

Three New Year resolutions for Prince Charles in the Cairngorms

Description

Issue of the day Should the Queen rewild Balmoral?

OTHER landowners are rewilding their estates restoring forests, and talking about species reintroduction, but the Queen's Balmoral shows no sign of changing from its current state as the iconic Scottish grouse moor estate.

Isn't it, some campaigners are saying, time the royals dedicated their land to the ultimate public good of combating the climate and biodiversity crises?

What's the problem with a grouse moor?
Chiefly, the way it's managed to boost the grouse population by a process known as muirburn – the controlled burning of heather, gorse bushes and grasslands – which destroys bushes, trees and other shrubs that might provide a habitat for other wildlife.

Who's been drawing attention to it?
Rewilding advocate, Guy Shrubshole, in an article in the conservation newsletter, Inkap, earlier this month, blamed Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's purchase of Balmoral – which triggered the trend amongst the elite for grouse moor sporting estates – for the degraded state of Scottish uplands today.

"The Royals started this trend," he wrote, "and they have it within their power to end it. Given Prince Charles' well-known environmentalism and Prince William's nascent interest in it, what better time to do so?"

Shrubshole, author of Who Owns England?, is not alone in having postulated that the Royal Family could be doing more to restore biodiversity. Nick Kempe of the blog Parkswatchscotland has been urging Prince Charles to

stop moorland burning at Balmoral and allow it to rewild, saying, "The royal family is at the apex of sporting estate owners. If they were to stop muirburn then other Scottish grouse estates might follow."

Why pick on Balmoral?
Perhaps it seems unfair to pick on the Queen and her estate. We could, of course, pick on other targets for rewilding like farms which are growing food and helping keep people alive.

Isn't HRH a little bit behind-trend on this occasion?
Yes, that does seem so. Rewilding is on trend with some of Scotland's other significant landowners, including Paul Povlsen at Glenfeshie, Paul Lister at Alladale, and Hugh Macleod, clan chief of Clan MacLeod who recently announced

that he intends to rewild his estate on Skye. Already Balmoral's neighbouring, National Trust-run estate at Mar Lodge is seeing a young forest take root, following a zero tolerance approach to deer.

It looks like the Royal Family may be late to jump on this latest biodiversity and planet-saving trend. When will they realise that it's now all about keeping up with the Povlensers?

But is rewilding really going to help save the planet?
A scientific study, published in the journal, Nature, in October found that restoring natural landscapes damaged by human exploitation could be one of the most effective and cheapest ways to combat the climate crisis while also boosting dwindling wildlife populations.

VICKY ALLAN

The Herald 22nd December picked up on the importance of how the Royal Family manage their land in the Cairngorms

A week after the Herald piece, on 29th December, Prince Charles was interviewed about his views on the natural environment by Margaret Atwood, guest editor for the Today programme ([see here](#) from 2.20.30 to 2.29.30). It is highly recommended listening. I had not realised that Prince Charles had been speaking out about the dangers of plastic since 1970 and he explained how his concerns about new technologies had been what got him interested in organic farming. Great stuff but it begs the question, why is Prince Charles allowing his private estate in the Cairngorms, Delnadamph ([see here](#)), and Balmoral ([see here](#)), to be managed in the way they are?



Fenced off area with tree planting between surviving stands of native trees near Inchmore

First though, credit where credit is due. There is very little tree planting going on at Delnadamph but, where there is, there is not a plastic tree tube in sight ([see here](#)). That I don't think is an accident. Unlike Prince Charles, other landowners round about appear to use plastic tree tubes as a matter of course:



Muirburn, planting and plastic tree tubes at Glen Gairn, south of Delnadamph. How many plastic fragments from these tubes will be swept down into the north sea over the next ten years?

Prince Charles made another very interesting point on the programme. Despite trying to influence people about the importance of nature through seminars, conferences and “dinner after dinner” he felt he had never got past what he described as the “barriers to change” until the last couple of years. While he fears we may now be too late, he can take an opportunity for change that has not existed up until now. What better time then to persuade all the other estates in the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership ([see here](#)), perhaps with the support of the National Trust for Scotland, to abandon plastic tree tubes and other damaging land-management practices?

Apart from the absence of plastic, however, there is very little evidence of Prince Charles implementing the beliefs he discussed on Radio 4 at Delnadamph. He gave a very cogent explanation of his interest in organic farming and his concerns about preventing chemicals getting into the natural environment. That makes the widespread use of what appears to be medicated grit at Delnadamph even harder to explain, let alone justify:



One of dozens of grit stations on Brown Cow Hill

If the grit is not medicated, Prince Charles should say so. Whatever the case, he should join with those calling on a ban on the use of medicated grit on grouse moors as part of any new licensing system as part of the Scottish Government's response to the Werritty Review ([see here](#)).

Prince Charles went on to explain his concerns about modern agriculture, *“nature is not a monoculture, it is based on diversity”*. Why then is Prince Charles allowing a red grouse monoculture at Delnadamph?



What is this if not red grouse monoculture?

Does Prince Charles have no control over the people who are managing his land? If he believes so strongly in biodiversity, why too is he allowing trapping of stoat and weasel and shooting of mountain hare to continue at Delnadamph?



