

Badger Persecution Report

Northern Ireland

2016-18



PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION AGAINST
wildlife crime
Northern Ireland



Report by: **Badger Subgroup, PAW NI**

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SUMMARY

Badger persecution is one of the six UK wildlife-crime priorities¹. This report describes incidents of badger persecution that have been logged by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in Northern Ireland during the calendar years 2016-18.

This document is the second report by the Badger Subgroup of PAW NI attempting to pull together data on badger incidents within Northern Ireland, so as to define the geographical and temporal spread, and any hotspots of badger persecution within the jurisdiction.

All data presented in this report were provided by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) as the lead enforcement agency for this type of wildlife crime. No other organisations had logged incidents to add to the PSNI data. PSNI data being logged as a wildlife crime against badgers is dependent upon the PSNI operator inputting the information onto the PSNI system. Badger incidents are then subcategorised by the PSNI into subcategories (which can be reassigned if necessary should new information come to light): 'Injured no suspicion', 'Sett disturbance', 'Suspected badger baiting', 'Traps and or Snares', two additional classifications have been added to the report to bring the report into line with that used in the GB report: 'Poisoning' and 'Shooting'. One initial report of 'Poisoning' did appear in 2016 but it was screened out after investigation.

From 2016 to 2018, two hundred and sixty three badger related incidents were logged by the police in Northern Ireland. The subcategory called 'Injured no suspicion' is considered not to constitute wildlife crime, but concerns members of the public merely informing the PSNI of an injured or dead badger. The majority of these cases will be road traffic incidents.

Consequently the total number of reports made to the PSNI that may be potential wildlife-crime against badgers, is one hundred and fifty five (155).

It is a fairly safe assumption that this data may not represent the true extent of badger persecution across Northern Ireland for the reporting period; as not all cases

¹NWCU Strategic Assessment 2018-2020 <https://www.nwcu.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Tactical-Assessment-UK-Wildlife-Crime-Nov-2018-sanitised-version.pdf>

of badger persecution may have been witnessed by a second party; nor all witnessed incidents may have been reported to the PSNI. It is also likely that those who come across damaged setts after the incident, don't feel reporting the incident will be beneficial; as it can be hard to pin a time line on the event if you are not a regular visitor to the area.

Reports may also be logged by a PSNI operator under a different offence – such as a firearms offence – and therefore, may not be included within the data presented in this report.

AIM OF REPORT

This report is intended to be a partnership approach, to raise awareness of the nature of badger persecution in Northern Ireland and, ideally, encourage reporting of these incidents. It is recognised that there is lack of knowledge across the wider public about what a 'wildlife crime' is, how to report and why it is important to report it. It is also hoped that publication of data will counter the negative perception within a section of the public that reporting incidents serves no useful purpose.

The report also identifies areas that merit further attention and provides recommendations for future action by stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime NI (PAW NI) brings together statutory, non-statutory agencies & interested parties with the common goal of combating wildlife crime through publicity, education and campaigning.

The PAW Northern Ireland Badger Subgroup currently consists of representatives from: Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Northern Ireland Badger Group (NIBG), Lecale Conservation, Nature Watch Foundation, Born Free and the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA). Any member of PAW's main steering group is welcome to contribute to and / or join this subgroup. A list of PAW NI current members is available on the groups sign post website www.wildlifecrimeni.org

Badgers in Northern Ireland are protected under the terms of **The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985** as amended. This legislative instrument affords protection not only to the individual badger itself, but also to its places of refuge (i.e. namely its sett).

Badgers in Northern Ireland as in Britain and Ireland, have been historically targeted for the blood sports known as badger digging or badger baiting. These activities, whilst prohibited, unfortunately still occur in Northern Ireland. Another threat to badgers classified as a wildlife crime is wilful or reckless damage to their setts. This can occur during agricultural works, building-development and civil-engineering work schemes. Road traffic incidents remain a significant cause of badger deaths while there is no legal obligation to report these incidents to the police, a high percentage of the call logs mentioning badgers are reporting these or dead or injured badgers on the public highway. We have discounted non-suspicious incidents from this report.

This report aims to increase awareness and understanding of the occurrence and distribution of crimes against badgers.

FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS DURING 2016-18

From 2016 to 2018, two hundred and sixty three badger related incidents were logged by the PSNI. Badger incidents are then characterised by the PSNI into subcategories based on the information that is obtained from the caller (these can be reassigned if necessary should new information come to light): 'Injured no suspicion', 'Sett disturbance', 'Suspected badger baiting', 'Traps and or Snares', two additional classifications have been added to the report to bring the report into line with that used in the GB report: 'Poisoning' and 'Shooting'. One initial report of 'Poisoning' did appear in 2016 but it was screened out after investigation showed it had no substantive evidence to be assigned that classification.

Injured no suspicion

The subcategory called 'Injured no suspicion' is not considered to constitute wildlife crime, but concerns members of the public informing the PSNI of a dead or an injured badger. The majority of these cases will be road traffic incidents (there is no statutory requirement to report road collisions with badgers unlike most domestic livestock or dogs). PSNI call handlers are advised to report occurrences of fresh badger carcasses found on the roads to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) - Veterinary Epidemiology Unit. DAERA collect a small percentage of the road casualties for veterinary research purposes. These carcasses are subject to a post mortem investigation and should the vet have any concerns or suspicions about a crime then this would be reported back to the police for further investigation. There are some suspicions that criminal actions may be disguised by roadside dumping of the carcasses, the use of post mortem examinations of road casualties should pick this up if the practise is widespread. However the police call handler may not have the time to forward all the reports that come in and DAERA may not have the resources to collect every reported carcass and/or the carcasses may be too damaged or autolytic for post mortem analysis.

Sett disturbance

Sett disturbance is typically where the earth and vegetation surrounding the sett complex is significantly disturbed normally by mechanical means during an agricultural, horticultural, forestry or construction operations. Sett disturbance can include operations that obstruct the badgers' access to the sett complex or through

vegetation (or structure) removal. Leaving the sett exposed when it was previously hidden may also be an offence. Landowners who knowingly permit these illegal actions are liable for prosecution.

Suspected badger baiting

Badger baiting is where the sett is dug typically by hand, normally by small groups of people with spades and other digging tools, with dogs (often a mix of terrier and lurcher type dogs). Sett entrances may be blocked to prevent badger escape and tunnels or chambers are penetrated by digging directly down from above. The digging can be several metres from the entrance of the tunnel system, it is typically about $\sim 1\text{m}^2$, there may be tool marks on the ground, on the sides of the hole. Persons legally hunting on land must have landowner permission. Permitted persons may hunt foxes but must not disturb badger setts. Landowners who knowingly permit illegal hunting are liable for prosecution.

Traps and snares

The use of certain traps and snares can be perfectly legal however the legal tools can be rendered illegal if placed too close to a badger sett or on a clear badger run. There are many types of illegal snares and traps freely available to buy online that if set outdoors would breach the current legislation. More often than not the report relates to a member of the public coming across a badger either dead or alive caught in a snare. Clearly if the animal is still alive this should be communicated to the police call handler so a vet can also be tasked to the scene with the officers. All hunting activity must have the landowner/managers permission to occur. So where traps or snares appear on your land without your permission an offence may have been committed. Landowners who knowingly permit trapping methods that may target badgers are liable for prosecution.

Poisoning

Poisoning is the suspected absorption of a toxic substance by the badger either accidentally, incidentally or administered with intention. Determining that poisoning is a cause of death may not be easy – in fact it takes a toxicology test to determine this. Finding a group of dead animals and or birds dead or injured in close proximity to one another is a likely indication. Individual animals well away from roads with ‘clenched balled paws’, or having vomited can also indicate poison or toxin ingestion.

The gassing of a badger sett (which may be initially recorded as Sett Disturbance) would also be a poisoning record.

Shooting

A badger that has been shot may or may not be obvious depending on the calibre of the weapon used. Entry wounds can be small and hidden in hair, exit wounds if present, can be extensive but easily mistaken for scavenger wounds (of course any carcass can be subject to post mortem scavenging). It is likely that there will be some other supporting evidence to suggest an animal has been shot before it is reported, i.e. witnesses seeing or hearing the shooting. Landowners who knowingly permit illegal hunting are liable for prosecution.

