



Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 14 February 2019

UCMK, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK9 3HS

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30

Present:

Graham Bennett (GB); Jim Collins (JC); Derek Hartshorne (DH); Nick Havermann-Mart (NHM); Andrew Knowles-Brown (AKB); Gordon Mellor (GM); Julie Murphy (JM); Jimmy Robinson (JR); Mark Upton (MU); Rachelle Upton (RU)

Apologies:

Gary Biddiss; Graham Irving; Paul Manning; Don Ryan; Martyn Standley; Dean White

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

Approved

Chairman's Report:

We are still dominated by two major issues - last year's Animal Activities Licensing and the possibility of a no-deal BREXIT.

Government representatives continue to provide inaccurate and misleading advice in response to letters asking for clarity. DEFRA is standing by what it has previously articulated, in that 'sporting use' is not exempted in the breeding animals for sale part of the legislation. The legislation is indeed quite clear on this. However Government ministers (albeit junior ministers) respond that breeders of raptors for falconry are indeed exempted.

The situation is a mess. To my knowledge it has not yet been tested in law - we will have to wait for this season's breeding to get underway. I advise breeders to be very circumspect before they become embroiled legally. It may be a lengthy and costly procedure.

We have already seen local authorities making widely differently decisions when it comes to whom they are seeking to license under the exhibition of animals section of the legislation. It is tempting to say 'we told you so' but I doubt DEFRA or the local authorities are likely to listen. Some of our professionals are being hounded by their licensing officer, whilst others are being consulted and listened to.

GM: Animal activities license has worried exhibitors more than anyone else. Most comment on people being treated differently depending on the County they are in and how they treat each application. I received a letter this week from Gary Wall saying that as a result of a FOI request he has established that the inclusion of BoPs as a pet was taken in March 2017 – that is post consultation. We could appeal to the Parliamentary Ombudsman stating that DEFRA didn't live up to their statutory brief. We need to decide if we are going to continue to fight. A junior minister took legal advice that the sporting exemption applies across the legislation not just exhibition and breeding

for sale. The guidance notes say there is no sporting exemption for breeding for sale, but there is for exhibition. It is to our advantage if the sporting exemption was across the board.

AKB: You would need a bill of sale to prove you are selling to a falconer.

DH: I'm amazed there are people who say there is an exemption. Pt6 Sch1 is specific to training for exhibitions.

NHM: Breeding for sporting purposes are exempt under Pt6 Sch1 – I have a letter from DEFRA.

GM: Do we fight:

1. Gary Wall point – not up to statutory brief
2. We are getting conflicting information from the Government not DEFRA regarding status of BoP bred under sporting purposes.

GM: Lawyer reading that would say yes there is an exemption.

MU: Another point; falconer like me keep the parents specifically for sport. Breeding is purely a secondary product.

GM: The hobby aspect of breeding is exempted.

NHM: Business test you have to pass shows it is irrelevant to how much you sell stuff for. So if you make no profit you would fail.

GM: We have to bear in mind there is a good number of our fraternity that think this is a good idea and it should go much further. It is politically unwise to be seen to be against welfare.

JC: If you look at social media some people have to be licensed even if making less than hobbyists.

AKB: Poke and stokers try to get round it by saying they are a charity.

GM: The ombudsman probably won't support us, but a letter could be worth a try. I will think it through and share a letter prior to sending.

JC: It is worth a letter as if there is further consultation as it will put us to the forefront.

MU: We should keep looking at welfare from a good point. We should have something in place – needs to be written very carefully.

GM: Do we review and rewrite our Welfare Guidelines?

AKB: I rewrote the guidelines and left out tethering, but Jemima Parry-Jones stopped it.

NHM: AAL guidelines are for very small pens.

DH: The guidelines were written for the inspectors.

GM: Do we reopen Guidelines and Welfare?

DH: We, Raptor Awards, spent a couple of years producing operational standards with contributions from Neil Forbes and Jemima Parry-Jones amongst others. As part of our review process would the HB be willing to take part in our consultation and could we get you to join into our review and have one set of standards not 2, RA & HB?

