3rd March 2021

Your ref: RRG/MMc

Dear Mr Gledson,

Thank you for taking the trouble to reply to my letter sent to His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. I’m sure your views on muirburn are sincerely held, and I would have been more disposed towards them before the climate emergency was declared. I am disappointed that I haven’t received what I asked for: the views of Prince Charles on the issue. Since you have not declared that for more than five decades you have been a champion for the fight against climate change, I feel the context of my letter is lost in your reply. I know I couldn’t fight climate change whilst condoning heather burning (unnecessarily releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere) to promote unnatural densities of Red Grouse, and I was interested in hearing how he can.

Taking your specific points in turn, whilst your approach to muirburn complies with current legislation, new laws follow new evidence and the legislative process takes time. Leaders change their practices in line with the evidence and in doing so they stimulate changes to the law.

Burning provides some diversity in a monotonous heather-dominated landscape, but to paraphrase Prince Charles, what good is providing a variety of habitats if the flora and fauna that would inhabit them are made extinct by an accelerating rise in temperature?

Presumably the heather fuel load could be mitigated by fire breaks a few metres wide where it is a risk, and I’ve seen these created without the use of fire on grouse moors. I don’t think setting swathes of heather on fire, to prevent the possibility of it burning later, is a valid solution to the problem of human induced global heating.

I wouldn’t say the heather burnt on Meall Dubh in winter 2014/15 is regrowing well. To my eyes the hill continues to look like a carbuncle on the landscape (please see enclosed photo from May 2020).

Merlins bred in the Meall Dubh nest area in 2014, 2015 and 2017. I have no records since. It is possible that burning reduces the insect population, which reduces the Meadow Pipit population, which reduces the Merlin population. Reference: Population and breeding biology of the Merlins in the Lammermuir Hills, January 2017, British Birds 110:138-154

[(1) (PDF) Population and breeding biology of the Merlins in the Lammermuir Hills (researchgate.net)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321699213_Population_and_breeding_biology_of_the_Merlins_in_the_Lammermuir_Hills)

In each of the last two seasons the Balmoral rangers have notified me of one successful pair of Merlins (located in the Girnock catchment). I’m not aware of any other successful breeding attempts on land managed by Balmoral in 2019 and 2020. Given that in a good year the Girnock can support three pairs, the upper Muick three and other parts of the estate at least two, I don’t understand how the Balmoral population can be said to be holding up reasonably well. It may be the case but it’s not my opinion based on the evidence I have.

I appreciate Balmoral Estate is currently owned by and managed on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen, and if it is inherited by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales I hope the Scottish people will benefit from his leadership in reducing the climate impact and increasing biodiversity.

Yours sincerely,