

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

New Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator

I started as the new full-time Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator in June 2014, taking over from Brian Etheridge who has supported the SRMS in a part-time capacity for the last decade. Since completing my PhD in 2007 I have spent the last seven years working for the RSPB in various roles, including three years as a Conservation Officer covering Tayside and Fife between 2009 and 2011 and a recent stint as a Data Manager in Wales. I hope that my passion for raptors, experience of field surveying, and data management skills can all be used to the Scheme's benefit.

Funding confirmed to support the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

The SRMS has secured funding from SNH, BTO, RSPB & FCS for the next two years to take the work of the SRMS forward. A new agreement will be signed in 2014 securing the addition of Forestry Commission Scotland as a partner to the SRMS and updating the original agreement.

2013 Annual Report

I am sorry that the 2013 Annual Report summarising the findings of the 2013 breeding season has not yet appeared through your letter box. This has been my number one priority since being in post. The report is almost ready to send to the printers and we hope to get a copy out to all members by the end of October. I am really grateful to Brian for all he has done to help with the collation of 2013 SRMS data and the advice he has provided during the handover period.



2014 Data collation and reporting

Please submit your 2014 monitoring data to the SRMS via the standard SRMS spreadsheet to: amy.challis@bto.org.

As previously, in order to claim for mileage please ensure that your data are in by 31st October. If data are not received by 31st December then it may not be possible to include them in the next annual report, which we aim to publish in February 2015. Please do take time to check your data before submission and ensure that you complete all fields in the spreadsheet as fully as you can.

The following website can be useful in checking OS grid references electronically: <http://www.getamap.ordnancesurveyleisure.co.uk>

We all make mistakes! So if you ever spot any of your own please do get in touch with me so that I can ensure that the SRMS master dataset is corrected and kept up to date.

2014 Peregrine Survey

The 2014 Peregrine Survey, which many of you contributed to earlier this year, was a great success. It is a credit to the surveyors, and to RSG members in particular, that in most parts of Scotland good coverage of both random squares and known breeding sites was achieved. Data have started coming in, and one RSG region has, impressively, completed all survey returns for both random squares (via electronic and paper forms) and known sites (via the standard SRMS spreadsheet). Mark Wilson and I look forward to receiving the rest of the data over the next month or so, and to letting you all know the results of the survey as soon as we can!

SRMS website

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) has agreed that a more detailed website will be developed to provide more information and bring the results from the SRMS to the attention of possible new volunteers and wider stakeholders.

There are currently misconceptions even among existing contributors about what the SRMS is and who it represents. We hope the development of an independent website for the Scheme will help to more clearly establish the SRMS's identity, and to provide all involved with more information on SRMS activities.

In light of this development, with information being more readily accessible via the web site, it may make sense to change the format of the Annual Report in future.



Online system

For much of the last decade data have been submitted to the SRMS via the standard SRMS spreadsheet. We are looking to make data submission and handling easier and more effective through the development of an online data entry system. The SRMS is capitalising on work that is being undertaken by the BTO to improve ringing and Nest Record Scheme data submission. This will greatly assist in providing the infrastructure that will be required to support entry, collation and storage of SRMS data. We are at the stage of working on a draft specification and hope to have a prototype ready for testing at the end of the 2015 breeding season.

The online system will have lots of benefits for SRMS contributors, and will be fully secure so that data can only be used by Scheme partners. If the prospect of entering data online is less than appealing, please don't panic. The transition to a new system will be a gradual process and training will be available to help users adapt to the new system (see Training below). For those keen to try out the new system, there will be opportunities to get involved in trialling ahead of its launch.

Data sharing protocols

We all know that information on raptors (particularly the locations of nest sites) is sensitive. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that data held by the SRMS is held appropriately to retain the trust of contributors and to safeguard raptor populations. We need to find ways of balancing appropriate safeguard of sensitive information with ensuring that we can maximise the value of SRMS data for conservation purposes to benefit raptor conservation in Scotland.

With this in mind, I will be looking to understand and document the current data flows to and from the SRMS and to understand current challenges to data sharing through discussion with all SRMS partners and stakeholders. The ultimate aim is to develop robust data sharing protocols that address how SRMS data are shared and used. Over the next few months I will be meeting representatives from SNH and FCS to discuss their requirements from SRMS data and in turn information they hold that could be shared further with the SRMS. I will keep you posted on progress and draft protocols for data sharing will go to the SRMG for consultation in due course.

Encouraging more recording of widespread raptors

Over the next two years the SRMS will be developing an "entry-level" raptor recording scheme to get more people involved in raptor monitoring in Scotland. We will be looking for input from existing contributors to help shape this new scheme (see Training below). Our



current thinking is that this will be focussed, at least initially, on more abundant and widespread species (e.g. Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel & owls), some of which are currently very under-recorded. Recording of these species should be designed so that less experienced observers can take part, but will complement more intensive studies already carried out largely by SRSR members. I will circulate more detailed ideas when they are ready.

Training

There is money in the budget for the SRMS to hold training events for existing and new SRMS contributors. The three categories of training the SRMS might support are: (i) training for already experienced raptor workers (e.g. specialist nest finding); (ii) the entry-level recording scheme for new raptor workers discussed above; and (iii) support with data inputting and the new online system. However, I will be looking to set up a Training Working Group with representatives from each RSG to help explore potential training requirements to ensure that the money can be spent to provide maximise benefit to the Scheme. If you are interested in sitting on this Training Working Group then please discuss with your SRSR branch Chair and get in touch with me by the end of October.

Trends reporting

SRMS data have been used to produce provisional trends for many of the raptor species in Scotland and a report on the methodology involved is in press as an SNH report. The emphasis here is on the word provisional! To create robust trends we need to significantly increase our understanding of coverage and how this changes from year to year. In order to do this, we need the help of SRMS observers in collecting the additional information we need. With your help, I will be looking to build on results of the questionnaire survey that many of you kindly responded to a couple of years ago. This will enable provisional trends in the report to be converted to definitive trends for as many species as possible.

Coverage for Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle is close to 100% and fairly well understood so trends for these species will be finalised first. The SRMG have agreed that the next priorities will be Peregrine, Raven, Goshawk and Kestrel, followed by Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle. We will get the finished trends into the annual report and/or onto the new website as they are completed.

Where possible, we would also like to extend trends back to cover the period before 2003 (the first year that the SRMS started collecting data). To this end, I will be working with individuals who are willing to contribute their pre-2003 data to the SRMS.



Current requests for SRMS data

RSPB/SNH National Golden Eagle 2015 survey 2015: SRMS data has been requested by RSPB to assist with planning next year's survey. The SRSG has agreed that the SRMS can provide these data for this purpose.

SPA review: SRMS data has been requested by SNH to inform the current SPA review. The data currently being requested are Merlin data in relation to five SPAs or potential SPAs.

Keeping you up to date

We want to keep you up to date with everything that the SRMS is doing. This is the first newsletter that there has been for a number of years so I would welcome any feedback on content and format and any suggestions of what and how you might hear from the SRMS in the future.

I look forward to meeting many of you at your Autumn meetings and wish you luck with any raptor projects that you may be endeavouring to participate in over the winter.

Best wishes

Amy



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