

Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2021 & 2022



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 | 4 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 5 |
| RESULTS | 7 |
| Incidents Reported in 2021 | 7 |
| Incidents Reported in 2022 | 7 |
| Geographic Distribution..... | 8 |
| Five Year Review: Confirmed Incidents 2018 to 2022 | 8 |
| Map 1. The number of confirmed Incidents by 10km location in 2021 /2022 | 11 |
| Map 2. Confirmed Incidents 2021/2022 by type of incident | 12 |
| Map 3. Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2018 - 2022 | 13 |
| Map 4. Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2018 - 2022 | 14 |
| DISCUSSION POINTS..... | 15 |
| ACTIONS TAKEN | 18 |
| GOING FORWARD | 20 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 23 |



Report Suspicious Activity

The hot spot maps of confirmed incidents enable PSNI & the PAW NI Raptor Subgroup 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 ONLINE VIA <https://reporting.psnipolice.uk/>
OR ANONYMOUSLY VIA CRIMESTOPPERS ON 0800 555 111**

SUMMARY

Bird of prey ('raptor') persecution remains one of seven UK wildlife crime priorities. 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 2021 to 31st December 2022, with an overview of incidents between 2018 and 2022 (five-year analysis).

There were 28 reports of suspected raptor persecution, or suspected poisons or baits, made to the PSNI in 2021/2022. Four confirmed crimes involved the poisoning of five peregrine falcons and one red kite. A further confirmed case of a poisoned bait was picked up by local council (Mid Ulster District Council). Four of the five confirmed incidents involved the use of banned highly toxic pesticide Carbofuran.

There was a 39% drop in reports made to PSNI and a 50% drop in the number of confirmed crimes in contrast to the previous period (2019-2020).

The confirmed incidents in 2021 and 2022 occurred in five separate 10-km squares across counties Antrim, Down and

Derry/Londonderry. Three of these areas have historically had confirmed persecution incidents (all in 2014), but none had confirmed incidents since 2018.

There was evidence of secondary rodenticide poisoning in 13 separate incidents, affecting 12 buzzards, one sparrowhawk and one red kite. Secondary poisoning by rodenticides was determined to be the likely cause of death in one of these incidents (red kite).

Between 2018 and 2022 there were 18 birds confirmed killed or injured in illegal incidents in Northern Ireland, across 14 separate incidents. There were an additional five confirmed incidents involving poisoned baits and/or other poisoned wildlife in circumstances where it is believed birds of prey may have been the intended target and/or could have been killed. The 19 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution and poisoned baits 2018-2022 were recorded in a total of 13 10-km squares in Northern Ireland and have involved three different raptor species; peregrine falcon (n=9), common buzzard (n=6) and red kite (n=3). In the five-year period 2018-2022 all confirmed crimes involved either poisoning (n=16) or shooting (n=3).



INTRODUCTION

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

Bird of prey ('raptor') persecution remains one of 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 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 and the law in relation to Wildlife Crime in Northern Ireland can be found in the 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, and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 (WANE Act).

¹NWCU Strategic Assessment 2022 - 2025 [<https://www.nwcupolice.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Strategic-Assessment-2022-public-version.pdf>]

²Gilbert, G. *et al.* 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.

Under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as amended, 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

Such 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 2021 and December 2022. This report also undertakes a 5-year review of confirmed incidents (2018 – 2022). Confirmed incidents are classified on a case-by-case basis and each incident may 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 (which, along with all previous reports, can be accessed at <https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>).

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.



RESULTS

Incidents Reported in 2021

In 2021, a total of 13 incidents of suspected raptor persecution were reported to and investigated by PSNI to determine whether offences may have been committed. An additional incident of a poisoned bait, highlighted through Animal Welfare Officers of the local councils, has been included in this report.

Ten incidents involved the deaths of 13 birds of prey. Three incidents concerned suspected poisoned baits, and one incident concerned the suspected poisoning of other wildlife and/or pets.

Of the 14 incidents reported there were two confirmed crimes. These confirmed incidents involved (i) the poisoning of two peregrine falcons, (ii) a poisoned bait (which killed a magpie, a hooded crow and two cats).

There was an alternative cause of death determined in two of the 14 reported incidents (secondary rodenticide poisoning and starvation respectively). In six incidents the cause of death was unknown, in five of which raptors tested positive for background levels of rodenticides. In three incidents involving suspected baits only, no crimes were determined to have taken place. In one incident the sample was too decomposed for testing.

Incidents Reported in 2022

In 2022 there were 15 incidents of suspected raptor persecution reported to and investigated by PSNI in 2022; 14 of these incidents involved the deaths of 17 birds of prey. In the remaining incident the bird of prey recovered following treatment.

