HISTORY OF THE INSH MARSHES NATURE RESERVE AND SURROUNDING AREA

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6 July 1994

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Abstract

This is an expanded version, incorporating much additional material, of a paper produced in 1991 by Lorcan O'Toole, who was also a volunteer warden on the Insh Marshes RSPB nature reserve. Much of the source material was gathered at the Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie. The section on Invertromie Farm is based on work done by Michael Gardner in 1986 and information on Invertromie burial ground was gathered by Mary Harman in 1987. Part One is a general survey of the history of the district of Badenoch in which the reserve is situated. In Part Two, an attempt is made to describe in detail what can be learned of the history of the reserve area itself. Part Three draws together the available information about the past flora and fauna of the area.

Part One: Highland History: Badenoch and Strathspey

It is difficult to imagine what travel in the Highlands must have been like in the days before railways and motor roads, but some idea is obtained from the colourful account of a journey over Drumochter in 1858 left by a German visitor:

> 'Clouds came over the sky and the warm blue changed to a thunderous grey. The Garry stopped foaming, moss and heather disappeared, even the water was silent that came down from the mountains. We had reached the great cemetery of these quiet districts. A plain stretched out for miles before us and only death - if nothing worse than death - seemed to have passed by here in the fullness of its malevolence, tearing off jagged pieces of rock with angry hands, even as a storm tears the ears from stalks of corn, scattering them far and wide over the field. A grisly feeling of horror came over us as we passed this seed-field of horror, and the conversation which had flowed so gaily from our lips suddenly came to a stop. No orangery with terraces and broad steps had ever seemed to us to be so magnificent as these linden trees that stood around the inn at Dalwhinnie. With feelings of undisguised joy we looked over the high garden wall into the orchard and kitchen garden, where heads of cabbage gleaming red occupied the beds and even a few cherries were still protruding from the leaves upon the trees.' (Theodor Fontane, quoted by Scarlett 1988 - p.93).

Badenoch, the upper basin of the River Spey, may seem harsh when compared to the coastal lowlands of Moray, but is an oasis of peace and plenty when approached by the mountain passes to the south or west.

River and forest

These were the two dominant features of the post-glacial Highland landscape. Kingussie (Gaelic: *Ceann-ghiuthsaiche*) means 'the head of the pine wood' (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895) and the most probable etymology of 'Badenoch' is 'the drowned land' (Scarlett 1988 - p.7). Settlers in the area have always had to contend with the river's spates and winter floods. Early settlements tended to be sited above the floodplain of the Spey on the gently sloping, drier ground to north and south. Roads and tracks, including the eighteenth-century Military Road, similarly followed a higher line. Only when the construction of the Highland Railway in 1863 gave protection from the river to a strip of low-lying ground was a new thoroughfare established on the valley floor. The older townships on the hillsides are mostly identifiable by the Gaelic prefix *Bal-* (town/home). Examples are Balgowan, Ballourie, Balnespick and Balnacreag.

Evidence of the formerly shifting course of the Spey is visible in the oxbow lakes at Ballochbuie (by the A9 road bridge at Kingussie) and below Insh village. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus recalled how a special boat was required in her childhood to transport the family carriage across the river to Inverdruie, until a shallow ford was thrown up by the river just below the family seat at The Doune (Grant 1898).

The river's frequent flooding is attested by sources ranging from ancient folklore to precise nineteenth-century records. Major floods since the mid Eighteenth Century are summarised in the recent report on flood alleviation (Highland Regional Council 1990). Summer fords were useless in winter unless the river froze over, an event which is attested by a fourteenth-century story, 'The Raven's Tale' (Scottish Women's Rural Institute 1965) and, for 1814, by Grant (1898). The Spey froze partially and the Tromie completely during the severe winter of 1946-47, when ice floes were to be seen piled along the banks bordering the frozen meadows, all small birds abandoned the district or perished, and an immature goldeneye was reported trapped in an area of open water too small to allow it to take flight (Perry 1948).

Ferries were numerous before the Spey was bridged. They are commemorated in place-names such as Boat of Garten. Boat of Rothiemurchus was

near modern Inverdruie and present-day Kincraig was also known as Boat of Insh, the former settlement of Kincraig being situated higher on the hill above the modern A9. The ferry there was operated by the proprietor of Invereshie (Shaw 1760) and part of its stone jetty remained visible until comparatively recently (NA). The ferryman in 1840 also ran the inn at Boat of Insh, but then moved to Tromie Mills because he did not want his large family to grow up in the rough atmosphere of the inn (BOHP 1984: AMcG).

A folktale, 'The Witch of Nuide', tells how a farmer, forced to take a detour by Ralia Bridge because the Spey was in spate, met the dreaded witch whom his dogs then chased from Badenoch forever (Gray 1987). Local people always feared *An t-Each Bán*, the white horse which lurked in the depths of the Spey and exacted a toll of one life a year. The horse would approach a weary traveller on the river banks, but if he mounted this apparently lucky horse he was doomed. It would gallop away, shrieking wildly and leaping into the dark depths of the river (Gray 1987).

Floods of exceptional severity occurred in 1768 and 1829. On the latter occasion, ('the muckle spate'), the River Feshie at Feshiebridge is reported to have risen some 25 feet, dislodging many tons of rock (Lauder 1829). In 1808, the Rev. James Robertson produced a pamphlet of advice on agricultural improvement in Inverness-shire. He suggested various ways of stopping the annual floods but few of his recommendations were implemented (Robertson 1808). An earlier attempt to drain Loch Insh had proved equally futile (Anderson 1790). Nonetheless, limited successes in drainage efforts were enjoyed during the Nineteenth Century. Most of the drainage ditches of today probably date from this period (they first feature on the OS map of 1872) and the Spey, although it continued to flood regularly, was forced between raised banks into its modern course.

Much of Badenoch away from the valley floor was covered in great woods. Pine was the dominant species away from the valley floor and was often mixed with birch, rising to the treeline beyond which stretched open moors. Alders lined valley watercourses and hill burns. However, tree-felling took place for local use and later on a larger scale for export to the south. By the early Nineteenth Century there was considerable concern about deforestation. The Duchess of Gordon was responsible for extensive planting of ornamental woodland around Alvie but an early guide for visitors could still lament that Glenmore and Rothiemurchus Forests were 'now equally denuded of their finest timber', although Glenmore was 'fast replenishing itself' (Longmuir 1860).

Human history: from prehistoric times to the end of the Middle Ages

Human settlement can be traced in Badenoch from Iron Age times. Since good farmland was at a premium in the Highlands, buildings tended to be situated on the edge of the best land. Because the region lacked good building stone or timber (except for Scots pine), individual buildings and even settlements were often impermanent and generally left few traces. The limited amount of good land and the readily defensible character of many settlement sites probably combined to encourage the warlike disposition which seems to have characterised Highland populations until comparatively recent times (Noble 1990).

Early signs of human settlement in Badenoch include *Dun da lamh* (Fort of the Two Hands) near Laggan (grid ref. NN583929), a hill fort of Pictish origins with walls 5-25 feet thick. A prehistoric canoe was discovered in Loch Laggan in 1959 (Scarlett 1988 plate 24). Other signs of the Celts along the strath include the ruins of a Pictish earth-house above Lynchat (NH784019). Dunachton (*Dun* meaning fort) is said to be named after a Pictish king, Nechtan.

Badenoch formed the southern limit of Caledonia, an area roughly conterminous with the later Province of Moray, which until the Ninth Century A.D. was the land of the Picts (Anon. 1911). So little is known about these people that it is even unclear what language they spoke. They were called 'Picti' or 'painted people' by the Romans, from their habit of covering their bodies with woad and other dyestuffs. During the Roman occupation of southern Britain, they would drive their cattle from the Highlands for barter or sale to the legionary forces along Hadrian's Wall (Noble 1990). The Gaelic Scots, who had originally inhabited Ireland, were at this time confined to the Kingdom of Dalriada (modern Argyll) and only came to dominate Caledonia around 840-860 A.D., under their king, Kenneth MacAlpine.

The coming of Christianity to the Highlands is a subject wrapped in obscurity and controversy. History and myth became inseparably intertwined at an early date, owing to the tendency of church communities to claim the greatest antiquity and the saintliest founders for themselves. There is little doubt, however, that the earliest missionaries were Gaelic monks, newly arrived from Ireland and associated with the monastery founded on Iona by St Columba. Columba himself made a pilgrimage to Inverness in 565 A.D. with the aim of converting the Pictish King Brude, and is said to have founded the church at Kingussie which bears his dedication during the course of this expedition (Anon. 1911).

It is likely that the first Christian missionaries to the area adopted some pagan rites and holy sites in order to attract converts. Badenoch contains the remains of several early churches, including St Columba's at Kingussie, St Colman's at Invertromie and St Adamnan's on Loch Insh. The visible remains of the chapel of St Droston near Kincraig date from the Eighteenth Century but it occupies the site of an earlier church, built in 1380, which itself was constructed on the site of a stone circle. Droston was reputedly an early Pictish saint who preceded the Gael Columba (Gray 1987).

Celtic Christianity differed in several respects from the religion practised elsewhere in western Europe, although agreement was reached over

such matters as the date of Easter at the Synod of Whitby in 665 A.D. Religious life was based around a series of loosely organised monastic communities. The parochial system as it exists today was an Anglo-Norman importation of the Twelfth Century. The combined parish of Kingussie and Insh is attested from this period, when the incumbent acquired an automatic right to a canonry in Elgin Cathedral (Anon. 1911).

Similar tensions between the indigenous, Celtic civilisation and Normanising influences from the south may be observed in the secular history of this period, which is fully discussed by Barrow (1988). By 1000 A.D., Badenoch formed part of the great Province of Moray, or Moravia, which had replaced the old Pictish Caledonia. Cut off from Dalriada and the central lowlands by the high Mounth passes, Moray continued to enjoy much autonomy even as the medieval Kingdom of Scotland developed a new and stronger institutional identity. From the mid Eleventh Century, and especially during the reign of Malcolm III 'Canmore' (1058-93), foreign influences were increasingly at work in Scotland. Norman and Flemish adventurers carved great estates for themselves in lowland areas from the Borders to Caithness and a feudal system of landholding on continental lines was slowly established.

Moray more than once acted as a centre of native resistance to this infiltration from the south. In 1130, Earl Angus, grandson of the last Celtic king of Scotland, rose in rebellion against Canmore's son, David I. His defeat and death in battle enabled the king to seize the whole earldom of Moray and reorganise it on feudal lines. In Badenoch, this had the effect of creating a division between royal lands south of the Spey and Church lands to the north. The region continued to be beset by rebellions for more than a century (Barrow 1988).

The upper valley of the Spey was feudalised somewhat later than the lowlands around the Moray Firth. Kinveachy (near Carrbridge) was enfeoffed (granted in return for military service) to a southern earl in c1180 and the land upstream from Boat of Garten was added to this grant soon after 1200 (Barrow 1988). The decisive event for Badenoch seems to have been a rising led by Gilleasbuig MacWilliam, son of the Lord of the Isles, in 1229-30. After this, King Alexander II decided that he needed a strong and trusted lieutenant in this part of the Highlands and enfeoffed the district to Walter Comyn, a younger son of the Earl of Buchan (Barrow 1988).

The Comyn lordship of Badenoch and Strathspey lasted for 75 years, during which a number of knights' fees (lands sufficient to support a knight, and held by him in return for military service) were created. Castles were built at Ruthven and on Lochindorb, the first of these giving the Comyns complete control of the Minigaig Pass, since they also had a castle at Blair. Yet despite the increasing veneer of feudalism, Celtic influence remained strong. The traditional division of land into *davochs* (approximately, the land cultivated by four ploughs) was still in place in 1371 and underwent little change between then and 1603 (Barrow 1988).

The Comyns lost Badenoch during the Wars of Independence which followed the extinction of the direct royal line in 1286. John III Comyn was appointed one of the Guardians of the Realm by Edward I of England in 1299, but his collaboration with the would-be conqueror combined with a family feud to lead to his murder by Robert Bruce in 1306 (Barrow 1988). Badenoch was forfeited to the Crown and retained by Bruce after his eventual victory at Bannockburn (1314), but later in the century it experienced a period of virtual autonomy under the rule of Alexander Stewart, 'the Wolf of Badenoch', younger son of King Robert II and Bruce's great-grandson. The Wolf had his principal castle at Ruthven, on the site of the later Barracks, and also held castles on Loch an Eilein and Lochindorb (Shepherd 1835 - p.66-68).

Later medieval Badenoch was largely populated by members of the Clan Chattan confederation. Highland history moved slowly and the basic social structures changed little between 1300 and 1700. The Gaelic word *clann* means 'children' and the clan system was founded upon kinship ties which might be real or imaginary. Even if a chief was not physically related to all of his clansmen by ties of blood, they still regarded themselves as his family. The bond was strengthened by common acceptance of real or mythical genealogies, affirming the chief's descent from Celtic or Viking heroes or Anglo-Norman adventurers (Noble 1990). The Macphersons who dominated Badenoch were an exception to this pattern in claiming descent from a parson (Macpherson = 'son of the parson'), after a younger son of the chief of Clan Chattan who was the priest at Kingussie until he unexpectedly inherited his father's estates in 1173 and obtained papal dispensation to leave the priesthood and marry (Anon. 1911).

Tacksmen, often relatives of the chief, acted as his subordinates in different settlements and paid their rent by supplying warriors whenever they were required. Black cattle were already the mainstay of the Highland economy and cattle-lifting or the payment of blackmail to deter it were familiar aspects of Highland life. Some arable farming was undertaken, but the heavy soil and primitive forms of plough which were used made it necessary for tenants to combine forces for ploughteams of eight or more oxen (Noble 1990).

During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, many Highland chiefs became involved in lowland politics and some, like the Campbells and Gordons, acquired lowland titles such as Earl or Duke. Change was probably inevitable sooner or later, but at the time of the Union of the Crowns (1707), Highland society still retained much of its traditional, archaic character and Gaelic was still the language of most of the population. Chiefs with town houses in Edinburgh or London, involved in elaborate commercial schemes extending to Britain's new, far-flung colonies, were also simultaneously fulfilling the role of patriarchal leaders of a warrior society.

Culloden and after

The exile of the House of Stewart after 1688 provided the catalyst for change, although its full effects were not felt immediately. From 1689, the throne was occupied by foreign monarchs, lacking the Stewarts' close ancestral ties with Scotland. Highland chiefs, especially those in the West who still adhered to the Catholic faith of the exiled James II, provided the main military support for the various attempts to secure a Stewart restoration. These Jacobite rebellions (1689, 1715, 1719 and 1745-46) were directly responsible for the intensified governmental efforts to 'pacify' the Highlands, which found their most permanent manifestation in the network of military roads constructed by Generals Wade and Caulfeild. Ruthven Barracks (built in 1718 on the site of the medieval castle) occupied an important strategic position in this network, being situated at the junction of the road from Stirling and the south to Fort George near Inverness (here following a line slightly above that of the modern A9) and the road over the Corrieyairick Pass to Fort Augustus and Bernera Barracks in Glenelg opposite Skye. Military roads ran along both sides of the Spey, and were set a short distance up the hillsides to avoid problems of flooding. With their hard surfaces and bridges over major watercourses, these roads were an enormous improvement on the rough bog-tracks of earlier times. It is one of history's ironies that the first army to use the Corrieyairick road in an actual campaign was that of Charles Edward Stewart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) en route from Glenfinnan to Edinburgh and Derby in 1745.

The defeat of this army of clansmen at Culloden (April 1746) marks a turning-point in Highland history. So far as Badenoch was concerned, the consequences were immediate. Cluny Macpherson had been among the rebels' leaders; his lands were held forfeit and he took refuge for some years in caves in the hills, notably those still known by his name on Creag Dhubh near Newtonmore and on Ben Alder.

Acts of Parliament prohibiting the wearing of Highland dress and the possession of arms were severely enforced by the Hanoverian redcoats. Many years later Cluny's heirs recovered most of the Macpherson lands, but by now the traditional bond between chief and clan was broken and the clan system was in terminal decline. Many Highland chiefs were forced into exile after the 'Forty-five and, forgetting their age-old patriarchal role towards their clan, began to milk what lands remained to them for profit.

