

AND FINALLY...



Malcolm Froid (right) continues to support *Legal Eagle* and other RSPB work

The RSPB would like to acknowledge the continued and generous support of Mr and Mrs C Malcolm Froid in helping to fund the production of *Legal Eagle*. Mr and Mrs Froid are long-term supporters of the RSPB and its Investigations team in particular. They have also generously funded the purchase of new equipment that will aid our Investigations Officers in the field. Thank you.

PAW

PAW is The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, a multi-agency body comprising representatives of the organisations involved in wildlife law enforcement in the UK. It provides opportunities for statutory and non-Government organisations to work together to combat wildlife crime. Its main objective is to promote the enforcement of wildlife conservation legislation, particularly through supporting the networks of

Police Wildlife Crime Officers and officers from HM Revenue and Customs and the UK Border Agency.

Please visit www.defra.gov.uk/paw for more information.



Write to be read

We welcome contributions to *Legal Eagle*. Please let us know about wildlife crime initiatives, news, events and prosecutions in your force. Send your articles and mailing list updates to the Editor, The RSPB, Investigations Section, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, by e-mail to vicki.blair@rspb.org.uk or by fax to 01767 693078. The views expressed in *Legal Eagle* are not necessarily those of the RSPB or PAW.



The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654, 232-0261-09-10

The RSPB

UK Headquarters
The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551

Scotland Headquarters
25 Ravelston Terrace,
Dunedin House, Edinburgh EH4 3TP
Tel: 0131 311 6500

www.rspb.org.uk

Northern Ireland Headquarters
Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT
Tel: 028 9049 1547

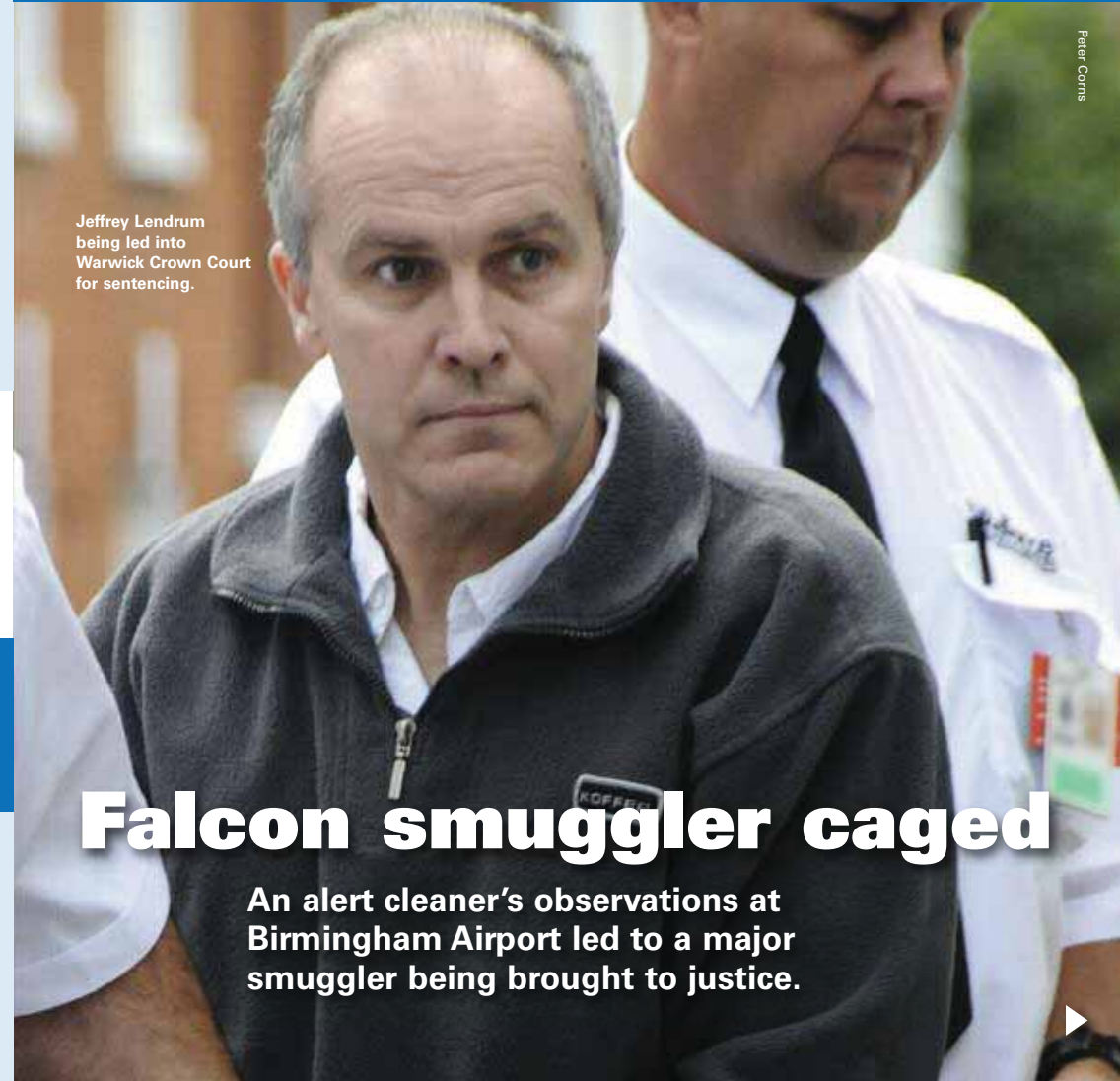
Wales Headquarters
Sutherland House, Castlebridge,
Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF11 9AB
Tel: 029 2035 3000



a million voices for nature

LEGAL EAGLE

THE RSPB'S INVESTIGATIONS NEWSLETTER
OCTOBER 2010 No 62



Jeffrey Lendrum being led into Warwick Crown Court for sentencing.

Falcon smuggler caged

An alert cleaner's observations at Birmingham Airport led to a major smuggler being brought to justice.

For more information on wild birds and the law, visit www.rspb.org.uk/birdlaw
Sign to give wildlife a chance: visit www.rspb.org.uk/lettertothe future



IN THIS ISSUE: New guidelines for covert surveillance • Auctioneer convicted • New bylaw saves seabirds • Swan mutilator caught red-handed • Gamekeeper let off lightly • Pensioner badgers badger to death • Trader jailed

continued from front page

An alert cleaner at Birmingham Airport sparked an investigation which led to a major smuggler being brought to justice. Andy McWilliam of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) reports.

"On 19 August 2010, at Warwick Crown Court, Jeffrey Lendrum, 48, from Zimbabwe was sentenced to 30 months in prison for attempting to smuggle 14 peregrine eggs out of the UK to Dubai, contrary to the Custom and Excise Management Act 1979 (CEMA). He was sentenced to a further four months, to be served concurrently, for taking the eggs from four nest sites in South Wales, contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA).

Jailing Lendrum, Judge Christopher Hodson said: 'I quote the words of a Lord Justice of Appeal (Lord Justice Sedley) when he says: "environmental crime, if established, strikes not only at a locality and its population but in some measure to the planet and its future. Nobody should be allowed to doubt its seriousness or to forget that one side of the environmental story is always untold." I adopt these words to express the gravity of what you did. You have had two previous warnings of the consequences of dealing with wild protected birds and now you have come to the UK and offended. These offences plainly pass the custody threshold for the reasons that I have mentioned, and pass it by a long way.'

On 3 May 2010, Lendrum, travelling on an Irish passport, was detained by West Midlands Police (WMP) Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) officers. He was waiting in the Emirates departure lounge at Birmingham International Airport, ready to board a flight to Dubai. Officers were alerted when cleaners became suspicious after Lendrum had asked to use the lounge's shower facilities. They found that the facilities were bone dry and unused, and that three egg boxes had been discarded along with one red egg.

