



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016/0191, 25 October 2016

Driven grouse shooting

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This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Monday 31 October 2016 to consider e-petitions [125003](#) (Ban driven grouse shooting) and [164851](#) (Protect grouse moors and grouse shooting) relating to driven grouse shooting. The subject for the debate has been selected by the Petitions Committee.

This pack contains links to news items, information about the petitions and the Petitions Committee's inquiry, press releases and useful links to further reading. Further details and analysis can be found in the Library's Briefing Paper on [Grouse Shooting](#).

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

Full background information and analysis can be found in our [Grouse shooting research briefing](#). The summary of the research briefing is reproduced below.

Grouse shooting takes place on moorlands managed for the birds. Management includes rotational burning of heather and the killing of predators. There is evidence to suggest that moorlands have been managed more intensively for grouse over recent years.

Grouse shooting can be beneficial to the environment and the rural economy. It helps to preserve heather moorland, which is an internationally important habitat. Grouse shooting industry research shows economic benefits including over 1,500 jobs in England. The Government believes that grouse shooting makes a “significant” economic contribution to the rural economy while delivering other important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation.

However, there are concerns that some forms of management may be seriously damaging to the environment in a number of ways. There are also concerns that the illegal killing of birds of prey, and in particular hen harriers, is being conducted on grouse moors.

Measures are already in place to manage these issues, such as legislation to make the killing of birds of prey illegal, an action plan to address illegal killing of hen harriers and the regulation of burning on moors.

However there are concerns about the enforcement and application of these measures. The European Commission has initiated infraction proceedings against the UK to determine whether EU environmental law is being met.

Some have called for driven grouse shooting to be banned. Others support a licensing system to enable licences for grouse shooting to be revoked where illegal activities are found. Representatives of the industry believe that the existing legislation is adequate and that it is working to address many of the issues raised.

Two public petitions have been launched on this matter, on both sides of the argument. The Petitions Committee took evidence from witnesses on 18 October 2016, and a debate is scheduled for 31 October 2016.

2. News items

Spectator

Why is the RSPB picking on grouse moors?

Charles Moore 21 August 2016

<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/08/rspb-picking-grouse-moors/>

Guardian

RSPB calls for grouse shooting estates to be licensed

Patrick Barkham 25 July 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/25/rspb-calls-for-grouse-shooting-estates-to-be-licensed>

Herald

New calls for tough crackdown on shooting grouse industry

Rob Edwards 17 July 2016

http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/environment/14624172.New_calls_for_tough_crackdown_on_shooting_grouse_industry/

Telegraph

Over-managed grouse moors made floods worse, says Green party leader Natalie Bennett

Laura Hughes and Christopher Hope 15 January 2016

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/green-party/12102239/Over-managed-grouse-moors-made-floods-worse-says-Green-party-leader-Natalie-Bennett.html>

3. The petitions and the Petitions Committee

An e-petition, [Ban driven grouse shooting](#), had 123,076 signatures when it closed on 21 September 2016.

Grouse shooting for 'sport' depends on intensive habitat management which increases flood risk and greenhouse gas emissions, relies on killing Foxes, Stoats, Mountain Hares etc in large numbers and often leads to the deliberate illegal killing of protected birds of prey including Hen Harriers.

Driven grouse shooting uses animals for live target practice, with thousands killed every day. Native predators are killed because they eat Red Grouse. Mountain Hares are killed because they carry ticks that can spread diseases to grouse. Heather is burned to increase Red Grouse numbers for shooting. Grouse shooting is economically, ecologically and socially unnecessary. This is 'canned hunting'.

Supported by Eduardo Gonçalves, CEO of League Against Cruel Sports, Chris Packham and Bill Oddie

The Government responded:

Defra is working with key interested parties to ensure the sustainable management of uplands, balancing environmental and economic benefits, which includes the role of sustainable grouse shooting.

When carried out according to the law, grouse shooting is a legitimate activity and in addition to its significant economic contribution, providing jobs and investment in some of our most remote areas, it can offer important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation. The Government's position is that people should be free to undertake any lawful activities. However, all those involved are encouraged to follow best practice.

