

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Spring 2007

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Wildlife Persecution in the Cairngorms</i>	1
<i>Action by the Campaign</i>	2-3
<i>Around the Cairngorms</i>	4
<i>Talking Point The future of Peat</i>	5-6
<i>In Brief</i>	7
<i>Cairngorm Stories</i>	8

The Cairngorms Campaign postal address:

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

"QUICK QUOTES"

"I can do without my eyes," I am reported to have said at the outset of my blindness, "but I cannot do without my mountains." Sid Scroggie, hillwalker blinded by a landmine in World War II and author of "The Cairngorms, Scene and Unseen"



WILDLIFE PERSECUTION IN THE CAIRNGORMS

Among the avalanche of news and comment that pours out of the Scottish media is an intermittent but depressing trickle of court cases of gamekeepers charged with the illegal killing of protected wildlife by trapping, shooting or poisoning. Historically, destruction of predators was a central policy on highland sporting estates. Even kingfishers were shot. Through this, four species of birds of prey were driven to extinction in Scotland – the goshawk, sea eagle, osprey and red kite, while others like the golden eagle, buzzard and hen harrier were reduced to small local populations.

Many birds of prey were given legal protection in 1954, but Adam Watson and Nethersole-Thompson, in their authoritative text "The Cairngorms" document the persecution of golden eagles in the Cairngorms from egg collectors and gamekeepers up till 1970, pointing out for example that persecution of eagles by gamekeepers was focused in grouse moor areas and rose in parallel with rents for grouse shooting.

The website of the Raptor Group, which monitors and studies birds of prey, quotes the late Donald Dewar, Secretary of State for Scotland condemning the practice and quotes Lord Sewell, Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Fisheries in the government's report "Counting the Cost – The Continuing Persecution of Birds of Prey in Scotland" saying,

"Scotland's wonderfully diverse wildlife is a national treasure, and wildlife crime is a crime against us all. It is particularly despicable when it takes the form of the illegal persecution of magnificent birds of prey, which give pleasure to thousands."

The longterm study by Adam Watson and his coauthors published in 1989 showed that on grouse moors between 58% and

75% of breeding attempts by golden eagles failed as opposed to 15% in deer forests. A report of the UK Raptor Working Group published in 2000 highlighted "that in the four years since the Working Group was established in 1995, there had been 371 confirmed reported incidents, but that this reflected a small proportion of the actual incidents which occurred."



Dead eagle killed by illegal poisoning.

Times have changed however – or at least they should have. There is now more potentially effective legislation in place for protection of such species, namely the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, but will they be effective? Are they being used effectively? According to a report by the RSPB considering raptor persecution from 1995 to 2004, it continues and shows a marked concentration in the southern and eastern Highlands where grouse moors are concentrated. Indeed there is a growing view that, with a younger generation of keepers, it is getting worse.

It is not just golden eagles or the birds of mountain areas that are illegally persecuted. Red kites, buzzards, hen harriers and others suffer. Buzzards have minimal impacts on sporting interests, living largely on rabbits, carrion and even worms, but they remained largely confined to a few areas until the pesticide carbofuran, used on some arable crops, was banned. Carbofuran is highly toxic to

WILDLIFE PERSECUTION IN THE CAIRNGORMS contd.

birds (and humans) and cases of poisoning of eagles are frequently recorded, but there is no overlap between the hunting range of eagles and where crops treated by carbofuran are grown.

The RSPB's recent report comparing the breeding success of red kites introduced to northern Scotland and the south of England shows much better survival rates of young kites in England than in Scotland where they reckon 37% of all kites had been illegally poisoned. Already this year two dead kites have been found within the National Park.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association may protest and claim keepers are innocent, but the evidence is compelling and the simple truth is many keepers and others regard themselves as above the law in this area. As one knowledgeable respondent on the government's

consultation on snaring stated, "Many keepers regard it as a badge of honour to flout the law and boast about it with their mates."

