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

Isla D. Hodgson^{ab*}, Steve M. Redpath^a, Anke Fischer^b, Juliette Young^c

^a*School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen, 23 St. Machar drive, Aberdeen AB24 3UU, Scotland, UK*

^b*Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences (SEGS), James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH, Scotland, UK*

^c*NERC Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik, EH26 0QB, UK*

*Corresponding author. Tel: +44 1224 395250
Email address: r01idh14@abdn.ac.uk (I.Hodgson)
Room G49, 23 St. Machar Drive (ACES), University of Aberdeen, AB24 3UU

30 Highlights

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

37 Abstract

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

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

61 Keywords

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

63 Fighting talk: How do organisations use discourse in the conflict over 64 raptor management in Scotland?

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

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68 1) Introduction

69

70 Conflict poses one of the most significant challenges to wildlife management across the globe
71 (Redpath *et al.*, 2015). The actual root causes of conflicts in conservation are often latent and so are
72 difficult to define and address (Engel and Korf, 2005; Mathevet *et al.*, 2015). It may seem that
73 conflicts arise due to the impacts of wildlife on people – livestock loss caused by predation for
74 example – or the impacts of people upon wildlife (Treves and Karanth, 2003; Dickman *et al.*, 2014).
75 Equally, a form of land use may appear to threaten conservation initiatives, or land managers may
76 be affected by environmental policy (Yusran *et al.*, 2017; Mason *et al.*, 2018). However, these
77 disputes are often manifestations of deeper-rooted social conflicts, stemming from asymmetries in
78 power, political preferences, values, beliefs and cultures (Skogen, 2003; Miall, 2004; Skogen *et al.*,
79 2008; Young *et al.*, 2016a). With each further dispute, these schisms are brought repeatedly to the
80 forefront and become embedded, sometimes developing into an integral part of group identity
81 (Madden and McQuinn, 2014). Certain social norms – such as the willingness to illegally kill
82 predators – become associated with particular groups of people, and conflicts become heavily value-
83 laden with different normative perceptions of what or who is ‘acceptable’ (Skogen *et al.*, 2008; 2009;
84 Crowley *et al.*, 2017). It is now widely recognised that the relationship dynamics between
85 stakeholders are more problematic than the economic or ecological issues that are so often given
86 more attention by conflict managers (Marshall *et al.*, 2007; Redpath *et al.*, 2013; Lühtrath and
87 Schraml, 2015). As a result of underlying social conflicts, stakeholders become unable – or unwilling
88 – to engage with alternative views, making collaborative processes aimed at finding solutions for
89 integrated land use challenging and ultimately, unsuccessful (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Stenseke *et al.*,
90 2009; Lute *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the social dimensions that hinder effective dialogue can
91 improve these processes, and lead to policy decisions that are better aligned and received (Madden,
92 2004; Stenseke *et al.*, 2009; Fox and Murphy, 2012).

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

97 represented by national and international organisations, who are typically invited to represent
98 different interests at deliberative and decision-making processes (Jasanoff, 1997; Eden *et al.*, 2006).
99 Such organisations can therefore become actors within the debate, coming into disagreement if they
100 feel their objectives, or the interests and values they embody, are threatened. These actors may
101 enter into conflict discursively; using publicly available sources of information, such as web articles
102 and social media, to contest with one another (Buijs, 2009; Lester and Hutchins, 2012). Such
103 resources can have substantial outreach, and therefore provide the ideal platform for organisations
104 to drive forwards their own agendas by engaging the public and/or authoritative bodies with their
105 campaign (Entman, 2003; Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Gamson, 2005; Buijs, 2009; Diaz *et al.*, 2015;
106 Smith and Watson, 2015). Using these outputs, groups may express their understanding of the
107 situation, their preferred outcome, and their perceptions of the views and actions of others (Eder,
108 1996; Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Buchanan, 2013).

