



FORESTRY SOUTH AFRICA™

Guideline for the Management of Human Wildlife Conflicts

Revised 19 March 2025

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Background

International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control

Human wildlife conflicts usually invoke widely divergent views. These views may be based on ill-informed proposals between those who practice culling in the absence of scientific evidence and believe that culling will solve the problem, and those who support nonlethal methods without evidence that this approach will achieve the desired outcome. Sustainable wildlife management is described by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as the sound management of wildlife species to sustain their populations and habitat over time, taking into account the socioeconomic needs of human populations. This suggests that all land-users are aware of and consider the effects of their activities on the wildlife resources and habitat.

In 2016, a total of 18 experts compiled a list of seven principles that, based on a systematic approach, would result in a consensus position (Dubois, S. Et al. 2016. International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control. *Conservation Biology*, Volume 31, No. 4, 753-760)

These principles are:

1. Modifying human practices
2. Justification for control
3. Clear and achievable outcome-based objectives
4. Animal welfare
5. Social acceptability
6. Systematic planning
7. Decision making by specifics rather than labels

The principles need to be supported by a step-by-step decision support system to ensure the highest standards of human wildlife conflict are managed accordingly.

Outline of the approach.

This code of good practice examines seven principles for ethical wildlife control and can be adapted for the control of damage-causing animals in a number of human-wildlife conflict situations in South Africa. This guideline will focus on those species most commonly associated with damage to plantation trees, viz, grey duiker, rodents (including porcupines) and baboons.

i. Modifying human practices

Human-wildlife conflicts often originate from human activities that result on habitat change. This change can disadvantage a species and result in its localised reduction or even extinction due to habitat change and reduction in food. In other cases, the change may result in the transformation of the habitat into a form that is advantageous to the species by providing new food resources, cover and relative safety from predators due to the localised extinction of those predators.

The principle of modifying human practices through preventative action and increased tolerance towards a culture of improved coexistence with wildlife, underpins this first principle.

ii. Justification for control

The principle of wildlife control should only be justified with evidence based on monitoring; for example, harm caused to people, property, livelihoods, and damage to crops and livestock. The extent of the problem should be objectively considered or measured and methods of control (including the no control option) should be evaluated.

Justifying wildlife control can be complicated since it requires reconciling both perceived and real damage as well as conflicting values or world views. Any wildlife control programme should distinguish between nuisances and real damage. Real and extensive damage may, in the absence of any non-lethal control methods, require lethal control based on what people perceive as the maximum number of animals that will be tolerated in any one area. In some cases, minor damage is not necessarily sufficient justification for any control, both non-lethal and lethal.

iii. Clear and achievable outcome-based objectives

The desired outcome of a wildlife control programme such as a reduction in animals that cause severe financial losses should be clear, achievable, monitored and adapted based on lessons learned.

To improve decision making, an understanding of the ecology of the damage-causing animal is necessary. This includes population size, behaviour, reproductive capacity, demography and the effectiveness of any selected control method. What is often overlooked is the need for continuous monitoring. It is probably the most important aspect of wild life control and the outcome of a population reduction programme can only be validated with this important step in place.

In most cases, complete eradication of damage-causing animals is impossible, and an outcome-based objective on number of animals or animals per unit of area (animals per squares kilometre) that are acceptable in terms of crop losses (financial losses) should be agreed upon.

iv. Animal welfare

Any control method should cause the least harm to the animal's welfare and to the least number of animals. Opposition to the control of wildlife may arise because animal welfare concerns are not necessarily related to the control *per se*, but to the methods used, especially if the potential for the suffering of the target animal (and by implication any non –target animal) is realised.

Control methods vary considerably in type and may require a different approach for different animal species, age, sex, social organization and others. Essentially, control methods fall into two categories... lethal and non-lethal.

