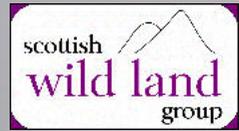


ISSUE 96  
AUTUMN 2019

# Wild Land News

Magazine of the Scottish Wild Land Group

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FREE TO MEMBERS



**Monitoring landscape change in the hills**

**The upkeep of hill paths**

**Rewilding: The Big Picture Conference**

**Grouse moors: the Revive coalition**

Autumn 2019

**WILD LAND NEWS**

Issue 96

Magazine of the  
Scottish Wild Land Group

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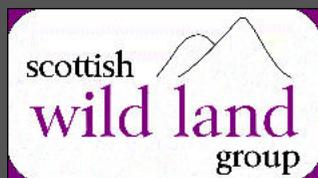
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**Help us safeguard wild land:**  
If you come across any  
proposed developments  
which might damage wild  
land, please let us know

*Front cover: Ben Alligin  
Left: Beinn Eighe  
Photos James Fenton*

## Editorial

### Climate change

Human-induced climate change has been front-page news over the past month or so, particularly thanks to the Extinction Rebellion protests. Indeed, having been there in the background for many years, it is now beginning to enter centre stage. I first learnt about it at university in the early 1970s, so it has taken nearly a lifetime to become near the top of the political agenda.

### Renewable infrastructure

But how does wild land fit in with climate change? One obvious impact of the new world we are moving into is the proliferation of new forms of electricity generation, such as windfarms, solar farms and hydro-schemes. Electricity is the clean energy of the future.

However, to ensure electricity generation does not itself contribute to climate change it cannot be created by the combustion of fossil fuels. The only alternatives are nuclear power and the earth's own natural flows of energy. Apart from highly localised geothermal energy, natural energy flows are low density compared to the concentrated forms found in fossil fuels (or in radioactive

elements). Fossil fuels represent the concentration of natural energy flows over millions of years, whereas renewable energy has to make use of the energy available at a given time. Because such flows are low density, the infrastructure to collect the available energy has to be spread over large areas. Which is where wild land comes in. Do we want every square inch of land, loch river, burn and sea to be developed in order to harvest the natural energy flows? To 'save the planet' do we accept visible infrastructure everywhere?

Is climate change mitigation such a priority that everywhere has to be sacrificed to the cause? My personal view is that I do not want myself, or my grandchildren, to live in a planet where there are no longer any wild places, where, wherever you look, human structures are visible.

The answer to this dilemma is zoning: this may seem a bureaucratic mechanism which inevitably restricts the freedom of individual land-owners. But is there any other way to ensure that some regions of Scotland, or anywhere on earth, are places where we can escape the hand of man? In Scotland we already



Allershaw, south of Elvanfoot

have Wild Land Areas although in practice they offer little protection against renewable energy development. But safeguard them we must.

### Land management

Related to the proliferation of energy infrastructure is the management of the land itself: should we always intervene to mitigate climate change, or in some instances let the land develop naturally?

Natural processes are not always on the side of climate change mitigation! For example, peat bogs in the Highlands can erode naturally, releasing their stored carbon. Hence revegetating eroding bogs to prevent this can in some instances be going against natural processes – not letting nature be in charge. It is introducing management into wild places.

And there can be issues with tree planting: not everywhere would naturally be wooded. But do we still intervene to plant trees in these places to help store carbon? There are issues as to whether planting

trees on Scotland's organic soils actually does mitigate the climate, particularly if their effect on soil oxidation and albedo is taken into account – but that is a story for another day!

### Wild land or climate change?

Wild land or climate change mitigation? Which is more important? We need both, of course, and this means zoning which, to be taken seriously, has to be underpinned by legislation.

As as I have said earlier, I would like to live in a Scotland where wild places are still to be found, places where the hand of mankind is minimal. Is this selfish?

Much debate still to be had ...

### Social media presence: help needed

We are looking for a media-savvy individual to help the group raise its social media presence. Please contact [admin@swlg.org.uk](mailto:admin@swlg.org.uk) if you would like to help us with this.

## SWLG AGM 2019

### Reminder for your Diaries!

The last two AGMs were held in the very pleasant and centrally located Birnam Centre, near Dunkeld. We appreciate that very many of our members live in Edinburgh and in a bid to encourage them along to the AGM we have decided to hold this year's meeting in the city.

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December**

**The Quakers' Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh**

**2pm: AGM in the Meeting Room**

**3pm: Presentation on wild land by Norman McNab**

Our speaker this year will be Norman McNab of the Munro Society. Norman is a Scottish mountain enthusiast and an excellent photographer. He will show us an awe-inspiring selection of his images from his northern Scotland collection. His presentation shows the real Wild Land that we need to protect. There will be opportunity to ask questions and share your own opinions.

Light refreshments and socialising will follow in the Library.

*The venue is on Victoria Terrace in the Old Town, close to the High Street, Edinburgh EH1 2JL. There is a vast choice of lunch venues close to hand.*

To save expense, resources and volunteer time, we will not be posting out AGM papers. These are available on the website at <http://www.swlg.org.uk/agms.html>

We very much hope you can join us. We would also like more members to become involved. If you would like to participate in the Steering Group, please get in touch by emailing [admin@swlg.org.uk](mailto:admin@swlg.org.uk) to discuss what is involved and how you could support our work.

*Beryl Leatherland*

Jane Meek

## Glen Etive Hydro Development – Latest News

*This is an update of the situation as reported in Wild Land News 94.*

In March 2019 the full Highland Council, at a specially convened meeting, voted to approve three run-of-river hydro schemes in Wild Land Area 9 on the south-east side of Glen Etive. Four schemes on the forested west side had already been consented. The Council's decision was greeted with dismay by all those, including Save Glen Etive and Mountaineering Scotland, who had poured months of their time and energy into the campaign to save these three tributaries of the Etive – Allt a' Chaorainn, Allt Mheuran and Allt Ceitlin – from industrialisation.

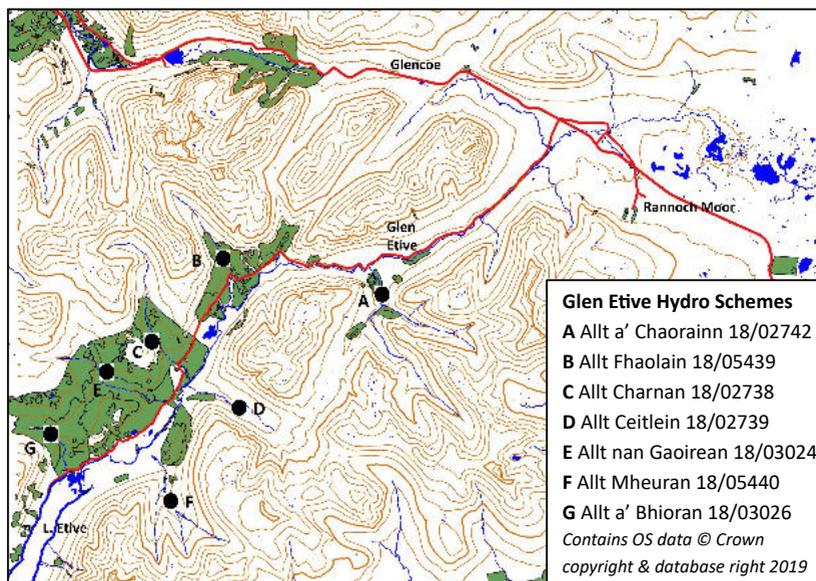
Even the most committed supporters of renewable energy must acknowledge that some places are simply not appropriate for development. Glen Etive is one such. As a National Scenic Area and Special Protection Area fringed by Wild Land, Glen Etive is internationally recognised for its special qualities. These qualities will

be lost forever once the bulldozers move in.

