



Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 22 February 2018

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

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30.

Present:

Gordon Mellor (GM); Graham Bennett (GBE); Gary Bidiss (GBI); Steve Eastwood (SE); Derek Hartshorne (DH); Nick Havermann-Mart (NHM); Andrew Knowles-Brown (AKB); Terry Large (TL); Martyn Standley; Derek Stotton (DS); Mark Upton (MU); Rachelle Upton (RU)

Apologies:

Jim Collins; Graham Irving; Paul Manning; Jemima Parry-Jones; Don Ryan; Dean White

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

None

Chairman's Report:

Our efforts to become recognised again as a key stakeholder are paying off. We have certainly struggled since about 2010, but this is largely due to reorganisation, staffing cuts and changes of personnel in Government departments. However I am far more optimistic now than I have been for some time.

Since December 2017 I have met with DEFRA twice; responded to the Natural England consultation on license charges, provided a template for falconers and others to use (see below under quarry license charges), engaged in a series of conference calls concerning these proposals; we arranged and have attended (four HB members plus a BoP collection curator) an Avian Influenza seminar with APHA vets; Graham Irving and I hosted a meeting with the NWCU about their concerns over the 'laundering' of peregrines and sparrow hawks; we responded to DEFRA on performing animals (see below under Animal Welfare Regulations); responded to the DEFRA consultation on animal sentience; we are active in Wales lobbying against their mobile animal exhibits legislation.

Details of the Animal Welfare Regulations (2018) have been published; they have been introduced by statutory Instrument and become law in October. There was a flurry of last minute activity before they were laid before Parliament and whilst some of the more extreme proposals were removed, what remains is not ideal. As far as I can see, almost all of us breeding BoPs will need to be licensed. We can lobby MPs but it is far from certain that there will be a full Parliamentary debate on the regulations.

DH: January 21st a Bill for England and Wales, it has now been turned into a statutory instrument, so unless someone really kicks up it will go through.

GM: Statutory Instruments don't normally get debated. It would be good to find someone who could ask questions in Parliament.

DH: Simon Hart – he might be interested in helping.

MU: Are the Countryside Alliance getting involved?

GM: They didn't know about it.

MU: SUN are concerned about it affecting breeders.

GM: Are we following CITES rules regarding business transactions.

NHM: My MP will ask questions.

GM: We will put some questions together for you to give him.

GM: Another major concern is how much they will charge for licensing.

DH: There will be 2 types of license:

1. Section 10, anyone using BoP for display or exhibition, 3-year license.
2. Breeding Section, for anyone producing/breeding birds there will be a risk based assessment.

DH: From October 1st it will be illegal to use any BoP for exhibition or display without a performing animals license. There is a high chance the guidelines will be written for inspectors. It is very doubtful we can change the bill, but we can influence the guidelines.

GM: Local authorities will appoint Inspectors.

GM: Submit any questions that need addressing to RU and we will write questions to go to MPs.

DH: Loads of people have contacted Raptor Awards; the majority want to see it tougher than it is.

In relation to the Natural England consultation on charging for A41 (quarry) and A30 (otherwise prohibited methods of recovery) licenses, I have the following observations: NE were excellent partners in this process, they are informed and knowledgeable, they listened to our concerns and have kept us very well informed as the process has progressed. Unfortunately, despite our publishing a specimen response to the consultation and disseminating this widely, encouraging participation, very few falconers responded - under twenty. If this reflects the level of engagement in our fraternity, I feel that it augurs ill for the future.

GM: NE understand that the A30 license needs to be issued quickly.

We received a fair amount of criticism last year regarding the Christmas Day 2016 statement on Avian Influenza, although this was issued after taking advice from senior Government vets. It was neither false nor ill advised but based upon the information presented to us by Government at that time. This year we post all DEFRA updates on the Hawk Board Facebook page. Thankfully DEFRA/APHA are better with their communications this year.

RU: We still need a report from the APHA/DEFRA meeting regarding AI, people are still asking for the outcome of the meeting.

