

**Countryside  
Alliance**



# **Campaigning for Shooting 2025-2026**

A year in retrospect,  
and the year ahead



**[countryside-alliance.org](https://countryside-alliance.org)**



# KEY MESSAGES

🔗 The Campaign for Shooting has a key role in promoting and protecting your sport, in Parliament, across the devolved administrations, in the media, and on the ground. Our objectives 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 all levels.

🔗 Working closely with politicians from all parties, the Campaign for Shooting, along with the Alliance's political, policy and media teams, ensure the true value of shooting, its associated management practices, and their considerable environmental, economic and social benefits, are recognised at all levels of government.

🔗 In 2019, Labour's election manifesto pledged to consult on banning driven grouse shooting. Their recent announcement that they have no plans to ban grouse shooting is in no small part down to the Alliance's work in promoting the many benefits of moorland management for driven grouse shooting to parliamentarians and the wider public.

🔗 The government announced on 10 July that it aims to legislate to ban the use of lead in ammunition by Summer 2026, with a three-year transition period. Beyond limited exemptions, these types of ammunition will then no longer be sold to the public. Outdoor rifle shooting ranges must have recovery measures in place after a two-year transition. Small calibre bullets and airguns are not in the scope of the restrictions.

🔗 The government is preparing to consult on restricting shotgun ownership by aligning parts of firearms licensing legislation, which would have enormous impacts on the shooting community, the rural economy and conservation, with negligible improvement to public safety. Instead, it is the creation of a single, centralised licensing body, similar to the DVLA, and full digitisation of databases that are required.

🔗 The government's proposed further restrictions on burning on peatland would make it all but impossible to manage vast areas of our uplands. The proposals lack the evidence base necessary to justify changes to the existing Regulations, and rather than protecting the entire area of upland deep peat, would have significant consequences for the environment and livelihoods.

🔗 The government's announcement that GL45 had been withheld by Defra for 2025 on the grounds that they could not "rule out the risk" of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) spreading to the internationally protected birds present on Special Protection Areas impacted numerous shoots wanting to release gamebirds, with limited Individual Licences being issued instead.

🔗 The government's increase of licensing fees to provide full-cost recovery for police forces was initially made without mention of service level improvement, acknowledgement of costs of mandated medical proformas for licensees or of extending the licence period from five to ten years – made possible by new medical markers. There was also no disclosure of costing calculation. After pressure concessions were made to use funds to improve services.





# INTRODUCTION

Managing the threats to shooting and its associated land management practices is central to our work. **Campaigning for Shooting 2025 – 2026 provides an overview of the main issues with which we have been dealing over the last year and looks ahead to those that we could be dealing with over the next 12 months.**

## Our objectives

The threats facing us are very real, and the Campaign for Shooting has a key role in 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 frequently contacted by politicians and journalists when input on shooting issues is required, and our coverage both in the national and regional media is extensive. Our objectives 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 all levels.



# THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT

## At Westminster

Working closely with politicians from all parties, and with the Alliance's political, policy and media teams, the Campaign for Shooting works to ensure the true value of shooting, its associated management practices, and their considerable environmental, economic and social benefits, are recognised at all levels of government. We also attend the party conferences, holding fringe meetings for MPs and party members, enabling us to continue our engagement with policymakers and to put rural communities in the political spotlight.

## The transition from lead ammunition

The government announced on 10 July that it aims to legislate to ban the use of lead in ammunition by Summer 2026, with a three-year transition period, two years less than the five-year transition that had been recommended by the Health & Safety Executive. The new measures will ban shot containing more than 1% lead and bullets with a lead content of more than 3%. Beyond limited exemptions, these types of ammunition will then no longer be sold to the public. There will also be a two-year period for outdoor rifle shooting ranges to enable them to implement measures to prevent pollution from entering the environment. As part of the restrictions, there will be exemptions in place for the military, police, elite athletes, outdoor target shooting ranges with risk management measures in place, museum collections and other minor uses. Ammunition for rifles smaller than .243 calibre and for airguns are not in scope of the restriction.

## Parliamentary debate on petition to ban grouse shooting

Wild Justice's latest petition to ban driven grouse shooting was debated by MPs in Westminster Hall on 30 June. As was the case when their previous petition was debated in 2021, it was very one sided with MP after MP from across the political spectrum making the case for grouse shooting and its associated management practices, and highlighting how Wild Justice's sweeping claims that grouse shooting is bad for people, the environment and wildlife failed to stand up to even rudimentary scrutiny.

