hosting six farm walks exploring habitat and predation management issues, which generated lively discussions and highlighted lots of interesting and useful perspectives from practitioners across the country.

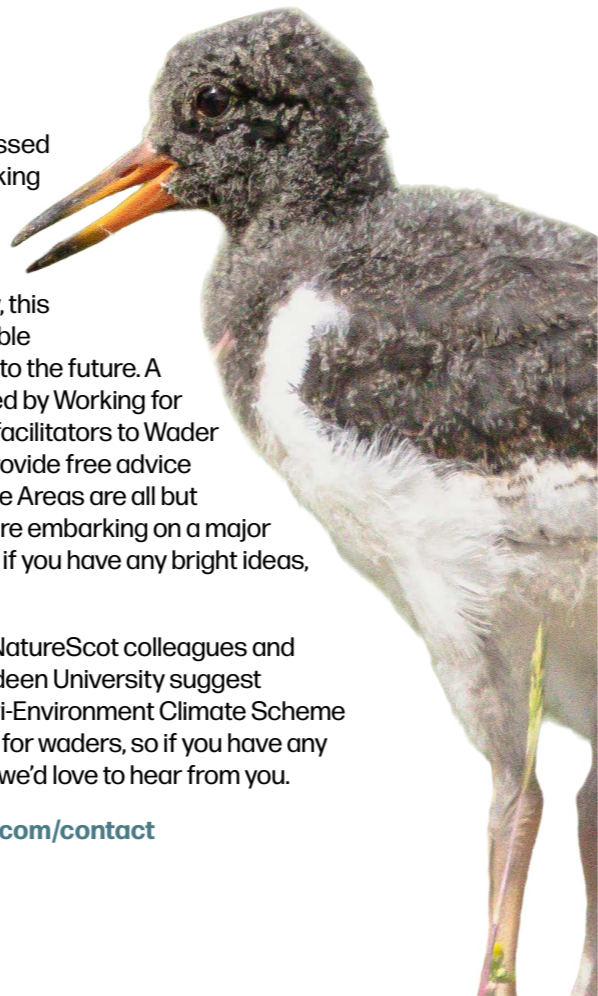
We also ran both our Nest Camera and Wader Calendar projects again (with BTO), although the results are not yet in. These are 'citizen science' projects where anyone can share their data on waders - if you're interested, please get in touch (www.workingforwaders.com).

The Nest Camera project contributed data to a paper published in the international journal *Ibis* earlier this year, an extremely valuable contribution. This showed that across mainland UK, wader clutches were mainly predated by badgers and foxes (you can see the paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ibi.13436>).

We have also progressed the NatureScot/Working for Waders, *Wader Conservation Plan*. Part of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, this aims to conserve viable wader populations into the future. A big part of the Plan, led by Working for Waders, is to deploy facilitators to Wader Recovery Areas to provide free advice to land managers. The Areas are all but determined and we are embarking on a major fundraising effort, so if you have any bright ideas, please get in touch!

We are also helping NatureScot colleagues and researchers at Aberdeen University suggest improvements to Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) prescriptions for waders, so if you have any experience of these, we'd love to hear from you.

workingforwaders.com/contact



Building resilience

Working together with Pasture for Life



CHLOE THORNTON, MARKETING MANAGER AT THE HEATHER TRUST

Towards the end of 2025, we collaborated with *Pasture for Life* on a joint event designed to build knowledge, encourage discussion and support practical action on wildfire management for farmers, land managers and advisors.

Wildfire Ready, held at Rottal Estate, Kirriemuir, on the 13th of November offered a hands-on look at wildfire preparedness, an increasingly critical topic as the frequency and intensity of wildfires rises across the UK.

The day featured live demonstrations of equipment, workshops on wildfire readiness, and expert-led discussions on building resilience across landscapes. Attendees heard from a range of specialists, including representatives from the *Scottish Fire & Rescue Service*, *Cairngorms National Park* and *Vallfirest*, who showcased cutting-edge wildfire-fighting equipment and shared frontline experiences.

The event also encouraged conversations around collaboration and coordination, and assisted the development of wildfire preparedness amongst farmers and land managers to strengthen prevention at a local level.



Wildfire Ready panel discussion and Q&A session: cross-sector collaboration and land use
 Pictured (l to r): Nadia Flaherty, Colin Mclean, Iain Hepburn, Michael Bruce, Eduardo Chivite, Peter Douglas



Wildfire Ready Kit Demo and the Practicalities of Providing Equipment, presented by Fire Hose Tech



Hill and upland farmers collectively manage 70% of Scotland's land area – areas where the impacts of these devastating events will be felt most by those who live and work there. Those managing and living in these rural areas need training and support to be prepared to protect our Scottish landscape and rural when wildfires break out, not if."

Partnership working remains central to how we approach our mission, empowering land managers to respond proactively to emerging challenges through knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Looking ahead, *The Heather Trust* and *Pasture for Life* are planning to build on the momentum from *Wildfire Ready* event by hosting a roundtable event in early Spring 2026, bringing together farmers and land managers to discuss topical issues, shared concerns and policy development.

For updates and future event announcements, please visit our website or follow us on social media.

heathertrust.co.uk

Heather Futures roadshow

Engaging with stakeholders across the UK: sharing our research findings



HEATHER FUTURES
HEATHER FUTURES
The Heather Trust
Change in the Extent of Moorland Habitat in the UK between 1990 – 2023



CHLOE THORNTON, MARKETING MANAGER AT THE HEATHER TRUST

Throughout 2025, The Heather Trust has been delighted to bring its Heather Futures research to audiences across the UK, highlighting the urgent need to protect and restore our heather moorlands. Our research revealed that, over the last 30 years, the UK has lost heather moorland equivalent in size to the city of Birmingham every year - a stark reminder of the pressures facing these vital landscapes. The Heather Futures roadshow was designed to share these findings widely, engage stakeholders, and encourage collaborative action to safeguard the future of our uplands.

