

Killing for sport



An investigation into how gamekeepers are devastating Britain's wildlife

NOTE: This report is based on research and covert investigations carried out in the UK throughout 2002 and 2003. Additional information has been supplied by Animal Aid, The National Anti Snare Campaign, The National Federation of Badger Groups, John Gill and Miro Penman.

More than 12,300 animals are killed by gamekeepers in this country every day. According to the Game Conservancy Trust, as many as 4.5 million mammals and birds of prey are killed annually in a largely unreported and frequently illegal programme of predator control. Gamekeepers snare, trap and poison these animals to protect the 12 million pheasants shot every year by wealthy businessmen and tourists who are keen to experience a day or weekend of country shooting.

Animals, including protected badgers, foxes, hares, stags, owls, kestrels, and domestic livestock and pets, die often excruciating deaths because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

To give just one example, a 'vermin return form' sent to Sir Jocelyn Stevens from gamekeepers at his Millden estate in Scotland (a copy of which was obtained by the League Against Cruel Sports), records that in the single month of April 2001, gamekeepers killed 698 rabbits, 37 hares, 19 stoats, 23 crows, three magpies, three jackdaws, one rook, three foxes, two "feral" cats, six gulls and one stag.

Dying to entertain

There are currently 2000 estates and farms involved in the game bird shooting industry, which claims to be one of the country's fastest growing 'sports'. These establishments include some of the oldest and most prestigious estates in the UK. Amongst those willing to pay £400 to £2000 per day for a day of shooting are celebrity enthusiasts including Guy Ritchie, Vinnie Jones, Bryan Ferry and Marco Pierre White. It is unlikely that any of these people have any notion of quite how bloody their new hobby is.

The rich and famous who shoot on Viscount Cowdray's Sussex estates are probably unaware that one of his gamekeepers narrowly escaped prosecution for the widespread use of illegally set snares in woodland managed for pheasant shooting. This particular estate has been rife with offences.

Other estates which have been found to be in violation of various wildlife regulations include those at Killinghurst, Milland and Polesdon. One bright note: an investigation which uncovered badger persecution on his Goodwood estate led the Earl of March to ban the use of snares by gamekeepers on the estate.

An industry based on criminality

Although only a small percentage of wildlife crimes are ever detected, those offences that are prosecuted reveal a flagrant disregard for wildlife protection laws. The large number of prosecutions involving offences committed in the immediate vicinity of game bird pens is a clear indication that this calculated slaughter is all about protecting an industry and nothing to do with the conservation gamekeepers claim to have as their primary goal.

A small sample of prosecutions in the past seven years include: A Hampshire gamekeeper fined for using live mallards and jackdaws as decoys in traps, a Norfolk gamekeeper killing three kestrels an Essex gamekeeper asphyxiating three fox cubs, a trainee Norfolk gamekeeper setting pole traps, which have been illegal since 1904, a Buckinghamshire gamekeeper charged with 16 offences, including snaring, trapping and killing badgers, owls, foxes, a sparrow hawk, and a buzzard.

The information contained in this report will shock many. Let us hope that it also leads to improved legal protection for wildlife, including a ban on snares, and proper enforcement of laws.

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The killing fields

British wildlife is facing unprecedented persecution by gamekeepers employed to manage the UK's game bird shooting estates, an investigation led by the League Against Cruel Sports and the National Anti Snaring Campaign has revealed.

Millions of wild mammals and birds are being brutally snared, trapped and poisoned annually by employees at Britain's shooting establishments catering for fee paying sport hunters.

The investigation has established that many of the animals being persecuted by gamekeepers undertaking predator control programmes are being killed in breach of wildlife law and of guidelines laid down by shooting regulatory bodies.

The findings undermine the claims of the shooting lobby that game shooting is concerned with conservation, illustrate the need for greater independent scrutiny of shooting outfits and highlight the requirement for legislation to outlaw snares and inhumane traps and poisons.

In an eighteen month operation that has taken investigators across England, Wales and Scotland, snares have been discovered set on some of the UK's most prestigious country estates, traps found on land managed for high profile shooting events, including the 'Glorious 12th', and animals and birds – including, at some locations, protected species such as the badger – targeted at numerous shooting estates visited.

Detailed research and covert investigations have revealed evidence suggesting the targeting of foxes, stoats, weasels, polecats, hedgehogs, badgers, rabbits, hares, birds of prey, magpies, jackdaws and crows by those involved in managing game birds. Domestic pets, including cats, have also been discovered caught in illegally set snares on and near land used for game shooting.

AN INDUSTRY BUILT ON KILLING

Game bird shooting – and pheasant shooting in particular – is big business in the UK, with the industry estimated to have an annual turnover of £600 million. Participants pay between £400 and £2000 a day to shoot game birds during the sporting

WHAT ARE SNARES?

