

Turn Your Back On Grouse

Three Years On



**A REPORT ON THE CURRENT STATE OF
THE GROUSE SHOOTING INDUSTRY AND
THE CAMPAIGN TO SEE IT BANNED**

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1. Introduction

Much has happened since the Ethical Consumer's last report into the grouse shooting industry, 'Turn Your Back on Grouse', which was published in May 2014. Events, campaigns and publications have intensified, changed and publicised the debate surrounding grouse shooting in England. This follow-up report aims to document and analyse these developments, commenting on how they have influenced the on-going debate around grouse shooting.

Section 2 analyses campaign victories for the movement to ban grouse shooting in England. It starts by looking into the National Trust's decision to revoke a shooting license in the Peak District. It then discusses the work of the campaign group, Ban Bloodsports on Ilkley Moor (BBIM), who have been relentlessly pressuring Bradford council to challenge moorland management practises, with promising results. It also looks at the campaigns which have forced supermarket chains M&S and Iceland to stop selling grouse to customers. Penultimately, it explores the somewhat surprising stance some leading banks have taken by refusing business from gun dealerships on the grounds of 'immorality'. Finally, it discusses the conviction of gamekeeper Allan Lambert, whose poisoning of eleven birds of prey was formally punished in a clear warning from the judiciary to gamekeepers and landowners.

Section 3 comprises the bulk of this report, focussing on parliamentary action around grouse shooting. It begins by analysing the e-petition campaign to ban driven grouse shooting which ran from March to September 2016 and attracted 123,077 signatures, resulting in a parliamentary debate. This debate gave a platform to the issues and debates surround grouse shooting, and helped raise its profile as an issue of public concern. Parliamentarians were urged to consider three major areas of contestation: financial, environmental and illegal persecution. Through studying the evidence session, in which members of the Petitions Committee questioned witnesses on these key topics, this report aims to expose and interpret the conflicting understandings about the industry. It also documents the frustratingly one-sided debate in Westminster where MPs discussed this issue and the Government demonstrated its steadfast support for the grouse shooting industry.

Section 4 addresses action and campaigning surrounding the persecution of Hen Harriers on grouse moorlands. Since 2013 Hen Harriers have received increased amounts of publicity and public awareness of its persecution is at an all time time. This investigation outlines the real-world implications of that attention and the impacts of policies and campaigns designed to protect Hen Harriers. Namely, DEFRA's Joint Hen Harrier Action Plan, Birders Against Wildlife Crime's (BAWC) Hen Harrier Day, satellite tagging, as well as insight into Lush's 'Skydancer' campaign.



2. Successes for the Campaign against Driven Grouse Shooting

Firstly, this report will address the numerous victories for the campaign against driven grouse shooting. Pressure and perseverance from the campaign against driven grouse shooting have forced these successes and slowly the grouse shooting industry is beginning to lose ground.

2.1 National Trust

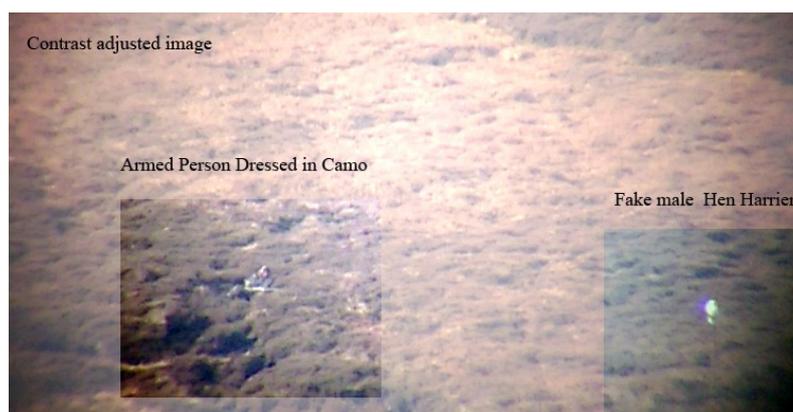
In February 2016, video footage was captured by two birdwatchers in the Peak District National Park, on National Trust owned land, which appeared to show an armed man using a decoy bird to attract hen harriers (see picture below) (BBC, 2016). After a two month long police investigation, no charges were lodged against the armed man or the land proprietor Mark Osborne because of inconclusive evidence (BBC, 2016). However, encouraged by the large amount of complaints received from the general public, the National Trust launched an investigation of its own into the incident (ERCA, 2016). This investigation resulted in the termination of Mark Osborne's grouse shooting licence. The organisation stated that:

“We have a clear vision for land management and wildlife restoration on the High Peak Moors which was developed in full consultation with our tenants and other key stakeholders.

However, in this case we have decided, after a meeting with the tenant, that we should revoke the lease four years early as it became clear that we could no longer have confidence that they were committed to the delivery of our vision for the land.

When considering renewals of individual shooting leases in future we will take into careful account the extent to which our objectives have been met, in particular relating to increasing raptor populations.” (Harper, 2016).

Although the National Trust are still going to allow shooting on their land, this action is a clear statement of intent, showing respect for the organisation's responsibility as a member of the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative. Some campaigners believe that this step indicates the beginning of the end of driven grouse shooting; "With a stroke of its pen, the National Trust has banned the two elements that are essential to making this cruel and environmentally destructive sport financially viable." (Gonçalves, 2016).





2.2 Ban the Burn

Legal action has been mounted by the EU Commission into the land management practices on Walshaw Moor in Yorkshire. Following two separate complaints from the 'Ban the Burn' group and the RSPB, the EU have opened an investigation into a possible breach of the Habitat Directive which protects Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (Mort, 2016). Extensive burning practices on this land have received a lot of attention, particularly in recent times where two major flood events in the Calder Valley (2013 and 2015) are believed to have been exacerbated by heather burning at Walshaw Moor Estate (Ban the Burn, 2016).

2.3 Ban Bloodsports on Ilkley Moor

A localised victory also occurred against shooting on Ilkley Moor. An action group called 'Ban Bloodsports on Ilkley Moor' (BBIM) have been successfully lobbying landowners Bradford council on matters surrounding the practice. Ilkley Moor is the last council-owned moorland in the UK that still permits driven grouse shooting (ITV, 2016). In February 2015, the council voted to prohibit the trapping and snaring of all natural predators of grouse, including stoats and weasels on the moor, following lobbying by BBIM (Robinson, 2015). Moreover, the group have pressured the council into unanimously supporting a heather conservation programme which aims to move away from the damaging practice of burning (Raptor Politics, 2015). Finally, BBIM have been influential in encouraging Bradford council to review its management plan for Ilkley moor. The council held a public consultation around the future management of the moor, including the future of grouse shooting (Robinson, 2015). The council drafted a future management publication which stated that it was considering not renewing the current sport shooting license and taking on management of the moorland itself (Bradford Council, 2016). Keighley's newest MP John Grogan said that: "The current agreement to allow shooting runs out in 2018 and I do not think it should be renewed." (BBIM, 2017).

