

NARGC Predator Control Manual



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About the Author



Dr. David Scallan has a professional background in environmental management, ecology, wildlife policy, sustainable agriculture and human-wildlife conflict. He received his Ph.D. from the National University of Ireland Galway in 2012, with a thesis examining the economic, ecological and social place of hunting activities in contemporary rural Ireland.

As an independent environmental consultant, David is experienced in site and species monitoring, habitat mapping, ecological surveys, the development of habitat management plans for species of conservation concern, and economic impact assessments. He has produced numerous management plans for a range of successful multi-stakeholder community-based conservation projects as well as various reports, position papers, submissions and book contributions. He has presented his research in several European countries as well as in the USA and served as an expert witness within the Irish courts.

In a voluntary capacity, David was the Public Relations Officer of the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC) from 2012-2015, which is the largest game shooting and conservation non-governmental organisation in Ireland. In doing so, he chaired various Sub Committees dealing with Red Grouse, Research, Communications as well as Education and Training.

He has several professional affiliations, including membership of the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi). In September 2015, David began working as Wildlife Policy Officer for the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the European Union (FACE), which has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. He has a keen interest in game shooting, deer stalking, clay-pigeon shooting and fishing.

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Golden Plover are vulnerable to predators

Introduction

CONTEXT

This manual provides practical guidance on various aspects of predator control in the Republic of Ireland. It explains which species can be controlled, by what means and provides clarity on shooting, snaring and trapping.

The laws governing predator control, particularly in regard to the specific licences and derogations, are sometimes misunderstood and the legislation often changes. For example, recent (Restrictions on Use of Poison Bait) Regulations (2010) make it illegal to use any poison to kill birds or animals, with the exception of rats and mice, without a special exemption¹. Therefore, it is an offence to use meat, eggs or any other animal-based product as poisoned bait, unless in accordance with a specific licence granted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Similarly, it is important to be aware that the Wildlife Acts 1976-2012 restrict the use of electric and manual callers, lamping from a vehicle, using decoys for corvids, shooting birds with a rifle, and removing the nests of grey crows and magpies.

1. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is responsible for the Registered and Approved Uses of all Pesticides in the Republic of Ireland. In November 2008, DAFM banned the use of Alphachloralose as a poison to kill birds/animals. Currently, Alphachloralose is now only approved as a rodenticide. It is important to be aware that the incorrect use of poisons can affect a farmer's Single Farm Payment as poisoning restrictions fall within Cross Compliance and keeping land within Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). See Appendix 2 for more information.

However, in many cases, individuals can apply for relevant licences to carry out these activities under certain conditions for the purpose of protecting game and other species from generalist predators.

This manual will be useful for Gun Clubs and other conservationists as well as those who enforce wildlife laws, which need to distinguish between legal and illegal methods of predator control.

WHY PREDATOR CONTROL?

Predation is the act of catching prey for food. It is a natural and necessary process. Predator and prey populations can ebb and flow, however, sometimes one population becomes too low or high, which can cause undue concern for farmers, conservationists, hunters and authorities at local and national levels.

In some cases, predators cause considerable losses to rare and threatened species. As a member of the European Union (EU) and signatory to a number of international agreements, Ireland has a legal obligation to conserve biodiversity, and, in cases, predator species need to be managed through control or eradication.

Predator control has been a well-known key component of game management for centuries. Properly planned predation control, as part of game management, is justified as it leads to the conservation of habitats and species, whilst not threatening the conservation status of protected species (GWCT, 2005).

For Gun Clubs and game managers, the objective is to suppress common species known to be predators of gamebirds and mammals. In most cases, these include fox, grey crow, magpie, grey squirrel, mink and rat.

Studies conducted in the UK³ have shown that managing the numbers of these common predators can significantly increase the breeding success of red grouse and other ground-nesting birds of conservation concern (e.g. see Fletcher et al., 2010). Research also suggests that if there is evidence of predation being at least partly responsible for poor conservation status, then predator management for conservation should, as a rule of thumb, control a broad spectrum of common generalist predators, not just, for example, corvids (Madden et al., 2015).

In Ireland, the Boleyrack Red Grouse Habitat Management Project, Co. Leitrim (Scallan, 2013; Scallan and Carslake, 2014), the Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse

3. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) has published numerous studies, which illustrate the benefits of predator management for a range of bird species. See: www.gwct.org.uk



Red Grouse. Photo Fiona Wheeldon

Project, Co. Roscommon (Scallan, 2014), and the Grey Partridge Project in Boora, Co. Offaly (Buckley et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2013) have shown that game management strategies that include effective predator control can lead to improved productivity for a variety of bird species (e.g. red grouse, grey partridge, breeding lapwing and breeding curlew).

Gun Clubs are probably the largest group carrying out predator control in Ireland. Most Clubs maintain a close relationship with the farming community and regularly assist farmers with pest/predator-related problems. The benefits of predator and pest control are widely acknowledged by farmers and their respective organisations. Farmers frequently request Gun Clubs to:

- control foxes and crows, which can be harmful during lambing
- control crows and pigeons to prevent the spread of disease particularly with regard to the cross-contamination of stored animal/human food stuffs
- control pigeons and crows to protect crops

A number of Gun Clubs also assist the NPWS in controlling predators around nationally important sites containing threatened ground-nesting birds.

Although predator control by lethal removal is often controversial, sometimes time-consuming and may only have short-term effects, the major Irish conservation organisations and agencies recognise the need for predation management as a tool for conserving wildlife.

TIMING: EFFECTIVE PREDATOR CONTROL

To be effective, predator control should be undertaken when it confers the greatest benefit, i.e. mainly spring and early summer. Hence, control efforts should be concentrated in the period February to July to remove the key predators just before nesting and during the chick-rearing period. This is also the period when predators breed and in many cases, after this period, the predator control programme may be relaxed; perhaps confining control to selected areas around, for example, release locations (GWCT, 2005). For red grouse and other ground-dwelling birds, however, winter predation by foxes can be a problem so the predator programme must be extended.

WHAT LEVEL OF PREDATOR CONTROL?

The effect of predation on wildlife varies over time and is influenced by both natural and human-induced conditions. For example, a short-term over-abundance of predators can occur if a particular prey species (e.g. pheasant poults) increases dramatically (e.g. when a Gun Club stocks a release pen).

A number of sophisticated studies (using radio-telemetry equipment) have shown that pen-reared pheasants suffer high mortality immediately after release. Predators such as foxes have been shown to do the most damage, accounting for more than 90 percent of all deaths⁴. Hence, for Gun Clubs, predator control is essential before, during and after game birds are released into an area.

In some cases, game populations may or may not respond to predator control as anticipated. For Gun Clubs that have a healthy naturally-occurring wild pheasant population, predators may not be solely responsible for poor production; it may be due to poor quality habitat. A lack of suitable habitat can force game birds into smaller areas, where they are more exposed to predators. Hence, it is important to consider the factors other than predation that may be restricting game production. More often than not, the bulldozer has been a far greater enemy of game in the long-term than predators (GWCT, 2005).

From this perspective, it is essential to remember that game management requires a combination of approaches, involving habitat improvement, predator control and other strategies (e.g. supplementary feeding). Habitat enhancement is the most 'natural' way to minimise predation and involves manipulating the habitat to favour the game species. Generally, the more cover available to a species, the better its odds of survival⁵. For Gun Clubs with a healthy population of wild pheasants, habitat enhancement should be the first line of defence (e.g. particularly improving nesting habitat).

For Gun Clubs that rely on releasing pheasants, it is important to remember that, in many cases, these birds do not display natural behavioural responses to predators. An effective predator control programme, which ensures successful game survival, is essential. When a predator control programme is attempted, it should be done in a systematic and determined way. In this context, it has been shown that small-scale predator efforts are largely a waste of time – the odd fox killed will quickly be replaced by another looking for a suitable vacant territory (GWCT, 2005).

4. Of course, pen released pheasants also need excellent husbandry, protection from disease, mitigation from road deaths, etc.

5. In terms of habitat management, sustaining pheasant populations involves the creation and management of brood-rearing, nesting and winter cover.

For the vast majority of Gun Clubs, it remains a challenge to put in place systematic predator control programmes. This is because gun Clubs are mostly reliant on the good-will of their members that also work full-time jobs. In this regard, predator control is frequently implemented in a more casual manner and is often reliant on a small number of motivated and interested members.



Foxes need year round control.



Magpies are nest predators.

EVIDENCE OF PREDATORS

It is essential to be able to evaluate carefully the impacts of predation on the wildlife in your management/Gun Club area. Scouting is necessary to determine the population levels of predators and prey and the amount of damage predators are causing. Predators usually leave enough evidence so that their presence and abundance can be determined. Tracks and droppings are the most common method of identifying predators.

Useful Tip: Consider looking for tracks at fence-crossings, along the banks of ponds/rivers, on trails, and on mud roads.

A predator's scat (i.e. its dropping) indicates its presence as well as what it was eating. The scat of predators often contains hair, bones, feathers and other remains. Early morning and last light is a good opportunity to see fresh evidence of predator activity.

DEVELOPING A PREDATOR CONTROL STRATEGY

It is essential to develop a control strategy that addresses the following:

- the species to be controlled
- the scale of control
- the season and length of control
- methods to be used
- ways of evaluating results

ETHICAL PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

It is important to be aware that wildlife is a shared resource owned by all citizens of Ireland. Public perceptions on the effects of predator control can vary greatly depending on the situation. These perceptions often influence the laws and regulations made by elected public representatives and state agencies. Therefore, it is important that the general public has evidence-based information on predator management. Ethical predator control requires⁶:

- strict adherence to laws, regulations and policies regulating predator control;
- exceptionally high levels of respect for people, property and wildlife;
- recognition that predators have ecological value;
- respect for varying viewpoints on predator control;
- determining the species responsible for losses and targeting only that species for control;
- broadening one's knowledge and skills relative to predator control;
- choosing the most humane, selective and effective control methods;
- monitoring traps and snares regularly;
- dispatching trapped animals humanely;
- proper carcass disposal.

PREDATOR CONFLICTS

Conflicts involving predator species can arise for a variety of reasons, but those involving protected species tend to create the most controversy. For example, in recent years, there has been a growing conflict between Gun Clubs and pine martens (e.g. see Scallan and Cooley, 2012). This has coincided with an increase in the population size and range of pine martens in Ireland.

Those affected by pine martens, through the predation of game birds in a release pen or domestic fowl/hens, should consult the manual produced by the NPWS and the Vincent Wildlife Trust, entitled "How to exclude pine martens from game and poultry pens"⁷. A Section 42 licence may also be considered after taking all reasonable steps to prevent damage⁸. Your local NPWS Conservation Ranger should be consulted at every stage in the process.

6. Adapted from Texas A&M (2013).

7. Available at: <http://www.npws.ie/content/publications/pine-martens-and-game-birds-information-leaflet>.

8. For more information on Section 42 licences, see page 19.



Red fox

Fox Control

DESCRIPTION

The red fox is about the size of a small to medium-sized dog and weighs 8-16 lbs (3.5-7 kg). It is the most geographically spread carnivore in the world and its range has spread alongside human expansion. Apart from its large size, the red fox is distinguished from other fox species by its ability to adapt quickly to new environments. Despite its name, the species often produces individuals with abnormal colourings, including albinos. The distinctive bushy tail is around 40cm long. The sexes are similar, but males (dogs) are generally larger than females (vixens). Mature dog foxes also have slightly broader heads than vixens (RDS, 2005).

The fox is considered to be an apex predator in Ireland (i.e. it has no natural predators) due to the removal of wolf and other predators⁹. Consequently, the natural food chain has been irreversibly changed and, in cases, there remains a responsibility to try to redress the balance in certain situations.

⁹ Evidence shows that the recently introduced Golden Eagles and Sea Eagles are now foraging on young foxes in Ireland.

BIOLOGY

Foxes are found throughout Ireland in all habitats. They thrive best in habitats where there is a mixture of scrub, woodland, grassland and arable land offering a wide variety of food, resting and denning sites (Natural England, 2011). Red foxes are omnivores with a highly varied diet. They feed on small rodents, young hares, rabbits, ground-nesting birds, reptiles, invertebrates (e.g. snails, slugs, worms), insects, as well as fruit and vegetable matter.

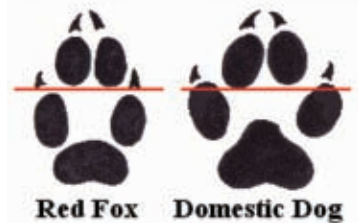
Although fox cubs have been found in nearly all months of the year, foxes are seasonal breeders with litters usually born in late-March to early-April (RDS, 2005). Vixens come into season in late-January and early-February; dog foxes are fertile for some time before this period and remain fertile until sometime afterwards. The average litter size is 4-5 cubs. Over time, cubs become more and more independent and by early-July, where sufficient surface cover is available, cubs will often lie above ground during the day (RDS, 2005). Foxes also communicate by distinctive calls, most frequently heard during the breeding season.

EFFECT ON WILDLIFE

Foxes prey on game birds and can eat the eggs of all ground-nesting birds. At release time, poults are very easy targets for foxes so pheasant pens must be fully fox-proof.

EVIDENCE OF PREDATION

Fox tracks are easily distinguishable from dog tracks. In pens, look out for the carcasses of pheasants with the head eaten off. It is also common to find the remains of pheasant wings and primary feathers that look as if they have been chopped off cleanly. If a fox gets among young pheasant poults, you will invariably find them scattered around bitten though the back and not eaten at all (GWCT, 2005). Foxes will often bury their kill especially leading up to the breeding season.



Fox vs. dog prints.

METHODS OF CONTROL

No single method of control is likely to be adequate on its own, and a range of techniques will usually be needed (GWCT, 2005). These include snaring, middens, shooting, hunting with dogs, and trapping.

SNARING

Snares work well all year round, in particular, when pad marks can be seen on wet ground and in snow. Snares can also work very well in spring and summer when cubs are establishing new territories and when other methods of fox control become impractical because of the growth of vegetation cover, especially among arable crops (GWCT, 2012). This is also the time when ground-nesting birds are most venerable.

Remember that after a snare is purchased, it should be weathered first by, for example, leaving it in a pot of boiling water with old tea bags. Then, hang the snares to continue weathering them. Human scent on a snare will deter foxes, so it is best to use an old pair of gloves or use scent-free soap before handling them (see also GWCT, 2005).

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) (2012) recommends that snares should be set in the morning so that any human scent left on the snare, or at the snare set, has the greatest chance of dissipating before nightfall. Check snares in the morning as foxes are most active at night. It is essential that snares are checked at least once every 24 hours. Do not set snares where other animals (farmed or domestic) are about or near areas of public access.

WHERE TO SET A SNARE?

Foxes unthinkingly follow existing tracks as they offer easier walking. It can be worthwhile trying vehicle tracks even when they are just a pale stripe on the grass. You can even make your own track deliberately. Before setting a snare, you should spend time looking for fresh fox signs (e.g. smell, tracks, fur, droppings, prey remains) and set snares where you find them (GWCT, 2012).

In setting a snare, the (challenging) objective is to outline with the cable the exact space in the landscape through which a fox's head is going to pass. Hence, set it approximately 20cm off the ground, with the loop 15cm high × 20cm wide, supported by a wooden tealer. **Most snares are set too low** (GWCT, 2005). Set the snare in a pear shape and it must, by law, be secured/fixed with an iron/wooded peg (in open countryside) or tree (in wooded areas). Drags are illegal in Ireland and it is not ideal to set snares on fences. Never set a snare just for the sake of it!

LEGISLATION: SNARES

Irish legislation states that a stop snare must have a minimum length from noose

to stop of 13 inches (33cm) if it is intended to snare foxes and 6½ inches (16.5cm) if it is intended to snare rabbits and which complies with the following:

1. A swivel is incorporated in the snare;
2. The snare is designed so that when it is used it will be securely tied to a fixed object;
3. The snare is designed so that for the purpose of avoiding catching large animals (for example deer, cattle or horses) by the leg when it is used a jump bar, i.e. a cross-bar at least two feet above the ground and supported by a pair of forked sticks fixed not less than two feet apart, may also be used.



Fox snare.



Rabbit snares.

When setting snares, every effort must be made to avoid the capture of non-target and protected species. Knowledge of the tracks, trails and signs of both target and non-target species is essential. If there is evidence of other species regularly using a site then snares must not be set. Look out for badger, deer, livestock, domestic pets, otters and hares.

MIDDENS

A midden is comprised of a central pit into which bait is left to attract foxes. A midden is anything considered attractive to foxes, for example, buried rabbit carcasses. The intention of a midden is to attract foxes to an area so they can be cage trapped or snared. A midden is usually surrounded by a fence that allows foxes free passage but keeps out livestock. Cage traps or snares are set within the fenced area in false entry points. Where the intention is to attract foxes so they can be shot, shooting is usually with a rifle, with shots taken from a suitable vantage point or a high seat (Natural England, 2011). Fox middens have been used very successfully, particularly in upland areas, where other methods of control are more

challenging. They work best during the winter between November and March when the weather is colder and harder. It is best to use weathered stake posts and old sheep wire.

NIGHT SHOOTING (LAMPING)

A number of different shooting techniques are used on foxes. The calling and shooting of foxes at night with the aid of a spotlight (i.e. lamping) should only be done by competent individuals who know the area very well and are familiar with it in daylight. A suitably powered (centre-fire) rifle (e.g. .22 Hornett, .222, .223, .220 Swift, 22-250, or .243) should be used. Calling foxes is a skill that can be learned with much practice. Some people can imitate effective fox calls. Other metal and plastic calls can be purchased, and used under licence (see below). Polystyrene rubbed against a window can be an effective call as well. It is essential to inform local farmers prior to lamping. An effective time for lamping is when the first fields are cut for silage as many dead frogs, mice, nests are present (GWCT, 2005).

LEGISLATION: CALLERS

It is important to note that Section 35 (1) (d) of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 states that a person shall not - *use an electrical or other instrument or appliance (including recording apparatus) emitting sound, for the purpose of hunting any wild bird or any wild animal.* The use of the term "...or other instrument..." obviously does not restrict the definition to electrically operated instruments/appliances only. For example, metal and plastic callers and possibly even polystyrene rubbed against a window could be interpreted as an "instrument or appliance" under the legislation. Calling a fox with one's mouth, however, would be acceptable.

In effect, this means that it is illegal to use callers for foxes (as well as for grey crows and magpies). Section 35 (4) allows the Minister to grant a licence to a person to *use an instrument or appliance emitting sound for the purpose of repelling, scaring or capturing any wild bird or any wild animal for scientific research or for another purpose approved of by the Minister.* Note that the legislation refers to "repelling, scaring or capturing" and does not say for the purpose of killing.

In this context, the wording of the licence application is important and the author is aware that licences have been refused to applicants seeking to use electric callers "to assist in controlling corvids and foxes". However, the author is aware of applicants being granted a licence to "assist in the identification of these species" as part of a predator control programme.

