

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

There is a lot to report on in this issue, not least the publication of our new-look annual report which I am quite excited about. Now that I've got another report under my belt (my third since being in post), there are lots of ongoing developments that I am looking forward to getting my teeth into over the next few months including progressing work on data sharing, working with SRMS contributors to understand coverage and survey effort in their studies (with a view to collaborating to produce and publish trends in breeding numbers and productivity) and also developing *Raptor Patch*.

In this issue we also have some articles from invited contributors including a follow-up article from Gaby Peniche who you may remember appealed for samples in the last issue to assist with her PhD research into raptor health. We also have an update on the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project and also an article updating on international work to help migratory raptors.

If you would be keen to offer an article for a future issue I would love to hear from you. Remember you can sign up to receive future issues of this newsletter direct to your inbox via the following link: <http://raptormonitoring.org/contact>

Amy (SRMC)

National Hen Harrier Survey 2016



Hen Harrier chick at a nest in Perthshire (Photo courtesy of Keith Brockie).

This year's national Hen Harrier survey, organised by RSPB, SNH and the Scottish Raptor Study Group, ran from early April to the end of July. The main survey objectives are: to provide updated estimates of population size; to identify trends, by country and region, since the last survey; and to provide data for further analyses of drivers of change in the Hen Harrier population.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in this year's

survey: there has been very good coverage across Scotland, with many more 10 km-squares covered this year compared to the previous survey in 2010. The greater coverage should provide robust country and regional population estimates with which to assess any changes since 2010.

Elsewhere in the UK, there has been comprehensive coverage of most of the 10 km squares containing suitable breeding habitat within the Hen Harrier range in England, Wales, Northern



Ireland and the Isle of Man. The other survey partners are Natural England, Northern England Raptor Forum, Natural Resources Wales, Manx BirdLife and the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group.

I am currently collating and entering the survey data that have been returned and am finalising numbers of proven, probable and possible breeding attempts within each 10 km square. If there are any survey forms still to be returned, can I ask that you send them to me by the end of November. The aim is for the survey results to be ready by the end of February 2017.

Simon Wotton (Senior Conservation Scientist, RSPB)

SRMS 2015 Annual report

SRMG are pleased to announce that the SRMS annual report is now published and available on the SRMS website at: <http://raptormonitoring.org/annual-report>.

This report explains how raptors in Scotland fared during the 2015 breeding season.

If you have been a regular recipient of our report, you may notice that this one is a little different – we have tried to enhance the format, including a range of supporting articles and taking advantage of the SRMS website for the presentation of supplementary information. We present up-to-date trend information for White-tailed Eagle and hope to be able to add trends for other SRMS species over the coming year. In this edition, we also discuss how the data that the SRMS holds can be used to look objectively at both spatial and temporal patterns in breeding failures as well as the causes for these failures. We hope this work will be of interest to a range of stakeholders as we develop it further.



Hard copies of the report will be making their way to SRMS contributors over the next few months and we would very much welcome your feedback.

Did you monitor raptors in Scotland in 2016?

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in monitoring raptors in 2016 and especially to all our contributors that have successfully got their data into the SRMS well ahead of the 31st October deadline.



IF YOU HAVE MONITORED BREEDING RAPTORS IN 2016 AND STILL INTEND TO GET DATA INTO THE SRMS THEN PLEASE STOP READING AND SEND US YOUR DATA NOW!

From the beginning of December, with the help of Mark Wilson (Research Ecologist at the BTO Scotland) I will be forging ahead with checking and standardising all the data I have received from the 2016 breeding season for incorporation into the SRMS database and in preparation for analysis for the next SRMS annual report which we are hoping to publish next spring. The SRMS will accept data for inclusion in our SRMS database (for all years) at any time but cannot promise that data for 2016 received after 30th November will be included in the next annual report so if you are yet to get your data in to us then please get a wriggle on. If you were anticipating somebody submitting your data to the SRMS on your behalf please check with them (or with me) that they have done so.

Update on the South Scotland Golden Eagle Project



As a result of the SGEP, sights like this will hopefully become more frequent in South Scotland (Photo courtesy of Keith Brockie).

