

MOORLAND BRIEFING



OCTOBER
2020



SAFETY MEASURES WORKING WELL

As we head towards the conclusion of the grouse shooting season, country sports providers report that the measures adopted to limit the potential spread of Covid-19 are working well.

Representative bodies including Scottish Land & Estates, BASC, the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association and the Scottish Countryside Alliance worked together in the Summer, in partnership with the Scottish Government, to produce a framework of guidance to enable the safe operation of country sports and to ensure that all associated suppliers were compliant with the new regulations on social distancing and hygiene.

These guidelines enabled the season to go ahead, in compliance with both the regulations for outdoor sports and those for business activity. It is not the case, as was erroneously stated by some sections of the media, that an exemption was made for grouse shooting. Rural businesses completed a full risk assessment and then changed their operations to mitigate the risks identified.

The main changes related to ensuring two-metre distancing between participants, the use of face coverings where appropriate, avoiding shared transport and not congregating in large groups.

The country sports sector is vital to thousands of jobs in rural areas, and this year the need to generate revenue for Scotland's economy is more important than ever.

SURVEY REVEALS MAJOR GROUSE SHOOT VISITOR SPEND

The shooting season has been restricted this year due to the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions on international travel.

However, in those areas where grouse shooting has taken place, participants have made a valuable economic contribution to the local area over and above their expenditure for the shoot itself.

A visitor survey undertaken jointly by Scotland's regional moorland groups and The Scottish Gamekeepers Association was undertaken among 22 sporting estates this month.

Each visitor spent an average of £3,593.18 in local communities, before shoot costs were even added in. That represents an average spend of over £450 per day in some of the country's most remote communities, with local accommodation, food, shops and garages all benefiting.

While average spend on car hire from air and ferry hubs saw nearly £327 per person going into the wider Scottish economy, the majority of the spend was in local, economically fragile areas.

The majority of participants were internal UK visitors, with a smaller number from the Netherlands; the average visit lasting one week. The lowest rates of accommodation occupancy in Scotland are traditionally found in remote rural areas, highlighting further the importance of shooting parties to these dispersed regions.

“This survey shows how important grouse shoots are to fragile areas. There has been a lot of businesses very glad of having high spending visitors around during an awful year.”
Lianne MacLennan,
Co-ordinator of Scotland's regional moorland groups.

“Our local grouse moors provide a rich seam of business to us which extends through the autumn and winter seasons. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where the tourism – and therefore revenue – provided by visitors coming to the Angus Glens to shoot could be provided by any other means. Grouse shooting has a reputation as a rich person's sport but it is a lifeline for the livelihoods of remote communities such as ours.”

Lesley McArthur, partner at the Glen Clova Hotel



RAPTOR SUCCESSES CONTINUE

These three examples are a snapshot of the excellent work being undertaken by moorland managers across Scotland.

INVERCAULD ESTATE

On Invercauld Estate in Deeside a survey of 'red' and 'amber' listed birds was conducted over a three-month period.

Gamekeepers recorded 1,117 breeding pairs of rare birds, an increase of 16% on the results from 2019.

Thirty-seven different endangered bird species were found nesting on the estate including dotterel, curlew, ring ouzel and merlin. Lapwings, a red listed wader species, were particularly successful this year with 175 nesting pairs recorded.

The figures included 33 pairs of raptors, including merlin, kestrel, osprey, barn owl, tawny owl and short-eared owl.



SEA EAGLES

On Mar Estate in Deeside a sea eagle pair have successfully fledged two chicks – the first successful sea eagle breeding in the region in 200 years.

The estate engaged with the local community to pick names for the fledglings, who will be known as Victoria and Albert.

There are an estimated 130 pairs of sea eagles in Scotland, with the population having rebounded since being declared extinct in 1918.

