



Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 18th February 2021

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30

Present:

Gary Biddiss (GB); Jim Collins (JC); David Fox (DF); Nick Havermann-Mart (NHM); Graham Irving (GI); James Legge (JL); Gordon Mellor (GM); Jimmy Robinson (JR); Mark Upton (MU); Rachelle Upton (RU); Amy Wallace (AW); Dean White (DW)

Apologies:

Graham Bennett; Don Ryan; Martyn Standley

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

Approved

GM to sign and send to RU

RU: Today's agenda has been swapped around as GI can only be here for the first and last half hour of the scheduled meeting and JC needs to leave by 13:25 so we have brought forward the items that involve them.

Legal/Guidelines Update:

See Appendix 2

GI: I have 2 further things to report; firstly, the government is reintroducing quarantine the bad news is this not linked to CITES but disease control – this means we will need import and export papers for the UK. All BoPs will be covered moving in and out of the EU; this will effectively stop UK residents taking BoPs to European field meets and vice versa and also make it difficult for European falconers who come to Scotland to fly grouse. They are also talking about vaccinations. We are waiting on the timings for this.

JR: Does this apply to zoological collections as well?

GI: Yes, sounds like all.

MU: Do you think this will go back to CITES eventually?

GI: No, this is all disease prevention. The timeline for reviewing CITES is next year (2022).

GM: Keep us posted.

GI: Secondly, JC and I have been invited to join a CITES legislation review group, the first TEAMS meeting is later today.

GI: Further to the change in the general licence to keep certain species for rehabilitation (GL07) - as an authorised person, use this general licence to keep disabled schedule 4 wild birds for up to 15 days to rehabilitate them, rather than 6 weeks. I have raised this as I think the licenses have been mixed up.

SUN Update:

See Appendix 1

JC: APHA and DEFRA are keen to see some premium come from BREXIT and leaving EU CITES, so probably no more regulation and hopefully a reduction of regulation. Anything from tweaking to make things easier for less referrals to JNCC all the way to getting rid of A10's.

JC: GM have you heard anything regarding Scotland pushing towards having a positive list?

GM: Not a word, I had a conversation with someone from Nature Scotland a few months ago and it wasn't mentioned.

JC: Scotland have said they will make their conclusions by July, and if they do conclude in favour of positive lists it will put more pressure on England and Wales to follow suit.

GM: They will have to have consultation around that?

JC: Yes, they have said they will

JC: Both the EU and the UK got to December 2020 and just hadn't done enough work - Health wasn't covered in any previous legislation so they couldn't roll it over because it didn't exist. So now we are in a situation where the UK will have to write its own domestic legislation and, in that legislation, put down what we think we require from the EU, of course that then assumes that the EU would agree with us. There is a 2-year timeframe to post domestic legislation into the UK, but if we have a situation where the EU says we don't actually agree with that we are going to have to negotiate what we have written in domestic legislation back into a trade agreement.

GI: A10's should be kicked into touch as they are an EU requirement to a UK one.

Brexit:

JC: Spain is facing a potential nightmare as their minister, for the equivalent of DEFRA, is a hard left and hard-line animal rights sympathiser, he is pushing his own agenda for a federal positive list which should only contain the animals we had as children - canaries, cats and dogs. Spain would be the first EU country to introduce across the board positive lists on all animal taxa, which will open up other EU countries to the antics to persuade them to have their own positive list.

GM: I wouldn't have thought the Spanish were highly compliant with obeying their Government.

JC: I have friends who live in Spain and they just shrug their shoulders and say they don't do and will not comply.

JC: At a previous meeting I mentioned that the next CITES meeting was to be held in Costa Rica; however due to the pandemic it looks as though they will forego hosting and in which case the meeting will probably be held in Geneva. This is a good thing as countries tend to often vote with the host country so as to not cause offence, Costa Rica are very hard-line on animal rights and the first country in the world to have announced a ban on the private ownership of all non-domesticated species.

RU: Don Ryan email has sent in an email

I'd like to raise the matter of falconers travelling with hawks between Ireland and the UK Post Brexit. As you know, UK & Irish falconers have a very long history of hawking in each other's countries and we'd like to maintain this tradition at all costs. We want to avoid excessive red tape & bureaucracy if at all possible. I should be clear that I'm referring to falconers travelling for hawking and field meets and not commercial trade in birds.

