

## SNH Position on Wildlife Welfare

### 1 WHY DOES SNH GET INVOLVED WITH WILDLIFE WELFARE?

SNH has specific legal responsibilities for welfare covered by the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. In addition to complying with our legal duties we will seek to promote best practice in wildlife welfare within our own work and when advising others.

SNH manages wildlife, for various reasons, on its own land. In addition SNH funds projects by third parties that directly or indirectly involve the management of wildlife. When carrying out our functions we will consider the impact of management practices on wildlife welfare and promote established best practice. Such consideration needs to be visible, consistent and explicit. This position statement sets out the principles underpinning SNH's approach to and involvement with wildlife management.

The position statement will form the basis of staff guidance and information on how to implement these principles in SNH casework and projects.

### 2 WHAT IS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT?

SNH regards wildlife management as the deliberate and targeted intervention by people to change the populations, structure or distribution of wild species, particularly mammals and birds. In practice our involvement in wildlife management primarily focuses on protecting wildlife, safeguarding their health and welfare and managing their effects. We also advise on wider wildlife management activities, including wildlife watching, country sports or food production.

### 3 WHAT IS WILDLIFE WELFARE?

#### 3.1 Legislative Context

There is substantial welfare legislation for farmed animals and domestic pets but this legislation does not extend to wildlife. The legislation relevant to wildlife focuses on preventing acts of cruelty by making specific deliberate or reckless acts illegal. Wildlife welfare is explicitly mentioned in the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 (as amended) which requires SNH to 'keep under review...all matters including their welfare'. It is also relevant to SNH work in other areas particularly in actions covered by provisions of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 and the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

#### 3.2 Wildlife Welfare Characteristics

Wildlife welfare has two components:

- the way animals function biologically;
- society's beliefs of what an animal experiences.

These are not always the same thing. SNH recognises that people can believe something to be in the best interests of an animal while biological evidence suggests the contrary. Disentangling these components is an essential first stage in the assessment of welfare.

Any approach to wildlife welfare should make an assessment first of the biological function of the animal and then of society's varying values.

### 3.3 Welfare from a biological view point

An animal's welfare state is generally regarded as a consequence of an animal's ability to adapt to environmental challenge. Animals adapt by adjusting their behaviour or physiology. Assessing an animal's welfare status is complex and not well understood for all species. It may require observation of an animal's physiological or behavioural response to the environmental conditions over a period of time. This is in order to take account of short intensive periods of environmental challenge which may cause stress for the animal at that point but is within the normal ability of the animal to withstand. Examples of this would be flight from a predator or shortage of food at the end of winter.

Welfare is also more than simply the avoidance of suffering. An animal's welfare lies on a continuum from poor to good. SNH when undertaking its wildlife management functions will seek to promote good welfare as far as we are able. We will also seek to understand and address situations when poor welfare is leading to unacceptable suffering.

Assessing welfare, therefore, needs to consider more than the status of any individual at a given moment in time. SNH will seek to develop generic indicators of welfare status based on observation of groups of species behaviour or physiological condition for animals where management activities are focused and where suitable information is available.

### 3.4 The animal's welfare state – taking account of society's views

Management decisions need to be based on a well-founded understanding of the biological needs of an animal or group of animals. They also need to have regard to society's views and values. Compromise to a welfare state becomes a recognised issue when it is of concern to society generally and this is summarised in the box below:

<b>Welfare State:</b>	Welfare condition as experienced by the <b>animal/s</b> .
<b>Welfare Problem:</b>	When the <b>animal(s)</b> may be beyond their own adaptive ability to deal with the problem.
<b>Welfare Issue:</b>	When <b>society</b> widely believes the problem requires consideration.

Acknowledging and assessing the differing views expressed by society add to the transparency of any decision. Decisions taken by SNH relating to wildlife welfare can never meet the aspiration of the wide range of divergent ethical views. SNH will use peer reviewed scientific evidence to underpin our welfare considerations and where appropriate develop staff guidance to help understand the range of ethical views within particular welfare issue.

Wildlife welfare is different from animal rights -

- Animal rights discussions focus on the question of whether animals have similar rights to humans and whether they should be used for the benefit of humans;
- Wildlife welfare discussions focus on how to promote the welfare of wildlife in a range of management contexts, including where animals are used as a resource and where they are managed to control their impacts.

While respecting the different ethical perspectives on the use of animals SNH's does not take a position on animal rights and accepts people's right to manage wildlife within the current legal framework.

## 4 SNH Wildlife Welfare - Ways of Working

This position statement is primarily aimed at SNH staff. It may be of interest to those who work in the land and wildlife management sectors as the principles will be used by SNH when considering support for partner initiatives. More generally SNH consider that it would be helpful to promote a

common understanding of best practice in wildlife welfare. SNH will therefore adopt the following ways of working:

- **Management plans and activities which have or are likely to have an impact on wildlife will take their welfare into account.**

Welfare will be explicitly considered in activities and planning processes which either directly or indirectly are likely to impact on the welfare of wildlife. Plans which have a bearing on wildlife welfare will show how welfare has been taken into account, both at the group and individual level, for species where we have the adequate knowledge and can undertake appropriate action.

- **The death of an animal, at an individual level, is not a *welfare issue* but the manner in which an animal dies is.**

We support the need, where necessary, to cull wildlife in order to achieve public interest associated with wildlife and land management objectives. As commonly understood by professional vets and others professionals working in this field, we do not consider death itself to be a welfare issue for the individual animal. What is important is managing the manner in which an animal lives and dies to avoid suffering.

- **Our approach to wild animal welfare is based on current scientific knowledge.**

Our knowledge of how wild animals respond to welfare challenges continues to expand. SNH will continue to take an evidence based approach which focuses primarily on an assessment of the effects of management actions on the animal rather than people's perceptions and reactions.

- **Our approach takes into account public opinion and values.**

We will be mindful of public values in relation to animal welfare and bear this in mind in our management approaches and subsequent communication. We will continue to try to understand public perceptions in order that we communicate why particular welfare decisions have been taken. We will seek to further the public's understanding of wildlife welfare to enhance support for planned management interventions.

- **We take into account the dynamic and adaptive characteristics of wildlife welfare.**

We consider that welfare, as it is perceived by the animal itself, is not a static measure but a dynamic, interactive and adaptive state. We will take this into account when considering welfare issues, and ensure that we take a longer term perspective on wildlife welfare.

For further information please contact.

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