

2021



Birdcrime

Fighting raptor persecution



Birdcrime is the UK’s only annual and comprehensive report of known offences against birds of prey. This report covers confirmed incidents in 2021, as collated by the RSPB’s Investigations Team, working in support of the police and statutory agencies.

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Appendices

Download the Birdcrime 2021 appendices [here](#)



Anastasia Taylor-Lind (rspb-images.com)

The RSPB Investigations Team works tirelessly to uncover crimes against birds of prey.

The killing continues

This report reveals the confirmed* incidents of raptor persecution for 2021 in the UK: the shooting, illegal trapping and poisoning of protected birds of prey.

In 2021, 108 confirmed raptor persecution incidents were detected in the UK. This includes 80 confirmed incidents in England. Sadly, this is the second-highest figure on record for the country, after 2020's unprecedented figures. You can read the full breakdown in the [Appendices](#).

These are just the known, confirmed incidents. The actual numbers are likely to be far higher, with more going unreported and undetected. Furthermore, if we extrapolate satellite tagging studies for key species, such as the hen harrier and golden eagle, it suggests the true number of raptors killed is far greater than the annual totals documented so far. This has been demonstrated by [numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies](#).

The annual totals can increase after publication due to the time taken to process cases. In recent years, this has particularly been the case due to Covid-19 related backlogs. 2020's 30-year high of 137 confirmed incidents has risen to 146 since the publication of the report in October 2021. We anticipate the same will be true for 2021.

As ever, there's a startlingly clear connection between raptor persecution and land managed for gamebird shooting. See the [RSPB Raptor Persecution Map Hub](#). Until there is far more accountability for the criminal activities associated with the shooting industry on sporting estates, raptor persecution will remain a persistent UK-wide problem.

All wild birds and their nests are protected by law, including birds of prey. Yet the killing continues. The continuation of these crimes in the midst of a nature and climate emergency is unacceptable, and requires urgent action. Additionally, the

RSPB is concerned by the number of dead birds of prey that have tested positive for lethal levels of rodenticide. We are working with partners to monitor and ascertain whether this is down to misuse or direct abuse.

Thankfully, 2021 demonstrated the success of multi-agency investigations in tackling raptor crime, generating more court cases leading to prosecutions. We were further encouraged by the publication of a United Nations-led review: [Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit Report](#), which recognised the need for action to tackle raptor persecution. It included several recommendations which we urge UK governments to take forward without delay. This was further supported by the NWCU (National Wildlife Crime Unit) [Strategic Assessment 2022](#).

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



There is a clear connection between raptor persecution and land managed for gamebird shooting.

"The figures once more show the horrors of raptor persecution, in connection with gamebird shooting. Greater regulation is needed urgently."

