



With Extreme Prejudice

The culling of
British wildlife



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Introduction

Across the UK, wild animals and birds are killed by the million. One hundred centuries of manipulating nature – controlling, shaping, taming, confining, restraining, breeding and terminating – have imbued our society with the notion that if a plant or animal is not serving a useful purpose, it is perfectly acceptable to snuff it out.

Intolerance of other species is now so great that mass killings are rarely even commented on. Animals and birds are persecuted for daring to feed themselves and rear offspring; or for being introduced to, or abandoned in, an area where they naturally would not live. They are shot, poisoned, trapped and snared for living in what is left of their fast-dwindling habitat or for adapting to a landscape that – thanks to human intervention – is changing rapidly. They are killed because they are considered noisy, messy or unsightly. But most of all, they are persecuted because they pose a financial threat to industries and ‘sports’, many of which have as their primary objective the killing of other animals or birds. These are the shooting, sea fishing, angling and farming industries. In this report, we examine the forces that



pursue and promote mass killings of wildlife, examine their reasoning and explore their hidden motivations. We also put forward a proposition: that there must be a sea change in society’s thinking. Compassionate guardianship needs to guide us in our care of this planet and its non-human inhabitants. Protecting the habitats on which animals depend, even if that means stepping back and allowing nature to reclaim territory, is essential. And respecting individual animals, rather than calculating and attempting to recalibrate numbers, will encourage true biodiversity.

‘Protecting the habitats on which animals depend, even if that means stepping back and allowing nature to reclaim territory, is essential.’



Aliens, pests and predators

The reasons given for killing wildlife nowadays tend to fall into three categories: animals are vilified either as aliens, pests or predators. Some – like the much-maligned grey squirrel – fall into all three.

ALIEN Aliens

In 2006, *New*

Scientist pointed to the folly of trying to impose genetic purity on a constantly shifting environment.¹ Nature is not pure or fixed and there is no clear divide between alien and native species. As the environment changes increasingly quickly, are we to exterminate every species that strays from its traditional and allotted boundaries and thrives in the new environment? Killing animals who adapt to new surroundings flies in the face of Darwinism. It is unnatural.

Persecuting alien species is not a uniform policy, which may indicate that killing for non-nativeness is more of an excuse than a legitimate reason. Some aliens – like the rare moth who was found in the UK in 2006 – are welcomed and make headlines.² But should a sufficiently vocal or powerful vested interest want members of an 'alien' or 'invasive' species killed – for whatever self-serving reason – their foreignness provides a ready-made excuse. People are constantly moving animals around the planet and forcing animals to live in unnatural and alien environments. Chickens are not native to Britain and nor are cows or cats, but people have ensured that large numbers of each remain and reproduce here.

Transporting around the globe exotic animals for the pet, fur, zoo and vivisection trades has increased the number of

non-natives being released or escaping. Curbing such activities is the logical place to start should we really be concerned with alien species. Killing individuals who – through no fault of their own – have been brought to this country and have adapted to life in the British countryside reveals a disturbingly purist tendency in our collective thinking.

Main proponents of 'alien' culling

- Conservation groups, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, some Wildlife Trusts, English Nature
- Forestry groups, including Forestry Commission, Timber Growers Association
- Shooting groups, including the Game Conservancy Trust, British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- Bird groups including Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Songbird Survival
- Farmers
- Hunters
- Local and national political authorities



PREDATOR

Predators

It is strange that we donate so much money to charities that protect predators like tigers and lions overseas and yet, in certain circles, there is little empathy for predator species in the UK. They are blamed simply for being wild, for feeding themselves and rearing their young. They are denounced simply for surviving. Generally, it is when industry or 'sporting' interests conflict with the survival of the predators, that they are cynically and systematically demonised and killed.

Phrases like 'prodigious predator'³ or 'ruthless predator' add fuel to the flames of intolerance and allow killing to be undertaken with little opposition. People who have never even been to a farm trot out the question: 'Have you ever seen what a fox does in a chicken run?' With hundreds of millions of chickens being reared in appalling intensive conditions only to be shackled and killed by people each year, one might be forgiven for thinking that their anger is misdirected. Animals need to eat. If people provide them with ready-meals in the form of a thousand pheasant poults or an over-stocked fish farm, they cannot be blamed for eating them.

Predation is not a catastrophe but a part of the ecological balancing of species and ecosystems. Predatory animals cannot be held morally accountable for their actions and yet they are judged and sentenced as if they were. Carnivorous animals need meat, so why persecute them simply for surviving?

Main proponents of 'predator' culling

- Shooting groups, including the Game Conservancy Trust, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Countryside Alliance and the Game Farmers Association
- Fishing industry
- Anglers
- Bird groups including Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Songbird Survival
- Farmers
- Hunters



'Predation is not a catastrophe but a part of the ecological balancing of species and ecosystems.'

'The field that they once foraged in is now a manicured lawn or golf course but they continue to grub for their meal. Perhaps they damage plants or trees – sometimes simply by eating them – and for these 'crimes', they pay with their lives.'



PEST Pests

The term 'pest' is applied to any animal or bird who inconveniences a person in some way.

But with the relentless encroachment of building developments into natural spaces, animals become displaced. The tracks they once used are destroyed; their food sources gone. As they try to adapt and eke out a living, their lives bring them into close proximity with people. The field that they once foraged in is now a manicured lawn or golf course but they continue to grub for their meal. Perhaps they damage plants or trees – sometimes simply by eating them – and for these 'crimes', they pay with their lives. The public's fears are ignited and stoked by hugely profitable pest control companies. They generate hysteria about rats and pigeons carrying disease when evidence does not support their case. They print images of ferocious-looking beasts, when those animals are, in reality, gentle and shy. They have done such sterling work in misrepresenting wildlife, that in every town and city, they are employed

by councils, sports clubs and members of the public to dispatch such 'pests'. Such is the intolerance of wildlife that few people stop to think of the suffering inflicted. Animals can be seen as pests if they are simply in the 'wrong' place. But animals are not weeds that can be grubbed up and thrown on the compost heap. They are sentient beings, capable of feeling distress, fear and pain. Choosing to snuff out their 'inconvenient' lives reveals a small-minded malevolence.

Main proponents of 'pest' culling

- Pest control companies
- Shooting groups
- Farmers
- Local authorities



Although essentially woodland dwellers, badgers have become habituated to more open areas and can be seen in suburban gardens and even in villages as they forage for food at night.

Badgers

Historically, badgers have been persecuted relentlessly. In Tudor times, a bounty was paid for their destruction to protect grain⁴, and throughout the eighteenth century, they were hunted with hounds at night, almost to the brink of extinction. During the nineteenth century, 'brock-hunters' killed them for sport and caught them for baiting (pitching in fights against dogs) – a pastime which, although now illegal, continues today. Gamekeepers freely killed badgers⁵ until the animals and their setts were afforded legal protection in 1992. While gamekeepers continue to be convicted of killing badgers, it is the farming community that poses the largest threat.

Targeted

Rates of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) have risen dramatically in recent decades, with

25,000 cows testing positive for the disease in 2006.⁶ While bTB is rarely fatal of itself in animals, milk yields are reduced and the trade in infected flesh is prohibited. Bovine TB – along with many other farmed animal diseases – is an inevitable product of the neglect, filth and intensification of modern-day farming practices. And the movement of cattle around the country – from market to farm, between farms, and from farm to slaughterhouse – spreads the disease nationwide. While the number of cows who test positive for bTB appears high, at least 250,000 adult cattle die or are killed annually because of conditions associated with squalor and low welfare standards.⁷ So, why the focus on bTB and the role that badgers play?

To put bTB into context: in 2002, 19,792 bTB reactors (cattle who gave a positive

'Since 1975, more than 30,000 badgers have been killed in an attempt to curb bTB in cattle. Tests revealed that 80 per cent of the slaughtered animals were free of bTB.'

tuberculin skin test result) were slaughtered. By comparison, 4,189,000 animals (including 590,000 cattle) were destroyed during the FMD outbreak. In addition, 90,000 cattle are culled annually due to mastitis, 31,000 due to lameness and 125,000 due to infertility.⁸ Although good husbandry and extensive farming practises can keep bTB and other diseases in check and prevent the deaths of tens of thousands of animals prior to slaughter, it is much simpler to blame a 'wild reservoir' for the infection. Badgers are currently scapegoated but deer⁹ have also been in the frame. The National Beef Association has called for badgers to be killed across entire counties, using snares, guns and gassing with carbon monoxide.¹⁰

In Defence

Since 1975, more than 30,000 badgers have been killed in an attempt to curb bTB in cattle. Tests revealed that 80 per cent of the slaughtered animals were free of bTB.¹¹ And despite virtually exterminating badgers from four counties in the republic of Ireland, a massive bTB problem remains in each of those areas.¹² A five-year trial cull in Britain, which cost taxpayers an estimated £35 million¹³ and in which 11,000 badgers were killed,¹⁴ actually helped spread the disease further.¹⁵ Despite the mass killings, it is more likely that cattle infect badgers than vice versa because of the latter's habit of seeking worms (their staple diet) from under

infected cowpats.¹⁶ Blaming badgers for a disease of modern cattle farming and then persecuting them for becoming infected with it is duplicitous in the extreme. Measures can be taken to reduce or eradicate bovine TB from farms, which do not involve the killing of wildlife. They do, however, require the raising of welfare standards.

Research has shown that where hedges and ungrazed strips of land are left on a farm, incidence of bTB drops.¹⁷ This may be because, on such environmentally sensitive farms, welfare standards are higher and therefore immunity is stronger.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, cattle with mineral deficiencies are more susceptible to disease, including bTB. Providing mineral licks or enriching the soil – depleted by years of intensive farming and fertilizing – has also allowed many farms to remain free of bTB, while those around them succumb.¹⁹

Farmers who are genuinely committed to eradicating diseases clean up their act, raise welfare standards and welcome the pre-movement testing of all cattle. Those looking for a way to deflect attention from their own inadequacies call for the government to cull badgers. And some won't adhere to the law and undertake illegal killings of their own.²⁰

Killing Methods

Trapping and shooting, snaring, gassing.



Boar lived wild in Britain until, it is thought, the thirteenth century.

Boar

Subsequently, there were a number of reintroductions from Continental herds by royalty and aristocracy for the purposes of hunting. All of these animals died out or were killed during the seventeenth century and, for 300 years, there were no boars living in Britain.

In the 1980s, farmers saw a chance to diversify and began to farm wild boar. Escapees from farms and from private zoological collections were able to establish herds and once again live in the wild. While their ideal home is in woodlands, boar are able to live in a variety of habitats. They are hardy animals and able to survive in diverse conditions.

‘After all, if boar were eradicated completely, there would be none left for the lucrative sport shooting lobby to hunt.’

