

The Victims of Wildlife Crime

LONDON



Have you witnessed
wildlife crime in London?

**Contact the
Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit**

on 020 7230 8898 or email wildlife@met.police.uk

You can also report crime anonymously to
Crimestoppers on 0800 555111



**METROPOLITAN
POLICE**

TOTAL POLICING

Foreword



It is easy to think of wildlife crime as being something that happens in the countryside and many people do not associate this type of crime with London. However, the London area is home to a wide range of wild species, many of which are protected in law.

Wildlife crime has serious consequences for wild animals and Londoners alike. Wildlife criminals trade, buy and sell animals and plants, exploiting habitats in the process.

There has quite rightly been a significant international focus on wildlife crime in 2013. The Met's Wildlife Crime Unit has been tackling the perpetrators of the illegal wildlife trade for many years and will continue working with our partners to end this illicit crime.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those groups who work with us; to end exploitation and cruelty and stop criminals from making money out of wildlife crime.

Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley

Specialist Crimes and Operations
Metropolitan Police Service



For London's diverse wildlife, our city is no concrete jungle but a living space where its interplay with human inhabitants touches millions of lives. So when wildlife crime happens, it doesn't just harm animals – it affects the people whose daily lives are enriched by their very presence.

For some, the wildlife on our doorstep, in our rivers, gardens and parks are just commodities to be used at will. To be taken for benefit, traded for profit or even deliberately harmed for fun - self-serving criminal acts which deprive the majority of Londoners of the pleasure of their presence. This report is a reminder that London's wildlife belongs to all Londoners, and invites all Londoners to play a role in safeguarding it.

And while some of the crimes against our wildlife may seem small by comparison to other types of crime, those carrying out these acts are invariably the same individuals engaging in antisocial behaviour or even more serious criminal activity.

WSPA hopes that this report will help to increase people's awareness and reporting of wildlife crime across London, so that both wildlife and Londoners can be protected from its negative impacts.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzi Morris." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Suzi Morris
UK Director
World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)

British wildlife

Urban victims

London may be a metropolis, but it is home to a diverse range of wildlife – from dormice, hedgehogs and great crested newts, to the fastest member of the animal kingdom, the peregrine falcon. Crime against our native wildlife is widespread and wide-ranging. Here are just a few of the victims.

Birds

London is home to a wealth of wild birds, including rare birds of prey such as the peregrine falcon. Even though British birds (and their nests and eggs) are protected in law, they are often illegally shot, poisoned or entrapped. Recent incident data from the Metropolitan Police's Wildlife Crime Unit shows that birds are the species most commonly affected by wildlife crime in London.

Some crimes against wildlife are antisocial behaviour, others are attempts to eradicate an unwanted species, and some are committed for commercial gain. Small songbirds like goldfinches and chaffinches are trapped illegally for sale, as are birds of prey. There are cases of people making homemade glue traps for their gardens, severely injuring and killing birds in the most inhumane way.

Despite birds being protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, there is a surge in wildlife crime during nesting season. Nest disturbances are commonplace – whether it's contractors managing wooded areas, or people cutting hedges in their garden. Egg collecting is also a problem, as collectors target the rarest birds, threatening the survival of some species.





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Badgers

Despite being one of the most protected species in law, badgers are all too often victims of wildlife crime. In fact, they are among the top five species affected by wildlife crime that the British Transport Police Wildlife Crime Officers deal with in London most frequently, due to large numbers making their homes on railway embankments and overground sections of the London Underground. Badgers are illegally shot, snared, poisoned, baited, and their setts interfered with.

Deer

Crime against deer isn't just a rural issue; there are over 1,000 red and fallow deer in the Royal Parks in central and suburban London. People forget they are wild animals, and try to pet, ride and feed them, all of which can cause serious harm. Another problem is people picking up fawns, wrongly assuming them to have been abandoned. Despite the good intentions, people may be unaware that human scent can sometimes lead to abandonment by the animal's mother.

Deer poaching is an offence that is more often than not carried out by organised gangs. They hunt at night, and butcher the deer on the spot. The meat is distributed into the human food chain, posing a significant risk to health.

