



## Speyside Fields for Wildlife 2023 Report

This is our seventh season of activities and again we continue to build on previous experience. We now have over a dozen active sites here in Strathspey and have been giving advice and support to others, some on Deeside and further afield. SFW have been promoting native wildflower establishment at several other smaller sites in Badenoch and Strathspey. We have provided practical help, advice and seeds where appropriate.

Most sites were sown during the second half of May, but a heat wave followed immediately during the second half of May and all through June. It was not till early July that the rains came and saved the meadows and seed crops from failing completely. Apparently, this June was the hottest ever recorded in UK. However, most sites recovered well but weeds overwhelmed the sown seeds at some sites.

We held our open afternoon on 10<sup>th</sup> of August and had a good turnout on a beautiful afternoon. Unfortunately, our date clashed with the Grantown Show so we may have had an even greater turnout.

Thanks to Aileen's sterling efforts, our fundraising was very successful this year. Special thanks and appreciation go to the HC Nature Restoration Fund, the Schroder Investment Management, Aviva/BBC Wild Isles crowdfunding appeal, the Swire Trust and to the Cairngorm Trust Nature Resilience Fund. Thanks also to CNPA for their continued financial support and advice. This welcome funding has allowed us to purchase some mini-implements which we can use to manage the perennial flower meadows. SFW are grateful to McLaren Tractors of Dingwall for their support and advice when acquiring and demonstrating these useful implements. This additional funding will now allow us to undertake more projects and to support landowners in creating or enhancing more sites for nature and for people.

You will see we have a new logo. Thanks to Stewart and Heather Potter for creating this, and to them for donating one of their paintings which was won by John Rafferty in our 'prize draw' which we held as a small incentive for donors to the Aviva crown funding appeal.

Here is a quick pictorial review of some of the sites we undertook or supported during this past 2023/24 season.

**Croft 20**

**Skye of Curr**

**0.5 ha**



James White of McLaren Tractors demonstrates the mini baler at Croft 20. 18<sup>th</sup> August

Following its creation in 2022, 2023/24 was the first full season of the established perennial wildflower meadow at Croft 20, Skye of Curr. By early June, the meadow was a colourful mixture of grasses and flowers, which attracted the attention of passing walkers, cyclists and motorists. In particular, wild carrot, ox eye daisy, yellow rattle, devil's bit scabious, red clover, self-heal, common knapweed, bristly oxtongue and melancholy thistle were abundant throughout the area and contrasted well against grasses such as Timothy, Red Fescue, Purple Moorgrass and black oats.

On the 18 August, SFW volunteers and CNP staff gathered at Croft 20 to try out the new SFW hay cutter, rake and baler. Several rows were cut and then turned from which a few round 20kg bales were produced. Later that day the rest of the field was cut, and then turned during the next two sunny days. On the 21 August the hay was all baled with a total of 30 good quality hay bales produced, which were collected that evening by a local farmer for cattle and horse feed.

Throughout the year, the meadow attracted many different butterflies and moths (especially peacock, red admiral, orange tip, speckled wood, green veined white, meadow brown, and chimney sweep), birds, amphibians, and other animals. Apart from lots of finches and tits, small flocks of bramblings, siskins and redwings were sighted. In May, a tawny owl and its fledgling were sighted, and in July there was a blackcap visitor. During the winter months buzzards and a sparrow hawk have been constant visitors hunting for prey. Other wildlife has included roe deer, brown hares, brown frogs, field mice, voles, and a stoat.



Keith cutting the meadow at Croft 20 with the new drum mower. 18<sup>th</sup> August

Thanks to Ian MacEachern for this detailed report.

**Mousa. Nethybridge**

**0.5 ha**

**hand sown on 16<sup>th</sup> May**

Mousa did well despite the drought in early summer. Crop was part corn annuals with phacelia and part bird seed crop of radish, mustard and quinoa. It was alive with bees and butterflies during the summer but fewer birds in winter, perhaps because they were all along at Balliemore or in the semi-abandoned weedy fields adjacent at Coulnakyle. A family of friendly roe deer enjoyed the field all summer.



Photo 19<sup>th</sup> July

**Balliemore Nethybridge**

**1 ha**

**hand sown on 16<sup>th</sup> May**

Balliemore did particularly well and flowered through till October.

The field was sown with a combination of corn annuals and phacelia and a bird seed crop of radish, mustard and quinoa. By November bird numbers built up and the early wintry spell in December saw a flock of several hundred finches using the bird seed crop. Several roe deer and brown hares also enjoyed the feed and cover offered by the crops.

2<sup>nd</sup> Dec      350 linnets, 100 chaffinches, 20 pheasants, 15 wood pigeons, 1 sparrow hawk, 1 kestrel.

4<sup>th</sup> Dec      300 linnets, 100 chaffinches, 10 bramblings, 20 pheasants, 3 robins, 2 wrens and 1 kestrel.



