

# Wildlife Crime

In Scotland, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected, although there are exceptions to the legislation and particular birds may be shot in season by the appropriate permit holders. Of the wildlife crime that is detected in Scotland, birds of prey are one of the commonest targets. The reproductive population growth rate of birds of prey is particularly slow – buzzards, for example, do not start breeding until they reach three years of age. Selective removal of birds by illegal activities can have severe, detrimental effects on the overall population. It is one of the main threats to charismatic species such as golden eagles, hen harriers, buzzards, kestrels and reintroduced red kites.

Most incidences of wildlife crime are discovered by chance, and actual crime-rates could be a lot higher than the number of reported incidences. So we need all eyes and ears on duty to look out for possible wildlife crime.

When crimes are directed at birds, they can occur in the following forms:

**Poisoning:** poisoned bait is left out in the open, sometimes to target raptors and sometimes to combat vermin. The bait, however, is nonspecific. This means that, whether or not they are the intended recipients of the poison, raptors such as Red Kite and Buzzards sometimes become victims of poisoned bait. Many birds of prey are scavengers, so they may also accidentally eat rodents which have been killed by rodenticides, thus suffering secondary poisoning.

**Trapping:** traps set on fence poles or on the ground, are used to illegally catch birds of prey.

**Shooting:** both within rural and urban areas of Scotland, birds are illegally shot every year and this continues to be a serious problem to raptor conservation.

**Egg Collecting:** although illegal since 1954, egg collecting still occurs. This of course affects the reproductive success of breeding birds, and thus hinders population growth and expansion.

**Nest Disturbance:** all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law and intentional or reckless destruction or damage of nests is illegal (with certain exceptions). Nest disturbance/destruction can lead to failure of egg-hatching or chick-rearing, as the adult birds may abandon the nest.

## What to do if you suspect wildlife crime:

If you come across a dead bird, please refer to the following (as recommended by the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime in Scotland, PAW Scotland)

Take photographs if possible, and make sure to note down the location as accurately as possible (grid reference, address/-postcode or other recognisable description of the place).

If you can disguise the item/ bird to keep it hidden and safe without disrupting the scene, please do so (by covering it with vegetation etc.). **DO NOT** touch any dead animals or birds! They may be victims of poisoning or they could be poisoned bait – many types of poison are extremely toxic and can easily be absorbed through contact with skin.

**DO NOT** approach any suspected culprits of wildlife crime. Instead, write down any information related to the crime scene (vehicle registration number, etc.) and contact your local police as soon as possible.

**Police Scotland:** in an emergency situation, **dial 999** to contact the police. Only do so if crime is in progress, fire-arms are involved or a suspect of crime is nearby. For any non-emergencies and general inquiries, **dial 101**. You should do this if you wish to report a crime that has already happened or to seek advice on how to prevent crime.

Source: [The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Scotland \(PAW Scotland\)](#) & [Royal Society for Protection of Birds \(RSPB\)](#).