

What place have plastic tree tubes in this environment?

Description



View over to Beinn Ghlas and Ben Lawers from Meall nan Tarmachan

Yesterday, like many others I took advantage of the break in weather, and headed for the hills. Along with two friends we traversed the Meall nan Tarmachan ridge above Loch Tay from the main car park in fantastic winter conditions, hard snow, almost no wind and clear skies.



Returning along the track on the south side of the hill we pass through a deer fence (with an electric fence running alongside it) on the boundary of the National Nature Reserve (NNR). The main part of the Ben Lawers NNR, famous for its Arctic-Alpine plants, was created in 1964 but in 2005 extended to include all the land the National Trust owns on the eastern and southern slopes of Meall nan Tarmachan.



Plastic tree tubes on NNR above Loch Tay.

Much of this large enclosure on Meall nan Tarmachan has been planted with native trees by NTS as part of its attempts to improve the ecological condition of the NNR. That was done more sensitively than many other such schemes (no mounding of soils etc). A little further along the track, however, we came across a number of trees more recently planted in plastic tree tubes. Why?

If these trees wouldn't grow here in the current conditions without a shelter, plastic or otherwise, then that is a strong indication they should never have been planted in the first place. It is one thing to claim that planting trees can benefit nature, quite another to create new artificial environments by cultivating soils, applying herbicides and pesticides or using plastic tree tubes.

The original purpose of NNRs was they should areas where natural processes predominated. That should have created a presumption in favour of natural regeneration against planting and use of commercial forestry practices. This purpose was then changed so that a second primary purpose of NNRs was as places for people to enjoy.



NNRs are full of contradictions, including saying they are for people and telling those people to keep

I am sure that I am not the only person who finds the use of plastic tree tubes an affront to my enjoyment. That is not just because they interfere with natural processes, it is also because they pollute. In this case water, carrying particles of plastic, drains down into Loch Tay, which is part of what is supposed to be one of Scotland's most highly protected river systems. While NTS has not planted that many trees in plastic tubes, one should have been more than enough.

The wider problem is that the Scottish Government is still not taking plastic pollution seriously. This last week it announced ([see here](#)) that it was banning the sale of wet wipes with plastic in them to the public from August 2027. The ban is UK wide ([see here](#)) and comes into effect in Wales in December 2026 and England and Northern Ireland in April 2027. Far from world beating, lagging the rest of the UK. The ban does not apply to businesses or the voluntary sector, including those that provide care, from nurseries and older people's homes, or to the NHS, despite the efforts of NHS front-line staff to reduce plastic (e.g [see here](#)).

If the Scottish Government finds it so hard to ban some plastic in wet wipes, what hope of it banning plastic tree shelters especially when large land-owning NGOs, like NTS, continue to use them? If wet wipes are a precedent, the Scottish Government is more likely to ban the public using plastic tree tubes in their own gardens, than they are to band businesses and the voluntary sector using them in the countryside.

Category

1. Other parts Scotland

Tags

1. forestry
2. landscape
3. NatureScot
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Author

nickkempe