



## SEVERE WEATHER ARRANGEMENTS FOR WILDFOWLING AND WATERFOWL SHOOTING

### VOLUNTARY RESTRAINT

The procedures for the introduction by the Government of a statutory suspension of the shooting of ducks, geese and waders (including woodcock and snipe), coot and moorhen, include a call by the BASC for voluntary restraint from day eight of 'severe weather' up to the time when any statutory suspension takes effect. In order to avoid misunderstanding about what is meant by "voluntary restraint", and, after consideration by the Wildfowling Liaison Committee, the BASC have produced this paper to give some guidance on the subject.

It should be recognised that the period of voluntary restraint is an essential element in the severe weather arrangements now established, and if seen to be effective, provides a strong argument against pressures to shorten the trigger period preceding statutory suspensions. Furthermore, the demonstration of action having been taken before a statutory suspension can be most helpful in ensuring appropriate flexibility when the subsequent lifting of such suspensions is being considered by the organisations involved.

It should be emphasised that it is a voluntary restraint not a "voluntary" suspension that is sought by the BASC. This is not to say, however, that a suspension may not be the most appropriate action. However, that decision can only be taken at the local level. No hard and fast rules can be established since conditions and needs vary so much around the country. Wildfowling and game shooters are best placed to consider all the factors relevant to their particular locality and to decide what is most appropriate under the circumstances.

As to the practicalities of appropriate action during a period of voluntary restraint, we urge wildfowling clubs in particular to consider the following points. Moreover, these matters should be considered at the earliest opportunity so that a club can agree the course of action which it will take, should it be necessary in the future.

Who takes the decisions?

Clubs need to consider carefully who takes the decisions on what action is appropriate during a period of voluntary restraint. Monitoring of the situation will be needed and this might well involve marsh wardens reporting regularly to the committee on the prevailing conditions of both birds and marsh.

How are the members informed?

Clubs must consider how they will inform their members of any decision, as well as any non-club permit holders. The posting of notices at access points is an obvious action. However, on some marshes wildfowling will be travelling considerable distances and a system whereby they are able to phone in for the latest information has considerable merit. However, such a system requires pre-planning and publicity among members and permit holders. Notices in local newspapers and use of local radio stations should also be considered.

Club committees should also consider what liaison with other wildfowling clubs or groups would be appropriate at these times together with the degree of any coordinated action with neighbouring clubs which might be appropriate. Again agreement of consultation procedures at an earliest opportunity would help ensure that any lines of communication work smoothly when required.

What action is appropriate?

Clubs may find the following points helpful in enabling them to decide what action is appropriate during a period of voluntary restraint. Such actions may be as a response to only small changes in bird behaviour, which require only some reduction of disturbance to birds during that period, up to conditions of very difficult feeding which might require a total (voluntary) suspension on shooting in the locality. Problems which may arise from possible large influxes of wildfowling using the marshes and practical difficulties in wardening may also need to be considered in some localities.

The appearance of unusual species and influxes of unusual numbers of wildfowl often suggests conditions hardening over a wide area. Tameness and other abnormal behaviour often follows, perhaps presenting opportunities of excessive bags. Appropriate responses might be to introduce bag limits or reduce those which already exist.

Increasing evidence of birds under stress, particularly coupled with high winds (the wind chill factor being a key element in how much energy birds expend in order to keep warm) might lead to time limits on shooting, so as to help birds conserve energy and to provide periods of undisturbed feeding.

Any signs of loss of body condition, freezing foreshores, and/or total snow cover on saltmarsh or inland feeding grounds might be thought enough to warrant a club suspension on shooting until such time as the birds have recovered.

It should also be borne in mind that after particularly hard and/or prolonged severe weather it might be appropriate for clubs to phase in normal shooting levels.

Throughout any period of voluntary restraint and subsequent statutory suspensions wildfowling clubs have the opportunity to demonstrate through the local media their responsible attitude to management of their shooting.

Finally, clubs are asked to maintain close liaison with their BASC Scottish Centre (01350 723 226) over any actions which they take. It is most important that your Association is fully abreast of the situation around the country when consulting with other parties involved in the severe weather arrangements.

If there are any aspects of the severe weather arrangements you would like to discuss then please get in touch with either Colin Shedden at the Scottish Centre or John Harradine at BASC Headquarters (01244 573 000).

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