

Killer fences – the carnage on the Pitmain & Glenbanchor estate.

## Description



Deer caught by a new fence on the Glenbanchor and Pitmain Estate April 2026. Approximate location NH 726 025 west north west of Loch Gynack, i.e on the Pitmain part of the estate. Photo Credit Shahjahan Ali.

Fit adult red deer normally jump over stock fences such as this with ease but accidents happen and become more likely over the winter months as they weaken through lack of food.

Part 3 of the recently passed Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 starts by setting out the aims and purposes of deer management. Two of these concern their welfare ([see here](#)):

– (iii) to ensure the effective and humane control of deer,

(v) to keep under review all matters relating to deer, including their welfare

Unfortunately the Act contained no new provisions to reduce the impact of fencing on deer or other wildlife, including capercaillie ([see here](#)). As well as the deaths and injuries they cause directly, fences

impact on the movements of mammals and the chicks of ground nesting birds. Some fences, as above, pose a hazard to be crossed or passed through but others present an impenetrable barrier. Such barriers divide territories, block "natural" movements through the landscape and, by excluding animals from certain areas, serve to concentrate their population elsewhere. In the case of red deer this has considerable environmental impacts.



Sheep caught in deer fence on the Pitmain and Glenbanchor Estate, near the former boundary between the two estates, 21 November 2025. Note the lack of fence markings, the nearby stock fence and beyond that, just visible in the middle distance, another stock fence.

Fencing has similar impacts on livestock. This sheep was quite possibly trying to reach lower ground in the snowy conditions and, like the deer in the top photo, is likely to have suffered a cruel death.

A research overview back in 2018 ([see here](#)), which described some of the impact of fences on wildlife, suggested that there could be as much as 10 miles of fence (of all types) for every mile of road in the world. Recently, the Ferret reported ([see here](#)) that between between 2018/19 and 2024/25 Scottish Forestry had subsidised 2,284 miles of fence in Scotland and the cost of such fencing between 2016 and 2025 was Â£48.8m.

In addition to Scottish Forestry funded deer fences are:

- the unsubsidised deer fences erected by commercial forestry interests;
- the deer fences erected by Forest and Land Scotland;
- the deer fences being erected in the name of nature conservation;
- the unsubsidised deer fences being erected by sporting estates landowners;
- the deer fences being erected to reduce car accidents;
- the deer fences erected by home owners to protect their gardens from deer.



Same sheep, 21st November 2025

The deer fences that have been erected on the Pitmain and Glenbanchor Estate over the last decade do not appear to have been funded by Scottish Forestry. They provide examples of deer fences erected for private forestry or sporting purposes and also, in the case of the enclosures in Glen Banchor, those erected in the name of nature conservation ([see here](#)).

Where deer fences are privately funded, they are not subject to the limited controls required under the Forestry Grants Scheme, such as marking to reduce the risks of black grouse and capercaillie flying into them. Whether privately or publicly funded, there is no requirement for landowners to assess the wider impact of deer fences on either wildlife or livestock.



Same sheep, 6th January 2026 – seven weeks later both horns had been snapped

Fewer mammals than birds probably die through collisions/entanglements with fences but, when they do in Scotland, their remains are less easily removed by predators and scavengers and the evidence tends to survive longer. Notwithstanding these differences the scale of the carnage receives very little attention in Scotland compared to other countries. Ron Summers, who was involved in the pioneering research into the impact of deer fences on capercaillie – up to one 1.8 capercaillie deaths per km per year – and I described some of the issues and how other countries control fencing in an article in British Wildlife ([see here](#)).



Remains of sheep April 2026. This deer fence is just over 11km from Glen Feshie, one of the last strongholds of the capercaillie.

