

## Evidence in response to RSPB's inaccurate claims:

1. Many of the species on protected and designated moorlands are there as a result of hundreds of years of managed fire. Ref: Davies et al. (2016).
2. Prescribed fire can be a very useful management tool, which can also protect peatlands from highly damaging wildfires. Ref: Harper et al. (2018).
3. To generalise all bird of prey incidents is misleading as it is (i) unknown how many of those were linked to grouse moors and (ii) were committed by staff employed on grouse moors. Moreover, much has been achieved for the increase in hen harrier numbers and other raptors, across the uplands in partnership with landowners, including grouse moors.
4. Whilst peatlands can store a lot of carbon, the annual accumulation rates are very small and the potential in relation to mitigate climate change are negligible in a UK context. Ref: Heinemeyer & Ashby (2023).
5. Most peatland emissions (~90%) and carbon losses are from lowland agricultural peatlands. Ref: Evans et al. (2023).
6. Previous social media statement by the RSPB in January 2022 (Vanessa Amaral-Rogers) that about 74% of all greenhouse gas emissions from blanket bogs are from [heather] burning are not based on any credible evidence.
7. The burning of heather does release greenhouse gases during the combustion. However, the only long-term study so far shows that this short-term loss is outweighed by carbon gains from ash-fertilisation and charcoal gains as predicted by a model study. Studies and reports claiming that heather burning results in overall carbon losses are based on inadequate short-term studies. Ref: Heinemeyer & Ashby (2023), Heinemeyer et al. (2023) and Worrall et al. (2013).
8. Burnt areas actually become wetter than unmanaged, older heather areas as shown in several studies, which relates to reduced water losses from evapotranspiration. Ref: Heinemeyer et al. (2023).
9. Moreover, saturated [healthy] peatlands do not store more water, therefore they might, in fact, increase flood risk. There is also no convincing evidence linking controlled burning to increased flooding, which is partly due to inadequate interpretation of space for time studies. Ref: Ashby & Heinemeyer (2020, 2021).
10. The claim of 43% of UK drinking water coming from peatlands is also false. This figure is for peat-fed (mixed source including peatlands) areas. Ref: Xu et al. (2018).
11. Red grouse numbers and those being shot vary hugely from year to year, undergoing natural cycles in response to climatic conditions and disease outbreaks. Clearly, the numbers being shot have to be sustainable as to prevent the collapse of the population. In fact, together with many upland birds, numbers tend to be highest on grouse moors (related to heather management and predator control). Ref: Fletcher et al. (2010).


## References:

- a. Fletcher et al., (2010) *Journal of Applied Ecology* 47: 263-272.
- b. Ashby & Heinemeyer (2020) *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 57: 2112-2120.
- c. Ashby & Heinemeyer (2021) *Wetlands*, 41:56.
- d. Davies et al. (2016) *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 371, 20150342.
- e. Evans et al. (2022) *Aligning the Peatland Code with the UK Peatland Inventory Final SP0822 Report to Defra*.
- f. Harper et al., (2016) *Science of the Total Environment*, 624, 691-703.
- g. Heinemeyer & Ashby (2023) *Fire* 2023, 6(5), 204.
- h. Heinemeyer et al. (2023) 10-year Report to the Project Advisory Group of Peatland-ES-UK.  
<https://doi.org/10.15124/yao-2wtg-kb53>.
- i. Worrall et al. (2013) *Journal of Environmental Management*, 120, 27-36.
- j. Xu et al. (2018) *Nature Sustainability* 1, pp. 246-253.

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