

**Official Statistics in development**

# **Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2022**



**SG/2024/45**

**April 2024**

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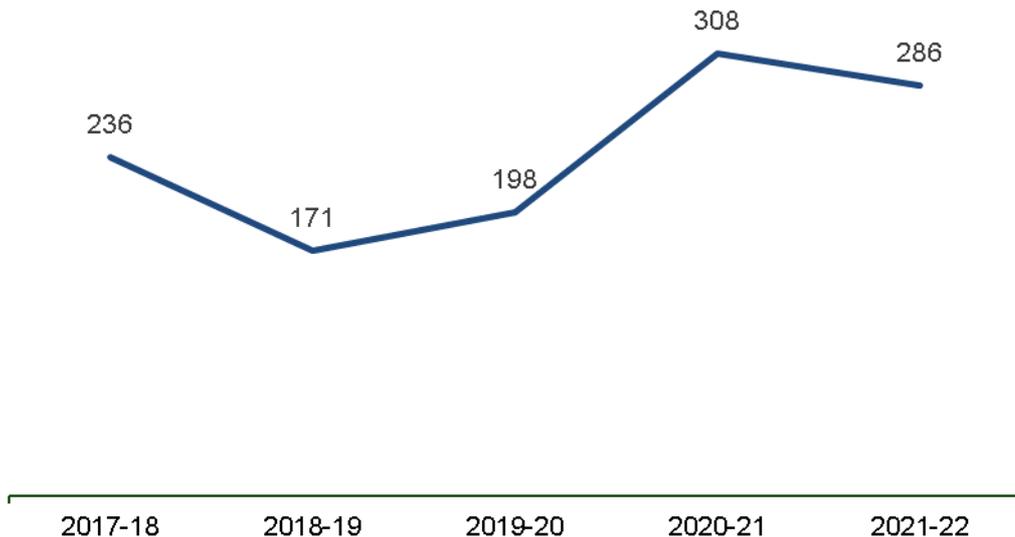
# Key Points

When a wildlife crime is suspected, the first step is for it to be reported to the police (or detected by the police), and then recorded. Further steps may include investigation to assess whether the recorded crime should be part of a case submitted to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and then a decision on whether there is sufficient evidence for the case to be prosecuted. Ultimately a court case may result in a conviction or acquittal. All these stages may be supported by relevant scientific evidence and intelligence.

This report presents statistics relating to 2021-22 for the various stages described above. Although these sets of statistics are related, direct comparisons between them cannot be made due to differences in data sources, timing and the bases on which statistics were collated. For example, several recorded crimes may be included in one COPFS case (involving multiple sources of scientific evidence), and subsequent criminal proceedings may occur in a different year.

## Police recorded crime (offences)

### Recorded wildlife crime down by 7% in 2021-22



- In 2021-22 there were 286 offences relating to wildlife recorded by the police. This is a decrease of 7% in comparison with 2020-21 (308 recorded offences).

- There were noticeable decreases in recorded crime for fish poaching (from 110 to 49 offences) and hunting with dogs (from 44 to 13 offences). Increases were seen for birds (from 29 to 74 offences) and “other wildlife offences” (from 43 to 73 offences) – both of these can, in part, be attributed to Operation Tantallon which targeted offences against peregrine falcons.

### **Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service cases**

- The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service received 77 cases relating to wildlife crime (which may include more than 1 offence per case), with fish poaching being the most common category (23 cases). Of these 77 cases, 23 were prosecuted, 33 received an alternative to prosecution e.g. fine and 21 resulted in no action.

### **Criminal proceedings (people proceeded against)**

- Criminal proceedings statistics in 2021-22 show that 18 people were proceeded against for wildlife crimes – a return to a more typical level after the very low number (2) in 2020-21 due to the impact of COVID. Of these 18 people, 11 were found guilty for at least 1 offence. Looking over the period (2017-18 to 2021-22), the average (5-year) conviction rate is 76%, with a monetary penalty being the most common main penalty.

### **Scientific evidence and intelligence**

- 17 cases were investigated by the Wildlife DNA Forensic Unit, with raptor persecution and poaching & coursing being the most common offence types investigated (5 cases each).
- 217 suspected wildlife poisonings were investigated by the Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) Chemistry Branch, with 14 of the incidents attributed to pesticides, and 3 identified as abuse incidents (i.e. deliberate intent to harm). The number of abuse incidents involving birds of prey has fallen from 9 in 2019-20 to 1 in 2021-22.
- Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) Veterinary Services examines bird and animal carcasses where wildlife crime is suspected, and undertook examinations in 155 cases in 2021-22. The percentage of cases identified by post-mortem as crime-related is higher for mammal cases (17 out of 44, or 39%) than bird cases (26 out of 111, or 23%).
- The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Special Investigation Unit) took part in 143 wildlife crime investigations in 2021-22, including 52 where they assisted a police-led investigation, and 91 where the Scottish SPCA was the sole investigator.

- The police National Wildlife Crime Unit gathers intelligence relating to wildlife crime in Scotland, with the most common intelligence information being in relation to hares, deer and fish.

### **Wildlife crime priority areas (further analysis of recorded crimes)**

- Some types of wildlife crimes (relating to badgers, bats, trade in endangered species, freshwater pearl mussels, poaching and coursing and raptor persecution) are designated as being “priority areas”. Police Scotland provide further detailed analysis to allow these areas to be separately identified from within the broader crime classifications of the recorded crime data presented earlier. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, there was a sharp drop in offences identified as relating to poaching and coursing (from 212 to 101). Police Operation Tantallon, which targeted crimes against peregrine falcons, was the key factor behind increases between 2020-21 and 2021-22 in offences for trade in endangered species (from 1 to 46) and raptor persecution (from 11 to 24). Offences for other priority areas in 2021-22 were broadly similar to preceding years, with 13 badger persecution offences identified, 2 freshwater pearl mussels offences and no bat persecution offences.

# Introduction

This report provides statistics on offences relating to wildlife, including information on reported crime incidence, prosecutions, penalties imposed and supporting scientific evidence and intelligence. The information is obtained from a range of organisations (including Police Scotland, Scottish Government, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Scotland's Rural College, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and NatureScot) whose work relates to the investigation and prosecution of wildlife crime.

The report uses the following definition of wildlife crime, as agreed by the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland in 2010:

*"Wildlife crime is any unlawful act or omission, which affects any wild creature, plant or habitat, in Scotland."*

This report presents statistics and information relating to 2021-22 for the stages described below:

- When a wildlife crime is suspected, the first step will often be for it to be reported to the police (or detected by the police), and then recorded.
- Further steps, supported by relevant scientific evidence and intelligence may then include:
  - investigation to assess whether the recorded crime should be part of a case submitted to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.
  - a decision on whether there is sufficient evidence for the case to be prosecuted.
  - a court case, which may result in a conviction or acquittal.

Although these sets of statistics are related, it is important for users of these statistics to be aware that summation and direct comparisons between them cannot be made due to differences in data sources, timing and the bases on which statistics were collated.

For example:

- several recorded crimes may be included in one Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service case (involving multiple sources of scientific evidence)
- prosecutions may be reported in a different year from the year a crime was recorded
- court statistics are based on the number of individuals proceeded against rather than the number of recorded crimes involving those individuals.

## Legislative requirement of annual report

This report is a requirement of Section 20 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, which inserted a new Section 26B into the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The section prescribes that Ministers must lay a report following the end of every calendar year on offences which relate to wildlife, to include information on incidence and prosecutions during the year to which the report relates, and on research and advice relevant to those offences.

## Structure of report

For the first time this year, a split is being introduced between the data on wildlife crime and the associated policy information. This recognises that the data are official statistics which should be produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The **statistics** are provided in the **main report**, ordered by data source. Information regarding wildlife crime **policy and enforcement actions**, and the organisations involved, is provided separately in **Annex 1**.

## Supporting documents

The following supporting documents are published with the report:

- **Figures** [underlying data]
- **Tables**
- **Data sources and methodology**
- **Annex 1** - Activities, projects and legislation related to wildlife crime policy and enforcement
- **Annex 2** - Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service case outcomes
- **Annex 3** - Court proceedings data by specific offence
- **Annex 4** - Health of the species – NatureScot appraisal for priority species

## Data sources and methodology

This supporting document describes the range of data sources used, the organisations providing the data, and relevant definitions. The Scottish Government would like to thank all the organisations which have provided data, analysis and advice.

The data sources and methodology supporting document also explains in more detail why care should be taken when comparing the statistics from different data sources as highlighted at the start of this introduction.

It is important to note that the recorded crimes statistical classifications used to group wildlife crimes in this publication are different from those used to group “wildlife offences” in the Accredited Official Statistics on Recorded Crime in Scotland, published by the Scottish Government. In particular, this publication excludes some crime classifications that are unlikely to relate to wildlife (e.g. “Pet and kept animals”, “Cruelty to dogs”) and includes some offences categorised in

Recorded Crime in Scotland as “environmental offences” (e.g. Salmon and freshwater fisheries offences”). Further detail is provided in the Data sources and methodology supporting document.

Please note that small revisions might be made to data from earlier years, so those wanting to look at trends over time should use the data here and not refer back to earlier reports.

## **Official Statistics Publication for Scotland**

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics in Development. Official statistics are statistics that are produced by crown bodies, those acting on behalf of crown bodies, or those specified in statutory orders, as defined in the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#).

Scottish Government statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of Official Statistics should adhere to.

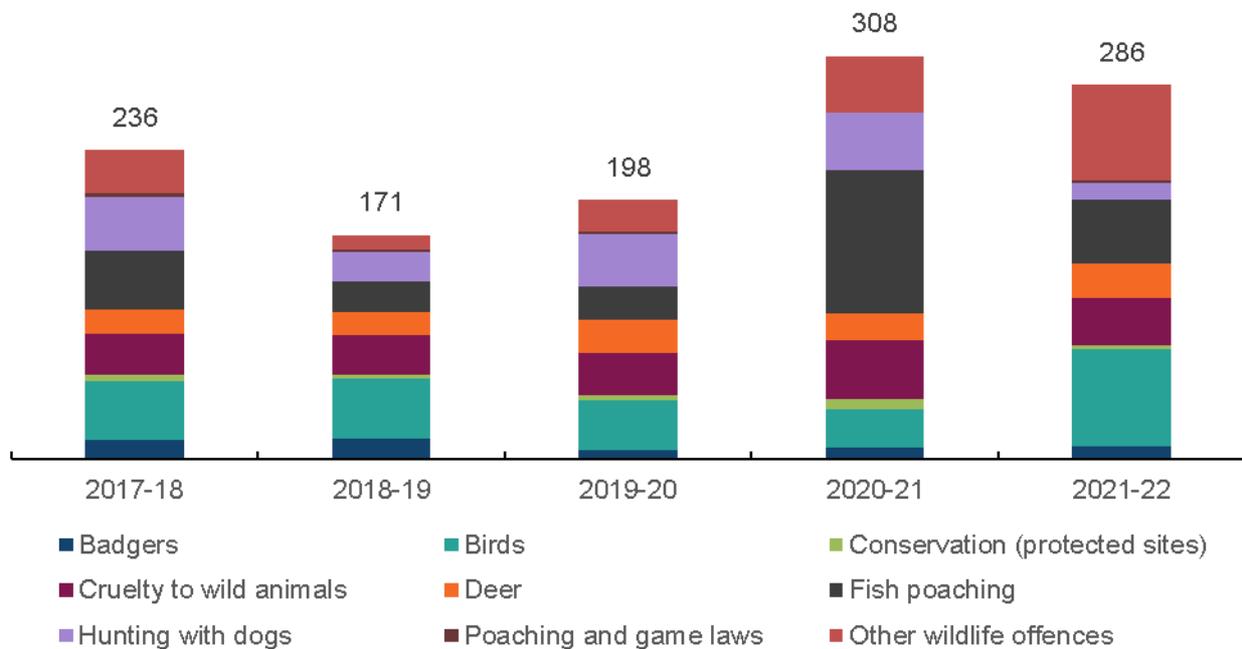
This is the first year in which this report has been published as Official Statistics, in accordance with advice provided by the Chief Statistician for Scotland. As per usual for new statistics publications, these statistics are published as Official Statistics in Development. Once the statistics have been tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics, the aim will be to move from publication as Official Statistics in Development to publication as Official Statistics.

