

RAVEN PREDATION A GUIDE FOR FARMERS

Providing information to RPID on damage

It is a requirement for any licence application to shoot ravens, that it can be shown that ravens are attacking livestock on your farm. Before you apply for a licence, alternative non-lethal methods must have been tried or be shown to be impractical. It is also necessary that you continue to attempt alternative strategies (for example, changes to livestock management &/or scaring &/or diversionary feeding) in conjunction with any licence issued, both as a requirement and because ravens are notoriously difficult to shoot.

Additional supporting evidence which could be requested:

- Details of known attacks.
- Photographs of attacked animals.
- Photographs of carcasses that show raven damage, e.g. puncture wounds to vulnerable soft tissues, and signs of bleeding.
- Supporting accounts from a local vet.

Developing an action plan reduce raven attacks

Recording as much information about each attack could be useful to you in trying to understand and reduce the likelihood of future attacks. By looking at the information you have collected a pattern may appear and steps can be taken to reduce the risk of future attacks on stock. A suggested form to record the information detailed below has been attached at Annex 1.

1. Date of attack. Is this a seasonal problem?
2. Location of attack, including field type and surrounding land. Are attacks restricted to just a few fields? Are ravens making use of high 'observation' points, such as trees?
3. Age of attacked animal. If a young animal, was it with its mother?
4. Was the attacked animal injured, ill or otherwise unable to defend itself prior to the attack?
5. What evidence is there that ravens (as opposed to other species) were responsible?
6. Was there anything other than the victim that may have attracted ravens (e.g. after-births or livestock feed, or a carcass of another animal)?
7. ***If seen attacking, were birds acting individually, as a pair or in a group?*** In the past, attacks were thought to be carried out by breeding pairs of ravens. However, more recent reports describe large flocks of non-breeding birds carrying out attacks. This information will affect the best course of action to take.
8. When are the livestock tended? How close and how often do people visit?

Other general information that could prove important includes:

1. How frequently are ravens seen at this location, and in what numbers? You should understand that although ravens may be present across your farm, only a few individual ravens may be attacking livestock. Eyewitness account of attacks could identify these individuals. To enable your licence to be fully assessed you should provide details of the individual number of ravens on your farm and, if only a few individuals are attacking livestock, how many this might be. If raven damage has been an issue in the past then you should keep a note of numbers of birds on your farm over the winter – ideally counting birds at least once or twice every month.
2. How many ravens are known to roost in the area? Are there any breeding pairs that regularly nest nearby, or is there a large flock of non-breeding birds that roost in nearby trees or another nearby location?

Raven management

(a) Make the area less attractive to ravens

Remove potential sources of food that might attract ravens to your farm. This can include afterbirths, fallen stock or dead wild animals. Spilled animal feed should be cleaned up and any food source should be made as raven proof as is practical. Make sure that ravens are not feeding from troughs and other sources of high quality feed in the area as this can sustain an unnaturally high population.

(b) Preventing access

Keep vulnerable stock indoors at critical times. If not possible, keep vulnerable stock in fields close to areas of greatest human activity (farms, houses, busy paths and roads). Fields and locations where regular raven attacks occur should not be used to hold vulnerable stock. Can tapes or wires be used to deter ravens from small fields or pens?

(c) Scare and deter

Scaring is most effective against large flocks of birds, since one bird that is particularly nervous and flies away, will often take the flock with it. For a range of scaring devices see http://www.sasa.gov.uk/pesticide_wildlife/wildlife_management/wildlifepublications.cfm. Use a wide range of devices and methods, varying them as often as possible, and use active human scaring. Random movement, sound, and unpredictability help prevent the birds getting used to scaring devices. If using scarecrows, make it look as real as possible, dress it in your old clothes, sit it on a chair and put a gun-like stick in its hand, move it regularly (ideally daily or more frequent). Occasionally change places with the scarecrow, and use this method to shoot at or kill ravens. Lethal shooting (under licence) works best if it takes place in a way that links it with other methods of scaring.

(d) Diversionary feeding

This method is an attempt to attract ravens away from fields with vulnerable livestock by providing food in another area. This is most successful when scaring techniques are used in the area where the livestock is kept. If used, the food **MUST** be put out well away from vulnerable animals. Food should be put out early in the morning onto a raised fencepost or platform, where scavenging mammals can't reach it. If several pairs of territorial birds are causing problems, a feeding post within the territory of each pair will be needed.

The Animal By-Products (Scotland) Regulations 2003 does not allow food to be used that would otherwise be go into the food chain. This excludes any animal that has been kept by man, including any fallen stock. Wild animals such as rabbits, game birds (unless they have already been kept for human consumption) or deer, unless they are being farmed, can be used.

Only use this method during times when livestock are most at risk. Do not continue for prolonged periods, as you may end up supporting a larger raven population than would normally exist in the area and risk attracting more ravens onto your land. If this method is used the problem should be monitored closely to check its effectiveness.

(e) Lethal shooting

Licences issued to shoot ravens are done so as part of an overall scaring programme and are not intended to 'cull' the population, but to deter them. Therefore, **ONLY** shoot ravens in the presence of other ravens.

Ravens will learn to recognise individuals who shoot and scare them, making lethal shooting particularly difficult. However, if you change your outer clothes and vehicle when approaching the field, this may allow you to get closer to the birds.

Summary

1. Make the area with vulnerable livestock as unattractive to ravens as possible, and ensure that other possible food sources in the area are not available to them.
2. Keep vulnerable animals in areas close to human activity and where ravens are less likely to visit.
3. Carry out as much scaring as possible, as often and as varied as you can. Boost scaring methods with human activity. Arrive at different times, wear different outer clothes, approach from different directions; be as unpredictable and surprising as possible. If the birds are 'nervous', they are more likely to feed elsewhere.
4. Think about trying to attract the ravens to another area where they pose less risk to stock. However, you must monitor this activity to ensure that this doesn't make the problem worse.
5. If you have a licence to shoot ravens, **shoot only in the presence of other ravens.**

Annex 1

RAVEN ATTACK MONITORING FORM

Date of Attack	
Is this a seasonal or year round problem	
How often are ravens seen in the location and in what numbers (please provide as much information as possible on numbers of birds causing damage and on the farm as a whole – include dates. Please provide individual numbers counted on each occasion.)	
Is there a known roost nearby	
Location of attack	
Description of attacked animal	New born Young Prime Old
Health of attacked animal	Fit & Healthy Injured Sick Old & vulnerable
What evidence is there that ravens were responsible for the attack	
Are there any other food sources that would have attracted ravens to the attack site	
How are attacks carried out	Individual bird Pairs Flock
How often is there human presence at the site	