CTU officers discovered that Lendrum had 14 eggs inside socks strapped to his abdomen. Lendrum said they were duck eggs and were strapped to him to

counter a back problem. Lendrum was arrested on suspicion of possessing wild bird eggs. I quickly made my way to the airport and, once it was confirmed they were peregrine eggs, they were handed to a local falconer, Lee Featherstone. The discarded egg from the shower was identified as a painted hen's egg, which are sometimes used to replace real eggs when wild nests are raided so parent birds will continue to incubate.

The following day Lendrum was interviewed at length. He admitted visiting the UK some three weeks earlier and that he had identified a number of peregrine nests in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. He returned a few days prior to his departure date to take 14 eggs from four nests. He claimed he initially intended to take them back to Zimbabwe to hatch the birds out. He denied that he had incubated eggs for any period of time and believed they were not viable so he was going to blow them for a collection. He denied strapping them to his body to incubate them, maintaining the story about the cure for his back ailment.



Lendrum admitted visiting the UK three weeks earlier and had identified a number of peregrine nests in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. He returned a few days prior to his departure date to take 14 eggs from four nests.

His car had been left in the long-stay car park. We found climbing gear and an incubator powered from the cigarette lighter inside it. Lendrum was charged and remanded in custody.

In a lockup facility rented by Lendrum, another incubator was found. Paperwork was also found relating to a conviction in 2002, when Lendrum was fined by Canadian authorities for taking gyrfalcons and

peregrine falcons. On that occasion, he had hired a helicopter to allow him to access nesting sites. We were also able to identify another conviction from 1984 for dealing in raptor eggs in Zimbabwe.

The information showed Lendrum was a highly organised and resourceful criminal poised to make significant profits from his exploits. From the evidence and intelligence gleaned, the eggs were due to be delivered to a contact in Dubai.

Falconer Lee Featherstone successfully hatched 11 chicks from the eggs. The RSPB found some suitable wild nests and seven chicks were successfully fostered into three Scottish nests. The remaining four chicks were later hacked back to the wild by falconers.

NWCU would like to thank officers from WMP CTU, in particular, DC Dave Cheshire; falconer Lee Featherstone for rearing the chicks and finally RSPB, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Raptor Study Group Workers and falconers for their efforts to get chicks back to the wild."



J Leonard (RSPB)

RSPB staff found foster nests for seven chicks hatched from the eggs Lendrum tried to smuggle

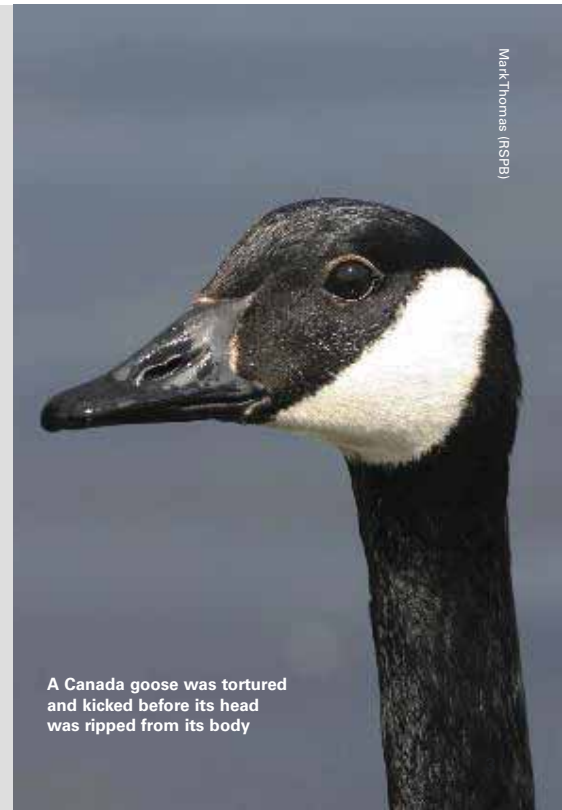
Goose killer pays the price

A Coventry man has been sent to jail following a horrific attack on a Canada goose in a public park. Distressed witnesses described how the attacker, after torturing and then decapitating the bird with his bare hands, ran around the park with the goose's bloody head for amusement.

On 23 June 2010, at Coventry Magistrates Court, Barry Sinfield, 36, of Rathbone Court, Stoney Stanton Road, Foleshill pleaded guilty to causing unnecessary suffering to a Canada goose. He was sentenced to 25 weeks in jail.

On 20 October 2009, witnesses in Swanswell Park, Coventry saw Sinfield swing the bird around his head then repeatedly kick it whilst it lay on the ground, before trapping the goose's neck against the floor with his foot and pulling its head off with his bare hands. The goose was seen desperately trying to escape throughout the ordeal, described by witnesses as a "sadistic and torturous rampage". Fuelled by alcohol consumed earlier that day, Sinfield was seen laughing during the incident, and he sought extra amusement by chasing his friend around the park with the bloody head, causing further distress to passers by.

Chairman of the bench, Dave Sykes, stated: "The bench has decided that this case was so serious that the defendant must be sent to prison today ... it had a distressing effect on the people who witnessed it."



Mark Thomas (RSPB)

A Canada goose was tortured and kicked before its head was ripped from its body



This poisoned buzzard started a major enquiry that led to the conviction of gamekeeper Ben Walker for multiple poisoning offences

Gamekeeper let off lightly after poisoning campaign

A prolonged RSPB surveillance operation on the Sufton Estate in Herefordshire paid off, after a gamekeeper was caught running a poisoning campaign. RSPB Investigations Officer Mark Thomas reports.

“On 21 April 2010, at Hereford Magistrates Court, gamekeeper Ben Walker, 26, formerly of Lower Farm, Westhild, Hereford, pleaded guilty to 17 offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. These related to the poisoning of five ravens and two buzzards, laying nine poison baits and possession of a pesticide cache. He was fined just £1,000.

The case started on 25 October 2009, when young children out walking with their family on a public footpath on the Sufton Estate near Hereford discovered a freshly dead buzzard lying next to a predated pheasant. When they reached home, the family immediately informed the RSPB.

On visiting the site, we found five dead ravens we suspected were poisoned and two more pheasants laid out as baits. However, the original dead buzzard and bait were missing and later enquiries revealed that the RSPCA had also been independently contacted and had recovered them.

Pheasants were reared nearby, and it seemed that poison baits were being put out to kill birds of prey and other predators. For four weeks, my colleagues and I carried out surveillance. During this time, it was suspected that more baits were laid out. These were immediately removed and no further birds were killed in the area under observation. However, a wider search of the estate found more dead ravens and buzzards which suggested that the poisonings were on a wider scale. A vehicle, believed to be driven by Walker, was seen on several occasions apparently checking locations where baits had been laid. Eventually, good quality footage of Walker was captured on video.



A mother took this photo with her child sitting next to a buzzard's last meal, not knowing it was laced with a deadly insecticide

I contacted Wildlife Crime Officer (WCO) PC Bryan Wood of the West Mercia Police and an operation was quickly planned. Natural England was contacted and a search warrant obtained. In the early hours of 25 November 2010, we intercepted Walker on his rounds on the estate. When we confronted him, he accepted his involvement in placing poison baits and showed us where he kept his pesticide cache within a grain sack hidden under a hedge. The cache held several containers of the insecticide Ficam W, which has the active ingredient bendiocarb. There was also a knife used to prepare the pheasant baits. Walker then took the search team to other locations on the estate where further poison baits were recovered.