# Recorded Crime

Recorded crime statistics are a Scottish Government statistical output derived from Police Scotland's recorded crime database. A number of factors will affect the number of crimes recorded, including the number of crimes committed, whether crimes committed were observed and reported and also the impact of operations by Police Scotland and other organisations to target specific types of wildlife crime.

**Figure 1: There were 286 wildlife crime offences in 2021-22, a decrease of 7% from 308 in 2020-21.**

Total wildlife crimes from Police Scotland Recorded Crime statistics, 2017-2018 to 2021-22



Overall recorded wildlife crime offences decreased by 7% from 308 in 2020-21 to 286 offences in 2021-22, with noticeable decreases in fish poaching (from 110 to 49 offences) and hunting with dogs (from 44 to 13 offences). The increases seen for birds (from 29 to 74 offences) and “other wildlife offences” (from 43 to 73 offences) can both, in part, be attributed to Operation Tantallon which targeted offences against peregrine falcons. Some offences resulting from Operation Tantallon (e.g. nest disturbance) have been classified under the category “birds”, whereas other offences (e.g. sale of peregrine falcon) appear under “other wildlife offences”. These offence categories are broad hence other factors will also be reflected in the data.

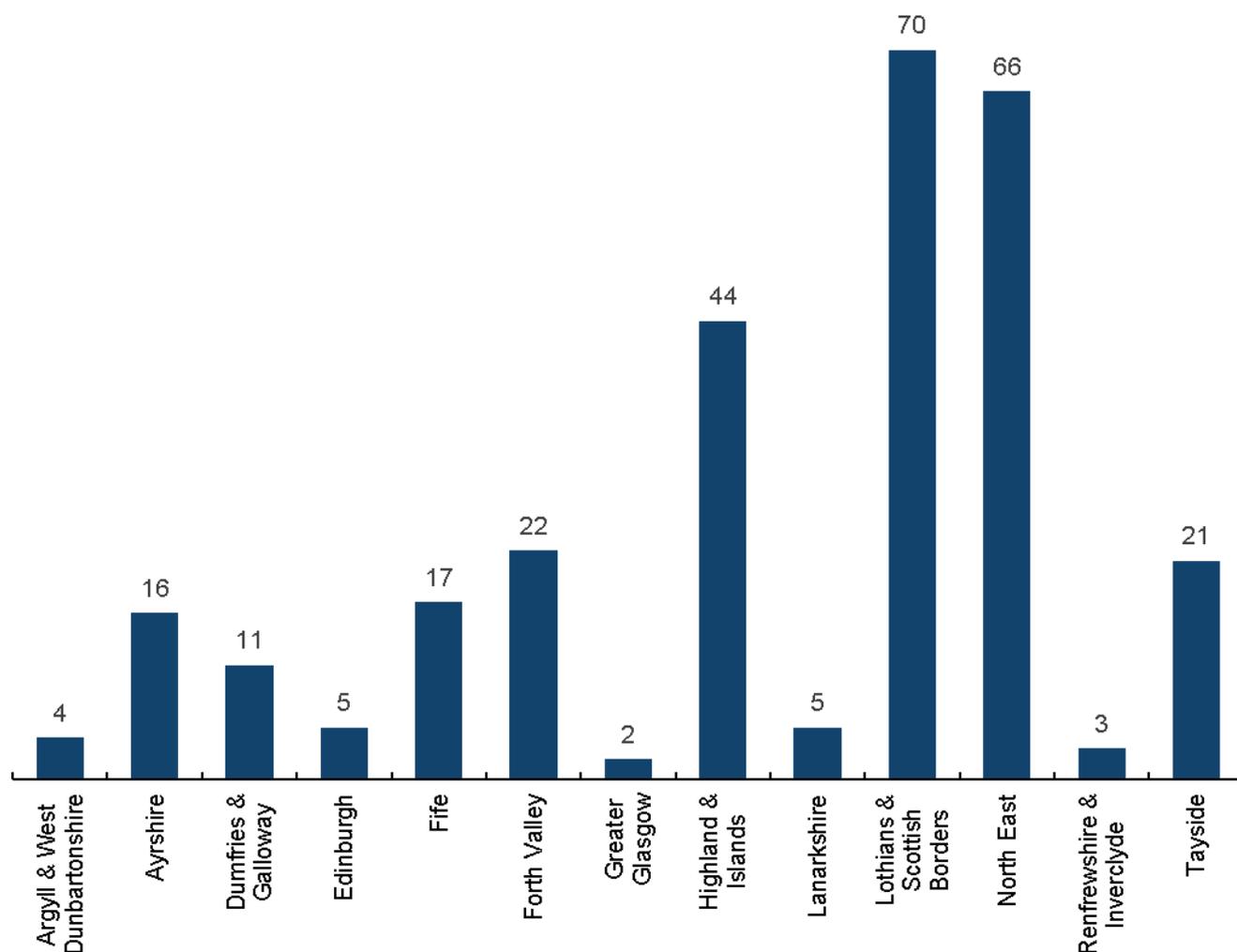
The data in Figure 1 is provided by Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services (derived from Police Scotland data) and aligns with official statistics on crime across all types. In previous Wildlife Crime reports, data was taken from a separate snapshot from Police Scotland, taken at a different time. Making this

change has had very little impact on total recorded wildlife crime numbers, but has impacted to some extent on the offence type to which crimes have been classified (in particular for 2020-21). To maintain a consistent time series, Justice Analytical Services data will continue to be used in future reports.

**Further detail:** of offences by year and offence type is provided in Table 1 in the Tables supporting document. Additional information on offences relating to wildlife crime priority areas (badgers; bats; trade in endangered species; freshwater pearl mussels; poaching & coursing; and raptor persecution) is provided in a later section of this report.

**Figure 2: The Lothians & Scottish Borders police division recorded the highest number of offences in 2021-22, with 70 offences.**

The distribution of the recorded wildlife crimes between different Police Scotland divisions in 2021-22.



The highest number of wildlife offences in 2021-22 was recorded in the Lothians & Scottish Borders police division (70), followed by the North East (66) and Highlands and Islands (44). The majority of all offences concerning birds were recorded in the

Lothians and Scottish Borders (20), North East (16) and the Highlands and Islands (14) divisions. The high number of offences in the Lothians & Scottish Borders police division can, in part, be attributed to recorded crimes related to Operation Tantallon.

**Further detail:** of the breakdown of offence types by Police Scotland divisions is provided in Table 2 of the Tables supporting document and in the Wildlife Crime Priority Areas section of this report.

# Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Statistics

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) has a dedicated Wildlife and Environmental Crime Unit (WECU) which investigates and manages the prosecution of all cases involving crimes against wildlife. Figures in this section are at case level and it should be noted that one case may relate to multiple offences and/or people.

**Figure 3: Fish poaching was the most common category of wildlife crime cases received by COPFS in 2021-22 with 23 cases out of a total of 77.**

The number of wildlife crime cases received by COPFS in 2021-22

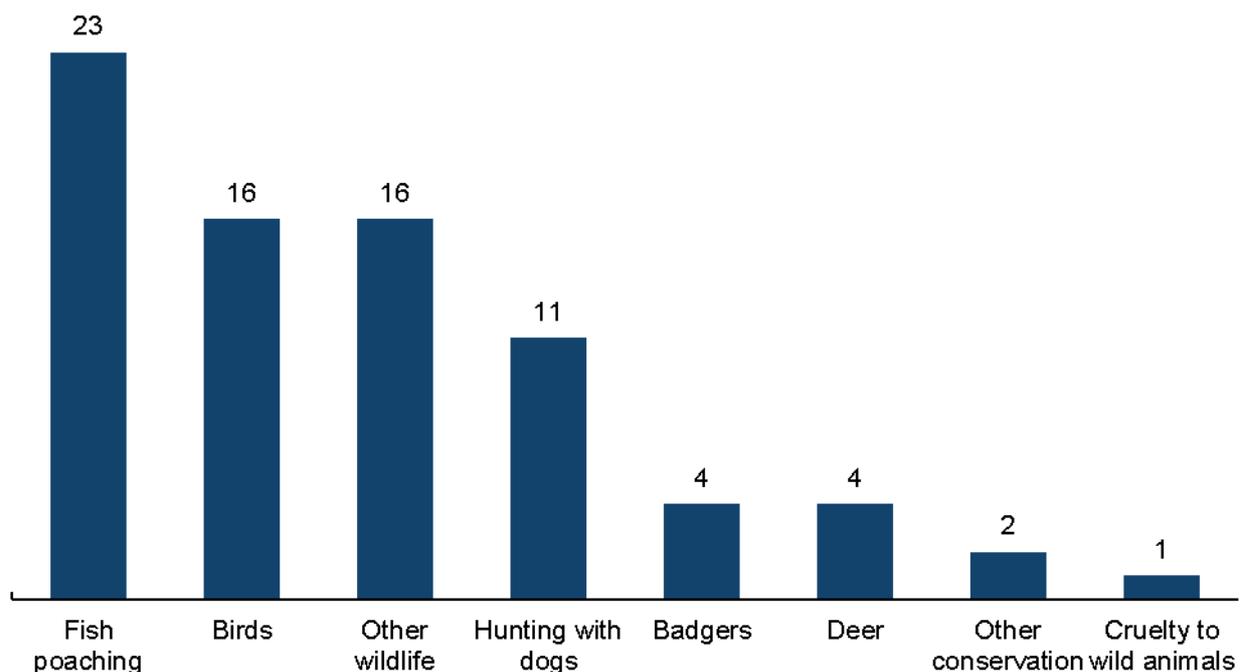


Figure 3 shows that cases relating to fish poaching (23) is the highest category, followed by cases relating to Birds (16) and "Other wildlife" (16), which includes damaging or destroying the breeding site or resting place of a European protected species. The 11 cases in the "Hunting with dogs" category related to allegations of hare coursing or deer coursing.

