

WILDLIFE CRIME

– The Case for Recording

Wildlife crime is widely recognised as a significant and growing threat to species conservation, animal welfare and the environment, alongside issues such as unsustainable use, habitat destruction and climate change. However, quantifying wildlife crime is a challenge.

In our report “The Recording of Wildlife Crime in England and Wales” we have set out the case for more effective recording of wildlife crime in England and Wales.

Unlike in Scotland, most wildlife crimes in England and Wales are not centrally recorded. Without a reliable method of assessing levels of wildlife crimes, how can national priorities be set appropriately, police forces be held accountable, or resources allocated effectively?

Our research illustrates that there were more than 4,000 incidents of wildlife crime - involving four of the Government’s priority wildlife crime areas - between 2005 and 2010. Yet this data is not collated through police forces and the Home Office.

Without data collection by a number of Non-Governmental Organisations, there would be no clear understanding of the level of these crimes.

Additionally, whilst some offences are recordable, such as the import/export of illegal wildlife products, there is no central collation of convictions, or up-to-date guidance for the sentencing of those found guilty.

Eighty seven percent of stakeholders surveyed for our report felt that all wildlife crime should be recorded, with many noting that the current practice of recording crime under the ‘miscellaneous’ category was ‘of no use at all’.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates that more accurate recording of wildlife crime would be highly beneficial for law enforcement, analysis and monitoring, and that contrary to common belief, the associated administrative burden would be minimal.

We urge the Home Office to make all wildlife crimes recordable in England and Wales, with specific priority areas addressed adequately within police recording codes, and to produce an annual wildlife crime report detailing trends, identifying priorities, and in turn, enabling better enforcement and helping to safeguard wildlife and nature.

Only a national, effective and uniformed method of recording all crime will provide an accurate picture.

The UK has a well-earned reputation for championing action on wildlife crime internationally and will host the 2018 international conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade. If we are to retain this reputation, we must apply the same commitment to combating wildlife crime here at home.



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