



Mar Lodge Estate National Nature Reserve

2025 Annual Review

The Mar Lodge Team

Mar Lodge Estate, the UK's largest National Nature Reserve, is managed for nature, people and Highland sport and is cared for by the National Trust for Scotland.

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the estate being acquired by National Trust for Scotland. This is an auspicious milestone, and one that deserves to be celebrated. The Trust is only 30 years into a 200-year vision for the estate, which is based on our charitable objectives of: ecological restoration and conservation; promoting open access for all; and practising Highland sport. This is our vision for the estate:

Mar Lodge is a place which connects habitats, wildlife and people; past, present and future; integrating conservation learning, recreation, field sports and culture in one vast and diverse landscape at the heart of the Cairngorms National Park.

2025 was another very busy year for us all, and we're pleased to share what we've been up to with you in this report. There are specific sections for key projects, and also sections on the work of the Hospitality, Functions, Estate, Stalking, Ranger and Ecology teams – though of course, we all pitch in together. Much of our work is done in with help from Trust staff based across Scotland, and many, many people from all walks of life.

Key Projects

The **restoration of the estate's Caledonian pinewood** has been the major conservation project of the last 30 years, with over 2,000 hectares (ha) of naturally regenerating pine, birch, rowan and willow woodland bringing this habitat back to life. This work continued in 2025, and big monitoring projects for both the moorland and woodland features on the estate showed that things are progressing well.

While most of our woodland restoration work is done without use of fences, two projects this year saw fencing undertaken on the estate. Realigning the existing Linn of Dee strategic fence has brought another 150ha of Caledonian pinewood into protection. You can expect to see regenerating aspen and Scots pine around Creag Phadruig in the coming years. Further afield, it was great to fence a remote pocket of broadleaf woodland in the Allt Garbh, on the flanks of Beinn Bhrotain. This patch of woodland has a particularly fine stand of the genetically distinct, Scottish variety of downy birch (*Betula pubescens var fragrans*), alongside willows and rowans. Trees are already responding well to the fencing. Thanks to SSEN for funding this work.

Large woody structures (ahem, trees) continue to be installed along the River Dee, in a partnership approach to catchment-wide river management. This is primarily for the benefit of salmon. The large chunks of tree provide places for salmon to rest behind in periods of high water, and create deep pools which stay cooler in long periods of drought. The trees will also increase the amount of nutrients in the Upper Dee catchment, leading to more invertebrates in the river. This year, in partnership with River Dee Trust, we installed another 70 structures into the river.

Our work on the **Buildings project** continued. We're creating more on-site accommodation for both staff and visitors, and so this year we undertook major changes in the Stable Block, creating a new two-bedroom staff apartment. We've also started work to renovate the Porter's Lodge (by Victoria Bridge), which will soon become holiday accommodation. One of the main findings from our community consultation back in 2021/22 was the need for more local housing, so it's been good to get this project underway, building on previous work to increase our housing stock (e.g. renovations at Cairn na Drochaide cottage and elsewhere in the Stable Block).

We tend to have minimal **interpretation** on the estate, but we've made a couple of exceptions to that rule this year. To mark our 30th anniversary, the rangers created a pop-up 're-photography' exhibition. Photos taken across the previous 30 years on the estate were 'retaken' in 2025 to show how the landscape has changed. These were installed over the summer holidays at the Linn o' Dee and Linn of Quoich.

A little further afield, it was good to refresh some of the interpretation in the bothies. With thanks to help from the Mountain Bothies Association and Friends of Bob Scott's, we've **installed interpretation panels** in the four bothies across the estate. Do keep an eye out for them when you're out and about on the estate.

The realigned **East Quoich path**, upstream of the Punchbowl, experienced its first full season and proved extremely popular. We always knew that further work would be required once footfall increased, and so a second phase of the project (flying-in local stone to surface or stabilise some sections) was undertaken in the autumn.

