



Annual report on Natural England's enforcement activity 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

A total of 117 offences were committed on SSSIs in 2014-15, a decline from the peak which occurred in the previous financial year (Figure 1.1). The vast majority of incidents were minor and were sanctioned through warning letters. More civil sanctions were used than in previous years, and these were dominated by Enforcement Undertakings (see section 6). No criminal proceedings were brought in 2014-15.

Since data collection began in 2008, the number of offences committed by those who own or occupy sites (e.g. farmers and land managers) compared to those who have no connection with the land (e.g. recreational off-roaders) has been very similar (Figure 1.2). The number of offences committed by public bodies has been much lower.

Offences continue to be concentrated in the south of England compared to the midlands and north (Figure 1.3). Coastal and lowland grassland habitats are most frequently damaged (Figure 1.4). The variety of illegal activities continues to be wide, but dominated by vehicle use and the direct loss of habitat through construction related activities, for example tracks, walls and fences (Figure 1.5).

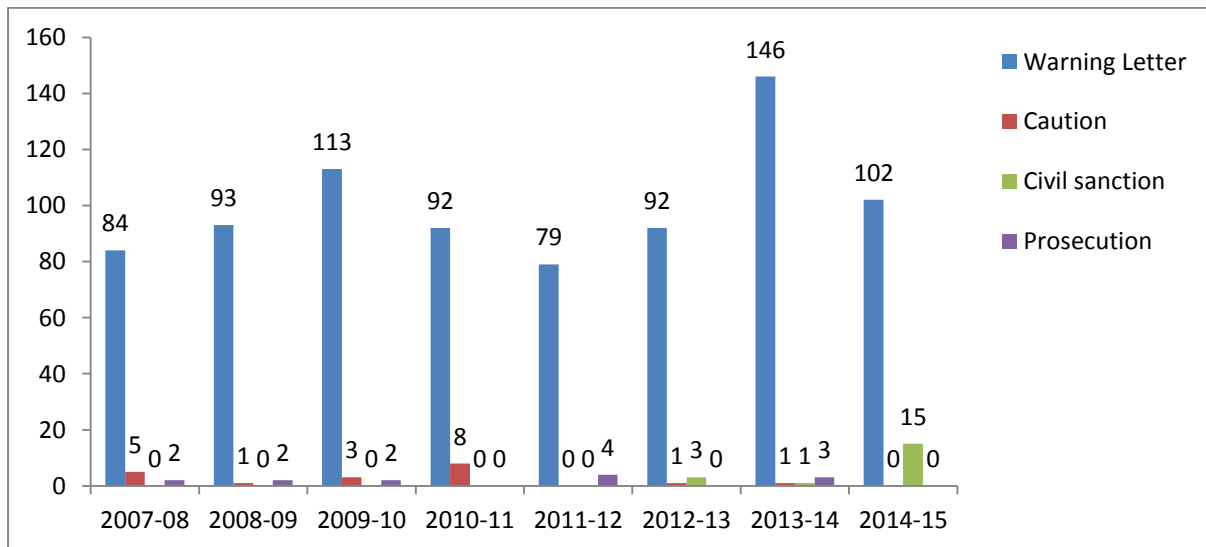


Figure 1.1. Criminal activity on SSSIs by financial year and sanction.

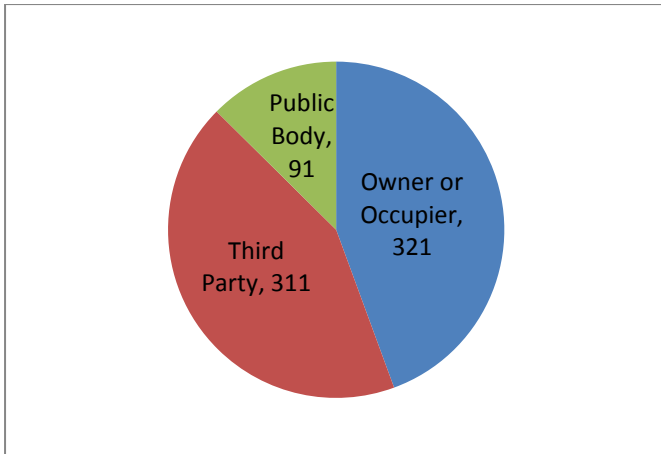


Figure 1.2. Criminal activity on SSSIs by responsible party. Data from 1 April 2008 - 31 March 2015.

