



Chinese lanterns *brief*

from **RSPCA Cymru**

Chinese lanterns (also known as Sky, Wish, Floating & Party lanterns) can harm wildlife, livestock and other animals by causing injuries that lead to suffering and a slow painful death. The RSPCA advises against the use of Chinese lanterns and recommends that harmless alternatives are sought to prevent injury, suffering and fatality of animals.

What are Chinese lanterns?

Chinese lanterns are novelty items made from paper covered wire or bamboo frames and an open flame heat source. Heat carries lanterns up into air where they can travel for miles from where they are first released. Once finished, lanterns fall onto land or into the sea, endangering the lives of animals that encounter them. With estimates of 200,000 lanterns being sold in the UK each year, popularity is ever increasing and with that increase comes the greater risk of harm to wildlife, livestock and other animals.

How do lanterns harm animals?

Ingestion: Animals can eat lantern parts through curiosity or because lantern litter is hidden in the vegetation they are grazing on. When lanterns fall into fields the frames can become chopped into silage and hay during harvest causing needle like splinters to enter animal feed. Ingestion can tear and puncture the animal's throat, stomach and internal organs leading to internal bleeding and a slow and painful death.

Entanglement & entrapment: Animals are at risk of becoming trapped and/or entangled in lantern frames and parts that have fallen into their habitat. Once trapped animals become panicked and sustain injuries trying to free themselves. Entanglement and entrapment can lead to stress, injury and death.

Splinters & embedment: Lantern debris and splinters can become embedded into an animal's skin and cause wounds that may become infected leading to illness and fatality.

Fire: Lanterns can cause fires to farm buildings that house animals and destroy habitats that are vital to wildlife. This can lead to displacement, injury & death of the animals there. Farmers and landowners have reported stress, injury and suffering of livestock, horses and other animals due to Chinese lanterns. Recent media reports include a barn owl found dead after becoming trapped in lantern debris and a number of cattle fatalities, clearly demonstrating the harm that lanterns can cause.

What is being done?

Farmers' unions have called for a ban on Chinese lanterns because of the dangers to livestock. The ban is supported by horse keepers, animal sanctuaries and zoos that have spoken out after finding lantern debris on their premises and the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) who are concerned about the impact lantern litter may be having on marine animals. Fire and rescue services around the UK have issued warnings against Chinese lantern use because of the fire hazard they pose. Lantern releases have already been banned in some countries including Australia, Germany & Malta.

Are 'biodegradable' lanterns safe?

No. Some retailers claim that 'biodegradable' lanterns are a safe alternative to those with wire frames. However, bamboo can take decades to degrade and the lantern debris still poses the risks of ingestion, entrapment, splintering, embedment and fire that can harm & kill animals.

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What we have asked the public to do

- ✓ Pick up lantern debris if seen lying around
- ✓ Discourage others from using Chinese lanterns
- ✓ Contact event planners and retailers encouraging them to seek harmless alternatives
- ✓ Contact local authorities about planned releases and discourage organisers from holding them
- ✓ Sign petitions & join campaigns that call for a ban
- ✓ Spread the word

Alternative suggestions

- Use stationary candles, nightlights, static lanterns or outdoor lights to create a fun and cosy atmosphere.
- Write a word or name onto a candle and let it burn down to make a symbolic wish or memorial.
- Plant a tree or donate to a good cause to honour the memory of a loved one.

National Assembly for Wales

There is the power to legislate on this issue in Wales. Antoinette Sandbach AM has a pre-Ballot proposal¹ for legislation to restrict the use of these lanterns for reasons of protecting public safety and animal welfare, which the RSPCA supports. Also in May 2012 the Assembly's Petitions Committee considered Petition P-04-385 regarding balloon and lantern releases which had gathered 564 signatures, making it one of the larger petitions under consideration. In response to the Committee's enquiries, the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, John Griffiths AM, confirmed the issue is under consideration as part of the planned Environment Bill². Due to the significant importance to the public of this topic the petition remains on the Committee's programme while stakeholders are consulted and further evidence is sought.



Owl killed by lantern. © Simon Pain/Billow Farm

¹ http://assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bill_ballots/bill_o26.htm

² <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8282/12.05.21%20Minister%20to%20Chair.pdf>

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