

Raptor Persecution UK

Illegal persecution of birds of prey is again a major public concern in Yorkshire Dales National Park

RaptorPersecutionUK
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2020 persecution incidents, 2021 persecution incidents, 2022 persecution incidents, 2023 persecution incidents, 2024 persecution incidents, 2025 persecution incidents, News, Persecution Incidents in England hen harrier, poisoning, shooting, trap

Regular readers of this blog will know that the Yorkshire Dales National Park is a raptor persecution hotspot, and has been for many years.

Hen Harriers, in particular, have been prime targets for illegal killing on the grouse moors of the Yorkshire Dales.

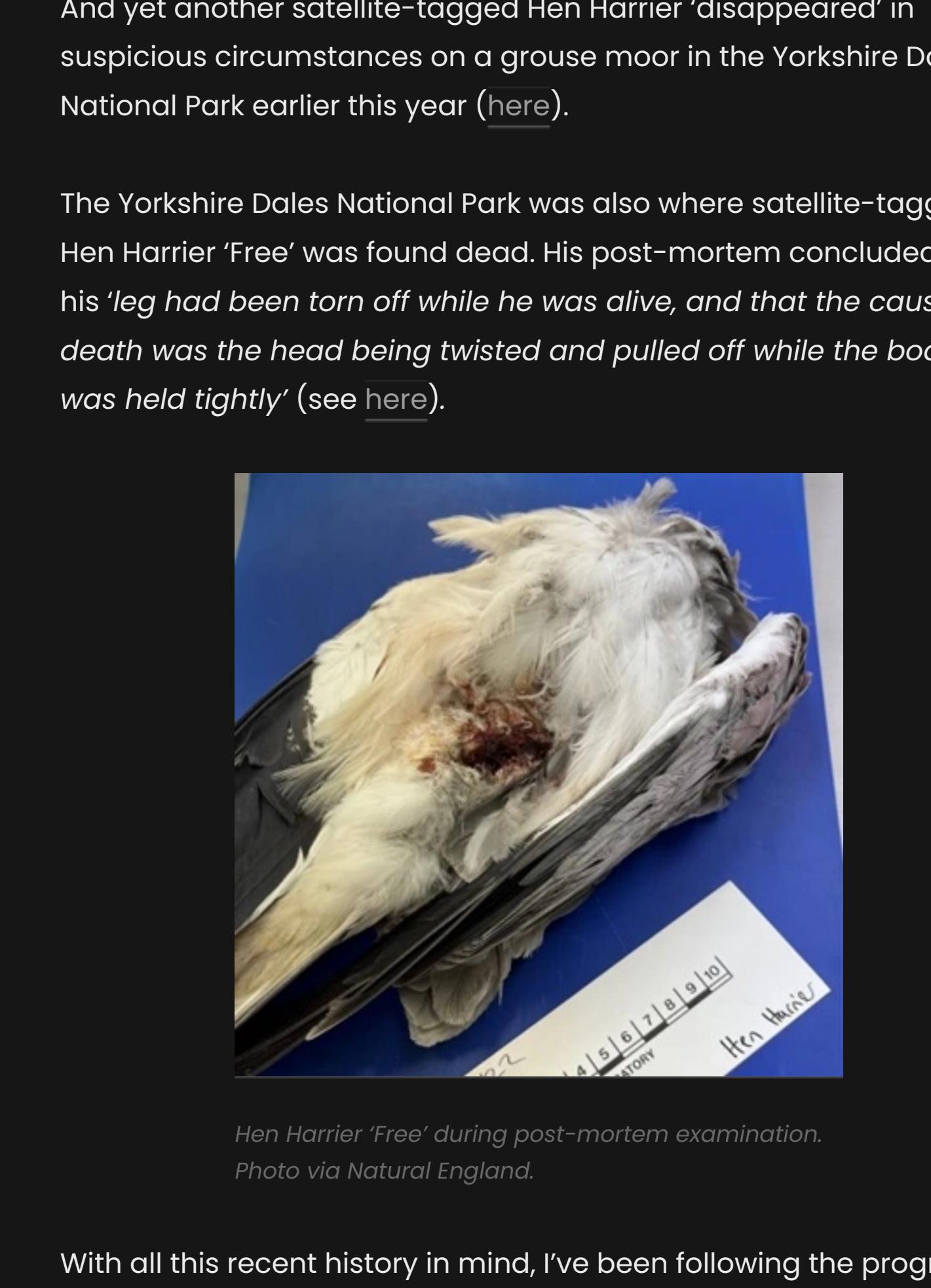


Photo by Ruth Tingay

For example, the following quotes are from the RSPB's recent report, *Hen Harriers in the Firing Line*:

"Swaledale in the Yorkshire Dales National Park is statistically the worst location in England with three Hen Harriers confirmed to have been illegally killed and 14 more satellite-tagged birds suspiciously disappearing between 2016-2023"

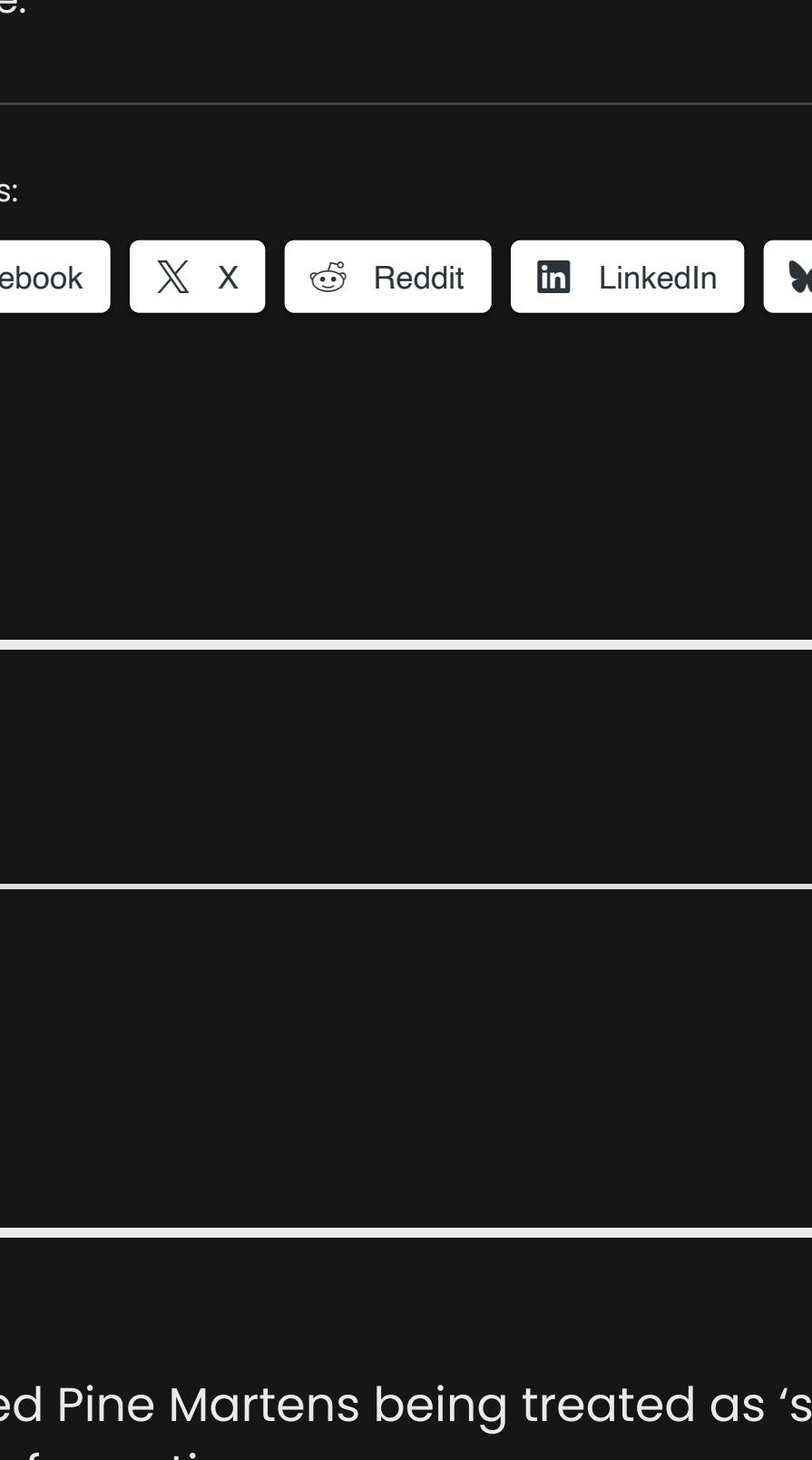
and

"The most significant declines in Hen Harrier breeding in England in 2024 were observed in the North Pennines and the Yorkshire Dales, with decreases of 67% and 73% respectively, compared to 2023. Both regions are intensively managed for grouse shooting and have been linked to several confirmed and suspected Hen Harrier persecution incidents in recent years".

Indeed, the forthcoming trial of a gamekeeper alleged to have been involved in the conspiracy to shoot and kill an untagged Hen Harrier relates to an incident filmed on a grouse moor in the Yorkshire Dales last October (as featured on Channel 4 News, [here](#)).

And yet another satellite-tagged Hen Harrier 'disappeared' in suspicious circumstances on a grouse moor in the Yorkshire Dales National Park earlier this year ([here](#)).

The Yorkshire Dales National Park was also where satellite-tagged Hen Harrier 'Free' was found dead. His post-mortem concluded that his leg had been torn off while he was alive, and that the cause of death was the head being twisted and pulled off while the body was held tightly (see [here](#)).



Hen Harrier 'Free' during post-mortem examination.
Photo via Natural England.

With all this recent history in mind, I've been following the progress of the development of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's latest five-year Management Plan (2025-2030), due to be published shortly.

As part of the Management Plan process, the Management Plan Partnership undertook a six-week public consultation process in January 2024 to find out what issues were important to residents and visitors.

A total of 1,106 responses were received, of which 50% were from people indicating they live and/or work in the National Park; 16% were from younger people (18-34); and 4% were from people identifying as being non-white ethnic groups.

The online questionnaire identified 18 issues from which people were asked to rank their top six.

The top two priorities selected by respondents were:

1. Help nature to recover by creating, restoring and connecting important habitats;