GM: I will do one.

NHM: The virus lasts or 60 days in mutes, etc.

Later this month, I will attend a symposium on Sustainable Use to be held at ZSL. IAF are keen that we are in attendance there. Having seen the delegate list, I think that I will be a lone figure representing hunting interests. I will report back as appropriate.

For a group of volunteers, the HB gets through a surprising amount of work on behalf of falconers and bird of prey keepers. If you meet falconers, keepers or breeders who might wish to attend a Board meeting ask them to contact our co-ordinator and we will issue an invitation. I think many would be surprised at how active we are.

There are many that doubt the need for The Hawk Board, however I believe that were it not to exist, British falconry would have to reinvent it because the threats and challenges to falconry and other aspects of bird of prey keeping just keep on coming.

Treasurers Report:

At present the HB accounts are relatively healthy.

As the CFF account is only used for 3 standing order credits I was thinking about merging the account into the main HB account, the bank should automatically merge those credits into the HB Account.

When CFF raises money for the HB this is credited into the HB account anyway so I don't see this being a problem.

On that note it was mentioned by Terry at the last meeting that the CFF had raised some money for the HB, this has still not been paid into the account and it would be great if that could be either paid in or given to me so that I can pay it in.

We still need to look into generating more revenue, especially with the election coming up this year.

The FACE subscription is now due at a cost of £295; do we feel this is worth continuing?

GM: are IAF members?

MU: IAF have a memorandum of understanding with FACE.

GB: If the IAF gets updates could they pass them on to us?

MU: I can ask.

GM: We can do without FACE if we can get the information from the IAF. Does anyone think we should continue with FACE.

TL: Where FACE comes in is where we operate under the General license.

AKB: After Brexit the general license will revert back to the Wildlife and Countryside Act. If the agreement is to stop then the IAF can let us know what is happening.

GM: Vote

Unanimous to stop

GM: The IAF have contacted me regarding Perdix. The IAF would like countries to subscribe; they suggest that HB and Clubs cover the cost for UK.

MU: This has also come to the BFC.

GM: Lets get RU to communicate with our clubs to say we have received this request and what do they think. Also include the weblinks.

GB: Could we make more of this at shows, etc.

Website/Facebook:

RU: Not much to say on this apart from all is going well, especially the Facebook page. We are getting some really positive feedback in relation to Gordon's update. This was in response to an email asking what it was that the HB actually did.

GM: Facebook has been a revelation and the regular DEFRA updates are going well. I would like to give a vote of thanks to RU for her work in keeping Facebook and the Website updated.

Election:

RU: The plan is for the notification of the election to be issued on 20 April; the closing date for applications is 15 June; voting papers to be returned by 24 August and the result announce on 31 August. These timescales are in line with previous elections.

We also need to look at the security of the voting papers after the criticism last time.

DS: Can't they be numbered?

RU: We could number the papers, but this was done by a club in Belgium who were then sued by a member on the grounds that the vote might not be confidential as the club could have noted which numbered paper was sent to which member. This entailed the club have to fold.

We could use Ultra Violet markings and/or watermarks, there would then be a statement at the bottom of each form explaining that the form is security marked.

Agreed

MS: I can provide you with paper to save costs.

RU: Yes please!

RU: The clubs will also have to look into the new Data Protection rules and ensure they have covered themselves, as they will need to provide me their member's names and addresses so that the voting papers can be sent out.

DS: Can't the papers be sent to each of the clubs to send out to their members?

RU: No as you are only allowed one vote and some people are members of multiple clubs; when I get the names and addresses I cross-reference them all to ensure that duplicates are not sent out.

Performing Animals License:

GM: Will there be compliance?

AKB: There will be from the big guys; it is the smaller ones (e.g. garden centres) who won't

DH: You have to display the license at the display at the display/show. For breeding, the breeders' license will have to be shown on adverts

AKB: Who has the license?