It is ironic this should all occur just when some Scottish politicians are promoting the golden eagle as Scotland's national bird. The RSPB makes the simple point that until courts take proper advantage of the new legislation and hand out stiffer penalties the practices will continue. That they should be commonplace within a National Park that is supposed to contain and protect the finest examples of the nation's wildlife is even more unacceptable and points to an area where the National Park Authority should be taking a strong stand and effective action.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

River Dee Catchment Plan

The Dee is one of the main rivers flowing out of the Cairngorms. It is a famous salmon river and important for white water canoeing on its mid to lower stretches. The river itself is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive for the Atlantic salmon, the freshwater mussel and the European otter. Increasingly, river management is being undertaken at a whole catchment scale. Campaign committee members read the Dee Catchment Plan consultation draft produced under the guidance of a steering committee made up of representatives of eight government agencies and nine voluntary or quasi-official bodies. Despite this, the Campaign expressed major concerns at its poor quality – a not uncommon problem with government policy documents.

Among the major points made by the Campaign were that some parts of the draft plan, which was directed at the general public, were completely unintelligible to most people. There were, further, major omissions in content in the draft plan. Landscape was simply not considered, although the river itself is a major unifying theme in the landscape and a key component of it that attracts tourists.

A major omission lay in how the section on landuse and landcover did not even mention recreational hunting, although sporting estates dominate large areas on the Dee's headwaters and midwaters, and the broad management of vegetation in these estates has a major impact on the hydrology of the area. Another problem was the lack of any "trans-catchment" strategy to manage problems like bio-invasion by such species as exotic water plants or fish which cannot be prevented at the catchment level.

The Campaign urged that this and other problems in the draft plan were rectified and looks forward to seeing the second draft.

Extension of Cairngorms National Park Boundary to Include the Atholl Area

The Campaign submitted extensive evidence to the Environment & Rural Development Committee of the Scottish Parliament regarding the Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill. The evidence pointed out that the area concerned possessed all the properties specified as qualifying for inclusion in the National Park under the *National Park (Scotland) Act, 2000*. These included outstanding natural heritage and fine landscapes. The areas concerned also possessed wild land qualities and the present boundary excluded the Atholl area on no logical grounds. The Committee acknowledged the strength of the case presented but decided the issue should not be taken forward immediately through a parliamentary bill but be reconsidered in the five year review of the work of the National Park Authority.

The Cairngorms Campaign's Stance on Snaring

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act of 2004 contains provision for ministers to regulate snaring of wild animals and ministers previously indicated their intention to do so. The Scottish Executive issued a consultation on this in November 2006. Many members will have encountered such snares during their visits to the Cairngorms and their gruesome catch. The Campaign decided to take a strong stance on this issue and submitted evidence as below.

Animals caught in snares often die slow deaths, especially if they are caught by the leg, or around their waist, as happens to badgers for example. Animals like roe deer do not usually get caught by their necks and strangle. They tend to get caught by their legs and thrash around, tightening the noose and finally die slowly of shock, thirst or other causes. Anyone who knows where to seek these often hidden snares has come upon the remains of animals that have died in this way. Killing of any domestic or farm animal in this way in slaughterhouses would lay the offender open to criminal charges of cruelty. Why, the Campaign asked, should standards of humane treatment of

animals differ between domestic and wild animals? There would be no difference in the degree of suffering experienced by either, and there surely should be a common standard by which a practice is judged. It is an embarrassment to Scotland abroad that this barbaric practice is still permitted under our law.

A further consideration is whether, if snaring remains legal, such requirements as their inspection every 24 hours to ensure animals did not suffer would be properly observed. In practice, this requirement is mostly not observed with



Young mountain hare in snare - wire from fence is just visible top left hand corner. The body was much older than 24 hours, so the snare had almost certainly not been inspected within the required time.

regard to this or other forms of trapping such as gin traps. Cairngorms Campaign members have not infrequently come upon examples of animals in snares and traps and which have been left there to die, not removed by the required daily inspection.

It is predatory species held to be harmful to populations of game species like grouse that are often targeted. The scientific, ecological basis of the whole practice of killing predators to boost populations of game species is believed



The agony pit! A badger caught in a snare crawled round and round the tree it is attached to so often in its pain it dug this pit and finally, incredibly, bit through the snarewire and crawled away.

to be doubtful by ecologists and other wildlife experts. Snaring of fast breeding species is completely ineffective in controlling their populations.

Another concern was the assertion that snares can be laid to distinguish between protected and unprotected species. There is no basis for this belief. Experience of finding non-target species like pine marten and wildcat in snares confirms this. If keepers or others set snares knowing non-target protected species can and will be caught in them, they are already in breach of the law. The idea that 'non-target species would be released with a minimum of delay, as currently advised, is derisible. Animals caught in snares do not sit quietly. They thrash in panic, tightening the noose, causing injuries that make their survival after release unlikely, or suffering potentially fatal levels of shock. Releasing them is possibly more cruel than killing them.