The roadshow began in May with a reception at Bonhams in Edinburgh, where we introduced our findings to a diverse audience of land managers, conservationists and supporters. This set the tone

for a series of events across the country, including two receptions - at the Royal Highland Show held by kind permission of Howdens, and with Calton at the Scottish Game Fair. Each reception offered an opportunity to discuss the key challenges identified in our research, from habitat loss and biodiversity decline to the pressures of land use and climate change.

In the summer, we took the roadshow further afield with a reception at Raby Castle in County Durham, bringing together upland stakeholders and rural professionals to explore the implications of the Heather Futures findings for moorlands in the North of England. Later in September, we held an event in London at the St James' office of RBC Brewin Dolphin. These receptions were complemented by vital

political engagement, with a reception at the Scottish Parliament in October and a Westminster event in December, allowing MSPs and MPs to hear first-hand about the scale of heather loss and the need for policy action.

Across all events, the roadshow engaged hundreds of attendees, including land managers, farmers, gamekeepers, conservationists, advisors and policymakers. Discussions focused on practical solutions, collaborative approaches and the critical role of research in informing sustainable upland management. Feedback from attendees highlighted the value of the roadshow in providing clear insights, encouraging dialogue and strengthening networks between rural communities.

The Heather Futures roadshow has been a

resounding success, demonstrating the appetite for evidence-based discussion and the importance of raising awareness about the state of our uplands. For those who were unable to attend a reception, the full report and key findings of the Heather Futures study are available on our website.

As we reflect on 2025, the Heather Futures roadshow has reinforced the power of engagement, collaboration and evidence-based advocacy. By sharing research, sparking conversations, and bringing together diverse voices, we are taking important steps toward securing a sustainable future for the UK's heather moorlands – landscapes that are vital for biodiversity, carbon storage and rural communities alike.

heathertrust.co.uk/heather-futures

Spring Auction 2025

Our annual fundraiser goes from strength to strength

CHLOE THORNTON, MARKETING MANAGER AT THE HEATHER TRUST

We are delighted that our 2025 Spring Auction raised almost £23,000 in support of The Heather Trust's work, and it was our most successful online auction to date. A huge thank you to everyone who contributed - from those who donated lots to those who placed bids and helped spread the word.

This year's auction offered an incredible range of items up for grabs, with something to suit every interest. From sporting and fishing experiences to luxury countryside retreats in the UK and overseas, as well as original artwork and one-of-a-kind experiences, the generosity of our supporters shone through in every lot.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the individuals and businesses who kindly donated prizes,

many of whom support us year after year. Your ongoing commitment makes a vital difference, helping us raise the funds needed to continue promoting and advocating for resilient, sustainable upland management across the UK for the benefit of nature, climate and rural communities.

We are already planning the 2026 Spring Auction, which promises to be even bigger and better! If you would like to get involved by donating a Lot, offering a monetary contribution, or supporting the event in some way, we would be delighted to hear from you. Every contribution helps strengthen our work and ensures we can continue to support those who advocate for and manage our uplands.

heathertrust.co.uk/contact



Peatland ACTION



Restoring Scotland's peatlands for the many benefits to people and to nature.

Climate change is the most serious threat to Scotland's environment. Early action is central to overcoming these impacts. Peatland restoration offers a solution.

The Heather Trust
celebrating our magnificent moorlands

Spring Auction

Bid online from
24th April to 17th May 2026

- Sporting experiences across the UK
- Fine food and drink
- Unique luxury getaways
- Bespoke artwork
- Wild fishing adventures and much more...



Helping us to reduce the effects of climate change by storing carbon.



Regulating water flow and quality, improving flood management, fisheries and source water supplies.



Benefiting farming and sporting practices e.g. the abundance of invertebrates on which grouse feed.



Internationally important habitats, home to rare and often unique plants, invertebrates and birds.

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ACTION

Restoring Scotland's Peatlands
Ath-stèidheachadh Talamh Mònach na h-Alba

We provide bespoke advice on restoration management and funding.

Contact us: peatlandaction@nature.scot
Follow us: @PeatlandACTION



There have been several defining characteristics of this Holyrood session which have arguably shaped how upland policy has evolved over the last five years.



A pivotal parliamentary session

A consequential parliament for our treasured uplands

ROSS EWING, DIRECTOR OF MOORLAND & STRATEGIC PROJECTS AT SCOTTISH LAND & ESTATES

Even by the standards of the Scottish Parliament, the current parliamentary session will go down in history as one of the most pivotal - at least as far as policies affecting our uplands are concerned.

The list is pretty expansive. Grouse moor licensing, muirburn training, compulsory land management plans, muirburn licensing, the grouse moor management code, wildlife trap training, compulsory lotting of land, enhanced powers for the Scottish SPCA, compulsory community engagement obligations, the muirburn code, wildlife trap licensing, a ban on the use of snares and humane cable restraints, statutory biodiversity targets, new powers for state intervention in deer management, abolition of the close season for male deer, a compulsory register for authorised deer managers... I could genuinely go on. At this point, it is probably easier to list policies which haven't impacted our uplands, rather than those that have.

There have been several defining characteristics of this Holyrood session which have arguably shaped how upland policy has evolved over the last five years. Of particular note, the Bute House Agreement - a short-lived alliance which brought MSPs from the Scottish Greens into Ministerial office for the first time. While it is true the greens only had two (junior) Ministers, their influence over policy could not have been more evident. Many of the more damaging policies of the last 5 years can be attributed to the Greens and their influence. It is also the case that the sheer raft of policy making is, perhaps, a reflection of Green Ministers in a hurry.