Targeted

Shooting lobbyists favour a cull as a ‘sport’, which would help boost the rural economy. Shooters are keen to bag trophies and now that boars are established in the UK, this is another animal for their tick list.²¹

They state that a cull is justified because boar damage wild plants, such as bluebells. But, unsurprisingly, concern over wildflowers does not stretch to calling for total eradication of the animals. After all, if boar were eradicated completely, there would be none left for the lucrative sport shooting lobby to hunt.

Farmers also favour a cull of boar, citing crop damage and the potential for the spread of disease to farmed pigs as their main problems.²²

Other reasons given include: damage to gardens and sports fields, the risk of passing diseases to farmed animals, danger to people and causing road traffic accidents.²³

In Defence

Boars were introduced to the UK by farmers and hunters with the sole aim of killing them, either for profit or for fun. That some have escaped and established themselves after centuries of persecution means that they finally have a chance to live a natural existence.

There are an estimated 1,000 boar living in the wild,²⁴ which makes them a rarity. Despite this, some people rank more highly perfect lawns and bluebells than the right of wild animals to live freely and feed themselves.

It is little surprise that farmers want to kill them – profit often outweighs ethics in the farming world – but there is a far greater risk of farmed animals contracting diseases from the stressed, overcrowded and filthy conditions in which they are forced to live, than from contact with a rare wild animal. Although most pigs are still intensively farmed in units, one reason that pig farmers call for a cull is that, should a wild boar breed with a domestic pig, the

“Having closed our minds to the possibility of interspecies camaraderie without respect to ‘domestic’ and ‘wild’, we have driven to extinction one species after another. We have become exterminators or masters, cutthroats and bullies.”

Renewing Animal Relationships
– Michael Tobias

resulting piglets would not be eligible for sale to a slaughterhouse.²⁵

While boar can be aggressive when they have young, there are very few reported incidents where people have felt unsafe. In fact, boar who have been living freely for some time become so shy and retiring that wildlife photographers have had difficulty in capturing them on film.²⁶ With natural habitats dwindling, and wildlife suffering from human intervention, it is remarkable that a new species can survive and thrive. We should be thrilled that boar can live freely in Britain, and not see their survival as an opportunity simply to bag another trophy.

Killing Methods

Shooting.

PEST

ALIEN



Canada geese were brought to the UK in 1678 by Charles II as ornamentals for St James's Park and so that they could be shot for sport.

Canada Geese

Numbers remained stable until the 1950s when they increased rapidly.

This was, in part, due to large areas of the Home Counties being dug up for road building. The gravel pits created provided ideal breeding grounds for the geese.

Around the same time, shooters dispersed the geese more widely for the pleasure of shooting them.

Today, however, the Canada geese population growth has slowed and stabilised, and is even declining in some areas.²⁷

Targeted

Although popular with the public, Canada geese have their fair share of enemies. Geese eat grass and forage for insects, and they clip the tops off some cereals, and these dietary habits have brought them into conflict with park attendants, golfers and farmers.

One golf club in Greater Manchester threatened to shoot an entire flock of 50 birds because 'there have been some instances when they've stopped balls getting to the greens and the players get really annoyed'.²⁸

Geese are further charged with congregating around ponds and lakes where they eat, defecate and 'cause a nuisance'.

Other complaints made against them include being aggressive during nesting, and the risk that they might collide with aircraft.

Finally, it is said that they compete with native wildfowl for resources and nesting sites.²⁹

In Defence

Human activity has led to the presence and flourishing of geese in the UK.

Although the numbers of geese have stabilised, grassy areas such as golf courses will inevitably attract the birds. They cannot be blamed for using habitats – whether natural or fabricated – that perfectly suit their needs.

That they have adapted to the human-generated landscape is wonderful. If they compete with other wildfowl – many of whom are also shot for sport or killed for other reasons – then that is nature's way: flux and change, and the survival of those most suited to the environment.

'Geese often mate for life and can pine to death at the loss of their partner. Killing them for being a nuisance is intolerant and inhumane.'

While there can be no legitimate reason for killing them, if individual flocks are not tolerated, non-lethal measures are available.

In parks, putting up special feeding areas can keep geese and their mess in one area, which makes it easier to keep clean. Although goose mess may look unsightly, it is not a health hazard.

Geese like to have access to and from water, so erecting fences – at least 18 inches high – will keep them away from ponds and lakes. Planting rushes in the water or shrubs around the water's edge also deters them.

As a last resort, egg control – soaking eggs in paraffin – can reduce numbers but this must be done within days of being laid, and one egg must be left to prevent another clutch being laid.

Geese often mate for life and can pine to death at the loss of their partner. Killing them for being a nuisance is intolerant and inhumane.

Killing Methods

Shooting.



Historically, numbers of cormorants in the UK have fluctuated wildly.

Cormorants

At the turn of the last century, they were rather rare³⁰ but numbers have since increased and there are an estimated 7,500 pairs in Britain.³¹

Cormorants are native to the UK coastline but have moved inland as well-stocked fish

farms have opened up. Although proficient at diving to catch their prey, their feathers are not waterproof, which is why they can be seen in that characteristic pose – standing on branches or rocks with wings outstretched while they dry.

‘Is the damage inflicted upon individual fish by cormorants worse than what happens to fish in intensive farms, or those hauled up from the seabed by trawlers, or hooked – sometimes through the eye or stomach – by anglers?’

Targeted

The cormorants’ diet of fish brings conflict with anglers and fish farmers. In 2005, following pressure from these interests, permission was granted for 3000 cormorants to be shot per year. Anglers want waterways stocked full of fish for them to catch, and many thousands are introduced to rivers and lakes for just this reason each year. Cormorants take advantage of these well-stocked waterways and congregate there. Similarly, commercial fisheries are an attractive spot for cormorants and provide easy pickings. Cormorants are charged with grabbing fish that are too large for them to swallow and so leaving injured fish with grisly wounds. Not surprisingly, the shooting lobby welcomes all calls for a cormorant cull. After all, it is a double-whammy. As Tim Russell of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation said: ‘Many people who shoot are also keen anglers and have seen at first hand the devastation which a colony of cormorants can cause to inland fisheries and waterways.’ In killing

fish-eating birds, such people get to indulge in two favourite deadly pastimes: fishing and shooting.

In Defence

Lakes and rivers are routinely restocked with fish for the sport of anglers. Tens of thousands are released into waterways, just so someone can haul them out again. The dice are loaded very much in favour of people in this sport. That wild birds should seek to take advantage of well-stocked waterways is perfectly natural and, while predation is not pretty – see an orca killing a seal or a lion killing an antelope – it is what makes our planet so diverse. Is the damage inflicted upon individual fish by cormorants worse than what happens to fish in intensive farms, or those hauled up from the seabed by trawlers, or hooked – sometimes through the eye or stomach – by anglers? Protection of fish is clearly not on the agenda of the fishing industry and anglers. They seek to kill cormorants to make their profits even greater and their sport even easier. Using bird scarers, and providing fish with refuges help ease predation. Not offering cormorants an all-you-can-eat buffet would also help.

Killing Methods

Shooting.

‘Think occasionally of the suffering of which you spare yourself the sight.’

Albert Schweitzer

Corvids – which include crows, rooks, jackdaws, jays and magpies – can be found right across the UK.



PEST

PREDATOR

Corvids

Some are scavengers and will supplement their diet of insects with scraps and carrion. Others eat grains, nuts and insects.

The crow family have complex social structures and are among the most intelligent of birds, and yet they have been persecuted for centuries. During the sixteenth century, bounties were paid to those who killed magpies, although few parishes took up the offer. But with the advent of widespread game shoots in the eighteenth century, their persecution was stepped up a gear, and this level of intolerance has continued.³⁴

Targeted

Corvids' need to eat creates enemies in the farming and game shooting industries. Farmers target them because they eat seed, seedlings and food put out for cows and sheep.³⁵

Gamekeepers target them because they eat eggs and chicks on game farms. They are commonly caught in Larsen traps – devices designed by a Danish gamekeeper but now banned in his own country because of their inhumanity. A live bird is placed in one compartment of the trap, to act as a decoy for other birds. Once caught, birds are dispatched by the gamekeeper. Decoy birds have been found dead inside traps, presumably having starved to death. Larsen traps were introduced to the UK by the charity, The Game Conservancy Trust, in 1988 and remain legal in this country.³⁶

“The assumption that animals are without rights and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance is a positively outrageous example of Western crudity and barbarity. Universal compassion is the only guarantee of morality.”

Schopenhauer

In Defence

If piles of feed are left out for livestock, one can't blame a wild bird for eating a little of it. Intensive agriculture, the destruction of hedgerows and woodlands, the liberal use of powerful herbicides and insecticides, planting of monocrops and the use of heavy machinery have all affected wild bird populations dramatically. And yet we blame the corvids for daring to feed themselves, and make them pay with their lives.

Killing Methods

Shooting of birds on their nests,³⁷ or trapping and then shooting.



There are six types of deer living in the UK: Roe, Red, Fallow, Sika, Muntjac and Chinese Water Deer.

Deer

Roe are indigenous to the UK. They have been present since before recorded history and seem to have undergone little evolutionary change. Forest clearance and over-hunting led to their extinction by 1800, apart from in Scotland where small pockets of woodland still harboured the Roe. Since then, reintroductions have helped to re-establish the species.

Red deer are also indigenous, and are the largest mammal in Britain. The species has survived an ice age and almost constant hunting for millions of years.

Fossil evidence shows that **fallow deer** were present before the last Ice Age, and were made extinct during it. They were subsequently reintroduced, possibly by the Normans, and are currently the most widely distributed deer species found wild in the UK.

Japanese Sika were probably first brought to England in 1860, when a pair was given to London Zoo. Other zoos and parks brought more to our shores and soon escapees and deliberate releases led to feral populations.

It is believed that the Duke of Bedford first introduced **Muntjac** to Woburn Park in the nineteenth century. Again, a number of deliberate releases – the most significant being from Whipsnade Zoo in 1921 – allowed Muntjac herds to form in the wild.

The current feral population of **Chinese Water Deer** derives from a number of deliberate releases and escapees. It is suggested that government officials working at Woburn Abbey during the Second World War were less than diligent in closing the gates! Chinese Water Deer are the UK's least common deer species, and they are red listed as endangered in their homeland.³⁸

'That some species are not native to Britain renders them vulnerable to culling.'

Targeted

The reasons for killing deer are varied and are advanced by some unlikely interests. Conservationists and bird groups, including the Woodland Trust, the RSPB and the British Trust for Ornithology, demand the culling of deer to protect trees and popular birds such as woodpeckers and bullfinches.^{39 40} Conservationists also blame deer for eating bluebells, oxslips and orchids.⁴¹

By eating and damaging broadleaf woods and forests, deer are said to prevent woodland regeneration and to contribute to the decline in bird numbers. Their dietary habits are also said to have a knock-on effect for ground nesting dormice and bank voles. Farmers blame deer for eating and damaging crops.

