

SUMMER 2012

Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

Tay Beavers

Butterflies and Bumblebees

Central Scotland Forest

Wind Farms and Hot Air

Jim Crumley

Garbh Coire Refuge



Summer 2012

“It’s much easier to explain concepts of biodiversity to people who have experienced more than just concrete and gravel”

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WILD LAND NEWS

Summer 2012, Issue 81

Magazine of the
Scottish Wild Land Group

SWLG

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“the loss of 97%
rich meadows in

“the ideal and purest form
of mountain travel...”

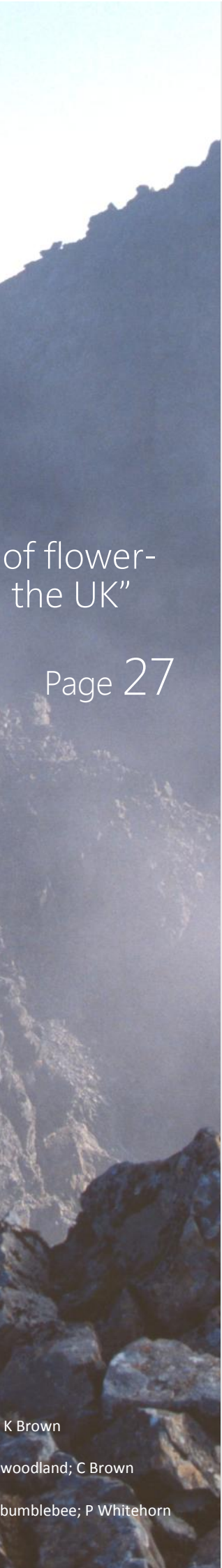
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Photos, this page:

Main — Sgurr Thearlaich;

Top right—ferns in native

Bottom right—Buff-tailed



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K Brown
woodland; C Brown
bumblebee; P Whitehorn



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Calum Brown

Comment from Calum, WLN Editor

Welcome to the summer 2012 edition of Wild Land News! After a cold spring we hope this issue will find you enjoying some warm weather, and perhaps taking the opportunity to become reacquainted with Scotland's native species, many of which have been absent since last summer - and a few for quite a bit longer. We focus on some such species in this issue, with articles on Scottish beavers, butterflies and bumblebees; an unusual collection, but one that tells us a great deal about how we interact with the environment.

Louise Ramsay, of the Scottish Wild Beaver Group, opens the issue with an update on the beavers living wild on the Tay. Beavers are of course a native species in Scotland, extirpated in the relatively recent past, and for 10 years the population on the Tay has been slowly but successfully recolonising some of their former range. They have not been universally welcomed, though, and are often the subject of negative propaganda in the press. Nevertheless, SNH's plan to trap and remove the animals has been put on hold by the government until at least 2015, and support is needed to ensure that public money is never spent on re-eradicating this native and beneficial species from the wild (and to ensure that they are not wiped out on the quiet).

Later, Naomi Sackett writes about how changing butterfly populations illuminate our past and present impacts on the environment. Being highly specialised and recognisable, many species of butterfly give us rapid and detailed information about how habitats are changing and how we can best manage

sensitive areas. Species that may seem insignificant are not only informative – they can also have dramatic ecological and economic effects in their own right. This is true of bumblebees, which play a crucial role in pollinating wild and commercial plants but, like honeybees, are suffering huge population declines. Penelope Whitehorn explains how commonly used pesticides may be contributing to these declines, with knock-on effects well beyond the boundaries of treated fields and gardens.

We include these articles against a backdrop of quite deliberate persecution of many of Scotland's native species. Birds of prey, in particular, suffer not only from illegal poisoning, shooting and trapping, but are increasingly threatened by hostile organisations and politicians. The UK government, with the support of the National Gamekeepers Organisation, recently formed – and were forced to abandon – plans to spend £375,000 of public money controlling buzzard populations, using trapping and nest destruction, *in order to protect pheasants*. Many will be surprised to learn that pheasants – a non-native species bred in their tens of millions to be shot on sporting estates – require any protection, let alone from an important native bird of prey that is still recovering from intense and long-term persecution in the past. Anyone who drove near certain estates last summer, where pheasants were allowed to congregate and die in their thousands on major roads (the A82 along Loch Ness was the scene of particular and long-running carnage) would be justified in thinking that there is a problem with too many pheasants, not too few. It is

certainly clear that the plan was formulated not because of any objective threat that buzzards pose to pheasant breeding, but because of the same deeply-ingrained prejudice that has left our country entirely devoid of many of its most important species. The same prejudice has now almost completely wiped out the English hen harrier, and continues to cause huge losses to numerous bird and mammal species that are of benefit to all of us and fully entitled to our protection. It should no longer be tolerated, let alone pandered to.

One of the best ways of tackling prejudice of any kind is education, and exposure to the natural world is the simplest and most effective way of improving understanding of environmental issues. Organisations like the Central Scotland Forest Trust work hard to ensure that people have opportunities to access, enjoy and learn about their local environments, and Simon Rennie, the Trust's Director, writes in this issue about how and why they do this. Equally important is the work of authors like Jim Crumley, who communicate their knowledge of and passion for Scottish landscapes and species very widely, reminding us all of how valuable these are. Jim is also a founding member of the SWLG, and in a conversation with John Milne featured in this issue he discusses the challenges facing the group and Scottish conservation in general.

Enjoyment of Scotland's wild places is something that comes naturally to

the SWLG, of course, and we have two articles on this subject here. First, George Charles considers whether appreciation of wild places depends upon a drive to challenge oneself and achieve ever-greater climbing feats, or simply on becoming immersed in natural surroundings. Chrissie Valluri takes the latter approach, recounting a recent trip to Ardnamurchan, one of her favourite areas of wild land in Scotland. Enjoyment of wild places should always be tempered with respect for them, however, and George believes that the Garbh Coire refuge in the Cairngorms, built to help climbers access the surrounding cliffs, undermines the Coire's grandeur and should be removed now that it has fallen into disrepair. A more clear-cut case of environmental vandalism is the quickening spread of windfarms across Scotland, built to generate profits for multi-national energy companies and to help governments avoid difficult decisions about climate change. In this issue we consider the future of windfarm development in Scotland, and why their continued construction is an abdication of some of the government's fundamental responsibilities.

We hope that you'll enjoy this issue of Wild Land News. Please remember to get in touch if you would like to help with the work of the Group or to contribute to the magazine. The wild land and species of Scotland need as much support as ever to prevent them from disappearing.

Please remember to join the group or renew your membership —see the form on the back page or go to:
<http://www.swlg.org.uk/join-swlg.html>

Louise Ramsay

The Tay Beavers

Louise Ramsay is co-chair of the Scottish Wild Beaver Group

The presence of a population of native Eurasian beavers in Tayside has been an emerging reality over the last eleven years. In May 2001 Hugh Chalmers of the Borders Forest Trust sent Paul Ramsay an email in which he reported a sighting of a beaver in the lower Earn. (He knew that Paul was an enthusiast for beaver reintroduction and was in the process of trying to source some beavers for an enclosure on his land). Hugh had been out canoeing with a party of eight people in two canoes. They reached the confluence with the Farg when Hugh, who had recently returned from a journey to Norway to study beavers, saw the broad head of a mammal coming through the water. He realised immediately that he was looking at a beaver and not an otter. Moments later the whole party watched as the animal climbed out of the water and revealed its flat tail. Seeing a beaver was a surprise, given that they were supposed to have been extinct in Scotland for 400 years.

earlier that year. It seems likely that this was the origin of Hugh Chalmer's beaver. Later in 2001 there were more reports: one at Rosemount, and another in the Alyth Burn at Alyth.