LAMPING TIPS

The GWCT (2005) recommends that the general technique for calling foxes at night is to approach an area from the downwind side where it is thought that one or more foxes are hunting. A few rabbit squeal sounds should be made. After a pause of 2-5 minutes, the ground should be scanned with the lamp. If a fox or its eyes are picked up in the beam,



Red fox.

calling should recommence. Only the bottom of the beam should play on the animal so that the foreground is not illuminated. Depending on the wariness of the fox, and the skill of the caller, the animal may come very close, e.g. to within a 10 metres. Adult foxes will often circle 70-100 metres away in which case only a rifle should be used by a competent marksman. Always identify your target very clearly and safety is the most important factor when night shooting.

LEGISLATION: LAMPING

It is not an offence under the Wildlife Acts to hunt fox and rabbit using a lamp (and other dazzling equipment, etc.) as they are **not protected wild animals**. It is, however, illegal to lamp protected species such as hare and deer.

Furthermore, the use of a mechanically propelled vehicle may not be used for the purposes of hunting **any wild animal**, including a fox or rabbit, whether the vehicle is stationary or moving. Therefore, a hunter must not be in any vehicle while lamping as the definition of hunting in the Wildlife Acts includes to “search for”. More specifically, hunting means: “stalk, pursue, chase, drive, flush, capture, course, attract, follow, **search for**, lie in wait for, take, trap or shoot by any means whether with or without dog except in sections 28 and 29 of this Act, includes killing in the course of hunting and kindred words shall be construed accordingly”. Legally, lamping and shooting would both be considered as “hunting” under the Wildlife Acts.

However, if you wish to hunt from a vehicle (with or without a lamp regardless of whether the vehicle is stationary or moving), you must apply for a specific licence under Section 36 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012. An application for a licence under Section 36 requires the applicant to specify the areas where he/she intends to hunt (county and townland) and the period for which the licence is required.

It is also important to note that lamping land for foxes from a road without the permission of the landowner can be considered hunting/trespass and subject to

Section 44 of the Wildlife Acts. For example, it would be an offence under Section 44 of the Wildlife Acts (trespass) for a person who not being the owner or occupier of land to either use a lamp to hunt for foxes or carry a gun for shooting them on the land without the permission either of the person who is the owner or the occupier of the land or other person entitled to enjoy sporting rights over the land.

LEGISLATION: SHOOTING FROM A ROAD

Note that it is illegal to shoot from a public road or near public places/houses. While lamping, a shot should be taken from inside the field and then at a distance of not less than 60 feet (18.3 metres) from the road and shooting away from the direction of the road. However, care should be taken because there is a tendency not to use the legal provision of specifying 60 feet but rather to use a charge of “reckless discharge of a firearm” where no proof of distance may be required.

SHOOTING (DRIVING)

Driving foxes towards standing guns with a relatively small number of people (with experienced dogs) can be an effective method of fox control. Guns should be located downwind and should move into position without making any noise (or smoking) as foxes may not exit where they hear, see or smell disturbance. Guns should be 40 metres apart and in many cases should stand with their backs to the drive and shoot foxes as they pass going away from them (GWCT, 2005).

LOCATION AND DESTRUCTION OF LITTERS

The use of dogs (e.g. terriers) to control cubbing earths can be an effective method of fox control. The terrier’s role is to locate its quarry underground, to bark at it continuously, to either cause it to leave the earth or alternatively to indicate where in the earth the quarry is located in order that it can be dug to and dispatched. From March onwards, make an effort to locate all the fox earths and make a point of visiting them every two weeks. The soil at the entrance of the den should be smoothed over so that tracks can be detected (i.e. not badger tracks). If a litter is present, it is a good idea to sit and wait for the vixen to come out of the earth, and then deal with the cubs (GWCT, 2005).

TRAPS

Live capture cage traps are not much favoured as a method of fox control in rural

areas as they are believed to be inefficient in most circumstances. A number of different traps are available commercially. All are of similar design and depend upon attracting a fox to suitable bait placed in the trap, with a trip mechanism to close the door (Natural England, 2011). If you want to make the trap yourself, it is recommended that it is constructed of rigid wire mesh not greater than 50 x 50cm (2ft x 2ft). It should be about 1.2m long, 45cm wide and 45cm high (4ft x 1ft 6in x 1ft 6in).



Fox cage trap.



Magpie

Corvid Control

DEROGATIONS

Under the terms of the EU Birds Directive, **all wild birds** (including grey crows and magpies) are protected in Ireland. However, each EU Member State is allowed to make derogations for the control of certain bird species that cause damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or to air safety. Every year, the Minister permits the control of grey crows, magpies, rooks, jackdaws, woodpigeon and feral pigeon. However, Gun Club members should note that different control methods are allowed for different bird species in different situations.

For example, in April 2015, Minister Heather Humphreys TD signed a nationwide Declaration for the 12 month period from 1st May 2015 to 30th April 2016. Note that the derogations do not allow for the control of grey crows and magpies for the protection of fauna (notably the nests and young of game birds) from 1st of October 2015 to 31st of January 2016. This means that magpies and grey crows can only be controlled if they are a **threat to public health and a vector in the spread of disease from 1st of October to 31st of January** (and from December 1st 2015 to 30th April 2016 to **prevent serious damage to livestock**). From the 1st of February 2016, control can take place for the 'protection of fauna' i.e. protecting nesting birds and their young from corvid predation.

SECTION 42 LICENCES

Protected wild birds and animals can be controlled under a Section 42 licence (Wildlife Acts 1976-2012), where they are causing serious damage to:

- food (including human food products and animal feeds), livestock, poultry or agricultural crops (including vegetables or fruit) either on pasture or on cultivated land;
- pen-reared wild birds on any land;
- other fauna and flora;
- a woodland, forest plantation or a fishery;
- buildings and other structures and their contents, or aquaculture installations.

A property owner or occupier may, on application to the NPWS, seek a permission (i.e. Section 42 Licence) to take appropriate steps to stop the damage. All Section 42 applications are investigated by local NPWS staff to determine if serious damage is being caused and, if so, the most practical method of stopping or controlling the problem.



Grey crow.



Predated egg.

It is important to note that different control methods are allowed for different bird species in various situations. However, of all the avian predators, the grey crow and magpie are the most serious predators of game (GWCT, 2005).

TIMING OF CORVID CONTROL

Grey crows and magpies become highly territorial in the spring, defending a comparatively large piece of ground against other members of their own species. During this territorial phase, both species become specialists nest robbers, with eggs, nestlings and chicks forming an important part of their diet¹⁰. They also spend

¹⁰. Rooks and jackdaws can also cause serious losses to game during the nesting season (GWCT, 2005).

considerable amounts of time on look out duty, watching for intruders and observing the movements of other birds. The greatest majority of game-bird nest predation is done by territorial pairs of crows and magpies (GWCT, 2005). It is often stated (e.g. GWCT, 2005) that outside of the territorial season, which coincides with the game nesting season, there is little point in wasting time catching corvids which are doing no harm and which are less likely to be caught.

However, it is not uncommon for Gun Clubs to continue corvid control throughout the year. Gun Clubs frequently state that they do not want to allow a situation to emerge whereby it remains very difficult to get on top of these species prior to the breeding season. Furthermore, Gun Clubs argue that can be advantageous in tackling grey crows over the winter when they are non-territorial and feeding in large flocks.

LARSEN TRAPS

These traps work best during spring and early summer when corvids are territorial and when game birds are nesting and therefore most vulnerable. Outside of this period, the use of larsen traps is of little value. Call birds are used in larsen traps to attract the attention of other territorial corvids. The call-bird is seen as an intruder, and other birds will try to drive it away. Call birds can be caught using bait (e.g. eggs, bread or dog food) and/or some Gun Clubs place a mirror in the larsen trap to attract magpies. Call birds from outside of the trapping area are far more effective than locally-caught call birds (GWCT, 2005).

Many Gun Clubs advise on removing trapped corvids from larsen traps at night to prevent other birds from becoming weary or trap shy. If you do not have success within a couple of days, it is always best to relocate your larsen trap elsewhere; sometimes moving it as little as 20 metres can yield success.

LEGISLATION

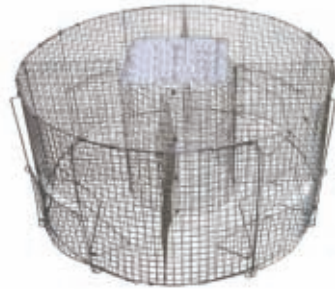
Larsen traps used must comply with the (Approved Traps, Snares and Nets) Regulations 2003, and Section 35(5) of the Wildlife Acts. In this regard, the decoy bird must only be used for hunting birds of the same species. The bird must regularly be provided with ample food and water and shall, when caged, only be kept in a cage which is of sufficient dimensions to enable it to move and exercise freely. Note that the welfare of decoy birds is covered by law (i.e. the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013). More specifically, the following conditions must be in place:

The live decoy may only be used to hunt birds of the same species:

- There must be suitable food readily accessible;
- There must be clean drinkable water available at all times;
- There must be shelter which protects the bird from prevailing weather conditions;
- There must be a perch placed under the shelter;
- No decoy bird should be left in a trap when the trap is not in use;
- The live decoy must only be kept in a cage which is of sufficient dimensions to enable it to move and exercise freely.



Top entry Larsen Trap.



Multi catch Larsen Trap.

Top-entry (roof funnel) larsen traps work well around woodland or along hedges. Side-entry larsen traps are better suited to an open setting. Large ladder/pit-fall traps also work well where flocks of corvids are present in an area.

