

We need to challenge the assumption that fewer deer means more trees

We need to talk about what happens when herbivore numbers are reduced but habitat fails to respond as expected, says **Tom Turnbull**



What should the uplands of Scotland look like? Expectations about the future look and management of Scotland's landscape weave through a range of environmental, agricultural and land-reform policies being implemented by the Scottish Government. Time will tell if the desired targets for social, economic and environmental benefits as well as climate mitigation can be achieved. Meanwhile, the reduction of our red deer herd continues.

As a backdrop there's the perhaps simplistic assumption that fewer deer will result automatically in more trees and an environment better equipped to combat climate change. But is this true – and at what expense?

Red deer have long been a part of the cultural history of our upland hills and glens. They are vital to many remote rural communities providing a valuable opportunity for young people to live and work locally. Deer management is challenging, carried out often in winter weather and over difficult terrain, yet most employed in it care passionately about the deer.

How our landscape is managed is also viewed as a key driver in combating species loss and climate change. Much has been documented about the detrimental ecological impacts of deer on biodiversity and carbon-rich habitats like peatlands and woodlands, which places deer managers in a unique but challenging position to help.

Hard work is under way to restore peatlands and establish trees whilst reducing deer numbers, although recognition for these efforts is hard to come by – commitment that has seen deer numbers as verified by Government data drop over the last 25 years in the Highlands.

But reality is nuanced. Nature's response to fewer deer may prove disappointing to those expecting to see Scotland's glens suddenly flourishing in dense, native woodland.

Past experience shows that simply reducing herbivore numbers, including sheep, to very low levels

cannot guarantee woodland regeneration. Without a seed source trees will struggle to regenerate and, even if they do, progress may be slow.

For our wetter, nutrient-poor west coast ecosystems some expect heather and blaeberry to recover and woodland to appear when herbivore numbers are reduced significantly. However, results are often disappointing with large areas as over-run with dominant, unproductive Molinia grassland with which other species cannot compete. This, coupled with reductions in deer population that some have managed for generations, can be hard to swallow.

ADMG, whilst challenging the generalisation that fewer deer automatically means more trees everywhere, would welcome a wider conversation about what happens when herbivore numbers are reduced but habitat fails to respond as expected. With woodland planting and agri-environmental schemes in development, and the experience of current and past schemes and incentives difficult to access, government also needs flexibility in its approach to biodiversity and climate gains. We must understand where swift progress can be made, or marginal gains enhanced and where we may have to intervene with other management tools such as cattle-grazing.

Some habitats will respond slowly, or in unexpected ways and the harsh environment in which the deer live, and deer managers work, could take many years to respond to change. ADMG fully supports the need for biodiversity improvement and addressing the climate crisis but expectations must be managed.

We should talk now, before disappointment over results at the highest level means that deer continue to be vilified when they have little or no bearing on nature's response. We must also take the deer managers – the very people expected to deliver these targets – with us.

Tom Turnbull, Chairman, the Association of Deer Management Groups

Social enterprises

A new report states the resilience and creativity of Scotland's social entrepreneurs, has been impressive, says **Duncan Thorp**



Social Enterprise in Scotland: Census 2021 is the latest comprehensive study into the scale and scope of social enterprise activity in Scotland.

The report also allows us to understand the characteristics and practical needs of Scottish social enterprises.

Building on the first report in 2015, then subsequent reports in 2017 and 2019, we can now begin to map the longer term trends. Crucially it's the first post-pandemic data we've seen and gives us a flavour of the experiences and needs of social enterprises coming out of the Covid lockdown period.

The statistics provide a key tool that can be used to help us better plan business support and investment. It also greatly assists as we seek to raise the profile of social enterprise to the public and media, as well as build support among policy-makers.

It's fair to say that the most interesting numbers for many of us are the headlines.

It's reassuring that, while some of the latest figures don't show the leaps in growth of previous years, other statistics do and others hold up well in the face of huge external pressures.