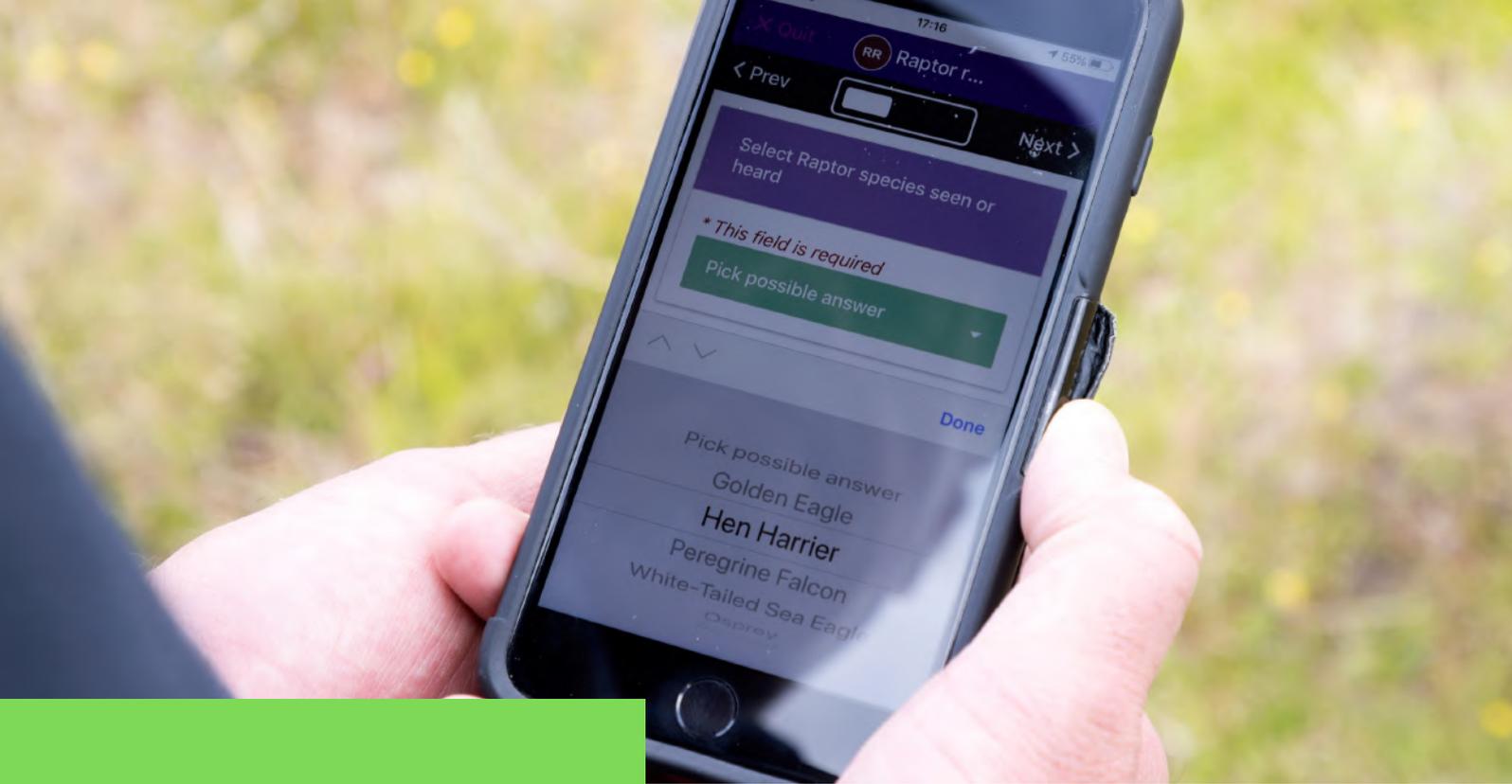


HEN HARRIERS

In August it was announced that four hen harrier chicks have successfully fledged on an estate in the Angus Glens, with licensed monitor Mike Groves recording the event.

Mike Groves commented that another pair of hen harriers had been trying for several seasons to raise young in the Angus Glens, but all their breeding attempts had been unsuccessful, which makes this news particularly welcome.





REAL TIME RECORDING OF RAPTOR SIGHTINGS

The recording of bird of prey sightings across Scotland has taken a major step forward thanks to a new app based on the EpiCollect5 platform developed by Imperial College London.

It is hoped that data from the new app will provide an authoritative reflection of raptor presence on moorland managed for grouse.

Keepers and land managers using the app can identify species such as eagles, hen harriers and buzzards and log photographs and behaviour of the birds along with the date and time they are spotted.

Scientists from the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust are discussing these data and protocols with SNH whose own research has identified the potential value of land managers' sightings of species and the need to share these data.

Research has shown that some populations of raptors, such as buzzards, have rebounded and the golden eagle population in Scotland has increased significantly in recent years.

"The production of evidence to demonstrate best practice is vital"

MUIRBURN AIDS CARBON STORAGE AND PREVENTS WILDFIRES

A pioneering study has revealed for the first time that quick surface burning over peatland can help to protect the carbon stored below the surface.

The paper, published in *Global Change Biology*, showed that low-intensity fires, like the muirburn practiced by gamekeepers, enhances the long-term retention of carbon in peatlands.

The US scientists found that quick surface fires made moist peat more stable, often creating a protective crust which allowed it to retain more of its stored carbon for longer.

On Scotland's grouse moors, gamekeepers undertake 'cool' muirburn in strips or patches to provide food and habitat for grouse, sheep and deer. Muirburn removes surface vegetation but, unlike wildfire, does not ignite the peat below.

This research shows that low intensity fires, like managed muirburn, actually help to protect the vast carbon stores locked in the ground below.

Muirburn is also vitally important to prevent the spread and duration of wild fires, which are becoming more frequent in Scotland.

Recognising this, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has been exploring ways to reduce fuel load as part of wildfire mitigation.

SFRS has announced that it will trial the burning of vegetation on moorland to create firebreaks.

Earlier this year there were huge wild fires in the Flow Country, Galloway and Moray, which burned for days.

WWF estimated that these fires were responsible for doubling all of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions (700,000 tonnes) over six days.



BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE OF SHOOTING

Scotland's rural organisations wrote to the Scottish Government on 9th October to unveil a blueprint for the shooting sector which can deliver major benefits for the environment.

The guidelines provide the most comprehensive framework to date for the creation, management and restoration of habitat for wildlife. The 'Principles of Sustainable Gamebird Management' have been developed by scientists at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and align with international guidelines on sustainable use of natural resources, including the Bern Convention and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Rural Environment Land Management (RELM), an informal alliance of Scottish rural organisations, urges Ministers to endorse the guidelines which provide a sound basis for the governance of shooting. With the Scottish Government still reviewing the recent report on grouse moor management by Professor Alan Werritty, the organisations said the principles will aid the delivery of many of the Werritty recommendations without the need for licensing.

"The new Principles of Sustainable Gamebird Management moves us a step further and rather than introduce a costly and onerous licensing scheme, it instead provides the opportunity to solidify the best practice that scientists have developed through domestic and international studies." RELM



MANAGED MOORLAND PROVIDES

- Environment and conservation
- Tourism and leisure
- Employment
- Accessibility

The Gift of Grouse



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