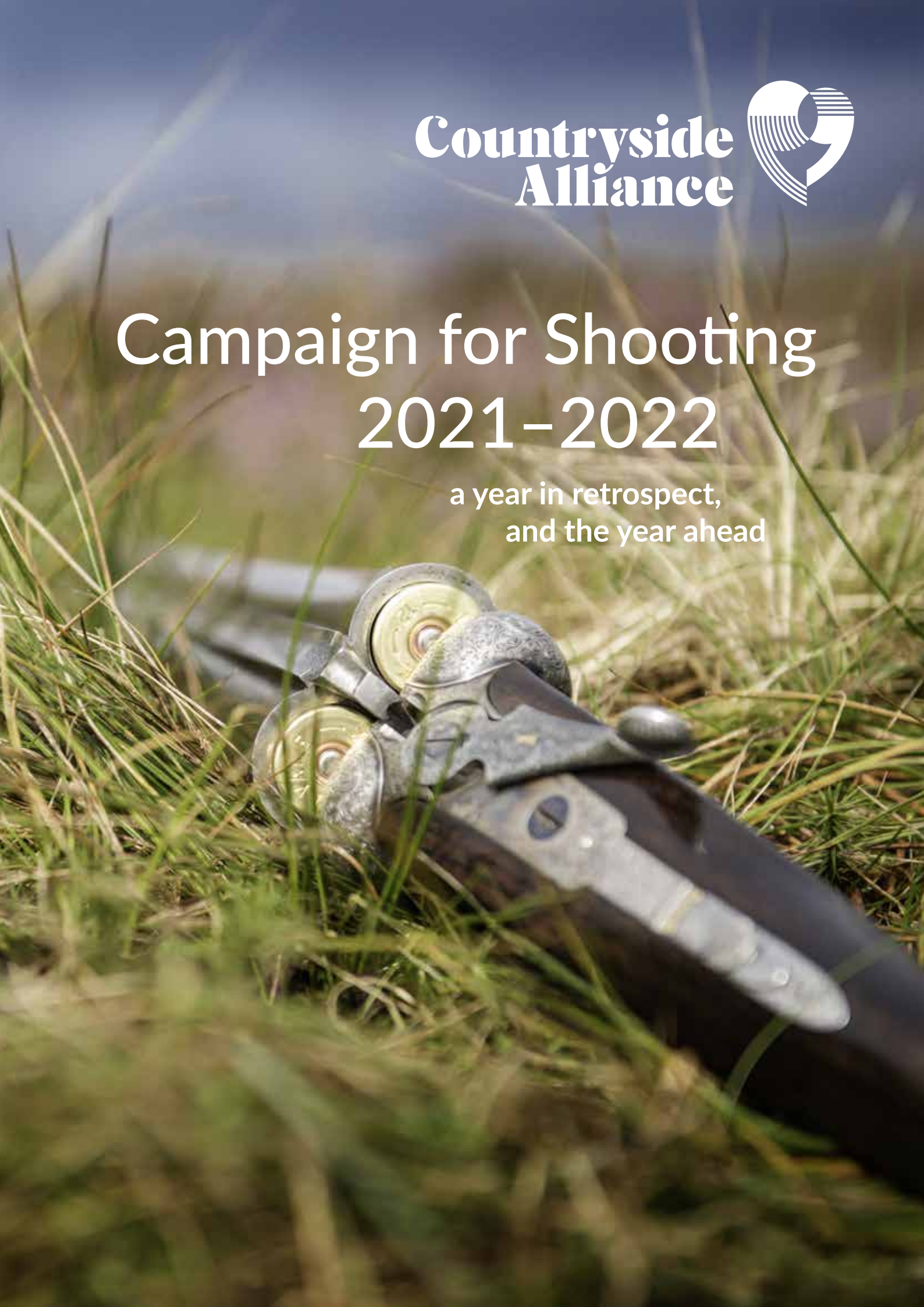


**Countryside
Alliance**



Campaign for Shooting 2021-2022

a year in retrospect,
and the year ahead



Introduction

Despite the disruption of a global pandemic, with our team working from home for more than a year, the Campaign for Shooting has never been busier. As we emerge from Covid-19, the Government is pursuing a number of Bills that could have an impact on shooting and its associated land management. Managing this political risk will be central to our work over the coming year. *Campaign for Shooting 2021 – 2022* provides an overview of the main issues with which we have been dealing over the last 12 months, and looks at those with which we know we will be dealing during the year ahead.


