Autumn-Winter Newsletter 2018

The Scottish Deer Centre

STAGGERED

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Hello and welcome to this edition of Staggered, I do hope you enjoy the content and new look of the e-zine.

I wish to introduce myself – my name is Findlay Withers, General Manager of The Scottish Deer Centre. I have returned after a 6 year absence for a second appointment at The Scottish Deer Centre.

I hope to use some of the skills learned in managing other visitor attractions, retailing and hospitality and help deliver our ambitious goals, strategies and plans of the next few years. Our returning guests will notice some of the changes already taking place in the Park and Coffee Shop.

My role is to oversee and control all aspects of the business and develop it with the support of the great team we have here. We have a unique and dynamic environment with 3 elements to the business – Park, Retail and Catering, a great combination for a day out. You can visit all three or simply visit the Park; our retail offer (EWM, Ponden, Gifts, Food and more) in a courtyard setting or pop in for a coffee, snack or light lunch.

My vision for The Scottish Deer Centre is to be the number one visitor attraction of choice in Fife and beyond, create a great day out where everyone can learn, have fun and be educated and be inspired by our tours and knowledgeable Park Staff.

Yours Sincerely,

Findlay
After an extremely busy and successful 2017 we look ahead to 2018. Renovation works and animal transfers are always a major part of our year and the coming year looks to be no different.

Planned for 2018 is the replacement of our old hand wash station and kiosk, this work has already started, and we have relocated the hand wash station and will start to erect the new kiosk in the next couple of months. In order to avoid unnecessary queues in our coffee shop the new kiosk will provide a food & drink offering to our visitors.

Last year we started to renew and upgrade the accommodation for our birds of prey and visitors to the park will have noticed our new and very large free flight aviaries. This was the first phase of a 3-year build plan and the second phase will begin soon.

So, all in all an extremely busy year is ahead of us, although we have no plans to add any new species to our collection this year we can look forward to April when we would expect our Pere David’s deer to have young. Once the summer months start there is no shortage of new arrivals as the rest of our deer species start to produce youngsters at an astonishing rate.

We look forward to the coming year and of course welcoming our visitors.

Our elk group has become so large we now need to find some of them new homes to form breeding pairs. Our two year-old female, Svea, will be moving to Longleat Safari park at the beginning of March to join a male which was brought in from ZSL Whipsnade, if Svea proves to reproduce as effectively as her mum they will certainly have their hands full. Both our males will be rehomed to make sure they don’t mate with their mother. One of our males will head to RZSS Highland Wildlife Park and the other is being sent out to a very high-end zoo in Belgium, a first for the Centre. This will leave us with our adult female, Toffee, and her two female calves from last year. As Toffee has produced calves annually since her arrival at the Centre this will give her a welcome break from breeding until a new male can be sourced and paired with her. We will also be sending Sika deer up to the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre very soon although they will not be on display as they are part of a private collection.

Tree-Top Walk Returns!

Visitors who have visited the Centre as children and indeed in the past as adults will fondly remember our tree top walk. Sadly, this has been closed for the past year due to ongoing concerns with the structural integrity of the walk way. Its is now permanently closed and was due for demolition with no real intention to replace it. We have received so many comments and queries from our visitors pointing out how much it is missed we have decided to bring it back!! Work is currently ongoing, and we hope to have it open again for the coming Easter season.
2017 was a quiet year on the new arrivals front, however we were delighted to welcome back White Lipped Deer to the collection in October, with the arrival of yearling males Delamere (‘Del’) and Rodney from RZSS Highland Wildlife Park.

Since 2009, we have worked alongside RZSS as the only other UK holders of White Lipped Deer, which are considered a ‘Vulnerable’ species having declined throughout their Tibetan range due to habitat degradation and over-exploitation for meat, antlers and various organs used in traditional medicines. Both collections have had breeding success in recent years in contributing to the conservation breeding programme currently in place for the species, as well as raising awareness for their wild counterparts.

Our first-born calf, Buzz, remained with us until December 2016, when he moved to Highland Wildlife Park to succeed Del and Rodney’s father, Andy (formerly of SDC), as the park’s primary breeding male. As a result of the move, we had a ten-month period without White Lipped Deer in the collection.

When new boys Del and Rodney arrived with us months ago, they quickly made themselves at home in the viewpoint enclosure and established strong relationships with our single Bactrian Deer, Ghost, who shares their enclosure. Rodney is the larger and bolder of the two, and loves a bit of antler-sparring with Ghost, whereas Del – who was partly hand-reared – can be a little quieter and is more easily pushed around by his two herd-mates, although is a laid back boy nevertheless who isn’t fazed by much.

