

Democracy, raptor persecution and our National Parks

Description

It was good to see that the Cairngorms National Park Authority have issued a statement condemning the latest raptor killing <http://cairngorms.co.uk/statement-re-goshawk-shooting/> and its well worth reading Raptor Persecution Scotland's response <https://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2016/05/10/statement-from-cairngorms-national-park-authority-re-shot-goshawk/> This provides all the evidence which anyone might need about why the CNPA needs to act. However, while I have a lot of sympathy for Raptor Persecution Scotland's frustration with the lack of action from the CNPA, who are saying that they need to talk to the new Minister about next steps, unfortunately I believe our National Park Authorities have got into a position where they are almost totally controlled by central Government. I therefore believe they probably do need to speak to the new Minister before they can take significant action.

Part of this is about finances. Basically, like local authorities, if the National Parks fail to do what central government says, then they face even further cuts in funding. The National Parks grant was "only" cut by 3% this year – most likely a reward to the LLTNPA for agreeing the camping bye-laws – unlike Scottish Natural Heritage which received a massive 10% cut in funding (I declare an interest, I used to be on that Board). Failing to consult the Scottish Government could therefore be financial suicide for the CNPA.

Part of this though is also about culture. A majority of Board Members are democratically elected and in theory could take their own decisions. They are ultimately accountable to their electorates, not Ministers. However, you only have to look at the Owen McKee case where the LLTNPA Board was happy to sign off an investigation that had been seen only by the Convener and the Chair of the Audit Committee, to see that the culture in the LLTNPA Board at least is to do whatever the Convener, Linda McKay, advises. She of course sits on the advisory board for the civil service and is at the heart of Government, which undermines the ability of the LLTNPA Board to act independently. Now, there is good reason to believe the CNPA Board is more independent minded but it is nevertheless quite constrained. More specifically the general assumption is that the primary function of the National Park Board is to deliver the Partnership Plan agreed by Ministers – i.e to act as a management body. In the current culture, stepping outside of the Plan and taking a lead would be a major step.

There is also a culture of taking decisions by "consensus". The process is far from neutral – I suspect as a result of the influence of the Scottish Government – so recreational organisations are not included in consensus building about camping management in LLTNPA but landowners are included in consensus building about raptor persecution in the CNPA. Breaking the consensus building approach to raptor persecution, which effectively gives landowners a veto over any decisions, will also

almost certainly end consensus at Board level. For, while the majority of Board members may be locally elected and in theory accountable to the whole electorate, in small rural communities the laird still wields considerable power. I don't think we know at present how many Board Members would be prepared or able to put the CNPA on a collision course with landowners but there is potential for a considerable stooshie. The best way of avoiding this would be if Ministers, as they did with the access legislation, made a clear statement to the landowners about the outcomes they were looking for.

I therefore believe the first priority for the concerned public is to put pressure on Nicola Sturgeon to appoint someone as Minister for the Environment who is prepared to stamp out raptor persecution and include this as part of land reform. As part of this, the new Minister needs to give a message to the National Parks that they are expected to use every power available to them to stop raptor persecution in the National Parks.

Meantime though the concerned public should also call on the CNPA to prepare a paper for their next Board Meeting in June on all the powers and measures available to them at present that could be used to end Raptor Persecution in the National Park. If they consider these insufficient, they could also outline what further powers should be given to them by the Scottish Government. In other words, I think the CNPA should demonstrate that they are thinking about what they could do to prevent raptor persecution even if, from their perspective, I can see it wise that they consult Government before taking action.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Minister Environment
3. Scottish Government
4. wildlife persecution

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