

RSPB BIRDCRIME REPORT 2021

SUMMARY – KEY STATISTICS

- Within the UK, there were 108 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution recorded in 2021, with a total of 91 victims; an anomaly that is unexplained within the RSPB’s report. That figure of 108 is 38 less than in 2020 when there were 146 confirmed incidents. Over two-thirds (71%) of all confirmed incidents were in connection to land managed for gamebird shooting
- The UK breakdown of incidents in 2021 was as follows:
 - England. 80 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution. Although this is 19 less than in 2020, it is allegedly the second-highest figure on record.
 - Scotland. 17 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution, 9 less than in 2020 when there were 26 incidents confirmed.
 - Wales. 10 confirmed incidents, double that in 2020 when there had been 5 incidents.
 - Northern Ireland. 1 confirmed incident of bird of prey persecution, 6 less than in 2020. Rather than welcoming this improvement, the RSPB is claiming that the lower figure is due to the fact that crimes against Birds of Prey in the Province are going undetected and under-reported.
- The 108 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution in 2021 included 41 shooting incidents (57 in 2020), 32 poisoning (pesticide) abuse incidents (35 in 2020), 18 trapping incidents (17 in 2020), 3 incidents of nest destruction (no change from 2020), and 14 ‘other’ persecution incidents, the details of which have not been provided (25 in 2020).
- The RSPB has split the 108 confirmed UK raptor persecution incidents into likely ‘persecution groups’, as follows:
 - Pheasant / partridge: 50%
 - Grouse: 13%
 - Mixed pheasant / partridge / grouse: 8%
 - Unknown / other / pigeon fancier: 29%
- The two counties with the highest number of confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution in 2021 were Norfolk (13 incidents), and Dorset (12 incidents). North Yorkshire was third with 10 incidents.

- Illegal poisoning remains a serious threat to birds of prey and other wildlife, and there has been a concerning rise in incidents relating to brodifacoum, a dominant second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide. During the 15-year period from 2005 - 2019, there were on average three incidents a year involving brodifacoum, but this rose to 23 cases in 2020, with 25 in 2021. This sharp rise, in concentrations well beyond lethal levels, is of concern.

INTRODUCTION

The RSPB's 2021 Birdcrime Report was published on 15 November 2022. This annual report provides a summary of related offences against birds of prey that have been collated by the RSPB's investigations team, and the reduction in the number of incidents recorded in 2021 should be welcomed. Just the one confirmed incident recorded in Northern Ireland is of particular note, but the RSPB has attributed this to the fact that crimes in the Province are going undetected and under-reported. It has therefore appointed a local dedicated investigations officer which it sees as being 'a significant step in identifying and tackling raptor persecution in Northern Ireland'.

Of the 108 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution recorded in the UK in 2021, over two-thirds (71%) related to land managed for gamebird shooting, compared to 62% in 2020. Of the remaining 29% of incidents, 21% have been categorised as 'unknown'.

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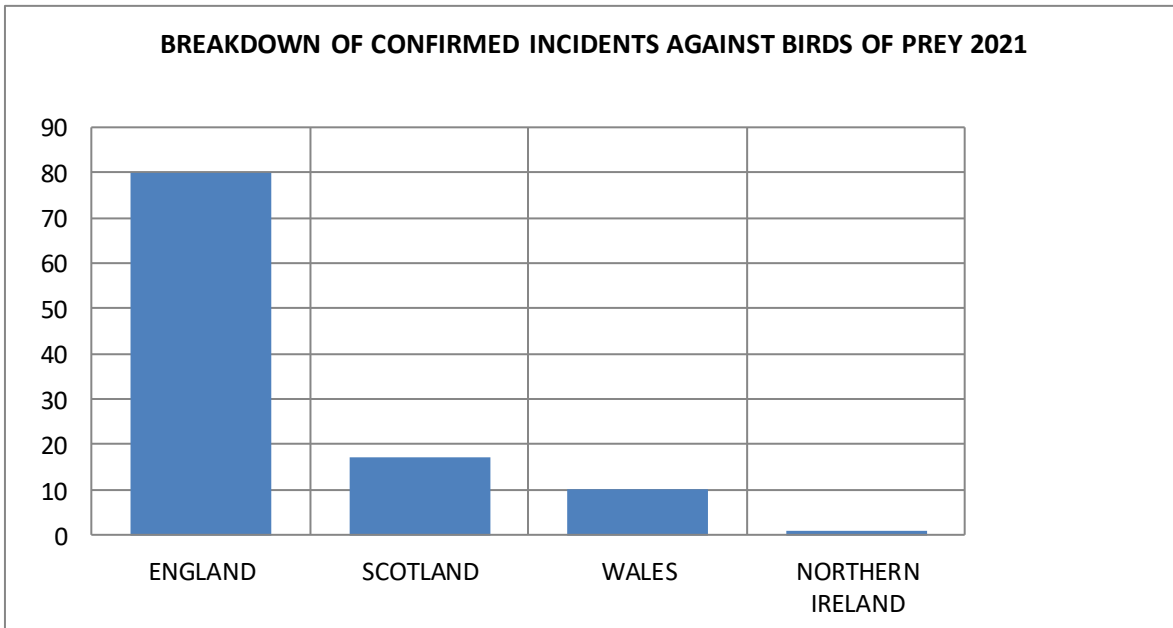
Of the two-thirds (71%) of incidents connected to gamebird shooting, only 21% at worst can be linked to grouse shooting yet, despite this, the RSPB focus remains firmly on the uplands. It believes that raptor persecution on grouse moors continues to be a considerable issue, claiming that the data shows raptor persecution to be at a high level, especially in England, and that 'licensing driven grouse moors is the first step in clamping down on those estates engaged in criminal activity at no loss to those operating within the law'. Yet again, the Birdcrime Report is being used by the RSPB as a blatant lobbying tool with which to try and influence policy makers to that end.

