

Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 23rd June 2022**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30

Present:

Gary Biddiss (GB); Jim Collins (JC); Grant Dudley (GD); Nick Havemann-Mart (NHM); James Legge (JL); Gordon Mellor (GM); Jimmy Robinson (JR); Martyn Standley (MS); Rachelle Upton (RU); Mark Upton (MU)

Apologies:

Cameron Balfour; Alan Collins; Barbara Royle; Don Ryan; Dean White

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

Minutes approved.

GM to sign and send to RU.

Matters arising were all completed.

Chairman’s Report:

I am sure that you share my disappointment that the recent good weather has not seen the scourge of Avian Influenza leave UK shores. Last winter's outbreaks had the most significant impact on both domestic flocks and indeed wild populations, in recorded memory. Whilst our own activities were restricted, we were able to continue flying with care and good practice. Some wild populations of raptors have been reported as being particularly vulnerable - the White-Tailed Eagle and Golden Eagle in particular. Avian Influenza seems here to stay, and we must learn to live with it. Doing so puts more pressure on all falconers to follow good bio-security protocols and avoid high risk areas.

I see from social media the excellent peregrine rehab/rescue work that some of our fraternity are doing. A good many 'nest jumpers' or eyasses that prematurely fledge, have been checked over, fed up, given a blast of anti-mite spray, and returned to the rooftops within a week of rescue. This seems to be the critical timescale that allows their parents and siblings to accept them back. All those who care deeply about them should be very appreciative of such expertise and commitment shown by falconers.

You will all be aware of the proposed revision to Zoo standards by DEFRA. Once again there was little genuine consultation until the final stage. I am grateful for the expertise of colleagues who attended the Birds of Prey round table where we gave a very good account of our reservations to the proposals and rejected the assumption that they can impose unrealistic restrictions concerning tethering. The department has promised to come back to us with revised proposals - we will see what these are and are ready to fight them if necessary.

Having been involved in the online Invasive Species week, I am pleased to report that non-native birds of prey do not feature as a major concern currently. Nonetheless, we must all be vigilant when flying our birds and take every step to recover any that become lost. Social media reports distort the scale of falconry losses and can give the impression of lost hawks in every postcode.

It has been election time for the Hawk Board, and I am pleased to say we have our required 'Elected Specialists'. Because the proposed and seconded applicants matched exactly the seats available, we did not actually have to hold an election. I have mixed feelings about this, positive because we have saved money and will not have to raid the HB coffers, but I am disappointed that we did not have more clamouring to join us. We have a few new faces that will take up their places in October and they and their viewpoints will be very welcome.

We must face what often seems to be a myriad of opponents ranged against us, not by hiding away or becoming apologists for our sport, rather we must go hawking - always showing excellence, good practice, high welfare standards, and pride in what we do. We have nothing whatsoever to be ashamed of.

MU: I attended a day of AI meeting and there was nothing on BoP. But Hawk Board did come up as the body overseeing falconry in a positive way because of the way we have circulated information.

Treasurers Report:

At present the HB accounts are holding their own.

Sun subs: We have increased our contribution to SUN from £1,200 to £1,400.

Subscription letters have been sent out, and about half the clubs have paid their subs.

We had one club finally fold, which was the Home Counties and they've reformed as the Southern Counties Falconry Sporting Society and they have come straight back to join the Hawk Board. And I would like to formally welcome the SCFSS o the Hawk Board.

We ran at a loss of £4,303.00 last year and are due a corporation tax liability of £3.61, although our Accountant has said that whilst this is due January 2023, as per last year he wouldn’t expect HMRC to try and collect it.

GM: We do have to look at how we are going to address the shortfall.  I don’t think the obvious approach of raising subs is sensible at this time.

GB: You might claw a bit back, but there's not an awful lot people can do about it at the moment.

GM: No, I agree, and I do feel that we're in a position whereby we do still have a number of years’ worth of reserve. It might be that in the fullness of time we can recalibrate.

MU: I think we just need to carry on as we are, but when funds get low we will then need to go to the clubs to ask for their ideas.

GB: The landscape has changed and there are no easy fund raisers as previously.

