

Raptor Persecution UK

‘Hundreds’ of UK Peregrines targeted for illegal falconry trade in Middle East

RaptorPersecutionUK
January 7, 2026
News
peregrine

The illegal laundering of wild UK Peregrines for falconers in the Middle East has received wide media coverage in recent years.

A police-led multi-agency operation named Operation Tantalion, which began in 2021, resulted in two men being convicted in 2023 of laundering Scottish Peregrines (see [here](#)) and a Worcestershire man is currently facing 21 charges relating to the keeping and trading of wild Peregrines, alleged to have taken place between 2018 and 2022 (see [here](#)).

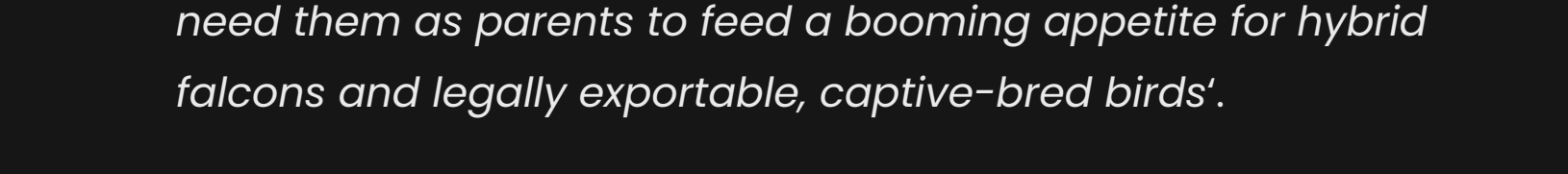
An article in *The Guardian* in February 2024 reported that Operation Tantalion had led to more than 3,000 active inquiries within the captive-trade of Peregrines across the UK, with 36 searches carried out. It is “*the biggest UK wildlife crime police investigation to date in the UK*”, said Chief Inspector Kevin Kelly, the head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NCWU). “*When we get to the end of this year, we’ll really be able to show that this is a large-scale, national and international crime type*.” The police believe this trade is worth £21m in undisclosed revenue to the UK.

Strange, then, that the UK supported a recent proposal to downlist the Peregrine from Appendix to I to Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to allow capture of wild Peregrines and international trade to meet demands for falconry. Fortunately, the proposal was defeated in December 2025 ([here](#)).

A new article in *The Guardian*, published on Monday 5 January 2026, has now reported that demand from falconers in the Middle East has led to ‘hundreds’ of UK Peregrine nests being raided over the last decade to supply this illegal trade.

How demand for elite falcons in the Middle East is driving illegal trade of British birds

Exclusive: data reveals hundreds of UK nests have been raided in the past decade amid growing appetite to own prized birds for racing and breeding



Elite falcons at Abu Dhabi's International Hunting and Equestrian exhibition. The elite birds often have Emirati passports, specialised healthcare and jet around the world. Photograph: Courtesy of ABU

The article says, ‘Demand for wild birds [UK Peregrines] appears to be coming from two directions, experts and police say. The first is direct from falconers in the Middle East who want wild birds for racing. The second is from some breeding facilities [in the UK] that need them as parents to feed a booming appetite for hybrid falcons and legally exportable, captive-bred birds’.

The NCWU says there are now 160 falcon breeding facilities in the UK, up from about 27 in the 1980s. The police inspected 27 of the 160 falcon breeding facilities during 2023 and 2024, during which 15 wild Peregrines were discovered and confirmed by DNA testing.

Journalists attending a recent International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition in Abu Dhabi, where ‘elite’ falcons were on display, were told by a number of traders of their preference for wild-caught British Peregrines, rather than captive-bred falcons, due to the ‘purity of their bloodline and their speed’.

The article includes comments from those with a vested interest in the legal trade of captive-bred falcons: a UK falcon breeder who supplies birds to royals in the UAE and Bahrain, the CEO of the International Association for Falconry, and a falcon trader in the United Arab Emirates, who all either downplay the extent of the illegal trade, or deny completely that it exists.

This will be a familiar narrative to those who follow the issue of illegal persecution of birds of prey on UK gamebird shooting estates.

Readers can make up their own minds. The article is well worth a read – [here](#).

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4 thoughts on “‘Hundreds’ of UK Peregrines targeted for illegal falconry trade in Middle East”

Country Born and Bred

January 7, 2026 at 12:09 pm

I lived there saw it first hand know about this exhibition. They encourage big game hunting as well and sell it there. All dispicable. Horrible country anyway everyone should boycottt the UAE completely.

Reply

spaghnum morose

January 7, 2026 at 1:00 pm

If the UK government boycotted or upset it's friends and partners in the Middle East, they would stop buying UK government bonds (which are not in particularly high demand with anybody else), they would casually turn off the taps of cheap capital that funds our infrastructure projects (they don't need us) and they would stop buying our overpriced & inferior defence “products” and shop elsewhere around the world. This is the truly sad state of affairs we have gotten ourselves into over recent decades. What sort of country are we and what sort of country do we want to be? Even if somebody doesn't really care too much about birds, this is one of those topics that ought to excite anyone who gives a shit about the integrity our political and economic systems.

Reply

Keith Dancey

January 7, 2026 at 10:08 pm

“If the UK government boycotted or upset it's friends and partners in the Middle East, they would stop buying UK government bonds (which are not in particularly high demand with anybody else)”

The UAE does not invest in UK Gilts (just a paltry £3million in 2021, apparently) although they are quite important buyers of UK defence equipment.

Only about 25 – 30% of UK Gilts are foreign-owned, and the big foreign buyers are the US, Japan, Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Including all types of investments, the list is still topped by the US, with Japan at 4 and all the others in the top ten being European countries.

The bulk of the UAE's investments in overseas Government bonds are with the USA while the bulk of its other investment types are with China.

Reply

spaghnum morose

January 8, 2026 at 7:04 am

Perhaps that is what a perfunctory Google on “UK Gilts” reveals. The challenge is to identify where all of the capital for the 70% that is “domestically owned” (which means banks, trusts and investment houses and individuals registered in UK) actually came from. In a nutshell, I say that a lot (who knows what %) of that money comes from relatively small (hundreds) numbers of investment institutions and global investors with much of the hard cash from America (first place) and the Middle East (second). What % of UK bonds were “bought” with foreign wealth (not necessarily are “registered to” the governments of foreign countries) is the key question that interests me, and was the point I tried to make. I have seen myself a small few times, and heard many more surprising but reliable stories of the “elite” individuals who mix together in the butts on several grouse moors and I also believe the bonds of friendship are just the same in elite falconry. But as this could go on and on, I am content for you to class me as a conspiracy theorist 🍷

Reply

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Job opportunity: Hen Harrier Protection Officer (RSPB Geltsdale & North Pen-nines)

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clam trap	Corrybrough Estate
crow trap	daillyprompt
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Gift of grouse	gin trap
Glanusk Estate	Glenogil Estate
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golden eagle	goshawk
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