2.4 Grouse Meat in our Supermarkets

Another campaign victory came in a very different area of the grouse shooting industry, namely the sale of grouse in our supermarkets. Industry statistics state that around 700,000 red grouse are shot each year on moorlands in Britain (BASC, 2014). Some of these birds are taken by the 'guns' that shot them, but considering that an experienced 'gun' could kill upwards of 150 grouse in a single day, there will be a considerable amount of excess. A proportion of these birds found their way into British supermarkets, specifically Marks & Spencer (M&S) and Iceland. Campaigners and conservationists have continuously spoken out against M&S's annual attempts to stock grouse during the grouse shooting season (Raptor Persecution UK, 2016; Avery, 2016; Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2014). For the last three years, campaigners have managed to convince the supermarket that the current state of the grouse shooting industry renders it impossible to ensure that grouse come from 'sustainable sources'.



Iceland showed less sensitivity towards campaigners when it stocked red grouse in its supermarkets in 2015. After receiving a number of complaints, the supermarket released a statement supporting its decision to continue selling grouse, claiming that, amongst other things:

- “Proper moorland management is fundamental to the rural environment. Any form of wildlife control is properly regulated. We do not source from moorlands with unethical or questionable practices.”
- “Game shot with lead ammunition has not been proven medically to have any adverse health effect.”
- “We do not condone illegal activities and would not source from any establishment which was involved in any illegal activity”

Campaigners continued to put pressure on Iceland. Dr Avery decided to test the grouse on sale for lead levels. His findings showed that, on average, the grouse on sale had 100x the lead level permitted in beef, pork or chicken (Avery, 2016). Further to this, Chris Packham released a statement threatening to boycott Iceland if it stocked grouse again in 2016 (Packham, 2016). The impact of these actions was that, despite the supermarket’s previous defence of the grouse shooting industry, Iceland said that it had “no plans to stock grouse” in 2016 (Foster, 2016). These examples demonstrate the direct impact that campaigning can have on important elements of the grouse shooting industry. Moreover, there are also less obvious outcomes, as these actions work to attract public attention and influence opinions, all of which were contributory factors to the success of Dr Avery’s e-petition, which will be discussed in Section 3.

2.5 Gun Dealerships and the Banks

In recent years the shooting industry have been encountering problems with the financial services sector. Many of the UK’s largest banks have been refusing the accounts of licensed gun dealerships. As you might expect, The Co-op Bank have always had an active policy against bloodsports and have thus rejected gun dealerships and other industry accounts (The Co-operative Bank, 2015). But in 2013, another two of the UK’s largest banks HSBC and Lloyds TSB, unexpectedly demonstrated a distaste for the UK’s shooting industry. In January, HSBC rejected an account request from Archie Bell for his gun dealership, saying that gun dealerships were a financial risk and that HSBC did not consider them “a moral company” (Dimbleby, 2013). Then in March 2013, Lloyds TSB prevented gun dealer Chris Wood from opening an account; going on to say that it would no longer opening new accounts for BASC trade members in light of a new policy decision within the group (Shooting UK, 2013). Reportedly gun dealers were also rejected by NatWest and Metro Bank in 2013 (Dimbleby, 2013). The Gun Trade Association (GTA) have stepped in, negotiating with banks with some success, with HSBC restating its position and saying that it is not a company policy to refuse the business of legitimate gun dealerships (Dimbleby, 2013). Despite this, it is evident that those in the shooting industry are finding it harder to acquire financial services.



2.6 Legal Action

There was much talk in the Petitions Committee about finding and charging gamekeepers who violate the law and persecute birds of prey illegally (Jones, 2016). The conviction of Allan Lambert in November 2014 demonstrated the capacity of legal institutions to act when a wealth of strong evidence is available. Lambert, a gamekeeper working at Stody Estate in Norfolk, was found guilty of deliberately poisoning and killing ten buzzards and a sparrowhawk (BBC, 2014). Judge Veits, who presided over the trial, said: "In other industries employers as well as the employee could be facing prosecution in such cases, and I hope therefore that this case can serve as a wake-up call to all who run estates as to their duties." (BBC, 2014). This case stands out as the vast majority of cases brought against gamekeepers are dismissed or never make it to court. Despite this promising case, there has been no other prosecutions of gamekeepers or land owners in England since our last report.

3. Parliamentary Action

Grouse shooting is in the public eye more than ever before; largely owing to the recent parliamentary debate which took place in October 2016. This debate was the result of an e-petition entitled 'Ban Driven Grouse Shooting', its summary stated that:

"Grouse shooting for 'sport' depends on intensive habitat management which increases flood risk and greenhouse gas emissions, relies on killing Foxes, Stoats, Mountain Hares etc in large numbers and often leads to the deliberate illegal killing of protected birds of prey including Hen Harriers.

Driven grouse shooting uses animals for live target practice, with thousands killed every day. Native predators are killed because they eat Red Grouse. Mountain Hares are killed because they carry ticks that can spread diseases to grouse. Heather is burned to increase Red Grouse numbers for shooting. Grouse shooting is economically, ecologically and socially unnecessary. This is 'canned hunting'.

Supported by Eduardo Gonçalves, CEO of League Against Cruel Sports, Chris Packham and Bill Oddie." (UK Government and Parliament, 2016).

The intensification of grouse shooting in England has put moorland ecosystems under increased levels of strain (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2014). Highlighting this to those in a position to effect changes to policy, regulations and law enforcement, had the potential to force real change in the industry. Unfortunately, as this report will outline in section 1.4, the Conservative Government, perhaps unsurprisingly, showed no desire to change the status quo.



3.1 E-petition 125 003

The petition was started by former RSPB Conservation Director, and author of the book *'Inglorious: Conflict in the Uplands'* (2015), Dr Mark Avery, who has become a principle advocate and campaigner against grouse shooting in England. Dr Avery's tireless campaigning to have a ban on driven grouse shooting debated in parliament bore fruit on the 13th August 2016, when his third e-petition on the matter surpassed the 100,000-mark necessary to trigger a parliamentary debate (Heighton, 2016). Dr Avery had vocal support of well know figures such as Springwatch presenter Chris Packham, famous bird enthusiast Bill Oddie and then leader of the Green Party Natalie Bennett (UK Government and Parliament, 2016; Abbott, 2016).

As the e-petition gathered pace it was picked up by national media outlets and widely publicized, catapulting the debate into newspapers, radio and television shows around the country (Heighton, 2016). The story was reported by the Guardian, the Daily Mail, the Independent, the Daily Mirror, the Daily Telegraph and the BBC. The 100,000th signature came in the wake of a heated debate between ex-cricketer and keen 'shot', Sir Ian Botham, and Chris Packham on BBC Radio 4, in which Packham was attacked for campaigning whilst an employee of the BBC (Heighton, 2016). The media attention following this encounter resulted in an extra 20,000 signatures for the petition (Heighton, 2016). After its allotted six-month running time, the petition had amassed 123,077 signatures and this important issue, which by Dr Avery's (2017) own reckoning is 'obscure', was firmly in the public eye.

Often characterised by secrecy and a distaste for public attention, the shooting community were evidentially uneasy with the success of Dr Avery's petition. In response they rallied around a counter e-petition in favour of grouse shooting. The petition, started by a young gamekeeper on the 15th August, was entitled 'Protect grouse Moors and grouse shooting' and stated that:

"Grouse moors and grouse shooting are an integral part of moorland management both for the grouse and other native wildlife such as lapwing and curlew it also helps support of local businesses and jobs in the local areas this cannot be banned

Here is a link to the Countryside Alliance website for more information on how grouse moors benefit the environment and the facts behind it [Link]" (UK Government and Parliament, 2017).

