



WATERFOWL SHOOTING AND SEVERE WEATHER

STATUTORY SUSPENSION

In periods of prolonged severe weather (typically persistent freezing conditions) the relevant government ministers have the power to make protection orders suspending the shooting of wildfowl and waders in England, Wales and Scotland, under Section 2 (6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Similar provisions apply in Northern Ireland under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended 2011).

This is done to reduce unnecessary disturbance of waterfowl when feeding conditions are difficult so that they survive the winter in good body condition and return to their breeding grounds to breed successfully the following spring.

When is a statutory suspension enforced?

England, Wales and Scotland

The shooting of wildfowl and waders is normally suspended after 14 days of freezing weather.

Short periods of thaw (i.e. only one or two days) are neutral in that they neither count towards nor terminate the severe weather process. A thaw of three days (when half or fewer of the weather stations have recorded freezing conditions) resets the counter to zero on the third day of thaw.

The criteria for triggering the severe weather procedure are based on the air and grass temperatures collected daily by 25 coastal weather stations around Britain. The procedure leading up to a suspension of waterfowl shooting is as follows:

When more than half of the weather stations have recorded a minimum of seven frozen days in Scotland or England/Wales or both, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and/or Scottish Government, informs BASC accordingly. The information from each weather station is gathered each morning and reflects the lowest air and grass temperature recorded the previous night. This combination of minimum temperatures has been found the most appropriate to reflect difficult feeding conditions for feeding waterfowl. Also important is that the information is available each morning to aid decision-making.

If the severe weather looks set to continue BASC will inform its members, in particular wildfowling and game shooting club secretaries, joint councils, syndicates and gamekeepers, that, if the weather conditions continue for a further six days, then a protection order suspending the shooting of wildfowl and waders in the appropriate country is likely to be signed on the 13th day, to take effect at 00.01am on the 15th day.

Throughout this period, information on local weather conditions and waterfowl numbers, behaviour and condition is closely monitored across all areas via BASC country and regional centres.

Northern Ireland

The arrangements for waterfowl shooting during prolonged severe weather in Northern Ireland are broadly similar. For detailed information contact BASC Northern Ireland.

Voluntary restraint

Restraint should be a part of normal waterfowl shooting but prior to the above procedures being brought into action BASC will call for voluntary restraint, where it is needed, from day seven of severe weather, up to the time when any statutory suspension is imposed. Such restraint is an integral part of the arrangements for waterfowl shooting during periods of prolonged severe weather. There are guidelines available from BASC, but there are no set rules as conditions and requirements vary around the country. Wildfowlers and game shooters are best placed to consider all the facts relevant to their particular locality and to decide the most appropriate action. It is voluntary restraint that is urged by BASC, not a suspension, although if necessary a self-imposed suspension may be the best course of action.

In recent years organisations such as RSPB, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, British Trust for Ornithology, and statutory conservation agencies, have supported BASC calls for voluntary restraint in waterfowl shooting during prolonged severe weather, by calling on their own memberships and the wider public to minimise disturbance to birds in wetland areas. This is a welcome development as waterfowl at such times benefit from reduced disturbance from all recreational users of their habitats.

NB The amount of snow cover is not measured in the formal weather monitoring process. In Scotland this is taken into account in its decision-making, not least in light of the need for inland feeding for geese. Elsewhere in Britain it is at the voluntary restraint stage that such covering of feeding grounds should also be considered when decisions about shooting are taken at the local level.

Who decides that there should be a suspension?

The criteria for deciding when there should be a suspension of waterfowl shooting have been decided jointly by the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, BASC, RSPB, WWT, BTO, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and others. The criteria have been adopted by the Scottish and Welsh governments for use as appropriate in their countries. These bodies are closely involved in any implementation of the procedures, and BASC, in particular, as representing shooting, is formally consulted before a protection order is signed.

Does a suspension affect the whole of Great Britain?

This depends on the extent of the severe weather. A suspension can be imposed throughout Great Britain, in Scotland alone or in England and Wales. Northern Ireland has its own, similar, arrangements. If you are in any doubt, contact your country or regional BASC centre.

