



Packham heads crusade to halt shooting of birds of prey

NEWS RELEASE 22 April 2010

Television wildlife presenter Chris Packham, as the new President of the Hawk and Owl Trust, is calling for a complete end to the shooting of birds of prey. He is spearheading the Trust's crusade to stop persecution of these magnificent creatures so that they can achieve their full potential.

"The Hawk and Owl Trust feels that it is completely unacceptable for any bird of prey to be killed – and should remain absolutely illegal. It is time for all who want to make Britain a better place for birds of prey to take a firm stand," said Chris. "We want to see the bad old days, when land managers tended to reach for the shotgun first, consigned to the past.

"Yes, birds of prey are predators – but predation is both natural and essential for life. It drives evolution through natural selection and improves the genetic stock – the fitness – of both predator and prey species."

As Hawk and Owl Trust President Chris succeeds actor Liza Goddard, who has just headed a highly successful 40th anniversary appeal for the wildlife charity as the culmination of nine years in the role. "She has been a tremendous, active advocate for the Trust and we are extremely grateful for all she has done," said Chairman Barbara Handley.

The Hawk and Owl Trust is a national charity working to conserve wild birds of prey and their habitats. Chris has supported it since his youth when he and fellow members helped to warden the UK's remnant population of red kites, which were just hanging on in mid Wales. More recently he has given up his time to help the Trust in a number of ways, including launching its Adopt a Box scheme in 1992.

Chris said: "Birds of prey are protected by law and there's a very good reason for that. They are a crucial part of our natural environment – in fact, key indicators of its health – but are only just recovering from centuries of persecution, habitat loss and, in the 20th century, drastic pollution from now-banned pesticides. Numbers are still way below what they were before the gung-ho persecution of the 19th century when birds of prey, seen as a threat to game, were poisoned, trapped or shot. Egg collectors and taxidermists also helped to push many species towards extinction.

"Unfortunately, the RSPB's latest Birdcrime figures include 210 reports of shooting and destruction of birds of prey in one year. That's 210 too many – and those are only the incidents that are actually reported!"

The Trust's firm stand against persecution – of any kind – reflects its commitment to helping bird of prey populations reach their full potential. Through its education centres and community projects, it is helping young and old to appreciate the importance of birds of prey. By supporting practical research it is increasing knowledge and understanding of them. Within the limits of its resources, it is backing with expert advice and practical conservation action anyone who wants to help them by reversing the great loss of habitat.

"We have a great track record of working on our own reserves and with others across the UK to create and manage vital habitat for birds of prey and the whole web of life on which they depend," explained Chris.

"In the case of the barn owl, the Trust's work with farmers and other land managers to improve habitat and provide nest sites has demonstrated conclusively the effectiveness of this approach.

"Similarly, the Trust is proving highly successful in creating habitat for marsh harriers on its own Sculthorpe Moor Reserve in North Norfolk, in restoring land for hobbies and buzzards on its Shapwick Moor Reserve on the Somerset Levels, and in managing Fylingdales Moor conservation area in North Yorkshire for merlin, short-eared owl and harriers.

"The Hawk and Owl Trust is keen to support the rural economy and if people feel that birds of prey have an economic impact we will work with them to secure a solution.

"But there is no excuse for shooting birds of prey, poisoning them or crushing their eggs – these are all 19th century reactions. There are other solutions today. Whether the problem is real or merely perceived, the last thing anyone should do is reach for a gun. Killing birds of prey is completely unacceptable under any circumstances. Where populations of other species are declining we need to identify the cause and not blindly blame birds of prey when farmland and songbird numbers, for example, are down primarily because of habitat loss."

- ENDS -

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Founded in 1969 to help save the peregrine, the Hawk and Owl Trust is a national charity which now works for the conservation and appreciation of all wild birds of prey and their habitats – both in our nature reserves and in partnership with others. Working with other organisations, farmers, foresters and landowners, the Trust researches, restores and manages nesting, roosting and feeding habitats and encourages greater understanding and appreciation of these very special birds. www.hawkandowl.org

- The Hawk and Owl Trust wants to see birds of prey reaching their full potential as a vital and beautiful part of the UK environment.
- The Hawk and Owl Trust will support anyone – landowners, farmers, householders – wanting to improve habitat and nesting places for birds of prey, through expert advice and practical action, as far as our resources allow.
- The Hawk and Owl Trust wants to see birds of prey universally recognised, as top of the natural food chain, for their vital role as indicators of the health of the environment we all share.
- The Hawk and Owl Trust will share the beauty of birds of prey, and help people understand and appreciate them through its education service, its reserves, outreach to landowners and community projects.
- The Hawk and Owl Trust deplores illegal persecution of birds of prey and sees its complete cessation as an urgent priority for all in the countryside.
- The Hawk and Owl Trust calls for any alternative to be sought to lethal control where humans come into conflict with birds of prey.

President Chris Packham

Chairman of Trustees Barbara Handley

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