Although this petition was not directly started by shooting lobbyists, they quickly showed their support and urged their members to sign the petition. Groups such as the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC, 2016), Countryside Alliance (2016), Field Magazine (The Field, 2016) and Shooting UK (2016) backed the campaign and used their influence and platform to promote the petition. With the support of leading lobbyists, the e-petition gathered over 20,000 signatures in the two months leading up the to the parliamentary debate (Jones, 2016). However,



by the end of its 6-month running time it had only reached 25,322 signatures (UK Government and Parliament, 2017).

This e-petition linked viewers to a Countryside Alliance document entitled, “Grouse Shooting – The Facts: 10 Key Questions Answered”, that sought to dispel the ‘lies’ coming from the campaign to ban driven grouse shooting (Countryside Alliance, 2016). The vastly different understandings of the ‘facts’ surrounding grouse shooting became evident and very confusing as the debate approached. Each of the 10 questions answered by the Countryside Alliance is to some extent contested by the movement seeking a ban. Both sides were accused of presenting unsubstantiated opinions as ‘facts’ during their campaigns, putting their own slant and bias on the limited amount of scientific evidence available. Furthermore, research and publications which had been funded by the industry, such as the ‘Value of Shooting’ (PACEC, 2014) and BASC’s ‘Grouse shooting and management in the United Kingdom’ (2015) and were presented as factual evidence for controversial lines of argument.

One example of these misleading claims concerns the contested issue of subsidies. Despite the clear Government position that moorland used primarily for grouse shooting is not eligible for Government subsidies, there is much controversy over whether grouse moor owners still benefit from government handouts. The Countryside Alliance’s (2016, p. 2) ‘facts’ state that:

“moorland used primarily for shooting purposes is not eligible for BPS [Basic Payment Scheme] payments and there is also an ‘active farmer’ test for claimants along with a range of other criteria to prove that the land is in agricultural use. The primary land use on many moors managed for grouse shooting is low intensity grazing, often leased to a tenant farmer, and it is the farming side of the business which benefits from BPS payments, not grouse shooting.”

Just how a clear separation is made between the farming and shooting elements of land use is left unexplained. This is why there has been a concern that these public funds find their way into the pockets of grouse moor owners; Animal Aid (2014, p. 7) claimed that:

“the government is to nearly double the CAP Direct Aid moorlands subsidy – up from £30 to £56 per hectare. The money, which is payable from January 2015, is intended for farmers. But bodies including the National Farmers’ Union and the UK Tenant Farmers’ Association have expressed fears that a substantial proportion of the increased funding will go to grouse shoots. As one commentator noted, such enterprises ‘borrow an agricultural backdrop but have nothing to do with food production’. An indirect way that shoot operators lay claim to these public funds is by increasing the rents of their tenant farmers, to whom the subsidy is formally allocated. Even Defra has acknowledged this scenario.”



Other issues had similar levels of debate surrounding them in the wake of the e-petition campaigns. These included the persecution of birds of prey, the impact of heather burning, and the effect on water tables and water quality. All of which were addressed in the Petitions Committee's evidence session.

3.2 Petitions Committee

After the successful e-petition campaign, the Petitions Committee agreed to debate the issue and moved to hold an evidence session comprised of the Petitions Committee and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA). On the 18th October 2016, the committee questioned Dr Mark Avery and Jeff Knott (Head of Nature Policy at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)), as well as, Amanda Anderson (The Moorland Association) and Liam Stokes (Countryside Alliance). Both sets of interviewees gave their alternative versions of the 'facts' surrounding grouse shooting. But importantly, only one respondent (namely Dr Mark Avery) was an advocate for a ban of driven grouse shooting. Jeff Knott (and the RSPB) championed a licensing system instead. During the session, a significant amount of time was spent deciphering the difference in these approaches rather than discussing the underlying issues which the petition was directly concerned with. That having been said, the session did give a platform for these topics, namely, heather burning, flooding, economic impacts, predator control and biodiversity.

3.2.1 Heather Burning

A large proportion of the questions addressed heather burning, an issue which was specifically mentioned in Dr Avery's e-petition blurb (UK Government and Parliament, 2016). Ensuring a continuous supply of young heather, which makes up 90% of the red grouse's diet, is vital to maximise grouse populations (Anderson, 2016). The intensification of the grouse shooting industry (highlighted in our last report) has necessitated increasingly regular and expansive burning practices (Natural England, 2015). Members of the Committee were informed in their session brief that, from 2001 to 2011, the number of recorded heather burns had increased 11% each year (Douglas et al, 2015). Although heather burning on England's grouse moors is mostly performed entirely legally, the environmental impact of the practice is becoming the subject of increased criticism (Committee on Climate Change, 2015; Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2013; Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014; Natural England, 2015). Conservationists and environmentalists point towards research projects that have concluded that burning heather has two major negative impacts. Firstly, when performed in areas of deep peat, it can release significant amounts of harmful greenhouse gases which would have otherwise remained locked underground (Committee on Climate Change, 2015). Secondly, systematic heather burning reduces the moorland's capacity for adsorbing rainfall and exacerbates flooding risks in local communities (Ban the Burn, 2016; Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014).

The practice of burning heather has been an integral part of moorland management for the last 200 years (Simmons, 2003). By burning mature heather on rotation, moorland managers claim



they are not only providing a food supply for grouse but also preserving the moorland environment and reducing the risk of wildfires (Anderson, 2016). When questioned on the potential need for more regulation on the practice of heather burning, the pro-shooting witnesses pointed to the pieces of legislation which are already in place. The main document of which is the 2007 'Heather & Grass Burning Code for England', which stipulates best practice but has no legal powers and is, by its own reckoning, is a purely "voluntary code" (DEFRA, 2007). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Amanda Anderson (2016) told the Petitions Committee that, "In my time working with the Moorland Association, I cannot recall someone being prosecuted for burning illegally." This is despite a wealth of evidence which shows that burning regularly occurs on areas of deep peat, a practice which the Code strongly opposes.

Jeff Knott (2016) stressed to the committee that "burning, particularly on deep peat areas, as an environmental ill and a net negative impact. That is because it can release carbon stored in the peat stores. Peat areas store more carbon than forests." Although the 'Heather & Grass Burning Code' suggests that areas of deep peat should only be burnt "on long rotations of 15-25 years" if absolutely necessary (DEFRA, 2007), a report by Natural England in 2015 (p. 1) states that: "Contemporary burning regimes on deep peat are essentially as intense as those on other soil types (3.76% yr-1 vs 3.99% yr-1 respectively) and forty percent of all burning now occurs on deep peat...and indeed recent increases in burn intensity have occurred mainly on deep peat soils."

This is a concerning trend considering that Natural England's 2013 (p. vii) report highlighted that:

"There is strong evidence that managed burning affects various components of the carbon cycle of upland peatlands. This includes strong evidence that:

- Moorland burning results in increased water colouration and/or dissolved organic carbon (DOC) in peatland watercourses.

