

15 April 2011

Our ref:

Your ref:



Natural England
11 Fenlock Court
Blenheim Office
Park
Long Hanborough
Oxford OX29 8LN

By email: [REDACTED]

T 07887 823726
F n/a

Dear [REDACTED]

Access to Information request – Provision of all requested information – Request No RFI 1092

Thank you for your request for information about the issue of a licence to the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, which we received on 4 April 2011. Your request has been considered under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

You have asked “*Can you tell me if you have granted GWCT a project licence, and if so what the terms of this licence are?*”

I can confirm that a licence has been issued to the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The licence permits magpies and crows to be controlled at four sites in England for scientific / research purposes using methods and subject to conditions that are similar to those of General Licence WML-GL06 (which permits the killing/taking of certain wild birds for conservation purposes). However, unlike the general licence we have set an upper limit on the number of birds that may be killed and stipulated as a reporting requirement. I have enclosed a redacted copy of the licence for your information.

Some of the details in the licence have been withheld as it falls under the exemption Regulation 12(5)(a) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 which relates to information that if disclosed would adversely affect public safety. The killing of corvids is a sensitive issue and we believe that releasing details of the sites where the research will be conducted could impact adversely upon the protection of the public, or public buildings, and on the health and safety of the public. This project has attracted considerable public interest and identification of study sites could lead to the sites being targeted by objectors.

In applying this exemption(s)/exception(s), we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

We believe that, in this case, there is a legitimate public interest in knowing that the research is being conducted the conditions applied to that research. This interest is satisfied in confirming that the licence has been issued and provision of a copy of the licence. However we feel that this knowledge need does not extend to the precise location of the study sites, given the potential threat to those locations if that information is released. In making this

decision we have also taken into account the public interest in research being conducted which examines activities conducted under widely used licences.

Whilst it is a public right to object, that right has to be balanced against issues of public security and safety of the personnel involved, especially in the current climate. We believe that these are legitimate concerns sufficient to allow Natural England to engage this exception and withhold the information.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. As you may be aware, under the legislation should you have any concerns with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, please contact Sally Green (Tel: 0300 060 1466; Email: Sally.Green@naturalengland.org.uk).

Under Regulation 11(2) this needs to be done no later than 40 working days after the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Natural England. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF. Telephone: 01625 545 700, www.ico.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Heydon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew Heydon
Natural England