

Teachers Background Information on Wildlife Crime

People buying, selling, harming or disturbing wild animals or plants that are protected by law

Examples (see wildlife trigger photos resource 0a.) include:

- Smuggling protected/CITES species and/or their parts (such as buying a tortoise and bringing it home from your holiday, ivory, traditional medicines including rhino horn and foods such as caviar)
- Illegally trading in endangered species e.g. selling a protected bird
- Poisoning of animals, such as birds of prey
- Disturbing or killing wild birds; or taking their eggs
- Poaching of game e.g. deer (venison) and fish e.g. salmon
- Disturbing, injuring or killing bats, and damaging or obstructing their roosts
- Taking protected plants e.g. bluebells from the countryside
- Destroying a badger sett and violence towards badgers
- The illegal use of traps, snares or explosives to kill or injure animals

The wildlife crime priorities in Wales are to reduce:

- Poaching (in particular deer poaching)
- Disturbance of nesting birds/egg collecting
- Badger persecution
- Bird of prey persecution, including poisoning, egg theft, chick theft and nest disturbance/destruction (with a focus on peregrine, golden eagle, goshawk, hen harrier, red kite and white-tailed eagle).

The impact of wildlife crime

Illegally taking protected plants and animals from the wild in the UK can:

- reduce their numbers
- affect the long term survival of the species; and
- push a species closer to extinction.

For example, of the 1,467 plant species found in Wales, 17.5% are threatened with extinction. Some of these species e.g. the Great Orme Berry are found in Wales and nowhere else in the world.



Wild animals and plants are also put at risk if their habitats are disturbed or destroyed. For example it is an offence to damage or obstruct bat roosts; or to illegally block up entrances to badger setts.

The legal consequences of wildlife crime

Wildlife crime may involve a local isolated incident or, as wildlife has become another commodity to be traded, be part of an organised international illegal smuggling racket attracting criminals intent on making large sums of money.

Wildlife in the UK is protected by the law, for example the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (which was amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

- Penalties for wildlife crimes that can be imposed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 include a £5,000 maximum fine and six months imprisonment.
- It is also an offence to destroy or damage the special features which led to an area being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Animal specific legislation;

1. Badgers

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 legally protects badgers and their setts from harm. Anyone caught treating a badger cruelly such as badger-baiting, or disturbing or damaging their setts, faces a possible 6 month prison sentence and / or a large fine and. Illegal threats include:

- fighting badgers with dogs, known as 'badger baiting';
- badger-digging and sett interference;
- poisoning (including the misuse of pesticides); and
- badgers getting caught in snares

2. Bats

In Britain all bat species and their roosts are legally protected. Anyone caught mistreating bats, damaging their roost or killing them, faces the possibility of a £5,000 fine and/or a six months prison sentence for each bat killed. You will be committing a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats.
- Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time).
- Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat.
- Intentionally obstruct access to a bat roost.



3. Birds

All birds of prey have been protected in the UK since 1954 (except for the sparrow hawk which received protection in 1961). Despite this protection, birds of prey continue to be the target of criminal activity which can result in a £5,000 and six months prison for each bird killed.

- It has been illegal to take the eggs of most wild birds since the Protection of Birds Act 1954 and it is illegal to possess or control any wild birds' eggs under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- It is illegal to sell any wild bird's egg, irrespective of its age.
- Possession of wild birds' eggs is an offence of strict liability. Anyone that chooses to be in possession of eggs is obliged to show, on a balance of probabilities, that their possession is lawful. For persons found guilty of any of these offences, Magistrates have the power to impose maximum sentences of £5,000 fine and/or six month's imprisonment per egg.
- All birds, their nest and eggs are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and it is an offence to damage or destroy an active nest or prevent parent birds' access to their nests.
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