Wildfires were in the news a lot in 2025, particularly following the massive Dava Moor fire to the north of Grantown-on-Spey. With the climate crisis accelerating, we are taking the risk of wildfires very seriously. In 2025 we completed a new wildfire management plan, which focuses on prevention and mitigation alongside our plans for firefighting should a fire break out. As part of this plan, we invested in new firefighting equipment, and 15 members of the team received extra training from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service.

Prevention is better than cure, however, and so the Trust puts substantial resource into fire patrols throughout the tourist season, with daily patrols during periods of high fire risk managed by the Ranger Team. This work will continue, and in 2026 we will be working closely with the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) as new byelaws that prohibit use of campfires and BBQs come into force in the National Park.



Ecology Team

The ecology team are responsible for monitoring the ecological health of the estate. This year, the team produced monitoring reports on **woodland regeneration, moorland health, and herbivore impacts**. Here, the news was very good, with improvements found in the condition of our woods at all altitudes, and herbivore impacts generally low across the estate. In addition, the ecology team reported on experimental work including **ringbarking, seed-spreading, and experiments in ground preparation**.

The annual round of **raptor monitoring** was busy this year, with plenty of birds around to keep us on our toes, and fine spring weather helping them to successfully rear young. Among the highlights were 12 pairs of **hen harriers** and four successful pairs of breeding **merlins**. Our merlin monitoring coincided with CNPA survey of the whole park. We also had successful **peregrine** nests this year, which was pleasing given the species currently appears to be struggling in the national park. Our raptor monitoring took up a fair amount of time this year, so we were grateful for field assistance from Scottish Raptor Study Group and financial help from CNPA.

Following exciting work from the north of the National Park, in 2025 we undertook **diversionary feeding for pine martens**, with the help of the Stalking team. This project, which provides a food source for pine martens for a limited period during the bird breeding season, is designed to improve breeding success of ground nesting birds. We're particularly interested to see whether it will have an impact on our black grouse breeding success. We therefore established feeding stations using deer waste at 16 sites across the woodlands for an eight-week period in the spring. All these sites were used by predators, with pine martens being by far the most frequent visitors to the sites. We also saw their use by buzzards, red kite, jays, tawny owls, and the occasional badger.

This year saw the national **montane bird survey**, overseen by RSPB. This work is looking at populations of our three montane species: dotterel, ptarmigan, and snow bunting. We took a close look at our breeding dotterels, in partnership with University of Highlands & Islands (UHI), to look more closely at the potential impact of disturbance by people on dotterels. We were pleased to have successful breeding for all our montane species. Staying up in the mountains, our **montane willow restoration project** continues. This year, a further **4500 willows** were planted in Coire Odhar, on Bod an Deamhaim. Monitoring suggests that our willows are doing well, with >95% of our monitoring sample still alive two years after planting. This brings us to almost 20,000 montane woodland trees (ahem, bushes) planted at high altitudes. Meanwhile, contractors surveyed our two **whortle-leaved willow** sites, and found them to be more extensive than was previously thought, with several thousand plants present!

Twinflower is one of our rarer species, and we have been working intensively with this species for the last few years to help restore the populations found here. These newly established sites are now just about beginning to flower themselves. Work also continued with other rare plants, in partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. **Alpine sow-thistle** populations are going from strength to strength. This year also saw work with **small cow-wheat**, with a trial establishment of the species at a new site on the estate.

The **Narrow-headed Ant** is a core species in the Trust's 'Plan for Nature', and this year saw several milestones in our conservation of the species. We were therefore delighted when ranger Rob found a previously unrecorded population of narrow headed ants, with at least four nests. We are working with ecologist Nick Baker, CNPA, and the James Hutton Institute on a suite of monitoring, small-scale habitat management, and captive mating, to promote the long-term viability of the small population found at Mar Lodge and across Deeside. This year, in an exciting first, we translocated a captive-reared nest out into the wild. We have taken several dozen narrow headed ant queens into captivity this year, with the aim of rearing them on and releasing them next year. Keep your eyes peeled for news of more developments from this exciting project.

