

Interview with BBC Countryfile on Banning of Snares in Wales

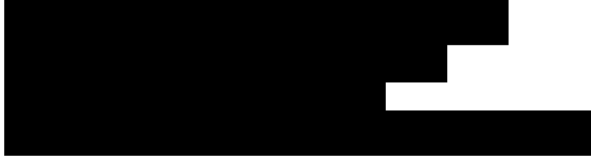
Date & Time: Wednesday 28 June – 3pm

Format: In-person

Location: Oriel, Senedd (or if weather is favourable, it will take place outside the Senedd)

Interviewer: Tom Heap (Presenter)

Countryfile Crew also attending:



Press officer attending: [Redacted]

Context: BBC Countryfile have asked for an interview as they're putting a piece together on snares including where the possible ban being implemented in Wales.

They have let us know the questioning will be around why the Minister thinks banning snares is the right thing to do, how much support there has been for the ban, how might it be implemented and have there been any counter-arguments.

BBC Countryfile say the Welsh Government is leading the way on this so it would be great to have our view in the piece.

Possible Questions & Lines to Take

Why are you introducing a ban on the use of snares in Wales?

- Our Programme for Government includes a commitment to ban the use of snares as a means of trapping and capturing wild animals.
- The Agriculture (Wales) Bill includes provisions to ban the use of snares in Wales.
- Snares – sometimes referred to as cable restraints – are inherently indiscriminate.
- They are not compatible with the high animal welfare standards we strive for here in Wales and can cause a great deal of suffering, severe injury and even kill.
- This ban will help protect species such as badgers, otters, dogs and cats, as well as the foxes and sometimes rabbits they are intended for.
- This would be the first such ban in the UK should the Bill be passed.

Has a licensing system been considered rather than a ban such as licensing modern HCRs for the sole purpose of species restoration and conservation of targeted species?

- Our work on snares has included an assessment of whether a licensing system (as seen in Scotland) would meet the Programme for Government policy objective of improving animal welfare. Officials have concluded that it would not. The Cost Benefit Analysis options within the Explanatory Memorandum - which accompanies the Agriculture Wales Bill - provides more detail.
 - No evidence has been put forward to demonstrate the voluntary code of practice, which has now been in place for 8 years, has been adhered to or improved the welfare conditions of target and non-target animals.
 - The setting up of a licensing system – plus the subsequent monitoring and enforcement – would present significant costs which could not be met solely from cost-recovery through charging.
 - Ultimately there is sufficient evidence that snares are inhumane and cause an unacceptable level of suffering to target and non-target species. Therefore, regulation would only result in licensing cruelty.
- Banning snares/HCRs is about preventing inhumane methods being used and does not prevent fox control using other methods.
- The regulatory system in Scotland which places obligations on users as well as on the setting of snares has not led to evidence of improved animal welfare standards. There also remain issues with the capture of non-target animals.

How much support has there been for the ban?

- The Labour Party campaign leading up to the last Senedd elections included a pledge to ban the use of snares in Wales.
- When we consulted on the Agriculture (Wales) Bill, an overwhelming majority of respondents commenting on the snares provisions supported an outright ban.
- Calls to take action on snares have been prevalent and growing for many years.
- The League Against Cruel Sports reported that a YouGov poll they had commissioned in January 2021 found that 78 per cent of the public in Wales wanted the use of snares to be made illegal.
- During the progress of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill through the Senedd, the provisions to ban the use of snares have received support from the majority and I am pleased Wales is leading the way on this matter.

What opposition has there been for the ban?

- Those who oppose the ban say this could impact on certain ground nesting birds, and farmers will not be able to control predators.
- There are other control methods being used and we have been clear the use of snares/HCRs is inhumane which is why we're implementing this ban.

Curlew

- Controlling foxes is not the sole key to protecting curlew, as other wildlife and livestock as well as land management practices are involved in the decline in their numbers. There are various non-lethal methods in use or being explored to protect ground nesting birds such as targeted habitat and landscape management as well as the use of electric fences. Having said that, the snare use ban will not prevent other lethal methods of predator control such as shooting.

Have any other counter-arguments been put forward? Why won't you allow humane cable restraints?

- A so-called humane cable restraint and a Code-compliant snare are identical in every aspect. They have already been in use since 2012.
- 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.

How will the ban be implemented?

- Only a complete ban on the use of snares will aid enforcement and establish clarity on acceptable methods of fox control.
- It is important to remember that most people are law-abiding. And I would expect organisations that have advocated for the use of snares will be advising their members of alternative – legal – methods of fox control.
- The All Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator – a post funded by Welsh Government - will be working with Wales' Rural Crime Teams to ensure all officers receive up to date training on illegal control methods, including the use of snares.

Wales is leading the way on this, would you like to see it implemented across the UK?

- I am pleased Wales is leading the way on this matter.
- It's for each government to decide whether they should implement a ban.

- We have been clear through our Programme for Government about implementing a ban.