

The dark side of the Cairngorms – King Charles’ countryside hero

Description

I was pleased to be quoted in an article in the National on Saturday ([see here](#)) about how the Scottish Parliament still drafts legislation designed to exclude the Royal Family and Crown Estate. Twenty 20 years ago outdoor recreational interests successfully fought to close a loophole which would have meant access rights did not apply to the Balmoral estate. The King still appears to have more influence over how the state operates than MSPs.

Two further stories emerged last week which raise questions about how King Charles may exert his influence in other, darker, ways. Both featured Peter Fraser, currently a Director of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, who the then Prince Charles described in 2013 as one of his “countryside heroes”:

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For almost 120 years, Country Life has been the voice of rural Britain. So when the Prince of Wales, who is guest-editing the magazine's November 13 issue to coincide with his 65th birthday, gave us a handwritten list of his rural heroes – people working tirelessly to preserve traditional ways of life – we knew we had the makings of a landmark feature. The men and women the Prince has nominated in this article are those whose efforts are not merely helping to preserve and secure the future of the countryside, but the whole nation.

The ghillie

Peter Fraser, 66



(GETTY)

Formerly head stalker for the Farquharson family at Invercauld, Aberdeenshire, now a ghillie at Birkhall for the Prince of Wales

Peter Fraser on red deer on the BBC

On 1st May Farming Today ([see here](#)) had a feature (11 mins) on how the number of red deer in the Scottish Highlands have doubled in the last 50 years, which it billed as “good news for wildlife-watchers” but also “damaging woodlands and other fragile habitats”.

The programme started in Glen Coe, which is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland,

and where counts last year found a staggering 17 deer per square kilometre. It was never explained why NTS, which have reduced deer to 2 per square km on the conservation part of Mar Lodge Estate, have taken so long to act in Glen Coe. The explanation probably lies with neighbouring landowners and landowners, a number of whom also featured on the programme claiming that any culls would threaten jobs, accommodation and rural communities. Those sporting estate interests made a number of ridiculous arguments, including that children from gamekeepers' families had filled the local school (Glencoe Primary is down in Ballachulish). None addressed the basic flaw in this argument, which is that the doubling of deer numbers has NOT resulted in any more stalking jobs.

The programme then moved over to Deeside, where gamekeepers had claimed over ten years ago that NTS's plans to reduce deer numbers at Mar Lodge would threaten jobs. Unfortunately the interesting interview with the manager, David Frew, about deer numbers on the estate and NTS' relationship with their neighbours, did not state how many staff are now employed compared to when it was run for sporting purposes.

Peter Fraser, who was described as deputy-chairman of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and resident at Crathie (by Balmoral) was then interviewed (at 9 mins 25). Mr Fraser made two extraordinary claims about deer numbers in the area.

