

Badger Persecution Report
Northern Ireland
2015



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 in Northern Ireland during 2015.

This report is the first attempt by the Badger Subgroup of PAW NI 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. The report has been stimulated by the success of reports on Raptor Persecution and Poisoning produced by the *PAW NI Bird of Prey Subgroup* (with lead author *Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group*).

All data presented in this report were provided by the PSNI. 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 four subcategories (which can be reassigned if necessary should new information come to light): **'Injured no suspicion'**, **'Sett disturbance'**, **'Suspected badger baiting'**, **'Traps and snares'**.

In 2015, fifty-one (51) incidents were logged by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Assuming that the subcategory called **'Injured no suspicion'** does not constitute wildlife crime, but constitutes members of the public merely informing the PSNI of an injured badger; then the total number of reports made to the PSNI that may be potential wildlife-crime against badgers, is forty-one (41).

¹NWCU Strategic Assessment 2013 [<http://www.nwcu.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NWCU-Strategic-Assessment-2013-final-v2.pdf>]

Naturally, it is recognised that this data may not represent the true extent of badger persecution across Northern Ireland for 2015, as not all cases of badger persecution may have been witnessed by a second party; and not all witnessed incidents may have been reported to the PSNI. 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 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 (PAW) is a body comprising representatives from government agencies and non-government-organisations involved in wildlife-crime detection and wildlife-law enforcement in the UK.

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, Born Free and the Ulster Society Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA). Any member of PAW's main steering group is welcome to contribute to and / or join this subgroup.

Badgers in Northern Ireland are protected under the terms of **The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985** *as amended* and **The Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 2011**. The Wildlife Order affords protection not only to the individual badger itself, but also to its places of refuge (i.e. namely its setts).

Badgers in Northern Ireland have historically been targeted in Britain and Ireland for the blood sports known as badger digging and badger baiting. These activities, whilst prohibited, unfortunately still occur in Northern Ireland. Another threat to badgers that is classified as a wildlife crime is wilful or reckless damage to their setts. This can occur during building-development and civil-engineering work schemes.

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

FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS DURING 2015

In 2015, fifty-one (51) incidents were reported to by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Badger incidents are categorised by the PSNI into four subcategories: **'Injured no suspicion'**, **'Sett disturbance'**, **'Suspected badger baiting'**, **'Traps and snares'**. Each case requires consideration on its own merits. Assuming that the subcategory called 'Injured no suspicion' does not constitute wildlife crime, but constitutes members of the public merely informing the PSNI of an injured badger; then the total number of reports made to the PSNI that may be potential wildlife-crime against badgers, is forty-one (41).

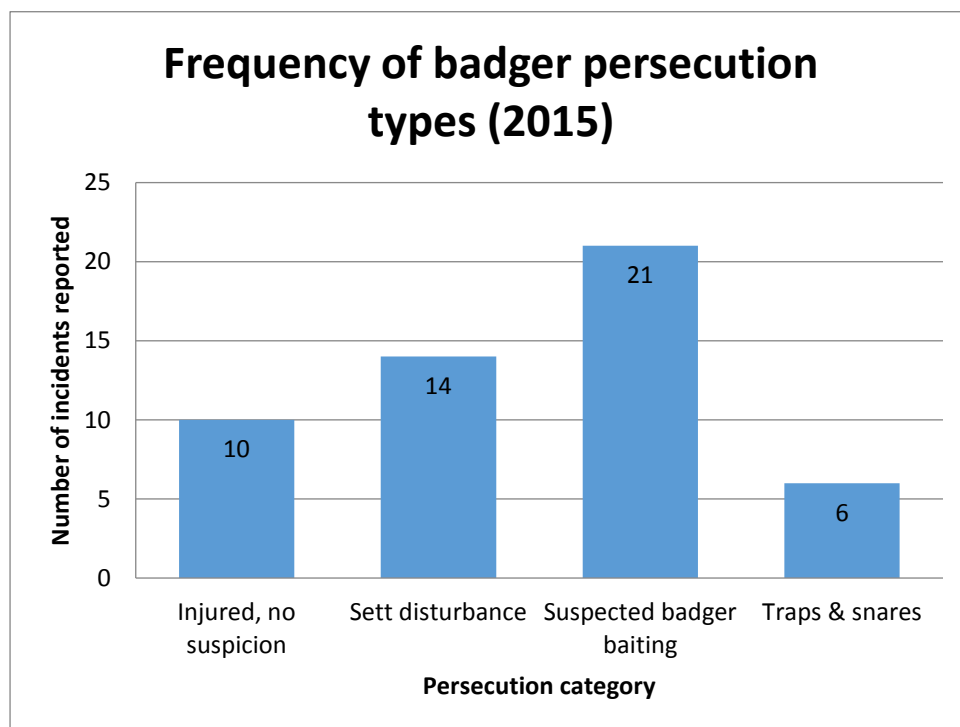


Figure 1. Frequency of various badger incidents within Northern Ireland during 2015

