giving nature a home

Birdcrime 2020

Peregrine falcons by Niall Owen (RSPB)

Peregrine falcon

Birdcrime is the UK's only annual and comprehensive report of known offences against birds of prey. This report covers confirmed incidents in 2020, as collated by the RSPB's Investigations Team, working in support of the police and statutory agencies.

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Download the Birdcrime 2020 appendices

Birdcrime 2020 front cover image by Peter Jenkins

A shot buzzard found in the Peak District, September 2020

Illegal killing at record high in England

In 2020, amidst a worsening nature and climate emergency, the illegal killing of birds of prey continued unabated – even during Covid-19 lockdowns. England recorded its worst ever figures and nationally the picture is bleak. Such criminal and unsustainable practices must stop at a time when the natural world is more fragile than ever.

Birdcrime 2020 reveals, for the first time, the full data set of confirmed incidents* of raptor persecution for that year: namely the shooting, trapping and poisoning of protected birds of prey in the UK. You can read the full breakdown of figures in the **Appendices**.

In summary, there were 137 confirmed raptor persecution incidents detected in the UK in 2020. This is the highest figure the RSPB has ever recorded, making 2020 the worst ever year since the first *Birdcrime* report in 1990. The rise is largely attributable to the unprecedented number of incidents detected in England during 2020, many of which occurred during Covid-19 lockdowns and on land used for gamebird shooting. This figure is likely to continue rising retrospectively as the RSPB receives additional data due to Covid-related delays.

Since this total only reflects the incidents that were uncovered, it's impossible to know how many more birds were illegally killed and never found. However extrapolation of satellite tagging studies for golden eagles and hen harriers suggest it is not unreasonable to speculate that the true number of raptors killed is far greater than the annual totals documented so far. All wild birds and their nests are protected by law in the UK, including birds of prey. Yet despite decades of protection they continue to be illegally killed. These wildlife crimes have no place in the midst of a climate and nature crisis, and it is clearer than ever that urgent, meaningful change is needed in order to end raptor persecution and carve out a better future for our incredible birds of prey. This includes the legal and sustainable management of all land. The RSPB supports licensing of the most intensive 'driven' grouse shooting, conditional on compliance with wildlife protection laws, and more widely seeks to work with the law-abiding gamebird sector to raise environmental standards.

A **UN-led review** assessing the enforcement response to wildlife crime in the UK was carried out in 2021. The RSPB was interviewed in respect of raptor persecution and we look forward to the publication of the findings and the response from UK governments.

In November 2021, world leaders will meet at COP26 to accelerate action on restoring the planet and tackling climate change. We all share the same Earth and when faced with a climate and nature emergency, it's surely beyond argument that all land must be managed in a way that promotes biodiversity and reduces the impact on the climate. The absence of birds of prey – at the top of the food chain – is a key indicator of the poor environmental health of our planet.

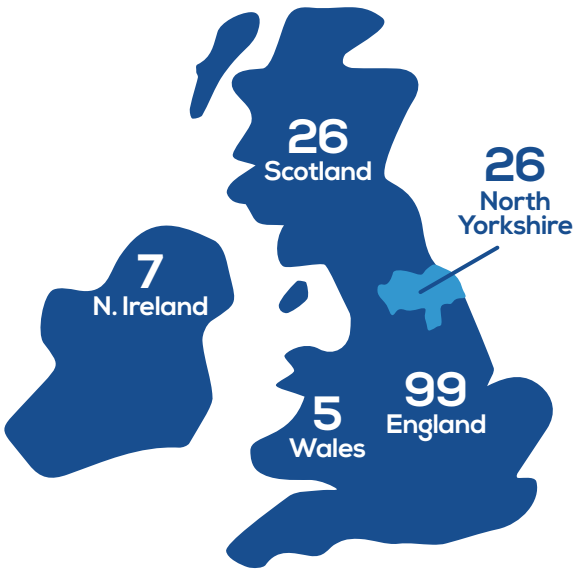
"Now is the time for action, not words."

Mark Thomas, RSPB Head of Investigations UK

** A confirmed incident is one where circumstances indicate that an illegal act has taken place. These incidents are of the highest evidential weighting, typically substantiated by evidence such as post-mortem or toxicological analysis, or reliable eyewitness evidence.*

