

## More on mountain hare culls and raptor persecution in our National Parks

### Description

There is an interesting thread on mountain hare persecution and National Parks on Raptor Persecution Scotland <https://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2016/03/30/sustainable-mountain-hare-culls-wheres-the-evidence/> Its very good that people are beginning to question not just why mountain hare persecution is happening but also why, of all places, its being allowed in our National Parks.

Mike, my climbing partner on Thursday, contributed this comment about why mountain hares are being massacred:

“Interesting to read that Invermark (which is in the CNPA at the head of Glen Esk) no longer culls hares – or does Adam Watson think it never did? I remember massive culls there during my time working as a ghillie in the mid 80’s. There would be a “keepers’ day” when men from local estates would arrive early in the morning, form a line across the hill (the beat to the south of Loch Lee was a favourite starting point) and the day would be spent walking in a line and shooting hundreds of hares. Done in spring, the still white hares stood out against the heather and had little chance. The reason given was that the hares eat the tender heather shoots that the grouse need. Contrast that memory with another of standing with the pony by the Unich burn and watching an eagle take a hare on the slopes east of Muckle Cairn – the eagle landing on the hare in a tumble to wings as it struggled to avoid rolling down the hill.”

Mike put me right on Thursday about my speculative questions about whether hunting culture had changed <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2016/03/27/landowners-defence-massacre-hares/> Mountain Hare massacres have been going on for a long time, even if this has now stopped at Invermark.

What the long history suggests is:

- the current claims by landowners that hare “culls” are needed to stop Louping Ill virus spreading from hares to grouse should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Its not so long ago that the culls used to be justified on the grounds that mountain hares deprived grouse of young heather shoots to eat.
- the massacres are mainly being conducted by estate staff, gamekeepers. Their job, particularly in the Cairngorms where grouse moors are the dominant land-use, is about and dependent on maximising grouse numbers for others to shoot. Hare shoots are a chance for keepers, who often work alone in tough conditions, to have a sociable day out with their peers from neighbouring estates. Whatever the overt justification, it could be seen in part as a reward for a job well done, the extermination of predators. Mike incidentally told me on Thursday about the

numbers of foxes shot each year on the Dalhousie estates – 100s. All that has changed is that instead of shooting hares by walking across the moors – which gave the hares some the chance to get away – estates are are now using All Terrain Vehicles to round them up.

### **Category**

1. Cairngorms

### **Tags**

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

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### **Author**

nickkempe

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