ROOST SHOOTING

Corvids, including grey crows and magpies, can be shot on route or adjacent to their roost locations¹¹. This method of control can be very effective, however, it requires considerable planning beforehand to get an idea of flight patterns and safety requirements.

DECOYING/ELECTRIC CALLS

Section 35 makes the use of decoys for crows, including grey crow and magpie, illegal without a licence. Artificial decoys can only be used for the purpose of hunting ducks, geese and woodpigeon. If you wish to use decoys for grey crow,

¹¹. Note: Most corvid roosts are populated by Rooks and Jackdaws which require a section 42 permit to control where they are causing serious damage to game species.

magpie or fox, you must apply for a specific licence under Section 35 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012. The same licence (Section 35) deals with the use of callers and decoys. When a licence is granted, the use of decoys can be a very effective method of corvid control. Sometimes, prior to shooting, feeding in an area can optimise success during early morning.

DESTROYING THE NESTS OF MAGPIE AND GREY GROW

Section 22 (4) (e) makes it an offence to wilfully disturb a protected wild bird on or near a nest containing eggs or unflown young. Note that **all birds are protected in Ireland** under the EU Birds Directive. However, Section 22 (9) (d) states that the Minister may grant a licence to a person to “*examine, inspect or **take the nest or eggs of protected wild birds of a species so specified for such educational, scientific or other purpose as shall be so specified***”. Therefore, if you wish to remove/destroy the nests of magpies and grey crows, you must apply for a specific licence under Sections 9 and 22 (9) (d) of Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012.

POISON

Since 2010, the use of poison is illegal in Ireland.



Woodpigeon

Woodpigeon Control

The woodpigeon has a hunting season commencing November 1st and ending on January 31st. Outside of the hunting season, woodpigeon can be controlled under derogation as they can cause serious damage to arable crops, including cereals, legumes and brassicas (O'hUallachain and Dunne, 2013). They can be controlled on any property (including stubble fields) throughout the state (under derogation) in order to prevent damage being caused.

The control is to be carried out by the owner or occupier of a property or the servant or agent (e.g. Gun Club member) of the owner or occupier of any such property. Please note that you should not assume that you are acting as an agent just because you shoot the land during the hunting season as a Club member.

Central to the legislation is that the owner/occupier has himself identified the need for control and requests someone to carry out the control as his/her agent. Remember, it is the owner/occupier who is the beneficiary of the derogation and not necessarily the hunter. While there is no statutory requirement for seeking permission, the owner/occupier should notify his local NPWS Conservation Ranger that he/she will be controlling woodpigeons under derogation to protect his/her crops.

Note that an NPWS Conservation Ranger is authorised for the purpose of the Regulations (S.I. No. 254 of 1986) to enter on any lands on which he/she reasonably believes that the control of wild birds is taken place and he/she may request the owner for information about the number of wild birds killed or captured on such lands and the means by which such wild birds have been killed or captured.



Woodpigeon.


DECOYING

Although not listed in Schedule four of the derogation, the Wildlife Acts permit the use of decoys, including mechanical/electrical appliances such as pigeon magnets, which do not emit sound.

FERAL PIGEON

Feral pigeon can be a problem to public health in areas where food is stored.

When pigeon shooting, individuals should be able to identify **protected** species, for example, stock dove.

A close-up photograph of a mink with dark brown fur and a white chest patch, perched on a grey rock. It is holding a small, white, fluffy chick in its mouth. The background is a blurred natural setting.

*Mink are notorious predators.
Photo by Terje Kolaas.*

North American Mink Control

DESCRIPTION

Invasive alien species are currently considered as one of the greatest threats to global biodiversity as they prey on, compete with, or spread diseases to native species. Over the last 500 years, invasive alien species have been partly or wholly responsible for the extinction of at least 68 bird species. North American mink are an invasive alien species that are now well established in Ireland as a result of escapes from fur farms. The first mink farms in Ireland were established in 1950-53 and reports suggest that by 1960, over 40 farms were breeding mink with an average annual production of 4,000 – 4,500 skins. Currently, only a handful of fur farms remain in operation in Ireland.

EFFECT ON WILDLIFE

Mink are regarded as one of the most voracious predators inside and outside of their natural range in North America. Mink cause severe damage to game, fish, poultry, geese and water-birds as well as threatened sea birds and waders. Mink frequently kill in excess of their requirements.

BIOLOGY

Mink mate from February to April and the average litter is five to six but more have been recorded. They have no natural predators in Ireland and can live for six to seven years. It has been estimated that the mink population in Ireland is potentially between 20,500 and 33,500 individuals based on the carrying capacity of available habitats (Roy et al., 2009). In Ireland, badgers, otters, stoats and pine martens are the only native Mustelids (Dayan and Simberloff, 1994). A lack of meso-predators may enable invasive mink to obtain higher densities than obtained in continental systems with a more diverse predator base (Stokes et al., 2004; Roy et al., 2009). Currently, most conservation and game shooting organisations are involved in mink control in Ireland. In 2012, 2013 and 2014 the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht has, in conjunction with the NARGC, established a mink bounty scheme.

METHODS OF CONTROL

Live capture trapping is the most common technique currently used for mink control in Europe. Trapping is most effective during January to March (before breeding) and during late-August to early-November (to target dispersing animals). All traps must be checked a minimum of once a day.

CAGE TRAPS

Cage traps are the most frequently used method for controlling mink. Traps should be set in locations along drains, hedges, near fallen logs or bridges. Avoid placing traps in the open or where they can be knocked or interfered with by people, cattle, sheep, badgers, etc. Hiding or partially burying the trap can be effective to ensure mink do not become too wary or trap shy. Traps are most commonly either baited with fish or some make extensive use of mink scent glands. Scent can be left in traps by rubbing the back of the mink over the cage trap. It has been shown that traps baited with mink scent glands, which can be extracted from culled animals, provide a catch success far greater than traditional fish baits (Roy et al., 2009).



North American Mink.

The advantage of using scent gland baits is that only a little is needed, which makes transport easier and the bait remains effective for several days after baiting, while food based baits often decompose. This bait has the disadvantage of being difficult to procure in quantity, even from commercial suppliers (Roy *et al.*, 2009). Mink caught in cages are best dispatched with an air rifle or .22 rifle using low velocity ammunition. It is an offence to drown mink under the Animal Health and Welfare Act (2013).

TUNNEL TRAPS

Spring traps (i.e. the Mark 6 Fenn Trap) are often set in tunnels, which attract the naturally curious mink. The tunnel can be open at one end or at both, depending if the trap is designed as a baited 'dead end' trap (which can be set into the ground) or a 'run through' trap. Fenn traps require a higher degree of operator skill than is the case with live traps and should only be used in tunnels or on bridges with appropriate restricted entrances (not greater than 8cm) to avoid non-target species (e.g. pine marten or otter).

BRIDGE TRAPS

When using a bridge style trap it is important to site the trap well. A natural crossing place over a river or drain, often at the narrowest point is suitable. If mink are using this place to cross, there will often be scats or droppings nearby and/or the remains of foodstuff. Natural bridges such as fallen trees or man-made bridges are often used by mink to overcome obstacles in their way and so a bridge trap nearby will often yield good results. As with tunnel traps, bridge traps should have restricted entrances (Carslake, *pers. comm.*) and it should be secured to prevent it from becoming washed away.



North American Mink.

RAFT TRAPS

Many Clubs have reported success using raft traps. These are attached to the bank and floated on rivers and streams and have a trap located in wooden housing on top of the float. Rafts have many advantages over standard bank-side trapping, as mink are often curious and will visit islands and floating objects in a water body. Rafts are also used as a monitoring tool as they provide a medium for recording footprints which, when confirmed, allow operators to trap reactively. This method also indicates whether the float is visited by non-target species (Roy *et al.*, 2009).

Note: Although this technique has many of the advantages afforded by standard live trapping, the disadvantages of raft trapping is that it is difficult to apply in tidal systems and the potentially unstable and depth-variable river systems of Ireland (Roy *et al.*, 2009).

When purchasing any spring style trap for min control, the person(s) using them should ensure that the trap is of a Mk. 6 style and not the smaller Mk. 4, which can be used only for the control of rats (see page 30). The trap should be marked 'Approved' and/or should have an approval number stamped onto the floor plate of the trap. Two well known makes of traps, which are classed as approved, can be used in the control of mink - 'Fenn Mk. 6' and 'Springer Mk. 6'.



Mark 6 Fenn Trap.



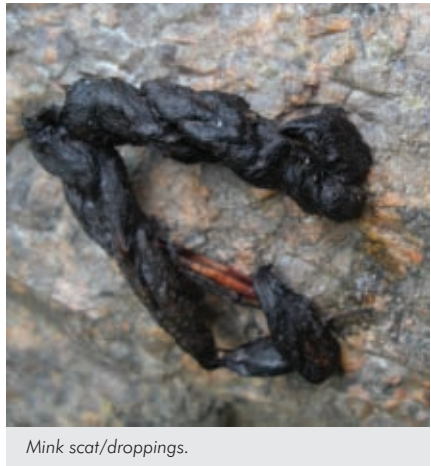
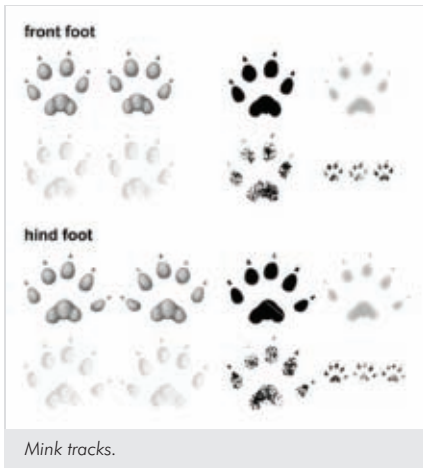
Cage Trap



Raft Trap (plastic).