Badenoch seems to have been spared the excesses of absentee landlordism which were inflicted upon Lochaber and other parts of the West, yet fifty years after the rebellion, the minister of Kingussie saw fit to regard tenants' lack of security in their tenures and liability to arbitrary and excessive fines and labour services as a major barrier to agricultural improvement (Anderson 1790). His contemporary at Alvie was especially critical of non-resident proprietors (Gordon 1792 - p.379). One exception among these predatory landlords was the Duchess of Gordon: 'Conscious of her duties as a great landowner's wife and....concerned to improve the lifestyle of the tenants', she encouraged the establishment of a flax mill at Kingussie and in 1803 co-founded the Strathspey Farming Society (Scarlett 1988 - p.48-51).

One of the more noteworthy inhabitants of Badenoch at this time was James Macpherson, a farmer's son from Invertromie who attained celebrity status in eighteenth-century literary society with his 'translations' into English verse of the works of the ancient Gaelic bard, Ossian. There is still no firm evidence whether his work was based on genuine original texts, or an elaborate fabrication imitating a still living oral tradition. Macpherson's work brought him wealth and social standing. He built the mansion of Belleville (a fashionable frenchification of the Gaelic 'Balavil') and became a Member of Parliament. By his own wish, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey (McOwan 1989).

Badenoch was more open to outside influences than many other parts of the Highlands, lying on the main road from Perth to Inverness. Those landowners who were resident on their estates early sought to introduce improved farming practices such as rotational cropping and schemes for alleviating floods and draining the Spey marshes. They often had support from the local clergy but encountered resistance from a traditionally-minded peasantry suspicious of innovation (Anderson 1790).

Agricultural improvements had reached Morayshire by 1706. Fallowing, growing foreign grasses and clover and fertilising with manure, marl and lime were all introduced. A 'Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture in Scotland' was instituted in 1723. But it was not until the 1760s that real changes began, with the introduction of blackfaced sheep, drainage and afforestation. Across the Cairngorms in Mar, 18 million firs and larches are said to have been planted between 1750 and 1806 (Shaw 1760)).

The arable farming practised in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Badenoch is described by MacBean (1951). Farms were generally small, rarely exceeding about a hundred acres, and the gentlemen farmers whose holdings approached even that size frequently sublet parts of them to crofters and cottars. About thirty of these small units were scattered about the lands of Killiehuntly, Balguish and Corarnstilmore and must have presented a considerable impediment to efforts at agricultural improvement. In other places, such as Drumguish, small crofts were the sole agricultural unit and the crofters shared common grazing on the hill ground. Dry-stone dykes divided the 'infield' around the farm buildings from the 'outfield', and the latter from the open hillside. Only the former was treated with manure and thus able to be cultivated more or less continuously; the outfield grew oats or barley for three years and was then left fallow for a further three years (MacBean 1951). By 1835, rotational cropping of potatoes, barley and oats was the norm at Alvie, but according to Macdonald (1835 - p.92), three years of cultivation had to be followed by three years lying fallow because of the smaller tenants' failure to manure their fields.

The area was not self-sufficient in grain, although the agricultural improvers believed that it could be made so. This was one of their main motives

for attempting to drain the marshes (Robertson 1808 - p.178). Cereal crops were grown for subsistence, rather than for sale, and they faced fierce competition from weeds. Yields were low, because of the continuous cropping of the infield (MacBean 1951).

Potatoes were added to the crofters' staple diet of oatmeal in the late Eighteenth Century and were followed by turnips and improved grass seeds in the early 1800s. It was around this time that iron ploughs and harrows began to be used; hitherto, farm implements had been made entirely of wood. Only after these innovations, did rotational cropping become the norm on all parts of the farm and smaller fields separated by dykes were created (MacBean 1951).

The mainstay of the Highlands' limited cash economy was the export of black cattle. Bullocks were kept on the land until they were large enough for sale at five years old and even then they fetched a meagre £3 (MacBean 1951). Every year, a September tryst (market) was held on the moor at Pitmain near Kingussie (Grant 1898). Drovers bought thousands of black cattle which were then driven south over the Minigaig Pass to the great trysts at Crieff and Falkirk where they were bought by English dealers. The cattle wintered on the low ground or in byres, but every summer, the women and children would drive the animals to summer grazings in the hills, and live in shielings making butter and cheese for the winter while the men stayed below to work on the arable land and gather the hay. The exceptional fertility of the land around these shielings, with the greenest grass attracting sheep and rabbits, was noted by Perry (1948), a century or more after they had ceased to be used.

Highland black cattle fetched high prices during the Napoleonic Wars, since their small carcasses made them easy to transport. Large numbers ended as salt beef in the holds of the British Navy (RG). But profits were never great, most of them being taken by middle-men, and the increase in prices benefited Highland tenants only to the extent of enabling them to carry on paying their rents (Macdonald 1835 p.96). As early as 1772, Thomas Pennant foresaw the replacement of cattle by sheep (Pennant's *Tour*, quoted by Little 1974 - p.33).

Sheepwalks, deer forests and crofters

The arrival of the blackfaced sheep had at least as great an impact on Highland life as the Battle of Culloden. Entire glens were cleared of their crofting populations in the interest of creating sheepwalks. But Badenoch was spared the brutal Clearances inflicted upon Sutherland and the West and most of the displaced tenants were rehoused in new settlements close at hand. Insh Village was one such settlement, for tenants from the Killiehuntly area (Little 1974 - p.34).

The minister of Kingussie wrote in 1790 that 'Sheep farming has not yet made any considerable progress in the parish, notwithstanding the many successful examples in the neighbourhood to recommend it.' First among these examples were the forests of Gaick and Glenfeshie, which were let as sheepwalks from around 1750 (MacBean 1951). It was a matter of concern to the minister that wool was not woven in the area, although it could easily be, but was instead carried south 'to buyers invited from another kingdom' (Anderson 1790). By 1835 there was still no native wool industry, but his successor could record that the land now consisted mostly of sheepwalks and a few well-managed plantations (Shepherd 1835 - p.74). The Napoleonic Wars encouraged the development of native sheep farming on a large scale, since potential foreign food sources were now inaccessible. Black cattle were driven over the Minigaig Pass as late as 1900 (by the grandfather-in-law of a present-day inhabitant of Insh (Ch)), but they had long ceased to be economically significant.

The first invasion of sheep took place on hill ground which had previously been used only as summer grazing. Only later were large numbers of sheep kept on lower ground where they displaced other forms of farming. Many sheep were driven from the uplands each autumn to winter grazings in Nairnshire and Morayshire. As late as 1914, when rail transport had long been available, many sheep continued to be driven on foot, often utilising the old routes and resting places of the cattle drovers (MacBean 1951).

Despite the displacement of people by sheep in many areas, the population of Badenoch underwent a slow but steady increase in the early Nineteenth Century. Figures for the parish of Kingussie (including Insh until 1828) rose from an estimated 1,803 in c1792, to 1,981 in 1811, 2,004 in 1821 and 2,080 in 1831 (Shepherd 1835 - p.72). These figures disguise what must actually have been a much more significant rise in the birthrate and/or a fall in the level of child mortality, for the writers of the Statistical Accounts all remark upon the number of recruits to the military from the region (hence, perhaps, the 45%:55% imbalance between males and females in the 1831 census data). There is some evidence of collective emigration to Australia and America from the 1830s (Scarlett 1988 - p.2), but this seems to have been less significant in Badenoch than in those regions more severely affected by the Clearances.

Sheep farming became less profitable after 1870, due in no small part to imports of wool and (later) refrigerated meat from the Canadian and New Zealand descendants of Scots who had been forced to emigrate to make way for the sheep half a century before. But long before this the character of the region had begun to change again.

Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic movement had made the Highlands fashionable. From the mid Nineteenth Century, roads and railways rendered them accessible. Whereas in 1839 Lord Cockburn wanted the native birch and pine woods of Rothiemurchus replaced with groves of sweet chestnut and oak (Scarlett 1988 - p.53), his social peers of the next generation began to come north for the very wilderness earlier dismissed

as worthless land. Some shooting leases were already available in the early Nineteenth Century. The (grouse?) shooting at Glen Feshie was advertised in *The Times* as early as 1812 and was let to a Strathspey laird, Grant of Ballindalloch, for £70 and Rothiemurchus was cleared of sheep for grouse shooting in 1827 (Orr 1982). But in 1835, Gaick was still the only deer forest in the district, although it was already 'much frequented by sportsmen' (Shepherd 1835).

Deerstalking became fashionable in the 1840s, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arrived at Balmoral. Rothiemurchus was converted from grouse to deer in the 1850s and the stalking was leased for £1000 p.a., compared to £350 for grouse shooting rights a few years before (Orr 1982). By 1852, the house and shooting at Invereshie were leased to the nouveau-riche Duke of Leeds (Murdoch 1852), precursor of a flood of incoming proprietors and tenants who effectively destroyed the closed, intimate society of Badenoch and Strathspey recalled by Elizabeth Grant in the early decades of the century (Grant 1898). By 1884, deer forests occupied some two million acres of the Highlands. In Badenoch and Strathspey, a more or less continuous belt of deer forest extended around the northern and western edge of the Cairngorms from Abernethy to Gaick and sporting leases accounted for 70-75% of the annual rental value of some estates (Orr 1982). Luxurious lodges were erected in the moorland fastnesses of Glen Feshie, Glen Tromie and Pitmain. Shepherds became gillies and the more prosperous farmhouses were let for the shooting season by their owners who moved into humbler accommodation (Scarlett 1988 ; BOHP 1984:JF). The Highlands had become the playground of the rich.

A regular coach service ran between Perth and Inverness from 1835 (Shepherd 1835 - p.79) although it was liable to disruption by the weather to such an extent that travellers as late as 1845 sometimes found it more convenient to journey by sea from Dundee to Inverness (Mackenzie 1921 - p.21). The Highland Railway reached Kingussie in 1863. Whereas the journey from Perth to Aviemore had taken three days in good conditions in 1803 (Grant 1898), Badenoch was now only a few hours distant from Edinburgh and Glasgow by train, with easy access to England. The number of visitors was probably already on the increase. A *Guide to the Highlands of Speyside* was published in 1852 (Murdoch 1852). A revised version came out in 1860 (Longmuir 1860) and this had run to a third edition by 1876.

The opening of the Perth-Inverness railway had a drastic effect on the whole of the central and northern Highlands. An Inverness writer in 1910 observed, perhaps rather contentiously, that:

> 'Since the institution of the Railway, the prosperity of the Highlands has increased by leaps and bounds: as a theatre for sport this part of the country now stands unrivalled, with well served communications; flourishing health resorts have sprung up and are springing up rapidly; Inverness and the other ancient burghs served by the system have increased largely in population and in trade; and, as a whole, the Northern Counties never before enjoyed a greater era of prosperity.' (Inverness Northern Chronicle 1910)

The number of visitors to the Highlands rose sharply. A nightly sleeping car ran between Perth and Inverness (and continued to do so until it was axed in 1990). Railway publicity advertised the facility of connecting services to the south and tourism of a more sedate sort was developed alongside the deer forests and grouse moors. Kingussie and Newtonmore became fashionable resorts for the holidaying Victorians of the industrial Lowlands (See below, Part Two). By the 1890s, Gertrude Martineau of Inverdruie was making comments with an uncannily modern ring to them, about tourists who tore branches off the trees around Loch an Eilein as they passed beneath them in their carriages, threw stones at squirrels and by their noisy shouting caused the ospreys on the castle island to desert their nest (Scarlett 1988 - p.61).

This tourism was almost exclusively an upper middle-class and aristocratic affair and, except for those who became gillies, estate servants or hotel workers, it brought few benefits to the general population. The rural population in particular suffered severely in the later Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Although no major Clearances took place in Badenoch, a surveyor's report for part of the Balavil Estate in 1883 revealed the pitiable conditions in which many tenants lived: the houses, most of them unslated, were rarely of stone and many were 'dangerous to live in'; holdings were considered too small to merit substantial expenditure on improvements and the situation could not be altered without recourse to evictions, which the proprietor, Colonel Macpherson, was unwilling to order (Brodie 1883).

The problem was apparently one of overpopulation, a phenomenon which was as potent as the forcible Clearances elsewhere in forcing emigration to the industrial Lowlands or to the colonies. But the general trend in the Highlands was one of rural depopulation, and this was observable at Kingussie by the turn of the century. In 1905, an anonymous newspaper reporter commented upon the 33% decrease in the rural population of the parish between 1861 and 1901, from 1,800 to 1,200. Large farms had been converted to sheep or deer and the number of farm horses had fallen by over 50% and, when crofts and small farms became tenantless, they were not being re-let as separate holdings. Recently, this observer remarked, 'A very nice little farm in the neighbourhood of Kingussie was in the market. There was a likelihood of a keen competition for it, as it was very suitable for a family. It was given, however, to the adjoining farmer, and has become little better than a wilderness, like most of the Badenoch farms.' The conclusion was pessimistic: 'If there is no reform in our land laws, what will the Highlands be like forty years hence?' (Anon. 1905)

The prosperity of the Highlands was increasing again, and Badenoch probably benefited more and sooner than many other regions because of the easy access from the south afforded by the railway. But living standards were rising more slowly than in the rest of Britain and this, in an era of generally rising expectations, was enough to encourage many people to leave (Hunter 1991).

The Twentieth Century

The early years of this century saw the disappearance of the Gaelic language in Badenoch as a means of everyday communication. Few of those born after c1900 grew up with a knowledge of the language. School education was conducted entirely in English and one informant to BOHP (1984) recalled that her father deliberately discouraged his children from learning Gaelic because he 'thought it would be a hindrance for our schooling' (BOHP: CS). Many farmhands at this time came from English-speaking areas of lowland Moray and by 1921 it was no longer deemed necessary for the minister at Kingussie to be a Gaelic speaker (BOHP 1984: JF).

Rural depopulation continued through the first part of the new century. Agriculture suffered in the depression years of the 1930s and gave the impetus for further emigration, especially to Canada and Australia. Many young women left the area to enter domestic service(BOHP 1984: AMcG). Two World Wars decimated the young male population and many of those who survived did not return to live in the Highlands after they had seen life elsewhere (BOHP 1984: JF). A fuller account of farming in the inter-war years is given in Part Two below (section on Invertromie).

Social and economic pressures had their effects too on the district's wealthy summer residents. In the 1920s, shooting tenants tended to return to the same estate from one year to the next and might establish a rapport with local farmers. Jean Fraser, then a young girl at Invertromie Farm, recalled a Mr Hargreaves in the Forest of Gaick and a Lord Milford in Glen Tromie, both of whom occasionally made presents of venison to her father. But 1930s tenants changed more often and showed less interest in their neighbours. One year a French family took the lease of Invereshie. At this time they were regarded as unusual, but they heralded a greater influx of foreign shooting tenants and commercial syndicates in the post-war period (BOHP 1984:JF).

The long agricultural depression of the early Twentieth Century ended with the outbreak of the Second World War. The national drive to increase domestic food production towards self-sufficiency had a marked impact on the Highlands, where subsidies for hill sheep and cattle were introduced (by 1943, eight shillings annually for each breeding ewe and two pounds a head for cattle) and a number of deer forests were compulsorily requisitioned by the Department of Agriculture and stocked with sheep. (Hunter 1991). One local effect of these measures was the existence, by 1946, of a stock of 2000 ewes on a 30,000 acre sheepwalk in Glen Tromie (Perry 1948).

The tendency towards more active state intervention in Highland agriculture gathered pace after peace was restored in 1945. Crofting areas became eligible for additional grants for improvements as varied as drainage, liming and bracken control and a further range of incentives was made available to farmers in 'more climatically disadvantaged localities', for instance to reseed hill pastures and construct cattle shelters. The simultaneous appearance of powered tractors in the region heightened the pace of change (Hunter 1991).

