



1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

A total of 101 offences were committed on SSSIs in 2015-16, a slight decline from the peak which occurred in during the financial year 2013/14 (Figure 1.1). The vast majority of incidents were minor and were concluded using warning letters. The number of civil sanctions utilised has declined from the previous year. Though the use of civil sanctions during 15/16 was dominated by Enforcement Undertakings, three Stop Notices were also issued, the first since the use of Civil Sanctions commenced in 2012 (see section 6). No criminal proceedings were brought in 2015-16.

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).

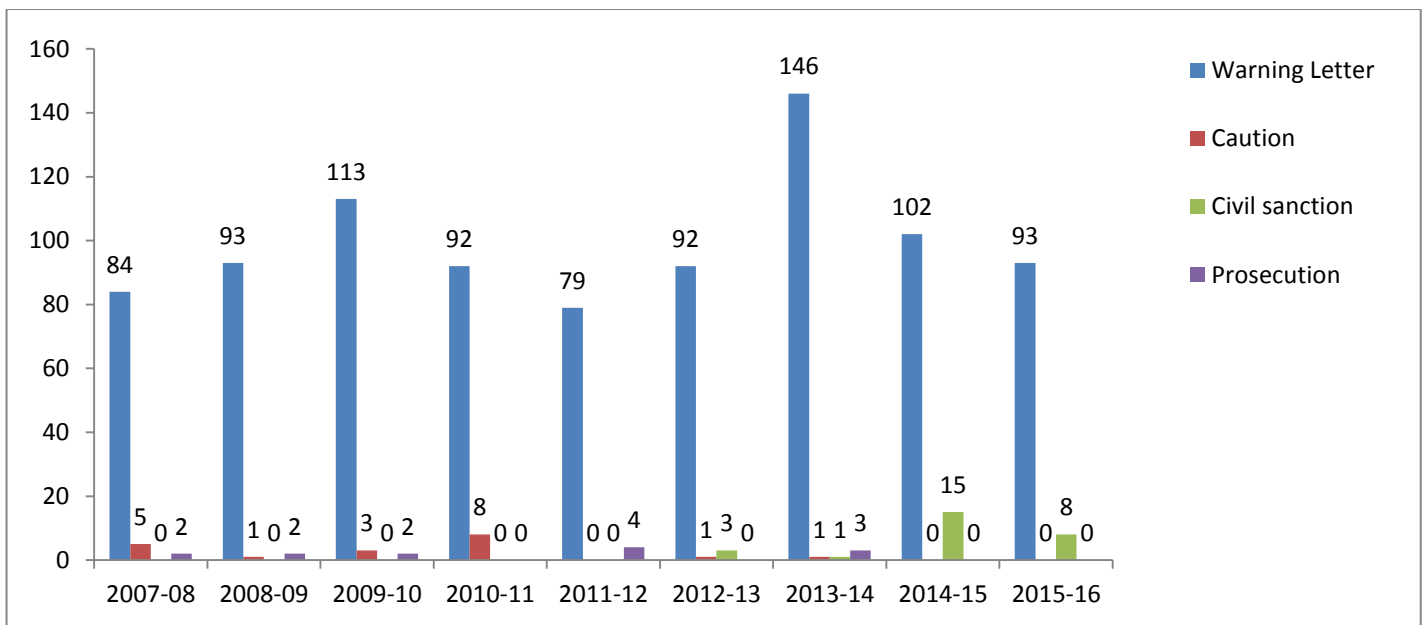


Figure 1.1. Criminal activity on SSSIs by financial year and sanction.

