



#### PRESS RELEASE - RAPTOR CRIME LEAFLET LAUNCHED

On the 8<sup>th</sup> March, at the annual Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group conference at Oxford Island Nature Reserve a new bird of prey (raptor) leaflet was launched by the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Northern Ireland encouraging members of the public to record and report suspected cases of raptor crime directly to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

In living memory during the 1960s, Northern Ireland lost our last breeding golden eagles, at Fairhead in Co. Antrim. It is believed persecution, habitat loss, negative human attitudes and disturbance all played a key part in the loss of some of our breeding raptor species over the past 200 years. Amongst others we lost breeding golden eagles, white-tailed eagles, ospreys and red kites whilst buzzards were almost totally extinct.

Over time some of these species have recovered naturally or via re-introduction programmes and are hailed as conservation successes. However, each year illegal incidents of shooting or poisoning are recorded and undoubtedly the incidents detected may only be the tip of the iceberg.

Dr Eimear Rooney, recently appointed as Raptor Officer, with NIRSG, stated: *“Disappointingly our volunteers detect incidents of raptor crime each year, particularly of peregrines falcons and buzzards being poisoned or shot. Some of our rarer species, such as the hen harrier, are still threatened by habitat destruction with several known nest sites having been burnt out during uncontrolled heather fires in recent years. It is important that our volunteers and the wider public learn how to detect and report raptor crimes so we can minimise the effects of illegal activities on their populations”*.

Dr Jon Lees, NIEA Wildlife Officer said, *“PAW NI aims to increase public awareness of crimes against our wildlife, to increase reporting of suspected wildlife crimes to the PSNI and to deter offenders in the first place. The loss of primary predators such as birds of prey from our ecosystems has serious consequences for Northern Ireland’s ecosystem, which ultimately impact a wide range of species. The barbaric and cruel methods used by the offenders to trap, poison or kill these birds would offend the majority of Northern Ireland’s citizens and these criminals can often put human lives at risk by indiscriminate use of highly toxic chemicals. The PAW NI appeal to the wider public to report these types of crimes, as they would any other crime, to help the PSNI tackle these issues. Raptor crime, or indeed any wildlife crime, simply should not be tolerated”*.

Wildlife Officer for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Emma Meredith said: *“Wildlife crime incidents, particularly where they occur in remote locations, can often go unreported. I hope the information leaflet will continue to encourage members of the public to provide valuable information to the police, and help us continue to build a more accurate picture of the extent of raptor crime on our native birds in a tangible way”*.

Emma, continued; *“It does not matter how small each piece of information that members of the public have, it could help the PSNI protect our raptor species. I would urge people to pass this information either directly to Police on 0845 600 8000 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111”*.

*“The PSNI have welcomed the stream of wildlife crime initiatives emanating from the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime sub-groups including deer poaching, fish poaching and now raptor crimes; the collective agreement and support by all these groups, representing such a diverse range of outdoor activities, hobbies and sports, is humbling to see in action as we are united against wildlife crime”*

Often raptors in Northern Ireland are poisoned by highly toxic, illegally used substances such as carbofuran or alphachloralose, which are laid out on meat baits, such as dead rabbits or even sausages, in the open countryside. These baits are typically left uncovered and can easily be discovered not only by wildlife but also children or be eaten by pet dogs or cats with fatal consequences. Numerous incidents of pets being poisoned are also recorded every year in Northern Ireland. These types of activities should not be tolerated and present a serious risk to human health and the perpetrators simply do not seem to have a conscience in this regard.

Bob Elliot and Adam McClure, with RSPB, both reinforced this message and they stated: *“This issue is of critical importance to our native raptors and notably to the re-introduced red kite population. Over the last 12 months we have lost four red kites to illegal poisoning including the deaths of adult birds but also red kite chicks still at the nest. We must deploy every available tool in the ongoing fight against wildlife crime and it’s vital that everyone is encouraged to report these crimes to the police.”*

This leaflet is aimed to disseminate information, and particularly improve awareness, detection and reporting of raptor crime throughout Northern Ireland. Crime prevention through education and awareness raising plays a vital role in reducing criminality and anyone with information on raptor crimes are urged to contact their local PSNI.

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#### **Notes to editors**

- Raptor crimes often comprise illegal shooting, trapping or poisoning events and may occur at any time of the year. It is also illegal to cause disturbance to all raptors or damage their nests or eggs.
- We would like to thank the NGO Challenge Fund administered by Northern Ireland Environment Link for the provision of funding to NIRSG to print these leaflets.
- The Raptor Priority Sub-Group comprises Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI); Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU); Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) and the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB).
- The Raptor Priority Sub-Group is acting on behalf of and reports back to the main PAWNI group which comprises, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA; chair); Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI; vice-chair); National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU); Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD); Forest Service NI; Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI); British Association of Shooting & Conservation (BASC); Scottish Association of Countryside Sports (SACS); Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB); Ulster Wildlife (UW); Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG); Northern Ireland Badger Group; Badger Trust; Northern Ireland Bat Group; Loughs Agency; Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL); Ulster Angling Federation; League Against Cruel Sports (LACS); British Deer Society; Lecale Conservation; Belfast Zoo; National Trust
- Wildlife legislation, namely the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011 protects birds of prey from disturbance and/or destruction by special penalties. Penalties can include a custodial sentence or up to a £5,000 fine per offence.

