



NEWS RELEASE

Langholm – One Year on

The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project is one year old and has started making improvements to a moor that has lain virtually dormant in respect of management for red grouse for 10 years.

Formerly one of Scotland's most successful driven grouse moors, Langholm became synonymous with hen harrier research during the 1990s when the moor hosted the Joint Raptor Study. The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project is taking forward the management of the moor so that driven grouse shooting can be re-instated whilst at the same time allowing hen harriers to build-up to internationally important numbers.

With funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, Buccleuch Estates, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Natural England and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Project is unique in bringing together a partnership committed to resolving the apparent conflict between birds of prey and grouse. The five organisations will work to find practical solutions so that hen harrier and grouse can co-exist.

Key achievements to date are:

- 4 Gamekeepers, 1 Head Gamekeeper and a Project Manager have been employed
- Scientific team established to monitor changes on the moor
- Heather burning re-commenced in March and April 2008
- 2 pairs of hen harriers successfully reared a total of 9 chicks – the best breeding success for 5 years



- Both hen harrier breeding pairs were given carrion (dead rats and day-old chicks) in order to reduce their predation on grouse
- Legal control of numbers of crows, foxes and stoats is now routine
- Regular surveys of grouse and other birds have been established.

Speaking of the progress, Chairman of the Board overseeing the Project, Professor Colin Galbraith said 'It was a huge achievement to bring the Project together and with the gamekeepers on the ground, action has certainly started to show results. Scientific monitoring has shown a marked reduction in numbers of foxes and crows. Intensive watching of hen harrier nests recorded no grouse chicks being brought into the nests – although there were 3 items out of 106 that could not be identified.'

With good sized grouse broods being seen early in the summer, everyone was optimistic about prospects for 2008. Despite spring numbers being higher, 87 birds were found on the traditional count areas in July, down from 111 in 2007. The average number of young per hen was 2.86, which whilst being markedly higher than the 5-year average of 1.96 was probably reduced significantly by the sustained wet weather during June, July and August.

Head Gamekeeper, Simon Lester said 'With such a huge backlog of burning, we have been planning for the start of the new burning season. We recently held an introductory briefing for around 35 people including local farmers, some of the retained fire crew from Langholm and good number of enthusiastic students from the University of Cumbria. With good kit and plenty of people, all we need now is the weather.'

Speaking of the overall progress, Project Manager Graeme Dalby highlighted 'The first year of any project is always going to present challenges. The gamekeepers were in place just in time to make a difference this year. Hopefully, we will get good weather this winter, with plenty of chances for burning. The moor seems to be a hive of activity and everyone is eager to hear about progress.'

Ends

Notes for editors

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 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. Shooting will be managed by the Company and the income used to defray the costs of the essential habitat management, predator control and monitoring.

Analysis of the results from all monitoring undertaken during 2008 is currently underway. A full annual report will be released in December 2008.

Further information can be obtained from

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Photographs relating to the project and aspects of moorland management can be obtained from Steve Tapper.