

Naturewatch

Wildlife crime

– a survey of Police Wildlife Crime Officers

Key results

Naturewatch's survey of Police Wildlife Crime Officers was sent to the 51 geographical police forces of Great Britain, of which 47 responded (a response rate over 90%).

The levels of staffing were a major concern. While some forces have invested significant resources in this area (most notably Dorset, Hampshire, Strathclyde, Tayside, North Wales and South Wales), some have officers working on wildlife crime only on a voluntary basis. This has caused considerable frustration. Overall, 82% felt that there were 'too few' or 'far too few' involved in combating wildlife crime.

*Respondents strongly agreed about the **connection between wildlife crime and other forms of serious crime**. Indeed, 84% agreed and there was no fundamental disagreement: the only dissent was that the connection involved crimes such as poaching and badger baiting but not habitat destruction.*

*The **illegal destruction of habitat** is clearly a major concern. It was ranked as the most significant crime across the country (which represents a major change from the DEFRA report on wildlife crime in 2001). Furthermore, 87% agreed with the statement that "The fines given to developers convicted of habitat destruction are too small to act as a deterrent". In the discussion section, we present examples showing the **vast gulf between the high level of costs for compliance and the low level of fines for disobedience, both of which make a mockery of the law** as it currently stands. Naturewatch recommends that a Parliamentary Select Committee (such as the Environmental Audit Committee) should investigate this issue.*

*There was a strong feeling that insufficient priority is being given to wildlife crime. 87% of respondents agreed that "The **Home Office needs to take a stronger lead** in tackling issues related to wildlife crime". A similar proportion also agreed that "**Severe wildlife crime, such as badger cruelty or destruction of bat roosts, should be made notifiable** to the Home Office so that police forces can give sufficient priority to tackling it".*

At present the National Standards for Incident Recording offer an improved mechanism for understanding what crime is taking place but do not affect police priorities, which are governed more by their performance on notifiable offences. Only if the NSIR system were to be adapted so that it could completely replace the system of making certain offences notifiable could it address the problem of insufficient priority being given to wildlife crime.

Introduction

Wildlife crime covers a wide range of offences from those that are highly politicised, such as hunting with hounds and badger baiting, to others like poaching and the illegal destruction of habitat that do not receive a similar level of attention. Somehow, the disappearance of a pond which was a breeding area for great crested newts is not as visual as a fox that has been mauled to death by hounds! One purpose of the survey was therefore to ascertain which are the most significant crimes as perceived by those on the front lines, the police.

Police officers provide a unique insight into wildlife crime. Being at the forefront, not only do they directly encounter the crime, they are also able to take an overview of the whole field. Campaign groups (including Naturewatch) tend to have particular emphases, so that while their specialist knowledge may often be exceptionally important, they do not offer a breadth of perspective.

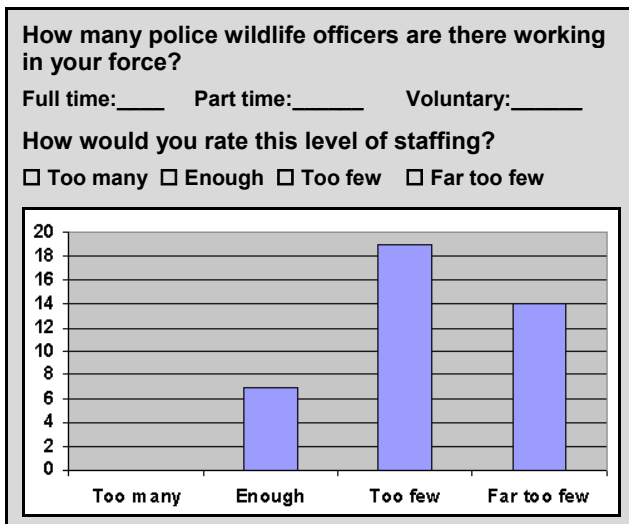
The responses from police wildlife officers during this survey frequently showed a high degree of passion for the job, and a frustration at the lack of resources at their disposal. Their willingness to respond to the survey suggests that theirs are voices which need to be heard.

The second major aim of the survey was to find out the opinions of wildlife crime officers on a number of issues that have received prominence recently. This was done via a series of statements, with officers asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or otherwise. The issues included, amongst others, the fines given for illegal destruction of habitat, whether wildlife crime should be made notifiable, and the role of the Home Office.

The key results are presented on this page. The remainder of this report will discuss the results in detail.

Staffing levels

The survey asked about the levels of staffing involved in wildlife crime. The two most important were:



Responses revealed a very wide range of staffing levels across the country. At one end there were those forces which have one officer dedicated to this work full time, with a number of designated part-time officers; they may serve as examples of best practice [see box at right]. However, there were forces with very low levels of resourcing: seven forces, for example, have between 1 and 6 officers who work on wildlife crime only on a voluntary basis – that is, outside of their normal duties. Six of these seven respondents rated this level of staffing as “far too few”.

