

A strangled hare and the stewardship of Cairngorm

Description



Strangled hare beneath Cas Gantry at Cairngorm 2nd June - Photo Credit Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group

Parkswatch received information that there was a strangled hare under the Coire Cas t-bar gantry ([see here](#)) and is very grateful to members of the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation group who visited the site today and confirmed this (above photo, which has had coverage on twitter). Natural

Retreats staff then turned up, presumably to check on what was being photographed, and stated they would inform the manager. What the manager should have done then was inform the police and leave the hare as a potential crime scene we will see.

There appear two potential explanations for what has happened. The first is that this was an accident. That a hare, taking shelter on the piles of rubble under the gantry became entangled in this string/twine and strangled itself. If so, I think Natural Retreats and Highlands and Islands Enterprise still bear a high degree of responsibility. They are meant to be custodians of Cairngorm but instead have failed to adhere to basic standards of good stewardship and have caused environmental destruction and left rubbish which harms wildlife (as this case might show) all over the mountain. These failures have been epitomised by their actions at the Cas Gantry where Natural Retreats bulldozed a far wider area than necessary for the emergency repair work that Highland Council agreed could go ahead without planning permission.

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View of Cas Gantry August 2016

What's more despite all the publicity on parkswatch Natural Retreats have still not restored the landscape properly, as you can see from the soil and boulders which still lie dumped below the gantry, on which the hare was found.

The second possible explanation is that this was deliberate and the string/twine was used as a snare. This would need expert investigation to establish.

There is a possible motive for the hare being killed which has nothing to do with their alleged role in transmitting ticks to red grouse. Natural Retreats took a long time before it made any attempt to restore the slopes around the gantry and because they had failed to store any vegetation had to re-seed it, using a fertilised seed mix. This did nothing for a while (see photo below) but now in the growing season is extremely attractive to hares - a large area of rich grass. The hare/s therefore may have been threatening to destroy the re-seeding and, rather than fence off the area, perhaps someone thought it easier to set a snare?

Whatever the explanation of the strangling, accident or deliberate or something else, the likely scenario is the hare was attracted to the re-seeded area before taking shelter under the gantry.

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Erosion on the slope to the right of the Cas Gantry January 2017, with blue fertiliser pellets washed a

If this was an accident, its an accident for which our public authorities bear some responsibility. They have regularly been made aware of the destruction which has happened at Cairngorm since Natural Retreats took over. Under the Glenmore and Cairngorm Strategy HIE agreed to produce a Cairngorm Estate Management Plan, which could be used to ensure Cairngorm was managed to the highest standards. Instead, they have tolerated Natural Retreats continued mis-management of the natural environment, from rubbish dump to off track use of vehicles.



Diesel tank adjacent to funicular station – note dead vegetation centre and left

A recent example – ignore if you can the half-hearted attempt to hide the tank behind a wooden fence – what has killed the vegetation here? A diesel spill which was then cleared up, is one explanation – but perhaps Natural Retreats can offer an alternative? (which Parkswatch would be happy to publish). Whatever has happened does not appear good for either wildlife or habitats.

Meantime, there is no sign of the set of standards for environmental management which the Cairngorms National Park Authority recommended Natural Retreats adopt last year. I would recommend their senior managers and Board Members go and take a look for themselves before parkswatch publish further photos – including how the Sheiling Track which they retrospectively approved is eroding as predicted. The strangled hare is symptom of a deep malaise, more evidence that the way Cairngorm is being managed is not fit for a National Park, that Natural Retreats are not fit to be leaseholders and HIE is not fit to own it.

The solution is for management of Cairngorm to be taken over by a community consortium which includes conservation interests.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. HIE
3. hill tracks
4. Litter
5. natural retreats
6. restoration

Date Created

June 3, 2017

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