

# Petitioner submission of 14 March 2024

## PE1859/RR: Retain falconers' rights to practise upland falconry in Scotland

During the passage of PE1859, I have reported a number of times of the direct impact of current legislation upon my Golden Eagles. Stanley our male (who has started self mutilating due to his government enforced inactivity) appeared with the committee at Holyrood, and our female who now has her own story.

My Golden Eagle is 24 years old and flew her winters over the mountains of the Cairngorms and Grampians and would occasionally take a mountain hare.

The relationship that forms between an eagle and falconer is based entirely on trust and loyalty which, if ever broken by the falconer, is NEVER forgiven by the eagle. We ultimately exist in a position of servitude to the eagle. We give them our time effort, our hearts and souls. We burn our muscles and lungs in exertion as we traverse the high places in brutal weather to get them to 'their' places, where they can truly be eagles. We owe them that, and spend our lives either giving it to them, or thinking about doing so.

Eagles are long lived (at 24, my female is around middle aged) and the reality is that in a falconers life, he or she may barely have the resources, fitness and energy to dedicate to two eagles in their lives. A falconer and their eagle will be together for far longer than most marriages last. Two or three times longer than your children will stay at home. It is a lifelong commitment.

Our male (Stanley) came here and was flown by Roxanne because we hoped to breed him with the female. It is a perfect life completing circle for a falconer to fly a bird for its whole long life, and at the mid point, have the loyal adult eagle produce a youngster so you can fly their progeny too.

This breeding cycle also gives complete fulfilment to an eagle. Working and flying hard to 'survive' through winter, and produce young during the calmer months of early spring and summer as is their instinct. It is complete satisfaction for the eagle, (and a tremendous boost for the conservation of species) and for our female, as a bird that has her whole

life (until the passing of legislation) flown over the mountains of Scotland for hours at the time at stupendous height - she is truly a magnificent eagle - is what has created demand for her to appear 'as wild' on film and documentaries aired across the world.

Genes like hers are those that we should secure and cherish, ensuring we always have the best genetics in captivity to support wild populations where needed. Wild eagles don't bumble around flat fields in Glasgow chasing stoats as the Government seems to think they do!

The point is, because of government legislation, I have had to keep my female eagle and Stanley apart. Breeding them would create an eagle destined to NEVER be able to be flown like an eagle and express itself as we are legally bound to allow by flying in a way that allows 'The Freedom to express behaviour natural to the species'. I would not want to demean an eagle to fly (I use the word 'fly' loosely) in the way government says we must, and an eagle trained to fly the way she does, cannot be repurposed to do something completely different.

Furthermore, the value of eagles in this country has utterly collapsed because of the legislation. Nobody wants to take on an eagle that they can't allow to fly like an eagle at its natural quarry. Eagles are slow growing and slow to mature, so the breeding cycle is long, and the food demands are very high (and expensive). I now cannot justify breeding a Golden Eagle because I do not want to condemn a young bird to a half life, and because it is no longer financially viable to produce one. Like the mountain hare, the government has completely devalued eagles.

To the point of this submission. Hearing each other from a distance, Stanley and the female eagle call to each other a great deal, and now, at 24 years old, in an aviary that she has now lived in for 3 years and with no male beside her and no nest, the female eagle has produced her first egg. We have the event on CCTV (date stamped) and it is absolutely heart wrenching. My ultimate hope and dream of the past 20+ years in touching distance, but unattainable. An eagle now incubating a precious egg that will never hatch, just like any other she may lay under the current legislation. Potential genes never realised or secured.

In short, a life of flying, training and skills honed and genes ready to flourish, all utterly wasted. My heart broken. My eagles point of existence erased and denied.

To give my eagle her life, and her point of existence back, (and that of many others) I ask that the government amends current legislation around mountain hares with the line 'Except for the purpose of falconry'.