

Debate Pack

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Petition debate on banning driven grouse shooting

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1

Background

Red grouse are wild game birds normally found in upper moorland in the UK and Ireland. In 2009 it was estimated that 230,000 pairs were present in the UK.¹ This has since increased to 265,000 pairs in 2016, the latest data available² However, red grouse are listed as amber in the UK due to having an unfavourable conservation status having faced population declines over the longer term.³

Heather provides over 90% of the red grouse diet. Grouse prefer young fresh shoots to eat and older heather for cover. Common predators of grouse include foxes, stoats and crows and some birds of prey.⁴

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) notes in their 2020 assessment that:

Given its economic significance, long-term population trends of Red Grouse are likely to be closely associated with changes in management practices [see below]. Shooting bags [numbers of birds shot] have revealed long-term declines, apparently driven by a combination of a loss of heather moorland, increased predation from corvids and foxes, and an increasing incidence of viral disease .

[...]

Strip burning of heather is undertaken to increase suitable habitat for Red Grouse. Although the short-term effect is to reduce the abundance of birds using the recently burnt areas, densities subsequently increase most in areas where heather recovery is greatest.⁵

1.1 Grouse shooting and moor management

Grouse shooting has taken place in the UK for more than 160 years. Grouse shooting comes in two forms, driven and walked grouse shooting with the former the most common:

- *Driven grouse shooting* involves a group of beaters, who scare the grouse towards a line of shooters concealed in a hide. This is normally done when grouse densities are managed to be higher.

¹ [The British Association for Shooting and Conservation Research White Paper: Grouse shooting and management in the UK: its value and role in the provision of ecosystem services, 2015](#)

² [RED GROUSE: Lagopus Lagopus BTO, Birdtrends 2020](#)

³ [RED GROUSE: Lagopus Lagopus BTO, Birdtrends 2020:](#)

⁴ [RED GROUSE: Lagopus Lagopus BTO, Birdtrends 2020](#)

⁵ [RED GROUSE: Lagopus Lagopus BTO, Birdtrends 2020](#)

- *Walked-up grouse shooting* involves shooters walking on the moor, driving the grouse from the ground and shooting them when they take flight. This is normally done where grouse densities are lower.⁶

Moorland is largely a human-created landscape. A combination of burning, deforestation and grazing holds the landscape in a “state of arrested ecological succession”, which otherwise might revert to other types of habitat such as forest.⁷ There were an estimated 450 grouse shooting moors in the UK in 2011, covering 16,763 km² or around 7% of the UK.⁸

Grouse moors are managed to create suitable habitat for grouse in order to increase the numbers available for shooting. This is typically done by the burning of moorland in patches or muirburn, on a rotation of a number of years.⁹ This encourages the mixture of young heather shoots and older heather that are beneficial to red grouse.

Alongside burning, there may be additional management activities on grouse moors such as:

- The use of medication to control grouse parasites;
- Infrastructure works such as tracks, car parks and fencing;
- Predator, deer and hare culling.

No licence is required for managing a grouse shooting business in England. The Scottish Government announced in 2020 that it would be introducing the licencing of grouse shooting business (see section 3 for further details).

The shooting Industry published a report in 2014 on the [Value of Shooting](#) which argued that its activities (including clay shooting) makes an important economic contribution to the rural economy. Campaign organisations dispute these figures, including Animal Aid in its report [Cheap Shots: How the bird shooting industry deprives the public purse](#).

Commons Library Briefing on [Grouse Shooting](#) published in October 2016 and Commons Debate Pack on [Driven Grouse Shooting](#) provide further background on the topic, including the debate over the economic and social benefits of grouse shooting.