Our Objectives

The Countryside Alliance has a pivotal role in bringing together the different shooting organisations, ensuring a coordinated approach when lobbying government. The Campaign for Shooting is at the forefront of promoting and protecting shooting in Parliament, across the devolved administrations, the media and on the ground, challenging misinformation and bias; promoting the considerable environmental, economic and social benefits of shooting; and positively influencing policy. The grouse debate held in Westminster on 21 June 2021 is a perfect example of how the Campaign for Shooting did all that. Our objectives are clear: 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.

For politicians and the media, we are frequently the first to be contacted when input on shooting issues is required. We robustly challenge misinformation and unsubstantiated accusations, and are constantly looking to hone arguments, develop research, and when necessary, lead radical reform.



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Working closely with politicians from all parties, and every level of government, the Campaign for Shooting ensures that the true value of shooting is recognised.

A Year in Retrospect

At Westminster

The Alliance is known throughout Parliament and Whitehall for its expertise. Working closely with politicians from all parties, and at every level of government, the Campaign for Shooting ensures that the true value of shooting is recognised. We have produced numerous briefing notes to ensure MPs, peers, Ministers and civil servants have the information they require on key issues, enabling them to contribute from an informed position. We have responded to all those consultations that may affect shooting, and submitted evidence on the value of shooting to a number of parliamentary committees. It is essential that we continue to shape the debate and retain control, rather than risk punitive legislation against shooting.

Covid-19 and Shooting

It was thanks to substantial work by the Countryside Alliance working with Government Ministers and pro-shooting MPs, along with lobbying by other shooting organisations, that the Government announced exemptions to the rule of six for England which enabled shooting to go ahead for much of last season. At the beginning of the pandemic the Countryside Alliance, alongside other shooting organisations, produced the document 'Covid safe principles for game shoots in England'. The document was updated to reflect each successive change in regulations, made plain the corresponding Government guidance, and helped those running game shoots manage the risks posed by Covid-19.

General Licences for the Control of Wild Birds

Three new General Licences for the control of wild birds, published by Defra, came into force on the 1 January 2021. Thanks to extensive lobbying by the Countryside Alliance and other shooting organisations, these represented a considerable improvement to the General Licences previously issued by Natural England. While there is still work to be done, they are at least workable and allow land managers to continue to operate effectively. Crucially, we believe that they are legally robust enough to avoid further legal challenge from Wild Justice. We were pleased that Defra listened to a joint letter from the Countryside Alliance and others, and issued these licences themselves, rather than handing back control to Natural England, who have repeatedly proved incapable of overseeing any credible wildlife licensing system.

General Licences for European Protected Sites

An interim General Licence for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge on, or adjacent to, European Protected Sites came into effect on 31 May 2021. This was as a result of Wild Justice's Judicial Review, which claimed that game birds might damage protected sites, and is yet another example of an attempt to abuse the precautionary principle by the anti-shooting organisation. While Defra's settlement is not ideal, it does have a clear sunset clause, which the Alliance, as one of the interested parties to the case, said was essential to any licence. After the Judicial Review had been withdrawn by Wild Justice, the judge made clear that had they proceeded, they may well have been unsuccessful. Despite this, Wild Justice have since issued a pre-action protocol letter threatening a further Judicial Review against the interim General Licence issued by Defra.