Of the 650 MPs in the House, only Olivia Blake MP (Labour, Sheffield Hallam) spoke in favour of the petition, choosing to disregard all available science and evidence and ignoring the consequences a ban would have on businesses and the lives of those in her constituency who rely on it. While this is the third time this issue has been debated in recent years, it is the first in this Parliament and under a Labour government with a huge majority. It was therefore particularly welcome that the Minister, Daniel Zeichner MP, confirmed that the government had no plans to ban grouse shooting and fully appreciated the economic benefits that accrue from that sector of the rural economy.

It was as recently as 2019 that Labour's election manifesto pledged to consult on banning driven grouse shooting and the U-turn in Labour's stance since then must be in no small part down to the Countryside Alliance's years of work to promote the many benefits of moorland management for driven grouse shooting to parliamentarians and the wider public.





# THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT

## Consultation on heather and grass burning in England

The government's consultation on proposed amendments to The Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021 closed on 25 May. The proposals would make it all but impossible to manage vast areas of our uplands. The Consultation was based on a number of fundamentally flawed assumptions and ignored, or overlooked, the most recent scientific evidence. Some proposals also revealed a total misunderstanding of moorland areas and their management. As a result, the proposals lack the evidence base necessary to justify changes to the existing Regulations. Rather than protecting the entire area of upland deep peat, the proposed changes would have significant negative consequences for the environment and livelihoods. Our response to the Consultation was submitted on 9 May and shared on our website.

## Deregulation of sound moderators

The government has announced that it supports proposals to remove sound moderators from the list of defined "firearms" in the Firearms Act 1968. The announcement came in response to a consultation which closed in April 2024. The enactment of this proposal will come through primary legislation 'when parliamentary time allows', but routes are open for this to be completed this year.



The proposals do not fully deregulate sound moderators - to purchase and own one for a Section I rifle would still require a Firearms Certificate. This deregulation will not apply to sound moderators for air guns in Scotland, as air guns are a devolved matter.

## New fee structure for firearms licensing

In Labour's manifesto there was a commitment to increase firearms licensing fees to provide full-cost recovery for police forces, with the money raised being used to support youth interventions to prevent serious violence. In January, the government announced that these increases would come into effect at the beginning of February, with no mention made of service level improvement, acknowledgement of costs of mandated medical proformas for licensees or of extending the licence period from five to ten years - made possible by new medical markers. There was also no disclosure of the costing calculation. It was only after we raised our concerns regarding this that the Home Office subsequently announced that the increased fees would be used to support police forces in providing an improved service to applicants through better-resourced and trained licensing teams. A new performance framework was also to be developed to provide greater transparency on application turnaround times. The first of these 'league tables' clearly showed that the current system needs root and branch reform and reinforces the case for a long overdue centralised licensing authority, like the DVLA.

## Threats to shotgun ownership

The Countryside Alliance launched an e-lobby as part of its campaign to safeguard the future of shooting in England, Scotland and Wales. The government is preparing to consult on restricting shotgun ownership by aligning parts of firearms licensing legislation, which would have enormous impacts on the shooting community, rural economy and conservation, without improving public safety. The e-lobby allowed people to contact their MP to let them know what impact the government's proposals would really have, the many benefits of shooting that would be threatened and the alternative and necessary actions the government should take to maximise public safety without harming shooting and the countryside. The e-lobby proposed the creation of a centralised licensing body, similar to the DVLA, and the full digitisation of databases instead of changing laws that are already sufficiently stringent.

## General Licence for Special Areas of Conservation

GL43, the General Licence that allows an authorised person to release common pheasants and red-legged partridge on Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or within 500m of their boundary (with the exception of Lundy SAC), was finally published by Defra on 2 May and closely follows the 2024 GL43. This licence will last for two years rather than just one - a welcome step which gives affected shoots a better ability to plan ahead.

