Written evidence submitted by Reginald Attfield

I would like to tell the select committee how very important grey squirrels are to me and why I think the time has come to stop vilifying them to cover for our own human mistakes. It is indeed well understood that red squirrels thrive best in a habitat that has largely been destroyed in the UK by humans, so it is not actually much of a surprise that red squirrel numbers are struggling here. Indeed human activity had caused the numbers to fall so dramatically (long before the introduction of grey squirrels into this country) that Scandinavian red squirrels had to be introduced over here to avoid total extinction.

Even after this, humans continued to hunt red squirrels in huge number because they were damaging trees so we need to accept that humans have a history of destroying red squirrel populations. Yet we speak now as though none of the responsibility for falling red squirrel numbers lies with us and that grey squirrels are to blame and this angers me because I have an interest in fairness and justice.

The squirrels that live wild in parks and gardens give thousands of people in my local area an enormous amount of pleasure with their intriguing antics and that matters. Bournemouth Gardens is full of smiling faced people enjoying being close to nature in the centre of town. There is insufficient natural red squirrel habitat in this build up area to sustain a red squirrel population so, as a disabled man who struggles to travel out to coniferous forests on squirrel watch, if there were no grey squirrels in the UK, I would never get to see a squirrel at all and that would take from my life a piece of pure, uncomplicated joy that I currently am able to experience.

So please do not allow an increase the already high levels of persecution of grey squirrels in this country. They fulfil a real purpose in my and many other people's world and also in the ecology of the South of England that no other creature does so efficiently (including their ability to plant new trees for us all to enjoy). I do love red squirrels too but we can not continue to show such hypocrisy when we humans have indeed made their population decrease by our own selfish behaviour so let this go now and stop giving the more violent members of our society further excuse to satisfy their blood lust. Live and let live.

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