The control of wildlife has been a conflict between protagonists for lethal control and protagonists for ethical and non-lethal control that has endured many years of debate. Advocating culling without evidence that the problem will be solved is a poor approach to a reduction in wildlife. The same applies to those who insist on ethical and non-lethal methods without evidence that this method will result in least harm to the animals' welfare or even achieve the desired outcome.

Note: Ethical includes that the need, benefits, feasibility and costs to people and wildlife are taken into account when considering an approach to culling of wildlife.

v. Social acceptability

Community values should be considered alongside scientific, technical and practical information, and decisions often involve balancing the harm and benefits. Scientific and technical information must be sound and clarify the potential benefits as well as the consequences of failing to act (increased damage).

Inevitably, decisions regarding wildlife control involve human values which differ from person to person, and in particular between interested (but not affected) or affected parties (those who suffer the brunt of the damage).

This diversity requires an open and transparent process of stakeholder engagement in which different world views are considered in order to develop a consensus or compromise solution. This is not always possible to achieve and may result in the unfortunate breakdown of stakeholder participation.

vi. Systematic planning

Decisions on wildlife control should not be *ad hoc* but integrated into a long-term systematic management programme. *Ad hoc* approaches do not lead to long term solutions and are short lived, particularly where control involves a prolific number of damage-causing animals. Low level culling of such numbers results in senseless killing as numbers rebound quickly.

A decision making tree should be followed in which various options are considered in a systematic manner.

vii. Decision-making by specifics rather than labels

Control of damage-causing wildlife must be based on the target species and not simply because that species has earned a reputation as a problem animal. For example, the control of black backed jackal may not be necessary in one area simply because it has a negative reputation in another (killing sheep).

viii. Questions to be asked

These principles can be used in sequence when decisions about human-wildlife conflict are made and will ensure that they are followed logically. Hence:

- ✓ Can the problem be mitigated by changing human behaviour?
- ✓ Is the damage serious enough in both actual damage and financial losses to warrant wildlife control?
- ✓ Is the desired outcome clear, achievable and based on monitoring?
- ✓ Does the proposed method carry the least animal welfare cost to the fewest animals?
- ✓ Has scientific, technical and practical information been considered alongside stakeholder values?
- ✓ Is the control programme part of a systematic long term management programme?
- ✓ Is the decision warranted by the specifics of the problem rather than the negative label attached to the animal?

Adherence to this Guideline allows for systematic decision-making and will assist foresters in responding to interested and affected parties who might not be well-informed on the problems associated with damage-causing animals.

Wildlife control in relation to Forest Certification

Forest Certification will play a significant part in a plantation manager's decisions to control damage-causing animals. Forest Certification relies on a set of principles and their supporting criteria, indicators and verifiers which require, to a greater or lesser extent, consultation with stakeholders.

Some focus on activities that affect adjoining communities or environmental values. Control of animals within a forest management unit (FMU) will not necessarily negatively affect the surrounding communities while any impacts on environmental values can be assessed through a Risk Assessment.

Lethal control of wildlife can be a highly emotive subject, depending on the species involved. Landowners should thus notify affected stakeholders of their intention to control damage-causing animals through carefully and unambiguously worded statements.

i. Forest Stewardship Council

Principle 6: Environmental Values and Impacts

Most of the Criteria in Principle 6 require a risk assessment of management activities that may have an impact on environmental values, which are defined by the FSC as *"the following set of elements of the biophysical and human environment:*

- a. *ecosystem functions (including carbon sequestration and storage)*
- b. *biological diversity*
- c. *water resources*
- d. *soils*
- e. *atmosphere*
- f. *landscape values (including cultural and spiritual values).*

The actual worth attributed to these elements depends on human and societal perceptions".

By following the **International Consensus Principles for Ethical Wildlife Control** in this Guideline, a plantation owner can demonstrate that all relevant risks have been considered in a systematic manner in coming to a decision to control wildlife that is negatively affecting the plantations.