As the decade wore on, more reported sightings of beavers in the wild were accumulating around the linked catchments of the Earn and Tay. Some were privately communicated between interested individuals but kept quiet, and some found their way into the press. In autumn 2006 a beaver was spotted at the "put and take fishery" at Sandyknowes near Bridge of Earn and its presence was reported in the Courier. The manager said later that he had seen two beavers through a night sight and Paul, who went over to investigate, noticed a lodge on the island in the pond: a sure sign of a pair and probably of breeding. As the owner was not happy about the beavers' presence one of them (officially the only one there) was trapped and removed in Spring 2007 by a member of staff from RZSS in Edinburgh. More reports came from Glamis, the Kerbit Burn, upstream of Glamis and the Dean Water, a tributary of the River Isla. There was

Photo:

R Scott

Where had this beaver come from? We learnt later that some Eurasian beavers had escaped from an enclosure further up the Earn,





Photo: Beaver dam at Bamff

S Ramsay

also evidence of their presence in the Tay further west.

In 2009 Paul, taking an interest in the spread of beavers about the catchment, filmed kits on the Dean Water. This was our first evidence of beavers breeding in the wild, but it seems unlikely that it was the first instance. At this point no-one knew how many beavers there were, but the number seemed to be growing. In the meantime the Scottish Beaver Trial had begun its project at Knappdale in Argyll.

In June 2010 the Tay beavers, as a whole, were “outed” in the Scotsman, the estimated figure being given as 50 to 100. In autumn 2010 it came to our ears that the National Species Reintroduction Forum had made a decision, in August, proposed by SNH but unopposed by all the members of the forum at the time, that the Tay Beavers were to be trapped and removed to zoos. The official figure was estimated at seven and twenty. We suspected the figure was higher but still had no clear idea of numbers. But we decided then and there that we had to campaign for the survival of the beavers and launched “Save the Free Beavers of the Tay” on Facebook, and subsequently founded “Scottish Wild Beaver Group”, a charity incorporated as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation .

Campaigners started to survey the beavers and it soon became clear that the Scotsman article was not far out. We now think there may be 120, before they breed this year (2012). The decision to remove the Tay beavers was given a number of justifications: they were unlicensed (which is certainly true), they might be diseased, or the wrong species, reasons we felt justified monitoring but not trapping to enclose or exterminate. The most baffling reason was “for their own welfare”. SNH decided to start with a “trapping trial” and succeeded in trapping one beaver, which we named Erica and adopted, for the Alyth beaver cubs. She subsequently died in Edinburgh zoo. As our campaign got underway, SNH decided to stop any trapping in March 2011, well before the breeding season, and in the event it was not resumed the following autumn, while the new minister, Stewart Stevenson deliberated on his decision.

To people such as Wild Land Group it is probably not necessary to emphasise the many benefits of beavers and the reasons why we felt, so strongly, that these animals should not be trapped out. *Castor fiber*, the Eurasian beaver, hunted out for its pelts and other products in Scotland and many other countries, and brought to near

The Eurasian beaver has now been successfully returned to 23 European countries where a large body of research lists its benefits: to biodiversity, water purity, soil retention, flood and drought mitigation, and of course eco-tourism.

land managers have been told that the beavers are not protected...and they can kill beavers on their land if they are causing problems

extinction as a species by 1900, has now been successfully returned to 23 European countries where a large body of research lists its benefits: to biodiversity, water purity, soil retention, flood and drought mitigation, and of course eco-tourism. We felt it was high time for them to come back to Scotland.

The SNH attempt in 1998 at a reintroduction, in spite of broad public support, had met with such opposition from salmon fishing bodies and various land managers that it had been watered down to a small trial. We feared that the opposition might find ways to call the trial a failure and have the small number of beavers at Knapdale removed, thus bringing to an end, for years or decades, any attempt at beaver reintroduction in Scotland. Ideally we would have liked to see a full reintroduction done properly, following IUCN Guidelines, but in Scotland the situation is not ideal, and a chance reintroduction, subsequently regulated by monitoring and study, seemed to be the best opportunity available. Removing a population that had escaped, spread and bred and survived through the tacit consent of a large number of people who had kept their presence a secret, just seemed wrong. Surely once was enough to wipe out this useful and engaging native animal? But a group of powerful bodies, not necessarily representing the range of opinions held by their members, are set against beaver reintroduction and would fight any official attempt to bring it about. This group has supported the Knapdale Trial but consistently opposed toleration of the Tay beavers.

As yet there has not been any research done on beavers and salmon in Scotland, but we find it

unlikely that the overall impact of beavers would be completely different from that of beavers on salmon elsewhere. In Norway, which has the same species of salmon in the same geology and similar topography, little research has been done as no problems have been reported, but Duncan Halley, in response to the concerns of Scottish fishermen, has done a study that shows that young salmon flourish above, between and below beaver dams. In North America, beavers have proved themselves a great asset to fishermen in many places. In Oregon, for example, beavers have been brought into rivers damaged by logging to restore Coho salmon to the river.

In the UK, the fear seems to be that dams will block access to spawning grounds. While this could occasionally happen, and would call for dam removal or reduction, some fishing specialists seem to forget that beavers will also make habitat for parr out of previously dry ground. They have done so here at Bamff, where a small ditch has been converted into a series of large parr-filled pools. Beavers dam ditches and small streams, but they do not dam rivers.

The beaver's ability to put coarse woody debris into water and thus increase habitat for the invertebrates on which salmon parr feed, its ability to make wetland out of dry land and increase complexity in waterways, braiding the stream and purifying water, all point to the likelihood that beavers will, on balance, benefit salmon here as elsewhere, and certainly have no overall negative impact. And the presence of the Tay beavers offers a brilliant opportunity for study of all kinds, whereas their removal would leave us all in the dark.

Our campaign has proved

successful. The Facebook Group is currently supported by 1269 people (4/5/12). In March 2012 the Environment Minister announced that the Tay beavers were to be left in the wild until 2015 when a final decision will be made about their future, as the Knapdale Trial ends and reports its findings.

In the meantime land managers have been told that the beavers are not protected and in the last resort they can kill beavers on their land if they are causing problems. We have even heard that they are being encouraged to do so. SWBG's submission is that the beavers should be protected by European law as they are established in the wild in their natural range. But it is illegal under UK law, according to English Nature, to "possess" a wild beaver, alive or dead. It would be difficult to kill a beaver legally.

Apart from animal welfare laws, the legislation that protects otters and water voles is relevant to beavers

since they live alongside them and benefit from their presence, but they could become victims of collateral damage. We will learn far more from applying mitigation techniques where problems arise than through lethal control. We encourage everyone who is aware of the presence of any wild beavers in their area to do anything they can to keep them safe.

For more information about the Tay Beavers and the Scottish Wild Beaver Group, go to scottishwildbeavers.org or email j@gilmorehouse.co.uk



Photo:
R Scott

George Charles

Garbh Coire refuge—should it stay or should it go?

The future of the Garbh Coire refuge, nestled in the lower reaches of the large coire stretching between Cairn Toul and Braeriach in the Cairngorms, has been debated recently following a paper written by MBA members Neil Reid and Kenny Freeman. Their suggestion is for the MBA to carry out sensitive renovation and take on the long-term maintenance of the bothy which is currently in a fairly sorry state. Any repairs are currently carried out on an unofficial basis by interested parties and, while this has kept the bothy in a useable state thus far, its long-term future under the status quo would appear to be one of gradual decline. This appears to be least desirable of all the options, the others being the MBA taking on the bothy or its complete removal.

There are essentially two main arguments put forward for the renovation of the bothy, the safety argument and the cultural argument. The safety case seems very shaky to me, primarily on the basis that managing the hills for safety destroys an essential element of their appeal. There is no obligation on anyone to look after people who travel through the mountains of their own free will and anyone walking or climbing somewhere as remote as the Garbh Coire should be willing and able to take care of themselves. The argument is backed up by anecdotal accounts of people who have used the bothy for shelter including a Mountain Rescuer who used it to avoid getting cold while waiting for a helicopter ride out. Bless. The safety point struggles under logical analysis as this was never the original

Photo: The Garbh Coire
refuge

G Charles



intention for the hut and there would be a number of more useful locations throughout the Cairngorms where emergency shelters might be located.

