

Meeting Between SGA, CNPA and Keepers 29th September 2016,

Aultcharn Shoot Room Glenloch

Present: Bert Burnett SGA, Ronnie Kippen SGA, Hans McKenzie Wilson, John Hay, Alex Jenkins, Graeme Rankin, Craig Hepburn, Calum Kippen, Frank Law, Eleanor MacKintosh CNPA, Duncan MacKenzie, Will Boyd-Wallis CNPA, Hamish Trench CNPA, Graham Mabon, Mike Cottam CNPA, John Conaghan, Iain Hepburn, Derek Brown, Carrieanne Conaghan, Geva Blackett.

Welcome Address – Given By Bert Burnett

Will Boyd Wallis - Address to attendees – He thanked attendees for the chance to put over his side of the blog and stated that he did not mean to cause offence with it. The information was initially for the Heather Trust Annual Report to raise debate and to encourage keepers and moorland managers to respond to the National Park plan consultation. He did not mean it to sound like he was quoting Avery and Packham, what he wanted to do was address concerns that had been highlighted. He wanted to use it to give an explanation to Intensive Management; he stated that in hindsight he understands the reaction of some to some of the points he raised and he understands the reasons why these practices are used for Moorland Management. Will emphasized that the questions all related to concerns that have been raised with him and were legitimate to highlight for debate.

Blog

Bert Burnett – Raised the fact that when the article was then used for the blog on the consultation of the CNPA, that as it was put into the domain of those about to fill in the consultation and no longer basically within the keeping community through the heather trust and that he felt that in this context it made it look like the CNPA thought the issues raised were actual problem issues within the Park.

Will Boyd Wallis – Stated that he did not mean to cause stress to those within moorland management. He also advised that it is not just the keeping community that was having a go at him regarding the blog. Others from opposing standpoints felt the blog was not strong enough.

Frank Law – Asked if the Blog was really the best way for the park to make contact with those within the Keeping community.

Hamish Trench – stated that the content of the blog did not go down well with the keepers

and feels that it would have been better to have had a discussion with them earlier rather than it getting to this stage.

Will Boyd Wallis – Stated he has been slated by extremists as well, but he has also had positive feedback on the blog from keepers and moorland managers who described it as “thoughtful” and “excellent”. He had been told from one individual that he did not like everything from the blog but he felt his moorland scored pretty well. He also stated that there is a perception that the CNPA just wants woodland and scrub everywhere, and this is simply not true. CNPA value moorland alongside, agriculture and forestry. He stated that he knows that there is already scrub in some areas of moorland and made this very clear in the article. It was not his intention to give the impression that there wasn't any. He also stated that it was not his intention to degrade the Red grouse by calling it willow grouse, his point was that the red grouse can thrive in a range of habitats.

Bert Burnett – responded to Will's comment regarding the Red Grouse and advised that this had angered the keepers as this has been a tactic used by anti-shooting lobby in the past trying to make it sound like Red Grouse, which are unique to the UK and have been here for thousands of years are not of any importance as a species to this country.

Eleanor MacKintosh - Stated that Glenlochry is a good example for scrub. She also stated that the CNPA board is in support of the keepers; however the keepers need to help them deliver on the mixed habitat and re-iterated that there cannot be any raptor persecution. She also raised the fact that she felt that point regarding treated grit and drink water straight from a hill was unjustified and that there is no issue with it and that there needs to be clarification on this.

Bert Burnett – Stated that the SGA and those within the group in attendance strongly believe in no raptor persecution but all keepers cannot be held accountable for idiots who decide to take matters into their own hands.

Frank Law – Asked if it was honestly thought that the keepers were a soft touch. He stated that the Blog was more theory than fact. He also stated that it was extremely unhelpful for a title such as Time to Move with the Times as it made it sound like keepers were stuck in the Victorian times

Will Boyd Wallis – Acknowledged that his blog and the point made about medicated grit could have been dealt with better.

