

Countryside  
Alliance



# Campaign for Shooting 2020–2021

a year in retrospect,  
and the year ahead



# Introduction

The Countryside Alliance plays 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, 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. 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.

We are the first port of call for any politician needing input on shooting issues, as well as for journalists from radio, television, and newspapers covering shooting related stories. Misinformation and unsubstantiated accusations are all too easily spread by opponents of shooting, and these must be robustly challenged, both in Parliament and in the media. To ensure that we are in a position both to protect and promote the value of shooting, whether reactively or proactively, we continually assess the threats and opportunities that it faces. The Campaign for Shooting is always looking to hone arguments, develop research, and when necessary, will lead radical reform.



*The objectives of the Campaign for Shooting 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.*



*The future of game shooting remains at stake. We need to shape the debate and retain control over our activities, rather than have them regulated by the state.*

## A year in retrospect

### At Westminster

The Alliance is known throughout Parliament and Whitehall for the quality of its briefings and expertise. The Campaign for Shooting works closely with politicians from all parties, and every level of government, to ensure that the true value of shooting is fully recognised. We have engaged with the many new MPs following the general election, and have produced regular briefing notes to ensure MPs, Peers, Ministers and civil servants are kept abreast of the key issues. The future of game shooting remains at stake, and we need to shape the debate and retain control over our activities, rather than risk punitive legislation.

### COVID-19 guidance for shooting

A COVID-19 Hub has been developed for the website which provides advice for shooters, and directs them to the relevant government web pages. Given the crucial role that shooting plays in the environmental, economic and social well-being of the countryside, the Alliance produced a document for Ministers which explained how a phased return to shooting as lockdown restrictions were eased could secure the numerous benefits it brings. Different versions of the document were also produced by the Alliance for each of the devolved governments. We, along with other shooting and countryside organisations, also sent a joint letter to Ministers outlining the steps that can be taken to ensure driven shooting can take place from 12 August.

### General Licences for the control of wild birds

The six new General Licences for the control of wild birds that were re-issued on a temporary basis by Defra will now remain in place until new licences come into force on 1 January 2021, thanks to lobbying by the Alliance, National Gamekeepers Organisation (NGO) and Moorland Association. The decision came in the wake of our joint paper 'Wildlife Licensing in England: Chaos, Crises and Cure' which was sent to Defra Secretary of State. This highlighted the ongoing chaos surrounding wildlife licensing and the need for Defra to take back control from Natural England. The current situation surrounding Individual Licences is untenable, and is having disastrous consequences for wildlife. Our paper has received great support within Parliament, and the Alliance's e-lobby on wildlife licensing has been sent by almost 2,000 members and supporters of the Alliance to their MP, with 396 out of 650 MPs having been contacted on this issue.

### General Licences for the control of stoats

Two General Licences for stoat control with new, burdensome and unworkable rules were circulated by Natural England just two weeks before they were to come into effect on 1 April. We, along with the NGO, wrote to Defra Secretary of State explaining that they were unfit for purpose, explaining that urgent action needed to be taken if we were to be able to continue to control stoats with no additional restrictions, as intended by Defra's implementation plan for new traps that met the Agreement of International Humane Trapping Standards. Thanks to our lobbying, revised licences, which although not perfect were at least workable, were issued just one day before the deadline.

## Phasing out lead ammunition

We have issued, along with all the United Kingdom's leading shooting organisations, a joint statement that seeks to phase out lead shot and single use plastics in cartridges used for live quarry shooting within five years. This move has been welcomed by the Government as a significant step both for wildlife and the wider environment. While we are committed to this voluntarily phase out of lead shot, we have been lobbying against punitive legislation in Europe which would see lead ammunition of all types banned over wetlands within the next two years. The broad definition of wetlands being used by the European Commission would have included 80% of the UK, and the two year implementation period would have caused unnecessary and avoidable chaos. Our proposed voluntary transition over five years has been a key tool in persuading the Government that adopting the legislation ahead of our exit from the EU is both unnecessary and impractical.

## Judicial Review into release of gamebirds

We have joined forces with BASC, Game Farmer's Association and the NGO to help fight Wild Justice's latest Judicial Review challenging the legality of releasing gamebirds on or near to European Protected Sites. The case has direct consequences both for those that shoot and those responsible for the management of these sites. It is essential that we are involved in the proceedings so that a robust evidence-based case can be presented to the court. Our joint written statement, which highlights the available science, along with Defra's statement, fundamentally disputes the legal basis for Wild Justice's challenge. The High Court has announced that the Judicial Review should be heard by the end of October.

## Firearms licensing consultation

We responded to the **Government's** consultation on medical procedures for firearms licensing, advocating that modern technology should allow an 'enduring marker' to be placed on licence holders medical records, enabling a move from 5 to 10 year renewal periods for all certificate holders. This

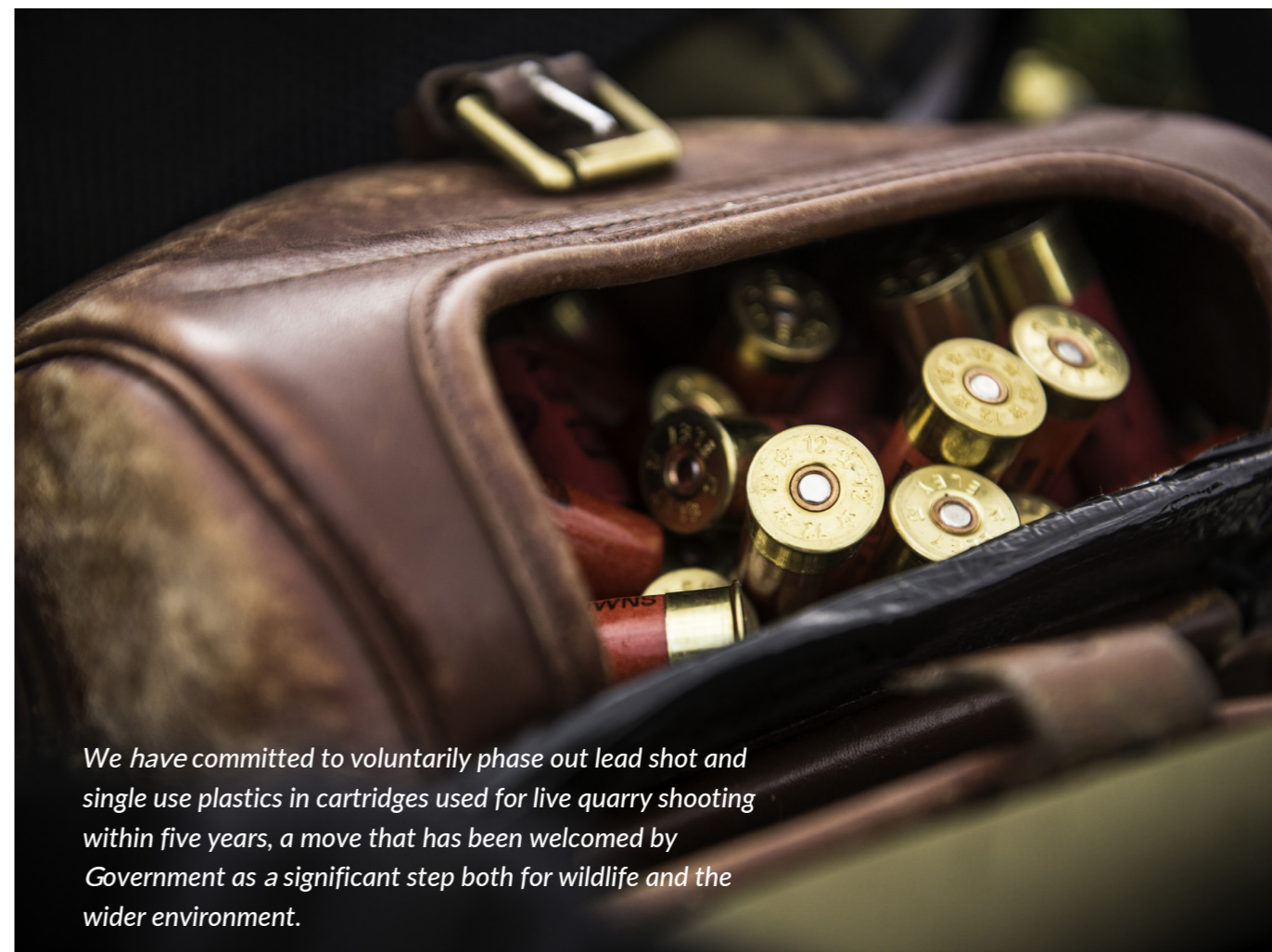
was well received in Government and we await the results of the consultation to see whether it will be implemented. We also called for a coherent and transparent system of charges applied by GP surgeries for reviewing applicants records, and writing the required report for police firearms departments. In the meantime we have brokered a relationship with MedCert, which charges a fee of £50 with a 10% discount for Alliance members, to produce the necessary paperwork if a GP is a 'conscientious objector', or a practice is charging inflated fees.