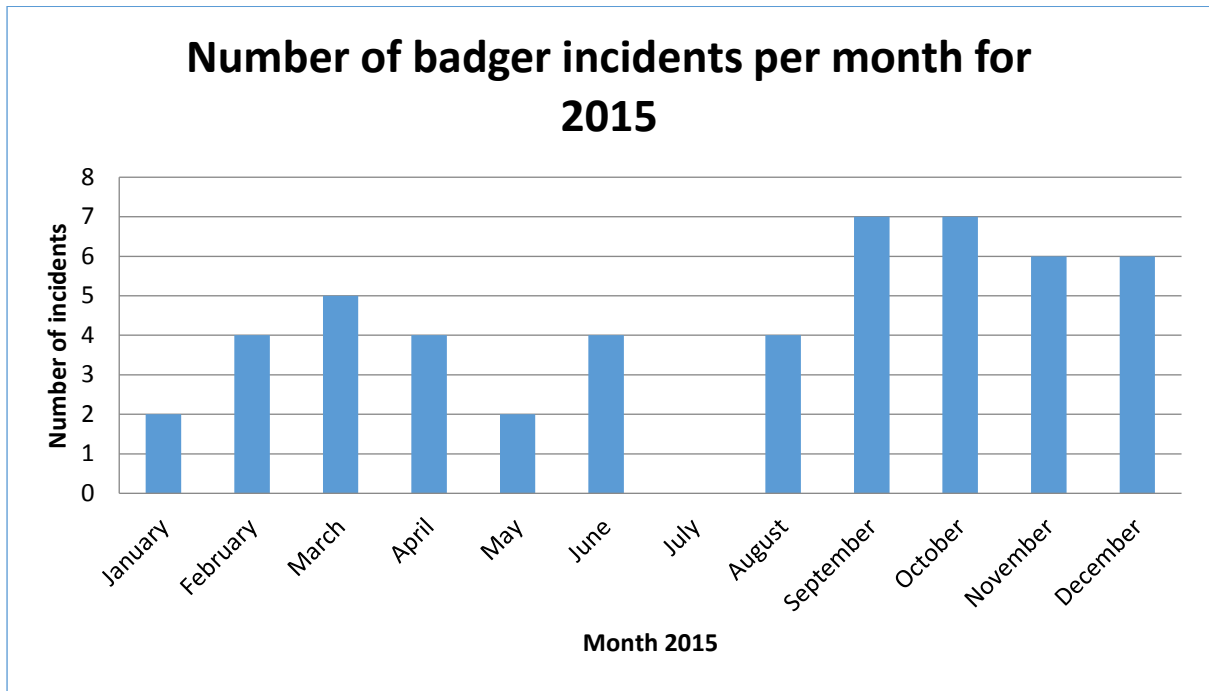


Figure 2. Frequency of various badger incidents per month within Northern Ireland during 2015