A report by the UK shooting community (Public & Corporate Economic Consultants report 2014: The Value of Shooting) concludes that the overall environmental and economic impact of game bird shooting is positive, and industry has estimated that £250 million per year is spent on management activities substantially benefiting conservation. For grouse shooting in particular, according to the Moorland Association, estates in England and Wales spend £52.5 million each year on managing 175 grouse moors. The industry also supports 1,520 full time equivalent jobs and is worth £67.7 million in England and Wales.

Grouse shooting takes place in upland areas, which are important for delivering a range of valuable "ecosystem services", including food and fibre, water regulation, carbon storage, biodiversity, and recreational opportunities for health and wellbeing. The Government is committed to helping create a more sustainable future for the English uplands,

including by protecting peatlands through measures such as the Peatland Code.

With regard to predator control, we welcome the proactive approach taken by game keeping organisations to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between shooting and conservation, for example through the BASC green shoots initiative. Control of grouse predators such as foxes and stoats on shooting estates has a role to play in the recovery of rare or declining species, particularly ground nesting birds. Mountain hares and other tick carrying species such as deer are controlled to reduce disease mortality in infected red grouse chicks. We also recognize that controlling mountain hares and deer is a legitimate practice in other circumstances: for example, to protect young trees and vegetation or as quarry species.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 affords protection to all wild birds; despite this, incidents of illegal killing of birds of prey continue, so we have identified raptor persecution as a national wildlife crime priority. Each wildlife crime priority has a delivery group to consider what action should be taken, and develop a plan to prevent crime, gather intelligence on offences and enforce against it. The raptor persecution group, led by a senior police officer, focuses on the golden eagle, goshawk, hen harrier, peregrine, red kite and white tailed eagle and is led by a senior police officer.

The National Wildlife Crime Unit, which is part-funded by Defra, monitors and gathers intelligence on illegal activities affecting birds of prey and assists police forces when required. Despite instances of poisoning and killing of birds of prey, populations of many species, such as the peregrine, red kite and buzzard have increased.

With regard to hen harriers, in January 2016 the Defra led Upland Stakeholder Forum hen harrier sub-group published the Joint action plan to increase the English hen harrier population. This sets out six complementary actions to increase hen harrier populations in England. These actions are individually beneficial, and when combined have the potential to deliver stronger outcomes and contribute to the recovery of the hen harrier population in England. These are:

- 1: Monitoring of populations in England and UK
- 2: Diversionary feeding
- 3: Work with Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG) to analyse monitoring information and build intelligence picture
- 4: Nest and winter roost protection
- 5: Southern reintroduction
- 6: Trialling a Brood Management Scheme

The Action Plan sets out who leads on each action and the timescale and benefits of each. The plan was developed with senior representatives from organisations best placed to take action, including Natural England, the Moorland Association, the National Gamekeepers'

Organisation, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, National Parks England and the RSPB. These organisations will now take the plan forward led by Natural England. They will monitor all the activities carried out and report annually on progress to the Defra Uplands Stakeholder Forum and the UK Tasking and Co-ordinating group for Wildlife Crime.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

An open petition [Protect grouse Moors and grouse shooting](#) has 23,579 signatures on 25 October 2016 and will close on 15 February 2017

Grouse moors and grouse shooting are an integral part of moorland management both for the grouse and other native wildlife such as lapwing and curlew it also helps support of local businesses and jobs in the local areas this cannot be banned

Here is a link to the Countryside Alliance website for more information on how grouse moors benefit the environment and the facts behind it:

<http://www.countryside-alliance.org/ca-flatcap/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Grouse-Shooting-The-Facts-10-Key-Questions-Answered-July-2016.pdf>

The Government responded:

Grouse shooting is a legitimate activity that provides economic benefits, jobs and investment in some of our most remote areas and can offer important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation.