Mark Thomas, RSPB Head of Investigations UK

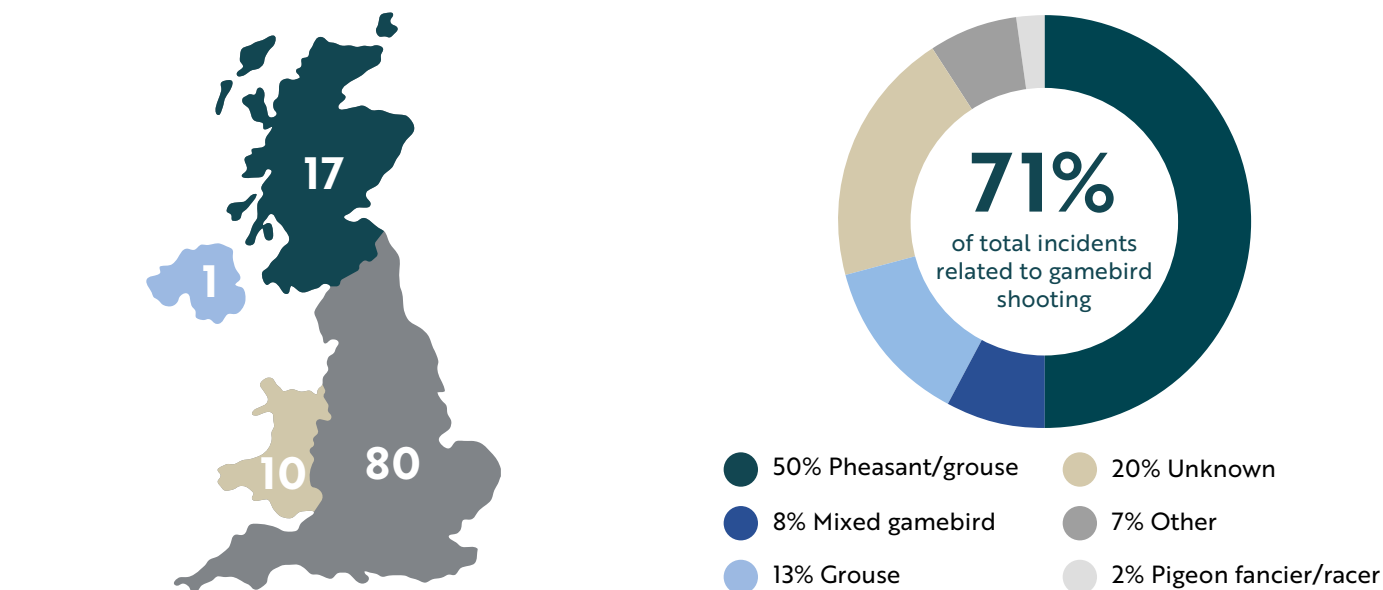


2021 in numbers

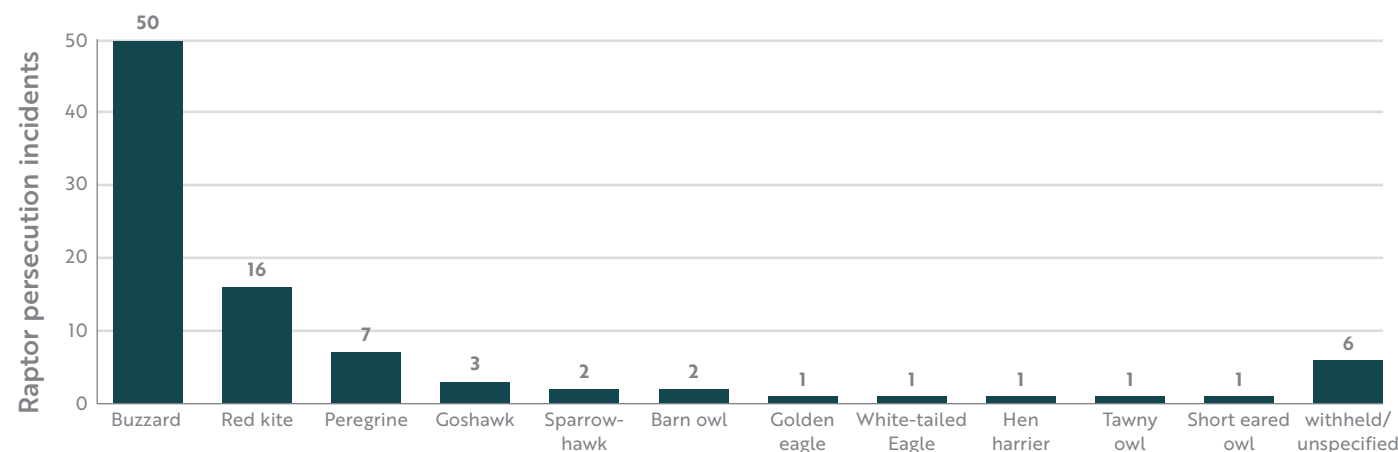
Raptor persecution is an ongoing problem, and the majority of the incidents occur in connection with land managed for gamebird shooting.

In 2021 there were 108 incidents of raptor persecution in the UK

Land use breakdown



Bird species affected



Highest number of confirmed incidents of raptor persecution

1. Norfolk (13)
2. Dorset (12)
3. North Yorkshire (10)

5 individuals were prosecuted for bird of prey persecution-related offences in 2021, **all of them gamekeepers**

The problem

Intensive gamebird shooting

In 2021, over two thirds (71%) of all confirmed incidents of raptor persecution related to land managed for gamebird shooting, compared to 2020's 62%.

Of the remaining 29% of incidents, 21% were categorised as 'unknown'. This is where there was not enough information or intelligence to determine the likely connections to those believed responsible. Two per cent were connected to pigeon racing or fanciers, and seven per cent were classed as 'other'. See also [Appendix 1, Figure 6](#).

Intensive management on some shooting estates is evidenced by the killing of birds of prey, which are seen as a threat to gamebird stocks. This is underpinned by decades of RSPB data, scientific studies and police prosecutions.

Raptor persecution on grouse moors continues to be a considerable issue. The RSPB Investigations Team has been involved with a number of significant investigations on driven grouse shooting estates in 2021. Several are still ongoing.

Driven grouse shooting also gives rise to other environmental concerns, including burning on precious peatland to create habitat for red grouse. Burning not only damages peatland flora, it releases stored carbon into the atmosphere, fuelling climate change.

The RSPB's [Raptor Persecution Map Hub](#) shows hotspots of persecution over 15 years. 2021's figures also show what has long been apparent: that raptor persecution is not just an issue on grouse shooting estates, but across pheasant and partridge estates too.

Two of the worst counties based on 2021 data – Norfolk (13 incidents) and Dorset (12 incidents)

– are lowland areas, dominated by pheasant and partridge shooting, where the police, supported by the RSPB, have detected persecution incidents and are involved in ongoing investigations. The third worst county was North Yorkshire (10 incidents), which includes grouse, pheasant and partridge shooting.

Until the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 60 million non-native gamebirds were released into the UK countryside every year, creating negative impacts on native wildlife and habitats. [This industry has reached unsustainable levels](#). The RSPB believes that better regulation of the larger, intensive shoots is the only way to drive up environmental standards and limit the overall release numbers.

At the RSPB AGM on 15 October 2022, RSPB Chair of Council Kevin Cox communicated a change in policy: for additional regulation of pheasant and partridge shooting. In the context of the nature and climate emergency, voluntary approaches have failed to deliver, leaving additional regulation the only option.

It is clear that existing laws are failing to protect birds of prey from being illegally killed. The actual punishments that are handed out act as little or no deterrent. The punishments available (jail and/or an unlimited fine) are not being utilised to their full extent by the courts. In 2021 there were only four convictions. In some previous years, there were none at all.

There must be better enforcement of existing laws, plus essential new legislation, to meaningfully protect raptors from routine and relentless persecution. In particular, strong statutory pressure needs to be brought on those managers and employers within the shooting industry who direct or allow their staff to commit these crimes.

Case studies

Whilst many crimes against birds of prey go undetected, the RSPB and enforcement agencies work closely to gather evidence and, where possible, bring perpetrators to justice.

