



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1500](#)

Main Petitioner: Stuart Housden OBE on behalf of RSPB Scotland

Subject: Golden Eagle as the National Bird of Scotland

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to formally declare the Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, as the national bird of Scotland. This could be done either through legislation, or through a parliamentary motion.

Background

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) [states](#) that the “golden eagle is the UK’s second largest bird of prey and has a wing span of around 2 metres”. Furthermore, they are:

found throughout the uplands of Europe, Russia, north-west Africa, Asia and North America. There are estimated to be over 50,000 pairs worldwide.

Originally they ranged over much of upland Britain and Ireland but persecution and modification of their habitat since the mid-18th century has restricted them to the wildest parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, with a few pairs in the hills of southern Scotland; currently there are none in England.

The most recent national survey in 2003 recorded 442 pairs, with little change in the overall population since 1982. The next national survey is scheduled for 2015, with the [Scottish Raptor Study Group](#) undertaking annual monitoring of some territories.

The golden eagle is an iconic species for the environment, conservation and culture in many countries. The UK population is approximately 5% of the total European population and ecologically is considered to be very significant as it comprises about a quarter of the population in the mountainous, Atlantic-influenced North West of Europe; hence it contributes significantly to the maintenance of the golden eagles’ range. Whilst the UK supports a notable proportion of the golden eagle population, the actual population size is relatively small and vulnerable to any losses.

Scottish Government Action

The [Year of Natural Scotland](#) 2013, was a Scottish Government initiative led by EventScotland, VisitScotland and SNH, supported by other government agencies. This sought to:

[...] inspire our people and our visitors to celebrate Scotland's outstanding natural beauty, landscapes, wildlife and biodiversity. It will be a year in which people in Scotland and our visitors discover or rediscover the natural attractions of the country and take part in an exciting programme of events.

As part of this promotion, a campaign called [Scotland's Big 5](#) ran from spring until the end of October 2013; this asked people to vote for their favourite from the following species – golden eagle, harbour seal, otter, red deer, red squirrel. The golden eagle received 38% of the 12,000 votes cast, and was 18 points ahead of the next nearest, the red squirrel.

Scottish Parliament Action

A previous petition (PE783) was submitted on the same subject in 2004 by Mr James Reynolds after a poll in the Scotsman newspaper voted the Golden Eagle the country's most loved bird.

The petition was referred to the Enterprise and Culture Committee, which was unable to identify a formal process to create national symbols for Scotland. No further action was taken or a conclusion reached prior to the 2007 election.

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