

Shadow Defra Secretary

York Central MP Rachael Maskell has replaced Kerry McCarthy who, at the time of writing, is among 35 of Jeremy Corbyn's Shadow Ministers to quit. Kerry is a vegan with an impeccable anti-bloodsports record and one of the very few Labour MPs to have said they support a strengthening of the Hunting Act. The hope is that she will get the post back when Corbyn's successor as leader has been chosen, but unfortunately it is not likely.

Hunting Act 2004. Petition to Rt Hon Theresa May MP

Theresa May is an experienced politician with a bit of charisma who would be a good choice from our viewpoint to replace David Cameron as Prime Minister, except for one problem – she supports a repeal of the Hunting Act. A petition asking her to reconsider her position on this issue is here:

<https://www.change.org/p/theresa-may-mp-maidenhead-reconsider-your-decision-to-vote-to-repeal-the-hunting-act>

Even Margaret Thatcher, who was not exactly renowned for a compassionate nature, famously crossed the floor of the Commons on two occasions to support Labour Premier Harold Wilson in his bids to ban hare coursing which he described as “a barbarous anachronism”.

Persecution of raptors and mountain hares

The RSPB's Hen Harrier team recently announced the “disappearance” of yet another satellite-tagged hen harrier. This time it's a two-year old female called Chance, whose last sat tag signal came from a grouse moor in South Lanarkshire at the end of May. The RSPB's Investigations team conducted a search for the body/tag but nothing was found. This is the same area, dominated by grouse moors, where another sat-tagged hen harrier (Annie) was found shot last year. Many young, sat-tagged hen harriers mysteriously “disappear” when those birds have been visiting grouse moors. In fact, the majority “disappear”. According to Natural England we know that of 47 young hen harriers that were fitted with sat tags between 2007-2014, a staggering 78.7% of them “disappeared”. It is abundantly clear that those responsible for the “disappearance” of these protected birds of prey have no interest in Scotland's wildlife apart from maximising the number of grouse available to be shot for fun. How, therefore, can we expect these same people to respond to appeals by the Scottish Government for “voluntary restraint” on the mass culling of mountain hares which allegedly carry a virus which kills grouse chicks?

Bill to ban hare coursing defeated in Ireland's Dail.

Independent TD Maureen O Sullivan's Private Members Bill to ban hare coursing in Ireland was defeated in Dail Eireann on 30 June following a vote on the issue by TDs. Of the 164 TDs who voted the overwhelming majority (114) voted not to ban hare coursing with just 20 TDs voting for the Bill. Ireland remains one of only three European countries where hare coursing is legal and the last time a Bill was brought to the Dail floor for a vote on the issue was in 1993 by Tony Gregory and it also failed to pass. Maureen said: “Inevitable conclusion once party whips got involved.” The Irish Wildlife Trust commented: “Really pathetic lack of leadership from the main political parties, well done M. O'SullivanTD for your courage in fighting this issue.”

Hares and field sizes

There is probably an optimum field size for hares. Large fields enable hares to utilise their superior speed over a fox – they are 50% faster, but can mean they have to spend more energy travelling further to find food. As part of their countermeasures against predators hares establish “race tracks” along which they practice running at full tilt so they know every twist and turn in the route should the need ever arise. Small fields restrict this strategy and give predators more opportunities to set up an ambush.

Harvest threat to hares

As the grain harvest approaches now is the time to write to the press, asking farmers to cut the crop from the middle outwards. This gives hares and other wildlife present an opportunity to escape into surrounding fields.