

RSPB BIRDCRIME REPORT 2022

SUMMARY – KEY STATISTICS

- Within the UK, there were 61 incidents where birds of prey were either targeted, vulnerable, or victims of illegal persecution in 2022, with a total of 51 birds killed. That figure of 61 is 47 fewer than in 2021 when there were 108 incidents of illegal persecution, and significantly lower than the previous 12-year average of 104 confirmed incidents. 64% of the confirmed incidents in 2022 were allegedly connected to ‘land managed for and/or connected to individuals or groups managing land for gamebird shooting’.
- The UK breakdown of incidents in 2022 was as follows:
 - England. 46 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, 34 fewer than in 2021 when there were 80 confirmed incidents.
 - Scotland. 4 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, 13 fewer than the previous year when there were 17 incidents confirmed.
 - Wales. 8 confirmed incidents, 2 fewer than in 2021 when 10 incidents were confirmed.
 - Northern Ireland. 3 confirmed incidents, 2 more than in 2021 when just one incident had been confirmed.
- The 61 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution in 2022 included 27 shooting incidents (41 in 2021), 12 poisoning (pesticide) abuse incidents (32 in 2021), 10 trapping incidents (18 in 2021) which resulted in 5 victims, and 12 ‘other’ incidents of illegal persecution which also resulted in 5 victims. These represent significant reductions on previous years.
- The RSPB has split the 61 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution into likely ‘persecution groups’, as follows:
 - Pheasant / partridge: 37.7%
 - Grouse: 19.6%
 - Mixed pheasant / partridge / grouse: 6.6%
 - Unknown / other / pigeon fancier: 36.0%

INTRODUCTION

The RSPB's 2022 Birdcrime Report was published on 24 November 2023. This annual report provides a summary of the 61 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution in the UK in 2022 which resulted in the killing of 51 birds of prey. The figure of 61 is 47 fewer than in 2021 when there were 108 incidents of illegal persecution, and considerably lower than the previous 12-year average of 104 confirmed incidents. Rather than welcoming this significant reduction, the RSPB believes that as a result of Avian Influenza, which had a significant impact on wild birds including birds of prey, many dead raptors did not undergo further analysis to identify their cause of death, with the result that possible cases of raptor persecution were not identified or reported. Additionally, fewer birds of prey were tested by the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme in 2022, which could have likewise resulted in a number of persecution incidents being unreported, which would also have had an impact on the overall persecution figures for 2022. But this positioning by the RSPB should not come as a surprise, as the significantly lower numbers do not help their lobbying of governments, policy-makers, and the public when driving forward their anti-shooting agenda.

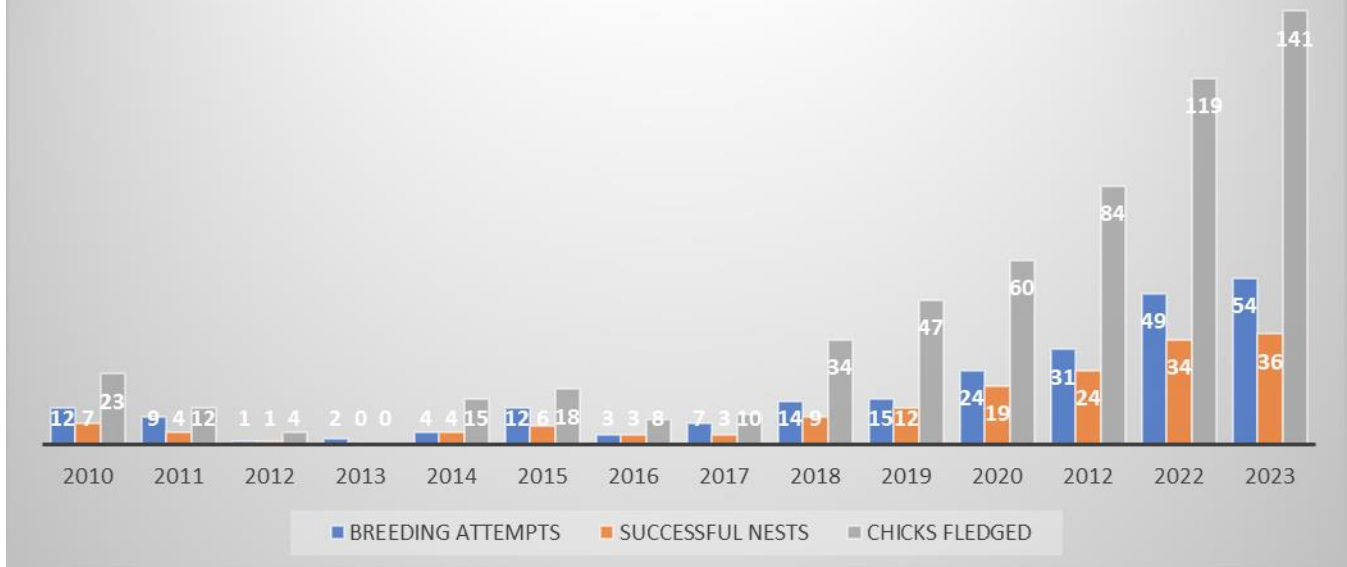
Of the 61 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution recorded in the UK in 2022, 64% were allegedly connected to 'land managed for and/or connected to individuals or groups managing land for gamebird shooting', compared to over two-thirds (71%) in 2021. 36% of incidents have been classified by the RSPB as 'other', compared to 29% last year.

