

# Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

As some of you may already know, the Raptor Monitoring Coordinator (SRMC) of the last 4.5 years, Amy Challis, has gone on maternity leave as of mid-March 2019. I'm sure we can all join in to wish Amy all the best for this exciting time in her life. As a result of this, I have been appointed as Amy's maternity cover and will be acting on her behalf for the forthcoming year. Some of you I may have already met at the Scottish Raptor Study Group Annual Conference or other recent meetings but if we have not crossed paths yet, hopefully we can correct that soon!

In case you ever come to wonder about my weird accent, it's a long story... I originally hail from Finland but have spent most of the last 10 years in the UK. Since gaining a MSc. in Global Wildlife Health and Conservation from the University of Bristol, I have had the fortune to work with some exciting species and conservation projects. After a stint working back in Finland at the Helsinki Zoo, looking after all sorts of wildlife including many raptor species (from Honey Buzzards to Great Grey Owls) I moved to Northern Ireland to work with Ulster Wildlife. As a member for the Living Landscapes' team, my main focus (alongside some squirreling and species rich grassland work) was to look after a nation-wide Barn Owl conservation project. More recently I worked as a Monitoring and Control Officer with the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, a Scottish Wildlife Trust-led conservation project, up in Aberdeenshire. Having grown up on the south coast of Finland where nature is always at your doorstep, I've had a healthy fascination from a young age for all wildlife but especially raptors (with a special soft spot for owls). I'm therefore (more than) delighted having been given the chance to work for the Scheme and I very much look forward to working with you and learning from you all.



*This young Goshawk had sustained an injury to its collarbone and stayed with us at the Helsinki Zoo for a month. Fortunately he healed well and is here about to be released back into the wild!*

This issue of the Scottish Raptor contains the latest on SRMS developments and some very interesting contributions from others, both from UK and further afield. I would like to thank everyone who contributed towards the content, which encompasses well the scale of important work that is taking place in raptor conservation, both by different organisations and individuals. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed putting it together! If you would like to offer an article for a future issue, please get in touch. Remember that you can sign up to receive future issues of the Scottish Raptor direct to your inbox via the following link: <http://raptormonitoring.org/contact>

Nina Schönberg (SRMC)

**Please note that a new email address has recently been allocated for the Scheme and will be used by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator from now on. This is: [srmc@bto.org](mailto:srmc@bto.org)**



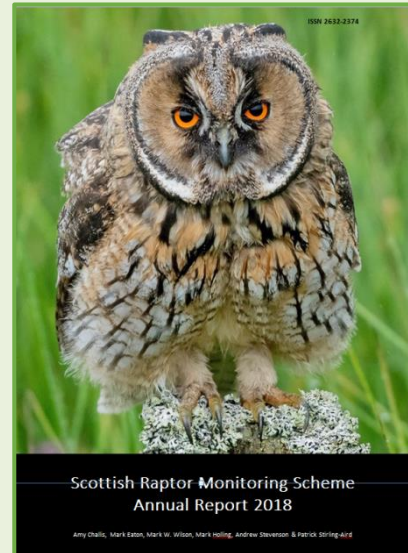
## SRMS Annual reporting

We are pleased to announce that our 2018 annual report is about to be published! The report was printed in April (the earliest it has ever been!) and will be distributed soon once preparations for PR work have been finalised. Thank you goes to the efficiency and hard work by all the data contributors and the editorial board which has allowed this happen.

The report has been compiled to summarise the 2018 raptor breeding season in Scotland and highlights how SRMS data have been used to benefit raptor conservation in the last year.

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

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



## Hen Harrier from Orkney Spotted in the Netherlands!

In early April, I received an email from the Netherlands, from the Dutch Montagu's Foundation, inquiring whether I would have the contact details of Stuart Williams, the Chair of Orkney Raptor Study Group. I was informed that one of their volunteers had photographed a female Hen Harrier with a colour ring, and its details indicated it originated from Orkney! With a little bit of investigating it was discovered that this in fact was a chick ringed by Stuart on Hoy on June 26<sup>th</sup> last year.



*Hilbrand Schoonveld*



*Hilbrand Schoonveld*

As far as Stuart's records could tell, there have been two other Hen Harriers originating from Orkney which have been spotted in the Netherlands, both seen in 1969 having been ringed in 1963 and 1968 respectively, so this is a very interesting recovery. Stuart later received another email informing him that this same bird had also been seen late March, c. 50km north east from where the attached photos were taken. Only time will tell whether this young female will return to Orkney which Stuart would very much like to see. Unfortunately for Stuart however, his bird was seen flying in the vicinity of a male (see attached photo), which may indicate otherwise.

Nina Schöenberg (SRMC)



## Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) Representatives

### Agencies join forces to protect birds of prey

JAMES FREEMAN  
ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

A GROUP of major conservation bodies yesterday agreed to work together to monitor numbers of birds of prey in Scotland, many species of which are seriously endangered.

Seven organisations signed an agreement to develop and manage a raptor monitoring scheme to help provide information on their populations.

Let by Scottish Natural Heritage, the committee will improve co-operation between organisations which gather information and provide uniform, high standards of data. This will help better determine trends in numbers, range, survival and productivity of raptors, and to understand causes of population changes.

Representatives from SNH, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Scottish Raptor Study Groups, British Trust for Ornithology, the Raptor Breeding Birds Panel, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland, and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club signed the agreement to establish the scheme.