Walker was arrested and interviewed. He stated he was the only person involved and that the head gamekeeper was unaware of his actions. RSPB provided the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) with comprehensive statements plus video footage and photographs. Walker pleaded guilty at the first opportunity to all charges. In mitigation, the court was told he was worried about losing his job if he could not keep pheasant numbers up and that he had been using poisoned baits for over nine months.

A huge amount of effort went into this investigation involving multiple agencies. The RSPB wishes to thank the informant, West Mercia Police, the RSPCA, Natural England, CRD and FERA. Sadly, the light sentence for such serious offences again highlights the inconsistencies in wildlife sentencing.”

Covert surveillance under the spotlight

The use of covert surveillance by non-government organisations (NGOs) has been brought under the spotlight resulting in new guidelines being issued by the CPS.

Coinciding with events at the Sufton Estate in November 2009 (see article opposite), a trial in Dorset involved a hunt employee charged with interfering with a badger sett. The evidence included covert surveillance footage from the League Against Cruel Sports. Following a defence submission, a District Judge expressed an opinion that this evidence should have been subject to an authorisation under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). However, a different District Judge at the subsequent trial did allow the evidence under Section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE).

The Countryside Alliance wrote to Chief Constables expressing concern that if the police and CPS used directed surveillance evidence gathered by NGOs, not authorised under RIPA, both the police and the CPS may be liable

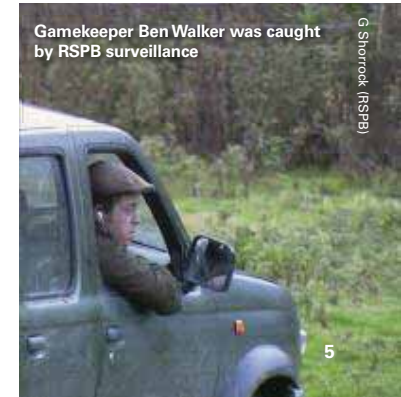
under the Human Rights Act. The Policy Directorate of the CPS subsequently issued guidance on www.cps.gov.uk/legal/h_to_k/hunting_a_ct/index.html#a666. This states that no authorisation under RIPA or the Police Act needs to be sought where an NGO conducts surveillance for its own purposes and then passes surveillance footage to the police. Where the police task the NGO to conduct directed surveillance and intend making use of such evidence, it would be appropriate to seek an authorisation. No authorisation would be required where the police neither initiate nor encourage the surveillance, even though they may be aware of it (case of R v Rosenburg 2006 cited).

Where the court determines an authorisation was necessary, it does not mean that the evidence will be automatically excluded; it will be for the court to consider when exercising its discretion under Section 78 of PACE.

The RSPB first used surveillance evidence in a pole-trapping case in 1990. Since then, of the 95 full and

part-time gamekeepers convicted of offences relating to bird of prey persecution, some 25 (18 England, five Scotland, two Wales) have relied on surveillance evidence. All but one of these used evidence gathered by the RSPB. These offences are often extremely difficult to investigate and the RSPB believes that such evidence has an important role to play, provided it is gathered in a reasonable and proportionate manner. The RSPB welcomes the guidance from the CPS.

Gamekeeper Ben Walker was caught by RSPB surveillance



G. Shorrocks (RSPB)

S. Spasov



Eggs of lesser kestrel were among those purchased by Seed

Seed sows his own downfall

A man named Seed, from County Durham, has been given a nine-month jail sentence, suspended for two years, as he was part of an international trading ring dealing in birds' eggs. Senior Investigations Officer, Guy Shorrocks reports.

"Election day, 6 May 2010, was full of choices for everyone. Away from the political stage, Judge Peter Armstrong at Durham Crown Court also had a choice to make. To decide what to do with Andrew Peter Seed of Low Willington, County Durham, who had earlier pleaded guilty to 17 offences relating to the smuggling, trading and keeping of birds' eggs. The long list of offences included four offences relating to the smuggling of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) listed birds' eggs from the USA and Australia contrary to the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979; 11 charges of trading in birds' eggs contrary to the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997; and two charges contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 relating to the

possession of 223 Schedule 1 birds' eggs and collecting equipment. He asked for another 25 offences to be taken into consideration. After deliberation, Seed received a nine-month sentence suspended for two years, plus a confiscation order and costs totalling £3,607.03.

In 2008, a local authority reported that Seed, one of their employees, had extensive e-mail correspondence on his computer about birds' eggs. In February 2009, the Durham Constabulary executed a warrant at Seed's home address and seized more than 2,000 birds' eggs, along with a quantity of data cards, correspondence and packaging.

I was asked to assist WCO PC Andy Cooke with the investigation. I have been involved in many major egg-collecting cases in the last 18 years. Most have been about the taking and keeping of eggs, rather than the trade and sale, which is a more uncommon line of investigation. At first, the collection appeared to contain little of real interest. However, as I delved through the eggs and other items, I

quickly began to change my mind. Whilst Seed's main interest was in trading eggs, his data cards indicated he had done a little collecting himself, most notably osprey eggs from Scotland in 2000. Though he later denied personally taking these, the details he had recorded fitted precisely with information on the RSPB database.

I found eggs of CITES-listed species including raptors, owls and egrets with information showing they had come from the USA, and some had been taken relatively recently. Packaging suggested they had been sent by post with false declarations, stating they were Christmas ornaments or knitwear. There were also a number of Australian parrot eggs smuggled into the UK by his associates. Closer to home, there were a number of eggs of Schedule 1 species with data cards, which I immediately suspected to be fraudulent and prepared by another convicted egg collector I had previously dealt with. Later, forensic handwriting analysis, supported by money from the PAW Forensic

Analysis Fund, confirmed these suspicions. Enquiries with Animal Health confirmed that no CITES permits or Article 10 Certificates had ever been issued to Seed.

The key information was contained in almost 6,000 e-mails relating to birds' eggs, going back to 2004, sent and received by Seed, while with his former employer. His downfall was caused by his failure to delete them.

Right from the start, it was clear that other people were involved, both in the UK and abroad. However, making sense of what trading had been taking place, pulling threads of hundreds of e-mails together and relating them to the items seized from his home was painstaking work. But from this tangled web, I prepared intelligence packages to allow the NWCUC to instigate national and international enquiries. These enquiries are continuing, but already two operations in the UK have led to the seizure of many thousands of birds' eggs, with a further seizure of over 3,000 eggs in Scandinavia.

Seed had been fairly co-operative with the police at the outset and accepted his involvement in many trading and smuggling offences. He admitted purchasing the Australian eggs and many of the Schedule 1 eggs from other collectors.

The response from the CPS was excellent throughout the enquiry, and the case progressed relatively smoothly to sentencing at the Crown Court. In sentencing, Judge Armstrong commented that Seed's hobby had become an obsession and he had turned a blind eye to the law.

This is one of the more demanding and unusual cases I have been involved with. As this and other cases reported in this issue of *Legal Eagle* show, it seems that the increasing use of electronic communications and the Internet have opened up new trading opportunities for these types of offences. In relation to this enquiry, I would like to thank WCOs PC Cook and PC Addison of Durham Constabulary, the NWCUC and in particular Ciaran Grogan and Steven Orange of the CPS for their assistance with this investigation."

Julian Hough



Eggs of great-horned owl and other CITES-listed species were smuggled from the USA

Going, going...

An experienced auctioneer has been convicted of exposing birds' eggs for sale. Northumbria Police WCO PC Andy Swinburne reports.

"On 31 March 2010, at Alnwick Magistrates Court, Ian Prytherch, who trades under the name Jim Railton, pleaded guilty to exposing birds' eggs for sale contrary to Section 6(1)(a) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. He was fined £1,000 plus costs of £85. He was ordered to forfeit the eggs.

