

# THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Spring 2012

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The Cairngorms Campaign postal address:

**"Cairngorms Campaign,  
PO Box 10037, Alford,  
AB33 8WZ"**



## Planning a Park or Preparing a Wish List?

The public consultations on the Cairngorms National Park Plan, 2012-2017 are now completed. A report on them was presented to the last meeting of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's board. The Park Plan is the broad strategic document for the Park's management, integrating and directing the efforts of the Park Authority, other governmental and nongovernmental bodies and private individuals within and outwith the Park. It is a key document.



Is the draft Plan fit for purpose? It identifies 10 five-year outcomes for the Park, policy initiatives to achieve them, and identifies groups or organisations that could help deliver them. The Campaign would support certain outcomes, such as *"More people will learn about, enjoy and help to conserve and enhance the special natural and cultural qualities of the Park."* and *"The qualities of wildness in the Park will be greater"*, particularly if it felt there was a reasonable possibility of them being achieved. There are also statements it would strongly support, as on page 10, *"The conservation and enhancement of the environment is central to National Parks. This underpins delivery of all four aims and is integral to the sustainable development*

*approaches."* Nonetheless, our response to the consultation expressed strong reservations. Why?

There are fundamental problems with the Plan. A strategic Plan must be based on an initial sound situation analysis, identifying constraints and opportunities, vulnerabilities and strengths. Above all, this must be derived from good data - but these are lacking. Without it, the aimed for Outcomes, Policy Approaches and Opportunities listed in the Plan, lack any analytical basis – and hence no test as to whether they can be realised. In short, it is not a plan. A foundation analytical document might have been an updated and upgraded 2006 *"State of the Park Report"* but that document is not even referred to. In some cases this lack of any verifiable foundation for policies and outcomes is clear. Under the outcome for more people to learn about, enjoy and help to conserve the park etc, targets include that the number of schoolchildren using the Park through the Curriculum for Excellence, and the number of volunteer days spent caring for the Park will each increase by 100% - but why 100%, and 100% of what current levels of involvement? As yet, few children have actually been educated under the Curriculum for Excellence. These figures, like others, seem plucked out of the air and hence the achievability or even desirability of the targets quite uncertain.

Similar problems appear in areas like outdoor recreation. Outcome 19 says *"There will be an even higher quality and increased range of outdoor recreation activities available and accessible to a wider range of people of all abilities to enjoy the Park."* Fine perhaps, but the history of the Cairngorms is littered with conflicts between outdoor recreations – partly because of failure to recognise that some outdoor recreations are incompatible with vulnerable environments or policies to protect wild areas. Outcome 10, on

## Planning a Park or Preparing a Wish List? *continued*

Improving the Park's recreational opportunities, commits it to the establishment of a "*Mountain Bike Development Cluster*" including attracting mountain bike visitors. But there are already developing problems regarding mountain biking in the Cairngorms. The CNPA must recognise that "Parks for All" does not, and cannot, mean "Parks for Anything and Everything". Choices have to be made but the CNPA, has no outdoor recreational strategy to guide such choices!

Housing is another area of great concern to many people and organisations. The Park Plan of 2007 gave a Strategic Objective for Housing to "*To increase the accessibility of rented and owned housing to meet the needs of communities throughout the Park.*" This is essential and a key need identified has been the provision of cheaper housing (so-called affordable housing) to meet these needs. But the planning policy involves building far more houses than the Park's communities need, whilst requiring that only about 20% of all new housing must be of the "affordable" kind. This draft Plan records over 250 affordable houses have been built. Has the policy worked? As the Park staff admit – they don't know. Incredibly, nobody has researched the effectiveness of such a fundamentally important and longstanding policy, that has huge implications for the future of the Park.!

In fact, housing, a key strategic issue, receives remarkably little attention with Outcome 13 simply stating "*People will have access to housing that meets their needs through rent or purchase.*" Then, suddenly, on page 80, under Policy Direction 8 to "*Develop sustainable patterns of settlement growth, infrastructure and communications*" appears the intention to build an entire new town within the National Park – An Camus Mor. Neither the reporters to the Public Inquiry into the Local Plan nor the CNPA have provided any rationale for a policy of intentionally increasing the population of the Park. This draft strategic Plan doesn't supply it either. The Board meeting to consider responses to the consultations on the draft Plan heard that 85% of respondents opposed the housing proposals. The response was to announce that Badenoch and Strathspey in particular would be targeted for the highest growth rate.

Strategy without data and derived logical analysis is just guess-work or, worse, an unachievable wish-list. Frequently what replaces analysis is embarrassing waffle. "*The Park is a place of 'Mountain folk' and 'Forest folk'*" it

declares in Key Theme 3. Such statements are delusional and ignore Scottish history! The listed special qualities of the park include, "*Part of what makes the Cairngorms National Park special is that it is a National Park with people living and working in it.*" Such statements are, at best, vacuous and demonstrably untrue. Every single other national park in the UK contains people living and working in it as do almost all European parks.

At best, one has to say that the future of the Cairngorms National Park remains uncertain. At worst, the future is one of rampant growth driven by the interests of developers and large landowners. The lack of method and attack in preparing this Plan, and the poor quality of discussion and analysis at Board meetings are key sources of that uncertainty. Underneath it all is an evasion of issues at Board level and an executive apparently committed to major development!

One reason for this failure is because the missing party in the discussion within the Plan seems to be the national community. It appears only as "visitors", usually to be given an "*experience*", as in the third aim listed under *Vision and Strategic Objectives* and again in the tenth *Five-Year Outcome*. The missing Outcome is the development of a stronger relation with the national community. Local communities and businesses are of fundamental importance, but a too narrow focus on them permeates thinking in the CNPA. Recognition of the National interest requires a wider focus than purely those local communities and businesses. The National Park Plan must have at least a National brief, and consider the National community – all of Scotland's people, more than solely visitors and local communities, both present and future generations. An entire Appendix 4 of 16 pages list the "*Community Visions*" of each local community – but none of the communities of interest in the environment or recreation groups who did so much to create the Park. The population of Scotland is some 6 million, whilst the population with the good fortune to be living within the National Park is around 17,000, just over one-quarter of one per cent.