Although the majority of dog owners responsibly exercise control over their animals whenever deer are nearby, unrestrained dogs chasing deer are still a major problem. As well as being highly distressing for the deer and onlookers, it can have fatal consequences for both animals.



© Kay Lockett/WSFA



Bats

The number of bats in London is in decline. They have a low reproductive rate and are vulnerable to a range of threats, which is why they and their roosts are protected by law. They are highly dependent on man-made structures for roosting, and on surrounding habitats for foraging and travelling, but these are being destroyed. The most typical crime against bats is roost damage and obstructing access.

Foxes

One of the most persistent wildlife crimes is that of foxes being shot with airguns. Many of these instances are antisocial behaviour; in other cases people make deliberate attempts to remove a species they don't like. As well as being shot, foxes are sometimes poisoned. This brings the risk of a domestic pet, or even a child, ingesting the poisoned meat.



British wildlife

Aquatic victims

As well as the River Thames, London has many miles of rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs. These waterways are home to porpoises, seals, salmon, otters, and even the occasional whale or dolphin. Here are a few of the aquatic victims of crime in the capital.

Water voles

The population of water voles in London has suffered a catastrophic decline. As the UK's fastest-declining mammal, they are strictly protected. They are often mistaken for brown rats, so may be incorrectly targeted in pest control. Furthermore, they are injured and killed by illegal crayfish nets.

Fish

The Thames is home to around 100 species of freshwater and saltwater fish. Poaching, theft and other fishery-related crime is a growing concern. There are now tighter regulations around the fishing of eels, as the European eel has become a critically endangered species.



Wildfowl

Some of the most persistent wildlife crimes are attacks on ducks, geese and swans. They are the victims of needlessly vicious behaviour; shot, kicked, attacked by dogs, and stones thrown at them. Wildfowl are commonly entangled in fishing lines, causing them injury or death. Another rising problem is poaching – people just helping themselves to wildlife.

Case studies

Wildlife crime in London



1. Kensington & Chelsea

February 2013

Incident: A significant haul of ivory items was found and seized by the Metropolitan Police from a shop on Portobello Road Market. The seller was cautioned and the items are now used for educational purposes.

The Law: The sale of ivory dated after 1947 is banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).



2. Ealing

December 2010

Incident: A group of youths beat a swan to death in a local park by kicking it repeatedly and stamping on its head.

The Law: Swans have special protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to intentionally injure, take or kill a wild swan. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 also prohibits any act that causes unnecessary suffering to animals.



3. Heathrow Airport

May 2012

Incident: Two consignments of Serval and Bengal Cats were seized by UK Border Force at Heathrow Airport as the import permits required were not present. The animals were being brought into the UK for breeding purposes

The Law: Both species are listed within Appendix 2 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Import is only permitted with appropriate permits.



4. Hackney

September 2012

Incident: A BBC undercover investigation revealed cane rat and 'smokies' (charred sheep skin) being sold at Dalston Market. This is just one example of 'bush meat' being illegally sold in London; other species that have been found include monkey, pangolin and various reptiles.

The Law: The sale of illegal meat is prohibited under the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Animal Health Act 1981. Inhumane slaughter is prohibited by the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) prohibits the import of certain endangered species.



5. Bexley

March 2013

Incident: Local residents expressed concerns to their Borough Wildlife Crime Officer that hedges were being cut during bird nesting season. As a result, the local policy on hedge cutting was reviewed and changed to ensure that nests would not be disturbed again in the future.

The Law: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 recognises that bird nesting season runs from 1st March to 31st July. Under Section 1 of the Act, it is an offence to damage or disturb a nest whilst occupied or being built.

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6. Richmond Park

May 2011

Incident: A stag (worth £9,000) was chased and attacked after a dog walker let their dog off the lead. The deer was hit by a car and had to be put down due to the severity of its injuries.

The Law: This was an offence under The Royal Parks and other Open Spaces Regulations (1997) which stipulates that no-one in the Park may 'intentionally injure or worry any animal'(20).