Highland issues were extensively debated both inside and outside governmental circles in the years of post-war reconstruction. Figures as prominent and diverse as the naturalist, Frank Fraser Darling (e.g. 'Island Farm', 1943) and the novelist, Neil Gunn (e.g. 'The Drinking Well', 1947), pointed out that the problems were complex and deeply rooted and related them both intellectually and emotionally to demands for social and political change. There could be no simple panacea for all ills when the questions that had to be confronted ranged from absentee landlords, to estates exclusively devoted to sheep, cattle, grouse or deer, to the tenurial rights of crofters.

Gunn, speaking though his hero, put the case for reform of land laws (to give security of tenure to tenant farmers, comparable to that of crofters with smaller holdings) and agricultural practices:

> "The land itself is dying....For a long time the heart has been taken out of it and nothing put back....It's been a slow process. Old people have pointed out land to me, pieces here and there, that once bore heavy crops. Now it's sodden, with rushes growing. I sometimes thought it was just old talk. But now I know the land there has gone sour. It needs draining and liming....In the old days, the cultivated land, the in-by land, *and* the hill pastures - they carried both sheep and cattle. The cattle were good for the land. It was a proper balance. But then the landlords found they could get more money - bigger rents - by driving the people off the land and turning it into huge sheep farms. So they did that. And for a long time sheep farming paid. But then they did not realize - what the old folks had always known - that sheep alone eat the heart out of the hill pasture. These sheep farms were thriving at first on the....goodness - on the stuff....the fertility, that the old way, the old economy, had put into it....But then sport came in, grouse and deer, and the landlords found they could get big rents for that. So they didn't mind so much about the sheep farms....In fact, it often paid them to clear the sheep farmers off, as once it had paid them to evict the crofters....they neglected the agricultural or stock-rearing land..."

Richard Perry (1948) articulated similar ideas in the more local context of Glen Feshie:

> 'Since 1752 the glen has been variously a sheep-run, a cattle-ranch and a deer forest; and when Highland landlords and sheep-farmers realise that cattle, sheep *and* deer are interdependent links in the conservation of soil fertility and green grazing, and that each benefit from the other's presence, we may see the glens grow green again, if it is also understood that you cannot conserve soil, nor regulate moisture, without woods and forests.'

All this discussion could not entirely be ignored by the Scottish Office, and the inevitable response was the creation of a number of commissions of enquiry and semi-autonomous bodies to investigate the issues and find means to their solution. The Taylor Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions (1952-54) led to the establishment of the Crofters Commission in 1955. The Hydro-electric Board was very active in these years, providing massive employment opportunities in the construction of reservoirs and power stations and bringing electricity to many outlying communities for the first time. Another product of this period was the Red Deer Commission (1959), a statutory body with a remit to regulate the numbers of red deer. The Highlands and Islands Development Board (1965) was set up to fill the crying need for a coordinating body for economic development (Hunter 1991).

There was, however, a gulf between the bureaucrats in St. Andrew's House and observers like Fraser Darling who had first-hand experience of the issues. Government agricultural policy, which was essentially geared to increasing productivity and yields at any cost, tended to see a future of larger farms, exclusively devoted to hill sheep or hill cattle, plus a large component of commercial forestry - a vision very much at odds with the reality of a tradition of small, mixed farms which were frequently not the sole source of income of those who worked them. Darling conducted his *West Highland Survey* (published in 1955), at the behest of the Scottish Office, but his conclusions were received with little sympathy and nothing was done to act upon them (Hunter 1991). Although he was not writing about the Grampians, his holistic, ecological approach applies equally well, perhaps in terms slightly less extreme, to upland districts like Badenoch and it is worth quoting the *Survey* here:

> The Highlands as a geologic and physiographic region are unable to withstand deforestation and maintain productiveness and fertility. Their history has been one of steadily accelerating deforestation until the great mass of the forests was gone, and thereafter of forms of land usage which prevented regeneration of tree growth and reduced the land to the crude values and expressions of its solid geological composition. In short, the Highlands are a devastated countryside and that is the plain, primary reason why there are now few people and why there is a constant economic problem. Devastation has not quite reached its uttermost lengths, but it is quite certain that present trends in land use will lead to it, and the country will then be rather less productive than Baffin Land.

Like Gunn in his novels, like Perry writing of Glen Feshie and Glen Tromie, Darling was keen to avoid the Highlands becoming an area whose 'wilderness value.....for the jaded townsman' justified ' a large subsidy to maintain a sufficient population of people following practices of misuse to prevent any natural healing of devastation'. The natural balance of the land must be restored, including the human element, and the first step towards this would have to be a massive reduction in sheep numbers and sensible control of deer populations.

These insights were largely ignored at the time of their publication, but they set out with a rare degree of prescience, the terms of contemporary debates about Highland land use and the complex of related issues. The tensions acknowledged here between those seeking to turn the region into a leisure park, or a massive nature reserve, or to restore an economically viable, working community, have still fully to be resolved.
Highland agriculture has never recovered the prosperity of earlier times, although falling profits on hill farms have been countered to some extent by government (and latterly European Community) subsidies. In the post-war period, the Department of Agriculture hired many farm implements to small farmers and some mechanisation of agricultural processes began to take place. Invertromie Farm acquired its first tractor around 1949, enabling longer working days than were possible with horses but not initially saving any manual labour (BOHP 1984:T&JG). Population levels continued to fall during the first part of the present century but more recently have stabilised and even in places begun to increase. Other activities have replaced farming as the principal sources of income and employment, the most important in economic terms being commercial forestry and tourism. Large tracts of low moorland south of the Spey between Kingussie and Inshriach were sold to the Forestry Commission and planted from 1956 onwards (Scarlett 1988). In the 1960s, the construction of the Aviemore Centre and the associated ski station on Cairn Gorm provided a focus for the promotion of the area as a summer and winter holiday resort. Aviemore now rivals Kingussie as the principal settlement in the area and tourism has become a major industry.

The cause of conservation has also advanced considerably in the post-war period. The Cairngorms were declared a National Nature Reserve (the largest in Britain) in the nineteen sixties and numerous Sites of Special Scientific Interest (incorporating some of the best wildlife and geological sites in the country) have been notified. More recently, a large area of the floodplain between Kingussie and Kincraig was purchased from the Forestry Commission by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds as a nature reserve in 1973. Other land nearby was added to this in the following years. It is to the history of this area and the surrounding habitations that we now turn.

Part Two: The Insh Marshes reserve and adjacent areas

Ruthven and Kingussie

Until the Nineteenth Century, there were no true villages anywhere in the Highlands. Settlements consisted of small groups of farmsteads, often identifiable by their use of the Gaelic prefix *Bal-*, many of which have since disappeared. Ruthven, the ancient capital of Badenoch, attained the status of a Burgh of Barony early in the Fifteenth Century although it remained a small settlement composed, like other places in the region,

mostly of impermanent structures of turf or wood. Knappach and Drumgallovie are today mere ruins, while the townships of Balnacreag and nearby Craggan have all but vanished.

There has long been a settlement on the site of modern Kingussie. Whether or not St Columba's church was founded by its dedicatee, it is attested from an early date. A small collection of houses, or *kirk-toun*, probably grew around it. By 1173, when the progenitor of Clan Macpherson obtained his papal dispensation to marry (see Part One, above), the incumbent of Kingussie was sufficiently significant to warrant automatic tenure of a canonry or prebend at Elgin Cathedral (Anon. 1911).

In contrast to the royal lands south of the Spey centred on Ruthven, the area north of the river seems to have been in ecclesiastical hands throughout much of the Middle Ages. It was claimed in 1380 by the Wolf of Badenoch, along with other Church lands, in an earlier phase of the vindictive campaign against the Bishop of Moray which led him to burn Elgin Cathedral to the ground (Anon. 1911). However, Kingussie remained in ecclesiastical hands and in 1490 a priory church was founded there by George Gordon, 2nd Earl of Huntly. The Earl's heirs resumed this priory's lands at the Reformation, seventy years later, and Gordon influence remained strong in the area over the next 300 years (Anon. 1911).

Gordon of Straloch's map, incorporated in Blaeu's Atlas of 1654, indicates a number of small settlements, or *ferm-touns*, around the edge of the Badenoch floodplain. North of the river, these include 'Pitmean, Kingussie, Kingussie Beg, Rait, Midrait, Dunachte, Kincragy, Pitchern and Dalfour'; south of the river were 'Ruffen, Inverouglas, Dalnavert, Contalait and Innesiskie', the last being close to modern Invereshie (Scottish N Rural Institute 1965). Most of these are readily identified with places or individual houses existing today. It was Ruthven, with its castle and burghal status, which remained the most important place in the district. During the Seventeenth Century it was variously held by forces loyal to Montrose, Cromwell and Claverhouse (Anon. 1911).

By the Eighteenth Century, Ruthven Castle was in a ruinous state. However, the strategic importance of the site encouraged the rapid construction of a government barracks (in 1718) and three of General Wade's military roads converged there. The barracks buildings were partly destroyed during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46 and were not repaired. The death-warrant of the old burgh of Ruthven was effectively signed in 1765, when traffic on the Perth-Inverness road was diverted onto the north bank by the construction of a bridge at Ralia.

Events leading up to the foundation of the modern village of Kingussie are summarised by Dixon (1991b). In the early 1790s, when the first blackfaced sheep were brought into the parish, the Duke of Gordon made an unsuccessful attempt to found a woollen cloth manufacture on the site of present-day Kingussie, using water power from the Gynack Burn. An enterprising young clergyman, the Rev. James Anderson (author of the Kingussie and Insh section of the Old Statistical Account), was responsible for the construction of a new church in 1792. He later became the Duke's agent and did much of the detailed planning when the modern village was eventually created at the Duke's instigation in 1799. Inn and post office were soon moved across the Spey to the new village and the desertion of Ruthven followed soon after. However, attempts to secure a direct postal service to the south via Drumochter were not successful until 1835 and mail for Badenoch continued to follow a circuitous route via Aberdeen and Huntly (Dixon 1991b). The early growth of the village was slow. Describing a childhood visit in 1812, Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus recalled only 'the indications of a village - the present town of Kingussie - a few untidy-looking slated stone houses each side of a road, the bare heather on each side of the Spey' (Grant 1898).

Eighteenth-century church and court records highlight contemporary manners and virtues. Soldiers and clansmen were sent to the local tolbooth (prison) at Ruthven or, just as often, denounced from the altar, for associations with Jezebels or for Sabbath trading (Macpherson 1893). The Church was even responsible for the construction of Tromie Bridge in 1728: the Rev. William Blair wanted to ensure that the whole of his parish was accessible at all times. Later ministers were unanimous in criticising the population's propensity to drink and fight, but generally credited the Highlanders with bravery, honesty and hospitality. In 1835 the Rev. Shepherd was able to say that the prison at Kingussie had stood empty throughout the previous year.

The Highlanders' qualities of bravery and bellicosity no doubt encouraged their heavy recruitment into the military. Badenoch provided redcoat soldiers from the period between the 1715 and 1745 rebellions, when the Black Watch regiments of Highlanders were created with the aim of providing a native force on behalf of the government. These were originally intended as a sort of home guard and not as regular troops. They twice mutinied when attempts were made to send them overseas and a number of local people can still trace their descent from the mutineers (R. Green *pers. comm.*). But despite early setbacks, a tradition of Highland service in the British army was established which continues to this day.

The Highlands were slowly opened to new outside influences during the Nineteenth Century. In Badenoch, the arrival of the railway in 1863 turned a steady flow of visitors into a flood. Kingussie was developed as a health resort, with spacious terraces of solid stone houses, a sanatorium, golf course, tennis courts and bowls ground (Scarlett 1988 - p.22). The 1910 *Handbook to the Highland Railway* noted that Kingussie was 'one of the leading summer resorts on the Highland Railway north of the Grampians'. The 'Duke of Gordon', the 'Royal' and the 'Star' were already established as the principal hotels by this date. Coach excursions were advertised to the Gaick Forest and Glen Feshie (Inverness Northern Chronicle 1910). Private golf courses were created by the proprietors of Lynachlaggan and the Dell of Killiehuntly (1903 OS map). At the same time, it became quite common for the inhabitants of Kingussie themselves to go on holiday. The seaside town of Nairn on the Moray Firth was a favoured destination in the 1920s (BOHP 1984:JF).

Several informants to BOHP (1984) recalled how busy Kingussie railway station was in the years before and after the First World War. The refreshment rooms were the scene of constant activity during the day and provided breakfast baskets for passengers on the northbound overnight train before restaurant cars were introduced. Extra trains were laid on for shooting parties arriving in the Highlands for the 'Glorious Twelfth' (BOHP 1984: DMcD).

For a short time early this century, a whisky distillery flourished at Kingussie. A 'Glen Gynack' single malt was produced, which was sold at 3/6 a bottle and was said to have been of considerable quality. However, the distillery was bought by the Johnnie Walker company and closed soon afterwards, as the market for single malts at this time was very restricted and the whisky was found to be unsuitable for blending (BOHP 1984: DMcD).

Kingussie High School already served a wide area, taking pupils from smaller village schools in the locality at the age of thirteen. There were also pupils from the Western Isles who boarded in digs around the town. A number of pupils in the inter-war period went on to university, most frequently in Edinburgh. The teachers at the High School were mostly not local people (BOHP 1984: JF & CS).

Insh Village

Until the creation of the separate parish of Insh in 1828, the area south of the Spey belonged to the parish of Kingussie. A late eighteenth-century map shows Insh and another two, unnamed, trading posts between Insh and Loch Insh, but no village existed here until late in the Nineteenth Century. Settlements in the area south of the Spey meadows took the form of scattered crofts, of which there were many around Killiehuntly at the mouth of Glen Tromie, at Ruthven and across the hill in Coire Fhearnasdail. Most of these holdings owed rent to Invereshie estate and its absentee laird, Grant of Ballindalloch (BOHP 1984: JF, AMcG).

The village of Insh was established in the later Nineteenth Century, when these crofts were cleared to allow the creation of hill sheep farms such as Killiehuntly, Baileguish and Corarnstilmore (BOHP 1984: JF). Houses were built at Insh for the people cleared from these areas and for the skilled sheep workers with Border country names such as Kennedy and Douglas who arrived with the new flocks. The 1903 map shows fifteen or so houses, each with a strip of land to its rear. Crofters were generally known as 'small farmers' and had a little over six acres (a 'half oxgate'), while cottars had only about a single acre. These lands are still known as 'The Acres' (RG). There were also larger farms, such as Inveruglas, Wester Inveruglas and Soillerie, and it is these which had the grazing rights on the meadows. The last named carried a stock of 120 breeding ewes and twelve suckler cows in its heyday (HW). Common grazing rights were shared on the hill behind Insh until it was bought by the Forestry Commission in 1956 and planted with conifers.

The crofting inhabitants of Insh probably had the same rights as their counterparts at Drumguish, who always left part of their land wild because they were not charged a full rent until the whole of it was broken in. These people thought of themselves as 'small farmers'; the term 'crofters' was little used (BOHP 1984: WMcD). Few made a living from their crofts alone. Sons and daughters, sometimes even the father of the house, often found work elsewhere (BOHP 1984: WMcD & JF). Alternatively, one man might work several holdings (BOHP 1984: AMcG). Communal peat-cutting rights on the moor behind Drumguish were retained until the area was planted by the Forestry Commission after 1956 (Scarlett 1988). The village was a close community and cooperation at major events such as harvesting and sheep clipping continued into recent times.

A spring, the *Fuaran ruadh*, served the whole community of Insh. This was regarded as a wishing well, 'a great big stone with a hole in it' which never went dry, and it attracted numerous visitors, especially at holiday times. There was also a drinking trough for horses and cattle by the road bridge. The hard-surfaced area by the road in the middle of the village, now used as a parking lot, was known as The Green. As late as the turn of the century, drovers used to stop here and slaughter one of their beasts to sell the beef to village wives (Ch).

