

Wildlife crime in 2022

A report on the scale of wildlife
crime in England and Wales





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Executive summary

- In 2022, Link estimates that there were around 4,457 reported wildlife crime incidents in England and Wales, compared to 4,885 in 2021. The actual figures are likely to be significantly higher due to reporting and data challenges inherent in assembling non-official estimates.
- In addition to stubbornly high levels of wildlife crime, it is concerning to note a fall in convictions for wildlife crime this year, from 900 in 2021 to 526 in 2022. Reported incidents wildlife crime in 2021 were at record highs, but this has not fed through into successful convictions.
- People who hurt wildlife are getting away with it, with too many left unhindered and able to cause further unnecessary animal suffering. These crimes also set back nature's recovery and often lead to crimes against people.
- The foundation for effective action to reduce crime levels would be to make key wildlife crimes notifiable, allowing patterns of criminality to be better understood. This increased understanding will inform effective policing and enable more effective prosecutions.
- The inadequacy of current wildlife crime data collection is illustrated by the provenance of the numbers in this report. In the absence of official recording, this report relies on direct reports from members of the public to nature groups, and subsequent engagement between nature groups, police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service.
- The reliance on charities and eNGOs to collect national figures on a damaging form of criminality represents sustained policy failure, with escalating consequences for wildlife and people.

Introduction to the data

This is the seventh annual wildlife crime report produced by Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) and Wales Environment Link members.¹ It provides an outline of wildlife crime in England and Wales in the 2022 calendar year.

The report is drawn from data collected by charities and eNGOs working to tackle wildlife crime. The data includes reports of suspected offences collected by charities and eNGOs and the outcomes of any subsequent prosecutions.

In the absence of official data, this report attempts to fill the gap to provide a national level overview of wildlife crime in 2022. Due to the nature of the data, it should be viewed as an indication of levels of crimes being committed, not a comprehensive record.

The data is presented in chapters covering the key groups of wild animals affected by wildlife crime. The report concludes with recommendations for policies that would reduce wildlife crime, principally better official recording.

As recommended throughout, we need official recording of wildlife crime in England and Wales to replace these estimates. The UK Government should follow the precedent of the Scottish Government who publish an annual wildlife crime report, including data on recorded wildlife crimes, related court proceedings and penalties, with additional information on priority crime areas.²

The authors of the report would like to express their thanks to the National Wildlife Crime Unit, Border Force, rural and wildlife crime teams across English and Welsh police forces and wildlife crime specialists within the Crown Prosecution Service. The hard work of those at the frontline of wildlife crime is very much appreciated by charities, eNGOs, and the general public.

The legislative framework

The bedrock of wildlife crime legislation in England and Wales is the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, which protects key species from injuring, killing and disturbance. Many of the offences described below are prosecuted under this Act. Further protections are provided for specific species and circumstances by other legislation, including the Hunting Act 2004 and the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) regulations.



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Sett interference is the most common form of reported badger crime, accounting for well over half of incidents.

Badgers

Chapter provided by Badger Trust

Despite their mostly secretive nature, badgers have undergone extensive persecution throughout history. Crimes against badgers have been a UK Wildlife Crime Priority since 2009, due to the scale of persecution.

Extent of crime

The National Wildlife Crime Unit carries out analytical work based on the incident data submitted to it by the Badger Trust, RSPCA and LACS. The UK Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group records incidents of badger persecution in England and Wales. As detailed in **Table 1a**, overall, a total of 600 incidents across England and Wales were reported to Badger Trust, RSPCA, League Against Cruel Sports and the Police in 2022, a -8.3% reduction in reports from 2021 (654 instances).

Analysis of the extent of crime

Dead badgers account for >50% of the 'Other' category in **Table 1a**. Many dead badgers found around roads can be found with injuries not typical of a traffic accident, suggesting criminal activity. A common modus operandi is to leave dead badgers killed by other means (baiting, fighting, digging, lamping, shooting etc.) at the side of the road to appear as if killed in a collision. Often multiple bodies are found at the same roadside location.

Sett interference is the most common form of reported badger crime, accounting for well over half (60%) of incidents. **Table 1b** breaks down the types of sett interference reports received. The top three types of sett interference reported are related to hunting with dogs (15.3% of total), blocking (14.6%. this is also often associated with hunting activity) and development (10.3% of total).

Development related sett interference in urbanised areas is likely due to increased interactions between badgers and people from land-use overlap. Development projects are complex and involve many different agencies and companies. Information about badgers can be either missed, ignored or purposefully disregarded, leading to habitat disturbance and sett damage or destruction.

Table 1a: Reports of Badger Crime

| Type of incident | Number of reports 2022 | Number of reports 2021 | % change 2021 – 2022 |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Sett interference | 349 | 370 | -5.7 |
| Baiting | 81 | 66 | +22.7 |
| Poisoning | 31 | 23 | +34.8 |
| Traps/Snares | 20 | 22 | -9.1 |
| Shooting | 17 | 24 | -29.2 |
| Hunting with dogs | 16 | 16 | 0 |
| Other | 86 | 133 | -35.3 |
| Overall | 600 | 654 | -8.3 |

Table 1b: Breakdown of sett interference reports

| Primary category | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | % change 2021 – 2022 |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------------|
| Hunt related | 106 | 53 | 115 | +117 |
| Blocking | 85 | 96 | 60 | -37.5 |
| Development | 112 | 70 | 67 | -4.3 |
| Damage/destroy | 59 | 77 | 60 | -22 |
| Sett dug | 38 | 46 | 25 | -45.6 |
| Agricultural | 36 | 24 | 17 | -29.1 |
| Forestry | 5 | 4 | 5 | +25 |
| Total | 441 | 370 | 349 | -5.7 |

Recommendations

In addition to the central report recommendation of making crimes against badgers notifiable, badger crime could be further reduced by:

- Measures to crackdown on people who use social media to organise and amplify badger persecution. Social media is used by a certain cohort of offenders who persecute badgers. They share images, videos and comments with likeminded people. There has been a large surge in the use of social media to organise badger baiting and lamping.
- More training for enforcement agencies, including a digital training based around the badger crime guidance developed by Badger Trust³ and the Naturewatch Foundation.
- Consideration of the role that hunt related activity has on badger crime, and ways this could be tackled.
- Consideration of further investigation, including forensic analysis, for badgers found in suspicious circumstances at the roadside, to determine if criminal behaviour played a role in their deaths.
- Routinely seizing dogs and vehicles when badger baiting or fighting is suspected. This is an effective disruption technique to reduce future criminality. This will also help improve the welfare of the dogs involved; dogs used in badger baiting incidents commonly incur serious injuries which can go untreated.

*The Wildlife Crime report for 2021 gave 600 badger incidents for 2021. This has subsequently been revised.



Bats

Chapter provided by Bat Conservation Trust

Extent of crime

Annual bat police incident figures are collated by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), as a Non-Government Organisation the Bat Conservation Trust relies on the police service to notify them of new cases so that they can record incidents on their case management system.

This incident data is then analysed by the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) on behalf of the Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group (PDG). More than ten years' worth of bat incident data is available which allows for the analysis and comparison of trends over time.

In 2022, there were 84 incidents recorded by BCT, across England, Wales and Scotland. This figure of 84 incidents is notable because it is much lower than previous years. There were three convictions for crimes against bats in 2022, a drop from five convictions in 2021.

