

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

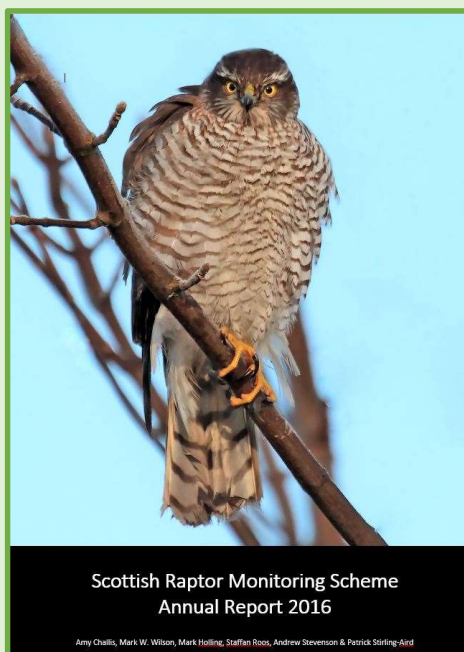
After what felt like the longest ever winter, we are now in the throes of another raptor breeding season and many of you will be busy monitoring how breeding pairs are faring right across Scotland. In May we were very pleased to have confirmation of funding from SNH, BTO and RSPB for the 2018-2019 financial year, which means that SRMS work can continue until the end of March 2019.

This issue contains the latest on SRMS developments and some interesting contributions from others including details of a new project being developed by SASA that licensed Hen Harrier ringers can get involved with.

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)

SRMS Annual reporting



We were pleased to publish our annual report, reporting on the 2016 breeding season early this year. Our report on the 2017 breeding season is currently being drafted and we are on track to get it published by the end of the summer.

Please remember that many species data tables can be accessed and downloaded as a pdf for you to print as you require via the SRMS website:

<http://raptormonitoring.org/annual-report>

Forensic database to help protect Hen Harriers - can you help?



Hen Harrier brood in Perthshire (Keith Brockie)

A new project to setup a DNA database of individual Hen Harriers, funded by SNH, has begun! Hopefully the database will act as a deterrent to persecution, but it could also be used as evidence in criminal proceedings.

The database will be created using samples collected at the nest at the time of ringing. These samples will be collected following a chain of custody process to give traceability of a sample back to a specific nest. Once populated, the database could be used to help link a suspect to a known individual hen harrier in wildlife crime investigation.

The database will be housed at the Wildlife DNA Forensic (WDF) unit at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA). Working in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, the DNA profiling method will first be verified before being applied to the samples collected. Over time, we hope to have a large number of individual birds represented on the database.

Can you help? For 2018, we are looking to recruit licensed Hen Harrier ringers to collect shed adult feathers from the nest when they make their ringing visit. If you think you might be able to assist, please contact the WDF unit and we can provide sampling materials and guidance (wildlifeforensics@sasa.gsi.gov.uk). We look forward to hearing from you, and also updating you on the progress of the database in due course.

Lucy Webster (SASA)

Update on SRMS online data entry

The BTO IT team have been extremely busy over the last few months putting the final touches to the SRMS online data entry system, which should be ready for testing by a small number of individuals later this summer. We now have a list of keen raptor workers ready to test the SRMS online data entry system. The SRMC will soon be in touch with these individuals to let them know what this testing will entail.

If you would like to offer to help test the online data entry system and have not signed up already, please get in touch with Amy as soon as possible.

2018 data submissions

Please remember that the deadline for submissions of 2018 breeding season data to the SRMS is 31st October 2018. Please submit your monitoring data as soon as it is available. Delays in data submission risk data being excluded from the annual report, meaning that it is not as comprehensive as it could otherwise be.



The Donald and Jeff Watson Raptor Award



Justin measuring a White-tailed Eagle bill on Mull (Lewis Pate).

Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference devised the Donald & Jeff Watson award in 2007 in association with the Watson family as a memorial to the contributions of both father and son to the study and conservation of raptors in Scotland, and specifically to recognise 'A significant long-term amateur contribution to the study of raptors in Scotland.' In 2018 the award was presented to Justin Grant. Below is the citation from Ewan Weston (North-east Scotland RSG) & Robin Reid (Lewis & Harris RSG), delivered at the most recent Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference where the award was presented.

Justin's introduction to the world of raptor research happened largely by chance as he returned from working in Africa to continue his studies at the University in Edinburgh, to

find he had become Mike McGrady's landlord! (while he had been in Africa his sister had answered Mike's advert looking for accommodation, and Mike had moved into a vacant room in their flat).

