

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Autumn 2014

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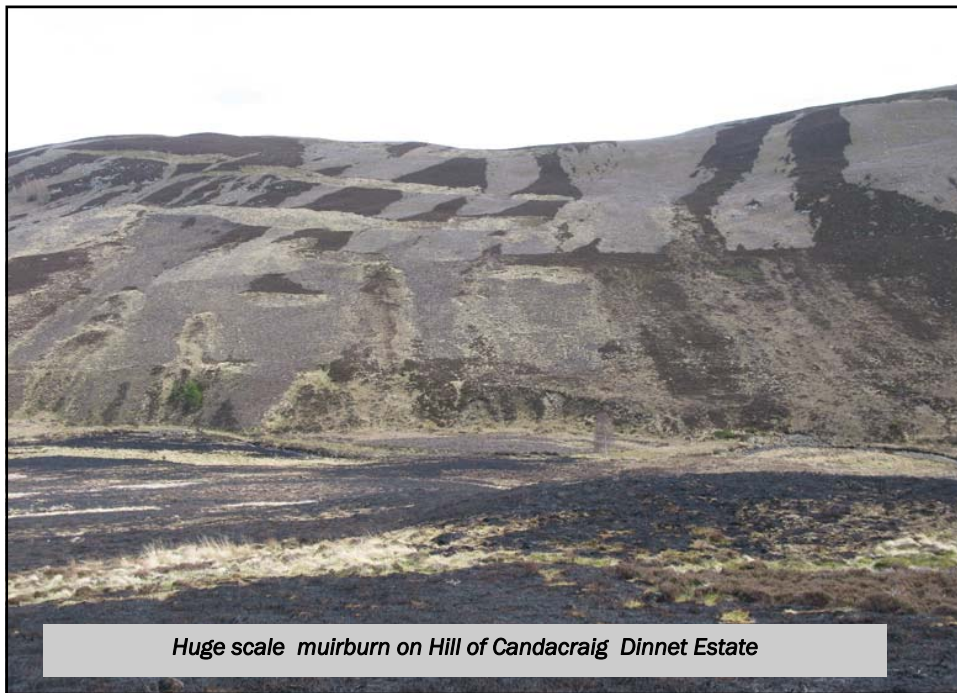
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WHAT TO DO ABOUT SPORTING ESTATES?



Huge scale muirburn on Hill of Candacraig Dinnet Estate



Muirburn burning into Scots Pine stand

Eliminating species in a National Park.

In our Talking Point article (page 6) in this issue, we discuss the persistent problem of red deer management. In our Spring 2012 newsletter we discussed problems in the intensification of grouse moors (see “The Inglorious 12th”) and described the diverse

problems resulting from the often-irrational measures taken to raise grouse populations.

The virtual elimination of mountain hares on estates in the Eastern Highlands to remove the ticks they carry is now being followed on some grouse moors by the elimination of deer for the same reason,

WHAT TO DO ABOUT SPORTING ESTATES? continued

followed by large scale erection of deer fences to exclude them with no provision for human access on foot. Pesticides are now used to control ticks by treating sheep with a group of pesticides called pyrethroids which kill ticks attracted onto the sheep. This aims to limit the spread of louping ill to grouse from ticks. To this end, estates are often taking over sheep enterprises on their land. There are emerging issues. In our Spring 2012 issue we described the horizon-to-horizon stock fences (erected to contain the sheep) that killed so many flying grouse the top wire is being removed in some areas. It is doubtful if the fences are then stockproof. Electric fences are now appearing instead in wild areas.

Pesticides enter a new field of use.

More fundamentally, pyrethroids are highly toxic to insects but graded as of relatively low toxicity to mammals. Yet farmers and shepherds applying them often complain of feeling ill after applying them to sheep. For normal sheep farming they are applied to sheep twice per year but, used as tickmops, they are applied five times. Estates employ "contract shepherds" to manage the sheep, but sheep husbandry is skilled and difficult, more so than cattle husbandry. Even by the early 1980s skilled shepherds were difficult to find. So where do skilled contract shepherds then come from?

We described how grouse grit is now being loaded with much denser concentrations of the pesticide flubendazole to treat the gut threadworm, *Trychostrongylus tenuis*. We pointed out in our Spring newsletter that the method of using flubendazole, one of a group of chemicals called benzimidazoles invited the emergence of resistance in the threadworm. Resistance of several gastrointestinal roundworms to all benzimidazoles, including flubendazole, is common and very high worldwide in sheep and goats and only slightly lower in cattle. It is thus very likely to develop in the grouse threadworm.

Pesticides cross an ethical boundary?