The Council's shock decision had the effect of a bombshell. A blanket of utter silence descended. For months there was no news and no sign of activity on the part of the developer, Dickins Hydro Resources. Then, in early August, an e-mail dated 10<sup>th</sup> June from SEPA to the Applicant commenting on the results of a site walkover for three of the schemes – Phase 1 of the development, including Allt a' Chaorainn but not Ceitlin or Mheuran – appeared on Highland Council's planning portal under the title "Condition 1 – pre-commencement".

In a welcome move, Highland Council planners have committed to making all relevant post-decision documents available for public scrutiny by uploading them to the planning portal as they become available. That there has been little to read so far is perhaps an indication of the difficulties facing the developer/contractor: while it can be easy enough to gain consent





on the back of high-sounding proposals, it is often a much harder task to make the theory work on the ground, especially in such a sensitive location.

**Technical questions remain unanswered**

SEPA’s remarks should concern anyone hoping that the schemes can be built without damaging the character of the glen. With reference to the Allt a’ Chaorainn scheme, they noted:

*“It was disappointing that much of the discussions at this site concentrated around the contractors (sic) views that it was not technically possible to construct the site in line with the conditions outlined in the consent.”*

*This shows the importance of including construction contractors in the planning process and employing a contractor who can meet the requirements of the consent.”*

One of the objections raised by Save Glen Etive and others to the original hydro proposals was the apparent inexperience of the developer. We also queried whether some of the technical solutions proposed by the developer to problems that included excavating or blasting through rock could ever work in practice and leave no trace. Judging by SEPA’s comments, it looks as though some of the proposals put forward by the developer to secure planning permission may not actually be

practical to implement. The Allt a’ Chaorainn scheme, for example, involves two intakes, the pipeline for which is to be cut through rock slabs. SEPA’s e-mail notes that

*“further investigation is required relating to the extent of rock that will need to be excavated before detailed layout designs and timing can be agreed”.*

In other words, there is currently no existing plan for this crucial aspect of construction, despite its importance in landscape terms. Nor is there as yet any indication as to how the broken rock slabs are to be restored.

**Flash flooding implications for intake design**

Over and above the problems outlined above, it seems we should now be calling for hydro intake design to be overhauled to cope with flash flooding. Floods on 5<sup>th</sup> August washed away part of the West Highland railway line and received extensive media coverage. Less widely reported is the scale of the damage caused to a number of hydro schemes in Glen Falloch within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park area. I was alerted to this by Nick Kempe, whose excellent Parkswatchscotland blog has covered the Glen Etive hydro schemes in some depth and

discusses the damage in Glen Falloch in a series of posts <http://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2019/09/27/climate-change-and-glen-falloch-3-the-hydro-schemes-have-failed-literally/>.

No less than six of Glen Falloch’s nine hydro intakes were affected by significant infilling, requiring remedial works to dredge the intake pools and restore the schemes to operation. In some cases the boulders used to screen the intakes and prevent bank erosion were swept away by the floodwater.

In a recent letter to Highland Council planners I drew their attention to events in Glen Falloch and the implications of this for the hydro developments planned in Glen Etive:

*“This recent storm event highlights the risk of damage to hydro schemes situated in locations vulnerable to flash flooding, notably Glen Etive, where all seven sites are described in the developer’s flood risk assessment as having the characteristics of a ‘flashy catchment’ due to low permeability of the underlying geology.*

*“The documents available on Highland Council’s planning portal offer little detail in terms of final*

Flash flooding infills hydro intakes

*intake design for the Etive schemes, but it seems likely that the developer will opt for the standard approach of concrete wing walls screened by a layer of boulders. While this approach is already less than satisfactory in landscape terms, events in Glen Falloch show it to be wholly ineffective in protecting hydro intakes from flood damage. The boulders are simply swept away, leaving the concrete walls exposed."*

I put the case for insisting on stone-faced walls using stone appropriate to the location (granite). I also asked Highland Council to consider rejecting rip rap (rock armour) bouldering as a practice across its territory in future, including Glen Etive. At the time my letter was written there was still no information available on proposed intake design or methods of bank erosion control for the Etive schemes. Drawings dated 4<sup>th</sup> October have since been made



SWLG Steering Group members visiting a hydro scheme intake near Braemar. Photo J Fenton

available for two of the schemes (Allt Fhaolain and Allt nan Gaoirean) and will be considered by Highland Council.

Disappointingly but predictably, they propose using reinforced concrete for the intake structure and wing walls and rock armour revetements for reinstatement of the burn beds and banks.

### Net contributors to carbon emissions?

Whether Highland Council will heed the lessons of Glen Falloch and force the developer to rethink his plans is not yet clear. What *is* clear is that by building hydro schemes in unsuitable locations we risk ending up with a damaged environment and no electricity generation to show for it. My letter concludes:

*"It would be deeply ironic if one or more of the Glen Etive schemes were to be abandoned just a few years down the line because of faulty design, for they would then become net contributors in terms of carbon emissions. This would be important anywhere, but it is doubly significant in a sensitive landscape such as Glen Etive which many would argue should not be hosting hydro development at all."*



*Above: The hills south of Glen Etive, Clach Leathad in the foreground, Ben Starav in the distance. Photo James Fenton*

For readers interested in following the progress of Glen Etive - Phase 1, the planning references are:  
18/02742/FUL (Allt a' Chaorainn);  
18/05439/FUL (Allt Fhaolain);  
18/03024/FUL (Allt nan Gaoirean).

The Highland Council planning portal is easy to use: click on **Search for Planning Applications**, choose **Simple Search**, type in the planning reference and select **Documents**.

Save Glen Etive website:  
[www.saveglenetive.co.uk](http://www.saveglenetive.co.uk)

Nick Kempe's blog:  
[www.parkswatchscotland.co.uk](http://www.parkswatchscotland.co.uk)

*Jane is a member of the Scottish Wild Land Group and of Save Glen Etive (SGE), a grassroots grouping of individuals formed in 2018 to fight plans for run-of-river hydro development in Glen Etive, including three schemes situated in a Wild Land Area. Jane opposes any industrial development in the glen on landscape grounds, in contrast to the view of SGE as a whole which is to contest only the three most sensitive schemes. Seven schemes in all have been granted approval. The views expressed in this article are Jane's own.*

James Fenton

## Torrison hydro scheme update

The Loch Gaineamhach hydro scheme referred to in issues 93 & 94 of *Wild Land News* was approved by Highland Councillors on 29 March 2019. This is located south of Badachro and immediately north of the Torrison mountains (see map)

Details of the application can be found on the Highland Council website, ref. 18/05132/FUL. It involves:

“Installation of 2mw hydro-electric scheme, including powerhouse, intake structure, buried pipeline, upgrading and formation of access tracks and bridges, construction areas and borrow pits.”

