# Unprecedented surge in wildfires devastates Wales’ landscapes and wildlife this spring



Senior firefighters in Wales have reported an unprecedented surge in wildfires this spring, describing the situation as a period of "extraordinary levels of fires" that are causing widespread and indiscriminate damage across the landscape. Mid and West Wales Fire Service alone has attended nearly 700 wildfires so far this year, a dramatic increase compared to approximately 100 during the same timeframe last year and well above the usual average of 250 incidents.

Scott O’Kelly, head of arson reduction for the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, spoke to BBC Radio Wales about the scale and nature of the problem. He highlighted that while spring traditionally sees an uptick in grass and wildfires, this year’s numbers far exceed any previous experience. “For the start of the first three months of last year, we were under 100, whereas we’re up nearer 700 this year. That just gives you a bit of an example of where we are,” he said.

O’Kelly explained that the fires result from multiple factors, including both human interaction with the environment—whether accidental or deliberate—and weather conditions. The recent dry and windy weather in Wales has created an optimal environment for fires to ignite and rapidly spread. He stressed, “Fires don’t discriminate” and, if not contained quickly, can cause severe and indiscriminate destruction to both natural and human environments.

The consequences for wildlife have been described as "devastating." Ben McCarthy, head of nature conservation at the National Trust, told BBC Radio Wales that animals are being "literally burnt alive" in these fires, which have been particularly destructive in areas such as Abergwesyn in Powys. He warned that about a quarter of the upland landscape there has been affected. McCarthy underlined the importance of these cherished landscapes, noting they are internationally significant for wildlife and vital for carbon storage in peat soils and water regulation across the country.

McCarthy went on to describe the impact on a broad range of species, from amphibians like frogs and toads to birds including skylarks, golden plovers, and hen harriers. “Wildfires is a bit of a misnomer,” he said, pointing out that it is extremely rare for fires to start naturally, such as from lightning strikes. Instead, government data attributes the vast majority of incidents to human causes, whether through carelessness or deliberate acts. He added, “This is absolutely devastating for our wildlife and it’s a tragedy to see both for the people who live and work and care for these iconic landscapes, as well as the wildlife.”

Wildfires have also been reported across all fire services in Wales, with some 1,400 grassfires responded to by crews so far this year, according to figures from BBC Wales. Gareth Tovey of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Wales expressed concern about the rising trend of wildfires, linking the increase to climate factors. He warned, “The alarming rise in wildfires this spring is the tip of the iceberg – rising temperatures mean these events will become more common, endangering homes and lives.”

In response to the growing wildfire problem, South Wales Police have issued reminders that deliberately setting fires in the countryside constitutes a criminal offence and is treated as arson.

Firefighters from stations such as Bala in south Denbighshire have been actively engaged in tackling hill fires amidst these challenging conditions, emphasising the ongoing and intensive nature of the emergency response required.

The current wildfire situation in Wales highlights significant operational challenges for emergency services and conservation groups alike, as they contend with a combination of environmental and human factors contributing to this unprecedented fire season.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)