But the arithmetic of Holyrood means that parliamentary deal making is set to continue in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament was not designed to have a majority administration - a feat only ever achieved once by the SNP under Alex Salmond, and that was back in 2011. Minority governments are the rule - not the exception - and agreements are generally struck between parties on a bill-by-bill or issue-by-issue basis: an arrangement known as 'confidence and supply'. In all likelihood, that means the door will continue to be open to negotiation in the next parliament, with

our uplands - and the people and wildlife who live there - potentially caught in the crossfire.

If polls are to be believed, the next election will deliver an SNP-minority administration led by John Swinney. The Reform party will rise - most likely at the expense of the Tories and Labour, and possibly enough to become the predominant opposition party - while the Greens and Liberal Democrats make modest gains. For the First Minister, getting business done will be contingent on working with others - the most likely candidates being the Greens or Lib Dems.

So what are the flashpoints of 2026-2031 likely to be? A lot depends on what features in the manifestos of the SNP, Greens and Lib Dems. It is worth noting that, prior to this parliament, a number of significant government-commissioned reviews were published into grouse moor management, deer management and hunting with dogs respectively. These paved the way for an unprecedented trio of Bills this parliament, all seeking radical change to wildlife management policy. We are not expecting any reviews of consequence to be published ahead of May 2026, so this might deliver a moment of legislative breathing space. However, it is also true to say that many of the policies referenced at the start of this article have yet to be commenced by Ministers (and implemented by government agencies). The work of the Heather Trust, Scottish Land & Estates and others will very much continue in this space.

When it comes to the uplands, this parliament has arguably been led more by ideology than evidence. It is no wonder land managers working in these breathtaking landscapes feel a degree of malaise when confronted with the prospect of more-or-the-same come next parliament. But there are chinks of hope amid the trepidation - especially when it comes to major societal challenges, such as the growing risk of wildfire, where land managers proved themselves to be instrumental in the response to what is widely being termed the worst year on record for wildfire incidents. There are definitive signs Ministers are beginning to listen, and that must be the focus of all our efforts as we look ahead to the 2026 Holyrood election and beyond.

A real-time view of wildfire risk on moorland

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation's Wildfire Risk Index



JOHN CLARKE, DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION, POLICY AND UPLANDS AT THE NATIONAL GAMEKEEPERS' ORGANISATION

This year has been the worst on record for wildfires in the UK and it's not hard to see why when the gamekeepers on one estate in the Peak District have recorded 960 naked flame incidents, (campfires, barbecues or camping stoves) this year alone. All of that on just 6000 acres!

According to the Moorland Association, wildfire costs in England are estimated to be £460 million for 2025 – the same as paying 15,770 new firefighters for a year and a sum that comes directly from the public purse. In response, the National Gamekeepers' Organisation launched the Wildfire Risk Index to help Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), National Parks, landowners, and the public assess real-time upland fire risk as perceived by gamekeepers working on the ground.

The Wildfire Risk Assessment gives the FRS the ability to appropriate staff and appliances when the risks are considered dangerous, allowing them to respond to wildfire dangers more effectively. National Parks and

private landowners can increase staff, adapt messaging and warn the public of the dangers of open fires and barbecues.

Information gathered by experts

The project collects information from 32 gamekeepers who manage upland estates across England and Wales; their depth of knowledge is vast. They manage 28 estates covering 250,000 acres and have over 700 years of experience between them. 54% of the keepers have taken the Defra-funded Wildfire Mitigation and Prescribed Burning course.

How does it work?

The gamekeepers in the project report weekly on a specific set of questions based on their own knowledge, experience and understanding of both the ground they manage and surrounding areas. This is not a scientific study but a picture of the state of the moors in real time put together by the people who spend their lives working to protect these fragile sites.

The questions

- Wind direction
- Wind speed
- Weather forecast, length of dry spell
- Last rainfall
- Are there fire supportive conditions / high ignition risk, over the weekend?
- Humidity levels
- Is there a public bank holiday with a high ignition risk?
- What is the estimated vegetation moisture content?

The keepers answer questions based on a traffic light system where green is low-risk, amber is medium, red is high and purple is extreme risk.

Keepers score each question from 1 (no risk) to 4 (extreme danger). These scores are averaged to produce a map-based risk rating, displayed live to give FRS, National Parks, and others a clear, real-time view of perceived wildfire threat.

In conclusion

Natural England's new controlled burning restrictions (lowering the depth of peat from 40cm to 30cm) have dangerously increased wildfire risk overnight on over 670,000 (from 246,156) hectares of moors. By allowing fuel loads to accumulate, their policy amplifies the threat to wildlife, property and human life, with little apparent understanding or consideration of the consequences.

nationalgamekeepers.org.uk

The power of collaboration

Why the Uplands Alliance matters and how we plan to refresh it

Uplands Alliance

CHRISTOPHER PRICE, CHAIR OF THE UPLANDS ALLIANCE

The Uplands Alliance is a unique forum dedicated to the future of our upland landscapes and the communities that depend on them. Bringing together farmers, land managers, researchers, conservationists, policymakers and rural organisations, the Alliance provides a space where evidence and practice meet. Its role is to ensure that England's uplands, vital for food production, biodiversity, water, carbon storage and cultural heritage, are represented in policy and public debate, and that those working on the ground have a strong, collective voice.

The uplands face some of the most complex and interlinked challenges in land management. They are home to fragile farming systems, distinctive native breeds, and globally significant habitats such as peatlands, heaths, and upland meadows. These landscapes also play a critical role in regulating water supplies, storing carbon, and supporting diverse wildlife. At the same time, upland communities face economic pressures, population decline, and the need to maintain cultural traditions that have shaped the land for centuries. Balancing these environmental, social, and economic priorities requires collaboration across sectors – something the Uplands Alliance facilitates uniquely.

