

Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2019 & 2020



PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION AGAINST
wildlife crime
Northern Ireland



A report prepared by the Raptor Subgroup of the Partnership
for Action against Wildlife Crime Northern Ireland (PAW NI)

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Contents

SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
RESULTS	6
Incidents Reported in 2019	6
Incidents Reported in 2020	7
Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2019	14
Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2020	16
Five Year Review: Confirmed Incidents 2016 to 2020	19
Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2016 - 2020	20
ACTIONS TAKEN	22
GOING FORWARD	23
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	25



Report Suspicious Activity

The hot spot maps of confirmed incidents enable PSNI & the PAW NI Raptor Subgroup's efforts to be focused in problem areas - however, this is not a substitute for intelligence gathering through public reports. Any information, whether current or historical, could be extremely important.

PLEASE REPORT ANY SUSPICIONS OF RAPTOR PERSECUTION TO PSNI ON '101'
OR ANONYMOUSLY VIA CRIMESTOPPERS ON 0800 555 111

SUMMARY

Bird of prey ('raptor') persecution remains one of the seven UK wildlife crime priorities, having been assessed as posing a threat to the conservation status of several bird of prey species. The Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime Northern Ireland (PAW NI) Raptor Subgroup supports the implementation of plans for the monitoring, awareness and prevention of raptor persecution in Northern Ireland.

This report on the persecution and secondary poisoning of birds of prey in Northern Ireland covers incidents recorded in the period 1st January 2019 to 31st December 2020, with an overview of incidents between 2016 and 2020 (five-year analysis).

In 2019, there were 24 reports of suspected raptor persecution, or suspected poisons or baits, made to the PSNI. Three cases involved confirmed illegal persecution incidents, in which four birds of prey were killed. Confirmed incidents involved the killing of two peregrine falcons and one buzzard, as a result of poisoning, and the shooting of a further buzzard.

In 2020, there were 22 reports of suspected raptor persecution, or suspected poisons or baits, made to the PSNI. Seven of these cases were confirmed persecution incidents and a further two incidents were classified as 'probable'.

Confirmed incidents in 2019 and 2020 were located across nine 10-km squares, four of which had no previous records of confirmed incidents since PAW NI reporting began in 2009.

There was evidence of secondary rodenticide poisoning in nine separate incidents in 2019, and five incidents in 2020, affecting 12 buzzards, one sparrowhawk and one red kite. Secondary poisoning by rodenticides was not determined to be the cause of death in any of these incidents. Additionally other toxicants identified were a high concentration of PP-DDE in one sparrowhawk and low levels of the anthelmintic flubendazole in a buzzard.

Between 2016 and 2020 the total number of birds confirmed killed or injured in illegal incidents in Northern Ireland was 24, across 20 confirmed incidents. There has been an additional incident of confirmed nest destruction (hen harrier) and an incident of a species confirmed to have been targeted (peregrine falcon). These incidents were recorded across 20 different 10km squares in Northern Ireland (14%) and have involved five different raptor species, most frequently the common buzzard (12), peregrine falcon (9) and red kite (3). There have been an additional four confirmed incidents involving poisoned baits and/or other poisoned wildlife in circumstances where it is believed birds of prey could have been killed.

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) is a body comprising representatives of the government agencies and non-government organisations involved in wildlife crime detection and wildlife law enforcement in the UK.

Bird of prey ('raptor') persecution remains one of the seven UK wildlife crime priorities, having been assessed as posing a threat to the conservation status of several bird of prey species¹. The PAW Northern Ireland Raptor Subgroup (hereafter PAW NI RS) consists of representatives from organisations involved in the monitoring, collection and analysis of data, and enforcement of wildlife crimes against birds of prey ('raptors') in Northern Ireland. These currently include; Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI NI), the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSE NI) and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Bird of prey populations in Northern Ireland, for the most-part, are making a recovery from previous centuries of persecution, land use changes and exposure to environmental contaminants^{2,3}. Some species are doing well whilst others remain vulnerable for a variety of reasons, but all species remain susceptible to population declines, and potential extirpation, due to persecution and poisoning.

The aim of this report is to increase awareness and understanding of the occurrence and distribution of crimes against birds of prey, and to increase monitoring and reporting of such incidents. Further information on the background of this report, the definitions and categorisation of incidents and the law in relation to Wildlife Crime in Northern Ireland can be found in the first Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2009-2013 ([here](#)).

All birds of prey in Northern Ireland are protected by legislation including the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as amended by the Wildlife (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995,

¹NWCU Strategic Assessment 2020 - 2022 [https://www.nwcu.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Strategic-Assessment-UK-Wildlife-Crime-November-2020-public-version.pdf]

²Gilbert, G., Stanbury, A. & Lewis, L. 2021. Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020 –2026. Irish Birds. 9: 523—544.

³ Stanbury, A. *et al.* 2021. The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. British Birds. 114. 723-747.

and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 (WANE Act). Under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 it is against the law to intentionally or recklessly:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take or destroy wild bird eggs or take, damage or destroy a nest of a wild bird whilst it is in use or being built
- Disturb a wild bird when it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young or disturb dependent young
- Obstruct or prevent any wild bird from using its nest or roost site
- Take, damage or destroy a nest of a golden eagle, white-tailed eagle, osprey, barn owl, peregrine or red kite at any time of the year

Acts of wildlife crime may be subject to custodial sentences of up to six months and/or fines (up to £5,000 per offence) if carried out against any bird of prey in Northern Ireland.

PAW NI Raptor Persecution Report

This report includes the persecution and secondary poisoning incidents involving birds of prey recorded in Northern Ireland between January 2019 and December 2020. This report also undertakes a 5-year review of confirmed incidents (2016 – 2020)⁴. Confirmed incidents are classified on a case-by-case basis and each incident may then contain various offence types, victims, poisons etc. Details on the collection and collation of the data, the definition of ‘confirmed’, ‘probable’ or ‘possible’ incidents and the definition of the ‘misuse’ or ‘abuse’ of pesticides can be found in the Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2009-2013 ([here](#)).

Cases of probable and possible incidents may be outlined and examined in the discussion, but neither of these type of incidents are included in the hot spot maps due to the lack of sufficient information to record these as confirmed incidents. These have, however, been collated for intelligence purposes in the databases held by PSNI, NIRSG and RSPB.

⁴ Previous reports can be accessed at <https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>

RESULTS

Incidents Reported in 2019

A total of 21 incidents, involving 23 deceased birds of prey, and a further two incidents involving suspected poisons or baits, were reported to and investigated by PSNI to determine whether offences may have been committed in 2019. An additional incident of shooting was confirmed by veterinary radiograph. Of these 24 incidents there were three confirmed crimes and no probable crimes.

There was an alternative cause of death determined in seven incidents (including disease, starvation, collision/ trauma). In ten of the incidents the cause of death was unknown, with the samples too decomposed for testing in five of these. In two additional incidents, where birds of prey were witnessed as being shot at, no carcasses were recovered and could not be examined at post mortem. In two further incidents involving suspected baits no crimes were determined to have taken place.

Confirmed Incidents in 2019

In 2019 there were two incidents of confirmed poisoning of birds of prey, both involving the banned substance carbofuran (Figure 2). Confirmed poisoning incidents occurred in two 10km squares; one square (D10) had no previous incidents recorded since mapping began in 2009 and the other (J45) had one incident⁵,

- ▶ A buzzard tested positive for carbofuran poisoning near Crossgar, Co. Down. This area has had one previously confirmed incident since recording began in 2009, which was a red kite confirmed shot in 2014.
- ▶ Two almost fully-grown peregrine falcon chicks were found motionless on their nest in a working quarry in Co. Antrim. This site has a history of peregrine falcon poisoning and shooting. With help from the Quarry Owners and Police Search & Rescue Team the bodies of the young peregrines were retrieved for testing. Both tested positive for the banned substances carbofuran and aldicarb.

In 2019 there was also a confirmed case of shooting of a bird of prey;

- ▶ Veterinary x-ray identified three pieces of lead shot in an injured buzzard which was found in the Newtownstewart area of Co. Tyrone in square H48. The buzzard was treated and later released alive. There was no previous confirmed incident recorded in this area.

⁵Previous reports can be accessed at <https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>

Incidents Reported in 2020

A total of 19 reports, involving 20 deceased birds of prey, one incident of suspected disturbance and one incident of suspected intentional trapping, and a further three reports involving suspected poisons or baits, were investigated by PSNI to determine whether offences may have been committed in 2020. Of these 22 incidents there were seven confirmed crimes and two probable crimes.

There was an alternative cause of death determined in five cases (including disease, starvation, collision/ trauma). In one case a buzzard was suspected possibly intentionally trapped and in a separate case a hen harrier nest was suspected possibly intentionally disturbed, but these were not confirmed. In the remaining six cases the cause of death was unknown, with the samples too decomposed for testing in three of these cases.

The seven confirmed incidents occurred across six 10km squares; three were found in areas where there were no previous records of raptor persecution in the preceding 11 years since publication of these reports began in 2009⁶.

Confirmed Incidents in 2020

In 2020 there were five confirmed incidents of poisoning of raptors and/or pesticide abuse cases in which indiscriminate baits were recovered in circumstances which there was a high likelihood birds of prey were the intended target, or could theoretically have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed (Table 2 & Table 3). These incidents involving poisonous substances were confirmed in counties Armagh (2), Tyrone (2) and Antrim (1) (Figure 1).

- ▶ A buzzard tested positive for alphachloralose poisoning in C90, near Portglenone, Co. Antrim.
- ▶ A buzzard tested positive for alphachloralose poisoning in H87, near Cookstown, Co. Tyrone.
- ▶ Several tethers, often used to tie live pigeons smeared with poison as bait for peregrines, were found at a peregrine breeding site with a history of peregrine persecution, in Armagh in May. The adult male peregrine was seen covered in a black substance. There were two small chicks in the nest but when the site was checked in June these had perished. More tethers were also found in June (see Image A below)⁷.

⁶ Previous reports can be accessed at <https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>

⁷ Tethers were found at breeding site in May. On next visit nest was empty and no sign of adults. Later in 2020 men were witnessed tethering live pigeons at the same site. Two pigeons tested positive for bendiocarb and alphachloralose, thus on the basis of witness evidence, circumstance and future events this incident is classified as confirmed targeted persecution of peregrine falcons.

- Later in the year, at the same site as above, perpetrators were seen tethering live pigeons to large rocks. The pigeons were rescued but unfortunately could not be saved. Both pigeons tested positive for bendiocarb and alphachloralose poisons. A police investigation and appeal for information was launched. The appeal appeared as part of the Crime NI programme on BBC Northern Ireland in January 2022.
- A dead lamb was found eviscerated and staked out on a flat wooden board on top of a six-foot fence post in a remote upland area in Co. Tyrone in May. The lamb was covered in a yellow powder which was later confirmed as nitroxynil, a veterinary medicine used in small doses for the treatment of intestinal worms in cattle and sheep. There is no doubt that the lamb was intended as bait for a bird of prey. A police appeal for information was made on social media.



◀ **Image A. One of the pigeon tethers found at the scene of an attempted poisoning of peregrine falcons in Co. Armagh in June 2020.**

In addition to the finding of poisoned birds of prey or poisoned baits, two birds of prey were confirmed shot in 2020, in counties Armagh (1) and Down (1).

- A buzzard was found shot (confirmed by radiograph) in the Drumbanagher area in Co. Armagh in September.
- A peregrine was found confirmed shot in the Hillsborough area of Co. Down. It had been shot some time earlier but survived this initial trauma. The bird died following an infection as a result of having been shot.

Other Incidents

Probable Incidents

Two recently fledged fully-feathered peregrine chicks were found a few metres apart from one another on the ground below their nest in Co. Tyrone in July 2020. This site has a history of confirmed targeted poisoning of peregrine falcons, most recently in 2018 when carbofuran was confirmed on pigeon bait. Unfortunately conditions were such that the birds were too decomposed for testing.

Six days after a dead buzzard, confirmed shot, was found, a second buzzard was found injured in the same area, caught in a fox trap in September 2020. This bird was found alive and received veterinary care for a wound which was possibly gunshot wound which was more than a week old, however given the age of the wound this was not conclusive on x-ray examination. Several months after receiving veterinary care and being cared for by a licenced falconer with the hope of releasing the bird back into the wild the buzzard unfortunately never recovered and had to be euthanized. The area in which these incidents took place is a 'black hot-spot' having nine confirmed and four probable incidents recorded since publications began in 2009.