Forces with highest commitment to wildlife crime:

- Dorset
- Hampshire
- Metropolitan
- North Wales
- South Wales
- Strathclyde
- Tayside
- West Yorkshire

Technical note: This excludes the City of London police, who have two voluntary officers but no wildlife crime.

Three-quarters of respondents expressed some degree of dis-satisfaction with the level of staffing for tackling wildlife crime, and just over one-third of the total felt there were “far too few” involved. A further 8 declined to answer the question; they tended to be amongst those with the higher levels of staffing.

By far the highest staffing level is in the Metropolitan Police, with four working full-time – two civilians, two police officers – and over 50 with part-time responsibilities. (It is also by far the largest police force, being five times the size of the next largest). Their experience of wildlife crime is significantly different to other forces, as will be discussed in a later section.

There was some strength of feeling expressed by wildlife officers about the staffing available – indeed, it was the issue which most often drew comments.

- “In a rural force such as ours, I believe there is scope to employ at least one full-time officer to co-ordinate wildlife issues.” (Midland force with voluntary wildlife officers only)
- “Each force needs a dedicated WLO to be able to deal with wildlife crime properly. North and South

Wales police have the correct approach.” (Southern force with ‘far too few’ voluntary wildlife officers)

- “[This police force] does not have any dedicated, full-time wildlife officers in force which I feel is unacceptable. Although I accept there are other matters of priority at times, I feel wildlife crime is not given the time it needs.” (Midland force with ‘far too few’ voluntary wildlife officers)
- “Until all police forces have a full time officer we will never begin to tackle the root causes and deal with wildlife crime offenders.” (Southern force with ‘far too few’ voluntary wildlife officers)

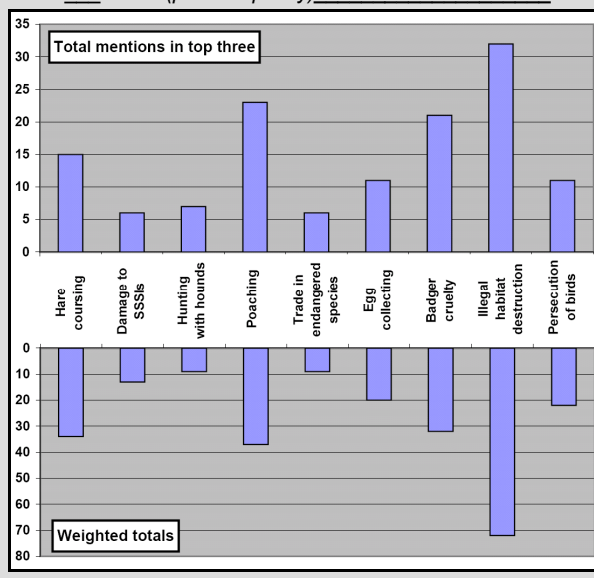
Most significant wildlife crime

The second section asked officers to list the top three most significant areas of wildlife crime.

Which are the three most significant areas of wildlife crime that you have to deal with?

Please rank the top three, 1-3:

- ___ Hare coursing
- ___ Trade in endangered species
- ___ Damage to SSSIs
- ___ Egg collecting
- ___ Hunting with hounds
- ___ Badger cruelty, e.g. baiting, lamping
- ___ Poaching
- ___ Illegal destruction of habitats by developers, e.g. of bat roosts
- ___ Other: (please specify) _____



Technical Note: In the top chart, the total number of top three mentions was tallied; in the bottom chart, a weighted score was assigned, with ‘3’ for a top listing, ‘2’ for second and ‘1’ for third. The charts have different shapes because some crimes tended to be in the top 2 when listed, whereas others were usually listed only third. A more rigorous data collection method would be needed for a detailed analysis, but the approach is sufficient for the present purposes. The regional charts on the next page are based on numbers of mentions in the top three, and are thus otherwise unweighted.

- Over three-quarters of the forces in England listed the **illegal destruction of habitat** as one of the top two crimes. Nationally, it is rated as far and away the most significant wildlife crime. It is particularly