The Alliance matters because it brings together voices that often operate in separate silos. Farmers and land managers can share practical insights with researchers studying biodiversity or climate resilience. Conservationists can highlight the latest evidence on habitat restoration, while policymakers gain a grounded understanding of how upland initiatives work on the ground. In short, the Alliance acts as both a convenor and a bridge, connecting science, practice, and policy in ways that no single organisation can achieve alone.

Another key strength of the Alliance is its role in shaping national discussions on upland land use. By providing evidence-based insights, hosting workshops and

conferences, and producing policy-relevant outputs, it ensures upland perspectives are included in debates on agricultural support, environmental land management schemes, and rural development. Its convening power enables knowledge exchange across regions, so successful approaches in one area – from peatland restoration to sustainable livestock management – can inform practices elsewhere.

Equally important is the Alliance's focus on cultural and social values. Upland landscapes are not only environmental assets but also places of heritage, recreation, and identity. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the Alliance helps safeguard these values, ensuring upland communities and landscapes remain resilient and vibrant for future generations.

As we look ahead, it is early days in considering how to refresh the Uplands Alliance. The intention is to strengthen participation, broaden engagement and ensure the network continues to be relevant and impactful. Possible options include exploring regional or thematic working groups, enhancing the sharing of practical case studies, and experimenting with new ways to communicate and connect members digitally. These ideas are still in development, and we see the refresh as an opportunity to listen to members and build a forum that meets the evolving needs of upland stakeholders.

The Uplands Alliance exists because collaboration is essential for resilient uplands. By nurturing the network, embracing innovation, and maintaining its focus on evidence-informed action, the Alliance will continue to be the place where people come together to shape a sustainable future for England's upland landscapes, their communities, and the many public goods they provide.

uplandsalliance.com

The Heather Trust EVENT ROUNDUP



The Heather Trust: Big Day Out



Lekkie & Brekkie



The Heather Trust: Big Day Out



Wildfire Ready



Wildfire Ready

Thank you to all who supported our events over the year. Together we achieved significant progress and created valuable opportunities for discussion and collaboration. Your involvement has set the tone for the future and we look forward to continuing this momentum in the year ahead.

See you in 2026!



Heather Futures Roadshow: Scottish Game Fair



Heather Futures Roadshow: Royal Highland Show



Lekkie & Brekkie



Wildfire Ready



Heather Futures Roadshow: Raby Estate



Heather Futures Roadshow: Westminster with Joe Morris MP



Heather Futures Roadshow: Scottish Game Fair



Women Who Work in Fieldsports x Heather Trust Christmas event



Book collaboration sparks wildfire understanding

Turning adventure into awareness: why wildfire education matters



KATRINA CANDY, DIRECTOR OF THE HEATHER TRUST

The Heather Trust Director and author Katrina Candy returns this winter with her fourth children's book, *Heather Munro's Race Against the Flames* – a gripping and heartwarming story that brings the vital issue of wildfire prevention to life through adventure, courage and community spirit.

The production of the book has been generously funded by the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) Charitable Trust and all profits from the sales will benefit both the Heather Trust and the SGA.

Set in the picturesque Glen Stoushie, the story follows Heather Munro, wife of gamekeeper Stag Munro, and their ever-faithful dog Biscuits, as they face a terrifying challenge: a fast-moving wildfire threatening their home, the people and the wildlife of the glen. With quick thinking and teamwork, Heather rallies the local community to battle the flames and protect the land they love.

While the story is filled with action and warmth, its underlying message is deeply timely. As wildfires become an increasing threat to our landscapes, wildlife and rural communities, *Heather Munro's Race Against*

the Flames helps young readers understand how we can all play a role in protecting our rural environment.

"Wildfires are an increasing threat to our landscapes, wildlife and communities," says Katrina. "Teaching the next generation about prevention and respect for nature is more important than ever. It's great to be working alongside SGA on this project as both organisations align on so many issues."

Through gentle storytelling and Lynsay Hay's beautiful illustrations, the book introduces children to aspects of responsible land management in a way that is both accessible and inspiring.

"By combining fiction with factual understanding, the book encourages children to appreciate the importance of safeguarding our natural landscapes and the biodiversity they support," said Katrina.

"I hope children will not only enjoy the adventure but also see that everyone has a role to play in protecting the places we love. With Heather Munro at its heart, this story illustrates how collective action and awareness can make a real difference," said Katrina.



By combining fiction with factual understanding, the book encourages children to appreciate the importance of safeguarding our natural landscapes and the biodiversity they support.

An SGA spokesperson said: "The SGA Charitable Trust is delighted to support this great, and very timely, book. Wildfires are increasing and Katrina's storytelling introduces important themes to children, helping them to understand the role we can all play in wildfire prevention.