⁶ [The British Association for Shooting and Conservation Research White Paper: Grouse shooting and management in the UK: its value and role in the provision of ecosystem services, 2015](#)

⁷ [A Review of Sustainable Moorland Management: Report to the Scientific Advisory Committee of Scottish Natural Heritage, October 2015](#)

⁸ [UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Technical Report Broad Habitats: Mountains, Moorlands and Heaths, UNEP-WCMC, June 2011](#)

⁹ *ibid*

2

Petition to ban driven grouse shooting

A [petition to ban grouse shooting](#) was launched by wildlife campaign group [Wild Justice](#) in July 2019. The petition closed early due to the December 2019 elections but received 111,956 signatures. A debate was scheduled in the new Parliament for January 2021, which was postponed and is now due to take place on 21 June 2021. The text of the petition is as follows:

Chris Packham, Ruth Tingay and Mark Avery ([Wild Justice](#)) believe that intensive grouse shooting is bad for people, the environment and wildlife. People; grouse shooting is economically insignificant when contrasted with other real and potential uses of the UK's uplands.

Environment; muirburn impacts negatively upon climate change and drainage leads to flooding and erosion. Wildlife; the wholesale culling of all predators and Mountain Hares has a disastrous effect on the ecology of these areas and the industry is underpinned by a criminal tradition of raptor persecution which shows no signs of abating. It's time to provide an opportunity to implement immediate, legislative and meaningful measures to address this abhorrently destructive practice.¹⁰

The [Government response](#) to the petition was published in September 2019 making clear that it did not intend to ban the practice in England:

The Government appreciates that many people hold strong views on the issue of driven grouse shooting. The Government considers that shooting activities bring many benefits to the rural economy and can in many cases be beneficial for wildlife and habitat conservation. We recognise that it is vital that wildlife and habitats are respected and protected and the law is respected. We will continue work to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between shooting and conservation. The Government has no plans to ban grouse shooting.¹¹

The petition response goes on to outline the Government's approach to dealing with some of the issue of concern and raised in the petition. The response highlighted that raptor persecution had been identified as a wildlife crime priority and the work of the [Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group](#) which is part of the [UK Wildlife Crime Unit](#). The response also refers to a number of commitments from the Government to improve and protect Peatland including proposals for an England Peatland Strategy (see section 2.1 below for further detail); and to the economic value of the shooting industry.

¹⁰ [Parliamentary Petition, Ban Driven Grouse Shooting Wilful blindness is no longer an option, July 2019](#)

¹¹ [Parliamentary Petition, Ban Driven Grouse Shooting Wilful blindness is no longer an option, Government response, 2 September 2019](#)

2.1

Muirburn

Muirburn is the practice of burning patches of heather on moors to encourage the new shoot growth that red grouse feed on. Concerns from campaigners about the impact of this practice on habitats and their carbon storage ability of peat, when it dries out due to damage, have been a longstanding issue, as [highlighted by the RSPB](#). The [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust](#) set out why this is:

Heather moorlands are very important areas for both carbon storage and biodiversity. They often sit on peat soils, which store around 30% of the world's soil carbon. Rotational heather burning is a traditional tool used for managing many moorlands, after which the heather regenerates, and this prevents it becoming old and woody. However, in the UK the use of fire as a management tool is increasingly considered controversial, with concerns around its effect on carbon storage, water quality, flood risk and biodiversity. Where burning is not used, heather can build up and other vegetation develops which is more prone to wildfires. Wildfires can be much more damaging than prescribed fires, so the moorland manager is in a difficult position when deciding whether to use prescribed burning to best protect their land.¹²

A Lords Library briefing on [peatland burning](#) provides further information, and summarised the debate as follows:

Peatlands have been identified as both [an important store for carbon and a habitat for plant life and animals](#). In 2019, Natural England estimated that [England's peatlands stored around 580 million tonnes of carbon](#). It has argued the preservation of peatlands in England was important to combat climate change and to help achieve the Government's aim to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Specifically, Natural England has [identified "deep peat" sites as important areas of carbon storage](#). These are areas covered by a majority of peat which is over 40 centimetres deep.

Areas of peatland classified as "blanket bogs" have been identified as particularly important stores of carbon. Blanket bogs are areas that [receive all their water from precipitation and typically form across a hilly landscape](#). They can be found in some [upland areas in England, such as Dartmoor](#). The Government's [explanatory memorandum](#) to the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021 says blanket bog sites constituted 40 percent of England's deep peat reserves.

Burning vegetation is [used in land management, including the management of upland peatlands](#). This includes creating and maintaining habitats suitable for [the supply of grouse for the grouse](#)

¹² [GWCT, Heather burning: Its impacts on peat formation and carbon storage, 2018](#)

[shooting industry](#). The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust has argued rotational burning has several other benefits including [supporting livestock grazing and increasing biodiversity](#).¹³

There are existing [regulations on heather burning](#), which set minimum standards and outlaws certain practices. There is also guidance in the form of a voluntary Heather and Grass Burning Code. In addition, The Government [announced in January 2021](#) that it would be banning the practice of burning completely on blanket bogs in England and has introduced [regulations to that effect](#). The regulations prohibit the burning on peat over 40cm deep without a licence, except under certain circumstances and come into force in October 2021.

However, [environmental groups raised concerns](#) in a letter to Defra in February 2021 that protection under the regulations will be limited. Wild Justice has been critical about what they see as the limited extent of the regulations. They have raised these and other issues with DEFRA in a June 2021 pre-action protocol letter which set out four legal grounds for future action. These were summarised by the specialist journal ENDS report:

The first relates to “unlawfulness arising from the Burning Regulations frustrating their own purpose”; while the second relates to a “demonstrable flaw in the reasoning or serious logical error in the reasoning leading to the making of the Burning Regulations”.

The third ground is in relation to alleged breaches of the Habitats Regulations 2017, and a final ground relates to “failure to take into account Material Considerations, in particular the requirements to act swiftly to limit the emission of greenhouse gases”.

Earlier this year it [emerged](#) that there is no map describing the location of deep peat in England, posing the question of how the limited ban on peat burning set in law by the regulations can be enforced.

In April DEFRA said that [a mapping project](#) is currently “in commencement” and once complete will be published.¹⁴

Peat Action Plan

The Government published a [Peat Action Plan](#) in 18 May 2021 which set out a number of areas that would be addressed:

The England Peat Action Plan sets out the government’s long-term vision for the management, protection and restoration of our peatlands, so

¹³ <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/peatland-burning-new-regulations-for-blanket-bog-habitats/>

¹⁴ ENDS Report, [Wild Justice kicks off legal challenge to DEFRA](#), 3 June 2021 [subscription required]

that they provide a wide range of benefits to wildlife, people and the planet. To implement this vision, the plan includes:

- the announcement of the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme through the Nature for Climate Fund
- a commitment to end the use of peat in the amateur horticulture sector
- a new spatial map of England's peatlands.¹⁵

2.2

Predator Culling

Control of predators such as crows (under licence) and foxes is common on managed moors. A 2010 study concluded that predator culling resulted in increased populations of a number of birds including red grouse. The British Game and Conservancy Trust [summarised the findings](#) as follows:

- Lapwing, golden plover, curlew, red grouse and meadow pipit bred on average three times more successfully when predator control was performed.
- As a result, the populations increased in subsequent years.
- In the absence of predator control, the populations declined.¹⁶

A 2012 study [Biodiversity impacts of game bird hunting and associated management practices in Europe and North America](#) by the John Hutton Institute summarised the practices in England and Scotland as follows:

Widespread and common intensive predator control appears to be primarily associated with driven shooting of rear and released game birds, and red grouse management in England and Scotland. The efficacy of predator control programmes is likely to vary according to population and ecological variables. To maximise efficiency, predator control has to be carried out in combination with habitat manipulation, and/or has to be very intensive, culling all potential predators, over large areas, and particularly in years or conditions when the impact of predation is likely to be greatest.¹⁷

Control of wild birds that predate grouse, such as crows and raptors require a special licence. The Commons Library paper on [General licences for](#)

