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Wolves and wildcats: bring ‘em on The solution to British wimpishness: reintroduce dangerous beasts to our countryside

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Tremendous news that the Aspinnall Foundation is planning to release more wildcats into Scotland, where at the moment only 400 are thought to survive. Even better that within five years the feisty felid may also be making a comeback in England and Wales, where it has not been seen since the 18th century. Exciting to think that instead of occasionally being chased by a Jack Russell on my way to work, a 15lb ball of muscle could jump out of a tree straight on my head.

The wildcat story came hot on the heels, or paws, or hooves, of another welcome development, the reintroduction in December of elk to Sutherland after 3,000 years. Hercules and Hulda are expected to mate within two years (sooner probably, given that they're Swedish), by which time they should be 8ft tall and weigh three quarters of a tonne. So although they may look absurd and are avowedly vegetarian, you'd still give them a wide berth if you wandered across their eat-zone on a boggy Caledonian hillside.

Meanwhile, millionaire Paul “the Wolfman” Lister, owner of 23,000 acres in Sutherland, wants, as his name suggests, to bring wolves back to these shores 265 years after the last one was shot. Brilliant. We need wolves and lynx and beavers and, most of all, we need bears. Lots of bears. Great big bears with sore heads.

So where's this leading? Well, in his influential book, *Paradise and Power*, Robert Kagan argued that Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus, his point being that Americans are more willing to throw their weight around because they've got plenty to throw, whereas Old World wussiness is born out of weakness. This was a good (if rather obvious) theory as far as it went, but Kagan overlooked an even more straightforward explanation for American assertiveness: zoologically the United States is much, much closer than the European Union, its western half anyway, to Nature, red in tooth and claw.

Go 30 miles from the centre of any city in America and you'll be close to something capable of either eating, mauling, poisoning, terrifying or, at the very least, impressing you. Man may still be top of the food chain, but he has to exercise strength, cunning and firepower to stay there. Go 30 miles from any city in Western Europe and the biggest fauna you'll come across is a bunny rabbit spread across a road.

Deep in our collective unconscious, we know this state of affairs isn't right. So we nurture myths about monsters in lochs and mysterious beasts on moors and we thrill to stories of rogue pigs, escaped leopards and sharks that might be, but never are, great whites off the coast of Cornwall, and we lionise naturalists such as Ray Mears, David Attenborough, Bear Grylls and, er, Bill Oddie. As a species we know we need competition, and now that we're finally getting some again after many centuries, a genuinely kick-ass foreign policy can't be far behind.