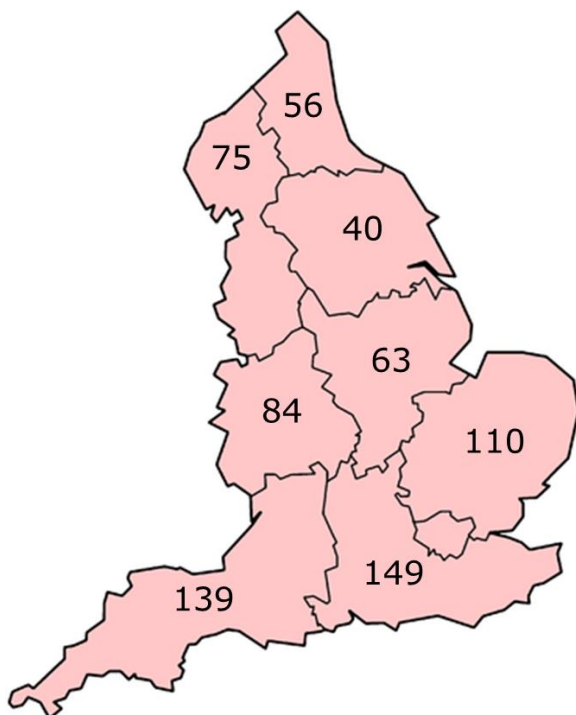


Figure 1.3. Spatial variability in criminal activity on SSSIs. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2015.

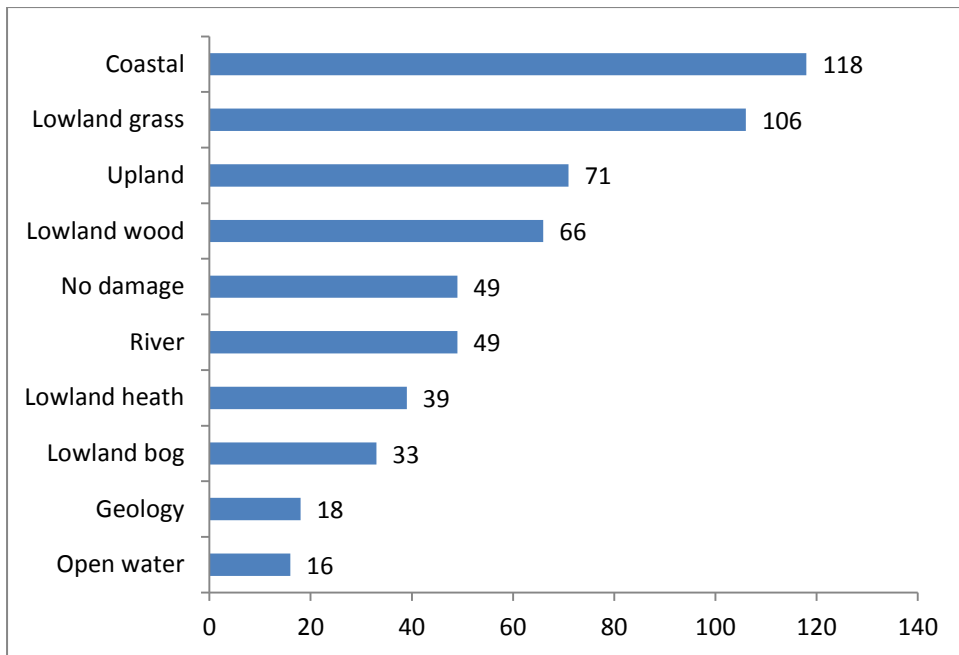


Figure 1.4. Criminal activity on SSSIs by affected habitat. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2015.

