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WILD THOUGHTS

We never seem to learn. Bounty hunting should belong to the dark ages of so-called wildlife management, but Alaska's Department of Fish and Game has just announced that it will give US\$150 for every wolf killed in five key areas of the hunting-shooting-and-fishing state. Naturally, state officials claim that the payout is merely an 'incentive'. But they can use whatever euphemism they like – it's still a bounty.

Designed to inflate moose and caribou populations, Alaska's predator-control programme already allows hunters to shoot wolves from aircraft and even plans to provide state biologists to help hunters locate their quarry.

In more enlightened parts of the world, we've learned the hard way that bounty schemes are impossible to regulate or monitor properly – not to mention downright unethical. Most famously, the Tasmanian Government used bounties in a determined effort to wipe out the Tasmanian tiger. And it worked.

Closer to home, research by Roger Lovegrove, author of *Silent Fields*, has revealed that bounties were responsible for annihilating much of Britain's wildlife. The Preservation of Grain Act, passed in 1532 by Henry VIII, made it compulsory for every man, woman and child to kill as many

creatures as possible that appeared on an official list of 'vermin' regarded as undesirable or unnecessary. The list included everything from water voles and hedgehogs to red kites and dippers. The act was finally repealed in the mid-18th century, but it's a wonder anything survived.

Hedgehog bounties were also paid in the Western Isles of Scotland from 2003-06, but this time it was to save the animals, not kill them. Uist Hedgehog Rescue paid £20 for every hedgehog saved from Scottish Natural Heritage's ill-advised cull – designed to protect important populations of ground-nesting birds from prickly egg thieves – and 756 hedgehogs were rescued and relocated. In response, Scottish Natural Heritage has just abandoned the cull in favour of relocation trials. So perhaps, just occasionally, we do learn.



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