

A RESPONSE TO "FERAL WILD BOAR IN ENGLAND"

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INTRODUCTION

As a native extirpated by human persecution, wild boar must be amongst the species considered for successful re-introduction to the English landscape. The current situation, of small, feral populations of uncertain genetic origin, may not be the best starting point, particularly since the habitats they occupy at present may not offer security from future persecution.

RESPONSE TO SECTION A: FUTURE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Option (d) is the most suitable option. Local consideration may conclude that the presence of wild boar colonies is accommodated within the existing cultural landscape and that their presence is acceptable in the same way that other wild mammals are able to co-exist with us.

RESPONSE TO SECTION B: OTHER PROPOSALS

(i) Disease and animal welfare

Proposal (h) is the precautionary approach.

Comments:

While the free-living wild boar at present originated from conditions of livestock management, it must be accepted at some point that wild animals are not livestock and that their health is dependent on natural forces and processes. This, as with other wild animals and potential re-introductions, raises issues about the supremacy of considerations given to the health of livestock over that of wild animals. This assumption of supremacy currently adversely impacts the security of wildlife.

(ii) Changes to legislation

Option (i) is a measure necessary for animal welfare in situations where management of feral wild boar – and of re-introduced wild boar - is required outside of areas where their free-living is accommodated (see Additional Comments later).

Option (J) is a sensible requirement, accepting that some population management may be necessary (see above).

Option (I) This option may be necessary to manage feral populations in cultural landscapes, but its purpose has to be distinctly clear from any implications for truly wild populations of wild boar that may exist in the future.

(iii) Monitoring of feral populations and establishments containing wild boar and wild boar/domestic hybrids

Option (n) Wild boar in livestock management should receive the same animal welfare considerations of any other livestock.

Option (o) If wild boar are successfully reintroduced as a wild mammal, it is likely that there will still be escapes from livestock-managed populations of wild boar and thus there will be wild as well as feral wild boar. It may be desirable to distinguish between these populations and freeze brand marks would be a favoured option.

Option (p) This is worth doing.

Option (q) This action needs to have its aims carefully considered. If its rationale is only on the basis of assessing potential for damage, then it continues the denial of the right of the natural behaviour of wild boar to be exhibited.

(iv) Provision of advice and guidance

Option (r) Only if it doesn't continue to stereotype wild boar, but explains their normal behaviour and how this is modified by un-natural situations or locations.

Option (s) Ditto Option (r).

Option (t) If you remove the word "problem" and instead give land managers the information to assess whether the free-living of wild boar can be accommodated (acceptably tolerated).

Option (u) This should be a requirement.

Option (v) Why? Doesn't this type of action reinforce the presumption that wild/feral animals are a constant disease threat to livestock? More important would be the provision of procedures and standards on competency and safety of kill.

(v) Additional Comments

We can farm wild boar if we sort out issues of containment, but probably as important is the difficulties posed by the lack of local slaughtering facilities. This is a problem facing all of our small-scale livestock production, and thus particularly difficult for rare breeds etc. We can also make use of the land management values of wild boar as recently reported on in trials for the reforestation program in Glen Affric.

Last year, I saw a family of wild boar in the Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves to the east of Ronda in Andalusia, Spain. They were playing in a clearing in the woodland, scurrying excitedly away when they sensed us. The woodland floor was turned over in places, showing evidence of their habitation, but it never seemed to unbalance the woodland ecology and it appeared adequately accommodated in that natural environment.

There are wild boar in the middle ground of the controlled spaces of wildlife parks, but I firmly believe that these animals will only be able to exhibit their natural behaviour if we give them enough space and natural landscape by setting up core areas of wildland that are not needed for any productive purpose - like the Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves in Spain.

Wild boar do have a place in England - as a food source, as natural managers of landscapes, and for their own sake in recognition of their intrinsic value. This consultation prefigures a potential burgeoning of feral populations of wild boar. In larger context, it must lead on to a discussion of

the rightful presence of wild boar and other wild mammals in the English landscape, and our responsibility as a nation to make provision for the unfettered presence of those wild mammals in land given over to securing their existence. It may be that their existence is given less security outside of these protected core areas except where there is local agreement that their presence can be accommodated.

There will be an issue of distinction. Feral wild boar arising from escapes will perhaps not be clearly distinguishable from wild boar reintroduced to English landscapes, especially since the variation in physical appearance of feral wild boar is not necessarily an indicator of species purity. Brand marks on livestock-managed wild boar will offer a visual check.

It may be that a policy of population management outside of protected areas will not need to make the distinction. It then remains to be determined whether in the long term the mixing of feral escapees with wild populations in protected areas will be a significant cause for concern.

Mark Fisher