We can follow up with our CITES & Wildlife Dep't here in order to advise the requirements for visiting UK falconers and also for falconers leaving Ireland to travel to the UK but we'd be grateful if the HB could find out what is required for falconers arriving in the UK

RU: Initially GI had suggested a 'Personal Ownership Certificate' (POC) which is an EU wide certificate and is already used by falconers within mainland Europe to move birds around different countries to attend field meets (according to social media). It has already been agreed between UK and the EU that it will be valid for movement throughout the EU and UK. But it looks as though this will have been superseded by the quarantine regulations GI spoke about earlier.

MU: Don and the IHC should lobby from their side as well.

Chairman's Report:

These are challenging times indeed – Covid, Avian Influenza and Brexit have all contributed to a period that we will not easily forget. However, the most disappointing occurrence of recent times has been the Scottish action around the Mountain hare. Which, despite promises of consultation through a stake-holder group, has it seems, been put beyond falconers as legal quarry.

I know that many falconers did manage to continue with their sport despite the Covid restrictions which curtailed the distance that we could legitimately travel for hawking, reduced us to a two people (or was it two households?), socially distanced gathering. I am heartened that reports of falconers being kept off their flying land by worried landowners were mercifully few.

Avian Influenza initially put some areas and then all of the UK under restrictions to avoid flying wildfowl and staying away from wetlands and areas where poultry are housed. Weathering birds of prey outdoors was effectively in breach of the legislation which caused some falconers a degree of difficulty. We received reports of one collection of birds of prey having to be culled, but mercifully no further such action has been reported to us. The AI biosecurity is something that we ought to be used to by now and I know is standard practice for many.

I worry that there were numerous posts on social media showing that some of our fraternity were still hunting duck in the latter part of the season, which strictly speaking they ought not to have been doing.

Brexit is of course with us and as a 'third country' travel from the UK with birds of prey and export to the EU, has become quite burdensome, not impossible but more costly and time-consuming. This of course covers the Irish Republic which is a blow to many of our Irish colleagues who hawk in the UK, and indeed to those of us who have enjoyed hawking in the Republic. Representations have been made to facilitate a simpler and more stream-lined process, but we are well down the priority list, so no movement there in the short term.

It will not have eluded falconers and breeders, that we are still using Article 10's despite their holding no legal legitimacy since Brexit. They are an EU CITES form and we are no longer part of that club. DEFRA and APHA are well aware of this problem but have given us a timescale of 2022/23 before they expect to resolve matters for us. We are hoping that questions will be asked at Westminster and in the devolved nations about the legitimacy of this.

In a recent virtual meeting of Masters of Foxhounds, the old matter of using a bird of prey to circumvent the legislation that made illegal, the hunting of foxes and hares with dogs, was raised again. That this meeting was not secure and was leaked to various anti groups, is neither here nor there – the falconry community is opposed to using our sport in this respect. We have made our position very clear in the years since the ban. Gratifyingly, the majority of Hunts do not use birds of prey to legitimise their activity and a number have articulated opposition to it.

We are approaching the period where we are all tarred in the annual media frenzy about young birds of prey or eggs being stolen from the wild for sale or use in falconry. Last year saw an unjustified assault on our reputations in the context of peregrine falcons, although I acknowledge there was a successful prosecution for eyass peregrine theft. This is really welcome, and I hope to see more, if there really is a significant problem of theft from the wild – which I do not believe there to be. Let us be under no illusion that the spectre of illegal activity undermines all the good work in conservation and rehabilitation that so many falconers are involved in.

If you are not already aware, the BFC have presented their annual and much coveted, Silver Falcon award to Barbara Royle of the Independent Bird Register. This in recognition of her valuable work reuniting falconers and keepers with their lost birds. There are few more deserving cases and I congratulate her on behalf of the Hawk Board.

I think that it is important that we continue our sport as best we can in difficult times, and yes, I acknowledge that we are at the end of the season. However, our best challenge to anyone who questions our legitimacy, is to be out flying our hawks and falcons, legally and ethically. Have a good break, moult, or breeding season, keep safe, and roll-on better times.