In other parts of Europe the deaths and injuries caused to livestock and wildlife by fences is far less of an issue because fixed wire fencing, particularly in upland areas, is avoided. Walking the 650 km long GR5 through the French Alps in 2023 I saw not a single deer fence ([see here](#)) and it was the same last year walking through the Italian Alps ([see here](#)). This is because the deer population is controlled through hunting and with the help of wolves so forests and woodland regenerate naturally without any need for deer fencing. And in areas grazed by livestock, movements of sheep and cattle are controlled through mobile electric fences, which is hardly used in Scotland but has little impact on wildlife.

Where livestock fencing is used in more lowland areas in Europe, there is widespread awareness and concern about its impact. For example, in Norway the use of barbed wire is banned. More recently there has been concern in Germany about the impact of the fixed electric fencing now being used to keep out wolves: this prompted research that surprising shows such fencing is surprisingly permeable to most other mammals ([see here](#) - there are some good photos illustrating the conclusions).

## **Why is Scotland so far behind the rest of the Europe?**

In Scotland the use of fencing is for all extent and purposes unregulated. Scottish Forestry does not even insist that deer fences within the average 11km dispersal distance of a capercaillie lek are marked. Meanwhile all the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Capercaillie Emergency Plan commits to doing isto remove c156km of deer fencing within 1-5 km of a lek by 2030. This pathetic target is despite modelling by the Game and Wildlife Countryside Trust which suggests that if the killer deer fencing was removed, the risk of capercaillie becoming extinct in Scotland within 50 years would fall from 95% to just 3%.

The impact of deer and stock fencing on other wildlife and livestock in Scotland has been subject to almost no research and kept from public view. It appears no-one in authority has any interest in either monitoring the total length of this fencing or its impacts. As a consequence it is not possible to estimate the total wildlife carnage or the welfare costs to livestock in Scotland. If every photo of an animal or bird killed by a fence was published, however, most of the general public would likely be shocked. Instead of raising public awareness of the issues or promoting good practice from other parts of the world ([see here](#) for an example from the USA), our two National Park Authorities have ignored their statutory duty to protect wildlife.

The underlying problem is the power of landowners in Scotland. The owners of the Pitmain and Glenbanchor estate can more or less do what they want on their land without any regard to the impacts on wildlife or livestock. The exceptions to this animal free for all, the rules around the illegal persecution of raptors and the use of traps, have only come about as a result of decades of research and public pressure. So far they have been almost completely ineffective. After a goshawk nest was found destroyed near Loch Gynack on the Pitmain and Glenbanchor Estate in June 2024, a fascinating episode of Highland Cops showed how lawyers acting for the estate forbid staff to talk to the police ([see here](#)).

An estate that deliberately interferes with the process of investigating wildlife crime seem unlikely to care about the carnage being caused by its fencing.

## What needs to happen?

It is time that the Scottish Government and our public authorities recognised, like countries across much of the rest of Europe, that the use of fencing has major implications for both wildlife and livestock. The solutions are relatively simple:

- reducing red deer numbers to a level where fencing is no longer required to protect woodland would address many of the issues;
- requiring land-managers to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment where fences are still proposed as part of a forestry scheme would mean the forestry industry could no longer ignore the problem;
- bringing all other deer fences and stock fences in upland areas under the Prior Notification system would empower planning authorities and the public to comment on the implications for wildlife (and the freedom to roam);
- making it a requirement of all forestry and agricultural grants that redundant fencing is removed would clear the countryside of historic hazards;

- starting to collect data on the extent of deer fencing in Scotland and funding research into its impact on wildlife and livestock would enable an overview of the problems and enable government to track progress addressing them.

Beyond these proposals there is a strong case for making landowners vicariously liable for the deaths and injuries to wildlife caused by killer fences just as they are supposed to be for raptor persecution. I will consider that further in respect to the Pitmain and Glenbanchor Estate in a further post.

### **Category**

1. Cairngorms

### **Tags**

1. CNPA
2. fencing
3. landed estates
4. scottish forestry
5. Scottish Government
6. wildlife persecution

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