Two houses only were named on the 1903 map: Soillerie and Croft Martin. The same map indicates a limekiln, one of several whose remains can still be found. There were two schools, one for boys and one for girls. The girls' school was close by the bridge, where discarded high boots and ink wells are still found from time to time (RG). Around 1906-14 the two schools together boasted two teachers and a roll of up to thirty pupils, who came from as far afield as Tolvah in Glen Feshie. Chrissie Shaw (BOHP 1984) recalled walking over the hill to school at Insh every day: 'The weather didn't deter us at all.' Only those from as far away as Gaick Lodge had to board out in winter time, because the road up Glen Tromie was frequently impassable for long spells (Ch). Pupils moved on to Kingussie High School at the age of thirteen.

A smithy existed near the bridge in the cottage now occupied by Mrs. Chisholm, and there was another blacksmith in a now vanished dwelling beyond Lynachlaggan. The site near the bridge is prone to flooding by the burn and, on at least one occasion, the whole of the blacksmith's gear was washed away downstream. Pieces of it are still found in the ground from time to time. More recently, flooding here was so severe that potatoes were actually washed out of the ground (Ch).

An inn or hotel, in a building close by the post box and telephone kiosk, existed in the first half of the century (BOHP 1984: WMcD). A post office

survived until comparatively recent times, initially at Soillerie and later at Rose Cottage (HW). The quick access to Kingussie afforded by the motor car was responsible for the demise of these facilities. Today it is scarcely possible to credit the parochialism and lack of local movement which Richard Perry described as recently as 1948:

> 'To the inhabitants of Kingussie, little more than three miles distant [from Drumguish], any place east of the Spey is beyond the pale. Some there are who have lived all their lives in that market town and do not know where Drumguish lies, and to the best of my knowledge no native of Kingussie has passed east through Drumguish in our time.'

In the days before holiday homes, a few summer visitors were taken into village houses, but traffic through the village was very limited. The road was metalled by the 1950s, although narrower than today, and a permanent roadman was employed to clean the ditches and scythe the adjacent banks. Tinkers still visited the village at this time and did odd jobs such as hoeing turnips (HW).

Most of the houses of the original village of Insh have survived. The only ones to have disappeared completely are a couple of low, stone cottages by the hedge east of Ivy Cottage. These had gone by the 1950s (HW). The RSPB volunteers' bothy behind Ivy Cottage was formerly known as 'Buidhe's Cottage' and the old right of way running up from here to the old road along the modern pylon line was 'Buidhe's Road'. The origin of these names is no longer known (Ch). A number of new houses and holiday homes have been built around the village in recent years.

Insh Meadows or Marshes

The writer of the first Statistical Account for Kingussie (Anderson 1790) observed that 'Grazing seems to be the only kind of farming proper for this place', but this has not deterred people at various times from attempting, often successfully, to drain the land and improve its agricultural potential. Shaw (1760) believed that the floodplain of the Spey was probably farmed from the Middle Ages, producing hay from the rank grasses growing on the sour, wet, undrained ground. He quoted an English traveller, who in 1702 noted the small black cattle that were the main produce of Highland farms. The grain harvest consisted chiefly of oats and barley and the little winter hay that was made came from the natural, marshland grasses (Shaw 1760). This bog-hay had only two thirds the value of sown hay and was more difficult to harvest. It was usually reaped in August. Potatoes, a recent addition to the crofters' oat-based diet in Shaw's time, tended to be harmed by early and late frosts. Peas suffered even more acutely, with often only a third of the crop surviving (Shaw 1760). The lack of fresh, green vegetables made scurvy a familiar disease in the Highlands well into the Twentieth Century (RG).

The first efforts at drainage were made in the mid Eighteenth Century (Shaw 1760). John Maclean, the first innkeeper of the new Pitmain Inn, instigated drainage measures around Kingussie Farm in the 1790s, digging ditches, grubbing up alders and willows, enclosing fields and embanking the Spey (Dixon 1991a). The Rev. John Robertson, offering advice on the improvement of Highland agriculture in 1808, commended 'the spirited exertions made to bank off the River Spey, and bring these extensive links of rich soil into cultivation . Urging the construction of deeper and better drains, he praised the quality of the bog-hay produced here and even noted the positive, fertilising effect of the sediments washed down by the floods. All that was necessary was to prevent the ground becoming waterlogged (Robertson 1808).

Shaw (1760) indicated how unmanageable the undrained meadows could be: 'The soil is a sandy slime in the meadows. Storms are frequent and frosts uncommonly intense, heavy falls of rain are frequent in harvest months and crops are always uncertain. Due to its altitude, the climate is naturally cold. The low meadows produce noxious vapours - Rheumatisms and Consumptions are frequent. The habitations are mean black earthen hovels, darkened by smoke and dripping upon every shower. Barley, oats, rye and potato are produced on cultivated ground.' It is interesting that the writer of the 1835 Statistical Account could observe a decrease in the frequency and intensity of these valley fogs consequent upon drainage of the marshes (Shepherd 1835).

Some idea of what the early engineers had to contend with is given by a contemporary account of the great flood of 3-4 August 1829: 'The western boundary of the fall of rain seems to have been about the line of the River Calder (Newtonmore). About Belleville [Balavil] and the Invereshie estate the meadows were covered to the extent of 5 miles long by 1 mile broad and both land and embankments of those belonging to Mr MacPherson Grant on the right of the Spey were much destroyed' (Lauder 1829).

Much experiment was required before the early attempts at drainage met with success. 'Several hundred pounds' were spent shortly before 1790 on a misguided attempt to drain Loch Insh, 'which, had it succeeded, would have been a great advantage to the county', but eventually it was realised that the angle of the valley floor below the loch was insufficient to allow it to empty (Anderson 1790). Slow progress was made during the Nineteenth Century. For instance, the lands around Lochandhu on the Balavil estate were covered in a thick belt of natural birch until the Macphersons uprooted the trees and converted the ground into arable land in 1860 (Longmuir 1860). By the turn of the century, much of the land had been brought under some sort of cultivation. Perry (1948) wrote that 'At one time the ten thousand acres of the Meadows between Loch Insh and the bridge at Ruthven produced the heaviest crops of oats, roots and hay on Speyside.'

The OS map of 1903 shows highly managed estates at Insh and Balavil and indicates a much smaller extent of land as liable to floods than is the case today. This area includes parts of the Invertromie and Gordonhall sections of the RSPB reserve (among the few areas which were never

farmed or grazed - AMcG) and small pockets of land between the railway and the river below the site of the modern-day Highland Wildlife Park. The large area presently liable to floods to the south of the Spey between Tromie Bridge and Loch Insh was apparently safe ninety years ago, when the local naturalist and wildfowler, H.B. Macpherson of Balavil, lamented the deleterious effects of 'the improved methods of draining which are now in vogue' upon the wildfowl population of the meadows (Macpherson 1903a). Local people referred (and generally still refer) to the area as 'Insh Meadows' (e.g. BOHP 1984: JF & AMcG); the name 'Insh Marshes' has no basis in tradition.

By 1903 there were twelve footbridges and two tracks on the meadows below Insh village and a large area of willow carr had appeared. Between the publication of the 1872 and 1903 OS maps, the Spey was forced into its modern course, with the reclamation of Ballochbuie Island opposite Kingussie and the resulting creation of an oxbow lake along its earlier line of flow. The modern parish boundary continues to follow the river's earlier course here.

Other alterations to the river's course had been caused by the construction of the railway from Perth to Inverness a few years before. The Spey used to enter Loch Insh close to the mouth of Dunachton Burn, well north of its present mouth, but was diverted southwards in a sharp S-bend when large quantities of spoil were extracted from the area to bank up the railway line above Dunachton Fen (NA). The 1910 *Handbook to the Highland Railway* praised the 'extensive and costly embankments' below Kingussie which protected the railway from flooding, as well as noting an abundance of wildfowl, tall reeds and water lilies in the area (Inverness Northern Chronicle 1910).

Around 1930, the road from Kingussie to Ruthven was raised by fourteen feet to bring it above the level of all but the most exceptional floods. Previously it had not been unusual for the road to be blocked for a fortnight at a time, forcing a lengthy diversion to the bridge at Ralia beyond Newtonmore (BOHP 1984: DMcD). The road from Insh to Kincraig has always been prone to flooding at Kincraig Bridge and along the eastern shore of Loch Insh. In one major flood early this century, the water is said to have reached the belly of a pony pulling a trap along this road to collect visitors to Insh from Kincraig station (HW).

In their late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century agricultural heyday, the meadows below Insh were protected from all but the most exceptional floods by a sluice in the 'canal' (as the main drain was generally known) at Coull (NA). This was closed when the Spey reached a certain height, to prevent the entry of water onto the meadows when the river, obstructed by gravel banks at the Feshie confluence, began to 'flow backwards' above Loch Insh. This sluice and associated floodbanks required continual maintenance, at least after every winter's floods. Access to the area was facilitated by a small railway, with a bogie to carry materials quarried on the river side of the hillock by Coull House to the river bank. Some of the rails were later used to bridge ditches (NA). Some remains of the sluice can still be seen by the bridge on the road to Coull, but it was rendered useless when the banks ceased to be maintained, as water can now enter the meadows round the other side of the Coull moraine hillock.

Control of flooding was made easier for a time earlier this century, when a flash flood caused by local thunderstorms around Kingussie, at a time when the Feshie was not in spate, proved strong enough to sweep away all the obstructing gravel bars at the Spey-Feshie confluence. Water levels were lowered by about three feet in the area upstream, until silt washed down by the Feshie began to accumulate once again. It is possible that the exclusion of water from the meadows by the Coull sluice may also have hindered the formation of blockages at the mouth of the Feshie, by forcing a greater volume of water straight through Loch Insh and on downstream (NA).

A fairly complete picture of the agricultural past of the meadows may be pieced together from diverse sources. There is nothing to suggest that corn crops were taken from anywhere other than the improved fields of the Dell of Killiehuntly, but hay was cropped within living memory from areas as wet as the present Coull section of the RSPB reserve (AMcG). Hay and rushes were cut together, and it was left to the horses and cattle to weed out the rushes when the dried hay was given to them as winter feed. Hand scythes continued to be used for cutting hay long after the First World War and were the only really satisfactory method in these very wet areas. Wheeled, horse-drawn mowers (binders) were later introduced, but the wheels left deep ruts in the waterlogged ground with the result that harvesting became more difficult from one year to the next. The light tractors introduced in the 1940s proved even less suited to the wet meadows, although by this time the wettest areas such as Coull had long been abandoned (AMcG, HW).

Cultivation of such marginal land required enormous effort and constant vigilance. The factor of Invereshie Estate, of which the Insh Meadows were a part, would organise teams of local farmers whenever necessary to repair damage to floodbanks and drainage ditches. Bridges, of which there were many, partly to facilitate the progress of teams of wildfowlers (see Part Three), had often to be repaired or replaced every spring (NA). It was not unusual for horses and carts carrying materials for this to become seriously stuck in the muddy ground (AMcG). Even areas not shown as 'liable to floods' on the 1903 map were prone to the occasional inundation, with potentially disastrous results if the flood occurred while the hay was still stooked on the meadows. Entire crops could be washed away in this fashion and there are even tales of livestock being lost to the floods when they were not lifted from the low ground quickly enough (BOHP 1984: JF and T&JG). With up to 700 cattle grazing the meadows between Old Milton and Coull (NA), the potential losses were enormous, and all the more damaging, because small farmers of the inter-war period did not normally take out insurance against them (AMcG).

Most of the hay cut from the meadows was used as winter feed by the farmers who cut it, but there was also an annual hay auction, organised by Invereshie Estate, where farmers from adjacent areas could come and buy as much as they needed in small lots. Occasionally they would come

from as far afield as Glen Truim. The keepers of neighbouring estates, such as Gaick, took advantage of this opportunity to obtain winter feed for the ponies used in stalking and for their own dairy cattle. They could not produce enough hay of their own to last the winter, but some hay was apparently cropped at Gaick on the flats around Loch an t-Seilich (AMcG, Ch).

Large-scale maps of the period reveal that all the different sections of the meadows had their own names. These often related to the tenant (e.g. 'Bell's Park', 'Kennedy's Park'). However, map names are not always those in everyday use, and by the 1950s the Kennedys of Soillerie were grazing 'Inveruglas Meadow' but not, apparently, 'Kennedy's Park'. The belt of land by the river behind the Insh oxbow lake is shown on maps as 'Barbeg Meadow', but was always known locally as the Flower Meadow because of the wild lupins that it supported (HW, Ch).

The decline of the meadows as an area of agricultural production is charted by Perry (1948) and occurred chiefly between the two world wars. The flood banks had always been prone to damage and decay followed rapidly once regular maintenance had ceased. The banks were initially breached by rabbits, whose numbers reached plague proportions in the pre-myxomatosis years, and the damage was then aggravated by sheep and cattle seeking access to water. The most marginal areas, such as Coull, were abandoned first (all the bridges were down here by the 1950s - HW) and the creeping incursion of sedges and willow scrub began to gather pace. Small amounts of hay were still cut after the war, but by 1948 only one field was worked (by Alec MacGregor of Tromie Mills). The general introduction of tractors tolled the death knell of the old hay-cropping regime, since early tractors could not cope with the wet, heavy ground (HW). Farming the meadows had quite simply become uneconomical (AMcG). Grazing continued into the 1950s, especially on the drier belt of land immediately behind the river bank, but, as early as 1948, Richard Perry was able to write that 'Nature [has] taken over from Man the agriculturalist' (Perry 1948).

There is much controversy surrounding the recent history of flooding and changes in water levels on the Spey floodplain over the past fifty years. Many areas formerly cropped for hay now appear entirely unsuitable, but it is difficult to say what the effects would be if flood banks were restored and drainage ditches reopened, especially if traditional methods of cutting by hand could be employed. Thomas Gair, who farmed Invertromie until the mid 1980s, believed that flooding had been slowed since the construction of the Spey Dam at Laggan. His meadows had steadily been drying out since the early 1970s and he no longer undertook drainage work (BOHP 1984: T&JG). But his predecessor at Invertromie had abandoned one meadow in the 1930s because of frequent flood damage (BOHP 1984:JF). The automatic water level recorder at Kincraig Bridge indicates no long-term change in water levels there over the forty years that it has been in place, but this does not rule out local changes in water levels on the meadows themselves, resulting from the decay of the drainage ditches. A number of local residents believe that the area has become perceptibly wetter during their lifetime but there is no general consensus.

Loch Insh

The loch is formed by the accumulation of gravel and boulders brought down by the River Feshie and damming the course of the Spey. It acts to some extent as a regulator of flooding further down the valley. During the great flood of 1829, 'The beautiful Loch Inch, 3 miles long by 1 mile broad, was raised between 7 and 8 feet - an astonishing accumulation for so wide an expanse of water' (Lauder 1829).

Although the loch contains a permanent island (Tom Dubh), according to Shaw (1760), it acquired its name (*inch / innis* - island) 'because the river Spey sometimes floweth around the hill on which the church standeth'. There has been a church on the eastern shore since the Seventh Century and the site may have been used for religious purposes by the pre-Christian inhabitants of the area. This church, known from earliest times as the Chapel of the Swans, was founded by St Adamnan, one of the earliest missionaries of Celtic Christianity to the Highlands. The Gaelic name for the place is *Tom an Eoin* (knoll of the birds), after the whooper swans which come here every winter and were revered for their mystical abilities on land, water and air. The church is dedicated to St Adamnan and is famous for its Celtic bronze bell. Legend has it that the bell was once stolen by a thief. While on his way to Perth he heard the bell repeatedly crying *'Tom an Eoin, Tom an Eoin'*, before the bell flew back to its rightful home. A popular annual pilgrimage was made to the church, in honour of St Columba.

At some stage a mound was built onto the knoll of the church to stop it becoming isolated during floods. Before the bridge at Kincraig was built, there was a ferry here and the old name for Kincraig was 'Boat of Insh'.

Loch Insh was the scene for a romantic tragedy in bygone times. The story of 'The Raven's Stone' tells how a young couple met in Tor Wood at the head of the loch. When the young lady eloped, a battle ensued and the youth was killed. The girl then killed herself over his dead body. The lovers are said to be buried in an unmarked grave in Tor Wood (Gray 1987).