Of the 15 incidents reported there were three confirmed crimes. These crimes involved the poisoning of (i) three peregrine falcons, (ii) one red kite and (iii) one peregrine falcon and one lesser black-backed gull.

One buzzard, which survived, tested positive for pentobarbital. One buzzard tested positive for bird flu and was not tested further. The cause of death in eight incidents was unknown, with birds in seven of these testing positive for background levels of rodenticides. The remains of a peregrine and a buzzard were too decomposed for testing.

In contrast to the previous period there was a 39% decrease in reports to PSNI (2019/2020, n=46; 2021/2022, n=28). This may have resulted in the 50% lower detection in the number of confirmed crimes in this period (2019/2020, n=10; 2021/2022, n=5).

Type of confirmed incidents 2021/2022

All four confirmed raptor persecution incidents, and the incident of indiscriminate bait, involved poisoning. Four of the five incidents involved the use of highly toxic banned pesticide, Carbofuran. The remaining incident involved the misuse of a product (Alphachloralose) intended for professional use only (Table 1).

Geographic Distribution

The confirmed incidents in 2021 and 2022 occurred in five 10km squares, four of which have historically had confirmed persecution incidents, but none of which had confirmed incidents since 2018 (most recent five-year period) (Figure 3).⁴

Two confirmed incidents occurred in Co. Down, two in Co. Antrim and one in County Derry / Londonderry.

Five Year Review: Confirmed Incidents 2018 to 2022

Between 2018 and 2022 the total number of birds of prey confirmed killed or injured in illegal incidents in Northern Ireland was 18,

across 14 confirmed incidents, occurring in 14 10-km squares (Figure 3). Incidents involved three different raptor species, most frequently the peregrine falcon (n=9), common buzzard (n=6) and red kite (n=3) (Table 6).

There were also five incidents of confirmed poisoned bait left in the countryside, in circumstances where they may have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed. These five incidents occurred across five separate 10km squares.

Incidents were recorded in five counties; Co. Down (n=6), Co. Antrim (n=4), Co. Armagh (n=4), Co. Tyrone (n=3), Co. Derry/Londonderry (n=2).

In the five-year period 2018 - 2022 most confirmed crimes involved poisoning (n=16) or shooting (n=3). Of the poisoning incidents ten involved Carbofuran, four involved Alphachloralose, one involved Bendiocarb, one involved Aldicarb and one involved Nitroxylin⁵.

⁴ A sparrowhawk was confirmed trapped in J37 in 2014; A peregrine was confirmed poisoned with carbofuran in H88 in 2014; Three red kites were confirmed poisoned with alphachloralose in J24 in 2014.

⁵ Some incidents involved more than one substance and in one case the substance was unknown (see previous 2019-2020 report

https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/files/ugd/259455_9d8bf2a0d96a48ecacd6f9ab5fe8a3f9.pdf

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Table 1. All confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey recorded in Northern Ireland in 2021 & 2022.

| | Species | County | 10Km Sq. | Year | Month | Incident Type | Toxin / Rodenticide detected |
|---|--|--------|----------|------|-------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Peregrine ⁶ | Antrim | J37 | 2021 | Mar | Abuse | Carbofuran & Aldicarb |
| 2 | Peregrine (& Lesser Black-backed Gull) | Down | J46 | 2022 | Jul | Abuse | Carbofuran & Diazinon |
| 3 | Peregrine x 3 | Antrim | J19 | 2022 | Jul | Abuse | Carbofuran |
| 4 | Red Kite | Down | J24 | 2022 | Nov | Abuse | Alphachloralose |

*

Table 2. 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 | Bait (involved Magpie, Hooded Crow, 2x Cats) | Derry /Londonderry | H88 | 2021 | Jan | Abuse | Carbofuran |

Table 3. Probable incidents of raptor persecution identified, but not confirmed, in 2021 & 2022.

| | Species | County | 10Km Sq. | Year | Month | Incident Type | Toxin / Rodenticide detected |
|---|------------------------|--------|----------|------|-------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Peregrine ⁵ | Antrim | J37 | 2021 | Mar | Abuse | Carbofuran & Aldicarb |

Table 4. Carcasses tested showing evidence of secondary poisoning by rodenticides in 2021 & 2022. In these cases rodenticides could not be confirmed as being used in an illegal manner. The majority of samples contained rodenticides in background levels.

| | Species | County | 10Km Sq. | Year | Month | Cause of Death | Rodenticide detected |
|---|-------------|--------------------|----------|------|-------|----------------|--|
| 1 | Buzzard | Down | J35 | 2021 | Feb | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen |
| 2 | Buzzard | Derry /Londonderry | C82 | 2021 | Feb | Unknown | Brodifacoum |
| 3 | Buzzard | Fermanagh | H15 | 2021 | Feb | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone |
| 4 | Buzzard | Antrim | D02 | 2021 | Aug | Unknown | Brodifacoum |
| 5 | Red Kite | Down | J44 | 2021 | Aug | Rodenticides | Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen |
| 6 | Sparrowhawk | Derry /Londonderry | C62 | 2021 | Sep | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Permethrin |

⁶ Two peregrines were reported dead but only one was available for testing when PSNI officers arrived

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| | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------|--------|-----|------|-----|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 7 | Buzzard | Down | J47 | 2022 | Jan | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difenacoum |
| 8 | Buzzard | Down | J48 | 2022 | Mar | Unknown | Background levels - Not given |
| 9 | Buzzard | Tyrone | C60 | 2022 | Mar | Unknown | Background levels – Not given |
| 10 | Buzzard | Down | J44 | 2022 | May | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen |
| 11 | Buzzard | Armagh | J02 | 2022 | Jun | Unknown | Brodifacoum |
| 12 | Buzzard | Down | J47 | 2022 | Nov | Unknown | Background levels – Not given |
| 13 | Buzzard x 2 | Antrim | C83 | 2022 | Dec | Unknown | Brodifacoum, Difenacoum |

Table 5. 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 2018 and 2022 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 |
|--------------|----------|------------------|----------|-------------|--------------|--------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| 2018 | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | 3 | 3 | 1 | 7 |
| 2019 | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | 4 | | | 4 |
| 2020 | 3 | 2 | | | | | | | 5 | | 2 | 7 |
| 2021 | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | 4 | | 5 |
| 2022 | | 4 | 1 | | | | | | 5 | 1 | | 6 |
| Total | 6 | 9 | 3 | | | | | | 18 | 8 | 3 | 29 |

Map 1. The number of confirmed Incidents by 10km location in 2021 /2022

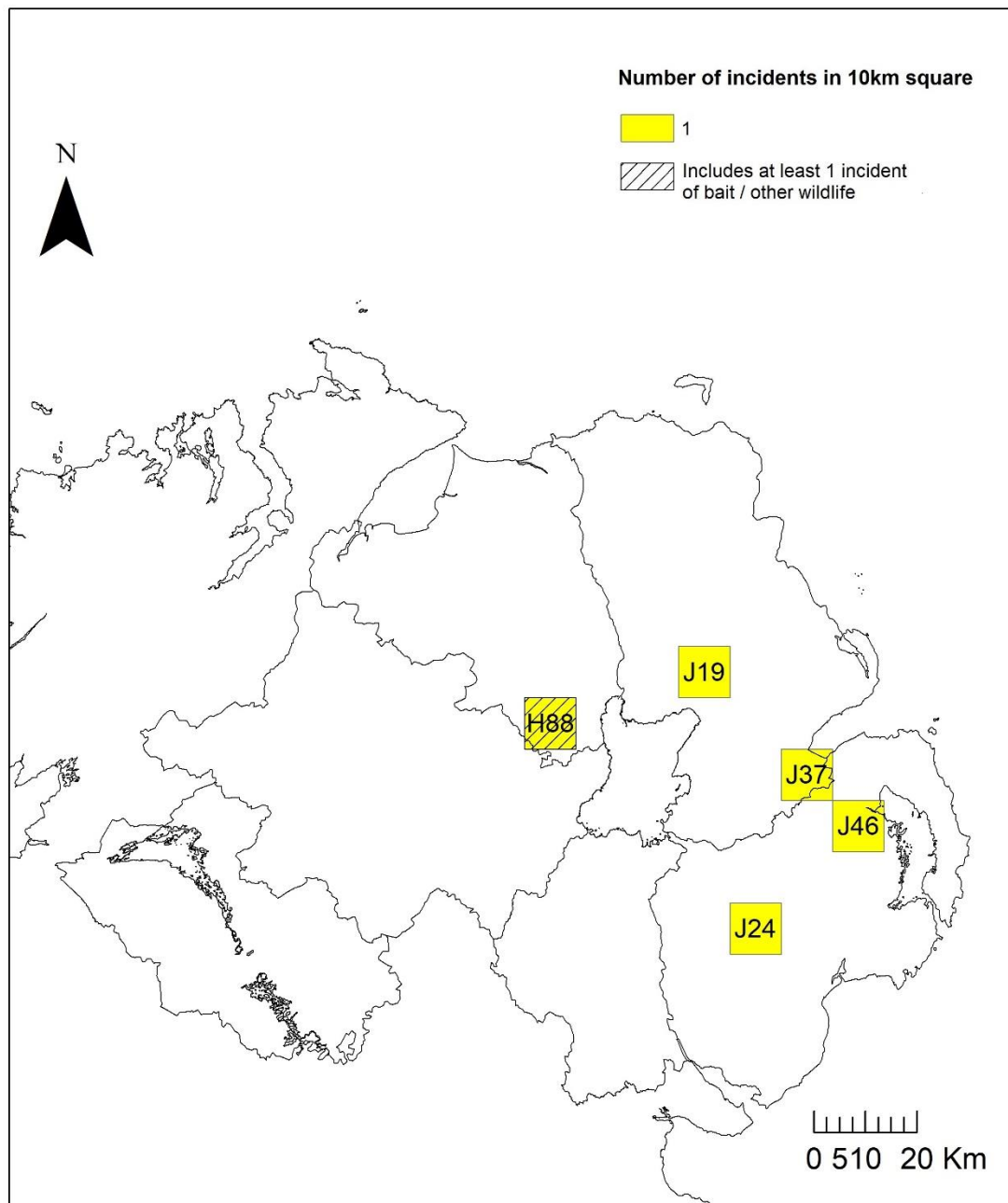


Figure 1. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife (see Table 1 and text above for details) reported in Northern Ireland in 2021/2022 The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of animals killed.*

Map 2. Confirmed Incidents 2021/2022 by type of incident

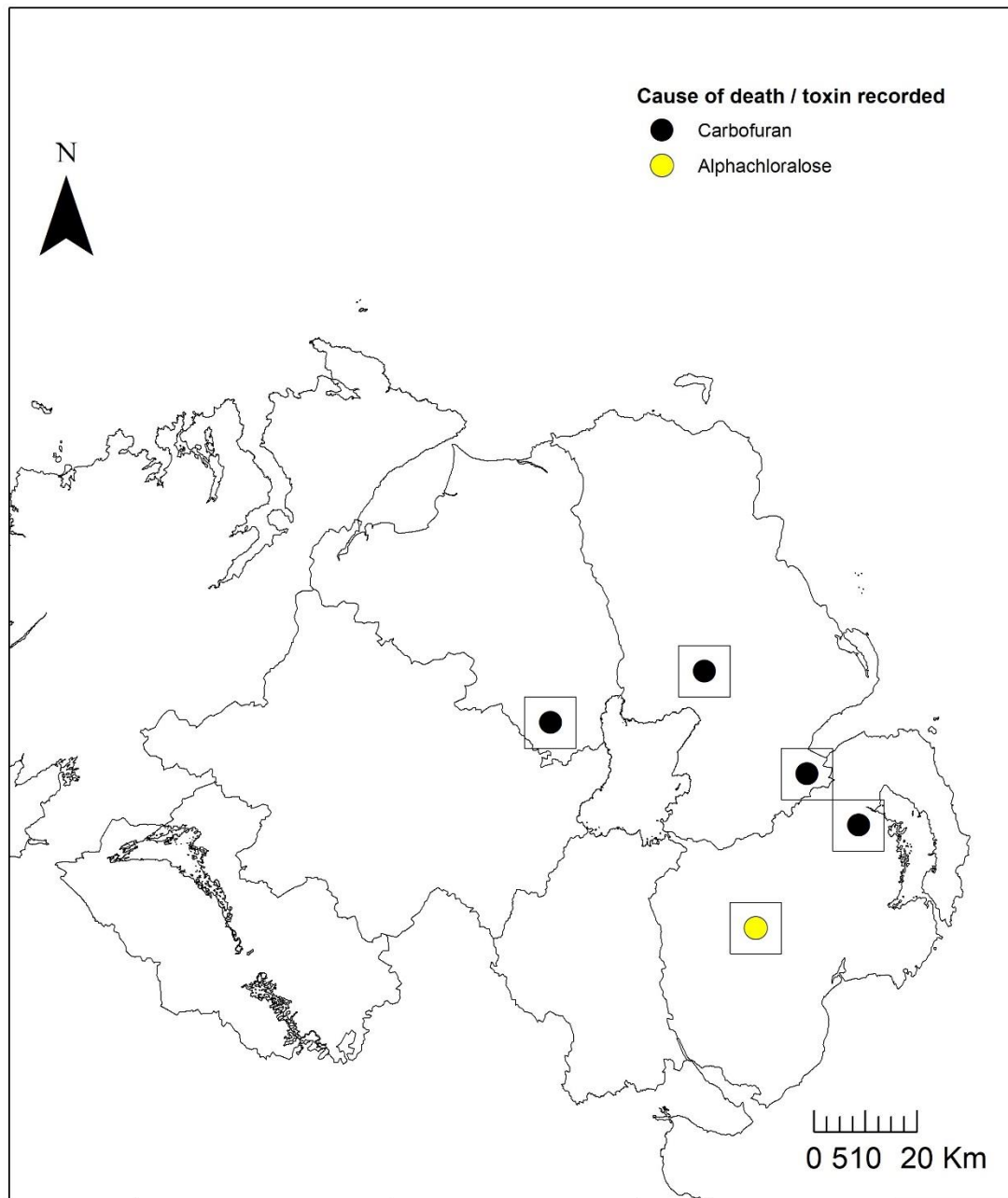


Figure 2. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife reported in 2021 & 2022 in Northern Ireland, mapped by incident type (see Table 1 and text above for details). The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. *Please note that this map does not indicate the number of animals killed.* N.B. Symbols within squares simply represent an incident in that square, not the actual location.

Map 3. Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2018 - 2022

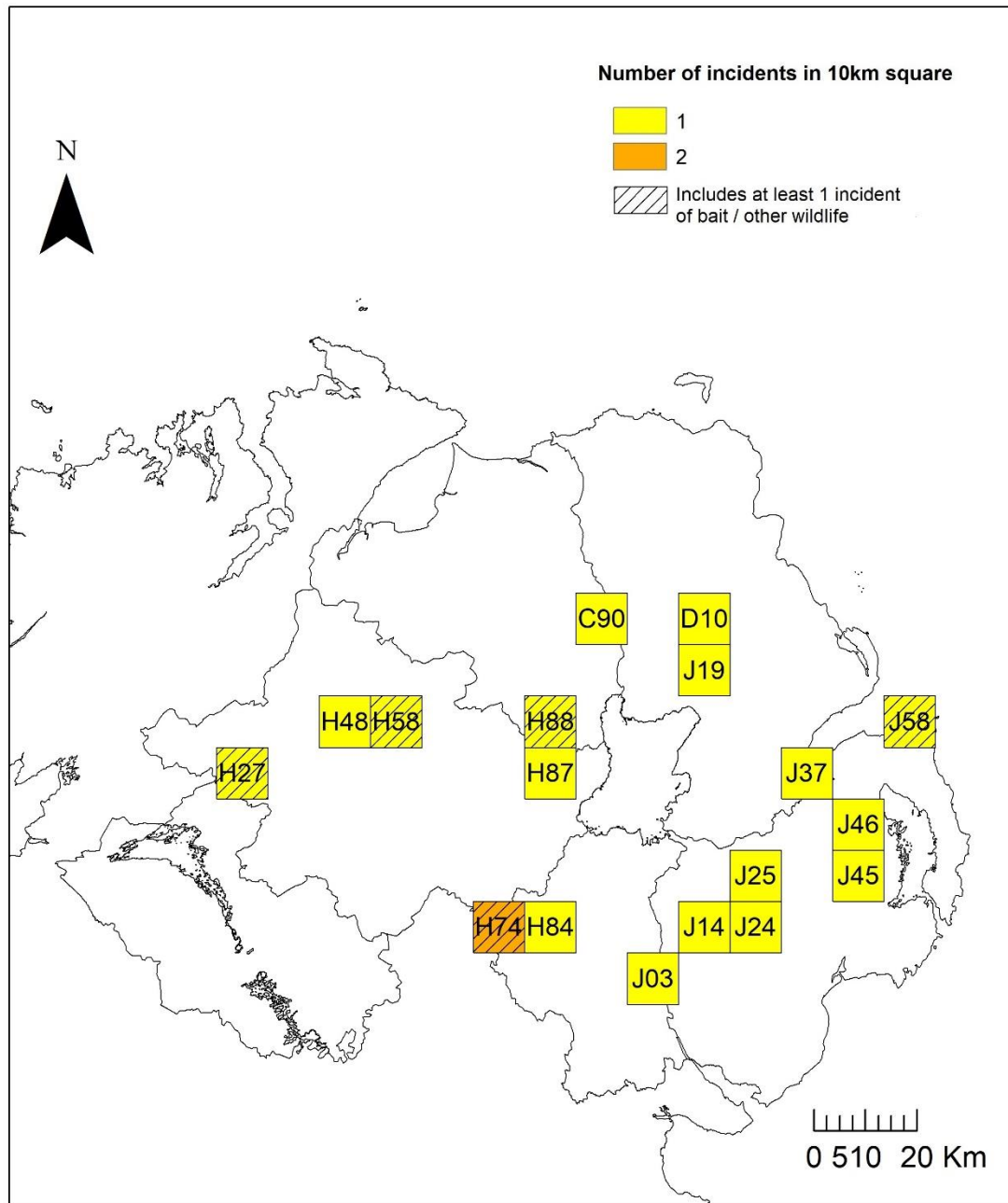


Figure 3. Five-year Hot Spot map of confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey, and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife, reported in Northern Ireland in the period Jan 2018 – Dec 2022. The map shows incidents on a 10km-square scale. Colour coding indicates where more than one incident has occurred in a 10km-square. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of animals killed*

Map 4. Five-year Hot-Spot Map 2018 - 2022

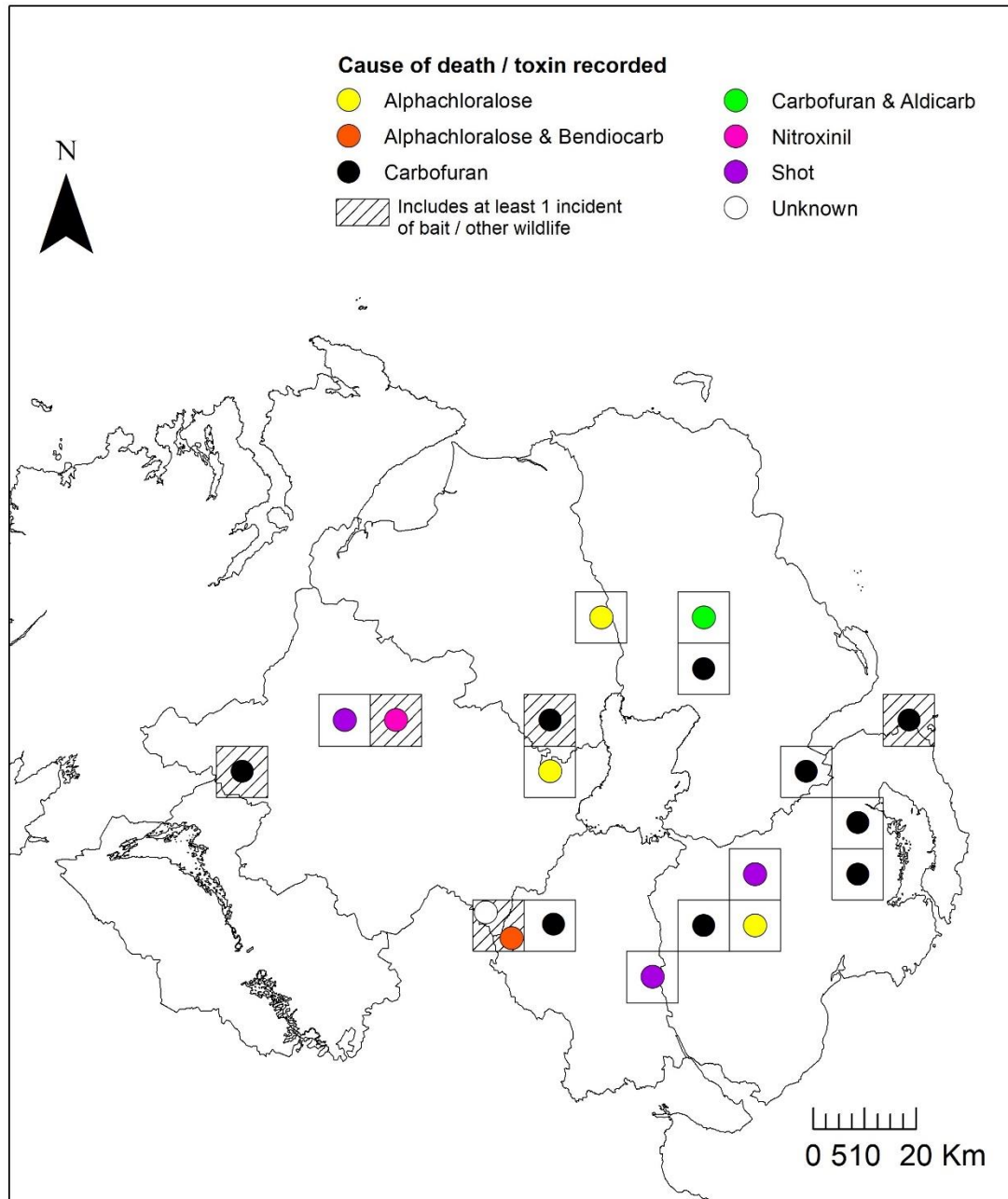


Figure 4. Five-year Hot Spot map of confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey, and illegally poisoned baits and other wildlife, reported in Northern Ireland in the period Jan 2018 – Dec 2022, listed by crime type in each 10km-square. *Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of animals killed. N.B. Symbols within squares simply represent an incident in that square, not the actual location.*

DISCUSSION POINTS

Level of Reporting.

Caution is required when interpreting the change in confirmed crime figures over time. The number of reports of suspected raptor persecution made to PSNI was down in the period 2021-2022 in comparison to the previous two-year interval. This lower level of reporting possibly reflects the decrease in detected confirmed crimes. It is likely that reports made to PSNI 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. The number of confirmed crimes detected may also be affected by samples which are too decomposed for testing when submitted. .

HPAI 'Bird Flu'

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been found in several bird of prey species including buzzard, red kite and white-tailed eagle. With the risk of HPAI ('bird flu') in Northern Ireland heightened in 2021 – 2022 dead birds may have been reported to DAERA for testing rather than PSNI as per the advice to the public⁷. Birds submitted for HPAI testing were not tested further for cause of death, even when negative for HPAI, unless submitted for testing by PSNI with reasonable suspicion that a crime had taken place. In cases of suspected persecution the testing for HPAI is carried out as a preliminary test before further post-mortem. Birds which test positive are not tested further.

Geographic Distribution

There continues to be expansion of areas where single incidents of persecution are detected, rather than repeated incidents occurring in the same area thereby creating new 'Hot Spot' areas in five-year intervals. The continued emergence of new squares shows that raptor persecution in Northern Ireland is widespread and not a localised occurrence (Figures 3 & 4).

Companion Animals

As in previous reports, indiscriminate poisoned baits were picked up by companion animals in 2021/2022. Two cats, along with two wild birds (non-raptor), were killed by consuming bait laced with Carbofuran in Co. Derry/Londonderry in January 2021. This is an area with a history of bird of prey poisoning. As the true target of indiscriminate baits is unknown, where circumstances indicate birds of prey could have consumed the bait (e.g. bait in the open in countryside), they are included in this report. The killing and mistreatment of companion animals

⁷ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wild-birds-and-advice-public>

is investigated by the local council Animal Welfare Officers. The PAW NI RS are developing links with council AWOs to ensure that information on the location of baits and pesticides used are included, where they may be relevant to raptors, in these statistics.

Pesticides found in Raptors 2021/2022

Pesticides responsible for poisoning birds in 2021/2022 included the highly toxic substances Carbofuran and Aldicarb, which have been banned in the UK since 2001 and 2003 respectively and for which there is no legal use in the UK. Alphachloralose was also recorded and is a pesticide with restricted indoor-only use in Northern Ireland, but which may be used in other strict conditions under licence by professionals for the control of pest species on the [General Licence List](#). In confirmed poisoning cases Alphachloralose was found in concentrations which would be considered as abuse of the product, rather than being consumed as secondary poisoning.

The PAWNI RS group note with continued concern the widespread use of highly toxic, banned pesticides Carbofuran and Aldicarb. There is no lawful reason to be in possession of, or to use, either of these pesticides. These pesticides were detected in two confirmed cases in 2021 (killing (i) at least one peregrine falcon – a second dead peregrine was unavailable for testing, and (ii) a magpie and a hooded crow alongside two cats) and a further two confirmed cases in 2021 (killing (i) three peregrines and ii) a peregrine and a lesser black-backed gull).

Secondary Poisoning by Rodenticides

Secondary poisoning by second generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) (mainly Bromadiolone, Brodifacoum, Difethialone, Difenacoum, and/or Flocoumafen) was recorded in six birds of prey in 2021 and eight birds of prey in 2022 (Table 4). However, in the majority of cases 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.

In one incident in August 2021 a Red Kite had >0.2 mg/kg combined rodenticide concentration when tested. This bird showed evidence of haemorrhage during post-mortem testing, indicating that rodenticides may have had a significant role in the death of the bird.

SGARs can accumulate in non-target scavenging and predatory species and the sublethal effects on breeding success and survival are unknown⁸. All of the remaining 13 birds of prey with background levels of rodenticides identified 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 'Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use', and more information on methods that should be used can be found at www.thinkwildlife.org.



Veterinary Products found in Raptors 2021/2022

Pesticides banned for marketing and use under Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 (plant protection products) and/or Regulation (EC) No 528/2012 (Biocidal products) continue to be used in an illegal manner in Northern Ireland. However, veterinary products have also been identified in toxicology reports of several birds of prey in recent years, although none of the following were considered to be the cause of death in 2021/2022;

Diazinon was found in a peregrine in July 2022. Diazinon is an organophosphate insecticide and used commonly in sheep-dip (used for preventing and treating tick, mite and fly larva infections in sheep). Diazinon (also called Dimpylate) is approved in the UK as a veterinary medicine in a number of professional and non-professional products. Diazinon is highly toxic to birds and there have been cases of this product being deliberately used to poison birds of prey.