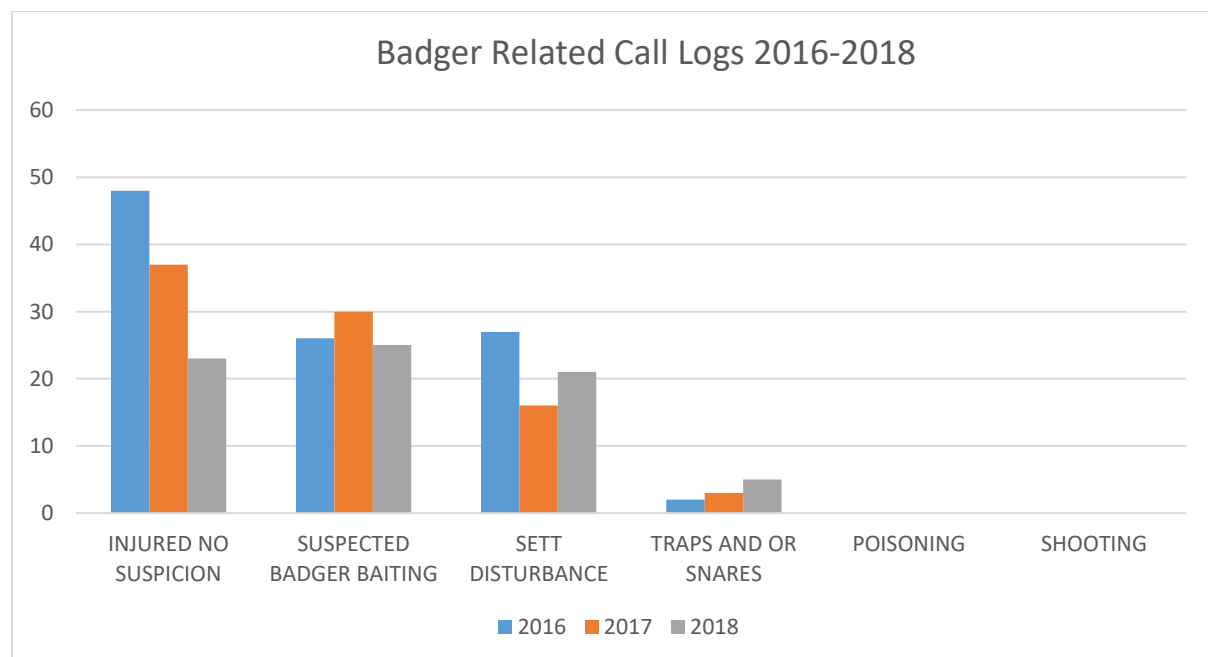


Figure 1. Badger related call logs received by the PSNI 2016-2018.

Consequently the total number of reports made to the PSNI that may be a potential wildlife crime involving badgers during 2016-2018, is one hundred and fifty five (155).

All data presented in this report were provided by the PSNI. No other organisations have logged incidents to add to the PSNI data. PSNI data being logged as a wildlife

crime against badgers is dependent upon the PSNI operator inputting the information onto the PSNI system.

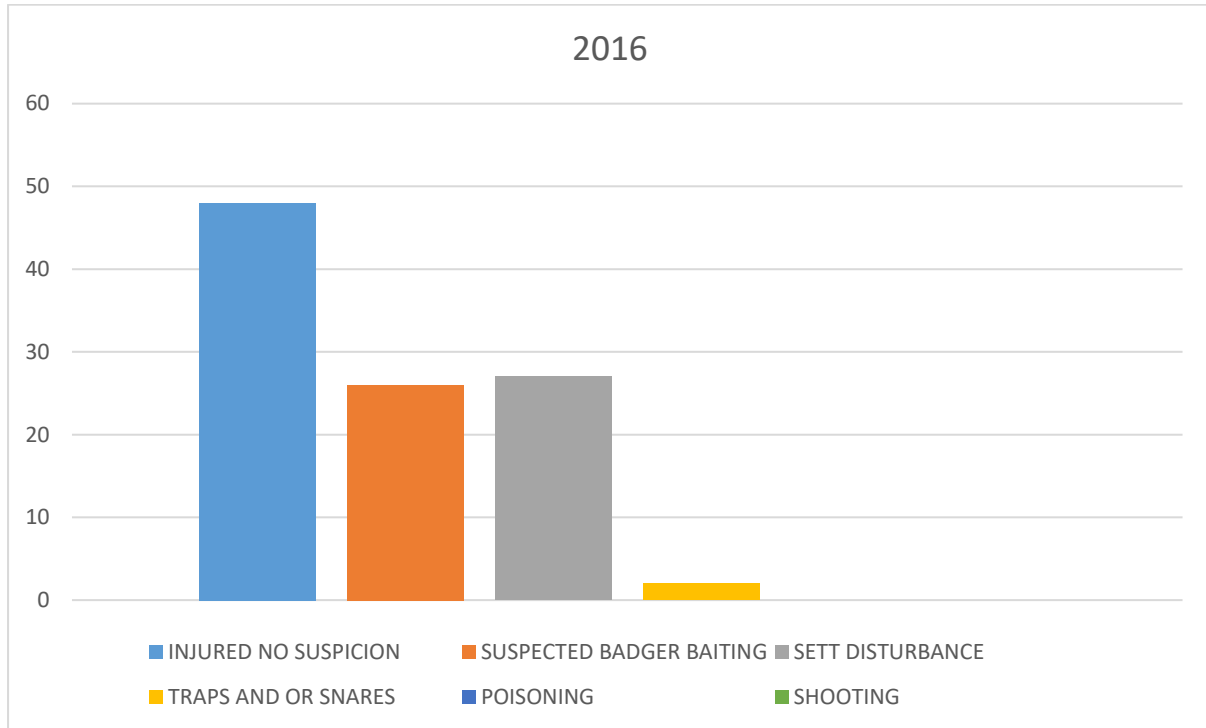


Figure 2. Call logs to the PSNI 2016.

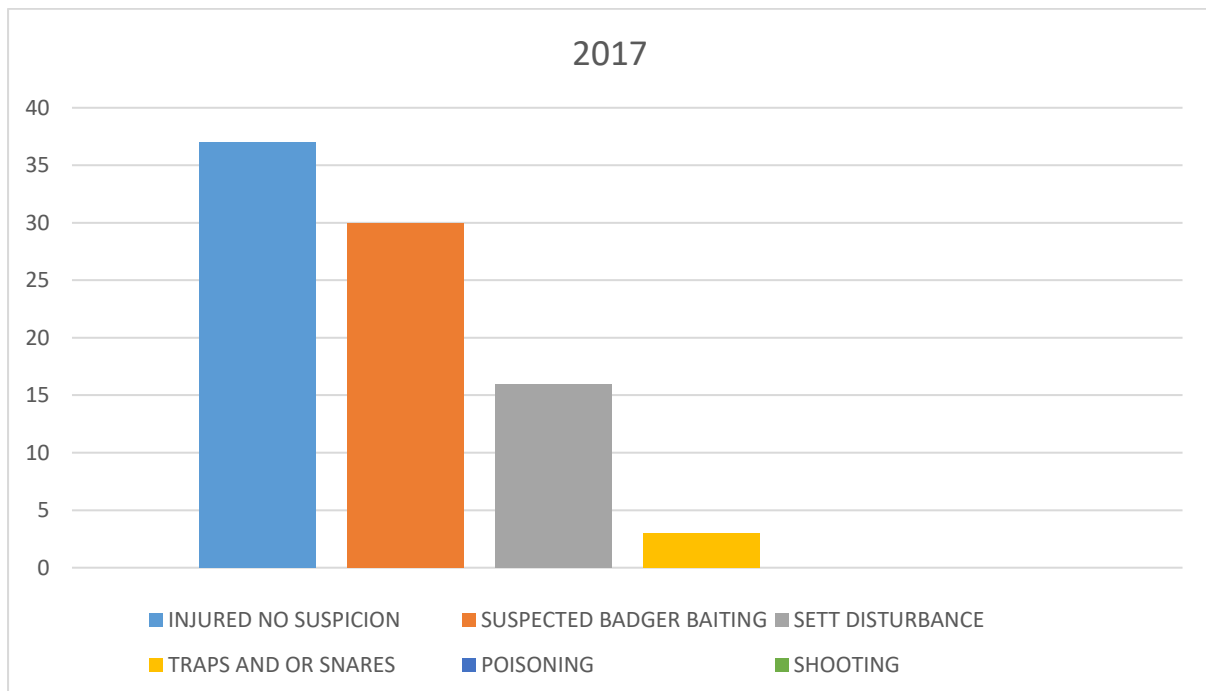


Figure 3. Call logs to the PSNI 2017.

