

RSPB BIRDCRIME REPORT 2020

SUMMARY – KEY STATISTICS

- Within the UK, there were 137 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution recorded in 2020. This is 52 more than in 2019 when there were 85 confirmed incidents; a significant increase, and the highest figure ever recorded by the RSPB, making 2020 the worst year since the Birdcrime report was first published in 1990.
- The UK breakdown of incidents in 2020 was as follows:
 - England. 99 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution. This is 32 more than in 2019, representing 72% of UK incidents. 26 of these were in North Yorkshire.
 - Scotland. 26 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, two less than in 2019, representing 19% of all incidents.
 - Wales. 5 confirmed incidents, one less than in 2019, and representing 4% of the UK total.
 - Northern Ireland. 7 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, four more than the previous two years figures of 3, and representing 5% of the UK total.
- The 137 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution in 2019 included 57 shooting incidents (42%), 35 confirmed poisoning (pesticide) abuse incidents (25%), 17 confirmed trapping incidents (13%), 3 incidents of nest destruction (2%), and 25 'other' persecution incidents, the details of which have not been provided (18%).
- Of the 137 confirmed incidents, 34% were 'connected' with pheasant and partridge shooting, 28% were 'connected' with grouse, and 1% with mixed gamebirds. Those 'connected' with grouse shooting therefore represent just over a quarter of all incidents.

INTRODUCTION

The Birdcrime Report is published annually by the RSPB as a summary of related offences against birds of prey that have been collated by its investigations team. The significant increase in the number of confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution recorded in 2020 is extremely disappointing, but they do not justify the RSPB in singling out driven grouse shooting, and it's call on governments to implement a system of licensing shooting, when less than two thirds of all incidents occurred in counties where driven grouse shooting takes place. There were no incidents recorded in Northumberland, and just two in Co Durham, and whilst there were 26 incidents in North Yorkshire, it is not possible to determine whether these were on grouse moors

given that they are mapped to a 10km grid square. There are numerous lowland shoots immediately adjacent to grouse moors in North Yorkshire, and the link must therefore be tenuous, at best. Despite this, the RSPB's focus remains fixated on grouse moors, with Beccy Speight, the RSPB's Chief Executive, stating in the report that: "If the Government fails to deliver effective reform within five years, the RSPB will call for a ban on driven grouse shooting". Such a call is not backed up by evidence, and totally disregards the findings of a new report into the sustainability of driven grouse shooting that has recently been published by the University of Northampton.

That report has taken the environmental, social and economic dimensions at the core of mainstream sustainability identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and considers each one in detail. This is extremely important as anyone making decisions about the use of moors on which driven grouse shooting takes place needs to ensure that any change is at least as beneficial to all three dimensions as the status quo. The research found that: no alternative uses have been put forward for managing grouse moors that would deliver the same positive economic impact to some of the most remote parts of the UK; and there is no evidence that the alternative uses for moorland that are commonly proposed will increase natural capital, or add value to the ecosystems services currently provided.