Petitions Committee Debate on Banning Grouse Shooting

A petition to ban driven grouse shooting, which had been launched by Wild Justice in 2019, was debated in Westminster on 21 June 2021. All supportive MPs and Defra ministers were sent our comprehensive briefing note ahead of the debate, and over 3,500 supporters used our e-lobby to write to a total of 481 MPs beforehand, to highlight the significant environmental, economic and social benefits of driven grouse shooting, and to ask them to speak out against the misleading and unsubstantiated claims made by Wild Justice. Only two of the eleven MPs that took part spoke in support of a ban, ignoring evidence and with a total disregard for the impact a ban would have. The remainder who spoke against the petition did so from a position of knowledge and understanding. In closing the debate, Tom Hunt MP said that “with respect to the petitioners, there is clearly not support in this House for the petition. In fact, there is probably less support than there was four years ago”, when a similar petition by Wild Justice to ban grouse shooting had been debated.

Heather Burning

New legislation came into force on 1 May 2021 which prevents the burning of vegetation on deep peat on those Sites of Special Scientific Interest that are also European Protected Sites, except under licence. There were also a number of exemptions where the prohibition does not apply, and it was these that lead to a motion of regret in the House of Lords on the grounds that the new regulations did not provide a basis for significantly reducing the amount of burning on peatland in England. The Countryside Alliance produced a briefing note for all

supportive peers in advance of the debate, and the motion failed. An amendment to the Environment Bill which also sought to prohibit the burning of vegetation on all peat in all areas of upland England was likewise successfully defeated during report stage in the House of Commons, the Countryside Alliance having briefed where appropriate. Defra has since been sent a pre-action protocol letter regarding the new burning regulations by Wild Justice, and a Judicial Review is a possibility.

Hen Harrier Southern Reintroduction

Defra’s Hen Harrier Action Plan provides us with the best opportunity to understand and reverse the decline of hen harriers in England, and all six component parts of the plan have a vital role to play, including that of the reintroduction of hen harriers to southern England. Despite Natural England having had the necessary infrastructure and personnel in place to receive the first hen harriers from Spain in 2019, and some £300,000 of public money having been allocated to the project, no reintroduction took place. Correspondence provided by Defra and Natural England in response to a Freedom of Information request by the Countryside Alliance show that this was due to interference by the RSPB, with one note from Defra stating that: ‘Due to contact by RSPB with conservation groups in France and Spain NE has been unable to source chicks for the reintroduction. Without chicks the reintroduction cannot go ahead and we cannot stop RSPB’. When challenged by the Countryside Alliance, the RSPB denied any involvement, saying the claims were simply untrue; despite all the evidence to the contrary.



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It has been over a year since the Countryside Alliance, along with leading shooting and rural organisations, called for a voluntary transition away from the use of lead shot and single-use plastics in live quarry shooting with shotguns by 2025.



Alternatives to Lead Ammunition

It has been over a year since the Countryside Alliance, along with leading shooting and rural organisations, called for a voluntary transition away from the use of lead shot and single-use plastics in live quarry shooting with shotguns by 2025. Since making that announcement, legislative pressure and market forces have shown that this is an inevitable move for game shooting, and during the last 16 months we have been in regular contact with both cartridge manufacturers and importers. The EU has also committed to banning the use of all lead shot over wetlands within two years. However, thanks to a procedural delay at Brussels, this did not make it onto the British Statute Book prior to Brexit. It will however apply in Northern Ireland, and Scotland have also said they will adopt the measure. In addition, UK REACH, which regulates chemicals post-Brexit, is undertaking a two-year review of lead shot, although the time frame will take this beyond our voluntary five-year transition. In a move that was not communicated to any stakeholders beforehand, the National Game Dealers Association (NGDA) has announced that from July 2022, its members will not take or process game, including venison, that has been shot with lead. This is in response to pressure from the largest retailers of game demanding a lead-free supply chain. While the NGDA only represents 30% of the game dealers in the UK, others are likely to follow suit, and in order to meet demand, the British Game Alliance (BGA) has compiled a register of shoots that have committed to shoot entirely lead-free this season.

