

Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity submission of 28 November 2023

PE2035/D: Recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act

You have stated that there is a perceived contradiction between NatureScot's recommendations on capercaillie conservation and the Scottish Government's communication through my Ministerial statement.

I would like to clarify that the Scottish Government agrees that predator control can be an important component of species conservation alongside other techniques such as habitat management and translocation as previously set out in the Scottish Government's response to this petition.

However, whilst predator control can be an important conservation tool it was not the only action recommended in regards to capercaillie conservation. Following consideration of the Review of Capercaillie Conservation and Management report, the below suite of actions are being taken forward by NatureScot and the CNPA which aim to aid capercaillie recovery alongside supporting the restoration of the wider native pinewoods flora and fauna:

1. Further investment in action to achieve landscape-scale restoration of pinewood habitat over the long-term;
2. Generalist predator population survey work to better understand the size and impact of the predator suite, including policy principles and tests that would need to be met for management of any protected species with a demonstrable impact on capercaillie;
3. Development of a costed, spatially-explicit plan of positive management measures, including reducing disturbance, expansion of diversionary feeding of predators and fence marking or removal.

I believe NatureScot have already written to you setting out their reasons for this approach. I have repeated these below for ease of reference:

Whilst a reduction in predation is part of the suite of SAC recommendations, lethal predator control is not the primary NatureScot recommendation, not least because it is already

available as a conservation tool. There is evidence that an increase in some novel nest predators in recent years may be contributing to a decline in capercaillie breeding success, but examination of the evidence available concluded there was uncertainty in how the guild of predators would respond to lethal control measures. For example, one (or more) individual may simply move into the space created by the removal of another, or a reduction in the number of one predatory species may lead to a numerical increase in another, resulting in no net benefit.

In addition, the SAC Sub group report concluded that removal of predators was only likely to be effective over a large scale, for many years. This widespread removal of a suite of species is not compatible with the overall biodiversity goals of the CNPA Park Partnership Plan.

A study by the University of Aberdeen which is just completing on diversionary feeding (using deer carcasses) of predators has shown significant promise as an alternative.

I hope this clarifies the Scottish Government's position.

Lorna Slater MSP