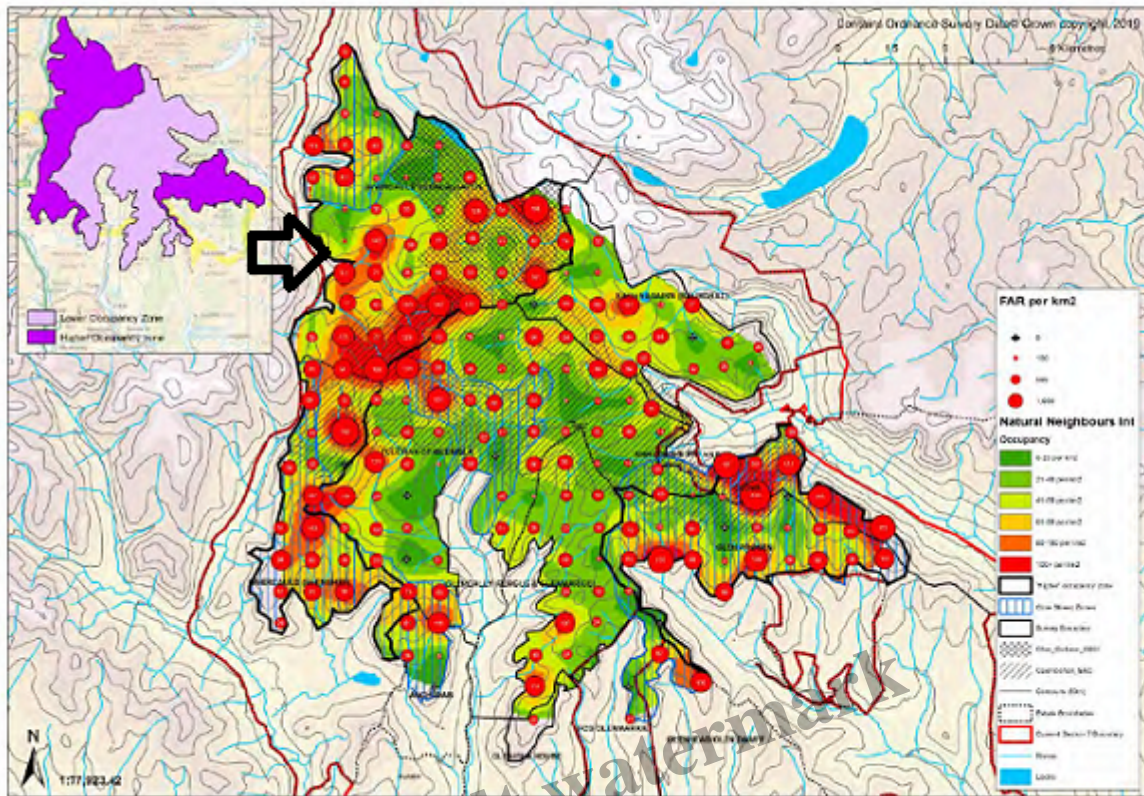
The first was that "there has been a big reduction in deer numbers, there is no question about that" and that "you can see this wherever you go". To provide evidence for this assertion he claimed that previously when driving up Glen Shee just above Braemar you could see "perhaps 500-600 stags" and now there are "only a 100 or so". While spotting deer and counting them is a complicated matter, partly because of how they move around, data obtained from NatureScot about on the Caenlochan Section 7 (deer control) Agreement shows Mr Fraser's claims are complete nonsense:

Annex D - Cull Allocation - Zonal and Property Contribution

Property	Planar Area (Ha)	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Density (Deer/Km ²)
Properties within the Section 7 Agreement Area						
ALRICK	1545	315	1	0	316	20.5
AUCHAVAN	810	152	545	130	827	102.1
BACHNAGAIRN (BALMORAL)	3401	327	444	141	912	26.8
CLOVA (SOUTH)	1230	327	364	124	815	66.3
FCS GLENDOLL	702	18	54	17	89	12.7
GLEN PROSEN	5689	2	0	0	2	0.0
GLENCALLY (FERGUS & GLENMARKIE)	2075	104	29	10	143	6.9
GLENHEAD/GLEN DAMFF	2827	24	218	62	304	10.8
GLENISLA HOUSE	1544	176	287	71	534	34.6
INVERCAULD (GLENSHEE)	4062	629	239	70	938	23.1
INVERCAULD GLENCALLATER	6973	980	654	182	1816	26.0
SNH CORRIE FEE NNR	166	16	0	0	16	9.6
TULCHAN OF GLENISLA	4926	168	380	116	664	13.5
Total	35950	3238	3215	923	7376	20.5

This data is from 2018-19. Response to Freedom of Information request

That high density (the Cairngorms National Park Authority has set a target of 6 – 8 deer per square kilometre) was despite the large numbers of sheep in Glen Shee (which Mr Fraser failed to mention and which compete with deer for food). This map from the Strathcauld report on the functioning of the Section 7 Agreement ([see here](#)) illustrates the very high number of grazing animals on Invercauld:



Map 12 The deer/sheep faecal accumulation rate per km² per day over the period June-October 2018, along with a 'density surface' interpolated using ArcMap. The section of the Invercauld Estate within the deer control area is marked by the black arrow with the black line showing the estate boundary

Mr Fraser's claim on the programme that the number of stags being culled at Invercauld was down from 100 to 50 a year, with the implication that this was due to a reduction in deer numbers, is also complete nonsense:

