

---

# Fighting Talk: organisational discourses of the conflict over raptors and grouse moor management in Scotland

Isla D. Hodgson<sup>ab\*</sup>, Steve M. Redpath<sup>a</sup>, Anke Fischer<sup>b</sup>, Juliette Young<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen, 23 St. Machar drive, Aberdeen AB24 3UU, Scotland, UK*

<sup>b</sup>*Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences (SEGS), James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler. Aberdeen AB15 8QH, Scotland, UK*

<sup>c</sup>*NERC Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik, EH26 0QB, UK*

\*Corresponding author. Tel: +44 1224 395250

Email address: [r01idh14@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:r01idh14@abdn.ac.uk) (I.Hodgson)

Room G49, 23 St. Machar Drive (ACES), University of Aberdeen, AB24 3UU

## Highlights

---

- We analysed the discourses of six high-profile organisations with conflicting interests
- Organisations offered diverging interpretations of central issues
- Discursive strategies were employed to gain ‘dominance’ in the debate
- Discourses were dismissive of the motives and actions of other actors
- Discursive contestation at this level could widen barriers between stakeholders and damage conflict mitigation efforts

## Abstract

---

Conflict is currently one of the greatest challenges facing wildlife conservation. Whilst conflicts may first appear to concern wildlife, they are often embedded within wider debates surrounding land use, land ownership, and the governance of natural resources. Disputes over the impacts or management of a species therefore become symbols for conflicts that are fundamentally between the divergent interests and values of the people involved. NGOs representing the interests of local stakeholders can become actors within the conflict, often utilising publicly available platforms such as websites and social media in an attempt to influence over others and gain a dominant foothold in the debate.

Here, we examined discourses of organisations in relation to a contentious and high-profile case of conflict in Scotland, that occurs between interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management. News articles sources from the websites of six organisations – identified as key voices in the debate – were subjected to discourse analysis. 36 storylines were drawn from common phrases and statements within the text. Storylines demonstrated a clear divide in the discourse; organisations differed not only in their portrayal of central issues, but also in their representation of other actors. Discourses were strategic; organisations interpreted the situation in ways that either supported their own interests and agendas, or damaged the image of opposing parties. We argue that discursive contestation at this level could be damaging to mitigation efforts – widening barriers between stakeholders and risking already fragile relationships. This in turn reduces the likelihood of consensus and impacts on successful decision-making and policy implementation. We conclude that conflict managers should be aware of the contestation between high-profile actors, and the ramifications this may have for conflict mitigation processes. An understanding of what constitutes these discourses should therefore be used as a foundation to improve dialogue and collaborative management.

## Keywords

Conservation conflicts; Conflict mitigation; Discourse analysis; Stakeholders; Organisations; Raptors

---

## Fighting talk: How do organisations use discourse in the conflict over raptor management in Scotland?

---

*Hodgson, I.D., Redpath, S.M., Fischer, A. and Young, J.C.*

### 1) Introduction

---

Conflict poses one of the most significant challenges to wildlife management across the globe (Redpath *et al.*, 2015). The actual root causes of conflicts in conservation are often latent and so are difficult to define and address (Engel and Korf, 2005; Mathevet *et al.*, 2015). It may seem that conflicts arise due to the impacts of wildlife on people – livestock loss caused by predation for example – or the impacts of people upon wildlife (Treves and Karanth, 2003; Dickman *et al.*, 2014). Equally, a form of land use may appear to threaten conservation initiatives, or land managers may be affected by environmental policy (Yusran *et al.*, 2017; Mason *et al.*, 2018). However, these disputes are often manifestations of deeper-rooted social conflicts, stemming from asymmetries in power, political preferences, values, beliefs and cultures (Skogen, 2003; Miall, 2004; Skogen *et al.*, 2008; Young *et al.*, 2016a). With each further dispute, these schisms are brought repeatedly to the forefront and become embedded, sometimes developing into an integral part of group identity (Madden and McQuinn, 2014). Certain social norms – such as the willingness to illegally kill predators – become associated with particular groups of people, and conflicts become heavily value-laden with different normative perceptions of what or who is ‘acceptable’ (Skogen *et al.*, 2008; 2009; Crowley *et al.*, 2017). It is now widely recognised that the relationship dynamics between stakeholders are more problematic than the economic or ecological issues that are so often given more attention by conflict managers (Marshall *et al.*, 2007; Redpath *et al.*, 2013; Lühtrath and Schraml, 2015). As a result of underlying social conflicts, stakeholders become unable – or unwilling – to engage with alternative views, making collaborative processes aimed at finding solutions for integrated land use challenging and ultimately, unsuccessful (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Stenseke *et al.*, 2009; Lute *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the social dimensions that hinder effective dialogue can improve these processes, and lead to policy decisions that are better aligned and received (Madden, 2004; Stenseke *et al.*, 2009; Fox and Murphy, 2012).

An added complexity to such conflicts is that they often involve many different actors, and take place in a variety of settings (Gerique *et al.*, 2017). ‘Place-based’ actors are typically local stakeholders, who directly effect, or are affected by, natural resources - such as farmers, land managers, and local researchers (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). However, local stakeholders are often

represented by national and international organisations, who are typically invited to represent different interests at deliberative and decision-making processes (Jasanoff, 1997; Eden *et al.*, 2006). Such organisations can therefore become actors within the debate, coming into disagreement if they feel their objectives, or the interests and values they embody, are threatened. These actors may enter into conflict discursively; using publicly available sources of information, such as web articles and social media, to contest with one another (Buijs, 2009; Lester and Hutchins, 2012). Such resources can have substantial outreach, and therefore provide the ideal platform for organisations to drive forwards their own agendas by engaging the public and/or authoritative bodies with their campaign (Entman, 2003; Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Gamson, 2005; Buijs, 2009; Diaz *et al.*, 2015; Smith and Watson, 2015). Using these outputs, groups may express their understanding of the situation, their preferred outcome, and their perceptions of the views and actions of others (Eder, 1996; Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Buchanan, 2013).

In this paper, we delve deeper into these discourses to tease out the factors driving underlying conflicts between non-place based actors. Environmental issues such as land use conflicts are often described as “socially constructed” – in essence, situations that are built and sustained by discourse (Castree and Braun, 2001). ‘Discourses’ may be understood as a form of social interaction, occurring in the form of speech or text (Hajer, 1995; 2006). On the one hand, they shape how an individual perceives the world, and provide a lens through which that individual may make sense of a complex issue or debate (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002; Benjaminsen and Svarstad, 2010). On the other, perceptions may also influence discourses; certain discourses may occur in response to the rhetoric of another, or in reaction to a personal experience (Shotter, 1993; Cunliffe, 2002; Bartesaghi and Castor, 2008). For example, the discourse of one actor prompts another to alter their own in response (Gray, 2003; Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Schwedes *et al.*, 2013). This process is described as ‘Schismogenesis’ by Brox (2000), who developed the concept as a way of explaining the social interactions between actors in an escalating case of conflict in Norway, which exists over the placement of predators such as brown bear *Ursos arctos* and grey wolf *Canis lupis*. Here, schisms between actors were established through discourse, through their divergent portrayals of the situation. These differences were then exacerbated through the interaction between them; an argument made by one group spurred another to respond, in a ‘vicious cycle’ where one attempted to out-do the other (Bateson, 1935; Brox, 2000). Discourses and social interaction therefore have an important role in how land use conflicts are framed and interpreted, as well as how they are shaped (McNamee and Gergen, 1999; Brox, 2000; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011).

Gaining an understanding of the discursive contestation between organisational actors is of great importance to conflict management. Firstly, if the process of schismogenesis remains unchanged,

conflicts will grow in intensity, making them harder to alleviate (Brox, 2000; Madden and McQuinn, 2014). As these organisations are frequently present in decision-making processes, their adversarial positioning may hinder the development of sustainable, collaborative solutions to land management issues (Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Fox and Murphy, 2012). By choosing to advance their own position, some actors may succeed in getting a specific interpretation reflected by policy (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Buijs *et al.*, 2014; von Essen and Allen, 2017). Whilst this is neither right or wrong *per se*, it may exacerbate tensions between local stakeholders, who feel their concerns have been neglected (Richardson, 2011; Linnell and Markova, 2014). It is therefore imperative to investigate what is constituted in the discourses of organisations involved in conflict, unpicking the social mechanisms that may drive such contestation – such as important relationship dynamics (e.g. O'Donnell and Stokowski, 2016) - so that they may be addressed. Furthermore, such exploration can shed light on not only potential areas of conflict, but also shared concerns and values. We argue this knowledge could then be used to inform policy and management strategies, by highlighting areas of potential consensus that could be used as a starting point for new dialogue.