Iain Hepburn – Advised Will that a vet has to sign for the care of the Grouse and will only sign for a script for medicated grit once they have reviewed the worm burden data that has been collected and that they feel that medicated grit is necessary.

Ronnie Kippen – Advised as to how the keepers have to keep a record of when the grit is put

out and when it is removed, he also advised that if a Raptor had a problem with worm burden and they were to eat a grouse which still had the medicated grit active in its system it would help the raptor to reduce its worm burden.

Duncan McKenzie – Asked why the Park does not advise on how successful the grouse moors are and questioned why they should have to change something that is working successfully.

Bert Burnett – Asked why the park did not check the science on the issues it raised re Treated Grit, Burning, Flooding, Hill Tracks etc.

It was requested from all the keepers that the park puts up a clarification on their website where the blog is stating that mistakes were made with the last Blog

Hamish Trench – Stated that CNPA will be happy to publish more information about positive projects associated with moorland management and to put something on the website acknowledging this meeting and the concerns expressed – Hamish and Eleanor will discuss the appropriate format.

It was also requested if the clarification/retraction could be viewed before publication, no definite answer was given on this, but was stated this could be possible

Carol Anderson – Asked what the time line would be on this?

Eleanor MacKintosh and Hamish Trench – Agreed that this will be addressed and that they will discuss this with the board on the night of 29th and again on 30th September. Following that they will be in touch with Carol Anderson on when the clarification will go on the website.

Bert Burnett – Asked if the CNPA will recognise that they will get an influx of brainwashed responses to the consultation after reading the introductory blog

Hamish Trench - stated that they are used to getting multiple organization responses and that they will be able to help the board identify when this happens. He also stated that he is very glad to speak with everyone today and is sorry that it has been under these circumstances to bring it about.

Hares

Hans McKenzie Wilson – Raised that the SSSI was issued a letter from SNH due to the over grazing by hares, and why did CNPA not put a positive story out stating that this is why the hare management was required.

Ronnie Kippen – Stated that the Hare population within the areas of rewilding will become an

issue, Hares cannot live within this type of habitat and will virtually become extinct within the rewilding area and that the managed moorland does not receive any public money for the management of these numbers.

Carrieanne – Asked the question as to what the CNPA were looking for as the keepers were only carrying out their job when culling the hare population.

Hamish Trench – Stated that as we now have social media an image showing a truck load of white hares can get out to the public within minutes. He also stated that the park put out a simple statement clarifying that the pictures were of a managed hare cull which was required. He understood that the keepers felt that the park needed to be more proactive in highlighting the positive side of the cull for instance Conservation of Habitat.

Bert Burnett – Stated that he felt the park needs to back the keepers more and explain the need to manage the number of hares within the park.

Eleanor MacKintosh – Stated that she feels that the keepers need to assist the CNPA to educate the general public and should do more themselves for the reasons for certain management practices. She also stated that it may assist with reducing the chance of an image getting out to public domain on social media if the keepers used covers on back of vehicles when transporting dead hares etc. rather than open trucks.

It was explained that the blogs were new and only reached a certain audience and that the park could help by giving links to the blogs from their sites

Graeme Rankin – Asked why can't the CNPA help with Education instead of leaving it down to the keepers. The CNPA have leaflets in every site and it would be better to pass the reasons why they do what they do for Grouse Management.

Deer

Ronnie Kippen – Putting this issue round to a farmer's point of view, if a farmer put sheep to the hill and there were no boundary fences to keep the sheep in and the estate that they cross in to decides to take them off the hill and put them to market. The farmer would not tolerate it and wouldn't want the neighboring estate to remove them, so then why is it ok for any estate to do this with deer when the estate needs them to sustain it's business.

Calum Kippen – Raised the fact that he feels that the CNPA are backing estates for killing deer (or rather slaughtering them) but then does not back estates when they need to manage the hare population.