In agriculture, pesticides are generally used in calculated, timed doses, by people required to be trained in their application to what are relatively simplified ecosystems of crop production. Even so, their application often creates major and frequently unpredicted damaging side effects to

non-target species like pollinating bees. Pesticides, using the term very broadly to include such things as antibiotics and fungicides, were evolved for two principal uses. One was to protect human health and the other to protect human food supplies through their use in agriculture. **Applying pesticides to much more complex semi-wild natural habitats where other species must be considered and protected, under much less controlled conditions by often untrained staff, simply to protect recreational hunting, is a major line that should never have been crossed without full consideration of the ethical and ecological and possibly even wider implications! Why was this not done?**

Muirburn out of control?

In our Spring 12 newsletter article we also discussed the increasingly common practice of burning large areas, apparently to help kill ticks. The practice also temporarily removes the habitat that grouse and other species depend on but it has other unexamined implications. Destroying the vegetation over large areas of hillsides radically increases water running directly off into rivers during rainfall rather than being retained temporarily in soils, with major implications for flooding and the ecology of those watercourses. Recent research has shown that even the standard restrained strips of muirburn on grouse moors has damaging effects on invertebrates in burns. Wildfires have become such a problem that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has appointed a special officer to help reduce them. Appeals have been made to the public and tourists to help reduce wildfires. But it is not them who cause most of the wildfires. The chief cause in the uplands is out of control muirburn lit by keepers. Looking at the scale of many such burns, many visible from public roads, it is clear that the limited staff on estates could not control them. Under the Hill Farming Act of 1946, the Muirburn Code is compulsory and specifies that fires must not be left unattended and that those who start them **must** be able to control them. Perhaps the most effective way to reduce wildfires is simply for the authorities to enforce the law.

The numerous issues arising under the management of deer and grouse point to an urgent need for a radical review of sporting estates in Scotland.

WEE APOLOGY

We apologise for the fact that members have received only one instead of two newsletters this year, although we have tried to place more information and comment than usual into this one. Illness of the editor, who is voluntary, prevented preparation of the spring edition

Action by the Campaign

An Camas Mòr – Recent Developments (or not ...)

Members will be well aware of the long-running concerns of the Cairngorms Campaign over the proposal for a new town with up to 1500 houses in an area of lowland heath and ancient woodland on the east bank of the Spey opposite Aviemore. This An Camas Mòr proposal formed a major part of the Campaign's legal challenge (of which more below). Since the last Newsletter there have been significant developments over this controversial issue.

Firstly, on 12 March 2014, the CNPA granted "Planning Permission in Principle" (PPP) for the new town, but with a number of challenging conditions attached, including the requirement for a Masterplan addressing 25 sub-conditions, and another "Landscape and Ecology Masterplan" with a further 13 sub-conditions. Significantly, another condition required the production of a "Recreation Management Plan conforming to all the criteria within the Habitats Regulations Assessments and demonstrating that there will be no adverse effect upon Capercaillie". The developer associated with the proposal for the previous three years, Springfield Properties, hailed the granting of PPP as *"very welcome news and a major step forward We can now move quickly to submit our masterplan"* (Press & Journal, 13 March 2014).

However, shortly afterwards, on 15 April, Springfield Properties announced that it was *"pulling out to pursue different priorities"* leaving the project with no developer and no masterplan submitted. Landowner John Grant of Rothiemurchus Estate *"said he was confident there would be progress soon"* adding *"An Camas Mòr is already in discussion with other partners"* (Herald 15 April 2014). However there has still been no announcement of any new developer (9 September).

Then on 12 June the local paper carried the story *"An Camas Mòr LLP has now submitted an application for a masterplan for the development ..."*. However, it rapidly became apparent that 1) it had not addressed all the numerous conditions applied to the PPP and 2) it was not even clear which conditions had been addressed. Moreover, even those conditions that did appear to have been addressed had been treated, in our view, very inadequately. For example, condition 2.h. required *"details of how the level of second and holiday home ownership and use within the development will be managed."* Yet the **only** mechanisms proposed to deal with the intractable problem of discouraging second/holiday homes was by *"positive design and by the creation of a vibrant mixed use community"*! Quite how those measures would manage second/holiday home ownership is anyone's guess: there is no explanation in the application.

The Cairngorms Campaign commissioned Ian Cowan of Highland Environmental Law to submit our response. Working under a tight time schedule, Mr Cowan produced two letters, firstly dealing with the structural failings of the application and, secondly, addressing some of the detailed inadequacies. Full details of all the documents associated with this application can be found at

<http://cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/planning/new-planning-applications/> and searching for **09/155/CP** .

On 28 July 2014, John Grant withdrew the masterplan application before any formal consideration by the CNPA. This application is dead, but no doubt there will be another.

