**Written evidence submitted by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation to the group reviewing pheasant shooting on University of Reading land**

## Executive Summary

This written evidence explores the benefits delivered through shooting at the UK scale. This evidence is presented in support of the written and oral submission received from the leaseholder of shooting at Hall Farm.

- The evidence presented clearly shows that legal, responsible game shooting contributes to the sustainable management of natural resources
- Shooting in accordance with the Code of Good Shooting Practice is sustainable and delivers conservation, economic, social and wellbeing benefits
- Benefits provided by shooting are principally funded by private investment of those who go shooting.

## The British Association for Shooting and Conservation

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) is the representative body for sporting shooting in the UK with a membership of over 155,000. It aims to protect and promote sporting shooting and the well-being of the countryside throughout the UK. It actively promotes good firearms licencing practice, training, education, scientific research and practical habitat conservation.

## Anti-shooting lobbying

It is public knowledge that the League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) is lobbying University of Reading to withdraw the pheasant shooting lease on University land at Hall Farm. LACS campaign material[1] makes a number of un-evidenced statements in relation to game shooting.

BASC has objectively critiqued these statements as part of our due process for presenting good evidence to University of Reading for its review. We have provided a copy of this report in Appendix A. In summary, LACS claims reflect their organisational position and not a balanced or correct review of available evidence.

## High level legislation and policy landscape.

### Convention on Biological Diversity[2]

The UK is one of over 190 countries which have signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The sustainable use principles enshrined within it support hunting as a legitimate use of biodiversity. European legislation and guidance on hunting[3]. Although the UK is working towards exiting the EU, we feel it is correct to highlight the support for hunting through the EU instruments.

Under the Birds Directive, the ability to hunt certain species is provided for and this was transposed into UK law in the 1981 wildlife and countryside act. In 2001, the EU commission launched the Sustainable Hunting Initiative to improve the understanding of legal and technical aspects of the directive's provisions for sustainable hunting.

This initiative has been supported by a European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity which was adopted by the standing committee of the Bern Directive in 2007. This demonstrates the recognition of hunting as a sustainable use of biodiversity (an important aspect of natural resources and the underpinning element of ecosystem services).

**Shooting and the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources**

Information from The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting sports to the UK (PACEC 2014)[4] provides robust evidence of the benefits shooting provides for the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources. These benefits are equally relevant to land University of Reading owns or manages.

The report indicates that shooting spends £250 million on conservation annually across the UK. This includes direct habitat management and creation, as well as pest control activities to support conservation. The report indicates that the effort that goes into conservation work from shooting is the equivalent of 16,000 full-time conservation jobs, 2,400 of which are provided in south east of England. This report demonstrates the high level of importance of shooting to the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources.

**Game shooting and its role in maintenance and enhancement of natural resources**

The influence of shooting game is an important reason for habitat maintenance and improvement. Pheasants prefer to utilise the outer edges of woodlands, be that the edges themselves or rides and glades within them. This is an important reason to increase the quantity and quality of hedgerows and woodland. The PACEC 2014 report indicates that 41 per cent of shooting providers (someone who provides shooting to others) create or maintain hedgerows and 37 per cent create or maintain small woodland 'coverts' (UK-scale information).

This can lead to shooting estates having up to ten times the woodland cover of non-shooting estates and for hedgerows to be better connected to woodlands (Oldfield, Smith, Harrop, & Leader-Williams, 2003[5] ). In addition, land managed for shooting is more likely to use traditional, labour-intensive, woodland management techniques, such as coppicing, which are beneficial to birds and other wildlife (Fuller & Green, 1998[6]; Fuller, Stuttard, & Ray, 1989[7]).

Shooting land managers also undertake other, large-scale habitat management to benefit gamebirds and other wildlife. For example, 33 per cent of shooting land managers report creating and maintaining grass strips around fields and 19 per cent report retaining overwinter stubbles (PACEC, 2014). Cereal stubbles are important as over-wintering habitat for farmland birds, providing habitat for up to 44 per cent of seed-eating birds (Perkins, Maggs, & Wilson, 2008[8] ). Sympathetically-managed grass margins can also provide important food throughout the year (for review, see Vickery, Feber, & Fuller, 2009[9]) for many types of birds and small mammals. For example, they can supply up to three times the level of chick-food arthropods, essential for breeding birds (Douglas, Vickery, & Benton, 2009[10] ).