The number of cases (77) in 2021-22 is close to the average over the past five years (70) and, of those 77 cases, 4 were received by Crown Office and Procurator

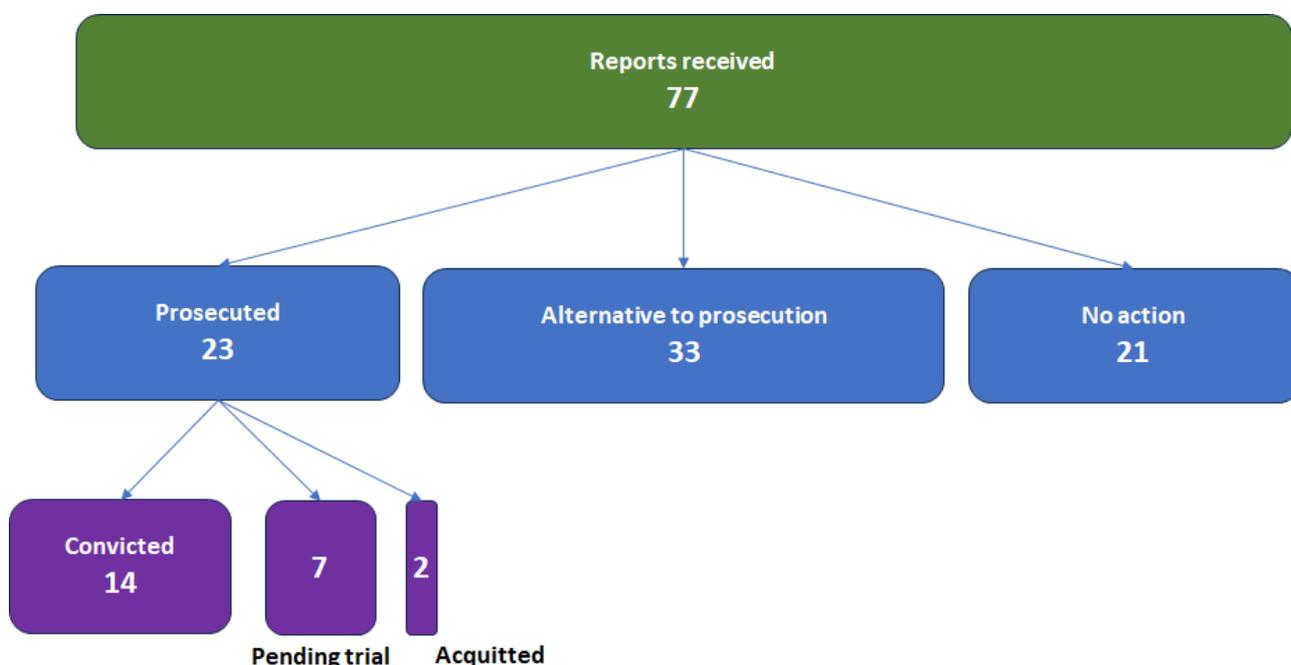
Fiscal Service (COPFS) from reports submitted by the River Tweed Commissioners and the Scottish SPCA.

**Further detail:** on data for earlier years is provided in Tables 3 and 4 of the Tables supporting document.

The outcomes of the cases for 2021-22 are shown in Figure 4 below and statistics for 2017-18 to 2021-22 are available in Table 5 of the supporting documents. Table 6 gives the outcomes of those cases reported by the River Tweed Commission and Scottish SPCA.

**Figure 4: 23 cases of wildlife crime resulted in prosecution (30% of all cases), of which 14 cases resulted in a conviction**

Outcomes of all wildlife cases reported to COPFS in 2021-22



The following information relates to cases reported in 2021-22:

Prosecution in court was undertaken in 23 cases in 2021-22 (30% of cases received) of which:

- 14 cases resulted in a conviction (61% of cases prosecuted).
- 2 cases resulted in acquittal (9% of cases prosecuted). In some cases this reflects the verdict following trial and in others, the result of a plea adjustment.
- 7 cases are pending trial at the time of writing (30% of cases).

33 cases were dealt with by an alternative to prosecution (43% of cases received). Fiscal fines were issued in the majority of those cases. Warning letters were issued in others.

No action was taken in 21 cases (27% of cases received). In the majority of those cases, no action was taken for legal reasons.

The legal reasons included:

- circumstances that did not constitute a crime;
- instances where there was insufficient evidence to permit proceedings; and
- instances where the delay in reporting was such that prosecutorial action was no longer possible.

**Further detail:** of case outcomes in the individual categories are provided in Annex 2 – Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service case outcomes.

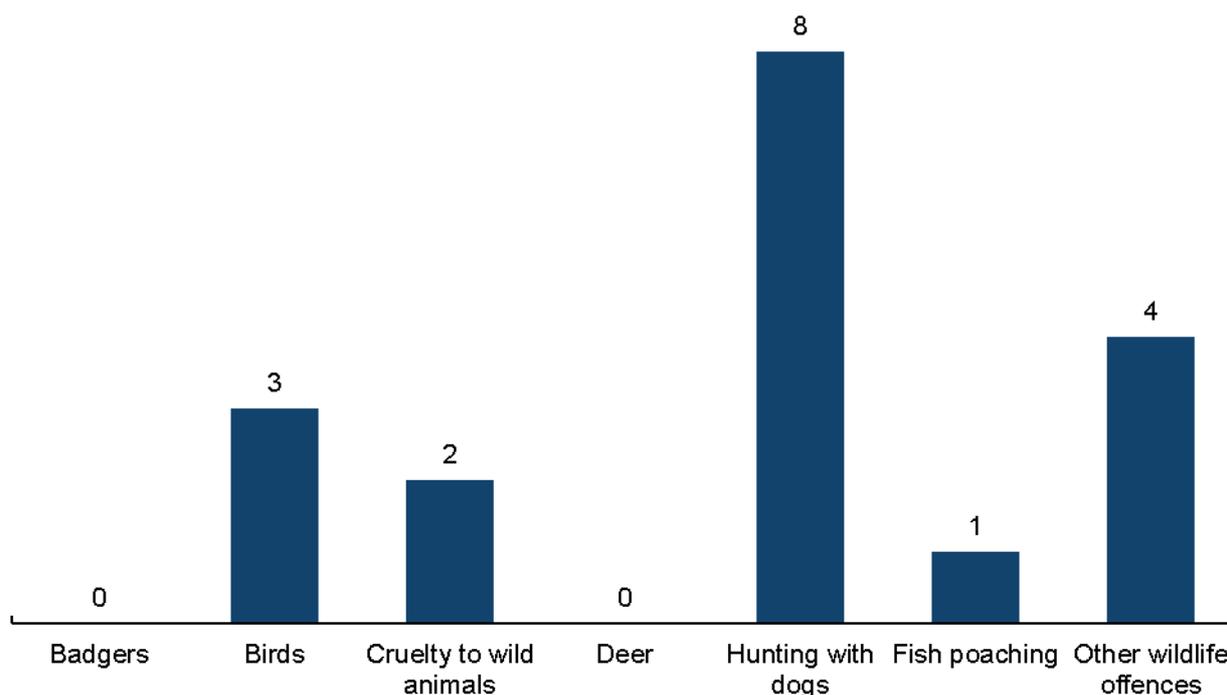
## Criminal proceedings statistics

This section presents Scottish Government data on criminal proceedings related to wildlife crime. Data are presented for people proceeded against, and from a different source to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Statistics in the previous section, hence figures are not directly comparable.

Figure 5 shows the number of people proceeded against for wildlife crime in Scottish courts in 2021-22 by offence category. The statistics for 2017-18 to 2021-22 are given in Table 7 in the Tables supporting document.

**Figure 5: There were 18 people proceeded against for wildlife related offences in 2021-22. The most common offence category was 'hunting with dogs'.**

People prosecuted in Scottish Courts for wildlife crime offences in 2021-22.



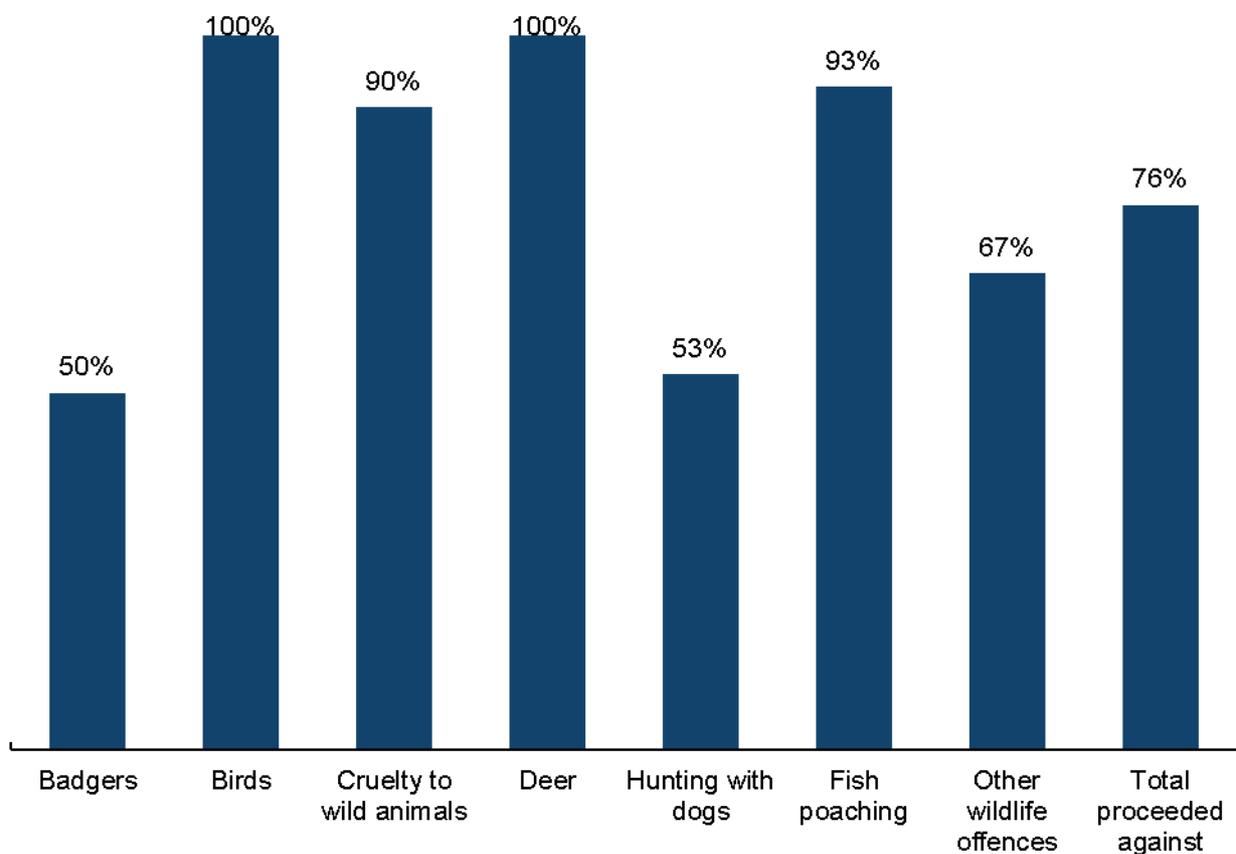
The number of people proceeded against (18) in 2021-22 was similar to the annual average of 19 for 2017-18 to 2019-20 and marked a return to a more typical level after a very low number of people (2) proceeded against in 2020-21, impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

The percentage of people proceeded against who were found guilty was 61% (11 out of 18 people). In terms of offences, rather than people, the percentage of all offences found guilty was 53% (17 out of 32 offences).