Within the Report, the RSPB calling on UK governments to implement:

- The introduction of licences for driven grouse shooting, which it believes will create greater public accountability, and ensure estates operate to legal standards. However, we do not believe there is any justification for this, as grouse shooting is already heavily regulated and controlled. There is extensive legislation in place that has an impact on almost every aspect of grouse shooting and grouse moor management. This includes the possession and use of firearms, use of lead ammunition, the grouse season, methods of predator control, heather burning, use of medicated grit, and the protection of wild birds. Any additional legislation would need to be consistent, evidence-based and principled, recognising that further controls would add to the cost and bureaucracy of grouse moor management, without necessarily improving outcomes.
- The introduction of additional regulation for pheasant and partridge shooting, with the release of non-native gamebirds reduced to more environmentally sustainable levels, alongside better compliance with existing regulations. However, the introduction of any additional regulation must be fully justified, and the RSPB will be aware that there is a considerable amount of research currently being undertaken into various aspects of gamebird releasing. When Defra announced last year that it would be introducing an interim licence regime for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge on and around English European Protected Sites, the Department also committed to addressing gaps in the existing scientific literature that had been highlighted during the review into the ecological consequences of gamebird releasing and management on lowland Shoots in England undertaken in 2020. Defra, Natural England and the Animal and Plant Health Agency have now begun a three-year Gamebird Research Project into those knowledge gaps. We need to wait for the findings of that research, as these will provide a more complete, evidence based, picture on which to base any conclusions and recommendations.
- Better General Licence conditions. Specifically: better regulation of the use of crow cage and other traps, including prohibiting use during a close season, changes to trap design, increased frequency of checks, and a separate compartment for decoy birds; a legal requirement for traps and their identifiable users to be registered with the police, and better enforcement of existing rules; provision for the removal of licences to use these traps if wildlife protection laws are breached; and the requirement for all General Licence users to submit an annual return.

