[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent:
To:
Subject: FW: MCS [redacted] - Shiants black rats - SNH Response - 25 June 2014

Attachments: MCS 2014 [redacted] - Shiants black rats - SNH Response - 25 June 2014.docx

---

[redacted]
Wildlife and Protected Areas | Natural Resources Division | Directorate for Environment and Forestry
The Scottish Government | 1-C North | Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ
0131 24[redacted]
www.scotland.gov.uk/nonnativespecies

-----Original Message-----
From: SNHGOVERNMENT_RELATIONS
[mailto:SNHGOVERNMENT_RELATIONS@snh.gov.uk]
Sent: 25 June 2014 13:32
To: [redacted]
Subject: MCS 2014 [redacted] - Shiants black rats - SNH Response - 25 June 201[redacted]

Hi [redacted]

Please find the SNH response to this MCS case attached. The correspondent wrote a similar letter to [redacted] and the text here reflects the letter sent by [redacted]n response.

[redacted]

[redacted] as sent you a copy of [redacted] Shiants black rats - SNH Response - 25 June 201[redacted] v0.3 from Objective.

Scotland welcomes the world in the Year of Homecoming Scotland 2014!
The year-long programme of events will celebrate the very best of Scotland's food and drink, active and natural resources as well as our creativity, culture and ancestral heritage.
<a
href="homecomingscotland.com">homecomingscotland.com

<HR>

<p style="font-family:verdana,arial,sans-serif;color:#A0A0A0;font-size:7.0pt">
This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual
or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system
manager or the sender.
Please note that for business purposes, outgoing and incoming emails from and to SNH may be monitored.

Tha am post-dealain seo agus fiosrachadh sam bith na chois dìomhair agus airson an neach no buidheann
ainmichte a-mhàin. Mas e gun d' fhuair sibh am post-dealain seo le mearachd, cuiribh fios dhan manaidsear-siostaim no neach-sgrìobhaidh.
Thoiribh an aire airson adhbharan gnothaich, 's dòcha gun tèid sùil a chumail air puist-dealain a' tighinn
a-steach agus a' dol a-mach bho SNH.

This email was scanned by the Government Secure Intranet anti-virus service supplied by Vodafone in partnership with Symantec. (CCTM Certificate Number 2009/09/0052.) In case of problems, please call your organisations IT Helpdesk.
Communications via the GSi may be automatically logged, monitored and/or recorded for legal purposes.
********** **********

This email has been received from an external party and
has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.
****

Shiants Seabird Recovery Project

The Shiant islands are home to an estimated 150,000 seabirds. This includes 10% of the UK's puffin population and 7% of our razorbills, as well as notable colonies of guilllemots, fulmars, kittiwakes, shags, gulls and great skuas. The international importance of the islands is recognised by their designation as a European Special Protection Area (SPA). We are legally bound to maintain the conditions underpinning this designation, and the health of the designation features, i.e. the seabird colonies.

Although the number of individual birds cited as visiting the Shiants seems large, Scotland's seabird colonies are, in fact, showing marked declines. Analysis of trends in 2012 showed a 53% decline in abundance between 1986 and 2011, with breeding productivity declining by over 37% in this period. The declines have affected 10 of our 16 species of Scottish seabird so, whilst the Shiants may seem to support very healthy populations, there is evidence that this is not the case. Data collated in 2013 showed that both the guillemot and razorbill populations are now in 'unfavourable declining' condition on the islands (more information on these assessments is available on SNH web pages at http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/protected-areas/site-condition-monitoring/)

[redacted]s correct that the project also aims to attract two non-resident species of bird to the islands. These are the Manx shearwater and the European storm petrel. There is some evidence that shearwaters were once resident, whilst the storm petrel is known to occur in waters around the Shiants in large numbers. They have not settled to breed but it is well established that these birds will not colonise areas where there are already ground predators present. Some 90% of the UK's manx shearwater is resident in only three sites around the UK, so it is important that new opportunities for nesting are provided where possible. Both the European storm petrel and the manx shearwater are categorised as 'amber' status Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK.

On the basis of this information, SNH weighed up the pros and cons of the project proposal and determined that, in light of our responsibilities and the wider difficulties facing these species, the methods being employed by the project offered a reasonable opportunity to improve the resilience of our declining seabird populations. SNH are therefore contributing £50k pa over the four years of the project to the project to support this objective.

Black Rats

[redacted]has presented some points as to why removing the black rat from the islands is unacceptable. It may, therefore, help to set the case for managing them in this situation.

Records of black rats in Britain date back to the 3rd-5th centuries, although there is a suggestion that they may have died out during Saxon times and subsequently recolonized by the 10th century. Whilst they have been resident here for a long time, they are not a native species (native species are those which colonised Britain naturally at the end of the last ice age). Rabbits and hares, referred to in [redacted]letter, are also non-native species although their populations are often cited as being 'naturalised'.

Black rats are a commensal species and their distribution is strongly associated with urban areas or routes of human transport. As [redacted]states, the evidence suggests they arrived on the Shiants with a shipwreck around 1900 although studies published in 1998 and

2002 suggest the population now lives at very high densities on the islands. A survey carried out in 2012 concluded that there may be as many as 3,600 rats present. They are, as [redacted] notes, omnivorous and are opportunistic feeders. The 1998 study also identified remains of birds in 68% of rat faecal pellets so, whilst this isn't conclusive that they actively predate the seabirds, there is strong evidence of seabirds in their diet. Black rats are not native to the Shiant islands and a global review of their impact concluded that the species can be associated with a larger number of declines and extinctions of indigenous species than the brown rat. There is, therefore, cause to review whether removal of the black rat will benefit the conservation of protected species. Following detailed consideration, we concluded that this was the case.

[redacted] suggests that we should consider live-trapping and re-locating the black rats from the Shiants as a more humane option. As stated above, this could involve the translocation of several thousand animals and the ecological impact of releasing them elsewhere could be catastrophic, particularly if released on an island such as St Kilda. More importantly, they are a non-native species and Scottish law now prohibits the re-release of these animals anywhere in the country (see http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/nonnative-species/law-in-scotland/ for further information). Other non-lethal options have been considered to manage the rats, including fencing areas to keep them rat-free for birds. Unfortunately the terrain on these islands, and in particular around the rocky cliffs and boulder screes where the birds live, mean this is not viable. Leaving the rats on the island would also prevent colonisation by petrel and shearwater and would, therefore, undermine the conservation objectives of the project.

It is unfortunate that past human activity has created circumstances where the survival and well-being of some species is dependent on control of others. It's never a happy situation to be advocating the lethal control of animals in the wild. However in some cases such control is necessary and justifiable.

[redacted]

Scottish Natural Hertiage

25 June 2014