

Stephen Parkinson
Director of Public Prosecutions, Crown Prosecution Service
By email

19th March 2024

Dear Mr Parkinson,

Re: Wildlife Crime prosecutions

I am writing as Chair of the [Link Wildlife Crime Group](#), England's largest coalition of organisations working to reduce crimes against wild animals, plants and fungi to express the concerns of the group about wildlife crime prosecutions.

I preface my remarks with Link's ongoing appreciation of the hard work of prosecutors, and of the challenges they face at the moment. However, over recent months, organisations belonging to Link have seen systematic issues develop in wildlife crime cases that undermine this hard work.

The first of these has been the apparent lapsing of the role of Wildlife Crime lead at CPS. This post previously provided a focal point for improving prosecution practices in wildlife crime cases, a complicated area of law where specialist knowledge, best practice and information sharing is vital to maximising the chances of successful prosecution. I understand that the previous holder of the role has now moved on, and that it has remained vacant for a significant period of time. The CPS Wildlife, Heritage and Rural Crime Community Involvement Panel, which met regularly under the Wildlife Crime lead to bring all those working at the frontline of wildlife law enforcement together, has not gathered since May 2023.

This sharp reduction in engagement between CPS and forces and charities working to reduce wildlife crime has meant that training opportunities have been missed. The Badger Trust has previously provided well-received training on wildlife crime issues to CPS, most recently in 2021-2022, but more recent attempts to renew this training have not received a response.

The loss of a focal point for wildlife crime issues, reduction in engagement with specialist wildlife crime organisations and non-take up of training opportunities is already resulting in poor outcomes in wildlife crime cases. Members of Link report a number of a recent cases where prosecution errors have resulted in wildlife crime prosecutions collapsing in their final stages. A December 2023 incident [written up](#) by the RSPB, where a prosecution case concerning a goshawk killing collapsed in court due to procedural errors despite strong forensic evidence, is typical of the process errors that now often frustrate wildlife crime convictions.

This decline in CPS performance comes against a backdrop of falling conviction for wildlife crimes. According to numbers collected by Link members, despite record levels of wildlife crime in 2021, there has been a notable [42% fall](#) in subsequent convictions for wildlife crime, from 900 in 2021 to

526 in 2022. Link members are concerned that further declines in CPS performance will exacerbate this trend. At a time when public concern about the future of the UK's wild species is [extremely high](#), it is disappointing that more people are getting away with hurting wild animals.

I would be very grateful for your response to these concerns, and hope that you can commit to:

- Swiftly appointing a new Wildlife Crime lead
- Swiftly resuming CPS Wildlife Community Panel meetings
- Accepting offer of training for CPS staff from the Badger Trust and other organisations.

Without these actions and further work, it is possible that the number of successful wildlife crime prosecutions will fall further, harming the reputation of the CPS, undermining the hard work of wildlife crime police officers and threatening the future of vulnerable wildlife species.

I look forward to your reply and would be happy to meet to discuss Link's concerns in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Dyer, Chair of the Link Wildlife Crime Working Group

Replies can be sent to matt@wcl.org.uk

The following organisations, members of the Link Wildlife Crime Working Group, have signed on to support this letter:

Angling Trust
Badger Trust
Born Free
Institute for Fisheries Management
International Fund for Animal Welfare
Humane Society International - UK
League Against Cruel Sports
Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
Plantlife
RSPB
Seal Research Trust
Whale & Dolphin Conservation
Wild Justice

CC: Deputy Chief Constable Nigel Harrison, NPCC National Lead for Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs