

# Wildlife crime prevention strategies: badger culling



According to Sykes & Matza (1957) techniques of neutralisation can be understood as a set or classification by which criminals seek to justify and rationalise their criminal behaviour. The techniques the theory of neutralisation is built on four main observation points, the individuals express guilt over their illegal deviant behaviour, the individuals frequently respect and admire honest, law-abiding individuals, a line is drawn between those whom they can victimise and those they cannot, the individuals are not immune to the demands of conformity. The author will analyse these four points in more detail later in the essay in relation to the research article.

A long-standing rural idea is that the countryside is a crime-free place to live, however, crime is by no means non-existent in rural areas. Yarwood (2001) argues that the geography of crime is

“Firmly entrenched in the urban environment and, by contrast, crime in the countryside has largely been ignored” (Yarwood, 2001)

Rural areas are sometimes described as being ‘close knit’. This term refers to the idea that people in rural areas have high levels of social intimacy with social connections being more immediate, more intense which is often based on similarities within the community (Weisheit et al 1996). This supports the criminologist’s theory of neutralization which outlines that one of the four observation points was that individuals frequently respect and admire honest, law abiding individuals. So therefore, wildlife crime between the rural communities is accepted within the closeness of the rural community setting. Rural culture is seen as being traditional, slow to change, relatively intolerant of diversity and unaccepting of outsiders (Wiesheit et al, 1996).

Wildlife crime encompasses a range of offences including trading in endangered species, poaching, and acts of animal cruelty such as badger baiting, and cock and dog fighting (Countryside agency, 2004a). However, statistics on the levels of these offences are not officially collated. It has been noted that such crimes are hard to quantify not least because accurate figures do not exist on domestic and wildlife populations and that in many instances, the crime has no human witnesses or victims (Anderson 1997). One of the problems facing wildlife criminology is the lack of criminal laws with which to frame research activity (Bierne, 1999). The frequent absence of a clear framework through which to pursue research is connected with a much broader definition of crimes against nature.

The RSPB reports that bird crime has been on a downward trend over recent years (RSPB, 2002). Nevertheless, the organisation believes that this may have been the result of the foot and mouth crisis restricting access to large parts of the countryside. The issue of wildlife crime in the countryside has received considerable attention in recent years. Fox hunting is an apposite example of how crime is a cultural construct. Whereas foxes have been legally hunted for centuries, it seems inevitable that the activity of fox hunting has become a criminal offence. The controversy surrounding the act of fox hunting led the government to pass the 'HUNTING ACT 2004' in November 2004 (Hunting Act, 2004) this act made fox hunting illegal with dogs in England and Wales in 2005. In America, the activity of fox hunting is referred to as fox chasing. Fox chasing can indeed go on for years and the population of the foxes are maintained (Smart, 2004).

The absence of a clear definition of wildlife crime has not stopped the causes or motivations of wildlife crime. (Macdonald, 1961) states that animal cruelty in childhood leads to anti-social behaviour and aggression in later life, and labels this as the ' violence graduation hypothesis. Control theories have been hugely influential in the sociology of deviance, and linked with explanations of wildlife crime. Control theory suggests that criminal activity occurs when the controls or rules that ensure conformity are somehow lessened. The rural community as stated earlier can be a ' close knit' community. Hirschi (1969) suggests that conformity arises from four types of social controls that create a social bond, attachment- strong social attachments encourage conformity, and thus, the rural community may conform towards wildlife crime due to social bonds. Opportunity- the more one perceives legitimate opportunity, the greater the advantages of conformity. Involvement and belief that in the rural community, strong beliefs in conventional morality and respect for their authority figures. Within the rural community different generations will respect their elders and peer groups and conform to their ideas and beliefs with reference to wild life crime.

