

# ANIMAL CONCERN

PO Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ.

Telephone: 01389-841639.

E-mail: [animals@jfrobins.force9.co.uk](mailto:animals@jfrobins.force9.co.uk) Website: [www.animalconcern.org](http://www.animalconcern.org)



Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015

**To Members of Animal Concern and Supporters of Animal Concern Advice Line and Save Our Seals Fund.**

*Dear Supporter,*

Earlier this month I was out in the garden in a gale. I had gone out to feed a hedgehog who should really be hibernating and I ended up trying to stop my greenhouse going to visit the neighbours. The hedgehog survived the night but the greenhouse door had a smashing time. It was 3am on a December morning. The temperature was 12c. A few nights later Cumbria was hit by the highest rainfall since records began.

Last weekend politicians seemed to take climate change seriously for once and promised to do something about it. Don't hold your breath. I have tried for years to get politicians to recognise that if they do not force salmon farmers to deploy and maintain predator exclusion nets they cannot claim seals are shot only as a last resort. More recently I have tried to get politicians to understand that without predator exclusion nets salmon farmers cannot meet their legal obligation to protect the welfare of their stock as required under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

This month marks the tenth anniversary of my campaign to get the RSPCA to insist that RSPCA Assured salmon farmers use predator exclusion nets and stop shooting seals. Ten wasted years.

One bit of good news on this is that a salmon farm on Shetland has fitted proper predator exclusion nets and, from killing 40 seals a year, they reckon they will have a zero kill rate this year. The Scottish Government did not force them to do this. The RSPCA did not force them to do this. I did not persuade them to do this. A seal persuaded them by getting up to the cage net holding the salmon, biting through the net and letting over £1.5 million worth of salmon escape. The nets were installed for financial reasons but it proved I have been right all along and the Government and RSPCA have let the salmon farming industry make mugs out of them for at least a decade.

Politicians, or more accurately, the civil servants who run the country, make mugs out of us all by delaying, refusing or ignoring Freedom of Information requests. I am about to start the English FOI complaint procedure after the Home Office ignored my request for details of research using or creating genetically modified animals in Scotland.

Earlier this year the Scottish Freedom of Information Commissionaire once again ruled in my favour and forced the Scottish Government to release information concerning infestations of lice on salmon farms. Politicians now want to weaken Freedom of Information laws. We must oppose this - we need more freedom of information, not less.

Along with this letter you will find the first draft of one of our most important campaign tools for 2016. Our shopping list to the political parties putting forward candidates for the election to the Scottish Parliament in May. Please read this carefully and send letters and e-mails to the political parties asking them to include all these issues in their manifestos for next May.

When the names of candidates standing for election are announced please write to them and ask them what their position is on these issues. Tell them if they want your vote you want their commitment to make Scotland a better place for animals. Let me know if you think we should add anything to our Manifesto wish list.

We had a minor success recently. I discovered that a member of a committee advising the Scottish Government on wildlife and conservation issues recently plead guilty to numerous breaches of wildlife and conservation law. I raised this with the Scottish Government and he was removed from the advisory committee but simply replaced by another representative of the same organisation.

After Scottish Environment Minister Dr Aileen McLeod publicly praised the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) for their help in formulating wildlife protection laws I requested that the Government ask the SGA if any of their Members were among the gamekeepers prosecuted for wildlife crimes in Scotland. My request was refused as was my request that instead of being packed with people who exploit and kill wildlife the Government should appoint conservationists and animal welfarists to such advisory boards. I'm still working on it.

I am about to embark on a programme of updating our literature. Until I do so please remember that we no longer have a Freepost address (put a stamp on any letters to us) and we no longer have a fax number. A Member has made a generous donation of £1,000 to print some new leaflets and I'll be getting on to that in the New Year. If any of you can distribute some leaflets let me know how many you would need to help me gauge what print run we might need.

I'm afraid these letters to supporters are too few and far between. I know many of you are not on the internet and don't receive news about our campaigns and our calls to send e-mails and letters or sign on-line petitions. I do feel guilty because many of those without internet access are regular donors who help provide the funds which keep us going yet hear the least about what we do. Same with standing order donors. You might not get thank you letters or receipts for your donations but they are greatly appreciated and give us the regular income we need to keep our campaigns going.

While on the subject of money. There has been a lot of adverse publicity about charity fund raising and expenditure - much of it justified. I'd like you to know how I feel about the way some organisations raise funds. Part of the problem is that too many charities have become very like the huge multinationals and Government agencies they should be fighting against.

When signing petitions on-line don't give your phone number. It's not needed and you may be phoned/pestered by high-powered commercial fund raising companies within 36 hours of signing.

You don't have to respond to every begging leaflet or e-mail you receive. Always ask for copies of the accounts, constitution and annual report of any organisation before you first donate to them.

Don't take at face value claims made in literature or on web sites. Some groups may exaggerate what they do or how much they achieve to persuade you to part with your hard-earned cash.


Remember too that there are straight forward scams involving animals including offers of "dogs free to good homes" which are used to extort money from you to pay for bogus transport and vets bills.

Those of you who are supporters of the Scottish SPCA may have been a bit shocked by recent press reports that they are paying Chief Executive Stuart Earley over £200,000 a year and that he has made statements supporting the use of the whip in horse racing.

If you need advice on giving to charities please feel free to contact me.

Whether celebrating the birth of Christ, the winter solstice or a good old Hogmanay, I hope you have a peaceful, cruelty-free holiday and I look forward to working for you on behalf of exploited animals in 2016.

Yours sincerely,



John F. Robins,  
Secretary