It was another busy year of **events and talks**. In 2025, the ecology team delivered 20 talks and events, reaching around 500 people. It was a diverse mix: we delivered events for deer managers, book clubs, university courses, and even a whisky distillery!



Pine marten 'mugshots' taken as part of our marten population survey, and the identifying markers of individuals - as designed by MSc student Jodie Shannon.

Estate Team

The estate team keeps the estate running from day to day. This is a huge and diverse task, which includes vehicle maintenance, groundskeeping, forestry management, and buildings repairs and maintenance. One day might see the team painting and decorating, and the next donning the chainsaw trousers and removing fallen trees from roads. The estate team works closely with the ranger and ecology teams, and our volunteers, to deliver the nature restoration work that occurs across the estate.

To this end, with **storms** making their presence felt in 2025, the team was kept busy with remedial tree work to **keep footpaths open**. Large trees came down across several of the estate's paths and tracks this year, and more work was needed on other trees around the lodge policies following **tree inspections**. Sticking with the policies, the estate team has done a grand job looking after the newly established **wildflower meadows**. In the three years since the meadows were established the number of plant species recorded on these old lawns has almost doubled!

The estate team has been pushing hard over the last few years to **reduce the carbon emissions** that the estate produces, and this year we pushed even further. The team invested in an **electric sit-in ATV**, which replaced a diesel sit-in ATV. As time goes on, we will see what the full capabilities of this machine are, and hopefully it will lead to us replacing more of our machines with electric. We also purchased an autonomous '**robo-mower**' for using on our lawns. Not only has this reduced the amount of diesel and staff time we devote to grass cutting, but it also produces beautiful straight lines in our lawns for picture-perfect wedding photos!

The estate team hosted a visit from pupils of **Braemar Primary School**, who have been looking at renewable energy as part of their studies. The visit involved a tour of the biomass plant, how it operates, and what it means for our energy use. In a joint piece of work with our electrical contractors CC North, biomass engineers, and the Trust's IT department, we've **improved the biomass efficiency** by replacing the Mar Lodge heating and biomass control system. This will contribute to **reducing the amount of woodchip** that is used to heat the buildings.

We're working on selective thinning and opening of clearings and rides as part of the ongoing work to **restructure the even-aged plantations**. Walkers heading towards Red House, Glen Tilt, and An Sgarsoch may well notice that the Ruigh nan Clach plantation has been restructured. This is one of the last places on the estate where **Sitka spruce** is present, and we are keen to remove it. This year, **1700 m³** of predominantly Sitka spruce, with a bit of Scots pine and Lodgepole pine, was removed. Approximately **900 m³ of timber** was hauled from the plantations, chipped, dried and then used in the biomass plant. Using regenerative biomass instead of gas or oil to heat the lodge has drastically reduced the estate's carbon emissions.

There was plenty to keep the team busy around the lodge, with **interior and exterior painting**, decorating and joinery works. The team also put a lot of effort into **fire inspections**. Following a Fire Safety Audit by the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, a fire risk assessment by the NTS Health & Safety team, and an inspection by the NTS insurers, the team have almost completed remedial works identified for all of the buildings on the estate. The team have also been working with contactors to deliver our **annual compliance tests** (water treatment, electrical testing, fire alarm testing, legionella testing, gas boiler servicing, lighting protection, catering equipment servicing, lift inspections). The team is also working with contractors to **improve the Lodge extraction system**.

Using fallen timber from around the lodge, we made a trial **bike rack** for use by visitors, which has now been installed at Derry Lodge. It is always great to work with members of the NTS team beyond Mar Lodge, and the estate team were joined by a member of the Crathes estate team. It is hoped that Mar Lodge team will do something similar with another NTS property next year, and so continue the **Trust exchange programme**.



Hospitality and Functions Teams

The hospitality and functions teams look after the beautiful Mar Lodge, and keep it filled with busy events, private functions, and holidaymakers throughout the year. **2105 guests** stayed with us over the course of 2025!