In Figure 6, conviction rates for individual wildlife crime categories have been presented as a five year average due to the small numbers of proceedings for some categories. This shows that conviction rates vary among these categories, from 50% to 100% with the 5-year average for all offence categories of 76%. It should be noted that, even with five year averages, the variability of the data is impacted by relatively small numbers in each category – for example, for badgers the 50% conviction rate represents 1 out of 2 people.

**Figure 6: The average (5-year) conviction rate for people prosecuted for wildlife crime over 2017-18 to 2021-22 is 76%.**

Conviction rates for all prosecutions in Scottish courts for wildlife crime from 2017-18 to 2021-22

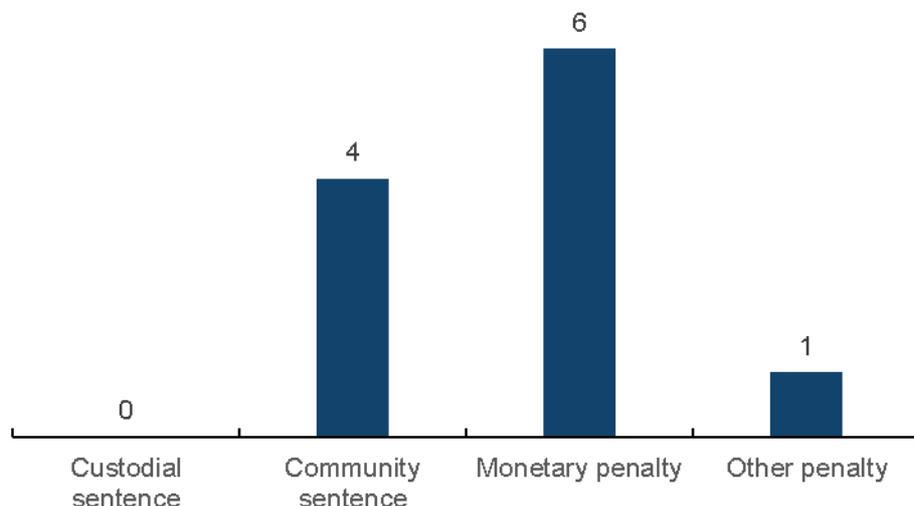


Where a single court proceeding involves a number of different offences at least one of which concerns wildlife crime, Criminal Proceedings statistics only report it as a wildlife crime where this is the 'main charge'. In 2021-22 court proceedings were held covering a total of 32 wildlife crime offences, in comparison to the 18 proceedings where wildlife crime was the main charge in a case.

For the 11 people with a charge proven, Figure 7 shows the breakdown of penalties imposed. The most common punishment was a monetary penalty (6 people), followed by a community sentence (4 people).

**Figure 7: The most common punishment for a wildlife crime conviction in 2021-22 was a monetary penalty.**

People with a charge proved for wildlife crimes in Scottish Courts, by main penalty, 2021-22



Aggregate totals for the five years from 2017-18 to 2021-22 show that monetary penalties were the most common main penalty for wildlife crimes (37 out of 58 convictions) and only 3% of all wildlife crime convictions resulted in a custodial sentence.

Looking over a five year period, the average monetary fine imposed for wildlife crimes was £688, with average fines by category ranging from £283 for fish poaching to £1,594 for hunting with dogs.

It is not possible to establish the average number of Community Payback Order (CPO) hours as this information is not held in the Criminal Proceedings database.

**Further detail:** on people and offences proceeded against, conviction rates and penalties (including fines imposed) is included in tables 7 to 12 in the Tables supporting document. In addition, a breakdown of proceedings for specific offences is provided in Annex 3 – Court proceedings data by specific offence.

# Scientific evidence and intelligence relating to wildlife crime

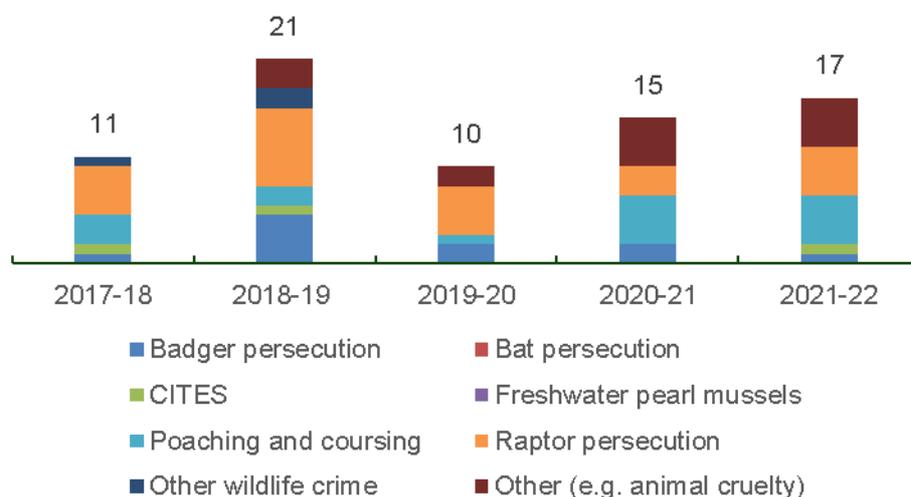
A number of organisations have particular skills and techniques that contribute to the detection and investigation of wildlife crime in Scotland. This section presents data regarding scientific evidence and intelligence from a range of bodies involved.

## Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA): Wildlife DNA Forensic Unit

SASA is a division of the Scottish Government’s Agriculture and Rural Economy directorate based in Edinburgh. One of its principal functions is to provide analytical and forensic services in the investigation of wildlife crime. The Wildlife DNA Forensic unit specialises in analysing animal DNA recovered during wildlife crime investigations – for example to determine what species a blood sample comes from or to link other evidence to a wildlife crime scene.

**Figure 8: The most common offences for 2021-22 were raptor persecution, poaching and coursing and other offences.**

Total cases submitted to the Wildlife DNA Forensic Unit 2017-18 to 2021-22



The 17 cases submitted to the Wildlife DNA Forensic Unit from Scotland over 2021-22 reporting period are presented in Figure 8, along with data for previous years. (Please note that CITES means offences relating to the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species.) These 17 cases show a broadly similar distribution in categories to 2020-21, with raptor persecution, poaching and coursing and other representing the highest numbers of submissions (five cases for each).

**Further detail:** of the breakdown by offence type for cases submitted to the Wildlife DNA Forensic Unit is provided in table 13 of the Tables supporting document.

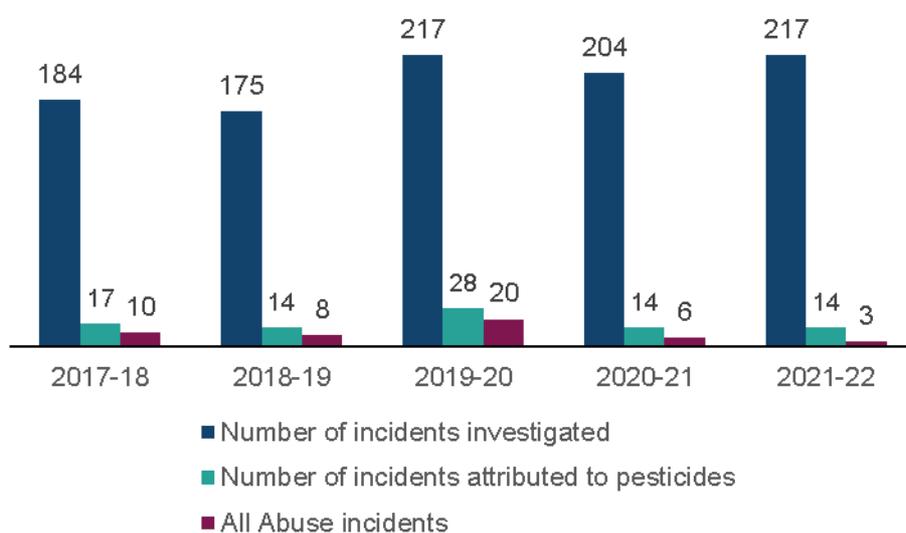
SASA also reported that three cases were concluded with a guilty plea from the accused: one case in the Poaching and Coursing category for red deer poaching, one case in the Raptor persecution category concerning the shooting of a Sparrowhawk and one case in the Badger persecution category for badgers and foxes being baited by dogs.

## SASA Chemistry Branch

The Chemistry Branch at SASA investigates suspected animal poisoning incidents as part of the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme. SASA provides data on the total number of incidents investigated, the number of those incidents attributed to pesticides and the number of incidents considered to be abuse. Pesticide use is considered to be abuse where it is used in breach of authorisation conditions with the deliberate intent of harming wildlife or other animals.

