# NatureScot plans broader licences to shoot ravens amid Orkney livestock attacks



New measures aimed at permitting the shooting of juvenile ravens in Orkney are being developed by NatureScot, Scotland's natural heritage agency. This response follows a concerning increase in livestock attacks attributed to these birds, with local farmers reporting substantial injuries and fatalities among lambs, calves, and sheep. Such losses not only inflict emotional distress but also pose considerable financial challenges to the farming community.

At a recent meeting, officials from NatureScot acknowledged that the existing control measures have failed to provide adequate protection for livestock. Currently, the agency offers licences to shoot ravens only when other methods have proven ineffective, such as scaring techniques. Since 2016, 34 licences have been granted in Orkney, resulting in the culling of 124 ravens—58% of the permitted number. However, many farmers express distrust in the licensing system, as it restricts shooting to specific fields, allowing ravens the chance to relocate to adjacent areas.

Robbie Kernahan, a NatureScot director, described the situation in Orkney as "bonkers", advocating for a more flexible licensing regime. This could enable the shooting of ravens over broader areas and for more extended periods, aimed at reducing the populations effectively before winter. Kernahan remarked, “There are not many alternatives to using lethal controls to scare them off,” indicating a need for decisive action in light of the mounting evidence of damage.

Farmer Douglas Paterson has been a vocal advocate for stricter controls, indicating that ravens pose a real threat to vulnerable livestock, particularly when they become incapacitated. He underscored the urgency of the matter by presenting a dead lamb at the meeting, a stark illustration of the losses endured. In response to NatureScot's proposal to tackle the raven issue, Paterson expressed cautious optimism, saying, “If it does happen, I will be delighted. It just remains to be seen how well NatureScot will deliver this."

The context extends beyond Orkney, as other regions in Scotland have also grappled with similar predation issues. Previous licensing measures have been trialled in areas like Skye and Argyll, demonstrating that this phenomenon is not isolated. Kernahan stressed the importance of timely control measures, suggesting that a more tailored approach is warranted to address local needs adequately.

However, not all voices in the community agree with the necessity of lethal measures. Wildlife expert Andy Mitchell has raised concerns, noting that there hasn’t been a significant increase in raven populations according to the latest surveys. He cautioned against removing legal protections without providing compelling evidence that such actions are justified, stating, “NatureScot cannot and must not ride roughshod over licensing rules to accommodate a few farmers.” This underscores an ongoing debate about balancing agricultural needs with wildlife conservation, a tension that is increasingly prominent within Scottish rural policy.

As NatureScot considers adjustments to its licensing framework, the debate continues. Farmers remain eager for swift action, while conservationists advocate for careful deliberation to ensure that wildlife protections are not compromised. The agency has committed to returning with a more comprehensive proposal by the end of summer, hoping to strike a balance that safeguards both livestock and the ravens, whose role in the ecosystem remains significant.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/14/wildlife-charities-call-on-scottish-government-to-close-loophole-in-law-on-protected-birds)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[3]](https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/licensing/species-licensing-z-guide/birds/birds-licences-prevent-serious-damage)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-45003370)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-43964922)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo), [[3]](https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/licensing/species-licensing-z-guide/birds/birds-licences-prevent-serious-damage)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/14/wildlife-charities-call-on-scottish-government-to-close-loophole-in-law-on-protected-birds), [[7]](https://www.shootinguk.co.uk/news/rules-on-shooting-ravens-to-be-relaxed/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj81z59qvxo> - Scotland's natural heritage agency, NatureScot, is developing new powers to shoot juvenile ravens in Orkney due to a series of attacks on livestock. Farmers report that ravens have killed and injured lambs, sheep, and calves, leading to significant financial losses and distress. NatureScot acknowledges that current control measures are ineffective and plans to introduce an area licensing scheme for Orkney by this winter. The agency aims to grant licences to shoot ravens only when no other satisfactory solution exists, targeting juvenile birds as breeding pairs are not associated with livestock attacks.
3. <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/licensing/species-licensing-z-guide/birds/birds-licences-prevent-serious-damage> - NatureScot provides guidance on obtaining licences to kill or take wild birds, such as ravens, to prevent serious damage to livestock. Applicants must demonstrate evidence of damage or potential damage, such as photographic material or records of previous attacks. The application should specify the number of birds causing the problem and the scale of the damage. Additionally, applicants must show that other scaring techniques have been attempted and found insufficient in reducing damage. Licences are granted only when no other satisfactory solution exists.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-43964922> - Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) defends its decision to grant a five-year trial licence allowing land managers to kill up to 69 ravens in the first year to protect wading birds in the Strathbraan area. The trial aims to assess the impact of raven predation on wader populations. Conservationists, including the RSPB Scotland, have raised concerns about the potential impact on raven populations and the adequacy of the scientific evidence supporting the cull. SNH maintains that the trial is a necessary measure to protect vulnerable wader species.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-45003370> - A controversial raven-culling licence in Perthshire has been voluntarily suspended after a review found it was not scientifically robust. The Strathbraan Community Collaboration for Waders had been granted the licence to control the protected birds to study the impact it would have on waders. RSPB Scotland, which objected to the licence, has welcomed the decision. Scottish Natural Heritage announced an internal review of its decision to grant the licence. A crowdfunded legal challenge to the decision was lodged earlier this month at the Court of Session.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/14/wildlife-charities-call-on-scottish-government-to-close-loophole-in-law-on-protected-birds> - Wildlife charities have called on the Scottish government to close a loophole in the law protecting birds of prey, following changes to the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Act. The new regulations allow estates to designate licensable areas only to parts of a grouse moor where shooting takes place, potentially covering only small areas rather than the entire estate. Critics argue that this undermines the primary intention of the legislation to tackle raptor persecution and could lead to increased illegal killing of birds of prey.
7. <https://www.shootinguk.co.uk/news/rules-on-shooting-ravens-to-be-relaxed/> - In an effort to protect newborn lambs and calves, farmers in Scotland are to be allowed to shoot more ravens than previously permitted. The move is seen as a quicker course of action than applying for licences. Details of where the rules on controlling ravens have been relaxed are contained in a letter to NFU Scotland from Environment Minister, Mike Russell, and Highlands and Islands Conservative MSP, Jamie McGrigor. NFU Scotland's head of rural policy, Jonnie Hall, welcomed the news, stating it should make a big difference to farmers who have struggled with raven predation on young livestock.