

Raptor persecution threatens us all



CHRISTOPHER GRAFFIUS, BASC director of communications, on why killing birds of prey *must* stop...

Raptor persecution is the most common criticism of shooting. It was mentioned on numerous occasions during the recent party political conferences, by all parties. This is doing the sport real damage.

I've shot for years and never seen a raptor persecuted. I've met many BASC members who would be appalled at the illegal killing of a protected species. I'm aware that our enemies can exaggerate, but I can't dismiss the Environmental Audit Committee of the House of Commons who recorded in 2012 that of "152 people convicted of offences against all birds of prey under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 since 1990, some 70 per cent were gamekeepers employed on shooting estates."

I know it's not all keepers, but the figures of those caught and convicted must be the tip of the iceberg and in 2017 the cases continue: a buzzard and a red kite in Yorkshire, a peregrine in Cambridgeshire, a buzzard in Hertfordshire, a peregrine in Lancashire, a red kite in Northern Ireland, a peregrine in Suffolk and a short-eared owl in Scotland. Those are some of the confirmed cases of shooting in the space of three months from July.

There is no excuse for illegally killing a bird of prey

Any BASC member convicted of killing a raptor is expelled from the Association. The other shooting organisations do much the same. As the Countryside Alliance (CA) says of persecution: "The time has come for it to be consigned to history.

There is no excuse for illegally killing a bird of prey." BASC and the CA are members of the

Partnership Against Wildlife Crime but our participation and the regular condemnation from all the shooting organisations are not enough to prevent the damage. BASC is working with all the shooting organisations to stop the illegal killing but to end this stupidity requires action by everyone who shoots.

All of us need to realise that the killing of raptors is doing us no favours. It risks terminal damage to the sport we love. Shooting famously claims to be self-regulating. We have to make this a reality for raptor persecution or those who are no friends to shooting will step in and do it for

us. We won't like their solutions, from banning grouse shooting to licensing all shoots or ending rearing and release.

Of course raptors take game birds; studies have shown that fewer than five per cent of pheasant poults were taken by raptors before the start of the season. The siting of pens and other management measures can reduce that loss. To kill raptors illegally for that five per cent is a fool's bargain, if it means the end of shooting and the benefits it brings to the environment and economy.

“We must make clear that wildlife crime has no place in our community”

It's our responsibility

In the uplands we have the hen harrier recovery programme, which is trialing measures such as diversionary feeding and brood management. In recent cases, licences have been issued to deal with problem buzzards causing particular damage. There are legal and ongoing measures to tackle raptor predation properly. This has to be a better way than crime. This should matter to everyone who shoots, and particularly the keepers, shooting tenants and landowners who rely on their living from the sport. If the killing doesn't stop, their jobs and the income they earn from shooting is at risk.

Peer pressure is a powerful force in shooting. The clearest example is our safety record. We make sure that our shoots are safe and anyone who breaks the rules is hauled up immediately. We have to do the same to stop the few criminals among us wrecking shooting for the majority. We must make it clear that wildlife crime has no place in our community.

STAY UP TO DATE

For any information on shooting and conservation, the BASC website should be your first point of reference. Please go to www.basc.org.uk

IMAGE BY LAURIE CAMPBELL

