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The Grey Seal in Britain: A Twentieth Century History of a Nature Conservation Success

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex history of the grey seal problem in Britain since 1914. In particular, it will focus on our different reactions to the animal over time, and show how fishing communities and organisations have called for a government-sponsored seal cull since the mid-1920s, and how the very different types of culls that came in the 1960s and 1970s were opposed and halted by public outcry in Britain and emerging international environmentalism. The essay is broad based, to show how the grey seal problem has been a political, environmental, social, cultural, economic and animal welfare issue. The study illustrates the value of an historical perspective in assessing the different strands of contemporary debate as to the wisdom and content of consciously managing a large mammal population. From this case study, using primary evidence from England and Scotland, wider conclusions about our changing modern relationship to the natural world can be drawn.

KEY WORDS

Great Britain, environment, grey seals, animals, nature conservation, fishing, environmental geography, environmental history.

INTRODUCTION

We often lament the failures of nature conservation, but rarely, if ever, do we address the historical roots and current problems of nature conservation successes. The Atlantic grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* is the most obvious and extreme example of the problems associated with a nature conservation success in Britain in the twentieth century. Such successes may well prove more and

more important as a pressing environmental issue over the course of the twenty-first century. Although this essay is, in part, based on a study of the archives of the National Trust (NT) in London and relates to their management experiences with the grey seals on the Farne Islands off Northumberland in north-east England, it uses other public and private archives to examine the culls in Scotland, illustrating the historical value of a range of environmental archival sources, most obviously those of voluntary conservation or animal welfare bodies.

There are broader lessons to be confronted. Such an investigation can shed light on the wider question of the changing nature of our complex relationship to the natural world, which has been overlooked in twentieth-century historical writing.¹ A dominant theme has been the explosion of our use of natural resources.² One neglected but important theme is our rising anxiety about the preservation of nature and how we treat other animals. This has its roots in the nineteenth century, with the establishment of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824 (obtained its royal charter in 1840, and thus RSPCA),³ and the Society for the Protection of Birds in 1889 (obtained its royal charter in 1904, and thus RSPB).⁴ The rise of these animal welfare and protection bodies are an important part of modern British social history and environmental geography that has not been looked at in great detail yet, although John Sheail has published on the political and scientific history of the British nature conservation movement.⁵

If this essay is an attempt to use a case study to put a current environmental problem in historical context and thus demonstrate the practical value of environmental history, it will also show how the grey seal over the twentieth century became a mammal of interest to politicians, fishermen, scientists, conservationists, animal welfare groups, and overwhelmingly, the general public. The grey seal passed from being a source of folklore, a resource for hunters and a sporting trophy in the nineteenth century, to being a curious but valued part of our natural heritage in the first half of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, due to one aspect of its behaviour, a sector of the population (certain fishermen) saw it as a real pest, and urged government to make it an object of scientific inquiry. From the 1960s, especially in the years of the biggest seal culls in Scotland (Orkney) and the Farne Islands, the public took up the grey seal as a domestic environmental cause in a far more popular crusade than the naturalists who had first sought its protection in the second decade of the century. On the international scene, the 1970s and 1980s alliance of Greenpeace, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), RSPCA, the media and Brigitte Bardot (she visited Newfoundland in March 1977), took up the photogenic cause of harp seal *Pagophilus groenlandicus* pups bludgeoned to death on the Canadian pack-ice. Television reports on the seal hunt, with the ice dyed red with blood, provided some of the most compelling images ever broadcast of our mastery over and use of Nature.⁶



FIGURE 1. Blind cow grey seal and pup. This photograph is held in the archives of J. Morton Boyd (former Director Scotland, Nature Conservancy Council 1970–1985), in the University of St. Andrews Library. The photograph was taken on the island of Tìree, Inner Hebrides, some time between 1953 and 1957 and is referenced ms389/Box 1/1.11. By kind permission of the University of St Andrews Photographic Collection.

STATUTORY PROTECTION

The grey seal was the first mammal protected by Parliament, under the Grey Seals (Protection) Act 1914, which established a close season from October 1 to December 15 each year when the seals were reproducing.⁷ This came about after a small group of concerned sportsmen put pressure on a handful of MPs and the Secretary of State for Scotland, worried that this ‘quite harmless and interesting beast’ then numbered less than 500 individuals in the UK.⁸ Biologists now suspect that this figure was likely to be somewhere between 2,000 to 4,000 animals,⁹ but the Act halted centuries of subsistence and commercial exploitation of the grey seal at its known breeding colonies,¹⁰ although it was difficult to police. The grey seal could still be shot or poisoned (strychnine was put in a salmon bait at nets) outside of the close season. In much of Scotland a bounty was

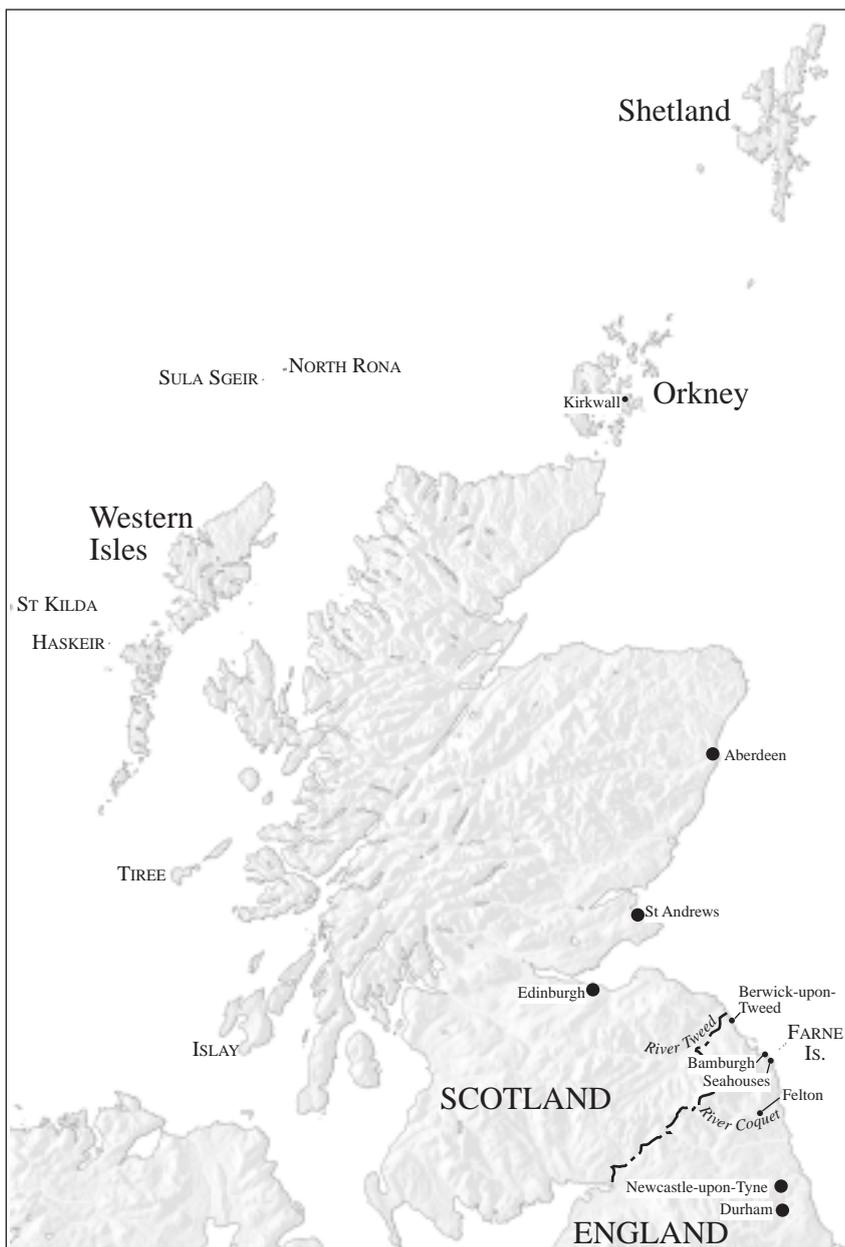


FIGURE 2. Map showing principal places mentioned in the text

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offered by Fishery Boards for the tail of any 'rogue' seal seen near fixed nets. Further parliamentary protection came with the Grey Seals (Protection) Act of 1932 which extended the close season, and gave year-round protection to the grey seals resident on Haskeir in the Outer Hebrides where many of the most bloody seal raids had taken place in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, this Act also gave government the power to order the suspension of protection at a site or to alter close season dates.¹¹

A Conservation of Seals Act in 1970 gave protection to the common seal *Phoca vitulina* after public protests about the hunting of this species in the Wash in the 1960s, and scientific concern about the impact of hunting in Shetland which was removing virtually every common seal pup born there. The Act was seen as an important compromise between the interests of conservationists and fishing communities. This new legislation urged conservation through good management, rather than blind protection.¹² However, complete protection post-1914 during the vital breeding season was one influential factor in allowing the British grey seal population to rise to about 9,000 by the mid-1930s, to 34,000 by the mid-1960s, and it has been increasing at 6% *per annum* since then. In 1999, the British population was almost 123,000 animals.¹³ Around 40% of the world population now breeds in Britain, giving the UK government international responsibility for the species.

