Raptor Persecution UK

‘Why are birds of prey still being killed in Scotland despite new legislation?’ – special report in The National

RaptorPersecutionUK
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2024 persecution incidents, News
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The National newspaper published a special report on Monday 16 December 2024 entitled, ‘Why are birds of prey still being killed in Scotland despite new legislation?’, with a particular focus on the Cairngorms National Park.

It’s reproduced below.

THE NATIONAL — Why are birds of prey still being killed in Scotland despite new legislation?

Why are birds of prey still being killed in Scotland's Cairngorms?

16th December

BIRDS GROUSE SHOOTING RSPB CRIME ENVIRONMENT NATURE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT SCOTLAND

By Laura Pollock
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There have been several killings this year, despite new legislations aimed at tackling the illegal acts *(Image: Getty/Unsplash)*

SCOLTAND passed the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill earlier this year, introducing a licensing scheme for the grouse shooting industry in a bid to end the illegal killing of birds of prey.

SCOTLAND passed the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill earlier this year, introducing a licensing scheme for the grouse shooting industry in a bid to end the illegal killing of birds of prey.

The first licenses were issued this past summer, and while considered a blueprint for tougher legislation across the UK – people are still killing birds of prey on grouse moors, which is not an easy thing to do.

Guilty parties must have access to a vehicle, equipment such as a firearm, opportunity and motive.

“*This isn’t people traveling from towns and cities going up onto our hills and randomly killing birds of prey. These are targeted offences*,” Ian Thomson, investigations manager for the RSPB, told The National.

But why? And who would do this?

Why are grouse moor shootings still taking place?

A Hen Harrier disappeared in February. A buzzard was shot in Perthshire in mid-May. An osprey was shot in the Glen Doll area in August. A dead golden eagle was found in a plastic bag near Loch Rusky in November.

In the last 15 years, more than 1500 birds of prey have been killed, with 57 convictions. However, the majority of these sentences are suspended, and only one person has been jailed.

Most of the evidence gathered by investigators is from satellite tags, fitted to allow conservationists to monitor the movements around the country.

The technology is estimated to be about 97% reliable, and “*very rarely suffers some sort of technical function*”, according to Thomson.

“*Often we believe that there is strong evidence that supports the fact that these birds are being shot often at night, the tags destroyed, and the carcass is disposed of*,” Thomson said.

The RSPB investigations team assists Police Scotland by speaking to local land managers and liaising with the community if a tag stops working. When asked why anyone would target the birds, even with the new legislation in place, Thomson said: “*The killings are being undertaken by people who are working on the land.*

“*That’s the reality, and the vast majority of raptor persecution offenses occurring in Scotland are linked to management for kind of game bird shooting and particularly grouse shooting.*

“*There are many layers of evidence that support that.*

“*First of all, the location of the incidents that are found. Whether its birds shot, birds poisoned, or nests destroyed, these are all subject to police investigations.*

“*A significant proportion of people convicted for raptor persecution offenses have been gamekeepers*,” Thomson shared.

RSPB data shows that at least 54% of all confirmed incidents in the last 10 years (2014-2023) have been linked to land managed for pheasant, partridge and grouse shooting.

The association of these crimes with the gamebird industry is also evidenced by criminal court records. Of all individuals convicted of bird of prey persecution related offences from 2009 to 2023, 75% were connected to the gamebird shooting industry and 68% were gamekeepers.

The Angus Glens crime hotspot

Angus Glens in the Cairngorms is a hotspot for the number of raptor persecution in Scotland, with the Highlands having 69 since 2009.

There have been multiple confirmed incidents occurring on several estates in the area. This includes many poisoning incidents using chemicals whose possession was long banned, repeated illegal misusing abuse of crow traps and pole traps, shootings and destruction of nests.

Earlier this year, NatureScot placed restrictions on an estate on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park for three years following evidence of bird poisoning on the property.

Thomson said there had been 10 suspicious disappearances of satellite tags on birds of prey in the Angus Glen in the last 15 years.

There has been a peregrine, and an osprey shot since the start of the shooting season in Angus Glens this year, which Thomson described as “*worrying*”.

The law as it has stood since 2012 has been serious liability, which means landowners are responsible for the actions of their employees and the land.

So are landowners aware of the circumstances surrounding raptor persecutions on their land?

A wall of silence

The first licenses under the new bill were approved this past July, but Thomson noted there would have been no need for it had the industry “*taken possession of this problem decades ago*”.

He added: “*I think had the industry rooted out criminals, then we wouldn’t have needed this sort of legislation moved on.*

“*We are in a situation where some Victorian management practices towards birds of prey persist. It really is time that the shooting industry got into the 21st century.*”

Thomson said it was rare for estates to report raptor persecutions.

When asked whether estates may be protecting or turning a blind eye to those who target birds of prey, Thomson said he could not confirm but he and his team frequently hear of peer pressure within estates to keep reporting low, adding that crimes are rarely reported by the industry.

