

COP 26, the Royal Family and the failures of the Cairngorms National Park

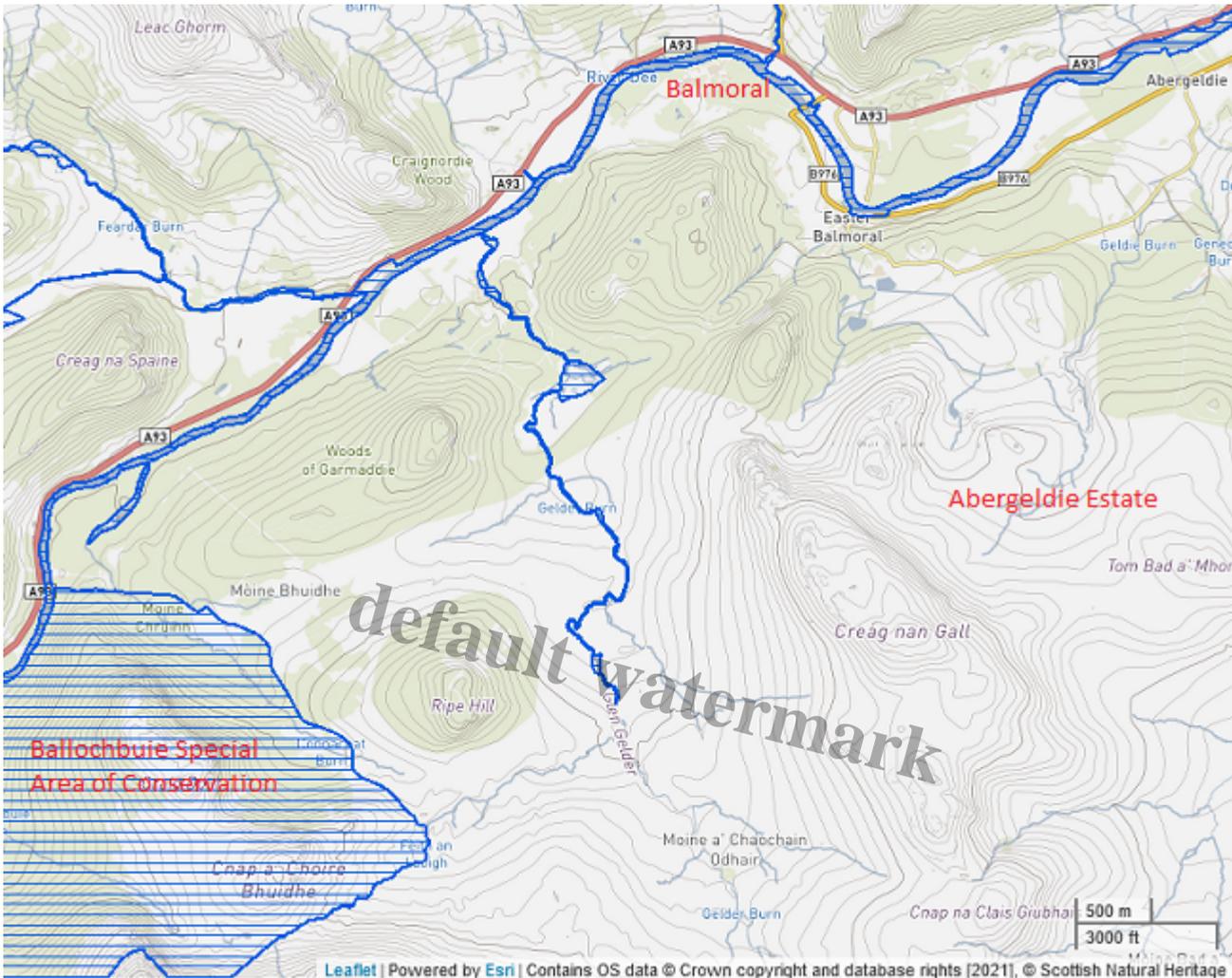
Description



The destructive impact of royal land mis-management at Balmoral is best viewed from the air. Muirburn for grouse shooting south of Ripe Hill – the fence around this is visible – and along the Gelder Burn. The Ballochbuie Caledonian pine forest remnant is visible along the left of the google satellite image.

Royal hypocrisy

“It is a source of great pride to me that the leading role my husband played in encouraging people to protect our fragile planet, lives on through the work of our eldest son Charles and his eldest son William. I could not be more proud of them.” (Queen’s Speech to COP26 reception for world leaders [see here](#))



Muirburn and high deer numbers on Balmoral are what have prevented the Ballochbuie Caledonian Pine forest remnant from expanding and recovering its natural range. As a Special Area of Conservation it is supposedly one of Scotland’s most protected sites for nature but it’s been in unfavourable condition for years.

Most of site condition reports on Ballochbuie on NatureScot’s sitelink website are now well out of date ([see here](#)) but below is a summary of the current position by Bell Ingram ([see here](#)) on the South Deeside and Angus Glens Deer Management Group website:

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Ballochbuie SAC | 1881.73 | Blanket bog | Unfavourable |
| | | Bog woodland | Unfavourable |
| | | Caledonian forest | Recovering |
| | | Dry heaths | Unfavourable |
| | | Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) | Favourable |
| | | Plants in crevices on acid rocks | Favourable |
| | | Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks | Favourable |
| | | Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath | Unfavourable |

Extract from Bell Ingram report. This conflicts with the NatureScot statement on sitelink that the blanket bog at Ballochbuie â?? above the deer fence â?? was found to be in favourable condition in June 2017. At the same time NatureScot listed burning and game management as â??negative pressuresâ?• on the peatbog! It is now accepted by the Scottish Government that any burning on peat which is over 50cm in depth is very damaging.

While otters and â??plants in crevicesâ?•, which are protected from grazing and burning, may be in favourable condition, the woodland and bog habitats are not. They are the key to absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and restoration of the natural environment â?? the two key issues which COP 26 needed to address. The Royal Family has continued to manage most of their land at Balmoral for sporting purposes rather than â??our fragile planetâ?• and this has undermined the very purpose of the Cairngorms National Park, one of the few places in Scotland where conservation is supposed to come first. The Royal Familyâ??s management of their land is one of the reasons the capercaillie is effectively extinct on Deeside. It is also why so much of the rest of the Cairngorms National Park is in such a poor state: where royals lead, lackeys follow.

Where is the royal leadership in the Cairngorms?

â??It is the hope of many that the legacy of this summit â?? written in history books yet to be printed â?? will describe you as the leaders who did not pass up the opportunity; and that you answered the call of those future generations. That you left this conference as a community of nations with a determination, a desire, and a plan, to address the impact of climate change; and to recognise that the time for words has now moved to the time for action.â?• (Queenâ??s speech to COP).



Destruction caused by muirburn on Prince Charles's estate of Delnadamph managed for grouse shooting October 2020 ([see here](#))

“Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us just how devastating a global cross border threat can be. Climate change and biodiversity loss are no different. In fact, they pose an even greater existential threat to the extent that we have to put ourselves on what might be called a war like footing.” (Prince Charles's address to COP summit 1st November [see here](#))

The Royal Family have been very happy to lecture others on leadership and tell people in other parts of the world what they should be doing, but they have carried on managing their land regardless. At the same time they have failed to speak out about the destructive ways that neighbouring sporting estates have been managing their land.

Yesterday, prior to their conference in Perth this weekend, Revive, the coalition for grouse moor reform, issued a short video on how landowners were raising two fingers to COP:

(Click on Watch on You Tube to view there is excellent coverage on Raptor Persecution UK ([see here](#))). The fires were apparently on the Edinglassie and Allargue estates. These are located just

across the River Don from Prince Charles's estate at Delnadamph.



Cairngorms National Park Estate map



Muirburn on the Allargue estate, above woodland plantations, viewed from Delnadamp across the Don. If the sheep were removed, there would be no need for these fenced plantations because the Delnadamp and these estates have effectively culled ALL the deer in the area in favour of grouse. Photo October 2020.

If you look on google earth, the muirburn on the Abergeldie Estate, which forms an enclave within the Balmoral Estate and is now up for sale for Â£23m ([see here](#)) is even worse. Where is the appeal from the Royal Family that this should stop and the land should now be bought for conservation purposes?

And then there is the Caenlochan Special Area of Conservation, a small part of which lies within the Balmoral Estate, which as Dave Morris has highlighted [Balmoral and the recommendations of the Deer Working Group](#) is probably the worst example of the failure to tackle the deer issue in the whole of Scotland. Where has the royal lead been these last 20 years?

The Royal Family have actually been actively influencing land-management on Deeside for some time but unfortunately its not been in the cause of conservation. Prince Charles has close links with Salvesen family, who donated Â£4m to the National Trust for Scotland through the Easter Trust to purchase the Mar Lodge Estate, but on condition that sporting use should continue. That in a nutshell is why natural regeneration and the recovery on the Mar Lodge Estate is ten years behind Glen Feshie.