Mark Hocking, vice-president of the ornithologists' club, said: "I hope that the data which results will indicate just how significant, in a world sense, Scotland's birds of prey are. They require to be protected and promoted, not persecuted."

"Real data may help to engender a groundswell of attitude change from the majority, rather than constantly hearing the oft-cited voice of the minority who favour persecution and control of raptor numbers."

Another factor endangering birds of prey has been the decline of heather moorlands - one of their most important habitats - by nearly a quarter since the 1940s, due to afforestation, heavy grazing and a fall in grouse shooting which has led to a considerable abandonment of active moorland management.

The committee recognises that the lack of a co-ordinated monitoring system to track progress of raptors has hampered efforts to conserve them.

Celia Calverley, chief scientist for SNH, said: "Until now, we have relied on separate organisations providing us with statistics on birds of prey, but this agreement will allow us to co-ordinate our information collection to provide a clear picture of population changes."



LET US PREY: This 21-day-old hen harrier, at its nest in Perthshire, is one of the birds the concerted aims to aid. Picture: Graeme H

*A Herald article from 2002 David Stroud found in his archives. Let the SRMG know if you'd like to have a read*

worked closely with the Scottish Raptor Study Groups and the Scheme in many different projects and having looked after his own Raptor Patch around Stirling University. Staffan had passed on his torch to Dr. Mark Eaton, a Senior Conservation Scientist, who's responsible for overseeing the RSPB's involvement in the monitoring of birds in the UK and overseas. We feel very lucky to have him and his expertise as part of the Group and very much look forward to working with him in the future.

We would also like to warmly welcome Logan Steele to the Group. Logan is a long-term member of the Tayside Raptor Study Group and has recently taken on a role as a Communications Secretary for the Scottish Raptor Study Group. In this role he will no doubt be able to bring a major positive contribution to the SRMG so we'd like to thank him for stepping in. This brings the overall number of SRMG representatives now to 15.

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) comprises of representatives from all nine partner organisations and meets three times a year to discuss Scheme-related matters.

David Stroud was one of the founding members on the Group and has been involved with the Scheme since its inception in 2002. David has now retired from his post as Senior Ornithologist with the JNCC (as of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2019) and has thus stepped down from the SRMG. The Scheme would like to extend its gratitude to David for the level of passion he has contributed over the last 17 (!) years towards making the Scheme the best it could be. We are sad to see him go but wish him all the best for his 'quiet retirement'. JNCC will continue to be represented on the group by Danny Heptinstall, a Senior International Biodiversity Advisor and we're very grateful to him for his input.

Dr. Staffan Roos, who had been a representative on the group for many years, most recently with RSPB, has taken up a new role as a Program Director at the Swedish Species Information Centre. Staffan has been an integral part of the Scheme and raptor research in Scotland, having



*Staffan being presented with a Thank You- card by SRMG chair Andrew Stevenson at his last meeting on January 24<sup>th</sup>*





## SRMS Paper Published in Bird Study

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme is delighted to announce a paper titled *'The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme: recent developments in good practice monitoring'* was published in the journal *Bird Study* (see next article for more information) in early January 2019. Hard work and countless hours by SRMG representatives were put into making this happen so a thank you and well done goes to everyone involved. The authors are Amy Challis, Colin Edwards, Alan Heavisides, Mark Holling, Kenny Kortland, Wendy Mattingley, Gordon Riddle, Staffan Roos, Andrew Stevenson, Patrick Stirling-Aird, David Stroud, Chris Wernham and Mark W. Wilson.

The Scheme (SRMS) has been operational for over 15 years and provides many examples of how nationwide monitoring programmes for raptors and other scarce bird species could be developed. The aim of the paper is to share experiences and approaches of the coordination of a nationwide raptor monitoring programme that other countries can use when embarking on their own monitoring programmes.

The paper presents seven current developments to enhance the SRMS, including: (i) profile raising, (ii) producing robust population trends, (iii) increasing monitoring of widespread species, (iv) expanding the volunteer network, (v) enhancing reporting on causes of breeding failure, (vi) developing an online data entry system and (vii) mobilizing data for conservation purposes. Following from this, the paper presents a first summary on survey coverage and trends of raptor species in Scotland in addition to highlighting some of the challenges in trend production, data mobilization and lack of diverse income streams.

To conclude the paper goes on to recommend that any new raptor monitoring programme should at the outset ensure that its aims are clearly defined and that agreement is reached regarding how data will be stored and shared. It is noted that consideration should be given to the potential uses of the data, the intended outputs from the programme and to the suitability of scheme design in meeting the agreed objectives. It is also recommended that a recording system that captures all required aspects of the data recording should be devised and implemented at an early stage.

The article is well worth a read and a full copy is available Open Access here:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00063657.2018.1477737?needAccess=true&>



## Special issue of the journal *Raptor Study* on raptor monitoring

The proceedings of the last conference of the European Science Foundation (ESF)-funded European Raptor Monitoring networking programme (EURAPMON) held in Murcia, Spain, in March 2015 were published in late 2018 in an open-access Special Issue of *Bird Study* (on-line access available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/tbis20/65/sup1>).

The issue contains a forward by Fabrizio Sergio and a range of (hopefully) interesting papers on raptor monitoring from across Europe, including: monitoring methods for Golden Eagles in Norway; monitoring methods for Tawny Owls and Ural Owls; standardised protocols for raptor migration monitoring; a comparative study of Ural Owl diet; and a review of monitoring environmental contaminants and change using raptors. It also contains a paper (see above) led by Amy Challis (with SRMG reps) showcasing the SRMS as an example of best practice in raptor monitoring, and the results from the inventory of raptor monitoring across Europe (led by Maja Derlink) that I helped to coordinate, which was compiled



using the results of a questionnaire to which some of you kindly contributed.