7. Lambeth

July 2013

Incident: Two males attempting to remove European eels from the River Thames for consumption.

The Law: European eels are a critically endangered species. Environment Agency byelaws prohibit the permanent removal of eels from the water where they were found.



8. Croydon

June 2011

Incident: Officers found two West Africa Dwarf Crocodiles cramped in a makeshift tank when visiting a house on an unrelated matter. The largest of the reptiles, which measured more than 1m (4ft), was found in such poor condition that it died soon after being rescued.

The Law: A licence is required to own particular animals under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Exotic wildlife

As well as crimes against our native wildlife, the trade in endangered species from other parts of the world goes on in many sectors across London – from medicine, food and fashion, to art and antiques. Because huge amounts of money can be made, it attracts serious criminals. There's been increased interest at a high level in the link between wildlife crime and organised crime, with former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and The HRH Prince of Wales all speaking out.

Rhinoceros

Illegal trade in rhino horn is placing the African rhino under serious threat. Some horns are sold for ornamental purposes, but the greatest demand comes from the traditional Asian medicine market. Freshly-cut rhino horn is more valuable than gold on the black market; it currently sells for around £40,000 a kilo. Its high value has even seen rhino artefacts removed from the gallery floor of our national museums as it poses a theft risk.



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Elephants

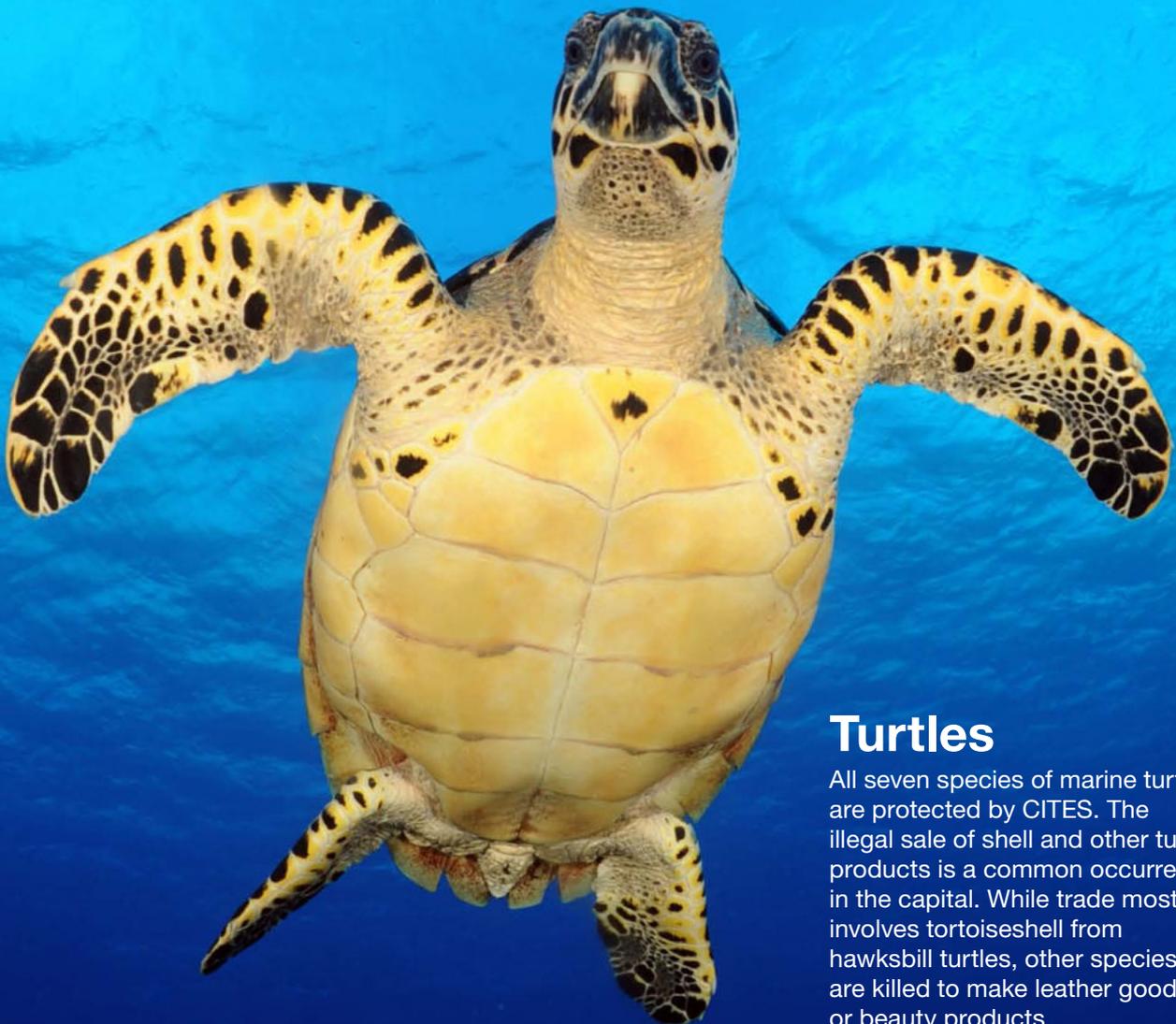
International trade in elephant ivory and other elephant products is tightly controlled by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which accords varying degrees of protection to more than 34,000 species of endangered plants and animals. Illegal trading is a persistent problem, whether in shops, on the internet, or on market stalls. Any CITES-controlled animal product must be sold with a certificate.