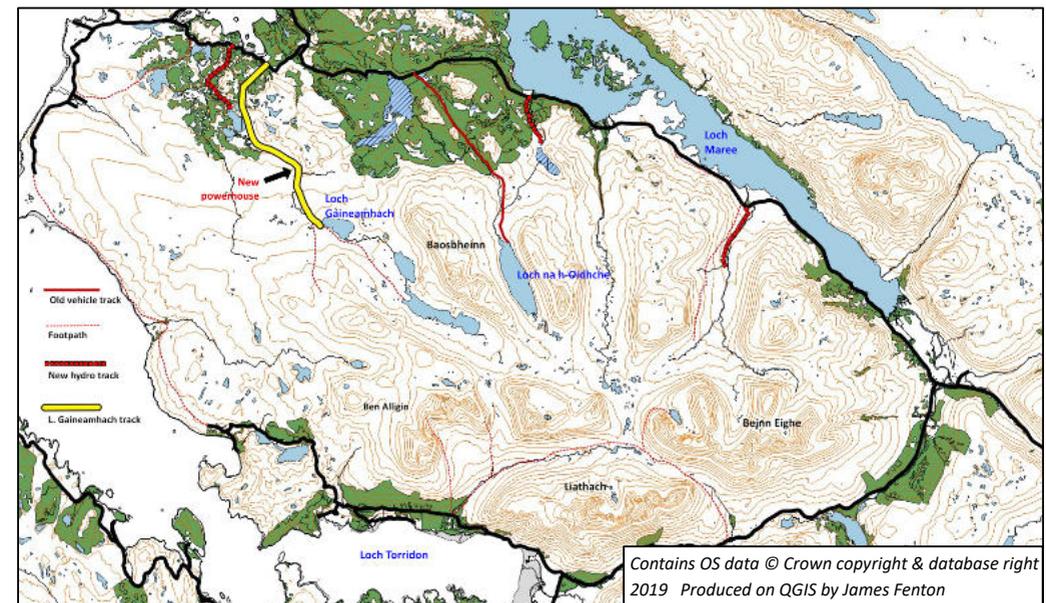
This scheme, located in Wild Land Area 27, is an example of how attrition of our core mountain areas continues apace: developments around the edges are slowly eating into the heart of the mountains.

However Highland Council reports that to date the applicant has not submitted any of the documentation as covered in the conditions attached to the planning permission; nor has any pre-commencement meeting as required by the planners yet taken place. Hence work has not yet started, and there is still a chance it might not yet be built?



Looking north from Beinn Alligin with Loch a' Bhealach in the foreground and Loch Gaineamhach beyond this on the left. Gairloch in the far distance. Photo James Fenton

Looking west over Loch Gaineamhach from Baosbheinn. Photo Jane Meek



The Torrison area showing location of existing and planned schemes

## Mountain Reporting: Changes to the landscape over time

### Background

Many people go to the Scottish hills and many more take pleasure from looking at them. Mountains may be thought of as unchanging, but this is not so. The natural forces of frost and flood gradually, occasionally dramatically, bring about change in shape and form, particularly as climate change manifests itself with the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events. More relevant perhaps are the changes wrought by human endeavour: forestry, recreation, power generation and much more – indeed climate change appears largely to be the result of human action on a global scale: we are now living in the Anthropocene Epoch. Few would argue that the Scottish Highland and Lowland hills are an irreplaceable asset which should be preserved for future generations, but who is monitoring change?

There has, until a few years ago, been no organisation prepared to make consistent and widespread observations on the changes taking place. Members of The Munro Society (TMS) decided that this is an obligation they were willing to

undertake, to carry out such monitoring as the Society's personnel and resources allowed. As a voluntary organisation of limited means, TMS confines itself to maintenance of a database in which, over time, members record their personal observations of changes taking place – or not taking place – in the mountainous areas of Scotland.

The Mountain Reporting project actually metamorphosed out of the earlier Mountain Quality Indicators project (MQIs), which had been initiated early in the Society's existence, around 2003. MQIs called for participants to assess their day on the hill in terms of eight criteria: **access, fauna, flora, drainage, human influence pre- and post-1900, degree of wildness** and finally 'aesthetic response'.

It was also the aim to assess each hill in each of the four seasons, and to a large extent this was achieved, with every Munro being assessed although there were a few gaps in winter – but that was not seen as a major weakness, as assessment is difficult if everything is covered in snow. However, participation



New hydro track, Bènglas Burn. Photo Derek Sime

tended to be confined to a small number of individuals; and there was also a scoring system which was not generally popular, as it was largely subjective. A simplified means of recording might generate a greater participation level.

### The Mountain Reporting project

Hence the Mountain Reporting project was born. Apart from the style of the form used, there were three principal changes, *i.e.* reports are submitted on-line rather than by email, photographs are included, and assessment is no longer confined to Munros: all Scottish hill lists from Donalds to Munros are now included.

Since its inception in 2015, 689 reports have been completed. It is pleasing to note that Mountain Reports have been of interest to the public with over 1,000 hits on average to the site each month;

although the participation level has unfortunately not changed, with still only a hard core of enthusiasts completing reports.

The Mountain Report is in six parts and calls for the following information:

- 1. Mountain-day information** – including the route taken, weather conditions, numbers of walkers seen.
- 2. Access, paths, tracks and roads** – information on the occurrence and condition of these, including bridges, and for hill roads, whether these are recent (*i.e.* not on the map).
- 3. Human and natural influences** – including windfarms, radio masts, hydro schemes, forestry, muirburn, overgrazing, litter, and invasive vegetation.
- 4. Additional notes** – principally the flora and fauna, geology and geomorphology and archaeology. This section calls for a degree of knowledge on such matters, but can

be left blank if the reporter does not feel able to complete it.

**5. Reflections of the mountain experience** – which basically replicates the ‘aesthetic response’ section of the old MQIs.

**6. Other matters** – to include practical information regarding car parking and charges, type of transport used and whether overnight accommodation was used (giving a measure of the economic contribution to the local economy).

The ongoing threat of changes to our mountain landscape that have been reported include:

- **Extreme weather conditions** – a major deluge on the mountains between Callander and Glen Ogle in August 2004 (Stùc a’ Chroin and Ben Vorlich), which washed away several bridges.
- **Increasing popularity** of activities such as mountain biking, charity walks and climbs; use of trekking poles; use of trails for motor bike cross-country *etc.* There is increasing evidence of mountain bikers riding on narrow unmade hill paths, and occasionally riding down from a summit at speed, causing erosion as well as safety concerns. Also, hill routes in the Mamores, Glen Nevis and Corrour areas are used for one week in May for motor cycle trials. Sponsored hill races with large numbers of participants are also becoming more common, with consequential issues of erosion and litter, and disturbance to wildlife.
- **Windfarms** – these are one of the main concerns over recent years,



Path erosion, Conival. Photo Derek Sime

with a proliferation of installations, affecting the landscape quality, bird life, and vegetation cover. With an ongoing increase in planning applications, the overall effect on the mountain landscape is likely to spread further. It should be emphasised that TMS is not opposed to renewable energy *per se*, but is opposed to inappropriate siting of such installations.

