"Not only can farming be very beneficial to wildlife, but game shooting can be very beneficial ?to wildlife"

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With the future of Britain's agri-environment policy up for debate, the way we incentivise good farmland conservation will be pivotal in reversing the biodiversity declines we've seen highlighted across the media this week.

The Agriculture Bill offers a chance to look forward and focus on decisive action, rather than looking backwards at mistakes made in the past. This positive approach was reflected in the House of Lords this week, as the Earl of Caithness laid out the important role farmers can play.

"I will correct one myth that seems to perpetuate in some quarters: that you cannot farm successfully and profitably if you also farm for nature", he stated, before highlighting the work of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Allerton Project. **"**It has done years of research on this subject and proved time and again that farmers can improve yields, output and productivity at the same time as improving biodiversity and wildlife on farms", noted the Earl, recognising the need to embrace what farmers can achieve for wildlife.

"I will take one example in conclusion: the grey partridge", he continued. "There has been a huge decline in this country, of some 85%, in the grey partridge population since 1970. The work of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has proven that farmers can get the grey partridge back in large numbers, as well as being successful and profitable. I commend that template to all farmers and to the House. I hope that when my noble friend the Minister implements ELMS, he will bear that very much in mind."

These comments prompted further discussion on the successes that can be achieved through good land management. "As we have all been hearing, nature-friendly farming is the way forward", remarked Lord Randall of Uxbridge, "I also send my congratulations on his words about the Allerton project of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. I visited it a few years ago and was incredibly impressed by the work there.

"He mentioned the grey partridge. In conjunction with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, National England and others, there is also the Peppering Partridge Project, which shows that not only can farming be very beneficial to wildlife, but game shooting can be very beneficial ?to wildlife. That might seem slightly counterintuitive, and I speak not as a shooter myself, but it shows how all those different aspects can work together".

The comments in the Lords reflect the latest GWCT's campaign for a more positive approach to conservation. Working for Wildlife calls on the public, policymakers and conservation bodies to ensure land managers have the support they need to let them restore habitats and protect wildlife and encourage others to follow their lead. More than a thousand people have already signed the pledge to support this campaign. You can do so at www.workingforwildlife.co.uk/pledge.

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