NATURE SANCTUARIES

The Farne Islands, comprising 28 islands and rocks at low water and 15 at high water, lie around 2 to 5 miles off the Northumberland coast from Bamburgh and Seahouses. For the first half of the nineteenth century the Farnes were held by tenants of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England, but in 1861 Inner Farne was purchased by Archdeacon Charles Thorp of Durham. Outer Farne was bought by Lord Armstrong in 1894. Over the last two decades of the nineteenth century the Farnes became an unofficial nature reserve with protection bolstered by the employment of wardens on Inner Farne after 1881, and the establishment of the Farne Islands Association (FIA) in the same year on the instigation of concerned local naturalists. Stricter protection measures were put in place in 1888 after egg-collectors had seriously disturbed the 1887 seabird nesting season.¹⁴ By 1900, the Farnes suffered little human disturbance or scientific oology and were an early example of a British wildlife sanctuary built on the goodwill of local proprietors and the hard work of the FIA. This private ownership continued until October 1922, when the Thorp family proposed that the Farnes be given to the National Trust, which had been established in 1895. The Thorps were no doubt comforted (in their search for more organised protection for the Farnes) by the knowledge that under the National Trust Act

1907, the NT had the right to declare its property inalienable, meaning it could never be taken away from the NT without the express will of Parliament. In January 1923, an appeal was launched by the NT under the chairmanship of the statesman and birdwatcher, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, to purchase Inner and Outer Farne together for £2,200. After press coverage and with anonymous donations, the money was raised by February 1924. The NT took full legal possession of the Farnes in August 1925.¹⁵ The London headquarters of the NT felt that although the FIA had an intimate working knowledge of the Islands and could form a core membership of a new NT local management committee (appointed on 5 June 1924), ultimate control must rest with London.¹⁶ Only in April 1946 did the FIA agree to change its name to become the Farne Islands Local Committee of the NT.¹⁷

The grey seal population of the Farne Islands probably held steady at around 100 animals from 1850 to 1920. By the 1930s, the Newcastle naturalist T. Russell Goddard believed the population to be around 150/200 strong. Information about the seals at this time is scanty and unsubstantiated. A trend does appear though. Local naturalists often gave a low figure to make the animal appear still rare and the population fragile, whilst Fishery Board estimates were always high to give the appearance of a growing seal menace. The naturalist Frank Fraser Darling mistakenly under-estimated the population to be 300 in 1939, whereas local naturalist Grace Hickling, Honorary Secretary of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, thought the colony could be at least 600 to 1,000 strong by the late 1930s. By 1950, Hickling estimated the colony size as between 1,500 and 2,000. Despite the lack of real figures it is apparent, as Hickling concludes, that almost 90 years of both unofficial (under the Thorps and FIA) and official protection (under the NT since 1924/5) had 'resulted in a very marked increase in the size of the colony'.¹⁸

One reason for the lack of rigorous scientific investigation into the grey seals on the Farnes, is the obsessive personal protective stance that the Thorp family had taken since 1861. In particular, Collingwood Thorp (nephew of the Archdeacon) 'ruled' the Farnes and the NT Local Committee from the 1920s to his death in December 1955, and emphatically refused all access to the islands for photographers, university science departments and government bodies. No visitors or even FIA committee members were allowed to land on Brownsman Island, save for Thorp himself. In a letter in August 1943, the Chief Agent of the NT in London expressed how the Farnes Local Management Committee no longer represented the national interest in the site and that few realised what the NT had to contend with in its dealings with Collingwood Thorp, later adding: 'I venture to think that there would be general rejoicing at his departure, not only on the part of scientific associations who have been baulked at every approach by his attitude, but also among local people'. The frustration caused by Thorp's distrust of science and scientists is amply revealed by the urgency of the

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application made by the Nature Conservancy (NC) to the NT on 8 November 1955 to send a research team to investigate the seal population, as Thorp lay on his death bed.¹⁹

THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

The first complaints about the impact of the grey seals of the Farnes on local fisheries came from the River Tweed Commissioners, who asked the River Coquet Fishery Board meeting in November 1933 if they would join with the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee in making an application to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) for the destruction of some local seals. Collingwood Thorp wrote to the Secretary of the National Trust in London, urging that all be told that ‘the islands belong to the National Trust and the seals are protected by them during the whole and not only during the close season’.²⁰ The NT pressed the Ministry to protect the grey seals, especially as there was such contradictory evidence presented at the meeting of the Coquet Board in Felton. Some net fishermen sought to blame both the grey seal and the common seal for diminished Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* and sea trout *Salmo trutta* catches, whilst Herbert Wright representing the Northumberland Anglers’ Federation took the contrary view that all seals drove the salmon into shallow water and were thus good for his sport. The Coquet Board suggested they would not act, as they did not have sufficient evidence about seal damage at nets or in rivers.²¹

By 1937, the Tweed Commissioners were pushing for action again, claiming they were being thwarted by fishermen in Seahouses who wanted to see grey seals prosper as they were good for local boat tourism. Indeed, the seals had been providing additional tourist income for boatmen since the 1920s, and probably back to the late nineteenth century. Collingwood Thorp, perhaps sensing that the distant NT hierarchy in London might bend to concerted pressure from fishing interests, kept up a constant barrage of letters to the Trust, enclosing newspaper cuttings and passing on hearsay. In September 1937 he warned, ‘there is a movement afoot to attack the seals where they breed. I hope you will be able to do something to prevent this – no one has any right to land there to molest them’.²²

The first conference to address the possible deleterious impact of grey seals on fisheries met in Newcastle on 12 April 1938, attended by the NT, FIA, the Northern Sea Fisheries Committee, the Tweed and Coquet Conservancy Boards, MAF, three local fishermen, and T. Russell Goddard of the Hancock Museum in the city as the recognised regional expert on seals. Fishing representatives called for some reduction in the local grey seal population because of damage to white fishing, salmon and trout fishing, and net fishing in rivers. Russell

Goddard spoke in passionate defence of 'the interesting and rare grey seal', asking if the Fishery Boards were truly confident that they could identify which seal species was really to blame, and could a few 'rogue' seals not be heaping blame on the whole population? Although these were the first tentative shots of a war that is still going on today, the tone of the meeting was remarkably conciliatory with the fishermen agreeing that it would be 'unreasonable to ask for any action to be taken until some more conclusive evidence had been produced', and that they 'might have been mistaken' to blame the grey seal so quickly.²³

There was a difference of opinion developing in the 1940s and 1950s between the fishermen of Seahouses local to the Farnes who obviously felt a sense of affection and attachment (albeit primarily financial) to the seals, and the net fishermen of the River Tweed, 20 miles to the north, who suffered all the seal damage. At a meeting of the FIA at Bamburgh in April 1946, boatman William Shiel spoke for the Seahouses fishermen, arguing that they had no objection to the presence of the grey seals, and found their mournful cries a useful guide in foggy autumn weather. Shiel would later write in anger to the NT in London fearing the utter destruction of 'our Atlantic grey seals' in 1958, and the subsequent loss of tourism and opportunities for scientific study.²⁴