Lynachlaggan

The name Lynachlaggan is most likely derived from *loinn* (glade) and *claggan* which is said to mean skull or head, although alternative etymologies involving *claggan* (small bell) or *clochan* (stone house) are possible. The bridge over the small burn running through the wood was known as *Glac* Bridge (*Glac* = a handful, or the palm of the hand, or a hollow).

The 1903 OS map indicates a nine-hole golf course in Lynachlaggan Wood. This apparently flourished until the inter-war period, but there is little sign of it today. A few treeless still exist, possibly on the sites of once regularly maintained greens and fairways. Patterns of growth in the bracken on the upper parts of the course may also date from the time of the golf course (O'Toole 1991).

Two obvious tracks are shown on the same map. One starts opposite Ivy Cottage, Insh, and runs down to and then along the boundary of marsh and wood to Lynachlaggan. The other leaves the B970 road about 150m south of the present RSPB Lynachlaggan gate, passes onto rough grassland and heath and continues along field boundaries, later dropping to the edge of the marsh which it then follows to Coull. These tracks may date from a time when animals were grazed on the Coull flood meadows, which were abandoned well before the Second World War.

Fragmentary remains of two houses may be found above the old golf course not far from the second track and traces of other buildings are discernible nearby, possibly the trading post of Balnacraig or Farletter indicated in this area on a late eighteenth-century map. None of these dwellings is shown on the 1870 or 1903 OS map. A full account of these ruins is given by O'Toole (1991).

The following information derives chiefly from a conversation with Hamish Windross, who has farmed at Lynachlaggan for over thirty years.

Lynachlaggan Farm was given to the Kennedy brothers, uncles of the present farmer, by the Forestry Commission around 1960, on the retirement of the previous tenant farmer, John MacBean. This was by way of compensation for the loss of hill ground attached to the Kennedys' farm of Soillerie. The hill ground of Lynachlaggan was not included in the exchange. This land, which had extended over the watershed towards Coramstilmore and was unfenced except for the march with Inveruglas, was now also afforested. Lynachlaggan Wood remained part of the farm holding until Hamish Windross gave up his agricultural rights to the RSPB recently.

Farming practices appear to have changed remarkably little in the past fifty years or so. Like most neighbouring farms, Lynachlaggan has always been devoted primarily to livestock, especially sheep, with only a small acreage of arable land for fodder crops. The system of 'five-yearly rotation' typical of the region has generally been employed: oats are sown
in spring on freshly-ploughed ground ('lea oats') and harvested the same autumn, leaving stubble. Dung is applied as fertiliser and the field supports a crop of turnips in the second year of the rotation. The resulting 'black ground' is again sown with oats in the third spring, but this time it is undersown with grass, so that a grass field is left once the oats are harvested. Hay is then taken for the next four years, after which the cycle begins again. The amount of grain grown has declined, as sheep are no longer given bruised oats as winter feed, but there has been no significant change in amounts of fertiliser applied.

Mechanisation of agricultural processes has occurred slowly but steadily since the Second World War. John MacBean of Lynachlaggan is thought to have been the first farmer locally to introduce a tractor (in wartime) and he soon began to hire out its services. However, the traditional Clydesdale horses and Highland garrons continued to be used for much routine farmwork into the 1960s, especially for shifting trailer loads of firewood, turnips and so on.

Combine harvesters did not make their appearance here until the 1970s. Before then, harvesting was done using a binder - first a horse-drawn mechanism powered by the rotation of its own large wheel as it moved along, and later a version drawn and powered by a tractor. The driver had constantly to adjust the height of the binder platform, to take account of hillocks and hollows in the fields. The binder produced ready-tied sheafs, still partly green, which were then arranged into loose stooks of about eight sheafs and left in the fields to dry. As soon as possible, small ricks were built, since the stooks were vulnerable to damage by bad weather and vermin (rats, crows, pheasants and small birds). It was not uncommon for the sheafs to remain in the fields until December before being brought into the stackyard. Many farms had their own barn mills for threshing, but use was also made of a much more efficient travelling threshing mill, brought by contractors from Grantown. Significant amounts of grain were lost at every stage of the process, resulting in a ready food source for a wide variety of granivorous birds.

Invertromie Farm

Invertromie Farm lies south-west of the confluence of the Rivers Spey and Tromie, between Kingussie and Tromie Bridge. In the early Eighteenth Century, it belonged to Macpherson of Pitmain, who sold it to the Macphersons of Invereshie in 1758 (Shaw 1760). It later passed to the Ballindalloch Estate, from which it was leased in the first half of this century by Donald Fraser, who combined his farmwork with a joinery business. After the Second World War the farm passed to Glen Tromie Estate and was tenanted by the Gair family (who had previously farmed at the Dell of Killiehuntly) until its acquisition by the RSPB in 1986. Information about its recent farming history is unusually abundant. BOHP (1984) contains lengthy interviews with Donald Fraser's daughter Jean (b. 1915) and Thomas and Jessie Gair, and Jessie Gair provided further recollections in conversations with M. Gardner (1986). The following account is based upon these sources.

Before the Second World War, Invertromie was a mixed farm - 'a very average mixed farm for the district' according to Jean Fraser. Sheep and black cattle, the traditional Aberdeen Angus/ Shorthorn crossbreed, were the economic mainstays and the annual September calf sale in Kingussie

was a highlight of the calendar. After calving they would be put out to graze the wild meadows by the Spey. Most of the cattle wintered at Invertromie, where there was room for approximately 24 cows with their calves in the byre plus a shed for stirks (yearlings), but some were sent to winter in the Laigh of Moray. As late as the 1920s they were walked there, only later being taken by train. The Gairs followed a similar regime in the post-war years, although now trucks began to be used for transporting livestock and cattle were sometimes sent for sale at Inverness.

The Frasers kept blackfaced sheep on the hill run above the B970, only bringing them onto enclosed land below the road by day in winter. Breeding ewes from Etteridge near Newtonmore wintered here and lambed before being sent back up the strath. For a time they were looked after by Alan Kennedy of Lynachlaggan (HW). More recently, the Gairs took in about 400 gimmers (one-year-old lambs) each winter, again frequently from Etteridge, in return for a small rent. These sheep left in April and the Gairs did not graze the moor in summer. By contrast, when they farmed the Dell of Killiehuntly, they sent most of their sheep to Nairn for the winter, since this farm had no hill ground and only a small flock could be sustained in the woods when the grazing meadows were unusable.

Dairy cattle were not an important feature in the area. About three were kept to supply the needs of the farm itself, but dairy produce was not sold. Donald Fraser often bought his dairy cattle in Lochaber, believing the western animals to be hardier because they were wintered outside. His wife continued to make her own butter until the family left Invertromie in 1942 and was reckoned the last farmer's wife in the district to do so. Cheese and crowdie were also made at home. The Gairs at pre-war Dell of Killiehuntly behaved similarly, although they also sold half a basket of crowdie each week to a local grocer. Invertromie also supported a few pigs, which were killed in the autumn. Bacon and salt pork were kept in a whitewashed cold store behind the house, which was built out into the burn to keep the temperature constantly cool.

Like the dairy cows, the arable land at Invertromie produced crops chiefly for domestic consumption. Only a small proportion of the acreage was used for arable crops at any time, although the six-yearly rotational system that was commonly employed meant that much of the farmland was in arable use at one time or another. By 1968 a mere 11½ acres was sown, typically with oats, turnips, rape and potatoes, but there had been more arable land in earlier times. With abundant farmyard manure, there was rarely any need to buy fertilisers from outside, although 'guano' was sometimes applied. Potatoes and turnips were grown and pitted for use as winter cattle feed. There was some barley sown, but oats were the main cereal crop. They were taken to Tromie Mills to be made into oatmeal for domestic use. (See section on Tromie Mills, below.) In later years some oatmeal was also sold. The other main crop was hay, both clover hay and meadow hay, which could be seriously damaged if the Spey flooded while the cut crop was lying on the riverside meadows. Both Jean Fraser and Thomas Gair told of such crops being washed away over the floodbank.

Invertromie and the neighbouring farms were remarkably self-sufficient in the pre-war period. Because Donald Fraser was absent for much of the day in his work as a joiner, he employed at least three farm workers - a grieve and two farmhands and sometimes a shepherd as well. These workers came and went with the twice-yearly Whitsun and Michaelmas terms, but they all lived on the farm in a bothy and cottages below the farmhouse and were paid partly in farm produce such as oatmeal, milk and firewood. The nearest vets were in Forres and Blair Atholl. They were rarely summoned except for major operations like castrating bullocks, when the vet would arrive by train at Kingussie and be met by the farm cart for a whole day's work. The blacksmith was Jean Fraser's uncle John. He would come at once to mend broken farm implements, since 'If it was a good day the farmers didn't want to lose the day' (BOHP 1984: JF). Both Invertromie and the Dell of Killiehuntly had their own threshing mills. The latter was water-powered, but the mill at Invertromie ran from an engine in the steading, which also powered a circular saw for cutting birch logs. In winter, local farmers clubbed together to keep the roads open with horse-drawn snowploughs. There was a regular rota: the Dell of Killiehuntly cleared the road to Tromie Bridge, Killiehuntly then took over as far as the Invertromie gate, Invertromie was responsible for the section from there to Gordonhall, and so on.

Even after the Second World War, farming here was largely unmechanised. The Gairs only acquired a tractor in 1949 and, without a muckspreader, animal manure was applied by hand. Later they bought some machinery of their own, notably a roller, hay turner and a small harvester, but eventually it proved cheaper to bring in outside contractors from Grantown for harvesting. Nonetheless the farm remained essentially a family concern and only casual outside labour was employed until the death of one of the Gair brothers necessitated taking on a full-time farmhand.

By the time even of Jean Fraser's childhood at Invertromie, farming in this area was well past its nineteenth-century heyday. No further bog land was reclaimed after the First World War and the 'main meadow' and 'back meadow' towards the river were progressively encroached upon by rushes during the 1920s and 1930s, although they continued to provide summer pasture for cattle. Only one meadow by the River Tromie, situated opposite Tromie Mills and known somewhat misleadingly as 'The Island', was reckoned free from flood danger. It was often used for horses and in spring held a 'wonderful' display of wild flowers (BOHP 1984:JF). Similarly, the Frasers made no attempt to reclaim or improve the moorland areas of Invertromie Farm. Indeed, in the long agricultural depression of the early part of this century, there can have been little incentive to improve yields or increase the area under production. As Jean Fraser recalled, 'Farming in some of these days was pretty grim...pretty deadly' (BOHP 1984:JF).

During their time at Invertromie, the Gairs broke in the upper field opposite Torcroy Cottage which had previously been rough grazing like the rest of the land bordering the B970 towards Tromie Bridge. This was done by cleaning, ploughing and harrowing; then a few crops of potatoes

and turnips were sown, and finally oats, before the field was ready to yield hay. Eventually it provided winter feed. However, the park was later re-seeded with grass, which proved to be of a mixture which sheep and cattle did not like, and the land was allowed to revert to heath.

In 1968 the Gairs gave up farming at Invertromie. By then the land comprised 11 acres first-year grass, 3½ acres second-year grass and 11½ acres ploughed and cultivated land. The remainder was rough grazing. Responsibility for the farm passed directly to the owner of Glen Tromie Estate, who arranged that nearby Ruthven Farm (which he also owned) should look after its interests. For a few years, turnips and hay were taken from the better parks, but ultimately the burden of running two farms proved too much and Invertromie Farm fell into disrepair. Fields which had previously been kept clean by spring burning were invaded by weeds, especially thistles, and buildings and fences fell into disrepair. The RSPB took a lease on the meadows and then, in 1986, bought the farm outright. By this time the farmland had suffered more than a decade of neglect.

Cladh Invertromie (Invertromie burial ground)

A small, disused graveyard is situated to the west of the River Tromie about a mile south of its confluence with the Spey. A detailed description of the site is given by Harman (1988), whose conclusions are summarised below.

The surviving remains are fragmentary, consisting of the foundations of several walls and a few overgrown gravestones. Little is known of the site's history, although it is acknowledged to be of considerable antiquity and was in use as recently as 1922. Jean Fraser (b.1915) recalled this last interment: the cortege had to use the farm access road because the old track through the birchwood was too overgrown (BOHP 1984:JF).

The graveyard seems to have had its origins in a chapel dedicated to the early Celtic saint, Colman, although it is doubtful whether any remains of such a chapel are identifiable today. Malcolm Fraser, whose grandfather farmed at Invertromie, knew the site as St Colman's. He was unaware of the name *Cille nan Ceatharnach* (graveyard or chapel of soldiers, heroes or freebooters) given in the 1870 Ordnance Survey Name Book from the information of Mr Fleming of Ballindalloch and Mr Macpherson of Killiehuntly. The burial ground was chiefly used by the inhabitants of Glen Tromie and Drumguish, but other communities to the south of the Spey made occasional use of it when flooding prevented access to the graveyards at Kingussie and Kincraig. Jean Fraser spoke of the practice of placing iron bars over each gravestone in order to deter body-snatchers (BOHP 1984). Another long disused graveyard is said to have existed across the road from Ruthven Barracks. It probably served the former burgh of Ruthven (Ch).

A story is recounted by Sinton (1906) of the young widow of the tenant of Invertromie who, remarried against her will to the tacksman of Ardbroilach (just north of Kingussie), used to walk up the hill behind her new home to gaze across to her first husband's grave at Invertromie. She is said to have died singing an elegy for him, 'Red Duncan's son', which she herself had composed. These events are thought to have occurred early in the Eighteenth Century.

Tromie Mills

The water-powered mill on this site, on Dell of Killiehuntly land below Tromie Bridge, was of some antiquity, although it replaced an even older mill at the site now known as Old Milton. For more than a century from 1843, it was run by the MacGregor family, formerly of Boat of Insh (Kincraig), and the following remarks mainly derive from interviews with the last miller, Alexander MacGregor (b.1903), in BOHP (1984) and conducted by myself (1993).

The mill served a wide area. It was used by all the crofters of Insh and Drumguish and by some from further afield, such as the Shaws of Tolvah in Glen Feshie (BOHP 1984:CS) and Mr. MacDonald, blacksmith of Laggan (AMcG). Both Chrissie Shaw, then of Tolvah and Jean Fraser, then of Invertromie, recalled the generally high esteem in which 'Mr MacGregor's oatmeal' was held in the inter-war period (BOHP 1984:CS & JF).

Milling was not a full-time occupation for the MacGregors. Like the majority of Highland families, they were also small farmers, and Alexander MacGregor won a number of prizes for the cattle which he bred over a period of more than twenty years. Like many others (See Part One above), he was well aware of the beneficial effects of cattle to the land they grazed upon (AMcG).

Before about 1850 there was no kiln at the mill and people had to dry their own meal before bringing it for milling. Later there were separate meal and threshing mills. Two grades of oatmeal were produced: a superior meal for human consumption and a basic 'hash' for animal feed. Alexander MacGregor recalled the mill being especially busy at harvest-time and before the ends of the six-monthly terms for which agricultural workers were customarily engaged, since many of them were paid partly in meal. The site of the mill is now occupied by the small Speyside Distillery.

Part Three: The Natural History of the Insh Marshes area in past times

Apart from Harvie-Brown and Buckley (1895), none of our sources from previous centuries was primarily concerned with the flora and fauna of the region, but a fair amount of information can nonetheless be gleaned. Apart from the floodplain of the Spey, the whole area was heavily forested until the Seventeenth Century. Badenoch lay well within the boundaries of the great Caledonian pine forest which extended from the Trossachs to the Kyle of Sutherland and from Gairloch to lowland Aberdeenshire (Darling & Boyd 1964). Place names such as Kingussie (*Ceannghuithsaiche* - 'the head of the pine wood' - Shepherd 1835), Drumguish (*Druim-a-ghuibhais* - 'the ridge of the pines' - Perry 1948) and Rothiemurchus (*Rath mor a ghuithsach* - 'the large plain of pines' - Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895) hint at the former character of the district. The pine woods were intermixed with birch, with alder and willow on the wetter valley floors and rowan on the hillsides.

