

# Raptor Persecution UK

## Scottish gamekeeper Russell Mason pleads guilty to battering a Goshawk to death on shooting estate in Perthshire

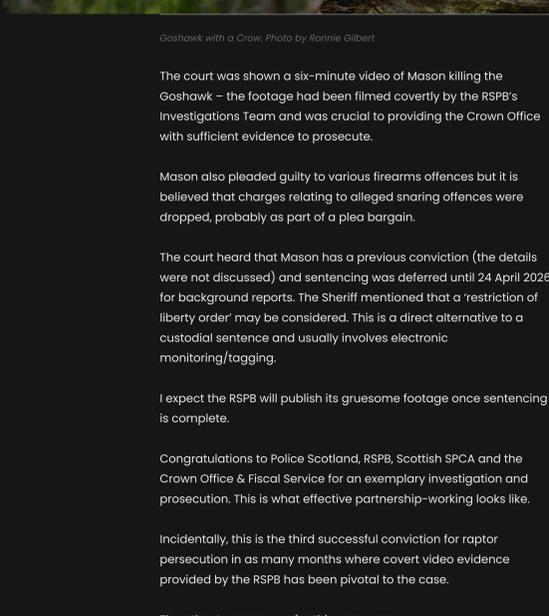
RaptorPersecutionUK  
March 17, 2026

2024 persecution  
Incidents, News

crow trap, gamekeeper,  
goshawk, scottish  
gamekeepers  
association, scottish  
parliament, trap

A Scottish gamekeeper has pleaded guilty to killing a Goshawk after he battered it to death after it was caught inside a Crow cage trap on a shooting estate in Perthshire.

At Perth Sheriff Court this morning, on what should have been the opening day of a criminal trial, gamekeeper Russell Mason, 49, changed his plea to guilty in relation to the charge that he had killed a Goshawk at Milton of Drimmie, near Blairgowrie, on 12 February 2024 (see [here](#) for background to this case).



Goshawk with a Crow. Photo by Ronnie Gilbert

The court was shown a six-minute video of Mason killing the Goshawk – the footage had been filmed covertly by the RSPB's Investigations Team and was crucial to providing the Crown Office with sufficient evidence to prosecute.

Mason also pleaded guilty to various firearms offences but it is believed that charges relating to alleged snaring offences were dropped, probably as part of a plea bargain.

The court heard that Mason has a previous conviction (the details were not discussed) and sentencing was deferred until 24 April 2026 for background reports. The Sheriff mentioned that a 'restriction of liberty order' may be considered. This is a direct alternative to a custodial sentence and usually involves electronic monitoring/tagging.

I expect the RSPB will publish its gruesome footage once sentencing is complete.

Congratulations to Police Scotland, RSPB, Scottish SPCA and the Crown Office & Fiscal Service for an exemplary investigation and prosecution. This is what effective partnership-working looks like.

Incidentally, this is the third successful conviction for raptor persecution in as many months where covert video evidence provided by the RSPB has been pivotal to the case.

The other two cases so far this year were:

**12 January 2026, Scarborough Magistrates' Court:** gamekeeper Thomas Munday pleaded guilty to battering to death a Buzzard that had been caught inside a Crow cage trap on a Pheasant shoot at Hovingham, North Yorkshire ([here](#))

and

**29 January 2026, York Magistrates' Court:** gamekeeper Racster Dingwall pleaded guilty to conspiring to kill a Hen Harrier as it came in to roost on a grouse moor on the Conistone & Grassington Estate in the Yorkshire Dales National Park ([here](#)).

Many of you will be aware of the game-shooting industry's recently ramped-up efforts to try to discredit and smear the reputations of RSPB Investigations Team members; these three convictions shouldn't leave you in any doubt of the industry's motivation.

Without the skill and expertise of the RSPB's ability to capture such covert footage, these criminals would have escaped justice and the game-shooting industry's claims of respectability and adherence to the law would go unchallenged. It's as simple as that.

We can expect more news on the repercussions of today's conviction in due course – i.e. was Mason a member of the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association? Was he a member of the Tayside & Central Regional Moorland Group? (certainly someone with the same name and affiliation has previously signed an official letter to the Scottish Parliament about snaring regulations). Will NatureScot impose a three-year General Licence restriction on this estate? Is the estate a member of the landowners' lobby group, Scottish Land & Estates? And will there be a prosecution for alleged vicarious liability?

NB: As legal proceedings have now concluded, comments are open on this case, with the usual caveat that offensive/libellous posts will not be published.

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18 thoughts on "Scottish gamekeeper Russell Mason pleads guilty to battering a Goshawk to death on shooting estate in Perthshire"

Roslieshields

March 17, 2026 at 2:37 pm

Sad that it's taken 2 years to bring this case to trial. It would be a much more effective deterrent to others if these cases could be resolved more quickly, especially with such damaging evidence as video footage available.

