



Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 17 October 2022

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30

Present:

Gary Biddiss (GB); Gordon Mellor (GM); Helen Nakielny (HN); James Legge (JL); Jimmy Robinson (JR); Mark Upton (MU); Nick Havermann-Mart (NHM); Rachelle Upton (RU)

Apologies:

Alan Bennett; Barbara Royle; Bob Dalton; Cameron Balfour; Dean White; Don Ryan;

Outgoing Chairman's Report:

Colleagues, welcome to the 'new' Hawk Board. Specifically, I want to welcome our new members and welcome back those old stagers. Thank you all for stepping up and being willing to represent our fraternity.

I send my best wishes to those past members of the Board who have left our ranks.

The challenges and threats to both falconry and raptor keeping have never been more pronounced and we have to be vigilant with respect to them and robust in our defence. Ironically the standards that we see in falconry and welfare for the most part, have never been higher.

We still await DEFRA's response to our engagement with them over the proposed Modern Zoo Standards and the banning of tethering in public display. I remain gratified that specialist vets, centre owners, and display givers, joined us in a robust rejection of the proposals. DEFRA were left in no doubt that there was little support from bird of prey experts and that their approach was illogical.

The Invasive Species Directorate have for the second year, embarked on an attempt to visit falconers and centres to inspect their premises. This according to them, is to ascertain why birds of prey are lost. They have recently been in touch with the IBR and will get a robust and expert opinion there, which is good because they have fixedly avoided engaging with the Hawk Board or our major Clubs.

Last year I took the unusual step of advising those so contacted to refuse the requests to visit – these civil servants have neither the remit nor the expertise to enable them to make any useful contribution. There is no evidence to support the assertion that lost captive birds of prey are invasive species or are self-sustaining in the wild. Of course, we have to take steps to recover all lost hawks but I believe that this issue is a welfare and not an invasive species one.

MS: I have offered to put together a guidance document on how not to lose your hawk, under HB heading, that can be used.

There has been a very small number of court cases concerning theft from the wild. These are very damaging to our public face but they do fall well short of showing any significant laundering of wild birds into the captive environment. There is also no evidence of British raptors being stolen for export to the Middle East.

Natural England are conducting a consultation on the status of licences for wild take. The Board has contributed to this and will continue to engage.

An area that needs to be addressed, is that of rehabilitation. Many falconers do excellent work in this area, but there is some confusion amongst law enforcement agencies about when this is legitimate. Rehabilitators have to tread very carefully indeed.

The devolved authorities (Scotland and Wales) are taking a harder line regarding field sports than we are seeing in England. We have already lost the Mountain Hare as legitimate quarry in Scotland. We need to support our colleagues in those countries in protecting our heritage and ways of life.

Despite outlining above, some of the risks that we face, currently the most profound threat is not political or ideological in origin, but emanates in nature: Avian Influenza.

The UK has seen an extraordinary number of cases in the poultry industry that has resulted in millions of birds culled. Legal restrictions have become wide ranging in attempt to protect the industry and of course these encompass all bird keepers.

With wild bird fatalities continuing to be seen across the UK, it is evidently endemic in our resident bird populations in addition to our migratory species. Whilst vaccination is a possibility, we are a long way short of this being available in the UK as yet.

AI has even delayed the issuing of quarry licences, although this has now been resolved.

DEFRA has been excellent in their communications and engagement both this and indeed last year, but the restrictions do not seem to have limited the spread of this pernicious virus. Housing orders and prevention zones can be problematic for bird of prey keepers. Bio-security measures are necessary for us all because the consequences of our birds of prey contracting avian influenza are catastrophic.

We have seen regional prevention zones that effectively shut down falconry in those areas and the fear is that this approach will be adopted nationally signalling an early end to all of our hawking.

Looking at ourselves, the Hawk Board is currently marching towards extinction in that our costs, which we keep to a real minimum, exceed our income. We must review how we are funded as we move forward as well as widening our reach – we have to represent falconers and bird of prey keepers far more meaningfully. Our reach falls well short of many professionals – breeders, centre owners, display givers, pest controllers and bird abatement specialists, as well as hobby aviculturists and the like.

