

**Countryside
Alliance**



Campaigning for Shooting 2024-2025

A year in retrospect,
and the year ahead



countryside-alliance.org

KEY MESSAGES

🔗 The Campaign for Shooting has a pivotal role in promoting and protecting your sport, in Parliament, across the devolved administrations, in the media, and on the ground. Our objectives are to secure and enhance the long-term sustainability of shooting and its associated land management practices, and to manage and reduce political risk at all levels.

🔗 Working closely with politicians from all parties, the Campaign for Shooting, along with the Alliance's political, policy and media teams, ensure the true value of shooting, its associated management practices, and their considerable environmental, economic and social benefits, are recognised at all levels of government.

🔗 Responding to United Utilities' decision not to renew shooting leases on its land, we lobbied the Chief Executive, challenged the company in the media, briefed and mobilised local MPs whose constituents would be affected, and launched an e-lobby that was used by 6,975 people to contact the company. Individual reviews of each shooting lease will now be undertaken as they come up for renewal.

🔗 Plans by Natural Resources Wales to introduce a licensing system for the release of game birds have been shelved for this season. Some 42,000 people contacted NRW in response to the proposal, almost one third of whom used the Alliance's e-lobby to do so. Given the sheer volume of responses, it has been decided that, should licensing be required, it will not come into force until the 2025/6 season.

🔗 Issues affecting the countryside and rural economy will be of particular importance with the change of government, and the key findings of a new Value of Shooting report, and the role they have in shaping the debate around shooting following the election, will be of particular importance. Wider in scope than previous iterations, the report highlights the benefits of shooting and how these have grown over the last decade.

🔗 We continue to encourage the voluntary transition away from lead and single use plastics in ammunition that is used by those taking live quarry with shotguns by 2025. It is important to act ahead of any statutory restriction that is announced as a result of the public consultation on the socio-economic impact of a restriction on lead in ammunition.

🔗 The challenges facing shooting and its associated management practices are greater than ever, and all those involved must embrace self-regulation, best practice, and assurance schemes. The Aim to Sustain Game Assurance enables shoots and game farms to demonstrate that they are operating to the highest standards, having been independently verified by an accredited external auditor.

🔗 Whilst Labour's talk of respect for the countryside, and acknowledgements of past failings have been welcomed, only time will tell whether these were genuine. With a commitment to ban 'snare traps', and a pledge to introduce full cost recovery for firearms licensing, no one can afford to be complacent, and the Campaign for Shooting will be at the forefront of challenging any threats to shooting as they emerge.



INTRODUCTION

Managing the threats to shooting and its associated land management practices is central to our work, and Campaigning for Shooting 2024 – 2025 provides an overview of the main issues with which we have been dealing over the last year and looks ahead to those with which we could be dealing over the next 12 months under the new government. We engaged directly with candidates ahead of the election, and also ran an e-lobby to ensure that those elected to represent us, and the next government, understand the priorities and concerns of rural people. Our e-lobby was used by over 11,000 members and supporters to contact candidates in their constituencies.

In Labour's manifesto of 136 pages, there was no mention of the word rural, 87 words on farming, and 50 relating to so called 'animal welfare', with a commitment to ban 'snare traps'. They have also pledged to introduce full cost recovery for firearms licensing. Whilst there was no mention of either of these undertakings in The King's Speech on 17 July, which set out the agenda for the first session of the new government, we fully expect them to be pursued in due course. Labour's talk of respect for the countryside, and acknowledgements of past failings have been welcomed; only time will tell whether these were genuine.



Image credit: Paul Duggan Photography

At some stage during the coming months, we expect to learn more about the government's approach to issues like general licences for the control of pest species, and whether it intends to follow the example of Labour in Wales with regards the licensing of the release of pheasants and red-legged partridge. No one can afford to be complacent, and the Campaign for Shooting will be at the forefront of challenging any threats to shooting as they emerge.