DW: Your concern about social media, is there something we or our clubs should be doing?

GM: It is difficult, whilst we should be promoting falconry as falconry is, the risk is that if it is noticed and it looks like we are ignoring AI advice then we will be stopped from flying altogether.

DW: I was thinking of H&S for our own birds.

GM: Whilst BoPs do die from eating infected quarry, most don't.

MU: I think we should protect ourselves by issuing a statement of advice and then if there is an attack on falconry, we can show that we have given advice and guidance.

GM: We are up on the guidelines, but maybe we should put out another statement.

MU: I know most falconers can think for themselves, but we could have statements in place in case we are attacked.

GM: I will put something together and then give it the board to check.

MU: As to Facebook, it's never going to be perfect, but the HB FB page was held up at the last IAF meeting as the way to run a page; updates put up quickly and regularly.

GB: Unfortunately, we haven't had any good news to share.

GM: We are facing restriction and legislation that is not entirely sympathetic.

Treasurers Report:

At present the HB current account and savings account have sufficient funds.

Home Counties Hawking Club had difficulties with membership and Covid last year so were unable to pay their subs. They have been long supporters of the HB so as a compromise they have been allowed them to stay on HB, but without a vote.

JR: Is it worth considering online meetings continuing after the pandemic?

RU: I think it would be worth a mixture of both online and face to face.

MU: We could be more flexible by having online meetings more often.

GM: It should allow for a wider attendance.

RU: I will double check the constitution to ensure we are allowed mainly online meetings, but I don't think there is anything saying we can't.

MU: We should let club members know.

JR: You have more access to people with online meetings.

DW: Be careful not to make it a public meeting, the invite can be passed on and could end up with the wrong people. Maybe have 1 public meeting a year hosted by HB.

GM: It's an opportunity to host meetings which don't cost so much. Let's think about an annual public meeting, we will have to think about how to manage them, but it would be a good way to go.

JR: Possible idea, we have the raptor fair here at Duncombe Park – even if it was a ticketed invite so you have to apply – we could hold an annual meeting here at the same time.

GM: what's your internet like?

JR: It's good.

GM: We could have a hybrid event

DW: I have put a link in for MS Teams Events – same platform but for an event rather than small meeting.

Blue/Mountain Hare:

RU: The Scottish Hawk Board and the Scottish Hawking Club are working on this and AKB has been lobbying the Scottish Parliament. AKB has written to NatureScot (ex SNH) with some suggestions but hasn't heard anything back from them. He is due a call with his MSP to see if he can suggest / organise something to push the Scottish Parliament into agreeing a way to keep falconers hunting hares. All that is known at the moment is that no licensing system is in place yet but is expected to be during the summer ready for when the normal open season begins.

GI: The problem we have at the moment is that we (and possibly NatureScot) don't know what the licensing system will look like, they have the options of General, Class and Individual licences with the first 2 being the best for all concerned. It's more about NatureScot being limited to exemptions within the WCA, any proposed non WCA exemptions will need legal instruments or laws and nothing is in the pipeline.

GM: SNP is highly reliant on the greens and they want a total ban on all hunting and shooting.

AW: Is there a petition we could give to clubs?

RU: The Scottish Hawking Club put a plea out to its members to write to their MSP:

"Ok guys we need a bit of joint falconer effort here. As you know an amendment to a Bill progressing through the Scottish Parliament, put forward by the Green Party, has made the Scottish Blue hare a fully protected species. This has now made it extremely difficult if not impossible for any hunting of blue hare by eagles, goshawks or harris hawks to continue, subject to a licensing proposal yet to be agreed. This is where you can help, especially if you are living in Scotland. We need as many of you who have an MSP to contact them and explain your concern that hunting blue hare is looking to be banned, please explain that Falconry is a worldwide UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, that blue hare has been hunted for many centuries by Falconers with their hawks in Scotland and that the numbers taken are negligible to the current population of the hare. Please ensure your MSP knows he should make sure NatureScot (ex SNH), who are consulting with the Scottish Hawk Board and

others, ensure any licensing system allows hare to be taken under license with birds of prey. It needs the will of the Scottish Parliament to make certain we can be licensed to carry on our cultural heritage. Please will everyone who has an MSP do this and ask others to do the same, as it could be grouse, rabbit or other important quarry species next.")