Finally, the CNPA has recently received a report it commissioned from the James Hutton Institute entitled "River Spey Water Quality and Effluent Chemistry". The report notes the Spey is a Special Area of Conservation for the freshwater pearl mussel, which has declined in the river from c. 10 million in 1989/90 to c. 5 million in 2013/4. The reasons for the decline appear to be i) low flows causing the mussels to dry out, ii) poor water quality iii) the spread of water weed (*Ranunculus*). Low flows may be exacerbated by increased water abstraction for human use. Poor water quality and *Ranunculus* spread are associated with discharges from waste-water treatment plants. The CNPA and SNH have described the implications of the report's findings as *"significant"* and *"important"* respectively. It hardly needs to be said that the implications for the 1500 houses planned for An Camas Mòr are likely to be both.

The Campaign's Legal Challenge to the Development of An Camus Mor

Members will understandably be curious as to the status of the legal challenge, after hearing no news for many months. Our Appeal is lodged with the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, together with the Statement of Facts and Issues, but no date has yet been set for the Hearing. We understand it is unlikely a hearing will be before the second half of 2015, so in the meantime we must be patient.

Forest Restoration in Glen Feshie Estate

Glenfeshie estate, under its Danish owner, *"is pursuing multiple objectives that demand economic, ecological and social sustainability."* Much of the estate is a Natura 2000 site in which restoration of the Caledonian Pine Forest is a prime objective. This was being achieved through a Forestry Commission (FC) Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) aimed at the regeneration of the native woodlands, and a Section 7 Agreement under the Deer (Scotland) act 1996 that requires a reduction in deer impact in order to fulfil the Natura 2000 objectives. Extensive culling of red deer ensued as initial red deer population densities were such that each year's crop of seedling trees were grazed. There were 34 red deer per square kilometre in 2000, 19.45 in 2002, 12.27 in 2003 and, by 2005, 11.6. It was hoped that a density of 5 per square kilometre would ensure regeneration but that finally had to go to 1.73. By 2007 the forest was regenerating. This policy brought the estate under pressure from neighbouring estates which maintain high populations for deerstalking. For this and other reasons, the Campaign wrote a letter of **support** to

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN contd.

the owner, Anders Holch Povlsen. Discussion has focused on the regeneration of pine and other trees. But a forest is an entire habitat and the river Feshie and its tributaries are a key part of it. Deforestation of a river catchment fundamentally alters its entire ecology and, although the Feshie is considered a "wild" river in UK terms as its course is largely, although not entirely, removal of trees strongly influences not only its course, but also its holding capacity for fish and other aquatic lifeforms. Large Woody Debris (LWD) falling in the river provides important habitat for young fish. Various effects of the forest alter river flows, constraining downstream flooding during heavy rainfall. Glen Feshie is seeing not just the restoration of a forest, but of much of an entire catchment. The letter explored this situation and is on our website.

Planning Control Over Hilltracks

Hilltracks bulldozed (now created by large diggers) into wild areas have long been contentious in the Cairngorms. Dr Adam Watson in particular documented their spread and spoke out strongly against them. Apart from the loss of wild land, they are nearly all badly constructed, poorly drained if at all, erode rapidly and have major landscape impacts. A Scottish Environment Link taskforce, led by the Ramblers Association, campaigns to have them brought under planning control. Earlier, the Campaign submitted, detailed, lengthy, well-illustrated evidence to the Scottish government on their impacts. This June, when the minister was considering action, it wrote a strong supportive letter to the minister pointing out the impacts of such tracks and urging effective planning controls.

Government has now announced some complicated but rather timid measures. Planning permission for track construction is already required in National Scenic Areas, but the government refuses to extend this to either National Parks or Wild Land areas mapped by Scottish Natural Heritage. Planning Authorities must now receive notification of the intention to build non-agricultural hilltracks and decide, within 28 days, if they require planning permission or, if not, do they require prior approval, a procedure that lets them attach conditions to their construction. If so, the Planning Authority must provide written decision within 2 months. However, it is doubtful if already busy planners have the time, or even the skills to assess many of the likely impacts on track construction like erosion, impact on peat, etc. It is a timid and possibly unworkable arrangement.

Change of Management on Cairn Gorm

Cairngorm Mountain Ltd operated the funicular and other activities on Cairn Gorm. It was taken over by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to prevent it being declared bankrupt closing whole operation. In July, HIE stated it was, "*---delighted to announce that Natural Retreats, a specialist leisure and travel company, as the new operator of Cairngorm Mountain.*" Natural Retreats it stated, "*---are renowned for offering customers and guests high quality tourism based experiences in the most dramatic natural*

locations around the world." The aim is to "*---elevate Cairngorm Mountain as one of the leading leisure and adventure resorts in Europe, offering high quality services across all aspects of the site.* Four key staff have gone. A new chief executive will share the job with managing Natural Retreat's centre in John o Groats.

