



Invasive Alien Species

And How We Might Best Deal
With Some Of Them

Defra's answer to this problem is to produce nice little booklets without ever doing very much to deal with either it or to prevent new ones from entering the country in the future. Before continuing, let's see the relevant clips of an Animal Health Corporate Center's information leaflet, the appropriate Executive Agency of Defra.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

Animals subject to CITES may need a licence. To obtain a licence or to find out if an animal is subjected to CITES contact Defra's Global Wildlife Division on 0117 372 8170 or fax 0117 327 8206 or visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cites-imports-and-exports>

The animals listed below have no specific requirements for EU trade:

Invertebrates (includes insects, spiders and molluscs);
Amphibians (includes salamanders, frogs and toads);
Reptiles (lizards, snakes and crocodiles).

These animals can be imported with a self-certificate from the owner. The certificate must state that the animals, at the time of dispatch, show no obvious signs of disease and that the holding of origin was not subject to any animal health restrictions

Currently, there is no limit on the number of pet invertebrates that an owner can bring into the UK.

Currently, there is no limit on the number of pet amphibians that an owner can bring into the UK.

Head Office: Animal Health Corporate Centre, Block C, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2IQ
Animal Health is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/animal-and-plant-health-agency>

Anyway, these are the current regulations that are in place. On leaving the EU. Of course things may well change for the better or the worse.

a) Animals subject to CITES. only **may** need a licence.

b) In order to validate reptiles, amphibians or invertebrates entering the country, **you can do this with a self-certificate, needing no more than a declaration of what they are written by yourself on a sheet of paper.**

c) There are **no limits on the numbers other than the latter category that you can bring in** either.

And so **with import laws like these, there's no wonder we have alien imports of all kinds coming into the country**, basically anyone can bring in what they like, and the problems have been most severe. In the past, admittedly a long time ago, someone decided Grey Squirrels would look rather nice on one of their estates, and so we now have Grey Squirrels in the UK. Someone else wanted to breed Mink to adorn fashionable ladies with furs, and now we have Mink. We had Signal Crayfish bred to supply the restaurant businesses, and now we have infestations of these things right through our river systems. Only a few decades ago, children wanted Terrapins as 'must have accessories' for their Ninger Turtle games, and now we have Red-eared Terrapins. And finally a green-house owner using Six-spot Ladybirds as pest control decided, for what ever reason, that this wasn't good enough and brought in some monster from the Far East, and now we have Harlequin Ladybirds. All of this doesn't even include the catalogue of species brought over as accidentally, and the list really is endless. Anyway, you get the picture, and all of it down to lack of care or to serve the whims of some no-brainers.

You would think a government, with such 'commitment for conserving our native species,' would see fit to outlaw such practices, but as we've seen on the above list of regulations, it is in fact openly encouraged. And, on top of all this, we now have Skunks in the UK. A Skunk breeder on the BBC One Show, 2012, I didn't even know we had such a person over here, telling listeners if there's a Skunk they don't want, to take it along to an animal shelter and let them deal with it and not to release it into the wild. Good advice on the face of it. But the fact he was the root-cause, bringing them over here and breeding them in the first place never even got a mention. It was like he was the authority sorting the problem out and like animal shelters don't have enough to deal with in any case.

Here is a cross-section of some of the worst cases:

Grey Squirrel: It's commonly assumed that with Greys you simply don't get Reds and that's the end of the problem, but it's a good deal more complex than that and there are probably scores of examples which are neither known about nor documented. The Common Dormouse is known to be badly effected, as too is the Hawfinch, a magnificent finch with a massive bill. All of the old bird books describe the Hawfinch as common, and yet within my lifetime I can't recall ever seeing one in this country. But go over to Germany, where there are no Grey Squirrels, and walk around their parks and cemeteries, and there you will see Hawfinches. I should stress however that this was over forty years ago and in those days we had Turtle Doves, Cuckoos, Bullfinches and Linnets in abundance here in the UK.

Grey Squirrels in Europe

In sixty years grey squirrels are predicted to colonise the western Alps, the internal hilly system in Piedmont, and the area along the Ticino river from Switzerland to the confluence in the Po river. In this phase of the project does not consider the expansion in Switzerland. Between 2060 and 2080 the two populations will join and then the expansion will continue in all Piedmont, part of Liguria and western part of Lombardy. The model predicts a maximum of 7,513 sub-populations totalling over 2 million individuals in the year 99. The fluctuations in population size between years are small until year 30 and then increase progressively. This is related to the annual changes in tree seed crops that were modelled. Population size remains under 1 million in the first 70 years, and then increases to 2 million in year 95, with a large fluctuation in number, and a drop to 750,000 animals in some years as a result of simulated poor seed years.