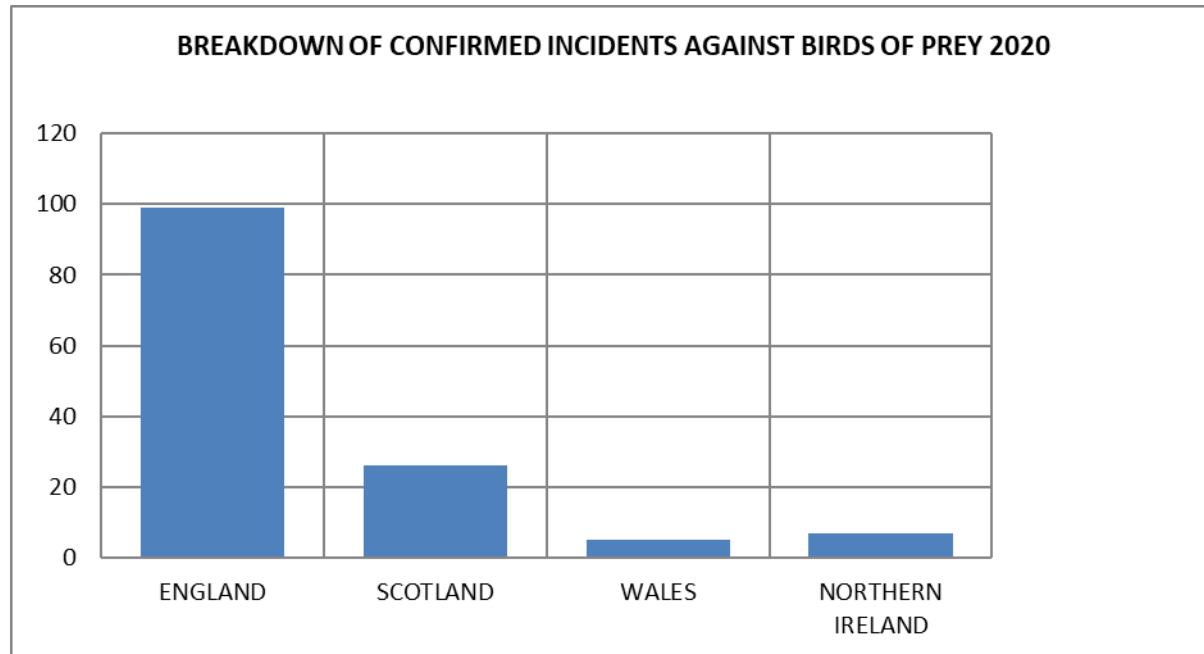
In calling for a ban of driven grouse shooting, The RSPB is demonstrating either willful blindness, or a remarkable degree of ignorance, paying no attention to the impact such a fundamental change in land use would have both on biodiversity in our uplands, and the livelihoods of many. In wishing to see all burning on peatlands stopped, it is also completely overlooking the extensive work that has been, and continues to be, carried out by grouse moor managers in rewetting and re-vegetating moors, and the need to prevent the risk of devastating wildfires. It is ignoring available science and evidence in doing so.

It is also disappointing that the RSPB has played down recent hen harrier breeding success in England. The report states that: "During 2020, 19 successful hen harrier nests were recorded in England. There were 24 in 2021, an increase which reflects some progress". No mention is made of the numbers of chicks fledged. 2021 has been the best for hen harrier breeding success in England since the 1960s, with 84 chicks fledged from 24 successful nests spread across uplands in County Durham, Cumbria, Lancashire, Northumberland and Yorkshire. Of those 24 nests, 19 (79%) were on moorland managed for grouse shooting. This is the fifth successive year of increases, following a low in 2016 when only 8 chicks fledged. The previous two years were also record years for hen harrier breeding, as can be seen from [our chart](#) which covers the 36 year period from 1986. In the case of the numbers of chicks fledged, the increases have been dramatic. The RSPB should be welcoming this upturn in the hen harriers fortune, largely thanks to grouse moor managers, rather than playing it down.

Nearly all raptor populations are now at a historic high, with far more birds of prey in the British countryside than there have been for a century. The claim by Mark Thomas, the RSPB's Head of Investigations that "the absence of birds of prey – at the top of the food chain – is a key indicator of the poor environmental health of our planet", is at complete odds with the most recent figures published by the Avian Population Estimates Panel, a collaboration between statutory conservation agencies and relevant non-governmental organisations. These are contained in a report showing how the populations of many of the UK's birds of prey are increasing, in some cases dramatically, which can be read [here](#). Contrary to his claims, there is no absence of birds of prey in the UK; something that should be celebrated

