12th January 2021

For the attention of HRH The Prince of Wales,

A letter from Dr. Graeme Rose, resident in Aberdeenshire

Dear Sir,

I listened with interest to your interview with Margaret Atwood on the Radio 4 'Today' programme. Like you I have grown up witnessing many examples of habitat destruction and the world has felt increasingly less rich as the years have gone by. My feelings about the depletion of wildlife in all its forms are confirmed by scientific data. I also note your Terra Carta initiative and the sustainable markets website states:

For more than five decades, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales has been a champion for the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

You are quoted as saying “Do we want to go down in history as the people who did nothing to bring the world back from the brink in time to restore the balance when we could have done? I don’t want to. And just think for a moment – what good is all the extra wealth in the world, gained from “business as usual”, if you can do nothing with it except watch it burn in catastrophic conditions?”

I am writing to you as I am particularly concerned about the decline of the Merlin, *Falco columbarius* in the UK. I hope you have been rewarded by seeing this dashing little falcon in Scotland. I have worked voluntarily on recording the Merlin population in Aberdeenshire for eight breeding seasons and have noted a decline. Whilst my data on its own is not statistically significant, observers throughout the UK have also noted declines and in 2015 the Merlin returned to the UK Red List for birds due to its worsening population status.

I have liaised with Balmoral Estate since 2015 when I first notified staff there of Merlin breeding on Meall Dubh in Glen Girnock. Some Merlins choose to nest in trees or on crags but in that area they nest on the ground in the cover of heather. Their nest areas are therefore susceptible to burning. I was disappointed to discover that, prior to the 2020 breeding season, heather in the Meall Dubh nest site had been burnt and I found no evidence of breeding Merlin. I don’t think it is illegal to interfere with the nest site of a specially protected bird outwith the breeding season but that being the case I would see it as a deficiency of the law. I would be interested in your view on the burning of heather in traditional Merlin nest areas.

On the wider issue of burning I recall farmers being banned from burning stubble, for what seemed to me to be obvious reasons, in 1993. During a climate change emergency it seems like madness to be introducing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning heather and I would appreciate your view on this too.

Yours faithfully,