

Question from Cllr Garbutt & Responses from the OPCC

29th May 2020

This is probably completely the wrong timing for me to ask about wildlife crime and moors burning. Nevertheless, could I ask what the Commissioner is doing to oversee police activity regarding the burning, and also about illegal stink pits set to trap wildlife. During the lockdown, this may well be being overlooked, but it is nevertheless still an important issue.

Response

Generally, the Force is seeing an increase in the number of wildlife crimes being reported. The Force is not clear whether this is a result of more animals being targeted, or more persons going out 'doing their daily exercise', which is leading to more reports and more dead wild animals being found which would normally go unreported.

The Wildlife Crime Lead has confidence in the Force's current structure given that the Force has a number of trained officers across the Force, that have a national accredited qualification having attended the National Wildlife Crime course. The Force has access to CSI staff (two of whom are national trained as WCO's) who have an understanding of the issues and are assisting with officers gathering evidence to support investigation and prosecutions. In addition the Force has the capability to record a number of offences on the crime management system, Connect, which relate to Wildlife offences, which is allowing the Force to build an accurate picture of locations of offences and patterns of behaviour. Due to their summary nature, the majority of wildlife offences are non-crime recordable, however, the Force Wildlife Crime Lead is in the process of seeking to add around 30 offences to the systems which will mean the Force will have the ability to easily capture a picture of Wildlife Crime across the Force.

In relation to the specific issues raised, these are operational matters which are the responsibility of the Chief Constable. However, the Force Wildlife Crime Lead has provided the following information in relation to your questions.

Moorland Burning

The burning of heather and grass outside gardens and private allotments is covered by the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2007. The licencing process is regulated and overseen by Natural England, whom provide information regarding burning safely, burning season dates, when licences are required and how and when to apply. Anyone not following the rules and regulations can be prosecuted or Natural England, may, seek alternative outcomes.

Attached is a link to the Government guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/heather-and-grass-burning-apply-for-a-licence>

The Force is not aware of any current reports being made to SYP of illegal burning of Heather and Grass. South Yorkshire Police would seek to investigate any reports of illegal burning through our network of Wildlife Crime Officers across the force and in conjunction with Natural England, as the regulatory and advisory body. Alternative any issues can be reporting to Natural England Report any other incidents to the Natural England enquiries team by calling 0300 060 3900 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Stink Pits

There is no specific legislation that relates directly to the use of Stink Pits. Stink pits are fenced enclosures, bins or holes dug out by gamekeepers who then fill them with rotting carcasses of discarded game birds, as well as other wild and domestic animals in order to attract target species

such as foxes in to a large quantity of surrounding snares. Stink Pink themselves are not illegal, however, the aspect of surrounding stink pits with snares is subject to legal restrictions, the use of snares in England is subject to legal restrictions, principally through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Deer Act 1991. Failure to comply with legislation may lead to prosecution and penalties. These penalties may include a fine or imprisonment or both.

Snare users in England are recommended to follow a voluntary Code of Best Practice on the use of snares for fox control in England developed by shooting industry and farming bodies and endorsed by DEFRA. This is not a statutory code but is rather a document which lays down best practice and details the legislative provisions in this area. It is the responsibility of all involved in pest and predator control to ensure their methods are legal, humane, and carried out with sensitivity and respect for other countryside users.

South Yorkshire Police would seek to investigate any reports of illegal snaring, reports can be made through contact SYP online or 101.