

Position Statement

Species translocation

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Definitions

Translocation is the movement of species of plants or animals, by people, from one area to another. There are three types of translocation:

- **Introduction** - deliberate or accidental translocation of a species into the wild where it does not occur naturally and has not occurred since the last glaciations. This may be into the UK or from one part of the UK to another.
- **Reintroduction** - deliberate or accidental translocation of a species into the wild where it was indigenous in historic times but is no longer present.
- **Restocking** - translocation of a species into the wild into an area where it is already present.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has developed a position statement on translocation¹ and specific policy guidelines on reintroduction². In 2003 the Joint Committee on Nature Conservation (JNCC) published a policy on translocation of species for conservation in Britain, which adopts IUCN's guidelines³. The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain was launched in 2008⁴. In Northern Ireland, Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), together with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in the Republic of Ireland, commissioned a report on invasive species. Implementation of its recommendations began in 2006⁵.

Introductions

Non-native species have been introduced for a variety of reasons: economic development, e.g., Sitka spruce; improvement of hunting and fishing, e.g., fallow deer; amenity, e.g., rhododendron; or maintenance of cultures by incoming settlers, e.g., sweet chestnut or rabbits. In general, the damage done by introductions to natural ecosystems outweighs any benefits.

Non-native species can interfere with the dynamics of natural systems causing the local extinction of native species, e.g., the impact of grey squirrels on red squirrels. Invasive non-native species can dominate large areas⁶.

IUCN's recommendations include:

- Species introduction should only be considered if clear benefits to people or natural communities can be foreseen and native species do not provide a suitable alternative.
- Species should not be introduced into a semi-natural habitat unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

- An assessment should be made of the impact on surrounding semi-natural habitats of introducing any species to artificial, arable, ley pasture or forestry systems.

Reintroductions

Reintroduction is used as a conservation tool for restoring a species to a habitat where it has become extinct due to persecution, over-collecting, over-harvesting or habitat deterioration, but where these factors no longer persist or can be controlled.

IUCN recommends reintroductions should only take place where:

- The original causes of extinction have been removed or reduced sufficiently
- The habitat requirements of the species are satisfied and are likely to be sustained
- Individuals are of the closest available race or type to the original stock
- The long term protection of the reintroduction area is assured.
- Actions are based on research into previous reintroductions of the same or similar species.
- Removal of individuals for reintroduction does not endanger the captive stock or wild source population.
- There is full permission and involvement of all relevant government agencies.
- Adequate post release monitoring is planned.

Restocking

Restocking is sometimes considered where populations have dropped below critical levels and natural recovery is in doubt due to inbreeding or slow reproductive rates. IUCN recommends restocking should only take place where:

- The causes of population decline have been largely removed.
- Actions to encourage the resident population to expand have been unsuccessful.
- The area has the capacity to sustain the population.
- Individuals are of the same race as the population into which they are released but not from genetically impoverished or cloned stock.
- If captive-bred animals are used, there is no danger of infecting wild populations with diseases and no problems with animals being accepted by wild individuals of the same species.

The Woodland Trust's view

Although IUCN's guidance on species translocation focuses on animals, the principles apply to all species, including fungi and plants, e.g. the translocation of trees to create new native woodland.

In the UK, where semi-natural habitats are highly fragmented, habitat creation is vital to:

- Place semi-natural habitats on a more sustainable footing by increasing their size and buffering them from damaging activities nearby
- Increase the opportunity for species to move across landscapes in response to climate change⁷.

Introductions, reintroductions and restocking should only be considered where:

- The needs of individual species can be met by habitat management rather than by long-term species-specific actions
- The species concerned are fundamental to sustaining or re-establishing the habitat e.g. trees as a component of creating woodland

When establishing trees:

- Non-native trees should not be planted into native or ancient woods.
- Within ancient and native woods, natural regeneration should be encouraged. Where it is necessary to plant trees this should be with site native species
- Planting of trees on land adjacent to ancient woods should be undertaken with site-native species.

In trying to ensure that the rate of environmental change allows the widest biodiversity to adapt and evolve, it is vital not to inadvertently reinforce genetic restrictions on species' capacities to respond. IUCN and JNCC's policies on species translocations need to be relaxed. Faced with uncertainty, it seems prudent to continue to re-introduce and restock with individuals of the closest available type to the original or surviving stock but supplemented by other individuals from a range of sources⁸.

Wholesale translocation of semi-natural habitats, such as ancient woodland, is not suitable as a compensation measure for their loss to built development⁹.

References

- ¹ (1987) *IUCN Position Statement on Translocation of Living Organisms: Introduction, Re-introduction and Restocking*. Prepared by the Species Survival Commission in collaboration with the Commission on Ecology, and the Commission on Environmental Policy, Law and Administration. <http://www.iucnsscrg.org>
- ² IUCN (1998) *Guidelines for Re-introductions*. Prepared by IUCN/SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- ³ McLean, I.F.G. (2003) *A policy for conservation translocation of species in Britain*. JNCC, Peterborough. <http://www.jncc.gov.uk>
- ⁴ Defra (2008) *The invasive non-native species framework strategy for Great Britain*. Defra, London. <http://www.nonnativespecies.org>
- ⁵ Stokes, K., O'Neill, K. & McDonald, R.A. (2006) *Invasive species in Ireland*. Report to Environment & Heritage Service and National Parks & Wildlife Service by Quercus, Queens University. Environment & Heritage Service, Belfast and National Parks & Wildlife Service, Dublin. <http://www.invasivespeciesireland.com>
- ⁶ Defra on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership (2010) *UK Biodiversity Indicators in your pocket*. Defra, London. <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4229#download>
- ⁷ Williamson, D. (1999) Plants on the move. *New Scientist* (Inside Science 112)
- ⁸ Woodland Trust (2010) *Position Statement: Tree provenance*. <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>
- ⁹ Woodland Trust (2010) *Position Statement: Ancient woods and translocation*. <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>