

Feedback

Want to get something off your chest? This is the ideal place

By contacting us, you consent to let us print your letter in *BBC Wildlife Magazine*. Letters may be edited.

EMAIL US
wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk

FOLLOW US facebook.com/wildlifemagazine;
twitter.com/WildlifeMag; instagram.com/bbcwildlifemagazine

WRITE TO US *BBC Wildlife*, Eagle House,
Colston Avenue, Bristol, BS1 4ST

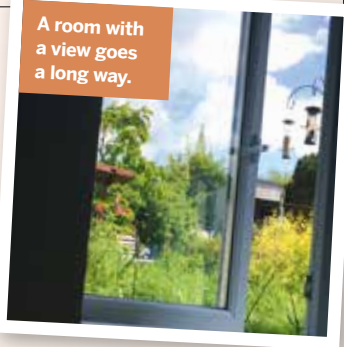
Star letter

Going unnoticed

I read the absorbing piece by Helen Pilcher with great interest (Adapt or die, April 2020), until I came to the phrase 'Scientists estimate that dozens of species go extinct every day'. Really? That would be a minimum of 9,000 a year, which I simply don't believe. A trawl of the internet gives the rather precise figure of 137 species becoming extinct each day, so 50,000 a year. These exaggerated claims do wildlife conservation no favours, because the figures are never backed up with evidence. What I want to know is what has gone extinct in the last 70

years? I think I would remember the flagship species that have gone forever. But perhaps it's my natural optimism that believes some individuals may still survive.
Hilary Bradt, via email

Helen Pilcher replies:
Studies estimate that up to 58,000 species go extinct annually but because most are unknown and unmonitored, they remain off the public radar. In the last year alone, about two dozen species were declared extinct – including a Hawaiian tree snail, Achatinella apexfulva, and the Chinese paddlefish, Psephurus gladius – but this is likely to be the tip of a very large iceberg.



A room with a view goes a long way.

out the window all day.
Melissa Davies, via email

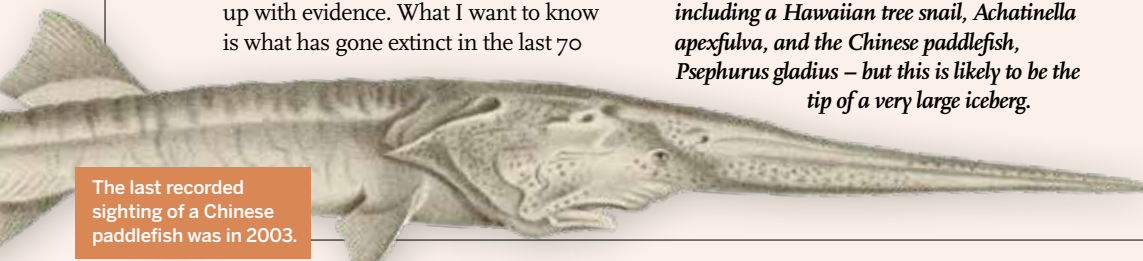
Cormorant culling

I read Mark Carwardine's article on culling cormorants (My way of thinking, spring 2020) and I honestly teared up at the very idea that cormorants are being victimised just so that people can go fishing for entertainment and not worry about these magnificent birds fishing for an actual purpose... to eat! It's horrible that it has become common in human nature to kill animals because it's convenient for us.
Shannon Ripsher, via email

I am a committed angler and bird watcher and have never met a fishing club representative that is pro cormorant or pro otter culling simply because of the damage to fish stocks in the area. Both are indigenous species and, in my view, have a God-given right to do what comes naturally. It should be left to nature to restore natural equilibrium of species and diversity.

The bigger issue in this debate, and what most people on both sides overlook, is the introduced American mink, which is widespread across the country and has devastated fish stocks, as well as preying on other native species.
Craig Mountford, Cheshire

The last recorded sighting of a Chinese paddlefish was in 2003.



Badger debate

I enjoyed your article on badgers and Bovine TB (Out of the woods?, spring 2020) and I feel that I learnt a lot. However, I would like to know more about the evidence relied on by Stuart Roberts of the NFU. He states "the latest peer-reviewed research definitively shows the phenomenal impact culling badgers has on reducing TB levels in cattle...". This is a very big claim, seemingly at odds with the views expressed by Rosie Woodroffe and Christl Donnelly in the article.
Tony Benton, via email

James Fair replies:
The figures the paper (bit.ly/badger-culling) came up with are hotly disputed. First of all, it's the same research referred to in the main copy (the one talked about after the subhead 'Crunching the numbers').