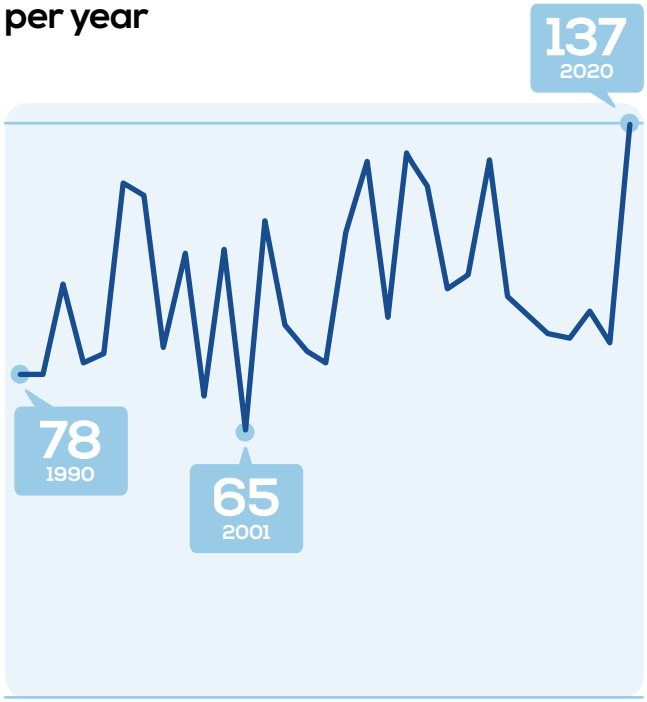
Raptor persecution 2020 in numbers

Breakdown by country



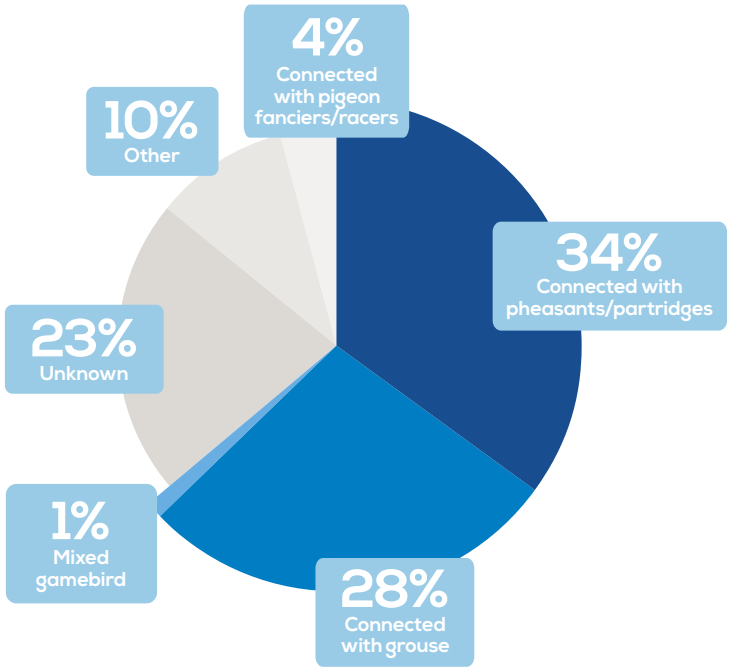
For the seventh consecutive year, the county of North Yorkshire was the hotspot for the largest number of confirmed incidents of raptor persecution.

Confirmed persecution incidents per year



Breakdown by type

Confirmed persecution incidents split into persecution categories



Almost 2/3 of all incidents are connected with gamebird shooting

Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

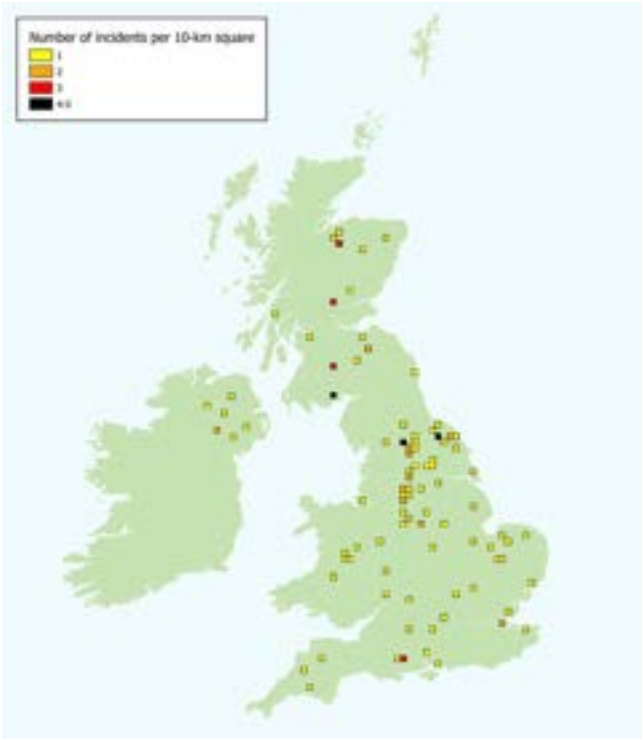
Red grouse

Why is this happening?

In 2020, raptor crimes took place across the UK, on land that was being managed for a variety of uses. However, a minimum of 85 (62%) of all confirmed incidents were linked to land managed for or connected with gamebird shooting (See Appendix 1 Fig.5). Of these 85 incidents, 46 (33.6%) related to pheasant and partridge shooting, largely in lowland areas, and 38 (27.7%) related to red grouse shooting, found largely in the north of England, and parts of Scotland.

