



**Buzzard** Photo - Brian Carruthers

# Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use Ireland (CRRU Ireland)

To protect wildlife while promoting and providing effective rodent control through the responsible use of rodenticides.



The largest type of land-use in Ireland is farmland. The methods of managing farmland impact on our wildlife and wildlife habitats. Healthy environments have a rich variety of habitats that support and maintain biodiversity. The presence of predators which are at the top of the food chain indicates a healthy ecosystem. Predators play an essential role in maintaining biodiversity and balance in nature. Birds of prey and owls are top predators, as are mammals such as Pine Marten and Stoat. Rats and mice form a major part of the diet of these predatory species.

Effective control of rodents is an essential part of farming and food hygiene, as rats and mice can spread human and animal disease, contaminate food stuffs and cause damage to property. Rat poisons, also known as rodenticides, are the most common means of achieving rodent control. However, these compounds are highly toxic and are persistent in the environment. Rodenticides can affect a wide range of non-target wildlife. Rodent predators can be exposed to rodenticides by feeding on rodents that have died as a result of poisoning or by catching and feeding on live rodents which have these toxins in their systems. Recent studies, in Ireland, have shown that Barn Owls and Red Kites have evidence of rodenticides in their bodies, likely acquired through consumption of prey. The contamination of such species has been confirmed through post-mortem examination of carcasses collected as part of ongoing statutory monitoring and is a matter of serious concern. Although species which feed on rodents are considered to be the most vulnerable to secondary poisoning from rodenticides, other species can also be contaminated indicating that these toxins are entering food chains through other routes.

The **Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use Ireland (CRRU Ireland)** was formed at the behest of the regulatory authorities, to champion the protection of wildlife while promoting responsible and effective rodent pest management. It is a registered company limited by guarantee and formed by companies that manufacture and distribute rodenticides in Ireland.

CRRU advocates the responsible use of rodenticides to control rodent pest species in the interest of protecting human and animal health and avoiding contamination of food. Its prime objective is to minimise negative impacts on wildlife. CRRU has drawn up a 7-point **CRRU Code**, for use by rodent pest management professionals, that is designed to minimise risks arising for wildlife:-



- **Always have a planned approach to rodent removal.**
- **Always record the quantity of bait used and where it is placed.**
- **Always use enough baiting points**
- **Always collect and dispose of rodent bodies**
- **Never leave bait exposed to non-target animals and birds**
- **Never fail to inspect bait regularly**
- **Never leave bait down at the end of treatment**

The CRRU Code is promoted by means of the **CRRU Ireland Supporters' Club** for rodent pest management companies and organizations that commit to abide by the CRRU code. Application for membership can be made via the CRRU website ([www.thinkwildlife.org](http://www.thinkwildlife.org)). Membership is free but applicants are required to abide by a licence agreement to facilitate their use of the 'Think Wildlife' logo. Member companies and organisations are listed on the CRRU website.

The following are some of the species of birds of prey and owls that can be exposed to rodenticides by feeding on rodents that have been poisoned:-

## Barn Owl (Scréachóg reilige)



Photo - Richard Mills

Barn Owls are scarce in Ireland – their population is thought to have declined by over 50% in the last 25 years although they are still present in every county. They nest in derelict buildings, ruined castles as well as farm buildings. They are efficient and silent killers of rats and other rodents and a pair can take up to 25 rodents in a single night during the breeding season. Barn Owls will only catch live rodents, but traces of rodenticides in live prey eaten can accumulate in Barn Owls. For information on how to encourage Barn Owls on to your land and conservation advice: visit [www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

## Long - eared Owl (Ceann cait)



Photo - Breffni Martin

Although rarely seen, this is the most common owl in Ireland. It is more often heard, particularly when there are young which call throughout the night during the nesting season. Their call has been described as being like a squeaky gate. The 'ear tufts' from which their name derives are distinctive, as are their orange eyes. They nest in disused nests of the hooded (grey) crow or magpie in shelter belts, forests, hedgerows or isolated trees and hunt the surrounding countryside for mice, rats, shrews and, where available, bank voles. Like Barn Owls, they are vulnerable to secondary poisoning with rodenticides.

