

Friends of Blairs Loch

SCIO - SC048921

Trustees Report

Year ending 31 December 2025



Introduction

2025 was another very successful year for Friends of Blairs Loch (FoBL). Official membership of the SCIO increased to 114 and our support from the local community was further demonstrated by the growth in our social media contacts. With over 2,100 Facebook followers we post updates on a regular basis and invariably receive extremely positive feedback.



Our volunteer cohort is small, with only 7 regular members, but this increases substantially with family and friends when we run community events. We were particularly pleased this year to welcome several staff from Virgin Money who joined us as part of their community Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme.

Funding and Support

Financially FoBL is in a good position with around £5,300 of unrestricted donations, and £1,500 from fund raising event, supplementing around £3,500 of income from facility hires. This means that, despite the facility hire income not fully covering the fixed overheads (for items such as insurance, heating/lighting etc), the free of charge provision for use by local schools is sustainable.

It should also be noted that over 80% of the unrestricted donations received come from small contributions made by local members of the community. We are, of course, extremely grateful for the larger grants we have received from funding organisations, but the support of the local community is critical to our long-term success.

The Trustees also want to express our thanks to local businesses and organisations that provide us with tremendous support. This support manifests itself in numerous ways. Our landlords, **Altyre Estate**, continue to provide a cost-free lease and manpower support when required. The local development organisation, **The Finnerne Development Trust**, have offered to cover 60% of



our fixed overhead costs for the next 3 years and we received a large donation of timber for volunteer projects from a local timber mill – **Logie Timber**. Add to this the support from local companies such as **Keith Builders Merchants** (discounts on materials), **James Jones & Sons** (timber supplies) and **External Reality** (free high speed broadband connectivity), it is clear that the FoBL is viewed as a valued community charity.

Work of the volunteers

As mentioned previously, the group of volunteers able to attend work parties on a regular basis is relatively small, at 7 in number. The size of the group is, nevertheless, more than compensated for by their enthusiasm and willingness to deploy existing skills and develop new ones.



Much of the work taken on in 2025 was of a maintenance nature. Severe storms brought down numerous trees that needed to be cleared from footpaths, and the 3 bird hides around the loch required replacement roofs.

However, time was also spent making additional picnic benches for visitors to use and, after a suggestion was received that a few more “rest awhile” seats would be helpful for less able-bodied visitors, the volunteers used some of the wind-blown trees to accommodate the request.



Perhaps the most successful project of the year was the construction of a “Squirrel Hide” and the installation of a live feed wildlife camera. Several bird feeders had been put up around the buildings at the loch side and CCTV coverage showed that these were also regularly visited by Red Squirrels. Unfortunately, these wonderful animals were rarely seen by visitors to the loch because they scurried away as soon as anyone came near. By constructing a rustic wooden screen amongst the trees, a short way back



from the footpath, and repositioning the feeders, the opportunity was created for visitors to sit and watch both the myriads of small birds and the regular appearance of the Squirrels. As well as a nice spot for visitors to spend a little time watching the wildlife, the hide has become particularly popular with photographers.



The downside of the new hide was that the nighttime visits by the local Pine Martens, which were often caught on the CCTV, were no longer recorded. The volunteers responded by digging a trench and laying an ethernet cable out to the hide, installing a video camera and with some technical help from a supporter, linking the whole system on to YouTube and the FoBL website. This “**Squirrel Cam**” live stream has been a tremendous success, allowing our followers to see the wonderful wildlife that our local area supports.

Community Events & Activities

The Easter “Bunny Hunt”, and the pre-Christmas “Elf Hunt” have become popular fixtures in the Blairs calendar. In addition to the adventure of hunting for the hidden Bunnies & Elves around the loch, the events also include craft activities for the children. The pop-up café, well stocked with home bakes and the BBQ “Sausage Sizzle”, is a welcomed venue for the children and parents alike. Whilst these two events do bring in very important revenue for our finances, the key success is the fun and enjoyment they give the local community.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, with the loch and the surrounding woods, the facilities have become a venue for groups involved in outdoor learning, arts & crafts and well-being and mindfulness. Workshops organised by the North East Scotland OWL group and the Moray OWL group have brought participants from the wider area, helping to spread the word about the facilities available at Blairs. These workshops often include teachers and educationalists, working on their continued professional development, who see the opportunity to bring their own groups at a later date. We still wish to see more schools using the facilities but there is a slow, but important, increase in the number of groups visiting.



One of the most unusual, but extremely interesting, groups to visit the loch was a platoon of soldiers from the 39 Engineer Regiment stationed at the nearby Kinloss Barracks. Needing a location for the soldiers to do some practical training in water crossing they approached us about using the loch. We were delighted to oblige and hope to see them back again during 2026.

The Trout Fishery



The one disappointment in 2025 was the extremely low water level in the loch. The very dry spring moved into an even drier summer and the water level fell to the lowest that anyone can recall. Despite having re-stocked the loch with a large number of good-sized fish we were forced to suspend angling for most of the season as the boat could not be launched. Our hope is that the fish will safely over winter and, water level permitting, we will see a good start to the 2026 fishing season in the spring.

2026 Calendar

The beauty of the loch and its wildlife is very popular with local photographers, including some of the volunteers. Selecting 12 of the many photographs taken over the last couple of years a calendar for 2026 was put together. The venture was financially successful, raising over £375, but more importantly it was another way of reinforcing our thanks for the support from the local community.



The future

2026 has the prospects of being another good year in the journey of the Friends of Blairs Loch. Our aim is to continue the work of creating a place for education and recreation by our community. The potential for the loch and its surroundings remains high and that is matched by the ambitions and enthusiasm of the volunteers.

The Trustees send their sincerest thanks to all the volunteers, visitors and supporting organisations.

December 2025.