Given that Cairngorm Mountain Ltd accumulated disastrous losses despite a reduction in rent to HIE from £513,000 to £100,00 including an over £5m debt to the Bank of Scotland, and the likely pressures the new aim would bring upon the mountain, the Campaign wrote requesting information on key aspects. The Public Audit Committee, in its Annual Report 2009-10 to the Scottish Parliament heavily criticised HIE's management of the facilities on its Cairngorm Estate. Construction costs alone had overrun by £11.2m! It urged HIE to develop an effective business plan. It was particularly critical of HIE's failure to accurately predict visitor numbers, pointing out summer visitor numbers in recent years had averaged only 92,903, a shortfall of 72,097 (43.69%) on HIE's 165,000 forecast.

The Campaign therefore asked what steps HIE took to ensure future visitor numbers will be adequate to sustain the development? HIE says it was confident it had secured a "*highly professional and well respected operator with the capacity, experience, skills and appetite to market the resort as effectively as possible so that it can fulfil its potential, not only as a snowsports centre, but a year-round visitor attraction which helps to underpin the wider area economy.*" HIE was impressed that, in its business model, Natural Retreats has anticipated that, "*two years out of every five may prove especially challenging due to weather conditions.*" (Code for no snow – or little of it?) The aim is to reduce the historic reliance on winter sports for income. This means increasing summer visitors greatly. But how is this to be done, what further activities will be developed to achieve it, and will it bring extra pressures upon the mountain?

HIE, following an independent survey, identified repairs and maintenance to the buildings, associated infrastructure and ski-tows costing £1,701,500 excluding VAT. These works are under way. HIE is also lending the company £4m over 25 years as part of a plan to invest £6.2m in restructuring including a new Day Lodge. When constructing the funicular, HIE abandoned assessment of value for money invested. The Audit Committee was critical of this. £12,000 of grant aid was then expected to create 1 job or 1 full-time equivalent job. In practice it cost over £130,000 per job! How therefore, asked the Campaign, would HIE ensure value for public money invested this time? HIE stated, "*Standard accountancy key performance indicators (KPIs) will be used to monitor the effectiveness of the business on a quarterly basis while the wider impact will be quantified periodically through an independent evaluation – with a focus on job creation and (tourism) sectoral development.*" We will see!

In Brief

The Rothiemurchus Estate Sells Large Area of Caledonian Pine Woods to Forestry Commission

The lands of Rothiemurchus have been in the hands of the Grant family for some 500 years. It came as a surprise therefore that the estate sold 2300 hectares to the Forestry Commission for £7.4 million. Why did the Commission buy them, why did the estate sell, and what difference will it make since they remain under the same management agreement as a Natura 2000 site. The Commission says, *“The Caledonian pinewoods that are prevalent in this area make it one of Scotland’s most iconic and widely recognised - and culturally and historically significant landscapes. We intend to manage it to deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits to generations to come. Combining this part of Rothiemurchus with the other native pinewoods that we manage in the area will mean that planning, partnership work, and enhancement/improvement action can take place on a truly landscape level.”*

Certainly, it permits the Commission to link their existing forests of Glenmore and Inshriach with an overarching management plan for the whole. Until then the existing forest management plan in place for this area of Rothiemurchus will continue. The Commission also says it will work closely with RSPB Scotland which manages the neighbouring Abernethy and SNH which manages the neighbouring Inshriach National Nature Reserve aiming to improve and enhance the forest and deliver recreational, environmental, social and economic benefits. This will be interesting!

Why did John Grant, owner of Rothiemurchus sell part of his family’s ancient lands? That has not been announced

although there is strong speculation it was to gain capital to progress the development of An Camus Mor.

Deluge and Floods in the Cairngorms

It’s been raining – just in case you hadn’t noticed. Just how much is demonstrated by the measured rainfall at the Strathspey Weather centre at Cromdale. For the 13 years 2001-2013 average rainfall for August is 75mm. For August 2014 it was 160.2mm! However, it was the southern and eastern sides of the Cairngorms that were particularly hit. It has not just been the overall high rainfall, but its concentration. The night of 10/11th August saw a downpour that caused widespread flooding and damage. Main rivers like the Dee and Don and, in the case of the upper Dee, all its tributaries, burst their banks. Footpaths in places like Glen Tanar and Mar Lodge Estate were badly eroded and bridges important to walkers damaged or removed. In Glen Livet, two footbridges over the River Avon were badly damaged. On Mar Lodge Estate, the footbridge at Derry Lodge, important in the access route to the Lairig Grhu, and upper footbridge in Glen Quoich were washed away and footpaths badly damaged (See www.facebook.com/MarLodgeEstate www.twitterfeed/MarLodgeNTS). Walkers need to check if these bridges have been restored when planning a route. Several people overnighing in Bob Scott’s Bothy in Glen Luis had to be rescued by a combined op by Braemar Mountain Rescue Team and Fire Scotland. The bothy survived too. See photographs of the scale of the floods at braemarmountainrescue.org.uk

