

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Committee for the hearing of deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes.

Notification of one Deputation has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

1. Ban on Game Bird Releases on Council Land

Spokesperson – Kim Greaves

Members of the deputation:

Dave Bangs

Richard Bickers

Rachel Henson

Polly Charlton

Sue Graig

Anne Tyndale

Ben Benatt

Ban on Game Bird Releases on Council Land – Spokesperson Kim Greaves

We would like to ask the council to seek to obtain details of the location and stocking figures, past and present, for game bird releases on shoots across the Brighton and Hove estate. Furthermore, we ask that the council consider options and mechanisms for controlling the release of game birds on council owned land, with the intention of ending this practice as soon as possible. This action would be completely in line with the existing ban on other forms of hunting on council land. The request is made in light of the biodiversity and climate emergencies the council declared in December 2018. We ask that the findings be fed back to the committee at the next available opportunity.

In need of immediate attention is the presence of rearing coups situated in close proximity to, or on, some of our most important ecological sites. There is growing evidence that the ever-increasing number of these non-native birds released onto our landscape is having significant adverse effects on important habitats and wild species, distorting delicate food webs and contributing to the tragic precipitous declines in native species seen nationally. There are also secondary adverse affects on our key conservation priority habitat, chalk grassland, due to the requirement of scrub to act as cover for game birds, encouraging tenant farmers to plant cover crops and allow this rare and endangered habitat to revert to species poor scrub. A case in point is the coup on Varcombe Hill, Waterhall Farm, immediately adjacent to the council's pioneering ecological restoration project at Waterhall. What was for millennia highly biodiverse ancient chalk grassland on Varncombe Hill, has been allowed to scrub over in recent years to suit the needs of the shoot, with destructive herbicides also routinely applied to the base of the coup. From September to January, vast numbers of game birds flood onto the former golf course at Waterhall, posing an unnaturally high risk of predation to priority species, such as adder and rare chalk grassland butterflies and moths. These are precisely the species the project is aiming to preserve, enhance and utilise over the coming years in order to inspire visitors. Currently, during shooting season the feel of the site is often more that of a free-range poultry farm.

This kind of widespread damage is commonplace where shoots exist. Furthermore, to suit the desires of shooting syndicates, wider public access is actively inhibited with barbed wire fencing, and unwelcoming attitudes and signage, with unsightly feed hoppers pitted throughout the surrounding landscape. This mere decades old industry is ruining the ancient aesthetic of an open and free Downs of the people. The industry is also extremely carbon intensive and the intensive rearing of birds in conditions with no welfare standards, provides diseases and parasites with ideal conditions to thrive. Notably, pheasants carry high loads of ticks and act as stable reservoirs for communicable diseases, such as Lyme disease. The lead shot and plastic casings produced by shoots litter the ground which forms a key part of our biosphere and feeds directly into the city's aquifer. Lead shot is already banned on wetlands due to the long known severe negative impacts on human and non-human life once it enters the environment. Such risks to human health and the environment should be reason enough to end the practice. Changes in approaches to negatively impactful land use such as this on a local level are imperative in order to act meaningfully upon the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Supporting information Item 90(c)(1)

Supporting evidence

Effects of lead from ammunition on birds and other wildlife: A review and update
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6675766/>
[Deborah J. Pain](#),^{1,2} [Rafael Mateo](#),³ and [Rhys E. Green](#)¹

Pheasants, ticks and Lyme disease
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51333265_Competence_of_Pheasants_as_Reservoirs_for_Lyme_Disease_Spirochetes

Game bird releases and negative impacts of game birds

Lucy R. Mason, Jake E. Bicknell*, Jennifer Smart, Will J. Peach

RSPB Research Report No. 66 October 2020 RSPB Centre for Conservation Science

The number of non-native gamebirds (ring-necked pheasants and red-legged partridges) released on lowland shooting estates into the UK countryside has been increasing since 1960, with a 4.3% annual increase in the density of birds released per site between 1960 and 2014 (Robertson et al. 2017) and a 38% increase in the total number of birds released since 2004, with an estimated 57 million birds released in 2016 (Aebischer 2019b). The scale of these releases greatly exceeds any similar releasing of non-native birds for hunting elsewhere in Europe or North America (Arroyo and Beja 2002, Mustin et al. 2012).

Pheasants and red-legged partridges together comprise 82% of the 24 million birds of all species shot annually in the UK (Aebischer 2019b). The ratio of the number of gamebirds released to the number shot (hereafter efficiency of rear-releasing), which remained relatively stable from 1960 until 1990, has since suffered a steep decline (Robertson et al. 2017). This is because the number of birds shot has remained relatively constant since the 1990s while releases have increased, with only 34% of the gamebirds released (32% of released pheasants, 46% of released red-legged partridges) now shot during the autumn and winter (Aebischer 2019b). The increase in numbers of birds released despite the relative stability in the numbers shot may be linked to a reduction in pheasant survival combined with an increase in late winter shooting, which may have driven the need to release more gamebirds the preceding autumn to ensure enough survive to shoot in January (Robertson et al. 2017).

Pheasants also account for 82% of the gamebirds released, and these add to the 4.4 million pheasants which currently breed wild in the UK. At the point of release in autumn, released and naturalised pheasants and red-legged partridges together represent more than twice the spring biomass of all native UK breeding birds combined and also more than the post-breeding native bird biomass (estimated from Blackburn and Gaston 2018, and Aebischer 2019b). There was more evidence for negative ecological impacts of gamebird release than for positive impacts. The average impact scores for five of the six primary impact themes were negative, while one theme (game estate management) was associated with a positive average score. Of the secondary themes, 13 median scores were negative (68% of 19 themes), while 6 were positive or benign (32%).”

(NB positive effects of game estate management does not apply on our chalk grassland)

Supporting information Item 90(c)(1)

Most other impacts were NEGATIVE, affecting a wide range of taxa and with several having the potential to influence native wildlife populations beyond the boundaries of gamebird estates. The extent of the impacts was often dependent on the densities at which gamebirds were released, with higher density releases associated with more negative impacts. The strongest evidence for negative impacts was associated with direct impacts of gamebird release (browsing of vegetation and predation of invertebrates by gamebirds) and current shooting practices (the use of lead ammunition).