

## Progress on wildlife protection in the Cairngorms National Park?

### Description

Reputation: the Authority's reputation is impacted by a small number of vociferous social media opinion leaders	A14	GM	Staff and Board training on use of social media to best support organisational aims in communications and reputation management. Ongoing delivery of communications strategy.	Added by Social media represents boost reput media being through st recruitment Campaigns
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This entry on the Risk Register made me smile, because its an acknowledgement that CNPA is taking concern about the wrong thing. The risk should be whether the CNPA is delivering the objectives for reputation.

The agenda for the Cairngorms National Park Authority meeting last Friday ([see here](#)) was brief: Chief Exec's Report, Corporate Performance, Risk and Mountain Hares. While I was not at the meeting and cannot report what was decided, there were some positive signs in the papers.

### Mountain Hares

The paper on Mountain Hares appears to have been in response to to One Kind's current campaign calling for a ban on hare culls in the National Park- the CNPA has received 450 postcards – and coverage by Raptor Persecution Scotland, the press and Parkswatch ([see here](#)) on hare persecution. While the paper is brief and mostly factual – the CNPA has no idea of how many hares are slaughtered in the National Park – the final paragraphs at the end signal a welcome step in the right direction:

*13. The cull of any species should be justified on sound environmental or economic reasons that are in the public interest. In the case of deer, culls are justified on the grounds that they allow the restoration of depleted habitat and in the longer term lead to a healthier environment and consequently a healthier herd. Hare culls similarly, may be necessary in some locations e.g. to allow woodland regeneration or to prevent damage to planted trees. The CNPA have concerns about the public interest justification and scale of culling for the primary purpose of tick control.*

The clear message is CNPA staff do not think culls for tick control – hares are alleged to pass on ticks which carry the louping ill virus to grouse – are justified. The paper contains no proposals to address this although the National Park could, if they wanted to, stop culls through the creation of byelaws for conservation purposes. I hope they will propose they could pilot this as part of the Scottish Government's Review of Grouse Moor management.

*14. CNPA accept that culling of hares may be justified and necessary in some circumstances but we do not advocate large-scale culls unless there is clear evidence to demonstrate extremely high densities which are causing significant problems.*

Unfortunately there is no reference to why hare numbers may sometimes reach such high numbers – the answer is in good part because of an absence of predators, particularly golden eagles, in the National Park.

*15. The CNPA want to see greater transparency on what level of culling is taking place in the Cairngorms and the reasons for culling. Mountain hares are an important species in the Cairngorms and we want to ensure healthy populations across their natural range.*

While no actions are proposed in the paper, the logic in the report suggests that the CNPA will have to take action in the near future, not just on hares but to protect other species. If the cull of any species needs to be justified on environmental or economic grounds – and remember the Sandford Principle means conservation comes before the CNPA's other statutory objectives, including sustainable economic development – then besides hare, the CNPA needs to look at all the other species that are killed in the National Park including corvids, raptors and mustelids. Moreover, if there needs to be transparency on the number of hares being killed, but if hares, as the CNPA acknowledges, then why not other creatures? The CNPA could deal with both of these issues by creating byelaws to replace the general license (which allows certain animals to be killed without permission) with specific licenses where culls could be justified on environmental grounds and required landowners to report on species populations as part of this..

## Raptor tagging

Under the Chief Executive's report there is a very brief paragraph which was given coverage by Raptor Persecution Scotland yesterday ([see here](#)):

*Civtech – The CNPA & SNH have launched a Civtech challenge on raptor persecution. Details at <http://ow.ly/BR1V30c4bo5>*

The idea is to try and find a solution to the problem of satellite tags being destroyed when raptors have

been unlawfully killed and data about their final whereabouts therefore being lost. This initiative was not included in the Government's recent announcement of a package of measures to address Raptor Persecution and I assume therefore its come from SNH and the CNPA. If so, that is again welcome. Our public authorities should be able to act independently of the Scottish Government.