¹⁵ [Defra, Peat Action Plan, 18 May 2021](#)

¹⁶ [GWCT, The effects of predator control on breeding moorland birds, 2010](#)

¹⁷ [John Hutton Institute, Biodiversity impacts of game bird hunting and associated management practices in Europe and North America, 2012](#)

[controlling wild birds \(2019\)](#) contains details on recent changes to licencing birds to prevent predation, as a result of a separate [Wild Justice campaign](#) and court case. The most up to date information on licences is available from Defra's webpage on [General licences for wildlife management](#). Government guidance on [wild birds: protection and licences](#) sets out the circumstances under which a licence may be granted which include preventing damage to crops or animal feed and conserving plants and animals (including other wild birds).

2.3 Raptor persecution

All birds, including raptors in the UK are protected under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) which state that it is illegal to intentionally kill, injure or take wild birds without a licence.

Raptor persecution has been highlighted as an issue of concern, with critics of grouse shooting raising concerns that illegal predator control takes place to protect grouse shooting moors. The RSPB was very critical of the existing approach to regulation on publishing its [2019 Birdcrime report](#):

Killing birds of prey is a criminal offence. Yet in 2019 there were 85 confirmed incidents* of bird of prey persecution. [You can read a breakdown of these figures in the Appendices.](#) Victims included buzzards, red kites, peregrines, goshawks, hen harriers and many other protected species. These are only the incidents we know about: more birds will certainly have been killed and not found, or their deaths not reported.

This is unacceptable. Now is the time for action.

For 10 years, tackling raptor persecution has been a Wildlife Crime Priority in the UK. But since then little has changed, and hundreds of birds have paid the price. The shooting community has had decades to put their house in order, but self-regulation has failed. Where next?

This year, during COVID-19 lockdown, many of us turned to nature for solace. Yet others took it as an opportunity to ramp up their efforts to kill birds of prey without fear of being caught. The RSPB Investigations Team experienced its busiest ever spring, assisting numerous police investigations into bird of prey persecution, many of which were related to land used for shooting.¹⁸

The RSPB also publishes an [interactive database which includes a UK map](#) of locations where there have been confirmed cases of raptor persecution.

¹⁸ [RSPB 2019 Birdcrime Report: 2020](#)

Evidence of the level and location of persecution has increased as the result of efforts to reintroduce species such as hen harriers and golden eagles across the UK, which are often released tagged and monitored after release. [Hen harriers](#), for example, are known to predate grouse and therefore have an impact on their conservation, and on intensive grouse moorland management. The [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trusts](#) states that:

If there are too many harriers on a moor the shoot becomes uneconomic, the gamekeepers lose their jobs, and numbers of ground-nesting birds decline, including ones of conservation concern such as waders.¹⁹

An article published in the scientific journal Nature Communications in March 2019 examined the [patterns of satellite tagged hen harrier disappearances](#). Of 58 birds tagged between 2007 and 2017, “72% were either confirmed to have been illegally killed or disappeared suddenly with no evidence of a tag malfunction.” [Robert Taylor from the RSPB](#), stated in a Birdlife international article in March 2020 that:

An overwhelming body of scientific evidence now shows that the main reason for their population decline is illegal bird killing associated with the management of moorland for grouse shooting.²⁰

North Yorkshire Police has been running [Operation Owl](#) aimed at tackling illegal raptor persecution in North Yorkshire uplands since 2018. Its website sets out the concerns:

North Yorkshire is known for its wonderful countryside, which is home to many species of birds – including protected birds of prey (also known as raptors).

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take wild birds. Nevertheless birds of prey are still shot, poisoned and trapped – especially in our upland areas. Sadly, as a county, North Yorkshire has more confirmed incidents of raptor persecution than any other county in England – a situation we are determined to tackle.

Launched in February 2018, Operation Owl is a joint initiative by North Yorkshire Police, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA), together with the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Parks. The initiative set out to raise awareness of raptor persecution, encouraging the public to be vigilant for signs of this criminal activity, and to report suspicious activity to the police.²¹

¹⁹ [GWCT, Hen harriers and red grouse Q&A, Website visited 17 June 2021](#)

²⁰ Robert Taylor, [Tracking technology confirms controversial cause of Hen Harrier decline](#), 5 March 2020

²¹ [North Yorkshire Police, Operation Owl, website visited 17 June 2021](#)

In January 2020 a joint statement was issued by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), Countryside Alliance (CA), Moorland Association (MA), National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) on raptor persecution, which included the following:

There is no excuse for the illegal killing of any bird of prey, and we unreservedly condemn all such acts. The shooting community has been tarnished with a reputation for persecuting raptors, and while many reports of such persecution have proven to be false and confirmed cases are decreasing year-on-year, the illegal killing of birds of prey continues to be carried out by a small minority of irresponsible individuals. We strongly condemn their actions and have a zero tolerance policy towards any such incident. These people have no place in a sector that is otherwise overwhelmingly positive; one that is the economic driver for many of our more remote communities, and the largest contributor to conservation schemes in England and Wales.²²

²² [Countryside Alliance. 'Zero Tolerance' for raptor persecution: A joint statement, 29 January 2020](#)

3

Policy review in Scotland

The issues covered by the petition are devolved but it is worth noting that the Scottish Government has been reviewing its policy on the management of grouse moors. It commissioned the Grouse Moor Management Group, led by Professor Alan Werrity:

In May 2017 the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, announced the setting up of an expert group to look at managing grouse moors sustainably and within the law. This had been triggered by the publication of *Analyses of the fates of satellite tracked Golden Eagles in Scotland* (Whitfield & Fielding, 2017) a report by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which recorded that 40 out of 131 young Golden Eagles had disappeared in suspicious circumstances over the period 2004-16, mostly in locations on or adjacent to grouse moors²³

The [Werrity Report](#) was published on 19 November 2019. Its main recommendation was that if there was no improvement licencing should be introduced:

We unanimously recommend that a licensing scheme be introduced for the shooting of grouse if, within five years from the Scottish Government publishing this report, there is no marked improvement in the ecological sustainability of grouse moor management, as evidenced by the populations of breeding Golden Eagles, Hen Harriers and Peregrines.²⁴

The Scottish Government, in its [response to the Werrity Report](#) on 26 November 2020 and announced a number of measures in addition to the introduction of an immediate licencing scheme for grouse shooting businesses:

- Grouse shooting businesses in Scotland will need to be licensed to operate under new proposals to tackle raptor persecution.
- Muirburn will also only be permitted under licence, in order to protect wildlife and habitats, regardless of the time of year it is undertaken and whether or not it is for grouse moor management or improving grazing.
- There will also be a statutory ban on burning on peatland, except under licence for strictly limited purposes, such as approved habitat restoration projects.

²³ [Grouse Moor Management Review Group. Report to the Scottish Government, 19 November 2019](#)

²⁴ [Grouse Moor Management Review Group. Report to the Scottish Government, 19 November 2019](#)

- The Scottish Government will work with all stakeholders to produce guidance on best management practices for the use of medicated grit, and convene an expert group to study how best to monitor compliance with the a new code of practice.²⁵

²⁵ [Scottish Government, Werrity Report Response, November 2020](#)

4 News items, journal articles and press releases

Aberdeen Press & Journal

[Grouse moors are being protected at the expense of Scotland's other wildlife](#)

31 May 2021

Moorland Association press release

[Moorland Association welcomes DEFRA's Peat Action Plan](#)

21 May 2021

Guardian

['It has become them and us': the battle to burn England's moorlands](#)

1 May 2021

Ecological Indicators

[Post-burning responses by vegetation on blanket bog peatland sites on a Scottish grouse moor](#)

Volume 123, April 2021

Independent

[Peat restoration on grouse moors 'cutting tons of carbon emissions'](#)