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

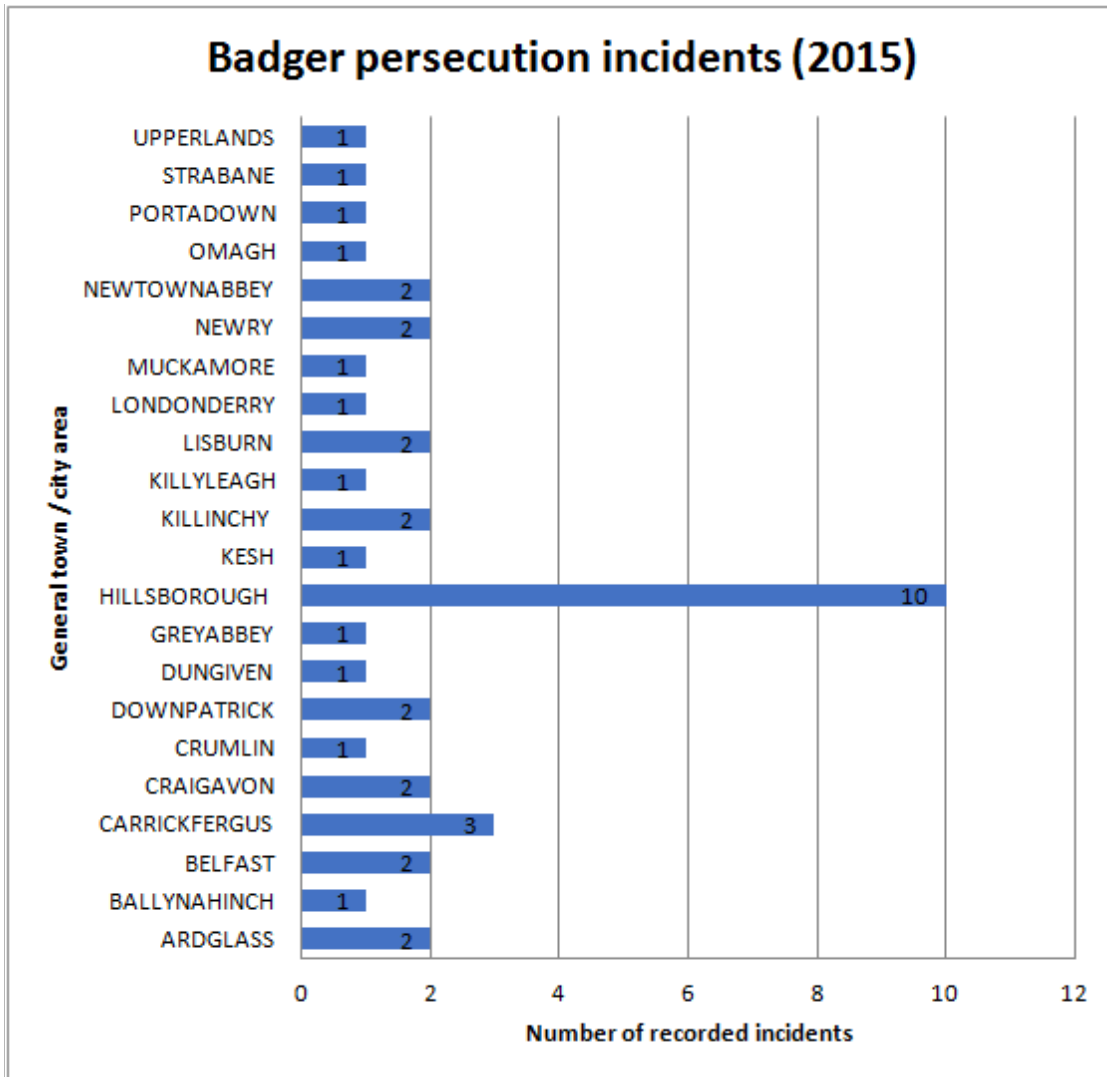


Figure 3. The number of badger incidents reported to and logged by PSNI during 2015, based upon general town / city areas

DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS DURING 2015

Sett-disturbance incidents

There have been 14 cases of sett disturbances that have been reported to and recorded by the PSNI during 2015. These were predominately concentrated in the south County Antrim and north County Down.