The use of discursive strategies by stakeholders has been studied extensively in the literature related to ecosystem management, ecosystem services, species reintroduction and climate change (Arts *et al.*, 2012; Ferranti *et al.*, 2014; Waylen and Young, 2014; Carmen *et al.*, 2016; Crate and Nuttall, 2016). However, the use of discourse by high profile organisations within conflict is still poorly understood, raising questions about the implications for these situations. This paper aims to understand the use of discourse by six key organisations associated with the conflict between the interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management in Scotland – a contentious and deep-rooted conflict, with an extensive history. We use discourse analysis to ascertain 1) how these organisations publicly interpret the conflict and its related issues, such as illegal killing; 2) how they represent the roles and motives of other actors within the conflict; and 3) the implications of using these discursive strategies to support their own objectives and agendas. Finally, we make suggestions as to how this improved understanding of their use of discourse can be used to move towards a successful mitigation strategy for conflict.

### [Raptor conflict in Scotland: A case study](#)

In Scotland, raptors have been a focus of controversy for decades. Whilst conservation conflicts exist between raptor management and other land-uses, such as farming and pheasant shooting, clashes between conservation and grouse shooting industries are well-documented and thus are the focus of this paper (Whitfield *et al.*, 2007; Thompson *et al.*, 2009; 2016; Redpath *et al.*, 2010; 2013). A history of hunting, habitat loss and pesticide use has contributed to the decline of many raptor species, some to the point of local extinction (Smart *et al.*, 2010; Balmer *et al.*, 2013; RSPB, 2014).

Primarily a change in legislation - it was declared illegal to intentionally kill, harm or disturb a bird of prey or its nest in Britain in 1954 – alongside extensive conservation efforts has seen the return and expansion of several of these species. Yet, this has led to concerns amongst some members of the shooting sector over the impact of increasing raptor populations on gamebirds. Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* are a particular focus of such apprehensions, and have been shown to be a potential limiting factor on populations of red grouse *Lagopus lagopus scoticus* (Thirgood *et al.*, 2000b). It is estimated that up to 1.7million of Scotland’s landscapes are managed to support the recreational sport of driven grouse shooting (Grant *et al.*, 2012). The sport provides revenue to Scotland’s economy, supporting rural communities, and holds important cultural value (Thirgood and Redpath, 2008; Sotherton *et al.*, 2009). However, there is evidence to suggest that the illegal killing and disturbance of birds of prey is ongoing and associated with land managed for driven grouse shooting; between 1994 and 2014, 779 cases of illegal killing were recorded, with gamekeepers on shooting estates confirmed or suspected as the culprits for 86% of these incidents (RSPB, 2014). It is argued that this has negatively impacted populations of hen harrier (Redpath *et al.*, 2002), golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (Whitfield *et al.*, 2007) and red kite *Milvus milvus* (Smart *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, common buzzard *Buteo buteo* are an emerging conflict, becoming the source of debate over whether licences should be administered for their control following their successful population recovery (Warren, 2016). This has resulted in animosity between the main stakeholder groups and has contributed to the breaking down of trust, leaving a lack of dialogue and many unwilling to communicate (Redpath *et al.*, 2015; Young *et al.*, 2016a).

This conflict has persisted and worsened, especially within the last decade following the development of online resources, such as social media. Organisations representing the interests of the various stakeholder groups involved (see table 1) have become important actors, using the media and online platforms to publicise their own views and debate over certain issues. As such, the conflict has become high profile and multi-levelled, and is proving increasingly difficult to alleviate. If we are to increase trust and encourage dialogue between these stakeholders, we must first understand the discourses of these actors and explore its potential to either exacerbate, or mediate, the conflict.

## 2) Materials and Methodology

---

### **2.1) Analytical concepts**

Here, we take a social constructivist perspective in the sense that social interaction defines entities of conflict and identity. The literature surrounding the concept of social construction is rich and

complex, however theories such as the 'Co-ordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) and 'Relationally Responsive' theory describe that phenomena such as conflict are relational processes, which are inherently personal and based on interaction (Shotter, 1993; Cunliffe, 2002; Bartesaghi and Castor, 2008). Similarly, dialogic approaches recognise that relationships shape how issues are constructed through discourse (Buber, 1970; McNamee and Gergen, 1999). Dialogue and discourses thus serve as a process by which to transform the actors' own understanding of the situation or action in question (e.g. who is at fault, what the situation itself is) and then functions to alter the relationships between actors themselves (Bartesaghi and Castor, 2008). This is not necessarily negative, but an inherent part of human relationships (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). This also plays into Brox's (2000) concept of Schismogenesis through social interaction; the action of one evokes response from another, in a dynamic, escalating process. The implication of this is that as these arguments feed off one another, they also increase in intensity (Bateson, 1935; Brox, 2000).

To frame our own analysis, we use Hajer's (1995) understanding of discourse: "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that is produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities". Hajer's theoretical frame best suits our purpose, as he develops the concept of a 'storyline', gathering together different discursive elements to simplify a complex narrative. Also drawing on similar work by Arts *et al.*, (2012), we will use thematic analysis to identify storylines within the discourse. A storyline may be defined as "a central idea that summarises and sometimes replaces complex narratives and debates" (Hajer *et al.*, 2006). Essentially, storylines are formed from a cluster of common themes or statements that become apparent across a discourse, and allow flexibility to include a larger range of discursive elements. This enables identification of not only the main arguments, but also subtler nuances, allowing for a more in-depth analysis. Extracting storylines may also provide insight into group dynamics and the interrelationships between different parties within a debate (Hajer, 1995). For example, shared storylines can imply unity through a common understanding, and become almost 'discursive symbols' of a certain group.

## **2.2) Data Collection and analysis**

Organisations were selected on the basis that they featured heavily in the grey literature surrounding raptors and their management, either indirectly or via direct quotes authored by that organisation. Preliminary analysis of the grey literature revealed six 'key' organisations that were central to the debate. These organisations represented a cross-section of views (see table 1). Those mainly interested in raptor conservation included the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSg), and organisations with primarily shooting interests

231 consisted of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) and Scottish Land and Estates (SLE). Whilst  
 232 these interests were not mutually exclusive, it was apparent that certain themes and issues fell  
 233 under these groups early on in the process. Lastly, two further organisations - Scottish Natural  
 234 Heritage (SNH) and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) – were identified.

235 As RSPB and GWCT are UK wide organisations, data was obtained from their regional sub-sites  
 236 selecting articles that focussed on Scotland only.

Organisation	Acronym	Type	Mission Statement
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	RSPB	Registered charity	“Giving nature a home” (“nature is in big trouble, but we have big plans to save it”)
Scottish Raptor Study group	SRSB	NGO	“Monitoring and conserving Scotland’s birds of prey”
Scottish Natural Heritage	SNH	Government funded organisation	“All of nature for all of Scotland”
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust	GWCT	Registered charity	“We aim for a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife”
Scottish Gamekeepers Association	SGA	Registered charity	“Managing Scotland’s wild places” (“represents and unites Scotland’s gamekeepers, ghillies, stalkers, wildlife managers and rangers”)
Scottish Land and Estates	SLE	NGO	“Driving rural business in Scotland”

237 **Table 1:** Summary of the six organisations identified by the preliminary analysis as being ‘key’ actors  
 238 in the debate over raptors and raptor management in Scotland, showing acronyms, the type of  
 239 organisation, and their respective mission statements. Information directly quoted from the websites  
 240 of each organisation, as written in August 2017.

