

BirdWatch Ireland condemns call for an 'open season' on Hen Harriers

Title

BirdWatch Ireland (BirdLife in Ireland) has recently condemned comments made by Limerick County Council Chairman John Sheahan urging the removal of protection for Hen Harriers, as reported in the [Limerick Leader on 20th July 2013](#). Chm. Sheahan called for an "open season" on the Hen Harrier, one of Ireland's most threatened birds of prey, unless changes are made to the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA's) for this species in the country. Alan Lauder, Chief Executive of BirdWatch Ireland, commented *"The Hen Harrier is protected under both Irish and European Union law, and Chm. Sheahan's statement could be viewed as an incitement to break these laws. BirdWatch Ireland would call on Chm. Sheahan to consider his position and to decide if he really is the best person to chair Limerick County Council or to act as an advisor to the Environmental Protection Agency and to represent the environmental interests of his country at EU level"*. He concluded *"Protecting the Hen Harrier and the environment in which it lives also protects the long-term viability of farming, not to mention Ireland's tattered international reputation when it comes to the environment?". "Being top-level predators, large birds of prey, such as the Hen Harrier are excellent barometers for the overall state of our environment and a precious part of our natural heritage"*, noted also John Lusby, BirdWatch Ireland's Raptor Conservation Officer. The Irish State already has a dismal record on the protection of its nation's natural heritage; actually, [Ireland has been prosecuted before the European Court of Justice](#) specifically for its failure to properly protect [Special Protected Areas](#), leaving the Irish taxpayer facing the prospect of hefty fines. The Hen Harrier is among the species most seriously affected by illegal poisoning, as it is stated in the [2011 Bird of Prey Poison and Persecution Report](#). This scheme, operated by the Irish government bodies and with input from BirdWatch Ireland and the Golden Eagle Trust, aims to monitor the impacts and prevalence of poisoning and other forms of persecution which affect Irish raptors, and is also designed to collect evidence to support prosecutions for these illegal acts. For more information: please contact [Niall Hatch](#), Development Officer at BirdWatch Ireland.
