

Patterns of persecution

10 years of evidence exposing the illegal killing of birds of prey

Birds of prey are routinely being illegally shot, trapped or poisoned in the UK. Between 2015 and 2024, 921 confirmed incidents have been recorded. As many incidents go unseen and unreported, these figures represent only the tip of the iceberg – the true scale of persecution is likely to be far higher.

Drawing on 10 years of data, this appendix provides additional context and detail to support the findings outlined in the main report.



Two poisoned eagles discovered on grouse moor

County Antrim, Northern Ireland

In 2023, two young White-tailed Eagles were discovered dead on a grouse shooting estate in County Antrim. Post-mortem examinations revealed that both birds had been poisoned.



Missing Golden Eagle's satellite tag found dumped in river

Perthshire, Scotland

Four years after a satellite-tagged Golden Eagle vanished in suspicious circumstances on a Scottish grouse moor, its tag was found dumped in a Perthshire river, wrapped in a sheet of lead.



Brutal Buzzard killing caught on camera

North Yorkshire, England

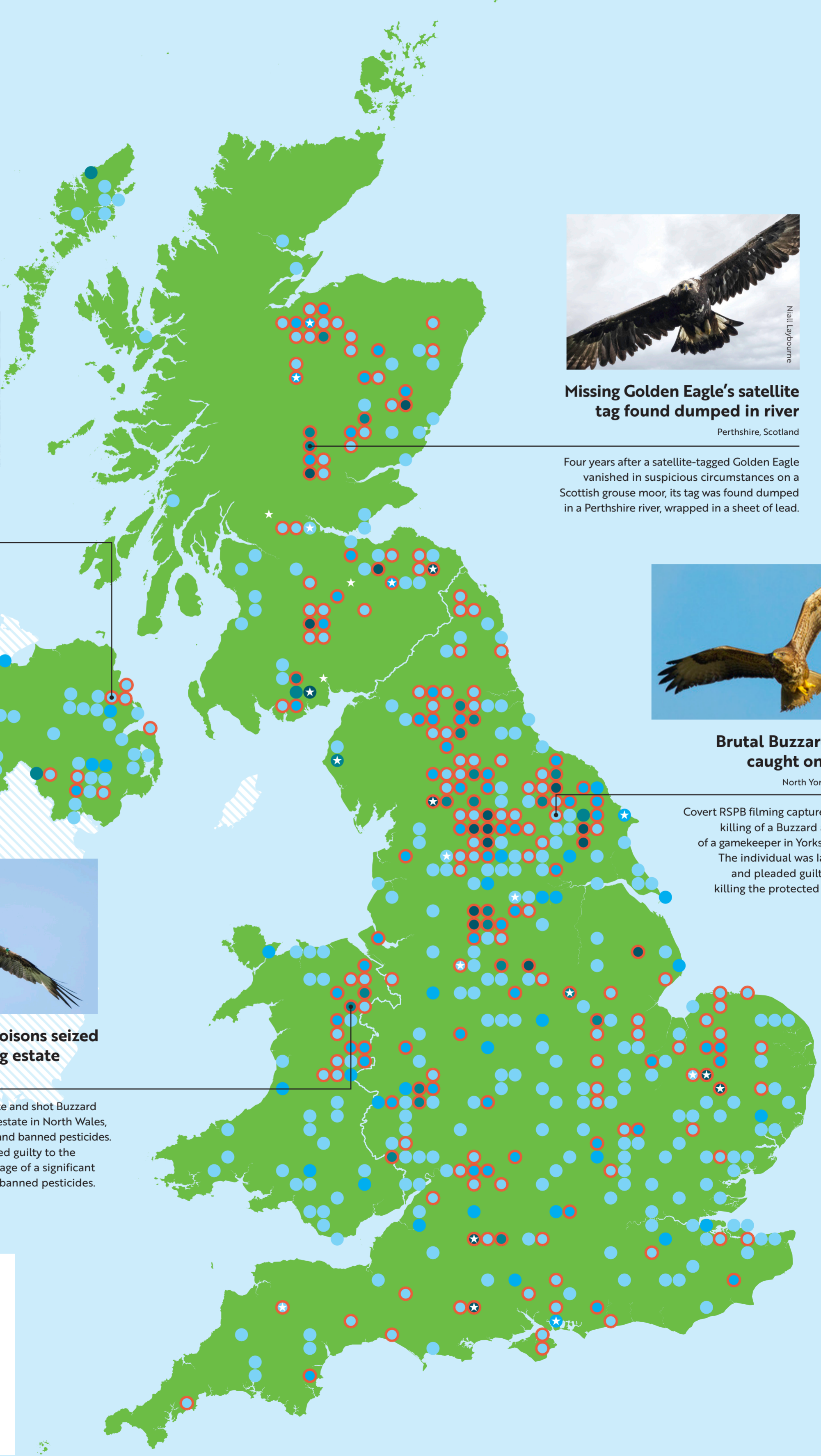
Covert RSPB filming captured the brutal killing of a Buzzard at the hands of a gamekeeper in Yorkshire in 2024. The individual was later charged and pleaded guilty to illegally killing the protected bird of prey.



