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Our ref: PO285611/KW

22 November 2012

From Richard Benyon MP  
Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter of 20 September to the Secretary of State concerning buzzards. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and apologise for the delay in doing so.

The success of conservation measures has seen strong increases in the numbers of buzzards and other birds of prey over the last two decades. As Minister for the Natural Environment, I celebrate that and since 2010 we have championed many new measures to benefit wildlife across England – set out in our England Biodiversity Strategy.

In the past two years, people have begun to tell us that they are seeing increased bird of prey predation and that this is causing damage to livestock interests and other birds. As a result, some people have applied for licences to help them manage the issues they see.

It is not clear what the full extent of the predation is or at what point it is likely to constitute serious damage to the small number of people applying for licences. This is why Defra formed the working group charged with gathering the best available evidence on the current impact of buzzard predation on pheasant poults and other game species; Defra has been grateful for the National Gamekeepers' Organisation's contribution to the group.

As part of the group's work, Defra commissioned research about the impact of buzzards on pheasant poults and to look at how non lethal methods could be used to prevent the damage buzzards can sometimes cause. Proposals were drawn up but they caused a good deal of public concern so I decided to look at developing new research proposals to understand better the whole relationship between raptors, game birds and other livestock.



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To move this forward, a meeting took place on 22 August chaired by the Defra Chief Scientific Adviser and the constructive contribution the NGO made to that discussion was important. The NGO should now have received information to comment upon regarding new research proposals and Defra is keen to move these forward now so they can be put out to tender.

I cannot comment on the circumstances of individual licence applications and officials tell me you have been in discussion with Natural England about service standards. Let me reassure you I have made it clear that licences should be determined in accordance with Defra's existing wildlife management policy, which can be found on the Defra website. Within the policy there is a general presumption that wildlife will not be killed but the policy acknowledges that in exceptional cases action may be taken under licence. The tests described in the policy document are the ones your members should consider when making future approaches for licences. Applications for licences to control buzzards will be determined in accordance with this.

I recognise the important contribution that game keepers make to improving biodiversity in large areas of England and I hope that we will continue to have a productive working relationship.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Richard*

**RICHARD BENYON MP**



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