According to the report, the number of social enterprises in Scotland stands at 6047, having grown by just a handful since 2019 – but having shot up from 5199 in just six years.

While there was only this small increase since 2019, this rise is still significant, as it happened in the face of a number of business closures over a very challenging period.

There were almost 90,000 full time equivalent jobs provided by social enterprises, up from just over 81,000 in 2017.

Rural Scotland continues to lead the

way in the number of social enterprises per head of population, with a consistent 33 per cent total of all social enterprises in a rural location, despite only having ten per cent of Scotland's population. 19 per cent are in island and remote communities – with only six per cent of the population – making these latest figures another big success story for rural Scotland.

A huge 85 per cent of social enterprises now pay the voluntary real living wage, up from 68 per cent just six years ago.

Women's leadership of social enterprises is now an impressive 71 per cent. This is in stark contrast to private sector businesses of all sizes, for example, only six per cent of UK FTSE 100 companies have women CEOs.

The economic contribution of social enterprises continues to be a valuable and increasingly important asset to Scotland's economy. This contribution, known as Gross Value Added (GVA) was £2.63bn, up from £2.4bn in 2017. It's this type of figure that really brings home the economic value.

At the same time we must recognise the many, often difficult to quantify, economic ripple effects of the strong social missions of social enterprises.

In addition we have other strong economic and financial indicators, with the total net worth of social enterprises at £7bn, up from £3.9bn in 2015.

While income from trading was at £3.3bn, up from £2.3bn in 2015 and generated collective surplus at £524m, up from £300m in 2015.

Of course it's important to recognise the wider economic and social context too. With Brexit, lockdowns and a global pandemic, increasing inequality and climate change, the challenges continue to be immense. A subsequent



cost-of-living crisis has certainly added greatly to these challenges.

Having said that, the resilience and creativity of Scotland's social entrepreneurs, has been impressive, according to the report. Social enterprises have demonstrated a capability to adapt and learn, in order to deliver their unique social and environmental missions, supported by financial support from government and other funders.

The new Census report gives us a

are in rude health

great platform in which to catalyse and drive forward Scotland's social enterprise movement.

We look forward to working with frontline social enterprises, partner organisations across different sectors and with government, to ensure the continued growth of our inspiring social enterprise community.

Duncan Thorp, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Social Enterprise Scotland

Women's leadership of social enterprises stands at 71 per cent – in stark contrast to private sector businesses of all sizes



If every human life is of equal value, why promote assisted suicide?

No member of society should be viewed as unworthy of life, says **Katie Breckenridge**

Mr Liam McArthur MSP's recent Summary of Consultation Responses to his proposed Bill on assisted dying for the terminally ill resulted in the National Secular Society calling for a reform of Scottish law that "protect[s] individuals to ensure other people's religious beliefs are not imposed on them and limit their choices and autonomy".

However, in a civilised society we all have beliefs which cannot be proven scientifically.

Indeed, in a just society, every human being is expected to believe (and it is just a belief) that all others have basic, inherent, and absolute equal value and worth.

As stated in the 1948 UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and it is only a Declaration and not

a proof): "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination".

This means that the reason why every person strives to be viewed as an equal member of society is that only such a society can function, peacefully, for the benefit of every person within it.

Thus, in a society where every life is believed to have equal value and worth, including those who may be depressed, old, or disabled, there is no rational basis to promote murder, suicide, or assisted suicide. Instead, the possible suffering of the dying patient is addressed by the provision of compassionate palliative care.

This all means that even those who are not religious and want to continue living in a civilised society have an inherent set of beliefs which protects this society from anarchy.

Otherwise, why do we need a parliament? Why do we insist on all persons having one equal vote for our version of what is best for society's stability?

If our culture and society is not founded on the essential moral belief that each person is equal, simply because he or she is a human person, then all other moral orders will degenerate into systems where only the persons wielding power are worthy of such equality.

