

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares
Date: 19 October 2022 09:19:17
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)

Hello [REDACTED]

I hope all is well. In response to your email of 10th October I have the following observations with particular reference to the GWCT statement:

“This position is backed up by both scientific and anecdotal evidence which I am desperate to share with the Ministers when our meeting is rescheduled. There are currently no examples where conservation of species such as curlew have been successful (i.e. breeding productivity surpassing the level needed to maintain/ recover populations) without the use of live-capture restraints to manage foxes. Whereas there is evidence that using these live-capture devices can reduce predation pressure enough to allow these species to reach breeding productivity which maintains and recovers local populations”

I have provided a background section on aspects of the evidence that we do know (this may be useful information for context) and an evidence assessment of the GWCT statement.

Background

Here is what we know:

- Peer-reviewed scientific evidence suggests the predation of eggs and chicks is a key driver of curlew *Numenius arquata* breeding failure and population declines (Grant *et al.*, 1999, Brown *et al.*, 2015).
- Nest monitoring highlights red foxes *Vulpes vulpes* and carrion crows *Corvus corone* are frequent meso-predators of curlew nests, with further losses to agricultural activities including mowing and rolling (Colwell *et al.*, 2020).
- The UK has the second highest densities of foxes across European countries, and the UK some of the highest densities of carrion crow. Furthermore, these predators have increased numerically in the UK in recent decades (Roos *et al.*, 2018). The reason's for such high densities is unclear but several correlates driving predator abundance have been suggested, such as increased food subsidy from large scale release of non-native gamebirds (Pringle *et al.*, 2019), and the role of woodland plantations and shelter belts supporting generalist predators.
- It is considered that for curlew recovery at the landscape scale lethal predator control will be needed but this would be an expensive and controversial approach (Colwell *et al.*, 2020) It would also need to continue for many years for positive effects to persist. However, in the short-term at least, it is considered that focused, effective predator control will be needed at key sites to raise curlew breeding success from the very low levels currently being recorded.
- Effects of predator control is not always apparent (e.g. Bodey *et al.*, 2011). For example, Bolton *et al.* (2007) found that reducing fox and carrion crow numbers had no overall effect on lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* nest survival rates or population trends, although twice as many pairs fledged young at some sites during periods of predator control.

- The impact of predator control on nest survival rates may vary depending on the density of predators present at that time (Bolton *et al.*, 2007). Several meta-analyses of the effect of lethal control on bird populations, have concluded that the average overall effect is positive but that there is great variation in effect sizes among species and locations (Côté and Sutherland, 1997; Smith *et al.*, 2010). There are many possible causes for variable responses to predator removal, including annual variation in the abundance of predators or alternative prey, an impact from other predators which have not been targeted, density-dependent effects, individual variation in predator behaviour, predator control method(s) or inefficient predator control.
- Whilst predator control can reduce predator densities at sites, high immigration rates indicate rapid replacement of culled foxes such that intensive culling is required to maintain low densities (Porteus *et al.*, 2019), calling into question the biological, spatial scale, ethical and financial sustainability of lethal control as a permanent solution. Control of a single 'key' predator species may also not achieve the desired conservation outcome due to potential compensatory predation, which can involve combined effects of foxes, corvids and other predators (Roos *et al.*, 2018).

Consideration of the evidence base of GWCTs statement

GWCT state:

“There are currently no examples where conservation of species such as curlew have been successful (i.e. breeding productivity surpassing the level needed to maintain/ recover populations) without the use of live-capture restraints to manage foxes.”

Though this statement may be accurate when applied to the findings of predator control studies to benefit breeding curlew, there are conservation studies that suggest lapwing populations responded positively to anti-predator fencing and/or predator control (lethal shooting) in the absence of snaring techniques (see Smith *et al.*, 2010).

