

Briefing Paper Provided by SNH to Scottish Government Re-introduction of the Wolf to Scotland

Article 22 of the Habitats Directive concerns the desirability of re-introducing species in Annex IV; the species formerly present in Scotland and listed on Annex IV are wolf, brown bear, lynx and beaver.

In considering the desirability of reintroducing such species, a range of factors have to be considered. These are summarised in the IUCN Guidelines for Conservation Translocations (2012) and the JNCC "Policy for Conservation Translocations of Species in Britain" (http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/species_policy.pdf). Such factors include consideration of whether the situation leading to the species' extinction now changed? Under Article 22 of the Habitats Directive a reintroduction should also take account of experience from other Member States to determine if it would help to re-establish the species at a favourable conservation status. It also requires consultation of the public to take place.

A key element of the IUCN reintroduction guidelines is that the original cause of the species extinction has to be identified and removed. It appears very likely indeed that the original cause of the extinction of the wolf in Scotland was persecution; understandable in the context of the time. Experience from elsewhere in Europe where the wolf is naturally re-colonising is that they are still subject to persecution. So only with the very clear support of the Scottish public, particularly in the Highlands and in the countryside sectors, would any reintroduction meet the guidelines, or be feasible. SNH does not believe that there is the necessary support amongst the Scottish public in general and land managers in particular for such a reintroduction to take place at present.

SNH currently chairs the 'National Species Reintroduction Forum' (NSRF) which is made up of a range of organisations from the conservation, land use, public and NGO sectors. If SNH were to receive any formal proposal for wolf reintroduction, then this would be put to the NSRF for discussion and consideration.

SNH has been involved with a range of other high profile reintroductions or trial reintroductions, such as for beaver, sea eagle, vendace and a range of plant and invertebrate species.

COMMENTS ON THE SG EMAIL

Statement "... the Scottish public would not approve of wolves savaging and killing the wild deer population (or any other wild animals in Scotland for that matter)".

Predators killing prey is, of course, a perfectly natural phenomenon. Indeed the SG have approved the reintroduction of a predator already, the sea eagle...the expectation that sea eagles would 'savagely and kill' rabbits, fish etc did not, quite understandably, stop SG issuing a licence for release!

The likely predation of livestock by wolves is a different matter of course, as there are certainly potential socio-economic impacts. We suggest that any wording the SG use in this respect is made with due care (noting the sensitive debates surrounding the ongoing sea eagle-sheep issue).

Reference is made to the effect on wolf welfare during any transportation. In fact any translocation of wolves, or other animal species, involves a number of stages where there may be complex welfare issues. Transportation is one element but there is also capture, quarantine, release, monitoring methods etc. There are protocols for trying to minimise adverse effects, but inevitably they can never be removed completely.

Reference is also made to quarantine requirements which would certainly be complex (although quite possible). You might want to think about whether you refer to this, these are probably not strong arguments against wolf reintroduction as there are well-established protocols to minimise such welfare concerns. It's also not worth raising the issue over who would pay as there are likely to be plenty of private individuals/organisations who would cover the costs of a wolf reintroduction if the decision was ever made.

Reference is made to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act. This is certainly relevant while they are within captivity. A licence would also be required under the WCA 1981 and WANE 2011(?) to release the animals into the wild. In the theoretical event that a release into the wild was approved and then done, the Dangerous Wild Animals Act would no longer be relevant to those animals.

Scottish Natural Heritage
January 2013

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Briefing on the Reintroduction of Wolves to Scotland

1. Scottish Natural Heritage has no current plans to examine the desirability of reintroducing top predators.
2. The Species Action Framework sets out a series of principles should be applied to species management in general e.g. there are ecological and socio-economic aspects to species management decisions and management activity should have regard to animal welfare. For reintroductions in particular, they would have to address IUCN guidelines and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee 'Policy for Conservation Translocations of Species in Britain'
(see http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/species_policy.pdf).
3. A specific issue raised by the IUCN Guidelines is the question as to whether the original cause of extinction has been removed. In the case of the predators the original cause was persecution. However, at the present time, can any body be satisfied that any reintroduced wolves would not suffer the same fate now? Scottish Natural Heritage considers that on this basis any such reintroduction is quite likely to fail at the moment. This would not be good in animal welfare terms for the wolves involved. In addition there are understandable concerns and fears that local land users may have with regard to the impact of predators on their way of life.
 1. When Scottish Natural Heritage undertook a consultation for the Species Action Framework, very few people suggested that the large predators should be included in our Species Action List (i.e. species to be the focus of new action over the next few years). As such Scottish Natural Heritage does not see introduction of the wolf as a current priority.
 2. Scottish Natural Heritage has examined the desirability of reintroducing European beaver (an Annex IV sp on the Habitats Directive) and has concluded that it is ecologically feasible and desirable. There are concerns among land users which is why a trial approach has been approved. This trial will begin with a release of animal in May this year in mid-Argyll. The European beaver is listed on the Species Action List of the new Species Action Framework.
 3. The proposal to reintroduce beavers has created a lot of discussion and debate over many years. This demonstrates the sensitivities that can be generated from reintroduction proposals. Any predator reintroduction proposal is likely to be far more of an issue than beavers.
 4. In terms of domestic legislation, the Scottish Government is the relevant licensing authority for releases of species not currently in the wild. Scottish Natural Heritage would be asked to advise, but ultimately the decision rests with the Minister responsible.

Scottish Natural Heritage 31 March
2009

All the relevant Species Action Framework publications can be downloaded from <http://www.snh.org.uk/speciesactionframework/>

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[Redacted]
By email:
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abc

Your ref: Two birds one stone Our ref:
2013/0001122
11 February 2013

Dear [Redacted]

Thank you for your email of 15 January 2013, regarding the hunting of wolves in Siberia, and in particular, your suggestion to reintroduce the wolf into Scotland. I have been asked to respond.

Article 22 of the Habitats Directive concerns the desirability of re-introducing species in Annex IV; the species formerly present in Scotland and listed on Annex IV are wolf, brown bear, lynx and beaver. In considering the desirability of reintroducing such species, a range of factors have to be considered.

These are summarised in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidelines for Conservation Translocations (2012), and the JNCC "Policy for Conservation Translocations of Species in Britain" (http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/species_policy.pdf). Such factors include consideration of whether the situation leading to the species' extinction has now changed? Under Article 22 of the Habitats Directive; a reintroduction should also take account of experience from other Member States to determine if it would help to re-establish the species at a favourable conservation status. It also requires consultation of the public to take place.

A key element of the IUCN reintroduction guidelines is that the original cause of the species extinction has to be identified and removed. Evidence suggests that the original cause of the extinction of the wolf in Scotland was persecution; understandable in the context of the time. Experience from elsewhere in Europe where the wolf is naturally re-colonising is that they are still subject to persecution. So only with the very clear support of the Scottish public, particularly in the Highlands and in the countryside sectors, would any reintroduction meet the guidelines, or be feasible.

The Scottish Government does not believe that there is the necessary support amongst the Scottish public in general and land managers in particular for such a reintroduction to take place at present. For example, when Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) undertook a public consultation for the reintroduction of species under the Species Action Framework, very few people suggested that large predators such as wolf or lynx should be the focus of action.

SNH currently chairs the 'National Species Reintroduction Forum' (NSRF) which is made up of a range of organisations from the conservation, land use, public and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sectors. If SNH were to receive any formal proposal for wolf reintroduction, then this would be put to the NSRF for discussion and consideration.

I hope you find this information to be helpful.

Yours sincerely,
[Redacted]