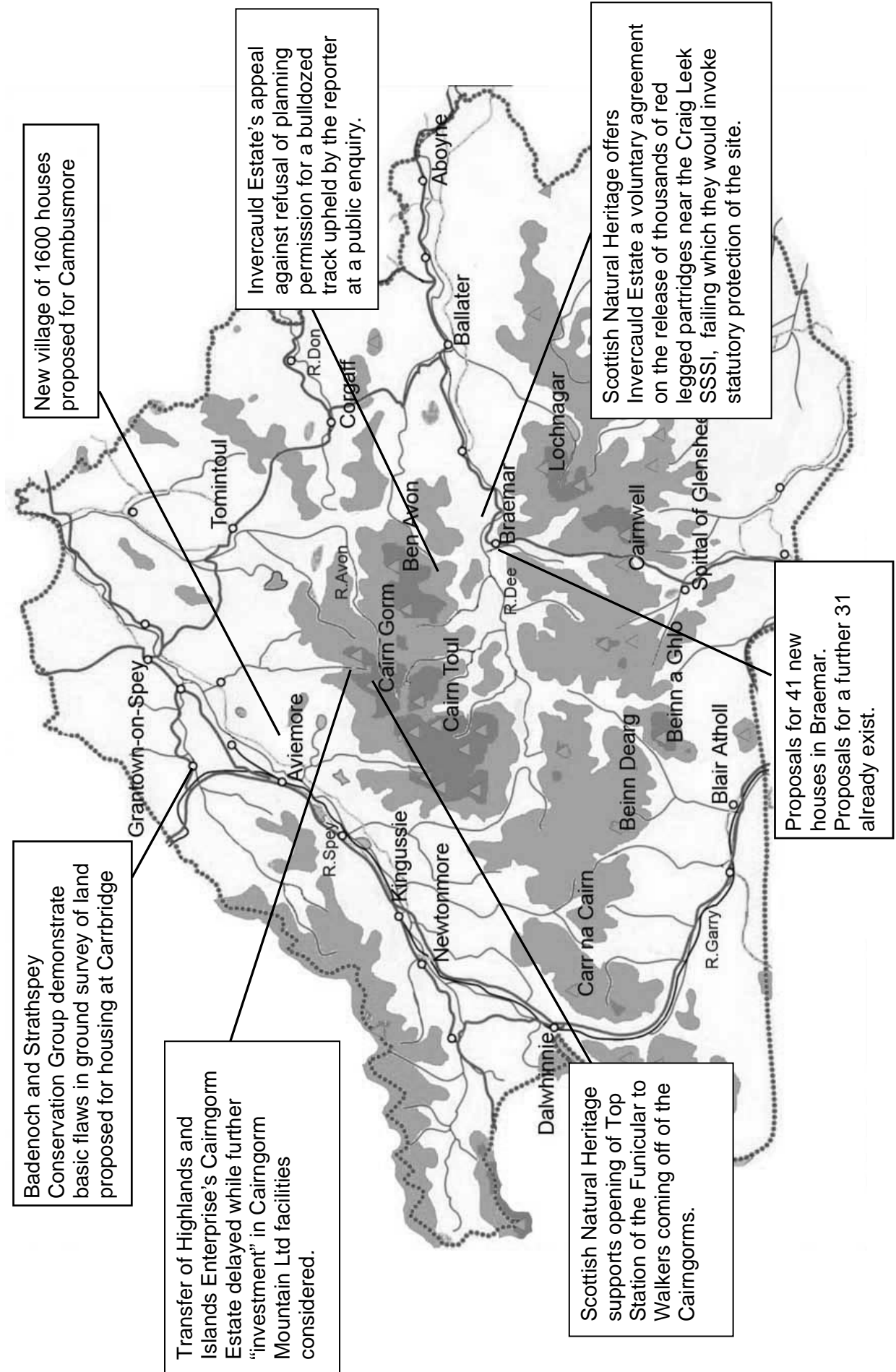
The Campaign strongly urged that snaring be banned.