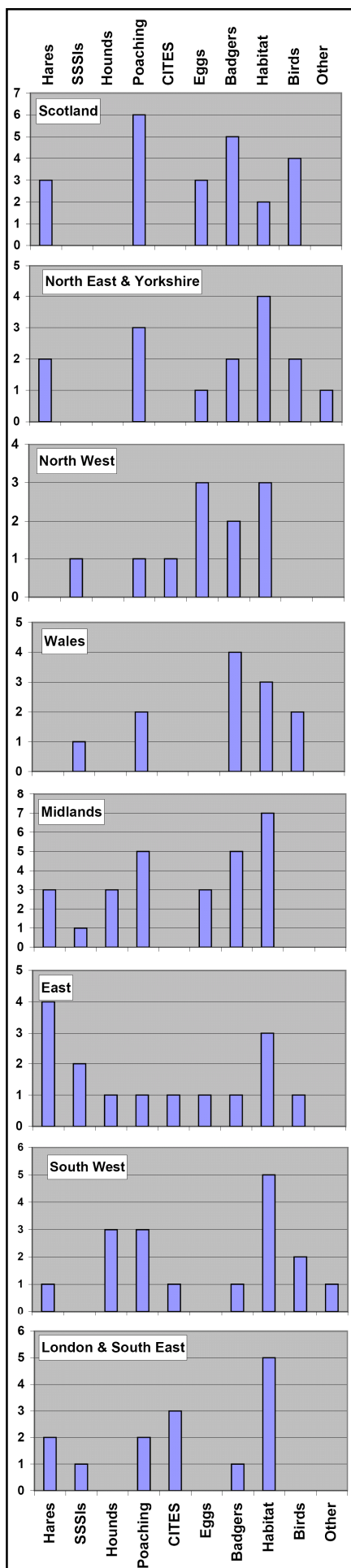
prevalent across the southern half of England, where the pressure for housing is greatest.

- **Poaching** is the second most significant crime across Britain, but is the first in Scotland.
- **Hunting with hounds** was rarely listed. One officer commented that they have a good relationship with local hunts who have converted to forms that are deemed legal, such as drag-hunting: this may be typical of other regions.
- **Hare coursing** appears to be strongly regional, being particularly prevalent in the East, and only slightly less so in the Midlands & West. However, it was not mentioned by officers from Wales or the North-West. (This is not to say that hare coursing does not happen in those areas – only that none of the forces listed it in their top three).
- **Egg collecting** is characteristic of the Midlands and regions further north, but was not listed by officers in the South.
- Of the more politicised crimes, **Badger cruelty** is the most prevalent, although where listed it was usually third in the top three.
- **Trade in endangered species** will be discussed later.
- Of the crimes listed in the original survey, there was one obvious omission – **raptor persecution**. This was the one most frequently written in, and has therefore been added to the charts.
- Other crimes were also reported as being significant. **Arson to heathland** was reported from Dorset, and **seal-shooting** was listed third from North Yorkshire.

Technical note: The question on the survey might have been phrased more simply, by asking for crimes to be ranked by numerical incidence. The intention was for the answer to reflect local priorities as well as raw numbers. A future version of this survey might separate the two issues.

Disagreement with 2001 DEFRA/PAW report

These results are in stark contrast to the information contained within the report jointly produced by DEFRA (the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and PAW (the Partnership for Action against Wildlife crime), "Wildlife Crime in the UK", from 2001. In summary:



- Whereas the illegal destruction of habitat is the top-ranked crime here, it was placed last of nine in the DEFRA/PAW report.
- Their top-ranked crime was that of offences against birds or their eggs. While the categories here have been grouped differently, egg collecting and raptor persecution are merely two of several mid-ranked crimes.
- Insofar as badger crime and cruelty to wild animals are mid-ranked in the DEFRA/PAW report, as are badger crime and hare coursing here, this represents the only area of significant agreement.
- The DEFRA/PAW report lists CITES and trading offences as the second-ranked crime whereas here it was limited to London and the home counties.

There are four main points that need to be made with regard to these discrepancies.

1. The ranking in the DEFRA/PAW report is derived from the estimates collated from a wide range of organisations, each of which operate different procedures, and have widely different records of efficiency. For example, the RSPB are renowned for their efficiency in handling crime against birds compared to other organisations, whereas only recently have the RSPCA begun to collate data which may be used in a rigorous study. This may have skewed the results in the DEFRA/PAW report towards a higher ranking for bird-related offences. By contrast, the data presented here is derived from a much more uniform set of sources – police wildlife officers. Moreover, it is likely that the rank order information is less susceptible to variations in the degree of commitment of police forces to combating wildlife crime than a tally of numbers of offences logged.
2. If CITES offences are extremely high in London and low elsewhere the overall national total of offences could still lead to it being the second-highest wildlife crime in the UK – thus accounting for the geographical variation elsewhere. (See next section)
3. The number of offences may, in itself, not be a good indicator of policing priorities: for example, large numbers of police may be

provided to cover hunts taking place under the new legislation, even though there has been a lack of prosecutions.