Source European Squirrel Initiative

Mink: Ravenous predators of native wildlife.

Skunk: Sightings have been made around Gloucestershire. Consequences unknown.

Rats, Black and Brown: Not great anywhere outside of their native S.E. Asia. Islands with populations of Rats are however particularly vulnerable because once infested they are totally out of commission for all subterranean seabirds such as Puffins, small Petrels and Shearwaters etc., until such time as the problem can be sorted out. **The RSPB. fortunately has a long-standing a policy of dealing with them.** Scottish Natural Heritage on the other hand once at least had a policy of actually protecting them on some of their island reserves. I understand things have moved on since then and that the RSPB. has now been allowed on some of the islands.

Sika Deer: Known to interbreed and genetically interfere with our native Reds, causing all kinds of problems, and yet we have those who very misguidedly encourage them. And as much as I respect the work undertaken by the National Trust, they do have a policy of protecting them on their lands.

Little Owl: An introduction from the Middle East and does practically no damage at all throughout most of the UK. **On offshore islands however they do eat large numbers of Storm Petrels, but far from doing anything to resolve the problem, most reserve wardens are protecting them.** As far as I'm concerned, if it's a toss up between an endangered native species and an import, I know where allegiances should lie.

Canada Goose: The trouble with some species is they simply take up a lot of room that could support natives. It's an inoffensive enough bird but they are very territorial, they are increasing at an alarming rate and they do drive out native birds. They also crèche their young and as a result they are better placed to ward off Mink attacks. With both Canada Geese and Mink becoming more and more numerous the problem is very serious.

North American Ruddy Duck: Migrates from here down to Southern Europe where it interbreeds and genetically interferes with the White-headed Stiff-tail. **A reasonably effective government led control was implemented over here.**

Red-eared Terrapin: Causing all kinds of problems; not least by sitting on and submerging grebe nests.

Red-clawed Signal Crayfish: Ravenous feeders of aquatic life, known to eradicate all kinds of natives.

Harlequin Ladybird: Feeds on various native insects to the point of wiping them out.

New Zealand Flatworm: Eats our own native Earthworms. Brought over here as a soil-borne pathogen courtesy of New Zealand's tree fern trade.

Cotoneasters, various species: Bird-sown garden escapees, covering many of our limestone areas while our own native one in N. Wales is endangered as a result of this and overgrazing. Even the RSPB's. wildlife gardening advice recommends them as a source of berries for birds. Unfortunately they fail to say how you can then stop these birds from crapping all over the countryside.

Japanese Knotweed Control: Operations currently undertaken by local councils are in reality little more than a public-relations exercise. They spray the leaves usually around mid-June; the plant then dies back only to reappear again as large as life the following year. They've been doing this for the past 40 years and if there were any seriousness about what it was they were doing, they would need to be far more vigilant. A better way is to cut them down in the autumn and then to inject herbicide into the stems. At that time of the year the sap travels back down to the roots and with only a few applications whole plants could be eradicated in a few years. They would need to gain access to any neighbouring land in order to do a proper job however.

Rose-bay Willowherb: Taking over vast swathes of valuable habitat.

Himalayan Balsam: Taking over vast swathes of waterside habitat.

Spanish Bluebell: Given the absolute mayhem this plant causes for our own English Bluebells, we need a law in place that prohibits the growing of this plant, and enforcing what's more. There are already laws that prohibits the cultivation of cannabis and this could easily be extended to include Spanish Bluebells.



**These are Spanish Bluebells from which bees carry pollen and genetically contaminate our own English Bluebells.
If you have these interlopers in your garden or on your land please get rid.**

Invasive species and how we might best deal with some of them:

Many of these problems could very effectively be sorted out by engaging far better methods for managing the countryside than we do today. Simply by bringing many of our extinct or less common native animals back again, species such as the **Wolf, Lynx, Bear, Elk, Bison, Wild Boar and Beaver etc.**, together they could play one enormous and collective role in ridding the countryside of these scourges.