HUNTING WITH DOGS

During the denning season (May and June), mink trapping success can be reduced virtually to zero. However, dogs trained on mink scent glands can be used to find den sites where females are, and then subsequently trapped intensively. By using multiple traps side by side, kits close to weaning can also be caught on the same night. If not close to weaning, kits can be unearthed from the den. Searching for spraints (i.e. droppings) is a commonly used technique for monitoring populations, especially in projects that cover a large area (Roy *et al.*, 2009).





Rat Control

DESCRIPTION

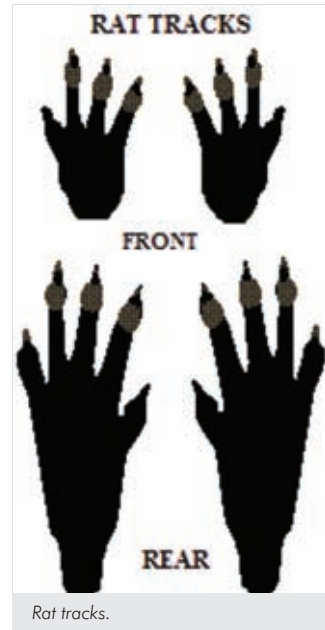
Thought to have originated in China, the brown rat has now spread to all continents except Antarctica, and is the dominant rat in Europe and much of North America. Its distribution and abundance makes it the most successful mammal on the planet after humans. In Ireland, the brown rat is the most common rodent species. It is probable that brown rats arrived by the 18th century, most likely aboard ships from Britain and mainland Europe. The brown rat is highly adaptable to most habitat types, preferring to remain in areas which are in close proximity to human settlements, as they provide these opportunistic animals with an abundant source of food and shelter.



Brown rat.

BIOLOGY

Brown rats are typically nocturnal, although they will sometimes forage for food during the day. Adults can grow up to 28 cm in length with males weighing up to half a kilogram. They live in loose colonies, made up of clans, usually consisting of a mating pair, or a male and a harem of females (BBC, 2013). Brown rats dig well, and often excavate extensive burrow systems. Their diet includes meat, fish, vegetables, earthworms, crustaceans, nuts and fruit. The brown rat can breed throughout the year if conditions are suitable, with a female producing up to five litters a year. The gestation period is only 21 days, and litters can number up to 14, although seven is common. They reach sexual maturity in about five weeks.



Rat tracks.

EFFECT ON WILDLIFE

Brown rats are numerous and provide an important source of food for larger predatory animals such as foxes, stoats and birds of prey. In most parts of Ireland, the brown rat has become the main food source of the barn owl. Red kites, buzzards and kestrels will also kill or scavenge rats. To humans, the brown rat is a serious pest species, which can pose considerable public health and environmental problems.

For Gun Clubs, rats will consume large quantities of food put out for game-birds and may kill chicks in the field and pheasant and partridge poults in the release pen (GWCT, 2005). Rats need to be controlled 12 months of the year.

STEPS IN RAT CONTROL

Prevention is better than cure! There are many ways to stop a rat infestation occurring. The first step should be to limit sources of rodent food and shelter, and proof buildings to prevent access. This should include cleaning up foodstuff, rubbish and debris close to buildings e.g. wire mesh around openings, guards around pipes, etc.

TRAPPING

If rat infestation is a problem, spring traps and cage traps should be considered as the first option for control. Systematic tunnel trapping at all strategic places should be undertaken, and the campaign never relaxed (GWCT, 2005). Traps must be checked on a daily basis and any rats or mice caught should be humanly dispatched. Rodents prefer the edges of open ground, so placing traps against boundaries, walls or other linear features is recommended.



Mk. 4 Springer/Fenn Trap can be used in tunnels for rats.

POISON¹²

Poison requires great care so that pets and non-target species do not end up dead. The use of poisons can lead to secondary poisoning for a range of protected species, such as red kite, barn owls, buzzards and kestrels. It is best to avoid rodenticide use where possible and take a series of precautions to maximise the efficiency of the method of control, without endangering other wildlife or domestic pets. If you must use rodenticide, all possible measures should be taken to minimise poisoning non-target species. These include:

- 1) Survey the site to establish the full extent of the infestation, including where rats are living, moving (e.g. regular runs of pathways) and feeding, both before and during treatments. This planned approach can help maximise the efficiency of control and limit the amount of poison released into the natural environment.
- 2) Record the quantity of bait used and the locations of baiting stations (baits need to be replenished with the correct amount when baiting), and inspect these regularly. Use baits only for as long as it is necessary to achieve satisfactory control and normally not longer than 35 days in any treatment. Remove all bait at the end of the treatment – if a bait box is not used, use bait trays to make removal easier. This will help limit the build up of resistance amongst the rat population, therefore making future control easier.
- 3) Rats are naturally curious and may not feed on bait immediately. Ensure bait is

¹² Information from Advice leaflet: Control of rats & mice and the threat to wildlife. Source: NPWS, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine & Golden Eagle Trust (undated).

sufficiently protected to avoid other birds, mammals and pets from eating it. Do not leave rodenticides baits out in the open, or in fields, ditches or along hedgerows. Hole or burrow baiting can be effective but treated areas must be plugged or covered to prevent non-target poisoning.

- 4) Carry out daily inspections to search for rodent bodies, both during and after the treatment period. Many rats will not die until several days after eating the bait and can be found up to 100m or more away from the bait site. Always handle rats with care (and gloves) as they may carry fatal diseases.

Closely follow advice on the label about correct disposal (e.g. burning, burying, or dumping) of rodent bodies. Ensure that you are capable of using rodenticides (poisons) safely before embarking on this method of control. Seek professional advice if necessary. Always follow product label instructions. In particular, ensure that bait is presented correctly, only the necessary quantity is used, remove bait after use and regularly search for rodent bodies so that they can be disposed of safely.

FIRST GENERATION RODENTICIDES

If rodenticides are used, products with the active ingredients warfarin, coumatetralyl and chlorophacinone are known as first generation anti-coagulant rodenticides (FGARs). These are preferable and lower the risk of secondary poisoning.

SECOND GENERATION RODENTICIDES

More recently developed, second generation anti-coagulant rodenticides (SGARs) are more toxic products, based on one of four active ingredients; difenacoum, bromadiolone, brodifacoum and flocoumafen. If second generation rodenticides are used, it is important to follow the relevant safety precautions, as the potential for poisoning non-target species is much greater than with less toxic substances.



Feral Cat Control

DESCRIPTION

Feral cats are domestic cats that have returned to/are living and sometimes breeding in the wild. They are considered feral as they are not owned by anyone and are normally not tame.

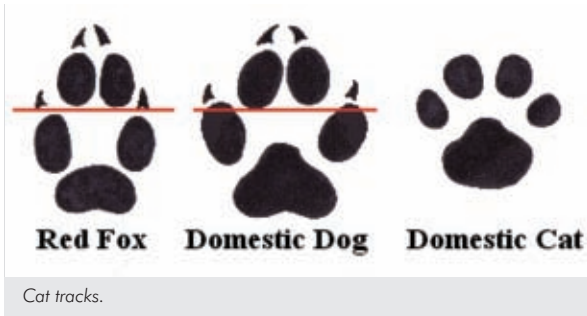
EFFECT ON WILDLIFE

Feral and even free-ranging domestic cats are serious predators of game birds and song birds. In the UK, research suggests that 55 million birds are consumed by cats annually. They also consume rodents, rabbits, insects, reptiles, fish and carrion. Feral cats are also a health risk in that they can transmit diseases to humans and wildlife. As instinctive hunters, feral cats rank very high as a destroyer of nesting game, and other young chicks (GWCT, 2005).

BIOLOGY

They weigh 3-8 pounds, stand 8-12 inches high at the shoulder, and are 14-24 inches long. The colour range is similar to domestic cats. Feral cats are adaptable

and reside in a variety of conditions including barns, sheds, under bridges, in the wild, etc. Feral cats are prolific breeders and can produce up to five litters per year.



LEGAL STATUS

Cats that are not personal property, which are considered feral, are not protected under Irish legislation and can be controlled using legally acceptable methods (e.g. shooting and trapping).

CONTROL

Shooting is an efficient method to reduce populations of feral cats in specific areas. Use shotguns with No. 6 shot size or larger or .22-calibre rifles. Aim shots between the eyes or in the heart/lung area to ensure an immediate humane death.

When using a rifle or shotgun, early morning is the best time to deal with feral cats. Otherwise, they may be caught live in various types of large cage traps (GWCT, 2005).



Grey Squirrel.

Grey Squirrel Control

DESCRIPTION

The grey squirrel is an alien species that was introduced into Ireland in 1911 to Castle Forbes in Co. Longford. They are distinguished from red squirrels by their grey fur, smaller ear tufts and their larger, more robust build. At present, they are found mostly in the eastern, southern and northern parts of the country, with the river Shannon providing some kind of obstacle for their progress into the west of Ireland. Squirrels belong to the most successful and widespread order of animals in the whole world, the rodents.

BIOLOGY

Grey squirrels are active by day and sleep by night in their nest, which is called a drey. They have two litters per year, with an average of three or four per litter and the young leave the nest about seven or eight weeks after they are born. Grey squirrels feed on acorns, tree shoots, flowers, nuts, fruits, roots and cereals. They bury surplus food in the soil or in tree hollows. They also feed at ground level more than the red squirrels. Grey squirrels can thrive in any area which provides their main food source of broadleaf tree seeds. These can be found in coniferous forests,

deciduous woods, parks, large gardens and hedgerows, but they prefer habitats of deciduous or mixed woodlands in Ireland. Most of their time is spent in the tree canopy with regular visits to the forest floor to forage.