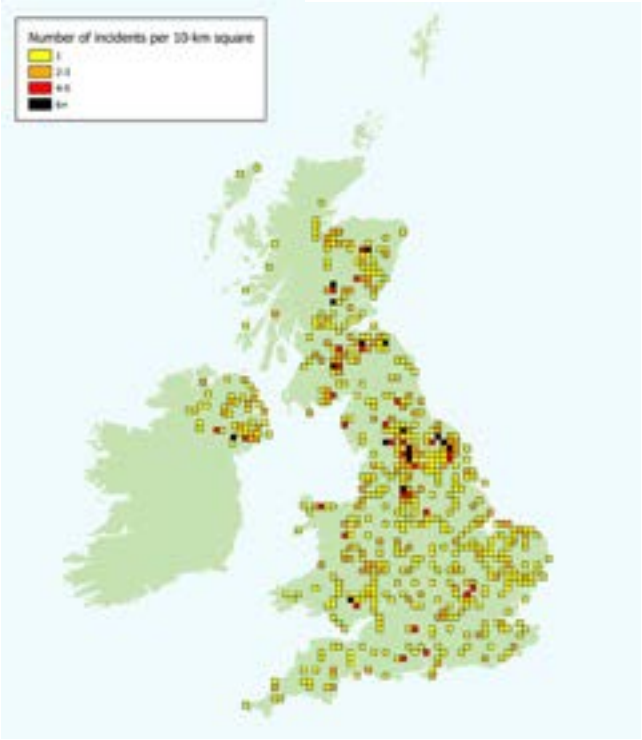
Raptor persecution was linked to both forms of shooting, with incidents generally being more widespread in lowland areas and more concentrated in upland areas (See Appendix 4). However, data suggests that the overall figure may be higher because an additional 32 incidents (23.4%) were categorised as 'unknown', where there was not enough information or intelligence to determine likely connections to those believed responsible. In addition, six incidents were connected to pigeon racing and 14 incidents were classed as 'other', for example an individual in an urban area killing a bird with a stick (see Appendix 1 Fig. 5).

Wildlife crime data, court convictions and **peer-reviewed studies** based on **satellite tagging** and **bird of prey populations** show that raptor persecution has the most negative conservation impact on raptors on land managed for driven grouse shooting, and that these areas are where breeding success and abundance continues to be negatively affected. This particularly intensive form of shooting involves red grouse being 'driven' by beaters towards a line of waiting guns. In order to manage these estates to support the largest possible number of red grouse for clients to shoot, some gamekeepers kill protected birds of prey. This is not only against the law, but it is also affecting populations of some of our most vulnerable species, including the golden eagle and hen harrier.



2020

This map shows 119 of the 137 confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents in 2020, each mapped to a 10-km grid square (18 are unmappable or withheld pending permission for release).



2011 – 2020

This map shows 971 of the 1,011 confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents from 2011 to 2020, each mapped to a 10-km grid square (40 are unmappable or withheld pending permission for release).

Peter Jenkins

This buzzard was found poisoned in a village surrounded by grouse moors and sadly had to be euthanised.

Case studies

Raptor killers evade justice in North Yorkshire

In April 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown, North Yorkshire Police received a report via the RSPB from a member of the public relating to men on a driven grouse moor shooting buzzards. Police officers subsequently found **five dead buzzards hidden in a hole** in the ground, where the men had been seen, on the edge of Bransdale in the North York Moors. X-rays and post-mortem examinations confirmed that four of the birds had been shot, and the injuries of the fifth were 'suggestive of damage from a shotgun pellet'. Eight individuals were interviewed under caution in connection with the incident but there was not enough evidence to bring any individual to court. In instances like this, if licensing had been in place, police may have been able to investigate the estate involved. This could result in an estate losing its ability to operate for a period of time.

This was one of several raids in North Yorkshire which, for the seventh year running, clocked up a higher number of confirmed raptor persecution incidents than any other UK county. **A buzzard was found poisoned on a grouse moor** within the North York Moors National Park, and near Pateley Bridge in the Yorkshire Dales, **one buzzard was found poisoned (see image above) and another shot** a month later. Also near Pateley Bridge, within the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), **one spaniel died while another was taken ill** after consuming a 'cocktail of poisons'. This is a known blackspot for bird of prey persecution, and the unusual combination of poisons the dog consumed had caused the death of **birds of prey in the area previously**.

A man was also **filmed shooting two buzzards on a grouse moor** having used an illegal, live eagle owl decoy to lure the birds towards him. North Yorkshire Police again searched a property, but despite being certain that a gamekeeper had been shooting buzzards, the identity of the suspect on the film could not be proved and it was not possible to bring about a prosecution. This demonstrates why the RSPB is calling on governments across the UK to license grouse moors, and bring more public accountability to estate owners and managers.

"It is shocking that crimes against birds of prey were at an all-time high in 2020, the worst for 30 years, and that North Yorkshire was the worst county overall, again. It appears that criminals took advantage of lockdown to kill iconic birds, which is inexcusable. There has been a strong response from the police in 2021 with over a dozen multi-agency investigations now underway, and we encourage everyone to continue to be our eyes and ears and report any crimes to the police."

Inspector Matt Hagen, North Yorkshire Police

Disposing of the evidence: eagle tag dumped in river

Research has shown that a satellite tag fitted to a golden eagle in Scotland is 25 times more likely to fail, compared with other studies from around the world. Furthermore, around a third of the 131 young eagles tracked over 12 years disappeared in suspicious circumstances, predominantly over land intensively managed for driven grouse shooting. Evidence as to what may be happening to these birds turned up unexpectedly in May 2020, when a member of the public discovered a satellite tag wrapped in lead on the bank of the River Braan in Perthshire.

The tag had been fitted to a young male golden eagle as a chick in 2014. When the young eagle fledged, he was tracked as he travelled through the central Highlands for almost two years. Then, on 1 May 2016, his tag – which had been functioning exactly as expected – suddenly and inexplicably stopped transmitting.

This area is notorious for raptor persecution and was identified as a geographical cluster of suspicious golden eagle disappearances in a 2017 scientific paper commissioned by the Scottish government: **Analyses of the fates of satellite tracked golden eagles in Scotland**. At least eight satellite-tagged golden eagles have vanished from this area in recent years.