Grace Hickling and Ian Telfer began their pioneering seal tagging experiments around the Farnes in 1951, but were already keenly aware of the significant growth of the seal population. In November 1950 they had counted at least 900 adults and 454 pups. Hickling consistently hoped this increase was just temporary, a natural upward fluctuation, and would be adjusted in future years. At this stage, the issue was how to keep this statistical information from fishing interests, and thus stave off any demands for culling. Hickling thought the only way was to keep quiet and 'emulate Brer Rabbit and hope for the best', but H.J.F. Smith, Chief Agent of the NT, sensed the approaching storm. He thought the time would come when the NT could no longer sit on this problem and would have to make a gesture of sorts: 'Before the Tweed Commissioners start a Hullabaloo, I think we would be well advised to consider possible steps to be taken, although in conformity with Brer Rabbit tradition, we must do so *sub rosa*'. Shooting might be necessary he warned, but could the NT make any money in selling surplus pups to zoos?²⁵

In the early 1950s there was no real indication that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) would act on this issue. They claimed no firm evidence had been submitted to them that the increase had any adverse affect on the salmon fishery and believed the advice of naturalists that the population could crash just as easily and unpredictably as it had grown. They did, however, agree that the situation needed watching, and sought the advice of Capt. Cyril Diver, first Director-General of the Nature Conservancy (NC).²⁶ Diver had no great affection for grey seals, having described them once in committee as 'tiresome organisms', that failed to grasp the difference between land and sea,

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Scotland and England. Indeed, there is a sense early on that the fledgling NC (created in 1949) failed to fully resolve the issue of their responsibility for British seals, and how that responsibility might change when the seals were in or out of the water, on or offshore from a nature reserve. They did rally in 1950/51 to protect breeding seals on North Rona, St Kilda's stacs and Sula Sgeir from Air Ministry and Admiralty plans to use these islands for live bombing exercises.²⁷ However, Diver and E. Max Nicholson (Director General of the NC 1952–1966), even at one stage considered dissipating the seal problem and boosting world stock by transportation, musing that surplus UK grey seals could be sold for profit to Norway, Iceland, USA and Canada.²⁸ There was no plan made on how to stop the seals swimming back!

EXPERT ASSESSMENT

What turned the situation around was a report in May 1955 to the Tweed Commissioners (who had been silent on this issue for a while) by a retired naval officer, Commander H.C. Courtney Clarke. He had lived by the River Tweed since 1933, and set about trying to gather definitive financial information on the actual damage that seals did. He calculated a total annual loss to the Tweed salmon industry of £5,700, divided thus: £1,300 loss in revenue on sale of damaged fish; £3,000 lost in fish eaten by seals from nets; £800 physical damage to nets, and £600 depreciation loss to rod fishings. The report contained submissions by local companies and concerned individuals. Clarke had some sympathy for 'the seal lovers', but argued that few of them had ever seen 'the same seals hunting and harrying the unfortunate salmon and killing and maiming so many'. He urged his report be publicised widely to the press, MPs and government departments.²⁹ The Tweed Commissioners now had the evidence they had been searching for since the early 1930s, and so put pressure on MAFF to act. MAFF turned to the NC scientists, who despatched J.D. Lockie (NC Scientific Officer) to Berwick in September 1955 to investigate the problem.

The Nature Conservancy report of March 1956 concluded that as only a small proportion of the Farnes' grey seals were raiding the Tweed, efficient control measures should be employed at the salmon fishing grounds, not at the breeding colonies. It suggested that although the grey seal should remain under the protection of the law, full-time marksmen should be used by the Tweed Commissioners at the nets, more evidence of damage should be gathered, seal tagging and marking experiments on the Farnes must continue, and the situation be reviewed every two years.³⁰ The NT Nature Conservation Sub-Committee, chaired by the plant ecologist Sir Edward Salisbury, accepted this report, but urged caution and sought further evidence before any cull should take place on the Farnes, although importantly, they did advise the Trust that such a cull could be on the horizon.

The Executive Committee of the NT, and their Local Committee were at this time (indeed, until the early 1970s) overwhelmingly wedded to the sanctuary ethos. Salisbury, however, was a keen advocate of controlling 'the unrestricted increase of any plant or animal', once biological knowledge had a thorough understanding of the species concerned. His work on weeds and agricultural pests had taught him that confronting the problems generated by an artificial condition created by man was a fundamental principle of modern nature conservation. He wrote to the NT in 1957, that they must accept that the establishment of a protected area for the seals had not meant an equal degree of protection to predators or parasites that controlled seal populations. He warned: 'I do feel most strongly that we shall place ourselves in a false position if we do not make it clear that we do not belong to the band of those, and there are many, who think conservation consists in leaving things severely alone. We should not give substance to those who claim that nature lovers are quite prepared to allow organisms they protect to increase beyond reason and disclaim all responsibility for permitting them to get out of hand. Such critics can only be silenced if it is manifest that conservation accepts the responsibilities that accompany its benefits'.³¹

A Nature Conservancy memo to the NT of February 1957 (in response to the Scottish Home Department's request for action to be taken against Farne Islands' seals that were marauding across the national border), suggested their willingness for 'control on a limited and experimental basis', as it was now felt advisable to control the seal numbers for biological reasons, and because it was 'not proved but virtually certain' that they were damaging local fisheries.³² In response the NT Nature Conservation Sub-Committee thought it wise to show some willingness to prevent any increase in the growth of the colony, whilst being aware of the Local Committee's implacable opposition to any interference with the colony, and their fear that unauthorised raids on the colony might take place once a green light had been given. At the same time they urged that no costs should be borne by the NT in this culling, and that MAFF had to come forward and make a formal request for action to take place.³³

Certainly there was a feeling in Spring 1957 amongst some of the prominent administrative staff of the NT that some culling of seals was more than likely, although there were differing viewpoints within the organisation. Grace Hickling and the Council of the Natural History Society of Northumberland publicly remained much against any culling, citing welfare and scientific research reasons. In February 1957 Hickling predicted, 'a storm of protest from animal lovers', should any control measures be taken. Worse, there was great anger in the Northumberland Natural History Society over the NC's suggestion of a cull of 300 seals, when Max Nicholson privately admitted to local naturalist Eric Ennion that this was a purely arbitrary figure without any scientific justification at all. Hickling wrote to the NT that 'the Council were horrified at this attitude...they considered it an absolute disgrace that a figure with such a basis

should be published as the official recommendation of a supposedly scientific government department'.³⁴

January 1958 saw the first national and regional press reports that a seal cull might take place on the Farnes, with suitably dramatic headlines as 'Murder in the Nursery' ('The friendly grey seals who sing happily on the Farne Islands are in trouble. Murder is planned in their nursery'), and 'What harm would I do?', accompanying emotive pictures of grey seal pups.³⁵ Various chapters of the Northern Naturalists' Union came out against any cull in March 1958 in a letter to the north-east regional press.

The Executive Committee of the NT considered the advice of the NC and their own staff and advisers, and privately drafted a conciliatory press release that spoke of there being 'no sufficient reason to justify an operation which would be unwelcome to many nature lovers, particularly on a sanctuary of such long-standing and international repute', nor would the killing be effective at stopping marauding seals in the Tweed. The Trust would, however, if pushed, not stand in the way of a MAFF-led cull 'in the national interest',³⁶ if a specific order was made under the 1932 Protection Act. The pressure was mounting on the NT and government. In April 1957, the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland presented a memorandum to the Scottish Home Department drawing attention to the seal damage caused on all sections of the Scottish coast, citing marauding seals from the Farnes in some cases, and calling for an investigation and then action to be taken.³⁷ In May 1958 a suspension of close season order was made to allow experimental culling by MAFF on the Farne Islands in November. In July 1959 a similar order was made to allow experimental culls in Scotland in December 1959 and October 1960.³⁸

THE CULLS AND POPULAR PROTEST

The Farne Islands, England

The first experimental cull of grey seal pups on the Farnes in 1958 was eventually called off, because local boatmen refused to help in the killing expeditions, the local press came out against it, and the NT put pressure on MAFF after receiving a gruesome report from Grace Hickling about inefficient culling methods employed.³⁹ But the pressure to cull was great. MAFF urged the NT to step aside, accusing them of 'harbouring on their property a stock of seals which is damaging the property and interfering with the commercial livelihood of fishermen'.⁴⁰ Culling began again in December 1963 to reduce the Farnes population to 750 breeding females, and continued until 1965/66.