The cultural argument makes up the bulk of the MBA case and is passionately argued in the Reid/ Freeman paper. While it's undoubtedly true that bothy culture is a key part of Scotland's mountain heritage there are a couple of important points to bear in mind here. One is that 'Cultural Heritage' on its own is a shaky justification for anything. For example, it could be used to argue for the reinstatement of the Land Rover track onto the plateau of Beinn a'Bhuird, or, indeed, it could be used generally by landowners who want to keep peasants off their land with warnings of 'high-velocity rifles'. The point being that it is only an argument for maintaining the status quo, whether good or bad. Secondly, we need to be clear exactly which culture we are celebrating. The bothy was originally constructed by climbers from Aberdeen university wanting a base for exploring the surrounding cliffs. In my mind there's a clear distinction between re-using an existing building as an unlocked shelter (e.g. Corrour) and the new construction of a building in a remote area for recreational purposes. The former seems like a worthwhile preservation of our, yes, cultural heritage, the latter an unnecessary intrusion into wild land that sits uneasily with my understanding of mountaineering ethics.

Ultimately, my opinion on this matter is primarily influenced by the factor of location. Perhaps the defining characteristic of the Cairngorms is their BIGNESS. The construction of the Garbh Coire refuge was an attempt to make the Cairngorms smaller and as such diminishes the range rather than improves it. The Garbh Coire of Braeriach, with all its hidden corners, waterfalls, pools, crags, scree and snow (most of all the snow) is arguably the finest area in all the Cairngorms (some may bring up Loch Avon at this point but that displays its grandeur for all to see on first visit whereas the Garbh Coire offers a lifetime's worth of secret corners). Adam Watson notes its unequalled status in terms of 'wildness, remoteness and freedom from the recent effects of man' in the SMC guide. When looked at from this angle any man-made intrusion requires serious justification. The Garbh Coire refuge just doesn't have it which is why I, for one, would be happy to see it removed and see one of the finest parts of Scotland's mountains restored to something very close to true wild land.

The construction of the Garbh Coire refuge was an attempt to make the Cairngorms smaller and as such diminishes the range rather than improves it.

Photo: Inside the refuge

G Charles



Simon Rennie

Woodlands through the mists ... of time

Simon Rennie is Chief Executive and Director of the Central Scotland Forest Trust, a charity dedicated to the creation of a network of woodlands across Central Scotland

Maybe my job is easier than most (although it doesn't always feel that way) since I'll be long retired before it's evident whether or not decisions in which I've played a part have really made their intended contribution to people's lives. Being a forester requires great patience since trees and areas of woodland can take decades to come to maturity. However, it also poses the challenge of considering what society might value and how it might value that in thirty, fifty or a hundred years time.

Certainly, at Central Scotland Forest Trust, the growth and development of communities and the people who live and work around them is of as much interest to us today as is the potential future impact of our actions. The image of a remote and silent woodsman on the fringes of society is as relevant today as the story of Little Red Riding Hood – at least as far as the Central Scotland Forest is concerned. Our people are far more likely to be found around a brownfield site pondering the difficulties of land degradation through industrial legacy, as to be working away on any remote, lonely hillside.

This is our primary challenge for forestry and woodland development in the 21st century in Central Scotland – it's about people, and how to make a genuine contribution to their mental and physical health. It's about creating opportunities for them to live a healthier lifestyle; and helping them reconnect with nature in ways which are as mainstream, easy and "natural" as possible. Critical to success here is making sure that woodlands are genuinely in and around communities, within

easy walking distance of the places where people live and work.

This prioritisation of community woodlands represents a welcome change in emphasis. It gives massively greater recognition to the social role of forestry and of the importance of "greening up" the landscape, not just for the sake of it, but to deliver defined and targeted human benefits. So, aside from looking at soil types, weather, planting seasons and tree types, CSFT staff are nowadays constantly also monitoring social and economic trends to plan their activities.

My belief is that the people of Central Scotland are facing an unusual set of circumstances, in that this generation may very well not be better off than the last (against what we have come to accept as the norm). And as people square up to a life where fuel and travel costs are a significant issue for all but the super-rich, and "staycations" become a much more acceptable way to enjoy a break, then it stands to reason that the home and community environment looks set to become increasingly important. How much more crucial than that free, natural amenities which encourage people to get out and about and enjoy a healthier lifestyle are available close to home?

Community planting projects also engender greater ownership and understanding of issues that might formerly have been dismissed as the stuff of tree-huggers. It's much easier to explain concepts of biodiversity to people who have experienced more than just concrete and gravel.

A further priority at CSFT is the creation of biodiversity corridors between our mosaic of woodlands right across central Scotland. It's not enough to have major woodlands or significant nature reserves in remote locations – wonderful as these are. It's just as important to offer the means for wildlife, from bugs and butterflies to birds, pollinating bumble bees and larger wildlife such as foxes and badgers, to migrate from area to area and to co-exist more effectively with the people with whom they share an urban landscape.

And while at CSFT we could simply be happy to create greater opportunities for human and wildlife to go about their business in harmony, community woodlands and “green” projects can take things to another level yet. It's not quite back to the future, but the well-documented resurgence in interest in allotments and growing spaces suggests that social trends and economic challenges alike are creating a welcome return of interest in home-grown food. A growing awareness of price, as well as concepts such as food-miles, mean that the media is full of chefs cooking outside, using local

ingredients and wood fired ovens. It's probably some way away until we can expect to see the German wood-fired, community ovens promoted recently by the chefs the Hairy Bikers, but where better to get the raw materials to travel along that road than within community woodlands and/or growing projects?

In all of this there are also improved training and employment opportunities within or near communities for people to work with the land and plant appropriately; to deliver a whole basket of potential social, economic and lifestyle benefits. So if anyone still thinks forestry is just about trees, they are way behind the curve of contemporary practice. The thinking behind community woodlands is complex, multi-faceted and forward-looking. The signs that it will pay off are also extremely encouraging, but as I said at the beginning, this is a long-term investment in Scotland's future. In fact, in order to accurately assess how right we got it in 2012, you'll probably need to hang about and ask an elderly person who is currently in pre-school.

Photo: HRH The Princess Royal digs in with Simon Rennie and Douglas Worrall at the CSFT headquarters

CSFT



John Milne

A conversation with Jim Crumley

Jim Crumley is an author, with twenty five books to his credit - with, he tells me, another one on eagles in preparation - a broadcaster and regular contributor to both the Scots Magazine and the Dundee Courier, where he started his journalistic career immediately on leaving school. He has been described by David Craig in the Los Angeles Times Book Review as "the best nature writer now working in Great Britain".

Jim was one of the founders of the Scottish Wild Land Group and I took the opportunity of this discussion to find out not only what was in the minds of these original members, but what challenge he might wish to present to the Group thirty years on. And challenge us he does, reminding us that in any area of human endeavour there will always be a need for individuals at the cutting edge of debate: "the original concept of the SWLG was to advance the cause of the care of wild land *for its own sake*, the land as an entity with rights of its own. It was loud and stropy and had good media connections from the start so it was able to make a big noise and punch above its weight on behalf of the landscape itself."

However, then and now such a group has not just to oppose, it must have robust alternatives to those current practices and policies which threaten. And so the objective of this article is to give Jim the opportunity to present an alternative strategy and hopefully encourage the Scottish Wild Land Group and readers of Wild Land News to rise to the challenge with "grand gestures for nature".

He is not against uncompromising opposition to commercial wind farms situated in entirely

inappropriate locations, but he suggests that there is a real danger that such opposition becomes "the only game in town". Take red deer, for instance. He suggests that if we don't reduce the red deer population by about 60% they will continue to degrade our landscapes with particular damage being done to our native woodlands, preventing regeneration which otherwise could proceed apace.