If anyone would like a hard copy of this issue, I do have some spare copies so please e-mail me with your postal address if you would like to receive one (first come, first served).

Chris Wernham (BTO Scotland)

## The Donald and Jeff Watson Raptor Award

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 2019 the award was presented to Roger Broad. Below is the citation from Duncan Orr-Ewing (Chair of the Central Scotland RSG) delivered at the Scottish Raptor Study Group

Conference in Battleby where the award was presented on February 23rd.

"Roger's involvement in the conservation of our nation's raptors since the late 1960s has been prodigious. Roger has an ornithological CV too long to cover in this short citation, but I have picked out a few achievements to support his nomination. His work has taken him to every part of the country where he has been actively involved in championing the conservation of raptor populations both in a professional, and significantly also, in a voluntary capacity, or has been there to actively support the work of others.



After departing as warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory in the 1970s, Roger moved to the Black Isle, Ross-shire. Here he worked with raptor enthusiasts including Jeff Watson and Roy Dennis, to survey and protect Golden Eagles, and played a major role in the first national population census of this species in 1981, doing much fieldwork in remote areas of the Highlands himself. In the 1980s he moved to Killearn near Glasgow and became involved in raptor conservation and monitoring in Argyll and Bute and Stirling. He tracked the recolonization by Ospreys of this part of Scotland, particularly around the Lake of Menteith and Loch Lomond, and this species became his next passion after eagles.

**“His unquestioned enthusiasm and devotion is matched by his dogged determination with his work spanning the complete suite of raptors, but he is best known for his work with Osprey, Golden and White-tailed Eagle. As the White-tailed Eagle returned to breed, initially on Mull from 1982, Roger monitored the rise of this population, and dealt with the difficult issues that were beginning to be raised by farmers around lamb predation. “**

Roger was one of the first RSPB Conservation Officers, and for many central Scottish ornithologists was for a long time the face of the RSPB. Roger worked from home and latterly moved into the RSPB office in Glasgow. To think that the RSPB conservation workload for the Strathclyde area, now covered by a sizable team, was previously covered by one man, Roger Broad! What he probably doesn't realise, for many young up and coming birdwatchers, Roger was referred to as *Mr. Broad* and I for one took some time to pluck up the courage to call him Roger, such was the respect we had for him. What

many did not know either was how much of his spare time Roger devoted to the voluntary monitoring of raptors. Roger was one of the founding members of both the Argyll and Central Raptor Study Groups. Roger loves data and information and could show MI5, GCHQ and the CIA how to hold onto it and keep it a secret! For many years Roger compiled all of the data and records, as well as submitted all of the licence returns for the Argyll Raptor Study Group! Roger was known for his “need to know” approach around raptors, many of which were scarce and heavily persecuted at that time. However, this mantra was borne of experience and the advice he once imparted to a CSRSG meeting is true now as it was at the time, “many raptors are protected by the secrecy that surrounds them”.

He is passionately committed to raptor conservation and his diplomatic and professional persona has carried him to many conservation successes, particularly in Central Scotland and Argyll. His depth of knowledge and insightful reasoning are very much appreciated during group meetings, and to acknowledge this and as a mark of respect from all his colleagues, he has been offered honorary memberships to both the Central and Argyll Raptor Study Groups, as latterly he has decided to take a bit more of a back seat and let the “young Turks”, as he describes them, pick up the monitoring effort.

His thrill has been to see raptor populations, including both the White-tailed Eagle and the Osprey, go from strength to strength in both Argyll and Central Scotland during his time. Roger is modest, polite and completely committed and has been and will continue to be a wonderful advocate for our subject “

**Duncan Orr-Ewing (Chair of the CSRSG)**



## Data Sharing & Use- Policy and SRMS Registration Form Now Out!

As discussed in the previous issue of the *Scottish Raptor*, the representatives on the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) have been working hard to get some crucial policies and paper-work in place in order to modernise and streamline how data are used by the Scheme. There are three major undertakings that have now been finalised and we'd like to ask everyone to take note of them:

- **Data Sharing & Use- policy:** this will help both providers and users of SRMS data to better understand our aims and intentions. The policy is operational and has been made available on the SRSM website: <http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/data-sharing-use-policy>
- **Privacy Statement:** this has been compiled in response to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) - new regulations relating to personal data that came into force on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018 and can be found here: <http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/privacy-statement>
- **SRMS Registration Form:** this form aims to gather up to personal data (such as contact information) from each raptor worker, consent for which purpose this may be used and to gain consent for the use and sharing each person's raptor records in the ways specified in the above policy. If you haven't yet received the form via email, it can also be downloaded from the Scheme's website here: <http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/registering-for-srms>

**If you contribute data towards the Scheme, we would like to ask everyone to please fill in the SRMS Registration Form and return it as soon as possible, either by post or electronically.**

## Richard Gladwell Senior (1945-2018)

On 16 November 2018 Richard Gladwell died in Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock, of lung failure following recent diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease, and so Scottish raptor groups lost one of their unsung heroes of dedicated observational fieldwork.

