

Rt. Hon Therese Coffey MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs

*By email*

03 November 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to express our dismay at the announcement that the “*reintroduction of species is not a priority for the Government*”, in response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee report on species reintroduction.

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 on behalf of the UK Government, 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.

The EFRA Committee report presents a number of sensible recommendations that provide a strategic framework for supporting reintroductions as part of nature recovery efforts across England. These include measures to manage risk, support and benefit landowners and communities, and ensure a scientific, evidence-based approach. As conservation charities and organisations at the forefront of working to reverse the shocking decline in UK nature, we are deeply disappointed at the UK Government’s apparent dismissal of these proposals, and we ask you to think again.

A piecemeal approach to nature restoration will not work. We need a coordinated and strategic approach, which is why we urge the UK Government to reconsider this de-prioritisation and step up 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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