

## **Written Submission from the Scottish Gamekeepers Association**

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the ECCLR Committee on the 2014-2015 Wildlife Crime report.

### Background:

The SGA represents 5300 gamekeepers, stalkers, river and land ghillies, wildlife managers and rangers in Scotland. The organisation has a clear and consistent message regarding wildlife crime. Any member convicted of a wildlife crime will be removed from the organisation. The SGA advocates only legal solutions to resolving species conflicts.

### Wildlife Crime- Actions:

Tackling wildlife crime is a priority for the SGA. Each wildlife crime incident undermines the organisation's progress in this regard. Having the actions of a few undermine the valuable work of the majority of our members cannot be tolerated by the SGA. Five members in five years have been removed from the organisation for wildlife crime convictions. As a membership organisation with no 'policing' function, this is the ultimate sanction open to the SGA Committee.

### Other actions taken/ continuing to be taken:

- The SGA is a long-standing partner in PAW Scotland, represented in both the raptor priority group and media sub-group.
- The SGA is a partner in the recently established Highland PAW group and is a partner in a number of wider rural crime prevention initiatives.
- Education: The SGA publicises its Wildlife Crime message at Game Fairs, regional meetings, events, through its quarterly member magazine and other media outputs.
- Encouraging Enlightened Behaviour: The SGA has established a system of two yearly reporting of Eagle nests/territories on members' ground in CNPA areas and Angus. Reports from 2013 and 2015 showed a slight but welcome increase (58 compared to 53). This is to be extended to the north of Scotland in future counts.
- The SGA is an approved training body for the delivery of The Snares (Training) (Scotland) Order 2015. The SGA is also an approved trainer for the new compulsory Rodenticide Courses.
- The SGA actively promoted and helped to deliver the Scottish Government's Pesticide Disposal Scheme in 2015.
- The SGA was one of 4 stakeholders who provided oral evidence during Lord Bonomy's Review of fox hunting in Scotland.
- In 2017 The SGA will hold regional roadshow-style events to promote and discuss legal solutions and options open to members to resolve species conflicts. As well as educating and removing membership, the SGA's strategy includes advocating the legal solutions available to mitigate conflicts, written into the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

- The SGA has a Memorandum of Understanding with PAW Scotland which encourages ghillie or gamekeeper members to report suspicious activity at known freshwater pearl mussel sites by following agreed protocols.

### Comments on the Wildlife Crime Report 2014-2015.

The SGA is encouraged by the report's overall findings, which details an improving picture, although concerns remain.

- Fish poaching remains the only type of recorded wildlife crime where there is a measurable increase, both in 2015 (up 12 per cent) and across the five year data (up 19 per cent). This is a significant statistic from the report in that it is the most evidenced indicator of a worsening trend. All other forms of wildlife crime are generally on a downward curve. The SGA is not in a position to comment on whether adequate resources or priority is given to tackling this type of crime. Indeed, the report would point at a fairly consistent approach from respective enforcement agencies. However, the lack of public profile given to such crimes, perhaps due to emphasis being diverted more towards raptor or animal cruelty cases, may promote the view that illegal activity in this area engenders less public scrutiny. This may be unhelpful in prevention. There may also be a cultural view that, as this is perceived to be more a crime against 'property' rather than wildlife per se, it is deserving of less attention. This, again, may hinder moves to prevent poaching.
- Five year data in the report is- and will be- an effective measure of assessing wildlife crime priorities. Changes to how wildlife crime is presented in these annual reports are welcome. Factoring in data from all agencies tasked with the detection and investigation of wildlife crime provides confidence that the reports provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of Wildlife Crime in Scotland and afford the ability to assess trends, enabling partners to analyse how single high profile events such as the mass pesticide abuse incident at Conon Bridge 2013/2014 sit within these wider trends.
- Public awareness: Statistics over the five year period in the report suggests there is a high level of awareness amongst the general public of wildlife crime, particularly raptor crime, as well as a willingness to report suspected crimes to SSPCA, RSPB and Police Scotland, as reflected in the consistently high number of submissions to SAC Consulting for post mortem. SSPCA, through its Special Investigations Unit, is investigating substantively more wildlife crime cases itself today compared to five years ago (94 cases in 2015 compared to 53 in 2010), although reporting less to COPFS than 2010 (7 per cent in 2015 compared to 12 per cent in 2010). There can be confidence, therefore, that the profile given to wildlife crime, particularly bird of prey crime, is continuing to encourage the reporting of suspected crimes to agencies including NGOs and under-reporting of suspected wildlife crime should continue to diminish.
- Improvements in Investigative Techniques: The report notes that SASA's specialist DNA unit investigated 10 cases using non-human DNA to provide leads in 2015 compared to 4 cases in 2010. Such innovations are likely to

increase the ability of enforcement agencies to secure successful prosecutions in future.

- Changes to the Law and deterrents: It is the SGA's view that the aforementioned factors; greater intelligence, increased public awareness and improvement in investigative techniques (securing prosecutions) are likely to point towards a continuing steady fall in wildlife crime in Scotland. The reporting period, which shows a welcome overall drop of 20 per cent in wildlife crime incidents in Scotland within 5 years also encompasses significant changes to the law in that time, chiefly the introduction of the offence of Vicarious Liability and a notice of intent by SNH to impose restrictions to the use of General Licences where wildlife crimes are suspected. These changes, in our view, have acted as a significant deterrent to wildlife crime. The commitment by Scottish Government to bring forward recommendations for tougher sentencing, outlined in the report by Professor Poustie, will act as a further deterrent which, we hope, will lead to this downward trend continuing and dropping further.
- Raptor Persecution: Crimes against raptors represent the second highest volume in the report, after fish poaching. Such crimes command the highest level of public attention. The SGA is encouraged by the steady decline in raptor crime in the 5 year period. Offences against wild birds decreased by 4 offences or 8 per cent last year, with an overall decrease of 17 per cent in five years. The organisation is also encouraged that shooting, trapping and poisoning offences have not increased in the reporting period and that 78 per cent of bird crimes over the past 5 years, brought by COPFS, have resulted in the perpetrator/perpetrators being convicted. We understand that 2016 is expected to show further improvements, pointing to this being a form of wildlife crime which is under control and declining. That said, every incident of wildlife crime against raptors is a crime no one wants and the SGA will continue to act should any of its members be convicted of such an offence. It is important for Committee members to note that, despite media reporting, not all bird crime can be attributed to the game industry and the report, in focusing on available evidence, makes no such distinctions.