Snares are wire nooses set to trap wild animals. In Britain, snares are largely used by gamekeepers to control foxes and are used to a lesser extent by farmers and landowners to control rabbits. Snares are set in a variety of circumstances, but are usually placed along runs or pathways thought to be used by the target species. They are sometimes also placed over the entrances to rabbit burrows or fox earths.



An example of a typical snare set to catch animals deemed to pose a threat to game bird stocks

TYPES OF SNARE

Free-running snare

This is the basic type of legal snare. The wire is threaded through a simple eyelet at one end, allowing free movement of the wire in both directions - hence the term free-running. The snare should tighten as a captured animal struggles, but relaxes when the animal stops pulling. The purpose of free running snares is to hold the target animal alive until the operator returns within a daily period to humanely dispatch it, usually by shooting. Free-running snares therefore may have a 'stop' which prevents the noose from closing too tightly. The law requires those snares to be inspected

season with runs (with variations for different species of birds) between August and February.

There are over 2000 estates and farms in the UK now concerned with rearing and shooting game birds. The industry as a whole is believed to employ around 25,000 people in either a permanent or seasonal capacity. There are around 3000 full time gamekeepers in the UK and a similar number employed in a part time capacity.

An estimated 36 million pheasants are bred annually for sport shooting, with around a third killed by shooting, the remainder dying of disease, taken by predators, killed on the roads or are otherwise unaccounted for.

The shooting lobby claims the pastime is undergoing something of a renaissance; they suggest that game bird shooting could be one of the country's fastest growing participatory sports. Among those recently cited as part of the new 'shooting revolution' are Guy Ritchie, Vinnie Jones, Bryan Ferry and Marco Pierre White.

Few would have any inkling, however, of the secret devastation being inflicted upon Britain's wildlife in order to sustain game bird populations for sport shooting. According to figures compiled by the Game Conservancy Trust, up to 4.5 million mammals and birds of prey are killed annually by gamekeepers in a largely unreported programme of predator control.

Investigators have found particularly disturbing evidence of wildlife persecution connected to game shooting in the Home Counties and the North East of England, both key shooting regions. Evidence obtained suggests the routine use of snares and traps by gamekeepers in these regions, many of them set in breach of wildlife law and codes of practice laid down by shooting regulatory bodies.

The use of snares in the UK is largely governed by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Under the act, the use of 'self locking snares' – snares manufactured or set to result in the wire noose becoming tighter and tighter as any quarry struggles – is illegal, as is the setting of snares in places where they are likely to catch badgers. Failure to inspect snares in every twenty four hour period and setting snares on land without permission is also illegal. In short, any action calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild animal is an offence.



A victim of a snare. Investigators discovered dozens of similar scenes during 18 months of covert field trips

PRESTIGIOUS COUNTRY ESTATES

In Sussex, snares have been found illegally set on land belonging to one of the region's largest and most prestigious landowners – Viscount Cowdray – and at a number of other locations used for game bird shooting.

In late 2002, a tenant gamekeeper from the Cowdray estate was formally cautioned after investigations revealed the widespread use of illegally set snares in woodland managed for pheasant shooting near Midhurst, West Sussex.

Following a call to police from a member of the public, investigators discovered a live badger caught in a snare which had come off a snare illegally set on a wooden drag pole and over twenty further snares, many set illegally (and including two self-locking snares), throughout the copse. The use of such poles is believed to contravene the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 because such snares are unanchored, cannot be checked in every twenty four hour period and can be dragged off by an animal, perhaps over a bank, and hang, leaving the snared animal to starve to death.

Following an enquiry by Sussex Police and the Crown Prosecution Service, the gamekeeper concerned received an official caution. It incident was not the first of its kind on land owned and operated for game shooting by the Cowdray estate; in the village of Ambersham a dog and a badger were discovered snared and illegal snares found at Bepton on the South Downs and north of the prestigious King Edward VII hospital. Dozens of snares have been discovered on or near to other sites on the Cowdray estate.

Initially Viscount Cowdray refused to remove the snares, but asked for a map of all snares set on his estate, saying, "this shows I do not approve of their use". However, following the Bepton police caution he asked for "all snares set on his estate to be removed until those setting them can prove attendance at a bona fide course of instruction."

Previous investigations had revealed a similar scenario on the prestigious Goodwood estate, north of Chichester, W. Sussex, where numerous snares had been discovered and badgers persecuted. One gamekeeper was prosecuted for shooting a snared badger, and another badger was discovered dead in a snare:

in every twenty four hour period.

Free-running (rocking eye) snare

This is a variation on the free-running snare. It has an eyelet which is heavier than normal, and does not allow the noose to slacken off so easily. The intention is that this type of snare does not allow a fox to back out of the noose once caught. The use of free-running snares is legal in Britain.

Self-locking snare

A self-locking snare has a small metal device at one end and the wire is threaded through two holes in the metal. The effect of this is that the wire will only run one way. When an animal is caught in a self-locking snare, the noose



Another - fox - victim of a snare

tightens, but does not slacken off when the victim stops struggling. Animals caught by self-locking snares are usually caught around the neck and die through strangulation or by dislocation of the neck. The use of self-locking snares is illegal in Britain.