## The release of gamebirds on Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

It was announced on 21 March that GL45, the General Licence which in 2024 regulated the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge on or within 500m of 85 SPAs, had been withheld by Defra for 2025 on the grounds that they could not "rule out the risk" of HPAI spreading to the internationally protected birds present on SPAs. Instead, shoots wishing to release have been required to apply to Natural England for an Individual Licence, the issuing of which has been severely restricted. There is only one SPA where release at the usual time of year is likely to be permitted, 17 SPAs where release may only be permitted in the Autumn, and the rest where release will likely not be permitted at all. In preventing the release of gamebirds, which has a debatable impact on wild birds, the habitat management and predator control by gamekeepers will also cease, which will have a negative impact on the very wild bird species that warranted the SPA designation in the first place. The responsibility for granting or withholding licences has also been transferred back from Defra to Natural England. This is regarded as a retrograde step as Natural England has previously shown itself incapable of effectively managing its current workload in this area.

## Police firearms licensing

As part of our ongoing firearms licensing campaign, we have been calling for full digitisation of the national firearms database for the 43 separate police forces in England and Wales. We have therefore welcomed the recent announcement by the Home Office that the National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS) has been put out to tender. However, although this is a positive step, it will not fix the broken firearms licensing framework in England and Wales.

An amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill that sought to require police firearms licensing departments to be inspected for efficiency and effectiveness by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary was rejected by the Bill Committee in May, despite the known failings of many police forces.



## The use of raised laying units (RLUs)

On 16 June 2025 MPs debated the use of 'cages' in farming, which could have become an opportunity for MPs to attack the use of enriched RLUs in pheasant and partridge rearing. The Countryside Alliance, along with the Game Farmers' Association, briefed several MPs who were poised to step in if shooting or game rearing came under attack. In the event this was not necessary, and it was welcome that the Minister, Daniel Zeichner MP, defended the already robust Defra Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes.

## The use of rodenticides

From 1 January 2025 it has been illegal to use second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides in open areas other than in connection with a building. From 1 January 2026, anyone wishing to purchase professional rodenticides must either hold a certificate from an approved training course completed within the last five years or combine an older certificate with active membership in a Continuing Professional Development scheme approved by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use UK. On passing the course, participants receive the certification required to purchase professional rodenticides, which is valid for five years.



## The importance of predator control

A new study by the GWCT, which revisited a predator control exercise undertaken in Northumberland between 2001 and 2008, shows the devastating ecological impact of the withdrawal of legal predator control. During the original experiment, foxes and crows were controlled and ground-nesting birds experienced a dramatic improvement in breeding success, with populations of moorland species such as curlew, lapwing, golden plover, and red grouse seeing significant increases. However, within just a decade of stopping predator management, red grouse numbers dropped by 71%, golden plover by 81%, snipe by 76%, curlew by 24%, and lapwing by 58%. Meanwhile, fox numbers rose by 78%, and carrion crows by 127%, as black grouse and grey partridge became locally extinct. Importantly, the habitat was largely unchanged, suggesting that the cessation of predator control was the key driver in bird population declines.



## Aim to Sustain

With the relentless threats to shooting, it is essential that the work of shooting organisations is complementary and coherent when lobbying in parliaments and the media. Aim to Sustain, the umbrella partnership of major shooting organisations ensures this is the case, using the Countryside Alliance's considerable political expertise and in-depth knowledge of the Campaign for Shooting, the specialisations of other partner organisations, and supported by the GWCT's depth of scientific research.

## RSPB's 2023 Birdcrime Report

As in previous years, the RSPB's 2023 Birdcrime Report published in October 2024 is a blatant lobbying tool in their persistent campaign against game shooting, manipulating data in a deliberate attempt to conceal the continuing downward trend in the number of confirmed incidents of illegal persecution of birds of prey. Instead, it is calling for game shooting to be licensed in order to address what it claims is the relentless killing of birds of prey, a claim that cannot be substantiated by its own figures.

## A disappointing year for hen harriers

2024 was a disappointing one for hen harrier breeding success due to appalling weather during the breeding season. It is, however, important to keep the figures in perspective as they are still significantly higher than any of those recorded prior to Natural England issuing the first licence for Brood Management in 2018. Before that, the highest number of successful nests had been in 2005 when 15 were recorded, and the highest number of chicks fledged was 46 in 2006. Last year's figures of 25 successful nests and 80 chicks fledged are therefore still significantly higher than any of those recorded prior to the start of the Trial.

## Complaint to the BBC over biased article on grouse shooting

We made a formal complaint to the BBC about an article on grouse shooting which was full of misinformation and bias. It was put on the BBC Wildlife website, having been published in the BBC Wildlife Magazine. In its response, the BBC denied any responsibility for content in BBC branded publications.