241 The websites owned by each of the six focal organisations were searched for news articles featuring  
 242 stories associated with five species and their management, identified from the primary literature  
 243 analysis as the focus of most news stories and media coverage: hen harrier, common buzzard, red  
 244 kite *Milvus milvus*, golden eagle and the white-tailed or sea eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. Websites were  
 245 searched either manually, or using the ‘search’ tab. If employing the latter method, particular search  
 246 items were used: “birds of prey”, “raptors”, “hen harrier”, “buzzard”, “sea eagle”, “golden eagle”,



“red kite”, “conservation”, “persecution”, “killing”, “shooting” and “grouse moor”. To ensure that these search terms did not exclude relevant articles, all general news articles regarding Scotland on these websites were also searched individually for stories linked to birds of prey and/or grouse moor management. To ascertain the overarching subject represented by each article, a thematic analysis was conducted; patterns within the data, such as common words and phrases, were collated to form a theme (e.g. illegal killing) and assigned initial codes. Once initial codes were established, themes were reviewed and further defined, then finalised. Articles were then categorised and coded using nVivo (v.8). From the analysis, nine themes emerged (see appendix for detailed theme definitions). For the purpose of this paper, two themes will be focussed upon - ‘Illegal Killing’ and ‘Other Actors’ – as these are the most relevant to the research questions this study aims to address. ‘Illegal killing’ refers to articles that regard the death or injury of a raptor specifically, for example incidents of shooting or poisoning. ‘Other actors’ encompasses articles that concern the actions or statements of another stakeholder group, either via a direct quote, or discussion of their objectives and motives. Articles coded as these two categories were then subjected to a further, more detailed line-by-line analysis, and ‘storylines’ ascertained from this. A total of 34 storylines were identified, and each assigned a specific code. Storylines that were expressed by all organisations were labelled as ‘shared’ and marked (‘\*’). ‘Mutual’ storylines were also apparent; storylines that were the same and used by both, but perceived to be the actions or opinions of the other group (distinguished using ‘+’).

### 3) Results

---

SNH and GWCT discourses featured no articles about illegal killing or other actors, thus further analysis centres on the discourse of “Raptor Conservation” (RC) and “Shooting Interest” organisations.

Within the two themes, six main ‘topics’ were identified (see figs. 1 and 2). Illegal killing articles discussed the severity and extent of the problem, the reasons behind raptor declines and illegal killing itself, and the impacts of raptors on gamebirds, other wildlife and rural professions. Articles under the second theme concerned the knowledge, credibility and abilities of other actors, the motives behind their actions and their roles within the conflict. 36 storylines were identified in total. 32 were unique to SI or RC organisations alone, and 4 were shared between them. Both RC and SI discourse portrayed illegal killing as a negative act that must be prevented, and agreed that raptors should be protected. They also shared a perception that the government did not see wildlife crime as a priority. However, the context of these shared storylines differed between groups, and it became apparent that RC and SI diverged in their interpretations of several different subjects.

### 3.1) Interpretations of illegal killing, raptor management and associated issues

#### 3.1.1) The severity and extent of illegal killing

RC organisations placed emphasis on the association between illegal killing and the shooting industry, in particular driven grouse moors. The severity of incidents – such as poisoned or shot individuals – was also highlighted and referred to as “persecution”. Illegal killing was portrayed by these organisations as an ongoing problem, which was continuing and increasing: *“there is no evidence of a decline [in incidents]”* (SRSG), *“[incidents have] doubled from the previous year”* (RSPB). Furthermore, RC organisations repeatedly argued that *“many incidents go undetected or unreported”* (RSPB) and those reported were discovered *“purely by chance”* (SRSG). Illegal killing was labelled as the main threat to birds of prey, as opposed to predation or insufficient food sources.

RC discourse also stressed the impact of illegal killing on tourism and the economy. RSPB argued that the public are being *“robbed of the chance”* to see raptors in the wild, and emphasised figures that demonstrated the importance of species such as the sea eagle to Scotland’s economy. Similarly, SRSG described birds of prey as *“valuable”* to the economy through tourism, and argued that illegal killing was therefore a threat to the country’s finances as well as *“public enjoyment”*.

Whilst SI organisations shared the view that illegal killing should be condemned and stopped, they differed in their portrayal of the situation (see fig. 1). Instead, they promoted the storyline that things were improving, and that the frequency of poisoning incidents had largely declined in recent years (*“[deaths] have fallen to a record low”* – SGA). This improvement was explained as a change in the attitudes of game keepers towards birds of prey, and of grouse moor management as a whole. Other methods of lethal control – such as shooting and the use of illegal traps – were not mentioned, but referred to as *“illegal killing”* or *“raptor deaths”*. It was also stated that birds of prey were in decline for alternative reasons, such as predation and changes in climate. In some instances, raptors were considered not to be declining at all, but in fact *“numbering tens of thousands”* in Scotland (SRSG) - to the point of requiring management in some instances. However, SI discourse strongly featured condemnation of illegal killing (*“we want to send a strong and clear message that any form of wildlife crime is totally unacceptable”* – SLE). Both organisations portrayed a desire to protect birds of prey (*“there cannot be a free-for-all against them [buzzards]”* (SGA) and to punish those who committed crimes against them: *“it is imperative justice prevails”* – SGA; *“we are working hard to stamp this sort of thing out”* – SLE.

#### 3.1.2) Causes of persecution and who is to blame

RC organisations considered that the shooting industry, in particular gamekeepers, were the only source of blame for the illegal killing of raptors. Birds of prey were stated to be completely absent

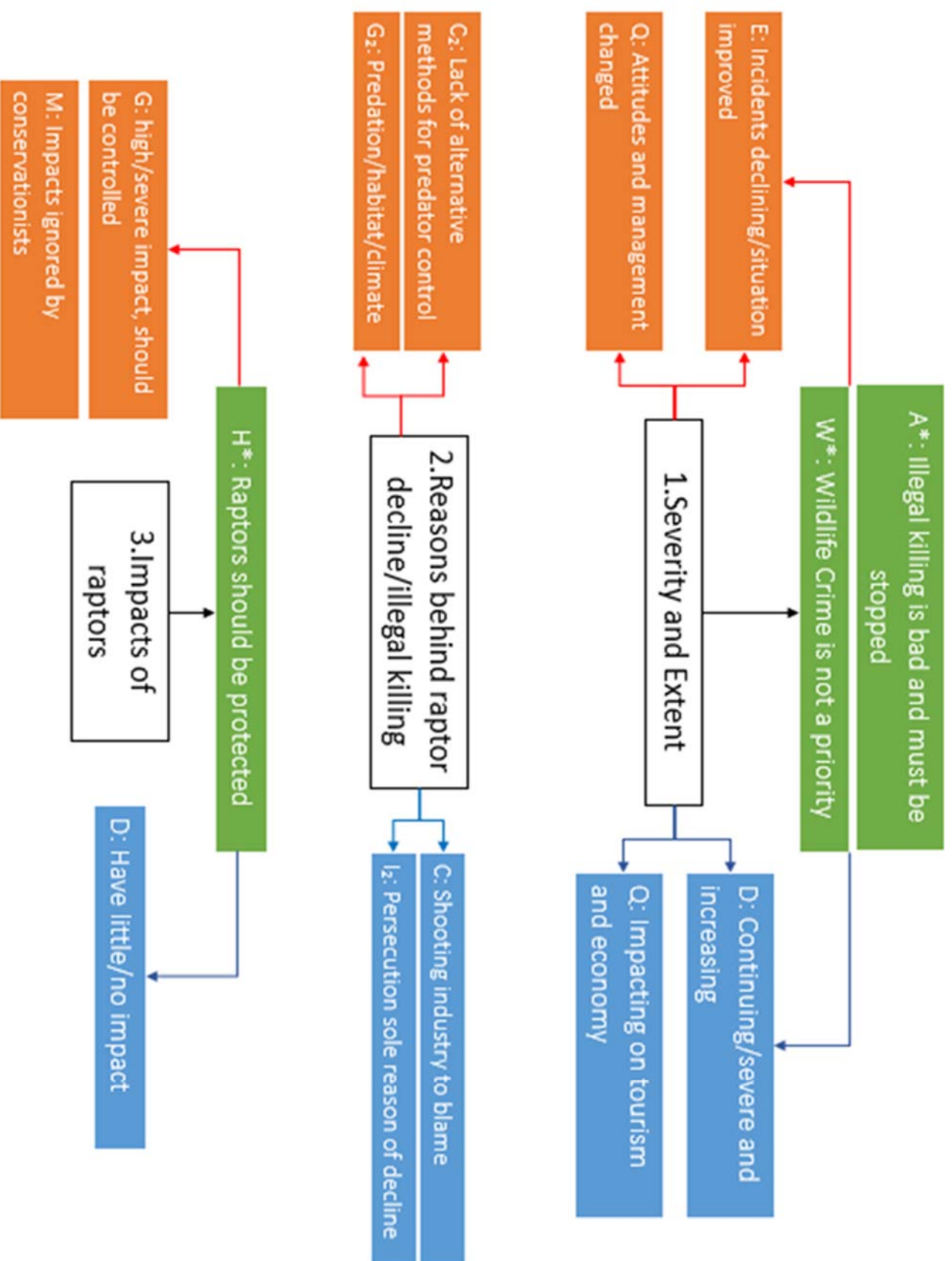
313 from driven grouse moors on account of killing and disturbance: *“very few [hen harriers] now nest on*  
314 *areas managed for red grouse”*, *“a desperate situation down to bad management”* (RSPB);  
315 *“SRSG...highlight the serious problem of hen harrier persecution on driven grouse moors”* (SRSG).  
316 They implied that this was down to a general bad attitude and lack of conscience by gamekeepers  
317  *(“a lackadaisical attitude towards adherence of current licensing conditions” - SRSG; “a Victorian*  
318 *attitude towards birds of prey” - RSPB)* and that they should therefore be held responsible for their  
319 actions (*“bring those responsible to justice” – SRSG; “we are challenging ‘leaders’ in the shooting*  
320 *community to...take real action” - RSPB).*