GM: We would contribute to yours, but we are two organisations and we might not be able to support Occupational Standards the review. HB would be underselling itself if we didn't have our own standards/guidelines.

AKB: Until I have seen and read yours I couldn't say.

GM: We still need to review ours.

RU to circulate our guidelines to all, for everyone to look into amending.

MU: What is different between tethering owls to tethering peregrines? If you put too much into the guidelines you open yourself up to being criticised.

GM: In the revised guidance notes (AAL) I thought I saw tethered birds should be flown every day or free lofted. This concerned me.

AHM: They told me they wouldn't expect a prosecution. Guidance review again.

JR: The document has errors and says raptors should fly 4 times – this is a mistake.

NHM: My letter contradicts this.

GM: We have work to do and look at our guidelines.

AKB & GM to review the RA guidelines.

The spectre of a no-deal BREXIT is worrying. It is hard to judge the likelihood of this coming to pass but I am sure that you will all share my sentiment that we need to avoid such an outcome if at all possible. From road/ferry transportation and airfreight of birds of prey into and from Europe to the importation of hawk food, the effects are likely to be profound. DEFRA's 'no discussion' designation of ports of entry and egress is one example of what could be an arbitrary and chaotic period. We are so far down the priority list for Government that we hardly register. I have little doubt that even through the tireless work of the Sustainable Users Network, our voice has hardly been heard.

NHM: With Brexit there is nothing we can do; Honeybrook and JC have lobbied to no avail. They don't comprehend and still they say there will be a 2-year transition. Import/Export to the UK is ok, but not to the EU.

JC: Logic doesn't stand up when it comes to border inspection - they need to know the difference between CITES and non-CITES species.

MU: They want to digitilise and not stop.

JC: They won't stop non-CITES, but they won't know the difference.

GM: Most difficult thing to achieve since the 2nd World War.

MU: It makes it difficult to have a strategy.

GM: Unlikely to crash out with no deal, but it is a possibility.

JC: Most likely will be another 6-12 month wait.

GM: Soon as Parliament make a decision we will have something to work on. No faith that public opinion would fall our way if we don't have food for our BoPs – but we would be in breach of welfare.

On a positive note, Avian Influenza has been far less prevalent across Europe this winter, present yes but less so. That is one import that we can very well do without.

We have received one or two bits of adverse publicity through the continued use of eagles in the hunting field in the presence of fox hounds. The Hawk Board came out strongly against this practice after the legislation to ban hunting with dogs in 2005. I had hoped we had all moved on and we could once again stand shoulder to shoulder with our field sports fellows, however we have been dragged into a couple of cases. One of which is certainly going to court. Whilst we are peripheral to these, the use of eagles in a manner that appears to circumnavigate the law and facilitate hunting with hounds, can only do us harm.

GM: Is there anything we can do regarding Eagles and fox hounds? Our statement made it clear we don't support it. But we are getting it in the neck – but it won't stop it.

AKB: Scotland are reviewing the hunting law at the moment to make it more difficult. Working with Emma Ford via the SHB to not remove the using a BoP exemption. But if they do remove the exemption then England may well follow suit.

GM: Do we reissue our guidelines?

AKB & MU: No

NHM: If they remove the exemption it is not going to affect falconry.

Treasurers Report:

At present the HB Current account and Savings account have sufficient funds.

The Yorkshire Hawking Club having said they would pay their subs have sadly not paid and so are no longer members of the Hawk Board and will need to be removed from your contact lists.

We still need to look at fund raising options. JR agreed at the last meeting to look into this.

GM: We are still facing major issues from our critics, so it is difficult to fund raise.

AKB: Scone (Scottish Game Fair) will put money baths out.

GM: Buckets are only a small part of what we do. We need a different approach to raising money, a strategic approach.

