

In Defence of Life - Standing Up Against The Lust for Culling Wildlife

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

Early in 2013 I thought I had reached a low point as I [reacted](#) to the way the animal-loving British elite happily slaughtered anything that got in its way. The most visible sign of its lust for 'controlling' wildlife by culling has been the project to kill badgers on the poor excuse that they are responsible for all the bovine TB in cattle. So the start of the second year of badger culling coinciding with Medway Council trying again [to destroy a protected site](#) where nightingales breed forced me to revisit the war we wage on nature.

So far it has not been a good year:

In January roe deer became [trapped](#) between two security fences at Sellafield nuclear power station and plans to shoot them caused uproar. Always shoot rather than rescue is the way to deal with pesky wildlife that has the temerity to get in the way and despite the protests the guns had their way. In April the [cull](#) started.

Also in January after another public uproar, a cull of hares [was called off](#) at Cranfield Airport. The cull was "to be undertaken following a crash between a light aircraft and a muntjac deer as the plane was coming in to land". Well, if a deer caused an accident, of course you'd go out and shoot hares, wouldn't you? Because according to the guns, the hare population was 'out of control'. Conservationists begged to differ and [Natural England](#) actually plans to try and double the brown hare population by 2020.

Anglers like killing too. They have called for [otters to be culled](#) because of 'damage' to fishing lakes. "If you watch £20,000 worth of stock disappear in just a few days – what are the owners going to do?" Well, either each fish costs an inordinate amount of money or there is a whole plague of animals that we know nothing about, seeing that most of us are desperate to see just one otter before we die. The very [expensive fish](#) are giant carp, twice the size of otters and like the pheasant, another species imported to provide fun.

And then there are the [beavers](#) on the River Otter in Devon, caught on film in February. Anglers immediately demanded culling – anglers need beavers "like we need a hole in the head". Defra announced they would be trapped and removed because they might be 'diseased'. Everyone else has sided with the beavers. Despite Defra's desire to control all wildlife, they are still there, and have been for quite some years, without trouble.

In March the Scotsman had news of how [birds of prey were suffering](#) because of gamekeepers 'protecting' game birds that were going to be shot for pleasure. They are switching from poisoning to shooting, trapping and nest destruction – small comfort there for the birds. Even worse, the Scottish RSPB reported that "There have been incidents where chicks and eggs of ground-nesting species such as the hen harrier have been

stamped on.”

In April the “We’re all in it together” Prime Minister Cameron [vetoed](#) the raising of the firearms licence fee. It has been frozen at £50 since 2001 – just over a quarter of the £196 that it costs police (and taxpayer) to issue the licence; it now costs us £17m. Why subsidise people who can afford [up to £1000](#) and more for the gun? [Top of the range guns](#) come at over £60,000, and they only pay £50 a year to licence it.

At the same time the pheasant-and-grouse-shooting government increased the subsidies for grouse moors. George Monbiot wrote [a brilliant resume](#) of how the pheasant constantly switched from ‘livestock’ to ‘wildlife’ in order to make the most use of both subsidies and regulations. As he said: “Through a series of magnificent legal manoeuvres it becomes whatever the wealthy want it to be.”

The battle to save the endangered hen harrier from the grouse shooters is ongoing. And its favoured habitat, the moors and uplands, are damaged by ‘management’ undertaken for ‘agricultural purposes’ by the owners. One only has to [look](#) at what such management means to fall into utter despair. Can these people not see what they do to the land?

The fight goes on to stop the [burning](#) of the peatlands in Northern England. An RSPB assessment of the scale of burning on England’s upland peatlands “revealed at least 127 separate historic agreements or consents which allow burning of blanket bog habitat on sites recognised as internationally important for birds.” Not so curiously, all permissions for such burning have been granted to areas managed for grouse shooting.

The practice doesn’t just destroy precious wildlife habitats in defiance of EU law. The Moorland Association (aka grouse killers) said that a review of the practice would “be a risk to us all”. As Hazel Hedge [commented](#):

“Which ‘all’ is referred to here? Not the residents of towns such as Hebden Bridge, who rely on healthy upland catchments to reduce the risk of flooding. Not the average Yorkshire dweller who is paying extra to have their water cleaned after the bog burning. And not the ‘all’ of us affected by climate change, which is being exacerbated by the release of carbon from moorland which could and should be used as a carbon sink. No, it must be the ‘all’ of us who have an interest in grouse-shooting...”

A study by Exeter University [revealed](#) just how much we need our green earth. Even a photograph of a dull rural scene produces a feeling of inner calm, while one of a city (no matter how beautiful), makes our brains disorganised and dysfunctional. We are not programmed to be “civilised”, to live piled on top of one another in deserts of buildings, with no more comfort for the soul than a dying pot plant or the trees plonked along between the street and the pavement, roots covered in concrete. We [need](#) ‘nature’.

For most of our past, as hunter-gatherers, we never thought about ownership. Killing for food was a necessity, but life was not about killing or being in control, it was simply about being within and a part of the landscape. As Douglas Fry [argues](#), we were at peace with ourselves and the earth.

The invention of agriculture damaged us, both physically and mentally. If [Jared Diamond](#) and others are to be believed, our bodies suffered and became diminished because of

agriculture. So did our spirits, souls, hearts – whatever you want to call that ‘other’ side of us.

By growing crops and domesticating animals we came to believe that we owned the food and animals we farmed, and that any other form of life that tried to eat ‘our’ food had to be killed. It is a short step from trying to protect your source of food to becoming addicted to the thrill of killing. After living healthily and peacefully with the earth for millennia, we learnt to see the rest of life as alien. We now see wildlife in two ways:

Something to be controlled or something to be killed for sport. But now, for a growing number of us, it is something to be protected and left alone. Which brings me back to the badger cull and another spate of unnecessary killing.

It is hard to accept that the cull is set up and carried out by fellow humans who simply take pleasure in killing; hard to accept that they will do anything to protect that pleasure, whether it is through bullying and intimidation, misusing the law and, utterly to be condemned, by our politicians misusing science in support of the killing.

For all those people walking the lanes and getting in the way of the cullers, I say this. Keep going. Somehow you will win this one. For every badger that is killed, you will save many more. Sooner rather than later sanity and honest science will win the day. The fact that you will have to immediately man the barricades to save yet another species from the hungry guns should not deter you. It should invigorate you – because look at what you have learnt:

Look at how much information you have garnered by using FoI requests. Look at the tactics you have mastered, the way you can render uninformed MPs speechless with solid, science-based arguments. Look at how you organise through social media, emails and meetings in pubs. Look at how you have liaised with the police and made them change their way of thinking and their approach to wildlife “protestors”.

Look at how a passion for wildlife has energised you; how it has brought many more people onto the streets; made so many more people realise just how important the idea of ‘green’, of ‘nature’ and ‘wildlife’ is to our sense of wellbeing.

And look at how many more friends you and I have made because of the badgers – and the buzzards and the hares and nightingales. We have woken up and seen that it is time to act in defence of life. Without the natural environment we will become dead – dead in our minds and souls and, eventually, dead in our bodies because we are slowly killing the earth that is our home, our blood and bone and breath.

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