

A stinking hole near the heart of the Cairngorms National Park

Description

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Stink pit with deer, hare and, in the green plastic tub, an egg and maggots. Photo April 2019 credit anon

Recently I was sent photos, taken in 2019, of a stink pit at the northern end of the 42,000 acre Glenavon Estate, about 5km south of Tomintoul.



The label marks the approximate location above the River Avon. Map credit CNPA estate maps.



View of the pit – note the woodland regeneration, though this is outside the fenced woodland regeneration areas

The person who sent the photos had been alerted by a walker who had stumbled across the pit a couple of months earlier in February and reported finding “scores of mountain hare” carcasses. That would have been within the “open season” for shooting mountain hares, which runs from August to the end of February but is due to be abolished later this year. Since there are no laws about the disposal of the corpses of most game animals, unless they enter the food system, shooting the hares and dumping them in this pit was quite legal.

In 2018, the Glenavon Estate was granted a license by Scottish Natural Heritage, now NatureScot, to shoot 200 mountain hares in the closed season, “*for the purpose of preventing serious damage to timber and crops*”. They reported shooting 157 ([see here](#)). This estate, which is a member of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)’s East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (ECMP), appears to shoot a lot of hares. That didn’t stop the CNPA putting out a news release in September 2019 ([see here](#)) claiming the ECMP was doing lots of good work to protect mountain hares. Perhaps staff didn’t realise what was actually going on on the ground?

By the time my contact visited, apart from the couple of mountain hare corpses by the plastic tub, there was greater evidence of red deer remains than mountain hare. Unlike farm animals the disposal of wild red deer corpses or body parts is not regulated, so long as they are not diseased. There is, however, best practice guidance ([see here](#)):

Burial

Where the above disposal routes are not an option then bury in compliance with the following terms of t
No burial should take place:

- Within 20 metres of a watercourse;
- Within 10 metres of a field drain;
- Within 250 metres from any well, spring or borehole used as source of drinking water;
- On waterlogged sites.

Burial should only take place if:

- At least 1 metre of subsoil is present below the bottom of the burial pit;
- At least 1 metre of covering soil is used to cap the site.

If a burial pit is used, fence the area, and cover each item/load with soil, so as to avoid access for flies/l
Seek advice from SEPA if there are any difficulties meeting the above criteria.

The photos clearly show that best practice wasn't being followed. The body parts of the deer weren't covered with soil and the area wasn't fenced. The reason for this is the hole was being used as a stink pit, a means of attracting and killing other animals attracted by the smell of decay:



Snare set among the deer parts

Nearby was another snare, intended to trap animals as they were drawn towards the pit.



This snare was set next to a path and could have caught a dog as well as a fox

Within the tub, there were also some hen's eggs:



That was highly suspicious. Eggs laced with poison have long been used to kill mammals and birds and that appears the only conceivable reason why they would have been placed here. However, the presence of live maggots suggest that for some reason poison may not have been added to the eggs in this case.

What needs to happen?

The CNPA set up the ECMP in 2015 in an attempt to improve moorland management within the National Park. Unfortunately there is a lack of transparency about what the estates in the ECMP have changed as a result – or more importantly what hasn't changed. It's not even clear if the CNPA has asked Glenavon and the other estates involved (Balmoral, Delnadmamph, Invercauld, Mar Lodge, Mar and Glenlivet) to stop using stink pits.

But then if you search in the Werritty Review on Grouse Moor Management ([see here](#)) or the Report on the Management of Wild Deer in Scotland (374 pages) ([see here](#)) published last February, you will find not a single mention of stink pits there either. It's as though our public authorities have a complete mental blank about the way stink pits are used to persecute wildlife in Scotland.

A ban on stink pits should have been introduced in our National Parks, which have a statutory duty to conserve wildlife, the moment they were created. With the Scottish Government now having committed to introduce a grouse moor licensing scheme in its response to the Werritty Review ([see here](#)), there is an opportunity for the public to press for a ban on the use of stink pits as a condition of the new licenses. My thanks to the sender of the photos for helping people see what is going on in the Cairngorms under the guise of land management. If you want to help, please share this post or the photos with politicians and ask them to ban stink pits.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Deer
3. grouse moors
4. landed estates
5. wildlife persecution

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Author

nickkempe