

Written Submission from Scottish Land & Estates

Scottish Land & Estates is a member organisation that uniquely represents the interests of both land managers and land-based businesses in rural Scotland. Scottish Land & Estates has members with interests in a great variety of land uses. Scottish Land & Estates welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Environment Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on the Annual Wildlife Crime Report in Scotland 2015.

Introduction

Scottish Land & Estates is an active member of the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime Scotland (PAWS) where it represents landowners, managers and estates. As an organisation we continually seek to promote good practice and disseminate information to our members with regard to tackling wildlife crime and we will remove any member convicted of wildlife crime from the membership.

Scottish Land & Estates welcomes the Wildlife Crime Report 2015

Scottish Land & Estates welcomes the publication of the fourth annual report covering the period 2014/15. The report provides an authoritative update on the range and volume of wildlife crime in Scotland and we are pleased to observe that over a five year period the report highlights a significant 20% reduction in wildlife crime.

Main Report Findings

Whilst media attention remains focused on just one of the six wildlife crime priority areas, raptor persecution, the 2015 Annual Wildlife Crime Report provides a balanced picture of the issues and it is evident to see that crimes of fish poaching, deer and hare coursing give the most concern.

Fish poaching alone remains the highest volume offence, accounting for 36% of all incidents during the year. Poaching fish and deer and illegal hare coursing are the most commonly reported of all wildlife crimes in Scotland and have been shown to have links with other types of rural, violent and organised crime. Consequently, this crime is of particular interest to the police and is especially concerning to rural communities.

Scottish Land & Estates supports the PAWS poaching and coursing sub-group and are working with partners to raise awareness of this problem. We need to ensure resources continue to be directed towards tackling rural crime.

Crimes against wild birds, in particular raptor persecution remain the most high profile wildlife crime. Scottish Land & Estates is pleased to note that the downward trend for offences against wild birds is continuing, with a significant reduction been observed over the last five years. Scottish Land & Estates believes this is due to a combination of efforts made by land managers on the ground as well as some of the toughest legislation in Europe.

Continued Enforcement

Whilst real progress has and is being made in tackling raptor and wider wildlife crime, it is important we do not become complacent. Enforcement must continue and those managing land and wildlife must continue to improve best practice so that the figures remain low or drop further.

Working with government and police, Scottish Land & Estates firmly believes PAWS is having a tangible effect on wildlife crime on the ground and it is critically important momentum is maintained, with all stakeholders playing a full role in this partnership. As such, there should be no let-up in joint efforts to eradicate raptor persecution, and all other forms of wildlife crime. Scottish Land & Estates will continue to be an active member of PAWS and will work with other stakeholders to further reduce all types of wildlife crime.

Positive Steps Forward

Scottish Land & Estates is resolute in advocating good practice in animal welfare and compliance with wildlife legislation, working closely with members to promote this, and working with others to develop approaches to resolving conflicts in the countryside.

Scottish Land & Estates is a pro-active partner in a number of conservation and wildlife management projects across Scotland, addressing nature conservation issues in the wider countryside as well as protected areas. Working closely with members to promote responsible landownership and follow best practice and suitable management activities has ensured landowners continue to play a leading role in the positive delivery of conservation and wildlife management objectives.

Partnership projects include; Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, Scottish Wildcat Action, Heads up for Harriers and the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project. There has been a positive uptake in the involvement of these projects with the generation of significant landowner support being a key component to some of the successes of these projects. These projects are an excellent demonstration of how conservation organisations, governments, businesses, landowners, communities and individuals are working together to protect Scotland's' native wildlife.