Jim acknowledges that this opinion does not go down well with the obvious vested interests but nothing daunted, he goes on to condemn with equal vigour the grouse moors, "the most artificial landscape one can imagine". Nevertheless, Jim further acknowledges that if any kind of seriously positive transformation in our approach to the land is to be achieved, the people must be taken along, being directly involved in the process from the start. Community ownership for instance is a fantastic concept and must continue to be vigorously promoted, the Scottish Land Fund being a totally justifiable and effective use of public money. It is one way of strengthening the bond between the people and their land.

However, the first step is to recognise the essential role of politics, without which we can achieve very little. You can't win the argument without persuading the politicians. John Muir knew that better than anyone. Jim argues for the abolition of Scottish Natural Heritage which he sees as a stumbling block, timid beyond words, unimaginative and unwilling to take risks. It would be replaced by a government ministry of land and wildlife, which with its place right at the heart of Scottish Government would be essential if any progress is to be made. Jim believes the land is

everything. It defines us, it's the most important thing we have and thus its wellbeing should be the direct responsibility of Government.

And then we must completely reappraise the national parks. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park was a particularly bad idea, with the Forestry Commission controlling 75% to 80% of the land. The park's performance has been so bad it should be deselected, if such a thing were possible under national parks legislation, unless, among other things, meaningful steps are taken to reinvent the Forestry Commission. In fact neither it nor the Cairngorms National Park has demonstrated that they take nature conservation seriously. The standard of land management in national parks should be much, much higher than elsewhere. They should be showpieces, 'look, this is how it should be done'.

If we are going to have properly managed national parks, the Cairngorms, with its unique landforms and landscapes, remains an obvious choice. Within it real strides could be made in the thoughtful and inspiring management of the land with every opportunity being taken to make nature itself the primary manager, the architect, of the landscape. There are two or three other places he recommends for this approach. A Heartland National Park incorporating a big chunk of the Central Highlands including above all else Rannoch Moor. There the land mass is big enough to push the boat out in really giving nature its head, the only way to manage the landscape effectively. A South Skye National Park would ensure the protection of a really remarkable landscape encompassing the Cuillins, both Red and Black, and Sleat. If such a park were to be in the ownership of the local community the opportunity for a really pioneering initiative would be created. And what about trying the

same thing in Assynt?

Before we move on I return to the issue of the Forestry Commission which earlier in the discussion he had suggested at the very least needed to be reinvented. I remind him of his words from his book 'Brother Nature' (Whittles Publishing 2007): "The most uncompromising crossing of the Highland Edge from South to North is by the Pass of Leny.

"The civilising of the road, the taming of the forests and the extinction of the wolves has not quite nullified the experience. Not even the unsubtle promptings of the tourist trade and the invention of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park have extinguished the primitive thrill that many a first-time traveller encounters here.

"For many travellers this is where they draw their first Highland breath". . . but . . . "the scene around the car park is something between an industrial wasteland and a battleground strewn with the piled torsos and severed limbs of dead trees, for these are the traditional hallmarks of the Scottish forestry industry at work."

On reading these words many of us who have travelled in recent months and years up the side of Loch Lubnaig to Balquhidder and beyond will think that nothing much has changed since he wrote them, as we see the accelerating and destructive march of the forestry industry he described in 'Gulfs of Blue Air' (Mainstream 1997) as being no longer "a landscape-conscious publicly owned source of rural employment teaching the skills of silviculture" but "privatised and shallow-minded cash crop mercenaries accountable to no one."

Jim has no objection to Sitka spruce as a tree but to the use that is made of it in this country, a purely

The land is everything. It defines us, it's the most important thing we have and thus its wellbeing should be the direct responsibility of Government.

We do not have a history of living in forests and we have lost our native traditions, both of which seem to be necessary to avoiding people-land disconnection

commercial cash crop. In the land of their origin, Alaska, they are a magnificent species, home to a huge variety of wildlife. Also the forestry industry's practice of clear-felling is destroying our landscapes both within and outwith our national parks, whereas thinning would not only recognise the value of our landscapes and its inhabitants but, being labour-intensive, it would create many skilled jobs.

He then goes on to highlight the necessity of reintroducing the wolf to Scotland, in his view the single most important step to be taken in the process of giving nature its head recreating the kind of benevolent chain reaction for every species with which the wolf shares the land. This reaction in Yellowstone is known as the 'trophic cascade', the chain reaction of opportunity created by the introduction of the wolf that benefits every layer of the food-chain from moose to beaver and on down to the ant. The wolf keeps the red deer on the move and in the process allows our wild woods to regenerate, which in turn restores the deer's true native habitat, the forest. The beavers, in recreating the wetlands, allow the reintroduction of wetland creatures and species of plant and tree.

In Yellowstone the positive consequences of the reintroduction of the wolf astounded everyone. The implication of this is that if we make the land available and put wolves on it, there is nothing in nature conservation we cannot do.

The totally unjustified negative image of the wolf has been handed down over many hundreds of years but it has been proved (in a study by Barry Lopez) that it is possible to change minds by allowing people to experience the charisma of wolves. It's about a ranger bringing a wolf into a classroom with young children. Beforehand the teacher

asked the children to draw a picture of a wolf and of course they all drew big teeth and fangs and blood. Then in it came and they all got to see it and touch it and just engage with it as another creature. After they had gone the kids were asked to do another drawing and every single one of them drew an animal with big feet. Over and over again when people are reintroduced to wolves the overwhelming response from the people has been one of wonder and admiration. Where the contact between wolf and people is ancient the wolf is regarded as an equal and teacher.

I suggest at this point that readers would gain much from reading the classic 'Of Wolves and Men' by Barry Lopez (Simon and Schuster originally published 1978) and of course Jim's own book, 'The Last Wolf' published by Birlinn in 2010. The mention of Barry Lopez leads us on to discuss why there should be a dearth of nature writers in Scotland and whether this might be related to the apparent lack of visionaries. Jim readily disproves my suggestion that Scotland has produced few visionaries but accepts that there is a serious lack of nature writers - although reminding me of the writer and poet Kathleen Jamie - compared with North America, which has John Muir (my suggestion being that we export our visionaries), Aldo Leopold, the aforementioned Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, Nancy Lord and Henry David Thoreau to name but a few with an international reputation.

He points to a number of areas of endeavour in which Scots had led the world. We have always produced creative people so there is not any deficiency in our make-up. But there is a clear disconnect between the people and the land, and the Clearances, both Highland and Lowland having been an obvious contributory factor. We do not have a history of living in forests

and we have lost our native traditions, both of which seem to be essential to avoiding people-land disconnection. The Americans have made great strides recently in understanding and valuing their native tradition. There's now an increasing awareness of the significance of how these folk live their lives and the terrible mistakes that were made by the incomers in relating with the indigenous cultures and the subsequent consequences. More and more Americans are coming to realise that many of the problems arising out of their materialist society may have their solutions in listening to those who belong to the land. We obviously need to find our own sources of inspiration and teaching.

However at this point the coffee runs out in the midst of a discussion on the feasibility of a Chair of Nature and Land Use at one of our universities.

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If the Editor would allow I would like to add a personal postscript to my discussion with Jim Crumley.

I am of the opinion that his writing makes a uniquely important contribution to the wellbeing of the Scottish land and what is more I am confident that he would wish, with me, to draw attention to the question posed by WH Murray, climber, world traveller and author, nearly fifty years ago, which I came across in 'The Way to Cold Mountain: a Scottish mountains anthology' edited by Alec Finlay and published in 2001 by Polygon.

"The Scottish Highlands have no counterpart on this planet . . . comparisons fail to survive even brief examination . . . The outstanding beauty of the Highland scene has been haphazardly expended and no account kept. Are Scots so blind that they cannot prize it for its own sake?"

and to some words from John Muir:

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul."

