

Landowners above the law (2) – wildlife persecution in the Cairngorms National Park

Description

On the same day, 24th May, that the Cairngorms National Park issued a news piece entitled [Our National Treasures](#) about the European Day of Parks, the police issued a news release about four geese that had been found poisoned near Loch Gynack by Kingussie at the end of April. This received excellent coverage on Raptor Persecution Scotland ([see here](#)). In the case of Cairngorms wildlife, the description of [European Day of Parks](#) as “a commemorative day for Protected Areas across Europe” seems apt. Its a National Park which, despite its professed good intentions, is fundamentally failing to protect wildlife.

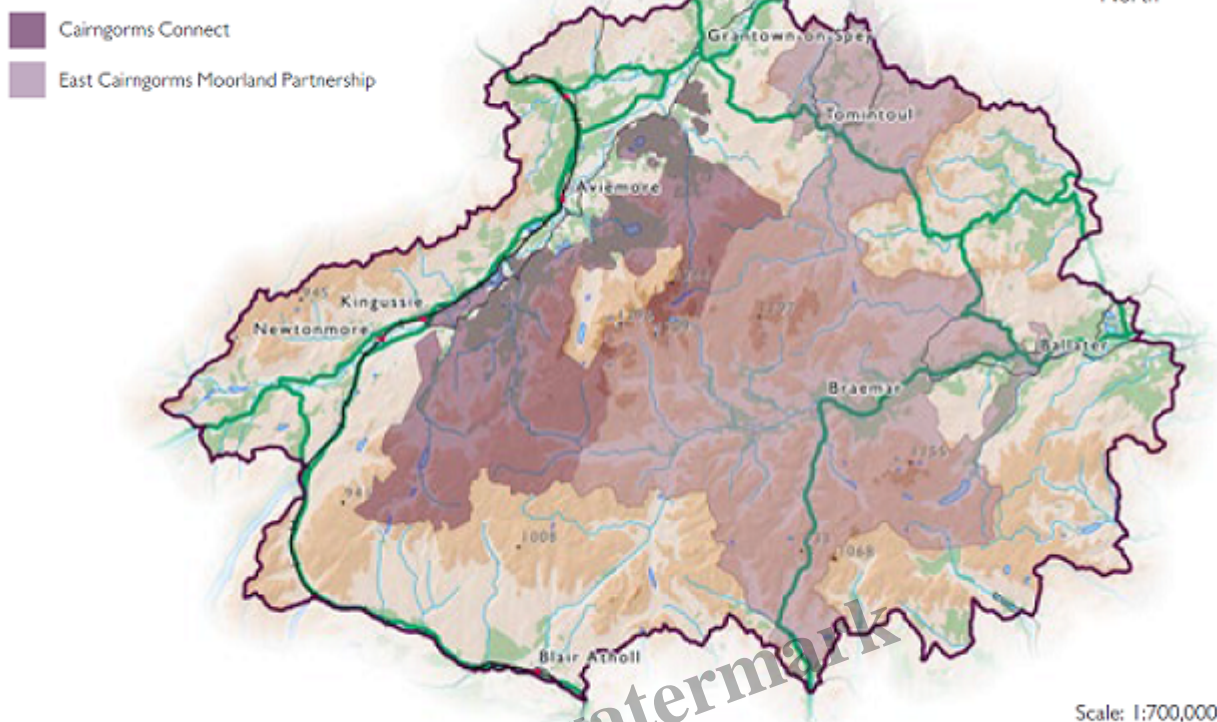
Three days earlier Raptor Persecution Scotland had blogged about the disappearance of yet another Hen Harrier on the north eastern side of the National Park ([see here](#)). This young Hen Harrier had been born on the Mar Lodge Estate, where it had been tagged, and spent the previous 3 weeks in the Strathdon area before disappearing.



Map Credit Raptor Persecution Scotland. The red circle shows the Strathdon area, a hotspot for raptor persecution in the National Park.