The issue was first brought into the wider public domain in 1963/64, with coverage of the culls in the media, and the vocal opposition of Grace Hickling, animal welfare groups and local natural history societies. The NT Council's

decision reluctantly to allow regulated culling saw them estranged from their local management committee who in general opposed the culls and called for more scientific research to be done. The issue was first put to NT membership at the November 1964 AGM in Cardiff, when a vote (63 to 23) fought off a resolution (from 3 members in south-east England) condemning the NT culling policy. There was discernible anger within the NT membership. By February 1964, there were 73 letters of complaint, 14 requests for information, 13 resignations, 9 threatened resignations, and a Co. Durham petition of 150 names against culling.⁴¹ But this was easily absorbed in a national membership of 151,000. In 1964, when R. Bloom of Flamingo Zoo raided the Farnes and rescued six pups, he was hailed as a 'seal saviour' in the press and public's eyes.⁴² The RSPCA were initially very against the culls, but later accepted them (angering some of their membership) as long as they could have an observer and vet on site to oversee animal welfare issues.⁴³ Over the 1960s and 1970s, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), University Fund for Animal Welfare (UFAW), Beauty without Cruelty, and the Seal Preservation Group (with links to the hunt saboteur movement) emerged as vocal campaigners against the culls and accomplished manipulators of public opinion. They argued that fresh financial assessments of seal damage to salmon, of £50,000 to £100,000 each year, were controversial and unsubstantiated.⁴⁴ The public outcry worked, as the NT refused to grant permission to cull after 1966 (by which time almost 1,000 pups had been killed, almost all of them females), hiding behind a call for more scientific evidence.

More importantly, these mid-1960s seal culls saw the emergence of a new coalition of middle class protestors in Britain, which comprised three strands of interest. First, wildlife enthusiasts, who would go on in the 1980s and 1990s to protest about fox *Vulpes vulpes* hunting, government-sponsored badger *Meles meles* culls, and stag hunting on National Trust land. Second, animal welfare supporters who would later protest about vivisection, call for wider animal rights and the humane transport of veal calves. And finally, the group we often underestimate, people who on a weekend walk at the beach hope to see a seal, or just want to know that seals are out there doing well. This last group now visit sea-life centres and seal rescue centres,⁴⁵ and pay for recreational seal-watching trips.

Press and television coverage of the culls hurt the image of the NT most, a November 1964 letter in the Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, pouring scorn on 'the National Trust myth', which 'had exploded with a blood red plop'. 'Never again can anyone interested in wildlife regard the National Trust as anything but a bitter joke', it ended.⁴⁶ This criticism was more relevant after February 1971, when the NT eventually produced a management plan for islands they had owned for 46 years. There had been growing NT concern from the late 1960s about seal and human damage to vegetation and puffin *Fratercula arctica* burrows. This, and subsequent plans in 1975 and 1981, indicated that the fragile ecosystem of the Farnes was under threat from seal overcrowding, and so turned the NT from

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being reluctant cullers in the 1960s, into 'gung-ho' cullers in the 1970s, the aim being the reduction of the breeding female population to 1,000.⁴⁷ This was a real shift in attitude for the NT, that they justified to their members as being done in the interests of the islands and their wildlife, and not for fisheries.

The Trust took a pro-active role in the 1970s, probably because they wanted to be seen to be in control of the situation themselves, especially as the new Conservation of Seals Act now gave government the right, if they wished, to enter private land to cull seals for the national good. However, some NT staff actually felt it was better to let government take full control, the Assistant Secretary asking in 1971, 'why don't we sit tight and let HMG, now they have assumed all the powers, take on the odium and the cost also?'⁴⁸ The NT also began their own control measures against rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, gulls *Larus spp* and weeds, but nobody protested about that. In 1979/80 they even fell out with the government's Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) who had asked for a halt to the culls, to provide the undisturbed opportunity for the study of colony population dynamics.⁴⁹

There were still letters of protest to the NT in the 1970s and 1980s, usually about 10 per year, and seal preservation groups even hatched a plan to parachute the comedian Spike Milligan onto the Farnes to stop the culls in 1972 and 1975!⁵⁰ Protest letters rose to 43 in 1983/84 when the Sea Shepherd Fund campaigned against the culling. These protest letters were more aggressive, and promised more direct action, than those of the mid-1960s, showing how the more modern radical wing of the animal rights movement was now influencing the public debate.⁵¹ In the long run, all subsequent culls and public outcries in Britain were in character shaped by events on the Farnes, but would have the added potency of enduring media hype, the animal rights movement, IFAW and Greenpeace.

Orkney, Scotland

In Scotland the first culls took place on Orkney. The experimental culls by Aberdeen Marine Laboratory tested various killing methods in 1959: shooting, clubbing and injections of nicotine pellets.⁵² In 1960, Bennet Rae published his Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) report *Seals and Scottish Fisheries*, which showed graphic photographs of seal-marked salmon, presented evidence of damage to nets and spoke of concerns over the propagation of the sealworm *Pseudoterranova decipiens* by seals.⁵³ Rae believed that possibly 15% of the total annual British catch of all kinds of fish from home waters fell victim to seal predation, concluding that 'seal stocks must be reduced and thereafter maintained at a level which will not interfere unduly with commercial fisheries'.⁵⁴ This gave the Scottish Office their *raison d'être* for future action against the seals.

The first complaints against the culling were raised in 1960 by Jo Grimond, the Orkney MP, who pressed DAFS over the evidence they had for the specific

guilt of Orcadian grey seals. In 1962, Grimond was joined in his protests by the Orkney and Shetland Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) branches, some local people, and the Orkney Field Club. The debate pitted local seal enthusiasts against local fishermen. However, some of the disquiet in Orkney at this time was not based on protection, rather that local people were not being given culling permits to make the business of 'some economic advantage to the islands'. British marine mammal expert, H.R. Hewer of the University of London,⁵⁵ urged DAFS to involve local people: 'this co-operation and understanding is absolutely essential for the successful carrying out of research of this character over a number of years, leading to the control of populations of animals'.⁵⁶ Local permits were introduced. In October 1963, 974 seals were killed, including an overkill of 224 by over-enthusiastic local hunters, causing DAFS to believe their local representative was losing control of the situation.⁵⁷

At this time events in Orkney were geographically distant from the bulk of the British population, but by the mid-1960s the more public culls on the Farnes were beginning to have a knock-on effect in the far north. In Scotland, the Nature Conservancy sought to distance themselves from the culling in April 1964, worried about the PR implications for their conservation work across the UK, concerned about over-zealous culling, and irritated that the MAFF publicity office insisted on directing all queries to them. Internal DAFS memos show that they were keenly aware of a gathering storm of bad publicity rolling north from the Farnes brought on by a one-sided 'Tonight' TV programme and press photos of pups being killed. DAFS civil servants suggested that perhaps the naturalist Peter Scott might be persuaded to broadcast to the nation on the problems of seal overcrowding and damage to fisheries, though it subsequently transpired that he was against the culling. In Orkney, the police expressed concerns over their lack of officers to deal with a protest, should it come, and suggested the involvement of Coastguard and Customs officers if necessary.⁵⁸ The Orkney culls continued over the 1960s, with the aim of reducing the breeding population there by 25%, as urged in the findings of the 1959 NC Consultative Committee, published in 1963 as *Grey Seals and Fisheries*.⁵⁹

The 30 year rule prevents much of the Scottish story past 1970 being told; indeed, some of the government files are closed for 50 years most probably because of political sensitivities and domestic security issues generated by the culls in the 1970s. However, oral history has yielded some information. In 1977, DAFS introduced a six-year plan to reduce the Scottish grey seal population by 15,000 to its mid-1960s level of around 35,000. The 1977 cull on the Western Isles went ahead with little local opposition to it, but was hindered by bad weather.⁶⁰ However, in concert with growing international protest in Canada going back to the mid-1960s, growing British protest disrupted the 1977 culls in

Orkney. Then Greenpeace with the support of much of the British public, forced an abandonment of the 1978 cull. The Scottish Office no longer felt that the proposed culling of 900 adults and 4,000 moulted pups in Orkney and North Rona in the west, would be successful or safe.

