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Scottish Parliament
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Dear Mr David

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION [PE1124](#)

The Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Petition PE1124 regarding the introduction of provisions to ban the manufacture, sale, possession and use of all snares.

The SCA believes that snaring is a vital tool for the protection of Scotland's biodiversity. Enclosed with this letter is a document setting out 'The Importance of Snaring'. Whilst this document is in excess of the suggested maximum four page response length, we trust that the Public Petitions Committee will give it due and careful consideration as it represents the best available collection of technical evidence on snaring.

The document enclosed was jointly produced by a number of organisations representing a Scottish membership of over 35,000 people.

A summary of our main response points follows:

Why is snaring important? –

- **To protect ground nesting wading birds.** Threatened waders such as Curlew and Lapwing have declined by 52% and 47% respectively in Scotland in the last 15 years. On moorland managed by gamekeepers – using snares to control fox predation - studies by the RSPB and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust have shown that wading bird numbers are between two and five times higher than on unmanaged moors.

- Records of moorlands managed in England and Wales by the RSPB, who do not allow snaring, show much lower levels of many ground nesting birds species than on comparable moors where snaring is practiced. Initial findings from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's Upland Predation project at Otterburn show a significantly higher breeding rate of waders such as Curlew and Lapwing where snaring is practised.
- **To protect ground nesting game birds.** Recent research by PACEC shows that shooting sports contribute £240m per annum to the Scottish economy. There are many diverse types of game shooting available in Scotland however Red Grouse shooting over heather moorland is world renowned and virtually unique to Scotland. Red Grouse are vulnerable to predation by foxes and therefore fox control, including snaring, is essential to protect the grouse and the multi-million pound contribution they make to the Scottish economy.
- **To protect livestock and crops.** Fox predation on lambs can be severe and targeted fox snaring is often the only way to catch the fox responsible. Rabbit damage to agricultural and horticultural crops and to newly established forestry plantations can be significant – with four rabbits exerting grazing pressure equivalent to one sheep, crop losses can quickly mount up. Snaring is a vital tool in the battle to control rabbit numbers.

Better regulation will improve snaring –

- Problems have been identified with the capture of non-target species where snares have not been correctly set or sited, or where out of date snare technology is used. Following the announcement by the Environment Minister on 20th February, much tighter regulations will be imposed to minimise this risk. These regulations will require all snare users to be properly trained, impose strict requirements on how snares are constructed and set, and all users will be identifiable to the police in case of any problems. The SCA welcomes these new regulations and believe they will result in a sharp reduction in the undesirable capture of non-target species.

The Economic value of shooting –

- The SCA was dismayed to see the validity of the PACEC report '*Findings of an economic and environmental survey*' called into question by the petitioners presenting PE1124. The report can be downloaded from www.shootingfacts.co.uk. The report has been welcomed and referred to by Labour MP David Milliband, (who wrote the foreword to the report), in his time as UK Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and by Michael Russell, Scottish Govt Minister for the Environment. PACEC – Public and Corporate Economic Consultants - are widely respected and are used by Government and many public bodies to carry out economic survey work, we therefore believe that their report on the economic value cannot be called into question.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, at the offices below or by email, should the Petitions Committee wish to further discuss any of the points raised in this letter or in the enclosed documents.

Yours sincerely

Ross Montague
Head of Policy and Campaigns

Joint Industry Briefing



The Importance of Snaring

- *BASC Scotland,*
- *The Scottish Gamekeepers Association,*
- *NFU Scotland,*
- *Scottish Countryside Alliance*
- *Scottish Estates Business Group*
- *Scottish Rural Property and Business Association*



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Executive Summary

Scotland's land and wildlife management organisations are concerned that the debate about snares is developing without full understanding of how and why they are used, and the new technology being developed.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC Scotland), the National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS), the Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA), the Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG), the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) and the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA) are all conscious of the welfare issues around snaring and have prepared a joint briefing to inform policy makers.

