

Killing of wild animals

Scope of this policy

1. This policy (2008) covers of the Scottish Wildlife Trust's (SWT) views on killing of wild animals. It replaces the Scottish Wildlife Trust *Policy on killing wild animals on wildlife reserves* (1995).
2. This policy supports SWT's broader vision for Scotland's ecosystems as flourishing, ecologically functional landscapes. Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary to manage animal populations (including by killing) in order to achieve overall conservation objectives or to fit in with other societal aims. The issues are complex and often controversial: this policy provides a coherent framework for making decisions in individual situations.

Definition of terms

- “Culling”. The control of numbers of a species by killing. Culling is a long-accepted method of countryside management and is a term commonly associated with deer management. It can refer to any form of control in this context, whether using guns, traps or poison, as the definition relates to the objective rather than the method used.
- “Humane killing”. Killing using the most humane method available following accepted guidelines¹.
- “Field sport”. The killing of wild animals for sport and possibly food. This may also relate to countryside management, but where the latter is the primary objective, “culling” would be the correct term.
- “Vermin”. Species that have an economic impact or implications for hygiene which do not relate directly to wildlife.

Policy Statement

3. SWT believes that it is usually best to allow wild animal populations to reach natural limits resulting from factors such as competition, disease and predation.
4. SWT considers that the key determinant of whether artificial control of a wild animal is justified is that the species has a negative ecological impact on either ecosystems or native species and is not being kept within reasonable limits by natural factors.

¹ The Wildlife Trusts, Killing Wild Animals, Guidelines for use by the Wildlife Trusts (1998) and other guidelines relating to specific methods such as the use of guns, live traps, and poisoned bait.

5. The Trust regards the control of wild animals through killing as a “last resort” measure. It should only be used where other means, such as habitat manipulation or exclusion have been shown to be ineffective, significantly less cost-effective than culling, or less humane.
6. Where a need for culling does arise, a fully justified and ecologically based case must be made to demonstrate the necessity for it and the effectiveness of the action in solving the problem.
7. Any action taken to kill animals must follow accepted guidelines² and be by the most humane and most effective method available.
8. SWT accepts the need for controlling some species³ for the purposes of disease control, welfare grounds, hygiene and prevention of damage to property. Should this become necessary on any of its reserves or premises, as with the culling of wild animals, only established, approved methods would be used. SWT would only undertake these actions where outcomes can be sustained.
9. SWT accepts that killing occurs in the pursuit of legal field sports but believes that these must be undertaken using humane means and in ways that are not detrimental to the target species or to nature conservation generally. SWT believes that wildlife reserves are not appropriate places for field sports, not least due to the amount of disturbance that this can cause. Only in very exceptional cases, where a long established, historic, legal right to hunt on a site exists, will it be accommodated. In such cases, every effort will be made to manage it in such a way as to minimise disturbance to wildlife and visitors⁴ (see SWT Reserves below for a more detailed discussion of this).
10. SWT accepts that animals may need to be killed for research or educational purposes. This must not, however, use inhumane means or be detrimental to the species involved or to nature conservation generally.
11. SWT also accepts that animals may be incidentally killed during operations to manage habitats. It is essential that any proposed habitat management is properly assessed not only in relation to the value of its intended consequences but also in relation to potential damage arising from incidental killing or other side-effects.
12. SWT will ensure that all necessary measures are taken to stop any illegal killing on SWT reserves, including seeking prosecutions where appropriate.

Action on SWT wildlife reserves

Culling

13. SWT will undertake the culling of wild animals on a reserve only where this is justified by scientific evidence that the species in question is having a negative ecological impact on either the ecosystem or native species. Where this is shown to be necessary, only the most humane method available will be used.