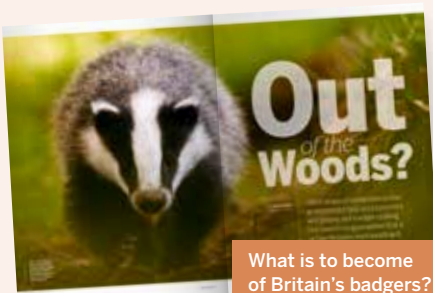
It is also the research referred to by Christianne Glossop, the chief vet of Wales. You'll notice she has a quite different point of view to Stuart Roberts on the same piece of research! Those who advocate culling say the research supports their case, while those who don't, say it's full of holes.

If cattle were protected by vaccination, the presence or absence of bTB in badgers would not be important. A wildlife disease like a parasite or predator is just part of the ecology of a species, just another factor a wild species has to contend with. There are proposals to trial the

BCG vaccine in cattle, but BCG was developed 100 years ago – technology has moved on. A COVID-19 vaccine has been developed to clinical trials stage in three months because there is a will to do so. There seems to be a persistent lack of will by the policy makers to consider any idea of vaccinating cattle against TB.
John Woods, via email

Wildlife at the window

My son, 15, gets your magazine every month and was pleased to see that you have featured a Talking Point by Elizabeth Guntrip (Inside out, May 2020), a writer with a chronic illness, as he also suffers with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and it brought him hope that other people understand and that this issue has been brought to a wider audience. Thank you for the suggestion of window boxes, as he stays in bed looking



What is to become of Britain's badgers?

Down on the farm

Mark Carwardine is right to celebrate a post-Brexit scheme to pay farmers who preserve habitat for wildlife (My way of thinking, May 2020).

However, a firm commitment to enforcement and monitoring will be required if the policy is to succeed.

With our embattled farmers under increasing pressure from climate change and an uncertain market (not to mention probable trade tariffs with Europe), the temptation to breach the terms may prove too strong for some.

So often the evidence shows that when funding is tight, government support for environmental causes falls by the wayside. While I share Mark's delight at this ground-breaking idea, I hope that ministers will uphold their pledges to ensure its long-term success.

Rob Buxton, via email

If Mark Carwardine is suggesting that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the main reasons we have lost so much wildlife across Britain, then I am afraid he is drastically over-simplifying. Unlike him, perhaps, I am old enough to have a clear memory of British agricultural land before we joined the EEC. In northeast Fife, in the 1950s and '60s, the intensive fields of sugar beet did not harbour wildflowers, numerous butterflies or great flocks of small birds. British farmers had taken to chemical weed killers and pesticides with enthusiasm well before this. 'Silent spring' was almost as relevant to Britain as to the USA.

I now see more fields red with poppies in the South of France than I did in Fife back then. In the Cerdagne last year, we saw the most beautiful meadows – despite decades of the much-maligned CAP.

Robin Noble, via email

QUIZ ANSWERS (see p90)

1C, 2A, 3B, 4A, 5A, 6B

TALES FROM THE BUSH

Clash of the titans

During a night dive, it wasn't just a lack of light that almost caused Jo Caird to miss a dramatic fight for survival.

Have a wild tale to tell? Email a brief synopsis to sarah.mcperson@immediate.co.uk



Steve Petty

I'd always considered moray eels faintly ridiculous. Sure, those gaping jaws and beady eyes are unnerving at first glance. But after a few underwater encounters, a moray guarding its patch of coral looks less like a threatening display, more like an awkward grin.

I was on a night dive in the Red Sea, when my scuba buddy gestured with his torch beam to get my attention. There on the reef was a giant moray ripping into the coral, scattering debris across the seabed. It seemed to be looking for something but we couldn't work out what.

After a brief discussion employing a combination of recognised scuba hand signals and a few made up on the spot, we continued on our way, keen to see more of the reef before our air ran out. When we arrived back at that spot 20 minutes later, it was clear that leaving had been a mistake.

While we had been amusing ourselves looking at sea slugs, harlequin shrimp and sleeping pufferfish, the moray had found what it was looking for. Clamped in the eel's jaws was an enormous octopus.

We may have missed the moment of capture (I'm still kicking myself to this day)

“There on the reef was a giant moray eel, scattering debris across the seabed.”

but this fight wasn't over. The moray – as long as I am tall, with a body the girth of my thigh – strained to keep hold of the octopus, as eight muscular tentacles wrapped tightly around its head and neck. The combatants writhed on the seabed until the water around us was dense with swirling sand.

We were close enough to reach out and touch these animals. I was worried that my buddy might inadvertently do just that, as he strove to capture the moment. An underwater camera flash lights all the tiny floating particles, so getting a clean shot depends on being close enough to minimise the amount of detritus in the way. Fortunately, the duelling duo remained oblivious to the paparazzo in their midst.

The octopus held out for a long time but, in the end, it was no match for its opponent's powerful jaws. As the eel swam away to find a quiet place to eat, I pledged to never again underestimate a moray. They may have awkward grins, but that doesn't stop them from having the last laugh. 🐡



JO CAIRD is a freelance journalist based in London. Read more of her work at jocaird.com