Birds killed and poisons seized on Welsh shooting estate

Wrexham, Wales

In 2021, a poisoned Red Kite and shot Buzzard were found on a shooting estate in North Wales, along with poisoned baits and banned pesticides. A gamekeeper later pleaded guilty to the possession and illegal storage of a significant quantity of approved and banned pesticides.



All confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents recorded in the UK (2015–2024) and locations of crimes associated with land managed for gamebird shooting.

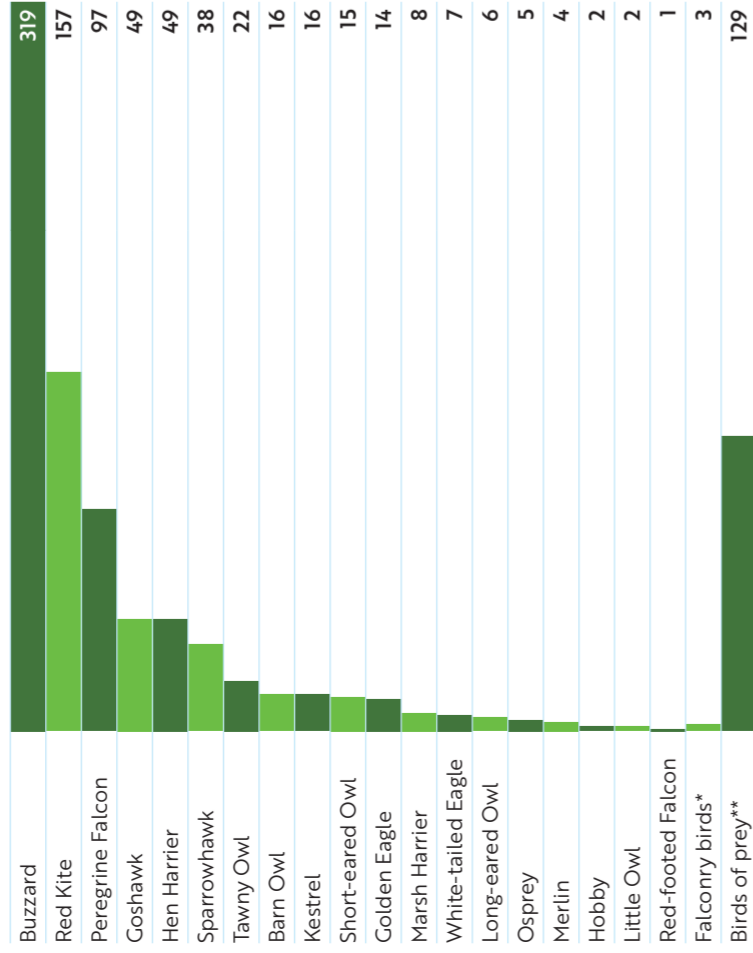
- 1 incident
- 2–3 incidents
- 4–5 incidents
- 6+ incidents
- At least one incident related to gamebird management
- ★ Locations of incidents resulting in successful convictions