² The Wildlife Trusts, Killing wild animals; guidelines for use by The Wildlife Trusts (1998)

³ The online Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press)

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=88045&dict=CALD> – defines vermin in the following way: “small animals and insects that can be harmful and which are difficult to control when they appear in large numbers: *Flies, lice, rats, foxes and cockroaches can all be described as vermin.*”

⁴ Wildfowling at Montrose Basin is an example of this and could provide a useful model for how to approach this on other wildlife reserves.

14. Use of the terms "pest" and "vermin" is sometimes subjective and can lead to prejudgement of difficult issues. SWT believes that killing of "pests" or "vermin" should only be done if a specific case to do so is made out and can be justified ecologically and the action proposed meets the policy requirements.
15. SWT regards good relations with the neighbours to our Reserves as very important. Their concerns about "pests", including the economic effects they might have, will, therefore, always be considered promptly, carefully and seriously, but action will only be taken if the situation merits it. Under the Pests Act 1954⁵ there is a statutory obligation for occupiers to control rabbits on their land, although there is no indication of the population level above which action would be required as this must be related to the damage done to other properties. SWT will seek to control rabbits on SWT reserves as far as this relates to legal requirements or if it is shown that their presence poses a significant threat to other wildlife.
16. The Agriculture (Scotland) Act 1948⁶ involves agricultural land only and, therefore, as it does not affect the majority of SWT reserves, relates more to the wider countryside. Under this Act, Part II Section 26 (1), occupiers of agricultural land are required to fulfil their responsibilities of good husbandry (including the systematic control of vermin) and manage their land in accordance with rules of good estate management (including the systematic control of vermin on land not in the control of an agricultural tenant).

Field Sports

17. Any particular field sport will only normally be approved on a reserve if it can be shown to be the most humane and most effective method available to carry out the killing of animals already determined as part of Reserve management. In this context by definition this would constitute culling, with the field sport element merely incidental.
18. Where an arrangement for field sports already exists on a reserve, e.g. those by agreement, positive measures will be taken by SWT to establish the acceptability of the practice within the policy requirements. Those which do not comply with this Policy will be phased out where possible through consultation with the local community.
19. New reserves will normally be purchased with the sporting rights and any existing arrangements phased out. For new reserve agreements any sporting or "pest" control conditions will be considered under this Policy before any documents are signed. However, when acquiring land, where overriding concerns for wildlife conservation exist, it might be necessary to accept existing field sports interests if these cannot be avoided.
20. In exceptional situations where the shooting or harvesting of wildlife is a specific objective of management, agreed by SWT for demonstration purposes, or as part of a partnership project, animals may be killed only if the purpose and method complies with this Policy (i.e. to ensure that the process is sustainable and that it is done humanely).

Illegal Killing

21. Action will be taken to stop any illegal killing on SWT reserves including seeking prosecutions where appropriate.

⁵ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1954/cukpga_19540068_en_1

⁶ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1948/cukpga_19480045_en_3

Wider countryside

22. SWT is promoting healthy, functioning ecosystems as being essential to the future of wildlife in Scotland. To achieve these in a highly modified fragmented landscape such as Scotland, in the presence of large numbers of invasive non-native species and in the absence of large predators, it is inevitable that culling will sometimes be essential.
23. Culling is a valuable and effective management method, provided it is guided by sound scientific principles and uses the most humane methods available.

Links to other SWT policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following SWT policies:

- Agriculture
- Non-native invasive species
- Pest Control
- Reintroduction, translocation and introduction of species
- Wild Deer and Wildlife in Scotland

References

- The Wildlife Trusts, Killing Wild Animals, Guidelines for use by the Wildlife Trusts (1998)
- The online Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press) - <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=88045&dict=CALD>
- Pests Act (1954) - http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1954/cukpga_19540068_en_1
- Agriculture Scotland Act (1948) - http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1948/cukpga_19480045_en_3
- Conservation of Seals Act (1970) - http://www.uklegislation.hmso.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1970/cukpga_19700030_en_1

Date of approval of policy by Council

Agreed by Council November 2008