

IFAW UK Manifesto: **stepping up** **for animals and** **conservation**



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IFAW is calling on the UK Government to deliver a number of actions in the lead up to elections and beyond, to support a better world for animals, people, and the planet.

By January 2025, a UK election will take place where citizens go to the polls to elect their representatives and constitute the next Government. These representatives play key roles in the decision-making process for animal welfare and conservation policy.

Harmful activities such as illegal and unsustainable wildlife exploitation and bycatch of protected marine species have contributed to alarming biodiversity loss. During the upcoming political term, opportunities to address these devastating practices will be offered. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a [toolkit](#)¹ two years ago with a plan for the UK Government to tackle wildlife crime. Gains have been made, including passing the Ivory Act 2018, but more action is needed.

The withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill in spring 2023, a vehicle which would have offered greater protection for animals, including primates, has delayed progress. In its place, we want to see stronger legislation that bans private primate keeping and reduces the number of animals in captivity.



A young red fox hunting in a field after harvest.

National wildlife crime

Many wildlife crimes in the UK occur under a veil of secrecy, with police forces too overstretched to investigate and prosecute them. Poisonings, trappings, and being set upon by dogs are some of the thousands of acts of crime and cruelty inflicted on wild animals, including badgers, foxes, hares, bats, and birds of prey.

IFAW's report, [Make Wildlife Matter²](#), draws on research by Nottingham Trent University working in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire. The findings paint a grim picture of a nation where wildlife crime is given a low status. Crimes against wild animals are not classified in the same way as other crimes involving drugs and violence, despite long-recognised links between serious organised crime and wildlife crime.

We call on the Government to protect wildlife by introducing several measures, starting with making wildlife crimes 'notifiable'—counted within national statistics. By making these offences notifiable, the detection and prosecution of key wildlife crimes can be enhanced, and more criminal offenders brought to justice.

IFAW is part of the [Time For Change Coalition³](#) of leading animal welfare charities, calling for the law to be strengthened to finally stop hunting with dogs for good. The ban on hunting with dogs is failing to protect animals from cruelty because hunters are exploiting confusing exemptions to the ban,

with trail hunting often used as a smokescreen for illegal hunting with dogs.

IFAW calls on the UK Government to:

- ▶ **Make wildlife crimes 'notifiable'. Incident recording should distinguish between types of crimes and the species involved.**
- ▶ **Close loopholes and discrepancies within wildlife law, specifically amending the Hunting Act 2004 to ban trail hunting and provide clarity for law enforcers.**
- ▶ **Increase funds for enforcement and provide prosecutorial guidance with protocol examples for different wildlife crime scenarios.** These should be complemented with binding Sentencing Council guidelines reflecting the varied nature of wildlife crime.
- ▶ **Resource one dedicated full-time wildlife crime officer per police force.** It is vital that wildlife crime is considered a specialist area rather than incorporated into rural crime issues.



Poacher Watch Area sign in the British countryside.

Illegal wildlife trade and trafficking

The UK has committed to delivering on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework—a deal signed by 195 countries aimed at protecting 30% of our land and oceans by 2030 and ending human-induced extinctions of known threatened species. The UK Government were also at the forefront of global conservation efforts in 2023, confirming plans to extend the ban on dealing in elephant ivory to five other endangered, CITES-listed species—hippopotamuses, walruses, narwhals, sperm whales, and killer whales. The Ivory Act is one of the toughest bans in the world, dealing strict penalties to those who trade in ivory illegally. Our recent studies have looked at ivory trading in the UK, pre- and post-Ivory Act. Commissioned snapshots in 2021 and 2023 showed a 66% reduction in ivory adverts on online/antique marketplaces, with some sites tracking a 95% reduction.

Yet, wildlife trafficking constitutes one of the main threats to species conservation, impacting ecosystems and regional and global security. The escalating trade in endangered animals via online marketplaces across the UK is a concern for conservation and animal welfare.

The UNDOC toolkit report found that the UK has an excellent legislative framework and expertise within the various prosecution agencies, but in the context of wildlife and forestry crime, it could not find examples of formal mutual legal assistance or extradition. Its recommendations,

many of which are reflected in the calls below, must be revisited.

IFAW calls on the UK Government to:

Specific to the Ivory Act

- ▶ **Implement the extension of the Ivory Act without delay and continue to raise awareness among the general public about the ivory trade.**
- ▶ **Advise law-abiding citizens on what they can do with unwanted ivory to prevent it from re-entering the marketplace, i.e. surrender for disposal.**
- ▶ **Clarify what evidence of legality ivory traders should display in their online adverts.**
- ▶ **Support training of relevant enforcement agencies in identifying and prosecuting illegal ivory sales.**

Tackling all illegal wildlife trade

- ▶ **Conduct an evaluation of the scale of legal and illegal wildlife trade post-Brexit.**
- ▶ **Commit more resources to the critical enforcement work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and other agencies, and support enhanced management of live animals seized from trade.**



Photo: © IFAW

Examples of raw and carved ivory.