Our objectives

The Campaign for Shooting has a pivotal role in promoting and protecting shooting in Parliament, across the devolved administrations, in the media, and on the ground. We challenge misinformation and bias; promote the considerable environmental, economic, and social benefits of shooting; and positively influence policy. We are frequently contacted by politicians and journalists when input on shooting issues is required, and our coverage both in the national and regional media is extensive. Our objectives are to secure and enhance the long-term sustainability of shooting and its associated land management practices, and to manage and reduce political risk at all levels.

THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT



Image credit: Paul Hurst

At Westminster

The Countryside Alliance is known throughout Parliament and Whitehall for its knowledge and the quality of its briefings. Working closely with politicians from all parties, and with the Alliance's political, policy and media teams, the Campaign for Shooting works to ensure the true value of shooting, its associated management practices, and their considerable environmental, economic and social benefits, are recognised at all levels of government. We also attend the party conferences, holding fringe meetings for MPs and party members, enabling us to continue our engagement with policymakers, and to put rural communities in the political spotlight.

New General Licence for Special Protection Areas

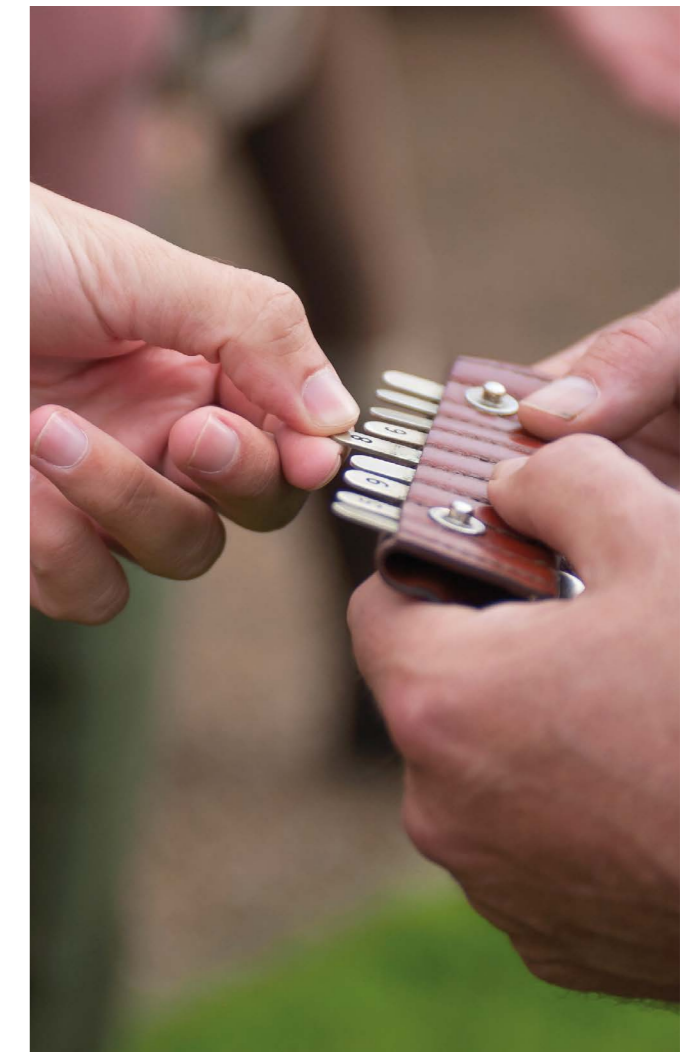
Defra has issued a modified General Licence 45 (GL45 (modified)) for the release of common pheasant and red-legged partridge on or within 500m of specified Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in England. This replaced the GL45 which was published in March 2024, and it reflects the subsequent reduction in avian influenza risk level in wild birds from medium to low.

When GL45 was originally published it applied to 29 of the 31 SPAs that were covered by an Individual Licence last year. GL45 (as modified) covers releases on 85 SPAs and their 500m buffer zones, and the specific conditions that had applied to a number of other SPAs have been removed.