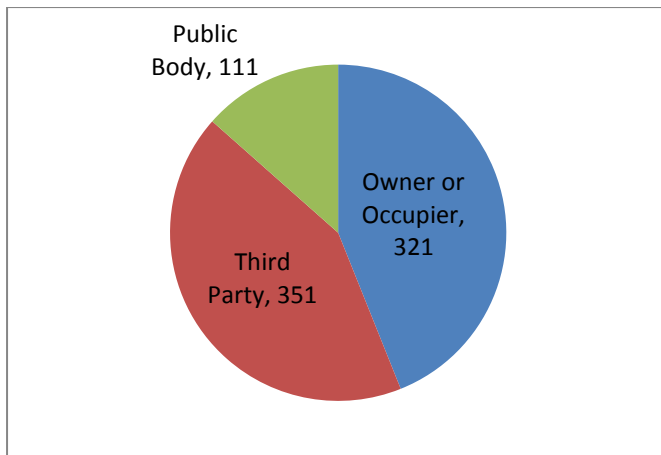


Figure 1.2. Criminal activity on SSSIs by responsible party. Data from 1 April 2008 - 31 March 2016

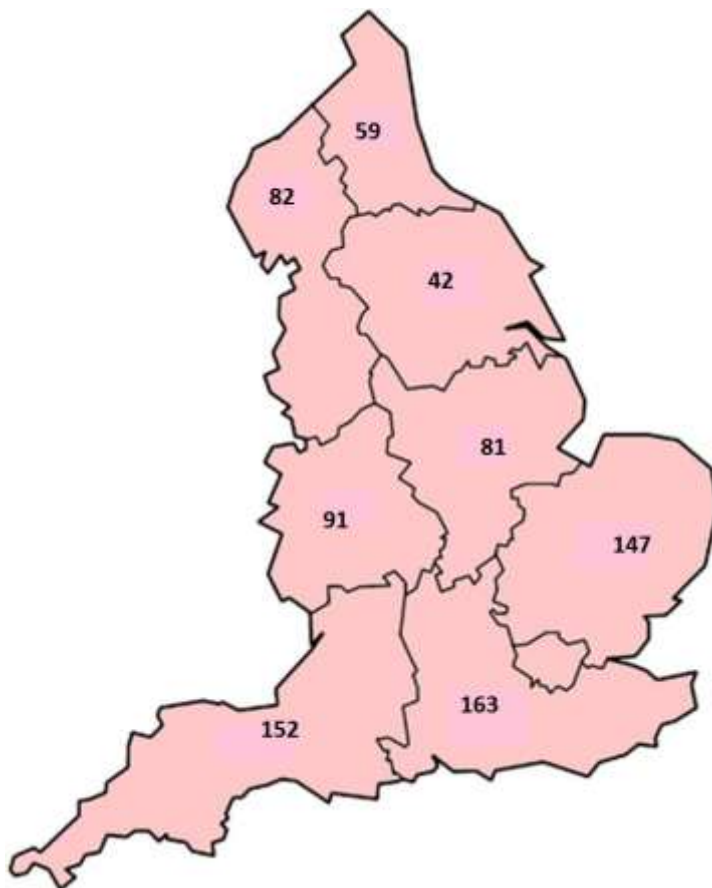


Figure 1.3. Spatial variability in criminal activity on SSSIs. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2016.

