Written evidence submitted by Helen Dulley

I am writing to ask the Committee to rethink the government’s position on so-called invasive species. This is not an academic submission; I am asking the Committee to review current policies on compassionate grounds.

I have been very sorry indeed to learn that vets and rescue centres will no longer be able to treat and release grey squirrels and muntjac deer, under the Invasive Alien Species Order 2019. I submit that these creatures are much loved by many members of the British public. Grey squirrels hold a very special place in the hearts of many urban people; and indeed, they are the only wild mammals that many of us ever see in our localities.

I should like the Committee to think again about its concepts of ‘native’ and ‘alien’, reflecting on the fact that grey squirrels have been living wild in this country for a hundred and fifty years, and muntjac deer for a century. Wildlife in this country has never been a fixed and settled thing; different species of birds and mammals have flourished and become extinct at all times of this island’s history.

I submit that it is an unethical and cruel thing for human beings to sit in judgement on the lives of other creatures. Grey squirrels, muntjacs and other ‘aliens’ did not come to this country of their own free will. I argue that it is a tribute to these creatures that they have been able to make homes for themselves and to thrive in our depleted and degraded environment.

I note that even if the government succeeded in exterminating every grey squirrel in the country, the ‘native’ reds would not recolonise our parks and gardens. The best policy that the government could adopt for them - if that is the goal of the Order - would be to restore their woodland habitat.

May 2019