Those wishing to release in an SPA not covered by GL45 (as modified), or cannot comply with its conditions, will need to apply for an Individual Licence. For those wishing to release on an Special Area of Conservation that is not also an SPA, the conditions of GL43 will still apply. GL45 (as modified) is valid in England until 1 February 2025.

Defra survey of gamebird regulations

Defra has been undertaking a Post-Implementation Review of the current gamebird regulations which prohibit the release of gamebirds on or within 500m of the boundary of a European protected site in England unless under the conditions of a General or Individual Licence. Although the previous Defra Secretary of State had been legally required to publish a report on the review findings by 30 May 2024, restrictions on departmental business during the pre-election period allegedly prevented him from doing so, and this will now be dealt with by the new Secretary of State.



THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT

General licences for the control of wild birds

The new General Licences for the control of wild birds in England that came into effect on 1 January replicate the conditions of the previous GL40-42. Although the licences will be valid for two years, there will be ongoing assessment by Defra of any risks associated with wild bird control, and if evidence does emerge which might necessitate amendment of the licences, then amendments will be made mid-term.

New requirements for keepers of birds

Following its consultation on the proposed registration requirements for all bird keepers in Great Britain, Defra has announced that the threshold number of kept birds requiring registration is to be reduced from fifty to one. This includes any number of gamebirds or ducks prior to their release. The implementation of this new requirement will be in two phases. The mandatory registration of all bird keepers with the Animal and Plant Health Agency will apply from 1 September 2024 in Scotland, and 1 October 2024 in England and Wales, with a mandatory review of their records 12 months after those dates. This should lead to more efficient progress when carrying out the required surveillance to allow disease control zones to be lifted after an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which could benefit the game industry going forwards.



Image credit: Graham Kemp

Licensing of gamebird release in Wales

Plans by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to introduce a licensing system for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge anywhere in Wales have been shelved for the 2024/2025 season. Some 42,000 people contacted NRW in response to the proposal, over 12,900 of whom used the Alliance's e-lobby to do so. Given the sheer volume of responses, NRW announced that it would not be achievable to bring in any changes in line with its current timeline, stating that: "We have decided, following discussions with Welsh Government, that, should licensing be required, it will not come into force until the 2025/6 season – a delay of 12 months from our original target".

Firearms licensing

The previous government's consultation on firearms licensing closed in August 2023, with 836 people using our e-lobby to send the Home Office their views on the recommendations that had been put forward. We supported the majority of the proposals, and although the previous government had been expected to announce the outcome of the consultation within a few months, it failed to do so, and it will now be for the new government to decide the changes to be made.

Deregulation of sound moderators

The Home Office consultation into sound moderator deregulation in England, Scotland and Wales, closed at the beginning of April. Sound moderators are currently defined in Great Britain as "firearms" under the Firearms Act 1968, and listed individually on firearms licences, and the previous government's proposal was to remove reference to them from the definition of "firearm" in Section 57 of the Firearms Act 1968. We supported the proposal on the grounds it would have no negative impact on public safety and reduce the administrative burden. Although we had expected the deregulation of sound moderators to be passed by the end of July via the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act, the general election means it will now be a decision for the new government.