There is moderate evidence that:

- Burning reduces peat accumulation and reduces above and below ground carbon storage compared to no burning.
- Managed burning can result in erosion and reduction in the level of the soil surface.
- There are increases in gross CO₂ fluxes of respiration and photosynthesis.
- There are carbon losses through fuel consumption during burning and in conversion to char."

Furthermore, conclusions drawn by the EMBER (Effects of Moorland Burning on the Ecohydrology of River Basins) project (Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014, p. 3) compound these findings, saying that:

"Water-table depth is very important in peatlands for maintaining their stability and function as a carbon store. Water tables were found to be significantly deeper for burned catchments than for unburned ones. Deeper water tables would suggest a greater scope for degradation of the peat and loss of carbon to the atmosphere."



The Committee on Climate Change (2015, p. 177) have reported that: “When in good condition, peat bogs and fens actively soak up carbon dioxide, accumulating between 3 and 7 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year.” Combine this with Natural England’s findings that: “Only 1% of England’s deep peats have been mapped as being in an undamaged state where they remain substantially waterlogged and actively continue to form peat and therefore sequester carbon”, and the scale of the problem becomes clearer.

The growth of Sphagnum moss is essential for new peat to form, in 2013 the Committee reported that of the total area of upland deep peat (3,550 km²), only 160 km² (4%) is in a favourable ecological condition where mosses are still actively forming peat; this figure has declined from 210 km² (6%) in 2003 (Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2013, p. 71).

“An estimated 350,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year is emitted from upland peat in England, the majority of which is from areas that are being rotationally burnt (260,000 tonnes carbon dioxide). Less than 20,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year are sequestered by undamaged blanket bogs.” (Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2013, p. 79)

These pieces of scientific evidence should dissuade heather burning, particularly on areas of deep peat, particularly when you consider the impacts of run-away climate change.

Evidence given by Liam Stokes and Amanda Anderson to the Petitions Committee frequently referenced the term ‘adaptive management’, which essentially means that management practices work best within a loose legislative framework which allow scope for change. Stokes (2016) said that:

“There has been a lot of use of this word “status quo”, but there is no status quo. Nobody is sitting here saying, “We know what we are doing. We are doing it the way we have done it for 50 years.” That is not what is happening. There is an awful lot of what Amanda has referred to as adaptive management where, as and when the research is showing us practice needs to change, practices have changed. As the research continues to develop, practice will continue to change”.

The fact that Natural England have reported an increase in heather burning, particularly on areas of deep peat, alongside a growing body of academic research which directly refer to the environmental impact of heather burning, undermines the pro-shooting lobby’s assertion that ‘adaptive management’ responds to new research. Clearly the shooting community requires more pressure before they will change ancient management techniques such as burning.

The Committee on Climate Change (2015, p. 177) summarises that:



“In 2013, Natural England undertook a systematic evidence review of the impacts of managed burning on blanket bog. This found strong evidence that rotational burning changes species composition, reduces peat accumulation, causes declines in carbon storage, and results in increases of dissolved organic carbon in peatland watercourses. A more recent review of the evidence also concluded that the benefits of rotational burning as a management tool are in most cases outweighed by the environmental impacts.”

3.2.2 Flooding

The second major issue with heather burning which was highlighted in the evidence session was its links to increased flood risks. First and foremost, it is important to say that moorland areas are waterlogged and naturally susceptible to high run-off rates. As such, it is imperative that all possible steps should be taken to mitigate the risk of flooding downstream. However, some moorland management practices exacerbate the problem. Published in October 2014, EMBER was a five-year research project funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, tasked with assessing “the impacts of prescribed vegetation burning” (Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014, p. 3). The study compared five burned river basins with five unburned ones, as well as 120 soil plots across the English Pennines (Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014). Amongst its key findings were statements of concern about the impact heather burning has on a moorland’s capacity to absorb water. In the evidence session, Angela Smith MP (2016) quoted the reports abstract, which stated that:

“More work is needed on fire effects on peatland river flow, but recent results suggest a complex response with smaller flow peaks for burned systems associated with most rainfall events, but enhanced peaks compared to unburned systems for the top quantile of rainfall events with the largest total rain.”

Although by their own admission some of their findings were not conclusive, it serves as a warning to moorland managers, particularly in areas of flood risk. Dr Avery highlighted to the Petitions Committee the findings of the Committee on Climate Change which stated that: “Surface revegetation, especially with Sphagnum, slows down the flow of water.” (Adaptation Sub Committee, 2013, p. 81). A point, which is highly concerning when viewed alongside the EMBER study’s finding that: “Changes in the hydrological properties of the peat after fire make the peat less conducive to Sphagnum moss growth.” (Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014, p. 3).

The direct correlation between increased rates of heather burning and decreased prevalence of mosses would suggest that a pragmatic approach (even disregarding the connection between burning and reduced peat bog water capacity) would be to burn heather on much longer rotation cycles or not burn it at all (Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2013). Instead, as mentioned above, Natural England (2015) have recorded increases in the use of burning. The lack of response from grouse moorland owners to scientific research proves that allowing moorland owners to practice ‘adaptive management’ is not in the best interests of the environment.



In response, the pro-shooting witnesses were keen to highlight that the results of research into the impact of burning on flood risk were inconclusive. Liam Stokes (2016) said:

“There have been some really interesting mixed reports...disputing this exact topic, as to how far we can go in saying heather burning is causing harm in these various circumstances. An international group of scientists collaborated to say that, actually, people are going well beyond the parameters of the existing evidence in making some very lurid statements about heather burning.”

Amanda Anderson (2016) added that:

“Run-off rate is all to do with the roughness of the surface. We have talked about getting the mosses back in; that will slow the flow of any system...We are trying, where we can, even though it is not a proven scientific fact, to use our noddles and say, actually, if we have a roughness there between the heather and the peat, the water will be slower.”

Flooding events are unpredictable and a result of freak weather, however their impact is worsened by irresponsible human activity. Upland areas can mitigate the impact of heavy rainfall, blanket bogs, Sphagnum mosses and woodland in upstream areas have the potential to act as natural flood defences for communities downstream (Ruz & Kelly, 2015). However, the actions of moorland owners in intensifying moorland management practices have seen blanket bogs converted to heathland (Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2013), Sphagnum moss growth stunted by burning (Brown, Holden & Palmer, 2014) and heather moorland prioritised over woodland habitats.

Lastly on this point, it is worthwhile to mention the impact of drainage ditches (referred to as ‘grips’) on flood risk. In 2004, grips were estimated to have drained 1.5 million hectares of the uplands (Holden *et al*, 2004), owing to the practice being promoted by Government in the 1960s and 70s, in an attempt to cultivate upland areas for farming (GWCT, 2017). Grips not only “kills or severely inhibits” Sphagnum mosses, but also vastly increase run off rates, and therefore, flood risk downstream (Moors for the Future (ND)). Efforts to block drainage grips are ongoing but the flood risk downstream continues to be exacerbated by these man-made water channels.