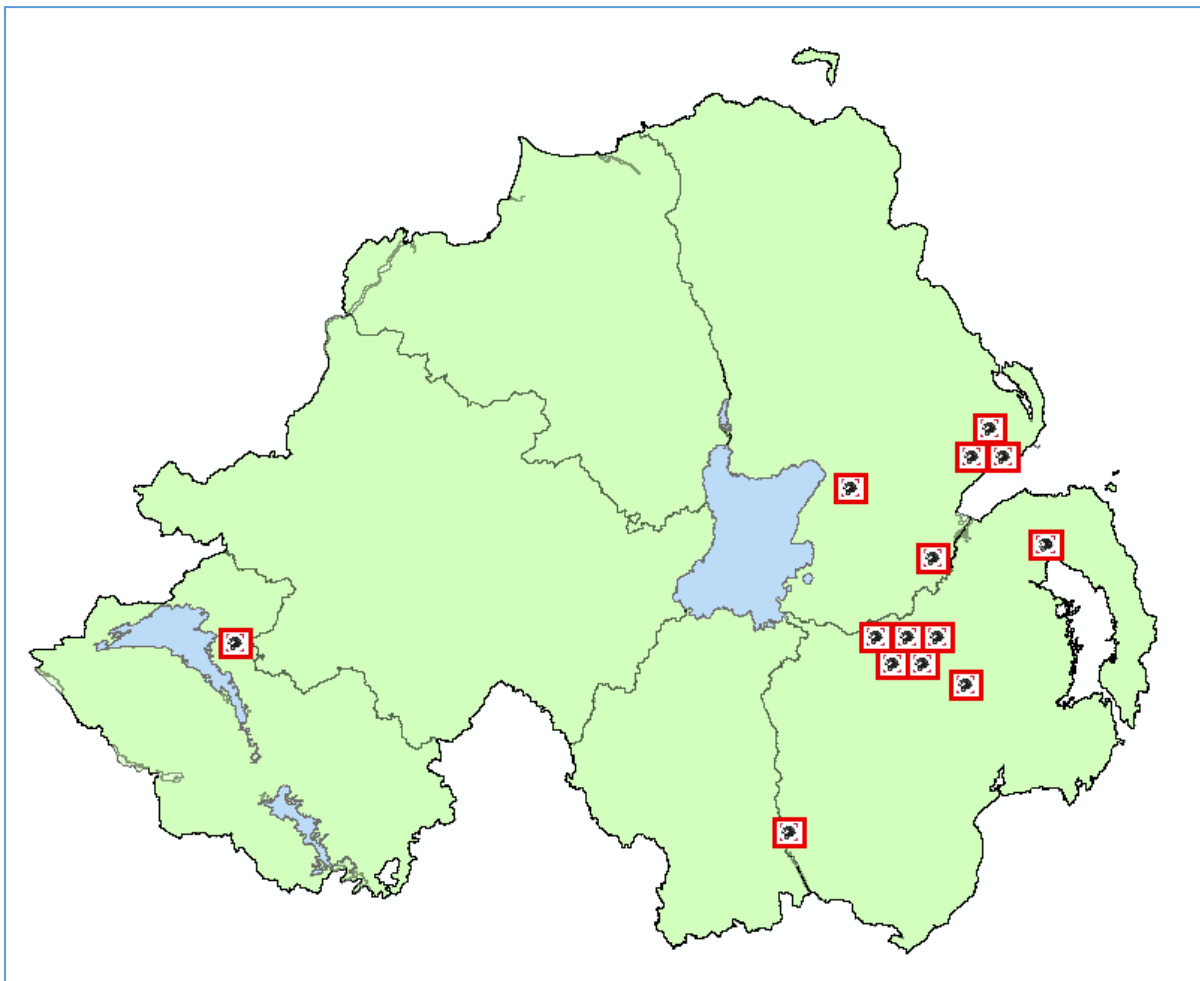


Figure 4. Distribution of sett-disturbance incidents during 2015

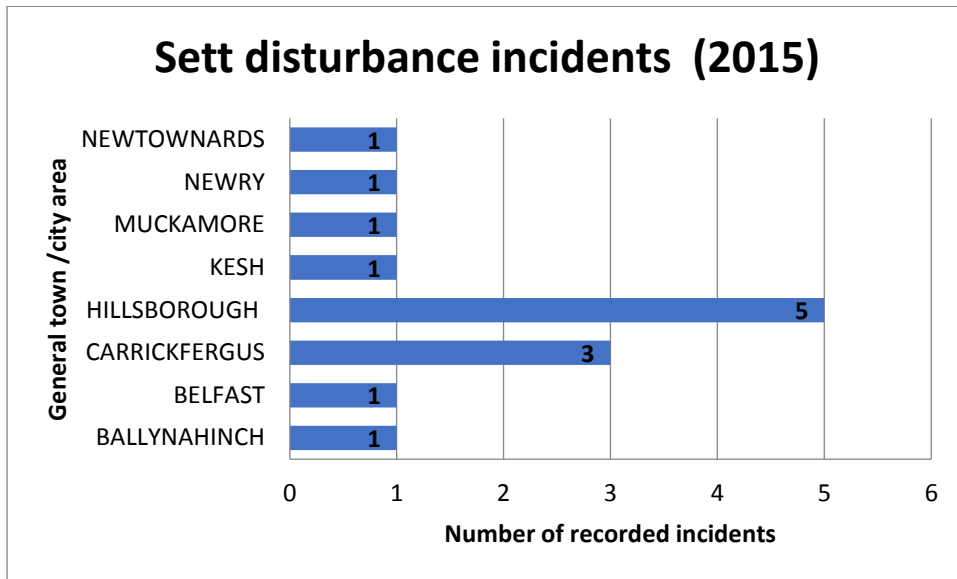


Figure 5. Sett disturbance incidents in general areas of towns / cities logged by PSNI in 2015