At the time, many theories circulated as to what had happened to this eagle. However, the discovery of the tag in these circumstances leaves little doubt that he was illegally killed, and the tag removed and wrapped in lead sheeting to stop it transmitting.

This discovery was damning confirmation not only of what is happening to these birds, but also the lengths to which the criminals involved in the killing of our raptors will go to dispose of evidence to try to evade justice.

This golden eagle satellite tag, wrapped in lead, was found in a river.

Buzzard gunned down on nature reserve boundary causes outcry

The strength of public feeling over birds of prey being illegally killed has never been clearer than in the winter of 2020, when **a buzzard was filmed being gunned down in Kent**. A family were out walking on the RSPB's Northward Hill reserve when they stopped to film a buzzard in flight above adjacent land. As they did, a loud shot rang out and the buzzard crumpled and fell to the ground. An injured buzzard was recovered from the location, but the shot lodged in its broken wing meant it had to be euthanised.

The gunman was never found, but the footage made headlines and went viral. The public responded with anger and sadness, with comments including: 'Can barely bring myself to watch this', 'Shocked and disgusted' and 'Bird of prey persecution is a national disgrace'.

The criminal destruction of wildlife also robs individuals of their personal enjoyment of nature. We spend time in the countryside to reap the physical and psychological benefits of being out in nature, and as well as the birds themselves this too has value and should be protected.

"At a time when nature is in crisis, *Birdcrime 2020* is showing us the worst year on record for raptor persecution. No-one should suffer the horror of witnessing a buzzard being shot out of the sky, or having a pet killed by an illegal poison bait. The appalling persecution of birds of prey has become chillingly commonplace, but public anger is mounting and cannot be ignored."

Chris Packham, naturalist and TV presenter

Criminals undermine protected landscapes

All National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) exist to conserve and enhance wildlife. Yet criminals are undermining this. Along with 2020 being the worst year on record for raptor persecution, it also has the highest proportion of incidents occurring within protected landscapes, with 40% (40.1%) occurring within either a National Park, AONB or Scottish National Scenic Area. In fact, from RSPB data we can see that over the last ten years 31% of confirmed raptor persecution incidents occurred in protected landscapes (see pie chart below).

The Prime Minister has committed to protecting **30% of UK land for nature's recovery by 2030 and claimed that 28% of the UK is already protected**. In contrast, **a recent scientific paper** has found that as little as 5% of the UK's land may be protected and managed effectively for nature. National Parks, AONBs and Scottish National Scenic Areas cover 23% of the UK and can play a vital role in reaching this target, but our finding that a significant proportion of raptor persecution is happening inside these landscapes shows how criminals are undermining this.

For the UK's protected landscapes to be able to contribute land that is protected and effectively managed for nature, governments need to give the authorities running these landscapes the tools and resources they need.

Many protected landscapes authorities are making their scant tools and resources go a long way for nature and many play an important role in tackling wildlife crime as demonstrated, for example, by the **Yorkshire Dales National Park** and the **North Pennines AONB**. However, bringing persecution to an end inside and outside these landscapes will require government action, including the licensing of driven grouse shooting, conditional on compliance with wildlife protection laws.

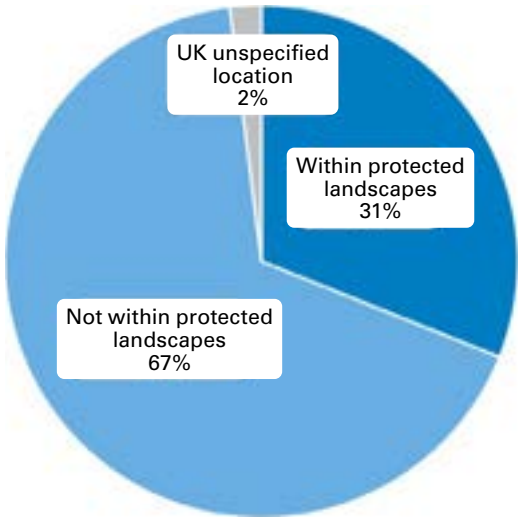
Raptor persecution continued unabated in the Peak District National Park in 2020, with eight confirmed incidents recorded within the National Park including nest robberies, shooting and poisonings.

A peregrine was found **poisoned on a grouse moor in the Upper Derwent Valley** – a known raptor crime hotspot. The remains of a shot short-eared owl, an amber-listed species, were found on a grouse moor near Glossop. **A buzzard barely eight weeks old was found shot dead** adjacent to woodland and a driven grouse moor near Little Hayfield. Another **buzzard was found in a terrible state near Diggle**. X-rays revealed the bird was riddled with shot. It sadly had to be euthanised due to the extent of its injuries.

