Mountain hares could be protected in our National Parks now

Description

Last week Raptor Persecution Scotland reported on the OneKind demonstration against the slaughter of mountain hares outside the Scottish Parliament on the 17th November:

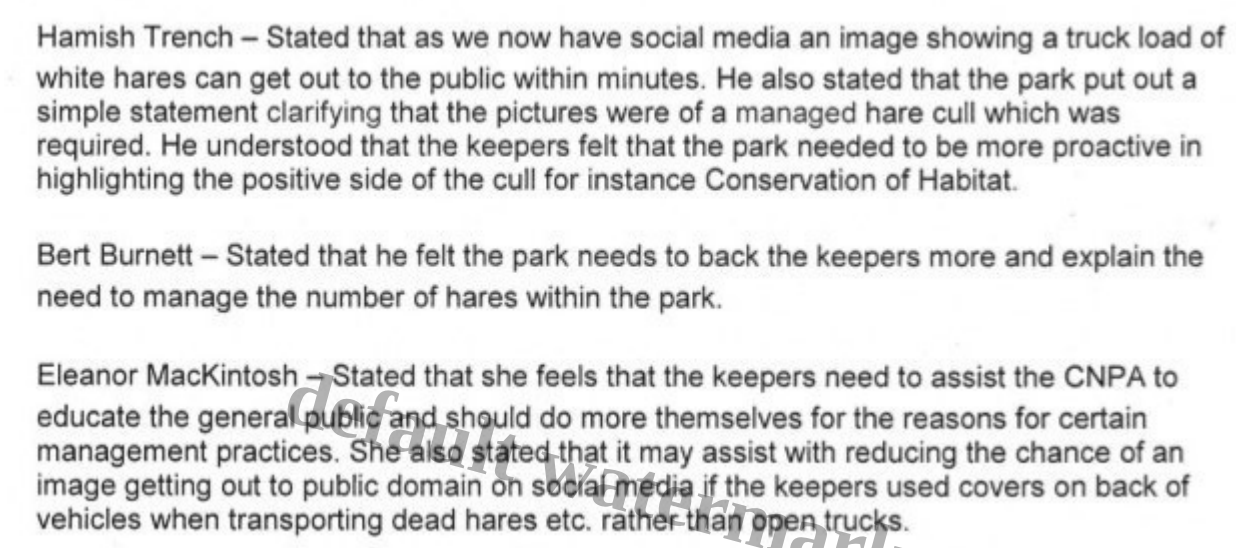
â??Environment Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham addressed the rally and said the Scottish Government opposes mass culls, that legislation to protect mountain hares has not been ruled out, but that the Government needs evidence before it can act.â?•

default watermark

Other reports of the demonstration also reported Roseanna Cunningham had spoken of the need for evidence but in the context of legislation rather than broader action. Whatever Roseanna Cunningham said there are things that could be done NOW to protect mountain hares without any government legislation and without any further evidence:

- conservation is one of the four statutory purposes of our National Parks but when other of the purposes conflict with it, conservation should be put first. Now whether the slaughter of hares is classified as coming up the statutory purpose of enjoyment or of sustainable economic development or sustainable use of resources (the other three aims) doesnâ??t matter. Conservation comes first and the photographic evidence of slaughter should be enough for our National Parks to act. The Government just needs to tell them to do so and to introduce byelaws to prohibit the killing of mountain hares in the National Park.
- moreover, the Government has created Special Protection Areas to protect Golden Eagles whose favourite food is mountain hare. The citation for the Cairngorm golden eagle SPA, which runs beyond the National Park boundary in the Angus Glens at present focusses on the habitats rather than the species on which the eagle depends. Amazingly the main threat listed for this SPA is disease. There is nothing on the eagleâ??s food supply. I believe if the Scottish Government had the will they could simply ask SNH to include provisions about protecting mountain hares in all our eagle SPAs including those in our National Parks.
- in addtion, some of the citations for moorland Sites of Special Scientific Interest explicitly refer to mountain hare in their description of the â??featuresâ?• worth protecting (the Morven SSSI is one example). Roseanna Cunningham could again ask SNH to ensure that culling of mountain hares was listed as an operation requiring consent, which in effect would introduce a licensing system year round (hares are currently protected for only part of the year in the â??closed seasonâ?•). SNH could then only issue consents for mountain hare culls if landowners were able to provide proof that this was not detrimental to the environment, including the eagle population. In other words shift the burden of proof away from public authorities onto landowners.

All this would make a difference, without the need for any more evidence. It could also be done relatively quickly. However, if the Cairngorms National Park Authority, which is currently finalising its partnership plan for submission to Roseanna Cunningham in the New Year, is to do this there needs to be a shift in thinking both at the Scottish Government and in the National Park Board. The need for this is illustrated by this revelation also featured on the Raptor Persecution Scotland post:



Hamish Trench – Stated that as we now have social media an image showing a truck load of white hares can get out to the public within minutes. He also stated that the park put out a simple statement clarifying that the pictures were of a managed hare cull which was required. He understood that the keepers felt that the park needed to be more proactive in highlighting the positive side of the cull for instance Conservation of Habitat.

Bert Burnett – Stated that he felt the park needs to back the keepers more and explain the need to manage the number of hares within the park.

Eleanor MacKintosh – Stated that she feels that the keepers need to assist the CNPA to educate the general public and should do more themselves for the reasons for certain management practices. She also stated that it may assist with reducing the chance of an image getting out to public domain on social media if the keepers used covers on back of vehicles when transporting dead hares etc. rather than open trucks.

default watermark

Credit Raptor Persecution Scotland

While Eleanor MacKintosh has rightly been criticised for saying this, and it was a very stupid thing to say, I am not sure Eleanor MacKintosh is stupid. The interesting question is why the convenor of the CNPA planning committee is telling the gamekeepers simply to hide the mountain hares they are shooting? A legitimate question is whether someone else told her to find a way to prevent the mountain hare massacres hitting the headlines in future and this was her clumsy attempt to do this.

Critics should hold onto the fact that this information came out as a result of an FOI request and at least the CNPA is recording things properly. It would be almost impossible to obtain this type of information from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park because they stopped writing things down long ago. The position at LLTNPA in terms of basic governance is far worse than the CNPA.

So I think campaigners need to pressurise both the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Scottish Government that the new Cairngorms plan contains measures, including byelaws, that will protect mountain hares in the National Park from next year. There is no reason why it could not be done and the Scottish Government could also extend protection would widely through using existing conservation legislation.

Category

1. Cairngorms

default watermark

Tags

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

Date Created
November 24, 2016
Author
nickkempe