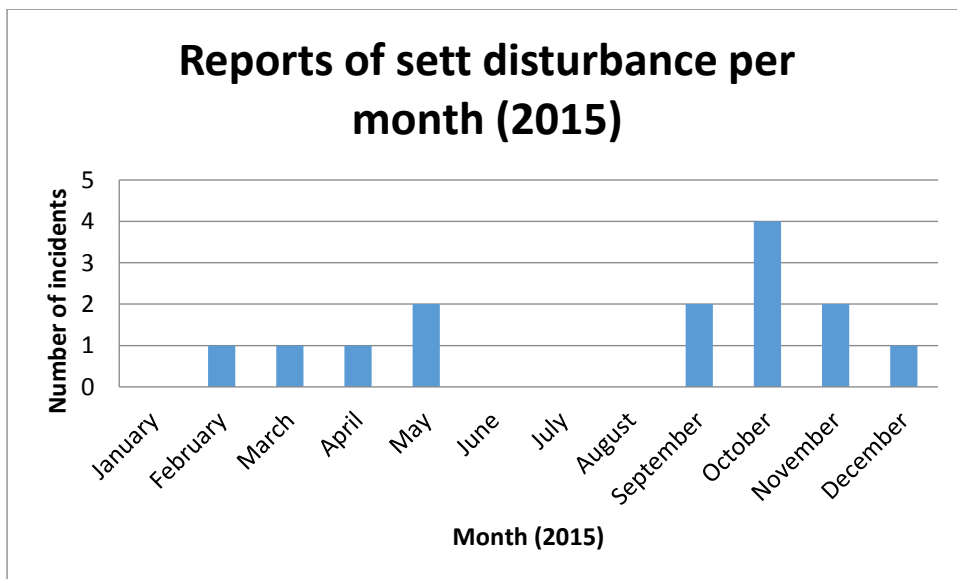


Figure 6. Sett disturbance incidents logged by PSNI by month in 2015

Suspected badger-baiting incidents

There have been 21 cases of sett disturbances that have been reported to and recorded by the PSNI during 2015. These were predominately in County Down, followed by north County Armagh.

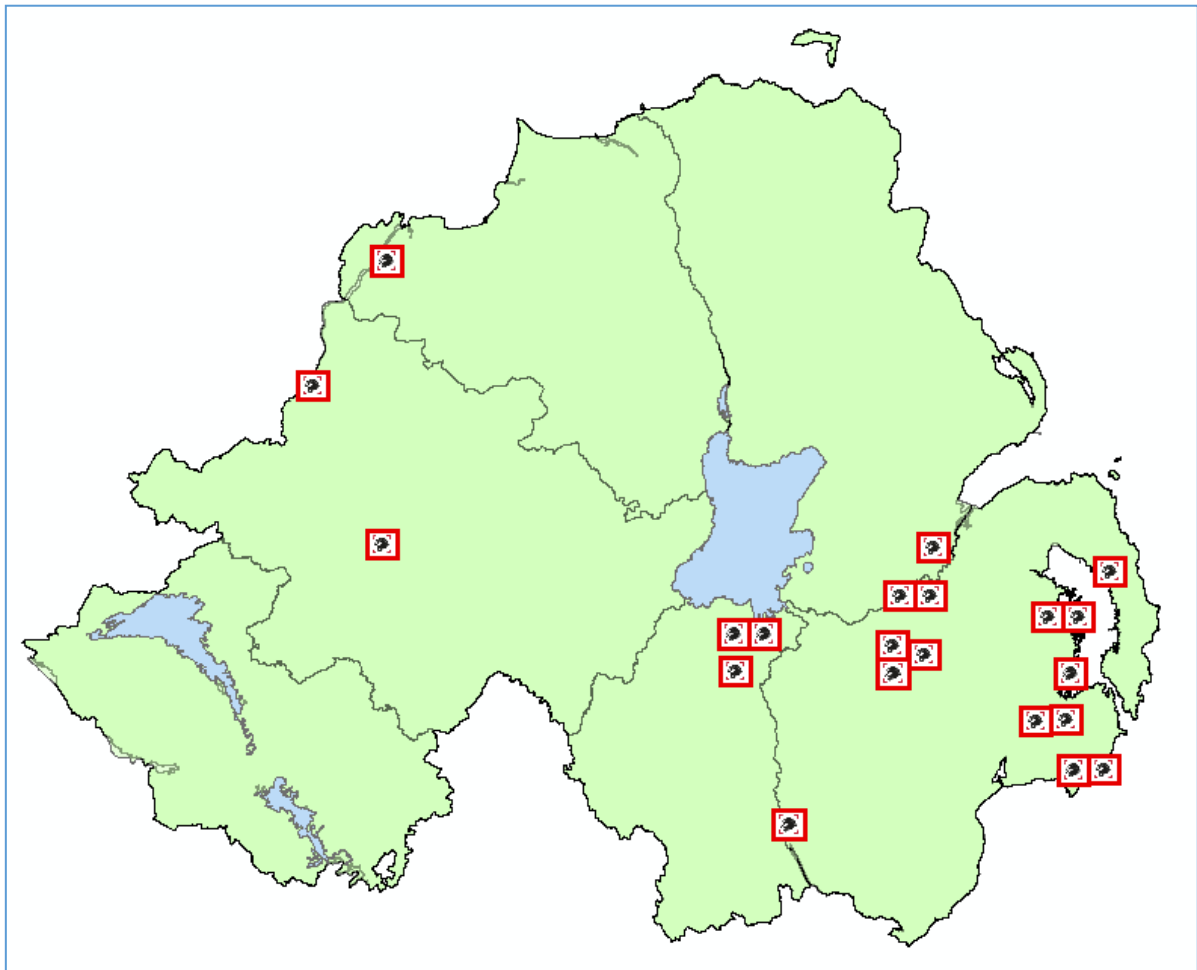


Figure 7. Distribution of suspected badger baiting (2015)

