

Nottinghamshire *Wildlife Trust*



Policies and procedures

Guidelines on Killing Wild Animals and Controlling their Populations

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Introduction

The killing of wild animals is not undertaken by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust without informed discussion through the governance structures and active membership. This paper provides guidelines and general principles to inform such discussions, from which specific policies can then be developed on the control of individual species.

- 1.1. The killing of wild animals is regarded by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust as a “last resort” measure to deal with serious conservation management problems. In some cases, short term, local action to control species needs to be taken to address the problem as a precursor to longer term measures. However, the majority of situations will involve allowing or encouraging self-regulating processes to control the numbers of the species concerned (eg the control of mink by encouraging the recovery of otter). Pragmatically this process may be the only practical approach in the long term because of the successful adaptation of the problem species to the countryside. For the few cases which require a regional, national or international approach (eg ruddy duck) the evidence for action will need to be more substantial, well researched and be able to demonstrate that killing is the only mechanism, which would work.
- 1.2. There are also occasional circumstances where control is subject to law rather than conservation management, such as where a species is impacting on the health and hygiene of a facility (eg rats around a visitor facility).
- 1.3. However in all circumstances considerable attention must be given to the impacts of the control measures on non target species (eg the impacts of the insecticide used to control cockroaches on other invertebrates). If no clear evidence is available, then a precautionary approach should be taken.

- 1.4. The question of controlling (culling) or eradicating wild animals, which have, or are perceived to have, a seriously damaging effect on habitats or on other species, can be addressed through the following guidelines. Although in many cases the species to be killed are those which have been introduced to the UK, and have spread dramatically, (eg muntjac deer, Canada geese, grey squirrels) this is not always the case. In fact, many species although introduced by man are in all practical terms now part of the 'native' fauna (eg rabbits, brown rats) and their origins are somewhat academic to this issue.
- 1.5. Of particular conservation concern are grazing animals which alter vegetation structure and composition on a large scale (eg various deer, rabbits, feral goats) and predators which, in certain conditions, put species of conservation importance at risk (eg mink on water voles, non-native crayfish on white-clawed crayfish). There is also a small group of species where the effect of their presence is more difficult to define (eg ruddy duck on the white-headed duck). Another group of species is *perceived* by the public or others to be a threat to wildlife due to a local, or more widespread, increase in their numbers (eg gulls on tern colonies, magpies on songbirds). The final group are those predators affecting wild or domestic species of economic importance (eg crows on lambs, foxes on pheasants).

2. The Guidelines

- 2.1. These guidelines provide a set of principles of documented justification, ecological rationale, best practice, monitoring and review. They should be used by anyone who is proposing to kill wild animals for *conservation purposes*.
- 2.2. These guidelines will particularly be applied to land under conservation management of the Wildlife Trust. However, the general principles should also be applied to proposals on neighbouring land that will impact on our own sites, requests from neighbouring landowners or through moral or legal obligations.
- 2.3. Where our advice is sought on proposals by others to kill wild animals elsewhere, such proposals should only be supported if a similar cautious and structured approach is used.
- i. Decisions to kill any animal on conservation grounds should be based on the ecological impact of the species concerned, ie its effects on species of conservation importance and/or habitats.
 - ii. To proceed there should be a convincing case that killing the animal concerned will address the management problem that has been identified and that killing is the only practical mechanism that would achieve this.¹
 - iii. Any killing should be done by the most humane, practical method available.

¹ ie any other relevant, available and practical mechanism have been tried first or have already been used in a parallel situation.

- iv. Any proposal to undertake a killing programme should be adequately researched and justified² on paper, be for a limited time scale and have a monitoring mechanism built in. The decision to continue a further phase should be based on the assessment of the effectiveness and continued relevance of the previous phase.
- v. Methods of regulating the population by other means eg by habitat manipulation, altering food supplies, adjusting natural predation levels etc to achieve a self regulating system should be frequently reviewed as the preferred long term solution. This method will require considerable monitoring of the impacts of the method, and even then predator numbers may need controlling to prevent significant imbalances developing in the predator / prey populations.
- vi. Before any activity is undertaken a communications strategy needs to be devised. As a minimum this should include an internal briefing available to staff and key volunteers to ensure that the rationale for the action is understood. The internal briefing will be used to address any media enquiries and pro-active media work will be determined on a case by case basis.
- vi. All activity is likely to have a cost associated with it. These costs should be understood and explained at the policy development stage, and this is likely to include an "indicative" cost-benefit analysis. These costs need to be understood and approved through the normal controls of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.

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² ie for the proposer's use and for anyone else they need, or wish to, convince.