In October 2009, after being contacted by the RSPB, I contacted Railton's Auctioneers at Narrowgate, Alnwick in Northumberland, about an advert on their Internet site for a miniature chest containing a quantity of birds' eggs. It was to be offered for sale at a forthcoming auction.

At the salerooms, the chest with 67 birds' eggs was seized and later examined by the RSPB. The eggs included 54 from 'wild birds', three of which were also listed on EU CITES Annex A. The auctioneer was later arrested and admitted advertising and offering the eggs for sale. He had little knowledge of the law regarding the sale of eggs, despite having been a professional auctioneer for many years.



J Leonard (RSPB)

The chest of eggs which resulted in the conviction of an auctioneer

The vendor was interviewed and was later able to provide details of provenance for the collection, most of which was dated as pre 1st World War. The CPS decided no action should be taken against the vendor because he had relied on the professional knowledge and advice of the auctioneer regarding the legality of the sale.

The case attracted widespread publicity and will hopefully act as a deterrent to those considering selling collections of wild birds' eggs. It has also provided a good informative curve for auctioneers."

Mutilation

Following a vicious attack on a mute swan in Bedford town centre, on 18 June 2010 at Bedford Magistrates Court, Mohammed Miah of Cathie Road, Bedford, pleaded guilty to one charge of intentionally killing a wild bird.

During the early hours of Monday 10 May 2010, several hotel night porters witnessed Miah strangling a mute swan to death along the River Ouse in the town centre. Bedfordshire Police were called and arrested Miah, who was drunk and splattered in blood. Nearby a plastic bag was found containing the blood-drenched body of a mute swan.

A joint investigation was launched by Bedfordshire Police, the RSPB and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. Forensic analysis later indicated that the bird's neck had been broken.

Magistrates said that the swan must have suffered a horrific death and handed down a 12-week suspended jail sentence. Miah was ordered to pay £85 costs, was electronically tagged and subjected to a weekend curfew for 12 months.

RSPB Investigations Officer Mark Thomas commented:

"The injuries to the swan were the worst I have ever seen inflicted to a bird by a human. Even the national newspapers could not publish the images. We are not sure of the motive of the killing but find it interesting that Miah was carrying the bird away in a bag."



Mark Thomas RSPB

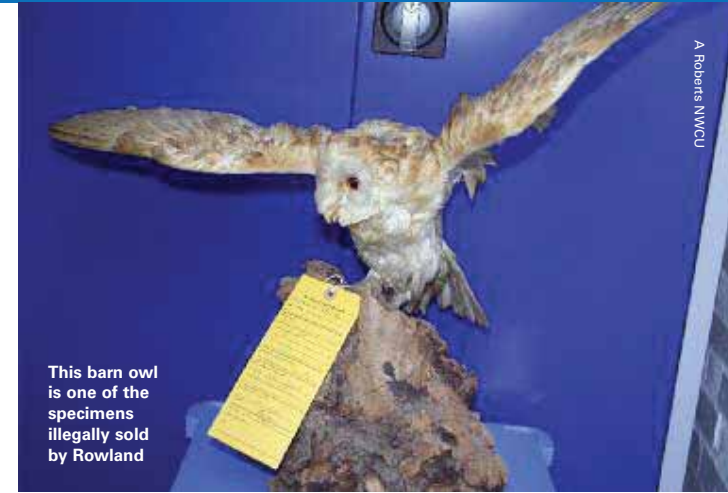
This swan suffered horrific injuries when it was killed by Miah

Wildlife trader jailed

An Internet trader who failed to learn his lesson after receiving a three-month suspended sentence has been jailed after committing further offences. Alan Roberts of the NWCUC reports.

"On 25 June 2010, after pleading guilty at an earlier hearing to six of 10 offences contrary to the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES), Mark Rowland of Orford Road, Swaffham, Norfolk, was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. This included three months from a previous suspended sentence in 2005, and six months for the new offences. Among the items were rhinoceros horn, as well as taxidermy specimens including hen harrier, wildcat, barn owl and long-eared owl. A Serious Crime Prevention Order was also imposed, banning Rowland from keeping or trading in any species protected by UK or EU legislation.

In my former role as a WCO with the Norfolk Police, I had investigated Rowland for trading in illegal taxidermy specimens. In December 2005, Rowland was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment, suspended for two years, for Internet selling of taxidermy items including birds of



A Roberts NWCUC

This barn owl is one of the specimens illegally sold by Rowland

prey, owls, and an American black bear, all without the appropriate EU CITES documents (Legal Eagle 48).

In April 2008, Norfolk Police attended his house for an unrelated matter and noted various taxidermy items, which gave them cause for concern. When I became aware of this information, I arranged for a further visit to his home. Rowland's computer, some paperwork and yet more taxidermy were seized. When interviewed, he denied he was still trading in EU CITES Annex A specimens. After examining his computer and checking eBay records, it was obvious that this was untrue. However, he had tried to conceal his

involvement by using family identities to filter in his own items.

Previous transactions included the sale of two rhinoceros horns to the USA for over £5,000 and a modern hen harrier taxidermy specimen. Monitoring his activities, which were ongoing during the time taken to have his computer examined, uncovered further sales of a wildcat and a barn owl. He had also bought a long-eared owl from Hong Kong without documents.

In sentencing, the Judge told Rowland that he had known what he was doing and that sanctions could only be effective if they were imposed."

Man fined for obstructing Wildlife Inspector

A Cumbrian man has been convicted and fined for obstructing an Animal Health Wildlife Inspector in the course of his duty.

On 5 July 2010, following a trial at Carlisle Magistrates Court, Brian Miller, 51, of Castlesteads, Hayton, Aspatria, was found guilty. He was fined £300 and ordered to pay £65 costs.

Miller had refused entry to an Animal Health Wildlife Inspector on 13 October 2009. The officer wanted to carry out an unannounced wildlife inspection under Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997. Miller refused access, claiming it

was too late in the day for the birds to be examined. The Inspector had made several previous visits to the address and was of the opinion that he had called at a reasonable time and that there was plenty of daylight to carry out the inspection.

Because of this refused entry, on 10 February 2010, Cumbria Police, along with staff from the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Animal Health, returned to the address with a search warrant. No offences relating to any birds present were disclosed, but Miller was reported for intentionally obstructing the inspector during the October visit.

Inspector Nevin Hunter, Head of Compliance at Animal Health commented: "It is vital that Wildlife Inspectors are able to undertake their role conducting inspections to ensure legislation is complied with.

On this occasion, the inspector was obstructed for no real reason. Those tempted to obstruct inspectors now know that robust action will be taken and I am grateful for the support of Cumbria Police and the NWCUC."

Couple receive suspended sentences for illegal CITES trading

A couple who ran an Internet business illegally trading in CITES-listed wildlife have received suspended jail sentences, been ordered to pay more than £5,000 in costs and carry out 200 hours of unpaid work. Alan Roberts of the NWCU reports on a protracted investigation.

"On 13 July 2010, Graham Pitchforth, 61, and his wife Norah, 65, of Southfield Close, Wrenthorpe, Wakefield, West Yorkshire returned to Leeds Crown Court for sentencing. Both had entered guilty pleas at an earlier hearing to 24 offences contrary to the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES) and Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. A wide range of species had been involved, including raptors, owls, primates, otters and butterflies. They were both sentenced to 44 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and 200 hours of unpaid work. They were ordered to pay £5,250 in costs.

