

Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Select Committee  
House of Commons  
*By email*

03 November 2023

Dear members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee,

Following the UK Government's response to your report on species reintroductions, we are writing to express our concerns about their announcement that the "reintroduction of species is not a priority for the Government".

Given the scale and urgency of the biodiversity crisis we face, and the fact that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, this admission suggests an alarming lack of ambition, and flies in the face of guidance in the IUCN SSC Global Species Action plan, regarding the importance of reintroductions as a conservation tool.

The Government claims that it aims to reach its biodiversity targets through other methods such as habitat restoration and biodiversity corridors. To present this as a choice between different approaches reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the scale and complexity of the task at hand. Habitats are shaped and maintained by the species that they support. Many of these species have already disappeared from our landscapes with no prospect of return without carefully managed intervention. These include the charismatic ecosystem engineers that capture the public's imagination, such as the beaver, in addition to scores of plants and invertebrates that support and enrich ecosystems across the UK and which organisations like ours are working hard to restore.

If we are to be given a fighting chance of meeting our obligations under the Global Biodiversity Framework agreed in Montreal in 2022, and to enable the Government to meet its own legally binding targets to deliver 30% of land and sea for nature and halt and reverse decline of species populations, scientifically driven reintroduction must be part of the restoration toolkit. Reintroductions already play a crucial role in achieving these targets, through restoring keystone species, increasing diversity and building the ecological complexity that will enable ecosystems to fully recover their function.

We welcome your report and believe it presents a number of sensible recommendations that provide a strategic framework for supporting reintroductions as part of nature recovery efforts across England. As conservation charities and organisations at the forefront of working to reverse the shocking decline in UK nature, we are deeply disappointed at the Government's apparent dismissal of your proposals.

We urge you as a committee to continue your work in this area and put further pressure on the Government to reconsider this approach before it is too late.

Yours sincerely,

Jamie Christon, Chief Executive Officer, *Chester Zoo*

Prof. Alastair Driver, Director, *Rewilding Britain*

Jill Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, *Peoples Trust for Endangered Species*

Dr Ruth Tingay, Co-Director, *Wild Justice*

Richard Benwell, Chief Executive Officer, *Wildlife & Countryside Link*

Matt Larsen-Daw, Chief Executive Officer, *The Mammal Society*

Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive Officer, *The Rivers Trust*

Tim McGrath, Director of Conservation, *Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust*

Dr Jo Judge, Chief Executive Officer, *British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums*

Nida Al-Fulaij, Co-chair, *IUCN National Committee UK Species Survival Working Group*

Sandra King, Chief Executive Officer, *Beaver Trust*

Paula De Zylva, Senior Nature Campaigner, *Friends of the Earth*

David Field, Chief Executive Officer, *Royal Zoological Society of Scotland*

Russel Hobson, Director of Evidence and Policy, *Butterfly Conservation*

Georgina Chandler, Head of Policy and Campaigns, *Zoological Society of London*

Joan Edwards, Director of Policy & Public Affairs, *The Wildlife Trusts*

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