## Grouse shooting debate

An on-line petition on grouse shooting which was started by Chris Packham will be debated by MPs in Westminster, just four years after a similar debate saw the case for banning grouse shooting totally dissected by MPs. An interview with Chris Packham, which was arranged by the Petitions Committee to hear the reasons behind last year's petition, resulted in a House of Commons press release being published, in which Packham calls on government to ban driven grouse shooting. This raised serious questions about parliamentary ethics and procedures. The interview was conducted by an MP who made no attempt at impartiality, and in doing so undermined the Committee's role of considering petitions so that MPs have the opportunity to have a properly informed debate on issues raised by the public. We have written to the Chair of the Petitions Committee to express our serious concerns.

## Trophy hunting

We responded to the government consultation on the import and export of hunting trophies, making clear that the consequences of banning the export of hunting trophies, such as stag antlers, would have far reaching consequences on both wildlife management and the economies of many rural communities. We also made clear that any tightening of legislation should be based on clear science and metrics on sustainability provided by the International Union for Conservation of Nature; not on loose sentiment.



*We have committed to voluntarily phase out lead shot and single use plastics in cartridges used for live quarry shooting within five years, a move that has been welcomed by Government as a significant step both for wildlife and the wider environment.*

## Beyond Westminster

The defence and promotion of game shooting depends on the highest standards being maintained by all those involved in the sport. Concerns about the environment are growing, and shooting must be seen as part of the solution to environmental concerns; not part of the problem. The Alliance takes a proactive stance to ensure that we are able to retain control over our own activities, rather than having them regulated by the state.

## Alliance secures the future of gamekeeper apprenticeships

The Alliance's 'Underkeeper Apprenticeship' has now been approved by Government, its funding has been formally agreed, and land based colleges around the country are enthusiastic at the prospect of providing specialist training when the apprenticeships start in September. If the Alliance had not taken action four years ago, when it learnt that the framework for apprenticeships was changing, the apprenticeship for

gamekeepers would have ceased to exist this year. From August 2020 to January 2021, any shoot that takes on a new young apprentice aged 16 to 24 will receive a £2,000 employer incentive, while those that take on new apprentices aged 25 and over will be paid £1,500. This is part of the Government's 'Plan for Jobs', to kick start the economy post COVID-19, and it is in addition to the existing £1,000 incentive the Government already provides for new 16 to 18 year-old apprentices.

## Zero tolerance on raptor persecution

The Countryside Alliance, along with the other main organisations representing shooting in England and Wales, issued a joint statement condemning all forms of raptor persecution. All incidents of illegal persecution are extremely damaging to the reputation of shooting, and we are working in partnership with the police and wildlife agencies, as well as developing a number of initiatives, to eradicate the persecution of birds of prey.

