



Wildlife crime in North Yorkshire, and beyond

This report sets out how North Yorkshire Police address wildlife crime concerns, both locally in North Yorkshire, as well as the lead force on wildlife crime for the National Police Chief's Council.

The PCC oversees this work in a number of ways, both locally by engaging with the Rural Task Force (including going out on patrol) and members of the public on their concerns, but also as Chair of the National Rural Crime Network.

The below is a summary of North Yorkshire Police's approach rather than a detailed breakdown, and should members have specific questions on specific issues, the Commissioner is happy to address those separately.

Background

The rural make-up of North Yorkshire is well known and, as the biggest county police service in England, wildlife crime is an important part of policing. It is fair to say the focus on rural and wildlife crime has increased in recent years, the reasons for which will be explored further below.

As members may remember, the Commissioner, as Chair of the National Rural Crime Network, undertook the largest rural crime survey to date in 2015, completed by 17,000 people across England and Wales. The results of the survey were stark with, for example:

- Just 39% of rural people rate the police as good (32.4%) or excellent (6.3%). Among rural businesses this figure was just 32%. Those figures compare to 63% nationally who think the police is doing a good job (53% Good and 10% Excellent), showing rural communities have a significantly lower satisfaction rate than their urban counterparts
- More than one in four (27%) did not report the last crime of which they were a victim. This means Home Office figures of 294,000 rural crimes between April 2014 and May 2015 could be incorrect and the actual number of crimes could be as high as 403,000.

It is difficult to say what impact wildlife crime had on the above feedback from rural residents and business, but for the interest of panel members, wildlife crime was considered to be in the top three most under reported crimes, and in the top three issues most likely to be ignored by the police.

Notwithstanding the specific concerns of the public, the Network's survey put rural and wildlife crime back on the agenda for policing nationally. This was also the case in North Yorkshire. Consequently, in February 2016, North Yorkshire Police launched their new rural crime strategy, and the new Rural Task Force (the biggest in the country). Within this team there are specialists trained in combatting wildlife crime specifically, and forms an important part of the role of the Task Force.

Wildlife crime specifically

In respect of wildlife crime specifically, the Rural Task Force has two major areas on which it focusses its efforts, largely both because of the impact and quantity respectively:

1. Raptor persecution
2. Poaching

Both issues have specific Problem Solving Plans, centred around four principles:

1. Prevention
2. Intelligence
3. Enforcement
4. Reassurance

There are of course concerns about other areas of wildlife crime, in particular, badgers, bats, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), other bird incidents etc. These matters tend to be ad hoc and dealt with by specially trained Wildlife Crime Officers as and when necessary, with trends or patterns picked up by the Rural Task Force coordinator and analyst.

In order to resource the above wildlife crimes issues, North Yorkshire Police (NYP) have increased the number of Wildlife Crime Officers (WCOs) to 20 across the force, and will increase further in November following an additional internal course NYP are running. The number of WCOs stood at approximately 14 in 2015. Furthermore, to make those officers as effective as possible, NYP have changed the way they work. WCOs will continue to deal with complex and serious investigations, but will also take on an advisory role for more common crimes e.g. poaching. Raptors however, given the complexity around investigations, will remain solely with WCOs. More on this approach below.

Raptors and Poaching

These two issues are seen as the stand out wildlife crime problems in North Yorkshire, and for that reason are the only two with specific Problem Solving Plans. It is worth covering the two issues in turn.

