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Affairs Committee

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Summary

Species reintroduction aims to re-establish viable populations of plants and animals by moving those species from areas where they are present to areas from which they have been lost. Reintroductions could potentially help the Government meet its biodiversity and species abundance goals, benefit local communities, restore ecosystems and secure the future of organisms in the wild, but may also lead to adverse impacts on other land users and local communities. In the UK, animals such as beavers, bison and birds of prey have been in the spotlight as examples of species reintroduction.

Our inquiry's key findings and recommendations are:

A lack of clarity on the plant and animal reintroductions the Government supports has caused confusion and uncertainty among stakeholders. The Government should produce a list of priority species for reintroduction as part of a Species Reintroduction Strategy. This strategy should be published by January 2024. There should be a long-term vision for each species the Government supports, and justification for the reasoning behind those it explicitly does not.

The system for reintroducing species is overly bureaucratic when there are many species—particularly amongst plants, fungi, and insects—that pose little or no risk. Of those that it has not ruled out, the Government should categorise regularly requested species into low, medium and high risk and create differentiated channels and processes for the proportionate management of cases in each risk stream.

All species categorised as high-risk reintroductions should be subject to a national, independent impact assessment considering their potential benefits and risks, including to food production, infrastructure and disease prevalence. Local communities and land managers should be consulted on which species are translocated, and how and where this happens. Compensation should be available in areas where species reintroductions have the potential to damage agricultural land or practices, and the Government should fund a network of rapid response consultants by 2026, empowered to make prompt decisions on remedial action where problems caused by reintroduced species are identified.

The potential positive impact of the Defra England Species Reintroductions Taskforce has been undermined by its slow establishment and lack of stakeholder engagement. The Government should publish a protocol with clear guidelines stating when the Taskforce will, and will not, be consulted on reintroduction decisions. The Species Reintroductions Stakeholder Forum also has an important role to play in engaging positively with stakeholders. The terms of reference for that forum should be publicised by October 2023 with the first meeting taking place before 2024.

Creating a central species reintroduction hub designed to be a one-stop shop for interested parties would improve collaboration and coordination. This hub should provide details on species licensing requirements, any Government support available, best practice guidance, and opportunities for collaboration such as connecting land managers interested in reintroducing species with groups able to support them in doing so. The Government should introduce this hub by June 2024.

The England Species Reintroductions Taskforce should revise the species reintroduction code and guidance to address the gaps identified in those documents and also review the licensing regime.

If a reintroduced species is to be given protected status (as in the case of beavers), a risk assessment and management plan should be in place in advance of the protected status being granted. The protected status of beavers should be reviewed by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce in consultation with the Stakeholder Forum.

1 Introduction

1. Species reintroduction is one of four types of intervention known collectively as “conservation translocation” - the release of a species or organism within or outside its natural range. Natural range is the natural past or present geographical distribution of a species, including all places where a species is or was indigenous. There are four types of conservation translocation:

- **Reinforcement:** This is the translocation of an organism into an existing population of the same species within its natural range. Reinforcement aims to improve population viability, for example, by increasing: population size, genetic diversity, the representation of specific demographic groups or stages.
- **Assisted colonisation:** This is the translocation of an organism to benefit the conservation status of the focal species outside its natural range. It aims to establish populations in places where the current or future conditions are likely to be more suitable than those within the natural range.
- **Ecological replacement:** This is the translocation of an organism outside its natural range to perform a specific ecological function that has been lost through extinction of another organism. It usually involves replacing the extinct species with a related subspecies or closely related species that will perform the same or similar ecological function.
- **Reintroduction:** This is the translocation of an organism inside its natural range, to areas from which it has been lost. Reintroduction aims to re-establish a viable population of the focal species within its natural range.¹

Although this report focuses on reintroduction, we recognise the importance of other forms of translocation as outlined above.

2. Our evidence indicated that on the one hand, reintroductions have the potential to help the Government meet its biodiversity and species abundance goals, benefit local communities, restore ecosystems and secure the future of organisms in the wild.² On the other hand, we were told that there can be adverse side effects and that reintroductions need careful long-term management plans to identify and manage potential negative effects on other land users and local communities.³

1 IUCN, [Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations](#) (2019) p 10

2 [Q71](#)

3 [Q77](#)

The Government's environmental goals

3. In 2018, the previous Government's 25 Year Environment Plan set out goals for improving the environment.⁴ The then Prime Minister Theresa May said:

The United Kingdom is blessed with a wonderful variety of natural landscapes and habitats and Our 25 Year Environment Plan sets out our comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing them in England for the next generation.⁵

4. The Environmental Improvement Plan for England, published in 2023, is the first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan. The Environment Act 2021 requires Government and other public authorities to protect and improve the natural environment.⁶ The Act makes provision for species abundance targets: "Ensure species abundance in 2042 is greater than in 2022, and at least 10% greater than 2030 levels".⁷ However, there is no interim target to measure progress.

Our inquiry

5. We launched this inquiry on 3 November 2022.⁸ The inquiry aimed to explore the role species reintroductions could play in the delivery of the Government's biodiversity and nature recovery goals, how the potential benefits from species reintroduction can be maximised, and what improvements can be made in how local communities, landowners and other land users are engaged and consulted on reintroduction proposals. The inquiry also considered how management plans for reintroduced species may be implemented.

6. We received 53 pieces of written evidence⁹ and held four oral evidence sessions¹⁰. Witnesses included: academics, the Country Land and Business Association, Defra, the National Farmers' Union (NFU), Natural England, Rewilding Britain, the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce (Taskforce), and the Kent Wildlife Trust. We would like to thank everyone who provided oral and written evidence during the inquiry.

