

**Countryside
Alliance**



Campaign for Shooting 2022–2023

a year in retrospect,
and the year ahead

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Introduction

Managing the threats to shooting and its associated land management practices continues to be central to our work, and *Campaign for Shooting 2022 – 2023* provides an overview of the main issues with which we have been dealing over the last year, and looks ahead at those with which we expect to be dealing during the next 12 months. Our predictions for last year were remarkably accurate, but no one could have anticipated the Avian Influenza outbreak in France which has prevented the import of birds, chicks and hatching eggs to the UK, and the devastating impact this will have on the coming season. However hard one tries to anticipate future challenges, there will invariably always be the unexpected.

Our Objectives

The objectives of the Campaign for Shooting are to secure and enhance the long-term sustainability of shooting and its associated land management practices, and to manage and reduce political risk at the local, national, and devolved levels. We are at the forefront of promoting and protecting shooting in Parliament, across the devolved administrations, in the media, and on the ground. We challenge misinformation and bias; promote the considerable environmental, economic and social benefits of shooting; and positively influence policy. We are constantly looking to hone arguments, develop research, and when necessary, we will lead radical reform. Our approach is at times different to that of other countryside organisations, but we always try and ensure that it is coherent and complementary. For politicians and journalists, we are often the first to be contacted when input on shooting issues is required, and our coverage in the media is extensive.



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The Year in Retrospect

At Westminster

The Alliance is known throughout Parliament and Whitehall both for its knowledge, and the quality of its briefings. Working closely with politicians from all parties, and every level of government, the Campaign for Shooting ensures that the true value of shooting, its associated management practices, and their considerable environmental, economic and social benefits, are fully recognised. MPs, peers, ministers and civil servants are kept abreast of all key issues and their development, ensuring they have the knowledge to enable them to contribute to discussions and debates from an informed position. The forming of an informal group of moorland MPs under Sir Robert Goodwill, MP for Whitby & Scarborough, is just one example of how we are forging closer links with those in Westminster. If we are to prevent the risk of punitive legislation against shooting, then we must continue to shape the debate.

General Licences for the control of wild birds

The three General Licences for the control of certain wild birds, which came into effect on 1 January 2022 are valid for two years to 31 December 2023. Whilst there are issues with some aspects of the licences, thanks to lobbying by the Alliance and other countryside organisations, they are a considerable improvement on those previously issued by Natural England. The clarification that gamebirds can be classed as livestock whilst they

are dependent on the provision of food, water, or shelter for their survival was helpful confirmation that the General Licences can be used to prevent serious damage to pheasants and partridges. However, it was this clarification by Defra that was challenged by Wild Justice on the grounds that the definition of livestock was significantly wider than that in the Wildlife & Countryside Act. This despite the fact that animals kept for the provision and or improvement of shooting are included in the definition of livestock in that Act. Defra's robust rebuttal of Wild Justice's claims, and its announcement that it would challenge any legal action against the Department, resulted in that legal action being withdrawn, but had it not, the Alliance would again have had to apply to be an Interested Party in the legal proceedings.

General Licences for European Protected Sites

Defra's updated General Licence (GL43) for the release of pheasants and red-legged partridge on or adjacent to English European Protected Sites came into effect on 31 May 2022. This replaced the Interim Licence issued the previous year, following the legal challenge by Wild Justice which claimed that gamebirds might damage protected sites. The licence conditions remain the same as they have been for the past year, with updated guidance added. Due to the recommendations of the Alliance and other shooting organisations, the new licence now includes clarification on who needs SSSI consent and in what circumstances. Following our request for earlier communications on the issuing of a new GL43 each year, Defra has also said that they will aim to issue the 2023 General Licence earlier in the year to give certainty to licence users when making their business decisions for the coming season.

Avian Influenza and its impact

Whilst all those taking part in shoots were urged to be vigilant and follow the latest biosecurity advice last season, shooting was not restricted as part of the conditions associated with the outbreak of Avian Influenza. Whilst it is hoped that will remain the case in the event of future outbreaks, which appear to be inevitable, it is the outbreaks in parts of France that have had a significant impact on the coming shooting season, with the import of birds, chicks and hatching eggs having been prevented due to cases in the Vendee and Pays de la Loire areas of France, where the majority of French game farms are located. Although the Countryside Alliance, along with other organisations, has been in close contact with the relevant government departments and civil servants, and whilst French and UK authorities have been trying to find a way forward, this has not been possible as both EU and UK law prevents their import for 90 days after an outbreak has ended. Although changes to EU law shortened the period for which restrictions would apply, with the 90-day rule no longer applying to intra-EU trade, those changes were introduced after Brexit and therefore do not apply to the UK. The absence of birds sourced from France will affect not just those who manage shoots and are employed on shoot days, but also numerous businesses across the countryside. We have welcomed the news that some of the UK's top scientists are to join forces in a major new research consortium that has been tasked with developing new strategies to tackle future outbreaks of avian influenza. Any scientific developments or research which can help put a stop to the spread of avian influenza will be of significant importance to those in our rural communities and their livelihoods.

