

ASSOCIATION OF APPLIED BIOLOGISTS

ASPECTS OF APPLIED BIOLOGY 85

Shaping a Vision for the Uplands

**Conference 21, Sheffield Hallam
University**

2-4 June 2008

Produced by the Association of Applied Biologists

**Copies available from: The AAB Office
The Warwick Enterprise Park, Wellesbourne,
Warwick CV35 9EF, UK**

REFERENCES

The correct form of reference for this publication, which is based on a meeting of the Association of Applied Biologists, is:

Aspects of Applied Biology **85**, *Shaping a Vision for the Uplands*, pp. 1–xx

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Printed in UK

Published by the Association of Applied Biologists
The Warwick Enterprise Park, Wellesbourne, Warwick CV35 9EF, UK

© 2008 The Association of Applied Biologists

ISSN 0265-1491

*Full reference: *Aspects of Applied Biology* **85**, *Shaping a Vision for the Uplands*, published by the Association of Applied Biologists, The Warwick Enterprise Park, Wellesbourne, Warwick CV35 9EF, UK.

INTRODUCTION

Aspects of Applied Biology no **85** contains a number of papers given as oral presentations and posters presented at *Shaping a vision for the uplands* - a conference of the Association of Applied Biologists organised with The Environment Agency at Sheffield Hallam University on 2–4 June 2008.

The uplands face many challenges. Recently the Minister of the Environment called for an increased focus on the key questions: ‘what is land for’ and ‘why do we value it’ recognizing the importance of land use to our social, economic, and environmental progress. These questions are of particular importance in the uplands where traditional agricultural management is becoming economically difficult to sustain. Although hill farming remains at the core of the rural economy and community, its primary role of food production is declining in importance. The reform of the Common Agriculture Policy has already led to significant restructuring of traditional hill farming systems and will continue to do so. The management of our uplands for grouse is also a key element of the rural economy. The role of uplands in providing a range of public benefits for those who live, work or visit the hills has long been recognised, traditional farmed landscapes are the cornerstone of rural tourism, our hills provide a space into which people can escape and wildlife can thrive. The uplands also provide less tangible public benefits such as water for people to drink, the means to sequester carbon and potentially, reduce the impact of flooding, but how do we value these benefits and protect them? The drive to put appropriate structures and policies in place to guide land management in the uplands has rarely been so high on the policy agenda. The uplands are not wilderness areas, but are living landscapes in which we need to balance wildlife, landscape, water, access and economic development. Mitigating and adapting to climate change is also a key consideration. All these individual elements need to be approached in an integrated framework which brings together evidence and people with policy. Establishing the right mechanisms for development and delivery are essential, and these need to be underpinned by a clear vision of what we want and where we want it.

Consequently this conference provided a forum for a wide range of stakeholders to:

- Share and learn from experience and practice of management approaches in the uplands
- Identify the key policy drivers and their implications for the uplands
- Evaluate the evidence for the range of public benefits
- Consider how such benefits can be valued appropriately in policy frameworks
- Identify common principles that can be used to inform locally adapted solutions

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Woods and trees in the uplands – why we might want more H M ARMSTRONG & M A SMITH	1–4
Hydrological restoration on intact and eroding blanket bog in the Peak District R BURTT & C HAWKE	5–8
Interactions between ecological condition and the management of grazing rights on Eskdale Common in the Lake District National Park J BUTLER & E A STOCKDALE	9–14
Effect of sward type and management on butterfly numbers in the uplands M D FRASER, J G EVANS, D W R DAVIES & J E VALE	15–18
A place for montane scrub and natural treelines in the British uplands D GILBERT, A HESTER & C LEGG	19–24
From over-grazing to under-grazing: are we going from one extreme to another? J P HOLLAND, M L POLLOCK & A WATERHOUSE	25–30
Building a better future for the uplands in Northern Ireland A H KIRKPATRICK	31–36
Mountain people, community and common goals: Partnerships in mountains A KRAUSE	37–40
Scale Mis-matches in Social-Ecological Systems: A case-study of multifunctional forestry in the cairngorms region of Scotland R Mc MORRAN	41–48
Hill and upland areas: Livestock farming changes and stakeholders preferences C MORGAN-DAVIES & A WATERHOUSE	59–56
Attitudes of land managers in the uplands to diffuse pollution mitigation J P NEWELL PRICE, C LORENC, S CLARK & I CHOLMONDELEY	57–64
Climate change in the uplands: is this the end of cheap and free services? HARRIET ORR	65–66
Integrated approaches to research and management in mountain areas: why and how? M F PRICE	67–74
Using scenarios to explore UK upland futures M REED & J MITCHLEY	75–76
Bracken: a competitive stakeholder in the uplands R C ROBINSON	77–84
Lessons from the past – a case study of how upland land-use has influenced the environmental resource I D ROTHERHAM	85–92
Tourism and recreation as economic drivers in future uplands I D ROTHERHAM	93–98

Shifting ecosystem services through time in the North West uplands and implications for planning adaptation in the future H SHAW & I WHYTE	99-106
Traditional knowledge as a fundamental input for natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods in mountain habitats: Learning from farmers in Uttarakhand, India V SINGH & N K JOSHI	107-114
Impacts of different policy-driven land uses for the Scottish hills on retention of farming, the environment and local economy A WATERHOUSE, C MORGAN-DAVIES & J P HOLLAND	115-120
The impact of pasture improvement on stream phosphorus concentrations in an upland catchment in Northern England P J A WITHERS	121-126
Evidence for a mechanism driving recent observed trends in dissolved organic carbon release from upland peat soils A R YALLOP, S M WHITE & B CLUTTERBUCK	127-132