FINAL CULL 2019/20		Estate Proposal for Hind Cull	Hind Cull Allocation using model, and taking into account Local Factors and Current Intelligence Oct 2019	Season Total			Stags	% of Hind Target culled for Zone
Group Member	CULL AS AT 15th Feb 2020							
	Hinds			Difference between Actual vs Target	Calves			
ZONE 1	GlenShee	150	88	103	15	25	53	119
	Tulchan	150	175	220	45	34	62	
	Ainick/Porter	10	15	0	-15	0	45	
	Auchavan	24	55	75	18	25	19	
		334	333	396	63	84	179	
ZONE 2	Glen Cally & Fergus	100	112	72	-40	21	41	62
	Glen Isla House	40	56	32	-24	9	26	
			168	104	-64	30	67	
ZONE 3	Scottish Water, Glenhead							98
	Glen Prosen							
	Balnaboth	50	60	75	15	49	56	
	South Clova	40	100	116	16	21	62	
	SNH Corrie Fee	20	25	3	-22	2	19	
	(NOT S7 Members:)							
	Lednathie & Balintore	25	27	19	-8	9	21	
	Airlie West	55	50	44	-8	18	15	
	190	262	257	-5	99	173		
ZONE 4	Balmoral/Bachnagairn	90	80	91	11	28	56	101
	Invercauld, Glen Callater	70	80	71	-9	18	76	
		160	160	162	2	46	112	
FES	FES GlenDoll	45	45	23	-22	12	14	51
Members out	SW Lintrathen	20	20	35	15	0	0	118
	Pearsie			0	6	0	0	
	Auldallan			2	2	0	1	
	Tullymurchie			0	0	0	0	
	Drumdearg			1	1	0	3	
	Craig Head Forest			0	0	0	0	
	Harra	20	20	9	-11	6	44	
	SUB TOTAL	40	40	47		6		
	Total		1008	989	-19	277	593	
FES	Glenisla/GlenMarkie			9		5	37	
	GlenProsen			7		4	6	

TOTAL WITHIN S7 AREA 879
TOTAL OUTWITH S7 AREA 110
OVERALL TOTAL 989

Part of response to FOI request from NatureScot on deer numbers at Caenlochan

In 2019-20 129 stags were culled within the two parts of the Invercauld estate that lie within the area covered by the Caenlochan Section 7 Agreement. These figures do not include the other three parts of the Invercauld Estate, including the land to the west of Glen Shee. There are similar figures for other years, for example in 2018-19 Invercauld culled 74 stags in Glen Callater and 60 on the eastern side of Glen Shee.



Looking out from the fence around the Ballochbuie Pinewood – if deer numbers were as low as Mar Lodge this moorland would now be covered with pine saplings. October 2020.

The truth is that rather than there being a reduction in the number of stags being culled, not nearly enough are being shot. Mr Fraser should know this, living as he does in the shadow of Balmoral, where the fragment of the Caledonian pine forest at Ballochbuie has had to be fenced by the Royal Family to protect it against the depredations of red deer. But maybe he only ever looks at muirburnt Abergeldie (see below)?

Mr Fraser and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association's attacks on Chris Packham

On 4th May Raptor Persecution UK published the witness statement ([see here](#)) that Chris Packham has submitted to the courts as part of a defamation case against three individuals. For any reader who is not aware, Mr Packham has been subject to all sorts of accusations from sporting interests and some vicious harassment, including dead animals being left at his home and an arson attack in October 2021 I action.

140. On 14 March 2021 an article was published in *The Sunday Times* written by Mark Macaskill, with the headline, "Packham did not forge death threat, say police" [CP1/212-215]. There was a large photograph of me accompanying that article. It was a photograph of me holding a dead badger which had been left outside my gate. It is widely known that I love badgers. As I have mentioned above, as part of the campaign of harassment and intimidation, someone had left a dead badger hung on my gate.

he Scottish Gamekeeper's

141. The article went on to say that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) had, "lodged a complaint with Hampshire Constabulary last month that questioned the authenticity" of a note containing a death threat against me. Apparently, the SGA had commissioned two "graphologists" to compare the letter with examples of my handwriting. (I wasn't sure which death threat this referred to, but I now know that it was the one I've mentioned above, which I made public).

