



Scottish Game Awards

Winner information

July 2024

GAME CHAMPION OF THE YEAR

This award recognises a champion of game meat, a game dealer, hospitality provider, individual or organisation who is going the extra mile to raise awareness of the value of wild meat products and deliver these from hill to grill and field to fork. The award aims to recognise a champion who is helping to expand the market for wild game and venison through passion and innovation.

Winner

Country Food Trust

The CFT is an amazing initiative to supply ready-made, high protein meals, using game meat from shoots and estates around the country to the people who are hungry and in need. All is provided free of charge. During the past year CFT Scotland has donated in excess of 43 tonnes of protein into the third sector, made up with 50% Venison, 30% Pheasant and 20% other Game meat. This is the equivalent of 430,000 meals supplied to more than 150 foodbanks and charities in Scotland.

Game is sourced locally and whenever possible returned to its original locality via a network of volunteers, many of which are Keepers and Stalkers who were involved in providing the game initially. Working within the field sports industry The Country Food Trust can ensure that as much game and venison produced in Scotland goes into the food chain as possible. Generous donations and fundraising events help to support the charity in a sustainable way, volunteering and help from the moorland groups has meant that game based meals have been made available to those less fortunate even in the remotest parts of Scotland. By involving the estates and shoots in the distribution process it has helped to integrate those often working in remote places to their local communities thereby increasing their self-esteem at a time when political pressures are making life difficult. With the ever-increasing pressure to cull more deer in the name of conservation, the trust's aim is to increase the consumption of this valuable resource, by utilising the prime cuts in restaurants and retail outlets to help fund the production of mince from the poorer cuts to create ready meals thus carcasses are utilised to the full. Recently the trust has sent large volumes of Venison Pasta Bolognese to help with aid in Ukraine.

Although a great deal of the game is donated in Scotland, there is still a large cost involved. The Game Dealers are supported in many ways and the trust has become a big enough player in the market place that it now puts a bottom in the market for game meat and in the last few months it has bought as much game as possible from the frozen reserves that game dealers have in stock, enabling them to have capacity for the coming season. The UK-wide the charity has now donated more than 500 tonnes of raw meat, delivered more than 3 million meals and supported over 1000 foodbanks and charities since its inception in 2015. In the last twelve month its achievements in Scotland have been staggering, as can be seen from the figures above.



Highly Commended

Angus Glens Moorland Group & Strathmore Rugby Club Partnership

The Angus Glens Moorland Group has provided Strathmore Rugby Club (SRC) with game meat for hospitality days, in doing so highlighting the nutritional benefits of locally sourced protein whilst supporting local employers. Through this unique initiative known as “game for game”, Strathmore RC have been able to provide the very best of local produce to guests, members and sponsors. As part of their pre-season rugby training, Strathmore RC introduces players to the importance of effective nutrition when it comes to winning games. Low-fat, high-protein game is directly applicable to this initiative. The added bonus is that the club are providing a unique hospitality experience with the very best of produce which is not matched by any other sporting club in Angus and beyond. The Angus Glens Moorland Group make all this possible at a time when providing value for money and quality are pivotal and have enhanced the club’s performance both on and off the field.

Winston Churchill Venison

Winston Churchill Venison is an incredible family business which started out taking stalkers out in the hills of Argyll in the 1980s. With the growing demand for venison and game meat, they set up a vibrant venison butchery, which supplied their stand at numerous farmers markets, bringing venison into the mainstream for many families. Next came the online shop and then the contract to supply hundreds of venison burgers to rugby supporters at Murrayfield. They also take the pheasants and partridge from the local shoots and produce a range of barbecue meats. Winston and his wife Anne were early supporters of the Farmers Markets movement, and were regular attendees at many of the West Coast markets – sometimes several over a weekend. Then, through their connection as early members of Food from Argyll, they won a contract to sell venison burgers at Murrayfield at rugby matches. The stalking and venison business employs several local people, and also several members of the Churchill family. Winston has made time to sit on committees and groups both locally and nationally to promote deer and wild Scottish venison. In addition to all this, Winston will always make time to speak to school groups about wildlife management, habitat change, deer, forestry, venison - and how to develop and run a business in rural Scotland. His energy is boundless and he is absolutely passionate about his family and their role in the promotion of venison in Scotland. Winston Churchill Venison is the epitome of a hard-working, family-run, innovative and resilient rural Scottish Business, committed to the promotion of Scottish game. All their employees are local or family. All of their venison is harvested from the wild. They are absolutely a champion of Scottish Game.



CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN SPORTING

The Conservation and Sustainability in Sporting Award is designed to honour individuals or businesses that actively contribute to the conservation of game and its associated flora and fauna in Scotland, focusing on the sustainability for the future.

Winner

Glenogil Estate & Game Conservancy Deutschland Partnership

A renowned mixed sporting estate where conservation through wise use of the natural environment and a responsibility to look after the countryside and the people living and working is fundamental. Glenogil Estate is a renowned sporting estate comprising a grouse moor and a low ground partridge and pheasant shoot. All of the game that is shot on the estate is processed in house and distributed to the guns at the end of each shooting party, as well as to shoot day staff. During the 2023-2024 season Glenogil estate were part of the Game for Game initiative and supplied over 50% of the game direct to the club, as part of Angus Glens Moorland Group. Woodland management is also an ongoing workstream on the estate.

There is extensive research that has been carried by The Game Conservancy Deutschland, in cooperation with the HAWK in Gottingen, and the estate staff at Glenogil since 2015, that clearly demonstrates the positive contribution moorland management makes to wider biodiversity and conservation.

The first two years were concentrated on understanding the ecosystem on the grouse moor with all its different parts and habitat diversity. The bird fauna has been summarised in a species list with special attention paid to the habitat use by those species. So far they have recorded at least 103 bird species on Glenogil estate, an immense figure. Not all species of course breed on the estate but they do use the area frequently for foraging or resting during migration. Habitat management including muirburn and the grazing of sheep, runs parallel to legal predator control and is an important tool to maximise higher densities in endangered species. To prove the positive influence of both habitat and predator management, there were further investigations in 2017 and these have taken place every year since.

Students come to Glenogil every spring to study the habitat, bird species and insects at Glenogil. Wader nests such as Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew are equipped with game cameras and thermologgers. The loggers are placed in the nests and they record date, time and temperature, so after the nesting period the information is accessible in order to assess if a clutch was lost or if indeed the brood was successful. In combination with the cameras it is possible to take a precise view about the hatching success and any causes of loss. Glenogil's forestry programme also provides benefits for the overall conservation on the estate. Diverse species including semi-natural woodland which is comprised of locally native trees and shrubs derived from natural regeneration as well as a replanting programme are present. Because of the natural appearance and features of the woods, they play a valuable role for nature conservation and the landscape. Dr Dan Hoffman, from the Game Conservancy Deutschland who leads the work at Glenogil, has produced rigorous and exceptional scientific literature which has had a meaningful impact on the political discourse in Scotland. The German students come to Scotland to study the ecosystem and biodiversity because it is not possible to do so in Germany, in-part because of decisions taken by politicians. Moorland management on Glenogil and beyond is delivering benefits for wildlife, conservation, communities and the future of the sector – evidenced meticulously through the research of the Game Conservancy Deutschland and supported and enabled by the Glenogil Estate.



Highly Commended

Seafield & Strathspey Estates

Strathspey estate is owned and managed jointly with Seafield Estates. There are multiple land management practices across both estates but when looking at Strathspey, the naturally regenerated woodland and deer management has brought significant conservation benefits, including protection of Capercaillie and Black Game. The Capercaillie population on the estate is stable despite the overall population in Scotland decreasing which is very positive and is evidence of the team's positive contribution to conservation and sustainability in sporting. Deer stalking as well as walked up Grouse shooting take place on the estate with the three gamekeepers managing the sporting. The Gamekeeping team at Strathspey have drastically reduced the deer numbers across the estate, from roughly 40 per square kilometre to 3-4 over a three-year period and have kept the population at that level for over 15 years. They carried this out to leave a managed herd to sustain an element of the deer stalking aspect of the estate, which still takes place yearly during the traditional deer stalking season. Along with deer management the keepers manage the habitat to benefit ground nesting birds and provide an ideal habitat for them. Along with habitat management they undertake legal predator control which also benefits the schedule 1 and red listed species present on Strathspey. The focus of this nomination is the protection of Capercaillie and Black Game on the estate. The overall picture for both species is on the decline across Scotland but 20-25% of Scotland's remaining Capercaillie population is on Strathspey. With the numbers stabilising this year there is hope that this will continue to increase following the breeding season. There was also an increase in Black Cock numbers this year with a substantial increase from 26 - 48. Due to the natural regeneration projects at the foot of the hill heather burning is not possible. Instead the team use a robo cutter within the regen areas to control the heather and create patches of habitat. This estate is also one of the only estates/forests within the area managing predators and carrying out brood counts. Their efforts have been well reflected in the maintenance of Capercaillie and Black Grouse numbers this year and this should be recognised.



