

04 June 2026

Dear

ATISN 26951 – Big cat sightings 2020 to 2025

Thank you for your request which we received on 8 May 2026. You asked for records held by the Wildlife team in relation to alleged big cat sightings for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2025.

The information we hold on alleged big cat sightings in Wales for the requested timeframe is enclosed in the attached spreadsheet. We have also attached a file for each of the cases set out in the spreadsheet, however, please note no information is held for the alleged sighting from 9 February 2021 at Merlin Bridge, Pembrokeshire. These files include any correspondence between the Welsh Government's Wildlife team and NRW, APHA, or police forces. We hold no other correspondence with these agencies outside of the cases set out in the spreadsheet.

In addition to the information provided, captured by your request, we also hold a number of videos and photos. Although some are not captured by the request, we sought permission to provide these to you from the people who provided these to us. In the case of Porthclais Harbour, the reporter was happy to release the information to you, and this is provided. In the case of Fairy Falls, we have had no reply. Should we receive permission to release the videos and photo, we will send these on under separate cover.

The Welsh Government do not have a formal policy document as there is no requirement to inform us of any alleged sighting. However, The Welsh Government record reports of alleged sightings of, and alleged attacks by, big cats on livestock in Wales and where physical evidence is supplied further investigation may be carried out including site inspection and evidence retrieval. Any threat to human life is the responsibility of the Home Office and such concerns should be referred to the police.

We have decided that some of the information is exempt from disclosure under section 13 of the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) and is therefore withheld. The reasons for applying these exceptions are set out in full at Annex A to this letter.

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at: Information Rights Unit, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ or Email: Freedomofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Annex A

Environmental Information Regulations

Regulation 13– Personal data

Regulation 13(1) together with the conditions in Regulation 13(2)(a)(i) and 13(2)(a)(ii) provides an absolute exemption if disclosure of the personal data would breach any of the data protection principles.

‘Personal data’ is defined in sections 3(2) and (3) of the Data Protection Act 2018 (‘the DPA 2018’) and means any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual. An identifiable living individual is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of the individual.

We have concluded that, in this instance, the information requested contains third party personal data. That is, the personal details of individuals who send and are in receipt of the reports.

Under Regulation 13(1) of the EIRs, personal data is exempt from release if disclosure would breach one of the data protection principles set out in Article 5 of the GDPR. We consider the principle being most relevant in this instance as being the first. This states that personal data must be:

“processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject”.

The lawful basis that is most relevant in relation to a request for information under the FOIA is Article 6(1)(f). This states:

“processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data, in particular where the data subject is a child”.

In considering the application of Article 6(1)(f) in the context of a request for information under FOIA it is necessary to consider the following three-part test:-

- **The Legitimate interest test:** Whether a legitimate interest is being pursued in the request for information;
- **The Necessity test:** Whether disclosure of the information/confirmation or denial that it is held is necessary to meet the legitimate interest in question;
- **The Balancing test:** Whether the above interests override the interests, fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject.

Our consideration of these tests is set out below:

1. Legitimate interests

There is a legitimate interest in obtaining the information for each alleged sighting to understand the nature and frequency of such sightings in Wales.

2. Is disclosure necessary?

The identities of the individual who reported the alleged sighting, those individuals in receipt of the information, and those who may be identified from email correspondence surrounding each alleged sighting is not necessary for the identified legitimate interests. The range of information are being gathered for broader analysis, and the personal data has not been specifically requested and is not required to meet the identified legitimate interest.

3. The balance between legitimate interests and the data subject's interests or fundamental rights and freedoms

As we do not believe there is a legitimate interest in identifying the individuals to understand the information provided for each alleged sighting, we are of the view that disclosure would breach the fundamental rights and interests of these individuals, and as such would be a breach of data protection legislation. Consequentially, we are of the view that the information should be excepted from disclosure.