



**Abbeystead Meeting**  
**27 September 2011**

**Summary of Presentations & Discussion**



**1 Aims of the meeting**

- 1.1 To consider the management of an upland estate, from a Resident Agent's, and a Natural England perspective;
- 1.2 To consider the relevance of the issues the Heather Trust is dealing with; and
- 1.3 To discuss moorland management matters with a mixed audience.

**2 Abbeystead Estate Presentation**

- 2.1 Neil Kilgour, Resident Agent, & Rob Foster, Moorland Technician, gave a joint presentation.
- 2.2 A graph was presented that showed the Abbeystead grouse bags over the period 1918- 2008.

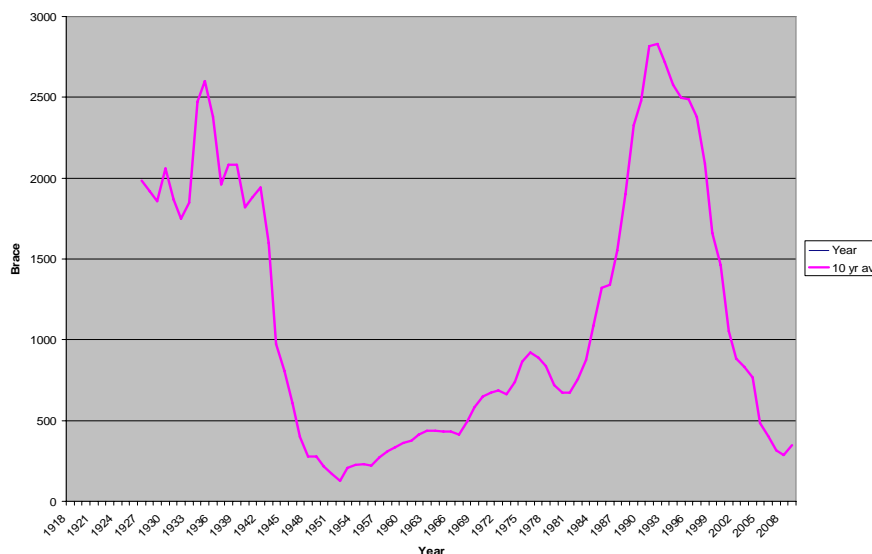
---

**Newtonrigg, Holywood, DUMFRIES DG2 0RA**

*Scottish Charity No: SC010204*

**President:** Professor R H Marrs BA PhD DSc  
**Chairman:** M C Hay MA  
**Director:** S P R Thorp BSc(Hons) CEnv MRICS

**Tel / Fax :** 01387 723201  
**Email:** [info@heathertrust.co.uk](mailto:info@heathertrust.co.uk)  
**Web:** [www.heathertrust.co.uk](http://www.heathertrust.co.uk)



- 2.3 The traditional, variable factors affecting grouse numbers had been identified as: habitat management, predator control and shooting pressure.
- 2.4 More recently, worm, tick & louping ill treatment had become significant factors in controlling the grouse population.
- 2.5 Red Grouse Monitoring had taken place using radio tracking techniques. This allowed the effect of sheep ticks on grouse chicks to be monitored after hatching.
- 2.5.1 More than 12 disease-free ticks on a grouse chick had been shown to be sufficient to kill it.
- 2.5.2 In 2008, an average of 24 ticks had been found on grouse chicks. 84 chicks had been monitored, but all were dead within 3 weeks.
- 2.6 It was not just grouse that were affected. Other moorland bird species suffered.



- 2.7 A sheep tick treatment scheme had been introduced. The pour-on acaricide *Dysect* was applied to sheep so that they could act as 'tick mops':
- 2.7.1 Ewes treated at scanning

- 2.7.2 Hogs treated at turnout
- 2.7.3 Ewes and lambs treated at turnout
- 2.7.4 Hogs treated in mid-May on problem areas
- 2.7.5 All sheep treated at clipping
- 2.7.6 All sheep treated at weaning
- 2.8 To reduce the levels of Louping Ill, all replacements were double vaccinated against the virus.
- 2.9 Tick numbers were monitored by blanket drags. The treatment scheme produced a significant reduction.
- 2.10 Grouse numbers have been increasing, and the young per hen figure is increasing.

