Written evidence submitted by the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals

We, at the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals believe in compassionate treatment of all animals. With regard to the Grey Squirrel, we believe, despite its current status as an invasive species, it is equally worthy as a valued member of the wild fauna in the United Kingdom. The Grey Squirrel was introduced to the UK in the 1870’s – it is therefore hardly a newcomer! It is now regarded by many as a much-loved wild creature with many being fed by members of the public who delight in their presence in urban and rural gardens and parks.

There does not appear to be any logic where the pheasant, bred in thousands for the shooting industry is released each year as cannon fodder is also an imported species (the pheasant originates from China and East Asia). We do not see any call for an end to the artificial breeding of these birds – we assume because of their commercial value to the shooting industry.

We are hugely sympathetic to the plight of the red squirrel but do not believe that the presence of the Grey Squirrel is the main factor to their demise. We believe that a much more important factor is the loss of habitat. Some do fall victim to the squirrel pox virus but this is only a small number compared to for example road deaths and other illnesses.

The red squirrel might be rarer in the UK but in other parts of the world such as Scandinavia it is flourishing so it cannot be view as an endangered species. Indeed, the current UK population were re-introduced from Scandinavia when their population declined long before the introduction of the Grey Squirrel! This again was due to habitat loss.

Loss of habitat is a factor affecting much of the wildlife in the UK and we need to look at this urgently and holistically rather than making the Grey Squirrel a scapegoat.

As a Christian organisation, we believe that all animals are uniquely valued by the God who created them. The Grey Squirrel was introduced into the UK through no fault of its own and it should not have to suffer as a result of the interference of human beings.

May 2019