



The scale of reported illegal animal abuse and neglect in Great Britain

This is the first report for the Animal Welfare Evidence Centre ('The Centre') looking at reported offences against animals in Great Britain. It establishes the baseline data that will be used in the final report to estimate the economic cost of this issue.

September 2026



**ANIMAL WELFARE
EVIDENCE CENTRE.**

About the Animal Welfare Evidence Centre (The Centre)

The Animal Welfare Evidence Centre researches and shares evidence about why people harm animals, so we can prevent it. By understanding human attitudes and behaviour towards animals, we help the sector make informed, evidence-based decisions. We don't campaign. We produce robust, independent research, and share it openly to support lasting change.

About WPI Economics

We are an economics, data insights, policy and impact consultancy, but one that is a little different to many others. We draw on backgrounds in government and the private and charitable sectors to produce work designed to make a difference. We do not do research for research's sake. We are committed to ensuring that everything we do has an impact – which is part of the reason why we are a verified B Corporation.

Report authors:

Julia Wyjadlowska
Senior Consultant
WPI Economics

Tinuke Bamiro
Consultant
WPI Economics

Eoghan McCauley
Consultant
WPI Economics

Marc Brazzill
Senior Consultant
WPI Economics

Rob Fontana-Reval
Chief Economist
WPI Economics

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1. Executive summary

The Animal Welfare Evidence Centre commissioned and funded WPI Economics to produce the first comprehensive assessment of the scale and cost of animal cruelty and neglect in Great Britain. The Centre is funded by the Katherine Martin Charitable Trust and the RSPCA. It was founded by the RSPCA, with Compassion in World Farming, FOUR PAWS UK and Humane World for Animals UK.

The report assesses the scale of reported criminal offences against animals in Great Britain, including those covered by animal welfare and relevant public offence legislation. These offences include both active abuse (for example, illegally hunting wild animals) and passive neglect likely to include unnecessary harm contributing to pain or death (for example, failing to meet the welfare needs of a pet). There is no single legal definition of animal abuse and neglect, as each law stipulates different offences according to the animal 'use' in focus. This report's definitions do not fully align with any one act of law because none of these are individually comprehensive, as explained further in Section 3. For simplicity, unlawful acts of abuse and neglect are referred to hereafter as 'animal harm', 'animal abuse' or 'offences against animals'.

The report used desk-based research, stakeholder engagement, and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to identify the data, which comes from a wide range of sources. As source publication schedules vary, the analysis focuses on the latest annual estimates available and transparently identifies the time period of each data point. Although the research considered all animals covered in law, the data analysis that follows only includes the available data on reported offences against animals.

Offence data is the tip of the iceberg of all harms experienced by animals. As discussed further in Section 5, the data landscape is very limited. Furthermore, many acts that result in animal harm (for example, slaughter of animals within current welfare guidelines) are currently legal and socially acceptable.

Although the report looks at Great Britain as a whole, some of the available data is disaggregated to England, Wales and Scotland, while other sources are UK-wide.

The report identifies four animal categories for which data exists:

- **Companion animals:** animals who are bred and/or kept by individuals for companionship, including wild, non-domesticated species kept as pets.
- **Farmed animals:** animals who are bred and/or kept by individuals or organisations for the purpose of food, materials or other products, whether for personal use or commercial sale.
- **Free-living and captive wild animals:** non-domesticated animals who are living self-sufficiently in their natural habitats, and wild animals who are living in captivity (e.g. zoos).
- **Animals used in science:** Animals who are used in scientific research, testing, education, or the development of medical and veterinary knowledge, products, or procedures.

These groupings represent the categories of animals for which there is existing data. Across these groupings, the report explores the extent of illegal harm faced by these animals, and the availability of data. Due to the fragmented nature of the data landscape, the estimates are likely an understatement of all illegal harm.

1.1 Data landscape

The data on offences against animals is fragmented. Many incidents of harm are never reported; for those that are, few show up in official crime statistics.

This report focuses on analysing reported offences against animals. This underrepresents the true scale of all animal harm for three main reasons:

- 1 Many illegal incidents are never recorded or reported (see Section 1.2).
- 2 Data on reported incidents is fragmented and inconsistent (see Section 1.2).
- 3 Legal definitions are very narrow, meaning many animal harms are legal – for example, inflicting “necessary suffering” on farmed animals within the current welfare guidelines.



Prosecutions are the very tip of the iceberg and represent a small portion of all recorded offences against animals. Many recorded offences have no outcome, are responded to through notices or informal action and do not result in a prosecution.

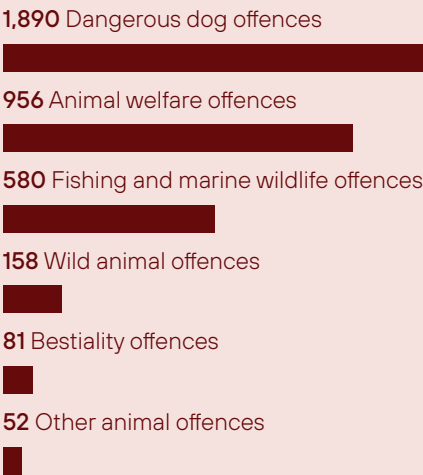
Recorded offences against animals make up a smaller portion of identified and reported offences. These include incidents formally logged by the police as an offence which has likely occurred. These are likely to be lower than reported offences due to a lack of enforcement resources and lack of evidence.

Reported incidents which include an offence that has likely been identified by enforcement and those reported to enforcement agencies.

Unreported and undetected. The true extent of animal harm is likely much higher than reported incidents. Animal harms are difficult to measure as they often happen in private and remote areas, animals cannot report their own abuse, and many harms fall within legal behaviours.

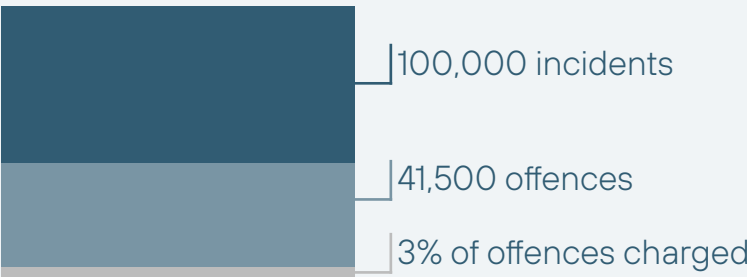
Between 1 million and 4.6 million animals are estimated to be harmed across all offences against animals analysed in this report (see Section 4).

In 2025, prosecutions that were likely to involve animal harm in England and Wales were up 52% compared to 2023. In total, 3,717 prosecutions were recorded by the Ministry of Justice in 2025 across England and Wales,¹ including:



Plus there were at least 200 estimated annual prosecutions in Scotland.² In total, prosecutions in England, Wales and Scotland are affecting up to 23,500 animals annually.³

Of the 100,000 animal-related incidents reported to the police across Great Britain in 2025/26, 41,500 (42%) were recorded by the police. Police records suggest 3% of these were charged and 2% cautioned.



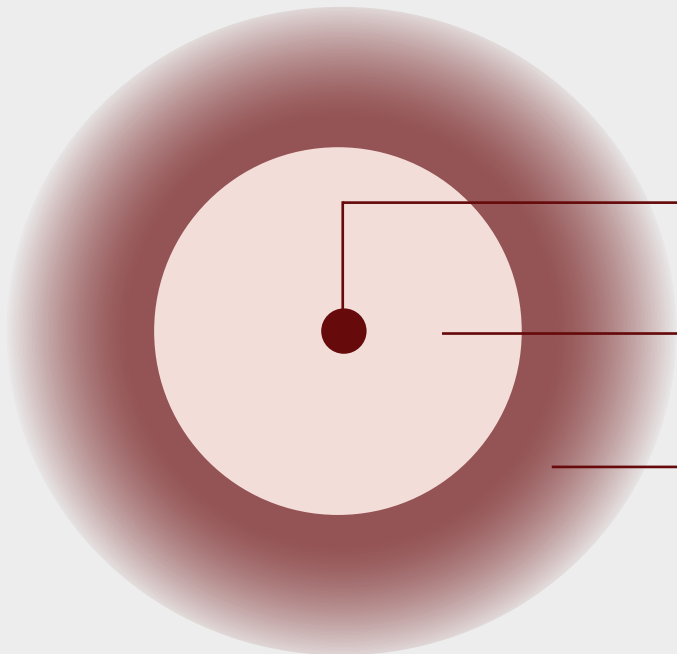
Companion animals

There are an estimated 35.5 million non-aquatic companion animals in Great Britain and 100 million+ inhabitants in the estimated 14 million tanks and ponds.⁴

An estimated 180,000–370,000 companion animals may be harmed annually in over 100,000 reported instances of illegal harm (see Section 5.1).

In December 2023, 2,960 breeder licences were active in Great Britain.⁵ On average, 754 complaints about dog breeders were recorded annually between 2018–2023 with only 5.6 animal breeder licence suspensions each year.⁶

Local authorities in England reported a total of 16,908 active animal boarding, breeding, selling and exhibition licences, covering almost 5 million animals in 2024/25. An estimated 18,750 animals may have been affected by the 30 suspended, eight revoked and 31 refused licences during this period.⁷



Companion animals: key numbers

Across Great Britain, the latest annual data shows:

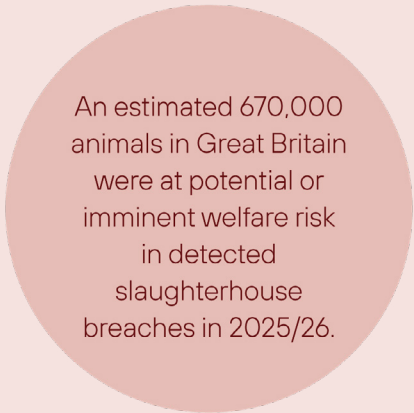
- Up to 3,100 prosecutions affecting up to 21,000 animals.
- 180,000–370,000 companion animals reported as harmed.
- The true extent of harm could be much higher.

Sources: reports to RSPCA, SSPCA, local authority licensing, Dogs Trust stray dogs and puppy smuggling.

Farmed animals

Enforcement inspections give an insight into the conditions experienced by the estimated 221 million animals in the UK agricultural farming system at any given moment.⁸

Up to 9% of farms in Great Britain were inspected by local authorities or the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in 2024.⁹



Between 830,000 to 3.9 million farmed animals may be subjected to unlawful harm annually (see Section 5.1).¹¹



Sources: Animal Law Foundation Enforcement Problem report 2024 data; Food Standards Agency Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26; and FSS Animal Welfare Data 2025.

Free-living and captive wild animals

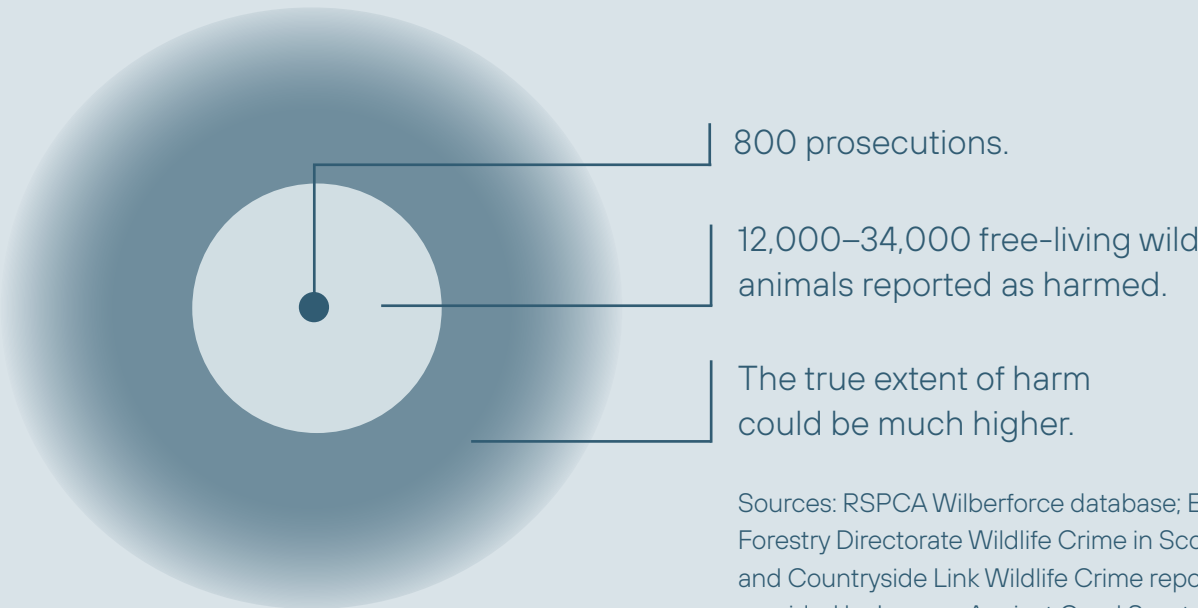
Although pinpointing the scale of the wild animal populations is difficult, recent estimates suggest the UK is home to approximately 600,000–800,000 hares,¹² between 750,000 and 1.6 million deer,¹³ 400,000–600,000 badgers,¹⁴ around 400,000 foxes¹⁵ and approximately 84 million breeding pairs of wild birds,¹⁶ as well as millions of smaller mammals, fish and reptiles.¹⁷ Yet, little of the illegal abuse experienced by wild animals is recorded (see below and Section 4.5 for a more detailed discussion on limitations).

Between 12,000–34,000 wild animals each year may be subjected to unlawful harm in the estimated 9,400 reported incidents (see Section 5.1).

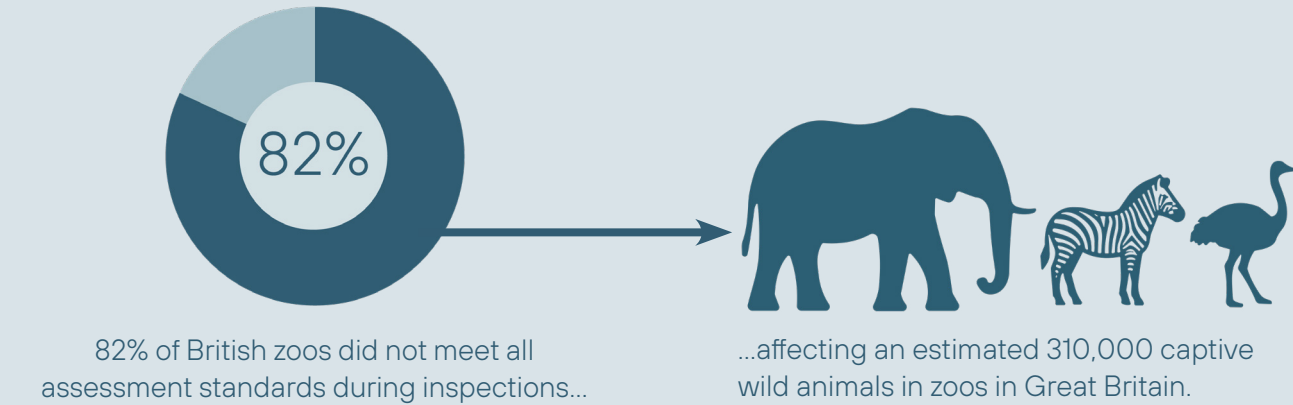
There are over 300 licensed zoos in the UK.¹⁸ Research in 2026 shows that across 108 zoos in Great Britain 324 formal inspections were undertaken between 2020 and 2025. Less than one in five (18%) passed every single assessment impacting an estimated 310,000 wild animals (see Section 5.1).

Free-living wild animals: key numbers

Across Great Britain, the latest annual data shows:



Sources: RSPCA Wilberforce database; Environment and Forestry Directorate Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024; Wildlife and Countryside Link Wildlife Crime report 2025; data provided by League Against Cruel Sports; data provided by the National Wildlife Crime Unit; Border Force data.



Animals used in Science

In 2025, 2.54 million regulated scientific procedures using live animals were carried out in Great Britain.¹⁹ Animal use in science is relatively tightly regulated and controlled, which means non-compliance data is more accurate.

During 2024 there were:

- 146 cases of non-compliance in 2024 affecting 22,204 animals.
- At least 189 animals experienced adverse welfare outcomes.²⁰
- Including 58 mice and 99 fish.

1.2 Data limitations

The data landscape for instances of animal harm is fragmented, lacks standardisation and is prone to underreporting. Crucially, several limitations must be recognised when considering current estimates:

Recorded data captures only a fraction of animal harm

Animal harm datasets are heavily constrained by a substantial 'dark figure' of unidentified and unrecorded offences, as animals cannot report their own victimisation and much of this harm typically occurs in private or remote spaces. Consequently, even data from key NGO and enforcement stakeholders will underestimate the true scale and nature of animal harm.

Reporting is inconsistent, fragmented and overlapping

There is no single source of homogenised animal cruelty data, making identifying the full scale of harm challenging. Multiple organisations collect related but separate data, introducing the risk of overlap and double-counting. Many wildlife offences are non-notifiable, meaning they do not have to be investigated and reported to the same standard as notifiable offences. Due to this, these offences may be defined and recorded differently across forces. Incident data collected by NGOs may overlap with police records, as NGOs may report incidents to the police.

There is substantial attrition from reports to convictions

A huge number of reported offences thin out as they proceed through the criminal justice system (and likely other enforcement systems), resulting in a tiny percentage ending in prosecution or conviction.

Animals affected per incident are rarely recorded

Many organisations do not record the number of animals involved in each incident, making it nearly impossible to know the true number of individual animals harmed. This is particularly true for offences against free-living wild animals and farmed animals, where it is more likely that multiple animals are victims in a single criminal case. Due to poor data quality, it is also very difficult to identify the species of animals harmed, especially in cases where multiple species are involved.

Official figures are narrowly defined and often unavailable publicly

Legal definitions of animal harm do not capture the full range of harm experienced by animals. Additionally, official figures are often not in the public domain as they are non-notifiable or there is no requirement for them to be released.

General data quality is low

The lack of data on individual animals, gaps in reporting, and inconsistent reporting frameworks negatively impact the overall quality of available data on animal harm.

1.3 Key changes needed to improve data accuracy

Having reviewed the data, it is clear there are several actions that could be taken to improve data gathering and sharing on offences against animals, to ensure better understanding of the scale and types of harms.

The key recommendations are summarised below and explained in more detail in Section 5:

1. Expand the list of notifiable crime offences to include a wider range of offences against animals. This could be led by the Home Office.
2. Introduce dedicated animal crime recording codes across all 43 police forces in England and Wales,²¹ and enhance training and guidance. This could be led by the Home Office.
3. Mandate the recording of animal victims in statutory data, and encourage recording in non-statutory data, as incidents may involve one or hundreds of animals. This could be led by the Home Office in the case of the police; the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) in the case of APHA, Food Standards Agency (FSA) and local authority inspection data in England and Wales; and the Scottish government in the case of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and local authority inspection data in Scotland.
4. Review the quality of criminal justice system data on offences against animals, to accurately identify the attrition rates and explain the low recording and prosecution rates. This could be led by the Ministry of Justice or Home Office.
5. Centrally aggregate and publish data on inspection outcomes relating to animal welfare non-compliance for those animals kept for commercial purposes, including all local authority and APHA inspection data (for example, animals involved in farming, markets, transport, border crossing, breeding and entertainment). Review this aggregated data via Defra to identify the reasons behind low prosecution numbers.
6. Enhance enforcement capabilities, resources and training to uncover the 'dark figure' of animal harm offences and develop more robust offence data on animal welfare, including licensing and farmed animal welfare.
7. To increase proactive independent and unannounced inspections, including APHA, local authorities, and the Animals in Science Regulation Unit; and investigate the effects of self-regulation of animal welfare enforcement. This could be led by Defra and the Scottish Government.
8. The UK Government to consider utilising the approach taken by the Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report, synthesising statutory and third sector data in an annual report.



2. Introduction and scene setting

WPI Economics has been commissioned by the Animal Welfare Evidence Centre (to be referred to in this report as 'The Centre') to undertake research into the scale and cost of animal harm in Great Britain. Although the report looks at Great Britain as a whole, some of the available data is disaggregated to England and Wales and to Scotland, while other sources are UK-wide. Northern Ireland was excluded from the research due to a legal and enforcement landscape that is very different from the rest of the UK, as this could complicate the measurement of scale and costs of animal harm.

This report is intended to improve the evidence base of animal harm cases by assessing the scale of reported illegal animal harm in Great Britain. A subsequent report will seek to better understand the links between scale and costs. This combined knowledge will help us demonstrate how investing in prevention work can save animals from harm and make the economic case for more such investment in future.

The research for this report began by defining the scope of animal harm and determining which offences against animals were the most reliable measurable harms.²² This formed the basis of our mixed-methods research approach – involving 18 stakeholder engagements, desk-based research and Freedom of Information (FOI) outreach to police forces – in estimating the scale of reported offences against animals in existing data (please see Section 7 for detailed methodology).