Whales

Whale products such as meat, bones, blubber, oil and teeth are illegal in the UK, but it doesn't mean they aren't sold. Last year, a bar in London was raided by police after selling cocktails containing whale skin. It had purchased the whale skin in Japan but was not aware of the legislation.



© De Meester / ARCO



Turtles

All seven species of marine turtle are protected by CITES. The illegal sale of shell and other turtle products is a common occurrence in the capital. While trade mostly involves tortoiseshell from hawksbill turtles, other species are killed to make leather goods or beauty products.

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Exotic pets

In the last few years, border officials in London have seen a range of different live animals imported to be kept as exotic pets in the UK. Licenses are required to do this legally and enforcement officers, including the UK Border Force, try to stop those who try to import animals without proper authorisation. Here are just a few of the most recent seizures that have been made at London Heathrow airport.



© Rod Williams



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Dangerous wild animals

The trade in exotic species often involves dangerous wild animals, some of which are brought into the UK illegally. To keep or sell a dangerous species, you need a licence. Also, many owners don't have the appropriate knowledge or facilities to look after them. Animals ranging from crocodiles to venomous snakes have been confiscated from London homes, either because the relevant documentation has not been present, or because the owner has been reported for acts of neglect or cruelty. The Marine Police Unit has also reported finding pythons dumped in the Thames after people have realised the demands and responsibilities that come with owning them.



© Kay Lockett/WSPA

Reptiles

Chameleons and many other types of lizard are commonly kept as pets, but due to their specific requirements, are not always the easiest reptiles to look after. With a booming demand, trafficking in reptiles is rife, with many taken illegally from the wild and smuggled to countries, including the UK, using fraudulent paperwork.

Wild Cats

Several types of protected wild cats – including Serval, Bengal and Geoffroy's cats - have gained popularity as exotic pets in recent years. They are often imported into the UK to breed with domestic cats, resulting in 'unique' hybrid animals that fetch a high price with some UK consumers. Seen simply as an easy source of profit, smugglers have been known to try and pass these cats off as regular domestic breeds or take chances with false documentation when entering the UK at London Heathrow.



Londoners

We have seen some of the British and exotic animals that are victims of wildlife crime, but what about Londoners themselves – the people that make up this diverse and bustling city? We are victims too.

The darker side of wildlife crime

Most people know about the illegal trade of endangered species, but think it's confined to Asia and Africa. It's not. It goes on right here in London. It increasingly involves organised criminal networks, who use profits to fund other illegal activities. These criminals are a danger to both wildlife and people. The connection between wildlife crime and more serious crime is not limited to the endangered species trade. People who commit wildlife offences are often found to be involved in other criminality. For example, a number of studies have demonstrated the link between the abuse of animals and violence against people, particularly domestic abuse.