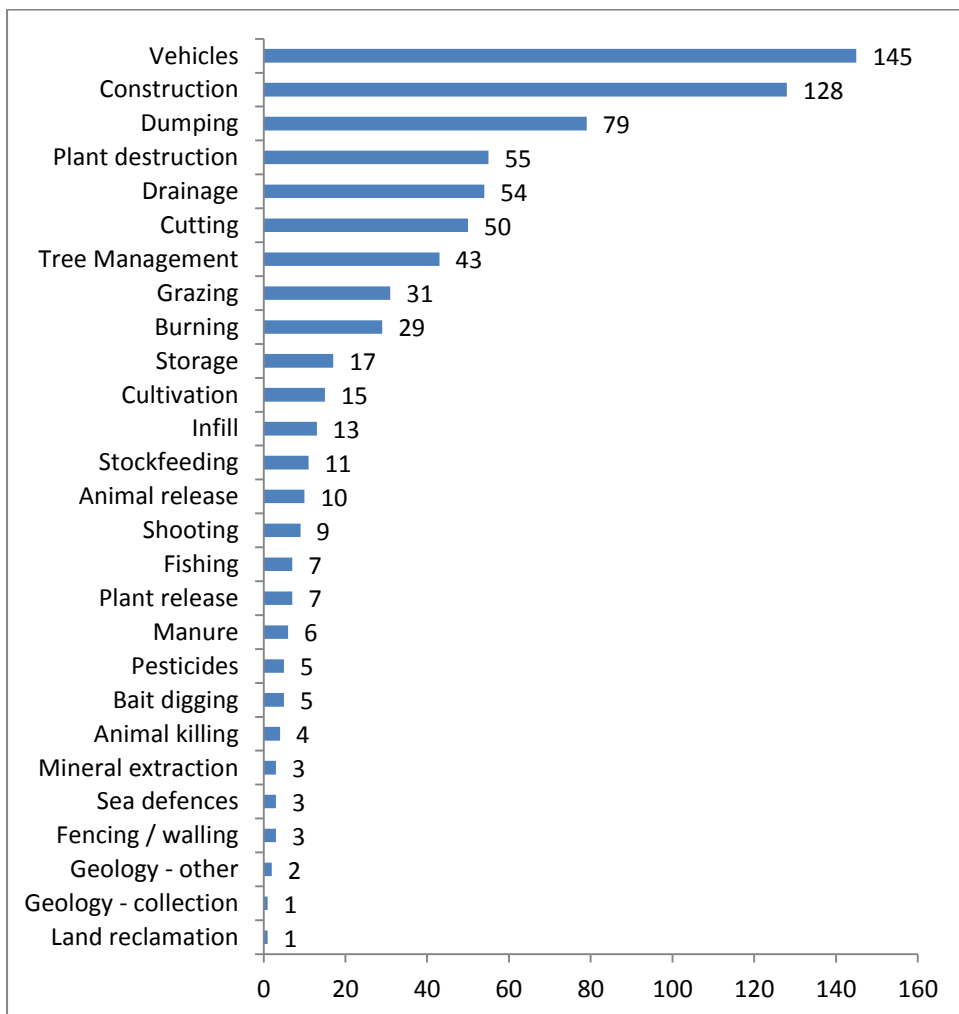


Figure 1.5. Criminal activity on SSSIs by activity. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2015.

2. Species Licensing

The number of breaches of licences has risen for the third year in a row (Figure 2.1), but most breaches remain minor and are responded to by warning letters. No cautions, civil sanctions or prosecutions were brought in 2013-14 for a breach of a species licence. The most frequently affected species are great crested newts, bats, cormorants and badgers (Figure 2.2). Offences remain concentrated in the south and particularly south-east of England (Figure 2.3).