Falconry Fair (Duncombe)

JR: Charlie Heap has set me a message regarding his Falconry Fair. He is offering the Hawk Board a free stand and camping if we attend. The problem is it is June 29-30, which is the start of the breeding season.

RU: Mark and I are away that weekend, so wouldn't be able to attend.

GM: He threatened to charge us when we had to pull out of one of his fairs at short notice. If we are able to go then we have to do it properly or not at all.

NHM: Honeybrook goes as it is a different part of the country.

MU: But we could target the north by doing presentations at club meetings.

GM: What does our display look like now?

NHM: You could have the stand next to ours, but you would still need people to man it.

JR: Depends on the breeding as to whether we can go, I could possibly go for one day.

GM: Then do we ask the co-ordinator to circulate to the entire board to see if we can get a few people to attend and support Duncombe? If positive then we go ahead.

Agreed - RU to put dates together for the different events to check on member availability

MU: Clubs have previously agreed to have a Hawk Board banner.

GM: Clubs could get a banner as part of their membership.

Zoological Subcommittee

JR: As Jemima Parry-Jones is no longer on the board; I feel that the Board could benefit from a group of people that are part of the well-established zoos and "centres" in the UK. I would like to suggest in inviting Gary Benton (Hawk Conservancy) and Holly Cale (ICBP) to a subcommittee to represent zoological legislation and to boost the profile of the Board going forward.

GM: We could do a letter inviting them to work with JR on a subcommittee of the Hawk Board.

Anyone think it is not a good idea?

All agree to the idea

JR: I will approach them.

GM: They can attend meetings if they wish.

Brexit Update

Discussed during the Chairman's report.

SUN Update:

See Appendix 1

JC: 2/3 on Brexit has already been covered. There are 2 sets of opinion on ditching requirements for Article 10s. DEFRA have given strong hints that they will ditch it.

AKB: Will they bring back in registration for raptors?

JC: Indication is that nothing will replace it.

AKB: Listed as previous Article 10 or registration document?

JC: It is a cost saving for them.

AKB: Lots of Annex A will be come CITES 2.

JC: Makes it very difficult for them to deal with other EU countries. For a couple of years we will be so far down the list of prioritisation. But something HB needs an opinion on, as and when it goes to consultation.

GM: Where do we stand?

AKB: Depends on whether they are going to take out or put in.

MU: Membership would be overjoyed with no paperwork, not realising the problems it could make.

AKB: We can work with SUN on this, as it will affect other SUN members.

MU: Definitely one to watch.

JC: Import/Export removal from Dover and the Tunnel will be within 2 years.

AKB: Is the import/export for birds still only Gatwick?

JR: Heathrow is on the list now.

JC: Animal transportation – the UK has said they will acknowledge all EU transport, but EU have said they won't approve ours.

AKB: BoP licence, or can use one for livestock transportation?

JC: Licence for non-human consumption. CITES focus will be on captive breeding.

AKB: Do we automatically revert to a CITES country?

JC: Down to Governments. CITES happy for trade within countries to remain and UK could request to remain within EU CITES. Germany is keen for UK to remain within EU CITES.

JC: Alien Invasive Species – No BoP on the current list. The Commission is now picking out species and proposing each time to see what member states say. If the Harris Hawk comes onto the list and passes the first vote it will go on a list with lots of other species and member states cannot then cherry pick they have to vote for all or nothing. During the Brexit transition period the UK won't have a vote, but would still have to implement the result.

Legal/Guidelines Update:

See Appendix 2

IAF Update:

See Appendix 3

MU: The main thing is the new president. I had a meeting with him last week at the French Falconry Club meeting, he is looking at some big changes; splitting the board into groups with a VP overseeing each group. He also wants to get more young people involved and also to bring in more women. There will be a push towards education and conservation

CA Update:

See Appendix 4

NHM: I sent an email to the Welsh Government regarding Mobile Animal Exhibit Licensing Wales to let them know that we had set up subcommittee to deal with this, but as yet I have had no reply.

AKB: DH have you heard of anyone outside England getting a licence to display BoP in England?