It is known for example, that **Otters predate heavily on Mink, so much so that Water Voles often follow in the wake of Otter recolonisations.** Mink over the years have caused untold damage to our wildlife with populations of species varying considerably depending on Mink densities in any given location. Otters also eat large numbers of Red-clawed Crayfish and certainly if anything could sort those out too it would be them. A good native animal like this can work in ways that our crude and clumsy Mink traps never could and with such little effort on our part too.

The way forward and how things could be improved enormously would be to have a well thought out waterways' action plan. It may sound a bit grand and fanciful but, with only a few minor adjustments, it would not be an overly complex thing to achieve. By banning certain pesticides and taking care of nutrient run-offs from sewage, slurry and other outlets. By vastly improving habitats by planting many more riverside Willow, Black Poplar and Ash pollards, building large numbers of log-piles along the river banks and by allowing proper meadows to flourish throughout the flood-plains. These are all things that really could make one enormous difference to our Otters which in turn would completely transform our rivers by doing what they do.

Otters hate disturbance too, whereas Mink seem immune, I have personally had Mink swim right up to me while I was once sitting on a bank. Footpaths hugging the riversides for too long, anglers gathering for hours at a time etc., are all unwitting creators of Mink safe havens, and so disturbance-free areas are also a must. Everything would win, cleaner water, varied habitats of log-piles, gnarled roots and proper meadows.

And this now brings us on to other examples. Given what's now known about **Grey Squirrels and Pine Martens**, Pine Martens killing greys with the nimbler and lighter reds more able to make their escapes, it seems only too obvious the best way for dealing with greys and therefore conserving reds would be bring Pine Martens into the equation and indeed within some locations Pine Marten reintroduction programmes, conducted by the Vincent Wildlife Trust, are now very much under way. Nowadays, throughout England and Wales, **Red Squirrels** are usually confined to Forestry Commission land where disturbance from felling and other operations are having their detrimental effects on already struggling small groups. By creating well-protected, disturbance-free sites within these remaining localities, with Pine Martens brought in so as to complete the job, then we would really be on the way to turning things around.

<http://www.vwt.org.uk/species/pine-marten/>

Even where greys have been established for decades, they are being got rid of without any of the messy and labour intensive trapping, that so often goes hand in hand with Red Squirrel conservation. Clean simple and effective ways of dealing with the problem instead. Ideally, once the threat from the greys has subsided, reds could then go back to living in their native broadleaved tree habitats from which they've been excluded for so many years.

In the region of the Po Valley in Lombardy, Italy there are similar species present there too, such as too the **Pine Marten** and also **Beech Marten and Sable**, all of which are very capable of having similar effects on the Greys there. We have sent this idea over to the European Squirrel Initiative and hopefully they may use it as well.

This kind of thinking need not be confined to squirrels and mink of course. Projects like these could have untold benefits with simple and very non-intensive interactions on our part. This kind of work of generally improving the habitat and utilising the services of long gone species has endless possibilities which could free us up to enable us to concentrate our efforts on all the many other conservation projects instead. With **Wild Boars eating the rhizomes of Bracken and Fireweed**, or in **Central Scotland, with Wolves thinning out the Red Deer herds and allowing the native Caledonian Forests to grow back again**. Not all of which are alien species I know but these are nonetheless examples of, where a rightfully belonging species we once had, was wiped out, some of our other native fauna and flora will run riot. **It's extremely fortuitous of course that we have species which will work like this for us, it certainly never had to be so. We need to be far more aware than we are now before transporting animals, plants, wood and soil all around the globe.**

Himalayan Balsam is another problematic species which is taking over vast stretches of our waterways. Some albeit pretty basic research has shown **Beavers** will eat this plant and that their reintroductions may well help to control it. It is an annual plant and so seed prevention, ie. finding something that eats it before it seeds, will certainly help. Although the tests have shown Beavers did indeed eat this stuff, whether they would necessarily gravitate towards it with the competition of all the other food available remains to be seen.

Sadly, what can be done about those **Spanish Bluebells** many insist in growing in their gardens would not be so easy. Some kind of species police, if this isn't being too draconian, seems to me to be the only way dealing with it. The utter devastation they are having on our wild native Bluebells certainly warrants this but whether it could ever become reality would have to be seen.

Details of other campaigns please visit: <http://cates1980.wix.com/cateswebsite#!/projects/c10d6>