Trap, as witnessed in October, when we also heard a gamekeeper shooting what were almost certain mountain hare on the upper slopes of Brown Cow Hill

Delnadamph has fantastic potential in terms of biodiversity. The soils on upper Donside are better than on Deeside and given the chance the estate could be a wildlife jewel in the eastern Cairngorms. Instead, most of it is an enormous farm, managed for one species, red grouse, and using new technologies and techniques which Prince Charles identified in the programme as posing an enormous threat to the natural environment.



Natural regeneration above Inchmore – note how muirburn on the bank to the right bank of the river terrace has destroyed natural regeneration

Over at Balmoral, the situation is slightly different but no better. It's also managed to promote one species for shooting, but red deer instead of red grouse. Dave Morris, a regular contributor to parkswatch, explained the issues well in a letter which appeared in the Herald this week:

We need big changes in deer management policy and the royals should lead the way

PUBLIC debate about the management of Balmoral estate by the royal family can no longer be ignored ("Issue of the day: Should the Queen rewild Balmoral?", Vicky Allan, The Herald, December 22).

Successive governments, expert scientists and voluntary conservation interests have all failed to persuade the royal family to change the way in which Balmoral is managed for trees, deer and grouse. For example, nearly 20 years of government-led voluntary deer control schemes have failed to persuade Balmoral and the neighbouring estates to reduce deer numbers down to ecologically acceptable levels so the natural vegetation can recover from severe overgrazing.

No wonder that a year ago the report of the Scottish Government's Deer Working Group recommended the Scottish Parliament should instigate a special investigation of the situation at Balmoral and its neighbours. No other part of Scotland was subject to such a recommendation. In other words, Balmoral and its neighbours are amongst the worst estates in Scotland in their approach to deer management and this requires effective intervention at the highest level. Every MSP elected to the Parliament next May needs to be committed to a land-use investigation of such estates.

If members of the royal family want to see the future they should go for a walk on Glenfeshie estate, on the other side of the Cairngorms National Park. Over the last 15 years Glenfeshie's Danish owner, Anders Polvsen, has demonstrated through effective deer management how



There is concern about overgrazing by the deer population

to restore montane and forest habitats. On his estate the Old Caledonian Pinewood is regenerating from the bottom of the glen to the altitudinal limits for tree growth, all achieved without any fencing or planting.

Nevertheless, the royal family has already demonstrated a clear and welcome understanding of the crisis facing the planet through climate change and biodiversity loss. The public debate the royals have stimulated, both in the UK and in distant lands, on these vital issues is impressive. But substantive changes in policy and practice are also needed much closer to home.

The regeneration of the vegetation of the Highlands will make a huge contribution to carbon capture and storage if only red deer populations are managed properly. Balmoral needs to set the standard, persuading other estates to sit up, take note and change direction.

When world leaders gather in

Glasgow in the autumn of 2021 to debate the climate crisis this can be Scotland's finest contribution – a demonstration of how the natural recovery of degraded landscapes through the control of overgrazing is a key part of climate-change mitigation.

Dave Morris, Kinross.

Rewilding is not a magic solution

VICKY Allan's Issue Of The Day article makes several inaccurate and wild assertions.

First, she argues muirburn is damaging and destructive. This is simply untrue, as evidenced by recent research commissioned by the Scottish Government that found muirburn provides considerable benefits for a diversity of wildlife, including golden plover, merlin, curlew, whinchat and lesser redpoll.

Secondly, she infers the royal family is somehow obliged to

follow the rewilding agenda if it is to save biodiversity and the planet. The notion that rewilding is "the magical solution" to the climate emergency highlights a fundamental lack of understanding of the complexity of issues that surround land use and ownership in Scotland, and patently disregards the fantastic work undertaken by many sporting estates to sequester carbon, protect peatlands, promote wildlife and create jobs
Ross Ewing, political and press officer (Scotland), The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, Scottish Centre, Dunkeld.

The double-think in the letter from the British Association of Shooting and Conservation is striking, claiming sporting estates are benefitting wildlife through muirburn while at the same time claiming those estates are busy sequestering carbon. Clearly BASC have no conception that golden plover, merlin, curlew, whinchat and lesser redpoll existed long before grouse moors. It is time that Prince Charles cut through this nonsense, which is totally alien to his own philosophy, and supported re-wilding at both Delnadamph and at Balmoral.

Prince Charles could do this by adopting the following New Year resolutions for the land he holds in custodianship in the Cairngorms National Park:

- Stop managing Delnadamph as a red grouse farm and let it return to mother nature
- Stop wildlife persecution (corvids, mustelids, hare) and let animal diversity return

- Recognise that in the absence of natural predators, it's necessary to reduce deer numbers at Balmoral drastically to enable other species to flourish

The attempts by the Cairngorms National Park to promote conservation management by voluntary means, as in the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, won't work unless Prince Charles resolves to put his principles into practice. If similar New Year resolutions were adopted by landowners across the Cairngorms National Park it would become the most brilliant place for wildlife in the British Isles.

Category

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