

CAIRNGORM STORIES

A Cairngorms Day

The forecast said that Friday would be one of the few fine days this miserable summer. You can't afford to miss these limited chances, can you? August still gave



Approaching Cairn Toul

us long enough days for a long haul, and there was Cairn Toul, sitting out there on the far side of the Lairig Ghru with its partner Braeriach. So, 10 am saw us both on the track to White Bridge and up towards Corour east of the Dee - up past that wonderful Chest of Dee with its cascading waterfalls from pool to pool. It must be the best swimming spot in the Cairngorms – well on a warm summer's day at least.

The path is fine at first but soon we hit the chief hazard of the day. It becomes a bog trot. Never the best of paths, the wet summer has made it much worse. There comes the first of those encounters that are to mark the day. Towards us comes a young bloke carrying a sizeable pack, and we chat. He is German, from Dresden, and is come through from the north, camping en-route, and heading for Linn of Dee, then Braemar. "Will the path get better?" "How can I get from Linn of Dee to Braemar? Can I hitch a lift with someone?" We answer and trog on through the bog till first Cairn Toul lifts its peak above the intervening hill and, finally, Corour hut hoves in sight.

We rest briefly there, start for the saddle, but meet a father and son. They are English and heading back to their camp in Glen Derry. On the saddle, we encounter, two men from the north of England. Knowledgeable of the Cairngorms, they have hiked and camped over Ben Avon and other farther peaks and dipped into Glen Avon where they encountered a large BBC film crew. "What's all that stuff doing in the middle of a National Park? All those cables, mobile toilets etc etc! A disappointment!". We see their point.

From the saddle onwards the Cairngorm day delivers its greatest rewards. Immense pressures in the Earth's crust caused folds to develop in it as mountains like the Alps and the Himalayas and the altitude range between

their higher and lower peaks is often great. But the Scottish hills arose differently. Ice flows of the ice ages and later weathering cut out corries, ridges etc from a high plateau. There is thus a small difference in height between peaks. So, from the highest summits, immense Cairngorms panoramas open up to distant horizons of hills upon hills. The lungs breathe deep but, looking at these scenes, the heart breathes deeply too. We chat pleasantly with a young lone hiker. He is up from England and heading back to his camp. That apart, only one person passes between there and the final summit where lunch is occupied with discussions on which far peaks we see and which should be visited next.

Back at Corour hut, another hiker from England is camping with his girl friend ("Hullo! Fine day!") and there - crossing the bog and over the bridge, comes a small boy. Large fine dark eyes smile out from under a headfull of curly black hair. His English is limited but he chats happily. He is Argentinean! Are the two adults still trying to navigate the bog his parents? No – they're German, friends of his mother and with him.

Well, off we go back along the bog trot. The midges are fierce and there is no stopping, even using repellent, so weary legs must carry on. And here comes a single hiker heading up towards Corour to camp. Our first Scot of the day! Eleven hours after leaving the car, we are back at dusk, tired but content.

The people as well as the hills made the story of our day. It could have been any summer's day in the Cairngorms. They attract devotees from all over the UK and abroad. It is a concern of the Cairngorms Campaign that the Cairngorms National Park Authority has detailed, well-financed ways of consulting local communities, but no parallel way of consulting that national and even international community. Without that



Returning from CairnToul. Wide skies and far horizons of the Scottish hills

perspective, there is a strong tendency for it simply to become a local park, not a national one. The Campaign tries to represent the wider perspective!

The Newsletter for the Cairngorms Campaign

Enhancing the Conservation of the Cairngorms

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Autumn 2007

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Conserving the Mountain Hare?

Few animals on the Scottish hills and mountains are more attractive than the mountain hare. Rob Raynor, Policy and Advice Officer with Scottish Natural Heritage, states, "The mountain hare is an iconic species which is highly specialised to deal with its environment. -----" and points out that almost all of the British population is centred in Scotland. However numbers of mountain hares are now very low

sporting estates showing hundreds shot and hung up. It is difficult to think of any time in the last fifty years or more when such drives would have produced this result. Are there other more enduring factors at work such as prolonged heavy grazing by sheep and deer altering habitats fundamentally?