- Scotland's countryside managers operate to the highest standards and demonstrate best practice at all times. And already work to many industry codes of practice.
- Snares are an essential tool used by Scotland's wildlife and conservation managers to manage certain predators and pests in the countryside.
- Foxes not only kill livestock and game birds, but threaten a range of ground-nesting bird species as well.
- A well-designed snare, set correctly, is a highly effective method of restraining foxes and rabbits until they can be humanely dispatched, and where other techniques such as trapping or shooting are neither suitable nor effective.
- The game shooting industry is worth £240 million per annum to the Scottish economy
- 58,000 workers are paid by shooting, amounting to the equivalent of 11,000 full-time jobs.
- Of Scotland's 7.8 million hectares, 4.4 million are influenced by shooting and 700,000 hectares are directly managed for shooting.
- Game shooting not only provides the equivalent of 2,000 full-time conservation jobs but spends £43 million a year on improving habitat and wildlife management.
- Heather Moorland is a world class habitat with 70% of its extent being within the UK.
- We have lost over 60% of heather habitat since 1940
- The Langholm Moor Project, a partnership which includes sporting interests, the RSPB and SNH makes provision for and recognizes the importance of the use of snaring for predator control in the project plan which is aiming to restore this special Scottish Landscape.

Snaring plays an important role in shoot management and ultimately in sustainable economic and social development of rural communities. Without snares, foxes and rabbits could inflict significantly greater damage on economic activities as diverse as agriculture, forestry and eco-tourism, all of which rely on a managed countryside.

Our organisations want snares to be used properly and humanely and to ensure that those who use them act in a responsible and a professional manner. Training in the use of snares is currently available and is to be enhanced.

What is snaring?



Figure 1 - Fox held in snare

Snaring is a skilful, selective and humane method of restraining an animal until the animal can be either released unharmed or humanely despatched, as appropriate. Fox snares are made from wire and are designed not to cause damage to a restrained animal.

In Scotland the snare is used exclusively for the targeted control of foxes, rabbits and occasionally rats, all of which can cause serious economic and environmental damage and rats are additionally a public health hazard.

The UK's fox population has been estimated to be around 250,000 (Webbon *et al*, 2004) and that there has been an increase in UK fox densities and numbers over the past 40 years (Reynolds and Tapper, 1993), and a similar trend in Scotland. As long ago as 1995, the UK's breeding rabbit population is estimated to be about 37.5 million (Harris *et al*, 1995).

These key points are confirmed by the Report on the Independent Working Group on Snares (DEFRA, 2005):

- *"Snares involve the use of flexible materials to capture and restrain, and in this regard they have similarities to gill nets used for capture of sea fish and mist nets used in the capture of wild birds for ringing"*
- *"In contrast to the situation in other countries (e.g. USA & Canada) snares are widely used in the UK to restrain animals for despatch rather than as killing devices"*

Snaring is often the most effective and efficient method of managing fox and rabbit populations; it is sometimes the only practical method. In a survey of over 1,000 gamekeepers, 96% reported the presence of foxes that needed to be controlled and reported that, after night shooting, snaring was the most effective method of control, used by 86% of 'keepers (BASC, 1995)

Snaring accounts for 30% of all foxes controlled by gamekeepers each year (BASC, 1995.); on some land, snaring accounts for more than 75% of all foxes taken (SGA, pers. comm.). Operator skills strongly influence capture rate. Foxes use the same routes on a regular basis therefore snares can be sited with a degree of precision (sometimes for a specific animal).

By law, snares have to be checked at least once within every 24 hour period to ensure captured animals are not restrained longer than necessary. Most animals are caught at night and best practice requires snares to be checked first thing in the morning (BASC Code of Practice) at which time non-target species can be released, target species despatched and any damaged snares removed.

Why is snaring so important?

Conservation

Two recent reports, "The Singing Fields" (Tapper, 2007), and the RSPB's "The predation of wild birds in the UK" (Gibbons *et al*, 2007) clearly demonstrate the advantages of predator control to a wide variety of ground nesting bird species including merlin, red grouse, black grouse, golden plover, lapwing and curlew.