2. Protect rare and threatened species, including ending illegal persecution of birds of prey.

That's quite a significant result! And this isn't the first time that the public has identified illegal raptor persecution as a major concern in this National Park (see [here](#)).

A second Management Plan consultation ran in January 2025 based on 40 proposed draft objectives, which included:

C6. Support implementation of the national Wildlife Crime Strategy to end the illegal killing and disturbance of birds of prey and other wildlife by 2028.

This proposed draft objective for tackling the illegal killing of birds of prey in the Yorkshire Dales National Park is quite different from the objective listed in the previous Management Plan (2019-2024) which was this:

C5. Work with moorland managers and other key stakeholders to devise and implement a local approach to end illegal persecution of raptors, including independent and scientifically robust monitoring, and co-ordinated hen harrier nest and winter roost site protection.

The latest draft objective for tackling illegal raptor persecution seems to have shifted significantly, away from the so-called 'Bird of Prey Partnership' approach, established in 2020 with representatives from the grouse-shooting industry, the raptor conservation community, RSPB, Natural England, Police, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and the Nidderdale AONB (now renamed Nidderdale National Landscape) Authority.

That 'partnership', just like the similar one set up in the Peak District National Park and on which the Yorkshire Dales/Nidderdale Partnership was based, has failed miserably (e.g. see [here](#)) and has seen two of the 'partners' walk away (RSPB [here](#), Northern England Raptor Forum [here](#)), both citing familiar complaints about the behaviour of the grouse moor lobby group, The Moorland Association.

The latest draft objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan doesn't mention the 'partnership' at all and instead focuses on 'supporting the implementation of the [Police] National Wildlife Crime Strategy', which includes the national wildlife crime priorities of which raptor persecution is a key focus.

Does that mean a formal end to the Yorkshire Dales/Nidderdale Bird of Prey Partnership?

Let's see.

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