Perhaps more significantly, this is the type of event that climate change models conclude will become more frequent and indeed more severe. Climatologists have been wary of attributing individual weather events to climate change, although the overall trend to more extreme weather events and more frequent ones is now clear. However, newer studies are venturing to assess the influence of climate change on individual events. It is calculated that climate change increased the likelihood of the floods in southeast England in 2014 from a 1 in a 100 year event to a 1 in 80 year event – that is made it 25% more likely. It is also calculated that climate change doubled the likelihood of the 2003 heatwave in Europe. The flood of the 10th/11th has been billed as a 1 in 200 year flood but such events will almost certainly be more frequent than that. It is a portent of things to come – more frequently and more a pointer to how the Cairngorms now need to be managed.



Footbridge over the Derry washed aside on the night of 10th 11th August

In Brief continued on page 9

Talking Point

THE PROBLEM OF DEER



Damage to conifers by deer



Stock fencing at the right height for g

Sporting estates, managed and used for recreational hunting of chiefly red deer and red grouse, occupy much of the land of the Cairngorms. How they are managed fundamentally influences how well the broad Cairngorms and its National Park, is sustained. Unfortunately, the story is not a happy one. It revolves basically around the deer forests and of grouse on moorland.

Concerns over what to do about “the red deer problem” in the Highlands date back as far as 1872! In 1959 the Deer (Scotland) Act set up a Deer Commission to manage the problem. It didn't. In the 1960s there were an estimated 150,000 red deer in Scotland but by 1983 there were 400,000. Estimates for roe deer are more recent, but these too indicate a rise from 300,000 to 350,000 in the last decade. A 2008 Reform Group pointed out in its final report, “*For over 50 years since the 1959 Act, the Red Deer Commission, the Deer Commission for Scotland and Natural Heritage have each consistently called for reductions in deer numbers to reduce their impacts on an expanding natural heritage. However, during that period, the overall numbers of wild deer in Scotland have continued to increase and their range has continued to expand.*” For example: in 1963, there were an estimated 23,700 red deer in the Cairngorms, but by 1983 the estimate was 34,000, and today it is over 40,000.

Other countries in Europe have statutory systems for managing deer populations. The “Deer Management Groups” set up in Scotland, dominated by landowners' representatives, have been a consistent failure. The result has been overgrazing by red deer, with significant impacts on the natural heritage, and a neglect of the public interest.

To take one example, the public cost of erecting deer fencing to exclude deer, principally red deer, from woodlands and forests rose from £1,200 in 2003 to an incredible £5,127,452 in 2012! Despite this, after eight years of research, the conclusion of the Forestry Commission's Woodlands Survey of Scotland, published February 2014, was that 54% of these woodlands were in unsatisfactory condition due to damage was overgrazing – mainly by deer.

But it is the impacts of overgrazing by red deer on the wider ecosystem that has commanded most attention. Under heavy grazing, extensive mosaics of near-natural diverse vegetation based broadly on dwarf shrubs like heather, deteriorate into less diverse species, dominated by grasses such as purple moor grass. These are less able to sustain deer populations, in part because they are dormant in winter, leaving little to graze, unlike heather which is evergreen. These changes also make the habitat less valuable for wildlife. Ecological consequences of climate change and acidic deposition. More directly, birds and invertebrates dependent on these habitats become at risk as the habitats decline or are fragmented. Ecologists find that, under pressure of heavy grazing by red deer, there is good evidence for the local extinction of ptarmigan and, over recent decades, reduction of populations of red grouse, harrar, and ring ouzel. Other kinds of species could also be affected. As an example, investigations into the dwarf willows of the Cairngorms have shown that they are being replaced by a more open, grassy sward.

Talking Point

FOREST MANAGEMENT



grouse to hit stretching over the hills



Deer fence around upper Glen Esk blocks access even to the trig point

of the Cairngorms. Historically, natural heritage of the management of red deer in

and) Act established the Red that figure now stands about As the government's Land Commission and now Scottish member of public interests. continued to expand." As an he increase continued.

to manage the problem and with a cascade of damaging

ests, rose from £571,797 in mission's report, Native on, and the chief cause of

grazing pressure by red deer, rse ones with fewer plant e they their foliage largely dies wide-scale monitoring of se near-natural habitats (and in places also sheep) e, black grouse, merlin, hen of the Scottish uplands, reduced



Large herd of 180 red stags moving in the snow Glen Gironck

Talking Point continued

by grazing and burning to small fragmented populations, raised fears that their genetic diversity had been reduced to the point where the survival of such species was endangered. But there are also twenty mycorrhizal fungal species that the willows live with symbiotically and depend upon, and other larger fungi growing in association with them. Many of these species were found nowhere else in the UK! These too therefore become at risk.