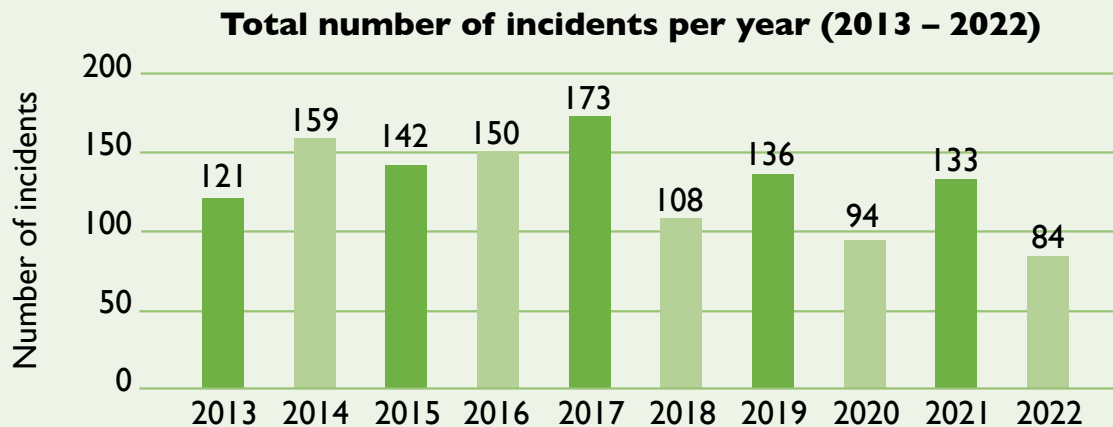
19 police forces from the 43 forces in England and Wales responded to the data request; an additional 80 incidents were identified, giving a combined total of **164 incidents for 2022**, across England and Wales. It is likely that the true incident figure is higher, as there will have been incidents in the areas covered by the 24 police forces who did not respond to the data request.

Analysis of extent of crime

The fact that at least 80 incidents escaped the BCT data set illustrates the challenges of relying on charities to collate wildlife crime information.

BCT and the Bat Crime PDG will be looking to develop interim solutions on the way incident data is captured for statistical analysis, until a Home Office decision is made on making wildlife crime recordable and notifiable. This is needed to secure a more accurate picture, allowing for targeted, intelligence-led responses against bat crime offences.

Graph I: Reports of bat crime received by Bat Conservation Trust (England, Wales & Scotland)



*The Wildlife Crime report for 2021 gave 136 incidents for 2021. This has subsequently been revised down to 133, as three incidents did not meet the new stricter guidelines since adopted by BCT.

Case study: Property developers fined for destroying bat roosts in Monmouthshire

PCI 154 Mark Powell, a police officer seconded to Natural Resources Wales successfully investigated a housing development company, who had carried out a renovation of a former primary school to create two new houses.

However, whilst doing so they failed to implement the conditions of a European Protected Species Licence issued by Natural Resources Wales in respect of bats known to be present on the site.

Pleading guilty on behalf of the parent construction company, they were fined more than £7,400. The officer stated, *“Their fines should stand as a warning to other developers in Wales who carry out work without first ensuring that the agreed licence conditions are followed and that all works support and protect all endangered species.”*

The primary motivation for such offending is the prospect of time and money savings from non-compliance with the law. Developers cannot be allowed to put additional profits before the conservation of protected species.

The police services, and the Crown Prosecution Service are doing good work tackling bat crime, but only when time, training and resources allow. Making such incidents recordable will streamline processes, saving the police money and time when upholding the laws protecting wildlife species.

Concerns were expressed in 2023 by BCT that their data did not accurately reflect the true national picture on bat related police incidents. This resulted in the NWCUC asking all police constabularies to complete a return with their incident data for the year 2022.



Fisheries crime takes many forms – from rod fishing in rivers and lakes without a licence, to illegally netting salmon or carp for commercial gain.

Fisheries

Chapter provided by Institute of Fisheries Management, with contribution from the Angling Trust

Fisheries crime takes many forms – from rod fishing in rivers and lakes without a licence, to netting salmon from estuaries and rivers or carp from private fisheries for commercial gain, to the trafficking of baby eels (elvers) to Asia.

Regulatory agencies

There are a range of enforcement agencies responsible for fisheries crime in England and Wales. The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales are principally responsible for freshwaters. For sea fisheries, the ten regional Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) are responsible for estuaries and the coast up to 6 miles out. Beyond that, within UK waters, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is responsible.

Some fisheries crime is reported directly to the police. Most of that is passed on to the relevant agencies but some, for example theft of large carp from private fishing lakes, might be recorded separately and are unreported here.

Extent of crime

Figures have been provided by the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, the Association of IFCAs and the Angling Trust.

Analysis of the extent of crime

Table 3a shows a marked decline in the number of defendants being convicted, with the number of prosecutions falling by 80% over five years. This might to some degree be explained by the Covid pandemic, however the number of incidents reported didn't decline to the same degree. So, this may be more a result of resourcing or willingness to prosecute by the enforcement agencies. If enforcement action isn't taken then the deterrent effect is likely to be lost, leading to greater fisheries crime, and loss of income to the EA and NRW from rod licensing.

Table 2a – Number of reports and convictions of fisheries crime
Note: 2016 – 2019, England only. 2020 and 2022 England and Wales

| No. incidents reported | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Type | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
| Rod and line | 3415 | 3616 | 2245 | 2680 | 3673 | 2727 | 2376 |
| Salmon, sea trout and trout poaching | 24 | 72 | 21 | 26 | 10 | 75 | 85 |
| Eel and elver fishing or export | 2 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Theft Act (Stealing of fish from private waters) | 10 | 2 | 17 | 7 | 2 | 25 | 8 |
| Sea Fisheries – nets, boats and shellfish | 364 | 475 | 398 | 378 | 477 | 508 | 499 |
| Total | 3815 | 4169 | 2681 | 3095 | 4163 | 3337 | 2972 |

| No. defendants convicted | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Type | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
| Rod and line | 2184 | 2569 | 1521 | 1934 | 604 | 805 | 424 |
| Salmon, sea trout and trout poaching | 7 | 13 | 6 | 10 | 0 | 9 | 34 |
| Eel and elver fishing or export | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Theft Act (Stealing of fish from private waters) | 5 | 2 | 16 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Sea Fisheries – nets, boats and shellfish | 65 | 62 | 83 | 86 | 45 | 30 | 36 |
| Total | 2262 | 2648 | 1626 | 2037 | 649 | 846 | 497 |



| IFCA Districts | Vessels (metres) |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Northumberland | 16m+5.3m |
| 2 North Western | 21m+7.5m 7m 6.3m 5m |
| 3 North Eastern | 26m+4m |
| 4 Eastern | 18m+6.5m 11.5m 11.5m |
| 5 Kent and Essex | 17m+5.4m 7.8m 12m |
| 6 Sussex | 18m+5.4m 8m |
| 7 Southern | 7.8m 7.8m 5.8m |
| 8 Devon and Severn | 7.8m 6.4m |
| 9 Cornwall | 27m+6.5m 10.8m 6.8m |
| 10 Isles of Scilly | 7.8m |



Drone to assist enforcement surveillance



Joint Voluntary Bailiff Service, Environment Agency and policy patrol

Case studies:

Use of drones to combat fisheries crime at sea

The ten regional Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) in England are responsible for managing sea fisheries around the coast and in estuaries up to 6 nautical miles out (see map above). The IFCAs operate a fleet of inshore patrol vessels and in recent years the use of drones has augmented the surface fleet's capacity.

Drones can be used in dynamic environments, as a fast response to monitor, record and evidence illegal activity that may not otherwise be seen, as well as being used for routine observations and checks. The cameras fitted to drones feature: laser rangefinder, thermal imaging, zoom and wide angle functions, which, in addition to GPS technology, will assist the detection and evidencing of offences. The drones will additionally be used to observe and monitor Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other areas of environmental concern.