Justin went on to work with Mike in Argyll studying the range-use of territorial golden eagles. This work was difficult and there were many challenges to overcome, not least of which were the terrain and weather. Justin's dogged determination, ingenuity and seemingly endless energy were a perfect match. His skills with a radio receiver have become legendary and he has been a key part of many raptor re-introduction projects that have relied on this technique to monitor the fates of their birds. As well as radio tracking, Justin is expert in a wide array of specialist skills – climbing, satellite tagging, ringing (and training ringers), prey identification and kayaking. He has passed many of these skills on to others in the raptor world, having shared his wealth of experience with a healthy dose of encouragement to any and all. Justin is a really key part of raptor research in Scotland and there is seemingly no site too remote or nest too hard to access. For those that need specialist help, whether it is locating a radio transmitter, accessing a difficult nest or fitting a satellite transmitter to an eagle on a remote island only accessible by kayak, Justin is your man.

Although Justin's name is synonymous with eagles, particularly sea eagles, for which species he has been the backbone of fieldwork for the last 20 years, he has been behind the scenes quietly helping with many projects and carrying out his own monitoring of a wide variety of species. He is an unsung hero of the raptor world, quietly getting on with it. His efforts and achievements have often gone un-noticed as he often keeps out of the limelight. This rare combination of skills, determination and willingness to share these with others makes Justin a deserving candidate for the Donald and Jeff Watson raptor award.

Ewan Weston (North-east Scotland RSG) and Robin Reid (Lewis & Harris RSG)



Data sharing

All SRMS partners have supported the production of a SRMS Data Sharing & Use Policy. We hope that having a clear policy will help both providers and users of SRMS data to better understand our aims and intentions.

SRMG are still to refine some of the finer details of the Policy before it becomes operational, and once it is finalised we will make it available on the SRMS website.

Highland Raptor Study Group – Training Days 2018



Highland Raptor Study Group woodland training event 2018 (Yvonne Brown)

Two successful raptor training days were held in the Spring. Brian Etheridge led a woodland-based training event on 15th April attended by 10 participants. This was followed up with a moorland-based training event on 22nd April led by Brian Etheridge & Jim Craib and attended by 12 participants.

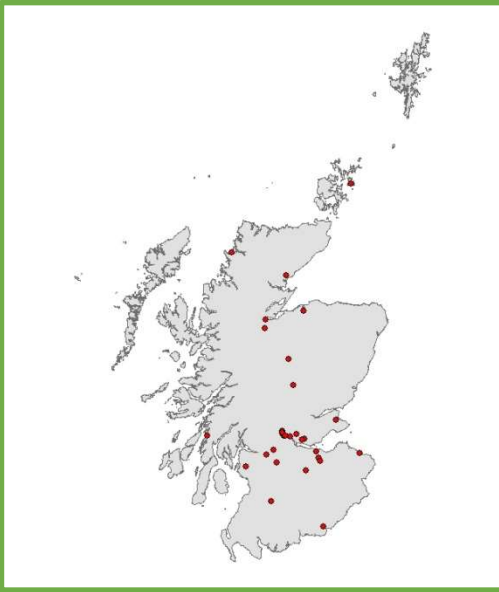
Yvonne Brown (Highland Raptor Study Group member)

Your personal data

If you have an email account you have probably spent the last month having your inboxes bombarded with emails about General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) - new regulations relating to personal data that came into force on 25th May. SRMG are currently working on a Privacy Statement, which will appear on the SRMS website in due course.

If you are reading this newsletter you may have received it direct in your inbox from the SRMS, equally it may have been passed on to you by somebody else. If you receive this email from the SRMS direct, you can unsubscribe at any time by letting Amy know. If you currently get the newsletter via somebody else but would prefer to get it direct to your inbox in future, then please do get in touch.

Raptor Patch



Live Raptor Patches in 2018.

The SRMS has 30 live *Raptor Patches* in 2018. Most of these *Raptor Patches* are concentrated in the Central Belt. We were pleased to have our first *Raptor Patch* established on the Scottish islands, on Stronsay in Orkney.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who are carrying out monitoring for this new initiative, which will, through time, improve the quality and quantity of trend information available for Scotland's most widespread raptor species.