The South Scotland Golden Eagle Project (SSGEP) <https://www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk/> is a partnership involving Buccleuch Estates (chair), Scottish Land and Estates (SL&E), RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, and SNH. The project aims to boost the vulnerable South Scotland Golden Eagle population of three breeding pairs.

The two local Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRS) branches are engaged, with Alan Heavisides (Chair of the Lothian & Borders branch) and Chris Rollie (Chair of the Dumfries & Galloway branch) the points of contact. The project was conceived in 2008 following the publication of the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework

http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/193.pdf, which indicated there were far fewer Golden Eagles in the South of Scotland than the land should sustain.

With Ministerial backing, RSPB Scotland and SL&E came together to investigate what was limiting Golden Eagles in the south. An authoritative report was commissioned and published by SNH in 2014 (http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/626.pdf). Following that, a Project Group was formed to take work forward to try and build up the population. With hard work by Cat Barlow, the Project Officer, and colleagues the Project made a successful bid for Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Funds (HLF) to develop the work <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/scotland%E2%80%99s-landscapes-benefit-%C2%A39million-hlf-investment>.

We now hope to secure Stage 2 HLF funding to make the ambition a reality. If successful, we will find out in April 2017. Subject to licences in place, we hope to release up to ten Golden Eagles each year over five years, collecting the first birds in June and releasing them in August 2017. A suitable release site has been identified, as well as a landowner who is very keen to play host to the project. A licence application is being prepared for submission to SNH this month. Local stakeholder meetings



are on-going, and well attended public consultations took place in September, in Peebles, Selkirk and Moffat (led by the Southern Uplands Partnership). The support of the SRSG to date has been very welcome, and the project looks forward to working with many members in the future.

South Scotland Golden Eagle Project (Contact Cat Barlow: cat@langholminitiative.co.uk)

Do you have a study or run a project for a raptor species in Scotland?

If so, then **please consider getting your study or project listed on the SRMS website**. Please get in touch with details such as when you started the study, if it is still ongoing and whether the monitoring is undertaken principally by yourself or in collaboration with others. Please email: amy.challis@bto.org with the details.

Amy will also be happy to work with you to **showcase your study or project on the SRMS website**, including creating a specific web page where we can provide relevant links to other resources relevant to your study such as your own website and or any publications your study may have generated. If you are involved in a project involving individually marking birds then this may be a good opportunity to appeal for sightings from members of the public.

Why not take a look at the Kestrel page (<http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-species/falconiformes/common-kestrel>) on the SRMS website and follow the link through to a page all about Gordon Riddle's Ayrshire study (<http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-species/falconiformes/common-kestrel/ayrshire-study>) to see the sort of thing that is possible to achieve.

The SRMS is also keen to collaborate with individuals to produce local study area trends in breeding numbers and productivity from your data that the SRMS holds, as a pre-cursor to ultimately using your data along with those from other nearby studies to produce regional trends and ultimately a national trends (if the data are amenable to this). Trends may not be possible for all studies and will depend on us having an understanding of coverage and survey effort and how this may have changed through time. To understand a little more about trends production please visit: <http://raptormonitoring.org/producing-rigorous-population-trends> and read more about the national, regional and local trends that the SRMS has been able to produce so far in our latest annual report: <http://raptormonitoring.org/annual-report>. We will not be able to produce trends for all species straightway but **we will initially be focussing on Peregrine and Raven**.

White-tailed Eagle numbers set to rise

A recently commissioned report by SNH considers the future of the reintroduced White-tailed Eagle population in Scotland (http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/898.pdf). This report uses population modelling to predict the potential future population size and geographical spread of reintroduced White-tailed Eagles in Scotland up to 2040. It updates an earlier study by using revised survival and productivity rates to take account of the fact that the population is now dominated by wild-bred birds rather than released ones. Various scenarios in relation to the limitations of the landscape, 'carrying capacity', and potential additional mortality (from persecution and wind farms) are explored.