It was a **record-breaking year** for wedding and events, for both income and quantity, with **46 events** occurring across the year. We once again hosted the Cairngorms Ultra race, as well as the Forest & Land Scotland northeast team meeting. We hosted the **Working for Waders** mini-conference back in March, which saw practitioners get together to discuss all things curlew. We also ran a trial **gin-tasting event** in the Picnic Lodge, along with the Ecology team and Persie Distillery (who produce our Pinewood gin).

We were delighted to host **27 weddings** this year. One, held on 12th July, was unusual in that our stash of umbrellas had to be used as impromptu sunshades when the thermometer out the front of the lodge reached a staggering 32°C. However, the following weekend the umbrellas were used more traditionally when we encountered our wettest wedding of 2025 - what a difference a week makes in the Cairngorms!

Work continues at the lodge on **upgrades and improvements**. This year we **installed uplighting** at the front of the iconic Stag Ballroom and improved lighting in and around the lodge to ensure a **warm welcome** for our guests. The lodge looks amazing after a **re-paint of the front and west elevation woodwork** as well as all the rainwater goods. The big project for this year was the full **refurbishment of Braeriach** apartment. Louise Kelly took inspiration from the second Mar Lodge and Pteridomania, or 'fern fever', the Victorian craze for ferns and all things botanical. The apartment features 40 different botanical specimens sourced (sustainably) from across Mar Lodge. Dalvorar apartment, which was refurbished last year, was a finalist at the **Scottish Design Awards 2025**.

In April we were joined by Sophie Streether as Wedding & Events Coordinator, a very welcome addition to the team. Whilst we are sad to say goodbye to housekeeper Pauline Mitchell this summer, we were very happy to be joined by Wendy Clark.



Ranger Team

With 2025's bright, settled weather drawing people to the estate, **we welcomed more visitors than ever**. Visitor numbers were **up 8%** on 2024, continuing the steady rise we've seen since Covid. Over summer we directly engaged (i.e. more than just a 'hello') with almost **8000 people**, and recruited a record number of new NTS members. We couldn't have done this without our Seasonal Ranger (Rob) and our Seasonal VSAs (Katie, Freya and Hannah), who really stepped up to the plate this year.

As ever, **fire prevention** kept us busy, with regular patrols across the estate. However, a record **51 days under High Fire Risk** warnings kept us even busier, and several other projects we'd planned for 2025 had to be curtailed or postponed due to the persistent knock-on impacts of the fire advisories. We organised additional, daily evening patrols during those advisories, which all estate departments helped us with. This not only meant we were able to speak directly to hundreds of visitors about the hazards of lighting fires and BBQs, but we also got through the risk periods without incident.

Still, **60 campfires** were recorded in 2025. This is, however, 10% fewer than 2024, and 36% fewer than 2023 (which was similarly dry and sunny). We believe our new high fire risk signage and clear messaging played a significant part in this, and we're hopeful that the Cairngorms National Park Authority's **new byelaw**, which prohibits use of recreational fires or BBQs between April and September, and comes into effect in 2026, will help continue this downward trend.

We counted **1375 tents** on the estate this season, many of which were **Duke of Edinburgh Award** groups. A lot of our time was (and is) spent liaising with DofE groups about their expeditions, and we always appreciate it when they contact us in advance as this helps to manage pressure on the camping/wildlife hotspots. It's good to see so many youngsters experiencing the great outdoors, and thankfully the midges were kind this year!

Overnighting motorhomes were 12% up on 2024, with 2,016 overnight stays recorded. The estate has been happy to accommodate overnight stays up till now but, with the increasing demand during peak months (**95% increase since 2022**), we are now reviewing whether this approach can be maintained in its current form.

Our work this year was strengthened by the support of our partner organisations. **Cairngorms National Park rangers** undertook 63 days of patrols here, and we jointly ran a responsible camping pop-up event in August. **Police Scotland** continued to support us throughout the year – we're grateful to them for their collaboration, and to **NatureScot** for funding additional patrols. We continued our close working partnership with the **Mountain Bothies Association (MBA)**: assisting in the transport of people & materials; flying the toilet waste out from Corroul; and helping the MBA find alternative methods of hygienic waste disposal at the bothies.