7. We undertook two visits in connection with this inquiry: first, to Bavaria, Germany, to see and discuss the longstanding beaver reintroduction taking place there with a wide range of stakeholders, including lessons learnt (organised by Gerhard Schwab, beaver specialist, and Derek Gow, reintroduction specialist and farmer); and, secondly, to Kent Wildlife Trust to see its bison project (in partnership with The Wildwood Trust). We are grateful to these individuals and organisations for facilitating and hosting these valuable meetings.

4 Defra, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#) (2018)

5 Defra, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#) (2018) p 4

6 [Environment Act 2021](#) (section 3)

7 The Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2023 ([SI 2023/91](#))

8 EFRA Committee [Species Reintroduction Terms of Reference](#) accessed 14 June 2023

9 EFRA Committee [Species Reintroduction Written Evidence](#) accessed 14 June 2023

10 EFRA Committee [Species Reintroduction Oral Evidence](#) accessed 14 June 2023

2 Government environmental targets: the role of reintroductions

8. The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) empowers and requires Government and other public authorities to protect and improve the natural environment. The Government has set species abundance targets via secondary legislation under the Act to “ensure species abundance in 2042 is greater than in 2022, and at least 10% greater than 2030 levels”.¹¹ However, there is no interim target to measure progress.

9. While these targets make no explicit reference to species reintroduction, we heard that there is the potential for reintroductions, and other types of conservation translocations, to contribute towards these goals.¹² In its written evidence to the inquiry, Natural England said that species reintroductions can play a key role in restoring biodiversity and in building the resilience of ecosystems to climate change and other human pressures.¹³ However, Natural England also said that species reintroductions are just one approach to restore nature and that in most scenarios, habitat restoration will be effective at recovering species and ecosystems.¹⁴

10. In response to the targets set out under the Environment Act, Craig Bennett, CEO of The Wildlife Trusts said:

The target to halt nature’s decline by the end of the decade is welcome but this should be coupled with a genuine target for nature’s recovery. Simply aiming for marginally more nature in 20 years’ time than our current, extremely depleted state is far from world-leading and an abdication of our responsibility to future generations.¹⁵

11. Minister Harrison told us that she does not see reintroductions forming a major part of nature’s recovery. She said:

Reintroductions are certainly part of the toolkit we have to reduce the decline of nature, which is the apex target set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan, recently published on 31 January, and very much building on the Environment Act. The main focus, if I was to choose one, would be habitat.¹⁶

12. Without interim species abundance targets it is unclear how this and future governments will be able to monitor progress against the Environment Act targets. We support species reintroduction as part of the effort to deliver current species abundance targets, but also believe that interim targets should be introduced to track progress against those.

11 The Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2023 ([SI 2023/91](#))

12 [Q71](#)

13 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 1

14 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 2

15 The Wildlife Trusts [Government’s new Environment Act targets defy public opinion on polluted rivers and wildlife recovery](#), accessed 16 December 2022

16 [Q233](#)

13. *The Government should introduce clear interim species abundance targets and reporting mechanisms to record progress every two years towards species abundance goals outlined in the Environment Act. It should inform us of those targets by December 2024.*

3 Strategic vision

14. A focus of our inquiry was the clarity of Government policy and vision on species reintroduction and how well that supported those wishing to reintroduce species. We heard that stakeholders interested in pursuing reintroduction projects often had to rely on hearsay and informal lessons learnt from previous project applications, and sporadic announcements such as that recently made by the Defra Secretary of State, Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey, ruling out support for reintroducing the lynx and wolf.^{17,18} In response to this announcement, Professor Alastair Driver, Director of Rewilding Britain said:

Lumping lynx and wolf together in the same sentence, when they are completely different issues, with a completely different ecology, shows a certain level of ecological illiteracy.¹⁹

Witnesses called for greater clarity in the Government's direction of travel, citing the delay in wild beaver releases²⁰—the Government established legal protection for the Eurasian Beaver from 1 October 2022,²¹ but applications are not yet open to stakeholders wishing to release beavers into the wild.

15. Evidence to the inquiry indicated that there are low-risk species that could be reintroduced with clear benefits and few risks, with therefore only light-touch oversight required from Defra.²² Professor Richard Brazier, Director of the Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste at the University of Exeter, said that the reintroduction of plant species could be positive for biodiversity and could help the Government meet its goals and targets in this field. He argued that potential plant species for reintroduction and reinforcement could include varieties of: sphagnum mosses in the uplands, perennial crops, and lowland, wetland vegetation.²³ Professor Alastair Driver said that further low-risk species include butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.²⁴

16. When we questioned the Department on whether there was a list of species that it would or would not support the introduction of, the Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use, Trudy Harrison, told us there was not and committed to providing us with a list of species that the Government is able and willing to support for reintroduction by June 2023.²⁵ Richard Pullen, Joint Head of National Biodiversity Policy at Defra told us that he sees a role for the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce in forming such a list.²⁶ He was particularly interested in looking at what species may offer benefits without major risks. In a letter dated 14 June, the Minister told us that the Department does not prioritise species but that she would discuss the information that could be provided with the Chair of the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce.²⁷

17 Defra, [Common Agricultural Policy reform](#) accessed 22 February 2023

18 [Q74](#)

19 [Q74](#)

20 [Q76](#)

21 Natural England [Beavers are now legally protected in England - the licensing regime explained](#) accessed 14 June 2023

22 [Q99](#)

23 Professor Richard Brazier [SR0057](#) p 1

24 [Q75](#)

25 [Q306](#)

26 [Q306](#)

27 [Letter from Trudy Harrison MP to chair of the EFRA Committee Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP following her appearance before the Committee 26 April 2023 \(June 2023\)](#)

17. It is unclear which plant and animal reintroductions the Government supports and there is no current long-term vision for how reintroductions fit into the Government's species abundance targets. This has caused confusion and concern between stakeholders seeking to reintroduce certain species, and amongst those against the reintroduction of such species, for example beavers.