GM: The display giver has to have the license.

DH: If you have a performing animal license you get an extra 6 months. Educational visits are included unless they are for free. This becomes law on 1 October 2018

TL: IS HB going to liaise with the circus group?

DH: Raptor Awards were directed to a facebook post regarding a meeting the Circus Group were holding in January. They went through the documents line by line, from that meeting it showed that the costs could be huge. Raptor Awards has now joined the Circus Guild, working together they will try and get some

documents together to help advise people.

Game Fair:

TL: we will need some more pop-ups as the old ones are out of date.

RU: GM and I have already discussed this and if he can get the wording to MU then MU will create a template for them.

MS: I will try and find the template for the banner we used in Abu Dhabi.

GM: When you find it please sent to RU.

DS: I can get someone to print it for free.

GM: Will be good to have up-to-date banners.

Legal/Guidelines Update:

See Appendix 1

GM: Disappointed in the numbers that responded to the quarry licence.

GM: We have been asked by DEFRA/NWCU to ask Peregrine breeders if they will participate in a DNA study to establish markers for family lineage. They want a buccal swab taken from parents and offspring. I know that there can be no take up until this year's young are removed from breeding aviaries, but there might be a few breeders willing to undertake this then. This is not a criminal investigation nor is it a fishing operation, it is to establish a base line for testing in Peregrines (both captive and wild). People questioned it being a very good idea and how many they will get is a moot point. Individual peregrine breeders will decide for themselves if they want to take part.

AKB: The science behind it may in future use this for Wildlife crime.

GM: We were asked to assist in looking at relationship status with BoPs, do we do it or not, I have had a mixed response so far. The buccal swabs are to be taken from the mouths of offspring of pure peregrines and the keeper would do this. Do we share this or not?

NHM: I think we agree to ask and leave it for the individuals to decide, but due to previous history I don't think there will be much take up.

AKB: We will ask but doubt much uptake due to the upheaval of the birds.

Vote: Majority agreement

AKB: The travelling circus bill has gone through the Scottish Parliament, SHB has secured an exemption for bird displays in the guidelines.

SUN Update:

See Appendix 2

IAF Update:

See Appendix 3

GB: Can we have more information on Denmark's success on getting Falconry legalised again.

MU: I will try and get more information.

CA Update:

See Appendix 4

A.O.B:

GM: Enrichment – A number of people have been inspected and asked where there enrichment is. We have sent Jemima Parry-Jones' opinion round, which Mark Habben disputes. Enrichment is going to go further so we need to get a statement out there on what enrichment means for BoPs.

DH: Enclosed and non-enclosed need to have enrichment, you have to provide and clean the enrichment once a week.

GM: we need to think what enrichment is.

MU: Enrichment could come in for anyone keeping a hawk.

GM: I have had an email from Don Ryan (IHC); they are supporting a member's license request for a wild

take peregrine in Northern Ireland and he has asked if the HB would consider supporting the application with a letter of support.

The meeting closed at 15:10

Next Meeting: 12.30pm Thursday, 14th June 2018

Location: TBC

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 2 March 2018

Legal and Guidelines Report from Graham Irving

Cotes update

DEFRA have confirmed the following changes will come into effect in 2018 as part of the current revision of these regulations:

- Inclusion of option to use civil sanctions.
- Inclusion of serial number of CITES A10s in all advertisements for sale/trade of CITES listed species/items. (We are awaiting a response to two questions 1) what about adverts published ahead of the breeding season and 2) what about premises holding "auctions/sales" that do not have full details of all items to be sold at the time the auction/sale is advertised).
- The proposal to restrict the number of boarder inspection points to Heathrow and Gatwick airports only from which breeders can export birds to locations outside the EU will NOT be included in the current revision of these regulations. (I would like to thank the breeders who provided information to the Hawk Board as to the potential welfare issues this amendment would create and it is also a good example of the government department involved taking on board concerns raised by the Hawk Board during the discussions held).