Under the EU Habitats Directive, it is an Annex V species, which means the UK government must ensure they are "sustainably managed." Is this happening? There is a need for some sound science and clear guidelines on how and when mountain hares should be hunted to be managed sustainably. For example, should they be shot at all when populations are at the low end of a population cycle? Even now on the Royal Estates at Dalnadamph on Donside, they are being shot. Shooters are transported up on All Terrain



Young mountain hare

over the Cairngorms area and much of its former territory. "Anecdotal reports suggest that in certain areas mountain hare numbers have declined in recent years,-----" states Dr Julie Ewald of the Game Conservancy on the Conservancy's website. "Anecdotal" is a curious way to describe the blindingly obvious to anyone regularly visiting the Scottish hills

Mountain hares are a "quarry species." They can be legitimately hunted. Their populations cycle in numbers and recent research by the Game Conservancy indicates that one gut parasite, called *Trichostrongylus retortiaeformis*, does not kill adults hares, but reduces the fertility of infected females to the extent they have 30% less young. This may be part at least of the cause of the cycling of population numbers. But is it the entire picture? There are old photographs of mountain hare drives on



Young mountain hare in trap

Vehicles, and hares driven towards them by a squad of motorised quadbykes racing back and forward across the hill. On the Game Conservancy website Dr Ewald states that "They are also culled for pest control, including controlling ticks as they carry a disease called 'louping ill', which affects certain wildlife populations." The links between hare populations, ticks and diseases of



Conserving the Mountain Hare? contd.

wildlife populations (such as red grouse) are not well founded scientifically, yet on some estates hares are being eliminated on such grounds. Most upland birds and mammals carry the same tick. Overshooting could

also be a cause of the mountain hares decline

It is time government and SNH took our responsibility for sustainable management of mountain hares more seriously and a suspension of "culling".

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Sustainable Management of the River Spey

Scottish Water is considering extracting water from the river Spey catchment to meet the increasing demands for housing in Badenoch and Strathspey. The Spey already has significant extractions taken from it. Over 70% of its headwaters are diverted into other catchments for hydro-electric power generation. Badenoch and Strathspey itself is supplied by water taken from Loch Einich. Downstream in the midreaches of the river, there is a major extraction that diverts water to northeast Scotland. This last measure moved the local Fisheries Board to insist on a contract whereby, if river levels fall below a certain point, then Scottish Water must buy water from companies making hydropower from diverted water and sustain water levels in that manner. Current proposals have had the effect of bringing the Scottish Canoe Association and the local fisheries board into cooperation despite past conflicts.

The management of water extracted from the Spey catchment has not always been efficiently managed. For example, till recent years at least, the leakage rate in the distribution system was over 50%. The Campaign is responding to enquiries from Scottish Water Solutions seeking further information before taking a view on the proposals.

Proposals for the Redevelopment of Cairn Gorm Mountain Ltd

Cairn Gorm Mountain Ltd, the company which runs the funicular railway on Cairn Gorm, has developed new proposals to secure its future. It plans to recreate its facilities as the "National Centre for the Mountain Environment." An overall description of the proposal can be seen on its website at www.cairngormsmountain.com. This is a proposal that needs careful thought and consideration and the CC is already doing this. It will be a topic of discussion at the forthcoming liaison meeting of environmental and recreational groups with an interest in the Cairngorms

Film Making of Climbing in the Cairngorms

A local film and TV production company, Triple Echo Productions, recently approached the CC to appear in a BBC TV programme showing live the climb of a new route in upper Glen Avon. It was clear from discussions that considerable trouble was being taken to avoid any environmental impacts of the operation and minimize those that were unavoidable. The convenor was asked

to be one of a series of people appearing to say what they most valued about the Cairngorms. Such exercises inevitably involve a sizeable group of people and much gear from cables to portaloos in remote areas and one would have reservations on this. However, once it became clear helicopters were to be used to transport people and gear in and out, albeit at the least intrusive times, the CC committee decided it could not appear to support this effort. It came to the view that helicopter use could be justified "for life and limb", that is for rescue purposes, and for delivering materials to remote areas where other methods would cause worse damage (e.g path maintenance) but not for making entertainment.

Scottish Enterprise Grampian's Proposals for Tourism Development

Scottish Enterprise Grampian is the local government enterprise agency responsible for promoting economic development. Its Services to Industry Group for Tourism's business growth document for areas within and close to the Cairngorms National Park on Deeside and Donside aims to take advantage of the areas qualities including its remoteness, accessible wilderness, and general high quality natural environment. Some aspects of the proposals give the CC cause for concern. An example is "Bringing the area's mountain bothies into the 21st century to promote the wilderness area" Mountain bothies are difficult to manage and are deliberately kept basic – partly to ensure they are not overused. The CC will discuss such policies with the document's authors.

