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**Sent:** 02 June 2015 13:38  
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**Cc:** Tim Baynes  
**Subject:** RE: Gas guns on grouse moors

Folks,

Firstly, thank you Doug, for your quick response to my query regarding the use of gas guns on grouse moors.

While not wanting to get involved in a protracted email debate on the subject, not least because I'll shortly be out of the country for a week, it is interesting that this is not perceived as a "raptor issue"! As someone who has been involved in raptor monitoring for over 30 years, I would be very wary of suggesting a "safe distance" away from a golden eagle or hen harrier nest where one of these guns would categorically not

disturb the breeding birds. Any unlicensed disturbance, of course, only needs to happen once for a potential offence to be committed. As such, I feel that it would be entirely appropriate to discuss this issue at the next PAWS Raptor Group meeting.

Given that there seems to be little in the way of regulation governing either the deployment of gas guns or the use of fireworks/bangers on moorland, and the suggestion that these contraptions "seem to have little impact on other species", it would be good to see the results of rigorous field-testing by an independent agency before such a claim is made. I also suggest that where the use of these guns deters breeding by raptors such as hen harriers, many of which are still settling well into May or even early June, this may, in certain protected areas, be an operation requiring consent from SNH.

While I don't doubt the assertion that this can be an effective tool for moving on flocks of ravens, the claim that ravens "have a devastating impact on all ground nesting birds" is just not supported by scientific evidence. For example, Amar et al (2010)<sup>[1]</sup> states that there is "little substantive evidence to justify the control of raven populations for the large-scale conservation benefit of breeding wader populations".

Similarly, Rae et al (2011)<sup>[2]</sup> comment that their study did "not support the view that Ravens have a detrimental effect on breeding Dunlin and Golden Plover populations in North-east Scotland. Consequently, any application for a license to kill Ravens to protect the nests of waders remains unjustified". Indeed, in the documentation kindly provided by Tim Baynes, SNH's licence refusal states "No robust information is provided or available to show declines in populations or that, even if declines were occurring, raven predation is driving that decline or even a significant factor in that decline".

It is unfortunate that Ravens are also subject to the same anecdotal accusations that are regularly aimed at other species such as, for example, buzzards, red kites or badgers. You can be assured that RSPB Scotland's contribution to the "Understanding Predation" project will be solely based on robust scientific evidence.

[1] Amar, A., Redpath, S., Sim, I. and Buchanan, G. (2010), Spatial and temporal associations between recovering populations of common raven *Corvus corax* and British upland wader populations. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 47: 253–262.

[2] Rae, R., Weston, E. and Duthie, E. (2011) Numbers and breeding success of Golden Plover and Dunlin in an area frequented by Ravens *Scottish Birds* 31: 98–106.]

Regards,

Ian

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**From:** Doug McAdam [mailto:douglas.mcadam@snh.gov.uk] [redacted]  
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**Cc:** Tim Baynes  
**Subject:** FW: Gas guns on grouse moors

Dear All,

I am replying on behalf of the land management sector to Ian Thompson's email to the PAWS Raptor Group. This is not a raptor issue and I hope we can provide enlightenment. These comments are general and not specific to any particular land holding.

Gas guns are used, and have been used for a number of years, on land where there is a problem with juvenile raven flocks which, as you will know, can have a devastating impact on all ground

nesting birds particularly grouse, golden plover, dotterel and other waders. Gas guns have proved to be one of the more effective methods of moving the ravens on, because they quickly become immune to human and other scaring methods. Gas guns are not foolproof but is sometimes the best available tool in the box for wildlife managers. The predation is also on sheep and lambs at this time of year but it is possible to obtain a licence to protect them.

Where gas guns are used, they have the advantage of being targeted and proportional, able to be moved according to where the raven problem is worst and they seem to have relatively little impact on other species. Nevertheless, a careful assessment will be made to ensure there are no known raptors nests nearby, raptors attempting to nest or historic nesting sites.

Ian's question is helpful in raising the issue of raven predation and how to prevent it damaging upland bird populations. In 2009-2011 a group of landowners on Deeside and Donside made applications to SNH to make scaring more effective by enabling them to shoot a small number of the ravens – less than 10% of a flock. Ravens are highly intelligent and there is evidence that they will not ignore scaring if they see some of their flock being shot. A considerable amount of evidence was put forward in accordance with SNH Licensing requirements, to demonstrate their impact on both grouse and waders. The quality of that evidence was recognised by SNH but the licence applications were all refused. As a result other methods had to be found to prevent what can be serious predation of wild birds.

The land management sector discussed this with Paul Wheelhouse MSP when he was the Environment Minister at meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2013, and he asked us to send further information about those licence applications. A copy of that email will be copied to the group to give further information. SNH agreed to look at whether a derogation to permit a trial might be permissible on the basis of research but we had no further response.

Perhaps the RSPB could now give their support to experimental removal of a small number of ravens to address the evidence gap rather than continuing to rely on 20 year old correlative data? Presumably RSPB will also be putting its full weight behind the Government/SNH/Moorland Forum "Understanding Predation" project which will help gather vital evidence about this issue?

Regards  
Doug

Douglas McAdam  
Chief Executive  
Twitter: [REDACTED]



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**Subject:** Gas guns on grouse moors

Fo ks,

I'm sure some of you will have seen the latest post on the "Raptor Persecution Scotland" blog regarding a gas gun situated on a grouse moor in S Lanarkshire. While this may be something new to the authors of the website, we've been receiving various reports regarding gas guns on or on the fringes of grouse moors for several years, but remain somewhat mystified as to why a "scaring device" would be used at a time when so many species, including grouse, are breeding!

I'd be grateful if someone from the land management sector could perhaps provide some enlightenment as to why these contraptions would be deployed?

Many thanks,

Ian

**Ian Thomson**

Head of Investigations, RSPB Scotland

**RSPB Scottish Headquarters** 2 Lochside View, Edinburgh Park, Edinburgh, EH12 9DH

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[rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk)

<image001.gif>

<image002.gif>

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[1] Amar, A., Redpath, S., Sim, I. and Buchanan, G. (2010), Spatial and temporal associations between recovering populations of common raven *Corvus corax* and British upland wader populations. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 47: 253–262.

[2] Rac, R., Weston, E. and Duthie, E. (2011) Numbers and breeding success of Golden Plover and Dunlin in an area frequented by Ravens *Scottish Birds* 31: 98–106.