



Falconry – Inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawk Board held on 8th November 2021

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:30

Present:

Jim Collins (JC); Nick Havermann-Mart (NHM); James Legge (JL); Gordon Mellor (GM); Jimmy Robinson (JR); Martyn Standley (MS); Mark Upton (MU); Rachelle Upton (RU); Amy Wallace (AW); Dean White (DW)

Apologies:

Cameron Balfour; Gary Biddiss; Paul Manning; Don Ryan

Sadly Mike Nicholls is also unable to attend the meeting as he is gravely ill in a hospice, he has specifically requested that no one seeks to contact him directly. We all send our prayers and best wishes to Mike

Minutes of last meeting / Matters arising:

Approved

GM to sign and send to RU

Chairman's Report:

As you will doubtless already be aware, and we have already posted and communicated,

Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ)

[Press Notice - Bird flu - Latest situation: Avian influenza prevention zone declared across Great Britain](#)

- *Following a number of detections of avian influenza in wild birds across Great Britain, the Chief Veterinary Officers from England, Scotland and Wales have declared an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) across the whole of Great Britain to mitigate the risk of the disease spreading amongst poultry and captive birds.*
- *This means that from 5pm on Wednesday 3 November 2021 it will be a legal requirement for all bird keepers in Great Britain to follow strict biosecurity measures to help protect their birds.*
- *The AIPZ now in force across GB, does not include a requirement to house birds. However, this is being kept under constant review. With the increased risk of Avian Influenza during the winter, the need to include a mandatory housing requirement in the AIPZ may arise. Further disease control measures will be based on the latest scientific evidence and veterinary advice.*

- Biosecurity guidance and information on the latest avian influenza situation and the AIPZ are available at:
- England: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>
- Scotland: www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza
- Wales: <https://gov.wales/avian-influenza-bird-flu>

Risk Levels

- The risk of incursion of highly pathogenic (HPAI) avian influenza H5 in wild birds has increased from medium (event occurs regularly) to high (event occurs often) for wild birds.
- The risk of poultry and captive bird exposure to HPAI H5 across Great Britain has increased from low (with medium uncertainty) to medium (with medium uncertainty) where biosecurity on premises is below the required standard. Where stringent biosecurity measures are in place, the risk has increased from low (with low uncertainty) to low (with medium uncertainty).
- Further details on the evidence which supported these decisions can be found in Defra and the Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA) [risk assessments](#) available on GOV.UK

New Case – Avian Influenza H5N1 in the Angus constituency, Scotland

- The Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland has confirmed a case of H5N1 Avian Influenza in birds at a premises in the Angus constituency, Scotland. Further testing is underway to confirm the pathogenicity of the strain.
- 3km and 10km Temporary Control Zones have been put in place surrounding the premises.
- Keepers can check where disease control zones are located and if they are in a zone on the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) [interactive map](#).
- For further information on this case and details of the measures that apply in the disease control zones see [the Scottish Government website](#).

Keepers must keep a close watch on their birds for any signs of disease, and seek prompt advice from a vet if they have any concerns. Clinical signs indicative of avian influenza must be reported in England to Defra Rural Services Helpline on [03000 200 301](tel:03000200301). In Wales, contact [0300 303 8268](tel:03003038268). In Scotland, contact to the local [Field Services Office](#). Failure to do so is an offence.

I make no apology for repeating this in full, it is a serious situation that I am advised, falls short of requiring us to stop flying. The advice remains as of last year, avoid flying and feeding your BoP on waterfowl and where possible stay away from wetlands. Also, respect poultry and livestock operations by observing access restrictions and adhering to strict bio-security protocols.

Other news

A number of zoos and their representative bodies have been consulted by DEFRA, on the tethering of raptors. I have not seen their response and there has been no approach to the Hawk Board. I am told that there will be a public consultation arising from the engagement with zoos. We need to watch these developments carefully and be willing to respond to the department when the opportunity arises.