Dual-purpose snare

This type of snare has the same kind of small metal device at one end as the self-locking snare. When the wire is threaded through one of the two holes in the metal, the snare acts as a free running snare and is legal. However, when the wire is threaded through the other hole, the snare becomes self-locking and its use is illegal.

following a post-mortem it was found to have an old snaring injury which had fractured its breast bone. Lobbying resulted in the landowner, the Earl of March, banning the use of snares by gamekeepers on the 12,000 acre estate.

In July 2003 snares were discovered illegally set adjacent to a badger sett in woodland used for shooting on the Surrey / Sussex border at Killinghurst and owned by a RFG Barlow – a previous master of the local Chiddingfold, Leconfield and Cowdray fox hunt. Investigators discovered the snares set around a pheasant release pen and on a woodland run used by badgers – an offence.

The sett itself had been dug in and severely damaged by whoever was responsible for constructing the pheasant release pen which had been erected over the top of the sett. One investigator who later attended the scene described the damage to the badger residence as one of the worst examples of persecution connected to game shooting on record. Surrey police were contacted in relation to the incident and are understood to be investigating at the time of writing.

LACK OF ACTION

Only weeks before, the gamekeeper at the Milland pheasant shoot in West Sussex, Mark Munday, received a police caution after being exposed in a covert operation setting self-locking snares contrary to the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act on land operated on behalf of Robert and Kim Jenner of Home Farm, Milland. Investigators have learnt that the same gamekeeper had in 2002 been warned by an RSPCA inspector over the setting of snares on drag poles, which had resulted in the police caution on the Goodwood estate.

Despite calling for the gamekeeper to be sacked, his employers are understood not to have initially replied to correspondence relating to the matter. Similarly, W.Trywhitt-Drake, the regional chairman of the Countryside Alliance, was contacted after a snare attached to a huge drag pole was discovered on his Bereleigh shooting estate near Petersfield on the Sussex / Hampshire border. He initially ignored correspondence, but eventually did respond via his solicitors, when it was suggested the snare and pole would be mounted on a plinth and carried in procession from



Many badgers are killed in snares set by gamekeepers

neighbouring Petersfield to his home. Trywhitt-Drake hosts shooting and fundraising events at Bereleigh on behalf of the Countryside Alliance.

In Berkshire, an investigation in conjunction with Animal Aid in the summer of 2002 uncovered evidence pointing to the extensive use of illegal snaring at Britain's most prestigious shooting estate, Polesdon, near Hungerford. Investigators discovered over a dozen illegally set snares attached to large wooden planks close to four pheasant release pens, alongside an extensive array of other animal traps.

The Polesdon shoot is hosted by the former head of English Nature, Sir Jocelyn Stevens, and includes amongst its participants the former BBC Chairman Sir Christopher Bland, King Constantine of Greece and the Dukes of Kent, Marlborough and Beaufort. Also on the official list of Polesdon 'guns' obtained by investigators are the Queen's cousin, Sir Angus Ogilvy, Nicholas Soames MP, Andrew Parker Bowles, former Tory ministers Douglas Hogg and Tom King, Max Hastings and former racing driver Jackie Stewart.

Subsequent field trips to the Polesdon estate in August 2003 revealed the reality of the killing of the region's wildlife and environment in order to protect the valuable game bird stocks; investigators discovered dumps of rotting animal carcasses, including deer and rabbits, and burning mounds of plastic and lead shot casings.

WIDESPREAD PERSECUTION

A disturbing indication of the levels of persecution at UK shooting estates is provided by a 'vermin return form' sent to Sir Jocelyn Stevens from gamekeepers at the Millden estate in Scotland. The form, obtained by investigators, notifies Stevens that in the single month of April 2001, gamekeepers killed 698 rabbits, 37 hares, 19 stoats, 23 crows, three magpies, three jackdaws, one rook, three foxes, two feral cats, six gulls and one stag.

The typical gamekeepers armoury of pest control devices in order to carry out 'control' of wildlife deemed a threat to game bird stocks was graphically illustrated by footage obtained at a pheasant rearing establishment at Batsford, near Morton-In-Marsh, Gloucestershire, in July 2003. Stacked up behind breeding sheds, investigators filmed dozens of metal fenn traps and wooden and wire mesh larsen

'AB' snare

Newer types of snare, such as those manufactured by AB Country Products, are said to be legal free-running snares. However, some authorities are of opinion that these snares are really self-locking in nature. The 'AB' snare for example features a V-shaped metal device at one end; the wire is threaded through two holes, one on each side of the 'V'. It seems that the wire does not run as freely as in a free-running snare - but neither does it lock fully. Expert opinion is divided as to whether these snares should be treated as free-running (and therefore legal) or self-locking (and therefore illegal).