The Fisheries Enforcement Support Service

The Fisheries Enforcement Support Service (FESS) is funded by the Environment Agency from freshwater coarse and non-migratory trout fishing licence fees in England. This is a formal partnership, delivered under contract, between the EA and the Angling Trust, the sport's governing body. The FESS is a team of mainly retired police officers working to support the Environment Agency to combat fisheries crimes.

The FESS provides training to the police and other partners, and coordinates Operations TRAVERSE and LEVIATHAN – multi-agency initiatives targeting illegal freshwater fishing and fish theft. The FESS's National Intelligence Manager processes the incoming information, sharing logs with partners as appropriate.

The FESS also runs Fisheries Enforcement Workshops, providing free training for the angling community, as well as Building Bridges Project, which engages with migrant communities to provide education about UK fisheries laws. The Angling Trust runs the Voluntary Bailiff Service, in partnership with the Environment Agency. These volunteers carry out patrols in fishing locations to check for any signs of criminal activity.



The number of convictions for offences under the Hunting Act 2004 fell by 50% between 2021 and 2022.

Hunting

Chapter provided by the League Against Cruel Sports

Extent of crime

The below data has been gathered by the League Against Cruel Sports from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) 'Outcomes By Offence Data' Tool.⁴

The overall number of prosecutions and convictions under the Hunting Act 2004 returned to levels seen in recent years, after a spike in 2021 attributed to cases linked to Operation Galileo and other police activities designed to reduce the impact of hare coursing. At least a third of prosecutions in 2022 are understood to relate to registered fox, deer⁵ and hare hunts.

Overall, the conviction rate fell from 53% to 40% between 2021 and 2022. Prosecutions of hunts are likely to be the tip of the iceberg of the problem of continued illegal hunting with dogs. The League Against Cruel Sports recently compiled a report of 526 eyewitness reports of hunts being involved in suspected illegal fox hunting in England and Wales during the 2022/23 season, to include 400 cases involving a hunt being seen chasing a fox. These figures are drawn from reports to the League's Animal Crimewatch service and the reports of hunt monitors between the beginning of the cub hunting season in August 2022 and the end of the main fox hunting season in April 2023.

Analysis of the extent of crime

While a relatively high volume of cases taken forward during the year was encouraging, with some notable convictions secured, outcomes in many cases continued to underline the challenges in prosecution posed by the legislation as well as police and CPS failings.

An illegal hunting prosecution against members of the Vale of White Horse Hunt, also involving charges of knowingly permitting land to be used for hunting, was dismissed at court due to procedural and administrative failures by the prosecution. Basic administrative failings also resulted in the dropping of a high-profile prosecution charging the Roal Artillery Hunt with hunting on Ministry of Defence land.

In 2023, a huntsman from the Fernie Hunt was cleared of illegal hunting after magistrates determined that while a fox had been pursued, intention to do so could not be established, underlining the current evidential challenges posed by the wording of the existing legislation.

Table 3a: Proceedings and convictions under the Hunting Act, 2010 – 2022

| | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
|--------------------------|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Proceeded against | 49 | 72 | 84 | 110 | 64 | 92 | 57 | 52 | 47 | 49 | 25 | 80 | 52 |
| Convicted | 36 | 56 | 48 | 56 | 35 | 45 | 31 | 22 | 21 | 17 | 17 | 42 | 21 |

Similarly, charges against a huntsman from the Puckeridge Hunt were found not proven as a result of the burden of proof required.

Successful convictions during 2022 included those of members of the Quorn Hunt and South Shropshire Hunt, leading to fines of £656 and £607 respectively. While welcome, it underlines the lack of availability of custodial sentences under the Hunting Act and the relatively low level of penalties issued, especially compared to the income required to take part in hunting activities.

The average fine for breaches of the Hunting Act is £406 (over the past five years). The average individual annual subscription for joining a Hunt stands at £2,250.⁶

A particularly notable case in 2023 was that of members of the Avon Vale Hunt, filmed digging up a fox and throwing it to a pack of hounds. The footage, aired on national television, drew significant attention to the issue of continued illegal hunting. It resulted in the conviction of two men, fined £833 and £384 for illegal hunting offences, in addition to one receiving an 18-month community order and 200 hours of unpaid work for causing unnecessary suffering contrary to the Animal Welfare Act.

A positive development to watch is the increasing use of Community Protection Notices (CPNs) to tackle the impact of hunts on wildlife and local communities. The conditions of such legally binding notices could limit the ability of individual hunts to target wildlife and cause disruption such as interference with road traffic. It will be interesting to see how their use develops and works in practice.

The use of “trail hunting”, a practice where hounds are said to follow a pre-laid trail of scent, continues to be of significant concern. A considerable weight of evidence from monitors across England and Wales suggest that hunting of foxes, hare and red deer continues in some areas in spite of the law, under the cover of trail hunting. Such is the strength of feeling on the loophole in the Hunting Act that 30 plus charities have formed a coalition to call on the Government and national parks to tackle hunting with dogs effectively.⁷



© National Trust Images / Dougie Holden

The Scottish Government passed the Hunting With Dogs (Scotland) Act in January 2023 to close loopholes in the law exploited by Scottish hunts.

A significant development in 2023 was the acknowledgement by Chief Superintendent Matt Longman, National Police Chiefs' Council lead on foxhunting crime, that “trail hunting has been used as a smokescreen for continuing illegal hunting”. Noting that the “*Hunting Act is not working effectively and illegal hunting is still common practice*”, he described the legislation as a “leaky sieve” and highlighted that “(t)he simplest reason for the lack of prosecution is that the law needs revisiting”.⁸

It therefore remains disappointing that the Government has still not acted on the recommendation of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime report to review exemptions in the Hunting Act.⁹

In stark contrast and a positive development elsewhere in the UK, the Scottish Government passed the Hunting With Dogs (Scotland) Act in January 2023 to close loopholes in the law exploited by Scottish hunts.¹⁰ It also bans trail hunting, in recognition of widespread concern that it is used in England and Wales as a cover for illegal hunting.



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Illegal Wildlife Trade

Chapter provided by WWF UK and TRAFFIC

International trade in wildlife is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The UK implements CITES through the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) regulations. Wildlife trafficking offences are driven by demand for wildlife products and specimens. Wildlife products, such as wild plants, traditional medicine products and ornaments made from wildlife parts such as ivory; as well as live wild animals for pets and even for food are desired by some individuals.

Wildlife trafficking continues to be stimulated by a largely unregulated market online, easily accessible through social media. An array of platforms facilitate trade, often with illegal trade passing as legal and advertisements for illegal wildlife products easily found. A Wildlife Justice Commission report published in October 2023 showed strong links between illegal wildlife trade and other forms of organised crime.

Extent of crime

Traffic and WWF UK monitor and collate CITES prosecution cases – they are only aware of 3 COTES prosecution cases in 2022, which is a drop of one, compared to 2021 and 2020.

Border Force seizure records show a marked increase in total seizures in 2022 in comparison to 2020 (from 438 to 715), which might reflect changes linked to the Covid pandemic and a resumption of travel and trade.

A lack of available data/records continues to constrain our understanding of the scale, scope, and character of illegal wildlife trade in the UK. This impedes the ability of the government and national agencies to direct resources to effectively address IWT, measure impact and track trends. Current methods to monitor, record and quantify confirmed crimes are inadequate and need to be addressed.