The BBC are making a series on the trade in wildlife both legal and illegal, despite considerable engagement with myself and a number of other falconers, the old chestnut of British peregrines being robbed from eyries to be sold in the Middle East will feature. We all made the point that there is little evidence to support this and the accusations are largely unsupported by prosecutions, but of course they are told otherwise by Police Wildlife Liaison

Officers, Wildlife Trusts, and the RSPB. The programme is likely to blur the lines between the legal export of gyrs and gyr hybrids, and the comparatively small export of captive bred peregrines, and the supposed illegal trade. For obvious reasons, our legitimate exporting breeders were reluctant to become involved in the making of this programme and I cannot say I blame them. Despite assurances from the BBC that we have been listened to, I am worried how the programme will turn out.

I make no apology in restating my concern about the prevalence of social media posts showing lost hawks and falcons, often with trailing furniture. This is despite APHA's ill-conceived interest in lost falconry birds as potential invasive species, which they are not, is an issue - a welfare one and we have to do better. Accidents do of course happen, but the impression given via social media is that losses are commonplace. Our challenge is how we address the issue.

The Mountain Hare issue in Scotland remains with little progress made. The ban on unlicensed hunting of the hare is in place but we are engaged with NatureScot and will continue to fight our corner here.

Fortunately, it seems that the spate of social media posting of hawking from a vehicle in urban and suburban settings somewhere in the UK, has subsided. Illustrating the reach of the internet, these were picked up by news outlets throughout the world and UK falconry was shown in a very poor light as a result. Let us be in no doubt about it - such activity is illegal in the UK.

Where you can, get out and fly your hawks and falcons our best defence is to continue with our sport and do so to the highest standard.

GM: Avian Flu is a big concern – something which, I suspect, will see greater restrictions this year. There is a DEFRA meeting this afternoon and on Wednesday.

GM: There has been a consultation with DEFRA/Zoo's regarding tethering, I was told that we would receive a copy, but this hasn't happened, so we need to keep an eye out for the DEFRA consultation and the opportunity to engage with them.

MS: I can speak to Mark Habben and see if I can get a copy of what has been written from a HB and BFC perspective.

GM: That would be good if you can. DEFRA have gone to the zoo's and it might be that they are going to restrict this to displays, but I doubt it.

JR: It is worrying that we are not being included on this.

MU: JPJ rang me and said this is going to be bad for falconry and she was worried about it and we should do something about it. What happened to the research that was being done on tethering?

GM: Gemma was doing it as part of her PhD and as such it could be years before it is completed, and she is ready to publish.

GM: There is a BBC program, which is in the process of being made regarding the theft of peregrine eggs. A number of us did speak at length to the programme makers/researchers, but I could not find any major breeder who was willing to talk to them on camera, and I don't blame them. It is only going to be 10 minutes long; BoP are high profile and make good television.

GM: There is a prevalence on social media of lost hawks often trailing furniture. Whilst not an invasive alien species it is a welfare issue. The car hawker on social media seems to have gone quiet, it didn't do us any favours.

MS: There is more heard about lost hawks due to social media.

MU: It is no worse that it was, but the trouble is social media now highlights to the anti's. Maybe we should put up regular statements on our FB page highlighting welfare.

GM: IBR does a sterling job.

MS: On social media I see very little negative comments apart from other falconers.

DW: If IBR have good intel maybe we could ask them what the underlying causes are: such as a hawk undoing knots; clips; faulty furniture.

GM: During the winter the biggest losses are out of aviaries; then flying; then weathering.

MS: Babs at IBR has this information.

MU: I think in our latest welfare document there was comment on double doors, we should regularly remind people that double doors are safer.

GM: RU can you please repost the welfare document.

Treasurers Report:

At present the HB accounts are in a fairly healthy state.

Subscription letters have been sent out and all subs have been received, except for the Bedfordshire Hawking Club, who have just confirmed their numbers so we should receive their subs soon, and the Home Counties Hawking Club who have been in touch, but are still having difficulties with membership following Covid and at the moment are 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, until they can pay.

The elected specialist positions are up for election next year, should we have more than 6 candidates then I will require the postal details of each member clubs voting members so they can be sent ballot papers.

Avian Influenza:

GM: We are now in national restrictions; we have not been told we can't fly, bird gatherings have been stopped, but we can still fly in small groups, although must travel separately and shouldn't fly in larger groups as this will spotlight us. There are 2 meetings this week with DEFRA and we will know more after these.

NHM: We have been sending out the FWF/HB AI leaflet with chicks, DEFRA can be told this at the meeting. Welfare guidelines are also available.

