

Mull Eagle Scheme

Mull Eagles

The island of Mull supports one of the largest concentrations of eagles in Britain. It has approximately 30 golden eagle ranges, evenly distributed across the island, while the population of breeding sea eagles (white-tailed eagles) reached 9 pairs by 2003. Juvenile birds of both species are also present. As a result, the island makes a major contribution to eagle conservation nationally.

Sea eagle numbers have increased steadily since they began to recolonise Mull in the 1980s, following the national reintroduction programme. During this period, the island has supported the highest density of breeding sea eagles in Scotland. Up to 35 individual sea eagles have been sighted on Mull (2003/04) and identified as either breeding, unattached adults or young birds not yet reached breeding age. Most are either original colonists or came from Mull nests. The remainder originated from other sea eagle ranges in Scotland.

Golden eagles usually pair for life from around 3 - 5 years old and use one of several nest sites within a home range. Nest sites are usually crag ledges but trees are also used. Territorial pairs tend to use ridges and hill tops for navigating around their home range, usually within up to 6km radius of their nest site. They feed on carrion all year round, but require live prey, especially when rearing chicks. On Mull, they are known to prey upon hares, rabbits and medium sized birds in particular.

Sea eagles also pair for life at about the same age but they are less territorial than golden eagles and appear to be more opportunistic in their choice of carrion and live prey. Rabbit, hares, seabirds and deer tend to dominate their diet but some birds in some years take sheep carrion and prey. Sea eagle nesting locations tend to be in coastal areas, mainly in large trees.

The Scheme

The Mull Eagle Scheme offers support to hill farmers on Mull who have sea eagles and/or golden eagles on their land. It has the following objectives:

- Helping to safeguard the sea eagle and golden eagle populations on Mull, through increased wardening and monitoring of eagles, in conjunction with RSPB and Police Wildlife Liaison officer led initiatives.
- Fostering the pride and commitment of land managers towards the eagle populations on Mull and the recognition that eagles are an asset to the island.
- Supporting land managers in measures aimed at reducing vulnerability of sheep flocks to sea eagle predation.
- Trialling a number of habitat improvements aimed at increasing levels of wild prey taken by eagles.

The scheme offers incentive payments towards:

- Extra shepherding and sheep health measures, aimed at reducing risk of predation by sea eagles.
- Extra support for lamb protection, in special cases where sea eagles nest close to lambing parks.
- Carrying out reporting/wardening tasks related to both golden and sea eagles.
- Habitat management trials, aimed at increasing the levels of eagle prey, at a few selected locations.

The Natural Care Scheme supercedes the Pilot Mull Sea Eagle Management Scheme which was introduced in 1998 and ends in December 2004. The experience from operating the pilot has been used in developing the new scheme.

Who can Apply for the Scheme?

The scheme is open for applications from IACS-registered agricultural units with hill/rough grazings supporting golden eagles and/or sea eagles on the Isle of Mull (including Ulva and Gometra).

Units which do not include hill/rough grazings will only be eligible in special cases and at the discretion of SNH. However, as a guide, units with in-bye or cultivated ground only, as declared in the IACS form, are eligible for the scheme if:

- eagles are nesting on the land,
- eagles nest within 5 km of the land and visit it regularly to hunt and find food,
- an eagle nest can only be accessed via the land by eagle workers and/or the occupier is expected to manage members of the public wishing to gain access across the land to view eagles.

Applicants should normally have secure tenure for at least 5 years. If you do not, it may still be possible to enter the scheme, depending on your circumstances.



Scheme Details

The scheme includes several different elements as explained below. Please note that not all applicants will be eligible for all of these.

1. Wardening

This part of the scheme recognises that land managers have a key role in:

- helping to protect eagles on their land,
- facilitating eagle monitoring and research,
- dealing with members of the public interested in viewing eagles.

In most cases this activity relates to sea eagles as they generally nest low down in coastal locations close to farm steadings and in-bye parks. Golden eagles normally nest on the hill usually remote from public and farm activity, but none-the-less can be threatened by unwary or inappropriate visitors.

When you apply for the scheme you will receive an advice sheet relating to wardening activities. This will include guidance on dealing with the public, along with details of relevant contacts for reporting purposes.

1.1 Basic Wardening Payment

If you wish to join the scheme you will be asked to participate in the basic wardening element of the scheme, for which there is a payment of £50 per year. You will be required to:

- co-operate with all eagle workers appointed by SNH,
- deal with public/interested parties encountered during normal farming activities,
- report any suspicious activity or threatening behaviour towards eagles.

This basic payment is aimed at land managers whose farming activities are not close to any eagle nest sites and who only have occasional call to be involved in the above activities.

1.2 Enhanced Wardening Payment

An enhanced rate of up to £500 will be payable to land managers who are regularly involved in wardening-type activities as a result of sea eagles nesting close to farm activity.

In addition to the tasks noted in 1.1 above, there may sometimes be a need to manage public access on your land. This could involve directing the public away from sensitive locations, or facilitating access at locations where this would not cause disturbance to eagles or disruption to farming activity. There will also be a need to take the nest location into account when carrying out farming activities nearby.

You will be eligible for an enhanced payment in the following circumstances:

1. The main farm steading or residence is within 5 km radius of an active sea eagle nest site*.
- and, either**
2. The nest site is within 100 m of a public access route for which the applicant has some responsibility e.g. path, track, road, car park.

or

3. There is an obvious connection between the nest location and farm that could lead to interaction between people and the birds. For example, a farm track; the nest is within line of sight from public gathering points on the farm; birds normally forage or fly directly over in-by or public gathering point to reach food source.

