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Media Contacts:

US:

Gretchen Peters

[Alliance to Counter Crime Online](#)

Email: gretchen.peters@cintoc.org

Tel: +1(202) 830 - 6309

UK:

Alisa Davies

[World Parrot Trust](#)

Email: adavies@parrots.org

Tel: +44 (0) 1736 751026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Conservationists Call for Wildlife Crime to be Addressed in UK Online Harms Bill

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Conservation, tech policy and cybercrime experts are joining forces this week to urge the British government to include animal abuse and illegal wildlife trafficking within the new Online Safety Bill in a letter to MPs and Government regulators.

“Britain is a country of animal-lovers that has long been a global leader in conservation,” says the letter. “There’s an opportunity now for the UK to take the lead in protecting animals in a place where wildlife trafficking and animal abuse has become widespread: the Internet.”

Groups including the [Alliance to Counter Crime Online](#) (ACCO), the [World Parrot Trust](#), [Born Free Foundation](#) and [the Humane Society](#) are calling for wildlife trafficking to be added as a ‘priority offence’ to the bill, alongside other serious crimes such as supplying drugs and financing terrorism.

Online content showing animal suffering, from horrific “crush” videos to fraudulent adverts selling mutilated puppies, have grown rampant on social media in the last decade. So have accounts, groups and pages selling endangered species threatened with extinction, with experts saying social media now poses one of the biggest threats to wildlife.

As the world emerges from a two-year pandemic that has claimed more than 6 million lives globally, leading British conservationists warn that the illegal online trade in wildlife also presents a grave risk to public health and safety.

“The rising demand for exotic pets is not only a disaster for wildlife, it also poses a potential public health risk that existing laws fail to address,” said Ian Redmond, OBE, Head of Conservation for [Ecoflix](#) and Chairman of the [Ape Alliance](#). “The growth in online sales and the social media algorithms that promote the cute or bizarre have accelerated the risks. The UK has the chance to lead the way in fixing this problem as part of global efforts to halt biodiversity loss and prevent the next pandemic.”

Signatories to the letter include biologists who last year authored a warning to humanity about the growth of the illegal online wildlife trade, as well as an alliance of crime experts working to reform the laws governing illegal activity in cyberspace.

“Evidence suggests that social media platforms are now a key driver of the global extinction crisis, alongside habitat loss, poaching and climate change,” said Gretchen Peters, executive director of the [Alliance to Counter Crime Online](#). “The UK has the opportunity to become a world leader in fighting this scourge, and we are optimistic this could motivate similar reforms in the EU, Canada and the United States.”

Conservationists applauded the ambition of the proposed legislation to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online and urged Parliament to extend that safety net to animals.

“This is a chance to turn the tables on wildlife criminals and would yet again position the UK in the vanguard of global conservation,” said Dr. Rowan Martin of the [World Parrot Trust](#).

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