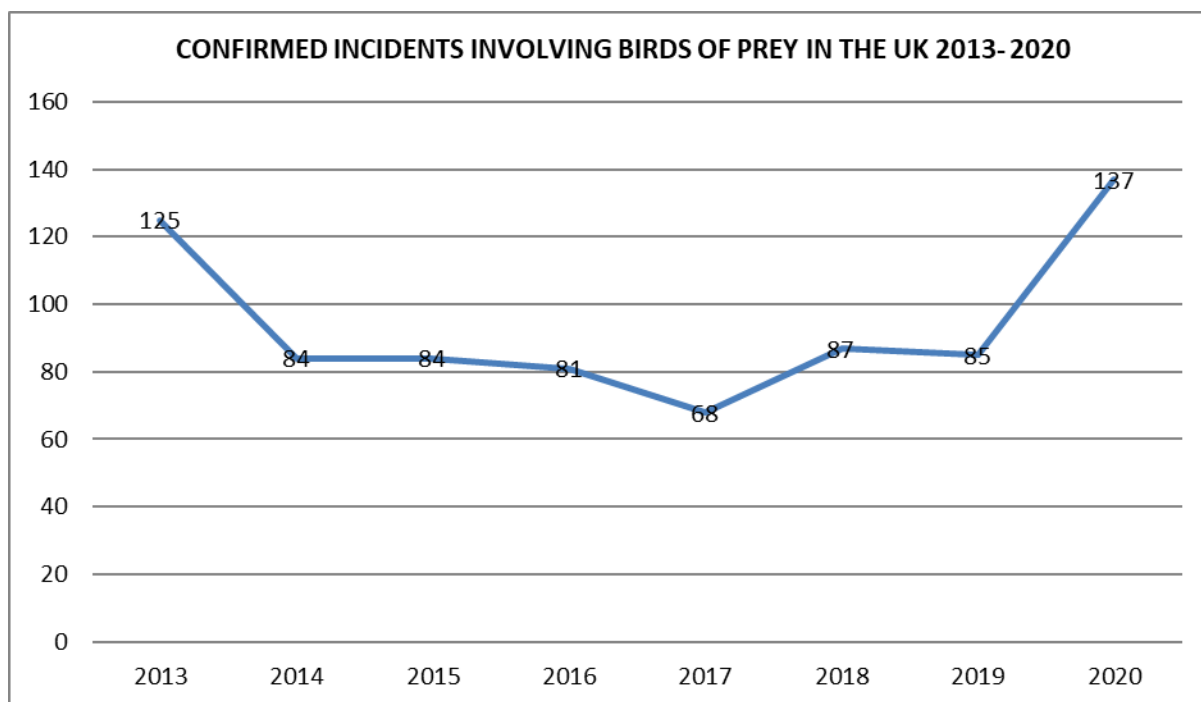
CONFIRMED INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE RSPB

In 2020, there were 137 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution. Of these, 99 cases (72%) were confirmed in England, 26 in Scotland (19%), 5 in Wales (4%), and 7 in Northern Ireland (5%).



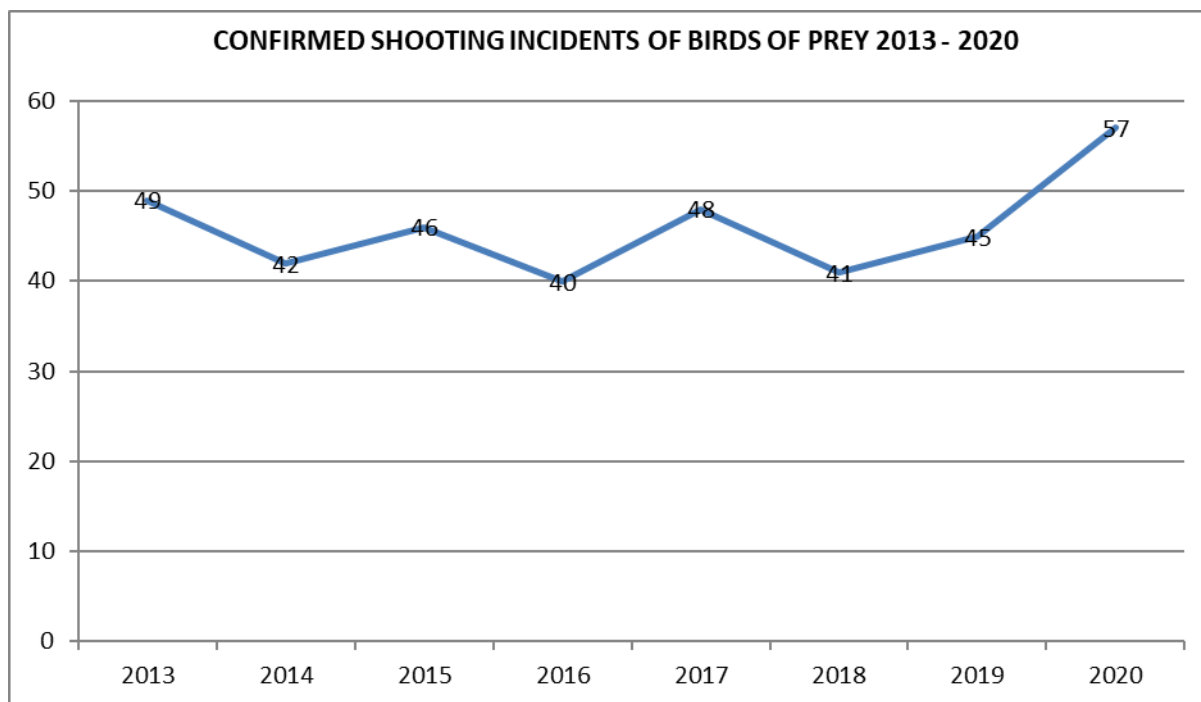
CONFIRMED INCIDENTS INVOLVING BIRDS OF PREY IN THE UK

The figure of 137 confirmed incidents of illegal persecution against birds of prey in 2020 was 52 higher than in 2019, when there were 85 incidents. Of these 137 incidents, 28% were 'connected' with grouse shooting, with the remaining 72% not linked to moorland managed for grouse.



