

PROJECT SPECIFICATION

Competition Code:	CTE 1201
Date for return of tenders:	4:00pm on 30 April 2012
Address for tender submission: (the Competition Code must be shown on the envelope and the tender submitted in line with the instructions in the attached guidance, otherwise your tender may not be accepted)	Mrs Omotayo Odubade Defra Area 4C Nobel House London SW1P 3JR
Number of electronic & hard copies required:	1 copy on CD-ROM plus 2 hard copies
Contact for information relating to this project specification:	Name: Richard Brand-Hardy Tel no: 020 7238 5005 E-mail: Richard.brand-hardy@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Proposed ownership of Intellectual Property (contractor or Defra):	Defra
Proposed start-date (if known):	1 June 2012
Proposed end-date (if known):	31 December 2015

PROJECT TITLE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE PREDATION OF PHEASANT POULTS BY BUZZARDS

Background

1. It has been claimed that raptors, particularly buzzards, have been causing serious damage to game interests resulting in financial loss because of predation on pheasant poults. A 2011 survey by the National Gamekeepers Organisation found that 76% of gamekeepers believe that buzzards have a harmful effect on gamebirds. The Breeding Bird Survey 2010 results for breeding buzzards in England shows an increase in the breeding population of 146% between 1995 and 2009 though this increase may have levelled off between 2009 and 2010 as a zero change is recorded.
2. Natural England has recently received requests to undertake licensed lethal control of buzzards, to prevent serious damage at pheasant release pens. At present, the extent of the problem on a national scale is unclear. However,

anecdotal evidence suggests that it can be significant at the local site level. In one case, it is claimed that 25-30% of pheasant poults were lost to buzzards. The applicant claims that this is an economically unsustainable rate of loss.

3. Buzzards are generalist feeders that respond to local variations in prey populations, for example, vole numbers. It is claimed that individuals may target pheasant release pens if they learn that they can find a readily available food supply at them. It is in these situations where they can come into conflict with game interests.
4. Buzzards, like all wild birds, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England which applies the requirements of the EU Wild Birds Directive at a national level. This protection can be derogated through licences issued by Natural England (NB licensing is devolved). Licences can be issued for a range of specified purposes, including preventing serious damage to livestock (which includes poultry and in certain circumstances, game birds) and to conserve wild birds. For all licenses under Section 16 of the 1981 Act, there is a general presumption against lethal control of wild birds unless there is no satisfactory alternative. NE determines licenses in accordance with Defra's overarching wildlife management policy and topic specific policies <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife-management/licensing-policy/> It is also Defra policy that there is a presumption against lethal control.

Research needs

5. Although research has yet to identify the extent of impact of buzzards at a national or local scale, there does appear to be a number of sites where buzzards could be contributing to a significant damage problem. There is therefore an urgent need to identify management techniques that could significantly reduce or eliminate losses of pheasant poults to buzzards within, and in the immediate vicinity of, release pens.
6. There is a wide range of management techniques that could be trialled but the emphasis should be on non-lethal approaches. Without guidance on relative merits of the techniques, the result could be a poorly focussed and expensive project. Therefore, in order to help prioritise which should be studied, Defra commissioned a desk study with Fera which provided a draft list of techniques. The finalised study report will be made available to the successful bidder once it is completed (probably in April).
7. Discussions with stakeholders have refined the list to the following techniques to be assessed in this project:

Technique	Short description
Cut vegetative or artificial cover	Low cover inside and outside pens. Provide shelters/refuges in the form of brash piles or wigwams. Possibly also wooden shelters/refuges.
Diversionary feeding.	Whole carcasses left on posts out of reach of ground predators. Type of carcass to be agreed with site owners.

	Provide for limited periods to reduce risk of increase in local buzzard population.
Translocation (permanent).	Permanent removal off-site, for example, to a falconry centre. NE would be able to provide assistance for researchers in planning and licensing negotiations with potential recipients.
Nest destruction	Breeding birds displaced by destroying nests during construction, for example, using squirrel drey-poking pole or shotgun from below thereby forcing the pair to move on to find another nest site or not breed that year. Care would be needed to avoid injuring birds.

8. The overall aim of the study is to develop mitigation techniques that significantly reduce predation levels of pheasant poults where serious damage is being caused by buzzards. The specific objectives are:
- a. To establish a baseline of predation of pheasant poults both inside and close to release pens differentiating, where possible, between different predators.
 - b. To quantify the effectiveness of a range of mitigation measures in reducing predation of pheasant poults inside and close to release pens, including:
 - i. Cut vegetative or artificial cover
 - ii. Diversionary feeding
 - iii. Translocation (permanent).
 - iv. Nest destruction
 - c. To calculate the full costs of mitigation measures tested.
 - d. To identify, and where possible, quantify other sources of predation.
 - e. To produce an advisory leaflet based on the results from this project and building on existing guidance.
9. Bidders are strongly encouraged to use a site that consists of 6 shoots spread over an area of 2000-2400 hectares in Northumberland. It is claimed that the shoots have suffered significant losses from buzzard predation and the owners have agreed in principle to allow them to be used in this research project Bidders should visit the Northumberland site to gain an understanding of the opportunities and constraints on the ground. Further details about the shoots and access to visit them can be arranged by contacting:

From 2- 13 April:

Lucy Bellini

Wildlife Management Adviser

Natural England

Newcastle office

0300 060 4164

07775 826112

Lucy.Bellini@naturalengland.org.uk

From 16- 27 April:

Nigel Shelton

Senior specialist- wildlife regulation

Natural England

Nottingham office

0300 060 0039

07785 720530

Nigel.Shelton@naturalengland.org.uk

10. In addition to testing single mitigation techniques, bidders should consider combinations if appropriate /feasible. Compensation may need to be paid to owners where no techniques are applied and birds are predated by buzzards, for example, in controls.

Reporting

11. It is expected that the successful bidder will report to a Project Advisory Group (PAG) including representatives from Defra, Food and Environment Research Agency, Natural England, National Gamekeepers Organisation, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, Aberdeen University, British Trust for Ornithology, Country Land and Business Association and the Northern England Raptor Forum. Bidders should include in their costs provision for an early Inception meeting and subsequent annual (at least) meetings with the PAG at which annual results will be presented. The secretariat for the meetings will be provided by the successful bidder. In addition to contractual requirements, a full report will be expected after the second season (ie 2013/14) which will be presented to the PAG in autumn/winter 2013. A draft final report will be presented to the PAG by 31 October 2015. It should include a draft advisory leaflet based on the results from this project and building on previous published guidance; it would be developed in consultation with the PAG.

Resources

12. It is expected that this project will last 3 years at a total cost of up to £125k per annum. It is hoped that the project can start on 1 June 2012. Proposals will be accepted which last for longer or shorter periods if this can be shown to maximise the cost-benefit of this research. The closing date for the submission of bids is 30 April 2012.

Further information

13. Late applications will be returned unopened. Applications by fax or e-mail are not acceptable. However an electronic version of the application (CD-ROM) should be submitted with the signed hard copies.
14. Bidders will be expected to have extensive knowledge of past and on-going related research and to take this into account in their bids. No specific further information is available, as all bids will be assessed against this specification. No advice can be provided about the relative merits of different scientific approaches. However, if you need further information about specific issues relating to this competition, please contact:

Richard Brand-Hardy

Richard.brand-hardy@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7238 5005