

Effective delivery of biodiversity policy and action in the uplands

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Introduction

The uplands present a number of particular challenges to the delivery of biodiversity objectives. Firstly, processes operate there at a large scale. Upland habitats cover huge areas and the factors that influence them such as grazing and pollution are widespread rather than localised. Secondly, the uplands are sparsely populated and do not benefit from a coherent public lobby. Thirdly, the uplands are largely privately owned and non-designated and therefore constitute the wider countryside over which there is limited public sector control.

A scoping study was carried out in order to discuss with a wide range of people how these issues impinge on the effective delivery of biodiversity policy and action in the uplands. The study was based on a total of 41 semi-structured interviews with people involved in the delivery of upland biodiversity objectives through participation in one of three Local Biodiversity Partnerships (Cairngorms, Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway) or at a national level. The people interviewed included agency staff, NGO staff, farm advisors and some land managers.

During the scoping study it became clear that a crucial element to the effective delivery of biodiversity policy and action in the uplands is the need to build a culture of partnership and cooperation among the diverse and various stakeholders. Central to the building of such a culture are:

- a need for appropriate fora for developing a widely shared vision and for delivering action towards realising that vision;
- a need to develop integrated land management at the landscape scale;
- a need to disseminate good practice in landscape scale management to land managers and to foster communication and co-operation among them;
- a need to involve communities and to build the case for the multiple public benefits of upland biodiversity.

Forum for vision

The first and primary objective for biodiversity policy for the EU, the UK and therefore for the Scottish uplands also, is to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The UKBAP and EU Directives provide the framework for prioritizing biodiversity action by defining priority species and habitats for protection and targets for achieving that. Land designation for conservation has been the primary tool for progressing towards the 2010 target and can be seen as an attempt to draw a line in the sand against biodiversity loss.

What people are now increasingly grappling with, particularly with the advent of CAP reform, is the delivery of biodiversity objectives in the wider countryside and also beyond the 2010 target. To this end there is still a need to develop a wider vision for uplands biodiversity. This is summed up by one interviewee who said:

“Until there is a recognised national objective on what should be the balance between different land uses, it will be difficult to have meaningful control or incentive schemes”.

In reality upland biodiversity is so intimately part of the wider social, economic and environmental landscape of Scotland that it requires a broad forum for brokering a larger shared vision for land use. In the words of its own website “Scotland's Moorland Forum strives to sustain and enhance the extent, diversity and range of habitats, species and enterprises encompassing moorland. The Forum wants to engender a greater awareness of these valuable habitats” (Scotland's Moorland Forum, 2007). Comprising 22 member organisations and five observer organisations, the Moorland Forum has the potential to embrace a wider remit in order to broker an agreed vision for integrated land use in the wider uplands.

Forum for action

As well as an appropriate forum for vision-brokering there is also need for appropriate fora for the delivery of biodiversity action in the uplands.

Local Biodiversity Partnerships (LBPs) were set up to identify local priorities and to determine the contribution they can make to the delivery of the UK Species and Habitat Action Plan targets. They work on the basis of partnerships that seek to develop and implement projects that deliver local biodiversity gains.

LBPs certainly have a role to play in the uplands. The strengths of LBPs include their potential for innovation. An example of this is the Cairngorms Upland Grain Project which, in partnership with local farmers, developed the sowing of sacrificial seed crops for upland birds which was subsequently adopted as a national measure within the Rural Stewardship Scheme. Further strengths lie in facilitating demonstration projects, awareness-raising, relationship-building, local action and influence over the public sector in terms of integrating biodiversity into local authority strategies and plans.

However, pitted against these strengths, are several factors that limit the ability of LBPs to act effectively in the uplands. These include the sheer scale of the uplands which is disproportionate to the financial and staff resources available to LBPs, the relatively few people who actually live in the uplands (thus negating one of the LBPs key drivers – i.e., raising public awareness among local communities), the lack of direct engagement of land owners (a lot of land owners and land managers are still unaware of the existence of LBPs) and the lack of public sector influence in the uplands.

Given the large scale of uplands and the fundamental requirement to engage private land owners in collaborative action for biodiversity, the promotion of more Upland Partnerships could be considered. If Upland Partnerships are concerned with the promotion of sustainable, integrated land management that delivers social, economic and environmental objectives, land owners may be more likely to participate than with LBPs which have a more specifically biodiversity focus. (See the paper on the Southern Upland Partnership by Pip Tabor in these proceedings).

Management planning and practice

The future for upland biodiversity lies in the further development of landscape-scale ecosystem management. In the words of one interviewee, *“strategic, process-orientated ecosystem planning that is robust enough to accommodate change”* However, if we wish to promote more connectivity, habitat mixtures and mosaics we will need to reach beyond the constraints of the UKBAP system that tends to compartmentalize biodiversity. As another interviewee put it, *“the greater benefits that may be derived from linking particular habitats might over-ride considerations about favouring one habitat over another or losing a bit of one habitat.”* We will also need to recognise that managing mosaics is inherently more difficult and will need to be developed through a process of innovation, trial and no doubt a few errors along the way.