- **Run-of-river hydro schemes** – when the MQI project started in 2003, there were relatively few of these, but in the last decade they have sprung up in just about all mountain areas. In theory, once completed, they should have minimal ongoing environmental impact, provided the planning conditions were adequate, and, more importantly, are rigidly enforced; but unfortunately all too often they are not enforced, even in our National Parks. The principal concern is the extent and nature of hill tracks, in particular the width of these, and the way in which they have been constructed: especially the gradient and extent of excavated slopes.
- **Forestry operations** – logging operations can lead to the opening up of views but often leave vast areas of brash. Although this is

ostensibly good practice from an economic and ecological point of view, it does not present the most aesthetically pleasing landscape. (The forestry road route from Beinn Ime by Allt Coiregrogan to Succoth is an example of this dichotomy). Forestry roads are often used as access onto the hill, examples being numerous. The corollary is that if the plantation did not exist, the road would not be required for access. Conservation work in forests often results in short term reduction in landscape quality, but leading to improved habitat, greater biodiversity and improved landscape value in the longer term.

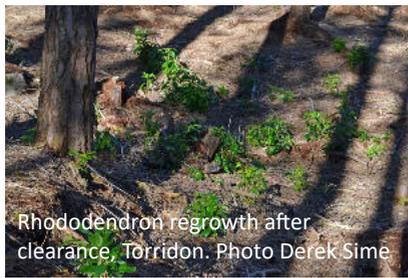
- **Tree regeneration** – where sheep have been removed from hills, or greatly reduced in numbers, regeneration has been noticeable. There are also many examples where temporary exclosures have been created to allow the natural regeneration of the post glacial climactic ecosystem, *e.g.* the riparian wood around Inverlochlarig Burn (Wild Rivers Demonstration Site), *en route* to Beinn Tulaichean. However, some of these schemes have been inappropriately sited, and some have failed completely, due to either unsuitable ground or climatic



Sitka spruce on slopes of Ben Vorlich. Photo D Sime

conditions; or, as is often the case, ongoing grazing by sheep (as on the John Muir Trust land at East Schiehallion), or browsing by deer, due to gaps in fences *etc.* (as would appear to be the case in the Forest of Mamlorn on the lower slopes of Creag Mhòr, in Glen Lochay).

- **National Parks** – the establishment of two National Parks (Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and Cairngorms) in Scotland in the early ‘Noughties’ was a sea change, but perhaps one which has not provided the landscape protection which had been hoped for. There are varied views about whether the inclusion or otherwise within a National Park has much effect on the Munros. It will be interesting to see how this develops in future, but the perception is that the National Parks in Scotland prioritise economic development over conservation – and there are many cases that demonstrate this. Contrast this with National Parks in Norway, for example, wherein no development is permitted whatsoever. Indeed in general, National Parks across mainland Europe have a core zone, where there is no development, and a peripheral zone, acting as a buffer – this principal does not apply in Scotland.
- **Other designations, such as National Scenic Areas, SSSIs and Wild Land Areas** – sadly we have seen many examples in recent years where these designations are virtually ignored where there is a ‘strong case’ for development: for example windfarm applications being granted permission within, or partly within, Wild Land Areas.
- **Bulldozed Tracks** – despite the high



Rhododendron regrowth after clearance, Torridon. Photo Derek Sime

profile of this aspect, new tracks continue to be created, sometimes with little apparent planning or engineering. A particularly bad example can be found on Beinn Buidhe associated with a run-of-river hydro scheme; and another by the Benglas Burn, which lies within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Also, on Beinn Sgulaire the old footpath up Glen Ure was replaced by an unsightly track, transforming the glen into a scene of industry rather than the former quiet secluded glen.

- **Path erosion** – the increasing number of people taking to the hills (not just Munros, but also the more popular Corbetts and Grahams) has often led to wide and deep erosion scars, Suilven being a classic example. Fortunately, many of these have been or are being addressed with well-constructed but discrete footpaths, e.g. Mount Keen, Carn Liath, with work being carried out by such organisations as the National Trust for Scotland, the John Muir Trust, and more recently, through the Mend our Mountains project in the two National Parks. Removal of hill tracks and replacing these with discrete paths has been something the National Trust for Scotland has achieved on the Mar Lodge estate for instance.
- **The Scottish Outdoor Access Code** – most effects have been positive, e.g.

an increasing number of walker-friendly notices, (Inverlochlarig and Victoria Bridge), and a reduction in the incidence of 'hostile' signage. On the contrary there are areas where little change has been detected; and there are still examples of inappropriate signs, discouraging access by misleading wording or ambiguous positioning, and electric and deer fences not provided with gates or stiles. There have also been some less positive aspects of the Code: prior to its publication, NTS positively discouraged the use of bikes on Mar Lodge Estate, by the use of signs (e.g. at Linn of Dee), to encourage the long walk in; after publication of the Code, these signs were removed, and this may be seen by some as detracting from the wildness. It can also result in some loss of perception of remoteness for those who do the long walk in, often with an overnight bivvy, seeing their compatriots doing the same hill(s) in a comparatively short outing, e.g. Carn an Fhidleir and An Sgarsoch in the Cairngorms.

- **Invasive species** – Mountain Reports often cite the occurrence of invasive species, such as *Rhododendron ponticum*, and the repeated efforts being made to control it, for example in Torridon, in the Ben-Damph Forest. More recently there have been reports of the menace of self-seeded Sitka spruce (a significant occurrence has been noted at 850m on the north side of Ben Vorlich, Loch

Earn). This is an increasing problem which has the potential to alter our mountain habitats permanently, and there is no obvious solution.

The format of the Mountain Reports is deliberately non-prescriptive; this follows from a belief that it is best to allow individuals to set down observations derived from their particular interests and expertise. The result, it is hoped, will be a resource which will monitor change, both in the general and in the particular, and will allow decision-makers to arrive at policies which do not ignore the long-term wellbeing of the mountains.

To date completion of Mountain Reports has been confined to TMS members, although unfortunately the transition from MQIs to Mountain reports has not generated the hoped-for increase in member participation. Consideration has been given in the past to opening these up to selected and suitably

experienced or qualified non-members, and this will no doubt be an ongoing source of discussion.

### The Munro Society

Membership of the Society is open to anyone who has completed a round of the Munros. It is contended that a Munro completion, usually an activity measured in decades rather than years, provides sufficient experience for the person to make valid judgments regarding the wellbeing of all Scottish mountains, not just the Munros.

The Mountain reporting website is open to all to view and can be found at [www.themunrosociety.com](http://www.themunrosociety.com), by clicking on the Mountain reports page.