Reply

RaptorPersecutionUK

March 17, 2026 at 2:45 pm

It would have called sooner had Mason chosen to plead guilty when he was first charged back in 2024. Perhaps, and I'm speculating here, the legal advice given to him was to plead not guilty and the defence would try and get the case thrown out on a technicality (re: admission of video evidence) as has happened so often before. However, the recent run of successful convictions, based on admissible covert footage, might have changed his lawyer's mind?

Reply

Country Born & Brad

March 17, 2026 at 3:04 pm

He had better go down for this, and when he does [Ed: rest of comment deleted]

Reply

SusanH

March 17, 2026 at 3:12 pm

And you have to wonder how many other cases like this that are not filmed, what fine, upstanding citizens these people are

Reply

NatureTim

March 17, 2026 at 3:23 pm

I wonder what the various firearm offences were and whether his previous conviction should have led to him to not be allowed to have a shotgun... Hopefully he won't get a slap on the wrist but I'm not holding my breath as I expect he's another one with an unblemished character and pillar of the community!

Reply

Concerned citizen

March 17, 2026 at 3:31 pm

Not a surprise, yet another gamekeeper proved to be a criminal. Are there any that aren't!

Let's see if this conviction is posted on the SGA website?

Reply

Alex Milne

March 17, 2026 at 3:33 pm

How has this happened? Several years ago it was apparent that the advocates had knobbed the Scottish CPS and effectively banned any video evidence which had been produced by anyone who might have wished to use it in court.

This is a brilliant change. Why?

Reply

sublimefortunately147102ff1b

March 17, 2026 at 3:44 pm

Well done to all investigators and the PF. mid hope his gun licence is removed as should happen in all these cases

Reply

Brian Leecy

March 17, 2026 at 4:35 pm

This is Great News, hopefully the tide is beginning to turn ! no Doubt the tip of the iceberg,let's hope the punishment fits the bill,though I won't hold my breath on it !! But a Very Well Done from All Concerned.

Reply

Pete

March 17, 2026 at 4:39 pm

Genuine question: How was video evidence successfully introduced as opposed to a number of previous failures to get it into court?

Reply

oJ55

March 17, 2026 at 4:49 pm

Indeed, well-deserved congratulations to Police Scotland, RSPB, Scottish SPCA and the Crown Office & Fiscal Service for an exemplary investigation and prosecution. Although I am annoyed by the fact that Mr Mason's, due to plea-bargaining, charges relating to alleged snaring offences were probably dropped. If you are guilty of a crime, you should be punished for it. Not allowed to barter. It's not as if there wasn't conclusive evidence of his murdering the poor goshawk in such an abhorrent way

Reply

2bluetails

March 17, 2026 at 5:06 pm

Dreadful criminality, one wonders what the penalty will be given that this sort of offence usually involves Buzzards a none Schedule One bird. One hopes this is taken into consideration as the last time there was such a conviction in Scotland the keeper ( a Goshawk Much I Believe) went to jail. I've long believed there should be specific rules governing crow cage traps because if set in woodland or woodland edge I strongly suspect that Goshawks not crows are the target, the same with Larsen traps.

Reply

Swaledale

March 17, 2026 at 7:23 pm

Well done to the RSPB investigations team, once again. They lead the way.

If it is now legally acceptable to film these atrocities using covert video techniques and present this as evidence to court where it will be accepted, Why don't the police and the NWCU do the same. They have the resources. The killing of raptors is a priority for them or so they keep telling us. Action not words so get on with it. The RSPB have shown you how to do it.

Reply

RaptorPersecutionUK

March 17, 2026 at 7:41 pm

It's not straightforward for the police – they are subject to RIPA (RIPSA in Scotland) regulations around surveillance, whereas RSPB is not because it's not a public authority. Although Mark Harrison from National Wildlife Crime Unit was making a case for covert surveillance to be used by the police in HH persecution hotspots (if serious/organised crime thresholds met).

Reply

Alex Milne

March 17, 2026 at 8:42 pm

Does anyone know what has happened to allow the RSPB evidence to be allowed in Scotland?

Personally I'm delighted. Years of this ridiculous situation may perhaps be ending?

Reply

hudsonjon19

March 17, 2026 at 7:56 pm

Brilliant result for a heart breaking crime. Goshawks are amongst the most enigmatic, beautiful and powerful raptors, as well as our rarest. Individuals like Mason rob us, and future generations of our natural heritage. Incidentally, his previous conviction is quite easily found on the net, and it's pretty unsavoury to say the least, if unsurprising. What a bxxxx!

Reply

Jimmy

March 17, 2026 at 8:09 pm

It would be nice to think he might get a sentence befitting the crime but my confidence is not high:(

Reply

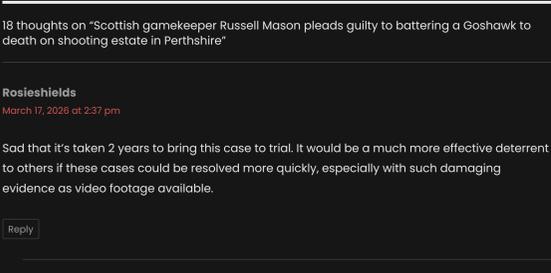
Alastair Taylor

March 17, 2026 at 10:26 pm

with the apparent acceptance of covert video evidence can we revisit the cases that were previously dropped due to covert video evidence being not allowed

Reply

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- 2006 persecution incidents (18)
- 2007 persecution incidents (14)
- 2008 persecution incidents (13)
- 2009 persecution incidents (49)
- 2010 persecution incidents (71)
- 2011 persecution incidents (51)
- 2012 persecution incidents (124)
- 2013 persecution incidents (147)
- 2014 persecution incidents (182)
- 2015 persecution incidents (108)
- 2016 persecution incidents (149)
- 2017 persecution incidents (146)
- 2018 persecution incidents (217)
- 2019 persecution incidents (219)
- 2020 persecution incidents (276)
- 2021 persecution incidents (233)
- 2022 persecution incidents (162)
- 2023 persecution incidents (140)
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- July 2025 (18)
- June 2025 (13)
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- March 2025 (19)
- January 2025 (20)
- December 2024 (18)
- November 2024 (28)
- October 2024 (19)
- September 2024 (17)
- August 2024 (20)
- July 2024 (13)
- June 2024 (18)
- May 2024 (17)
- April 2024 (20)
- March 2024 (28)
- February 2024 (23)
- January 2024 (27)
- December 2023 (22)
- November 2023 (29)
- October 2023 (21)
- September 2023 (17)
- August 2023 (50)
- July 2023 (20)
- June 2023 (36)
- May 2023 (37)
- April 2023 (31)
- March 2023 (27)
- February 2023 (24)
- January 2023 (30)
- December 2022 (16)
- November 2022 (15)
- October 2022 (22)
- September 2022 (14)
- August 2022 (33)
- July 2022 (21)
- June 2022 (26)
- May 2022 (32)
- April 2022 (26)
- March 2022 (34)
- February 2022 (26)
- January 2022 (31)
- December 2021 (22)
- November 2021 (27)
- October 2021 (29)
- September 2021 (24)
- August 2021 (26)
- July 2021 (21)
- June 2021 (15)
- May 2021 (35)
- April 2021 (41)
- March 2021 (38)
- February 2021 (42)
- January 2021 (38)
- December 2020 (33)
- November 2020 (48)
- October 2020 (29)
- September 2020 (41)
- August 2020 (50)
- July 2020 (40)
- June 2020 (38)
- May 2020 (35)
- April 2020 (27)
- March 2020 (30)
- February 2020 (21)
- January 2020 (22)
- December 2019 (34)
- November 2019 (21)
- October 2019 (30)
- September 2019 (23)
- August 2019 (31)
- July 2019 (30)
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- March 2019 (42)
- February 2019 (23)
- January 2019 (25)
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- September 2018 (13)
- August 2018 (35)
- July 2018 (26)
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- April 2018 (37)
- March 2018 (31)
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- June 2017 (30)
- May 2017 (37)
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- March 2017 (31)
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- November 2016 (28)
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- August 2016 (29)
- July 2016 (27)
- June 2016 (31)
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- January 2016 (10)
- December 2015 (12)
- November 2015 (33)
- October 2015 (17)
- September 2015 (18)
- August 2015 (22)
- July 2015 (37)
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- May 2015 (33)
- April 2015 (27)
- March 2015 (26)
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- October 2014 (40)
- September 2014 (15)
- August 2014 (18)
- July 2014 (10)
- June 2014 (14)
- May 2014 (23)
- April 2014 (33)
- March 2014 (25)
- February 2014 (18)
- January 2014 (21)
- December 2013 (20)
- November 2013 (15)
- October 2013 (16)
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- July 2013 (12)
- June 2013 (12)
- May 2013 (18)
- April 2013 (18)
- March 2013 (23)
- February 2013 (22)
- January 2013 (24)
- December 2012 (21)
- November 2012 (20)
- October 2012 (32)
- September 2012 (18)
- August 2012 (27)
- July 2012 (23)
- June 2012 (20)
- May 2012 (26)
- April 2012 (17)
- March 2012 (27)
- February 2012 (28)
- January 2012 (13)
- December 2011 (20)
- November 2011 (26)
- October 2011 (11)
- September 2011 (20)
- August 2011 (18)
- July 2011 (19)
- June 2011 (15)
- May 2011 (23)
- April 2011 (14)
- March 2011 (13)
- February 2011 (6)
- January 2011 (7)
- December 2010 (10)
- November 2010 (7)
- October 2010 (6)
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