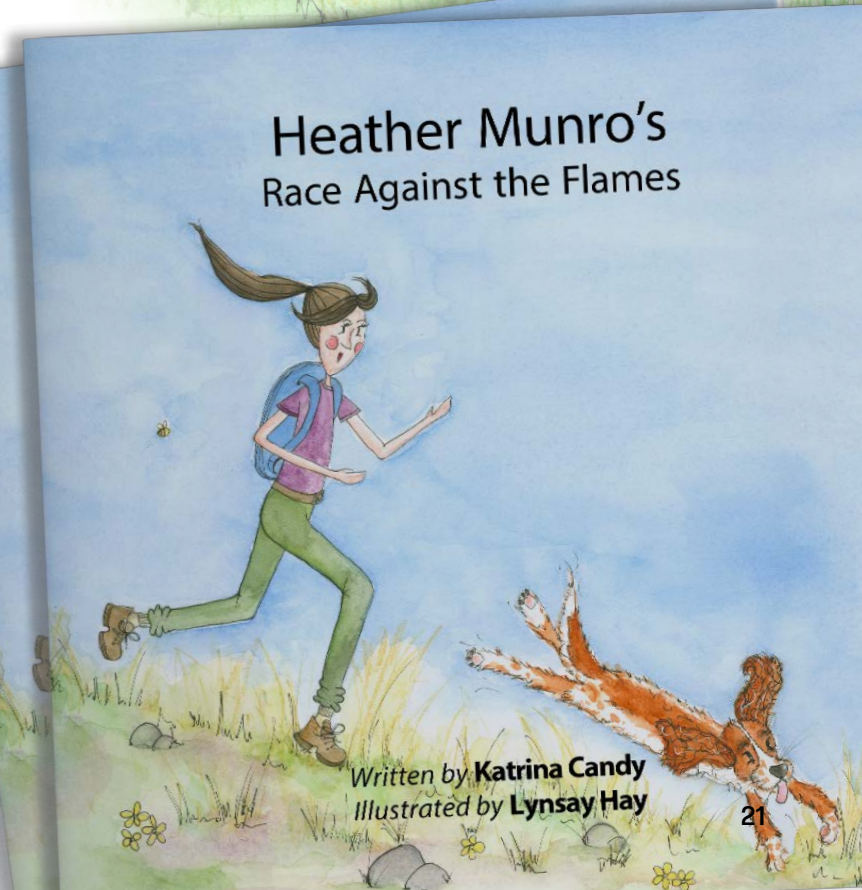
"Not only that, it is an excellent and beautifully illustrated read and we'd encourage everyone to buy it."

The book will be officially launched at events at Farlow's in London and Calton in Edinburgh during December.

Whether you're passionate about conservation, committed to supporting rural communities, or simply looking for a captivating story to share with children, this charming book offers both an engaging read and an important lesson in stewardship.

Heather Munro's Race Against the Flames will be available to purchase (for £10) directly from the Trust or SGA from December 2025 – the perfect gift for any young nature lover, and a wonderful way to support the ongoing work of both organisations. You can order your copies here:

heathertrust.co.uk/shop



Heather Munro's
Race Against the Flames

Written by Katrina Candy
Illustrated by Lynsay Hay

Beating Bracken

Introducing a landmark research and demonstration hub

KATRINA CANDY, DIRECTOR OF THE HEATHER TRUST

Bracken is on the march. Since the withdrawal of Asulox, many of our members have reported an accelerating spread across moorland, hillsides and marginal ground—bringing with it reduced grazing and access, suppressed biodiversity, potentially heavier tick burdens and landscapes increasingly difficult to manage. The Heather Trust has long championed practical, evidence-based approaches to heather and upland management, and the urgent need for a fresh strategy to bracken management has never been clearer.

We are therefore pleased to share details of an exciting new initiative: Beating Bracken – a four-year research and demonstration project led by The Heather Trust in partnership with Professor Robin Pakeman and the James Hutton Institute. Based on an estate in North Perthshire, this project will become a national focal point for practical, reliable, and affordable bracken control.

A project rooted in practical need

Earlier this year, Professor Pakeman delivered a series of Bracken Management Workshops on behalf of

NatureScot, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. These workshops identified clear knowledge gaps and confirmed what many land managers have long suspected: there is no single silver bullet, and a wider suite of methods must be understood, tested and combined.

As a long-standing advocate for collaborative and applied research, The Heather Trust is ideally placed to drive this work forward and by combining Professor Pakeman's scientific expertise, we will build a robust evidence base that can immediately inform policy and those working on the ground.

A living lab in the heart of Perthshire

The Perthshire estate will serve as a 'living laboratory', enabling direct comparison of multiple bracken control techniques under real conditions. The project will be designed with strong statistical rigour and clear, measurable outcomes - all of which will be fed back to UK nature agencies and shared widely with Trust members and supporters.

The work will include

- 1 Native tree establishment**
Testing how sensitively placed native trees can weaken bracken and support long-term ecological recovery.
- 2 Evaluating mechanical control**
Cutters, rollers, crimpers - some swear by them, others dismiss them. This project will provide the most robust comparison to date of what works and where.
- 3 Tick monitoring**
Assessing whether bracken control can reduce tick density and the associated risks to people, livestock and wildlife.
- 4 Valuing the wider benefits**
From improved grazing and restored habitats to access improvements, the project will quantify the benefits of reducing bracken dominance.
- 5 Real costs in real settings**
Tracking the genuine financial implications for estates - machinery, labour and long-term commitments.
- 6 Restoring landscapes after bracken removal**
The project will work with the estate to identifying which plant communities should be restored to maximise biodiversity gains while preventing bracken's return.

Innovative methods such as drone-applied herbicide and livestock-led control will also be explored if resources allow. In addition, we will be working with partners across the UK to build a complete picture of best practice and emerging techniques.

A hub for learning, sharing and demonstration

This project is designed not just for research, but for open demonstration. Members and partners will be invited for knowledge-sharing events as trials progress. The work will complement the efforts of the Scottish Government's Scottish Bracken Working Group and contribute to a more coherent national approach.

Your support can make the difference

We are delighted to confirm that a generous estate owner's family trust has pledged £15,000 per year for four years to help initiate the programme. However, to



The Breaking Bracken project will become a national focal point for practical, reliable, and affordable bracken control.

deliver the full scope of research and demonstration work, we need to at least triple that annual figure. This is a rare opportunity for Heather Trust members, supporters and partners to be directly involved in shaping a national response to one of the most pressing challenges facing our uplands.

We warmly invite:

- Donors wishing to back a transformative, practical project
- Estates willing to offer comparative trial sites
- Organisations or individuals with an interest in biodiversity, land stewardship and rural resilience to partner in this project

If you would like to support or discuss the Beating Bracken project, please contact Director of The Heather Trust, Katrina Candy.