Legal challenge to burning regulations fail

The new legislation that came into force on 1 May 2021, which prevented the burning of vegetation on deep peat on those Sites of Special Scientific Interest that are also European Protected Sites, except under licence, was unsurprisingly the subject of an application for judicial review by Wild Justice. Despite the High Court twice refusing Wild Justice permission for a judicial review on the grounds that all four of their reasons for challenging the regulations were unarguable, Wild Justice appealed the High Court's refusal. The Court of Appeal confirmation of the High Court's decision at the beginning of this year was welcomed by the Alliance which, along with BASC, the Moorland Association and NGO had been an Interested Party to the proceedings. We will continue to fight any further actions by Wild Justice that threaten the positive management of our countryside.

The burning of vegetation on peatlands

The RSPB has been calling on the public to use its new App to report burning on peatland, as part of its campaign to see all burning banned. The possibility of wildfires has grown due to climate change, yet the RSPB is ignoring the latest available science produced by the Uplands Partnership, of which the Alliance is a member, in its attempt to stop an essential management practice that can help both prevent and reduce their devastating impact. During the 2021/22 burning season, an investigation by the RSPB, Greenpeace, and animal rights activists reported that 221 fires had allegedly taken place without a licence either in a protected area or on deep peat. 79 of these had been reported by the RSPB using the information provided through its

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App. Although the RSPB used this evidence to claim that the new peatland burning regulations were not working, and repeated its calls for a ban on all burning and for grouse shooting to be licensed, it subsequently transpired that the investigation had failed to find any conclusive evidence of widespread illegal activity. The RSPB's claims, which generated considerable media coverage, were a gross misrepresentation of the facts; something that was widely publicised by the Alliance.

Review of Habitats Regulations

Speaking at the Alliance's reception at last October's Conservative Party Conference, Defra Secretary of State, George Eustice MP, explained that leaving the EU had provided an opportunity to move away from a system that had been all about litigation, and to do things differently by adding the clarity and certainty that has been missing. Policy, he noted, needs to be decided by politicians based on evidence and science, and not driven by those with an agenda of their own. The Government is therefore reviewing the Habitats Regulations, and has powers under the Environment Act to amend the law in this area. The objective is a system that provides consistent protection for protected areas that allow the continuation of the management and activities that have created and maintained these special areas, without the threat of constant legal challenge. It is groups such as Wild Justice, weaponising the

courts to pursue their ideological campaigns, that have made this review so necessary.

RSPB fails to stop hen harrier trial brood management scheme

The 2021 breeding season was the most successful for hen harriers in England since the 1960s, with 84 chicks fledged from 24 successful nests spread across uplands in the North of England. Of those 24 nests, 19 were on moorland managed for grouse shooting. This is the fifth successive year of increases, and the numbers of chicks fledged since Natural England issued its first licence for the trial brood management scheme in 2018 have been dramatic. We therefore welcomed the decision by the Court of Appeal in November 2021 to uphold the decision of the High Court to dismiss legal challenges against the brood management scheme that had been bought by the RSPB and Wild Justice's Mark Avery, the High Court having dismissed their application on all seven grounds. It is unknown why the RSPB should be against a scheme that is doing so much to help the conservation status of the hen harrier in England, but their opposition, along with its sabotaging of Natural England's southern re-introduction of hen harriers with chicks from Spain in 2019, raises serious questions.

The transition from lead ammunition

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published its restriction dossier for the use of lead in ammunition, and a six-month consultation based on its findings was opened at the beginning of May. The restrictions proposed for England, Scotland and Wales include a ban on the sale of all lead shot, a ban on the use of all types of lead ammunition for live quarry shooting, and a ban on the use of lead shot and lead bullets for outdoor target shooting, with possible exemptions. Had we and eight other rural organisations not taken the decision to call for a voluntary phase out of lead shot in live quarry shooting by 2025, then it is clear that it would have been taken for us. However, we have always been clear that any restrictions must be based on science and evidence, and where that does not exist there should be no restriction. Any transition period must also be realistic, and it should allow time for viable alternatives to be developed and manufactured in sufficient quantities to meet demand. Significant progress has been made towards the transition from lead ammunition, but global logistic supply chain issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been having a profound impact on the manufacture of steel and other non-lead cartridges, and these have been ignored by the HSE. Neither have they been considered by the RSPB and Wildlife and Wetlands Trust who published an open letter calling for a statutory ban of lead ammunition by the 2024/2025 shooting season, pre-empting the outcome of the HSE consultation in doing so. In our public response, we made it clear that the timing and delivery of their letter would suggest it is more about political grandstanding, rather than trying positively to influence the voluntary five-year transition.

