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Public attitudes to the management of invasive non-native species in Scotland

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ABSTRACT

Invasive non-native species are one of the main threats to biodiversity. Consequently there is a need to control or eradicate those species that are causing problems in order to mitigate their impact. Such management programmes can be controversial and in some cases have been delayed or halted because of opposition from pressure groups. Public support can be critical to the success of such projects, and understanding the underlying attitudes of the public can help inform outreach education activities. To assess attitudes towards invasive species management and investigate socio-demographic factors influencing such attitudes, a questionnaire survey of 600 randomly selected members of the public in Scotland was conducted, and a total of 248 completed questionnaires returned. The level of support for control and eradication programmes was, in general, high and was higher amongst men, older people, and people who had previously heard of control and eradication projects. The species to be managed influenced levels of support, and projects to control birds were the least supported. Respondents with prior knowledge of control and eradication programmes and members of conservation organisations, in general, showed higher levels of support, indicating the important role that awareness and education has in terms of increasing public support for invasive non-native species management projects.

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1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged by conservationists that invasive non-native species are one of the biggest threats to biodiversity (Diamond, 1989; Mack et al., 2000; IUCN, 2000). The Convention on Biological Diversity (United Nations Environment Programme, 1992) considers that eradication offers the best management option for mitigating the impacts of non-native species on biodiversity if prevention of their introduction fails. The Scottish Government's statutory advisory body on nature conservation, Scottish National Heritage (SNH), carried out a Public Consultation exercise in 2006 to

provide input to their policy on species management in Scotland. The consultation document provided details of threatened species, native species that are the subject of control programmes, and key invasive non-native species that SNH believe should be managed for the benefit of Scotland's native species (SNH, 2006a). Their list included the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) which threatens the red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) through direct competition and spread of disease (Gurnell and Pepper, 1993), the New Zealand flatworm (*Artioposthia triangulata*) which preys on native earthworms (Boag, 2000), and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) which alters the natural species

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composition of woodland by preventing native tree regeneration (Tyler et al., 2006).

The case for eradication of invasive non-natives is often strong and there is scientific support for the benefits of control on biodiversity (e.g. Craik, 1998). Very few eradications, however, have taken place in Europe, in comparison with other parts of the world e.g. New Zealand (Genovesi, 2005). Possible reasons for the low number of European eradication projects include; lack of political and public awareness of the potential threats (Bertolino and Genovesi, 2003), the view that eradication is an impossible goal (Bomford and O'Brien, 1995), and lack of enthusiasm amongst conservationists for an activity that many people find distasteful (Temple, 1990). The eradication of the coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) in the UK is one of the few successful programmes to be completed in Europe (Gosling and Baker, 1989) and required extensive funding and specific legislation (Sheail, 2003).

Conservation managers understand that public support for their activities can be key to the success or failure of the projects they undertake. This is especially true when control and eradication projects are being undertaken to remove invasive non-native species. The species involved and the methods of control used are likely to affect levels of public support, especially for animals or plants the public find appealing (Manchester and Bullock, 2000; Fraser, 2006). In Europe, this was most clearly illustrated when animal rights groups initiated legal action to stop a trial eradication of grey squirrels in Italy. Lethal control was halted for three years during the ensuing judicial enquiry and, although the personnel involved were eventually acquitted, the rapid expansion of the squirrel population during this time led to the project being abandoned (Bertolino and Genovesi, 2003). Objections have also been raised over the Uist Wader Project in Scotland (SNH, 2004) and the associated culling of European hedgehogs on Hebridean islands (Urquhart, 2005).

A growing number of researchers are recognising that the issue of managing invasive non-native species is as much a social issue, encompassing political and human factors, as it is a scientific one (e.g. Reaser, 2001). In Australia and New Zealand, where eradication programmes have become well established, public surveys have been undertaken in order to help understand people's reactions to proposed management and their attitudes to non-native species (Johnston and Marks, 1997; Fraser, 2001, 2006). As yet very little such research has been carried out in Europe, with any questionnaire-based studies usually focussed around one particular project or species. These include rats on Lundy Island in North Devon (Meech, 2005), grey squirrel control (Barr et al., 2002), and public attitudes to control of tree mallow on Scottish islands (Fischer and van der Wal, 2007). Some researchers have used contingent valuation techniques to examine conservation priorities amongst the public for goose conservation (Macmillan et al., 2002), or for various management programmes for wild animals in Scotland (Philip and Macmillan, 2003). With an increasing recognition of the need for participatory decision making involving the public (Decker et al., 1996) a better understanding of the attitudes of the general public to invasive non-native species is required. In this study, we aimed to assess the attitudes of the Scottish public to conservation and the management of a wide range of invasive