The transition from lead ammunition

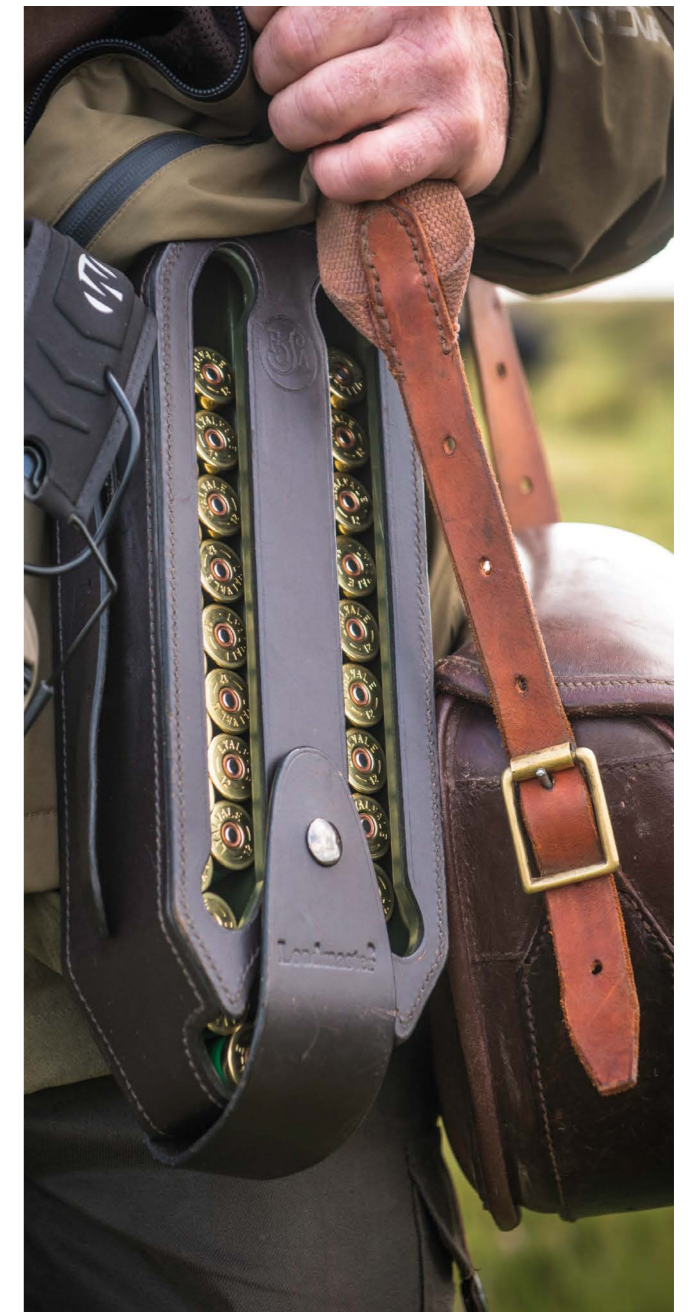
In October 2023, after a delay of 11 months, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) finally published its draft opinion and response to the consultation on its restriction dossier for the use of lead in ammunition, which had contained a proposed transition period of 18 months for shotgun cartridges and large calibre bullets. The main outcome was the proposal to ban the sale and use of lead shot for game and target shooting after a five-year transition period from the point of enforcement. This was the transition period we had campaigned for, given the impact a shorter, 18-month one would have on cartridge manufacturers. HSE's subsequent public consultation on the socio-economic impact, which considered whether the proposed transition period of five years should be reduced to just three years, was also delayed. That consultation received over 8,000 responses, 5,000 more than its previous consultation, and given the delay and quantity of responses the decision will now be one for the new government to make. That decision must be based on the science and evidence provided, and the proposals must be proportionate and practical. It is expected that HSE will publish their final opinion at some point in Autumn 2024.

Westminster Hall debate on heather burning

Westminster Hall debates provide an opportunity for MPs to raise local and national issues, often as part of a wider campaign, as was the case with January's debate on the regulation of heather burning on peatlands, raised by Olivia Blake MP. Our briefing note, containing all available science and evidence, was circulated ahead of the debate, which was attended by just four MPs, and it was used extensively by the minister replying on behalf of the government, who dismissed Ms Blake's call for a ban on all burning.

The use of rodenticides

Since 4 July 2024, it has no longer been permissible to buy any of the five second generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) for use in open areas or waste dumps, where their use is considered to present the greatest risk of exposure to wildlife. Products purchased on or before that date will be authorised for use in open areas and waste dumps until 31 December 2024, after which their use will be illegal. From July, it will only be possible to purchase any of the five SGARs to treat a rodent infestation inside and around a building. From January 2026, all buyers and users of professional rodenticide products, including gamekeepers, will also have to hold an approved training certificate.



