

Conservation and the welfare of the public: the Wallabies and Fallow Deer on the Loch Lomond islands

Description

In December the Planning Committee of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) unanimously approved the planning application by Mr and Mrs Young to build a luxury holiday lodge on Inchconnachan ([see here](#) for committee report).

Initially the application had included a proposal, based on advice from NatureScot, to remove the wallabies from the island because of the damage they were alleged to be causing to oak woodland on the island. After the public outcry ([see here](#)) all basically went quiet from April 2022 to September 2023 when various documents assessing the impact of the development on the natural habitats of the island and proposals for restoring these appeared on the planning portal ([see here](#)). These documents are notable for saying almost nothing about the wallabies or fallow deer. The Site Specific Habitat Restoration plan, for example, does not mention the wallabies and makes only one reference to deer despite talking of the need to reduce grazing pressure. How this might be done is not explained.

The Report to the Planning Committee makes one mention of wallabies noting a “concern that any proposal to cull/remove the Wallabies would lessen the visitor experience and the public should be consulted on any proposed cull/removal, as it is not in the public interest”. This was recorded under a heading “non-material considerations”, i.e objections that are said not to count under planning law. Nothing more was said. As a result it is now completely unclear whether Mr and Mrs Young’s plans to build a luxury holiday lodge on the island include removal of the wallabies and fallow deer or not.

Wildlife and human welfare in our National Parks

The objectives of Scotland’s National Parks reflect a common position that our land should be organised for the long-term welfare of humanity. Thus most of us can accept the emphasis of the LLTNPA places on bringing Climate Change under control as the long term consequences of not doing anything could be catastrophic. However what is unacceptable is the almost complete absence of any strategy in their National Park Partnership Plan ([see here](#)) to deal with the short and medium term pressures caused by visitors and the absence of any actions to promote their welfare. This post looks at the developments on the islands of Inchconnachan and Inchmoan on Loch Lomond and the failure to take into account human values.

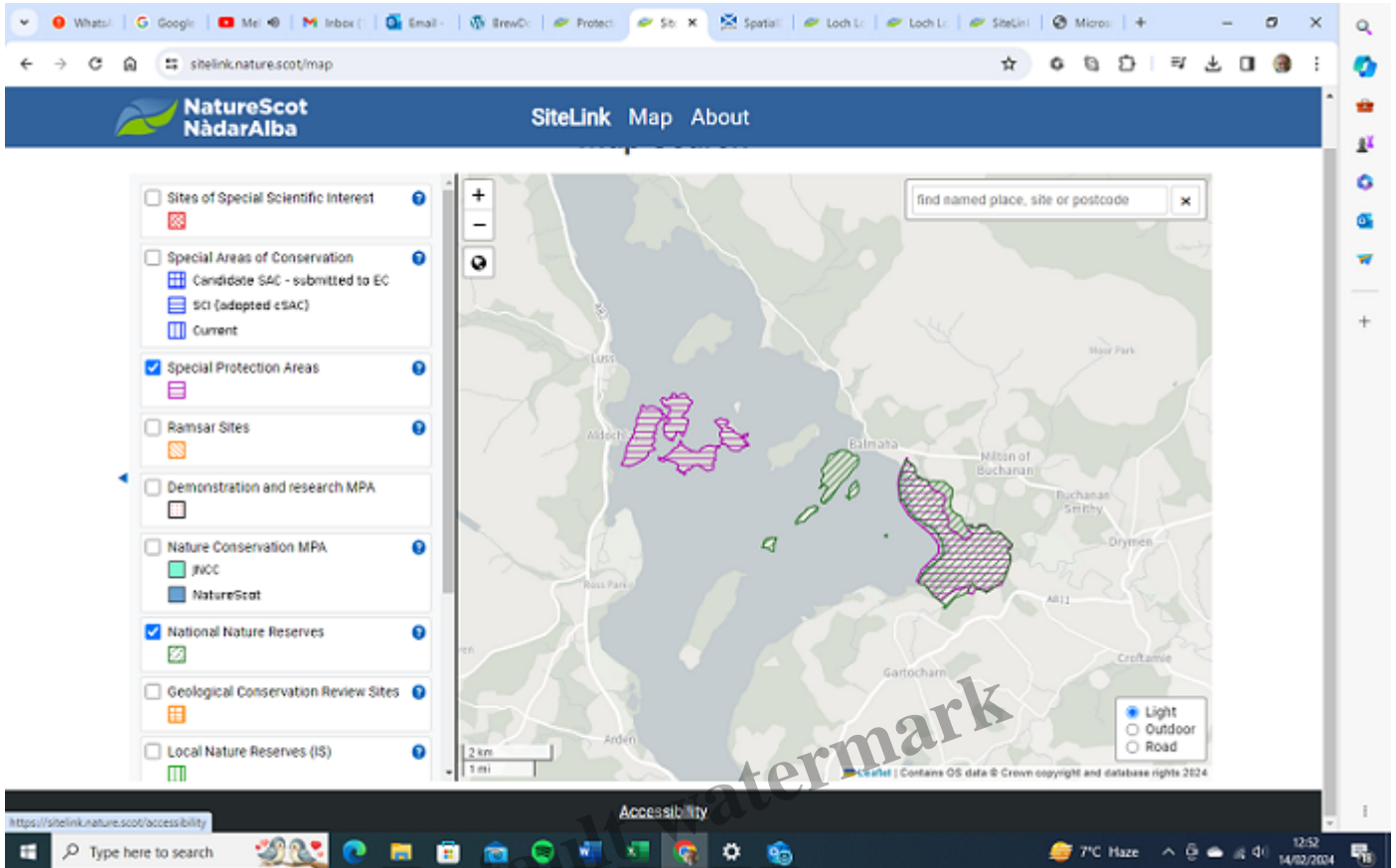
The islands of Loch Lomond are very special. Some of us would argue that scenically they are incomparable; jewels in the most glorious setting imaginable.