DW: Our club regularly get requests for information; it would be good to have something formal to send out from the HB.

GM: we can look at that.

MU: It is good to put things up in the HB name not just DEFRA's. We put up lots of information so falconers are doing quite well and DEFRA should be told this, and that we disseminate more information than small poultry keepers do or receive.

NHM: The leaflet does include a QR code to access APHA information.

JL: Please let me have an advice and we can put it up on the CA website as well.

RU to send JL AI leaflet and Welfare guidelines.

Mountain (Blue) Hare:

CB (email): There has not been much progress on the Mountain Hare issue. The details of the license and application process have now been published on the NatureScot website, along with supporting guidance materials. One key point that should be noted is that applicants must select the method(s) of killing that will be used under license, and therefore falconry will not be automatically included in a license. During consultations with NatureScot the HB did ask for falconry to be included in all licenses but I have received verbal reassurance from NatureScot that falconry can be included to a license that has already been issued.

As I explained during the last meeting, falconry is not a licensable purpose within the WCA and therefore falconers can only take hare acting under a license issued for a licensable purpose. The only way this situation can change is by Scottish Parliament changing the law, realistically the earliest chance of that happening will be in when they introduce grouse moor licensing legislation.

JL: Can you send that out?

RU: Yes, and it will also be in the minutes

AW: NatureScot did write to the petitions committee in the second round of the input section, and they acknowledged that it wouldn't be practical with Eagles because of the nature of the areas where you are hunting and we need open spaces and most of it is woodland, so they are very negative towards falconry ever being licensable in the current circumstances, quite an interesting read. Did the HB submit a petition in that second round, because I can see that about 7 falconers have and a few anonymous ones and I mentioned it last time.

GM: No, we have not engaged in a petition, we certainly did submit to NatureScot, but you just said that you feel it was quite a negative response and as I was saying to colleagues, before we started, that I feel we are being played along a little bit here and I don't believe there is any vehicle for a realistic revision at the moment, which is a pity because in actual fact through Cameron Balfour we have good links with NatureScot and I think they are quite genuine, but I think they are also quite politically savvy and they know that they are on a hiding to nothing. If they if they go back to the Scottish Government suggesting provision that that is likely to be a little bit offensive to those that brought in the legislation in the first place. Now there is a possibility that when they go through the process of licensing grouse moors, which of course we would rather not see in the first place because that will be restriction, there is a possibility that we might be able to engage with them on a slightly different footing. At the moment it looks fairly bleak.

AW: I do appreciate that, but I wondered why the Hawk Board didn't feel like responding. We have had a couple of months to add more facts and comments from falconers for the petitions committee and Parliament to consider at Holyrood, so I just don't understand why Cameron or yourselves didn't take the opportunity whether or not there is any point to it. I agree it is a pretty bleak outcome, but it would be nice if the Scottish Government decides to change it, but I feel like it's one of those things where actually your voice is better appreciated. You know if they turn around in four years and say, well, you didn't much care about it four years ago, so why do you care about it now, sort of thing. I do appreciate that there might be stuff going on behind the scenes.

GM: We have a very good record of our engagement with NatureScot, so that wouldn't hold water. We have engaged with them quite extensively, but we haven't engaged with them through petition, and so if anybody was to turn around, and I think it is highly unlikely, but if they did turn around in the future and say we didn't care we have ample evidence to show that we have engaged with them. We chose what was a slightly different route from the petition route and I think we both received exactly the same outcome.

AW: Yes, it's just a shame that we couldn't work together on it really.

Zoo Regulations:

GM: We have heard a bit about the potential, but we don't know the details yet.

IAF Update:

See Appendix 2

MU: Ebulletins are a good way for getting IAF information and I know Rachelle sends those out to you all.

GM: I was talking earlier about that BBC programme and the constant low-level complaint about hawks or peregrines being stolen for the Arab market and I think that without a shadow of a doubt that there is a racist undertone, and it is an open goal because the Arabs never feel the need to respond to actually say yes, no, or anything – I don't even know if they are aware of the criticism. Is there anyway there could be some sort of engagement with falconry organisation or significant people in the Middle East to say that unless you support this with evidence you are not really saying anything that pertains to falconry. Is there any worth in doing that? I've got the feeling that the answer is no.