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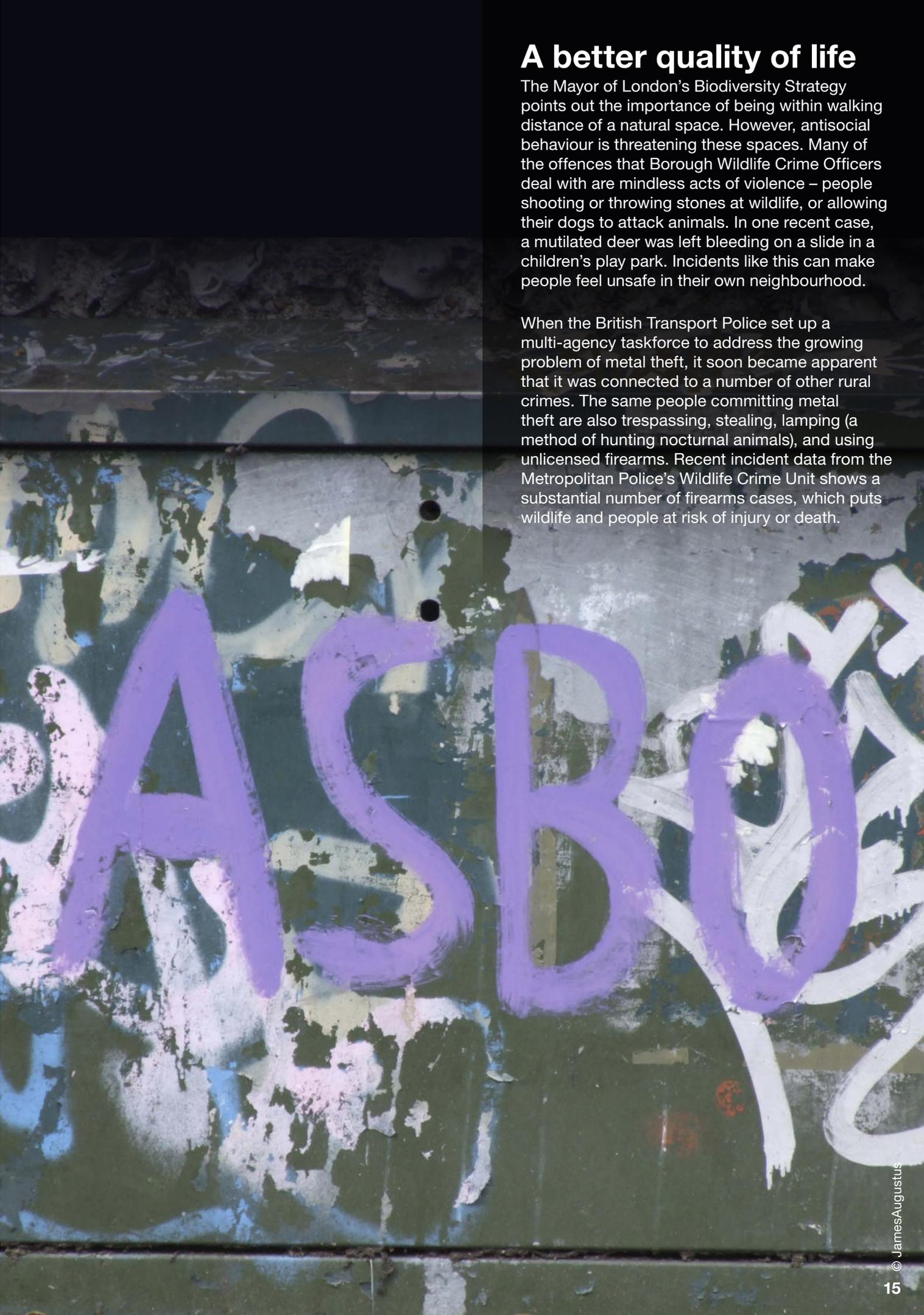
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Illegal bush meat

There is a deep concern that the illegal import of exotic animals may lead to the spread of animal-borne disease – posing a threat to human health, and to our indigenous wildlife. When smuggling goes undetected, diseases such as rabies are at risk of entering London. The trade in illegally poached or imported meat is a persistent problem in London too. 'Bush meat' is derived from a number of species, including apes and monkeys, and has been found on sale at some of London's street markets. It doesn't abide by the UK's strict health controls and may well be contaminated.



