Wild species that threaten farmed animals, native animals or humans by killing for food or by spreading disease are sometimes controlled, but this must always be done as humanely as possible. In view of economic and practical constraints, such as to protect human or animal health, biodiversity, or the local environment, in some circumstances, wildlife may be lethally controlled.

BVA recommends that for any proposed intervention, consideration should be given to the potential welfare implications and how any adverse consequences could be minimised.

It is recommended that a cost benefit analysis for lethal control is undertaken as part of the process of determining whether wildlife management is ethically justifiable, and scores attributed to and weighted against each variable. An audit trail should also be kept.

If it is considered that it is ethically justifiable to control a particular population of wild animals, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- Which species or populations are likely to be affected and to what extent
- Whether it is national/regional/local issue
- What the area of the lethal control should be
- Whether any interim reviews should be carried out to determine if the original objectives and aims were being achieved
• What criteria should be considered before ending lethal control and the right moment for lethal control to end

• How to determine when the critical mass been reached

• An exit strategy

All capture or lethal control procedures have the potential to produce adverse welfare consequences. Therefore, decisions should be made carefully using well known ethical frameworks such as the principles of the three R’s (Reduction, Refinement, Replacement) by considering:

Replacement

a. Whether lethal control is necessary
b. Whether there are alternatives to lethal control
c. Whether cost/benefit assessments for both target and non-target species has been carried out
d. What the welfare costs are at an individual level, as well as at a population level
e. The extent to which the benefits (e.g. human health, biodiversity, the economy, scientific knowledge) will outweigh the harm done to the target species

Reduction

a. Whether the numbers of animals to be controlled could be reduced in any other way e.g. by targeting animals during breeding seasons
b. The minimum number of animals that could be controlled in order to achieve the objectives

Refinement

a. Whether the methods of lethal control proposed are humane and effective
b. Whether the capture/lethal control /control procedures can be refined in order to minimise adverse welfare or environmental impacts
c. How the personnel involved can be educated, trained and assessed
d. How the control method(s) can be regularly tested to ensure that their welfare impact is constant throughout the process
e. What risk assessment and contingency plans can be put in place
Useful resources

- The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare’s (UFAW) has produced guidance on the control of rodents
- Natural England has information about licences and wildlife and habitat conservation
- The government website archive has information about managing wild mammals
- The Deer Initiative has best practice on deer management