There are no complete estimates of how many animals live in Great Britain. However, UK-wide figures estimate the companion animal population to be 36.5 million, including approximately 15.5 million dogs, 13 million cats, 1.4 million indoor birds, 700,000 guinea pigs and 500,000 rabbits.²³ There are also an estimated 14 million outdoor and indoor fish tanks across the UK.²⁴ The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association estimates more than 100 million fish are kept across 4 million households in the UK.²⁵ Assuming the distribution of animals across the UK follows human population estimates, that would mean approximately 97% (35.5 million) of UK land-based companion animals, and possibly more than 100 million pet fish, live in Great Britain.²⁶ In the wider UK, almost two-thirds (62%) of households own a pet.²⁷ Since 2021, dog ownership among UK households has increased from 33% to 41% in 2026, with especially strong growth among younger age groups.²⁸

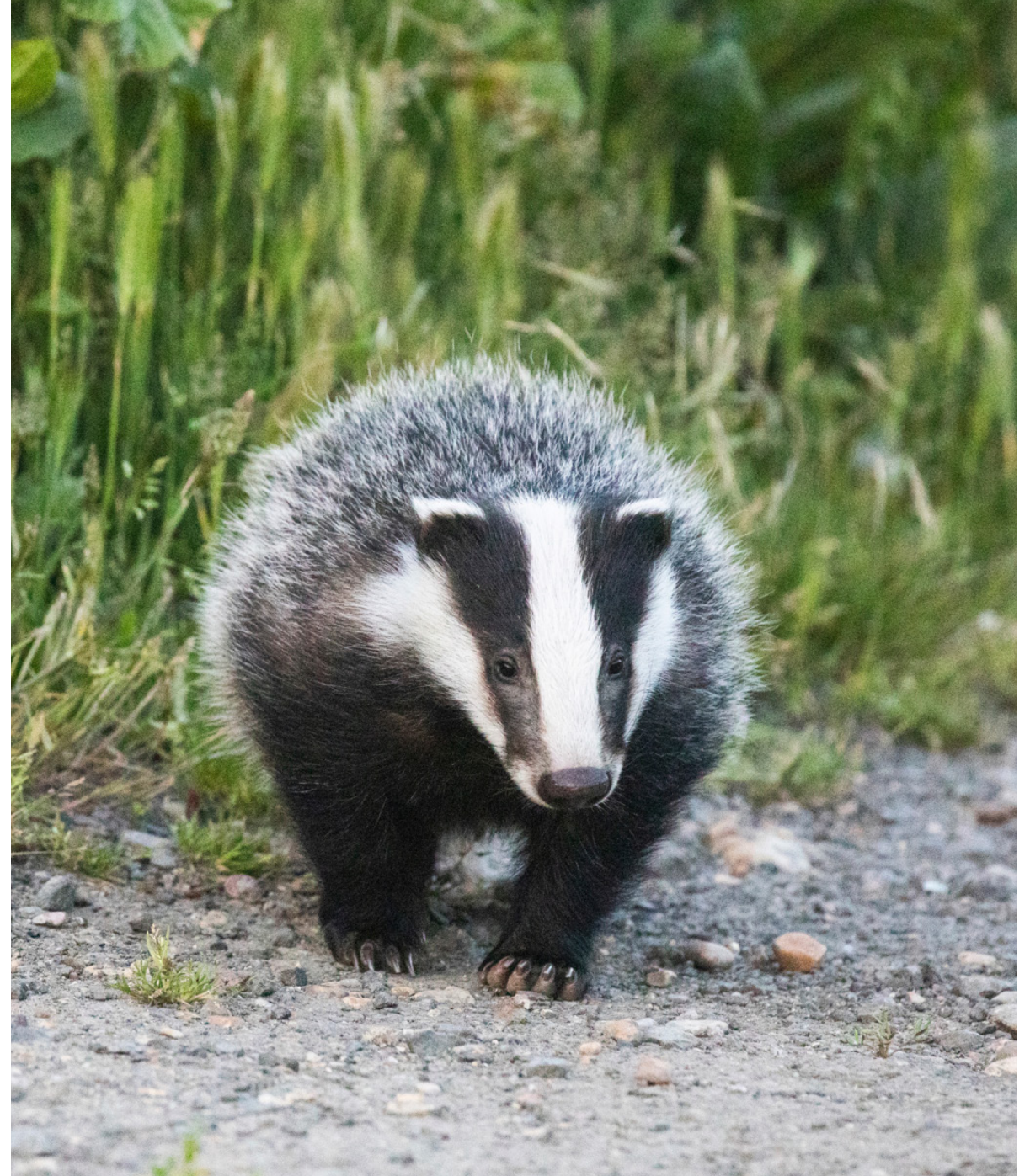
The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated UK pet acquisition, with 3.2 million households obtaining a pet in the first year. UK Google searches for the term "puppies near me" rose by over 650%, increasing from around 2,000 searches in January 2020 to approximately 15,000 in July 2020.²⁹ Many 'pandemic puppies' missed out on vital socialisation during lockdowns, with new owners finding pet ownership more challenging than expected, resulting in a rise in behavioural and guardianship challenges. Over the same period, the RSPCA and similar organisations saw a rise in cases of animal cruelty to companion animals since the pandemic.³⁰

The UK is also home to a large population of land-based farmed animals, including approximately 9.3 million cattle and calves, 4.7 million pigs and piglets, 30.5 million sheep and lambs, and 183 million poultry at any one time.³¹ Among marine-based farmed animals, the top species by volume in 2023 were Atlantic salmon (150,949 tonnes), sea mussels (15,911 tonnes)³² and rainbow trout (13,034 tonnes). Although pinpointing the scale of wild animal populations is difficult, recent estimates suggest the UK is home to approximately 600,000–800,000 hares,³³ between 750,000 and 1.6 million deer,³⁴ 400,000–600,000 badgers,³⁵ around 400,000 foxes³⁶ and approximately 84 million breeding pairs of wild birds,³⁷ as well as millions of smaller mammals, fish and reptiles, and likely trillions of insects.³⁸ Additionally, a total of 2,458,000 animals were used for the first time in scientific procedures involving animals across Great Britain in 2025³⁹ including 1,775,000 mice, 125,000 rats, 380,000 fish and 126,000 domestic fowl.⁴⁰ The total populations of other animals, including animals in entertainment, sports or hobby collections, are difficult to estimate and are not included in this report due to the difficulty in accessing measurement data.

Quantifying the often hidden animal harm remains inherently difficult. The nature of animal guardianship in private homes, commercial establishments and rural areas means that those responsible for an animal's wellbeing are often the ones perpetrating the harm. This, alongside animals' inability to voice their victimisation, means that much of the harm experienced by animals is 'invisible' and so goes unreported. For reported instances, enforcement can be challenging due to a complicated legal framework and fragmented enforcement responsibilities, which contribute to low prosecution and conviction rates.⁴¹

The welfare of animals is a consideration of increasing importance in government policy. The Animal Sentience Committee is an independent body established in 2023 to assess whether, and to what scale, government policies pay all due regard to the welfare of sentient animals. They advise the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Scottish and Welsh Governments on the welfare of animals.⁴² According to the Committee: "an effective, structured, fair and integrated system of animal welfare surveillance and enforcement is lacking".⁴³ Addressing animal harm is not just an ethical duty because of animal sentience; it prevents widespread economic, social and environmental costs. At the end of 2025, Defra launched the Animal Welfare Strategy for England. This sets out a programme of reforms across four key areas: companion animals; wild animals; farmed animals; and internationally; including tightening regulations surrounding hunting methods and methods of animal slaughter.⁴⁴

The enforcement and prosecution of crimes are resource-intensive. Evidence from UK enforcement bodies indicates that responding to animal harms can impose substantial costs on local authorities and the justice system. For example, complex cases of animal harm can cost local authorities more than £100,000 per case,⁴⁵ and there are also widespread impacts and downstream costs not included in this figure. The direct and indirect costs of



animal harm are measured in our follow-up report on the economic costing of animal harm, which will be released later in 2026.

This report discusses the available evidence base that helps shed light on the scale of illegal harm in Great Britain – across England, Wales and Scotland. Since the issue of animal welfare is devolved, regulations and data collection differ between the UK's constituent nations.⁴⁶ This further complicates any attempts to define and measure animal harm, as the definition is inconsistent across the UK.

The next section of this report outlines the definitions of animal harm that have been used to guide the quantification of the scale and costs of animal cruelty. Section 4 then discusses the scale of animal harm as revealed by currently available evidence. Section 5 outlines plausible ranges of how many animals are harmed each year based on the available evidence, and Section 6 provides a conclusion and recommendations.

Case study 1: Operation Paris ⁴⁷

Operation Paris was an RSPCA investigation into a group of individuals who had been illegally selling puppies from at least 2016 until November 2018. Many of the puppies they sold developed illnesses, passed away or were euthanased.

The perpetrators – a couple with the help of another individual – used multiple aliases, phone numbers and addresses in the Manchester and Telford areas to advertise puppy litters for sale online. The phone numbers and addresses used on these adverts often led back to takeaways or local businesses.

Witness statements from 34 members of the public who had purchased puppies from the couple revealed that at least 12 puppies had died very shortly after purchase, with others becoming extremely sick. Many of the puppies purchased cost their owners thousands in vet bills.

The investigation estimated that, in just under three years, the couple would have turned over at least £253,885.39 by selling all 439 listed puppies.⁴⁸

In November 2018, police executed warrants at three properties. The warrants revealed that the dogs were being kept in insanitary conditions, with some in very poor condition: some puppies were very underweight, while others had severe skin problems. From the warrants, 55 dogs and puppies were seized by the police and taken into the RSPCA's care. However, a number of dogs gave birth while in RSPCA custody, bringing the total number of dogs related to Operation Paris to 81.

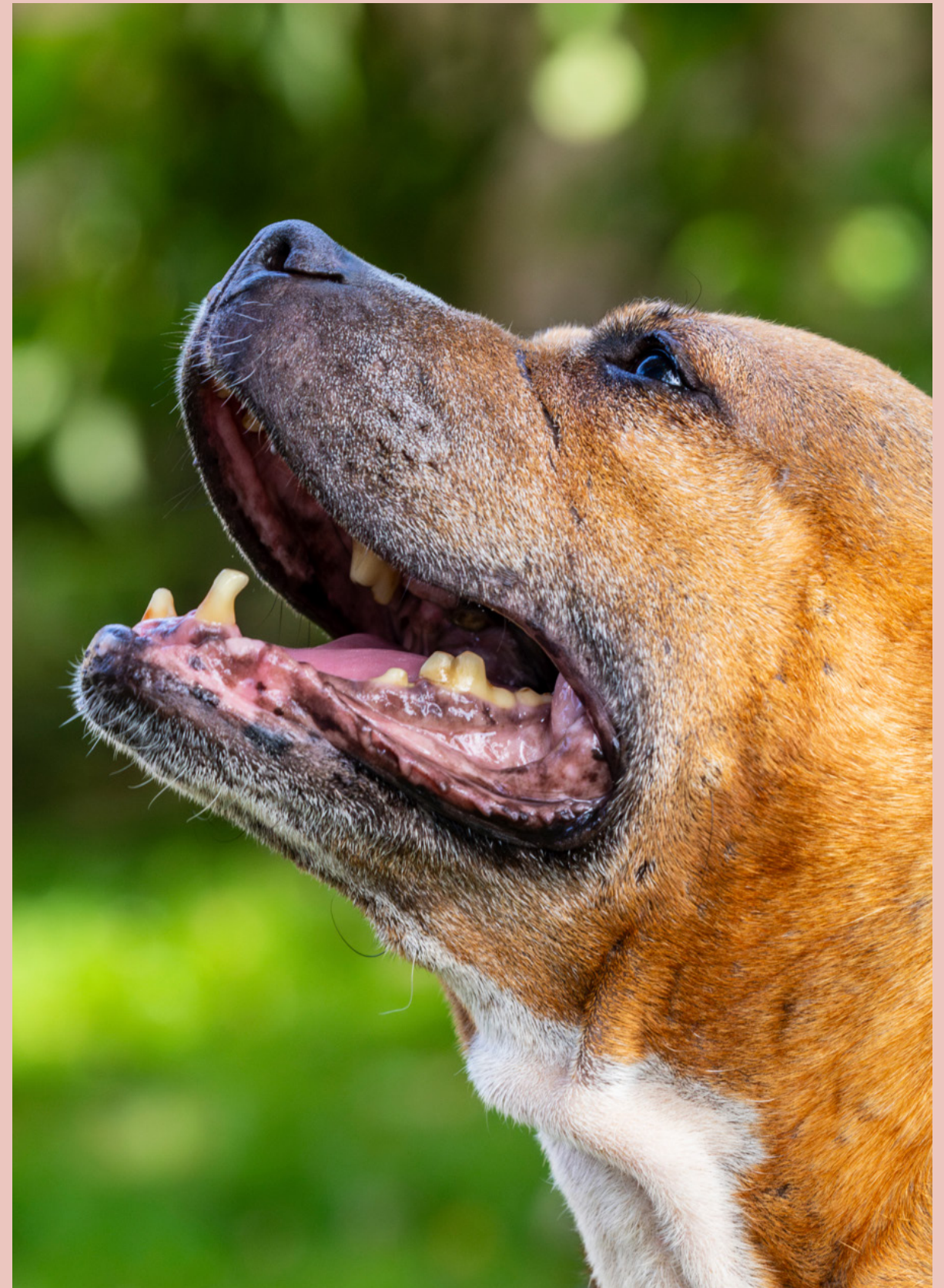
After the puppies were seized, it became apparent that some were bred on site, while others had been imported from elsewhere due to the lack of 'mother' dogs. This was further supported by the couple's repeated trips to Ireland (on one of which they were stopped with puppies at the border), their links to a Welsh puppy trader, and evidence found in their text messages. The couple sold puppies from smaller properties owned by other people, and it was believed they deliberately targeted vulnerable individuals. Neither the couple nor anyone at any of the selling addresses possessed a pet shop or breeding licence.

In February 2021, the couple and their accomplice were found guilty of the following offences.

- Criminal Law Act 1977 – conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation
- Fraud Act 2006 – fraud by false representation
- Animal Welfare Act 2006, Sections 4 & 9 – unnecessary suffering and not meeting the needs of dogs
- Pet Animals Act 1951, Section 1 & 5(1) – keeping a pet shop without a licence
- Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, Section 1 & 3(1) – keeping a breeding establishment without a licence.

In total, Operation Paris cost the RSPCA £28,142.05. The RSPCA's Special Operations Unit conservatively estimates at least 1,000 dogs have been impacted, but are not able to provide more specific estimates.

All surviving dogs found new homes.





3. Definitions of animal harm

The definition of animal harm is inconsistent across UK legislation. In England and Wales, the most significant act is the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA).⁴⁹ Although the AWA doesn't explicitly define animal harm, it criminalises any knowing act, or a failure to act, that causes an animal under human control to suffer unnecessarily. The AWA does not apply to free-living wild animals who are not under the control of humans, nor to non-vertebrate animals. The condition of 'unnecessary' suffering means that certain activities that cause animals harm, such as slaughter for meat, are legal under the AWA because they are considered necessary for the sale and consumption of legal meat products. However, what is considered 'unnecessary' under the AWA is left ambiguous, potentially opening a loophole that limits animal protections. The landscape is further complicated by other pieces of animal legislation that do not assume the same definition of an animal. For example, the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966⁵⁰ doesn't include fish (unlike the AWA), which means fish can be treated by non-veterinarians. The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 is again different, as it defines animals as: any vertebrate other than a human; any cephalopod mollusc (e.g. octopuses); and any decapod crustacean (e.g. crabs and shrimps).⁵¹

The central legal framework for protecting free-living wild animals in Great Britain is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA).⁵² The Act provides legislative protection for all wild birds and certain wild animals such as bats, otters and red squirrels. Under this Act, it is an offence to disturb or destroy any wild bird, their eggs, or their nests. However, some bird species can still be shot outside of their breeding season, or with a licence for bird control for public health and safety,⁵³ to prevent damage to livestock and crops⁵⁴ and for conservation purposes.⁵⁵ Under the WCA, certain wild animals, such as foxes and hedgehogs, have protection from being killed or captured through specific methods, such as through poisoning, but aren't otherwise protected. Additionally, the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996⁵⁶ protects wild mammals from certain cruel acts, including beating, burning or crushing. Wild animals aren't protected under the AWA until they become captured or otherwise controlled, e.g. to become a companion animal, in which case it becomes illegal to cause them 'unnecessary' suffering and to fail to meet their welfare needs.

As animal welfare is a devolved matter, legislation and enforcement differs between England, Wales and Scotland, further fragmenting the legislative landscape. Although the AWA covers England and Wales, Scotland has its own, similar animal welfare legislation – the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.⁵⁷ Scotland also has other pieces of legislation that cover wild animals.

- The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.⁵⁸
- The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011,⁵⁹ which supersedes parts of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024, which bans snares and glue traps.⁶⁰

The enforcement mechanisms and specific provisions differ and even overlap between the three regions. This makes developing a consistent definition of animal harm, and identifying its prevalence, all the more challenging.

Another challenge is that legal definitions are narrow and do not capture many instances of harm. Many legal frameworks focus primarily on physical harm and overlook psychological suffering. The Five Domains model⁶¹ goes beyond current legislative definitions to assess animal welfare across the domains of nutrition, environment, health, behavioural interactions and mental state. Under this model, once an animal's needs across all five domains are met, the animal is considered to be in a positive state of wellbeing, providing a more holistic view of animal welfare than current legal frameworks. This is similar to the five welfare needs acknowledged in Section 9 of the AWA (a suitable environment; a suitable diet; an ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease),⁶² which are based on the older Five Freedoms concept.⁶³

However, despite its inconsistencies and contradictions,⁶⁴ the legal framework does offer a helpful basis for defining animal harm for the purpose of measuring the scale and cost. Illegal acts are more systematically recorded than harms that are not illegal, and statutory data on reported offences offers a more reliable picture of scale. For this reason, we focus in this report on what legislation deems to be animal harm. In doing so, we recognise that this report can only provide analysis of the most visible harms and offences experienced by animals. It is important to emphasise that legal-based definitions do not capture the full range of harm experienced by animals.

3.1 Scope and classification of animal engagement

Animals are given many different roles by humans, which often overlap or change over time; each confers different levels of protection for the animal. For example, the legal definition and level of protection afforded to a companion rabbit differs from that afforded to rabbits classified as wild or used in science. This makes developing distinct animal typologies challenging. Through our research, we identified four broad categories of human-animal engagement for which the scale of harm data was available. These capture the context in which animals are used or live.

- **Companion:** Animals kept and bred by individuals for companionship, or owned by hobbyists, including wild, non-domesticated species kept as pets.
- **Farmed:** Animals bred and/or kept by individuals or organisations for the purpose of food, materials or other products, whether for personal use or commercial sale.
- **Free-living and captive wild animals:** Non-domesticated animals living self-sufficiently in their natural habitats, and wild animals living in captivity (e.g. zoos).
- **Animals used in science:** Animals used in scientific research, testing, education, or the development of medical and veterinary knowledge, products, or procedures.

Existing legislation, apart from the overarching AWA, also broadly follows these areas of use. Crucially, these categories could be further expanded if there was recorded data available on the harms experienced by these animals. Section 4 applies these four categories when outlining the scale of harm.

There are, of course, animals who do not fit neatly into these categories, for example, working animals, hobby animals or 'game' birds. These animals may appear in the existing data as they cross over categories, such as an ex-racing greyhound who is currently kept as a companion animal.

3.2 Defining animal harm

This report adopts a legalistic definition of animal harm, which includes acts or omissions identified in law as intentionally or neglectfully inflicting unnecessary suffering on animals. In quantifying the scale of harm, we follow the legislative definitions for the purposes of accuracy. For simplicity, these illegal acts are hereafter referred to as animal harms or offences against animals.

In using legalistic criteria, it is crucial to acknowledge that many legal and acceptable but no less harmful behaviours towards animals are excluded from this analysis. For example, while there is data available on animal fatalities and injuries in sports such as greyhound racing and horse racing, these are not necessarily criminal offences and, as such, have not been analysed in this report. Likewise, it is important to note that illegal acts that are not captured in the available data also cannot be included in the report. In many cases, offences against animals are not prosecuted, and the available data sources may not neatly distinguish between legal and illegal acts. Therefore, the numbers presented in the report are a collection of the best available data that helps identify the scale of illegal harm.

Due to the data's complexities and limitations, its shortcomings and inconsistencies are clearly highlighted. A table is provided at the start of each animal category in Section 4 and a detailed evaluation of the data limitations is provided at the end of the section.



4. Assessment of the scale of animal harm

4.1 Overview of the section

This section focuses on understanding the scale of animal harm in Great Britain, and explores various existing datasets that help to highlight this issue. Throughout this section, we discuss companion animals, farmed animals, free-living and captive wild animals, and animals used in science. This is because each of those groups is governed by a different set of laws and enforcement landscapes and, therefore, each group has differing depths of data available.

Each sub-section begins with a table that outlines the key evidence sources this research has investigated. The table outlines the key numbers, as well as the key considerations and data issues that affect our interpretation of those figures. The table also suggests some changes to data collection that might improve future understanding of the true underlying extent of animal harm. Following the table, each sub-section examines the data sources in greater detail. A summary of data quality across all categories is detailed at the end of this section on pages 56–57.

The data has been collected through desk research, a programme of engagement with a range of sector stakeholders, and a series of FOI requests submitted to police forces across Great Britain. The desk-based research involved identification and synthesis of publicly available reports and data from charities (including the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), Wildlife and Countryside Link, and Naturewatch Foundation), and public sector organisations including government agencies (such as Border Force and the Food Standards Agency). Stakeholder engagement involved emailed requests to 22 stakeholders identified through desk-based research and conversations with the RSPCA, receiving an initial response from 18 stakeholders, with six follow-up conversations (please see Section 7.3 for a full list) to ensure the available data was used and understood correctly. Replies to the FOI requests to police forces (detailed in Section 7.2) were received from 17 constabularies across England and Wales and Police Scotland, and analysed using Excel and statistical software R.

4.2 Prosecutions and offences data across all groups of animals

Prosecutions in England and Wales for animal-related offences increased by 52% (from 2,438 to 3,717) between 2023 and 2025, while convictions rose by 63% (from 2,012 to 3,263). In total, prosecutions in England, Wales and Scotland affect up to 23,500 animals annually.

In total, an estimated 41,500 animal-related offences were recorded across Great Britain in the latest annual data. Those might affect between 41,500 and 250,000 animals.

The total number of police incidents recorded across Great Britain in 2025–26 is estimated to be 98,000. Those might affect between 100,000 and 600,000 animals.

Official data on the number of prosecutions for offences that likely involve animal harm establishes a useful baseline for understanding animal welfare enforcement in Great Britain. However, it is important to consider this data in the wider context, especially given the overwhelming majority of discovered instances of animal harm that never reach the prosecution stage. For example, of 12,800 animal-related offences recorded across 14 police forces, only 400 (3%) resulted in a charge.⁶⁵ Similarly, only 35 (1.6%) of the 2,185 inspected cases of non-compliance found on farms, in markets, in transport and at the border in Great Britain ended in a prosecution.⁶⁶ This data shows that a prosecution is sought in only a small proportion of reported cases of animal harm. Therefore, the number of prosecutions drastically underestimates both reported instances and the true scale of harm. There are legitimate reasons for cases not being prosecuted, when other outcomes are available to enforcement agencies proportionate to the regulatory breaches, such as issuing formal notices.

4.2.1 Prosecutions and offences data table

Data suggests that between 3,900 and 23,500 animals may have been harmed in 3,900 criminal cases prosecuted in Great Britain in 2025. Between 41,500 and 250,000 animals may have been harmed as a result of 41,500 recorded offences; and as many as 100,000 to 600,000 animals may have been hurt in 100,000 incidents reported to the police across Great Britain (Table 1). The exponential increase in case numbers between prosecutions, offences and reports reflects the high attrition of animal welfare incidents as they move through the criminal justice system.

As the number of animals harmed per case may vary considerably and is not publicly available or consistently recorded, it is difficult to determine the total number of animals affected. The datasets that inform these estimates, and their limitations, are detailed below. The approach to our scale estimates is detailed in Section 5.1.

Table 1: Prosecutions and offences data.

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Ministry of Justice sentencing and prosecutions – England and Wales , 2023–2025	3,717 prosecutions and 3,263 convictions likely involving animal harm in 2025, up from 2,438 prosecutions and 2,012 convictions in 2023 across England and Wales. For a more detailed breakdown of prosecution numbers, see Table 2. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department as a proxy average (1–6 animals per case), the total number of animals involved in all 2025 prosecutions may have fallen in the range of 3,700–22,300.	Why this might be an underestimate Very few offences involving animals will reach the prosecution stage. Many offences will have targeted multiple animals, but total numbers of animals affected per case is not recorded. Sometimes, prosecutions will target only the worst abuse cases, even when other animals were harmed in the same incident. The lack of disaggregation by type of animal, particularly for companion and farmed animals, makes it difficult to distribute these numbers across other sections.	Likely an accurate estimate of the total number of cases involving animals that reach the prosecution stage. But an underestimation of the actual number of offences and animals harmed. The total number of animals affected should be treated with caution as it is based on a proxy estimate.
RSPCA Prosecutions Department data, 2024/2025	1,144 convictions secured by the RSPCA in 2025, up from 1,064 in 2024. 1,297 cases referred to the RSPCA Prosecutions Department in 2025, up from 1,254 in 2024. Note: this data will likely overlap with the MoJ prosecution statistics presented above. ⁶⁷ Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (1–6 animals per case), the total number of animals in convictions may have fallen in the range of 1,140–6,900.	Why this might be an underestimate This is difficult to translate into animal numbers as one instance of animal harm may result in multiple convictions, and some convictions involve multiple animals. The lack of disaggregation by type of animal, particularly for companion and farmed animals, makes it difficult to distribute these numbers across other sections.	Likely an accurate estimate of the total number of convictions secured by the RSPCA. But an underestimation of the actual number of offences and animals harmed. The total number of animals affected should be treated with caution as it is based on a proxy estimate.

Table 1: Prosecutions and offences data (continued).

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Environment and Forestry Directorate, Wildlife Crime in Scotland, 2024	In 2023–24, in Scotland, 20 people were prosecuted where wildlife crime was the main charge. The five-year average conviction rate for people prosecuted for wildlife crimes over 2019/20 to 2023/24 was 74%. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (1–6 animals per case), the total number of animals in wildlife prosecutions may have fallen in the range of 20–120.	Why this might be an underestimate The estimate of prosecutions is taken from wildlife prosecution data released in the ‘Wildlife Crime in Scotland, 2024’ report where wildlife crime was the main charge. However, the report outlines that there were a further 72 wildlife offences where it was not the main charge, giving a total of 92 offences prosecuted.	Likely an underestimate of the total number of cases involving animals that reach the prosecution stage. The total number of animals affected should be treated with caution as it is based on a proxy estimate.
Hooper, 2020, Animal welfare prosecutions reported by the SSPCA (2011–2019)	The SSPCA submitted 1,543 charges to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) relating to offences against animals crimes between 1 January 2011 and 23 July 2019, an average of 180 annually. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (1–6 animals per case), the total number of animals in prosecutions submitted by SSPCA may have fallen in the range of 180–1,080.	Why this might be an underestimate Scotland does not publish official prosecution statistics related to animal offences reported annually in the public domain, aside from wildlife prosecution data. The estimate of prosecutions is constructed from an analysis of welfare prosecutions reported by the SSPCA between 2011 and 2019. Other sources of prosecutions (for example, farmed animal cases that were not submitted by SSPCA) are not included.	Likely an underestimate of the total number of cases involving animals that reach the prosecution stage. The total number of animals affected should be treated with caution as it is based on a proxy estimate.
WPI Economics’ analysis of police forces’ FOI responses Police Scotland Crime data, 2024–25	44,700 animal-related incidents in 2025/26 in Great Britain across 18 police forces (including Police Scotland). 13,000 animal-related offences recorded in 2025/26 in England and Wales across 17 (40% of) police forces. Based on this, an estimated 41,500 animal-related offences may be recorded in Great Britain each year. Those might affect between 41,500 and 250,000 animals. Approximately 1,600 animal-related offences recorded by Police Scotland in 2024/25. Approximately 400 records of suspects being charged or summonsed across 14 police forces in England and Wales in 2025/26. The total number of incidents recorded across Great Britain in 2025/26 is estimated to be 98,000. Those might affect between 100,000 and 600,000 animals.	Why this might be an underestimate Data is drawn from live police systems and is subject to change. Many wildlife and animal welfare offences falling under specific legislation requested are non-notifiable. This means a report of such an offence may not result in the crime being recorded, the offence may be one of a number of offences (notifiable or non-notifiable) and the crime may be classified as an alternative offence. There is not always a requirement for the creation of a crime report as part of an investigation, and so this may not be readily retrievable from the crime recording system. Why this might be an overestimate Data is drawn from live police systems and subject to change. Logged reports of crime include cases where the suspect is found to be not guilty. In addition, not all wildlife offences result in animal suffering – for example, taking protected plants.	Likely an underestimate of the total number of offences since many animal-related offences are non-notifiable, which means a report of such an offence may not result in the crime being recorded. Some relevant offences may be classified as an alternative offence. The total number of animals affected should be treated with caution as it is based on a proxy estimate.

4.2.2 Prosecutions and offences data discussion

Prosecutions

According to Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data, animal-related prosecutions and convictions are on the rise in England and Wales. Prosecutions for all crimes that are likely to⁶⁸ involve animal harm increased from 2,438 in 2023 to 3,717 in 2025.⁶⁹ The convictions also increased from 2,012 to 3,263 between those years.⁷⁰ MoJ data is likely to include the prosecutions and conviction data detailed in the other sections. The 2025 prosecution, convictions and sentencing numbers in England and Wales for various offence groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Prosecutions, convictions and sentences in England and Wales, 2025.

Category	Prosecutions	Convictions	Sentenced
Dangerous dogs offences ⁷¹	1,890	1,608	1,621
Animal welfare	956	858	857
Fishing and marine wildlife offences	580	545	545
Wild animal offences	158	122	122
Sexual offences involving animals	81	88	90
Animal licensing offences	28	23	25
Worrying livestock	16	13	13
CITES ⁷²	5	2	2
Pet abduction	3	3	3
Animal fights	0	0	1
Other wildlife offences	0	1	1
Total	3,717	3,263	3,280

Source: Ministry of Justice (2026) Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: December 2025

In 2025, the RSPCA secured 1,144 convictions across England and Wales for offences against animals, up from 1,064 in 2024. 1,297 cases were referred to the RSPCA Prosecutions Department in 2025, up from 1,254 in 2024. It is likely these convictions overlap fully with the MoJ data above, underscoring the critical role the RSPCA plays in the prosecution of animal crime. It is difficult to translate this figure into animal numbers as one animal may result in multiple convictions and some convictions may involve multiple animals. It is highly likely that the RSPCA prosecution numbers will also overlap with the MoJ data presented above. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (one to six animals per case), the total number of animals in convictions may have fallen in the range of 1,140–6,900.

Information on the total numbers of animals affected in each case is not publicly available. The RSPCA’s Wilberforce database records the number of animals involved in reports of animal harm who were handed over to its Prosecutions Department. Although this metric is not perfect,

as not all animals involved may have suffered harm, this data can give an indication of the average number of animals who may be victims in a typical prosecution case. The mean number of animals involved between 2023 and 2025 was eight, while the 25th, 50th and 75th percentile were one, two and six animals respectively.

Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in the RSPCA’s Wilberforce data reports that were handed over to its Prosecutions Department as a proxy average (1–6 animals per case), the total number of animals involved in all 2025 prosecutions across England and Wales may have fallen in the range of 3,700–22,300.

In Scotland, there are currently no official prosecution statistics related to animal offences reported annually in the public domain, aside from wildlife crime data.⁷³ The Wildlife Crime Report is a key source of consolidated data that collects information from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), the SSPCA, National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and other key stakeholders.⁷⁴ There is a statutory duty to collate this data in Section 20 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, which requires Scottish government ministers to prepare an annual report on wildlife crime for the Scottish Parliament, which should include information on the incidence and prosecution of such offences.⁷⁵ Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, there was an average of 251 cases recorded relating to birds, badgers, deer, hunting with dogs, and fish poaching.⁷⁶ The Special Investigations Unit of the SSPCA investigated 71 wildlife crime incidents in 2023/4 and assisted in 61 investigations led by Police Scotland. However, not all incidents provide sufficient evidence for a prosecution. Therefore, in 2023/24, just three cases handled by the Special Investigations Unit were reported to COPFS. Overall, COPFS received 72 wildlife crime cases in 2023/24. Of those, 25 were prosecuted and 16 led to convictions. The average conviction rate from 2019/20 to 2023/24 was 74%.⁷⁷ Although there were 20 prosecutions in 2023/24 where wildlife crime was the main charge, there were a further 72 wildlife offences where it was not the main charge, giving a total of 92 offences prosecuted.⁷⁸ This further shows how animal offences can be hidden in official data. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (one to six animals per case), the total number of animals in wildlife prosecutions may have fallen in the range of 20–120.

A 2020 Scottish Government report, which detailed SSPCA data, showed that between 1 January 2011 and 23 July 2019 the SSPCA submitted 1,543 charges to COPFS relating to offences against animals, an average of 180 annually. The information on the number of animals affected in each case is incomplete, but most charges where this information was recorded involved one or two animals.⁷⁹ Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in RSPCA Wilberforce data reports that were handed to its Prosecutions Department (one to six animals per case), the total number of animals in prosecutions submitted by SSPCA may have fallen in the range of 180–1,080.

Put together, those numbers suggest a minimum of 200 animal-related prosecutions in Scotland annually. Assuming one to six animals are affected per case, this means between 200 and 1,200 animals may be harmed in relation to Scottish prosecutions.

Across Great Britain, an estimated 3,900 animal-related prosecutions take place annually, affecting approximately 3,900–23,500 animals.

Online abuse videos (e.g., involving staged ‘rescues’, animal fights or sexual harm) are increasingly used as evidence in prosecutions for animal crime. While there is no accurate data on how many of these videos involve offences and occur in the UK, the available data provides a useful insight into the scale and ‘dark figure’ of these offences. For example:

- the RSPCA Kindness Index 2026 survey found that 27% of people in the UK witnessed animal cruelty online over the last 12 months;
- the Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition identified more than 83,000 posts involving cruelty content across 11 major social media platforms in 28 countries;⁸⁰
- Kühnöhl et al. analysed 162 online pet videos intended to be funny; the analysis identified animals’ stress reactions in 82% of the videos and assumed pain in 30%.⁸¹

Recorded Offences

Of the 17 police forces across England and Wales that responded to our FOI request, 13,000 offences were recorded – an average of 770 per force. Despite the FOI request asking for dangerous dogs offence data, two police forces excluded this data from their response. One police force responded only with offences that resulted in an arrest.

When considering only FOI responses that included dangerous dogs offence data and excluding the force that responded with arrests data only, 12,800 offences were recorded across 14 police forces – an average of 920 per force (the numbers ranged from 490 to 1,850). For a more detailed discussion on how those numbers were calculated, please see Section 7.2. The vast majority of these offences were recorded under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, reflecting the trend observed in prosecution data. For most crime categories, we assumed the average across responses was representative of all police forces across England and Wales. The total number of fishing and marine wildlife offences in England and Wales was estimated using the total number of prosecutions as a proxy for recorded offences⁸² (for a more detailed discussion of our methodology, please see Section 7.2). Using those assumptions, an estimated 39,930 animal-related offences may be recorded in England and Wales each year.

Additionally, data from Police Scotland reveals that there were 959 crimes detected⁸³ and 1,619 crimes recorded in 2024/25 that likely involved animal harm, including reports of cruelty to animals, dog fighting, and wild animal offences. Under Scottish law, the term ‘detected crimes’ means those where an accused has been identified and there exists enough evidence to justify considering criminal proceedings.⁸⁴

In total, an estimated 41,500 animal-related offences were recorded across Great Britain in the latest annual data. A breakdown of this is provided in Table 3. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in the RSPCA’s Wilberforce data reports that

were handed over to its Prosecutions Department as a proxy average (one to six animals per case), those might affect between 41,500 and 250,000 animals.

Table 3: Recorded offences, England and Wales (2025/26) and Scotland (2024/25).

Category	Total offences recorded in England and Wales, 2025/26 (estimated)	Total offences recorded in 2024/25 in Scotland
Dangerous dogs offences	35,240	972
Animal welfare	2,120	334
Pet abduction*	650	–
Fishing and marine wildlife offences**	580**	58
Wild animal offences	560	117
Worrying livestock	540	125
Sexual offences involving animals*	160	–
Other wildlife offences	60	13
Other offences*	20	–
Total	39,930	1,619

Source: WPI Economics’ analysis of police force FOI responses and Police Scotland (2026) Multi Member Ward Crime data. 2024–2025.

* Not recorded separately in Scotland ** Proxied using prosecutions data in England and Wales (see Section 7.2)

Incidents

In total, 44,700 animal-related incidents in 2025/26 in Great Britain were reported across the 18 police forces that responded to our FOI request (for details of the request, please see Appendix A); 13,400 of those were in Scotland. The average number of incidents per force in England and Wales was 1,800, or 2,000 excluding forces that reported only wildlife-related incidents. Assuming the 2,000 average is representative for all forces across England and Wales, this would mean the overall total number of incidents recorded across Great Britain in 2025/26 is estimated to be 98,000. Using the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in the RSPCA’s Wilberforce data reports that were handed over to its Prosecutions Department as a proxy average (one to six animals per case), those might affect between 100,000 and 600,000 animals.

Outcomes

Fourteen police forces across England and Wales responded with outcome data for animal-related crimes across nearly 12,000 offence records. Table 4 details the outcomes, showing that only 3% (approximately 400) resulted in a charge or summons and 2% were issued with a caution.

Table 4: Recorded outcomes of offences, England and Wales, 2025/26.

Recorded outcome	Proportion of records
Evidential difficulties – no further action	33%
Investigation complete – no suspect identified	28%
Community resolution	15%
Victim withdrew support	9%
No public interest to prosecute	4%
Charged or summonsed	3%
Caution issued	2%
Ongoing	4%
Other	2%

Source: WPI Economics’ analysis of police force FOI responses

‘Other’ cases were made up of various outcomes, including the prosecution time limit expiring, suspects or witnesses dying or becoming too ill, or records being cancelled or missing outcomes.

4.3 Companion animal data

269,000 companion animals were reported to the RSPCA as having been potentially harmed in 2025, a rise of 40% since 2023.

The SSPCA receives reports of potential harm affecting an estimated 60,000 animals in Scotland annually (based on 2023 data).

Across 16,908 active licences covering animal boarding, breeding, selling and exhibition, 30 licences were suspended, eight revoked, and 31 refused in 2024/25, based on responses from approximately 60% of English local authorities.

4.3.1 Companion animals data table

As prosecutions capture only a small proportion of harm cases, the following tables identify various sources of animal harm reports. The first of those, Table 5, summarises data sources available for companion animals. Some of the reports identified in the table may have resulted in an eventual prosecution, although the vast majority never reached that stage for various reasons including lack of evidence or lack of resources needed to prosecute. Using incident reports made to the RSPCA and SSPCA, stray dogs and puppy smuggling data from Dogs Trust, and local authority licensing returns, an estimated 180,000 to 370,000 companion animals may suffer harm annually. However, it is important to note that many incidents are likely to have never been reported. Although this data does not directly identify



offences, the types of reports considered – including abuse, neglect and abandonment – are illegal under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 for animals under human control. Where some of the reports may include non-offences (for instance, rehoming data may include animals voluntarily relinquished and those who have not experienced harm), this is noted clearly in Table 5.

Table 5: Companion animal data.

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
RSPCA's Wilberforce database 2023–25.	269,000 companion animals involved in reports to the RSPCA of animal harm in 2025 were included in the Wilberforce database. Of this total, 188,000 companion animals were involved in investigated reports.	Why this might be an underestimate Harm happens out of public view and many incidents go unreported. Animals cannot report their own harm. It is possible harm was present in cases that were not investigated, or where investigation was inconclusive. Why this might be an overestimate Same animals might be duplicated across multiple reports. Some reports might be false.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence due to underreporting, although the figure will include some false reports.
SPCA 2023 Impact Report .	17,300 reports of possible animal harm investigated in 2023, involving approximately 60,000 animals.	Why this might be an underestimate Harm happens out of public view and many incidents go unreported. Animals cannot report their own harm. Why this might be an overestimate The estimate relies on an approximation from RSPCA data, which introduces uncertainty. Some of the investigations might involve non-companion animals. Some of the investigated instances may have found no harm.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence due to underreporting, although the figure will include some false reports.
Blue Cross Impact Report 2024 .	7,809 animals helped via rehoming/fostering in 2024.	Why this might be an underestimate Only captures animals who reach the charity, not all animals in need. Why this might be an overestimate Some of the animals may have needed rehoming and fostering due to circumstances that did not involve abandonment or illegal harm.	Likely an overestimate of the number of animals helped by Blue Cross who were victims of illegal harm, as some animals helped may not have experienced harm.

Table 5: Companion animal data (continued).

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Battersea Dogs & Cats Home Annual Review 2024 .	1,559 dogs and 2,176 cats rehomed via its rehoming service in 2024.	Why this might be an underestimate Only captures animals who reach the charity, not all animals in need. Why this might be an overestimate Some of the animals may have needed rehoming and fostering due to circumstances that did not involve illegal harm.	Likely an overestimate of the number of animals helped by Battersea Dogs & Cats Home who were victims of illegal harm, as some animals helped may not have experienced harm.
Dogs Trust Stray Dogs Survey 2025 .	19,093 stray dogs were taken in by local authorities in 2024/25 (excluding dogs relinquished by owners).	Why this might be an underestimate Data only captures the stray dogs who have been found and handed into local authorities. Why this might be an overestimate Impossible to know from the data how many of these instances are the result of illegal abandonment.	Likely an overestimate of the number of stray dogs helped by Dogs Trust who were victims of illegal harm, as some animals helped may not have experienced harm.
Data provided by Dogs Trust Puppy Smuggling Taskforce via email received.	4,280 illegally imported puppies seized since 2015 – an average of approximately 400 a year.	Why this might be an underestimate Only captures seized puppies – an unknown number escape detection.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
FOUR PAWS UK Puppy breeding and licensing; a postcode lottery of enforcement .	On average, 5.6 animal breeder licence suspensions and 754 complaints about dog breeders were recorded annually between 2018–2023 across England, Wales and Scotland.	Why this might be an underestimate The large number of complaints against the small number of licence suspensions suggests enforcement might be lacking in this area. High costs of enforcement might discourage local authorities from taking action. Harm happens out of public view and many incidents go unreported. Animals cannot report their own harm. Why this might be an overestimate Some licences may be revoked for breaches that do not involve animals suffering.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence, although the number of animals affected cannot be determined.

Table 5: Companion animal data (continued).

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
National Data Library, local authority licensing data , England, 2025	Across 16,908 active licences covering animal boarding, breeding, selling and exhibition, 30 licences were suspended, 8 revoked, and 31 refused in 2024/25 based on responses from approximately 60% of English local authorities.	Why this might be an underestimate Only approximately 60% of local authorities responded to questions about licences that were suspended, revoked or refused. Why this might be an overestimate Some licences may be revoked or refused for breaches that do not involve animals suffering.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.

4.3.2 Companion animals data discussion

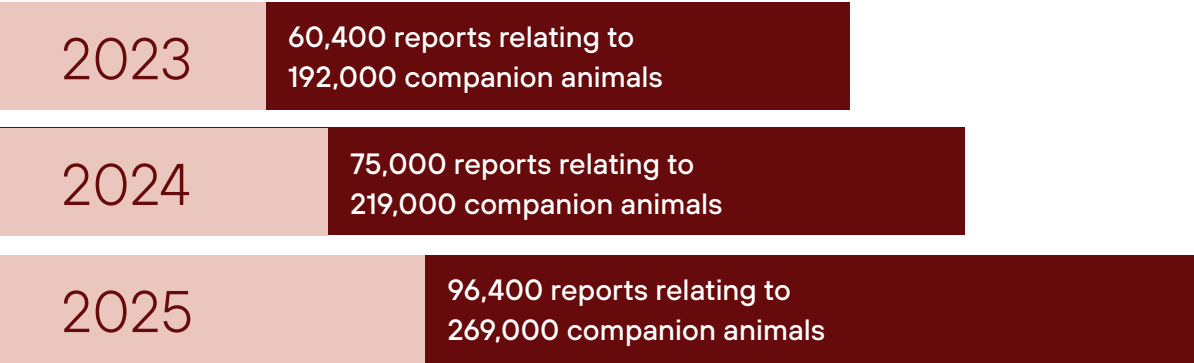
Offence and prosecutions data (Great Britain) – various sources

Based on data collected from police forces via FOI responses, along with MoJ and Police Scotland data, an estimated 40,090 companion animal offences are recorded by the police across Great Britain annually (based on the latest yearly estimates available, summing across all dangerous dogs offences, animal welfare offences, sexual offences involving animals and pet abduction offences). Across Great Britain, this research has identified approximately 3,100 annual companion animal prosecutions. For more detailed discussion of these estimates, please see Section 4.2.2.

RSPCA data (England & Wales)

The RSPCA records the richest data available in England and Wales on harms towards companion animals. Its Wilberforce database records reported incidents of animal harm. Those are overwhelmingly reported by the public, however, the database received some reports from the police, councils, courts, RSPCA branch members, and other sources. These are classified by responders as ‘abandonment’, ‘illegal activity’, ‘intentional harm’ or ‘neglect’, as well as cases of entrapment in a hot vehicle where an animal was presumed to be harmed, and any instances where emergency services were called. Here are the last three years of data.

Companion animals reported as potentially harmed to the RSPCA.



The total number of individual animals potentially affected has increased by 40% since 2023, while the number of incidents reported rose by 60%.⁸⁵ Of the 269,000 companion animals identified, approximately 100,000 dogs, 84,000 cats and 6,500 birds were impacted. 51,800 incidents of harm were investigated by the RSPCA in 2025, involving 188,000 companion animal victims. It is important to note that a lack of an investigation does not mean no harm took place.

SSPCA data⁸⁶

In Scotland, the SSPCA rescued 37,000 companion and wild animals in 2024.⁸⁷ In the latest available data (from 2023), the SSPCA recorded 76,000 reported incidents of companion and wild animal harm. The SSPCA also investigates 17,300 reports of possible animal harm each year.⁸⁸ Assuming 3.5 animals are affected in an average case (this is the average number affected in incidents reported in the RSPCA's Wilberforce database during 2023–2025), these incidents impacted an estimated 60,000 animals.

Blue Cross data (UK)

The Blue Cross is a UK animal charity that helps sick, injured, abandoned, and homeless companion animals through veterinary care, rehoming, and support services.⁸⁹ According to its Annual Report, Blue Cross helped 7,809 animals via its rehoming and fostering services in 2024 (see Table 6). While these numbers do not directly identify which animals had to be rehomed following instances of abandonment or harm, the demand for the charity's services has increased by 31% between 2023 and 2024. This shows a similar trend to data recorded by the RSPCA above (see 'RSPCA data (England and Wales)') and underlines the concerning trends in demand for services across different animal welfare organisations.

Table 6: Number of companion animals helped via the Blue Cross's rehoming and fostering services.

Category	2022*	2023	2024
Dogs	660	1,228	1,760
Cats	1,848	2,412	3,565
Small animals	1,080	1,359	1,479
Horses	415	979	1,005
Total	4,003	5,978	7,809

Source: Blue Cross. Annual Report 2024.
*2022 figures contain only animals helped via rehoming services

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home rehoming data, England

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home is an animal rescue charity that shelters, treats, and rehomes dogs and cats in need. Its 2024 Annual Review documented rehoming 1,559 dogs and

2,176 cats (see Table 7). Since 2022, figures show that Battersea has seen a 21% rise in the number of cats and dogs receiving care via its three rehoming centres in England.

Table 7: Number of animals rehomed via Battersea Dogs & Cats Home's rehoming services.

Category	2022	2023	2024
Dogs	1,258	1,417	1,559
Cats	1,819	2,112	2,176

Sources: Battersea Dogs & Cats Home (2022) Annual Review 2022; Battersea Dogs & Cats Home (2023) Annual Review 2023; Battersea Dogs & Cats Home (2024) Annual Review 2024.

Dogs Trust data – The Stray Dog Survey (SDS) Report (2024/25)

The Dogs Trust is a UK dog welfare charity dedicated to caring for, rehoming, and improving the lives of dogs through rescue, rehabilitation, education, and advocacy.⁹⁰ Since 1997, Dogs Trust has conducted the Stray Dog Survey, which captures UK-wide data on dog-related services provided by local authorities.⁹¹

Table 8 shows that of the 20,491 dogs handled by local authorities, 92% were found as strays. This figure will include dogs who have accidentally escaped from their guardian and those who have been illegally abandoned. It is not possible to differentiate these circumstances in the data. Nonetheless, as it is an offence to abandon a dog and to allow a dog to be out of control (e.g. without a guardian in public) under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, this local authority data provides an indication of the scale of harm towards companion dogs.

Table 8: How dogs arrived at local authorities (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland 2024/25).

Category	Number	Percentage (inc. all responses)
Found as stray – Collected by LA staff	7,834	38%
Found as stray – Brought in by member of the public	1,210	6%
Found as stray – Brought in by police	133	1%
Found as stray – Brought in via vet practice	549	3%
Found as stray – Other	246	1%
Found as stray – Specific arrival route unknown	8,979	44%
Relinquished by owner	1,398	7%
Other	142	1%
Total	20,491	100%

Source: Dogs Trust (2025) The Stray Dog Survey Report 2024/25.

Across these stray and rescued animal sources, 28,370 dogs have received care or an intervention.⁹² This number should be treated with caution as it may include dogs moved from one agency or organisation to another and dogs not purposefully abandoned or harmed, and only represents large NGOs and local authorities.

4.3.4 Commercial breeding/keeping of companion animals

FOUR PAWS UK data – Licensing of breeders and pet shops

Across Great Britain, local authorities are responsible for licensing animal breeders. Data from FOUR PAWS UK reveals that, in the 2018–2023 period, 10,347 licence applications were made, 9,625 were granted, and 11,186 inspections were carried out. Local authorities received 4,523 complaints related to licensed and unlicensed dog and cat breeders. On average, 5.6 animal breeder licence suspensions and 754 complaints about dog breeders were recorded annually between 2018–2023 across England, Wales and Scotland.⁹³

Although these estimates do not directly shed light on the number of animals harmed, the low number of licences suspended (34) compared to the high number of complaints received by local authorities (754) suggests there might be an enforcement gap in this area.

Local authority licensing returns 2025 – Licensing of breeders, pet shops and exhibition animals

Local authority licensing returns detail licensing activities involving animals and the total number of licences that were suspended, revoked or refused in 2024/25. Between 54–62% of local authorities provided data on optional questions. Table 9 shows the number of licences in force across local authorities and the enforcement outcomes.⁹⁴



Table 9: Licences suspended, revoked and refused in England, 2024/25.

Licence Type	Total number in force on 1 April 2025	Average number of animals per licence	Licences reported as suspended in 2024/25 (optional question)	Licences reported as revoked in 2024/25 (optional question)	Number of licences reported as refused in 2024/25 (optional question)
Dog boarding (kennels)	1,837	39.80	4	0	7
Home boarding for dogs	6,252	4.70	19	3	6
Dog day care	1,154	31.10	1	3	4
Dog breeding	2,226	7.30	3	1	6
Cat boarding	1,629	29.00	2	0	2
Selling animals as pets	1,523	3064.00	0	1	2
Hiring out horses	1,068	22.12	1	0	2
Keeping or training animals for exhibition	1,219	39.89	0	0	2
Total	16,908	–	30	8	31

Source: National Data Library (2025) Local Authority Licensing of Activities involving Animals returns 2025.

Assuming no overlap, this data indicates that approximately 4,940,600 animals were subjected to licensed activities in 2025. There were an estimated 18,750 animals affected by a licence suspension, revocation or refusal.

Academic and NGO evidence – Exotic pet trade licensing

The picture is similarly concerning when looking at trade in exotic companion animals. A 2020 study from Elwin and colleagues identified nearly 2,000 exotic pet traders in 283 different local authority areas across the UK who had permission to sell exotic pets. Of those, 95 pet traders in England had been given a one-star rating by local authorities, indicating ‘minor failings’ in animal welfare (although it is worth noting that this does not correspond to illegal activity, this data illustrates the potential scale of offences).⁹⁵ More recent data from local authority licensing returns identifies 22 one-star ratings among licensed pet shops; however, only 55% of local authorities have shared this data, and local authorities with better-rated exotic pet traders in their area may be more likely to respond.⁹⁶

Another report looked at a sample of 1,800 online classified ads for the sale of exotic animals, some of which included unsuitable and potentially dangerous animals and lacked basic advice on animal care and welfare. Some individual animals up for sale were kept in inappropriate environments or reported as being in ‘poor health’, which would constitute an offence under the AWA.⁹⁷



Dogs Trust data – Puppy Smuggling Taskforce

Since November 2015, Dogs Trust has supported the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in seizing 4,280 illegally imported puppies at UK borders through the work of its Puppy Smuggling Taskforce. Each year the Taskforce seizes an average of 399 dogs at the border.⁹⁸ ‘Case study 1: Operation Paris’ details one such investigation into an offence involving puppy smuggling.

4.4 Farmed Animals

The Food Standards Agency identified approximately 630,000 farmed animals to be at imminent or potential welfare risk at slaughterhouses in 2025/26.

Of the 5,551 farm inspections conducted by local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland in 2024, 28% found non-compliance, but the total number of animals impacted is unknown.

Of the 2,530 farm inspections conducted by APHA in England, Wales and Scotland in 2024, 33% found non-compliance, but the total number of animals impacted is unknown.

Just 9% of farms were inspected by local authorities or APHA in 2024.

13,700 farmed animals reported as harmed across 1,100 incidents in the RSPCA’s Wilberforce database in 2025.

4.4.1 Farmed animals data table

Data on farmed animal harm comes mainly from welfare and compliance inspections undertaken by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Food Standards Scotland (FSS), local authorities and APHA, as outlined in Table 10. Using the available data on 8,657 non-compliance incidents, an estimated 830,000 to 3.9 million farm animals may suffer harm annually. However, it is important to note that many offences against farmed animals are likely never reported or discovered.

Table 10: Farmed animals data.

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Food Standards Agency Animal welfare report 2025/26 data.	630,124 animals in slaughterhouses at potential or imminent welfare risk in 2025/26 in England and Wales across 5,311 breaches.	Why this might be an underestimate Only includes breaches caught by inspection.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Food Standards Scotland Animal welfare data , 2025 data.	Approximately 40,000 animals in slaughterhouses estimated to be affected across 334 breaches detected by the FSS.	Why this might be an underestimate The FSS has less standardised reporting than the FSA, and doesn’t always include information on the total number of animals affected in incidents that affect multiple animals. Why this might be an overestimate Uncertainty about the number of animals involved in each incident, as the estimate uses a proxy from FSA data in place of unreported prevalence.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Animal Law Foundation The Enforcement Problem 2024 Data .	Local authority inspections 1,579 non-compliance instances, out of 5,551 local authority farm inspections (28%) in 2024 across Great Britain. APHA inspections 827 non-compliance instances of 2,530 APHA farm inspections (33%) in 2024 across Great Britain.	Why this might be an underestimate Only up to 9% of farms are inspected annually, which increases the likelihood that non-compliance goes unreported. Only 14% of breaches found by local authorities, and 5% by APHA, resulted in any enforcement action being taken. No information on numbers of animals affected in each incident.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.

Table 10: Farmed animals data (continued).

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2026.	The estimated cost of livestock theft in 2025 reached £4.5m across the UK. In the same year, an estimated £1.95m worth of farmed animals were severely injured or killed in dog attacks across the UK.	Why this might be an underestimate Uncertainty about the number of animals harmed in each incident, as instances might cause distress to an unknown number of animals. Why this might be an overestimate Uncertainty about the number of animals harmed in each incident, as instances might cause distress to an unknown number of animals.	Likely an accurate estimate of associated cost to farmers. However, the number of incidents and animals harmed is difficult to determine based on the available data and would likely underestimate the total number of animals harmed, since distress and non-severe injuries are not costed.
RSPCA's Wilberforce database 2023–25.	13,700 farmed animals involved in 1,100 reports to the RSPCA of animal harm in 2025 were included in the Wilberforce database.	Why this might be an underestimate Harm happens out of public view and many incidents go unreported. Animals cannot report their own harm. It is possible harm was present in cases that were not investigated, or where investigation was inconclusive. Since 2023, the RSPCA no longer investigates farmed animal incidents, with the function taken over by APHA. RSPCA passes the incidents onto APHA, or advises the public to inform APHA. Why this might be an overestimate Same animals might be duplicated across multiple reports. Some reports might be false.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence due to underreporting, although the figure will include some false reports.

4.4.2 Farmed animals data discussion

Food Standards Agency (FSA) data on slaughterhouse breaches (England & Wales)

The FSA is a non-ministerial Government department responsible for ensuring food safety and hygiene in England and Wales.⁹⁹ FSA data on animal welfare is the richest centralised datasource on individual farmed animals' welfare available across the UK. Slaughterhouse inspections record regulatory breaches by the level of animal welfare risk: Category 4 ratings pose an imminent welfare risk, and Category 3 pose a potential welfare risk. Examples of Category 4 breaches include: heat stress; water and food not being adequately provided;

or animals being visibly injured, such as with bruises or broken bones. Uniquely, this data includes information on the total number of animals affected in each incident, ranging from one to several thousand.

In 2025/26, 630,124 animals were affected across 5,311 welfare breaches detected by the FSA, as detailed in Table 11. Of these, 542 breaches originated in the slaughterhouse, and 4,769 on the farm and on transport. Breaches originating on-farm and on transport were referred to APHA and local authorities. The total number of breaches increased by 7% compared to 2024/25, and 36% compared to 2023/24. The number of affected animals reduced 43% from 2024/25, when 1,107,022 animals were affected. According to the FSA, the reduction is mainly due to fewer cases of pododermatitis in poultry. Pododermatitis, or inflammation of the bird's feet, is a symptom that can affect whole flocks of poultry. A reduction in cases can significantly reduce the number of affected animals.¹⁰⁰

Table 11: Animals identified by the FSA to be at potential or imminent welfare risk during slaughterhouse inspections.

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
766,978	1,107,022	630,124

Source: Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26, FSA, 2026 and Annual Animal Welfare Report 2024/25, FSA, 2025.

In 2025/26, the FSA issued 159 written notices and warning letters, and 19 enforcement notices, and referred 14 cases for potential prosecution to its investigators. This means prosecution was sought in 3% of slaughterhouse breaches.¹⁰¹

Food Standards Scotland (FSS) data on slaughterhouse breaches (Scotland)

The FSS is a non-ministerial Scottish Government body responsible for ensuring food safety, standards, nutrition and labelling in Scotland.¹⁰² In 2025, the FSS reported 334 imminent or potential welfare breaches, a 12% increase compared to 2024.¹⁰³ Of those, 49% were recorded as welfare on transport, and 31% as on-farm welfare issues detected during slaughterhouse inspections.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the FSA, the FSS does not have a robust reporting system for inspectors estimating the numbers of animals affected in multi-animal incidents. For example, in the case of a few incidents of pododermatitis, the note recorded in the data states that a given percentage of the flock were afflicted, but the total size of the flock is not estimated.

Given those data limitations, it is very difficult to estimate the total number of affected animals. Based on analysis of the available data, the total number of animals affected could range from several hundred to several thousand animals. In order to estimate the total number of breaches detected in slaughterhouses across Great Britain, the FSA estimate of animals affected has been scaled up in line with the additional number of breaches detected by the FSS (6% more), giving a total of 40,000 animals.

The Animal Law Foundation – The Enforcement Problem report

No equivalent data is routinely released for local authority and APHA investigations into animal welfare compliance. Enforcement, investigations and data collection is undertaken by individual local authorities and APHA, and data is not collected consistently or shared externally. The Animal Law Foundation undertakes an annual data collection activity, requesting enforcement data from all relevant bodies via FOI requests and aggregating it into The Enforcement Problem report.¹⁰⁵ The report is the most authoritative source for the total number of animal welfare enforcement breaches on traditional farms, in transport, and at market, in Great Britain.¹⁰⁶ The data it draws on is summarised below.

Local authority inspections: According to the latest The Animal Law Foundation report available at the time of writing, which uses 2024 data,¹⁰⁷ around 20,095 local authority inspections at farms, borders, markets, or during transport took place in England, Scotland and Wales. Of those, 2,185 (11%) found non-compliance. However, the rate of non-compliance was higher for farm inspections. Of 5,551 farm inspections undertaken by local authorities in 2024 in England, Scotland and Wales, 1,579 (28%) found non-compliance (which might include, for example, untreated lameness or overcrowding), 184 of which resulted in a notice. A notice is an official warning given by an inspector that specifies the improvements needed to rectify non-compliance within a specific period of time.¹⁰⁸ Of these local authority inspections, just 34 incidents resulted in a prosecution, equating to 2.2% of cases, which is very similar to 3% in FSA data. The need to improve enforcement of farmed animal protection laws is an issue gaining increasing recognition from legislators.¹⁰⁹

Farm inspections: APHA safeguards animal and plant health, primarily executing government policies. In the UK, APHA farm inspections target animal welfare, exotic and endemic disease control (such as bovine TB and avian influenza), biosecurity, and international trade. It conducts these visits alongside local authorities, ensuring agricultural compliance. APHA conducted 2,530 farm inspections in England, Wales and Scotland in 2024, of which 827 (33%) found non-compliance. Only 39 care notices were issued by APHA relating to farms, meaning enforcement action was taken in only 5% of cases.¹¹⁰ In addition, APHA undertook 123 investigations at markets, 22 of which found non-compliance.¹¹¹ Using a conservative estimate of the total number of farms in Great Britain, up to 9% of farms were inspected by any public body.¹¹²

NFU’s Rural Crime Report

The Rural Crime Report 2026, published by NFU Mutual, estimates that, in 2025, the estimated cost of livestock theft rose by nearly 30% to £4.5m. In the same year, an estimated £1.95m worth of farmed animals were severely injured or killed in dog attacks. The report does not provide the numbers of animals impacted. An NFU Mutual survey of 1,407 dog owners revealed 1 in 20 reported their dogs having chased livestock and that 72% were not actively taking steps to prevent their dogs from chasing, despite livestock worrying constituting an offence.¹¹³ Although this data does not provide any estimates of the total

number of animals harmed by illegal activity, it suggests a high number of animals are impacted and this is unlikely to show up in other data.¹¹⁴

The RSPCA’s Wilberforce database

Assuming the same inclusion criteria as for companion animals, the Wilberforce database identifies the following numbers of farmed animals associated with reports of harm: 60,000 across 3,000 incidents in 2023; 113,000 across 1,900 incidents in 2024; and 13,700 across 1,100 incidents in 2025. The 2024 spike in affected animals is driven by a large outlier in the data.

