


**DIARY CASE**

Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**PREAMBLE**

<b>Who is the Minister meeting?</b>	Matt Goodall, Advisor Wales & Head of Education, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)
<b>Who requested the meeting?</b>	Matt Goodall and Dr Roger Draycott
<b>Primary purpose</b>	To discuss the ban on the use of snares in Wales and its effect on species conservation
<b>Is there an agreed agenda?</b>	N/A
<b>Which officials are supporting the Minister?</b>	
<b>Where is the meeting?</b>	Virtual meeting with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd on Thursday 30 March between 14:00 – 14:30
<b>Other practical considerations</b>	The Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd will take this meeting in view of her responsibility for the Agriculture Bill and the ban on snares and glue traps.

## DIARY CASE BRIEFING

### Purpose

Matthew Goodall, Advisor Wales & Head of Education, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) has requested this meeting as a follow up to MCC's visit to the Ysbyty Ifan curlew restoration where he discussed the use of humane cable restraints (or snares) in conservation management.

### Current position and issues to note

The Programme for Government published on 15 June included a commitment to ban the use of snares in Wales. This will be introduced in the Agriculture Bill (Wales) which is to be brought before the Senedd before this meeting is due to take place. GWCT have been attempting to re-brand Code-compliant snares as 'Humane Cable Restraints' (HCRs), with the aim of persuading Ministers to allow certain named groups to continue to use snares following the proposed ban, through a licensing regime. **A HCR and a Code Compliant snare are identical in every way.** Our work on snares has included an assessment of whether a licensing system (as seen in Scotland, although that is now under review) would meet the PfG policy objective of improving animal welfare. Officials have concluded that it would not, as the Scottish model has not demonstrated improvements in animal welfare nor a reduction in capture rates of non-targets.

The ban on snares is being taken forward on animal welfare grounds and not in relation to the conservation of specific species. However, they are not at odds and officials do not believe there is a significant conflict between the two principles, not least of all because sufficient, more humane alternative forms of pest control (both lethal and non-lethal) are available. Officials have been advised that the most efficient and humane method of fox control is to use a thermal spotter and night scope in conjunction with a rifle. GWCT argue that when vegetation is dense / high this method is not always possible. We have sought advice from NRW on this issue and it is their view that any claim that a lack of ability to snare will cause a decline in ground nesting bird numbers appears to assume that people will not, to some degree, 'compensate' for the loss of their ability to use snares by investing more effort in shooting. NRW also highlight the importance of the timing of predator control which would have most effect during nesting season at which time vegetation is not at its densest.

Whilst curlew protection and restoration remains a key concern, there is now growing evidence that sheep disturbance is the primary factor in nest failure, with badgers – a protected species – coming second (Curlew Action Newsletter June 2022). This clearly demonstrates that predator control is a complex issue requiring methods that can better differentiate between the target and non-target species, which snares/HCRs cannot.

Officials have met with both GWCT and BASC to discuss this issue and have considered evidence from a wide variety of sources in our work on the snare Code dating back to 2014 and more recently in providing policy instructions for lawyers drafting the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. The Bill will ban the use of all snares and cable restraints.

## **Update 27/03/23**

RSPB have recently (Feb 2023) published results from a study on the response of Curlew to management interventions. The project tested whether the combined delivery of habitat management and legal predator control of foxes and crows was effective in improving Curlew nesting success and breeding abundance. Despite habitat management and killing large numbers of foxes and corvids by shooting and trapping (RSPB do not use snares), no significant increase in in curlew fledging success was seen. RSPB concluded it would be extremely difficult to replicate these interventions and increase predator control, because the costs would be huge and the killing of large numbers of native animals would be required and might be unpalatable to large sections of society.

Over the medium and long term, rather than perpetual predator control at high cost and sometimes limited effectiveness, RSPB suggest a focus on addressing the human-induced causes of high generalist predator densities, such as foxes and crows, which are not fully understood but includes a ready food supply from release of non-native gamebirds such as pheasant.

## **Points to make**

- As Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd, I have responsibility for animal welfare and I am taking forward legislation to implement our Programme for Government commitment to ban snares. In doing so, I work very closely with the Minister for Climate change who has responsibility for biodiversity policies.
- Banning snares/HCRs is about preventing inhumane methods being used and does not prevent fox control using other methods.
- The use of snares to protect curlews from foxes has been discussed with NRW specialists and also those who carry out fox control. The most efficient method of fox control is the use of rifles with thermal-image scopes at night, particularly during the winter and early spring while vegetation is lower and before nesting begins. There are also various non-lethal methods in use or being explored to protect ground nesting birds such as scaring and/or using electric fences because it is important to note that controlling foxes is not the sole key to protecting curlew, as other wildlife and farm animals are also involved.
- The option of licensing, like the system in Scotland, has been fully considered as part of the process in developing legislation. It cannot, however, meet our policy objective in relation to improving animal welfare.

## **Background information**

Welsh Government officials began work on snares in 2014 and working with snare user groups and those opposed to snaring produced the Code of Best Practice on the use of snares in fox control which was published by Welsh Government in 2015. Since that time, officials have requested evidence annually from snare user groups to demonstrate the

success of the Code in improving animal welfare and decreased capture of non-targets. Very little evidence has been provided and no assurances given that the Code has improved practice. An assurance was also provided by the then Minister for Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths to the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee last Senedd term that if improvements in operator practice were not demonstrated then Ministers would seek to legislate.