

Note to members of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association welcomed the opportunity last week to provide evidence, through our representative, Ian Duncan Millar.

There are some supplementary points we would like to make following the session.

- During Session 2, the representative from RSPB Scotland, Duncan Orr-Ewing, stated that the Bill, and its stipulation on a two dog limit (unless under licence) would not prevent his organisation from carrying out the conservation work it currently does.
- While this will be reassuring to the Committee that the Bill- as drafted- works for conservation NGOs, it is important to re-state that the needs of conservation groups in the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill will differ greatly to the needs of practical land managers and it is our view that this context ought to be kept in mind during debates on the Bill.
- In RSPB's latest published accounts (20/21) [https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/annual-report-2021/rspb-annual-report-2020-2021\\_digital.pdf?sourcecode=GENWEB0026](https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/annual-report-2021/rspb-annual-report-2020-2021_digital.pdf?sourcecode=GENWEB0026) it states that of its £142.4 million income, £2.362m came from land and farming income. We assume the land income is likely to be from rents. While Mr Orr-Ewing stated that RSPB were involved in productive farming, this element of its activity comprised **1.7%** of its total annual income. Mr Orr-Ewing also accepted that a considerable percentage of the farming undertaken in Scotland was on islands *with no foxes*. The RSPB report would indicate, therefore, that productive farming is a very minor concern for the organisation.
- It should be remembered that RSPB Scotland's decisions upon the methods of fox control it chooses to use will be influenced by the sensibilities of its members, upon whom it relied on for **£51m** of its income in the last financial year, according to the above report. Such figures represent sums that a farmer or land manager will never know, and productive land managers require- and are willing to pay for- a professional predator management service which is effective, quick and as humane as possible. Lord Bonyon himself acknowledged that the use of 2 dogs would limit effective and efficient fox control. We note Mr Orr-Ewing's acknowledgement that RSPB Scotland would not claim that its fox management was the most efficient (see second research paper, below). Perhaps this is reflective of its needs as a member charity, when compared to the needs of productive land managers. Each loss of livestock or ground-nesting birds becomes acutely pronounced when a farm or business' bottom line depends on one good breeding season per year and their care for the environment and ground nesting birds can be more noticeably compromised.
- Mr Orr-Ewing stated that RSPB Scotland did not manage foxes around dense forestry when carrying out its conservation work in Scotland. He said that this was because foxes were not identified by them as a problem requiring management, in those areas under its control. This is entirely the RSPB's management prerogative. We would like, however, to draw the Committee's attention to scientific work which demonstrates the impact- on declining bird species- of predation, specifically at forest edges. Aside from predation of farm livestock, we agree with the science- and empirical knowledge- that there *is a need for fox management around dense forestry*, particularly for the conservation of ground-nesting and red listed species with low productivity and survival. The paper, below, was published in March this year. Although this is an Estonian study, it chimes with other UK science which has identified negative forest 'edge' effects on ground-nesting birds. The *causes* of edge effects has not always been well researched, although its existence is clearly identified. The Estonian work is, therefore, important in charting - through nest cameras - what land managers have themselves witnessed over decades whilst managing breeding grounds bordered by forestry plantations. The principal predator, over the 3 year camera study, was the red fox, operating close to forest edges.

<https://zslpublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/acv.12774>

The paper, below, examined the role of predation and other factors in relation to Capercaillie and black grouse survival at RSPB Abernethy in the Cairngorms National Park. The paper acknowledged that the fox control carried out- overseen by RSPB- was not rigorous and, therefore, limited the ability of the study to meaningfully chart the impacts of foxes on Capercaillie.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227586278> An experimental study of the effects of predation on the breeding productivity of capercaillie and Black Grouse

The recent NatureScot assessment of how Capercaillie can be saved as a species in Scotland cites **the red fox**, in the remaining core forests, as one of the principal predators of Capercaillie and supports an extension of predation management. <https://www.nature.scot/doc/review-capercaillie-conservation-and-management-report-scientific-advisory-committee>

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