That some species are not native to Britain renders them vulnerable to culling. It is said that they weaken native bloodlines by interbreeding with indigenous deer. Gamekeepers want deer killed, too. Muntjac in particular can disrupt a shoot by running through the woodland, flushing gamebirds into the air before the guns are ready to fire at them.⁴²

Finally, all types of deer are charged with causing traffic accidents. According to the Deer Collisions Project, 30,000 to 50,000 deer are killed on the roads each year, although the number of human fatalities is unknown. A database of collisions is being

set up to monitor the number of accidents involving deer on the roads.⁴³

In Defence

The reasons given for culling deer are a mish mash of misguided ideologies and excuses. While deer are blamed for the destruction of woodlands and habitats, the impact on these landscapes of sheep – a species introduced to the UK and one whose numbers far outstrip those of deer – is conveniently overlooked. This is, presumably, because a lot of people make money from farming sheep. Not all woodland organisations approve of killing wildlife. Dan Morrell, the director of Future Forests, which has planted about 1.25 million saplings over the past five years, says: 'I would much rather see the Government spending money on fences and putting the saplings in tree shelters, such as protective tubes, rather than a large culling campaign ... The deer have to eat as well.'⁴⁴

Blaming deer for impacting on populations of birds, dormice and bank voles deflects attention away from the devastating effect of 'development' on these wild animals. It is the loss of suitable habitat due to human activity that has led to the decrease in dormouse numbers. According to the Kent Wildlife Trust, 'as woods become separated by roads, buildings and farmland, dormouse populations become isolated and more at risk of local extinction.'⁴⁵ And, despite pressures on their habitats and the 'devastation' of marauding deer, bank voles are thriving and common throughout the UK.⁴⁶

One statement by the pro-culling Woodland Trust gives an indication of the real reasons for the killing of deer. They state: 'The Woodland Trust monitors the



impact of deer at our sites and assesses the degree to which the deer are affecting our objectives for the management of individual sites and the wider semi-natural habitats around them.' Clearly, the Woodland Trust has its own views about how woodlands should look and are trying to impose their ideal onto a shifting and evolving landscape. Animals who do not fit neatly into their vision are exterminated.⁴⁷ That some damage to crops will be caused by animals is inevitable and should be factored into the cost of food production. The alternative is to cull all wildlife and live in a barren landscape. Deer-proof fencing should be erected where damage is deemed unacceptable. Ironically, modern-day farming practices (and warmer climates) have helped Muntjac, roe and fallow deer to become established and to spread.⁴⁸ It suits the £200 million a year stalking industry to play up the damage done by deer. It is, after all, big business. Some stalkers will pay up to £1000 for the right to hunt a trophy roebuck⁴⁹ and the industry is said to be 'burgeoning'. This has had a huge impact on deer numbers in some areas. Says one Scottish deer stalker: 'Four years ago, in one particular glen, we counted 1,000 deer. Now there is none... I know of stalkers being ferried around by helicopter in order to cull as many as possible.'⁵⁰ A deerstalker from Dorset had the same experience: 'I've been out with clients for days without seeing a single deer... To annihilate one species to save another is ridiculous.'⁵¹ Even the shooting press is alarmed by some of the culling methods, particularly the use of helicopters to 'aid in controlling red deer'.⁵²

The charge that interbreeding of native deer and non-native deer causes a

“There will be no justice as long as man will stand with a knife or with a gun and destroy those who are weaker than he is.”

Isaac Bashevis Singer

weakening of native bloodlines is at best transparent nonsense, and at worst a form of ecofascism. Interbreeding of deer strengthens and widens the gene pool, and allows deer to thrive. It is called evolution. Besides, calls for the culling of pure-bred deer are common, so their genetically 'pure' status is of no protection to them. As for road safety, deer are culled by shooting. In so doing, marksmen increase the likelihood of animals bolting and colliding with vehicles. Enforcing speed limits in areas where deer are likely to cross roads makes accidents less likely. Education about what to do if deer are spotted on the roads would help drivers react appropriately.

Deer numbers are self-limiting, should people care to leave the task to nature. They are already under pressure from shifting landscapes, road building and other developments, and the smaller non-native deer like Muntjacs are already susceptible to cold weather, arthritis and dog attacks.⁵³ Electric and other types of fencing can deter them from areas where they are unwanted and tree guards can protect saplings.

Killing Methods

Shooting.

PEST

PREDATOR



Animals are said to be native to Britain if they arrived since the last Ice Age without human assistance. This makes foxes native to Britain, even though some have been imported to these shores, specifically to be hunted.

Foxes

Foxes are opportunistic feeders and their adaptability has allowed them to survive in a variety of habitats, ranging from isolated woodlands to city centres.

Targeted

It is precisely because they are so adaptable that foxes have made enemies: notably among conservation groups, farmers and those with game shooting interests.

Some conservation groups, including the Essex Wildlife Trust, have initiated fox culls with the aim of protecting other species including ground-nesting birds such as lapwings.⁵⁴

Some farmers cite predation as their reason for killing foxes. Chickens and lambs, they say, may be killed by foxes,

should they be afforded the opportunity of doing so.

Gamekeepers routinely kill foxes because they may take grain intended for their farmed pheasants or partridges, or the poults themselves.

Some urban dwellers also employ pest control companies to kill foxes because the animals dig up lawns, looking for worms, tip over dustbins or raid rubbish sacks left out in the street.

In Defence

Nature is not fixed, and predation is a natural feature of the animal kingdom. Conservationists who focus on making local environments fit their idealised view of what it should look like, and who should live in it, are fighting a losing battle. And

‘Preserving habitats and encouraging diversity, irrespective of which animals are currently in vogue, is a worthy enterprise.’

they are making animals pay with their lives to suit their fetishes. Preserving habitats and encouraging diversity, irrespective of which animals and birds are currently in vogue, is a worthy enterprise. Forcing individual species to survive where they naturally are unable, is not. Foxes eat a wide variety of foods and will take domestic rabbits, farmed pheasants, lambs and chickens given the opportunity. But in modern-day factory farms, chickens are not accessible. The oft-repeated question ‘have you seen what a fox does in a henhouse?’ harks back to a bygone era, long before ‘henhouses’ consisted of thousands of birds packed densely into one filthy shed.

Most lamb mortality occurs in the first week of life and is due overwhelmingly to poor husbandry rather than predation.⁵⁵ If fox predation were a serious problem, some farmers would need to explain why they encouraged the breeding of foxes on their land in order to provide more quarry to be hunted.

Urban dwellers see precious little wildlife, and foxes are likely to be the only wild mammal they have any contact with. We should be thrilled that foxes manage to survive in our towns and cities, and tolerate any small inconvenience that may bring. Bin lids can be secured and foxes humanely deterred. Most local authorities in urban areas have now replaced small dustbins and plastic-bags with wheelie-bins to which foxes cannot gain access. In areas where plastic bags remain, rather than complain about animals ripping them

open, it is both more productive and more humane to lobby local authorities to install less primitive waste disposal systems. Killing them shows a miserly unwillingness to share even a small corner of our world with other animals. Irrespective of the ethics of killing foxes, research shows that culling them does not control their numbers.⁵⁶ They control their own numbers and breed according to the amount of food available.

Killing Methods

Trapped, snared, shot, hunted with hounds (until 2005).

“We have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feather so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form.”

William Ralph Inge,
Outspoken Essays, 1922



Goats were introduced to the UK as domestic stock centuries ago.

Goats

Some escaped or were turned loose and their descendants still roam wild in areas across the country. Herds can be found in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the West Country. The Domesday Book recorded 75 goats in the Manor of Lynton (Devon) and a wild herd remains there today.⁵⁷ Culls periodically take place in Snowdonia, Devon and elsewhere. In May 2007, a cull of the billys at Lynton was undertaken despite advice to the contrary from the RSPCA. The RSPCA said it believed that as many as 20 billy goats had been culled and said that it was 'not aware' of any research demonstrating a cull was necessary. A spokesperson for the charity said it had alerted the Lynton authorities to long-term alternatives in April 2005 and said it was 'disappointed' to see its advice had not been investigated further.⁵⁸

Targeted

Because goats eat a wide variety of plants, they have been targeted by forestry groups, conservationists and gardeners. Some farmers approve of goat culls because goats 'compete with' – i.e. eat the same food as – sheep. Not only do they graze the same land, but goats may eat the crops that are being grown to feed to livestock as well as the feed put out directly to feed sheep. There is evidence that goats 'cause short-term localised loss of forage to farmers'.⁵⁹ Simply put, they 'take advantage'.⁶⁰ They are also charged with causing road accidents.

In Defence

Britain used to have 250 herds of wild goats; now there are fewer than 50. Descendants of ancient breeds still live free, alongside the offspring of more recently escaped individuals. As it is impossible to tell which goats are British 'primitives' just by looking at them, culls hasten the extinction of an ancient breed. The British feral goat research group says that, before a recent Snowdon cull, no census had been carried out. The culling had begun with no real knowledge of how many goats there were to start with.⁶¹ Concerns have been voiced that goats are being blamed for damage done by sheep, horses, rabbits and – mainly – humans.⁶² Overgrazing is a common problem, caused by people packing too many domesticated animals onto an area of land. The damage done can be significant but it is easier to blame wild goats for their minor role. It is inevitable that wild animals will die on roads – and that the larger species 'cause' accidents – when roads are built through their landscape. Co-opting the natural habitat of goats and other animals and then hurtling through it in metal boxes is bound to cause collisions with animals, but these cannot be said to be the fault of the animals. The language used by goats' antagonists to describe them is typically inflammatory. Goats are said to be 'marching down mountains' and 'marauding through gardens'. In reality, goats – like all wild animals – move to where food is most freely available. This means that they will eat what they find – whether that is in a wood, a park or a garden. Goats are notoriously difficult to contain but it is primarily for financial reasons that humane methods are not pursued. Rod Gritten,

ecologist with Snowdonia national park said 'I suppose we could put up goat-proof fences but that would cost millions.'⁶³ Killing them is a cheaper solution. Even though it is the goats who pay with their lives, they continue to be released into areas where people desire them to be, and then they are destroyed when deemed an inconvenience. During the 1980s, a herd was released on Exmoor in order to help 'manage' the land.⁶⁴ This herd is now being culled.⁶⁵ But goats are not lawnmowers that can be put away when the job is done. Why should they be killed for surviving in an area to which they have been taken? One reason given for not capturing and relocating any goats that do cause trouble is that it would be stressful for the animals, and yet goats are relocated and released all the time when it suits a purpose. In March 2007, the National Trust (NT) killed 18 goats whom the conservation organisation had introduced to Purbeck in Dorset. The animals had been released by the NT to keep scrub down but when they escaped from a designated area, the Trust simply moved them to yet another location. When they jumped fences at the new site, they were shot.⁶⁶ The Trust later apologised, saying: 'Given the offers that have come in to us in the last few days to take the three remaining goats, we wish we had done more to try to find them a home. It may also have been over-ambitious to undertake the grazing trial with these goats in the first place.'⁶⁷ Despite these contrite words, the National Trust continues to support goat culling in other areas.