Millions of wild animals are killed annually to ensure that sports shooters, as seen here, have an adequate supply of game birds to kill

traps, in addition to pits containing rotting deer, foxes and other animals killed by gamekeepers at the estate.

More disturbing still, and in scenes identical to the Killinghurst shooting estate in Surrey, only metres away from the rearing sheds, on land operated by the Batsford Foundation, which runs the Batsford Arboretum, investigators filmed two badger setts destroyed; the entrances showing signs of digging and blocking with heavy earth and multiple chunks of badger fur, suggesting the illegal baiting of the animals. Investigators have passed information relating to the incident to Gloucestershire Police and an investigation is understood to be under way.

Investigations during the past eighteen months have also found evidence of wildlife killing connected with game shooting in Dorset, Devon, Somerset, Cornwall, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Essex, Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Powys, Gloucestershire and several locations in Scotland. But it is in the North East of Britain that some of the largest concentrations of both legal and illegal snaring have been uncovered.

ONE MAN'S STRUGGLE

Aged 55, X is a former clerk at Consett steelworks in County Durham. When the plant closed in the early 1980s he was eager for any work and took a job as a beater for a local grouse shoot. He was not that taken with grouse shooting, because he had five cats, and "at the time all the talk was about gamekeepers killing cats." However, he enjoyed walking on the moors and being paid for it.

In 1984, he first discovered snares in a local wood and asked the gamekeeper he worked for if they were his. He firmly denied setting them. It was not until 1991 that he would give thought to the issue of snares again. This time his dog went missing in woods only a few miles from his Castleside home.

X did find some snares while looking for his dog, but it did not click that they might be responsible for the loss of his dog. It was only six months later that he was informed by the rural police officer that he had heard his dog was "caught in a snare and shot by the gamekeeper."



Evidence of environmental damage caused by shooting parties was discovered by investigators: the remains of a fire including broken bottles and spent shotgun cartridges

Later in 1991 X found a fox in a snare, caught by its neck and front leg. He released it the next day after feeding it, and subsequently determined to use his spare time to tour the local woods and locate snares. Since that day X and colleagues have reportedly discovered hundreds of wild animals, including badgers, foxes, stoats and hares; livestock, including sheep; and domestic pets, including cats, trapped, maimed and killed by snares in County Durham and Northumbria.

An indication of the level of snares being set in the region came when police were investigating the setting of illegal snares. This followed a complaint by X that they were self-locking. A police officer investigating asked the keeper to remove snares on the Allendale estate in 1998 while his investigations were on-going. The gamekeeper responded by saying: "What all of them, but there are hundreds on the estate."

INVESTIGATIONS

In August 2003, investigators travelled to Northumbria to verify independently the scale of the problem in the region. The trip unveiled a disturbing picture of the continued targeting of wildlife by gamekeepers 'protecting' the region's grouse and pheasant stocks. The following accounts are lifted from field reports compiled by investigators.

"On 22nd of July investigators visited Acton Moor wood, Northumberland. This had a history of dead snared foxes, and a snared cat had been found alive by X in 1996. The site was last visited in 1997 when 40 snares were found. The wood is a pine plantation just over half a mile square and surrounded by grouse moors.

An owl box was discovered in the wood. While there was no proof this was being used for unlawful reasons, gamekeepers have a history of persecuting owls on grouse moors because of their potential predation on grouse chicks. The walls of the wood had snares set in gaps.

Over 30 snares were found throughout the wood, some attached to quite small drag poles. Small branches had been cut from conifer trees to establish elaborate means of channelling animals into snares. At the heart of the wood was a dump



As well as undertaking supposed pest control, gamekeepers fulfil a secondary role during a sport shoot; acting as beaters for the shooting party



A fenn trap has caused this animal to die an unpleasant death

SNARES AND UK LAW

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Under this Act (as amended by the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1991), it is an offence for a person to: 1, set a self-locking snare in such a way as to be calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild animal (this includes dual purpose snares set in the self-locking position), or to knowingly cause or permit the setting of a self-locking snare in this way; 2, to kill or take, or to knowingly cause or permit the killing or taking of any wild animal using a self locking Snare; 3, to set a snare (or other article) in such a way as to be calculated to cause bodily

of animals containing two fresh deer, a fresh rabbit and fox. These were on top of hundreds of bones and various decomposed bodies.

Three snares were set in the conifer branch barrier around this dump, with a further four in the immediate channelling surrounding the animal dump. The animals were clearly there as bait for the snares. A few hundred yards from Acton woods, two Fenn traps were discovered, one of which contained the decomposing body of a stoat.

South of Allendale town, a local landowner had complained that cats were going missing in the area in 1996. X had visited and removed over a dozen snares in 1996. This area is a small mixed deciduous woodland on both sides of the road, with a small stream and river running through it. Four snares were found including one on a drag pole.

