

RSPB BIRDCRIME 2014 REPORT ANALYSIS

SUMMARY – KEY STATISTICS

- 367 incidents were reported to the RSPB in 2014 of which only 84 incidents were confirmed as being illegal persecution, a significant reduction of 33% since 2013 when there were 125 confirmed incidents. The figure of 367 reported incidents is also well below the previous 5 year average of 531 incidents reported.
- The UK breakdown for the 367 incidents in 2014 is as follows:
 - England: 255 reported incidents of which 35 were confirmed against birds of prey (14%).
 - Scotland: 68 reported incidents of which 35 were confirmed against birds of prey (48%).
 - Wales: 20 reported incidents, 4 confirmed against birds of prey (20%).
 - Northern Ireland: 19 reported incidents of which 10 were confirmed against birds of prey (52%).
 - United Kingdom (country un-specified): 5 reported incidents.
- 116 of the 367 reported incidents relate to non-lethal actions including: the taking, sale, and possession of birds of prey (17); the taking, sale and possession of non-bird of prey species (44); egg collecting and egg thefts (22); photography and disturbance (17); the sale of eggs (11); taxidermy and possession of dead wild birds (4); and the import and export of live or dead birds (1).
- 179 of the 367 reported incidents relate to the shooting or destruction of birds of prey of which, the shooting of 42 birds of prey have been confirmed – a reduction of 15% since 2013.
- 72 of the 367 reported incidents relate to poisoning of which the poisoning of 36 birds of prey have been confirmed, a reduction of 41% since 2013. 16 of the 36 birds of prey were those found poisoned on the Black Isle near Inverness. Information on the poison used has been withheld by the RSPB in the Birdcrime Report.
- 4 confirmed cases of illegal trapping of birds of prey in 2014, a reduction of 78% since 2013 when there were 18 confirmed cases, and well below the previous 4 year average of 17 confirmed trapping cases.
- 19 individual prosecutions involving wild birds in 2014, a reduction of 40% since 2013 when there were 32 wild bird related prosecutions. Of those 19 individuals, two were gamekeepers found guilty of offences against birds of prey.

INTRODUCTION

The RSPB's Birdcrime Report for 2014 was published on Thursday 26 November 2015. As in previous years, it provides a summary of the offences against wildlife legislation that were reported to the RSPB during 2014. It should be noted that in 2009, the RSPB ceased recording certain categories of incidents, such as the shooting and destruction of non-bird of prey species. The figures supplied do not therefore give a total figure for wild bird crime in the UK, and they are not comparable with figures provided for years prior to 2009.

In his forward to the Report, Martin Harper, Conservation Director of the RSPB, focuses firmly on the uplands, claiming that many "are not in good heart, and species that rely on them, such as the hen harrier, remain absent from vast swathes of suitable habitat because of illegal persecution". He again calls for the introduction of an offence of vicarious liability in England, along with a robust system of regulation such as licensing in order "to improve controls over the most damaging forms of management, particularly intensive practices which underpin big bag driven grouse shooting". He calls for penalties that would act as an effective deterrent, and effective enforcement to accompany those. The option to withdraw the "right" of an individual to shoot game, or businesses to supply shooting services, for a fixed period following a conviction for a wildlife or environmental offence would be one such penalty, as would be the withholding of payments through the Basic Payment Scheme for failing to protect wild birds or poisoning wildlife. His wish is "to work with land managers whose less intensive approach focuses on a broader range of outcomes and which provide (in his opinion), a basis on which to build a better future for our uplands".

Chief Inspector Martin Sims, Head of the UK's Police National Wildlife Unit, acknowledges in the report that "raptor persecution is only one strand of offending against birds: chick theft, finch trapping, nest destruction and egg collecting still continue". However, the uplands and birds of prey have now become a recurring theme of the RSPB's "Birdcrime" reports, and it is these that dominate the report.