*Jim Robertson is the Society's coordinator of mountain reports and Derek Sime is the editor of the Society's newsletter.*



New hydro track, Invervar Burn. Photo Derek Sime

To date completion of reports has been confined to Munro Society members

Andrew Painting

## Best Foot Forward: Paths in the Hills

### Our footpath network

Scotland's footpath network spreads out across the hills, a tangled web linking people to the land. Paths are simultaneously manifestations of human mobility and also facilitators of it. In our footpaths are our history and our culture. But just as footpaths are shaped by human conceptions of the landscape, they are equally shaped by the landscape over which they traverse. Footpaths seek out lines of least resistance. They curl around bogs, creep around boulder-fields. A footpath through a wood will become overgrown and disappear remarkably quickly if no one keeps the wild away by walking it.

Some paths are ancient lines across the country

A footpath is only a footpath as long as there are people to walk it. As such, footpaths are the purest physical manifestation of our ancient links to the land. They remind us of our place in the landscape. Scotland's footpath network does not tame the landscape – it enwildens its people. While a hilltrack is a brutish imposition on the landscape, an

ancient footpath is a reminder of our place in it.

Some footpaths are ancient lines across the country, drovers' roads, trade routes, lines of power. Others 'pop up' to suit the need of a new trend or industry. Some, like stalkers' paths, change over time – what were implemented as a means to an end for deer stalking, often building on more ancient thoroughfares, are now widely used by an assemblage of tourists, wilderness seekers and Munro baggers.

Small wonder then, that footpaths have been at the heart of the conservation movement for as long as such a movement has existed. People have been concerned about footpaths and their state since people have been people. From the legal tussles of the Tilt road and Jock's road, through Kinder Scout and right up to the adoption of the Outdoor Access Code and beyond, the right to roam our land on the footpaths used by our forefathers is one of the oldest of the green movement's battles. The radical



Path to the Fairy Pools, Skye.

nature of the Ramblers is often forgotten, but at the core of this venerable organisation is an understanding that access to the land, and the protection of rights of way, is an integral part of a functioning society which is truly 'at one' with the land.

New footpaths spring up out of notoriety. A lack of footpaths will deter walkers for a while, but if walkers are keen to visit an area then a desire line will quickly become a track, then a path, then an eroded path and finally a scar. Footpaths then, are most often appreciated in their absence. It is a truism that the Grahams are the hardest of the walkers' hill sets to complete due to the lack of footpaths. It is all yomping through bogs and deep heather for those rarely visited peaks. The best footpaths are engineering marvels. Unobtrusive, subtle, hard-wearing, the best footpath is one that isn't

noticed at all, a subtle ribbon through the landscape.

We have all felt the tension between sticking to the path and rambling off for adventure through the bog. Such is the paradox at the heart of wild land – we all want access to it, but too much access would destroy it. To complicate matters further, everyone has their own idea of how much access is the correct amount: as the saying goes, 'one person's wilderness is another's roadside picnic spot'. The footpath sits somewhat uneasily in this ontological puzzle. While it facilitates access to wild land, thus reducing the wild land quality of the area, it also acts as its conservator. It does this by keeping people to one area – it is a ribbon of sacrificial land, highly developed, which allows the remainder of the land to stay undisturbed by feet and wheels and walking poles.



The eroding Path to Ben Dòrain, above Bridge of Orchy.

There will always be arguments about the ‘correct’ amount of development along footpath networks, and indeed the impact of specific footpaths in specific places. But the best footpaths add to the wildness of the land, rather than taking away from it.

### Maintaining paths

Waxing lyrical about the sublime and indeed socialist qualities of footpaths and those who tread them is all very well, but footpaths are of the earth, as it were, and so there are practical considerations to be considered. The increasing popularity of walking in wild areas is, like all development in fragile ecosystems, both a blessing and a curse. Footpaths are worn down by, well, feet, and increasingly it seems by mountain bikes. Overuse of footpaths can cause a real headache for cash-strapped land managers –

the popular footpath up Ben Wyvis springs to mind. Here, the great flat whaleback ridge is carpeted with *Racomitrium*-stiff sedge heath which is as pleasant to walk on as, well, a carpet. SNH has had a devil of a time trying to keep people on a footpath. This heath is a major area for breeding dotterels, a rare ground-nesting wader that is extremely sensitive to disturbance. As always, appreciation of wild land can become detrimental to the land itself.

Of course, Scotland’s footpath network has no overarching managing body. Instead, its well-being is subject to the whims and bank balances of landowners, public bodies and charities. Many of these interests are now represented by Scottish Natural Heritage’s (SNH) Upland Footpath Advisory Group, who have been doing good work for

The path network has no overarching body

a number of years to bring together some sort of coherent management strategy for the ongoing upkeep of Scotland’s upland footpaths.

Back in 2017, SNH published figures showing that users of upland paths contribute £110 million to the economy. Their upland path audit, which incorporated information from ten different organisations, deserves being quoted extensively:

“Around 700km of paths have been repaired and restored over the last 30-40 years and the study has identified a further 410km that are in need of repair. An initial estimate of between £27 and £30 million is required for capital investment to secure and enhance the benefits of these paths to the nation, its people and the visitors who come to enjoy Scotland’s mountains.

“The investment would, over a ten-year period provide stability to a fragile industry and secure upwards of 40 skilled jobs in rural areas (not

accounting for any multiplier effects). This investment would help to sustain and nurture the estimated £1 billion of value contributed by upland paths to the economy over the same period ...

“This study has also estimated, for the first time, the likely resource requirements and employment opportunities to sustain the management of Scotland’s upland paths. This will be an incremental cost during the major repair phase which would reach approximately £400,000 *per annum* to maintain 1,100km of upland path and provide long term skilled employment opportunities for at least 20 people.”

<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-02/Scottish%20Upland%20Path%20Audit%20Report.pdf>

### Current initiatives

The costs of our upland footpaths and all the benefits that they bring are astonishingly cheap. And the



A path up Bidean nam Bian, Glencoe; once an eroded slope & one of the first paths to be restored by the NTS footpath team

Path on the summit of Ben Dòrain.



good news is that the word seems to be getting around that, as far as environmental conservation is concerned, footpaths are a (comparatively) easy win in a sector used to tackling very complicated problems.

While many visitors to wild land areas will remain unaware of the path below their feet, at least until it gets into a sorry state of repair, there is a growing appreciation for the footpath networks that criss-cross the country, and indeed the skill and finances required to maintain them. If you fancy lending a bob or two, then there is a bewildering array of footpath funds ready and raring to take your cash.

The National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) ongoing footpath fund is one

of their most successful ever fundraising campaigns, which is just as well, given that the charity manages 245 miles of footpaths in some of the remotest parts of Scotland. John Muir Trust (JMT) has its own Wild Ways campaign. The British Mountaineering Council's (BMC) Mend our Mountains appeal has raised around £1 million for 13 projects across the UK which are being overseen by Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland. For people wanting to get their hands dirty, a number of charities, including both JMT and NTS, offer footpath workdays and working holidays.

The last couple of years have also seen a flurry of high-profile footpath works across the country. Much of this work is highly collaborative in nature, with charities, local

communities and the public sector clubbing together in a bewildering array of permutations, as befits the conservation of a diasporic path network that connects us all.