See the full text of the Cairngorms Campaign joint response with the Scottish Wild Land Group on the Campaign's website, see: <http://www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk/32>

### QUICK QUOTE

FROM "ON FOOT IN THE CAIRNGORMS" BY V A FIRSOFF

"Geology was borne in the mountains. Nowhere else are the workings of its forces and processes so clearly on the landscape. Once geology is called in, order emerges from apparent chaos and many land features become predictable, making mountains easier to understand and live with."

## ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

### **The Legal Challenge –The Appeal to Members and Supporters for Funds**

As all members should be aware, last Autumn we launched an appeal for funds to enable us to pursue the legal challenge against the CNPA's excessive housing policies through to a Hearing in the Court of Session in Scotland.

Based upon prudent (or pessimistic) estimates of the potential further costs, we sought £50,000 from members and supporters. We prepared an Appeal Form with a reply sheet, which we sent to all our members, and also to many former members of the Cairngorms Campaign. The other bodies involved in the challenge, The Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and The Scottish Campaign for National Parks also sent copies of the Appeal Form to their members, as did the Scottish Wild Land Group, so some of you will have received more than one copy. Many other conservation and mountaineering/hill-walking bodies gave public support – in particular, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland was front page news in The Press and Journal when it urged all its supporters to contribute to our appeal. We contacted 66 mountaineering clubs by letter and e-mail asking for support. We handed out hundreds of leaflets and appeal letters at the Dundee Mountain Film Festival, where most attenders were quite unaware of the CNPA plans for such large housing estates and a New Town, and were horrified by them.

We also opened an account with JustGiving, so that donations could be made on-line as well as by cheque, and this offered the opportunity for donations to be made completely anonymously –it was pretty depressing for me to learn that several donors from the Aviemore area were very concerned to ensure that their support for our challenge to the National Park Authority could never be revealed.

Members and supporters responded enthusiastically, and we raised enough to take the case to the Hearing, which was a great relief and satisfaction – it would have been a very disappointing let-down if we had been forced to withdraw the challenge to the CNPA from lack of funds. Over 300 individual donors have given contributions, ranging in size from £5 to £1,000, and we have also received donations from the John Muir Trust, the Scottish Wild Land Group, the North East Mountain Trust and the Munro Society. As we write in early March, the total raised so far is £36,318 (including Gift Aid tax refunds around £5,000) which leaves plenty of room for further donations, but in the event the legal fees were less than we budgeted, despite the case lasting its full four days, because our solicitors and our QC both very generously restricted their normal fee rates significantly as a mark of their support for the cause. Several committee members of the Campaign attended the entire proceedings, providing support and information to our legal representatives where it was useful.

Perhaps most crucially for the challenge, our legal team agreed an acceptable Protective Costs Order with the CNPA and the developers, which limits our potential exposure to paying their costs if we lose. The Cairngorms Campaign is a charitable company limited by guarantee, in which the liability of any individual member is restricted to a nominal £5.00 in the event of an insolvent winding up, but the BSCG and the SCNP are unincorporated charities, which means that their officers could be personally liable for any debts – so securing a limit on our exposure was vital. Of course, if we win, we should recover many of our costs, but even if Lord Glennie finds against our arguments and the worst arises, we can be sure that the Cairngorms Campaign will survive to fight another day! At present, the court's decision is expected in June.

### **Campaign's Critique of the Report for the National Trust for Scotland into the Management of Deer Woodland and Moorland on Mar Lodge Estate by an Independent Panel**

The National Trust for Scotland acquired Mar Lodge Estate (MLE) in 1995. The Cairngorms Campaign strongly supports the work by the Trust on the Estate in conserving and restoring the internationally important geology, flora, fauna, wild land quality and archaeological value. Regeneration of the Caledonian Pine Forest remnants on the Estate, which are protected internationally under the EU Habitats Directive and are a specified feature of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) declared under that Directive, is particularly important. But to date very limited success has been obtained. Their subsequent inclusion in the Cairngorms National Park intended to demonstrate best practise in the conservation of the Scottish environment increased the significance of this task.

In response to recent complaints from neighbouring estates and some elements of the local community, the Trust commissioned an independent review of its management of its Mar Lodge Estate with particular regard to the conflicts between deer management and regeneration of the ageing remnants of the Caledonian Pine Forest on the land. The Cairngorms Campaign submitted detailed evidence to the Mar Lodge Independent Review Panel and met directly with it. We considered the Panel's Report and recommendations. We support many of the recommendations on management structures and communications with local stakeholders. However, we also identified serious flaws in the Report's context, analysis and recommendations that would be damaging to the Trust's reputation and standing and to the management of MLE. We therefore wrote and published a critique of the Report to counter these errors!

## **ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN contd.**

Our critique urges that the Trust continue its work to conserve and restore of its internationally important geology, flora, fauna, wild land quality and archaeological value including extensive removal of bulldozed tracks in wild areas, and particularly efforts to restore the Caledonian Pine Forest.

However, we also found the Trust's vision for MLE confuses landuses and social constructs, giving too much weight to the social construct of a Highland Sporting Estate and urges the Trust to restate its vision in clearer terms of attempting to integrate the three land uses of conservation, outdoor recreation and recreational hunting. In particular, it should avoid apparent commitment to the social construct of the Highland Sporting Estate and its inherent values that are not part of the Trust's remit, and ensure it primarily safeguards the national and international interests, for biodiversity, wild landscapes and outdoor recreation, that are the sole reasons for its ownership of the land.

