



uk|National Wildlife  
Crime Unit

# Help us stop bird of prey persecution

Recognise, record and report



Photo: Simon Stobart

## Bird crime and the law

In the UK all wild birds, their nests, and their eggs are protected by law. It is against the law to intentionally kill, injure, or take wild birds\*. Offences can carry a prison sentence of up to six months.

(\*unless carried out under a licence)

Despite this, species such as golden eagles, peregrine falcons, buzzards, red kites, hen harriers, and more are shot, poisoned, and illegally trapped, as well as having their nests disturbed.

We want to stop these crimes and bring offenders to justice but we need your help. Operation Owl is a national initiative, which you can support by being our eyes and ears out on the moors, fells, mountains, and dales. Help to spot suspicious activity, poisoned bait sites, and illegal 'pole traps' which are used to capture birds of prey before the trapper returns to kill them.



*Hen harriers are regularly persecuted*



*An illegal spring 'pole trap'*



*Rabbit used as poisoned bait*

# Recognise

### What to look out for:

- Dead birds of prey lying next to dead pigeons, rabbits, pheasants, or other poisoned baits. **DO NOT TOUCH.**
- Live birds of prey caught in any trap.
- Any spring traps set out in the open that are not within a cage tunnel or other enclosed tunnel structure.
- Any spring traps set out on top of a post – known as 'pole traps'.



*Poisoned red kite*

# Record

If you come across a dead bird or suspicious object, this could be a wildlife crime scene. Every piece of information may be crucial in prosecuting an offender.

- Don't disturb the scene by walking around it unnecessarily and trampling possible evidence.
- Don't move anything.
- Don't touch any traps, dead birds, or suspected poison baits. Many poisons (e.g. carbuforan) are extremely dangerous even in very small amounts and can be absorbed through the skin.
- Don't approach anyone you suspect of committing crime, as they may become violent or aggressive.
- Do take photographs if you can, or make a sketch as soon as possible.
- Also take photographs of the surroundings and any landmarks to help officers relocate the crime scene.
- If photographing an object try to use a coin or notebook for scale – providing it won't disturb anything.
- Note the location as accurately as possible by grid reference, GPS, or what3words.
- Note a description of any suspect(s) and any vehicle numbers.
- Note the time and date and what happened.



## Illegal egg collection

Over a dozen egg collectors have been jailed since 2001 but a small number are still active in the UK, targeting the rarest breeding birds.

## What to look out for:

Suspicious behaviour including; people looking in bushes or wading out to islands, often at unsociable hours, on reserves or in good breeding birds' habitats.

**CALL YOUR LOCAL POLICE**



**101**

**IN AN EMERGENCY  
ALWAYS CALL 999**

**OPERATION OWL**

*Be our eyes and ears*



# Report

If you spot something illegal or suspicious, report it to the police.

If the crime or suspected crime is still taking place right now, call 999 immediately. Never approach suspects yourself as they may react violently.

If the crime or suspected crime is no longer taking place, please use the national police non-emergency number 101.

When you are connected to the police, ask to speak to a Wildlife Crime Officer and make sure you get an 'incident report number'.

You can also:

- Give information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
- Report suspected pesticides and poisoning incidents to the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS) hotline number 0800 321600.
- Call the RSPB's confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on 0300 999 0101.

## Guidance on legal trapping

A variety of cage and spring traps, plus snares, can legally be used to control certain mammals and birds.

Please be aware that if you damage them, you may be committing an offence of criminal damage.

Report any trap you are unsure about to the police.

## OPERATION OWL

*Be our eyes and ears*



**CrimeStoppers.**

**0800 555 111**

100% anonymous. Always.

Operation Owl has been a major success since 2018 through North Yorkshire Police. The NWCU are now looking to drive this forward nationwide. We have updated a range of printable posters available to download [here](#).

Be our eyes and ears – together we will end Bird of Prey Crime.