In conclusion on heather burning, the 2015 Committee on Climate Change (p. 16) report recommended that:

“Natural England, in partnership with the Upland Stakeholder Forum, should take further action to deliver the widespread restoration of degraded upland peat habitats. An action plan should be published within a year of this report that includes: (a) a programme for reviewing consents for burning on protected sites; and (b) an assessment of the extent to which agri-environment schemes are being used to fund damaging practices on peatland habitats.”



At the time of writing, no such action was being taken by Natural England or the Upland Stakeholder Forum.

3.2.3 Financials

The Petitions Committee were keen to understand the financial pros and cons of driven grouse shooting. This issue was covered in some detail in our previous report published in 2014. Currently, the conservation and management of moorlands is largely financed by land owners who have claimed to relieve the UK Government of their duty to protect these rare habitats. The Countryside Alliance (2016) stated that: "Heather moorland is rarer than tropical rainforest and threatened globally, with 75 percent of remaining habitat found in Britain." To put this point into perspective Amanda Anderson (2016) claimed that "£1 million [is] privately invested every week" into moorland management, of which 90% comes from private funds.

The pro-shooting witnesses framed the £52.5 million investment made by landowners as a philanthropic act and, in mentioning it, suggested that Government would have to foot this bill if driven grouse shooting was banned. For the purposes of analysis it is perhaps more accurate to think of this figure as a business investment, made by the land owner to increase the value of their estates by maximising the number of grouse on his/her moors. Although "the 'average' shoot has only broken even in two of the past five years" (Savills, 2015), moorland owners are incentivised to invest heavily: "Because the value of grouse moors is based on the number of birds they yield, injecting cash into intelligent management increases their value in the long term" says William Duckworth-Chad, of Savills (2011). Without the need to artificially inflate the number of grouse through intensive and expensive management practises, the cost of moorland upkeep would be significantly lower.

Instead of considering this point, MPs in the Petitions Committee highlighted that, in the event of a ban, the onus would still be on landowners to continue bearing the costs of moorland management without the financial incentive of selling grouse shooting days. Simon Hart MP (a registered chairman of the Countryside Alliance) challenged the respondents to highlight alternative sources of income for these landowners and communities (Hart, 2016). Dr Avery's suggestion that increased ecotourism would prop up these communities was roundly dismissed (Stokes, 2016). Even though this source of income would have nowhere near as much environmental and ecological costs connected to it as the highly intensified version of country sports currently practised in the English Uplands.

The second major aspect of the financial impact of driven grouse shooting is the benefit the shooting community claims it has on the local economy. Industry statistics suggest that shooting generates £2 billion to the UK economy (PACEC, 2014); £15.2 million for businesses direct connected to grouse shooting (Countryside Alliance, 2015) and 4,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs (BASC, 2014). Dr Avery (2016) cast aspersions on the statistics used by the shooting industry



and MPs during the evidence session, highlighting that the only quantitative research that has been done on the wider economic impacts of driven grouse shooting are industry led, which somewhat undermines their credibility. The League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) evidently agreed when they conducted a critical analysis of the most referenced economic study of shooting, PACEC's 2014 'Value of Shooting' which was commissioned by the BASC. The LACS (2016, p. 10) rebuttal stated that:

“The shooting industry claims to be worth £2bn to the UK economy and support 75,000 FTE jobs (PACEC 2014). However, these figures deliberately obscure the nature of shooting sports and omit taxpayer subsidies and the negative financial impact on other businesses.”

The LACS's (2016, p. 10) first finding was that: “Of the 70,000 shooting providers in the UK, 23,000 – effectively one-third – provide only clay and/or target shooting, no animal shooting.” Moreover, the LACS (2016) highlighted that, in terms of participation, clay/target shooting outstripped animal quarry shooting by 3 to 1. The report undermines the industry's claim that it supports 75,000 FTE jobs, stating that: “The figures from the PACEC suggests an extremely low rate of pay for those supported directly by the shooting industry – an average of £6,129 per annum (excluding tips and housing).” (LACS, 2016, p. 11). Either the industry is paying their workers grossly under the minimum wage or the figure of 75,000 FTE jobs is inflated.

This point contributes to a key financial aspect of the shooting industry, inequality. First and foremost, driven grouse shooting is extremely expensive and as such only accessible to a small fraction of the population. Last year alone (2015/16), the price of shooting days increased by 4.6% (Savills, 2016, p. 1). Although it's difficult to get exact statistics on the costs of a day's shooting (as it depends on number of grouse shot as well as the prestige of the moor), estimates value of day of shooting between £20,000 and £40,000 for a group of nine (Animal Aid, 2016, p. 2). As the LACS (2016) report establishes, most of this money does not find its way into the pockets of those employed by landowners, instead it is reinvested in intensive moorland management to further the artificial inflation of red grouse numbers. This aspect of economic benefit is solely felt by the landowners insofar as their estate value increases alongside inflated red grouse numbers (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2014).

Furthermore, 'guns' supposedly benefit the local community by staying at hotels, visiting local pubs and being the reason that local people are employed on grouse moors. In specific relation to driven grouse shooting it is important to remember that most moors only have up to a fortnight's worth of shooting days per year; and despite the lavish lifestyle of those who indulge in driven grouse shooting, the benefit to local businesses is unlikely to be anywhere near the £15.2 million estimated by the industry (Countryside Alliance, 2015).

Moreover, there has been increased scrutiny around the amount of public money which is paid to grouse moor estates in the form of argi-environment subsidies. Research conducted by Friends of the Earth (FOE) (2016) contradicts the Countryside Alliance's (2016) claim that the grouse



shooting industry does not benefit directly from subsidies. The recent FOE (2016, p. 2) report investigated “30 grouse moor estates, covering around 300,000 acres” and found that these estates had received “over £4million in farm subsidies in 2014.” A argument which was supported by Jeff Knott (2016) in the Petitions Committee, who said: “over a £100 million over 10 years is going into areas of grouse moors” (Knott, 2016). Furthermore, Animal Aid (2016, p. 2) discovered that, “in the financial year 2012-13, ES [Environmental Stewardship programme] subsidies paid out in relation to land on which driven grouse shooting takes place totalled £17,308,297. This is up from just £89,848 in 2008-09.” These statistics were unsurprisingly refuted by the shooting industry, who claimed that the subsidies had been granted for farming activities occurring on grouse moors (Peters, 2016; Countryside Alliance, 2016). However, DEFRA later revealed that it had no way of deciphering whether grouse moorlands benefited from agricultural subsidies or not (Parliament UK, 2016).

3.2.4 Predators on Grouse Moorlands

One of the linchpins of the e-petition to ban driven grouse shooting was the plight and near extinction of the Hen Harrier from England’s skies. The most recent estimates state that England possesses enough habitat to support 323-340 pairs of Hen Harriers (JNCC, 2011); in a national survey in 2010 there was thought to only be 12 pairs in England (Hayhow et al, 2013). The Hen Harrier is included on the Birds of Conservation Concern’s UK Red List and on Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive (Elston *et al*, 2014). The year before our last report ‘Turn your Back on Grouse’ (2014), not a single Hen Harrier chick was fledged in England (BBC, 2016). The British Trust for Ornithology [BTO], an organisation which by Liam Stokes (2016) own reckoning is “genuinely neutral”, said:

“Several scientific studies (Etheridge *et al*. 1997; Potts 1998; Sim *et al*. 2007; Fielding *et al*. 2011; Hayhow *et al*. 2013) have found that breeding Hen Harrier numbers in the UK, particularly in northern England and southern and eastern Scotland, are currently, or have been, constrained by illegal population control associated with management of grouse moors.” (BTO, 2015)

For moorland gamekeepers to keep the population of red grouse so artificially high, its natural predators need to be culled. The vast majority of this killing happens within the parameters of the law. ‘Managing’ the numbers of predators such as stoats, weasels, foxes and crows, by means of poisoning, shooting or trapping, is legal (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2014). However, Hen Harriers, along with other birds of prey, have been protected under the ‘Protection of Birds Act, 1954’ (Protection of Birds Act, 1954); despite this, wide-spread persecution still occurs across the UK, leading to the Hen Harrier being dubbed the UK’s “most intensively persecuted” bird by the RSPB (2017).