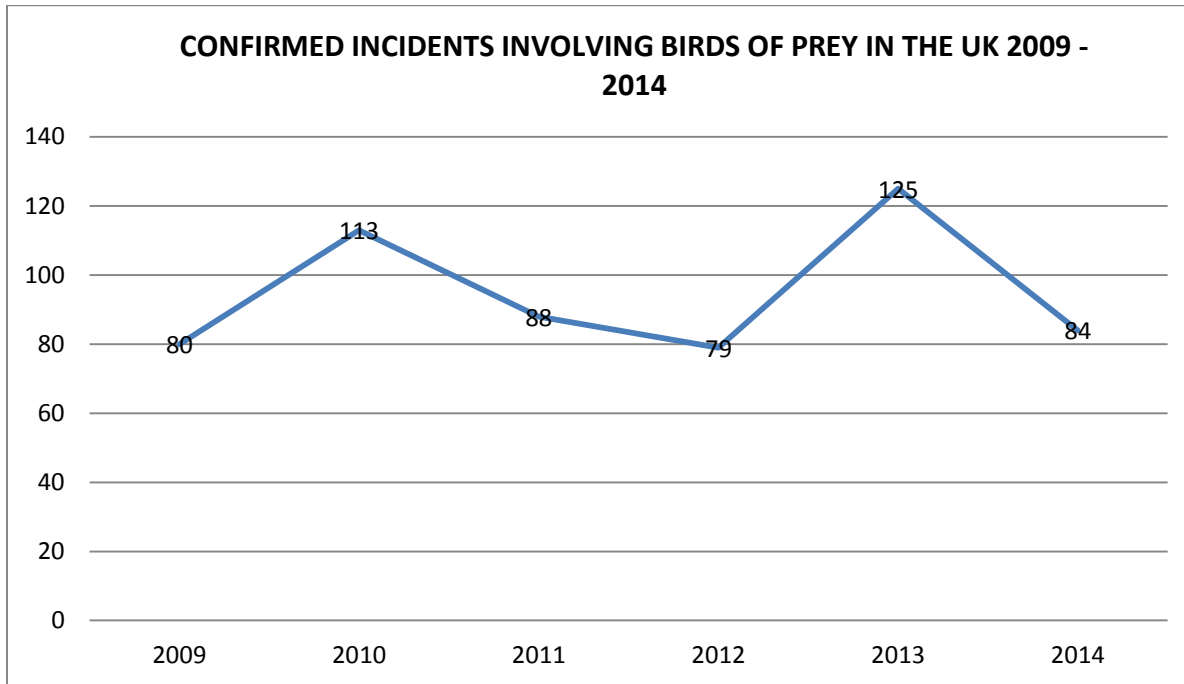
Any act of illegal persecution is unacceptable, and each one is one too many, but overall the number of confirmed incidents against birds of prey is falling, and in the context of our rapidly growing raptor populations this is a positive trend that should be welcomed. The populations of almost all our birds of prey are now at their highest levels since records began as a report compiled by the Countryside Alliance in 2014 showed. The only two species of birds of prey shown to be of high conservation concern were the hen harrier and white-tailed eagle. *Birds of Prey of the UK and their Population Trends, Countryside Alliance 2014.*

INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE RSPB

In 2014, there were 367 incidents reported to the RSPB. Whilst this is seven more than in 2013, it is a figure well below the previous 5 year average of 531. A breakdown of all incidents reported to the RSPB between 2009 and 2014 is at Annex A which shows the overall reductions in the number of different categories of incident over the past five years.