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

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

131 conflicts will grow in intensity, making them harder to alleviate (Brox, 2000; Madden and McQuinn,
132 2014). As these organisations are frequently present in decision-making processes, their adversarial
133 positioning may hinder the development of sustainable, collaborative solutions to land management
134 issues (Buijs *et al.*, 2011; Fox and Murphy, 2012). By choosing to advance their own position, some
135 actors may succeed in getting a specific interpretation reflected by policy (Carragee and Roefs, 2004;
136 Buijs *et al.*, 2014; von Essen and Allen, 2017). Whilst this is neither right or wrong *per se*, it may
137 exacerbate tensions between local stakeholders, who feel their concerns have been neglected
138 (Richardson, 2011; Linnell and Markova, 2014). It is therefore imperative to investigate what is
139 constituted in the discourses of organisations involved in conflict, unpicking the social mechanisms
140 that may drive such contestation – such as important relationship dynamics (e.g. O’Donnell and
141 Stokowski, 2016) - so that they may be addressed. Furthermore, such exploration can shed light on
142 not only potential areas of conflict, but also shared concerns and values. We argue this knowledge
143 could then be used to inform policy and management strategies, by highlighting areas of potential
144 consensus that could be used as a starting point for new dialogue.

145 The use of discursive strategies by stakeholders has been studied extensively in the literature related
146 to ecosystem management, ecosystem services, species reintroduction and climate change (Arts *et al.*
147 *et al.*, 2012; Ferranti *et al.*, 2014; Waylen and Young, 2014; Carmen *et al.*, 2016; Crate and Nuttall,
148 2016). However, the use of discourse by high profile organisations within conflict is still poorly
149 understood, raising questions about the implications for these situations. This paper aims to
150 understand the use of discourse by six key organisations associated with the conflict between the
151 interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management in Scotland – a contentious and
152 deep-rooted conflict, with an extensive history. We use discourse analysis to ascertain 1) how these
153 organisations publicly interpret the conflict and its related issues, such as illegal killing; 2) how they
154 represent the roles and motives of other actors within the conflict; and 3) the implications of using
155 these discursive strategies to support their own objectives and agendas. Finally, we make
156 suggestions as to how this improved understanding of their use of discourse can be used to move
157 towards a successful mitigation strategy for conflict.

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

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

165 Primarily a change in legislation - it was declared illegal to intentionally kill, harm or disturb a bird of
166 prey or its nest in Britain in 1954 – alongside extensive conservation efforts has seen the return and
167 expansion of several of these species. Yet, this has led to concerns amongst some members of the
168 shooting sector over the impact of increasing raptor populations on gamebirds. Hen harrier *Circus*
169 *cyaneus* are a particular focus of such apprehensions, and have been shown to be a potential
170 limiting factor on populations of red grouse *Lagopus lagopus scoticus* (Thirgood *et al.*, 2000b). It is
171 estimated that up to 1.7million of Scotland’s landscapes are managed to support the recreational
172 sport of driven grouse shooting (Grant *et al.*, 2012). The sport provides revenue to Scotland’s
173 economy, supporting rural communities, and holds important cultural value (Thirgood and Redpath,
174 2008; Sotherton *et al.*, 2009). However, there is evidence to suggest that the illegal killing and
175 disturbance of birds of prey is ongoing and associated with land managed for driven grouse
176 shooting; between 1994 and 2014, 779 cases of illegal killing were recorded, with gamekeepers on
177 shooting estates confirmed or suspected as the culprits for 86% of these incidents (RSPB, 2014). It is
178 argued that this has negatively impacted populations of hen harrier (Redpath *et al.*, 2002), golden
179 eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (Whitfield *et al.*, 2007) and red kite *Milvus milvus* (Smart *et al.*, 2010).
180 Similarly, common buzzard *Buteo buteo* are an emerging conflict, becoming the source of debate
181 over whether licences should be administered for their control following their successful population
182 recovery (Warren, 2016). This has resulted in animosity between the main stakeholder groups and
183 has contributed to the breaking down of trust, leaving a lack of dialogue and many unwilling to
184 communicate (Redpath *et al.*, 2015; Young *et al.*, 2016a).

