



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Richard Fuller MP
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Dear Richard,

Thank you for your further email of 22 December to Rebecca Pow MP on behalf of your constituents about the illegal killing of hen harriers and other birds of prey, and management practices associated with driven grouse shooting. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

The Government recognises the importance of tackling wildlife crime. Since 2016, Defra and the Home Office have jointly committed £300,000 a year to funding the National Wildlife Crime Unit. We have also ensured that legislation contains the necessary powers for enforcement agencies to investigate any possible offences and bring offenders to justice. The legislation that is in place for the conservation of wild birds is robust and I can assure you that the Government is committed to helping ensure that the strict protection afforded to wild birds of prey is effectively enforced. It is important to remember, however, that the enforcement of wildlife and animal welfare laws are operational matters for the police and local authorities. There are now over 500 wildlife crime officers, covering most police forces in England and Wales. These officers are specially trained to conduct and support investigations into wildlife crimes.

It is for individual Chief Constables to determine how their resources are deployed and it is for locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners to hold their forces to account, including on how they tackle the crimes that matter most to residents and businesses in rural and urban areas alike.

There is still much to be done to address the ongoing issue of raptor persecution, however, despite instances of poisoning and killing of birds of prey, populations of many species, such as the peregrine, red kite and buzzard, have increased. The combined breeding population of hen harriers in the UK and the Isle of Man has shown a non-significant decline between 2010 and 2016. Further information can be found at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00063657.2018.1476462>

The Hen Harrier Recovery Project started in 2016 and there were three successful nests. The numbers have steadily risen since, and last year there were 19 successful nests and 60 chicks fledged. The number of successful nests and birds fledged last year was the highest in 30 years.

The Government has always been clear of the need to phase out rotational burning of protected blanket bog to conserve these vulnerable habitats. There is an established scientific consensus that burning of vegetation on such sites is damaging and that is why we are taking action to prevent further damage by bringing forward legislation that will limit burning of vegetation.

The Government is committed, through the forthcoming England Peat Strategy, to protect, restore and sustainably manage England's upland peatlands. The Strategy will include protection measures which, along with restoration, will reverse the decline in our peat and deliver the full suite of benefits derived from these ecosystems, including carbon storage, a haven for rare wildlife, and water regulation and provision. We are aiming to publish the strategy in 2021.

The Government recognises the conservation and economic benefits that shooting sports bring to rural communities. This was also recognised by the Werritty Report, submitted to the Scottish Government from the independent Grouse Moor Management Group. The report examined the environmental impact of grouse moor management practices and advises on the option of licensing grouse shooting businesses. It can be found here: <http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781839604348>. We will carefully consider the Scottish Government's Ministerial Statement in response to the Werritty Report and whilst the Government has no current plans to carry out a review of the management of grouse moors, we do not rule out the possibility of a review in the future.



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