

Nature in brief

12: Living Landscapes— Scottish Uplands



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Scotland's uplands contain some of the largest expanses of semi-natural habitat in the UK, and hold hugely important stocks of natural capital. These landscapes, typically 300-400m above sea level, have been shaped by climate, geology and centuries of human influence. Many of these habitats have, and continue to, suffer a decline in extent and deterioration in condition. Most notably heather moorland, peatlands and native woodlands.

The main threats to Scotland's uplands are: habitat fragmentation; grazing pressures; intensive grouse moor management; peatland drainage; spread of invasive non-native species; inappropriately located energy developments and large scale monocultural forestry plantations; poorly targeted public subsidies that fail to value ecosystem benefits and wildlife crime.

Major shifts in land use policy and management and wider societal attitudes are required to restore Scotland's upland ecosystems in order to realise the full range of services and benefits. These benefits include food and freshwater, climate and flood regulation, carbon stores, and recreation and tourism.

The Trust has three wildlife reserves that contain significant areas of upland habitats: Ben Mor Coigach, Rahoy Hills and Largiebaan. They cover a total area of over 9,000 ha and Ben Mor Coigach is part of the wider Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape, a community partnership. **These areas will be the focus of our own landscape-scale restoration activity over the next five years.**

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What the Scottish Wildlife Trust would like to see:

- **Integrated Land Management plans that secure sectoral cooperation to improve the condition, services and benefits from upland ecosystems.**
- **Reform of subsidy regimes for upland sheep and cattle farming to encourage low stocking densities and 'agro-forestry' systems.**
- **Financial incentives for low-impact forest management in commercial upland plantations**
- **Regulation of deer and upland grouse moor management to encourage more sustainable management practices**
- **Wildlife-rich networks in areas between protected sites that support natural dynamic processes and succession.**
- **Incorporation of Ecosystem Health Indicators (EHIs) and Natural Capital Valuations (NCVs) into all relevant policy instruments.**
- **New statutory guidelines to mitigate the impacts of energy developments.**
- **Re-introduction of lost species such as Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*).**