15 March 2021

Independent

[RSPB video shows two buzzards illegally lured to grouse moor and shot by 'gamekeeper'](#)

10 March 2021

Scotsman

[Scotland wildfires: Scottish moorland chief renews call for better education on muirburn to prevent the country's fast growing wildfire crisis](#)

22 February 2021

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[Government ban on peat burning 'almost completely ineffective', charities warn](#)

16 February 2021

Yorkshire Post

[Hen harriers return to Wharfedale moorland after estate owners banned grouse shooting](#)

11 December 2020

Guardian

[Grouse shooting to require licence in Scotland](#)

20 November 2020

Scottish Farmer

[Managing land with muirburn helps curb wildfires](#)

4 October 2020

RSPB

[**A review of recent evidence on the environmental impacts of grouse moor management**](#)

October 2020

Guardian

[**Call for grouse shooting to be licensed amid rise in bird of prey deaths**](#)

12 August 2020

National Gamekeepers' Association press release

[**Grouse shooting essential for survival of moorland communities**](#)

7 August 2020

Stockholm Environment Institute York, for Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[**Restoration of heather-dominated blanket bog vegetation on grouse moors for biodiversity, carbon storage, greenhouse gas emissions and water regulation: comparing burning to alternative mowing and uncut management**](#)

March 2020

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), Countryside Alliance (CA), Moorland Association (MA), National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

[**Joint statement on raptor persecution**](#)

28 January 2020

European Journal of Wildlife Research

Spatial and temporal variation in mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*) abundance in relation to red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*) management in Scotland

April 2019

Wildlife Biology

Does rotational heather burning increase red grouse abundance and breeding success on moors in northern England?

June 2017

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Parliamentary material

Debates

[Heather and Grass etc. Burning \(England\) Regulations 2021](#)

Lords motion to regret

HL Deb 18 March 2021 | Vol 811 c509-

[Moorland burning](#)

Commons debate

HC Deb 18 November 2020 | Vol 684 c200WH-

PQs

[Peat Bogs: Fires](#)

Asked by: Debbonaire, Thangam

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the recommendations of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature UK Peatland Programme, what assessment the Government has made of the potential merits of banning the burning of peat.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

While there continues to be scientific debate over aspects of the environmental impact of managed burning, there is a large and increasing body of literature that provides evidence that overall managed burning is damaging to peatland. This literature includes a systematic evidence review published by Natural England in 2013 synthesising the findings from 124 studies.

We have always been clear of the need to phase out rotational burning of protected blanket bog to conserve these vulnerable habitats. This is why we

have brought forward legislation that will limit burning of vegetation on protected deep peat.

This legislation represents a crucial step in meeting the Government's nature and climate change mitigation and adaptation targets, including the legally binding commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

We will be setting out further measures to restore, protect and manage England's peatlands this year as part of a package of measures to protect England's landscapes and nature-based solutions.

HC Deb 29 April 2021 | PQ 188124

[Peat Bogs: North of England](#)

Asked by: Lord Greaves

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Great North Bog Initiative.

Answering member: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government is committed to the restoration and sustainable management of England's peat. England's peatlands store around 580 million tonnes of carbon but are emitting around 9.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per year. Restoration, through initiatives such as the Great North Bog, is a crucial tool in combating climate change and achieving the Government's aim to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

We have engaged with the development of the Great North Bog from an early stage. Restoration of these habitats can achieve multiple natural capital benefits, including havens for rare wildlife and flood protection. We have already invested a significant amount of our early Nature for Climate funding in peatland restoration projects in Great North Bog areas, including the Yorkshire Dales, Peak District and the North Pennines AONB.

HL Deb 08 March 2021 | PQ HL13419

[Business of the House](#)

Asked by: Largan, Robert

Can we have a debate on the way we can use nature-based solutions to tackle climate change? I want to highlight the efforts to restore the Peak district's beautiful moorlands. Raising the water table by restoring peat bogs has many benefits. It increases carbon capture to tackle climate change, it reduces the risk of fire and flooding, it improves water quality and it also

enhances biodiversity. It really is a no-brainer, and I am proud to have helped secure a significant increase in funding for these vital local projects.