Sir William Fraser, Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Scottish Office, recalls that the Secretary of State for Scotland, Bruce Millan, saw the seal culls as a huge political issue, and despite a compelling economic case from DAFS urging him to authorise further culls, thought it 'politically disastrous and would have none of it'. Fraser recalls the 1978 furore as a clash between economic logic (depleted fisheries) and political reality (men with clubs killing baby seals). He also considers that the normally tough Millan backed down because of huge media interest in the killing, and because the Scottish populace was heading towards the March 1979 referendum on independence under the Scotland Act of 1978. The Scottish Office came under pressure at home and overseas. A petition with 42,000 names against the culling was delivered in October 1978, as the Greenpeace boat *Rainbow Warrior* lay in Kirkwall harbour. Internationally, the European Parliament, and later the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) meeting in USSR, asked for an immediate halt to the killing.⁶¹ Newspapers carried headlines such as 'Fight on the Beaches', and 'Battle Lines Set in Seal War'; The *Sunday Mirror* appealed direct to the Prime Minister with an editorial saying, 'Come on Jim: Stop it'.⁶² On 12 October 1978 there were angry clashes between protestors and government officials on Kirkwall quay, and a later bomb scare on the Norwegian cullers' vessel gave the protest a sinister angle. Clearly Millan ignored his scientists and made a political decision; as Fraser noted, it was simply 'best to avoid all controversy; do not incur the wrath of the bulk of the population'.⁶³

On the morning of 17 October 1978 every national newspaper had the end to the cull as its main headline, proclaiming 'Greenpeace Victorious'. With the important support of local conservation groups and people, they had used their international protest experiences gained in Canada to ensure that their campaign in Orkney was so effective. Now holding the political and moral ascendancy, a group of wildlife conservation and animal welfare groups opposed to the culls formed the Council for Nature's Grey Seals Group in 1979 and kept the issue in the public eye (calling for more scientific evidence before more political gestures were made), as did the local groups across Britain that emerged from Animal Welfare Year 1976/77.⁶⁴ The emergence of sentiment and emotion as a key factor in wildlife management, and a corresponding public lack of respect for science, angered biologist Charles Summers, who penned a stinging attack in the *New Scientist* on ill-informed animal welfare groups and conservation bodies, blaming them for truly putting the 'con in conservation'.⁶⁵

KINDNESS KILLS

In the modern British environmental movement, the naturalist Frank Fraser Darling is seen as something of a mid-century prophet in the wilderness, a British Aldo Leopold.⁶⁶ He was particularly interested in grey seals, having studied them on North Rona in 1938, sensing overcrowding already at this colony and estimating that 15% of pups died because of this.⁶⁷ In August 1939 he had been employed on the Tweed to ascertain the impact of seals on the fishery, and although his investigations were never finished because of the war, he openly predicted that there was a problem developing. At this stage in his career, Darling was striving to make the conservation establishment wake up to the doctrine of utilitarian conservation, American President Teddy Roosevelt's dictum of 'conservation through wise use'. Darling wrote in January 1951 to Grace Hickling: 'The lesson of conservation appears more and more insistently to be that absolute protection should be a temporary and local measure, not an inflexible rule'. By the early 1950s, he was pushing for 'an overall carefully controlled annual toll of the Atlantic grey seals', thus both conserving the species and cutting out criticism from fishery interests. Such a new policy, he reasoned, 'would be better for the seals because they would be valued as a continuing natural resource rather than purely sentimentally'. Sentiment was a dangerous foundation for conservation policy, he warned Hickling, for the seals would be in grave danger as, 'government departments are fickle bodies who can be rushed by well organised vested interests. The seals are extremely efficient gatherers of energy which the nation should not neglect at present'.⁶⁸ They could yield fat, protein and leather. Darling wrote along similar lines in a open letter to the Scottish Committee of the Nature Conservancy (NC) in December 1950,⁶⁹ but this vision found little favour among those firmly wedded to the concept of species protection through representative habitat nature reserves.

By the mid-1960s, although serving as Vice-President and Director of the Conservation Foundation in the USA, Darling remained passionate about the challenges and problems of nature conservation in his homeland. In a 1964 draft press article 'Kindness Kills', he returned to the grey seals of the Farnes and his experiences on the River Tweed.⁷⁰ An organised seal cull was necessary, 'but it would be harder work and harder on our feelings' than just blindly protecting the seal through mere sentiment in a designated sanctuary. Darling was the first to recognise that the grey seal issue was a scientific, technical and ethical problem: 'it would be cowardly to ignore it and deceive ourselves by holding inflexibly to the idea of sanctuary'. If Americans had accepted 'after an emotional battle' that elk *Cervus elaphus* needed to be culled in National Parks to reduce damage to aspen trees and bring the population in line with the carrying capacity of the habitat,⁷¹ then in Britain we should steel ourselves for a similar policy with the grey seal. People had to be made to realise, he argued, 'that the welfare of the species is more important than the survival of individuals'.⁷²

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Darling was supported by other influential commentators with international experience. The President of IUCN, Dr Francois Bourliere, wrote in a 1964 bulletin of the evolution of the concept of nature protection, and the dangers of the now outdated nineteenth century preservation movement that simply put habitats and species 'under a bell-glass'. He argued that the long-term survival of all life on earth depended on conservation through wise management where tough choices would have to be made. Overpopulation, brought about by absolute protection or the removal of predators, could only be dealt with by regulated culling, or else it would radically alter the structure of existing fragile biological communities. It was no longer good enough to take a *laissez-faire* attitude to wildlife protection. In many instances, active environmental management was necessary. To this end the International Union for the Preservation of Nature (IUPN) created in 1946 at Fontainebleau had recognised this development, with a name change to IUCN in 1956 at the Edinburgh General Assembly.⁷³ The scientific community in Britain did not unequivocally agree that the grey seal was a pest to fishing interests. Government took the line that before a change in the legislation was needed, there had to be better knowledge of the biology and feeding behaviour of the animal, and founded the Natural Environment Research Council's (NERC) SMRU in December 1977 at Cambridge, by amalgamating the Seals Research Division and Whale Research Unit, hitherto part of the Institute for Marine Environmental Research. SMRU have never agreed that there is enough scientific data to justify a grey seal cull in the last twenty years, and in the absence of hard evidence and knowing the strength of popular resistance in the 1960s and 1970s, British governments have dodged calls for a return to organised official culling.

Grey seals have not been culled on the Farne Islands since 1985. Instead, human disturbance and aggressive wardening are used to keep the seals away from Inner Farne, so important for its breeding seabird populations. Each year a very small number of seals may be shot for welfare reasons, usually ill health or serious injury.⁷⁴ The National Trust has ultimately heeded the advice of a civil servant in the Scottish Office, who when asked in December 1961 if Orkney MP Jo Grimond should be kept abreast of the culling in the Northern Isles, suggested: 'No, it might just encourage him to raise the whole thing again. Better to let sleeping pups lie!'⁷⁵

SEALS AND POPULAR CULTURE

Before the late nineteenth century there was no real sense of people taking delight in seals in Britain, save for a few enlightened proprietors who offered some limited and unofficial protection to the animals at places as diverse as Haskeir in the Outer Hebrides, the Farnes off Northumberland, and the Isles of Scilly off Cornwall (SW England).⁷⁶ Also important is the delight we can extract from the

seal's role in literature, and Gaelic folklore as the 'selkie'.⁷⁷ Our most traditional response to grey seals was to use them as a resource for food, for their oil and for sealskins made into waistcoats, sporrans and fashionable motoring jackets. Over the course of the twentieth century humans voluntarily removed ourselves from our position as top predator of the grey seal after naturalists and sportsmen informed us that it was rare, and we then embraced it first as a treasured part of our natural heritage worthy of protection, and later (post 1960) as an environmental icon, a potent eco-symbol.