**Figure 9: The number of incidents investigated has remained similar in recent years but abuse incidents have decreased.**

Suspected animal poisoning incidents investigated by SASA Chemistry Branch: 2017-18 to 2021-22



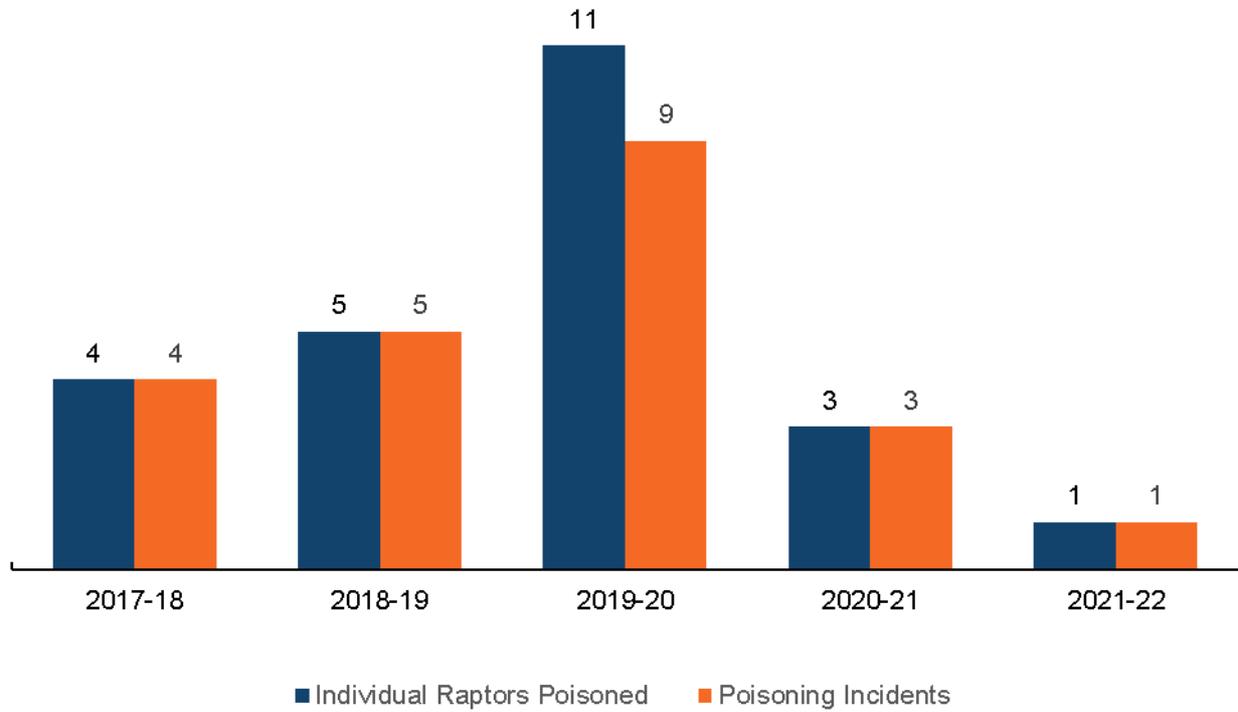
From Figure 9 it can be seen that the number of incidents investigated has remained broadly similar in recent years (217 in 2021-22 is only slightly above the five year average of 199), but the number of abuse incidents has dropped markedly from 20 (9%) in 2019-20 to only 3 (1%) in 2021-22.

Within the abuse incidents, it is of particular note that the number of abuse incidents involving birds of prey has fallen from 9 in 2019-20 to 1 in 2021-22, as shown in Figure 10, below. Looking at the five year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22, there have been 22 incidents (involving 24 birds) investigated by SASA where birds of prey had been poisoned, with the most common species being red kite (15 birds) and buzzard (6 birds).

**Further detail:** of categories of incident investigated by SASA (and the outcomes) is provided in tables 14 and 15 of the Tables supporting document.

**Figure 10: There were a total of 22 incidents of birds of prey poisonings over the period 2017-18 to 2021-22.**

Bird of prey poisonings 2017-18 to 2021-22



## SRUC Veterinary Services

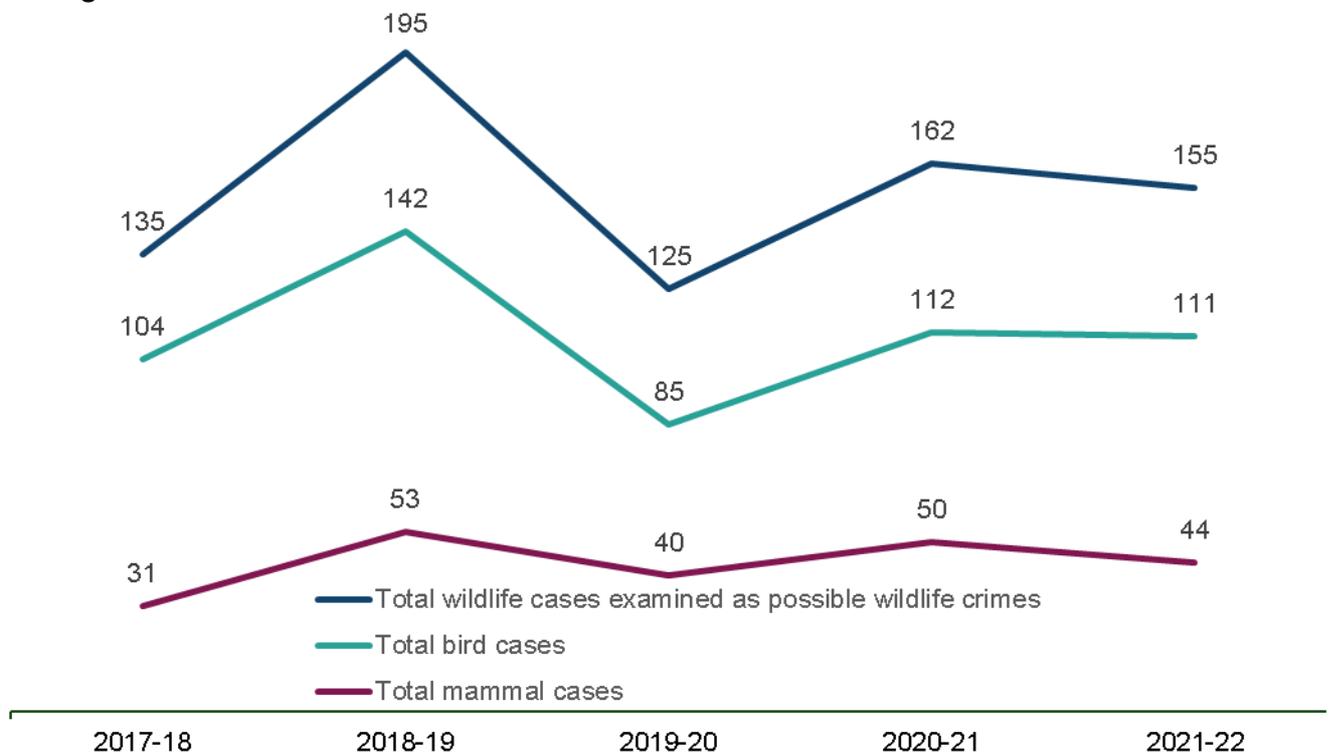
SRUC Veterinary Services is a division of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). While not a government agency, the work of the Veterinary Services team includes post mortem examinations on wild birds (under the Wild Bird Disease Surveillance budget) and on wild mammals (under the Animal Welfare budget). These budgets are funded by Advisory Activity grants-in-aid from the Scottish Government.

Carcasses may be submitted for examination due to the suspicion of a potential wildlife crime. These come predominantly from Police Scotland, with substantial contributions from the RSPB and the Scottish SPCA. Small numbers of carcasses come from other conservation or wildlife organisations, or from members of the public. Where a wildlife crime is suspected following examination of a carcass submitted by non-law-enforcement agencies, the police are notified, to allow investigation to proceed.

In 2021-22, there were a total of 155 cases where a suspicion of potential criminality was present upon submission, of which 44 involved mammals and 111 involved birds. Figure 11 below gives the number of cases from 2017-18 to 2021-22.

**Figure 11: There were 155 wildlife cases examined by SRUC Veterinary Services in 2021-22, a slight decrease from 162 in 2020-21**

Wildlife cases examined by SRUC Veterinary Services under advisory activity funding, 2017-18 to 2021-22



In addition to the numbers of cases, SRUC Veterinary Services also provide the percentage of cases identified by post-mortem as crime related. This is typically higher for mammal cases (39% in 2021-22) compared to bird cases (23% in 2021-22). Data for earlier years is provided in Table 16 of the Tables supporting document.

For mammal cases, road traffic collisions were the most common cause of death where no criminality was suspected. Where potential criminality was still suspected after postmortem examination, shooting was the most common cause, then attack by a dog or dogs. Mammal submissions covered a wide range of species including squirrels, hares, otters, beavers, badgers, smaller mustelids, foxes, and deer.

For avian (bird) cases, causes of death or injury were most commonly due to a failure to thrive/starvation, or to blunt trauma suspected to be non-criminal in nature, such as collisions with road traffic, electricity pylons, wind turbines, trees, and other objects. Shooting (chiefly by shotgun, but air rifles and catapults were also represented) was the most common cause of death or injury where criminality was still suspected following postmortem examination in avian cases. Here the range of species submitted included birds of prey, waders, songbirds, pigeons, swans, gulls, geese and ducks, herons, corvids and capercaillie.

When providing data, SRUC noted that the spread of avian influenza during this period may have had an effect on the numbers, locations and diagnostic success pertaining to wild bird carcasses submitted this year. In addition, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 may also have affected the numbers and types of submissions received by SRUC so caution is required when reviewing year on year trends.

## **Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – Special Investigation Unit**

The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) and their Special Investigations Unit (SIU) can lead or support certain wildlife crime investigations in Scotland. Powers are granted to suitably trained staff by Scottish Ministers under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Scottish SPCA inspectors deal with routine domestic and wildlife welfare cases. The SIU has a slightly different remit dealing with cases which are linked to illegal activities. The SIU deals with both wildlife incidents and incidents involving domestic animals such as dogfighting and the puppy trade, and consists of five inspectors and one intelligence manager.

The SIU receives information (and complaints) from two main sources – the Scottish SPCA animal helpline and other agencies through intelligence logs and reports.

The Scottish SPCA's animal helpline received over 262,000 calls between April 2021 and March 2022 with an increase of 17% in calls from the public compared to the previous year. Many calls related to the low welfare puppy trade which is not included within wildlife crime.

The SIU estimate that between April 2021 and March 2022 they received:

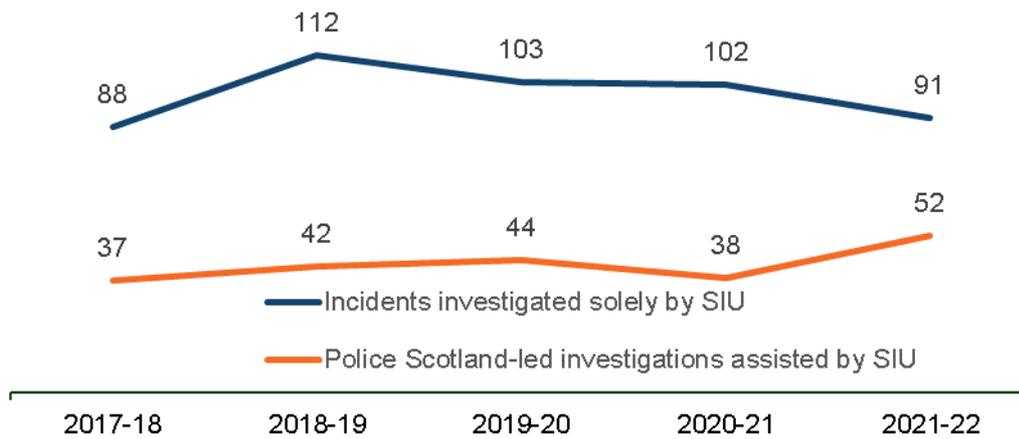
- 277 pieces of information for consideration from the Scottish SPCA helpline
- 221 pieces of information from other sources.

Upon investigation, some pieces of information were identified as not criminal, not involving wildlife, or duplicates relating to the same incident.

SIU identified 71 pieces of information as relating to wildlife crimes priorities – 31 of these related to badgers; and 16 to raptor persecution. In addition, there were 20 incidents related to trapping or snaring investigated solely by SIU making a total of 91 incidents investigated solely by SIU, and a further 52 Police Scotland-led investigations assisted by SIU, as shown in Figure 12, below.