National Wildlife crime Enforcers' Conference

The meeting was opened by Therese Coffey, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment who re affirmed the governments stand on fighting wildlife crime and supporting the work of the countries enforcement agencies in their work.

Funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit is now secured until the 2019/20 financial year; talks are already taking place to secure funding beyond this period.

The UK will host the 2018 International Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in London in October.

The new head of the NWCUC Chief Inspector Lou Hubble took over from CI Martin Sims shortly before the conference; Martin will be retiring in mid-December.

The report from the head of the UK Boarder Force, Grant Miller, included reference to 14 prosecutions during the current year concerning raptors and CITES offences; he did not expand on the exact details of the offences involved.

The CPS is moving forward with placing specialist prosecutors' in all of their regional offices to specialise in wildlife and heritage crimes.

DEFRA is aiming to hold a consultation covering legislation on Non-native and invasive species with the aim of an enforcement regime being in place in the later part of 2018.

Prof Stephen Harris, the specialist witness used in hunting and animal welfare prosecutions has announced his retirement and the CPS are looking for a suitably qualified individual to replace him!

Meeting with UK Environmental law association-

I spent 3 days with representatives from this organisation as part of a work related course on Wildlife legislation, a section dedicated to Brexit and its impact on UK wildlife legislation revealed that the potential time frame for the complete review of all legislation affecting wildlife in the UK would probably be spread over at least a 10 year period due to the initial priority being given to legislation covering trade and other high priority matters.

Natural England consultation re charging for licenses.

This consultation closed in early February and as far as falconers are concerned the two issues that would impact on us was the proposal to charge £350 a year for quarry licenses' and £110 per hour to process an application to recapture a lost/escaped hawk!

10 days after the closing date I took part in a conference call with the protect team involved in this review

and they confirmed that following the review of the Hawk Boards submission supported by a small number (16 in total) from individual falconers they are going to review/revisit the proposed charges for quarry licenses.

Total responses were just over 400 the bulk of those from ecological consultants - 17 responses re just the quarry licenses.

2018 general Licences published

Those of you who's chosen quarry species are hunted via the requirements laid out in the various general licenses can find the 2018 licences via the below links.

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prevent-wild-birds-damaging-your-land-farm-or-business#general-licences>

Scotland:

<https://www.nature.scot/general-licences-birds-valid-2018>

Wales:

<http://www.cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk/permits-and-permissions/protected-species-licensing/uk-protected-species-licensing/general-licences-2018-birds/?lang=en>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wildlife-licensing#toc-2>

Sun Report from Jim Collins

Activity has focused most especially on what will happen on wildlife trade issues post-Brexit, combined with activity on trying to ensure that the proposed Animal Establishment License legislation (including that for 'Performing' Animals) is fit for purpose. As mentioned in the previous report to the Hawk Board, the European Commission have agreed to the imposition of a halt to any new species proposals for the Alien Invasive Species Directive during 2018 which gives us a twelve month respite in having to seek to counter inappropriate proposals. It remains to be seen whether the UK will adopt and comply with the Directive post-Brexit. If we do, it will mean we need to continue to try and counter proposals from more zealous countries like Spain, if not the UK can adopt its own invasive species legislation where we can be confident of getting a good hearing from the authorities with whom SUN have an excellent relationship (especially with the Non-native Species Secretariat). Overall, however, the mood music tends to be suggesting that environmental areas (along with security) is likely to see the most clearly defined alignment with the remaining 27 EU Member States. A case of watch this space.

