

BIODIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND: 2018 AND BEYOND

ENRICHING RURAL ENVIRONMENTS

Enriching means restoring nature and improving its connection with and benefits for people. There are three ways to achieve this. First, greater recognition should be given in our thinking and actions to the diversity of land and landscape as a reflection of the natural process of evolution and the imprint of human activity over many millennia. Second, there needs to be greater focus and effective action on removing the mistakes of the past with priority to reducing herbivore overgrazing in the uplands, enforcing higher standards of environmental responsibility on the forestry industry at all stages of operation, and changing the mindsets in sporting estate management to accept natural species, especially raptors, as part of the natural and human environment. Third, there should be more encouragement in policies and resourcing levels to the restoration of natural processes and working with nature for its own sake and to improve humans connection with it. The result of these approaches will be a greater feeling of connection of people to their natural environment, more employment opportunities for residents to help others understand, explore and sustainably use nature, and benefits to the mental and physical health of all who engage with the rural environment.

PAYING FOR BIODIVERSITY

How do we provide resources for biodiversity conservation? There are limited funds through SNH and NGOs, limited cross compliance through the EU CAP, and time-limited LIFE projects. Leaving the EU provides an opportunity for greater policy and resource support for stewardship of biodiversity and natural systems functioning, based on the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, backed by mandatory Codes of Practice. Translating the rubric 'public money for public goods' into reality should be the cornerstone. Government should also seriously consider payments from forestry and renewable energy developers to fund restoration elsewhere. Support should be directed at priority species and habitats, degraded ecosystems requiring restoration, especially wetlands, grasslands and intensively used agricultural land. Basic standards should be adhered to by all owners, managers and tenants with the availability of top-up payments for exemplary practice. Also, public bodies in their regulatory roles and in their executive action should have more stringent responsibilities placed upon them. This can be done through strengthening the biodiversity duty in Part 1 1(1) of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to make it a requirement rather than a balancing duty, linked to the Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government and all public authorities and bodies.

MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity conservation will only be successfully achieved if it is mainstreamed into scientific thinking, public policy and practice from the local to the international levels. For Scotland, this means first linking the revised biodiversity strategy to the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030. Many of the seventeen goals are relevant to biodiversity conservation. Second, natural science can help in two ways: by applying in practice the knowledge of functioning ecosystems, and the delivery of ecosystem goods and services, and by recognising the intellectual development of the 'conserving nature's stage' thinking to link geoconservation and biodiversity conservation as parts of an integral whole given their natural interdependency. Finally, the Scottish Government should recognise that the biodiversity strategy is a fundamental component of its programme for Scotland and not merely an adjunct to sustainable economic growth. It should, therefore, be an intrinsic part of strategic regional planning throughout Scotland, through Regional Land Use Strategies following on from the successful pilot studies in the Borders and the north east.

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