Overgrazing almost certainly affects the hydrology of the area, although this is an inadequately researched topic. Run-off of rainfall from grass-dominated areas is certainly faster and greater than from heather dominated areas, leading to concerns about flooding. In an era of climate change leading to more frequent and greater floods, this could be a highly significant impact. Heavy grazing also damages river bankside vegetation, reducing bank stability, deposition of food into burns and rivers in the form of foliage and insects etc, and reducing shading.

The influence of trampling and heavy grazing on soil erosion, especially in peaty areas, is also regarded as significant.

Scottish Environment Link's Deer Task Force recently assessed the management of native deer as, "*one of the most pressing conservation issues in Scotland.*" That is certainly true in the Cairngorms. But the problem goes on spreading. Red deer do not greatly expand their range except under pressure of high populations within their current range. Hinds especially are strongly "hefted" to the area where they were borne. But excessive deer populations have pressured red deer to expand far outwith their former range, for example into woodlands fringing the Cairngorms and contiguous hill ranges like the Coreen hills. There farmers on the upland fringe are now having to employ stalkers to cull red deer among their crops. In 2005, a consultants' report to the then Deer Commission warned that there was a danger that red deer would spread to the Scottish agricultural lowlands if the problem was not contained. This is now happening in the Aberdeenshire lowlands, and possibly elsewhere. There they could become both an agricultural pest and a traffic hazard on busy roads.

Under Scots law, wild deer belong to no-one until they are 'rendered into possession' by being killed or captured by someone but 18th century landowners established that nobody could hunt wild deer over any land without the permission of the land owner, thus permitting the evolution of Deer Forests with rights to stalk deer exclusive to the landowner or their guests or clients. The Scottish Deer Management Code states its aim is "*managing deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities now and for future generations*". It clearly isn't happening. The Land Reform Review Group, in its

recent report "The Land of Scotland and the Common Good", concluded, "*The Review Group has been struck during its own investigations by the limited progress in addressing some of the issues over the management of wild deer in Scotland, particularly red deer, despite many years of debate over these issues.*" Neither the Deer Commission nor its successor, Scottish Natural Heritage have used powers given to them to cull red deer. Why the lack of progress? Two reasons at least are clear.

Tree-free areas grazed heavily by herbivores are commonly called "rangelands." Deer forests are valued principally according to how many stags that can be shot. Hence deer are regarded as the primary resource. This is the most fundamental error in rangeland management. The basic resource on which all else depends is the soil/plant system, not the herbivore being harvested, in this case red deer. Where this error has been made in other parts of the world, results have been disastrous. Only the resilience of soil/plant systems in the Scottish uplands has prevented that, but there has been extensive damage nonetheless. A second reason is that the very landowners that make this mistake dominate Deer Management Groups. It is a recipe for a classic case of "The Tragedy of the Commons". "*There is also widespread recognition of the need to improve the management of these populations in the public interest to reduce their impacts, as reflected in the Scottish Government's response to the Committee's conclusions*", says the Land Reform Group. So what is the government going to do about it? Well, Deer Management Groups are to be given a last chance. By 2016 all these groups are to have deer management plans in place. Scottish Natural Heritage has been given £200,000 to finance staff to oversee their development. These measures do not address the two basic problems outlined above. **It seems more than likely that this farce will continue!**

Quick Quote

From **Caenlochan** by Helen B Cruickshank

"I saw a herd of wild red deer
In dark Caenlochan Glen.
They scented me, saw me, and upward fled
Splashed through the burn, and upward sped
Into the mists on Monega's head,---"

In Brief continued

Adam Watson Awarded a Further Honorary Degree

Our Spring 2012 newsletter stated Adam Watson had been awarded the *Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture* at the 2012 Fort William Mountain Film Festival. He has now been awarded an Honorary Degree by Aberdeen University where indeed he was an undergraduate. This is not the first honorary degree he has been awarded by a university but there is an irony that his alma mater has been the last to recognise his contribution in a diversity of fields of science including mountain management, and population dynamics. It is a well-deserved award and we offer our congratulations.

When Were the Cairngorms Last Glaciers?

About 11,500 years ago has been the standard view up till now, but views are changing. New research by a Dr Marten Kilbride of Dundee University suggests that in fact glaciers formed only 400 years ago during Europe's "little ice age", most severely between 1650 and 1790, and may even have persisted into the 18th century! Dr Kilbride's work points to Coire an Lochain as being the site of the last glacier. Parallel to this, researchers at Aberystwyth

and Exeter Universities have been working on climate models to predict how cooler and snowier winters would have had to be then to cause glaciers to form in the Cairngorms. These predict glaciers would have formed in several places in the Cairngorms. It is interesting in this respect that snow depths lying in some parts of the Scottish mountains this year suggest that some large patches at least may well persist through into next winter.