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

193 2) Materials and Methodology

195 **2.1) Analytical concepts**

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

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

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

224 **2.2) Data Collection and analysis**

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

247 “red kite”, “conservation”, “persecution”, “killing”, “shooting” and “grouse moor”. To ensure that
248 these search terms did not exclude relevant articles, all general news articles regarding Scotland on
249 these websites were also searched individually for stories linked to birds of prey and/or grouse moor
250 management. To ascertain the overarching subject represented by each article, a thematic analysis
251 was conducted; patterns within the data, such as common words and phrases, were collated to form
252 a theme (e.g. illegal killing) and assigned initial codes. Once initial codes were established, themes
253 were reviewed and further defined, then finalised. Articles were then categorised and coded using
254 nVivo (v.8). From the analysis, nine themes emerged (see appendix for detailed theme definitions).
255 For the purpose of this paper, two themes will be focussed upon - ‘Illegal Killing’ and ‘Other Actors’ –
256 as these are the most relevant to the research questions this study aims to address. ‘Illegal killing’
257 refers to articles that regard the death or injury of a raptor specifically, for example incidents of
258 shooting or poisoning. ‘Other actors’ encompasses articles that concern the actions or statements of
259 another stakeholder group, either via a direct quote, or discussion of their objectives and motives.

260 Articles coded as these two categories were then subjected to a further, more detailed line-by-line
261 analysis, and ‘storylines’ ascertained from this. A total of 34 storylines were identified, and each
262 assigned a specific code. Storylines that were expressed by all organisations were labelled as ‘shared’
263 and marked (‘*’). ‘Mutual’ storylines were also apparent; storylines that were the same and used by
264 both, but perceived to be the actions or opinions of the other group (distinguished using ‘+’).

265 3) Results

266

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

270 Within the two themes, six main ‘topics’ were identified (see figs. 1 and 2). Illegal killing articles
271 discussed the severity and extent of the problem, the reasons behind raptor declines and illegal
272 killing itself, and the impacts of raptors on gamebirds, other wildlife and rural professions. Articles
273 under the second theme concerned the knowledge, credibility and abilities of other actors, the
274 motives behind their actions and their roles within the conflict. 36 storylines were identified in total.
275 32 were unique to SI or RC organisations alone, and 4 were shared between them. Both RC and SI
276 discourse portrayed illegal killing as a negative act that must be prevented, and agreed that raptors
277 should be protected. They also shared a perception that the government did not see wildlife crime
278 as a priority. However, the context of these shared storylines differed between groups, and it
279 became apparent that RC and SI diverged in their interpretations of several different subjects.

280 3.1) Interpretations of illegal killing, raptor management and associated issues

281 **3.1.1) The severity and extent of illegal killing**

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

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

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

310 **3.1.2) Causes of persecution and who is to blame**

311 RC organisations considered that the shooting industry, in particular gamekeepers, were the only
312 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).*