Raptors

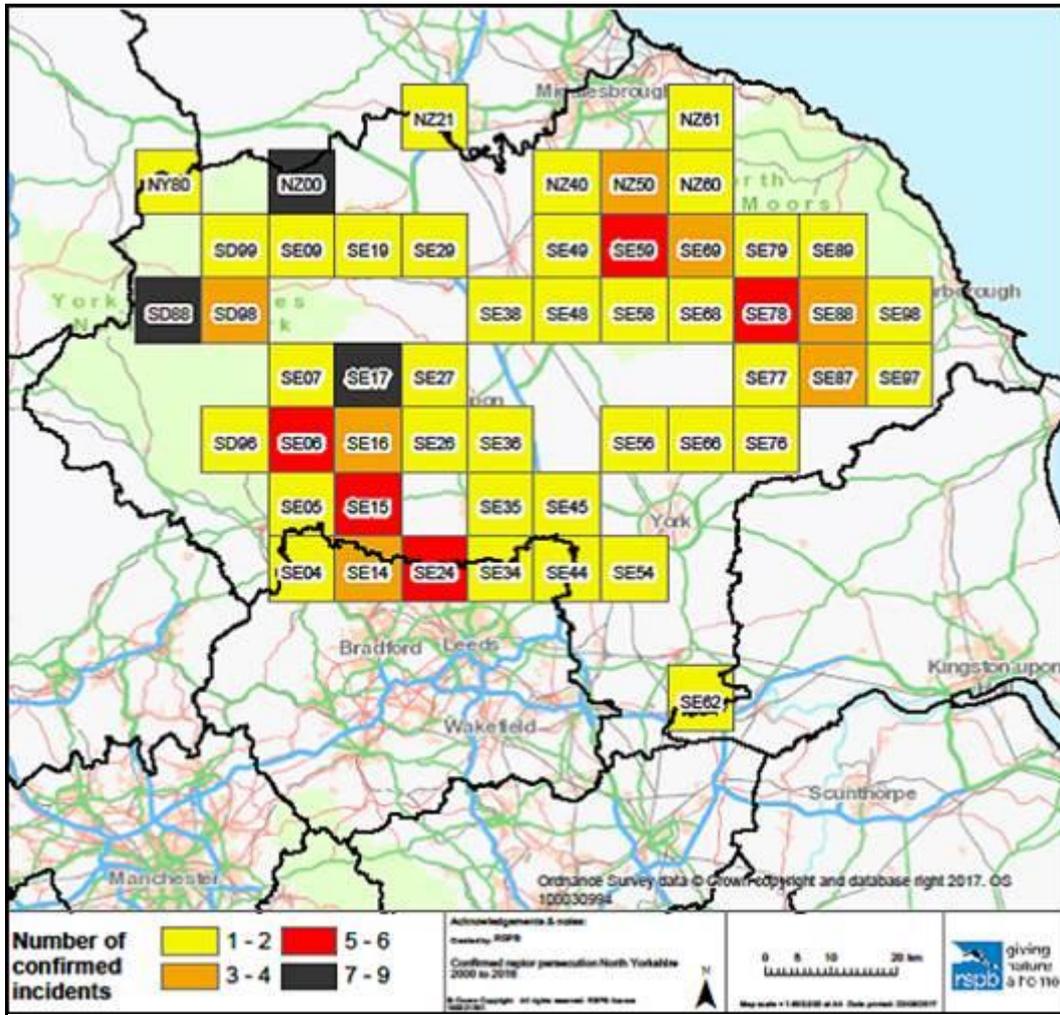
There are two public reports which demonstrate the scale of the problem in North Yorkshire; one uses data from the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the other is the annual RSPB Birdcrime report. To quote the RSPB report specifically:

There were... “83 confirmed raptor persecution incidents in the UK during 2016 of which 19 of these (23%) occurred in North Yorkshire”.

And.. “RSPB data shows over the past five years, North Yorkshire has 54 reports, more than twice the next area (Scottish Border – 22)”.

DEFRA maps

Confirmed Raptor persecution per 10km square in North Yorkshire, 2000 to 2016



In summary, North Yorkshire has more confirmed incidents of raptor persecution than any other county in England. Much of this is determined by the abundance of natural habitat which suits raptors in North Yorkshire, but it would be naive to believe this was the sole cause of the problem. To respond to this, North Yorkshire has both a long-term plan in order to address this matter, as well as Operation Owl, which is the specific operation aimed at reducing raptor persecution.