non-native species. There have been a number of high profile invasive species eradication projects in Scotland in recent years (e.g. Uist Wader Project, SNH, 2004; Hebridean Mink Project, SNH, 2006b), so we expected that awareness may be higher here than elsewhere in the UK, allowing us to explore the influence of socio-demographics on attitudes to control. Specifically we wanted to address the following questions:

1. Which socio-demographic factors influence attitudes to the management of invasive non-native species?
2. Do levels of support for invasive non-native species management vary between particular species or taxa?
3. Do higher levels of awareness of invasive species management influence the attitudes towards control or eradication programmes?

This information will give conservation managers a better understanding of public attitudes on which they can base management decisions, education programmes and publicity.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Questionnaire design

Postal questionnaires consisting of 10 pages (see supplementary material) asked respondents about their support for invasive non-native species control, the control methods used, and level of support for control of 15 non-native species. They were also asked general questions about their involvement in conservation, outdoor activities, and basic demographic information. The 15 species (Table 1) were selected from those listed in an SNH public consultation document (SNH, 2006a) and from an audit of non-native species which suggested they had potential moderate, or highly significant, impacts on either the economy or biodiversity of Scotland (Welch et al., 2001).

Most questions required respondents to select their level of agreement with a particular statement or with control measures for a particular species. A five-point rating scale was used with options of strongly agree (=1), agree (=2), neither agree nor disagree (=3), disagree (=4) and strongly disagree (=5). At the beginning of the questionnaire there were definitions of the terms non-native species, native species, invasive, control and eradication. In the final question, in which people were asked about agreement with control or eradication programmes for particular species, each species was illustrated with a picture and a description explaining the impacts they had on biodiversity. In order that the questionnaire returns be, as far as possible, representative of the opinions of the Scottish public, the sample ($n = 600$) was proportionally stratified by the population size, mid-year estimates 2005 (General Register Office for Scotland, 2006), of the 32 council areas across Scotland so reflecting the actual distribution of the population (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996). The council areas were then mapped onto phone book areas and the relevant number of people selected from the phone book using a random numbers method. To encourage return of the questionnaire, the first mailing, including a self-addressed envelope, was followed by a reminder letter 10 days later. To those that failed to respond to the reminder, the question-

Table 1 – The common and Latin names, and type of organism, of the 15 invasive non-native species referred to in the questionnaire

Species	Type
Green spruce aphid (<i>Elatobium abietinum</i>)	Terrestrial invertebrate
New Zealand flatworm (<i>Artioposthia triangulata</i>)	Terrestrial invertebrate
Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>)	Terrestrial plant
Giant hogweed (<i>Heracleum mantegazzianum</i>)	Terrestrial plant
Grey squirrel (<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>)	Mammal
Ruffe (<i>Gymnocephalus cernua</i>)	Fish
Signal crayfish (<i>Pacifastacus leniusculus</i>)	Crustacean
Brown rat (<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>) ^a	Mammal
American mink (<i>Mustela vison</i>)	Mammal
European hedgehog (<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>) ^a	Mammal
Chinese mitten crab (<i>Eriocheir sinensis</i>)	Crustacean
Ruddy duck (<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>)	Bird
Canada goose (<i>Branta canadensis</i>)	Bird
Japanese knotweed (<i>Fallopia japonica</i>)	Terrestrial plant
Zebra mussel (<i>Dreissena polymorpha</i>)	Aquatic invertebrate

a Only on islands.

naire was re-sent after a further 20 days. The use of the phone book for postal questionnaires does have certain limitations (see discussion and conclusions), but has the strong advantage of allowing stratification of a named sample set, and the use of reminders as outlined above has been found to lead to high return rates of around 50% (e.g. Zinn and Manfredi, 1998).

Socio-demographic variables of age, education, employment, country of birth and ethnicity, were categorised using the same categories as the 2001 Census (General Register Office for Scotland, 2001).