It seems a long time ago, when in December 2006, following information received by HMRC, I assisted the West Yorkshire Police and Customs with a search warrant at their Wakefield home. We were aware that Norah was advertising a few skulls for sale on eBay, but it became immediately apparent that this was more than just a bit of a hobby. In both their small office and their garage there were boxes bulging with dried bats, hornbill casques and the skulls of assorted animals including monkeys, fruit bats and reptiles. A half-unpacked box contained a consignment of skins from South

Africa, and hand written labels showed others to have a southeast Asian origin.

At the end of a long day, an enormous collection of skulls, skins, and taxidermy were removed, as well as paperwork and a computer. This was only the start, as the real hard work involved piecing the evidence together to work out what had been taking place. We ploughed through thousands of computer records and hard copy e-mails and compared them with eBay records. It was possible to show that from over 3,600 transactions arranged via eBay and e-mail, a substantial quantity involved CITES-listed species imported from suppliers in Indonesia and South Africa, many without relevant permits. This was clearly a thriving business, selling to buyers all over the world.

Eventually, it was decided that we would charge them both with the strongest 51 offences, covering illegal importation and export plus COTES offences of sale and keeping for sale.

In deciding on the suspension of their sentence, Judge Batty made it clear that it was due to their ages, their personal circumstances and the length of time between the start and conclusion of the offences that had kept them from going straight to prison. He also made it clear that these were serious offences and that a custodial sentence was an entirely appropriate means of dealing with them."

Gamekeepers cautioned

Northumbria Police WCO PC Andy Swinburne reports on two intelligence-based operations to tackle offences on sporting estates. Both operations involved a multi-agency approach utilising NWCU, Natural England and RSPB Investigations.

"In March 2010, a warrant under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) was executed on premises in the Fenton area near Wooler, Northumberland. During the search, more than 700 rounds of Section 1 ammunition, well in excess of what he was allowed to hold, were found in the gun safe with a legally-held firearm. A spring-over trap was also found at the premises along with a container of the pesticide alphachloralose, though there was insufficient evidence to pursue matters in relation to the later item.

A gamekeeper was arrested and, when interviewed, admitted he had repaired the spring-over trap ready for use. It is an offence under Section 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to use a net, other than one powered by hand, to take or attempt to take a wild bird. The man was subsequently cautioned for failing to comply with the conditions of his firearms licence, under the Firearms Act 1968 and for possession of an article capable of committing an offence,



One of two buzzards poisoned by carbofuran in the Mindrum area of Northumberland

J Leonard (RSPB)

contrary to the WCA. Northumbria police later revoked his firearms licences.

In April 2010, the RSPB recovered two buzzards from land near Mindrum, Wooler, Northumberland. Analysis confirmed the presence of the banned pesticide carbofuran. In May, a WCA warrant was executed in the area. A gamekeeper was arrested and subsequently received a caution for failing to comply with the conditions of his firearms licence and for the illegal storage of a partly used canister of the fumigant pesticide Phostoxin contrary to the Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986.

Pensioner badgered badger to death

An elderly man who tried to stop badgers from taking bird food in his garden is his garden is convicted by the RSPCA of causing unnecessary suffering. The badger was trapped, shot at, and finally drowned.

On 21 May 2010, at Mold Magistrates Court, Norman Fletcher, 75, of Glan Yr Afon, near Holywell, Flintshire, pleaded guilty to trapping a badger contrary to the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, causing unnecessary suffering contrary to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 by confining the animal in a metal cage. He received a three-year conditional discharge and was ordered to pay £2,894 in costs within 28 days.

The court heard that on 24 September 2009, Inspector Armstrong of the RSPCA called at Fletcher's house to be shown a cage containing a dead badger. Fletcher said that he had put the cage down to catch rabbits or rats, though it was apparent that the trap was obviously designed to catch larger mammals. Fletcher had used peanuts as bait, and it is widely recognised that peanuts attract badgers. It was clear to the Inspector that the cage had been doused in water and a vet confirmed the badger had drowned. Fletcher revealed that he had shot at the badgers using a .22 air rifle but found "the pellets just bounce off them".

Inspector Armstrong said the judgement would act as a deterrent to anyone considering harming a protected species.

Fletcher had shot at the badger with an air rifle, but found that the pellets "just bounce off"



Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

Selection of CITES-listed specimens seized from Mr and Mrs Pitchforth



Crown copyright

Newts butchered

A pensioner hammered three great crested newts to death and posted their bodies to Natural England to protest that a colony of the rare amphibians in his garden pond was not being protected.

On 30 June 2010, at Stroud Magistrates Court, retired property manager Brian Butcher, 75, of Canonbury Street, Berkeley, Gloucestershire, pleaded guilty to four charges of killing and transporting

great crested newts (European Protected Species), contrary to The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. He received a conditional discharge for two years and was ordered to pay £40 costs.

The court heard that Mr Butcher dug the pond in his garden shortly after he moved into the property ten years ago. It was soon teeming with great crested newts, which bred in the pond. As is normal with amphibians, they

lived on adjacent land for the rest of the year. Mr Butcher claimed that four-and-a-half years ago a neighbouring landowner began grubbing up the verges and destroying the hedgerows to destroy the newt population, so that a planning application would be granted permission. Mr Butcher said he had provided Natural England with evidence, but they had refused to take action against the landowner.

He told the court that he had slaughtered the amphibians out of desperation and frustration after battling for four-and-a-half years against the "incompetence and negligence" of Natural England and a "tyrant" local landowner.

Magistrates accepted he had acted out of feelings of distress at what he perceived to be a threat to the newt colony. A spokesman for Natural England, speaking after the case, said: "We recognise that feelings have run high in this case, but the deliberate killing of these rare amphibians is an offence and we hope that the hearing will prevent further such actions taking place."

Britain's largest newt, the great crested newt, has been affected by the loss of breeding ponds and the decline in suitable surrounding habitat



Froglife

Wrong side of the claw

Catching and killing the wrong species of crayfish cost a Leeds man £4,000.

On 13 April 2010, at South Lakeland Magistrates Court, Christopher Hemsley, 41, of Bramhope, Leeds, pleaded guilty to killing white-clawed crayfish contrary to Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and taking fish in an inland water with a trap without a licence, contrary to

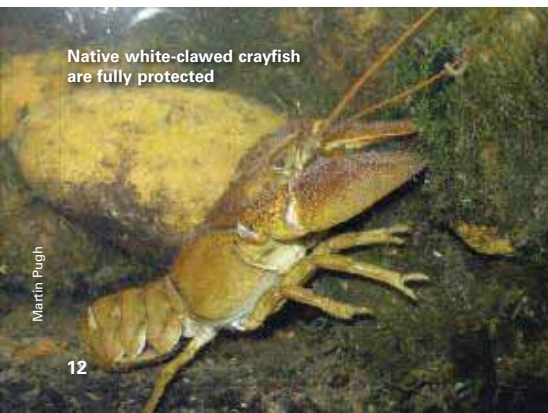
the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975. He was fined £3,500 for killing the crayfish, £400 for trapping them, and ordered to pay £100 costs.

The court heard that on 27 September 2009, Hemsley, an active environmentalist from Leeds, was on a weekend break with friends. A member of the public alerted the Environment Agency that several men were catching crayfish in the River Kent at Staveley, Cumbria. Fisheries Officers from the Environment Agency attended and found a number of illegally set crayfish traps. The police were called, and they found 14 cooked crayfish in a vehicle. It was established that some 40 white-clawed crayfish had been illegally taken and killed. Officers were able to return several live crayfish to the river.

Hemsley accepted what he had done, claiming he thought he had done a good deed by catching what he believed to be invasive American signal crayfish in a trap his wife had bought him.