142. The SGA have a long standing and well documented history of hostility directed at me, particularly on social media. It appears that someone connected to the SGA thought that they had spotted a similarity between my handwriting and the handwriting on the death threat note.

143. I read in the Sunday Times article that they (the newspaper) had instructed their own expert and they had (correctly) concluded that I did not write the death threat letter. I

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The section of the statement about

the SGA continues for a couple of pages – well worth reading! – and details what lengths they were prepared to go to concoct evidence that Mr Packham had forged the death threats against himself.

Perhaps Mr Fraser, who has according to Companies House has been a Director of SGA since 1st November 2012 ([see here](#)) and is currently its deputy chair, could explain his involvement in this?

Mr Fraser's ongoing royal connections

“I first met the Prince in the late Eighties, when he was invited to shoot grouse on Invercauld. Later, he employed me on the Glen Callater and Baddock beats after he took them over. He has great respect for those who work in the countryside, as well as Mother Nature. He hates to see vehicle tracks on the hill, for example. When he’s at Birkhall, it’s a working holiday for the Prince but if he gets an hour or two to himself in the evenings, he might go down to the river and have a cast.”

Extract from 2012 Telegraph article

When Mr Fraser’s address was given as Crathie on Farming Today, my ears pricked up it is so close to Balmoral. Information lodged at Companies House suggests that Mr Fraser resides at Catanellan, Crathie, Ballater, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, AB35 5TJ.



Extract from Abergeldie sales brochure, an estate sandwiched between Balmoral and Birkhall

(Prince Charles' residence).

Catanellan is not on land owned by King Charles but is on the Abergeldie Estate which as put up for sale in 2021 and where the Royal Family leases the shooting rights ([see here](#)). This appears more than a coincidence. Whether this was because the Royal Family had no empty properties or whether they feared that allowing someone like Mr Fraser to live at Balmoral might risk damaging their reputation, what better than to ask the neighbouring estate to help out? Abergeldie's sales brochure showed it had lots of empty properties.

The wider question here is whether King Charles has not just supported individual gamekeepers but may be providing other support to the Scottish Gamekeepers Association whose activities do not come cheap. Someone, for example, paid for those reports from the alleged handwriting experts in the Chris Packham case. Unfortunately, the SGA's most recent (unaudited) accounts ([see here](#)) don't show income and expenditure (not that they would show donations from the King), only that they employed 4 people in 2021 and at the end of the year had net assets of £203,421

King Charles needs to reform how he manages the royal estates

Part of explanation of why King Charles has such a poor record of managing his own land in Scotland from an environmental perspective ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)), is that he has far too much respect for those who work in the countryside and spout nonsense like Mr Fraser, whether this is about the numbers of red deer or Chris Packham forging death threats to himself.

It appears, however, that King Charles is not just poorly informed but is actively supporting people that are working to undermine conservation interests. On Farming Today, for example, Peter Fraser criticised NTS's plans to reduce deer numbers at Glen Coe, claiming it would not be possible to do this without affecting jobs locally, when King Charles is patron of that organisation. While ostensibly supporting conservation organisations on the one hand, King Charles appears to be supporting people who are working to undermine them on the other.

King Charles, now he has been crowned, has a duty to start distancing himself from the SGA and listening to people who really do understand the countryside and have the public interest, rather than Scotland's archaic sporting estate system, at heart. What better way to admit the error of his ways and start afresh than by asking Chris Packham, along with other conservation experts, up to Balmoral and Delnadamph to have a discussion on what he needs to change? The answer is quite simple for someone as rich as King Charles, bring deer numbers at Balmoral down to two per square kilometre, as they have done on the conservation part of Mar Lodge and following the example of Anders Povlsen at Glen Feshie, and stop burning the moors and Delnadamph and Abergeldie.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation

3. Deer
4. landed estates
5. NTS
6. wildlife persecution

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