



Press Release

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The Understanding Predation project identifies pathways to address conflict

A report from a ground-breaking project identifying ways to resolve conflicts about predation is being launched today by Environment Minister, Dr Aileen McLeod. The report analyses the views of a large number of stakeholders in conservation and land management alongside the most up to date ecological research on predator-prey relationships and the best means of protecting declining populations of ground-nesting birds.

Dr McLeod launched the report at Scottish Natural Heritage's Battleby Conference Centre, in front of 60 delegates drawn from a wide range of organisations with particular interests in the uplands and farmland of Scotland.

Predation is a natural process, yet it often excites controversy and widely diverging opinions. The Understanding Predation project was established to develop a basis for a common understanding between scientists, conservationists and those who work the land. Collaborative discussions were a hallmark of the study as it progressed, and this bodes well for the development of future work to consider how we can address problems associated with predation.

The report found strong support from survey data and stakeholders' knowledge that all six wild birds studied in detail (black grouse, curlew, golden plover, grey partridge, lapwing and oystercatcher) had shown widespread declines across Scotland since the 1960s. Importantly, stakeholders agreed that urgent action was needed to stop these population declines. Stakeholders valued the collaborative process adopted by the project, and the opportunities it provided for many diverse voices to be heard. The study recommends developing an

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Chairman: Lord Lindsay

Director: Simon Thorp

adaptive, collaborative approach, linking scientific evidence gathering and stakeholders' knowledge, to guide the development of management practices.

The Minister commented, "The Understanding Predation project is promoting a shared understanding of the nature of predation of wild birds in Scotland. I believe the collaborative approach adopted, bringing together science and local knowledge, will prove to be a turning point in the way we tackle these difficult issues in the future. I would like to offer my thanks to the Moorland Forum and all those who have contributed their knowledge and experience for providing this unique overview of predation issues."

This project was initiated by Paul Wheelhouse, MSP, when he was Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and the novel feature developed for this work involves comparing scientific information with the local knowledge held by those who have a direct connection with the land.

As part of his welcome to the Minister, Lord Lindsay, the Chairman of Scotland's Moorland Forum, said, "The project has demonstrated that there is a broad consensus over a wide range of topics between scientific and local knowledge of the issues surrounding predation. It has also shown that where there is a will, new solutions can be found to contentious problems through collaboration and joint-working. I would like to thank the very large number of stakeholders who have given us the benefit of their knowledge and experience, and the extensive project team that has overseen this substantial and ambitious project. I believe that the report marks a turning-point and I commend its findings to the Scottish Government."

The scientific information has been gathered by an independent Research Group. The local knowledge of many stakeholders was derived from people drawing on their local knowledge and experience. Both researchers and other stakeholders contributed to a questionnaire, attended workshops and seminars, and provided inputs to a survey on the draft findings.

Scottish Natural Heritage oversaw the development of the project plan, and SNH's chairman, Ian Ross, said: "This is the first time an approach like this has been used in the UK, and we are pleased to see the extent of common ground between all the participants. I'm confident that, with this genuinely collaborative approach, we will make progress. It will not be easy – there's still disagreement about several aspects of management practices, but there is broad

agreement about improving habitat and many other issues. The project is a major step towards building consensus on predation issues and the decline of ground-nesting birds in Scotland. I want to put on record my thanks for the considerable effort and contribution made by a great many people and organisations."

ENDS

Media queries – contact Anne Stoddart at 01387 723201 or info@moorlandforum.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

- 1 The Project Report and the photographs from the launch event will be available to download from the Project page on website. Follow the Understanding Predation link from the home page at: www.moorlandforum.org.uk
- 2 Simon Thorp, the Director of Scotland's Moorland Forum and the Project Manager, will be available for comment after 3pm on 07850 789189 and from The Heather Trust office (Tel: 01387 723201) on Tuesday, 9th February.
- 3 Formed in 2002, Scotland's Moorland Forum is a unique partnership of 28 organisations, which engages robustly with matters influencing the moorland and upland areas of Scotland. It actively promotes improvements in policy, practice and management.
- 4 More details about the Forum's activities, and a full list of members, are available on the website: www.moorlandforum.org.uk
- 5 There is a separate section on the website for [The Understanding Predation Project](#), and a [separate blog](#) was established to display information about the project and to receive comments about it.
- 6 The Forum has been commissioned to carry out other work by the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage that includes:
 - 6.1 A Review of the Muirburn Code
 - 6.2 Development and promoting of best practice guidance for upland and moorland management activities.