**Figure 12: There were 143 Wildlife crime investigations dealt with by SIU in 2021-22, of which 52 were SIU assisting Police Scotland**

Wildlife crime investigations involving SIU, 2017-18 to 2021-22



There were no cases submitted to COPFS by SIU in 2021-22.

**Further detail:** on wildlife crime investigations dealt with by SIU in recent years is provided in tables 17 and 18 of the Tables supporting document.

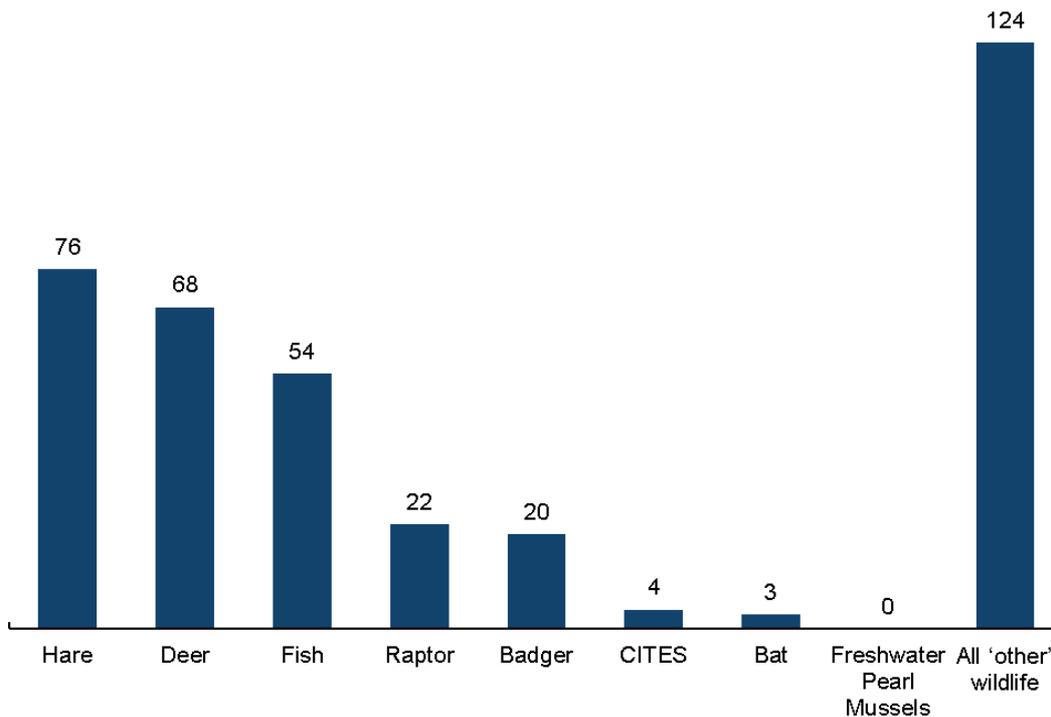
## National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU)

The NWCU is a police intelligence unit providing operational support to law enforcement. All intelligence relating to wildlife crime in Scotland is gathered by the NWCU and researched on a weekly basis to identify emerging trends and prepare tactical and strategic analysis. For example, intelligence and analytical support was provided by NWCU for Operation Tantallon - an operation relating to the theft of peregrine falcons from the wild.

Figure 13 provides a summary of wildlife crime intelligence logs, broken down by relevant keywords. Aside from the general All Other Wildlife category, the most frequent keywords are Hare (76), Deer (68) and Fish (54) which represent 20%, 18% and 15% of the total of 371 intelligence logs.

**Figure 13: The most common specific species recorded in NWCU intelligence logs are Hare, Deer and Fish.**

NWCU intelligence logs by species keyword



It should be noted that an intelligence log is not a detected crime but a tool for Police to use to establish a bigger picture of what is happening in a given area. A single incident may generate a number of pieces of intelligence. Intelligence logs cannot be used to (a) directly compare year on year or (b) comment on long term trends, as they are reviewed on a yearly basis and deleted if grounds for inclusion for policing purposes no longer exist. As a result, the number of intelligence logs for any given year decreases over time.

**Further detail:** including the most frequent key words for earlier years, is provided in tables 19 and 20 in the Tables supporting document.

# Wildlife crime priority areas

This section provides detailed data on wildlife crime Priority Areas along with additional information on Hunting with Dogs and Trapping and Snaring.

Wildlife crime priorities are set at UK level by the Wildlife Crime Tasking and Co-ordinating Group. The group's membership includes the Police, the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW), National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU), and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Priority groups on poaching and coursing, and freshwater pearl mussel crime, continue to operate in Scotland, as well as the PAW Scotland Raptor Group (formerly the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group).

The priorities remained unchanged in 2021-22:

- Badger persecution;
- Bat persecution;
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
- Freshwater pearl mussels;
- Poaching (including deer poaching, hare coursing, fish poaching);
- Raptor persecution.

Wildlife crime classifications can be quite broad (e.g. “cruelty to wild animals”, “other wildlife offences”) and do not align with the priority areas, above. To allow statistical reporting of offences relating to these priority areas, Police Scotland provide further detailed analysis of recorded crime data (“disaggregated data”). There is a slight difference between the total numbers of records in this disaggregated data (295) and the aggregated data used in the Recorded Crime section of this report (286). In addition to slight differences due to the data being extracted at different times, the disaggregated data contains 11 records where the classification of the crime was not one of the wildlife crime classifications used in the Recorded Crime figures, but Police Scotland had identified a wildlife crime element from additional detailed information about the crime.

It should also be noted that the categories in this section (aligned to wildlife crime priorities) differ from the standard categories in Figure 1. Even for similar categories the numbers may not match if, for example, additional information has been used to allocate crimes from a more general category (e.g. cruelty to wild animals) to one of the specific wildlife crime priorities (e.g. poaching and coursing).

**Further detail:** in addition to the statistics on priority areas, Annex 4 of the supporting documents includes a 'Health of Species' appraisal for those priority species that fall within NatureScot's remit: badger, bats, freshwater pearl mussels, deer, brown hare and key raptor species. NatureScot's appraisal is intended to give an overview of current population trends, factors affecting the health of the species

and the relative impact of wildlife crime on the conservation status and is in response to an Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee request for this contextual information.

## Overview of all priority areas

**Figure 14: Poaching and coursing (typically the most common offence) dropped sharply in 2021-22 and there was a spike in CITES offences.**

Police Scotland offence data from 2017-18 to 2021-22

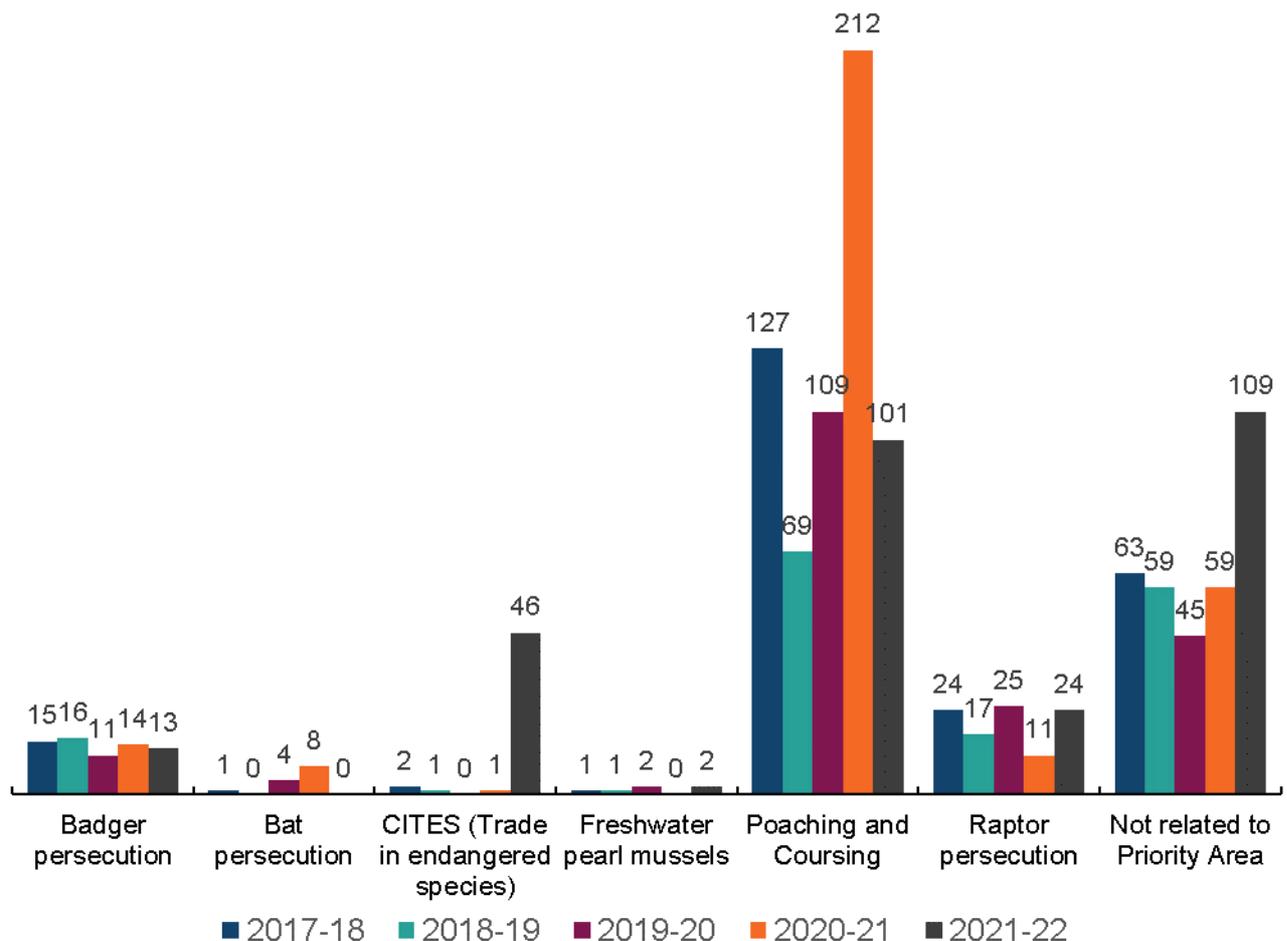


Figure 14 shows the relative levels of recorded crimes for different wildlife priority categories, and trends over the last 5 years. After a sharp increase to 212 offences in 2020-21 in poaching and coursing, the level dropped down a more typical level (101) in 2021-22. Offences not related to a priority area had the highest number of offences in 2021-22 (109) and these were spread over a number of crime types, with around half relating to birds (excluding raptors) including gulls and pigeons.