18. Despite assurances by the Minister that we would be provided a list of priority species for reintroduction in June, in a letter to the Committee on 14 June the Minister said that the Department does not prioritise species but that she would discuss the information that could be provided with the Chair of the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. We were disappointed not to receive this list, which we consider essential as a starting point for a broader species reintroduction strategy. Without this, the current passive and piecemeal approach will hinder meeting the Government's species abundance targets and risk further damaging biodiversity.

19. *The Government should produce a list of priority species for reintroduction as part of a long-term strategy on species reintroduction in tandem with the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. This will allow stakeholders to plan applications ahead of time and have a more strategic, coordinated approach to projects to benefit nature recovery. This strategy should be published by January 2024.*

20. *Using evidence from the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce and its Stakeholder Forum, the Government should agree on the plant and animal species it is willing and able to support the reintroduction of in England and bring this information together in a register. This register should be included in the Strategy and should be reviewed by the Taskforce every 12 months. This register should also contain details of the species the Government does not support the reintroduction of in England. The Strategy should include a long-term vision for each species the Government supports, and justification for the reasoning behind those it explicitly does not.*

The England Species Reintroductions Taskforce and Stakeholder Forum

21. In May 2021, Defra established the English Species Reintroductions Taskforce.²⁸ The Taskforce was created to consider reintroductions of species which have been lost and the introduction of declining species into new areas: for example, the pine marten, dormouse, corncrake, short-haired bumblebee, and large blue butterfly. It brings together experts in the field, guided by published terms of reference.²⁹ The first meeting took place in mid-February 2023 with a second in late April.

22. There has been concern amongst stakeholders about the lack of transparency of the Taskforce so far,³⁰ given that one of its explicit tasks was to: “establish and work with a Stakeholder Forum to facilitate the development of partnerships leading to successful programmes for conservation translocations in England”.³¹ A perceived lack of urgency around this part of the remit has limited stakeholder buy-in from the outset and appears to be undermining external confidence in its role. For example, Judicaille Hammond

28 Defra, [England Species Reintroductions Taskforce](#), accessed 14 June 2023

29 Defra, [England Species Reintroductions Taskforce](#), accessed 14 June 2023

30 [Q83](#)

31 England Species Reintroduction Taskforce, [Terms of reference](#)

of the Country Land and Business Association said that she had only discovered the Taskforce by chance.³² Areas she would like the Taskforce to focus on include: the role of scientific advice, exercising due diligence on reintroduction applications, and providing a mechanism for conflict mediation and resolution. However, she questioned the ability of the Taskforce to deliver valuable work of this nature given its current resourcing and composition.³³

23. The minutes of the first meeting of the Taskforce suggest a recognition of stakeholder value, especially the value of engaging potential critics, and the importance of a communication plan;³⁴ by the second meeting, the stakeholder discussion appeared to be more inward, including the imbalance between those who support mammal reintroduction and those more inclined to support the reintroduction of lower risk species including insects and plants.³⁵

24. Richard Pullen, Biodiversity Policy Head at Defra, said the Taskforce existed to build best practice and that it did intend to engage with stakeholders.³⁶ Trudy Harrison said that the Taskforce was an advisory group and aimed to use global best practice to understand how reintroductions have, or have not, worked elsewhere.³⁷

25. We welcome the formation of the Defra England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. However, we regret that the positive impact it has the potential to create has been undermined by its slow establishment and resultant lack of stakeholder engagement. The Defra proposed species reintroduction Stakeholder Forum, created to support the work of the Taskforce, has an important role to play in engaging positively with stakeholders, broadening the Taskforce’s reach and buy-in. However, we are concerned that there is little information publicly available about that forum.

26. Urgent stakeholder engagement is required to build relationships with key individuals; these stakeholders should have an open invitation to join the Stakeholder Forum and be able to feed into Taskforce decisions through it. The Government should be clear when the Taskforce is expected to provide advice and the influence of that evidence. In cases where the Taskforce’s recommendations are not followed, there should be a clear explanation and rationale published by the Government so as to not undermine the Taskforce’s credibility and scientific authority. The Government should publish a protocol with clear guidelines stating when the Taskforce will, and will not, be consulted on reintroduction decisions.

27. A sign-up opportunity and terms of reference for the Stakeholder Forum should be publicised by October 2023 with the first meeting taking place before 2024. The Stakeholder Forum should inform the risk-based categorisation of species and be consulted before changes are made to classifications.

