

Representation Denied - Britain's Hidden Citizens

By [Lesley Docksey](#)

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Look at our cities – the concrete, the unbeautiful buildings where people live separated from each other; the constant rumble of traffic, the noise, the dirt and the polluted, heavy air. Look at the rich men making yet more money that they don't need while the poor sleep on the streets, the homeless who have no vote, no say in what happens to their country, their land.

But we have other cities, places where the land is soft under our feet, or hard with rock and root. It may be quieter but the traffic is just as busy. Leaf litter is a maze of active highways; fox and deer step carefully between the trees while the branches deal with air traffic. And underground are other creatures, and nature's internet, a web of roots and fungal filaments, an information highway hidden from view.

Each wood is a city of a million souls, each tree and hedgerow a vibrant town, each grassy bank a village – busy communities all. Think of scrub and grasslands as nature's urban sprawl. For wherever you look and everywhere you tread, there are nonhuman lives going about their business, nature's work of keeping the earth healthy, balanced and sustainable. We do not trouble to listen to them, no matter how loud they shout. Indeed, most people do not believe they have a voice.

Yes, we think these communities are lovely, balm for the spirit, and we sometimes fight for their protection. That is why, for those who care, we value the influence of the EU and want to hold on to its environmental protections. But still, only humans have the 'power of speech'. All else is dumb.

Once, millennia ago, this land was one big city, stretching from sea to sea. Its tiny remnants of ancient woodland are felled, bulldozed flat for development. Its people can't 'relocate', no matter what the planners think. They die, along with their ancient homes, voices lost forever.

All that life, those hidden citizens, make this land what it is. Without them we could not exist.

Before the Ice Age the British Isles were part of the European land mass. The ice melted and the seas rose and turned us into islands. Over the centuries wave after wave of human migrants from Europe became the dis-United Kingdom of today, fighting over whether we should 'Remain' or 'Brexit'. Welsh, Scots, Irish or English, all our history makes us European. Europe is where we belong.

This part of Europe has for centuries welcomed other migrants, new citizens from around the world that are part of our nation. We are used to a multi-cultural, multi-racial society.

That also is who we are. And look around you. There's not a garden in the land that doesn't have its migrants, its 'foreigners' that we have taken in and planted to make our human lives more beautiful.

Britain's other citizens, nature's ignored majority, also know about migrants and migration. As man-made climate change kicks in, their relatives in Europe (that we insist on seeing as apart from us) flee to colder climes. Fish swim, birds and insects fly, seed and pollen float on the wind, and mammals and reptiles hitch lifts on our endless trade.

The woods across the land cry out for a vote. My friends the badgers would surely vote to stay in Europe because that is where they live. They do not understand nations, just the soil in which they tunnel to make their home, the soil on which all we humans depend. Nothing can live well in isolation; there is no power in cutting our ties, no matter what some believe.

The woods, the badgers and all the other citizens of hidden Britain have no vote. That is why we have to vote for them.

Lesley Docksey is a freelance writer who writes for The Ecologist and other media on the badger cull and other environmental topics, and on political issues for UK and international websites.

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