

**From:** [\[REDACTED\]](#)  
**To:** [First Minister](#)  
**Cc:** [Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform](#)  
**Subject:** Another poisoned eagle  
**Date:** 28 July 2020 22:26:54

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Dear First Minister and Cabinet Secretary

I am writing to you about the poisoned White-tailed Eagle that was found on a grouse moor in the Cairngorms National Park. I'm sure you're getting lots of emails on this subject and I know you will read very few of them. No matter, somebody will read this and be keeping count of the numbers for you.

Let me introduce myself - I'm a scientist by training who has worked in nature conservation for over 30 years. I live, and vote, in England but I have strong links with Scotland. My first paid job in nature conservation was as the summer warden of the National Nature Reserve at St Cyrus in the summer of 1976. My first experience of research was as a field assistant on the Red Deer Project on Rhum in 1977 and 1978. My PhD is from the University of Aberdeen. I started my career with the RSPB, for whom I worked for 25 years (13 of them as the UK Conservation Director) working in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. I met my wife in Scotland and my son, who has a PhD from Edinburgh University, got married just off the Royal Mile two weeks ago and we enjoyed a socially distanced wedding breakfast of champagne and take-away pizza on the grass near the Scottish Parliament building while some Peregrine Falcons from Arthur's Seat flew overhead. I am engaged with Scotland, its people and wildlife.

Let me go back to my opening sentence:

- poisoned - poison has been illegal in the countryside for many many years and yet news of another poisoned bird of prey is hardly news, the scale of law-breaking is so huge
- White-tailed Eagle - a wonderful bird and a fully protected species. It's a species reintroduced into Scotland painstakingly over decades and I played a very small part in that myself but hundreds of people have spent huge chunks of time restoring this magnificent bird to Scotland's skies. The photographs of it lying dead in the heather are so sad, but also so maddening. But let's think instead of how wonderful they are alive and how much of an asset to tourism in Scotland.
- grouse moor - a Victorian anachronism of a highly intensive management regime which is the way it is solely so that a few can shoot Red Grouse for fun or profit. As I think you know, intensive grouse moors are the source of many of the crimes against Scotland's eagles, hawks, kites and falcons but also mammals such as Pine Marten, Wild Cat and others.
- Cairngorms National Park - how sad is it that many UK National Parks, in Wales, England and Scotland are not places where wildlife thrives but are wildlife crime hotspots which besmirch the title of National Park?

I know that the SNP's policy is to license driven grouse shooting, and I know that you are considering the slightly feeble Werritty report (why is it taking soooooo long?) but surely you must act soon? I would like to see a complete ban of driven grouse shooting across the UK and have been associated with two UK-wide Westminster petitions which have easily passed the 100,000 signatures needed for debate. In both cases Scottish signatures were slightly overrepresented compared with population and of course those signatures from Scotland far outnumber the support for any petition for licensing. So please consider an outright ban of driven grouse shooting, but if not, then please get on with the putting licensing in place even though it is the feeble compromise option.

I admire you both as politicians and if you were ever on the ballot here in my constituency of Corby I would happily vote for either of you. Admittedly we have a pretty poor crop of politicians down here in England! But you are increasingly looking weak and unprincipled on the issue of protecting Scotland's wildlife from criminals.

I watched Braveheart on TV recently and despite its historical inaccuracies I was reminded that it is a very entertaining film. One of the most memorable scenes is when the Scots turn their backs on the English and lift up their kilts to present their bare backsides to the English King and army. Did that ever happen? Well, its like is happening nowadays. Every poisoned eagle, shot harrier or trapped hawk is the grouse moor industry showing you their backsides to show that they have no fear of you, or respect for you. They are taking the mickey mightily out of you. And every gamekeeper you meet who greets you with a smile, just wonder how often his backside is on a Landrover seat taking poisons up into the hills. And the besuited landowner from the New Town of Edinburgh who greets you with a smile, just think how he counts his grouse moor income with his backside smoothly placed far from the hills in a comfortable office. When they smile at you they are really laughing, and in their breaking of the law they are showing everyone their backsides. How long are you going to let this go on?

Please act now.

[REDACTED]

My website and blog

I am a co-founder of Wild Justice <https://wildjustice.org.uk/about/>

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T : 0300 244 4000  
E : scottish.ministers@gov.scot

[REDACTED  
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Our Reference: 202000072061  
Your Reference: Sea eagle poisoning

17 August 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 29 July to me and the First Minister. I am replying on behalf of both of us.

I appreciate your candour and frankness. I will reply in the same vein.

Like just about everybody in this country who heard about the poisoning of the sea eagle I was outraged and appalled. It is sickening that there seems to be a small group of people who are prepared to abuse and destroy some of our most precious wildlife for whatever narrow selfish reasons they are pursuing. There is no business or sport or pastime that can possibly justify systematic killing of eagles in their native habitat. The fact that this particular killing involved the poison carbofuran makes the crime even worse.

I agree with you that as well as being cruel and barbaric, this sort of criminality seriously damages our efforts to restore biodiversity and to promote Scotland as place that values our natural heritage.

You are right also about the difficulty of identifying, prosecuting and convicting these criminals. Where crimes take place in remote areas, evidence is cleared away, and there is no victim to tell their story, law enforcement is always going to struggle. The answer is not to lower standards of proof or to change rules of evidence which protect all our civil liberties. The answer is to find another way – which is what we asked Professor Werritty to do.

This is where I depart from your thinking. We are not going to ban grouse shooting with the stroke of a

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pen. We have Professor Werritty's report and we intend to continue with the process of responding formally, and then taking forward properly considered proposals, following due process with consultation and engagement. Where legislation is required we will follow proper Parliamentary procedure. I know it is frustrating and slow, and of course the Covid pandemic has knocked back the timing for so much we want to do. But it is vitally important that the action we take is justifiable and proportionate and as near bullet-proof as we can make it, if it is challenged. I can assure you we are deadly serious about ending the systematic killing of raptors in our uplands and will do whatever is necessary to consign that behaviour to history.

Yours sincerely,



**Roseanna Cunningham**

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
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