Our critique finds that the Panel's Report defines the problems of deer management and forest regeneration on MLE too narrowly. It fails to take account of the fact that deer populations generally in the Eastern Cairngorms more than trebled between 1954 and 1994 (and the reduced 2009 population is more than double that of 1966), the mutuality of neighbour obligations between estates and the origins of and responsibility for causes of the problems outwith MLE. We assert the Trust should demand neighbouring estates act to address their responsibilities in the situation. In particular, they should address their failure to provide winter cover for red deer or their removal of such cover.

We strongly recommended the Trust take a more research based approach to clarify the basic causes of lack of regeneration and, in promoting regeneration, in cooperation with SNH, ascertain where it puts its priorities between assemblages of species or scientifically important ecological restoration processes. Also, whether it sees adoption or avoidance of various measures to aid restoration and the study of consequent ecological restoration processes as a significant part of the scientific value of these sites and, if so, how the matter should be approached.

We found that the analysis of deer numbers and culls is sprinkled with arithmetic and other errors that, collectively, undermine the Reports analysis, conclusions and recommendations. We demanded that the Trust re-analyse the Report's calculations on red deer populations and the implications of the Trust's current culling policies by removal of the various serious arithmetic errors and numerical inconsistencies in the Report's analysis and reconsider the Report's self-conflicting statements and assertions regarding the impacts of deer culling on MLE on a "wider

catchment" (that is neighbouring estates). Failure to do this will leave the Report's conclusions and subsequent recommendations for action entirely without credibility.

It is likely that the chief constraint on regeneration of pine trees is dense ground vegetation preventing establishment of seedlings. The Report makes a series of recommendations to break open ground vegetation to permit seedling establishment and opening of plantations to provide deer winter cover alternatives to that in the regeneration zone. These seem sensible. However it also makes recommendations to use deer fencing to block movement of deer into areas set aside for regeneration, protect regenerating areas, establish planted areas to act as seed sources, and to establish riparian woodlands. Collectively, this is a very extensive intrusion into wild areas. Our critique rejects these recommendations and the lack of consideration of the recreational and wildlife interests it reflects, strongly recommending that the Trust pay greater heed to negative impacts of deer fencing on wildlife broadly, landscape and outdoor recreation and associated policies on wild land protection. Instead the Trust needs to focus on what appears strongly to be the chief constraint on regeneration – that is the density of ground vegetation preventing the establishment of tree seedlings and, in general, pursue a more research-based approach to the factors affecting regeneration to elucidate the causes of failure of pine regeneration more soundly in cooperation with Scottish Natural Heritage.

Lastly, our critique supports the Report's recommendations that it assess and publicise the economic benefits of its management of the estate to the local economy through such things as increased visitor numbers, any increase in employment on the estate and a more commercial use of Mar Lodge itself. The full text can be accessed on the Campaign's website.

### **Preparation of a Video on the Work and Aims of the Cairngorms Campaign**

Jim Clos, a member of the Cairngorms Campaign who worked in the business of making such items, has prepared a video, on a CD, of the work and aims of the Cairngorms Campaign. He has done this at no charge and the CD will soon be available to members and others. In the meantime, we would like to record our thanks to Jim for all his hard work and support for the Campaign.

### **Response of the Cairngorms Campaign to the Draft National Park Plan 2012-2017**

The Campaign gave a strong response to this plan and this is the subject of our lead article in this newsletter.

## In Brief

### Black Grouse Increase

Counts from 8 estates on Deeside show a welcome increase in the populations of black grouse from 2010 to 2011 on all 8 estates. This is the second year in succession to show increases. On lower Deeside in fact the increase this year was dramatic. The number of males counted at lecks (where the males gather to display) on lower Deeside increased from 79 to 190. The Deeside Black Grouse Newsletter records that, *"This level of increase has been recorded previously on Mar Lodge Estate where the lek count increased from 84 to 160 birds between 2002 and 2003.* Early indications are that populations on Donside and Strathspey have also increased although much data is still to be gathered in. These increases are welcome following previous declines.

### Dr Adam Watson BSc(Hons), PhD, DSc

#### Awarded the *Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture*

Adam Watson was presented with this award at the 2012 Fort William Mountain Film Festival. It is given to persons who have done two of four things. These are to have promoted Mountain Culture over a sustained period of years, encouraged and/or educated others to engage and indulge in mountain culture, had been inspired by mountain culture, and achieved much within their own chosen field. In addition, recipients have to have inspired others in their particular field and beyond within the scope of Scottish Mountain Culture and have influenced at a national/international level. Adam Watson definitely fulfilled all of these requirements, not just two of them. He has studied and loved the Cairngorms throughout his long life, starting from his days as a young climber and hillwalker and working on Mar Lodge Estate. He is unquestionably the pre-eminent authority on the Cairngorms and indeed has a deep broad understanding of the Scottish mountains. He has been a campaigner to protect them and was coauthor, along with Desmond Nethersole Thompson, of *"The Cairngorms"*, the classical text on them and sole author of the Scottish Mountaineering Clubs guide on them *"The Cairngorms."* The award could hardly have been made to a more deserving person and everyone who loves the Cairngorms will be glad that his unique and major contribution has at last been suitably recognised.

### Upper Deeside Riparian Woodland Scheme

This is an interesting scheme produced by a project partnership of the River Dee Trust, Dee District Salmon Fishery Board, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Cairngorm National Park Authority in 2009 to consider restoration of riparian woodland, that is river and burn edge woodland, in the Dee catchment. The project is now the subject of an EU funding application. What drives it is the realisation that, under the influence of climate change, water temperatures in rivers and burns in the Dee catchment (and therefore elsewhere) will rise above levels tolerable by salmonid species like the Atlantic salmon at spawning or stunt growth of young fish.

It has been realised that watercourses in upper Dee catchment, and for that matter in all of the upper catchments in the Cairngorms are particularly vulnerable to this trend due to the lack of shade from trees along banks.

The project would be expected to have multiple benefits for fish, wildlife in general, bank stability and even downstream flooding.