- 'The Singing Fields' report concludes "*On grouse moors, red grouse, black grouse, lapwing and curlew, are faring better than elsewhere but are in national decline*". At the report's launch, Dr Mark Avery - RSPB's Director of Conservation, said: "*We are increasingly recognising that predators are having a greater impact on ground-nesting birds and waders and on more and more of our nature reserves are carrying out predator control.*"
- The RSPB's predation review concludes that "*...generalist ground predators, such as foxes, can sometimes reduce the population levels of their prey, and that this is a growing worry if we are to conserve populations of threatened ground-nesting birds, for example, lapwings.*"
- Snares account for many foxes moving into core capercaillie areas; the Capercaillie BAP group has issued guidelines for snare deployment in any capercaillie areas. Without snares, these foxes will cause damage; this is also applicable to other areas of conservation interest such as moorland, woodland and coastal fringe, where nesting dotterel, dunlin, black grouse, terns, and eider ducks are just a few of the species that an increase in the fox population could impact.
- Golden plover and lapwing are five times more abundant and curlews are twice as common on managed grouse moors compared with unmanaged moors (Tharme *et al*, 2001).
- Preliminary results from the Upland Wader Experiment at Otterburn quantify the positive impact of predation control, including snaring, on the breeding success of five key moorland bird species.
- Heather Moorland is a world class habitat with 70% of its extent being within the UK; Scotland's moorland, which covers some 38% of Scotland (3 million hectares), is host to habitats and wildlife of European importance. The outstanding economic and conservation importance of well-managed moorland in rural Scotland also makes an important contribution to the image of Scotland. This iconic Scottish habitat continues to be in decline at the expense of improved pasture, we have lost over 60% of heather habitat since 1940. The Dumfries & Galloway Biodiversity Action Plan, currently out for consultation, cites this as a Priority Habitat and specifically recommends for action the restoration, extension and enhancement of these upland heath habitats. The Langholm Moor Project, a partnership which includes sporting interests, the RSPB and SNH, makes provision for and recognizes the importance of the use of snaring for predator control in the project plan which is aiming to restore this special Scottish Landscape.

Game shooting, although normally seen as cultural, recreational and economic activities, also serves to protect species of high conservation value, including declining species such as capercaillie, black grouse, golden plover, lapwing and curlew. Foxes can also cause significant damage to livestock, such as lambs, and to game birds prior to release.

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 it is the duty of every public body and office holder to further the conservation of biodiversity. As can be seen from the above, snaring has a key role to play in conservation in Scotland and in our two National Parks achieving the first of their four Statutory Aims: 'To conserve and enhance the natural heritage of the area'.

Agriculture

Fox control is vital especially to protect lambs in hill farming areas and it is increasingly done in partnership with local gamekeepers. Rabbits must be controlled to protect agricultural crops as well as sensitive flora. Under Section 1 of the Pests Act 1954, practically the whole of Britain has been declared a rabbit clearance area and the occupier of any land has a continuing obligation to kill or take rabbits on his land. Rabbits can damage sensitive flora, crops and young trees and undermine grassy banks (including burrowing under railway lines). Snaring is one of the most widely used methods of rabbit control.

The Economy

Shooting is worth £240 million per annum to the Scottish economy (PACEC, 2006) representing income and employment to Scotland's most fragile rural economies. Snaring plays an important role in shoot management and ultimately in sustainable economic and social development of rural communities.

- Shooting and stalking contribute money to rural areas. "The bulk of this money is spent at times when other forms of tourism are at a low level." (PACEC, 2006)
- 58,000 workers are paid by shooting, amounting to the equivalent of 11,000 full-time jobs.
- Of Scotland's 7.8 million hectares, 4.4 million are influenced by shooting (some 60% of rural Scotland) and 0.7 million hectares are directly managed for shooting. As a result shooting not only provides the equivalent of 2,000 full-time conservation jobs but spends £43 million a year on improving habitat and wildlife management.
- *"There is no doubt that moor management for grouse plays a vital part in Scotland's rural economy"* - Michael Russell MSP, Minister for Environment, October 2007.