Women's Upland Network

Heather Trust survey confirms need for new support network

KATRINA CANDY, DIRECTOR OF THE HEATHER TRUST

The Heather Trust has taken an important step toward strengthening the role of women in the UK's uplands by conducting a survey designed to understand women's experiences and test the need for a new, dedicated Women's Upland Network (WUN). The response was clear - the time for such a group is now.

The survey gathered insights from the target demographic of women representing a broad sweep of upland life - land managers, farmers, ecologists, charity professionals, rural business owners, and creatives. Their collective message underscored both the diversity of women's contributions and the challenges they continue to face in these remote and beautiful landscapes.

The most frequently reported barrier was limited career progression, followed closely by isolation and a lack of professional networks—a striking finding in a sector where collaboration is essential. Only 20% of respondents felt that current rural support groups meet the needs of women working in the uplands. Yet the appetite for connection and development was unmistakable with participants expressing strong interest in face-to-face events, practical training, leadership opportunities, and accessible online sessions.

Encouragingly, 79% of respondents said they would consider contributing to a membership subscription if it meant access to meaningful training, networking

and community support. This openness signals that a sustainable, long-term network is both wanted and achievable.

For the Trust, these findings form a compelling mandate. The proposed Women's Upland Network aims to provide the visibility, skills development, and peer support that respondents consistently asked for. But to turn this evidence into action, the Trust now seeks partners, funders and supporters to help build the programme from the ground up.

"We have already formed a Founders Group and the results of the survey have bolstered our desire to really support and celebrate women in the uplands," said Trust Director, Katrina Candy.

"We're all driven to get this group off the ground and start making a difference, therefore we are calling upon supporters to help us fund what is an important addition to upland communities.

"Women are ready to connect, collaborate and lead and with the right investment, the Heather Trust can help ensure they have the platform they deserve—strengthening rural communities and the future of upland landscapes."



Women are ready to connect, collaborate and lead and with the right investment, the Heather Trust can help ensure they have the platform they deserve.

Future Moors: Science for sustainable uplands

A pioneering research project to quantify ecosystem services and secure the future of moorland landscapes



DR NICK HESFORD, DIRECTOR OF GWCT SCOTLAND

UK upland and moorland landscapes are nationally and internationally valued for their distinctness and ecological importance. They are home to rare animals and plants, some of which are found almost nowhere else in the world. Moreover, they provide essential ecosystem services, playing a quiet but vital role in storing carbon, regulating water and supporting rural life.

However, our uplands are changing. Climate pressures, shifting government priorities and evolving public attitudes mean that the future of our moorlands is uncertain. At the same time, there is surprisingly limited quantitative evidence describing what these changes might mean for the delivery of ecosystem services such as biodiversity, carbon storage and flood prevention.

That is why Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) are working with The Heather Trust to launch Future Moors, an ambitious new research project designed to quantify the ecosystem services delivered by traditional moorland management. Building on the Heather Trust's Heather Futures research, this project will use digital

mapping tools and ecological models, to explore how moorlands, their wildlife and the services they provide, from flood control to carbon storage, could change under different climate and policy scenarios. By doing so, Future Moors will provide robust evidence to inform decisions at national and regional levels, helping policymakers understand how different land uses and management approaches influence the upland environment and the services it provides.

Just as importantly, Future Moors will help demonstrate the value of traditional upland management and how it can fit within emerging "natural capital" markets, where the benefits of good land stewardship are duly valued and rewarded.

This is a true partnership project and one that GWCT is pleased to bring its scientific expertise to. Together, we want to make sure that moorland voices are heard, and that the value of these landscapes is recognised for their beauty and for the vital services they deliver.





Policy, regulation and the common ground approach



TOM TURNBULL, CHAIR OF ADMG

Scotland's upland landscapes are famous for their natural beauty with visitors from all over the world travelling here every year to enjoy them. Vital to these upland environments is the management of deer populations, and particularly the iconic red deer. In recent years deer managers in the Highlands have come under increasing pressure from Scottish Government to manage deer in the public interest and, with the introduction of the Natural Environment Bill on 19th February 2025, the latest effort from Scottish Government to shape the future of the uplands through deer management.

The alterations to the 1996 Deer Scotland Act contained within the Bill will enable NatureScot to intervene in deer management for the preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural heritage. On the face of it, one might consider it completely reasonable to intervene on the basis that nature restoration may take place by reducing deer numbers, however given closer consideration we at the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) have fears about how these new triggers for intervention could be used.

In the past, the trigger for NatureScot intervention in deer management on a landholding has been 'damage' by deer, a metric that can be measured through Habitat Impact Assessments and careful evaluations of herbivore impacts. The new proposals, should they become law, will see intervention made possible on what 'might' occur if herbivore numbers are reduced on a habitat that may be slow to respond and could take decades to recover. Reductions in deer levels down to very low levels will also, in some cases, have significant effects on businesses and potentially on jobs. The ability to employ a stalker is often, after all, supported through a sporting cull.

Meanwhile, outwith the confines of Holyrood, the upland deer sector has forged ahead regardless of the Bill. The Highlands might be the only part of the UK where deer numbers are level or dropping - our member Deer Management Groups can be proud of the work that they have undertaken over 3 million hectares of the Highlands - collaborating and managing deer responsibly in the light of the climate and biodiversity crises.

Another example of progress and collaboration has been the creation of the Common Ground Forum. The Forum has sought to put aside long-held differences and concentrate on working together in finding those things that we do agree on whilst teasing out some of the thornier issues. Difficult conversations have taken place, but common ground has been found. We all agree that realistic incentives must be put in place to support deer management. We are also agreed that the venison sector needs to be thriving to support the increased culls required to hit government targets. The Common Ground Forum has seen unlikely allies come together and we believe that these combined efforts are gathering momentum. The Common Ground Forum has been a breath of fresh air, and I believe that it is a model that could be rolled out in other rural sectors.