MU: I think it could be done, they are aware of it and they don't like it. They spend a lot of money on conservation and they don't like being told they are where the stolen hawks go. I will raise this through the IAF.

GM: I would appreciate that and if you can get any traction at all. You know it would appear in British culture that you can say what you like about Arabs, but it goes without saying if you were to say it about the Scots, Irish, or anybody else we would be making a fuss.

MS and JR leave for the DEFRA meeting

SUN Update:

See Appendix 1

GM: I have seen the report and it is not happy reading, it contains some quite worrying observations. Zoonotic disease will be coming a higher profile here. At the end of JC's report, he says that DEFRA/APHA have announced a project to take a look at cross-cutting legislation that pertains to keeping and sale of birds-of-prey with a particular initial focus on Peregrine Falcons. JC has requested that HB be include in the review so let's hope they have listened and include us, I don't know Sarah Jones other than in a very sort of superficial way, does anybody else have any closer dealings with her? No, OK. If they are particularly looking at Peregrines, it's likely that they must also share the concerns that our colleagues in Police wildlife liaison officers, RSPB and the Wildlife trusts have that somehow Peregrines are being taken from the wild and finding their way into captivity either for export or otherwise. That, in a funny sort of way, goes to the fact that either the legislation is entirely ineffective or that the legislators and enforcers are not doing their job, have you any thoughts about that – what can be behind a particular focus on Peregrine Falcons?

NHM: If there are a lot of peregrines being exported to the Middle East then CITES should know this. There are no major breeders exporting peregrines, they export Gyr Hybrids.

GM: Less than 250 peregrines exported from the UK to the Middle East.

NHM: It would be relatively simple to DNA check them.

GM: There has been an escalating concern over peregrines in the last few years.

DW: They can't claim scarcity, so attacking via theft.

NHM: Nevin Hunter's position on theft from the wild but have not prosecuted anyone.

MU: There must be somebody/group behind this because when you look at the facts the Peregrine is doing better than it's ever done in the wild. We are struggling to find homes for home bred peregrines.

DW: People talk of the prices rising.

MU: I think the price rise was big a couple of years ago, but not in the last couple of years.

GM: The only way we can assess if this is a problem is if we have prosecutions.

MU: 3 to 4 years ago I was getting phone calls from people wanting peregrines, mainly for breeding projects for the Arabs. Not now.

GM: Might be worth putting in a FOI request to DEFRA for peregrines bred and peregrines exported.

Legal/Guidelines Update:

GI: The EU are bringing in new quarantine rules from 1st Jan 2022 to take live birds into the EU have to quarantine for 30 days for Avian Influenza. This will have big impacts on people going to field meets. I've had a discussion running with Imports/Exports health team since April about the whole issue of moving birds, for field meets in particular. I have also asked if they will be tightening up restrictions in relation to birds coming from the EU to the UK, I am waiting on them to come back to me.

GM: So, the 30-day quarantine is this an EU rule.

GI: Yes, and it is on our FB page and the Falconry Hub. It went round about 2 months ago. It effects all third country status imports.

- Find GI post and repost and send around to HB. GM to send it to FACE

JL: Has this been raised with FACE

GI: I don't know, but the IAF are aware of it.

JL: FACE should be as they can raise it with the commission.

GI: It will affect everyone and applies to all birds, not been given a species just says birds.

MU: At the last meeting we thought there would be no movement for falconry, but Xavier managed to bring his birds in on a pet passport.

GM: Now a moot point with quarantine regulations coming in.

NHM: You can bring them in from the UAE on a UAE falcon passport, but only to the UK not the EU. Import is easy as you just need a swab before leaving, but export is impossible.

MU: Before Brexit you couldn't bring Hawks in from the UAE, but you could from the EU, now following Brexit it's the other way around.

DW: Is the EU quarantine time limited or in legislation?

GI: It is set in legislation.

MU: To GI - We were talking about the last paragraph of the SUN report, how worried are you about that?

