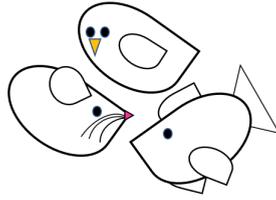


ANIMAL CONCERN



LEGISLATE TO LIBERATE

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Established in 1988 as Animal Concern (Scotland) Ltd.

It incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which was founded in 1876

Mairi McAllan MSP

Minister for Environment and Land Reform.

The Scottish Government,

Edinburgh

&

Mairi Gougeon MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands & Animal Welfare,

The Scottish Government,

Edinburgh

Dear Minister and Cabinet Secretary,

I write to express my grave concerns over The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill, introduced a few days ago.

From what I have read this Bill appears to be the basis for yet another dog's dinner of animal welfare legislation which has been reduced to useless rubbish in attempts to bend over backwards to accommodate perpetrators of animal cruelty whom the law should be prosecuting instead of protecting.

When the Scottish Government finally legislated to stop seals being shot at wild salmon netting stations and floating factory fish farms, I thought thirty years of campaigning had finally been successful. I was wrong. The Government also issued licenses to shoot seals thus negating the so-called protection. It took more than another ten years for us to put an end to seal shooting and we only achieved that by

getting the American Government to force Scotland to legislate or lose access to the lucrative USA market.

For several years Animal Concern lobbied for protection of beavers in Scotland to stop farmers and landowners shooting them, even during the beaver breeding season. You did, finally, make it illegal to shoot beavers. Unless of course shooters obtained a Government Licence, conveniently introduced at the same time.

We also joined the lobby to stop mass culling of mountain hares and eventually you outlawed that too. However once again your double-jointed be all things to all people policy kicked in and you issued licences to let cullers body swerve that new legislation as well.

Here we go again. The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill will restrict farmers and land managers to using a maximum of two dogs to flush out foxes to be shot. That should merit a "Hooray!" but sadly Scottish Government plasticity pops up yet again and those who want to use more than two dogs can apply for another Government Licence.

Media reports on the introduction of The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill quote you Minister McAllan as having said;

"I should like to be clear that foxes can cause significant harm to livestock, as well as other wildlife such as ground nesting birds – so it is important that farmers and land managers have access to control measures that are efficient and humane. This legislation provides that."

That statement may not be as accurate as you think. As you know foxes are not pack animals and hunt and scavenge as individuals. Their main live prey are rodents, rabbits and birds. Indeed they do farmers a favour by helping keep rabbit and pigeon numbers down. I have watched a domestic cat chase off a dog fox which made the mistake of getting too close. I've also seen video footage of a ewe chasing a fox away from her lamb.

Although foxes will take sick, weakly or unattended lambs they are much more likely to scavenge on afterbirth in fields where ewes have been lambing. They will also scavenge on carcasses of fallen sheep and lambs which have succumbed to accidents or bad weather.

The real problems arise when farmers do not adequately protect free range poultry. If foxes get into a flock of poultry they may kill as many as they can. This is not for fun or bloodlust but to make best use of an easy food source by burying any surplus for days when they cannot make a kill. Usually the fox is disturbed and chased off

before it can do this thus reinforcing the myth that foxes kill for fun. Killing for fun is what fox hunters do.

Under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 livestock owners have a duty to protect their stock from known dangers including predators. For poultry this means protecting them by deployment of adequate fencing (including agricultural electric fences around fields) and housed in fox proof accommodation at night. Randomly killing foxes does not provide that protection.

As regards foxes causing significant harm to "... wildlife such as ground nesting birds...". That too is not very accurate. Foxes have preyed on ground nesting birds for millennium yet, apart from when foxes have been introduced to small islands where they had not been known previously, foxes and their prey co-exist. Numbers may fluctuate but nature will reach a balance.

Foxes become a "problem" when land managers try to artificially increase the numbers of birds available to sporting guns. Foxes and other native birds and animals are persecuted to "protect" intensively bred birds, including non-native pheasants, which are released into the wild, shot for fun and often dumped in landfill.

I urge the Scottish Government not to repeat the past failures of wildlife "protection" legislation. The new Bill does not permit Trail Hunting as it was proved in court that national hunt officials deliberately exploited this loophole to allow hunts to break previous anti hunting legislation.

Issuing Government Licenses to allow the use of more than two dogs is just another very convenient loophole through which hunters will drive a pack of hounds and forty riders while declaring, as they did after the last failed attempt to ban fox hunting in Scotland, "Tallyho! It's business as usual."

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
For Animal Concern