



WATERFOWL SHOOTING AND SEVERE WEATHER

In periods of severe winter weather (usually when freezing weather conditions are persistent) the relevant Government ministers have the power to make a protection order suspending the shooting of wildfowl and waders under Section 2 (6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

When is a suspension enforced?

The shooting of wildfowl and waders is normally suspended after 15 consecutive days of severe weather. The criteria for triggering severe weather procedures are based on the state-of-ground data collected daily by up to 23 coastal National Climatological Message Stations around Britain. The procedure leading up to a wildfowling suspension is as follows:

When more than half of the climatological stations have recorded seven consecutive days of frozen or snow-covered ground in Scotland or England/Wales or both, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee informs BASC accordingly.

If the severe weather looks set to continue BASC informs the secretaries of its wildfowling and gameshooting clubs, joint councils and syndicates that, if the weather conditions continue for a further 6 days and look likely to continue, then a protection order suspending the shooting of wildfowl and waders in the appropriate country is likely to be signed on the 13th day, and will take effect at 9.00am on the 15th day.

Throughout this period, information on local weather conditions and waterfowl numbers and behaviour is closely monitored all around the country, through BASC regional offices.

Voluntary restraint

Prior to the above procedures being brought into action, BASC calls for voluntary restraint, where appropriate, from day eight of severe weather, up to the time when any statutory suspension takes place. Such restraints are an integral part of the arrangements for waterfowl shooting during periods of prolonged severe weather. There are guidelines available from BASC, but there are no set rules as conditions and requirements vary around the country. Waterfowl shooters are best placed to consider all the facts relevant to their particular locality and to decide the most appropriate action. It is a voluntary restraint that is urged by BASC, not a suspension, although if necessary a self-imposed suspension may be the best course of action.

Who decides that there should be a suspension?

The criteria for deciding when there should be a suspension of waterfowl shooting have been decided jointly by the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and BASC. All of these bodies are consulted, and particularly BASC, before a protection order is signed.

Does a suspension affect the whole country?

This depends on the extent of the severe weather. A suspension can be instituted throughout Great Britain, in Scotland alone or in England and Wales. Northern Ireland has its own, similar, arrangements. If you are in any doubt, contact your county or regional BASC office.

What if the weather changes before the suspension?

After five days of severe weather when more than half of the climatological stations have recorded frozen or snow-covered ground, short periods of thaw (one or two days when fewer than half the stations are frozen) have no effect on the lead up to a suspension. A thaw of three or more days terminates the severe weather process. The short periods of thaw are 'neutral' in terms of counting days towards a suspension; they neither count nor terminate the process.

Even if the weather changes for the better before the 13th day a suspension may still follow (to allow birds to recover any lost condition or return to their normal habitats), although it may not last so long (see below).

How long will a suspension last?

A statutory suspension of waterfowl shooting normally lasts for a maximum of 14 days although it is reviewed after 7 days. The suspension may be lifted before the end of 14 days if the weather conditions have improved and the forecast is for a continuation of this improvement, although this will take into account the need for a recovery period for waterfowl after the severe weather.

If the suspension is lifted early, DEFRA, Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department, if appropriate, and BASC undertake a publicity campaign to inform waterfowl shooters of the fact. If the severe weather continues beyond the first 14 days, and looks likely to continue, a second protection order may be signed, suspending waterfowl shooting for up to a further 14 days.

How will I know if there is a suspension?

When a protection order is signed, DEFRA and SEERAD, as appropriate, issue press releases and place public notices of the suspension in the following national and regional newspapers:

The Times, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Sun, Scotsman, Glasgow Herald, Dundee Courier and Advertiser, Aberdeen Press and Journal, Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Edinburgh Gazette and the Western Daily Mail.

Announcements are also placed in the sporting press and, where possible, on television and radio. If you are in any doubt, you should contact your BASC regional office where a 24 hour telephone information service will be available.

BASC Head Office -	01244 573000
BASC Scotland -	01350 723226
BASC Wales -	01686 688861
Northern England -	01200 445046
Midlands -	01889 565050
East -	01284 728752
South East England -	01798 865165
South and South West England -	01823 480903

Local wildfowling clubs and game shooting syndicates will inform their members of details of any voluntary restraints prior to a statutory suspension.

Similar arrangements apply in Northern Ireland, although the period leading up to a suspension is shorter and the suspension comes into force on the thirteenth day of severe weather. For information contact the BASC Northern Ireland, 028 9260 5050.

Which species are affected?

When a protection order is signed, it becomes an offence to kill or take any of the following species, whether on the coast or inland:

Ducks: mallard, teal, wigeon, pintail, tufted duck, pochard, shoveler, gadwall, goldeneye, scaup (NI)

Geese: greylag, pink-footed, white-fronted, Canada

Waders: golden plover, woodcock, snipe, curlew (NI)

Others: moorhen and coot

Game birds are not affected, but reared duck are included.

NB: Shooting of geese for crop protection during any statutory suspension period is also prohibited unless it is otherwise permitted by licence. Any such shooting should be conducted to minimise unnecessary disturbance to other waterfowl.

Who else is affected?

Following BASC efforts, the press notices and media coverage by DEFRA, RSPB and others, call on all people, not just waterfowl shooters, who might otherwise disturb waterfowl during prolonged severe weather (bird watchers, dog walkers etc), to avoid doing so.

In conclusion

It is in the shooting community's interest to be seen to respond responsibly during prolonged severe weather, even though wildfowl and waders may not always show signs of suffering from the conditions. We have gained much respect by our actions in the past, and must not jeopardise this by thoughtless or irresponsible behaviour.

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