Without snares, foxes and rabbits could inflict significantly greater damage on economic activities as diverse as agriculture, forestry and eco-tourism, all of which rely on a managed environment. The fourth Statutory Aim of our National Parks – 'To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities' – could be jeopardised by a ban on the use of snares.

What are the alternatives to snares?

There is no effective, selective alternative to snaring that would operate 24 hours a day. There is, however, a range of significantly less effective methods that we will consider in detail below:

'Lethal' approaches to fox and rabbit management:

Shooting at night using a lamp generally depends on good vehicle access and terrain that facilitates safe shooting. In parts of Scotland there is no access for vehicles and many areas are covered in forestry plantations, standing crops or thick scrub making it impractical to shoot. *"Lamping can generally only be undertaken in terrain that permits free movement of vehicles and it is not practicable for some hilly areas or where there is a lot of cover"* (Reynolds, 2000). Over exposure to lamps severely reduces the effectiveness of this technique. Given their nocturnal habits, fox and rabbit shooting at night may cause problems relating to working hours and health and safety concerns.

Live-capture traps depend on the fox entering a box or cage and triggering a door release mechanism. Innate or learned wariness in the fox makes this an impractical solution in rural areas as they are typically cautious of novel, man-made objects which severely limits the efficacy of these traps. Only 9% of gamekeepers report having caught foxes using such traps (BASC, 1995). These traps may, however, be effective in urban environments, where foxes are more confident about entering small spaces.

Drop Traps for rabbits must be sited on a rabbit-proof fenceline and dug into the ground. They can be an effective method of rabbit control but are expensive to install and maintain. Each trap costs about £100 plus the cost of installation; one trap is needed for every 50 yards of fence. Such fencing, as required for these traps may restrict the freedom of movement of many species such as badgers, hares, otters and pheasants.

Foot packs consist of a small team of dogs and beaters to flush foxes from cover to waiting guns. They are often used in dense woodland adjoining moorland or farmland and require a great deal of manpower and expense. This method is deployed at the end of the shooting season to avoid disturbance to gamebirds and before the lambing and ground-nesting bird breeding season starts.

Fox hunts, where traditional packs of hounds flush foxes to waiting guns, can be an effective method of fox control in the areas in which they operate. Such control is only really suitable in lowland situations.

Terriers are used to flush foxes from underground to a waiting gun. Used mainly in the spring, this is a very time consuming but effective method for dealing with known dens.

Unavailable/prohibited methods:

Gassing foxes in the den is not prohibited in principle but not allowed in practice since no gassing agent is currently licensed for this purpose. Even if a gassing agent were available there are serious health and safety issues surrounding such practices.

Phostoxin is currently licensed to kill rabbits and rats however rabbit carcasses cannot enter the human food chain after gassing.

The use of poisons to control species commonly snared is illegal in Scotland, except for rats.

'Non lethal' approaches to fox and rabbit management:

Physical barriers such as wire netting can be valuable in reducing loss of poultry, gamebirds or livestock held in small areas. Wire netting is widely used in an attempt to exclude rabbits from vulnerable forestry and crops. Electric fencing has partial success in protecting ground-nesting birds on nature reserves but experience has shown it must be backed up by lethal control methods, that it may not be practical in a moorland situation and is very expensive

Conditioned Taste Aversion (CTA). It proved impossible to develop baits that were exclusively taken by foxes – an essential prerequisite - and therefore it is a non-viable method of fox control.

Fertility control for wild mammals has been the subject of several years' intensive research by Australian and French scientists. Despite enormous expenditure, many practical problems stand in the way of a workable methodology.

So what is the way ahead?