Populations of white-clawed crayfish have shrunk rapidly since the 1970s, out-competed by signal crayfish, which were accidentally released from fish farms.

Native white-clawed crayfish are fully protected



Martin Pugh



Chris Commercial (rspb-images.com)

Red kites are still under threat from illegal poisoning

Kites not out of the woods

Red kites have been a great conservation success story over the last 20 years, with more than 1,500 pairs now re-established in the UK. Reintroduction programmes and dedicated work to protect the species, especially in Wales, have paid off handsomely. But the kites are not welcomed by all, and persecution has had serious impacts on the north Scotland population.

Compelling new research into the low expansion rate of red kites around the Black Isle in north Scotland shows the species is being severely restricted by persecution, primarily by illegal poisoning. Between 1989 and 2009, 64 red kites were found illegally poisoned in Scotland, though the true number will be far higher as most killed birds are never recovered.

The study, conducted by RSPB Scotland and funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, was published in the scientific journal *Biological Conservation*. It compares the performance of two red kite populations. Equal numbers of young birds were released during the initial reintroduction phases in the Black Isle in Scotland and in the Chilterns, in southern England.

Since 1989, the population in the Chilterns has thrived, reaching approximately 320 pairs by 2006. However, the Black Isle population has struggled, reaching just 41 pairs over the same period. Close monitoring showed that breeding productivity of both populations was very good, and indeed was amongst the highest in Europe.

The low survival rate of Scottish birds in the first two years of life was the main factor limiting population growth. This was almost entirely due to persecution, and in the absence of which, it is believed the north Scotland population would have been over 300 pairs by 2006.

Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for the Environment with the Scottish Government, said: "The Scottish Government welcomes any work which can add to our understanding of Scotland's populations of valuable species. However, it is hugely disappointing whenever we hear that our bird populations are being threatened by illegal killing. Continued persecution of our precious birds of prey is simply unacceptable. Poisoning poses serious risks to other wildlife, and potentially people, in our countryside."

Bengal eagle owls under stricter control

As from 10 April 2010, Article 10 Certificates are required for all sub-species of eagle owl *Bubo bubo* before they can be used commercially. This is due to changes in the most recent EC Annexes, which inadvertently resulted in Bengal eagle owls *Bubo bubo bengalensis* being included in Annex A to EC Regulation 338/97.

This taxonomic change arose from the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP14) in the Netherlands where this species was adopted as a sub-species of eagle owl. Problems arose when the taxonomic change was transposed

into EC regulation 338/97, when the listing of *Bubo bubo* (Annex A) should have excluded *Bubo bubo bengalensis*, which would have resulted in Bengal eagle owls being treated as Annex B.

This may be rectified later in 2010 when the Commission drafts new regulations to implement changes from the most recent CITES Conference (CoP15). Animal Health is currently advising people to apply for Article 10 Certificates, though there will be no charge for existing live birds or taxidermy specimens.

Northern Ireland partnerships

“Island Guardians” are helping to protect the Copeland Islands from anti-social behaviour and wildlife crime. These guardians gave presentations on 19 June to the local community near Donaghee. They covered egg theft, the reporting of incidents, and working in partnership.

In 2007, local police established a working partnership between a number of organisations including the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Copeland Bird Observatory, the local council anti-social behaviour team, the RSPB, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. This group has been funded by The Crown Estate to enable it to educate local residents through boat trips and school visits to the island.

Wildlife Liaison Officer Emma Meredith said: “A number of years ago, police were informed that approximately 3,000 eggs were taken from the Copeland Islands. The maximum fine per egg is approximately £5,000 under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985. So, this was an issue that needed a proactive response and resulted in the formation of the Islands’ Guardians. The efforts from all the Guardians, especially Constable Jenkins and Shane Wolsey (BTO), in educating and informing the local residents about reporting wildlife crime has been tremendous. The tireless effort has not only helped the community, but the landscape and wildlife have benefited from their efforts.”

Meanwhile, the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime, Northern Ireland (PAWNI) is delighted to have PAW leaflets and banners funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to use at local events, to help raise the profile of wildlife crime in Northern Ireland.



David Wilson, USPCA, Rosanna Ballintine RSPB, Emma Meredith, PSNI and Johanna Hopes, Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Operation Caesar flexes its mussels

An operation by WCOs has been launched to crack down on the illegal destruction of Scotland’s freshwater pearl mussels.

Freshwater pearl mussels are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and they are one of the UK National Wildlife Crime priorities.

A survey by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has shown that criminals have damaged around 75% of the country’s pearl mussel sites. These criminal acts ranged from illegal pearl fishing to unauthorised river works, resulting in the destruction of entire pearl mussel populations. The monitoring took place during 2008-09 and covered nine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Special

Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which had been specially designated to conserve pearl mussels.

The police and SNH have launched “Operation Caesar”, which is asking for help from the public to identify and report any suspicious activity to the police. The crimes usually occur in remote places and early in the morning when there are fewer people about. Crimes are also carried out seasonally, when river levels are low and the water not so cold.

The giveaway signs are people in the river looking at the riverbed through glass-bottomed receptacles and sometimes using a staff to grab a pearl mussel. After opening, the shells are often discarded in a pile on the riverbank. On average, only one in a thousand pearl mussels yields a pearl. In one river system in the west Highlands, at least 600 animals were found to have disappeared since the previous monitoring visit five years earlier, with no explanation other than destructive pearl fishing.

Scotland’s Environment Minister Roseanna Cunningham said: “It is clear that the pearl mussel continues to suffer from indiscriminate and illegal ransacking by determined criminals. It is a UK wildlife crime priority and SNH has been tasked with co-ordinating action to try to halt this decline. The Scottish Government is committed to protecting all our native species and to cracking down on the criminals with the help of SNH, the police and PAW Scotland.”



Only one in 1,000 freshwater pearl mussels contain a pearl



Golden eagles and other birds of prey have been persecuted

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Scottish Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill

RSPB Scotland has welcomed the publication of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, and most of the measures proposed by the Scottish Government.

The First Minister for Scotland made a statement to the Scottish Parliament regarding the Scottish Government’s Legislative Programme, and set out the Scottish Government’s intention to bring forward a Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill on 3 September 2009.

A consultation to help inform development of the Bill asked for opinions about deer management, game law (game licensing and poaching), invasive non-native species, muirburn (controlled burning of moorland, grass and heather), the administration of species licensing, the implementation of Ministerial commitments on snaring, the protection of badgers and issues relating to SSSIs.

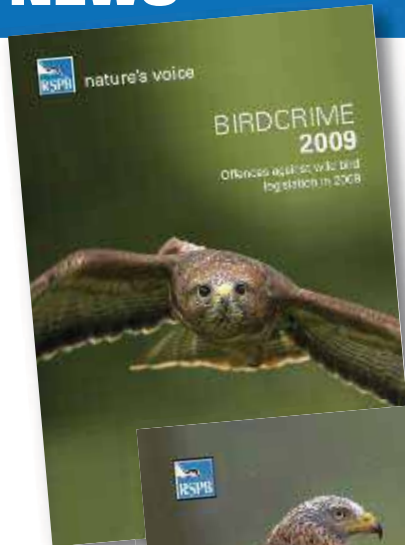
The consultation responses revealed that overall the proposals met with a “significant level of agreement”. However, there were some topics that provoked strong stakeholder disagreement, the most contentious being deer and species licensing. The Scottish Minister for the Environment and officials met with various stakeholder groups to discuss the proposals.

