



MEDIA RELEASE

Operation Owl launched

Operation Owl is a national campaign currently operating in 25 police forces in which the public are being asked to help tackle the unlawful persecution of birds of prey (be it by shooting, trapping or poisoning) and report incidents to their local Police force.

Operation Owl is now underway in the Northumbria Police Force area and two successful launch events were held recently at Kielder Waterside and Haggerston where representatives from Northumbria Police, the RSPB and Friends of Red Kites were present and engaged with members of the general public to show support for, and take action as part of, Operation Owl.



<< Image of PC Lee Davison, Blanaid Denman (RSPB) and Allan Withrington (FoRK) at Kielder Waterside >>

Local Wildlife Officer PC Lee Davison, from Northumbria Police, said: “We need to educate people about the risks and consequences of killing birds of prey. It is a criminal offence and the public can help us root out those responsible by sharing information or reporting crimes.

“Birds like peregrines, red kites and hen harriers are deliberately shot, trapped and poisoned in our countryside. The more information available to law enforcement through reporting, the greater chance we have of prosecuting offenders.

<<More>>

For further information please contact Harold Dobson (Media Relations) on mobile: 07801 907832 or email: hfdobson@btinternet.com

“If you notice anything suspicious, like a dead or injured bird of prey or a trap then call officers immediately. Be sure to take photos where possible and remember not to interfere with what could be a potential crime scene.

“Together we can help put an end to the illegal killing of birds of prey.”

As mentioned above, one of the affected raptor species is the Red Kite. The funded Northern Kites Project was responsible for the re-introduction of 94 young red kites in Gateshead’s Lower Derwent Valley between 2004 and 2009. [In 2006 red kites began to breed in the region for the first time after an absence of over 170 years.] The volunteer group the “Friends of Red Kites” (FoRK) is the successor to the original project.

Fifteen years later, the red kites are faring well in the core area but threats, like persecution, are preventing them from expanding their range. As mainly scavengers, the red kites are no risk to anyone/anything. However, since 2010, seven red kites have been found poisoned or shot near the Derwent Gorge and surrounding Durham Moorland. Sadly, there will have been many more undetected casualties.

Like all raptors, red kites are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which makes it an offence to deliberately kill or injure a wild bird. Those found to have done so could be given an unlimited fine and/or a prison sentence of upto six months.

In summary, Operation Owl is for the public to:

- R**ecognise trapped or dead birds of prey
- R**ecord the bird by photograph and its date/time/location
- R**eport the finding to the Police [if the crime is still taking place then ring 999. If not then ring 101]

For more information about Operation Owl visit the website: www.operationowl.com

ENDS

The Friends of Red Kites (**FoRK**) is a constituted, membership-based, community organisation which was formed by volunteers in 2009 to encourage an active interest in the conservation of the red kite population in Gateshead’s Lower Derwent Valley and to continue to monitor their health & welfare.

For more information see our website: www.friendsofredkites.org.uk

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