**Evidence on improving benefits from driven grouse shooting from Rob Yorke FRICS**

As a rural chartered surveyor I have been involved in managing projects for over 25 years that often involve conflict. I also wear another hat as an independent commentator on rural affairs.

The conflict around driven grouse shooting (DGS) is not between humans and wildlife, but between human interests as explored by Messrs Redpath etc al. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/tilting-at-wildlife-reconsidering-humanwildlife-conflict/8CBF762319F5340BA6A7A8D3721F867A>

The interests of those in raptors conflicts with those interests in DGS <http://www.thefield.co.uk/country-house/conservation-conflict-ending-conflict-32001> – this is why the matter is being debated by MPs.

There is no doubt that some DGS moors have utilised illegal practices such as removal of raptors in order to increase wild game bird numbers.

But the matter of controlling (lethal and non-lethal) wildlife to enable a business to remain viable, is a political ‘hot potato’ with many subjective judgements being made on the motive of the applicant. A free-range chicken farmer may gain a licence to remove a buzzard but a released or wild pheasant shoot may not without public outcry. Montagu’s harrier’s eggs are removed from in front of combine harvesters for incubation (see below\*) and bullfinches, a red listed bird, may be culled by licence if having an unavoidable impact on commercial nurseries <http://www.adlib.ac.uk/resources/000/094/963/TIN032.pdf>

Historical context is important in setting out this issue – the National Trust used to allow killing of birds of prey in their game leases 50 years ago - and I have written a guest blog for the RSPB’s Martin Harper around the subject <http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/martinharper/archive/2016/02/17/bird-crime-a-shooters-view-draft-27-1-guest-blog-for-martin-harper.aspx>

I was involved in writing up the science within the 7 year review of the RSPB/GWCT/NE/SNH and landowner partnership Langholm Moor Demonstration Project <http://www.langholmproject.com/PDF%20downloads/7yr%20review.pdf>

(In brief for RICS Land journal <http://robyorke.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/04/RICS.Land_.langholm.pdf>)

The key outcome is how hard it is to maintain wild bird numbers to ensure a commercially viable return to cover the costs of running the shoot and more importantly, the costs of the conservation works, that have wider benefits beyond DGS. See my piece for CountryFile Magazine <http://www.countryfile.com/article/wildlife-wildlife-stories/grouse-ban-call>

Some of the potential outcomes from banning driven grouse shooting are explored in this guest blog – with links to scientific evidence - that I undertook for Mark Avery <http://markavery.info/2014/08/06/guest-blog-silence-guns-rob-yorke/>

The focus on humans in this matter diverts our attention from other factors that can impact on some of our rarer wildlife - in Skye where no DGS takes place, foxes have an impact on ground nesting and roosting hen harriers <http://robyorke.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Skye-harrier-nest-predation-report.pdf>

‘Cool’ burning of heather (unlike damaging ‘hot’ burns that eat into the soil/peat, ‘cool’ burns remove only the vegetation) can be improved alongside acknowledging more nuance on defining the differences between ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ moorland and **improving code of practices that enhance how land management can be enhanced.** I fear that over-regulation could snuff out the good work done to date on many upland SSSIs that have no other form of funding to aid their recovering status.

We can come together to find ways to remove ‘the need’ to continue illegally persecuting raptors. The Hen Harrier Action Plan can work. Scientific evidence provides the basis for successful harrier translocation (known as hacking\*) - see <http://www.conservationevidence.com/actions/574> but public opinion issues cloud the scientific ability to explore the public benefit from pilot studies on the brave new conservation actions required.

I’ll leave the last word to an expert from the front line (via a news item in Country Life <https://twitter.com/blackgull/status/727778224651026432>

***“To resolve conflict you need to be objective, wise brave and above all, honest. Sadly, these qualities got lost in the politics”*** *Simon Lester* (retired headkeeper from [Langholm Moor Demo Project](http://www.langholmproject.com/))

***Rob Yorke*** [***www.robyorke.co.uk***](http://www.robyorke.co.uk)