Ricky was born in Darvel, Ayrshire, on 12 February 1945 and, apart from several years in Yorkshire, lived most of his life in Galston near Kilmarnock, where he worked as an engineer with Glazier Metals and latterly Johnnie Walker Whisky. Although he always had a love of walking in the hills and local moors, it was a chance meeting with Dick Roxburgh on the Upper Avon Water around 1980 that inspired



(George Christie)





him to intensively study and record some of the scarcer raptors he encountered in the area.

**“His friendly nature, steady approach and experience of abseiling soon made him a key member of Dick’s developing network of raptor workers. He quickly gained field expertise with breeding Peregrines, Golden Eagles and Merlins, but Hen Harriers became his passion and he studied them intensively throughout the year, becoming a world expert on the species - christened by Dick ‘the Jock Stein of harriers.’”**

A meticulous recorder, Ricky was a founding member of the Southwest Scotland Raptor Study Group, becoming Secretary-Treasurer of the South Strathclyde group for many years and a regular attender of Dumfries & Galloway group meetings and national conferences.

However, it was his observational skills and field craft that elevated his work on breeding and roosting Hen Harriers to a level that attracted fellow enthusiasts including Donald Watson and Roger Clarke, who became firm friends. A recurring question in the late 1980s was whether some breeding birds stayed on to overwinter in the same area, resulting in the Southwest group embarking on a wing-tagging programme that attracted the RSPB, who employed Brian Etheridge to successfully broaden this work to other areas of Scotland. Brian, of course, became a close friend and harrier expert in his own right, with a deep appreciation of and respect for Ricky’s advice and deep knowledge of the species.

Ricky’s fieldwork and data gathering over many years made a huge contribution to the designation of Special Protection Areas for

breeding and wintering Hen Harriers and other raptors at Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands, and for breeding Hen Harriers at Glen App and Galloway Moors. His friendly and engaging manner impressed farmers, estate owners and even some gamekeepers, whilst his attention to detail in recording greatly facilitated the difficult work of SNH in the successful designation of these impressive moorland areas, which otherwise might well have been lost to forestry or developed as wind farms.

He carried his love of harriers to Auvergne annually over some fifteen years, where he watched both hen and Montagu’s harriers enjoying freedom from persecution or even attention from local people; they were so part of the scene, but where increasing silage production over the period reduced their respective populations to a small fraction of their former glory.

Never one for the limelight, sadly Ricky never published his various behavioural findings, but his passion, experience and knowledge of Hen Harriers is both undoubted and unsurpassed by anyone in the field of Hen Harrier study in the UK. He recorded important territorial behaviour related to food supply by Hen Harriers in winter, and his knowledge of roosting behaviour was on a par with his dear friend Donald Watson, who died in 2005. He was also one of the nicest, most hospitable, intelligent and helpful people you could hope to know, a dear friend and inspiration to all who knew him in the southwest of Scotland and beyond. He is survived by his daughter Mary and sons Richard Jnr, Ian and Jim.

**Chris Rollie (Chair of D&G RSG)**





## Paul Haworth (1951-2018)

**Paul Haworth passed away on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018 from complications arising from his dignified and private battle with melanoma cancer. He died in hospital with his family close by.**

Paul was from Lancashire and was based on Mull for almost 30 years. Before that he had graduated with a BSc Hons in Geology from Aberyswyth. He never lost his interest in rocks and his nickname was Barney (as in Rubble). His Hobby, later in life, was building things in stone which you cannot have missed if you visited Bendoran Cottage.

After his geology degree he completed an MSc in Landscape Ecology Design and Maintenance at Wye College before working as an ecologist for West Yorkshire County Council and then as a Conservation Officer for the Welsh Water Authority. After some travelling he returned to education to complete his PhD in Moorland Management and Nature Conservation based on the moorlands on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border close to the village of Haworth. Amongst other species those hills had a significant population of Merlin. Des Thompson was his external examiner and I ended up as his supervisor after he lost, through no fault of his own, two earlier supervisors.

He had a brief time working for the NCC Orkney but rapidly concluded that this wasn't the life for him and he moved south as a Research Fellow at Glasgow University investigating the impact of land use change on upland predatory and scavenging birds in Argyll. It was then that he moved to Mull and the house he stayed in longer than any other in his life.

He was a very important member of the small team which produced the Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier national conservation frameworks, often completed whilst working around the table at Bendoran Cottage. He was also a key author of the background report which underpinned the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Reinforcement and the review of Golden Eagles in NHZ 10 (Monadhliaths) and the subsequent Regional



*(Alan Fielding)*

Golden Eagle Conservation Management Plan which is adding enormously to our understanding of Golden Eagle ecology.

Paul was a very strong supporter of Irish birds of prey, partly because his wife's Tricia's parents were originally from Connemara. He spent time in Connemara, working for the WWF, including several seasons monitoring the local Merlin population in the 1980s. He shared the maps of his detailed fieldwork there, which allowed the IRSG to build upon his dataset. The ongoing Connemara Merlin studies are now an important part of this species' national conservation effort.

Paul also played a key role in supporting the tenuous efforts to secure the Irish Golden Eagle Reintroduction programme. As Lorcan O'Toole acknowledged, Paul provided constant help and support throughout the lifetime of the project. Paul and I also produced the detailed reintroduction population modelling programmes for the three Irish raptor reintroduction programmes; namely the Golden Eagle, the White-tailed Eagle and Red Kite projects. Over the last two decades, the IRSG repeatedly sought his advice and guidance regarding Hen Harrier conservation and a broad range of other land management issues.