2.2. Data analysis

The influences of socio-demographic variables (e.g. age, gender) on levels of agreement with statements regarding attitudes to conservation and invasive non-native species were tested by backward ordinal regression (using the polytomous universal model (PLUM, Norušis, 2005)). To explore whether individual species or taxa influenced acceptance of control or eradication, the scores from respondents for particular species (strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5) were analysed using a Kruskal Wallis ANOVA (Siegel and Castellan, 1988). The 15 individual species also represented six different groups; mammals, birds, plants, invertebrates, fish and crustaceans, and the mean scores per respondent for each group were analysed in a similar way. For those groups where control had less support, a binary response variable was created for respondents agreeing (a score of 1 or 2) and neutral or disagreeing (a score of 3, 4 or 5) with control, and backward logistic regression used to investigate the influence of socio-demographic variables on attitudes towards control of these groups. The difference in attitude between those who had previously heard of control and eradication projects for certain species, and those who had not, was analysed using chi-squared tests. Statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS v 13.0 (SPSS Inc., 2005) and SigmaStat v 3.11 (Systat Software Inc., 2004) with a significance level of 5%.

3. Results

3.1. Return rate

Of the 600 questionnaires sent out, 47 were returned undelivered. This gave an effective sample size of 553, of which 274 (49%) were returned. Of these 26 were only partially completed and were omitted from the analyses. Analysis of the 248 fully completed questionnaires indicated that those returned reflected the proportional population sizes of the council areas that were sampled. Due to the way the population is distributed across Scotland respondents were therefore concentrated from areas in, and surrounding, Edinburgh and Glasgow, although responses were also received from councils all over Scotland including the Highlands and Islands. These Scottish council areas are assigned to urban or rural categories by the Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive, 2004) based on population density, and our survey returns exactly matched the overall Scotland figures (of 69% urban and 31% rural).

3.2. Demographic statistics

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents closely matched that of the total population when compared with the 2001 Scottish Census (General Register Office for Scotland, 2001). There was a higher proportion of male respondents (55% male, 45% female), but this was not significantly different from the gender proportions in the population ($\chi^2 = 2.61$, d.f. = 1, n.s.). Respondents were, however, significantly older than would have been expected from a random sample ($\chi^2 = 21.43$, d.f. = 5, $P < 0.01$), and included more highly qualified people (degree level or higher; $\chi^2 = 13.06$, d.f. = 4, $P < 0.05$).

3.3. Attitudes to conservation

We asked a number of questions about awareness of, and involvement in, conservation activities to explore the influence of such factors on people's attitudes. Respondents were

asked if they were members of wildlife, conservation or heritage organisations, and 64 (26%) respondents said they were members of at least one such organisation. Of our respondents, 30 (12%) were members of the National Trust for Scotland, followed by 13 (5%) who were members of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. There were six (2%) who were members of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and one member of the Game Conservancy Trust.

Of respondents asked how they heard about issues relating to the Scottish countryside, only 11 (4%) people said they did not hear about such issues. The main medium for communication was television which 200 (81%) people said was one source of such information. This was closely followed by newspapers, which was a source for 187 (75%) respondents. Only 34 (14%) people said they got this type of information from the Internet. When asked whether protecting the Scottish countryside and its wildlife should be a Government funding priority, 210 (85%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. An ordinal regression (PLUM) test of the influence of socio-demographic factors and agreement with this statement found no significant variables at the 5% level.

3.4. Attitudes to control and eradication

Several questions, in the form of statements, asked people how much they agreed with control or eradication programmes. The questions gave examples of different reasons for these programmes being carried out, such as to protect a threatened species. A total of 216 (87%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that controlling some wildlife (native or non-native) is necessary to help conserve the environment, whilst only five (2%) disagreed. The majority of respondents (73–84%) supported control or eradication of invasive non-native species causing economic damage, or those harming native, or threatened, Scottish species (Table 2). Fewer people

(45%) supported the eradication of all invasive non-native species to protect native species, although a further 37% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. There were several demographic variables significantly associated with responses to these statements (Table 2). Men were more likely to agree with general wildlife control, eradication of all invasive non-native species and those specifically to conserve threatened species, and were marginally more likely to support control and eradication programmes to protect native Scottish species. Older people, particularly those in the 45–54 age group, were more likely to agree that control and eradication programmes should be carried out for economic reasons, and to protect native Scottish species. People in full time employment were more likely to support eradication of all invasive non-native species. Respondents who had previously heard of control and eradication projects were more likely to support general wildlife control and control and eradication programmes to protect threatened species, although membership of a conservation organisation was not shown to be significant. There were no significant differences between the responses of urban and rural residents to any of the questions.

