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Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: PE1490

Main Petitioner: Patrick Krause (On behalf of 'Scottish Crofting Federation')

Subject: Control of wild goose numbers

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

Background

Scotland hosts large populations of geese that spend the winter within its border and has obligations to safeguard a number of goose populations and their associated habitats under national and international law, such as the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive.

Scottish goose populations can be categorised under four groups:

1. Populations currently considered vulnerable in Scotland (Greenland White-fronted Goose and Taiga Bean Goose);

2. Other non-quarry (species that cannot be killed or hunted) populations (Svarlbard and Greenland Barnacle Geese);

3. Quarry (species that can be killed or hunted) populations (Icelandic and resident Greylag Geese and Pink-footed Goose); and

4. Non-native species (principally Canada Goose).

The Greenland White-fronted, Barnacle and Bean Goose are on the Scottish Biodiversity List (i.e. considered of principal importance for biodiversity conservation in Scotland). The Greenland White-fronted Goose is listed on the SNH Species Action Framework as one of 32 species for which targeted management development should take place.

The Canada Goose is considered a non-native species in terms of the Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain, and it is

considered there are real risks that this species could: compete with native goose species for habitat; hybridize with native Greylag Geese; and cause other potentially serious environmental and economic impacts if the population rises further.

According to the report of the National Goose Management Review (2010) Scotland's key obligations for all naturally occurring goose species are: to ensure maintenance of range and abundance; and to ensure sustainable use, for populations that may be hunted legitimately.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) collect data on geese numbers, although how and when data are collected varies for different goose species and location. Their data broadly shows that:

- British Greylag Goose populations in the Uists and Orkney have been increasing. In 2008 the estimated population in Uist was 5,948 and in 2012 was 8,650. In Orkney the estimated population was 10,000 in 2008 and 21,327 in 2012

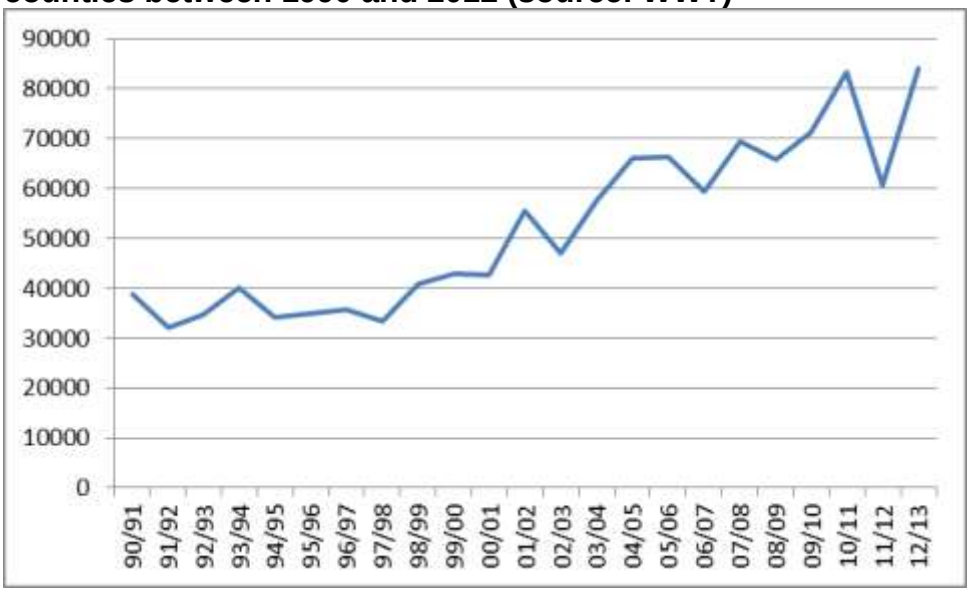
- The number of Iceland Greylag Geese counted in the Crofting counties has been increasing as shown in Graph 1

- The population of the Greenland White-Fronted Goose is declining overall

- The Pink Footed Geese counts within the crofting counties appears erratic year by year

- Greenland Barnacle Geese are increasing year on year.

Graph 1: Number of Iceland Greylag Geese counted in the Crofting counties between 1990 and 2012 (source: WWT)



The benefits associated with geese populations

Geese may provide benefits to farmers and landowners through shooting of quarry species. Geese may lead to additional visits to an area bringing benefits to local communities. However, the National Goose Management Review (2010) argued that geese tourism should not be considered a major driver of future goose management (p 119).

There is some evidence from 2001 to suggest that the public are willing to pay for the enhancement of endangered geese populations[1].

More recently, SNH have licenced the limited and controlled sale of goose carcasses and meat arising in Orkney, which may provide income to farmers and crofters (more details below).

The costs associated with geese populations

The report of the National Goose Management Review (2010) indicates that the presence of geese can cause problems such as grazing on agricultural crops; goose waste reducing productivity of agricultural crops, and negative effects on other species and habitats.