The rise of the totemic status of both seals and whales is one of the great post-war changes in the way that we have constructed nature around us. We now not only show great concern for the welfare of some species, but focus in our thousands on the individual plight of an orphan seal pup or stranded whale. The British countryside writer and broadcaster, Richard Mabey, sees this popular totemism as worthy, but unpredictable and volatile: 'underneath there are more fundamental and less easily resolved conflicts of values – about who can legitimately be said to own natural resources, about the rights of humans and animals, about the relative importance of present livelihoods and past traditions – conflicts which involve deeply held personal beliefs and meanings'.⁷⁸ The last 30 years have seen a dramatic rise in the popularity of mass recreational seal watching around British coasts, from Scotland to Northumberland, Norfolk to Cornwall. To an angry fisherman whose livelihood is threatened, this must be little more than 'city folk gawping at vermin',⁷⁹ reflecting the social and economic conflicts between the bulk of the British public and hard-pressed fishing communities.

In Scotland, the political debate over a return to culling has recently been resurrected by the Scottish National Party (SNP), who are strongly supported in remoter rural regions. In 2000, the Atlantic Salmon Trust (founded in 1967), called for action to reduce the effect of predation on salmon by seals, cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* and goosanders *Mergus merganser* to be taken on a local or regional basis, rather than attempting any wide-ranging national control.⁸⁰ This proposal perhaps represents a possible 'middle ground' solution, but would it be acceptable to all interests?

The growth and popularity of coastal seal-rescue centres reflects our continued fascination with marine mammals and our wider cultural need to establish contact with an accessible, and with what we construct as a benevolent and sympathetic nature. We search for something human in the animals we watch, and the grey seal pup cloaked in white fur is a potent symbol of baby-like innocence, with eyes that shed tears, an ability to sing, and a dog-like face. This enables us to construct it as a sensate creature and accept it as most like ourselves. In effect, we have in Britain established a 'special relationship' with the grey seal. As Fraser Darling observed in 1939, 'there is no creature born, even among the greater apes, which more resembles a human baby in its ways and its cries than a baby grey seal'.⁸¹ This British popular attitude to seals is seen as rather

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eccentric in Norway, where seals are still seen in a utilitarian light, and sealing is seen as inherently traditional. Grey seals have always been seen as vermin in Ireland. In 1924, Charles Green, Minister of Fisheries in Dublin, wrote to George Hogarth of the Fisheries Board for Scotland, 'while you have been cherishing the brutes, we have been offering rewards for their destruction!'⁸²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In 1982 the European Parliament announced a ban on 'baby seal' skin exports from Canada to Europe, which had a dramatic effect as catches fell from 200,000 in 1982 to a minimum of 45,000 in 1985. By 1987, under massive international pressure, the Canadian government had banned commercial hunting of harp seal pups under 3 weeks old.⁸³ Of course, this is in part the product of the cultural change that has altered the way we think about animals since 1800, the implications of which are enormous for those who are charged with the management of animal species, especially those species that were once endangered but are now regarded as a pest in some aspect of their behaviour. It also reflects the rise of environmentalism and animal rights issues post 1960, and the power of mass membership environmental NGOs when allied with the media. Grey seals are the extreme case of this cultural shift in Britain, but increasing populations of African elephants *Elephas africanus* in parts of sub-Saharan Africa post-1960 (especially South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe), and even tigers *Felis tigris* in reserves bordering parts of rural India, show people/wildlife conflicts to be an international policy problem.⁸⁴

There has been little protest about the culling of red deer in Scotland over the last thirty years,⁸⁵ where the public seem to accept this as a necessary evil and accept the advice of science, but this is not necessarily paralleled in responses to the culling of roe *Capreolus capreolus* and muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi* deer in England. One concern expressed in Scotland is that deer will not be shot from helicopters as is practised in New Zealand wildlife management. The culling of barnacle geese *Branta leucopsis* and Greenland white-fronted geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris* by farmers on the Hebridean island of Islay, where the huge flocks damage crops, was halted recently in a lawsuit by WWF and RSPB quoting wider European bird legislation. On issues of wildlife management, public opinion has become strangely variable. Sometimes it tolerates traditional pest control, other times it seems to demand absolute protection for certain iconic animals.

The Atlantic grey seal has proved to be an exceptionally challenging mammal to manage in Britain over the twentieth century. It inhabits both the land and the sea, and therefore cuts across the institutional and administrative land/sea divide. It is also a difficult animal for scientists to study in the wild, and we need a far deeper understanding, gained from further research, of such issues as

grey seal demographics, biology, diet, seasonal movements, behavioural traits, and the extent to which it poses a threat to domestic fisheries. The grey seal story also challenges us to think hard about the strengths and weaknesses of the three key approaches to nature conservation practice here in the UK, namely protection through legislation, the designation of nature reserves as sanctuaries from uncontrolled human disturbance, and the dissemination of environmental education and information in its broadest sense. Given the diverse range of political and social perceptions and environmental and economic impacts of the grey seal, it has been far from easy to co-ordinate policies here in Britain (in England and Scotland), and indeed, within the wider North Atlantic. The exceptional thing about the grey seal is that the bulk of the British public (and, indeed, the public in Europe and North America), not just the voluntary conservation bodies (as is the case with geese on Islay, and hen harriers *Circus cyaneus* on grouse moors) are up in arms about the thought of government-sponsored seal culls. This attitude has not really changed for at least 50 years now. Thus, those responsible for the management of this nature conservation success, or any other controversial species population in the modern era, will have to take into account not only scientific and biological opinion, but also the relative contemporary (and historical) political and popular strength of the animal's human friends and enemies. Although this essay has focused on the British experience of coping with the grey seal and its varied interactions with both the natural and more explicitly human environments, the themes developed are common to many international situations where there is conflict between conservationists and other user-interests as to the optimal management of a species.

The trial of wildlife management by public opinion is here to stay. When it came to culling in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain many organisations, including nature conservation bodies like the Scottish Wildlife Trust (founded in 1964),⁸⁶ were taken genuinely by surprise over the weight of public opinion to halt the culls immediately. The RSPCA 'seal rally' held around Trafalgar Square on 10 March 1979 was a huge British propaganda and publicity success, as staff dressed as seal pups were 'clubbed' on busy London shopping streets by RSPCA Chief Inspector Frank Franzmann (dressed as a sealer with a baseball bat).⁸⁷ Remember, those of us who take great delight in seals, do so without any economic loss.

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NOTES

¹ Exceptions are: Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London: Penguin, 1984). Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998). T.C. Smout, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

² See especially, John McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun* (London: Allen Lane, 2000). B.W. Clapp, *An Environmental History of Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (Harlow: Longman, 1994). Ian Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001). John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

³ John Harrison, 'Animals and the state in nineteenth century England', *English Historical Review*, LXXVIII (October 1973) :786–820. The RSPCA is driven entirely by welfare issues (RSPCA officers are contractually obliged to care for any injured animal).

⁴ Tony Samstag, *For the Love of Birds: The Story of the RSPB* (Sandy: RSPB, 1988). The RSPB concerns itself with the protection of birds and their habitats from a wide range of threats.

⁵ John Sheail, *Nature in Trust* (London: Blackie, 1976); John Sheail, *Seventy-five Years in Ecology: The British Ecological Society* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1987); John Sheail, *Natural Environment Research Council: A History* (Swindon: NERC, 1992); John Sheail, *Nature Conservation in Britain: The Formative Years* (London: TSO, 1998).

⁶ The Gulf of St. Lawrence and Front (off Labrador) harp seal herds have been exploited commercially since the 1760s, with the Norwegians taking a major part in the hunt from 1937. During the 1960s the Norwegians took up to 100,000 harp seals a year for commercial reasons. See especially, Briton Cooper Busch, *The War against the Seals: A History of the North American Seal Fishery* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985); Farley Mowat, *Sea of Slaughter* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1997); Paul Watson, *Sea Shepherd* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982). The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) archives, Horsham, West Sussex, are illuminating on this issue.

⁷ *Grey Seals (Protection) Act 1914*, 4 & 5 George V, Chapter 3.

⁸ National Archives of Scotland (NAS) AF56/1443. See letters from Charles Lyell MP, draft bill and minutes by naturalists and Fishery Board civil servants.

⁹ Conversations between author and staff of the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), University of St. Andrews.

¹⁰ Mary Bones, 'The Slaughter of Selchis: Notes on Seal Hunting in the Outer Hebrides', *Hebridean Naturalist*, 10 (1990): 7–16.