Management for game shooting typically includes supplemental feeding to encourage them to stay within the boundaries of a shoot, improve winter survival and subsequent breeding success in the wild. Feed is provided through provision of grain in hoppers, hand feeding or through planting seed-rich plots of wild bird cover, also known as cover crops.

The PACEC 2014 report indicates that in the UK those providing shooting spend over £5.4 million on cover crop seeds each year. Cover crops are also an important source of food for many farmland birds (Boatman, Stoate, & Watts, 2000[11] ; Sage, Parish, Woodburn, & Thompson, 2005[12]) and can support up to 100 times more birds than set-aside or cereal

stubbles (Parish & Sotherton, 2004[13]), including threatened farmland birds such as the tree sparrow, linnet, corn bunting, yellowhammer, dunnock and reed bunting.

Food hoppers and feeding rides are used by shoots to encourage pheasants and partridges to use specific areas. UK shoot providers spend £25m per year on grain, which equates to over 200,000 tonnes of feed. Typically, only around a quarter of this food is eaten by gamebirds (Sánchez-García, Buner, & Aebischer, 2015[14]) with songbirds consuming a significant proportion. This can increase overwinter survival for some species (Siriwardena, Calbrade, & Vickery, 2008[15]), and is likely to improve breeding success (Stoate & Szczur, 2001[16]). This could be especially important for species such as yellowhammer, linnet and corn bunting which are known to use hoppers (Brickle, 1997[17]).

In summary, evidence demonstrates that game shooting is a motivator for the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources. In addition, these benefits apply to habitats as well as species, many of which are not game birds but are biodiversity priority species in the UK.

**The Code of Good Shooting Practice and its role in maintenance and enhancement of natural resources.**

The Code of Good Shooting Practice[18] applies to all game shooting activities and provides rules and guidance on a range of practical and ethical matters pertaining to game shooting. It recognises the conservation benefits of game shooting and provides guidance on sustainable gamebird releasing to avoid potential negative conservation impacts.

A review of gamebird release by the RSPB (Bicknell et al., 2010[19]) highlighted the range of impacts (both positive and negative) associated with gamebird releasing. The many benefits included positive habitat management for a wide variety of bird and animal species, as well as the economic and employment benefits to the local area. (PACEC 2014). Of the negative impacts listed, many are simply management trade-offs, for example, managing for game increased the number of thrushes and generalists, but decreased the number of tits. The majority of the impacts, such as damage to vegetation and localised declines in butterflies, can be mitigated by following best practice releasing guidelines (which are within the Code of Good Shooting Practice).

The executive summary for Bicknell et al., (2010) reported that: "*The data available shows that at high densities of gamebird release, negative environmental impacts are likely to occur, and in some cases may be severe. In the majority of cases, however, where densities are moderate, it is likely that impacts are minor or may be offset by beneficial habitat management. In areas where good habitat management is combined with low release densities, or in areas that work to promote breeding populations of gamebirds, impacts may be largely positive*." In this context, 'high density' is likely to be in excess of 1,000 birds per hectare in the release pen. Current research from the GWCT supports this (Neumann, Holloway, Sage, & Hoodless, 2015[20]; Sage, Ludolf, & Robertson, 2005[21]) which is why it forms the basis of the maximum recommended release density in the Code of Good Shooting Practice and the English Nature and Forestry Commission's Guidance on Woodland Conservation and Pheasants[22].

**Pest and Predator Control**

The PACEC 2014 report indicates that over half of the people that provide shooting opportunities (shoot providers) carry out wildlife management (for example deer management) and pest and predator control to avoid damage to game and habitats. Such activity is regulated through legislation (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Deer Act 1991, Animal Welfare Act 2006, Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996) supported by relevant codes of good practice.

Predator control, in combination with habitat management, has been found to reverse the local declines of farmland bird species such as song thrush, whitethroat, dunnock and blackbird (Stoate & Stour, 2001).