Neither Problem Solving Plan can be shared in full due to operational sensitivities, but the below gives the Panel a broad understanding of what North Yorkshire Police are doing to reduce raptor persecutions specifically:

Prevention

- Develop of a training video, which can be shown in relevant places, such as Tourist Information, or Park Authority buildings. The purpose is to educate members of the public and those working in relevant areas to be able to spot the signs of raptor persecution, and subsequently report this to the police.
- Training to be provided on the ground to Volunteers and Staff from National Park Authorities to allow them to identify raptor persecution, how to record and report it.
- Identify areas most at risk from raptor persecutions, and WCO's to engage with risk area land owners and others (gamekeepers, rights holders, etc.), whose activities bring them into contact with birds of prey, with an aim to encourage reporting, prevent illegal activity, and to engage with them.

- Firearms Licensing to explore the opportunity for sending out details on raptor persecution with renewals, and applications.

Intelligence

- North Yorkshire to be represented on the national Raptor Priority Delivery Group to ensure good national practice is identified, networks with key individuals are developed, and information is shared.
- The establishment of a local group, similar to the Raptor Priority Delivery Group, incorporating partners, with a view to ending raptor persecution in North Yorkshire. Representation to include, but not be limited to, NYP, Natural England, RSPB, Countryside Landowners Association, Moorland Association, Park Authorities, local support groups.
- Actively encourage reporting of intelligence through our communication, including day to day business, targeted campaigns, and social media interaction.
- Accurately record reports and intelligence relating to raptor persecution on police databases.

Enforcement

- Reinforce the restructuring of Wildlife Crime Officers and procedure to all staff where appropriate to ensure the timely attendance to incidents, but also the consultation of experts (WCOs) in response to reports of raptor persecution.
- Provide guidance and information to all staff, regardless of role, ensuring information is available to facilitate quality investigations, every time.
- Upon report of incidents of raptor persecution, experts should be consulted at every stage; initial response, investigation plan setting, disposal decision, case management. Supervision of such cases should be intrusive, and specialist CPS prosecutors must be made aware.
- Ancillary Orders and firearms revocation should always be considered along with prosecution.
- When no offender is identified, consideration must be given to contacting the land owner on which the incident has occurred, with a view to making them aware of their responsibilities for them and their staff.

Operation Owl

Launched in February 2018, Operation Owl is a new initiative to prevent the persecution of birds of prey in our countryside. The operation is an ongoing joint initiative by North Yorkshire Police, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the RSPCA, working together with the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

Through Operation Owl, partners aim to:

- Carry out surveillance checks on known raptor persecution hot-spots at random times to disrupt offender activity
- Work with local landowners to make them aware of the legal position on raptor persecution

- National Park volunteers are trained to identify the signs of raptor persecution across the national parks
- Raise public awareness of raptor persecution by distributing information at country fairs, tourist venues, vets surgeries, animal marts and local community venues
- Encourage the public to be our eyes and ears, keep a look out for dead or injured birds, poisoned bait and pole traps, and report these to the police on 101



Poaching

Analysis figures through 2016/17 would suggest there were approximately 1,600 incidents of poaching in North Yorkshire. Poaching also features highly in the concerns of rural residents and businesses, both anecdotally and in the 2015 National Rural Crime Survey (as well as in the not yet published 2018 results). There is also evidence that poaching leads to, or is linked to, more serious organised crime.

In efforts to address poaching, North Yorkshire Police has developed a specific 'Poaching Pack' which walks all officers through the approach needed when responding to and investigating poaching, with specialists (WCOs) on hand as required. There is now a pack in each car available to all officers, which has already led to more consistency in decision making and a greater confidence in officers to address poaching appropriately.