Table 4a: Number of known COTES prosecutions in the UK from 2012 – 2022

| 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 15 | 17 | 14 | 7 | 15 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

Table 4b: Border Force summary seizure records from 2022

| | Quarter 1 | Quarter 2 | Quarter 3 | Quarter 4 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Caviar and Caviar extract | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Live Coral and derivatives | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Ivory and ivory items | 23 | 54 | 10 | 56 |
| Live animals and birds | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Live plants | 0 | 3 | 4 | 16 |
| Parts or derivatives of animals and birds | 62 | 135 | 36 | 97 |
| Parts or derivatives of plants | 10 | 17 | 10 | 20 |
| Timber or wood products | 44 | 11 | 11 | 4 |
| TCM (parts or derivatives of endangered species) | 30 | 16 | 17 | 14 |
| Total seizures | 180 | 240 | 107 | 222 |

Case study of note: Traditional medicinal practitioner

In September of 2022 a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner admitted to being involved in the illegal trade of endangered wildlife and was sentenced at Northampton Crown Court to six months in prison – suspended for 21 months – and ordered to complete 120 hours of unpaid work. Lei Zheng, of Corby, was charged with seven counts of selling or keeping endangered species for sale.¹¹

This followed a joint investigation between the Rural Crime Team of Northamptonshire Police and the NWCUC launched in July 2018. Zheng was running a substantial online business which included the selling of Chinese medicines. During searches at his home and business premises, officers recovered medicines which contained species of plants and animals listed under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), which had been imported illegally. Among the products recovered were musk, seahorses, four species of plants and scales from pangolins, one of the most heavily trafficked animals in the world and highly threatened.

The case highlights the potential linkages between traditional medicinal uses and trade in endangered species and the role that online platforms play in facilitating such illegality. As the case was heard in a Crown court, the maximum sentence was 5 years and/or an unlimited fine. Despite this, the sentencing for this case followed a pattern commonly seen for CITES cases in which even following successful prosecutions, fines and sentences are typically in the lower end of the range available.

Good news: Ivory ban

In 2018 Parliament passed the Ivory Act, prohibiting dealing within the UK of items made from elephant ivory (with certain exemptions). This Act enhances existing protections under COTES and empowers police and Border forces to do more to stop the passage of ivory goods in the UK. After significant delay, the Act came into force in 2022, to good effect.¹²

Recommendations

The illegal wildlife trade could be better tackled in England and Wales by:

- Research to understand why the rate of COTES prosecutions has declined over recent years.
- Training for call handlers and crime recorders so that COTES offences are correctly recorded.
- The passage of regulations following the Online Safety Act 2023 to make it harder for social media platforms to function as online markets for illegal wildlife trade. Bustling markets for illegal wildlife products and exotic pets from threatened species are to be found on the world's largest social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and WeChat, all constituting COTES offences. The powers the Online Safety Act gives to the UK Government could be used to crack down on this online commerce in illegal goods.¹³



There has been a sharp rise in the number of people participating in outdoor activities near the coast, causing increased disturbances to marine mammals.

Marine mammals

Chapter provided by Whale and Dolphin Conservation, with contribution from the Seal Research Trust

Extent of crime

The primary long-term dataset of suitably recorded data on crime affecting marine mammals is from Cornwall. This data is collected by Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group & Seal Research Trust.

Data on cases of disturbance of marine mammals and other wildlife is now being recorded in various locations around the UK, including in Wales within Cardigan Bay SAC¹³, in Yorkshire by Humber Nature Partnership, in Tyne and Wear by the St Mary's Island Wildlife and Conservation Society and around the coast of Scotland by Whale and Dolphin Conservation Shorewatch programme.¹⁴ In future reports, it may be possible to present data here from additional coastal areas alongside Cornwall.

To illustrate the scale of reports outside of Cornwall, at St Mary's Island 31 incidents of seal disturbance were recorded by volunteer observers and filed with the Northumbria Police in 2022. 16 of these were due to kayaks/SUPs, only 2 of the 31 incidents were followed up by the Police.¹⁵ Marine police officers now have a regular presence on the reserve as part of Operation Seabird.

Analysis of the extent of crime

In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of people participating in outdoor activities on or near the coast including walking, paddleboarding, kayaking and jet skiing, as well as wildlife tours and wild swimming.

Due to these activities putting people in close proximity of marine mammals, there has also been a corresponding increase in instances of marine wildlife disturbance which can lead to harm caused when animals need to adapt their behaviour in response to the disturbance caused, such as animals abandoning favoured feeding or resting areas, and can even result in deaths, such as when young animals become separated from their mothers.

Table 5a: Reported marine mammal disturbance incidents in Cornwall (N/K denotes not known)

| Disturbance incidents | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of incidents recorded | 326 | 193 | 366 | 450 | 508 |
| Number of probable cases of criminal offending | 73 | 90 | 33 | 254 | 287 |
| Number of cases referred to the police | 3 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Number of cases where criminal offending confirmed | N/K | N/K | N/K | N/K | N/K |
| Number of cases and charges prosecuted | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Number of defendants prosecuted | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Number of defendants convicted | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Public reporting of instances of marine wildlife disturbance via calls to 101 remains patchy. It will hopefully improve with better public awareness and police call handler training, and the growing recognition of the issues around marine wildlife disturbance this will bring. Between 2018 and 2022, there were zero people successfully convicted for marine mammal disturbance. It is a continuing challenge to evidence disturbance of marine mammals with appropriate proof (i.e., images/ video) in a way which effectively demonstrates the behaviour of the animal before, during and after the disturbance has occurred. This is especially so as many marine mammals spend a large proportion of their time out of sight below the surface of the water and at distance from land.

Recent highlights

Operation Seabird (#OpSeabird) began as a local initiative in Yorkshire bringing together the resources of coastal partnerships, management schemes and enforcement agencies. In recent years, it has increased in profile and reach, covering much of the country. #OpSeabird is now a police-led operation with coastal forces and joint partners working together across England, Scotland and Wales to reduce the disturbance of marine wildlife. The network of agencies and organisations uses a partnership approach to prevent marine wildlife disturbance, engaging with and educating the public about the sensitivities of the coastline and encouraging respect for coastal wildlife.

In May 2023, Defra's first national Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code launched, providing guidance to the public on how to behave around animals such as seabirds, seals, cetaceans and sharks¹⁶. The code was developed in collaboration with experts from various wildlife organisations and is aimed at those walking along the coast or taking part in water-based activities. Unlike other forms of wildlife crime, marine mammal disturbance is usually inadvertent, as such public education can play an important role in reducing it.



© Cardigan Bay SAC

A rib approaching a group of dolphins, **the skipper repeatedly circled the dolphins and re-approached to try and get close to the animals.**



© SRT

The first sign of disturbance, **seals hauled out on a beach are suddenly awake and alert, looking for the source of disturbance.**



Before...



... After

Passing kayakers disturb resting seals, causing one of the seals to enter the water from its haul-out ledge.



At least 70% of all the raptor persecution incidents confirmed for England and Wales in 2022 were linked to land manage for gamebird shooting.

Birds of prey

Chapter provided by RSPB. See RSPB Birdcrime report 2022, published in November 2023

Extent of crime

In 2022, the RSPB recorded a total of 54 confirmed bird of prey persecution (also referred to as raptor persecution) incidents in England and Wales (**Graph 2**), representing 88% of the total number of incidents across the UK.¹

Bird of Prey persecution is one of the UK Government's seven Wildlife Crime Priorities. These priorities have been assessed as those posing the greatest current threat to the conservation status of a species or those which show the highest volume of crime and therefore require an immediate UK-wide tactical response.

At least 70% of all the raptor persecution incidents confirmed for England and Wales in 2022 were linked to land manage for gamebird shooting. The three counties which had the highest number of confirmed incidents of raptor persecution were all in England. North Yorkshire is recorded as having the highest with 12 confirmed incidents.

There were 54 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution – 46 in England and eight in Wales – including eight incidents of poisoning, 26 of shooting and 10 of trapping (see **Table 6a**). Species persecuted in 2022 were Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and Short-eared Owl.