His experience allowed unique comparative insights into many raptor species' biology and the threats they face, especially Merlin, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle, through diligent field records ranging from the English Pennines, the west of Ireland, and most recently in his devotion to the Scottish Hebrides and the western mainland. Paul saw, for example, that despite the substantial research attention being paid to the Hen Harrier on moors for driven grouse shooting, where their fate and conservation status was far less than certain, that for many years which he had documented they were doing far better in the west and islands, where there was little burnt heather, no grouse shooting, but rather more in the way of woodland and scrub habitats.



*Paul with a delivery of stones that he later moved by hand to build a series of walls which may well puzzle future archaeologists! (Alan Fielding)*

and Golden Eagles using the naturally open ground. This was re-wilding long before the term became popular.

Paul had a holistic view of ecology and landscapes which reflected his education and his experience in the field. He also had a view on the state of ecological knowledge and understanding which he summed up for me in a quotation adapted from something Dennis Healy wrote "ecological forecasts are better than nothing, but their origin lies in extrapolation from a partially known past through an unknown present to an unknowable future, according to theories about the causal relationships between certain ecological variables which are hotly disputed by academic ecologists and may in fact change from country to country or from decade to decade". The original quotation was about economics but he thought it fitted well with the update to the Hen Harrier Conservation Framework that we were working on at that time. For reasons that are unclear that update never appeared despite it being finished and refereed.

**"He was immense fun to be with, always helpful, kind and supportive of raptor field workers and any others with a shared passion for raptors and the uplands who had the good fortune to cross his path. Paul was the best company in the field, the pub, or in meetings on the numerous research and conservation projects he contributed to."**

He endeared the highest respect and affection amongst friends and colleagues through his



*Clearing paths in the Tireragan estate on Mull (Alan Fielding)*

He was the key driving force both intellectually and physically in the management of a small estate on Mull, where removal of sheep and deer have seen many species flourish and biodiversity expand, from native trees and the passerines which rely on them, to Hen Harriers



immense knowledge, charm, and often, piercingly observant sense of humour. He will be greatly missed by the many who loved him, not least by his wife Trish and his daughters Erica and Kathryn.

The sudden loss of such a wildlife advocate is offset to some degree by his own words – confiding with his family before he died, that he was “Totally at peace and had a privileged life doing what he loved”. He also had a very sound

piece of advice for me and anyone who would listen “life is not a practice, you don’t get a second go so enjoy it while you can”.

If you are on Mull in late July (27<sup>th</sup>) please come along to Creich Hall which is between Bunessan and Fionnophort. We will be celebrating Paul’s life and you would be most welcome. The celebration starts in the early afternoon.

Alan Fielding

Paul was a long standing member of Argyll RSG and species coordinator for Hen Harrier and Merlin. I found him always willing to provide helpful advice.

He carried out extensive fieldwork over many years with particular reference to Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle. The group are deeply grateful to his wife Trish who, assisted by her close friend Moira have stepped up to continue with Paul's Hen Harrier fieldwork. This work is of crucial importance in view of the national importance of Mull for breeding Hen Harrier.

David Warden (Chair of Argyll RSG)

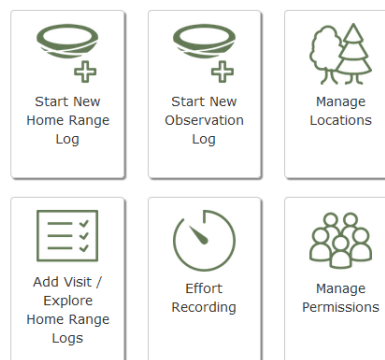
## SRMS Online- Where are we at?

Since last December, we have had 18 people testing the SRMS Online who have provided very useful feedback, which is currently being worked through by the development team.

We are currently expecting to roll out the system in late summer, which would allow plenty of time for training to take place and for everyone to familiarise themselves with the system well ahead of the 2020 season.

Thank you everyone who has given us a hand with testing the system and for taking the time to feed back on their experience!

### SRMS Data Home





## Winter Red Kite Roost Count

Around 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019, SRSG volunteers participated in the annual and Europe-wide winter Red Kite roost monitoring exercise, coordinated by Birdlife France (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux). All known Scottish Red Kite winter roosts were visited during this period, and counts of numbers of birds attending these sites were made. Mainly good counting conditions were encountered this season. A final total of 940 Red Kites were recorded at 29 roost sites. These figures represent an increase on last year's coordinated counts where 823 birds were recorded. The main increases in numbers of birds attending roosts were noted in Dumfries and Galloway.

Birds attending roosts are mainly non-breeding and juvenile birds, although they may be joined,



*Red Kite at Loch Ken (Angus Hogg).*

particularly in hard weather, by local breeding adult Red Kite pairs. These counts give a further indication of the gradual growth of the Red Kite population in Scotland. Thanks to all of those who participated. A repeat national winter roost survey is planned for early January 2020.

**Duncan Orr-Ewing (Red Kite Species coordinator for CSRS and TRSG)**

## Raptor Patch – A volunteer experience

"Raptor Patch for me is a reason to get out and explore the local area while hopefully contributing useful data gathering information about distribution of raptors.

My allocated area borders an estate with an excellent woodland to the north-east that is occupied by breeding raptors (at least Buzzards and likely Kites). Any birds I've seen probably "leak" out of the woods, but thus far have not established in the adjacent territory, although there was a nest just beyond the northern boundary, independent of the woodland, last year. It could be the quality of the trees, nature of the agricultural landscape or competition that keeps birds from settling here.