GM: Clubs are really struggling at the moment.

MU: Clubs have always supported us; others haven’t

GM: The group of people that we were defending the most in the bird of Prey Roundtable, where we focused on tethering, is a group that we had comparatively little contact with, the show giver/display giver.  Then there are the small Raptor centres, which we reach into just occasionally, but for the most part they are not really supporters of the Hawk Board.

MS: I will revisit the display/rehab/pest controllers as a possible to become supporters of the Hawk Board.

Election:

We only had 6 nominations and with 6 seats to fill this means we will not need to hold an election this year. For those clubs that have sent me their members details these have now been deleted, in line with GDPR.

We will welcome the specialists at the October meeting, and they will be:

Gordon Mellor

Helen Nakielny

Jimmy Robinson

Mark Upton

Martyn Standley

Robert (Bob) Dalton

An announcement will go out on the Hawk Board website and on social media tomorrow

GB: We need to look into a way of the details of candidates going out to the clubs, before it becomes a shoo in.

MU: We do need to look at this as many of the current board where thinking of standing down – we could have ended up with anyone.

RU: If you have 6 spaces and only 6 candidates then by constitution they are elected. All candidates have to be proposed and seconded by a member of a club which is affiliated to the Hawk Board. Normally we would have hoped for more candidates and then you would have been sent their CV’s.

GM: It was disappointing that we didn’t have enough people stand to require an election – we have a lot of critics, but none prepared to stand and be counted.

GB: It doesn’t surprise me, reps don’t come to meetings, there is just massive apathy, and it has become worse since Covid.

JR: Although it is easier to be part of a meeting now, they are on-line.

GM: If HB goes by the wayside, it will have to be reinvented somehow.

MU: Good thing is we try to be democratic body – Clubs can’t complain as reps have the numbers to out vote specialist members at meetings if they want to.

RU: I will send out the CV’s.

Tethering:

JR: I stand with you Gordon when you said earlier that we take it as it comes.

JR: Who does the HB represent now, I actually think there is a group of people who are desperately seeking advice from the whole board and standing on the other side of the fence, where actually they might be part of the problem and fuelling anti tethering. I know I'm working in zoological collections and have done throughout my whole career.

JR: The on-line meetings were interesting meetings to sit in and I think Hawk Board represented themselves incredibly well and I actually think we got the result which we wanted and through yourself and Nick Fox being quite open and very much straight to the point in the meeting.  Because if we'd sat in the shadows and just listened to what they said, we actually wouldn't have made as much headway as we did.

JR: I wanted to ask the board, is where do we go now? I think one thing which is being talked about is, and I hate the use of the word, but it's just an example, is tethering licences.

Throughout the hawking season, it’s something entirely doable. We apply for game licences and things. So, can we apply for a tethering licence? And I actually think most good falconers have got perfectly adequate enclosures with their free lofting and moulting Hawks in, and that's perfectly fine. I think the issue is new private keepers who are tethering their Hawks 24/7 and throughout the year they're being malted out on blocks.  People who should be governed a bit more by Defra. You know there's too many outfits which are going round in shopping centres, village fetes and country shows showing horrific tethering practises and it's slowly going to trickle down the ranks and I think falconers could bear the brunt.

MU: We have to stick with it and protect falconry. Similar questions are being asked regarding hooding and the BFC are putting forward a document saying why hooding is necessary. HB should be involved in any such document and it could contain advice about tethering and hooding.

GM: Hooding doesn’t have such a high profile, but the discussions have opened the door for antis to include hooding.

JR: I’ve never been asked or questioned about hooding, my worry is the actual question of hooding practices have come from our own ranks.

GM: Just as an observation in my time as HB Chair I have ‘helped’ 2 commercial enterprises, both relatively small, when challenged about tethering hawks. By the letter of the law I was in a position that I had to tell the complainants that the displays were within the law – it was an uncomfortable position to be in.

MU: We also need to be aware that this has come from the powers above and that they won’t let this lie.

GM: I absolutely agree, there are some very powerful voices within government that are really very anti about what we do and we just have to be as robust as we possibly can.

