

Reflections on wildlife trapping in our National Parks – the case of Glen Prosen

Description

I was up in Glen Clova with friends for the weekend and on Saturday, which was wild and very windy, went for a walk up Glen Prosen with Helen Todd who works as campaigns and policy manager for Ramblers Scotland. Our intention was to take a closer look at the restoration of the hydro scheme ([see here](#)) at the head of the Glen.



Trap No 1

However, on passing this Fenn Trap in a cage tunnel, just beyond Glenprosen Lodge, we decided to add a little more purpose and interest to the walk-in by photographing every trap we could see from the road.



Trap 2 with muirburn clearly visible on the side of Eskielawn and Bruntshields behind

There are two stories here, the clearance of wildlife from the land in our National Parks and the reaction from the Scottish Gamekeepers Association to Helen for daring to raise this as an issue on twitter yesterday.

To all those who have been incited by this post to damage traps, it is a criminal offence [@policescotland](#) [@HelenRambler](#) is this tweet a [@ScotLINK](#) official viewpoint?

— Scottish Gamekeepers (@ScotGamekeepers) [February 11, 2019](#)

SGA's response shows just why it is now totally discredited as an organisation. Its tweet is anonymous, unlike Helen's. It uses Helen's openness to mount a personal attack by referring to ScotLINK – Helen once served as chair of Scottish Environment LINK. It wrongly suggests that by showing photos of traps Helen was inciting people to damage them. And its bullying, *"Police Scotland will be informed"*.

From this exchange it appears that the SGA, and the landowners who back it, don't believe the right to freedom of speech should extend to questioning how land is managed. Even in our National Parks.

Interestingly though, this afternoon the SGA appears to have acknowledged that it has gone too far

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commentary

Trap No 3 All the upper part of Glen Prosen where these photos were taken lies within the Cairngorms National Park.



Trap No 4 with the Glen Clova Forest behind

Forestry Commission Scotland own the Glen Clova Forest and, at the parking area just before Glenprosen Lodge, warn walkers about the wildlife camera traps in place in the forest:



While the public purse is being used to monitor what mammals live in the forest through camera traps, all around the Glenprosen estate is using a very different type of trap to eliminate wildlife. This illustrates the current incoherent approach to land-use within the Cairngorms National Park.



Trap No 5

The law permitting the use of these traps is the Spring Traps Approval (Scotland) Order 2011. The traps need to be placed in a tunnel '*suitable for minimising the chances of capturing, killing or injuring non-target species whilst not compromising the killing or taking of target species*'. There are no rules or guidance on the size of the tunnel openings, that is left to the landed estates.



Trap No 6

Its therefore not possible for the non-expert or the person without a measuring tape – beware of getting too close, the SGA might accuse you of interfering with the trap – to tell exactly which species these traps are intended to destroy. The “target” species are likely to be weasel and stoat which prey on the gamebirds and grouse being farmed on the estate.



Trap No 7 with Old Craig behind

There were a cluster of traps around Old Craig:



Trap No 8

We missed this trap, just opposite the one above, on the way out but spotted it on the way back.



Trap No 9 While we may have missed a number of other traps, they are placed by the road for a reason. It makes the traps much easier to manage. They can all be checked in a half hour round trip up in a landrover.



Trap No 10

That is a primary reason why so many estates are constructing new roads into the hills, it makes monitoring traps and other measures associated with the intensification of grouse moor management much more “efficient”.



Trap No 11 Bruntshields with ATV track clearly visible on left

The road up Glen Prosen has been there for some time, though there are now three new roads at the head of the glen, two to the new hydro intakes and one to a line of recently constructed grouse butts.



Trap No 12

The SGA in the twitter exchange refer to areas such as this as a workplace but the fact is that grouse moor management supports relatively fewer and fewer jobs because the extensive road network which has spread over most of the Cairngorms makes it possible to manage moorland with fewer and fewer people. Its becoming ever more obvious that alternative forms of land-use could support more jobs.



Trap No 13

There was another cluster of traps near where the road crosses the Prosen Water. The reason being that the road bridge acts like a wildlife funnel for animals like stoat and weasel trying to cross the main river.



Trap No 14 just above the bridge looking to the head of the glen

It would be interesting to know how many animals have been caught in these traps, the scale of the destruction that has been taking place here and in other places. Yet even in the National Park, there is no record of this.



Trap No 15, the road bridge is just to the left of the photo

The first (and primary) statutory aim of our National Parks is “*to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area*“. So when did anyone ever agree that small mammalian predators such as stoat and weasel were not part of that natural heritage?