Killing Methods

Shooting.



There are many species of gull – some can live both in coastal regions and inland, while others are strictly marine.

Gulls

Traditionally, gulls were seaside dwellers, feeding from the oceans but by the 1920s, seaside towns and their human-generated waste were booming.

Gulls took to feeding from the streets and, in time, took advantage of our increasingly 'throwaway society' and moved further inland, adapting to nest on rooftops.⁶⁸ Now, five different species are found in towns – herring, black-headed, common, lesser black-backed and great black-backed – and it is these urban dwellers who are most routinely targeted. The RSPB has stated that, while not endangered, all five are a 'conservation concern'.

The decline in their numbers, it says, could have been caused by changes in their marine environment, overfishing, reductions in discarded fish (by-catch) or pollution. Large gulls feed on almost anything of suitable size and texture. They hunt fish and other sea creatures, but also take carrion, rubbish, waste food, as well as eggs and chicks of other seabirds. They obtain a substantial amount by scavenging, and so are well-placed to take advantage of waste food in gardens, in streets and at rubbish tips. Black-headed and common gulls will scavenge, but also feed on insects in pasture or ploughed arable fields.⁶⁹

'...they cannot be blamed for adapting to a new habitat when their traditional one has been so drastically altered.'

Targeted

There are two main reasons why gulls are killed: they are said to be a nuisance, and they predate the eggs and chicks of other birds.

In urban areas, gulls can be loud. They can make a mess by ripping open bin bags and by defecating and, during the breeding season, they can become very protective of their chicks, even to the point of launching attacks on people who get too close.

Labeled as 'flying rats', they are charged with spreading disease and even stealing shopping.⁷⁰

Conservation groups approve of the culling of coastal-dwelling gulls because their diet includes the eggs and chicks of species that such groups want to protect, including the endearing puffin.

In Defence

Most gulls still live on the coast or in coastal towns – their traditional habitats. The influx of people into these areas and the resulting development has meant that gulls have had to adapt. And they have. Thankfully for them, people leave food, scraps and waste all over the place and so gulls are well fed. They cannot be blamed for adapting to a new habitat when their traditional one has been so drastically altered.

Gull populations are generally in decline, although in some localised areas, this might not be the case. Climate change

has meant that birds are breeding sooner in the year and are rearing two broods some years, rather than one.⁷¹ In these areas, simple measures like securing bins, not leaving rubbish bags on the street and regular street cleaning can help deter birds from nesting. Without these steps, culling can't work, as the niche created will simply be refilled.⁷²

Irrespective of efficacy, culling wild birds simply because we regard their behaviour as 'criminal' is just as illogical as the Medieval practice of charging animals with nefarious crimes and then hanging them when found guilty. If gulls really are a nuisance, it is time for people to clean up their act.

Contrary to common belief, gulls do not attack without warning but people often do not heed the warnings given to them. From mid-June until the end of July, when the chicks are growing, anyone wandering into a bird's territory may be issued with a warning call. A quick look at the bird can determine who is causing this alarm – the bird will be in an upright stance, with feathers sleeked back and will be looking at the person who is causing him concern. If this warning is ignored, the bird may swoop and drop guano. Should these signs all be ignored, the bird may strike the person from behind at high speed.⁷³ Gulls, like all good parents, take their job of protecting their young very seriously.

Killing Methods

Shooting.



Hedgehogs – the gardeners’ friends – live in varied habitats right across the UK, from wild woods to city-centre railway embankments.

Hedgehogs

They eat beetles, caterpillars, earthworms, slugs, snails and insects.

Their greatest threats are man-made: road traffic, agricultural intensification, pesticide use (including slug pellets), loss of hedgerows, open swimming pools and garden ponds, cattle grids and litter. These dangers have led to a dramatic drop in hedgehog numbers but it is rare for them to be deliberately and systematically killed. In Tudor times, however, hedgehogs were routinely persecuted, accused of sucking the milk from recumbent cows and stealing eggs from henhouses.⁷⁴ While the former accusation is clearly ridiculous, the latter has brought this gentle creature a great deal of trouble, and that has continued into the 21st century.

Targeted

Hedgehogs are persecuted by two groups: the game shooting industry and conservationists.

In December 2005, *Shooting Times* – the weekly bible for bloodsports enthusiasts – published a list of what it considered to be Britain’s 30 ‘most wanted’ pests because of the threat they were said to pose to ‘sporting’ shooters and anglers. Alongside the usual suspects – rats, magpies and rabbits – the hedgehog was included. Accused of being a ‘voracious predator’, the hedgehog’s penchant for eggs has made him some powerful enemies. Although hedgehogs cannot be trapped or killed without a licence,⁷⁵ it is clear that gamekeepers do not tolerate them.⁷⁶ Conservationists have also instigated a cull of hedgehogs. In the 1970s, 30 hedgehogs were taken from their natural habitat and transported to the Scottish islands of Uist and Benbecula. Before long, their need to eat brought them into conflict with the RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Executive. As hedgehog numbers grew, the number of

ground-nesting birds on the islands diminished. These groups united and announced that they would kill all 5,000 hedgehogs in an effort to protect the eggs of the islands’ ground-nesting birds. The cull began in 2003.

Fieldworkers gathered them – either by live trapping or by simply picking them up as they foraged – and took them away to be euthanased by injection.⁷⁷

Announcements were made that, in future, dogs would be used to track the last hedgehogs, who would then be shot.⁷⁸ Strangely, killing was suspended during the month of May to avoid the deaths of any orphaned young.⁷⁹

It was claimed that trapping and moving the hedgehogs to the mainland would cause ‘suffering and slow death’⁸⁰ and that culling was the most humane way to deal with the problem of hedgehogs on the islands.

In Defence

The sport shooting industry has no tolerance for any animal that threatens the industrial production of factory-farmed birds. The huge numbers of eggs or chicks, and the vast quantities of grain scattered liberally about to ensure that the target birds do not wander off before a paying customer has had the chance to shoot at them, are attractive to many wild birds and animals, including hedgehogs. By providing so much food, the population of predator animals actually increases.

Conservationists adopt flavour-of-the-month species and have often introduced ‘alien’ species to areas for ‘ornamental’ reasons or to prey upon an unwanted ‘pest’. But when the new species grows too numerous or inconvenient they, in turn, are persecuted.

“The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.”

Alice Walker

Hedgehogs were deliberately introduced to the Scottish islands of Uist in the 1970s to keep down garden ‘pests’.⁸¹ Should they pay with their lives because of man’s short-sightedness?

The Scottish hedgehog cull was launched without a humane relocation trial being undertaken. The reason given was that relocation was cruel (whereas killing hundreds of animals was deemed to be less cruel). Such outlandish statements were finally rebuffed when, in 2007, a Bristol University report proved that the relocation of the hedgehogs could be successful. With this evidence, the Scottish Society for the Protection of Animals had a change of heart and backed relocation. In February 2007, the Scottish hedgehog cull was officially scrapped.⁸²

Killing Methods

Lethal injection.



Rarely has a wild animal been so demonised as the North American mink – or served as such a convenient scapegoat for the environmental vices of our species.

Mink

Introduced to the UK in 1929 for fur trade exploitation, the mink has suffered shocking cruelties at the hands of farmers. Inside those farms, wild animals lived a desperate existence. Psychologically damaged by their imprisonment, they paced, spun and self-mutilated. In the 1950s, as big operators moved in and smaller businesses went bust, thousands of mink were released by farmers into the countryside. Decades later, more were released by animal activists.

Targeted

Farmers, anglers, fish farmers, shooters and conservationists all decry mink. Their alien status is a problem for some while the fact that they eat native species is unforgivable for others – especially when the loss of prey animals means loss of profit. Mink are blamed by farmers for taking poultry; by fish farmers and anglers for taking fish; and by shooters for taking pheasants.

PEST
ALIEN
PREDATOR

Conservationists also target them, citing displacement of otters, and the decline in both water vole and ground nesting bird populations.

Blood sports enthusiasts cite all of the above and welcome the opportunity to hunt mink now that otters – having been hunted to the brink of extinction – are legally protected.

In Defence

Mink have suffered enormous cruelties at the hands of fur farmers. The caging of wild animals and killing them by anal electrocution – to avoid spoiling the fur – has made mink one of this country's most persecuted wild species, even before we consider how they have fared in the wild. Predators eat other animals. We accept this of both wild and of our own domesticated cats, and yet have a hard time accepting it of other species. If rivers and lakes are well stocked with fish and shooting estates with poults, then there is a good chance that they will be predated. And the vast majority of chickens and other poultry are incarcerated inside huge factory farm sheds, where no mink could reach them. Mink live a solitary life in the British countryside, marking out territory a mile apart from each other. It is now accepted that they do not out-compete otters. In fact, it is the other way round.

The number of otters had previously slumped due to hunting, persecution by anglers who blamed them for eating fish and the use of DDT-type chemicals by farmers. As otter numbers have risen, so the population of mink has declined to less than half that of the 1980s.⁸³ Water vole numbers were in decline 40 years before mink were released into the British countryside. Their populations

'Mink live a solitary life in the British countryside, marking out territory a mile apart from each other. It is now accepted that they do not out-compete otters. In fact, it is the other way round.'

suffered from the removal, damaging and pollution of riverside habitats through building, flood control measures, bank mowing, dredging, angling and the reinforcement of riverbanks with iron and concrete. In short, human activity has led to the demise of the water vole.

Mink may take eggs from some ground-nesting birds and consequently are targeted by groups like the RSPB – a powerful organisation, whose aims inevitably trump those of the mammal protection societies. To protect popular bird species, the society has rounded up and killed rats, hedgehogs, foxes and even other birds as well as mink.

Tour operators in Mull called for a cull of mink in order to protect ground-nesting birds, on which, they said, their livelihoods depended. And mink hunters opportunistically utilise any argument – as they previously did against otters – in order to continue their sport.

Killing Methods

Trapping, shooting, hunting with dogs (until 2005).



Moles are essentially woodland animals, and the forest floor, rich in earthworms and other invertebrates, forms their primary habitat.

Moles

As forests have been cleared for agriculture and development, moles have had to adapt to a new environment⁸⁴ – one of manicured lawns and golf courses, and profit-driven farmland.

Moles are rarely seen but their molehills give them away. These earth mounds – formed as the mole digs his way through underground tunnels – cause outrage in

some quarters and lead to calls for the death of the perpetrator.

Records of mole-catching go back centuries with parishes offering a bounty on their heads or employing a full-time catcher. Things haven't changed so much. Pest control companies are still employed to kill this native species, and the Queen employs a mole catcher to keep her lawns pristine.

'Moles can, in fact, be beneficial to the gardener. The damage they cause is almost entirely cosmetic – certainly not worth killing a living being for – and they eat slugs and many unwanted insect larvae such as cockchafers and carrotfly.'

