

David Stewart MSP
Convenor
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

28 May 2014

Dear Mr Stewart

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the most recent round of responses you have received to our petition for the golden eagle to be adopted as Scotland's national bird. We welcome your efforts to encourage wider debate on the issue through contacting the various Scottish Parliament Committees with an interest in this subject.

As with the previous correspondence, we are pleased that any comments on the petition have been supportive, either of the species choice, in particular, or of the petition in general, following the precedent of the designation of the Scots pine as Scotland's national tree. It is welcome that Stewart Maxwell MSP, for the Education and Culture Committee, supports following this process of adoption. We also note Rob Gibson MSP, for the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, acknowledges that there could be merit in having symbols such as a national bird.

It is disappointing that the Economy, Energy & Tourism Committee were unable to comment on the petition, especially since iconic species such as the Golden Eagle are an important feature of Scotland's vibrant multi-million pound wildlife tourism industry. We consider that, as Rob Gibson mentions in his response, national symbols are a representation of a nation's values and give a clear signal to the rest of the world how Scots value our significant natural heritage as part of our international commitments towards the conservation of biodiversity. We suspect that, should this be debated further, the members of the committee might affirm this suggestion.

There seem to be two outstanding issues for the Petitions Committee to discuss. Firstly, the designation process for national symbols in general. As you are aware, the Scottish Parliament designated the Scots Pine as Scotland's national tree in January. We note that both RACCE and E&C Committees have noted this as a precedent, as has the Minister, Paul Wheelhouse MSP. We believe that this process could be followed again for the

designation of a national bird and that a good mechanism to ensure that national symbols are genuinely representative is to have a debate in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament. This would allow for a thorough discussion of the merits of national symbols, and provide a mechanism to illustrate cross-party support for the creation of a new symbol. This could be provided through a Member's Business motion by an interested member of the Scottish Parliament, or on a motion proposed by the Committee.

Secondly, with regards to the golden eagle in particular, we feel that there is already a notable ground-swell of public support for this bird species to be the national bird of Scotland. As stated in our original petition statement, the golden eagle has topped national polls as a favourite species amongst Scots. However, if the parliamentary debate is deemed an insufficient mandate to select a specific species, it could at least provide a justification for asking the public on the view of a fitting national bird. A public consultation exercise would ensure the symbol is truly representative of Scotland and its people.

In conclusion, we believe that the precedent set by the recent petition to have the Scots pine designated as Scotland national tree provides a suitable process to also designate a national bird. In light of the comments, of both the Minister and the Conveners of the other Committees, we suggest that at your discretion a parliamentary debate to discuss the adoption of the national bird could be a valuable next step in the process.

Thank you once again for the time that you and your Committee have dedicated to this petition and for the keen interest shown in this subject.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Orr-Ewing
Head of Species and Land Management, RSPB Scotland