It is likely the decrease in the number of reported incidents over 2023–25 is caused by a change in reporting requirements. Since 2023, the RSPCA no longer investigates farmed animal incidents, with the function taken over by APHA. RSPCA passes the incidents onto APHA, or advises the public to inform APHA. Given the incident numbers recorded in the Wilberforce database (particularly for 2025) are relatively low compared to reports from the FSA, FSS and farms, and the data are unlikely to be representative of true trends given the change in reporting requirements, this data has been excluded elsewhere in the report.

4.5 Free-living and captive wild animals

4,819 incidents of wildlife crime were reported to Wildlife and Countryside Link for England and Wales in 2024.

The RSPCA received 1,400 reports relating to 4,300 wild animals in 2025.

Only 18% of the estimated 300 zoos across Great Britain meet all assessment standards against animal welfare standards, animal escape protocols, and engagement in conservation measures.

4.5.1 Free-living and captive wild animals data table

Free-living wild animals are non-domestic animals who live free in the environment. Captive wild animals are non-domestic animals who live in captivity, such as animals kept in zoos.¹¹⁵

Using data from the range of sources detailed in Table 12, an estimated 12,000–34,000 free-living wild animals are harmed in the criminal offences reported by a range of stakeholders (see Section 5.1 for further detail). However, it is important to note that reported incidents are likely to make up a small proportion of overall incidents. Moreover, in the case of wild animals, more so than any other group, it is difficult to judge how many animals are affected per incident. Additionally, an estimated 310,000 captive wild animals in Great Britain live in zoos that do not meet all assessment standards during inspections (see Section 5.1).

Table 12: Free-living and captive wild animals data.

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Border Force migration transparency data , January to March 2026 edition.	2,600 animals seized at the UK border in 2025.	Why this might be an underestimate Animal smuggling is unlikely to be caught. Only CITES seizures are recorded in routinely published data.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) The UK Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Project Final Term Risk Assessment, 2025 .	259 illegal wildlife trade (IWT) investigations supported by NWCU in 2024, and 6 organised crime groups monitored as of 2024.	Why this might be an underestimate The total number of animals harmed in relation to each investigation is not publicly known and may not be accurately recorded. Not all IWT crimes are being investigated. Why this might be an overestimate Not all investigations will involve animal harm that took place in Great Britain.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Environment and Forestry Directorate's Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report .	The report outlines that in 2024/25, the most frequently recorded wildlife crime offences in Scotland included: 86 poaching and coursing offences; 22 hunting with dogs offences; 21 raptor prosecution offences; and 20 badger offences. Separately, in 2024/25, NWCU intelligence logs recorded 262 wildlife-related keywords in Scottish wildlife crime, most commonly fish (53), hares (47) and deer (34). This data is likely to overlap with police records detailed above. Although this data relates to the preceding year, the report also details that the SSPCA Special Investigations Unit was involved in 132 wildlife crime investigations in 2023/24.	Why this might be an underestimate Not all wildlife offences are reported to stakeholders. Many incidents are likely to involve multiple animals. Why this might be an overestimate Not all incidents may involve animal harm and some reports may be false.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Wildlife and Countryside Link's Wildlife Crime report 2025 .	4,819 incidents of wildlife crime affecting badgers, bats, fisheries, marine mammals and birds of prey in 2024 in England and Wales reported by Badger Trust, Bat Conservation Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Environment Agency, the British Divers Marine Life Rescue, the Yorkshire Seal Group and the Seal Research Trust for Southwest England, Cornwall and Devon (north and south coasts).	Why this might be an underestimate Not all wildlife offences are reported to stakeholders. Many incidents are likely to involve multiple animals. Many wildlife crimes are not notifiable.. Why this might be an overestimate Not all incidents may involve animal harm and some reports may be false.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
League Against Cruel Sports Fox hunting end of season report 2024/25 .	At least 800 animals confirmed as harmed in reported illegal fox hunting incidents in the 2025/26 season in England and Wales. This includes nearly 500 foxes and 300 other animals.	Why this might be an underestimate Only includes reported incidents. Many incidents are likely to involve multiple animals.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
NWCU data received via email.	1,714 reports of hare coursing in 2025 in England and Wales.	Why this might be an underestimate Only includes reported incidents. Many incidents are likely to involve multiple animals.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
The RSPCA's Wilberforce database 2023–25.	4,300 wild animals mentioned in reports of illegal activity and intentional harm in 2025 across England and Wales.	Why this might be an underestimate Only includes reports that have been made to the RSPCA call line. Why this might be an overestimate Some reports may be false. This data could overlap with reports from other data sources.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.

Table 12: Free-living and captive wild animals data (continued).

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
The RSPCA's Special Operations Unit (SOU) database.	In reports relating to hunting with dogs across 2023–2025, approximately 330 wild animals and 170 dogs may have been hurt.	Why this might be an underestimate Only includes reports that have been made to or collected by the SOU. Why this might be an overestimate Some reports may be false. Reports might overlap with other organisations.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
The Environment Agency data on illegal angling , 2023	In 2023, the Environment Agency reported that over the past 6 months, fisheries enforcement officers had issued 360 offence report forms to illegal anglers, a figure that exceeds the equivalent period last year by 40 cases.	Why this might be an underestimate The number of unreported or undetected illegal fishing incidents remains unknown.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Lewis, C., & Osuch, F. (2026). Up to Standard? A Longitudinal Analysis of Regulatory Compliance in British Zoos .	Research from 2026 shows that, across 324 formal inspections from 108 British zoos undertaken between 2020 and 2025, only 18% passed every single assessed question. The most common areas of non-compliance were improper escape drills (41% of reports), lack of documented veterinary care or nutrition programme (30%), and improper storage and disposal of medicines (27%).	Why this might be an underestimate Only captures non-compliance among selected assessments. It is impossible to determine the number of animals affected.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.
Draper and Harris (2012) The Assessment of Animal Welfare in British Zoos by Government-Appointed Inspectors .	A 2012 study found that only 24% of British zoos met all animal welfare standards across 9,024 assessments between 2005–2008.	Why this might be an underestimate Only captures non-compliance among selected assessments. It is impossible to determine the number of animals affected.	Likely an underestimate of true prevalence.

4.5.2 Free-living wild animals data discussion

Offence and prosecutions data (Great Britain) – various sources

Based on data collected from police forces via FOI responses, along with MoJ and Police Scotland data, an estimated 1,400 wildlife offences are recorded by the police across Great Britain annually.¹¹⁶ Across Great Britain, this research has identified approximately 770 annual wildlife prosecutions and 685 convictions.¹¹⁷ For more detailed discussion of these estimates, see Section 4.2.2.

Border Force and NWCU Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) offences

The international trade in wildlife is regulated by CITES, which is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Although the UK is primarily a demand country, native species such as European eel are illegally exported.¹¹⁸

UK Border Force transparency data shows that approximately 2,600 live animals were seized at the UK border in relation to the enforcement of CITES in 2025.¹¹⁹ However, interception of animals who are not listed in CITES is not routinely published, meaning the figures likely

underrepresent the total numbers of animals intercepted.¹²⁰ For example, in one instance, Border Force seized over 3,000 live tarantulas in 2023, but this is not fully reflected in published CITES data.¹²¹ Between 13 September and 15 October 2025 as part of Operation Thunder, Border Force seized more than 250 endangered species and illegal wildlife products at airports, ports and mail depots across the country. Those seizures were part of an annual international operation to combat illegal wildlife smuggling, representing a 73% increase from 2023.¹²² In spite of this, as indicated in our prosecutions data, only five prosecutions were undertaken for CITES offences. While not all these cases will have come to court yet, this is another clear indicator of attrition of animal-related cases moving through the criminal justice system.

In its latest report, the UK’s NWCU supported 259 international illegal wildlife trade investigations in 2024, and was monitoring six organised crime groups involved in this trade as of 2024.¹²³

Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report

Although the Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report has been used as an evidence source in the prosecutions and offences section, the data on wildlife crime priority areas is discussed in additional detail below.¹²⁴

The report outlines that in 2024/25, Police Scotland recorded:

- 20 badger offences,
- eight bat persecution offences,
- one CITES offence,
- 86 poaching and coursing offences, mainly involving fish, hares and rabbits,
- 21 raptor prosecution offences,
- 22 hunting with dogs offences, and
- six trapping offences targeting a range of species including birds, badgers and rabbits and using a range of methods such as snares, spring traps and glue traps.¹²⁵

Separately, in 2024/25, NWCU intelligence logs recorded 262 wildlife-related keywords in Scottish wildlife crime, most commonly fish (53), hares (47) and deer (34). This data is likely to overlap with police records detailed above.¹²⁶

Although this data relates to the preceding year, the report also details that the SSPCA Special Investigations Unit was involved in 132 wildlife crime investigations in 2023/24.¹²⁷

Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) data – Wildlife Crime Report (2024)

WCL reported that, in 2024, there were 4,819 reported incidents of wildlife crime in England and Wales, covering incidents affecting badgers, bats, fisheries, marine mammals and birds of prey.¹²⁸ Incidents in fisheries were the most common type reported. This is broadly in line with data from the previous four years, where incident numbers ranged from 4,504 to 5,657. While there is no aggregated number of animals impacted available in this report, other NGOs provide some species estimates, which are detailed below.

League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) data – Illegal fox hunting (2025/26 season) and attacks on birds, 2025

In the 2025/26 season, LACS reports a total of 593 instances of illegal fox hunting in England and Wales, which includes nearly 500 foxes being pursued and at least 30 confirmed killed, although the real death toll is likely to be higher. They reported that over 200 of these illegal hunts also resulted in distress to companion animals, livestock and other wild animals. In addition, there were 110 reported instances of harm to horses and hounds used in the hunt. This means the total number of animals harmed by illegal fox hunting is at least 800.¹²⁹

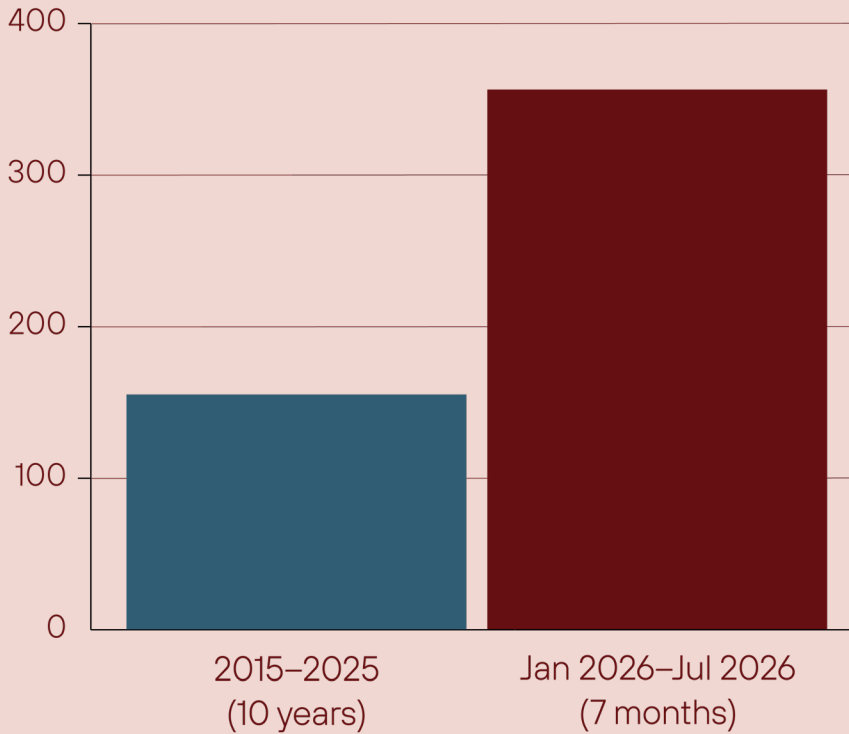
Data provided by LACS by email identified 59 attacks on wild birds in the first seven months of 2025, in comparison to a total 154 similar attacks over the preceding decade. Over one-half (53%) of these reports involved birds being killed or euthanased.¹³⁰ This is consistent with Scottish Government report data, which indicates bird offences were the second most common wildlife offence (making up 22% over a six-year period).¹³¹ For a more detailed discussion of these attacks, see Case study 2: Operation Lakeshot, below.

Case study 2: Operation Lakeshot ¹³²

Operation Lakeshot is the multi-agency response to a crime involving waterfowl and wildlife being killed or injured with powerful catapults.

To date, 2026 has seen a disturbing rise in the number of catapult attacks on birds and wildlife. In the first seven months of 2026, there were 355 recorded instances of catapult attacks against wild birds in the UK; a significant increase from the 154 attacks observed between 2015 and 2025. Growth in the number of instances has been driven in part by harmful social media trends where young people capture and share footage online of them committing catapult attacks against wildlife. It is worth noting that focused data collection also began at the start of 2026 and is in part responsible for the significant increase in recorded incidents.

Figure 1: Number of recorded catapult attacks against wildlife – 2015–25 versus 2026



Source: Operation Lakeshot

Operation Lakeshot was initiated to address the growing issue of catapult attacks against wildlife, bringing together police wildlife crime officers, rescue organisations, and specialist groups such as the RSPCA, League Against Cruel Sports, the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council and the Environment Agency to form a national, multi-agency taskforce.

The perpetrators of catapult attacks are typically young, meaning early intervention and education is vital. Operation Lakeshot works closely with parents, schools, and communities to help young people understand the consequences of committing harmful and illegal acts against wildlife.

Operation Lakeshot launched a national awareness campaign on the use of catapults on wild birds. The campaign involved educational materials and posters, engagement with the Home Office on legislation, and discussions with social media platforms on reducing the proliferation of harmful content.

However, despite this awareness campaign, in 2026 the consortium has seen rising levels of instances across the UK, particularly in the South East of England. Attacks happen predominantly in urban areas, with pigeons being the most targeted species. However, recent reports also identify squirrels, rabbits and domestic pets as victims of attacks.

Operation Lakeshot demonstrates the complexities in uncovering and putting a stop to crimes against wild animals, as well as the importance of animal welfare organisations cooperating in order to tackle this type of crime.



National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) data – Hare coursing (2025)

NWCU identified by email that it was aware of 1,714 reported hare coursing incidents in England and Wales in 2025. This included 202 reported offences.¹³³

The Environment Agency data – Illegal angling (2023)

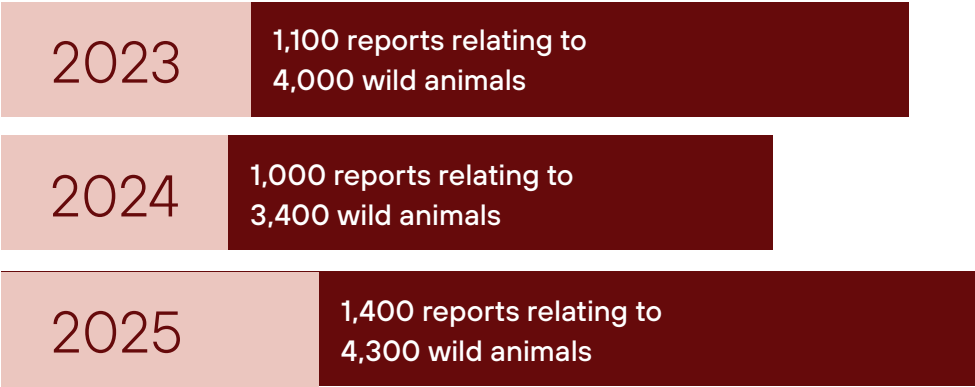
Over the first half of 2023, fisheries enforcement officers in the South East of England issued 360 offence report forms to illegal anglers, a figure that exceeds the equivalent period last year by 40 cases. The Environment Agency characterises illegal fishing as being harmful to fish populations and detrimental to surrounding wildlife, yet enforcement data alone cannot quantify the scale of suffering or population-level impacts. Recent prosecutions in Kent resulted in four convictions and £1,478 in combined penalties, but prosecution numbers

represent only detected cases, and the true extent of unreported or undetected illegal fishing and its consequences for aquatic animals remains unknown.¹³⁴

RSPCA data – Wild animals in the Wilberforce dataset (2020–2024)

The RSPCA receives reports of illegal activity and intentional harm involving wild animals.

Wild animal incident reports and numbers have been relatively stable in recent years, although the number of incidents and affected animals is higher in 2025 than in both 2024 and 2023 respectively. The RSPCA received:



Additionally, during 2020–2024, the RSPCA recorded 9,239 reports linked to netting, including bird deterrent netting, and garden and sports netting. When caught in a net that’s incorrectly installed or is damaged, wild animals and birds risk suffering injury or starvation. RSPCA data shows the illegal¹³⁵ use of glue traps, which cause animals a slow and painful death when they become stuck to them.

In addition to the reports above, the RSPCA Special Operations Unit recorded approximately 330 wild animals and 170 dogs who may have been hurt, in reports relating to hunting with dogs across 2023–2025 – on average, 110 wild animals and 57 dogs annually.

4.5.3 Captive wild animals data discussion

Academic evidence – welfare compliance across zoos

In the UK, zoos are regulated under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981. Non-compliance of welfare standards is regulated by the local authorities in which zoos operate, as well as self-regulation by zoo associations. Despite operating within a heavily regulated framework, evidence suggests a systemic prevalence of welfare failures in UK zoos.

Research from 2026 shows that across 324 formal inspections from 108 British zoos undertaken between 2020 and 2025, only 18% passed every single assessed question. The most common areas of non-compliance were improper escape drills (41% of reports), a lack of documented veterinary care or nutrition programme (30%), and improper storage and disposal of medicines (27%).¹³⁶ This situation appears to have deteriorated over time, as a



2012 study found that at that point in time, 24% of British zoos met all animal welfare standards, albeit across significantly more assessments than the 2026 study: 9,024 assessments.¹³⁷

Beyond explicit welfare violations, practices in zoos that fall within the law are often still inadequate in meeting wild animals’ essential needs. For example, research has shown that elephants kept in zoos generally experience poor welfare stemming from stress and/or poor physical health, with mean life expectancy in European zoos just 15 years for Asian elephants and 16 for African elephants, compared to 30 years for elephants living in Burmese timber camps and up to 65 years in the wild.¹³⁸ It could be argued that such practices show a likely failure to meet the five welfare needs and are therefore in breach of the AWA.

4.6 Animals used in science

In 2024, 22,204 animals were affected by reports of non-compliance of welfare standards in scientific procedures.

4.6.1 Animals used in science data table

Table 13 below summarises the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) data on adverse welfare outcomes in animals as a result of non-compliance with regulation surrounding the use of animals in scientific research.

Table 13: Animals used in science data.

Source	Annual number	Why this might be an under- or over-estimate	Overall judgement
Home Office – Animals in Science Regulation Unit Annual Report 2024 .	Adverse welfare outcomes as a result of 146 cases of non-compliance were specifically recorded for 189 animals in 2024 in Great Britain.	Why this might be an underestimate ASRU has audited 68 establishments. Of those, 10 were unannounced. In 2024, 69% of non-compliance cases were self-reported, meaning 31% were identified by ASRU, and only 3% were identified during an audit.	Potentially an underestimate of non-compliance, given the enforcement relies strongly on self-reporting.

4.6.2 Animals used in science data discussion

Home Office statistics on scientific procedures (2024)¹³⁹

In 2025, 2.54 million regulated scientific procedures using live animals were carried out in Great Britain. The number of procedures has been trending down since 2015, and is currently at the lowest point since 2001. The majority (95%) of procedures (both for experimental and breeding purposes) used mice, fish, birds or rats. Cats, dogs, horses and non-human primates were used in 1% (approximately 17,000) of experimental procedures. Although 31.4% (450,000) of procedures involved moderate to severe suffering, this is deemed as ‘necessary’ suffering and is legal under UK law.¹⁴⁰

During 2024, 146 cases of non-compliance were recorded, affecting 22,204 animals. Of those, adverse welfare outcomes as a result of non-compliance were recorded for 189 animals,¹⁴¹ including 58 mice and 99 fish.¹⁴² ASRU has audited 68 establishments. Of those, 10 were unannounced. In 2024, 69% of non-compliance cases were self-reported, meaning 31% were identified by ASRU, and only 3% were identified during an audit.¹⁴³ On the one hand, the high proportion of self-reported breaches might be a positive signal, since it shows that researchers are proactive in reporting themselves when a breach occurs. On the other hand, reliance on self-reporting might mean that some breaches are never discovered by regulators.