Beauly to Denny Power Lines

The Campaign lodged a carefully worded objection to this proposed development. While the committee is fully supportive of moves to reduce greenhouse gas omissions and therefore a major move to renewable energy resources, it also feels the current concentration on onshore wind is a temporary measure that is saddled with inefficiencies, and inevitable major damage to our landscapes, which are a major economic resource. The construction of the power line is inextricably linked to that of an extensive system of windfarms. The two cannot be separated. It is the overall impact of and benefits from this scenario that needs considered but the planning process does not take this kind of holistic approach. The current proposals would result in massive landscape impacts on major parts of the Cairngorms especially along extensive distances close to the most important tourist entry route to the Northern Highlands! Landscape, as the fundamental quality that attracts tourists, is the basis of the Highland economy and a major component of the Scottish economy. A major impact on this is a huge price to pay for a relatively small amount of power and minimal saving of fossil fuels compared to the savings that could be made by following other policy routes like large scale tidal energy harvesting. The Campaign's objection was based partly on the lack of a strategic renewable energy plan developed through proper consultation with all the stakeholders and not just the energy companies.

Pressure of time has prevented CC representatives attending the public inquiry, but liaison is maintained with fellow NGOs who oppose it. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland appealed for funds to support this work. At its last meeting the CC's management committee, decided to support this appeal and a contribution of £500 was sent.

AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS



Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group demonstrate basic flaws in ground survey of land proposed for housing at Carrbridge

Transfer of Highlands and Islands Enterprise's Cairngorm Estate delayed while further "investment" in Cairngorm Mountain Ltd facilities considered.

New village of 1600 houses proposed for Cambusmore

Invercauld Estate's appeal against refusal of planning permission for a bulldozed track upheld by the reporter at a public enquiry.

Scottish Natural Heritage supports opening of Top Station of the Funicular to Walkers coming off of the Cairngorms.

Scottish Natural Heritage offers Invercauld Estate a voluntary agreement on the release of thousands of red legged partridges near the Craig Leek SSSI, failing which they would invoke statutory protection of the site.

Proposals for 41 new houses in Braemar.
Proposals for a further 31 already exist.

TALKING POINT

THE FUTURE OF PEAT

Peat has come steadily to the fore as a topic in recent years. Historically, it was seen as at best a useful fuel, and at worst an impediment to agriculture. The Netherlands is a good example. "Amsterdam was built on herring bones" is an old saying, referring to its access to the north seas herring fisheries and the role of herring as a food, especially in winter, as the foundation of the Dutch wealth and trading empire. But peat played its part too, as the fuel that sustained it, and "skinned land" where the peat had been removed for fuel and the mineral soils below exposed, became important food-producing agricultural land. For centuries, peat fuel was used by people in places like Ireland and Scotland, its slow burning nature producing dishes like Irish Stew. However, in the decades after the Second World War in particular, exploitation of peat deposits as a fuel was pursued large scale, especially in countries like Finland with large deposits.

But peat has other properties based on features like its unrivalled capacity to retain water and, outside of the alkaline peats found in places like the fens, its strongly acidic and infertile nature. The product of incomplete breakdown of plant remains, it accumulates slowly and, in the acidic, anaerobic conditions within it, the pollen falling in it from surrounding vegetation is preserved for centuries. Hence peat contains a long historical record of past vegetation. It similarly preserves the stumps and roots of pine trees that grew there and died as the peat built up around them, along with their resin content. The annual trek north of people from the lowlands to the south of the Mounth to collect these roots to be used as torches, gave the hillpass they used its name of the Fir Mounth.

Only specially adapted plants, animals and micro-organisms could thrive on it, giving rise to unusual plant and animal communities. Its capacity to hold water makes it an important reservoir, storing water over dry periods, slowing down rising river levels downstream in flood periods and greatly influencing the hydrology of the area. Most recently, in an era of climate change and the need to control CO₂ release, it has been realised that it stores vast amounts of this greenhouse gas. To give some measure of the role of peat in storing carbon and thus influencing climate, the UK's peat bogs contain up to 20 times more carbon than ordinary soils and store up to 20 billion tons of carbon – equivalent to 150 years of burning fossil fuels in UK.