The remaining offences were spread between CITES - Trade in endangered species (46), raptor persecution (24), badger persecution (13) and freshwater pearl mussels (2), with no offences recorded for bat persecution. The jump in CITES

offences were generally in relation to peregrine falcons (41 of 46 offences) and reflected the impact of the police Operation Tantallon which targeted crimes against peregrine falcons. This was also a factor in the number of raptor persecution crimes, with over half of these crimes involving peregrine falcons.

**Further detail:** regarding offences by wildlife crime priorities (including by time of year) is provided in tables 21 to 24 of the Tables supporting document. A description of Operation Tantallon is also included in the Police Scotland update in the supporting document on Activities, projects and legislation related to wildlife crime policy and enforcement.

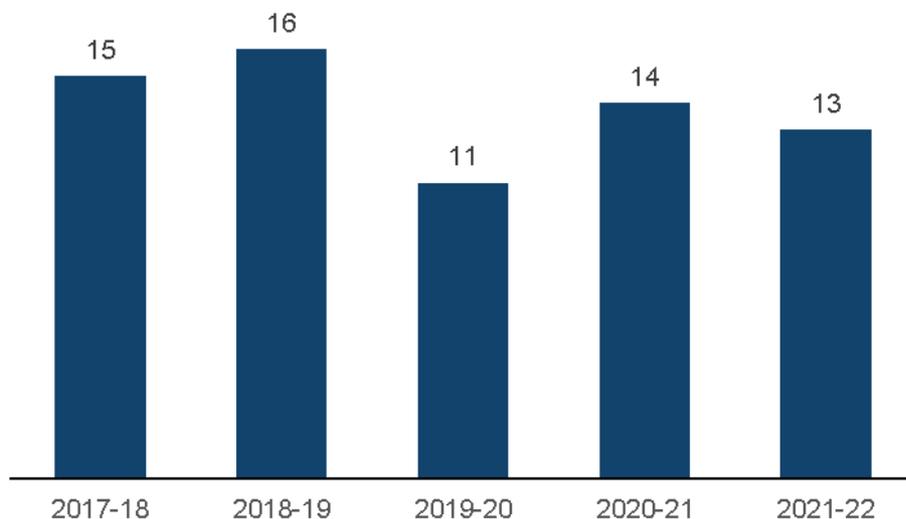
## Badger Persecution

All badgers in Scotland are protected by law, but they are sometimes still illegally targeted by those who see them as a pest or for the purposes of illegal animal fights. Reckless or intentional damage, destruction and interference to badger setts (including sett blocking) is an offence which may arise from unlicensed forestry, agricultural or construction works.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 15: There were 13 offences relating to badger persecution recorded by Police Scotland in 2021-22, compared to 14 in 2020-21.**

Badger offences recorded by Police Scotland 2017-18 to 2021-22



As shown in figure 15, there were 13 recorded offences relating to badger persecution recorded in 2021-22, close to the 5-year average of 14 in recent years.

The majority (11 out of 13 offences) related to digging, damage and obstruction to sett, and just over half of all offences against badgers occurred during the period April to June.

**Further detail:** of offences by year, offence type, police division and time of year is provided in tables 25 and 26 of the Tables supporting document.

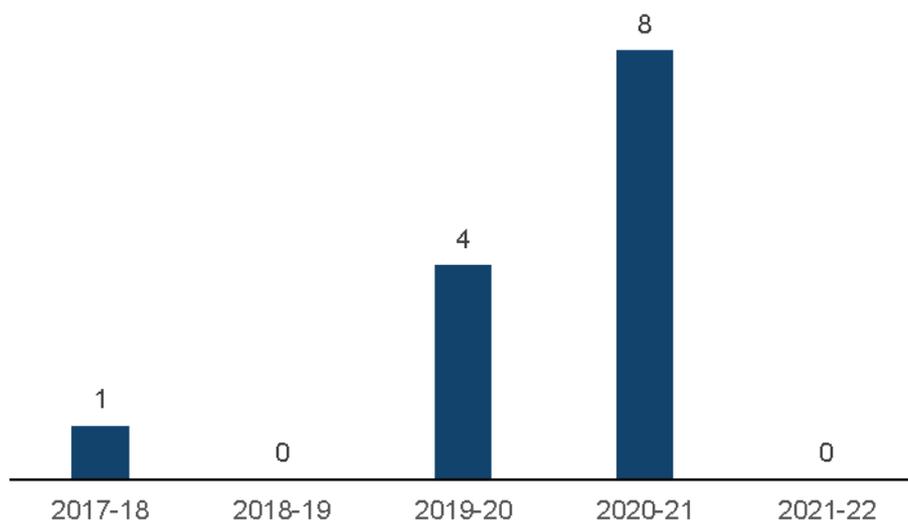
## Bat persecution

Bats and their roosts are protected by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, which gives strict legal protection to all species listed under Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive – known as European Protected Species (EPS). Scotland's bat population is relatively small compared to other parts of the UK. Bats, their breeding sites and resting places are at particular risk from development works and evidencing the presence of bats in these cases can be very challenging.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 16: There were no recorded offences involving bat persecution during 2021-22, compared to 8 offences in 2020-21.**

Bat offences recorded by Police Scotland 2017-18 to 2021-22



As shown in Figure 16, there were no recorded offences involving bat persecution during 2021-22. This is down from the 8 offences in the previous year, which was the highest level in the last 5 years. The average for the last 5 years was around 3 offences per year.

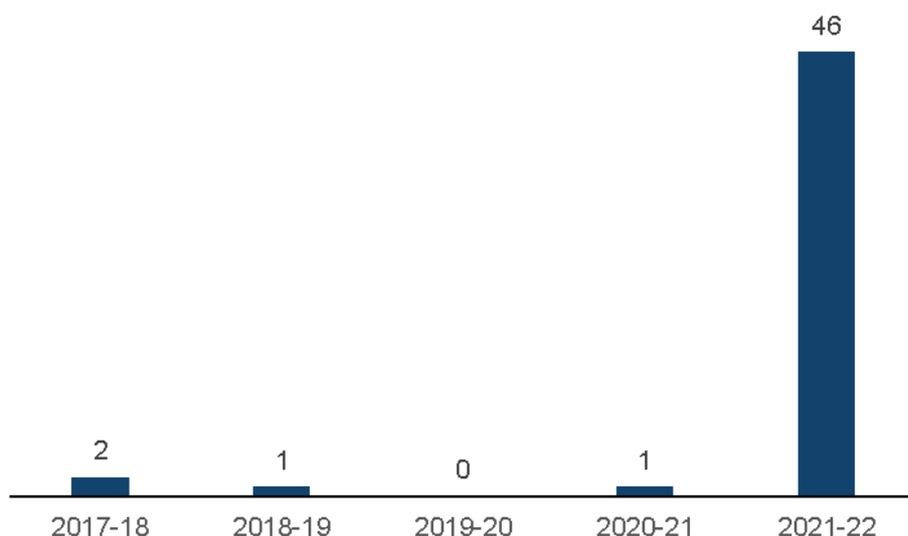
## Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. It is an international agreement between governments, which aims to protect certain animal and plant species from over-exploitation by trade. In Scotland and the rest of the UK, this agreement is given legal authority by the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997, known as COTES.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 17: The 46 CITES offences for 2021-22 reflect the impact of Operation Tantallon concerning offences against peregrine falcons.**

CITES offences recorded by Police Scotland 2017-18 to 2021-22



As shown in Figure 17, the number of CITES offences is typically low, with an average of 1 recorded offence per year in the 4 years before 2021-22. However, a very sharp increase was seen in 2021-22 (46 offences) and this reflected the impact of Operation Tantallon – a police operation targeting crimes regarding the theft, illegal handling and trade of peregrine falcons. Out of 46 CITES offences, 41 concerned offences against peregrine falcons in the Lothians & Borders police division.

Further detail on CITES offences by police division and type of offence is provided in Table 28 of the Tables supporting document.

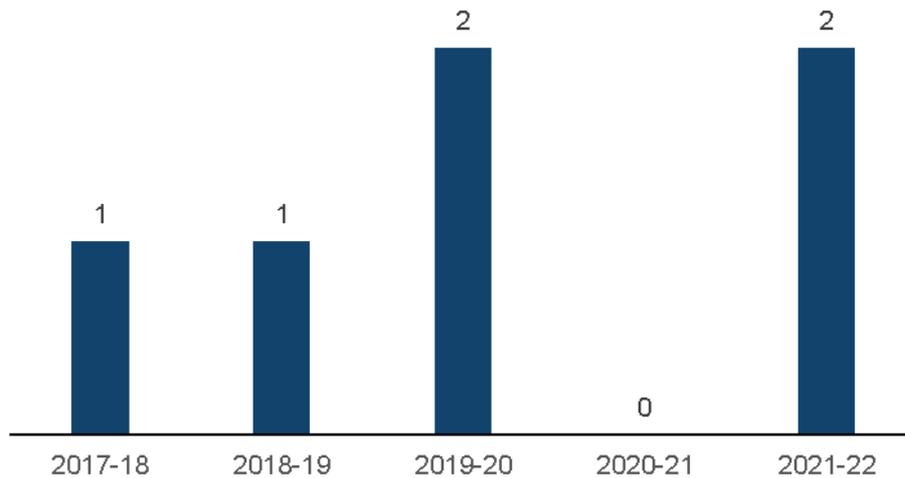
## Freshwater pearl mussels

Scotland supports several of the largest remaining populations of freshwater pearl mussels (FWPM) in the world some of which continue to be damaged by criminal activity. Pearl fishing continues in Scotland, almost uniquely within Europe. FWPM are also threatened by unlawful river engineering and pollution.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 18: Two offences concerning freshwater pearl mussels were recorded in 2021-22, in line with recent years.**

Freshwater Pearl Mussels offences recorded by Police Scotland 2017-18 to 2021-22



As shown in Figure 18, there were two recorded offences in relation to FWPM during 2021-22, which concerned the taking of freshwater pearl mussels. Both were located in the Highlands and Islands police division. This is in line with the level in recent years (5-year average of 1-2 offences).

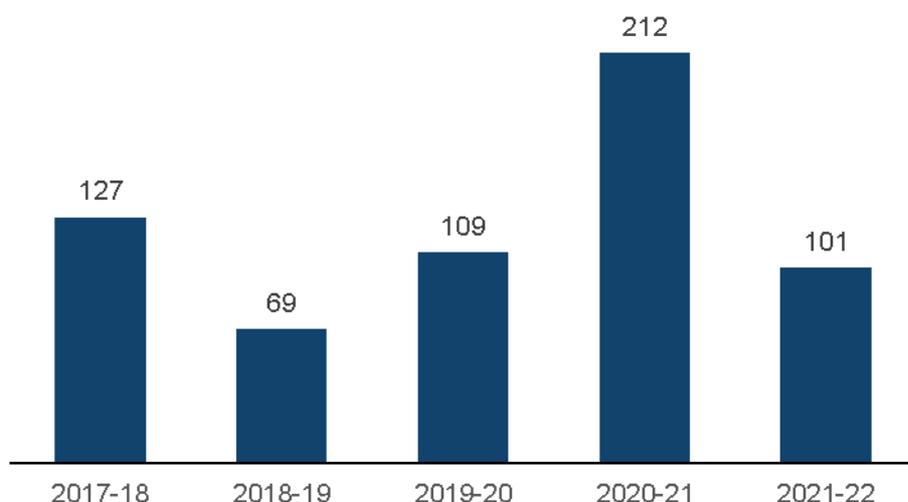
## Poaching and coursing

Poaching involves the taking of deer, fish or other game without permission, or using unlawful methods. Coursing is the hunting of animals with dogs.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 19: During 2021-22, 101 poaching and coursing offences were recorded by Police Scotland, compared to 212 offences in 2020-21.**

Police Scotland disaggregated offence data for poaching and coursing 2017-18 to 2021-22.