Cairngorms National Park Local Plan

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has issued its latest draft of the Local Plan, which sets out proposals for development with the Park. The CC has been examining this important plan in some detail. It contains many policies that aim to ensure development is sustainable. Underlying the plan however, are issues such as the scale of holiday homes that would be permitted in within the Park. Excessive housing development places strain on the environmental resources of the area. Already further extraction from the Spey catchment is being considered, and housing development is straying onto sites holding semi-ancient woodland and protected species. The CC will shortly have to decide what policies it supports and whether it should object formally to policies which permit excessive housing development simply to build large numbers of holiday homes.

IN BRIEF

Members Visit to Glas Maol Caenlochan

This area is of outstanding importance for its mountain plant life and for montane bird species and has various protective designations on it. It has however been heavily damaged by overgrazing and trampling by excessive numbers of red deer. The Deer Commission for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage have been working jointly on the problem and a cull of 8,000 deer is underway, which gives some idea of the scale of the problem. An aerial view of one herd of over 1200 on the site can be seen by going to the website of the Deer Commission for Scotland, clicking on joint working, and then on Caenlochan. As part of services to members, seventeen members of the CC went on an outing to the area with Reg Popham and Drennan Watson as guides. There was much botanising and discussion of the situation and the outing was enjoyed by all.



Members Group back at the car park after a good day out.

Changes to the Visitor Management Plan for People on Cairngorm Mountain Ltd

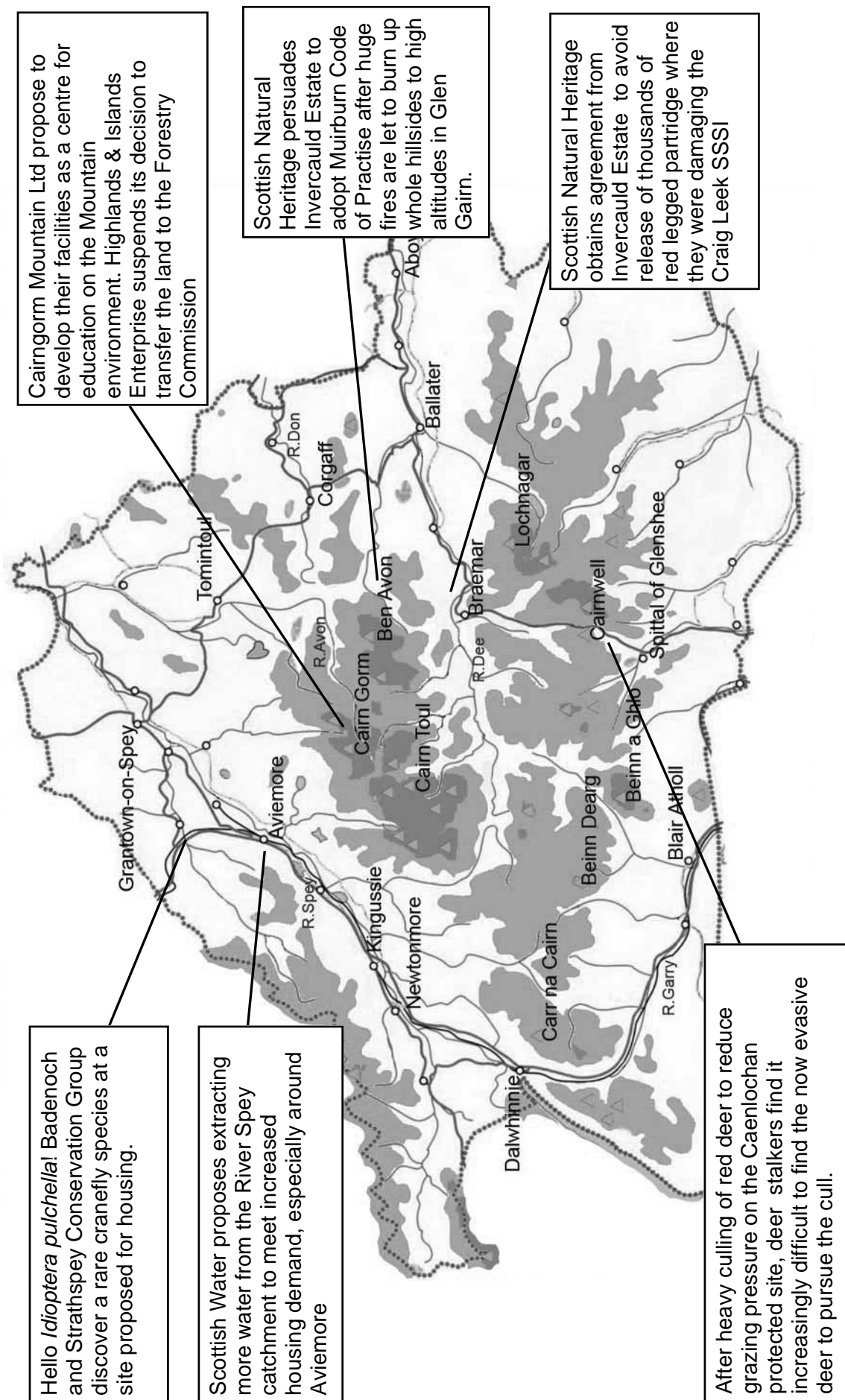
Cairngorm Mountain Ltd recently requested changes to the Visitor Management Plan. Under this plan, certain routes are officially recommended for accessing Cairn Gorm on foot and it is not permitted for people on foot to enter or leave the top station of the funicular railway outwith the downhill skiing season. This last, controversial, restriction was to prevent the spreading damage on the Cairngorm–MacDhui plateau caused by greatly increased number of people using the old chairlift to reach high on the mountain. The proposed changes were to promote the path up "Windy Ridge" (Sron an Aonaich on the map) and to permit walkers coming off of Cairn Gorm to enter the top station and take the railway down.