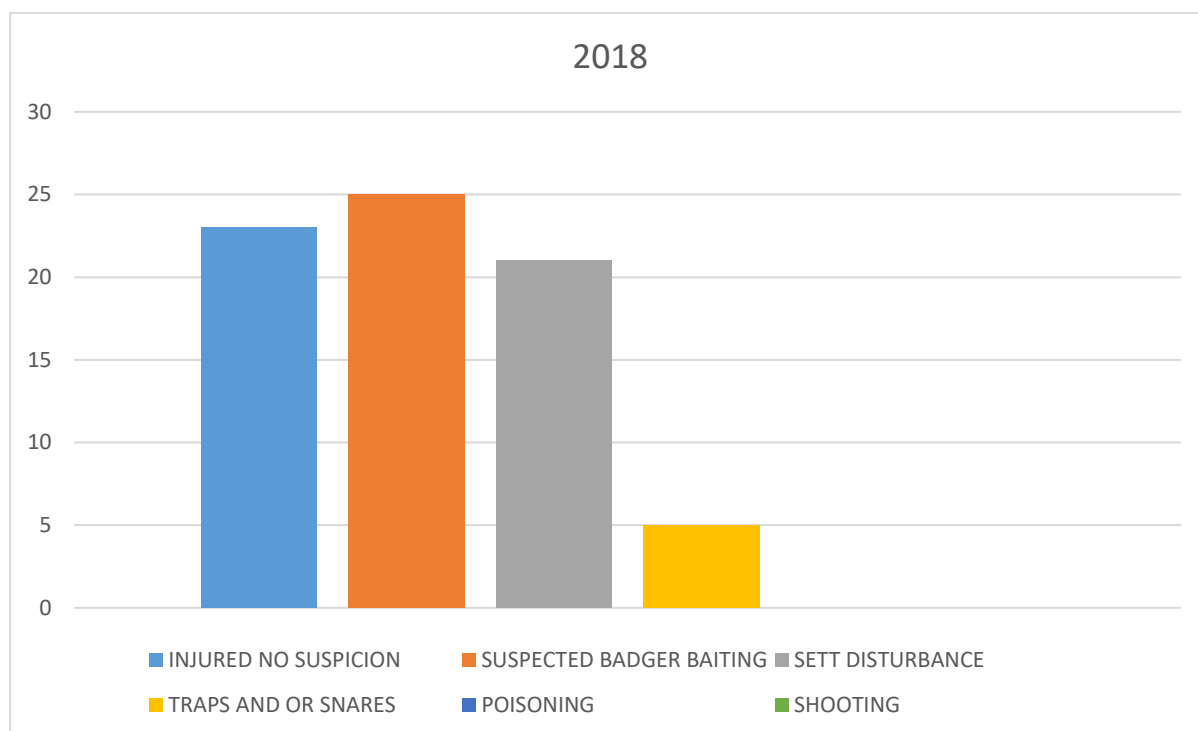


Figure 4. Call logs to the PSNI 2018.

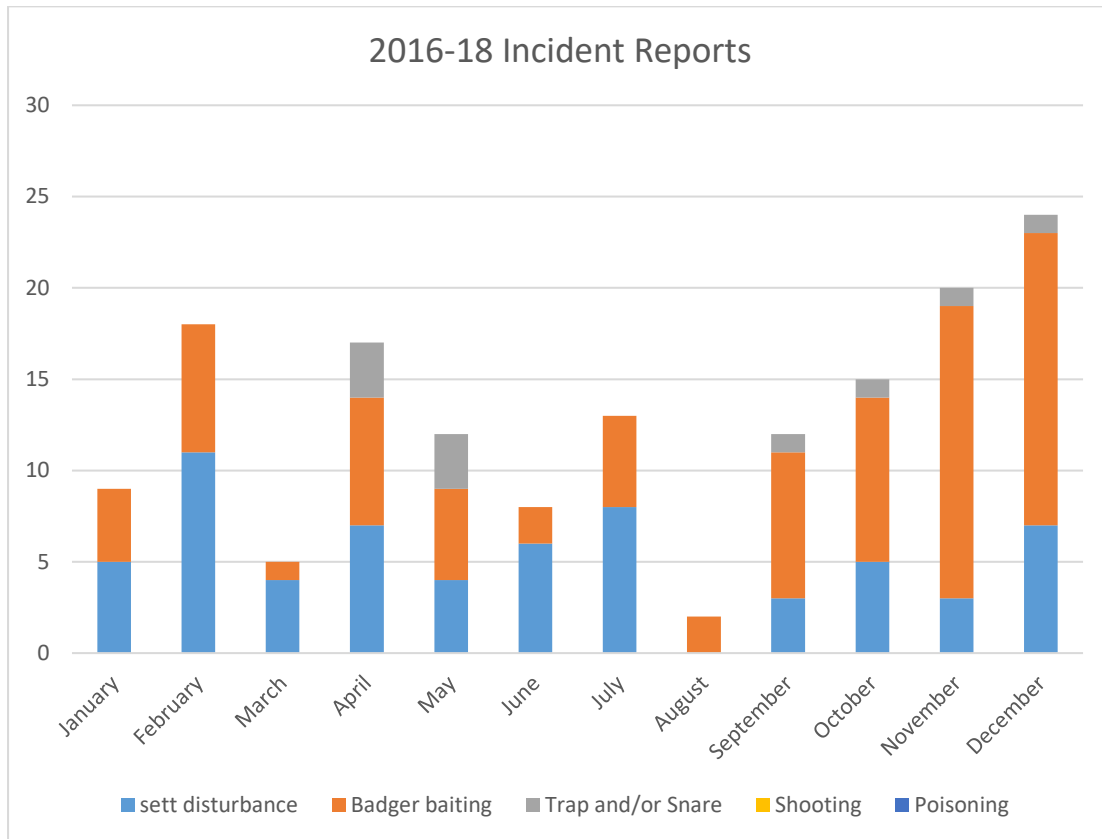


Figure 5. Frequency of various badger incidents per month within Northern Ireland during 2016-18. There appears to be a decline in incident reporting during the summer months. It is not necessarily a decline in crime

Persecution of badgers occurs across the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland, but logged reports are predominately concentrated in County Down.

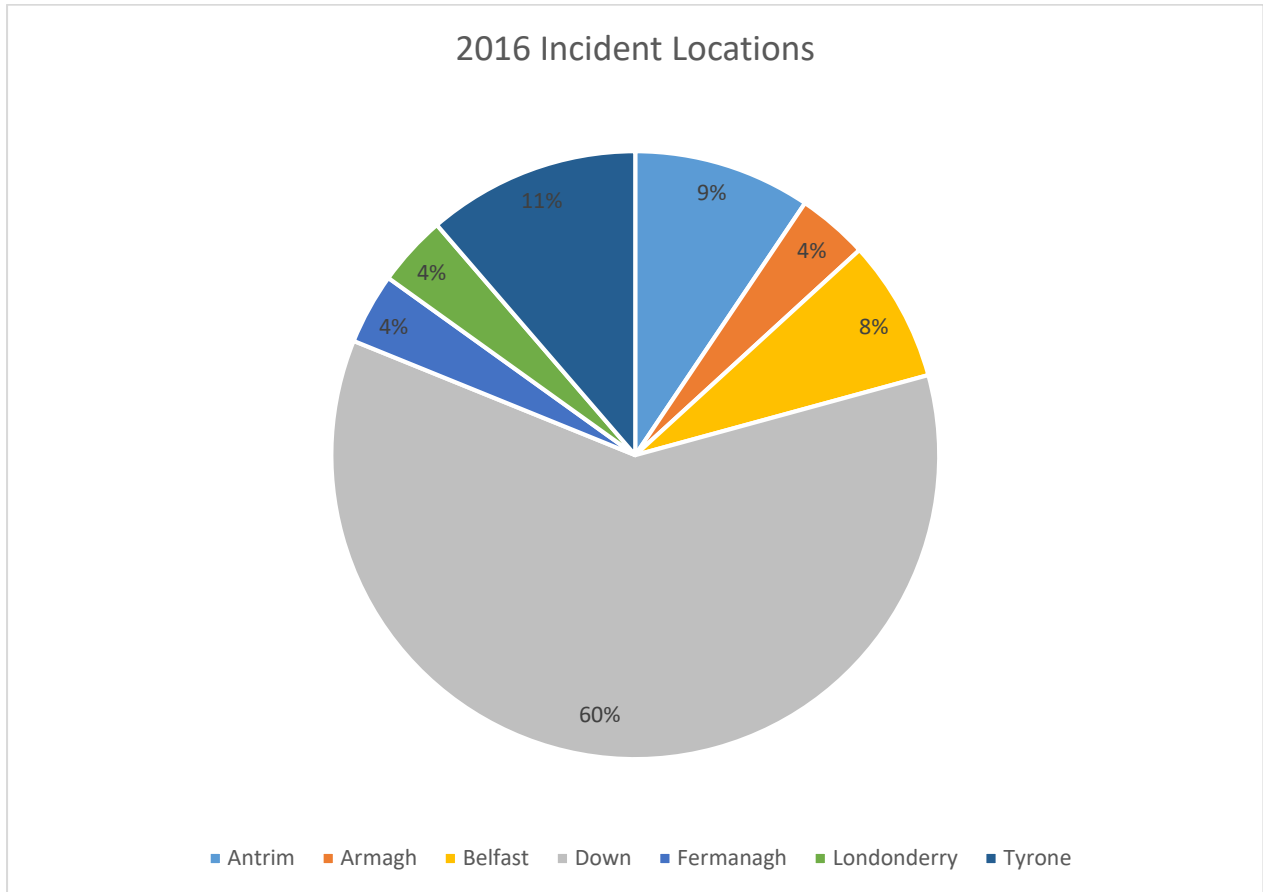


Figure 6. The number of potential badger crime incidents reported to and logged by PSNI 2016 by county.

