

Landowners defence of the massacre of hares

Description

Douglas McAdam, Chief Executive of Scottish Land and Estates had an article in the Sunday Herald today

http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/14386203.A_landowner_s_defence_of_culling_mountain_hares/ defending the killing of hares in which he referred to the Cairngorms at the end. He was obviously trying to persuade our politicians, who I have heard read the Sunday Herald, and the CNPA that everything is just fine.

McAdam's argument is basically that landowners need to cull hares for the same reasons that red deer need to be culled, to prevent grazing pressure. Ignoring the obvious provocation, that landowners aren't culling red deer nearly enough and haven't been for as long as I can remember, the argument is completely untenable:

- It implies mountain hare are doing similar damage to vegetation as red deer. They don't. I have checked three of the management statements for large Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Cairngorms (the eastern Cairngorms, Beinn a Ghlo and Caenlochan) – you can see them for yourself at <http://gateway.snh.gov.uk/sitelink/searchmap.jsp> They all mention grazing pressure from deer, not one even refers to grazing by mountain hare
- More importantly, the mountain hare has a number of natural predators in Scotland, ranging from the fox to the eagle, unlike adult red deer. So, whatever arguments there are for humans to cull red deer simply don't apply to hares because there are other creatures which could control their numbers or would if estates hadn't persecuted predators to extinction on grouse moors. Agreeing with the landowner's rationale for culling hares is simply to condone this persecution, which is unacceptable anywhere but should be off the radar in our National Parks.

What some of the debate on persecution of mountain hares is perhaps missing is that estates have hunted the creatures of the high tops, mountain hare and ptarmigan, for many years. McAdam's article was silent about this and has tried to turn the debate onto a supposed need for culls. What this hides perhaps is a shift in the way hares are being killed, from hunting for pleasure (where landowners and their guests might have shot a few hares in a day) to mass extermination by estate staff using machines on the utilitarian grounds that this increases grouse numbers. What this suggests is that hunting of hares as such has become less socially acceptable – maybe its difficult now for estates to attract paying guests – whereas there is still high demand for grouse shooting.

It will be interesting to see how the Cairngorms National Park answers the argument of the landowners.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. grouse moors
3. hunting
4. wildlife persecution

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