Common sense prevails on animal sentience

The Government's acceptance of an amendment to the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, requiring that the new Animal Sentience Committee's recommendations "respect legislative or administrative provisions and customs relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage", helps address our concerns that the Committee could have been hijacked by those with extreme animal rights agendas, such as Wild Justice, allowing it to be used against rural interests, including wildlife management and shooting, on ideological rather than evidential grounds. The Countryside Alliance helped promote this amendment within Parliament, and it will make it harder for an unfriendly government to use the Committee as cover for implementing damaging policies. This requirement will be key to future scrutiny of the Committee's work, and the Alliance will hold them to it.

Beyond Westminster

Aim to Sustain – one year on

The launch of Aim to Sustain in July 2021 represented a significant change in the approach of rural organisations with an interest in sustainable game shooting. Although having previously worked together as part of the Shoot Liaison Committee, the relationship had been relatively informal, and there were clear benefits to be had from having a public facing partnership that unified the sector in delivering even higher standards. Aim to Sustain links the Countryside Alliance, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, National Gamekeepers' Organisation, British Game Assurance, Moorland



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Association, Scottish Land and Estates, Game Farmers' Association and Country Land and Business Association, with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust as scientific advisors. Working together to support sustainable and responsible shooting, environmental balance, animal welfare, local communities and the rural way of life, its purpose is to protect, preserve and promote game shooting and associated habitats in the UK. With the challenges facing shooting and its associated management practices being greater than ever before, the creation of this exciting new partnership could not have come sooner. The Alliance has been, and will continue to be, pivotal in driving this work forward.

Renewal of shooting leases on Yorkshire Water's upland landholdings

Animal rights extremists have been lobbying Yorkshire Water not to renew the shooting lease on Thornton Moor when it comes up for renewal at the end of this year. The environmental, economic and social consequences of this would be considerable, and it is essential that the misleading and inaccurate accusations that are being made against shooting and its associated management practices are effectively countered. The Alliance therefore launched an e-lobby which resulted in over 3000 people contacting

Yorkshire Water urging the company not to be taken in by a campaign of misinformation, and instead take note of the available science and evidence that fully supports the renewal of the Thornton Moor lease, and those of its other shooting tenants when the time for renewal comes. We are also engaging with Yorkshire Water, and have sent them a copy of our comprehensive briefing note on grouse shooting and upland management, as well as with relevant MPs.

Research: The True Value of Shooting

Last year, the Countryside Alliance, alongside other shooting and countryside organisations, commissioned the most comprehensive research ever to be undertaken into the impact of shooting in the UK. Building upon PACEC's 2014 report, which focused primarily on the economic and environmental benefits of shooting sports in the UK, the True Value of Shooting Report will also include mental and physical health, well-being, and social benefits. A survey, which will help inform the report, was launched at this year's Game Fair, and promoted to the memberships of those organisations commissioning the report. The report will be published by the independent contractor, Cognisense, once the results of the survey have been incorporated.

The Devolved Administrations

Scotland

The Hunting with Dogs [Scotland] Bill is making its way through Holyrood, with the first of the three parliamentary stages due to be completed by the end of September. As part of Stage 1, the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee has taken written and oral evidence from rural organisations as well as those opposed to hunting, the enforcement agencies, and the Scottish Government. The evidence provided by the Scottish Countryside Alliance included the possible impact that some of the new legislation could have on those who shoot, from the number of guns that can be in a gunline when flushing a fox from cover with dogs, to the control of rabbits. As it stands, the proposed Bill could also adversely affect those working with dogs in the beating line. In an attempt to avoid unintended consequences as a result of the Bill, we will continue to advise the Scottish Government on the best way forward.

Many shoots on lowland farms and estates have been severely impacted by the extreme weather that hit much of the country at the beginning of the year. Windblow has made it very difficult to access certain areas that were once key to the success of a shoot, and in some cases shoots have either had to cease operating, or move having re-negotiated or cancelled their lease. With two years of restrictions owing to the coronavirus

pandemic, and this year's outbreak of Avian Influenza that has prevented the import of eggs from France, the coming season will be a challenging one for many shoots.

Wales

The Welsh Government remains committed to banning the use of snares through the new agricultural policy which was due in draft form in July. Snares have a crucial role in protecting and improving biodiversity in Wales, and Countryside Alliance Wales has stressed the need for stakeholders to be engaged in the process. The Minister for Rural Affairs has also confirmed that her Department is reviewing the use of cages across all livestock systems, and that this review will include gamebird rearing. There is to be a public consultation, the date of which has yet to be announced.