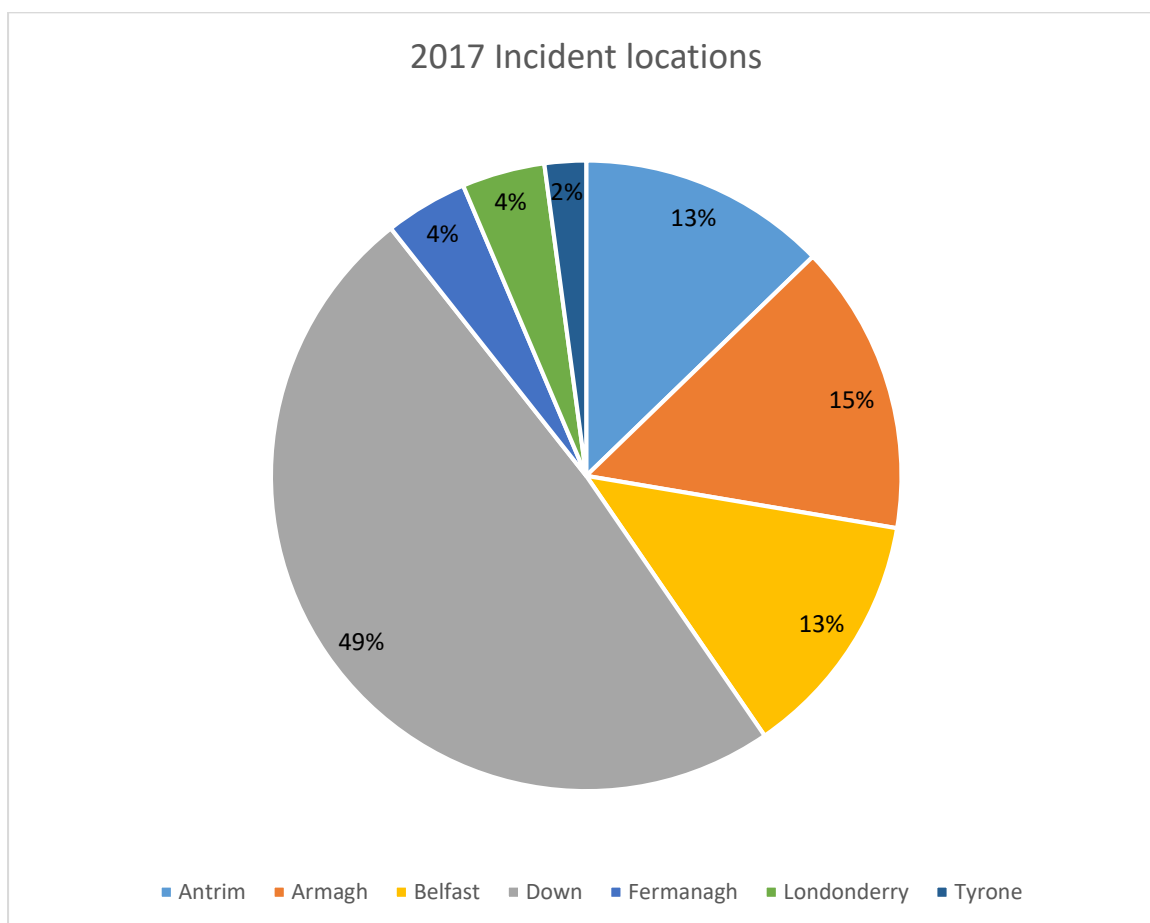


Figure 7. The number of potential badger crime incidents reported to and logged by PSNI 2017 by county.

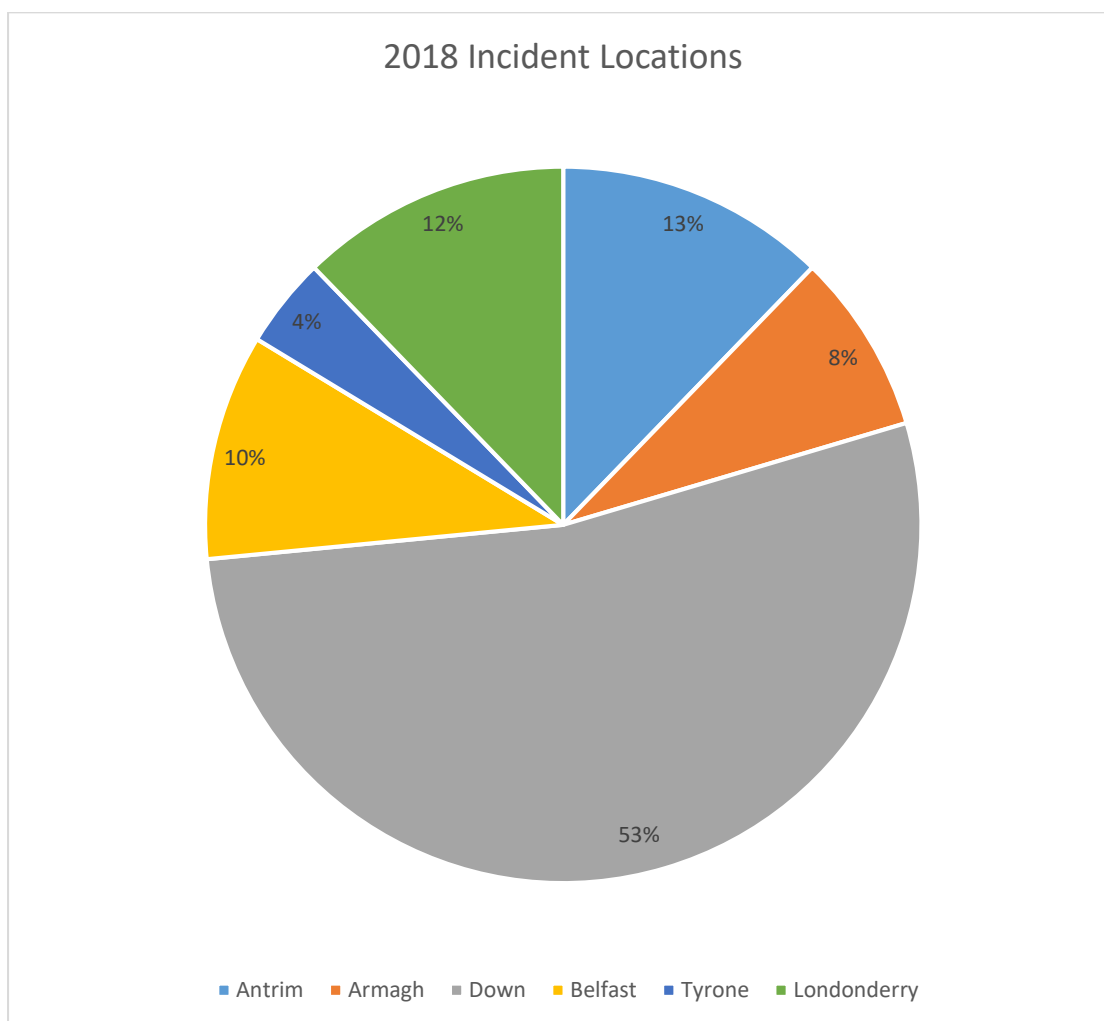


Figure 8. The number of potential badger crime incidents reported to and logged by PSNI 2018 by county.

DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS

The calls relating to badger crime originate across all six counties of Northern Ireland. We have mapped these to the nearest postal town below to approximate the location of the suspected offence.