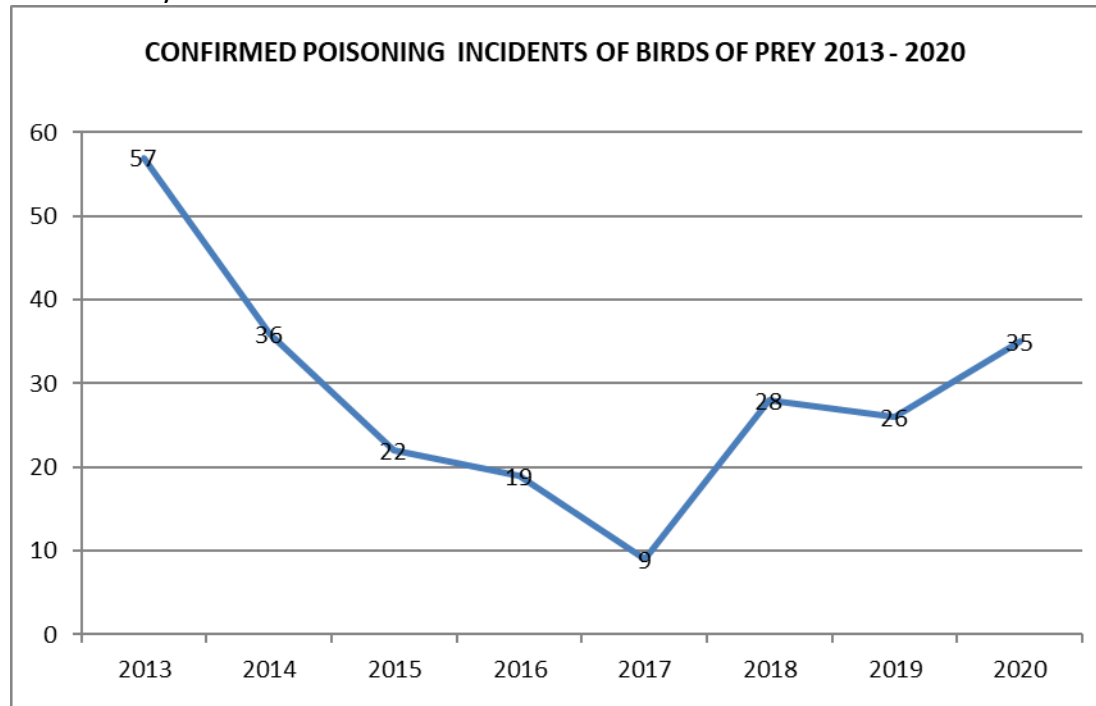
SHOOTING INCIDENTS

The RSPB's figures show that shooting remains the most common way of killing birds of prey, with 57 (42%) confirmed shooting / attempted shooting incidents in 2020.