The Animal Establishment License legislation has been being pursued with greatly undue haste - seemingly driven by a political decision for the Conservative leadership to be greener and more heavily pro animal welfare than the Labour Party. All the information we receive is that this is being driven very much by the Minister of State (Mr. Gove) himself. Accordingly, public consultation and dialogue with the wider stakeholder community has been virtually zero. The outline draft of the legislation has already been placed before Parliament with the legislation set to come into effect on 5th October 2018. The Impact Assessment that accompanies the draft legislation can, at best, be described as laughable. DEFRA generated the figures - as they readily accept - without speaking to the pet industry and the data they present is as a result ridiculously wide of the mark (they try to suggest that moving from an annual inspection to an inspection every two or three years represents a cost saving and is deregulation but completely ignore the huge costs associated with all the additional requirements encapsulated within the draft legislation and guidelines and, worse still, neglect to remember that the legislation is proposed to capture many more people and businesses than is the case with the current legislation i.e. covering wholesalers, importers, those using animals for education and performance display, consolidators and commercial breeders none of whom are currently covered).

A major part of the problem is that DEFRA have framed the legislation as a one size fits all - so the stipulated requirements and guidelines to inspectors are the same for a pet shop holding animals in a transient manner as they are for a breeder of animals and as someone importing and holding for a day or two at most. DEFRA have also allowed the legislation to be drafted in an overly prescriptive manner and is far, far too detailed (will local authority inspectors really be able to use a document 60-70 pages in length?). The issue of so-called Performing Animals will be captured and has been discussed at length in Hawk Board forums but of more significance I believe is the danger that hobbyist breeders will be caught-up in this legislation. In private e-mail correspondence, senior DEFRA officials have assured SUN's Coordinator that it is not their intention to force licensing upon hobbyist breeders (be that of birds of prey, parrots, tropical fish, whatever) and are really only looking to cover cats, dogs and obviously commercial breeders of other species. However, the legislation as currently worded leaves a huge amount of ambiguity in this regards - not least as to how Commercial Breeder would be defined and delineated. If not amended, tens of thousands of hobbyist breeders of whatever taxa would be liable to licensing, inspection and adherence to the legislative requirements. The SUN Coordinator has been invited to a crunch meeting with DEFRA and its drafters (mainly vets) and four other stakeholder representatives on 27th February (a DEFRA official involved in the legislation stood aside to allow SUN to be represented since the room for the meeting is tiny). Further feedback on this matter will follow as hopefully clarity is placed on this and related issues.

SUN have been able to secure a high level meeting with DEFRA officials to specifically discuss CITES import and export with the EU Member States post-Brexit. We have had several meetings with DEFRA/APHA in the past year which have included this agenda item but not as the sole item of discussion. It is fair to say that up until now DEFRA have shed more heat than light on the likely situation, largely because the CITES trade will largely depend on what agreement is reached on trade relationships overall (which, as everyone will know, is very far from clear at the present time). DEFRA and the European Commission have both indicated that Import & Export Permits will almost certainly be required post-Brexit and 'blamed' this on the Articles of Association of CITES itself. The SUN Coordinator has disputed this and in the past week has obtained from a very senior member of the CITES Secretariat confirmation that the Articles of Association do not preclude the possibility of the UK/EU maintaining permit free trade after Brexit, indeed the CITES Articles of Association specifically state that none of the other articles trump in any way separate trading arrangements made between signatories of CITES i.e. if the UK and EU deem CITES to be an area where we accept each others paperwork and where completely free trade continues to be allowed

then import and export permits need not be reimposed. An update after the small sub-group meeting has met on 1st March will be forthcoming - Jemima Parry-Jones will represent the Hawk Board at this meeting, accompanied by the SUN Coordinator.

IAF Report from Mark Upton

The main event the IAF was involved with over the last few months was the International Falconry Festival, held in Abu Dhabi in December. The event was organised around youth, and was extremely well attended, with falconers from more than 90 countries. More than 700 attended.

With different organisers for this event the style of the festival was changed. There were no flying displays and a minimal numbers of hawks on show.

The first three days of the festival involved a series of workshops in the Desert Camp at Telal Resort aimed at the youth. They also visited displays of falcons presented by Emirates Falconers Club in cooperation with Abu Dhabi Falconers Club. Workshops in Bedouin tents discussed issues such as: falconry heritage, international agreements and legislation, future strategies for falconry in the world, technologies and conservation, animal rights and nutrition and veterinary care of raptors. It was great to see so many youngsters from different countries interacting around a common interest.

