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One of only two Irish-bred white-tailed eagles shot and killed

Minister decries shooting as shocking crime as gardaí and NPWS investigate

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[Eoin Burke-Kennedy](#)



The incident represents a serious blow to the country's eagle reintroduction programme which has already been blighted by a series of poisoning incidents.

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One of the only two Irish-bred white-tailed eagles has been shot and killed in what Minister for Arts, [Heritage and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan](#) has described as a "shocking crime".

The bird was found in a remote part of Co [Tipperary](#) with 40-50 shotgun pellets in its body.

The incident represents a serious blow to the country's eagle reintroduction programme which has already been blighted by a series of poisoning incidents.

The male bird was reared by a nesting pair of eagles on Lough Derg near [Mountshannon](#), Co Clare, and successfully flew from the nest in July last year along with its sibling.

This was the first time in over 100 years that white-tailed eagles had hatched and fledged in [Ireland](#).

After a few months of care by their parents, both juvenile eagles began to disperse more widely and become more independent.

The last confirmed sighting of one of the birds was near [Dromineer](#), Co Tipperary, on the east shore of Lough Derg in January.

After a tip-off from a member of the public and a subsequent search of lands near the north-eastern shore of Lough Derg by an officer from the [Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's National Parks & Wildlife Service \(NPWS\)](#) and the reintroduction project team, the dead bird was found near [Ballinderry](#), North Tipperary.

A postmortem examination by pathologists at the Regional Veterinary Laboratory in [Limerick](#) revealed the bird had been shot. An X-ray showed there were between 40 and 50 pellets lodged in the bird's body.

The impact of the shooting broke one of its legs and wings but the bird is believed to have survived several weeks after the shooting before dying.

The horrific nature of the bird's shooting and ultimate death has shocked locals and those involved in the reintroduction project.

Separate investigations by the gardaí and the NPWS have been launched into the shooting.

"I am shocked by this crime. The birth of this bird was a special day for nature conservation in Ireland," Mr Deenihan said. "So much work has gone into reintroducing this species here, and there has been wonderful cooperation by many different groups to achieve successful breeding. To have all this undone is a significant blow.

"Eagles are protected by law. I would urge anyone with information to contact An Garda Síochána or my department's staff in the area."

Local NPWS district conservation officer [Stefan Jones](#) said the available evidence indicated that this offence resulted in an especially drawn out and horrific death for this bird.

"This bird would have been unable to fish and forage as normal, and it appears that it slowly starved to death as a result. Bearing in mind the broken limbs and the fact that it had approximately 50 shotgun pellets in it, it is amazing it managed to survive for such a period."

Reintroduction project manager Dr [Allan Mee](#) said: "Finding one of the first two young white-tailed eagles to fly from a nest in Ireland shot dead is heart-breaking.

"It is absolutely incomprehensible that someone would shoot one of these magnificent birds but even more shocking is that one of the first two Irish-bred eagles has been shot only seven months after leaving the nest."

White-tailed eagles reach maturity and begin breeding at about four or five years of age. The goal of re-establishing a viable population of the species depends on young Irish-bred eagle surviving and breeding themselves into the future.

“Although all losses impact the project, for me the loss of this male, the first Irish-bred white-tailed eagle of the reintroduction programme, is especially difficult to take,” said Dr Mee.

“This bird and its sibling were the hope for the future of the species in Ireland. Many people spent months closely watching this bird’s progress until it flew from the nest near Mountshannon last year. I feel gutted for these people as well as the bird. Let’s hope its sibling and the other chicks to fly from nests in Ireland in 2014 will see a better fate.”

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