RU: I will ask the SHC if there is anything we can do.

MU: I have lots of enquires from the IAF and individual falconers abroad who come to Scotland with broad and short wings for the blue hares – I know there is very little we can do to help them, but I was wondering if it was worth a request to Andrew to know who they should write to in the Scottish Government, as it might help.

Lost Hawks:

A request from AKB:

'Lost birds' regrettably I have no answer or suggestion, you will have seen the amount of birds on the 'Hub' lost and I have had some correspondence along the line of what is HB doing about this. I know this has been discussed before without resolution but at the moment we have the added issues of people flying hawks with a C19 shutdown and an AI prevention zone in place and still losing birds. Though I suppose it could be that this number of birds lost is the norm and its now we are seeing the full extent due to social media.

But if we are not careful this could become a welfare / invasive alien species issue and we will get dragged into the problem. Perhaps a worst-case scenario cause and effect document be generated to try and look at the problems with recommendations, so we can be a little prepared.

GM: There isn't much we can do about lost hawk, we already encourage good husbandry etc. You see a lot more HH on social media as they don't tend to fly away from people in the same way other BoPs do, so it is easier for photos to be taken and posted

MU: I can't see what we can do, but it could be used against us.

AW: The people who are losing them aren't in clubs and don't want to be told what to do so you are already losing the battle.

GM: What should be recommended is restrictions on ownership, but this is something we don't want. The animal welfare legislation tries to control sales, but other than being an inconvenience it has no teeth.

MU: Could we go back to the IBR for figures?

DW: Clubs could do a straw poll on members who have lost hawks. Trouble is a lot of the people losing hawks are not members of clubs, so they don't know who to ask for help, so they do a shout out on social media instead.

AW: You need to focus on how to support people.

GM: at some point we will be held to account over lost hawks.

AW: Need to encourage people to join clubs so they have help in the learning of flying.

GM: I will send Babs the report I wrote a year or so ago and ask her to update her figures.

AW: I am happy, as a club, to ask my members about lost hawks – it can be done anonymously.

GM: That would be great, it's the embarrassment of losing one that stops people admitting to loses.

DW: You could word it 'do you or someone you know'

GB: Another statement for HB FB page and website – if you are a beginner to falconry and you've lost a hawk, then join one the clubs and they can help you.

GM: We should have updated statements roundabout – good practice; beginners to get help for lost hawks; etc. We should do it regularly.

AW: I wrote an article for my members a while ago.

IAF Update:

See Appendix 3

Countryside Alliance Update

See Appendix 4

JL: Brexit & Scotland were useful topics for me to hear; if there is anything we, (CA), can do to help with lobbying, supporting, writing letters, etc. then let us know.

MU: Quite a few rumours coming out of Scotland about the grouse shooting and moors will be coming under attack next.

JL: Wild Justice causing problems both here in England and in Wales. There was due to be a debate on the banning of grouse shooting on the 25 January, but it is on hold.

JL: Also, the Government is looking at a closed season for hares, we are expecting an animal welfare bill to be announce including the question of animal sentience in the Queen's speech.

JL: There is lots coming down the line over the next 12 months.

GM: Do we have any natural allies?

JL: We do have allies in both houses and in Government. The biggest threat we have is for a closed season for hares and when asked why this was considered necessary, what the thinking behind it was; would it improve the welfare of hares and their population of hares? To which the answer was "number 10 is looking for media appeal".

JL: John Blair (NI Parliament) is proposing a private members bill to ban hunting with dogs, including to flush wild game.

GB: Is this for mammals only?

JL: Yes, but you could flush a mammal, unintentionally, whilst looking to flush a bird and you could be prosecuted.

MU: Get this on FB and out to clubs and also make NI colleagues aware.

A.O.B:

AW: There is a pest control falcon in Merseyside that whilst on a job went out of site and very quickly after the signal was lost as well. The owner then received a video showing the falcon being injured.