Gamekeeper caught on camera beating buzzards

Following information from a member of the public, RSPB Investigations Officers located a live buzzard caught in a crow cage trap in Nottinghamshire in January 2021. They released the bird and installed a covert surveillance camera to determine what was going on. [The footage caught gamekeeper John Orrey](#) trapping and brutally beating two buzzards to death. A search by Nottinghamshire Police, supported by the RSPB, uncovered the same weapon used in the footage to dispatch of the birds. Additionally, two stock doves, also a protected species, used to bait the trap, were revealed to have been illegally shot. A guilty plea earned Orrey a £1,000 fine and 20 week's imprisonment suspended for one year.

This case highlights the abuse of cage traps on land managed for gamebird shooting. Cage traps can be used legally under various government

General Licences to catch and kill certain birds, such as crows and magpies, for specific reasons. If non-target birds, such as raptors, become accidentally caught they must be immediately released unharmed. However, in 2021, there were 10 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution involving crow cage traps. This included a gamekeeper in Cheshire whose unlawful operation of a trap resulted in a sparrowhawk starving to death inside. And in November 2021, a [gamekeeper pleaded guilty](#) to recklessly killing a barn owl and goshawk in an unattended trap in the Scottish Borders the previous year.

In numerous other cases no court action was possible, because no one was able to identify the trap operators. Better General Licence conditions could have prevented this. The RSPB believes that trap users in England, Wales and Northern Ireland must be registered, as is the case in Scotland.



Golden eagle poisoned in National Park

In March 2021, a young golden eagle was found dead in the Cairngorms National Park, on the Invercauld Estate, managed for driven grouse shooting. A toxicology report confirmed the bird had been illegally poisoned. Undoubtedly, it had scavenged from the hare bait lying nearby, laced with the same toxic chemical. The eagle had fledged from a nest a few miles away and was not yet a year old. A rabbit bait laced with the same banned pesticide was found within 500m of the golden eagle and hare. This incident followed the poisoning of a young white-tailed eagle in nearby Strathdon in April 2020.

There is a long history of raptor persecution in this area. In 2019, a flying golden eagle was photographed with its leg caught in a spring trap. In 2016, evidence of a line of similar traps, hidden under moss and placed beside baits to attract birds of prey, was found on a nearby hillside.

Despite a search and further enquiries by Police Scotland, no one was charged in relation to the poisoning of the eagle. Incredibly, 68 golden eagles have been illegally killed in Scotland since 1981, the majority falling victim to illegal

poisoning on grouse moors. No one has been convicted in relation to these incidents, and these are only the cases we know about.

In 2022, NatureScot imposed a General Licence restriction on the Micras and Gairnshiel beat of the estate, where the incident was discovered. These licences allow landowners and managers to carry out control of common species of wild birds, such as crows and magpies, to protect crops or livestock, without the need to apply for an individual licence. Disappointingly, however NatureScot confirmed that the estate had successfully applied for individual licences allowing estate staff to carry out these same activities.



68

golden eagles have been illegally killed in Scotland since 1981



The dead raptors found in the well on a Wiltshire pheasant shoot.

Dead raptors discovered down well

The discovery of a tomb of dead raptors down a well on a Wiltshire pheasant shoot was a graphic illustration of the horrors of raptor persecution.

“For something as dignified as a bird of prey to end up in a subterranean mass grave is a sign of something deeply wrong.”

In June 2022 gamekeeper Archie Watson received a 12-month community order (180 hours unpaid work) and was told to pay £393 costs. He pleaded guilty to offences relating to the possession of deceased birds of prey.

An RSPB covert surveillance camera captured Watson depositing a buzzard down a well, and other items on other occasions, often preceded by the sound of gunshots. While whoever killed the birds is unknown, we believe the birds recorded (at least 11 buzzards and four red kites) were illegally killed. This was the largest raptor persecution case in England in terms of body count.

RSPB Investigations Officer Jack Ashton-Booth said: “For something as dignified as a bird of prey to end up in a subterranean mass grave is a sign of something deeply wrong.”