Legislation protecting birds of prey

All birds of prey in the UK are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, which make it an offence to kill, injure or take any bird of prey, or their nests and eggs. Schedule 1 species receive extra safeguards during the breeding season, making it illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb them while they are nest building, occupying a nest with eggs or young, or caring for dependent young. In Scotland, Schedules 1A and A1 provide further protection to particularly vulnerable or conservation priority birds of prey.

Despite these protections, illegal persecution continues. Between 2015 and 2024, there were 921 confirmed incidents in the UK, each meeting strict evidential standards. Nineteen species were affected, with Buzzards, Red Kites and Peregrine Falcons the most frequently targeted.

The total number of confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents in the UK, by species affected (2015–2024).

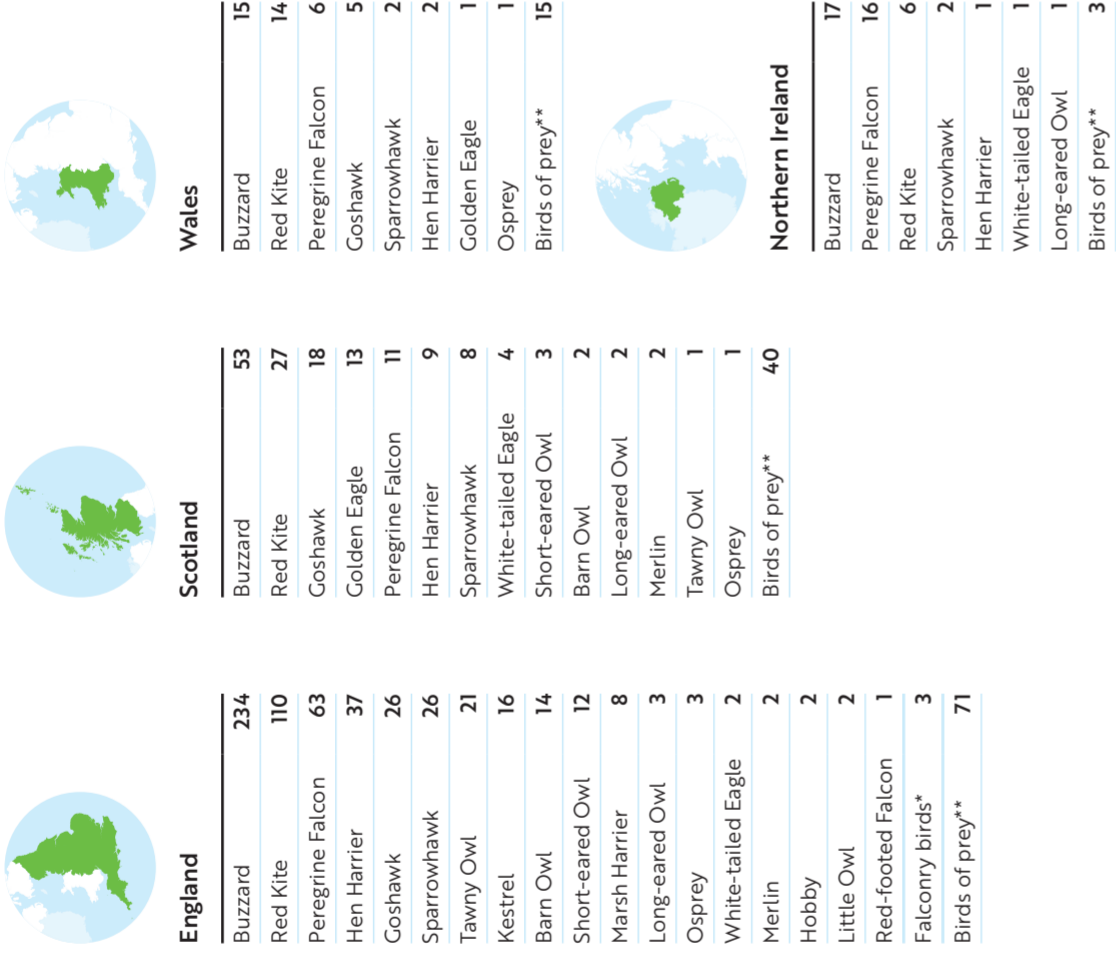


*Falconry birds: captive-bred birds including hybrid species, used in falconry. Not wild.
 **Birds of prey: includes confirmed incidents involving the illegal targeting of birds of prey where the exact species could not be identified. Examples include the use of illegal traps and poisoned baits.
 Note: In some cases, more than one species has been linked to a single confirmed incident.
 The figures in this report show the total number of incidents associated with each individual species.

Country focus

Bird of prey persecution is happening across all four countries of the UK. It involves a range of species, from our most threatened and rare, to our most common.

A species breakdown of the total number of confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents recorded in the four UK countries (2015–2024).

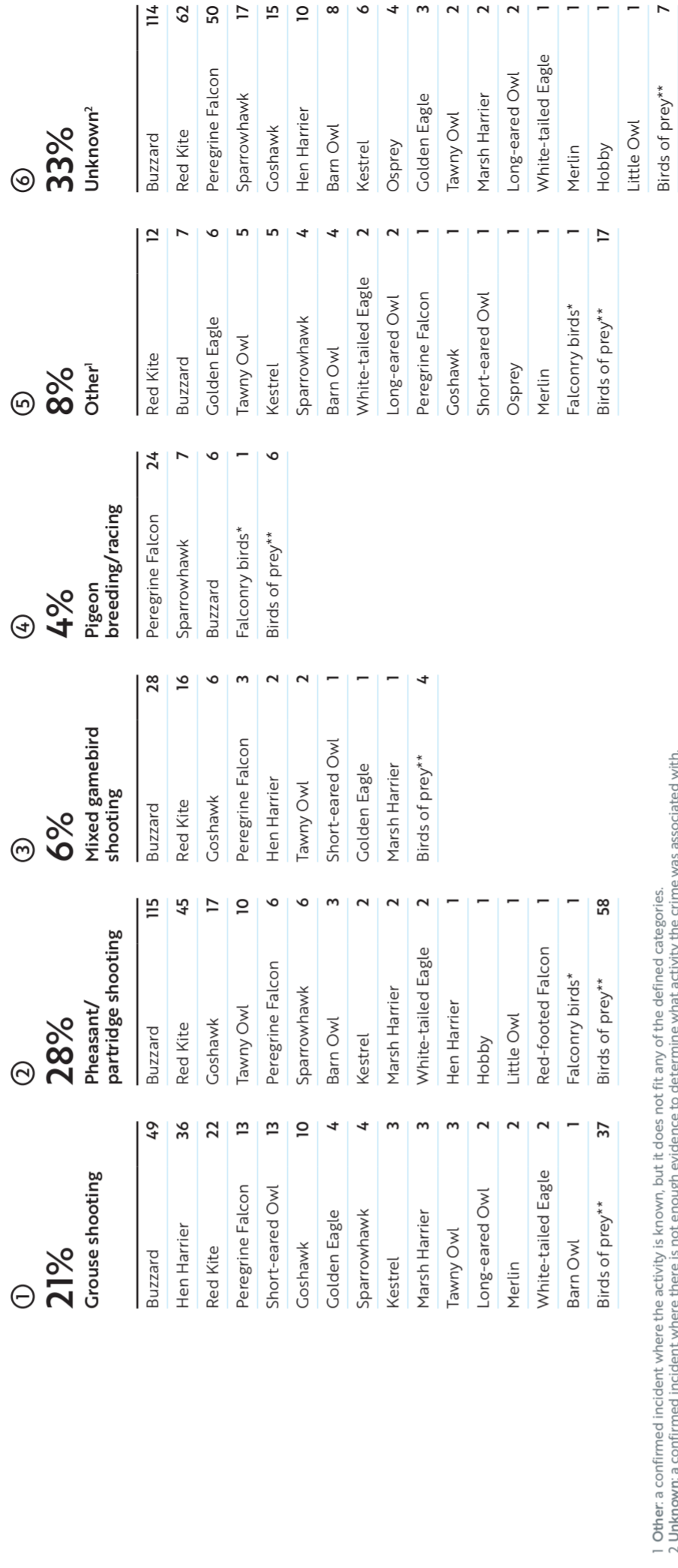


Note: In addition to these figures, a confirmed persecution incident involving a Peregrine Falcon was recorded in the UK but could not be assigned a specific country due to a lack of information.

Activities associated with bird of prey persecution

The illegal persecution of birds of prey can often be linked to recognised activities. 55% of all confirmed incidents recorded between 2015 and 2024 were linked to gamebird shooting (including