

Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2014



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)

CONTENTS

	Page
Summary	3
Introduction	4
Results	6
Hot-spot Map (2009 – 2014)	11
Actions Taken	13
Going Forward	14

SUMMARY

Raptor persecution is one of the six UK wildlife crime priorities, having been assessed as posing a great threat to the conservation status of several birds of prey¹. The PAW NI Raptor Subgroup supports the implementation plans for the monitoring, awareness and prevention of raptor persecution in Northern Ireland.

This report of the persecution and poisoning of raptors in Northern Ireland covers the period January 2014 to December 2014, with comparisons made to the previous report which covers the five-year period of 2009-2013².

In 2014 a total of nine illegal persecution incidents, involving 11 individual birds of prey, were confirmed in Northern Ireland. There were five incidents of poisoning, three incidents of shooting and one incident of trapping. The most frequently recorded species involved were buzzard (4) and red kite (4) with peregrine falcon (2) and sparrowhawk (1) also persecuted. There was evidence of secondary rodenticide poisoning in five incidents, involving five red kites, a peregrine and a buzzard, but in none of these incidents was secondary poisoning reported as the cause of death.

These confirmed incidents bring the total number of birds of prey confirmed shot, poisoned or trapped in Northern Ireland between 2009 and 2014 to 44, with an additional incident of confirmed nest destruction. These incidents have involved seven different species.

Incidents in which a wildlife crime cannot be confirmed, and/or where the cause of death remains unknown, are not presented in this report but have been collated and remain on file on databases held by PSNI, NIRSG and RSPB.

¹NWCU Strategic Assessment 2013 [<http://www.nwcu.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NWCU-Strategic-Assessment-2013-final-v2.pdf>]

² <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/advice--information/animal-welfare/documents/pawni-raptorpersecution--poisoning-report-2009-2013-final.pdf>

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.

The PAW Northern Ireland Raptor Subgroup (hereafter PAWNI 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) and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSE NI).

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 contaminants³. 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 first Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report Northern Ireland 2009-2013⁴

³ Colhoun & Cummins (2013). Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-2019. Irish Birds 9: 523-544.

⁴ <https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/advice--information/animal-welfare/documents/pawni-raptorpersecution--poisoning-report-2009-2013-final.pdf>

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). Under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the WANE Act 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.

This Report

This report includes persecution and poisoning incidents involving birds of prey between January 2014 and December 2014 reported in Northern Ireland. 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 2009-2013⁵.

Cases of probable and possible incidents may be alluded to in the discussion, but neither type of incident is 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 main databases.

⁵ <https://www.psnl.police.uk/globalassets/advice--information/animal-welfare/documents/pawni-raptorpersecution--poisoning-report-2009-2013-final.pdf>

RESULTS

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

Between January 2014 and December 2014 there were nine incidents of confirmed incidents against raptors collated in Northern Ireland involving 11 individual birds of prey from four species, namely red kite, buzzard, peregrine and sparrowhawk (Table 1).

Confirmed incidents most frequently involved poisoning (5) and shooting (3) with one recorded incident of trapping (Figure 1). Four of the five poisoning incidents involved the highly toxic substance carbofuran, which has been banned in the UK since 2001. These poisoning incidents also involved either aldicarb (banned in 2007), isofenphos and/ or alphachloralose. Incidents were confirmed in Counties Down (4), Tyrone (2), Armagh (1), Antrim (1), and Londonderry (1) (Figure 2).

Similar to the 2009-2013 report pesticide abuse incidents in which other wildlife was killed or indiscriminate baits were recovered in circumstances that could have resulted in raptor persecution were also noted here in a separate table (Table 2); In 2014 a raven was confirmed poisoned by carbofuran.

The confirmed incidents recorded in 2014 bring the total birds of prey confirmed persecuted or poisoned in Northern Ireland between 2009 and 2014 to 45 (including once incident of confirmed nest destruction), with buzzards and red kites most frequently recorded (Table 3).

Seven individual birds of prey showed detectable levels of secondary poisoning by rodenticides in 2014 (bromadiolone, brodifacoum, difenacoum, and/or flocoumafen); but these were not deemed to be recorded at concentrations to have been the cause of death (Table 4).

