

In direct contrast to the spring and summer of 2018, 2019 was one of the coolest and wettest in years.

Seeds were sown in good time but most crops failed to develop till well into the summer. Grasses and 'weeds' got a head start at most sites and generally our bird seeds did poorly but the corn annuals and other flowers did well.

Red and roe deer incursions were a major problem at some sites so we will have to choose future sites more carefully.

As a result of exposure on BBC Winter Watch last year we were inundated with enquiries about our project and gave advice to numerous individuals and organisations. Following our advice, a number of flower meadows and wildlife fields established throughout the country.

Some enquiries came through our website which we have continued to develop and improve. www.speysidefieldsforwildlife.org

We have recruited more patrons and supporters and are extremely grateful to them for their support. We also thank the many volunteers who have provided practical support and or donations towards our projects. And to the farmers and landowners who have provided the sites or who undertook the ground preparation.

Coulnakyle

A new site this year but in the wet summer it proved to be rather marginal and prone to waterlogging. Sown on 19th May but seeds checked due to persistent rain and the cool weather after sowing.

However, the bare field with shallow surface water attracted lots of wildlife and seven pairs of peewees were recorded nesting on 10th June. Four with young and 3 still incubating. The last nest hatched on 27th June and 15 chicks were ringed by BTO ringer Hugh Insley. The wider Coulnakyle fields were very attractive to peewees and nine nests were marked so that the tractor man could avoid them when cultivating or sowing.



Peewee with chicks at Coulnakyle Image taken on 10th June

Balliemore

1 ha

Hand sown on May 17th by the SFW team.

A pair of oystercatchers nested in the field and reared 2 chicks which were ringed by Hugh Insley.

Sadly, our information sign was vandalised and a field gate was deliberately opened. 40 cattle got into the field and severely damaged the crop.



Info sign at Balliemore.

Mousa**0.5 ha**

Hand sown on 17th by SFW team. Corn annuals did well but regular visits by roe deer severely impacted the bird seed plants. This site is in the village, adjacent to the road and was much admired by locals and visitors.



Mousa corn annuals. image taken on 23rd August

Inchdryne**0.5 ha**

Hand sown on May 20th. Slow to germinate due to cool wet spring. Flowers did ok but up to 15 red deer visited regularly and ate most of the radish and linseed before it matured.



Inchdryne . image taken on 12th August

Croft of Clachaig

0.5 ha

Hand sown on 24th May by SFW team and filmed by BBC Spring Watch crew.
SFW held a site visit to Clachaig and other sites on 13th of August



SFW and CNP staff visit Croft of Clachaig. image taken on 13th August

Croft 20 Skye of Curr

0.5 ha

Sown on 17th May by the SFW team. This site did well and numerous passers by admired the flowers during the summer. Ian MacEachern recorded sweet gale moth caterpillars in the crop, a local notable moth species. A flock of 100 chaffinches utilized the seed crop during the winter



image taken 19th August, corn annuals in foreground, linseed and radish at rear.

Coulnakyle cottage**300 sq m**

A small piece of rough ground part of an extended garden was prepared and sown by SFW volunteers. Flowers were good from mid June till the end of September.



image taken on 6th August

Balliemullach**1 ha**

This site also suffered from the wet spring and germination was poor. Patches recovered well and birds began to utilize the crop when the weather turned colder in November.

Some records were:

13/11 70 linnets, 20 reed buntings, 6 yellow hammers, 2 green finches, 2 goldfinches and 3 pheasants. Lots of signs of badgers using the grain element.

Croftallan

This perennial field has developed well and provided a rich pollen and nectar source throughout the summer. Local farmer John Kirk mowed the field in October and volunteers from SFW and CNP raked up and loaded the cut material into a trailer for removal.

A family of roe deer enjoyed the field throughout the summer and a whitethroat's nest was discovered at the end of the summer.



Roe buck in the Croftallan meadow. Image taken 18th June



Volunteers raking up the cuttings at Croftallan.

Image taken October 1st

Eilean Donan

This extended garden is now in its second year as a perennial meadow. It has developed well and was a haven for bees and other invertebrates during the summer. Viper's bugloss was particularly abundant and attracted lots of bees.



Bumble bee at Eilean Donan on Viper's bugloss

Image 22nd July