What Raptor Persecution Scotland did not say was that three of the estates on the western fringes of the red circle denoting Strathdon, Glen Avon, Glenlivet and Invercauld, are members of the east Cairngorms Moorland Partnership:

Figure 3: Landscape scale collaborations



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Strathdon lies just to the east of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership area

The East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership is the CNPA's preferred vehicle for demonstrating improved moorland management within the National Park part of which is about "*Eliminating the illegal killing of raptors and increasing raptor populations.*" Assuming the hen harrier was killed on one of the Strathdon estates, the Partnership would appear to be having NO influence on its neighbours. Not even Prince Charles, who owns Delnadamph, a sporting estate on the upper reaches of Strathdon.

Sporting estates follow the example set by the Royal Family. While Prince Charles is only too happy to talk to the media about red squirrels ([see here](#)), he appears to keep his silence when it comes to raptors. Only last year, another hen harrier, disappeared on the border of Delnadamph ([see here](#)). Until Prince Charles speaks out or the National Park takes control the slaughter in Strathdon will, I am afraid, continue.

The CNPA's current policy to end raptor persecution in the National Park was set out in its National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22. This was re-iterated in the fourth action in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan launched on 1st March this year:

Raptors	Create the conditions for a measurable and sustained increase in both home range (re) occupation and breeding success of golden eagle, hen harrier and peregrine across the National Park	T2 (all species)	R3 (all species)	CNPA , Estates, SNH, and RSPB
	Identify unoccupied golden eagle, hen harrier and peregrine territories and work with land managers to carry out positive management that will encourage re-colonisation			CNPA , RSPB, SNH, RSGs, estates
	Carry out collaborative mapping and monitoring of golden eagle, hen harrier and peregrine sites and populations, sharing data to establish baselines which will inform management and measure progress			RSPB , CNPA, ECMP, Estates, RSGs
	Build relationships and gather intelligence to eliminate the illegal killing of all raptors through increased wildlife crime enforcement			Police Scotland , CNPA, SNH, estates
	Develop and deliver wildlife tourism opportunities that benefit local businesses and promote the National Park as an example of raptor conservation success	n/a	n/a	CNPA , SLE, estates, Visit-Scotland

T2 = Trial management underway but not yet clear evidence that it can deliver objectives R3 = Solutions enable achievement against population / range targets but only with continued conservation intervention

The first and last action in this chart were not in the draft Nature Action Plan ([see here](#)) and added after/as a result of the public consultation. The main problem with the action to eliminate raptor persecution is that it depends on voluntary measures and “relationship building”. You cannot build relationships with landowners who are out of control, who perceive themselves as being above the law and knowing best. That’s why the current National Park Partnership Plan is failing to deliver what the Park Board – and most of the population of Scotland – want.

Its now time for the CNPA Board to review the plans it has in place for tackling wildlife crime and the wider land-use questions that underpin this ([see here](#)). The current strategy clearly isn’t working and, in such circumstances, any reasonable organisations would be reviewing the mechanisms it has

identified for achieving its aims. In this case more special constables, partnership working and improved satellite tagging. The solution lies in the Cairngorms National Park Authority being far more assertive with landowners – a challenge to Prince Charles to commit to working with them to end raptor persecution in Strathdon would be a start – and to back this up with enforcement action and the introduction of new bye-laws which control what landowners are allowed to do on their land.

Its no coincidence, I believe, that Loch Gynack, where the poisoned geese were found, is also at the centre of a large area on the western side of the National Park where the sporting estates and intensifying their management of the land (introduction of red legged partridge, muirburn, unlawful bulldozed roads up into the Monadhliath etc). The CNPA's approach to this has been to try and work in partnership, to persuade landowners to do the right thing.

That approach has been misguided and counter-productive. It has given landowners and their agents the message that, as long as they give a nod here and there to the need for change, they don't really need to alter the way they manage land because when push comes to shove the CNPA is wedded to the voluntary approach. Its therefore extremely unlikely to take compulsory enforcement action against them. This is not how you gain the respect of the rich and powerful. The landowners concerned must be delighted and reassured by the lack of any news release from the CNPA about the latest two wildlife persecution incidents featured here.

Unfortunately the CNPA through its current approach is, I believe, inadvertently creating the very environment which causes the problems it professes to want to address. The time for change is now.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. grouse moors
3. hill tracks
4. landed estates
5. Scottish Government
6. wildlife persecution

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