GAMEKEEPING TEAM OF THE YEAR

This award aims to recognise a gamekeeping team who, as a collective, are delivering outstanding benefits to rural Scotland. Be it high-quality conservation work or charitable fundraising, this award aims to recognise gamekeeping teams who are going the extra mile to deliver for the environment, the economy and their community.

Winner

Auchnafree Team – Richard Malseed and Max John

The Auchnafree Team have been decisive advocates and educators around the benefits of moorland management for grouse shooting. Never ones to shy away from requests for help, Richard and Max have been on the frontline of communicating the benefits of moorland management for grouse shooting in the Tayside region and beyond. Over the last couple of years they have: i) hosted Scottish Government Ministers and civil servants; ii) led the representation of the Tayside & Central Scotland Moorland Group at national events such as the Scottish Game Fair; iii) contributed extensively to the education of young people through estates that educate and careers fairs; and iv) featured on national television to inform about the benefits of humane cable restraints (HCRs). Richard and Max are an impressive keeping team who have established themselves as excellent ambassadors and advocates for the gamekeeping profession. At the outset of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill, Richard and Max facilitated a visit by the then Minister for the Environment and Land Reform, Mairi McAllan MSP. Their contributions during the visit were remarked upon for their persuasiveness by Scottish Government civil servants. Last year, Richard and Max were also the driving force behind TCSMG's representation at the Scottish Game Fair, which included multiple demonstrations in the main ring which were extremely well received. Their commitment to the education of the next generation is extremely impressive, having supported countless estate that educate days and school visits to promote the economic and environmental value of moorland management. They have also been attending careers fairs - a crucial outreach activity to inspire the next generation of gamekeepers and land managers. Richard has also been an extremely capable spokesperson for the profession, articulating during the sunset stages of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill the implications of a ban on the use of snares and cable restraints for wildlife and biodiversity. In short, the Auchnafree Team are a credit to the gamekeeping profession and have demonstrably improved its standing among decision makers, the public and the next generation.

Highly Commended

Dalnaspidal Grouse Moor – Joe McGowan, Robert Brannan and Fraser Walker

Dalnaspidal Grouse Moor (part of the Ben Alder Estate) is one of the most impressive and prestigious moors in Scotland. Renowned for its sporting prowess and dramatic landscapes, Dalnaspidal is expertly managed by Joe, Robert and Fraser. With some of the most challenging topography of any grouse moor in Scotland, the Dalnaspidal team go above and beyond in facilitating an incredible sporting experience which is revered by pretty much everyone who has the honour of shooting there. The Dalnaspidal team have consistently produced a sustainable surplus of grouse, facilitating a huge amount of local / regional spending on seasonal employment and other local businesses. The operation at Dalnaspidal is meticulously planned owing to its scale and topography which Joe, Robert and Fraser consistently execute. Beating at Dalnaspidal is not for the faint hearted, but the camaraderie fostered by the Dalnaspidal team plays an integral role in keeping everyone going. The beating team leave every day feeling valued and respected by the professionals charged with running the operation. The sporting experience at Dalnaspidal is extremely impressive, and revered by some of the best guns in the UK for its challenge. Joe's reading of the ground has enabled some spectacular drives and the continuation of shooting well into the season. The area is also renowned for its diversity of wildlife, especially waders and raptors. The slick and professional operation at Dalnaspidal in what is an unforgiving landscape makes the team deserving of recognition for their efforts over the years to make the moor the success it is today.



Judges' commendation

Conor Kelly

Conor Kelly, headkeeper at Stanhope and Patervan Estate near Biggar, has had a tangible and decisive impact in furthering the reputation of gamekeeping in Scotland. Stanhope and Patervan is an island grouse - a characteristic which brings additional challenges in respect of its management, particularly when it comes to predator control. The estate's reliance on predator control has provided a platform through which Conor has become an important advocate for the sector. Not only did he provide expert evidence to the Scottish Parliament's rural affairs and islands committee - as well as meeting with Ministers and officials - about snaring, but the estate has also recently opened its doors to talk in frank terms about what is required to deliver good land management. The estate 'open day', to which local communities were invited, was credited as a tremendous success by those in attendance, providing an educational oversight of biodiversity enhancement, sheep farming and the management of designated sites (including SSSIs). The openness of the estate and the willingness of its keepers to talk about their work is extremely commendable. In terms of Conor's engagement with Ministers, officials and parliamentarians, he could not have made a more persuasive case for the retention of humane cable restraints, and was instrumental in persuading Ministers to at least consider a licensing scheme to retain HCRs. While snaring is set to be banned under the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Act in due course, Conor's advocacy on behalf of the gamekeeping profession throughout this difficult period was both exceptional and commendable. It is for this reason he has been singled out for a judges' commendation.