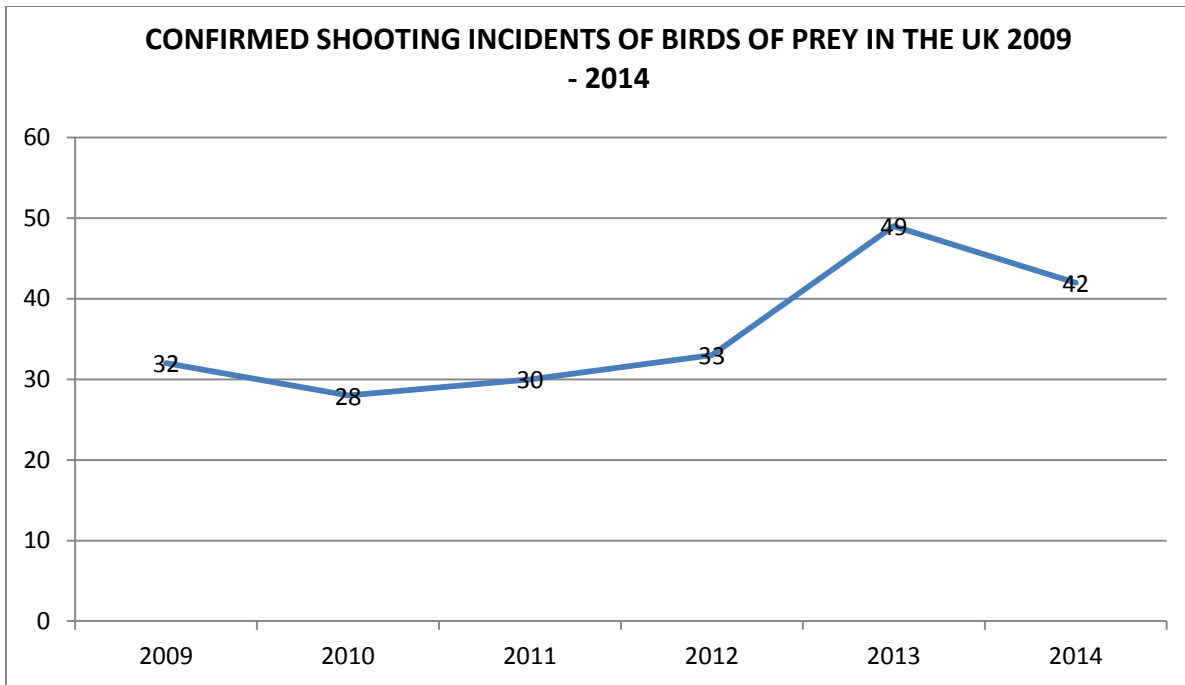
CONFIRMED INCIDENTS INVOLVING BIRDS OF PREY

There were 84 confirmed incidents of illegal persecution against birds of prey in 2014, a 33% reduction since 2013 when there had been 125 confirmed incidents, and below the previous 5 year average of 97 confirmed incidents.