GI: That has literally come out of the blue and the first I've heard about it. Now JC and I sat on a working group last summer looking at the new CITES legislation for the UK and one of the things was the continuation of A10's as they are an EU document, technically not now a UK document. I'm wondering if looking at peregrines is the start of that because obviously with peregrines if you have an A10 then you don't need to do the schedule 4 registrations. The same with Merlin's, so I'm wondering if they are looking at what the trade looks like from an A10 point of view in relation the potential increase in schedule 4 registrations and how they would process that. That is the only link I can think of.

MU: If what GI says is true and it is related to article 10's then it makes sense.

GI: NWCU-WCA there is a reverse burden of proof.

JL: Reverse burden is often applied in situations where there are various regulatory requirements and is therefore perfectly reasonable, it is not a very hard burden for a defendant to discharge and obviously if you lose that then you are going to have to make sure that you can discharge that burden of proof unless you amend the legislation.

GI: They are going to use a Statutory Instrument to bring the legislation in.

GM: And just as context we have Gary Wall threatening DEFRA with a judicial review on their retention of Article 10's.

GI: What I can say is that the withdrawal agreement/white paper enshrined EU law into UK legislation until such time as we amend, update, change, or whatever.

DW: Given that over the years we have had conversations about how to strengthen the arrangements around raptor keeping, is there any opportunity at this point in time given all the changes to CITES, etc for us to come together with propositions about what the future arrangements for Raptor keeping should be, especially if there is going to be legislative changes. Thinking of something like a national code for mandatory training and apprenticeships, etc.

GI: At the moment that is not on the radar, be very careful what you wish for. It's a minefield, but I agree with the sentiment around it.

GM: If legislation is being reviewed then can we engage with it, I think we would have to be very circumspect about prompting legislation to be reviewed, because we may well find ourselves as an out and out minority. I absolutely share with you the aspiration to provide a greater safety net for expertise and welfare within what we do, it is quite how we go about that. I think we would need to be very careful about it because for every one of us there is probably about 50 antis and if it came down to a push and shove then I have no doubt who would lose. But we will always be willing, if the legislation is open, to engage absolutely with a rather more nuanced approach to falconry and better BoP keeping.

MU: I fully agree with the idea as it would improve welfare, but I cannot see Government bringing it in as it would cost to police it.

GI: If you cast your mind back 8 or 9 years to the law commission review that there is an intention to wrap-up/re-open the law commission review on wildlife legislation, which is the WCA; Deer Act; Badger Act and 2 others – there are 5 bits of legislation – so at some point they are going to revisit it, initially they said 5-10 years.

Countryside Alliance Update:

See Appendix 3

JL: Anything I can do with FACE then let me know.

MU: Quite a few falconers that will be interested in the grouse moor licensing, it would be good if you can keep us informed.

JL: We will also keep an eye on general licences.

GI: I am confident that NE & SNH will consider falconry as an approved method during any review of the general licences.

JL: My concern has been that when they write these licenses that falconry gets dropped off.

GI: From NE's point of view because falconry is not listed as a prohibited method within section 5 NE is of the opinion that that doesn't prohibit the use of trained raptors to control general licence species.

AOB:

GI: NE are looking at a closed season for the Brown Hare – licensing options. It will be consulted on.

The meeting closed at 15:00.

Next Meeting: 12.30pm TBC February 2022

Location: TBC

Rachelle Upton, Co-coordinator – 9 December 2021

SUN Report from Jim Collins

The primary message to everyone is to reinforce just what immense pressure is being put on animal-keeping and animal trade around the world by the activities of pressure groups and acquiescent governments. In the U.S., across Europe and even in China governments have either proposed tough new restrictions on animal-keeping and animal trade or have announced their intention to undertake reviews with the strong likelihood of introducing punitive legislation thereafter. This, in itself, builds-up a head of steam whereby even those countries (like the UK) less inclined to knee-jerk legislation feel obliged to 'do something' for fear of being seen as having been left behind. In regard to the UK, movements across the EU are particularly poignant and influence the UK Government more so than actions in other international arenas (especially the ever-increasing clamour for Positive Lists that stipulate what species are allowed to be kept and all other species banned - in all such proposals no birds-of-prey ever feature on the allowed list).

