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Experts shine a light on invisible wildlife crime with a new annual report

The first ever annual wildlife crime report for England and Wales is being launched tomorrow (Weds 18 April) by 18 NGOs¹, co-ordinated by Wildlife and Countryside Link and Wales Environment Link.² Wildlife and conservation experts are committing to publishing a report each year on the number of crimes against wild animals and birds they record, in the absence of government and police data. They aim to shine a light on the hidden deaths, suffering, and conservation impacts of wildlife crime in England and Wales.

The [report](#), shows that there were **almost 1,300 wildlife crime incidents** recorded by NGOs in 2016 (the most recent data available). However, this figure is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg. Most wildlife crimes are not officially recorded through the Home Office crime recording system, so the best available data is information that comes through directly to NGOs. However, many types of offences are not collected by NGOs, and wildlife organisations use different methods to collect the data. Some types of wildlife crimes are also less visible than others and therefore are more likely to go unreported.

Wildlife crime figures recorded by NGOs in 2016

	No. of incidents recorded/reported	No. of cases referred to the police	No. of cases where criminal offending confirmed	No. of prosecutions and convictions
Badgers	612	92	-	5
Bats	145	145	32	1
Wildlife Trade	-	-	-	16
Marine Mammal	366	3	0	0
Raptors	155	- *	67	0
TOTAL	1278	240	99	22

* There is not enough data to provide an exact figure, but most cases involving birds of prey are referred to the police.

Dominic Dyer, CEO of the Badger Trust, said: ‘It is shocking that most wildlife crimes reported to the police are not recorded in a meaningful or coordinated way. Badgers and other animals are suffering and dying, and it is hidden away amid a multitude of miscellaneous offences. We are urging the Home Office to heed the public’s sense of injustice at these crimes, and record and report on them transparently, so that resources can be targeted effectively to help stop animals and birds being senselessly killed.’

Kit Stoner, CEO of the Bat Conservation Trust, said: ‘These figures show that wildlife crime is still a clear and present danger for British bats, birds, and other animals. Inadequate recording and reporting is turning it into an invisible crime – making it impossible for hard-working enforcement officers to target resources effectively and stop criminals in their tracks. We need the Home Office to

shine a spotlight on wildlife crime and ensure resources are used effectively to catch and punish those killing and maiming our treasured wildlife.'

Dr Elaine King, Director of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said: 'We must protect our wildlife from horrible deaths at the hands of badger baiters, poachers and illegal hunters. Scotland has legal requirements to report on this issue and wildlife in England and Wales must not be forgotten.'

Wildlife crime poses a major threat to protected animal populations and their welfare. However, it is an 'invisible crime' in England and Wales. In Scotland, wildlife crimes are recorded centrally, with a requirement in Scottish law to report annually on wildlife crime offences. In contrast, in England and Wales, most wildlife crimes are currently recorded as 'miscellaneous' offences and are therefore invisible crimes in police records, with no duty to be reported upon. While some offences are recordable, such as the trade in endangered species, there is no central collation of crimes and convictions, or sentencing guidelines.

To ensure that wildlife crime is transparently assessed and priorities and resources are targeted most effectively to safeguard vulnerable species, the NGOs are urging the Home Office to:

- make all wildlife crimes recordable in England and Wales, with specific wildlife crime police recording codes;
- produce a comprehensive annual wildlife crime report - detailing trends and directing funding and resources accordingly

The wildlife and conservation experts are also calling on the Ministry of Justice and Sentencing Council to:

- produce guidelines relating to the investigation and prosecution of wildlife crime, ensuring sufficient resources and expertise so that wildlife criminals are subjected to dissuasive sanctions.

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Notes to editors:

1. These calls are backed by 18 organisations:
Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, A Rocha UK, Badger Trust, Bat Conservation Trust, Born Free Foundation, Environmental Investigation Agency, Humane Society International, IFAW, Institute of Fisheries Management, Naturewatch Foundation, Plantlife, RSPB, RSPCA, Wildlife Trusts Wales, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, WWF, Zoological Society of London.
2. [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) is the biggest coalition of wildlife and environment charities in England, and operates as part of a UK-wide coalition - [Environment Links UK](#). [Wales Environment Link](#) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage non-governmental organisations with an all-Wales remit, also operating as part of Environment Links UK.
3. The types of wildlife crime discussed in this report are limited to areas within the remit of Wildlife and Countryside Link members.
4. This report follows a report on [recording wildlife crime](#), published in November 2017, which demonstrated the impact of wildlife crimes without proper recording.