### Shooting and saboteurs

The Countryside Alliance's guidance note 'Saboteurs and Shooting' raises awareness of the risks of saboteurs on a shoot day and provides advice on how best to deal with them. The guidance provides practical advice on the arrangements that should be made before the day, and the actions that should be carried out if saboteurs do turn up.

### RSPB consultation on gamebird shooting

The RSPB's consultation on game shooting and associated land management has been carried out as part of a review of their existing policy on driven grouse shooting and to develop a new position on the high-density release of gamebirds. Unlike the principles used by the RSPB, which are clearly intended as a tool to restrict shooting, the Alliance has been promoting an alternative based on the GWCT's principles for game management. These are based on internationally accepted principles and comply with the objectives of the UK's major environmental treaties. The RSPB is continuing to call for the introduction of a system of licensing for driven grouse shooting and a ban on burning on

peatlands, whilst it conducts its review, the results of which will be announced in October.

### Heather burning

The importance of retaining burning as a management tool in the uplands continues to be stressed by the Alliance. The Uplands Partnership, of which we are a member, has produced a dossier of the most recent research into heather burning which shows that the conclusions of the previous science is out of date, and can no longer be regarded as a safe basis for policy making decisions. This is particularly important in light of the expected publication of the Government's peatland strategy.

### Anti-biotic use in gamebird rearing

The Alliance, with others, is calling for further reductions in anti-biotic use in game rearing, explaining why it is necessary and the steps that need to be taken to make it possible. Although great progress has been made, resulting in a 50% reduction over the last three years, further reductions are necessary.



*We work closely with other countryside organisations in order to prevent, wherever possible, unnecessary restrictions to our ability to manage wildlife.*



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## The devolved administrations...

### Scotland

Scottish Countryside Alliance is a member of the Rural Environmental and Land Management Group. We work closely with other countryside organisations in Scotland in order to prevent, wherever possible, unnecessary restrictions to our ability to manage wildlife.

### General Licences

Following a substantial consultation, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) confirmed changes to the Scottish General Licences from 1 April 2020. The main changes relate to those species that are included on certain licences for certain purposes, and they included the removal of rooks from that for the conservation of wild birds. A number of additional conditions now apply to the use of General Licences over certain designated sites, and the new licences require individual trap operators to register in advance with SNH, with all traps displaying a registration number.

### The Werritty Review

The main recommendations of the Werritty Review into Grouse Moor Management in Scotland include plans to license and place further restrictions on controlled muirburn, the management of mountain hare populations, and the use of medicated grit for grouse. The Review also recommends that a licensing scheme should be introduced within five years unless there is an increase in the populations of specific raptors on grouse moors.

### Deer Management

The independent Deer Working Group has now published its long-awaited report. The Group was appointed to review the existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for the management of wild deer in Scotland, taking account of the position of the four species of wild deer across Scotland. The report makes ninety-nine recommendations for change.

# The devolved administrations...

## Wales

Shooting interests in Wales operate in an increasingly hostile environment. All too often the evidence and science are ignored by politicians, as was seen by the decision last year to ban game shooting on Welsh government land. This decision was taken despite all the evidence to the contrary, including Natural Resources Wales's (NRW) own findings and recommendations.

Although the code of practice for gamebird rearing in Wales has been reviewed using the most up to date evidence and research available, and amended accordingly, the amended code which was circulated at the end of last year has still not been signed off. We have therefore written to the Minister asking her to approve the amended code, and not to give in to pressure from animal rights groups who we know wish to ignore the scientific evidence and advance an anti-shooting agenda.

NRW's new General Licences could have potentially irreversible consequences for wild birds, restricting many from carrying out essential conservation work in the countryside. Despite these shortcomings, Wild Justice is still bringing a legal challenge against the General Licences issued by NRW on the grounds that they are unlawful.

It therefore came as a surprise when NRW issued new licences for stoat trapping that were short,

workable and fit for purpose. This was thanks to a considerable lobbying effort by Countryside Alliance Wales and other stakeholders.

## Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland now has a functioning but fragile government in place which is trying to catch up on the three years of work during which the assembly was suspended, whilst at the same time dealing with COVID-19. Countryside Alliance Ireland continues to assist members who have either received refusal notices or had their firearms removed, making representations on their behalf to the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Firearms and Explosives Branch, and when necessary escalating appeals directly to the Department of Justice and the Justice Minister to achieve a positive outcome for members.

## Republic of Ireland

Countryside Alliance Ireland, in partnership with other stakeholders, has been successful in overturning a decision by the Government in the Irish Republic to ban pigeon shooting during the months of June, July and August. While the Minister claimed the decision had been taken on scientific advice, no evidence was forthcoming when challenged by the Alliance, and having demonstrated the considerable damage that would have been caused by the ban, the Minister had no choice but to overturn it.

*We take every opportunity to promote the considerable benefits of shooting to the environment, the economy, and individuals.*



## The year ahead

During the coming year, the Campaign for Shooting will continue to fight to secure the future of shooting. We will respond to issues as they arise, whether it is attacks on shooting and its associated management practices, or wildlife crimes, and take forward research into the true value of shooting. We will be re-arranging shoot walks both in the uplands and lowlands for MPs, journalists and opinion makers, many of which had to be cancelled this year due to COVID-19. These provide an excellent opportunity actively to promote shooting, and its many benefits, on a face to face basis. In addition, we are establishing an informal group of MPs with moorland constituencies which can be alerted to issues that have an impact on grouse shooting and its management.

### The true value of shooting

There has been a growth in game shooting, as well as a fundamental change in rural and agricultural policy, since the publication of PACEC's report 'The Value of Shooting' in 2014. That report, which was based on the economic and environmental aspects of the sport, also largely omitted the social aspects, and failed to break down the component parts by region / country. We now need to produce a report that is more ambitious, accurately measuring not just the environmental and economic benefits, but also those associated with well-being and public goods. This will be a crucial lobbying tool, enabling us to show the true value of shooting. Our proposal for this new study into the value of shooting has been agreed by the members of the Shoot Liaison Committee, and a working group has been established to take this forward.

*Natural Resources Wales's new general licences could have potentially irreversible consequences for wild birds, restricting many from carrying out essential conservation work in the countryside.*





*Shooting must be seen as part of the solution to environmental concerns; not part of the problem.*

## Media and public relations

The Campaign for Shooting has great success in generating extensive coverage in national, regional and sporting press, on television and radio, and on social media. We challenge robustly any attacks on shooting that are unsubstantiated, and correct any claims that are either incorrect or misleading. We expect balance in reporting and will ask for retractions or the removal of articles, and posts on social media if necessary. We also take every opportunity to promote the considerable benefits of shooting to the environment, the economy and individuals.

## We need your support

The Countryside Alliance plays a pivotal role in promoting and defending shooting, and the Campaign for Shooting enjoys considerable influence and success in doing so. But in order to challenge effectively the many threats that we face, we must have the necessary resources. Your support is essential to our work.

### Shooting badges and sweepstakes

One of the easiest ways to support the Campaign for Shooting is to buy this season's shooting badge, and to encourage your friends to do likewise. The badge costs £100, and all proceeds will go directly towards the work of the Campaign for Shooting, which will include the funding of new research into

the true economic, social and environmental value of shooting, and our share of legal costs incurred in defending Judicial Reviews against game shooting. For those in a position to do so, shoot sweepstakes are also an excellent way in which you can help raise funds for the campaign.

You can order this season's new shooting badge, and download a pdf of this year's shoot sweepstake card at: [www.countryside-alliance.org/seasonbadge](http://www.countryside-alliance.org/seasonbadge).

### Gun Draw

Buying tickets for this year's gun draw is another way in which you can support the Campaign for Shooting. The prize is Longthorne's stunning new Sporter Deluxe Boxlock worth £16,995, and tickets cost just £50. The draw runs from 1 - 30 September, and tickets can be bought online from 1 September at [raffle.countryside-alliance.org](http://raffle.countryside-alliance.org). The winning ticket will be drawn on 2 October.





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