Firearms Licensing Consultation

The fees being charged by some GPs to provide an assessment and medical letter to accompany firearms licence applications or renewals continues to be an issue. We have therefore continued to publicise the private GP service MedCert, which is able to undertake medical assessments and supply a letter for an acceptable fee. We have secured a 10% discount for members of the Countryside Alliance. Prior to the pandemic we were lobbying for, and close to securing, a move from five to ten-year renewals for firearms and shotgun certificates. This has now been picked up again by the Home Office, with ministerial backing.

Brexit: Game Exports

The ending of the Brexit transition period on 31 December 2020 has had implications for the export of shot game to the EU, the majority of which had previously been whilst still in feather. This is no longer possible, and all game will now have to be inspected by an Official Veterinarian and pass through an Approved Game Handling Establishment. Despite this added layer of bureaucracy, we do not anticipate demand from Europe to fall, and are confident that we will continue to be able supply game to the Continent. We have lobbied Defra to ensure the process is as smooth as possible and, with the BGA, we have produced an information sheet which explains the new processes that shoots and game dealers will need to follow.

Brexit: European Firearms Pass

The European Firearms Pass is no longer valid for British citizens. Thanks to lobbying from the British Shooting Sports Council, of which the Countryside Alliance is an active member, it remains valid for European citizens travelling to shoot in Britain. We are currently pushing for an equivalent scheme for Britain which will be recognised by all EU member states. In the meantime, we have produced a FAQ document for members who wish to travel to Europe with firearms.

House of Lords Committee on Sports and Recreation

At the request of the House of Lords Sport and Recreation Committee, we compiled a dossier of relevant research that demonstrated the value of shooting to the economy, health and well-being of rural communities, including that which showed how numerous people across the country benefit from participation in shooting related activities. Our submission will be used in the development of the Government's National Plan for Sport and Recreation.

Beyond Westminster

RSPB Gamebird Consultation

The RSPB has reviewed its policy on gamebird shooting and associated land management following the Gamebird Consultation that it conducted in 2020. It is calling for greater regulation of grouse shooting, a ban on all heather burning on peatland, and a maximum cap of 3000 gamebirds released on any shoot, regardless of land area concerned. Unlike the GWCT's principles for game management, which are based on internationally accepted principles and comply with the objectives of the UK's major

environmental treaties, the RSPB's policy is not based on any scientific evidence, and its proposals have generated little traction either at Westminster or in the media.

The British Game Alliance Assurance Scheme

It is essential that the shooting sector demonstrates best practice, and supports effective self-regulation. With the BGA, we have been promoting the independently audited BGA shoot assurance, and we are delighted that prominent estates and nearly every sporting agency in the UK have committed to the goal of only offering days on BGA Member Shoots from the start of the 2023 game shooting season.

The Devolved Administrations

Scotland

The Scottish Countryside Alliance has been standing-up for country sports during the Covid-19 pandemic, and thanks both to its efforts and those of the other members of the Rural Environmental and Land Management group, shooting was one of the first sports allowed to resume. 'Country Sports in Scotland: A Framework for Appropriate Covid-19 Precautions' provided a set of basic principles for country sports employers, employees, and practitioners to operate safely during restrictions, and the Scottish Countryside Alliance also independently produced: 'A Return to Shooting: a phased approach to shooting as lockdown restrictions are eased', which outlined how shooting could return when safe to do so.



The RSPB is calling for greater regulation of grouse shooting, and a ban on all heather burning on peatland.

The Scottish Government has accepted many of the recommendations from the Deer Working Group report, and legislation on deer management will be introduced in this Parliament.



Our manifesto 'Priorities for Rural Scotland' was launched ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May 2021. Making the case for rural communities, the manifesto, outlined what the next Scottish Government needed to do to protect, connect, grow and enrich rural Scotland. On the day our Manifesto was launched, we held a hustings and heard from then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing MSP, as well as rural spokespeople from the other main political parties.