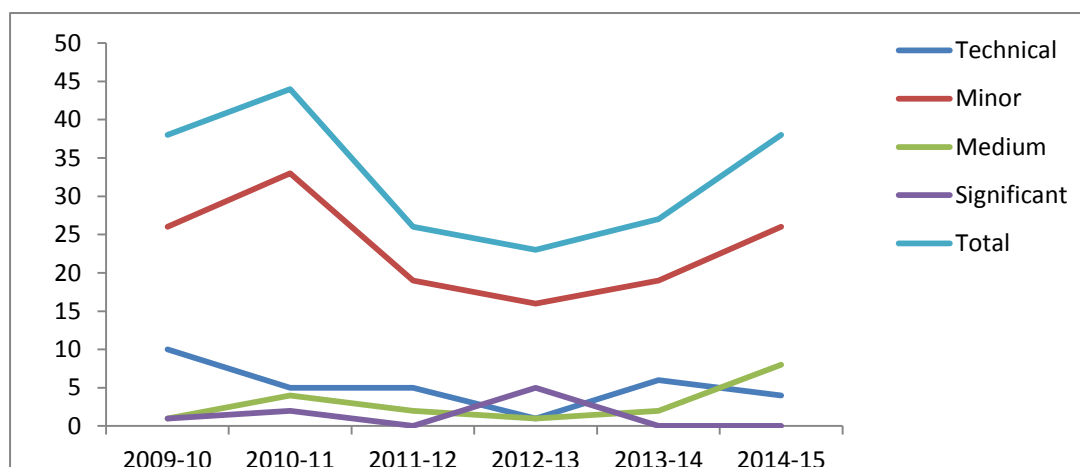


Figure 2.1. Breaches of species licences by classification. Classifications of technical, minor, medium or significant are based mainly on the environmental impact of the breach but also on a range of aggravating and mitigating factors.

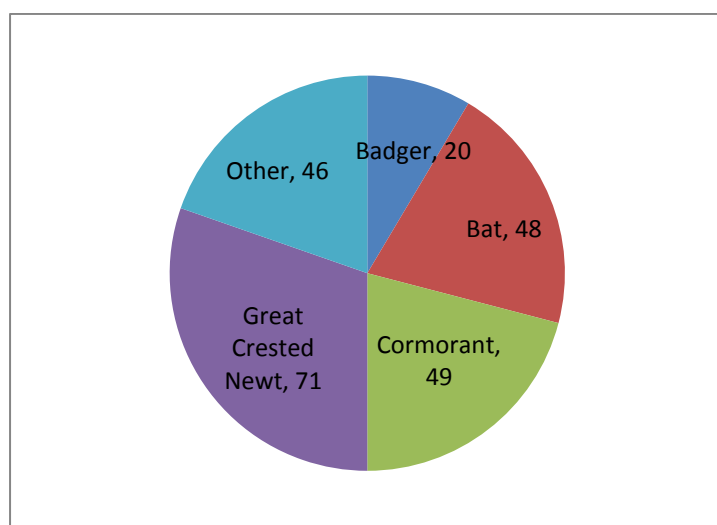


Figure 2.2. Species affected by breaches of species licences. Data from April 2009 – March 2015.

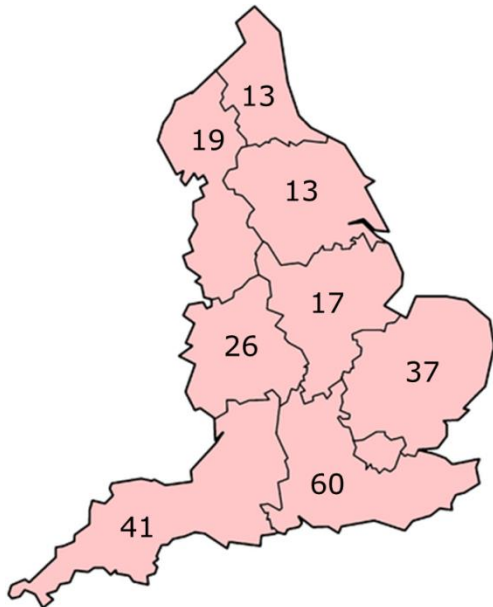


Figure 2.3. Spatial variability in breaches of species licences. Data from April 2009 – March 2015.