321

322

323

324



**Figure 1:** Diagram showing the allocation of storylines identified from the discourse analysis, in relation to three overarching themes surrounding the topic of illegal killing, its causes, and the impacts of raptors. Colours denote the allocation of the storyline: blue indicates a storyline exclusive to raptor conservation (RC) groups, and red exclusive to shooting interest (SI) groups. Green and starred (\*) signifies a storyline shared by all six organisations. Analysis performed on 324 news articles obtained from the websites of each organisation.

SI discourse expressed a feeling that good efforts to combat illegal killing and overhaul management were being ignored or overlooked by other actors. For example, SLE stated that RSPB were “reluctant to highlight the positives of grouse shooting”. Articles associated with illegal killing would link to statements that demonstrated gamekeepers as “conservationists” and suggested that grouse moor management is beneficial for biodiversity: “participating estates have been instrumental [in conservation projects]” “[gamekeeping] has an exemplary record in wildlife conservation and protection” – SLE; “land managed by gamekeepers for shooting is teeming with wildlife” – SGA. SI organisations were also keen to promote their continued support for raptors (“gamekeepers have shown a great deal of ownership over ‘their’ harriers” – SGA).

SI organisations also claimed that a lack of alternative methods for predator control prompted some individuals to engage in the illegal killing or disturbance of raptors, and that it was a “last resort” (SGA) for those suffering negative impacts on their gamebird stocks. Another argument was that illegal killing sometimes occurred by mistake. For example, SLE stated that in many cases, raptors were killed via “accidental rodenticide poisoning [rather] than deliberate killing”. Unlike RC groups, SI groups frequently referred to “conflict” and “conflict resolution” when discussing cases of raptor killings, highlighting the need for ‘adaptive management’ and claiming negative feelings towards the shooting industry – which prevented partnership efforts and thus new management schemes – as an indirect cause.

### **3.1.3) Impacts of raptors**

All organisations agreed that raptors should be protected, but diverged on the level of impact they perceived raptors to have on gamebirds and livestock. RC discourse portrayed raptors as “innocent” (SRSG), having very little impact on the numbers of game birds or livestock in comparison to other sources of loss, such as unfavourable environmental conditions and disease (see fig. 1). In contrast, raptors were considered by SI groups to predate heavily on red grouse and, in the case of sea eagles, lambs. Therefore SI discourse argued that species – in particular the buzzard and sea eagle – had “significant economic impacts” (SLE) on the lives and livelihoods of farmers and those employed on shooting estates, and that this was “causing concern” amongst the shooting community (SGA). Gamekeepers were said to be “struggling” with the impacts of raptor predation, with both organisations suggesting that grouse bags were smaller and that efforts to maximise grouse numbers for the shooting season were often falling flat. Connected to this was the storyline that raptors, alongside other predators such as foxes and crows, were impacting on the wading bird population of moors. Species such as the golden plover and curlew were said to be deteriorating as a result of increasing predator numbers, and as such this argument was developed to support the view that birds of prey should be controlled “under certain circumstances”. Furthermore, these storylines

were used to drive for the issuing of licences that would allow keepers to control populations of raptors on their land.

However, these concerns were said to be ignored by conservationists, leading to feelings of exclusion and a general perception that raptor workers were ‘against’ the shooting industry. For example, SGA accused RSPB of “*demonising keepers en masse*” when instead they needed to “*assess the bigger picture of [raptor] declines*”, and quoted feeling left out of proceedings despite being a key member of the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime in Scotland (PAWS). Similarly, SLE claimed that the charity would benefit more from “*tackling the issue rather than trying to point fingers*”. It was then suggested that this attitude risked valuable partnerships that would otherwise be beneficial in assisting landowners to “*responsibly*” alleviate the impacts of predators, and that this feeling of neglect was in part a driving force behind illegal killing.

## 3.2 Perceptions of other actors

### 3.2.1) Motives

RC discourse tended to portray a negative image of the industry and give arguments as to why they engaged in the illegal killing of raptors. These included allegations that they were “*against raptors*” and their conservation, and that they were only interested in maximising the number of grouse (see fig. 2). The shooting industry were repeatedly labelled as having a “*Victorian attitude towards birds of prey*” by SRSB, whereas RSPB described a tendency of the industry to “*narrowly focus on increasing grouse bags*” and make “*archaic*” management decisions.

SI discourse, however, accused conservation organisations – in particular the RSPB – of having an ulterior motive to their campaigning: using raptors as tools to fundraise and gain memberships (“*a money making exercise and nothing else*” – SGA) and ultimately to wage a war against driven grouse shooting, with SLE describing their campaigns as “*a class war propaganda line against ‘shooting toffs’*”. Raptors were thus labelled as “*flying fundraisers*” (SGA), used as weapons in the debate, and any claim made by RC organisations that highlighted their plight were dismissed as “*scaremongering*” (SGA) and “*general slurs and accusations*”. RC and SI groups therefore had a mutual perception of one another: that the opposing party was only interested in asserting their own interests at the expense of others (fig 2.)

Furthermore, both groups accused the other of attempting to influence the public and/or the media in their favour, to gain backing and support. For example, SGA and SLE were said by RC groups to be promoting a false, positive image of gamekeepers by “*telling lies*” (SRSB) and making “*inaccurate and misleading claims*” regarding raptor conservation (RSPB). They were also said to be fabricating evidence to sway public perception in favour of licenses to cull buzzards and other predators.

Conversely, SI group discourse indicted RC organisations of portraying an inaccurate, negative image of gamekeepers (*"the picture you paint [of gamekeepers] is not a true one"* –SLE) as well as interpreting scientific data in a way that best suited their own agenda, cherry-picking results and using 'emotive' language to persuade the public against them: *"[conservationists] are confusing the public"* (SGA); *"[RSPB] are using flawed stats...and misrepresenting the sector"* (SLE).

### **3.2.2) Knowledge and Credibility**

Both groups portrayed the other as having a lack of credibility and generally being inferior in their knowledge and capabilities (fig. 2). For RC organisations in particular, this was evidenced in a lack of robust scientific reasoning within SI argumentation: *"a level of prejudice and ignorance"*; *"sensationalist claims...no credibility"* (SRSG). Whereas for SI groups, RC organisations' lack of knowledge stemmed from a misunderstanding of the *"way of the land and land management"* (SGA), and too heavy a reliance on scientific data (*"they would achieve more by working more closely with people on the ground"* – SLE).