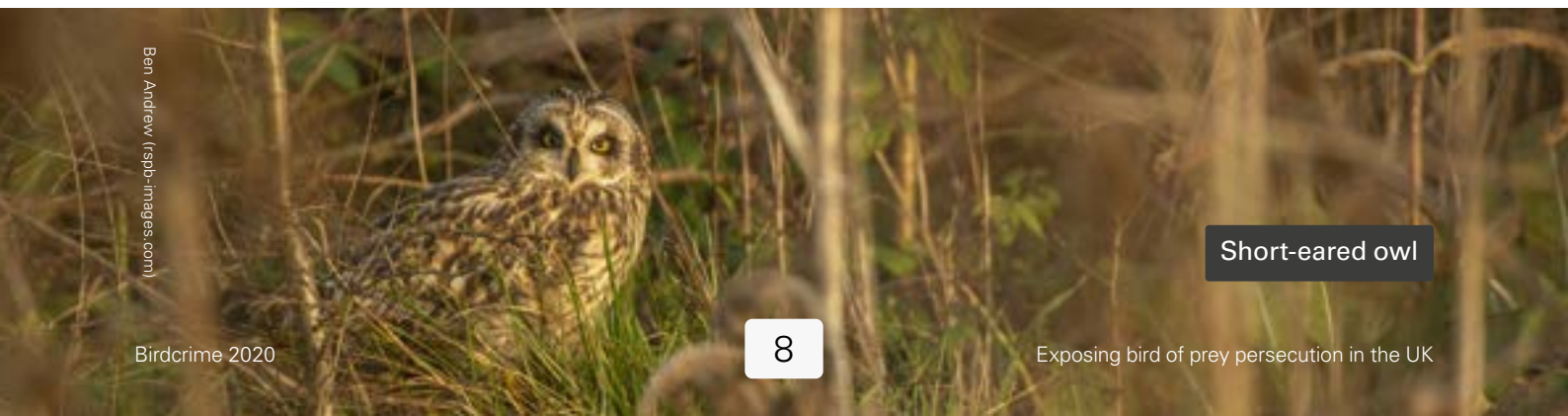
Birds of prey were also shot, trapped, poisoned or disappeared in suspicious circumstances in other protected landscapes such as the Nidderdale AONB, North Pennines AONB, Cairngorms National Park, Yorkshire Dales National Park and North York Moors National Park. This persecution is impacting spectacular species like the peregrine falcon: a bird whose population and breeding success has **crashed in the northern Peak District (Dark Peak) over the past two decades**, particularly in areas managed for driven grouse shooting.

Some protected landscape authorities are doing all they can to call out and to tackle illegal persecution, but they need the support of the authorities responsible for investigation and enforcement if they are to more effectively take the fight to the criminals. Governments also need to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss in protected landscapes that are beyond the control of those authorities, including the illegal killing of protected wildlife.

Confirmed raptor persecution incidents 2011–2020 within* UK protected landscapes



**Indicates incidents occurring within or intersecting with the area boundary*



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Short-eared owl

Hen harriers hit hard

Hen harrier by Pete Morris (RSPB)

During 2020, 19 successful hen harrier nests were recorded in England. There were **24 in 2021**, an increase which reflects some progress, but is still a far cry from the **300-plus pairs England has the capacity to support**. Hen harriers remain a long way from establishing a stable population, and the **government's own study**, published in 2019, found persecution by humans to be the main factor limiting their recovery throughout the UK.

The RSPB's hen harrier satellite tagging programme continued in 2020 with new chicks tagged in England, Scotland and Wales. The satellite tags used are highly reliable, with a very low malfunction rate. Three of these youngsters (Yarrow, Tarras and Dryad) have already disappeared in suspicious circumstances in Northern England. In Scotland, four birds of breeding age (Hoolie, Marlin, Fingal and Silver) also joined the long list of hen harriers whose satellite tags have suffered suspicious 'sudden stops' over land managed for grouse shooting. Searches found no trace of their bodies or tags.

In Scotland, **a 2020 report** based on five years of camera evidence on 28 estates participating in the Heads Up for Harriers partnership project, found that hen harriers fared best on those estates with no shooting interests. Here, more breeding attempts, nesting success and higher productivity was recorded. The report also found that the hen harrier's diet largely consisted of meadow pipits, with red grouse accounting for only 5.6% of prey items. One of the key findings, however, was that almost half of breeding adult female harriers were four years or older and 87% of males were older than one year. This suggests an unnaturally low number of females are surviving to breeding age. The recurrent disappearance of satellite-tagged birds, especially in their first year, is a clear driver of this.

Ultimately, for the UK hen harrier population to recover, persecution by humans needs to stop.

"The persecution of hen harriers and other species is morally indefensible. It is vital we do more to protect these birds and implement a serious strategy to ensure that those who break the law to harm them – and all other raptors – face prosecution. The flora and fauna of our natural environment should not be put at risk by those committing these terrible crimes. Instead, we must protect and preserve biodiversity to address the climate and nature emergencies we face."

Olivia Blake MP, RSPB hen harrier species champion

A changing climate, a changing world

As well as the illegal killing of birds of prey and other protected species, the RSPB, along with many other conservation and environmental organisations, is concerned with other intensive land management practices associated with gamebird shooting. Burning on peatland habitats (to create a mix of young heather shoots on which grouse can feed and older heather for cover) damages sensitive peatland flora, lowers the water table, and can result in the release of climate-damaging carbon into water and the atmosphere. Some of the most intensive burning for grouse moor management occurs on protected sites, especially in England. Burning can be reported online **here**.

To realise the full potential of our uplands we need to restore damaged habitats and allow natural processes to play a part in recovering these ecosystems. Peatland soils need rewetting, and a mosaic of habitats would support a greater diversity of flora and fauna. In this time of climate and nature crisis, we as a society have a duty to preserve wild spaces and allow wildlife to flourish.

More widely, the RSPB is also concerned with the impact of **the release of an estimated 57 million gamebirds** (non-native pheasants and red-legged partridges) into the countryside each year, which is weakly regulated and has largely unknown (but potentially significant) environmental consequences. We would like to see better compliance with existing laws and concerted efforts to reduce the number of gamebirds released. Conversations with shooting representative bodies to address this issue are underway.

The UK picture: problems and progress

Hen harrier by Niall Owen (RSPB)

In October 2020, the RSPB's Chair of Council announced the results of the society's **review of gamebird shooting** and associated land management practices. The review came as a result of growing evidence and increasing membership and public concern over raptor persecution and other damaging and unsustainable land management practices. It concluded that urgent reform is needed in the shape of new regulation, including licensing of driven grouse shooting, better enforcement of existing laws and higher environmental standards. It also set some timescales for these changes to happen.

It's clear that the status quo cannot continue, and some steps are being taken in each of the UK's four countries, all working towards a goal of ending raptor persecution, enhancing landscapes and promoting biodiversity in the context of the nature and climate emergency.

England

2020 was the worst year on record for the illegal killing of birds of prey in England, with 99 (72%) of the 137 confirmed UK incidents occurring here.

Persecution in England is having an adverse effect on the populations of birds of prey such as peregrines and goshawks, which remain absent from some areas that should be strongholds for these species. And despite a more successful hen harrier breeding season than usual, satellite tagging continues to show that human persecution is the principle threat to these birds after they fledge. The English population is still a long way from the 323–340 pairs the English uplands could support, according to a **JNCC report**.

The condition of English upland landscapes has also been called into question. New analysis of government data published by the RSPB in 2020 showed that three quarters of the 2.7 million hectares of peatland in the UK is degraded. Much of this is found in some of our most iconic English landscapes, including the Pennines, North York Moors and the Lake District. **62% of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in poor condition** and this figure rises to around 90% for our precious upland bogs and heaths (**Natural England report on SSSI condition by main habitat, provided to the RSPB in 2020**).

The RSPB wants an end to destructive practices in England's uplands, especially the burning of peatland vegetation and the establishment of new commercial forestry on peat. The RSPB is also calling for the cessation of peat extraction in the lowlands for horticultural use.

The RSPB is pleased that the Scottish Government has committed to license all vegetation burning and to ban burning on peatlands (except in very limited circumstances), as well as to revise the definition of deep peat. In England, Defra has now prohibited burning on peat (>40cm deep) within sites designated as SSSI/SAC/SPA, except under licence. To tackle climate change, we must drive down emissions of greenhouse gasses urgently. Given the vital importance of our carbon-rich upland peatlands for tackling climate change, the RSPB wants to see all burning on peatlands stopped.

The Government made amendments in August this year to strengthen the Environment Bill, making England the first ever country to have **legally binding targets to halt the decline of wildlife**.

Northern Ireland

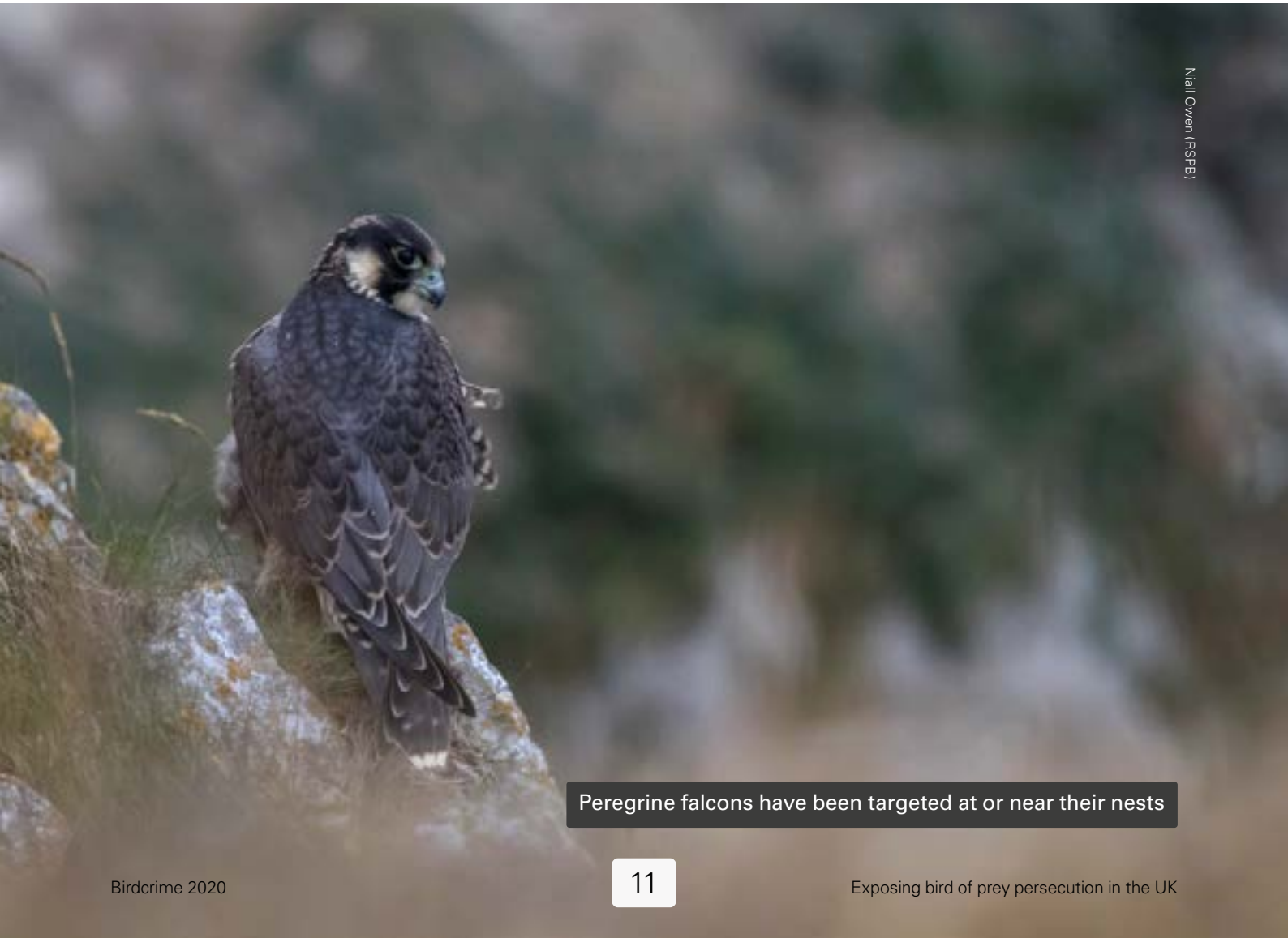
Raptor persecution continues to pose a significant threat to several species in Northern Ireland. As in previous years, peregrines were targeted at or close to their nest sites in a number of locations, despite these birds being scarce in the country.