Table 1. All confirmed incidents of persecution and poisoning of birds of prey recorded in Northern Ireland in 2014.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Incident Type	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Red Kite	Down	J45	2014	Feb	Shot	Shot
2	Buzzard, Fox	Tyrone	H76	2014	Mar	Abuse	Carbofuran
3	Red Kite x 3	Down	J24	2014	Jun	Abuse	Alphachloralose
4	Peregrine	Londonderry	H88	2014	Jul	Abuse	Carbofuran, Alphachloralose
5	Buzzard	Down	J33	2014	Jul	Shot	Shot
6	Peregrine	Down	J43	2014	Sep	Shot	Shot
7	Buzzard	Armagh	J03	2014	Oct	Abuse	Carbofuran, Aldicarb, Isofenphos
8	Buzzard	Tyrone	H76	2014	Nov	Abuse	Carbofuran
9	Sparrowhawk	Antrim	J37	2014	Nov	Trapping	Trapped

Table 2. Pesticide abuse incidents in 2014 in Northern Ireland, in which other wildlife was killed or indiscriminate baits were recovered in circumstances that could have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed.

	Species	County	10Km Sq.	Year	Month	Incident Type	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Raven	Down	J64	2014	Mar	Abuse	Carbofuran

Table 3. All confirmed bird of prey victims of persecution and poisoning recorded in Northern Ireland between 2009 and 2014 and incidents where other poisoned animals, or baits, were recovered in circumstances that could theoretically have resulted in raptor persecution had they not been discovered and removed. NB. Figures relate to the total number of animals found.

	Buzzard	Red Kite	Peregrine falcon	Golden Eagle	Merlin	Sparrowhawk	White-tailed Eagle	Sub-total	Raven	Other Animal	Bait only	Total
2009	3	1						4	1	5	1	11
2010	5		3	1				9	1	1	1	12
2011	3	1						4		2	2	8
2012	2		1			1		4	1	1		6
2013	6	5			1		1	13		2		15
2014	4	4	2			1		11	1			12
Total	23	11	6	1	1	2	1	45	4	11	4	64

Table 4. Carcasses tested showing evidence of secondary poisoning by rodenticides. 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	Toxin / Rodenticide detected
1	Red Kite x 3*	Down	J24	2014	Jun	Abuse	Bodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difenacoum, Flocoumafen
2	Red Kite	Down	J11	2014	Jul	Unknown	Bodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Difenacoum, Pentobarbital
3	Red Kite	Down	J23	2014	Sep	Unknown	Background levels of rodenticides
4	Peregrine	Londonderry	C41	2014	Sep	Unknown	Brodifacoum
5	Buzzard*	Armagh	J03	2014	Oct	Abuse	Brodifacoum

*In these cases the cause of death was confirmed as abuse of other pesticides and as such these incidents are also included in Table 1.