As shown in Figure 19, poaching and coursing offences had increased significantly in 2020-21 (212 offences) but dropped back down to 101 offences in 2021-22, similar to the level seen in the three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20. The reason for this was not clear from the available data.

**Figure 20: During 2021-22, there were 47 offences concerning fish poaching, and 54 related to poaching and coursing of deer, hares and rabbits.**

Police Scotland disaggregated offence data for poaching and coursing 2021-22.

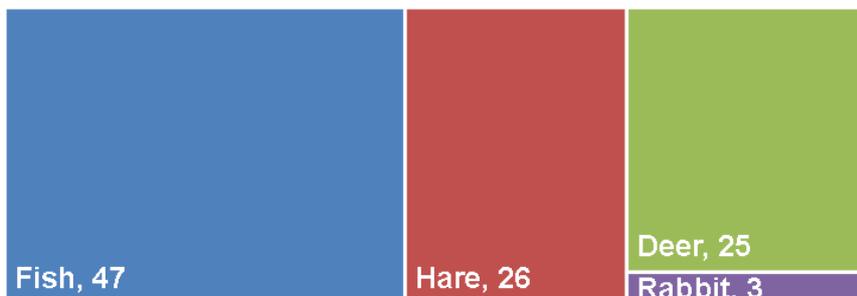


Figure 20 provides the breakdown of poaching and coursing offences in 2021-22 by species. The area in the chart is proportional to the number of offences and shows that approximately half of the offences were related to poaching of fish (47

offences, 47%) and the remainder related to poaching and coursing of hares (26 offences, 26%), deer (25 offences, 25%) and rabbits (3 offences, 3%).

**Further detail:** on poaching and coursing offences by target species, police division and time of year is included in tables 30 and 31 of the Tables supporting document.

## Raptor persecution

The persecution of raptors, or birds of prey, is the most high-profile type of wildlife crime in Scotland and it can have a serious impact on the populations of some raptor species at local, regional or (if carried out more widely) national level.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 21: There were a total of 101 bird of prey offences recorded in the last 5 years, with 24 occurring in 2021-22.**

Recorded Bird of prey offences 2017-18 to 2021-22

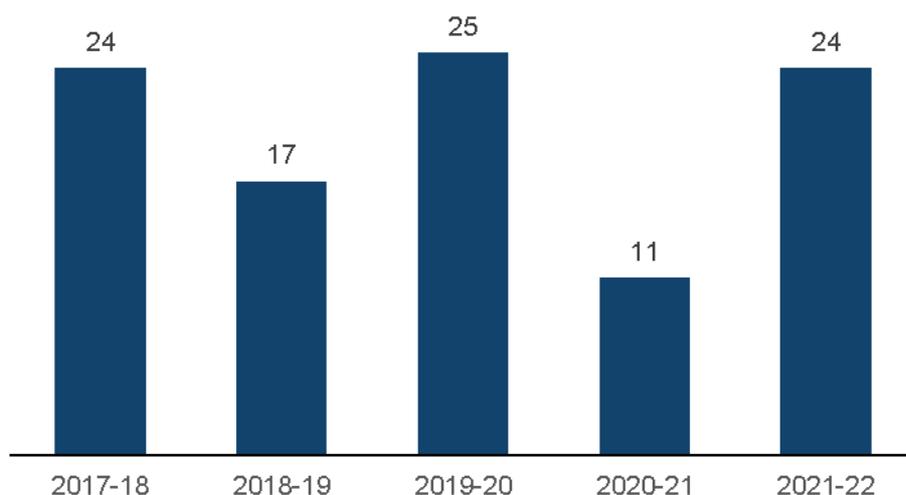


Figure 21 shows that raptor persecution offences increased from 11 in 2020-21 to 24 in 2021-22. Of the offences in 2021-22, 15 out of 24 were related to offences targeting peregrine falcons, reported in the Lothians & Borders police division and these reflect the impact of Operation Tantallon which targeted offences against peregrine falcons (and also resulted in other crimes recorded as CITES offences, discussed earlier in this report).

For the 101 offences over the last 5 years, the most targeted species were buzzard (23 offences), peregrine falcon (20 offences) and red kite (15 offences). In some cases the offence included multiple species or the species was unknown. Offences covered a range of crime type including poisoning (26 offences), shooting (24

offences), trapping (12 offences), disturbance (7 offences) and egg theft (5 offences).

**Further detail:** on raptor offences by target species, police division, type of offence and time of year is included in tables 32 to 34 of the Tables supporting document.

## Hunting with dogs - additional breakdown

This section highlights offences under the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002. Section 1 of the 2002 Act prohibits the deliberate hunting of a wild mammal with a dog (subject to certain exceptions). The Act is most commonly used in connection with hare coursing, although it has also been used for incidents relating to foxes, deer and badgers. It does not prohibit the hunting of rabbits or rats by dogs. This legislation has now been overtaken by the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023. However, as this legislation did not come into effect until October 2023, it was not in place during this reporting period.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 22: Hunting with dogs offences decreased from 85 in 2020-21 to 34 in 2021-22**

Hunting with dogs offences, 2017-18 to 2021-22

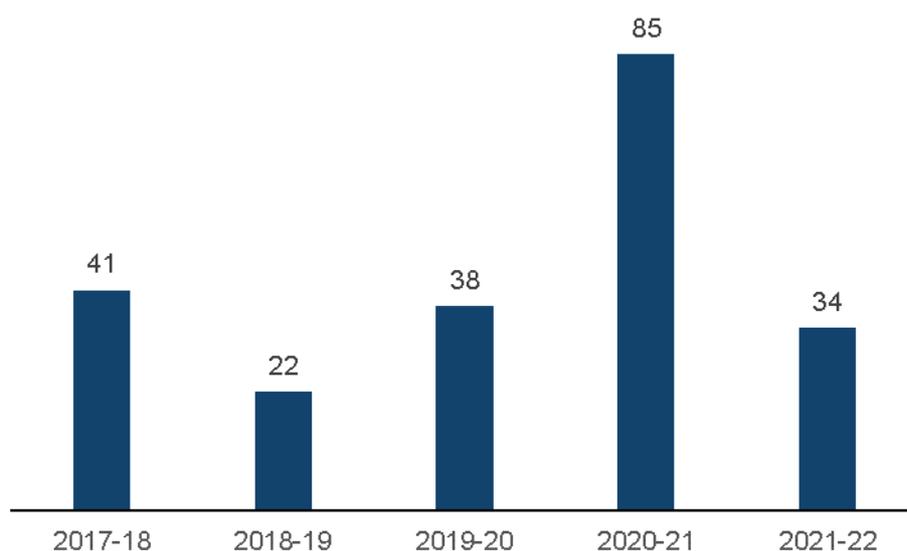


Figure 22 shows the number of offences that involved hunting with dogs and is a further breakdown of the data already presented earlier in this section of the report (Wildlife crime priority areas). The total of 34 hunting with dogs offences identified in 2021-22 was considerably lower than the 85 offences identified the previous year although the reason for the peak in 2020-21 is not clear. The vast majority (32 of 34) of the hunting with dogs offences in 2021-22 were included in the poaching and coursing data presented earlier, with the remaining 2 offences relating to the hunting of foxes and included within the category “not related to a priority area”. The majority (25 offences) of hunting with dogs offences in 2021-22 were for hare coursing, and 7 were for deer coursing (including 1 offence which also included hares).

There were 2 hunting with dogs offences categorised as fox hunting, similar to the average in the last 5 years of 2-3 offences per year.

**Further detail:** on hunting with dogs offences by police division, target species and time of year is provided in tables 35 and 36 of the Tables supporting document.

### Trapping and Snaring (additional breakdown)

Trapping and snaring are methods which can be legitimately used for the control of some types of wildlife such as corvids, rodents or foxes. This may be for conservation purposes, to protect agricultural or sporting interests or for human health and safety reasons. However, the use of traps and snares is subject to legal restrictions designed to prevent harm to non-target species or unnecessary cruelty.

Recorded crimes

**Figure 23: Trapping and snaring offences increased from 22 in 2020-21 to 31 in 2021-22**

Trapping and snaring offences, 2017-18 to 2021-22

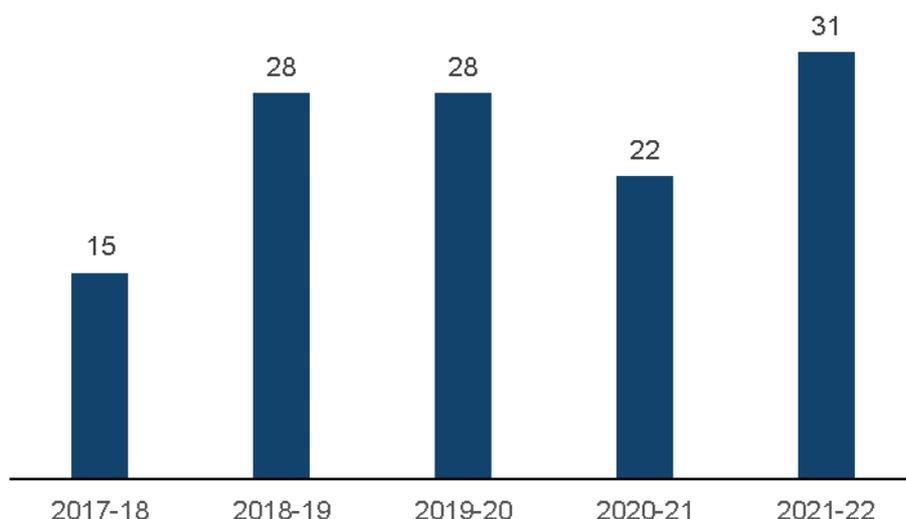


Figure 23 shows the number of offences that involved trapping and snaring and is a further breakdown of the data already presented in this section of the report (Wildlife crime priority areas). None of the trapping and snaring offences in 2021-22 related to a priority area hence all were included in the “not aligned to a priority area” data presented earlier in Figure 14.

Of the 31 offences in 2021-22, 21 related to the use of snares, with the remaining 10 involving the use of traps / cages. For many offences the target species was unknown, although the species was identified in some cases (e.g. foxes; magpies / crows).

**Further detail:** on trapping and snaring offences by police division, type of trap/snare, target species and time of year is provided in tables 37 and 38 of the Tables supporting document.

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