The Scottish Parliament's interim report into whether to introduce a Positive List and/or a traffic light system of green (allowed), amber (allowed under restrictions, licensing, etc.) and red (banned) has concluded a need for more evidence on numbers of species kept, husbandry and sell conditions, etc. with a final report with recommendations in spring/summer 2022 and consideration by politicians in the latter part of 2022 and any legislation coming forward in 2023. The three worrying features of the Scottish activity is how little consultation is occurring with direct stakeholders (keepers and traders); the willingness of the reviewers to quote protectionist and animal rights organisations/individuals as though they are the font of knowledge on animal keeping; and the fact that they appear to be favourably disposed to a Positive List/Traffic Light system.

Currently all remains quiet (at the UK level) regarding further moves on the invasive species list but we are almost certain to see activity on that front in the next year or so as the Government department's plough through all the EU retained legislation - this will present opportunities as well as dangers for us in the animal-keeping fraternity as the retained legislation of the EU Invasive Alien Species Directive is far from fit for purpose.

We continue to have regular (at least quarterly) meetings with the combined government departments/agencies (DEFRA, APHA, JNCC, RBG-Kew, Border Force and Wildlife Crime Unit) and these meetings are of great importance as it gives us further opportunity to have our voices heard as well as receiving updates from the authorities. The last such meeting took place this past Thursday and the following paragraphs cover some of the more important and relevant items discussed.

The COTES review (COTES is the UK's enforcement and compliance side of CITES legislation) remains ongoing in terms of what is expected to be included in advertisements for sale of CITES I (Annex A) species with no conclusions reached as yet. The U.K. Government is currently considering what will be its priorities at the forthcoming CITES Conference of the Parties (Panama, 2022) and will share these once they have been determined. Little has been disclosed by other countries on CITES proposals at the present time and it is not clear if Canada will try to reintroduce its proposal to down-list the Peregrine Falcon from CITES I to CITES II.

One piece of EU retained legislation that DEFRA/APHA are actively reviewing are the CITES Wildlife Trade Regulations and we are actively involved with input on this (as, of course, are our opponents). We will argue vigorously against any further hardening/broadening of the licensing requirements on CITES II (Annex B) species and for a continued rationalisation of the supplementary questions from the JNCC regarding Article

10's - I believe after our successful lobbying people should have already seen some improvement in this regards in the past summer. DEFRA/APHA have concluded that for most likely changes in the Wildlife Trade Regs. access to primary legislation will be required and as such they are looking for a legislative opportunity to give them such powers (likelihood in spring/summer 2022) and, thereafter, with appropriate consultation they will seek to amend the Wildlife Trade Regs. inherited from our having been in the EU into UK specific legislation.

The use of Eurostar as a Border Control Post on CITES species is being considered but the authorities have already ruled-out live animals from being included as Eurostar does not have and will not have the facilities to process live animals (the consideration being more for things like musical instruments containing CITES-listed material). The authorities report continued confusion resultant from the changes that have occurred post-Brexit for a good number of CITES species being moved to-from the EU and these non-compliances are being dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Likewise, the authorities acknowledge that the interpretation of requirements between the UK and EU countries appears at odds on occasions and they are hoping things might be better agreed and communicated in 2022 assuming the UK and EU reach an accommodation on trade issues and Northern Ireland overall.

DEFRA/APHA are undertaking a project - we will be strongly involved during any consultation - on the whole issue of zoonotic disease risk coming from animal trade and animal keeping. We have made the point already that the protectionists have hugely abused the situation of the Covid19 pandemic to set scare stories running on all animal trade/keeping and have used this to push for bans across the board; likewise, I made the point that any such review should not have as its premise a starting point that the pandemic originated from an animal market as there is plenty of substantive evidence to suggest it might well have, instead, arisen from an accidental laboratory release.

Finally, DEFRA/APHA have announced a project to take a look at cross-cutting legislation that pertains to keeping and sale of birds-of-prey with a particular initial focus on Peregrine Falcons (it seems - justifiably or not - that the enforcement agencies see some issues with the current situation). I have stated that the Hawk Board must be given a front row seat on such a review - it is just about to launch - and the authorities see this as important. The review will be led by Sarah Jones at DEFRA and I'll send to the Hawk Board all details in the coming week.