A total of 170 (69%) people agreed that the methods used for control would affect their level of support for control or eradication programmes (Fig. 1), and a backward binary logistic regression indicated no significant socio-demographic variables associated with responses to this question. Of 10 control measures cited in the questionnaire, seven were applicable to animals and three for plants. Control measures respondents disagreed with most were poisoning (49%) for animal control and herbicides for plant control (25%).

3.5. Attitudes to particular species or taxa

There was a significant difference in the level of agreement for control between individual species (Kruskal Wallis:

Table 2 – Coefficients and P-values associated with significant socio-demographic variables derived from backwards ordinal regression (PLUM) tests of attitudes to particular statements on conservation and non-native species management

Significant at the 5% level	Coefficient	SE	Wald	d.f.	Sig. (P)
<i>Controlling some wildlife (both native and non-native) is necessary to help conserve the environment (87% agreed, 2% disagreed, 11% neither agreed or disagreed)</i>					
Prior knowledge of projects	-0.803	0.273	8.631	1	0.003
Gender	-0.576	0.258	4.994	1	0.025
<i>All invasive non-native species living in Scotland should be eradicated (totally removed), where possible, to protect native species (45% agreed, 18% disagreed, 37% neither agreed or disagreed)</i>					
Employment	-0.139	0.43	10.328	1	0.001
Gender	-0.619	0.237	6.806	1	0.009
<i>Non-native species should be controlled or eradicated where they cause economic damage (74% agreed, 17% disagreed, 9% neither agreed or disagreed)</i>					
Age	-0.221	0.078	8.012	1	0.005
<i>Non-native species should be controlled or eradicated where they do damage to any native Scottish species (78% agreed, 10% disagreed, 12% neither agreed or disagreed)</i>					
Age	-0.228	0.078	8.608	1	0.003
Gender	-0.467	0.244	3.657	1	0.056
<i>Non-native species should be controlled or eradicated where they do damage to threatened Scottish species (84% agreed, 2% disagreed, 14% neither agreed or disagreed)</i>					
Gender	-0.651	0.246	7.031	1	0.008
Prior knowledge of projects	-0.593	0.261	5.147	1	0.023

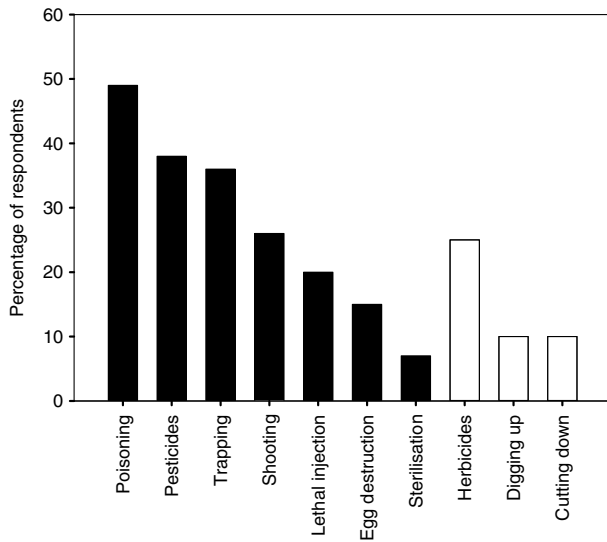


Fig. 1 – The percentage of respondents in the survey disagreeing with the use of particular animal and plant control methods for conservation management.

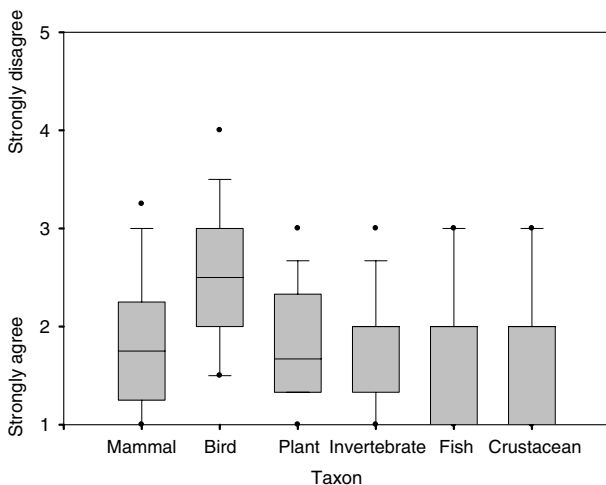


Fig. 2 – Comparison of respondents' scores for control or eradication of different taxa. Lower scores indicate a higher level of agreement. Box plots shown here indicate 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th and 90th percentiles with horizontal lines and all data points outside this range.