Pentobarbital is a veterinary product which can end up in birds of prey in two ways;

- i) euthanised animals are incorrectly disposed of and are scavenged upon;
- ii) baits laced with the substance are intentional left out to be scavenged upon

A buzzard was found lifeless in March 2022. The buzzard's regurgitate tested positive for pentobarbital. There were no baits nearby. It is unknown whether the bird was intentionally poisoned or had fed on a euthanised animal.

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.

The finding of veterinary products in birds of prey requires actions for livestock managers to cover fallen stock appropriately when awaiting collection so they cannot be scavenged⁹. Also a reminder to vets to make it clear to pet owners that animals must be disposed of responsibly so as not to cause accidental exposures to wildlife to veterinary products.

Other Pesticides of Concern in Birds of Prey 2021-2022

Dieldrin was present in a buzzard found dead in Co. Down in February 2021. Dieldrin is an organochloride insecticide and was widely used between 1950 and 1970. Dieldrin is an extremely persistent organic pollutant and can biomagnify as it passes along the food chain. Birds of prey are particularly vulnerable as being apex predators they accumulate a larger proportion of the compound. This compound has been banned in the UK since the late 1980s. Persistent organic pollutants such as Dieldrin 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. Disposal of these chemicals is strictly controlled to prevent further contamination of the environment. The occurrence of Dieldrin in the buzzard is of concern and although it cannot be classified as a confirmed crime it remains on record as a possible poisoning incident.

Chlorpyrifos was found in the same poisoned peregrine as the Diazinon in July 2022. Chlorpyrifos is an organophosphate insecticide which is prohibited for use in the UK as an active substance in biocidal products since 2008 and in plant protection products since 2020. Nevertheless it is likely that some farmers and land managers are still in possession of old stock.

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:

- '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

⁹ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/fallen-animals-safe-disposal.pdf>

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 2021/22 and saw the NIRSG and NIEA meet with the PSNI TSG unit to 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.
- [Updated leaflets](#) created in 2021 have been used at public events to raise awareness of raptor persecution and how the public can recognise and report wildlife crime.
- A RSPB Investigations Officer started in post in Northern Ireland in October 2021 and has joined the PAW NI RS.
- The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group have initiated a campaign for the legislation of a list of prohibited prescribed ingredients to appear in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as amended, after Article 15B. The petition can be signed [here](#).
- 'Hawk-Eyes', an ongoing multi-agency initiative, was continued in 2021/2022. 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](#).
- A video highlighting the Hawk-Eyes project was created in 2022 to highlight purpose and utility of the PAW NI RS and the raptor persecution awareness raising project. The video was launched at the National Wildlife Crime Unit's conference for Rural and Wildlife Crime in 2022 and can be seen [here](#).
- NIRSG scientists have undertaken marking project of birds of prey as part of ongoing research studies on raptor species. RSPB and NIRSG fieldworkers have also been monitoring adults and nestlings at vulnerable nest sites and 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.
- RSPB carried out a virtual wildlife crime training event for field volunteers in April 2021. This training focussed on wildlife protection legislation, raptor persecution and how to identify and report wildlife crimes.

- PAW NI RS representatives from PSNI gave a presentation at the Veterinary conference in November 2022. Topics included PAW and procedures for reporting suspected wildlife crime to PSNI.
- The PSNI Wildlife Liaison Officer and Tactical Support Unit, along with representatives from NIEA, NIRSG and RSPB, compiled a PSNI Flow-chart for the use of Investigating officers in the field, to help navigate individual cases based on finding circumstance and suspected persecution type. The flow chart was very well received by officers on the ground.
- It can be expensive to have banned pesticides collected and disposed of so in April 2022 NI Water ran a Pesticide Disposal Scheme through the Interreg programme 'Source to Tap', and invited farmers and other professional pesticide users to safely dispose of agricultural chemicals free of charge. The purpose of the scheme was to provide safe disposal of unwanted, out of date or banned agricultural herbicides, pesticides, fungicides and veterinary medicines, with these, and any empty containers, collected by a specialist contractor. In total 488 containers and 925 litres of chemicals were collected from the 24 individuals who took part in the scheme. NI Water aim to run the disposal scheme again in 2023 in conjunction with the Water Catchment Partnership.

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 maintain a collective media strategy, in both print media and social media, particularly around times of the year when raptor persecution, including nest disturbance, is most likely
- To carry out targeting proactive campaigning to minimise the misuse of rodenticides to reduce the prevalence of rodenticides in secondary poisoning of birds of prey. 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 and to promote and advertise these.
- 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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Image credits

Page 6: Juvenile peregrine falcons [Image taken under licence © C. Cassidy]

www.wildlifecrimeni.org



PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION AGAINST
wildlife crime
Northern Ireland