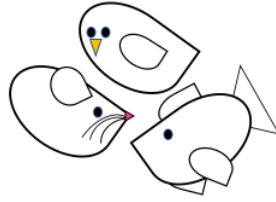


ANIMAL CONCERN



LEGISLATE TO LIBERATE

**John F. Robins, Campaigns Consultant,
Animal Concern Ltd, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ.
Tel. 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521.**

E-mail: info@animalconcern.org website: <http://www.animalconcern.org/>

Animal Concern Ltd is a Registered Scottish Charity (No. SC050422) and a registered non-profit making Limited Company (Co. No. SC109126)

Established in 1988 as Animal Concern (Scotland) Limited we changed our name to Animal Concern in 1992 as several of our campaigns were international.

It incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which was founded in 1876.

For the personal attention of Scottish Government Ministers:

Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands.

Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment and Land Reform.

Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

Avian Influenza with reference to The Guga Hunt & Animal & Bird Sanctuaries.

Dear Cabinet Secretary and Ministers,

I believe the subject I am raising is part of all your portfolios.

The BBC recently reported that “The Men of Ness” have called off their annual guga hunt due to the avian flu epidemic. However the organisers of the hunt have said they hope to resume their activities next year. If the BBC report is accurate I find it ludicrous that the hunt has been called off by the hunters and not by the Scottish Government refusing to issue the necessary licence.

Animal Concern has been calling for the cessation of this annual killing spree for over three decades yet successive Governments continued to issue licences to kill up to 2000 young gannets every year. The Scottish SPCA also opposes the cull as the method of catching and killing the guga is cruel.

The reason the Government gives for permitting the killing is that the hunt is a tradition widely supported by the population of the Outer Hebrides. That might have been the case up until the 1960s when a documentary crew filmed people lining the quayside to greet the returning hunters and buy a share of the catch. The last time the returning hunters were filmed the quayside was as busy as the queue to contribute to Boris Johnson's leaving present – there was nobody there. The Men of Ness had to travel around the islands in an old van trying to flog enough guga to pay for the fuel for their trip.

I'm told guga tastes like rubber tyres marinated in diesel oil as old as some of the island ferries. That is perhaps why the tradition of eating it seems to have died out and, given that avian flu is likely to be a serious threat to populations of gannet and other birds for the foreseeable future, now is the time for the Scottish Government to end the guga hunt once and for all.

I would appreciate a reply from you, the relevant representatives of the Scottish Government, as it will take a political decision to put an end to this shameful, cruel and wasteful tradition.

My second request refers to the culling programme adopted to combat avian flu. It seems to be based on the same policy used to control foot and mouth and swine fever. However the avian flu epidemic is very different to foot and mouth and swine fever. Both of those disease epidemics centred on animals whose movements were under the control of farmers. Banning movement of animals and culling herds over infected areas had a fair chance of halting the spread of disease.

Avian flu is spread by wild birds including migratory species which can cross continents twice a year. The movement of these birds cannot be controlled and populations cannot be culled to create a firebreak. A few weeks ago an animal sanctuary in the west of Scotland was ordered to cull its rescued birds after a sick swan died from avian flu shortly after arrival at the sanctuary. The swan had been kept in isolation and had not had contact with other birds in the sanctuary yet all the birds were ordered to be killed.

This simply does not make sense. Infected wild birds could fly into a sanctuary at any time. If infection is found in any birds they could be humanely killed and the premises put into quarantine with no new birds brought in or any rehabilitated birds released until the sanctuary is given the all clear. Similarly with zoos which have aviaries. Wild birds often visit to take advantage of feeding time. These could easily bring avian flu into the zoo population. Rather than culling all the captive birds a process of quarantine would make more sense, only humanely killing any birds which become infected.

I look forward to your reply in due course.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
For Animal Concern.