I believe that our fraternity needs representation and if it is not the Hawk Board, then we would have to reinvent a similar organisation. I am delighted with the make-up of this Board, but I observe that we did not have to hold an election. Surely our colleagues should be competing to be part of this, our representative body.

I complete my term as Chairman and reflect that it has been both demanding and enjoyable in equal measure. Thank you for your support over a good number of years now. I will continue to support the Board as best I can, regardless of your choice of Chair.

Election of New Chair and Vice-Chair:

RU: I requested that anyone interested in the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair to let me know as yet I have had no names – does anyone wish to put their names forward?

GM: I am willing to stand again as Chair if no-one else wishes to take it on, but I really mean it when I say this will be my last term.

MU: I am happy to move from acting Vice-Chair to Vice-Chair.

RU: If you would both like to leave the room whilst the decision is taken.

GM & MU leave the room

RU: On the position of Chair can we have a show of hands for GM to continue as Chair.

Unanimous

RU: On the position of Vice-Chair can we have a show of hands for MU to become the Vice-Chair.

Unanimous

RU: We will invite them back into the meeting.

GB: I would like to thank you for your past years of service and for taking it on again.

Co-Opted Members:

RU: We need to look into the role of co-opted members and who to take on these roles.

Eagle Specialist – David Fox

Agreed

IAF Liaison – Mark Upton

Agreed

SUN Co-ordinator – Jim Collins
Agreed

Veterinary Adviser – Tom Dutton or Karl Jennings

MU: They are both have a lot to offer, but I think Tom edges it as he is an avian specialist.

HN: Also vote for Tom.

GB: I'd vote for Karl as he has given us lots of help already.

GM: Karl has a lot to offer the falconry community and I would be happy to go to him for help, but Tom is a specialist.

RU: Maybe they would both be happy to help us?

Agreed

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

None

Treasurers Report:

The HB bank accounts remain in a stable position.

Subscription letters have been sent out and all subs received, except for the IHC – they have been in touch to say this will be resolved shortly, they have had a change of personnel following their AGM.

MU: We have done a lot to cut costs.

GB: How are we going on fund raising suggestions? The London night that was done quite a few years ago now was really good night and raised lots of money. I could speak to Jose to see if it is something that he would help with again.

MU: They weren't very happy at the time as they were not thanked by the HB – something that would be done if they were happy to do another dinner.

GM: Not really a fund raiser but symposiums are good for getting our name out. A social event is a good idea though.

MU: Could do a symposium followed by a bbq.

GM: Let's start to develop ideas.

MU: Be good if people could come to the next meeting with developed ideas.

Wild Take:

GM: We need to reply to the consultation. We are broadly in agreement, but shades of different opinion. My thoughts are we don't want licensing to be removed from the statute book as we might need it in the future. I'm not in favour as an individual,

MU: I am on both sides!! We don't want to lose the ability/licence to take eyasses from the wild. It could be a minefield and we need to be cautious how we answer the consultation. I think we should keep the status quo and just suggest 5 or 6 licences as it won't affect the wild population.

MS: NE say there is a harvestable amount. It would be good to be able to take from the wild fly and then release and then fly the next young.

GM: Why were the last licences not taken?

MS: Covid stopped it as you couldn't travel. We asked for nest jumpers but that was not allowed. Field craft is what I would like to do.

GM: We got quite a lot of flak on tethering from LUSH.

MS: It's all noise and then it goes away, this is perfectly legal.

GM: Is this why they are having the consultation, so they can try and stop it?

HN: We just have to be cautious.

GM: We need a specimen result and need to get feedback before we send it out to falconers.

GB: Wild Take is an emotive subject.

GM: All agree we should fight to keep the licences?

Agreed

GM: I will respond to the questionnaire and then circulate to the HB for feedback.

MS: Falconry; Breeding and F&B – I will do a small one for falconry and longer one for the BFC.

GM: By the weekend I will have a draft out for the HB. Will ask all who are interested to respond to the consultation.

Avian Influenza:

GM: we know we are in a mess and it's not getting any better. A vaccine is still a long way and I don't think we are significant enough to make them change their minds.