Following the failed legal challenge by Wild Justice to the lawfulness of the General Licences issued by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), a review was undertaken into the approach taken to grant permission for the shooting and trapping of wild birds, including the destruction of eggs and nests. The Alliance, along with other stakeholders, responded to a call for evidence, and a public consultation has also taken place. The new General Licences, which came into effect on 1 July, are far from satisfactory, with NRW having taken magpie, jay and jackdaw off the General Licence for conservation. Only carrion crow can now be controlled, and then only between 1 February and 31 August.



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Northern Ireland

The political situation in Northern Ireland remains very unstable, with a big change in the political make-up following the elections in May, and the Assembly still to meet owing to ongoing issues concerning the Northern Ireland Protocol. Despite losing the Hunting Bill, which could have criminalised every dog owner and posed huge issues for shooting in Northern Ireland, the Alliance Party has vowed to reintroduce the Bill, showing their continued disdain for rural communities and the rural way of life. Countryside Alliance Ireland will robustly challenge any such reintroduction, to ensure shooting activities are protected.

Firearms licensing continues to be a matter of concern, with thousands of applications still to be processed by the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI) firearms department. Whilst the coronavirus pandemic played a part in this issue, it is largely due to the introduction of a new IT software system, and insufficient staff with inadequate

training. This is frustrating for firearms holders, and it is impacting severely on land managers who need to protect livestock, crops, and biodiversity. Countryside Alliance Ireland, working closely with sister organisations, is pushing for additional resources to be made available to tackle the backlog of applications, which has been declared a 'critical incident' by the PSNI.

Following Wild Justice's legal challenge of the General Licences for the control of pest birds in Northern Ireland in October 2021, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs launched an eight-week consultation at the end of May. An amended Interim Licence has been issued in the meantime. News on the introduction of EU restrictions on the use of lead shot is still awaited, as is a possible reintroduction of pet checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a result of the Protocol, both of which could also have an impact on shooting.

The Year Ahead

Gamebird Research Programme

When Defra announced last year that it would be introducing an Interim Licence regime for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge on and around English European Protected Sites, the Department also committed to addressing gaps in the existing scientific literature that had been highlighted during the review into the ecological consequences of gamebird releasing and management on lowland shoots in England undertaken the previous year. Between the summer of 2022 and 2025, Defra, Natural England, and the Animal and Plant Health Agency will be undertaking a three-year Gamebird Research Project into these knowledge gaps which will inform its wider work on considering longer term regulatory solutions around gamebird releases on and around European sites; a project in which we expect to be involved.

Representation on Committees and Steering Groups

The Countryside Alliance is, and will continue to be, represented on numerous committees and steering groups, the decisions of which can have a direct impact on shooting sports and those that

participate in them. Our involvement is essential if we are to be in a position to safeguard the interests of our members, and in the last 12 months we have attended meetings of the British Shooting Sports Council, the Thames Valley Strategic Shooting Organisation, the British Game Assurance Advisory Committee, and the European Federation for Hunting and Shooting Ammunition Working Group. Topics covered have been varied, from the Health and Safety Executive's dossier on the banning of lead in ammunition, to the Home Office review of firearms licensing fees. We have, and will also continue to be, represented on Aim to Sustain's Executive, Development, Research, and Political, Policy and Communications committees, and will remain at the forefront of driving the partnership's work forward.

New legal challenges from Wild Justice

We fully expect Wild Justice to continue its attacks on game shooting and land management practices, with the likelihood that the Alliance will need to be an Interested Party in future judicial reviews when they are launched. The defeat of these legal challenges is essential if we are to continue to undertake perfectly legal activities without unnecessary constraints being imposed upon us.

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One of the easiest ways to support us is to buy this season's shooting badge, and to encourage your friends to do likewise.



We Need Your Support

The Campaign for Shooting has a key role in promoting and defending game shooting, and it has considerable influence and success in doing so. However, our opponents are well funded, and we must have the necessary resources if we are to be in a position to challenge effectively the many threats against shooting and its associated management practices that face us. Your support is essential to our work. We are therefore extremely grateful to those who so generously donate a day's shooting either as an auction lot or draw prize, and to all those who bid or buy tickets for these, as well as for the gun draws that we also hold. These are really important ways in which you can help support our work.

Another way in which you can support us, and be seen to be doing so, is to buy this season's shooting badge, which is in the official colours of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, and to encourage your friends to do likewise. The badge costs £100, and all proceeds go directly towards the work of the Campaign for Shooting. Badges can be bought online at <https://campaigningforshooting.org/>

For those in a position to do so, shoot sweepstakes are another excellent way in which you can help raise funds, and a PDF of this year's sweepstake card can be obtained from shooting@countryside-alliance.org.

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