Targeted

Moles live underground and are active diggers, creating twenty metres of tunnel a day.⁸⁵

They are part of the rich diversity of British wildlife but their molehills bring them into conflict with farmers, gardeners and those enjoying recreational sports.

Molehills are irregular and are not welcomed by those wanting a picture-perfect garden, where nature is kept in her place.

Farmers also consider moles to be a pest. Problems cited include exposing stones and thereby damaging farm machinery, covering the field with fresh soil, thereby reducing its size and yield, damaging young plants through disturbing their roots, and contaminating silage with earth particles.

Golfers, like gardeners, cannot abide the unsightly hills, and other sports people – including footballers and horse riders – state that the hills can cause accidents.

In Defence

In some European countries, moles are a protected species,⁸⁶ with farmers, gardeners and sports-players simply living with them.

Moles can, in fact, be beneficial to the gardener. The damage they cause is almost entirely cosmetic – certainly not worth killing a living being for – and they eat slugs and many unwanted insect larvae such as cockchafers and carrotfly. Their tunnels actually help to drain and aerate heavy soils and the fine soil of molehills makes terrific potting compost.⁸⁷

Horse riders churn up bridleways until the ground is virtually impassable for those on foot. If horses can navigate this uneven terrain, a few molehills should pose no problem. As for football and other sports

“If we forget that humans and other animals are all part of the same world, and if we forget that humans and animals are deeply connected at many levels of interaction, when things go amiss in our interactions with animals, as they surely will, and animals are set apart from and inevitably below humans, I feel certain that we will miss the animals more than the animal survivors will miss us.”

'Deep Ethology' Kinship with Animals – Marc Bekoff

pitches, a shovel will quickly remove the offending hill and the game can commence.

Killing Methods

Poison, lethal trap, gassing.

Parakeets are not native to Britain but have been recorded here since 1850.⁸⁸

Parakeets

Originally from India and sub-Saharan Africa, it is likely that captive birds – brought to Britain and sold for the pet trade – escaped or were deliberately released and have since made their home in and around London. In 2007, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced – after being approached by the RSPB – that it would be investigating their impact on native species.⁸⁹

Targeted

Some ornithologists believe that the parakeets are competing with native birds for nesting sites and food. Parakeets nest in holes and crevices in trees and as such it is hypothesised that they may be displacing woodpeckers, nuthatches and starlings. As yet, this is not proven but talk of a mass cull of the 30,000 birds persists and may be carried out if the population grows or extends its territory.

‘As climate change continues to alter our seasons, parakeets may feel more at home than some native British birds.’

In Defence

Parakeets are not native to Britain but, having been taken from the wild, shipped around the world and stuffed into ornamental cages in urban and suburban residences, it is a something of a joy that some have escaped such a dreadful fate. Parakeets have become part of the fabric of London life. Despite their native tropical climes, the parrots have coped with British winters and feed on fruit, berries, nuts, seeds, grain and household scraps. As climate change continues to alter our seasons, parakeets may feel more at home than some native British birds. Dictating which birds can and cannot live within our national boundaries is ridiculous given the rapidly changing natural environment.

The charge that they may be competing with native birds is not made against the shooting industry which releases 40 million factory-farmed birds into the countryside each year, and which deliberately kills any species who competes with them. Bird groups certainly pick and choose their campaigns carefully.

That parakeets are attractive should certainly help their case.

**Killing Methods
Expected to be shooting.**

ALIEN



PEST



Descendants of the wild rock dove, pigeons are the tamest of all wild birds.

Pigeons

Traditionally, they inhabited coastal cliffs but have learned to survive in towns and cities, roosting on buildings instead.

Wild rock doves – who still live on the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland – eat seeds, but the diet of pigeons is wide and varied. City centre inhabitants survive on scraps dropped by people.

Their cousins, wood pigeons, are equally adaptable. With the loss of much of Britain’s woodland, wood pigeons have become common garden and farm birds.⁹⁰ In 1917, a whole-county shoot in Devon killed more than 25,000 wood pigeons.⁹¹

Targeted

While many urban dwellers accept that they share their city with pigeons, and welcome this small contact with the

natural world, others say that pigeons are messy and spread disease. Defecating on cars, buildings and pavements has brought about an intolerance of these amiable birds.

Others – primarily pest control agencies – are especially keen to argue that pigeons pose a health risk as they carry disease. In the countryside, wood pigeons are blamed for eating crops, particularly peas and standing corn,⁹² and this has made them a target for farmers.

In Defence

Pigeons have adapted to city life very well, largely due to the huge amounts of food that people leave lying around for them. It could be argued that they do a fine job of cleaning up this mess.

There is a lack of evidence that pigeons spread diseases to people, and yet the myth – largely perpetuated by pest control companies – persists. They say that pigeons carry histoplasmosis, toxoplasmosis, psittacosis, cryptococcosis, salmonellosis, meningitis, tuberculosis and encephalitis, which certainly sounds terrifying. But the multi-billion pound pest control industry relies on the public being so scared of animals that it will pay for them to be killed.

In reality, birds such as chickens, who are raised in crowded factory-farmed conditions, are more likely to infect people with both salmonellosis and toxoplasmosis when they are eaten, than are live pigeons, wandering around a town.⁹³ Equally, all animals, and humans too, are carriers of a host of disease organisms. That doesn’t automatically make them dangerous or lead to calls for their mass slaughter. In the countryside, farmers are at least partly responsible for the increase in pigeon numbers. Encouraged by financial incentives, farmers now grow 400,000 hectares of oilseed rape in the UK.⁹⁴ Before the subsidies, oilseed rape was virtually unknown. But it is a favourite food of pigeons and their numbers have increased correspondingly.⁹⁵

‘There is a lack of evidence that pigeons spread diseases to people, and yet the myth – largely perpetuated by pest control companies – persists.’

‘They were shooting pigeons... how hardening to the heart it must be to do this thing: to change an innocent soaring being into a bundle of rags and pain. At one moment – graceful, mysterious, desirable and free – and the next moment there is nothing but struggling and blood and confusion.’

Iris Murdoch

Killing pigeons, either by poisoning or by shooting, is not a humane way to reduce numbers, nor is it effective. Killing adult pigeons gives the younger birds a better chance of survival and allows breeding to continue. In a matter of weeks, numbers can quickly return to pre-cull figures. Where pigeons are not tolerated, there are humane ways to control their numbers. Clearing away food and encouraging the birds to roost in more convenient locations can help, as can installing anti-perching devices. In the countryside, bird scarers and netting are useful options.

Killing Methods

Shooting, poisoning, hawking, gassing.



Rabbits were introduced to the UK in the twelfth century by the Normans to be bred for their meat.

Rabbits

Warrens were established on islands around the coast to prevent them from colonising the country. But over the next century, warrens were established on the mainland, with many being constructed at monastic houses. Since then, rabbits have spread right across the country and have made their homes in a variety of habitats, from open meadows and grassland, to woodlands and even sand dunes. In the 1950s, myxomatosis, which was deliberately spread around the country as a control measure, wiped out 90 per cent of rabbits in the UK and Europe. The disease continues to ravage wild populations to this day.⁹⁶ But that isn't their only threat. An Order was made in the Pests Act 1954 by which every landowner in England and Wales 'is responsible for destroying wild rabbits on his/her land or for taking steps to prevent them causing damage. This is a continuing obligation.'⁹⁷

Targeted

Enemies of rabbits include farmers, gardeners and forestry groups – all of whom blame them for doing what they have to do to survive: that is, eating. Rabbits eat crops, grass and saplings and will strip tree bark. But shooting rabbits is also considered fun. 'What better sport,' asks James McKay in *Shooting Times*, 'than shooting at bolting rabbits?'⁹⁸

In Defence

Rabbits have lived in the UK for 900 years. In recent history, habitat destruction, urbanisation, disease and cultivation have

all had an impact on their numbers. Rabbits can be kept in or out of a designated area by erecting fencing, and trees can be protected by the use of tree guards. Making an effort to protect valuable woodland means that rabbits need not pay with their lives. With less to eat, numbers naturally drop. And while rabbits inevitably will eat some crops, surely farming in the 21st century can make allowances for wild animals and their need to feed themselves, too? In many areas, however, grazing by rabbits can actually help conserve valuable chalk downlands and other habitats by keeping grass short and preventing scrub taking over the habitat.⁹⁹ In fact, in many areas – including at Breckland in Norfolk – their grazing is said to be crucial to the habitat.¹⁰⁰ And grazing by rabbits allows the rare Large Blue butterfly to thrive in small pockets of the country.¹⁰¹

Killing Methods

Shooting, ferreting, killing with dogs, trapping, gassing, hawking.

“He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.”

Immanuel Kant

Raptors are birds of prey and, in the UK, include eagles, hawks, buzzards, falcons and owls.

Raptors

Sea eagles were hunted to extinction in 1916 but the golden eagle – who continues to be persecuted – clings on.

The osprey was also driven to extinction. In the 15th century, red kites were given special protection because they were responsible, along with ravens, for keeping the streets clean and preventing outbreaks of disease. But centuries of persecution took their toll and, by 1930, just ten breeding pairs could be found – all of them in Wales.¹⁰²

Targeted

Birds of prey have two main enemies: the shooting industry and egg collectors. Although raptors have been protected for more than 50 years,¹⁰³ persecution by gamekeepers and those with sporting interests in grouse moors remains a major problem. In 2005, for example, RSPB Scotland received 22 confirmed reports of poisoning and 20 confirmed reports of persecution of birds of prey by shooting and trapping.

Both the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and the Game Conservancy Trust – a registered British charity – are lobbying to end their legal protection and to be able to ‘control’ them.^{104 105} In 2006, *Shooting Times* magazine listed ‘30 pricey pests’ and on it were ospreys, red kites, peregrine falcons, buzzards and golden eagles.^{106 107}

‘Persecuting a bird or animal for feeding himself is inhumane, intolerant and ridiculous.’

Egg collectors persecute the birds indirectly. They take eggs from rare species for their personal collections or to sell. The more rare a bird becomes, the more prized their eggs are for those who collect them. Thus, the decline is perpetuated.

In Defence

Birds of prey eat mammals, birds and fish, and where better to find dense stocks of them than in areas where vast numbers of their prey are bred and reared? Shooting estates and fish farms are attractive to these birds – they simply take chicks, eggs or fish from the buffet laid out before them. Persecuting a bird or animal for feeding himself is inhumane, intolerant and ridiculous. Is it better that we live in a world where the only animals who survive are the ones purpose-bred by people for the purpose of their exploitation?

Killing Methods

Trapping, poisoning, shooting.

PREDATOR



Peregrine Falcon

PEST

PREDATOR



Originally native to Asia, both brown and black rats can now be found all across the globe.

