

PE2035/G: Recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity submission, 5 June 2024

Thank you for your letter of 30 April 2024 regarding the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's consideration of the above petition at its meeting on 17 April 2024.

You have asked for the Scottish Government to clarify a number of points raised in your letter. I have responded to each of these in turn below.

You asked, *whether you will consider giving a Ministerial statement to recognise the importance of predator control and the value of gamekeepers in addressing the biodiversity crisis.*

As stated in the letter sent to the Committee on 04 October 2024, the Scottish Government agrees that predator control can be an important component of species conservation alongside other techniques such as habitat management and translocation.

The Scottish Government also acknowledges that those undertaking predator control and other wildlife management activities on the ground for the purpose of species conservation play a key role in addressing the biodiversity crisis.

These statements are recorded in previous correspondence to the Committee, but I would be happy to reiterate this message should the opportunity arise.

You asked, *whether there is information available on the costs and outcomes for each conservation method and if not, whether you will consider commissioning research to compare the costs of each method against outcomes for species.*

There is no specific information available on the costs and outcomes of each conservation method. The efficacy and costs of each method or approach to conservation of a particular species depends on a variety of factors and therefore cannot be easily compared on a like-for-like basis.

For example, diversionary feeding or predator control is only useful as a conservation tool if the limiting factor affecting the conservation of a particular species in a particular location is predators. Therefore, comparing these conservation methods with habitat management techniques may yield completely different results to a location where predators are a limiting factor. Furthermore, the costs of diversionary feeding at one location where availability of a diversionary food source is readily available may be considerably less than at a location where it is not.

It would be for the land manager to determine which methods were most suitable and were likely to be the most effective taking in to account the costs of each in a particular situation.

You asked, *what financial support is available for predator control activity and your view on whether more funding should be made available for gamekeepers to carry out this work to support conservation aims.*

Funding is available through the Agri-Environment Climate Schemes (AECS) for control of certain species to benefit ground-nesting birds, such as black grouse and waders which are vulnerable to predation.

There is also funding available to benefit Scottish wildcat populations by undertaking legal predator control using methods that reduce the risks to the Scottish wildcat.

Further information on AECS schemes can be found here: [Management options and capital items \(ruralpayments.org\)](https://ruralpayments.org/)

There is also support available through the Forestry Grant Scheme to undertake predator control for capercaillie and black grouse within a 1.5 kilometre radius around active lek or breeding sites. This includes labour costs for shooting and trapping of pest mammals and birds, the monitoring of traps, the humane despatch of live animals, the completion of annual monitoring returns, and associated material costs such as traps.

Further information on this scheme can be found here: [Sustainable Management of Forests – Species Conservation – Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse \(ruralpayments.org\)](https://ruralpayments.org/)

We are currently reviewing the financial support available for future agri-environment and climate schemes through development of the future agricultural support work which is ongoing. As this develops we will be considering the funding available for predator control activity.

You asked, whether consideration has been given to area zoning to allow for targeted predator control while preventing widespread removal of species.

This question has come up previously primarily in relation to control of pine martens in capercaillie habitat in the Cairngorms National Park.

Following consideration of the Review of Capercaillie Conservation and Management report, NatureScot and the CNPA are taking forward a number of actions which aim to aid capercaillie recovery alongside supporting the restoration of the wider native pinewoods flora and fauna. One of these actions is to undertake generalist predator population survey work to better understand the size and impact of the predator suite, including policy principles and tests that would need to be met for management of any protected species with a demonstrable impact on capercaillie.

The outcome of this work will best determine and allow us to consider whether area zoning to allow for targeted predator control while preventing widespread removal of predator species will be useful in conserving capercaillie numbers.

You asked, what efforts have been made to promote the contribution of gamekeepers in Scotland, particularly amongst young people.

The Scottish Government provides Skills Development Scotland (SDS) with funding to deliver services in support of Scottish Government priorities. This includes administering national training programmes including apprenticeships in the Game Keeping and Land Management Sector. SDS also fund Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) by providing funding contributions towards the cost of training MAs.

Alongside direct funding for training and apprenticeships, Scottish Ministers regularly promote the contribution of gamekeepers in Scotland. Ministerial statements have been made in the Scottish Parliament thanking gamekeepers in Scotland for their bravery and selflessness in tackling wildfires in early 2024. Scottish Ministers also attend events held which celebrate the gamekeeping profession. I attended the BASC gamekeepers day earlier this year and spoke of the efforts of gamekeepers in not only conserving species but also of the efforts of gamekeepers in tackling wildfires. I was also delighted to attend and support Lantra Scotland's 2024 ALBAS event (Awards for Land-Based and Aquaculture Skills) in March this year. I was pleased to have been able to promote gamekeeping amongst young people by presenting an award to Campbell Strang from Blair Atholl, who is doing his SVQ in Game and Wildlife Management at Borders College while working as a Trainee Stalker at Atholl Estates. The event celebrated and showcased learners' achievements in the land-based, aquaculture and environmental conservation sectors.

NatureScot have recognised publicly the role that gamekeepers can and do provide for nature and climate outcomes specifically. This was most recently done at the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) AGM in Perth earlier this year, and the NatureScot CEO and chair have very recently met with the SGA youth committee at the Slipperfield Estate. Furthermore, NatureScot have provided support at Royal Highland Education Trust events over the last number of years working closely with local estates and gamekeepers in demonstrating the benefits from wildlife management, particularly deer management and how this supports important species and habitats. We are currently working with SGA and other gamekeeping organisations to ensure that the positive role that gamekeepers is recognised, understood and that this delivers a range of public benefits for climate, nature and rural economy.

I hope this clarifies the Scottish Government's position.

JIM FAIRLIE