

REF: 2015S40/0025

From:

Sent: 23 December 2014 05:19

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Review of Section 40

Dear Minister Humphreys,

I am concerned about your impending review of section 40 of the Wildlife Act which covers the cutting and burning of vegetation.

I believe the existing restrictions on the hedge cutting and burning are the minimum which ought to be in place, especially given that birds are nesting earlier each year due to climate changes. Even with these restrictions, on numerous occasions I have seen farmers and councils cutting hedgerows back inside the restricted period. The blanket reason given is usually road safety and whilst this may be applicable for a minority of cases, I have seen and photographed farmers cutting back hedgerows in fields and on lanes which see very little or no traffic.

With regard to the burning of vegetation, if this is to be carried out it should be done so immediately. In many cases, the vegetation is left for months and then burned when hedgehogs and birds may already have colonised it, thus killing and depriving more wildlife of a habitat. I have personally seen one farmer in Co. Limerick adding tyres to burning piles of vegetation in order to get rid of them and I am sure this practice goes on in other areas as well.

The existing structure in place to report and prevent this illegal cutting and burning is laughable since invariably, the Gards do not want to get involved and the rangers tell me they are powerless to act. In any case, by the time they arrive, the damage is done and the farmer is nowhere to be seen.

This illegal cutting and often overcutting of hedgerows is having such a devastating impact on our wildlife. I don't have to be an expert to see how few nests there are in hedgerows now and official figures support that bird numbers have been decimated over the years, especially songbirds. Healthy hedgerows support a huge number of creatures, providing shelter and safe conduits between areas. The brambles which are so often found in hedgerows are one of the the main food sources for bumble bees which I'm sure you're aware, are under threat of extinction.

I would urge you to at least keep the existing restrictions in place and if possible, to improve the system for reporting and redressing breaches of this legislation in order to preserve the remaining natural heritage that Ireland is so keen to promote but so poor to protect.