Wild boar persisted into the Middle Ages and a few wolves still roamed the forests as late as the early Eighteenth Century (Darling & Boyd 1964). In 1563, Mary, Queen of Scots is said to have killed 360 red deer, 5 wolves and some roe deer during a hunting foray into Badenoch. She returned to Blair Castle 'delighted with the sport' (Anon. 1911). Much burning of the pinewoods took place in the later Middle Ages in barbaric attempts to exterminate the wolves and outlaws who alike found refuge in these vast, untracked forest expanses (Scottish N Rural Institute 1965).

A polecat was shot at Balavil in 1873 - the last definite record of this species in Badenoch (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Other characteristic mammals, such as pine marten and red squirrel, have recolonised the area from other parts of the country after a temporary absence (Darling & Boyd 1964). Wildcats were rare by 1895 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895) and still are, but they were probably commoner in medieval times. A legend of the Thirteenth Century tells of the Witch of Laggan (a cottage above Kingussie), who could turn herself into a wildcat at will, terrorising her neighbours and their animals (Gray 1987).

The destruction of the native pine forest has been a long-term process, taking place over more than a millenium from the Eighth Century to modern times (Darling & Boyd 1964). Much of the finest remaining timber was felled for warships in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus recalled how huge logs used to be dragged by horses to the rivers, then 'floated' down them when in spate, or tied together in rafts and poled across lochs, on their way to sawmills on lower Speyside or ships at the coast (Grant 1898). In Glen Einich, sluice gates were opened to release a flood when the foresters wanted to send logs down the Beanaidh Mor to the Spey (Perry 1948). This 'floating' came to an end during the Nineteenth Century, when more bridges were built across the river which huge logs riding a spate could easily demolish.

The destruction of pinewoods was bemoaned by the author of the 1852 *Guide to the Highlands of Speyside,* although Glenmore Forest was by then 'fast replenishing itself' (Murdoch 1852). Several late eighteenth-century landlords, notably Jane, Duchess of Gordon and James Macpherson, translator of 'Ossian', undertook extensive planting programmes, mostly of fir and larch. Macpherson, however, was also responsible for the destruction of areas of birch on the Balavil marshes in order to drain them for arable land (Shepherd 1835 - p.66, Macdonald 1835 - p.84). Macdonald (1835) noted the prevalence of the dwarf birch, *Betula nana*, on the moors above Balavil.

Most early references to the animal life of the region naturally concern species which were shot for food or sport, and indeed some local people today admit that interest in wildlife for many was confined to such species (e.g. N.A.). However, this is not the case with the whooper swans which have wintered on the lochs and marshes of Badenoch 'from time immemorial'(Macdonald 1835). The author of the 1835 Statistical Account for Alvie gave an etymology of the name as *ealabh-i*, or Swan Island. Two hundred years ago, between seventy and a hundred swans are said to have wintered on Loch Insh (Anderson 1790). Associated with St Adamnan and his chapel on the'Hill of the Birds', *Tom an Eoin*, these swans were held sacred by the local folk, with a curse the reward for anyone who harmed them (Little 1974). The birds did not arrive back from breeding grounds in Iceland until after the first snowfall on the hills or the first severe frost in the strath (Perry 1948).

Other wildlife tended to be less fortunate. Fish have long attracted attention in Badenoch and Strathspey and the authors of the 1790 and 1835 Statistical Accounts for Kingussie noted the presence of trout, pike, salmon and char in the Spey and its tributaries (Anderson 1790, Macdonald 1835). Fishing rights have been guarded as jealously as deer and grouse, and poaching salmon with spears was part of the crofters' way of life. In the Eighteenth Century, more salmon were taken with the spear than with the rod (Gordon 1792). It was not uncommon to catch fifty or sixty salmon in the River Tromie in a single October night in the mid Nineteenth Century. The fish were salted and stored for winter use (MacBean 1951). Shepherd (1835) also mentions fresh-water mussels, containing pearls, which were to be found in the river.

Poaching has continued into recent times. Mrs. Chisholm of Insh, widow of the post-war water bailiff for the reaches of the Spey immediately above Loch Insh, recalls a number of episodes involving the illegal placing of nets on river and loch by night. The chief culprits were Fife coalmen, who used to set their nets on their outward delivery journeys and retrieve them when heading south again, and Aberdonians who would claim to be in the area to visit girlfriends working in the hotels.

The other part of the water bailiff's job was to rid the river and loch of unwanted pike, which might necessitate the laying of nets across the entire width of Loch Insh. Pike of up to 18 pounds were caught. They were too bony to eat and were generally used as garden compost (Ch), or sometimes fed from boats to the otters which bred on Eilean Dubh (NA)..

Red and roe deer are both native to the district. Anderson (1790) remarked that both species were to be found 'in unfrequented places'. Red deer, like the roe, were originally forest animals, but adapted to a life in more open terrain as the extent of land under trees diminished. These animals have always been hunted, but the establishment of formal deer forests, with shooting lodges and seasonal tenants, was a development of the Nineteenth Century. The only deer forest in existence by 1835 was that of Gaick (Shepherd 1835 - p.66). Deer numbers were increasing by 1860 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895) and around this time, many more managed deer forests were created. The traditional, haphazard and barbaric method of hunting with deerhounds was replaced by the more selective and individual approach of a particular animal by small parties armed with rifles, the method used today. Regulation of deerstalking by Acts of Parliament and, since 1959, by the Red Deer Commission, has further formalised procedures and numbers taken (Darling & Boyd 1964). Roe deer may have increased in recent years as a result of reafforestation: Perry (1948) knew of only one or two pairs in the Badan Dubh area before it was planted with conifers after 1956. They are quite common there now.

Control of mammals was essentially a job for keepers on the various estates. Their principal targets were weasels, stoats and foxes. Badgers too were subject to persecution. Gin traps were widely used until well after the Second World War (HW). But even the keepers could do little to reduce rabbit numbers during the inter-war period, once they had all but eliminated the main natural predator, the buzzard. The rabbit population only crashed in the 1950s with the advent of myxomatosis and, although numbers have since recovered substantially, so that many people again consider them a pest, they are still far from the plague proportions of fifty years ago.

When deer strayed onto valley farmland, as at Invertromie, the tenant farmer had to call the keeper from Glen Tromie. Similarly with foxes, the keepers exercised sufficient control and the Invertromie farmer had to do little. Only rats were dealt with on the farm, with poison (BOHP 1984:JF). Alasdair Mackintosh, retired head keeper on Ralia Estate, told BOHP (1984) how he used to follow a routine of vermin killing all through the winter, moving on to the destruction of fox dens around 20 April and then spending June and July preparing the hill paths and bothies for the shooting season (BOHP 1984:AMcK). Mrs. Chisholm on Insh, whose father-in-law was head keeper at Gaick at the turn of the century, recalls that 'dishes' of water used to be put out for grouse to drink in dry parts of the moor, and supplementary feeding of grouse was also not unknown.

Birdlife

The district's birdlife has attracted considerable attention over a long period. Apart from the whooper swans, whose special position in local folklore has already been noted, the earliest information that we possess comes from the Old Statistical Account, compiled between 1791 and 1799. The writer of the account for Alvie showed most interest, offering the following list of what was to be found in his parish with no claim to comprehensiveness: 'Of the feathered tribe, the linnet and goldfinch seldom appear here, though numerous along the coast. The swan, a variety of fishing-ducks or duckers, and the woodcock live here in winter, but retire in summer. The sky and sandy larks [ringed plover], sea-magpie [oystercatcher], lapwing, stonechatter, swallow, cuckoo, bat [!] and night-hawk [nightjar] remain here during the warm months, but disappear in winter; the last 5 are believed to be sleepers [i.e. hibernators].' (Gordon 1792 - p.382). All of these species except the nightjar still occur regularly in the area and most breed here. The same author gives an early record of a snow bunting: 'a bird of the size and make of a linnet, entirely white', which appeared in winter 1791.

More detailed and scientific works were not produced until half a century later. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) provide a full, general account and their information is supplemented by Baxter and Rintoul (1953). More local information comes from the naturalists H.B. Macpherson of Balavil and Richard Perry who lived at Drumguish in the 1940s. Henry Edward Brewster Macpherson who died in 1946, was a celebrated Highland naturalist and photographer whose book on the Home Life of the Golden Eagle was a standard work at the time. His obituary (Anon 1946) gives further details about his life and works.

Many local people believe that there has been a decline in the numbers of various bird species in the district since the days of their youth and they often attribute this to perceived changes in water levels on the meadows or to changes in agricultural practices. In the absence of reliable counts for earlier years, it is impossible to reach firm conclusions about this subject. People are often surprised on being told how many birds, especially wildfowl, are to be found in the area today, and it may be that the wildlife of the meadows was more widely familiar in former times, when the area was regularly visited by those involved in agricultural or shooting activities.

We possess most historical information about those bird families which were shot for sport or as vermin. Gamebirds attracted much attention in the past, as indeed they do today. [Red] grouse and ptarmigan were both said to be common in 1792, as were mountain hares. Blackcock and woodcock were present in smaller numbers (Gordon 1792, Anderson 1790). Since these remarks relate to the parishes of Alvie and Kingussie as a whole, it is impossible to be precise about exactly where these birds occurred. The writer for Alvie noted a recent decline in grouse and ptarmigan numbers, which he attributed 'more to the inclemency of the weather during the hatching season, than to the havock wrought by sportsmen'. This may refer to the medium-term cycles of population growth and decline which are characteristic of these species. Harvie-Brown and Buckley (1895) noted a decrease in grouse numbers in areas set aside as deer forest, attributing this to inadequate predator control by the keepers; however there was a corresponding increase in those areas managed as grouse moors, where crows and other 'vermin' were kept rigorously in check.

The 1852 *Guide to the Highlands of Speyside* recounts a strange story about a grouse from the moor near the Black Mill of Feshie, which 'built its nest in a niche near the mill hopper, 'much to the annoyance of the miller while filling the hopper with corn'. This incident, for which no date is given, inspired a Gaelic song (Murdoch 1852). Red grouse were indeed abundant in the area between Drumguish and the Feshie until it was planted with conifers after 1956. Birds from this grouse moor would occasionally come down in severe weather to feed on spilt grain in valley farmland (HW).

The Statistical Accounts make no mention of the other member of the grouse family occurring in the region today. The capercaillie was extinct in Scotland by c1780 and its successful reintroduction (near Loch Tay) was not achieved until 1837 (Thom 1986). The bird did not return to Badenoch until much later. A reintroduction attempt failed at Invereshie in 1873 and Badenoch and Strathspey seems eventually to have been colonised by Perthshire birds. These probably spread from Atholl by way of Drumochter. A hen was seen and a cock was shot in the unlikely surroundings of Dalwhinnie in 1881. There is no reliable evidence for the presence of capercaillies in Badenoch before 1895, although a few were seen in Rothiemurchus in earlier years (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). A century later, the bird is an established, if by no means common, member of the local avifauna. The birds probably benefited from afforestation of the moors south of the Spey from 1956 onwards, although Perry (1948) noted that they 'rarely came' to the much less extensive plantations around Drumguish at that time. Between 1945 and 1971, the shooting tenant at Invereshie, whose rights extended from Old Milton to Kincraig and east to the Feshie/Einich watershed, bagged 127 capers. The comparable figures for other gamebirds were: black grouse 81, red grouse 4857, ptarmigan 268. The last named was only shot up to 1952, when the shooting rights on the slopes of Sgoran Dubh were given up (Abel-Smith 1992). Blackgame used occasionally to occur in the birch woods around Coull (NA).

The introduced pheasant was well-established in the district by Harvie-Brown's time. It was abundant at Lynwilg and birds were reared at Dunachton near Kincraig (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Partridges may formerly have been more abundant, like many other birds which used to feed on the stubble fields after harvest. They would breed near Inveruglas, then move to the lower agricultural land later in the season (NA).

The history of raptors in the Highlands is intimately linked with that of gamebirds, owing to the intense persecution which they suffered in the Nineteenth Century in the interests of grouse preservation. One has to see the evidence of what was destroyed in order to appreciate how rich in birds of prey the Highlands must have been less than two hundred years ago. The following list of what was shot as 'vermin' between Whitsunday 1837 and Whitsunday 1840 on the single estate of Glen Garry in Inverness-shire illustrates the point vividly:

'246	Martens	78	Merlins
198	Wild Cats	71	Short-eared Owls
106	Polecats	63	Goshawks
67	Badgers	35	Long-eared Owls
48	Otters	27	Sea Eagles
475	Ravens	18	Ospreys
462	Kestrels	15	Golden Eagles
371	Rough-legged Buzzards	11	Hobbys
285	Common Buzzards	6	Gyrfalcons
275	Kites	5	Marsh Harriers
98	Peregrine Falcons	3	Honey Buzzards'
92	Hen-Harriers		

'Other vermin destroyed: 11 Foxes, 301 Stoats and Weasels, 78 House Cats, 1431 Hooded or Carrion Crows, 3 Barn Owls, 8 Magpies, 7 'Orange-legged Falcons'. (Perry 1948, Pearsall 1950)

The details of this list may be open to question, since the people concerned are unlikely to have been experts in identifying the less familiar species and keepers who were paid bounties for each bird shot may have been tempted to inflate the size of their bags. However, some corroboration of seemingly dubious records is provided by Baxter and Rintoul (1953), who quoted a figure of seventy golden eagles killed on Deeside in the decade 1776-86, evidence of breeding goshawks in Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Forests in the mid Nineteenth Century and a record of 'considerable numbers' of rough-legged buzzards (normally a scarce winter visitor) at Dunkeld in 1840. Perry commented:

> 'In this year of 1946 there are on the 100,000 acres of my beat only 2 pairs of golden eagles, 1 of buzzards, 3 of peregrines, 3 of ravens, not more than 6 of kestrels, and possibly one of merlins. Yet in those three black years, little more than a century ago, there were destroyed on this single estate 1,484 individuals of these six species....to consider these statistics from another angle, there were *destroyed* in each of the three years more than 1,000 individuals of a fauna of which to-day I do not *see* as many as 50 individuals during a twelvemonth. Yet (ghastly irony!) never before in the history of the Grampians have grouse and blackgame been scarcer than have been for nearly a decade now....Four generations of game preserving, and a natural zoological reserve has become what is, in comparison, a zoological vacuum, in which for seven months of the year Black-faced sheep and rabbits are likely to be the only obviously numerous inhabitants.'

As with his remarks about monocultures of sheep and deer (See Part One, above), Perry saw as the root of the problem the social system which allowed this massive slaughter 'for no better purpose than a monstrous private pleasure'.

The history of many raptor species in the Highlands is one of a marked decline, in some cases to extinction, during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, sometimes followed by a recovery in more recent years. Whatever their own views on the effects of raptor predation on grouse stocks, and many would agree that black and hooded crows are much the more damaging species, keepers have often been under pressure from their employers to exterminate all birds with talons and a hooked bill. Even those acknowledging the limited impact of predation admit the disastrous consequences to a shoot of, say, a golden eagle chancing to pass over the moor and panic the grouse (NA). Only the merlin has continued to decline in recent years, although hen harriers still suffer much persecution in the breeding season.

Early naturalist writers made many intelligent comments about the effects of human interference on the status of various species. Macpherson (1903b) described 'the rapacious sparrowhawk and the destructive kestrel' and Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) noted that numbers of the latter had stabilised as keepers realised that the bird was virtually harmless to their interests. Buzzards were common in Badenoch according to Macpherson, although Harvie-Brown, discussing a wider area, remarked that they were 'now one of the rarer birds of prey in the faunal area of Moray' and Perry (1948) regarded them as rare and scattered in Badenoch, with a single breeding pair south of the Spey. Buzzards were earmarked for persecution as early as 1457, when an Act of James II listed these, and also kites, among 'foulys of reif', to be destroyed in order to protect 'wildfowl' such as partridges and plovers. However, the buzzard is quite common now and is probably the most commonly seen raptor in the district today.