¹¹ *Grey Seals (Protection) Act 1932*, 22 & 23 George V, Chapter 23.

¹² *Conservation of Seals Act 1970*, 18 & 19 Elizabeth II, Chapter 30. W.N. Bonner, 'Legislation on the Seals in the British Isles', *The Salmon Net*, 7 (1971): 30–33; Robert A. Lambert, 'Grey Seals: To Cull or not to Cull', *History Today*, 51, 6, (2001): 30–32.

¹³ Michael B. Usher, 'Minimum Viable Population Size, Maximum Tolerable Population Size, or the Dilemma of Conservation Success,' in B. Gopal, P.S. Pathak, K.G. Saxena (eds) *Ecology Today: An Anthology of Contemporary Ecological Research* (New Delhi: International Scientific Publications, 1998). Figures kindly supplied by Professor John Harwood of the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU).

¹⁴ Grace Hickling, 'Islands of the Wanderers: the Farne Islands Nature Reserve', in G. Jackson Stops (ed.) *National Trust Studies 1981* (London: NT, 1981).

¹⁵ The islands actually passed to the NT on 13 March 1924.

¹⁶ National Trust (NT) archives, File 208/2, Extract from the Farne Islands Association Report for the year 1922 by Collingwood F. Thorp; cutting from *Times*, 6 February 1924; NT Executive Committee and Council Minutes for meetings 17 October 1922, 9 April 1923, 18 June 1923, 11 February 1924, 5 June 1924.

¹⁷ An interesting sub-plot of this study is that it provides a window on the history of the NT itself, especially in the *ad hoc* way it dealt with its regional members and local management committees, and more importantly, in the often strained relationships it had with donors of properties.

¹⁸ Grace Hickling, *Grey Seals and the Farne Islands* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). It is important to document what these numbers refer to. There is some confusion. In some cases the figures given are the numbers of pups born on the islands, in others they are the maximum number of seals counted at the Farnes at any time of the year, and some are simply best estimates of the total number of seals associated with the islands.

¹⁹ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from E. Max Nicholson, NC London, to H.F. Smith, NT London, 8 November 1955.

²⁰ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from Collingwood Thorp, Alnwick to S.H. Hamer, Secretary NT, London, 10 November 1933. The more pressing concern for the NT at this time was the control of human visitors to the Farnes.

²¹ NT archives, File series 208, cutting from *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 6 November 1933.

²² NT archives, File series 208, Letter from Collingwood Thorp to D. McLeod Matheson, Secretary NT, London, 9 September 1937.

²³ NT archives, File series 208, Report of 'Conference convened by the Farne Islands Association to discuss the question of the Grey Seal', by R.E. Hale, April 1938, 18pp.

²⁴ NT archives, File series 208, Minutes of meeting of the Farnes Islands Association Committee, Bamburg Castle Hotel, 8 April 1946. Letter from William Shiel, Seahouses to NT London, 2 February 1958.

²⁵ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from H.J.F. Smith, NT London, to Grace Hickling, 10 January 1951.

²⁶ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from T.S. Leach, Chief Inspector of Fisheries, MAFF London to Capt. Cyril Diver, NC London, 29 May 1951.

²⁷ NAS, SNH1-1, Minutes of meetings of the NC Scottish Committee, Edinburgh, 2 November 1950 and 25 January 1951.

²⁸ NAS, AF62/929/14. Letter from Cyril Diver, NC London to T.S. Leach, MAFF London, 12 February 1951; Letter from John Berry, NC Edinburgh to A.J. Aglen, Scottish Home Dept, 16 February 1951.

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- ²⁹ NT archives, File series 208, 'Report by H.C. Courtney Clarke on the damage done by seals to the Tweed Salmon Industry', Clint Lodge, St. Boswells, 9 May 1955.
- ³⁰ NT archives, File series 208, 'Report on the Grey Seals and Damage to Salmon Fisheries on the Northumberland and Berwickshire Coast', by NC, distributed by MAFF on 3 March 1956.
- ³¹ NT archives, File series 208, Letters from E.J.K. Salisbury, Felpham, West Sussex, to Hubert Smith, NT London, 31 December 1957 and 4 January 1958.
- ³² NT archives, File series 208, NC memo 'Grey Seals: Question of Control on the Farne Islands', 13 February 1957.
- ³³ NT archives, File series 208, Minutes of the meeting of the NT Nature Conservation Sub-Committee, London, 25 February 1957.
- ³⁴ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from Grace Hickling, Hancock Museum, Newcastle to Hubert Smith, NT London, 16 January 1958.
- ³⁵ NT archives, press cuttings files. *The Sunday Sun*, 5 January 1958; *The Newcastle Journal*, 16 January 1958.
- ³⁶ NT archives, File series 208, Press release 'Farne Islands: Grey Seals', 28 February 1958.
- ³⁷ NAS, AF62/4201, Memo from Salmon Net Fishing Association to P.R.C. Macfarlane, Inspector of Salmon Fisheries, Scottish Home Department. The seal menace was 'a matter of national importance'.
- ³⁸ See NT archives, File series 208; NAS AF62/3927.
- ³⁹ NT archives, File series 208.
- ⁴⁰ NT archives, File series 208. Letter from C.F. Huntly, MAFF London, to H.J.F. Smith, NT London, 2 March 1959. See Sheail, *Nature Conservation in Britain*, 76–82.
- ⁴¹ NT archives, File series 208. Memo from C.J. Gibbs, NT Chief Agent, 7 May 1964.
- ⁴² NT archives, File series 208. Report on 1965 cull by Grace Hickling, February 1966. The NT received many letters from individuals and organisations asking could they come to the Farnes and rescue seal pups from the culls, to keep as pets or donate to zoos and wildlife parks.
- ⁴³ RSPCA archives, IF/29/4 Policy 'Culling of Farne Islands Seals'. NT archives, File series 208. Letter from Mrs M. Hamilton, Stockton, to *Newcastle Journal*, 19 September 1958: 'Is it humane to rain blows on the head of a grey seal pup in view of its mother? I am heavily ashamed to identify myself with the RSPCA who, in my opinion, steer a middle course in various subjects'.
- ⁴⁴ NT archives, File series 208, WWF statement by British National Appeal on Grey Seals, 27 November 1964: 'It is a sad reflection that these culls should happen in a country which leads the world in conservation; which rallied to the cause of saving the Leonardo da Vinci cartoon, but which puts commercial profit above the saving of one of God's treasures'.
- ⁴⁵ Ken Jones, *Seal Doctor* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978). Orphan seal pups can be viewed at 17 Sea Life Centres around the UK coast, at places such as St. Andrews, Scarborough, Hunstanton, Weymouth, Newquay etc. The National Seal Sanctuary is at Gweek in Cornwall. There is a Seal Rehabilitation and Research Centre at Pieterburen in the Netherlands.
- ⁴⁶ NT archives, File series 208, extract from Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, 24 November 1964.
- ⁴⁷ NT archives, 208/2/PF, W. Nigel Bonner and Grace Hickling, 'Grey Seals at the Farne Islands: A Management Plan', February 1971.

⁴⁸ NT archives, 208/2, memo from S.H.E. Burley, Assistant Secretary NT, London, to Chief Agent NT, 7 April 1971.

⁴⁹ NT archives, 208/2, Letters between SMRU Cambridge, and NT London.

⁵⁰ Letters from Frank and Mavis Strudwick, held in archives of Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), University of St. Andrews. The Strudwicks now live on Orkney. These 1970s Farnes culls were carried out by Norwegians, as was the 1977 cull in the Outer Hebrides, and the aborted 1978 cull in Orkney.

⁵¹ NT archives, File series 208, protest letters 1983/84.

⁵² NAS, AF62/3927.

⁵³ This worm was originally known as the codworm *Porrocaecum decipiens*, although it parasitises many other fish species in addition to cod. Seals are the definitive host of this parasite.

⁵⁴ Bennet Rae/DAFS, *Seals and Scottish Fisheries* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1960) Marine Research 2.

⁵⁵ H.R. Hewer, *British Seals* (London: Collins, 1974). H.R. Hewer, *Grey Seals* (London: Sunday Times Books, 1962).

⁵⁶ NAS, AF62/2329, Letter from H.R. Hewer, University of London, to J.R. Gordon, DAFS, Edinburgh, 19 September 1961.