3. Animal poisonings

The total number of reports of animal deaths under the Wildlife Incident Investigations Scheme fell very slightly in 2014-15 to 351. Of these 258 cases were rejected on the basis that pesticides were not thought to be involved, and 103 cases were accepted into the scheme (Figure 3.1). In recent years reports of vertebrate poisonings has fallen whilst reports of invertebrate poisoning have remained steady (Figure 3.2). The number of incidents of deliberate abuse of pesticides fell markedly in 2014-15 (Figure 3.3). Cases remain unevenly spread throughout England with the highest number of incidents in the south east of England (Figure 3.4).

We issue Enforcement Notices to remedy immediate issues with storage and use of pesticides discovered as part of our enquiries. In 2014-15 we worked in conjunction with the Chemicals Regulation Directorate of HSE who issued 5 Enforcement Notices in relation to storage issues arising in Wildlife Incidents.

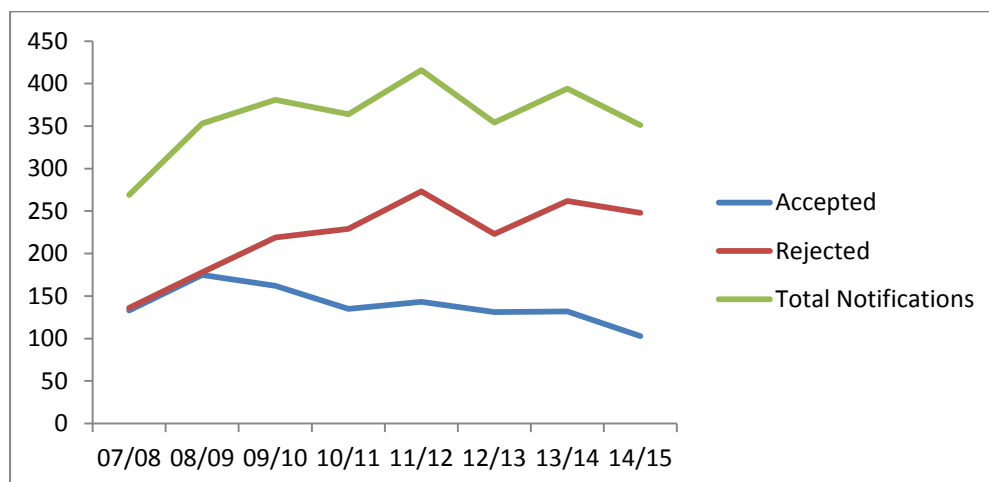


Figure 3.1. Reports of injury or death of animals to the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme. Cases are accepted if pesticides are suspected of being involved.

