

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 5 February 2025  
2nd Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Alex Hogg on behalf of The Scottish Gamekeepers Association

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to officially recognise legal control of abundant generalist predators as an act of conservation to help ground-nesting birds in Scotland.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2035>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 17 April 2024](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 4 October 2023](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,439 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**January 2025**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2035: Recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act**

#### **Petitioner**

Alex Hogg on behalf of The Scottish Gamekeepers Association

#### **Date Lodged**

27 June 2023

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to officially recognise legal control of abundant generalist predators as an act of conservation to help ground-nesting birds in Scotland.

#### **Previous action**

Writing to MSPs with responses of generalised understanding but no move towards a concrete action. Participating in forums such as The Moorland Forum and Biodiversity Action Groups for species such as Capercaillie. Liaising with NatureScot officials. Taking part in the Understanding Predation work supported by the Scottish Government.

#### **Background information**

In a Nature Emergency, legal control of generalist predators (such as foxes and crows) should be recognised as an act of conservation benefitting the survival of ground-nesting birds.

In 2010, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust published results of their science at Otterburn which compared plots where predators were legally managed and plots where they were not.

On average, lapwing, curlew, red grouse, golden plover and meadow pipit bred 3 times more successfully where legal predator control was carried out.

Reducing populations of abundant generalists can benefit many rarer and fragile prey species from waders and merlins to common scoters.

Just as the Parliament recognises habitat restoration as an act of conservation, so too, should it recognise control of generalist predators as similar. Both are important if we are to see ground nesting species survive in our landscape.

<https://www.gwct.org.uk/research/species/birds/lapwing-and-other-waders/predator-control-and-moorland-birds/>

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2035 on 17 April 2024**

**The Convener:** PE2035, to recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act, a petition on which we took evidence recently. It was lodged by Alex Hogg on behalf of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association.

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to officially recognise legal control of abundant generalist predators as an act of conservation to help ground-nesting birds in Scotland. Members will recall our meeting with Mr Hogg, who called for a ministerial statement recognising predator control and the value of gamekeepers in addressing the biodiversity crisis. He also suggested ways that the Scottish Government could actively support predator control activity.

In the light of the evidence that we heard from Mr Hogg, do colleagues have any suggestions as to how we should proceed?

**Fergus Ewing:** I suggest that we write to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to highlight the petitioner's evidence, to which you have alluded. In that, as I recall from having briefly re-read some of it, he not only asked for a ministerial statement—which I will come to in a moment—but postulated that the good work that his members and others do in the control of predators in order to encourage biodiversity and a reduction in the number of other species being lost should, perhaps, be recognised financially in the forthcoming decisions about the restructuring of agricultural support in Scotland. I mention that because I think it is an innovative suggestion and one that deserves to be considered.

I would invite the minister to consider that specific suggestion, and I have four other points for her.

First, if she gives a ministerial statement, as Mr Hogg suggested—in which he would like her to recognise predator control and the value of gamekeepers in addressing the biodiversity crisis—I would like to know whether information is available about the costs and outcomes of each conservation method. In her statement on 28 November, the minister dealt with various conservation methods, but I got the impression that she did not prefer predator control, at all; that screams out from the page. Therefore, I would ask the minister to commission research to compare the costs of each method against the outcomes. That would surely assess whether we are getting value for money.

The other points are these: what financial support is available for predator control activity? What is the minister's view on whether more funding should, as alluded to, be made available for keepers to carry out that work to support conservation aims? Has consideration been given to area zoning to allow for targeted predator control while preventing the widespread removal of species?

**The Convener:** Thank you, Mr Ewing. Are there any other suggestions?

**Foyso! Choudhury:** The last time the committee considered the petition, the petitioner mentioned that he goes to schools to teach children about gamekeepers and the pupils do not know what a gamekeeper is. I do not know whether he has done anything about that, but he mentioned that that needs to be taught in schools and that a lot of people are not aware of that. Is there any improvement on that?

**The Convener:** We could include a question to the minister about what efforts are being made to promote the valuable work that gamekeepers do and the contribution that they make. Are we content with those proposals?

**Members *indicated agreement.***

## Annexe C: Written submissions

### Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity written submission, 5 June 2024

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

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**

## **Petitioner written submission, 12 June 2024**

### **PE2035/H: Recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act**

I note the response from Minister Jim Fairlie and thank him for this correspondence.

On the first point, we are pleased that the Scottish Government has, in writing, expressed support for legal predator control and, specifically, the role it plays in halting biodiversity loss. It is important for our members to hear this, from the Scottish Government and, to that end, we would still wish it that this message (given

here in writing) is declared in a Ministerial statement in the Scottish Parliament. I note the Minister says this is possible. It would mean a lot to the SGA membership who undertake legal predator control, professionally. Wildlife managers have, of late, suffered a reduction in their work tools to do the job, due to changes brought about in the Parliament.

This has impacted morale and led to legitimate questions over rural policy direction.

Having the Government's support for legal predator control officially recognised, on Parliamentary record, is therefore more critical now than ever. It will also fulfil a key motivation for starting this petition in the first place and I hope this can come to pass.

The Minister makes many points I agree with and I am satisfied with the answers given.

Moving to the specific point of considering predator control in future agriculture and climate funding schemes, I would make the case that this is necessary, if we look at the pattern of species decline in Scotland in relatively recent times. I feel that increased funding for predator control, in tandem with habitat management, will see an increase in species and I noted some prominent examples of this, in my petition preamble. Nothing has changed since this petition was first considered to make me alter my view on the necessity of support for legal predator control in halting species decline and bolstering species on the brink.

While alarming declines in some favourite species can be multifactorial, and much science is being done on those aspects, there is a need to consider also the wealth of land manager knowledge in Scotland.

Ask someone like myself or a farmer, forester or crofter, who have spent major parts of their lives in daily observation of species of the Scottish countryside and they will note the palpable change in balance between predator and prey (in some species) and how this has impacted conservation over recent decades. It is not the only change, of course, but it is very visible to practitioners in the fields and hills every day.

It is important to note too that there are far fewer trained wildlife managers today than there once was. It is important that those still operating are given the encouragement they need, to continue doing an important job.