

Mass killing of mountain hares in Cairngorms National Park

Description

There has been some excellent coverage today of the mass killing of hares in the Cairngorms National Park by Rob Edwards

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14340402.Outrage_of_landowners_mass_killing_of_mountain_hares

Raptor Persecution Scotland <https://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2016/03/13/more-mountain-hares-massacred-in-cairngorms-national-park/> and Mark Avery <http://markavery.info/2016/03/13/mountain-mountain-hares/>

I am delighted that some of the commentators are now asking why this practice is taking place in a National Park which was set up to protect the environment.

The landowners excuse for destroying the mountain hares, is that they carry a tick which can harm red grouse and sheep. While of all the species our National Parks should protect, there is a strong case that sheep and red grouse should be at the bottom of the list, I think there is another reason for the persecution. Mountain hare is a favourite food for eagles. The persecution of golden eagles in the eastern Cairngorms is well documented but the risks to estates of doing so are increasing because most birds are now monitored through tracking devices and penalties for wildlife crimes have increased. Allow the grouse moors to provide plentiful food for eagles and they will keep coming back and might take a few red grouse, too, so better just to exterminate their food source.

As Mark Avery, former Director of Conservation at RSPB, argued in his book Inglorious, as long as the production of grouse for shooting is the primary purpose of owning land, almost every other species will suffer. He argues for an end to intensive grouse shooting – what better place to start than the Cairngorms National Park?

SNH meanwhile is still talking about what evidence might be required to impose a temporary ban. I believe this is the wrong way of looking at things. The more hares, the more food for golden eagles. The way to get eagle numbers back to what they should be in the Cairngorms and further afield is to ban ALL culling of hares and other species persecuted by the estates. Let the food for eagles flourish.

There are two ways that I can see to do this quickly. One is simply for SNH to use its powers to issue a temporary ban on mountain hare shooting. The second is for the National Park to introduce byelaws to ban mountain hare culling. To ensure enforcement of this National Parks could require estates to apply for permits for all shooting under the byelaws. (There is a precedent for this in the permits for

hunting SNH issues under National Nature Reserve byelaws). Both options could happen with a little encouragement from the Minister of the Environment, Aileen McLeod.

Having backed byelaws to ban camping in LLTNP, on the grounds that these were needed to protect the environment, one might have thought Aileen McLeod would be only too keen to support the introduction of byelaws to stop landowners and managers destroying Scotland's wildlife. I personally believe the photos of rows of massacred hares are far more compelling evidence of the need for action than the photos of a few abandoned campsites. Unfortunately, I suspect that evidence, let alone consistency won't come into it.

If Aileen McLeod doesn't give a lead, I hope others will:

- The Cairngorm National Park Authority should announce its intention to introduce byelaws to control hunting in the National Park, including a ban on hare culls, as soon as possible.
- Our MSPs should press Aileen McLeod to add Mountain Hares to our list of protected mammals – there is no need ever for human to control mountain hare numbers, our predators can do this job quite effectively – and by supporting the introduction of hunting licenses to ensure this is observed. Any estate found breaking the law, whether killing hares or raptors, should lose their right to hunt.
- SNH should stop trying to evaluate whether the population of the mountain hare is in danger or not and instead focus on the impact that the persecution of these and other animals has on the population of other species

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Camping bye laws
2. CNPA
3. hunting
4. Minister Environment
5. wildlife persecution

Date Created

March 13, 2016

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