EFFECT ON WILDLIFE

The grey squirrel is a significant threat to the endangered and protected red squirrel. Grey squirrels also cause economic loss to forestry plantations by stripping the bark of trees, which can lead to tree die-off. Red squirrels are out-competed by the grey squirrels in many woodland types; the more robust greys have a more varied diet, can eat acorns before they are ripe enough for the reds, and may also act as a vector of the parapox virus, which affects the red squirrels but not the greys (Lawton, 2003). Grey squirrels will also snatch the eggs of any ground nesting birds if the opportunity arises.



CONTROL METHODS

Although road kills account for the main cause of grey squirrel deaths in Ireland (NPWS, 2008), they can be controlled by a variety of trapping and shooting techniques.

TUNNEL TRAPS

Using Mark 4 Fenn traps in tunnels can be an effective method to take grey squirrels. Tree roots, drains, holes in banks, walls and hollow stumps can all be used (GWCT, 2005). Areas of bare soil around the base of large trees are usually productive, also under the roots of a tree which has partially blown down. Baiting is unnecessary if the traps can be set on natural runs, but a scatter of grain may increase catches, particularly when food is short in late-winter, spring and early-summer (GWCT, 2005). Trap entrances must be well protected to avoid catching non-target species.

CAGE TRAPPING

This is a very effective method of controlling grey squirrels. Traps should be set

under trees known to be used by squirrels travelling from the canopy to the ground. Once traps are set, they should be visited at least once a day. Some traps are worth visiting twice a day.

SHOOTING

Grey squirrels can be shot with a .22 rifle (using hollow-point ammunition) or a high powered air gun. Always remember your background when using a rifle. Squirrels can also be controlled using a shot gun with two individuals working together. On occasion, it may be necessary for one gun to stand still while the other walks around a tree where a grey squirrel is present (GWCT, 2005).



Cage trap with grey squirrel.



Buzzard.

Buzzards and Game Management

INTRODUCTION

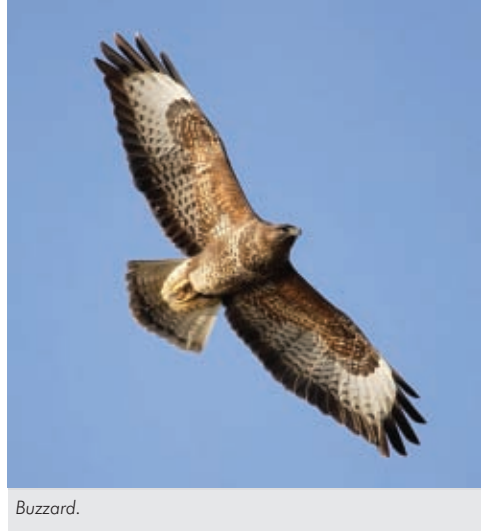
In recent years, a number of Gun Clubs have expressed concern about the impact of buzzards on game birds, particularly young and released pheasants/partridge. The extent of the issue is difficult to establish as there is currently limited detailed information available.

DESCRIPTION

The buzzard is medium-sized bird of prey with broad rounded wings and a short neck and tail. When gliding and soaring, it will often hold its wings in a shallow 'V' and the tail is fanned. Common buzzards are variable in colour from dark brown to tan, although all have dark wingtips and a finely barred tail. The buzzard's feet are yellow and feather-free. The sexes are identical, but females are slightly larger than males. It is a very vocal bird, especially in the spring. Its call is a loud 'mewing' sound, which it uses mainly in flight. The common buzzard breeds throughout Europe, except in Scandinavia's far north, Iceland and parts of the west of Ireland.

BEHAVIOUR

The buzzard is generally seen gliding in wide circles, taking advantage of rising currents of warm air. It is often considered a lazy bird, particularly when seen quietly perched for a long time, often beside roads/motorways looking for carrion. This species has great adaptability and can be found in a variety of habitat types.



Buzzard.

DIET¹³

Research on buzzards in Northern Ireland during the breeding season has shown that they predominantly eat rabbits, crow species and rats, which together make up over 70% of their diet. In particular, young magpies, hooded crows and rooks are predated after they leave the nest. Rabbits are main prey item of the buzzard where available and directly affect the number of chicks produced (Rooney and Montgomery, 2013). During the winter, when other prey items are scarce, and hunting via soaring is reduced due to the absence of warm air, buzzards largely feed on beetles, worms and carrion.

RANGE INCREASE

Driven to extinction in Ireland by the early part of the 20th century, buzzards have successfully re-colonised much of the country in recent decades. Results from the recent Breeding Birds Atlas (2007 – 2011) reveal the dramatic extent to which the buzzard has bounced back. Breeding was confirmed in 16 counties during this survey, with probable breeding recorded in a further five counties. This represents one of the greatest increases in distribution (885%) and abundance of any species recorded by the Breeding Atlas in Ireland over the past 30 years. The population recovery is continuing, with an expanding range and increasing numbers.

13. The text for the sections dealing with Diet and Range Increase was provided by John Lusby, Raptor Conservation Officer, BirdWatch Ireland.

PROTECTION

Under the Wildlife Acts (1976-2012), all birds of prey including Hawks, Falcons, Harriers, Eagles, Kites and Buzzards, are afforded special protection and listed in Schedule Four, whereby even if they are thought to be causing damage they cannot be disturbed without a special exemption from the Minister (i.e. a Section 42 licence).

STRATEGIES TO PROTECT PHEASANT POULTS

High densities of food (prey) (e.g. pheasant poults in a release pen) will inevitably attract predators, be they foxes, mink, cats, rats, corvids, pine marten or birds of prey (BASC, 2009). In the UK, research has shown that losses of poults to buzzards are usually low and that far more pheasants are lost to other predators, disease and starvation in the period after release (Harradine and Reynolds, 1997). In one study, losses at pheasant release pens were deemed to be less than 1% to more than 10% (the reported mean losses were fewer than 5% and individual losses often less than 1%) (BASC, 2009). Other research, conducted mainly in England, has also shown that less than 5% of pheasant poults are taken by raptors (Lloyd, 1976).

Gun Clubs, particularly in the east, south east and south west of Ireland have indicated that the level of buzzard predation on pheasant poults is sometimes well in excess of 10%, however, no documented evidence exists.

With respect to pheasants in release pens, a study by Allen et al. (2000) led to the production by the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) of a booklet giving practical advice to gamekeepers and others on reducing the impacts of raptors on their birds. This publication is entitled: "Birds of prey at pheasant release pens – a practical guide for game managers and gamekeepers" (Harradine and Reynolds, 1997). The recommendations of that publication can be summarised as follows:

COVER

Consider planting a variety of shrubs to provide dense cover 1-2 metres high over at least 20% of the pen. Maintain thick woody ground cover over a least 60%. Provide a mixture of open ground and cover.

PERCHES

It is advisable to reduce the number of suitable perches around release pens. Try covering release pen posts with bags.

CONSIDER RELEASING EXTRA POULTS

Research in the UK has shown that losses are often around 1%. So, if your Club releases 300 pheasants, this research would recommend releasing 10-20 more to accommodate for poult predation.

RELEASE OLDER BIRDS

Consideration should be given to poults at 7-8 weeks. Predation of birds at this age generally declines.

TRY REFLECTIVE TAPE

A tape with a single reflective side, creating flashing effects in the wind can be stretched across open parts of the pen.

KEEP BIRDS OF PREY GUESSING

Scaring devices and decoys should be varied and moved frequently to stop birds of prey getting used to them, thereby reducing their effectiveness. An Irish game-keeper recently suggested the use of a radio when poults are placed in a release pen as a good deterrent. He noticed, however, that Buzzards did get use to music stations so then he switched to a news-talk station and found that more effective. Where levels of predation are high locally, it may be an option to cover release pens.

The BASC publication also argues the more that can be done to protect released pheasants from other predation, road deaths, disease, etc. the better return for a shoot.

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Appendix 1:

Summary of Specific Legislation and Licences for Predator Control in Ireland

USE OF FOX/CROW CALLERS & CROW DECOYS

Section 35 (1) (d) of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 states that a person shall not - *use an electrical or other instrument or appliance (including recording apparatus) emitting sound, for the purpose of hunting any wild bird or any wild animal.* The use of the term "...or other instrument..." obviously does not restrict the definition to electrically operated instruments/appliances only. For example, metal and plastic callers and possibly even polystyrene rubbed against a window could be interpreted as an "instrument or appliance" under the legislation. Calling a fox with one's mouth, however, would be acceptable.

In effect, this means that it is illegal to use callers for grey crow, magpie and fox. However, Section 35 (4) allows the Minister to grant a licence to a person to *use an instrument or appliance emitting sound for the purpose of repelling, scaring or capturing any wild bird or any wild animal for scientific research or for another purpose approved of by the Minister.* Note that the legislation refers to "repelling, scaring or capturing" and does not say for the purpose of killing.

In this context, the wording of the licence application is important and the author is aware that licences have been refused to applicants seeking to use electric callers "to assist in controlling corvids and foxes". However, the author is aware of applicants being granted a licence to "assist in the identification of these species" as part of a predator control programme.