The True Value of Shooting

A new report, 'The Value of Shooting', published in June highlights the considerable economic and societal benefits of shooting; its enormous benefit to the environment, rural land management and conservation; the benefits to the wellbeing and health of participants; and the provision and promotion of game as food. Issues affecting both the countryside and the rural economy will be of particular importance with the change of government, and the key findings of this new report, and the role they have in shaping the debate around shooting following the election, are of particular importance.

Aim to Sustain Game Assurance scheme

The challenges facing shooting and its associated management practices are greater than ever, and it is essential that all those involved embrace self-regulation, best practice, and assurance schemes, operating only to the highest standards. The assurance scheme built by the British Game Assurance transferred to Aim to Sustain last Autumn, enabling game farms, game shoots and estates to demonstrate that they operate to the highest standards, having been independently verified by an accredited external auditor. Since becoming operational in December 2023, the standards both for lowland and upland shoots, as well as those for game farms have been rewritten, the pricing scheme has been adjusted, and a group discount offer has also been introduced.



United Utilities

The decision by United Utilities not to renew shooting leases on its land was allegedly made to manage water quality, quantity, and flood mitigation. There is no evidence that banning upland and lowland shoot management would have any beneficial impact on these issues, with science and evidence being overwhelmingly in support of game shooting and its associated management practices. We wrote to their Chief Executive to raise concerns with their decision, challenged the company in the media, briefed and mobilised local MPs whose constituents would be affected, and launched an e-lobby that was used by 6,975 people to contact the Chief Executive. The company's subsequent announcement that an individual review of each shooting lease would be undertaken as they come for renewal, was welcomed, as was the assurance that we will be involved in the review process.



The RSPB and birds of prey

The Countryside Alliance condemns all acts of illegal persecution against birds of prey, and it is disappointing that the RSPB chose to disregard the significantly lower number of raptor persecutions in its latest Birdcrime report. The figure of 61 confirmed incidents of persecution was 47 fewer than in 2021, and considerably lower than the previous 12-year average of 104 confirmed incidents. Despite this, the RSPB claimed the relentless targeting of birds of prey was having a serious conservation impact on their survival.

Hen Harriers – a conservation success story

The hen harrier is one of our rarest birds of prey. In 2013 no hen harriers nested in England, but there are now more nesting than at any point since they were lost as a breeding species around 200 years ago. Last year's figure of 141 chicks was exceptional when compared with those over the previous 30 years.



Scotland

The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 21 March and became an Act on 30 April 2024. The Scottish Countryside Alliance was involved through all the various stages as the Bill progressed through parliament to try and ensure licensing schemes would be workable and fit for purpose. The Act includes legislation that bans the practice of snaring, including the use of humane restraints, in Scotland; bans the use of glue traps to catch rodents; gives greater powers to Scottish SPCA inspectors to tackle wildlife crime; introduces a new licensing scheme, valid for five years, for taking red grouse by any means, along with a Code of Practice for managing that land; and strictly regulates the use of muirburn, the controlled burning of vegetation on peatland, the code for which will be reviewed, and if necessary revised, every five years by Scottish Ministers.

Wales

The ban on the use of snares, including humane restraints, in Wales, which came into effect on 17 October 2023 following the passing of the Agriculture (Wales) Act into law, was yet another blow by the Welsh Government to the conservation efforts for red-list species. Although possessing a snare will not be considered an offence, anyone found guilty of using one could face imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both. The use of glue traps also became illegal from the same date. Plans by NRW to introduce a licensing system for the release of gamebirds were shelved for the 2024/2025 season due to the high volume of responses received. If it is decided that licensing is required, it will not come into force until next season. New General Licences (GLs) for the control of wild birds were published in December following their review by NRW. A significant change was the removal of magpie from GL001, the purpose of which is to prevent serious damage or spread of disease to livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, crops, vegetables, or fruit.

Northern Ireland

The possible transfer of ownership of Lough Neagh is cause for concern to many wildfowlers, and Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) will continue to promote the environmental, health, and community benefits of wildfowling, in the hope shooting activities can continue. Stormont has now been restored, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is a member of the Alliance Party which remains committed to the reintroduction of the Hunting with Dogs Bill. The CAI will robustly challenge its reintroduction as it could criminalise dog owners and create enormous issues for shooting. We will work constructively with the Minister to ensure shooting activities are protected.