Like Raptor Persecution Scotland I think the initiative is well-intentioned but I don't think it will cause too much concern to the people who are unlawfully killing raptors. Even if you could establish the exact position of a raptor before it died, and therefore the landowner who was likely responsible, it would not prove who did it. To convict someone of a criminal offence, the evidence needs to be beyond reasonable doubt. An estate has two gamekeepers, how do you prove which one did it? Its because of this that I think the Scottish Government's attempt to improve enforcement of the criminal law won't make much difference.

While its worth trying to improve information about where and when raptors disappear, where new thinking is really required is on what other measures, apart from the criminal law, would deter raptor persecution. I would suggest that the removal of the right to hunt, which could be done on the balance of probabilities (rather than requiring evidence to be beyond reasonable doubt as in the criminal law) would hit the people who allow this persecution to continue where it hurts. It would remove both the enjoyment they get from hunting and the income this brings in. Its likely to be a far more effective deterrent than the criminal law. Unfortunately, I think it will take a lot more public pressure before that happens.

## **Resources**

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Risk	Ref	Resp	Mitigation	Comments
Cross-over risks				
Resources: public sector finances constrain capacity to allocate sufficient resources to deliver corporate plan.	AI	DC	Focus resource on diversification of income streams to alternate, non-public income generation. Continuing to support “delivery bodies” such as Cairngorms Nature, LAG and COAT in securing inward investment. Corporate plan prioritised around anticipated Scottish Government budget allocations, taking on Board expectation of funding constraints. Ongoing liaison with Scottish Government highlighting achievements of CNPA.	Budget allocations remain in Corporate Plan. Pressures remain. V move quick spending in future years remains at and opportunities reductions continue to also continue ideas for a streams to investment collective National P

One of a number of risks in the CNPA risk register which relate to limited resources

It was good to see the Board Papers highlighting that limited resources, which result from the imposition of austerity, pose serious constraints on the CNPA’s ability to deliver on their plan let alone undertake new initiatives. Instead of our National Parks pretending like other public authorities they can make austerity work, we need organisations which are open about the impact of cuts and can articulate what they could do – and what differences this would make to visitors, residents and wildlife – if they had the money. The CNPA appears to be more open about this than the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority which continues to present itself as perfect in every respect (but then maybe that’s because it has too much money, as demonstrated by the large resources wasted on trying to implement the camping byelaws).

## Nature conservation targets

Status of designated features	320 out of 403 (79%) of CNP designated features in “Favourable” or “recovering” condition.	SNH site condition monitoring	Annual	90% of designated features in Favourable or Recovering Condition by 2018
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What the figures from the Corporate Performance report tell us is that the CNPA is failing in its nature

conservation objectives. The percentage of designated features has gone up from 79% to 81% but is way below the 90% target for next year. If this had been due to dates of monitoring visits, I would have expected the report to clearly state this. Instead, the accompanying report says that this reflects “the national position”. How shocking is that? What it tells you is our National Parks appear to have been making no real difference to nature conservation.

That’s not entirely true of course, there is plenty of evidence to show from raptor persecution, that a significant number of landowners in the Cairngorms won’t co-operate with Nature Conservation so, while CNPA staff may have been trying very very hard, it’s made relatively little difference. This is an argument for a different approach, which puts land reform at the heart of the vision for our National Parks and how they should operate.

## **An insight into the political challenge**

*“An MSP survey carried out in December shows 100% have heard of the Cairngorms National Park and a third say they know a fair amount or know it well. A little under half (43%) are favourable towards the Cairngorms National Park with 51% claiming to be neutral. Both national parks are held in strong regard at the Parliament, stronger than may be expected given the level of awareness compared to other organisations.”*

I found this extract from the corporate performance report pretty shocking: only 43% of MSPs are favourable to the Cairngorms National Park (the target was 50%). Since we know that the Labour, Lib Dems, Tories and Greens are in favour of more National Parks, it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that the majority of SNP MSPs (who avoided the debate in the Scottish Parliament on new National Parks [\(see here\)](#) don’t like the existing ones either. If that is so, it goes a long way to explaining the lack of resources.

Our MSPs really do need to start seeing our National Parks as a means of doing things differently, particularly the way we manage the land.

### **Category**

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

### **Tags**

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. grouse moors
4. land reform
5. Scottish Government
6. wildlife persecution

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