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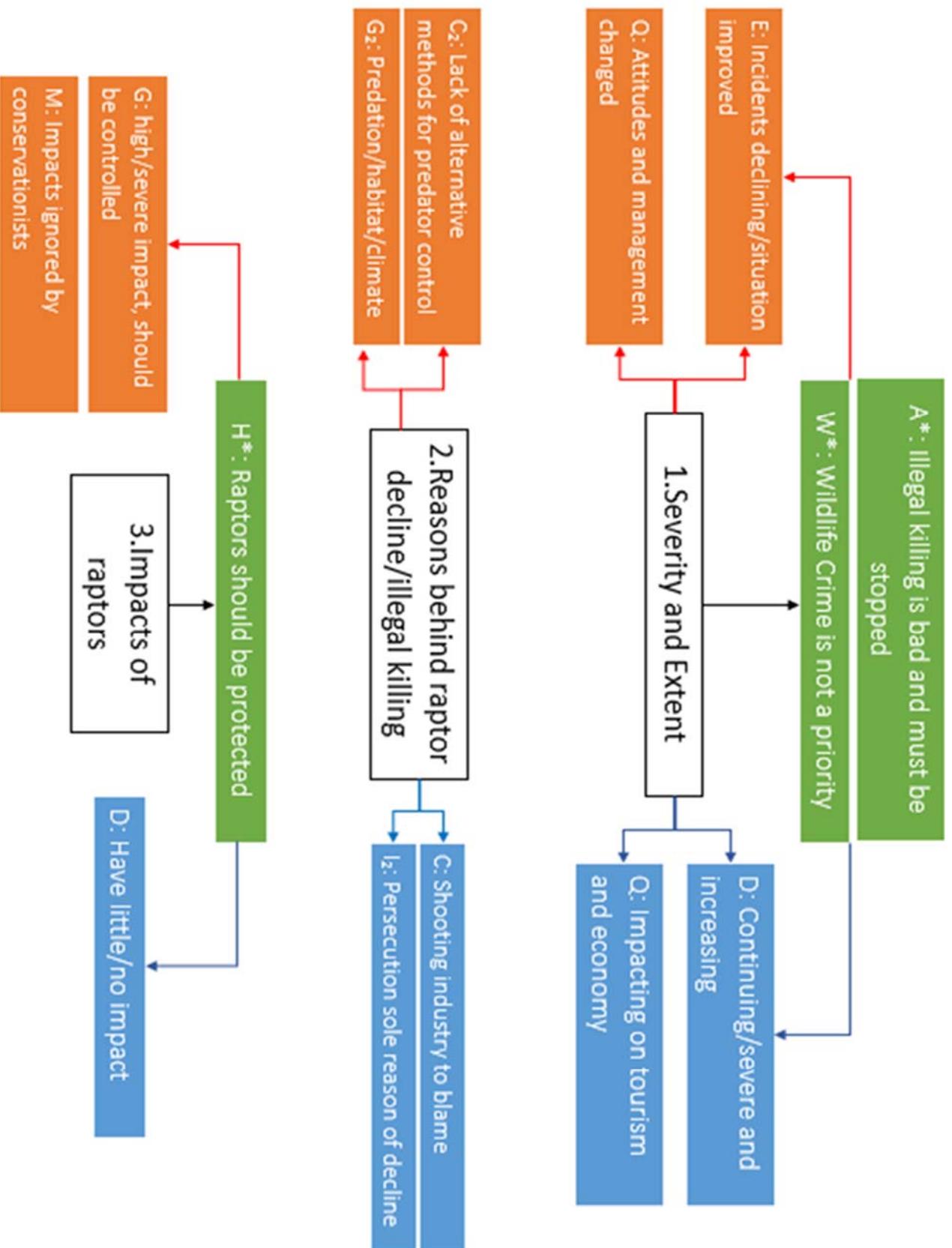


Figure 1: Diagram showing the allocation of storylines identified from the discourse analysis, in relation to three overarching themes surrounding the topic of illegal killing, its causes, and the impacts of raptors. Colours denote the allocation of the storyline: blue indicates a storyline exclusive 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.