grouse, pheasant and partridge shooting) and 4% to pigeon breeding and/or racing.

Confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents categorised by likely persecution groups (2015–2024).



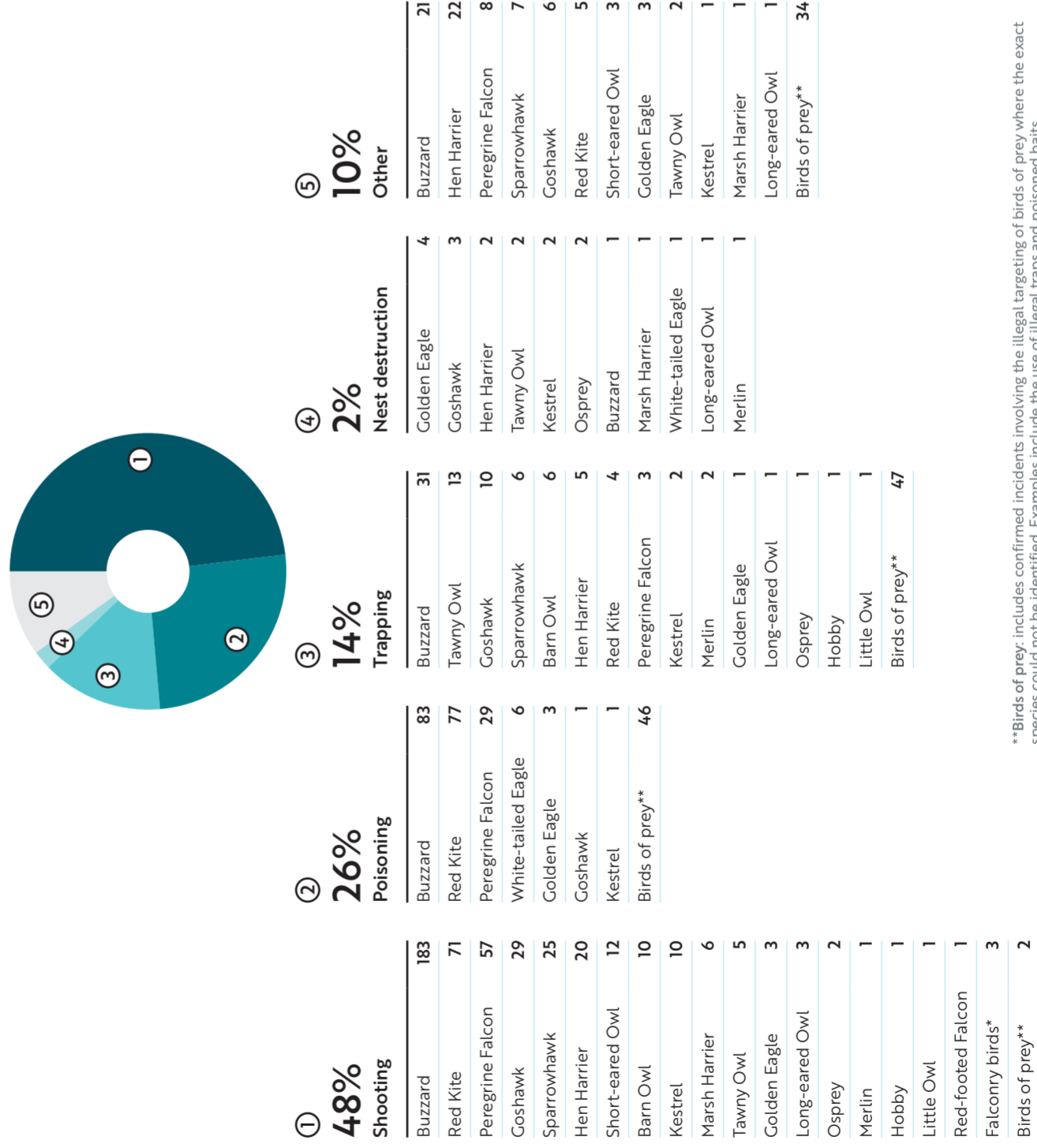
¹ Other: a confirmed incident where the activity is known, but it does not fit any of the defined categories.
² Unknown: a confirmed incident where there is not enough evidence to determine what activity the crime was associated with.

