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Dear XX

I am writing to express my concern about important changes to the status of many of our widespread species in the United Kingdom as a result of the 7th Quinquennial Review (QQR) of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (WCA) which is being coordinated by the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). This review will provide recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and to Ministers for the Environment in the Scottish Government and Welsh Government for changes to these schedules.

I understand that the 2021 review seeks to change the ‘Eligibility Criteria’ of species currently (and in future times) listed under Schedules 5 and 8, such that the country-based nature conservation bodies will only pursue scheduling of a species when an animal or plant is in danger of extinction in Great Britain.

This shift in focus will preferentially consider GB Red Listed species, i.e.  those facing imminent threat of extinction (IUCN 2012) in GB Schedules 5 and 8 of the WCA. However, a great swathe of other widespread species where there is either no evidence of a massive decline, or it has not been assessed against the IUCN national or regional Red List Criteria will not be considered.

This will effectively remove any form of protection from many of our well-loved widespread species. This could include red squirrels and water voles as well as common frog, common toad and the small newts; and reptiles such as the slow-worm, grass snake, adder and viviparous lizard.

This means that it will be legal to trade or sell these animals, and worse still the reptiles will lose their protection from killing and injury. This means that it will once again be legal to persecute adders, pine martens and mountain hares – despite all of the costly efforts to try and conserve these vulnerable species.

As a member of my local amphibian and reptile group I believe this could have the following specific impacts on our amphibians and reptiles:

* There would no longer be a requirement to consider any of the widespread species (excepting European Protected or ‘critically endangered’ species ) under planning protocols
* It would become legal to trade wild-caught British widespread amphibians and reptiles - which poses a huge biosecurity risk, since this could result in wild animals being moved around, and entering into captive collections alongside animals imported from elsewhere in the world. We have already identified a significant threat to our native newts should the novel form of the chytrid fungus enter wild populations in the UK (it is already present in captive collections); a disease that has led to >99% mortality in fire salamanders in The Netherlands and Belgium. We only have to look at the state of our English elm, native ash, native white-clawed crayfish, and red squirrel to understand the far-reaching and irreversible impacts of such disease spread.
* It would remove protection  from killing or injury from our only native venomous snake  - the adder - so it would no longer be a wildlife crime to persecute or kill them, which could be the final blow for an animal already on the brink
* These animals will be removed from the following lists of priority species and habitats in [England](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http%3A/www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx), [Scotland](https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/scottish-biodiversity-strategy/scottish-biodiversity-list), and [Wales](https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Environment-Wales-Act), from [Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/41) (England), [Section 7 of the Environment Act (Wales)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/section/7), [Section 2(4) of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/section/2).

I believe this could lead to local extinctions of some of our widespread species!!

The review is currently in the early stages so there is still time to question the process, as I understand that according to the current timetable, submission of final recommendations to Governments will not happen until November to December 2021. However, my concern is this will be too late, and at this time the recommendation from the Joint Committee will pass through the statutes without further opposition

The UK is blessed to have such a beautiful and species rich countryside. This proposed change to the legal protection of so many of our native species can only lead to further impoverishment. If we are only prepared to protect animals that are already ‘critically endangered’ and therefore may already be irrecoverable, we will have to justify to our children and grandchildren that we allowed our environment to degrade, on our watch!

Please can you bring this to the attention of colleagues in Parliament and ensure that our native wildlife gets a fair hearing!

Yours sincerely

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