- The very low incident count for habitat-related destruction in the DEFRA/PAW report, compared to its top-ranking here, is hard to explain in and of itself. Even if the unintended vagueness of the term 'significance' in this survey led to its having a higher ranking than for a strict numerical count of incidents, this cannot account for either the high ranking of this crime throughout England or its geographical variation. According to Sgt. Ian Guilford of South Wales Police, closer partnerships between the police and both English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales have raised awareness of habitat related destruction within the police service and it is this that may be reflected in the high ranking of this form of crime in this survey.

These issues highlight the need for the data collected under the new National Standards for Incident Recording, which will include wildlife crime. This is vital for producing a uniform and objective data set which should cut through the inconsistencies revealed here.

Trade in endangered species

The most surprising absentee from most regions is that of offences against CITES (the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species), especially as this is one of the three national priorities set by the police (along with persecution of the hen harrier and offences against bats). However, for the Metropolitan Police, this is by far their biggest single issue. Although London is an obvious centre for international trade, with Heathrow and Gatwick airports lying within their area, products derived from endangered species – such as certain types of Chinese medicine – are available nationally. It is not clear that other forces are giving this sufficient priority – but neither is it clear that they are sufficiently well resourced to tackle this form of crime.

Case example:

A London-based egg-collector

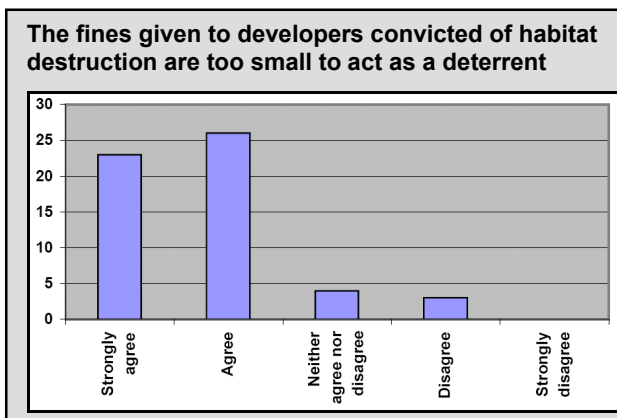
It is often assumed that, because London is a large city with little wildlife, there would be hardly any wildlife crime. This is untrue. As a representative from the Metropolitan Police emphasised, criminals in London may often travel long distances across the UK to commit crime.

As an example, in 2004 25 wild birds' eggs were seized from a visitor on the Isle of Tiree (one of the southernmost of the Inner Hebrides). This led to the Metropolitan Police searching two premises in London, where a further 750 eggs were found, including those of two threatened species, the black-tailed godwit and the hen harrier.

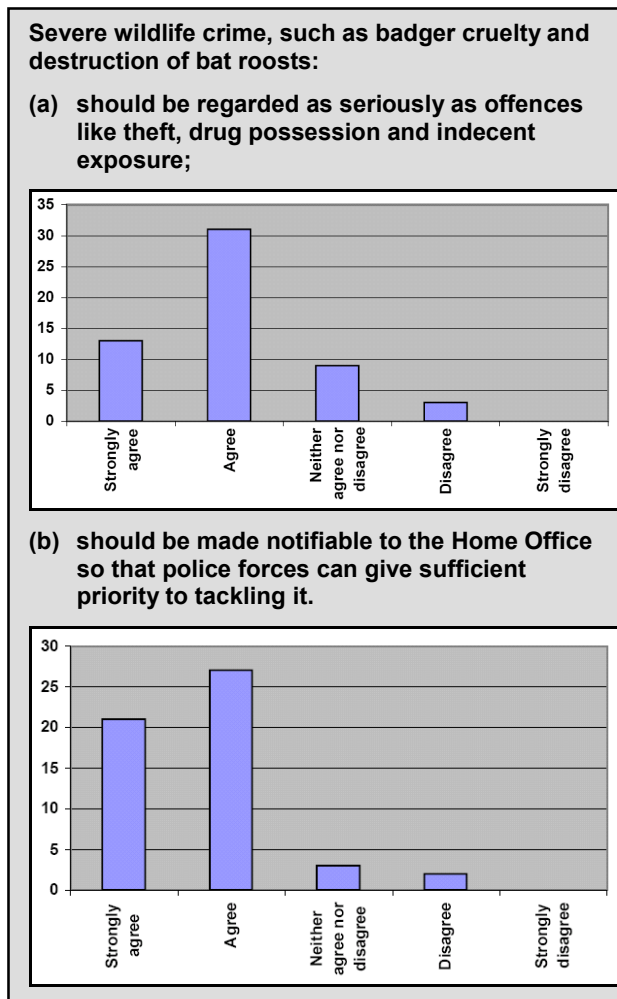
This case highlights the vital importance of good communication between volunteers (in this case from the RSPB) and the police, and between individual police forces (here, the Strathclyde and Metropolitan forces). It also emphasises the need for urban police units to be as vigilant in this area as those in rural locations. [Reference: Strathclyde Police press release dated 29 July 2004]

Statements

The final section of the survey asked for officers to register their agreement or otherwise with a set of statements. We present the results graphically in the grey boxes, with a brief discussion in each case immediately after.