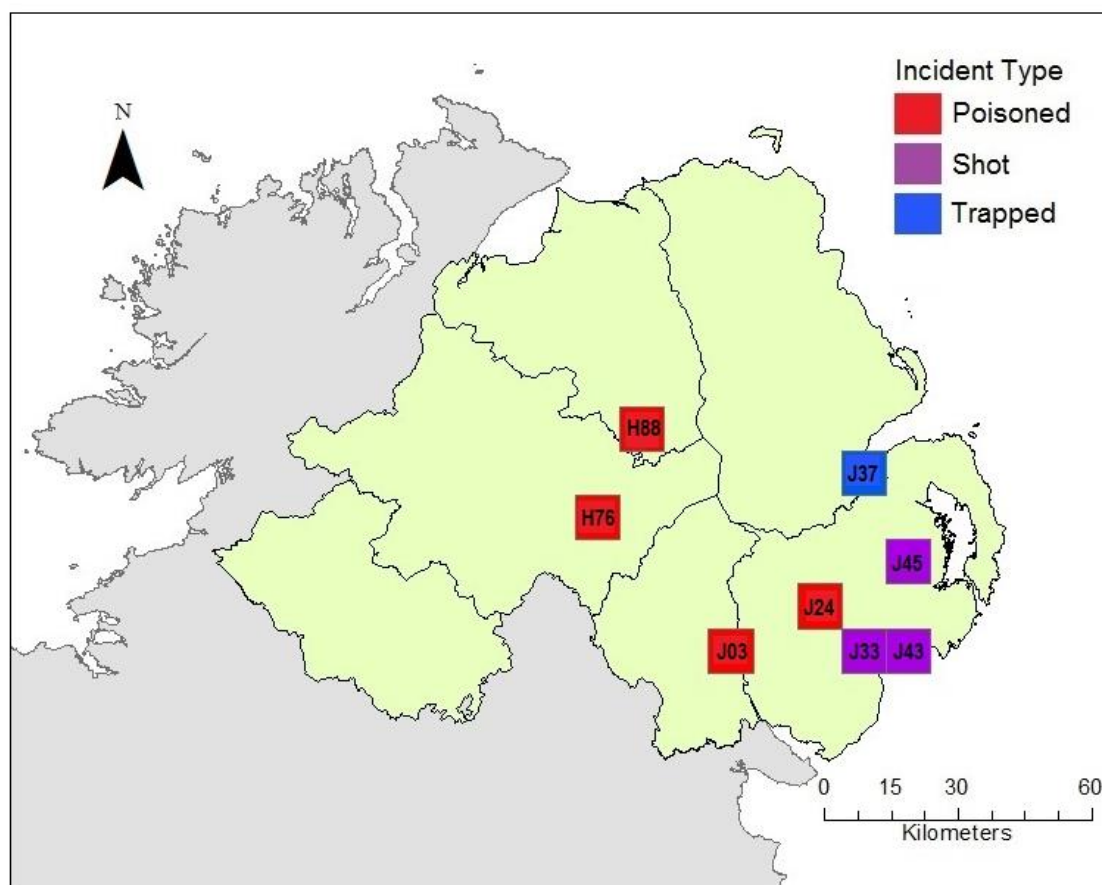


Figure 1. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey reported in 2014 in Northern Ireland mapped by incident type (see Table 1 for details). The map shows incidents on a 10km scale. Please note that this map does not indicate the number of birds killed.

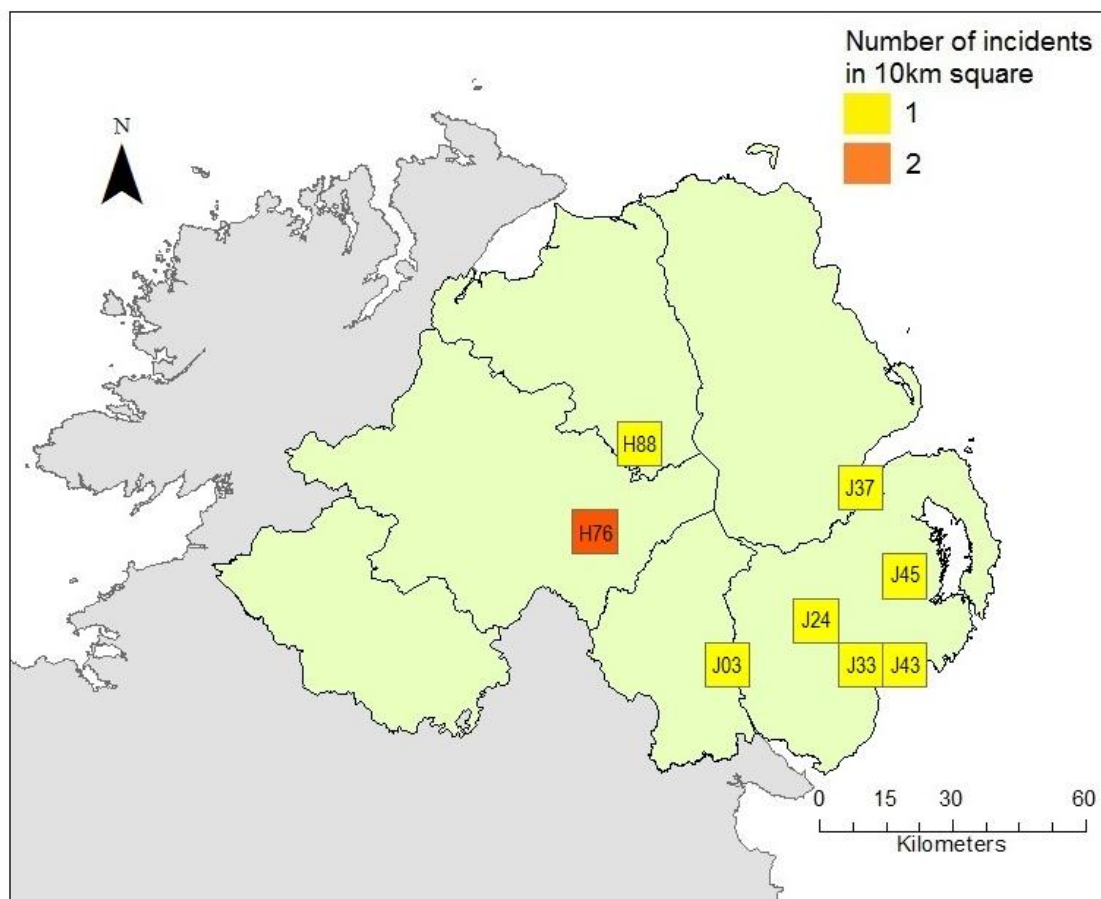


Figure 2. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey reported in Northern Ireland in 2014 mapped by number of incidents (see Table 1 for details). The map shows incidents on a 10km scale. *Please note that number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed.*

