

UKWAS Interpretation Note 9

Definition of “Priority Species”

PLEASE NOTE: THIS INFORMATION NOTE RELATES TO THE FOURTH EDITION OF THE UK WOODLAND ASSURANCE STANDARD (VERSION 4.0)

Key Words: Priority species, IUCN Red List

Relevant requirement references:

- 2.4.4 Priority species shall not be harvested or controlled without the consent of the relevant statutory nature conservation and countryside agency
- 2.13.2b ... The conversion and subsequent site management (of land converted to non-forested land shall) protect and substantially enhance at least one of the following: the status and condition of priority habitats and species; important landscape features and character; important historic environment features and character; important carbon stores
- 3.1.2 The planning of woodland operations shall include: taking measures to protect.... and prevent disturbance of and damage to priority species....
- 4.1.2 Appropriate measures shall be taken to protect identified priority habitats and species in accordance with plans agreed with nature conservation agencies. In planning and implementing measures within the WMU, the owner/manager shall take into account the geographic range and ecological requirements of priority species beyond the boundary of the WMU.

Date: This Information Note was discussed by the Panel in email correspondence between July and August 2019 and submitted to the UKWAS Steering Group for provisional approval in November 2019.

Interpretation request:

A Steering Group member pointed out that the UKWAS 4 definition of “priority species” includes species categorised as Near Threatened (NT), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (ED) or Critically Endangered (CR) in the IUCN Red List.

The Red List includes species which are present but not native in the UK and threatened in their native range. Such species include Chinese water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*) (VU) and a number of conifer species of interest to UK forestry including Fraser’s fir (*Abies fraseri*) (EN), Korean fir (*Abies koreana*) (EN), monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) (EN), Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*) (EN), Brewer’s spruce (*Picea breweriana*) (VU), western white pine (*Pinus monticola*) (NT), Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*) (EN), eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) (NT).

Discussion:

The IUCN Red List Guidelines (version 14 (August 2019))

<https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/redlistguidelines> include the following guidance:

2.1.3 Introduced taxa and subpopulations

In addition to wild subpopulations (see section 2.1.4) inside the natural range of a taxon, the categorization process should also be applied to wild subpopulations resulting from introductions outside the natural range, if all of the following conditions are met:

(a) The known or likely intent of the introduction was to reduce the extinction risk of the taxon being introduced. In cases where the intent is unclear, the assessors should weigh the available evidence to determine the most likely intent.

(b) The introduced subpopulation is geographically close to the natural range of the taxon. What is considered to be geographically close enough should be determined by the assessor, considering factors such as the area of the natural range, the nature of the landscape separating the natural and the introduced range, and whether the taxon could have dispersed to the introduced range without the effects of human impacts such as habitat loss and fragmentation. For example, an introduced subpopulation in a continent distant from the natural range would not qualify. On the other hand, most introduced subpopulations within the same ecoregion as the natural range would qualify.

(c) The introduced subpopulation has produced viable offspring.

(d) At least five years have passed since the introduction.

From the above, it is clear that the UK populations of Chinese water deer or of the conifer species listed have no effect on the classification of the species as IUCN Red List species.

Conclusion:

The definition of “priority species” includes species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. This includes species present, but not native, in the UK such as Chinese water deer and a number of non-native conifer species relevant to UK forestry. The wording in the Standard implies a requirement for a degree of protection for such species which is neither intended nor justified.

For the purpose of UKWAS, IUCN Red List species will qualify as priority species only if they are within or geographically close to their natural range as described by IUCN global or regional lists.