- ▶ **Encourage online marketplaces to proactively ban or restrict sales of illegal wildlife products, with formal agreements with Government to support information sharing.**
- ▶ **Consider Lacey Act style provisions for wildlife crime (particularly cyber-enabled). The Lacey Act is a US conservation law prohibiting trade in wildlife, fish, and plants from another country that have been taken, possessed, transported, or sold in contravention of that country's laws.**
- ▶ **Extend the Online Safety Bill protections to endangered wildlife, to oblige online platforms to remove both animal abuse and wildlife trafficking content.**
- ▶ **Commit more money to the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund to support new innovations and intelligence.**

Kept animals and exotic pets

The UK market for exotic pets and the range of affected species are growing both within the UK, EU, and internationally. Stricter regulation of the legal trade in exotic pets within the UK is needed to safeguard biodiversity, public health and safety, and animal welfare. NGO reports present evidence of exotic pets being commonly held in unsuitable environments, unable to exhibit normal behaviours or have their basic welfare needs met.

IFAW calls on the UK Government to:

- ▶ **Ban the keeping of primates as pets, starting with a review of feedback from the recent consultation (July 2023) on a proposed licence scheme for the keeping of primates.**
- ▶ **Launch a consultation into the keeping of all exotic pets in the UK to understand the risks to conservation and welfare and move towards greater regulation, where people cannot keep wild animals in their homes.**



Photo: © IFAW/RSCN

Cheetah and lion cub seizures in Jordan, February 2010.

Marine conservation

The [EFRA report published in June 2023](#)⁴ noted that global biodiversity is in crisis, with the UK cited as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Yet 'mammals such as whales, dolphins, and seals play a vital role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem in a variety of ways, including cycling nutrients and playing different roles in the food chain, as well as helping to combat climate change'.

Bycatch

The UK Government is committed to preventing bycatch, and this is now a requirement under the 2020 Fisheries Act. Although there is a UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative it is estimated that over [1,000 whales, dolphins, and porpoises](#)⁵ are killed each year by UK fishing activities, as well as countless seals, sharks, skates, and rays.

Licensed fishing vessels in UK waters should be reporting marine mammal bycatch to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) within two days. But Freedom of Information requests show that [this system is not working](#)⁶. The UK's legislation is neither effective nor accountable. There are calls for the Government to introduce mandatory remote electronic monitoring (REM) to make bycatch monitoring more effective on destructive fishing vessels like supertrawlers, but we also need to be confident that all fishing vessels are being held to account. But reporting is just the first step—action to reduce and eliminate bycatch in UK waters is needed.



Photo: © Vanessa Mignon

A pod of long-beaked common dolphins swimming in the ocean.

Marine protected areas

The recently adopted UN High Seas Treaty enables the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the high seas—the parts of the ocean that lie outside of national boundaries and cover half of our planet's surface. MPAs protect habitats, rare/threatened species, and processes essential for healthy, functioning marine ecosystems and must be managed well.



Photo: © New England Aquarium/Taken under permit authorized by NOAA

A north Atlantic right whale swims through ship traffic.

Noise and ship strikes

In UK waters, major shipping activity overlaps with areas critical for protected marine species, creating both underwater noise pollution and the risk of collision (known as ship strikes). Underwater noise from shipping adversely impacts many species which rely on sound for survival to find food, to avoid predators, to communicate with one another, and to navigate. Noise pollution interferes with the ability of these animals to detect and interpret critical sounds, resulting in stress, avoidance behaviours, and disturbance. [Reducing the speeds of ships](#)⁷ has been shown to have multiple environmental benefits including less underwater noise, reduced risk of vessel strikes and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The UK should take the lead in promoting quieter, more efficient shipping.

Whaling

A moratorium on commercial hunting of whales agreed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) came into effect in 1986, yet some countries (Iceland, Japan, and Norway) continue to hunt whales commercially outside of any international control. As a member of the IWC, the UK Government has provided leadership within the Commission for many years. The IWC now faces significant fiscal challenges which threaten the future functioning of the agreement. Given the precarious position of the IWC, the UK government must continue to lead assertively to support conservation initiatives, address the issue of whaling outside of IWC control, protect the moratorium, and ensure the long-term future of the IWC.