X had previously found around 20 snares in 2000 at Schoolhouse Woods, near Allenheads. This is a small conifer plantation about 400 yards by 400 yards, which adjoins the grouse moors. Investigators found five snares all in position but unset, and a number of other snares. There was also an artificial fox earth in the woods with two entrances. This is very significant because foxes that had once been encouraged to provide sport for hunting now risk suffering in the snares set by the grouse shoot.

A local resident had found a young roe deer caught in a snare several years ago near Slaggyford, Cumbria. He believed snares were still set in the natural woodland close to a river and was concerned. Investigators were told the area was “well kept,” and that there was a trail through the wood where the snares are set, and consequently “there is no fox badger or deer left.” Investigators initially found one dead buzzard. At the time of writing this was being examined for shot damage by veterinary surgeon.

Campaigners had found two dead foxes in snares in 1997 in Parmently Cottage Wood, near Whitfield Moor. 15 snares were found unset upon return investigations. The wood had been extensively channelled using conifer branches and with snares set in the channels. These would have formed a complete trap to any animal venturing through the wood. Some of the snares had been bent to make them lock, and



A selection of traps discovered prior to setting on a shooting estate in Gloucestershire

most had no stop: Some were also lying on the ground, making a hazard to any animal.

X had last visited the Rye Close estate six years ago and had found snares and foxes hung in the trees. At least twenty fox snares were found set: the majority on distinct animal runs. The wood is largely conifer bordering a river and the grouse moor. Two rabbits were found dead in snares. One had maggots in a neck wound where the snare had been, indicating the snares were not being checked regularly. This same rabbit had fought a tremendous fight and had twisted the snare with its dying struggle.

X had previously visited Allenheads Wood in 1998. There are several woods at Allenheads, but the two investigated are about 400 yards by 1000 yards each. X had found 50 snares, which he believed to be self locking, in 1998. He also found a large animal dump designed to attract animals to the snares which were set in elaborate channels of pine branches.

BONES

Investigators found at least 15 snares. All were unset and would have been free running, but weathering had made them self-locking in many cases, or they had twisted. Several of the snares were discarded in a manner in which any animal could walk into them and be trapped. At the centre of the wood there was an animal dump containing no fresh animals but thousands of bones, where animals had been dumped to entice foxes into the snares. Surrounding this were hundreds of metres of extensive channelling made with conifer branches.”

The North of England also holds the unsavoury reputation for being one of the country’s leading hubs for the persecution of birds of prey, many incidents pointing towards the involvement of gamekeepers, who may regard birds of prey as a pest and potential risk to valuable bird stocks. Figures compiled by the RSPB indicate a higher number of incidents involving the shooting, trapping, poisoning or nest destruction of birds of prey than any other geographical area in the UK.

injury to any animal listed in Schedule 6 of the Act, or to knowingly cause or permit the setting of a snare in this way. (Schedule 6 species include badger, otters, pine martens, polecats, red squirrels and wild cats); 4, to kill or take, or to knowingly cause or permit the killing or taking of any animal listed in Schedule 6 of the Act (e.g., a badger) using a snare; 5, anyone who sets a snare, or knowingly causes or permits a snare to be set, to fail to inspect that snare (or have someone else inspect it) at least once every twenty four hour period or to possess a snare for the purpose of committing any of the above offences. (HMSO, 1981).



A deer caught in one of many illegally set snares found during this investigation

The Deer Act 1991

It is an offence under this Act to set in position a snare which is of such a nature and so placed as to be calculated to cause bodily injury to any deer coming in contact with it, or to use a snare for the purpose of killing or taking any deer. It is also an offence to attempt to commit either of these offences, or to possess a snare for the purpose of committing either of those offences (HMSO, 1991).

The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

The use of various specified methods of taking or killing certain wild animals are prohibited by these Regulations. Prohibited methods

Such is the scale of the problem in the north east that campaigners are calling for the creation of a special police unit dedicated to combating shooting related wildlife crime in County Durham and Northumbria.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION?

Advocates of shooting, including the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) and the National Gamekeepers Association (NGO), unsurprisingly champion the work of gamekeepers, maintaining that those engaged in the pastime are responsible persons with an interest in conserving the natural environment.

According to the National Gamekeepers Organisation, gamekeepers' main work "is to help pheasants, partridges, hares and grouse to thrive in the countryside. Looking after the woods, hedgerows and fields in which the game birds and animals live is crucial. Most game birds need good grassy cover in which to nest, plenty of food and protection from rats and crows which would otherwise attack and eat the chicks. Hares need open country and protection from foxes. Because lots of other wild birds and animals benefit from these things too, gamekeeping helps to ensure a balanced countryside with plentiful wildlife."

The shooting lobby's stance on snaring is less straightforward; whilst BASC and the NGO have always fully championed their use, the Countryside Alliance appears to have changed its view on the issue to suit its political campaigning on hunting with dogs. The organisation currently supports the use of snares although it strongly criticised them only a few years ago.

BASC maintains that "snares are a vital tool of wildlife management. Legal snares, properly set, are a humane means of control which is not only used for pests but also by scientific researchers who need animals to be captured alive with minimum stress for radio tagging and release.

