



media release

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South West not a good place to be a bird Bird crimes increase across the region and Devon is top of league of shame

Bird crimes against species other than birds of prey have almost doubled in South West England since last year.

The figures come from the RSPB's annual 'Birdcrime' report, which shows that although numbers of incidents affecting raptors in the region have dropped slightly, gulls, swallows and swans are increasingly suffering at the hands of criminals.

In Devon, Cornwall and Gloucestershire, non bird of prey incidents had more than doubled since 2006 and gulls seem to be hardest hit.

The RSPB's Sophie Atherton said: "We understand that gulls' behaviour and habits can be annoying to some people, but that is absolutely no excuse for the sort of violent acts that have been committed against these birds."

"Gulls are legally protected and it is a crime to wantonly kill or injure them. It is also incredibly cruel."

There have been numerous reports of gulls being shot, but also some incidents of them being kicked or beaten to death — but they aren't the only victims. Even garden birds like pied wagtails, blackbirds and blue tits have been hit.

Ms Atherton added: "The statistics and details that have come to light through this report are shocking and disgusting. The only glimmer of hope is the knowledge that there are many more people out there that love wildlife than the minority that are prepared to destroy it through criminal acts."

Nationally, the number of crimes committed against birds of prey has reached an all time high in 2007, increasing by a massive 40 per cent on the previous year. Reports of crimes against all wild birds were at record levels for a second year in a row, with 1,208 separate incidents reported to the RSPB's investigations department in 2007.

As a result, the RSPB is urging the Government to make tackling the illegal persecution of birds of prey and other wildlife a higher priority for the UK's police forces.

Ian West, Head of investigations at the RSPB, said: "It is hard to say whether the problem is increasing or whether we are just getting to hear about more of the offences that are taking place."

“What is clear is that very large numbers of birds are being illegally killed every year and that is totally unacceptable in a civilised society. There has to be a greater effort to enforce the law.”

He urged the Home Office to make it clear to police forces that wildlife crime needed to be given a higher priority.

The RSPB is also asking members of the public who care about our birds of prey to pledge their support for an end to illegal killing at: www.rspb.org.uk/birdsofprey

ENDS

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Editor's notes

1. Regional breakdown of Southwest England incidents reported in 2007

<i>County</i>	Bird of prey incidents	Non bird of prey incidents	Total
Bristol City	0	5	5
Cornwall	5	11	16
Devon	6	35	41
Dorset	3	5	8
Gloucestershire	5	17	22
North Somerset	0	1	1
Somerset	2	7	9
Torbay	0	1	1
Wiltshire	4	3	7
Total	25	85	110

2. Regional breakdown of Southwest England incidents reported previous year (2006)

<i>County</i>	Bird of prey incidents	Non bird of prey incidents	Total
AVON	1	3	4
CORNWALL	3	5	8
CHANNEL ISLANDS	0	1	1
DEVON	10	16	26
DORSET	5	10	15
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	4	8	12
SOMERSET	3	5	8
WILTSHIRE	5	4	9
Total	27	44	71

3. Examples of incidents in some South West counties (NB: the RSPB's database of Birdcrime makes a distinction between 'confirmed' and 'unconfirmed' incidents, but logs both types):-

- Devon: A number of suspected shootings of buzzards and sparrowhawks, three herons found shot near Dulverton, a house martin nest destroyed in Barnstaple, a man seen shooting a dunlin (small wading bird) on the River Taw, a gull being beaten to death with a stick, others shot with air weapons and another had its nest destroyed.
- Cornwall: Buzzards shot and poisoned, a pied wagtail being shot, a gull kicked to death and a number of other gulls shot with air weapons.
- Gloucestershire: Non bird of prey incidents include swans being shot. A buzzard was also poisoned.
- Dorset: Numbers of bird crimes in Dorset have dropped since last year, but pigeons, house Martins and gulls were among the non bird of prey incidents and it is believed a peregrine nest was destroyed at a site near Poole.
- Somerset: Non bird of prey incidents include the shooting of a heron. A buzzard was also killed.
- Wiltshire: Numbers of bird crimes in Wiltshire have dropped since last year, but incidents include the suspected destruction of a sand martin colony and buzzards and a kestrel being shot.

4. The RSPB's Birdcrime 2007 report reveals that the conservation charity received 262 reports of incidents of illegal shooting, trapping and nest destruction of birds of prey during the course of last year. There were 185 reports in 2006, a figure which prompted the Society to launch a campaign calling for an end to the illegal killing of birds of prey.

5. Part of the reason for the dramatic rise in reported crimes may be due to improved sharing of data between the RSPB, the police, RSPCA and the newly-formed National Wildlife Crime Unit. Despite this, the RSPB believes the true figure is much higher still, with many crimes taking place in remote areas where they remain undetected and unreported.

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