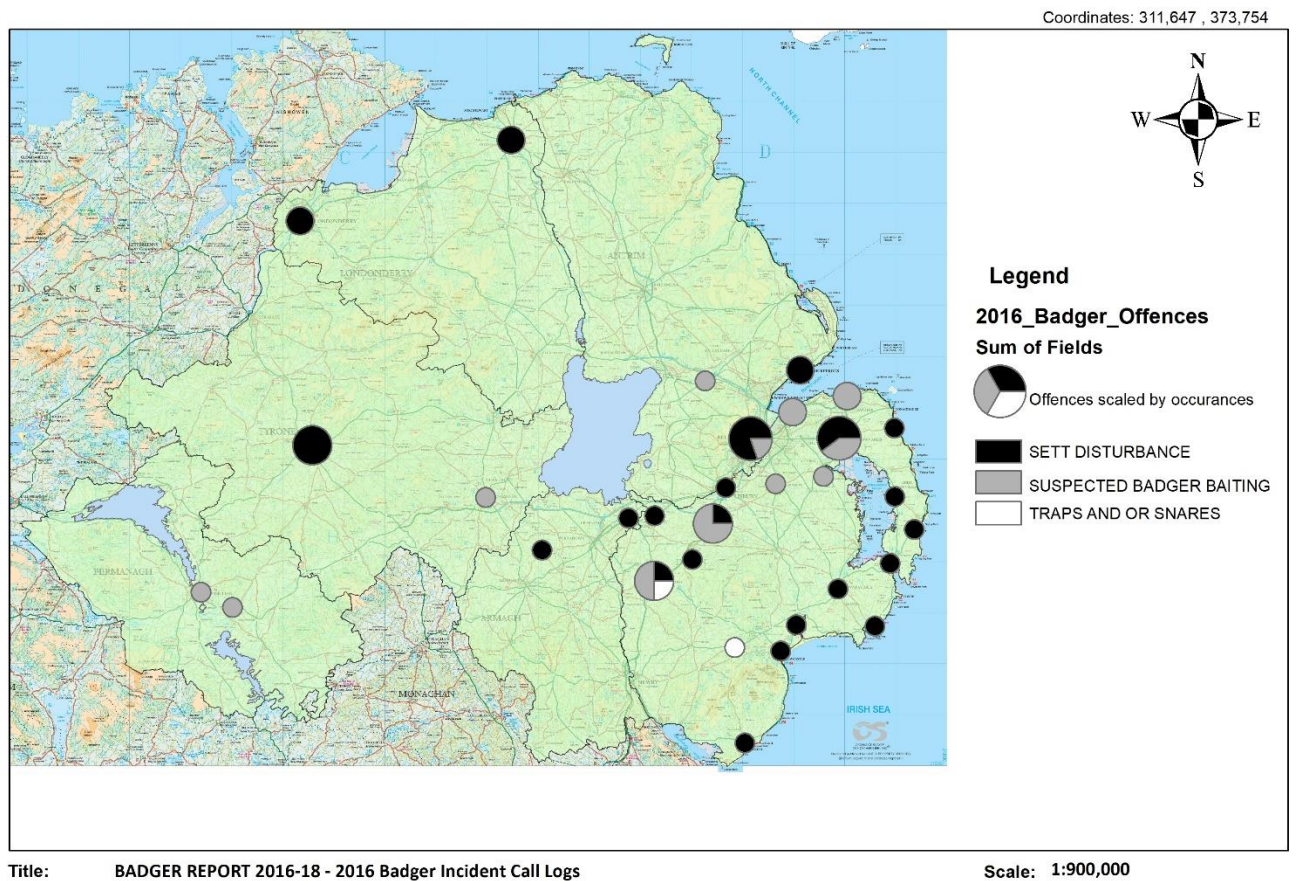


Figure 9. Distribution of call logs for Badger crime for 2016 by offence type and scaled for number of the incidents. With the smallest dot being one report incident.

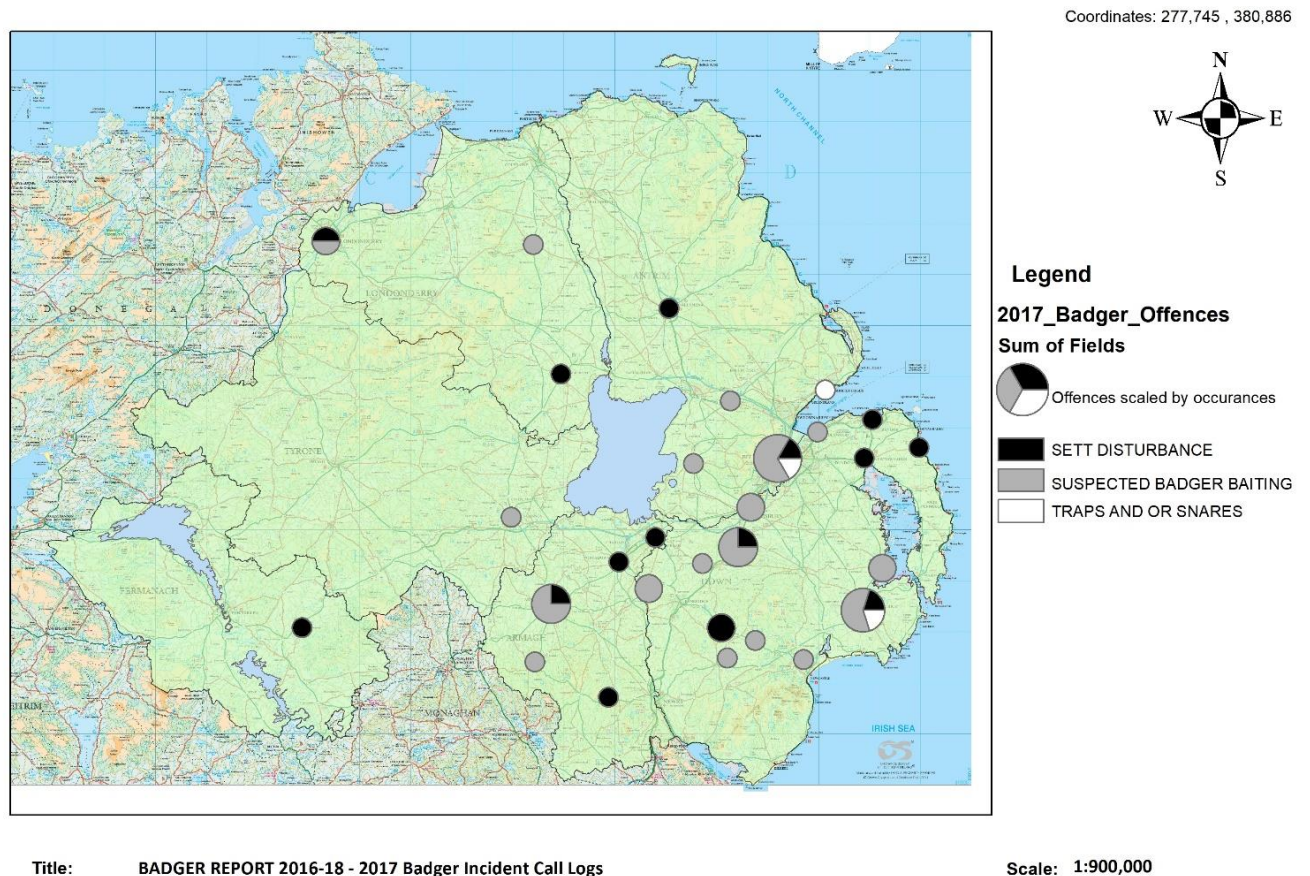


Figure 10. Distribution of call logs for Badger crime for 2017 by offence type and scaled for number of the incidents. With the smallest dot being one report incident.

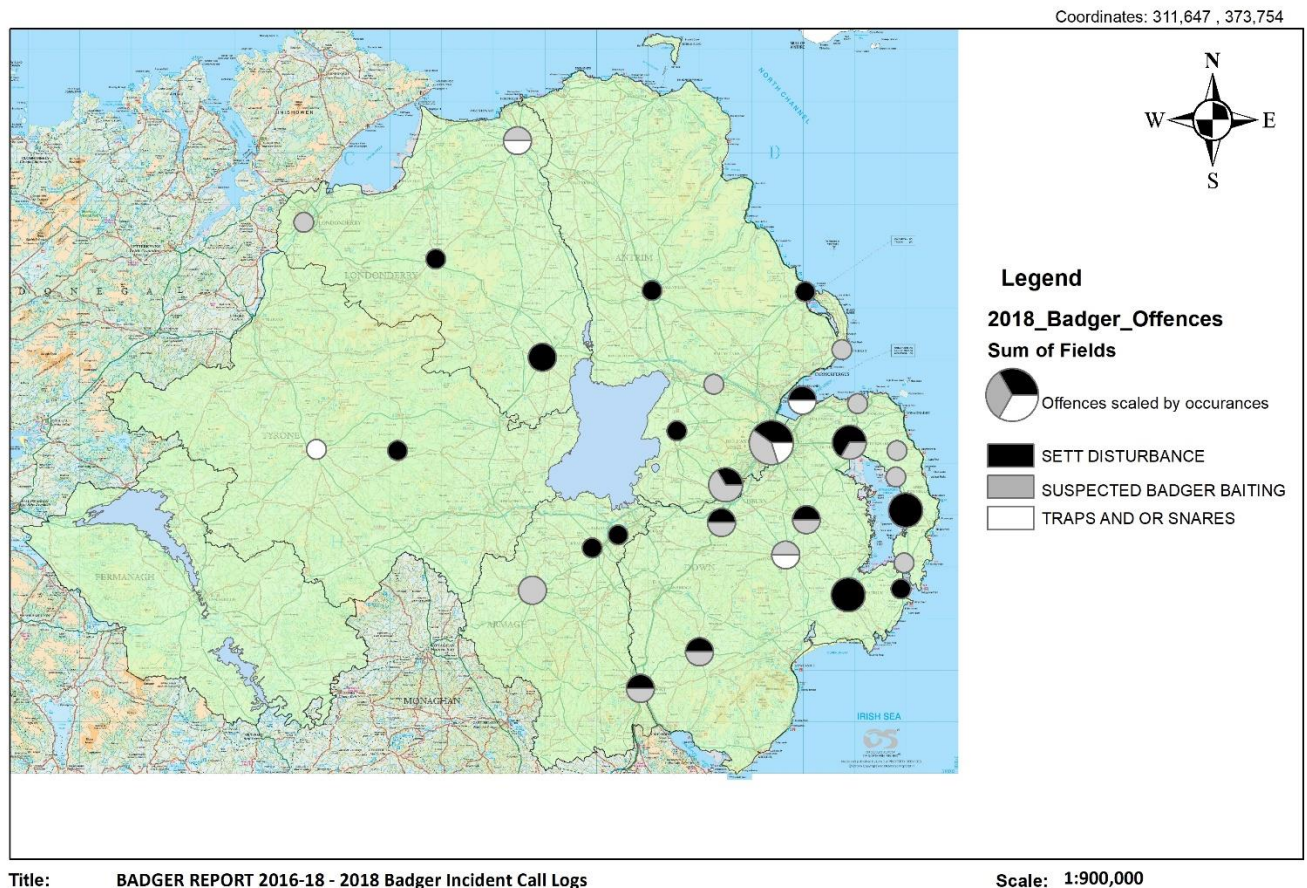


Figure 11. Distribution of call logs for Badger crime for 2018 by offence type and scaled for number of the incidents. With the smallest dot being one report incident.

