



SCOTTISH POLICY GROUP

BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Beyond Protected Areas:

**Notes from the BES Scottish Policy
Group Pie and a Pint, 20th April 2016,
Edinburgh**

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On 20th April 2016 the British Ecological Society's Scottish Policy Group ran a 'Pie and a Pint' (PAAP) event on the topic "Beyond Protected Areas". This event was inspired by discussions taking place between SNH and members of Scottish Environment Link on the future role of protected areas (PAs) in nature conservation in Scotland. This document is a note of the main themes and points raised during the evening's PAAP discussion; it is not a minute of the meeting but hopefully accurately captures the balance of ideas and opinions presented.

Over 30 people attended. This was our largest ever PAAP event, demonstrating the interest in this topic. Attendees included representatives from the Scottish Government, National Trust for Scotland, Plantlife, RSPB and the local candidates from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

Introductory presentations

The event started with introductory thoughts from four speakers, representing organisations that we felt would have a range of views on the topics for discussion:

- Adam Smith - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust Director in Scotland
- Davy McCracken - SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) Professor of Agricultural Ecology
- Andrew Bauer - National Farmers Union Scotland, Deputy director for policy
- Lloyd Austin - Head of Conservation Policy for the RSPB in Scotland

Each speaker gave a brief outline of their views on PAs and conserving biodiversity in the wider countryside, including discussing the difficulties of this latter approach and what might need to change in order to facilitate it. The main points from their outlines are summarised below.

Adam Smith, GWCT

- The skills and knowledge of land managers need to be recognised when developing management schemes.
- We need demonstration systems.
- We should consider land sparing vs. land sharing options; for example the use of the middle of fields for intensive management creating space for nature at the edges.
- Support networks can be good mechanisms for enabling coordinated nature conservation within managed land – for example the GWCT farmer clusters approach¹.
- Ecologists need to support managers to implement adaptive management in a dynamic world.

Davy McCracken, SRUC

- It is notable that some areas of high biodiversity value are dependent on land management, e.g. high nature value (HNV) farming systems, and the vast majority of these occur outside of protected areas.
- For many species it is highly unlikely that any one PA can hold viable populations of those species. Consequently PAs are not immune from their surroundings.
- Effective management of PAs will necessitate changes to agricultural and forestry management in the wider countryside (and within many PAs as we need to remember that most are managed in some way). But this is hard to achieve.

¹ <http://www.gwct.org.uk/farming/advice/farmer-clusters/>

- Land managers need help: after agri-environment funding is granted the help stops, and farmers are not proactively encouraged to engage in schemes in the first place. We need pro-active facilitators encouraging farmers to consider agri-environment schemes and ensuring that activities in an area are complementary and benefit biodiversity in a wider sense.
- In HNV farming the existing biodiversity benefits often need maintaining by maintaining the management practice; this is difficult to achieve via the current agri-environment route. We also need schemes giving payment for biodiversity outcomes², which in turn could provide the evidence base that HNV farming practices maintain conservation value.

Andrew Bauer, NFUS

- Protected areas should be acknowledged as a subjective snapshot in time, and we need to accept that the network should not be untouchable and static; more needs to be done within the framework of adaptive management.
- The focus of management is often process rather than outcomes – is this sensible?
- Have we done our best to enlist land managers to the cause of nature conservation?
- We need to have a process to discuss what we want from rural Scotland, accepting that some opinions might matter more than others.
- The private cost of managing protected areas is often not fully met, and the process overall lacks funding and specialist advice. In particular, if society continues to not value its food, then we probably will not achieve the outcomes that we want.

Lloyd Austin, RSPB

- Many sources of evidence indicate that nature is in trouble, for example the recent State of Nature report³. This is despite global government commitments to nature conservation, which in turn respond to people's desire to protect nature. This includes high support for special places such as PAs.
- Protected areas are needed because nature is not homogenous – there are special places, which is why PAs are a key part of the policy toolkit. We have different PAs for different purposes; they should be seen as the listed buildings of our natural environment. PAs are representative of the best of nature and their existence underpins efforts to protect nature more widely.
- Protected areas are living things – they were created by or currently rely on management; the concept of PAs therefore acts as both a label and a management tool and too often these get confused. But the PA label can help bring benefits, e.g. clarity for planning, generating tourism, encouraging funding for land managers (albeit not enough).
- The public wants to see nature conserved and protected both at land and at sea because people value it for many different reasons, such as recreation, bequest values of passing on biodiversity to the next generation, sense of place etc. Overall PAs are important for biodiversity and should be protected and improved, supported and celebrated. We need to identify key pressures and target these by regulation, incentives and advice; resources are needed for each of these.
- In addition we should act to make our PA network ecologically coherent (as encompassed in the National Ecological Network proposal), take action off-site to deal with on-site issues

² See, for example, the payment for biodiversity outcomes approach has been developed in the Burren in the Republic of Ireland (<http://burrenlife.com/the-programme/our-approach/> and <http://efnecp.org/hnv-showcases/ireland-the-burren/burrenlife-project/>). This approach is also currently being tested in the Aran Islands and will be rolled out to a number of other test areas in 2016 (see document available at http://www.efnecp.org/download/AGRI_ENVIRONMENT-SCHEME-RDP-2014-2020_final12Dec.pdf).

