

Note of meeting between Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd.

30 March 2023 at 14.00 virtual over Teams

Present

Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd, Lesley Griffiths MS
Dan Butler, SpAd



Matthew Goodall, GWCT
Dr Roger Draycott, GWCT
Marlies Nicolai, GWCT

Notes

The Minister introduced Welsh Government staff noting this meeting had been previously arranged and postponed. She was keen to hear the view from GWCT about the proposed ban on snares, a Programme for Government commitment which she is responsible for taking through the Senedd in the Agriculture (Wales) Bill.

Matthew Goodall gave a presentation and will provide a copy of his slides the week afterwards. The key points noted were:

- The Environment (Wales) Act identifies certain protected species in section 7. There is a duty on Welsh Government to secure the conservation of these species. Curlew, Lapwing, Plover, Black Grouse and Hen Harrier are all S7 species for which control of predation is critical and which currently benefit from use of snares to control predators.
- Focus on Curlew – as the most pressing issue – there has been an 81% decline and perhaps only 400-500 pairs left. BTO forecasts curlew will be extinct in Wales by 2033 unless action is taken to reverse current trends. Lapwing has declined by 77%.
- Use of ‘cable restraints’ to enable fox control is essential to both of these species continuing to breed in Wales. Cited new research from Dave Baines which found Curlew numbers are 4 times higher in areas where there is predation management – with the role of ‘HCRs’ as important. Three times as many waders since management introduced.
- What measures does WG propose to compensate for the loss of access to ‘cable restraints’, to offset the negative impact on these species?
- Cable restraints are humane, they are not designed to kill the fox but to restrain it. Showed drone footage of a fox it was claimed was not distressed while sitting restrained in a ‘cable restraint’. Made the point that videos of distressed foxes were taken when a person was in close proximity, in contrast to the ‘lack of distress’ seen using the drone camera.

- Mr Goodall argued the recent RSPB data (the Douglas 2023 paper) showed it was impossible to control fox populations using shooting alone in the absence of 'cable restraints'. He said that removing access to 'cable restraints' would mean that very large-scale fox control would become necessary and that much of this would be ineffective in contrast to the tactic of using 'cable restraints' which he claimed are a more targeted method so achieve the same conservation outcome for curlew while killing many fewer foxes.
- He noted that non-target species are caught – acknowledging 68% (hare and badger) but it was claimed are not killed and larger animals - including dogs - can self-release because of the break point in the 'cable restraint' while smaller non-target species are released by the wildlife manager who deployed the restraint.
- GWCT prefer to recognise snares as a killing device and 'HCRs' are designed to capture only.
- Reference to Defra trial and there being no indication anything is inhumane (AIHTS).
- Claims that Black Grouse numbers are 6 times due to predator management.
- Put forward claims that shooting with the aid of thermal imaging doesn't work and NRW were wrong to say that in the EM.
- He argued for a licensing system which would require ID tagging, twice daily inspections, mandatory training and limitations to curlew or other ground nesting bird conservation only.
- Called on Minister not to ban 'HCRs'. Claim they are humane.
- He also argued for a vicarious liability requirement to be introduced. So, landowners would be responsible for illegal use of snares on their land.
- He argued that a snare ban is likely to push people into illegal activity.
- All three GWCT representatives stated that HCRs and code compliant snares are entirely different ("drastically so").

The presentation had taken 27 minutes of the allotted 30 and thus there was only a brief discussion about the use of cable restraints in Scotland and that the Scottish Government had not fully enforced the restrictions in their licensing system, nor did their data identify between a code compliant and a regular snare.

Finally Mr Goodall noted that achieving positive conservation outcomes for Curlew is very hard to achieve and all the tools in the box, including 'cable restraints', are essential.

The Minister thanked Mr Goodall for his comments and for the presentation, she noted that she is in regular discussion with the Minister for Climate Change who is responsible for Curlew and other species conservation measures. She confirmed Mr Goodall would be written to following receipt of a copy of the presentation.