The UK government should build partnerships with other countries to support active engagement in the activities of the Commission from the wider membership.





An endangered fin whale is flensed on shore in Hvalfjordur, Iceland.

This includes holding Members and Observers who have influence in these forums to account around damaging whaling practices.

IFAW calls on the UK Government to address the recommendations within the EFRA report and specifically:

- ▶ **Develop stronger policy to meet the requirements of the Fisheries Act and effectively implement the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative.** This should include developing regional bycatch reduction groups to implement effective mitigation measures locally.
- ▶ **Ensure existing MPAs are managed effectively, with measures to address and eliminate bycatch alongside wider measures.**
- ▶ **Introduce a UK Marine Mammal Protection Act akin to the equivalent US policy to secure greater protection**

for marine mammals and funding

(for example ‘Take Reduction Teams’ to reduce bycatch). This should be alongside pushing for action on existing marine legislation.

- ▶ **Take action to encourage the nations still conducting commercial whaling, Iceland, Norway and Japan, to stop whale hunts, and ensure new trade deals with these nations commit them to greater marine conservation.**
- ▶ **Take a leading role on the reduction of ocean noise pollution by initiating further collaboration with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others to implement the adopted underwater noise guidelines in UK waters.**
- ▶ **Ratify the High Seas Treaty and encourage other countries to do the same.**



International leadership on nature and climate

Nature 2030

IFAW are members of the Nature 2030 campaign alongside more than 95 charities demanding a vote for nature at the next election. Only 1 in 10 members of the public think the Government is performing well on key environmental issues. Nature 2030 calls on all political parties to adopt [five landmark policies](#)⁸ for nature's recovery ahead of the 2024 General Election.

The Nature 2030 campaign asks include:

- ▶ A pay rise for farmers, doubling the support for farmers to make sure they can deliver nature-friendly farming and nature restoration.
- ▶ Making polluters pay, ensuring that businesses have nature and climate plans in place and setting new duties to drive private investment in species and habitat recovery.
- ▶ Making more space for nature, restoring more protected sites and landscapes by 2030, and creating a Public Nature Estate across England with the support of local and national partners.
- ▶ Creating more green jobs, delivering widescale habitat restoration and creating green jobs in urban, rural and coastal

habitats and in species recovery through a National Nature Service.

- ▶ A Right to a Healthy Environment, establishing a human right to clean air and water and access to nature.

IFAW call on the UK Government to:

- ▶ **Maintain leadership in multilateral environmental agreements, such as CITES, Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), particularly for the conservation of species that help mitigate climate change.**
- ▶ **Build on international leadership by supporting other countries to implement decisions adopted under multilateral environmental agreements.**
- ▶ **Commit to no further fossil fuel development.**
- ▶ **Support rewilding and nature-based solutions as vessels for climate change mitigation.**

By addressing these calls to action, this Government and the next can move us closer to a world where wildlife is protected and biodiversity matters, setting a positive precedent for other nations.



Photo: Donal Boyd / © IFAW

A group of orphaned elephant calves enjoying time outside as they undergo rehabilitation at the Zimbabwe Elephant Nursery (ZEN) in Harare, Zimbabwe. IFAW and Forestry Commission of Zimbabwe supported Wild is Life and the Zimbabwe Elephant Nursery (ZEN) to establish The ZEN Project - www.ifaw.org/international/journal/the-zen-project.

International leadership on nature and climate

The UK Government are well positioned to deliver on global commitments to climate and biodiversity as well as disaster resilience, including the Paris Agreement, the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Many wild animals play a critical role in mitigating climate change by supporting the health and productivity of ecosystems, promoting carbon sequestration, and helping regulate the carbon cycle. Protecting these animals

and their habitats is essential for building a more sustainable future. Effective conservation of species such as whales, sharks, and elephants should be fundamental to the UK Government's positions in multilateral environmental agreements.

Nature's ability to be our greatest ally in fighting climate change can only succeed if nature conservation receives the same level of political will and resources as combatting climate change. This must be done recognising that nature-based solutions to climate change, including wildlife conservation, are not a replacement for rapid greenhouse gas emissions reductions, but must happen alongside them.

About IFAW - IFAW is a global non-profit animal welfare and conservation organisation. IFAW rescues, rehabilitates, and releases animals and restores and protects their natural habitats. To address today's challenges, we partner with local communities, governments, non-governmental organisations, and businesses. Together, we pioneer new and innovative ways to help all species flourish.

Cover photo: European badger by a tree in the forest.

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Endnotes

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- 4 House of Commons (2022-2023). *Protecting Marine Mammals in the UK and Abroad*. <http://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40588/documents/197985/default/>
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