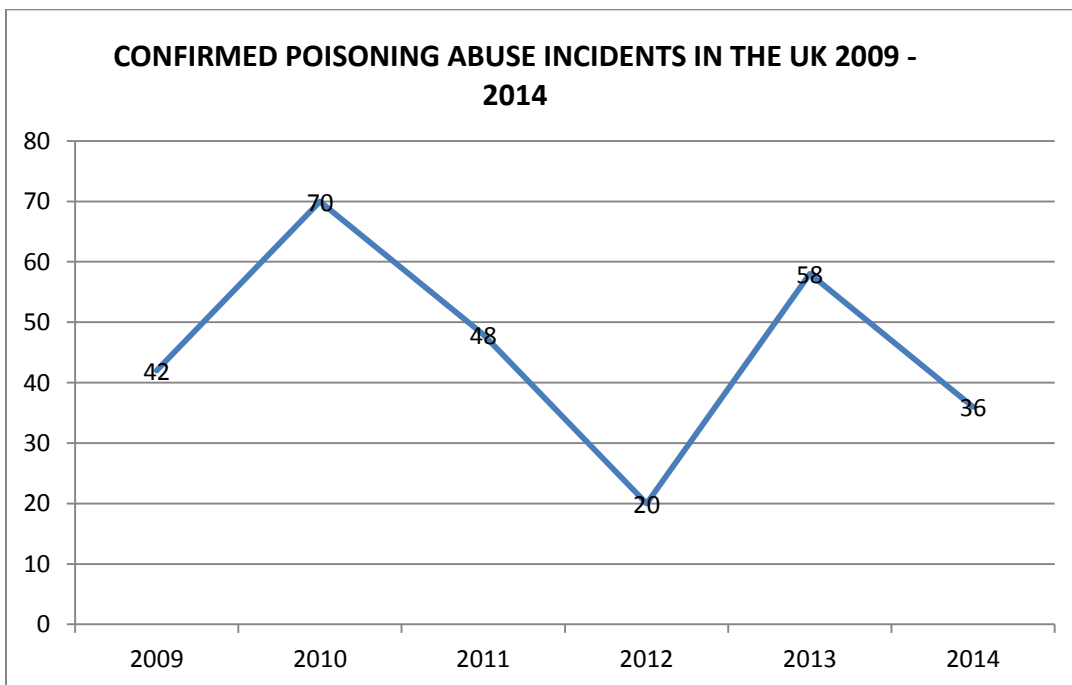
CONFIRMED SHOOTING INCIDENTS OF BIRDS OF PREY

The most commonly reported offence in 2014 was once again the shooting and destruction of birds of prey, with 179 reported incidents. Of these, the shooting of 42 birds of prey are shown in the report as having been confirmed – a reduction of 15% since 2013, but still above the previous 5 year average of 34.



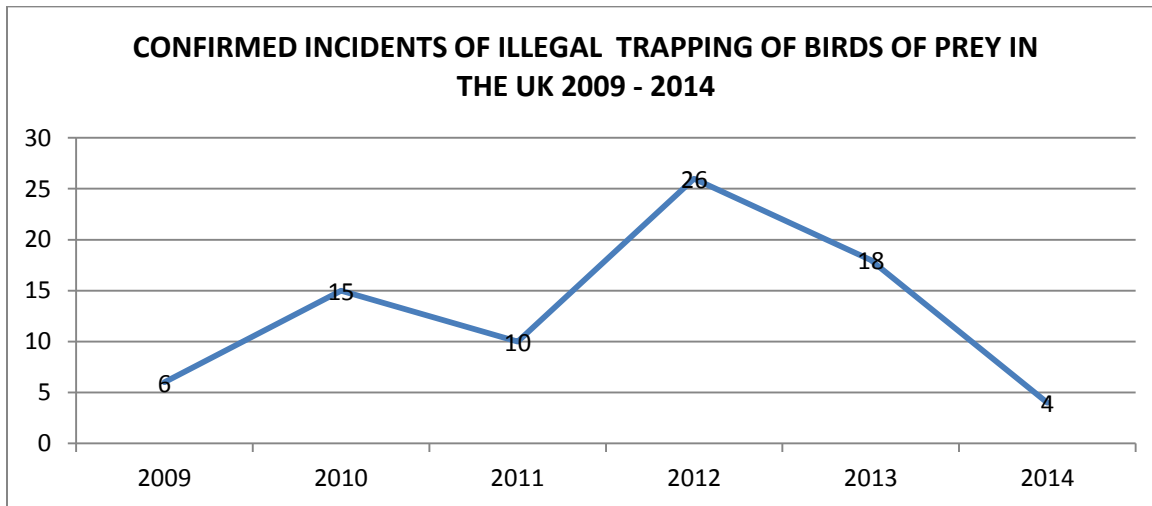
CONFIRMED POISON ABUSE INCIDENTS OF BIRDS OF PREY

During 2014 there were 72 reports of poisoning incidents involving the confirmed poisoning of 36 Birds of Prey, a reduction of **41%** since 2013 when there were 58 confirmed cases, and the second lowest number in five years. 16 of those 36 poisoned birds of prey were those found on the Black Isle near Inverness, and information on the poison that was used in that incident has been withheld.