As referenced above, it is widely accepted that lethal predator control can be used to dramatically reduce the number of generalist predators, namely foxes and carrion crows (Bolton *et al.*, 2007; Baines *et al.*, 2008; Fletcher *et al.*, 2010; Douglas *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, studies indicate that predator control on grouse moors in the UK uplands leads to higher breeding wader densities, including curlew, than on moorland with no predator control, and increases in wader populations have been documented following the reinstatement of predator control (Tharme *et al.*, 2001; Littlewood *et al.*, 2019; Ludwig *et al.*, 2019). In many of these cases, multiple predator species were lethally controlled, this in turn lead to a detectable increase in prey numbers than removal of a single predator. However, it is difficult to determine the relative contribution of individual species of predator to a prey response, in most cited predator control studies (Roos *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, I am not aware of any peer-reviewed scientific study of predator removal and prey response that investigated or determined the efficacy of different predator control methods, such as shooting and snaring or their statistical contributions to population level response by prey species, such as breeding curlew. I am aware the RSPB has a vertebrate control policy that prohibits the use of snaring as a predator control method and have now concluded a five-year curlew Trial Management Project. Here, fox control was deployed but only used lethal shooting as a control technique. However, their findings are still in preparation and were not available for me to determine either the efficacy of lethal shooting of foxes or

population level response of breeding curlew to that fox control technique.

Because predator control benefits a relatively small number of species compared to habitat management, there are several evidence gaps, such as a need to understand not only the minimum level of lethal predator control effort to determine a response in overall curlew breeding success but also the efficacy of different lethal control measures required to push curlew chick survival above the threshold for a stable population. To date, I am not aware of any intensive studies of curlew chick survival, in addition it is fair to say there is little knowledge of how to effectively protect curlew broods to fledging. There is now some site-based evidence that electric fencing relatively small areas around curlew nests can substantially increase hatching success on grassland, but this does not protect broods.

I hope the above helps, if you did to discuss further please let me know



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[Yn falch o arwain y ffordd at ddyfodol gwell i Gymru trwy reoli'r amgylchedd ac adnoddau naturiol yn gynaliadwy.](#)

Proud to be leading the way to a better future for Wales by managing the environment and natural resources sustainably

From: [Redacted]

Sent: 19 October 2022 08:14

To: [Redacted]

Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

Hi [Redacted]

Apologies, please have you had a chance to pull the information together?

Thank you

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 10 October 2022 14:11
To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted]
Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

Hello [Redacted] time scale is challenging but doable. Its ok I will speak to [Redacted] and compile something for you.

BW

[Redacted]



[Yn falch o arwain y ffordd at ddyfodol gwell i Gymru trwy reoli'r amgylchedd ac adnoddau naturiol yn gynaliadwy.](#)

Proud to be leading the way to a better future for Wales by managing the environment and natural resources sustainably

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 October 2022 12:59
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

Hi [REDACTED]
Thank you for your swift reply. Would it be possible for you to provide advice by next Tuesday if possible please? (18th).

Is it worth me contacting [REDACTED] direct for his views or will you be building RSPB work in to your response? I am happy to contact [REDACTED] if it makes things easier as I'm sure you've got enough to do generally without chasing things on our behalf.

Let me know
Thank you
[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 October 2022 12:15
To: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

Hello [REDACTED] yes all is good on Anglesey. I equally hope all is well at your end. Thank you for your email. I am aware of the RSPB UK Curlew Trial Management Project (concluded in 2018) and the ongoing RSPB Curlew LIFE project. Though both projects commissioned fox control, snares/live-capture restraints to manage foxes were/are not used. When do you need a response to the evidence paragraph.

BW

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



[Yn falch o arwain y ffordd at ddyfodol gwell i Gymru trwy reoli'r amgylchedd ac adnoddau naturiol yn gynaliadwy.](#)

Proud to be leading the way to a better future for Wales by managing the environment and natural resources sustainably

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 10 October 2022 09:44

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Subject: FW: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

Importance: High

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope you are well?

You are probably aware that the Agriculture (Wales) Bill was published a fortnight ago and it has begun its journey of scrutiny etc. Linked to that but also as a result of GWCT ambushing the Minister with a Code compliant snare at the curlew day at Ysbyty Ifan back in July, both the Minister for Climate Change and Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd have agreed to meet with GWCT to discuss snares. The meeting was due to take place last week but had to be postponed at short notice. In reaction to the postponement GWCT have sent an email stating that they would like a meeting ASAP. I have included an excerpt from the letter below

It is the Trust's position that without the ability to use these live-capture devices, devices which meet the highest internationally agreed humaneness standards set out within the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTS) and which the UK is signed

up to, then the ability to conserve several Section 7 Priority species under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (species such as curlew, lapwing, golden plover and black grouse) will be severely compromised.

