

NATUREWATCH BRIEF MPS ON WILDLIFE CRIME

Members of Cheltenham-based animal welfare organisation Naturewatch are travelling to London on Tuesday 29th November to brief MPs on the results of the organisation's survey of wildlife crime.

Naturewatch director John Ruane and campaign manager Dr Richard Tweedy will be supported in the House of Commons by Cheltenham MP Martin Horwood.

The survey, which is based on the responses of Police Wildlife Crime Officers across the UK, found that the most significant wildlife crime across the country is the illegal destruction of habitat. The majority of respondents (86 per cent) believe the fines given to developers convicted of habitat destruction are too small to act as a deterrent.

The vast gulf between the high costs for compliance and the low fines for disobedience 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.

Almost all respondents believe that there is a connection between wildlife crime and other forms of serious crime, and that the Home Office needs to take a stronger lead in tackling issues related to wildlife crime.

They feel 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 tackling it sufficient priority.

Levels of staffing are also a concern; some police forces only have officers working on wildlife crime on a voluntary basis.

"Based on the survey results, we are asking MPs to focus their attention on three areas," said Naturewatch campaign manager Richard Tweedy. "These are the illegal destruction of habitat, making severe wildlife crime a notifiable offence so police forces can give it a higher priority, and the lack of leadership from the Home Office in tackling issues related to wildlife crime."

Further details of the survey are available on the Naturewatch web site
www.naturewatch.org

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Notes to Editors

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