These indicate the population is self-sustaining and likely to continue growing quickly in the short to medium term, and is reasonably robust to additional mortality. Potential geographical spread was modelled based on the habitat preferences and known dispersal and settlement patterns of the reintroduced population. The report suggests that the species will continue to be mainly found on the western seaboard and highlands of

Scotland but with some spread into inland areas. The findings of the report will be used to inform future conservation actions for the reintroduced population.



Population modelling suggests that we are likely to see more White-tailed Eagles soaring in the skies in future (Photo courtesy of Amy Challis).

Red Kite population in North Scotland growing slowly

Another recently commissioned report considers the impacts of wildlife crime and windfarms on mortality in the North Scotland Red Kite population

(http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/904.pdf).

This report predicts, through population modelling, the potential future population size of the North Scotland red kite population up to 2044. Using revised survival and productivity rates, this updates an earlier study. Three sources of additional mortality were explored. Firstly the report considers whether the impacts of illegal killing have reduced since a previous study which included data up to 2006. Secondly, it considers the impacts of the Ross-shire mass poisoning incident in 2014 on the population and, thirdly, the impact of predicted wind turbine collisions on the population. The report considers the impacts of the three sources individually and cumulatively. It concludes that illegal killing had not declined; that the Ross-shire incident as a one-off event did not critically affect the population; and that potential wind farm impacts need to be carefully evaluated due to the constraints on the population. The findings of the report will be used to inform future conservation actions for the reintroduced population.

Oot and about

It's that time of year when I have been enjoying doing the rounds of as many of the Scottish Raptor Study Group branch meetings as I can fit in. It is always great to hear first-hand from raptor workers on the ground their impressions of how the breeding season has gone for raptors in their region. Later this month I am looking forward to attending the Northern England Raptor Forum conference to hear how raptors are faring south of the border. I've also got a couple of invited talks lined up for this winter including to the Natural History & Antiquarian Society of Mid-Argyll and to the SOC Central branch.



Northern England Raptor Forum Conference



This year's North of England Raptor Conference is being hosted by:- The Durham Upland Bird Study Group and The Durham Bird Club and will be held on Saturday 19th November at the Xcel Centre (www.Xcelcentre.com) Aycliffe Business Park, County Durham, DL5 6AP.

It is open to all with an interest in raptors in the uplands. To learn more about the full one-day programme and how to book please go to www.raptorforum.co.uk/conference.

Alternatively please contact: davidrawdubsg@aol.com for more information.

Improving the flow of SRMS data to benefit raptor conservation

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) who oversee the work of the Scheme are keen to improve the flow of data to and from the SRMS so that it gets mobilised to support raptor conservation much more efficiently than it does at present.

One of the key tasks for 2016-2017 in the SRMS Memorandum of Understanding, which all SRMS partners are signed up to is *"To ensure improved data flows between Parties and to SNH, FCS and JNCC for statutory reasons and to wider stakeholders as appropriate"*.

A number of documents are currently being drafted and at this stage SRMS data contributors have been invited to share initial feedback on two of them:

(i) Data Usage Agreement between the SRMS & SNH

This is the first of a number of agreements between the SRMS and its partners. This document will hopefully provide a useful template to be able to develop similar agreements with all other partners.

(ii) Data Usage Agreement between the SRMS & SRSB

This is the first draft of what an agreement between SRMS & SRSB could look like. However, input is being sought from SRSB member to help shape subsequent drafts.

SRMS contributors have been given until later this month to get initial feedback back to the SRMG via Amy, the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator, whereupon it will be reviewed.