RSPB Scotland is calling on the Scottish Government to use this as an opportunity to provide police and Scottish courts with enhanced powers to bear down on wildlife

criminals. These criminal activities are damaging bird of prey populations and tarnishing Scotland’s international reputation. Scottish Government statistics earlier this year showed continued high levels of illegal poisoning of some of our most vulnerable and iconic birds of prey, as well as several recent serious incidents in the Scottish Highlands. The RSPB believes an urgent review of the legal options is needed to make landowners more responsible for the actions of their employees.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, RSPB Scotland’s Head of Species and Land Management, said: “The voluntary approach to wildlife crime reduction needs to be supported by tougher sanctions against the hardened minority of landowners who continue to tolerate the illegal killing of Scotland’s wildlife and who ignore public opinion. We call for an urgent review of the legislative options that could be included in this bill, such as the introduction of a vicarious liability offence, a recommendation of the Thematic Review of Wildlife Crime.”

With regard to the other measures, the RSPB supports reform of the antiquated Game Laws, dating back to the 1800s, and believes there may be options for alternative arrangements to tackle wildlife crime, such as licensing sporting estates instead of individuals. The RSPB believes these aspects should be explored as part of the Scottish Government’s review of ways to improve wildlife crime enforcement and deterrents.



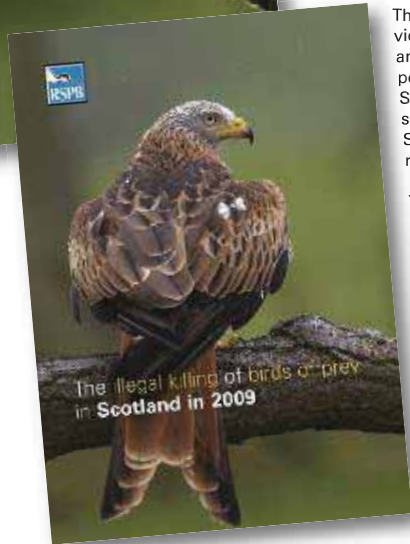
RSPB launches annual reports

In September 2010, the RSPB launched its annual Birdcrime report, and yet again, it presents a bleak picture for birds of prey in the UK.

Deliberate poisoning of wildlife ruled the roost in 2009 – with 85 of the total 158 reports of poisoning being confirmed as deliberate abuse cases. These 85 “confirmed abuse cases” involved the poisoning of at least 81 individual birds or animals – including two golden eagles, one white-tailed eagle, 27 buzzards, ten red kites and 12 ravens.

The white-tailed eagle was the second such bird to fall victim to deliberate poisoning in the space of two years – and the RSPB is, once again, concerned about the lack of police follow-up action, despite increasing pressure on Scottish police forces to take these investigations seriously. Many of these poisoning cases occurred in Scotland – and this is the focus of the Scottish 2009 report *The illegal killing of birds of prey in Scotland in 2009*.

These RSPB reports focus primarily on bird of prey persecution. The NWCU now produces a “total” figure for wild bird crime in the UK, allowing the RSPB to focus its finite resources on the most serious and organised forms of wild bird crime and criminality affecting species of highest conservation concern. In the foreword to *Birdcrime 2009*, Richard Crompton, Association of Police Officers (ACPO) lead for wildlife crime, makes it very clear that “the illegal killing or persecution of birds of prey is unacceptable. The protection offered to birds of prey by the law is clear and the police will enforce that legislation”. Both reports are available on the RSPB website, www.rspb.org.uk/Images/birdcrime_tcm9-260567.pdf and www.rspb.org.uk/Images/illegalkillingsScotland_tcm9-256571.pdf.



NWCU Annual Report

The National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) has produced its annual report covering 2009. With an enthusiastic foreword by Chief Constable Richard Crompton, the report outlines the increasing work of the unit to record wildlife crime and provide practical assistance to police forces investigating wildlife offences. It also features some high-profile convictions involving work by the NWCU. The report can be obtained via the PAW website at www.defra.gov.uk/paw.

Timber update

Madeleine Groves from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, outlines some recent changes in timber controls.

In March 2010, the 15th CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) met in Doha, Qatar and voted to list two tree species on Appendix II, namely Pau rosa *Aniba roseaeodora* and guaiacwood *Bulnesia sarmientoi*. Both are used by the fragrance and flavouring industries and traded as essential oils, extracts and timber. Russia has added Korean pine *Pinus koraiensis* while Bolivia added three species of Spanish cedar *Cedrela* to CITES Appendix III.

In the UK, the new coalition Government stated that as part of its environmental measures it would make “the import or possession of illegal timber a criminal offence”. Government procurement policy also reflects a drive to stem the trade in illegal timber. From April 2009, central government, together with their executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies, is required to procure timber and wood products from either legal and sustainable or FLEGT-licensed or equivalent sources. More information can be found at The Centre Point of Expertise on Timber at www.cpet.org.uk/international-context/european-initiatives/flegt. In July 2010, the European Parliament approved legislation that prohibits the sale of timber logged illegally under the rules of the country of origin. In addition, companies must use a system of “due diligence” to ascertain that the timber they sell in the EU was harvested legally.



Forensic tests are being developed to identify species such as *Dalbergia rosewood*

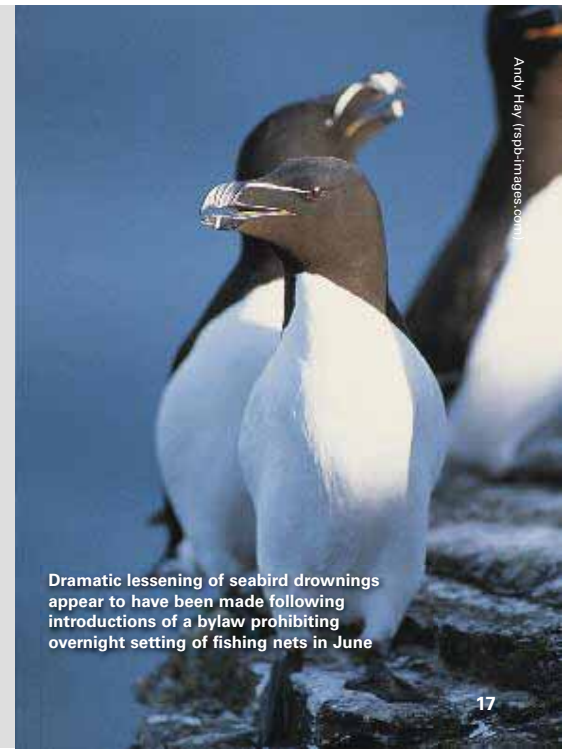
To aid identification of timbers in trade, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and TRACE (The Wildlife Forensics Network) are working on a Defra-funded project to identify ramin *Gonystylus* and rosewood *Dalbergia* through the development of forensic DNA techniques.

So far so good for Filey bylaw

Following the deaths in recent years of large numbers of seabirds at the salmon and sea trout fishery at Filey Bay, North Yorkshire, a new bylaw has been introduced which appears to have dramatically improved the situation.

There have been ongoing problems with seabirds drowning in fishing nets at Filey Bay. In 2008, this was highlighted by RSPB surveillance, which on one occasion showed over 100 razorbills dead or dying in a fishing net (*Legal Eagle* 56). Since then, dialogue between the RSPB, Natural England and the Environment Agency (which licenses the fishery) saw the adoption of a bylaw which officially came into place in May 2010. The main clause of the bylaw was that, during June, overnight setting of fishing nets was not permitted, as this was seen to be a major contributing factor to bird deaths. Local ecological consultants Wold Ecology were commissioned by the agency to undertake detailed monitoring.

Preliminary results from the season indicate that bird deaths were considerably lower than in recent years, particularly during June. Although it's early days, all parties hope the bylaw will continue to be effective in future seasons and will bring an acceptable resolution to the situation.