Eleanor MacKintosh – Knows that deer are an ongoing issue and asked what power does

the keepers think the park have in relation to telling one estate how to manage their ground from another.

It was decided that the deer issue was not decided by the park and that this was an issue to be decided by the deer groups etc.

East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership

Hans McKenzie-Wilson – Asked why have a partnership if you don't discuss things with them – the CNPA need to speak with the keepers on the ground.

Hamish Trench – Stated that they are working with a partnership of 6 estates; however he does feel the need to find a better way to ensure the partnership engages with the keepers and will discuss this again with the relevant estates. He stated that the CNPA while working with these estates it is not to tell other estates that this is how they should do things but rather to be able to make them aware of other practices that work well in case it would be beneficial for that estate.

CNPA Communication with Keepers

Mike Cottam – Stated that he has worked closely with Moorland Groups to help put the positive news to the public and has had a good relationship with the keepers.

Will Boyd Wallis – stated that the CNPA had received government funding through the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund which will help get out and speak to with the Keepers in the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership area.

Carrieanne Conaghan – Stated that the moorland groups needed support from the CNPA PR as they feel they cannot get positive news out in other forms bar their social media as even the local paper does not give them as much coverage as it does to the negative stories.

It was again suggested that the park promote the various keeping blogs connected to the park and this was seen as a distinct possibility by Will Boyd Wallis.

Hamish Trench – Stated that he felt the park can help the keepers by putting out the positives things that they do for the park. He also admitted that the park have not found an effective way to speak/engage with Keepers. He also asked that keepers be willing to discuss with the Park where change may be desirable and possible. He said CNPA is clear there is a good opportunity in the Park to demonstrate how the wider demands on upland land use, eg woodland expansion, peatland restoration, can be delivered alongside management for grouse. There are issues of public and political concern and

our best opportunity is to acknowledge them and show how they can be addressed by working together.

CNPA Board

Geva Blackett – Raised that she felt the board needs to go out and see how the estates works, as some of them including the convener of the park in her view does not know anything about moorland.

Duncan McKenzie – Advised he would be happy to take anyone out to let them see how things worked on estates at any point in the year so they could understand what happens, when and why.

Iain Hepburn – Suggested that Keepers and or Land Managers should be on the board, as he feels that the keepers and land managers are not represented within the board.

Eleanor MacKintosh – Stated that there are 3 ways to be elected to the Board, 1 by putting yourself up for election, 2 by being appointed by the local council, 3 by being appointed by Scottish Government. She also stated that all of the discussions here today will be passed to the board when they meet this evening.

Heather burning and Rewilding.

Frank Law – Have the park done anything to promote low carbon for all the houses within the park using fossil fuels to heat their homes.

Iain Hepburn – Raised that there is generally no issue with Muirburn by keepers and that the main reasons that the fire brigade are called out are due the control room not checking with the keeper if there is a need for them to come out. The reasons that the fire brigades have to attend wildfires are because the general public have started fires in gardens etc and them getting out of control and even then if it escapes on to ground near an estate general rule is to call for the keeper's assistance.

Bert Burnett - Raised that the fact that it is not Keepers causing wildfires and therefore it needs to be addressed as to whom/why the fires were started etc. he also pointed out that a recent FOI to SNH highlighted that few if any wildfires were the result of controlled muirburn by keepers and indeed most seem to be connected to area's where land was not being managed. He also said that it was stated in a copy of an ecology report shown on the BASC website that if you don't have regular muirburn then you will lose up to 30% of plant species.

Ronnie Kippen – Raised the point that the State of Nature report written for the RSPB stated 'Decreased Management of Other Habitats – Negative Factors Abandonment of traditional management, including grazing, burning and cutting, which is Critical for maintenance of habitat for Heathland and Grassland. He asked if the CNPA were happy with the fact that this will be what is happening on the % Million Acre of rewilding they currently have.

Graham Mabon – Asked why is it that when statements regarding Moorland Management that it is always described as intensively managed for Grouse Management. Management for trees etc. could be seen as intensive.