Comments provided in support of the petition indicate concern over goose numbers for a variety of reasons, including that geese eat seed sown by farmers as well as the resulting crops; that efforts to reduce geese numbers such as placing old cars in fields, are changing the aesthetic of the countryside; that geese hit power lines causing power cuts; that goose droppings reduce the quality of crops, are unhygienic and can affect water quality; and that geese disturb other less aggressive wildlife such as ducks and red throated divers.

There have been some estimates of the costs of the damage caused by geese. According to the National Goose Management Review (2010 p121) damage costs as measured by payment rates in the Local Goose Management Schemes (of which more later) vary from around £15 to £52 per goose. The report goes on to suggest that " …the risk remains that, without intervention to control increasing damage, social costs could rise very substantially without any compensating public benefits."

Scottish Government Action

Scottish Government support for goose management is on-going and is carried out in accordance with the 2010 Review of Goose Management Policy in Scotland and the Scottish Government response. There are currently five local goose management schemes, funded through Scottish Natural Heritage. These are on Islay; Solway; Kintyre; South Walls and Strathbeg. Funding for these schemes is set out in Table 1.

[1] Macmillan, D., Hanley, N., Philip, L., Daw, D., Daw, M. and Wright, R. (2001) *The Costs and Benefits of Managing Wild geese in Scotland*. Report to the Scottish Executive. Central Research Unit.

Table 1: Funding for goose management schemes on Islay; Solway; Kintyre; South Walls and Strathbeg

Winter 10/11 (£000s)	Winter 11/12 (£000s)	Winter 12/13 (£000s)	Winter 13/14 (£000s)	Proposed Winter 14/15 (£000s)
1,392	1,073	1,155	1,155	1,155

The budget for the individual schemes for 2013/14 are set out below and shows that the Islay schemes receives the majority of the funding.

Islay	£868,258
Solway	£173,125
Kintyre	£80,629
South Walls (Orkney)	£17,130
Strathbeg	£12,000

According to the Scottish Government, the Minister has recently agreed an 8% increase in the budget for the Islay scheme for this year only (Pers.comm.).

Two additional schemes on the Uists, Coll and Tiree have been funded separately under the Machair Life Project. This project provided partnership funding (EU, RSPB, SNH & local authority) for 2010 – 2014 to promote biodiversity of ground nesting birds. Goose management formed part of this. The goose management element on the Uists is now being carried out through the adaptive management trial (see below).

Since 2011 Scottish Natural Heritage has also funded additional advisory support to enable crofters to access the Scottish Rural Development Programme which provides funding in support of traditional machair cultivation.

Scottish Natural Heritage are now supporting adaptive management trials on certain Scottish islands to deal with serious agricultural damage by resident greylag geese. Three year trials are currently operating on Orkney, the Uists and a scheme is due to start shortly on Tiree. Future bids are being developed on Shetland and Lewis. £49,499 is available to support this work in 2013/14, with a commitment to continue funding into the final year of the current trials.

Scottish Parliament Action

There have been a number of Parliamentary Questions on geese management programmes which can be found here, and include the following.

Question S4W-08492: Jamie McGrigor, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Date Lodged: 29/06/2012

To ask the Scottish Executive what the budget has been for the Islay Goose Management scheme in each year of operation and what its annual budget will be in future.

Answered by Stewart Stevenson (24/07/2012):

The budget and expenditure figures for the Islay Local Goose Management Scheme are set out in the following table.

Year	Approved Expenditure	Actual Expenditure	Expenditure on Marksmen/ Scaring Equipment
2000-01	£569,000	£637,000	(1)
2001-02	£542,000	£611,000	(1)
2002-03	£542,000	£638,000	(1)
2003-04	£542,000	£630,000	(1)
2004-05	£542,000	£626,000	(1)
2005-06	£785,270	£763,000	£41,200
2006-07	£785,270	£717,000	£27,500
2007-08	£785,270	£727,000	£27,500
2008-09	£903,000	£897,000	£27,500
2009-10	£903,000	£910,000	£27,500
2010-11	£903,000	£897,000	£27,500
2011-12	£710,000	£708,000	£25,000
2012-13	£843,258	(2)	£25,000
2013-14	£843,258	(2)	£25,000
2014-15	£843,258	(2)	£25,000

Notes:
1. For the 2000 to 2005 scheme the budget includes marksmen and scaring equipment costs.
2. Future budget set out in revised proposal of 5 July 2012.

Question S4O-02193: Jean Urquhart, Highlands and Islands, Independent, Date Lodged: 22/05/2013

To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Scottish Natural Heritage regarding the impact of greylag geese on agricultural land and the possibility of introducing a mechanism for the sale of greylag geese.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (30/05/2013):

My officials have had extensive discussions with Scottish Natural Heritage and with stakeholders represented on the National Goose Management Review Group regarding the impact of greylag geese on agricultural land and possible solutions to limiting their impact on certain Scottish islands, including the trialling of adaptive management techniques.

At the request of farmers on Orkney, Scottish Natural Heritage is working on the development of a scheme to permit the limited sale of wild goose carcases

under licence, provided an effective and proportionate system of identification and control can be established.

We are required to consult with the European Commission before putting any such scheme into practice and we intend to start those consultations very shortly.

Wendy Kenyon
Senior Research Specialist
9 October 2013