

RSPB submission of 15 March 2024

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

I am writing to the committee in reference to a comment that was made by Mr Alex Hogg of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association during a committee session on the 6th of March 2024, and the consideration of petition PE2035. In his evidence to the committee Mr Hogg stated that there are “no white hares at Abernethy...RSPB reserve”. This is completely untrue.

Mountain, or white hares (*Lepus timidus*), are found throughout the reserve from the high montane habitats to the forest edge, with recent habitat restoration works on peatlands and grazing likely to benefit the population further.

Records of mountain hares across the reserve have remained consistent with little sign of the highly cyclical population highs and lows often experienced on intensively managed grouse moors. This is likely due to the multitude of habitat types provided at Abernethy, offering different opportunities for food and shelter across the season.

Mountain hares are a key part of the Abernethy ecosystem, grazing vegetation from the high peaks to the forest edge and an important prey item for threatened predators like Golden Eagle and White-Tailed Eagle – which are also present and breeding at Abernethy. Our work at Abernethy provides the species with a naturally functioning ecosystem that can continue to support a healthy, stable population.

If any of the committee would like to visit Abernethy to see the work we are undertaking at this amazing site, then you would of course be most welcome.

Head of Species and Land Management