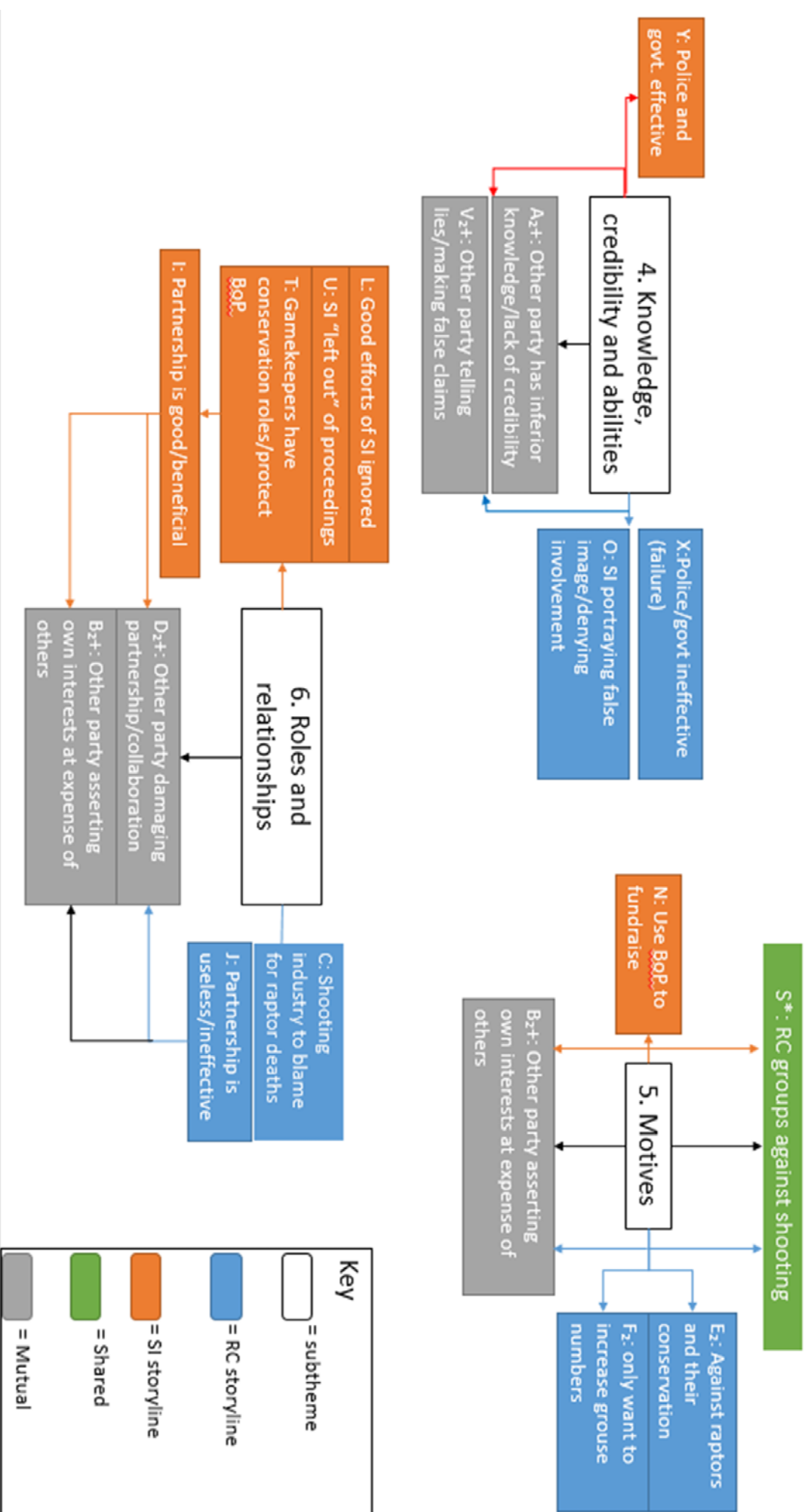
RC discourse focussed on the abilities of two other groups. Whilst all organisations shared the view that wildlife crime was not enough of a priority, RC groups felt that this was largely an issue with the Scottish government and police: *"we were under the impression that wildlife crime was supposed to be a police priority"* (SRSG). It was felt that the current legislation was too *"weak"* and that enforcement needed to be stronger (*"we want to see the government getting tougher on wildlife crime"* –RSPB). There were also frequent calls for the government to demonstrate their commitment to the problem by allocating more funding to specialised authorities, such as the Wildlife Crime Unit. The capabilities of the police were questioned; criticisms included delays to sentencing, time taken to prosecute, and poor communication: *"we are deeply concerned about police failure to attend a suspected poisoning incident"*; *"...another cryptic press release [from police Scotland]"* (SRSG). Both SRSG and RSPB denoted a distinct lack of confidence in SNH, accusing them of not having the best interests of conservation in mind (*"[SNH are] interfering with nature"*, *"...not doing their job properly"* - SRSG; *"[SNH] needs to do more"* - RSPB). In contrast, SI organisations praised the authorities, offering their support to investigations and encouraging their members to do the same (*"we wholeheartedly encourage our own members to assist the police in their investigation"* – SLE), although SGA expressed a concern of not being fully informed of investigations: *"we are disappointed not to have known about it [death of a hen harrier] until now...given the discovery was made in April"*. In addition, whilst SI organisations were quick to condemn confirmed incidents of illegal killing, they were cautious on passing their judgement of suspected cases (*"there is very little known about the bird or the case at present, so we await the outcome..."* – SGA; *"we should be*

careful about commenting on speculative figures” – SLE). In opposition to RC discourse, SI organisations claimed that wildlife crime was not enough of a priority to raptor conservationists, who elaborated data regarding illegal killing in order to ban driven grouse shooting as opposed to saving raptors (“finger pointing without evidence” – SLE; “forgetting their true message” - SGA).

### **3.2.3) Roles and Relationships**

RC and SI discourse featured the roles of themselves and others within the conflict, in particular partnership and collaborative efforts. Both groups blamed the other for damaging potential partnership efforts through their actions. RC discourse portrayed the shooting industry as untrustworthy, stating that efforts to work together in the past had failed: “we tried self-policing [within the shooting community] but it hasn’t worked...they need to prove themselves before we try again” (RSPB). As a result, partnership working was viewed as ineffective. Conversely, SI discourse implied partnership efforts were alive and well: “we have an excellent relationship with all relevant wildlife organisations, especially RSPB” – SLE. Collaborative efforts were largely described as beneficial, and both SGA and SLE referred their role in organisations such as PAWS as having a positive effect – “a positive step in the joint effort to combat raptor persecution”; “partnering estates have been instrumental” (SLE). However, SI organisations still claimed feelings of being ignored or excluded, describing other organisations as “ganging up” on shooting estates (SLE), utilising science to attack the shooting sector (“reports such as this do little other than damage ongoing partnerships” - SGA).





**Figure 2:** Diagram showing the allocation of storylines identified from the discourse analysis, in relation to three overarching themes regarding the roles, motives and abilities of other actors within the conflict. Colours denote the allocation of the storyline: blue indicates a storyline exclusive to raptor conservation (RC) groups, and red exclusive to shooting interest (SI) groups. Green and starred (\*) signifies a storyline shared by all six organisations. Analysis performed on 324 news articles obtained from the websites of each organisation.

## 4) Discussion

The present study aimed to understand how high-profile organisations (Box 1) involved in the conflict between the interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management represented central issues and the roles and motives of other actors. Analysis identified 36 storylines around two main themes that demonstrated the complex variety of issues and values underlying the debate, and illustrated that organisations with different interests and objectives will often offer different portrayals of the same situation. The illegal killing of raptors was a central and important issue, however groups diverged on key elements, disagreeing on the severity and extent of illegal killing, as well as who or what was to blame.

What may drive these different interpretations will now be explored. What possible discursive strategies are being employed by these organisations, and to what purpose? Furthermore, inferences are made as to what the implications of such strategies may be in respect to the conflict. The paper concludes with suggestions as to how this knowledge may be incorporated into conflict mitigation strategies, in a wider context.

Name of Organisation	Abbreviation
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	RSPB
Scottish Raptor Study Group	SRSB
Scottish Natural Heritage	SNH
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust	GWCT
Scottish Land and Estates	SLE
Scottish Gamekeeper's Association	SGA

*Box 1: Reminder of abbreviations used for the focal organisations of this study. For full descriptions and mission statements, see table 1.*

### **4.1) The blame game: using discourse to portray a certain version of events**

Throughout the analysed news pieces, it was apparent that organisations represented numerous issues according to their own goals. RSPB and SRSB – who are predominantly focussed on the conservation of birds of prey and wildlife (see table 1) – placed emphasis on the severity of illegal killing, its association to grouse moors and the shooting industry, and the failure of the government and wildlife crime authorities to enforce laws and prosecute those who engaged in it. In contrast, shooting organisations focussed on demonstrating a decline in poisoning incidents, the benefits of game keeping and grouse moor management (in particular to conservation and biodiversity), as well as the “attack” made by conservationists on the shooting sector.