DH: No. One LA told someone they would have to have a license for every county they display in.

MU: One lady based in Wales does most of her work in England contacted DEFRA who couldn't give her an answer of what she needed to do.

AKB: Someone I know was told you only have to contact the 1st county and would then be covered for the rest of England.

DH: One person who travels from England to Wales is now waiting to see what Wales does.

NHM: Some LA's claim not to know anything about the licenses.

GM: We have a lady in Wiltshire who does hunting days and hawk walks, she was told she would have to have a zoo licence for her home – which is a misinterpretation of the rules.

DH: Hunting days could be out of scope.

NHM: Guidance is due to be reviewed this year and advice taken.

JC: Targeted advice; they have written to SUN. When you write to the ombudsman make sure you mention the Hawk Board in the letter.

A.O.B:

The meeting closed at 15:05

Next Meeting: 12.30pm Thursday, 13 June 2019

Location: UCMK, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK9 3HS

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 18 February 2019

Sun Report from Jim Collins

Traditionally this past quarter is the quietest of the year from a legislative viewpoint and this year has proven no exception. The authorities are primarily tied-up with dealing with the various options (and implications) of Brexit together with preparing for the forthcoming Conference of the Parties (CoP) to CITES.

Submissions have been made to the UK Invasive Alien Species Secretariat and to the European Commission (Jim Collins as SUN Coordinator also met in Brussels with the European Commission officials who head-up the EU's CITES and IAS teams) in respect of the latest proposed species to be banned from trade and future breeding/propagation. The Management and Scientific EU Forums have met in the past quarter but decisions for species going-forward to the vote in June have been deferred until meetings in the Spring. No bird-of-prey species feature in the current list of species but there does remain the spectre of having the likes of Harris Hawks listed since these were looked at in the European Commission's horizon-scanning exercise and species are now coming-forward from this exercise proposed by the European Commission itself as opposed by Member States - one especially ludicrous example being the Brush-tailed Possum proposed for banning in Europe on the basis that it has become invasive in New Zealand (as a result of tens of thousands having been intentionally released with the **specific aim of having them establish** in order to provide a fur-bearing mammal to hunt!!).

In terms of primary interest for bird-of-prey keepers, the forthcoming CITES CoP consideration of captive-breeding is probably of most significance with a number of protectionist organisations along with a number of country signatories wishing to impose more and more controls, bureaucracy and prohibitions on the captive-breeding of CITES species (especially those species on CITES Appendix I).

As referenced previously, UK Government officials have almost solely been engaged in Brexit-related work in the past few months, particularly with a major ramp-up of considerations for a No Deal Brexit. Regrettably, despite major lobbying to the contrary, DEFRA have publicly announced that in the event of a No Deal Brexit, CITES specimens will be banned from the Channel Tunnel and Dover Ferries in despite the fact that their argument of not having the facilities or time is baseless since they also confirm that non-CITES animals will still be allowed through since there is no legal mechanism to prohibit them. Under such a scenario, Border Force will still need to spend time and have the 'expertise' to know what is and is not a CITES species! This will obviously have a major impact on time, cost and choice for transporting birds of prey (whether for sale or hunting on the Continent) since it means Harwich will be the nearest to the Continent usable for moving CITES specimens.

Similarly, in the event of a No Deal Brexit all movement of CITES specimens to and from the UK and the remaining EU Member States will require both Import and Export Permits and for these to be wet stamped at the Border Inspection Port, together with veterinary health checks taking place. The UK would also cease to be bound by participation in the EU collective voting at CITES meetings and could be free to scrap - if it so chose and as has been muted by DEFRA officials as a deregulatory possibility - the use of Article 10's for CITES I/Annex A species as well as having the possibility of dropping to CITES II species that in Europe are on Annex A but only globally on CITES II e.g. species such as White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Saker Falcon and Lanner Falcon.