Secondary Poisoning by Rodenticides

Secondary poisoning by rodenticides (Bromadiolone, Brodifacoum, Difenacoum, and/or Flocoumafen) was recorded in nine birds of prey in 2019 and five incidents in 2020 (Table 5). However, these rodenticides were not deemed to be recorded at the combined concentration (>0.2 mg/kg) which is considered to be the threshold for an intentional targeted case of poisoning, and were instead found within the levels considered to have occurred through accidental ingestion and/or exposure through secondary poisoning. This may or may not involve the misuse of these compounds, for example the use of indoor-only compounds in outdoor settings, or rodent carcasses not being collected and disposed of correctly by the operator. .

Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) can accumulate in non-target scavenging and predatory species and the sublethal effects on breeding success and survival are unknown⁸. Nine of the 14 birds had an undetermined cause of death. SGAR contamination and poisoning of non-target animals is increasing in degree and scale⁴.

There is a code-of-best practice for the safe use of rodenticides, which not only aims to protect non-target wildlife from exposure, but also make the treatment regime most effective in killing rodents and preventing spread of rodenticide resistance. This code of best practice is from the

⁸ Rattner, B.A. *et al.* 2014. Adverse outcome pathway and risks of anticoagulant rodenticides to predatory wildlife. *Environ. Sci. Technol.* **48** (15): 8433-8445.

'Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use', and more information on methods that should be used can be found at www.thinkwildlife.org.

A further toxicant of note which appeared in toxicology results of birds of prey in 2019/ 2020 is PP-DDE which was present in a sparrowhawk found dead in Co. Antrim in February 2020. DDE is a persistent organochlorine compound formed by the degradation of DDT. Widely used as pesticides and insecticides in the past, the use of these compounds has been banned in the UK since 1986 after it was discovered that they bioaccumulate in the environment and are harmful to wildlife. They are fat soluble allowing them to magnify through the food chain. DDE and DDT are reproductive toxicants and can cause eggshell thinning in birds leading to population decline. Birds of prey are particularly vulnerable as being apex predators they accumulate a larger proportion of the compound, and this guild have historically seen significant population declines due to DDT/DDE bioaccumulation.. These chemicals have lengthy half lives , meaning that they are still persistent in the environment many years after their use has ended and potentially still having harmful effects. The presence of pp-DDE in a sparrowhawk in February 2020, nearly 35 years after these chemicals were banned is testament to this. Disposal of these chemicals is strictly controlled to prevent further contamination of the environment.



Table 1. All confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey recorded in Northern Ireland in 2019.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Incident Type	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Buzzard	Down	J45	2019	Apr	Abuse	Carbofuran
2	Peregrine x 2	Antrim	D10	2019	Jun	Abuse	Carbofuran & Aldicarb
3	Buzzard	Tyrone	H48	2019	Nov	Shot	

Table 2. All confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey recorded in Northern Ireland in 2020.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Cause of Death	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Buzzard	Antrim	C90	2020	Jan	Abuse	Alphachloralose
2	Buzzard	Tyrone	H87	2020	Apr	Abuse	Alphachloralose
3	Peregrine*	Armagh	H74	2020	Jun	Abuse	Targeted*
4	Buzzard	Armagh	J03	2020	Sep	Shot	
5	Peregrine	Down	J25	2020	Sep	Shot	

*Species targeted.

Table 3. Pesticide abuse incidents in which other wildlife was killed, or indiscriminate baits were recovered, in circumstances which; i) in all likelihood birds of prey were the intended target, or ii) could theoretically have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Incident Type	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Lamb	Tyrone	H58	2020	May	Abuse	Nitroxynil
2	Pigeon bait	Armagh	H74	2020	Nov	Abuse	Bendiocarb & Chloralose

Table 4. Probable incidents of raptor persecution identified, but not confirmed, in 2020.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Probable Cause of Death
1	Peregrine x 2	Tyrone	H27	2020	Jul	Poisoning
2	Buzzard	Down	J03	2020	Jul	Shot

Table 5. Carcasses tested showing evidence of secondary poisoning by rodenticides in 2019 & 2020. In these cases ingestion of rodenticide was not deemed to be the cause of death and rodenticides could not be confirmed as being used in an illegal manner.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Cause of Death	Rodenticide detected
1	Buzzard	Antrim	J18	2019	Feb	Unknown	Bromadiolone, Brodifacoum, Difethialone
2	Buzzard	Londonderry	D14	2019	Feb	Unknown	Bromadiolone, Difenacoum
3	Buzzard	Antrim	J39	2019	Apr	Unknown	Difenacoum, Difethialone, Flocoumafen
4	Buzzard	Tyrone	H36	2019	Apr	Unknown	Brodifacoum, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen
5	Buzzard	Armagh	J04	2019	Apr	Unknown	Brodifacoum
6	Sparrowhawk	Armagh	J04	2019	May	Trauma	Brodifacoum
7	Red kite	Down	J23	2019	Jun	Unknown	Bromadiolone Difenacoum Flocoumafen
8	Buzzard	Down	J36	2019	Oct	Unknown	Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difethialone
9	Buzzard	Londonderry	H87	2019	Oct	Collision	Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen
10	Buzzard	Antrim	C90	2020	Jan	Poison	Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone
11	Buzzard	Armagh	H83	2020	Jan	Unknown	Difenacoum, Flocoumafen, Brodifacoum
12	Buzzard	Down	J46	2020	Mar	Collision	Bromadiolone, Difenacoum
13	Buzzard	Antrim	J49	2020	Apr	Unknown	Bromadiolone, Difenacoum, Brodifacoum
14	Buzzard	Armagh	J03	2020	Sep	Shot	Difenacoum

Table 6. All confirmed bird of prey victims of persecution (including nest destruction and species confirmed targeted) recorded in Northern Ireland in the five-year period between 2016 and 2020 and incidents where other illegally poisoned animals, or illegal baits, were recovered in circumstances that could theoretically have resulted in raptor persecution. *NB. Figures relate to the total number of animals found.*

	Buzzard	Peregrine Falcon	Red Kite	Sparrowhawk	Golden Eagle	Merlin	White-tailed Eagle	Hen Harrier	Sub-total	Other Animal	Bait only	Total
2016	3	2		1					6			6
2017	3	2	1	1				1	8			8
2018	1		2						3	3	1	7
2019	2	2							4			4
2020	3	2							5		2	7
Total	12	8	3	2				1	26	3	3	32



▲ Image B. Two almost fully grown peregrine chicks lying dead on their nest after consuming poisoned bait laced with carbofuran and aldicarb, Co. Antrim, 2019.

Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2019

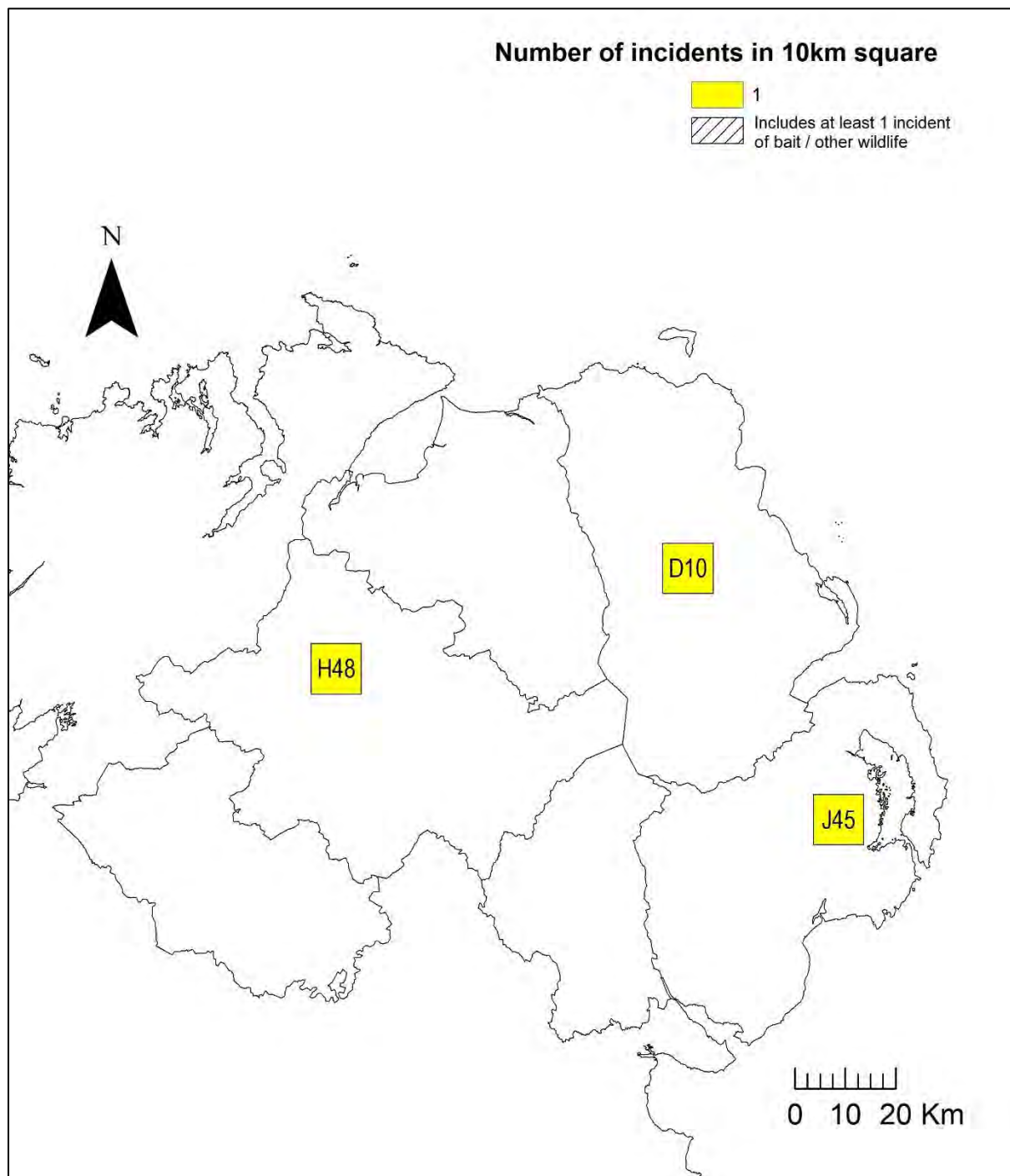


Figure 1. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife (see Table 1 and text above for details) reported in Northern Ireland in 2019. The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed.*

Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2019

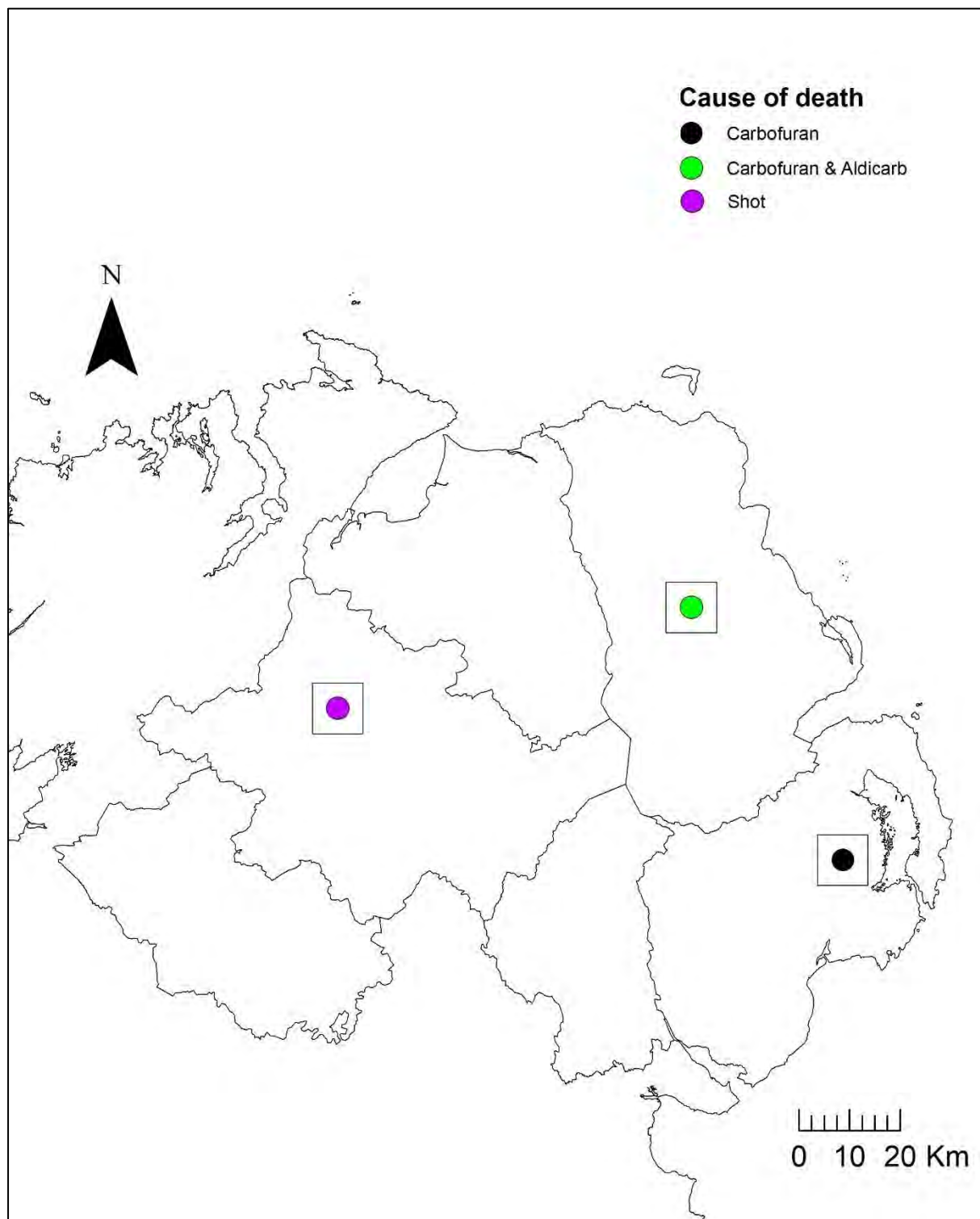


Figure 2. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife reported in 2019 in Northern Ireland, mapped by incident type (see Table 1 and text above for details). The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that this map does not indicate the number of birds killed.* N.B. Symbols within squares simply represent an incident in that square, not the actual location.

Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2020

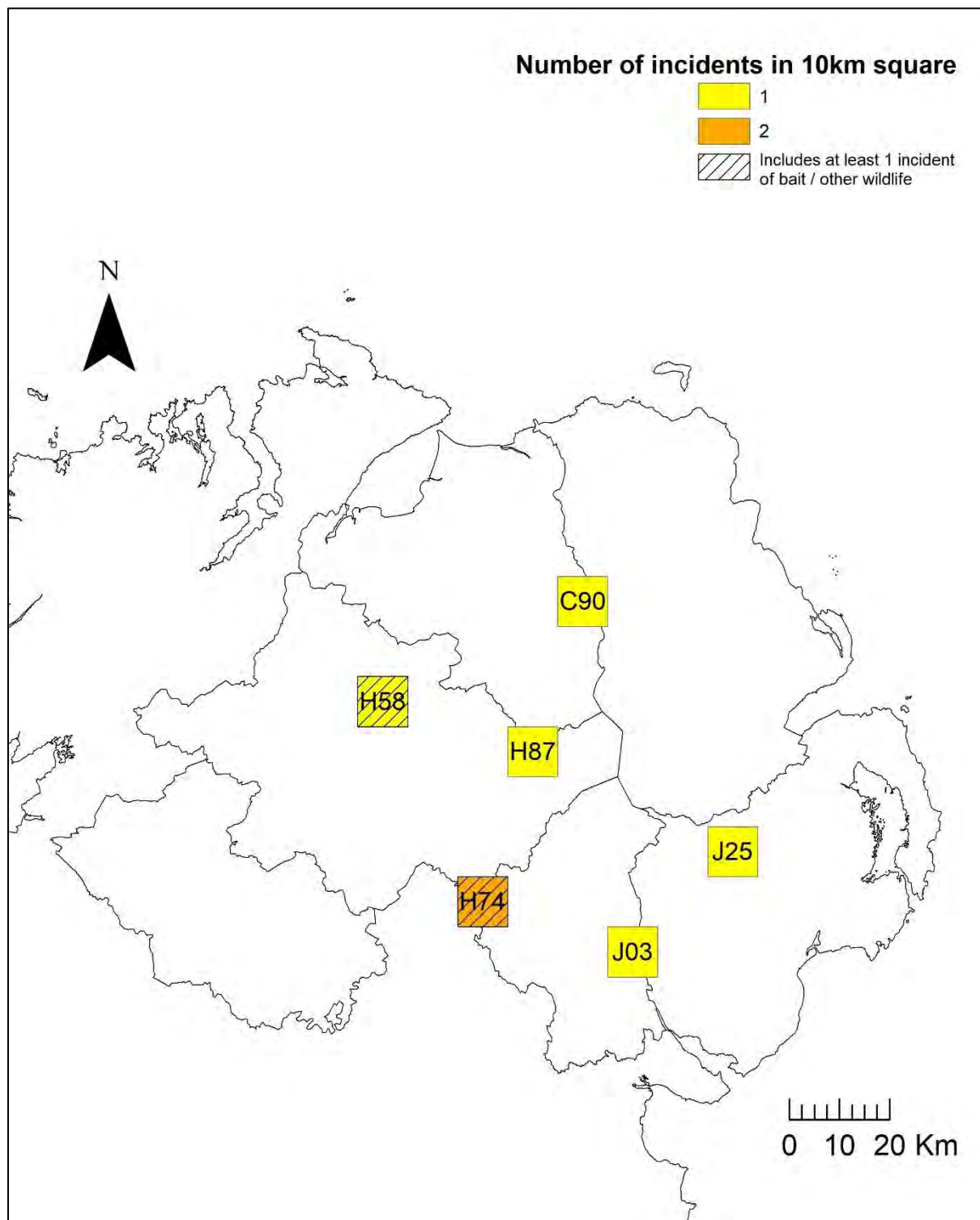


Figure 3. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife (see Table 2 and Table 3 and text above for details) reported in Northern Ireland in 2020. The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed.*

Mapping: Confirmed Incidents 2020

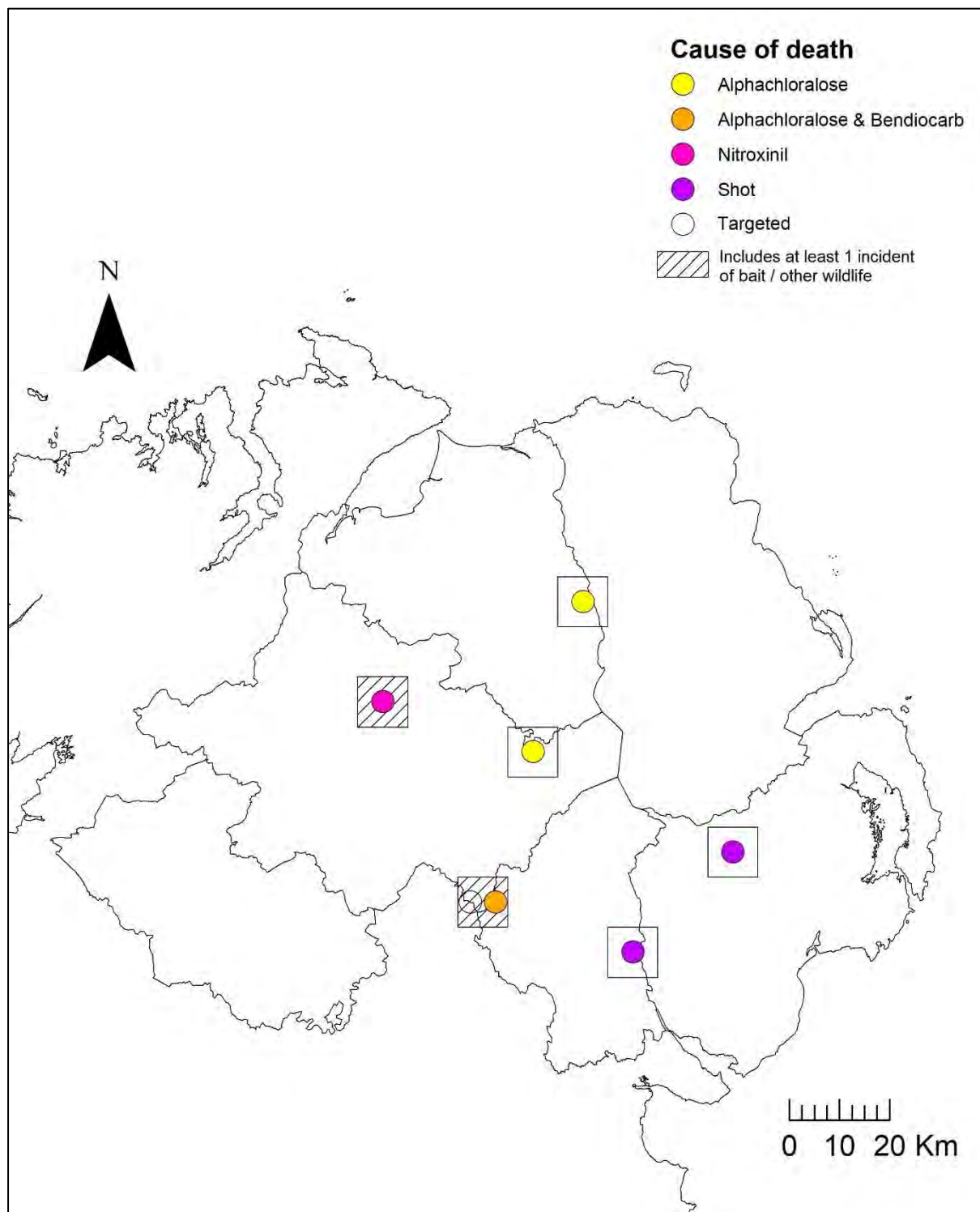


Figure 4. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife reported in 2020 in Northern Ireland, mapped by incident type (see Table 2 and Table 3 and text above for details). The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that this map does not indicate the number of birds killed.* N.B. Symbols within squares simply represent an incident in that square, not the actual location.

CASE STUDY

Wildlife crimes often occur in remote places and remains can be too decomposed for conclusive post-mortem or toxicology testing. In 2020 the remains of two peregrine chicks were found at a breeding site in Co. Tyrone. At this site in 2018 peregrine chicks were found dead and the remains of a pigeon, tethered to a rock, tested positive for the banned substance carbofuran. In 2020 volunteers from the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) had been observing the pair of peregrines nesting in the quarry for several months. The two chicks successfully fledged but fieldworkers subsequently found the dead remains of both fledged young in the quarry and both adults missing. Due to the level of decomposition of the chicks they could not undergo toxicology testing. Although a wildlife crime was suspected in this case it cannot be confirmed, but given the history of the site, the breeding ecology of the species and the field records from monitoring of the chicks it is classified as 'probable'.



▲ Image C. The decomposed remains of one of the two recently fledged peregrines at the scene of a suspected poisoning attempt in Co. Tyrone in July 2020.

Five Year Review: Confirmed Incidents 2016 to 2020

Between 2016 and 2020 the total number of birds of prey confirmed killed or injured in illegal incidents in Northern Ireland was 24 across 20 confirmed incidents. There has been an additional incident of confirmed nest destruction (hen harrier) and an incident of one species having been confirmed to be targeted (peregrine falcon). These incidents were recorded in a total of 14% of 10-km squares in Northern Ireland (n=20) and have involved five different raptor species, most frequently the common buzzard (n=12), peregrine falcon (n=8), red kite (n=3), sparrowhawk (n=2) and hen harrier (n=1) (Table 6).

There were a further three incidents of poisoned baits (with no other victim) confirmed in this period, in circumstances where it is believed birds of prey were the target, and three animals were found poisoned in a further incident in circumstances where they may have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed. These four incidents occurred across four separate 10km squares.

In the five-year period confirmed crimes most frequently involved poisoning (n=16) and shooting (n=9), with the remaining involving nest destruction (n=1). Of the poisoning incidents eight involved carbofuran or bendiocarb, five involved alphachloralose, two involved aldicarb and one involved nitroxylnil (N.B. some involved more than one substance).

There continues to be an expansion of areas where single incidents of persecution have been detected, rather than repeated incidents occurring in the same area thereby creating new 'Hot Spot' area (areas where confirmed incidents of raptor crime are most frequently detected). The continued emergence of new squares shows that raptor persecution in Northern Ireland is widespread and not a localised occurrence (Figure 5).

It is likely that these figures may represent only a fraction of the number of incidents within each category, as incidents may remain undetected and/or unreported, particularly since these are often crimes that occur in remote areas.

Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2016 - 2020

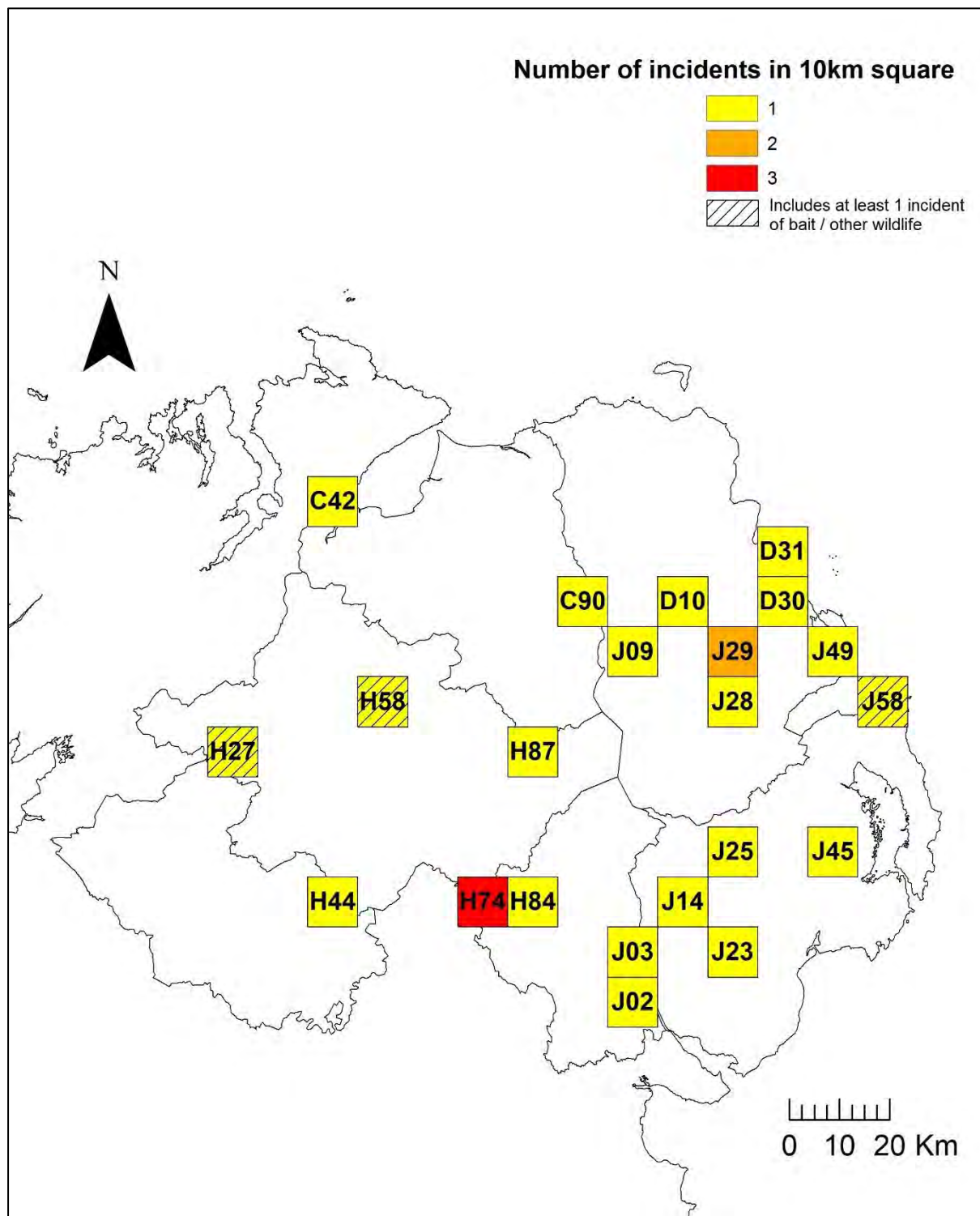


Figure 5. Five-year Hot Spot map of confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey, and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife, reported in Northern Ireland in the period Jan 2016 – Dec 2020. The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. Colour coding indicates where more than one incident has occurred in a 10km-square. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed*

Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2016 - 2020

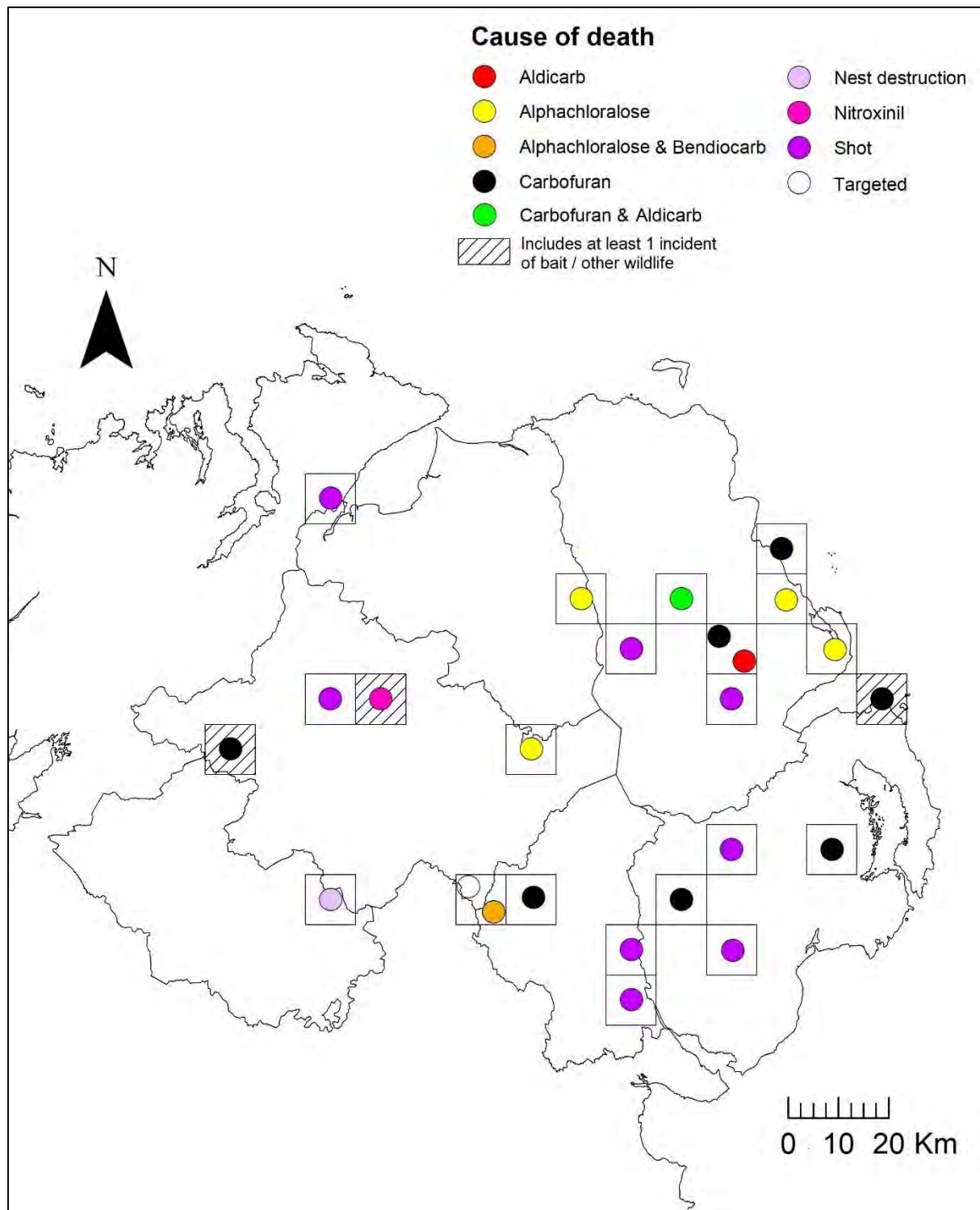


Figure 6. Five-year Hot Spot map of confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey, and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife, reported in Northern Ireland in the period Jan 2016 – Dec 2020, listed by crime type in each 10km-square. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed.* N.B. Symbols within squares simply represent an incident in that square, not the actual location.