For reasons explained in previous newsletters, after careful thought and a site visit by members of the management committee, the CC advised against these changes. Scottish Natural Heritage disagreed with our views and the changes have now come into force. The CC feels that these decisions may, in time, come to be regretted.

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AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS



Liaison Between Voluntary Environmental and Recreational Groups with an interest in the Cairngorms.

The CC is organising a liaison meeting between the above groups to jointly consider a range of issues current in the Cairngorms such as the Local Plan, and the proposals to develop the Funicular system on Cairn Gorm as a environmental interpretation centre on mountains. This permits a more informed and cohesive view on such issues that, collectively, gives a voice to the national perspective on Cairngorms issues.

Cairngorms Campaign Development Plan

An advanced draft of the Development Plan of the Cairngorms Campaign was sent to two selected people of wide experience to comment on. Their comments were extensive and their suggestions incorporated into a more final draft. This has now been submitted to a consultant with expertise in using such plans in funding applications. It is intended to obtain five year funding sufficient to employ staff to develop the Campaign to a larger and more self-sustaining form.

"QUICK QUOTES"

"Our facility will be akin to an "Eden Project of the North" where the primary offering is about learning to appreciate, understand, protect and be inspired by mountains and everything they represent in human culture."

From the website of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, on their plan to convert the facilities on Cairn Gorm into a center for education on the mountain environment.

A Brief Book Review

Hostile Habitats – Scotland's Mountain Environment Edited by Nick Kempe & Mark Wrightham (A hillwalkers' guide to the landscape and wildlife)

Published by the Scottish Mountain Trust with support from Scottish Natural Heritage - ISBN 0-907521-93-2 .

"I see" said the blind man. In truth, when we look at landscapes, we are all partially blind, for landscapes are the product of the workings of ecosystems which are too complex for us to understand more than a small amount of what is going on in them. Human use of the land adds a further layer of complexity that can be difficult to "see." When we are in the hills and mountains we spend much of our time looking at these mountain landscapes, these vistas that stretch to far horizons; but how much do we see? The editors have brought together twelve authors, each writing chapters on their specialist subject. The topics range through geology, the basic shaping of the landscape over eons of time, the plants, birds, animals including invertebrates, and the traces of human impact on the mountains. Keith Miller, a member of the CC management committee has written the chapter on invertebrates.

The dangers in such a book are that each specialist talks his or her own language, intelligible only to fellow specialists, and in a way that fails to connect each specialism into an overall picture. Editing control must have been good for the texts use only limited, necessary specialist terms and remain intelligible to most laymen and there are connections made between topics. The quality of the many illustrations is excellent and each section is complimented by a well illustrated section on how to recognise the animals, plants, features and processes described. The final chapter by Nick Kempe is "the Future of Our Mountains" which gives an overview of the value of Scotland's mountains and attempts to protect them. Are there gaps? It is probably not possible to cover everything in one text, but perhaps the big gap is soils, although their evolution is mentioned at various points. Most of the vegetation, most of the water and most of the species are all down there and they are a key link between the geology, climate and life.

