

Dear Mr Hunt,

Re. Schedule 5 and 8 Wildlife Protection Changes

I have discovered that there are some pending catastrophic changes to the status of many UK wild species. The 7th Quinquennial Review (QQR) of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), which will provide recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (and Scottish and Welsh equivalents), proposes changes to these schedules.

I understand that the 2021 review seeks to change the 'Eligibility Criteria' of species to be listed under Schedules 5 and 8, such that the appropriate nature conservation bodies will only pursue scheduling of a species when an animal or plant is *in danger of extinction in the UK*. This will effectively remove any form of protection from many of our well-loved and vulnerable species, including Red Squirrels, Pine Martens and several reptiles and amphibians. This means that it will be legal to kill these charismatic animals – despite all of the popular and costly efforts to try to conserve them. For example, the arbitrary killing of Red Squirrels will be permitted to extinction in England (e.g. in the Isle of Wight) and Wales, and only halted when they are deemed to be near UK extinction, perhaps clinging on in the Scottish Highlands – what an appalling prospect! The protection from sale of many uncommon butterflies (including several special species in our area, such as Purple Emperor, Silver-studded Blue and Wood White) is also proposed to be scrapped.

The review is currently in the early stages so there is still time to question the process: I understand that, according to the current timetable, submission of final recommendations to Governments will not happen until November/December 2021. However, I am concerned that this will be too late, and at this time the recommendation from the Joint Committee will pass through the statutes without proper scrutiny.

The Government should refer back to its current Environment Bill: Part 6, section 95 "General duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity" strengthens commitments from "conserve" to "enhance" biodiversity; in Sections 97-99 "Local Nature Recovery Strategies" are encouraged, as are "Species Conservation Strategies" (Section 102). None of this is compatible with the changes in the QQR mentioned above.

The changes in the QQR are also totally at odds with the Government-supported "State of Nature 2019" report, and this year's Government-commissioned Dasgupta Report "The Economics of Biodiversity", which painstakingly proves that healthy ecosystems are immensely valuable in financial terms in the short term, as well as for the future of civilisation. There is a burgeoning body of research linking mental health and general wellbeing to enjoyment of wildlife (reviewed briefly by Dasgupta in Chapter 11.6). The Government should not treat all of this work with contempt.

The people of this country benefit from our beautiful and species-rich countryside, but the "State of Nature 2019" report shows that this condition is precarious. The proposed change to the legal protection of so many of our native species can only lead to further impoverishment. If we are only prepared to protect animals that are already 'critically endangered' and therefore may already be irrecoverable, the government should consider how to justify to our children and grandchildren that you allowed iconic wildlife species to wither away, on your watch. If other countries follow our lead (and we couldn't complain if they did), we should expect elephants, lions, orang-utans etc. to be killed with impunity until they are 'critically endangered', by which time it may be too late to save them.

We do hope we can rely upon your strongest support in ensuring that these disastrous changes do not come to pass. It is possible that these changes are not widely known, so please also bring this to the attention of colleagues in Parliament.

Dr Andrew R. H. Swan
on behalf of the Committee of
Haslemere Natural History Society
c/o Haslemere Educational Museum