

ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION

Sponsored by University of Glasgow

Eric Neilson

FARMER, MERSEHEAD

From installing sluices to harvesting hay, and digging pools for natterjack toads, life is busy for farmer Eric Neilson, who has been farming land at Mersehead near Dumfries for 45 years.

Our judges were so impressed with his environmental credentials that they unanimously agreed to declare him an outstanding winner of the Environmental Champion award.

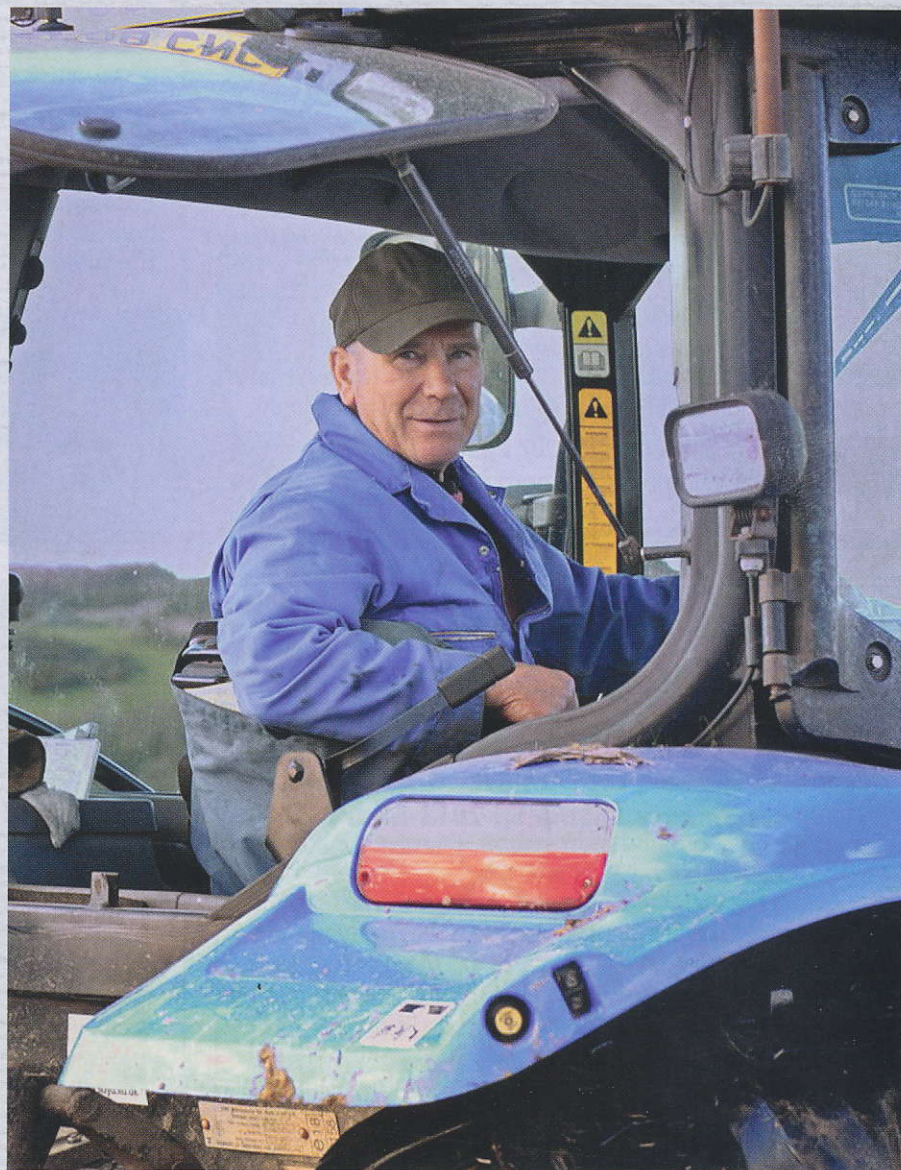
For his first 25 years farming at Mersehead, Eric drained land, harvested hay, cereals and potatoes, and reared dairy cattle. In November 1993, the RSPB bought the farm and since then Eric has re-flooded the land to create wetland habitats which now support internationally important populations of wildfowl and waders.

One nominator said: "Through his work, Eric has provided the local community with a fabulous nature reserve where they can enjoy the increasingly rare sight of displaying lapwing; catch a glimpse of Britain's rarest breeding bird of prey, the hen harrier; and see 10,000 Svalbard geese feeding on moonlit fields.

"His enthusiasm and dedication to nature conservation has even seen him dress up as Santa to encourage the next generation of budding nature conservationists into the reserve."

Eric's knowledge of the land at Mersehead played a vital role in the design of the nature reserve, and his understanding of growing fodder crops meant he knew exactly what kind of crops would help birds survive the harsh winter months.

He is also much in demand in an advisory capacity and is helping to design one of the RSPB's newest reserves at The Crook of Baldoon at



Wigtown. He has also given advice to more remote communities such as Islay, Oronsay and Fetlar Shetland.

One nominator added: "Eric Neilson is a true environmental champion because of his passion and dedication to Mersehead, which has ensured the

development of an internationally important reserve, which is not only a haven for wildlife but contributes to the well being of the local community and encourages the younger generation to become the environmental champions of the future."

OUR SPONSOR

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