It was encouraging to see rapid publicity of several persecution cases in 2020, as well as appeals for information by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, as yet there has never been a successful prosecution for raptor persecution offences in Northern Ireland.

It was concerning that despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and limited public access to Northern Ireland's countryside, incidents involving the illegal use of poisons persisted. Scavenging species, such as buzzards and red kites, are particularly at risk from this indiscriminate activity, whatever the motivations of the perpetrator.

Despite having been reintroduced as far back as 2008 to 2010, the Northern Irish red kite population continues to be small and concentrated in a relatively small area of the country, which makes it exceedingly vulnerable. The RSPB is concerned that persecution may already be restricting both the spread and growth of the red kite population in Northern Ireland. As a result we are putting investigations resource in place to both assist the statutory agencies in the follow-up of such offences and to assess the wider extent and impact of these crimes on Northern Ireland's wildlife.

Red kite by Norman Norris (rspb-images.com)



Niall Owen (RSPB)

Peregrine falcons have been targeted at or near their nests

Scotland

A number of significant cases were uncovered in Scotland in 2020. In April, during the Covid-19 lockdown, a **white-tailed eagle was found poisoned** on a grouse moor in the Strathdon area of Aberdeenshire. That same month, just a few miles away, a satellite-tagged hen harrier named Marlin sent his final transmission. Ultimately, four satellite-tagged hen harriers disappeared on Scottish grouse moors in spring 2020.

And in South Lanarkshire, **confirmed incidents of raptor persecution continued** on a notorious grouse shooting estate, where two gamekeepers have previously been convicted. In May, Silver, a satellite-tagged hen harrier suspiciously disappeared soon after settling to nest in the area and in July an eyewitness reported seeing a man, wearing a balaclava, shoot a short-eared owl.

In perhaps the most damning episode, a satellite tag was discovered which had been dumped in a river after being removed from a golden eagle that disappeared on a grouse moor in 2016. The incident was a stark reminder of the extensive and organised effort of criminals to target birds of prey and dispose of the evidence.

Even at a time when the shooting industry was under intense scrutiny, these crimes continued. Clearly change will not come from within.

"There has never been a stronger awareness and sense of revulsion from the public over the persecution of Scotland's iconic birds of prey. Despite this we see criminal activity continuing from one season to the next. The need to clamp down harder on perpetrators and those who aid and abet them has never been more critical."

Mark Ruskell, MSP and LINK white-tailed eagle species champion in the Scottish Parliament

Leading the way: the Werritty report and beyond

In the push towards implementing meaningful changes to clamp down on raptor persecution, Scotland is leading the way. In November 2020, in response to the 'Werritty review' of grouse moor management, the Scottish Government committed, if re-elected, to introducing a number of measures: the licensing of grouse shooting businesses; the licensing of all muirburn and the banning of burning on peatlands; and to stopping raptor persecution. Now that this action has been proposed, RSPB Scotland wants to see licensing delivered as soon as possible.

"It is clear from the incidents that continued to take place on Scottish grouse moors in 2020 that even despite a national lockdown and ongoing scrutiny of their management practices, there are those involved in the gamebird shooting industry who think our laws do not apply to them. These ongoing cases are indicative of a serious level of organised crime, now recognised by the full-time detective resource devoted to investigation of these incidents by Police Scotland. This, and the Scottish Government's response to the Werritty review, is a clear signal that times are changing. The days of criminals killing our birds of prey are numbered."

Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland Head of Investigations

A white-tailed eagle found poisoned in 2020

Wales

The Welsh Government's funding of an RSPB Raptor Officer role began in 2020: a clear statement that raptor persecution is being taken seriously and a commitment to uncovering these crimes. It also funded five satellite tags, three of which were fitted to young hen harriers in 2020 and another two in 2021. The monitoring of these harriers will undoubtedly improve our understanding of these birds and the challenges they face.

The reported theft of the eggs and chicks of birds of prey from the wild has almost ceased in Wales, but persecution rates are not declining – according to a new RSPB Cymru review, published in August 2021.

Crimes against raptors in Wales 1990–2019, a paper written by RSPB Cymru and published by the Welsh Ornithological Society, summarises the plight of raptors in Wales over the past three decades (**see paper here**).