On reading these words, while agreeing very much with Jim Crumley that wind farms are certainly not "the only game in town", I cannot but think that it is difficult to "play and pray" in a landscape dominated by machines driven, not so much by an intermittent wind, but by an apparently insatiable lust for subsidy. We cannot possibly hear and reflect upon what John Muir, WH Murray and Jim Crumley himself have to say over the noise made by the wind farmers baying for more support, backed up noisily by those in the environmental movement who used to argue that the answer to climate change is not to resort to technical fixes but to address the problem of the Western lifestyle.

The wind turbine, behind its facade of elegance, is emblematic of the way our culture treats not just the land but the disadvantaged, being hugely symbolic of much that is wrong with our society: consumer driven, materialistic to the almost total exclusion of that which uplifts the spirit. The disadvantaged? At what point do they come into the debate on renewables? The proponents of commercial wind farms are apparently totally indifferent to the consequences of a grossly regressive transfer of resources, driven by the renewables subsidy mechanism, from communities of the rural and urban poor to landowners, multinational energy companies, developers and already prosperous communities such as Shetland, without having any regard whatsoever for relative need, the usual basis for allocating scarce national resources. The processes of redistribution are being totally distorted.

It is difficult to "play and pray" in a landscape dominated by machines driven, not so much by an intermittent wind, but by an insatiable lust for subsidy

Photo, next page:

Sgorr Ruadh from Coire Làir

C Brown





Calum Brown

The rising tide of windfarm development

Windfarms have hardly been out of the news recently, with policy debates and announcements, reports, inquiries and controversies giving them an unprecedentedly high national profile. While it is better that they are the subject of a coherent national debate than a series of isolated local – and losing – battles, there is little else to give encouragement in recent developments. The UK and Scottish governments remain committed to investing billions of pounds in the construction of windfarms on a vast scale across the country.

In Scotland, the Renewable Energy Inquiry of parliament's Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has been attracting attention, largely because of Donald Trump's appearance before it on the 25th of April, amidst both anti- and pro-windfarm (or anti-Trump) demonstrations. Angered by proposals for an offshore windfarm near his newly constructed golf resort, Trump has become an improbable champion of the anti-windfarm movement, donating money to campaigns and loudly criticising the government's energy policy.

His intervention has not been helpful. Apart from undermining the credibility of those who oppose the indiscriminate spread of turbines in Scotland, he has contributed to the further dumbing-down of the debate. His argument is essentially that he doesn't like wind turbines, and doesn't think visitors to Scotland will either (when asked for evidence, he told the committee "I am the evidence!"). While the sentiment is one that

many of us would agree with, it isn't really any more edifying than the usual counter-argument that some people do like windfarms, and that tourists might as well.

In fact, this has been the main thrust of the pro-windfarm coverage recently. In March, Visit Scotland published the results of a survey they had commissioned that showed, in addition to general disinterest, that more people were happy about the spread of windfarms than were not, that the majority of visitors to Scotland said they would not avoid an area because of windfarms, and that many would in fact visit a windfarm if they had a visitor centre. (They were apparently not asked how many such visitor centres they would like to visit, but we can probably assume that their enthusiasm would wane somewhere in the Southern Uplands, when faced with endless miles of turbines to the north). Around 20% of people even thought that the landscape was improved by the presence of turbines. Another survey, released a few days beforehand, showed that two thirds of people were 'in favour of wind power' and found windfarms' impact on the landscape 'acceptable'.

Arguments of this kind are, of course, irrelevant. Windfarms are not being constructed because some people like to look at them, and are not being opposed (except in a narrow NIMBY way) because other people don't. Presumably those who feel that windfarms enhance the Highlands of Scotland simply prefer industrialised

landscapes to wild ones – an opinion they are welcome to hold but not, of course, to impose on others. If we were really in the business of ‘enhancing’ the landscapes of Highland Scotland, we could surely do better than covering them with giant metal poles. Trees, for example, would be a better option – and they don’t require thousands of tons of concrete to be pumped into sensitive peatlands, the destruction of flora and fauna and large-scale industrialisation of semi-natural environments.

In fact, windfarms are being built to “help our efforts to tackle climate change”, according to the Scottish Government, and they must be judged on whether their contribution to this end justifies their cost and the obvious environmental damage that they do. It’s also important to recognise the limited nature of this objective – we could cover Scotland in turbines and perhaps meet the energy requirements of our own windy and sparsely-populated country (depending on the extent of backup required from other energy sources), but this would have virtually no effect on climate change. It would do nothing to help reduce emissions in rapidly developing and carbon-emitting economies like China and India, where the technology is obviously completely inadequate.

The solution is not to do nothing, as some might advocate, but to work on long-term global solutions. Public money should be used to develop new sources of energy, but should not be diverted into those that aren’t capable of making a significant difference just because they can be constructed within a parliamentary cycle and give political parties a quick ‘green’ sheen. Turbines, by their sheer visual intrusiveness, register politicians’ determination to do

something; wind power, you might say, is a gift to windbags.

Even worse, these are huge sums of money. The Renewables Obligation, funded through increases in our energy bills and used to pay power companies to generate energy from renewable sources (not to invest in new ones), is expected to cost £100 billion by 2030, according to the Renewable Energy Foundation. Meanwhile, 5.5 million people in Britain are in fuel poverty, and it is estimated that 3,000 die every winter as a direct result. Average household bills have doubled in the past 6 years, while the profit margins of the ‘big six’ power companies increased *seven-fold* within 3 months last year.

Some of these vast profits are meant to be spent on helping the poorest to insulate their homes and introduce other energy-efficiency measures. This is intended to help 90,000 homes and save 19.3 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions over a lifetime; a total cost of £5.5 billion producing a net benefit to society of £17 billion, according to government figures. Two-thirds of the way through the scheme, however, only 12,700 homes had been affected and 1.4 million tonnes of CO₂ had been saved - and now the power companies have asked government to extend the previously agreed deadline for the scheme.

The same hesitancy is not apparent in the payment of ‘community benefit’ to towns and villages within arbitrary distances of windfarm developments. This is supposed to be a form of compensation for inconvenience and environmental damage, but its true purpose is revealed by a ‘Policy Makers Summary’ on Community Benefits from Wind Power. This states that “the routine provision of meaningful benefits to communities hosting

The Renewables Obligation is expected to cost £100 billion by 2030 ... meanwhile, 5.5 million people in Britain are in fuel poverty.

wind power projects is likely to be a significant factor in sustaining public support and delivering significant rates of wind power development". In other words, it effectively functions as a pay-off to keep communities compliant and ease the progress of applications through the planning system. The Department of Energy and Climate Change plans to allow local communities to benefit even further by entitling them to some of the profits of renewable energy projects (i.e. more of the money that we all pay in our rapidly increasing energy bills).

This unilateral and arbitrary redistribution of wealth from all of us, including thousands of pensioners freezing in their homes, to a few select communities is wholly indefensible (as has been recognised in a recent report by Consumer Focus Scotland). It is not even as though the money, having been taken on the pretext of tackling climate change, is used for generally beneficial and appropriate things like energy efficiency measures. Instead, most community benefit goes into painting village halls and building playparks – and is another source of conflict in communities often already divided over the original windfarm application.

Some councils, including Highland, Aberdeen, and Dumfries and Galloway, appear to be aware of this, and have started to keep some proportion of community benefit funds for region-wide use. In Dumfries and Galloway, 40% of community benefit gets earmarked for energy efficiency, and 40% of that is used region-wide. Predictably, this has angered both energy companies and some communities.