Along with a great deal of lobbying on Brexit matters involving live animals, SUN has also been very much engaged in seeking to have DEFRA understand the potentially massive welfare and business complications of imposing further time delays or other restrictions to the movement of frozen rats, mice, chicks, etc. essential in huge volumes for the feeding of birds of prey, many reptiles and mammals, held in the UK and reliant on production of feed animals from outside the country.

Of course, if a Brexit deal is struck then we face an interim period of either two or three years wherein nothing in essence changes from the status quo in respect of CITES, Balai and Invasive Alien Species legislation (other than the UK will accept the EU decisions on these pieces of legislation but will not have a vote in the decision-making process).

Legal/Guidelines Report From Graham Irving

Changes within the Crown prosecution Service

At the end of 2018 Gerallt Evans took over from Sue Hemmingway as the head of the specialist wildlife, heritage and rural crime team within the CPS. He now oversees the specialist prosecutors within the CPS 14 regional areas. This team is in place to take on or provide specialist advice on the above crime types.

Operation Easter

Many of you are probably aware that each year there is a national operation to target egg thieves across the UK; from 2019 this operation will be extended to include a more targeted regime in areas where cases of raptor chick theft has been identified via intelligence information.

2018 Cotes review

As mentioned in the summer 2018 newsletter, new regulations requiring the listing of A10 certificate numbers in all advertisements' when a commercial activity will take place came into force on October 1st. This is going to be policed by the enforcement team within APHA and investigations will be "intelligence lead" although how and what they mean by that phrase has not been expanded upon! On the subject of APHA, they are recruiting additional staff to help deal with the expected increase in import/export applications post Brexit.

Staying with the Cotes review, the use of civil sanctions as part of this review is going to be the subject of a short, 6 week consultation sometime in early 2019. This will be to gather feedback from stakeholders as to their thoughts about developing this option for a small number of Cotes related offences, including the omission of A10 cert numbers in advertisements'. Finalised guidance will be published after feedback from the consultation has been considered and following a 1 month acclimatisation period APHA will be able to use civil sanctions if appropriate.

Invasive non-native species- new legislation introduced.

New legislation has recently come into effect that prevents the re-release and breeding of some pest species found in the UK, the commonest ones being the grey squirrel and Muntjac deer, the falconry community will need to keep a close eye on any list that the UK draws up post Brexit, we all know that a variety of raptors are lost on an almost daily bases, (you only have to look at the monthly figures produced by the IBR to see the never ending list). To me, this legislation has the potential to be the biggest threat to falconry in the UK in a long time in relation to the types of raptors we can both breed and fly, please, all of you reading this pass the word that we need to ensure that every single falconer in the UK takes an extra bit of time to prevent loss when flying hawks, handling hawks and entering weathering's and chambers.

The "B" word

Meetings with various government bodies to discuss and try and get a grip on what is and will happen post Brexit have been happening regularly over the past 6 months. In this time frame we have seen the pendulum swing from "it will all be OK" to "we are not quite sure now" and the latest guidance notes and information published have all been around a no deal scenario. I think the safest thing I can say is that if it ends up with a no deal situation we can safely assume that import and export paperwork requirements will come into effect. Will we lose A10's overnight, I doubt it as APHA don't even seem to know the answer to that one, although they are though looking at bringing back semi complete A10 applications for business with volume trade, but we don't know what their interpretation of "volume trade" is yet. If we go out with a deal we are being told that nothing will change until 2020 at the earliest, free movement (with documentation as currently exists) will continue between the UK and EU, and this free movement period will allow the two sides to work out if the agreement will remain permanent or if we will revert to "third country status" after that grace period. One thing we do know, if we end up with no deal, is that Dover and euro tunnel will not immediately become designated ports for movement of CITES specimen, the authorities do not currently have the manpower and budgets available to put sufficient staff at the ports to handle the level of trade that currently passes through them.

IAF Report from Mark Upton

On the 1st of January Adrian Lombard retired from his post as President of the IAF. The post has been taken over by HE Majed al Mansouri. The posts of Vice Presidents remain the same except for Vice-president for Middle East and North Africa, which is vacant.