Appendix 2

IAF Report from Mark Upton

As in my last report IAF work continues to be hampered by the pandemic. The usual IAF attendance at international meetings has been impossible due to travel restrictions and many meetings have been postponed or held online. When online IAF representatives have been able to attend.

The monthly IAF eBulletin which appears on the HB and BFC Facebook pages records most of the news in international falconry and can be subscribed to. The latest can be viewed at <https://preview.mailerlite.com/i5j0v4/1805876044905842312/k6c5/>

The IAF made a presentation to the Bern Convention Expert Group on Invasive Alien Species at a recent meeting on behalf of falconry, using Prof. Matthew Gage's work on the 2017 Code of Conduct for Hunting and Invasive Alien Species. This concluded that the effect of lost falconer's birds had a negatable effect on wild populations.

An excellent 'Young Falconers' pamphlet has been produced by the IAF Womens' Working Group and other members of the IAF huge volunteer force, with sponsorship from the Falconry Heritage Trust. This is available to all member clubs for distribution and to encourage young falconers.

The IAF "Sharing the Knowledge" zoom lectures by prominent international falconers on various subjects, including history, archives, hood making, collections and the present state of falconry in their countries have been well attended and a great success. A nice respite in difficult times. The lectures were organised by Tony James, IAF Board Member for Culture and Heritage. A new series of lectures is being planned for the autumn and any club member is welcome attend via Zoom. The lectures are usually advertised on the BFC Facebook pages.

A working group has been put together to lobby UK and Europe over the continued uncertainty of travel between the UK and Europe by falconers.

We have been using this quieter time to re-organise admin of the association and catch up on work that has been side-lined in busier times. I have been having monthly meetings with the admin team and representatives of the different regions of the IAF. We have been updating our knowledge of clubs and how falconry is progressing in these regions and any problems that they might be having.

The annual Council Delegates Meeting went ahead in Abu Dhabi at the same time as the ADIHEX sporting exhibition. The meeting was moved there after Hungary, who had been due to host had to cancel because of the pandemic. Very few delegates, and indeed board members attended, because of the difficulties with travel. I was one who didn't attend, being unable to travel because of a positive Covid test in the family. The meeting was integrated with a zoom meeting for those who were unable to travel, which I took part in. Due to technological problems most of the first days meeting was missed by those on zoom because of lack of sound. Things went better on the second day. Due to that, the absence of the President and few delegates being in attendance the meeting didn't discuss much and relied on online reports from board members. I was able to follow up the BFC's letter of complaint, following the IAF taking away the hosting of the 2022 Council of Delegates Meeting, by bringing up the matter in any other business.

Elections were held for the positions of President, Vice-president for Asia and Vice-president for Europe. The President, who has been in his position for one term stood unopposed for a second term. Both the Vice-presents had been in their roles for two terms, so had to stand

down. The Vice-president for Asia went to Dorjsuren Otgonsaikhan (Mongolia) and the Vice-president for Europe was contested with me standing against Andrea Villa (Italy). I was elected to the post.

I would like remind club reps that if their club is a member of the IAF they are invited to have a representative at the Council of Delegates Meetings.

Countryside Alliance Update

POLITICAL/POLICY

Environment Bill

The Environment Bill, at the time of writing, is in its final stages having provoked some controversy in deliberations between the Houses of Commons and Lords, particularly with respect to sewage discharges to watercourses. As a result the Government is imposing a new duty on water companies to show a reduction in sewage overflows over the following five years.

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

This Bill received Royal Assent on 29 April and is now law. It raises the maximum penalty for certain offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to 5 years imprisonment.

Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill

This is an omnibus bill that brings together several measures relating to animals under human control. Its provisions relate to dog worrying of livestock, banning live animal exports for slaughter, non-commercial imports of pets, the keeping of primates and zoo licensing. The Bill has begun in the Commons and passed its Second Reading on 25 October and will be proceeding to Committee.

Animals (Penalty Notices) Bill

This is a Private Members' Bill introduced in the Commons through the ballot process with the Government's support. It provides for fixed penalty notices to be issued in response to various animal welfare offences, intended to be used in cases where no malice was evident. The Bill passed its Second Reading on 29 October.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

The Countryside Alliance is promoting amendments to this Bill, which is currently going through the Committee Stage in the House of Lords. These would strengthen laws on hare poaching and to require those accused of aggravated trespass to show, affirmatively, that either they were not trespassing or that the activity in relation to which the aggravated trespass occurred was unlawful activity. It would therefore be for the defence to establish that an activity was unlawful and not for the prosecution to establish that it was, as is the case at present.

