

Roseanna Cunningham MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform
Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
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Dear Cabinet Secretary

We are writing to ask for your help to resolve an increasingly contentious situation around satellite tagged birds of prey which is undermining collaborative efforts to address this issue.

You will be aware that this issue has been thrown into sharp focus again last week following the emergence of information through REVIVE that the satellite tags on two golden eagles in Perthshire ceased working on April 18.

For the avoidance of doubt, we would once again underline our condemnation of wildlife crime. We are committed to measures to prevent wildlife crime through PAW Scotland and also to supporting Police Scotland in the work they undertake to detect and investigate crimes when they occur.

On this occasion, Police Scotland commenced a comprehensive investigation and we understand that Auchnafree Estate is not under suspicion. However, the estate has been named and allegations of criminality by 'grouse moors' have been made in the media, including by Andy Wightman MSP.

This is a significant escalation in an already difficult situation where self-declared anti grouse shooting campaigners hold all the satellite tag data and only reveal publicly what suits their purpose, without either the Police or Scottish Natural Heritage seeming to have control over how it is used.

Attempts have been made to tackle this through the formal PAWS Raptor Group channels but it is now 18 months since the first submission from Scottish Land & Estates and we are not aware of any substantive change. We understand that SNH is looking at this matter but we have not seen anything concrete. In addition, it is only recently that the chair of the PAW Science Group has been able to determine from BTO some basic information; that 171 raptors or owls were tagged between 2013 and 2017.

We have proposed a formal review to look at:

- An open public register of all satellite tags put on birds of prey in Scotland, type, date, location, ownership, who put on the tag and scientific purpose.
- Strict management of licensing for putting on tags by SNH/BTO, and public record.
- Transparency of data on movements of tagged birds (with a time delay if necessary)
- Improved protocols around searching for tags which have stopped transmission and publicity.

More transparency and fairness would be a step forward. Our organisations support the announcement by the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association that it is lodging a petition to the Scottish Parliament which calls for greater independence in monitoring of satellite tags.

Opponents of grouse shooting believe the only way forward is further restrictions on our sector. Such a negative outlook, in our view, is unlikely to achieve the common objective of eradicating raptor persecution completely.

We recognise that there is a very important principle underpinning this issue, namely that the public has a right to be reassured that the wildlife and environment of Scotland is cared for to the highest standards. In recent years, frameworks such as Wildlife Estates Scotland, the Principles of Moorland Management (PoMM) and SLE's Landowners' Commitment have been created for this very purpose to provide openness and transparency in our work.

However, it is abundantly clear that the monitoring of tag data does not fit this criteria and urgent action is required to restore trust in the system. We believe there is much more that can be achieved by greater co-operation and partnership and see transparency and fairness over the collection and monitoring of satellite tag data as an important and constructive step.

On a related note, we would like to see the publication of the 2018 PAWS Raptor maps as soon as possible in order to provide the latest police recorded data on raptor crime. Traditionally the maps have been published in the Spring and we understand from the Scottish Government that the data has now been received. We have supported the publication of official data as an important step in tackling wildlife crime and we would welcome an update on progress for 2018 statistics.

We ask for an urgent meeting with you to discuss these matters.

Yours sincerely



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