The boys won’t have their second birthdays until May, so have a bit of maturing still to do, and we are looking forward to seeing how their characters develop from here on. Del and Rodney will now remain with us as part of an all-male holding collection until further recommendations are made for them within the breeding programme.
The deer breeding season, also known as the rut, is a time when guests are greeted by a variety of weird noises, sights and smells when they visit the park.

Noises are at their loudest during dawn and dusk (which can be around 4pm). These come mainly from our red and wapiti stags that are known to roar out across the park. As the stag’s behaviour noticeably changes in autumn, when filled with testosterone they become much more aggressive!

The biggest brag about behaviour we found was Argyll our Red Deer stag, who is around 19 years old and an established veteran. In the rut he took on the youthful persona of Disney’s Peter Pan and flew around his enclosure chasing females to breed with and scaring away his rival. His roaring was so impressive he interrupted the 3pm Wolf talk and when he got close we noticed his smell was outrageous too. Red deer wallow in their own urine during the rut and this odour helps to bring the females into oestrus. So at the wolf feed guests had a close shave when greeted by a stag wearing large hard bone antlers and the very opposite of a good aftershave!
In the wild brown bears will often hibernate over the tough winter period where food is not abundant in many areas and the temperature can drop below zero.

As you know the Scottish deer centre is home to two European brown bears: Loki and Nelly. Although our bears are well fed and don’t have to deal with the pressures of the wild they still go through a dormant period during the winter months. Since around November Loki and Nelly have been much less active and have been spending more and more days curled up in their thick straw bed. As well as being less active they have been eating much less; with their feeds reduced to one small offering a day.

Keepers will always go by the bears behaviour so if they happen to be up looking for food at any time they will be offered a bit more. They prefer certain foods at this time of year so they will be given things like nut eggs and some leafy vegetables or carrots as well as their specialised omnivore pellets. They will also be offered some meat in small quantities at this time. Keepers will adjust what they will offered based on what the bears are eating and what they leave untouched.

The bears have free access to their enclosure throughout the winter and can come and go from their bear house as they please. Sometimes the keepers find them curled up together sleeping and other times they are in separate sections of the house sprawled out in their own space. On really cold frosty days they tend to stay cosy in bed until late afternoon but if the temperature raises above 5 degrees they tend to come out and be more active.

The keepers expect to see Loki and Nellie coming out of this dormant state towards the end of March. They will gradually become more active and their appetite will slowly increase over the weeks into spring and summer. Check out our blog ‘Deer Diaries’ for a post and video about our sleepy bears.

Sleepy Bears

By Clare McElroy
This year we at the SDC are launching a new education outreach program. Our mission is to inspire passion for Scottish wildlife and the natural world, as well as to promote sustainability and conservation in people of all ages. Who better to start with than schools!

Sir David Attenborough once said:

“No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced”

This is a sentiment that strikes close to home. In the zoo industry we are well placed to give people experiences that they would be unlikely to get in any other way. With this new outreach program, we hope to extend these experiences past the perimeter of our Zoo and bring them to local classrooms.

We have been working with teachers to make sure these new activities fit well with the Curriculum For Excellence as well as provide an interesting, fun and engaging way for children to learn about the fascinating world of biology.

OUTREACH COMING SOON:

Native Species Past and Present
Participants join us on a time travelling adventure going back 10,000 years to look at some of the fantastic species that once roamed the hills of Scotland. Combining Time travel, Jenga and artistic expression; what more could you ask for?

Web of Wildlife
Introduces the concepts of ecosystems and demonstrates how all organisms rely on one another to survive. Explore the essential interconnectedness of all things. It’s cosmic.

Awesome Adapations
Many of us at the centre could be described as evolution geeks (and proud of it!). Learning about adaptations is a great introduction to the world of evolution and this is our opportunity to engage young minds in this large and fascinating subject.
The Eastern Imperial Eagle is a large migratory bird of prey that breeds and lives across Europe and northern Asia. As a species they are classed as vulnerable to extinction and their populations are currently declining. Historically their main threats have been habitat loss and persecution by humans. The International Raptor Research & Conservation charity (IRRC), run by Stewart from Raptor World, has been leading a project called “Save the Eastern Imperial eagle” to try and protect these magnificent birds.

The project began in 2005/6 when Stewart made contact with a Russian biologist to try to set up a collaborative project to help save the Eastern Imperial eagles of southern Siberia.

In 2007, they put together an expedition to an area of Siberia to the west and south west of lake Baikal to begin studying the eagles. The study area was vast and the expedition crew travelled many miles across steppe country and forest to search for the breeding eagles.