Rats

They are highly intelligent and have adapted to survive in many different habitats. Typically nocturnal, they live in loose colonies, usually near to human habitation because of the ease of finding food. Black rats are one of the rarest mammals in the UK, but both they and the brown rat are routinely persecuted.¹⁰⁸

Targeted

There never was a species more universally persecuted than the rat. They are the bread-and-butter for pest control companies, whose profits rely on people being frightened of them. Much of the fear stems from the Black Death when rats (among other animals)

carried the fleas that spread the deadly disease. Since then, they have been charged with carrying and spreading a host of killer diseases. Gamekeepers target rats to stop them from eating grain meant for factory-farmed pheasants, or eggs. Conservationists also cull rats. Lundy is a small island just off the coast of Devon and was home to one of the few remaining colonies of black rats. Part of their diet was made up of eggs from ground nesting birds. In 2003, a cull was launched by conservation groups, English Nature, the National Trust, the RSPB and the Landmark Trust. The cull lasted for two years and saw the deaths of 40,000 rats, mostly by poisoning.¹⁰⁹

In Defence

Rats are shy creatures, preferring to steer clear of people for good reasons. Their domesticated cousins are known to be extraordinarily bright, clean and sociable, which makes the hysteria surrounding wild rats unfathomable. The water vole – one of Britain's most popular species – resembles rats and the two are often confused, so why are rats feared and persecuted, while water voles are revered and protected? It is commonly presumed that rats spread disease wherever they go – a belief that stems from the spread of the Black Death 700 years ago. In fact, researchers have recently found that the Black Death was not spread by rats at all but by human-to-human contact.¹¹⁰

It is true that rats – along with all animals, humans included – carry and may spread disease. Much of this threat can be eradicated with good personal hygiene and by keeping neighbourhoods clear of food. The fear of rats is hyped up by pest control companies and the media, both of which typically characterise the animals as savage, bloodthirsty beasts. The common perception is that we are only ever a few feet away from a rat and that we could die at any time from the cocktail of diseases that they carry. In fact, rats generally appear in gardens only where people put food out for birds. In public areas, it is, once again, food that attracts them. If people cleared up after themselves, rats would rarely be seen, let alone be seen as a pest.

The prejudice of some conservationists is extraordinary. In 2005, a colony of woodmice was evacuated from the Scottish island of Canna, the rats on the island were killed and the mice returned.¹¹¹ A case of: woodmice – good; rats – bad. But who are we to pronounce on the moral worthiness

of one animal to live, and another to die? Species fall in and out of fashion all the time. Some are protected, while others are killed to preserve people's appetites for 'loveable' species. As yet, however, rats have never been in vogue. Black rats lived on the island of Lundy for 400 years, but only recently were blamed for the declining populations of puffin and Manx shearwater. However, scientific studies suggested that their decline was likely to be due to over-fishing of sand eels (the birds' staple diet) or inaccessibility of breeding sites.¹¹² Although rats had lived on the island for four centuries, seabirds had only begun to decline in the last 60 years. There was no significant increase in rats during this time. Despite this, the RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage called for another cull of rats on the isle of Rum in order to 'protect' Manx shearwaters in 2005.¹¹³ A local couple who ran a ship rat domestication programme reported that these primarily vegetarian rats had no interest in meat and were unable to recognise birds' eggs as food.¹¹⁴ The inflammatory language used to describe rats ('menace', 'maraud', 'infest', 'sewer rat') means that, unless the lies are countered, these animals are likely to be persecuted for a lot longer.

Killing Methods

Poisoning, trapping, killing with dogs.

“The love for all living creatures is the noblest attribute of man.”

Immanuel Kant

Ruddy ducks were brought to the UK from North America in the 1940s by the ornithologist Peter Scott of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.



Ruddy Ducks

Originally among Scott's pastimes was duck shooting but the ruddys were intended to be 'ornamental exhibits'. After an accidental release of the ducks into the wild, the ruddys established themselves in Britain and continued to thrive, that is, until 1993 when this 'alien' species was first culled.

Targeted

Ruddy ducks have just one enemy: conservationists. Reports of the ruddy duck

reaching Spain and mating with the rare white-headed duck caused outrage amongst leading figures with certain bird groups. Their offspring were 'impure hybrids' and this meant that all ruddy ducks in the UK became targets. A series of government-sponsored 'trials' ensued and now there is a state commitment to eradication. Calls for a ruddy duck cull began in the political arena. It is believed that Spain was feeling under pressure from other EU countries for its lack of action in protecting

'It is true that the white-headed duck is a rare bird, but it is rare because it has been hunted extensively and has lost its natural habitat to human destruction. Rather than focusing on remedying the problems suffered by the white-headed duck, the ruddy has been made the fall guy.'

the Spanish steppes from the ravages of intensive agriculture – the steppes being important for the survival of species such as the black vultures. Spain retaliated to the chiding by demanding action on the ruddy duck, which it claimed was threatening the survival of the now cherished white-headed. British conservationists took up the challenge, and the rest – including the £3.3 million of taxpayers' money which funded the killing – is history.¹¹⁵

In Defence

The argument for wanting to decimate an alien species is usually couched in conservation terms – the animal is a marauding pest that is placing other native species in mortal danger.¹¹⁶ It is true that the white-headed duck is a rare bird, but it is rare because it has been hunted extensively and has lost its natural habitat to human destruction. Rather than focusing on remedying the problems suffered by the white-headed duck, the ruddy has been made the fall guy. To quote British Birds, '...when faced with a long list of biodiversity actions, many of which are difficult, intangible, expensive and not necessarily in the short-term interests of the economy, politicians and environmental agencies will always tend to jump on easy targets.'¹¹⁷

Killing in the name of blood purity – human

or animal – is dangerously retrograde. It does not matter to the white-headed duck that she has produced 'impure' offspring. It matters only to the more extreme bird listers and tickers. The mixing of genes is a Darwinian adaptation – a survival mechanism for coping in a changing world. Far from leading the white-headed duck to extinction, leading British ornithologist Tom Gullick is convinced that competition from the ruddy male has prompted a robust response from the white-headed male and has caused white-headed numbers to increase more than they otherwise would have done.

Gullick is the ornithologist who first alerted authorities to the plight of the white-headed ducks. He believes that the ruddy ducks who did reach Spain were most likely coming from neighbouring France and not from the UK at all. He calls the cull 'a scandalous misuse of rare conservation money'.¹¹⁸

The government's 1993-4 trial cull chose shooting as the best option on the grounds of cost rather than effectiveness. Dipping the eggs in paraffin was found to be 100% effective, unlike shooting them. But convenience won the day.

Killing Methods

Shooting.



Grey seals are among the rarest seals in the world and half of the world's population can be found on and around the British coastline.¹²⁰

Seals

Seals can live for 30 - 40 years and feed mostly on fish living on or close to the seabed, particularly sandeels, whitefish (cod, haddock, whiting, ling), and flatfish (plaice, sole, flounder, dab). Their diets vary seasonally and from region to region.¹²⁰ In recent years, local culls have taken place and bounties on grey seals have

been offered in several countries, such as Canada, Iceland and Norway. The last organised fisheries-related cull in the United Kingdom took place in 1983, but was terminated due to public opposition.¹²¹ Grey seals are currently protected by the Conservation of Seals Act (1970), but individuals 'causing damage to fishing nets'

can legally be killed. The northeast Atlantic subpopulation is considered to be endangered by the 2000 IUCN Red List.¹²²

Targeted

Fishermen are actively petitioning for a cull¹²³ because seals damage static nets (presumably by getting caught in them) and eat fish. It is claimed that predation by seals is responsible for the decrease in the amount of commercially landed fish. The fishing industry is in decline and is having to 'scratch a living'. Allowing seals to eat any fish adds to the burden. Grey seals can act as hosts to the codworm parasite, and calls have also been made to cull grey seals by those who believe that such a cull would reduce the codworm infestation in cod and flatfish 'stocks'.

In Defence

Seals need to eat and, whereas people can and do live without eating fish, seals can't. The reason for declining fish 'stocks' in the oceans is overfishing, particularly during the last 50 years. At least 20 of the world's most important fisheries have disappeared in the last 25 years, with many more suffering so badly from overfishing that they are unlikely to recover.¹²⁴

The fishing industry is massively destructive. Bottom trawlers wreak havoc in the oceans, destroying entire ecosystems. The industry catches and kills dolphins, porpoises, rays, turtles and even diving sea birds, and throws the carcasses back.

The suffering of the fish themselves remains largely ignored. Fish are hauled up from the deep, and undergo excruciating decompression. Frequently, the intense internal pressure ruptures the swimbladder, pops out the eyes, and pushes the

“Animals give me more pleasure through the viewfinder of a camera than they ever did in the crosshairs of a gunsight. And after I've finished “shooting”, my unharmed victims are still around for others to enjoy. I have developed a deep respect for animals. I consider them fellow living creatures with certain rights that should not be violated any more than those of humans.”

Jimmy Stewart

oesophagus and stomach out through the mouth.

Killing seals who need to eat fish to survive compounds the cruelty of this trade and is hugely unpopular with the public. In the first eight months after the fishermen launched their pro-cull petition, just 15 people had signed it.

Killing Methods

Shooting.

PEST
ALIEN
PREDATOR



Native to North America, the grey squirrel was introduced to Victorian Britain as an ornamental species by the aristocracy and released all over the country.

Grey Squirrels

By 1945, squirrels had expanded their range to include much of southern and central England. Today, these highly intelligent and adaptable animals can be seen in woodlands, parks and gardens across the country.

Targeted

Grey squirrels are blamed for aggressively ousting red squirrels from their territory. And they are said to carry a myxomatosis-like virus (SQPV), which is fatal to red squirrels. They are also blamed for having an impact on woodland birds by eating eggs from the nests. For these reasons, conservation groups support and initiate culls. Squirrels' eating habits also bring them into conflict with forestry companies, as they gnaw the bark of hardwood trees, such as beech and sycamore, to get at the

nutritious sapwood below, and are said to destroy young saplings. Gamekeepers kill squirrels to stop them taking bird feed and pheasant eggs, although they more often cite the decline of woodland birds for wanting grey squirrels killed.¹²⁵

In Defence

Grey squirrels are scapegoated for the mistakes of people and there is no evidence to suggest that they drive reds from their homes. Red squirrels suffered badly from deforestation, severe winter weather and epidemic diseases even before the greys arrived.¹²⁶ They declined to near extinction in the eighteenth century, which led to the introduction of more reds from Europe. Despite this, red squirrels continued to be killed by clubs for

a bounty during the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ Grey squirrels are hardier than their red cousins, and they need to be in order to survive in a changing world. It is true that red squirrels are more susceptible to SQPV but the red population was periodically badly hit by a range of diseases before the greys arrived.