During this time a more academic conference was held at the Al Ain Zoo conference building on various aspects of falconry, organised by The New York University Abu Dhabi. With talks on the Biology of Bird of Prey, the Viking Age of Falconry, Early Falconry in China, Early Falconry of the Eurasian Steppe, Falconry in Art History, An Illustrated Picture Book of Hawking from 19c Japan and Frederic II and the Introduction of Arabic Treatise on Falconry into Europe.

The festival then moved to Khalifa Park in Abu Dhabi city. This was open to the general public and consisted of an exhibition of photographs of the 1976 Abu Dhabi Conference on Falconry and Conservation. Stands from most of the participating countries hawking clubs and heritage, veterinary and equipment areas. On the penultimate evening a huge gala dinner was put on for everyone attending at the The Ritz-Carlton Hotel overlooking the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque.

During the festival guests who had been part of the 1976 conference were flown over to attend. This group was treated as honoured guests by the Arabs and it was nice to see the respect with which a lot of the young falconers present showed to them.

On the last day of the festival it was announced that Falconry had been re-legalised in Denmark. This is after years of hard work by Danish and neighbouring falconers, and the IAF.

The IAF has also had representatives at the 2017 Berne Convention in Strasbourg and at the UNESCO ICH session in Korea.

The IAF has opened its new office in Brussels. IAF AISBL, Rue de Flandre 31, Bruxelles 1000, Belgium. The office is funded by Abu Dhabi under a separate agreement to the IAF funding for running costs. It is close to the European Parliament buildings and is easy to get to from train stations and metro. About 10 to 15 minutes walk from the main square.

We got involved with two questions that came up from the IAF:

- The first following the Vice-president for Europe becoming aware of the case of a harris hawk breeding naturally with a common buzzard near Plymouth. We were able to inform them that this was actually old news. It started quite a discussion on non-natives and hybrids being lost and the effects on wild populations. Matt Gage put forward some very good research showing that it had extremely little effect on wild populations but could be more of a publicity problem for falconry.
- The second was a request for information about newspaper report of a raid on a falconer here and Graham was able to help with a rough outline of what was going on.

Graham made a request to the IAF for information on numbers and prices of wild taken hawks in the Middle East to help with his meeting with NWCU on possible laundering of Scottish peregrines. IAF was able to help.

Countryside Alliance Update from James Legge

POLITICAL AND LEGAL UPDATE ENGLAND AND WALES February 2018

People Moves

The following MPs have been elected to the EFRA Select Committee: Alan Brown MP (SNP), Paul Flynn MP (Labour), John Grogan MP (Labour), Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative), Sandy Martin MP (Labour), Sheryll Murray MP (Conservative), David Simpson MP (DUP), Angela Smith MP (Labour), and Julian Sturdy MP (Conservative).

Christmas Reception

Around 50 MPs and Peers attended our Christmas Reception in Parliament on 11 December.

Parliamentary Update

An update on our campaigning work in Westminster and beyond was sent to all MPs and Peers on 7 February ahead of the half-term recess.

Select Committees

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA)

The Alliance submitted written evidence to the inquiry on the draft Animal Welfare Bill which was used in the final report published on 2 February. The Committee has recommended separating the two components in the draft Bill on sentience, and increased sentencing, and the need to carry out an impact assessment on the changes being proposed. We have also submitted written evidence to the Committee's inquiry into fisheries.

Environmental Audit Committee

The Committee has launched an inquiry into the ambition and overall approach of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, and we will be submitting written evidence in due course.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Committee has launched an inquiry into the social impact of participation in culture and sport, and we will be submitting written evidence in due course.

DEFRA

Draft Animal Welfare Bill

In addition to providing written evidence to the EFRA Committee, we also made a submission to the Defra consultation on the draft Bill. We also commissioned a legal opinion from Hugh Mercer QC and this has been attached as an appendix to our consultation response. The consultation closed on 31 January and the Government will respond in due course.