Table 14: Summary of data quality across categories.

Companion animals	
Summary	Data quality, availability and consolidation is highest for companion animals, especially dogs and cats, but relies heavily on reported instances and is impacted by double-counting. For some data, information on animal numbers is missing.
Key sources	The RSPCA, as the largest enforcer of the AWA, largest generalist in animal welfare, and largest charity in England and Wales, holds the most comprehensive dataset on instances of harm against companion animals in England and Wales; the SSPCA fulfils a similar function in Scotland. Additionally, local authorities release licensing data returns on animal welfare establishments. Although other animal welfare organisations hold data on harms against companion animals, most animal harm cases go through the hands of the RSPCA or SSPCA. The scale of the overlap with RSPCA or SSPCA data is unknown.
Farmed animals	
Summary	Data collected about farmed animals in Great Britain is fragmented and difficult to access. The data available only provides a snapshot of the likely extent of incidents, and the number of animals impacted are often not recorded. Only a small proportion of farms are inspected each year.
Key sources	Any data collected during local authority inspections and enforcement is held by individual authorities in varying formats. It can be accessed and aggregated through FOI requests, although it must take authorities less time and cost less to investigate than limits imposed under the FOI Act’s Section 12 exemption. This makes accessing granular data difficult. Several other sources provide additional information about harm in specific contexts. The FSA records animal welfare data from slaughterhouse inspections to a high standard and publishes it at a very high degree of granularity. The FSS, which is responsible for enforcement at Scottish slaughterhouses, releases data in a less standardised format. A number of charities and other organisations collect information on farmed animal welfare, ranging from reports made by concerned callers (as is the case for the RSPCA data) to undercover investigations (such as a recent high-profile investigation undertaken by Animal Equality, which was aired as a BBC Panorama documentary called A Cow’s Life: The True Cost of Milk?).
Free-living and captive wild animals	
Summary	Data availability for wildlife crimes is poor, and is likely to significantly underreport the number of incidents and animals impacted per incident. Our understanding of the scale of wild animal harm relies mostly on NGO reporting.
Key sources	While most offences against animals are non-notifiable, and so not recorded in the same systematic way as notifiable offences, this is particularly problematic for wildlife offences due to the reliance on the police to enforce these offences. Wildlife crime data collection is inconsistent between police forces and generally underreported, despite the best efforts of NWCUC, which tries to consolidate this data. Data on captive wildlife in zoos is held by individual local authorities and not regularly published in an aggregated format. Disturbance, unlawful killing and the hunting of wild animals is also reported to and recorded by a wide range of other organisations, such as the RSPCA, SSPCA and other charities (including Badger Trust and League Against Cruel Sports). Additionally, data on the smuggling of wild animals across UK borders is reported by Border Force and NWCUC. The Wildlife Crime in Scotland report provides a key source of consolidated data in Scotland.
Animals used in science	
Summary	Data on breaches concerning animals used in scientific research is collected and published by ASRU. However, a lot of detected instances come from self-reports, and most audits are announced before they take place.
Key sources	Data on the welfare of animals used for scientific and experimental purposes comes from the ASRU annual report. Non-compliance data largely relies on self-reports, which might introduce bias into the data as some individuals may avoid reporting their own non-compliance. Only a small proportion of audits undertaken by ASRU are unannounced, which again creates potential bias in the data as individuals may take additional measures to hide non-compliance ahead of announced inspections.



5. Plausible ranges of animals affected by reported illegal harm and data limitations

By its very nature, data can only reflect what is reported. Like all offence data, a 'dark figure' of unidentified and unrecorded incidents exists, but underreporting is especially pronounced in animal harm cases.

As set out above, the data landscape for instances of animal harm is fragmented, lacks standardisation and is prone to underreporting. This section summarises the key data challenges (across Section 5.2) as these limitations significantly impact the data quality and thereby the estimates of animal harm provided. Prior to this, plausible data ranges are provided for the total number of animals affected by recorded animal-related criminal offences/breaches as indicative estimates of the total animals harmed.

1. Recorded data captures only a fraction of animal harm.
2. Reporting is inconsistent, fragmented and overlapping.
3. There is substantial attrition from reports to convictions.
4. Animals affected per incident are rarely recorded.
5. Official figures are narrowly defined and often unavailable publicly.
6. General data quality is low.

5.1 Plausible range of animals harmed in Great Britain each year based on reported offences

This research aimed to quantify the scale of animal harm. However, this evaluation was then refocused on recorded offences against animals due to the challenges of defining and then accurately identifying and quantifying legal and acceptable harms. This focus required further narrowing due to the limited data available on many offences against animals (e.g. animals in sport or in entertainment). In this way, the data only captures recorded and available instances of harm against companion animals, farmed animals, free-living and captive wild animals, and animals used in science.

Within this narrow data category, it was also not viable to estimate a single definitive number of animals affected by harm annually, due to the aforementioned data complexities. To address the research aim, plausible ranges of animals harmed are set out using the available evidence. For animals used in science, a single estimate is given, because the number of animals affected in detected welfare breaches is highly precise and comes from a single source.

It is vital to emphasise that these estimates are highly uncertain for the reasons outlined below. We present two possible scenarios: the first is conservative; the second is an upper estimate of the scale of harm. These estimates should be taken as indicative and subject to revision if more data becomes available. **For more detail on how those numbers were calculated, please refer to Section 7.2.**

Approximately 3,900–23,500 animals may be harmed in prosecution cases.

Data suggests that between 3,900 and 23,500 animals may have been harmed in approximately 3,900 criminal offences prosecuted in Great Britain in 2025. The average number of animals affected in each case is taken from the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in the RSPCA's Wilberforce data reports handed over to its Prosecutions Department as a proxy average.¹⁴⁴ As the number of animals harmed per case may vary considerably and is not publicly available or consistently recorded, it is difficult to determine the total number of animals affected with greater certainty.

Approximately 180,000–370,000 companion animals may be affected in reported instances of illegal harm.

In the case of companion animals, when annual reports of cruelty, neglect and intentional harm made to the RSPCA and SSPCA were combined, approximately 330,000 companion animals were deemed to be affected. Given the possibility that some reports may be false, and the fact that Scottish data may include some reports of wild animals, a conservative estimate might place the lower bound of potential animals harmed at 150,000. This conservatively assumes that approximately one-half of the reports made to the RSPCA and SSPCA are true reports of harm. Additionally, the lower bound estimate (of 180,000) takes into account one-half of the number of stray dogs taken in by local authorities (assuming a degree of overlap with RSPCA data), along with the total number of puppies illegally smuggled, and estimated animals affected in licences recorded as being suspended and revoked.

An upper bound estimate that assumes all reports made to the RSPCA and SSPCA are truthful would put the total number of animals harmed annually at approximately 330,000 animals. Additionally, the upper bound estimate (of 370,000) takes into account all stray dogs taken in by local authorities, puppies illegally smuggled, and the estimated number of animals affected by licences recorded as being suspended, revoked or refused, by extrapolating the figures reported to all local authorities in England.

Approximately 830,000–3.9 million farmed animals may be affected in instances of illegal harm.

The Food Standards Agency's (FSA) slaughterhouse inspections found 630,000 animals were at potential or imminent welfare risk in 2025/26 (on average, approximately 120 animals per incident). In 2024 (the latest annual estimate), non-compliance was found on 2,400 farms across England, Wales and Scotland. Assuming on average – the same as in FSA data – that 120 animals were affected as a result of non-compliance on farms per incident, this would mean approximately 290,000 farmed animals may have been harmed by detected non-compliance on farms. Additionally, there were 630 instances of non-compliance detected on markets, at the border and in transport across England, Wales and Scotland. Assuming 120 animals affected per incident, this would mean an additional 76,000 animals affected. Together with estimates of animals harmed in Food Standards Scotland (FSS) data (40,000 animals), those estimates suggest

approximately 1 million animals may be harmed annually. However, assuming a degree of overlap between FSA and FSS inspections and local authority and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) data, an estimated 830,000 animals are affected in the lower bound.

Data shows only up to 9% of farms were inspected in 2024, and non-compliance was found during approximately 30% of those inspections (28% during local authority inspections and 33% during APHA inspections). Assuming a similar non-compliance rate would have been found on farms that were not inspected, approximately 26,700 farms might have recorded cases of non-compliance overall. Assuming the average number of animals affected is the same as observed in FSA inspection data (120 per breach detected), this would mean 3.2 million animals are affected annually. Combining this number with data from the FSA (630,000), the FSS (40,000), and non-compliance on markets, in transport and at the border (76,000), this would mean up to 3.9 million animals may be affected each year in the upper bound.

Approximately 12,000–34,000 free-living wild animals may be affected in reported instances of illegal harm. Additionally, an estimated 310,000 captive wild animals in Great Britain live in zoos that do not meet all assessment standards during inspections.

The total number of wild animals who may be harmed annually is also difficult to determine. Assuming the reports made to stakeholders, which are detailed across the report, have a degree of overlap and, on average, correspond to one affected animal, this might give a highly conservative estimate of 12,000 animals being affected on average in reported incidents.

On the other hand, if we assume all reports are separate and use RSPCA data as a proxy for the average number of free-living wild animals affected per incident, this would give us an estimate of up to 34,000 free-living wild animals affected in reported incidents.

In 82% of zoo inspections between 2020 and 2025, at least one welfare breach was found. As there are more than 300 licensed zoos in the UK, we assume there are approximately 300 licensed zoos in Great Britain. Freedom for Animals found there were 270,753 animals across 217 zoos across Great Britain based on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted in 2025, an average of 1,250 animals per zoo. An estimated 310,000 captive wild animals in Great Britain live in zoos that do not meet all assessment standards during inspections (based on the estimated 300 zoos in Great Britain).

At least 189 animals experience adverse welfare outcomes as a result of non-compliance in scientific procedures.

Of 146 cases of non-compliance overall, the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) detected 54 cases where inadequate care was provided, and nine cases that involved failure to provide adequate food and/or water, affecting 189 animals.¹⁴⁵ This is out of a total of 2.64 million regulated scientific procedures using live animals.¹⁴⁶ Since this number is highly precise and comes from a single source, a band is not given. While it is possible some animals suffered

in welfare breaches that were not detected, the available data does not allow for a robust estimate of this to be developed.

ASRU has audited 68 establishments. Of those, 10 audits were unannounced. In 2024, 69% of non-compliance cases were self-reported, meaning 31% were identified by ASRU, and only 3% were identified during an audit.

Given four out of 68 audits (6%) found non-compliance, and given just 146 cases of non-compliance were discovered across 2.64 million procedures (<0.01%), it is possible that the true incidence of non-compliance is higher. However, the extent of this is difficult to estimate.

Although 31.4% (450,000) of procedures involved moderate to severe suffering, this is deemed as 'necessary' suffering and is legal under UK law.¹⁴⁷

5.2 Data limitations overview

This section summarises the key data challenges as these limitations significantly impact the data quality and thereby the estimates of animal harm provided.

Issue 1: Recorded data captures only a fraction of animal harm

Data, by its nature, can only reflect what is reported. Like all offence data, a 'dark figure' of unidentified and unrecorded incidents exists, but underreporting is especially pronounced in animal abuse. While key stakeholder organisations, such as the police, RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations, receive thousands of reports of animal harm each year, offences against animals are generally underreported across all sources. Evidently, animals have no voice to report their own victimisation and much of this harm occurs in private or remote spaces. As a result, many incidents never enter any dataset.

As most sources rely on active reporting of animal harm, figures typically reflect the number of reported incidents, not the true extent of animal harm. This means the numbers are likely to underrepresent the true scale of the issue. Here are three wildlife crime examples.

- League Against Cruel Sports figures put a number to reported instances of fox hunting in a given season, as well as the total number of animals confirmed killed, but are likely to underreport the true scale of harm associated with this activity as some hunting may never be reported, and some kills may never be confirmed.
- The National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCUC) advised us that it is aware of up to 1,714 hare coursing reports in 2025, but it expected that the real number may be higher due to underreporting.
- In a survey of 128 police officers and call handlers between November 2024 and April 2025, Naturewatch Foundation found that 61% said wildlife offences are not easily searchable within their systems, 88% would not feel confident identifying offences, and 23% do not have sufficient resources to deal with the crime.¹⁴⁸

However, the incident numbers, such as those reported to the RSPCA and SSPCA, still give a strong insight into the potential scale of the issue and highlight the growing trend in reports of animal harm.

Even the few datasets based on incidents identified during inspections are also likely to underreport the true extent of animals impacted. For instance, only up to 9% of farms were inspected by local authorities or APHA in 2024, and the cases identified through these inspections only offer a narrow view of the true number of farmed animals experiencing harm. As a result, both report- and inspection-based data sources are likely to underreport the true extent of instances of animal cruelty. Adding to this problem, animal welfare enforcement is often self-regulated, meaning the organisations responsible for reporting animal welfare outcomes are the same organisations where animal harm occurs. This creates incentives to minimise external reporting where it can be avoided.

Although this does not directly reflect offences involving animal harm (and has therefore not been discussed in the scale section of this report), the RSPCA's Animal Kindness Index 2026 survey found that 27% of people in the UK witnessed animal cruelty online over the last 12 months, with people aged 18–24 most likely to have witnessed it (47%).¹⁴⁹ Online harm videos might involve staged 'rescues', animal fights or sexual abuse, and are increasingly used as evidence in prosecutions for animal crime. Although online content may not necessarily show illegal harm, it is widespread in online media. However, using this data to directly measure the scale of harm is difficult for several reasons. Firstly, studies measure posts and videos rather than unique offences, and those might be posted multiple times across different platforms. Secondly, it may be difficult to determine the geographic location of an offence. Finally, it is possible offences recorded online may overlap with records from other sources. The prevalence of cyber-related harms supports the evidence that the true extent of animals harmed is likely to be much higher than recorded offences in the official statistics.

Finally, there are certain subsets of animals where research suggests that the potential scale of harm is significant, but official offence statistics may not reflect this accurately. For example, research from 2012 found that "at least 75% of pet snakes, lizards, tortoises and turtles die within one year in the home",¹⁵⁰ although more recent studies identify the one-year mortality rate to be significantly lower (between 1.9% for boas and pythons; 28.2% for chameleons; and 3.6% for other snakes, chelonians and lizards).¹⁵¹ Overall, this shows that a potentially large number of exotic animals in Great Britain face harm, and many instances might go unreported. According to a 2021 report by the RSPCA and Born Free, an estimated 1.8 million reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates, and 1.3 million indoor birds, are thought to be kept as pets in UK households. Disease and injury were commonly observed among exotic pets; some of these are related to unsuitable environments, diet or the inability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns, all of which would be covered under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.¹⁵²

Issue 2: Reporting is inconsistent, fragmented and overlapping

Where reporting does happen, it is still difficult to establish a comprehensive picture of the extent of identified offences against animals due to the lack of centralised data or mandatory reporting frameworks. There is no single source; rather, multiple organisations collect related but separate data, including local authorities, the RSPCA, SSPCA, Badger Trust, League Against Cruel Sports, Border Force, and the police. While this data collection is vitally important, it means the picture is fragmented and synthesis is difficult due to a number of issues including the risk of overlap, double-counting, and a lack of standard aggregation methods.

The full extent of overlap between the data provided by different organisations included in this report is unknown. Incidents can be reported to multiple agencies or the same animal might be mentioned across multiple reports, and may be double-counted. For instance, the RSPCA Special Operations Unit recorded approximately 330 wild animals and 170 dogs who may have been harmed in reports relating to hunting with dogs across 2023–2025. It is possible, however, that this figure overlaps with reports from other organisations, such as data provided from the NWCUC or League Against Cruel Sports.

Additionally, it should be noted that not all reports of harm will reflect true cases. It is possible that even reports made in good faith are incorrectly identifying harm. For example, this might be relevant to some reports of harm made to the RSPCA. However, despite these factors, the likely extent of underreporting discussed under Issue 1 means, on balance, that we expect the figures used in this report to significantly underreport rather than overreport the true extent of animal cruelty.

There is no unified approach to recording incidents or reporting across organisations. A particular issue is the inconsistent recording between police forces. As part of our research, we submitted FOI requests to police forces across Great Britain, and found there to be variable coding and different reporting practices that make cross-force aggregation unreliable. This is particularly common for wildlife crimes, with some offences non-notifiable or recorded under a miscellaneous code. One police force told us, for example: *"Most incidents [relating to animal crime] dealt with are non-recordable offences, which means they are not logged in a way that would let us run a report"*. Another force, when asked about the volume of wildlife crime, also advised that *"Fulfilling [the] request would require manual review. As other officers may have provided ad hoc assistance, we would need to ask all personnel to check their Pocket Notebooks (PNBs) for unrecorded animal crime logs, before cross-referencing these findings with [...] systems to eliminate duplicates"*.

This demonstrates an important distinction between reporting and recorded data. While these crimes may have been reported successfully, as the recorded data is untraceable among thousands of other miscellaneous crime reports, it is rendered difficult to access and aggregate. When approached about this information via FOI requests,

organisations use the Section 12 exemption which means they do not have a duty to retrieve and share the information due to the significant resource strain this would place on them.

Furthermore, lack of data sharing across stakeholders means official figures only present a partial picture. Police forces are not required to pass information relating to the many non-notifiable offences against animals on to the Home Office. Notifiable offences include offences related to animal fighting, pet theft, and sexual offences involving animals (for a full list see the Home Office counting rules for recorded crime¹⁵³). Non-notifiable offences are not included in police recorded crime and crime outcomes statistics; however, they do make up a great number of criminal proceedings.¹⁵⁴ Few wildlife offences are notifiable and so omitted from Home Office data. This issue is further compounded by the possibility that animal-related prosecutions are logged against other codes where multiple offences took place. For example, although there were 20 prosecutions in 2023/24 where wildlife crime was the main charge, there were a further 72 wildlife offences where it was not the main charge, giving a total of 92 offences prosecuted according to the Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report.¹⁵⁵

Although police forces are encouraged to share their data on wild animal offences with the NWCUC, many recording systems used by police forces do not support searching for wildlife crime specifically, which means any data sharing would require lengthy manual reviews to extract the necessary information.¹⁵⁶ Similar issues impact farmed animal offence data in Great Britain. In part due to the complex and devolved enforcement structure, any data collected during local authority inspections and enforcement is held by individual authorities in varying formats. There is currently no requirement placed on local authorities for how they collect and share information on animal enforcement activity and welfare breaches.¹⁵⁷

Issue 3: There is substantial attrition from reports to convictions

A huge number of reported offences thin out as they proceed through the criminal justice system (and likely other systems such as the RSPCA system), resulting in a tiny percentage ending in prosecution or conviction. This can be observed across a range of data sources discussed in this report, including the following:

- For farmed animals, only a small proportion of identified non-compliance cases resulted in prosecution, despite evidence of welfare breaches being detected through inspections.¹⁵⁸
- Only a small proportion of reports identified by responders as illegal harm, cruelty and neglect eventually result in a prosecution according to the RSPCA Wilberforce database.¹⁵⁹
- Only 5.6 animal breeder licence suspensions were recorded against 754 complaints about dog breeders between 2018–2023 across England, Wales and Scotland.¹⁶⁰

The causes of high attrition are not well understood and could vary between different categories of animals and enforcement agencies. However, stakeholder evidence identifies the following potential causes.

- In some cases, prosecution and conviction may not be the most appropriate outcome in offences against animals, and so an alternative resolution is sought (for example, a formal improvement notice).
- Enforcement capacity is often fragmented and resource-constrained, limiting the extent to which breaches are pursued through the courts.
- NGOs and charities that investigate reports of animal harm operate with finite resources and must prioritise the most serious or evidentially robust cases, meaning that many reported incidents receive limited investigation or are resolved through informal interventions.
- Local authorities responsible for enforcing animal welfare licensing regulations often face financial and staffing constraints.¹⁶¹

Issue 4: Animals affected per incident are rarely recorded

As discussed under Issue 1, many organisations do not record the number of animals involved in each incident. This makes it nearly impossible to know the true scale of individual animals harmed. This is a key limitation of many of the major data sources, but it particularly impacts data quality for estimates for wild and farmed animals, where it is highly likely many animals are impacted in each incident. This limitation impacted the:

- Home Office data on wildlife and animal crime for England and Wales;
- prosecutions data on the number of convictions and sentences for animal crime offences;¹⁶²
- data aggregated and shared in the Wildlife and Countryside Link reports;
- League Against Cruel Sports' fox hunting data;
- NWCUC's hare coursing data;
- FSS data on slaughterhouse breaches;
- local authority data on non-compliance incidents for farmed animals; and
- Police Scotland's figures and other police datasets, none of which specify the number of animals per incident.

In some cases, this information is known but not easily retrieved. For example, one police force confirmed this data may be included in some but not necessarily all internal case reports, and would be difficult to extract.

