



Exmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor House
Dulverton
Somerset TA22 9HL
Tel: 01398 323665
www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

A member of National Parks England and National Parks UK

Dr Keith Howe
Vice-chairman
The Exmoor Society
34 High Street
Dulverton
TA22 9DJ

2 October 2019

Dear Keith

Exmoor Society Views on Commercial Shooting

Thank-you for your letter of 27 August and for the Society's ongoing interest in this important issue.

Increasingly we feel that evidence, or the lack of it, should be our greatest focus. As you say, it is important to establish the facts. There are many activities we could embark upon, but as our resources and powers are very limited, we would like to focus on the areas where we can achieve most benefit.

We are in the process of setting up an Exmoor Game Shoots Evidence Group to develop a research brief. We would welcome a representative from The Exmoor Society onto that group and I wondered whether you might be able to raise this with the Society in order to suggest a suitable person? Obviously, you would be very well qualified to take on the role and we should be delighted if you were able to help us develop our thinking.

With regard to the photographic record, you may be aware that we commission aerial photographs of the national park on a rolling basis – normally every three years. This is an incredibly valuable resource. We have considered taking fixed-point photographs – the problem being that there would have to be hundreds of sites to monitor the landscape and pick up changes. We could not afford this level of work, but there may be options through a volunteer programme, particularly given modern technology advances.

At a regional / national level, we are in contact with Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England and other National Parks and we hope to work closely with them on evidence gathering. I understand that next year Defra is to review the way in which the release of gamebirds on or near protected sites in England is managed, following a proposed legal challenge from Wild Justice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defra-responds-to-wild-justice-challenge-releasing-gamebirds-on-protected-sites>

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I have asked the team at Defra to involve us with any such review and once I find out more, this is likely to shape our action locally.

I am meeting again, this week, with Tom Adams, the CEO of the BGA, to update him on issues on Exmoor and explore how we can improve practice in the National Park. We will also be holding a focused discussion with ENPA Members on the 15th October and I wondered whether you might be happy to attend that meeting? The discussion will take place at around 12:30 over lunch at Exmoor House.

Meanwhile we will continue to encourage GESA and the shooting community to improve practice and communication through a cooperative approach and, of course, investigate and take action against any specific planning-development or Public Rights of Way complaints that are brought to our attention.

I look forward to hearing from you about the 15th October.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Bryan', with a stylized, flowing script.

Sarah Bryan
Chief Executive