This position is backed up by both scientific and anecdotal evidence which I am desperate to share with the Ministers when our meeting is rescheduled. There are currently no examples where conservation of species such as curlew have been successful (i.e. breeding productivity surpassing the level needed to maintain/ recover populations) without the use of live-capture restraints to manage foxes. Whereas there is evidence that using these live-capture devices can reduce predation pressure enough to allow these species to reach breeding productivity which maintains and recovers local populations.

GWCT are requesting that a licensing system be put in place to allow conservation work.

The AIHTS claim is not strictly correct as snares were predicted to pass the required standard for fox capture (although insufficient animals were caught to state this conclusively), the standard was not tested for non-targets and GWCT research has demonstrated that non-target captures constitute a large proportion of captures with significant numbers of both hares and badgers caught.

What I am seeking is your view on the second paragraph. Earlier this year, we were given a presentation by GWCT where they provided data on pest control in several curlew project areas. The data revealed that whilst 80% foxes killed on Ruabon was by snaring, only 33% foxes killed as part of Powys Moorland Partnership was through snaring. Clearly this is a big difference. From memory, I think there was another moor, possibly in England where it was 20%. GWCT did not share the presentation with us.

The Agriculture (Wales) Bill includes provisions to ban all snares and cable restraints with no exceptions. The ban was a Labour Manifesto pledge and also a Programme for Government commitment. We have fully considered introducing a licensing system and have looked carefully at what has been done in Scotland. A review of the Scottish legislation did not evidence either improvements in animal welfare or a decrease in the capture of non-targets. The current WG position after assessing the information available is that the most efficient and humane method of fox control is the use of rifles, with thermal-image scopes, at night. It is important to be clear that the ban on snares is about the method used and does not prevent fox control using other methods.

We also understand that the use of non-lethal measures are being assessed? Electric fences? Scaring?

Lastly, it is our understanding that foxes are not the main predators of ground nesting bird eggs. A recent study in Scotland using camera traps provided evidence that livestock are a major problem, as are badgers. Are you aware of any other research that assesses the role each of the main predators plays – corvids / foxes / badgers / livestock / mink?

I would be very grateful for your input as soon as possible.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 24 February 2022 14:41
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Urgent: WG - the use of snares

[REDACTED] just a quick note to follow up on your email.

[REDACTED] is on A/L and when we caught up before he headed off we realised that your email had fallen off our radar. Apologies. It may be too late now but in case not here are a few (slightly random and 'off the top of our head') thoughts below which may / may not help! I need to caveat that they've come from a bit of chat in the Wild Bird Review core project team so they represent a subset / 'pocket' of views and are not a 'formal' NRW position. Please treat them in that context!

Regards

[REDACTED]

- A ban of the use of snares would result in unintended consequences and have a negative impact on Welsh biodiversity, especially ground nesting birds - This is quite similar to the argument about restricting or withdrawing general licences, i.e. making it 'harder' to control predators (because to do so requires applying for a specific licence), which is seen as a barrier and may result in people being dissuaded from doing it, so there'll be more predators which in turn could impact on populations of prey etc. In the case of snares the argument is all about effectiveness/practicality of alternative methods of control rather than about the introduction of new regulatory barriers. Whether we or others would agree with this statement depends mostly on the question of whether there are

practical/effective alternatives to using snares. We say 'mostly' because it probably can't be assumed that requiring people to use an alternative or a less effective method (if shooting is a less effective method) will necessarily result in a reduction in levels of control, significant enough to have adverse consequences for biodiversity. BASC's argument appears to assume that people will not to some degree 'compensate' for the loss of their ability to use snares by investing more effort in shooting. Like the SL / GL discussion, banning snares is about the method used and does not prevent fox control using other methods.