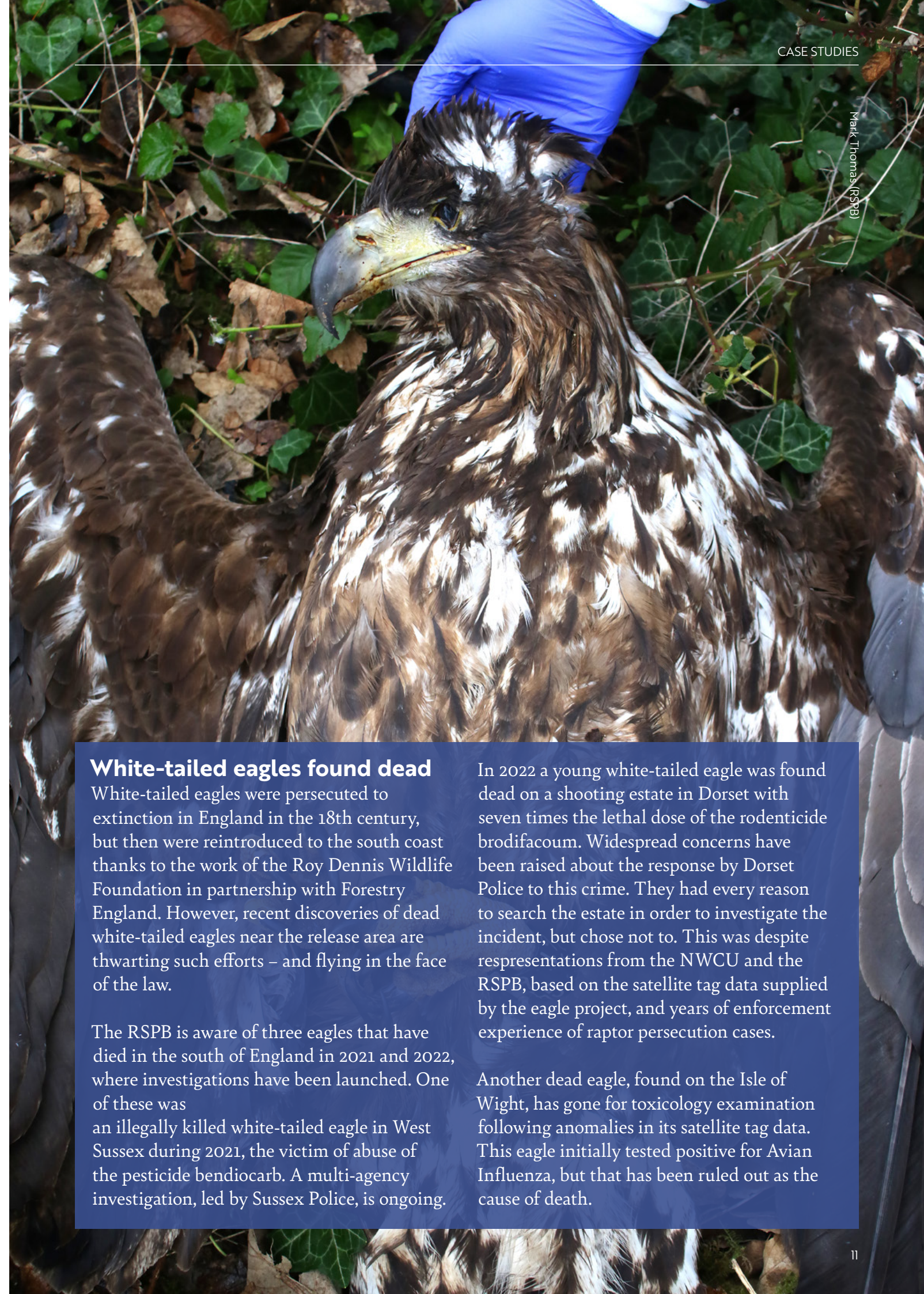
The remains of a shot buzzard.

Illegal pesticide storage in Wales

In June 2022, a gamekeeper was fined for pesticide storage offences following the discovery of a poisoned red kite, poison bait and a shot buzzard.

In 2021, [RSPB Investigations Officers assisted North Wales Police](#) in “the worst case of illegal pesticide storage” the team had ever seen.

On a pheasant shooting estate in Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, they uncovered 18 highly toxic products – many of which are banned – stored in an unlocked outbuilding. David Matthews, a gamekeeper for 50 years, was prosecuted. The fine and costs amounted to just £219.



White-tailed eagles found dead

White-tailed eagles were persecuted to extinction in England in the 18th century, but then were reintroduced to the south coast thanks to the work of the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation in partnership with Forestry England. However, recent discoveries of dead white-tailed eagles near the release area are thwarting such efforts – and flying in the face of the law.

The RSPB is aware of three eagles that have died in the south of England in 2021 and 2022, where investigations have been launched. One of these was an illegally killed white-tailed eagle in West Sussex during 2021, the victim of abuse of the pesticide bendiocarb. A multi-agency investigation, led by Sussex Police, is ongoing.

In 2022 a young white-tailed eagle was found dead on a shooting estate in Dorset with seven times the lethal dose of the rodenticide brodifacoum. Widespread concerns have been raised about the response by Dorset Police to this crime. They had every reason to search the estate in order to investigate the incident, but chose not to. This was despite representations from the NWCU and the RSPB, based on the satellite tag data supplied by the eagle project, and years of enforcement experience of raptor persecution cases.

Another dead eagle, found on the Isle of Wight, has gone for toxicology examination following anomalies in its satellite tag data. This eagle initially tested positive for Avian Influenza, but that has been ruled out as the cause of death.

Emerging threats

Illegal poisoning remains a serious threat to birds of prey and other wildlife. The substances used may change, but the threat remains very real.

The government-run Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS) conducts toxicology testing across the UK, the results of which can be used for enforcement by the police and CPS. It continues to be a barometer of the current threat and emerging issues for poisoning related bird of prey deaths. The substances used may change, but the threat remains very real. For example, for years the highly toxic insecticide carbofuran was the substance of choice for those attempting to poison birds of prey, until it was banned in 2001. Although it is still found, it has now been usurped by bendiocarb, another highly toxic insecticide. In recent years, bendiocarb's legal usage has been limited to products approved for specific indoor usage only. Bendiocarb is now the most recorded substance in raptor poisoning cases, and the favoured substance by those attempting to poison birds of prey.

A significant emerging threat is the toxic rodenticide brodifacoum. Professional brodifacoum products can only be used legally in and around buildings, to mitigate its impact on the wider countryside. However, this is not always happening. In recent years, multiple raptors have been discovered dead in open countryside and found to be containing background traces of the rodenticide. Even sub-lethal levels found in birds of prey – perhaps picked up through scavenging – indicate this poison is widely getting into the food chain.

Worryingly, now brodifacoum is being found in birds of prey in concentrations well beyond lethal levels. The misuse of rodenticide is a criminal offence. But it's also an increasing concern that criminals are now fully aware of brodifacoum's effectiveness as an abuse product to deliberately target wildlife.