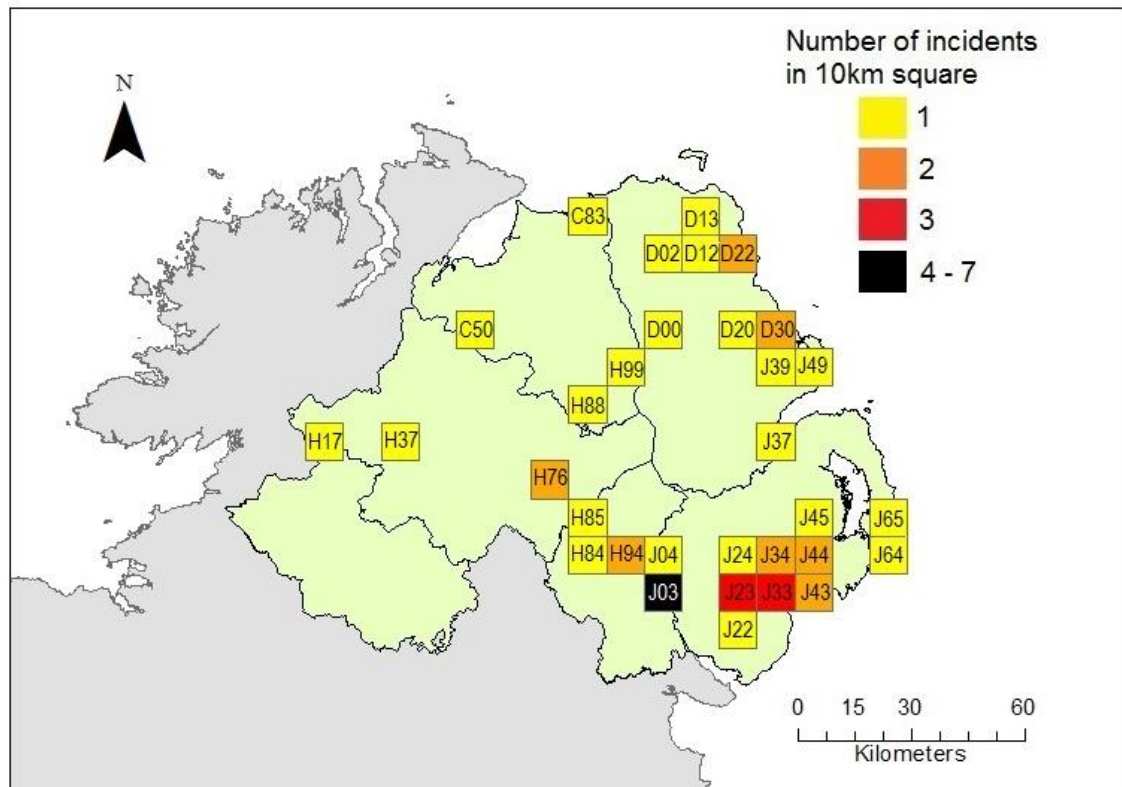


Figure 3. Hot-spot map. Confirmed incidents of persecution of birds of prey, poisoned baits and other wildlife reported in the period Jan 2009 – Dec 2014. The map shows incidents on a 10km scale. Please note that the number of incidents does not indicate the number of birds killed.

Spatial data analysis 2009-2014

When the confirmed incidents from 2014 are added to those recorded in 2009-2013 (see previous report⁶) several “hot-spot” areas are evident (Figure 3), i.e. areas where confirmed incidents of raptor crime are most frequently detected.

One of these areas is on the border of counties Down and Armagh, the area surrounding Jerrettspass and Poyntzpass (10km-square J03), where there have been seven (7) confirmed incidents of persecution and/or poisoning of raptors between 2009 and 2014. Three buzzards and one red kite were recorded killed here using alphachloralose and one buzzard killed using carbofuran with a further buzzard recorded shot and one trapped. In a further incident here in 2011 a magpie was found dead next to three dead buzzards and a rabbit bait but only the magpie was retrieved for toxicology testing. It was confirmed poisoned by alphachloralose.