*An active sea eagle nest site is one where breeding activity takes place in a particular year. Breeding activity includes anything from the point of nest occupation to chick/s fledging.

Please note that you may not be eligible for this enhanced payment every year, as sea eagle nest locations can change from year to year. Eligibility will be assessed by SNH each year, in relation to nest locations, and agreed with you shortly after the start of the nesting season.

If a nest site is active up to the end of the breeding season in September this will normally require more time input than one which is abandoned earlier. In recognition of this, payments will be based on £50 per month that breeding activity continues, from January to September, along with the £50 basic payment.

Examples:

- (i) Nest site active for the whole season, running into September: this would qualify for 9 months payment (£450) plus the £50 basic payment, totalling £500.
- (ii) Nest site active until May: this would qualify for 5 months payment (£250) plus the £50 basic payment, totalling £300.

If the nest is not active for the whole season, claims for up to £500 will still be considered in cases where the nest location or bird behaviour results in extra time inputs. In such cases, you should seek SNH approval first and agree on a method of recording time inputs to allow SNH to verify and calculate payment at the end of the breeding season. Payment will be made on the submission of a record of hours spent working on wardening activity up to a maximum of 50 hours.

In addition to the above payments, SNH can also assist you in resolving any problems arising from a nest location on your land (for example, situations where public access has implications for farming activity).



2. Sheep Management

These measures are aimed at reducing the risk of sea eagle predation on sheep flocks.

Extra Shepherding and Sheep Health Measures are together subject to a payment ceiling of £1500/year and based on the total forage hectareage on your holding to which sheep have access. The Lambing Park Measures attract additional one-off payments to cover capital items necessary to implement the measure.

2.1 Extra Shepherding

This payment is available to all units supporting sheep. It is intended to assist towards extra shepherding inputs during the sea eagle breeding season.

Payment: £0.28 per hectare per year.

2.2 Sheep Health Measures

This payment is available to all units supporting sheep.

You will be required to undertake at least 2 of the following measures:

- Annual ewe tick treatment.
- Provision of ewe nutrient supplements prior to lambing.
- Use of protective jackets on new born lambs.
- Lambing shelters.
- Other with prior approval of SNH.

Payment: £0.31 per hectare per year.

2.3 Lambing Park Measures

These payments are for measures which help to reduce the impact of sea eagles on lambing parks. They are available only in special cases where sea eagles are nesting close to a lambing park and are known to hunt over the park. Eligibility for these payments will be assessed each year. If you are eligible, SNH will work with you to agree an Action Plan which may include some of the following measures:

- Scanning ewes in order to separate those carrying twins from singles prior to lambing.
- Use of scaring devices where the device will not disturb eagles on their nest.
- Provision of supplementary food for eagles to reduce their need to hunt over the park.
- Erection of a temporary lambing shelter.

Payments: Where measures are agreed in the action plan, payment will normally cover the full costs of carrying out the work. The payment details will be discussed with you when your plan is being prepared.

3. Habitat Management Trials

A number of trials will be carried out at selected sites. These are aimed at helping to improve habitat for eagle prey. Measures are likely to include the use of enclosure plots.

As this is an experimental measure, it will not be automatically available to all scheme applicants. SNH staff will contact managers of potentially suitable sites to discuss whether they would be interested in taking part in these trials.

Payments will reflect the costs of setting up the trial at each site and will be discussed with individual site managers.

Summary of Scheme Payments

	Measure	Payment Rates	Notes
1.1	Wardening – Basic Payment	£50 per year	Payable to all applicants in all years
1.2	Wardening – Enhanced Payment	Up to £500 per year	Subject to annual assessment of eligibility
2.1	Extra shepherding	£0.28 per ha per year	Subject to payment maximum of £1500
2.2	Sheep Health	£0.31 per ha per year	
2.3	Lambing Park Measures	As agreed in Action Plan.	



General Conditions of the Scheme

You will need to complete an Annual Record of Management by end of October each year to ensure payment by 15 December. This will include information on the work carried out under the scheme during the year.

SNH will make payments as follows:

- Annual payments will be made in arrears by 15 December.
- Capital items purchased according to the agreed plan for lambing park measures will be paid on proof of purchase and re-imbursed net of VAT if so registered.

Payments may be reviewed by SNH during the lifetime of the scheme to ensure they remain compatible with other agri-environment scheme rates and with state aid funding rules. Any changes to payments will be made after consultation with farming representatives on Mull.

Applicants are expected to give SEERAD permission to release relevant IACS information to SNH in order for SNH to assess their eligibility and calculate payments.

How to Enter the Scheme

The scheme is open for applications until October 2007.

If you would like to participate in the scheme please send in a completed application form to the address below.

Please get in touch if you wish to discuss any aspect of the scheme before filling in your application.

Once your application is approved, SNH will prepare a formal Management Agreement to be signed by all parties. You will not be committed to participating in the scheme until you have signed the agreement.

Your management agreement will start on 1 January (to coincide with the start of the eagle nesting season) and run for 5 years.

For further information about the scheme please contact:

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OBAN
Argyll PA34 4DN

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General information on the Natural Care programme can be found on the SNH website
<http://www.snh.org.uk>



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ISSN 1479-7798

NP.1501104

Photography:

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