Poisoning data delay must be addressed

Every quarter, the data released by WIIS shows cases where pesticide abuse and misuse has taken place. This is using either long-withdrawn products such as carbofuran detected at lethal levels in a victim; or such high levels of approved products that there is real concern of organised abuse of the product, to target wildlife and birds of prey.

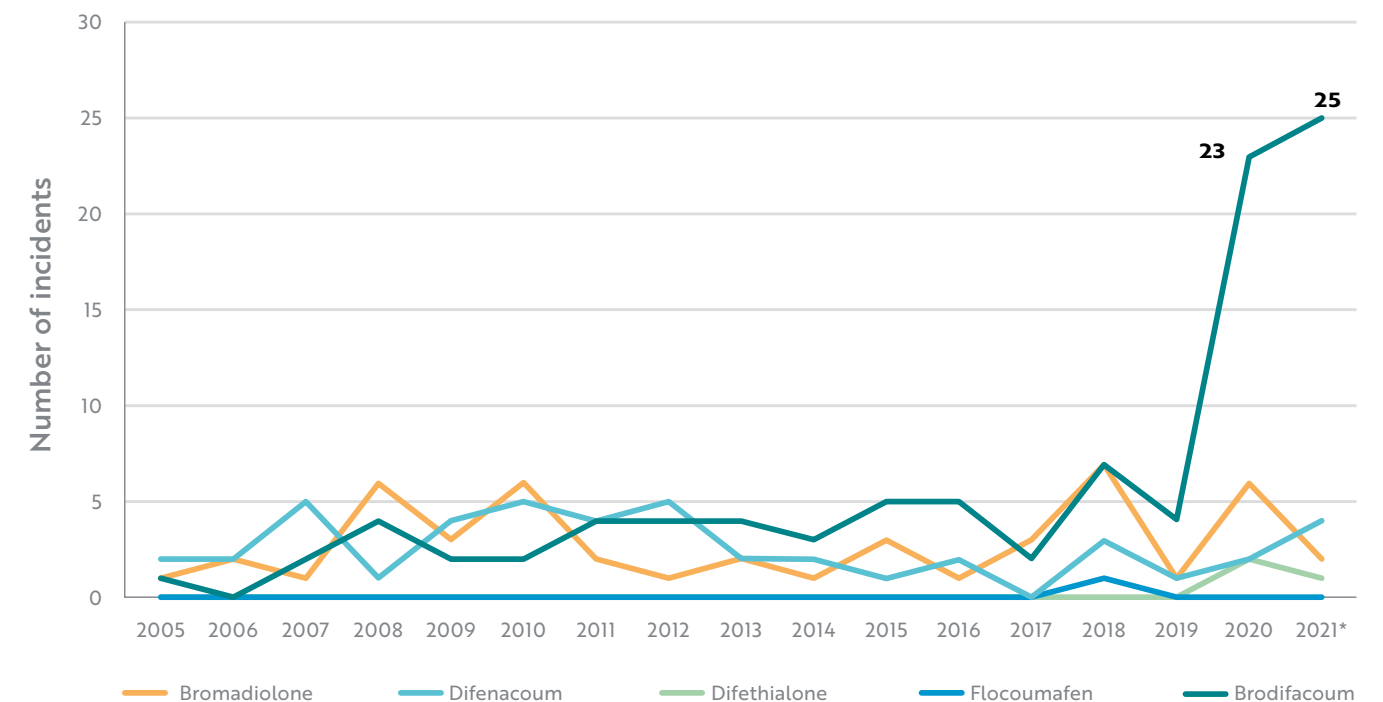
The RSPB fully supports the function and integrity of WIIS. Their standard of toxicological analysis aligns with our stringent recording criteria for whether an incident can be 'confirmed'.

These toxicology results also form vital links in the chain of evidence in police investigations. Unfortunately, whether due to high demand

or available resources, these results are often not available for several months (sometimes more than a year) after a dead bird or animal is found. This causes inevitable delays in investigations and increases the risk of missed opportunities for follow-up. This lag is also concerning from an environmental health and public safety perspective. While enforcement agencies await the result of a dead bird, animal or suspected bait, the activity may continue unchecked.

We flagged this in a recent government review of WIIS. We will continue to urge UK governments to invest more resources in the toxicological analysis of potential wildlife poisoning cases to ensure quicker results.

Concerning rise in incidents relating to brodifacoum in bird of prey deaths



Source: Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme

*2021 data is not a full year - covers period to 31/07/2021

Hen harriers

Hen harriers are one of our rarest breeding birds of prey, typically found on moorland. Despite being fully protected by law, reports for over two decades continually identify criminal persecution as the main factor suppressing their population.

The shocking story of Asta, a Natural England-tagged hen harrier, is a horrific tale of raptor persecution that underlines the ongoing threats they face, and the terrible lengths that perpetrators will go to. Asta fledged from a nest in Northumberland in 2020 and settled in the North Pennines, centred on Gilmonby Moor, an area managed for grouse shooting. Natural England Strategy Director John Holmes said: "Concerns were raised when Asta appeared to suddenly move to a new location and stopped moving. The police were immediately informed, and no efforts were spared in tracking down the tag. What our fieldworkers eventually found was shocking and unexpected: the tag, which they had last seen on the healthy nestling Asta, attached to the scavenged carcass of a carrion crow. It was quickly established that the tag and harness were intentionally fitted to the crow by a human. We know that Asta must have died before or soon after her tag was removed, because the harness straps were not cut or broken, and there would have been no way to remove the harness intact from a live bird without severe injury." It is not known who did this or why, and despite a thorough investigation it was not possible to identify a suspect.