According to the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute's website, *"The blanket peatlands of Scotland, formed under cool maritime conditions are of international importance because of their global scarcity and the habitats they support provide important breeding grounds for a number of bird populations. They also contain a huge store of carbon and are an important component of the carbon budget for Scotland."*

Deep peat bogs occur in the Cairngorms, but not over huge areas, as in Caithness and East Sutherland. Extensive areas of blanket bog occur as a layer of peat

covering mineral soils below. Other peat containing soils, the peaty podzolls, occur more widely. According to the Macaulay, *"These acid, nutrient deficient soils support a number of important vegetation communities of conservation interest, for example heather moorland and native pinewoods. They also support productive forestry plantations, primarily of Scots Pine."*

Unfortunately, peat is a vulnerable component of soils and fears are growing for what is happening to it. Internationally, there are major concerns like the burning of huge peat deposits in Borneo and the melting of permafrost in the vast peatlands of Siberia.

Within the UK, hill drainage schemes put in to "improve" land for grazing have damaged peat-holding areas and, in some areas, are now being reversed, partly to restore their water storage capacity to help manage water flows. This points to another consideration in that flood control and restoring the ecological quality of water bodies are required under the Water Framework Directive, so management of peat bogs and peaty areas is involved.

Peat is very vulnerable to erosion. Partly this is because of a perverse property it has in that, although moist peat is hydroscopic, and draws in and holds quantities of water, once it dries out, it repels water and is very resistant to rewetting. This is why sodden peats cut for fuel, stacked and left uncovered on moors in wet climates, still dry out enough to burn. Exposed peat surfaces thus do not rewet and, if exposed, the dry surface layers are easily blown or washed away in erosion. This exposes the next layer to the same fate and so on. Experienced peat cutters always lay the top mat of vegetation back onto the bog to cover the exposed layer and prevent it drying.

Heavy grazing that kills or weakens vegetation and exposes the peat can thus have enduring effects. One researcher, working on the impact of sheep grazing in the Peak District, found that once peat was exposed, vegetation did not re-establish itself until, decades later, the peat had been eroded off to expose the mineral soils below. "There is an important implication arising from this finding." He stated, concluding that, once erosion of peat has started it was likely to continue until the peat and underlying infertile mineral layers of soil were stripped off. Grazing pressures, he concluded, must therefore not be permitted to rise above a critical level.

Other impacts on peat are now causing concern as, once it dries out, it starts to decay and release its stored carbon dioxide. A recent project analysing aerial images of moorland in English uplands over the last 30 years calculated that the rate of muirburning had doubled in that time and on some moors much greater than that, as keepers tried to increase grouse numbers. This research found peat dry down to one metre instead of being saturated like a bog. This raised the question as to whether there was an emerging need to regulate muirburn.

Talking Point contd.

Other researchers are raising concerns at the impacts of windfarms. Globally, wind energy is the fastest growing source of power, especially in Europe. Ideal sites for windfarms are on rolling hills near the sea, but that is also where blanket bog layers of peat accumulate. Hitherto, impacts on peat of tracks created to build and maintain windfarms in causing drainage and hence drying out of the peat, have been held to extend to 50m but they are now thought to extend to 100m and by some workers to 250m. The resultant release of CO₂ would be a major impact on the capacity of windfarms in these situations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, significantly reducing their value as a renewable energy source. The RSPB, stating its concerns over the huge windfarm proposal on Lewis, states, *"Our independent peat expert advises us that the developers have seriously under-estimated the damage to the habitat."*

But what might be the implications in the Cairngorms? One national survey surveyed 20% of the Scottish uplands and found 12% of the area surveyed was affected by soil erosion. *"Peat erosion was most extensive in the Monadhliath and eastern Scotland which would include the Cairngorms, coinciding with the area of most extensive upland management (burning and tracks). Erosion associated with footpaths was not significant in area, but found mostly in the Cairngorms."*

Peter Marren, writing on climate change and the Cairngorms, concludes *"Against that will be the danger of wildfires in the predicted warmer, drier summers. The Cairngorms is among potentially the most combustible parts of Britain. Even in a globally warmed climate, the land will take time to recover from a hot fire. And bare, scorched soil and peat will erode quickly in the predicted stormy weather ahead."*

The Cairngorms National Park Authority's draft long term plan at least begins to recognize the issue, stating, *"For example while peat lands have their own intrinsic importance for their habitats and species, they also have an important function in regulating water flows in catchments, and as long-term carbon stores."* It observes that *"The National Park also has large areas of mire and fen that store and create peat. These accumulations of peat may be active (forming peat), or nonactive, and occur both as blanket bog over gentle slopes on the hills and within topographic hollows and on valley sides on lower ground."*

Making predictions on climate change and its impacts is a chancy business but at least it is a warning to start to think about muirburn, and other issues. It is something to which the Campaign will have to give attention.