Nonetheless, this is an excellent book a new kind of mountain guide book well worth reading. There is no doubt when looking at our mountains, the more we "see" the more we appreciate them and many climbers and walkers will find it opens doors to this deepening of their appreciation.

Talking Points

Did you notice the Notice? Signs of the Times

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has clarified people's right of access to land in Scotland. Post the act, there are now far more notices in Scotland guiding, or misguiding people on their rights of access. They are becoming a new kind of litter, a kind of visual clutter that is spreading. What is really objectionable about many of them is that many are misleading or worse. Few brashly state "Keep Out!" Many more subtly try to establish private territory by landowners, the equivalent of doggies peeing on lampposts, paint a more benevolent picture of the landowner in question, or simply misguide to provide a "moral" rationale for saying Keep Out or confine access. Worse still, some imply the visiting public are the cause of problems they in fact have little to do with. Members should be wary of accepting some of the statements on some these notices at face value.

A classic example of a misleading notice. It implies, indeed claims, that, if you do not confine yourself to certain paths over a large area of Scotland during the deer stalking season, then you will damage the welfare of deer and threaten the livelihood of estate and farm workers. We know of not one scrap of evidence that actions by walkers or others has ever endangered the livelihood of farm workers in northeast Scotland or the Cairngorms, or even of estate workers. Previous studies showed that 90% of the disturbance of deer in the deerstalking season is due to deer stalking! Being shot at is terribly disturbing.



"Hillwalkers and visitors are welcome in the East Grampians but are asked to bear in mind that deer management ,farm and estate activities continue throughout the year and that undue disturbance in sensitive areas may be a threat to the well being of the deer and to the livelihood of farm and estate workers. The stalking season takes place between 1st July and 16th Feb but the most important period is from 12 August to 20th Oct. During this time please remain on the hill tracks indicated by a red line. Thank you."

TAKE CARE
High Fire Risk
Please guard
against Fire



When did you last meet a hillwalker or a rambler who smoked? Use of fires by wild campers is virtually extinct and there is little evidence of increased firerisk in much visited areas. Fires in the countryside are largely caused by the people who live there. In a recent year, there were three major hill fires in Deeside by summer – all of them caused by keepers losing control of muirburn! Yet again the unspoken implication is that the visiting public is the firehazard!



A reasonable notice during felling operations
– but not months after all operations had
ceased – as was the case here

Below Another misleading notice. Research shows people buy sporting estates to acquire prestige and maintaining local employment and wildlife has little to do with it. The notice implies that “deer management” takes place chiefly in the stalking season mid-August to mid -October. Red deer welfare is largely governed by the population densities of deer, which is largely controlled by the number of breeding females (hinds) and hence the level of hind culling. This takes place after the stalking season, when the problem of disturbance by walkers suddenly disappears. The notice says the statements are supported by the “Access Forum.” Do organisations like the Ramblers’ Association and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland really support it?



Notice at the start of
farm track leading to
the hills. Ignore it!
You ARE an
authorised person
under the Act!



Actually, outside of some places like bothies, the Scottish hills, are remarkably litter free, including heavily used areas of the Cairngorms. This notice was outside a farm. The average Scottish farmyard is a rural slum and the commonest litter in many lowground areas is plastic blown from farms. The commonest litter in many hill areas is empty shotgun cartridges. Yet the unspoken implication here is the walking public are the litter louts.

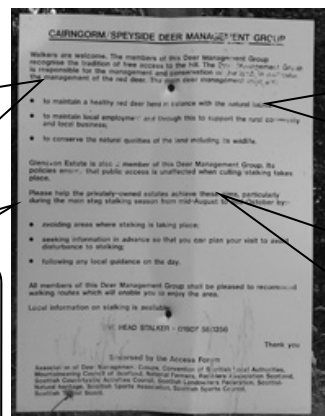


And of tripping over your bootlace, and of – Oh come! People, over the years, have been bitten, but wide discussion among hillwalking and rambling acquaintances has not revealed one person bitten by an adder. It is a very rare event.



Well. OK! Point taken.

Cairngorm/Speyside
Deer Management
Group



To maintain a healthy red deer herd in balance with the natural habitat

To maintain local employment and through this support the local community and local businesses

Please help privately owned estates achieve these aims particularly during the main stag stalking season from mid Aug to mid Oct by;

- Avoiding areas where stalking is taking place