The Scottish Government will be introducing a licensing scheme for grouse moors, despite the Werritty Review's recommendation that it should continue to monitor specific raptor species on grouse moors for five years before taking any such action, if at all. The Scottish Government has accepted many of the recommendations from the Deer Working Group report, and legislation on deer management will be introduced in this Parliament. We can also expect legislation on fox control, land management, and animal welfare. The Scottish Countryside Alliance was successful in fending off a hunting amendment to the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment)

(Scotland) Bill at the end of the last Parliament, and managing these ongoing political threats will continue to be a key challenge.

Wales

Following a legal challenge by Wild Justice of the lawfulness of General Licences issued by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the High Court ruled that the General Licences were in fact lawful, and they can therefore continue to be used as vital means for controlling wild birds.

NRW are undertaking an extensive review into the approach taken to grant permission for the shooting and trapping of wild birds, including the destruction of eggs and nests. It will look at the processes used to deliver the activities through five separate projects, and Countryside Alliance Wales, along with other stakeholders, is meeting regularly with NRW to ensure that the licensing of wild bird control continues to be delivered whilst the review is undertaken. Countryside Alliance Wales has also responded to a call for evidence, and a public consultation is due to take place in August 2021.

The Devolved Administrations...

Welsh Labour has made a manifesto commitment to ban the use of snares. This is despite extensive stakeholder engagement with Welsh Government officials in recent years, and a new and improved code of practice on the use of snares for fox control. The Minister has made it clear that she intends to ban them in this Senedd term, and the work to do this is likely to begin in Autumn 2021.

The Code of Best Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes has still to be published by Welsh Government. It is understood that this is because the evidence around the use of cages in farming, including their use for the breeding gamebirds is still being examined. Business Wales has also refused a number of shoots financial support from the Covid Economic Resilience Fund, on the grounds that it may bring Welsh Government into disrepute. This is being robustly challenged by Countryside Alliance Wales.

Northern Ireland

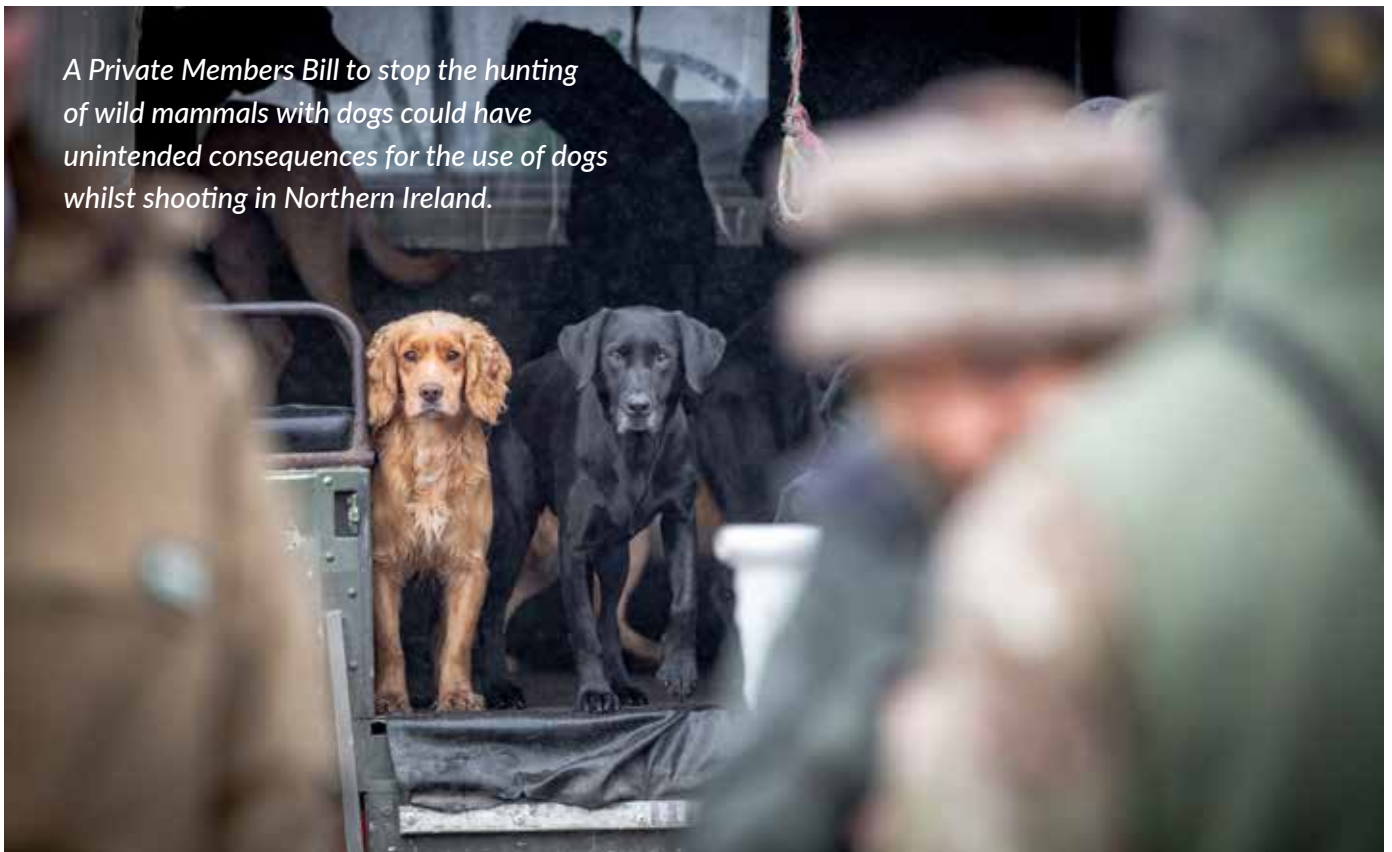
The Northern Ireland Executive continues to limp between periods of instability, and the