32 [Q84](#)

33 [Q84](#)

34 England Species Reintroductions Taskforce, [Meeting minutes \(February 2023\)](#)

35 England Species Reintroductions Taskforce, [Meeting minutes \(April 2023\)](#)

36 [Q284](#)

37 [Q282](#)

Risk-based approach

28. We were told that the current regulatory framework for reintroducing species was patchy and bureaucratic and failed to distinguish clearly between lower and higher-risk species.³⁸ We heard that unnecessary bureaucracy is hindering the reintroduction of some species, particularly species which pose little or no risk, and that this should be urgently addressed to aid nature recovery and deliver wider societal benefits.³⁹ During oral evidence, the NFU, the CLA, Rewilding Britain and Kent Wildlife Trust agreed that a risk-based permitting system of reintroductions could be helpful for practitioners, resulting in the level of regulation being proportionate to the risks the reintroduction project presents.⁴⁰ For example, the same level of consultation is not expected for translocation of the wart-biter crickets as for beavers, birds of prey or apex predators. An example of a reintroduction that has gathered public support with few identified risks is the reintroduction of the red-billed chough in Kent, undertaken through a partnership between Kent Wildlife Trust and Wildwood Trust.⁴¹

29. Professor Alastair Driver of Rewilding Britain said that a tiered system for reintroductions was required, categorised by risk.⁴² He said that the number of species that would be in that high-risk category would be small, but the low-risk or non-controversial list would be enormous. Tom Bradshaw, Deputy President of the NFU agreed, saying, that there are some species that are controversial and others that are not controversial at all, therefore they should not have to go through the same processes.⁴³ He said that impact assessments are fundamental to setting out on the journey of a species reintroduction, although they are not undertaken consistently at present.

30. Commenting on the potential of categorising species according to risk, Trudy Harrison, Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use said that a bespoke approach was needed because the impacts of a species in one area might be very different to its impacts in another area. She did not think that a simplistic species-by-species categorisation approach was the correct way to enable reintroductions to happen.⁴⁴

31. The current system for reintroducing species is overly bureaucratic, hindering nature recovery. There are many species—particularly amongst plants, fungi, and insects—that pose little or no risk. Identifying and supporting those low-risk species would give confidence to stakeholders seeking to reintroduce them and reduce the burden on the Department, allowing it to focus on more complex and high-risk cases. Rather than attempting to include all species in the register, the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce should identify commonly requested species for inclusion in it.

38 Professor Richard Brazier [SR0057](#) p 1

39 [Q1](#)

40 [Q100](#)

41 Kent Wildlife Trust [Reintroducing choughs to Kent](#), accessed 14 June 2023

42 [Q99](#)

43 [Q100](#)

44 [Q304](#)

32. *We recommend that the register contained within the new Strategy should include species categorised according to the risks related to their reintroduction. Of those that it has not ruled out, the Government should categorise regularly requested species into low, medium and high risk and create differentiated channels and processes for the proportionate management of cases in each risk stream.*

33. *We recommend that the Government should be clear how the classification of species determines the requirements for stakeholder consultation and involvement of the Department. We recommend that all species categorised as high-risk reintroductions should be subject to a national, independent impact assessment assessing their potential benefits and risks, including to food production, infrastructure and disease implications. Local communities and land managers should be consulted in which species are translocated, and how and where this happens.*

Collaborating for success

34. Many conservationists and farmers have already engaged in the reintroduction of certain plants, birds, fungi, insects and mammals and other individuals, professionals and organisations are interested in learning more.⁴⁵ We heard that there is great merit in sharing experiences between interested parties for the benefit of nature recovery. For example, enabling the connection of a wildlife group with expert knowledge of a particular plant or animal, with a land manager wishing to participate in reintroductions.

35. Dr Sarah Dalrymple, Reader in conservation ecology at Liverpool John Moores University, told us that it would be beneficial to have a hub which could be an open access source of advice, sharing experience and learning from other people.⁴⁶ Dr Richard Brazier, Exeter University, said that most of the required and relevant information exists, but as piecemeal studies or reports and have not been brought together.⁴⁷ He thought that a positive action, that would make an immediate difference, would be for Natural England and the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce to consider how such a hub could be developed. He said that he hoped it would be mapped as to better understand where species are, where they are naturally expanding and thus where no interventions are needed because the species are getting there themselves.⁴⁸

36. **Creating a central species reintroduction hub designed to be a one-stop shop for interested parties would be a positive step forward to improve collaboration and coordination in this policy area. The value of any hub lies in its ability to bring good practice guidance, licensing information, and sign-up opportunities together, as well as bringing people together for the benefit of species recovery. This seems an appropriate task for the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce.**

37. *The Government should create an online species reintroduction hub by June 2024, supported by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce and Stakeholder Forum, for parties interested in the reintroduction of species. The hub should be a one-stop shop for good practice and collaboration and its advice should be aligned with a national reintroduction strategy. The hub should display the Government's species reintroduction*

45 [Q74](#)

46 [Q42](#)

47 [Q45](#)

48 [Q45](#)

register and clearly outline the licensing conditions and classification relating to each species. It should also directly connect landowners and managers interested in introducing species with groups able to support them in doing so.

4 Legislative framework and good practice

Legislative framework

38. We were told by Natural England that the licensing of reintroductions is a process that ensures good practice is followed and requires the wider public interest in nature recovery to be considered.⁴⁹ Reintroductions currently requiring a license from Natural England include species listed in schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: barn owl, capercaillie, chough, corncrake, common crane, Eurasian beaver, northern goshawk, red kite, white-tailed eagle and wild boar.⁵⁰ Further restrictions, for species such as bison and wild boar, are outlined in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.⁵¹

39. However, the Beaver Trust told us that the licensing regime acts a deterrent and blocker rather than an enabler for positive and valuable reintroductions and that species recovery was suffering as a result.⁵² The Wildlife Trusts said that Natural England should streamline the process of species reintroduction and accelerate the reintroduction of species as the current process takes too long and it is slower than the rate at which species are declining in this country.⁵³ It said that the current regulatory regime for species reintroductions is already a barrier to improving biodiversity in England and that the current system is too bureaucratic.⁵⁴ Natural England said that “basing such controls around the code and guidance, which is already in place, means that these controls need not be overly burdensome for regulators or for projects following good practice.”⁵⁵ However, Professor Richard Brazier said that Government should work to remove the designation of species including European bison, wild boar and elk from the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. He stated that these animals are no more dangerous than their livestock counterparts, and the act was drawn up to represent zoo animals, not wild, free-living animals.

