

Nature in brief

3: Wildlife crime



Image by Peter Cosgrove

Wildlife crime is defined as any **unlawful act or omission**, which affects any **wild creature, plant or habitat**, in Scotland.¹

It encompasses both the very evident, illegal and harmful activities such as **badger bating, raptor persecution** and **egg collecting** to the not so obvious such as **inappropriate disposal of chemicals, fly tipping** and introduction of **invasive non-native species** - all of which can destroy species' habitats and damage ecosystem health.

Having a flagrant disregard and lack of respect for the environment can lead to actions that have long-lasting and devastating consequences for the species' affected as well as **damaging Scotland's reputation and the economy** too. Wildlife tourism alone in Scotland is worth at least **£127 million** per year.²

Recent strengthening of wildlife legislation³ may have led to a **fall in birds of prey poisoning**.⁴ However, such crimes often occur in very remote areas and as such, the current data may only be the **tip of the iceberg** in terms of real persecution levels.⁵

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes the **punishment must be proportionate, discourage others and reflect the damage done**. Recently, an internationally important population of freshwater pearl mussel on a Perthshire river was totally wiped out because not enough was done by developers to prevent silt and oil from entering the river. The total fine of around £15,000 could be considered paltry compared to the damage inflicted on a globally threatened species.

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What the Scottish Wildlife Trust would like to see:

- **Funding secured** in the long-term for the National Wildlife Crime Unit
- **Tougher sentencing** for wildlife crime to send a strong message to potential offenders
- **Wider publication and dissemination** of the requirements with regard to the protection of wildlife in legislation
- **Continued funding of the pesticide and biocide disposal scheme** to rid Scotland of illegal poisons such as carbofuran - which is commonly used to kill raptors
- **Rigorous enforcement and zero tolerance of those not complying with The Snares (Identification Numbers and Tags) (Scotland) Order 2012** — which comes into effect on 1 April 2013

1 See: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/921/0116246.pdf>

2 See: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B720765.pdf>

3 E.g. vicarious liability under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011

4 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland/types-of-crime/crimes-against-birds/Poisoninghotspotmaps2010/2008-2012>

5 See: http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Illegal_bird_killing_tcm9-335703.pdf