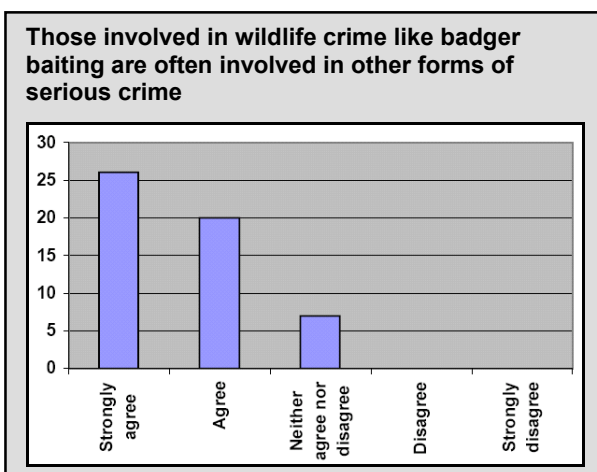
There was very little disagreement on this issue, with 87% indicating either that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement. The strength of opinion on this matter is consistent with the perceived importance of the crime itself. Thus, we will discuss the issues surrounding the illegal destruction of habitat in more detail in the final section.



Each year there are over one million notifiable offences; these include those like theft, drug possession and indecent exposure. There was broad agreement that severe wildlife crime should be treated as seriously (79% agreeing) although a few were reluctant to compare across categories in this way. One officer was horrified at the question because of the implication that a crime like badger baiting, which involves systematic cruelty, could be reduced to a comparison with theft.

There was even stronger support for the statement that wildlife crime should be made notifiable: 91% either agreed or strongly agreed; 41% of the total strongly agreed.

It should be noted that the issue of whether a crime should be made notifiable to the Home Office is significantly different to whether it should be recorded under NSIR (the National Standards for Incident Recording). This new system allows for a uniform and objective set of data to be obtained about what crime is taking place, and where. This is a comprehensive database and because it includes information about incidents irrespective of whether the crime is notifiable, it will include wildlife crime. However, offences which are made notifiable to the Home Office are the ones which are used to produce performance indicators for police forces. This – as we have heard from officers repeatedly – leads to resources being allocated primarily to covering notifiable offences, and not to those like wildlife crime which are outside this category. This is therefore at the root of the problem of insufficient resources, highlighted earlier in the section headed “Staffing Levels”. Thus, the NSIR system can only solve this problem if it were to be modified so that it could completely replace it.



The purpose of the question was to find the extent to which there is believed to be a link between wildlife crime and other forms of crime. What is striking is that there is no disagreement with the proposition of a link: 84% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while the 16% of others did not disagree.

The connection between the abuse of animals and the abuse of humans has been suspected for many years in the United States, but recognition of this in the UK has been rather slower. In 1988 FBI research found “substantial rates of severe animal abuse in childhood and adolescence in a sample of serial sexual homicide perpetrators”. More recently, “a 1997 survey of 50 of the largest shelters for battered women in the United

States found that 85% of women and 63% of children entering shelters discussed incidents of pet abuse in the family.”

Evidence in the UK tends to be more anecdotal. For example, the child killers of the Liverpool toddler James Bulger had already been involved in animal abuse before the murder. Signs like this could be used to alert authorities before crimes against humans are committed.

In 2001, the RSPCA and NSPCC published a joint study of the connection between animal and child abuse which acted as a review of the existing literature. All of these studies are, however, restricted to domestic situations.

[Sources: NSPCC information briefing, “The link between child abuse and animal abuse”, October 2001; Humane Society website <http://www.hsus.org/>]

One officer wrote a clarification to his agreement:

- *“Leaving aside the implication that badger baiting is serious crime I would strongly agree with the suggestion that those involved in badger baiting are also involved in other crime. It is equally true that poachers are involved in other crime. However not all wildlife crime offenders are involved with other crime. I have found few examples of those involved in damaging sites of special scientific interest or of those damaging the habitat of protected species also being involved in other crime.”*

Another wrote,

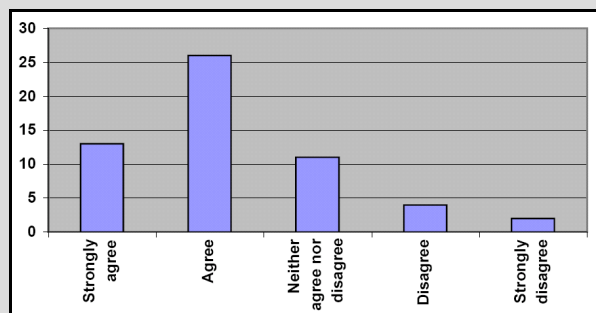
- *“I would agree that in some cases those involved in wildlife crime are also involved in other criminal matters; I have personally dealt with illegal falconry, badger digging and poaching where the perpetrator is or has been involved in other criminal activity ranging from public order offences and drugs to burglary and theft. This is not consistent across the whole of the wildlife crime spectrum especially when looking at offences involved in development and those taking place on Sites of Special Scientific Interest”.*