Petitions Committee

On 28 June the House of Commons once again debated a ban on driven grouse shooting, as a result of a petition initiated by Chris Packham. The Government maintains the view that grouse shooting is a legitimate activity providing benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation and investment in remote areas.

A debate on breed-specific legislation under the Dangerous Dogs Act was held on 05 July. The Government continues to oppose the lifting of restrictions based on its view that doing so would more likely result in an increase than a reduction in dog attacks. A petition relating to the protection of hedgehogs was debated on the same day.

Following the murder of Sir David Amess MP, the Committee agreed to re-schedule a debate covering animal experimentation to 28 October.

SHOOTING

RSPB Birdcrime Report

The RSPB's annual Birdcrime Report for 2020 was published in October. It recorded a disappointing increase in confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, but despite the RSPB's attempts to use it to justify attacks on driven grouse shooting, it is not possible to determine whether any incidents took place on grouse moors given that they are mapped to a 10km grid square.

Judicial Review on Heather Burning

In October the High Court dismissed what it termed a 'speculative' attempt to judicial review Defra's most recent burning legislation in England, brought by Wild Justice. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the National Gamekeepers' Organisation, the Countryside Alliance and the Moorland Association successfully applied to join the proceedings as interested parties, and were collectively awarded £1,100 in costs that they collectively pledged to donate to the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust. Wild Justice is appealing the decision.

Aim to Sustain

At the Game Fair in June the Countryside Alliance and eight other rural organisations launched a sustainable game shooting alliance called Aim to Sustain. It has been created to help its members work more closely to promote the crucial role that sustainable game shooting plays in delivering biodiversity gain, protecting the countryside and sustaining rural communities.

Environment Bill Amendment

In May MPs rejected a Labour amendment to the Environment Bill that would have banned the controlled burning of heather and grass in its entirety. The amendment sought to go beyond the latest regulations, which came into force on 1 May 2021, that prevent the burning of any specified vegetation on areas of peat over 40cm deep on Sites of Special Scientific Interest that are also Special Protection Areas or Special Areas of Conservation, except under licence.

Hen Harriers

This year has seen the most successful breeding season for hen harriers since the 1960s, with 84 chicks fledged from 24 successful nests of which 19 (79%) were on moorland managed for grouse shooting. This is the fifth successive year of increases.

HUNTING

Scottish Government Hunting Proposals

The Scottish Government has published a consultation on its crackdown on fox hunting, including proposals for a licensing system if hunts want to use more than two dogs. The Scottish Countryside Alliance takes the view that the proposals are "unnecessary, unjustified and directly contradict the conclusions of the independent review carried out by Lord Bonomy [in 2016]".

National Trust

A members' resolution proposed to ban lawful hunting activities on National Trust land. Although the vote saw a significant increase in support for trail hunting compared to an identical vote in 2017, when the results of the membership vote were announced at the AGM on 30th October, the motion was carried. In total (both for and against), 115,000 votes were cast, representing less than 2% of the national membership.

WALES

Gamebirds

A petition calling for a ban on raised cage laying units in Wales has been raised with the petitions committee on 4 October. The committee is to write to the Minister Lesley Griffiths MS to ask for an update on the revision of the code. In the meantime, the League Against Cruel Sports have been unofficially asked to provide the committee with an updated paper.

Natural Resources Wales Wild Bird Review

The Countryside Alliance has held extensive meetings with other stakeholders discussing the consultation which closes on 11 November and will respond accordingly.

Shooting of Pochard, etc.

It has been brought to our attention that the current Minister for Climate Change who is responsible for Natural Resources Wales, Julie James MS, wishes to review the shooting of Pochard, Black Grouse, Woodcock and Snipe. Evidence is being prepared in conjunction with Aim to Sustain in readiness for a potential call to evidence.

Snares

The First Minister has reaffirmed his government's intentions to ban snares in Wales via the Agriculture (Wales) Bill that will be set out in its first legislative year.