The multiplicity of aims really takes the project into the realms of ecosystem management. It is telling that, although the project is clearly focused on the commercially valuable salmon stocks and fishing, there is no mention of the loss, within living memory, of the brown trout populations that were an important resource to local people – a curious omission in a *"Park for All the People"*. Much American work has emphasized the importance of large woody debris in watercourses in maintaining salmonid and other fish populations. The lack of it in treeless Scottish uplands must always have been a severe constraint on fish populations.

Nonetheless, how would the project be achieved? Surveys of 150km of watercourse in the upper Dee catchment identified the requirement for 80km of fencing with 125 access gates and 140 water gates covering 50km of river length with native trees and shrubs planted within the fences. Now here comes trouble? There is clear potential collision with the Park Authority's Wild Land Policies although the project description states, *"More innovative techniques can be used to establish trees in wilderness areas where the erection of fences would be unsuitable. The main technique we have considered here is tree planting (without fencing) on land that is inaccessible to deer. Such a planting method is proposed for the main stem of the Upper Dee."* But areas inaccessible to deer nearly always already have trees naturally and they are not many.

The project description states that, *"SNH commented that the impacts of deer fencing on landscape and visual values and access/recreation for wild land would need to be considered."* How true! The project's proposers say they will discuss it with Aberdeenshire Council and a landscape adviser. How thoughtful of them! This is an interesting project but it could turn into a classic example of how agencies blunder into conflicts. "Stakeholders" like land managers with interests in grouse and deer etc have been carefully consulted. Here's an idea! Why not discuss it with voluntary groups like the North East Mountain Trust, the Cairngorms Campaign and the Ramblers Association who are also stakeholders. After all, 80km of deerfencing would cost up to a staggering £800,000 of taxpayers' money.

### Cairngorms National Park Authority's Wildcat Project Comes to its End

This project, run by David Heatherington of the Park Authority has come to its end. During it, use of many automatic cameras and other work helped map the distribution of wild cats in the Cairngorms, sometimes in

## Talking Point

### Grouse Farming and

August is coming and, with boring predictability, the Scottish media will announce the arrival of "The Glorious 12<sup>th</sup>". That is the AU glorious about using small birds that would hardly make a pot of soup as target practice as they are driven over the grouse butts. bulldozed tracks are appearing, while old and valued things like mountain hares, wild land and eagles are disappearing. Behind th reduce grouse predators, and to give wheeled access to remoter areas to permit this more intensive management. Much of it is il

Ticks are small, blood-sucking arthropods related to spiders, mites and scorpions. They can transmit pathogens to a wide range o This last seldom infects humans but it readily infects grouse species, killing some 80% of infected grouse, and causing illness and for reasons that are unclear but possibly related to climate change.

#### Badly Practiced Muirburn Spreads in the Cairngorms

A variety of measures have been employed to handle infection in grouse. One measure is changes in muirburn practice. Falling standards of muir spread into the Cairngorms since the late 1990s. Out-of-control muirburns started by keepers are one of the main causes of callouts of fire brigades moorland areas. The worst form of this bad muirburn practice is that of simply lighting fires along the bottom of a hill and leaving the fires to spread uphill to summits and possibly beyond. Such fires are clearly against the Muirburn Code and impossible to control. Examples can be found on Glen on the Cairn o Mounth, on Invercauld Estate in Glen Gairn, on Dinnet Estate in the hills around Morven, and some of the worst on the Crown Estate avon and Glen Livet. There are many others. The aim seems to be to kill off ticks in burned areas and probably also to reduce habitat for mountain which more below. But there is no evidence that there is any benefit in terms of increasing grouse numbers. However, the fires burn up into vuln and soil plant systems, damaging them, and destroying large areas of habitat for small birds, for example, and almost certainly do other damage any remaining trees increasing bank erosion along burns where bank vegetation is damaged.

#### Farewell to the Mountain Hare?

Dr Adam Watson counts mountain hares annually and has noted steep declines in their numbers, at least since 2000. Hillwalkers and others ha they are almost absent in wide areas like Morven and the Ladder Hills where once they were plentiful. As mountain hares are an important prey eagles, their disappearance has important implications for golden eagles. What is the cause of this widespread and steep decline of an animal t an enjoyable part of the day in the Scottish hills? Mountain hares are subject to natural cycles of about ten years in their numbers but the main o the fact that hares carry ticks that can transmit louping ill virus to grouse. Over large areas, they have been systematically shot out or snared in a reduce tick-transmitted disease. But Annex 5 of the EC Habitats Directive (1992) lists the mountain hare as a species: "*of community interest wh the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures.*" This Directive requires member states to ensure exploitation of Annex 5 sp "*compatible with their being maintained at a favourable conservation status.*" This is simply not happening. Hares are being systematically large over sizeable areas of the Cairngorms and, under the Directive, that is illegal!

Behind this practice is a paper issued by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust in Scotland suggesting that reducing mountain hare numbers tick populations and hence louping ill and thus increase grouse populations. It was promptly strongly criticised by scientists at Glasgow University Hutton Institute who not only suggested the work lacked scientific rigour but suggested removal of mountain hares might even damage grouse s the longer term. That has not stopped the slaughter.

Besides, these authors pointed out, other animals such as red and roe deer also carry ticks and can harbour the virus. So now, on some estates have been much reduced but, amazingly, on others like Millden Estate in Glen Esk, a deer fence has been erected around the entire grouse moor the hills, intruding far into wild areas and, in some cases, without even provision for access for walkers through them. Deer within the fence are or driven out before it is erected – onto neighbouring land where they quite possibly cause problems. In some places further measures are taken trical fences either side of the main fence, or double fences to prevent deer crossing over single ones when snow is deep.