A third wrote that

- *“Persons involved in badger digging, deer poaching, hare coursing and the like will often be on the lookout to commit crimes such as theft of quad bikes, horse tack and 4 wheel drives from insecure or isolated buildings. BASC has for many years promoted an advertisement that ‘Poaching is the pastime of the criminal’. This is known to be true.”*

This is an area which could fruitfully be analysed with full academic rigour: if a trusted researcher were to be able to access the full criminal records of a range of people convicted of wildlife crime offences, it should be possible to provide a more definitive answer to the question of the connection between wildlife crime and that against humans, rather than relying on largely anecdotal evidence, as has been the case hitherto.

The police do not have sufficient powers to arrest suspects at the scenes of wildlife crime

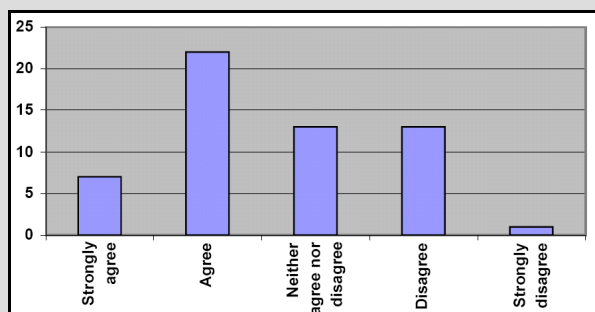


Just over two-thirds (70%) of respondents agreed that the police have insufficient powers of arrest. However, changes are imminent with the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA): from January 1 2006, all offences will become arrestable.

Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, there was a limited number of offences that were in and of themselves arrestable – such as those carrying substantial prison sentences. For other offences, ‘general arrest conditions’ which could be applied if, for example, a suspect failed to provide suitable identification, or if arresting a person would prevent him from causing harm to himself or others.

Under SOCPA this distinction is removed. All offences from January 1 2006 will, in principle, be arrestable. However, police officers will now need to establish which of several reasons contained within the legislation are applicable to the individual arrest. One is that someone may be arrested in order to prevent that person from causing physical injury to himself or any other person – which cannot be applied to wildlife as they are not ‘persons’ in the eyes of the law. This and three others are the same as the General Arrest Conditions under section 25 of PACE. However, there is now a new condition, that someone may be arrested “to allow the prompt and effective investigation of the offence or of the conduct of the person in question”. This would be applicable to badger baiting or to other forms of wildlife crime, as for any other form of crime.

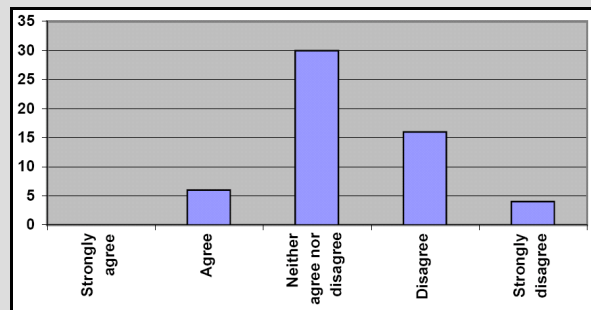
Existing legislation does not allow for incidents of badger baiting to be properly investigated by the police



This statement is derived from a standard Home Office response to a recent Naturewatch campaign on badger baiting, except that for the survey the negative was added. 48% agreed with the survey statement, 28% disagreed, while 24% remained non-committal. This is hardly an endorsement of the Home Office’s view, but

in the context of the other results in the survey, they may be somewhat relieved that the result was not worse.

The prevalence of Bovine TB has led to an increase in badger baiting



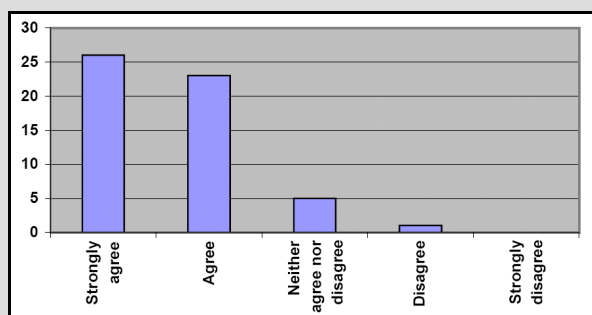
There was widespread disagreement to the statement presented here: 36% disagreed, compared to 11% who agreed. Although this was surprising at first, one officer explained that, had the statement referred to badger crime in general as opposed to the specific crime of badger baiting, then he would have agreed. Other officers may have made the same distinction. One officer from the Midlands went so far as to say:

- *“Your survey appears skewed towards badger baiting when in my opinion sett destruction and killing of the animals themselves is probably far more prevalent. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that farmers are engaged in a campaign of badger destruction due to the links with TB.”*

There was a feeling, expressed by a couple of officers, that badgers are over-protected. As an example, one of them felt that a farmer responding to bovine TB by lacing a doughnut with paracetamol and placing it near a badger sett was guilty of a much less serious offence than someone involved in badger baiting. The perception that badgers may be over-protected arises because, from a conservation perspective, they are not threatened. However, from an animal cruelty perspective, they are faced with the vile abuses of badger baiting and similar crimes – hence the need for the Protection of Badgers Act.

What this and the previous result does show, in the context of the strong backing for some of the other statements in this survey, is the careful thought and attention given to the survey by individual officers.

The Home Office needs to take a stronger lead in tackling issues related to wildlife crime



87% of police officers backed this statement, more than half of whom strongly agreed.

- *In the the Environmental Audit Committee report of October 2004, paragraph 34 of their conclusions and recommendations stated that “The role of the Home Office has been shown to be absolutely crucial in the fight against wildlife crime but their commitment has been sadly lacking. The Home Office must re-engage with wildlife crime.”*

One officer from the south complained that, where wildlife crime was concerned that while there were several departments that he needed to contact (such as DEFRA and the Department of Trade and Industry), it was the Home Office to whom he was ultimately responsible, and from whom there was insufficient communication in this area.

The Home Office is clearly perceived to be failing in its duty of leadership in the fight against wildlife crime. The results from this report identify key areas where progress is most needed.

Additional comments

Officers made additional comments on a number of issues, which often shed important light on the battle against wildlife crime. Some of these have been quoted earlier, with regard to staffing levels and the connection between wildlife crime and crime against humans. Other remarks, while not fitting into the main theme of the survey, are nevertheless pertinent.

One early respondent to the survey from the north made the following additional comment:

- *“The general problem with trying to get wildlife crime taken more seriously... is not helped by the use of emotive issues which politicise the entire problem of wildlife crime. For example badger baiting (which in my experience has got no worse in the last few years), hunting with dogs (not really a major wildlife crime) and the usual smattering of ‘cruelty’ stories.”*

Campaign groups need to be aware of the delicate balance between highlighting important issues and alienating those we seek to influence.

One of the most constructive suggestions as to how to tackle the lack of resourcing for wildlife crime came from an officer from Scotland:

- *“As a general rule wildlife crime is not viewed seriously enough. Perhaps if the Scottish Executive / Home Office encouraged Police Forces to include it*

in the main syllabus of training more officers would take it seriously”.

One full-time officer was frustrated by the lack of consistency in the legislation:

- *“Wildlife legislation needs to be rationalised so that powers are similar whatever the protected species”.*

Discussion

Destruction of Habitat: It Pays to Disobey

This survey has shown that the illegal destruction of habitat is one of the major concerns nationally.

- It is rated as the most significant crime across Britain, being particularly prevalent in the southern half of England.
- 87% of the wildlife officers who responded to the survey felt that the fines were too small.

Legislation concerning habitat destruction focuses on species which are deemed to be nationally threatened, such as water voles, dormice and great crested newts, or others – chiefly bats – which are regarded as being under particular threat from development. We will focus on great crested newts for reasons that will become clear.

Three examples should suffice to illustrate the ranges of fines that tend to be imposed for harming the habitat of great crested newts. *(Most of this information is available in press releases on the English Nature website).*

- In Essex in 2005, an individual was fined £250 with £35 costs for damaging the resting place of Great Crested Newts.
- In Co. Durham in March 2005, a man was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay £500 costs, after dredging a large pond of weed in which he knew there were great crested newts. Numerous newts and frogs were subsequently found to have been trapped in the removed weed, some of which had been killed. The man had been planning to build three bungalows adjacent to the pond.
- In July 2002, a housing developer from North Yorkshire was fined £7,600 for destroying a large colony of great crested newts at a former Butlin’s holiday camp. According to English Nature, “A wildlife survey found at least 272 newts living in an old swimming pool, boating pool, disused water tanks and smaller ponds on the derelict site, with the total newt population estimated at over 1000. The mix of rubble, rough grassland, trees, shrubs and derelict buildings were perfect for the thriving population.... The developers applied for a licence after consulting with English Nature and carrying out a detailed survey of the site but were turned down in September last year as they did not have valid planning permission. Weeks later they levelled the site.”