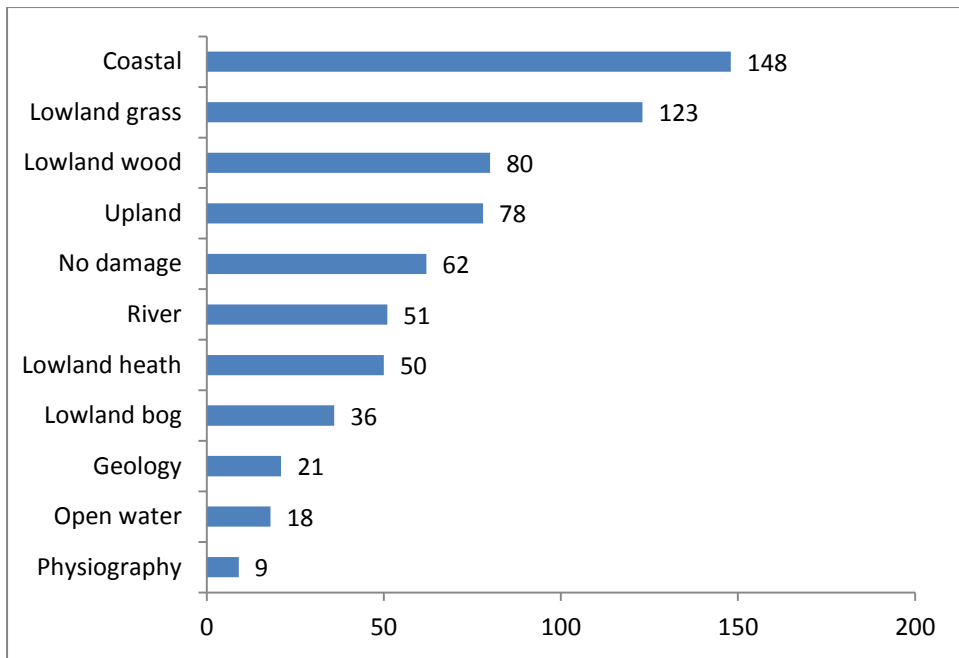


Figure 1.4. Criminal activity on SSSIs by affected habitat. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2015.

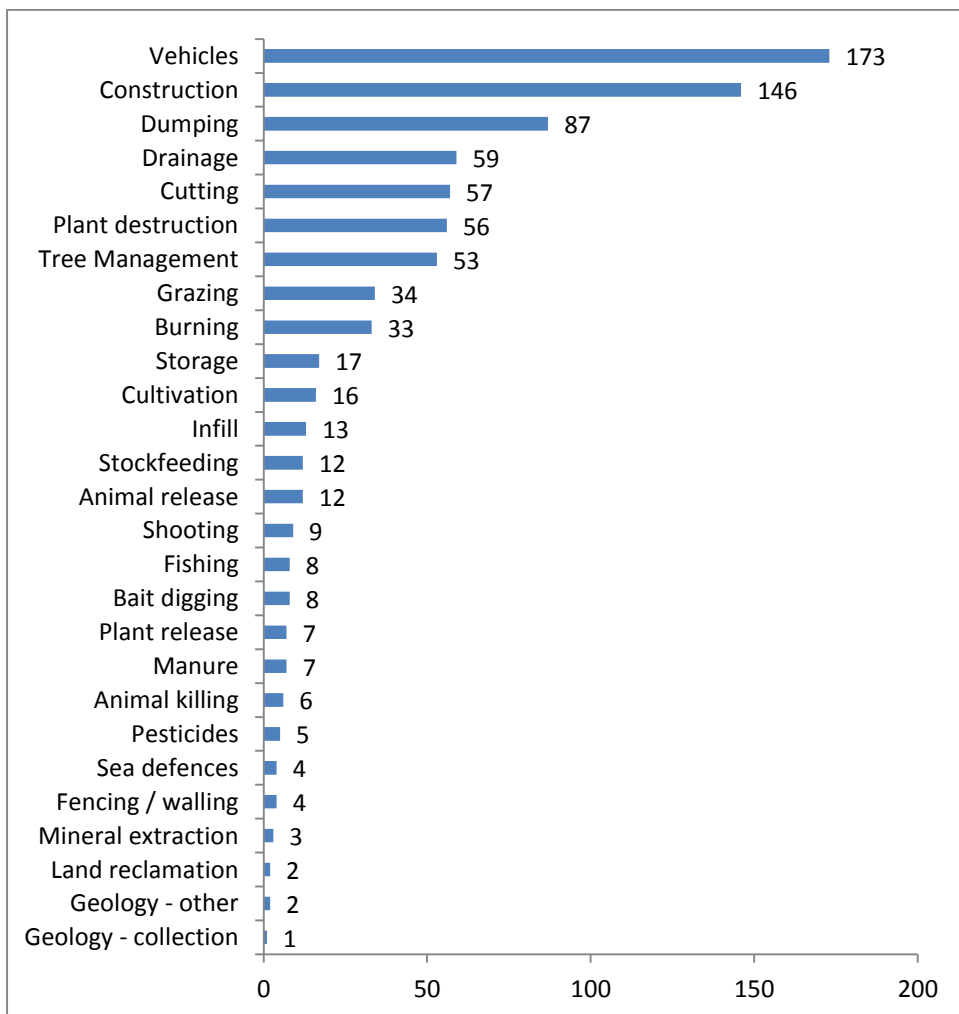


Figure 1.5. Criminal activity on SSSIs by activity. Data from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2015.

