



## **Environment Minister visits McPedro's home**

**2 November 2011**

Environment Minister, Stewart Stevenson this week visited the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project and heard about the innovative work going on there – as well as a Scottish bird of prey on holiday in Spain.

Mr Stevenson was able to see first hand the work taking place on the moor to integrate conservation and grouse moor management. The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project is a partnership of Scottish Natural Heritage, Buccleuch Estates, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and Natural England. The Minister noted the good co-operation between all the project staff, both game management and conservation workers, which is contributing to a robust evidence base on the merits of different management activities.

Simon Lester, the project's head keeper, showed the Minister a range of techniques used on the modern grouse moor including predator control, heather recovery from heather beetle attacks, and burning practices to benefit grouse and other birds. The Minister was able to see areas of the moor that had been badly affected by heather beetle (a damaging pest on heather moors) in recent years and which had been burnt under new muirburn licensing provisions brought in earlier this year – the first moor in Scotland to be so licensed.

Mr Stevenson's interest was particularly drawn to the project's role in testing and promoting diversionary feeding of hen harriers. Hen harriers are known to prey on red grouse so scientists have been leaving alternative food sources, such as day old chicks and rats, near hen harrier nests for the birds to take. After four hen harrier breeding seasons, no grouse chicks have been detected being taken into breeding hen harrier nests, leading to a developing consensus amongst partners that this can be an effective management technique.

The Minister heard how young hen harriers are being tracked using satellite tags. One bird, nick named McPedro, which bred on Langholm moor in 2010 spent last winter in Spain. Two other birds tagged on Langholm and a north England moor are currently being tracked in western France.

Environment Minister Stewart Stevenson said: “The project at Langholm Moor is of crucial importance in finding a way for driven grouse shooting to co-exist with hen harrier populations.

“This visit was an opportunity to see how the project is operating on the ground. Diversionary feeding of hen harriers at the moor is a key part of protecting grouse numbers and it was fascinating to learn that harriers that have been tagged at Langholm are being satellite tracked as far afield as France and Spain.

“Diversionary feeding is only part of the story though, and I was interested to find out more about activities such as predator control and heather management. Muirburn is an important tool in managing heather moorland and I was also pleased to see that the project is able to make use of new licensing arrangements brought in through the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act earlier this year.”

Speaking following the visit, the project’s chairman and the estate manager at Langholm, Mark Oddy highlighted that:” Mr Stevenson has a genuine interest in supporting the management we are doing here at Langholm. We are very grateful to him for his support. Today has been helpful in ensuring that if any new regulation is being considered for introduction, the project can help ensure it is both effective and practical.”

Last year the project hosted a visit by the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee during its final consideration of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill. Further information on the project is at [www.langholmproject.com](http://www.langholmproject.com)

**ENDS**

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**Notes for editors**

1. Photo attached available for free, single use please credit Scottish Natural Heritage
2. Langholm Moor Demonstration Project website is <http://www.langholmproject.com/>
3. The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Buccleuch Estates, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Natural England and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The project was launched by the then Environment Minister, Michael Russell MSP in September 2007. It aims to re-establish driven grouse shooting thereby providing the management required to maintain the nature conservation objectives of the site. Langholm Moor has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Area for the upland habitat assemblage, range of breeding birds, geological exposures and for the aggregation of breeding hen harriers. The delivery of the project is being undertaken by a recently formed company, the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project Limited. This company employs the project manager, the gamekeeping team and funds the essential scientific monitoring. It is guided by a board of directors, with each funding partner being represented.