### **3 Natural England Presentation**



- 3.1 Neil Clark, the area manager for Natural England covering Lancashire & Cheshire, spoke about the uplands and why they are important from a Natural England perspective.
  - 3.1.1 They provide people with the opportunity to explore and enjoy the natural world. In the National Parks alone there are 70 million visitor days per year.
  - 3.1.2 400 million tonnes of carbon is stored in the peat soils of the English and Welsh uplands
  - 3.1.3 70% of UK drinking water comes from the uplands

- 3.1.4 The uplands provide a living for many people - farming, field sports, forestry and tourism.
- 3.2 Current challenges
  - 3.2.1 Changing demographic patterns – younger people are not continuing with farm businesses in large numbers.
  - 3.2.2 The rising price of food, and
  - 3.2.3 Low incomes from land management relative to the rest of society.
- 3.3 Some facts & figures
  - 3.3.1 The value of the payments made annually through the Upland Entry Level Scheme is £133.5 million;
  - 3.3.2 There are 1.1 million ha of land in agri-environment schemes in the Less Favoured Areas;
  - 3.3.3 68% of eligible agricultural land is in agri-environment schemes; and
  - 3.3.4 On average, the value of a Higher Level Scheme agreement is £35,000.
- 3.4 Current issues & priorities
  - 3.4.1 Delivering SSSI targets. The area of the uplands in ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable improving’ condition had risen from 25.5% in 2004, to 97% in 2010.
  - 3.4.2 Natural England wants to listen better to land managers and their representatives, and to build trust through various hill farming grazing forums and groups.
  - 3.4.3 Promote new ways to pay for ecosystem services
- 3.5 Conclusion
  - 3.5.1 The pace and scale of change in the uplands seems to be accelerating;
  - 3.5.2 Climate change is taking us into un-charted territory;
  - 3.5.3 Nature is remarkably resourceful; but
  - 3.5.4 It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the much-loved environments of the uplands are in the best possible condition to adapt to these challenges.

## THE HEATHER TRUST PRESENTATION

### 4 Key issues

- 4.1 Amongst a plethora of issues that the Trust is dealing with throughout the UK, three key issues have been identified:
  - 4.1.1 Bracken Control;
  - 4.1.2 Heather Beetle; and
  - 4.1.3 Fire - prescribed burning & wildfire

### 5 Bracken Control



- 5.1 The biggest current concern is the future of Asulam, the main bracken control agent. The EU Appeal Committee met on 20 September and decided to ban Asulam. This will be effective on 31 December 2011, with a use-up period until 31 December 2012.
- 5.2 Why is Asulam important?
  - 5.2.1 It is the best control agent; it is the only selective control agent, and it is the only one that can be applied by helicopter.
- 5.3 The Trust's Role
  - 5.3.1 To investigate whether United Phosphorus Ltd, the licence holders, will apply for the re-registration of Asulam. It was noted that the re-application process is likely to take 4 years.
  - 5.3.2 If re-application takes place, to work with Defra and the Chemical Regulations Directorate to introduce an interim arrangement to allow Asulam to be available under Emergency Authorisation provisions.
  - 5.3.3 Keep a communications flow to keep individuals and organisations up to date with developments Using websites and the Director's Blog

(<http://heathertrust.blogspot.com>). Seek funding to help with the cost of this work.

- 5.3.4 Provide clear, concise advice to land owners and managers about what the practical implications of the ban are and any interim measures.

## 6 Heather Beetle



- 6.1 The Trust suggested that:
  - 6.1.1 The damaging effects of heather beetle have been underestimated; and
  - 6.1.2 Beetle damage is a major cause of heather loss.
- 6.2 Since August, areas with heather beetle damage from Exmoor to Caithness have taken place. Reports have been received about damage in other parts of the country: parts of the northern uplands of England, in mid-Wales and Southern Scotland.
- 6.3 Work in progress
  - 6.3.1 A restoration trial is underway on Langholm Moor, Dumfries-shire. This aims to establish some indications about the best restoration technique to use after an attack.
  - 6.3.2 It is hoped to carry out similar work at other sites to improve knowledge: Abbeystead (although the beetles are not cooperating and are currently not present in large enough numbers), Exmoor and a large wind farm in Lanarkshire.
- 6.4 Until further work is completed, the best advice remains:
  - 6.4.1 As the risk of serious damage increases with age, manage the heather; do not leave it to grow old and rank. This will maximise the resilience in the face of an attack by beetle and other diseases or external agents.