"There are strict laws governing the use of snares and the treatment of animals taken by them. The capture of non-target species can be avoided by proper training. A snare which is correctly set and sited will rarely catch non-target species,



Investigations have revealed woodlands containing as many as a hundred snares similar to this

and if it does they can be released unharmed. Pests can be dispatched instantly, without undue stress.

“Where capture of non-target species it is usually the result of inadequate training. Formal training is available at colleges and from organisations such as the Game Conservancy Trust. There is a code of practice, produced by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, which is now regarded as the standard by the police, RSPCA and ADAS, Forest Enterprise and the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, and the statutory nature conservation agencies. It is widely available. Nevertheless, organisations concerned with pest control and countryside management are constantly looking at ways of improving snaring.”

PROLONGED PAIN AND DISTRESS

The Countryside Alliance now fully supports snares having previously criticised them very strongly. Their submissions to the “Lord Burns” enquiry into hunting with dogs condemned snares as causing “prolonged pain and distress”.

This gained the support of Lord Burns who stated in his House of Lords speech 12th March 2001: “Therefore we have to consider the welfare effects of the alternatives. For foxes, that means considering methods such as shooting and snaring. None of them is entirely comfortable. Both snaring and shooting with shotguns can have serious adverse welfare effects.” “We consider that the use of snaring is a particular cause for concern.” Paragraph 6.60 (Final Report) Lord Burns Inquiry into Hunting With Dogs

The British Field Sports Society (the Countryside Alliance under its previous name) stated in its booklet “The Case for Hunting”, circulated in the 1990s, that: “Indiscriminate snaring causes suffering to foxes and other mammals. Both snares and traps cause unavoidable stress for wild animals”.

In June 2000, the Countryside Animal Welfare Group, a group made up of several thousand Countryside Alliance Supporters who are members of the RSPCA, stated: “Snaring with a legal snare - one equipped with a “stop” that prevents strangulation - professionally and properly positioned causes the same stress and fear as trapping.

include “traps which are non-selective according to their principle or their conditions of use”. The SSPCA takes the view that this definition includes snares. The mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*) is included in Schedule 3 of these regulations as one of the species of wild mammal which may not be taken or killed by this and other specified methods (along with the pine marten, polecat and otter, which are also protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act – see above). (HMSO, 1994). The snaring of mountain hares in Scotland is now licensed.

Protection of Animals Act 1911 & Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912

A person who sets a snare in such a way as to catch domestic animals may be guilty of an offence under section 1(1)(a) of the Protection of Animals Act 1911 in England and Wales, and section 1(1)(a) of the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912 in Scotland (HMSO 1911, HMSO 1912). These Acts make it illegal to cause unnecessary suffering to a domestic or captive animal through the wanton or unreasonable commission or omission of any act, or by causing or procuring the commission or omission of any act.

An animal correctly snared will struggle violently to free itself, and it may wait many hours in a distressed state before being despatched.

“However, snaring is a highly skilled method of control and unless the snare is correctly placed it can result in the animal being trapped by the leg and neck or around the body. As the animal struggles the snare tightens around the body which is bigger than the ‘stop’. By the time the snare is visited the animal is either in great pain or has died from its self-induced injuries.”

The Countryside Alliance has now completely changed its tune and come out fully in support of snares, possibly as a result of pressure from the National Gamekeepers Organisation, whose members form a significant part of the CA membership.

In fact, documents obtained by investigators reveal that representatives of the Countryside Alliance have held private meetings with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the Game Conservancy Trust to discuss ways in which to defend the use of snares and combat what are perceived as threats to the pastime.

In paperwork relating to the first ‘snares consultation meeting’, which took place in early 2002, it is stated that the Countryside Alliance has been developing a new type of snare called the “Rose Cuff” which has already been tested on captive foxes and – most revealingly – that the shooting lobby is looking to launch a media drive to reverse the “excessive popularity of badgers” and maintain the “problematic image of the fox”.

SECRETIVE PASTIME

In addition to the substantial documentary evidence gathered throughout the investigation, research has revealed an extensive number of criminal cases brought against gamekeepers following incidents of wildlife persecution and other offences. Such findings help to dramatically cut through the public facade that gamekeepers are concerned with conservation, painting an unsavoury picture of a secretive pastime concerned with killing wildlife to maintain and support an unnatural population of reared game birds.

The following examples are not exhaustive but can be regarded as typical of offences committed by those involved in managing game bird stocks. (Some names have been omitted in accordance with the Rehabilitation Of Offenders Act.)

In 2000, Charles Arnold, a gamekeeper of Shipton Bellinger, Hampshire was fined £500 with £40 costs after pleading guilty to setting four pole-traps on the fence posts of a pheasant release pen near Snoddington farm, Cholderton.