Of the 64% of incidents allegedly connected to gamebird shooting, just 26% at worst (grouse – 19.6% and mixed pheasant / partridge / grouse – 6.6%) can be linked to land managed for grouse shooting, and there is then no evidence to prove that individuals or groups managing that land were responsible. Despite this, the RSPB's focus remains firmly on the uplands.

Despite the enormous reduction in the number of incidents in 2022, the RSPB claims the relentless targeting of birds of prey is having a serious conservation impact on their survival, even though the majority are at their highest levels since records began. Of the 70 species of wild bird on the red list as being of the highest conservation concern, only three are birds of prey. Regardless of this, the RSPB believes that 'only through legislation and regulatory improvements including the licensing of grouse moors and vicarious liability can a positive long-term change happen'. They maintain their objection to the Trial Brood Management scheme for hen harriers, the success of which has been overwhelming, as can be seen from the breeding figures for the period 2010 – 2023. They are also calling on governments across the UK to license the release of non-native gamebirds and mallards, underpinned by a statutory code of practice, with mandatory reporting of movements and releases, and an appropriate sentencing of those convicted of offences against birds of prey. Calls for improvements in the testing procedures associated with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza are likewise being made, so that investigations also look for signs of wildlife crime.

HEN HARRIER BREEDING SUCCESS 2010 – 2023

HEN HARRIER BREEDING SUCCESS IN ENGLAND 2010 - 2023



CONFIRMED INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE RSPB

There were 61 incidents where birds of prey were either targeted, vulnerable, or victims of illegal persecution in 2022. Of these, 46 cases were confirmed in England, 4 in Scotland, 8 in Wales, and 3 in Northern Ireland.

BREAKDOWN OF CONFIRMED INCIDENTS AGAINST BIRDS OF PREY 2022



CONFIRMED INCIDENTS INVOLVING BIRDS OF PREY IN THE UK

Within the UK, there were 61 incidents where birds of prey were either targeted, vulnerable, or victims of illegal persecution in 2022, with a total of 51 confirmed deaths. That figure of 61 is 47 fewer than in 2021 when there were 108 incidents of illegal persecution, and significantly lower than the previous 12-year average of 104 confirmed incidents. Of these 61 confirmed incidents, 64% were allegedly connected to 'land managed for and / or connected to individuals or groups managing land for gamebird shooting'.



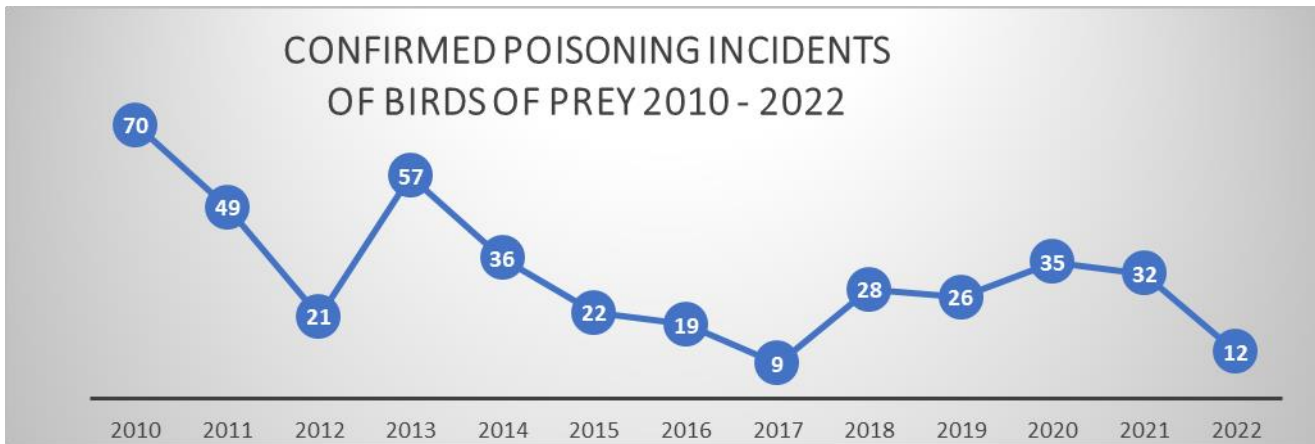
SHOOTING INCIDENTS

The RSPB’s figures show that shooting remains the most common form of illegal persecution of birds of prey. The figure of 27 confirmed shooting incidents in 2022 is the lowest since 2010, and significantly below the previous 12-year average of 42 incidents.