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

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

344 **3.1.3) Impacts of raptors**

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

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

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

371 3.2 Perceptions of other actors

372 3.2.1) Motives

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

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

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

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

398 **3.2.2) Knowledge and Credibility**

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

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

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

430 **3.2.3) Roles and Relationships**

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

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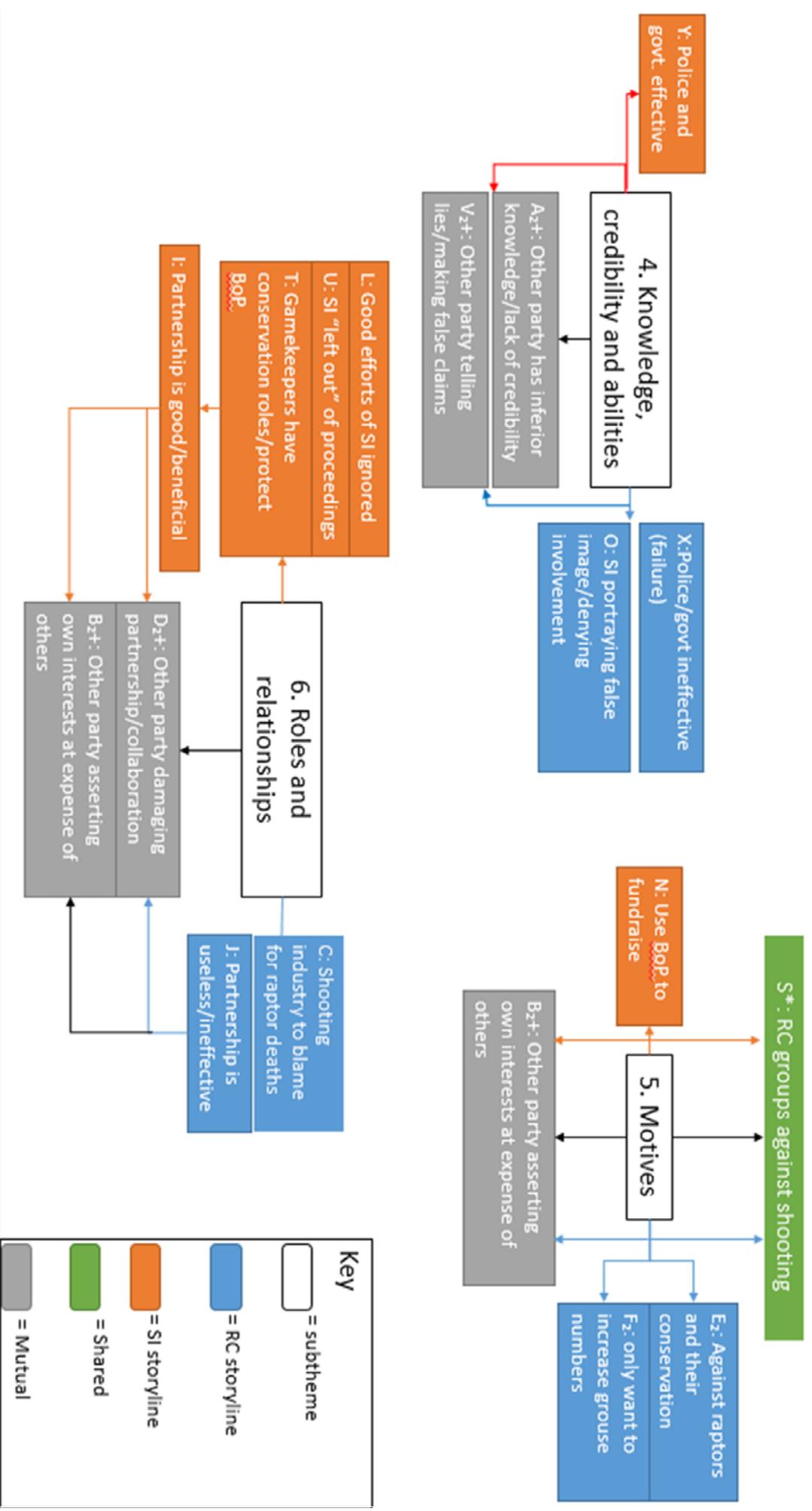


Figure 2: Diagram showing the allocation of storylines identified from the discourse analysis, in relation to three overarching themes regarding the roles, motives and abilities of other actors within the conflict. Colours denote the allocation of the storyline: blue indicates a storyline exclusive to 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.