It seems intuitively obvious that these fines are low – but for an objective assessment of the scale of the fines, we sought to compare them with the costs faced by developers for conducting a survey and providing suitable mitigation for compliance with the law.

We contacted English Nature, who do not appear to have access to this information. They take the view that if developers build on sites that have wildlife value, they should expect to pay the cost.

A developer in Gloucestershire was more forthcoming. Planning permission for a site at Olney was conditional on their carrying out a full environment survey. This revealed the presence of one great crested newt in a pond. The mitigation which was thus required involved fencing the pond and translocating the newt after its hibernation. Later, two others were found. All three were moved to a suitable site. The total cost of this activity to date is £40,138.50, with the developer expecting to pay another £5,000 before the project is completed.

These actual costs are far higher than any of the fines levied in the cases above: it is more than twenty-five times higher than in the weed-dredging case in Durham, and over five times higher than that for the destruction of at least 272 newts and their habitat in North Yorkshire – even though the number of newts involved (three) was far lower than in either case.

The developer was also anxious to point out the additional, less visible, costs with which they are faced in these circumstances. These include paying interest for a year on a loan of £1-3million, and management salaries for the same duration: together, this may amount to well in excess of £100,000. Although these costs are less tangibly related to the newts than those of mitigation, they are no less real to the developer.

It cannot help the conservation of the great crested newt (or any other species) to have such a vast gap between the high cost of obedience to the law and the low cost of infringement. We cannot avoid concluding that the scale of the fines is so low as to make a mockery of the law. Attention also needs to be paid to the very high scale of actual costs that developers face when they are committed to discharging their obligations to the letter and spirit of the law. It is beyond the scope of the present report to recommend ways by which this might be achieved while retaining effectiveness in conservation, but neglecting this issue

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all those wildlife officers who took part in the surveys. Returns were received from the following forces:

Avon & Somerset Constabulary; Bedfordshire Police; Cambridgeshire Constabulary; Central Scotland Police; Cheshire Constabulary; City of London Police; Cleveland Police; Cumbria Constabulary; Derbyshire Constabulary; Devon & Cornwall Constabulary; Dorset Police; Dumfries & Galloway Constabulary; Durham Constabulary; Dyfed Powys Police; Essex Police; Fife Constabulary; Gloucestershire Constabulary; Grampian Police; Gwent Police; Hampshire Constabulary; Hertfordshire Constabulary; Humberside Police; Kent Police; Lancashire Constabulary; Leicestershire Constabulary; Lincolnshire Police; Lothian and Borders Police; Merseyside Police; Metropolitan Police Service; Norfolk Constabulary; Northamptonshire Police; North Wales Police; North Yorkshire Police; Northern Constabulary; Nottinghamshire Police; South Wales Police; South Yorkshire Police; Staffordshire Police; Strathclyde Police; Sussex Police; Tayside Police; Thames Valley Police; Warwickshire Police; West Mercia Constabulary; West Midlands Police; West Yorkshire Police; Wiltshire Constabulary

Thanks also to Steve Hughes of Pegasus Homes for the information within the Discussion section.

will encourage developers to flout the law in order to pay the comparatively negligible cost of a fine.

Naturewatch recommends that a Parliamentary Select Committee should focus on the illegal destruction of habitat, so that the issue of the high costs of compliance and the low penalties for disobedience might be addressed. This might be a natural topic for the Environmental Audit Committee as a follow-up to their October 2004 Wildlife Crime report. Alternatively, as the subject cuts across several departments, it might be equally suitable for the select committees associated with DEFRA, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or the Home Office.

Conclusion

Police wildlife officers show a high degree of passion for and commitment to their work, but this survey has revealed that in many forces they are woefully under-resourced.

Much of the problem stems from a lack of leadership from the Home Office. 87% of respondents agreed that the Home Office needs to take a stronger lead in this area, more than half of whom strongly agreed.

A key issue is that of making severe wildlife crime notifiable to the Home Office – an issue supported by 91% of officers. The new National Standards for Incident Recording will provide a much more accurate database of incidents but, unless it is adapted so that it can replace the system for making certain offences notifiable, it will not affect policing priorities.

The link between wildlife crime and other forms of crime also received strong backing (84% agreeing with no disagreement), strengthening the need for greater priority to be given to this area.

The illegal destruction of habitat came out as the most significant crime across Britain. 87% of officers agreed that the fines for infringement are too low. We recommend that a Commons select committee look into this along with the very high costs of compliance.

Naturewatch

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST ANIMAL CRUELTY

Naturewatch is a non-profit animal welfare campaigning organisation. Our aims are to promote the prevention of cruelty to animals and to conduct and support the publication of information concerning animals in furtherance of their welfare. We are completely committed to the democratic process and condemn all illegal activity.

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