A better quality of life

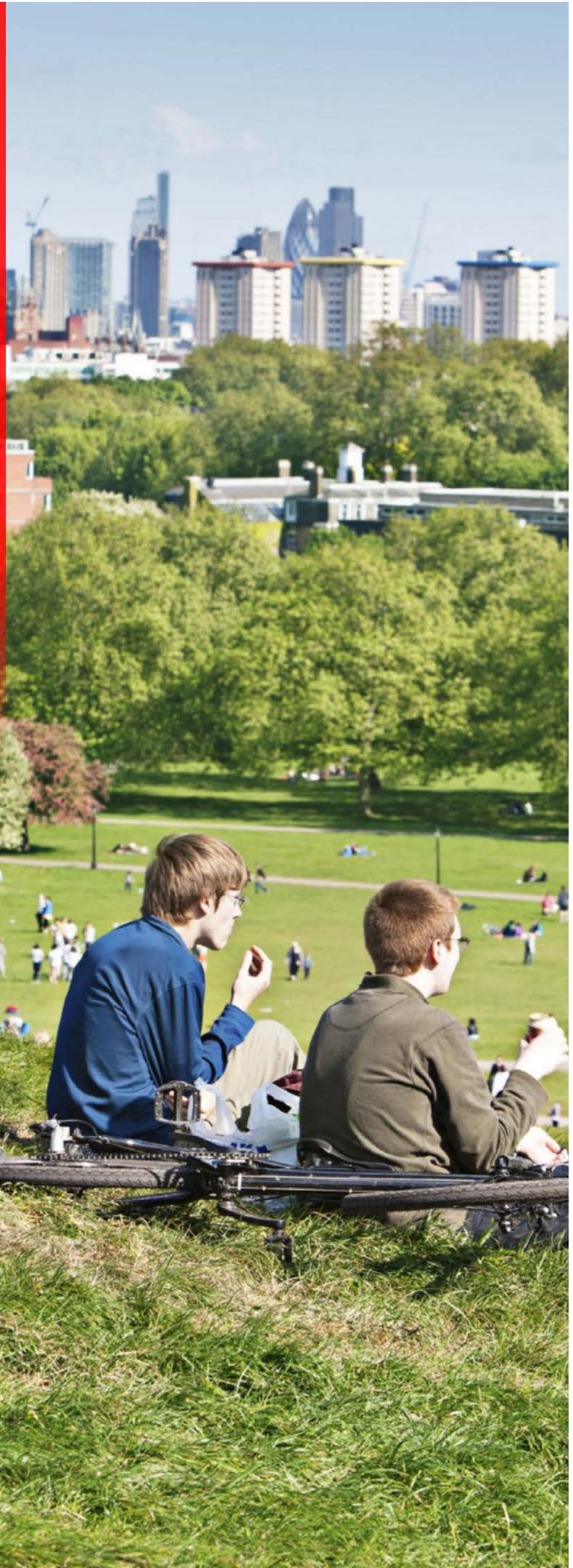
The Mayor of London's Biodiversity Strategy points out the importance of being within walking distance of a natural space. However, antisocial behaviour is threatening these spaces. Many of the offences that Borough Wildlife Crime Officers deal with are mindless acts of violence – people shooting or throwing stones at wildlife, or allowing their dogs to attack animals. In one recent case, a mutilated deer was left bleeding on a slide in a children's play park. Incidents like this can make people feel unsafe in their own neighbourhood.