#### Sheep Are for Wool and Mutton – No as Tickmops

However, there are other measures taken to reduce the dreaded ticks. Sheep attract and carry ticks – but are dipped or sprayed with acaricides farmers to kill them. Now, estates are increasingly getting rid of their tenant sheep farmers, taking over the management of the sheep themselves them simply as "tickmops". They are then treated five or six times a year. With these, admittedly often fairly older hill farmers, goes the longterm the land and their connection with it and with them also, arguably, a way of life. Managing and handling sheep is a skilled business, more so than cattle. Where are the estates or shooting tenants obtaining such help? They use "contract shepherds", but skilled shepherds have been exceeded decades. One wonders what standards of stockmanship and care are in use?

Meanwhile, tickmops need retained on the land where they are to mop up ticks. So kilometres of new stock fences appear, marching over the m these paid for at about £4 per metre? We pay much for them under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). A fence for example, ca and grant aided to keep sheep out of regenerating woodland, when its real function is to keep the tickmops on the open moor on the other side. SRDP grant aid, our taxes, was meant for?

Meanwhile, these stock fences are just the right height for grouse to fly into the wires. At least one estate has already removed the top wire because grouse decapitated themselves on it and others may have to follow suit. This raises the question whether such a fence is any longer stockproof a meet the condition of the SRDP grant?



# Talking Point

## and the Inglorious 12<sup>th</sup>

August date on which grouse shooting commences. Human recreations are diverse, but it has never been quite clear what was. However, the grouse moors are changing – and not for the better! New and rather unwelcome things like deer fences and more. These changes lie the drive to boost grouse numbers and this has focused on measures to decrease the populations of ticks and ill-informed and destructive!

of birds and animals, including the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* (which causes Lyme disease in humans) and the louping ill virus. and sometimes death in livestock such as sheep. Ticks and tick-borne diseases have been increasing very significantly in recent years

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Large scale muirburn on the Hill of Candacraig, Dinnet Estate



Massively engineered bulldozed track on Millden Estate in Glen Esk



At least 25 hares plus fox left to rot on Invecrauld Estate, with snares around them for foxes attracted to this bait.



Dipper caught in trap for weasels etc. People have noted the disappearance of dippers where these traps are numerous



Left. A large mechanically dug hole and mound for grit. Scores of these are dug and take many years to heal



Right. Large mound dug to hold grit for grouse. Large numbers of these have been dug



A simple hand dug mound for grit for grouse that is perfectly adequate

## Talking Point continued

### Grouse, the Threadworm and Medication

Grouse are also subject to infection by a parasitic gut threadworm and intensive measures to control it are now taken. It has long been the practice to provide grouse with grit for various reasons by leaving small deposits of grit at sites on moors. Now, a fashion spreads for mechanically digging out many large prominent mounds in the soil or the peat with grit on top of them. Collectively, these numerous mounds and the tracks to them on vulnerable ground become a landscape feature, and hardly a welcome one. The grit is medicated with drugs like flubendazole, an anthelmintic often used against worm infections in cats and dogs. A concern always with such treatments is possible emergence of resistance to the drug in the parasite. Simple rules for avoidance include don't mass treat populations containing infected and non-infected individuals alike, and always treat at the recommended effective dose. Parasites with partial resistance can survive sub-lethal doses and resistance thus selected for. All grouse are treated when they take grit and, as the drug within the grit naturally decays on site, lower and lower doses will be ingested. The method thus breaks simple rules and it is not surprising that resistance problems are emerging. Keepers on some moors in fact even go out at night, capture grouse, dose them and release them again! Quite apart from this, it is very doubtful that medical drugs should be used en masse on wild species at all. Equally, the law requires that the medication be removed for one month before shooting begins and during the shooting season to avoid the drug being ingested with grouse when eaten. But grouse scatter the grit in the soil and vegetation around the initial deposits and it is difficult to see how this scattered material on so many gritting sites can realistically be withdrawn. How is the law being obeyed?

### Enter Saturation Trapping

Predators also can be a problem, including stoats, weasels, eagles, peregrines and buzzards. Enter saturation snaring and trapping – aimed at predators like stoats and weasels that it is legal to kill, but also undoubtedly killing other species. Hedgehogs, dippers and red squirrels have all been found in such traps and snares. In some areas, such as in Glen Gairn and estates on Strathdon, there are traps everywhere. During a walk of less than a mile (about 1 km) in Glen Gairn, it is easy to count 14 traps along the way, and the entire glen is strewn with them. Not much survives. Illegal poisoning and other killing of eagles and other raptors continues. In places where there once were several or more pairs of buzzards, maybe only one pair or none survives. Eagles are missing from sizeable grouse moor areas suitable for them as territories. Keepers on some estates have grown more subtle in ways to remove protected raptors, such as burning out areas of deep heather they need for nesting sites.

A new development is large-scale drainage of grouse moors. Badly designed hill drainage schemes in the past have led to damaging erosion but that apart, draining peat or peaty soils leads to the release of carbon dioxide – hardly an acceptable result in a time of climate change concern.

All this intensive management requires easy access to areas – like by Landrover along bulldozed tracks. These are spreading. Millden estate on Glen Esk for example installed several km of highly engineered tracks. All except one of the sheep farmers have gone. But, if the estate keeps sheep on the ground, even if they were only managed as tickmops, it can be claimed the tracks are for agricultural use and require no planning permission. Sometimes, new tracks erase old routes of historical importance, such as on Allargue Estate on Donside where a centuries-old military road, possibly the best example of these historically important routes left in the Cairngorms National Park, was crudely bulldozed to make a new route. The old road was perfectly passable by landrover. What was the point?

### What Lies Behind the Changes?

What lies behind much of these changes? Mostly, in a word, money! Estates are often bought by extremely rich people looking mainly to gain prestige through owning a sporting estate. Wealthy shooting tenants are also behind much of it. These tenants often employ the keepers directly, and estates seem to either loose control or fail to control activities on their own land. Money is no constraint. After all, erecting a deer fence covering 10 km around a grouse moor would cost approaching £100,000. This would make no sense if the moor was to be run as an economic unit. Shooting nowadays is often managed by companies that are remote from local or even broader Scottish interests. These companies and today's new very wealthy grouse moor owners and shooting tenants often bring in squads of keepers from far away, even abroad, with no local connection – even instructed in some cases to avoid connection with local people. Such keepers are felt to be much more indiscriminate in their methods.