## Avian Influenza

During the last 12 months there have been outbreaks of HPAI across England and Wales, resulting in periods of widespread housing orders and disease control zones. Although predominantly affecting seabird colonies and commercial laying hen flocks, there have also been outbreaks in game rearing and shooting operations. Besides the immediate effects for those with infected flocks, the wider impact of the heightened risk of HPAI in wild birds has resulted in Natural England's risk-averse assessment of gamebird release licensing and their refusal to issue GL45, preventing many shoots from operating in the 2025/26 season. Vigilance and strict adherence to the highest levels of biosecurity remain essential to combat the disease and its impacts.

## Scotland

The implementation of a new licensing scheme for trap users which was to have been in place in early 2025 has been delayed until the autumn. Training for trap users is already underway, with the Scottish Countryside Alliance having helped develop the course. Trap licence numbers will not be issued to accredited users until at least September.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance continues to engage with the Scottish Government and NatureScot in relation to The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and proposed deer management legislation relating to deer numbers which is currently passing through the parliament. We are asking for legislation that recognises deer management operations as an important part of the Scottish government's net zero plans. NatureScot and the Scottish Government are also developing new ways of regulating activities, such as full cost recovery for all wildlife licences, as well as firearms licensing. We are working with Ministers to help ensure any new legislation is proportionate and fair.

## Wales

No further progress has been made by the Welsh government to introduce a licensing system for the release of gamebirds in Wales, and even if the decision is taken to do so, it is now questionable whether there is sufficient time before the Senedd elections in May 2026. Countryside Alliance Wales continues to meet Senedd Members, setting out our opposition to licensing.

The League Against Cruel Sports and others opposed to game shooting continue to call for a review of gamebird rearing practices in Wales. A demonstration outside the Senedd showed barren cages as opposed to the enriched raised laying units that are used in game farming, and which are fully compliant with the Animal Welfare Act and the Welsh government's statutory code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds. A joint paper explaining this was produced for Senedd Members by Countryside Alliance Wales and the Game Farmers' Association.

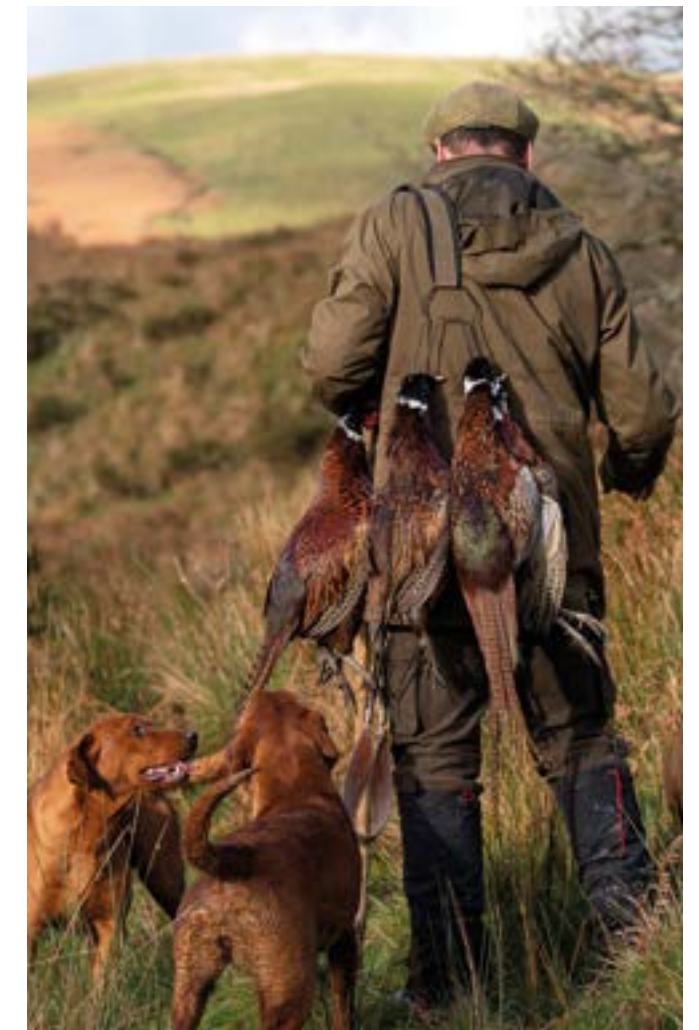
The Welsh government has published its response to the consultation on the licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits, including greyhound racing. It has announced that it will maintain a watching brief on animal exhibits. Previous proposals had included the licensing of mobile exhibits such as gun dog displays. We will continue to campaign strongly against these proposals.