$H_{14} = 575.0$; $P < 0.001$). Post hoc Dunn's tests showed that respondents agreed most with control and eradication programmes for Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed and least with programmes for ruddy duck, Canada goose and rhododendron. There were also significant differences in the mean scores given for the six taxa (KW: $H_5 = 194.6$; $P < 0.001$; Fig. 2), with respondents less willing to support control and eradication projects for birds than other taxa. There was a significant relationship between gender and mean score, when scores for all species were averaged and then converted into a binary

response of agree or disagree, with men more likely to agree to control and eradication programmes for the species listed than women ($\chi^2 = 8.33$, d.f. = 1, 246 $P = 0.004$).

Because support for control programmes involving birds was significantly less than other taxonomic groups, possible explanatory variables were investigated for respondents agreeing or disagreeing with bird control. Respondents who were members of conservation organisations were more likely to support control programmes for birds ($\chi^2 = 6.09$, d.f. = 1, 246, $P = 0.014$). Questions about attitudes to particular control methods and attitudes to species control were asked separately, however, certain species can only be successfully removed using a method some people find objectionable. In the case of the brown rat, which is usually controlled or eradicated through the use of poison, 113 (50%) of the 226 people who supported rat eradication disagreed with the use of poisoning as a control method. When examining the results for the ruddy duck, where control can involve shooting, only 19 (17%) of the 109 people that supported eradication disagreed with the use of shooting as a method of control.

A total of 80 respondents (32%) had previously heard of programmes to control the numbers of invasive non-native species in Scotland. Of these the majority, 68 (85%), cited those involving mammals. For those respondents ($n = 48$) who had heard of the programme to eradicate European hedgehogs from islands in the Scottish Hebrides there was a significant association between prior knowledge and increased level of support ($\chi^2 = 10.36$, d.f. = 1, $P = 0.001$; Fig. 3). Of those who had heard of programmes to control or eradicate grey squirrels ($n = 36$) and American mink ($n = 12$) there was also a significant association between prior knowledge of programmes and increased level of support (grey squirrels: $\chi^2 = 5.32$, d.f. = 1, $P = 0.021$; American mink $\chi^2 = 4.72$, d.f. = 1, $P = 0.030$, using Yates' Correction; Fig. 3).

