



# A snow book, northern Scotland

*Adam Watson*

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This book documents long-term studies of snow on high land in the Cairngorms, including fresh snow lying in summer, the extent of snow on Ben Macdui plateau at the start of June, and dates of the first fresh lying snowfalls at the sites of the main snow-beds. It reviews data on the survival of snow patches through to the following winter, and recounts a decline of snow patches in recent decades. The author describes observations on rock lichens in relation to snow-lie, and lists vantage points on public roads with good views of places with snow patches on alpine land. He describes skiing in and near Aberdeen in the snowy winters of the early 1950s, and an exceptional snowfall in the Cairngorms at the start of September 1976. The author presents some descriptions and photographs of how birds and mammals use snow for shelter and sleeping. It has long been well known that red grouse, ptarmigan and mountain hares use snow hollows, but here the author illustrates how a fox used a snow hole, and how an otter made a snow slide. He presents photographs of snow pillars, snow holes made by human parties practising in winter, and avalanches. Next he draws attention to the observation that the extent and species of lichen and moss on cliffs, boulders and soil signify the extent of snow-lie. These plants are absent on sites where snow lies very late, or where frequent avalanches plunging down the cliff or water flowing down it prevent plants from growing. Where prolonged snow-lie occurs at the foot of cliffs or on cliff-tops, a band of pale, greenish-yellow rock lichens that thrive in snowy conditions is conspicuous, and in sunshine easily visible to the naked eye at over a mile distance. Lastly he presents some photographs that show snow mould growing on hill vegetation in Iceland and Scotland. Keywords Snow, climate, weather, physical geography, science, birds, mammals Author Adam Watson, BSc, PhD, DSc, DUniv, raised in lowland Aberdeenshire, is a retired research ecologist aged 81. He began lifelong interests on winter snow in 1937, snow patches in 1938, the Cairngorms in 1939. A mountaineer and ski-mountaineer since boyhood, he has experienced Scotland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, mainland Canada, Newfoundland, Baffin Island, Finland, Switzerland, Italy, Vancouver Island and Alaska. His main research was and is on population biology, behaviour and habitat of northern birds and mammals. In retirement he has contributed 16 scientific publications on snow patches since 1994. He is a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Royal Meteorological Society, Royal Society of Edinburgh, and Society of Biology, and an Emeritus Member of the Ecological Society of America. Since 1954 he has been a member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and since 1968 author of the Club's District Guide to the Cairngorms.

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