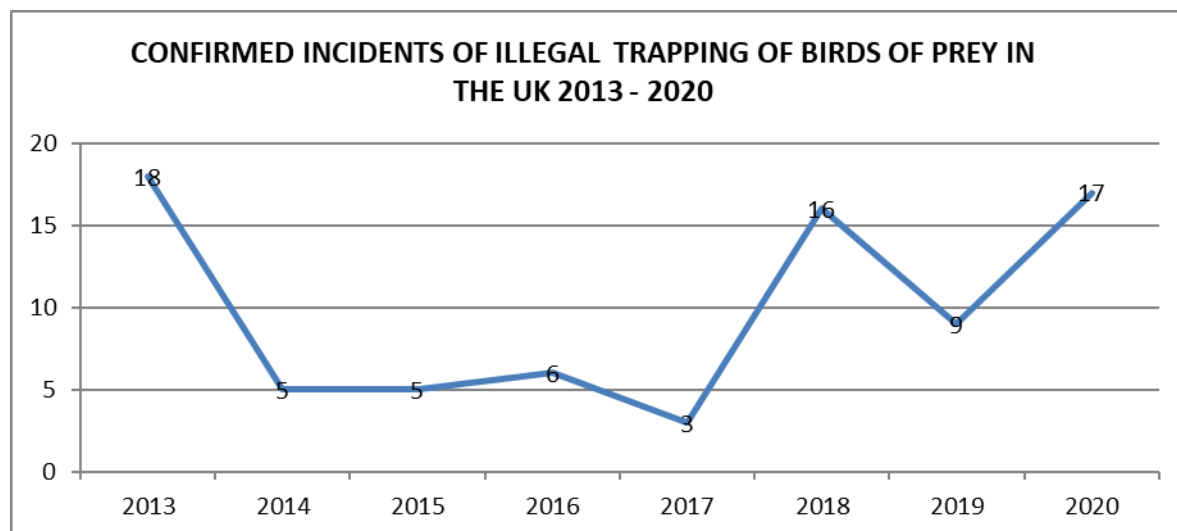
POISON ABUSE INCIDENTS

There were 35 confirmed poisoning incidents involving raptors in 2020, 9 more than in 2019, but considerably less than the 57 incidents in 2013.



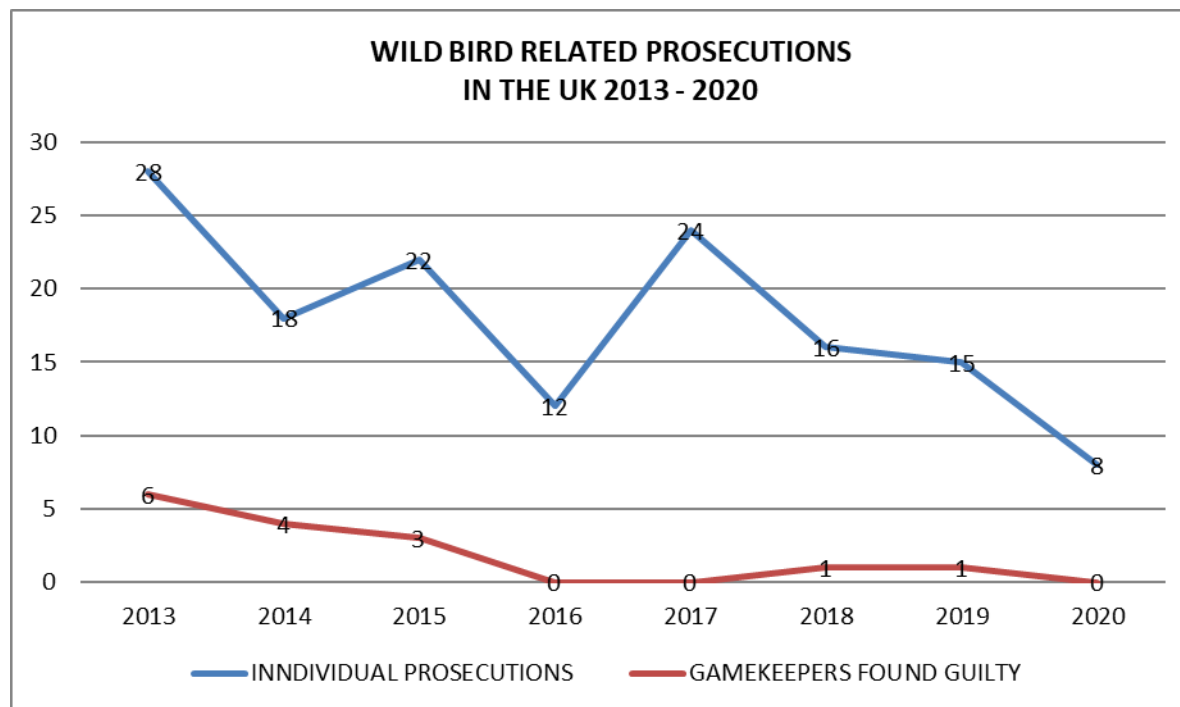
ILLEGAL TRAPPING

There were 17 confirmed incidents of illegal trapping in 2020, the second highest number since 2013.



WILD BIRD RELATED PROSECUTIONS

There were 8 wild bird crime prosecutions in 2020, of which 4 involved birds of prey of prey. None involved gamekeepers.



CONCLUSION

The shooting community remains committed to eradicating raptor persecution, and it has a zero tolerance towards all wildlife crime, including the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The increase in the number of incidents in 2020 is therefore a disappointment. Although less than one third of these incidents were 'connected' to the uplands, the RSPB remains relentless in its campaign against driven grouse shooting and its associated land management practices, and its annual Birdcrime Report has become a blatant lobbying tool with which to try and influence policy makers to that end.