IUCN:

MU: A few weeks ago, the IUCN were encouraging groups like us to become members so that they would have more support fighting falconry issues. I am not sure what the cost would be as they charge groups a fee per member and we don’t have members, so I would have to check that out.

MU: IAF are keen to have us attend an IUCN meeting at ADIHEX in September and I thought it would be best for our chairman to attend.

GM: Keep us informed and I recommend that you all do your research on IUCN as they are a good organisation.

Scottish Update:

My apologies once again to you all for missing the meeting on Thursday. There have not been any big changes in recent months, mostly relating to the mountain hare issue.

The petition by Barry Blyther continues to make small steps in the right direction. In its latest meeting on 20th April 2022, the public petitions committee agreed amongst other things to invite Dr Nick Fox and Scottish Gov’t to give evidence at one of its future meetings.

The RSBP has also recently responded to the petition in surprisingly a more neutral way than what I would have expected from them. Essentially, they make 2 points:

1. “We are not opposed to falconry provided this activity is carried out legally and sustainably.”
2. “… we think that a change in the law is inappropriate at the present time … we consider that such licences should only be issued for falconry hunting where there is robust evidence … that the mountain hares’ population in the relevant geographical area is in healthy conservation status.”

JL: Another Scotland issue, and this is an interesting one from your point of view, the evidence given to the Raine Committee on the hunting with dogs’ bill in connection with Birds of Prey is that the anti-organisations comments about the nature and humaneness of death by a bird of prey, that is not in connection with the use or means with a pack of hounds or more than 2 dogs, it is simply an observation that they do not consider death by Bird of Prey as being acceptable or humane. So if you are going out flushing at hares, even with just 1 dog, totally unconnected to a hunt, they do not consider that to be a humane activity and they also do not like the fact that falconry is exempted as it is under the 2002 legislation, but is now explicitly described as a sport and as you know the antis are very keen on trying to distinguish between activities that are for legitimate purposes, such as pest control, and activities they consider to be sport hunting and I just think from the point of view of the HB your position with regard to the use of BoPs in connection with a pack of hounds is the position of the board, but there is a broader and more hostile view now being expressed about killing and taking with Birds of Prey as an activity, whether it is a sport, whether some of it is pest control which it could be, I just think it is something that we should all be aware of.

GM: This doesn’t surprise me at all, and I think we have always been slightly vulnerable.

SUN Update:

See Appendix 1

JC: The really significant thing was the fact that we had two days of kind of hellish thinking that the European Council had pushed the European Commission for a directive to make it an EU wide directive on positive lists and they were quite smart and this was clearly positioned by the antis, so first of all they lobbied small countries, so the full proponents if you look at the four countries they are tiny countries, Lithuania, Cyprus, Malta and Luxemburg you know all heavyweight countries, obviously who were drafted in and obviously for those countries it's very easy for the antis to get into those, they only have to have a link to one minister. And they are quite clearly targeting small countries because obviously when it comes to the vote, they are equivalent to the likes of Germany. The meeting itself was an interesting one, I've had quite a lot of read out of it and basically there were countries who simply didn't feel that there was a need for positive lists, that their negative lists worked perfectly well, and they didn't see why there should be a positive list, but they wouldn't stand in the way of a consensus.  So, when they actually had the vote it was 27 to 0 in favour of requesting the European Commission to build the framework for a review of the positive list. So, for two days it sounded horrible, but then the European Commission formally responded and basically told them to take a hike. So, the Commission have gone on record, it is now public record that they've rebutted the Council and said that first of all they don’t believe a directive is the right way of going because I don't believe this should be across the board, it should be up to individual Member States, which is great news. But also, they argued quite strongly that that they believed it would have legal ramifications both for their signatory to CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also because they believed it would put them in dire straits in terms of WTO arrangements. So, the Commission were really quite strong in rebutting this and basically it cannot go ahead without the Commission making the framework and the Commission basically declined to make the framework so it will be interesting to see at the next European Council meeting if they raise this because our opponents, if you go onto their websites, are apoplectic with rage.