Do some landowners and shooting tenants realise the risks they are running? The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced the concept of criminal vicarious liability for certain wildlife offences, including the illegal persecution of raptors. Under this, landowners, shooting tenants and others whose keepers or other employees illegally kill protected species can be prosecuted unless they can prove they have taken adequate measures to prevent such acts. The penalties can be severe!

All this is taking place in a National Park, that aims to be a "Park for All the People", not just managed for a wealthy few. It is a National Park where wildlife is a major support for the key industry, tourism. "The Cairngorms National Park is unique and it is special" stated the draft National Park Plan. Scotland's National Parks, it says are, "places to develop and trial innovative approaches to managing rural Scotland, enhancing landscapes and biodiversity, reconciling competing landuses and maintaining thriving rural communities." Well, increasingly on grouse moors, the opposite is happening! It is time for the Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage and other agencies to take a long look at this situation – and ACT!



## In Brief continued from page 5

surprising places, but also demonstrated the need to increase protection for this threatened species. Threats to its existence include snaring and interbreeding with feral or farm or household domestic cats, a different species. The project succeeded in publicising the need to enhance their protection widely and engaged with keepers through the Scottish Gamekeepers Association to encourage keepers to record wildcat distribution and enhance their protection. Vets and members of the Cats Protection League were also engaged with under the project, to encourage neutering of domestic and feral domestic cats.

### Tescos, the Lochan and the Damsel Fly

Tescos, wanting to build a new supermarket Aviemore, have wanted the destruction of a small lochan on the site on grounds of safety. However the lochan, described by Aviemore Community Council as a "cesspit" and by ecological consultants for Tesco as having the very highest conservation value, harbours the northern damselfly (*Coenagrion hastulatum*). This species is on the Scottish Biodiversity List, which is a list of species considered by Scottish Ministers to be of principal importance to conservation. The Northern Damselfly is listed as 'endangered' on the Odonata Red Data List for Great Britain 2008. The solution recommended by CNPA planners is to relocate the species to other nearby sites prior to development. However, relocation can be a tricky thing. As the Park Authority's own Biodiversity Officer put it in his advisory paper on the issue, "...a translocation programme is not a quick or guaranteed option. It is handicapped by the lack of knowledge of the key habitat requirements for this species, and the need for a suitable donor site nearby. A donor site must not hold a current population of Northern damselfly and should meet the habitat requirements of the species. There is a complex process involved and this can take a number of years, hence the preference for retaining the population in situ." After all, if the species is present on one site and not others close by, there is probably a reason. In other words, you can relocate the species, but that is no guarantee it will thrive there. Therein lay the problem as the CNPA planner is recommending relocation, but that development would go ahead before it is known whether it has been successful. Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group, diligent as ever, wrote to the Authority questioning the legality of this procedure.

Currently, it seems that Tesco may now have realised that translocating this species is a longer term project than formerly realised.

### River Don Trust Launches Project to Control Invasive Plant Species

In recent years, giant hogweed has started to invade the banks of the Don, as we pointed out in our newsletter of Spring 2010. At present, the invasion is confined largely to scattered individual plants and we pointed out that was the time to attack the outbreak. So this project is welcome and timely. Other invasive plants such as Japanese knotweed will also be tackled if they occur. At least one point where *Rhododendron ponticum* -that introduced curse of the West Highlands - has colonised banks and needs eliminated. There are however, other problems in the Don catchment. Within living memory, its prolific brown trout fisheries in which even small burns yielded sizeable fish have hugely declined for no clear reason. The Dee and the Spey both have catchment management plans and it is time the Don had one also.

### The Garbh Choire Refuge – Removal or Renovation

The Garbh Choire "bothy", situated in the northernmost corrie of Braeriach, the Garbh Corrie, was largely created by Jerry Light, a leading Lairig Club member at the time. He was the prime mover in the design and construction of the Refuge. Its function was to act as a base for the climbs being opened on Braeriach in the 19760s and 1970s but that era is now over, with many climbers coming in from the more accessible northern route instead of the south at a time when most were from northeast Scotland. The condition of the bothy is rather poor and the choice has to be made whether to remove it or renovate it. The National Trust for Scotland, which owns the land, on the whole, favours its removal. There are arguments either way and the Campaign will consider the issue of bothies in general in the next newsletter. One thing is for sure – removing bothies, footbridges etc is one thing. Removing them from maps used by people navigating by maps to find and use such features is another. It requires careful and full publicity.