A report by the UK shooting community (Public & Corporate Economic Consultants report 2014: The Value of Shooting) concludes that the overall environmental and economic impact of game bird shooting is positive; the industry has estimated that £250 million per year is spent on management activities substantially benefiting conservation. For grouse shooting in particular, according to the Moorland Association, estates in England and Wales spent £52.5 million on managing 149 grouse moors for shooting in 2010. Scottish landowners manage a further 150 moors for shooting grouse. The industry also supports 1,520 full time equivalent jobs and is worth £97.7 million across Great Britain.

Grouse shooting takes place in upland areas, which are important for delivering a range of valuable "ecosystem services", including food and fibre, water regulation, carbon storage, biodiversity and recreational opportunities for health and wellbeing. The Government is committed to helping create a more sustainable future for the English uplands, including by protecting peatlands through measures such as the Peatland Code.

The Government welcomes the proactive approach taken by game keeping organisations to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between shooting and conservation, for example through

the British Association for Shooting and Conservation's green shoots initiative.

The Government recognises the benefits that grouse shooting, and shooting more widely, bring to individuals, the environment and the rural economy. It is for these reasons that the Government believes shooting and other country pursuits such as hunting and fishing should be protected.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Petitions Committee's inquiry on grouse shooting

The Petitions Committee held an [inquiry](#) on this petition. It held an [oral evidence session](#) and also received [written evidence submissions](#), including those from the witnesses:

[Written evidence from Dr Mark Avery \(GRO0248\)](#)

Summary:

1. Many practices intimately associated with the hobby of driven grouse shooting require change (eg damage to protected habitats such as blanket bogs, use of lead ammunition, culling of Mountain Hares, heather burning which increases water treatment costs and flood risk etc) but one aspect, wildlife crime, requires elimination not improvement.
2. My evidence shows that wildlife crime by grouse shooting interests against birds of prey is widespread and systematic, and has large impacts on the status of protected wildlife.
3. Wildlife crime is endemic to the hobby of driven grouse shooting – it cannot be swept under the carpet as being 'a few bad apples'.
4. After decades of negotiation, discussion and arbitration with the grouse shooting industry no progress has been made on reducing wildlife crime – things are worse than ever.
5. Driven grouse shooting has lost any right to be regarded as a legitimate activity because it depends on, is underpinned by, and profits from, crime.
6. Society as a whole would be much better off without driven grouse shooting and we should ban it as soon as possible.

[Written evidence from RSPB \(GRO0304\)](#)

Executive Summary

1. Driven grouse shooting is a form of sports shooting reliant on increasingly intensive management to produce un-naturally high densities of grouse. It is uniquely intensive and unregulated.
2. Grouse moor management has been linked to wildlife crime targeted at birds of prey and there is growing evidence of the impact of inappropriate management on protected habitats, particularly the

burning of internationally important peatland habitats, leading to wider societal costs including effects on water quality and flood risk.

3. Voluntary approaches have failed to deliver necessary compliance with environmental regulations and the existing situation will not improve without regulatory intervention. Public confidence could be improved by changes to the law to introduce a robust system of licensing, supported by a statutory code of practice and effective deterrent sanctions, including licence restriction and revocation, and the introduction of an offence of vicarious liability which ensures land owners and managers take responsibility for the training and monitoring of their staff.

[Written evidence from The Moorland Association \(GRO0308\)](#)

1. Executive Summary

- Custodians of grouse moors are motivated to manage wildlife and invest privately and significantly in the nation's natural assets.
- The motivation for conservation success is driven grouse shooting, so if it were to be banned or curtailed by heavy-handed regulation, this unique and treasured landscape would be at risk of being lost forever with far-reaching negative consequences.
- Grouse moor managers demonstrate a strong desire to do the right thing and operate within a complex framework of designations, and wildlife and animal welfare laws.
- Where there is room for achieving even more positive outcomes, our members are applying their practical and expert knowledge to find workable solutions.

