

Wildlife Trail Generates Millions for Economy - RSPB Press Release, 10 January

People visiting Dumfries and Galloway to see the region's red kites have contributed over £8.2m to the local economy a new report has found. These birds of prey were re-introduced to an area north of Castle Douglas from 2001 and two years later the Galloway Kite Trail, a self guided tour circling Loch Ken, was launched as a partnership project led by RSPB Scotland. An economic survey carried out by the conservation organisation found that between 2004 and 2015 the trail attracted over 100,000 visitors to the area and that £8.2m of spending was directly attributable to people who came to the region to see red kites. On average, the trail also supported the equivalent of 19 full-time jobs each year, however that figure rose to 21 in 2015. Calum Murray, RSPB Scotland Community Liaison Officer, said: "The re-introduction of red kites has been a massive conservation success story and we now have over 100 pairs breeding in Dumfries and Galloway, but this survey clearly demonstrates how nature can bring economic benefits to areas as well. *(The survey also demonstrates the false claim by the bloodsports lobby that they are essential to Scotland's economy. Indeed, there remains huge scope for the development of benign enjoyment of wildlife throughout the UK, Ed)*

Mountain hares and golden eagles

There has been publicity recently about mountain hares possibly being vulnerable to predation owing to unseasonal warm weather and lack of snow upon which they rely for camouflage in their white winter coats. Our under cover contact in Scotland says: "sure, if they are on a patch of ground with no snow on it, they may well be vulnerable to golden eagles, but if the number of hares taken by the eagles from grouse moor survivors is having an impact, then the hare population is far too low. Bear in mind that only 15-20 years ago mountain hares were common enough in many areas to be considered a bit of a pest." Climate change is probably the least of the mountain hare's worries. In the past we have released rehabilitated albino brown hares into the wild and subsequent monitoring showed that they were able to cope with the lack of camouflage.

Scottish Government plans to strengthen the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act

In our view hunting with dogs would have been effectively banned in 1997 had Michael Foster's Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill been enacted. It received 411 votes in the Commons but fell because the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, would not allow it a few moments of extra parliamentary time. Offences under the Bill were defined as:

- (1) Any person who uses, causes or permits any dog to hunt any wild mammal shall be guilty of an offence.
- (2) Any person who in the course of hunting uses, causes or permits any dog to enter any structure or place, whether subterranean or not, used or likely to be used by any wild mammal for shelter or protection shall be guilty of an offence.
- (3) Any person who being an owner or occupier of land, causes or permits any person to enter upon or use that land to hunt with a dog any wild mammal shall be guilty of an offence.
- (4) Any person who being the owner or keeper of a dog permits any other person to use, cause or permit that dog to hunt any wild mammal shall be guilty of an offence.
- (5) Any person who owns, uses or controls a pack of dogs for the purposes of hunting shall be guilty of an offence.

It will be interesting to compare these offences with the provisions of the revised Act in Scotland and whether they are fit for purpose in prohibiting hunting with dogs.

Scandal of Health Service exposing vulnerable patients to animal cruelty

This relates to hare coursing in Ireland and the disturbing revelation that the Irish Health Service was involved in teaching the ethics of coursing as "therapy" to people with learning difficulties. Although the dogs wear muzzles this does not stop the terrified hares being subjected to crippling, potentially fatal injuries as they are mauled and tossed about, often resulting in broken bones. Also, potentially fatal stress myopathy is a very likely outcome of the hares' suffering. The hare coursing and greyhound training project has now ceased at

the training centre and the Health Service Executive has issued a statement declaring that hare coursing is "not an appropriate leisure activity to provide or fund as a social care provider."

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