

## The burning myth

In the natural world, especially in plant ecosystems, it is recognised that nature 'abhors a vacuum'.

With our increasing knowledge of the roles played out by pathogens and parasites and their impacts on communities it is becoming increasingly apparent that nature eventually will not tolerate monocultures.

The man made monocultures of heather moorlands and barrens that cover very large areas of the UK are a glaring example.

Industries and culture are inextricably tied to perpetuating this monoculture which is enshrined perhaps to one of our greatest ecological myths in the wet Atlantic NW Europe – management of a plant by burning.

The grouse industry is the main driver in perpetuating this myth. Presumably no one has taken the trouble to read the Handbook of the Birds of the Western Palearctic page 392 habitat of red grouse: 'The UK red grouse now largely confined to heather moors normally above or well clear of trees, while nominate *Lagopus* (willow grouse) in northern USSR prefers shrubbery of willow, salix and dwarf birch mixed with hillocky berry growing tundra though avoiding thick extensive willow stands in the breeding season.'

Maybe making the UK's grouse population survive in heather is the prime reason for its continual troubles. For the heather managers – perhaps we could call them members of the scorched earth society a sub section of the flat earth society.

To be continued.....