[Written evidence from the Countryside Alliance \(GRO0288\)](#)

Executive Summary

- The Countryside Alliance is a membership-based organisation that works for everyone who loves the countryside and the rural way of life. We welcome this inquiry and the opportunity to submit evidence on grouse shooting and grouse moor management, particularly its benefits for wildlife, the environment and upland communities.
- Grouse shooting is already heavily regulated and controlled. There is extensive legislation in place that has an impact on almost every aspect of grouse shooting and grouse moor management, and licensing requirements are in place across many areas such as firearms possession and heather burning in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Any additional legislation, or licensing requirements, would need to be consistent, evidence-based and principled, recognising that further controls would add to

the cost and bureaucracy of grouse moor management, without necessarily improving outcomes.

- The theory and practice of modern gamekeeping is centred on conservation and a respect for biodiversity. Modern gamekeepers are increasingly expected, and often required, to undertake formal apprenticeships or college courses, gain practical qualifications, and attend best-practice courses.
- Grouse moor management has played a key role in creating and maintaining our upland landscape, preserving heather habitat and peatland, sustaining some of our rarest plants and wildlife, and promoting biodiversity.
- For many upland communities, grouse shooting plays a pivotal role in the local economy, providing a valuable source of jobs and income for local businesses. It also underpins the social life of these communities and helps to tackle rural isolation.

4. Press releases

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

Heather burning good for biodiversity, says study

Sep 13, 2016

BASC has highlighted a 44-year study which recommends burning as a method of maintaining biodiversity on moorland.

The New Journal of Botany has [published details of the study](#), which examined changes in the flora of four Scottish moorland sites under moderate levels of grazing.

The research by the Edinburgh-based Centre for Ecology & Hydrology found that species numbers fell up to 35 per cent between the first and last recordings when there was an absence of heather burning on lower-level sites.

Dr Colin Shedden, BASC's director Scotland, said: "This long-term study, over an impressive 43-44 years of observation, tested the hypothesis that without prescribed burning and with only moderate grazing there would be a decline in the number of plant species recorded.

"This was confirmed at three of the four sites (the fourth site was at a higher altitude) and each of these three sites also showed an increase in the height of the heather.

"The conclusion reached by the author was that 'to maintain floral diversity in heathlands there needs to be regular burning'. Another conclusion could be that regular burning, on a 20-year rotation as happens elsewhere, is also required to ensure the heather does not become so tall and dense that it becomes a real risk for wild fire."

BASC chairman Peter Glenser said: "Those who manage moorlands know that the burning of heather is beneficial. This report should be welcomed for adding more evidence to that weight of knowledge."

Moorland Association

Bird Protection

22nd August 2016

James Kay's letter exploring Hen Harriers on grouse moors has appeared in [Bird Watching magazine](#) and is reproduced by kind permission of the magazine.

BIRD PROTECTION

"The question of Hen Harriers on grouse moors has become increasingly controversial and antagonistic recently. As a member of the RSPB for 60

years, I have observed this polarisation of views with some alarm. There is a danger that in our efforts to protect the Hen Harrier, we may be doing more harm than good. I recently spent a wonderful morning birdwatching on a grouse moor in the north of England. The air was filled with the calls of ground nesting waders including Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Snipe, Curlew, and Golden Plover. In addition, we also saw Red Grouse with chicks and were able to locate the nests of a number of Ring Ouzels and Wheatears. Later, we met the gamekeeper and discussed the birds with him. Little we said was new to him as he knew his moor well and clearly cared for its wildlife. His livelihood depended on the driven grouse shoot and he made sure that aggressive species of wildlife were kept under control. It was clear that without his efforts the ground nesting birds (including several of current concern) would be greatly at risk. It is for this reason that I feel that conservationists should be much more careful before we condemn gamekeepers and seek to ban driven grouse shooting. Not only are the livelihoods of local people at risk but we also run the risk of endangering some of those birds that we are currently trying to protect. We must continue to protect Hen Harriers. However, we must never forget that bird protection needs support of those in the countryside. We must insure that we do not alienate them."

James Kay

League Against Cruel Sports

Not So Glorious 12th - Pressure builds to ban grouse shooting amid extinction fears

12 August 2016

As the number of breeding pairs of hen harriers in England plummets to just 3 this year, pressure is building across the UK for a ban on driven grouse shooting before total extinction of the raptors takes place.