Photo 19<sup>th</sup> July

**Balliefurth, Nethybridge**

**0.5 ha**

**hand sown on 24<sup>th</sup> May**

Three small sites were sown at Balliefurth. Each was adjacent to the Speyside Way and were enjoyed by birds, bees, butterflies and walkers throughout the summer. To prepare these sites for sowing, an enthusiastic SFW work party spent a morning gathering up about three tons of big stones – phew!



One of three sites at Balliefurth on the Speyside Way - 8<sup>th</sup> August

Easter Tulloch, Nethybridge 0.5 ha

hand sown on 16<sup>th</sup> May



The big field at Easter Tulloch. Photo 30<sup>th</sup> July

Two fields were sown at Easter Tulloch. The larger one had a corn annual strip and a bird seed strip. It attracted a host of insects during the warm summer days and small numbers of chaffinches enjoyed the seeds in late autumn and winter. Brown hares, badgers and odd red deer also enjoyed the lush pickings.

The smaller field up against the forest was sown with a mixture of corn annuals, phacelia, radish, mustard, quinoa and black oats. It did well, perhaps as it was more shaded from the June heatwave. It flowered well and was still in flower and attracting butterflies in mid-October. See photo below.



Bob's wee field at Easter Tulloch still flowering into October. Photo 18<sup>th</sup> October

**Caledon**

**0.25 ha**

**hand sown on 26<sup>th</sup> May**

This perennial meadow was sown last year and had an element of corn annuals which came up again this year.

The meadow was mown on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Stewart Potter recorded 14 species of butterfly using the meadow, these included: Meadow Brown, Small Copper, Small Heath, Small pearl bordered fritillary, Dark green fritillary, Common Blue, Scotch Argus, Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma, Cabbage White and Ringlet. Stewart sowed a smaller area adjacent to the main field, but it didn't do well due to the prolonged hot dry spell in June and to the hungry mouths of several roe deer.



**Balliemullich, Aberlour**

**3 ha**

**spinner sown on 27<sup>th</sup> May**

This larger field was sown with a strip of corn annuals and phacelia at the top (featured) and mixed bird seed and grain lower down. Being on a slope and well drained the drought impacted seed establishment and grasses and weeds rather dominated. Towards the end of the summer the flowers recovered and gave a good show.

A small flock of around 100 linnets and a few yellow hammers used the field throughout the winter along with about 20 pheasants and a few roe deer.



Balliemullich meadow flowering late 27<sup>th</sup> Aug

## Castle Roy, Nethybridge

Work at Castle Roy continued this season and was led by Aileen. This ongoing project is a joint initiative between SFW and the Castle Roy Trust. The meadows gave a good show but not so poppy dominated as they were last year. This year lots of wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace) appeared; such is the unpredictability of seed sowing and germination.

In the autumn, SFW and volunteers mowed and raked the meadows and sowed lots of yellow rattle seed in the meadows and around the castle moat. Some native wildflower plug plants were also planted around the small pond.

Aileen has worked hard and has secured funding to establish a mixed hedge at the north end of the castle and to plant numerous shrubs and berry bearing bushes. Due to quite severe browsing by hares and roe deer on existing trees, new additions will have to be protected by fencing and guards.



Castle Roy on 23<sup>rd</sup> June

### **The Lazy Duck, Nethybridge**

Over the past two seasons, SFW have assisted with the enhancement of the meadow at Lazy Duck. This was David and Valerie Dean's idea and Phil and Sarah have taken it forward.

The meadow was plug planted with a variety of flowers and yellow rattle seed was sown last autumn.

SFW are grateful to Richard Mason from Skye of Curr for the use of his small Kubota tractor at Lazy Duck and other sites.



Phil bailing the Lazy Duck meadow on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

## Tulloch verges

This is the second year of our trial roadside verge management. The yellow rattle we sowed last autumn has germinated well. Lady's bedstraw and Harebells also gave a good show and this was partly due to our work party having cut and removed the heavy grass toppings last autumn. Lack of management and heavy competition from grasses is often the cause of wildflower decline. Thanks to our volunteers who strimmed and raked the verges again this autumn and to the Tulloch Busy Bees group who grew native plug plants.



The Tulloch verge on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Lots of Lady's bedstraw and yellow rattle.



Volunteers cutting and raking the Tulloch verge in late summer. Photo 16<sup>th</sup> September



Desmond's meadow 18<sup>th</sup> July



Lovely private Meadow near Dulnain Bridge Photo 13<sup>th</sup> July



Aileen's meadow 22<sup>nd</sup> July

## Glen Beg

2ha

Aileen has been working with Iona Laing to enhance what has been for some years a heavily grazed horse paddock. Our intention is to develop it into a species rich meadow.

In October Gerald Calder kindly topped the field and then 'scuffed it up a bit' with his old harrows to create niches into which we sowed yellow rattle seeds. At the top of the field there are several old aspen trees which are sending out lots of suckers. Unfortunately, these were being heavily browsed by the horses and now rabbits. Iona kindly organised a local lad to come along in the winter to reduce the number of rabbits.

To ensure that at least some suckers get away, we plan to erect metal guards around a number of aspens this spring.



Gerald with his wee red Fergie scuffing up the field at Glen Beg. 23<sup>rd</sup> October