

Birdcrime is the UK's only report summarising known offences against birds of prey. This report covers confirmed incidents from 2019 as collated by the RSPB's Investigations Unit.

Self-regulation has failed

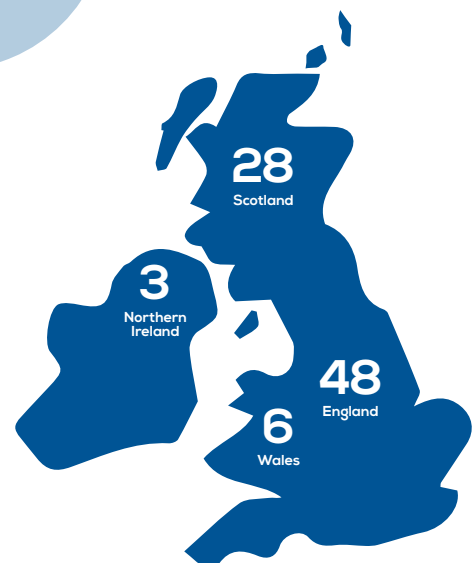
Killing birds of prey is a criminal offence. Yet in 2019 there were **85 confirmed incidents*** of bird of prey persecution.

This is unacceptable. Now is the time for action.

2019 in numbers

In 2019, there were 85 confirmed raptor persecution incidents and one conviction, a Scottish gamekeeper.

Since 1990, two thirds of those convicted of raptor persecution related offences have been **gamekeepers.**



*Note that data delays from various sources due to COVID-19 are likely to result in further incidents or details being added retrospectively.

Raptor persecution blackspots 2019

Birds of prey continue to be targeted, often in connection with grouse moor management, on the basis they may reduce the number of red grouse available to be shot.

Despite assurances from shooting organisations that they oppose raptor persecution, we have seen no evidence of meaningful attempts to remove this criminal activity from their industry. Instead, they routinely deny such crimes are even occurring.

North Yorkshire

This year, once again, North Yorkshire emerges as the county with the highest number of confirmed raptor persecution incidents (15 of the 85). In 2019, the hen harrier River was found shot dead on a grouse moor, a red kite was found poisoned near Pateley Bridge, and buzzards were found shot at Bransdale Moor, Ryton and Thixendale among other incidents.

Strathbraan and Strathdon

Raptor persecution cases in Scotland almost exclusively occur in land managed for gamebird shooting, and particularly driven grouse moors. The grouse moors of Strathbraan continue to be problematic. In 2019, two tagged eagles "Adam" and "Charlie" vanished in the same morning and a hen harrier, tagged as part of the RSPB's Hen Harrier LIFE project, was found dead in an illegally set spring trap.



In Strathdon, a head gamekeeper was convicted in 2006, but still persecution and suspicious disappearances continue, including the disappearance of hen harrier Marci in 2019. A white-tailed eagle was also found poisoned on a Strathdon grouse moor in 2020.

None of the 13 satellite-tagged birds that have disappeared in these two areas have been seen or heard from again.

Our Raptor Persecution Map Hub contains data going back to 2007 and shows where the highest concentration of confirmed incidents occurs. Go online: rspb.org.uk/raptormap

Save our skydancers

A government study published in 2019 revealed that, of 58 British hen harriers satellite tagged over 10 years:

"72% were either confirmed to have been illegally killed or disappeared suddenly with no evidence of a tag malfunction"

(Natural England, Nature Communications)

The single factor affecting hen harrier recovery is illegal killing. So much so that, between 2004-2016 their numbers dropped by 24% and in England they risk going extinct as a breeding species.

Satellite tagging, as part of the EU-funded Hen Harrier LIFE project, has given the RSPB an unprecedented insight into the lives and the threats faced by hen harriers in the UK.

Since 2018, 45 hen harriers are known to have been killed or gone missing in suspicious circumstances. Many of these incidents have been brought to light thanks to data from satellite tags.

Raptor crime in lockdown

When the UK went into lockdown in spring 2020, the RSPB Investigations Team were inundated with reports of crimes against birds of prey. Most of these related to land used for game shooting in the uplands and lowlands.



Since 2009 there have been over 1000 confirmed raptor persecution incidents



The law has failed our birds of prey

In 2009, raptor persecution became a UK National Wildlife Crime Priority.

But in ten years the situation has barely changed. Stronger regulation is needed to address the failings of the shooting community, which has proven incapable and unwilling to respect the law. UK governments must step in.

Pushing for change

England

In England, we are pushing for an independent review of grouse shooting, as has taken place in Scotland, and for grouse shoots to require a license to operate which could be removed if the law is broken.

Scotland

In Scotland, we await a response to our proposals following the 'Werritty' review of grouse moor management. In December 2019, the Werritty review recommended licensing grouse moors; but only if, in five years' time, self-regulation was found to have failed. We challenged this. We need immediate regulation.

Wales

RSPB Cymru, the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and the four Welsh police forces issued a statement of intent in the fight against bird of prey persecution by initiating a new Raptor Officer. Niall Owen joined the RSPB's Investigations Unit early in 2020 in a post funded by the government, to undertake fieldwork, satellite tag hen harriers and support police investigations. We are grateful to the Welsh Government for their funding.

Northern Ireland

In November 2019, the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Northern Ireland (PAW NI) launched 'Hawk-Eyes': a new project involving the tracking and surveillance of red kites, buzzards and peregrine falcons in Northern Ireland. '[Hawk-Eyes](#)' is about raising awareness about the illegal activity affecting birds of prey, and to empower the public to detect and report crimes.

See: wildlifecrimeni-hawkeyes.com.

Public outrage is growing

The public is playing an increasingly powerful role in the push to end raptor persecution.

In 2019, Hen Harrier Day - an annual event - attracted more than 1,500 people for a celebration of these birds. For more details, see henharrierday.uk

The police-led raptor persecution awareness initiative Operation Owl went UK-wide for the first time in 2019. For details, see operationowl.com

The RSPB is currently reviewing its policy on gamebird shooting and associated land management. We plan to announce the results of this review of our policy at our AGM on 10 October 2020.



The public has, quite rightly, had enough of birds of prey being systematically and illegally slaughtered. Chris Packham

What you can do

Report a crime

- Call the police on **101**.
- Email the RSPB Investigations Team at: crime@rspb.org.uk or fill in the [online form](#).
- If you have information about someone killing raptors and want to remain anonymous, call the RSPB's confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on **0300 999 0101**.

Raise your voice

Join the conversation on Twitter [@RSPBbirders](https://twitter.com/RSPBbirders).

Become a Bird of Prey Defender

To will help us continue our vital work become a Bird of Prey Defender for just £3 a month, or through a one-off donation. Visit rspb.org.uk/defend



In 2019, there were 85 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution.

Red kite by Ed Marshall (rspb-images.com)

The RSPB is a registered charity in England and Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654. 776-1141-19-20