DISCUSSION

It is widely believed that wildlife crime is under-reported in Northern Ireland for a number of reasons; the public don't recognise the incident as a crime, the public don't know who to call, or the public don't believe that the offences are serious enough to bother the police. Additionally concerns about personal safety may also deter witnesses from coming forward, particularly in isolated rural areas where the pool of potential witnesses is relatively small.

However, the data recorded for 2016-18 presents a relative picture of the incidences of reported badger baiting, sett disturbance and suspected misuse of traps and snares.

All data presented in this report was provided by the PSNI as a result of calls to the police. This information contributed or referred to the PSNI by not only the general public but also by agencies/organisations including;

- Crimestoppers,
- The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA),
- The Northern Ireland Badger Group,
- USPCA.

In general, the recording of all badger data in the jurisdiction remains fragmented. Although some groups and agencies diligently report suspected badger crime, this is not universal. As with the general public there is a lack of knowledge in some sectors of what they should do if they come across some suspected criminal activity.

The non-emergency 101 reporting system has shown itself to be an effective and user-friendly channel for reporting wildlife crime, although during busy periods there can often be long waits to speak to an operator. The Crimestoppers number Tel: 0800 555 111 allows reports anonymously, without the witness having to speak to the authorities. The information appears to be passed efficiently to the police by the charity. The weakness of Crimestoppers is if the sett is difficult to locate on the ground the investigating police officer cannot go back to the witness and ask for better directions or further information. Therefore, it relies on the call handler extracting as much information as possible at the time.

A location mapping tool being rapidly adopted by the Emergency Services across the world is the “What-3-Words” app. This mobile phone based downloadable app uses the phone’s Global Positioning System (GPS) to identify the phones location to a 3x3m square and using clever algorithms codes this into a ‘random’ three word code. For example, the centre of the NIEA’s Klondyke Building Office is “**///pigs.friday.visits**” these are much easier to convey to the call handler than GPS reference numbers or grid references and less likely to be wrong, reducing the search zone considerably for those on the ground. If this system is not available to the PSNI then it is something that we would ask them to consider adopting. Aside from wildlife crime this has been widely recognised as having lifesaving benefits for quickly locating missing persons or those in trouble.

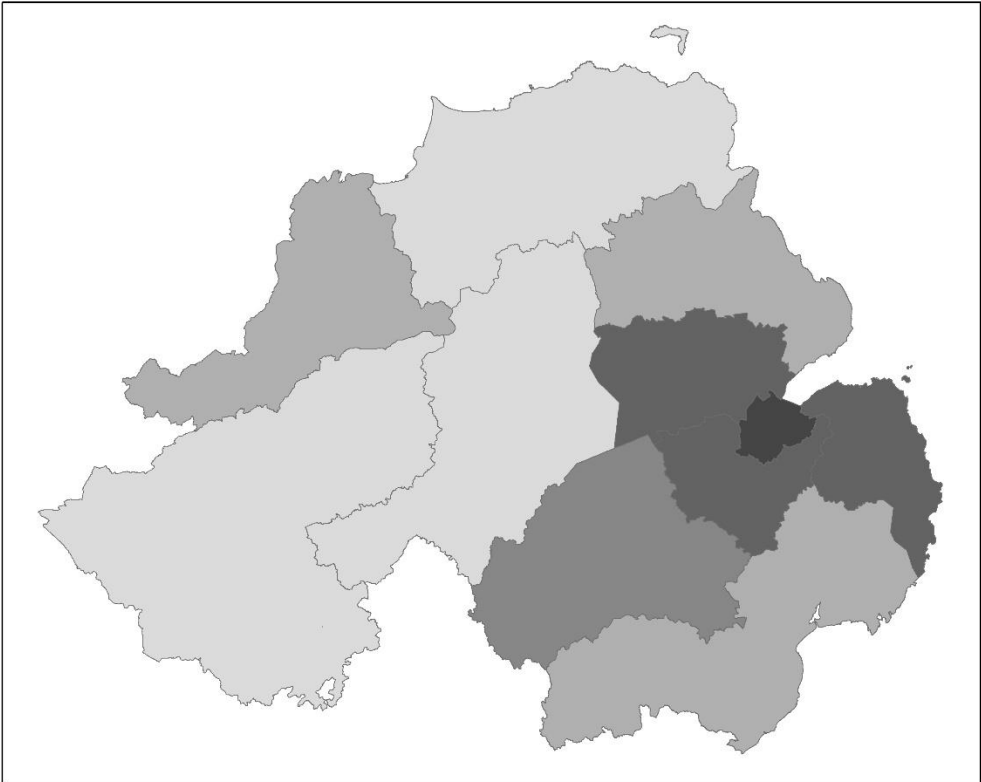
Work by PAW NI since 2015 to increase the information available to the general public explaining what wildlife crimes consist of and how/where to report them has involved the development of “[The Watch Out For Wildlife Crime](#)”² website and the [PAW NI Badger crime leaflet](#). Links to these resources are regularly used by PAW members on their publications, press releases and social media posts. With the aim of improving public knowledge of what is a wildlife crime and how to report it. Additionally the NIEA has published an updated volume of “the Wildlife Law and You” a layman’s guide to the complex wildlife law in Northern Ireland which is available on the Department’s website³ or via www.wildlifecrimeni.org .

South East Bias?

For each of the three reporting years there is a larger number of incident reports in the southeast of Northern Ireland. This is also evident in the previously published 2015 report. There are a few possible reasons why this may occur beyond the suggestion that there are more wildlife criminals operating in the south east. These factors are; greater density of people living ‘East of the Bann’ and greater density of badgers in the south east. Using figures obtained from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Figure 12 shows the relative human population density for the regional councils. The east of the country is clearly much more heavily populated than the land west of the Bann corridor. Hereby increasing the chances of witnesses coming across the incident, or the possibility of offenders operating in the area.

² www.wildlifecrimeni.org

³ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/wildlife-law-and-you>



Coordinates: 277,745 , 380,886



Legend

Population Density km2

Populati_1

41 - 80
81 - 132
133 - 157
158 - 350
351 - 2536

Title: 2017 Population density estimates using NISRA figures by council region

Scale: 1:900,000

Figure 12. NISRA figures for human population density by council region per km² for 2017. There is clearly a greater proportion of the population living in Mid-Antrim, Armagh and Down or the eastern side of Northern Ireland.