- When vegetation is long at the end of summer, snares are a more successful method due excessive cover making shooting harder – In our project team we probably don't have any expertise or evidence on which to challenge the view that shooting is harder when there is tall vegetation cover - this does seem obvious/common sense. But we would ask - where is the evidence about the effectiveness of snares at any time of year? Is there evidence to support this? When BASC say that snares are effective, it is unclear how are they defining effectiveness? e.g. Number of foxes caught per snare? Number of foxes caught per unit of snaring effort? Is snaring cheaper than shooting, and how is the comparison made?
- Rifles with thermal image scopes somewhat overcome the problem with tall vegetation – We don't have expertise in this area but as this has come from BASC it would appear to offer some mitigation of the points made on the adverse consequences of banning snares.
- Predation by foxes on ground nesting birds (e.g. Curlews) in late summer – Unfortunately we didn't test the timings / whether or not birds will be nesting in late summer / if it is likely to be a problem or not with [REDACTED] before he went on A/L. However if this was put to BASC we wonder if they would say that predator control for the purposes of conserving ground nesting birds is needed all year rather than only in the nesting season as this was a similar argument as part of their General Licence / JR submission). We did note though that page 3 of the best practice document says the opposite - "It is a mistake to look simply at the number of foxes taken in snares as opposed to other methods, seasonality is a major consideration, but simply a single fox caught in a snare at a critical time, such as when ground nesting birds are present, in locations where other methods are not viable will have far greater conservation impact than 'many' foxes culled after such birds have fledged young." This seems to acknowledge that controlling foxes outside the nesting season is of very limited conservation value, in which case does it actually matter in conservation terms if fox control outside the nesting season (incl in late summer when there is tall vegetation cover) has to rely on the supposedly less effective method of shooting?
- In relation to curlew specifically -
 - Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate that the breeding population of curlew in Wales is declining at a rate of 6% per year (Gylfinir Cymru, 2021). Between 1995-2018 curlew in Wales have declined by 69% (Harris *et al.*, 2020)

- Curlew is predicted to be on the brink of extinction as a viable breeding species in Wales by 2033. Due to the significance of this emergency, curlew is now considered to be the most pressing bird conservation priority in Wales (Gylfinir Cymru, 2021).
- A likely demographic driver of curlew population decline in Wales and elsewhere in the UK is low productivity due to a combination of a) earlier cropping, mowing and grazing dates, b) reduced food quality and/or availability in intensively managed grasslands and c) increased predation of eggs and chicks due to high densities of generalist meso-predator (eg red fox and carrion crow), combined with greater susceptibility to predation in degraded breeding habitats (Grant *et al.*, 1999, Gylfinir Cymru, 2021). The success of predator control for breeding waders, such as the curlew may depend on several metrics such as the specific predators, their spatial and temporal distribution and abundance, the effectiveness of different control measures and sustained use of control measures over time.
- **References**
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cyfoethnaturiol.cymru / naturalresources.wales

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From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 07 February 2022 12:55

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: Curlew conservation - the use of snares

Hi [REDACTED]

I'm sure I've spoken with you about the Ministers intention to ban the use of snares (without exception) this legislative term. It features in the Programme for Government and the FM is also keeping abreast of how this is progressing. It has cross party support generally although one lone MS has spoken about the necessary use of snares by farmers, gamekeepers and conservationists.

BASC have recently requested a meeting with us about the proposed ban. BASC state that a *'ban of the use of snares would result in unintended consequences and have a negative impact on Welsh biodiversity'*. They are particularly concerned about ground nesting birds.

Their report and letter are attached. We are not planning to prevent fox control, only the method used. Snare users have told us that when vegetation is long at the end of summer, snares are a more successful method due excessive cover making shooting harder. Since that advice however, BASC have discussed rifles and thermal image scopes with us that somewhat overcome the problem with tall vegetation. In addition, I would also question whether curlews would still be nesting late summer.

Please do you have any observations?

Many thanks

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Sganiwyd y neges hon am bob feirws hysbys wrth iddi adael Llywodraeth Cymru. Mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn cymryd o ddifrif yr angen i ddiogelu eich data. Os cysylltwch â

Llywodraeth Cymru, mae ein [hysbysiad preifatrwydd](#) yn esbonio sut rydym yn defnyddio eich gwybodaeth a sut rydym yn diogelu eich preifatrwydd. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn anfon ateb yn Gymraeg i ohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi. On leaving the Welsh Government this email was scanned for all known viruses. The Welsh Government takes the protection of your data seriously. If you contact the Welsh Government then our [Privacy Notice](#) explains how we use your information and the ways in which we protect your privacy. We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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