The industry proposes that:

- It should be a legal requirement that all fox snares used in Scotland must be fitted with a crimped stop 9" from the end of the snare to ensure that they cannot, under any circumstances, tighten further than this. (All snares used in Scotland must be free-running snares.)

- Snaring is already subject to industry codes of practice, containing best practice recommendations; legislation, with penalties for illegal activity/practice is in place. We will develop a new Code of Practice for Scotland to take into account all legal and best practice provisions
- Well attended, industry run, training courses which result in Certificates of Attendance have been supported and financed by local authorities, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and land managers. We will develop and deliver a unified training package covering all legal and best practice issues.

After twenty years of continuous work and research, The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) is trialling a new breakaway snare, part funded by Defra. The trial is ongoing and shows promise of reducing non-target captures. Greater detail attached as Appendix 1.

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Appendix 1: G&WCT's 'new' snare:

Designing the perfect fox snare by Jonathan Reynolds, Mike Short and Austin Weldon

Key achievements

- *Developed the design for effective break-away snares to allow non-target animals to break free.*
- *Achieved high capture rates compared with averages from gamekeepers.*
- *Developed the design for a cushioning spring to avoid injuring the caught animal.*
- *We are close to having a new, more humane snare ready for field-testing.*

In fox snaring, performance (target capture rate, non-target involvement, and the welfare of captured animals) is chiefly dependent on operator skills and practices. As such, the Independent Working Group on Snares addressed these with its Code of Practice. However, snare design also makes a difference.

Although there have been attempts in the past to improve snares in various ways, new designs were only attractive to operators if they promised better catching ability. Now, however, the IWG Report and the Animal Welfare Bill place responsibility for welfare of the captured animal morally and legally (respectively) on the shoulders of the operator. One recommendation of the IWG was to explore any modifications to the snare that might conceivably reduce non-target captures and lessen the risk and severity of injuries for captured animals. There are two main concepts, neither of them new:

1. Break-away devices, which release species stronger than the target species by building a weak link into the snare.
2. Cushioning springs, which dampen the physical strain incurred by captured animals when struggling against the snare.