The recently completed £200,000 project to repair the Suilven path, for example, was an innovative partnership project between the Assynt Foundation, the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Partnership and JMT. To make matters more complicated, it was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), SNH, the European Outdoor Conservation Association, the Scottish Mountaineering Trust (SMT) and numerous members of the public. Meanwhile in the Cairngorms, The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust is managing a four year, £2 million pound project to repair 58 miles of paths in the Cairngorms. Again, a mind-boggling array of different partners with different acronyms is involved. HLF has stumped up £720,000 for the project, while the European Regional Development

Fund has provided another £722,000. Other organisations involved include Cairngorms National Park Authority, SNH, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, RSPB, SMT and NTS.

The list of high-profile footpath works goes on. JMT has started work on a low level route at Schiehallion, where high level footpath repairs are also underway. Paths at Quinag, Skye, Sandwood Bay and Ben Nevis are also receiving attention this year. NTS' footpath team remains as busy as ever, with extensive works on Goatfell, Glencoe and Carn a Mhaim. The notorious scars of Beinn a' Ghlo and Ben Vane are getting a good seeing to, thanks to the BMC and the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland.

The popularity of these projects is understandable and heartening. Not only do footpaths facilitate our enjoyment of the natural world, but here are projects where the impact of one's cash can be directly seen underfoot. These works are a rare example of an uncomplicated, uncontroversial piece of conservation being put together by a huge variety of organisations for the benefit of everyone. Long may our footpaths bring us all together.

*Photos James Fenton*

There is growing appreciation of the footpath network



The restored path to Coire an t-Sneachda, Cairn Gorm.

Pete Ewing

## Bringing Rewilding to Life: The Big Picture Conference

On 21st September 2019 'Scotland: The Big Picture' held their first rewilding conference in Stirling. Despite there being 450 places available, the event was heavily over-subscribed with 90 people languishing on the reserve ticket list. Given this level of interest, and also the establishment of new organisations such as Rewilding Britain, the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, Cairngorm Connect and Scotland: The Big Picture, it looks like the rewilding movement in Scotland is very much reaching critical mass. I attended the conference on behalf of SWLG.

The delegates seemed to be mostly private individuals rather than representatives of organisations. Amongst others I met the owner of a 3,000 acre estate who was interested in rewilding, the Green Party MSP Andy Wightman, a local ecologist, a writer, a wildlife photographer, several students and various land managers. The average age was notably younger than at a typical SWLG or John Muir Trust

meeting, and genders were equally represented. Some of the young people were wearing Extinction Rebellion t-shirts from the previous day's climate strikes. It struck me that people interested in rewilding are nice people – there was a lot of fascinating and civilised conservation going on in the coffee breaks.

### Restoration ecology

Peter Cairns, director of **Scotland: The Big Picture**, opened the conference and handed over to Sir John Lister-Kaye, renowned nature writer and founder of the Aigas Field Centre. His opening was devastating: 'Conservation by my generation has singularly failed.' He was referring to the establishment of nature reserves, with the unspoken assumption that they were where nature belongs. He moved on to the concept of restoration ecology, now popularly known as rewilding. He spoke of the 'Balmorality Triad', where land is managed exclusively for the benefit of grouse, red deer and salmon.

The event was heavily over-subscribed

Reintroducing bison to Europe. Photo Joep van de Vlasakker, Flaxfield Nature Consultancy



Next came Frans Schepers, managing director of **Rewilding Europe**, who said that 80% of Europeans now live in urban areas, with 'land abandonment' in rural areas – which then sometimes progress to closed-canopy beech forest. He described eight ongoing projects, aimed at developing socio-economic opportunities such as nature tourism, which is apparently the fastest growing segment of the tourist sector. Projects included re-flooding of the Danube Delta after decades of Communist-era drainage, and resolving conflicts between farmers and bears in the Central Apennines. A project in Swedish Lapland was also underway. There is currently no project in Scotland.

### Cairngorms Connect

Jeremy Roberts, Program Manager for **Cairngorms Connect** was up next. This is an ambitious 200 year

vision covering 600 square kilometres. It is a partnership between four adjacent landowners: RSPB, WildLand Ltd (Anders Povlsen's Glenfeshie estate), Scottish National Heritage and Forestry & Land Scotland (the successor to Forestry Commission Scotland). The project area provides habitat for 50% of our capercaillie, and eleven species of breeding raptors including white tailed eagle. Deer densities have been reduced – in Glenfeshie this has fallen from 20/sq km in 2003 to 3 to 4/ sq km now. This has resulted in natural regeneration of the native pinewood.

Perhaps more controversially there has also been planting of 3.5 million new trees where the seed source is poor. For me this was the most interesting talk. I used to think that wilderness preservation/restoration would necessarily involve state



ownership, like the American National Parks (indeed, like every country's National Parks except ours). In the Cairngorms Connect partnership we have the state, the enlightened private owner and a charitable NGO all working together. Whether this is replicable elsewhere depends very much on the attitude of the local private landowner.

The next speaker was **Lyn Cassells**, an archaeologist turned farmer who runs Lynbreck Croft. The farm is managed with conservation in mind.

Ian Mackenzie from **Scottish Wildlife Trust** was next, describing a project in that well-known wilderness destination, Cumbernauld. Amongst the concrete, there remains a fair bit of undeveloped land where wildness is being maximised. 22% of local people are on antidepressants or other psychoactive drugs, and the project aims to improve wellbeing through physical exercise, awareness of nature, connecting

with others, giving something back to the community and education.

Steve Micklewright, CEO of **Trees for Life** then spoke about the launch of a new initiative – the **Scottish Rewilding Alliance**. This is a coalition of 17 organisations, not all of whom have a specific environmental focus – for example, Mountaineering Scotland has joined. There is hope to increase the number of participating organisations to 30 or 40. SWLG is not yet a member.

In the lunch break there was a talk on **Wildcats** from Dr Helen Senn of the **Royal Zoological Society of Scotland**. Unfortunately I missed this due to networking over lunch, but I did attend the other lunchtime lecture '**Mewilding**' by Polly Pullar. This was about small scale rewilding, for example in your garden. |

In the afternoon Nick Underdown from the Scottish charity **Open Seas**

spoke of issues affecting our seas. Scallop dredging and prawn trawling in inshore waters can have long lasting effects, but only 5% of inland sea is protected. Salmon farms employ acoustic seal deterrents which can affect cetaceans, and under the salmon farm net is a mat of bacteria, disrupting the normal seabed habitat.

### Eurasian lynx

Next up was well-known lynx expert, Dr David Hetherington. Despite being reasonably well-read on the subject of lynx re-introduction, I nevertheless took four pages of notes during his talk. Across Europe, lynx have been reintroduced successfully even where the human population density is far higher than it is in the Highlands. Dr Hetherington felt the main conflict may be over deer, as the lynx competes with human hunters. Besides reducing numbers, I would expect the presence of lynx would make deer more wary, as

happens when deer are subject to high shooting pressure.

There could also be conflicts with sheep if they are grazed close to woodland. The worst case situation is in Norway, where sheep are often grazed near woods, there are fewer roe deer, and there is no verification required to get compensation for sheep losses. The annual compensation costs are three million euros per year. In Sweden, which has four times as many lynx but sheep are grazed in pasture and compensation claims are verified, the compensation costs are only 37 000 euros per year.