Majed is in the process of choosing his board and advisory committee. There will probably be some quite big changes. He is expecting the board to be more involved with the running of the IAF and is hoping to use more specialist working groups lead by members of the executive.

Some board members will be changed to involve some younger members and more women. I attended the IAF AGM at the DFO Meeting in Bamberg, Germany in October. Elections were held for the posts of President and Vice-presidents for Europe, (Africa South of the Sahara & Oceania), Asia and Middle East North Africa. Majed al Mansouri stood unopposed for the post of President and was duly elected. The Saudi candidate for the post of Middle East North Africa pulled out and the other two Vice President posts the current occupants both stood unopposed for a second term.

Some new countries and clubs were joined, although more were rejected for not fulfilling the criteria to become a member. The IAF now has a problem with over popularity and some countries wrongly seeing it as a path to obtain free trips aboard.

There were many presentations and reports from IAF groups and clubs. The most interesting was a new video produced by IAF Young Falconers Group. This is a simple film of young falconers interviewed at the last festival of falconry in Abu Dhabi about their views on falconry and its future. It is extremely effective and heart warming and could be used with great effect to promote falconry. It can be viewed on the IAF Facebook page. The other report that is of great worry was that on the lost of Goshawks in Europe from the now confirmed West Nile Virus. American delegates at the meeting informed us of the devastating effect it had in North America. This is an extremely vigorous disease and is easily spread. It kills hawks very quickly although it can be inoculated against. It is certainly something we should keep a close eye on.

World Falconry Day was once again celebrated around the world with many countries putting on events to promote falconry.

In December on Graham Irving's advice I contacted the IAF about the possible difficulties of falconers moving raptors between Britain and Europe following a Hard Brexit. They have informed European clubs and published it in their eBulletin. Having just got back from a IAF meeting at the ANFA AGM I can confirm there is a great deal of worry from European falconers. Many of them have to pay large amounts for hawking ground in the UK well before the season and have very legitimate worries about not being able to bring there hawks in. It also has the possibility to effect breeders who export from Europe to the UK as well as our breeders.

The IAF have as usual represented falconry at a number of international meetings since my last report, including, 'EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking', 'Meeting between IAF, Pakistan Falconry Association and Gilgit Conservation Department', 'Possibility to publish IAF articles in the online magazine HuntMag' and 'Intangible Cultural Heritage Event and Bird Hunting Art Contest events in Vietnam',

Countryside Alliance Update

POLITICAL AND LEGAL UPDATE ENGLAND AND WALES February 2019

Parliamentary Update

An update on our campaigning work in Westminster and beyond was sent to all MPs and Peers on 11 December ahead of the Christmas recess. This is available on the Countryside Alliance's new website in the section entitled Political Hub.

Parliamentary Events

A lunch hosted by Lord Mancroft for peers interested in shooting and the food industry took place on 21 November to celebrate Great British Game Week, to discuss challenges and opportunities for the game market, with representatives from both the Countryside Alliance and British Game Alliance being present.

The annual Countryside Alliance parliamentary reception, which took place at the beginning of December, was attended by over 50 MPs and Peers. The event provided an excellent opportunity for the political and campaigns teams to update parliamentarians on our work.

Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill

The Alliance submitted a response to the consultation on the future of environmental regulations outside of the EU, which closed on 2 August 2018. The Government are now consulting on a draft Bill. We have submitted evidence to the joint inquiry into the Bill being conducted by the Environmental Audit Committee and the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee and have raised a number of concerns about the Bill. We understand that the draft Bill will be part of a bigger environment bill and that further proposals are expected for inclusion in the final Bill and may include something regarding animal sentience.

Offensive Weapons Bill

The Bill has now completed its Committee Stage in the House of Lords and is awaiting Report Stage. The Countryside Alliance has been working with several peers to raise concerns about firearms licensing arrangements, particularly around background medical checks.