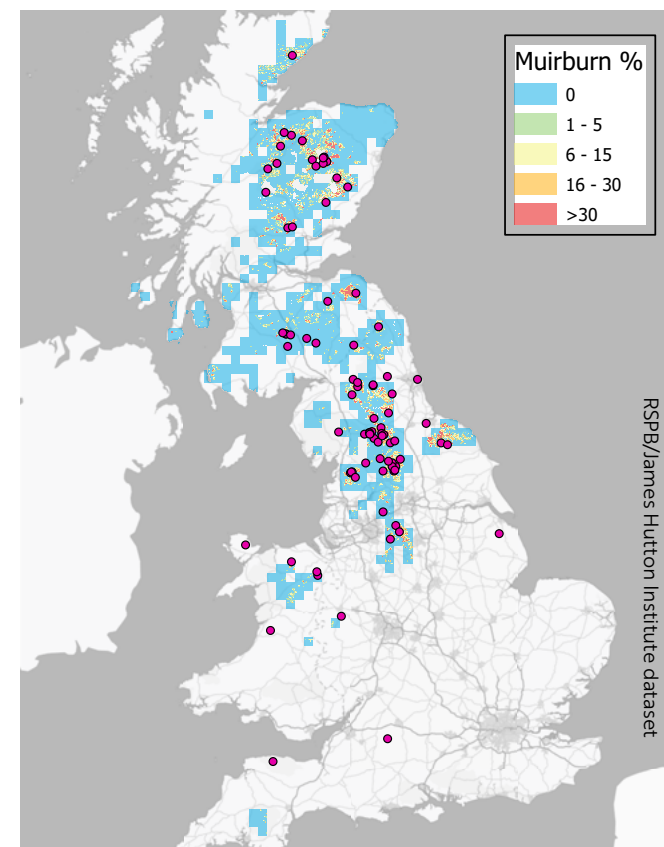
In 2021, three hen harriers tagged by the RSPB disappeared in suspicious circumstances: distressing repeats of a familiar narrative.

Yarrow, Tarras and Reiver were fitted with satellite tags as nestlings in 2020 and 2021, and came from a small breeding population in southern Scotland. [All three disappeared](#) in Northern England in suspicious circumstances associated with driven grouse shooting.

A 2019 paper on Natural England satellite tagging data of hen harriers showed that, of 58 birds fitted with tags, 42 (72%) had been illegally killed or disappeared suddenly with no evidence of a tag malfunction. They are 10 times more likely to die or disappear in areas dominated by grouse moors. Several police investigations into hen harrier persecution in England are ongoing. [Satellite tagging suggests widespread illegal killing on British grouse moors.](#)

Whilst 2022 was the most successful breeding season in England for many years, with 119 chicks fledging, the English population remains considerably below the potential carrying capacity of our upland habitats. Breeding males continue to disappear in suspicious circumstances, and the danger to young birds after they have left the nest remains very real.

Suspicious disappearances of satellite tagged hen harriers, 2004-2021



Muirburn is the practice of burning vegetation, mainly associated with managing land for grouse shooting.

"All too often, satellite-tagged hen harriers are killed or disappear in suspicious circumstances in the first few months of their lives."

Steve Downing, Chair of the Northern Raptor Forum (NERF) and licensed satellite tagger



Satellite-tagging hen harriers is shining a light onto the lives of these persecuted birds.

Country focus

Despite all the bad news, there has been significant progress throughout the the UK in tackling raptor persecution, particularly the increase in partnership working and joint police operations.

England

Number of confirmed incidents: 80

The levels of raptor crime in England remain worryingly high at 80 confirmed incidents.

Since the surge of raptor crimes in 2020, the RSPB has been involved in police-led multi-agency enquiries with nearly half the English police forces in relation to raptor persecution cases. This has resulted in significant operations and, so far, two court cases (Orrey and Watson, see pages 8 and 10), with others ongoing.

While enforcement alone will not fix raptor persecution, it remains an essential part of the toolkit and we extend our thanks to our partners.

These joint investigations demonstrate what can be achieved with a collective approach. They give much cause to be optimistic, particularly where cases are publicised, allowing the public to see the good work going on behind the scenes, in a work area often dominated by bad news.



Officers from Durham and Northumbria Police plus staff from the RSPB Investigations Team and Natural England.



David Tipling (rspb-images.com)

Scotland

Number of confirmed incidents: 17

It's almost two years since the Scottish Government announced that it would be introducing legislation to regulate grouse shooting. This cannot come soon enough.

Meanwhile, significant raptor crimes continue to be detected, highlighting that licensing cannot come soon enough. It was particularly concerning that in 2021, for the second successive year, an eagle was deliberately poisoned on a grouse moor in Aberdeenshire.

Detected poisoning incidents have declined markedly in Scotland over the last 10-15 years. This has undoubtedly been driven by the increased use of raptor satellite tagging, and the introduction of vicarious liability legislation by the Scottish Parliament in 2012. This means that landowners can be prosecuted if their employees are proven to have broken the law. Poison use is indiscriminate and unpredictable, and with tags providing a higher chance of detection of raptor victims, there are clear deterrents.

"...the victims are unable to speak for themselves, and we know that many wildlife crimes are not witnessed and not reported."

However, we still do not have a sustained successful breeding population of harriers

or peregrines across most of the uplands of southern and eastern Scotland, and hen harriers are largely missing from driven grouse moors.