- All raptors are listed on Schedule 1 of the order and there are six raptor species which receive additional protection on Schedule A1 which protects them and their nests from disturbance or destruction at all times of the year. Schedule A1 includes peregrine falcon, red kite, barn owl, golden eagle white-tailed eagle and osprey.

Photos:



1) Photo of the leaflet launch on 8<sup>th</sup> March, with delegates at the annual raptor conference, Oxford Island (Lough Neagh)



2) Dead sparrowhawk © NIRSG





3) Dead Northern Ireland Red Kite and baited rabbit © RSPB

**THE LEAFLET**

**What to do:**

- ⚠️ **Do not put yourself at risk.** Take careful note of exactly what is happening and report it to police as soon as possible.
- ✓ **Do report all suspected wildlife crimes,** even if you are not sure – report it. The evidence of wildlife crime is not always obvious and any information may be valuable to an investigation.
- ✓ **Call the PSNI on 0845 600 8000** and tell them you would like to report a wildlife crime. To make a report anonymously call Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**.
- ✓ **Do take careful note of exact locations** of anything that might be useful evidence and note the grid reference of the incident if possible
- ✓ **Do write down vehicle registration numbers** believed to be involved in the possible incident, don't trust memory alone.
- ✗ **Don't touch dead birds or animals** and/or possible bait that you have found, especially if you suspect they may contain poison. Many of these substances are extremely dangerous and you may put yourself at risk.
- ✗ **Don't trespass on private land** or interfere with traps or snares, etc. These may be for legitimate use. If in doubt call the NIEA wildlife team for information on 02890 569551 and to report a crime call the PSNI on **0845 600 8000**.



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**Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime**

Northern Ireland  
**CRIMESTOPPERS**  
**0800 555 111**  
Call anonymously with information about crime

 

 Northern Ireland Environment Agency

 giving nature a home

 FOREST SERVICE



**Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Northern Ireland**



**Crimes Against Birds of Prey**

Working in partnership to reduce wildlife crime by raising awareness and promoting effective enforcement



The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) is a body comprising representatives of government agencies and non-government organisations involved in wildlife crime and enforcement in the UK. It provides opportunities for people with a range of skills and experience to work together to combat and reduce wildlife crime by raising awareness and promoting effective enforcement.

Birds of prey ('raptors') are predators at the top of the food chain and are an important component of our ecosystem. They are also important indicators of the general state of our biodiversity and health of our environment. Birds of prey are extremely sensitive to many environmental changes in our ecosystem and can indicate when something is wrong with our environment and when we need to take action.



Wildlife crime against birds of prey remains a significant threat to the conservation of a number of species in the UK and Ireland. Populations of birds of prey are particularly vulnerable to wildlife crime due largely to their slow reproductive rates; that is when birds are killed they are only slowly replaced in the overall population. Persistent killing of birds of prey can therefore result in local population extinctions, and if carried out more widely, in regional and national extinctions.

### The Law and Crimes Against Birds of Prey

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) are responsible for investigating a possible breach of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 legislation.

It is against the law to intentionally or recklessly:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take or destroy wild bird eggs
- 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.

These acts of persecution may be subject to custodial sentences or fines (up to £5,000 per offence) if carried out against any bird of prey in Northern Ireland.

It is likely that the victims of wildlife crime that are found each year are only a very small proportion of the actual deaths and these crimes may be under-reported. That is why we need the public to remain vigilant and to report any suspected wildlife crimes.

The most common crimes committed against raptors are poisoning, trapping and shooting. The setting of poison baits in the open is illegal because it is indiscriminate and has the potential to kill many birds of prey as well as other wildlife, pets and livestock and/or people.

### What Can You Do? **Report It!**

In Northern Ireland if you suspect a wildlife crime has taken place contact PSNI on **0845 600 8000** with the following details if possible:

- That you suspect a wildlife crime
- Suspected activity, location, date and time
- Description of the person(s) involved
- Vehicle registration number, colour, model
- Whether there has been a use of firearms

Always ask for and retain a '*Police Command and Control (C&C) Reference Number*' and record the date on which you have made the report.

Alternatively if you suspect a wildlife crime and wish to provide information anonymously contact the Crimestoppers charity on **0800 555 111**.