MU: If they know who did this and they have evidence that they have broken the animal welfare act then this is a criminal matter.

GB: Several laws have been broken.

MU: This is a legal matter and HB should stand back unless asked for help as an expert witness.

JR: NHM I have heard reports about hatcheries in Germany not being able to cull doc's is this correct and is there any update on bringing chicks into the UK?

NHM: We have researched this, (Act amending the Animal Welfare Act - ban on the culling of Chicks), and initially this regulation will apply only in Germany. As an aside there is currently no machine available to comply with this regulation that will be viable in any hatchery producing more than 40000 chicks per week.

The meeting closed at 2.20pm

Next Meeting: 12.30pm TBC June 2021

Location: TBC

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 19 February 2021

SUN Report from Jim Collins

Although the pandemic situation has obviously curtailed almost all formal meetings, the very situation of the pandemic being associated with zoonotic transfer has generated a whole raft of activity in order to seek to minimise knee-jerk restrictions on animal-keeping and animal trade from the UK Government, across Europe, internationally and through the United Nations. Additionally, we have been incredibly busy in trying to ascertain the full implications of Brexit and lobbying for problems being put right by the authorities as soon as possible. The CITES Animals Committee meeting in summer 2021 is still set to take place but there are very strong rumours (not yet confirmed) that the CITES Conference of the Parties to be hosted by Costa Rica in 2022 will instead be moved to Geneva with Costa Rica no longer feeling able to cope with the costs following-on from the pandemic.

As reported previously, the initial response from Governments around the globe to the pandemic (including that in the UK) was to look at ways to implement near carte blanche bans on the keeping and trade in any non-domesticated animal species. Our opponents in the protectionist and animal rights NGO's obviously considered this a time of maximum opportunity and have spent a lot of time and money lobbying their case to governments, the European Commission and the United Nations. Fortunately, after their initial successes in terms of statements of intent, most governments are taking a more balanced approach to proposed additional legislation. This being said, the move to highly restrictive Positive Lists continues apace with Spain the latest country to announce their intent to introduce Positive Lists which will have a massive negative impact (including on falconry) if enacted.

The Sustainable Users Network has been able to engage regularly at the highest levels within DEFRA through the pandemic (and continues to do so) and it is fair to say that we have witnessed a very considerable shift in our favour since the initial pronouncements back in the spring of 2020. This is especially pleasing given that we do have to contend with personnel and positions that are, let's just say, far from being naturally disposed towards our way of thinking (for example, Zac Goldsmith as the DEFRA Minister who is publicly well known for his 'green' and animal 'welfare' credentials and the Prime Minister's partner who gleefully states she is supportive of animal 'rights' and was recently voted by PETA to be their Woman of the Year). Nevertheless, we must remain on the front foot in these regards since our opponents are far from quitting the battle.

One means by which our opponents are seeking to further restrict keeping and trade is by amending the criteria by which species can be listed on CITES. They are seeking (with fervent support from the previous CITES Secretary General) to allow CITES listing and restrictions by virtue of 'zoonotic' concerns as well as the current conservation criteria. These ideas are going forward for review although, I am pleased to say, that thus far Parties to CITES have not generally been receptive to these proposals - CITES is already failing on so many fronts, is unduly burdensome and has been dominated in the past years by a protectionist, animal rights agenda that has little in common with genuine conservation and sustainable utilisation.

Brexit has thrown-up a great deal of immediate issues for movements of CITES species between the UK and EU Member States and vice versa (less so for species not listed on CITES). With the EU considering the UK as a Third Country no different from say Mongolia and the UK considering the EU Member States in exactly the same way it means that before any purchase/sale/transportation of CITES species can take place both an Export and Import Permit needs to be in place. Furthermore, a variety of health certification requirements will pertain to live animal movements for birds and mammals, plus the likes of bees and shellfish (not for reptiles and amphibians since these do not carry known zoonotic

diseases). Looking at the statistics for the first six weeks of 2021 it is obvious that almost everyone has chosen to not import or export live animals until the picture becomes clearer.