While the number of confirmed incidents of raptor persecution fell between 2000 and 2009, compared to the previous decade, there has been a marginal increase in the past decade. And the real total will undoubtedly be much higher, as the number of confirmed persecution cases is likely the tip of the iceberg. Most worryingly of all, the rate of poisoning cases has increased in the last 30 years, with 52 cases confirmed in the last decade. Laying poison baits in the open has been illegal since 1911.

The paper also shows that the probability of a persecution incident from 2010 to 2019 was three times higher in areas where driven shooting of gamebirds is available for sale.

"Good progress has been made over the past three decades to reduce the rate of crimes against our majestic birds of prey. The dramatic reduction in the theft of eggs and chicks shows that tougher action really does work. This has helped the welcome return of birds such as red kites, which were once on the brink of extinction. However, the rise in persecution, and especially poisoning cases, is a big worry. There's still work to be done to root out these deplorable acts of crime against wildlife.

"The relationship between raptor persecution and driven shooting was stronger than we expected, and we think this deserves further investigation."

Julian Hughes, RSPB Cymru Head of Species and lead author of the paper

Chris Franklin

One of three kites found poisoned in Powys, with the substance diazinon.

Police, NWCU, Natural England and RSPB on a raid near Thetford, Norfolk

Norfolk Rural Crime

Conclusion

The figures in *Birdcrime 2020* show once again that the illegal killing of birds of prey remains a serious and deep-set stain on our landscapes. More than just a yearly snapshot, this data is underpinned by crime reports, intelligence, and years of scientific research and systematic population studies.

All of this evidence clearly shows the link between land management for gamebird shooting and raptor crimes. It also reveals that the conservation impact of persecution on populations of birds of prey is particularly significant in areas where land is used for driven grouse shooting in England and Scotland.

It has never been clearer that reform of driven grouse shooting is urgently needed. Raptor persecution is a symptom of an unsustainable model, and the RSPB wants to see an end to environmentally damaging and illegal practices associated with this industry.

Action is needed now

UK governments can no longer ignore the blatant and often criminal destruction of protected species and landscapes, and we are pleased that the Scottish Government at least has recognised this fact and plans to take action. We are in a nature and climate crisis. All land must now be managed sustainably for people and for nature. Industries, businesses and land managers alike must not only operate within the law but should not be adding to declines in the UK's wildlife. In light of raptor persecution being a National Wildlife Crime Priority, we want to see a consistent approach across all four countries towards the investigation of these offences.

The RSPB, as a voice for nature and its members, demands that grouse moors are licensed as a matter of urgency in Scotland (as proposed in the independent Grouse Moor Management Review Group ('Werritty') Report published in autumn 2020), and also in England. An effective licensing system should provide better protection for our birds of prey. Those who operate within the law should have nothing to fear from such a system. But failure to comply with legal and environmental standards could result in the removal of a license to operate. If the Government fails to deliver effective reform within five years, the RSPB will call for a ban on driven grouse shooting.

"Change can and does happen. 100 years ago, after 30 years of indefatigable campaigning, the fledgling RSPB succeeded in bringing about the Plumage Act, banning the import of feathers to be used in fashionable hats, which was having a brutal and devastating effect on many species around the world. We are proud to uphold the values of our founders, and will always continue to campaign on behalf of birds."

Beccy Speight, RSPB Chief Executive

Positive steps with partners

Partnerships aimed at ending wildlife crime continue to go from strength to strength, with proactive multi-agency raids stepping up in 2020 and 2021, largely as a result of the National Wildlife Crime Unit, key police officers and statutory agencies. The RSPB is working closely with police forces across the UK, as well as statutory agencies and government bodies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and others who are committed to taking action against raptor persecution.

Raptor workers and study groups, vets and rehabilitators, and countless other volunteers and individuals also deserve recognition for their ceaseless efforts to protect birds of prey and the landscapes they inhabit. Finally, the role of RSPB members and supporters, and the general public, cannot be understated. Thank you. Please continue being our eyes and ears and raising your voice for nature. It matters, and it makes a difference.

What you can do

We believe that public pressure on governments is crucial in turning the tide and ending the culture of criminality towards birds of prey that persists in some parts of the country. A growing body of people are speaking out against this injustice, and the louder and stronger we are, the closer we come to securing a brighter future for birds of prey and their habitats.

While the RSPB employs a dedicated Investigations Team, focusing on detecting and preventing raptor persecution, gathering intelligence and evidence, and assisting the police, you also play an important role. By reporting potential crimes against birds of prey you can help us end this injustice and make our countryside safer.

How to report a crime

If you see suspicious activity, find evidence of illegal traps or find a dead or injured bird of prey in suspicious circumstances, please:

- Call the police on **101**.
- Report it to the RSPB by filling in this **online form**. All reports to the RSPB are treated in confidence.
- If you have information about someone killing raptors, call the RSPB's confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on **0300 999 0101**.

Signs of raptor crime – more information.

Become a Bird of Prey Defender

You can help the RSPB's Investigations Team fight for the future of birds like hen harriers by becoming a Bird of Prey Defender for just £3 a month, or through a one-off donation. This will help us continue our vital work, monitoring problem areas, installing covert cameras and gathering evidence of these crimes.
Visit **rspb.org.uk/defend**

Thank you to those who have already contributed. Your support is vital and much appreciated.

Niall Owen (RSPB)

Peregrine falcon