

Raptor Persecution UK

What's happened to the police investigation in to the poisoned Hen Harrier found dead on the edge of a grouse moor in North Yorkshire?

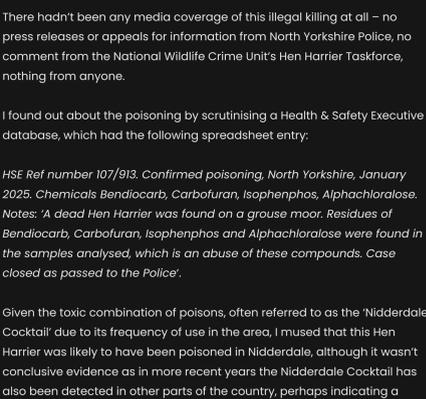
RaptorPersecutionUK

March 10, 2026

2025 persecution incidents, News, Persecution incidents in England

alphachloralose, Bendiocarb, carbofuran, gamekeeper, hen harrier, poisoning, shooting

In December 2025, I blogged about a Hen Harrier that had been found poisoned on a grouse moor somewhere in North Yorkshire, 11 months earlier in January 2025.



Hen Harrier (photo by Pete Walkdan)

There hadn't been any media coverage of this illegal killing at all – no press releases or appeals for information from North Yorkshire Police, no comment from the National Wildlife Crime Unit's Hen Harrier Taskforce, nothing from anyone.

I found out about the poisoning by scrutinising a Health & Safety Executive database, which had the following spreadsheet entry:

HSE Ref number 107/913. Confirmed poisoning, North Yorkshire, January 2025. Chemicals Bendiocarb, Carbofuran, Isophenphos, Alphachloralose.

Notes: 'A dead Hen Harrier was found on a grouse moor. Residues of Bendiocarb, Carbofuran, Isophenphos and Alphachloralose were found in the samples analysed, which is an abuse of these compounds. Case closed as passed to the Police'.

Given the toxic combination of poisons, often referred to as the 'Nidderdale Cocktail' due to its frequency of use in the area, I mused that this Hen Harrier was likely to have been poisoned in Nidderdale, although it wasn't conclusive evidence as in more recent years the Nidderdale Cocktail has also been detected in other parts of the country, perhaps indicating a gamekeeper moving from this region to work in another.

News then emerged in an RSPB press release in January 2026 that this Hen Harrier was a young female named Ataksak (named after an Inuit Goddess, the 'ruler of the sky') and she was carrying a satellite tag, fitted by the RSPB in Bowland in 2024.

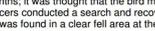
It turned out that Ataksak was the Hen Harrier that gamekeeper Raester Dingwall and his accomplices had discussed shooting and killing as it came in to a roost site on Grassington Moor in the Yorkshire Dales National Park one evening in October 2024, but they then chose instead to "fleg it" (scare it off with warning shots) because they deduced it was wearing "a box" (a satellite tag) and killing it would draw unwanted attention from the authorities to their grouse moor.

The RSPB's press release included details of the area where Ataksak had been found poisoned but still didn't name a location:

'The area where Ataksak's body was found is recognised as a bird of prey persecution hotspot. In the last ten years 25 confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents have been recorded in this area, including Ataksak. These included four Hen Harriers, 13 Red Kites and five Buzzards. A satellite tagged Hen Harrier also disappeared in this area in 2024'.

When I first wrote about this poisoned Hen Harrier in December 2025, I said I'd submitted a number of Freedom of Information requests about the Police investigation, some 11 months after she'd been found poisoned.

First, here's a redacted post mortem report on Ataksak from FERA (Food and Environment Research Agency). It's pretty conclusive:

WILDLIFE INCIDENT UNIT		17/25	
WILDLIFE INCIDENT REPORT			
INCIDENT NUMBER	17/25	RESTRICTED	
PART OF STUDY	WIIS25	Original thinking... applied	
REGIONAL NUMBER	107/913		
OTHER REFERENCES	BW79000008		
SENDER	Private Veterinary Surgeon		
LOCATION	Fountains Earth North Yorkshire		
GRID REFERENCE	SE1371		
INCIDENT DATE	14 January 2025		
SUSPECTED CAUSE OF INCIDENT	mixture of chemicals abuse		
DATE OF REPORT	28 April 2025		
REPORTING OFFICER			
SIGNED : ...			
NUMBERS AND SPECIES INVOLVED	1 hen harrier		
COPIED TO	 SASA via WIISOL via WIISOL Natural England		

Samples received	Date received	Sample identifier
101705 hen harrier	4/3/25	107/913/A
101705 hen harrier tissues	4/3/25	107/913/A

Summary of field data

A satellite-tagged hen harrier (ID 210568), monitored by the RSPB, transmitted a mortality signal. A transmission three days previously indicated that the bird was alive and well. The RSPB thought the hen harrier had been roosting in the area for 2-3 months; it was thought that the bird may have been shot at to disturb it and to encourage it to leave the area. RSPB officers conducted a search and recovered the carcass three days after the mortality signal. The hen harrier carcass was found in a clear fell area at the edge of a large grouse moor. X-ray of the carcass did not identify signs of shot or trauma. When it was found the bird appeared to be in good condition lying on its front with the satellite tag visible on its back. There is a history of raptor abuse in the area: in 2010 the death of a red kite was attributed to an abuse of chloralose (101/880 57/10), in 2012 the death of a red kite was attributed to an abuse of alpha-chloralose (102/603, 12/12). There have been a series of incidents in the area - albeit not necessarily in the immediate vicinity - over a period of several years, with a similar and unusual chemical profile. See below:

Year	Grid reference	Species/incident category	Cause	WIISOL/Fera ref
2018	SE1467	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	105/591 5/19
2019	SE1765	Red kite abuse	Bendiocarb + isofenphos	105/569 5/19
2020	SE1565	Buzzard abuse	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	105/942 23/20
2020	SE1563	Dog	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	106/038 45/20
2020	SE1372	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals*	105/434 19/20
2021	SE1271	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	106/519 32/21
2021	SE1467	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	106/563 50/21
2021	SE1471	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals*	106/569 52/21
2021	SE1376	Red kite abuse	Mixture of chemicals* + alphachloralose	106/993 16/21

*Bendiocarb, carbofuran, isofenphos.