On the surface, it may appear these storylines reveal different understandings, or perceptions, of the situation itself. But it could be hypothesised that separate organisations are utilising these different interpretations to enhance their own message and agenda (Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Ferranti *et al.*, 2014). As such, discourse is used to battle: actors will frame conflicts according to their own values and ideas, in order to increase support for their specific world view and exert dominance over the central issue (Lewicki *et al.*, 2003; Buijs *et al.*, 2011). For example, RSPB and SRSB are ultimately interested in raptor conservation, and so they frequently emphasised the severity and urgency of their plight. Raptor populations – in particular the hen harrier - were presented as being restricted or even “*on the brink of extinction*” (RSPB), and illegal killing portrayed as a serious and worsening threat. Indeed, this could reflect the truth – but also by describing the situation in such a way, RC organisations may hope to gain support from the reader and persuade them that this is the ‘true’ interpretation of events. Furthermore, it could be a tactic to increase memberships and funding. Similarly, RC organisations focussed blame on the shooting sector – in particular gamekeepers, who were said to be “*flouting the law*” (SRSB) and labelled as criminals. Whilst it was acknowledged that the majority of gamekeepers are “*law abiding*”, heavy emphasis was placed on illegal killing and those who perpetrated it, which may serve as a tool to gain momentum for other agendas, such as the licensing or even blanket ban of driven grouse shooting.

The use of discourse is a dynamic, socially constructed process; actors transform and exchange ideas through debate with others, and will readjust their own discourse in response (Schmidt, 2010; den Besten *et al.*, 2013). In reaction to the negative portrayals of their industry, the discourse of SGA and SLE - who represent grouse shooting and other field sports - was geared towards ‘re-framing’ this narrative, a discursive strategy common to actors who feel under pressure (Benford and Snow, 2000; Greenberg, 2005). Groups who recognise the negative perceptions that others may have of them use discourse to present a positive image, in an attempt to change these perceptions. SGA and SLE promoted the image of the “*responsible*” and “*law-abiding*” gamekeeper, who encourage biodiversity and feel it is their “*duty*” (SGA) to protect wildlife - including birds of prey. Emphasis was also placed on a decline in poisoning incidents, directly challenging claims made by RC organisations that implied illegal killing to be worsening. It could be inferred therefore, that such discourses from SI groups are an attempt to alleviate the negative connotations pinned on them by the likes of RSPB and SRSB. In turn, the latter organisations will counteract with argumentation that provides evidence against them (e.g. “*Sixty years of protection but the killing continues*” – SRSB; “*...of those convicted [of illegal killing], 70% were gamekeepers employed on shooting estates*” - RSPB). The discursive strategies we are seeing here are shaped by both the goals and values of these organisations, but also through their interaction with one another; essentially it is a conflict of its

own, with actors disputing one another in order to gain the upper hand (Lewicki *et al.*, 2003; Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011; von Essen, 2017).

This returns us to Brox's (2000) concept of Schismogenesis; one argument feeds off another. We certainly saw evidence of an element of this between the discourses of rival actor in the raptor management debate. A good illustration of this is the dispute over the decline of the hen harrier, more specifically the belief that its demise is solely down to illegal killing carried out on driven grouse moors. Whilst this was the interpretation given by the RSPB, SRSB and – to a lesser extent – SNH, SGA and SLE responded directly to these accusations by claiming they were ill-informed: *"there is no evidence to support the RSPB's interpretation of events"* (SGA); *"they [the RSPB] need to assess the 'bigger picture' of harrier declines"*. This prompted SRSB to state that the SGA had a *"disappointing attitude"*, and RSPB to reiterate their stance using evidence that aligned with this argumentation in direct response. The implication of Schismogenesis is that as one argument fuels another, continuation of such debates causes them to intensify (Bateson, 1935; Brox, 2000). Whilst direct evidence of this is difficult to ascertain, it could be noted that earlier RSPB discourses included habitat loss and weather conditions as contributing factors to harrier declines; then, over the years included in our study, their argumentation changed to single out illegal killing as the *"single most constraining factor"* of harrier populations in Scotland.

#### **4.2) War of the words: discourse as an arena for competition**

Exploring in more detail the idea that certain interpretations within discourses are used as a tool with which to 'out-do' one another, it must be asked what the intended purpose of this discursive competition is. Blekesaune (1997) suggests that competition over narratives is to *"conquer the centre of the discursive arena"* – in other words, narratives are used as a means to *"win"* the debate by interpreting the conflict in a way that is beneficial to their own interests, but damaging to those of others (Entman *et al.*, 2003; Pecural-Botines *et al.*, 2014). This also allows actors who perceive their discourse to be less 'dominant' – or threatened by opposing groups – to gain control by convincing others, namely policy makers, that their interpretation is the 'right' one (Buijs *et al.*, 2014; Dinnie *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, using interpretations tactically allows these actors to disrupt or infiltrate current networks of power by rejecting the discourses they see as dominant (Neves-Graça, 2004; Lester and Hutchins, 2012). For example, scientific expertise is often viewed as hegemonic, ruling the language and policy that surrounds environmental issues and wildlife management (Allen *et al.*, 2001; Boswell, 2008; Wesselink *et al.*, 2009; Skogen and Krangle, 2010). Often, this perceived power causes those whose interests lie in rural traditions or professions – whose way of life may be seen as threatened by the management of certain species – to challenge it, reinforcing already

547 apparent rural-urban antagonisms (Blekesaune, 1997; Brox, 2000; Wesselink *et al.*, 2013; Dinnie *et*  
548 *al.*, 2015).

549 We often observed statements within SGA and SLE discourse that implied that they saw themselves  
550 as the subordinate party, who were “*unfairly attacked and accused*” by conservation groups, such as  
551 the RSPB. They also implied that RC groups had influence over the decisions and perceptions of the  
552 government, public, and the media. Quotes such as “*...the public must be made aware of these false*  
553 *accusations and finger-pointing*” (SGA) and “*this new report [referring to the SGA golden eagle*  
554 *survey] we hope will change common perceptions that game keeping is bad for wildlife*” could be  
555 argued as demonstrating a concern that the public (and possibly, policy makers) are adhering to  
556 what they perceive as the ‘dominant’ discourses of raptor conservation groups. This aligns with  
557 similar research by Bergman (2005), who identified an emerging discourse of victimisation expressed  
558 by American hunters who felt threatened by a wider, changing attitude towards their industry.  
559 Interestingly, RC organisations also portrayed this apprehension, stating that the “*sensationalist*  
560 *claims*” of the industry were “*misleading*” and made in a direct effort to attack the RSPB. Counter-  
561 discourses such as this may serve to reinforce differences between groups, as they attempt to  
562 establish their own “claim to rights” and push back against those who oppose it (Dunk, 2002; Dinnie  
563 *et al.*, 2015).

564 Furthermore, by representing the interests and discourses of other stakeholders in a negative light,  
565 actors may also attempt to persuade others of their moral rightness (Stone, 1989; Dryzek, 2005;  
566 Schwedes *et al.*, 2013). Several “mutual” storylines found within the discourse questioned the  
567 knowledge and capabilities of the other party and stated that their claims were ‘false’ or unfounded.  
568 The de-legitimisation of other discourses during conflicts over biodiversity objectives can occur  
569 through the framing of them as ‘emotive’ or ‘ill-informed’ (Buijs *et al.*, 2014; von Essen, 2017). This  
570 was demonstrated when organisations discussed opposing actors in the conflict – for example, SGA  
571 and SLE dismissed RSPB and SRSB discourse surrounding an increase in persecution incidents as  
572 “*scare-mongering*” (SGA) and “*deeply flawed*” (SLE), inferring that their argument was emotionally  
573 driven as opposed to based on what was perceived as solid evidence. Actors may also utilise  
574 strategic positioning to play upon certain areas of weakness within the discourse of other groups  
575 (Guitierrez *et al.*, 2016). RSPB and SRSB frequently questioned the narratives of shooting interest  
576 organisations, claiming their statements of remorse regarding incidents of illegal killing and their  
577 condemnations of such acts were “*hollow and false*” (SRSB), backed up by claims of the inherent lack  
578 of self-policing by the industry and their refusal to remove memberships for the perpetrators.  
579 Furthermore, these groups accused the industry of damaging collaborative efforts via their continual  
580 denial of illegal killing, thereby diminishing the SI narrative that partnership was alive and well.