Corvids are one of the most important groups of avian nest predators (Andren, 1992[23]; Anglestam, 1986[24]), and management for shooting, which includes the removal of corvids, can lead to significant increases in passerine breeding success (Stoate & Szczur, 2001). Furthermore, jays can be responsible for up to 40 per cent of all nest predation in blackcaps (Weidinger, 2009[25]). c

Research has found that the most effective control is where mammalian and avian predators are both removed (Bodey, McDonald, Sheldon, & Bearhop, 2011[26]; Madden, Arroyo, & Amar, 2015[27]; Parker, 1984[28]). The data from PACEC 2014 shows that, on average, shoots report annual bags of 74 small mammalian predators per estate, suggesting that this is likely to be common practice.

**Animal welfare**

The welfare of pheasants reared and released for sporting purposes is regulated through section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, supported by DEFRA Code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes[29].

Further guidance on ensuring welfare of animals is provided through The Code of Good Shooting Practice and Respect for Quarry; a code of practice[30].

**Food**

One of the products of shooting is food. There are approximately 3,000 tonnes of gamebird meat available to eat each year (BASC & CA, 2014[31]) with 97 per cent destined for the human food chain (PACEC, 2014). The game meat market is expanding rapidly with sales up from £97 million in 2014 to over £106 million in 2015 (Poultry and Game Meat - UK - October 2015[32]); this has led to it being identified by Mintel as one of the “50 fascinating markets you need to watch”. There is significant room for growth in the game market, which currently accounts for just 2 per cent of poultry and game sales, but sales of game meat are forecast to reach £143 million by 2020.

**Well-being**

Sports and outdoor activities are increasingly being recognised as important for their contributions to our physical, personal and social well-being. The Personal Value of Shooting[33] summarises results from a survey in 2015, which investigated the well-being benefits people receive from taking part in shooting, beating, picking up, and habitat management.

At the UK scale it reveals:

- 98% of people stated it improved their well-being.
- 91% said they would spend less time outdoors if they could not shoot.
- 71% said their levels of physical activity would suffer without shooting.
- 88% of people said one or more of their shooting related activities was of moderate to high intensity.
- 75% of respondents said they would spend less time on conservation work if they were not involved in shooting. This really does show the strong linkage between shooting and conservation in the minds and lives of the public that shoot.
- 77% of people said their social life in general would be poorer without shooting.

Clearly, this report demonstrates the benefits shooting sports have for the well-being of people who participate in them.

BASC would be pleased to expand on this response and to meet with the review group at University of Reading in relation to pheasant shooting on University land.

**Reference list**


[1] University of Reading urged to end pheasant shooting on its land. (Sept 2019) https://www.league.org.uk/news/university-of-reading-urged-to-end-pheasant-shooting

[2] Convention on Biological Diversity https://www.cbd.int/sustainable/intro.shtml

[3] European legislation and guidance on hunting http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/hunting/index_en.htm

[4] Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (2014) The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting sports to the UK. http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk/

[5] Oldfield, T. E. E., Smith, R. J., Harrop, S. R., & Leader-Williams, N. (2003). Field sports and conservation in the United Kingdom. Nature, 423(6939), 531–3. http://doi.org/10.1038/nature01678

[6] Fuller, R. J., & Green, G. H. (1998). Effects of woodland structure on breeding bird populations in stands of coppiced lime (Tilia cordata) in western England over a 10-year period. Forestry, 71(3), 199–218. http://doi.org/10.1093/forestry/71.3.199

[7] Fuller, R. J., Studdard, P. & Ray, C. M. (1989). The distribution of breeding songbirds within mixed coppice woodland in Kent, England, in relation to vegetation age and structure. *Ann. Zool. Fennici,* 26, 265-275

[8] Perkins, A. J., Maggs, H. E., & Wilson, J. D. (2008). Winter bird use of seed-rich habitats in agri-environment schemes. Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment, 126(3-4), 189–194. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.agee.2008.01.022

[9] Vickery, J. A., Feber, R. E., & Fuller, R. J. (2009). Arable field margins managed for biodiversity conservation: A review of food resource provision for farmland birds. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment, 133, 1–13.

[10] Douglas, D. J. T., Vickery, J. A. & Benton, T. G. (2009). Improving the value of field margins as foraging habitat for farmland birds. *Journal of Applied Ecology.* 46(2), 353-362.

[11] Boatman, N. D., Stoate, C., & Watts, P. N. (2000). Practical management solutions for birds on lowland arable farmland. In Ecology and Conservation of Lowland Farmland Birds (pp. 105–114).