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals)(England) Regulations

The draft Regulations were laid before Parliament on 8 February. The Regulations are made under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and must be approved by both Houses of Parliament. The Regulations introduce an updated licensing system for five activities involving animals: selling animals as pets; providing for or arranging the provision of boarding for cats and dogs; hiring out horses; dog breeding; and keeping or training animals for exhibition. The licensing system will be enforced by local authorities. These Regulations replace a number of existing Acts as they apply in England, such as the Riding Establishments Act 1964. The new regime will come into force in October this year. Guidance is in preparation which we hope will give greater clarity and certainty as to the scope and impact of the new licensing system. The Regulations also provide for the Regulations to be reviewed at least every 5 years, with the first report to be published before 1 October 2023.

Home Office

Firearms Licensing Medical Procedures

The Countryside Alliance has raised serious concerns regarding the failure of a number of police forces and medical practices to implement the Home Office guidance on firearms licensing law in respect of background medical checks. In response to these concerns, we have initiated an online email campaign to enable people to email the Policing Minister with their concerns, with these emails copied to their respective local MPs. Over 3000 signatures have been collected as we continue to lobby the Home Office to take action.

Two letters have also been sent to the Policing Minister, Rt Hon Nick Hurd MP. A number of WPs have also been asked by MPs on our behalf.

Air Weapon Review

The Countryside Alliance has responded to a Home Office review of air weapon legislation opposing the potential implementation of further restrictions on the use of airguns, including licensing.

Parliamentary Petitions – Grouse Shooting

In its response to the latest petition against grouse shooting, the Government has once again stated the conservation benefits of grouse shooting and highlighted its economic value to the rural economy. It has *also used the opportunity to state that “neither subsidies nor agri-environment payments are paid to farmers to support shooting activities”*. There is also another parliamentary petition in support of grouse shooting. We continue to work extremely closely with parliamentarians and the media, and one of our key messages is that public opinion cannot be gauged by online petitions, given that even those that are well supported represent the tiniest fraction of the electorate.

Fabian Research Project

A draft final report has been written and makes a number of useful observations and recommendations around animal welfare and rewilding. The report is due to be published shortly.

25 Year Environment Plan

Political Relations Manager, James Somerville-Meikle, attended the launch of the Plan at the London Wetland Centre on 11 January. The Environmental Audit Committee is currently holding an inquiry into the Plan.

CAMPAIGNS

Wildlife Law Essays

In light of our decision to leave the European Union, the Countryside Alliance is asking the question ‘*Where next for wildlife law?*’, beginning with a collection of essays from individuals from a range of backgrounds and organisations who have a wealth of experience and knowledge of the countryside and wildlife to help inform and stimulate this important debate.

We have eight essays from the following:

- Professor Sir Roger Scruton, writer and philosopher
- Matt Ridley, academic and land manager
- Ben Goldsmith, commentator and environmentalist
- Nick Fox, conservationist and practitioner
- Richard Benwell, Wetland and Wildlife Trust
- Arlin Rickard, The Rivers Trust
- Tim Baynes, Scottish Land and Estates
- Teresa Dent, GWCT
- Adrian Prabst, political philosopher

The project was launched at the parliamentary Christmas drinks on 11 December and is ongoing. It has attracted interest from other stakeholders and experts who are keen to contribute. The long term aim is to present the Government with a set of principles for the future of wildlife law.

HUNTING

National Trust

The Countryside Alliance, in conjunction with the hunting authorities, continues to liaise with the National Trust (NT) over their proposed licensing arrangements, which were initially deemed unacceptable. Some progress has been made and subsequently hunts were advised they could apply for licences ahead of Boxing Day. The NT agreed not to publish meet information on their website and softened some of their demands regarding the use of quad bikes. However, the Board was not willing to compromise on the use of a wholly artificial scent. While there are still some local issues, particularly in Cumbria, there are currently 19 packs which have successfully applied for and been granted a licence.