A single roe kill will feed a lynx for 3-4 days, with the lynx eating the haunches first. Foxes attempt to scavenge lynx kills, but the lynx will predate on foxes (which make up 6% of lynx diet). Although lynx can take capercaillie, the effect of lynx predated on foxes is likely to outweigh this.

Rewilding applies to the sea as well. Photo James Fenton



It was an uplifting day, and there is an ever increasing interest in rewilding

The lynx was definitely here in Roman times, and possibly much later. Lynx thrive in any conifer woodland, whether native ancient pinewood or Sitka plantation. There is potential for two habitat areas in Scotland. The area north of the central belt could support *ca* 400 lynx, and the area south of the belt 50 to 100. Four hundred lynx would take 20,000 deer a year – by contrast the Forestry Commission shoot 38,000 per year.

The next speaker was **Pete Higgins**, Professor of Outdoor, Environmental and Sustainability Education at the University of Edinburgh. He spoke of rewilding being a multi-generational issue, asking ‘how do we foster love of the natural world?’

This was followed by a question and answer session with four young environmentalists, the youngest being just fourteen.

Finally there was a talk by Sam Gerrity, who runs the **American Prairie Reserve Project**. I have long been impressed with the can-do attitude of Americans, and this attribute is rather strong in Mr Gerrity. He started with no land, no money and no staff, but with a vision of developing the largest nature reserve in the continental

United States – 5,000 square miles of it. That’s 3.2 million acres. The method is to unite scattered areas of publicly owned land by the strategic purchase of private land to provide a continuous area managed for conservation with the return of the bison that used to live there. The project ran into opposition from some cattle ranchers, but interesting ideas have got many of them onside. For example, ranchers are given wildlife cameras and rewarded if they show proof that diminished species have returned. Someone asked a question about whether the wishes and interests of Native Americans had been taken into account. They had.

### Concluding remarks

One criticism that could be levelled at the conference was the absence of input from those who might have different views, or feel threatened by rewilding. More dialogue could get some of these parties on board, as has happened in the American Prairie Reserve.

Overall it was an uplifting day. The public interest in rewilding seems to be ever increasing. It perhaps marks a change in the ethos of conservation from the negative (don’t do that) to a positive, joyous Bob the Builder message: Can we fix this? Yes we can!

Beryl Leatherland

## The Revive Coalition and Grouse Moor Management

‘Revive’ is the coalition that supports driven grouse moor reform, including aspects of moorland management and practice. Members include Common Weal, Friends of the Earth Scotland, the League Against Cruel Sports, One Kind and Raptor Persecution UK.

The coalition was set up to consider the intensification of driven grouse moor activity and the impacts of moorland management on the environment and biodiversity. Their findings, published in 2015, identified how the implications of such management should be addressed in the light of growing public and political concerns.

The Revive coalition launched an update to their 2015 report in Edinburgh in October 2018, with Chris Packham as the main guest speaker. The latest report includes further information about recent scientific research and political activity and policy, to help inform the public debate. In 2016 the Scottish Raptor Study Group lodged a petition with the Scottish Parliament calling for a licensing system for all game bird hunting in Scotland. Subsequently in 2017 the Scottish Government set up an independent body under Professor Werritty to look into all aspects of grouse moor management, including the possibility of a licensing system. The review was

The coalition was set up to review intensification of moorland management



The pattern of muirburn above Glenshee.  
Photo James Fenton



A crow trap.  
Photo Tom Leatherland

due to be published in the spring of 2019 but we continue to await it

In Scotland there is no distinct body of law on grouse shooting as an activity or land use; there is no regulatory approach such as that seen in other European countries where there is strict legislation to ensure sustainability of species via such legislation as licensing of hunters and the requirement to report bags and harvest quotas. In some countries hunters have to pass practical and theoretical examinations to qualify for a hunting licence. Here, the state only has a role in regulating issues such as the species hunted, the seasons, the hunting method and limited regulation of matters such as muirburn.

The concerns of the Revive coalition and many others around driven grouse shooting are given below, but centre around the intensification of management to maximise numbers of red grouse.

The Cairngorm National Park Authority in its 2014 report on moorland management said that “there are concerns about the single-species focus of this management and negative impacts on other species and habitats in the National Park”. In its National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 (which SWLG responded to) the Park wrote “Good moorland management makes a significant contribution to delivering conservation priorities set out in the Partnership Plan. In some places, however, the intensity of management measures to maintain or increase grouse populations is out of balance with delivering wider public interest priorities”.

There is concern about the single species focus

Note that there are two different approaches to grouse shooting: ‘driven moors’ where beaters cover the ground and drive the grouse towards the shooters concealed in butts; and ‘walked-up moors’ where shooters themselves walk the ground and shoot the grouse they encounter. Driven moors tend to be more intensively managed and so



A spring trap for stoats, but indiscriminate. Photo Tom Leatherland



cannot be termed ‘wild land’, that is land where nature is in charge.

**Management practices associated with intensive grouse moor management:**

**Muirburn:** The burning of heather to provide a range of age classes, tall heather for birds to hide in and short nutritious heather shoots for feeding. The practice is controversial, with many arguing that it damages the ecology and landscape, and contributes to climate change.

**Use of medicated grit:** Birds eat grit to help with digestion and grouse moor managers dose the grit with the medication Flubendazole to protect the birds against parasites which have a detrimental effect on grouse populations. There is no routine statutory monitoring of the use of medicated grit and there are concerns about the possibility of the drug entering the human food chain and watercourses.

**Spread of disease:** Birds are susceptible to respiratory cryptosporidiosis when in overpopulated conditions, such as

commercial poultry farms and increasingly, grouse moors. There is no monitoring of the spread of this disease as other bird species are also inevitably exposed to it, including those of conservation significance.

**Predator control and wildlife crime:**

Moorland managers control species which are likely to predate grouse or their eggs, such as crows, foxes, stoats and weasels. Killing of unprotected bird species is permitted under the individual and general licence schemes, issued by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). This is a controversial practice and the Revive coalition says that on some estates protected birds such as hen harriers and golden eagles are illegally killed, which stains Scotland’s reputation worldwide.

The LINK Wildlife Crime Group, of which SWLG is a member, is actively engaged with a number of key issues associated with this, and in 2015 it produced a commissioned report *Natural Injustice: a review of the enforcement of wildlife protection legislation in Scotland* which can be accessed at [www.scotlink.org](http://www.scotlink.org). The report claimed that the existing measures were inconsistently applied, weak and ineffective. Its findings were rejected by the Crown Prosecution Service, who did not enter into a dialogue with the Link group even

though a meeting was requested. The group recently held a cross party event at the Scottish Parliament hosted by Colin Smyth MSP, where diverse issues were discussed and action points identified.

**Mountain hare culling:** Mountain hares are killed by estates both as a sport in itself and because they can harbour ticks which can spread louping illness, a debilitating grouse disease. Large scale culls of hares on grouse moors have taken place. As a result of public concern at its scale, SNH, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, and Scottish Land & Estates have asked land managers where this occurs to exercise 'voluntary restraint', an approach supported by the Scottish Government despite lobbying by many for stronger control. More recently Alison Johnstone MSP introduced a Member's Bill on control of hares and foxes which stimulated numerous consultation responses. The outcome is awaited, as are the findings of the Werritty review which will include hare culling in its scope.