SUN has been heavily involved with DEFRA/APHA/Border Force in discussion of these very real challenges. At the most recent meeting a couple of weeks ago, DEFRA were frank in saying that movements of birds for shows on the Continent or falconry birds going to the Continent for meets and then returning to the UK was likely to be impossible for at least two years. There is no agreement with the EU as to how this might be facilitated and, in any case, to change UK law to allow this to happen again is thought by DEFRA to take two years and only after a public consultation (where, of course, our opponents will seek to keep the effective ban in place) and, even then, it will require the EU to agree to reciprocate with any proposed relaxations. Furthermore, we have the particularly weird situation that Northern Ireland has stayed within the EU CITES arrangements meaning that any movement between the rest of the UK and Northern Ireland requires CITES Import and Export Permits but someone living in Northern Ireland can move CITES to/from the 27 EU Member States in a fully unrestricted capacity (i.e. as we all had until 31st December 2020) provided the specimens do not first go through the UK - so going from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and thence by ferry to the Continent requires no CITES certification as it is deemed to be intra-community trade. We live in strange times, that's for sure, and undoubtedly these Brexit issues will keep us heavily occupied for years to come.

Legal/Guidelines Report from Graham Irving

2021 general Licenses

All 3 devolved governments have now published their 2021 General Licenses for wild birds, the below links will take you to the relevant counties' documents:

England <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bird-licences>

Scotland <https://www.nature.scot/general-licences-birds-2021>

Wales <https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/uk-protected-species-licensing/general-licences-for-birds-2021/?lang=en>

There are some fairly substantial changes within some of these licenses, with species being removed, changes to their use on designated sites and changes to the species that can be controlled for certain purposes. Please take the time to read and digest these changes.

Also, check the restrictions on using the GL's on designated sites because the restrictions that affect keepers will also affect falconers.

Brexit

Up to the minute info on the implications to our sport are posted regularly on the Hawk Board, (and other), Facebook page. Information pertaining to subjects such as updated lists of approved points of entry/exit, the need for import/export documents to move birds between the UK-EU-UK, movement of birds between the UK and NI, the continuation of the need to apply for A10's in 2021 and personal ownership certificates to name a few.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1249841371719754>

English quarry licenses

Individuals who hold a QL issued by Natural England should take note of the new condition on this year's licenses to do with designated sites. PLEASE make contact with your landowners to check if their land is or is adjacent to a designated site, if the answer to either of these is yes then you cannot take wild birds on that land if you are doing so via a quarry licence unless the landowner has Natural England consent for you to do so.

And finally

As we approach the time of year when pest control contractors will be flying their hawks and falcons in towns and cities for bird control purposes please ensure you check the area for breeding peregrines before you start flying any hawks. IF you're flying a hawk results in a territorial adult breeding peregrine investigating/attacking your hawk, you have probably committed the offence of recklessly disturbing a breeding pair, this is an absolute offence with no defence via "I didn't know they were there!". If this does happen you should cease flying the hawk and inform the client that their presence prevents you doing so and move to other non-lethal activities.

IAF Report from Mark Upton

Work within the IAF has been hampered all year by the pandemic. The board and working groups have done their best to carry on with projects but many international meetings of wildlife NGO's and European meetings that the IAF would have attended have also been cancelled or postponed. The IAF monthly eBulletin, which is posted on the HB facebook Page and Rachelle circulates, have covered the majority of projects the IAF have been involved in over the period. They also produced a good journal which I hope many of you have seen along with an online newsletter.

The IAF was unable to hold its Council of Delegates meeting in Kearney, Nebraska, as intended because of the pandemic. Instead, the meeting was held by zoom at the same time as the planned meeting. Reports were asked for before the meeting, and circulated to all delegates, only discussion of the reports was needed at the meeting, so reducing time spent online. Organising a Zoom meeting globally with time differences, and poor internet in some regions, was a big logistical undertaking. It worked well with around 120 participating. There was not so much to discuss as usual, with little happening globally this year.