40. Natural England told us that only a limited number of species reintroductions are currently regulated. It said that further improvements in reintroduction practice will require “greater control” through the rolling out of licensing across further species.⁵⁶ It said that extending controls (increasing the number of species that are licensed) would have a positive overall outcome through improved project design and planning and improved public and stakeholder confidence in the oversight of translocations as a method to restore species abundance. The Government’s 2021 guidance on reintroductions and conservation translocations was established to reduce the likelihood of poorly conducted reintroductions.⁵⁷ However, Natural England said that only reintroductions of licensed species are required to follow the code and guidance.⁵⁸

49 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 3

50 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, [sections 14 and 22](#)

51 Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, [section 7](#)

52 Beaver Trust [SR0015](#) p 2–3

53 The Wildlife Trusts [SR0016](#) p 3

54 The Wildlife Trusts [SR0016](#) p 3

55 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 7

56 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 3

57 Defra, [Reintroductions and conservation translocations in England: code, guidance and forms](#) accessed 14 June 2023

58 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 5

41. **There is little support for the current conservation translocation licensing regime: on the one hand some stakeholders said that it is too bureaucratic, and, on the other we heard that the existing system is not stringent enough. As a priority, the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce should seek to clarify and resolve this situation. The Government should clarify its position on reintroduction licensing.**

Promoting good practice

42. Defra commissioned Natural England to produce the ‘reintroductions and other conservation translocations: code and guidance for England’ (‘code and guidance’), published in May 2021.⁵⁹ The code and guidance set the standard for species reintroductions and, through alignment with the equivalent Scottish code and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines, aims to encourage consistency across the United Kingdom and with international best practice.⁶⁰

43. According to Natural England, the code and guidance aims to provide advice that, if followed, helps projects succeed, maximise potential benefits and minimise the risk of failure or harm.⁶¹ Natural England also told us that while it is too early to fully evaluate and review the effectiveness of the code and guidance in promoting good practice, it has identified gaps in relation to the reintroduction of large predators and herbivores, disease risks and assisted colonisation to support the adaptation to climate change.⁶² It would like these gaps to be addressed by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce in a revision of the code and guidance. The NFU has called for the England code and guidance for species reintroduction to be strengthened, particularly regarding stakeholder consultation, project management and exit strategies.⁶³

44. Dr Katie Beckmann, Lecturer in wildlife health and conservation medicine at the University of Edinburgh, said that the Taskforce should have a role to promote the code and guidance. Dr Beckmann also said that reintroduction projects should have a wildlife veterinarian or a wildlife health specialist involved from the start; and there were well-established procedures for undertaking disease, and health, assessments—in parallel with other risk assessments—that are needed during translocations planning.⁶⁴ Dr Tony Sainsbury, Senior Lecturer in wild animal health at the Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London, said that far too many translocations ignored best practice, citing cases where species are being reintroduced without any consideration of the risks of doing so, particularly disease risks.⁶⁵ However, The Lifescape Project told us that the code and guidance were well established and provided a widely recognised basis for project consideration, development and implementation.⁶⁶

59 Defra, [Reintroductions and conservation translocations in England: code, guidance and forms 2021](#) accessed 14 June 2023

60 IUCN, [Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations](#) (2019) p 10

61 Natural England [SR0027](#) p 5

62 Oral evidence, taken 31 January 2023, HC 849, [Q4](#)

63 NFU [SR0038](#) page 1

64 [Q40](#)

65 [Q19](#)

66 The Lifescape Project [SR0029](#) page 3

45. **The Government’s 2021 code and guidance for species reintroductions form a valuable tool, but it must be revised and updated to maintain high project standards, for example in relation to assisted colonisation, disease risks, exit strategies, impact assessments, large predators and herbivores, and more effective stakeholder consultation. The England Species Reintroductions Taskforce, and its Stakeholder Forum, should feed into this process.**

46. *The Government should revise the species reintroduction code and guidance by January 2024 and reissue it alongside the new Strategy. The revised code and guidance should be available via the species reintroduction hub when it is launched.*

5 Management plans and rapid responses

47. This chapter considers how reintroductions can be managed successfully and how potential conflicts may be mitigated. Natural England is the only body in England with authority to permit many types of management and control of species. As an example, for beavers, guidance on what management action can be taken and when a license is required is detailed in Government guidance.⁶⁷ For other species, management is less clear and for most reintroduced species, there is no defined responsibility for management when populations have become established.⁶⁸ In a letter to us dated 14 June, the Minister also outlined the Government’s approach to post-release monitoring.⁶⁹

48. Stakeholders told us that the process of gaining authorisation for species management action is long-winded and bureaucratic, resulting in delays often at a juncture when time is critical.⁷⁰ We heard that when questions or problems arise, they should be dealt with quickly and locally, rather than having to go through national systems or be vulnerable to prolonged litigation.⁷¹

49. The NFU has criticised the Government for providing legal protection for beavers before management plans were in place.⁷² They said that it is possible for farming to coexist alongside reintroductions, although cautioned that if the population ends up causing negative impacts or being out of control, land managers need to know what management action can be taken and the responsibility for management must be defined and funded.⁷³ The CLA said that they support reintroduction where it makes sense for ecological restoration, provided that the reintroduction is supported by the land owners who are impacted, both immediately and in the future, where populations are likely to move, which they said is “certainly the case” with beavers.⁷⁴

50. The NFU also said that compensation for negative impacts such as the loss of livestock or the flooding of agricultural land should be available to farmers to manage potential impacts on food production and to reduce uncertainty.⁷⁵ The Kent Wildlife Trust, however, said that compensation to mitigate the impacts of reintroduction projects does not work. They said that payments for species presence, rather than compensation, is the most appropriate way forward as landowners could be paid to tolerate species.⁷⁶

51. The Committee visited Bavaria where beavers were introduced in the 1960’s. For beavers to co-exist with human activity, we were told that over 1,000 beaver consultants are in place to steward beaver releases and migration to help them to co-exist with landowners and communities. The beaver consultants have responsibility for working with land managers to minimise conflict and advise generally on beaver mitigation measures.

