

Scottish Wildlife Trust Briefing



Scottish Government Debate:

Wildlife Crime, eradicating raptor persecution from Scotland

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 and ultimately Scotland's stock of natural capital.

Having a flagrant disregard and lack of respect for the environment and wildlife law 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 £1.4 billion per year.

We know the public value wildlife and are passionate about raptors in particular; the golden eagle was recently voted Scotland's favourite species ahead of the red squirrel, otter, red deer and harbour seal. The public also want to help protect wildlife from crime – the Trust's peregrine watch at the Falls of Clyde (to prevent peregrine eggs being stolen) was oversubscribed this year with 15 volunteers coming forward to help out. The Trust also knows that Scotland's raptors are loved around the world - the osprey's web cam at the Trust's Loch of the Lowes reserve attracts over 1 million viewers a year from 150 countries.

The shocking spate of red kite (an Annex 1² and Schedule 1 species³) and buzzard poisonings in Ross-shire highlights the fact that some individuals are determined to flout the law, for their own selfish needs. Sadly it is obvious that the recently strengthened wildlife legislation has failed to halt or change the behaviour of some. More worryingly, as such crimes often occur in very remote areas the recent deaths may only be the tip of the iceberg in terms of real persecution levels.

Illegal killing of rare birds is more commonly associated with other countries such as Malta. Last month, the wildlife presenter Chris Packham witnessed internationally protected harriers being shot by hunters there and he describes Malta as a 'bird hell' – he also states that this sort of thing wouldn't happen in the UK.

The poisoning of 20 birds in Ross-shire follows closely on from the death of a four-year old female peregrine in Stirlingshire, the disappearance of a fledged white-tailed eagle in East Scotland and the poisoning of the tagged golden eagle, Fearnan, in Angus which illustrates that some are not immune to carrying out such despicable acts in Scotland. This not only damages Scotland's biodiversity it also puts at risk what makes Scotland such an attractive and special place for residents and visitors alike.

To get to grips with wildlife crime, the Scottish Wildlife Trust believes the punishment must be proportionate, discourage others and reflect the damage done.

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

² Red Kite is listed as an Annex 1 species in the EU Birds Directive

³ Red kite is afforded the highest degree of legal protection under the Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

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
- Any proven crime use the vicarious liability provision so as to send a clear signal to landowners that they need to take responsibility for their staff

Although this debate is focussed on raptor persecution, the Scottish Wildlife Trust encounters wildlife crime across the Trust's 120 reserves. Here are some examples of what occurs:

- Badger baiting within 200 m of the Falls of Clyde Reserve
- Fly tipping, the worst incidents usually involve: glass, tyres, asbestos, garden waste (risk of spreading non-natives/invasive plants e.g. Spanish bluebell), sharps, general household waste and burnt-out cars - the Trust even had to dispose of a dead foal which had been dumped on one of our reserves in West Lothian. The cost for clearing up the waste is not trivial - in Cumbernauld alone where the Trust manages a large area of urban greenspace the Trust could spend in the region of £25,000 per year cleaning up after illegal dumping.
- Unauthorised fishing on some sites; there is a suspicion that in some cases fish are introduced into water bodies e.g. pike. The Trust also has to clean up the rubbish left (drink cans/bottles, discarded fishing line) and fires lit by fishermen
- Disturbance of birds at their breeding site (e.g. ospreys)

For further information please contact:

Dr Maggie Keegan, Head of Policy and Planning. E mkeegan@swt.org.uk