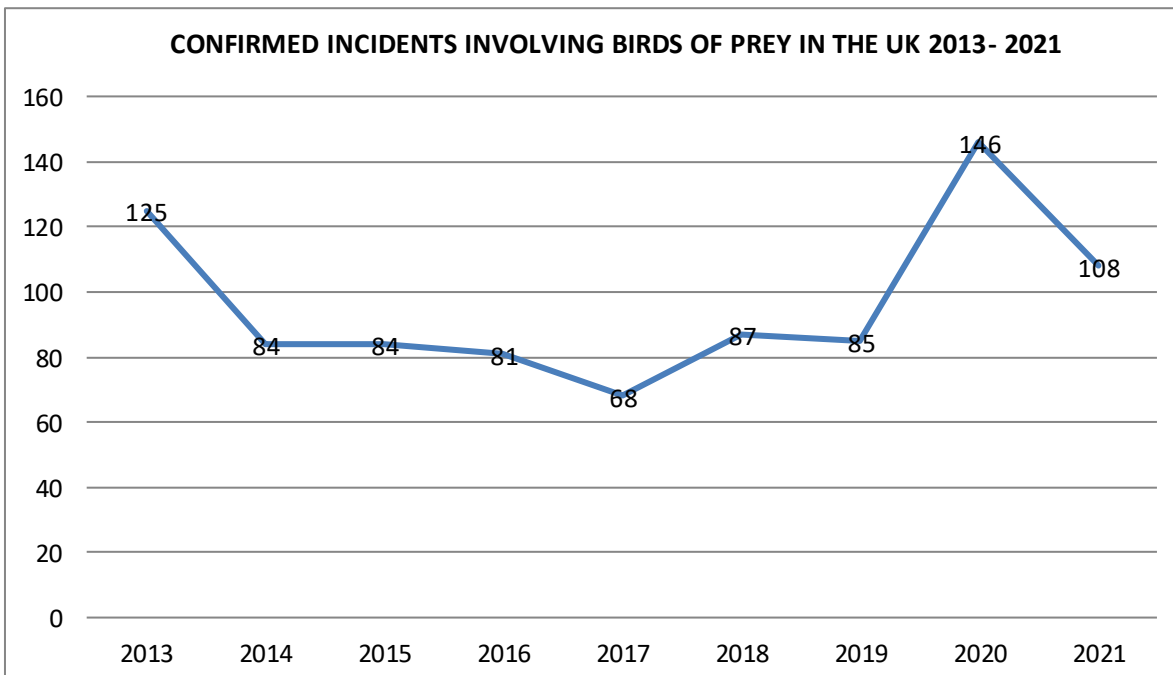
CONFIRMED INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE RSPB

In 2021 there were 108 confirmed incidents of bird of prey persecution. Of these, 80 cases were confirmed in England, 17 in Scotland, 10 in Wales, and 1 in Northern Ireland.



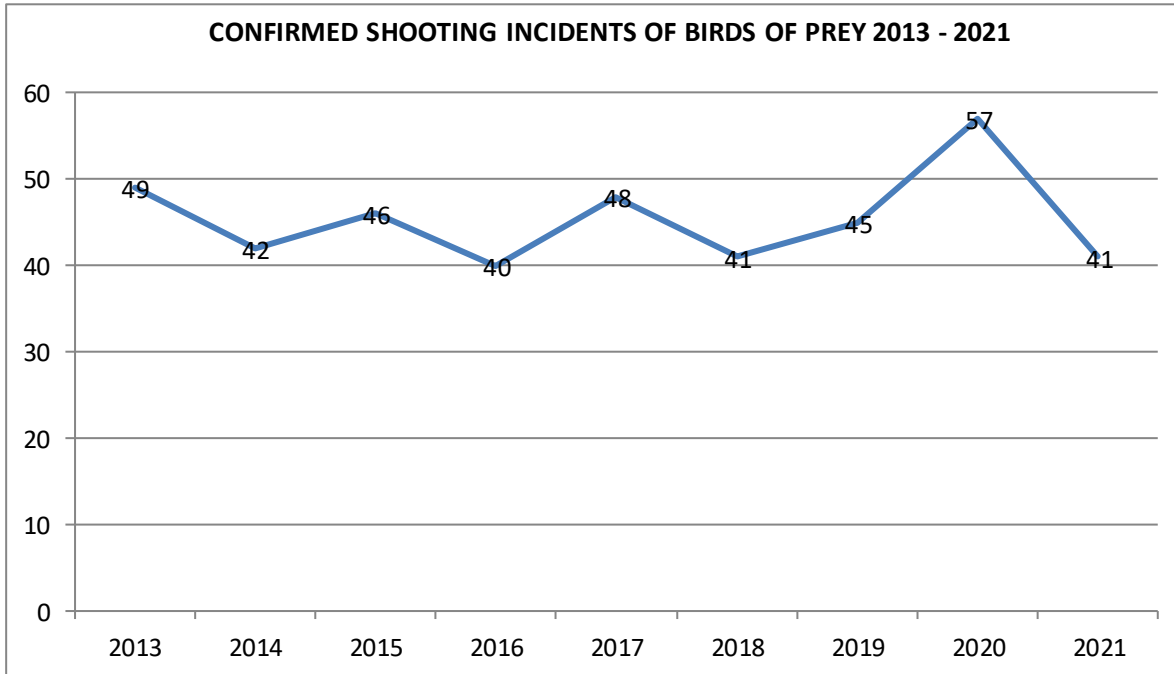
CONFIRMED INCIDENTS INVOLVING BIRDS OF PREY IN THE UK

The figure of 108 confirmed incidents of illegal persecution against birds of prey in 2021 was 38 lower than in 2020 when there were 146 incidents. Of those 108 incidents, two-thirds (71%) were connected to gamebird shooting, with pheasant and partridge accounting for 50%, grouse 13%, and mixed (pheasant / partridge / grouse) 8%. Even taking a combined figure of 21% for grouse, 79% had no connection at all with driven grouse shooting in the uplands, yet the RSPB sees the licensing of driven grouse shooting as its top priority.



