

Written evidence submitted by the Beaver Trust (SR0015)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee - Species Reintroduction Call for Evidence

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/2957/>

Deadline for Submission Friday 6 January 2023

Submission Format:

- Less than 3,000 words, or if over that need to include a short summary as well
- Should include an introduction to our organisation and our reason for submitting evidence

Introduction to Beaver Trust

Beaver Trust is a nature restoration charity, established in September 2019, run by a small team with expertise in conservation, ecology and land management. We provide practical solutions to help people to live alongside beavers and support legislation that rebuilds ecosystems and strengthens climate resilience in a time of ecological and climate crisis. Our mission is to restore beavers to regenerate our landscapes.

Beaver Trust Views

1. What role should species reintroductions play in the delivery of the government's biodiversity and nature recovery goals? Should specific objectives/targets be set for species reintroduction?

- Species reintroductions and conservation translocations are key tools the UK Government needs to implement across a wide range of taxa in order to meet its legally binding targets of halting the decline in species abundance by 2030 and increasing species abundance by at least 10% by 2042 in comparison to 2030 levels.
- The reintroduction of keystone species which are currently absent from England (such as Eurasian Lynx) and conservation translocations of other keystone species present but not widely distributed (Eurasian beaver, European bison, wild boar, Golden eagle) would have the biggest effect on species abundance in England and present the government with the best opportunity to meet its legally binding targets due to these species scientifically documented ability to create and change habitats which benefit an innumerable number of other species.
- The reintroduction and increase in abundance of keystone species would also restore natural processes and provide ecosystem services which will contribute to creating climate resilient landscapes. For example the restoration of the beaver populations across England would mean more water being trapped in the headwaters of our river catchments making the country better equipped in the face of extreme flood and drought events.

- Conservation translocations when used effectively are also a key tool to help species present but in decline recover. Examples include red squirrel, pine marten, red kite, white-tailed eagle and many more.
- Yes - Given the impact keystone species can have on species abundance, natural processes, and habitat creation we would like to see ambitious legally binding targets set around the following:
 - Timelines for the reintroduction of missing native keystone species
 - Population targets for already present native keystone species i.e. restore the Eurasian beaver population to X individuals by 2030
 - Targets for translocation of present native keystone species into new areas to facilitate range expansion i.e translocate Eurasian beavers into X river catchments where they aren't currently present by 2030.
 - Targets relating to the genetic diversity of present keystone species through population augmentation to mitigate the risk of genetic bottlenecks.

2. How can the government maximise the potential benefits from species reintroduction, and ensure the correct species are reintroduced in the correct places?

- By adopting the principles and approach outlined in the IUCN guidelines for reintroductions and conservation translocations as policy or law in England.
- By ensuring that any reintroduction programme is sufficiently funded by the government to meet its existing and any further legally binding targets discussed in question 1.

3. What role should the Landscape Recovery and Local Nature Recovery Schemes, under ELMS, have in supporting species reintroduction?

- These schemes should be seen as a key mechanism to encourage local communities, landowners and other land users to adapt or change behaviour to live alongside reintroduced species and make space for nature.
- For example, incentivising land managers to create 10m buffer strips along either side of water courses on their land can reduce conflict with beavers by up to 95% while creating habitat for a wide range of other species. It will also provide ecosystem services for people, such as improved water quality.

4. How effective is current government policy and 2021 guidance in leading and managing species reintroductions? Should any changes be made to its policies and guidance?

- Current government policy, guidance and approach does not allow for decisions and actions to be taken regarding species reintroductions in a timely manner. For example The River Otter Beaver Trial ended in March 2020 but it took until August 2020 for the Government to decide whether the beavers would be allowed to stay. It then took until October 2021 for

government bodies to launch a national consultation on the management and protection of beavers in England. The results of which were delayed. Beavers were finally given European Protected Status in Oct 2022, 2 years and 6 months after the completion of the River Otter Trial but we are still waiting on wild release licensing information to be published.

- Currently public consultation to facilitate a reintroduction is carried out at multiple levels (nationally, regionally, and at community level) which is currently inefficient as many species don't adhere to community and county borders. A review of current practice which results in a streamlined standardised approach for all species should be adopted.
- Ensure the scope of public consultations aren't binary (whether stakeholders are for or against proposed reintroduction) but instead are focussed on their concerns about potential impacts the reintroduced species will have. That way illegitimate and legitimate concerns can be easily identified and treated appropriately. (Auster et al, 2021).

5. What improvements can be made in how local communities, landowners and other land users are engaged and consulted on reintroduction proposals? What practical steps can be taken to reduce conflict with these groups?

- Use schemes like the Landscape Recovery and Local Nature Recovery Schemes, under ELMs to incentivise and encourage communities, landowners, and other land users to adapt or change behaviours to live alongside reintroduced species.
- Ensure the scope of public consultations aren't binary (whether stakeholders are for or against proposed reintroduction) but instead are focussed on their concerns about potential impacts the reintroduced species will have. That way illegitimate and legitimate concerns can be easily identified and treated appropriately. (Auster et al, 2021).

6. How could the development of long-term management plans and regulatory regimes for reintroduced species control be improved?

- Review, adopt, or create similar long-term management plans and regulatory regimes that have been proven to be successful for reintroduced species control in other European countries where appropriate.
- It is essential that species reintroduction is normalised and streamlined supported by policy and centralised funding.

7. What can the government do to help prevent unregulated species reintroductions?

- Setting ambitious legally binding targets related to species reintroductions as set out in question 1 would show clear intent and act as a deterrent towards unregulated species reintroductions.

- Normalisation of species reintroductions and a review of current practices and policies (as described above) which results in a streamlined and standardised approach and is supported by centralised funding.

8. What lessons could the UK government and Natural England learn from reintroduction in other jurisdictions, in UK and Europe?

- Strong legal and policy frameworks underpin the successful reintroduction of many species across Europe, especially birds. (*Wildlife Comeback in Europe: Opportunities and challenges for species recovery, Ledger et al 2022*)
- Coexistence with some reintroduced species may require some communities to adapt and change behaviour. Policies and legislation that ensure communities are engaged with, supported and benefit from coexistence are important to promote human wildlife coexistence (*Wildlife Comeback in Europe: Opportunities and challenges for species recovery, Ledger et al 2022*)
- The EU Nature Directives, including protective measures for species and sites, should continue to be recognised, practised and written into UK law and potentially expanded to recognise and protect ecosystem processes.

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