To find out more about *Raptor Patch* and how you can get involved please visit

<http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/raptor-patch>

New paper: Reproductive senescence in Scottish White-tailed Eagles

A collaboration between scientists from the Fitz Patrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, RSPB Centre for Conservation Science in Scotland and Natural Research have recently resulted in a paper in *Journal of Animal Ecology* investigating how White-tailed Eagle reproductive performance changes with age. The paper ("*Sex-specific patterns of reproductive senescence in a long-lived reintroduced raptor*") benefitted from the detailed long-term monitoring carried out by RSPB, SNH and members of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, which has resulted in a unique database of both long-term breeding performance in different home ranges and life-long breeding performance of many tagged eagles. The results of the study showed that in early life, reproductive performance improved with age for both males and females. Thus, White-tailed Eagles did not produce many chicks in their early reproductive lifespan, but gradually gained more and more breeding experience, and their reproductive performance steadily increased with age. Both their breeding success (whether a nest was successful or not) and the number of fledglings produced peaked at different times for males and females. On average, females produced most chicks at the age of 14-16 years, whereas males produced most chicks at the age of 19 years of age. Interestingly, after this peak, reproductive performance decreased for both sexes, but significantly more rapidly in males than in females. In fact, of the small number of males that reached an age of 23 or older (3 individuals making a total of 10 breeding attempts), none managed to fledge a single chick! Females originating from the first release of birds in 1975-1982 showed a significantly steeper decline in reproductive performance in late life than did wild-hatched females. Obviously there were some changes in partners over the years, caused by "divorces" and mortality of eagles, and that enabled the scientists to elucidate the factors involved in this sex-specific breeding senescence.



Overall, this study showed that long-term monitoring of a reintroduced population can give valuable insights into individual life-histories, but also how to best undertake reintroduction programs. In the paper, we speculate about whether the first release phase (mainly on the Isle of Rum 1975-1985) may have been less benign than the second (Wester Ross 1993-1998) and third (East Coast 2007-2012) release phases, because of the lack of an established population of white-tailed eagles in Scotland at the time of the initial release phase. White-tailed Eagles can be gregarious, especially during the non-breeding season, and it is possible that the lack of adults in the wider environment may have affected females from the first release phase in ways that affected their breeding performance negatively late in life.

Full reference: Murgatroyd, M., Roos, S., Evans, R., Sansom, A., Whitfield, D. P., Sexton, D., Reid, R., Grant, J., Amar, A. *In press*. Sex-specific patterns of reproductive senescence in a long-lived reintroduced raptor. *Journal of Animal Ecology*.

Dr Staffan Roos (RSPB)

Project Owl



Adult female Tawny Owl (Katy Anderson).

The most recent BTO appeal was focused on raising money to support research projects on owls (see <https://www.bto.org/support-us/appeals/bto-owl-appeal>). A programme of work under the title of 'Project Owl' is expected to go ahead using this and additional funding over the next 3-5 years. Details of the strands of work are still being finalised but the first phase is likely to focus on surveys of Tawny Owls, using a range of methods to allow different levels of volunteer involvement and survey intensity. As well as providing updated information on changes in Tawny Owl populations across the UK, it is hoped that the surveys will encourage lots of new volunteers to get involved in survey work and raise their awareness of, and interest in, owls and their conservation. More information will be available on the BTO website later in the summer.

Chris Wernham & Ben Darvill (BTO Scotland)

New contact details

Please note that the BTO Scotland office, where I am hosted, has recently moved a short hop from Stirling University campus to the Stirling University Innovation Park. I am now enjoying a view from my office of the Wallace Monument and our office window list of raptors is steadily growing – Raven, Buzzard, Peregrine & Tawny Owl all seen and heard to date. My new address and office phone number can be found below.



Kestrel Species Champion visit to a Kestrel study in North Lanarkshire

On the morning of Monday of 11th June, Mr John Mason MSP, for Glasgow Shettleston, spent time with two of our Central Scotland Raptor Study Group members - Jackie Gilliland (Countryside Ranger with North Lanarkshire Council) and James Leonard (SSPCA Investigations Officer). The main objective of the day was to provide Mr Mason with an educational, hands-on experience of Kestrel, by having him assist in colour ringing ten Kestrel chicks at two of our sites within North Lanarkshire. This is an area where these



John Mason MSP witnessing a Kestrel chick being ringed in North Lanarkshire by James Leonard (Jackie Gilliland).



birds are doing rather well in comparison to other areas throughout the UK. Jackie and James, along with some much needed assistance from others, assist the overall declining population of this species by creating platforms and building nest boxes for them. Mr Mason has a special interest in the Kestrel having taken on the role as Kestrel Species Champion in the Scottish Parliament.

Mr Mason really enjoyed his morning with Jackie and James and this was reflected in a “thank you” letter. “I have some great photos and will certainly long remember this visit”, he said.

Jackie Gilliland (Central Scotland Raptor Study Group)

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