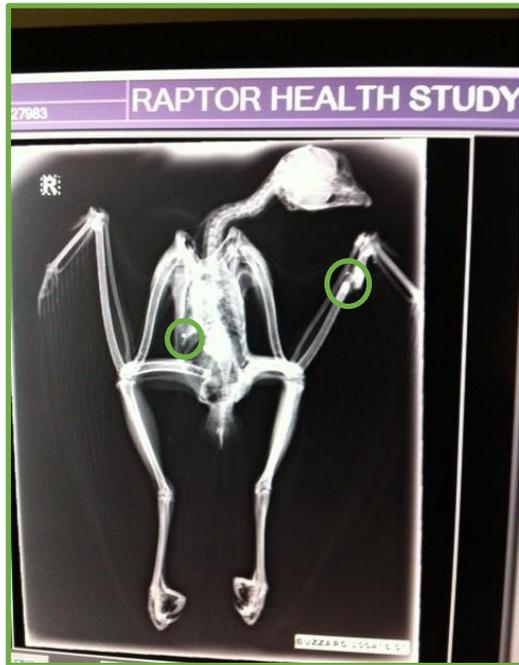
Update on Raptor Health PhD

In our May issue you may recall Gaby Peniche of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh, appealing for raptor samples in support of her PhD looking at pathogens, diseases and other environmental factors affecting the health of raptors. Below Gaby provides an update on what she has been doing over the last few months and has a fresh appeal for samples....

Updates:



Thanks to all of you, carcasses of various birds of prey species have been arriving from all over Scotland. I have received 38 carcasses, and so far have processed 22 of them. Interestingly, a large number of trauma cases were carrying a significant load of intestinal parasites, and I am investigating if this contributed to their death. I am collating the information obtained from these examinations together with those submitted to SRUC as suspected of persecution. This is providing information on major causes of death in raptors submitted for post mortem examination in Scotland. The reasons behind deaths, variety of chemicals and parasites found in them, and the locations of where corpses were found are helping me create a picture of what is happening with submitted birds of prey (Figure 1).



Morphometric data have been obtained from all species submitted for post mortem examination, and from live Golden Eagle chicks in Wester Ross at the time of ringing. I will analyse the different measurements and see if one or a combination of these can indicate accurately the sex of adults and/or nestlings. This may point to a valuable and inexpensive tool for monitoring raptor populations. I am working on a Home Office licence to obtain blood samples from Golden Eagle nestlings in 2017. The plan is to obtain blood samples in territories in the Uists, Lochaber and the Cairngorms, and to analyse these for the presence of antibodies and health indicators. This information will be compared between the three areas which currently are showing a contrasting difference in breeding productivity. Screening of the blood for pesticides, poisons, veterinary drugs and multi-residues

will be trialled together with PCB's and analysis.

I am working closely with SASA and PBMS bone, feathers and soft tissue samples for variety of chemicals including rodenticides, fertilizers and heavy metals. New tests to detect veterinary drugs and other multi-residues are being developed. We are determining lethal and sub-lethal levels of toxins, and looking into the effects of these on individual health. In doing this we are collaborating with researchers in Japan.

New appeals:

No special licence is required to pluck three non-flight feathers from a live bird for purposes of identification, in this case, sexing. There is an application form for ringers to complete and conditions you must adhere to -i.e. the feather tract and number of feathers taken (<http://blx1.bto.org/ringers/ringers>). If you could help me obtain three non-flight feathers from each individual that you ring and measure, I will run the genetic test require to find out the sex of each individual. The information will then be matched to the morphometrics to look for a pattern on the different measures used that will help sex chicks accurately in the future without the need for a genetic test. The best way to preserve the feather samples for genetic sampling is to use is 70%

Figure 1: Buzzard submitted as non-suspicious death but found on examination to have shotgun pellets associated with bone and soft tissue injuries responsible for its death.

lead

to examine

a wide



alcohol. I can supply pots, medium and bags as needed. Gabriela.Peniche@roslin.ed.ac.uk, Office telephone: 0131 650 7683; Mobile: 07847 170997.

Gaby Peniche (University of Edinburgh)

Update on the pilot year of *Raptor Patch*

Raptor Patch

A new survey brought to you by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme



Can you help with your local piece of the Scottish raptor jigsaw?

In 2016 we ran our first pilot year of *Raptor Patch* – our survey to get more people involved in monitoring some of the more widespread raptor species. We held a successful training day back in March for potential volunteers which we reported on in the last issue.

A total of eight *Raptor Patches* were set up in 2016, two each within the following areas of Scotland: Central, Highland, Lothian & Borders and Tayside.