[12] Sage, R. B., Parish, D. M. B., Woodburn, M. I. A., & Thompson, P. G. L. (2005). Songbirds using crops planted on farmland as cover for game birds. European Journal of Wildlife Research, 51(4), 248–253. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10344-005-0114-z

[13] Parish, D. M. B., & Sotherton, N. W. (2004). Game crops and threatened farmland songbirds in Scotland: a step towards halting population declines? Bird Study, 51(2), 107–112. http://doi.org/10.1080/00063650409461341

[14] Sánchez-García, C., Buner, F., & Aebischer, N. J. (2015). Supplementary winter food for gamebirds through feeders: Which species actually benefit? The Journal of Wildlife Management, 79(5), 832–845. http://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.889 18

[15] Siriwardena, G. M., Calbrade, N. A., & Vickery, J. A. (2008). Farmland birds and late winter food: does seed supply fail to meet demand? Ibis, 150(3), 585–595. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2008.00828.x

[16] Stoate, C., & Szczur, J. (2001). Could game management have a role in the conservation of farmland passerines? A case study from a Leicestershire farm. Bird Study, 48(3), 279–292. http://doi.org/10.1080/00063650109461228

[17] Brickle, N. W. (1997). The use of game cover and game feeders by songbirds in winter. In 1997 Brighton Crop Protection Conference - Weeds (pp. 1185–1190). Farnham: British Crop Protection Council.

[18] The Code of Good Shooting Practice, http://www.codeofgoodshootingpractice.org.uk/

[19] Bicknell, J., Smart, J., Hoccom, D. G., Amar, A., Evans, A. D., Walton, P., & Knott, J. (2010). Impacts of non-native gamebird release in the UK : a review. RSPB Research Report number 40.

[20] Neumann, J. L., Holloway, G., Sage, R. B., & Hoodless, A. N. (2015). Releasing of pheasants for shooting in the UK alters woodland invertebrate communities. Biological Conservation, 191(1), 50–59. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2015.06.022

[21] Sage, R. B., Ludolf, C., Robertson, A. (2005). The ground flora of ancient semi-natural woodlands in pheasant release pens in England. Biological Conservation, 122 (2), 243-252.

[22] Woodland conservation and pheasants; A practical guide produced by The Game Conservancy Trust for game managers and woodland owners. https://www.gwct.org.uk/media/208626/woodland-conservation-and-pheasants.pdf

[23] Andren, H. (1992). Corvid Density and Nest Predation in Relation to Forest Fragmentation: A Landscape Perspective. Ecology, 73(3), 794. http://doi.org/10.2307/1940158

[24] Anglestam, P. (1986). Predation on Ground-Nesting Birds' Nests in Relation to Predator Densities and Habitat Edge. Oikos, 47(3), 365–373.

[25] Weidinger, K. (2009). Nest predators of woodland open-nesting songbirds in central Europe. Ibis, 151(2), 352–360. Retrieved from ://WOS:000264547600009

[26] Bodey, T. W., McDonald, R. A., Sheldon, R. D., & Bearhop, S. (2011). Absence of effects of predator control on nesting success of northern lapwings Vanellus vanellus: implications for conservation. Ibis, 153(3), 543–555. Retrieved from ://WOS:000292478300009

[27] Madden, C. F., Arroyo, B. E., & Amar, A. (2015). A review of the impacts of corvids on bird productivity and abundance. Ibis, 157(1), 1–16. http://doi.org/10.1111/ibi.12223

[28] Parker, H. 1984. Effect of corvid removal on reproduction of willow ptarmigan and black grouse. Journal of Wildlife Management. 48:1,197–205

[29] DEFRA. (2009). Code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69379/pb13356-game-birds-100720.pdf

[30] BASC. (2010). Respect for Quarry; a code of practice. https://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/respect_for_quarry_2010.pdf

[31] BASC, & CA. (2014). Game meat consumption in relation to FSA guidance: The results of a joint survey. Rossett/London.

[32] Poultry and Game Meat - UK - October 2015 http://store.mintel.com/poultry-and-gamemeat-uk-october-2015

[33] The Personal Value of Shooting https://basc.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/downloads/2016/10/The-personal-value-of-shooting-LOW-RES.pdf