

Conflict between two endangered species: crofters and geese



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THE UISTS HAVE had a problem with wild geese damaging crops and grazings for many years now.

The main culprit was the greylag but this is now being overtaken by the Greenland barnacle goose. The greylags were fairly well controlled in an adaptive management pilot scheme run by SNH but, despite its success, the scheme has closed. Was this a good investment of £294,858 public money? Yes, if you look at the success; no, if the scheme does not continue and the greylag

population returns to its former numbers.

The barnacle population in Uist is escalating. Last year it was 4,000, this year 8,000, next year? It has been predicted that if they are not controlled now, crofting will stop within 10 years. The repercussions will last for generations, with some of Europe's finest high nature value farmland, the esteemed machair habitat, being left to degenerate. As SCF chair Russell Smith said recently, "We have a conflict between two endangered species – barnacle geese and

crofters on the machair. And the geese seem to be winning."

SCF has been fighting for the control of wild geese on croft land for many years, with a petition in the Scottish Parliament urging the government to not cut the budget, and the goose issue being regularly brought to the Cross Party Group on Crofting. This parliamentary group recently wrote to cabinet secretary for environment Roseanna

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Scottish upland sheep support shenanigans

THE SCOTTISH UPLAND Sheep Support Scheme is a very significant support mechanism for crofters, introduced as a chance for those on Region Three rough grazing to make up for their distressingly low basic payments, but the obscure criteria and fear of reprisals has put off many who deserve the payment from claiming it.

The recent mixed messages from Scottish Government over claiming and tagging dates has done nothing to help this; and has only emphasised the fact that we need to revamp this essential scheme with the potential to pay the

differential needed for those crofting our marginal areas.

The scheme has been very lucrative for some though, as the SCF highlighted recently, due to the lack of capping.

Some large producers have been claiming not only on their replacements but on any number of ewe hogs, the surplus then being sold off. This rapidly uses up the limited budget, depriving others of benefiting from it. This was not the intention of the scheme; and it is appropriate that even NFUS has recognised this and is proposing a limit on claims of 20-25% of the breeding flock – roughly equivalent

to actual replacements.

However, the objective could be achieved most effectively by paying on ewe hogs retained as breeding replacements or on gimmers taken into the breeding flock. This would allow for maintaining flock numbers in regular ages, or for growing the flock size. But cynics may say that the Scottish Government is unlikely to take such a bold step which could require more administration.

Paying on a percentage is a step in the right direction at least and should be relatively easy to accommodate.

However, the payment should

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