SRMG have taken the decision to continue with another pilot year in 2017 as this will allow (i) some more volunteers to pilot the scheme; (ii) assessment of whether this year's volunteers carry on in 2017; and (iii) trialling of the on-line data inputting system by *Raptor Patch* participants. I have sent out a questionnaire to everyone that had been involved in *Raptor Patch* in 2016 for feedback on a range of aspects (guidance materials, training event, within season support) and to assess the likelihood of people continuing or taking up a *Raptor Patch* in 2017.

If you would like to take part on *Raptor Patch* in 2017 or know of anyone that might be interested in getting involved take a look at the *Raptor Patch* page on the SRMS website: [http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-](http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/raptor-patch)

[involved/raptor-patch](http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/raptor-patch)

Convention on Migratory Species Raptors MoU – recent international developments to conserve migratory birds of prey

SRSG members and others working on raptors in Scotland contribute to the international effort to help raptors. Here we give a flavour of some work we are involved in. The Coordinating Unit of the [Raptors MoU](#) has been busy this year leading the development of the Multi-species Action Plan to conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP). The mandate for the Vulture MsAP was established by Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) at the 11th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP11), held in Ecuador in November 2014, by means of [Resolution 11.14](#) - Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways.



Following consultation with the IUCN SSC Vulture Specialist Group, BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation and other specialists, the Coordinating Unit drafted a [Project Charter](#) for the Vulture MsAP in February. The overall aim is to develop a comprehensive strategic Action Plan for 15 species of Old World vultures, covering at least 124 countries across Africa, Asia and Europe, to promote collaborative international conservation actions. With a Vulture Working Group, Steering Group, three Regional Coordinators and an Overarching Coordinator in place, good progress has been made, including gathering data on the relevant species and plans to organize three Regional Workshops (October-November 2016).

The first draft of the Vulture MsAP should be published early next year, and further developed at an Overarching Workshop in January/February. After a formal public consultation exercise, the goal is to finalise the Vulture MsAP by May 2017 for submission to the CMS COP12, to be held in October 2017.

In addition, the Coordinating Unit participated in the First Meeting of the Intergovernmental [Task Force](#) on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade (IKB) of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean, held in Cairo, Egypt in July. The meeting adopted a Programme of Work for the IKB Task Force until 2020, identifying the main activities and regional priorities, and discussed practical initiatives and projects targeting hotspots to be implemented in parallel. The IKB Task Force is convened by the CMS Secretariat in conjunction with the [AEWA](#) Secretariat, the Raptors MoU Coordinating Unit and the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan Working Group. It aims to facilitate concerted efforts and procedures to combat IKB of all migratory birds in the Mediterranean Region.

The urgent need to [reduce poisoning pressures on scavenging raptors](#) was highlighted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress (September 2016) with a Motion adopted addressing this issue. This Motion builds upon significant work undertaken by the CMS Preventing Poisoning Working Group, and CMS [Resolution 11.15](#) Preventing Poisoning of Migratory Birds with its substantive [Guidelines](#).

Many people and organizations working on migratory birds of prey in Scotland directly contribute towards implementing the [Action Plan](#) of the Raptors MoU. No single country can act alone because the conservation of migratory raptors relies critically on international cooperation, collaboration and coordinated conservation actions.

Nick Williams, Jenny Renell and Des Thompson

Appeal for regurgitated raptor pellet samples

Dr Mark Taggart of the Environmental Research Institute, University of the Highlands and Islands is working in collaboration with PhD student Gaby Peniche of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh on exposure of Scottish raptors to various environmental pollutants. As part of this work Mark and Gaby are appealing for regurgitated raptor pellets. The feasibility of using these pellets to monitor exposure to a range of environmental pollutants will then be studied; in the first instance, they will be used to consider the ingestion of lead (Pb) ammunition (i.e., shot and fragments) embedded in prey items. The project will gratefully accept any raptor pellets from all species of raptors found in Scotland, in conjunction with information regarding raptor species, location and date collected. For details regarding sample storage/packaging/postage and to submit samples please contact Gabriela.Peniche@roslin.ed.ac.uk, Office telephone: 0131 650 7683; Mobile: 07847 170997.