The criminals have simply changed their modus operandi. Those killing raptors now do it in more targeted circumstances, using traps and guns, with concerted effort to tidy up the evidence. Recent examples of tags or birds hidden or dumped in lochs and rivers provide ample proof of this.

In her foreword to the Scottish Government's wildlife crime report for 2020, Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment and Land Reform, states:

"We remain aware that recorded wildlife crime does not provide the full picture. This is an area where the victims are unable to speak for themselves and we know that many wildlife crimes are not witnessed and not reported. This has been especially true in the area of raptor persecution where tagged birds have disappeared in unexplained circumstances and where expected numbers of some species are not present in certain areas."

We agree, and we welcome the Scottish Government's announcement that it will introduce legislation to regulate the driven grouse shooting industry in 2023.



Wales

Number of confirmed incidents: 10

Investigations work in Wales has focused on two key areas. These are producing a scientific report highlighting raptor persecution in Wales, and uncovering crimes on the ground through the work of a dedicated RSPB Raptor Officer.

The recorded theft of eggs and chicks has almost ceased in Wales. However, illegal shooting, trapping and poisoning of raptors is still harming some of our most iconic and vulnerable species, like red kites and hen harriers.



[A paper published in summer 2021](#) found that poisoning cases have increased in Wales in the past 30 years, with 52 cases confirmed in the last decade. Laying poison baits in the countryside is illegal, and has potentially devastating consequences for wildlife, people and pets.

In May 2021, an osprey nest platform was cut down in a “horrific act of vandalism”, just after the birds had laid their first egg. The pair, at Llyn Brenig, in north-east Wales, were one of just five breeding pairs in Wales.

The employment of an RSPB Raptor Officer, part-funded by the Welsh Government, to tackle these crimes has been a success. It has generated significant enquiries that remain under investigation and gathered information about raptor persecution in Wales. The collaboration between the Welsh Government and the RSPB has proven valuable, demonstrating its worth in protecting raptors in Wales.

Hen harrier satellite tagging efforts have increased in Wales. Natural Resources Wales has funded 12 tags over the past two years, on top of the five already funded by Welsh Government. We’d like to extend our thanks for their continued support.

The Wales Bird Crime Enforcement Group has been set up by Welsh Government to mirror the Bird of Prey Persecution Priority Delivery Group. It involves enforcement agencies and supporting organisations, to discuss and tackle ongoing issues relating to crimes involving bird species.

Northern Ireland

Number of confirmed incidents: 1

The addition of an RSPB Northern Ireland-based Investigations Officer in October 2021 marks a significant step towards identifying and tackling raptor persecution in Northern Ireland. The role provides support and assistance to the statutory agencies and other partners, such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group. The work involves recording and following up wildlife crime incidents as well as being the point of contact for the public.

The addition of this post is also increasing RSPB NI’s understanding of the impact of wildlife crime on some of the country’s priority raptor species: the red kite, peregrine and hen harrier.

Alongside RSPB NI colleagues and partners, the Investigations Officer has assisted in the monitoring of red kites to try and understand

what is limiting their distribution. This additional resource will also enable increased monitoring of hen harriers, a species which has undergone a steady decline in breeding numbers in Northern Ireland over the last few decades.

[The Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2019 and 2020 \(psni.police.uk\)](#), written and published in March 2022 by the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime NI (PAW NI), summarises the plight of raptors in Northern Ireland 2016–2020.

RSPB data shows that between 2016 and 2020, there were 30 confirmed incidents involving 26 birds. Poisoning continues to be the prevailing method, involving over half these incidents (16), followed by shooting (11 incidents). We believe the single raptor persecution incident in NI during 2021 reflects the low detection rate in the country. It highlights the need for increased awareness and reporting of potential crimes.



Working together

Strong enforcement partnerships, a robust RSPB Investigations Team and a passionate body of supporters are creating a force to be reckoned with against raptor persecution.

Successful partnership working

Following the publication of the RSPB's Birdcrime report for 2020, we welcome the NWCU's public recognition of the fact that raptor persecution is at an all-time high. As a result of the United Nations report recommendations (detailed on page 22), they are successfully seeking increased funding to provide dedicated resources to tackle raptor persecution.

During the last 30 years, the RSPB has instigated or supported the majority of raptor persecution investigations across the UK. In addition, in recent years, we have seen a marked improvement in the investigation of these crimes by the police, although this still varies from force to force. We welcome longer-term funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit, and look forward to that unit employing a dedicated detective resource to be allocated to the more serious cases.

We continue to successfully work in partnership with the prosecuting agencies and support their investigations into cases that can be exceedingly complex.

RSPB Investigations staff continue to input into police training across the UK, while we continue to develop our work with other PAW partners in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, particularly with respect to the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Groups. September 2022 saw the launch of the new National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) [Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy for 2022-25](#), which includes an ambition to create a more enduring policing model for rural and wildlife crime.

30 years
of instigating or supporting the majority
of raptor persecution investigations
across the UK



Guy Shorrocks (RSPB)



Guy Shorrocks (RSPB)

Public outcry

After a white-tailed eagle was found poisoned in Dorset, a local MP declared that eagles were "not welcome" and the police investigation was shelved in early 2022. This caused widespread public outcry. People took to social media to express their support for birds of prey using the hashtag [#BirdsOfPreyWelcome](#).

Public support for projects to restore white-tailed eagles, ospreys, golden eagles and red kites to places where they have been driven out by past

persecution is a heartening. It shows the strength of public feeling for our native wildlife. It's a strong reminder of the power of multiple voices.