North Yorkshire Police's Problem Solving Plan cannot be shared with the Panel for the reasons already outlined, but an outline of the plan is below:

Prevention

- Repeat victims to be identified and subject to crime prevention visits adopting usual practice for repeat victims of crime.
- Use of letters to be sent to identified offenders to discourage return to North Yorkshire
- Identify what works for prevention from regional networks

Intelligence

- Specific campaigns to target poaching including #callitin
- Use of social media, and traditional media to encourage reports of poaching
- Use of Community Messaging to encourage reports of poaching

Enforcement

- Days of action to take place under the Op Galileo banner, mirroring neighbouring forces days of action where possible
- ASB legislation to be used at suitable opportunities, in particular Criminal Behaviour Orders, Community Protection Notices, Dispersals etc.
- Specialists to be identified within Prosecution Team
- Senior Crown Prosecutor to be identified within the Leeds Office to review wildlife crime, including poaching files

- Identify the potential of joint prosecutions with neighbouring forces, or partner agencies such as RSPCA where possible
- Utilise victim impact and community impact statements to provide context to magistrates on effect of poaching
- Provide training to magistrates / clerks on poaching and wildlife crime incidents

Reassurance

- Success stories to be publicised using a range of networks, in particular social media, to provide information to community
- Each and every call reporting poaching to be followed up by personal visit or phone call.
- Develop training package on poaching and wildlife crime for FCR colleagues and wider police population.

The success or otherwise of these Problem Solving Plans will be scrutinised by the OPCC as per any other part of policing in North Yorkshire. Rural Policing was the thematic of the Public Accountability Meeting in November 2017, including wildlife crime, and the meeting still be viewed on the Commissioner's website. The Commissioner, as Chair of the National Rural Crime Network, can also scrutinise the success of the national strategies and is in a good position to see best practice from across the country with which to assess the approach in North Yorkshire.

National work

Dave Jones, former Chief Constable of North Yorkshire Police, was the national lead for rural affairs and wildlife crime on behalf of the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC). Following his retirement, this lead role continues to rest with North Yorkshire Police in the short term, but may get allocated to a different force in the future. However, in recent years there has been much progress in developing and agreeing a national strategy to address wildlife crime in all its forms. The senior officer for the Wildlife Crime Unit, based in Scotland, is North Yorkshire's Assistant Chief Constable Amanda Oliver.

The NPCC's wildlife crime strategy, following extensive consultation with relevant partners, focusses on the below issues:

- Badger persecution
- The Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (e.g. ivory trade)
- Raptor persecution
- Bat persecution
- Freshwater pearl mussels
- Poaching (mirrored in rural affairs strategy also)

The above strategy is supported by the National Wildlife Crime Unit, whose role it is to support police forces and partner organisations across the UK in their efforts to prevent and combat wildlife crime. The Unit's stated purpose is to:

- Research, share, and exchange information where appropriate with police forces and partners in support of combating wildlife crime

- Support police forces and partner agencies in criminal investigations when required
- Identify Organised Crime Groups involved in wildlife crime through the information sharing process
- Enhance cross-border work both domestically and internationally between police forces and partners
- Develop methods of working together between all agencies in reducing wildlife crime and enhancing conservation

Examples of work in North Yorkshire

National Award

Sergeant Kelly was named Wildlife Law Enforcer of the year at the Wildlife Crime Conference on Friday (25 November 2017).

The award is presented annually to the law enforcer who has done the most to combat wildlife crime within the UK. The awards are WWF-sponsored and the criteria the panel uses to choose the winners is based on a range of things from proven success in tackling wildlife crime in the last 12 months, partnership working, use of innovative techniques, dedication to the cause, amongst others. The panel is made up of various governmental departments and WWF.

Convictions

The below are examples of successful convictions which Panel members may wish to read more about. Further details will be provided to the Panel at the meeting.

Badger sett disturbance – man convicted in court

http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/16202384.Fined_for_disturbing_badger_sett/

Police warning over hare-coursing as man stripped of dog and car

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/police-warning-over-hare-coursing-as-man-stripped-of-dog-and-car-1-9142250>