Written evidence submitted by Sally Carr

I want to express my opinion on the management of invasive species. I've believe there has to be both a rational and compassionate approach to this. For example until we have more evidence to support the idea that, say, knotweed is sentient we need to look at invasive species in the context of sentience versus non sentience as we in the UK have the makings of a decent society that can appreciate the difference. My arguments are focused on concerns I have for the control of sentient species which cause suffering or unnecessary deaths.

We have to accept responsibility for our species' errors and that means we can't ethically persecute a sentient being that humans have put in an awkward position because we have been careless, selfish or foolish. If we do then we degrade ourselves as a community and history will shame those that pursue such injustice.

So let us take as an example the persecution of the very definitely sentient squirrel. This is completely unethical on so many levels. Not least, the suggestion that UK authorities should withhold release licences from rescue centres. This dangerous attempt to limit the kind and caring actions of the UK public so that sentient creatures die unnecessarily, goes against everything we all argue makes for good society. And attempts by some organisations to encourage children to get involved in grey squirrel killing initiatives sends a chill down many people's spines in light of the level of violence young people are already often exposed to in today's society.

So instead of seeking approval for unethical acts let's look for reasons not to have to go down this route. The reasons are many; firstly we have to recognise that the eradication of grey squirrels on mainland UK is not going to happen and this is widely accepted by experts. So bearing that in mind we then have to ask the question how significant is the rescue of a few hundred young squirrels in terms of environmental impact compared to the several hundred acts of kindness performed by the UK public in saving them? I don't know a single person who claims that the world would be a better place if only there was a little less kindness so let's not try to legislate this ethos into our society.

True this may mean that it is time to accept that red squirrels populations in the UK will never rise again to a time in Olde English history when it was legal to beat your wife, keep slaves and hunt red squirrels as close to extinction as possible but times do change (thankfully). Bearing in mind that red and grey squirrels fulfill similar ecological functions and do similar damage to trees, I suspect the only real reason to sacrifice our ethics is a rose tinted spectacled longing for the "good old days".

It is scientifically accepted that red squirrels are plentiful in Europe wherever their habitat is left intact so they are not at risk of extinction. The EU has asked the UK to follow policy that will prevent our grey squirrels reaching mainland Europe. They ask that our actions are proportionate and accept that eradication is not the answer so why are we even thinking about changing processes disproportionally? It feels like this
request from the EU is being inappropriately highjacked by certain lobby groups to get their way at the expense of others and probably society as a whole.

In the meantime, grey squirrels give millions of people in the UK great joy every single day. In many urban areas they are often the only wild mammal that people can see from their homes, gardens and local parks. Those millions of people don't want to see children (or adults) engage in mass culls or ban rescue centres from releasing healthly grey squirrels back into the habitat from whence they came. Most people in the UK are fundamentally kind and it is authority's job to encourage rather than surpress that kindness so we can live in a better world. So let's get a little perspective regarding this relative "handful" of grey squirrels that get rescued every year.

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