In 2000, Raymond Holden a gamekeeper at Hi-Fly Game Hatchery near Pilling, was fined £2000 for using a live mallard duck as a decoy in a fox trap. He was also fined £500 plus £500 costs for maiming a jackdaw which he used as a decoy in a cage trap (he actually maimed 10 jackdaws, one for each of 10 traps, but he was only summonsed once). Holden was found not guilty of killing a moorhen, keeping a mallard in a cage in which it could not stretch its wings and using a funnel trap to catch wild birds.

Also in 2000, Martin Joyce a gamekeeper was fined for the killing of three kestrels on the Holkham Estate in Norfolk. Joyce admitted to shooting two birds and poisoning a third because he blamed them for attacking young partridges.

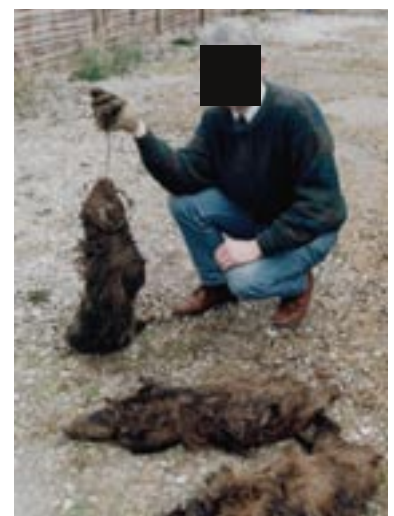
In 2000, Haydn Williams a gamekeeper on the Kentchurch Estate in Herefordshire and also a falconer was fined £500 for illegal possession and non-registration of two goshawks, and illegal possession of two barn owls. At court Williams admitted he had illegally trapped the goshawks to reduce predation at his pheasant release pens.

'A' was found guilty in 1996 by Wrexham magistrates of four charges of setting traps and two charges of possessing them and was fined £400 and £100 costs. The traps were found by RSPB investigators on the Bry-y-Pys estate at Overton where he then worked. During a search of 13 pheasant pens on the estate evidence was found of illegal pole-traps in all but two, and in four of the pens the steel spring traps were set. On a search of his house five identical traps were found and restraining wires hanging from a hook. He claimed a trespasser with a grievance had placed them there while he was on holiday.

'B', a gamekeeper for 30 years, appeared before Stonehaven Sheriff Court charged with using an illegal spring trap. He had used the traps believing predatory



An investigator examines an illegally set snare



Illegally snared badgers found by investigators



A larsen trap

THE LARSEN TRAP

The Larsen trap is a wire and wood framed cage where a live bird i.e. a crow or a magpie is placed to encourage another bird, not always of similar species, to come down to it. The visiting bird, not knowing its fate, falls through a false door into a compartment where it awaits its fate with the gamekeeper. Investigators have witnessed crows left to die without food and water. They have also witnessed birds with broken beaks and cut heads where they have tried desperately to escape. Decoy birds routinely have their wing feathers cut to prevent them from escaping.

birds were eating the rabbits he had caught in other traps. He was discovered when a dog walker came across a bird on the ground caught in the trap. When police questioned him about the incident he admitted placing the trap and knowing it was illegal to set one uncovered above ground. He was fined £120.

BIRDS OF PREY

'C' and his nephew 'D' appeared before Llangollen magistrates on 27 June 1997. Both were charged with three counts of using a trap to take a wild bird, possessing traps to take wild birds, having control of part of a wild bird and keeping a pheasant in an under-sized cage. The offences fall under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Magistrates heard how an RSPB employee found two Larsen traps near a pheasant release pen, one contained a crippled pheasant. When the police interviewed the pair (who are both experienced gamekeepers on the estate) they said one of the traps was to catch fox cubs. The prosecution alleged the traps were really a decoy to destroy birds of prey. The incident was alleged to have happened on the Nanttyr Estate near Llangollen where many birds of prey breed.

'E' appeared before Welshpool magistrates and denied five charges relating to the illegal use of a trap for ensnaring birds of prey on 25 August 1995 on the Leighton Estate near Welshpool. The magistrates heard how a badly injured wood pigeon was used as a decoy to trap birds of prey. The estate is used for rearing pheasants for shooting. He admitted setting the trap but claimed he only intended to catch crows or magpies.

'F' was convicted of assaulting Stuart Roberts and Raymond Maxwell, both of Harraby, Carlisle. After finding the two men taking rabbits with guns, ferrets and dogs at Mellguards, Southwaite, 'F' admitted punching Maxwell "at least twice". He said he pushed Maxwell and as soon as he fell into the car boot his leg came up. "I thought he was going to kick me. I took action and hit him again when he was standing in front of me. I thought I would hit him just in case. I hit him when he got out of the boot because I didn't know what he was going to do".

'G', a gamekeeper from Essex, appeared before Witham magistrates on 23 January 1997 where he was found guilty under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act



Game birds in a rearing pen to maintain stock levels to ensure plenty of targets for paying customers

of 1996 of 'asphyxiating three fox cubs with intent to cause suffering'. The offence took place at Coggeshall around the end of May 1996. The foxes were gassed with cyanide. He was fined £350 and ordered to pay costs of £150.