A plea to anyone with good quality raptor images

Now that the evenings are drawing in please consider taking some time to sort through all the fantastic raptor photos that you may have taken during the season and send them into the SRMS.

The SRMS is always interested in receiving good quality images/video footage from your own raptor monitoring. These materials can be really helpful in the production of SRMS products including the SRMS website, the annual report and presentations.

Photos of *Raptor Patch* focal species – Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Raven – will be particularly useful in helping with the development of further training materials for new volunteers. We are in the early stages of making an online photographic resource which is linked to from the SRMS website – please visit <http://srms.piwigo.com/>.

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme photo gallery

To find out more about the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) please visit our main website: raptormonitoring.org

This gallery aims to provide useful reference images to those getting to grips with monitoring raptors for the first time.

All the images in this gallery have been generously provided by SRMS contributors.
If you have any images which you would be happy to share via this gallery then get in touch with the [Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator](#).

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1 photo



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20 photos



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22 photos



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Please send any good quality photos/video footage of the following to Amy:

- useful bird id images.
- various nest sites (close up, local setting and in a wider landscape setting). Ideally groupings of photos – the nest in a landscape-scale setting, the nest in its immediate environs and the nest close up. It would be really valuable to be able to show the breadth of variation in the sites that these raptors use. A raptors eye view of nests from the ground in tricky situations would be also helpful.
- field signs including plucks, droppings, pellets, moulted feathers.
- birds exhibiting key behaviours in various settings (display, defence etc.).

If you are a keen photographer or home-video maker and involved in monitoring any of the *Raptor Patch* focal species (Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Raven) please bear this request in mind over as the breeding season unfolds in 2017.



Anyone interested in raptor feather ‘fault bars’?

Following Gaby’s article in the May 2016 issue of Scottish Raptor we have been developing ideas on indicators of raptor health we might use in the field. A number of people have suggested we might use feather ‘fault bars’ to diagnose health or stress issues. Has anyone looked into this?

Several general references are in the veterinary/pet and falconry literature

<http://avianmedicine.net/content/uploads/2013/03/24.pdf> and

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248866425_Dermatology_of_raptors_A_review

This review has just been published <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27062218>.



Ian Newton’s monograph *The Sparrowhawk* (1986) refers to fault bars as ‘hunger traces’ and mentions that almost all birds examined had fault bars in wing feathers, with only around 10% having faults severe enough to cause feather breakage (p. 253). As Ian points out, feathers contain so much protein that they must be formed largely from food eaten at the time, rather than from body reserves.

Have any readers looked recently at the incidence of fault bars in raptors’ feathers?

A few papers have looked at fault bars in raptors, notably

American Kestrels <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2656.2002.00602.x/full>,

upland buzzards <http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.3356/JRR-12-14.1> and more

widely <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4823350/> .

We would like to hear from you if you have any information or ideas on this. We wonder if regional differences in the incidence of fault bars in some raptors might betray differences in prey availability or food quality.

Gaby Peniche Gabriela.Peniche@roslin.ed.ac.uk, Anna Meredith, Neil Anderson, Andrew Stevenson
& Des Thompson

Richard Evans (1964-2016)

It would be remiss not to include a tribute to Richard in this newsletter. News of his untimely passing following a heart attack in early August shocked us all. I know some readers of this newsletter will have known Richard very well as a friend and colleague but others may be less aware of his achievements. In my SNH role I worked closely with Richard over the last 10 years or so on raptor and development casework issues.

He worked for RSPB for 26 years and also produced some excellent papers on Golden, and especially, White-tailed Eagles. However Richard had a wide range of abilities with a gift for applying scientific research and thinking to practical situations and having the ability to listen and understand others arguments. Not that he acquiesced, as his Shakespearian bon mots and masterful quizzical looks when he thought someone had gone ‘off piste’ in a meeting would attest.



Although he did appear ‘in the front line’ as part of SNHs or RSPBs team at public inquiries or meetings with developers about potentially contentious developments, Richard’s approach was always persuasive and tactically astute. The number of cases or issues which could have become major problems but haven’t due, at least in part, to Richard is a great testament to his abilities.