There are signs of progress in this area. Catchment Management Planning is a topic that came up a lot in the interviews and there are examples of this happening under the auspices of LBPs in Dumfries & Galloway (Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, 2007) and Argyll & Bute. A catchment seems to be a reasonable ‘bite-sized chunk’ at which to look at integrated land use. It also lends a degree of ecological coherence.

Communication and co-operation

Disseminating good practice in ecosystem management to land managers is crucial for it is they who actually deliver biodiversity action on the ground. Interviewees offered many good examples of land management demonstration projects arising from LBPs. These include the ‘Linking the Ling’ project in Dumfries & Galloway (Heather Trust, 2007). In Argyll & Bute the West Highland Woodland Grazing project aims to demonstrate the conservation and economic value of woodland grazing, another example of LBP innovation (Argyll and Bute Biodiversity Partnership, 2007).

In addition to giving practical advice to farmers, demonstration events are important for breaking down barriers between land managers, agencies and conservationists. As one interviewee put it these events are *“a good opportunity for farmers to interact with agency staff and discover the surprising amount of common ground between them.”* Another interviewee highlighted the fact that the delivery of biodiversity objectives is essentially a social process and that we need a better understanding of what motivates estate owners, farmers and land managers, how they relate to each other and to the conservation lobbies and vice versa.

Since habitats and species don’t respect human boundaries we need to find ways of encouraging joint-working across boundaries. These demonstration events can help to break down psychological barriers associated with joint-working between neighbours and make an essential contribution to building the culture of partnership required for the effective delivery of biodiversity objectives for the uplands.

Financial incentives may help to promote joint-working for biodiversity. However, it should be recognised that land owners and managers are more likely to engage with the biodiversity process if they are able to retain a high degree of freedom to manage towards agreed objectives rather than simply being required to implement prescribed practices.

Community involvement

Fostering greater community involvement with uplands biodiversity is also important because of the lack of a coherent and vocal public lobby for it. Where the public are disconnected from the uplands, their perception of the public benefits of them is limited and the case for public money is diminished. The stronger the case for linking upland biodiversity to the health, wealth and well-being of the population, the stronger will be the incentive for Government to put sufficient money into providing for it. Some of the barriers to and opportunities for improving community involvement are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Barriers to and opportunities for improving community involvement with uplands biodiversity.

Barriers	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present communities of interest for upland biodiversity (e.g., walkers, climbers, naturalists) tend to be dispersed. • Local communities may be more interested in economy, employment, history, tradition. • Public perception of uplands was variously described during interviews as “<i>hostile environment</i>”, “<i>insensitive to damage</i>” and “<i>unchanging</i>” or simply “<i>up there</i>” outwith the sphere of interest. • Lack of influence. • Scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (make biodiversity easier to understand). • Promote biodiversity recording among local communities and communities of interest. • Facilitate access and provide good interpretation. • Promote community ownership. • Develop models of community assisted farming. • Stimulate community action by providing more, meaningful volunteering opportunities.

Public benefits

Greater recognition of the diversity of public benefits associated with upland biodiversity such as tourism, recreation, employment, local business and ecosystem services could be used to facilitate lobbying for more diverse sources of funding for upland land management.

The case for public benefits of upland biodiversity is powerfully made by the growth of ecotourism and wildlife-related recreation. The huge attraction of the Sea Eagle on Mull is the classic example of biodiversity pulling money into a local economy. A recent study estimated that Sea Eagles alone attract £1.5 million per annum to the Mull economy (Dickie *et al.*, 2006).



Employment of local contractors for biodiversity management operations such as removal of non-native trees, fencing and drain blocking is a direct benefit to local communities.

In addition to direct employment we also need to look for more ways in which local businesses can be spun-off from management for biodiversity. For example, on the Glenlivet Estate in the Cairngorms, farmers were offered incentives to promote birch woodland on their land for biodiversity purposes. This stimulated the establishment of a sawmill to supply logs to the local household firewood market.

In the future, the case for delivery of upland ecosystem services may become much more important. Clean water and carbon sequestration are clear public benefits derived from uplands biodiversity. If land needs to be managed in order to deliver these services then land managers should be able to attract public support for this.

Conclusion

Uplands biodiversity is part of a wider economic, social and environmental landscape for which we need to develop appropriate fora for developing a vision for the future and for delivering action. Action should increasingly involve good ecosystem management through innovation in farming and forestry practices to deliver simultaneous economic, social and biodiversity returns in the uplands. Effective delivery of good ecosystem management will require barriers to co-operation to be broken down and good practice to be disseminated among land managers. Community involvement needs to be encouraged in order to strengthen the public lobby and complement the case for recognising the multiple public benefits of uplands biodiversity.

References

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