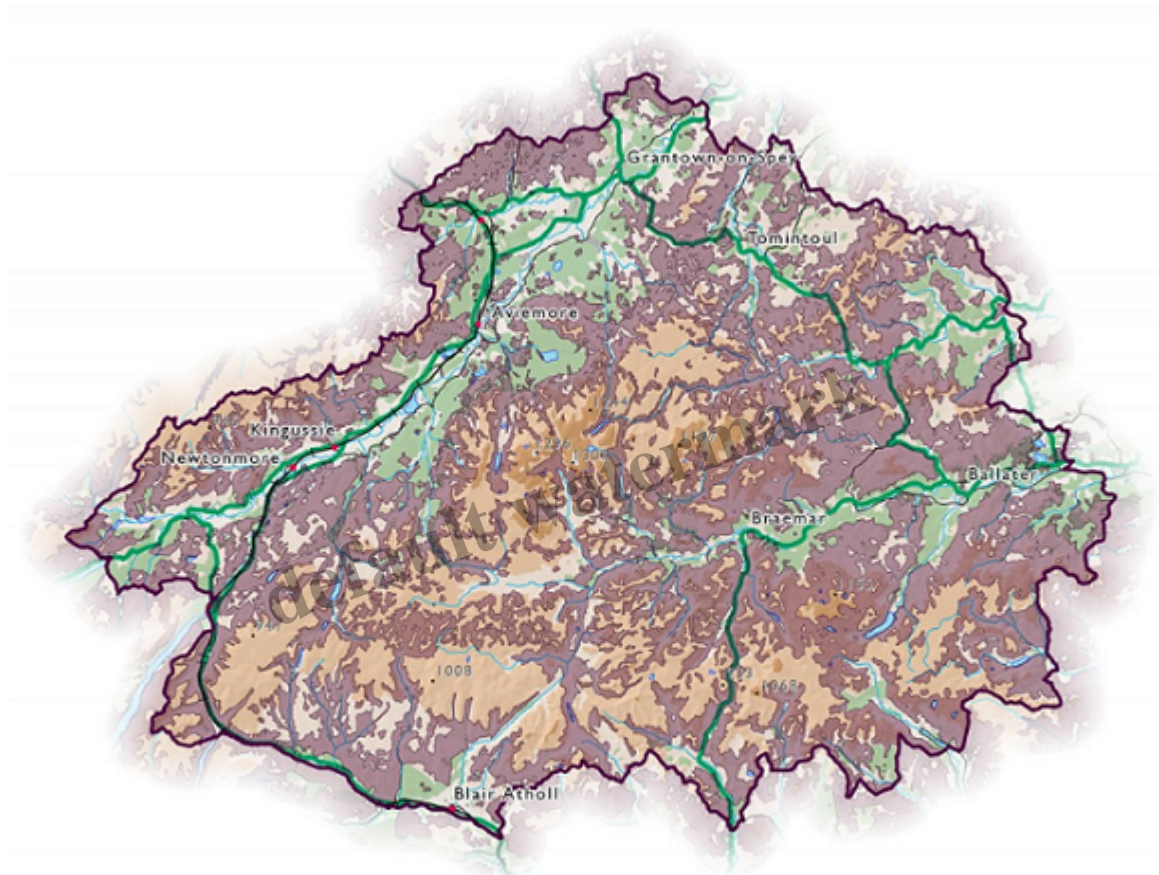


Grouse moor wars – not the Cairngorms National Park’s proudest moment

Description

Heather Moorland Areas Within The Cairngorms National Park



■ Heather Moorland Areas Within The Cairngorms National Park

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In 2016 the Cairngorms National Park plan estimated that 44% of the National Park was heather moorland

A ding-dong battle

On Thursday an organisation called Rewilding Britain issued a news release ([see see](#)) highlighting the destructive impact of grouse moor management in national parks in the north of England and the Cairngorms and which urged:

“ministers to show real leadership by creating wilder national parks and setting up core rewilding areas in each of them – in which driven grouse shoots are phased out, and our precious moors brought back to health”.

In support of this, Rewilding Britain have also set up a petition ([see here](#)) calling for wilder National Parks as part of our response to the *“Extinction Crisis and Climate Emergency”*. Good stuff and not before time.