Most grey squirrel killing is conducted within the context of protecting commercial woodland,¹²⁸ yet while red squirrels also damage trees, too, they remain protected. Reds thrive in conifers, while greys don't fare so well there. Unsurprisingly, the Forestry Commission and other timber groups campaign for red squirrels and suggest that planting more conifers is the answer. A sceptic might wonder whether additional conifer planting is intended to boost red populations or timber companies' bank balances. Grey squirrels may eat some of the same foods as dormice but claims that this 'competition' has adversely affected the dormouse population are largely made by the Game Conservancy Trust – a charity whose reports always find in favour of the gameshooting industry, and often at the cost of wild animals. It is not hard to imagine why those involved with game rearing should favour dormice over squirrels. And if it were true that the presence of grey squirrels causes a decline in dormice, that is nature's way.

'Grey squirrels are scapegoated for the mistakes of people and there is no evidence to suggest that they drive reds from their homes.'

No species can thrive under all circumstances.

Killing grey squirrels to control their numbers has not been successful. Bounty schemes have failed in the past¹²⁹ and modern-day culling may actually lead to an increase in local density of squirrel populations, increased damage to woodlands and increased spread of disease.¹³⁰ This is because recolonisation occurs extremely rapidly, which can result in higher numbers than pre-cull. And culls disperse animals, who, if infected, can spread disease further afield. Research that followed five squirrel culls found that populations recovered in just three to ten weeks. Quite simply, culls don't work.¹³¹ There are ways to help protect red squirrels. Establishing them on islands, changing forest planting and supplementing their feed could all help the much-loved animal, without harming the greys.

The sentimental attachment to reds is, in part, based on a fondness for a romanticised childhood character – Squirrel Nutkin. But not long before this upsurge in warmth, red squirrels were persecuted in much the same way that grey squirrels are today. In the 1800s red squirrel clubs 'accounted for' thousands of squirrels every year.¹³² As times change, perhaps the grey will come back into fashion but, in the meantime, doesn't discriminating against an animal on the grounds of his colour leave a bad taste in the mouth?

Killing Methods

Poisoning, live trapping and/or shooting, spring trapping, smashing dreys and stamping on the young.¹³³

Stoats and weasels are native to Britain and are found throughout the country in a variety of habitats.

PEST

PREDATOR



Stoats & Weasels

Stoats are the larger species and historically have been killed and skinned for their fur. Both species are agile, and strong climbers and swimmers.

Stoats and weasels are carnivorous. Stoats predate mainly on rabbits, while weasels prefer smaller prey, including voles and chicks.¹³⁴ Although one would think that they would be welcomed for their control of rabbit, rat and vole populations,¹³⁵ they continue to be demonised by some as 'troublesome vermin'.¹³⁶

Targeted

The main enemy of stoats and weasels is the gamekeeper, who ruthlessly targets them because the animals 'relish the odd chick or egg'.¹³⁷ Even such a small loss has led one Northants gamekeeper to kill 50-70 stoats and weasels every year.¹³⁸

Stoats are targeted on grouse moors, where their presence is a problem for those managing grouse shoots.

And both species are said to have a negative impact on songbirds, especially skylark and meadow pipit.

In Defence

Blaming wild animals for feeding themselves – particularly when large numbers of factory-farmed gamebirds are put in their way – is intolerant and obscene. Gamekeepers actually encourage the breeding of stoats and weasels by supplying them with an abundant food source. But since they make a living from killing any and all animals who threaten profits, even minutely, even animals

encouraged by them are not safe. Stoats and weasels may well take songbird eggs, but are we to kill every species that eats another one? Killing stoats and weasels is not undertaken to ensure biodiversity; it is all about maximising profits for shooting estates.

Killing Methods

Trapping, killing with dogs.¹³⁹

“...if one person is unkind to an animal, it is considered to be cruelty, but where a lot of people are unkind to animals, especially in the name of commerce, the cruelty is condoned and, once sums of money are at stake, will be defended to the last by otherwise intelligent people.”

Ruth Harrison

Killing Methods

When faced with a ban on their country pursuit, hunters claimed that shooting, gassing, snaring and poisoning are all crueller than hunting. Yet such methods are the backbone of 'pest' control activities.¹⁴⁰



Shooting

The likelihood of achieving a clean kill depends on a number of criteria, including the bore of the gun, proximity, size of the animal, speed at which he or she is moving and the competence of the marksman.

As not all criteria can be controlled, there is always a high risk of leaving an animal or bird wounded but alive. The government issues guidelines on how to shoot certain species. In their Codes of Practice on the Licensed Shooting of Brent Geese, it suggests bore size, load and shot size, a range of 30-40 yards, and restricting shooting to

safe and competent shots who have already had experience of shooting geese. (Of course, people only become experienced after shooting a lot of a particular species and along the route to competency, a much higher percentage of targeted animals or birds will be maimed.) With all advice followed, the government still accepts that some birds will not be killed outright. It suggests the marksmen 'make all efforts to recover and humanely despatch wounded birds.'¹⁴¹ But the pro-shooting organisation, BASC, admits that 'Traditional driven game and flight pond shooting practised in the company of others may make immediate retrieval and despatch difficult.'¹⁴²

Shooting inevitably leads to animals being wounded and left to suffer for hours, days, weeks or months. An unpublished study by the BASC found that up to 40 per cent of all birds shot at for sport are wounded rather than killed outright, and are never recovered.¹⁴³

The very best that can be hoped for is that 'wounding and wastage are kept to an absolute minimum.'¹⁴⁴ When the sheer number of animals and birds shot at are taken into account, even this best-case scenario equates to suffering on an immense scale.

In Denmark, research showed that almost as many geese were wounded as killed. Until 1997, 25% of the first-year and 36% of the older geese carried embedded shot, corresponding to at least 0.7 wounded geese per bagged one.¹⁴⁵

Drey Poking

This is a method used to kill squirrels and is traditionally conducted in pairs.

One person stands with long poles in his hand, and knocks and bangs on the squirrels' home, while the shotgunner stands ready to take a quick-fire shot at any squirrel leaving the nest. Dogs who are 'capable of taking any squirrels that come to ground' are used and the nest is completely destroyed.¹⁴⁶



Poisoning

Poisons may be used by industries or by individuals in their gardens. Apart from causing the deaths of the 'target' species – often in a protracted and terrible way – they can also harm people, domestic animals, wildlife and the environment. Warfarin and other anticoagulants, used to kill squirrels, rats and mice, are described as 'markedly inhumane' by the Pesticides and Safety Directorate.¹⁴⁷ These substances cause internal haemorrhaging and death rarely occurs quickly, with animals taking 1-2 weeks to die.¹⁴⁸ Newer anticoagulant chemicals – sometimes referred to as superwarfarins – are lethal after a single ingestion of the bait. These include chemicals such as brodifacoum, which is absorbed though the

'Apart from causing the deaths of the 'target' species – often in a protracted and terrible way – [poisons] can also harm people, domestic animals, wildlife and the environment.'

gut and death usually occurs through gastric haemorrhage within 4-5 days.

Other types of poison are metal phosphides, which react with the acid in the stomachs of the animals creating a toxic gas, and calciferols, which cause internal organs to fail.¹⁴⁹

Strychnine was the poison of choice for killing moles until 2006 when it was banned. According to DEFRA, the fact that it was so cheap 'probably led to more control of moles than was really necessary.'¹⁵⁰ Now, government and industry have been looking for new ways to poison moles. A new substance – bromoform – has been tested experimentally against captive moles in studies funded by DEFRA.¹⁵¹

Raptors continue to be poisoned both directly and through secondary routes.



When faced with a peregrine falcon who had digested the banned chemical Carbofuran, the RSPCA described the death as ‘excruciating’.

The effect on cats, dogs and other animals – ‘non-target’ species who are accidentally poisoned – is similarly painful, and pesticides continue to pollute the environment. Many are toxic to aquatic life and can devastate rivers, lakes and groundwater. Scientists have linked declining numbers of farmland birds to the use of pesticides in intensive farming over the last 50 years.¹⁵²

Pesticides can contaminate drinking water supplies. Once groundwater is polluted it remains contaminated for many decades and is costly or impossible to clean up.¹⁵³

Trapping and Snaring

There are two types of trap commonly used to ‘control’ mammals. Spring traps generally consist of a plate and a trigger and are lethal. Cage traps capture the animal alive.¹⁵⁴

Spring traps are used predominantly by gamekeepers to kill stoats, mink, rats, squirrels¹⁵⁵ and other animals. There are many types and not all are legal. Spring traps known as ‘break back traps’ are commonly used to kill small ground-dwelling animals. They are intended to kill quickly but this is not always the case. Animals may be caught by a limb, or by their head, tail or body and suffer for hours or days until death or a visit from the trap-setter means they are put out of their misery by a blow to the head.

Although **cage traps** capture animals alive, it does not follow that those animals survive. Cage traps keep an animal in one place until the trap-setter returns. Then, the animal *may* be released elsewhere but is more likely to be clubbed, shot or have his



neck broken. It is currently illegal to release any non-native animal back into the wild.¹⁵⁶ This includes grey squirrels.¹⁵⁷

Gamekeepers commonly use **Larsen traps** to catch corvids. They are made from wire and wood and have a compartment where a live decoy bird is kept. On seeing a bird on the ground, other birds come down and fall through a false floor and into another compartment. When the gamekeeper returns, the caught birds are ‘dispatched’. Decoy birds are often found dead through neglect, or can only watch on as other trapped birds are killed. Larsen traps were designed by a Danish gamekeeper in the 1950s but are now banned in Denmark because of their cruelty. They were introduced to the UK by the Game Conservancy Trust and the use of them remains legal.

Snares are crude wire garrottes that are designed to catch and hold rabbits and foxes around their necks. Used by gamekeepers, snares are indiscriminate and capable of causing immense suffering. Snared animals can legally remain unchecked for up to 48 hours and, in practice, this may be very much longer. Animals caught in a snare suffer from the stress of restraint, fear of predation,

‘Snared animals can legally remain unchecked for up to 48 hours and, in practice, this may be very much longer.’

dehydration, starvation, exposure, horrific injuries and death. Legal ‘free-running’ snares should slacken if the animal stops struggling but this may only happen when the animal is strangled to unconsciousness.¹⁵⁸ Illegal snares – where the garrotte continues to tighten and eventually may decapitate the animal over a long period of time – are still found to be in use. The dividing line between legal and illegal snares is not always clear.

Gassing

Traditionally, sodium cyanide was used to kill rabbits, moles and rats. Government trials at the highly secretive Ministry of Defence laboratories in Wiltshire in the 1980s used the same gas on badgers. It was found that pumping cyanide into setts did not achieve rapid death¹⁵⁹ but animals continued to die from its effects until the use of sodium cyanide was banned in December 2004.¹⁶⁰ Farmers and gamekeepers switched instead to aluminium phosphide. DEFRA admit that the humanity of using aluminium phosphide to kill moles is ‘questionable’.¹⁶¹ Fumigation with aluminium phosphide preparations (that give off phosphine gas on contact with soil moisture) can cause moles to ‘show prolonged symptoms of poisoning’¹⁶² and there is no other chemical approved in the UK.¹⁶³ Recommended concentrations of the gas

vary with the porosity, temperature and dampness of the soil and getting this right to achieve a rapid death is not simple. In government-funded tests, moles exposed continuously to a phosphine concentration chamber died within 30 minutes but exposure to sub-optimal concentration-time doses resulted in prolonged symptoms of poisoning before recovery or death.