Persecution methods

In recent years, the most common method of bird of prey persecution has been shooting, usually with a shotgun. Trapping is another major threat, involving the abuse of lawful traps and the use of illegal traps, including pole traps. Birds caught in these traps often suffer slow and painful deaths.

Poisoning remains one of the most brutal methods of persecution, with many poisoning incidents involving the illegal use of poison baits. In these cases, offenders will leave carcasses with highly toxic, often banned pesticides. These are left out in the open where they are more likely to be discovered by scavenging species. Although this indiscriminate method of killing birds of prey has been illegal in the UK for more than a century, it still continues, putting not only birds of prey at serious risk, but also other wildlife, pets and even people.

Confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents by offence type (2015–2024).

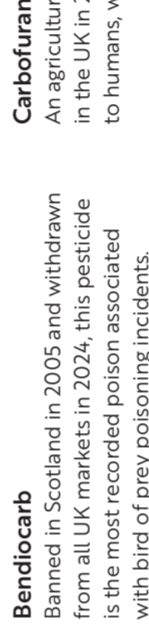
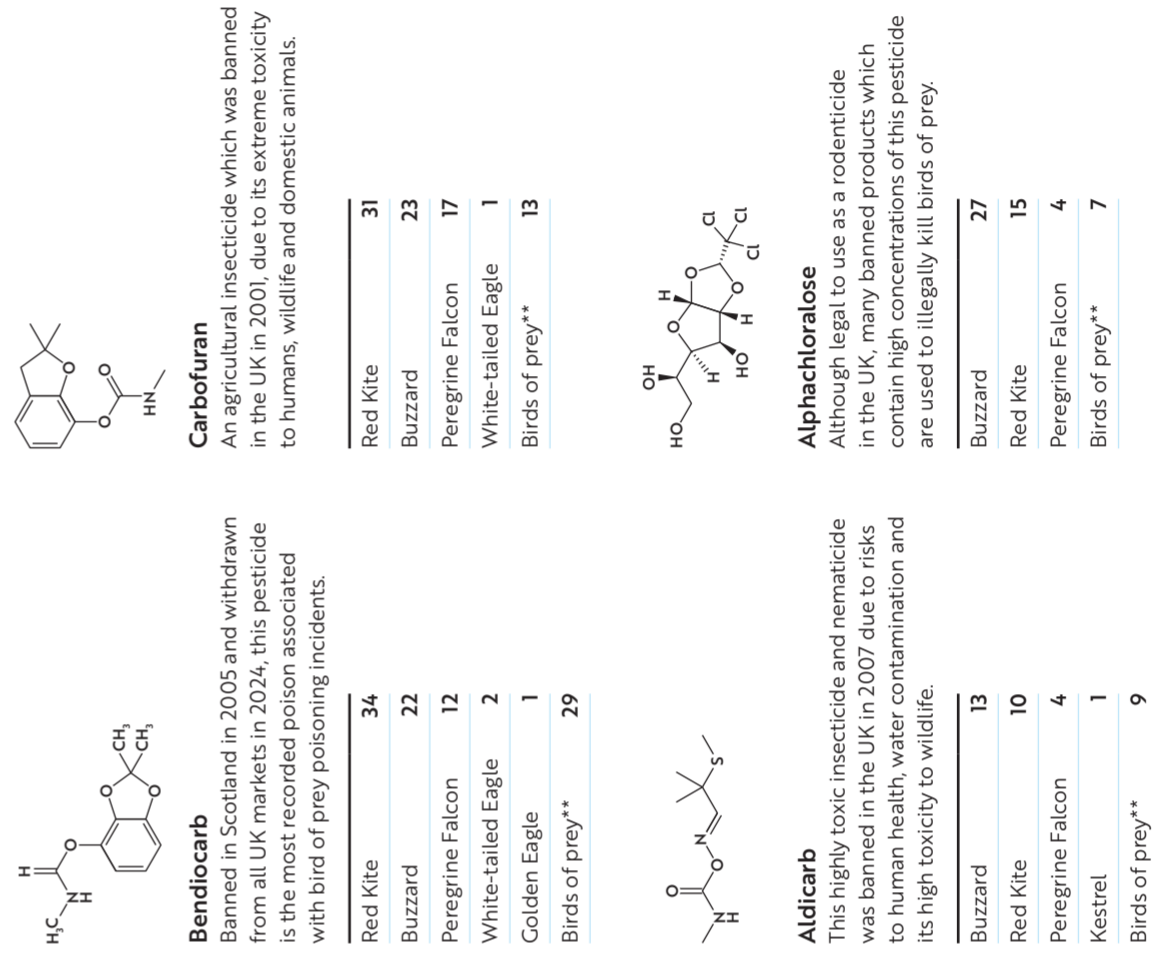


**Birds of prey: includes confirmed incidents involving the illegal targeting of birds of prey where the exact species could not be identified. Examples include the use of illegal traps and poisoned baits.

Poisons

Banned and legal pesticides are often used to kill birds of prey, often by lacing gamebird, pigeon or rabbit carcasses with high concentrations of these toxic chemicals and leaving them out as bait. Such poisons can kill birds of prey within minutes of ingestion or exposure.

Total number of confirmed bird of prey poisoning incidents by species affected and the four most frequently detected poison types (2015–2024).



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Learn more

To read the full *Patterns of persecution* report scan the QR code or visit:

rspb.org.uk/patterns

To learn more about bird of prey persecution in the UK, visit:

rspb.org.uk/crime

How you can help

Help us stop wildlife crime

The RSPB Investigations team works across the UK to protect birds of prey and bring offenders to justice. Your support makes this vital work possible. Discover how you can support the team's work at: rspb.org.uk/donate/help-us-stop-the-killing

Seen something? Say something

Many bird of prey persecution cases that result in a successful conviction are reported to us by members of the public. If you spot suspicious activity involving a bird of prey, reporting it quickly can make a huge difference.

Find out more about what to report, and how, at: rspb.org.uk/report-crimes

To make an anonymous report, call the RSPB's confidential

Raptor Crime Hotline on: **0300 999 0101**

Disclaimer: The data in this report were accurate as of 1 December 2025, but are constantly being updated and may be subject to change. Additional incidents or details may be added retrospectively, pending the release of information from statutory agencies or other sources.

