

Davy McCracken



Lessons in hill farming from the rice fields

I mentioned previously that I am providing guidance to a project comparing six farming landscapes in Japan and Europe.

These landscapes have each been shaped by farming systems which have developed intimate relationships with the biodiversities they support.

But government and societal failure to value these links is leading to the loss of habitats and species in all six.

The Satoyama Reconnections project is seeking to reinvigorate the interdependencies between people and nature in these landscapes and show this can help increase biodiversity and reduce climate-change impacts.

Last month, the project team visited one of the study landscapes around the communities of Hira-Ogi near Kyoto in Japan.

Historically, the hill farmers managed a mix of farmland, woodland and wetland but rice fields are now largely confined to the lower slopes.

Also, the number of people farming has fallen, but there has been an influx of people into new housing in the area.

So, what have efforts to reinvigorate rice cultivation in Japan got to do with hill farming in Scotland?

Well, there are similarities concerning water and woodlands. Productivity of the rice fields in Hira-Ogi is dependent on management of the water channels flowing from the mountain tops.

Meanwhile, maintenance and management are



TRADITION: Working the land around Hira-Ogi in Japan.

becoming increasingly important, not only to help supply water for the rice paddies, but also to reduce the risk of flooding and mudslides during periods of intense rainfall.

Similarly, in Scotland we are increasingly looking to upland land managers to hold water back and thereby reduce the risk of flooding in the lowlands.

We also recognise how integrating more trees and woodland into hill farms and crofts will not only help with water management but also to provide livestock with shelter and shade.

Farming and woodland management was previously an important income source in Hira-Ogi and also ensured there was a diversity of natural and semi-natural habitats.

But this link has broken down as communally owned woodlands have

been sold into private ownership.

In both Scotland and Japan there is a need to bolster a closer working relationship between farming, water and woodland management.

There are also two common challenges, the first to address the limited understanding of why such interlinkages are important in order to attract financial support.

The second is to identify solutions flexible enough to establish or restore management systems to provide the production, environmental and social benefits that flow from doing so.

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