More than **400 people joined events** led or supported by our ranger team, from guided walks and education sessions to the **TGO Challenge**, from scout visits to the **Braemar Mountain Festival**. A highlight for us was welcoming **Braemar Nursery** back to the estate for the first time in several years.

The newly renovated **Picnic Lodge**, at the Linn of Quoich, saw its first full season of opening too, and it was wonderful to hear such positive feedback from visitors. Daily opening/closing duties have also meant we now have a much **improved ranger presence** at the Quoich, which has been great for public engagement.

In October we organised our first **Leisure Industry Day**, where we invited representatives from guiding companies and outdoor businesses to the estate. It was a fantastic opportunity to share the story of Mar Lodge Estate, showcase our work, answer questions, whilst highlighting how leisure operators and their clients/guests can support and assist us. The feedback was so overwhelmingly positive that we're hoping to hold the event every other year.

As we look back on 2025, we want to say a **heartfelt thank you** to everyone who visited us. The conversations we have—whether with first-time visitors or those who have been coming for decades—are a highlight of our work. So, if you see us out and about on the estate, please do stop and say hello. We love a good blether!





High Fire Risk

- ✗ No campfires or fire bowls
- ✗ No barbecues
- ✗ No discarded cigarettes

✓ Use gas camping stoves for cooking, but never leave them unattended

Smell smoke? See a fire? Tell us ASAP

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Mar Lodge Estate
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RANGER SERVICE

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Glen Quoich

Looking towards Beinn a' Bhuid

2011



Glen Quoich

Looking towards Beinn a' Bhuid

2025

Nature Notes

It was another bumper year for **species recording**, with 40 new species added to the estate species list. This was thanks in no small part to the Scottish Entomological Society, who rolled into town in July. 36 of the new species recorded on the estate were found by this group, including one nationally rare, and eight nationally scarce, species of beetle. This brings the total number of species recorded at Mar Lodge to **5392**.

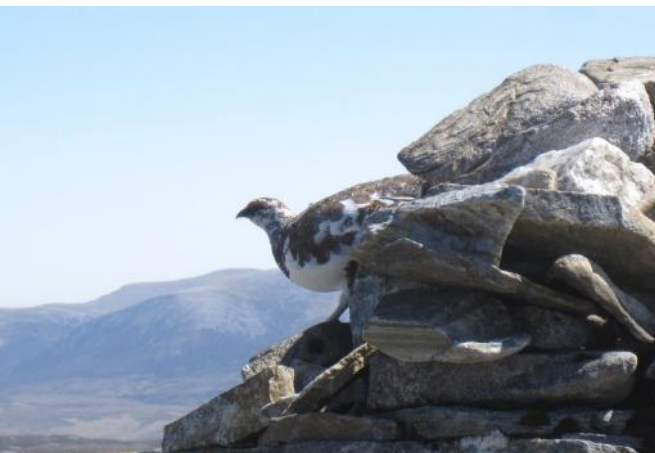
The stars of 2025 were undoubtedly the **pine martens**. During the winter, the team put out 60 camera traps, baited with peanut butter, to survey the estate's marten population. MSc student, Jodie Shannon, then used the 'capture-mark-recapture' method to work to determine that Mar Lodge has a healthy population density of martens across the estate. We're using this research to help with our diversionary feeding on the estate. One upshot was that we now have a library of lovely photos and videos of martens from across the estate!