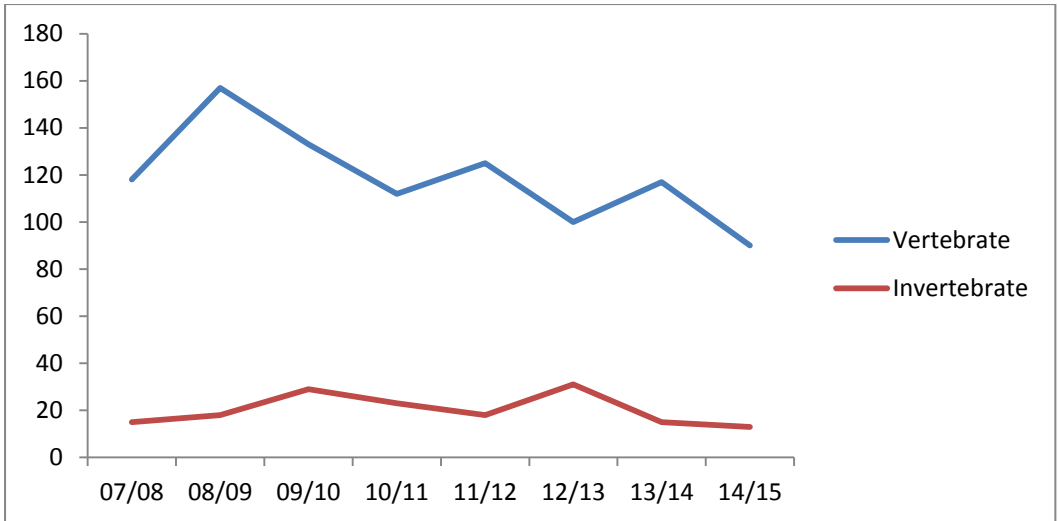


Figure 3.2. Vertebrate and invertebrate cases accepted into the WIIS scheme

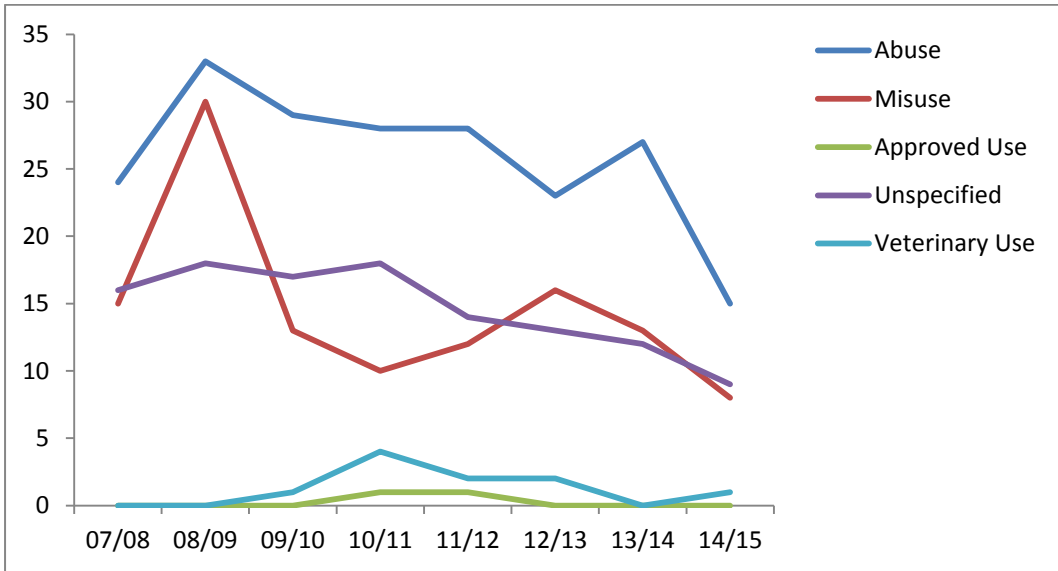


Figure 3.3. Classification of poisoning incidents by suspected use of pesticide

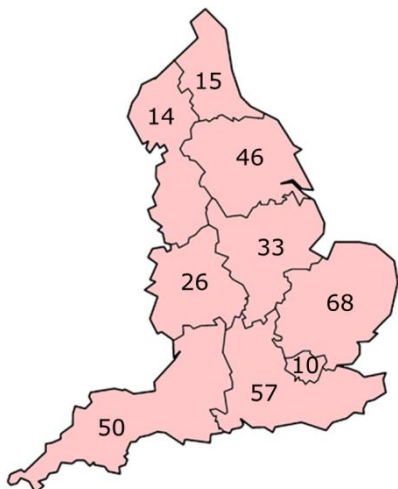


Figure 3.4. Confirmed pesticide cases by Government Region. Data from April 2009 – March 2015.

4. Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations

In 2014 there was a decline in the number of queries received by our helpline as well as a decline in incidents that we investigated (Table 4.1). One Restoration Notice was served.

Table 4.1. Enforcement action relating to the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations

Year	Queries	Investigations	Stop Notices	Restoration Notices	Prosecutions
2006	1795	21	0	0	0
2007	1462	20	2	0	0
2008	1105	23	1	0	0
2009	633	19	0	1	0
2010	575	23	0	0	0
2011	899	48	2	1	0
2012	1627	51	1	1	0
2013	1640	68	0	1	1
2014	1292	50	0	1	0

5. Injurious weeds

Complaints of damage caused by injurious weeds have continued to fall in recent years (Table 5.1). In 2014 only 17 enforcement notices were served and no clearance actions were required.

