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I'M NOT STUMPED BY ATTACK ON RSPB

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the hidden agenda behind Sir Ian Botham's recent scathing attack on the RSPB. I could hit every one of his ill-informed arguments for six, but there would be no point. His 'You Forgot The Birds' campaign has nothing whatsoever to do with caring for birds. It is all about hunting.

Botham is heavily into field sports and already has form on fronting anti-conservation campaigns: he attacked plans to reintroduce beavers to Scotland, for example, over fears that it would ruin his salmon fishing. Meanwhile, his main collaborator, Martyn Howat, is a former chair of the British Association for Shooting & Conservation.

Surprise, surprise, they don't like the RSPB. More specifically, they're peeved about its increasingly strong position on certain field sports. So they rant about too much money being spent on lobbying, research and education (as if these aren't conservation) and anything else they can think of to slur the organisation. If anything is a waste of charity money, it's forcing this

conservation great to defend itself against such utter nonsense.

The real issue is driven grouse shooting. In an effort to create artificially high densities of red grouse – ready to be flushed past lines of shooters – some people are illegally persecuting hen harriers and other protected birds of prey, in some cases nearly to extinction.

The RSPB has been

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trying to work with more responsible members of the hunting community to establish a robust licensing system and tighter regulation. But the driven grouse shooting industry has no desire to change, so its advocates take cheap shots at one of its main critics to deflect attention.

If anything, the RSPB is being too generous. Driven grouse shooting doesn't only result in the killing of endangered species – though with a little luck, Botham and his cohorts will have unwittingly hastened its own demise.