Section 35 also makes the use of decoys for crows, including grey crow and magpie, illegal without a licence. Artificial decoys can only be used for the purpose of hunting ducks, geese and woodpigeon. If you wish to use decoys for grey crow, magpie or fox, you must apply for a specific licence under Section 35 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012. The same licence (Section 35) covers the use of callers and decoys. An application for a licence under Section 35 requires the applicant to outline the:

- i. Purpose of licence
- ii. Species name
- iii. Area(s) in which applicant will operate (e.g. county & townland)

- iv. Qualifications/experience in this field of activity
- v. Other supporting licence/permit(s)
- vi. Organisation to which applicant is affiliated
- vii. Period for which licence is required

DESTROYING THE NESTS OF MAGPIE AND GREY GROW

Section 22 (4) (e) makes it an offence to wilfully disturb a protected wild bird on or near a nest containing eggs or unflown young. Note that **all birds are protected in Ireland** under the EU Birds Directive. However, Section 22 (9) (d) states that the Minister may grant a licence to a person to “*examine, inspect or **take the nest or eggs of protected wild birds of a species so specified for such educational, scientific or other purpose as shall be so specified***”.

Therefore, if you wish to remove/destroy the nests of magpies and grey crows, you must apply for a specific licence under Sections 9 and 22 (9) (d) of Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012. In the licence application, you must state the:

- i. Purpose of licence
- ii. Species name
- iii. Area(s) in which applicant will operate (e.g. county & townland)
- iv. Qualifications/experience in this field of activity
- v. Other supporting licence/permit(s)
- vi. Organisation to which applicant is affiliated
- vii. Period for which licence is required

LAMPING/HUNTING FROM A VEHICLE

It is not an offence under the Wildlife Acts to hunt fox and rabbit using a lamp (and other dazzling equipment, etc.) as they are **not protected wild animals**. It is, however, illegal to lamp protected species such as hare and deer.

Furthermore, the use of a mechanically propelled vehicle may not be used for the purposes of hunting **any wild animal**, including a fox or rabbit, whether the vehicle is stationary or moving. Therefore, a hunter must not be in any vehicle while lamping as the definition of hunting in the Wildlife Acts includes to “search for”. More specifically, hunting means: “*stalk, pursue, chase, drive, flush, capture, course, attract, follow, **search for**, lie in wait for, take, trap or shoot by any means whether with or without dog except in sections 28 and 29 of this Act, includes killing in the course of hunting and kindred words shall be construed accordingly*”. Legally,

lamping and shooting would both be considered as “hunting” under the Wildlife Acts.

However, if you wish to hunt from a vehicle (with or without a lamp regardless of whether the vehicle is stationary or moving), you must apply for a specific licence under Section 36 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012. An application for a licence under Section 36 requires the applicant to specify the areas where he/she intends to hunt (county and townland) and the period for which the licence is required.

It is also important to note that lamping land for foxes from a road without the permission of the landowner can be considered hunting/trespass and subject to Section 44 of the Wildlife Acts. For example, it would be an offence under Section 44 of the Wildlife Acts (trespass) for a person who not being the owner or occupier of land to either use a lamp to hunt for foxes or carry a gun for shooting them on the land without the permission either of the person who is the owner or the occupier of the land or other person entitled to enjoy sporting rights over the land.

SHOOTING FROM A ROAD OR NEAR PUBLIC PLACES/DWELLINGS

It is illegal to shoot from a public road or near public places/houses. While lamping, a shot should be taken from inside the field and then at a distance of not less than 60 feet (18.3 metres) from the road and shooting away from the direction of the road. However, care should be taken because there is a tendency not to use the legal provision of specifying 60 feet but rather to use a charge of “reckless discharge of a firearm” where no proof of distance may be required.

SNARING

Irish legislation states that a stop snare must have a minimum length from noose to stop of 13 inches (33cm) if it is intended to snare foxes and 6½ inches (16.5cm) if it is intended to snare rabbits and which complies with the following:

1. A swivel is incorporated in the snare;
2. The snare is designed so that when it is used it will be securely tied to a fixed object;
3. The snare is designed so that for the purpose of avoiding catching large animals (for example deer, cattle or horses) by the leg when it is used a jump bar, i.e. a cross-bar at least two feet above the ground and supported by a pair of forked sticks fixed not less than two feet apart, may also be used.

SEMI-AUTOMATIC SHOTGUNS

It is an offence (under Section 33 of the Wildlife Acts 1976-2012) for a person to shoot, hunt or injure in the course of hunting **any wild bird** with a repeating or automatic shotgun (other than a repeating or automatic shotgun which is adapted or modified so as to render it incapable of carrying more than three shotgun cartridges).

SHOOTING BIRDS WITH A RIFLE

It is illegal under the Wildlife Acts 1976-2012 (i.e. the primary legislation) to shoot any bird with a rifle.

POISON

Since 2010, the use of poison (except for rodents) is illegal in Ireland. More specifically, the (Restrictions on Use of Poison Bait) Regulations (2010) make it illegal to use any poison to kill birds or animals, with the exception of rats and mice, without a special exemption. Therefore, it is now an offence to use meat, eggs or any other animal-based product as poisoned bait, unless in accordance with a specific licence granted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

FERAL CATS

Cats, which are not personal property that are considered feral, are not protected under Irish legislation and can be controlled using legally acceptable methods (e.g. shooting and trapping).

SPRING (OR FENN) TRAPS

Spring (or Fenn) traps (but not Gin traps, which are illegal) must be designed to cause the immediate death of the target species or the immediate unconsciousness and subsequent death without intervening consciousness. Spring traps (i.e. the Mark 6 Fenn Trap for mink and Mark 4 for Grey squirrels/rats) can be set in tunnels, but trap entrances must be well protected and measured (e.g. for mink, not greater than 8cm) to avoid catching non-target species (e.g. pine marten, otter, etc.).

DEROGATIONS FOR CONTROLLING CROWS AND PIGEONS

Under the terms of the EU Birds Directive, **all wild birds** (including grey crows and magpies) are protected in Ireland. However, each EU Member State is allowed to make derogations for the control of certain bird species that cause damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or to air safety. Every year, the Minister permits the control of grey crows, magpies, rooks, jackdaws, woodpigeon and feral pigeon. However, Gun Club members should note that different control methods are allowed for different bird species in different situations.

Minister Heather Humphreys TD recently signed a nationwide Declaration for the 12 month period from 1st May 2015 to 30th April 2016. Note that the derogations do not allow for the control of grey crows and magpies for the protection of fauna (notably the nests and young of game birds) from 1st of October 2015 to 31st of January 2016. This means that magpies and grey crows can only be controlled if they are a **threat to public health and a vector in the spread of disease from 1st of October to 31st of January** (and from December 1st 2015 to 30th April 2016 **to prevent serious damage to livestock**). From the 1st of February 2016, control can take place for the 'protection of fauna' i.e. protecting nesting birds and their young from corvid predation.

SECTION 42 LICENCES

Protected wild birds and animals can be controlled under a Section 42 licence (Wildlife Acts 1976-2012), where they are causing serious damage to:

- food (including human food products and animal feeds), livestock, poultry or agricultural crops (including vegetables or fruit) either on pasture or on cultivated land;
- pen-reared wild birds on any land;
- other fauna and flora;
- a woodland, forest plantation or a fishery;
- buildings and other structures and their contents, or aquaculture installations.

A property owner or occupier may, on application to the NPWS, seek a permission (i.e. Section 42 Licence) to take appropriate steps to stop the damage. All Section 42 applications are investigated by local NPWS staff to determine if serious damage is being caused and, if so, the most practical method of stopping or controlling the problem.

LARSEN TRAPS

Any larsen traps used must comply with the (Approved Traps, Snares and Nets) Regulations 2003, and Section 35(5) of the Wildlife Acts. For example, the decoy bird must only be used for hunting birds of the same species. The bird must regularly be provided with ample food and water and shall, when caged, only be kept in a cage which is of sufficient dimensions to enable it to move and exercise freely. Note that the welfare of decoy birds is covered by law (i.e. the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013). More specifically, the following conditions must be in place:

- The live decoy may only be used to hunt birds of the same species;
- There must be suitable food readily accessible;
- There must be clean drinkable water available at all times;
- There must be shelter which protects the bird from prevailing weather conditions;
- There must be a perch placed under the shelter;
- No decoy bird should be left in a trap when the trap is not in use;
- The live decoy must only be kept in a cage which is of sufficient dimensions to enable it to move and exercise freely.

PIGEON SHOOTING

The woodpigeon has a hunting season commencing November 1st and ending on January 31st. Outside of the hunting season, woodpigeon can be controlled under derogation as they can cause serious damage to arable crops, including cereals, legumes and brassicas. They can be controlled on any property (including stubble fields) throughout the state (under derogation) in order to prevent damage being caused.

The control is to be carried out by the owner or occupier of a property or the servant or agent (e.g. Gun Club member) of the owner or occupier of any such property. Please note that you should not assume that you are acting as an agent just because you shoot the land during the hunting season as a Club member.

Central to the legislation is that the owner/occupier has himself identified the need for control and requests someone to carry out the control as his/her agent. Remember, it is the owner/occupier who is the beneficiary of the derogation and not necessarily the hunter. While there is no statutory requirement for seeking permission, the owner/occupier should notify his local NPWS Conservation Ranger that he/she will be controlling woodpigeons under derogation to protect his/her crops.

Note that a Conservation Ranger is authorised for the purpose of the Regulations (S.I. No. 254 of 1986) to enter on any lands on which he/she reasonably believes that the control of wild birds is taken place and he/she may request the owner for information about the number of wild birds killed or captured on such lands and the means by which such wild birds have been killed or captured.

Although not listed in Schedule four of the derogation, the Wildlife Acts permit the use of decoys, including mechanical/electrical appliances such as pigeon magnets, which do not emit sound.