Trap No 16

The SGA in their tweets states its a criminal offence to interfere with traps. That is legally correct. Its also fair to conclude that this shows just how far our laws have been devised to favour sporting estates before wildlife.



Trap No 17 in former forest plantation below Craigie Thieves

Our National Park Authorities, however, have the power to make byelaws for conservation purposes. They could make it a criminal offence to kill the wildlife which it is currently being persecuted throughout our National Parks whether by traps or by shooting. That however is not yet on their agenda. It should be.



Trap No 18

The Werrity Review into grouse moor management ([see here](#)) will not address this issue. Its remit is to consider the issues that result in illegal persecution of wildlife, not the persecution which is currently quite legal under the law.



Trap No 19

While some persecution of other wildlife, particularly mountain hares, is related to grouse moor management, much of it is not. Pheasant and red legged partridge production is economically more important than grouse farming in the Cairngorms National Park and the constant persecution of foxes, stoat and weasel is as much related to those sporting interests as it is to grouse moors.



Grain feeder for game birds just after Traps No 1.

Even in upper Glen Prosen, not all the wildlife persecution is related to grouse moor management.



Trap No 20

The Werrity Review therefore has relatively limited relevance to addressing the issue of wildlife persecution in our National Parks and there is no reason for our National Park Authorities to await the outcome of that review (due out in June) before they do anything further to consider how they tackle it. (The Cairngorms National Park Authority is involved in recruiting special constables and a project to improve the information transmitted by satellite tags on raptors).



Trap No 21

Instead our National Parks could and should be considering how they could be setting new standards for protecting wildlife as a whole. That is what most people believe our National parks should be about.



Trap No 22

My reaction as we saw more and more traps was initially to feel depressed. Just how can we be allowing this in our National Parks. There is another way of looking at it though. Despite all these traps – and Glen Prosen sits in the heart of the Angus hills where there is possibly more wildlife persecution than anywhere else in Scotland – our native predators still survive. Why else would there be all these traps? They are attracted of course by all the farmed game birds, easy prey, but this is a war that our landed estates can never win. The predators will always try and move back.



Trap No 23

I was reminded of that earlier in the morning when on the way to Glen Prosen when we stopped and watched two Red Kites hunting in Glen Clova. I found out the next day, from the Glen Clova Ranger, that he had counted no less than 7 Red Kites in the glen one day last month. We should be shouting this from the rooftops and, if Red Kites fail to nest successfully this summer, which on past record is only too likely, shout that from the rooftops too.

Where Red Kites should be nesting, unlike where stoats should be seen, is within the remit of the Werrity Review.

How much better it would be if, instead of sporting estates employing people to eliminate wildlife that is not game, those same people – with their undoubted wildlife protection skills – were employed for conservation purposes? Instead of employing people to work in killing fields, how much better it would be if gamekeepers were employed to re-wild – and given better paid jobs and secure housing to boot. Unfortunately the Werrity Review has been tasked at looking at the “*valuable role of gamekeepers in rural Scotland*” rather than alternative ways their skills might be used. That is a license for continued wildlife persecution. That’s not the gamekeepers fault, its that of the landowners who at present have almost total freedom to decide how the land is managed.



Trap No 24

In the past, I have photographed traps haphazardly and never bothered to try and count them. I would not have anticipated how difficult this would be without photographs. After the first half dozen we lost count and without the photos would have no reference. I hope more people will start to record them systematically and broadcast this on social media – just like Helen did.



Trap No 25 with Kilbo behind and behind that the new road up Cairn Dye just visible

The building at Kilbo has been nicely renovated. Its hard to tell for what purpose, though my guess is that its to provide a good lunch spot for parties coming to shoot grouse on Cairn Dye. If so, that tells you something about the priorities in this glen.



Trap No 26 upstream of Kilbo

We saw just one trap above Kilbo – perhaps the roads are too new for the estate to have had time to install traps? – but plenty of other signs of more intensive grouse moor management.



Medicated grit tray with Mayar behind. You can just see the line of the new hydro track, picked out by snow, on the far side of the burn.

Helen reckons she took photos of 27 traps, I have 26. Some will no doubt claim that this shows we don't know what we are talking about. I believe it shows we are asking the right questions.

What does it say about the conservation purposes of the National Park that on one 5km stretch of road there are at least 26 traps? How many traps are there in the Cairngorms National Park as a whole? I believe its the duty of the Cairngorms National Park Authority to find out. Just like with Mountain Hares they need to start evaluating the true level of wildlife persecution that is taking place in the National Park. Then, more importantly, they need to introduce measures to fulfil their statutory objective to conserve the natural heritage.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. grouse moors
4. hill tracks

- 5. landed estates
- 6. wildlife persecution

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