## Red Kite (Préachán ceirteach)



Photo - Tony Cross

Red Kites were widespread until the end of the 18th century. Easily recognisable due to their striking red colouration and the distinctive forked tail when seen in flight, they are magnificent fliers capable of acrobatic flight and of soaring for long periods. They were re-introduced into Ireland from Wales between 2007 and 2011 when 160 young Kites were released between Co. Wicklow and Co. Dublin and have been breeding since 2009. There were 80 Kites also reintroduced into Co. Down between 2008 and 2010. They feed mostly on small mammals, rabbits and crows, and also on carrion including dead rats. Several Kite carcasses have tested positive for rodenticides since their reintroduction. For more information see [www.goldeneagle.ie](http://www.goldeneagle.ie)

## Kestrel (Pocaire gaoithe)



Photo - Clive Timmons

The Kestrel is one of our most common birds of prey. It has a very distinctive hunting method. It hovers in mid-air, hanging almost motionless, scanning the ground beneath for prey. It mainly takes small mammals - rats, mice and shrews as well as frogs, lizards and small birds. It occupies a wide range of farmland habitats. It nests in trees, buildings, quarries and coastal cliffs. Recent survey work has shown a decline in the Irish Kestrel population. Although the extent of secondary poisoning of Kestrels in Ireland is not known, research in the UK has confirmed that the majority of the Kestrel population there is exposed.

## Buzzard (Clamhán)



Photo - Shay Connolly

Buzzards are present throughout Ireland and can be observed soaring over rich farmland in lowland areas, particularly in parts of the east and south. They are a medium sized bird of prey with broad wings and a compact body. Buzzards became extinct in Ireland in the early part of the 20th century but re-colonised naturally in the 1970's. They hunt small mammals such as rats and mice and also take rabbits as well as young rooks, magpies and hooded crows. They also take carrion, putting them at risk of feeding on rodents that have died as a result of rodenticide use.

Research in the UK has found that a proportion of the Peregrine and Sparrowhawk populations may also be exposed to rodenticides. These are two species of raptor which may occur on farmland, but which feed almost exclusively on small birds.

There are a number of other predatory species which can be exposed to secondary rodenticide poisoning, including Otters, Foxes, Stoats, Pine Martens (image opposite), Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers.

The responsible use of rodenticides requires implementation of an **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** approach to rodent pest control together with adherence to the **CRRU Code**, an approach essential for effective long term management of rodents. Rodent control, either by the use of traps, biological means (cats or dogs) or rodenticide bait, will not prove effective unless other measures are also taken. Important measures in an integrated approach are:

- **Rodent proofing, to deny rodents access to sensitive areas**
- **Habitat modification, to deny rodents food, water & shelter**
- **Rodent killing, to remove rodents in existing infestations**

In the interest of promoting the responsible use of rodenticides by professional pest control officers, a 'Wildlife Aware' Training Course has been prepared by CRRU-IASIS and is offered twice yearly at each of three locations by accredited 'Wildlife Aware' course providers. Details of dates and locations can be found on both the CRRU ([www.thinkwildlife.org](http://www.thinkwildlife.org)) and IASIS ([www.iasis.ie](http://www.iasis.ie)) websites. Persons that complete the course and pass the examination, are on application made, accredited by IASIS as CRRU-IASIS 'Wildlife Aware' Technicians and are entitled to use the CRRU/IASIS Wildlife Aware logo. A continuous Professional Education (CPE) programme must be completed in subsequent years to maintain accreditation.

The Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (G.L.A.S.) introduced in the context of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 specifies that participants should comply with the CRRU Code in their daily farming activities.

The Teagasc Advisory Service recommends that farmers follow the CRRU Code to ensure that the threat of secondary exposure to wildlife associated with rodent control measures is minimised.

Further information can be obtained from the website [www.thinkwildlife.org](http://www.thinkwildlife.org)



Photo - Noel Marry



IRISH AGRICULTURAL SUPPLY INDUSTRY STANDARDS



Chairman of CRRU Ireland is Dr Mark R Lynch and Communications Officer is Eanna Ni Lamhna.

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