

The power of grouse moor owners in our National Parks

Description



This new track on the Dalnacardoch Estate, which was created to construct the Beaully Denny pipeline through the Drumochter Hills Special Area of Conservation. All the original assessments and plans for the Beaully Denny stated that there should be NO new tracks created in European protected areas, trying to find out HOW the decision was changed (more soon!) but it appears this track could have been allowed to remain if the landowners wanted it. Another case of individual landowner interests taking precedence over national policy.

Further evidence of the political power of landowners in our National Parks was revealed yesterday when Kate Forbes, the SNH MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, held a reception for the Gift of

Grouse <http://www.giftofgrouse.com/> at the Scottish Parliament. This was preceded by an excellent post from Raptor Persecution Scotland ([see here](#)) lambasting the claims from the Gift of Grouse organisation that grouse provide healthy and sustainable food and providing links to comments and research from Andy Wightman, MSP. The persecution of raptors such as hen harrier and golden eagle on grouse moors is now well known and the eastern part of the constituency which Kate Forbes represents is not only in the Cairngorms National Park, it is something of a raptor persecution hotspot ([see here](#)). Getting a National Park MSP to host this event therefore was something of a coup for landowning interests â?? unless of course Kate Forbes told those attending the reception that the Cairngorms National Park Authority should be taking a lead role in correcting the ills of the grouse industry.

There have been two other recent stories covered by Raptor Persecution UK which illustrate the political power and influence grouse moor owners have over our National Parks â?? and we need to remember that National Parks are places where, legally, conservation is meant to come first.

The first was how the Moorland Association blocked a draft press release from the Peak District National Park in England on the results of the Peak District Birds of Prey Initiative which basically showed it had been a complete failure ([see here](#)). The significance of the Report was that it showed that the voluntary measures which the grouse moor industry repeatedly claim are the way forward do not work. As a consequence of the Moorland Associationâ??s actions the findings of the report received very little publicity. I hope the CNPA Board formally consider the findings of that Report and its implications for the voluntary measures they are pursuing with landowning interests in the Cairngorms at present as set out in the National Park Partnership Plan agenda for action on Moorland Management.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

The focus of action for this Plan period is:

- To deliver and recognise good practice in moorland management
- To eliminate raptor persecution and increase raptor populations
- To contribute to woodland, peatland and design

Partners will support delivery and recognition of good practice which will include:

- a) Improving a shared definition and understanding of good practice
- b) Delivering more habitat and species diversity via moorland management
- c) Implementing guidance and trialling new approaches and initiatives, for example: mapping what implementation means, using the Principles of Moorland Management and the Understanding Predation project to share knowledge
- d) Minimising landscape impacts through a presumption against tracks in open moorland;

Partners will work to improve raptor populations in the following ways:

- e) Eliminating the illegal killing of raptors through increased capacity and recognition for good management
- f) Developing a multi-partner golden eagle project

The second news story was the Countryfile programme on Sunday evening ([see here from 7.01 and 30 mins 30 secs](#)) which filmed a hare cull in the eastern part of the Cairngorms National Park and is well worth watching if you have not done so. The estates that took part in the programme presumably did so because they thought they could persuade the public with images of dead hares being placed in refrigerators for consumption rather than dumped in stink pits. Raptor Persecution Scotland ([see here](#)) reported a huge backlash on social media which was even picked up by the Daily Mail (see [here](#)) a sign that grouse moor interests got this badly wrong. The presenter was far more sensitive to public opinion than either the gamekeepers or scientists discussing research about hare numbers and summed this up really well when they stated that shooting hares to create a habitat to shoot something else might seem hard to swallow.

The only shame was that the programme did not ask some more questions:

- how mountain hare culling fits with the conservation objectives of the National Park?
- how does hare culling, which removes the favourite food of golden eagles, fit with the lack of eagles in the eastern Cairngorms
- how does the claim that grouse moors support rural employment fit with the abandonment of many of the remaining houses left on grouse moors and would not other forms of land-use create more rural jobs?
- what did the estates concerned think of the east Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, the Cairngorm National Park Authority's preferred means to address moorland management issues? (Raptor Persecution Scotland pointed out that keepers from the Edinglassie and Candacraigs estates were present on the programme and neither is part of the east Cairngorms Moorland Partnership).

These stories illustrate where we are at present in terms of grouse moor management in our National Parks. Grouse Moor interests still have the political power which means they can still block anything which threatens their interests and in effect have prevented the CNPA from taking any meaningful action to change the way grouse moors are managed in the National Park. However, like many interests with too much power (and there are interesting connections between grouse moors and bankers not least in the case of RBS where Fred Goodwin's idea of a management development day was to go grouse shooting at huge expense) they have become divorced from public opinion. The ideas of the people who ultimately control what happens in our National Parks in respect to grouse moors are no longer the ruling ideas and in that lies hope for change.

The implications of this are that the CNPA and politicians like Kate Forbes risk alienating public support unless they start to address the issues. I don't believe the public will allow the Scottish Government's review of grouse moor management which has taken a lamentably long time to get off the ground (another example no doubt of the political power of landowners) to become yet another talking shop.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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Date Created

February 2, 2018

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