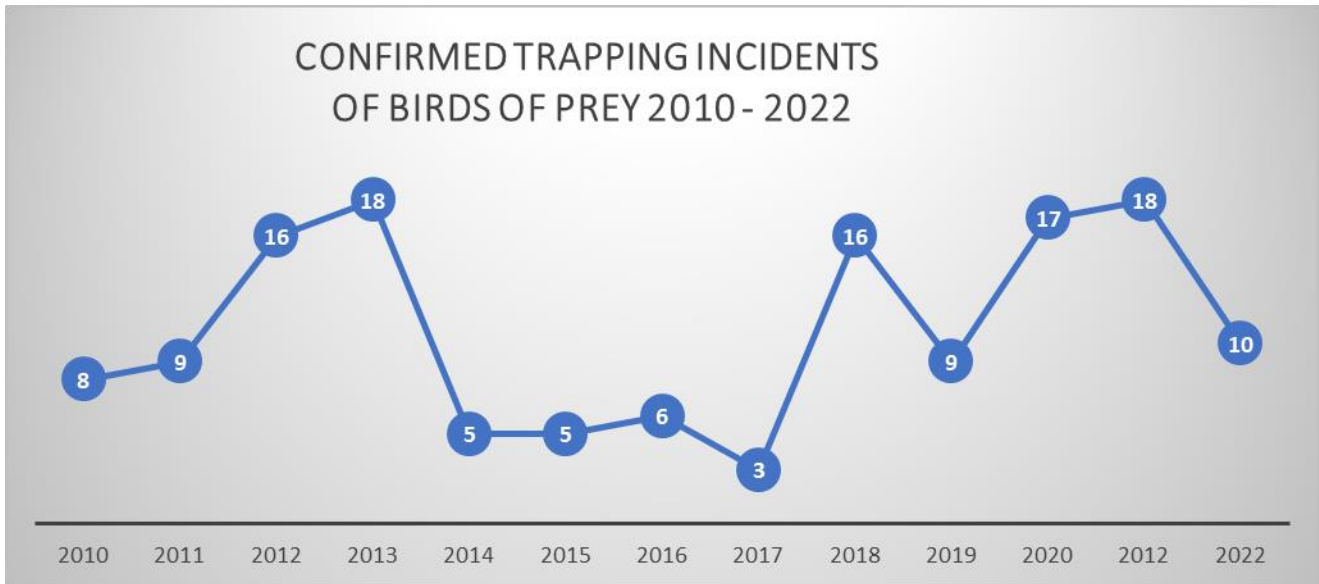
POISON ABUSE INCIDENTS

There were 12 confirmed poisoning incidents involving raptors in 2022, which is a considerable improvement on previous years, and almost 1/3 of the previous 12-year average of 34 incidents.



ILLEGAL TRAPPING

There were 10 trapping incidents in 2022 which resulted in 5 victims. Although this is an improvement on the previous two years, it is the one form of illegal persecution that has not seen a significant improvement in its previous 12-year average.



WILD BIRD RELATED PROSECUTIONS

In 2022, there were 15 wild bird related prosecutions of which two were gamekeepers who were convicted for bird of prey related offences.



CONCLUSION

The shooting community remains committed to eradicating raptor persecution, with a zero tolerance towards all wildlife crime, including the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The considerable reduction in the number of incidents in 2022 is something to be welcomed, and it is therefore extremely

disappointing that the RSPB cannot acknowledge this, instead attributing the lower numbers to Avian Influenza, which had a significant impact on wild birds including birds of prey, with many dead raptors not undergoing further analysis to identify their cause of death. It is their belief that this, along with the fewer birds of prey that were tested by the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme in 2022, could have resulted in a number of persecution incidents being unidentified or unreported, impacting on the overall persecution figures for 2022. This positioning by the RSPB would appear to be a desperate attempt to save what has become its relentless campaign against game shooting, and in particular driven grouse shooting.

Whilst one incident of raptor persecution is one too many, it is positive to see such a significant drop in the numbers for last year, and this aligns with the conservation success involving the majority of raptor species, most of which have populations at historic highs. Species like buzzard, red kite and hen harrier are now flourishing across the country in areas where they haven't been seen for generations, and this is a great success story at a time when biodiversity more generally is declining. We should be celebrating the return of so many iconic species, and it is disappointing that the RSPB is unable to see that the way forward is to work together for all bird species, for the good of the countryside.

Adrian Blackmore
Director of Shooting

24 November 2024