In response to questions on the potential impact of a ban on wildlife on grouse moors, Liam Stokes (2016) said:



“Scottish Natural Heritage papers would suggest that what you get is biodiversity-poor grassland. You get a loss of any mountain hare population you may once have had. It is certainly no better for hen harriers. In fact, a genuinely neutral organisation on this subject, the British Trust for Ornithology, is very clear that, as and when you lose a grouse moor, what you actually lose is habitat, food and protection from predators for hen harriers.”

To some extent this statement is accurate, however, Stokes failed to recall that the BTO went on to say that: “The relevance of these positive influences for overall productivity of harrier populations has been questioned, however, in the context of the levels of persecution associated with grouse moor” (BTO, 2015). The truth of the matter is that as Hen Harrier are ground nesting birds, like red grouse, current intensive management practices which are aimed at protecting ground nests from predators, should also be artificially inflating Hen Harrier numbers (Knott, 2016). Instead, Hen Harriers are on the brink of extinction in England. Ultimately, the Hen Harriers greatest threat is the Gamekeeper.

The experience of Hen Harrier populations on the Isle of Orkney bolsters this argument. In contrary to the claims made by Liam Stokes, the absence of grouse moorland on the Isle of Orkney did not hinder Hen Harrier numbers. In fact, the Isle currently boasts 80 breeding females, and is one of the most studied populations of Hen Harriers (Orkney.com, 2017). Without the problem of persecution, when the Hen Harrier population declined in the 1990’s, the cause was identified and resolved allowing Hen Harrier numbers to increase dramatically to their current levels (Padgett, 2012).

Preventing wildlife crime is an inherently difficult task, owing to the remote locations where they most often occur. Despite these difficulties, the scale of persecution is so large that strong evidence for criminal prosecution is regularly acquired by members of the public and concerned groups such as the RSPB and Raptor Persecution UK. Unfortunately, even when significant evidence is available, convictions are very rare, undermining the deterrent that the law should provide. One alternative approach is to introduce ‘vicarious liability’, a measure which holds landowners responsible for actions taken on their behalf by their employees. Vicarious liability for wildlife offences has been in practice in Scotland since January 2012. Although there have only been two successful prosecutions of landowners under this law (RSPB, 2015), Dr Avery believes that more time is needed before we can tell whether this measure has served as a deterrent for wildlife crime (Avery, 2017).

During the Petitions Committee, David Mackintosh MP (2016) asked about vicarious liability: “You talked about Scotland. How well do you think it is working there?” To which Jeff Knott (2016) answered: “The lesson from Scotland so far is that vicarious liability alone is not a magic bullet, but it is a positive step in the right direction.” Knott (2016) and Avery (2016) both emphasised the importance of other measures being put in place alongside vicarious liability, such



as increasing the number of birds who are fitted with satellite tags and more investment in wildlife crime enforcement agencies. If vicarious liability is to work as a deterrent for wildlife crime, more wildlife crime needs to be caught and be backed up with robust evidence.

3.3 Westminster Debate

Before this report analyses the Parliamentary debate, which followed the Petitions Committee, it is important to realise that without much in the way of lobbying power, campaigners were hard pressed to convince MPs of the negative impact of driven grouse shooting. Dr Avery retrospectively considered this one of the major contributing factors to such a disappointingly one-sided debate (Avery, 2017). The fact of the matter is that the issue of driven grouse shooting is a rural-centric one and the parliamentary party which most often represents rural areas is the Conservatives. The Conservative party has long standing and strong connections to both the landed classes of England and the shooting community. In fact, at the Tory party's famous annual Black & White fund-raising ball this year, one of the auction prizes was a day of driven grouse shooting for a party of 8 (Riley-Smith, 2017).

Conservative MP Steve Double led the debate in Westminster which occurred on 31st October 2016. His opening speech, was dubbed biased by Bristol East MP Kerry McCarthy who interjected by saying, "I would have thought that someone opening a debate on a petition on behalf of that Committee ought at least to look at both sides of the argument and not present such a biased argument against the petition." (Hansard, 2016), Steve Double attempted to discredit all claims that driven grouse shooting had negative impacts. Firstly, he informed MPs of the industry figure of over £50 million spent by landowners on moorland management. Moving on to address the environmental impacts of moorland management, he contradicted recent research by claiming that:

"Ending moorland management as a result of banning grouse shooting might actually make flooding worse and more likely to happen."

"The evidence is clear that birds of prey, including hen harriers, are better off on managed heather moorland. Hen harriers need gamekeepers as much as grouse do."

He decided to ignore the body of evidence which shows that burning on areas of deep peat and blanket bog are detrimental to the environment and increase flood risk.

Steve Double MP went on to discuss the economic benefit of driven grouse shooting to local communities. He said that: "The Moorland Association and Countryside Alliance note that in many cases grouse shooting not only supports but is a lifeline for rural areas of the UK that are cut off from employment streams that other parts of the country enjoy." (Hansard, 2016). As discussed above, the extent to which local communities financially benefit is highly debatable, particularly when you consider that this debate was solely about the banning of driven grouse



shooting, not walked-up shooting or the shooting of other types of game. Steve Double MP continued, quoting another industry statistic that grouse shooting provides the equivalent of 4,000 jobs (Hansard, 2016).

In the following debate between MPs there was a total of eighteen contributions, fifteen of which were strongly in favour of driven grouse shooting (Hansard, 2016). It became evident that the only version of the ‘facts’ surrounding driven grouse shooting that most of these MPs were prepared to consider were those that have been funded by, or directly collected by, the shooting industry itself. When challenged on areas of impacts around which there are no alternative statistics, such as the impact of heather burning on climate change, MPs ignored the question, exemplified by this section of the proceedings:

“Caroline Lucas [(Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)]

I want to come back to the point about climate change. When the hon. Gentleman talks about scientific evidence, he makes it sound as if grouse shooting is good for the environment. However, the Committee on Climate Change’s 2015 progress report to Parliament notes:

“Wetland habitats, including the majority of upland areas with carbon-rich peat soils, are in poor condition. The damaging practice of burning peat to increase grouse yields continues, including on internationally-protected sites.”

That is the kind of evidence that the hon. Gentleman is talking about, but it shows exactly the opposite conclusion to the one he draws.