MU: UK is in the European Council, but not the commission so it could be that the UK says alright, the European Council has told us that we should look into positive lists. Forgetting what conclusion the Commission has come to, so do we need to be a bit worried about it from that point of view?

JC: That's a very good observation and yes that that is the case, particularly if you happen to be a minister that has already a predetermined idea of what he wants. But I guess you could argue that if it's not going to be across the board for the whole of the EU and those arguments in terms of WTO, CITES and CBD are all valid irrespective of whether you are talking of the EU or the UK.

JC: The other issue, that you were talking about earlier, tethering it's an interesting. The official feedback has closed now for the consultation on the Zoo standards, but I do know that a very large number of smaller Zoos, some terrible person got them organised and they all voted independently. But nevertheless, there's been a whole raft of small zoos that have written in to criticise quite large chunks of the entire Code of Practise in terms of trying to do a one size fits all solution, which they seem to have done across the board, if you look at that piece of legislation or those Codes of Practice as they are currently written, they're very different from almost anything we've seen previously, including whether you see “You should do this” and “as appropriate” and terms like that, you see, almost none of that in that current Code of Practise it's “musts” all over the place. Which is not very British and doesn’t fit with how we have done things in the past, but it's also inconsistent with what the government as a whole is saying, so ignoring the fact that we have a somewhat biased DEFRA minister, that the the cabinet position is that they want no one size fits all solutions, and as minimum democracy as they can get. So my take is that our strength is probably not so much lobbying DEFRA, not whilst Goldsmith is in power, but actually playing the kind of business and benefits of Brexit departments, so basically Jacob Rees-Mogg. We took part in a meeting with JRM which was very much a business meeting and he wasn't very politically correct, he ripped into DEFRA and said that their civil servants, or the junior minister were over egging the cake in terms of disease risk and health risk for transporting animals to and from the EU and you'll see that the deadline for the imposition of the third tranche of restrictions, which was due in the 1st of July, has been completely dropped between ourselves and the EU and that is purely Jacob Rees-Mogg's intervention.  JRM also said during these meetings was an open invitation to stakeholders to get back to him and his department if we saw areas of government that were not playing ball with minimal bureaucracy, flexibility in legislation, not having a one size fits all. So, we are waiting for the next draught of the Code of Practice but I’m sure that it won’t be massively moved away in our favour and I think at that point we push the more nuclear button of undercutting DEFRA and going elsewhere to make our complaints.

NHM: We have written to JRM and have no response.

MU: It’s an un-British way. I was talking to JPJ, she was one of the 3 that was asked to look at the raptor review, they went back with their proposals and DEFRA sent them away and said they had to be yes or no answers.

JC: It shows that it is direct political influence.

GM: CITES is yet another battleground.

IAF Update:

See Appendix 2

MU: There is not a lot on at the moment. The major thing is that the IAF meeting in Pakistan has been moved to Poland.

Countryside Alliance Update:

See Appendix 3

GM: It seems to be the devolved nations that are in the vanguard of changing the bias of the way we function.

JL: Be aware that the general licence keeps changing and is becoming more restrictive.

AOB:

MS: I would like to try again to create other HB memberships: pest controllers; breeders; etc. They are the ones who tell us what we should be doing, but they have no input. I would like the board’s approval to look at this again.

JR: I completely agree with MS, it would be great if others would contribute.

MU: We spend as much time fighting for them as for falconers. Now is a good time as many went to the DEFRA meeting.

RU: The Constitution already allows for new membership groups to be set up.

GB: MS did a lot of work on this before and we got close to this. Should start doing the seminars again.

MU: We could do online seminars with interested bodies.

GB: MS thank you for putting yourself forward for this, I will help.

JR: I am willing to help to, how about BIAZA/EAZA

RU: BIAZA is part of the HB but they have no rep since Mark Habben left.

NHM: Honeybrook is a member of BIAZA, so we have contact there. If you want to invite people to Vowley we have tickets.

MS: NHM’s suggestion of using Vowley is a good one, Nick Fox is a good friend of HB.

 \*MU; GM; RU to scope out Vowley.

GB: I spoke to Charlotte Hill this morning about the Game Fair, if you have any pop-up banners we are happy to represent the HB.