It's taken a massive effort by staff working on the estate to get agreement from the land-owner dominated NTS that muirburn should stop ([see here](#)) and that deer numbers on the "regeneration" part of the estate should be reduced. During this period, I have heard that Prince Charles has met with NTS bosses and expressed the view that these positive changes are incompatible with continued "sporting use" on the estate. If that is wrong, perhaps Prince Charles should go public about what he has actually discussed with NTS.

Prince Charles is unfortunately locked into the traditional culture of sporting estates. He should go and take a look at Glen Feshie, where deer stalking and walked up grouse shooting continue but in a far more "sporting" manner than the sitting deer ducks and driven grouse on Balmoral.

The Royal Family and the Cairngorms National Park

Five years ago I blogged about the damaging land management practices of the Royal Family at Balmoral and the opportunity that the then new National Park Partnership Plan, out for consultation, offered for change ([see here](#)). Nothing has changed since then. Moreover, if you want to understand why the targets for net zero, woodland restoration and peatland restoration in the latest National Park Partnership Plan which I blogged about yesterday ([see here](#)) are so weak, you need look no further than Balmoral.

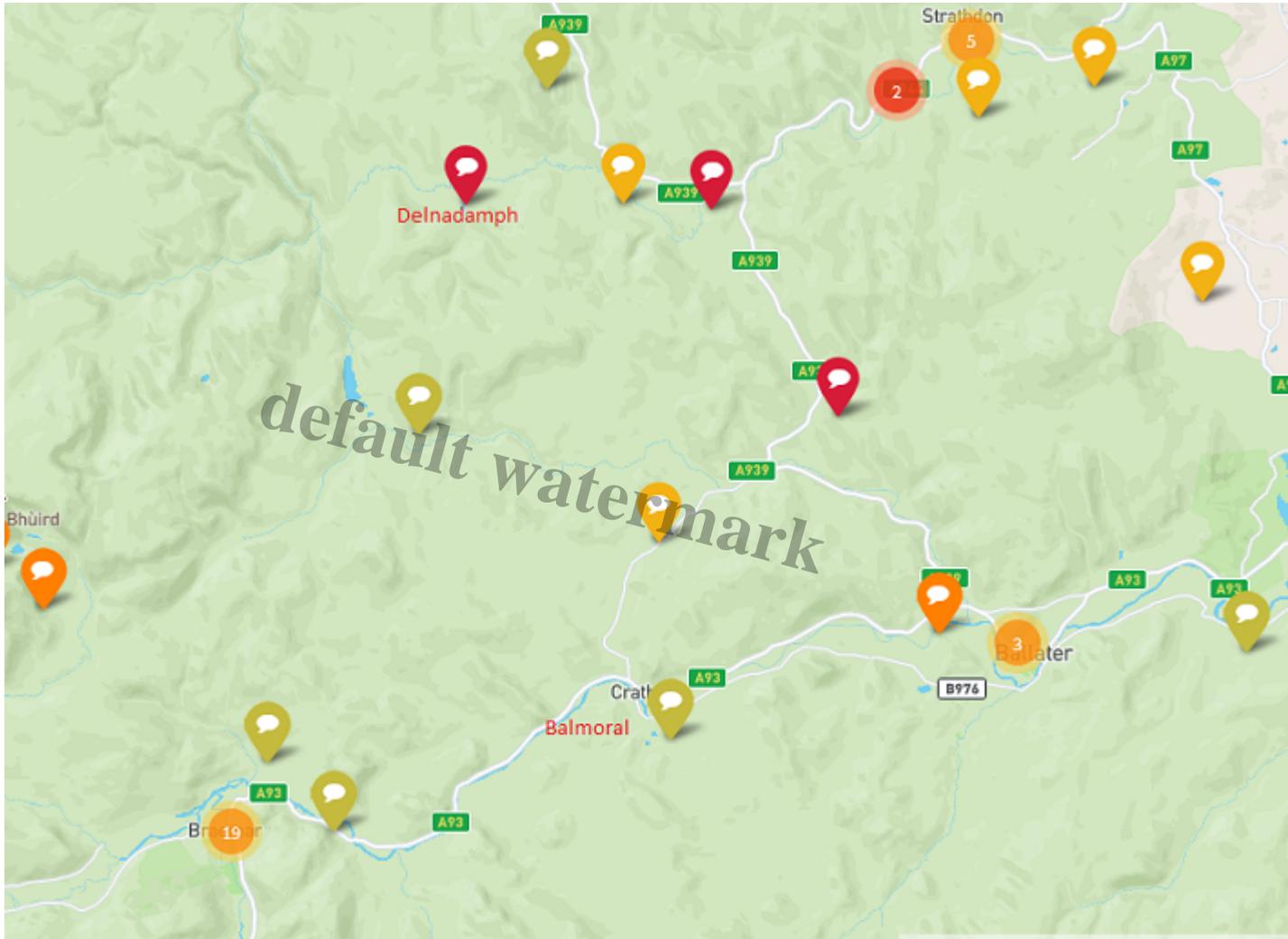
As an illustration of the power of the Royal Family and other large landowners, Objective A7 of the NPPP is that "Carbon and biodiversity plans are in place for farms across the National Park by 2028". And so there should be, give the climate and nature emergencies, but there is NO such objective for the large landowners who own the sporting estates! Nor is there any commitment to improve financial transparency about the amount of public subsidy that continues to be directed towards estates.