Symptoms reported included uncoordinated movements, rapid respiration and mild convulsions. One animal displayed these symptoms for 3-4 days before dying.¹⁶⁴ DEFRA is currently trialling the use of carbon monoxide from exhaust fumes. But it seems that a quick death is not guaranteed using this method either.¹⁶⁵

According to the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG), ‘The NFU have suggested that gassing badgers is a very efficient means of despatch. The ISG is not aware of scientific data to support this view’.¹⁶⁶

Lethal Injection

Hedgehogs are the only wild species to be euthanased in the same way as domestic animals – by lethal injection. However, unlike a cat or a dog, hedgehogs ball up when frightened, and must first be

“For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.”

Pythagoras

prised open. This is not an easy or gentle procedure and yet hedgehogs were killed on the Scottish islands of Uist and Benbecula by untrained staff, not veterinarians. Uist Hedgehog Rescue's veterinary advisor, Andrew Greenwood of the International Zoological Veterinary Group said: 'I am very concerned to hear about SNH [Scottish Natural Heritage] training its temporary staff to lethally inject hedgehogs. This is actually very difficult to do humanely. This is the domain of the veterinary profession and there is the potential for this killing to be cruel and cause unacceptable suffering.'¹⁶⁷

Hawking

Hawks are used to scare pigeons away from roosting sites but also to attack and kill them.

In London's Trafalgar Square, 121 pigeons were attacked and ripped apart when hawks were deployed to scare the pigeons away.¹⁶⁸ Hawks are also set upon rabbits.¹⁶⁹

Hunting with dogs

In 2005, hunting with dogs was banned. Before that time, foxes, deer, hares and mink were hunted with dogs. While the other species would be killed by the dogs themselves, deer would be 'held up' and shot after the chase. Years of evidence showed the stress felt by animals being chased, and the claim that animals died from 'a quick nip to the back of the neck' was discredited as films revealed animals being disembowelled and postmortems showed that others had died without being bitten behind the head. Because of the cruelty involved, a ban was finally enacted but not before 40,000 hunt members signed a Declaration, stating that they would disobey the ban.¹⁷⁰ Convictions for those taking part in these illegal killings continue.



Dogs are still used legally to kill other wild animals – most notably, rabbits, rats, stoats and weasels.

Lurchers may be used during the day or at night to kill rabbits. At night, rabbits are caught in the beam of a powerful lamp and the dog is sent after them.

Terriers are set onto rats and are also sent down fox earths to 'hold up' foxes until someone – often a gamekeeper – digs down, retrieves the terrier and shoots the fox. In reality, terriers may attack foxes underground, causing both animals to sustain life-threatening injuries.¹⁷¹ Dogs are still used to drag badgers from their setts – even though this is illegal.¹⁷²

Ferretting

A ferret is sent into a rabbit burrow to bolt the animals out and into netting placed over the other end. Once caught, the animals are 'dispatched' – often by having their necks snapped.

Ferrets may also be used in conjunction with other animals. The ferrets bolt the animals from below ground out into the open where lurchers, terriers or hawks may go after them and kill them, or a shooter will be waiting.¹⁷³ The fear felt as a predator is introduced to their burrow will be increased by the presence of dogs or a hawk, and a clean kill is not guaranteed with either hawks or guns.

Changing Fashions in Conservation

Nature is not fixed and neither are human attitudes to it.

Species that once enjoyed great popularity fall from grace, and those that were once persecuted become revered and protected. Today's cherished animals cannot rely on being protected forever. Such changes are often whimsical, resting on little more than children's books.

In 1903, the Highland Squirrel Club was established to kill, not grey, but red squirrels who were classed as vermin. Over 30 years, the club killed 82,000 squirrels and were paid between 3d and 4d for each tail.¹⁷⁴ Other squirrel clubs killed thousands every year.¹⁷⁵ In the same year, Beatrix Potter wrote *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, and the squirrels' fortunes started slowly to change. Hares, who are now on the UK Red Data list of endangered species, were hunted and persecuted as a 'pest' for centuries. Despite being endangered, hunts continued to pursue and kill them until the ban in 1997. Even today, they are still not protected¹⁷⁶ and continue to be shot as pests.¹⁷⁷

Otters were hunted for 6,000 years, from the Mesolithic era until they were finally afforded legal protection in 1978.¹⁷⁸ Throughout the seventeenth century, otters had a price on their heads – paid for by churchwardens in parishes across England. Today, thanks to the 1927 novel, *Tarka the Otter* and the 1969 film, *Ring of Bright Water*, these animals are – for now – cherished. Fish farmers continue to rail against the animals for feeding from intensive fisheries and calls for a cull from



farmers and anglers are almost certainly just around corner.

It is not just otters who are living on a knife-edge. Vested interests continue to drip-feed negative information about a range of species and these slurs are likely to be followed by demands for culls, many of which will come from 'country sports' enthusiasts. Already, the powerful country sports lobby has listed its 30 'pricey pests' – animals who interfere with the production of 'gamebirds' and fish for so-called sport shooting and for angling.

The golden eagle, red kite, osprey, heron, peregrine falcon, buzzard or otter could be next in the firing line.

And some anglers have already demanded a cull of swans.¹⁷⁹ Swans don't eat fish but they do pull up water weed, where fish breed. Angry at the thought that there may be fewer fish to catch, anglers demand the death of these 'pests'.

Unintended Consequences

Meddling with ecosystems leads to unexpected consequences.

Zoologist Laura Bonesi conducted research with Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. She said "We introduced pollutants which made the otter population go down, and then introduced mink because we wanted fur. When we do these things, we don't realise how far-reaching the effects are. There is a chain reaction."¹⁸⁰

Aside from the immense suffering, culls cause ecological imbalance. In 2000, the last of the feral cats living on a remote island off Australia were killed. The theory was that, by killing the non-native cats, seabird populations would rise but, in fact, it led to 'an alarming ecological domino effect' and Macquarie Island was branded an international embarrassment by scientists. With the cats gone, the rat and rabbit populations boomed. The soil became eroded and entire cliff-tops collapsed, destroying the nests of the very sea birds that the people had intended to help.¹⁸¹

Closer to home, these same ripples can be seen. Rats are among the most persecuted of all animals. They are killed in farms and

on shooting estates, in homes, gardens and city centres all across the country. One unintended consequence of this is that so many have been killed in the countryside that their numbers have plummeted, and so have the numbers of kestrels who depend on rats for food.¹⁸²

There are regular calls by conservationists, often passionate about a single species, for their favourite animals to be reintroduced to Britain. In 2001, beavers were captured and brought from Norway and released into the Kent countryside.¹⁸³ Many died and others failed to breed.¹⁸⁴ Undeterred by this failure, a millionaire with a passion for beavers took six more from the wild in Bavaria and brought them to Britain where they were confined to a reserve in 2005. Jeremy Paxton hopes to get permission to release them into the countryside, even though beavers have not lived in Britain for 500 years.¹⁸⁵ If he gets his wish, we will, in time, see what effect this has on landscapes, plants and other animals, and how long it is before someone demands that they must be culled.

When the National Trust released 18 goats in Purbeck, Dorset in 2007, it narrow-mindedly thought that they would benefit a land management programme. Within months, the charity had ordered the deaths of the goats because they were said to be a nuisance.¹⁸⁶

'Aside from the immense suffering, culls cause ecological imbalance.'



Conclusion

Labelling animals as aliens, pests or predators is a tactic designed to ignite fear, intolerance and even hatred.



The use of inflammatory vocabulary works so well that culls are seen as inevitable. Necessary, even. But killing wildlife is not necessary. It simply serves a purpose, and those who wield most power and shout the loudest – landowners, big business, country sports enthusiasts – are yielded to, unquestioningly. Much of the clamour stems from conservationists and, although they claim to put nature first, they are not without prejudice. The powerful RSPB, for example, lobbies to protect birds but not all of them. Those less popular, along with certain other animal species, pay with their lives in order to try and boost the numbers of 'crowd pleaser' birds. Such partiality is endemic among conservationists.

Some argue that conservationists must interfere with the natural order, if only to rectify the wrongs of the past. But what makes them think that the current systems of 'managing' the natural world are any more enlightened than those that created

imbalances?¹⁸⁷ Certainly, modern methods of 'management' remain as barbaric and crude as ever.

Conservation is driven, in part, by nostalgia – a desire to recreate the hazy days of a bygone era, where crystal-clear brooks babbled through woodlands and flower-rich meadows thronged with butterflies. Time has tinted our spectacles and we hope to

Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages.

Thomas A. Edison

recapture those carefree days by engineering circumstances to suit our fancies, despite the impracticalities involved. The relentless march of 'progress' has forced animals and birds into pockets. And there, they must take their chances with, among other dangers, chemical pesticides, landscape change, polluted waters, road traffic and the whims of people who prefer this bird over that bird.

In targeting those animals who do adapt and thrive, conservationists work against Darwinist evolution. They fail to recognise that the rise and fall of species in accordance with changes in the world is natural, even if those changes result from human activity. In recent years, the impact by humans on the natural landscape has become all pervasive and that elusive golden age seems further away than ever. But still, there has been no let-up. The demand for culls has only increased. But most culls are not driven by the desire to create a perfect world; they are driven by selfishness and greed. Big business and sporting interests – and sometimes the two married together – are responsible for much of the killing. In some environments – most notably shooting estates – all semblance of the natural world is banished. Almost every species that may have an impact on profits, however minutely, is shot, trapped or



'Big business and sporting interests – and sometimes the two married together – are responsible for much of the killing.'

poisoned, leaving the woodlands virtually barren but for mass-produced game birds. Dupliciously and deliberately, blood sports enthusiasts tie their sporting interests to conservation efforts and claim that their 'pest control' programmes benefit the countryside. And pest control companies display similar guile in persuading people to part with money in exchange for being rid of a 'pest' that – they say – could damage a person's home, their garden or even their health.

All such assertions must be challenged and true motivations revealed. We should ask: do pigeons really infect people with deadly diseases just by living in the same town, or do such claims originate with pest control businesses? Do those who call for badger, cormorant or deer culls truly have the welfare of animals at heart or does a financial impulse drive their agenda? And can we trust those who say they kill grey squirrels to stop environmental degradation, when those same animals pose a financial threat – however small – to their sport or business? By allowing ourselves to be duped by powerful interest groups into believing that animals or birds must be killed 'for the greater good', we become complicit in the massacres. The first step toward supporting viable, healthy wild populations begins with questioning the status quo. Beyond that, we must curb our destructive impulses and instead champion a rich, diverse environment upon which those lives depend.



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