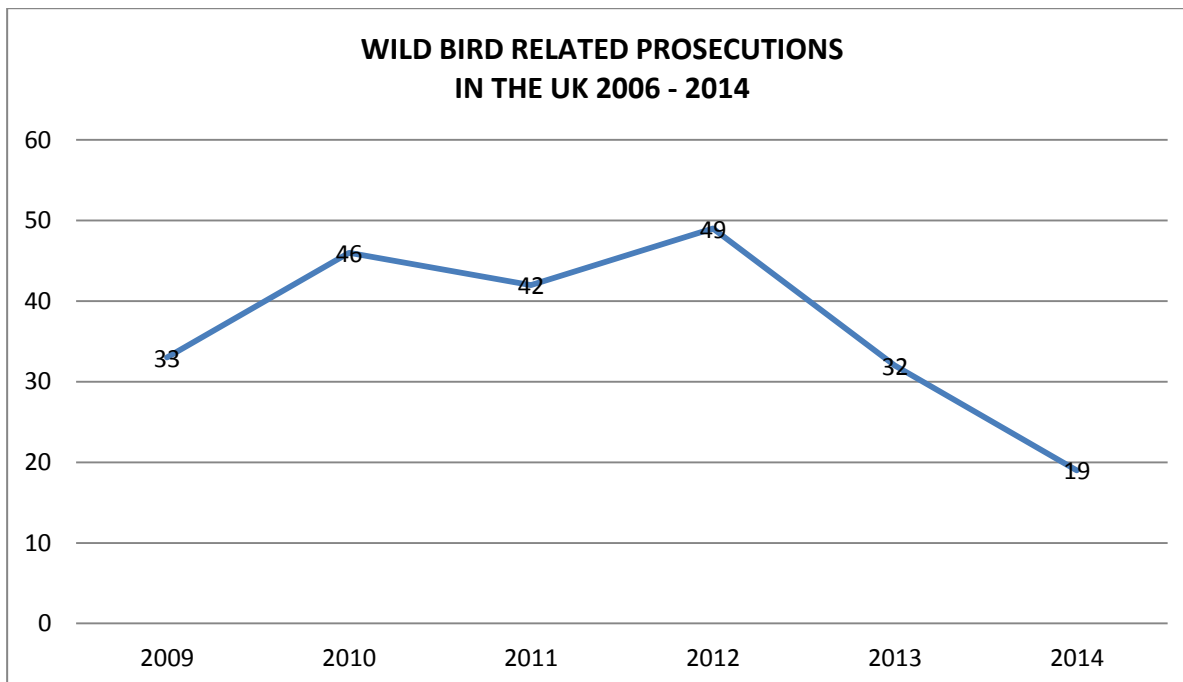
CONFIRMED ILLEGAL TRAPPING OF BIRDS OF PREY

There were just 4 confirmed incidents of illegal trapping of birds of prey in 2014, a significant reduction of **78%** since 2013 when there had been 18 confirmed cases, and an **85%** reduction on the 26 cases in 2012. This was the lowest figure since 2009.



WILD BIRD RELATED PROSECUTIONS

In 2014 there were 19 individual prosecutions involving wild birds, a reduction of **40%** since 2013 when there were 32 wild bird related prosecutions, and the lowest figure in six years. Of those 19 individuals, only three were gamekeepers found guilty of offences against birds of prey and owls.



CONCLUSION

It is clear from its 2014 Birdcrime Report that the RSPB's focus remains firmly on driven grouse shooting, and the illegal persecution of birds of prey in our uplands; specifically the hen harrier and peregrine falcon. This is despite the fact that confirmed incidents of wildlife offences against birds of prey in upland areas or connected to gamekeepers and grouse moor managers represent a tiny fraction of all incidents.

The result is a report which is misleading and distorts the real picture in favour of attacking shooting. The RSPB have no firm evidence with which to back up many of the claims and accusations it makes against the shooting community, gamekeeping or moorland management associated with grouse shooting.

Adrian Blackmore
27 November 2015

ANNEX:

A. Breakdown of Total Incidents Reported to the RSPB 2009 – 2014.

ANNEX A.

BREAKDOWN OF TOTAL INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE RSPB 2009 – 2014.

