

A Future With Falconry submission of 7 April 2022

PE1859/AA - Retain falconers rights to practice upland falconry in Scotland

I write on behalf of 'A Future With Falconry'. We are a UK organisation working to publish and share information on falconry and raptor conservation efforts by falconers. We have been actively following Barry's petition and the distressing situation falconers currently face for the birds of prey in their care. We would like to bring some additional information to the table.

There have been recent developments in the methodology of counting mountain hare which has led to confirmation (made public in February 2022) that in the Peak District National Park the number of hare may be as many as five times greater than was originally thought. While we appreciate the Peak District is not in Scotland, it does beg the question that if the original counting methods have now been shown to be inaccurate in England, is this the case for Scotland also? Is a new study needed? The new methodology was developed in part by NatureScot. Could this new method not be used to recount mountain hare here in Scotland too?

AFWF would like to raise serious concern around the previous, potentially incorrect counting methods used to count the Scottish hare. If the mountain hare are actually more abundant than originally thought and as previously stated in other submissions, then the already minimal impact of falconers would become miniscule.

In regard to the Scottish government's submission on 16th February, they linked to a distribution map while explaining that "*It is the responsibility of the falconer to eliminate, or at least significantly reduce the risk of their birds of prey taking mountain hares, by only undertaking falconry where mountain hare are unlikely to be present*".

If conscientious falconers are to follow the exact guidance of that map and avoid areas where mountain hare are apparently frequenting, then essentially there is barely anywhere left in Scotland for falconers to fly their birds at all. This extends to all bird of prey related activities in Scotland - falconers working their raptors during pest control, bird of

prey rehabilitation centres trying to hack and re-release rehabbed raptors back to the wild, and falconers free flying birds of prey in educational demos. For example, where does a falconer stand if his demonstration bird decided it would rather fly off and follow a hare than the lure provided? All falconers would be at risk of prosecution under current legislative changes.

We ask that the committee considers this additional information, and we would like to reiterate that a simple amendment in the legislation, “*except for the purpose of falconry*” would have such a massive impact on the long-term welfare and lives of falconers’ birds.