What if the weather changes before the suspension?

Short periods of thaw (i.e. only one or two days) are neutral in that they neither count towards nor terminate the severe weather process. A thaw of three days (when half or fewer of the weather stations have recorded freezing conditions) resets the counter to zero on the third day of thaw.

Even if the weather changes for the better by day 13 a statutory suspension is still likely to follow (to allow birds to recover any lost condition or return to their normal habitats), although it may not last so long (see below).

How will I know if there is a suspension?

When a protection order is signed, BASC will inform its members and the shooting community via its website, emails to membership groups, telephone messages, and press releases to national/regional newspapers and media, and the sporting press. The appropriate government department and conservation agencies will also undertake to issue notices to the public through the press and media. The non-governmental bodies, including RSPB and WWT, contribute to the publicity campaign through their own press and other means calling on their members also to minimise disturbance of wetlands.

If you are in any doubt, please log on to the BASC website (www.basc.org.uk) which is kept fully up to date through all periods of prolonged severe weather. You can also contact your BASC country or regional centre where a 24-hour telephone information service will be available:

Office	Tel. no.	Email address
BASC Head Office	01244 573000	wildfowling@basc.org.uk
BASC Scotland	01350 723226	scotland@basc.org.uk
BASC Wales	01244 573029	wales@basc.org.uk
Northern England	01244 573040	northern@basc.org.uk
Central	01283 810910	central@basc.org.uk
Eastern	01283 810910	eastern@basc.org.uk
South East England	01244 573028	southeast@basc.org.uk
South West England	01884 260910	southwest@basc.org.uk
BASC Northern Ireland	02892 605050	nire@basc.org.uk

Local wildfowling clubs and game shooting syndicates will inform their members of details of any voluntary restraint prior to a statutory suspension.

Which species are affected?

When a protection order is signed, it becomes an offence to kill or take any of the following species, whether on the coast or inland:

Ducks: mallard (including reared mallard), teal, wigeon, pintail, tufted duck, pochard, shoveler, gadwall, goldeneye, (scaup NI)

Geese: greylag, pink-footed, European white-fronted, Canada

Waders: golden plover, woodcock, snipe

Others: moorhen and coot

Gamebirds are not affected, but reared duck are included.

NB: Shooting of geese for crop protection, protecting human health and safety etc. during any statutory suspension is also prohibited unless otherwise permitted by an appropriate general licence or individual licence issued by a statutory agency (such as Natural England). Any such shooting should be conducted to minimise unnecessary disturbance to other waterfowl.

How long will a suspension last?

A statutory suspension of waterfowl shooting is imposed for 14 days although it is normally reviewed after seven days. The suspension may be lifted before the end of 14 days if weather conditions improve, although this will take into account the need for a recovery period for waterfowl body condition and feeding opportunities after the severe weather. Any such early lifting is agreed by all the appropriate organisations.

If the suspension is lifted early, BASC and the appropriate government departments use available means to inform waterfowl shooters, and other wetland users, of the fact. If the severe weather continues beyond the first 14 days, and looks likely to continue, a second protection order may be signed, suspending waterfowl shooting for up to a further 14 days. A second statutory suspension will also be reviewed after seven days but, by then birds will have experienced difficult conditions for some five weeks, and so extra time might be needed for their recovery.

What can I do to help?

In addition to acting responsibly ourselves during prolonged severe weather we all can help waterfowl under pressure from the conditions, by informing all shooters, especially during statutory suspensions, of the situation and encouraging other users of wetlands to avoid unnecessary disturbance of the birds until conditions improve.

On JNCC's website (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2894>) you should find a form on which you can record observations of waterfowl body condition and habitat conditions. From day seven onwards, waterfowl shooters around Great Britain can help key organisations decide on the most appropriate actions during prolonged severe weather by completing and sending in these monitoring forms.

In conclusion

It is in the shooting community's interest to be seen to respond responsibly during prolonged severe weather, even though wildfowl and waders may not always show signs of suffering from the conditions. We have gained much respect by our actions in the past and must not jeopardise this by thoughtless or irresponsible behaviour.