

THE IRISH GROUSE CONSERVATION TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The Trustees present their report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the accounts and comply with the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (as amended for accounting periods commencing from 1 January 2016)

Objectives and activities

The Trust's objects as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association are to conserve the depleted grouse populations and their natural upland habitats in Ireland.

IGCT Aims

IGCT's aims are as follows:

- To create a sustainable and viable Grouse Moor, while at the same time improving habitat and biodiversity for other upland species.
- To inform and help resolve the longstanding hen harrier/red grouse debate on the basis of an equal partnership of all interested parties.
- To raise awareness: The IGCT aims to educate and demonstrate best practice in upland management in partnership with DAERA (Greenmont Agricultural College).
- A window of opportunity exists to form partnerships with land owners, government bodies and others to improve farming practices and conservation, and help fulfil EU objectives specific to Ireland together with UK objectives.

Achievements and performance

The IGCT created a unique partnership in the United Kingdom context with the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Development (DAERA), the RSPB, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and local stakeholders. This group is called the Glenwherry Heathland Regeneration Partnership, with IGCT representation from both Ian Glendinning (Managing Director) and Merlin Becker (Gamekeeper). The GHRP meets quarterly and has finalised a Master Plan, which we are in our Ninth year of.

The Master Plan aims to inform and if necessary, change current DAERA policy regarding their Countryside Management Scheme (CMS), which is currently rolled out throughout Northern Ireland on a uniform basis. The current CMS does not take into consideration habitat management practices for the regeneration of Grouse i.e. stocking densities, grazing regimes and Moorland management practices. Landowners who are not signed up to the CMS are currently exempt from any European or UK legislation. This arrangement is anomalous and, in our view, policy needs to become more aligned and coherent.

The Master Plan is the most significant achievement to date. It is hoped this document will result in a change in government legislation, as enforced by DAERA, mainly in relation to the burning of "blanket bog" which is currently prohibited within the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) but allowed outside the scheme. We remain confident that research over the next few years will prove beyond doubt that the burning of "blanket bog" can deliver a benefit both for heath land regeneration and wildlife. To date the Heather Management Project has proven a significant increase of heather, up to 10%, in upland habitat across the project site. We also provide consultation to NI Fire & Rescue Service regarding wildfires and controlled heather burning.

RSPB have been supportive and helpful to the IGCT in negotiations with other parties over the Master Plan. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (G&WCT) have assisted our progress. The IGCT has helped to initiate implementation of the DEARA 2003 Red Grouse Action Plan. There is also strong support for the work of IGCT from local stakeholders as it will bring clarity to the current policy and may provide opportunities for further diversification of farming activities.

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FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

We have been the main advisory body helping DEARA to put forward a Red Grouse Action Plan Delivery Group. This Group has made several presentations to Government Ministers to date, namely Edwin Poots DEARA. The IGCT is the leading agricultural body in Northern Ireland who can help Government fulfil EU Policies for both Grouse and Raptors. Parts of the Master Plan have already been adopted to set policy within Northern Ireland to assist upland management.

The IGCT is working successfully within an SPA (Special Protection Area) and has successfully increased Grouse numbers by 1800% since inception.

The IGCT facilitates a Gamekeepers Course held at Greenmount which has proven very successful and is now in its fifteenth year.

The IGCT won the Gold Award at the 2019 prestigious Purdey Awards in recognition for its remarkable work in moorland management which allowed it to arrest and reverse the decline of the population of Irish Grouse. The Purdey Awards have been held annually since 1999 and seek to promote a wider appreciation of the outstanding game and habitat conservation work carried out by shoots throughout the UK.

57 hectares (140.85 acres) of deciduous forest have been removed from Glenwherry Hill Farm and converted to recovering bogland. Waders are returning to the recovering bogland such as Redshank, Golden Plover and Lapwing with these species nesting on site.

69 Curlew chicks fledged to flight from Glenwherry and its hinterlands in 2022, a record addition to the population of the UK. A success which has been achieved in cooperation between the IGCT and the RSPB.

The IGCT propose to restore 250 acres plus, of hummock rank heather by reseeding to achieve a healthy habitat of flora and fauna on those parts of the Glenwherry Hill Farm. In doing so and research proven, this practice could then be applied throughout the uplands and included under environmental farm schemes.

Financial review

It is the policy of the Trust that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to twelve month's expenditure. The Trustees consider that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the Trust's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserves has been maintained throughout the year.

The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the Trust is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure.

Future Strategy

The IGCT has achieved a considerable amount in the short time that it has been around. Relying entirely on the generosity of its founding subscribers, the Trust has successfully managed to get the first project to save the Irish Grouse underway. The success of the project at Glenwherry has attracted the attention of government bodies and will assist in their obligations to fulfil EU objectives and the case for directing resources towards investment into the management of Ireland's uplands has gathered pace.

The Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the Trust should undertake.

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TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Structure, governance and management

The Trust is a company limited by guarantee.

The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

John Cunningham

Peter Mackie

John McDowell

(Resigned 10 June 2022)

Adrian Morrow

The Hon Shane O'Neill

Gilbert Jonathan Crawford

David Cunningham

Martin McKay

(Appointed 10 June 2022)

None of the Trustees has any beneficial interest in the company. All of the Trustees are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.

The Board of Directors operates as detailed in the governing document for the charity, its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Peter Mackie

Trustee

Dated: 28th July 2023