Public perception

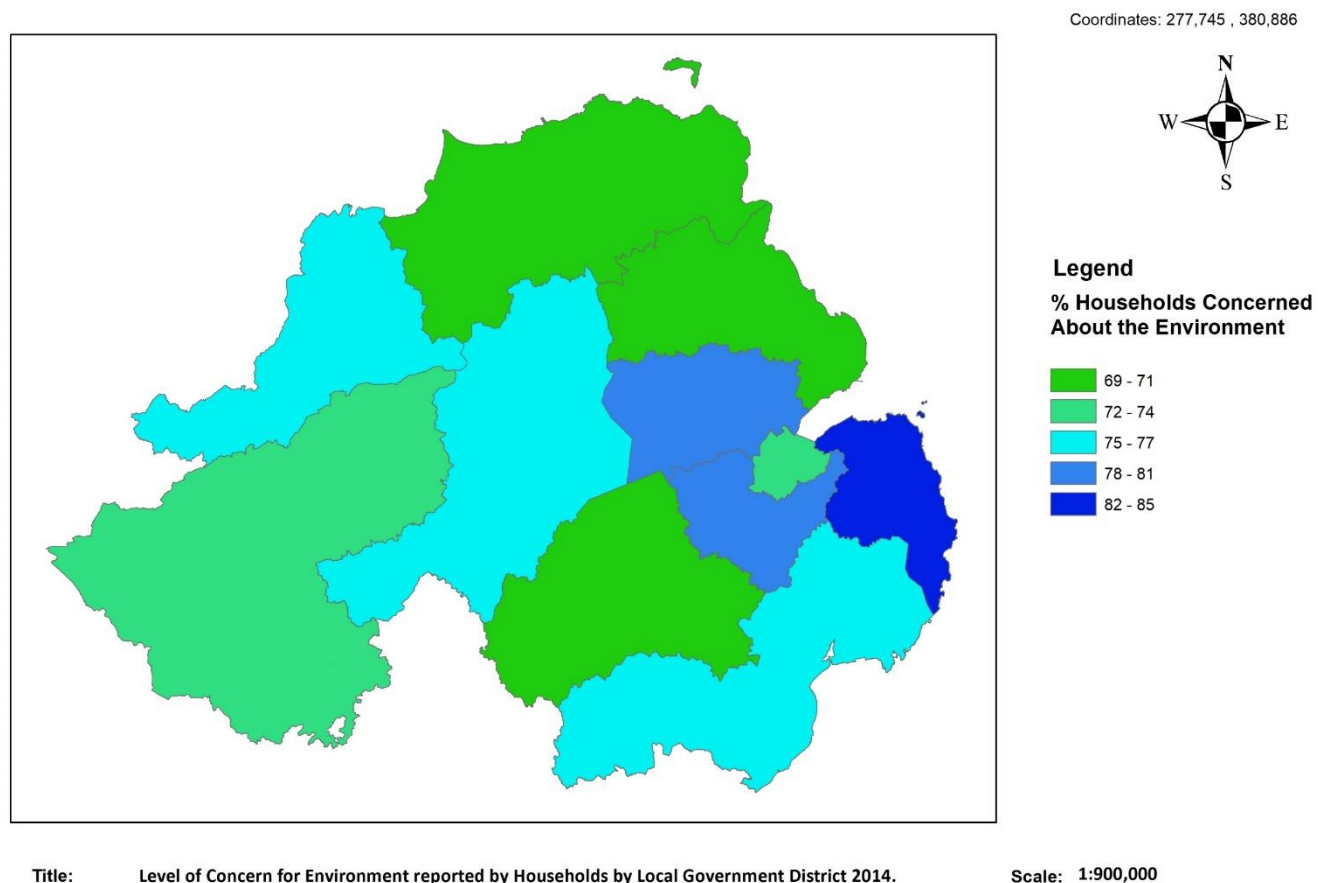


Figure 13 Level of Concern for Environment reported by Households by NISRA Local Government District 2014. Indicating that there are stronger concerns relating to the environment and its wellbeing in the southeast.

Official government survey data appears to show there is a greater level of concern about environmental matters in north Down and south Antrim. The Continuous Household Survey is one of the largest continuous surveys carried out in Northern Ireland. It is based on a systematic random sample of 9,000 addresses and the questionnaire consists of both a household and individual interview with each person

aged 16 and over. These social considerations may influence how likely it is that a member of the public will contact the authorities about suspected environmental crime. The survey questions are fairly generalised and don't refer to wildlife crime specifically, with most respondents indicating their primary concerns relate to water pollution, illegal dumping and climate change. However in general it may help explain the higher levels of reporting in the east of Northern Ireland.

Additionally the Northern Ireland Badger Group and USPCA are both based in County Down and have perhaps a more visible presence in the south east of Northern Ireland which could lead to a more knowledgeable local 'fan base' who are more likely to report suspicious activity. Additionally most of the environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) are based in the greater Belfast area and similar effects are likely.

Badger density

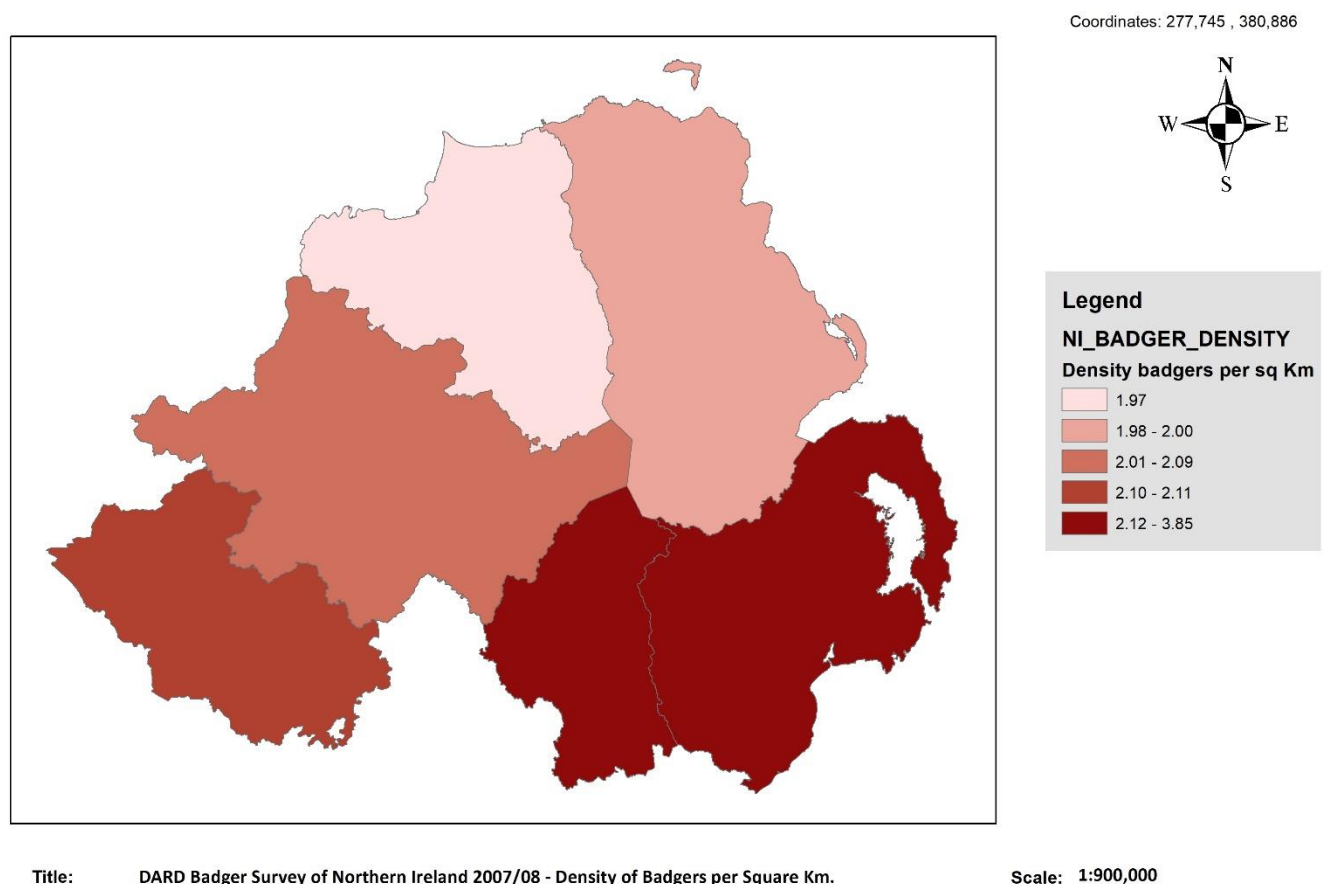


Figure 14. Estimates of badger population density for Northern Ireland 2007/08 - Badger Survey of Northern Ireland 2007/08 prepared for Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD) - Reid, N. *et al.* (2008)⁴. There is a clear indication of greater badger density in the south and particularly the southeast.

The DARD Badger Survey 2007/08 carried out by Queen's University Belfast indicates a much greater density of badger activity in the south east too, as shown by Figure 14. From this the following inferences can be drawn; that there may be more crime just because there are more badgers. It is easier to find a badger sett in the countryside and commit an offence if that is your intention. Equally it is more likely that you will come across a badger sett on your land which obstructs a normally lawful operation and you choose to deal with the sett illegally rather than take advice on any lawful actions that could be undertaken. Finally there is more likelihood of the public coming across a badger sett during their day to day business and henceforth detecting any suspicious activity associated at it.

⁴ Badger Survey of Northern Ireland 2007/08 prepared for Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD) - Reid, N., Etherington, T.R., Wilson, G., McDonald, R.A. & Montgomery, W.I. (2008) *Badger survey of Northern Ireland 2007/08*. Report prepared by Quercus and Central Science Laboratory for the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD), Northern Ireland, UK.

