

Wales' Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy 2025-2028





Leaflets held by the man on the left:

- Leaflet 1: RURAL CRIME PREVENTION VISIT AND PROPERTY MARKING
- Leaflet 2: RURAL CRIME PREVENTION VISIT AND PROPERTY MARKING
- Leaflet 3: RURAL CRIME PREVENTION VISIT AND PROPERTY MARKING
- Leaflet 4: RURAL CRIME PREVENTION VISIT AND PROPERTY MARKING

Trust and relationships between the police and the farming community have improved in many counties... The presence of officers at livestock markets has been positively received, increasing their accessibility and building confidence within the farming community. Continued engagement with the rural community is essential for maintaining and strengthening this trust

Foreword

The first joint Police and Welsh Government Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy (2023 – 2025) was embraced positively by stakeholders and practitioners alike and as such we are delighted to build upon that work with the publication of this new three-year successor Strategy.

Both wildlife and rural crime are issues of national and international significance. It is not only the intrinsic importance of the species, habitats and people affected by these crimes, but it is also the gravity of the links with other harmful behaviours, including serious organised crime.

We are confident that collaboration is the right approach for Wales – between the Welsh Government and the police and, critically, with our other partners in the statutory and NGO sectors, without who much of this work simply could not be delivered. The involvement of dozens of organisations across all the priority areas therefore remains critical to achieving success.

As could be expected, there have been key learnings from the first two-year Strategy which, along with the results of the stakeholder consultation, have shaped the development of this new strategic approach. It is evident the innovative role of the Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordinator, which is now approaching a fifth year, continues to be pivotal and as such the Welsh Government has committed a further three years of funding, to correspond with the period to which this Strategy applies.

The commitment to dovetail with wildlife and rural crime strategies at a UK level is preserved so that we may stay alert to national or international trends, and to ensure key outcomes are shared in both directions. We also remain, however, ambitious for what can be achieved by those working together and responding to the issues specific to, and appropriate for, Wales so that our wildlife, environment and rural communities can be better protected.



Nigel Harrison
Deputy Chief Constable
North Wales Police
NPCC Lead for Wildlife
& Rural Crime



Huw Irranca-Davies MS
Deputy First Minister and
Cabinet Secretary for Climate
Change Rural Affairs
Welsh Government

Introduction


The results of the stakeholder survey conducted during the development of this Strategy demonstrate that during the past two years public confidence in policing has improved in many areas. Challenges remain, however, including variations in response, by area and by issue. This only serves to reinforce the need for the Coordinator role with a focus on providing information, training, resources and coordination across the four police areas to support improvements where possible.

NFU Mutual reports the cost of rural crime claims rose in Wales from £2.4m in 2023 to £2.8m in 2024 but overall remains low compared to areas of England. These increases may be attributed to organised criminal gangs targeting farmyards and fields, driven by high inflation and ready resale markets both domestically and overseas for high value items such as ATVs and GPS devices. The report emphasises the severe impacts of rural crime with 96% of NFU Mutual agents surveyed noting the negative effects upon the mental well-being of farmers. The persistent threat of crime, combined with economic pressures, has only heightened stress levels within rural communities.

The priority has been on – and will continue to be – reducing all forms of wildlife and rural crime, enhancing rural partnerships, and improving community safety and this has been through a structure of six priority groups bringing together police and partner organisations. Our approach in Wales recognises the mental health vulnerabilities within our rural communities and as such has a specific, and unique, strategic focus on connecting enforcers and support services. The aim is to ensure those responders dealing with an unfolding crisis are better equipped to access the right help whether that be mental health, suicide prevention or domestic abuse. Whilst this has been broadly welcomed by stakeholders in the consultation, there remains some concern about its inclusion in the Strategy. In recognition of this, the group has been renamed Networking Rural Support Services to better reflect its strategic aims.

Other changes from lessons learned and consultation responses include the removal of the Wales Police Rural Supervisors group from the strategic priorities. Whilst this valuable group will be retained, as a forum for operational and management issues it will instead become part of the governance structure. Meanwhile heritage crime will become a full priority group, which reflects both the emerging trends and the number of partners who are engaging and contributing which it is hoped will result in more initiatives to help tackle these crimes.

Some stakeholders remain steadfastly supportive of the broader priority areas that are unique to the Wales Strategy whereas some have repeated calls for narrower and/or more specific priorities. Such an approach, however, could disenfranchise many of the important stakeholders who currently can increase or decrease their engagement to suit the nature of the work the group is undertaking. The reality of current resources is that it is simply not possible to have a priority group for every species and/or specific criminal activity. By grouping issues together there is the opportunity to share resources, knowledge and activities. There is also a flexibility which enables each group to remain agile and respond appropriately to emerging crime patterns and trends.



I feel extremely strongly about this broad focus of groups continuing – it prevents siloed working and ensures efficient collaboration and cross species, habitat and sector learning²



The meetings have strengthened
[our] relationships with police,
other third-sector organisations,
and farming communities.
It has facilitated knowledge-sharing,
collaborative problem-solving,
and an improved understanding
of rural crime³



Our mission is to provide the best possible service to those residing and working within rural Wales, ensuring the preservation of our world-renowned farming produce, rich historical culture, and wildlife habitats for now and generations to come.

Wildlife and rural crime can take many forms, including the theft of agricultural equipment, livestock offences, and the destruction of wildlife habitats. The police and our key partner agencies play a vital role in preventing these crimes from occurring and apprehending those responsible.

A coordinated and strategic approach is essential for success and sustainability. The police and our partner agencies are at the forefront of this progress, facilitating a combined approach to problem-solving by utilising expert knowledge and experience throughout Wales and beyond.

This Strategy, aligned with the UK NPCC rural Strategy, provides clear guidance and support for those tackling rural offences. It aims to reduce crime at its source through a coordinated and professional approach.

During the last strategic period technological advancements, improved training for rural officers, and increased rural community liaison have significantly enhanced the capacity to detect and address incidents across Wales. The 'We Don't Buy Crime' project and crime prevention initiatives in Wales represent a collaborative and proactive approach to crime reduction, leveraging technology, community engagement, and strategic partnerships to create safer communities and reduce the incidence of acquisitive crimes across the country.

Livestock attacks continue to be a significant issue for our farming communities in Wales, but several initiatives are enabling a fight back. A new law is passing through the UK Parliament and a project to analyse and compare DNA between an attacked animal and the suspected dog(s) is also underway. A Responsible Dog Ownership Course, in collaboration with the Blue Cross, is being trialled in Wales as a UK first, giving owners the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge to prevent further occurrences.

We have to be creative and focused to firstly understand the issues and then seek the answers to ensure that our rural communities have the best possible support and protection.

As the Wales Rural & Wildlife Crime Coordinator, I am proud to lead a programme that contributes to the success and future growth of our rural communities. Our goal is to minimise the risk and fear of crime while maintaining our iconic wildlife, heritage, and habitats.

Rob Taylor, QPM, Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Coordinator



Strategy Development

Throughout the execution of the work under the previous Strategy there has been an emphasis on continual development aimed at maximising impact and chances of success, while also anticipating future strategies. Feedback from programme partners has been, and will continue, to be encouraged, with constructive challenge welcomed particularly where resource pressures and purview – for those involved in delivery – is recognised.

The Wildlife and Rural Crime Coordination Programme: Theory of Change report⁴, commissioned by Welsh Government and published in October 2023, underpinned the questions within the consultation sent to all programme stakeholders in March 2025. The report, along with the results of the stakeholder consultation, and recent research into wildlife and rural crime in Wales, forms the foundation for this new Strategy.

⁴ <https://shorturl.at/lrfFx>

Wildlife and Rural Crime Consultation Outcomes

A targeted stakeholder consultation was issued in March 2025 to all partners who have engaged (at any level) in the programme. Responses came direct from wildlife and rural crime police officers, Police & Crime Commissioners, statutory bodies, and a wide range of NGOs representing the victims of crime and those working within the environment and/ or with animals.

Benefits of the previous Strategy were reported by 73% (of those responding to a question on benefits and challenges), along with a healthy engagement from all respondents providing ideas on developing the programme further to be even more targeted and effective. A number of respondents expressed a preference for the focus of the programme to be on a narrower set of issues, but others recognised the significant value that the broad focus of the priority groups has had in ensuring efficient collaboration and coordination. In this Strategy the priority groups have been kept broad to enable the merits of working collectively, and to enable organisations to target limited resources more effectively.

There was a mixed response on confidence in policing, with several respondents reporting on a personal or organisational opinion rather a wider society viewpoint. There are merits in understanding both, particularly where organisations have a larger membership from which to draw an opinion. Even where responses were not as positive, there was a general recognition of the competing priorities and resource demands upon the police service.

The question on the proposed priorities attracted the most responses and, whilst it is not yet universal, there appears to be an appreciation amongst most stakeholders that priority groups with broader areas of focus are, on balance, the best fit for Wales. Several changes to the perceived emphasis of issues within the priority areas, as well as calls for ceasing, merging, or introducing specific priorities were suggested but these proposals were varied and often conflicted. We have chosen to retain the broad set of priority groups, with relatively minor changes described above.