He was the driving force, in his secretariat role, of the White-tailed Eagle Project Team and had pivotal roles in developing guidance and with the national Sea Eagle Scheme. He was pretty much a walking encyclopaedia on White-tailed Eagles and I greatly valued our discussions on them. Richard was one of the authors of the recently published SNH commissioned report modelling the future population growth and range expansion of the reintroduced White-tailed Eagles in Scotland. He was also working on an overview paper on the reintroduction at the time of his death and it is intended that his co-authors will complete the manuscript as a fitting tribute to his huge contribution to the species re-establishment. He was also strong supporter of the SRMS approach to coordinated raptor monitoring and friend to many who contribute to or help run the scheme, we will all miss him greatly.

Andrew Stevenson
Chair of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

The soggy Peregrine

Heading along the Beaully River on July 7th 2016 we were pleased that the weather was fair as the forecast hadn’t guaranteed it. Doug Mainland, Jacquie Heaton and myself, Justin Grant, were paddling a couple of kayaks a few kilometres along and across the river to gain access to, climb up and colour ring a brood of Ospreys. Between us we’d been colour ringing the Ospreys for quite a few years now and had realised that kayaks were just the quickest and easiest means of transport for



Brood of two Osprey chicks (Photo courtesy of Justin Grant)

climbers, ringers and kit. I was in my regular ‘NDK’ fibreglass sea boat – admittedly more usually used to ring White-tailed Eagles on the west coast than Ospreys on the east – while Doug and Jacquie, with somewhat less paddling experience, were in an extremely stable double ‘Klepper Aerius’. This particular model was a camouflaged military boat as used by UK Special Forces to sneak in to places to which they haven’t been invited, and it is highly suitable as an Osprey ringers’ boat in

North-east Scotland.

We landed in the usual place, and with a brief look at the calling adults overhead, I headed up the tree. I was pleased to find a healthy looking brood of two young and very soon they were ‘in the lift’ to the ground floor where Doug and Jacquie were waiting to weigh, measure and colour-ring them. Osprey young are delightfully easy birds to handle (especially when you are more used to White-tailed Eagles) and they soon were back in the nest sporting their blue ‘Darviks’.



Having done the Ospreys we were back on the water and enjoying a leisurely paddle back down the river to the car. Before long we were aware of a fledged brood of Peregrines far overhead in the tree tops at the top of the gorge, chasing each other and making lots of noise. I was somewhat behind the other boat when I heard Doug shout “hey look there’s a young Peregrine in the water”. I was closest to it so I changed course and scooped it up on to my deck. We obviously had no idea how long it had been in the water but it was very soggy to say the least, and clearly in trouble. Needing both hands for my paddle I handed it over to Doug and Jacquie in the double Klepper,



Justin with the soggy male Peregrine (Photo courtesy of Doug Mainland)



Freshly dried and ready to re-join his siblings (Photo courtesy of Doug Mainland)

as one of them could hold it and one could paddle back to the bank. The situation was obviously poor for the young falcon. It was waterlogged and low down in the gorge. Putting it up on the bank or on a tree branch really wasn’t going to do much to help it. The decision was easy; we’ll take it home, dry it out, weigh, measure and ring it and then take it up the sides of the gorge to the top where its siblings are playing in the trees. So up at Jacquie’s it was “three cups of tea and a hair-drier please”. On a medium heat setting and not too close, the youngster dried out quite quickly and gave the impression that it really enjoyed the warm airstream - stretching its wings out to the sides. At 655g and with a wing length of 295 it was clearly a male. Fitted with a G ring it was back in the car and Jacquie took us mid-way up the gorge to an open area where we could see and hear the peregrine fledglings still doing bumps and circuits up in the trees above our heads a bit further along. We put it down on a handy tree stump (we hadn’t got to know it well enough to name it) and it shuffled a bit and sat there looking at us. Expecting it to take

off in its own time, we retreated and walked along the path to get a better view of the river and surrounds while we were up there. A few minutes later going past the spot on the way back to the car, the bird had flown, its chances of survival now being a whole lot better than they were earlier.

Justin Grant
Highland Raptor Study Group



Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) contact

Amy Challis: Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator (SRMC)

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