455 4) Discussion

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

464 What may drive these different interpretations will now be explored. What possible discursive
465 strategies are being employed by these organisations, and to what purpose? Furthermore,
466 inferences are made as to what the implications of such strategies may be in respect to the conflict.
467 The paper concludes with suggestions as to how this knowledge may be incorporated into conflict
468 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

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

471 **4.1) The blame game: using discourse to portray a certain version of events**

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

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

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

514 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).

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

531 **4.2) War of the words: discourse as an arena for competition**

532 Exploring in more detail the idea that certain interpretations within discourses are used as a tool
533 with which to 'out-do' one another, it must be asked what the intended purpose of this discursive
534 competition is. Blekesaune (1997) suggests that competition over narratives is to "*conquer the*
535 *centre of the discursive arena*" – in other words, narratives are used as a means to "win" the debate
536 by interpreting the conflict in a way that is beneficial to their own interests, but damaging to those
537 of others (Entman *et al.*, 2003; Pecural-Botines *et al.*, 2014). This also allows actors who perceive
538 their discourse to be less 'dominant' – or threatened by opposing groups – to gain control by
539 convincing others, namely policy makers, that their interpretation is the 'right' one (Buijs *et al.*,
540 2014; Dinnie *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, using interpretations tactically allows these actors to disrupt or
541 infiltrate current networks of power by rejecting the discourses they see as dominant (Neves-Graça,
542 2004; Lester and Hutchins, 2012). For example, scientific expertise is often viewed as hegemonic,
543 ruling the language and policy that surrounds environmental issues and wildlife management (Allen
544 *et al.*, 2001; Boswell, 2008; Wesselink *et al.*, 2009; Skogen and Kränge, 2010). Often, this perceived
545 power causes those whose interests lie in rural traditions or professions – whose way of life may be
546 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 SRSG 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 SRSG 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*” (SRSG), 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, suppressing 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

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

624 Whilst these four organisations were vocal on the potentially controversial topic of illegal killing and
625 the actions of other groups, SNH and GWCT - who initially fitted our selection criteria – did not produce
626 any articles that came under these themes, and as such were not a part of our final analysis. Whilst at
627 first this may seem unimportant, the relative silence of these organisations in regards to such sensitive
628 topics could have more meaning. Discursive strategies may be useful tools for those wanting to
629 position themselves within the debate, but others may desire to keep their heads below the parapet.
630 In particular, government authorities – such as SNH – tend to refrain from speaking of controversial
631 topics in order to avoid attention and negative representation by the media (Lester and Hutchins,
632 2012). Although not a government body, GWCT are attempting to be a “middle-ground” group (see
633 mission statement in table 1) and may thus also want to stay ‘invisible’ on such subjects.

634 **4.4) The wider context: discursive competition and what it means for conflict**

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

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

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

655 Secondly, discourses can actively bring about conflict between stakeholders (Idrissou *et al.*, 2011).
656 Returning to Brox's (2000) theory of Schismogenesis, individuals who carry the same values,
657 attitudes and beliefs will inevitably group together, and these schisms will create rivalry between
658 opposing groups. This can foster an 'us versus them' mentality; groups share not only views, but also
659 feelings of injustice and how these relate to the objectives and actions of others (Forsyth *et al.*,
660 1998; Gergen *et al.*, 2002; von Essen *et al.*, 2014; von Essen and Hansen, 2015). This is only
661 exacerbated when it is brought to a public platform: actors assign meaning and symbolism to
662 particular subjects or groups of people, emphasising the parts of reality that are in concordance with
663 this world view (Ford *et al.*, 2002). As these messages are made visible in the public domain, others
664 may pick up and adopt that train of thought, making prejudicial assumptions based on identity alone
665 (Brox, 2000). As such, as smaller disagreements grow and accrue, so do the schisms between
666 stakeholders – it almost creates a 'snowball' effect, with more and more actors from different parts
667 of society becoming involved and adding their own narratives to the debate (Bateson, 1935; Gray,
668 2003; Aarts *et al.*, 2011).

