

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

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| To: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE | | Subject: CONTROL OF NORTH AMERICAN RUDDY DUCKS IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE |
| From: HEAD OF LAND SERVICES | | |
| Date: 22 AUGUST 2007 | Ref: KW/JT/BRT/CS | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of an official request received to cull non-native Ruddy Ducks on water bodies belonging to North Lanarkshire Council, and to seek agreement to the proposed formal response to this request.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July 2006 a request was received from the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), an Executive Agency of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) seeking Council's permission for CSL to carry out control of Ruddy Ducks in North Lanarkshire. In particular two sites were identified for this action, namely Garnqueen Loch (by Glenboig) and Woodend Loch SSSI (at Drumpellier Country Park).
- 2.2 Background information supplied from CSL indicated that in October 2005, a five-year programme to eradicate the non-native North America Ruddy Duck from the UK had been announced in Parliament. This work is co-funded by DEFRA and the EU LIFE-Nature programme, and in Scotland is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Scottish Executive.
- 2.3 The reason for conservation concern is on account of the ability of Ruddy Ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) to breed with the globally threatened White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), which has an estimated world population of less than 10,000 birds, with about 2,500 in Spain, the rest in Asia.
- 2.4 Ruddy Ducks are a relatively common North American species which were imported into wildfowl collections in UK in the 1950's. From there some escaped and formed a free-flying and breeding population in the UK, which reached 3000. Increasing numbers migrated to the Continent, and in early 1990's reached habitats in Spain where White-headed Ducks occur. Soon afterwards, the first hybrid Ruddy-White-headed Ducks appeared. Hybridisation is now considered to be a major threat to the survival of White-headed Ducks as a separate species.
- 2.5 While considering consent for this cull, Conservation and Greening staff in the Council became aware that there were some local ornithologists and individuals who took an opposing view, arguing against the cull either on animal welfare grounds, or in the belief that the threat to the White-headed Duck population in Spain from hybridisation with Ruddy Duck had been overstated. In particular, Glenboig Village Park Committee members have expressed their concerns over the plans to cull Ruddy Duck at Garnqueen Loch.

2.6 Accordingly the decision was taken to meet with representatives who could marshal evidence as to why they thought the Ruddy Duck cull should or should not go ahead in North Lanarkshire. Separate meetings were held in October 2006 to hear the arguments for and against.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 It is noted that the view of DEFRA and SNH, guiding the UK and Scottish Government action for the cull, has European support through the EU-LIFE Nature programme and through participating European Governments, including Spain. It is further noted that the eradication programme has the support of several leading voluntary organisations in the UK. These include :-

- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) : “The RSPB welcomes the European Commission’s announcement that LIFE Nature funds are to support efforts to safeguard the future of the globally threatened White-headed Duck by eradicating Ruddy Ducks from the UK. While it is sad that such measures are necessary, we are pleased that the Commission recognises the serious threat posed to the White-headed Duck through hybridisation with Ruddy Ducks”
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT): “WWT believes that wildlife should only be controlled where a conservation threat cannot be addressed by any other method. WWT has considered this issue very carefully and believes this is such a case. We are pleased that the Government recognises the serious threat posed to the White-headed Duck through hybridisation with Ruddy Ducks, and welcomes the Minister’s announcement of further control measure for Ruddy Ducks in the UK.”
- Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT): “In 2003 Ruddy Ducks were found at an estimated 88 sites in Scotland, 764 in England, 33 in Wales, and 17 in Northern Ireland. SWT supports the targeted eradication of the Ruddy Duck across the UK to contribute to the conservation of the White-headed Duck, ...a globally threatened species and one of the most endangered birds in Europe.”

3.2 Taking a different view from the conservation organisations above are some organisations whose principal concern is animal welfare:

- RSPCA: “While recognising the UK’s international obligations under international conventions, the RSPCA believes that the Ruddy Duck cull will not achieve its goal and will result in culled birds being subjected to unacceptable suffering. Also, the cull’s objectives may be impossible to achieve as it will be difficult to kill every Ruddy Duck in UK, and migration from other Countries could occur in the future. The RSPCA believes that more humane methods, such as egg control, could be explored further”
- Animal Aid : “Animal Aid believes that the cull plans on Ruddy Duck are cruel and senseless, and will be impossible to carry out. Obsessively targeting one species of duck whose only crime has been to mate with another - a liaison that will result in the survival of both types - amounts to species racism. It will also divert precious resources away from genuine conservation projects. If the government has a true commitment to conservation, they should be channelling funds into the preservation of wildlife habitat, not the killing of ruddy ducks”.

3.3 The Central Science Laboratory, which is implementing the cull, has issued an Information Bulletin (April 2007) that indicates :-

- 1,894 Ruddy Ducks were culled in UK between September 2006 and March 2007

- Control was carried out on 32 sites in 20 different council areas of England, Scotland and Wales
- A reduction in the UK population of as much as 55-60% has occurred between January 2006 to January 2007 (Independent counts by World Wildlife Trust).

4 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Council staff have now thoroughly investigated this matter over a period of several months, have listened to the arguments of those for and against the cull and studied the evidence and statements. Whilst understanding the strength of feeling of those opposed to the cull, staff involved have come to the unanimous conclusion that North Lanarkshire Council should support the international conservation action which is intended to secure the future of a globally threatened species, namely the White-headed Duck.
- 4.2 Control actions by CSL staff thus far have obviously led to a very significant reduction in the UK Ruddy Duck population over the last year, and it is proposed that they should be permitted access to selected North Lanarkshire Council water bodies to continue this programme. Appropriate arrangements and indemnities will be required to ensure public safety and to minimise disturbance to other wildlife.
- 4.3 Specifically it is proposed that CSL be granted approval to undertake the cull of Ruddy Duck through the safe and discrete use of firearms. Initially this will be at two sites, Garnqueen Loch and Woodend Loch, and thereafter at any further necessary sites as may be required for the successful undertaking of this eradication programme.
- 4.4 Should the Council have any further queries, Dr Iain Henderson of CSL has offered to make a presentation directly to Members, and to answer any questions.

5 FINANCIAL & CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The proposals noted above are in line with the Corporate Plan Objectives of caring for the environment and sustainable management, and there are no financial implications for the council, the project being undertaken and financed by the EU and DEFRA .

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That Committee accept the internationally agreed conservation programme on the White-headed Duck by allowing Ruddy Duck control on Council Property, and approve the proposals noted at section 4 above.



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Head of Land Services

Members seeking further information on this report, please contact Kenneth Wilson, Head of Land Services (0141 304 1846).