Badger culling has featured as part of government attempts to eradicate the disease Bovine Tuberculosis (b TB) in cattle. This disease is spread between cattle but can be transmitted by badgers to cattle. (Grant, 2009). Bovine Tuberculosis was found in badgers after a dead badger was identified having the disease. Farmers attempted to cull the badgers, leading to various protests from wildlife campaign groups. In 1973 The Badgers Act prohibited the killing, injuring or taking of badgers, except by authorised personal. It is

not an offence for an authorised person to kill a badger if a court is convinced

“ his action was necessary for the purpose of preventing serious damage to land, crops, poultry or any other form of property or for the purpose of preventing the spread of any disease”. (The Badgers Act, 1973)

Wildlife criminologists focus on the theory on Sykes & Matza (1957) ‘ techniques of neutralisation’; this theory can be used in the sociology of deviance to account for a wide range of deviant behaviour (Cohen 2002). Neutralisation techniques can be understood as a set or classification of discourses by which criminals seek to justify and rationalise their criminal behaviour. Sykes and Matza (1957) wanted to build upon (Sutherlands, 1939) theory ‘ differential association ‘ which states that an individual learns criminal behaviour through techniques of committing crimes and motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes. These techniques reduce the social controls over the delinquent, neutralisation is defined as a technique, which allows the person to rationalize or justify a criminal act. There are five techniques of neutralisation. Firstly, ‘ denial of the victim refers to the belief that whoever is harmed by an action deserved its consequences. Secondly, in ‘ denial of responsibility’, offenders argue that their actions were caused by forces beyond their control. Thirdly, ‘ denial of injury’ suggests that no-one suffered as a result of the crime. Fourthly, in ‘ appealing to higher loyalties’, offenders cite that importance of maintain loyalty to small groups rather than society. Fifthly, ‘ condemnation of the condemner’s refers to statements that suggest disapprovers are hypocrites who have caused more harm (Sykes & Matza, 1957)

Coleman (1994) adds another concept of techniques of neutralisation and states that 'denial of necessity for the law', everyone's doing it', and 'claims of entitlement'. There have been several attempts to apply these concepts to explain wildlife crime. Forsyth & Evens (1998) have analysed the neutralisation techniques used by individuals involved in organised dog fighting. Eliason & Dodder (1999) have shown how deer poachers deploy the 'claim to entitlement'. They also use the concept that they have a right to the defence of necessity to justify their criminal activity, due to believing the concept that what is on their land is the poacher's property.

Sykes & Matza (1957) further develop their views on delinquency as a result of a deviant sub-culture, which exposes the individual to crime and in turn teaches deviant behaviour or subterranean values, which cause them to deviate from the norms of society. This is captured in the concepts of 'drift' (Matza, 1964)

Drift is explained as a gradual process, which results in moulding the individual's behaviour. Once the crime is committed the delinquent feels guilt and must balance their behaviour by returning to act in a law-abiding manner. Drift can be described as soft determinism, which views criminality as partly chosen and partly determined. The will to commit a crime occurs when one of these conditions is present, preparation and desperation. These allow the individual to form the decision to commit a crime. Preparation occurs when a criminal act is repeated once the person realizes that the criminal act can be achieved and is feasible. Desperation activities the will to initially commit a crime because of an extraordinary occasion, which is the feeling of lacking control over ones surroundings (Matza, 1964).

In conclusion, this research article analysis of farmer's reasons for illegally culling of badgers in England and Wales. Utilising the concept on Sykes & Matza's neutralisation theory, the article highlights the activity in which badger culling occurs and how the rural community rationalise their deviant behaviour. The farmer's attitudes and neutralisations might be perceived as a means they can view themselves as faultless victims and suggest that badger culling is a justified reaction to the current issue of preventing the spread of disease.

The government on the 11th December 2012 announced it will delay a planned cull of badgers in England and Wales until next summer.

Environment secretary Owen Paterson stated that it was crucial to get it right and it is too late in the year. Under the current Government plan, several thousands of badgers could be shot, in an attempt to decrease the levels of the disease Bovine Tuberculosis. Many Anti-Cull campaigners have welcomed this latest news on the activity of ' legal badger culling'.