2025 was an exceptional year for butterflies and moths. The great conditions saw an enormous emergence of **Scotch burnet moth** on Carn na Drochaide – a species restricted in range to just a few hills around Braemar. There was also a good number of **Rannoch brindled beauty** at their usual moorland site in Glen Dee. Sticking with moths, it was nice to see a paper published in 2025, based on work we completed in 2023. This study showed that old-growth Caledonian pinewoods are incredibly important habitats for moths. The paper highlighted the importance of woodland restoration for moth communities, but also showed that having a mosaic of habitats, from old-growth Caledonian pinewood to open moorland, made for the best landscape for overall moth diversity. Moth research continued in 2025, with researcher Laura Sharp looking into how moorland management benefits different moth species. Laura is working across Deeside, so it is nice to be involved in this cross-estate study.

91 bird species were recorded as either breeding or attempting to breed in 2025, up from 81 in 1998. **Pied Flycatcher** once again bred successfully, making this five years out of the last six that the species has bred here. This is a particularly rare breeding bird in Northeast Scotland, so here's hoping they return again in 2026. **Great northern diver** was a bizarre fly-by (or rather swim-through) record. Both **common and lesser whitethroat** were recorded in the estate woodlands: these are birds of scrubby habitats, so are benefitting from the estate's woodland restoration. 2025 saw the highest numbers of **black grouse** recorded since 2019. It is hoped that the fine spring weather and our roll-out of diversionary feeding for pine martens will further boost numbers in 2026. It was also a good year for crossbills, with lots of birds seen across the pinewoods in 2025.

There were some nice plants to be found at Mar Lodge in 2025. Of particular note was **Highland saxifrage**, a tiny arctic-alpine specialist and an NTS priority species. Trust botanist supremo, Dan Watson, was helped by team members to survey this tiny plant in the farthest reaches of the estate. News was mixed, with most sites doing well, but the species was missing from a couple of previously known sites. Highland saxifrage is thought to be vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis. This survey also discovered rare plants like the nationally rare and near-threatened **Hare's-foot sedge**, and the scarce **Alpine speedwell and Starwort mouse-ear**. Of more arcane interest were several new records for *Sagina x normaniana*, otherwise known as **Scottish pearlwort**. This curious hybrid plant was found in a couple of coires across the estate where it has not been previously noted. The team also found a previously unrecorded population of **Issler's Clubmoss**, an extremely rare, near-threatened plant. We've been working closely with this plant for a few years, and our monitoring has shown that Mar Lodge has a high proportion of the entire Scottish population. It was also great to find **Creeping ladies-tresses** in a part of the estate where it has never been recorded before. This plant can be common in pinewoods, but is curiously rare at Mar Lodge, probably as a result of high herbivore densities in previous decades. **Buxbaumia viridis**, the Green Shield Moss, experienced its highest number of sporophytes since 2019, and recently turned up at a new spot, where monitoring showed it has persisted.

Not everything likes dry weather though. Peatland wildlife appeared to suffer from the summer drought. Further downstream, **Oystercatchers** had a poor breeding season, as the dry ground stopped them from feeding with their long probing bills.



Previous page, clockwise from top left: wood ant queens and males emerge en masse, with 2025 being an excellent year for ants; Highland saxifrage, a nationally rare plant, was recorded in several high altitude sites; a merlin chick is monitored under licence, this bird would be one of around a dozen to successfully fledge in 2025; a European eel, critically endangered, is photographed in a pool at the Linn o' Dee; Pearl-bordered fritillaries were monitored by volunteer Roos this year; a ptarmigan is photographed by a hillwalker on An Sgarsoch; Alpine blue sow-thistle flowered in abundance in 2025; it was also a great year for adder sightings, as they enjoyed the sunshine.

History and Culture Snippet

We had an interesting visit from a team of heather pickers this summer, who were hand-collecting some of our heather for thatching a dwelling called Lonbain Cottage. Due to our low grazing pressure in recent years, our heather has grown well and is very good for thatching. It can be rather difficult to find suitable heather for thatching in Scotland these days, due to it usually being managed with regular burning and grazing, but in previous years heather was a widely-used roofing material.

Lonbain Cottage is a thatched cottage in the Applecross parish in Northwest Scotland. It is an earlier-mid 19th century, small single storey, west-facing 3-bay cottage, and is the only surviving thatched cottage in the settlement of Lonbain.





