

Written evidence submitted by Gill Mander

In my arms just now is a small defenceless animal that was rescued last year. She is partially sighted, deaf and lacking a little dexterity in her hands and has developed seizures, believed due to a head injury. These are now being treated with medication from an understanding vet. He understands that as with my previous rescue squirrel, she will never be released and will be kept safe and well for as long as I can and regardless of the cost.

She is a squirrel who was found as a tiny baby in a garden centre and taken to a squirrel rescue. I am the person who agreed to give this unreleasable (by health) squirrel a home for life. She breathes, eats, sleeps, climbs, runs for fun like Forrest Gump, plucks my clothes and furniture with her claws, climbs over the dog’s head and then snuggles up next to him. She is a living, breathing, sentient creature who has every right to live.

I hold her when she has seizures, give her the foul tasting medication (followed by a nut) and wish every day she’d never had the knock on her head that took away her freedom. But at least she can live safely with me, given the best quality of life I can manage.

If she were a different colour, say a little more red (she’s far more red in her coat than is normal) and had tufty ears, people would say how wonderful she was and sing her praises as a symbol of the UK’s wildlife. But she’s a grey squirrel, different in size and colour, which isn’t as picky an eater and is a stronger survivor. Just like the red she may cause a little damage to trees and in times of desperation consider taking a baby bird to eat.

Yes, her relatives may carry SQPV and many would say that this is the reason that the red squirrel population has declined. However the reality is that the decline in the red population started a long time ago, before the greys were brought here to provide sport for the rich, Royal and landed. Indeed the same people who now decry the presence of the grey. Does that mean she has no value?

The statistics for causes of red squirrel death show quite clearly that the grey is not at fault, we are!

53% road traffic accidents
18% other/unknown cause
14% predation, mainly cats and dogs
13% other disease
2% SQPV

Grey squirrels are now wide spread throughout the UK and like Marmite are both loved and hated. Yet for many town dwellers they are important for the pleasure they bring, the sheer joy of watching the antics of a wild animal live naturally.
Red squirrels are not classified as being at risk and their conservation status is of “least concern”. Should they decline in numbers, they can be reinforced by importing their European cousins. In the UK where they occur natural they are located in their best natural habitat, the tall pine forests of Scotland. Sadly others are falsely maintained in small areas by hopper feeding (which increases the risk of spreading SQPV) and a zero tolerance to greys. Yet despite our interference greys and reds do live together in some areas quite equitably.

Historically our red population was almost destroyed by the same people who now bray for the eradication of the greys. Yet this same group of people openly support the pheasant population who they introduced for sport. Such is the hypocrisy of the anti grey brigade.

This beautiful, wickedly clever, charming, sentient creature has been in our lives and hearts for over 100 years. It didn’t choose to come here but was brought as a filler for the gaps created in the red population so that more “sport” could be had. They do no more harm than the native red and having been here so long are truly native too.

The EU Invasive species legislation does not require us to cull greys:

_In an EU question and answer session about Invasive Alien Species (IAS) the following was asked and answered:_

**Question:**
Will Member States with widely spread listed species be obliged to eradicate those species? Will Germany need to eradicate the raccoon? Or will the UK need to eradicate the grey squirrel?

**Answer:**
It is up to the Member States to select the measures appropriate to the local conditions. In the example of the raccoon, it is a priority to prevent this species from being introduced where it is not yet present, in particular islands where it could cause great damage.

It is important to note that Member States do not have an obligation to eradicate IAS of Union concern that are already widespread in their territory. As provided under Article 19(2) of the IAS Regulation, the management measures can aim at the eradication, population control or containment of an IAS. Article 19(1) specifies that those measures shall be proportionate to the impact of the environment and appropriate to the specific circumstances of the Member State and be based on an analysis of costs and benefits. The risk management decisions in relation to IAS that are widely spread this lie with the Member States.

**THERE IS NEITHER AN OBLIGATION FOR GERMANY TO ERADICATE THE RACCOON FROM ITS TERRITORY, NOR IS THERE AN OBLIGATION FOR THE UK TO ERADICATE THE GREY SQUIRREL FROM ITS TERRITORY.**

For those that care nought about squirrels, here is a thought for you:
In a country where your National Health Service, Education System and Emergency Services (to name a few) are struggling to make ends meet, families are relying on the kindness of strangers and food banks to eat and our women are being denied the pensions that they have paid for, our Government is prepared to spend millions of pounds to kill a small grey animal, loved by many, whose only crime (having been forcibly brought into the UK) is to have adapted well to living in our country.

If you love and want to protect our grey squirrels, if you want to make our Government to correctly prioritise how and where it spends our money please sign our petition bit.ly/SquirrelPetition to secure a debate in Parliament.

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