#### 581 **4.3) “Flying fundraisers”: using discourse to achieve action**

582 Perhaps the real question to ask therefore, is *who* organisations are attempting to influence with  
583 their discourse - we must acknowledge the persuasive nature of how these issues are framed.  
584 Discursive strategies are often used by organisations to exercise control over legal proceedings;  
585 altering the focus of policy makers and therefore their subsequent legislative outcomes (Iyengar,  
586 1990), or by gaining legitimacy to their own causes by influencing the media or public in their favour  
587 (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Gamson, 2005). Especially in today’s climate, publicly available forms of  
588 communication – such as the news articles used in this study – can be hugely influential, serving as  
589 platforms where principal actors can make their views heard and drive for action, such as public  
590 petitioning (Gamson, 2005; Watts and Maddison, 2012). Such acts can then be a driving force behind  
591 political change. This has already occurred in the UK; a petition to ban driven grouse shooting was  
592 put forward to parliament in 2016, following increased pressure from conservation lobbyists and  
593 NGOs. This was later rejected by the government, however it incited a fresh wave of media coverage  
594 and argumentation, and at time of writing, a second petition has just been circulated (Avery, 2017).

595 Arguments that later become accepted by other groups in positions of influence (i.e. policy makers)  
596 may privilege certain actors who share these preferred outcomes, and threaten to override more  
597 nuanced discourses (Dryzek, 2005; Feindt and Oels, 2005; Wesselink *et al.*, 2013). For example, in a  
598 case study of the Intag Valley in Ecuador, Buchanan *et al.* (2013) describe a “*complex and multi-scale*  
599 *struggle for power*” where claim-makers (stakeholders) with different interests contest the future of  
600 the valley through discourse, utilising different discursive strategies to strengthen the validity of  
601 their arguments and ultimately influence policy. For example, environmentalists were able to  
602 leverage power by incorporating the dominant, neoliberal biodiversity discourse into their anti-  
603 mining rhetoric and undermine the argument of economic development supported by powerful,  
604 internationally recognised mining concession owners. In this case of conflict, and indeed many  
605 others, policy decisions were being made on the basis of one specific interpretation, regardless of  
606 whether this benefitted all actors (Neumann *et al.*, 2005; Dessai *et al.*, 2009; Buchanan *et al.*, 2013;  
607 Wesselink *et al.*, 2013). If conflicts are allowed to persist, discourses become more and more  
608 extreme and the tensions between actors are exacerbated (Brox, 2000). At the policy level, these  
609 dominant, contested discourses can have a prominent and excluding effect, supressing subtler, more  
610 nuanced narratives (Nooteboom, 2006; Feldpusch-Parker *et al.*, 2013). This too can become a  
611 dynamic process, based on what is perceived by policy makers to be the over-riding ‘voice’ at that  
612 moment in time (Buijs *et al.*, 2014).

613 In this case of conflict, it could be argued that RC and SI groups are competing for the attention of  
614 policy-makers, ultimately to influence decisions regarding land use legislation and licensing in their

favour. Especially within RC discourse, there was a strong call to the government to “do more” (RSPB); to enforce already established laws, such as vicarious liability, and to pass new ones, such as the licensing of driven grouse moors. By placing emphasis on the link between driven grouse shooting and the killing or ‘mysterious disappearances’ of birds on grouse moors, and dismissing the shooting sector’s arguments as “lies” and “scaremongering”, RC groups may hope to improve the validity of their own agendas in the eyes of the government. On the other hand, SI organisations frequently urged the government to re-think their legislations regarding predator control, portraying gamekeepers as “struggling” with the effects of birds of prey and other predators and insinuating that these concerns are largely ignored by the bodies they claim to look to for help.

Whilst these four organisations were vocal on the potentially controversial topic of illegal killing and the actions of other groups, SNH and GWCT - who initially fitted our selection criteria – did not produce any articles that came under these themes, and as such were not a part of our final analysis. Whilst at first this may seem unimportant, the relative silence of these organisations in regards to such sensitive topics could have more meaning. Discursive strategies may be useful tools for those wanting to position themselves within the debate, but others may desire to keep their heads below the parapet. In particular, government authorities – such as SNH – tend to refrain from speaking of controversial topics in order to avoid attention and negative representation by the media (Lester and Hutchins, 2012). Although not a government body, GWCT are attempting to be a “middle-ground” group (see mission statement in table 1) and may thus also want to stay ‘invisible’ on such subjects.

#### **4.4) The wider context: discursive competition and what it means for conflict**

In utilising such publicly available forms of discourse in this way, organisations can try to ‘cement’ their discourse within society and, in a very loose sense, attempt to institutionalise it (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Saarikoski *et al.*, 2013; Buijs *et al.*, 2014). We argue that this fight for dominance, on such a widely available platform, could be damaging for collaborative processes and conflict mitigation.

Firstly, because individuals look to online sources and written communication as a potential knowledge base, discordance in the portrayal of the conflict could cause confusion and accentuate the distance between groups with opposing interests. For example, Young *et al.* (2016a) found that a lack of shared understanding surrounding conflict over sea eagles in Scotland was identified by interviewees as being a problem area, with definitions of the conflict needing to be adjusted to suit all stakeholder groups. In the present study, RC and SI organisations expressed different portrayals of not only the situation at hand, but also what – or more appropriately who – was responsible. Expressing these differences in written discourse that is published, and thus readily available,

cements these discordances within an open domain and can encourage the development of 'extreme' perceptions (Lunstrum *et al.*, 2017). This mismatch could drive mistrust, not only towards each other, but also mistrust in the fact that they themselves have control over the situation (Markova and Gillespie, 2012). This can reduce willingness between actors to share understanding and knowledge, and discuss the disagreement at hand (Young *et al.*, 2016b). We argue therefore, that conflict managers should aim to create situations where all actors feel 'in control', allowing a better environment with which to explore areas of disagreement and develop consensus.

Secondly, discourses can actively bring about conflict between stakeholders (Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Returning to Brox's (2000) theory of Schismogenesis, individuals who carry the same values, attitudes and beliefs will inevitably group together, and these schisms will create rivalry between opposing groups. This can foster an 'us versus them' mentality; groups share not only views, but also feelings of injustice and how these relate to the objectives and actions of others (Forsyth *et al.*, 1998; Gergen *et al.*, 2002; von Essen *et al.*, 2014; von Essen and Hansen, 2015). This is only exacerbated when it is brought to a public platform: actors assign meaning and symbolism to particular subjects or groups of people, emphasising the parts of reality that are in concordance with this world view (Ford *et al.*, 2002). As these messages are made visible in the public domain, others may pick up and adopt that train of thought, making prejudicial assumptions based on identity alone (Brox, 2000). As such, as smaller disagreements grow and accrue, so do the schisms between stakeholders – it almost creates a 'snowball' effect, with more and more actors from different parts of society becoming involved and adding their own narratives to the debate (Bateson, 1935; Gray, 2003; Aarts *et al.*, 2011).

In a case study regarding the conflict over forest resources in Agoua forest, Benin, discourse was found to actually drive the conflict itself; although nothing changed in the way the forest was managed, stakeholder discourses framed situations strategically to blame other parties, portray themselves as 'victims' and to construct stereotypes regarding those with alternative views (Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, there are many similarities with the discourse analysis here – actors used discourse to place blame, to position themselves and their agendas in a positive light, and to create stigma surrounding the alternative goals and interpretations of other actors. Whilst some power struggles are to be expected during coalitions of stakeholders (Leeuwis, 2000; 2011), we argue that - given the potentially influential role that these high-profile organisations have – the conflict over raptor management in Scotland has become a discursive one to a certain extent, with organisations such as RSPB and SGA as leading voices. The conflict may therefore be continued and developed not through illegal acts on the ground, but through the organisational discourse.