2. Species Licensing - TBA

3. Animal poisonings - TBA

4. Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations

In 2015 there was an increase in the number of queries received by our helpline as well as a slight increase 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
2015	1391	55	0	1	0

5. Injurious weeds

Complaints of damage caused by injurious weeds increased slightly in 2015 but reported number remain low compared to the peak in 2006 (Table 5.1). In 2015 18 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
2015	113	49	18	0	0

6. Prosecutions, civil sanctions and cautions

April 2015

In April 2015 Natural England served Stop Notices on Mr T Bell and Mr T Evans (not SSSI Owners or Occupiers) after Jet Ski activity was found to be causing, or presented a significant risk of causing, serious harm to the internationally important colonies of breeding sea birds which are features of the Flamborough Head SSSI, North Yorkshire. The activities covered by the Stop Notices were the use of mechanically propelled personal watercraft including Jet Skis between 1 March and 30 September within areas adjacent to Flamborough Head Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Jet Ski activity at Flamborough Head SSSI



Also in April, Natural England served a stop notice on Mr D Daly (not a SSSI owner or occupier) after it was found that horses grazing land within the Nene Washes SSSI, Cambridgeshire, during the bird breeding season (1st February to 31st August) presented a significant risk of causing serious harm to nationally important populations of breeding wet grassland birds. The Stop Notice required the cessation of grazing of land within the Nene Washes SSSI with livestock between 1st February and 31st August.

May 2015

In May Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with Terrace Hill Farm LLP at Croxton Park SSSI, Leicestershire, following unconsented pheasant rearing activities, damaging vehicle activity and the unconsented supplementary feeding of grazing animals. These activities had resulted in damage to the grassland feature of the SSSI, as a result of compaction and poaching from vehicle use and supplementary feeding, as well as impacts upon the lichen assemblage of the site due to nutrient enrichment caused by pheasant rearing activity. The EU required immediate removal of feeding troughs and amendments to

pheasant management, control of weed and invasive species and survey work to inform necessary habitat restoration works.

Also during May 2015, Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking to deal with approximately 0.5ha of damage to the grassland notified feature of Lount Meadows SSSI, Leicestershire. This EU, agreed with Huntley Wood Investments Ltd., aimed to address damage resulting from unconsented dumping of material on the SSSI and damage caused by vehicle access.



June 2015

In June Hedgeley Farms proactively offered an Enforcement Undertaking to cover restoration of heather moorland damaged as result of a managed burn becoming out of control at Bewick and Beanley Moors SSSI, Northumberland. The restoration, covering an area of approximately 43ha, included a commitment to no further managed burning in the area affected, review of grazing management, bracken control and ongoing monitoring of recovery.



An enforcement undertaking was agreed with Prees Storage Limited, also in June 2015, to restore an area of heathland following the unconsented construction of an area of hard-standing, for the storage of vehicles, within the Prees Heath SSSI, Shropshire. The EU covered removal of vehicles and concrete hard standing followed by sowing of appropriate acid grassland, heather seeds and heather plug plants. Follow up monitoring was also agreed.

Also in June an Enforcement Undertaking was agreed to address damage to the grassland feature of Thoresby Lake SSSI, Nottinghamshire resulting from the unconsented passage of construction vehicles and machinery. Pierrepon Estates Ltd. agreed to the levelling of areas of bare soil, removing track marks, spreading green hay (collected from other parts of the SSSI) and, where necessary, undertaking follow up weed control. The works have resulted in restoration of 0.1ha of grassland SSSI.