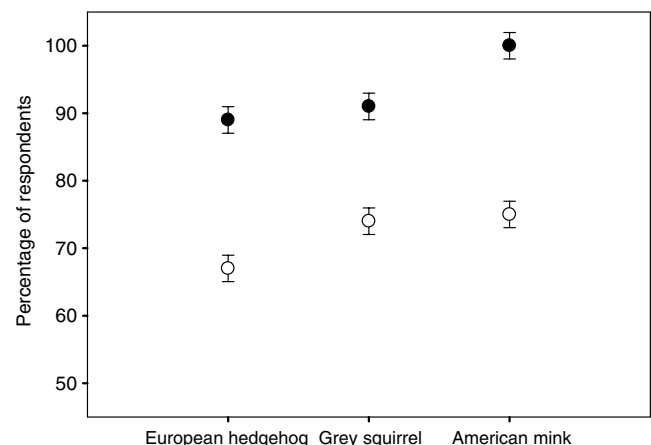


Fig. 3 – The proportion of respondents agreeing with control and eradication of three species of invasive non-native mammals in the UK according to whether they had previously heard of control and eradication projects for these species (filled circles) or not (open circles). Control of European hedgehog specifically relates to where this species has been introduced outside its native range in the Scottish Hebrides. Errors are 95% confidence intervals.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This study attempted to provide a wider view of public opinion on the management of invasive non-native species than has been attempted previously in the UK. It enabled us to examine the role of particular species, the methods used, and the socio-demographic background and prior knowledge of the respondents, in shaping attitudes towards control and eradication programmes. All questionnaire-based studies have certain limitations in relation to how representative of the general public they are (Sapsford, 1999). We used a stratified random sampling procedure to minimise sampling bias but recognise that, because not all members of the public are in the phone book, and those that are tend to be the head of the household, often older males, some bias may still exist. In addition, there is the possibility of non-response bias. There does appear to be some degree of non-response bias in the respondents of this survey; younger people and those with fewer formal qualifications were less likely to respond, a common finding in surveys of this nature (Sapsford, 1999; White et al., 2003). Self-selection amongst respondents would also mean those people with a strong interest in the topic are more likely to respond. In terms of assessing the attitudes of the public in relation to invasive species management, however, those who are strongly in favour and those strongly against control may be equally likely to respond. That respondents were older than would have been expected from a random sample likely indicates some degree of sampling bias and possibly also a response bias. In addition, the number of respondents belonging to conservation organisations ($n = 64$, 26%) was very high in this survey and it is possible that those who were members of conservation organisations were more likely to respond to this questionnaire. Data on the proportion of the public who are members of conservation organisations is not easily available, however statistics from 1998 indicated there were 228,000 members of the National Trust for Scotland and over one million RSPB members in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2000). A 2002 survey of public attitudes to the environment in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2005) involving 4000 people found that only 5% of the respondents reported membership of a “green” organisation, although 23% said they had made a one-off payment to an environmental group in the past 12 months. These figures, however, are not directly comparable because respondents were left to decide which organisations were ‘green’ and membership of specific organisations was not reported. Although we are unable to account for non-response bias, we feel these data can be used to assess the views of the general public in Scotland due to the broad similarities between the socio-demographic profiles of respondents and the public and the high return rate achieved (49%).

Respondents to the questionnaire showed high levels of support for control and eradication programmes, a result similar to some of those found in a previous survey of members of the public in the Aberdeen area of Scotland as part of a contingent valuation study (Philip and Macmillan, 2005). In their survey they found that 75% of respondents approved of management programmes involving humane culling to protect rare species whilst our study found 84% of respondents fa-

voured control for this reason. In contrast, whereas only 38% of respondents in the initial questionnaire by Philip and Macmillan (2005) favoured eradication of invasive non-native species to protect native species, a much higher proportion of respondents in our survey (78%) agreed that control and eradication of non-native species should be conducted for this reason.

4.1. Socio-demographic factors influencing attitudes

Studies on conservation management and the values, beliefs and attitudes of the public have focussed on gender differences (Dougherty et al., 2003), and how an understanding of values can help wildlife resource managers develop a constructive dialogue on conservation issues with the public and stakeholders (Miller, 2003; Fischer and van der Wal, 2007). Studies on control options for deer management have indicated that men are more likely to accept lethal control, whilst women prefer contraception as a method regardless of its effectiveness at controlling deer (Lauber et al., 2001). Other studies have not found any differences between the attitudes of men and women in terms of management options (Zinn and Pierce, 2002). It may be that the reasons given for using lethal control, such as whether control is for reasons of human safety or protection of livestock, equally influence people’s preferences. Our survey indicated that gender may have an impact on attitude; men were more likely to agree that all invasive non-native species should be eradicated, and should be controlled to aid conservation objectives and specifically to protect rare species. Men were also significantly more likely to agree to control and eradication for the 15 species listed in the questionnaire. For these reasons care should be taken to account for gender bias in sampling. Other factors influencing attitudes to control and eradication in the survey were the age of respondents, and whether they had previously heard of any projects to control or eradicate species in Scotland. Those in the age group 45–54 were more likely to support control and eradication for economic reasons, or to protect native species, but it is not clear if these are attitudes related to age *per se* or those of a particular generation. In the USA, there have been suggestions of differences between urban and rural residents in terms of attitudes towards animal rights, animal welfare and trapping (Kellert, 1996). There was no evidence of such differences between urban and rural residents in this survey. A similarity in attitudes between urban and rural residents, as found in this survey, has also been demonstrated in Australian and New Zealand surveys on public attitudes to vertebrate pest management and introduced wildlife control (Johnston and Marks, 1997; Fraser, 2001), and in a survey of public attitudes to brown bears in Slovenia (Kaczynsky et al., 2004).