³ https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/stateofnature_tcm9-345839.pdf

(e.g. diffuse pollution), recognise that policies should target delivery of multiple benefits. Critical to all of this is resourcing.

Break-outs and group discussions

Following these scene-setting presentations, the attendees split into four groups; the four speakers rotated between the groups every 10 minutes and the groups discussed the following questions:

- How can we make PAs as effective as possible?
- How do we ensure connectivity between PAs?
- How do we conserve nature outside PAs?

Some of the groups addressed these questions directly, and others discussed these issues in a more general sense.

The groups then fed back main points from their discussion to all attendees. A record of the notes from the break out groups is given in the Appendix. Below the main points arising across the groups, and in the final feed-back discussion, are summarised:

How can we make PAs as effective as possible?

- The PA network is cherished by many people, and it is a focal point for enabling people to engage with nature. However, this should not stop us from discussing exactly what PAs are for, and whether their role is location specific, habitat/species-specific, or a combination of both. This then determines the most appropriate management philosophy and the extent to which flexibility within the PA network is appropriate.
- Some flexibility could be sensible given that the primary purpose of some PAs is already or very likely will be lost, without the potential to restore the key features for which they were designated. However, flexibility should not be to the detriment of the overall network, including its existence as an integrated and connected entity, this being particularly true within the context of climate change.
- We also need to remember that protected areas are themselves managed land. So the issues that are flagged up relating to improving links between conservation and land management are as relevant to land within the PAs as they are to land outside of PAs.
- Finally we do not have perfect knowledge about our existing protected areas, especially in the marine environment. We need to better understand the resource they represent and current threats to them.

How do we ensure connectivity between PAs?

- We need to understand what we mean by connectivity, what we want to achieve in delivering connectivity, what this would look like at the landscape scale, and how incentive mechanisms might be tailored to delivering this (for example focussing on key habitat features such as hedgerows).
- Landscape-scale management actions are essential, but these need to be properly incentivised and supported through adequate advice and guidance. To this end we need to know how we can best encourage land managers to work collectively.
- We should not forget the potential of urban greenspace to act as wildlife corridors, and to deliver conservation benefits away from PAs.

How do we conserve nature outside PAs?

- It is essential that we work to get more land managers better engaged with nature conservation. Current farm incomes are clearly an issue, and so appropriate financial incentives need to be developed to allow land managers to commit to nature conservation.
- Advisory services (e.g. FWAG) have been lost, and this needs to be addressed as it represents a clear limitation on both applying for funding and the delivery of appropriate management action. Advice needs to be long-term and sustained. Associated with this, demonstration projects can be vital in encouraging land managers to engage with nature conservation.
- Conservation measures need to be focussed on outcomes rather than actions, and land managers need to be trusted and given the freedom to use their own knowledge – supported by adequate advisory services – to deliver these desired outcomes.
- As noted above, many of these points are just as relevant for delivering appropriate land management within protected areas.

Some more general messages arose:

- The scale of the challenge of biodiversity loss is huge, and we will not be able to address it without much greater political will and adequate funding.
- Biodiversity conservation really does need to become a cross-policy issue, associated with a clear vision of what we – collectively – want from our marine and terrestrial environments.
- To develop cross-policy traction, we need to make it clear that conserving biodiversity is not necessarily a cost to other policy areas; in fact conserving biodiversity is essential to the delivery of key aims from many policy sectors.

Next steps

These notes provide an overview of the various challenges associated with conserving nature both inside and outwith the PA network. They will be passed back to Scottish Environment LINK and SNH and hopefully can make a contribution to any future discussions concerning Scotland's Protected Area network. They will also be circulated to the event's attendees and posted on the BES website.

The BES Scottish Policy Group would once again like to thank our four contributing speakers and all attendees for their contributions and lively discussion.

For more information on the BES Scottish Policy Group please visit

<http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/public-policy/scottish-policy-group/>

Appendix – Notes from the four break out groups

Group 1.