Before restoration



After restoration



August 2015

In August 2015 NE agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with Rutland Council following damage to the calcareous grassland feature of the Toletorpe Road Verges SSSI, Rutland. Inappropriate cutting of the grassland led to the uprooting of vegetation and, since the arisings were not removed, smothering of the sward. The area of damage was estimated to cover approximately 80% of the SSSI grassland area. Agreed restoration works included the replacement of dislodged turves, control of weeds and monitoring to determine successful restoration.

September 2015

In September Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with J&C Hibert with the aim of restoring damage to the Kedleston Park SSSI, Derbyshire. The unconsented creation and subsequent use of a track through the SSSI, as well as the dumping of material (garden waste, straw and grain), was considered to be a threat to saproxylic invertebrate feature of the SSSI. The EU required the removal of all dumped material, filling of ruts along the length of the track and cessation of use of the track.



Following the dumping of manure within the Fens Pools SSSI, West Midlands, Natural England agreed an enforcement undertaking with Mrs Berrisford (not a SSSI landowner or occupier) to remove the manure. The dumping was considered to be detrimental to the habitat supporting great crested newts, a SSSI interest feature, and manure was removed from site during September. A completion certificate has been issued and the case is now closed.

In September 2015 an Enforcement Undertaking was agreed with Mr G Bond following unconsented creation of an access route, vegetation clearance and coppicing of trees within Quants SSSI, Somerset. Approximately 600m² of SSSI woodland had been damaged as a result of the works but the enforcement undertaking aimed to rectify this by erecting stock proof fencing to exclude grazing animals (for 5 years), protection of coppice stools against browsing and the retention of felled timber in piles to provide deadwood habitat.

Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with the Mexborough & Hawnby estate in September 2015, to address unconsented works to upgrade an existing track and install ten sunken grouse shooting butts within the North York Moors SSSI, North Yorkshire. The Estate agreed to remove the butts and associated drainage as well as undertaking works to achieve re-vegetation of the track sides.

Before restoration



After restoration



October 2015

During October 2015 Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with Mr Frank, a land owner of Morton Pool and Pasture SSSI, Shropshire. The works agreed in the EU addressed unconsented ditch works by restoring the original level of the ditch, installing flow control barriers and removing ditch spoil from surrounding areas of grassland. This resolved the potential degradation and damage to over 3.5 ha of wet grassland habitat.



At Long Dale and Gratton Dale SSSI, Derbyshire, Mr Davie-Thornhill proactively reported potentially damaging activity within the SSSI resulting in the agreement of an Enforcement Undertaking. This EU resulted in the cessation of pheasant rearing activity and removal of pheasant pen from the SSSI allowing natural regeneration and ensuring that further degradation of the calcareous grassland feature of the site was not observed.

Also in October, Natural England and Messer's R & S Murphy agreed an Enforcement Undertaking to address damage caused to the woodland ground flora within Hense Moor SSSI, Devon. The damage was caused following the unconsented excavation and de-silting

of a pond located within the SSSI boundary. The material removed from the pond was then spread in adjacent areas leading to the smothering of approximately 500m² of SSSI vegetation. The EU required the removal of this material to allow the natural regeneration of vegetation.

During restoration works



Following a breach of the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations Natural England agreed an Enforcement undertaking with Mr Dennis, landowner at Botloes Green, Gloucestershire. Mr Dennis had ploughed over 2ha of semi-natural grassland and subsequently sown an arable crop. The EU required restoration of the grassland by removing the sown crop, reseeding with an appropriate grassland species mix, control of weeds and success monitoring.

February 2016

Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with W Stapleton and Sons following the cultivation of 5ha of semi-natural habitat undertaken without the benefit of an EIA (agriculture) screening assessment. The EU, covering land at Newton Moor, North Yorkshire, aimed to allow the natural regeneration of vegetation assisted by the exclusion of grazing animals from the area. The agreement also covered the control of undesirable species.

March 2016

In March 2016 Natural England agreed an Enforcement Undertaking with Mr B L Davies, land owner at Lower Swaledale Woods and Grassland SSSI, North Yorkshire. The Enforcement undertaking covered the reinstatement of grassland habitats following unconsented spreading of soil and spoil.