Sir Gerald Howarth [(Aldershot) (Con)]

All the hon. Lady has managed to do, I am afraid, is illustrate her complete and utter obsession with climate change. It is an important subject, but the science is not settled. If she is saying that burning 0.6% of heather in this country is contributing to climate change, I am afraid to say that I, for one, do not believe it.” (Hansard, 2016).

3.4 Outcome

The Government’s official response to the e-petition to ban driven grouse shooting read:

“When carried out according to the law, grouse shooting is a legitimate activity and in addition to its significant economic contribution, providing jobs and investment in some of our most remote areas, it can offer important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation. The Government’s position is that people should be free to undertake any lawful activities. However, all those involved are encouraged to follow best practice.” (UK Government and Parliament, 2016)



The eventual outcome of the parliamentary debate on whether to ban driven grouse shooting was disappointing for anti-shooting campaigners. After months of campaigning and over 120 thousand signatures, the parliamentary debate amassed to little more than a fanfare of Tory MPs proclaiming the benefits of the practice. According to Dr Avery (2017), there was a disappointing lack of opposition MPs in parliament who were concerned with wildlife issues when the debate took place, evidenced by the fact that one three MPs spoke in favour of a ban, he also said that campaigners lacked the finance and connections to lobby MPs to support this cause.

4. Campaigning and Hen Harriers

There have only been fourteen confirmed successful nesting pairs of Hen Harriers in England in the three years since our last report (BBC, 2016). Particularly concerning is that in 2016, the year that the DEFRA's Hen Harrier Joint Action Plan was launched, there were only three nesting attempts in England, from which seven Hen Harrier chicks were fledged (BBC, 2016; Denman, 2017). As mentioned earlier, England possesses enough habitat to support 323-340 pairs of Hen Harriers (JNCC, 2011). Developments in this area include; the publication of DEFRA's Joint Action Plan and the subsequent brood management debate, satellite tagging programmes, the founding of 'Hen Harrier Day' and Lush's fund-raising and public awareness campaigning.

4.1 DEFRA's Joint Action Plan

In August 2012, DEFRA sought to bring together a range of concerned and influential organisations around the common cause of Hen Harrier population decline. This included representatives from DEFRA, Natural England, the Moorland Association, the RSPB, National Parks UK, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and the National Gamekeepers' Organisation. Three and a half years after its formation, the group published its first paper in January 2016 (Uplands Stakeholders Forum, 2016).

The 'Joint action plan to increase the English hen harrier population' outlined six points of action, with the explicit aim of increasing the number of breeding Hen Harrier pairs in England without negatively impacting local businesses or the rural economy (Uplands Stakeholders Forum, 2016, pp. 4-7). These were:

1. "Monitoring of population in England and UK – Satellite tagging of and tracking of hen harriers in England."
2. "Diversionary feeding – Gamekeepers and shoot managers encouraged to follow 'best practice' by providing carrion as supplementary feeding for hen harriers, to substitute for more valued prey (e.g. grouse)."



3. “Work with Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG) to analyse monitoring information and build intelligence picture – The RPPDG will provide advice on the most effective enforcement and deterrent measures to protect hen harriers, and supply analyses of intelligence received regarding reported incidents of persecution.”
4. “Nest and winter roost protection – Nests are monitored so that action can be taken where appropriate to protect them from disturbance and destruction, and to identify provisioning problems. Winter roosts are identified and monitored so that action can be taken where appropriate to protect them from persecution.”
5. “Southern reintroduction – Reintroduce additional hen harriers to suitable upland or lowland habitat in Southern England with the aim of securing a stable, self-sufficient population with the potential to expand its range.”
6. “Trailing a Brood Management Scheme – Data was used to estimate a threshold at which economic impact is likely to be caused on a moor [by Hen Harriers] and where intervention could improve economic viability.”

The ‘Success Criteria’ of this programme is two-fold:

- “The hen harrier has a self-sustaining and well dispersed breeding population in England across a range of habitats including a viable population present in the Special Protected Areas designated for hen harrier.
- The harrier population coexists with local business interests and its presence contributes to a thriving rural economy.” (Upland Stakeholders Forum, 2016, p. 3)

There is an omission, in the success criteria, to mention the EU Birds Directive, under which DEFRA has an obligation to restore the Hen Harrier population in Special Protected Areas (SPA) to a ‘favourable conservation status’ (Avery, 2016). Moreover, Dr Avery highlighted that neither vicarious liability nor licensing had featured in the plan, echoing the activist group ‘Raptor Politics’ (2016) who argue that, “no strategy included in the plan designed to stamp out the root cause of hen harrier losses from moorland where red grouse are shot...the intentional criminal activities of rogue gamekeepers.”

Although the programme is still in its infancy, early results are not encouraging. So much so, that with only three nesting attempts recorded in England during 2016, the RSPB saw fit to withdraw its support for the action plan (BBC, 2016). Martin Harper, Conservation Director at the RSPB said:

“The voluntary approach of the Hen Harrier Action Plan has failed, leaving licensing as the only viable option...This year, there have been a series of depressingly predictable incidents in England and Scotland, the disappearance of the hen harriers ‘Chance’ and ‘Highlander’, the use of pole traps and the hen harrier decoy in the Peak District...the commitments made in the Hen Harrier Action Plan are not being delivered. People are still



breaking the law and not enough is being done within the grouse shooting community to effect change.” (Harper, 2016).

Without the involvement of the RSPB, the Joint Action Plan lost its main conservationist support and the programme began to look more like an industry driven token gesture, rather than a workable conservation strategy.

4.1.1 The Brood Management Debate

There’s no doubt that the debate surrounding brood management played a large role in RSPB’s decision to snub the plan. It had been an ongoing point of conflict within the Upland Stakeholders Forum for some time and had delayed the publication of the plan significantly (RSPB, 2014). Brood management (point 6 of the action plan) is aimed at reassuring grouse moor owners that Hen Harrier numbers will not threaten their economic interests. The brood management programme involves removing Hen Harriers from grouse moors once breeding numbers had reached a density at which they would significantly impact the economic viability of the grouse moor (Uplands Stakeholders Forum, 2016, p. 11). The activist group ‘Raptor Persecution UK’ (2016) argue that the scheme:

“only allows for one pair of breeding hen harrier per 80 sq km or 20,000 acres, or a (straight line) distance between pairs of 10km or 6.3 miles...even if there are only two hen harrier breeding attempts in 2017, and at least one of those breeding attempts is on a driven grouse moor and is within 10km of the other nest (even if the other nest is on an RSPB reserve) then the eggs/chicks of that grouse moor nest will be removed.”

Under the programme, Hen Harrier eggs would be moved to a rearing facility and the birds would be reared in captivity until fledging, where they would re-join the wild population (Uplands Stakeholders Forum, 2016, p. 12). The RSPB (2015) opposed the idea being included in the first publication, stating that “brood management may merit experimental investigation in the future, but only once hen harrier numbers have recovered to a pre-agreed level and less interventionist approaches, particularly diversionary feeding, have been widely attempted.” The RSPB’s opposition to brood management played a significant role in haltering the progress of the Joint Action Plan, but the RSPB’s concerns were evidently not enough to prevent its inclusion in published plan.