Answering Member: Leader of the House of Commons (Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP)

My hon. Friend raises an important point. Indeed, we know that better management of our peatlands can improve biodiversity, carbon storage and flood protection. We have always been clear about the need to phase out rotational burning of protected blanket bog, and we are looking at how legislation could achieve this. We have already allocated £10 million over the last three financial years that will restore over 16,000 acres of peatland. We have committed to restoring a further 85,000 acres of peatland as part of the new £640 million nature for climate fund, announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor during the most recent Budget. Later this year, we will be publishing an England peat strategy to manage, protect and restore our peatlands so that they deliver benefits for climate and for nature.

HC Deb 17 December 2020 | Vol 686 c401

[Topical Questions](#)

Asked by: Tony Lloyd

Will the Minister make a very clear statement on the Government's policy with respect to our peat bogs and recognise that they are an enormously powerful carbon sink as well as being important for water retention in flood prevention schemes? On that basis, will he agree to meet me and one or two colleagues virtually who, particularly in the south Pennines area, have a real interest in this issue?

Answered by: George Eustice | Department: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

I or one of my ministerial colleagues would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and others to discuss this. I completely agree with him that deep peat in particular can be an important store of carbon. That is why we have recently announced new restrictions on burning on blanket bog. Restoration of the hydrology of some of those deep peats is a fundamental part of our approach to tackling climate change.

HC Deb 04 March 2021 | Vol 690 cc376-7

[Game: Gun Sports](#)

Asked by: Twist, Liz

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to review regulation of driven grouse shooting to help protect (a) hen harriers and (b) other birds of prey.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Party: Conservative Party | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government recognises the conservation and economic benefits that shooting sports bring to rural communities.

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There are strong penalties in place for offences committed against birds of prey and other wildlife; significant sanctions are available to judges to hand down to those convicted of wildlife crimes. Most wildlife crimes carry up to an unlimited fine and/or a six-month custodial sentence.

To address concerns about illegal killing of birds of prey, senior government and enforcement officers have identified raptor persecution as a national wildlife crime priority. Since 2016 Defra has contributed approximately £165,000 annually to the National Wildlife Crime Unit that monitors and gathers intelligence on wildlife crime, including raptor persecution, and aids police forces in their investigations when required.

We are committed to securing the long-term future of the hen harrier as a breeding bird in England. The Hen Harrier Action Plan sets out what will be done to increase hen harrier populations in England and includes measures to stop illegal persecution. The long-term plan was published in January 2016 and we believe that it remains the best way to safeguard the hen harrier in England. A copy of the plan is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/491818/henharrier-action-plan-england-2016.pdf

Whilst the Government has no current plans to carry out a review of the management of grouse moors, we recognise that it is vital that wildlife and habitats are respected and protected, and that the law is observed. We will continue to work to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between shooting and conservation.

HC Deb 08 September 2020 | PQ 82283

[Hen Harriers: Conservation](#)

Asked by: Twist, Liz

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help protect the hen harrier from extinction.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government is committed to securing the long-term future of the hen harrier as a breeding bird in England. The Hen Harrier Action Plan sets out what will be done to increase hen harrier populations in England and includes measures to stop illegal persecution. The long-term plan was published in January 2016 and we believe that it remains the best way to safeguard the hen harrier in England. A copy of the plan is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/491818/hen-harrier-action-plan-england-2016.pdf.

Natural England has recorded the best year for hen harrier breeding in England since Natural England's hen harrier recovery project was established in 2002. Illegal persecution of raptors such as the hen harrier is one of the UK's wildlife crime priorities. There are strong penalties in place for offences committed against birds of prey and other wildlife. Those convicted of committing an offence can face an unlimited fine and/or a six-month custodial sentence.

HC Deb 08 September 2020 | PQ 82282

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