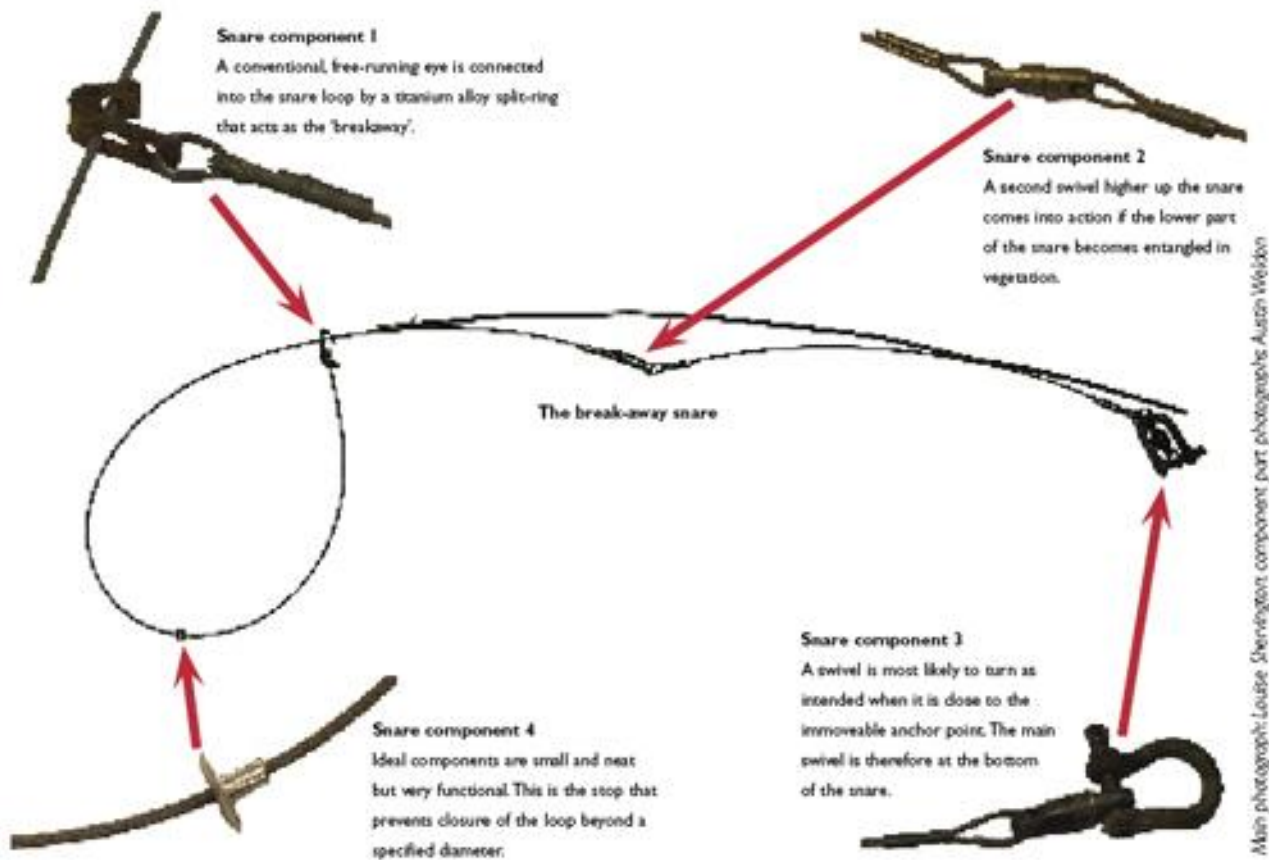
The keys to successful development of such devices must be accurate specification, and correspondingly precise manufacture. With break-away snares, for example, the aims are to release non-target species such as badgers and deer easily, and to retain foxes reliably. The distinction between target and non-target species is unlikely to be clear cut. Some species may challenge the snare with a steady pull, others with stronger but briefer lunges. There are big foxes and small badgers. Even among members of a species, the pull exerted by different individuals varies not only with size and build, but also with motivation. Any specification is therefore likely to compromise one aim or another. However, once the optimum specification has been chosen, it needs to be consistently achieved. The finished product must be dependable, not a lottery.

It is hard to add anything to a snare without destroying its essential minimalist nature. For this reason too, it is important to have high quality components that are dependably strong while also simple, small and discrete. In our research, we are indebted to DB Design for advising us and supplying suitable components.

Developing the break-away specification (see Figure 1) has been a steady but frustrating process. Prototype snares are necessarily hand-made. At each change of specification, an adequate number of snares had to be prepared for use, but the entire batch could be consigned to the rubbish bin by a capture on the first night of deployment. We began these cycles of development using break-away snares at the 'weak' end of the spectrum. From a research viewpoint it was important to know which species broke free and which were restrained, so we also had to devise a way of retaining the animal in the snare even though the break-away device had released it. This added yet more components. Despite these handicaps, we achieved high capture rates (27.5 foxes per thousand snare-days, or 38 snare-days per fox) compared with average figures from gamekeepers (1.1 and 3.5 foxes per thousand snare-days in two previous studies).

Figure 1

The break-away snare,
showing the component parts.



Developing a cushioning spring has to follow the specification of the break-away device. The only way to assess its benefit would be to compare the condition of samples of foxes taken in normal practice using snares with and without springs. Because foxes are variable in size, strength and motivation, quite large samples would be necessary, and because it is a big investment even to organise such a trial among gamekeepers, we need to make a very close guess at the correct specification for the spring. A spring that is either too weak or too strong will be inoperative for much of the time, so the ideal may be one that is progressive in action. However, we can also foresee a complex relationship with the break-away device. The break-away snare can open predictably only if pulled against a dead weight, so spring strength must be chosen so that it is inoperative under the strong pulls exerted by large non-target animals.