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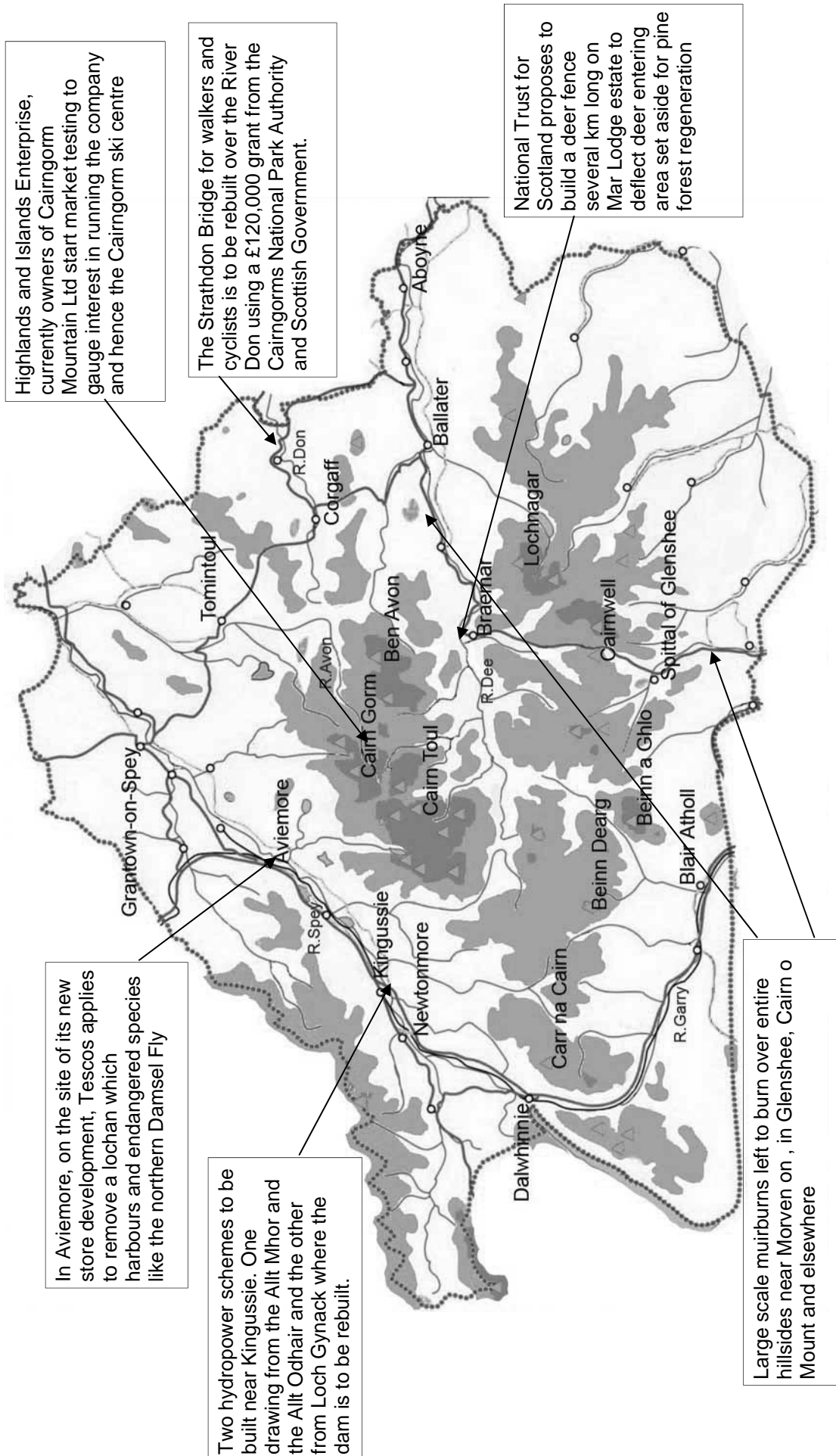
## QUICK QUOTE

### Lord Byron – from his poem Lochnagar

Although he left Scotland aged 10 and never returned, he described himself as "born half a Scot and bred a whole one". When he made his first speech in the House of Lords he was ridiculed because of his Scottish accent, which he kept all his life.

“Yet, Caledonia, beloved are thy mountains  
Round their white summits though elements war  
Though cataracts foam 'stead of smooth-flowing fountains  
I sigh for the valley of Dark Loch na Garr”

# AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS



## Book Reviews

### A Cairngorms Cluster! – Plus Baffin Island!

1. **Human Impacts on the Northern Cairngorms** - £29.99
2. **Vehicle Hill Tracks in Northern Scotland** – An Independent factual report on numbers, distribution, impacts and ground reinstatement – £24.99 paperback
3. **Some Days from a Hill Diary Scotland, Iceland, Norway, 1943-50** - £19.99
4. **A Snow Book, Northern Scotland** - £24.99
5. **A Zoologist on Baffin Island, 1953** - £28.04

This is a clutch of books by Dr Adam Watson on various aspects of his work and life in the Cairngorms and abroad. Space prevents lengthy review of each. The text on human impacts is basically his evidence to the 1981 Public Inquiry into proposals for expansion of ski developments in the Northern Cairngorms, at which it was a key document. Its current value lies in the detail and insight into human impacts on vulnerable mountains like the Cairngorms. Few other mountains have been studied in such detail regarding human impacts. The descriptions cover increase in visitor numbers due to ski developments, the resulting damage to vegetation and soil, the consequent soil erosion and flash flooding downstream, plus the direct and indirect impacts on animal life. The photographs are as enlightening as the data. To hillusers, developers or land managers with an interest in such impacts, and especially to students of mountain management or applied ecology, this text must be a classic of high educational value.

The text on vehicular tracks and their expansion in the Cairngorms, sponsored and published by the North East Mountain Trust, is at least two things. It is the background of a long battle to protect the remoter areas of the Cairngorms from such developments – and which has largely failed. It is also the story of incompetence on the part of those who built these tracks and the frequent failure of planning authorities to enforce their own conditions. Again, the photos of badly engineered bulldozed tracks and the results illustrate as much as the text. It is one of these puzzling things that Scots, who have lived so long in mountains, are so incompetent in managing them.

The Snow Book is one that will be of interest mainly to those with a specialist interest in the topic but again, even looking at the photos and captions it is striking and educational how an ecologist's expertise reads from the snows and the landscape the impacts of snow on vegetation, the behaviour of animals and of the snow itself. The text also demonstrates the extent to which, before satellites and other forms of technical observation, long term environmental change could only be detected and assessed through careful, laborious data collection on the ground.

A zoologist on Baffin Island is the account of an expedition in Canada in the days before modern communications and the invention of much modern aids like snowmobiles. Travel was by dogsled, on foot etc and the whole undertaking adventurous and risky – one member of the expedition, Ben Battle, was drowned and, on one occasion, a group were drugged by some mushrooms they picked and ate. It is written in diary form. The photographs of the places, snow owls, and perhaps particularly of the people like the Inuit are striking and often of high quality.