The creation of the Cairngorms National Park in 2003 has done nothing to change the way the Royal Family have managed their land at Balmoral or Prince Charles' estate at Delnadamph. Rather it's the opposite. It's been the Royal Family who have been main determinant of what the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is able to do. This explains why all the major conservation successes in the National Park (Cairngorms Connect, Mar Lodge etc) are not due to the CNPA but are down to conservation owners who are prepared to ignore or challenge the way sporting estates are being managed.

What can be done?

The speeches by the Queen and Prince Charles to COP, however, do present an opportunity to hold the Royal Family to account for what they are doing in the Cairngorms National Park. It's wonderful how more people are now speaking out about how the Royal Family are mismanaging their vast landholdings not just in Scotland but elsewhere ([see here](#)). If the Royal Family continue to fail to act on their own advice they will lose all credibility. And that in turn could create a constitutional crisis. Why would Scotland want a king who fails to practice what he preaches in public and fails to show a lead on his own land?

The CNPA's consultation on their new National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) presents an opportunity to register publicly an objection to how the Royal Family are managing their land in the Cairngorms. There is an online interactive map ([see here](#)) for people with an interest in the Cairngorms to add comments to particular places or areas:



Snapshot of part of the online map 12th November

Estate boundaries are not shown on the map and nor is the name Delnadamph so I have added this to the map above below the comment I submitted. I suggest that if you don't know the estate boundaries for Balmoral you pin your comment above the castle (just above where I have added Balmoral to the snapshot). Here the comments I have made:

Balmoral

Are you commenting on a specific location in the National Park (eg Aviemore) or a broader area (eg a local authority)?

Broader area

Please briefly describe the location you are commenting on.

Balmoral Estate

Which of the following does your comment relate to? (select all that apply)

Land management / farming

Climate change

Conserving and enhancing nature

What do you want to tell us about this particular topic?

After their pronouncements at COP 26, the Royal Family now need to put their words into action at Balmoral and pledge to stop all muirburn with immediate effect and reduce deer numbers to 2-3 per square kilometre to enable the Ballochbuie and Caenlochan Special Areas of Conservation and other land on the estate to absorb more carbon from the atmosphere and for nature to recover. Should they fail to do this voluntarily, the Cairngorms National Park Authority should use their powers to force them to do so.

Who should take responsibility for acting on your comment? (select all that apply)

The Royal Family

Why do you say that?

The CNPA has so far never shown any real determination to address these issues.

Delnadamph

Please briefly describe the location you are commenting on.

Prince Charles' Estate at Delnadamph

Which of the following does your comment relate to? (select all that apply)

Conserving and enhancing nature

Climate change

Land management / farming

Rural employment and skills

What do you want to tell us about this particular topic?

Prince Charles' estate at Delnadamph is in a highly degraded state due to it being managed for grouse shooting (see <http://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2020/11/07/prince-charles-and-conservation-in-the-cairngorms-national-park/>) with significant damage to the natural environment caused by muirburn, hill tracks, construction of grouse butts etc. After all Prince Charles public declarations about putting the natural environment first it is time he practised what he preached on his own land and set an example for other landowners to follow, for example by ending muirburn and the trapping of wildlife and calling for other landowners to do the same .

Why do you say that?

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has so far completely failed to address the failure of the Royal Family to manage their land according with the National Park's statutory conservation objectives

As an alternative to adding your own comment, you can agree with comments that have already been submitted. There are quite a few critical comments about damaging land-management practices across the National Park which are worth looking at and supporting and I would also encourage people to add comments about issues in the areas they know.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. climate change
2. CNPA
3. conservation
4. Deer

5. grouse moors

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