

## DEFRA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Much of our domestic work is based on legally binding EU directives (Birds/Habitats Directives), or international conventions (Bern) in which we, along with many other countries, have made specific commitments to conserve and protect wild fauna and flora. We also have domestic legislation (traps, badgers, deer) which was introduced to reflect domestic priorities at the time.

This species specific protection (badgers, great crested newts) can lead to occasional conflicts with our socio-economic activities (e.g. farming, land/ property development) or habitat/species conservation. These sometimes conflicting priorities need to be balanced in a sustainable way. This is what is meant by wildlife management. This complements non-species specific measures such as the biodiversity duty placed on public bodies, agri-environment and other incentive schemes and government's involvement in voluntary Habitat and Species Action plans. Wildlife management thus contributes to Defra's High level goal of maintaining and enhancing our natural asset base by establishing/maintaining the boundaries within which species protection takes precedence over competing needs. Where we intervene, we do so for specific reasons using available evidence.

Occasions when wildlife management is necessary include:

a) **Very rare or endangered species** (e.g. bats) - there are sound conservation arguments for Government intervention. The main aim is to increase endangered species numbers and distribution.

**How:** Defra protects and enhances habitats, introducing legislation that prohibits any taking or killing of the endangered species or manages other species that can have a detrimental effect on their long term survival. There is a licensing regime to move protected species under specific circumstances provided appropriate mitigation is put in place. The Department also supports the work of Natural England.

b) other **Protected species** - all birds and some other species such as badgers are legally protected against indiscriminate killing or disruption but not all of them are endangered species. There are occasions where the presence or behaviour of protected species adversely impacts on people or their activities. The Government aim is to strike a balance between protecting species (and meeting international obligations to do so) and providing effective solutions to the problems that they cause (e.g. badgers undermining railway lines which may cause derailments).

**How:** the general presumption is that wildlife is not killed. In most cases, people and wildlife are not in conflict with each other. However when conflict occurs, most problems can be resolved using non lethal methods of control (eg scaring swans away from valuable crops). Defra promotes the use of non-lethal methods. However, there can come a point when damage caused by wildlife becomes unsustainable and lethal methods of control are required. As the legislation generally prohibits lethal control, Defra policy is to issue licences to kill in defined circumstances where 1) all other reasonable non-lethal solutions have been tried and/or shown to be ineffective and 2) there is a genuine problem/need; 3) there are no satisfactory alternatives; 4) the licensed action will be effective at resolving the problem and the action is proportionate to the problem. Wherever possible, humane methods of lethal control are used.

c) **Invasive non-native species** (e.g. Grey squirrels, Japanese knotweed, North American mink, parakeets). Invasive non-native species are the second greatest threat to biodiversity worldwide, after habitat destruction and are the greatest threat on islands.

**How:** The GB non-native species mechanism, established to steer non-native species issues in Great Britain, is made up of the Programme Board and its Secretariat, a Risk Analysis Panel, a Stakeholder Sounding Board, Stakeholder Forum and the creation of working groups as necessary. The Programme Board has consulted publicly on its GB Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy.

There is a particular case for protecting native biodiversity – species and habitats – from the adverse impacts caused by non-native species. Mechanisms available include promoting preventative measures, banning the sale of certain invasive non-native species (public consultation proposals under development), issuing Codes of Practice, and eradication programmes eg, eradication of the North American bullfrog which predated on frogs, toads, and other animals of similar size and routinely carries the chytrid fungus, which can be lethal to native amphibia.

d) **Other native wildlife** (e.g. foxes/rats) - there is only very general legislative protection which prohibits causing unnecessary suffering. The Government aim is to intervene only where there is clear justification (eg serious rabbit damage) and also to support reasonable actions by others (eg through the Deer Initiative). Local Authorities or conservation bodies such as Natural England may formulate plans specific to their areas of responsibility.

**How:** largely dictated by the specific circumstances. However, Defra would normally consult fully on any new proposals.

**Natural England** is responsible for the delivery of Defra Wildlife Management policy and we have agreed how these functions will be carried out.

**Wildlife Species Conservation Division**