The Hill Diary is just what it says – a daily account of days in the hills and mountains. For those with an interest in these areas or mountain days or simply stravaiging among hills there are tales of interest – like the lengths he and companions, low in cash, had to go to to reach Iceland or other distant reaches and encounters with people there.

### Cairngorm Stories

### The Story of Bracken

Look around you in the Cairngorms - at all the plants and animals. Ask yourself, "What is the most ancient species I can see?" Not the most ancient living individual plant or animal like the ancient granny pines of Glen Feshie or Mar Lodge, each several hundred years old, but the species it belongs to. What about that ubiquitous fern, bracken? It's a possible candidate. Ferns as a group evolved some 350 million years ago in what is called the Devonian period. Certainly, there are fossils of bracken 55 million years old, so bracken has been around at least since then. Long

before continental drift broke supercontinents into today's smaller ones like the Americas and Africa, bracken was there. So today it occurs globally. It may in fact be made up not of one species (*Pteridium aquilinum*) but several in different parts of the world.

To survive that long, a species must have warded off attacks by numerous pests and diseases and competition from other plant species. Bracken has an impressive armament. It produces chemicals toxic to other plants (that

## The Story of Bracken continued from previous page

is it is “allelopathic”). These are washed out of the ageing fronds into the soil where they inhibit growth of herbs, young trees etc. An effective way of reproduction must be part of that armament and bracken certainly has it. Lift the fronds and look underneath at the curious structures fringing the leaves. These produce spores that can develop into mature bracken plants. A single sixfoot (nearly 2 metres) frond can produce an amazing 300 million spores, so imagine what a hillside of bracken can produce! In the bombed remains of buildings of the second world war, many young bracken plants were seen growing from spores blown from afar yet, in the wild in Scotland this process is rare. The late Professor Kenneth Braid, who studied bracken all his life, only ever found two young plants developing that way. It’s a puzzle. But bracken has a second way to reproduce. Under the soil, it grows long black horizontal stems called rhizomes that store energy in a kind of starch. Researchers have shown there can be 40 tons of rhizomes under one acre of bracken covered land – three to four times the weight of potatoes under a crop – and these grow out spreading the plant.

The story of bracken’s relationship with man in the Highlands has gone through stages. In various parts of the world, bracken has had an amazing range of uses for example as medicine, food source (making a flour from the energy rich rhizomes) and as human bedding that repels biting insects. Historically in Scotland bracken was a valued plant. Farmers used it chiefly for animal bedding and thatch. In the middle ages it was forbidden for tenant farmers to cut bracken before September when it was full grown, and there is a record of a farmer in Argyllshire paying his rent as 16 cartloads of bracken. Indeed bracken was absent from the Western Isles and raiding parties from the islands dug up plants to take back and establish it there – with dire consequences for those caught stealing bracken plants! The fronds are high in minerals, especially potassium, making its ash useful for bleaching, making quality soaps and glass making in later centuries. Indeed the industrial revolution created a demand for it in the glass works of Glasgow and Yorkshire.

However, in Scotland, from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century on, bracken began to spread and became a problem, mainly because its dense fronds shade out grazing and can also restrict tree establishment. A rhizome can grow seven feet (two metres) in a year and one small piece of rhizome has been shown to produce 300 bracken fronds in four years. It is very invasive! Reasons for this spread include the gradual decline of cattle raising in favour of sheep – cattle effectively trample bracken’s young emerging shoots and even rhizomes. Heather burning for sheep also favoured bracken, which easily regenerates from the buried rhizomes. The depopulation of the Highlands also meant bracken cutting declined. Whatever the causes, bracken spread to dominate some 400,000 acres in the Scottish uplands, especially in the southwest Highlands. Diverse ways to control it were attempted including spraying with weedkiller, cutting and bruising. Tractors, helicopters and aeroplanes and work by hand all were used. Two weedkillers emerged as effective – glyphosphate (i.e Roundup) and asulam. Asulam was favoured as being

selective in targeting bracken but the EU banned it from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 onwards. Where to now?

In the next stage of the story of bracken and man, one negative aspect of bracken emerged and that is its toxicity. It produces a range of toxins that can kill animals grazing it. One destroys the vital metabolite thiamine. More sinisterly, it is carcinogenic, being especially associated with intestinal cancers. Its toxins have been shown to seep into soils and thence water supplies, leading to speculation about locally raised levels of certain forms of cancers in populations drawing water from bracken infested areas. In Japan, the emerging shoots of bracken, called “fiddles” are commonly eaten. Is it a coincidence that stomach cancer is particularly high in Japan?

Veterinary researchers from Glasgow bought upland cattle auctioned because they were failing to thrive, the so-called “poordoers”, and postmortemed them. This revealed that a cancer of the intestines, hitherto thought uncommon, was the commonest cause of “poordoing”. Fascinatingly, further research showed the disease started as a harmless wart caused by a virus. Only when the animal ate bracken and the bracken toxins interacted with the virus did the wart become a carcinoma. Here was the first instance of a virus and a toxin interacting to produce a cancer. Past failure to realise the importance of the disease was understandable as neither farmers nor their vets would see the cancers. Nor would butchers and others later in the foodchain. Each saw a bit of the picture. However, in some societies, keepers of the cattle still see the whole process from . birth to killing and consumption of their cattle. A visit to Kenya by the researchers showed local farmers and researchers thought the disease did not occur there despite the presence of bracken. As a last thought, it was suggested they visit Masai elders who knew their cattle from birth to death and consumption. One glance at the pictures of the condition, and they said, oh yes the disease was in Kenya. *“Is it a problem in your country?”* they asked. Yes they were told. *“Well don’t worry, “just keep your cattle away from bracken and they will be alright!”* It pays to see the whole picture!

Where next will the story of bracken and man go?



Bracken rhizomes from under one small patch of ground colonised by bracken.