

Naturewatch wildlife crime and animal welfare workshop

Wildlife crime and animal welfare workshop for police forces, covering the correct recording and accounting of reported wildlife crime/incidents and conservation concerns.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Rural and wildlife crime Intelligence
Organisation	West Mercia Police
Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Clark - jim@naturewatch.org • Graham Donaldson - graham.donaldson@westmercia.police.uk
Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2024
Scale of initiative	National

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

The aim of the wildlife crime and animal welfare workshops provided by Naturewatch Foundation is to improve data collection and reporting of wildlife crime by police forces. The workshop enables police forces to build confidence when identifying, collecting and reporting wildlife crime data. It also supports police and crime commissioners scrutinising how forces respond to wildlife crime and makes key data available to government on wildlife crime offences.

Intended outcome

Consistent and accurate recording of wildlife crime is essential for several reasons:

- Law enforcement. The ability to track local and national wildlife crimes, trends and hotspots enabling police forces to identify repeat offenders, develop intelligence and bring offenders to justice.
- Public protection. To highlight links between animal abuse and violence against persons.
- Conservation. Accurate data allows for at-risk species-specific policing and conservation strategies to be created, and identifies those at risk from poaching and habitat destruction.
- Harsher sentences for new and repeat offenders as a deterrent to prevent crimes from occurring.

Description

Genuine wildlife crime is not covered by the Animals Act 2006, therefore, the lack of notifiable status (recordable crime) makes wildlife offences non-recordable. This means wildlife crimes are often inputted into police incident recording systems inconsistently. With no notifiable status, there are no central nationwide records, meaning there is limited factual knowledge about the scale of wildlife crime across the United Kingdom.

Certain elements of legislation from the acts below where wildlife crime is covered but not notifiable includes: (this list is by no means exhaustive)

- Hunting Act 2004
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Deer Act 1991

Naturewatch Foundation offers free training to police forces for all matters regarding wildlife crime, Animal Welfare Act offences and the link between violence to animals and violence to people. In 2023, three police forces took part in training days which were arranged by Naturewatch Foundation, police force wildlife and rural crime single points of contact (SPOCs). The training material included:

- Identification of specific wildlife offences
- scene preservation and correct recording of offences
- in-house methods of incident and 'occurrence' recording advice, as no standard practice across forces is currently in place.

The workshop is delivered as one session, but additional sessions are available if required. Any police force can request a workshop from Naturewatch Foundation and any officer or member of staff is welcome to attend. The workshops are free of charge to police forces.

There have been approximately 10 attendees to sessions so far, and all workshops have been delivered in person. Some forces have reached out directly to Naturewatch Foundation requesting the workshop, and Naturewatch Foundation have also contacted forces offering their awareness sessions.

Additionally, Naturewatch Foundation launched a survey aimed at all police officers, staff and those either deployed to wildlife crime or at the first point of contact. This survey is designed to indicate a true reflection of 'in force' knowledge regarding what is or isn't a wildlife crime and how accurate the initial recording of allegations are. The survey can either be completed anonymously or with further details provided in the comments. Participants are encouraged to add good practices examples and further comments to improve our understanding of the issues.

Naturewatch Foundation have met with MPs to discuss the possibility of highlighting this in the House of Commons.

In 2023, Naturewatch Foundation launched their award-winning Police Control Room wildlife crime training package. This package saw over 5,500 police staff trained in less than 12 months.

The training package was created in partnership with the National Wildlife Crime Unit, RSPCA and supported by the expertise of Thames Valley Police. It aims to show the learner what a caller or witness may experience when a wildlife crime takes place. Using innovative animations, It takes learners through the stages of wildlife crimes, such as the 'dig' in a badger baiting incident. This means that the police control room operator knows exactly what is required of them to aid an effective police response.

Naturewatch Foundation have also made a significant financial contribution to the National Wildlife Crime Unit's digital online training academy. This package will ensure officers have 24/7 access to species specific online training modules.

Overall impact

Several police forces have requested training for police officers and staff. These include South Yorkshire Police and Cheshire Constabulary In addition, Nottinghamshire Police have requested training for wildlife officers, new police starters, and control room staff.

Feedback received from the West Mercia Police rural and business crime officer:

"Naturewatch Foundation kindly provided some face-to-face training to West Mercia Police in the summer of 2024. I arranged the training in my role as the rural and business crime officer with West Mercia. The training covered wildlife crime, animal welfare offences, puppy farming and livestock attacks.

The training was at no cost to the force and was delivered in a friendly and efficient manner. I would recommend Naturewatch Foundation to colleagues and am looking forwards to working with them again. A great resource in helping the police to reduce wildlife and animal crime."

Feedback from a wildlife trained officer:

"The training was very good and the feedback from all the officers there was good. I felt the face-to-face training was very good, especially for me who is dyslexic, online training doesn't fit my learning style. I found it very accessible and easy to follow."

In respect of the police force control room package:

“Naturewatch Foundation is a key partner to the National Wildlife Crime Unit and to policing in the UK. It’s no secret that policing is under increased pressure and scrutiny, and Naturewatch Foundation are our unsung heroes. To quantify that statement, I can refer to their ongoing support and accountability that they bring, but more recently, Naturewatch Foundation has been a critical enabler in delivering a strategic policing priority.

This has been used by forces across the UK and has made the first response to wildlife crime much better. I would like to thank Naturewatch Foundation and their members. Your support is critical in the fight against wildlife crime and the expertise that Naturewatch Foundation brings can elevate our voice.”

Learning

- Identifying there is a lack of understanding around wildlife crime.
- Frustration resulting from wildlife crime not being a specific notifiable offence, meaning it is difficult to understand prevalence and trends.
- Little understanding of legislation around wildlife crime. This has resulted in inclusion of more information around legislation in the workshops.

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