MU: You can exercise BoPs for welfare – I think they think we just fly to the lure and are not hunting. At the last meeting someone asked if they were looking into other ways of dealing with AI and they said no as they are on top of it. A point of interest though is that the Chief Vet said they only have to cull poultry, it's up to the inspector/vet if they cull other species. Paignton Zoo had an outbreak, and they didn't have to cull, but could quarantine instead.

GM: How do we get that out to falconers?

NHM: There was a full prevention zone information email sent out by APHA.

GM: Will read the prevention zone email fully and go to Lara for clarification on flying. I think this is just a biosecurity increase and not a flying ban.

SUN Update:

See Appendix 1

IAF Update:

See Appendix 2

MU: IAF normally have 2 elections now, but one coming up for VC for North America only has one candidate and so she will be voted in unopposed. The MENA region VC had to resign for work commitments and again there was only one candidate, so it was shoo in.

MU: The IUCN have signed a memorandum of understanding with the IAF, this should help with wild take and entry into global meetings.

GM: IUCN will be good for falconry.

Countryside Alliance Update:
See Appendix 3

JL: Not much more to add, the DEFRA ministers at the moment are better than the last lot, but that could change depending on No. 10 outcome.

AOB:

RU: We need to decide on meetings, with so much going on should we go back to 4 meetings a year?

MS: 4

Agreed

RU: Locations, we normally use Teams/Zoom and MK, but we have also been offered BAF and Vowley – both near Swindon, one off J15 and the other off J16 of the M4. How many meetings do we want to have face to face and how many electronically?

GM: It's beneficial to have at least 1 face to face meeting a year, the others can be electronic

RU: So how about:

January	Online
April	Face to Face &/or online
July	Online
October	Face to Face

MU: I was wondering if NHM might have any more information/updates on food supplies?

NHM: No more information at the moment, but the news is not looking good for UK stocks. We have been attempting to locate DOC's from elsewhere in the world, for months now, but APHA/DEFRA have been very difficult on import licences. We have started production again in Ukraine, but bombing could stop this again. We are hoping on a satisfactory answer from APHA soon, they are waiting on a ruling to which countries we can import from. APHA seem intent to stick to the list the EU produces. There are supplies in lots of countries, but APHA are not allowing them at the moment, we are waiting for the reasoning. I will let you know when we have any good news.

HN: What is your local MP doing for you?

NHM: He is doing what he can.

The meeting closed at 14:55

Next Meeting: 12.30pm TBC January 2023

Location: Zoom

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 8 November 2022

Appendix 1

SUN Report from Jim Collins

With the Summer Recess in the UK Parliament and the two months summer shutdown of the European Commission offices in Brussels, we have witnessed relatively little movement on the legislative front since the June meeting of the Hawk Board and so relatively little to report.

Most activity for government officials and SUN has revolved around the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to CITES with a huge amount of reading and pre-lobbying involved. Canada did not submit a proposal to down-list the Peregrine Falcon so for species proposals there are none on birds-of-prey. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of issues to be discussed and voted upon that could make a significant difference to falconers especially around the whole gambit of commercial controls for CITES Appendix I (Annex A) species, more rigorous proof of legal acquisition of founder stock, etc. - this following the heavy restrictions on elephants and rhinos at the last conference, now lobbying for the same coverage for all CITES I species. Significant Trade Reviews for Captive-bred CITES Species may well also have a further restrictive outcome.

We still await the release of the Scottish review into the 'benefits' or otherwise of Positive Lists which is set to inform DEFRA in respect of the intent for England and Wales (was due out in July). Meanwhile the 'anti' NGO's have made clear their anger at the European Commission's decision to decline the requests from the European Parliament and Council of Ministers to commence a review to support the introduction of a Positive List across the whole EU. Our opponents have also released glossy 'reports' supporting their wish for a European equivalent of the U.S.'s Lacey Act whereby the wildlife laws of other countries can be enforced in Europe without them being specifically identified in European legislation - this has at times caused havoc with keepers and traders in the U.S.

