

Plastic tree shelters, fences and deer – Scotland's forestry lunacy

Description



Nibbled tree with buds surviving just below the tube rim, lower Glen Kinglas, 21st December

It was Drennan Watson, long-time conservation activist in the Cairngorms, who first pointed out to me that when saplings emerge from tree shelters they are the perfect height for deer to nibble. But until yesterday I didn't have any photos to demonstrate what happens.

The tree tubes were a few kilometres beyond the neglected western boundary of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park in the lower part of Glen Kinglas:



The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park boundary runs across Glen Kinglass at Butterbridge where it is neglecting its statutory duty to promote the cultural heritage

The immediate context is important. We had traversed the southern watershed of Glen Kinglas, from Beinn an Lochain to Stob an Eas, in the cloud and the descended towards the A813/A83 junction above Cairndow to get back across the river. After spotting a track in an area of clear felled plantation, we climbed over a newish forest fence (still in good condition) and almost immediately noticed that there were deer droppings everywhere. The deer, so it appeared, had been fenced in rather than fenced out.

As is all too usual, rather than employing people to control the deer, the decision had then been taken to use plastic tree tubes. An inner fence of plastic round each tree. In this case, trees had been planted alongside a watercourse, in a half-hearted attempt to mitigate the devastation of the clear fell:



Looking back across Glen Kinglass from the old military road at the clear fell and the planted plastic. The track we descended is just visible to the right and to the right again another burn with native woodland visible.

Given the droppings we had seen on our approach, we were hardly surprised to find that most of the saplings that had grown above the height of the shelters had been nibbled:



Not just nibbled, chewed!

Rather than control deer numbers, the Scottish Forestry grant system forks out extraordinary amounts of public money on ineffective deer fencing and plastic tree tubes that bring up carbon from beneath the earth's surface and then pollute the natural environment. The watercourse in the photo drains into the River Kinglass and thence to Loch Fyne, renowned for its seafoods. Just how long will it be until plastic particles from these tree tubes enter the human food chain?



The lower part of the plastic planting beneath the remnants of native woodland. This woodland would regenerate naturally without planting if only deer numbers were reduced.

While sections of the forestry industry have vested interests in fencing and tree tubes, that is far less the case with landowners. While some don't care that much about the land, most of those that do still follow the money. So if the Forestry Grants system is designed to promote fences and tree tubes, that's what happens, however ineffective and bad for the environment. Only the most extraordinarily principled landowners refuse the money.

If, however, grants were designed to reward those who controlled grazing, most forestry landowners would start to manage the land very differently. Low deer numbers would enable woodland to start to regenerate naturally and planted trees to survive without protection. This would have wider benefits: increased biodiversity; reduced pollution; more attractive landscapes; barriers to access removed; and increased local employment. Instead of bringing in temporary contractors to put up a fence or erect plastic tubes, the best way to monitor and control deer numbers would be to employ people locally to do so.

The nibbled trees we spotted could just as well have been inside the National Park boundary, for all the action our National Park Authorities have taken to date to stop their use. But change could be afoot with the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)'s proposal that its preferred means for woodland expansion should be by natural regeneration ([see here](#)). This presents an opportunity for the CNPA to set an example to the rest of Scotland and ditch the fences and the plastic tubes in the Cairngorms.

But to be successful its Board will need to persuade Scottish Forestry to co-operate and redesign the current forestry grants system.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. CNPA
2. fencing
3. forestry
4. landscape
5. LLTNPA
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Author

nickkempe

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