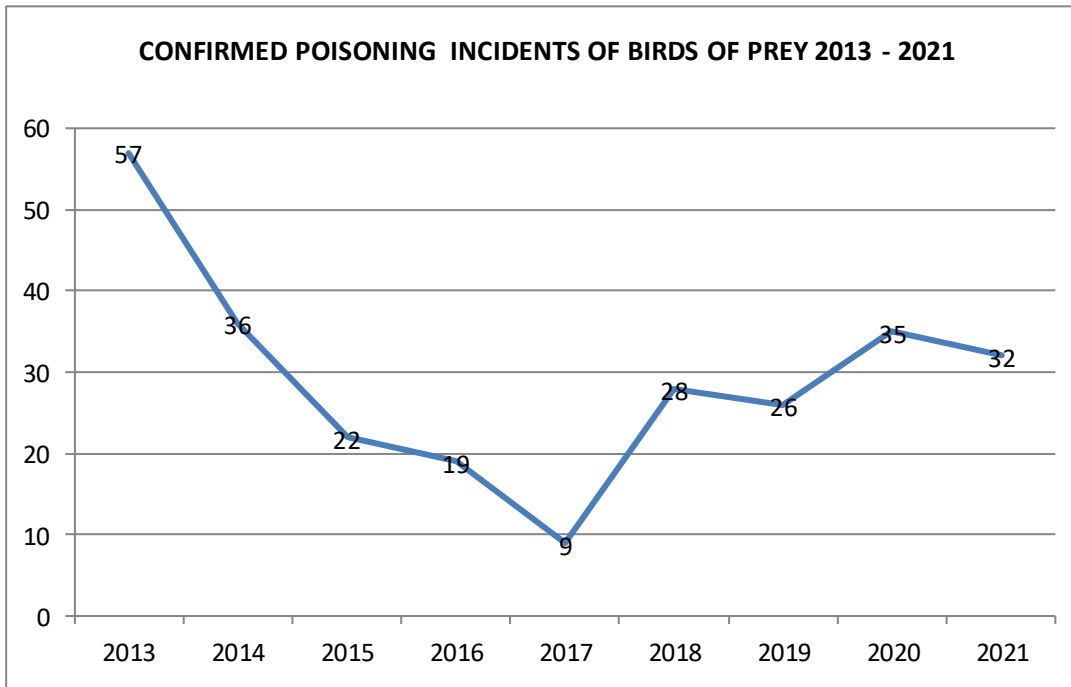
SHOOTING INCIDENTS

The RSPB’s figures show that shooting remains the most common way of killing birds of prey. The figure of 41 confirmed shooting / attempted shooting incidents in 2021 is below the previous 8-year average of 46.



