

For the attention of members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

Statement in support of Petition PE1750: Independent Monitoring of Satellite Tags fitted to raptors.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) would welcome any moves the Parliament can make which will see the deployment of satellite tags become more transparent and accountable in future.

We also appreciate that some research projects are already using them in such an open manner. We commend this work and its transparency.

We do not believe this is the case in all circumstances, however, and wanted to notify Committee members of an experience we, as an organisation, encountered last year.

The SGA, in collaboration with a moorland group in Scotland and a conservation enterprise, with considerable experience in this field, hoped to be able to fit a tag to a Golden eagle and make the data open to the public, with live updates on an open app.

By giving land managers in the area 'ownership' of the project, we hoped to contribute to eagle conservation in the area whilst espousing the type of open-ness we, ourselves, would value. The nature of the collaboration may also have led to further positive joint working towards conservation ends.

The collaboration visited a nest and identified a suitable Eagle chick. Thereafter, the project encountered road blocks which, ultimately, debarred the project from happening.

The SGA learned, through conversations with the conservation partner, that no one would tag the bird and, indeed, that those willing to do so- appreciating the progressive nature of the venture and its potential- were being subjected to the threat of future work being removed from them, if they agreed to be an accessory to the collaborative venture.

This proved to be a disheartening process for all and, judging by this experience (the only close-quarter experience we have had) satellite tagging would appear to operate in a 'closed shop' environment where only the select in-group can participate. Influential individuals within the conservation/campaigning world would appear able to exert a strong grip on projects and its actors. We wonder why this should be the case, given the many public claims to open-ness and we leave the Committee members, individually, to make their own minds up as to why this should be so.

Frustrated by our experience, we notified NatureScot, privately, regarding what the attempted collaboration had experienced. They expressed a sympathy for our experience but were not able to get to the bottom of what occurred through their own conversations. Our understanding was that it was denied by BTO, who grant the appropriate licences, although it may have been blocked before even reaching them.

Regardless of how this Petition progresses, we wanted to make members aware of this so they can get an idea of the culture which appears to surround raptor tagging.

The SGA acknowledges that wildlife crime exists, does not condone it and supports work to move forward from it. We support legal solutions and giving land managers and others genuine tools to deal with human/wildlife conflicts which inevitably happen. We will continue to work with Scottish Government and NatureScot on the matter of legal solutions, in line with our organisational stance.

Yours,

The Committee of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association. June 27th, 2022.