NPWS Wildlife Licensing Unit

All licence applications (and questions) should be put to:

Wildlife Licensing Unit

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht

7 Ely Place

Dublin 2

Email: wildlifelicence@ahg.gov.ie

Telephone: 01-888 3242

For more info, see the NPWS website: www.npws.ie

Appendix 2:

Implications for farmers regarding the use of poison

Payments to farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are dependent on the achievement and maintenance of baseline standards set down in EU legislation (Directives and Regulations); otherwise known as Cross Compliance. The two key elements to Cross Compliance are:

- I. Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs): These are existing and already legally binding standards defined by a range of 19 European regulatory requirements covering environmental, public health, plant and animal health and welfare standards¹⁴; and
- II. Standards consistent with keeping land in "Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition" (GAEC) including habitat conservation and soil protection.

In pursuit of this objective, it is necessary to put in place adequate checking and control arrangements to ensure adherence to the required standards. If an applicant is found to be non-compliant, sanctions will be applied under the Single Payment Scheme. Two of the Statutory Management Requirements relate to the protection of birds of prey and the use of poison:

■ **SMR 1: Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive)**

All Irish Birds of Prey are fully protected under the 1979 European Birds Directive and any killing of a Bird of Prey is in breach of this Cross Compliance Measure.

■ **SMR 9: Plant Protection Products (Pesticides)**

Anyone using a non-registered or non-approved poison product or an approved product or a veterinary medicine contrary to its approved uses, that kills foxes, crows or birds of prey is in breach of this Cross Compliance Measure.

¹⁴ SMRs have been in place on a phased basis in Ireland since 1st January 2005.

Appendix 3:

Pigeon Control in Ireland (by Des Croffon)

THE BACKGROUND

Under Directive EU79/409 (the “Birds” Directive) all birds are protected. However, certain species may be hunted during a formal hunting season outside their period of reproduction. All birds must be fully protected during their period of reproduction. The period of reproduction may generally be regarded as commencing when nest building commences or in the case of migratory birds, when the first bird leaves on the return migration. The end of the reproductive cycle is when the young birds have fully fledged. Following a European Court of Justice judgement, the Commission has determined that return migration therefore commences on 1st February and all migratory bird hunting should cease throughout the EU from that date. Non migratory species must also be protected during their reproductive period and Member States are obliged to set the dates of hunting seasons to take account of this. Accordingly, the Woodpigeon has a hunting season commencing November 1st and ending on January 31st.

THE DEROGATION

Notwithstanding the legal obligation to give complete protect all birds during their period of reproduction, the Directive provides under Article 9 that Member States may derogate from the general obligations as regards full protection in certain circumstances which are specified. These include safety at airports; prevention of the spread of disease, crop protection etc. In Ireland the Minister with responsibility for wildlife has given effect to Article 9 Derogations by Declaration Under Regulations 3(1)(A) of the European Communities (Wildlife Act 1976) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I. No. 254 of 1986). This Statutory Instrument sets out the conditions which apply for a derogation to exist.

The wording of the S.I. is of paramount importance and should be studied and fully understood by anyone undertaking the killing of birds for the purposes of the derogation, and crop protection in particular, outside the normal hunting season. It is also worth remembering that the derogation applies to the owner/occupier of the land and not the hunter. The hunter is merely the servant/agent of the owner/occupier. There is no formal application process for derogation. It is sufficient for the circumstances which meet the conditions as set out in the

Declaration to exist. However, while there is no statutory requirement for seeking permission, the owner/occupier should notify his local Wildlife Ranger that he/she will be controlling Woodpigeons under the derogation to protect his/her crops.

THE DECLARATION

The period covered by the Declaration (S.I.) spans a full year. It was previously issued on a quarterly basis. The S.I. states:

‘The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, being of the opinion that the species referred to in the Schedule to this declaration represent a threat to public health or are likely to cause serious damage to crops or to livestock or are likely to cause damage to fauna and being satisfied that no other satisfactory solution exists, hereby declares pursuant to regulation 3(1)(a) of the European Communities (Wildlife Act 1976) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I. No. 254 of 1986), as adapted, that for the purpose of preventing the disease, injury or damage specified in column (2) of the Schedule, the said species may be captured or killed on any property throughout the administrative province of Leinster by any of the means, arrangement or methods specified in column (4) of the Schedule during the period specified for each species in column (3) of the Schedule to this declaration, by the owner or occupier of any such property or the servant or agent of the owner or occupier of any such property on which the said threat to public health is represented by such species or in order to prevent serious damage to crops or to livestock or damage to fauna on such property, as specified in column (2) of the Schedule’.

Schedule 1 lists the species which it is believed constitute the relevant threats, among which Woodpigeon is listed.

Schedule 2 sets out the reasons for control i.e. the type of threat posed by each species.

Schedule 3 Lists the periods during which the declaration applies.

Schedule 4 Lists the methods by which each species may be controlled.

The important points to remember are:

1. The Minister is of the opinion that the species listed pose a threat to public health or are likely to cause damage to crops or livestock or to other fauna. Please note that the Minister is only of the **opinion** that the species (Woodpigeon) is **likely** to cause damage. There is no requirement for the production of any substantive evidence of particular damage to particular crops or to livestock.

2. The Minister is also satisfied that as no other satisfactory solution exists the **said species**, (among which is the Woodpigeon) may be captured or killed in order to **prevent** the damage or injury etc. It is important to note that the stated purpose of the capturing or killing is to prevent the damage. In other words the killing is intended to take place prior to the damage occurring in order to prevent it.
3. On **any property throughout** the administrative province of Leinster. This means literally **anywhere** within the specified province and that means also on stubble. It is noteworthy that there is no exception listed anywhere. For example, the declaration does not say "On any property throughout the administrative province of Leinster **except stubble fields**". For the shooting of Woodpigeon on stubble to be illegal, that exception would have to be included in the text of the declaration.
4. By **any of the means** specified in column (4) of which shooting is one.
5. During the **period specified for each species** listed in column (3) of the Schedule.
6. The killing is to be carried out by the **owner or occupier** of any such property **or the servant or agent of the owner or occupier** of any such property. *(Please note that you may not assume that you are acting as agent just because you shoot the land during the hunting season as a club member. Central to the legislation is that the owner/occupier has himself identified the need for control and requests someone to carry out the control as his/her agent. Remember, it is the owner/occupier who is the beneficiary of the derogation and not necessarily the hunter.)*

Therefore, the test as to whether a person is shooting Woodpigeon lawfully outside the official hunting season for that species can be established by answering the following simple questions:

- a. Am I shooting Woodpigeon in an area/location/province covered by the declaration?
- b. Am I shooting Woodpigeon during a period specified in the declaration?
- c. Am I shooting Woodpigeon at the request of the owner/occupier i.e. as his servant/agent for the purposes of crop protection?
- d. Am I killing Woodpigeon using one of the methods specified?

If the answer to **all** these questions is **"YES"**, then you are acting undisputedly within the law.

The above Declaration for each region can be found on link:

<http://www.npws.ie/legislationandconventions/irishlaw/eubirdsdirectivederogations/>

(Please note that while the above link refers to the Province of Leinster, identical declarations are in force for Munster, Connaught, Cavan/ Monaghan/ Donegal and a separate declaration is made for these species specifically in respect of Air Safety.)



Woodpigeon.

USE OF DECOYS FOR PIGEON SHOOTING

Section 35 of the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended by Section 43 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 governs the use of live birds and artificial decoys for hunting birds. It also regulates the use of various appliances, electrical and mechanical for the same purposes. The Act specifies that it shall be unlawful for any person to use artificial decoys to hunt any wild bird **except** for hunting any wild duck, wild geese and Woodpigeons. It should be noted that **it is** unlawful to use decoys for hunting Crows, Rooks and Magpies. There is also a prohibition on using electrical and/or mechanical appliances which emit any sound for the purposes of hunting **any** wild bird. This provision is often the subject of confusion/misunderstanding, even among those who represent the regulatory authorities. The prohibition refers to appliances, including recording equipment which emit sound to attract birds. This is distinct from, and not to be confused with, mechanical/electrical appliances such as pigeon magnets which do not emit sound and are perfectly lawful. The use of live birds in cage traps such as Larsens are covered by regulations, including the Derogation S.I. No. 284 of 1986 and it is not necessary to get a separate permit. It is not lawful to use live Woodpigeons as decoys or in cage traps.

Appendix 4:

About the NARGC

The National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC) is the largest hunting and conservation non-governmental organisation in Ireland. It is the principle national organisation representing the interests of individuals involved in game shooting. The Association was formed in 1968 and today it enjoys a membership of 26,000 individuals. These members, who pay an annual membership fee, are spread throughout 965 Gun Clubs all over the country - a Club in almost every parish.

The NARGC is a Seanad Nominating Body on the Agricultural Panel. Its individual Clubs are also "Recognised Bodies" under the Wildlife Acts. This is a recognition unique to NARGC Clubs which essentially means that the Clubs are entitled to take prosecutions for offences under the Wildlife Acts.

NARGC Gun Clubs are actively involved in the management of ecological features in the Irish countryside. Their work includes the establishment, funding and management of sanctuary areas, game-bird release programmes, the planting of native tree species and game crops, the construction of duck ponds and the development of wetlands.

Gun Club members actively engage in protecting ground-nesting and breeding birds from predators during spring/early summer when game and other bird species are most vulnerable. Members also engage in the protection of crops and livestock for the farming community.

For more information, see: www.nargc.ie



**National Association of
Regional Game Councils**

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National Association of
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NARGC

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