Iain Hepburn and Duncan MacKenzie – Asked why the CNPA were not as supportive of Grouse Moors as they were of areas of Rewilding.

Raptors

Calum Kippen & Frank Law – Asked why the park doesn't put a positive story as to how many Raptors are within the park.

Hamish Trench – Agreed they would like to do this. CNPA have discussed this with some Estates, but he admitted that they had not consulted with Keepers yet; however they feel that keepers are very secretive with what raptors are on their ground. He stated that he would like everyone to be less secretive and asked for assistance from moorland groups to get figures.

Bert Burnett - stated that the secretive people on raptor numbers are the raptor lobby, if the keepers were just to produce raptor figures they would be challenged immediately by the raptor lobby, but if the park were involved then these figures could be accepted. Work with the keepers to find the real numbers in the park and not believe the statements about no raptors on grouse moors.

Duncan MacKenzie – Raised why is it the last raptor disappearance is to be discounted and why is something not said about the other trackers that have failed.

Bert Burnett – asked why not put positive information out on all the tagged birds. He also stated that the CNPA would need to gain the trust of keepers. Instead of dwelling on the occasional raptor killed by an idiot, concentrate on the positive side, like you have 50+ nests of eagles in and around the park. No checks are made on the raptor lobby in regards to the disturbance at these nest sites by them.

Geva Blackett – Suggested that CNPA should back Keepers to help them get licences to become ringers.

Ronnie Kippen – raised the fact that Grouse moors have the highest counts of waders but BTO have also stated that they are still crashing. SNH carried out a study showing that Ravens are predating waders. Why not work with keepers to get licenses to control species to reduce the numbers to let the Waders survive. He also stated that he has raised this with Will Boyd Wallis and others time and again. Understanding Predation has shown what the problem is and there needs to be action taken and not just within the Park. 95% of ptarmigan lost through predation, mainly from ravens on Drumochter as an example.

Hans MacKenzie Wilson – Advised that they had to do a course to be able to count waders and many of the keepers had taken the course.

Will Boyd Wallis – Understanding predation can be used across the park. He also stated that he feels if they can get the data then they would be able to use it in a positive way. He asked if everyone around the table would be willing to give data as to how many are nesting and is breeding on their ground. There was a general agreement that this could be done.

Duncan MacKenzie – Stated that he felt this should be open to repeated sightings showing where the birds are feeding.

Frank Law – Asked if Will or Hamish have seen the estate newsletter that is issued to the park. They had not, stating they don't see all the correspondence which it was agreed was part of the problem relating to gaining local knowledge from within the park.

Hamish Trench – Advised that he understood that there needs to be more clarity when sharing information. He also stated that he would like help from the Moorland Groups in getting the Raptor and Wader information. Agreed action – discuss with moorland groups establishing a project to collate raptor records at an area level.

Geva Blackett – Suggested having a meeting with moorland groups which would be in the park initially to try and get a resolution to help get things sorted and good PR etc.

Will Boyd Wallace – Regular meetings would be useful with Maybe 2 or 3 from each of the groups

Bert Burnett – Raised the fact that input is needed from all estates within the groups not just those within CNP.

Hamish Trench – Asked if Carrieanne to help set up a meeting with groups. Carrieanne agreed to assist with this. Agreed action – CNPA to meet with reps from each moorland group to take forward joint working

Carrieanne – Asked for help with getting keepers trained to ring raptors, waders (Bert

advised no training is needed) only a license is needed. Raptor workers do not go through any formal training it is basically a buddy system where the more experienced pass on their skills (however limited that might be)

Bert Burnett – Stated that he felt that CNPA could have discussions with SNH in getting keepers ringing or monitoring licenses.

Hamish Trench and Will Boyd Wallis – would be delighted to have the keepers able to count and ring Raptors and Waders.

Bert Burnett – Called the meeting to a close and gave thanks to all those involved.