RSPCA data is one of the key information sources that consistently captures the total number of animals involved in each case. However, there are a couple of exceptions worth noting:

- The number of animals recorded against reports in the RSPCA's Wilberforce database is collected at the point of the report being made and, particularly in cases where a large number of animals are affected, may be a best-guess estimate.¹⁶³
- In some prosecution cases where multiple animals were harmed, the charges are brought against the offender in relation to the animal (or animals) harmed most significantly.¹⁶⁴ This is to increase the chances of conviction, but it also means conviction data will underreport the true number of incidents and animals impacted.

Issue 5: Official figures are narrowly defined and often unavailable publicly

Different data sources collect information related to specific definitions of harm or categories of animals. This means that figures often do not account for the full range of animal harm taking place. This includes sources such as Border Force smuggling data, which captures animals seized at the border under CITES enforcement, and does not account for trafficked non-CITES animals.

Data availability is also an issue. Official figures are not always in the public domain. In Scotland, for example, there are currently no official prosecution statistics related to animal offences reported annually in the public domain, aside from wildlife crime data outlined in the wild animal section.¹⁶⁵ This indicates the reporting of some prosecutions is prioritised over others, within and across species and categories – for example, wildlife prosecutions over other animal prosecutions in Scotland.

This issue is also present in animal-related offence data in England and Wales, where only some crimes have a notifiable status and are therefore recorded to a consistent standard (for additional discussion on the consequences of this, please see Issue 1). For example, fishing with prohibited instruments is notifiable in England and Wales, while hare coursing offences are not,¹⁶⁶ meaning that police forces do not have a responsibility to report them to the Home Office. In general, illegal fishing often has better visibility due to dedicated funding from the Environment Agency, which allows for more targeted enforcement.¹⁶⁷ This limits the ability for not only levels of animal harm to be monitored but also for trends to be observed on an ongoing basis. It also raises important questions about how and why these priorities are set in place and whether it provides a feedback loop where only the prioritised offences are recorded, meaning all other offences remain deprioritised as they seem less prevalent.

Issue 6: General data quality is low

Finally, there are general data quality issues that are worth noting:

- **Prosecution and conviction complexities:** Converting prosecutions or convictions into animal counts is unreliable because one prosecution can involve multiple animals, or multiple prosecutions can relate to the same animal.
- **Reporting versus investigation gaps:** Not all reports are followed by investigations and not all investigations lead to enforcement action. This can happen even in cases when illegal harm has taken place, as datasets can mix report-only and confirmed/prosecuted harm cases without consistent labelling (this is the case in the RSPCA's Wilberforce database). This is especially the case where alternative responses, such as education or informal notices, are deemed more appropriate, which is often the case in animal harm offences.
- **Variable detail and metadata:** Many datasets lack breakdowns by injury or animal type, severity, or outcome, and some lack contextual detail on circumstances or frequency. As a result, in some cases, such as SSPCA data that does not specify if reports were



for companion or wild animals, we have been unable to allocate cases between the categories included in this report.

- **Lack of standardisation and reporting consistency:** Some datasets have low data quality due to reports being captured in a less standardised way. For example, FSS data on slaughterhouse breaches was assessed to be lower quality than FSA data because it recorded the number of animals affected per incident less precisely. In other cases, the lack of standardisation and granularity in reports means FOIs cannot be fulfilled within the cost thresholds, such as in the case of police force and local authority FOIs regarding animal crime incidents.

6. Conclusion

As discussed throughout the report, the scale of animal harm in the UK is concerningly high, and rising. This report focuses on quantifying the scale of legal offences against companion, farmed, and wild animals, and animals used in science. Importantly, it also evaluates the data limitations and where data collection could be improved to help to develop a more complete picture in the future. Understanding the true extent of harm to animals is vital for prevention. It will also shift the conversation towards a business case for prevention, which can then inform Government policy, funding allocations and animal welfare enforcement. Taking a data-driven approach to understanding the extent and breadth of the impact of animal harm is an important component in helping to make the case for those more preventative measures. The second report in this series, set for publication in 2026, will estimate the costs associated with harms discussed in this report. Better understanding of the data limitations facilitates informed decision-making across practice, policy and enforcement, and effective prioritisation of resources.

In summary, our research estimates that:

- 3,900 to 23,500 animals are identified in prosecution cases;
- between 180,000 and 370,000 companion animals, between 830,000 and 3.9 million farmed animals, and between 12,000 and 34,000 free-living wild animals are harmed based on reported offences and breaches, plus an estimated 310,000 animals live in zoos that do not meet all assessment standards during inspections;
- at least 189 animals are harmed in scientific procedures as a result of welfare breaches.

When added together, those estimates suggest that the annual number of animals illegally harmed in Great Britain (based on reported offences) could be between 1 million and 4.6 million. Please see Section 7.1 for more detail on how this number was calculated.

The recommendations below centre on improving the available data so that the true scale of offences against animals can be more readily understood, assessed and tackled.

1. Expand the list of notifiable crime offences to include a wider range of offences against animals. This could be led by the Home Office.

- a. Multiple police forces approached via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests for this research cited the non-notifiable status of animal offences as the reason they were unable to fulfil our requests.
- b. As identified by Wildlife and Countryside Link, at least 11 major wildlife crimes should be made notifiable so that they are recorded in national statistics,¹⁶⁸ requiring police forces to record and report them to the same standard as other notifiable crimes.
- c. This will enable Home Office aggregation, standardise England and Wales offence data collection, eliminate reliance on FOIs and empower the sector to identify national trends in animal harms, victims and offenders.

2. Introduce dedicated animal crime recording codes across all 43 police forces in England and Wales,¹⁶⁹ and enhance training and guidance. This could be led by the Home Office.

- a. Wildlife crimes currently lack a dedicated recording standard and are often filed in miscellaneous or generic categories by police forces, making aggregation of data across police forces unreliable. Data is fragmented and siloed among many agencies. Without dedicated codes, Section 12 FOI exemptions mean that police data on animal welfare offences is virtually impossible to retrieve.
- b. The introduction of dedicated codes should be supported by appropriate guidance and training for police officers and call handlers on how to correctly identify wildlife crime offences. Introducing dedicated animal crime recording codes will standardise the recording processes and remove technical barriers in data access, sharing and analysis.
- c. This in turn will help to meaningfully utilise the data that is already being reported. It will also help incidents and crimes to be correctly recorded, further supporting prosecution.

3. Mandate the recording of animal victims in statutory data, and encourage recording in non-statutory data, as incidents may involve one or hundreds of animals. This could be led by the Home Office in the case of the police; Defra in the case of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA); Food Standards Agency (FSA) and local authority inspection data in England and Wales; and the Scottish government in the case of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and local authority inspection data in Scotland.

- a. Without animal-level data, any estimate of the scale of animal cruelty in Great Britain will remain fundamentally incomplete.
- b. To record the number of animal victims, ideally the police systems will need to be updated or expanded to allow animal offence incidents to log individual victims. Eventually, the recording of animal victims should be required. Other public bodies and self-regulated sectors would record and report on the number of animals impacted by non-compliance.
- c. This is an essential step if we are to fully understand and capture the number of animals harmed by illegal activity in Great Britain.

4. Review the quality of criminal justice system data on offences against animals, to accurately identify the attrition rates and explain the low recording and prosecution rates. This could be led by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) or Home Office.

- a. Currently, cases involving animal harm are not easily traceable across the criminal justice system. Figures produced from different sources suggest high attrition rates between incident reports, investigations, and eventual prosecutions.
- b. Establishing joined-up data systems and sharing would allow incidents to be traced through the criminal justice system.
- c. This would help to identify the attrition rates linked to animal welfare offences across incidents, investigation, prosecution and conviction, allowing policy-makers to make more informed decisions in animal welfare matters.

5. Centrally aggregate and publish data on inspection outcomes relating to animal welfare non-compliance for those animals kept for commercial purposes, including all local authority and APHA inspection data (for example, animals involved in farming, markets, transport, border crossing, breeding and entertainment). Review this aggregated data via Defra to identify the reasons behind low prosecution numbers.

- a. Currently, data from local authority inspections is held by individual authorities in incompatible formats with no requirement to share it externally, meaning the true scale of animal welfare non-compliance and licensing breaches is difficult to track over time and compare regionally. Similarly, APHA does not currently regularly publish data on its welfare inspections.
- b. Defra should require local authorities and APHA to submit inspection outcomes across farms and licensed establishments. This data should include collecting non-compliance type, number of animals affected, and enforcement action taken, to a central repository that is published annually in an aggregated form.
- c. The UK Government committed in its Animal Welfare Strategy for England to tracking and reporting enforcement actions taken in response to animal welfare non-compliance, initially focusing on farmed animal welfare. This data will be published for the first time in 2027.¹⁷⁰ Defra and the Scottish Government should ensure farm inspection outcomes and licensing of commercial animal activities are explicitly included in its scope.

6. Enhance enforcement capabilities, resources and training to uncover the 'dark figure' of animal harm offences and develop more robust offence data on animal welfare, including licensing and farmed animal welfare.

- a. Currently, animal welfare compliance enforcement is inconsistent between local authorities and sectors, with enforcing bodies infrequently taking action. For example, FOUR PAWS UK's report on puppy breeding and licensing calls on local authority licensing officers to more actively exercise their powers to withdraw or temporarily halt licences in cases where animal welfare issues are identified.¹⁷¹ Additionally, the Blue Cross calls for improved enforcement of exotic animal legislation, requiring sellers of such animals to hold a Dangerous Wild Animals licence or endangered species certification.¹⁷²
- b. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's 2025 report puts forward four stages to better enforcement: improving inspectors' animal welfare knowledge through better guidance issued by Defra and developed by local authorities; making enforcement more cost-effective (through better benchmarking of fees and cost reduction); empowering the public to act by improving the availability of information; and establishing stronger partnerships.¹⁷³
- c. Enhanced enforcement capabilities, resources and training would enable stakeholders to better exercise their powers, strengthening their capacity to collect high-quality data on enforcement activity. Robust data would improve understanding of the prevalence of animal harm, and potentially its drivers and predictors, which could help improve the effectiveness of future enforcement and safeguard animal welfare.



7. To increase proactive independent and unannounced inspections, including APHA, local authorities, and the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU); and investigate the effects of self-regulation of animal welfare enforcement. This could be led by Defra and the Scottish Government.

- a. Over-reliance on self-reporting and the high proportion of announced inspections in some sectors leave room for underreporting.
- b. Increasing the frequency of unannounced audits and inspections would improve the reliability and accuracy of breach data.
- c. This will help to reduce the ‘dark figure’ relating to animal harm in commercial and scientific purposes, and to remove possible conflicts of interest arising from self-regulation.

8. The UK Government to consider utilising the approach taken by the Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report,¹⁷⁴ synthesising statutory and third-sector data.

- a. Currently, the Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024 report is a unique aggregated source of information on animal welfare created from data provided by a range of stakeholders across government and NGOs. Under Section 20 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, Scottish Ministers must lay an annual report on wildlife crime before the Scottish Parliament after the end of each calendar year.¹⁷⁵
- b. This approach could be replicated in England and Wales, and expanded to include offences against other animals, including farmed and companion animals.
- c. Doing this would enhance the ability of policy-makers to make informed decisions regarding animal welfare across Great Britain, and offer a useful statutory instrument that would enable tracking of animal crime trends over time.

7. Technical annex

7.1 Methodology overview

The data presented in this report has been collected through desk research, a series of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted to police forces across Great Britain, and a programme of engagement with a range of sector stakeholders. The desk-based research involved identification and synthesis of publicly available reports and data from charities (including SSPCA, Wildlife and Countryside Link, and Naturewatch Foundation), and public sector organisations such as governmental (including Border Force and the Food Standards Agency). Stakeholder engagement involved emailed requests to 22 stakeholders identified through desk-based research and conversations with the RSPCA, receiving an initial response from 18 stakeholders, with six follow-up conversations (please see Section 7.3 for a full list) to ensure the available data was used and understood correctly. The responses to FOI requests to police forces (detailed in Section 7.2) were received from 17 police forces across England and Wales and Police Scotland, and these were analysed using Excel and statistical software R.

The details of our quantitative methods and stakeholder engagement can be found below.

7.2 Quantitative methodology

Data sources presented in the report have been collected through desk-based research and as a result of the stakeholder outreach exercise detailed below. The full list of quantitative sources found in this report is detailed in Table A1:

Table A1: Summary of sources.

Source	Annual number
<u>Ministry of Justice sentencing and prosecutions – England and Wales</u>	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
RSPCA prosecutions department data	Supplied by RSPCA prosecutions department
<u>Wildlife Crime Report Scotland, 2024</u>	
<u>Hooper, 2020</u> Animal Welfare Prosecutions reported by the Scottish SPCA (2011–2019)	
WPI Economics’ analysis of police forces’ FOI responses	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
<u>Police Scotland crime data, 2024/25</u>	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
RSPCA’s Wilberforce database 2026	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
<u>Scottish SPCA 2023 Impact Report</u>	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
<u>Blue Cross Impact Report 2024</u>	
<u>Battersea Dogs & Cats Home Annual Review 2024</u>	
<u>Dogs Trust Stray Dogs Survey 2025</u>	

Source	Annual number
Data provided by Dogs Trust puppy smuggling taskforce via email received	
FOUR PAWS UK licensing data	
National Data Library, local authority licensing data , England, 2025	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
Food Standards Agency Annual Animal welfare report , 2024 data	
Food Standards Scotland Animal Welfare data , 2025 data	Involving secondary analysis – see detail below
The Animal Law Foundation, The Enforcement Problem: 2024 data	
NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2026	
Home Office , Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables 2026	
Police Scotland & others , Wildlife crime in Scotland 2024	
Naturewatch police force data from “Policing Wildlife Crime: Make Wildlife Count” report 2025	
Border Force migration transparency data, January to March 2026 edition	
National Wildlife Crime Unit: The UK Illegal Wildlife Trade Project Final Term Risk Assessment, 2025	
Wildlife and Countryside Link’s wildlife crime report	
League Against Cruel Sports Fox hunting end of season report 2024/25, England and Wales	
National Wildlife Crime Unit, hare coursing data	
RSPCA Special Operations Unit database	Supplied by RSPCA Special Operations Unit – excludes overlap with the RSPCA’s Wilberforce database
Draper, C. and Harris, S. (2012) The Assessment of Animal Welfare in British Zoos by Government-appointed Inspectors	
Lewis, C., & Osuch, F. (2026). Up to Standard? A Longitudinal Analysis of Regulatory Compliance in British Zoos. <i>Animals</i> , 16(7), 1038.	
Born Free, Exhibition Or Exploitation	
Home Office, Animals in Science Regulation Unit Annual report 2024	
Freedom for Animal Taking Stock: What Britain’s Zoos Really Reveal	

Analysis of the RSPCA’s Wilberforce database 2026

The RSPCA’s Wilberforce database covering incidents opened between 2023 and 2025 was analysed by WPI Economics in the statistical software R to calculate the total number of companion and wild animals appearing in annual reports. The original database contained 660,660 reports recorded in the three years between 2023 and 2025. After removing duplicated and invalid reports, 634,734 reports remained. We then filtered the records to only include incidents reported as affecting vertebrate animals, which left 576,077 reports. The remaining data was filtered to include only incidents recorded by RSPCA responders as illegal activity, intentional harm, neglect, abandonment, and entrapment in hot vehicles, where an animal was harmed (for companion and farmed animals); and illegal activity and intentional harm for wild animals. The data was checked for the presence of suspicious outliers in animal count (incidents where high total animal numbers were not explained sufficiently by incident description). One outlier relating to wild animals was removed from the analysis. We have discussed our methodology with the RSPCA data team to ensure our methods for data collection are robust.

After filtering, 231,852 reports of harm of companion animals across 2023–2025, 6,060 reports of harm of farmed animals across 2023–2025, and 3,462 reports of harm of wild animals across 2023–2025 were used in the analysis.

Analysis of FSA/FSS data

The analysis of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) data was analysed to understand the total number of reported incidents. Due to the data on quantity of animals affected being incomplete for incidents involving multiple animals, the average number of animals affected per breach in the Food Standards Agency (FSA) data was used as a proxy average across all FSS incidents.

Analysis of Ministry of Justice sentencing and prosecutions – England and Wales

Prosecutions, convictions and sentencing data was produced using the latest available Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data for 2023–2025. The data was filtered for animal-related offence codes selected on the basis of desk-based research and additional manual review of all Home Office offence codes. Counts were summed across prosecutions and convictions for the relevant years. The exact list of offence codes used to produce the analysis is detailed in Table A2.

Table A2: Offence codes used in prosecutions analysis.

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
09705 – Offences relating to animal fights	Animal fights
10833 – Offences relating to animal fights (Reclassified)	Animal fights
10804 – Offences under Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925, e.g. exhibition and training of performing animals without being registered	Animal licensing
10809 – Offences under Pet Animals Act 1951, e.g. Licensing of pet shops	Animal licensing

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
10818 – Offences under Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963, e.g. licensing and inspection of boarding establishment to ensure welfare of animals	Animal licensing
10819 – Offences under Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970, e.g. animal cruelty, prohibited sports and pastimes, irregularities in horse slaughtering, etc.	Animal licensing
10836 – Carrying on activity without authority of S.13 licence or carrying on unregistered S.13 activity concerning Animal Welfare Act 2006	Animal licensing
11107 – Offences in relation to dogs under Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, e.g. licensing of breeding establishments for dogs	Animal licensing
09701 – Causing, permitting or failing to prevent unnecessary suffering of a protected animal	Animal welfare
09702 – Carrying out, permitting, causing to be carried out or failing to prevent prohibited procedure on a protected animal	Animal welfare
09703 – Removing or causing or permitting or failing to prevent removal of a dog’s tail other than for medical treatment	Animal welfare
09704 – Administration of poisons, etc. to a protected animal	Animal welfare
10802 – Offences under Protection of Animals Act 1911, e.g. cruelty to animals	Animal welfare
10814 – Offences under Abandonment of Animals Act 1960	Animal welfare
10829 – Causing, permitting or failing to prevent unnecessary suffering (Reclassified)	Animal welfare
10830 – Carrying out, permitting, causing to be carried out or failing to prevent prohibited procedure on a protected animal (Reclassified)	Animal welfare
10831 – Removing or causing or permitting or failing to prevent removal of a dog’s tail other than for medical treatment (Reclassified)	Animal welfare
10832 – Administration of poisons, etc. to a protected animal (Reclassified)	Animal welfare
10834 – Failing to ensure needs of an animal are met, as required by good practice	Animal welfare
10837 – Breach of a disqualification imposed after conviction of specified offences concerning Animal Welfare Act 2006	Animal welfare
10839 – Intentionally obstructing a person exercising power conferred by this section relating to an animal in distress	Animal welfare
10840 – Transported an animal in transporter not fit for intended journey	Animal welfare
10843 – Offences under Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2007	Animal welfare
11001 – Summary offences under Animal Health Act 1981 (except cases of cruelty under SS.8, 9, 10(1), 13, 37–43 or offences relating to dogs under S.13)	Animal welfare
09903 – Offences relating to the purchase and sale of specimens (Control of Trade in Endangered Species [Enforcement] Regulations 1997)	CITES offences
09917 – Triable either way offences under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018, para 1	CITES offences

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
09918 – Triable either way offences under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018, para 2	CITES offences
00821 – Owner or person in charge allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control in any place in England and Wales (whether or not in a public place), injuring any person or assistance dog	Dangerous dogs offences
00822 – Owner or person in charge allowing a dog to enter a non-public place and injure any person	Dangerous dogs offences
11101 – Offences in relation to dogs under Town Police Clauses Act 1847	Dangerous dogs offences
11102 – Offences relating to keeping of dangerous dogs	Dangerous dogs offences
11104 – Owner or person in charge causing or permitting a dog to be in a public place without a collar	Dangerous dogs offences
11106 – Cause or permit dog to be on a designated road when not held on leash	Dangerous dogs offences
11112 – Breeding or breeding from a fighting dog	Dangerous dogs offences
11113 – Selling, exchanging, offering, advertising or exposing for sale a fighting dog	Dangerous dogs offences
11114 – Giving or offering to give a fighting dog or dangerous dog	Dangerous dogs offences
11115 – Allowing a fighting dog to be in a public place without a muzzle or a lead	Dangerous dogs offences
11116 – Abandoning, or allowing to stray, a fighting dog	Dangerous dogs offences
11117 – Possess/have custody of a fighting dog	Dangerous dogs offences
11118 – Owner or person in charge allowing dog to be dangerously out of control in a public place, without injury being caused	Dangerous dogs offences
11120 – Offences in relation to dogs under Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and Protection of Badgers Act 1992, e.g. failing to give up a dog for destruction or having custody of a dog while disqualified or having a dog present in the killing/injury/taking of a badger	Dangerous dogs offences
11125 – Owner or person in charge of a dog dangerously out of control – no injury	Dangerous dogs offences
11127 – Offences relating to failure to deliver a dog up to enable order for the dog to be taken into possession to be carried out	Dangerous dogs offences
09888 – Triable either way offences under Sea Fisheries Act 1968	Fishing and marine wildlife offences