Study Into Illegal Interference with Legal Traps and Snares

A year-long study into unauthorised interference with legal traps and snares has been instigated by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) and agreed to by land managers in Scotland. Monthly analysis of reports from gamekeepers and others will be sent to the Scottish Government's Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (PAW Scotland). Although certain kinds of traps and snares and how they can be used is entirely within the law, much public feeling is so opposed to it that people sometimes destroy them. It is also uncertain whether members of the public know legal from illegal forms of trapping and snaring.

What a month !

August 2014

What a Month!

(Taking Averages from 'Strathspey Weather' station at Cromdale since 2000)

Wettest, coldest and least sunny August so far this new millennium:

189.7mm of rainfall, two and a half times the average (75.9mm) for August

Average temperature only 10.7C, 1.6C colder than next coldest (August, 2011, at 12.3C) since 2001

Only 43.59 hours of sunshine against average of 104.89

Second highest daily rainfall record, of 46.9mm on 10th August - beaten only by 11th October 2005 with 62.6mm

YUCK!

BOOK REVIEWS

In the Cairngorms – Poems by Nan Shepherd. Pub Galileo Publishers Cambridge

Nan Shepherd died in 1981. By 1933 she had published three novels “*Quarry Wood*”, “*The Weatherhouse*” and “*A Pass in the Grampians*.” But she is remembered chiefly for her outstanding nonfiction book about the Cairngorms, “*The Living Mountain*” which, although she wrote it in the 1940s, was not published until 1977 when she was 84. Her book of poems has been out of print for many years and this reprinting is welcome. Most are about the Cairngorms and are written largely in English and a few in Scots or rather a mix of these two miscible languages. They have a sharpness and clarity that reflect the depth and intensity of her experience in those very mountains and hence often strike a strong cord with those who know and love the Cairngorms.

Loch Avon

Loch A’n, Loch A’n, hoo deep ye lie!
 Tell nane yer depth and nane shall I.
 Bricht though your deepmaist it may be,
 Ye’ll haunt me till the day I dee,
 Bricht an bricht, and bricht as air,
 Ye’ll haunt me noo for evermair

By Nan Shepherd

The Cairngorms - A Secret History

By Patrick Baker Pub Birlinn, 2014

There are various ways to explore mountains and things to explore in them. Patrick Baker, while clearly smitten by the Cairngorms themselves, sets out to explore that other Cairngorms – the Cairngorms of what he calls their “hidden narrative”, their secret histories, their stories seldom told. Of these he believes the Cairngorms hold more than any other range of mountains he knows. He embarks a series of journeys, minor expeditions, to find and explore these features that fascinate him, including the El Alamein bothy, the source of the Dee, remains of crashed aircraft, Landseer’s wilderness hideaway in Glen Feshie, and the tors of Ben Avon. His book recounts his often rather arduous journeys in detail but along the way, he explores and recounts hidden histories. So tracking the course of the upper Dee to its source, he also recounts the history of the people who once lived there including James Grant (Auld Dubrach) who, dying at the age of 110, was the last survivor of those who fought at Culloden. The journey to find the El Alamein explores the story of bothies in the Cairngorms and to find the remains of an Oxford Mk1 plane that crashed on the plateau in 1945 recounts the history of mountain rescue. There is the story of the affair between the Duchess of Bedford and Landseer at their hideaway in Glen Feshie, and diversions such as into the poetry of Nan Shepherd. It is these journeys into the histories of these issues that will hold the interest for many Cairngorm enthusiasts. The text is very readable and, for many Cairngorm enthusiasts, will add much to their knowledge of that cultural “hidden history” Baker explores.

Singing Burn

O birnie with the glass-white shiver,
 Singing over stone,
 So quick, so clear, a hundred year
 Singing one song alone,
 From crystal sources fed forever,
 From cold mountain springs,
 To o’erpersuade the haunted ear
 It new-creates the tune it sings.

By Nan Shepherd

BOOK REVIEWS

The Mounth Passes A Heritage Guide to the Old Ways Through the Grampian Mountains

By Neil Ramsay and Nate Pedersen with photographs by Graham Marr

Between the Dee and the Scottish lowlands to the south lies that huge area of mountains and lowland hills commonly known as the Mounth. It is much visited by hillwalkers, climbers and others and the routes traversing it are favoured cross-country walks. But these routes have an ancient history. Once, before modern methods of travel, they were the highways of the kingdom and saw the passage of travellers, armies, drovers, smugglers and others. Ramsay and Pederson describe the routes of the ten that cross Aberdeenshire and Angus, including the easterly ones close to the coast, illustrating the descriptions with photographs. But they have also delved into the history and ancient maps of these routes and summarise their findings on each. It is work of some scholarship and, while the route descriptions will be useful to those following them, this historical background on each, stretching back to medieval times and earlier, will enrich walkers appreciation of them. It is an ebook available through Amazon for the princely sum of £3.08 and can be added to your Kindle library