DEFRA have advised that the long-awaited conclusions into the review of the UK's Wildlife Trade Regs (post-Brexit) will come out in the next few months but are keeping contents close to the chest. We think it is likely to see some deregulation and/or lessening of administrative burden in CITES A10 Applications and licensing for CITES Imports and Exports but not as radical, perhaps, as was first thought.

We continue to work with officials in seeking to facilitate fairer and more consistent movement of goods (CITES and non-CITES, live animals and animal by-products) across the various areas of DEFRA and APHA responsible and with the recent change in Ministers the possibility of a better and more pragmatic approach may well arise.

Appendix 2

IAF Report from Mark Upton

The 2022 IAF Council of Delegates Meeting is taking place in Poland in November. The meeting will be held from the 8th -14th of November 2022 and is centered on 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 nearest train station is at Busko Zdroj. Attendees will need to make their own arrangements for transport from the airport. Car-hire is relatively inexpensive in Poland and cars may be shared for transportation to the hunting grounds.

Only IAF Board and Advisory Committee members, National Delegates and official Club Representatives, and Individual Subscribers may attend the actual Council of Delegates Meeting. Observers may attend at the invitation of the IAF President. Queries to info@iaf.org

[Registration Form to attend the IAF Council of Delegates Meeting only](#)
[Registration Form to attend the activities offered by the Polish Falconry Clubs \(to be completed by both IAF and non-IAF participants\).](#)

The IAF attended the recent Abu Dhabi International Hunting & Equestrian Exhibition.

In the summer the IAF online Welfare Course for Raptors was launched. This course is the culmination of work from multidisciplinary experts in IAF from countries all over the world, led by the IAF Welfare Working Group Chairman, Prof. Dr. Tom Richter, throughout the last 4 years. It is built upon IAF policy documents and expertise gathered through our work in international conventions and with local stakeholders and falconers.

IAF is pleased to provide this comprehensive course free of charge to anyone who wishes to improve their understanding of the welfare of raptors used in falconry.

[Link to course](#)

Countryside Alliance Update

POLITICAL/POLICY

New Prime Minister

Boris Johnson resigned as Prime Minister. Liz Truss was elected leader of the Conservative Party and asked to form a Government by Her Late Majesty.

New Defra Team

Ranil Jayawardena MP (North East Hampshire) was appointed Secretary of State replacing George Eustice MP (Camborne and Redruth). Also appointed to Defra were Scott Mann MP (North Cornwall), Mark Spencer MP (Sherwood) and Trudi Harrison MP (Copeland). Lord Benyon remains Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Defra spokesman in the Lords. Lord Goldsmith, who had a joint role with the FCDO, no longer retains the Defra element of his portfolio.

Party Conferences

Although plans to attend the Liberal Democrat Party Conference were cancelled owing to the death of the Queen, successful fringe events were held at the Labour and Conservative Party Conferences. At both events a fringe was held on the subject of sustaining rural communities in the age of shifting patterns of land use to support decarbonisation. At the Conservative Party Conference there was a further panel on electoral politics in rural areas, and a reception in conjunction with the Conservative Rural Forum. Guests included the Secretary of State, the Minister of State, the Shadow Minister of State, the Chair of the EFRA Select Committee and a range of backbench MPs and media and campaigns figures.

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act – Animal Sentience Committee

Michael Seals has been appointed as the first-ever chair of the new Animal Sentience Committee. As chair, Michael Seals will provide leadership for the new committee, enabling it to carry out its statutory function and to support parliamentary accountability on how well government decision-making effectively considers the welfare of animals. The committee's responsibilities stem from the Animal Sentience Act, which formally recognises animals as sentient beings in domestic law. Michael Seals is the former chair of the Animal Health and Welfare Board of England and the current Chairman of the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority. The Animal Sentience Act was a core commitment in the Government's [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), which sets out government plans on improving standards and eradicating cruel practices. Committee member recruitment is ongoing and will be announced in the coming months.

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill

As reported in June, the Bill is still awaiting Report Stage in the Commons. The Government is still 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.

HUNTING

British Hound Sports Association

The constitution and rules for the newly-created British Hound Sports Association (BHSA) were approved at the MFHA and AMHB AGMs on 28 June and a new regulatory body called the Hound Sports Regulatory Authority (HRSA) has also been announced.