In July 2022, hundreds gathered at [Wild Justice's Hen Harrier Fest](#) to hear talks, share their passion for wildlife and unite peacefully against the ongoing persecution of birds of prey. A 'Walk for Hen Harriers' took place on an Inverness-shire grouse moor in August, organised by Hen Harrier Action.

Stronger than ever

The RSPB Investigations Team has never been stronger. Increased resources means the team has grown to include a robust intelligence team plus fieldworkers located where they can best tackle raptor persecution including Wales and Northern Ireland for the first time.

The team is enjoying undertaking expanded training of police officers and statutory agencies in detecting and enforcing raptor persecution crimes. Satellite tagging of hen harriers remains a central core of the team's summer months, a tool that remains groundbreaking in both protecting and detecting crimes against these birds. In short, thanks to support from RSPB

members, the team remains the key partner in providing intelligence, knowledge and practical experience to help the statutory agencies tackle raptor persecution across the UK.



**Increased resources means the
Investigations Team can work in Northern
Ireland and Wales for the first time**

The solution

The RSPB is calling on UK governments to implement urgent action. Only this will ensure birds of prey are kept safe from illegal persecution.

The RSPB's vision is for landscapes that are rich in wildlife and benefit both people and wildlife. There must be a united focus on sustainable and legal practices to achieve this vision.

In December 2021, a UN assessment on UK wildlife crime, requested by Defra, was published. It confirmed the involvement of organised crime groups in raptor persecution and other wildlife crime, and promised that 'The Government will now consider the recommendations to ensure our legislation and enforcement of wildlife crime is as strong as it can be'.

The report contained 72 recommendations with several focusing on raptor persecution. These include stronger regulation of the shooting industry, allowing the removal of licences to use crow cage traps.

Almost a year on, no official response has been forthcoming from Defra. In the current nature and climate emergency, we urge UK governments to take the UN recommendations forward as soon as possible.

The RSPB is calling on UK governments to implement urgent action. We recommend:

1. Introduction of licences for driven grouse shooting

We believe licencing is needed on driven grouse shoots across the UK. This will create greater public accountability, and ensure these estates operate to legal standards. Failure to comply, including the illegal killing of birds of prey, should result in sanctions including licence revocation for a defined period, and as a meaningful deterrent to wildlife crime.

2. Introduction of additional regulation for pheasant and partridge shooting

There is a growing evidence on the impacts of lowland gamebird shoots on wildlife caused by the release of 60 million non-native gamebirds across the UK each year (pre-Covid-19).

We want to see this number reduced to more environmentally sustainable levels, alongside better compliance with existing regulations. We are mostly concerned about large-scale intensive gamebird shoots and not smaller farm shoots. Self-regulation has largely failed to drive higher environmental standards, leaving no option but to look to for additional regulation to deliver the scale of change needed.

3. Better General Licence conditions

The following are urgently needed in the whole of the UK:

- Better regulation of the use of crow cage and other traps, including prohibiting use during a close season, changes to trap design, increased frequency of checks and a separate compartment for decoy birds.
- A legal requirement for traps and their identifiable users to be registered with the police and better enforcement of existing rules.
- Provision for the removal of licences to use these traps if wildlife protection laws are breached.
- All General Licence users should be required to submit an annual return.

Conclusion

We've taken great strides. However, more must be done. We call on the UK's governments to act now.

When it comes to securing the future of our wildlife, there is no time to lose. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. At a time when nature is in crisis, the illegal killing of protected species cannot be allowed to continue. Furthermore, a recent [YouGov poll](#) showed that the public want environment and climate to be a top three priority for the Prime Minister.

We recognise and welcome the work being done by the NWCUC, however more must be done across the board to tackle this large-scale, ongoing problem of raptor persecution and associated environmentally-damaging practices.

We call on the UK's governments to implement the recommendations as set out in the UN report, to heed the warning and advice from the RSPB and other organisations, and listen to the voice of a public which is growing increasingly frustrated with the criminal damage wrought on its wildlife.

53%

is all that's left of the UK's biodiversity, making it one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

"The evidence shows that the illegal persecution of birds of prey - which is time and time again linked to gamebird shooting - is holding back the recovery of some key species. This year's Birdcrime report is another reminder of the appalling methods deployed by some, and why there is a need for swift and effective change in our countryside. The United Nations report makes clear what must be done to end these wildlife crimes and we call on the new government in Westminster and governments around the UK to act and pave the way towards a sustainable future, respectful of the law."

Beccy Speight
RSPB Chief Executive

How you can help

You already are. Public pressure on governments is crucial in turning the tide on raptor persecution. A growing body of people are speaking out against this injustice. The louder and stronger those voices are, the closer we come to securing a brighter future for birds of prey and their habitats.

The RSPB employs a dedicated Investigations Team, focusing on detecting and preventing raptor persecution, gathering intelligence and evidence, and assisting the police. Reports and intelligence from members of the public are crucial in helping set those investigations in motion.

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**, or **999** if a crime is in progress



Report it to the RSPB by filling in [this online form](#)



Email the RSPB Investigations Team at: **crime@rspb.org.uk**



Call the RSPB's confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on **0300 999 0101**

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 of monitoring problem areas, installing covert cameras and gathering evidence of these crimes.

[Discover more](#)

If you have already contributed, thank you. Your support is vital and much appreciated.

North Wales Police and RSPB Raptor Officer Niall Owen, recovering vital evidence. There are many ways you can help us carry out this valuable work.



Stay connected

Keep up to date with the latest thinking, news, events, and information from the RSPB in your local community.



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