Access road cut through peat over three metres deep for timber extraction and access to windfarm. Trees growing on peat have poor stability and are easily windthrown as above when operations like road building or clear felling expose them.

"QUICK QUOTES"

"His claim rests on the fallacious assumption that climate is temperature. In fact the lower limit of the Alpine zone extends to lower altitudes in windier climates towards the north and west. In Northwest Sutherland it goes down to 600 feet above the sea, on land with little frost or snow, but much wind."

Dr Adam Watson, in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald of 25 April, commenting on a claim by David Attenborough on TV saying ptarmigan and dotterel will disappear in the Cairngorms if temperatures continue to rise.

"QUICK QUOTES"

"A famous sportsman who was hoping to bag his 40,000th grouse on Deeside this season, Captain Keith F T Caldwell of Inneshewen, Dess has died in London at the age of seventy-three.

It was no impossible ambition, for seventy-three-year-old Captain Caldwell was one of the finest shots in the country and was within range of fulfilling it."

From the obituary of Captain KTF Caldwell, in the Press and Journal 6th May 1958.

IN BRIEF

More Tick Talk - Lyme Disease Research

This disease, which is transmitted by ticks when they bite hosts like us, is attracting increasing interest by researchers. Marianne James is doing a three-year study at Aberdeen University into the transmission of the disease and asks for some help.

She would like to hear from Campaign members who remember particular areas they visited last year in Scotland as being particularly 'ticky' - to try and identify hot spots for fieldwork this coming summer. If you are interested please email her with details of where you picked up ticks or received bites, with a grid reference, habitat description (e.g.> forest/grassland/garden) and how many. Finally, if anyone has been unlucky enough to have acquired Lyme disease in Scotland and are willing to give information via a small questionnaire, please contact with Marianne with details of where you were bitten: either by post to Marianne James, Room 216, Zoology Building, Tillydrone Avenue, Old Aberdeen, AB11 6FG, or by email at marianne.james@abdn.ac.uk

Sundry Activities

CC committee members have attended a seminar on Wild Country held by the National Park Authority to help advance policies on wild land protection in the Cairngorms Park Plan, and an all day meeting on Climate Change held by Scottish Environment Link to inform them on likely impacts on the Cairngorms. The convenor of the CC has also tried, whenever possible, to participate in Scottish Environment Link's Deer Group.

Forthcoming Action by Cairngorms Campaign

Much of the Campaign's time goes on reacting to the plans and policies of agencies. Two such policy documents have recently issued by the National Park Authority. One is the Park Plan. After much pressure from all round, it at least now contains a policy on the protection of wild land. The revealing thing is that this had to be urged on the Park Authority. Another is its Access Strategy. Previously, the convenor met with staff of the Park Authority to urge that any access strategy was set within the context of a broad strategy for recreational management. The Campaign's is now considering its reaction to the Access Strategy and details of reactions to both documents will be within the next newsletter.

The Cairngorms Must Always be Respected

Three times this winter, the Northern Cairngorms and their unpredictable weather took the lives of climbers. It is an unprecedented series of incidents. The Mountaineering Councils of the UK have considered this and other incidents and named various factors as being responsible, particularly the ease of accessibility of areas like the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms. Certainly, the construction of the public road up to Coire Cas has played a role in such incidents over the years. At the very least however, recent tragic events are a warning that with or without climate change, the Cairngorms must always be respected. Much precautionary guidance focuses on the particular dangers of winter but there are two periods of the year outwith winter that local experience shows need watching. One is the very end of November when blizzards sweep in, often from the east, with remarkable regularity. The other, is the late spring, when the "lambing storms", the ancient enemies of hill shepherds, can bring fierce blizzards. These are less frequent but still dangerous.

Member Involvement

As is stated in our Development Plan a continuing and effective communication programme has to be maintained if you, the membership, are to be fully aware of what we, the Board, are doing on your behalf. Such communication has to be two-way. The Newsletter gives a detailed account of actions taken and future issues. As you will see from the enclosed invitation to join in a walk into **Caenlochan** we are continuing with our programme of visits to locations in the Cairngorms that deserve our attention. Such visits will help keep you informed as to our activities.