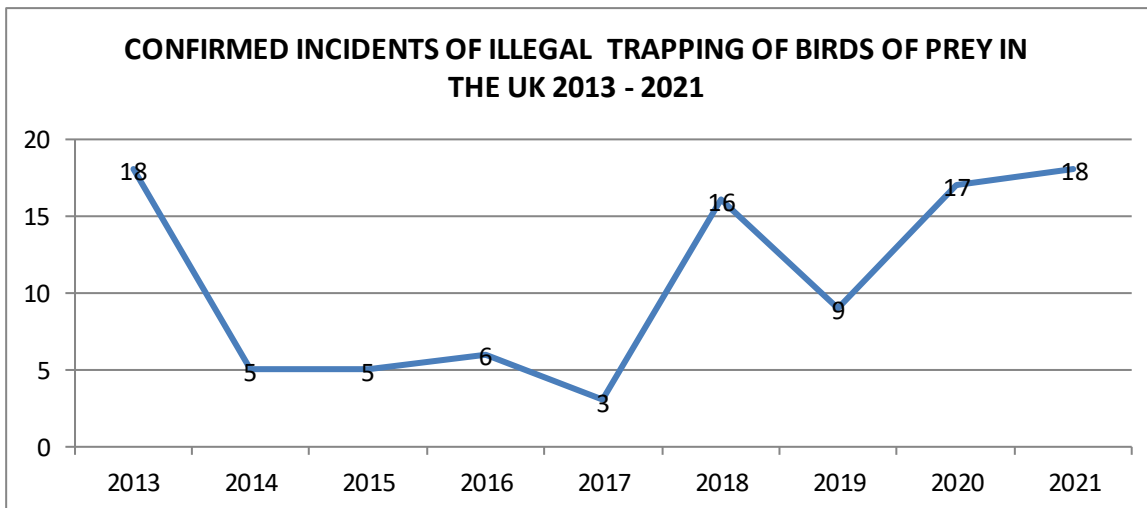
POISON ABUSE INCIDENTS

There were 32 confirmed poisoning incidents involving raptors in 2020, which whilst 3 lower than in 2020, is still higher than the previous 8- year average of 29 incidents. The rise in incidents relating to brodifacoum, a dominant second-generation anticoagulated rodenticide is of concern, there being 25 cases in 2021, all with concentrations well beyond lethal levels.



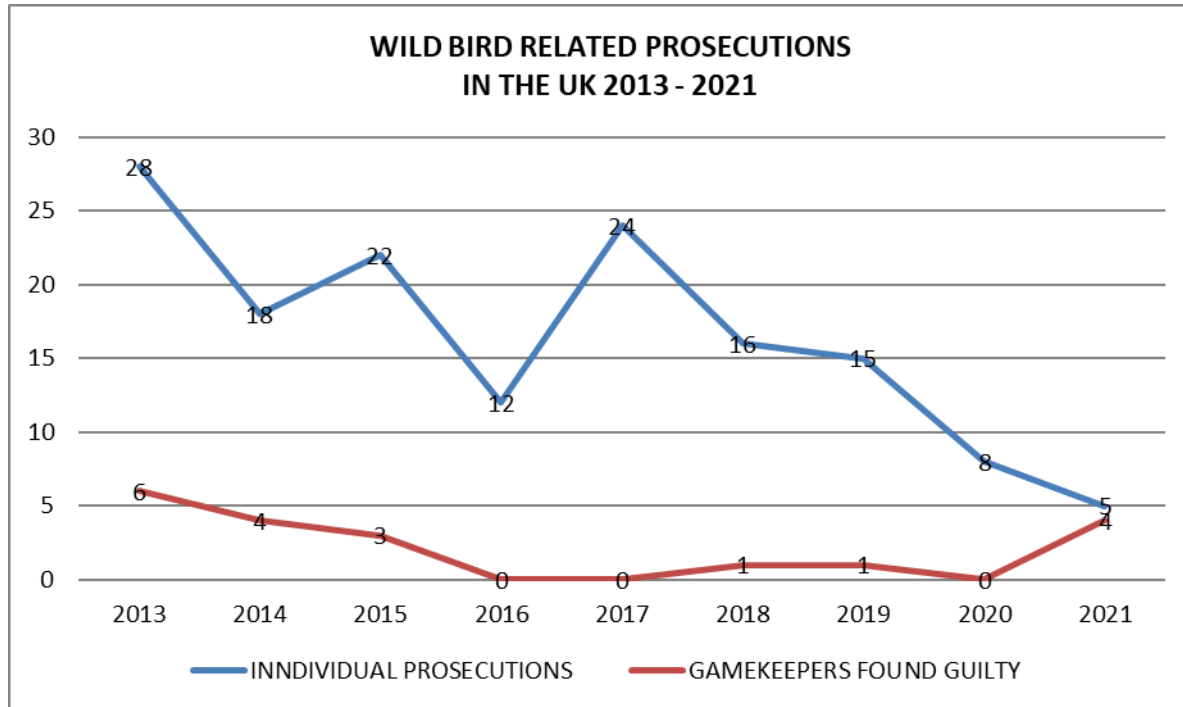
ILLEGAL TRAPPING

There were 18 confirmed incidents of illegal trapping in 2021, the only form of illegal persecution to have shown a rise since 2020.



WILD BIRD RELATED PROSECUTIONS

In 2021, there were five individuals prosecuted for bird of prey persecution related offences, all of whom were gamekeepers. Four were convicted.



CONCLUSION

The shooting community remains committed to eradicating raptor persecution, with a zero tolerance towards all wildlife crime, including the illegal persecution of birds of prey, and the reduction in the number of incidents in 2021 is therefore to be welcomed. It is disappointing that the RSPB is unable to acknowledge these improvements, instead attributing the only case in Northern Ireland to incidents being undetected and under-reported. So, too, is the RSPB’s fixation on the uplands where its own data fails to support what has become a relentless campaign against driven grouse shooting and its associated land management practices.