681 Lastly, if certain discourses cement themselves in the public debate, little room is left in which to  
682 allow change to occur, and the opportunity for new discourse to emerge is minimised (Percurul-  
683 Botines *et al.*, 2014; von Essen, 2017). As stated by Brox (2000), as long as extreme or ‘militant’  
684 actors exist in a conflict, then compromise is unlikely; alternative ideas are almost “squeezed out” by  
685 those that symbolise the objectives of conflicting stakeholders. Furthermore, dominant discourses  
686 may become ‘institutionalised’ – adopted by numerous actors at various levels, resulting in  
687 important changes in policy and becoming ingrained in culture (Raitio, 2012; Saarikoski *et al.*, 2013;  
688 Buijs *et al.*, 2014). Organisations can fuel this process. Those that promote the dominant discourse in  
689 discussions over management can actively increase the embeddedness of this discourse within  
690 society, gaining support from the public and other civil actors (Nooteboom, 2006; Buijs *et al.*, 2014).  
691 The strength of institutionalised discourse can drown out other counter discourses, leaving no place  
692 for alternative ideas to come through (Percurul-Botines *et al.*, 2014; von Essen, 2017). Additionally,  
693 more localised voices may be overridden and prevented from contributing to policy, which risks side-  
694 lining important values and perceptions that instead need to be integrated into such management  
695 decisions (Turnhout *et al.*, 2012; Buijs *et al.*, 2013; Fungfeld and McAvoy, 2014). This can magnify  
696 feelings of exclusion and disempowerment (Fungfeld and McAvoy, 2014). Furthermore, it can even  
697 prevent compliance with new management schemes and promote resistance (Barnes *et al.*, 2003;  
698 von Essen *et al.*, 2014) – almost producing a mentality of ‘if they don’t listen to us, why should we  
699 listen to them?’

700 Further research would be required to assess the political impact of the discourse of our focal  
701 organisations. However, there are indications that the diversity of views within stakeholder groups  
702 might be silenced and potentially squeezed out by the larger organisational voices such as RSPB and  
703 SGA. For example, common perception amongst both raptor workers and gamekeepers working in  
704 Scotland is that people on-the-ground are largely ignored, but “*tarred with the same brush*” as the  
705 organisations who represent them (pers. comm., 2017). This mismatch may limit more collaborative  
706 approaches to policy building, by preventing the goal of reaching a shared consensus by actively  
707 promoting contestation (von Essen and Allen, 2017).

#### 708 **4.4) Where next? Steps towards mitigation and a new dialogue**

709 So, amongst all these underhand tactics and struggles for power, is there a way forward? Certainly, it  
710 may seem that this is a complicated network of actors who foster a deep mistrust for one another  
711 and weave a tangled web of narratives that only serve to support their self-interests and drive them  
712 further apart. With this in mind, what should our next steps be? How can we transfer the findings of  
713 this study into the management of conflicts over land-use and/or species management, with a view  
714 to bettering decision making processes?

Translated to an arena outside of web articles and social media, the frustration between stakeholders is still apparent. Attempts at workshops and other collaborative processes, aimed at building co-management schemes - such as the 'Understanding Predation' project - have so far been unsuccessful at producing a shared solution. This was in part because participating groups disagreed on fundamental aspects, such as the extent of predation – even though actors were engaging with one another (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2016). But also, a lack of government funding and resources contributed to its failure. If parties are to reach a consensus on the future of grouse moor management and raptor conservation, it requires time and adequate resources to address the deeper-rooted social aspects and multi-levelled structure that characterises this, and many other, cases of conservation conflict (Woodroffe *et al.*, 2005; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011; Redpath *et al.*, 2015; Skogen *et al.*, 2017; von Essen, 2017).

As we have shown, such conflicts may be perpetuated through the use of discourse, especially by high-profile organisations who have the potential to influence opinion and policy action. Discourse is a significant part of conflict situations, and it can impact and shape how the conflict plays out. Respective conflict management strategies should therefore aim to understand discursive conflict between organisational actors. We have demonstrated that analysis of discourses between organisations can be a useful tool with which to explore potential drivers of conflict, revealing where stakeholders diverge on certain issues and how they perceive the roles and objectives of their opponents. This understanding and knowledge of the underlying variances and grievances of stakeholders should be used to inform policy, and paves the way for new approaches to mitigation (von Essen, 2017). This paper also carries a message for policy makers: such strong, institutionalised voices may drown out new, counter-discourses (Buijs *et al.*, 2013). Diversity in stakeholders may help to prevent dominant discourses from over-riding others – allowing a larger variety of values and attitudes to be incorporated into the process, thus enabling innovative solutions to be developed that encourage, rather than hinder, communication (Kelemen *et al.*, 2013; Buijs *et al.*, 2014; von Essen, 2017; von Essen and Allen, 2017). For example, the implementation of conservation policies in rural Spain became more successful once the old, dominant discourses were removed - actors disassociated with their old roles and became more open to new dialogue (Pecurul-Botines *et al.*, 2014). This may be achieved by paying attention to the discrepancies that occur between the organisational level and those stakeholders “on-the-ground” – whilst some dominant discourses reflect the values of these stakeholders, others may not necessarily reflect what they want and need, even if this is assumed (Bozak, 2008; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Mitigation strategies could be more successful if they were developed at a local level, working with the needs and values of stakeholders on a smaller scale (von Essen and Allen, 2017). Furthermore, workshops and forums aimed at

connecting policy-makers with the people on-the-ground – as opposed to the organisations that are perceived to be representing them – may assist to create more resilient solutions that benefit the people who are actually going to be affected by these management decisions.

However, if conflict is multi-levelled, so must be its mitigation. Organisational conflict must also be addressed. Rectifying the relationships at this level could have a ‘filter-down’ effect, laying the foundations for collaboration between other stakeholders – essentially leading by example. Again, this is where understanding the use of discourse could be beneficial. Our analysis demonstrated that whilst actors diverged on many different issues, there were a few storylines which were shared between all. These could be utilised as a springboard on which to build new dialogue between these organisations. Using shared interpretations as a starting point for adaptive management assists a sense of “joint ownership” over the solution and encourages a more collaborative rational (Füngfeld and McAvoy, 2014). At the institutional level, cohesion between organisations is important for the success of such processes (Hillier, 2003; Soini and Aakkula, 2007; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Using areas that are apparently agreed upon – such as the storyline that ‘raptors should be protected’ – as a basis for discussions and engagement encourages a united front, and could therefore work to develop a shared solution and facilitate trust between parties. This could also establish an important feeling among involved stakeholders that they remain in control of the situation, and that authorities are truly independent of bias – especially if shared concerns and goals are reflected in policy decisions (Butler *et al.*, 2014; von Essen and Allen, 2017).

## 5) Conclusion

---

This paper examined the role of discourse by high profile organisations in a conservation conflict between the interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management in Scotland. The discursive strategies used by these actors and the implications of these strategies in driving the conflict itself was explored. Analysis demonstrated that organisations will depict often divergent interpretations of the same situation, which align with their own objectives and goals. Furthermore, discursive strategies were employed possibly to change perceptions and policy in their favour, and ultimately ‘win’ the debate. These included diminishing the stance of other actors by dismissing their narratives, accusing them of being false and untrue, and pulling apart their arguments. Discursive contestation such as this can not only drive conflict, but become a conflict of its own (Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Conflict management strategies should therefore be aware of what is constituted in discourse between key organisations, and the potential influence this can have in shaping and exacerbating the situation.

Understanding and addressing the discourse of high profile actors may prevent the institutionalisation of 'old' discourses, enabling more diverse discourses to come through and allowing innovative and more inclusive management solutions to be developed. This paper has also shown that through analysing discourse, it may be possible to ascertain where stakeholders diverge and converge on certain issues – knowledge that may be used to inform policy in order to build a resilient, long-term solution. Shared values could be used as a springboard to begin new dialogue between stakeholders: a starting point for the mitigation of conflicts over land use.

## 6) Acknowledgments

---

The authors would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and sincerely thank the Macaulay Development Trust and the University of Aberdeen for funding this research and providing their continued support. We would also like to express our gratitude to three anonymous referees for their constructive comments on the earlier versions of this manuscript.