With intensively managed driven grouse moors implicated in wildlife crimes such as raptor persecution, the maiming and killing of animals in snares, environmental destruction and downstream flooding, support is surging to ban the destructive 'sport'.

- The League Against Cruel Sports urges the public to wake up to the imminent extinction of Hen Harriers and add their signature to the 80,000+ already collected on Dr Mark Avery's [parliamentary e-petition](#) to ban driven grouse shooting.
- Chris Packham supermarket boycott: the wildlife celebrity presenter threatens to boycott supermarkets like M&S and Iceland if they stock the toxic lead-tainted birds and reveals the environmental devastation caused by intensively managed grouse moors.

- RSPB withdraws its support for the government's failed Hen Harrier Action Plan as breeding pairs plummet to just 3 – none of which bred on grouse moors
- To maximise profits, grouse moorlands are intensively managed. Increasing evidence shows that burning, draining and removing all predators (including hen harriers) to protect the shooting industry's grouse cash-crop is bad for the environment and wildlife conservation and can contribute to devastating flooding downstream.
- It has also been shown that grouse are indiscriminately medicated as well as carrying lead - a dangerous toxin.

Chris Packham, TV presenter and naturalist said: *"Tests show some supermarket grouse contain from 100 to 3000 times the amount of lead that would be permitted in beef, pork or chicken."*

"Driven grouse shooting not only spells environmental devastation with the burning and draining of the moors, the slaughter of wildlife and the illegal killings of raptors, but the game birds themselves are toxic."

"If M&S and Iceland choose to stock grouse this year, I won't be shopping in their stores. Help fight this poisonous abomination by signing the online petition to ban driven grouse shooting."

More than 79,000 people across the UK have now signed environmental campaigner Dr Mark Avery's parliamentary e-petition, supported by animal welfare campaigners the League Against Cruel Sports and Chris Packham.

Conservation expert and e-petition sponsor Dr Mark Avery said: *"This bloodsport is ecologically, economically and socially unacceptable. Please urge your friends and family to add their signatures to yours on my online e-petition to ban driven grouse shooting."*

"To make a profit, driven grouse shoots depend on intensive land management. This leads to an increase in flood risk and greenhouse gas emissions as well as extermination of wildlife like foxes, stoats and mountain hares in large numbers. Shockingly even protected birds of prey including hen harriers are still being persecuted, despite Defra's Hen Harrier Action Plan. The RSPB has wisely withdrawn its support from this plan, which was always going to be an exercise in futility."

"With 79,369 signatures already, we only need to get it to 100,000 for this repugnant bird-shooting 'sport' to be considered for a proper debate in parliament."

To date, the highest number of signatories on Dr Avery's e-petition have come from people living in constituencies situated near and downstream of grouse moors, many of which – such as Calder Valley - suffered terrible floods last winter which grouse shooting is thought to contribute to.

Eduardo Gonçalves, CEO of the League Against Cruel Sports said: *"The driven grouse shooting industry is almost exclusively responsible for the*

virtual extinction of Hen Harriers. With only three – THREE – remaining breeding pairs in the whole of England, the public is starting to wake up to the imminent demise of this iconic raptor.

“Grouse moorland management is linked to environmental destruction, wildlife persecution from snaring, the killing of raptors and increased flooding. Added to that, the shocking levels of lead toxicity in these game-birds lends the lie to any claims from the shooting industry that grouse are a healthy option.

“It’s no coincidence that the numbers of petition signatures to ban driven grouse shooting are highest in areas where there is a grouse moor nearby, and it’s noticeable that some of these places – like Calder Valley – also suffered from devastating floods.