 \*RU to sort out banners and leaflets to GB.

JR: Scottish Hawk Board has slim representation and is a weak area that needs looking at.

GM: I will email you to discuss how we go forward.

MS: SHB is a separate entity so can help but not dictate.

The meeting closed at 14:20

**Next Meeting**: **12.30pm TBC October 2022**

**Location: TBC**

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 24th July 2022

Appendix 1

**SUN Report from Jim Collins**

We await the conclusions of the Scottish review into the desirability or otherwise of Positive Lists for what species of animals are permitted to be kept in captivity by private individuals.   This review has taken on added significance since it has been referenced by the UK's Environment and Animal Welfare Minister (certainly no friend of animal keepers) in a parliamentary response where he said any moves to a Positive List in England (this being a devolved power) will await a reading of the soon to be published Scottish review.   The latter's consultation process has been next to non-existent and led by veterinarians and academics so the betting is that this will make favourable conclusions to adopting a Positive List.

What started as a horrible outcome at the EU's latest Council meeting has turned-out to be a major move in our favour and a slap in the face to the protectionists.   The Council meeting unanimously agreed to seek the European Commission to adopt the necessary framework review to adopt a Positive List across the European Union (this would then only be a matter of time before the UK did likewise in order not to be 'left behind' on the welfare and conservation agenda).  It would seem that only Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary had anything sensible to say (these three countries pointed out that their Negative lists seemed to work perfectly well but they would not bloke a consensus by the Council to call for a review) with the rest of the countries all coming out with the usual rubbish.

It seems that they were guided by the 'Antis' to talk about biodiversity and conservation (which is a European Commission Competency) rather than animal welfare which remains a Competency of each individual State.  In this way they intend to get a EU Directive applicable to all the EU Member States as they know that if they looked at animal welfare the European Commission would have to decline because it wasn't one of their Competencies.    Our opponents were over the moon with the day's events and went overboard in celebratory media releases.

Then the good news!  Only days later the European Commission rebutted the approach from the European council of Ministers and stated that they would not be putting in place the framework for such a review.  Instead, the Commission reiterated its opposition to a universal Positive List stating that this should be for individual states to decide and pointing out that Negative Lists are demonstrated to work.  The Commission stated that a universal Positive List was likely to place the EU in default of World Trade Organisation rules and might well contravene their obligations under both CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity.  To say our opponents were apoplectic with the Commission's response is an understatement.   Shame.   The whole saga, of course, will not go away as adoption of Positive Lists and the introduction of a Lacey Act equivalent have become their Holy Grails.  It does demonstrate how our opponents work, targeting small countries where they can most easily build-up a head of steam and gain influence without dedicating an excessive amount of resource - the four proponents at the meeting of the European Council of Ministers were Malta, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Lithuania!

Away from Positive Lists, the deadline for submission of proposals to the CITES Conference of the Parties is this week.  I've been monitoring what comes up on the CITES website but very little has been posted to date - expect a flurry through July and August.  Asking around it is clear that neither the European Commission nor UK will be proposing anything specifically on birds of prey and it does not seem that Canada will resubmit their previous down-listing proposal for the Peregrine Falcon.  Key areas for the forthcoming Conference of the Parties - for us as keepers - are likely to be the extension into captive-bred stock of the Review of Significant Trade process, animal transportation and further focus on restrictive stipulations for the keeping of CITES I (Annex A) species as is currently in place for the likes of elephants and rhinos - are opponents see this as a good opportunity to severely restrict the keeping of species listed on CITES I (Annex A) if they can further extend the remit.

Finally, the various working groups set-up by DEFRA/APHA continue to progress (I'm on each one) - these being run in parallel with separate meetings for the pro-keeping/trade side and another for those with a protectionist/animal rights agenda.  The one on legislation - most particularly a review of the Wildlife Trade Regs. - has been presented with a first draft of conclusions from DEFRA and weighs heavily towards our opponents.  We have made our angst very clear to DEFRA in this regard and wait to see if a second draft is more balanced.  Of particular worry was a strong nod towards adopting something like the U.S.'s Lacey Act which would force people to be able to demonstrate that their specimens were legally acquired and in accordance with the exporting nations legislation no matter how long back into the past the founder stock was imported - this has caused havoc on a number of occasions in the U.S.   The one draft conclusion 'in our favour' was the suggestion that something be done to process applications more speedily for the Import/Export of Captive-bred CITES species to/from the UK and EU Member States.

