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A Wildlife Strategy for Defra

A basic misunderstanding

The consultation paper states: “*Wildlife management is the management of conflicts between wildlife and human interests.*” This is wrong. It is not, and is a complete misunderstanding.

Wildlife management is much wider and is principally about managing wildlife for the benefit of mankind*. This includes everything from pest control, through harvesting game and fish stocks, to the conservation of difficult or rare species where interventions are needed to retain biodiversity in the face of intensive land-use.

What we need

Wildlife management is undertaken on a huge range of scales from a gardener trapping mice in the tool shed or moles on the front lawn, to foresters reducing deer numbers to allow woodland to regenerate, or conservation groups attempting to re-instate species such as the sea eagle to parts of their former range. None of this should require intervention by ministers. Only in circumstances where the current legal framework is inadequate, such as whether or not to cull badgers on a large scale to control bovine TB, are ministers likely to be involved. In these circumstances the issues are likely to be complex and require a lot of expertise from outside Defra. Ministers will naturally want to draw on this expertise before taking a policy line. It is difficult to see how the proposed decision tree would be of any help in such a situation.

A more constructive approach would be to review the current wildlife legislation to see whether or not it is still fit for purpose. In our view it is not. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is over twenty-five years old and does not reflect changing circumstances or recent conservation science. Re-drafting our wildlife law should reduce the circumstances in which ministers need to be called upon to make wildlife choices for which they are usually ill equipped.

Stephen Tapper

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* The veracity of this assertion can be checked by simply inspecting the volumes of the internationally recognised *Journal of Wildlife Management* which has been publishing refereed science papers on the subject since 1936.