

CONSERVING SCOTLAND'S NATURE: WHAT FUTURE?

1. The good, the appalling and the debatable

Good

- Landscapes and weather interacting
- Long diverse earth history & its unravelling Hutton
- Geo and cultural eg Fingal's Cave and Mendelssohn
- Trace in the land: Glen Roy and NNR status
- The great oakwoods: east and west
- Species brought back: sticky catchfly
- Sea bird cities the northern gannet Boreray St Kilda
- Winter visitors at the shoreline and pink foots locations
- The endemics eg St Kilda wren
- New places for wildlife: Leith docks, Levenhall Links
- Recreating lost wetlands

Appalling: but all is not well in nature

- Newspaper headlines
- Declines and stability at best
- Persecution of protected birds eg eagles
- Herbivores rule: red deer overpopulation
- Blanket forestry of non-native species and Flow Country and extraction
- Canalising rivers and effects on pearl mussels
- Invasive non-native plants and animals

Questionable: do we agree with all that has happened in the past?

- Peat extraction for whisky
- Non-native trees: beech trees and hedges; the sycamore; rhododendron
- Hydro-electric power generation in the 1930s
- Skiing despite lack of snow
- The river ravagers: mink and American signal crayfish
- Protecting species at the extreme end of their range: the corncrake
- What's wrong with rats: Canna eradication success
- Repairing the footpaths Ben Lomond

2. What can we learn from what's happening?

i. Changing the management focus

- Reference to Carrifran as step change through ownership.
- Using ownership and therefore management visions as examples at Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge. Note degradation under previous owners: too many deer, no natural regeneration, ski development ideas and high level track at Mar Lodge. Note that early new owners did not work out. Note ownership indifferent: private or NGO. Would local communities in either case have done what the owners have done? Resources, vision, radical action on reducing deer numbers and stewardship count most: NTS and private individual Anders Holch Povlsen. Note that tale can still wag the dog viz one funder of Mar Lodge

Easter Trust has overly significant influence and therefore estate of two halves. The re-wilding agenda at landscape scale.

ii. The battle for our moorlands

- Conflicting interests: sheep for food, deer and grouse for sport, birds for nature, trees for fibre, wind for electricity. How do we get out of the bind? Leave it to market forces? Having specific strategies eg for 'woodland' expansion? Have a real strategic approach: the Land Use Strategy with overarching criteria and regional action plans developed with all key stakeholders.

iii. To re-introduce or not: the vexed question

- Already have European beavers, white-tailed eagle, ospreys, red kites, some well researched (beaver), others less so. But attitudes still in conflict on each of these: beavers disturb wild fishing and cause flooding; eagles kill lambs; red kites disturb game. But captured public imagination locally: Mull look after OUR birds & nationally the annual return of Lady to the SWT Loch of the Lowes Reserve. Needs to be done in measured manner based on internationally agreed protocols developed by IUCN rather than we'll do it because it should be there. The two acid tests: ecologically sustainable and socially acceptable. Did not get it right for sea eagle and many corrective actions needed especially as breed not where supposed to but still a spectacle which attracts visitors and locals largely content and pleased. Beaver substantial research base proved the ecological case, much local and nationally consultation proved national case. But slow bureaucracy and vested interest resistance meant first private re-introductions, government asking for removal strategy cloud cuckoo land, and now government does not know what to do with recommendations from SNH after carefully monitored trial re-introduction. Red kites: well persecution is clearly in the areas where there are sport shooting interests, but not at the other relocation sites in Scotland, England and Wales: so attitudes have not changed. And what about wolves, bear, lynx: do the assessments first and test the outcomes in society.

3. What future?

What is conserving nature? Why is it important? What gets in the way?

The ingredients

i. Changing mind sets

- Get out of silo, vested interest mentality, good for society and nature as whole, nature and society as one interdependent and indivisible. Not negative stopping everything but progressive and positive preserving and protecting, creating and restoring etc. Why: moral duty, protect our heritage, honour legal obligations, safeguard our present well being and secure society's future.

ii. Protecting special places

iii. Making links in the landscape

iv. Recognise Scotland's diversity through local strategies

v. Plan for climate change

vi. Take the long view

A future or not? Minus and plus so yes it has