

# **Cross Party Group on Shooting and Conservation Minutes – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

## **Meeting details**

Wednesday 14th March 2022

12 – 13:30pm

Hybrid meeting – Via zoom and in person (Conference Room B, Ty Hywel)

## **In attendance**

Sam Kurtz MS (Chair)

Peter Fox MS

Joel James MS

Russel George MS

Sam Rowlands MS

Llyr Gruffydd MS

Bronwen Gardner– BASC (secretariate)

David Boden – BASC

Ian Danby – BASC

Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance (CA)

Charles de Winton – Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Liam Stokes – British Game Assurance

Matthew Goodall – Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)

Dominic Boulton, Game Farmers Association (GFA)

Mike Bryan (support staff for Samuel Kurtz MS, Welsh Conservatives)

## **Apologies**

Iain Hill-Trevor - CLA

## **Welcome**

Sam welcomed members and stakeholders to the meeting and thanked all for attending. Apologies were noted.

## **Game meat and the NHS- Liam Stokes the CEO of British Game Assurance (BGA)**

- The BGA was established to promote, develop and assure the consumption of game meat by creating a game meat market, underpinned by independent assurance. The BGA model covers standards, registration, auditing and accreditation.
- The BGA promotes British game to the general public and to businesses. Some game is exported, the Middle East is an exiting market, but most goes to the domestic market which aligns with the message that game is a local, sustainable produce.
- The BGA's initial conversations with the NHS began in 2019. The process included six months of recipe development. A small trial began in 2021 which resulted in positive feedback
- Six NHS hospitals in England have begun trialling pheasant, partridge and venison on their menus. They take about 6,000-15,000 birds per year into their hospitals. The BGA recently hosted a workshop for catering staff for other NHS trusts.

- Game is a very healthy meat (high in iron and protein) and often comes in at a lower price to alternatives such as chicken. This makes it a viable alternative.
- 48,000 birds are being supplied to the Ministry of Defence. Game is also being supplied to supermarkets, 500,000 birds year to Sainsbury's, 50,000-70,000 to Co-Op, 40,000-100,000 to Aldi, 200,000 to Marks and Spenser's and 10,000-15,000 to Booths.
- BGA are working to increase the value of game at the shoot gate. At present, only one processor is willing to pay for game.

**Action** – The group to write a letter to the Minister from the highlighting the benefits of game meat in the NHS.

### **The conservation benefits of shooting – Ian Danby, BASC Head of Biodiversity**

- 76,000 people shoot in Wales resulting in an annual spend of £7.4 million on conservation and supporting the equivalent of 2,400 full time jobs in Wales. 98% of participants in Wales say shooting improves their wellbeing.
- Ian highlighted the policy impacts of two priority species, the curlew and woodcock.

#### **Curlew**

- The curlew is the most significant bird conservation priority in the UK. The UK holds a quarter of the global breeding population, a population that has declined by 65% since the 1970's. The Welsh breeding population is estimated to be around 400-1700 pairs and is declining at 6% per year. It is predicted that the curlew will be extinct as a breeding bird in Wales estimated by 2033.
- BASC are one of 18 members of Gylfinir Cymru, a group that last year launched a Wales recovery plan for curlew. It received cross party support at the launch event.
- The plan recognises three key pressures; habitat loss, unfavourable management and nest and chick predation. These issues impact the curlew but also other vulnerable species.
- Ruabon moor, an Important Curlew Areas ICA is estimated to have the most breeding curlew per sq km in Wales. A substantial area of Ruabon moor is managed for grouse shooting. Peer reviewed evidence indicates ground nesting birds do well on grouse moors.

#### **Mammal policy issues**

- Effective predator management requires the suite of generalist predators to be controlled, otherwise others take their place.
- Snares/humane cable restraints account for the management of the majority of foxes in the spring and summer when cover is high and control is of peak importance for ground nesting birds.
- They are efficient because a single operator can set multiple snares across a landscape. Control through centre-fire rifle is effective but labour intensive.
- Labour has pledged to ban snares in Wales, the impact of this is likely to be heightened predator pressure, especially before and during the breeding months for ground nesting birds.
- The outcome of this is a more rapid decline in ground nesting birds including the curlew.

#### **Bird policy issues**

- NRW issue general licences and specific licences for the control of birds under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.
- NRW have decided to remove magpie, jay and jackdaw from the conservation general licence starting on 1st July. This leaves only carrion crow on the general licence for conservation purposes.

- The proposed alternative for control is NRW's specific licence process, however it is little used, slow and effectively retrospective, meaning the damage is not avoided.
- There is a significant difference in the predator control allowed across the home nations, with Wales allowing the least number of species to be controlled. All the regulators are using predominantly the same evidence base so it is questioned why such a difference in approach.
- The impact is there will be less management of abundant generalist predators, leading to increased predation. The outcome is an acceleration in the decline of vulnerable species.

### **Woodcock**

- A petition to ban critically endangered species was submitted to the Senedd petitions committee. There is no evidence that the harvesting of woodcock is linked to their decline. Issues such as habitat loss and climate change are influencing factors.
- However, the taking of woodcock did give landowners a motive to manage other factors that benefit them. The shooting community are also adapting our best practice, such as encouraging people to shoot them later in the season.
- In response to the petition the Climate Change Minister said that existing voluntary measures are more effective alongside following guidelines and best practice and that the statutory monitoring of birds shot was inappropriate, impractical and a duplication of existing work. This was a welcome response.

### **AOB**

#### **Lead ammunition**

- UK reach currently have a public consultation ongoing which opened on 6 May and will close on 6 November 2022. The consultation is reviewing lead shot for all types of shooting from air rifle to rim fires and shotguns for both clay and live quarry shooting.
- BASC have reviewed the dossier and supplied UK reach with our in-depth information and believe that any restrictions on the use of lead ammunition must be evidence based and proportionate to the risk. We encourage all members and operators of outdoor shooting ranges to respond to the consultation.

#### **Date of the next meeting**

- The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July at the BASC stand at the Royal Welsh Show.