“*The problem is the game keeping industry is used to operating a bit like a closed shop*,” Thomson said.

“*It’s very difficult. There is no whistleblowing culture, and it would be fantastic if organizations representing gamekeepers set up a scheme where people could report incidents taking place and those are passed on to the police.*

“*But that just never seems to happen. Exceedingly rare truths are told.*”

Thomson revealed that gamekeepers come to the team sharing their worries and are “*terrified*” to come forward.

“*They say to us this information can’t come from me because I may lose my job and I may lose my friends and I may lose my hobby. People are under considerable pressure to keep their mouths shut*,” he said.

“*Either people won’t see anything or there is just a culture of denial.*”

Thomson described “efforts to deny or downplay” incidents, and said that when satellite tags start to disappear, people blame “imaginary wind farms” or factors, dismissing science and evidence of crimes.

“*It’s a mix of cultural misinformation, a wall of silence and complete denial*”, Thomson added.

ENDS

For those who are sick to the back teeth of birds of prey being illegally killed on grouse moors, you might want to sign this new petition from Wild Justice calling for a ban on driven grouse shooting – **HERE**.

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5 thoughts on “‘Why are birds of prey still being killed in Scotland despite new legislation?’ – special report in The National”

Greyandblue
December 19, 2024 at 1:32 pm

I have long wondered why these killings occur so often….seems to me the perps, obviously somehow involved in this barbaric ‘industry’ and presumably of low intellect and with cold hearts….do so in order to, in their minds at least, protect their game birds from being predated, without a care.

Even though gamebirds lost this way is I gather small, this seems to have become a kind of tradition, it is just what happens.

Any thinking intelligent person would accept that it is surely better to just accept a few will be lost and allow it to occur.

Clearly whatever measures are put in place to stop this slaughter it wont work and will be ignored, apparently as has licensing.

The only way to preserve the future of these poor poor creatures has to be completely banning the whole primitive and hugely cruel business.

I feel that nothing else should be even entertained any longer.

It’s ban or nothing.

Reply

Keith Dancey
December 19, 2024 at 3:57 pm

“Even though gamebirds lost this way is I gather small, this seems to have become a kind of tradition, it is just what happens.

Any thinking intelligent person would accept that it is surely better to just accept a few will be lost and allow it to occur.”

From: Raptor predation and population limitation in red grouse, 2001.

https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2656.2000.00413.x

“Winter losses of grouse between October and April averaged 33% and were density-dependent. Raptors were the cause of about 70% of winter mortality and they killed about 30% of the grouse present in October.”

“Summer losses of adult grouse between April and July averaged 30% and were density-dependent. Raptors were the cause of more than 90% of the early summer mortality of adult grouse. Summer losses of grouse chicks between May and July averaged 45% and were not density-dependent. Harriers killed about 28% of grouse chicks by late July and about 37% by the end of August. Summer raptor predation on adult grouse and chicks appeared to be largely additive to other losses and we estimated that it reduced autumn grouse densities by about 50%.”

But, is this really significant? – considering that these birds are ‘helped to breed in artificially high numbers’ just to be shot anyway (with highly-toxic-to-humans lead ammunition).

Red Grouse are fast flyers – which makes them ‘fun’ to shoot (apparently) – and take flight to escape predators, which is why they are deliberately driven toward a line of shotguns and put into the air.

But any hunting raptors in the area might scatter them, and ruin the ‘shoot’. So, there is a second reason why raptors are not tolerated by those who seek to make a living out of ruining the high moorland and endless, pointless, killing of our native wildlife.

Reply

alsere32
December 19, 2024 at 1:39 pm

If the National parks authouries banned hunting in National parks this problem would no longer exist it stands to reason that whilst you have one set of people spending money and running around trying reintroductions and such whilst another is trying to destroy wildlife and ANY competition to the game they make a profit from (shooting)there is going to be conflict.

These people many of them foreigners are quite determined to do just as they like on the land THEY own I often wonder how many are Russians ?

This will go on forever.

Reply

lesleymarian
December 19, 2024 at 2:08 pm

Thanks to the National – seems like a very good article to me.

We in Animal Interfaith Alliance agree entirely with the tone of your last sentence, Ruth – our members have signed the petition, of course.

Reply

oj55
December 19, 2024 at 3:03 pm

The answer is to ban all driven grouse shoots in the UK plus shoots against other birds, as well as ban all forms of hunting. The banning of snares across the UK would be a good idea also.
But I can’t see Keir Starmer and his Labour Party doing anything about regardless of all their rhetoric and promises in their election manifesto.
To me it seems like lies to get votes, and it worked

Reply

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PREVIOUS
Two satellite-tagged hen harriers that disappeared from a winter roost both found dead with shotgun pellets lodged in their bodies