Please note: prior permission is required to fly drones (of any size) at NTS properties, including anywhere on Mar Lodge Estate

Stalking Team

We are continuing to maintain our **red deer herd** at 1650 total across the estate. We took off **91 stags** with paying guests, who come from all over the world, including one party from Botswana who stalked several stags and a roe buck with us. Our average sporting stag weight was **13st 11lb (87.5kg)** and the heaviest was 18st 1lb (114.8kg). Stags could be heard **roaring on 8th September**, which indicated we could be in for an early **rut**, but unfortunately the weather turned wet and mild thereafter. This suppressed the rut, as the deer's preferred rutting conditions are frosty mornings followed by bright days.

We welcomed back **Aboyne and Alford pupils** on separate occasions for a Deer/Venison field-to-plate experience: the pupils (under guidance) cut and prepared a deer carcass in order to mince, they then minced the venison before forming their own venison burgers. We then BBQ'd the burgers for their lunch, after which the Ranger Team took the students into the Regeneration Zone to see first-hand the vital role that deer management plays in **habitat restoration and protection**.

The Stalkers in the 'Regen' Zone have been utilising some new **thermal image drone technology** to aid with their deer management. The drone has proved to be a useful tool in locating deer over large areas, which enables the stalkers to be more efficient with their time and vehicle use.

The new drone has many more practical applications such as **helping to detect wildfires**, enabling the appropriate application of resources to a dynamic and changeable situation. Also, once the fire has been initially extinguished, it is common for a large hot fire to reignite, due to the fire burning deep into the peat and reemerging to the surface sometime later. With the use of the drone's thermal camera, these 'hotspots' can be identified before they surface. There are also a host of **wildlife and habitat monitoring** applications in which the drone can be used to view, record, and demonstrate change in populations.

One of the Stalking Team's key objectives for 2025 is to implement the NTS Policy requiring that we leave 10% – 15% of our shot **deer carcasses on the hill**, for nutrient recycling to benefit other species. The remaining 85% - 90% will go into the food chain as normal. All carcasses left on the hill are discreetly and respectfully positioned.



Volunteer Round Up

Once again, volunteers played a big role in our work at Mar Lodge in 2025. Perhaps the most exciting find of the year was aided by our regular visitors the **John Muir Trust North East** Volunteer Group. Of particular excitement was their help in October with our narrow-headed ant surveys. The team found three new nests for this rare species, which is a real boost to their conservation status on the estate. The group also helped with fencing removal, and maintenance of the new hedges around the lodge.

The ranger team have been putting together a small, **local volunteering group**, which progressed well in 2025. The group got to grips with all sorts, including riverfly surveys, peatland restoration, path drainage, hedge maintenance, and the River Dee **'Source to Sea' litter pick**. Thanks to Megan, Roos, and Chelsea for all their help.

Roos Dijkhuizen took the lead on our **butterfly monitoring**, setting up baseline surveys for the two rarest species found on the estate, the Northern Brown Argus and Pearl-bordered fritillary. 2025 proved to be a good year for both, so Roos's work paid dividends for both these lovely species. Her work will help inform our management in years to come. We were also helped by CNPA rangers, who undertook bumblebee surveys around the lodge. Again, these will help inform our management of this particularly wildflower-rich area.

In the summer we were joined by a volunteer group from local tour company **Hillgoers**, who helped ringbark some woodland to create standing deadwood, but also installed leaky dams in the fields around Inverey, and small fence enclosures around regenerating aspen. While there are currently no beavers in the River Dee catchment, the Trust is planning to be **beaver-ready** for the future, and these actions will help us on our way.

We also had great help from ecological researchers. **WildCRU**, an international group of researchers and conservationists with Oxford University, came to help us with some work in the summer. It was great to hear about the work that they are doing across the world. We also had brilliant research done by Jodie Shannon on **martens**, Joe Carroll on **dotterel**, and of course the Raptor Study Group on **eagles, merlins, and hen harriers**.





In the media this year

[Visit to restored Braemar picnic cottage loved by Queen Victoria](#)

[Pictures comparing how Mar Lodge has changed since 30 years of ownership under National Trust Scotland](#)

[Distilling a clandestine craft: Exploring the archaeology and history of illicit whisky-making - Current Archaeology](#)

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/24954532.tiny-ice-age-fly-discovered-highland-mountain-loch/>

Social Media

Between us, we maintain Facebook (21k followers) and Instagram (2.7k) accounts. Our combined output **clocked up a massive 6 million views** in total in 2025. The most far-reaching posts this year included: video footage of pine marten kits (241k); a seasonal reminder about ticks (193k); a golden eagle wing feather (97k); Glen Quoich campfire patrols (96k); video footage of a baby adder (75k); and the anniversary of the Vickers Wellington crash (62k). Our Fixed Point Friday (re-photography) posts in autumn had a combined reach of 579k!

Scientific Publications

[Landscape-scale native woodland habitat restoration using natural tree regeneration provides a biodiversity boost for moths in the uplands - Cook - 2025 - Ecological Solutions and Evidence - Wiley Online Library](#)

[Montane willow scrub restoration in Scotland: reviewing 30 years of progress to reestablish the altitudinal treeline - Watts - 2025 - Restoration Ecology - Wiley Online Library](#)

[Wader Study 132\(2\): 102–109. \(2025\) Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* in north-east Scotland 2023: continued decline, local increase or natural population fluctuations? Rab Rae, Shaila Rao & Georgia Carrington.](#)

With thanks

Thanks to all of the organisations we've worked with this year, a non-exhaustive list of which is below: Aberdeen University, Ann Ashman, Butterfly Conservation, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Braemar Community Council, Braemar Local History Group, Braemar Tourism Group, Cairngorms Connect, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Trust, East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, Easter Charitable Trust, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Gammies Ground Care, Great Glen Ecology, Forestry and Land Scotland, Forest Research, Friends of Bob Scott's, H.E.L. Scotland, Hillgoers, Invercauld Estate, James Hutton Institute, John Muir Trust, Ruth Maier, Mountain Bothies Association, Mountain Woodland Action Group, Moxon, National Trust for Scotland Patrons Club, NatureScot, NTS Foundation USA, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, PDG Helicopters, Police Scotland, River Dee Trust, Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scotland: the Big Picture, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Forestry, Scottish Raptor Study Group, Skyhook Helicopters, Taiga Upland, Techmarx, TreeSurv, Upper Deeside and Donside Deer Management Group, University College Dublin, University of Highlands and Islands, Colin Wells.

Who Are We?

Freya Balchin: Visitor Services Assistant

Rob Boughen: Seasonal Ranger

Tabitha Broatch: Ghillie

George Charles: Estate Worker

Wendy Clark: Visitor Services Assistant

Roos Dijkhuizen: Volunteer Ranger

Ben Dolphin: Ranger

Katie Entwistle: Visitor Services Assistant

David Frew: Head of Mar Lodge Estate

Ryan Grant: Stalker

Jamie Hamilton: Stalker

Megan Hare: Volunteer Ranger

Dorota Jakowienko: Head Housekeeper

Michal Jakowienko: Housekeeper

Louise Kelly: Visitor Services Manager

Peter Lawrence: Ghillie

Ross MacKay: Estate Manager

Derek McLaren: Estate Worker

Pauline Mitchell: Housekeeper

Przemek Miszt: Estate Worker

Chris Murphy: Head Stalker

Charlie Newman: Stalker

Andrew Painting: Conservation Officer

Lisa Reid: Estate Secretary

Shaila Rao: Conservation Manager

Jonathan Rowe: Estate Foreman

Hannah Smart: Visitor Services Assistant

Lianne Starbuck-Stephen: Ranger

Sophie Streether: Wedding & Events
Coordinator

Gosia Szczepanska: Housekeeper

David Webster: Ghillie