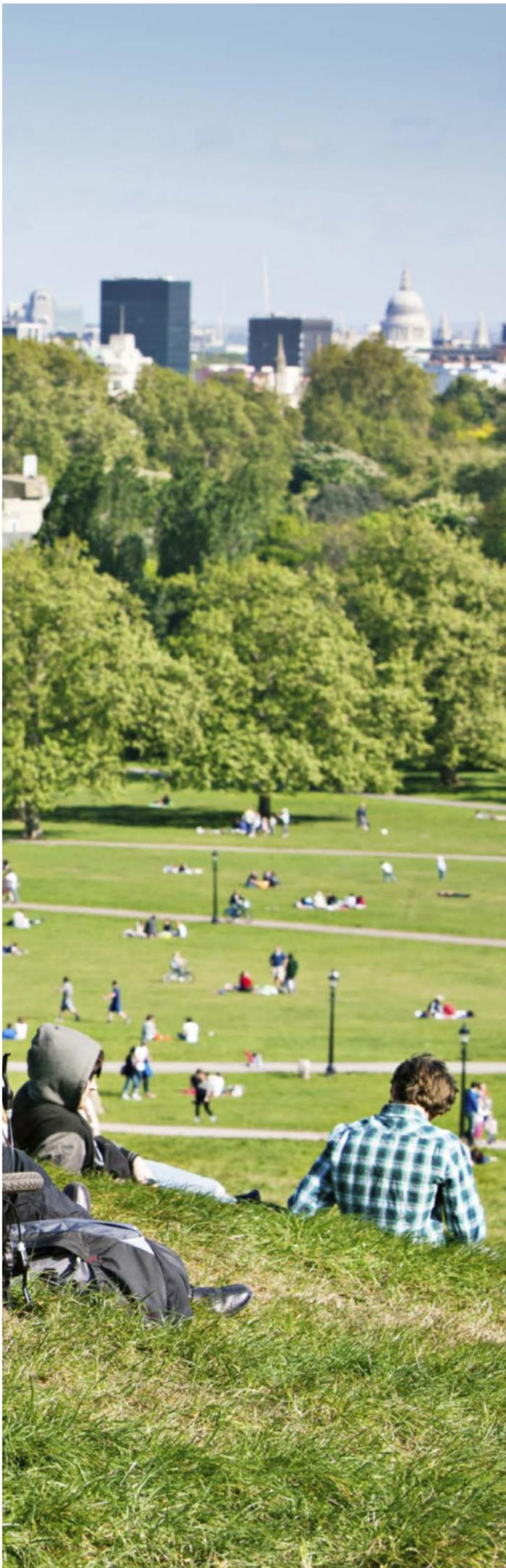
When the British Transport Police set up a multi-agency taskforce to address the growing problem of metal theft, it soon became apparent that it was connected to a number of other rural crimes. The same people committing metal theft are also trespassing, stealing, lamping (a method of hunting nocturnal animals), and using unlicensed firearms. Recent incident data from the Metropolitan Police's Wildlife Crime Unit shows a substantial number of firearms cases, which puts wildlife and people at risk of injury or death.

Connecting with nature

Our lives are enriched by experiencing wildlife in the city. The Mayor of London's Biodiversity Strategy demonstrates the importance of nature for Londoners. The strategy aims to protect and conserve natural open spaces in the city; ensures there is no overall loss of wildlife habitats; and creates more open and accessible spaces.

The impact of wildlife crime on London's biodiversity adversely affects both habitat and the species that live in them. Clearance of habitat such as scrub, long grass and trees during the spring and summer could have an adverse effect on nesting birds, invertebrates and reptiles. Yet this is a common occurrence. Once an area of habitat has been cleared, wildlife rarely returns. The impact on species comes from humans killing or harming them – either because they are seen as pests, or because people mistake them for another species. For example, it's been known for people to have killed stag beetles after mistaking them for scorpions. Overall, wildlife crime wears away the biological resource of London.





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At the World Society for the Protection of Animals, we have worked to expose animal cruelty and prevent animal suffering for more than 30 years. Working with individuals, organisations and governments across the globe, our campaigns range from ending the mass suffering of industrially farmed animals to protecting animals in disasters. Consultative status with the United Nations means we have a unique international platform to prove that the lives of animals are inextricably linked to our own, and now more than ever is the time to stop their suffering.

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