



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

The Old Granary
West Mill Street
Perth PH1 5QP
01738 493 944
(messages only)
hebe@mcofs.org.uk
www.mcofs.org.uk

18/1/10

Dear Sir / Madam

Consultation on golden eagle proposed Special Protection Areas (pSPAs)

Thank you for inviting the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) to comment on the proposals for 6 new SPAs. The areas under consideration are very important for hill walking and climbing interests, and therefore conservation of the quality of the landscape, biodiversity and recreational access opportunities. The MCoFS is recognised by the Scottish Government as the Representative Body for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers. We have over 10,000 members and aim to represent the interests of all the 400,000 regular Scottish mountaineers on issues relevant to access to, and conservation of, Scotland's mountaineering environment.

Occasional sightings of Golden Eagle, along with other wildlife, are one of the enjoyments of mountaineering in remote areas, hence MCoFS supports measures to stabilise and expand the population. Our primary concern is that this is seen in the context of conservation of habitats and the full range of species found in these areas without overemphasis on any one species, however iconic.

The answer to question 4 notes that, "people's leisure time has increased and some of this is being spent in outdoor recreational activities such as walking, camping, climbing, and mountain biking. This has led to increasing numbers of people venturing into remote and previously relatively undisturbed areas. Through appropriate awareness raising and sympathetic management inadvertent disturbance to golden eagles can be avoided (see also question 9)." The MCoFS fully supports this approach. We educate mountaineers through our website, magazine and advice leaflets, including about issues specific to birds. We are concerned however that greater conservation effort for Golden Eagles does not unnecessarily impact on recreational access, and that requests to avoid areas be based on science not prejudice. We note that the answer to question 9 states that, "there will be no restrictions on public/outdoor access, though access rights should be exercised responsibly, as per the Scottish Outdoor Access Code." The MCoFS has been trying to work with organisations with a bird interest, including SNH, RSGs and RSPB with mixed results. The opportunity of a focus on raptor conservation brought about by this consultation should be capitalised upon for the benefit of the natural heritage and recreational access. We have experienced on a number occasions representatives of these organisations restricting access, or attempting to, based on an overly-cautious approach not based on science. Other representatives of these organisations support the excellent system that exists in England and Wales of the "crag database" (<http://www.thebmc.co.uk/bmcCrag/>) where potential conflict sites involve discussions to promote mutual understanding and respect for restrictions. The MCoFS advocates the latter approach as "appropriate awareness raising" as referred to in answer 4. In other areas of the UK it has been recognised as not having detrimental effects on raptors through open access to information while engendering great benefits such as respect of wildlife conservation efforts and maximisation of recreational opportunities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer