

Wildlife crime



Executive summary

The far-reaching impacts of crimes against wildlife

Read the full Wildlife Crime report of 2024 incident reports and convictions by Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) [here](#).

“Protecting wildlife is protecting communities. Wildlife crime fuels broader organised offending and damages public safety, the economy and nature. Only a sustained, well-resourced, partnership-led response will stop it.”

Kevin Lacks-Kelly

Head, UK National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and Chair, INTERPOL Wildlife Crime Working Group

Many wild species and habitats are protected by legislation. Too often protected animals are harmed by criminals who break the law and face little to no consequences for their actions. Our 2024 data shows that wildlife crime remains widespread and serious, yet conviction rates remain alarmingly low. Just over 2% of reported wildlife crime incidents in 2024 resulted in a conviction (excluding fisheries, which increases this figure to 15%).

In contrast to many other crimes, wildlife crimes lack a dedicated recording standard and are often filed in ‘miscellaneous’ or ‘generic’ categories by police forces. Without a national police record, charities and eNGOs record reports of the annual wildlife crime offences and present it in this report. This data is the best indication of levels of crimes being committed in England and Wales but is not a comprehensive record.

Link gratefully acknowledges all the organisations who have helped to collect this data, and the National Wildlife Crime Unit and local police forces working at the wildlife crime frontline.

Recent polycriminality analysis has shown that investigating wildlife crime can highlight links to other criminality. NWCU analysis demonstrates the strong link between offenders of wildlife crimes and other serious crimes, including theft/criminal damage type offences, illegal firearm use, money laundering, drugs and domestic violence/abuse. Just 18% of all wildlife crime offenders did not have a connection to any other crime besides their conviction.

Although it is just a snapshot and the statistics shown are likely to underestimate the true scale of polycriminality, this analysis shows the breadth of crimes that wildlife crime offenders are associated with.

Recommendations

Wildlife and Countryside Link urge the Government to raise the stakes for wildlife crime offenders and:

1

Make at least eleven major wildlife crimes reportable (notifiable) to the Home Office so that they are recorded in national statistics.

2

Work with the Sentencing Council to develop sentencing guidelines in England and Wales for key wildlife crimes, including breaches of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, Hunting Act, Protection of Badgers Act, Habitats Regulations and Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) regulations.

3

Increase penalties for wildlife crime offences in line with higher levels of sentencing available for companion animal welfare offences under the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 (in similar fashion to the Scottish Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020).

4

Increase local authority planning inspections and enforcement of regulation to prevent illegal wildlife harm from development projects.

5

Increase wildlife crime and animal welfare training for police forces (online or face to face), ensuring officers, including neighbourhood police officers, are trained to detect and confidently respond to wildlife crime and animal welfare offences. *90% of police officers told Naturewatch Foundation that they would like more face-to-face training for wildlife and animal welfare offences.*

6

Provide longer term, index-linked funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit so that they may continue their work on the same scale or with greater resources. Funding should also go towards developing a public awareness campaign to show the variety and magnitude of wildlife crime and how to report offences.

7

Meet the manifesto commitment to ban snares and tighten the Hunting Act and associated practices, to end the wildlife harm and illegal activity involved in these practices.

2024 data: the tip of the iceberg

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS REPORTED								
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Badgers (England & Wales)	633	551	452	713	654	600	636	592
Bats (England, Wales & Scotland)	173	108	136	94	133	161	186	157
Fisheries (England & Wales from 2020)	4,169	2,681	3,095	4,163	3,337	2,972	2,916	2,820
Hunting (England & Wales)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Illegal trade CITES (UK wide)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Marine mammals (certain countries only)	169	326	193	366	450	508	1,290	1,098
Birds of prey (England & Wales)	216	280	230	321	330	263	187	152
Total	5,360	3,946	4,106	5,657	4,904	4,504	5,215	4,819
<i>Total (excl. fisheries)</i>	1,191	1,265	1,011	1,494	1,567	1,532	2,299	1,999

NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS REPORTED								
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Badgers (England & Wales)	–	8	14	8	6	18	6	18
Bats (England, Wales & Scotland)	4	2	2	1	5	3	2	1
Fisheries (England & Wales from 2020)	2,648	1,626	2,037	649	846	497	456	679
Hunting (England & Wales)	22	21	17	17	42	21	15	14
Illegal trade CITES (UK wide)	4	5	8	4	4	3	3	8
Marine mammals (certain countries only)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Birds of prey (England & Wales)	–	1	–	1	3	2	4	2
Total	2,678	1,663	2,078	680	906	544	486	722
<i>Total (excl. fisheries)</i>	30	37	41	31	60	47	30	43

Eight years of Wildlife and Countryside Link reports show that little progress has been made to treat wildlife crime as a priority and making the recommendations above is long overdue.

With both the UK Government's Animal Welfare and National Rural Crime Network Strategies due to be published this year, the opportunity to make a sustained difference is here and needs to be grabbed.

Notes on 2024 data

- Reports of marine mammal incidents from 2017 to 2022 covered Cornwall only. The 2023 figures include reported incidents from Cornwall, Devon, Yorkshire and Kent. The 2024 figures include Cornwall, Devon and Yorkshire.
- Reports of hunting incidents are not presented here as they are collected per hunting season (August to March) rather than by calendar year.
- Numbers for badger, bat and raptor incidents reported between 2017 and 2023 will differ slightly from [previous reports](#), due to new data. The numbers in this table should be used over previous reports.
- Badger related crime convictions have been included for the first time for England and Wales. This includes hunt related crimes where a badger sett is damaged by hunt staff.

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 90 organisations to campaign for nature, climate, animal welfare and a healthy environment for everyone. Wildlife and Countryside Link is a registered charity number 1107460 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales number 3889519.

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