There's still hope and definitely satisfaction participating especially if one uses the analogy 'it's not winning but playing the game that counts'".



**Raptor Patch Volunteer (Central Scotland)**

Many thanks to all the volunteers who are carrying out monitoring for this continuing 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>

## The South Angus Hobby Study

The Hobby is monitored throughout Tayside though more intensively in Angus. The South Angus Hobby study is located south of the Highland Boundary fault and lies partly within the Vale of Strathmore extending eastwards to include eastern Angus.

It is mainly an area of arable farmland, often with isolated or rows of trees, woods and plantations (some being large as in the case of Montreathmont but others rather small). Large Scots Pines, which Hobbies like, are plentiful and so are Beeches, Oaks and other large trees. The study is part of the Tayside Raptor Study Group's Hobby study and there are four nest sites where breeding has been confirmed within the study area and a further two where breeding was probable. Breeding has also been confirmed in two areas in Perthshire and with probable nesting at two sites. Hobbies are also seen regularly in Fife where breeding has been confirmed.

In spite of its attractive appearance and spectacular flight, the Hobby is frequently overlooked. With its low wing loading and high aspect ratio it cruises around with easy elastic wing beats and steady glides with hands depressed, at a height of 50 to 100 metres using small woods and avenues of trees as cover to approach its prey. The Hobby also hunts from altitude, ringing up in tight circles to a considerable height before stooping. I have seen a Hobby stooping on a Buzzard to drive it away on a number of occasions. Soaring is also part of the courtship display during the breeding season when after climbing to a considerable altitude it makes a spectacular stoop terminating in a steep climb – 'throwing up' in falconry terminology. On sunny days Hobbies will soar to a great height, sometimes disappearing into the cloud base.

The earliest Hobby arrivals I have seen are in the first week in May. This is then followed by egg-laying in mid-June, hatching in mid-July and fledging in mid-August, and dispersing during the following 20 to 35 days. Hobbies are all tree nesters, appropriating nests of other species – mostly Carrion Crows and Rooks, though other suitably sized nests including squirrel drays may



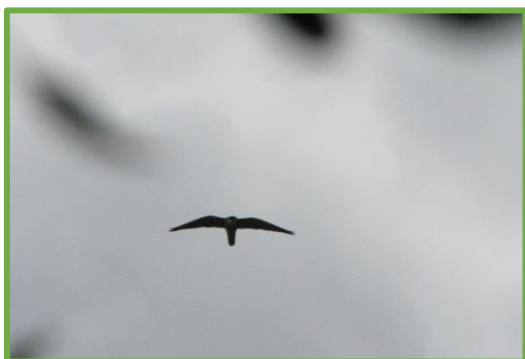
*A Hobby chick estimated at 24 to 26 days old (Ron Downing)*

be used. Being late breeders, Hobbies often use the empty nests which the former breeding occupants have only just vacated. Nests built in previous seasons may be used if they are in good condition.

Hobbies are strongly philopatric – i.e. they are faithful to their natal area or where they previously bred. Small plantations, small woods and avenues of trees are favoured. However larger woods or plantations may be used but breeding is limited to within 30 metres from the woodland edge (Fiuczynski, K. D., 2017). Hobbies also have a very interesting relationship with Woodpigeons, which are tolerated near the nest, where they alert the Hobby to the presence of predators. They are allowed to nest only metres from that of a Hobby. Hobbies also use pigeons and doves as stalking horses to get amongst their prey. What the pigeons get in return is presumably, a degree of un-guaranteed protection.

Hobbies will not tolerate intruders, raptors or other birds, which they regard as threats to their eggs, young or themselves, and will drive them off. Goshawks, with good reason, are especially disliked. I have seen an adult Hobby drive an adult Goshawk from the nesting area, which contained two fledged Hobbies, using a barrage of fierce attacks. They also chase off the "inoffensive" Honey Buzzard for reasons that are not fully known. Extra-territorial Hobbies are usually driven off, though some (usually first summer birds) may be tolerated as helpers (Fiuczynski, K. D., 2017). Nearest neighbour

distances in South Angus vary between 5.5 and 18.0 km, but these figures are based upon probable incomplete coverage.



*The flight profile of a Hobby (Ron Downing).*

Their prey is very varied, consisting of birds (aerial feeders and other small birds), large insects (dragonflies, cockchafer and large beetles) and bats. Mammals are also taken, often by kleptoparasitism (Kestrels as well as Sparrowhawks). Growing Hobby chicks cannot be fed exclusively on insects and in the breeding season birds are the main prey item – I have seen birds up to the size of Blackbirds taken. I have recorded Blackbird, Swallow, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting and Bluetit as prey items and Philip Brown records a Hobby killing a Turtle Dove. Leslie Brown recorded Hobbies attacking Green woodpeckers, possibly because they regard the woodpecker call as a challenge. Nesting Hobbies avoid taking bird prey within the woods they nest in (Fiuczynski, K. D., 2017) but this rule does not apply to insects or bats.

