Dear XXXX

I am contacting you as my MP to ask you to support a petition by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) that is being debated in Parliament on 5th July 2021 from 4.30 to 6pm in Westminster Hall (currently relocated to the Boothroyd Room to allow for social distancing and virtual participation). Matt Vickers MP, as a member of the Petitions Committee will open the debate.

Since 2000, Hedgehog numbers in the UK have declined by half in rural areas and by a third in urban ones. BHPS is asking for hedgehogs to be moved from schedule 6 to schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 to allow them greater protection.

However, I am extremely concerned to learn of newly proposed changes to the status of many of our widespread species in the United Kingdom, including hedgehogs, as a result of the 7th Quinquennial Review (QQR) of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (WCA) a process that is being coordinated by the 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 major changes to these schedules.

I understand that the 2021 review seeks to change the ‘Eligibility Criteria’ of the hedgehog,  currently listed on schedule 6. It is proposed that, the country-based statutory nature conservation bodies will only retain protected status for species that are in imminent danger of extinction in Great Britain.

This shift in focus will preferentially consider GB Red Listed species, as defined by the IUCN, but IUCN guidance specifically identifies automatic use of Red List categories in policy as an "inappropriate use" of the Red List, so this is the wrong bar to set.

The effect of the proposed changes would mean that rather than increasing protection for hedgehogs, as called for in the petition being debated, their current minor level of protection will be removed altogether!

This change will make it legal to sell hedgehogs. Worse still, they will lose protection from killing and injury. The current petition makes clear that hedgehogs have widespread public support and are in need of enhanced protection. Hedgehogs have been voted Britain’s most popular wild mammal in several surveys e.g. ‘BBC Wildlife’ in 2013 winning 42% of the vote and ‘Royal Society of Biology’ in 2016 winning more than double the votes of the 2nd placed animal. Removing the hedgehog’s legal protection would be widely viewed as inappropriate and an extremely perverse response to our Parliamentary petition which has been backed by over 100,000 voters.

I urge you to please attend this debate to try to ensure that the legal protection of this much-loved species is increased in order to help their numbers recover in the UK and that any legislative changes implemented by the JNCC are subject to public consultation.

Yours sincerely

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