The major power companies have

said, reasonably enough, that they are blamed for the lack of a coherent government policy for reducing carbon emissions while securing energy supplies. A policy of this kind is badly needed, not only to provide a real basis for tackling climate change, but also to protect Scotland's wild land from pointless and destructive development. Currently, the increasing spate of windfarm planning applications is threatening to overwhelm the system, and means that objections are, in a general sense, doomed. This is true even without proposed changes that would weaken the democratic planning process in order to ensure the quick acceptance of renewable energy developments. The ever-growing pressure to meet targets has already prompted Highland Council to extend its search areas for wind farm development (including a new 'very large' category) to areas on the west coast, with all non-designated areas available for consideration.

While these plans may be amended to respect some 'wild land', the clear implication is that the inexorable creep of windfarms and power lines across our most prized environments and landscapes is only set to quicken. Several key areas defined as 'wild' by SNH's recent mapping exercise are already scarred by windfarms and are targets for further large-scale developments. Perhaps the most we can hope for is that climate change, which Scottish windfarms will do nothing to prevent, might provide us with the consolation of better weather. But our best chance may be that other governments take the issue more seriously than our own and develop truly global solutions. And the sooner the better, before we have a scrapyard of obsolete wind turbines quietly rusting in our warmer, wetter Scottish summers.

Naomi Sackett

The Scottish butterfly and the human landscape



Naomi Sackett works for the National Trust and is studying for an MSc in Landscape, Environment and History with the University of Edinburgh

Photo: Northern Brown Argus

Iain Leach
(UK Butterflies)

'Each act of man is no simple deed, done and forgotten, but a complex of actions and interactions whose influence spread and spread like the circles in a disturbed pool, or rather that, like the sound waves impelled from a bursting bomb, reach up and down and all around'. (Ritchie)

When many people think of Scotland they think of wilderness; craggy mountains, lochs, moorlands and islands. It is an iconic landscape, perceived as one of the few places of wilderness in the UK. However, ecologically, it is not that wild. Humans have been using the land in Scotland since pre-historic times; woodlands have been managed for fuel and building materials, grassland grazed, uplands managed for hunting, and rivers exploited. Our management of the land (both historically and today) has altered

and influenced it, in turn, affecting the wildlife that lives in the landscape. It is through understanding how our management of the land affects native wildlife that we can learn to manage it in a sustainable way to benefit both us and nature.

The butterfly is a useful indicator species to reveal how our land use affects habitats for our fauna and flora. Our knowledge of distribution and ecological requirements, and the ease of recognition and access to them make our butterfly species valuable candidates to study and better understand environmental change. The present butterfly fauna has been shaped by the thousands of generations which survived all the changes to the environment brought about by humans and natural climatic fluctuations. The

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most important factors for butterfly habitat are the presence of the larval food-plant in right conditions, flowers for nectar for the adults, and a sheltered position, preferred by many species. There are 30 resident butterfly species in Scotland; I will describe how just a few of these species have been affected by our land management.

One of the key habitats to have been substantially altered by changing management practices and policies is open woodland. The varied structure produced by active management for a variety of purposes created suitable habitat for a range of butterfly species, for example the Chequered Skipper, which feeds on nectar from bluebells and bugle, and requires purple moor-grass, found in sunny, damp and sheltered spots, as its

Photo: Chequered Skipper on bluebell

Trevor Sawyer
(UK Butterflies)



larval food-plant. This species has been particularly adversely affected and is now restricted to a small region of western Scotland centred on Fort William, having died out in England in 1976. It wasn't discovered in Scotland until 1939 and its range was unknown until surveys were conducted by Scottish Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation in the 1980s and 90s.

Changing woodland management practice, primarily the decline of coppicing which provided a constant supply of clearings and early successive habitats, almost certainly contributed to its decline in England. This lack of traditional management is combined with the fact that Britain's original cover of native broad-leaved woodland has been reduced to about 2% of land area. Deforestation of the countryside is not just a recent phenomenon, there is documentary evidence for land management, including timber felling, from as early as the twelfth century. Charters granted to monasteries in the early twelfth century show fuel given in timber and the right to gather dead wood from the royal forest. However, by the late twelfth century grants for south-eastern and eastern Scotland tend to include peat as well as timber, and by the early thirteenth century it is almost exclusively peat (*Podcast 9*).

There is concern in Scotland about the increasing pressure on our remaining woodlands from deer browsing following an increase in population largely due to our extermination of their natural predators. This more intense browsing prevents the natural regeneration of the woodland, and has led to some initiatives to fence off woodland and protect it from deer. Unfortunately this can prove just as damaging to Chequered Skipper habitat as it risks losing the open space needed for breeding.

While the needs of insects do need to be incorporated into woodland management initiatives, there are actions we take that benefit the butterfly without actively managing for their benefit. For example, over one third of the Scottish Chequered Skipper colonies occur in wayleaves beneath electricity pylons where scrub is cut on rotation, similar in effect to the traditional practice of coppicing (*Asher*). The twentieth century forestry commission conifer plantations (a policy begun following the First World War as a response to wood shortages) are often seen as wildlife redundant mono-cultures, but, if they include woodland rides and glades or have inherited varied ground flora from previous ancient woodland they can provide habitat for many of the woodland butterfly species. Indeed, the young plantations provided good habitat for the Pearl-Bordered Fritillary in the 1950s and 60s, but the woods grew too shaded and dense causing an increase in local extinctions in the last few decades. Even so, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary remains widespread in the west and Highland regions, despite a dramatic decline in Wales and England.

Similar to the decline in woodland cover, semi-natural grassland is also reduced to about 2% of lowland areas in Britain. Since 1945 there have been 90% losses in this type of habitat and the scale of loss in the Scottish lowlands is similar to that of England and Wales. Small fields bounded by hedges and field margins provided a network of habitat and the ability for linear colonisation. Whereas larger fields preferred by modern farming, while enabling large machinery and greater productivity, have meant the loss of many species from these sites. The changing farming practices such as reduced light grazing on low productivity

grassland (combined with other factors such as myxomatosis in rabbits) has, in some places, led to increased sward height that is unsuitable for butterfly food-plants.

The reverse situation can also become a problem; the Highland clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shifted stock significantly towards sheep, increased stocking levels and therefore much habitat became too closely grazed for the butterfly food-plants. The Northern Brown Argus butterfly needs well-drained, unimproved grassland where common-rockrose, its most important food-plant, grows. It requires lightly grazed conditions, which on some sites is maintained by rabbits or by light winter grazing by livestock. These restricted habitat requirements mean that it has been adversely affected by the use of fertilisers, by more intensive stocking of northern grasslands, and by the abandonment of other sites. Suitable grassland habitats have also become much smaller and more fragmented which means a smaller population of butterflies which in turn makes them more vulnerable.

There have been some species of butterfly that have fared better through our management of the landscape. The Scotch Argus, for example, enjoys the damp moorland and grassland conditions that arise from our management of moorland that without regular burning, woodland clearance or stock grazing would revert to woodland and scrub. Tree cover was suppressed by poorer climatic conditions during the Little Ice Age 1350-1900 but it is estimated that human agency was responsible for much of the woodland loss by 1500 (when 15-20% of cover remained) and by 1750 (when only 5% remained) (*Dodgshon*). The muirburn also

Semi-natural grassland is reduced to about 2% of lowland areas in Britain. Since 1945 there have been 90% losses in this type of habitat and the scale of loss in the Scottish lowlands is similar to that of England and Wales.

often creates richer soils, which mean more caterpillar food-plants and nectar plants for adults. The Scotch Argus is widespread particularly on the west coast, in the Highlands and in Dumfries and Galloway, and appears to be stable in Scotland despite declining in many other European countries. However, suitable habitat is being lost due to afforestation, heavier grazing and the draining of bog edges for agriculture, and because it is a fairly mobile species, any decline may not become apparent immediately.