67 Defra, [Beavers: how to manage them and when you need a licence](#), accessed 14 June 2023

68 Association of Drainage Authorities [SR0023](#) page 3

69 Letter from Trudy Harrison MP to chair of the EFRA Committee Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP following her appearance before the Committee 26 April 2023 (June 2023)

70 [Q78](#)

71 [Q93](#)

72 [Q93](#)

73 [Q78](#)

74 [Q77](#)

75 [Q78](#)

76 [Q79](#)

The beaver consultants receive a week's training before being certified and are paid a modest allowance for their work. Kent Wildlife Trust told us that an advisory group for beavers already exists in East Kent. It said the group is taking steps to meaningfully engage with land managers and is beginning to turn the perceptions of beaver conflict into beaver activity.⁷⁷ We were told that this has resulted in positive action and stakeholders welcome the transparency of the project.

52. Minister Harrison said that the Government is not considering a reintroduction compensation scheme currently.⁷⁸ She also said that she would ask the England Species Reintroduction Taskforce to look closely at the learnings from Bavaria and the department would consider how it may build capacity in this area.⁷⁹

53. We have seen first-hand in Bavaria that crop damage compensation and mitigating works, such as substantial structural changes to the drainage system, were major calls on the public purse, requiring bold decisions and significant funding. The annual budget for compensating farmers for damage to crops such as maize and sugar beet amounted to €450,000⁸⁰ alone. We also saw the benefits of rapid response consultants. We believe that this approach, in combination with a government funded compensation scheme, is the best way to mitigate concerns and provide reassurance to land managers potentially impacted by high-risk reintroduction projects. Where populations are already established, the case for establishing a management process should be urgently considered, with priority given to species with protected status.

54. The Government should implement localised control and management systems by forming and funding a network of rapid response consultants by 2026. The rapid response consultants should be members of the local community and be empowered to make prompt decisions on the remedial action to be taken where problems caused by reintroduced species are identified. The framework for creating these networks should be included in the strategy called for above.

55. Those affected by the reintroduction of species, including farmers and land managers, must have access to sufficient support and funding to prevent and deal with potential negative impacts. Budgetary provision should be made for this as part of the Government's reintroduction strategy. The framework for this provision should be included in the strategy outlined above.

56. If a reintroduced species is to be given protected status (as in the case of beavers), a risk assessment and management plan should be in place in advance of the protected status being granted. The protected status of beavers should be reviewed by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce in consultation with the Stakeholder Forum.

77 [Q85](#)

78 [Q300](#)

79 [Q302](#)

80 European Commission, [Eurasian Beaver \(Castor Fiber\) – Germany](#), accessed 14 June 2023

Conclusions and recommendations

Government environmental targets: the role of reintroductions

1. Without interim species abundance targets it is unclear how this and future governments will be able to monitor progress against the Environment Act targets. We support species reintroduction as part of the effort to deliver current species abundance targets, but also believe that interim targets should be introduced to track progress against those. (Paragraph 12)
2. *The Government should introduce clear interim species abundance targets and reporting mechanisms to record progress every two years towards species abundance goals outlined in the Environment Act. It should inform us of those targets by December 2024.* (Paragraph 13)
3. It is unclear which plant and animal reintroductions the Government supports and there is no current long-term vision for how reintroductions fit into the Government's species abundance targets. This has caused confusion and concern between stakeholders seeking to reintroduce certain species, and amongst those against the reintroduction of such species, for example beavers. (Paragraph 17)
4. Despite assurances by the Minister that we would be provided a list of priority species for reintroduction in June, in a letter to the Committee on 14 June the Minister said that the Department does not prioritise species but that she would discuss the information that could be provided with the Chair of the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. We were disappointed not to receive this list, which we consider essential as a starting point for a broader species reintroduction strategy. Without this, the current passive and piecemeal approach will hinder meeting the Government's species abundance targets and risk further damaging biodiversity. (Paragraph 18)
5. *The Government should produce a list of priority species for reintroduction as part of a long-term strategy on species reintroduction in tandem with the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. This will allow stakeholders to plan applications ahead of time and have a more strategic, coordinated approach to projects to benefit nature recovery. This strategy should be published by January 2024.* (Paragraph 19)
6. *Using evidence from the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce and its Stakeholder Forum, the Government should agree on the plant and animal species it is willing and able to support the reintroduction of in England and bring this information together in a register. This register should be included in the Strategy and should be reviewed by the Taskforce every 12 months. This register should also contain details of the species the Government does not support the reintroduction of in England. The Strategy should include a long-term vision for each species the Government supports, and justification for the reasoning behind those it explicitly does not.* (Paragraph 20)

Strategic vision

7. We welcome the formation of the Defra England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. However, we regret that the positive impact it has the potential to create has been undermined by its slow establishment and resultant lack of stakeholder engagement. The Defra proposed species reintroduction Stakeholder Forum, created to support the work of the Taskforce, has an important role to play in engaging positively with stakeholders, broadening the Taskforce's reach and buy-in. However, we are concerned that there is little information publicly available about that forum. (Paragraph 25)
8. *Urgent stakeholder engagement is required to build relationships with key individuals; these stakeholders should have an open invitation to join the Stakeholder Forum and be able to feed into Taskforce decisions through it. The Government should be clear when the Taskforce is expected to provide advice and the influence of that evidence. In cases where the Taskforce's recommendations are not followed, there should a clear explanation and rationale published by the Government so as to not undermine the Taskforce's credibility and scientific authority. The Government should publish a protocol with clear guidelines stating when the Taskforce will, and will not, be consulted on reintroduction decisions.* (Paragraph 26)
9. *A sign-up opportunity and terms of reference for the Stakeholder Forum should be publicised by October 2023 with the first meeting taking place before 2024. The Stakeholder Forum should inform the risk-based categorisation of species and be consulted before changes are made to classifications.* (Paragraph 27)
10. The current system for reintroducing species is overly bureaucratic, hindering nature recovery. There are many species—particularly amongst plants, fungi, and insects—that pose little or no risk. Identifying and supporting those low-risk species would give confidence to stakeholders seeking to reintroduce them and reduce the burden on the Department, allowing it to focus on more complex and high-risk cases. Rather than attempting to include all species in the register, the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce should identify commonly requested species for inclusion in it. (Paragraph 31)
11. *We recommend that the register contained within the new Strategy should include species categorised according to the risks related to their reintroduction. Of those that it has not ruled out, the Government should categorise regularly requested species into low, medium and high risk and create differentiated channels and processes for the proportionate management of cases in each risk stream.* (Paragraph 32)
12. *We recommend that the Government should be clear how the classification of species determines the requirements for stakeholder consultation and involvement of the Department. We recommend that all species categorised as high-risk reintroductions should be subject to a national, independent impact assessment assessing their potential benefits and risks, including to food production, infrastructure and disease implications. Local communities and land managers should be consulted in which species are translocated, and how and where this happens.* (Paragraph 33)

13. Creating a central species reintroduction hub designed to be a one-stop shop for interested parties would be a positive step forward to improve collaboration and coordination in this policy area. The value of any hub lies in its ability to bring good practice guidance, licensing information, and sign-up opportunities together, as well as bringing people together for the benefit of species recovery. This seems an appropriate task for the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce. (Paragraph 36)
14. *The Government should create an online species reintroduction hub by June 2024, supported by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce and Stakeholder Forum, for parties interested in the reintroduction of species. The hub should be a one-stop shop for good practice and collaboration and its advice should be aligned with a national reintroduction strategy. The hub should display the Government's species reintroduction register and clearly outline the licensing conditions and classification relating to each species. It should also directly connect landowners and managers interested in introducing species with groups able to support them in doing so.* (Paragraph 37)

Legislative framework and good practice

15. There is little support for the current conservation translocation licensing regime: on the one hand some stakeholders said that it is too bureaucratic, and, on the other we heard that the existing system is not stringent enough. As a priority, the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce should seek to clarify and resolve this situation. The Government should clarify its position on reintroduction licensing. (Paragraph 41)
16. The Government's 2021 code and guidance for species reintroductions form a valuable tool, but it must be revised and updated to maintain high project standards, for example in relation to assisted colonisation, disease risks, exit strategies, impact assessments, large predators and herbivores, and more effective stakeholder consultation. The England Species Reintroductions Taskforce, and its Stakeholder Forum, should feed into this process. (Paragraph 45)
17. *The Government should revise the species reintroduction code and guidance by January 2024 and reissue it alongside the new Strategy. The revised code and guidance should be available via the species reintroduction hub when it is launched.* (Paragraph 46)

Management plans and rapid responses

18. We have seen first-hand in Bavaria that crop damage compensation and mitigating works, such as substantial structural changes to the drainage system, were major calls on the public purse, requiring bold decisions and significant funding. The annual budget for compensating farmers for damage to crops such as maize and sugar beet amounted to €450,000 alone. We also saw the benefits of rapid response consultants. We believe that this approach, in combination with a government funded compensation scheme, is the best way to mitigate concerns and provide reassurance to land managers potentially impacted by high-risk reintroduction

projects. Where populations are already established, the case for establishing a management process should be urgently considered, with priority given to species with protected status. (Paragraph 53)

19. *The Government should implement localised control and management systems by forming and funding a network of rapid response consultants by 2026. The rapid response consultants should be members of the local community and be empowered to make prompt decisions on the remedial action to be taken where problems caused by reintroduced species are identified. The framework for creating these networks should be included in the strategy called for above. (Paragraph 54)*
20. *Those affected by the reintroduction of species, including farmers and land managers, must have access to sufficient support and funding to prevent and deal with potential negative impacts. Budgetary provision should be made for this as part of the Government's reintroduction strategy. The framework for this provision should be included in the strategy outlined above. (Paragraph 55)*
21. *If a reintroduced species is to be given protected status (as in the case of beavers), a risk assessment and management plan should be in place in advance of the protected status being granted. The protected status of beavers should be reviewed by the England Species Reintroductions Taskforce in consultation with the Stakeholder Forum. (Paragraph 56)*

Formal minutes

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Members present

Sir Robert Goodwill, in the Chair

Ian Byrne

Barry Gardiner

Dr Neil Hudson

Cat Smith

Derek Thomas

Draft Report (*Species Reintroduction*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 56 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 27 June 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 31 January 2023