4.2 Satellite Tagging

Efforts to monitor these endangered birds has increased significantly in recent years. The RSPB, with support from the EU LIFE scheme, are now monitoring Hen Harriers more closely than ever before. Their Hen Harrier LIFE+ project began in 2014, with the sole aim of better understanding Hen Harrier’s flight patterns and identifying where they are most at risk (RSPB, 2017). Since it started, the programme has tagged eighteen Hen Harriers with a satellite device which relays the



birds' location on a regular basis (RSPB, 2017). Since this level of sophisticated monitoring began, the extent to which persecution of Hen Harriers occurs has become self-evident (Natural England, 2014; RSPB, 2017). Of the eighteen Hen Harriers that the RSPB has tagged, only five were still alive at the time of writing (RSPB, 2017). The most recent casualty was 'Carroll', who was found dead in Northumberland in late January this year. Although Carroll died of a parasitic infection, a post-mortem x-ray revealed two shotgun pellets lodged in her throat and leg (pictured), these shots did not kill Carroll but speak volumes about the current levels of persecution (Raptor Persecution UK, 2017). The hope amongst conservationists and birders is that the more Hen Harriers that are tagged, the more gamekeepers will be deterred from shooting them. Unfortunately, a clear majority of satellite-tagged Hen Harriers disappear without trace, rendering it impossible to determine the cause of death (Raptor Persecution UK, 2017).

Natural England, in partnership with the Hawk and Owl trust, are also involved in satellite monitoring of Hen Harriers. Their more focused study consisted of two Hen Harriers, named Rowan (male) and Sorrel (female), who were tagged in September 2016 (Hawk and Owl Trust, 2016). The partnership was founded following the incentive set by action point 1 of DEFRA's Joint Action Plan, "Monitoring of population in England and UK – Satellite tagging of and tracking of hen harriers in England." (Uplands Stakeholders Forum, 2016, p. 4).

"By satellite tagging two juvenile Hen Harriers the Hawk and Owl Trust, together with Natural England, are hoping to extend our knowledge of what happens to them once they leave the nests from which they have been fledged." (Hawk and Owl Trust, 2016)



Sadly, the efforts of Natural England and the Hawk and Owl Trust only confirmed what Hen Harrier campaigners already knew, that Hen Harriers are systematically prosecuted by grouse moorland gamekeepers. Rowan was found dead in Cumbria just one month after being tagged, and in a statement from Cumbria Police it was revealed that a post-mortem "carried out by the Zoological Society of London has established that the bird was likely to have been shot" (Raptor Politics, 2016).

4.3 Hen Harrier Day

Galvanised by the shocking news that in 2013 there was not a single successful Hen Harrier nesting attempt in England, the campaign group Birders Against Wildlife Crime (BAWC) was founded. This volunteer-led group has tasked itself with documenting and raising awareness around the amount of wildlife crime that occurs, and to this end founded the Hen Harrier





Day in 2014 (BAWC, 2014). In its first year, the event attracted over 700 people to three events across England (BAWC, 2014). The event aims to give campaigners and bird lovers a platform to increase awareness of the endangered Hen Harrier and encourage concerned parties to coordinate efforts to bring an end to the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The organisers have also produced merchandise, including a beer mat (pictured) which they hope will find its way into drinking establishments across the country, encouraging supporters to circulate them in their local areas (henharrierday.org, 2016).

At the second annual Hen Harrier Day event in Derbyshire, Mark Avery said that “we are spreading the word, the more that people hear, the more that people will care”. The campaign effort has also sought to engage social media through a ‘thunderclap’. The first of these claps reached an estimated 2 million people, and a year later it reached 5 million (henharrierday.org, 2016). A key element in the growing success of this event has been the increased engagement of influential figures in the conservationist movement. Speakers at Hen Harrier Day 2016 included then leader of the Green Party Natalie Bennett, Springwatch presenter Chris Packham, Jon Steward the Peak District National Trust general manager, Dr Mark Avery and Blánaid Denman, project manager of the RSPB’s Hen Harrier LIFE+ project. The impact of the Hen Harrier Day and its campaigning efforts are best exemplified by the success of Dr Avery’s e-petition, which took a rather obscure topic into parliamentary debate through popular demand.

4.4 Lush

Often conservation concerns, such as this one, are limited to those already sympathetic to conservation issues. One of the major successes of the campaign to protect Hen Harriers has been pushing the issue into the public eye. A campaign run by cosmetics company Lush has attempted to harness the company’s consumer-facing platform to promote public awareness, through engaging and informing its customers of the plight of Hen Harriers. Their involvement with the movement began in 2014, when Lush ran a campaign to petition the Queen about Hen Harriers (Lush, 2014). In only a few months over 20,000 people signed postcards to Her Majesty, which representatives delivered in October 2014 (Lush, 2014). Hilary Jones (2014), Ethics Director for Lush, said that “our customers have very kindly signed postcards to the Queen. If she can use her influence to say enough is enough...if it comes from her maybe that will be the protection that the Hen Harrier needs, because clearly the law at the moment isn’t working.” Lush say that the Queen’s advisers told them that the Queen thanked them and their customers for the interest in Hen Harriers and that all 20,000 signed postcards would be forwarded to the Right Honourable Elizabeth Truss (then Secretary of State for EFRA). However, nothing has been heard since 6th November 2014 (Lush, 2015).





Lush's second campaign effort came in 2015 when they started selling the 'Skydancer Far From The Madding Guns' bath bomb (pictured) (Lush, 2015). Profits from sales of the bath bomb, which was named by TV presenter Chris Packham, went directly towards funding the RSPB's satellite-tagging programme (Lush, 2015). After just a year on Lush's shelves, the bath bomb raised over £120,000, all of which was donated to the RSPB to help tag more Hen Harriers (Packham, 2016). Blánaid Denman (2016), project manager of the RSPB's Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project, said that:

“thanks to sales of the Skydancer bath bomb, we've been able to double the number of satellite tags the project can fit! What's more, the funds raised by Lush customers have also enabled us to provide more RSPB staff with specialist training to fit satellite tags to Hen Harriers. The more people who are trained and licensed to fit these tags, the more tags we can fit!”

As discussed earlier, satellite tagging has been instrumental in recording incidences of raptor persecution, monitoring their winter roosts and increasing awareness amongst the public.

5. Conclusion

This report aimed to provide an overview of the events, campaigns and publications which have impacted the driven grouse shooting debate in England between May 2014 and March 2017. By mapping these developments concerned parties and members of the public will be able to better understand the current climate of this on-going debate.

Pressure from campaign groups, activists and the general public has increased significantly since our last report on driven grouse shooting; catalysed by Mark Avery's e-petition and campaigning from Lush. The National Trust's decision to revoke Mark Osborne's shooting licence can be, in part, attributed to the tireless work by raptor protection groups and the increased public attention on the issue. Tackling this debate on a national level, through parliamentary procedure, did not prove successful, but localised steps have been taken towards a more sustainable relationship between driven grouse shooting and the natural environment. The plight of Hen Harriers continues to be at the forefront of this debate, with incidences of persecution being monitored extremely closely and growth in successful nesting attempts failing to respond to the actions laid out in DEFRA's Joint Action Plan. Presently, driven grouse shooting is still legally practised in England, but the fight to see it ended will continue.



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