'H', a trainee gamekeeper at the Kimberley Hall Estate, Norfolk appeared before Norwich magistrates on 18 January 1996. The magistrates heard how 'H' set pole traps to catch birds of prey and that he had been told by the head gamekeeper to set the traps. The traps which have been illegal since 1904 were rigged to trap birds such as sparrowhawks and tawny owls as they swooped down on pheasants which were being reared in pens on the estate. The traps were set on five 10 foot poles at various places on the estate and their steel jaws were triggered by a spring to snap shut when the birds land on the poles.

An RSPB officer commented that any birds caught in a pole trap would die a very slow and painful death as they would just be hanging there with one or two broken legs until it either died from starvation or shock. 'H', who was fined £1500 (£300 for each trap) and £30 costs later said: "I have been made a scapegoat. I did not know these traps were illegal. I was just told to do it and I did." He also told the court that any fine would be paid by the landowner.

'I' appeared before Wycombe magistrates on 24 October 1997 charged with killing protected wild animals. He faced a total of 16 charges, including: taking a badger, destroying a badger sett, two breaches of firearms certificate regulations, killing three wild owls, setting snares to injure wild animals, using an illuminating device to assist in the killing of a badger, killing two sparrowhawks, using a Fenn trap for foxes in a non-approved way, taking an unknown number of badgers, and killing a buzzard. The charges related to dates from January 1996 to August 1997 in the High Wycombe area.

CYANIDE

'J', a gamekeeper from Norfolk appeared before Swaffham magistrates in November 1996 and pleaded guilty to illegally poisoning foxes. He admitted to laying sodium cyanide (Cymag) at a fox earth which was located near to a public footpath. Police went to the estate after a pair of passing walkers found the body of a dead vixen.

Larsen traps are normally found near game bird rearing pens or on the edge of woodland where the game bird rearing pens is located.



Bird victims of a gamekeepers programme of persecution

They found the earth had been blocked with bags and sodium cyanide could be seen around the earth. The court also heard how the Cymag canister had not been disposed of properly and two garages used to store lethal chemicals were left unlocked. He was fined £550 and ordered to pay costs of £350.

'K' appeared at a court in Dumfries accused of using a funnel trap for the killing of wild birds. He pleaded not guilty to the charge; he also denied possession of a funnel trap and two pigeons capable of being used to catch wild birds. The court heard how an SSPCA investigating officer found a trap baited with pigeons. The sheriff found the case not proven.

'L', the then head keeper at Vivoid Estate, Llangollen appeared in front of Llangollen magistrates on 21 June 1997. He was cleared of seven charges involving the illegal use of traps and poisoned bait.

'M' was found guilty of having shotguns and rifles out of his cabinet and of illegal possession of 20 rounds of .275 ammunition and 4 slug cartridges. Following an anonymous complaint about poisoning police obtained a warrant to search Skelly's house. During the search they found Cymag gas, .275 ammunition and his guns were out of their cabinet. Following an appearance at Peebles Sheriff Court in September the police have revoked his shotgun and firearms licence. However, the court did not fine him or make him pay any costs, he was just admonished by the sheriff.

'N' was convicted of using a Larsen trap for the purpose of killing or taking a wild bird and fined £100 with £200 costs. During a hearing at Hexham magistrates court on 18 October 1996 the court heard how RSPB officers and police had kept watch on the Park End trap which had been baited with a live racing pigeon and had been placed near a pheasant release pen. The prosecution of 'N' was the first successful one of this type in England and Wales. The wildlife liaison officer for Northumbria said after the case : "It is a milestone case and we are delighted at the decision. It is a very important development which will hopefully send out a message to all gamekeepers and landowners that the law will not tolerate the persecution of birds of prey".



Skeletons of long dead victims of wildlife persecution

Jail for badger persecution

The South Lakes Badger Protection group called in the RSPCA when they found dead badger carcasses and illegal locking snares on the Holker Hall estate of Lord Cavendish, near Cark-in-Cartmel. A covert operation was set up by the RSPB in response finding a cage trap. It ultimately led to the discovery of two dead badgers, though fifteen were believed to have been killed, in the preliminary investigation in 1998. One was found hanging over the edge of a limestone outcrop where it had asphyxiated after dragging a snare for 30 yards. Badger bones and skulls were scattered around the area and a dead buzzard was found hidden in a hole. On 11/6/99 John Drummond (32) of Old Park Farmhouse, Grange-Over-Sands who is the Head Gamekeeper for the estate was found guilty on 46 out of 65 charges under the Protection of Badgers Act and the Wildlife and Countryside Acts. Drummond was found guilty of wilfully killing two badgers, wilfully taking one badger and cruelly mistreating all three. On 12/7/99 Drummond was jailed for three months.



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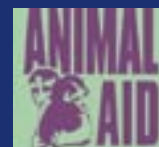
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