6.5 The Trusts needs support to take this work forward:

6.5.1 Information to be able to monitor the scale of current and past outbreaks; and

6.5.2 Funding to help with the cost of the work.

## 7 Wildfire



7.1 Some conclusions were drawn from attendance at the International Wildfire Conference in South Africa in May 2011, and the UK Wildfire 2011 conference in Buxton in September.

7.2 The global area affected by wildfire amounts to about 350-400m ha p.a. - about the same land area as India.

7.3 Climate change is having an impact:

7.3.1 It is a physical fact that increasing temperature will increase fire activity.

7.3.2 There is a link between temperature and the required amount of rainfall to retain the same level of fire risk:

- For every rise in temperature of 1°C, 10% extra precipitation is required.

7.4 International wildfire problems

7.4.1 The Spanish problem

- The current area of wildfire damage is about 148,000 ha p.a.
- Under a medium scenario, climate change model, this area would increase to 1,526,000 ha by 2050. This area of damage could easily be exacerbated by non-standard weather events.

#### 7.4.2 The Australian problem - Black Saturday – 7 Feb 2009

- 450,000 ha burnt, 173 deaths, 2029 houses lost, cost \$Aus 4Bn

#### 7.4.3 The Russian Problem - Smoke pollution – Russia

- In July & August 2010, 55,800 people are thought to have suffered premature deaths due to the smoke pollution from wildfires.

7.5 Could these international problems happen in the UK? The fires of early May 2011 indicate that they certainly could.

7.5.1 It is not all about remote hillsides. The fires in Swinley forest / Copethorne Wood in Berkshire during May are an indication that it can happen anywhere.

#### 7.6 Recommendations

7.6.1 Wildfire risk reduction measures should be an important part of land use planning. Prescribed burning should be a widely accepted policy. We should be prepared to fight fire with fire.

7.6.2 More top down support is required and better organisation on the ground. Fire Groups should be established to cover all areas of the country that have a recognisable wildfire risk. The Peak District Fire Operations Group is the best example to follow.

7.6.3 Fire groups need to integrate the skills, local knowledge and equipment possessed by landowners and managers.

7.6.4 A Decision Support System for Prescribed Burning should be developed and made widely available.

7.7 In summary, we need to stop being precious about using fire to manage our heathlands. As the fuel load rises, so does the risk of catastrophic damage.

## 8 Discussion on Abbeystead Estate



8.1 After lunch, a visit took place to Grit Fell, to the north of Abbeystead, in near perfect conditions.

- 8.2 Some additional discussion took place about the relationship between the public and private sectors. There was agreement that the two sectors could work together better.
- 8.3 Officials from the agencies, who usually only had short-term involvement in an area, needed to respect and draw on the knowledge gathered over several generations by some farmers and land managers.
- 8.4 Farmers were happy to be grazing the fell and got value from it, but it was accepted that for upland farming to be viable financially, public sector support was essential.
- 8.5 There were different levels of diversity associated with different styles of management. It was proposed that a 'one size fits all' approach should be avoided as every block of land is different and needs sympathetic management.
- 8.6 The owner's management objectives also need to be taken into account.
- 8.7 The problems associated with the colony of lesser black-backed gulls on the estate were discussed, and it was noted that the implications of the colony on drinking water quality were important.
- 8.8 It was suggested that Natural England staff needed to gain a better understanding of the land management issues, but it was stated that they were not able to spend more time with individual land managers.
- 8.9 It was noted that the high-quality tracks made it easy to gain access to the top of the hill and that this provides benefit for management and monitoring purposes as well as recreational access.
- 8.10 There was a general feeling that there was not enough burning taking place. Burning of the heather was seen to be important for livestock grazing as well as grouse.