It is likely that the total actual number of incidents of raptor persecution is far higher than our data suggests, as confirmed cases include only those substantiated by irrefutable evidence gathered from post-mortems, toxicology tests and reliable eye-witness accounts. Although persecution is suspected, satellite-tagged birds which 'suspiciously disappear' are not recorded in the confirmed total.

¹ See RSPB Birdcrime report, published in November 2023.

Graph 2: Number of confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents in England and Wales (2013 – 2022)

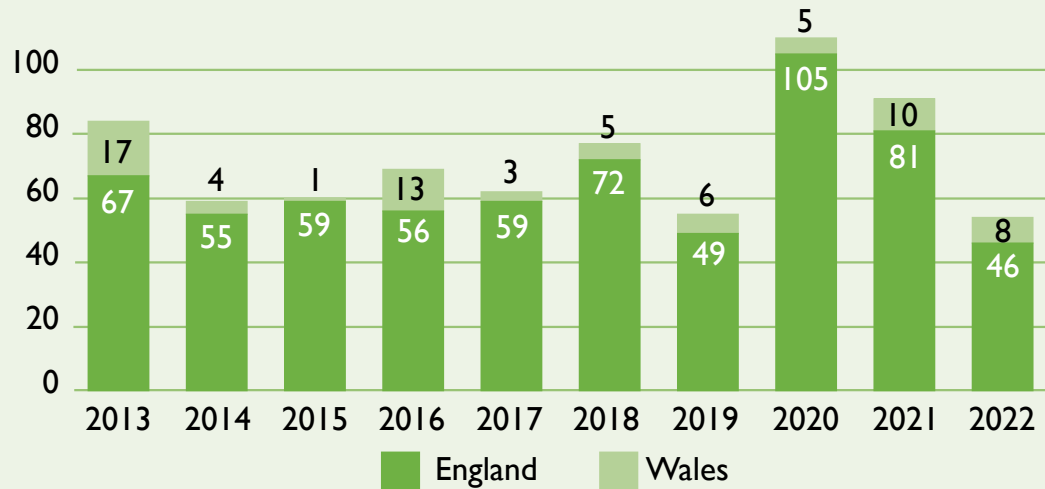


Table 6a: Confirmed 2022 incidents by type

| Bird of prey persecution incident type | Number of confirmed incidents |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Persecution Other | 10 |
| Poisoning | 8 |
| Shooting | 26 |
| Trapping | 10 |
| Total | 54 |

Table 6b: Raptor persecution in England and Wales 2019 – 2022

| Year | Number of incidents recorded/reported | Number of probable cases of criminal offending | Number of cases where criminal offending confirmed |
|------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2019 | 224 | 36 | 55 |
| 2020 | 313 | 57 | 110 |
| 2021 | 311 | 61 | 91 |
| 2022 | 213 | 26 | 54 |



It is likely that the total actual number of incidents of raptor persecution is far higher than our data suggests.

Evidence suggests that the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has indirectly influenced the number of confirmed raptor persecution incidents in 2022 across England and Wales, and the UK. The most detrimental consequence of HPAI on raptor persecution relates to procedural changes introduced to manage risks associated with the disease. The removal of standard testing procedures, including toxicology tests and post-mortems, on birds associated with HPAI has meant that evidence necessary to determine the bird's cause of death cannot be established. This lack of testing has meant that suspected cases of raptor persecution have not been investigated, and potential crimes have subsequently not been recorded. The recently published RSPB Birdcrime report for 2022 discusses this issue in more detail.

Drivers of crime

Evidence gained from the long-term scientific monitoring of raptor populations, supported by intelligence and data from wildlife crime incidents, shows that the majority of raptor persecution cases are linked to land managed for gamebird shooting. As evidenced in previous years, in 2022 at least 70% of all confirmed incidents of raptor persecution in England and Wales were associated with land managed for gamebirds (**Figure 1**). In the lowlands, this includes Pheasant and Grey/Red-legged Partridge and in the uplands, Red Grouse. In these areas birds of prey are often deliberately targeted to reduce potential predation on gamebird stocks and reduce disturbance to these quarry species on shoot days.

There were two persecution-related convictions in the UK in 2022, both in England. Both individuals were actively employed as gamekeepers. This is consistent with historical conviction trends in England and Wales, where 61% of all individuals convicted on raptor persecution-related offences between 1990 and 2022 were gamekeepers and 67% were in employment related to the game industry (**Figure 2**).

Recent disappointments

The illegal targeting and persecution of birds of prey continues

- The UN wildlife crime report (UNODC, 2021)², requested by Defra recommended several changes to licensing regimes across the UK, including the enhancement of powers of licensing authorities to revoke licences for gamebird shoots or amend those licences where abuse occurs with a proven link to estate management. It is disappointing that these recommendations along with other suggested improvements to legislation linked

² www.unodc.org/documents/Wildlife/UK_Toolkit_Report.pdf

Figure 1: The 54 confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents in England and Wales in 2022, split into likely persecution groups