The IAF's regions have been altered. The America's region, including North America, Latin America and South America has been split into North America and Latin America. The split being organised along language difference barriers. There are new Vice-president positions for the two new areas, with Dan Cecchini, the previous VP for The America's, becoming VP for North America and Adrian Reuters becoming VP for Latin America. In many Latin American and South American countries it is not clear whether falconry is legal and much work is ongoing in getting falconry recognised legally within these countries. There was a problem with this in Ecuador where there are meetings between the falconry clubs and government on the legislation of falconry. The President of one of the IAF member hawking clubs refused to support the initiative. The IAF asked her to re-think her position and to state whether she agreed to the IAF's constitutional definition of falconry as being "Falconry is the traditional art and cultural practice of flying falcons to take quarry in its natural habitat". She refused to and so she was written to explaining that the club could no longer remain a member of the IAF and a vote would be taken on their expulsion at the council of delegates meeting. This was in the end unnecessary as they resigned from the IAF before the vote was taken.

There were several problems with the scheduling of future council of delegates meetings. Czech Republic withdrew their offer of hosting the 2021 Council of Delegates Meeting because of the problems caused by Covid and the withdrawal of sponsorship for the hunting expo where the meeting was going to be hosted. Abu Dhabi offered to stand in and host this meeting at their hunting expo in September 2021. This is now under question following the continuation of the pandemic and it is unclear whether people from around the world will be able to travel as early as September.

NAFA requested to host the 2023 meeting. Pakistan, who should have hosted in 2019, and then had to cancel, asked that they should be allowed to host 2022 or 2023. It was considered NAFA should be able to host in 2023, following the cancellation of 2020, because of Covid. It was then asked if UK would reconsider their hosting in 2022. It had already been agreed in 2018 that the BFC should host 2022, with a vote by delegates at the Council of Delegates Meeting. Having been approved by BFC Council. As BFC delegate I stated that this was not acceptable because a vote had already been taken by IAF Delegates and should not go back on. Secondly, I could not agree to a cancellation without the agreement of the BFC Council. The President of the IAF stated that there were important reasons for considering the Pakistani request. I suggested that this shouldn't be decided at the meeting and the BFC should be given the opportunity to discuss the situation.

A message then came from the BFC saying that because of the situation the BFC was willing to forgo hosting the 2022 meeting. It was accepted that Pakistan should now host the meeting.

POLITICAL/POLICY

Environment Bill

The Environment Bill has progressed to Report Stage and a carry-over motion has been passed to ensure the Bill does not fall at the end of the session, currently expected April/May. The amendment in relation to the precautionary principle, which we had worked on with other organisations, was moved and debated, but not voted on. This is an issue to be taken up again when the Bill is considered in the Lords.

Agriculture Bill

The Agricultural Bill has now received Royal Assent. The legislation is intended to help farmers stay competitive, increase productivity, invest in new technology and seek a fairer return from the marketplace. Whether the Bill will deliver these outcomes is far from certain and work continues on the development of the Environmental Land Management Schemes that lie at the heart of delivering public money to farmers in return for public goods.

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

The Bill had one day in Committee on 3 February and was unamended. We are awaiting a date for Report Stage. Due to Covid-19 restrictions there is reduced time for private members' bills but may still pass in this session, as the Bill has Government support.

Petitions Committee

Sittings in Westminster Hall have been suspended. As such, Petitions Committee debates have been postponed, including the debate on grouse shooting, which was to have taken place on 25 January. The Leader of the House has indicated that a larger venue might be found, and some debates on petitions are now taking place in the main chamber.

Prior to the suspension of sittings, a briefing note on grouse shooting had been sent to MPs, and we launched an e-lobby to enable constituents to contact their MP. In view of Parliament's decision, our e-lobby has also been suspended until we have a new date for the debate.

Covid Hub

With the UK in a national lockdown we continue to update our Covid Hub to reflect the current regulations. The Hub continues to be one of the most active areas of our website.

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Manifesto

Currently the PCC elections in May look likely to go ahead and so work continues apace on our rural crime manifesto. We will be using our manifesto, and the results from our England and Wales rural crime survey, to engage with candidates.

SHOOTING

Covid-19 and Shooting

The Countryside Alliance has updated its 'Covid Safe Principles for Game Shooting in England', and issued specific guidance on shooting to take account of all new regulations and restrictions that applied to the introduction of the Tier system, and subsequently during the latest national lockdown.