Mountain hare.  
Photo Andrew Painting

**Hilltracks:** One reason for the creation of new tracks in the hills is for access to grouse moors. SWLG members will be well informed of the activities of the LINK Hilltracks group which I co-convene with Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland. At the August Revive conference in Perth, we gave a presentation and participated in a Q&A session on our more recent work, including our disappointing but not unexpected outcome at Stage 3 of the Planning Bill when the amendments tabled by Andy Wightman MSP were not successful. Since then the programme for progressing the Planning Act has been published and hilltracks are highlighted as a priority in the forthcoming review of Permitted Development Rights, so it looks as though Helen and I plus other LINK colleagues will be continuing on this into our 7<sup>th</sup> year! More information on this is on the SWLG website.

**Fencing:** There has been a proliferation of fences on grouse moors, particularly electric fences that can be moved easily. Fencing keeps out wild deer that carry ticks and keeps sheep in that are used to mop up ticks. Fencing is controversial as it can impede free access, the deer burden is shifted elsewhere, and lines of fencing across the hillsides have a visual impact.



ATV tracks proliferate from the end of constructed hilltracks.  
Photo Tom Leatherland

**Lack of oversight, ownership and public interest:** In recent years management of driven moors has intensified markedly on many (but not all) estates, with very little public involvement or debate. Sometimes it is difficult to trace moorland owners and many estates seem to be owned by offshore companies. Grouse estates can be very profitable businesses and this can be seen from the available data. In addition they qualify for farming subsidies for associated farming activities (such as sheep), and the majority also qualify for the Small Business Bonus Scheme so that they contribute no rates to local authorities. The phrase 'public goods for public money' comes to mind.

**Other issues:** Of concern to Revive members is the use of bird scarers which can affect a range of species, including protected species. Their use is unregulated. It is also surprising that lead shot is still used in ammunition despite its known

toxicity. This is despite the fact that the Food Standards Agency has carried out risk assessments on the consumption of lead shot game and have advised consumption should be reduced, particularly by vulnerable people.

### The Revive conference

These matters were discussed at the Revive conference in August, which was well attended, not just by representatives from organisations but also by interested members of the general public. There were four panel sessions during the day. Helen and I spoke on the hilltracks issue during the Environment and Landscape session, together with Richard Dixon Director of Friends of the Earth, and Peter Cairns from Scotland: The Big Picture.

Revive intend to make this an annual event, and I would recommend that you attend next year if you can – by then we will be in the middle of the GPD Review and will know the findings and implications of the Werritty report: and who knows what else will be impacting on Scotland's moorlands?

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The Revive conference will become an annual event

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James Fenton

## And after all these facts...

"If conservation is to compete with other land uses on an economic level..." says the expert. But what are we talking about? What, in God's name, is the conservation debate all about?

How many of the developers (and yes, in all probability, many of the conservationists as well) have walked the moors with a wet west wind blowing cold, but exhilarating, on their cheeks? How many have admired the bog cotton, brighter even than snow, as it shakes continually in the ceaseless wind, or have jumped the long bog pools and peered into their depths for the dragonfly?

How many have looked for midges in the sundew and wished if only it could catch some more? How many have found rare bog mosses and, rarer still, the peace of the great wide moors? How many have walked long days and been so alone

that the cry of the golden plover brings tears to the eyes?

How many of these people would know a natural, ancient Scottish wood even if they were walking through one? How many would stare in amazement at the bent formed trees, home of the Fairy Queen (an artist's dream, but a forester's nightmare), and seeing the long ferns and draping mosses would think themselves in some long lost Tierra del Fuego jungle? No, these types would probably complain of the damp, stumble over rotten logs, curse the midges and pray for it to be cleared!

How many of these urban people, even if country dwellers, have slept under the stars after a long day's tramp in the company of John Buchan, lying half asleep on the hilltop, listening to the wind rustling through the fescue, watching the light ebb over the treeless moors, feeling the cool caresses of the breeze on their face, and drifting off to sleep while glad to be alive.

'Come forth, the sky is wide and it is a far cry to the world's end...'



How many of these people have skied alone through the mountains in the short winter days, have faced the winter blizzards, have been tired and hungry, and yet happy with only a tent or snowhole for shelter? How many of these people could rejoice (or mourn) in pentatonic and compose love songs: 'like the white lily floating in the peat hag's dark waters'? How many of these people really know Scotland? Why are these people, who may well condemn the destruction of the Amazon forest, so blind, oh so blind, to their own backdoor? How can these people write off the value of the cold, bleak, windy, windswept, midge-ridden, rough, boggy and yet glorious, oh so glorious, Scotland?

Why do they want to replace the call of the whaup, the beauty of parnassus, the orange glow of the asphodel, the smell of the myrtle, the black of the peat hag, the white of the bog wood, this fairy magic... Why do these people want to destroy Scotland, and do so in such a hurry? What of our descendants in 500 years, 5 million years, or even 500 million years' time? How much of the magic will be left?

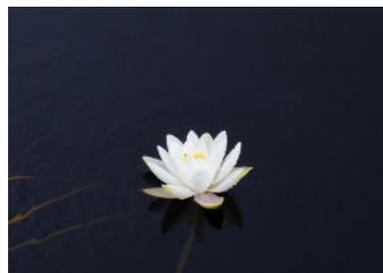
*The original version of this article was first published as the 'Garrulus' column in Scottish Wildlife Winter 1989/90, the magazine of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and reprinted with permission. It was targeted at the commercial forestry boom of the 1980s, but has been edited here to reflect development in wild land generally.*



**If you have a burning issue you would like to get off your chest, why not write a piece for this new SOAPBOX column? Please send to the editor.**

Come forth, the sky is wide and it is a far cry to the world's end

John Buchan





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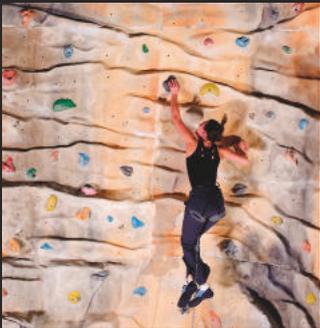
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# Scottish Wild Land Group

Working to protect Scotland's species, environment and landscapes



*Liathach by James Fenton*

The objects of the Group are:

- (a) To promote the conservation of wild land in Scotland;
- (b) To promote public awareness of the problems facing wild land in Scotland;
- (c) To promote and encourage the implementation of good planning policies;
- (d) To co-operate with other bodies to promote the foregoing objects.

We campaign for:

- ✓ Protection and promotion of Scotland's wild land
- ✓ Safeguards against inappropriate wind farm and other developments
- ✓ Environmentally-sensitive land and wildlife management
- ✓ Planning controls on the spread of hill tracks
- ✓ Restoration of rare and missing species and environments
- ✓ Connection of habitats and protected areas to allow ecological recovery and species movements

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