forthcoming elections may change the political makeup. Countryside Alliance Ireland will continue to work both with existing and new representatives to prevent any detrimental restrictions to our ability to manage wildlife.

A Private Members Bill to stop the hunting of wild mammals with dogs could have unintended consequences for the use of dogs whilst shooting. Although full details of the proposals have still to be brought forward, Countryside Alliance Ireland will robustly challenge any threats to shooting interests.

Countryside Alliance Ireland has continued to support members with firearms issues, its focus being on ensuring the safe and responsible use of firearms by those who participate in shooting sports. Along with other shooting organisations, we will continue to work constructively with Firearms Licensing to ensure a safe, and fair environment for all those that shoot.

A Private Members Bill to stop the hunting of wild mammals with dogs could have unintended consequences for the use of dogs whilst shooting in Northern Ireland.





The Countryside Alliance has been the driving force behind the formation of a formal public facing partnership that can combine the expertise of the organisations, deliver the highest standards, and best promote and protect sustainable game shooting.

The Year Ahead

Future Shooting Partnership

Organisations with an interest in sustainable game shooting have been working increasingly closely for the benefit of shooting as a whole, as highlighted by our lobbying on General Licences, the agreement for a voluntary phase out of lead ammunition, zero tolerance of raptor persecution, and intervention in Judicial Reviews brought by Wild Justice. That close working, as part of the Shoot Liaison Committee, has been relatively informal, and the Countryside Alliance has been the driving force behind the formation of a formal public facing partnership that can combine the expertise of the organisations, deliver the highest standards, and best promote and protect sustainable game shooting.

The result of this work was the launch of 'Aim to Sustain' on 23 July 2021. This formal partnership of nine leading UK rural organisations will highlight the crucial role that sustainable game shooting plays in delivering biodiversity net gain through protecting and enhancing our rural landscapes, and its enormous array of wildlife. The partnership will also focus on showcasing the considerable contribution that game management makes to sustaining rural communities, providing high quality food, and making the countryside a place that people want to visit. By moving together into this formal partnership, we can secure greater recognition of the considerable benefits that come from game management and shooting, and the Countryside Alliance will remain pivotal in moving this critical step for game shooting forward.

The Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech laid out how Government plans to introduce up to 30 Bills, many of which will affect the countryside and rural communities, including potential impacts on shooting and its associated land management. The Countryside Alliance has produced a briefing note in response to this, which has been sent to all MPs and peers. Whilst we are broadly supportive of the Government's ambitions, we do have concerns as to how it intends to fulfil these, and the possible consequences to the countryside.

Action Plan for Animal Welfare

The Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare aims to revitalise the treatment of animals in the UK and introduce measures to protect the welfare of animals abroad. This includes animal sentience, consideration of the introduction of a close season for brown hares, a review of snaring, and the examination of the use of cages in poultry farming, which will also have implications for game farming. Along with other stakeholders, we will be working closely with politicians to ensure that any new legislation is proportionate, and based on all available evidence.

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

It is important that animal welfare is not confused with animal rights, and the inclusion of sentience in UK law must not damage the ability of land managers to manage wildlife humanely and responsibly. There are concerns that the Bill may not only fail to deliver improved animal welfare, but could threaten positive animal welfare gains from being made in the future. With a less amenable Government in power, there is also a risk that what this Bill puts in place could be manipulated to support an animal rights agenda. We will therefore be working with parliamentarians, and other stakeholders, to ensure that the Bill does not result in a series of unintended consequences.

Research: The True Value of Shooting

The most comprehensive research ever to be undertaken into the impact of shooting in the

UK, embracing all forms of the sport, has been commissioned by the Countryside Alliance in collaboration with other organisations. The research will update the evidence of shooting's economic and environmental contribution, as well as setting out for the first time the true social, health and well-being benefits that shooting delivers. The research is being undertaken by the University of Northampton and GWCT, and the report is due to be published towards the end of the year.

Research: The Case for Sustainable Driven Grouse Shooting

The Uplands Partnership, of which the Countryside Alliance is a member, has commissioned a detailed report reviewing the evidence on whether driven grouse shooting is sustainable. Published in July 2021, the report will be regularly updated, making it a 'living document' that is continually available as a resource for policy makers and other interested parties.

New Legal Challenges from Wild Justice

We fully expect Wild Justice to continue its attacks on game shooting and land management practices. It is therefore likely that the Countryside Alliance will need to be an Interested Party in future Judicial Reviews that are launched, the defeat of which are essential if we are to continue to undertake perfectly legal activities without unnecessary constraints being imposed upon us.

We fully expect Wild Justice to continue its attacks on game shooting and land management practices.





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 Countryside Alliance has a pivotal role in promoting and defending shooting, and the Campaign for Shooting enjoys considerable influence and success in doing so. Our opponents are well funded, and if we are effectively to challenge their many threats, we must have the necessary resources. For example, the Countryside Alliance's share of the legal costs incurred in successfully fighting Wild Justice's Judicial Review into the release of game birds on and adjacent to European Protected Sites last year was over £98,000, and membership subscriptions alone are insufficient to cover such costs. Your support is therefore essential to our work.

Shooting Badges and Sweepstakes

One of the easiest ways to support us is to buy this season's shooting badge, 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. You can order your badge online at <https://www.countryside-alliance.org/seasonbadge>. 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.

Both this year's season badge and shoot sweepstakes are being supported by Taittinger Champagne, who are very generously providing a bottle of champagne to all those that manage to raise £1,000 either by selling badges, or running sweepstakes, and for each £1,000 thereafter.

Gun Draw

Another way in which you can support the Campaign for Shooting is to buy tickets for our gun draw, the prize for which is Longthorne's stunning Boxlock Acanthus Model 3003. The launch date for the draw is 12 August and tickets, which cost £50, can be bought on line at: www.raffleplayer.com/countrysidealliancedraw

Countryside
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