Boxing Day

Our hunting coverage reached nearly 3 million people via social media channels over the Christmas period. We produced a trail hunting promotional video this year and an interactive map detailing where Boxing Day meets were being held. The map alone was viewed over 170,000 times. Media interest remained strong, particularly in light of the Prime Minister's comments, and we conducted a number of television and radio interviews.

SHOOTING CAMPAIGN AND MOORLANDS

RSPB Birdcrime Report 2016

The RSPB's Birdcrime Report for 2016 was published on 1 November 2017. Its focus is again firmly on the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The RSPB are urging the Government to introduce a licensing system for driven grouse shooting, and an offence of vicarious liability, as seen in Scotland, in England. However the evidence provided by the RSPB does not support their recommendations for additional legislation, and we have written to the Environment Minister, Therese Coffey MP, to stress this point. She has also been sent a copy of our analysis of the Report.

Ilkley Moor – Renewal of Shooting Lease

Having been informed on the 15 January that the vote by Bradford Council's Labour Group on the renewal of the Bingley Moor Partnership's shooting lease on Ilkley moor had not been in favour of the Partnership, the Portfolio Holder announcing that the lease was to lapse, the Council now appears to have changed its position. The Countryside Alliance generated considerable coverage in the national, regional and sporting media criticising the decision that had allegedly been made by the Council, and due to our concerns over the decision-making process, we have been in close contact with the Leader of Bradford Council's Conservative Group since late last year, with that group also making an official complaint against the decision, and the manner in which it was made. In response, the Council has now confirmed that no decision with regard to the cessation or continuance of the arrangements for grouse shooting has been taken. It has been suggested that the Council has only now retracted the decision that was made on the 15 January thanks to the media interest generated by the Alliance, and that official complaint. We have written again to the CEO of Bradford Metropolitan District Council to express our concerns with the way in which this issue has been handled to date, and to ask for an explanation of the process that is now to be followed.

Raptor Persecution Maps for England and Wales

Raptor persecution maps for England and Wales have been published by Defra on behalf of the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group, of which the Countryside Alliance is a member, and the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU). The maps, which show the number of shootings, trappings, poisonings and nest destructions that took place between 2011 and 2015, will be updated annually, and help enable the NWCU and police to focus their resources in those areas where they are most needed.

WALES

Welsh Government Cabinet

There have been a number of changes to the First Minister's Cabinet. Of interest to our campaigns, former Plaid Cymru and now Independent AM Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas becomes Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport; Hannah Blythyn is now the Minister for the Environment and Lesley Griffiths remains Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs.

Animal Abuse Register

The RSPCA have been tasked by the Welsh Government to explore the feasibility of an animal abuse register in Wales. The Alliance responded to the initial consultation and has given oral evidence to the RSPCA in February. We have also put on record in a letter to the Minister our concerns that an organisation with a longstanding campaign to introduce such a register has been given the task of reviewing the issue.

Mobile Animal Exhibits

The Minister has announced that there will be a licensing system introduced in Wales for all mobile animal exhibits. The Alliance is working with the chief veterinary officer's staff to try and ensure that some activities such as hound parades at agricultural shows, pets taken into schools for education purposes etc. will be exempted. It is far from clear how falconry will be impacted in Wales. It is also not clear whether this licensing system will follow the new Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals)(England) Regulations.

Natural Resources Wales

The long awaited summary of responses to Natural Resources Wales's (NRW) consultation on whether the use of firearms is appropriate on land they own or manage has been published. A full public consultation has been launched. The Alliance has lobbied on this issue since the campaign against shooting on NRW land was started by Animal Aid. The Alliance has briefed NRW board members, attended several meetings and presented evidence to the initial review. The initial recommendations favour allowing the use of firearms for exempted hunting and pheasant shooting. However, the consultation is now public and the board will need to agree the proposals put forward by the review team in the light of the public consultation.