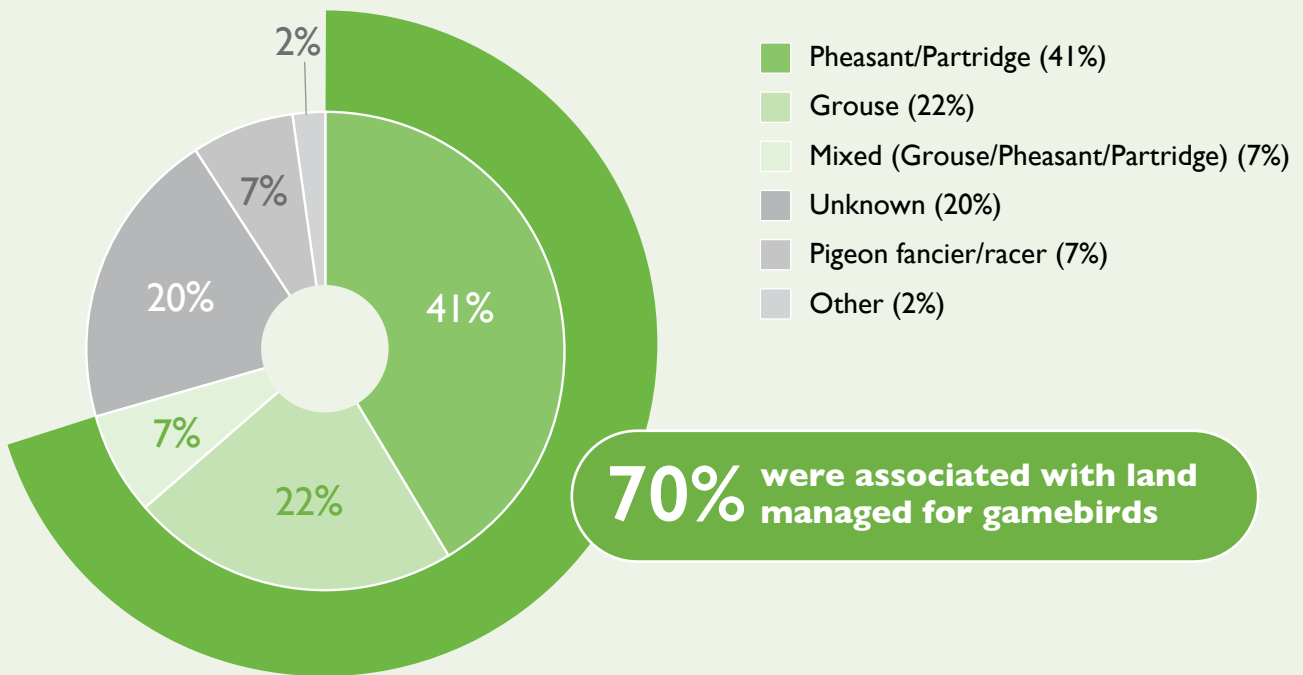
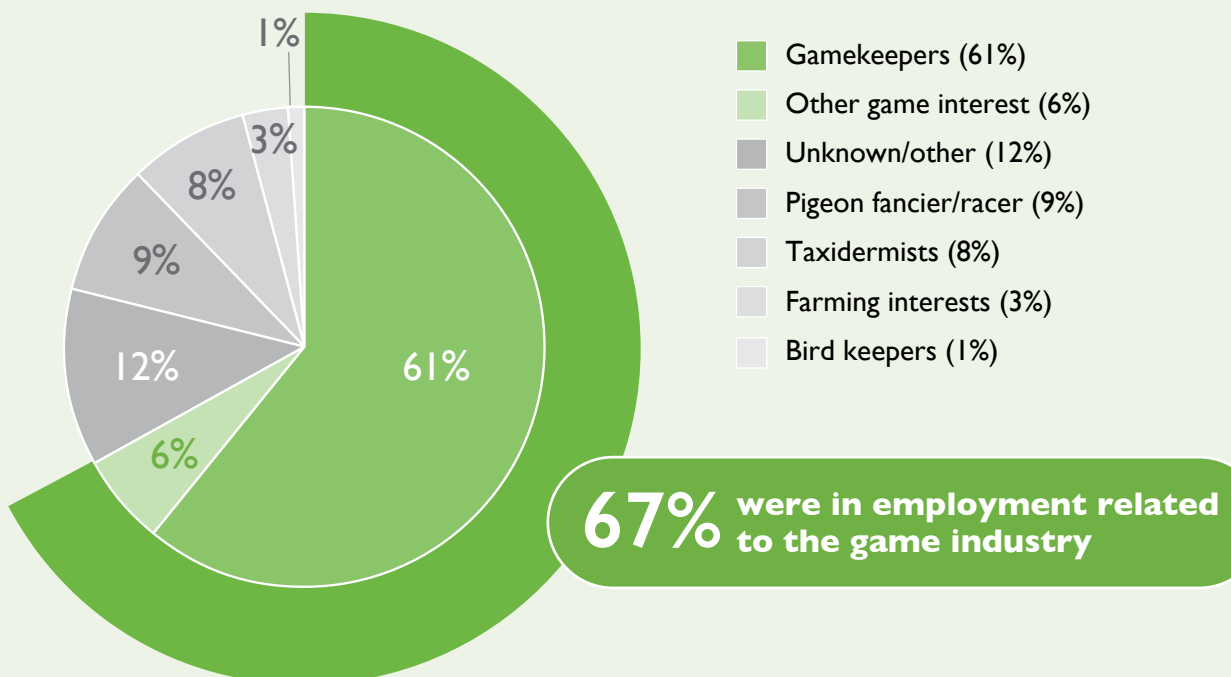
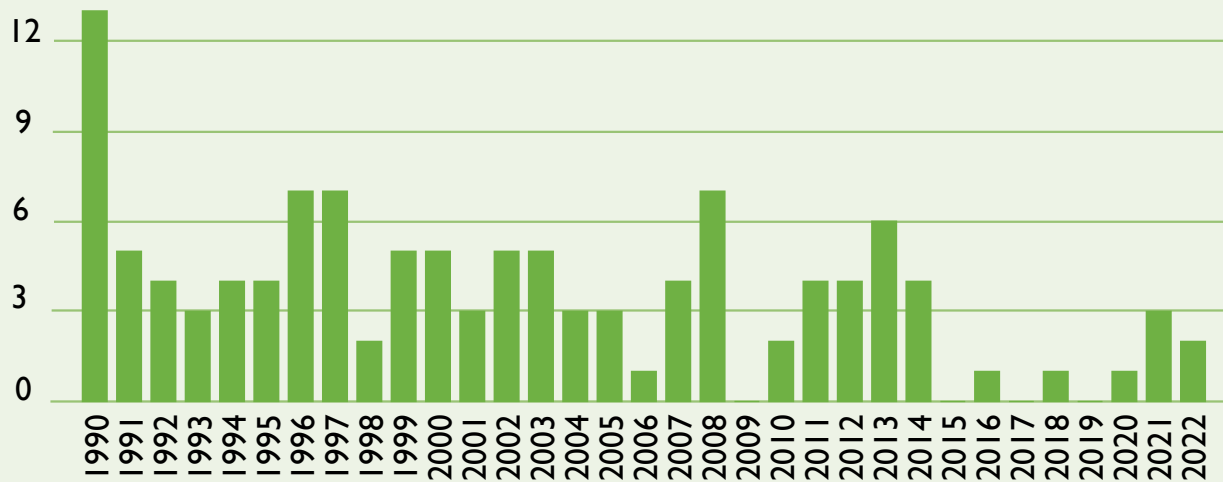


Figure 2: The occupation or interests of the 116 individuals convicted of bird of prey persecution-related offences in England and Wales between 1990 and 2022



Graph 3: Bird of prey persecution-related convictions in England and Wales 1990 – 2022



to the protection of raptors and the prevention of raptor persecution have not yet been adopted in England and Wales, especially when such a bill is progressing well in the Scottish Parliament.

- The significant and concerning numbers of Hen Harriers which were confirmed cases of raptor persecution or highly suspected to have been persecuted in England in 2022, further emphasises that this critical issue is not being effectively challenged on a legislative level or through enforcement. See case study (1) for a more in-depth review of the concerning status of the Hen Harrier in England and Wales.
- In 2022, there were only two convictions linked to raptor persecution, a continuing worrying low trend seen in recent years (**Graph 3**). The number of cases reaching court was also disappointingly low. This was partly due to a lack of proactive enforcement by police forces, as shown in case study (2). In many cases, effective enforcement can depend on the specific police force and often the individual officers directly involved.
- Charges handed out at court for incidents of raptor persecution often fail to reflect the scale of the crime. No person in England or Wales has ever served time in prison for crimes relating to raptor persecution. Without handing down of stricter penalties (which are available) there is no significant deterrent for these crimes.
- Adapted procedural guidelines imposed by Defra, in response to the outbreak of HPAI has meant that suspected cases of raptor persecution have been masked by Avian Flu protocols meaning that some persecution cases have been undetected and therefore not investigated.
- The highly toxic rodenticide Brodifacoum is still being detected in persecuted raptors in concentrations significantly higher than necessary for professional use. The abuse of this pesticide along with other toxic insecticides and rodenticides to target raptors continues to cause concern, killing indiscriminately and harming wildlife and domestic animals.

Recent highlights

The RSPB continues to work tirelessly to end raptor persecution

- 2022 marked the third and final year in which the Welsh Government provided financial support for the role of a RSPB Raptor Officer for Wales. This role led to significant cases being investigated across Wales and enabled the RSPB to gain a better understanding of the scale of raptor persecution in Wales. In early 2023 the RSPB created a permanent Investigations Officer role in Wales, to ensure this vital work continues.
- We welcome the National Wildlife Crime Unit's introduction of a dedicated detective resource, which is essential when dealing with serious cases of raptor persecution.
- The RSPB continues to work closely with police forces and prosecuting agencies, providing support and training when needed. In 2022, the RSPB Investigations Team assisted UK police forces with 23 multi-agency searches as expert partners. Partnership working is essential to tackling raptor persecution, ensuring vital evidence is gathered where possible.