Appendix 2

**IAF Report from Mark Upton**

Recently the proposed International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey annual Council of Delegates Meeting due to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan has be cancelled because of security worries. An offer has been received and accepted from the Polish Falconers Club to host. It is the 50th Anniversary Field Meet of the Polish Falconers Club and is a celebration of the UNESCO Inscription. It is to be centred around the town of Pińczów in the south of Poland, one and a half hours drive from Kraków airport, or two and a half from Warsaw.

The IAF attended 2022 Archives of Falconry Spring Rendezvous and the opening of the updated Sheikh Zayed Falconry Heritage Wing. The opening speech by Tony James, IAF Culture and Heritage Representative, spoke of the international co-operation of falconers and how we share the knowledge through friendship.

Between the 7th and the 10th of June IAF took part in the joint Meeting of the Bern Convention SFPs and CMS MIKT on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Wild Birds and the Meeting of the Bern Convention Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds. The two meetings were held in Valencia, Spain.

This meeting was of key relevance to IAF, to highlight the positive role that falconers play in monitoring and working against illegal killing of birds. IAF’s standing as a core stakeholder, was highlighted by the positive reception of the interventions made by IAF. There was a presentation by CMS on electrocutions. Julian Muehle made an intervention on this, stressing the role played by falconers, by the IAF and particularly by the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi and the MBZ fund in mitigating thousands of kilometres of dangerous lines across Asia and into Europe and North Africa.

There is an online stakeholder meeting with CITES coming up in July which the IAF will be attending.

Appendix 3

**Countryside Alliance Update**

**POLITICAL/POLICY**

**The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill**

This received Royal Assent ahead of prorogation and the Queen’s Speech on 10 May. The Alliance joined BASC in promoting an amendment tabled at Report Stage by Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown requiring that the new Animal Sentience Committee must *“respect legislative or administrative provisions and customs relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage”*, restoring a provision of the Lisbon Treaty. The Government ultimately accepted this amendment and it has been included in the law. We also worked with Greg Smith MP to bring a range of probing amendments based on those that had first been raised in the Lords, which secured a Government commitment that extremists would be kept out of the Committee. The future Animal Sentience Committee remains a source of concern.

**Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill**

This received Royal Assent at the end of the last session and includes greater powers for the police and courts to tackle hare poachers.

**The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill**

This was carried over from the last session and is awaiting Report Stage in the Commons. The Government is looking to take this forward but there remain a series of hostile amendments, including amendments on hunting and working dogs. The Alliance is supporting the Bill in its current form.

**The Animals (Penalty Notices) Bill**

This has received Royal Assent. The Alliance was content with the Bill and no amendments were tabled at any stage.

**Petitions Committee Debate - Hunting**

A Westminster Hall debate took place on 25 April on two e-petitions calling for new restrictions on hunting and which proposed to ban hunting on Forestry England land and to prevent hounds from being exercised in public spaces. Although there was no substantive motion the Alliance briefed members of the parliamentary committee, of which two members attended and gave strong contributions. The debate was otherwise brief and sparsely attended.

**Game Birds (Cage Breeding) Bill**

Lord Randall’s Game Birds (Cage Breeding) Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Lords on 26 March. The debate highlighted a level of misapprehension about game rearing that stands among the foremost examples of ignorance as to the realities of rural life. The Alliance briefed peers and attracted helpful contributions from the Earls of Leicester and Errol. In conjunction with the GFA we then followed up by a letter with the Minister and peers who had taken a critical stance, facilitating invitations to visit game farms. The Bill fell at the end of the last session and has not been reintroduced to date.

**Queen’s Speech**

The Queen’s Speech took place on 10 May. The Government set out its legislative programme including a number of Bills of interest to the Alliance including infrastructure and online safety.

**Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill**

This is a Private Member’s Bill (PMB) and is introduced by Henry Smith MP, who was drawn at thirteen in the PMB ballot. The Second Reading is scheduled for Friday 25 November 2022.

**SHOOTING**

**Code of Practice for Gamebirds**

Defra is looking at the Code of Practice for Gamebirds and the use of cages more widely.

**Snares**

A call for evidence on the use of snares will be launched online in due course. The call for evidence is planned to run for 12 weeks, after which period responses will be analysed and a summary of responses published. The Alliance has prepared general issue briefing material in readiness. There is also an outstanding petition on the use of snares which has still to be scheduled for debate by the Commons Petitions Committee.

**Avian Influenza**

The mandatory housing measures which were introduced across the United Kingdom to help stop the spread of Avian Influenza were lifted on Monday 2 May 2022 for all poultry and captive birds, unless they are in a Protection Zone. Avian Influenza has impacted some of the major game-rearing areas on the Continent which has seen the cross-channel trade in partridge and pheasant eggs almost completely closed down. Some 80% of partridges and 40% of pheasants released in the UK originate from laying flocks in Europe, and this will have a significant impact on this year’s shooting season.

**General Licence for Protection of Livestock**

Wild Justice announced in February that it would be legally challenging the General Licence for the protection of livestock, and the clarification that gamebirds can be classed as livestock whilst they are dependent on the provision of food, water, or shelter for their survival. In response, Defra confirmed that it would contest their proposed claim in full, and we stand by to be an Interested Party if the case goes ahead.

**General Licence for Gamebird Releases on European Protected Sites**

In 2021, pheasants and red legged partridges needed a licence for release on or close to some protected sites for the first time, with a new individual licensing system launched by Natural England. The current licence expired at the end of May, and a simplified online service has now been launched which will run through until the late Autumn.

**Natural Resources Wales General Licences**

The Board of Natural Resources Wales has pushed through changes to the General Licensing system following its Wild Bird Review. From 01 July 2022, the public will no longer be able to control magpies, jays or jackdaws to protect wild birds, including those that are red and amber listed.

**Heather Burning**

The RSPB’s recent calls on the public to use its new App to report burning on peatland had more to do with its dislike for grouse shooting, rather than its concerns for the environment. The possibility of wildfires has grown due to climate change, yet the RSPB is wanting to stop an essential management practice that can help both prevent and reduce their devastating impact. We wrote an open letter criticising their actions in response.

**Firearms Licensing Fees**

The Home Office has launched a review of firearms licensing fees and a working group, on which the Alliance is represented, met at the beginning of April. A 10-year certificate is expected to be looked into in 2025, and no firearms legislation is expected in the next session.

**SCOTLAND**

**Hunting with Dogs Bill - Scotland**

The Bill is currently being scrutinised by the RAINE committee, which is hearing evidence from a range of witnesses. It is notable that those animal welfare/rights groups supporting the Bill have also taken the opportunity to note their opposition to falconry and have made some unhelpful observations about the death of mammals by birds of prey.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) now chairs a working group that we set up to specifically look at issues surrounding the Bill. It is made up of around 12 rural organisations and now has government officials acting as observers, so there is a direct link back to Ministers at Holyrood. The SCA also has a meeting in the diary with the Minister overseeing the Bill, Mairi MacAllan. It is our intention that the group will be utilised as an advisory group to propose, evidence and support amendments as the Bill passes through each stage.

**WALES**

**Tree Planting**

The Alliance is robustly challenging Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government on their plans to plant trees on productive farmland. We have made our position clear that we are not opposed to tree planting in order to address the climate emergency, however, the recent purchase by the Welsh Government of prime agricultural land for a Covid memorial woodland has been strongly opposed. There has been considerable coverage in the media.

**Animal Welfare Network**

The Animal Welfare Network Wales group has been tasked by Welsh Government to work on the legislation on “mobile animal exhibits”. Currently, through the Network, greyhound racing is also included, and there are calls for an outright ban in Wales. Rachel will work towards removing greyhound racing from the discussion surrounding the legislation as this could inevitably affect terrier racing which has already been mentioned.