ACTIONS TAKEN

In order to increase awareness and promote recognition and reporting, and to increase the likelihood of successful prosecution in the near future, several actions have been identified and undertaken by the PSNI and other members of the PAW NI RS:

- ‘Hawk-Eyes’, an ongoing multi-agency initiative, was launched in 2019. This project sees the use of satellite tags on several species of birds of prey in Northern Ireland, to monitor survival, alongside a public awareness campaign. More about this initiative can be read [here](#).
- NIRSG scientists, along with PSNI officers, carry out the fitting of leg-rings, under special licences, at a number of peregrine falcon sites across the country as part of ongoing research studies on this species. NIRSG scientists have also been installing cameras under licence at peregrine nest sites, in order to monitor adults and nestlings and to identify individual peregrines. RSPB and NIRSG fieldworkers have also undertaken the fitting of patagial wing-tags to buzzards and red kites. This information contributes to knowledge about the movements of birds of prey and their survival, and ongoing monitoring by remote cameras across Northern Ireland will continue indefinitely.
- ‘Operation Raptor’ was launched by PSNI in March 2016 and remains on-going. This initiative targets hot-spot areas identified in the persecution reports in a bid to encourage the public to report wildlife crime and to deter potential offenders. Operation Raptor continues to be promoted by PAW NI to remind the public that PSNI are committed to working with partner agencies to tackle wildlife crime through prevention as well as enforcement.
- Operation Peregrine Watch (launched 2017) is an ongoing NWCU initiative to prevent and stop any peregrine persecution and this can include theft of eggs and chicks from nests and/or the killing of adults and/or chicks through poisoning, shooting or trapping at any time of the year. This joint initiative between PSNI, NWCU, NIRSG and NIEA, continued throughout 2018 and saw the Air Support Unit (ASU) from PSNI use an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) fitted with specialist cameras to monitor peregrine nest sites in ‘Hot Spot’ areas to assist in prevention of persecution.
- The Raptor Persecution awareness leaflet was redesigned and printed to bring up-to-date the messaging and branding with the ‘Watch Out for Wildlife Crime’ message. The updated leaflet can be accessed [here](#)⁹.

⁹ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/259455_67750c0253004a558102e14ea436f7c0.pdf

GOING FORWARD

In order to;

- ▶ increase the reporting, recording and analysis of raptor injuries and mortality incidents
- ▶ increase public awareness and education about the issues surrounding crimes against birds of prey
- ▶ help combat illegal bird of prey persecution and poisoning in Northern Ireland,
- ▶ help secure successful prosecutions,

the PAW NI RS has collectively agreed the following;

- To support PSNI and AFBI in developing a good practice working arrangement surrounding the collection, delivery and testing of incidents of different types, to maximise the likelihood of determining cause of death, and maintain records which could be used in a prosecution.
- To maintain an ongoing review of protocols, to identify any factors which may be improved upon going forward.
- To review staff changeovers within partnership organisations and invite new representatives accordingly to ensure continued representation of partners.
- To maintain a review of the availability of additional resources, research and techniques to help support the ongoing work.
- To explore and develop new initiatives to raise the awareness of, increase the reporting of, and to deter, wildlife crime.
- To investigate the possibility of funding streams for additional raptor tracking hardware for Hawk-Eyes.
- To maintain an ongoing review of resource availability for a disposal scheme (amnesty) for banned substances including carbofuran and aldicarb.
- To continue to encourage the publication of a prescribed substance list for Northern Ireland with the Natural Heritage Policy Team.
- To provide assistance to AFBI in the identification of raptors submitted for testing.
- To continue to use the Wildlife Department in PSNI as the point of contact for information and advice in suspected wildlife crime cases.
- The PSNI will continue to carry out searches in the areas identified in this report, and when future incidents occur, in collaboration with the HSE NI and NIEA where there is information available to do so.

- To continue to identify, and engage with, other stakeholders or partners to maximise participation in future reporting e.g. Council Animal Welfare Officers, local council biodiversity officers, veterinarians etc.
- To raise the profile of each incident on a case-by-case basis, an important tool in obtaining intelligence information relating to specific crimes. However it is necessary that the PSNI/ WLO and/or PSNI Investigating Officer be consulted before information is to be highlighted in the public domain to ensure any ongoing investigation is not compromised.
- To continue to support the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (www.thinkwildlife.org) in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to continue to raise awareness of the risks to wildlife from rodenticides and secondary poisoning of raptors.
- To continue to raise the profile of Operation Raptor and Operation Peregrine Watch as and when required.

The PAW NI RS partner organisations recognise the increased efficacy of the collaboration of effort, knowledge and analysis gained by compiling these annual reports and will endeavour to continue to maintain the working partnership facilitated by the PAW NI RS. All partners recognise the value in review and improvement of systems and knowledge relating to the illegal killing of birds of prey.



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PAW NI Raptor Subgroup Contributors

Eimear Rooney (Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group)
Marc Ruddock (Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group)
Emma Meredith (PSNI)
Donna Stewart (PSNI)
Michael Crutchley (PSNI)
Jon Lees (Northern Ireland Environment Agency)
Roisin Kearney (RSPB NI)
Guy Shorrocks (RSPB)
Helen Mason (RSPB)
Ian Thomson (RSPB)
Siobhan Corry (Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute)
Barry McNerney (Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute)
Jason Barley (Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute)
Malcolm Downey (Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland)
Alan Roberts (National Wildlife Crime Unit)
Deborah Currie (DAERA)
Tommy McNamara (DAERA)
Helen Thompson (DAERA)



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Northern Ireland