

Grouse moor management and the Cairngorms National Park

Description



Muirburn by Bruar Lodge, Atholl

I have been meaning to give a plug for the post, <http:// Cairngorms.co.uk/guest-blog-time-to-move-with-the-times/>, from Will Boyd Wallis, Head of Land Management at the Cairngorms National Park, on grouse moor management. He was encouraging people to respond to the current consultation on the CNPA's new Partnership Plan and I think was suggesting, as far as someone in his position can, that its time for change. This is welcome but I believe if change is going to happen people need to respond to the Park's consultation and say that the stated objectives in their current form are totally inadequate.



The northern edge of the Bruar plantation forest, looking across Glen Bruar to the new native woodland at Creag Bhagailteach

You only need to spend a day on the hill to see why. I was out on Saturday and did a loop up Glen Bruar, over Beinn Dearg, then headed north for a couple of kilometres before dropping down to the Allt a Chuil, which runs through a wild, remote and unspoilt glen, and then back round to the northern end of Glen Bruar. I took the track out over Creag Bhagailteach to Calvine. Apart from the woodland along the A9 corridor and the summit slopes, almost the entire route was over moorland.

In over 20 miles of moorland habitat I saw several hundred red grouse – as soon as you step off track you appreciate they are everywhere – but very little else: 1 buzzard, 1 carrion crow, a few meadow pipit, 1 dipper and, on the summit slopes of Beinn Dearg, two mountain hare and 7 ptarmigan. That

was it. Now, I am sure I missed some wildlife as I was jogging and my eyesight is not what it as, but I think this was a pretty accurate reflection of the wildlife “balance” on the Bruar grouse moors. Grouse and not much else. A land of plenty mainly for grouse shooters and the hen harrier. Despite stopping, scanning the moorland and hoping against hope, there were no harriers to be seen. I am sure Glen Bruar has more than enough red grouse to support a pair but maybe I just missed them.

All the slopes along the glen had been subject to muirburn and there was evidence of this to altitudes of c850m.



Muirburn below the red granite boulder strewn summit slopes of Beinn Dearg

There was other evidence too of intensive grouse moor management from the track high onto Beinn A Chait (yes there were wildcats here once) to medicated grit.



Medicated grit by track north end Glen Bruar

I think moorland is a misleading term for this country, its not natural at all, “game reserve” or “grouse farm” would be more accurate.

Commentary on the CNPA’s “Targets/Preferred Direction” for grouse moors in the draft Partnership Plan

CNPA Plan “Continue to improve and enhance the quality of moorland and montane habitats, particularly those in unfavourable condition”. **COMMENTARY** our montane and moorland habitats generally are not improving, they are getting worse, because – as Will Boyd Wallis indicated in the CNPA blog – the farming of grouse has been intensified.

CNPA Plan “Manage muirburn to enable habitat enhancement”. **COMMENTARY**– the only way we are going to enhance habitats is by stopping muirburn. I would prefer a complete ban in the National Park but as a compromise how about an altitudinal limit to muirburn and designating some large muirburn free areas (say 50% of land under 600m altitude).

CNPA Plan “Improve the integration of grouse moor management with wider habitat and species diversity” **COMMENTARY** I don’t understand what this means, you cannot integrate current grouse moor management with other objectives, you need to change it. This won’t happen unless moorland managers are brought under control or the ownership of the land is transferred to people who do support diversity.

CNPA Plan “Improve raptor population conservation”. **COMMENTARY** raptors don’t need conservation, it’s the persecution that needs to stop. Parkswatch has published several ideas of what the CNPA could do to stop this from using its planning powers (just stop consenting to new hill tracks) to licensing hunting.

CNPA Plan “Expand peatland restoration projects”. **COMMENTARY** this sounds good but in Glen Bruar significant areas of peatland have been destroyed by the new hydro scheme consented to by the CNPA! It would be interesting to know how much peatland has been lost in the National Park because of new hill tracks and other developments consented to under the planning system compared to the amount that has been restored.

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Destruction of moorland along the buried hydro scheme pipeline in Glen Bruar. There has been no attempt to preserve the peat/topsoil and instead boulders/minerals have been left on the surface creating new s

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1. CNPA
2. conservation
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