Cairngorm Stories

Of Clans and Feuds and Other Things

The highland clans of the land in and around the Cairngorms have a turbulent and violent history. Some of their direct descendants in fact still own land there. The Forbes clan are a striking example. Arising in Strathdon they spread their power and land holdings. Ochonchar Forbhasach, known as "man of courage", was one legendary founder of the clan who is said to have slain a ferocious bear that had been terrorising the area. He claimed the land as the first man to make fire and boil water on the land, a right that must date back to the end of the ice age as human colonists arrived. Whatever the truth, the Forbes are "aboriginal" and have certainly been in the area known as The Braes of Forbes since prehistoric times. The Forbes power reached its zenith in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Highland clans had a propensity towards violence and feuding which, unfortunately, the Forbes shared in full, with a particularly longstanding bloody one with the Leslies. But it is their feud with the Gordons, that equally powerful clan and family, mere Norman incomers who have only been around for about 1000 years, that is most famous. The two had actually had tolerably friendly relations up to about 1537 when the heir to the Forbes, John, Master of Forbes, murdered one of the Leslies, Alexander Seton of Meldrum, also a cousin of the Gordons. His dad bought him a royal pardon and saved him from a hanging but, not discouraged, the good lad continued with a further ten years of mayhem. This finally induced the head of the Gordons, the 4th Earl of Huntly, to have him falsely charged with conspiring to assassinate the king. The lad was found guilty by a jury rigged with Gordon's supporter and promptly beheaded. That did it! For the next 200 years the two clans took opposite sides on every issue of the day, including protestants (Forbes) versus catholics (Gordons). Some of the killings had a splendid touch. On 10 October 1571, a force of catholic

Gordons, under the command of Sir Adam Gordon met a force of protestant Forbes under the command of "Black Arthur" Forbes, the 6th Lord Forbes's youngest son. The Gordons were victorious. Black Arthur Forbes escaped but one of the Gordons' henchmen hid by a burn where he realised Black Arthur would stoop to drink en route home. This would open a crack in his armour as he stooped. It worked! As Arthur stooped his enemy sprang out and drove his knife through the crack. That finished Black Arthur!

Other estates and clans also furnish gory tales. Take John Cameron who, in 1355, married Helen Mowatt of Abergeldie, thereby gaining the lands of Brux as a marriage grant from the Earl of Mar. Not fair claimed the Mowatts! These lands should have come to us! A bloody feud developed. It was agreed to settle the matter by a contest between the two sides, each of which was to send twelve horses with riders to battle it out – winner takes all! But the cunning Mowatts sent two men on each horse and the Camerons were too stupid to refuse to fight – so they all died and the Mowatts got Brux. But it wasn't over yet. A daughter of the late John, Kate Cameron, by then heiress to the lands, fled to Kildrummy castle where the Earl of Mar gave her shelter. She then announced that she would offer her hand and the lands of Brux to whoever avenged the death of her father and brothers – clever lady! This was an offer too good to refuse and along came a Forbes them Forbes again! Alistair Cam Forbes slew the chief of the Mowatts and claimed both land and lady. Thus arose the Forbes of Brux, a cunning bunch. One of them supported the Jacobite cause at Culloden, where he "*let daylight into three of the English devils*" in revenge for the death of this two friends before fleeing the field. Now hunted, he hid among his own people by simply dressing as a peasant and commencing to build a drystone dyke across his land. "*Have you seen*

Cairngorm Stories contd. Of Clans and Feuds and Other Things



The Forbes March at the Lonach Gathering in Strathdon

the laird?" enquired the redcoats hunting him. *"He was at breakfast in his castle this morning"* he is alleged to have replied. True! Once terms were agreed, and he was no longer hunted, he simply left the unfinished dyke where it now stands, and went home.

Brux did however furnish one more fascinating tale, again with the Forbes. Elizabeth Forbes-Sempill was a daughter of the landowner Lord Sempill. Or at least that was what it was thought. She grew up to become a much-respected local doctor but one day a small advert in the local paper announced that, from then on she/he wished to be known as Ewen, not Elizabeth! An early pioneer of sex-change! She had re-registered herself as a man and now HE married his house keeper Isabella Mitchell. She/he had always had a noted preference for rather masculine dress and ways! In 1965 he stood to inherit his/her elder brother's baronetcy (he being a famous pilot who also passed military information to the Japanese). This title passed through the male line, together with a large estate. A cousin challenged this in court on the grounds that the reregistration was invalid – he, Ewen, was still a she, Elizabeth. After a trial held in secret, it was ruled he had been attributed to the wrong sex at birth and Ewen won the case and inherited land and title! Well done!



Billy Connoly among the Forbes at Lonach