Matters to address

We are calling on the Westminster and the Welsh Government to:

- Introduce grouse moor licensing legislation in England and Wales, as is currently being considered by the Scottish Government. Detection of raptor persecution should result in sanctions including license withdrawal for a defined period as a meaningful deterrent to raptor killing.
- Ensure appropriate sentencing is handed down in proportion to the conservation significance of crimes committed in connection to raptor persecution. Magistrates must use the full weight of their powers to give more appropriate sentences based on impact statements if these punishments are to act as significant deterrents.
- Improve testing procedures associated with HPAI which will ensure potential incidents of raptor persecution are detected and then investigated rather than being masked. The recovery and processing of dead birds of prey must be improved with standard analysis taking place when necessary.

Disclaimer: The data in this report were extracted from RSPB databases in October 2023 and were accurate at time of extraction but are constantly being updated and may be subject to change. Additional incidents or details may be added retrospectively pending release from statutory agencies or other sources. The RSPB suspect that the true number of persecution incidents in 2022 are likely to be significantly higher than the data in this report suggests due to the impact of restrictive procedural methods and associated limiting factors connected to the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in the UK.

Case studies

The relentless persecution of Hen Harriers continues

Hen Harriers are one of the UK's rarest breeding birds of prey. Despite being fully protected by law, and a UK Red Listed species, they are illegally killed on a relentless scale. This targeted persecution is due largely to the ongoing conflict raptors face when on land managed for gamebird shooting, particularly driven grouse moors in the uplands. A recent peer-reviewed paper (Ewing et al., 2023)³, highlighted the clear and ongoing links between persecution of this rare species and land managed for driven grouse shooting, concluding that the life expectancy of Hen Harriers in their first year is only four months.

The targeted persecution of these birds continued throughout 2022 and into 2023, with an astounding 38 Hen Harriers (both satellite-tagged and untagged) vanishing or being confirmed as being persecuted between January 2022 and October 2023 in England. These include known satellite-tagged harriers and untagged harriers which were being monitored before 'suspiciously disappearing'. This is likely to be only a fraction of the true number of Hen Harriers which have been persecuted as these disappearances or confirmed cases involve birds which are included in monitoring programmes or are satellite-tagged individuals. There were no cases of confirmed or suspected Hen Harrier persecution in Wales in 2022, but there have been several suspected cases in previous years.

The future survival of Hen Harriers in England and Wales is at risk if their relentless persecution continues. Only through improved legislation and enforcement can we ensure the future of these rare and threatened birds in England and Wales.

White-tailed Eagle poisoned on a pheasant estate

The latest RSPB Birdcrime report covers the issue of White-tailed Eagle persecution in greater detail. In 2022, two White-tailed Eagles were confirmed to have died as a result of illegal raptor persecution: one on a gamebird estate in Dorset, which the police chose to not investigate, and another case reported here for the first time, which also happened on a game shooting estate in West Sussex.

In West Sussex in October 2021, the data from a satellite-tagged White-tailed Eagle from the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation and Forestry England reintroduction project suggested it was no longer moving and presumed dead. Police were notified and the RSPB assisted with a land search where the tag was transmitting from, on a game shooting estate in West Sussex. The body of the eagle was found and eventually sent for toxicology testing by Sussex Police. In 2022, the Government's Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS) confirmed that the White-tailed Eagle had died from ingesting Bendiocarb, a highly toxic pesticide. It was later established, on the same estate, just three days after the White-tailed Eagle had died a Labrador Retriever had also died from Bendiocarb poisoning, after it had picked up a dead pheasant during a shoot.

The laying of any poisoned bait in the open is illegal and indiscriminate. This method is commonly used by those who wish to deliberately kill birds of prey and is often carried out on gamebird estates. Although White-tailed Eagles are unlikely to be the intended target of these crimes these opportunistic scavengers are as at risk as any other bird of prey.

* www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320723001738

This is a historically significant incident as it is the first confirmed case of the illegal persecution of a White-tailed Eagle in England since these impressive birds were persecuted to extinction in England and Wales in the late 1700s. This is also the first confirmed case of a reintroduced White-tailed Eagle being persecuted in England. Despite the weight of this incident, the response of Sussex Police was disappointing. Although they led a formal investigation into the poisoning of the dog and White-tailed Eagle, no charges have been brought.

Illegal pesticide storage in Wales

In June 2022, a gamekeeper was fined for pesticide storage offences following the discovery of a poisoned Red Kite, poison bait and a shot Buzzard. In 2021, RSPB Investigations Officers assisted North Wales Police in “the worst case of illegal pesticide storage” the team had ever seen. On a pheasant shooting estate in Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, they uncovered 18 highly toxic products – many of which are banned – stored in an unlocked outbuilding. David Matthews, a gamekeeper for 50 years, was prosecuted. The fine and costs amounted to just £219.

Shot Short-eared Owl

Raptor persecution is an incredibly difficult type of wildlife crime to investigate especially on vast remote moorlands where many of these persecution incidents occur. Eyewitness accounts are extremely rare but are often key to investigation processes. In June 2022, the RSPB Investigations Team was contacted by a member of the public, a keen birdwatcher, who had witnessed a Short-eared Owl being shot on a grouse moor at Broomhead in the Peak District National Park.⁴

The birdwatcher had spotted a Short-eared Owl and watched it through his scope as it gracefully quartered the moor. Suddenly, the bird’s body was lost in a cloud of feathers as a shot rang out across the moors. The eyewitness managed to record footage of the suspect and reported the incident to the police and the RSPB.

The following day, after a thorough search by South Yorkshire Police and RSPB Investigations Officers, the body of the Short-eared Owl was found stuffed down a rabbit hole. The police identified a suspect and seized a number of items from a local gamekeeper. Despite police efforts there was insufficient evidence to bring any charges. Although the outcome of this case is disappointing, it highlights the issues faced in detecting and investigating raptor persecution. Without the account from this eyewitness, another incident of raptor persecution would have gone undetected.

NOTE: Classifications used:

Reports/reported: This is the total number of incidents collated by the RSPB each year for raptor persecution including confirmed, probable and unconfirmed incidents.

Confirmed: The evidence indicates that an illegal act has taken place. This is usually substantiated by a post-mortem, toxicology testing or reliable eye-witness account.

Probable: The circumstances indicate that it is highly likely that an illegal act has taken place.

Unconfirmed: The circumstances indicate that an illegal act has possibly taken place, but irrefutable evidence is lacking.

Suspiciously disappeared: When a satellite-tagged bird’s tag suddenly stops transmitting, without explanation or tag malfunction. If the tag or bird is not recovered, after a land search of the area around the point of last transmission, it is suspected that this bird was persecuted. These birds are not classed as confirmed cases of raptor persecution and do not feature in the total numbers of confirmed incidents.



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In May 2022 a series of thefts of rare wild orchids were reported in southern and eastern England.

Other forms of wildlife crime

Text provided by Plantlife and Buglife

Plants and fungi

The lack of recorded data for wild plants and fungi makes it impossible to assess the true scale or nature of this type of crime. A lack of awareness of legislation protecting plants and fungi means that many crimes are unintentional or that evidence is not reported by the public. However, large-scale collection of wild plants and fungi for commercial use, such as wild mushrooms in restaurants, and thefts or illegal imports of rare plant specimens continue to be a problem, exacerbated by access to online trading platforms.

In the flowering season of May 2022, a series of thefts of rare wild orchids were reported in southern and eastern England. These included a population of 30 Late Spider Orchids stolen near Folkestone in Kent, Burnt Orchids from a National Nature Reserve in Sussex and Lizard Orchids from sites in Sussex and Suffolk. An alert was issued by the National Wildlife Crime Unit to all wildlife crime officers.¹⁷

Invertebrate crime

A range of invertebrate species are protected under UK law and international statutes, meaning that causing intentional harm or disturbance is an offence. Once again, shortfalls in data means that we cannot fully assess the scale of crimes against invertebrates. This is even the case when invertebrate species have been designated as a wildlife crime priority, as is the case with freshwater pearl mussels.¹⁸ This mussel species occasionally produces a pearl and as such, has been targeted by humans, with local populations devastated by those hunting for pearls. To protect against this, the species has been protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and classed as a priority area for police action. Despite all of this, publicly accessible data on the scale of freshwater pearl mussel crime is not available.