Review of Policing of the Hunting Act in North Wales

The Alliance has worked with local hunts in response to a review to consider how North Wales Police oversees the enforcement of the Hunting Act, being conducted on behalf of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner.

Local Councils

Work has been ongoing to ensure that hunts continue to have access to council land, where opponents have sought to have them banned.

SHOOTING

Code of Practice for Gamebirds

We are still waiting for Defra to begin its review of the Code of Practice for Gamebirds and the use of cages more widely.

Snares

The Government has announced that it will be launching a call for evidence on the use of snares for fox control to determine whether, through its Animal Action for Welfare Plan, any changes need to be made to reflect concerns that have been raised. In Wales, the first Welsh Agriculture Bill which was laid before the Senedd at the end of September includes a Program for Government commitment for a complete ban on the use of snares, and it is understood that Scottish ministers are also considering the question.

Avian Influenza

Over the last year, the United Kingdom has faced its largest ever outbreak of avian influenza, with over 160 cases confirmed since late October 2021. The risk is expected to continue to rise over the coming months as migratory birds return to the UK, and a mandatory regional housing order for all poultry and captive birds in Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex came into effect on 12 October following the detection of the disease at 16 premises in those areas since the beginning of September. Avian influenza in France prevented the import of pheasant and partridge eggs from the continent, and it continues to present serious challenges to poultry farmers and to shooting in affected areas.

Lead Ammunition

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published its restriction dossier for the use of lead in ammunition, and a six-month consultation based on its findings was opened at the beginning of May. The restrictions proposed for England, Scotland and Wales include a ban on the sale of lead shot, a ban on all types of lead ammunition for live quarry shooting, outdoor target shooting for both lead shot and bullets and mandatory

labelling of the packaging of lead ammunition regarding the hazards and risks of lead shot. There are possible derogations for target shooting. The Countryside Alliance responded to the consultation, and the Environment Agency will be meeting the challenge panel (mostly academics, toxicologists) in November. They will then finalise their opinion and summary and there will be a second public three-month long consultation on the socioeconomic impact of the ban starting in February 2023. The final submission to Defra is scheduled for summer 2023, with Defra hereafter determining the scope of the legislation.

Defra Gamebird Research

When Defra announced last year that it would be introducing an interim licensing regime for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge on and around English European Protected Sites, the Department also committed to addressing gaps in the existing scientific literature that had been highlighted during the review into the ecological consequences of gamebird releasing and management on lowland shoots in England undertaken the previous year. A three-year project involving Defra, Natural England and the Animal and Plant Health Agency was started this summer to undertake research into those knowledge gaps.

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, claiming that the definition of livestock was significantly wider than that in the Wildlife & Countryside Act. Defra's robust rebuttal of Wild Justice's claims, and its announcement that it would challenge any legal action against the Department, resulted in that legal action being withdrawn.

SCOTLAND

Hunting with Dogs Bill

Following the six evidence sessions held by the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment (RAINE) Committee the Stage 1 report into the Bill has now been published and the Stage 1 debate is expected on the 25 October. The Bill will then go back to the RAINE Committee for Stage 2 consideration. It is at this stage that amendments can be tabled. In its current form the Bill is not workable and will make the effective and humane control of foxes and other wild mammals impossible in many situations. The Alliance continues to seek amendments that would address the Bill's deficiencies.

WALES

Tree Planting on Prime Land

The Alliance has launched an e-lobby challenging Natural Resources Wales and the 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 but that the use of prime agricultural land is not acceptable, and threatens the culture, heritage and Welsh language in Wales.

General Licences

New General Licences issued by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) came into effect on 1 July. They are far from satisfactory, with NRW having taken magpie, jay and jackdaw off the General Licence for conservation. Only carrion crow can now be controlled, and then only between 1 February and 31 August.

Releasing of Gamebirds Consultation

Natural Resources Wales on behalf of Welsh Government launched a call for evidence on a proposed game bird release licence in Wales. The consultation opened in July and closed at the end of August. A stakeholder meeting is due on the 6 December at which NRW will provide an update. We are expecting game bird release to become licensed in Wales, as this is clearly the Minister's intention.