

LAND SEA AND NATURE FROM MARTIN TO THE PRESENT

Format

1. what he observed
2. what has changed

His observations and what has changed

1. tides and currents springs and neaps Harris, St Kilda tidal flows ebb goes south and flood north
2. sand covering the high mountains hills of Skye weathering of lavas basalts and andesites to sand forming sand plains and dunes especially Trotternish Ridge
3. minerals: white marl, agate Skye; freestone quarries on Raasay, Borrie
4. Deer hunting: Harris 2000 in hills but hunting restricted to laird
5. the land and agriculture:
 - ✓ soils: Lewis red clays, sandy soils, black heath soils;
 - ✓ sea weed as soil improver and conditioner Lewis west Harris
 - ✓ vegetation cover: wet heath and grass and treeless only trees in Lewis birch and hazel near Stornoway; Skye claims extensive tree cover because roots in bogs
 - ✓ Lewis deer, black cattle, sheep;
 - ✓ sheep on small islands for summer grazing;
 - ✓ Uists machair cultivation;
 - ✓ geese summer on islands with sheep, destroy barley crops therefore trapped;
6. peat cutting: Uists and Barra; Skye peat for fuel
7. whaling Lewis by driving them into the bays
8. coral in Lewis what???
9. river and loch life: trout, eels, pearl mussels, salmon, Uists: speckled salmon (?char), trout, eel, salmon
10. birds: coulternet head of peacock with tuft, down, long tail; fowls nest and breed on islands in Uists; Uists swans (? Whooper) overwinter, corncrakes, colk smaller than goose variety of colours tufted and long tail ?merganser, ha rather than eider duck, plovers, crows, swans, hawks, eagles, pheasants, moorfowls, ptarmigan, rain goose = diver, wild geese destroy barley; hawks = peregrine or merlin; Skye hawks, 2 types of eagle, black cock????, heath hen????, plovers, pigeons, wild geese, cranes?????, cormorant, shag, 2000 plovers over wintering on Fladda Skye; St Kilda fulmar scavenger of whales and wild sorrel, land birds: hawks (extraordinarily good) eagles, plovers, crows, wrens, stonechats, crater, cuckoo at time of human death; sea birds: gairfowl largest black with red eyes, white spot under eye, broad long bill, guillemot, razorbill, bouger: flat bill with point red at tip, yellow feet, black with white breast
11. pests: Rona plague of rats, Rodel Harris rats (cf Canna today and Ailsa craig recently)

12. summer fragrance clover, daisy and others pleasant to the sight and very fragrant smell'

Quirks: what did he mean or observe?

Very poor at numbers but good at lists of occurrences

Some oddities eg 2,000 plovers over wintering on Fladda Skye,

Reports of black cock, heath hen and cranes on Skye

Five issues

1. Eagles Shiant 2 do not kill sheep or lambs but bones of lambs fawns and wildfowl in nest; Harris 2 types: large and grey attacks sheep fawns and lambs, and smaller black hawk attacks deer; Uists and Barra small black eagle live killing of fawns and lambs; St Kilda: 2 large eagles get prey from elsewhere but no hen or lamb predation on Kilda
Eagle persecution between then and last sea eagle shot on Shetland in 1918
And then re-introduction programme Rum but best success Mull
2. Sea fish: Lewis cod, very large ling, herring, whales; Lewis bays: clams, oysters, cockles, muscles, limpets, whelks; Uists and Barra great shoals of herring, shellfish, lobster, seals fishing; Skye cod, ling herring, mackerel, haddock, whiting, turbot, mussels plentiful in bays; St Kilda: cod, ling mackerel, congers, braziers, turbot, greylords, saithes, herring,
With EU CFP and better fishing technology then stocks continuous decline, unsustainable levels according to scientists in ICES but politicians ignore or dilute advice for saving fishing communities and for fear of fishermen's backlash as powerful lobby
3. Coastal erosion and sea level change: Berneray north walls below sea level suggests coastal erosion and retreat; Harris round shaped kiln at Rodel under water (broch?) suggests sea level rise, Valay north Uist no quoted evidence of wind blow cf today
Long term sinking of the Long Island as evidenced by peat deposits and continuing
4. natural harvest: summer collect eggs down feathers and quills fowls generally and especially St Kilda and islands off Barra; St Kilda: 20,000+ solan geese in cleits, eggs preserved in peat ash, guillemot eggs the best, eat gannet, fulmar puffin, solan eggs 'very pectoral and cephalic'; no longer practiced except for annual expedition to North Rona from north end of Lewis: societal attitude change Bird protection early legislation compared with other species 1954, biological viability of population, risk and hardship in doing it, but in Iceland tradition continues for example puffins and guillemot eggs
5. medicinal plants Harris sadic, clover, daisies sea slake; Skye: nettles for sleep, foxgloves for post fever pain, seaweed/dulse for headaches, crow foot for sciatica, maiden hair for coughs, yarrow for consumption; plus fulmar oil from nostrils for aches and pains and bones stitches, vomiting; St Kilda do not know their herbs or medicinal plants cf today virtually no knowledge and

left to developing countries where tradition continues eg Himalayas (Plantlife project) and where large pharmaceutical companies can gain edge on competitors

So what has changed

1. weather patterns more stormy, more intense precipitation
2. sea level rising over whole area and coast eroding especially soft coast exposed coasts
3. scientific knowledge of presence species and causes of changes
4. greater consciousness of sustainability at a distance than in 19th C but probably no different from MMs time, cause celebres over fishing renewable energy
5. self sufficiency to dependency on food from elsewhere and issue of food miles etc
6. ecotourism
7. intervention to correct earlier problems and errors eg hedgehogs, rats, trees,, sea eagle, bring back and get rid of.