Damage to habitats can have particular impacts on invertebrate species. In 2020, a landowner destroyed 1.5km of freshwater habitat on the River Lugg in Herefordshire, leading to custodial sentence in 2023. The damage to invertebrate species caused by this destruction was cited in the prosecution.¹⁹



© National Trust Images/Derek Hatton

Conclusion

The picture painted by the 2022 wildlife crime data collected by nature charities and eNGOs is dispiriting. Reports of wildlife crime remain high, whilst successful prosecutions remain low. A record number of wildlife crime incidents in 2021 has not been followed by successful prosecutions, the number of convictions for wildlife crime actually fell by 42% between 2021 and 2022.

Hideous acts of cruelty continue to take place against British wildlife, with an increasing proportion of perpetrators escaping any sanction, despite concerns from police forces about links with other crimes.

This unnecessary animal suffering is unacceptable on its own terms. To this must be added ecological impact; the scale of wildlife crime is such that it does have a discernible impact on the population of certain species, especially birds of prey.²⁰ The Government will struggle to achieve its Environment Act target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 if these indicator species continue to decline due to human violence.²¹

Violence directed towards wildlife is also frequently a warning sign of violence against people. Major survey work commissioned in 2023 for IFAW found that all surveyed wildlife crime officers stated that wildlife offending is linked to other forms of serious crime. 50% of respondents highlighted wildlife crime links to firearms and violent crimes.²² The survey work, carried out by Nottingham Trent University, found that wildlife crime is not given the same policing priority as 'mainstream' crimes, despite 100 per cent of the wildlife crime officers stating that wildlife offending was linked to other forms of serious crime.²³

The failure to get a grip on wildlife crime is hurting wildlife, nature recovery and people. Charities, eNGOs and police forces have spoken as one to request a key policy reform to turn this around – notifiable status for key wildlife crimes, allowing them to be centrally recorded by the Home Office. Having a clear and up-to-date central database for a particular type of criminal activity is a pre-requisite for successfully addressing it, allowing repeat offenders to be tracked and offending patterns to be observed, strengthening prosecution cases. This key informational input will improve multiple 'downstream' elements of the policing and criminal justice systems, making a clunky process more effective at deterring, catching and sanctioning wildlife criminals.

Since 2020, bodies ranging from the National Wildlife Crime Unit, the National Police Chiefs Council and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime have all asked the Government to make key wildlife crimes notifiable, to no avail.²⁴

Attempts to press Ministers on this²⁵ are batted away with assurances that this is being reviewed (this review has been ongoing since at least 2018), directions to the wildlife crimes already on the Notifiable Offence List (a very small number, not relating to the most commonly occurring wildlife crime offences) and the suggestion that police forces can use the incident recording system (this system does not feed through into national or even regional data, so is of little use in providing an overall picture). Such equivocation is detrimental to wild animals, wild places and people.

2024 will see a General Election. Any party wishing to demonstrate environmental credibility must include a commitment to make wildlife crimes notifiable in their manifesto. The fight against wildlife crime has been hampered for too long by data shortfalls.

Our plea to political parties is simple – make this the last year when charities and eNGOs have to inform the Government how much wildlife crime is actually taking place.

Other policy recommendations

In addition to notifiable status, the following reforms would aid the fight against wildlife crime:

- **Increased resources for wildlife crime teams:** A number of police forces now have teams dedicated to tackling wildlife, heritage and rural crime. However, the size and scale of those teams is variable from force-to-force. It is recommended that all police forces within the UK have such teams established and that they are adequately resourced. Partnership work between different forces and organisations tackling wildlife crime should be encouraged. Funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit should be increased in line with inflation, to allow the Unit to continue its excellent work.
- **Sentencing guidelines for wildlife crime:** No sentencing guidelines are in place for wildlife crimes. This frequently leads to sentences on the low end of the range, as judges err towards caution in the absence of clear direction. The Sentencing Council should rectify this by producing sentencing guidelines for wildlife crimes.
- **Updates to wildlife crime legislation:** Eight years on from its publication it is high time for the Government to implement the Law Commission's 2015 wildlife law report, which reviewed wildlife crime legislation and made recommendations to improve its effectiveness. As the review highlighted, some of the legislation relied on for tackling wildlife crime is nearly two hundred years old and requires urgent updating.



This report is supported by

Wildlife and Countryside Link is the largest environmental coalition in England, bringing together 80 organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of wild spaces and wild animals. Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage non-governmental organisations working across Wales since 1990.

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The National Wildlife Crime Unit is a supporting partner to this report



End notes

- 1 See previous reports here: www.wcl.org.uk/wildlife-crime.asp
- 2 See latest Scottish Government annual wildlife crime report here: www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-crime-scotland-annual-report-2021/
- 3 www.badgertrust.org.uk/badger-crime-guide
- 4 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2022
- 5 www.bds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/BDS-Position-Paper-Hunting-deer-with-hounds.pdf
- 6 www.horseandhound.co.uk/plus/features-plus/the-cost-of-running-a-hunt-hh-plus-713088
- 7 See the Time for Change campaign: www.timeforchangecoalition.co.uk/
- 8 www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jun/29/foxhunting-law-in-england-unworkable-says-police-chief
- 9 www.unodc.org/documents/Wildlife/UK_Toolkit_Report.pdf
- 10 www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/hunting-with-dogs-scotland-bill/introduced
- 11 www.northantslive.news/news/northamptonshire-news/chinese-medicine-practitioner-caught-selling-7611383
- 12 www.wcl.org.uk/uk-lawmakers-should-extend-the-online-safety-protections-to-endangered-wildlife.asp
- 13 www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk/disturbance/
- 14 Watch out for whales and dolphins when you are near the coast – Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- 15 Data provided by St Mary's Island Wildlife Conservation Society
- 16 Marine and coastal wildlife code - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- 17 www.cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/Policy-and-legislation-summary-final-2014_0.pdf
- 18 www.nwcu.police.uk/how-do-we-prioritise/priorities/freshwater-pearl-mussels/
- 19 www.gov.uk/government/news/landowner-sentenced-for-destruction-of-river-lugg-herefordshire
- 20 See Wotton, S. et al (2018), Status of the Hen Harrier in the UK and Isle of Man: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00063657.2018.1476462 & Smart, J. et al. (2010), Red Kites: www.researchgate.net/publication/232361176_Illegal_killing_slows_population_recovery_of_a_reintroduced_raptor_of_high_conservation_concern_-_the_Red_Kite_Milvus_milvus
- 21 See the Nature 2030 campaign for more on the target and how it could be reached: www.wcl.org.uk/nature2030.asp
- 22 www.ifaw.org/uk/journal/make-wildlife-crimes-matter
- 23 See Nottingham Trent University paper here: www.d1jyxxz9imt9yb.cloudfront.net/resource/1465/attachment/original/ntu_policing_wildlife_research_report_revised_Oct-Nov_2022.pdf
See coverage in trade magazine Police Professional here: www.policeprofessional.com/news/wildlife-crime-falls-down-list-of-policing-priorities-according-to-new-study/
- 24 www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Notifiable_status_for_wildlife_crimes_Evidence_dossier_17.10.22.pdf
- 25 www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Letter_to_Home_Secretary_notifiable_status_for_wildlife_crimes_03.07.23_2.pdf



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