“We call on everyone who wants the Government to listen to evidence and protect wildlife, the environment and health to sign the petition at: www.league.org.uk/grousepetition. ”

Bill Oddie OBE, wildlife expert and President of The League Against Cruel Sports said: *“The Twelfth of August. Someone called it the glorious 12th. Why? The beginning of autumn? Glorious weather? Glorious colours? Glorious birds gathering to travel south? Glorious wild flowers on the downs? Glorious wildlife.*

“Or is it glorious shooting? Glorious cruelty? Glorious killing? Glorious death?

Especially in this world, how can this pointless slaughter be considered in any way glorious? It is inexcusable.

“Our country should be embarrassed. ”

Contrary to industry claims, independent data shows that the 500+ grouse moors in the UK are implicated in

- Animal cruelty: as well as grouse being shot for fun, wildlife such as otters, foxes, deer, badgers and hedgehogs are trapped and killed, shot or poisoned just to protect the shooting industry’s cash crop – the grouse
- Environmental damage: including competition with native species and pollution from moor burning, which lowers the water table, causing the deep peat covering to dry out and release heavy metal pollutants into rivers and carbon into the atmosphere
- Wildlife crimes: protected birds of prey like the Hen Harrier are routinely killed illegally to protect shooting interests
- Inaccurate & overstated economic & employment claims: The shooting industry claims that it contributes millions to the economy, but it includes income from clay and target shooting, which involves more people than those who shoot birds. The shooting industry – which pays less than minimum wages – is also propped up by subsidies from tax-payers

Moorland Association

Highs and lows for start of grouse season

8th August 2016

NEWS of major environmental gains where peatland equalling the size of two cities has been restored greets the start of grouse shooting on August 12.

Although early hopes of a relatively good season have been dashed for many by adverse late weather during the crucial nesting period, there is cause to celebrate.

So said chairman of The Moorland Association, Robert Benson, who heralded results coming in showing a massive 18,000 hectares of fragile peatland has been repaired and revegetated, with much more to come.

He explained: "This is all on land managed by our members and equates to the combined areas of Liverpool and Nottingham. It shows that even in poor shooting seasons the huge commitment to moorland conservation continues.

"On the one hand, we are looking at pockets of poor grouse numbers on some moors this year and shoot days being cancelled but, on the other, very positive outcomes for work that will ultimately impact on vast numbers of people.

"In the wake of some of the worst flooding in recent memory, [peatland restoration](#) will help slow the flow of water. We are working with some of the country's leading conservation organisations on these critical areas.

"The process improves the diversity of habitat and therefore food supplies for our precious moorland wildlife, including notable endangered bird species and plants. It creates homes for millions of insects, as well boosting water quality and trapping carbon."

Natural England's operations director, Amanda Craig, said: "Data is still being collated, but we are currently looking at a figure of around 18,000 hectares of restored moorland habitats across northern England, all on land managed for grouse shooting.

"This gratifying result is especially thanks to peatland restoration partnerships and we are very grateful to The Moorland Association for all its help.

"We recognise there is still a long way to go to restore all these habitats, and so the work continues to ensure we have as much properly functioning moorland habitat in the uplands as possible."

Speaking about prospects for the 2016 season, Robert Benson explained: "Chick survival seems better than the calamitous conditions experienced last year, but this is not the case for all. Yet again, we are reminded that grouse are wild birds.

“Initially, we were predicting a relatively good season, despite the mild and very wet winter followed by a damp spring. However, due to snow in late April and early May, grouse counts indicate poor chick survival on some moors and we are now much less optimistic.

“Shooting usually stops well before the official end of season in December, but every day is a bonus to the local economy.”

Managing moorland for grouse shooting in England and Wales brings many economic, environmental and social benefits, not least a £52.5 million annual spend on conservation. Grouse shooting creates 42,500 work days a year and over 1,500 jobs.

Mr Benson added: “During a good season associated spin-offs are worth in excess of £15 million to local businesses. Grouse shooting therefore generates £67 million for local rural economies, as well as conservation.

“We are proud of significant wildlife gains. Careful moorland management has made a real difference to some of the country’s [most endangered species](#). While lapwing, curlew, golden plover, ring ouzel, merlin and black grouse are in serious decline elsewhere, they can still be found in good numbers on our moors.”

