



The Moorland Association

Many of you will be aware that there have been a number of damaging incidents recently that are detrimental to the reputation of the MA, and in turn damaging to the perception of the work you do.

Hen Harrier decoy film

During February film footage was published by the group Raptor Persecution apparently showing an armed man using a decoy male hen harrier allegedly to attract hen harriers on land owned by the National Trust in Derbyshire.

Derbyshire Police investigated the footage but have decided not to take any further action.

The MA issued a statement at the time explaining that "we condemn all acts of wildlife crime and support the prosecution of those who break the law, but that making judgements based on assumptions of the content of this clip, or indeed the intentions of those who have produced it, would be pure supposition and not something we are going to enter into."

As a result of this incident the National Trust conducted their own internal investigation and have decided that, because they'd lost confidence that the tenant shared the Trust's High Peak Moors Vision, to terminate the agreement over Hope Woodlands and Park Hall in the Peak District four years early. This will take effect from April 2018. However, we are pleased that the NT have recognised the importance of grouse shooting in helping to deliver its Vision and will be looking for a new sporting tenant. Now is the time to show the NT and other landowners that driven grouse moor management is a partnership that truly delivers added value.

Goshawk nest

In May the RSPB issued a statement appealing for information after a goshawk nest failed 'in suspicious circumstances' at Dove Stone in the Peak District.

The RSPB statement said: "The abandoned goshawk nest in conifer woodland, is in the Longendale Valley, which the RSPB co-manages with landowner United Utilities. There were three cold eggs in the nest, one of which was broken. Damaged goshawk body feathers and a spent plastic shotgun cartridge were found in the immediate vicinity."

This was again reported by the group [Raptor Persecution](#), and picked up by many on twitter and other social media channels. The police have said they will not take further action.

Illegally set traps

Earlier this month a junior keeper at an MA member estate, received a police caution for setting three Fenn traps illegally on posts on open moorland ([video link](#)). The owner made it clear that neither he nor his head gamekeeper knew anything of this illegal and totally unacceptable activity. The estate immediately suspended the keeper pending a final decision giving due regard to employment law and procedure. The MA issued [this statement](#) at the time and is reviewing the case. A second statement will be issued when that process is complete.

This news has been covered by a number of newspapers, online blogs ([Raptor Persecution](#)), attracted intense social media attention and opinion formers have been comprehensively targeted by those wishing to see grouse shooting banned.

All of these incidents have been damaging to the MA's reputation by association of grouse moor management on the land or nearby. The Mossdale incident with clear film footage has been particularly damaging to the work we all do to promote the benefits (both socio-economic and ecological) of grouse moor management. Key organisations with whom we have worked hard to find sustainable solutions on issues such as hen harriers and heather management have expressed their dismay. You can read the reaction of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority [here](#).

What can you do to protect your reputation as a responsible grouse moor manager?

- Review keeper employment contracts and ensure that these are explicit about working within the law and best practice.
- Ensure head keepers have a mechanism to oversee subordinates sufficiently.
- Provide training where necessary to ensure staff comply with the law.
- Review staff disciplinary procedures to ensure swift, fair and proportionate decisions.

Counter-intuitive for most when there is trouble, it is now more important than ever that estates come forward to demonstrate the huge myriad of benefits that grouse moor management delivers, be that peatland restoration, wildlife success or community involvement.

Best Wishes,