⁵⁷ NAS, AF62/2327. Internal report on 1963 culls.

⁵⁸ NAS, AF62/2327.

⁵⁹ NC, *Grey Seals and Fisheries* (London: HMSO, 1963); E.B. Worthington, 'Grey Seals and Fisheries', *Nature*, 203 (11 July 1964): 116–118. The Consultative Committee on Grey Seals and Fisheries was set up in 1959 by the Nature Conservancy and the Development Commission, with the zoologist E.A. Smith appointed as special research officer based in Edinburgh.

⁶⁰ Letter to author from John P. Grundy, Senior Inspector SSPCA, Portree, Isle of Skye, dated 21 September 2001. Grundy was the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) representative at the 1977 culls on the Western Isles and the 1978 cull on Orkney. He makes the observation, supported by evidence in the SSPCA archives (Edinburgh), that the SSPCA were placed in a difficult position in 1978 as their sister organisation in England and Wales, the RSPCA, had come out on the side of Greenpeace. Grundy notes that the SSPCA were, 'neither pro- nor anti-cull, our position being that the cull was a legally licensed act authorised by the Secretary of State for Scotland and our sole role was to ensure that the legal cull was carried out humanely'.

⁶¹ W.N. Bonner, *The Natural History of Seals* (London: Christopher Helm, 1989). W.N. Bonner, *Seals and Man: A Study of Interactions* (Seattle: Washington Sea Grant, 1982).

⁶² John Lister-Kaye, *Seal Cull* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979): 42.

⁶³ Sir William Fraser, Edinburgh, letter to author 22 December 1999, and telephone conversation.

⁶⁴ NT archives, File 208/2, 'A summary of the report presented to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the Council for Nature's Grey Seals Group, 27 September 1979'. A Scottish Grey Seal Group was formed in Edinburgh in April 1981. See Sheail, *An Environmental history of twentieth century Britain*, 148–150.

⁶⁵ Charles Summers, 'Grey Seals: the 'Con' in Conservation', *New Scientist* (30 November 1978): 694–695.

⁶⁶ Frank Fraser Darling delivered the 1969 Reith Lectures, which were later published as *Wilderness and Plenty* (London: Ballantine, 1971). Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) was first a professional forester in the US Forest Service from 1909, who turned to wildlife

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management, restoration ecology and wilderness preservation, proposing that society embrace a 'Land Ethic' including the natural world within its ethical structure. See especially, Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: OUP, 1949); J. Baird Callicott (ed.), *A Companion to a Sand County Almanac* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Peter Coates, *In Nature's Defence: Americans and Conservation* (Keele: BAACS Pamphlet 26, 1993).

⁶⁷ F. Fraser Darling, *A Naturalist on Rona: Essays of a Biologist in Isolation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939).

⁶⁸ NT archives, File series 208, Letter from Frank Fraser Darling to Grace Hickling, 15 January 1951.

⁶⁹ NAS, AF62/929/14, copy of Fraser Darling's open letter to Scottish Committee of NC, 28 December 1950, where he declared: 'My ultimate aim is to see the British stocks of the Atlantic grey seal valued as a natural resource, conserved as such and regularly used'.

⁷⁰ This was published in *The Guardian*, 13 January 1964.

⁷¹ See Stephen Budiansky, *Nature's Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management* (London: Phoenix, 1996) for the USA National Park Service's failure to keep to a culling policy in the face of public outcry. The culling of northern elk in Yellowstone NP ended in 1967.

⁷² NT archives, File series 208, transcript of lecture 'Kindness Kills: The Ethical and Technical Problems of the Conservation of Wildlife', by F. Fraser Darling, 13 January 1964. But Darling was wrong. The welfare of the grey seal has never really been threatened. This belief came from his misreading of the North Rona situation in the late 1930s.

⁷³ NT archives, File series 208, *IUCN Bulletin*, New Series No.10, January/March 1964.

⁷⁴ Dr H.J. Harvey, Assistant Director of Estates and Head of Nature Conservation, National Trust, Cirencester, *pers.comm.*

⁷⁵ NAS, AF62/3927, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland memo, Gilmour Leburn to J.B. Godber of MAFF, 14 December 1961.

⁷⁶ Robert A. Lambert, 'Grey Seals on Scilly', in ISBG (ed) *Isles of Scilly Bird and Natural History Review 2000* (2001): 186–187.

⁷⁷ John M. MacAulay, *Seal-Folk and Ocean Paddlers* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 1998); L.A. Knight, *The Morlo* (London: Gryphon Books, 1956); Rowena Farre, *Seal Morning* (London: Hutchinson, 1957); Monk Gibbon, *The Seals* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935); R.M. Lockley, *The Seals and the Curragh* (London: J.M.Dent, 1954); H.G.Hurrell, *Atlanta – My Seal* (London: William Kimber, 1963); R.H. Pearson, *A Seal Flies By* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959); Nina Warner Hooke, *The Seal Summer* (London: Arthur Barker, 1964); Frank Stuart, *A Seal's World* (London: George Harrap, 1954); L. Harrison Matthews, *The Seals and the Scientists* (London: Peter Owen, 1979); Victor B. Scheffer, *The Year of the Seal* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1970); R.M. Lockley, *Grey Seal, Common Seal* (London: White Lion/Survival, 1977); Alison Johnson, *Islands in the Sound* (London: Gollancz, 1989).

⁷⁸ Richard Mabey, *The Common Ground* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993).

⁷⁹ This phrase was used by an actor playing an irate local fisherman in an episode (screened 1 September 2000) of the popular BBC1 drama 'Badger' about the life and loves of a Northumberland Police Wildlife Liaison Officer.

⁸⁰ Letter to author, from Jeremy Read, Director, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Pitlochry, 10 July 2000.

⁸¹ Darling, *A Naturalist on Rona*, 76–90; J.W. Kempster, *Our Rivers* (Oxford: OUP, 1948): 24.

⁸² NAS, AF62/929/2 Letter from Charles Green, Minister of Fisheries, Dublin, to George Hogarth, Fishery Board for Scotland, Edinburgh, 19 December 1924.

⁸³ Interestingly, the seal hunt seems to no longer be an issue of mass public concern, as total annual catches of harp and hooded seals in Canada and Greenland have now climbed to over 350,000: the highest levels for thirty years. The resurgent seal hunt has been able to continue uninterrupted because the Canadians have found new markets for different seal products (like seal penises for their supposed aphrodisiac properties for Eastern traditional medicine, and seal oil to reduce human cholesterol levels in the Western world), which are much less susceptible to the market disruptions that were so successful in the 1970s and 1980s. Although white-coated seal pups are no longer killed, and no animals are clubbed, IFAW still raises a good percentage of its income through campaigns to end the harp seal hunt.

⁸⁴ See John Knight (ed.), *Natural Enemies: People-Wildlife conflicts in Anthropological Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2000). Richard Carrington, *Elephants* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962). Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600–1950* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001).

⁸⁵ Some estateowners in the Scottish Highlands are very much opposed to any cull of red deer hinds, though they will accept the culling of young stags in the belief this makes for better quality older deer with magnificent antler racks. These ‘monarchs of the glen’ bring in good money in the stalking season, especially from overseas clients. From a purely nature conservation perspective, a large cull of hinds is needed to bring the population of red deer in Scotland down to levels that would allow for the regeneration of the native Caledonian pine forest.

⁸⁶ See SWT, *Scottish Wildlife*, Volumes 14, 15, 1978–1979.

⁸⁷ RSPCA archives, File IF/7/10 ‘Wild Animals – Seals’. See also RSPCA (Horsham, West Sussex) photographs of this demonstration.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

The archives of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (England and Wales) are privately held at 36 Queen Anne’s Gate, London SW1H 9AS.

The archives of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) are privately held at RSPCA Headquarters, Wilberforce Way, Oakhurst Business Park, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 7WN.

The archives of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) are privately held at Braehead Mains, 603 Queensferry Road, Edinburgh EH4 6EA.

The archives of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland are held in the National Archives of Scotland (NAS), West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DF at ref: AF.

The archives of the Scottish Committee of the Nature Conservancy/Nature Conservancy Council are held in the National Archives of Scotland (NAS), West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DF at ref: SNH.