[Scientific research](#) has shown where predator control is in place, birds such as the now ‘red listed’ curlew, and lapwing, are 3.5 times more likely to fledge their chicks. Where driven grouse shooting has been lost in Wales, populations of many of these species have dropped by 60 to 90 percent.

Preservation schemes away from keepered grouse moors have failed the curlew and since December it has been given the highest conservation priority. These beautiful birds have bucked the serious declines where gamekeepers and predator control are in place.

The Moorland Association (MA) has pledged its continued commitment to the government’s Hen Harrier Action Plan after RSPB’s recent pull-out. Mr Benson said his organisation was determined to see more of Britain’s most talked about bird of prey on grouse moors.

He added: “We are delighted by Defra’s announcement that it will still be working with us and other key partners. The new upland brood management and lowland reintroduction elements in the plan are currently being scoped and work is going well.”

He also reiterated the association’s total condemnation of any act of wildlife crime and its support of prosecutions.

MA members are responsible for 860,000 acres of iconic and internationally recognised heather moorland, loved by millions of walkers and wildlife enthusiasts. Mr Benson said those wanting to see grouse shooting banned should be ‘careful what they wished for’.

“There is no plausible alternative land use to driven grouse shooting that will deliver these benefits,” he explained.

“Short-term licensing of driven grouse shooting, advocated by RSPB, could also foreshorten the generation to generation planning and investment that is inherent in managing moorland, leading to less successful conservation management.”

Shooting days can be held from August 12 until December 10, excluding Sundays. Only the surplus population is shot, ensuring healthy wild breeding stock, supported by the moor, is left.

Click [here](#) for more on peatland restoration.

Click [here](#) for more on the value of grouse moor management.

Below are links to a number of short films from [BASC](#) on the importance of grouse shooting:

- Click [here](#) for a film on how the grouse shooting helps the local economy and provides jobs for local people.
- Click [here](#) for a film on how grouse shooting keeps moors alive with a rich habitat for many rare species.
- Click [here](#) for a film on how grouse shooting helps local business.
- Click [here](#) for a film on how grouse keep customers coming back.
- Click [here](#) for a film on how grouse shooting keeps communities together.
- Click [here](#) for a film on grouse shooting and wildlife.

Scottish Government

Tackling wildlife crime: Tough new penalties for wildlife offences

24 February 2016

Environment Minister Aileen McLeod has accepted recommendations from the wildlife crime penalties review group to introduce tough new maximum penalties for those who commit crimes against wildlife.

Subject to the necessary legislative steps this could mean fines of up to £40,000 and 12 months imprisonment for certain offences.

The Scottish Government will take forward a number of other recommendations including:

- Greater use of alternative penalties such as forfeiture of equipment used to carry out offences
- Greater use of impact statements in court to better explain the impact a wildlife crime may have
- Explore creation of new sentencing guidelines

Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Dr McLeod said:

“Wildlife crime has no place in modern Scotland, this is why I have decided to increase the maximum available penalties to bring wildlife offences into line with other environmental crimes. It is important we have appropriate penalties that deter criminality but also reflect the impact these crimes can have on our environment and Scotland’s reputation as a wildlife tourism destination. Work will now begin on bringing together a list of relevant offences this change would apply to.

“We already have the strongest wildlife legislation in the UK, in 2012 we implemented the vicarious liability provisions in relation to offences involving wild birds and we recently secured the second conviction under these provisions. We also funded the pesticide disposal scheme which removed over 700kg of illegally held poisons in Scotland. But I am determined to do even more to end these crimes that threaten the survival of some species and inflict cruelty on others.

“I would also like to reiterate my thanks to the wildlife crime penalties review group and to Professor Poustie for their extensive work on this report.”

Natural England

Hen harrier breeding season set to be most successful for 5 years

5 August 2015

Figures from the 2015 hen harrier breeding season show it is on track to be the most successful year since 2010.

Despite poor weather throughout the breeding season, there are 6 successful harrier nests fledging 18 new chicks. An additional seventh nest - which was close to fledging young - unfortunately failed late in the season, due to natural causes.

