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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

33rd meeting
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2013

Other complaint

**Cutting of trees for the expansion of the railway
network
(United Kingdom)**

REPORT BY THE NGO

*Document prepared by
The Tree Savers (United Kingdom)*

Our complaint against Network Rail (NR) is based on the policy they have adopted in recent years in order to maintain the Nations Railside Embankments. It is to simply remove all the trees. This has been happening for the past 10 years as far as we have been able to establish and in the past couple of years the problem appears to have escalated quite considerably.

Since our campaign started in April last year, we have found many examples of places that Network Rail have systematically destroyed. Using as their *modus operandi* 'safety' large areas of rail-side embankments have been eradicated. However we now believe this is little more than a cost cutting measure undertaken to maintain the banks after 50 years of neglect.

Network Rail have shown a lack of respect for their rail-side neighbours by simply removing all the trees – sometimes a great distances from the track – leaving the residents with no protection from the noise and dirt from the trains, *and in the process devastating our country's wildlife corridor.*

The trees in many places have been removed during the bird breeding season with NR again stating that safety was an issue, however this we believe to be untrue. For example here in Whitstable back in April 2012 we were told that they had to remove the trees at that time, as it was an emergency. After contacting the RSPB we were able to get the work stopped until the bird breeding season had finished. Now we find ourselves in March 2013, we still have trees standing here (not all, as some were removed in November 2012) on our side of the track, however on the other side ALL the trees have been removed and the roots poisoned, yet no emergency work to the lines has been carried out.

We have been given no evidence that such work is truly required, having asked on many occasions for their reports and environmental studies and non have been forthcoming. We have been given a presentation at a local public meeting that was supposed to show the necessity for the work, however the presentation did little more than to convince us that we were being manipulated into their way of thinking, with little proof that it was a safe and sound idea to be removing such a large amount of trees.

Network Rail appear to give no consideration what's so ever to the fact that they are the custodians of one of the Nations few remaining places where wildlife can live freely, and their actions will be doing untold amounts of damage to the ecosystem. Network Rail themselves have stated that they will be removing an estimated amount of trees the size of The Forest Of Dean, in Gloucestershire, England. We estimate that to be 20 million trees!

Using the presentation given to us by Network Rail from the first public meeting, civil and Chartered engineer Peter Johns was asked to do a report on behalf of the people of Whitstable, pointing out the errors and misleading information that NR had given us in their presentation.

Peter Johns report is a 42 page document that we have already sent to you in October 2012. We hope you have had time to read it and discovered exactly why we believe NR are not giving us a full representation of all the facts. Mr Johns report also has a lots of other information including letters from councillors and MP's.

You should also have received other documents that we believe will help you to see the situation we find ourselves in. Our website has many -but not all – examples of were NR have already devastated the wildlife corridor : <http://www.thetreesavers.webeden.co.uk/>

If you contact Network Rail they will state that safety must come first (we also believe this to be true) and they will tell you they have no alternative, this is not the case. This issue must be brought to the public eye before it is to late to save what is left of our country's very important wildlife corridors and eco system. We also need to protect the people who live along side the railway so they can live a healthy, save and peaceful existence as it always was up until now.