

Nature based solutions: deer and their management

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Covid has hammered home our lack of resilience. The virus has hit every part of our lives – health and wellbeing, education, finances, relationships, family and friends, and prospects. The reach is global. Social inequalities are cruelly exposed. Even though many have come to value being outdoors and securing solace from nature, many people in Scotland simply cannot get to decent greenspace and unfortunately, for many of those that can, they do not know how to behave when they get there!

You will also have heard the narrative that this pandemic originated from an unhealthy relationship between the human world and the natural world, which can lead to disease jumping and mutating from species to species. This same unhealthy relationship is also contributing to the loss of nature across the globe. Therefore, it follows that ensuring society is more resilient against future pandemics must involve tackling the climate and nature crises.

The two things are inextricably linked. Two sides of the same coin. Globally, nationally and locally an enormous effort is needed to tackle them both

This importance was reiterated in the recently published Dasgupta Report, an independent [Review of the Economics of Biodiversity](#), commissioned by the UK Treasury.

It states: “Nature is our most precious asset and we are all asset managers.” It also states that: “we are seriously mismanaging those assets, with our demands far exceeding capacity.”

So, there it is - the link to nature based solutions - when thinking about the climate emergency and how best to stimulate a green recovery, the facts of the matter are that as we make progress in decarbonising the energy, transport and housing sectors, as we have been for some time in Scotland, the importance of land use comes in to much greater focus.

Land use becomes one of the most important areas to tackle existing emissions, but also one of the most important means by which we can mitigate, lock up and store carbon.

The Scottish Government remains committed to ending our contribution to climate change and we have one of the most robust legislative frameworks for emissions reduction in the world.

The updated [Scottish Government Climate Change Plan](#), published in December 2020, sets out the actions that chart a pathway and - let's make no bones about it - the challenges in shifting the rural economy away from its dependence on fossil fuels and traditional use of the land and sea towards a nature-rich, net-zero economy are significant.

Not an easy journey. My overall sense is that the amount of change required to make that transition is scarcely appreciated by many.

To meet that challenge we will require systematic changes to policy and practice and probably greater urgency and focus if Scotland is to meet its interim net-zero target for 2030

We are in an emergency – and whilst we must not convey a sense of panic, we have got to recognise that and act. Nature is our most precious asset and we now need to ‘up the ante’, both to protect what we have and indeed to enhance it.

Agricultural reform is underway and there are changes afoot to the regulation and management of our uplands. Policy alignment is key - including the extent to which the Government’s commitment to climate change and nature-based solutions drives the Economic Strategy, Regional Economic Partnerships, National Planning Framework, Land-Use Partnerships and agricultural policy.

I don’t underestimate the challenge of achieving that alignment. In the interim there is lots of really good work going on within all of your DMGs to deliver nature-based solutions such as woodland creation, peatland restoration, and a great range of coastal, agricultural, wetland, riparian and upland enterprises which all use nature to help tackle environmental and social challenges.

We need to do more. As we awaken to the importance of natural capital, we need to place greater value on sustainability and biodiversity. That is why the Scottish Government is ramping up and committing to multiyear investments with £250 million over 10 years on peatland restoration and an additional £150 million over the next five years in forestry to support the economy and our net zero goal.

The Land use Targets within the Climate Change plan are really ambitious.

Can Scotland meet the ambition? The peatland restoration challenge in itself is huge. The aim is to restore 250,000 ha of peatland by 2030 – so 25,000 ha per year (we managed 6,000 ha last year!)

There are big questions around capacity, skills, and sheer scale of the task, creating an industry from scratch, but real opportunities here too...

Nature-based jobs grew at more than five times the rate of all jobs in Scotland over the last five years and accounted for one third of all job growth in Scotland in this period. Nature-based jobs are just emerging in some sectors, such as urban green infrastructure and green finance, but these are expected to develop quickly as demand for these roles grows.

The emergence of the carbon market, which is still in its infancy, and the market for ecosystem services which is slightly further behind, means there is no shortage of interest from private investors. Banks, institutions, insurance providers and big business are all keen to invest in carbon for a variety of reasons and private finance will be key to help make the transition to net zero.

One of the challenges will be to identify the revenue streams for investors (not just from carbon) and link them to those who manage the resource – ie the land.

But the Scottish Government remains committed to ending our contribution to climate change within a generation. This year the world is looking to Scotland's leadership on climate action as Glasgow hosts the COP 26 climate summit in November, which marks the most important moment of the international climate challenge since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015.

Some of the messages that will inevitably emerge from COP15 and COP26 are that we need to shift from a model where we continually extract from nature, depleting it and its capacity to support itself and us, to one where we support nature in a restorative and regenerating economy.

And also, that we, as individuals must take responsibility. The collective, whether it is companies, communities, governments or international institutions, must all step up.

So, it is a time of change – but moving away from high level declarations to meaningful practical implementation. As a sector you are well placed to step up and deliver. Indeed, many of you already have. You only need to read the latest ADMG newsletter to see that.

I encourage you all to seize the opportunities that are emerging because there is an urgent need to do so, and we will continue to provide support as part of the solution to delivering a green recovery.