⁶ <https://www.psnr.police.uk/globalassets/advice--information/animal-welfare/documents/pawni-raptorpersecution--poisoning-report-2009-2013-final.pdf>

Following three confirmed incidents in 2009 – 2013, in which three buzzards and one red kite were poisoned, no further raptors were confirmed as poisoned or killed in the areas east of Rathfriland, including Moneyslane and Kilcoo, Co. Down (10km-square J23) in 2014. Two red kites were found dead here in August (2014) and September (2014), but the causes of their deaths were inconclusive (Table 4). Both birds were decomposed and largely unsuitable for further post-mortem. However, the possibility of bird of prey persecution in this area remains high, given that a further five red kites have been found dead here since 2009 (cause of deaths inconclusive).

A buzzard was shot in Newcastle, Co. Down (10km-square J33) in 2014, bringing the total confirmed incidents in this area to three since 2009; however, the previous two incidents involved the abuse of alphachloralose rather than shooting and were in the Castlewellan/ Leitrim area of this square.

One area which had no confirmed incidents in the period 2009-2013 had two in 2014; Dungannon, Co. Tyrone (10km-square H76). In this area there were two separate incidents where buzzards were killed via carbofuran poisoning, one in March and one in November. This indicates the repeated use of this highly toxic and banned substance in this area.

Finally, two further areas which had no incidents recorded in the period 2009-2013 had a single confirmed persecution incident in 2014: A red kite was shot and killed in the Crossgar area in Feb 2014 (10km-square J45) and a red kite breeding female and her two chicks were found dead on their nest, having succumbed to poisoning by alphachloralose, near Katesbridge, Co. Down, in June 2014 (10km-square J24) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Red kite 'Blue 13', breeding adult found dead on her nest along with two chicks, tested positive for alphachloralose poisoning outside Katesbridge, Co. Down. (Picture courtesy of NIRSG)

ACTIONS TAKEN

In order to minimise the number of potential persecution and poisoning incidents which are not reported to the PSNI and/or birds which are not sent for post-mortem, several actions have been undertaken by the PSNI and the PAWNI RS;

- As a direct result of the PAWNI RS Bird of Prey Persecution and Poisoning Report 2009-2013 the PSNI, in partnership with the PAWNI RS, launched a new initiative in March 2016 called 'Operation Raptor'. This campaign is designed to encourage people to report suspected crimes against birds of prey to PSNI and to directly target those who seek to kill birds of prey, to remind offenders that they could face imprisonment and/or fines (up to £5,000). The Operation Raptor poster will be distributed into local hot spot areas.
- The PSNI Wildlife Liaison Officer (WLO) has continued to raise awareness of wildlife and welfare issues within the PSNI and has implemented on-going training of officers to raise awareness nationally and locally. The WLO remains as the central point of contact within the Police Service for police and police staff when support and advice is required by any investigating officer regarding

wildlife crime and therefore information remains consistent within the service and a high level of knowledge is maintained.

- The PSNI WLO has included a two-page article in the internal PSNI magazine (February/March 2016 edition) on Operation Raptor and the multi-agency initiative launched to pursue those who target birds of prey. There is also guidance information for operation officers in the article.
- The PAWNI RS has welcomed the addition of representatives from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the Health and Safety Executive of Northern Ireland (HSE). The sub-group is benefiting from their considerable experience and understanding of matters relating to bird of prey persecution.
- The PAWNI RS is in the process of rolling out 'Operation Raptor' across the Veterinary network in Northern Ireland as a reminder of veterinary responsibilities in reporting suspected bird of prey crime to the PSNI.

GOING FORWARD

In order to increase the reporting, recording and analysis of raptor injuries and mortality incidents, and to increasing public awareness and education about the issues surrounding crimes against birds of prey, to help combat illegal bird of prey persecution and poisoning in Northern Ireland, the PAWNI RS has agreed the following;

- The areas mentioned in this report warrant close PAWNI RS co-ordinated monitoring in conjunction with PSNI/NIEA and the PSNI should continue to carry out searches in collaboration with the Health and Safety executive and NIEA where the information is 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, which is recognised as an important tool in obtaining intelligence information relating to specific crimes. However it is necessary that once confirmed a crime is to be highlighted in the public domain, that the PSNI/ WLO and/or PSNI Investigating Officer will

be consulted beforehand 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.

It is also recommended that PAWNI also liaise with other agencies in Britain and Republic of Ireland (e.g. NPWS) to increase national awareness of crimes against birds of prey where possible, including cross-border initiatives where necessary.

It is recommended that it will be useful in the future to undertake population modelling of raptors in Northern Ireland to establish the impact of persecution on their respective populations. It will be necessary to collate further historical and future statistics for this further research which is highly desirable.

The PAWNI 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 PAWNI RS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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