FISHING BEAT OF THE YEAR

This award aims to recognise a fishing beat going the extra mile through conservation, innovation, education, community engagement and advocacy.

Winner

Bemersyde Fishing

Bemersyde Estate, nestled along the River Tweed, actively champions river conservation, community engagement, and sustainable angling practices. Through partnerships with the Tweed Foundation and citizen science initiatives, they monitor and protect the river ecosystem. Their commitment to inclusivity, exemplified by the Bemersyde Trophy and Junior Trophy, celebrates anglers while promoting conservation. Bemersyde's dedication to preserving both fish stocks and broader biodiversity, combined with their proactive approach to community involvement, makes them a deserving candidate for the Fishing Beat of the Year award. Bemersyde Estate goes beyond its environmental efforts by actively involving the local community to cultivate a spirit of stewardship and collective responsibility. Since 2012, with the inception of the Bemersyde Trophy and the Junior Trophy in 2015, the estate celebrates anglers fishing for Atlantic Salmon on the fly, emphasising the practice of catch-and-release to sustain the salmon population. Moreover, these initiatives are designed to promote inclusivity and encourage participation from anglers of all age groups. The annual fishing lunch and presentation serve as meaningful occasions to recognise these accomplishments while underscoring the importance of conservation-minded angling practices. Moreover, Bemersyde's commitment to community extends to its employment practices, with a focus on supporting local residents through job opportunities and partnerships. By housing a full-time ghillie and employing local individuals for assistance and riverbank maintenance during busy periods, the estate not only stimulates the local economy but also fosters a sense of belonging and investment among residents. In summary, Bemersyde Estate distinguishes itself as a model of excellence in the realm of fishing beats through its unwavering dedication to conservation, community engagement, and innovative practices. From its collaboration with environmental organisations to its active involvement in citizen science initiatives, Bemersyde embodies the values of sustainability and stewardship, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the unparalleled beauty and bounty of the River Tweed.



Highly Commended

Kercock Fishings

Kercock Fishings is one of the prolific Lower Middle Tay beats, situated in the Perthshire countryside near Murthly. The beat provides two and a quarter miles of double bank fishing with good access. Conditions are suitable for both the fly and spinning and can comfortably accommodate the novice and more experienced angler alike with a five year average of 137 salmon and grilse and where a once in a lifetime 51lb salmon was safely caught and released in 2013. From the fishing hut, to the equipment, the hand-built fishing boats, to the bank and river maintenance, what Kercock does is set the standard in Scottish Salmon fishing. Kercock Fishings is Gary and Rona Harkin who for fifteen years have become synonymous with the beat. From initial enquiry to booking right through to the genuinely warm welcome, skilled tuition and overall care in every aspect of the business, this couple make the experience on Kercock one of the finest in the industry and set the standard in Scottish Salmon fishing. Simply, they make Scottish salmon fishing what it is and why it is such an important part of the fabric of rural Scotland, and this reputation has maintained throughout change in ownership. The beat works alongside The Tay Salmon Fisheries Board, Tay Rivers Trust and SEPA to ensure this stretch of The Tay, Scotland's premier salmon river, is well cared for through ongoing river maintenance and restoration. It is immediately evident upon arrival the amount of care invested with what is a pristine beat and immaculate facilities and their record keeping is equally precise adding to the value of the important data collected on salmon and sea trout and clients are educated on TSFB policy on catch and release which is respected at Kercock. Extreme weather events in recent years have brought significant challenge with damage from upstream flooding impacting significantly on the beat however, the concerted effort of Gary and his fellow ghillies and assistance of gamekeepers and farmers have together undertaken the necessary clean up, repairs and restoration which has seen Kercock quickly recover. Ongoing surveys monitor the health and biodiversity of the river providing data to reinforce the decades of experience brought by Gary. The respect given to Gary and Rona, the integrity with which they manage the beat and their courage to act always in the best interests of the river and environment have brought them this support and cooperation, maintained a loyal client base, and secured a stable of respected and experienced ghillies which together create a far greater impact than what is fundamentally a one man (and one woman) operation. Every year, Kercock is at the heart of celebrating the opening of the fishing season in-keeping with the fine tradition of the sport. In typical modest style, Gary and Rona would not suggest they are doing anything extraordinary, but what they do is the very best they can for their sport and are the best possible example of the sector.