I recently signed the petition “Make grey squirrel rescue exempt from Invasive Alien Species Order 2019”. I have since received an email asking for my views.

Regarding invasive alien species generally my views are that each species should be considered separately. I would be quite happy to see Giant Hogweed eradicated but I find grey squirrels entertaining and would be unhappy to see them destroyed.

The government response I received having signed the petition states invasive species, including the grey squirrel, challenge the survival of our rarest species. The red squirrel is not rare. It is well established across Europe, including Scotland, Wales, and Cumbria with pockets of populations elsewhere in England. Neither the red nor the grey can cross wide, open spaces so as long as the wide, open spaces remain the current populations are unlikely to run into each other.

The response says grey squirrels out compete red squirrels. Since they are in different areas this does not arise. The same argument goes for the squirrel pox.

Applying grey squirrels cause damage to the tune of between £6 and £10 million per annum. This is very vague. What are these figures based on? If grey squirrels are removed and red squirrels replace them, then what is to stop the red squirrels doing between £6 and £10 million worth of damage each year?

Grey squirrels are prey to mustileds, diurnal owls, cats and dogs so there is regulation of numbers, and these animals would have to find alternate prey if the squirrels were removed.

Are the grey squirrels in England now even the same genetic make-up as the American Grey? The greys in Florida and California, where I was recently, are very grey. Ours are brindled brown. Has there been cross-breeding? If this is possible can some of the more robust features of the grey be introduced into the red?

The cost of eradicating all grey squirrels would be high and I fear may give some unpleasant people the excuse to use inhumane methods.

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