



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on

Game and Wildlife Conservation

Notes of the meeting held on

Tuesday 25th January 2022

12:30-13:30 via Zoom

Attendees

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Sir Robert Goodwill (Chair)	MP	Amanda Anderson	Moorland Association
Jonathan Djanogly	MP	James Legge	Countryside Alliance
Deirdre Brock	MP	James Aris	Campaign for Shooting
Earl of Caithness (vice-Chair)	House of Lords	Sophie Hutchinson	BASC
Lord Harlech	House of Lords	Rufus Sage	GWCT
Lord Blencathra	House of Lords	Roger Draycott	GWCT
Earl of Lindsay	House of Lords	Teresa Dent	GWCT
Harriet Davenport & Danielle Golds	Lord Trees office	Alastair Leake	GWCT
Simon Liebert	Defra	Henrietta Appleton	GWCT
Finn Eaton	Defra	Andrew Gilruth	GWCT
Carl Hanson	Defra	James Swyer	GWCT
Anna Sargeant	Defra	Joe Dimpleby	GWCT
Michael Costello	Natural England	Ross McLeod	GWCT
Kristin Waeber	National Trust	Jen Brewin	GWCT
Alasdair Johnson	Peers for the Planet		
Ewan McHenry	Woodland Trust		

Minutes:

Apologies received from Alex Sobel MP, Sir Bill Wiggin MP, Baroness Young of Old Scone, Lord Colgrain, Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville, Lord Boswell of Aynho, Baroness Masham of Ilton, Lord Carrington, Lord Wigley, John Arwel Watkins (AONB Chief Exec) and Sir Jim Paice (GWCT Chairman).

Meeting notes:

The APPG discussed the topic “The gain from releasing game?”. Sir Robert welcomed all attendees and drew the meeting to order. After a brief introduction to the subject Dr Rufus Sage, Head of lowland research at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, presented on the findings of the peer-reviewed and published research review that culminated in a paper and the report “Gamebird releasing and Management in the UK”. Hard copies of this report have been sent to attendees (an online copy can be found here <https://www.gwct.org.uk/releasingreport>). He presented a slide which summarised the effects (positive, neutral and negative) from the evidence review and how these were dependent on scale (landscape, patch and local) with a density component. Dr Sage pointed out that the review found that the benefits of gamebird releasing and management were widespread and real. The woodland habitats favoured by pheasants such as low cover and shrubs support a wide variety of other wildlife, and game crops can make an enormous contribution to farmland bird populations. Several of the negatives occurred at a local scale (mainly at release pens) and most were dependant on the scale or density of release. Such impacts could therefore be

ameliorated with improved management and Defra were using these mechanisms in their licencing arrangements at sensitive sites.

Sir Robert then introduced the second speaker, Dr Roger Draycott, Head of Advisory and Lowland gamebird policy. Dr Draycott emphasised the importance of game management as an incentive for investment in wildlife conservation. When game management is done well it can deliver for a wide variety of other wildlife including butterflies and small pollinators due to habitat provision and songbirds through supplementary feeding during the hungry gap. He explained how the work of the GWCT in consultation with the game management community had resulted in the development of 12 principles for sustainable gamebird management - these guidelines had been updated in 2021 (see <https://www.gwct.org.uk/releasingreport>) - to ensure that game management delivered net biodiversity gain. These principles are aligned with the Bern Convention and European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, are supported by other UK rural organisations, are embedded in the Code of Good Shooting Practice and importantly ensure key conditions in Natural England's GL43 are met. He emphasised that it was important for all shoots to conduct best practice, pursue self-regulation and to work with rural organisations to develop a matrix of assurance and accreditation such as the British Game Alliance and the GWCT's BASIS certificate in game & wildlife management. He concluded by drawing attendees attention to the recent GWCT report on Gamebird releasing which was aimed at providing practitioners, advisors and policy makers with the available scientific evidence, practical management information on how to limit downsides and maximise upsides and illustrate how good game management can delivery net biodiversity gain.

Sir Robert then opened the meeting to the floor for questions. Sir Robert (RG) commenced with a question about where negative impacts were found and whether there was different guidance for sensitive areas/landscapes and the impacts of avian flu. Roger Draycott (RD) responded that the GWCT's releasing densities guidelines had a lower threshold for sensitive sites such as Ancient Semi-natural woodland. He also said that where localised impacts had been identified the GWCT's advisory services can be used to highlight how management regimes can be altered to mitigate them. RD said that some avian flu outbreaks had occurred in free living and captive gamebirds and that Defra's restrictions on movements, biosecurity etc were the same as for other poultry etc.

Deidre Brock then followed with questions on the impact of non-native bird releasing on native species through for example competing for resources and whether these impacts were being monitored. RD responded that at unsustainable densities it was possible that there might be local impacts but that the management provided alongside releases at the landscape scale would be beneficial. Rufus Sage (RS) added that as releases were supported by supplementary feeding there is little evidence of food competition and current evidence suggests no impacts on insects outside the release pen. However indirect effects maybe occurring but there was little evidence of this. RS added that monitoring of how releases attract foxes was now the subject of two studies.

Lord Harlech asked about plans for getting this important message across to land managers and policy makers. RD responded that the GWCT was undertaking broadchurch messaging with the APPG part of the process regarding policy and that the Trust was looking at initiatives to get the message to practitioners. Andrew Gilruth (GWCT Head of Communications) (AG) added that the GWCT Accredited Game Shot programme which had been completed by 15000 gameshots included

elements of this message as it encouraged them to understand the positives and negatives of their pursuit.

RG also asked about the benefits of ELMS. RD responded that currently options focussed on habitat provision but that the Trust was hoping to encourage the development of packages of measures that address for example the recovery of ground nesting species that would include predator control to improve productivity.

RG asked about the balance between quantity and quality and perceptions about large bags. AG responded with the example of the visit of his local MP, John Glen, to their community shoot. This emphasised that shooting has a broad social and community role in rural areas and is not just about corporate and expensive shooting experiences. He emphasised that it was too easy to simplify the narrative and that the benefits to the wider community needed to be recognised.

The meeting was brought to a close by Sir Robert at 13.15 who, in summarising, noted the importance of sound science and evidence-based research in getting the message across.

Date: 14 February 2022