669 In a case study regarding the conflict over forest resources in Agoua forest, Benin, discourse was
670 found to actually drive the conflict itself; although nothing changed in the way the forest was
671 managed, stakeholder discourses framed situations strategically to blame other parties, portray
672 themselves as 'victims' and to construct stereotypes regarding those with alternative views (Idrissou
673 *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, there are many similarities with the discourse analysis here – actors used
674 discourse to place blame, to position themselves and their agendas in a positive light, and to create
675 stigma surrounding the alternative goals and interpretations of other actors. Whilst some power
676 struggles are to be expected during coalitions of stakeholders (Leeuwis, 2000; 2011), we argue that -
677 given the potentially influential role that these high-profile organisations have – the conflict over
678 raptor management in Scotland has become a discursive one to a certain extent, with organisations
679 such as RSPB and SGA as leading voices. The conflict may therefore be continued and developed not
680 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?

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

726 As we have shown, such conflicts may be perpetuated through the use of discourse, especially by
727 high-profile organisations who have the potential to influence opinion and policy action. Discourse is
728 a significant part of conflict situations, and it can impact and shape how the conflict plays out.
729 Respective conflict management strategies should therefore aim to understand discursive conflict
730 between organisational actors. We have demonstrated that analysis of discourses between
731 organisations can be a useful tool with which to explore potential drivers of conflict, revealing where
732 stakeholders diverge on certain issues and how they perceive the roles and objectives of their
733 opponents. This understanding and knowledge of the underlying variances and grievances of
734 stakeholders should be used to inform policy, and paves the way for new approaches to mitigation
735 (von Essen, 2017). This paper also carries a message for policy makers: such strong, institutionalised
736 voices may drown out new, counter-discourses (Buijs *et al.*, 2013). Diversity in stakeholders may
737 help to prevent dominant discourses from over-riding others – allowing a larger variety of values and
738 attitudes to be incorporated into the process, thus enabling innovative solutions to be developed
739 that encourage, rather than hinder, communication (Kelemen *et al.*, 2013; Buijs *et al.*, 2014; von
740 Essen, 2017; von Essen and Allen, 2017). For example, the implementation of conservation policies
741 in rural Spain became more successful once the old, dominant discourses were removed - actors
742 disassociated with their old roles and became more open to new dialogue (Pecurul-Botines *et al.*,
743 2014). This may be achieved by paying attention to the discrepancies that occur between the
744 organisational level and those stakeholders “on-the-ground” – whilst some dominant discourses
745 reflect the values of these stakeholders, others may not necessarily reflect what they want and
746 need, even if this is assumed (Bozak, 2008; Idrissou *et al.*, 2011). Mitigation strategies could be more
747 successful if they were developed at a local level, working with the needs and values of stakeholders
748 on a smaller scale (von Essen and Allen, 2017). Furthermore, workshops and forums aimed at

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

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

768 5) Conclusion

769
770 This paper examined the role of discourse by high profile organisations in a conservation conflict
771 between the interests of raptor conservation and grouse moor management in Scotland. The
772 discursive strategies used by these actors and the implications of these strategies in driving the
773 conflict itself was explored. Analysis demonstrated that organisations will depict often divergent
774 interpretations of the same situation, which align with their own objectives and goals. Furthermore,
775 discursive strategies were employed possibly to change perceptions and policy in their favour, and
776 ultimately ‘win’ the debate. These included diminishing the stance of other actors by dismissing their
777 narratives, accusing them of being false and untrue, and pulling apart their arguments. Discursive
778 contestation such as this can not only drive conflict, but become a conflict of its own (Idrissou *et al.*,
779 2011). Conflict management strategies should therefore be aware of what is constituted in discourse
780 between key organisations, and the potential influence this can have in shaping and exacerbating
781 the situation.

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

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