

RANTING ROBINS



June 2018

It's a while since I allowed myself a good rant, something a namesake of mine was doing in the 1650's. John Robins the Ranter also married a Mary but his Mary ranted with him rather than at him.

Like my possible ancestor it is the actions of politicians and their civil servants (or should that be civil servants and their politicians?) which makes my blood boil.

1650's John spent nearly a year in jail because of his rantings. I'm more worried about being gagged and taped to a chair as happened more recently to a dissenter working within Marine Scotland who upset her colleagues by complaining about their behaviour.

Marine Scotland gives me great cause for concern. It might sound like a conservation pressure group but it is really just a deliberately confusing name for the Scottish Government Department of Fisheries. I always thought this Department should control commercial fishing and fish farming to protect fish stocks from over-fishing and to minimise the damage fish farms do to our fragile marine environment.

Marine Scotland and the Government Ministers connected with it think differently and believe they are employed by fish farmers and trawler owners to assist and promote these industries with little regard for the environmental damage they cause. For years the Scottish Government have been describing salmon farming as "sustainable" when it is less sustainable than a Donald Trump tweet.

This may all change as a current Government inquiry into salmon farming seems to be taking seriously the massive damage being caused by filthy floating factory fish farms fouling our seas and causing suffering and death to hundreds of millions of fish every year.

If the Scottish Government has an ounce of common sense they will stop demanding that the salmon farming industry doubles in size and instead impose a moratorium on any expansion plans.

Preparing to combat the fishing free for all which is very likely to follow our exit from the EU would also be a good idea.

While Marine Scotland covers the fishy side of what used to be the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries the agricultural side of things is dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

At the end of last year Michael Gove, who is responsible for Ag & Fish at the Westminster Government, announced he was considering banning the export of live animals for slaughter. His Scottish counterpart, Fergus Ewing, immediately declared he would not ban any live exports from Scotland.

His more jerk than knee reaction brought him widespread condemnation from the many people within the SNP who realise that long distance transport and the export of live animals can cause animals to suffer and should be banned.

While it took Fergus minutes to make his decision to defend Scottish farmers no matter what it cost in animal suffering, it took him over three months to put together a letter inadequately attempting to justify his decision. That's over three times as long as it is supposed to take to get a reply out of Government.

Mr. Ewing is Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity at Scot Gov and he's responsible for Marine Scotland, Agriculture and Rural Affairs (that might be where the connectivity activity happens) and the likes of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Forestry Commission Scotland.

There's big trouble at SNH as well. For years I have been trying to get Scot Gov to overhaul/abandon the General License Scheme. In brief this allows anyone who simply reads and complies with some rules on a Government website to kill unlimited numbers of circa 22 species of native wild birds which are regarded as vermin.

Used mainly by gamekeepers to kill birds which might eat the eggs and chicks of the tens of thousands of non-native pheasants they breed to be shot for fun or run over as rural road kill, General Licences are also used by misguided gardeners who trap corvids and then kill them by bashing their brains out. They do this in the mistaken belief that it will save garden song birds but corvids and song birds have co-existed for tens of thousands of years.

If there are more corvids in gardens it could be because they have been driven out of the countryside by clowns culling them to create more road kill pheasants.

Three years ago we objected to calls to cull ravens (a protected species). At that time it was claimed it was sheep farmers who wanted the cull. Thankfully no cull was permitted. However behind the scenes lobbying continued and this year, without any warning, SNH announced a five year license to cull ravens over a large part of Perthshire.

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The reason given for the raven cull was not to protect sheep from attack but to see if reducing raven numbers has any influence on the number of wading birds in the area. This is just as nonsensical as the lady in Bearsden who trapped and killed magpies under General License to increase the number of song birds in her garden.

There is a natural balance between predator and prey species. If prey numbers drop, predators cannot feed their young. Predator numbers fall and prey species recover. Species have naturally fluctuated in this way for millions of years.

You would think the country folk who called for the cull would know this. If not SNH should have explained it to them and refused their request.

The excellent folk at Raptor Persecution UK (if you are on-line look them up and join their e-mail list) have done a bit of digging and what they found shows the cull is to take place in an area with several grouse moors and that some of those calling for the cull may be land owners and gamekeepers connected to grouse shooting.

Did I mention, ravens eat grouse eggs and chicks.

I've an idea. If SNH and Scot Gov really want to protect waders which nest on grouse moors they should ban the use of lead shot on the moors. Predation is a natural hazard for grouse and waders but lead poisoning, caused by ingesting spent lead shot along with the grit they need to digest their food, is not.

While on the subject of culling I'm afraid Scot Gov is still allowing the slaughter of tens of thousands of mountain hares on grouse moors. The cullers do it to limit the number of ticks which can prove fatal to young grouse. However if you remove one of their main hosts the ticks are going to have to go elsewhere to suck some blood. Grouse chicks perhaps?

I'm very surprised that country folk and SNH experts are naive enough to believe this rubbish about killing ravens to protect wading birds. It is a pity many of our MSPs have a taste for hooks, lines and sinkers and don't do more to question their civil servants on the culling culture rife in SNH and other Government agencies.

I've also had a look at another Scot Gov cull or, to give it its more PC name, the Islay Goose Management Scheme.

Tax money is being used to kill 3,500 Barnacle Geese on Islay. I see no scientific or economic reason for it. It's an expensive placebo to placate people who don't like geese eating "their" grass.

Aside from questions about whether it is necessary, morally acceptable or scientifically justified I have reason to believe it may be extremely cruel and causing a great deal of suffering.

I have heard allegations that shooters, paid by SNH, are shooting from too far away to achieve clean kills. It sounds like a scatter gun approach blasting large numbers of moving birds with lead shot to bring down as many as possible. It is not always possible to catch and dispatch wounded birds and they are left to bleed to death or die slowly and painfully from festering wounds.

This is so common SNH has named it (cripling) and set acceptable percentages (10% of geese shot). Actual cases of crippling may be higher than 10%.

I hoped to give you more details on this but there's a severe problem getting info from Scot Gov.

It took three months to get a reply on live exports.

Goose cull: I made a FOI request on 11th April. I was told it would be dealt with by 10th May. On 25th April SNH said I was asking for too much info and could I withdraw parts of my request. I agreed. On 27th April SNH said they would supply my info by 25th May. On 24th May SNH told me they had found 5,000 relevant documents and could not cope with this. I cut my request down again. On 31st May SNH said they would supply my info by 26th June.

Raven Cull: Ditto! I made a FOI request on 26th April and on 25th May SNH told me there was a lot of paperwork to be blacked-out and they would get back to me by 25th June.

FOI requests are supposed to be dealt with in 20 working days!

I'd be grateful if you could do a bit of lobbying for the animals. If you live in Scotland write to your MSPs. If not lobby First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

In your own words please ask your MSPs and the First Minister to rid SNH and other Government agencies of their culling culture and to start by ending mountain hare, goose and raven culling and reviewing the principal behind the General License Scheme with a view to scrapping it.

Ask that lead shot in shooting be totally banned and for a law to ban the deliberate release of balloons and sky lanterns throughout Scotland.

Please write to your MP and Michael Gove, Minister for the Environment, calling for similar bans in England and Wales. : **House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA.**