

5 November 2020

Dear Julie,

I am very disappointed that you have chosen to propose a motion against grouse shooting and moorland management. Especially as you represent a rural area that depends on the income from Upland estates and the generosity of its owners to keep the rural communities alive. You follow Rottal Estate on Instagram and every photo on there is taken on the estate and shows the abundance of wildlife we have on the estate, so I simply cannot understand why you think the glens are devoid of wildlife.

In the last 15 years we have planted over 250,000 trees, created 5 km of new hedges, restored 1.2km of river habitat and just restored 40 hectares of peatland. We have independently verified 103 bird species living here including nesting golden eagles, peregrines, merlins, buzzards, ring ouzels, dotterel, golden plover, curlew, redshank, lapwing, snipe, woodcock, we have a population of over 200 black grouse, 3000 mountain hares, as well as huge quantities of skylark, twite, goldfinch, wheatear, amongst many others.

We have invested over 2 million pounds in infrastructure improvements, a hydro scheme, biomass for all the properties, an events space that supports the local community, and spend hundreds of thousands of pounds each year in local suppliers in Kirriemuir and Forfar such as Gammies, Thrums Tyres, Thrums Vets, Bertrums Butchers, Bels Butchers, Auto Sales, Maryton Garage, 88 Degrees, AB McIntosh, Willie McConnachie, Glenbuild Construction to name but a few.

Grouse shooting is not all that happens on this land as you claim. We are all about integrated land use and we produce renewable electricity, grow trees, capture carbon, store carbon, mitigate flooding, improve wetland habitat, farm sheep, have holiday cottages, run an events space, conduct wildlife tours, and let fishing and stalking as well as grouse shooting, and run a B&B for country sports visitors from Europe and the rest of the UK. All this brings in badly needed money into the glens where there is limited other business and employment opportunities. We also create work for 6 people directly as well as many people seasonally.

You have never taken the time or trouble to actually learn what we do and you claim there are better alternatives but actually there are no obvious ones. I recently visited the west coast where no grouse shooting occurs and saw very, very little wildlife – how come that is do you think? It's because most of the land there is neglected. No one lives on it, no one works it and it really is a desert. At least we have plenty of wildlife of all descriptions and if we didn't burn heather sensibly (which by the way the SNP Govt pay me to do in my Agri-Environmental Climate Scheme - AECS) there would be no waders left. Angus is a stronghold for waders and black grouse having some of the highest densities in the whole country. We also have 3 golden eagle nests in Glen Clova alone!

So as sensible land managers we are happy to have a debate about improvements we could make in land management best practice but to make general disparaging and quite frankly untrue allegations about grouse moors and their management based on limited, if any facts is very disappointing from someone in your position. If you would like to get the true story of what we do perhaps you would like to come and visit the Angus Glens and see what we actually do without blindly following the "fake news" of anti-capitalist, anti-landowner pressure groups.

We are trying to work with Nature Scot, Scot Govt and the RSPB amongst others, both individually, as a sector, and through the European Wildlife Estates initiative championed by Roseanna Cunningham [Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform] and Nature Scot to find a way forward so we can help manage land to mitigate climate change, deliver net biodiversity gain and also deliver a sustainable grouse surplus to help pay the bills and keep people employed. I would have hoped that you would have welcomed this?

Kind regards

Dee Ward
Owner, Rottal Estate