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
09889 – Offences of damaging, etc. protected features of Marine Conservation Zones (Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009)	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
09891 – Contravening the law relating to the regulation and control of fishing and the protection and conservation of fisheries for salmon, trout, freshwater fish and eels, and the times of fishing for the selling of such fish b. Sec 27 (instrument other than rod and line), Secs 4 and 5 (Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975)	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
09892 – Fishing with, or possessing, fishing prohibited instruments	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
09895 – Fish/take fish by other than licensable means in circumstances where fishing/taking may or may not be authorised, or possess unlicensed instrument with intent to fish/take fish or without a S27A authority	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
09922 – Triable either way offences under Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Control Measures) Order Act 2000	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11601 – Offences against Sea Fisheries Acts 1851 to 1968	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11602 – Offences against Sea Fisheries Regulation Acts 1891 to 1966	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11606 – Summary offences against Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11607 – Fishing salmon or freshwater fish in breach of The Scotland Act 1998 (River Tweed) Order 2006	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11611 – Attempt to unlawfully take or destroy fish in private fishery, etc. (Theft Act 1968)	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11612 – Offences against Diseases of Fish Act 1937 and Orders thereunder and Diseases of Fish Act 1980	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
19698 – Summary offences under Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
19701 – Summary offences under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
11105 – Owner or person in charge of dog worrying livestock on agricultural land	Livestock worrying
09171 – Triable either way offences under Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2005 and 2011	Other offences which may involve animal harm
09814 – Triable either way offences under Products of Animal Origins (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations 2006, and Animal and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 2004	Other offences which may involve animal harm
09919 – Triable either way offences under Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011	Other offences which may involve animal harm
09902 – Intentionally or recklessly removing or causing or permitting the removal of a hedgerow	Other wildlife offences

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
09920 – Offences relating to the introduction of new species	Other wildlife offences
09948 – Areas of special scientific interest (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)	Other wildlife offences
04903 – Abduction of pet dog/cat	Pet abduction
08614 – Possession of extreme pornographic images, e.g. a person performing an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive) (bestiality)	Sexual offences involving animals
08803 – Intercourse with an animal (male offender)	Sexual offences involving animals
08804 – Intercourse with an animal (female offender)	Sexual offences involving animals
10822 – Offences under Protection of Badgers Act 1992	Wild animal offences
10823 – Offences under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, e.g. certain wild animals (schedule 5) may not be killed, injured or taken by any method	Wild animal offences
10824 – Offences under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, e.g. certain wild animals (schedule 6) may not be killed or taken by certain methods	Wild animal offences
10825 – Offences under Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	Wild animal offences
11801 – Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands, etc. by night, or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Wild animal offences
11804 – Enter land as a trespasser at night to poach armed with a weapon	Wild animal offences
11901 – Trespassing in the daytime in search of game, etc. and other offences in connection therewith (Game Act 1831)	Wild animal offences
12001 – Coming from land in possession of game that has been unlawfully obtained, or with gun or net	Wild animal offences
12111 – Summary offences under the Deer Act 1991, e.g. taking, injuring or killing deer	Wild animal offences
12113 – Hunting a wild mammal with a dog	Wild animal offences
12114 – Knowingly permitting land to be entered or used in the course of hunting a wild mammal with dogs	Wild animal offences
12115 – Knowingly permitting a dog to be used in the course of hunting a wild mammal	Wild animal offences
12116 – Participating in a hare coursing event	Wild animal offences
12117 – Attending a hare coursing event	Wild animal offences
12120 – Permitting, etc. a dog to participate in a hare coursing event	Wild animal offences
12121 – Offences relating to trespassing with intent to pursue hares with dogs	Wild animal offences
19001 – Summary offences in relation to birds under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Wild animal offences
19002 – Summary offences in relation to nests and eggs of birds under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Wild animal offences

Home Office Offence Code and Description	Category
19006 – Prohibition of certain methods of killing or taking wild birds under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Wild animal offences
19007 – Offences under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Wild animal offences
19009 – Offences under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Section 7)	Wild animal offences

Analysis of police force Freedom of Information (FOI) responses and fishing and marine wildlife offences

FOI request:

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we would be grateful if you could provide the following information:

1. The count of offences of “animal-related” crime you recorded on your system in 2025/26.
Please see below for our exact definition of “animal-related” crime.
2. Total count of offences of “animal-related” crime you recorded on your system in 2025/26, by offence code.
3. Total count of offences of “animal-related” crime you recorded in 2025/26, by outcome.
4. Total number of incidents recorded as “Animals/wildlife” in 2025/26.
5. The total number of calls with a call type ‘animal’, ‘wildlife’ or ‘animal/wildlife’ within STORM (if STORM is used) in 2025/26.
6. Any known reason for why recorded reports might be lower than true volume of incidents.

Please provide this data for the 2025/26 financial year (date range 01/04/2025–31/03/2026).

For the purposes of this request, we define “animal-related crime” as any incident which is logged against any of the following pieces of legislation:

Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963, Animal Health Act 1981, Animal Welfare Act 2006, Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, Deer Act 1991 Sec 1, 2, 3, Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, Game Act 1831 Sec 30, Hunting Act 2004 Sec 1, 3(1), 5, Night Poaching Act 1828 Sec 1, Pet Abduction Act 2024 Sec 1 and 2, Poaching Prevention Act 1862 Sec 2, Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Quota Measures), Order 1988 Sea Fishing (Prohibition on Removal of Shark Fins) Order 2007 Sec 4,5,12, Sexual Offences Act 2003 Sec 69(1)(3) and Sec 69(2)(3), The Control of Dogs Order 1992, Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2007, Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Responses containing data were received from:

1. Bedfordshire Police
2. Cambridgeshire Police

3. Cheshire Constabulary
4. Derbyshire Police
5. Greater Manchester Police
6. Humberside Police
7. Kent Police
8. North Wales Police
9. Northamptonshire Police
10. Northumbria Police
11. Nottinghamshire Police
12. Police Scotland (incident only, as Police Scotland publish offence data)
13. Surrey Police
14. Sussex Police
15. West Mercia Police
16. West Yorkshire Police
17. Wiltshire Police
18. Gwent Police

The FOI responses received spanned a range of different formats, including Excel, Word, and PDF. The responses were cleaned up and summarised in a common format in Excel. Responses from each force were analysed individually to ensure the correct data was summarised and no duplicates were added.

Incident, offence and outcome data was analysed using statistical software R using the ‘tidyverse’ and ‘readxl’ packages. The data was cleaned up into common categories based on outcomes, and summarised.

Notably, the FOI request responses returned a relatively small number of fishing and marine wildlife offences. This is likely due to commercial sea-fishing offences being handled by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) or regional Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), from inspection all the way through investigation and prosecution, bypassing the police.¹⁷⁶ Those organisations operate as independent statutory regulators and possess their own direct legal powers to investigate, issue administrative penalties, caution, or prosecute breaches.¹⁷⁷

Because of this, the total number of fishing and marine wildlife prosecutions was used to proxy for fishing and marine wildlife offences. While a criminal prosecution in England and Wales does not strictly have to be a pre-recorded offence, the underlying conduct must be established as an offence in law during the proceedings. We assume prosecution statistics in this case are a better reflection of the underlying incidence of offences than data recorded by the police.

For other crime categories, we assumed the average across responses was representative of all police forces across England and Wales. Data analysis found that the responses were received from a representative sample of police forces in England and Wales. The mean population across the respondents was 1.36 million, and 1.48 million across non-respondents. Mean total crime recorded across respondents was 112,600 in the latest annual data, and 122,000 across non-respondents. There was also good representation of regions among police forces that submitted complete data, with three police forces from the East Midlands; two police forces from each of the East of England, North West of England, and Yorkshire and the Humber regions; and one police force from each of the North East of England, South East of England, South West of England, and West Midlands regions, and Wales.

Analysis of National Data Library, local authority licensing data, England, 2025

Local authority licensing data was analysed using Excel. Aggregated figures of total numbers of issued licences were taken directly from the overview available in the document. The total number of licences revoked, suspended and refused were calculated from raw data by summing together all positive records (where a local authority reported a negative value, this was assumed to equal zero). One local authority recorded that the number of suspended, revoked and refused dog day care licences were each equal to 432, which was more than the total number of active licences. Another local authority identified the number of one-star pet shops to be more than the number of active licences. Those numbers were excluded from the analysis.

Analysis of Police Scotland crime data, 2024/25

Police Scotland published detected and recorded crime. Offences were filtered for the descriptions detailed in Table A3, and summed to generate the total number of offences.

Table A3: Offence codes used in Police Scotland crime data analysis.

Offence name	Category
Offences involving animals, excluding dogs, or birds elsewhere classified	Animal welfare
Birds, offences involving	Wild animal offences
Cruelty to animals ex dogs incl killing and maiming cattle	Animal welfare
Cruelty to dogs	Animal welfare
Cruelty to wild animals	Wild animal offences
Deer – Statutory – offences	Wild animal offences
Dogs bred for fighting	Dangerous dogs offences
Dogs, other offences	Animal welfare
Hunting with dogs	Wild animal offences
Keeping dogs under prop. ctrl, contrav. of an order	Dangerous dogs offences

Table A3: Offence codes used in Police Scotland crime data analysis (continued).

Offence name	Category
Offences involving badgers	Wild animal offences
Other conservation offences	Other wildlife offences
Other wildlife offences	Other wildlife offences
Pet and kept animals	Animal welfare
Possession of salmon or trout as result of offence	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
Possession of salmon or trout unlawfully obtained	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
Protection of livestock from dogs	Worrying livestock
Salmon and freshwater fisheries offences	Fishing and marine wildlife offences
Sea fisheries offences	Fishing and marine wildlife offences

Analysis of Scottish SPCA 2023 Impact Report

In the latest available data (from 2023), the SSPCA included the total number of reports of companion and wild animals in need, as well as the total number of reports that were investigated.¹⁷⁸ However, the information on total numbers affected in an average incident was not reported. To proxy for this, we took the average number of animals affected in incidents reported to the RSPCA during 2023–25 (3.5) and multiplied this by the total number of reports.

Animals harmed in prosecutions bands: method

Data suggests that approximately 3,900 *prosecutions* that may have involved animal harm took place in Great Britain in 2025.¹⁷⁹ The number of *animals* affected in each case is proxied by taking the 25th and 75th percentile of the number of animals involved in the RSPCA’s Wilberforce data reports handed over to its Prosecutions Department (one and six animals, respectively).¹⁸⁰ Combining this band with the prosecution data gives the range of the number of animals who may have been harmed in cases prosecuted of between 3,900 and 23,500. As the number of animals harmed per case may vary considerably and is not publicly available or consistently recorded, it is difficult to determine the total number of animals affected with greater certainty.

Companion animal harmed bands: method

In calculating bands for companion animals, the RSPCA, SSPCA, Dogs Trust Puppy Smuggling Taskforce, stray dogs and local authority licensing data was considered. Rehoming data from charities was not used due to (i) the likelihood of overlap with other reports and (ii) the possibility that some animals who needed rehoming did not experience harm.

The lower bound estimate conservatively assumes that approximately one-half of the reports made to the RSPCA and SSPCA are true reports of harm. Additionally, the lower bound

estimate takes into account one-half of the number of stray dogs taken in by local authorities (assuming a degree of overlap with RSPCA data), puppies illegally smuggled, and estimated animals affected in licences recorded as being suspended and revoked.

The upper bound estimate assumes all reports made to the RSPCA and SSPCA are truthful, putting the total number of animals harmed annually at approximately 330,000. Additionally, the upper bound estimate takes into account all stray dogs taken in by local authorities, puppies illegally smuggled, and estimated animals affected in licences recorded as being suspended, revoked or refused, and extrapolating the figures reported by 62% of local authorities linearly to all local authorities in England. This number was calculated by taking the average number of animals per licence and multiplying it by the number of licences that were suspended, revoked or refused, and dividing the total by 0.62.

Table A4: Summary of companion animal data.

Source	Total animals mentioned in reports	Lower bound	Upper bound
RSPCA ¹⁸¹	270,000	135,000 (half)	270,000
SSPCA ¹⁸²	60,000	30,000 (half)	60,000
Dogs Trust ¹⁸³	400	400	400
Stray dogs data ¹⁸⁴	19,100	9,500 (half)	19,100
Licences suspended, revoked or refused ¹⁸⁵	10,350	3,600 (only revoked and suspended)	16,700 (linearly extrapolating to all local authorities)
TOTAL (rounded to the nearest 10,000)	–	180,000	370,000

Farmed animals harmed bands: method

FSA slaughterhouse inspections found 630,000 animals at potential or imminent welfare risk in 2025/26 in England and Wales, an average of approximately 120 animals per incident.¹⁸⁶ FSS slaughterhouse inspections found 334 breaches in 2025 in Scotland.¹⁸⁷ Assuming on average 120 animals were affected as a result of each breach – the same as in FSA data – this would mean approximately 40,000 animals might be affected. In 2024 (the latest annual estimate), non-compliance was found on 2,400 farms. Assuming on average 120 animals were affected as a result of non-compliance on farms per incident – again, the same as in FSA data – this would mean approximately 290,000 farmed animals may have been harmed by detected non-compliance on farms. Additionally, there were 630 instances of

non-compliance detected across market, border and transport.¹⁸⁸ Assuming again 120 animals affected per incident, this would mean an additional 76,000 animals affected. Assuming a degree of overlap between FSA and FSS inspections and local authority data, the total number is downscaled by 20%. Adding the above estimates together and scaling the total down by 20%, these estimates identify approximately 830,000 animals who may have been harmed annually.

Data shows that only up to 9% farms were inspected in 2024, and non-compliance was found during approximately 30% of those inspections (28% during local authority inspections and 33% during APHA inspections). Assuming a similar non-compliance rate would have been found on farms that were not inspected, approximately 26,700 farms might have recorded cases of non-compliance overall. Assuming the average number of animals affected is the same as observed in FSA inspection data (120 per breach detected), this would mean 3.2 million animals are affected annually. Combining this number with data from the FSA (630,000), the FSS (40,000), and non-compliance on markets, in transport and at the border (76,000) – and this time not applying the assumption of overlap between FSA and FSS inspections and local authority data – this would mean up to 3.9 million animals may be affected each year.

We use these two numbers – derived from different data sources and applying different assumptions – as our lower and upper bounds.

Wild animals harmed bands: method

The report identifies:

- A. 186 reported wildlife offences in Scotland in 2024/25 and 791 wildlife crime recorded STORM incidents in 2025/26 reported by the Scottish Police in the FOI analysis.
- B. 2,600 animals seized at the UK border in 2025.¹⁸⁹
- C. 4,819 incidents of wildlife crime reported by stakeholders across England and Wales in 2024 involving badgers, bats, fisheries, marine mammals and birds of prey.¹⁹⁰
- D. 1,714 reports of hare coursing in 2025 in England and Wales reported by the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU).¹⁹¹
- E. At least 800 animals were harmed due to illegal fox hunting in the 2025/26 season in England and Wales, according to the League Against Cruel Sports.¹⁹²
- F. 4,300 wild animals mentioned across 1,358 incidents of intentional harm and illegal activity reported to the RSPCA in 2025 in the Wilberforce database.¹⁹³
- G. Concerns raised to the RSPCA Special Operations Unit affecting approximately 110 wild animals harmed by hunting with dogs annually between 2023–25 across 429 total reports, excluding Wilberforce database reports.¹⁹⁴
- H. 82% of zoo inspections between 2020 and 2025 found at least one failure to meet assessment standards during inspections.¹⁹⁵ There are more than 300 licensed zoos in the

UK. For our purposes, we assume there are 300 licensed zoos in Great Britain. Freedom for Animals found there were 270,753 animals across 217 zoos, based on FOI requests submitted in 2025, an average of 1,250 animals per zoo.¹⁹⁶ It is impossible to know how many animals are harmed per detected breach.

To estimate the lower and upper bounds of animals affected where only the incident number is known, we use 1 for the lower bound and 3.4 for the upper bound, which is the average number of animals affected in a wildlife incident of illegal activity and intentional harm reported to RSPCA, as captured in the 2023–25 Wilberforce database. Where a precise number of animals affected is reported, we use that and do not use a range.

Table A5: Summary of wild animal data.

Source	Total incidents	Total animals affected (direct)	Total proportion (number) of establishments affected	Total animals affected (estimated)
A	791	–	–	790–2,690
B	–	2,600	–	–
C	4,819	–	–	4,820–16,380
D	1,714	–	–	1,700–5,830
E	593	At least 800	–	800–2,020
F	1,358	4,300	–	1,360*–4,300
G	–	110	–	110–110
H	–	–	88% of 300	330,000

* Assuming a degree of overlap with data from other stakeholders.

For lower bound, we sum the lower bound estimates, which, when rounded to the nearest whole thousand, give rough bands of 12,000–34,000 free-living wild animals affected annually. Additionally, an estimated 310,000 wild animals in Great Britain live in zoos that do not meet all assessment standards during formal inspections, but it is not possible to know how many animals within these zoos experience illegal harm.

All animals harmed bands: method

The three sections above detail the methodology used to estimate the following.

- A. Between 180,000 and 370,000 companion animals were harmed based on reported offences and breaches.
- B. Between 830,000 and 3.9 million farmed animals were harmed based on reported offences and breaches.
- C. Between 12,000 and 34,000 free-living wild animals were harmed based on reported offences and breaches.
- D. An estimated 310,000 animals live in zoos that do not meet at least one assessment standard during inspections.
- E. At least 189 animals experienced adverse welfare outcomes as a result of non-compliance in scientific procedures.

The lower bounds A, B, C and E are added together to create the lower bound of the total estimated number of animals illegally harmed in Great Britain (based on reported offences) – approximately 1 million animals. Since it is impossible to know how many animals are harmed in zoos which fail to meet assessment standards, D is excluded from the lower bound calculation.

The upper bounds A, B, C and E, along with the total number of zoo animals in D, are added together to create the upper bound of the total estimated number of animals illegally harmed in Great Britain (based on reported offences) – approximately 4.6 million animals.

7.3 Stakeholder engagement

The stakeholder engagement undertaken in the scale element of this research involved an initial mapping of stakeholders who would be contacted requesting available data on the scale of harm of animals in Great Britain. The initial stakeholder list was developed by WPI Economics based on desk research and subsequently reviewed by and discussed with the RSPCA, which also provided a range of contacts to stakeholders that WPI followed up on. Where the RSPCA was not able to provide a contact, WPI sourced an alternative contact.

WPI reached out to 22 organisations and received a response from 18 organisations.

Table A6: Stakeholder engagement list.

Contacted originally	Initial response received
Animal and Plant Health Agency	No
Badger Trust	Yes
Bat Conservation Trust	Yes
Blue Cross	Yes
Border Force	Yes
British Veterinary Association	Yes
Dogs Trust Puppy Smuggling Taskforce	Yes
Food Standards Agency	No
FOUR PAWS UK	Yes
League Against Cruel Sports	Yes
National Animal Welfare Trust	Yes
National Crime Agency	No
National Wildlife Crime Unit	Yes
Natural England	Yes
Natural Resource Wales	Yes
Nature Scot	Yes
Naturewatch Foundation	Yes
PDSA	No
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Yes
SSPCA	Yes
The Animal Law Foundation	Yes
Wildlife and Countryside Link	Yes

Following the data being shared or signposted, WPI had follow-up conversations with six organisations: Animal Law Foundation; Badger Trust; FOUR PAWS UK; League Against Cruel Sports; National Wildlife Crime Unit; and NatureScot; with the aim of ensuring the data available from those organisations was used appropriately in the report. Ultimately, of the 22 organisations contacted originally, data from 18 organisations was used in the scale report, with data from a further three organisations intended to be used in the subsequent cost report. The majority of the data comes from public releases since, broadly speaking, animal welfare stakeholders mostly told us all data they hold is routinely published. The only organisation originally contacted whose data was not ultimately used in the report was the British Veterinary Association, which advised us that it does not hold any data on abuse and neglect.

Endnotes

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68 The offences presented here are selected based on the standard Home Office recording codes and the Scottish Government's Justice Directorate's offence classifications (for the exact list of offences, please see Appendix A). The offences selected include offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, as well as relevant wild animal legislation. Certain offences, for example, 'Attending a hare coursing event', are likely associated with animal harm; however, it is possible that the offence occurred without any animal harm taking place (for example, if the hare coursing event failed to find and disturb any hares). For the sake of transparency, this report presents the data as 'likely to' involve animal harm.

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WPI Economics Limited
5–6 St Matthew Street
London
SW1P 2JT
@WPI_Economics
wpieconomics.com

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Suite 301, Stanmore Business and Innovation
Centre, Howard Road, Stanmore, Middlesex,
HA7 1FW, England, is registered as a limited
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September 2026

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