Agriculture Bill

The Bill is currently awaiting Report Stage in the Commons. The Alliance is pushing the issue of the future of upland communities, given that the Bill makes no mention of landscapes and communities. An amendment has been promoted, which would allow financial assistance under a new agricultural policy to be provided for the purpose of "supporting upland landscapes and communities" alongside other purposes set out in the Bill, which include rewarding farmers who protect or improve the environment and support public access. Our suggested amendment has support from MPs across the House of Commons, including former Conservative Minister, Sir Nicholas Soames MP, and former Liberal Democrat leader, Tim Farron MP.

Parliamentary Petition - Driven Grouse Shooting

A Parliamentary Petition, calling for an independent study into the economic benefit of driven grouse shooting, closed on the 2 February with just over 10,700 signatures. The petition claimed that driven grouse shooting is a minority sport which seriously compromises other activities and businesses over vast stretches of northern England, and that it has been implicated in the loss of wildlife and opportunities for wildlife tourism. Without it, the uplands it dominates could instead have fully fledged ecotourism, natural flood alleviation projects, be more fire resistant, have woodlot forestry to provide fuel for those without mains gas, provide cleaner water and better fishing, and be considerably better for general tourism. The Government responds to all petitions on Parliament's website that exceed 10,000 signatures, and we have written to Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment, with information on the latest economic figures on grouse shooting ahead of the Government producing that response.

Labour policy on hunting

The Countryside Alliance has written to Shadow Defra Secretary, Sue Hayman MP, calling for clarity on Labour's policy to "enhance and strengthen the Hunting Act".

Poaching

A policy document has been launched setting out how the problem of illegal coursing/hare poaching could be tackled. The Countryside Alliance has been keen to stress the difference between traditional coursing activities and hare poaching. The document has been sent to all MPs in England and Wales and we are working with other organisations, police and Government to take our proposals forward.

Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG)

Countryside organisations have reaffirmed their commitment to stamping out raptor persecution after The Times ran an article claiming they had boycotted the latest meeting of the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG). The RPPDG is made up of Government and non-Government organisations working together to reduce raptor persecution in England and Wales, with the Chair appointed by the National Police Chief's Council. The Countryside Alliance, alongside partner organisations BASC, CLA, NGO and MA, did not attend the last meeting of the RPPDG on 16 Jan, a move that should not have come as a surprise to anyone involved in the Group, which includes the RSPB and North of England Raptor Forum amongst its members. Trust in the integrity of some of the members has been eroded over time as information from within the private meetings has been twisted and leaked. The Countryside Alliance has not resigned from the RPPDG. Regardless of the next steps, we remain committed to the eradication of raptor persecution, and we hope to attend the next meeting of the Group once the Chair has taken steps to address the loss of trust in the process.

RSPB Birdcrime Report 2017

The RSPB's Birdcrime Report for 2017 was published on 25 September 2018. Although the stated purpose of the Report is to provide a summary of the offences against wild bird legislation reported to the RSPB across the UK during 2017, it does not provide a complete picture of wild bird crime in the UK; neither does it determine how the illegal persecution of birds of prey actually fits within that. Instead, it has become an unashamed lobbying and fundraising tool for the RSPB's politically driven campaign to see driven grouse shooting licensed, and to extend Scotland's vicarious liability laws throughout the UK. In doing so, evidence is being manipulated or misinterpreted to fit the RSPB's policy objectives. As in previous years, the evidence presented by the RSPB does not support its recommendations for more legislation, and we have written to the Environment Minister, Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, to stress this point. Our analysis of the 2017 report has also been sent to all 28 MPs with moorland in their constituencies.

Shooting Ban in Wales Challenged

The Countryside Alliance, along with BASC and the NGO, are challenging the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) ban on pheasant shooting on public land.

Mobile Animal Exhibit Licensing, Wales

The Alliance has been working closely with Welsh Government officials on the proposed Mobile Animal Exhibit legislation. Following a series of workshops at the end of 2018 The Welsh Government has announced that there will be a full and detailed public consultation to take place this year.