

Cairngorms nature – laugh or cry?

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8 THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017

No risk to rare insect at wood, say forestry

FORESTRY chiefs have said that two Red List species are being protected whilst felling takes place in a well-loved woodland.

There have been claims that the pine hoverfly and twinflower could be wiped out by the work at Curr Wood by Dulnain Bridge.

Fears were expressed that Forestry Commission Scotland had overlooked the importance of the woods in granting a felling licence for the site to Bell Ingram.

But a commission spokesman said that machine exclusion zones have been put in place for all twinflower and hoverfly locations to prevent damage; and thinning intensity is light and has been kept to below normal silvicultural practices.

A spokesperson said: "The Curr Wood felling is for a very small area of four hectares, which is below the threshold that is within

existing acceptable limits.

"As is our usual procedure, we placed the application on the public register and we also notified the

Cairngorms National Park Authority and RSPB but we received no responses.

"Conserving biodiversity is one of our main priorities and, aware that the wood is home to pine hoverfly – and to the very rare twinflower – we have insisted that mitigation measures to protect both species are in place for this felling. Taking all of this into account we were content to issue the

felling licence."

Bell Ingram has said formal procedures had been properly followed in applying for the felling licence at Curr Wood.

Opponents to the work have claimed Curr Woods has lost its capercaillie population due to past felling operations.



STRONGHOLD: rare pine hoverfly thrives in wood.

On 27th April, the same day the above article appeared in the Strathie about felling at Curr Wood, on Speyside, SNH's latest post on Scotland's Nature popped into my inbox

<https://scotlandsnature.wordpress.com/2017/04/27/time-to-celebrate-bugs-in-the-cairngorms-national-park/>.

And guess what bug featured? One so rare thatit only occurs at a single location in the National Park, Curr Wood.....shome mistake surely!

Cairngorms Nature

One example is the pine hoverfly. Due to intensification of forest management over the decades this is now an endangered species, so rare in fact that it is restricted to a single location in the Cairngorms National Park. It depends on the deadwood cycle – the process of trees (in this case big old granny pines) falling over or succumbing to fungal disease and decaying. The pine hoverfly’s larvae live in wet rot holes created by this process – a very specific niche. Natural occurrences of these “rot holes” are nowadays few and far between because most pines in forestry are felled before they get to be old, knarled granny pines. To help save the pine hoverfly from extinction, a range of organisations in the park have been making artificial holes in tree stumps to give the pine hoverfly a home. It is hoped that in the future numbers of the hoverfly will increase to levels that allow it can survive on its own, and with more pine forest in the park being managed less intensively, natural rot holes should become common again.

Thank goodness our public authorities don't always co-ordinate what they put out to the media. The cracks between them are most revealing. And for a broader view of what is going wrong with the approach to tree “management” in the National Park, the same issue of the Strathie contained this very interesting letter from Basil Dunlop which appears to re-inforces previous points made on parkswatch about Loch an Eileen ([see here](#)).

Woodland gems are being ruined

FURTHER to the article and letter in the Strathy last week (April 20) on the adverse effects of thinning, felling and planting on various rare and threatened species in Curr Wood, there is another aspect which should be considered – heritage.

The system of management through natural regeneration, previously practised by Seafeld Strathspey Estates in magnificent pinewoods such as Curr and Anagach, is being replaced by the more convenient anthropogenic system practised by other owners elsewhere – fell and replant.

The exceptional quality of the wood regarding wildlife and timber was mainly due to the fact that it had been regenerated in the late 19th Century by wildlife friendly gradual tree removal through selection, encouraging natural seeding.

Seedling densities of up to 40,000 per acre produced a thick crop of tall straight poles and eventually superb quality trees. The system was so renowned that Professors' of Forestry brought their students, even from abroad, to view these Strathspey woods.

The Forestry Commission set up sample plots in Curr Wood, and “plus” trees were marked with a yellow band and used to provide twigs for grafting onto rootstock for seed orchards, to

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produce genetically superior seed and stock for planting elsewhere.

Before the sale at the beginning of this century, the wood was again self-regenerating.

It is tragic that even in and around our rare boreal pinewood forest remnants such as Abernethy, which have self-perpetuated since post glacial times, the present guardians of our natural heritage now permit unnatural retrograde intervention management by planting.

This is despite conservation designations such as SSSI, national nature reserve and national park, and is contrary to European and world policies and practice.

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Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend 12th – 14th May

The place of nature in the Cairngorms National Park is highly contested and full of contradictions and this is evident in the events being organised for the Big Nature Weekend ([see here](#)). There are some great events on and, due to the current attempts to criminalise people who enjoy the countryside in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, I particularly liked this one at Invercauld:

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Camp fire capers – explore around the wonderful Invercauld Estate, collect sticks and other things from nature and learn how to light a small fire without matches. It's not the easiest thing to do but a great skill to learn and a fab party piece. There will also be marshmallows for everyone to toast! Suitable for kids 3 years + (with a well behaved adult!)

Collecting wood for lighting fires is now of course a criminal offence in the LLNPA camping management zones, incurring a fine of £500 and a criminal record. So what's being promoted in the Cairngorms National Park Authority is a criminal offence in the LLTNPA! This just shows how completely out of touch the LLTNPA are.

On May 1st though the CNPA put out a Cairngorms Nature email which highlighted events that were taking place on five estates under the heading "Behind the Scenes" which just so happens to be the same heading used Natural Retreats on their blog to explain what they are doing at Cairngorm!

Behind the Scenes

Part of the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend is about offering opportunities that are not normally available to the public.

Landscape management is vital to the long term future of the Cairngorms National Park, it is a challenging task which is all about balance. The weekend will offer a number of opportunities to join the people who look after our landscapes on a day to day basis and get an exclusive 'behind the scenes' tour of a working estate.

There are events happening in [Strathspey](#), [Phoines Estate](#), [Corgarff](#), [Glenmuick](#) and [Balmoral](#). Please click on the relevant area above to find out more and book a place.

The claim that landscape management is vital to the long term future of the Cairngorms National Park is highly ideological. What about the wild land/rewilding view? This explains that the reason why so much of the National Park is degraded in conservation terms is precisely because there is too much management: muirburn, proliferation of bulldozed tracks. Indeed one could cite the felling and replanting at Curr Wood.

The CNPA would, I guess, respond by saying "its all about balance" – to which the question needs to be asked, balance between what? Unfortunately while promoting these events at the Big Nature Weekend there appear to be no events being promoted by RSPB, SNH or NTS which might demonstrate some alternative ways of managing the land.

Click on Corgarff and you will find the event is on the Allargue Estate, which is described as conservation-minded – this is the estate where all the vehicles were parked that took place in an infamous mountain hare massacre featured on Raptor Persecution Scotland ([see here](#)). The event

is called “A Question of Balance – Wildlife and Land Management”. It makes you want to cry.

What needs to happen

The CNPA needs to stop promoting estates which do not adhere to the standards for conservation we should expect in National Parks. Now maybe the Allargue Estate has made a commitment to stop culling mountain hares. If so, I would applaud that but if not, the CNPA should not be promoting it.

The new Cairngorms Partnership Plan provides an opportunity for the CNPA to ask all estates within the CNPA that have not already done so to submit an estate management plan and for those who have them, to revise their current plans. Such plans should contain transparent statements on what wildlife is killed by estates, either for “sport” or “protection of wildlife”, on practices such as muirburn and how the estate is going to play its part in meeting the conservation objectives set out in the Partnership Plan.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. hill tracks
4. landed estates
5. LLTNPA
6. wild land
7. wildlife persecution

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