81% (of those who responded to the question on contact) reported a level of interaction with police wildlife and rural crime officers and the vast majority characterised this as positive, although the variances between police areas was also noted. The appetite for partnership working remains strong and there were offers of training support from partners which priority groups will be able to benefit from over the period of the strategy. Likewise other offers – from all respondents with the means – included expertise and knowledge, with the consultation serving as a timely reminder to priority groups to make use of any untapped resources. The detail provided by respondents, including a few suggestions on additional stakeholders to engage with, can be utilised by the priority groups.

Of those responding to a question about communications channels, almost all were able to offer at least a discussion on utilising their social media, newsletters and magazines to enable the dissemination of important information. This has the potential to enable access to many thousands of people and where those databases can select specifically rural residents this could be of benefit to any public awareness element in the work of the priority groups.

Strategic Aim

To consolidate and further develop an all-Wales coordinated and effective response to wildlife and rural crime; a response which complements the UK Strategy but is tailored to Wales' needs; supporting policing and its partners to prevent crime, pursue those who commit it, and protect those most affected by it. The communities, individuals, habitats and wildlife most at risk of harm will be the central focus.

Strategic Enablers

Enhanced Coordination

Enhanced coordination and effectiveness in addressing wildlife and rural crime, our strategic objectives include centralised intelligence, proportional data sharing agreements, and fostering cross border cooperation.



Secure Successful Prosecutions and hold offenders accountable

We will work to strengthen prosecution cases, by supporting better evidence gathering and analysis, improving officer skills and knowledge, working closer with specialist Crown Prosecution Service contacts, and advocating for increased penalties for rural crimes.



Disrupt and dismantle criminal networks involved in wildlife and rural crime

Utilise intelligence and advanced policing tactics to identify and target high-value criminal networks, conduct joint initiatives across Wales to disrupt their operations, and execute targeted enforcement operations.



Promote a culture of respect and stewardship for the natural environment

We will raise public awareness about the impacts of wildlife and rural crime, engage communities in protection through education and crime prevention, collaborate with government and public health agencies and promote the responsible use of nature spaces to support local communities and reduce crime.



Reducing Risk and Vulnerability

We will reduce vulnerability by safeguarding the most vulnerable, raise the profile of wildlife & rural crime using available crime statistics, and invest in relationships with professional civil society organisations to meet our strategic aims.



Governance, Ethics and Professionalism

We will maintain governance, provide value, remain data-focussed, professional, and robust.



Enhance Prevention and Detection Capabilities

We will focus on crime prevention, public information, utilise disruption tactics, and provide specialist training to prevent and address wildlife and rural crime.



Building Collective Resilience

We will focus on technology, performance, demand reduction, and community engagement to combat wildlife and rural crime effectively.





Delivering the Strategy

The Priority Groups were established under the previous Strategy and these will continue although by incorporating the changes previously mentioned to the Police Rural Supervisors Group, renaming Mental Health/Domestic Abuse to Networking Rural Support Services and introducing the Heritage Crime Group.

This Strategy is designed to provide the framework and high-level objectives within which the priority groups are expected to operate but each group has the autonomy to further define the parameters of its focus through its Terms of Reference. Each group will also be expected to produce their own measurable and achievable metrics, utilising the 4Ps and MoRILE⁶, with performance being reported against, quarterly, through the governance structure detailed later in this document.

The 4Ps are:

Prepare

Prepare for when wildlife and rural crime may occur, preventing where possible and mitigating its impact through efficient use of intelligence, data and technology.

Prevent

Preventing and deterring people from engaging in wildlife and rural crime through effective partnerships, media and communication, and public engagement.

Pursue

Relentlessly pursue offenders with particular focus on serious and organised criminals, using our criminal justice partners to prosecute, and to disrupt and deter offending through effective enforcement tactics.

Protect

Protect rural communities and wildlife from the impact of crime through a coordinated national effort utilising all resources and increasing the capacity and capability of police and partners.



Priorities 2025-2028

Bird Crime

Farm Crime

**Mammals and European
Protected Species**

Habitats

Heritage Crime

**Networking Rural
Support Services**

Priority Groups Overview

Bird Crime

Bird offences include poisoning, nest destruction, trapping, habitat damage, egg theft, trade, and illegal shooting. These crimes affect both raptors and urban species, as well as coastal birds.

The group identifies key threats to birds in Wales, collaborating through police operations, officer training, intelligence sharing, and public awareness. The Coordinator is also a member of the UK Bird of Prey Persecution Group.

Operation Seabird Cymru, a sub-group, addresses coastal offences, including mammal disturbances.