It would be a society similar to George Orwell's allegorical novel *Animal Farm* pub-

lished in 1945 where 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others'. With the equality of value and worth of each person (which must be believed by every person and can never be lost) comes a society which focuses on fairness of access to healthcare, employment, education, compassion, and justice.

We know justice cannot exist without equality, and equality cannot exist when we are viewing

certain members of society as having lives that should be ended.

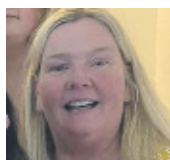
Thus, equality in society can never be achieved while some of its members are viewed as unworthy of life, meaning that Scotland must reject assisted suicide to uphold even a semblance of moral civilisation.

Katie Breckenridge, Research Associate, Scottish Council on Human Bioethics



The lack of understanding of autism across all services is utterly dumbfounding

Charleen Morton always knew she was different – and she knew her daughters were too. So why did it take so long for them to receive the correct diagnosis?



My story doesn't start with a three-year-old boy who doesn't speak. My story starts many years ago with a four-year-old girl who would only speak to her family. My amazing mum knew something was wrong and I was sent to a child psychologist. I can remember that appointment to this day. I played in the sand pit as the doctor spoke with my mum, telling her "this child is just shy, make her play and join in more, force her to socialise".

Mum did exactly that.

I knew even back then I was different. I struggled to communicate, struggled with food, noise, even chewing holes in my bedsheets and clothes. "That's just Charleen" was often said about my little 'quirks'. This went on for many years and I learned how to cope, how to mask. I have lived a life copying, trying not to stand out, trying to be the same as everyone else, trying to be anyone but me.

My eldest daughter Megan had lots of behavioural "issues". She punched, kicked, bit everything and everyone, and was very defiant and aggressive. I believed I was a useless mother, that I couldn't cope, that I had failed. Age seven I sought help from our GP, and we were seen at CAMHS. Five years later and diagnoses of PTSD, IBS and depression were all thrown out and at long last, we got an autism diagnosis.

Due to my lack of understanding about autism I questioned this, surely it was more than that? My child would fly into the most violent rage in a few seconds, would put her foot through a glass door, would refuse to go to school, even spending a full day hidden in the boot of my car. However, I came to understand that this is in fact everything to do with my girl being autistic. Nothing was going to change this behaviour except understanding. From me, from Megan and yes, from you.

Next it was Shannon, who spoke a few words. Then suddenly, at the age of 13 months, nothing. She fell into a silent world.

I asked for help. "She will come on in her own time", they said.

Eventually aged two we saw a speech therapist, their diagnosis? Delayed speech. Autism was never mentioned. I knew it was more than just delayed speech, but no-one would help. She started to speak at age seven but only to very close family. Eventually at age 11, ten years after I raised concerns about my daughter, she was seen at CAMHS, and within two visits she had her autism diagnosis. I came to realise this diagnosis, autism, was so very different in both my girls. The more I understood about them, the more I understood myself.

Finally, we have Demi-Leigh. I knew, I just knew. I can't explain why but I did. Six weeks into nursery the teacher called me to the side.

"You're going to tell me she is autistic", I said.

"No," she replied, "but I am going to refer her to a paediatrician".

"It's learned behaviour", said the paediatrician.

I was told to come back when she was seven if I still had concerns. Four years and two CAMHS appointments later and my youngest daughter had her autism diagnosis.

During all this time my understanding grew further. I approached my GP, who told me I can't be autistic, as I can drive a car and I work! I was then sent to the mental health team for depression and anxiety when I finally got my autism diagnosis, 38 years after my first visit to the doctor.

Four females, 38 years and nothing has changed. I support other parents during the autism diagnosis process now, and it remains the same. "She is fine at school", "she can play with friends". The lack of understanding across all services from schools to CAMHS is dumbfounding.

Why am I telling my story? Because people need to understand, and changes need to be made. If I don't, who will?

Charleen Morton, Chairperson of National Autistic Society Dundee Branch