Although marked improvements in processing times within the Firearms & Explosives Branch have been welcomed, a backlog remains for those cases referred to Senior Licensing Managers, and we will continue to work with partners to address this. The Northern Ireland Firearms and Firearms Users Representative Groups in the Republic of Ireland continue to form closer relations. As an active member of both groups, CAI will continue to draw on their knowledge and ideas when producing detailed evidence for the review of the Firearms Order 2004, which is still to be undertaken by the Department of Justice.



THE YEAR AHEAD

The previous government left much unfinished business and it will be for our new Labour government to make decisions on a number of issues that will directly affect shooting. Whilst we previously had an indication as to what those decisions were likely to be, that is no longer the case. There is uncertainty regarding: whether sound moderators will be deregulated; the outcome of the Post-Implementation Review of the Habitats and Species Regulation 2017; Defra's survey of gamebird regulation and whether pheasant and red-legged partridge should continue to be included on Schedule 9; and changes to firearms licensing and full cost recovery. We will be following these closely, working on your behalf to ensure that any changes are proportionate, reasonable, and based on evidence and science.

The future of humane restraints as a management tool

Humane restraints are used to manage certain species, the control of which underpins agricultural production, animal husbandry, the sustainable harvesting of gamebirds, and the protection of species of the highest conservation concern such as the curlew and grey partridge. As a legitimate, humane and effective means of fox control, they are an essential management tool, especially in those habitats where other control techniques are either ineffective or impracticable. Despite this, Labour is looking to ban their use, and in doing so contradicting their own pledge to "halt the decline of British species".



The Transition to non-lead shot

Over four years have now passed since the Countryside Alliance and other shooting and countryside organisations called for a voluntary transition away from lead and single use plastics in ammunition used by those taking live quarry with shotguns within five years. We continue our support for that transition timeline to be met ahead of any statutory restriction that is announced following the public consultation on the socio-economic impact of a restriction on lead in ammunition which closed in December 2023.

Habitats Regulations

The government is undertaking a Post-Implementation Review of the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. We have responded highlighting the need to reform the regulations and ensure a proper application of the precautionary principle.

Representation on Committees and Steering Groups

The Campaign for Shooting is represented on all committees and steering groups, the decisions of which can have a direct impact on game shooting and those that participate in them. Our involvement is essential if we are to safeguard the interests of our members. In the last 12 months issues covered have included firearms licensing, lead ammunition, licences for the control of wild birds, licences for the release of gamebirds, game assurance, moorland management and burning, the control of avian influenza, and shooting leases.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Our opponents are well funded, and we must have the necessary resources to challenge effectively the numerous threats against shooting and its associated management practices. The income from membership subscriptions alone is insufficient to cover our costs, and we are therefore extremely grateful to those who so generously donate shooting either as an auction lot or draw prize, and to all those who bid or buy tickets for these, as well as for our gun draws.

We are also extremely grateful to the Bereleigh Estate for the significant sums it raises through its highly popular annual 'Lobster Shoot', and to the Warter Priory Estate for having the Countryside Alliance as the beneficiary of this year's Clay Shoot which raised a staggering £205,000. The Estate has very generously agreed that we are to be one of the two joint beneficiaries of next year's Charity Clay Shoot on 15 and 16 May 2025. The funds raised by this fabulous event will be of considerable importance to the Alliance, and you can help give your support by entering a team.



Shooting badges and sweepstakes

You can support us, and be seen to be doing so, by buying this season's shooting badge, and encouraging your friends to do likewise. All proceeds go directly towards the work of the Campaign for Shooting. You can purchase your badge by scanning the QR code:



For those in a position to do so, shoot sweepstakes are another excellent way in which you can raise funds for the Campaign for Shooting. This year's new sweepstake card can be obtained from info@countryside-alliance.org.

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