Dramatic lessening of seabird drownings appear to have been made following introductions of a bylaw prohibiting overnight setting of fishing nets in June

S.Spasov www.NatureImages.eu



Two nests of imperial eagles were robbed in Bulgaria

Bulgarian raptors under threat

The illegal taking of birds of prey for falconry remains a persistent problem in Bulgaria, with regular nest robberies of species such as golden eagles and peregrines. More worryingly, in June 2010, chicks were taken from two imperial eagle nests, despite protection schemes being in place. It is thought that organised criminals, using climbing equipment, raided the nests during the hours of darkness.

There is particular concern about the status of imperial eagles and saker falcons in Bulgaria, the latter being on the brink of disappearing from the country altogether. An EU Life project involving the Bulgarian BirdLife partner BSPB, assisted by the RSPB, is looking to improve the conservation status of these species by reducing impacts of direct persecution and indirect threats. This includes maintaining and enhancing suitable habitat and improving enforcement.

During another incident in March 2010, employees at the border checkpoint for the Vidin ferry prevented the export of two Bonelli's eagles, allegedly accompanied by fake documents. It appears the suspect was falsely claiming to work for a Bulgarian NGO operating a CITES Wildlife Rescue Centre. A man has been charged with offences relating to the attempted smuggling of the birds.

While the potential penalties are severe, with jail sentences of up to five years and substantial fines, there is little history of wildlife crime enforcement in Bulgaria. The RSPB is working with the BSPB to try to encourage the statutory agencies to take a more proactive role.

EU ban on seal products delights IFAW

Following many years of campaigning by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and others, in 2009 the European Union voted to ban the trade in seal products from all commercial hunts. Clare Sterling, Senior Press Officer at IFAW, reports.

"The ban, which came into effect on 20 August 2010, means that no fur, oil or other products from seals killed in commercial hunts may be imported or traded in the EU. IFAW was founded in 1969 with the specific aim of ending Canada's commercial seal hunt – the largest marine mammal hunt in the world. This involves harp and hooded seals being clubbed, shot and skinned, primarily to provide luxury fur products for the fashion industry.

The vast majority of seals killed are young pups. As well as being an incredibly wasteful hunt, with most of the carcasses being left to rot on the ice, the hunt is also extremely cruel. IFAW footage from hunt observers has shown thousands of clubbed pups being skinned without the necessary checks being made to ensure they are dead. As a result, many are skinned alive. Other seals are shot in the water from boats, and many are injured, or drown before they can be recovered.

Despite falling markets for seal products and increased pup mortality caused by decreasing ice cover, the Canadian government has continued to issue huge quotas, with a 2010 figure set at 330,000 seals. Results of European opposition to the hunt can already be seen with sealers in the last couple of years choosing not to fill quotas due to falling demand. IFAW are delighted with the new EU legislation and with a key market for seal products closed, we believe it sends a clear message to the Canadian government that this cruel hunt must end."

Courtesy of IFAW



There is now an EU ban on seal products from commercial hunts

Global Recognition for NWCU officer

Andy McWilliam of the NWCU has received a prestigious award for his efforts in tackling wildlife crime.

In March 2010, at CITES Conference of the Parties 15 (CoP15) in Doha, Qatar, Andrew McWilliam was awarded the prestigious Clark R. Bavin Wildlife Law Enforcement Award. Detective Inspector Brian Stuart, Head of the NWCU, accepted the award on Andy's behalf.

The award, sponsored by the Animal Welfare Institute, was given to eleven individuals who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to fighting wildlife crime. They included representatives from Israel, India, the US, Kenya, China, the UK, Denmark, and the Philippines. More details can be seen at www.awionline.org/ht/d/sp/d/sp/i/20095/pid/20095.

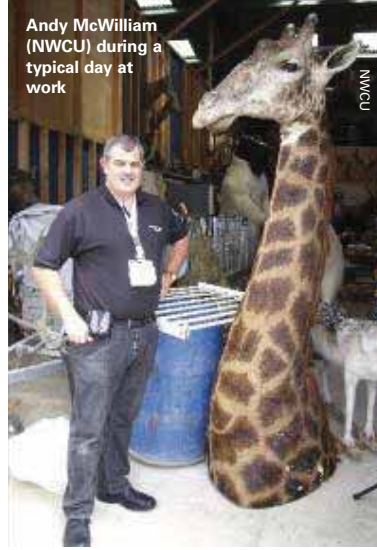
Willem Wijnstekers, the UN CITES Secretariat said: "Mr McWilliam has shown tremendous commitment, gaining considerable success in apprehending wildlife criminals,

making effective use of innovative techniques, compilation of educational materials, while conducting enforcement training to improve efforts within and outside the UK to stop wildlife crime."

Andy served for 31 years with the Merseyside Police and was an active full-time WCO. Since joining the NWCU in 2006, he has been involved in more than 100 enforcement operations leading to many successful prosecutions. His collaboration with other wildlife crime investigators has been a key weapon in his arsenal, and has contributed significantly to his success. He is currently investigating the illicit trade in traditional medicines which are made using protected species, the illegal import of CITES species, and the laundering of birds of prey.

In highlighting his achievement, Brian Stuart said: "This award underlines the significant contribution Andrew McWilliam has made to wildlife crime enforcement both here in the UK and

Andy McWilliam (NWCU) during a typical day at work



further afield. I congratulate him in this personal achievement for which he should be justly proud."

The RSPB has worked regularly with Andy since one of his first enquiries in Liverpool in 1999 and staff would like to add their congratulations for this well-deserved award.

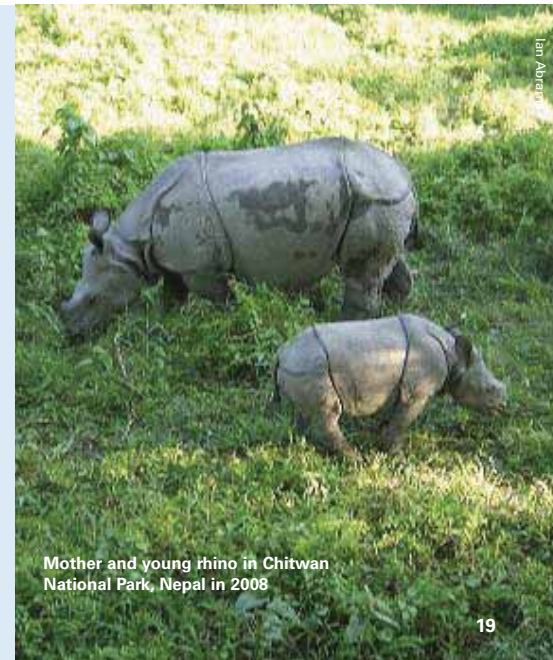
Concerns rise for Nepalese rhinos

A report that at least 28 rhinos have died in 2010 has forced officials in Nepal to turn their attention to the country's threatened population of Indian rhinos at a time of intense political uncertainty.

More than half of the 28 were killed by poachers in the Chitwan National Park, in southern Nepal, an area supposedly guarded by troops. Experts say that many efforts have been made to protect the rhinos, whose horn is highly valued in traditional medicine across East Asia.

However, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) protection officers have noted that there are not enough security personnel to cover the whole park sufficiently. Many troops have reportedly been called up in recent times amid ongoing protests in many of Nepal's cities.

In the 1950s, Nepal claimed it had an estimated population of 800 rhinos but that number has steadily fallen. The latest census of the Nepalese population took place in 2008 when they were said to total just 435.



Mother and young rhino in Chitwan National Park, Nepal in 2008