Development pressure

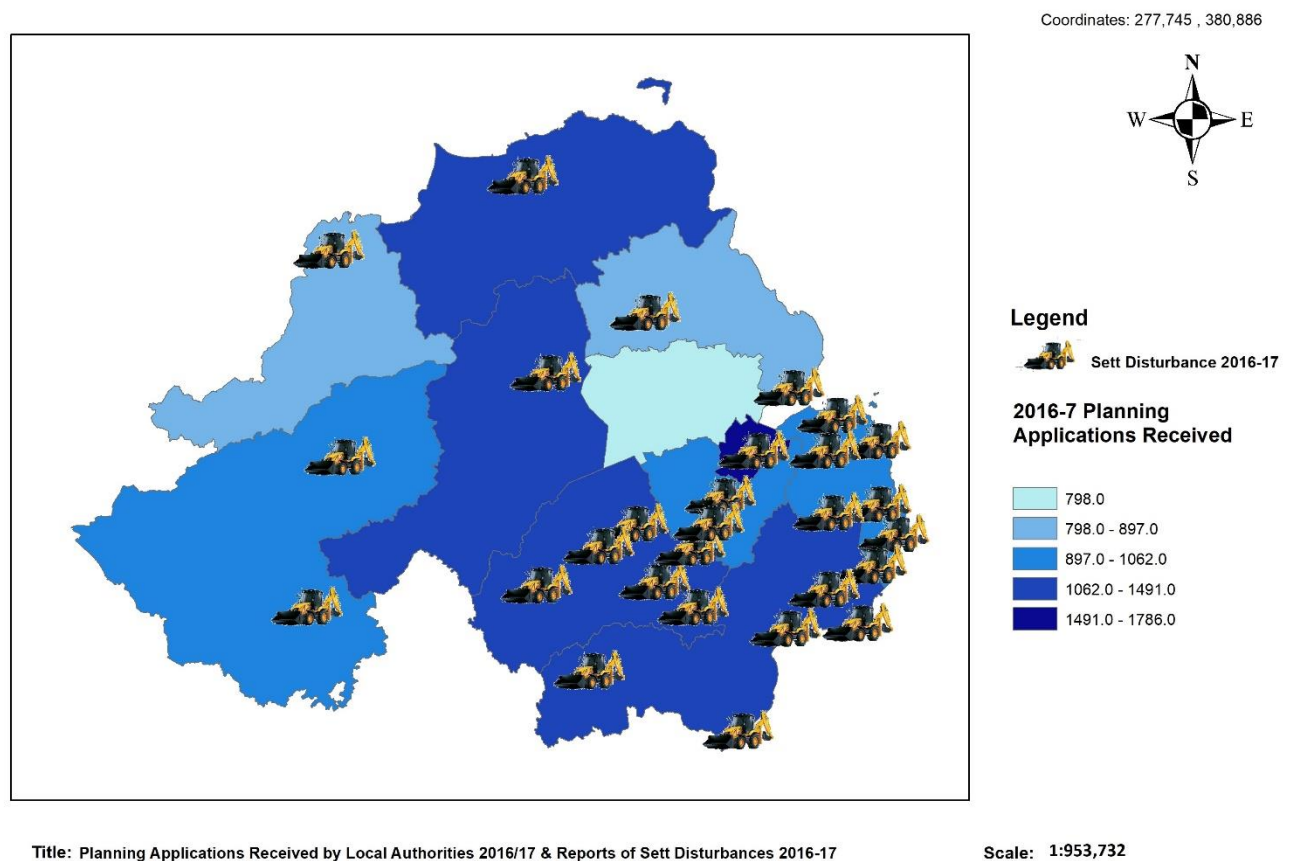


Figure 15. Development pressure measured by number of planning applications per local authority area and reports of sett disturbance 2016/7.

There is no clear link between the number of planning applications received by the local planning authorities and the number of reported badger sett disturbances. There are higher levels of development pressure in the more populated areas of Northern Ireland, these also coincide with the incident reports. However most sett disturbances occur outside the planning system, either through site preparation, works that don't necessarily require permission or agricultural works. Badger setts identified during the planning process are generally mitigated for during the assessment progress.

“Injured no suspicion”

During the reporting period 2016-2018 one hundred and eight (108) call logs were classified as “Injured no suspicion” while only two cases or 1.9% were referred to the

DAERA Veterinary Epidemiology Unit by the PSNI. In correspondence between the authors and the DAERA Veterinary Epidemiology Unit it would appear that during the recording period DAERA staff raised concerns about 7 badgers found by the roadside either at the point of collection or after the post mortem examination. The unit collected 1112 badger carcasses that were suitable for post mortem during the recording period. Therefore 0.63% of those collected and in reasonable condition were suspicious. These results or concerns were reported to the PSNI and have been included in the reports statistics. This does provide evidence for the theory that some animals found by the roadside may have been dumped to disguise a crime, although it is acknowledged that the injured animals may have been less capable of crossing the road or just happened to die there. It highlights the danger of ignoring all reports of dead badgers classified as “Injured no suspicion” and this should be used to encourage more PSNI call handlers to report more of these ‘dead by the road’ cases to DAERA Veterinary Epidemiology Unit to allow testing to be done. It should also be recommunicated to the DAERA vets that they should be watching out for anything suspicious, ensuring they know the procedures to follow if they find something unusual.

CONCLUSIONS

The report itself is only indicative of the likely extent of crimes against badgers in Northern Ireland because it is based on initial call logs to the police. These crimes occur in all six counties, however there is a much greater number of reports from the Antrim, Down and Armagh. There are several of reasons why the number of reports from the east exceeds the west; primarily, the number of badgers is significantly greater in the east. Equally there is a greater density of people in the east to carry out the crimes or to report them. There is perhaps some evidence of greater compassion for wider environmental issues in the east which could mean people are more likely to call in reports. The influence of lobby groups and environmental charities is probably stronger in the greater Belfast area, where the majority of them are based and the core of their volunteers are based which could further increase people’s knowledge of the subject. The public’s confidence in policing across

Northern Ireland⁵, is fairly similar across the six counties outside the two main cities. Therefore it is unlikely that this is a major factor in determining whether a suspected offence is reported. The use and promotion of the Crimestoppers number hopefully reduces the concerns of those reluctant to deal with the police directly.

It is likely that with all wildlife crime, what is reported to the authorities is a fraction of the total incidents as they tend to occur in isolated locations. The trends indicate that moderate levels of badger baiting are still persisting despite the practise being deemed barbaric by the public. There is still further work needed to educate people about wildlife law, to increase their awareness of what constitutes a wildlife crime and to whom do they report it. Confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole is fairly low in Northern Ireland⁶ and certainly anecdotally there is widespread belief that offenders do not get punished adequately for crimes against animals. Public concern and protest lead to an amendment of the Welfare of Animals (NI) Act 2011 by the Justice (NI) Act 2016 which significantly increased the range of sentences available to the judiciary. Without witnesses coming forward and reporting the suspected crimes, investigations cannot take place. Only by putting cases forward to the courts regularly will the crime be taken seriously, and therefore PAW NI and its partners must continue to promote the key messages on wildlife crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and areas that merit further attention in the future action by stakeholders include:

- Continue to raise awareness amongst the wider public and stakeholders and encourage the standardised reporting of suspected incidents of badger crimes.
- Raise awareness of using Tel:101 to report wildlife crimes.
- Publicise the Crimestoppers number 0800 555 111.

⁵ NISRA - Confidence in Policing survey.
<https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/SearchResults.aspx?sk=confidence;>

⁶ NISRA - Confidence in the justice system.

- Identify, and engage with, other stakeholders or partners to maximise participation in future reporting and data sharing e.g. Planning Officers, Animal Welfare Officers etc.
- Continue to liaise with other agencies in Britain and in the Republic of Ireland (e.g. NPWS) to increase national awareness of crimes against badgers where possible, including cross-border initiatives where beneficial.
- Encourage where appropriate and where time allows PSNI Call Handlers to report on Badger Road Traffic Incidents to DAERA Veterinary Epidemiology Unit on Tel: 07767271431 or email rta badgers@daera-ni.gov.uk.
- Encourage members of the public to report on Badger Road Traffic Incidents to DAERA Veterinary Epidemiology Unit on Tel: 07767271431 or email rta badgers@daera-ni.gov.uk.
- Encourage the PSNI to adopt the What-3-Words app for location recording.

Appendix 1. Reporting a Wildlife Crime

Information taken from PAW NI's wildlife crime initiative 'Watch Out for Wildlife Crime'. See <http://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>



REPORT WILDLIFE CRIME



Any information about wildlife crime should be passed immediately to the PSNI on 101.

- Describe your call as a Wildlife Crime report
- Give details of the (potential) crime
- Ask for an incident reference number

Fish poaching in the Foyle Lough and Carlingford Lough should be reported to the Loughs Agency on 028 71 342100.

Fish poaching in any other river-catchment areas can also be reported to DAERA Inland Fisheries on 028 91513101 or outside office hours on 0800 807060.

*Information can also be given anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Appendix 2. “PAW NI Badger Subgroup” aims and its member organisations

The PAW NI Badger Subgroup aims to highlight badger-persecution issues amongst the general public; to inform them of what constitutes wildlife crime; and to empower them with knowledge as to how they might effectively report wildlife crime against badgers.

The ultimate aim of the PAW NI Badger Subgroup is to increase capacity to inhibit the activities of wildlife crime against badgers, and therefore, reduce the opportunity for incidents of badger crime to occur.

The PAW NI Badger Subgroup is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- **Born Free Foundation**
- **Lecale Conservation**
- **Northern Ireland Badger Group**
- **Northern Ireland Environment Agency**
- **Police Service of Northern Ireland**
- **Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**
- **Nature Watch Foundation.**
- **Ulster Wildlife**

Any member of PAW’s main steering group is welcome to contribute to and / or join the subgroup.

Appendix 3. “PAW NP” member organisations

- Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
- Belfast Activity Centre
- Belfast Zoological Gardens
- Born Free Foundation
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- British Deer Society
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Crimestoppers NI
- Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
- Food Standards Agency
- Forest Service Northern Ireland
- Health and Safety Executive NI
- Lecale Conservation
- Loughs Agency
- National Trust
- Nature Watch Foundation
- Northern Ireland Badger Group
- Northern Ireland Bat Group
- Northern Ireland Deer Society
- Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Scottish Association for Country Sports
- UK National Wildlife Crime Unit
- Ulster Angling Federation
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Ulster Wildlife
- USPCA