

Letters Editor
The Times
Pennington Street
London

For publication

March 1st 2006

Sir,

On March 8th the governing board of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) will decide whether to implement swingeing cuts to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), closing five out of nine CEH centres and shedding some 200 scientific staff. Such cuts are, we believe, scientifically flawed. They will undermine the Government's scientific base for policy decisions and the UK's capacity to deliver high quality ecological research and should be rejected.

CEH Centres now threatened with closure include the internationally acclaimed Monks Wood, Winfrith and Banchory research stations. Monks Wood and Winfrith are in the forefront of the study of natural habitats and the impact on them of pollution and climate change. Banchory is the premier research station in the Highlands and its long-term studies of sea-birds have provided key evidence leading to changes in fisheries management in the North Sea.

In addition to action on climate change, the UK has made an international commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. In the face of rapid climate change, pollution, intensive agriculture and built development, this is an ever more daunting challenge. Key to success will be properly resourced research. CEH presently does much of that, tackling wide-ranging environmental problems and fulfilling a unique role in the gathering, maintenance and analysis of long-term data sets.

CEH has a well-deserved reputation for scientific excellence, not only in the UK but across the world. Cutting CEH resources will not only damage our science base but have a serious detrimental effect on the Government's ability to make policy based on sound scientific research. Effective policy requires public understanding of key issues, and here too CEH plays a role. For example, Monks Wood recently hosted the BBC's Spring Watch programmes, and Monks Wood and Winfrith assisted in the making of *Life in the Undergrowth*.

NERC has failed to justify why these severe cuts are necessary, either financially or scientifically, or to offer any convincing alternative arrangements that will meet our ever growing needs for the good science we need to underpin future environmental policy.

We urge NERC to consider alternative solutions to its financial problems, less damaging to the national priorities in environmental science.

Signed

Ecological Experts:

Sir David Attenborough OM, FRS
Dr Stephen Baillie
Professor Tim Birkhead FRS
Professor Steve Buckland
Professor John Croxall CBE, FRS
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Dr J.P.Dempster, former director of CEH (ITE)
Professor Charles Gimingham OBE, FRSE
Professor Alan Gray OBE
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Sir Martin Holdgate CB
Sir Fred Holliday CBE, FRSE
Dr David Jenkins FRSE
Professor Charles Krebs
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Sir David Smith FRS, FRSE
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Professor Michael Usher FRSE
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Organisations:

Tony Juniper, Friends of the Earth
Dr Mark Avery, RSPB
Stephanie Hilborne, The Wildlife Trusts
Stephen Tindale, Greenpeace
Robert Napier, WWF
Fiona Reynolds, National Trust
Shonaig Macpherson CBE FRSE, National Trust for Scotland
Amy Coyte, Bat Conservation
Mrs Sam Fanshawe Marine Conservation Society
Dr Tony Gent, The Herpetological conservation Trust
Jeremy Greenwood , British Trust for Ornithology
Dr Jayne Manley, Plantlife
Matt Shardlow MPhil, Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust

Martin Spray, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Martin Warren, Butterfly Conservation