## Northern Ireland

Delays continue in the processing of complex firearms licence applications. While we welcome the news that additional staff are being trained within the Firearms & Explosives Branch (FEB), Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) continues to press for meaningful reform to reduce the unacceptable 12-18 month waiting times.

We have highlighted serious governance and financial concerns within FEB, including a £2 million overspend, an increase of £1.7 million since 2018. CAI also contributed to a BBC feature on firearms seizures, ensuring the voice of the law-abiding shooting community and lawful firearms ownership was heard in a balanced discussion.

John Blair MLA of the Alliance Party has begun the process of reintroducing his divisive Hunting with Dogs Bill, despite its defeat in the previous mandate. Although he insists that the Bill will not impact shooting interests, his earlier proposal risked criminalising gundog owners, and the Bill again seeks to ban the use of terrier work; an essential practice for protecting game birds. CAI has met John Blair to robustly challenge the Bill's reintroduction.





# THE YEAR AHEAD

Looking ahead, there are a number of issues we expect to face. Wild Justice has said they will not be giving up when it comes to the fight to end driven grouse shooting, despite the failure of its latest petition, and the RSPB can be expected to use every opportunity to continue calling for the licensing of grouse shooting. The government has announced it will introduce the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation, there is the possibility of a new Wildlife and Countryside Act, and animal rights groups will continue to press for a ban on snaring. Other issues are likely to include the burning of vegetation on peatland, the release of gamebirds, and the ongoing issue of HPAI with all its implications. Undoubtedly, there will be more, which we will deal with as they arise.

## The future of humane restraints as a management tool

The Labour Party committed to banning what it called “snare traps” in its 2024 General Election manifesto, which could include humane restraints. Whilst the Countryside Alliance fully supports a ban on non-code-compliant snares, we need to ensure that humane restraints are not subject to a ban on “snare traps”. As a legitimate, humane and effective means of fox control, they are a vital tool to protect livestock, gamebirds and vulnerable wild species, especially in areas where other control techniques are either ineffective or impracticable.

## Representation on Committees and Steering Groups

The Campaign for Shooting is represented on all those committees and steering groups, whose decisions could directly impact game shooting. Our involvement is essential if we are to safeguard the interests of our members. In the last 12 months, issues covered have included firearms licensing, lead ammunition, licences for the control of wild birds, licences for the release of gamebirds, predator control, moorland management and burning, the control of avian influenza, and shooting leases.



# WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

It is essential that we have the necessary resources to challenge effectively the numerous threats to shooting and its associated management practices. The income from membership subscriptions alone is insufficient to cover our costs, and we are therefore extremely grateful to those who so very generously donate shooting either as an auction lot or draw prize, and to all those who bid or buy tickets for these, as well as for our gun draws. We are also extremely grateful to the Bereleigh Estate for the significant sum it raises through its highly popular annual ‘Lobster Shoot’,

and to the Warter Priory Estate for having the Countryside Alliance as one of the joint beneficiaries of this year’s charity clay shoot which raised the huge sum of £150,000 for the Alliance. The estate has very generously agreed that we are also to be one of the two joint beneficiaries of next year’s charity clay shoot from 14 to 16 May 2026. The funds raised by this marvellous event will be of considerable importance to the Alliance, so do please help support us by entering a team.



## Shooting badges and sweepstakes

You can also help support us, and be seen to be doing so, by buying this season’s new shooting badge and encouraging your friends to do likewise. All proceeds go directly towards the work of the Campaign for Shooting. You can purchase your badge by scanning the QR code:



For those in a position to do so, shoot sweepstakes are another excellent and enjoyable way in which you can raise funds for the Campaign for Shooting. This year’s new sweepstake card can be obtained from [info@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:info@countryside-alliance.org).



**Countryside Alliance**, China Works, 100 Black Prince Road, London, SE1 7SJ

**E:** [shooting@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:shooting@countryside-alliance.org)

**W:** [countryside-alliance.org](http://countryside-alliance.org)

©Countryside Alliance 2025



[countryside-alliance.org](http://countryside-alliance.org)