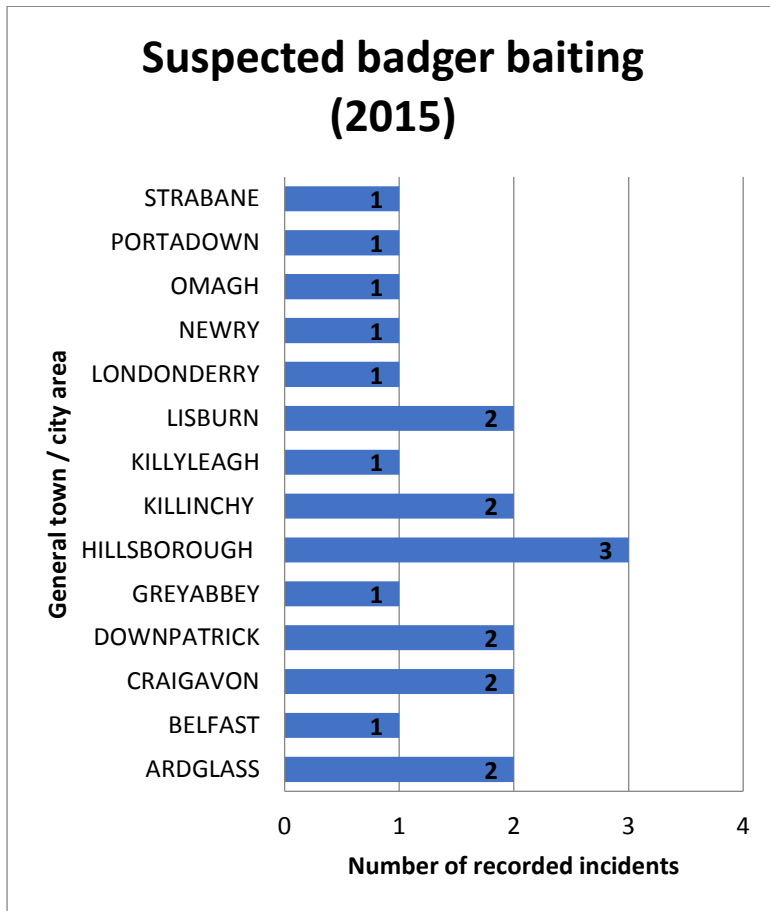


Figure 8. Suspected badger baiting incidents in general town / city areas logged by PSNI in 2015

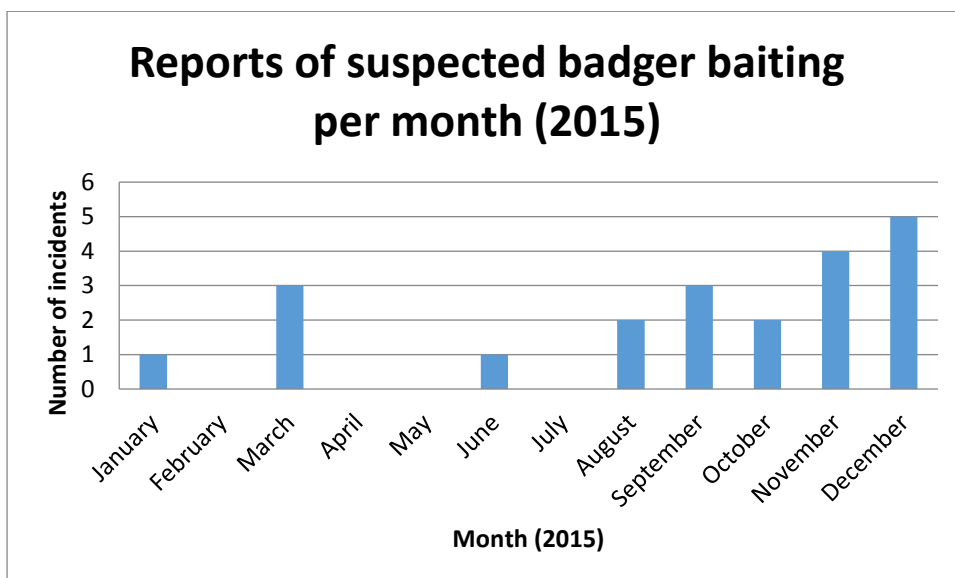


Figure 9. Suspected badger baiting incidents logged by PSNI by month in 2015

Traps and snares incidents

There have been 6 cases of traps and snares reported in relation to badgers reported to and recorded by the PSNI during 2015.

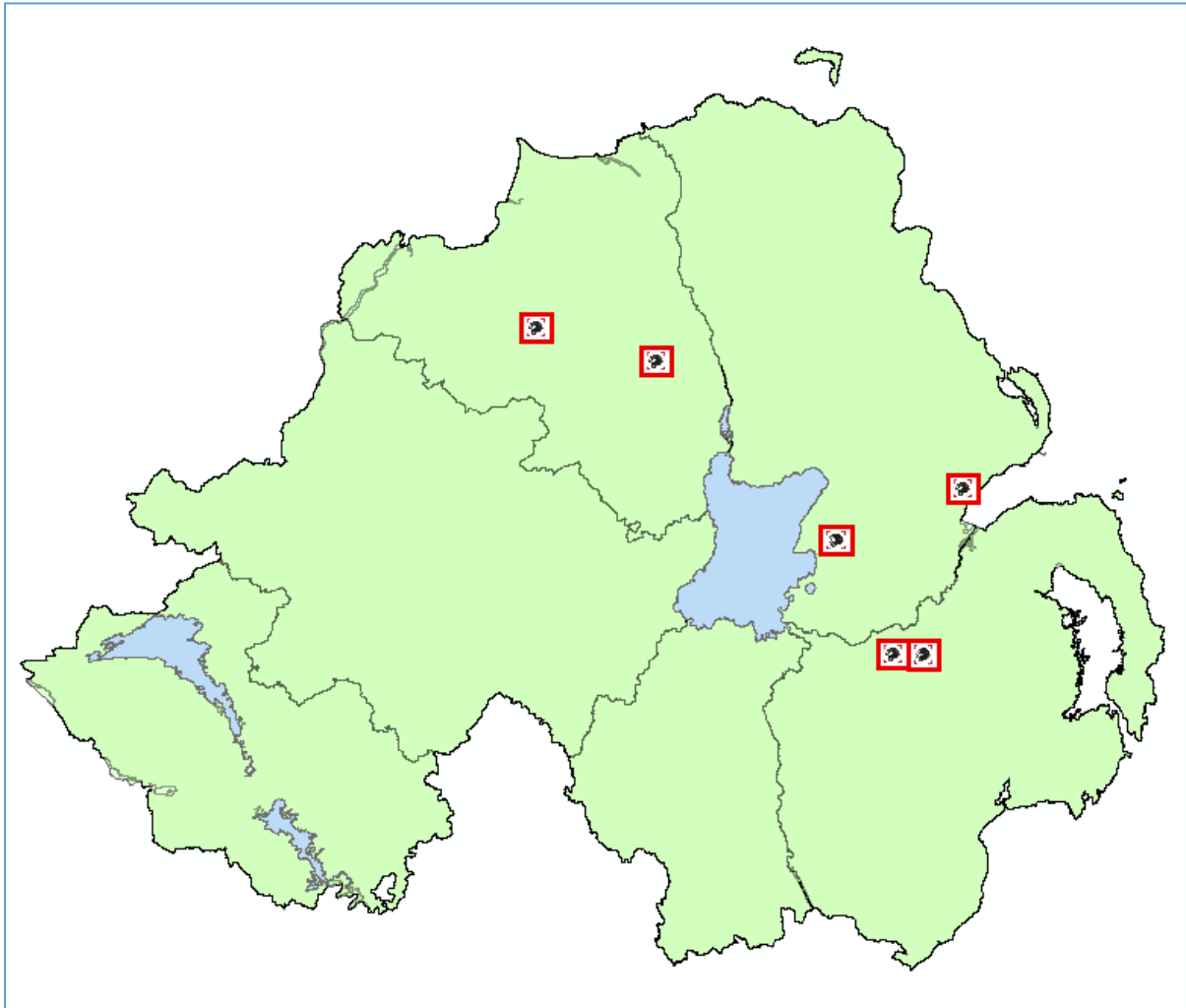


Figure 10. Distribution of trap and snare incidents (2015)

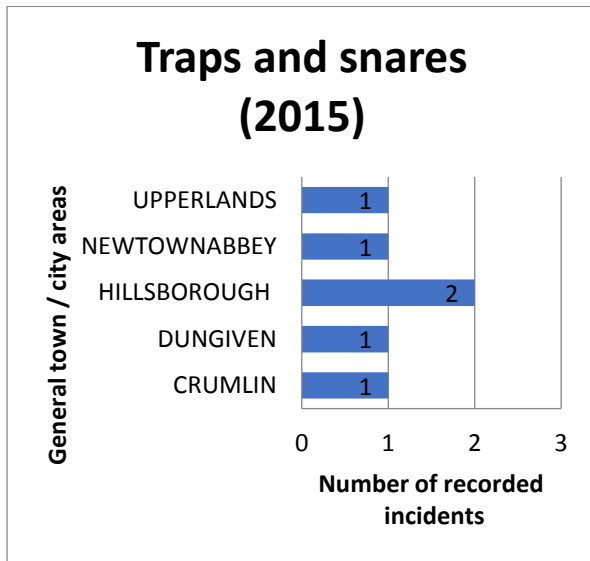


Figure 11. Trap and snare incidents in general town / city areas logged by PSNI in 2015

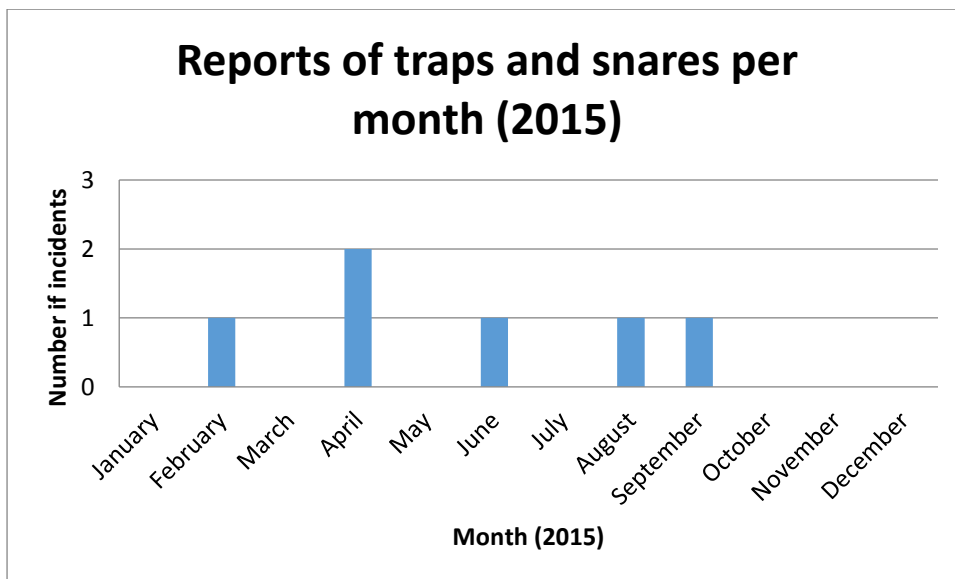


Figure 12. Frequency of trap and snare incident reports per month in 2015

DISCUSSION

It is widely believed that badger-related wildlife crime is under-reported in Northern Ireland. However, the data recorded for 2015 present a relative picture of the incidence of reported badger baiting and sett disturbance.

All data presented in this report were provided by the PSNI. These data are compiled from information contributed or referred to the PSNI by not only the general public but also by agencies/organisations including;

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

The reasons for under-reporting of suspected badger-related crime are not fully understood. However, lack of awareness among the general public regarding the protected status of badger setts and confusion regarding the reporting process may be contributory factors. Anecdotal evidence suggests a lack of public confidence in the reporting process. This situation is exacerbated by a concern for personal safety as there are often links, real or perceived, between those who perpetrate badger crime and criminal groups.

At a general level, 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. Incidents involving sett disturbance that come to light during development works, for example, may not be reported beyond the planning process or be recorded in the PSNI data at the present time.

The police non-emergency telephone number 101 reporting system has shown itself to be an effective and user-friendly channel for reporting wildlife crime. However, anecdotally there seems to be a lack of public awareness of its role in this respect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Raise awareness amongst the wider public and stakeholders and encourage the standardised reporting of suspected incidents of badger crimes.
- Publicise the crime reporting protocols and encourage reporting of wildlife crime to the police. Raise awareness of using 101 to report badger crimes.
- Publicise the Crimestoppers number for concerns of personal safety.
- 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.
- 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.

Appendix 1. Reporting a Wildlife Crime

Information taken from PAW NI's wildlife crime initiative 'Watch Out for Wildlife Crime'. See <http://www.wildlifecrime.ni.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
- USPCA

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

Appendix 3. “PAW NI” member organisations

- Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
- Belfast Zoological Gardens
- Born Free Foundation
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- British Deer Society
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
- Food Standards Agency
- Lecale Conservation
- Loughs Agency
- National Trust
- 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