Macpherson produced records of rough-legged buzzards being seen, 'and even taken', although the bird was a rare migrant here. His comments and the Dunkeld record of 'considerable numbers' in 1840 (Baxter and Rintoul 1953) lend a modicum of credibility to the amazing figure of 371 rough-legged buzzards shot in Glen Garry in 1837-40.

Hen harriers, 'a common breeding bird in Scotland' in the early Nineteenth Century (Baxter and Rintoul 1953), had declined markedly by the 1890s and Harvie-Brown believed them to leave inland areas of the Highlands entirely in winter. Perry (1948) records only a single passage individual, and no wintering birds, on the Spey meadows during his years at Drumguish in the 1940s. The significant numbers wintering in Badenoch today may be related to the bird's recolonisation of the Scottish mainland as a breeding species from the 1950s and consequent national increase in numbers (Sharrock 1976).

The red kite survived in the district into the present century. In 1903 the 'swallowtailed kite' was 'not yet....totally exterminated' (Macpherson 1903b) although already very much less common than formerly. It became extinct soon after. There are proved breeding records from Grantown (1845), Glenmore (1850) and Rothiemurchus (1878) (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Harvie-Brown quoted a letter written to him in 1885 by the Rev. J. Forsyth of Abernethy:

> 'I have not seen one for many years. I remember when they were very numerous; and a pretty sight it was to see them hunting for mice in the stubbles on a fine autumn day. Their mode of flight and of striking prey was very beautiful....Kites are still seen and sometimes killed by keepers. Can't something be done to prevent this senseless work? *May the vole-plague ravage the lands of those who neglect this plain-featured fact!*'

The red kite is now the subject of a reintroduction scheme in Scotland.

Macpherson applauded the fact that the golden eagle ('the king of the birds') was 'now protected and preserved in many parts of Badenoch' and noted that peregrines could still be found on the crags of Gaick. Harvie-Brown remarked more generally that both of these birds of prey were increasing in numbers in deer forest areas where they did no harm and were not persecuted, but decreasing elsewhere. The peregrine in particular was 'shot down on every possible occasion on the grouse moors', yet, unlike the kite, it was never totally exterminated. Perry (1948) noted that the female from Glen Tromie was often to be seen in winter around the crag on Badan Dubh.

Peregrines enjoyed special protection in the past, owing to their extensive use by royalty and nobility for falconry. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) quote royal and parliamentary statutes to this effect from as early as the reign of Alexander III (1242-86) and a record of a payment by James IV in 1496 to his falconers for procuring birds from the Forest of Atholl. Persecution of these falcons began with the development of managed grouse moors in the early Nineteenth Century.

Ospreys have long enjoyed a celebrity status in Badenoch and Strathspey. Their status and history of its decline occupies 23 pages of (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895), compared to six for the golden eagle and five for the red kite. They were never numerous in our area (Harvie-Brown reckoned a maximum of five sites had been permanently occupied during the Nineteenth Century) and by the 1890s only the pair nesting on Loch an Eilein Castle remained. The presence of ospreys at Loch Insh was noted in 1844, although it is not clear whether they were breeding (Brown & Waterston 1962). Macpherson (1903b), writing specifically of Badenoch, made no mention of ospreys in the district.

The Loch an Eilein eyrie, attested since 1824, somehow managed to survive repeated robberies by egg-collectors in the middle years of the century and increasing disturbance by the growing numbers of casual visitors towards its end. Human (and indeed avian) disturbance rather than direct

persecution seems to have been the cause of the birds' desertion of this nesting site. The local conservationist, Gertrude Martineau, writing in the 1890s, attacked the behaviour of tourists who used to drive noisily around the loch in their carriages, shouting at 'the old man in the castle' (Scarlett 1988 - p.61).

Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) set out a programme of measures for the protection of the breeding ospreys strangely prescient of what was done sixty years later when the birds were seeking to re-establish themselves in Strathspey: the local, egg-stealing jackdaws should be exterminated, the boat on the loch removed or at least padlocked; the nest should be watched throughout the period of incubation by a watcher who was paid over and above his wages for each successfully hatched chick; the castle might be encircled with barbed wire, including an underwater layer to impede any swimmer attempting to gain access, and placards should be posted, warning "No Disturbance to the Ospreys can be allowed during the months of April, May, June, July or August"; County Councils should assist estate proprietors in financing this programme of protection. This comprehensive programme was way ahead of its time, but a few measures, such as a prohibition on boats on the loch during the summer months, were enforced to improve the birds' chances of a successful hatch, and the local laird, John Peter Grant of Rothiemurchus, was awarded the silver medal of the Zoological Society of London for his efforts. However, disturbance by tourists and jackdaws continued and the ospreys nested at Loch an Eilein for the last time in 1899. A single bird continued to visit the site until 1902 (Brown & Waterston 1962).

Wildfowl and waders have always attracted attention in Scotland, since they were an important food resource long before they were shot for sport. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) quote an Act of the Scots Parliament in 1551, which fixed the sale price of various species of goose and duck, as well as curlew (or 'quhaip', = whaup), woodcock and snipe. An Act of James II (1457) forbade the destruction of nests or eggs of 'wilde duks', or mallard. The penalty for taking mallard eggs was set at 40s. Scots in 1474, a sizeable sum at the time. Teal were 'protected' by game laws from 1551 onwards, initially for hawking purposes and later for shooting.

In Badenoch, the writer of the 1792 Statistical Account for Kingussie noted that duck were 'uncommonly numerous' here, while his contemporary at Alvie remarked upon the wintering 'fishing ducks' (diving ducks?) and swans there (Anderson 1790, Gordon 1792. A century later, H.B. Macpherson of Balavil wrote a much fuller account of the district's attractions for wildfowl and wildfowlers:

> 'Few....are aware', he wrote, 'that large numbers of wild fowl, among which the Mallard predominates, are to be found in the inland valleys of Badenoch....In this district Loch Insh may be called the home of the Mallard....Here they may be seen on an autumn evening, as they prepare for the evening flight, flapping their wings ere with a final effort they rise with one accord, speeding up the valley to the swamps and corn fields, where they may indulge in their nightly feast' (Macpherson 1904).

So far as wildfowling was concerned, Macpherson noted that 'On the whole the wild duck have an easy time in Badenoch, owing to the fact that the moors and forests are mostly in the hands of shooting tenants to whom the Grouse and the deer are the chief attractions, and who have little leisure left for such sport as these meadows afford. The majority of them arrive just in time for the Twelfth, and, owing to the claims of the Grouse, August, the only month during which the Mallard can be easily approached, is irretrievably lost.' Nonetheless, Macpherson wrote at considerable length about the joys of standing in the meadows on an autumn evening and taking shots at the duck as they flew overhead on the way to their feeding sites. They were wary birds; if shot at persistently, they would fly off elsewhere, or take refuge out of range in the middle of Loch Insh. In another article, Macpherson observed that the birds grew increasingly unapproachable as the shooting season progressed, necessitating stratagems such as lying down behind corn ricks (Macpherson 1903a).

As Macpherson suggests, duck shooting was never a major occupation of the tenants of Highland lodges during the grouse and stag seasons. On Invereshie Estate, which had shooting rights over the meadows between Coull and Old Milton, not more than one day a week was devoted to shooting duck or snipe, and frequently only a small number of surplus 'guns' was involved. Tactics were simple : the shooters would spread out in a line across the meadows and walk east from Old Milton, flushing all the birds in their path. All the intervening ditches were bridged, and the bridges marked with poles, but this procedure apparently involved many wettings up to the armpits and was only undertaken in dry or warm spells. The area contained within the Insh oxbow lake was known as the Snipe Meadow, on account of the large numbers of snipe usually found there, and sometimes whole days were devoted to shooting snipe alone (NA).

Until the arrival of combine harvesters in the 1970s, duck would fly onto farmland during the autumn months to feed on spilt grain, providing ideal opportunities for shooting. Similar tactics were employed for woodpigeons and pheasants (HW), and geese too would flight out from their day roost on Loch Insh to feed on the stubble fields at dusk (NA). Mallards were reared on ponds in Glen Feshie, for use as decoys or 'call ducks' in shooting their wild brethren and there was even some management of the wild population: on one occasion when the Spey flooded badly at nesting time, about 400 mallard eggs were removed from endangered nests. The chicks were hatched and reared in incubators and around 300 young birds were released back onto the meadows as a result (NA). The same source believes that grazing sheep on the meadows were beneficial to downy ducklings there, since their tracks allowed the ducklings passage through areas of long grass without getting their feathers wet (NA).

Macpherson's observations on wildfowl at the turn of the century may be supplemented by Harvie-Brown's vast compilation of 1895. The former noted that Mallard were the only duck species to winter in the area in any numbers, but scaup might also be found along the river in winter (Macpherson 1903b). It is possible that 'scaup' was an old name for tufted duck, but the description seems to support the claim: 'Known to the

natives of the country as the "Norwegian Duck." Small though it is, yet its flight is, perhaps, more powerful than that of any of its genus, and distance is of so little consequence to it that, although its home is by the sea, it is frequently found among the inland valleys of Badenoch, not only in the spring, but even in the depths of winter.' The tufted duck is much the commoner of the two species today (with more than 30 pairs breeding between Kingussie and Kincraig and smaller numbers regular in winter), but this is a modern development. It was first recorded breeding in Scotland 'as recently as 1872' (Thom 1986 - p.123). In the Moray basin in 1895 it was 'not a particularly abundant species, even in winter, and not *as yet* found breeding in our area' (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Already, however, an increase was noted from former years, when tufted duck only occurred inland in the Highlands in the severest weather. None appear to have been shot on the Balavil Estate in the inter-war years (Bhatia 1993) and even around 1950, tufted duck were regarded as 'exceptional' in an August shooting bag, as were pintail (Abel-Smith 1992). The tufted duck's post-war expansion in Scotland is noted on a wider scale by Cramp *et al.* (1977 - p.580).

The late Nineteenth Century seems to have been an exciting time for observers of breeding wildfowl in Badenoch and Strathspey. Several species previously known as winter visitors were proved to breed for the first time and this multiple coincidence seems likely to be due to more than just increased observer coverage. Harvie-Brown's italicised *'as yet'* (in 1895) suggests that he anticipated the discovery of breeding tufted duck in the near future. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) knew of breeding tufted duck 'on several lochs in East Inverness' and believed many of the Scottish breeding population to be resident, unless frozen out.

Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) considered the shoveler 'a very rapidly increasing nesting species in many parts of Scotland', although breeding was always difficult to prove. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) note the bird's rarity in earlier times. Today, upto five pairs of shoveler nest here in most years. Wigeon, a well established breeder on the reserve today, were also recent colonisers and were suspected of breeding at Abernethy by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895), although there was at that time no firm evidence of colonisation south of Ross-shire (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Pochard, first recorded breeding in the Highlands in 1871, nested on Loch Insh in 1914 (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Goosander were increasing as a nesting species, despite persecution by fishing interests. Macpherson believed that they probably nested 'near some mountain loch or reedy tarn' (Macpherson 1903b). Breeding in Inverness-shire was first proved in 1892, just 21 years after the first recorded nesting in Scotland (Baxter and Rintoul 1953).

Harvie-Brown's remarks about goldeneye are especially interesting, in view of this species' eventual breeding in Badenoch and Strathspey (in nest-boxes) in 1970: 'A common winter visitant, and often remaining late into the spring....We would be inclined to credit its probable breeding among the old pine woods or alder-lined rivers of Spey, near to the numerous wood-encircled lochs of that district.' The situation had changed little by 1953, when Baxter and Rintoul wrote: 'There is, as yet, no authenticated breeding record for Scotland though breeding has been suspected in some areas, but it seems probable that this lingering on into summer is a prelude to eventual nesting, more especially as, within recent years, this duck has been found breeding in England.' There are now some doubts about the authenticity of the English breeding record and the species was first proved breeding in Britain in 1970 (Macmillan 1970) and on the reserve in 1981.

By contrast, common scoter were notably absent from all inland parts of the Moray basin, whether as breeding birds or as passage visitors. A single record of 'a black duck' which the observer 'thought belonged to this species' on the Spey between Lynwilg and Aviemore was regarded as exceptional (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). It is surprising that there are no more early records of this bird, which was recorded breeding near Loch Tummel in 1921 and has long bred regularly in areas close to the Great Glen (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Other sea-duck recorded in the area include scaup (see above) and a long-tailed duck shot at Balavil in 1908 (Bhatia 1993).

The only reasonably common breeding ducks were mallard, nesting on hill streams whence the broods were led down to the marshes for protection, usually along the watercourses but sometimes overland through the heather (Macpherson 1904). Teal, 'too well known to need any description,' may also have bred (Macpherson 1903b). Chrissie Shaw (BOHP 1984:CS) recalled teal in Glen Feshie during her childhood in the first decade of the present century - 'just beautiful'. Two gadwall shot in the winter of 1926/27 were (and still are) distinct rarities in the district (Bhatia 1993).

Wild geese seem to have occurred here only on passage at the turn of the century (Macpherson 1903b), whereas nowadays greylags usually winter in small numbers. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) spoke of wintering geese only in coastal areas.

The meadows alongside the Spey have always supported significant wader populations. Perry (1948) noted breeding birds here and also the hill-breeding birds' habit of congregating on the meadows on their arrival from the coast in spring, before dispersing to their breeding grounds. Waders mentioned by Macpherson (1903b) are the familiar breeding birds of the area today: green plover [lapwing], golden plover, curlew and oystercatcher. A recent (1903) increase in oystercatcher numbers was remarked, in line with general trends towards increased use of, and nesting in inland habitats. A greenshank's nest had been found 'during the last few years' in Badenoch, and Perry (1948) knew of pairs in Gaick Forest and at the Dell of Balguish. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) noted this bird's relative abundance in the area around Loch Morlich, but forestry operations and recreational disturbance have dealt a severe blow to Strathspey's greenshank population in the past fifty years (Nethersole-Thompson and Nethersole-Thompson 1979).

Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) made an interesting observation on (unintentional) human creation of a breeding habitat, noting an abundance of

lapwings on the central moor of Rothiemurchus, 'where the great acreage of pine was cut in order to supply sleepers for Highland Railway in 1864'.

It is thought that there has been a decline over the past forty years in numbers of breeding waders such as lapwings, curlews and oystercatchers on more marginal habitats like the wetter meadows below Coull and Insh and the adjacent rough grazing (HW). The only change in farming practices during this period likely to have affected numbers is the decline in the amountof 'black ground' (bare soil where turnips are grown, which these birds favour as feeding areas), and it is possible that external factors may be responsible. Breeding numbers remain high locally in optimum habitats. Snipe are also said to have become less common than formerly (AMcG).

Wood sandpipers had not colonised Badenoch in the Nineteenth Century and Harvie-Brown's only nesting record, near Elgin in 1865, was rejected as unsatisfactory by Baxter and Rintoul (1953), who knew of no authenticated breeding of this species in Scotland. Breeding by wood sandpiper was first proved in Britain in 1959 (Sutherland) and on the reserve in 1968. However, the area could boast some rare breeding waders much earlier. Nest and eggs of red-necked phalarope were found at Loch Insh in 1914 (Dennis 1984) and nesting whimbrel were recorded near Newtonmore in 1924 (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Slightly further afield, Temminck's stints nests with eggs were discovered at Loch Morlich in 1934 and 1936 (Dennis 1984). Rare passage waders were also known in the past: a knot was shot at Dunachton in September 1921 (Dennis 1984).

Harvie-Brown was relatively optimistic about breeding dotterel in the Cairngorms and Monadh Liath. Notwithstanding the depredations of egg-collectors, for whom this bird seems to have held almost as great a fascination as the osprey, he believed there to be 'no very clear evidence of any serious diminution of their numbers', while increased observer coverage of the high and remote breeding areas had led to the discovery of far more nests than had been anticipated. Nonetheless he was severely critical of 'English collectors, who often in their own country pose as "protectionists", but, with radical twist of conscience, preach plunder across the border as perfectly legitimate, and sneer at the rights of property over a "mountain in Scotland" or a "barren island of the Hebrides"!'