Hobbies are highly crepuscular - the first prey items are delivered to the female and/or young soon after dawn. They also hunt at dusk until it gets too dark for visual hunting and bats are frequently taken on these late evening excursions. The distance of nest areas from hunting grounds may be as little as 200 metres

or as much as 6.5 kilometres (Fiuczynski, K. D., 2017). Hobbies usually pluck their prey from perches high in trees so prey remains become scattered over the woodland floor and are difficult to find. The calls of Hobbies, either adults or nestlings, are a useful sign of occupancy yet different people give different renderings of the Hobby call. I translate the basic call as 'Cui Cui Cui Cui', nestlings having a harsher chick-like call and adults having a rather soft 'Cui Cui Cui Cui' near the nest. Alarm and food pass calls are similar but much louder.

Pre-breeding Hobbies frequently gather in flocks to hunt collectively over attractive areas before dispersing to their breeding territories. During the late breeding season Hobbies hunt post-breeding hirundines (swallows) which gather in family groups within their hunting ground and can become hundreds strong as their migration time approaches. Post-fledging young Hobbies hunt large insects but they continue to take bird prey from their parents while honing their skills. They remain insectivorous until the following breeding season in their second calendar year. End of breeding season adults also hunt insects and mixed flocks of adults and juveniles may be seen hunting dragonflies over wet areas with ponds. The huge flocks of pre-migration hirundines that gather at areas such as the Tay reed beds act as magnets for Hobbies but the reed beds are a hunting ground for the Hobby throughout the breeding season. There's however no evidence of breeding, nearest nesting likely taking place in the area of large trees bordering the Carse of Gowrie.

My advice to anyone wishing to study this fascinating and rather secretive bird is to get to know it, –to know its behaviour, flight performance, nesting habitat and calls.

**Ron Downing (TRSG)**

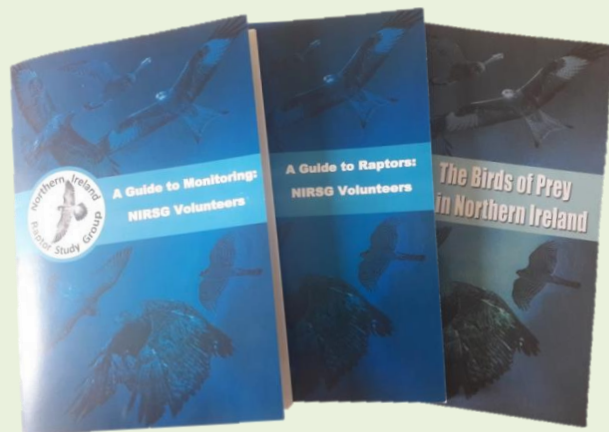
Reference: Fiuczynski, K. D. (2010) The Eurasian Hobby: *Falco Subbuteo*. VerlagsKG Wolf



## Oot and About- SRMC's visit to Northern Ireland

In late March I flew over to Northern Ireland to take part in a training event run by the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) on the surveying and monitoring of lowland raptors. This was a great opportunity for me to pick up some tricks of the trade and to observe how NIRSG runs its training events.

When I worked with Ulster Wildlife I would have worked closely with the NIRSG staff and volunteers so I was pleased to see and catch up with many familiar faces on the day. Furthermore, I was especially delighted to see the vast range of people in attendance both in age and the level of experience. While I chatted to a young gentleman who had no previous experience in raptor monitoring but was very keen to get involved, there were also many more (or may I say extraordinarily) experienced raptor workers on hand to provide tips and guidance throughout the day, which worked very well.



*Materials produced for volunteers and public engagement*

We started the day with an introduction to the organisation, its objectives and long-term ambitions. This is when we had a Red Kite fly past the window of the Tollymore Outdoor Centre where the training took place, which caused quite a stir and distracted us all from the training for a good amount of time, me included! After we got ourselves together we were divided into two groups (after a coffee and scone break, of course!) and attended workshops on the surveying for both direct and indirect signs of raptors, supported by data collation and map reading exercises. Over lunch, our raptor monitoring related skills were then put into test through a quiz to ensure we had indeed been paying attention during the morning sessions.



*Raptor Officer Eimear conducting a workshop on direct signs of raptors (Alan Ferguson)*

In the afternoon we headed outdoors looking for signs of raptors and were in fact very lucky to observe several species; a Peregrine Falcon, a Buzzard, a Raven (the honorary raptor) and a very quick glance of a sparrow/goshawk (remains under dispute...). We also observed several wing-tagged Red Kites (in fact we observed signs that indicated an area for a potential new nest!) which was especially rewarding, as this is the area where Red Kites were originally reintroduced back in 2008 in collaboration with the RSPB and work is still very much ongoing as part of the RKites project.

We then gathered together and finished the day off with a dinner at the beautiful Slieve Donard Hotel. While the original guest speaker David Anderson, who's name and face is very familiar to many raptor workers in Scotland had to unfortunately cancel due to unforeseen circumstances, we were treated to two excellent talks, one by Alan Ferguson and the role of volunteering and one by Charles Tweney, who spoke about his many years surveying in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Ireland.

The evening also provided an excellent opportunity for everyone to chat with those they may not have had the chance to talk to earlier in the day and to discuss the day gone by.

The contents of the training were well balanced considering the different experience levels of the participants and some very useful topics were discussed such as the usefulness of WhatsApp groups for training opportunities and for foresters (to whom information on raptors can thereby be passed on in a very straightforward and immediate manner) and the use of mobile applications such as Vieweranger for data recording in areas with poor mobile reception.

All in all I would say that the day was a huge success so congratulations go to everyone involved in organising the event. I'd also like to express my gratitude towards the NIRSG Raptor Officer Dr. Eimear Rooney for welcoming me over. I'd still say you trained those Red Kites!