The news release was picked up by the Strathy who asked *“Will it be the Glorious 12th in the Cairngorms?”* ([see here](#)) and quoted Rewilding Britain as stating that *“a staggering 44% of the Cairngorms National Park comprises driven grouse moors”*.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) responded with their own news release ([see here](#)) stating they were:

“aware of a recent report from Rewilding Britain, which claims – incorrectly – that 44% of the Cairngorms National Park comprises driven grouse moors. The figure quoted is for heather moorland as a whole, not the area used for driven grouse shooting.”

The Dundee Courier then picked this up with its own story ([see here](#)) on what they rightly described as *“a bizarre row”*. At the end of this Rewilding Britain explained that they had got the 44% figure from the CNPA and challenged them to *“issue a clarified and revised figure for the precise area of intensively managed driven grouse moors in the park.”*

The facts

The 44% figure comes from the supporting documents to the current National Park Plan (see map above and [here](#)):

Moorland management is a significant land use in the National Park, extending to approximately 44% of land cover, shaping much of the landscape. Much of it is managed for the primary aim of producing sufficient populations of red grouse and/or red deer for sport shooting. Its management for sporting purposes is a strong influence on landscape, wildness, habitat, species and other land management, for example hill livestock, peatland, woodland and water management.

The 44% was almost certainly incorrect at the time (2016) because, as the CNPA later acknowledged, the moorland map failed to take account of the large areas of natural woodland regeneration on the western side of the National Park. It will be even more out of date now because of the natural regeneration since, which has enabled the CNPA to reach its target of 1000 hectares of woodland expansion a year mentioned in their news release.

Whatever the area of heather moorland, the CNPA is right that not all of it is used for driven grouse shooting. But, as the CNPA also knows a very large part is. In the supporting evidence for the National Park Plan it stated:

“a survey of landowners (which included 50% of landholdings, covering 66% of the National Park) records the dominant form of land use as managed moorland (189,552ha).”

What is this if not management for grouse?

It will be interesting to see if the CNPA can now rise to Rewilding Britain's challenge and provides the correct facts.

The real issues

What is striking about this spat is that rather than address the real problem, the destructive impact that sporting estates and intensive grouse moor management has had on the natural environment of the Cairngorms, the CNPA has chosen to criticise an organisation promoting the need for re-wilding in our National Parks. They could have just responded by saying *“small error but we welcome the call to re-wild more of the National Park”*. But that would have conflicted with the interests of the owners of sporting estates in the National Park.

Douglas McAdam, former Chief Executive of Scottish Land and Estates, is on the CNPA Board for a reason: to make sure those landowners' interests are never threatened by the CNPA.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has failed to publish facts and figures about grouse moor management in the National Park, including from its “flagship” East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, or about its impacts (e.g just how much of the National Park is burned each year). But the evidence available to the informed observer suggests that the CNPA has done almost nothing to affect current trends:

- On the one hand, the woodland expansion the CNPA refers to in its news release is almost entirely down to conservation minded land-owners, such as the estates in Cairngorms Connect and the National Trust for Scotland at Mar Lodge. This has happened because they have stopped muirburn, brought deer numbers down and, in some places, planted native woodland. Those changes in land-management are entirely attributable to the landowners concerned and would have happened whether or not the CNPA had ever been created.
- On the other hand, however, the intensification of grouse moor management has increased elsewhere in the National Park. Areas of moorland that were once left to deer have had new access tracks constructed, have been covered with grouse butts and medicated trays of grit, and are now burned. The CNPA completely failed to mention this in its news release or say how far it has influenced this process. With the departure of the Invercauld Estate from the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership ([see here](#)), the evidence suggests “not a lot”.

Some facts and figures might enable us to establish the truth more accurately, but until then an informed guess is that to date the adverse impacts on the natural environment resulting from the intensification of grouse moor management may well outweigh the positive impacts that re-wilding has had in the National Park.

Whatever the overall picture, the CNPA should be ashamed that so much of the National Park is still being trashed by grouse moor owners and needs to stop burying its head in the heather.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. grouse moors
4. hill tracks
5. landed estates
6. muirburn

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Author

nickkempe

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