

# Title: Living with Wildlife

**Date: 24th August 2022**

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| **Purpose:** | Discussion |
| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | Corporate objective to:‘Build stronger collaboration reducing the impacts of deer and modernise our wildlife other wildlife management and licencing functions to enable a net zero and nature positive future’. |
| **Summary:** | This paper summarises the priorities and sets out key challenges and opportunities in delivering our wildlife management corporate objective. It sets out background material to the presentation which will be delivered at the meeting.  |
| **Actions:**  | This paper and the associated presentation aim to raise awareness, stimulate discussion and seek feedback on NatureScot’s role in wildlife management.  |
| **Recommendations:**  | Provide feedback on how to address the challenges and realise the benefits associated with our role in wildlife management.  |
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| **Appendices**:  | Appendix 1 Current Priorities |

## PURPOSE

1. To update the Board on NatureScot’s approach to wildlife management and to set out challenges and opportunities in delivering the corporate plan objective of modernising approaches to wildlife management.

### **BACKGROUND**

**What is wildlife management?**

1. Wildlife management is about interactions between nature and people. It includes a range of actions around the protection, conservation and control of species. It includes managing impacts on habitats and species, translocation of species, incorporating wildlife needs within development and infrastructure and tackling wildlife crime. There is a tendency, amongst the public and others, to focus exclusively on lethal control. This can lead to conflict, polarised views and tension.

**What is NatureScot’s role?**

1. NatureScot is Scotland’s wildlife agency. We lead on delivering key Scottish Government objectives with a range of work covering different species such as red squirrels, capercaillie, beavers, deer, geese and many more. We engage with a range of interests and perspectives. NatureScot has multiple roles including regulator, advisor, manager, facilitator and land manager of NNR interests. We have responsibility for species licensing, species policies and for providing advice to Scottish Government on managing wildlife. We work with a wide range of stakeholders and collaborate with others to carry out these roles effectively.

**Modernising our wildlife management functions**

1. The corporate plan aims to ‘modernise our wildlife, other wildlife management and licensing functions’. This means ensuring and demonstrating that the way we manage our wildlife is in such a way that supports biodiversity, climate and net zero outcomes as well as supporting economic opportunities.
2. A number of proposed changes to wildlife legislation will be introduced within this parliamentary term. Most notable are the proposed Grouse Moor Bill, the Hunting with Dogs Bill and new legislation around deer management. These changes will result in increasingly regulated approaches to wildlife (and land) management and the behaviours needed to live alongside our wildlife and deliver biodiversity and climate benefits.
3. Our current priorities are set out in Annex 1.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**Working with others – Shared Approach to Wildlife Management**

1. The [Shared Approach to Wildlife Management](https://www.nature.scot/doc/wildlife-management-shared-approach-concordat) was launched in 2020. It has broad buy-in from stakeholder groups who have actively signed up to it. It represents key guiding principles which were developed and agreed to by a diverse range of interest groups. The approach is a signal of intent to work together. It provides a foundation on which to build a ‘modern approach’.
2. A modernised approach to living with wildlife means recognising the changing role that land managers and practitioners across Scotland play in understanding and delivering wildlife management in light of climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to constantly challenge ourselves to find constructive, creative ways to engage with all stakeholders. The Shared Approach provides a basis for this.
3. Our lead role in developing the Beaver Strategy facilitated by the IUCN and the work we support on deer management through the Centre for Good Relations are two examples of the principles being applied to challenging wildlife management species issues.

## CHALLENGES

**Resources**

1. The Wildlife Management delivery plan sets out a resource need of ca £4m and a staff resource ca 80 FTE. The rebalancing of this resource to move from species specific support (geese £1.2m, beavers £0.25m, Sea Eagles £0.35m) to deliver on SBS outcomes (deer etc.) will be a significant challenge.
2. Delivering a modernised approach to wildlife management will require investment. Delivery of the priority work outlined in Annex 1 is significant given new licensing responsibilities and the range of wildlife management activity required to deliver SBS objectives of halting loss by 2030 and then restoration by 2045.
3. A more integrated and holistic approach to supporting wildlife and the necessary management within future rural support is required. Species specific approaches lead to inconsistencies and become increasingly costly to deliver.
4. Some resource may be secured through cost recovery schemes and through tapping into potential green finance initiatives. There may be potential to offset some of the costs e.g. venison sales from deer management or wild goose meat products from the Local Goose Management Schemes. However, securing adequate resources will be a significant challenge, especially as modernising in part will result in an increase in regulation and in turn compliance monitoring.

## CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The key issues around modernising wildlife management are the need for wildlife management to be more integrated into wider land-use policy; and for regulation, support and incentives to be complementary. The ‘modern’ approach will be driven forward by new legislation and will result in an increase in regulation. This will demand, to some extent, a change in our relationships with stakeholders and land managers. We can build on the solid networks and relations we have built up over several years. All of this change will inevitably result in some ‘difficult’ issues. We can use the Shared Approach to help bring people together to discuss and resolve these issues in constructive and engaging ways.
2. To deliver our objective of a modern approach to wildlife management we have significant opportunity to provide leadership, direction and influence in developing:
* The legislative opportunities which have been outlined;
* Our new licensing functions and regulatory role in wildlife management;
* Policies supporting the transformational land use required for net zero;
* Future rural support mechanisms;
* The application of the shared approach principles across species.
1. We ask the Board to consider these challenges and opportunities and offer any insights, feedback or suggestions for future approaches or ideas.

### **Annex 1 Current Priorities**

*Wild Deer*

1. Effective deer management has a vital role in tackling the climate crisis by ensuring appropriate levels of grazing, particularly in woodland and peatland habitats and delivering the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Living with deer means addressing these impacts in the most effective way. It also means capitalising on any benefits associated with managing deer - rural skills and employment, healthy wild meat, opportunities to connect with nature.

The Deer Working Group’s recommendations are being taken forward through a joint agency approach and this includes developing new deer legislation, incentives, approaches to regulation and prioritising efforts to deliver landscape scale benefits. Although not confirmed it is likely new deer legislation will be encompassed within the Natural Environment Bill.

*Species Licensing*

1. NatureScot currently processes over 5,000 species licences and registrations to undertake activity (trapping) annually. These licences allow actions which would otherwise be illegal and are a vital wildlife management tool. New hunting with dogs legislation in 2023 where more than two dogs will require to be licensed by NatureScot will increase our licensing provisions along with, licensing of grouse shooting and muirburn. Scottish Government has also committed to reviewing species licensing as part of the Bute House Agreement. This will include looking at the potential for introducing cost recovery into the licensing system.

*Grouse Moor Licensing*

1. A Grouse Moor Bill, built on the recommendations set out in the Werritty Report, will be introduced this parliamentary term. It will require the development of two licensing regimes; one for grouse moors and one for muirburn. Its policy intention is to ‘tackle raptor persecution’. Work has started with outline options assessed. A public consultation is planned for late summer 2022.

*Beaver*

1. A new beaver strategy, developed through a structured, facilitated, collaborative process is being finalised. It will set out how to live alongside beavers; how to benefit from their role as ecosystem engineers; and also how to address the damage they can cause to agricultural lands, parks and roads. This strategy will incorporate Ministers’ intentions to reduce the amount of lethal control being undertaken and see wider translocation throughout Scotland. This will involve working closely with those affected by impacts and keen to see the benefits of beavers realised.

*Geese & Sea Eagle*

1. Wild geese are a conservation success story and an on-going management challenge. Funding is available to some crofters and farmers, through Local Goose Management Schemes, to help them live alongside geese by providing them with compensation for the damage they can cause. This is a significant part of NatureScot’s wildlife management budget. There have been recent attempts to move away from dealing with the impacts of geese in this way and instead encourage those affected to manage the geese themselves.
2. Sea Eagles can provide social, conservation and economic benefits and challenges. They can take lambs and have a negative impact on the economies of affected farms and crofts. They also attract significant tourism revenue, most notably on the Isle of Mull. NatureScot administers the Sea Eagle Management scheme which aims to help farmers and crofters live alongside Sea Eagles by providing advice and support to help deal with and address any negative impacts.

*Invasive Non Natives*

1. Invasive non-natives (INNS) can cause significant damage to indigenous species and habitats. Mink have a detrimental impact on water voles. Non-native hedgehogs in the Hebrides and stoats on Orkney have the potential to severely impact the local, internationally important populations of sea birds and waders. This can render these threatened species even more vulnerable and less resilient to new threats such as the recent HPIA outbreak. Addressing the impacts of INNS is a considerable challenge for NatureScot and land managers given the intensive and sustained efforts required.

*Wildlife welfare*

1. Wildlife welfare is an increasing focus in the modern world of wildlife management. The challenge is to distinguish between contemporary views on animal rights views and the science of wildlife welfare. Often the two are conflated. The science of welfare is constantly evolving. A modern approach means being clear on the key role that wildlife management can play in addressing the current nature/climate crises. It also means being consistent across the species. This is an opportunity for NatureScot to show leadership. We will use the principles set out in our wildlife welfare position statement to provide structure to decisions and actions. We are currently reviewing this statement.

*Wildlife Crime*

1. We are one of the lead organisations in the Partnership for Wildlife Crime (PAWS) and lead on a number of the priority workstreams. Working closely with Police Scotland, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and the Crown Office we support work to prevent, investigate and tackle wildlife crime. Our continued use of General Licence restrictions along with new licensing functions and compliance monitoring approaches will see the NatureScot role in this area develop.