New General Licences for 2021

New General Licences came into force on 1 January 2021. Thanks to lobbying by the Alliance, alongside other organisations, the new licences represent a considerable improvement on those that had been in place, and it is believed they are legally robust enough to avoid a further legal challenge from Wild Justice. We are grateful to Defra for issuing the licences, rather than handing back control to Natural England who proved incapable of overseeing a credible wildlife licensing system.

European Protected Sites – Judicial Review into Gamebird Releases

Court papers have been published that suggest Wild Justice's Judicial Review on releasing game birds on or near to European protected sites, in which the Alliance was an Interested Party, would not have been successful had it been heard.

European Protected Sites – Gamebird Releases

We have written, with other organisations, to the Secretary of State to express concerns that Defra's current proposals for the release of gamebirds on and within 500m of European Protected Sites (EPS) will not achieve an interim regime for gamebird release which is proportionate to the need for Natural England to gather evidence on those protected sites. The proposals are far too complex, and impossible to convey or deliver in the time frame needed to allow shoots to plan and be legally compliant for the 2021 season. We have requested that an alternative approach, which has a far better way of resolving the issue, is adopted. Negotiations are ongoing.

Heather Burning on Blanket Bog

Whilst the Government remains committed to phasing out the rotational burning of heather on protected blanket bog, Defra has recognised that there may be circumstances where vegetation management is necessary and where burning may be the only practicable technique available. The Alliance is delighted that Defra has listened to evidence and has refined its policy so that it reflects the latest scientific research, which was collated by the Uplands Partnership, which comprises leading countryside organisations, including the Countryside Alliance.

Brexit – End of Transition Period

The end of the transition period on 31 December had a number of implications for shoots and shooters. Since 1 January, the European Firearms Pass is no longer valid for British citizens. Travelling to Europe with a firearm will now require a permit for each country being visited, including those you may be passing through, and we have therefore produced a Q&A to help members on this. Many shoots have also previously exported their game, in feather, directly to Europe. We have therefore produced an information sheet in conjunction with the British Game Alliance, which explains the plans shoots now need to make. The transition for the game meat market has not been without its problems, as it has more widely for the meat sector.

Patagonia – Financial Support to Saboteurs

Moorland Monitors, an animal rights group with links to Ban Bloodsports on Yorkshire's Moors and hunt saboteur groups, has received a financial grant from Patagonia, two years access to its Action Works platform, and the opportunity to use Patagonia's social amplification tool for their campaigns and actions. Patagonia claims that it is not opposed to any field sports activity that is carried out legally, in an environmentally responsible way, and that protects the local environment and its biodiversity, and it appears to be under the misapprehension that Moorland Monitors is an environmental or conservation group. We have now written to the company twice to express our concerns at its involvement with the group and have asked them to stop all its funding of them with immediate effect. If Patagonia do not respond satisfactorily, we are poised to run an e-lobby on the matter; an approach that proved effective when Calor Gas made a similar donation to LACS in 2019.

HUNTING

Local Councils Campaign

As we anticipated, a number of councils have seen motions put forward regarding the future of trail hunting and hound exercise on their land which has resulted in a number of campaigns taking place. We recently re-launched our e-lobby to encourage hunt supporters to show their local councillors that support for hunting remains strong in their areas and to encourage them to permit the continuation of hunting on council-owned land should the issue crop up on their agendas.

Media Coverage

Although Boxing Day usually provides one of our main opportunities to promote hunting online and in both local and national media, the decision taken in October for hunts to move away from towns and villages during the festive period meant that coverage was limited, although there was still a reasonable level of interest in hunting activities by the national media.

Legal

There are currently five cases outstanding in England from last season. In Scotland, there is one case outstanding. There are a number of other ongoing inquiries relating to the 2020/21 season.

WALES

Wild Justice Judicial Review against Natural Resources Wales

The High Court has ruled that Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) General Licences to control wild birds are lawful, following a legal challenge by Wild Justice. The rejection by Judge Harman QC of all three of Wild Justice's grounds, and his description of the current approach as rational, means that they can continued to be used for the control certain pest bird species.

Access Reform Working Groups

The Alliance continues its work as a member of the Access Reform Expert Group co-ordinated by Natural Resources Wales on behalf of Welsh Government.