4.2. Attitudes to different control methods

Poisoning and other chemical control, such as herbicides, were the least supported methods; a similar finding to other studies (Barr et al., 2002; Sheail, 2003; Fraser, 2006). Many respondents commented that they abhorred the thought of taking any creature’s life but where it was absolutely

necessary it should be done as humanely as possible. There was a discrepancy between the control methods people had objections to and those species they agreed with controlling. This was particularly true in the case of the brown rat and the use of poison; of the respondents supporting rat eradication (91%), half said they would not support the use of poisons. Further research to investigate how the level of information available to people influences their attitudes to these issues would be of value to conservation managers and public authorities. In particular, it would be useful to explore whether understanding the range of control options and their efficacy, along with the impacts in terms of levels of animal suffering, affects attitudes.

4.3. Species and taxonomic bias effects

Researchers have previously demonstrated taxonomic bias in conservation research and in reintroduction projects (Seddon et al., 2005), with a focus on mammals and to a lesser extent birds. A review of successful eradication projects in Europe (Genovesi, 2005) found none involving invertebrate, plant or marine organisms, although this could be because those groups are harder to eradicate successfully. Fraser (2001) found the public were less happy with control projects for larger non-native species, which tended to involve mammals. In this survey, many more respondents had heard about mammal control and eradication programmes, possibly due to the amount of publicity these particular projects have had in recent years. However, even where there had been a great deal of publicity, as in the case of European hedgehog eradication on Hebridean islands, knowledge of the project in our survey was still generally low (19%). Where respondents were asked to agree with control or eradication programmes for specific species there was significantly less support for projects involving birds or rhododendron, and a tendency to strongly agree with those projects that involved the Japanese knotweed or giant hogweed. In general taxonomic terms, bird control projects were the least supported, although even here the median response score (=2.6, equidistant between “agree” and “neither agree nor disagree”) was in favour of control. Veitch and Clout (2001) have suggested that the public may view invasive species differently and proposed that ‘hated invasives’, such as rats, were universally disliked and therefore more likely to be subject to control, whilst ‘attractive invasives’ such as rhododendron, were less likely to be controlled because they were liked for aesthetic reasons. These underlying attitudes combine with the ‘situational specifics’ (Zinn and Manfredo, 1998), in terms of why and how the species should be controlled or eradicated, to influence levels of public support.

4.4. Education and awareness

How can the results of this questionnaire help conservation managers? Firstly it helps highlight the importance of understanding the values and attitudes held by the general public with respect to wildlife control. There is a general willingness amongst the respondents of this survey to support conservation management but they need help to understand the threats that non-native species can pose. Where respon-

dents knew about control projects their level of support for control of particular species increased. This supports the view that explaining activities and the reasons behind wildlife control operations will help increase public support (Mack et al., 2000; Fraser, 2006). In a contingent valuation study (Philip and Macmillan, 2005), for example, the researchers found that support for control and eradication projects for non-native species increased from c. 38% to 78% following focus group meetings to discuss particular projects. The role the media can play in the dissemination of information can be problematic, in part because of the tendency to sensationalise news items (Goulding and Roper, 2002). This can create the impression that opposition from animal rights groups, for example, represents the public view to a greater extent than may be the case, whilst also clouding the conservation justification for control and eradication with arguments about the control methods and potential animal suffering.

Conservation managers and policy makers should find the high levels of support for management programmes amongst the general public found here reassuring. However, results from this questionnaire suggest that knowledge of invasive species, and programmes to control their impacts, remains low in Scotland. In addition, there appears to be a wide gulf between preferred methods of control and those that are of most practical use for particular species. This study indicates that awareness of particular projects is associated with increased levels of support. It is therefore important that those involved in invasive species management continue to engage directly in public outreach activities that do not shy away from the ‘nasty necessity’ of eradicating non-native species (Temple, 1990). Instead they should explain why such management projects are essential to conserve the habitats and native species the public know and love. Numerous studies have argued for the greater involvement of local communities at the earliest stages of detection of non-native impacts and use of the public during the decision making process (Barr et al., 2002; Philip and Macmillan, 2005). Where the reasons for eradication have been fully explained to the public there tends to be greater public support, as has been the case with the eradication of American mink in the Western Isles of Scotland. Eradication projects that have been initiated by people at the local level, such as the coypu eradication in the UK, had full local support and success was achieved with little negative public response (Sheail, 2003). Until people have more personal experience and understanding of the damage caused by non-native species they will not realise the benefits of control and eradication programmes (Fraser, 2006).

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2007.07.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2007.07.005).

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