

British Herpetological Society: A Position Statement on Rewilding and Translocation of Amphibians and Reptiles

The British Herpetological Society (BHS), a registered charity, is the United Kingdom's principal voluntary organisation dedicated to the study, conservation, and understanding of amphibians and reptiles. As interest in rewilding and wildlife translocation continues to grow within conservation policy, land management, and public discourse, the BHS considers it important to state its position on how such activities should be approached when they involve herpetofauna. While rewilding and translocation can, in some circumstances, provide valuable tools for species conservation and ecological restoration, they also carry significant ecological, ethical, and legal risks if undertaken without appropriate rigour. The BHS therefore emphasises that any rewilding or translocation involving amphibians and reptiles must be grounded in robust scientific evidence, carried out with full legal compliance, and supported by long-term commitment to monitoring and management. These are the fundamental principles underlying the IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations (<https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/2013-009.pdf>), and those Guidelines align closely with the BHS stance on such actions.

Translocation, including reintroduction, population reinforcement, or assisted colonisation, is a complex intervention that should never be considered a simple or low-risk solution to ongoing conservation challenges. All such initiatives must therefore be carefully planned and justified. The BHS strongly advocates that all such projects are supported by high-quality multidisciplinary evidence, as discussed in detail in the IUCN Guidelines. Where evidence is limited or uncertainty is high, this must be explicitly acknowledged, and such projects should proceed only where risks are clearly understood, minimised, and justified within a structured adaptive management framework. In general, extensive research to fill those gaps should be undertaken before any translocation is implemented, notwithstanding emergency situations involving the imminent demise of a last remaining population (of which there are none affecting UK reptile and amphibian species).

In addition to the evidential framework, all translocation activities involving amphibians and reptiles must be fully compliant with requirements for landowner permissions, wildlife legislation, and regulatory frameworks. This includes obtaining the correct licences from the relevant statutory authority (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot, and Northern Ireland Environment Agency), and following the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and any other applicable legislation. Biosecurity and long-term monitoring are also critical considerations in any project involving the movement of amphibians and reptiles, as again covered in detail by the IUCN Guidelines, and the BHS therefore expects that stringent biosecurity protocols are embedded within all

project planning and delivery (including all post-release activities). Particularly in the context of reptile and amphibian translocations, the global spread of pathogens such as chytrid fungi and ranaviruses has demonstrated the severe consequences of inadequate disease control. Monitoring programmes should be designed to assess survival, reproduction, dispersal, population trends, and ecological effects, and should be capable of informing adaptive management where outcomes differ from expectations. Such monitoring enables the determination of whether conservation objectives have been met or to learn lessons that can improve future practice.

This BHS policy statement on translocations closely follows and strongly endorses the IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations as the international benchmark for best practice in this field. These guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for decision-making, risk assessment, ethical consideration, and long-term accountability, and are directly applicable to rewilding and translocation projects involving herpetofauna. Alignment with the IUCN guidelines ensures that projects are scientifically defensible, ethically sound, and consistent with global conservation standards, while also supporting transparency and knowledge-sharing across the conservation community. These Guidelines cover the entire process of translocations from the initial consideration of whether a translocation is warranted, through establishment of a robust evidence base to inform planning, to implementation and post-release monitoring.

Because of the comprehensive and internationally reputable nature of the IUCN Guidelines, the BHS takes the formal stance that it is supportive of translocations which follow those Guidelines closely. However, we will always stand opposed to any reckless, ad hoc, or poorly planned translocations which deviate meaningfully from those guidelines. The IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines are freely available at the link given near the start of this document, and we refer readers interested in the details of what is required for an acceptable translocation project to there.