

John F. Robins, Secretary, Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL), c/o Animal Concern,
Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel 01389-841111. Mobile: 07721-605521.
Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982.
Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal
Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.
E-MAIL: acal@jfrobins.force9.co.uk Website: <http://www.adviceaboutanimals.info>

Is SNH breaking the law?

To all MSPs.

Dear Member of the Scottish Parliament,

For over ten years Animal Concern Advice Line has been asking for a review of the SNH administered General License scheme which allows the killing of an unlimited and unknown number of circa 22 species of native wild birds in Scotland every year. The number of birds killed probably easily exceeds 100,000 per annum and causes localised near extinction of some species.

All a person has to do is read a signed Government License on the SNH website and, so long as they follow the guidance on the license, they can shoot or trap and kill as many of their target species as they want. They do not have to tell anyone why they are killing the birds or how many birds they kill.

The main target species are native corvids and pigeons. Farmers and land managers kill huge numbers of crows without having to prove they are causing damage to crops or livestock.

Gamekeepers slaughter thousands of native birds to artificially increase the number of non-native pheasants so that "sports" shooters can kill any pheasants that don't end up as roadkill.

Under the scheme domestic gardeners can quite legally trap magpies and kill them by bashing their brains out against a wall. They do this in the mistaken believe that they are saving songbirds from extinction. The fact is that magpies and songbirds have co-existed for millennia.

We have asked successive Governments to review the General License scheme with a view to scrapping it as unfit for purpose and an indefensible persecution of wildlife. In response Ministers have been quite happy to believe SNH when they say the scheme is reviewed every year when in fact SNH only consult to determine what species should be removed from or added to this free-for-all exterminator's charter.

In England a group called Wild Justice, believing the General License scheme to be unlawful, threatened a legal challenge to the same scheme as operated by English Nature. In around 13 weeks they have achieved what we have failed to do in 13 years – English Nature have immediately suspended general licenses and would-be crow and pigeon cullers now have to apply for a specific license, giving a good reason for why the license should be granted. You can read more about that via the link at the foot of this e-mail.

I urge those of you with Ministerial responsibility for SNH to order them to suspend all General Licences immediately and remove them from the Government website. I ask all of you to demand that suspension takes place immediately and a full Parliamentary review of the General License Scheme and other SNH culling licenses is established quickly.

Perhaps it is also time to bring Scottish Natural Heritage and other Government agencies such as Marine Scotland back into the fold?

Scottish Natural Heritage and Marine Scotland sound like stand-alone charities instead of Government Departments. Rename them Department for the Environment and Department for Fisheries and Aquaculture and those employed in them might remember that they work for the Government and not for the land owners, land managers and commercial fishery interests they have become uncomfortably close to over the last decade.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Secretary to ACAL.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/24/woodpigeons-and-crows-can-no-longer-be-freely-killed-in-england>