However, particular note of **Criterion 6.4** should be made:

Criterion 6.4 The Organization* shall* protect rare species* and threatened species* and their habitats* in the Management Unit* through conservation zones*, protection areas*, connectivity* and/or (where necessary) other direct measures for their survival and viability

Damage-causing wildlife such as grey duiker, rodents and baboons on forest land are generally speaking not Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) under the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act, 2004. Nor are they protected in any international lists of threatened or protected species (Based on IUCN. (2001). IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1. IUCN Species Survival Commission. IUCN. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK). Baboons, bush pigs and grey duiker also do not meet the IUCN (2001) criteria for Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR) species, that are facing a high, very high or extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

Principle 10 Implementation of Management Activities

The following criteria are of relevance to the control of damage-causing animals.

Criteria in Principle 10 cover all the production related management activities categorized into silviculture (10.1-10.8), natural hazards (10.9), environmental impacts of operations (10.10), harvesting (10.11) and Waste disposal (10.12).

Criterion 10.9 The Organization* shall* assess risks* and implement activities that reduce potential negative impacts from natural hazards* proportionate to scale, intensity, and risk*.

Indicator 10.9.8

Hazard: Damage Causing Animals - Where damage-causing animals (e.g. baboons, bush pigs, grey duiker & rodents) pose a significant threat to the productivity of the plantation, they are controlled according to recommended protocols and in line with legislation.

ii. Southern African Forestry Assurance Scheme

Definition of rare species

Species that are uncommon or scarce, but not classified as threatened. These species are located in geographically restricted areas or specific habitats, or are scantily scattered on a large scale. They are approximately equivalent to the IUCN (2001) category of Near Threatened (NT), including species that are close to qualifying for, or are likely to qualify for, a threatened category in the near future. They are also approximately equivalent to imperilled species. {Based on IUCN. (2001). IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1. IUCN Species Survival Commission. IUCN. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK}.

Grey duiker, baboons, and bush pigs are not rare species nor are they threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) under the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act, 2004. Rodents in plantations (including porcupines), are mostly not TOPS, but this should be confirmed before any large-scale rodent control is initiated.

Principle 6 Forest Health and Protection

Criterion 6.4 Monitoring, identification and control of pests and diseases and damage- causing animals

Criterion 6.4.3 Where damage-causing animals (e.g. baboons, bush pigs, grey duiker and rodents) pose a significant threat to the productivity of the plantation, they are controlled according to recommended protocols and in line with legislation.

Verifier Assessment of damage has taken place and shown that productivity is significantly affected.

Appendix 1

The legal position as of November 2024

Legislation provides for the protection of threatened species at both the national and provincial level. At the national level there is the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEM: BA).

The NEM:BA prohibits (or requires a special permit for) any activity which may impact on threatened or protected species (TOPS) or ecosystems. A permit is required to carry out a restricted activity (e.g. hunting) involving listed threatened or protected species. Grey duiker, baboons and porcupine are not listed anywhere under the NEM: Biodiversity Act Regulations.

Draft Regulations were published in 2016 in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act Norms and Standards for the management of damage-causing animals in South Africa (Government Gazette 40236 GN 40236 on 30 August 2016. The purpose of the Norms and Standards is to apply to management intervention related to all damage causing animals. The actual loss needs to be assessed by the relevant issuing authority, while the affected party is encouraged to provide supporting documentation. Deterrent methods to manage damage-causing animals can be used without a permit,

Section 8(1) of the Draft Regulations provides for minimum requirements for what is termed a “restricted method”. This includes the use of a cage trap. Section 9(1) describes the minimum requirement for the use of a cage trap. The size of the cage must be species specific and should take the size of the target damage-causing animal into account.

The Draft Regulations require monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of the method used. There is no requirement for any monitoring and reporting on the removal baboons that are controlled by shooting, since shooting is not a restricted method (paragraph 8).

A compensation strategy has been included, but such a strategy is not a legal requirement due to the use of the word “may”. Criteria under which circumstances compensation may be paid have been proposed.

The norms and standards currently remain in draft form as of November 2024.