

Written submission from Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

Stakeholder evidence on the 2015-16 Interim Review of “Scotland’s Biodiversity: A Route Map to 2020”

About Us:

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) is a charity that conducts research into Britain’s game and wildlife. We use the 1,122 scientific papers we have published in peer-reviewed journals to provide advice to statutory bodies including; SNH, SGRPD, Defra, and Natural England.

We also turn our science, conducted in collaboration with other institutions including; the James Hutton Institute, SRUC, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the RSPB, into practical guides that help farmers and landowners improve the biodiversity on their land.

To help disseminate this knowledge we manage a 500ha demonstration farm in Aberdeenshire and sit on over 100 external committees including; the PAW Executive, CAP Stakeholder Group, Scotland’s Moorland Forum and the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Panel.

Why we are submitting evidence:

After 75 years of research into what makes and drives effective wildlife and habitat conservation we feel that that Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS):

1. Contains appropriate Big Steps and Priority Project aims which if delivered effectively could improve Scottish Biodiversity.
2. The SBS could be made more effective by attending to three issues:
 - Increasing policy support for trials of new approaches to conservation using adaptive management (*addressing Priority Project 9: Conservation of priority species Langholm Moor Demonstration Project; Priority Project 9 – Developing a suite of species focussed projects - Curlew*)
 - Increasing support for ‘top-down’ rather than ‘bottom-up’ approaches which use land managers to best effect (*addressing Priority Project 9 – Developing a suite of species focussed projects – Curlew; Priority Project 10: Improving ecological connection – National Ecological Network*)
 - Improving co-ordination between Government strategies and agencies interacting with land managers (*addressing Priority Projects 1 & 2: Restoration of peatlands and native woodlands; Priority Project 11: Sustainable Land Management – Demonstration Farms*)

1. SBS Big Steps and Priority Projects (PPs)

- a. The SBS has had some valuable successes, and we particularly welcome the attention paid to PP9: Conservation of Priority Species and PP11: Sustainable Land Management.

- b. We draw attention to other landscape scale projects such as ECAF (Environmental Co-operation Action Fund), the work of the CNPA (Cairngorms National Park Authority), the support of the MacRobert Trust and European Union in developing farmer-clusters with GWCT in Aberdeenshire, Fife and Mid-Lothian which will complement numbers of priority projects.
- c. The work of Scotland's Moorland Forum with its 'Understanding Predation' and 'Principles of Moorland Management' will also contribute to the PP9: Conservation of Priority Species and PP11: Sustainable Land Management goals.

2. Improving action in SBS

- a. These (1b, c) projects highlight that most of Scotland is not designated for conservation, and that the wider landscape is critical for delivery of Scottish biodiversity. Species conservation has no correct single approach but typically can be improved by improving survival and breeding success locally and improving connectivity widely. Species and habitat management thus work together to complete conservation management. Productive land management (farming, shooting, fishing) should be supported as a driver of conservation management and thus biodiversity. Land and Conservation management should be adaptive, changing as climate, species, habitats and socio-economic drivers alter. Policy should enable and incentivise adaptive management, making best use of current legislation, conservation easements, biodiversity offsets and paying for ecosystem services.
- b. We believe 6 of the Priority Project Actions that have not made satisfactory progress could be addressed bearing these principles in mind. We lay these out below:

Priority Project 9: Conservation of priority species Langholm Moor Demonstration Project; Priority Project 9: Developing a suite of species focussed projects - Curlew

- c. These priority project actions need increased policy support for trials of new approaches to conservation using adaptive management principles.
- d. Adaptive management approaches, where management is undertaken, the effects are related to target population changes and then further adapted to achieve stated goals, have been used by SNH with success to address goose impacts. Some of the potential for such approaches in addressing predation pressure have been identified by Scotland's Moorland Forum's 'Understanding Predation' project.
- e. The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project has been unable to reduce the number of grouse deaths and increase the number of grouse chicks sufficiently to allow driven grouse shooting, which appears to be the only sensible economic driver for ongoing moorland and grouse

management. One reason for this is that 78% of adult grouse deaths are attributable to raptors. It appears likely that adaptive management, beyond diversionary feeding, may be required to address this predation impact. Policy support for driven shooting as a driver of biodiversity management and policy support for management which may require licensing could be necessary.

- f. Curlew numbers and range are in sharp decline. One apparent constraint on new projects starting to manage for wading birds is the concern that there may be uncontrollable predation pressure from currently protected species. The policy issue is therefore like the LMDP in that policy support may be needed for licensed management.

3. *Priority Project 9: Developing a suite of species focussed projects – Curlew*

Priority Project 10: Improving ecological connection – National Ecological Network

Priority Project 11: Sustainable land management – targeted support

- a. These priority project actions need to focus on what farmers, keepers, foresters and fishers are willing to do and require support to achieve.
- b. We and RSPB believe targeted support through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (PP11) for an approach which supports targeted seasonal predator control in suitable habitat areas would make a significant difference to conserving the curlew (PP9). The work of Scotland's Moorland Forum with its 'Understanding Predation' project has identified that supporting groups of land managers to deliver best practice habitat and predation control could benefit curlew and a number of other ground nesting birds.
- c. Landscape scale projects such as the National Ecological Network (PP10) also rely on bringing together and facilitating the discussions and work of groups of land managers. Projects such as ECAF (Environmental Co-operation Action Fund), the work of the CNPA (Cairngorms National Park Authority) with Moorland managers, the support of the MacRobert Trust and European Union in developing farmer-clusters with GWCT in Aberdeenshire, Fife and Mid-Lothian rely on this approach which will complement numbers of priority projects.

4. *Priority Project 2: Restoration of native woodlands*

Priority Project 11: Sustainable Land Management – Demonstration Farms

- a. These priority project actions would benefit from better co-ordination between Government strategies and agencies interacting with land managers
- b. Many parts of the SBS require land manager's adoption and support but it is reported to us that this is being suppressed by the perceived

poor linkage between national strategies including the SBS, the National Peatland Plan, the Land Use Strategy, Forestry Strategy, National Park Plans and possible Moorland Vision. Clarifying the interactions of these plans and the goals and objectives of the agencies acting through them would encourage land managers to take further action for biodiversity, particularly perhaps under PP2: restoration of native woodlands which is commonly perceived as conflicting with our national goal of enhancing moorlands.

- c. GWCT Scotland, as do the James Hutton Institute and SRUC, runs a demonstration farm – ours is on Deeside. The GWCT also runs the Allerton Project farm in England. This has become a centre for excellence in combining farm production with nature conservation and hosted 40,000 visitors in 2015. We have been disappointed that funding for a Scottish demonstration farm network has not been available, so it has not been possible to progress this action (PP11) beyond joint co-ordination of biodiversity monitoring between GWCT, JHI and SRUC. Such a network is highly desirable as it is a deliverable aim under PP11 because it would also demonstrate how to achieve PP2-4, 8-10 and would help deliver PP5-6.

5. Conclusion

- a. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is a challenge to meet by 2020.
- b. To meet some of the remaining targets increased focus now needs to be placed on supporting land managers, to facilitate their own initiatives and advise on how to improve best practice.
- c. This support will be partly financial but much can be achieved through policy support.