

England Species Reintroductions Taskforce: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation stakeholder meeting

Date and time: 16th November 2023, 10:00-11:30

Location: Online

Attendees: Andy Clements (Taskforce Chair), Jim Foster (Amphibian and Reptile Conservation), John Ewen (Zoological Society of London, Taskforce member), Mina Patel (Natural England), Simon Lee (Natural England).

Note of the meeting

1. Welcome and introductions

Andy Clements welcomed everyone to the meeting, followed by brief individual introductions.

2. Background to the Taskforce

Andy Clements provided an account of the creation and activity of the Taskforce and Simon Lee touched upon governance and finances. Andy Clements clarified the role of the Taskforce in providing evidence-led advice and guidance (and not generating translocation projects), coupled with proactive public communications and stakeholder engagement, in doing so highlighting the aims and objectives of this meeting: to present the work of the Taskforce; and, to listen to views, concerns and experiences of the stakeholders.

4. Roundtable discussion

Attendees contributed to a broad discussion around issues and topics facing conservation translocations of amphibians and reptiles and exploration of suitable channels for an ongoing dialogue and information exchange with the Taskforce.

Key subjects raised and discussed:

- Spectrum of motivations and ideologies for undertaking conservation translocations, and varying levels of consistency in following IUCN/England codes by some bodies.
- Potential role of the Taskforce in advising the sector on addressing the perceived increase in the number of 'rogue' and illegal translocations.
- Value of a collective sectorial strategy for conservation translocations with the aim of providing structures that facilitate suitable translocations and discourage inappropriate programmes. Such a strategy would benefit from cross-taxa and an international perspective, and proportionate and positive approach to balancing opportunities with risk-mitigation.
- Need for an England symposium to tackle future wildlife recovery challenges, notably in relation to topics such as assisted colonisation, ecological replacement and differing legal and ecological definitions of indigenous/native ranges.

- Efra Select Committee inquiry and report into species reintroductions and Government position, and the independence and technical advisory role of the Taskforce.
- Value of timely posting of Taskforce minutes/products and publication of a forward plan in early 2024.
- Public communications around population management and potential role of Taskforce
- Issue of Town and Country Planning development mitigation falling outside of conservation translocations best practice guidance and codes.
- Inclusion of genetic supplementation in population reinforcement programmes and value of updated published guidance covering this subject.
- Appropriate conduits for feeding future issues and topics to the Taskforce.

5. Summary and round up

Andy Clements thanked attendees for their insightful contributions, noting the following as agreed actions from the meeting:

- Natural England to send round a note of the meeting (with an agreed version being posted on the Taskforce webpage).
- Natural England to share a summary work plan of the Taskforce in the New Year.
- All agreed that these themed discussions should continue on a regular basis.
- The Taskforce will conduct a detailed review of the definitions of native status as a key piece of work in future.
- John Ewen to share hyperlinks to IUCN Red List classification of wild vs. naturalised populations and contemporary academic papers debating native/indigenous definitions.
- Jim Foster agreed to give a presentation to the Taskforce in 2024 based on some of the themes raised and discussed above.