Following this expedition it was determined that conditions in the breeding range for this species were favourable but that the wintering areas would need to be assessed, as these eagles migrate and many do not survive to breeding age.

So, with the help of donations from members of the public (many of them visitors to the deer centre) and a fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, IRRC embarked upon an expedition to China in 2013 to survey conditions in wintering areas for Imperial eagles. This was a truly international effort, with Stewart and his Russian partners being joined by Chinese partners, working together to find the reasons for declining eagle numbers.

This year (2018), Stewart will be travelling once again to Siberia to carry out another breeding survey and to see what changes have occurred and whether population numbers are stable or still in decline after more than 10 years.

He will be using the data from these expeditions to help campaign for better protection for this and other species in Siberia.

This work is not directly funded and IRRC very much rely on the generosity of members of the public with donations. They are always interested to hear from individuals or companies who would like to get involved with eagle conservation by supporting their projects.

If you are interested in learning more or wish to donate to this, or any other IRRC project check out their website:

www.irrc.org.uk

By Annie Armstrong and Stewart Miller
Santa’s Grotto

We were lucky enough to have Santa Claus stop off at The Scottish Deer Centre each weekend in December and then stay for the 22nd, 23rd & 24th of December. As our keepers took care of his reindeer, Santa diligently gathered the wish lists of all the kids from Fife, Tayside & Lothian that visited.

The theme of the grotto this year was delicious gingerbread and sweets. The rangers were kindly assisted by Bev Nicholl, local artist to help create this. All the sweets used in the grotto were later donated to the Tayside Toy Drive charity.

Wear it Wild

Staff dressed up as wild animals in October for the “WWF - Wear it Wild Event” (and they paid a donation to charity to do this). It was lots of fun. We had a bear lead the 3pm Carnivore feed and a Tiger muck out the wildcat den.

Also visitors were asked at the ticket office if they would like to contribute by donating their deer food money to charity and most agreed. This meant we were able to raise over a hundred pounds for charity that day.

Love not Loss

In February the theme of the event was “Love Not Loss” from the IUCN biodiversity campaign. This involved helping visitors to find a “love of nature” on their valentine visit. With so much negative news of species extinction in the press the aim of this event was to make a warm, positive memory for visitors to treasure!

How do we help people and nature fall back in love? Extinction, habitat loss, climate change stories about loss don’t work. We need to tell a love story starting today.

By Yvonne Dallas
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is a registered charity which was founded in 1889 and currently operates across the whole of Britain helping to protect and conserve many different bird species, their habitats and in turn, the wider ecosystem.

Working with various organisations, businesses and schools the R.S.P.B aims to inspire people of all ages to engage with nature and in doing so hopefully they themselves will develop a desire to protect Britain’s bird species and consequent wildlife.

Many events are organised by the R.S.P.B in affiliation with other businesses, charities and individuals. The charity also encourages volunteers to get involved and there are many different ways in which to do so, the options and details of which are available on their website.

The Woodland Trust is the UK’s largest and most extensive charity organisation responsible for the preservation, conservation and restoration of our native forests and woodland. The charity aims to raise awareness, funds and support to help protect our remaining woodland areas and the wildlife which inhabit and rely on these complex ecosystems.

Established in 1972 The Woodland Trust actively seeks to inspire and engage people of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in conservation through a combination of efforts, including campaigns, talks, educational events and community based activities such as tree planting. By preserving and maintaining our ancient forests which remain or have been restored and planting new trees in many areas, we can help to protect the biodiversity in our wider ecosystem.

The charity greatly appreciates help from everyone who can lend a hand, their time and/or support to the cause. Volunteers play an important role within the organisation and individuals can become sponsors for the charity helping to promote the fantastic work they collectively continue to do, everyday, all across Britain and further afield.

For anyone who would like to learn more about The Woodland Trust, the work they do and ways in which to get involved, the link to the trusts events and activities page is: https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/

Do not miss your chance to vote for the European Tree of the Year 2018!
Daily Events

April-September

Guided tour
Walk around the park with one of our education rangers who will introduce you to our animals.

Nose to nose
A close encounter with our hand-reared deer.

Falconry displays
Watch our birds of prey flown by the falconers from Raptor World.

Otter feeding
See our otters up close and learn about their plight in the wild.

Feeding tour
5 species! Wolves, wildcats, lynx, bears and red foxes. Watch them be fed and learn about how they live, hunt and survive in the wild.

Ticket prices

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More than 10 of you visiting? Give us a call to arrange a group discount.

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