

The scientific evidence that progressive and harmful climate change is taking place is compelling. In common with many conservation bodies and, in particular, those concerned with the preservation of biodiversity, GOS believes that climate change already poses an unprecedented threat to birds and other wildlife. It thus prompts questions about the longer-term effects on our own well-being and ultimately, perhaps, on our own species' survival.

In considering these threats, one response from the UK Government has been to give a commitment to generate 20% of the nation's electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

GOS

understands the need and recognises

that the use of wind turbines, on both a local and a national scale, will be important in meeting the nation's 'renewables' target.

The GOS

committee and its officers are often asked for their policy on wind energy and, more specifically, on wind farms. We believe that wind power has a significant role to play in limiting the rate of climate change but this does not mean that we blindly support all proposals for the erection of wind turbines; nor should we blindly oppose them. It is important that in taking a position on any proposed developments, we attempt to assess the degree of risk that specific installations present to the local and national avifauna

Such assessment is based on the fact that wind farms may cause harm to birds in three ways:

- First, research has demonstrated that birds, especially large low-flying species such as raptors and wildfowl, are killed in some numbers by turbines, so it is vital that wind farms are located in areas where populations of vulnerable species will not be threatened, especially on their breeding grounds or along known migration routes. GOS monitors bird populations and habitats in our area so is well placed to assess the likely impacts of major infrastructure projects, including wind farms.

- Second, for the construction and operation of large-scale wind farms an extensive civil engineering infrastructure is required. This means the installation of access roads, hard standings, security fences, lighting, drainage and so on, while on-going operations, including the

need for regular repair and maintenance, can generate significant disturbance. Thus in both the construction and operational phases, considerable alterations to the local habitats occur and so it is important that wind farms are not sited where their development will damage key breeding or feeding ecosystems, uncommon habitats or important migration 'stop-off' sites. Obviously, these considerations are of particular significance where rare, declining or protected species are involved.

- Third, potential for killing birds and damaging habitats is not limited to the immediate vicinity of the wind turbines, since the power generated by the turbines must be distributed to the national grid. This almost always requires new pylons and power lines, often extending over very long distances. These pose a well-known collision hazard for birds, with larger species again being the most vulnerable, so the routes of power lines associated with wind farms have to be considered with care, ahead of any final decision to build.

It will be apparent from the above that GOS does not have a preconceived position either for or against wind farms. We are supportive of the drive to use more renewable resources in power generation and recognise the important role of wind turbines in the achievement of that aim, but at the same time we will seek to mitigate their adverse effects and will oppose all ill-conceived ventures where there is, in our view, an unacceptable risk to wildlife and, in particular, to birds.