

P-06-1201: Ban the shooting of critically endangered birds...give them the protection they so desperately need!

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 1 Tachwedd 2021
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Reference: SR21/1044-3

Petition Number: P-06-1201

Petition title: Ban the shooting of critically endangered birds...give them the protection they so desperately need!

Text of petition: It is absolutely shocking that some of our most endangered birds, including Woodcock, Pochard, Black Grouse and Snipe are still allowed to be shot in Wales.

These species are currently on the RED and AMBER list of birds of conservation concern 4. That means that they are currently of the highest conservation priority in the UK.

We fully understand that shooting may not be the main cause of their decline, but at the moment when they need maximum protection allowing them to be shot is madness.

We are calling for a complete ban on the shooting of all birds on the red and amber list of conservation concern 4.

Experts are collating ecological and scientific evidence on the health of a species, but the law and gun lobby choose to ignore the facts.

There are around only 200 Black Grouse surviving in Wales. This Red listed species exposes the hypocrisy of spending large amounts of money on trying to conserve this vulnerable species yet allowing them to be shot at the same time.

With its beautiful plumage and camouflage, the Woodcock is another Red listed species currently being targeted by shoots, even though they are



experiencing dramatic population decline. Although game shooting in the UK is controlled by having an open and closed season, which restricts the time of year birds may be shot, we are calling for a total ban on the shooting of these endangered birds. Whilst many call these shoots a tradition, it is time for a change in the law to protect our struggling wildlife.

1. Background

1.1. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the EU Birds Directive

All species of wild birds in Wales are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (WCA). The WCA implements the EU Birds Directive in the UK.

Schedule 2, Part I, of the WCA lists wild birds which may be taken or killed by an authorised person outside of that species' 'close season'. Close seasons are species-specific periods of time where birds cannot be taken or killed.

1.2. Birds of Conservation Concern 4

Birds of Conservation Concern 4 (BoCC4) is the fourth review of the conservation status of birds in the UK. It is produced by a collaboration between the UK's Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and several other organisations. It includes lists which categorise the 244 UK bird species as 'Red', 'Amber' and 'Green' status depending on their conservation importance.

The BoCC4 lists are used by conservation organisations such as the RSPB to prioritise action. Red listed species are of the highest conservation priority (67 species), and require urgent action.

It is legal to take or kill several BoCC4 Red listed birds under Schedule 2, Part I, of the WCA.

2. Welsh Government action

2.1. *The Environment (Wales) Act 2016*

Under section 7 of the *Environment (Wales) Act 2016* ('the Environment Act'), the Welsh Government must publish lists of priority species and habitats that it considers are 'of principal importance for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales'. Public authorities are expected to take steps to maintain and enhance these species and habitats, and encourage others to act similarly.

The priority species and habitat lists have been transposed from the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* (NERC Act) (section 42) as an interim measure, but are being revised by the Welsh Government in consultation with Natural Resources Wales.

Priority species listed under section 7 of the Environment Act include wild birds which may be taken or killed under Schedule 2, Part I, of the WCA.

2.2. Removal of species from Schedule 2, Part I, of the WCA

In 2020, Wales removed the Greenland white-fronted goose (GWfG) from Schedule 2, Part I of the WCA. This made it an offence (under section 1 of the WCA) to kill or take GWfG outside the close season.

The decision to remove GWfG from Schedule 2, Part I, was taken following a complaint under the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), an independent Intergovernmental treaty which the UK is signatory to. AEWA coordinates the conservation and management of migratory waterbirds throughout their migratory range.

RSPB Cymru welcomed the legal protection of GWfG. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) argued that voluntary moratoriums, in place in some areas of Wales since 1972, had been successful and negated the need for a legal ban.

In 2018, the then Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, stated:

there are no plans to make any other changes to Schedule 2 to either add or remove any other species.

2.3. Ministerial response to this petition

The Climate Change Minister's letter on this petition states:

Any regulatory changes to the listing of amber and red listed species as shooting quarry would need to be underpinned by robust evidence to support that change and need to be considered alongside other factors that are contributing to the decline of these endangered species such as loss of habitat and the effects of climate change.

3. Welsh Parliament action

There has been no significant action by the Senedd regarding the removal of Red listed quarry birds from Schedule 2, Part I, of the WCA.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.