The Natural Environment Bill has been both divisive and time consuming, and I cannot help but think that if the upland deer sector had simply been supported, encouraged and incentivised, as other rural sectors have been, then Scottish Government would be further down the road in achieving its targets without the potential prospect of additional unclear, divisive and unnecessary regulation.

deer-management.co.uk



Difficult conversations have taken place, but common ground has been found.

Photo by: Claire Ball @claireballphotography



Photo by: Cerys Evans @ceryscountryphotography

A profile of a quintessential uplands pub

The Kirkstyle Inn and Sportsman's Rest

The Heather Trust has been fortunate to partner with The Kirkstyle Inn & Sportsman's Rest at Slagford on a number of successful fundraising events this year. This establishment is at the heart of a Northumberland community and here, **Roz Parkinson, from The Kirkstyle Inn tells us why people and place are so important to this quintessential upland pub and restaurant.**

When we reopened The Kirkstyle at the beginning of 2023, following a rebuild and complete refurbishment, we set out our stall as a country pub and restaurant - serving seriously good food, complemented by a bar and wine list to match.

It wasn't long before we gained recognition across the country, attracting visitors from far and wide. One of our greatest ambitions was to serve our community - to become a place where locals could come together, enjoy each other's company, and rekindle old friendships. We're proud to say that we believe we have successfully achieved this.

Connor Wilson has been Head Chef at The Kirkstyle Inn since we reopened. His menus reflect a deep respect for provenance and the ingredients that define our region. Having grown up just 10 miles down the road, Connor's passion lies in showcasing the exceptional produce of his home county - celebrating what is bred, grown, and nurtured on our doorstep.

Our menu is proudly game-led, featuring game birds and venison from the surrounding estates, and meat from neighbouring hill farms - a true reflection of our deep connection to the moorlands that surround us.

The bar is a true centrepiece, hand-carved from oak and impressively stocked with local brews, artisan spirits and fine wines.

The seasons govern our menu and sustainability determines what we serve. Reducing our carbon footprint and waste and intuitive ways of recycling dominate our day.

We are proud to say that 80% of our team are members of our local rural community, many joined us with little or no prior experience. We have trained and developed them in-house - clear evidence of our robust training programme and our commitment to creating meaningful employment in the area.

We built an on-site laundry that employs local people and serves neighbouring businesses. Generating £20K annually, it adds a valuable revenue stream while reducing our carbon footprint - and that of fellow businesses.

In the restaurant, rustic elegance meets modern comfort. Soft lighting, natural wood, and carefully chosen furnishings create an atmosphere that is relaxed yet refined - large windows frame views of the stunning Northumberland countryside.

The ensuite bedrooms are beautifully designed by Emily Smoor, Fantoush Interior Design Studio, Edinburgh, offering a sanctuary of comfort and style. With plush beds, luxurious linens, and thoughtful touches throughout, they balance contemporary elegance with the inn's rural heritage.

We want everyone who walks through our doors, whether local or visiting from afar to feel welcome, comfortable, and valued. We're at our happiest when the bar is alive with locals sharing a crack, alongside visitors discovering the flavours of the moorlands and soaking up the atmosphere.

theksi.co.uk



Our menu is proudly game-led, featuring game birds and venison from the surrounding estates, and meat from neighbouring hill farms - a true reflection of our deep connection to the moorlands that surround us.



Heather honey at risk

Bee farmers warn of falling yields as moorlands suffer from beetle damage



LUKE HUTCHINSON, CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF NORTHUMBERLAND HONEY CO

Bee farmers are becoming increasingly aware of Heather Beetle damaging vast swathes of heather moorland in the UK. They rely on the presence of healthy heather to produce heather honey, which can be the main crop of the season for many.

No official figures currently exist for volumes of heather honey production in the UK, however it is estimated somewhere between 300 and 400 tonnes of the honey is produced in the UK annually which gives an estimated retail value of between £5-10 million.

The impact of Heather Beetle on the bee farmer is being noticed with yields of heather honey dropping significantly on affected moors. In badly affected areas - and during years like the North Yorkshire moors has endured in 2025 - bee farmers simply do not migrate their bees to those locations, which in turn could reduce pollination in those areas and seed set for future years.

Within the Bee Farmers Association we are hearing many reports of the impact of Heather Beetle on honey production. What is clear, is that without heather moorland in good condition, bee farmers will struggle to produce heather honey and significant income will be lost - nationally this could become very significant.

Heather honey is known to be one of the most premium honeys that can be produced in the UK, so any reduction in yield stands to be a significant issue for bee farmers who make a living from producing honey.

There is no research at present around the effect of Heather Beetle on heather honey production and pollination of heather, which is concerning given the value of heather honey production and heather pollination by managed honey bee colonies.



Awareness needs to be raised of the many issues the Heather Beetle causes and the ripple effect of bad beetle years on many industries. To that end, the Northumberland Honey Company has been in discussion with The Heather Trust to bring forward a new research project which we hope will answer some of the many questions. We hope to share more information with our contacts as this vital and innovative proposal develops.

northumberlandhoney.co.uk

“...without heather moorland in good condition, bee farmers will struggle...”

Partnership hopes for sweet success

The Heather Trust and Northumberland Honey Co join forces for moorland conservation



KATRINA CANDY, DIRECTOR OF THE HEATHER TRUST

We are delighted to announce our first official collaboration with an aligned business which will see vital funds raised for The Heather Trust.

We have partnered with the Northumberland Honey Co to offer you the finest heather honey in attractive co-branded 120g jars. Net proceeds from the sales of these jars go directly to The Heather Trust to help fund our work which is directly helping to protect the future of heather moorland landscapes.

