

Date: 15 November 2017

Your Ref:

Our Ref:

Mr Graeme Dey MSP
Convenor
ECCLR Committee
c/o Clerk to the Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



**Detective Chief Superintendent
Sean Scott**

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Dear Mr Dey,

WILDLIFE CRIME UPDATE

I am aware that the Scottish Government Annual Wildlife Crime Report is still to be published and therefore, as the Wildlife Crime portfolio holder in Police Scotland, I thought I would take the opportunity to update you on elements of the wildlife crime work that Police Scotland has undertaken in 2017.

The following is offered by way of a brief synopsis:

1. Freshwater Pearl Mussels (FWPM) – To date, only one incident of pearl fishing has been reported in 2017. However, many of the previous reports have been as a result of surveys conducted by Scottish Natural Heritage and other organisations, and in 2017 these have been fewer in number. In order to assist officers when they are investigating FWPM related crime, Police Scotland has worked with partner agencies to produce a guide to estimating the age of dead mussel shells. This has been circulated to relevant Police Divisions where crimes have been reported in the past and is available on the Police Scotland intranet. Finally, Operation Caesar has been concluded. This operation started in June 2012 to investigate whether Scottish FWPM that had been illegally fished were being laundered through the jewellery trade. Following extensive work with the jewellery trade it would appear that currently, pearls do not appear to be being laundered through the mainstream or local jewellery trade. As such, it is suggested that current FWPM crime is more likely to be for personal collections.

2. Badger Persecution - The winter / spring period of 2016 / 17 saw Scottish Badgers staff deliver one day training to a number of police officers in Divisions across Scotland. It is anticipated that further local training will take place in early

2018 as this has undoubtedly improved the partnership response when a crime is reported. Police Scotland now meets with Scottish Badgers officials on a regular basis to discuss reports of badger persecution received by both organisations. The consensus is that this has seen an improvement in the dissemination of information by both sides along with more accurate recording of crime and a greater understanding of why certain incidents may not necessitate a crime report.

3. Raptor Persecution – Disappointingly, raptor persecution remains an issue in Scotland although fewer reports have been received than in previous years. Police Scotland continues to investigate all instances of reported raptor crime and meets regularly with SNH to share information which could assist in Open General Licence restrictions. With the impending launch in 2018 of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project, a draft operational order has been written in conjunction with the National Wildlife Crime Unit to consider crime prevention activity, not only in the south of Scotland but in the north of England as well. Meetings have also been held with colleagues south of the border.

4. Poaching – Hare Coursing has continued to be an area of concern in 2017, not just in Scotland but across the UK in general. A number of well publicised arrests have been made and those individuals already sentenced at court have received fines and orders banning them from keeping dogs (unfortunately this is only applicable in Scotland and is not a cross border sentence). This form of crime occurs predominantly in east coast divisions and now appears to be almost year round activity rather than the traditional period of late spring and late summer. Many of the individuals involved are repeat offenders and a number are believed to travel across divisional and national boundaries. Analytical work is being undertaken in conjunction with the National Wildlife Crime Unit to assist in targeting the individuals and vehicles involved.

Operation Moon (targeting deer poaching) has been running across a number of Police Scotland Divisions in 2017. Highland and Islands Division is currently undertaking such work in the lead up to Christmas when venison may be offered for sale via the black market. In light of this, and issues recognised with the venison dealer licensing process, Police Scotland officers are now in initial discussion with Food Standards Scotland on a range of wild game issues and how these may be addressed in future.

5. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) – Police Scotland continues to undertake a small but significant number of CITES cases, increasingly generated by postings taken from internet. The impact of Brexit could be significant in this area as CITES is implemented within Europe through two EC Regulations (338/97 and 865/06 as amended). These Regulations implement CITES in a stricter manner than is required by the Convention and also contain provisions to prohibit or restrict imports of species which are considered to be a threat to native EC fauna and flora. Police Scotland is now an established member of the UK CITES Priority Delivery Group and this will assist with remaining fully engaged in the developments in this area. Discussions continue with a number of partner organisations for a one day CITES course in Scotland in early 2018.

6. Bat Persecution – An SNH bat expert provided awareness training to Police Scotland officers at three venues across Scotland. Once again it is hoped that this can be repeated in 2018.

7. Training – Police Scotland held a further Wildlife Crime Officer Introduction course at the beginning of October 2017. In total, 40 officers from across Scotland received

inputs on the UK Wildlife Crime priorities as well as inputs on the role of SNH, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Traps / Snares. Although predominantly delivered by police officers, assistance was received from colleagues at SNH, SASA and RSPB. Further offers of assistance with training are currently being developed with BASC, SGA and GWCT.

It should also be highlighted that in 2017, Police Scotland launched the Investigators Development Programme (IDP) and that a wildlife crime module exists within the new National Investigators Exam. This is the first stage of the IDP and is open to all officers and staff in Police Scotland.

8. Additional posts – Police Scotland is currently in the process of appointing an additional Detective Constable within the Specialist Crime Division to support the work of the Wildlife Crime Coordinator and to support investigations at divisional level. This is a Scottish Government funded post and is in addition to funding provided for the Wildlife and Rural Crime Special Constable scheme currently being developed for deployment in the Cairngorms National Park.

9. Bonomy Review – As you will be aware, Scottish Ministers responded to Lord Bonomy's report on the Protection of Wild Mammals Act 2002 by outlining proposals to convene a stakeholder group to develop a new code of practice on hunting. Police Scotland has played a full part in this group, including assisting with the provision of a facilitator for a workshop day, and is now part of the small team drafting the proposed code of practice document.

2017 also saw the first conviction of 'traditional fox hunting activity' under the legislation introduced 2002. This resulted in fines for two individuals who were convicted of deliberately hunting a fox with dogs near Jedburgh in 2016.

10. Scottish Sentencing Council – Police Scotland recently met with representatives of the Scottish Sentencing Council. Environmental and Wildlife Crime has been chosen by the Council as one of the first areas of business due to the particular impact in Scotland on tourism, rural industry and the local economy. Officers provided an overview of the variety of legislation, breadth of investigations undertaken and both the penalties available and those handed out to convicted wildlife criminals.

I hope the foregoing is of interest to you and your fellow committee members and I look forward to your continued support in our efforts to tackle wildlife crime.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Scott
Detective Chief Superintendent
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