

1 **In Defense of Invaders**

2 Everybody loves to hate invasive species. Americans battle **widespread** plants such as kudzu, a Japanese vine;
3 Europeans **accuse** the American grey squirrel of spreading disease and damaging forests. At present a scientific
4 **committee** is already working on Europe's first invasive-species blacklist. Cross-border trade in 37 species will
5 be banned (the list is bound to grow longer as **conservationists** add more troublemakers). Where it is not
6 already too late to wipe out these alien invaders, EU member states will be **required** to do so.

7 Europeans are restrained in comparison with other countries. The international list of **invasive** species – defined
8 as those that were **introduced** by humans to new places, and then **multiplied** – runs to over 4,000. In Australia
9 and New Zealand hot war is waged against introduced creatures like cane toads and rats. In 2013 New Zealand
10 used helicopters to drop a poison known as 1080 on 448,000 hectares of land – an area about the size of
11 Yosemite and Sequoia national parks put together. Just four public **objections** were **recorded**.

12 Some things that are uncontroversial are nonetheless wrong. With a few important exceptions, campaigns to
13 **eradicate** invasive species are an utter waste of money and **effort** – for reasons that are **partly** practical and
14 partly philosophical.

15 Let's start with the practical arguments. Most invasive species are neither terribly successful nor very harmful.
16 Britons think themselves under attack from foreign plants like Japanese knotweed, *Rhododendron ponticum* and
17 Himalayan balsam. In fact Britain's invasive plants are not widespread, not spreading especially quickly, and
18 often less of a nuisance than **vigorous** natives such as bracken. The **arrival** of new species almost always
19 increases biological **diversity** in a region; in many cases, a flood of newcomers drives no native species to
20 **extinction**. One reason is that invaders **tend to** colonise disturbed habitats like **polluted** lakes and
21 post-industrial wasteland, where little else lives. They are nature's opportunists.

22 New arrivals often **turn out** to be useful, even lovely. Americans worry about the **decline** of a **vital**
23 crop-pollinator known as the American honey bee. *Apis mellifera* is actually an invader from the Old World:
24 having travelled from Africa to Europe, it was brought to America by colonists and went wild. Invasive plants
25 **provide** food and nests for **vulnerable** natives; invasive animals can help **native** species by killing their
26 predators, as the poisonous cane toad has done in Australia.

27 Another practical objection to the war on invasive species is that they are extremely hard to eradicate. New
28 Zealand will not **get rid of** its rats any more than Britain could **wipe out** its grey squirrels. Culls tend to have
29 a **short-term** effect at best. It is, however, sometimes possible to get rid of troublesome immigrants on tiny
30 oceanic islands. Because the **chances** of success are higher, and because **remote** islands often contain rare
31 species, efforts there are more **worthwhile**.

32 The philosophical **rationale** for waging war on the invaders is also **misleading**. Eradication campaigns tend to
33 **claim** that it is possible to restore balance to nature—to return woods and lakes to the idyll that existed before
34 human **interference**. That is misguided. Nature is a perpetual riot, with species **constantly** arising, retreating
35 and hybridising. Humans have only **accelerated** these processes. Going back to ancient habitats is becoming
36 impossible in any case, because of man-made climate change. Taking on the invaders is a useless gesture,
37 not a means to an achievable end.

38 A rational **attitude** to invaders need not mean passivity. A few foreign species are truly **damaging** and should
39 be fought: the Nile perch has helped drive many species of fish to extinction in Lake Victoria. It makes sense to
40 keep out pathogens, especially those that destroy whole native tree species, and to stop known agricultural pests
41 from growing stronger. **Putting up** fences around wildlife sanctuaries to create open-air ecological museums
42 is fine, too. Finally, it is a good idea for European gardeners to destroy Japanese knotweed, just as they deal
43 with native problems like bindweed and ground elder. You can garden in a garden. You cannot garden nature.