

## Tekst 9

# Unnatural selection

Paul Evans

1 **T**WO stories to hit the headlines recently make you wonder about our attitudes to wild nature and worry about the limits of conservation thinking.

2 A fierce debate, with furious letters in the Guardian, followed proposals to control rabbits on the Sussex Downs by gassing them with cyanide. The conservation argument against the rabbits, put forward by the local council and supported by the Wildlife Trust, – motto, “Putting wildlife on the map” – was that the rabbit population on the Downs has increased so much that it is damaging important areas for wild flowers through overgrazing.

3 Rabbit populations are extremely variable and can build up massively with a heavy impact on the plants they graze, only to be decimated by myxomatosis in other years. Trying to control them by gassing seemed a brutal and very short-term solution. It also incensed animal welfare groups. The Downs have seen the ebb and flow of grazing pressure for many centuries and will adjust.

4 In their fervour to protect native wild flowers, the more xenophobic of the ecological chauvinists claimed that rabbits were not native anyway and were the result of human mistakes. Many argued that it was only because the rabbit’s predators have been so persecuted that its numbers have expanded unchecked.

5 Then came a story about a predator that no one seemed to want to encourage. Animal Liberation Front activists broke into a fur farm in the New Forest to liberate thousands of captive mink. Perhaps it was because the mink are non-native predators that seemed complicit in an act of terrorism, but the outpouring



of public sympathy for two pigs that escaped from an abattoir earlier this year did not extend to mink. Hundreds of fugitive mink have been rounded up by volunteers, including the RSPCA, and returned to the misery of the fur farm. Farmers and landowners are shooting and trapping as many as they can. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food sent in a hit squad.

6 American mink were brought to Britain for the fur trade in 1929 and began escaping from the word go. It was not until the fifties that they began to breed in the wild, occupying an ecological niche somewhere between polecats, stoats and otters. At that time polecats had been persecuted to near extinction by the game-keeping frenzy of the late 19th century. Stoats, too, were a common sight hanging on barbed-wire fences.

7 It is estimated that there are more than 100,000 wild mink in

Britain, and a similar number suffering in fur farms. The conservation case against mink is that it has almost wiped out the native population of water voles. Though it is true that mink mothers with hungry kits will gobble up all the surrounding water voles, it is not the whole story. Overgrazing and the removal of reedy river edges, grubbing up hedgerows, drainage and flood defence schemes and other developments have caused the damage. The real villain is not mink but agricultural intensification.

8 Nature conservation is a cultural project, and however it's dressed up, the killing is done for cultural ends. If we are being persuaded to protect the nature we like from the nature we don't, we'd better have more of an open public debate about it than we do at present, and thorough investigation into the attitudes, prejudices and values that are being bandied about.

'Guardian Weekly'

## ■ Tekst 9 Unnatural selection

- 1p 35  Wat wil de schrijver benadrukken door het motto van de Wildlife Trust te vermelden (alinea 2)?
- 1p 36  Leg aan de hand van alinea 3 uit wat de schrijver bedoelt met "the ebb and flow of grazing pressure".
- 1p 37 ■ How can the arguments referred to in paragraph 4 be summarised?  
A Rabbits are a common health risk.  
B Rabbits are a threat even to their predators.  
C There are good reasons to get rid of the rabbits.
- 1p 38 ■ Which of the following quotations from paragraph 5 is meant as an ironical aside?  
A 'Perhaps ... terrorism'  
B 'Hundreds ... volunteers'  
C 'including the RSPCA'  
D 'Farmers ... can.'
- 1p 39 ■ Which of the following is suggested with regard to mink in paragraph 6?  
A They have become part of British wildlife at the expense of native species.  
B They have flourished as a result of human interference with wildlife.  
C They were introduced into Britain to restore the ecological balance.
- 1p 40  "The real villain is not mink but agricultural intensification." (laatste zin alinea 7)  
Citeer het zinsgedeelte uit alinea 7 dat aangeeft voor welk feit de "real villain" verantwoordelijk gehouden wordt.
- 1p 41 ■ Which of the following is in line with paragraph 8?  
In Paul Evans' view present-day nature conservation  
A comes down to shaping nature to fit people's taste.  
B should strive for the best possible habitats for native species.  
C tends to concentrate on Britain's fauna at the expense of its flora.  
D would be best served by clear government guidelines.