

*An alien lizard invasion that must be stopped or the more the merrier?
That's a matter of opinion...*

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Our personal perception of the natural world is shaped by many subjective influences. In turn, these perceptions can form the foundation for deeply held beliefs and opinion about what the natural world means to us and how we feel society should interact with nature. The spread of invasive non-native species by humans – one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss worldwide, is a topic which is beset by uncertainty about which species might become a problem and how best to manage non-native species. There is also highly varied and subjective understanding of emotive terms such as 'non-native', 'alien', 'exotic', 'pest', 'invasive species', and 'ecological impact'. As such, people's feelings towards non-native species are expected to be based on subjective influences rather than hard evidence. This study uses a technique called Q-methodology (an interactive questionnaire of sorts) to explore social perceptions towards the presence of wall lizards (*Podarcis muralis*), a characterful lizard introduced to the UK from continental Europe. We explore the ways in which different stakeholder groups (i.e., public, land managers, conservationists) might agree and differ in their views and how subjective influences might drive opinion between groups. Specifically, we ask: How and why do stakeholders share/differ in their opinions towards the lizard introduction? What does the discourse in this case study tell us about perceptions and attitudes towards management of introduced species more generally?

Three clearly defined viewpoints emerge from the study reflecting both differences and commonalities in stakeholder opinion towards the species' introduction. Whereas two of the three viewpoints are defined from each other solely by differences in levels of ecological knowledge and concerns over impact uncertainty, the third group holds very different opinions that appear to be reflective of pronounced variation between the groups deeper beliefs, perceptions and values about 'naturalness

and balance', and overall relationship with nature. Such insight will be useful in identifying discordant attitudes and areas of potential contention between stakeholders that may arise in consideration of management decisions regarding non-native species more widely. In addition, the analysis will also help illustrate how people reason their subjective views regarding complex ecological concepts in general.



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