In addition we are looking at the possibility in the autumn of mounting a seminar to explore some concerns in depth. However such activities do not always make it easy for members to communicate their views to the Board. To encourage this kind of involvement of members we are at present exploring the possibility of setting up a members' only website within our present public website. This 'private' website will enable members to have access to the various documents that come to the Board for consultation, to Board responses and to a variety of other papers such as minutes, meetings and the like. But most importantly it will allow you, the member, to communicate your views on what at that time is exercising the Board. This will make possible real two-way communication.

Much of this is still in the future but **we would welcome your views on the matters raised here** –the website, the walks and the seminar. Send them by phone, e-mail or letter to:- **Donald McCalman, 5 MacBean Road, Kincaig PH21 1AD.**
Tel 01540 651 477 email:- douald.mccalman@btinternet.com.

CAIRNGORM STORIES

THREE STORIES – WEE STORIES – FROM THE PLATEAUX!

It is Spring - one of these unusually still, balmy May days on the plateau near McDui. I lie down to enjoy the moment. The sun, in a clear blue sky, warms my face. The craneflies have taken their cue from such welcoming weather and thousands emerge around me. I watch them fly off with their curious drifting flight, to mate and fulfil their final act in their short adult lives. It is quiet enough almost to hear them fly but I hear another sound. Faint high calls drift down on me from somewhere. They seem almost all around, yet nowhere. Nothing is to be seen. But I have often heard that faint wild lovely sound before, and an idea comes to me. I get out my binocs, lie back, and slowly focus up into the blue – and there they are! High above the highest Cairngorms, out of sight of the unaided eye, skein after skein of wild geese are pouring over the range. It is spring. They too respond to it and go north to breed.

It is February, winter, and dark. I have just climbed one of the gullies of Lochnagar and emerged onto a moonlit, snow-covered plateau to head home. What a still night it is! Not a breath of wind disturbs grimly cold air – one of those winter nights when the ice holds everything in its grip, the air is crystal clear and sound travels far. There has been a recent fall of snow and it absorbs every, every, single sound. So, as I wander along, the only sound is the steady “crump, crump” of my footsteps as I sink through this semi-consolidated layer. At least it should be, but it is not. Behind me I hear the similar sound of another set of footsteps. But there is nobody there! I wander on and again hear it and swing round to view an empty expanse of flat snowfield. I am alone. But a third time I stand looking and listening and realise what I am hearing. So utter is the silence I am hearing my pulse in my ears! The moon is not so bright as to conceal the stars, yet bright enough to let me see the snow-covered ranges rippling to the horizon where the hills meet the stars. As my eye travels quietly to this horizon, I become aware of the great silence as almost a presence - not there but yet totally there. I wonder awhile whether perhaps, behind all the silliness and din of the everyday, a Great Silence is always there, then wander on

to the Red Barrel in Ballater for a pint, with “crump, crump, crump” behind.

It is September - a fine sunny day on the Ben Avon plateau; indeed hot for this altitude. The land seems unusually green and, some distance away, a large party of stags grazes peacefully. Having walked all the way in from Cockbridge and reached the plateau, we are now enjoying this high leisurely amble. But what's this? Here, over there, and over there, and there's another one – large brown butterflies are skipping and flitting along! Such large butterflies are unusual at this altitude, but there seem to be hundreds of them if you look over a large area. What kind are they? The fly pretty fast and alight only fleetingly and, chase them as I will, I can't see one at rest until we are descending. They are peacock butterflies! Then I realise what is happening. A gentle northerly breeze cools the day, and all the butterflies are going with it in the same direction – south! They move fifty yards, stopping fleetingly, and fly on, stop briefly, and on again. Not until the early 1990s did Peacock butterflies appear this far north, and then only in the lowland gardens. Now, in 2006, I am watching these seemingly fragile creatures migrate over the high Cairngorms. It is autumn, in the September that had average temperatures 3.5 centigrade above the previous highest record. I am seeing a sign of the times.



Peacock butterfly in a Cairngorms garden May 2007

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The management committee has been bringing the annual cycle of the Campaign events back into its normal seasonal pattern

The **AGM** this year will be on the weekend of

September 22/23

It will be at Kingussie Public Hall Talla nan Ros on Speyside and a topic of central interest to the Campaign members will be selected and focused on by selected speakers

There will be more information in a newsletter prior to that date.

**Web: www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk
E-mail: rdw@cairngormscampaign.org.uk**