



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Richard Fuller MP
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Dear Richard,

Thank you for your email of 18 August to the Rt Hon the Lord Goldsmith on behalf of your constituents about the illegal killing of hen harriers. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and apologise for the delay in doing so. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

Wildlife crime is a priority for the Government; consequently Defra and the Home Office have committed £300,000 a year to fund the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) until 2020/21. The NWCU helps prevent and detect wildlife crime by obtaining and disseminating intelligence and undertaking analysis which highlights local or national threats, and directly assisting law enforcers in their investigations. Decisions on the future funding of the NWCU will be taken as part of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There are strong penalties in place for offences committed against birds of prey and other wildlife, with significant sanctions available to judges to hand down to those convicted of wildlife crimes. Most wildlife crimes carry up to an unlimited fine and/or a six-month custodial sentence and there are no plans to review or amend these penalties. It is important to remember that the enforcement of all offences, including wildlife offences, is an operational matter for the police. The police monitor and gather intelligence on online activity relating to crimes against birds and other wildlife to inform their investigations.

To address concerns about illegal killing of birds of prey, senior Government and enforcement officers have identified raptor persecution as a national wildlife crime priority. Priority areas are those which are assessed as posing the greatest current threat to either the conservation status of a species or which show the highest volume of crime and therefore they are assessed as requiring an immediate UK-wide tactical response. Each priority area has an implementation plan with plan owners and leads identified for the prevention of crimes and enforcement.

Defra sits on the police-led Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group, which takes forward activities to raise awareness and facilitate intelligence and incident reporting, leading to increased prevention and enforcement activity. The group focuses on the golden eagle, goshawk, hen harrier, peregrine, red kite and white-tailed eagle. The Government also supports Operation OWL, which is led by police forces across England and Wales and aims to raise awareness of raptor persecution amongst the wider public and police officers.

We are committed to securing the long-term future of the hen harrier as a breeding bird in England and this year Natural England has recorded the best year for hen harrier breeding in England since its hen harrier recovery project was established in 2002. The Hen Harrier Action Plan sets out what will be done to increase hen harrier populations in England, including measures to address illegal persecution. The long-term plan was published in January 2016 and we believe that it remains the best way to safeguard the hen harrier in England. A copy of the plan is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/increasing-hen-harrier-populations-in-england-action-plan>

Thank you once again for taking the time to write about this important issue.



REBECCA POW MP