- While progress has been made in understanding the threats to protected areas there are still some knowledge gaps that need identifying. Work will then need to be carried out to identify the solutions to address the gaps (a big piece of work since many of the threats are much wider societal issues that need, for example, behavioural change.)
- The scale of this issue (i.e. biodiversity loss within Protected Areas specifically) is huge and therefore it needs political will and support behind it. For example, even just being able to carry out enough monitoring at the moment is too difficult (underfunded) to really understand and know what the current state of play is for the features of interest and to know how to address the issues.
- There wasn't support for de-designating since with climate change species will need to be able to move around and the fact that we don't know the full picture in a lot of cases means we should definitely be at least keeping them designated as a future safe guard.
- The Scottish Government should lead by setting out a clear and defined vision for the Scotland's nature through combining the different Strategies (including biodiversity within PA's and within the wider countryside) but the ways to address the losses and improve the situation should not be tackled with a 'one size fits all' approach. Some issues could be led with an Outcome Based Approach and allow for flexibility in how to reach that outcome i.e. through adaptive management techniques. One area of this should be giving more responsibility and trust into the land managers that they will know how to do this. * Others approaches will need to be more process orientated and led with Regulation.
- *At the same time it was recognised that the advisory services have been cut too much and land managers now do not have enough access to advice. Exasperating the situation is measures for biodiversity such as AES are becoming so bureaucratic and prescriptive that the schemes are alienating the very people being targeted. Land managers will take up management prescriptions when the tool, the information and the advice is readily available. It is short sighted to take the advice and information services away.
- It is best to tackle the land managers that are part of the 'enlightened self-interested' category as the door is half open with them. If you try and create incentives that encourage everyone you end up diluting the incentive too much. Do not bother chasing those not interested, and instead work on those who will be willing to put in some extra effort themselves in conjunction with some help.
- We need a mental shift towards species diversity in the landscape such that land owners want to compete to have the most diversity on their land.
- Underpinning what was said above was that 'planning' for biodiversity should happen at the landscape scale level (point 4). (Currently landscape scale conservation has not been successful as it has been developed in a way the benefits just a few different sectors and has even had negative implications for other sectors.) Landscape scale conservation should be implemented in conjunction with adaptive management techniques since it is impossible to meet all biodiversity targets in all places.
- CAP should be about delivering more public goods than subsidising food production

Group 2.

- Policy signals historically have not sufficiently encompassed nature; for example within farming the focus has very much been on food production. All land use policies should consider the environmental issues associated with related land management decisions.
- The problem of cheap food for consumers is that it reduces the incomes of farmers. This makes it increasingly difficult for them to achieve a reasonable income from farming. The consequence for biodiversity is that farmers simply do not have the time/energy to consider nature conservation when making land management decisions.
- Conserving nature should not be seen as a “cost” to other policy areas. For example, biodiversity can help bring resilience into farming systems. The underpinning role of nature in delivering benefits is central.
- We should not forget that farming is not the only land management activity that needs to be considered; there are major challenges for integrating biodiversity conservation into commercial forestry.
- Research challenges exist around the desire to deliver resilient ecological networks – what should these look like and how do we integrate their development into existing land management?
- We need processes to encourage and help land managers engage in nature conservation, both on and off of protected areas. These include demonstration projects (linked to holistic analyses of the costs and benefits of conservation actions for a range of benefits); and facilitating land managers to engage in these activities, for example through the provision of advisory services.

Group 3.

How can we make PAs as effective as possible?

- Increase shared appreciation. Different groups value the benefits derived from PAs in different ways, and we need better communication so that collectively we can understand why certain areas of land are special.
- Strategic and better advisory services, working across different stakeholder groups, are essential. The advice – and associated monitoring (in part delivered through self-assessments) - needs to focus on delivering outcomes and support needs to be long-term (“with you all the way”).

How do we ensure connectivity between PAs?

- Connectivity can be aided by farmers working together in farm clusters.
- Long-term commitments need to be made; there has to be continuity of appropriate land management at the appropriate scale, but there also needs to be flexibility.

How do we conserve nature outside PAs?

- Where needed existing PAs should be replaced, allowing for the creation of new PAs and loss of some that are no longer fulfilling their goals, and that cannot be managed for these or new conservation goals moving forward.
- However, we should be careful to cherish our PA network – flexibility should not be to the detriment of the overall PA network.

Group 4.

How can we make PAs as effective as possible?

- We need to identify what the PA network is for – this includes main objectives and potentially conflicting management aims. This should take into consideration the existing variation in protection for different types of PA related to their different status (e.g. SSSIs, Natura sites).
- The concept of protection in a single location can be an artificial situation because the habitat itself might be man-made. So we need to be clear of our objectives – are they location-focussed or habitat/species focussed, or both.

How do we ensure connectivity between PAs?

- Good land management for features associated with connectivity (e.g. hedgerows), and premiums for managing these features appropriately.
- Farmers working together within catchments, although this can be complicated to achieve.
- We need to understand at the species level the consequence of shifts in species' climatic zones. From this arises an understanding of the type of connectivity we might want to achieve, and how we can go about delivering that.
- We also need to be clear what we mean by connectivity – connectivity for what, exactly?

How do we conserve nature outside PAs?

- Make it worthwhile for land managers – i.e. appropriately funded incentive schemes.
- Again, we need to decide what we want, but in terms of delivery we should allow land managers to be creative and consider how best they can deliver the desired outcomes. Output driven schemes encourage land manager engagement.
- Providing information in a timely way is critical, and wider environmental “education” for land managers might be an element of this.
- We need to encourage communication between different groups of key actors – in particular we need to build communication links between those that make the rules and those that deliver the outcomes.
- We need to remember the importance of urban greenspace for nature conservation away from protected areas. We should also highlight the multiple benefits that appropriate management of urban greenspace can bring, e.g. for human health. However, there are often considerable problems related to land ownership in terms of delivering appropriate management for urban greenspace.