Overarching objectives:

- Reduce bird offences in Wales.
- Raise awareness of bird offences.
- Enhance police and partner agency training.

Farm Crime

Rural crimes in Wales primarily affect farms and rural communities. These include thefts of machinery, tools, vehicles, livestock, fuel and working dogs; attacks on livestock by dogs; arson; burglary; and equine offences.

The group coordinates action and awareness among police and farming unions. Farm crimes impact livelihoods and production, making prevention and police empowerment crucial. Raising awareness, preventing offences, and enhancing police powers are key objectives. Officer training is essential for understanding farm-related issues. Over 60 officers in Wales have completed specialised training.

Overarching objectives:

- Reduce farm-related crimes.
- Provide specialist training to officers and partners.
- Engage directly with farming communities and associated agencies.
- Seek law change, where appropriate.

Habitats

The habitats of Wales support ecosystems and wildlife, making the prevention of offences in rural areas important for their maintenance. Offences include fly-tipping, illegal off-roading, introducing invasive plants and species, and damage to protected SSSI areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest). The group aims to identify issues across Wales by collaborating with partner agencies and experts to address offences effectively. Education, prevention, and enforcement are essential components of any action plan.

Operation Taurus Cymru – a sub-group, is a collaborative effort to combat illegal off-roading throughout Wales is crucial to prevent the spread and dispersal of offences from one area to another. Raising awareness about the damage caused and implementing targeted enforcement are key tactics in preventing such offences.

Overarching objectives:

- Coordinate with key partner agencies to ensure more effective and closer working practices.
- Develop a greater understanding of the impact certain offences have on habitats.
- Deploy proactive measures through police and partners to prevent and detect offences through operations and education.

Heritage Crime

As a new core priority, the group will work to address heritage crime in Wales focusing on preventing damage to heritage sites through collaboration between the police, partner agencies, and Cadw. Increasing officer knowledge is key as well as educating the public on protecting our heritage.

Overarching objectives:

- Develop training programs for rural officers and cadets to prevent and respond to heritage crime.
- Strengthen partnerships and improve coordination among police, Cadw, and other agencies.
- Increase public awareness about heritage preservation through community outreach and educational campaigns.



Mammals and EPS⁷

Wales faces various wildlife crimes that threaten species, such as bat offences, poaching, illegal hunting, and badger offences. Criminal activities also affect flora and fauna protected under CITES or European law.

A collaborative group of police and partners works to identify, prevent, and enforce against these crimes. They combine knowledge and experience to tackle issues and share best practices across the UK. Cooperation with local authorities is crucial to prevent unconsented planning work that harms species.

Overarching objectives:

- Provide immediate and professional response to offences involving mammals and EPS (European Protected Species).
- Enhance knowledge and best practices for dealing with species offences.
- Use specialist agency knowledge to aid investigations and prosecutions.

Networking Rural Support Services

This group which aims to link in with domestic abuse, mental health and suicide prevention support has been renamed to better reflect its main focus. Each of these subject areas is significant in its own right and crucial work is being conducted by police, dedicated agencies and partners in Wales. The priority group brings together key organisations and rural police who are frequently the first to engage with victims or patients in rural settings. The group ensures co-ordination, and a unified approach required to provide specialised training, knowledge, and support. These matters are not exclusive to urban environments but also manifest in rural communities, where the conditions that contribute to problems and the solutions for addressing them often differ. The police and our supporting agencies deliver frontline services, working collaboratively to offer essential services, enhanced protection, and raise awareness within farming communities.

Overarching objectives:


- Provide essential training for officers and partner agencies to manage crises in rural areas.
- Enhance the knowledge within the police and partner agencies regarding available resources and support.
- Develop an understanding of the rural environment, the pressures within the farming industry, and the support that is accessible.

All Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Governance Structure

With a new Strategy comes the opportunity to refresh the governance structure to provide greater clarity on how overview and accountability will be exercised and how each level interacts with others.



The UK NPCC Wildlife and Rural Crime portfolio lead is Deputy Chief Constable of North Wales Police, Nigel Harrison. While policing and the criminal justice system is not devolved, the conditions that give rise to crime; its effects upon people, the environment and animals; as well as significant portions of law – for example wildlife – are within the portfolio of Welsh Government Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs Huw Irranca-Davies MS.



Contact: wildlife@gov.wales

Crimes should be reported by calling:

- ☑ 999 in an emergency
- ☑ 101 for any non-emergency incidents
- ☑ Via your local police area online website reporting form
- ☑ Or anonymously through CrimeStoppers on 0800 555 111

For more information:

www.gov.wales/wales-wildlife-and-rural-crime-group

www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net

www.nwcu.police.uk

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