



**TRAPPING PEST BIRDS  
IN THE UK**  
A CODE OF PRACTICE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Pest and predator control is an integral part of conservation and wildlife management. It is necessary to reduce predation and damage to acceptable levels, particularly at vulnerable times of the year such as the nesting season. It is the responsibility of all those involved in pest and predator control to ensure that their methods are legal, humane and carried out with sensitivity and respect for other countryside users.

### **High standards underpin public and political support for shooting, now and in the future.**

#### **The code provides advice at two levels:**

Advice that **must** be followed in order to deliver sustainable shooting – unless otherwise stated the term ‘must’ only applies to meeting the standards set by this Code of Practice and does not refer to a legal obligation.

Advice that **should** be followed in order to achieve Best Practice, any deviation from which would need justification.

#### **THE FOLLOWING GOLDEN RULES APPLY:**

1. It is your responsibility to ensure that you abide by the law.
2. Always consider the welfare of your call bird and any other birds you may have trapped.
3. Have respect for the countryside, consideration for others and due regard to health and safety.
4. Only carry out control where you have permission to do so.
5. You must understand and comply with the relevant general licence to which you are working.

## 2. THE LAW

In England, Wales and Scotland under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 5, and in Northern Ireland under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 Section 6, it is illegal to:

- Set in position any trap which is calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild bird coming into contact with it.
- Use as a decoy, for the purpose of killing or taking any wild bird, any sound recording or any live bird or animal which is tethered, or secured by means of braces, or other similar appliances, or is blind, maimed or injured.

Under Section 8 (1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Section 9 (1) of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, it is an offence liable to a special penalty to keep or confine any bird in any cage or receptacle which is not sufficient in height, length or breadth to permit the bird to stretch its wings freely.



Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 6 and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 Section 7, it is illegal to sell decoy birds.

### **General licences**

The general licences permit authorised persons to carry out a range of control methods against bird species that are listed on them. These licences may only be relied upon where the control methods are carried out for the reasons specified on each licence, for example, to conserve flora and fauna (including wild birds).

General licences are issued for a variety of reasons and are renewed annually. These licences are made available on the websites of the government agencies in each of the devolved nations and can be accessed via the BASC website ([www.basc.co.uk](http://www.basc.co.uk)) or by contacting the BASC game and deer department on 01244 573 019.

**Note:** You do not have to apply for a general licence but failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the licences amounts to an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

Control methods allowed under the general licence may include shooting, the destruction of eggs and nests, and the use of Larsen traps and multi-catch traps, which includes the use of decoy birds within such traps.

Anyone acting under a general licence must comply with all relevant animal welfare legislation including the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Persons who have been convicted of an offence under wildlife legislation may not be able to rely on the general licences to control pest birds.

The general licences can only be used by authorised persons and each of the government agencies gives different definitions of authorised persons. Please see the relevant licence for the full definition.



### **Cage traps and the general licence**

- Decoy birds must be provided with:
  - suitable food which is readily accessible
  - clean, drinkable water which is available all of the time
  - a shelter which should protect the bird from the prevailing weather conditions
  - a suitable perch placed under the shelter.
- Every cage trap used in accordance with the general licences in England, Wales and Scotland must be physically inspected at least once every day at intervals of no more than 24 hours.
- Any birds killed in accordance with the general licences must be killed in a quick and humane manner. In Wales the general licences require that any bird held captive before being killed must be killed out of sight of other captive birds. In England this requirement applies to Canada geese only.
- Non-target species caught in a cage trap should be released unharmed immediately upon discovery.

Note: It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal which: Is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state, or is an animal listed in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Part 1 of Schedule 9.

- The general licences in England, Wales and Scotland require that when cage traps are not in use they are immobilised and rendered incapable of use. The country-specific general licences describe how the trap should be rendered incapable of use.
- In Scotland any cage trap used under the general licence must display a tag or sign which displays the contact number of the local police station or wildlife crime officer and a unique identification code obtained from the local wildlife crime officer.

### **Types of cage trap**

**Larsen Trap:** A Larsen cage trap usually consists of a cage trap which has a closed compartment for confining a live

decoy bird and an additional compartment(s) with a spring-activated trap door either on the top or on the side. The use of this type of trap is permitted under certain general licences and allows an authorised person to keep or confine the birds listed on the relevant general licence in a Larsen cage trap, the dimensions of which do not satisfy the requirements of Section 8 (1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and Section 9 (1) of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The Scottish general licence gives a specific definition of a Larsen trap.

Note: A decoy bird cannot be held captive in a Larsen trap if the trap is not in use. If the trap is not in use then the permission authorised by the general licence, which allows a person to confine a bird in a cage smaller than that required by Section 8 (1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and Section 9 (1) of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, is withdrawn.

**Multi catch trap:** There are several types of multi-catch traps available such as the ladder/letterbox and funnel trap. These traps usually consist of large timber-framed sections which are covered in small wire mesh with a door for operators to gain access to the trap. These traps are designed so that the target species can enter by a funnel or narrow opening but cannot escape when they attempt to fly out again.

**Larsen mate/Larsen pod traps:** These traps are a relatively new trap and can be used in conjunction with a Larsen trap. They are useful for catching the initial bird to use in a Larsen trap as a decoy bird and are often baited. They consist of a wire cage frame which is hinged at the bottom and held open by a split perch. When the bird lands on the perch the cage springs together catching the bird inside.

In Scotland, eggs or bread are the only permitted baits for use with Larsen mate and Larsen pod traps.



Note: Cage traps apart from those described above may be used provided they meet the requirements of all the relevant legislation.

### 3. TRAPPING IN THE FIELD

- BASC does not recommend the wing clipping of decoy birds.
- Any of the birds killed in accordance with the general licences must be killed quickly and humanely.
- Using a trap on land where you do not have permission is illegal and could result in a prosecution.
- The displaying of carcasses serves no useful purpose and may offend other countryside users. Carcasses should be disposed of responsibly in accordance with any regulations.
- Avoid setting traps near to public footpaths or public rights of way.

Cage traps should not be used during severe weather conditions or when such conditions are reasonably expected, which would prevent daily checking.

### 4. INSURANCE

It is advisable to have adequate legal liability (third-party) insurance when shooting. Membership of BASC includes insurance for recreational sporting activities (<http://basc.org.uk/join-basc/basc-members-insurance/>).

### 5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Never guess at what the law allows. More detailed advice and links to the devolved administrative countries' general licences can be found by following this link <http://basc.org.uk/shooting/general-licences/> or by contacting the game and deer department 01244 573 019.

**BASC is the largest representative body for sporting shooting.**

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