Another man-made habitat to be exploited by butterflies is post-industrial and derelict land. The thin, dry soil, bare patches and the presence of larval food-plants such as Bird's foot-trefoil, Kidney Vetch and grasses, and the sheltered slopes, scrub and shelter make it good butterfly habitat. It is used by various species such as the Northern Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper, Small Blue, Common Blue, Wall, Grayling, Meadow Brown, and Small Heath. Although, like the heather moorland, they are artefacts of human culture, these post-industrial sites are crucial for many species; for example, the last colonies of Small Blue in the Scottish Borders were all along disused railways lines, which eventually became too shady and the Small Blue became extinct in Southern Scotland. Other colonies using such habitats are also threatened as sites are often reclaimed for other use, or developed.

Whether by design or as an unintended consequence of our land use and management, butterfly habitat is very much a product of a human landscape and has been so for thousands of years. As long as there is human exploitation of the landscape, there will be ecological

change, which will mean some winners and losers in plant and animal populations. However, a better understanding of the consequences of our land management practice could mean that the landscape can be naturally and culturally balanced. In Scotland, as in the rest of Britain and Ireland, the story of the fortunes of the butterflies is also the story of humans in the landscape.

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the story of the fortunes of butterflies is also the story of humans in the landscape

Penelope Whitehorn

Bumblebees, pesticides and wild land

Bumblebees are familiar to many of us as garden insects, harbingers of warmer weather and longer days. Their furry bodies make them recognisably different to honeybees and they also have a different life cycle. It is only the new queen bumblebees that survive the winter in hibernation and in spring they emerge to find a suitable place to nest and produce a new colony.

Bumblebees may not seem particularly relevant to Scottish wild land but in fact they play a very important role in our natural ecology, pollinating a huge range of native plants. The UK has 24 bumblebee species in total and Scotland is a stronghold for some of the rarer of these. The great yellow (*Bombus distinguendus*) and the moss carder (*Bombus muscorum*) bumblebees, for example, are now mainly found in coastal areas in the west and far north of Scotland, surviving on remaining pockets of machair grassland. The bilberry

bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*) is another rare species that has quite healthy populations on upland moors - particularly in Scotland.

Sadly, as with much of our native wildlife, bumblebees have been suffering from population declines. Two species have become extinct in the last 70 years and others are perilously close to the same fate. The main reason for these declines has been the intensification of agriculture and the associated loss of natural habitats on which bumblebees depend. Changes in farming practises have resulted in the loss of 97% of flower-rich meadows in the UK, and so it is no wonder that bees have been suffering as they rely on the pollen and nectar from wildflowers for their food.

The intensification of farming has also led to the increased use of chemicals, again to the detriment of our wildlife. Insect pollinators are



Penelope Whitehorn is an ecologist specialising in bumblebees (or a 'bombologist'). Her recent study on the effects of pesticides on bumblebees, carried out with colleagues at Stirling University, received worldwide press coverage. Here she outlines its implications for the management of Scottish wild land.



Photos:
top—*Bombus muscorum*, the moss carder bumblebee;
P Whitehorn

left - Machair on Barra
P Whitehorn

particularly threatened by one group of insecticides - the neonicotinoids. These chemicals were introduced in the early 1990s and have become the best-selling insecticides in the world, with global annual sales of over \$1 billion. They work as insect neurotoxins and are used on many different crops, including oilseed rape and cereals. The chemicals are systemic and so they are often applied as a seed dressing from where they can migrate in the sap to all parts of the plant. This means they are present at low levels in the pollen and nectar of flowering crops, where bumblebees and other beneficial pollinators can come into contact with them.

There has been much debate about the role that neonicotinoids have had in the declines of bees but many suspect that they are connected to the current losses of honeybees. Some laboratory studies have shown that low levels do harm bees' ability to forage and navigate effectively and as a result the chemicals have been partially or completely banned in a number of European countries. They are licensed in the UK however, and the volume used is ever-increasing. Alarmingly, they are also available to buy non-commercially – most garden centres sell products containing neonicotinoids to use against garden pests and it is likely that they will also come into contact with beneficial insects when used in gardens.

The use of these pesticides has been allowed to continue here because realistic field studies investigating their impact under natural conditions have been lacking. In order to fill this knowledge gap, a group of us at Stirling University looked at the effects of the commonly used neonicotinoid imidacloprid on bumblebee colonies

under natural conditions. We exposed a number of developing colonies of the buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) to low levels of imidacloprid by adding it to their nectar and pollen - the doses were comparable to what the bees are often exposed to in the wild. When placed in the field and allowed to forage under natural conditions for six weeks, we found that the colonies that had been exposed to the pesticide gained less weight than 'control' colonies that had not been exposed, suggesting that workers had brought back less food to the hive. The most dramatic effect was, however, on queen production – the treated colonies produced about 85% fewer new queens than the controls. This last finding is very important because fewer queens means that fewer new nests will be built the following year and such a drastic reduction will really threaten bumblebee populations over time.

These effects are likely to extend well beyond the boundaries of farms and gardens as bumblebees can travel a kilometre or more to collect food, and there are only a few areas of the UK that are not within a kilometre or two of pesticide-treated fields. Highland Scotland contains many such areas, however, making it crucially important to British bumblebees— as it is for the preservation of biodiversity in general. Bumblebees do not respect man-made boundaries, and one clear message of our research is that we have to investigate and remember the effects of our actions on ecological systems as a whole. It could be to all of our benefits if wild land in Scotland was treated as the largely contiguous refuge that it actually represents to many of our native species.

Alarmingly, most garden centres sell products containing neonicotinoids to use against garden pests



George Charles

Ultramontanes and Salvationists

Ever since the earliest days of the SMC the distinction has been drawn between 'Ultramontanes' (climbers) and 'Salvationists' (walkers) (the terms referencing religious movements of the day) and, indeed, it would be worth the time for interested parties to look up the views of far more distinguished minds than myself, available on the web. Although many things have changed since those articles the original observation remains as true as ever. Although I've enjoyed a small amount of climbing I've always placed myself firmly in the Salvationist camp; feeling that my natural home is crouched behind a peat hag eating my sandwich while the horizontal mizzle lightly beads on my jacket hood.

Recently, however, time spent with an Ultramontane (on Skye, in the

high corries of the Cairngorms - you know the kind of places) and a run of Himalayan expedition reading has led me to question my own motivations and commitment to the hill.

Serious climbing contains within it its own, often unstated, philosophy. Perhaps most succinctly expressed as 'Carpe Diem' it involves making the most of every minute you're alive and maximising each sensory experience. I don't think I have what it takes to be that purist, preferring a magpie approach to mountain philosophies, collecting leaves to place over the map so that at times just the high crags will stand out, at others the eagle nests and ranges, at others the prime wintering grounds of the red deer and so on. Above all, I view the Scottish landscape through the prism of its

Photo: Stob Coire an Lochain from Stob Binnein

C Brown

human history. As a most visual reminder of the social changes of the last few hundred years, the increasing urbanisation and homogenisation of this country, and indeed, the world.

However, seeing the hunger and energy generated by a passion for climbing can be humbling, leading one to question how keen one really is for all the mountain environment can offer. Ultimately though, it led me to focus on the reasons why I do go to the hill and these remain the same as they did all those years ago when I used to bunk off school to seek out wild land close to my home in south-west England.

The first and foremost of these is an aesthetic appreciation of the landscape. One of the great appeals of the Scottish hill environment is the way in which the seasons bring such a transformation to the scene. Sensitivity to this, to changes in light, qualities of colour and landform, whether it be the sun setting behind the Cuillin ridge or the water droplets catching on the club moss on a dreich day; this is what gets me out of the door each weekend and is the backbone of a rich and satisfying lifetime in the Scottish hills.

Another aspect that keeps me addicted to the hills is solitude. I believe any wild land experience is only amplified by being alone. Why being alone in the hills feels so different to being alone in any other context is a beautiful mystery to me. It gives the opportunity to tune in more closely to your environment, a greater sense of freedom and space to be yourself and think your own thoughts and also, when things start to get serious, there's the knowledge that no-one is responsible for your decisions but yourself.

There is also a more basic pleasure to be had from simple exercise and

fresh air and, while I would be hesitant to identify myself too closely to the current rash of walking-for-health groups, the benefits and endorphin release of these things are clear.

All these things can be achieved most precisely through a solitary backpacking trip. I see this as the ideal and purest form of mountain travel. Camping at the head of a lonely glen, preferably close to some shieling remains, gives a true sense of how the mountains have worked as a backdrop for generations of peoples lives.

Strangely, a lot of my time on the hills brings out two contradictory responses in me. One is a kind of amplified stillness, a desire to leave everything be and an awareness of detail and subtle shading which spills over into everyday life. The other impulse is to fill every minute with action; to do all things harder, faster and for longer. Maybe this choice between elevated contentment and desire; between Rousseau and Nietzsche is the fundamental schism between Salvationists and Ultramontanes, although many peak-baggers have desire enough and mountaineering can bring a contentment of its own. Ultimately we're all looking for the same thing, those moments when we truly feel at home. This puts me in mind of a day I spent walking up Mount Keen, not because I particularly wanted to but because I couldn't think of anything better to do. The rain was falling, the bogs were hard going. It felt familiar but the contentment remained elusive. Towards the end of the day I dropped back into Deeside from Pannanich hill, the setting sun glowing fiercely below the dark clouds. And there it was. I knew I hadn't been able to think of anything better to do because there is nothing better to do. I kept on walking. And who could ask for more than that?

Camping at the head of a lonely glen, preferably close to some shieling remains, gives a true sense of how the mountains have worked as a backdrop for generations of people's lives

Chrissie Valluri

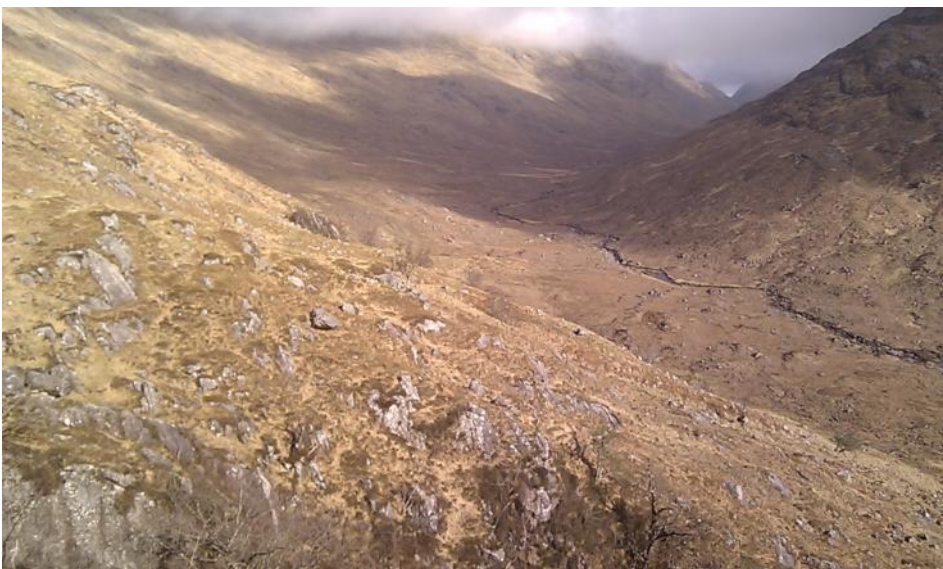
My Wild Land: Ard-na-what?

Apart from being difficult to pronounce, Ardnamurchan doesn't look anything different from the rest of Scotland when looking at it on the OS map. On a more detailed look you might notice that it is Britain's most westerly point and that most of the Peninsula has a rather hairy, or entertaining as it turns out, infrastructure. Then, looking even a wee bit closer one might notice the absence of any Munros, possibly one of the reasons that even on the most stunning days the hills are quite empty and feel very wild. Lastly, those slightly more geeky of us might remember it from the Geology class as that 'super volcano thing'.

I had planned a couple of days 'out there' to recce some tours for the coming season and was expecting to walk them out briefly and then head back home. This also coincided with my first trip in our newly converted van so I felt like a proper adventurer when I took the Corran Ferry and headed into the wilderness. My first walk took me and my very excited dog Whisky around the Strontian Oakwoods and up to the old lead



mine workings – a very atmospheric place and before I knew it I found myself napping on a lovely heather plateau on top of the Glen feeling completely free and careless with nothing to worry other than my dwindling supply of chocolate. I could have easily lingered around for longer but it was getting late so sadly I had to start my descent back to the car park...I don't like walking out the same route – I sometimes wish I could just keep going whichever direction I feel drawn to and see where I would end up.



Photos: C Valluri

Photo: C Valluri



The next day I met up with my friend Emma and her dog and we attempted to 'Otter watch' – have you ever 'Otter watched'? I sometimes feel it is a bit like 'Water vole surveys' – you know they are there but all YOU ever get to see is poo....so there – obviously we didn't see one that evening but we still spent ages sitting at the hide watching the sun go down over calm waters and listening to the seabirds.

My last recce day took us out from Glen Borrodale all the way to Castle Tioram. A stunning day full of pure wilderness with great company. Whilst I sometimes enjoy solitary walks this was the perfect day for a hillwalk with an old friend and two excited collies – sunshine, no clouds, hills, the islands of Rum, Eigg and

Skye in the distance, and the deep blue sea. Topped off with an empty stunning beach at Tioram – the perfect place to end a perfect day!

When I drove back that night I was already so used to not having people and cars around that I got slightly stressed just turning right onto the A830 towards Glenfinnan and felt somewhat unable to cope with the hustle and bustle of Morrison's in Fort William – a five minute ferry crossing takes you mentally a lot further away, and 48 hours away felt like a whole week and a proper adventure. On trips like this I become very aware on how lucky I am to be living in this great part of the world having the wilderness so close yet so far away...

News

Buzzard control trial cancelled

Government plans to carry out a £375,000 trial on the control of buzzards to help pheasant shoots have been dropped after a public outcry. The plans, formulated by Richard Benyon, the Minister with responsibility for wildlife and biodiversity (and owner of an estate on which pheasants are bred for shooting), would have involved the

capture and removal of adult buzzards and the destruction of their nests. The Government has said that new proposals for buzzard management will be drawn up.

Cairngorms National Park Tesco

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has accepted plans for another Tesco store in Aviemore.

The £15m development will destroy a lochan that is of high conservation value and provides habitat for rare species including the endangered northern damselfly. Attempts will be made to relocate surviving examples of the species, although a suitable site has not yet been identified. David Green of the CNPA lauded what he called a “sustainable outcome as befits a national park”.

Staffa fish farm proposals

Plans to create a large Salmon farm in the waters near Staffa are being opposed through an online campaign and petition. Residents of the small island of Gometra argue that the farm would cause substantial damage to the wildlife, wild land and clean water of the Staffa Archipelago, with seals and cetaceans being particularly badly affected, undermining eco-tourism in the area. More information and the petition are available at: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/savestaffaarchipelago/>

Hill tracks

The Scottish Government has put forward proposals to remove Permitted Development Rights from hill tracks. Currently exempt from planning laws if claimed to be for the purposes of agriculture or forestry, the tracks will be subject to planning permission if the proposed changes are made, and will not be permitted within conservation areas, National Scenic Areas or National Parks. The SWLG strongly supports the proposals.


Wind farm subsidies to go?

Recent reports suggest that the UK Government is planning to phase out all subsidies for wind and solar power by 2020, arguing that the technologies should be financially self-sustaining by then. The move would slash the payments that power companies can expect to receive from increased consumer energy bills, which are driving the current spate of windfarm applications.



Gordon Buchanan plants the millionth tree on Trees for Life's Dundreggan estate, with Alan Watson Featherstone.

Photo: Trees for Life



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