Professor Richard Brazier, Professor of Earth Surface Processes, University of Exeter; **Dr Katie Beckmann**, Lecturer in Wildlife Health & Conservation Medicine, The University of Edinburgh; **Dr Sarah Dalrymple**, Reader in Conservation Ecology, Programme Leader, BSc Wildlife Conservation, Liverpool John Moores University; **Dr Tony Sainbury**, Senior Lecturer in Wild Animal Health, Institute of Zoology

[Q1–69](#)

Tuesday 28 February 2023

Tom Bradshaw, Deputy President, National Farmers' Union; **Professor Alastair Driver**, Director, Rewilding Britain; **Judicaelle Hammond**, Director of Policy, Country Land and Business Association (CLA); **Evan Bowen-Jones**, Chief Executive, Kent Wildlife Trust

[Q70–138](#)

Tuesday 21 March 2023

Dr Andy Clements, Chair, England Species Reintroduction Taskforce

[Q139–179](#)

Tony Juniper, Chair, Natural England; **John Holmes**, Director, Strategy and Government Advice, Natural England

[Q180–232](#)

Wednesday 26 April 2023

Trudy Harrison MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Richard Pullen**, Head of National Biodiversity, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

[Q233–317](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SR numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 ADA (Association of Drainage Authorities) ([SR0023](#))
- 2 Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust ([SR0009](#))
- 3 Anonymous, ([SR0046](#))
- 4 Bainbridge, Dr Alan (Reader in Education, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh); and Consorte-McCrea, Dr Adriana (Education for Sustainability Lead, Academy for Sustainable Futures, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury,) ([SR0004](#))
- 5 Beaver Trust ([SR0015](#))
- 6 Beckmann, Dr Katie (Lecturer in Wildlife Health and Conservation Medicine, The University of Edinburgh) ([SR0051](#))
- 7 Brazier, Professor Richard ([SR0057](#))
- 8 Brazier, Professor Richard (Director, Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste, University of Exeter) ([SR0052](#))
- 9 British Association for Shooting & Conservation (BASC) ([SR0024](#))
- 10 British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) ([SR0032](#))
- 11 CLA ([SR0044](#))
- 12 Chester Zoo ([SR0050](#))
- 13 Citizen Zoo ([SR0018](#))
- 14 Countryside Alliance ([SR0021](#))
- 15 Dalrymple, Dr Sarah E. ([SR0055](#))
- 16 Dalrymple, Dr Sarah (Reader in Conservation Ecology, Liverpool John Moores University); and Meloro, Dr Carlo (Reader in Vertebrate Palaeontology, Liverpool John Moores University) ([SR0047](#))
- 17 Defra ([SR0030](#))
- 18 Driver, Alistair ([SR0058](#))
- 19 Ellis, Councillor Suzie (Councillor For Central Rural IoW Council, Isle of Wight Council) ([SR0040](#))
- 20 England Species Reintroduction Task Force ([SR0056](#))
- 21 Forestry Commission ([SR0035](#))
- 22 Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust ([SR0034](#))
- 23 Humanist Climate Action ([SR0043](#))
- 24 IUCN National Committee UK Species Survival Working Group ([SR0042](#))
- 25 IUCN/SSC CTSG Human-Wildlife Interactions Working Group ([SR0006](#))
- 26 Institute of Zoology ([SR0053](#))
- 27 Joint Nature Conservation Committee ([SR0025](#))
- 28 Knox, Mrs Caroline ([SR0020](#))
- 29 Landmark Associates Ltd ([SR0002](#))

- 30 McNally, Mr Ross ([SR0005](#))
- 31 Morris, Mr Leslie ([SR0012](#))
- 32 Munt, Mrs Robyn ([SR0011](#))
- 33 National Farmers Union ([SR0038](#))
- 34 National Pig Association ([SR0022](#))
- 35 National Sheep Association ([SR0028](#))
- 36 Natural England ([SR0027](#))
- 37 NatureScot ([SR0007](#))
- 38 Norfolk Rivers Trust ([SR0001](#))
- 39 Rewilding Britain ([SR0060](#))
- 40 Rewilding Britain ([SR0003](#))
- 41 Rodgers, Michael ([SR0037](#))
- 42 Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation ([SR0039](#))
- 43 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds ([SR0036](#))
- 44 Smith, Mr Thomas (farmer, Marvel Farms) ([SR0008](#))
- 45 The Environment Agency ([SR0031](#))
- 46 The Lifescape Project ([SR0029](#))
- 47 The University of Exeter ([SR0054](#))
- 48 The Wildlife Trusts ([SR0016](#))
- 49 The Wildwood Trust ([SR0014](#))
- 50 The Zoological Society of London - ZSL ([SR0033](#))
- 51 Vincent Wildlife Trust ([SR0045](#))
- 52 West Dorset Wilding ([SR0048](#))
- 53 Wild Planet Trust ([SR0017](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture	HC 23
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-designate of the Environment Agency	HC 546
3rd	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste	HC 22
4th	Rural mental health	HC 248
1st Special	Tree Planting: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2021–22	HC 323
2nd Special	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 412
3rd Special	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 700
4th Special	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1044

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Moving animals across borders	HC 79
2nd	Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition	HC 78
3rd	Tree planting	HC 356
4th	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector	HC 713
5th	Pre-appointment Hearing: Chair of Ofwat	HC 1253

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	COVID-19 and food supply	HC 263
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	HC 1042
3rd	The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain	HC 231
4th	Flooding	HC 170

Number	Title	Reference
5th	Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual	HC 468
6th	Public Sector Procurement of Food	HC 469
7th	Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply	HC 1156
8th	Seafood and meat exports to the EU	HC 1189