

# Police Scotland submission of 21 March 2024 PE2050/B: Prohibit the use of recreational drones on national nature reserves without a permit from NatureScot

I refer to your letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024 and wish to provide you with the following information in response to the Committee's questions.

*Have there been any prosecutions for wildlife crimes in Scotland related to drone use and if so, how many?*

Police Scotland have liaised with COPFS Wildlife and Environmental Crime Unit with regards to this question and there is only one reported and prosecuted wildlife crime case involving drone use in recent memory. This case involved the use of drones to establish the location and stage of peregrine nesting sites. This information was then used to steal peregrine eggs and chicks from the wild. This case resulted in two convictions.

*How many police investigations into suspected wildlife crimes arising from drone use have taken place each year since 2018?*

This is a challenging type of incident to quantify. Police Scotland have a storm incident marker for drone incidents. This means when someone contacts Police Scotland to report an incident and it involves a drone, this identifier is added to the incident. There have been c. 400 of these incidents since January 2024 alone, the vast majority of which are simply notifications of legitimate drone use. Establishing all wildlife crime incidents involving drones would require manual examination of records and would require a disproportionate amount of time allocated to it.

As an alternative, I have canvassed all Wildlife Crime Liaison Officers within Police Scotland. The vast majority of these Officers have been in post for a number of years and would be most likely to deal with a specialist incident such as Wildlife disturbance/offending using a drone. No significant incidents have been brought to my attention with regards to drone related wildlife crime barring the case previously mentioned, involving the theft of wild eggs and chicks.

I have liaised with Police Scotland Aviation and Security Unit, who monitor drone related incidents across Scotland. Again, this department

were unaware of any incidents involving wildlife crime associated with drone use.

I requested figures for reports made to the Police under Sec 117 of Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 which relates to disturbance of seals. I can confirm there have been crimes recorded for seal disturbance but none of the recorded crimes have involved drone use.

There have been numerous incidents reported to the Police regarding the *possible* poaching of deer while using a drone. The incidents have all been reported at the same location within the Forth Valley Policing Division. The use of a drone has not been confirmed through investigations to date and no charges have been preferred in relation to these incidents.

*How many investigations of this nature have been reported to the procurator fiscal each year since 2018?*

I have canvassed all Wildlife Crime Liaison Officers across Scotland, and none recall any significant incidents involving a drone being used to disturb, or offend against wildlife. Similarly I have liaised with COPFS who don't recall any cases whereby a drone was used in the commission of a wildlife crime, with the exception of the previously mentioned case whereby a drone was used in the commission of stealing eggs and chicks of wild birds.

I hope this information is useful for the committee and if any further information or clarity is sought then please do not hesitate to send a further request.