

Raven Culling

Statement from Natural England in email from Des Sussex to Renton Righelato 28 June 2018

- There has been no increase in Natural England's licensing activity regarding ravens in recent years.
- In 2016, NE issued 3 licences covering 3 farms for a maximum of 12 ravens, in 2017 NE issued 2 licences covering 4 farms and a maximum of 19 ravens. All these licences have expired.
- There is currently only 1 licence live in 2018 covering 3 farms and 15 ravens.
- For context, around 150 are issued annually in Scotland and 1 in Wales.
- Natural England has not received any licence applications to 'cull' (reduce the overall numbers of) the species in England; all licences have been for specific farms and allow them to kill a limited number of birds, with the action to be targeted against particular problem birds or, where large flocks are involved, to reinforce scaring, within a defined area.
- There are no new powers to issue licences to protect livestock – the legislation for the issue of licences to protect livestock from serious damage has been in place since 1981.
- Sensitivity regarding control of raven has increased since SNH issued a licence to control a large number of birds over a wide area to investigate the impacts on breeding birds.
- The Times article contained inaccuracies and misleading implications. This has led to further coverage throughout England which is incorrect.
- NE has engaged at senior level with the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts who were concerned by the media coverage to allay their concerns by providing information relating to the low numbers of licences and our process (as contained here).
- The licence would not be issued to cull large numbers of birds in the area.

Legislation and policy

The raven is fully protected in law by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is not afforded special protection by being listed in Schedule 1, which many think is the case.

Whilst the Act offers the species general protection, it also provides exemptions for licences to be issued. These purposes include that of preventing damage to livestock, which is the purpose that would cover any licence application to kill or remove raven to protect lambs.

In determining any licence application NE takes account of the requirements of the legislation and the policy tests set out by Defra on behalf of Government. These 5 tests include the need to show that: actual damage is occurring; the species is actually causing the damage; other reasonable and practical non-lethal alternatives have been considered; the action is proportionate; and that the conservation status of the species will not be negatively affected.

Evidence required to support an application

Whilst there is evidence to confirm that raven can cause damage to livestock, care should be taken to ensure that the bird seen feeding on a carcass is actually the cause of death of that animal. The mere presence of a raven on a carcass does not mean that that bird killed the lamb, it may have fallen of natural or other causes and the carrion is being scavenged.

Evidence must be submitted by the applicant that will enable NE to apply the tests and determine if the application can be granted a licence. Science and Advice to Scottish Agriculture ([SASA](#)) have published guidance for farmers to help prevent damage. This guidance is equally applicable in England and should be followed.

Appropriate non-lethal measures need to be tried first and where large flocks are concerned, continued alongside lethal control to maximise the effectiveness of an overall scaring strategy.

The size and extent of raven population in England

The raven is recovering from a very low population level and reduced range which for many years had been confined mainly to the uplands. However, is not an exclusively upland species – it is also a traditional bird of lowland pastoral landscapes. It is estimated there are now 7-8000 breeding pairs in the UK, and the English range has spread eastwards through the midlands.

There is evidence of flocks of non-breeding birds occurring in England, and these seem to be increasing in frequency and are reported to be causing problems with both livestock and breeding birds. The likely benefits of lethal control alongside other scaring or predation avoidance measures are always carefully considered before any licence can be granted.