Hen harriers remain the most endangered breeding birds in England. News of this year’s successful nests follows the disappearance of 5 male hen harriers, which resulted in the failure of their nests.

Rob Cooke, Natural England’s Director of Terrestrial Biodiversity, said:

6 nests is a small number, but it is actually more than we have seen in total over the past 3 years – which is a significant and positive step forward. Obviously we need to see many more pairs of these iconic birds nesting successfully and we are actively looking at how we and our partners can build on this positive outcome in the future.

The nests range across the north of England, in Northumberland, Lancashire, County Durham and two in north western England. Dedicated staff from Natural England, Forestry Commission, RSPB and the Moorland Association have worked tirelessly with volunteer raptor workers, landowners and their staff to help bring about these results.

Chairman of the Moorland Association, Robert Benson, said:

Grouse moor managers have played a significant role in protecting nests and this year's success, which is very welcome. However, we need to do more for hen harriers. With government help, via a hen harrier action plan, numbers and the spread of nests next year could be even better, buffering the effects of poor weather and predation.

Fledged chicks are being fitted with satellite tags by the RSPB EU funded hen harrier LIFE+ project and by Natural England, and their progress closely monitored. Satellite tag technology is improving rapidly and these latest tags will provide even more detailed information on how birds move around the landscape and the factors which currently limit the population.

RSPB board spokesman Stuart Housden said:

Whilst we're very pleased some hen harrier chicks have fledged successfully this year, we must recognise there remains a long way to go to secure the species' future as a breeding species in England. Harriers are still absent from vast swathes of suitable habitat, and are highly vulnerable to illegal persecution. Until this is addressed there is little prospect of a sustainable population in England's uplands.

Tom Dearnley, Forestry Commission Ecologist, said:

We are thrilled there have been 2 successful hen harrier nests in Northumberland. We hope that this will mean many more successful years for breeding hen harriers on land the Forestry Commission manages. This success highlights the habitat value to the species.

Background

Number of successful nests since 2010:

Successful nests Chicks fledged

2015	6	18
2014	4	16
2013	0	0
2012	1	4
2011	4	12
2010	6	18

5. Useful links and further reading

DEFRA *Increasing hen harrier populations in England: action plan* 14 January 2016

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/increasing-hen-harrier-populations-in-england-action-plan>

RSPB Blog *Why the RSPB is withdrawing support for the Hen Harrier Action Plan* 25 July 2016

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/martinharper/archive/2016/07/25/withdrawal-from-the-hhap.aspx>

Countryside Alliance *Grouse Shooting: The Facts – Ten Key Questions Answered* July 2016

<http://www.countryside-alliance.org/ca-flatcap/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Grouse-Shooting-The-Facts-10-Key-Questions-Answered-July-2016.pdf>

University of Leeds *Effects of Moorland Burning on the Ecohydrology of River basins* October 2014

<http://www.wateratleeds.org/ember/>

The Intensification of Grouse Moor Management in Scotland Andy Wightman & Dr Ruth Tingay, commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports 2015

[http://www.league.org.uk/~media/Files/LACS/Publications/1384-LACSS-A4-Land-Reform-Report-AW-LR-\(3\).pdf](http://www.league.org.uk/~media/Files/LACS/Publications/1384-LACSS-A4-Land-Reform-Report-AW-LR-(3).pdf)

British Association for Shooting and Conservation White Paper *Grouse shooting and management in the United Kingdom: its value and role in the provision of ecosystem services* March 2015

<http://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2015/03/Research-White-Paper-Grouse-shooting-and-management.pdf>

Natural England *The effects of managed burning on upland peatland biodiversity, carbon and water (NEER004)* May 2015

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5978072>

Public and Corporate Economic Consultants *The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental, and social benefits of shooting sports in the UK* May 2014

<http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk/pdf/consultancyreport.PDF>

British Association for Shooting and Conservation's *Green Shoots* initiative

<https://basc.org.uk/conservation/green-shoots/>

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