The familiar upland breeding waders of today, such as golden plover, were recorded in the past. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) quote early Twentieth Century records of breeding dunlin on the Moine Mhor and Perry (1948) hypothesised that these birds were of a different, northern race from those which bred at much lower altitudes.

Woodcock seem to have undergone marked changes in status over the past two hundred years. Gordon (1792) described them as winter visitors to Alvie. Breeding was recorded in Scotland from about 1827 and numbers increased dramatically in the later Nineteenth Century (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). By 1948, they were chiefly summer birds: only once in three years' residence at Drumguish did Richard Perry see one in December or January (Perry 1948). They are still more common in summer today, although occurring at all times of year.

Woodcock and snipe both feature prominently in old shooting records. 245 woodcock, 143 snipe and 23 jack snipe were taken at Balavil in the period 1925-34; the figures for Invereshie (including the Insh, Coull and Lynachlaggan sections of the RSPB reserve) were 41 woodcock and 524 snipe for the years 1945-71 (Abel-Smith 1992, Bhatia 1993). A great snipe is said to have been shot at 'Glenshiero, Kingussie', possibly Glen Shirra in Laggan parish (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895).

Early observers remarked on the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about secretive species such as rails and crakes. The water rail, although infrequently reported, was reckoned 'really a common bird in our present area [the Moray basin], certainly during migration; and far from uncommon even in the breeding season' by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895). The same authors do not mention any occurrences in Badenoch and Strathspey of either spotted crake or corncrake breeding, although the latter used to be 'a regular breeder in meadows.[in Badenoch and Strathspey]....but has been very scarce since at least 1960' (Dennis 1984). There is an old reserve record of corncrake for April 1896 and Baxter and Rintoul (1953) quote a bizarre record of 'several' corncrakes being killed in a snow storm at Balavil in December 1905.

The blackheaded gullery was a prominent feature of marshy areas of the meadows in summer, and was remarked upon by both Macpherson (1903b) and Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895). The former also noted the absence of great black-backed gulls with approval. Loch na Stuirteag ('loch of the blackheaded gulls') on the Moine Mhor may denote a former breeding colony, although this, like other high moorland lochs in the area, is now frequented by common gulls. Perry (1948) and Seton Gordon (quoted by Baxter and Rintoul in 1953) regularly observed blackheaded gulls foraging over the Moine Mhor once their chicks had hatched, but these were birds from gulleries in the strath. No gulls were reported breeding on the hill lochans of the Moine at this date, although Chrissie Shaw (b.1895), who grew up at the croft of Tolvah in Glen Feshie, spoke of two lochs which were known as 'Seagulls' Lochs', because 'Seagulls came there every year'. Local people used to cook their eggs for food (BOHP 1984:CS).. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) noted herring gulls occurring as far up the Spey as Kingussie, but these were not breeding birds. They recorded breeding lesser black-backed gulls only on the peat mosses of Abernethy.

The status of owls in Badenoch appears to have undergone little change over the past hundred years. Macpherson (1903b) and Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) both remarked the abundance of tawny owls and the scarcity of barn owls. Macpherson had only seen one barn owl during his long residence at Balavil. Long-eared owls were reckoned at least as common as tawnies in the Laigh of Moray and specimens had been collected from Newtonmore. Their spread was linked to the establishment of new coniferous plantations (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Tawny owls

have increased in the district during the Twentieth Century, thanks again to new plantings and also, according to Baxter and Rintoul (1953), to a growing realisation by the public of 'the value of the bird'. But as late as 1948, Richard Perry could write that tawny owls 'seem never to have been commonly distributed in Badenoch, the keeper's hand is against those that do inhabit the strath, and the very few that survive are shy and, lacking the excitement of numbers, rarely, very rarely enhance with their hooting the majesty of moonlight nights in the Drumguish pinewoods.' Short-eared owls, which Harvie-Brown believed unlikely to breed anywhere in the Moray basin, may have been under-recorded, although he noted a winter influx from the north. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) described how these, like other owls, had taken to frequenting young plantations.

A bird formerly familiar in the district but now extinct is the nightjar. Gordon (1792) mentioned its presence in a short list of birds of the parish of Alvie, which may be assumed to include those which were most common or otherwise prominent. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) spoke of its recent spread across many parts of Scotland and commented: 'We have not ourselves met with it anywhere either by eye or by ear on the south side of the Moray Firth, but there is not a shadow of doubt as to its occurrence over all the area, and it is universally spoken of both by the names "Nightjar" and "Goatsucker." Eggs had recently been taken from a nest in Abernethy Forest. But the nightjar's decline since 1900 has been rapid. C. and D. Nethersole-Thompson, quoted by Baxter and Rintoul (1953), 'said that in Strathspey it was decreasing and that its churr soon bids to be forgotten', and today the only breeding birds in Scotland are a few, scattered pairs in Galloway and around the Firth of Clyde (Thom 1986).

By contrast, kingfishers and great spotted and green woodpeckers have extended their Scottish range during the Twentieth Century. The first-named is still a rarity in the Highlands, although its possible spread was anticipated as long ago as 1953 by Baxter and Rintoul (1953): 'It will be interesting to see if the introduction of minnows to rivers such as the Spey will be correlated with a spread of the Kingfisher.' The kingfisher has been suspected of breeding near Aviemore in a recent year.

The great spotted woodpecker was widespread until the mid Eighteenth Century, when rapid deforestation seems to have occasioned its retreat from the Highlands. Selby, visiting in 1832, found the bird in Strathspey woods (Baxter and Rintoul 1953), but by Harvie-Brown's time it was extinct north of the Great Glen and so uncommon elsewhere that younger folk, unfamiliar with the bird, had begun to refer to treecreepers as 'woodpeckers'. The great spotted woodpecker is now relatively abundant in suitable habitats throughout Badenoch and Strathspey (Thom 1986 - p.252-54). The green woodpecker, which received no mention at all from Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) and had not yet bred in Scotland in 1953 (Baxter and Rintoul), is another recent and still scarce coloniser (with breeding proved in Lynachlaggan on the reserve in 1992).

Early information about passerines is limited. Apart from the 1792 references to skylarks and swallows, the rarity of linnets and goldfinches and a single snow bunting, we must turn once more to Macpherson and Harvie-Brown. The latter made some interesting observations on the use of Drumochter Pass and Badenoch and Strathspey as a corridor by summer migrants, including sand martin, tree pipit and redstart. A similar phenomenon was noted by Baxter and Rintoul (1953), concerning large-scale autumn passages of fieldfares and redwings, particularly associated with north-east winds. These still occur today.

Other summer visitors to Badenoch mentioned by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) include redstarts and spotted flycatchers, both of which were thought to have undergone recent increases in number or extensions of breeding range in the Moray basin. The willow warbler was 'undoubtedly the very commonest warbler in the north', while wood warbler and sedge warbler were both recorded breeding in Badenoch and Strathspey for the first time in the 1890s. The blackcap was a scarce breeding bird in Badenoch and Strathspey, as it still is today, and passage and occasional wintering by presumed continental birds was also remarked. The migrant whinchat was reckoned more plentiful than the stonechat.

Several species which are now resident appear formerly to have quit the district in winter. Reed buntings were said by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) to leave Badenoch for coastal districts and similar observations were made by Baxter and Rintoul (1953). An undated report, quoted by the latter, that all bullfinches left the area of Balavil in winter, implies a marked change in status over the last forty years. The species is now a fairly common resident in Badenoch woods. By contrast, the autumn departure of the majority of song thrushes, noted by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895), continues today. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) observed the presence of wintering dunnocks around Kingussie, whereas most inland and upland birds of this species were said to leave their breeding areas in autumn. The same authors quoted H.B. Macpherson of Balavil as saying that the local woodpigeons departed in winter.

However, at least some of these basically granivorous birds remained in the district through much of the winter. Before the introduction of combines in the 1970s, harvesting methods resulted in significant amounts of spilt grain being left on the fields and later in farm stackyards (See 'Lynachlaggan', Part Two above). These provided an ideal food resource for many species, from ducks, gamebirds and woodpigeons on the autumn stubble fields to passerines such as greenfinches, chaffinches, reed buntings and yellowhammers in the stackyard. Bullfinch and dunnock also occurred and flocks of 12-20 snow buntings were common in the yard at Lynachlaggan (HW). The disappearance of this food resource may be sufficient by itself to explain the serious decline in bunting numbers and apparently also of woodpigeons in recent years.

Skylarks were thought to have declined as a breeding species over the years before 1895, a change which was tentatively ascribed to changing agricultural practices (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). The goldfinch, reckoned rare by Gordon (1792) was considered extinct by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895), owing chiefly to the activities of collectors of cage birds. The species underwent a renewed expansion of range during the first half of the present century (Baxter and Rintoul 1953) and is now well established in small numbers. By contrast, the Nineteenth Century saw a

general spread of the mistle thrush, formerly almost unknown in the Highlands, through the whole region (Baxter and Rintoul 1953).

Notable among the woodland birds were the large numbers of goldcrest and long-tailed tit (Macpherson 1903b), although Harvie-Brown reckoned the coal tit was the commonest of the titmice in the region. Goldcrests were also common, nesting 'in branches of spruce and pine and in the tall juniper bushes of the forest areas of Spey' (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Nineteenth-century references to marsh tits in Badenoch almost certainly concern willow tits, which were not distinguished as a separate species until 1900 (Sharrock 1976). Baxter and Rintoul (1953) regarded old records of these species as 'hopelessly and inextricably entangled'. Willow tits were said to frequent Loch an Eilein and to have bred in birch woods near Kingussie, but they were commonest around Aviemore and Kinrara (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Breeding was proved at Balavil in 1914 (Baxter and Rintoul 1953) and in wet birch woods at Kingussie as recently as 1940-41 but by 1948 the species was scarce, and was extinct in the Highlands by the early 1950s (Dennis 1984. Thom 1986). The yellowhammer, which was also described by Harvie-Brown as widespread and abundant, is now very scarce in Badenoch almost certainly due to changing agricultural practices. If it is to be believed, the record of a pair of firecrests is remarkable (Macpherson 1903b), there being no records noted by other recorders.

The 'special' birds of the native pinewoods naturally attracted the attention of observers and collectors. Macpherson (1903b) spoke of crested tits in secluded woods, 'fortunately unknown to and unvisited by the destructive collector', but Harvie-Brown knew of several eggs and nests of Strathspey crested tits in collections. He reproduced an engraving of a metal fencepost near Aviemore in which a pair of the birds had bred in 1893. Crested tits frequented the scattered Scots pines of Badan Dubh in the years before afforestation and one bird was recorded by Richard Perry in the birchwoods bordering the Spey meadows (Perry 1948). Siskins, now widespread in coniferous plantations, were only recorded from Abernethy Forest a century ago (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Baxter and Rintoul (1953) noted the scarcity of old records of this species, which was nowhere mentioned in the Old Statistical Account of 1791-99. The same authors linked the spread of the redpoll to its liking for semi-mature plantations.

Early records of crossbills are difficult to interpret, since common and Scottish crossbills were rarely recognised as distinct and continue to confuse observers today. Macpherson (1903b) seems to have had the crossbill in mind when he wrote of the 'Pine Grosbeak', which had recently increased in numbers enormously and been proved to breed in the district. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) spoke of the crossbill as 'one of those birds that is increasing enormously', noting the Moray area in general, and Badenoch and Strathspey upstream to Kingussie in particular, as the bird's 'headquarters' in Scotland. The increase in numbers may have been linked to the large amount of afforestation with different species of pines which was undertaken in the later Nineteenth Century (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Harvie-Brown recorded a Speyside nest in a 'Scots fir' (Scots pine), fitting the Scottish bird, but also remarked upon the species' irruptive behaviour, characteristic of the continental, common crossbill which was not proved to breed in Britain (in East Anglia) until 1910 (Sharrock 1976). Crossbills were observed in winter at Drumguish by Perry (1948): sometimes 30-35 birds would overwinter in the pines there, while in other years the birds would appear briefly in October and then move on elsewhere.

Upland birds were a prominent feature of the area. Snow buntings were mostly confined to the high ground of the Cairngorms, where numbers were said to have increased and nests had recently been found (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). As with dotterel, this 'increase' may have had more to do with observer coverage than actual numbers of birds. By contrast, twite and the ring ouzel both appear to have declined in number during the first half of the present century. The former were regarded as widespread in upland areas by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895), but were scarce and local in the upper Badenoch and Strathspey and Cairngorms half a century later (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Twite and snow buntings were apparently regular in severe weather among the finch flocks at Drumguish in 1944-47 (Perry 1948). During very snowy weather, snow buntings accompanied the usual hordes of reed buntings and yellowhammers in the stackyard during winter at Lynachlaggan Farm until the arrival of the combine harvester meant there was little for them to eat there (HW). Ring ouzels were abundant in the foothills of the Cairngorms and Monadh Liath, where they were said to favour juniper (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895), but Baxter and Rintoul (1953) charted a fall in numbers so drastic that they feared the bird's loss as a breeding species unless it was halted. They particularly remarked their recent failure to locate breeding ring ouzels in former, regular haunts above Kingussie. Since then, however, the rate of decline would appear to have slowed down and extinction is no longer seen as an imminent danger (Thom 1986).

Hooded crows, rooks and jackdaws had attained pest proportions by the late Nineteenth Century (Macpherson 1903b). Macpherson (1903b) noted only hooded crows in Badenoch, while today both hooded and carrion crows are found, with the latter subspecies more abundant. The geographical divide between these races has generally shifted north-west in the Highlands in the Twentieth Century (Thom 1986 - p.320). Jackdaws were especially noted by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) as recent colonisers of the ruined castles at Ruthven and Loch an Eilein, at the second of which they provided an additional threat to the breeding ospreys. Magpies were regarded as rare by Harvie-Brown in 1895 and were not mentioned by Macpherson in 1903, although they bred across the Highlands north to Sutherland earlier in the Nineteenth Century before being eradicated as pests (Thom 1986). However, one resident of Insh regards them as having been reasonably common in the locality in the relatively recent past (Ch). A jay killed at Grantown in 1874 is a rare record for the district (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). Ravens were noted by Macpherson (1903b) as frequenting the wilder areas. Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) believed that numbers were kept artificially low by persecution, so that the raven was 'far less really destructive at present than his smaller cousins'.

Most birds associated with human habitations have increased their numbers in recent times, an exception being the house martin, which suffered

when roads were macadamised from the loss of the muddy pools which provided its nesting material (Baxter and Rintoul 1953). Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1895) noted that starlings and house sparrows were both more common than formerly. Baxter and Rintoul (1953) recount the former's' northward spread through the Highlands during the Nineteenth Century, while Harvie-Brown noted the latter as 'very abundant' at Aviemore, Kincraig, Kingussie and Glen Tromie. The Glen Tromie population was perhaps a survival from pre-Clearance days. Nonetheless the chaffinch remained 'almost our commonest bird' (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). A later coloniser mostly found close to inhabited buildings arrived much later: the collared dove, first recorded in Scotland in Morayshire in 1957 (Thom 1986), is now an established resident in Badenoch.

Acknowledgments

The task of producing this paper would have been much harder without the earlier work of Lorcan O'Toole and Zul Bhatia's seemingly inexhaustible supply of additional source material. Jeanette French, formerly Librarian at the Highland Folk Museum, gave help in locating more material there. Ross Noble, Curator of the Museum, read and commented upon an earlier draft, saving me from several errors. Several long-term residents in the area were interviewed, filling in gaps in the written record of the relatively recent past. They are listed below. Thanks also to Roy Dennis, Dave Pierce, and the late Dennis Toynbee for loan of books long out of print.

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James Anderson, of Kingussie, former Head Keeper on Glen Tromie Estate (JA)

Mrs. Chisholm, of Insh (Ch)

Raymond Green, of Insh (RG)

Alec MacGregor, of Kingussie, formerly of Tromie Mills (AMcG)

Hamish Windross, of Lynachlaggan (HW)

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- CS Miss Chrissie Shaw
- DMcD Mr Duncan MacDonald
- JF Miss Jean Fraser
- T&JG Thomas & Jessie Gair
- WMcD Mr William MacDonald

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