



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Lord Douglas-Miller
Minister for Biosecurity, Animal Health and Welfare

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
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7 May 2024

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 25 March to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about wildlife crimes. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The Government takes wildlife crime seriously, including crimes against badgers, to which your constituents refer. In 2022, Defra more than doubled its funding of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) from a total of £495,000 over the three previous years to £1.2 million for the three-year period of 2022-25, to target wildlife crime priorities. This unit helps prevent and detect wildlife crime, such as badger baiting, by obtaining and disseminating intelligence, undertaking analysis which highlights local or national threats, and directly assisting law enforcers in their investigations. The NWCU also provides comprehensive training to wildlife crime officers across England and Wales on all wildlife crime priorities, including practical sessions on investigating crimes against badgers.

Badger persecution is one of the seven UK Wildlife Crime Priorities, and a UK Badger Persecution Priority Delivery Group is in place. This is police-led and comprises of a range of members meeting regularly to tackle horrific offences such as badger baiting, which is rightly illegal in this country, and anyone found guilty of these activities should be subject to the full force of the law.

Sentencing those convicted of wildlife crimes is a matter for judges and these decisions are rightly taken independently of the Government.

In 2021, the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 came into force, which protects animals that are commonly domesticated in the British Islands but can extend to badgers as it prohibits causing unnecessary suffering to animals under the control of man, for example, wild animals caught in traps. It also increases the maximum sentences for animal cruelty from six months to five years, which is equal to the highest penalty in the world for such crimes; anyone who is cruel to an animal now faces being sent to prison for up to five years, receiving an unlimited fine, or both. The new maximum sentence sends a clear signal to any future potential offenders that animal cruelty will not be tolerated.

As your constituents rightly say, most wildlife crimes are not categorised as notifiable, so there is no obligation for UK police forces to capture and report them. Any decision to make offences notifiable would sit with the National Crime Registrar at the Home Office rather than Defra.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 continues to provide protection against certain methods of killing, injuring, or taking of badgers, or interference with their setts.

I hope this reassures your constituents that the Government takes wildlife crime seriously.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K Douglas-Miller', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

LORD DOUGLAS-MILLER