Table 5.1. Enforcement action relating to injurious weeds

Year	Complaints	Inspections	Enforcement notices	Clearance actions	Prosecutions
2006	342	67	19	5	0
2007	234	117	52	2	0
2008	319	136	39	3	0
2009	202	73	40	0	0
2010	145	41	24	2	0
2011	230	86	46	0	0
2012	193	72	36	1	0
2013	127	59	37	0	0
2014	94	52	17	0	0

6. Prosecutions, civil sanctions and cautions

April 2014

In April 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with the West Wittering Estate, after they undertook repair works to sea defences within Chichester Harbour SSSI without our consent. The repair works were affecting the geomorphological interest at the site. The Enforcement Undertaking required the Estate to make alternations to the defences that removed the risk to the geomorphological features whilst still allowing a level of protection to property. These works were completed in September and a completion certificate was issued.



June 2014

In June 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a farmer who had cleared out a ditch within Walton Moss SSSI in Cumbria. We were concerned that the mire may become too dry and the material excavated from the ditch had been dumped onto the mire. The Undertaking required the farmer to return the material to the ditch and to monitor and remove any invasive species.



Also in June 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a wildfowling club who had installed drainage on part of the Ribble Estuary SSSI. The club agreed to allow the drains to naturally deteriorate and to review their current management agreement.

Also in June 2014 we served our first Restoration Notice requiring the removal of a track constructed on Windy Hill within the South Pennine Moors SSSI. We had attempted to negotiate an Enforcement Undertaking with the individual responsible but this was not successful. The notice required full removal of the track and this was successfully completed in September 2014. The photographs below show the area before and after restoration.



July 2014

In July 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a land management company following the unconsented use of ring feeders. The company agreed to remove the ring feeders and all supplementary feed, spot spray invasive species and implement an appropriate grazing and cutting regime. They also committed to produce a 10 year management plan.



Also in July 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with an Estate following damage to blanket bog through unconsented vehicle use. The Estate agreed to re-profile the damaged land and to repair grip blocks that were also damaged by the vehicles.



September 2014

In September 2014 we agreed our first Enforcement Undertaking under the EIA Agriculture Regulations. In Longstone Edge in Derbyshire Bleaklow Industries Ltd destroyed over 5ha of semi-natural grassland through levelling and the importation of top-soil. The company

agreed to undertake restoration. As the area was of particular importance for great-crested newts this concentrated on the creation of breeding ponds and terrestrial habitat.

October 2014

In October 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a company who owned a golf course adjacent to the Medway Estuary SSSI. The company levelled an area of grazing marsh. To compensate for the loss of pools important for breeding waders, the company agreed to create 5 surface water features. They also agreed to desilt and extend some of the borrow dykes in the area.

November 2014

In November 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a landowner to restore damage caused to MG5 grassland within Rose End Meadows SSSI in Derbyshire. The damage was caused by the installation of a drainage pipe which was not carried out in accordance with the works specification detailed within his HLS agreement, together with vehicular damage caused during maintenance of stone walling on the site. The agreed works involved the infilling of an unconsented trench, relaying of turves and spreading of green hay.



December 2014

In December 2014 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with Northern Powergrid Ltd. Contractors were undertaking works for the company outside the SSSI boundary, but two contractors drove excavators through the SSSI which became submerged in blanket bog. The vegetation and peat were damaged during recovery of the vehicles. Northern Powergrid Ltd agreed to repair the damage, mainly by installing peat bunds.



January 2015

In January 2015 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a landowner who had felled a large number of trees to create an extensive access track through a woodland within Crowhill Valley SSSI, Cornwall. The Undertaking requires tree planting to make the track shorter and narrower.



Bowes Moor

In February 2015 we agreed two Enforcement Undertakings with a shooting estate on Bowes Moor SSSI, Northumbria. The first involved rectifying drainage issues associated with the construction of a shooting butt. The second involved stabilisation and reseeding of a bank that had been excavated during track construction.



March 2015

In March 2015 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a limited company on the River Eye SSSI in Leicestershire following damage to river through dredging operations.



Also in March 2015 we agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with a farming partnership on Kings Lud's Entrenchment and the Drift SSSI, also in Leicestershire, following damage caused by unconsented water pipe repair work.