“The whole story behind this collaboration is really important,” said Katrina Candy, Director of the Trust. “The team at Northumberland Honey Co is acutely aware of the issues which lead to a reduction in heather flowers and this year, in particular, they witnessed the devastating effects of heather beetle attacks on our moors. Healthy heather is obviously key to a good honey crop, so it became obvious really quickly that we had a common interest in sustainable, resilient moorland.”

“The Northumberland Honey Co is a really exciting, young business with a focus on sustainability and produces a very high-quality range of honey-based products in Haltwhistle, Northumberland. We are absolutely



delighted that Luke, Suzie and their team are donating so generously to our charity and the jars will make ideal stocking fillers for all those who love the finest honey and also want to support a charity this Christmas.”

To purchase the special edition heather honey at £6 per jar, please visit the Heather Trust Shop or order directly from the Northumberland Honey Co:

heathertrust.co.uk/shop
northumberlandhoney.co.uk



Pictured (l to r): Katrina Candy, Luke Hutchinson, Viv Gill



OPINION PIECE

Heather beetle: the silent crisis on Britain's moorlands

Understanding the life cycle, climate drivers, and management dilemmas behind an escalating threat



Robert Benson, Trustee of The Heather Trust

ROBERT BENSON, TRUSTEE OF THE HEATHER TRUST

Once again 2025 has seen thousands of hectares of England and Scotland affected by heather beetle after devastating attacks in 2024. The frequency of attacks has been exponential over the last 20 years, with extraordinary explosions in numbers.

Heather Beetle (*Lochmaea suturalis*) are naturally occurring and native to north-west Europe. They have always been present and feed on heather. This has become a very serious problem.

The life cycle needs to be understood in order to try and find a solution. Heather Beetle (HB) enter winter dormancy by hibernating in the moss litter as soon as the temperature drops in late October. When the temperature lifts in the Spring, usually early April, the beetles re-emerge to feed,

and this kick-starts dispersal and then the reproductive cycle. They are very poor fliers so usually rely on the wind for dispersal into a new feed area. There they reproduce, laying up to 700 eggs in damp vegetation. Humidity is key to this stage.

The larval stage is when the eggs hatch over three-four weeks with larvae emerging in mid-June and then eating their way up the heather, stripping stems and leaves and in some cases killing the plant. They are fully grown in about six weeks and then drop off the heather back into the moss layer to pupate.

Adult beetles reappear again in late August early September.

The reasons for the increase in frequency and huge numbers are not fully understood



Almost certainly climate change is a major factor and, particularly, the almost total lack of lengthy periods of frost...



yet. Almost certainly climate change is a major factor and, particularly, the almost total lack of lengthy periods of frost getting well into the peat and killing the dormant beetles.

Is climate, allied with current allowed vegetation management, combining to aid numbers and frequency? The brash created by the increase in cutting could be a factor helping to provide perfect conditions for HB.

Why has the predatory wasp, *Ascodes mento*, which lays eggs in the beetle larvae, disappeared or not kept in kilter with HB numbers?

Desiccated heather that turned fox red in colour in late July was instantly labelled as HB. The grouse had already moved off and there was no flowers for bees with the honey industry severely affected. In many cases the diagnosis was definitely correct, but by no means all. It became clear that some was due to drought

and heat stress. These areas then recovered over late August / early September with an increase in humidity and drop in temperature and then flowering followed.

Some dead looking beetled heather is showing signs of life and therefore potential recovery - shoots are appearing - but in other cases it is very dead. Moorland managers need to know how to regenerate these dead areas as quickly as possible. Loss of heather can result in grass dominance, particularly on wetter ground and dead heather is yet another factor in increased wildfire risk.

Most disappointing is the complete indifference of Natural England as, in my opinion, it seems HB suits their agenda. More research is needed and, as an advocate for sustainable moorland, I believe that those involved in our uplands have a duty to investigate this further and find solutions.

Purple pages

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Shared Solutions**

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Headingley Stadium, Leeds

Wildfire2026 returns as a key biennial event for wildfire professionals.

If you are interested in taking the stage as a speaker or supporting the event as a sponsor, or if you simply have a question, we invite you to get in touch.

ukwildfireconference.co.uk
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championing our magnificent moorlands

UPCOMING EVENTS 2026

More information about these events and how to book will be shared in due course. Please keep an eye on our website and socials.

heathertrust.co.uk/events

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APRIL

21

LEKKIE & BREKKIE

Abercairny Estate, Perthshire

Join us at Abercairny Estate near Crieff for a display of black grouse lekking and wildlife watching.

JUNE

TBA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Join us for our online AGM to hear updates on the Trust's work and plans for the year ahead.

APRIL

24

THE HEATHER TRUST 2026 SPRING AUCTION

Bidding closes on 17th May at midnight

Save the date and get ready to bid in our annual online auction. We have curated another excellent catalogue full of exclusive and unique items. There is truly something for everyone.

JULY

3

WOMEN'S UPLAND NETWORK RECEPTION AT THE SCOTTISH GAME FAIR

Scone Palace, Perth 11-12 Noon

We'll be hosting a reception for WUN members and supporters in the Calton marquee next to the main ring and would be delighted to welcome you.

MAY

19

SPRING NETWORKING BRUNCH

Hampden Auditorium, Edinburgh 10.30a.m.-1.30p.m.

The Women's Upland Network is partnering with Women Who Work in Fieldsports to bring you this free-to-attend networking brunch.

NOVEMBER

10-11

WILDFIRE2026: UK WILDFIRE CONFERENCE

Headingley Stadium, Leeds

A key biennial event for those involved in the wildfire sector, offering expert insights and shared solutions.





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