Note that only suspected abuse compounds have been listed; some of these had additional small residues of anti-coagulant rodenticides.

This is a rural area surrounded by farmland and small pockets of woodland. There is a large grouse moor in the area, with land actively managed for grouse shooting.

Summary of post mortem report

One female hen harrier weighing 0.446 in very good body condition with no autolysis was submitted dead for post-mortem examination. Brain, cloacal and crop-pharyngeal swabs were taken for AI testing, no Influenza A viral RNA was detected. The hen harrier had BTO ring FJ24975. There were no obvious signs of fractures or other evidence of trauma. The bird had a backpack type satellite ID 210568 held in place with black tapes secured at the front of the chest. The tag was in good condition. There was a patch of feather loss on the front of the chest under the point where the satellite tag tapes join, with no skin damage, this is likely to be insignificant. There were multiple linear imperfections in the bars in the tail feathers and tips of the flight feathers on the right wing with shafts undamaged.

The outer surface (serosa) of the stomach and intestines was intensely congested as were the kidneys. The intestinal content became pink approximately 4 cm from the start and was frankly bloody by the end. The crop contained a strand of pale, unidentified tissue. The stomach was empty and the mucosa of the pylorus (beside the exit to the intestines) was slightly congested. The liver was slightly enlarged and rounded, and the upper portion of the right lobe was pale. The brain was not examined. No other significant gross abnormality detected. The bird was in very good condition at the time of death but had not fed recently. The intestines and kidneys were congested, the intestinal content bloody and the liver appeared slightly swollen with a discoloured area in one lobe; these changes are nonspecific but suggest an acute intestinal or systemic disease process. The cause of death was unascertained, but acute systemic disease was suspected. The histopathology report indicated congestion in the liver, lung, spleen, kidney and the serosa (outer layer) and muscle of the small intestine. The heart vessels were dilated but there was no congestion in the myocardial tissues. There was no evidence of necrosis or inflammation, and no evidence of disease to explain the death of the bird.

The PM report gives the location as 'Fountains Earth' in North Yorkshire, and a four-figure grid reference SE1371. This places Ataksak's death in Nidderdale, a well known raptor-poisoning hot spot:

The parish of Fountains Earth, Nidderdale (google maps)

Given the high toxicity of the chemicals used to poison her, I'd think it quite likely that Ataksak was poisoned very close to the spot her corpse was found.

The PM report is dated 28 April 2025, some three months after Ataksak was poisoned.

So what progress had North Yorkshire Police made with its investigation in to this crime?

Well, apparently very little.

According to my sources, as of January 2026, a full year after Ataksak's body had been found, and nine months after the conclusive post mortem report, North Yorkshire Police hadn't even bothered to conduct a search, despite being encouraged to do so by the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Natural England.

And therein lies the problem. The responsibility for investigatory decision-making lies entirely with the local police force. Experienced officers from the National Wildlife Crime Unit (including specialists involved with the Hen Harrier Taskforce) and specialist poisoning experts from Natural England can only offer their assistance; if the local police force chooses not to accept those offers of help, for whatever reason, there's nothing they can do about it.

How bankers is that? Hen Harrier persecution is a national wildlife crime priority, there's a national Taskforce that's being funded (with tax payers' money) to deal with it, but it doesn't have the authority to investigate these crimes unless the local police force agrees to it.

This isn't a problem in some areas, where local police forces are only too happy to accept specialist help and support, but it is definitely a problem in North Yorkshire (e.g. see here), and in several other counties in northern England where raptor persecution is known to take place, particularly on driven grouse moors.

I submitted Freedom of Information requests to the NWCU and to Natural England about the status of the investigation into the poisoning of Ataksak but surprise, surprise, both refused to release any information, stating the information has been withheld by exception, citing regulation 12(5)(b)(g) – *Course of justice, inquiries & fair trial*.

There is no 'course of justice' in this case, because North Yorkshire Police has been fighting on its hands for over a year. Rather than holding them to account, these agencies are simply providing them with cover.

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2 thoughts on "What's happened to the police investigation in to the poisoned Hen Harrier found dead on the edge of a grouse moor in North Yorkshire?"

NatureTim

March 10, 2026 at 12:38 pm

And the local MP also turns a blind eye whenever he's asked to support increased (or any) efforts by NYP to tackle raptor persecution. The police and crime commissioner doesn't seem to engage either. No wonder it's a persecution hotspot with numerous birds of prey disappearing in the North Yorkshire moorland version of the Bermuda Triangle! The fact that the Nidderdale Cocktail can harm children/pets/pets/other wildlife doesn't seem to bother them either. Will a child have to die before something is done by North Yorkshire Police?

Reply

David Kennedy

March 10, 2026 at 15:7 pm

An utter joke! These agencies should be hanging their heads in shame. Regulation and red tape is aiding the cruel perpetrators of these sickening raptor crimes. An excellent point about the risk of children being poisoned. If god forbid it happens to a child we will hear the authorities shout, "How could this child's death happen, we need an enquiry and changes to see it never happens again!" Better idea....let's see it sorted now instead for the sake of children and raptors.

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