Winter kayakers on the beach on Inchcailloch looking south to Torrich and Creinch

They boast golden sand beaches, oak woodlands, exotic birds (Ospreys in summer and Geese in winter) and exotic animals (Fallow Deer and Wallabies). Not surprisingly, given the fact that 50% of Scotland's populations (2.8m) people live within an hours drive, they also have literally thousands of visitors. Many camp overnight with standards that range from exemplary to atrocious.

The islands are part of the Lomond National Nature Reserve (NNR) and some are designated as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC) for their flora and fauna, Special Protection Areas (SPA) for their birds) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The map below shows the NNR and SPA areas.



The overlapping designations are confusing. The following table shows the complexity:

Site	SSI	SAC	SPA	NNA
<u>Inchconnachan</u>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Inchmoan	Yes	No	Yes	No
Inchcailloch	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Endrick Mouth	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

The designation of Inchconnachan and Inchmoan as part of the SPA was apparently to protect the Capercaillie. These, sadly, have now completely disappeared. Failure by the LLTNPA to deal with bad camping and roaming dogs has been put forward as reasons for their demise but the area was possibly too small.

The SAC designation of Inchconnachan is to protect the acidic oak woodland, which is part of the rapidly diminishing temperate rainforest. Action has already been taken by removing mature beech trees on an adjacent island, Inchtavannach ([see here](#)). These are regarded as invasive and were restricting the natural regeneration of the oak.

Many of us might regard spending money on removing mature beech (and failing to clear up the mess) as possibly not in the public interest. However it is the suggestion that the Wallabies and Fallow Deer be culled for the same reason that has aroused most comment. There are clearly costs if many people believe it to be wrong.

The LLTNPA should be promoting active travel options that are world class. Kayak trips around the islands potentially fall into that category. Meeting a Wallaby emerging from the undergrowth, in my experience, increases the value of the trip significantly.



An emerging Wallaby on Inchconnachan

How can we balance that unique experience against the value of the possible emergence of a new oak tree? The study I undertook with a colleague on **Valuing the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park** ([see here](#)) in 2011 found the public gave little value to the conservation of these woodlands, only a general reference to rarity.

Deer are the property and responsibility of land owners. These come together in Deer Management Groups that produce plans that are supposed to conform with the Deer guidance and include target densities. The LLTNPA have a central role in producing a plan for the Loch Lomond Islands; the Loch Lomond Deer Management Plan ([see here](#)). Apparently, without reference to the wider community, Wallabies have been included along with the deer because *“they are both grazers and browsers and therefore can cause serious impacts to the flora of Inchconnachan”*. The 2019 survey found only 7 Wallabies but it still advocated further killing to help the woodland! The drone survey in 2023 found between 10 and 12.

Estimates of deer numbers vary hugely. The Deer Management Plan estimated a total of 93 fallow deer and a density of 19 per ha in 2019 while the 2023 drone survey (now including Inchmurrin) increased that to 137. Population models predicted 37 and the stalker was adamant the population was around 70. The larger numbers came as a considerable surprise to me. In around 100 trips I have seen deer on only three occasions; twice on Inchmoan and once on Torrinch.



Fallow Deer on Inchcailloch

I admit to excitement and pleasure from seeing deer. However unless the deer can be discouraged from swimming between the islands, if these population figures are correct, the fundamental choice would appear to be between the islands as a deer sanctuary with little natural regrowth of the

woodland, or regular culls. Like many, my preference is for preserving the deer. This appears to be the position of the owner of Inchcruin. This option should be considered.

The planning committee meeting on Inchconnachan gave no consideration to the deer, only the regeneration of the flora. It points to a glaring omission in the considerations of both the LLTNPA and Nature-Scot i.e. what people value from their experiences.

This post was engendered by a sense of anger at cutting down beautiful beech trees, at the threat to the Wallabies and at the potential killing of the fallow deer on the islands. (I am not arguing against deer numbers being reduced dramatically in other parts of the National Park). It followed my initial anger at the vacuous National Park Plan that almost completely ignored visitors to the Park. National Parks are for humanity and their wishes and values have to be at least considered and factored in.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. climate change
2. conservation
3. Deer
4. LLTNPA
5. NatureScot

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