

Wildlife photography, filming and licensing

When do I need a licence?

In the UK there are a large number of species that are afforded different levels of protection under wildlife law, mainly the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010, amongst others.

If in filming/photographing a protected species you will be undertaking actions that would involve committing an offence under the current UK wildlife legislation then you may require a licence.

How do I find out if I need a licence?

Firstly you need to determine whether the species you will be photographing/filming is protected. Most protected species are listed on the schedules of the Wildlife & Countryside Act copies of which can be found on the [Natural England species licensing pages](#). Alternatively, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee have compiled a comprehensive spreadsheet of all [UK protected species and their designations](#).

I think I need a licence – what do I do next?

You will need to contact the appropriate licensing authority – this will differ depending on whereabouts in the UK you plan to carry out the filming/photography (please see links below). They will be able to confirm whether you need a licence and explain how to apply for one.

Example 1

John Smith wishes to take White-Clawed Crayfish from the wild to film in an appropriate enclosure for up to 24 hours. As it is an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act to taken White-Clawed Crayfish from the wild John would need a licence.

Example 2

Jane Smith wishes to erect a hide near to a Peregrine nest to film adult birds rearing their young. Peregrines are listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is nest building or is in, on or near a nest with eggs or young; or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

If Jane believes that she will cause disturbance to the birds then she should apply for a licence however, if she will be erecting the hide far enough away from the nest that she will not cause a disturbance then a licence is not required. Please note, the onus is on the individual to justify, if challenged, the fact that the birds were not disturbed.

Example 3

Jim Smith wishes to photograph Adders in the wild. The Adder is only protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act against killing, injuring or sale. As Jim will not be doing any of these a licence is not required.

Additional Information

If a photographer were to accompany a person who was already licensed and film them carrying out their normal licensed activities e.g. surveying for Great Crested Newts then a licence may not be required.

Under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 there is no provision for issuing licences for the purpose of photography/filming for European Protected Species e.g. dormice or otters. Therefore any photography/filming of European Protected Species must fulfil another licensable purpose – Science, Education or Conservation e.g. the footage will be used for educational purposes or will form part of a research project.

For filming/photographing schedule 1 bird species there is a quota system, therefore the number of licences issued is limited. A licence is not required to film/photograph a schedule 1 species outside of the breeding season or away from a breeding site.

Links:

[The Royal Photographic Society's Nature Photographer's Code of Practice](#)
[Joint Nature Conservation Committee](#)
[Naturenet](#)

Licensing Authorities
England – [Natural England](#)
Scotland – [Scottish Natural Heritage](#)
Wales – [Countryside Council for Wales](#)
Northern Ireland – [Northern Ireland Environment Agency](#)

To summarise, when filming wildlife you need to consider the level of protection that may be afforded to any species concerned, determine whether you will be committing an offence, and if so, consider applying for the appropriate licence.

Natural England advocates the use of best practice to minimise disturbance at ALL times.

*Please note that this information is only in respect to photographing/filming protected species and does not cover the licensing provisions required for photographing/filming on protected sites.