Nina Schönberg (SRMC)



*Looking for raptors over the Mourne Mountains (Pete Crossett)*





## ERB Facility – a European Programme to improve raptor, environmental and human health

The European Raptor Biomonitoring Facility (ERB Facility) is a programme of action funded by the EU-COST programme that brings together an open network of people from across Europe, all of whom are working towards coordinated Europe-wide monitoring of contaminants in raptors (birds of prey, including owls). The network is interdisciplinary and includes: researchers involved in monitoring contaminants in raptors; specimen banks and museums involved in collecting and storing samples for analysis; field researchers and volunteers working on the demography and ecology of raptors, who may be able to collect samples for analysis and who collect important information on raptor individuals and populations to allow better interpretation of contaminant findings; and policy practitioners, including those from the EU regulatory agencies.

The programme is led by Guy Duke (Chair, from Oxford University) and Dr Al Vrezec (Deputy-Chair, from the National Institute of Biology, Slovenia). Currently the management committee of the programme comprises representatives from 26 of the 36 eligible COST EU countries, plus Israel (a COST 'Cooperating Member'). The two UK Management Committee members are Professor Richard Shore (from CEH Lancaster; who oversees the running of the Predatory Birds Monitoring Scheme with which many of you may be familiar) and myself (from BTO Scotland). Dr Pam Berry (Oxford University), Dr David Noble (BTO Thetford) and Professor Dan Osborn (University College London) are also involved in providing expertise from the UK. All the other formal representatives currently involved are listed on the programme website but there is also a growing network of participants involved in particular network activities. The programme was launched in late 2017 and runs until October 2021.

The overall aim of the network is to support ever more effective implementation of EU chemicals regulations by using raptors as sentinels of environmental contamination, and thereby reducing risks from chemicals to the raptors themselves, to the wider environment and to human health. The programme is considering a very broad range of environmental contaminants, including metals (like lead, mercury and cadmium), agrochemicals and rodenticides (including second generation anti-coagulant rodenticides (SGARs) that have been raised as a potential issue for some Scottish raptors), non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and perfluorinated compounds.

The programme aims to scope out the potential for:

- ERBioS - a 'European Raptor Biomonitoring Scheme' (a cooperating infrastructure of laboratories and researchers) to get appropriate samples of tissues analysed from across Europe and reporting of results;
- ERSpecB - a distributed 'European Raptor Specimen Bank' (to provide storage capacity for enough samples across Europe); and
- ERSamP - a 'European Raptor Sampling Programme' (to provide a field sampling network that can obtain samples for analysis and related important population information from raptors in the field).

After working for the BTO for more than 20 years, I was entitled to a 'double-sabbatical'! So I am using that time, and some unpaid leave, spread over four years, to assist in this work by leading one of the programme's four Working



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Hùdair na h-Alba air fèid





Groups – ‘Working Group 4 (Field Arena)’. My group’s role is to develop the ideas for the sampling programme (ERSamP) and develop ways of capacity building expertise in the field arena across Europe – hopefully helping more people and countries to get involved in collecting samples for analysis and promoting stronger pan-European monitoring of raptors in general.

BTO Scotland recently hosted a small workshop in Stirling for the ERBFacility, involving 15 participants from 8 countries. They came up with ambitious plans to demonstrate proof of concept for the new developing monitoring network by collecting and analysing samples from across Europe to show the potential to measure spatial variation in one or more contaminants – probably heavy metals (mercury and/or lead) and/or rodenticides. The work will involve one or a small number of focal raptor species (probably owls, Common Buzzard and/or Common Kestrel) and decisions will be finalised once the resources available have been agreed.

We are obviously very lucky in Scotland (and across the UK) in having many highly experienced and dedicated people with an interest in monitoring and research on raptors (both in professional and voluntary capacities). We are always keen to improve this monitoring even further (e.g. through the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme) but we should also spare a thought for those countries which do not yet have the luxury of such established networks of skilled people – so they do not have the capacity to monitor or adequately protect their raptor populations at all, even though many are very passionate about trying to do so. The work that I

am involved with for ERBFacility is all about finding ways of sharing skills, knowledge, best practice guidance and resources where possible between countries, to help establish or enhance both field monitoring and contaminant sample collection in countries that currently cannot do this.

If you would like to get involved and help support these other countries in some way, then please get in touch. You may be able to:

- Attend one of the programme workshops to give a presentation that will help us to develop best practice guidance for monitoring or skills development (places are limited but if you have something to offer travel and accommodation will be paid for attendance);
- Apply for a short-term scientific mission to help with one of the programme’s tasks (involves getting a grant as a contribution to travel and living costs and then visiting a different country for a period of up to 6 months to work with an appropriate host organisation to do a piece of shared work; funding does not cover all costs or employment costs);
- Get involved in helping us to write or review guidance on best practice for monitoring or for capacity building and training volunteers to collect samples and data in the field; or
- Get involved in helping us to source appropriate samples from raptors (later, as the programme develops).

**There is something that I hope some of you at least might be able to help us with immediately please.**

As part of one of the short-term missions funded by the programme, we are trying to identify the main constraints that prevent researchers in countries from getting involved in raptor monitoring and sampling. We need submissions from as many countries and types of participants as possible. The questionnaire only takes about 15 minutes and it would really help us if some Scottish raptor workers could fill it in. You only need to answer the questions that you feel are relevant – just ignore any that you cannot answer. The link for the on-line questionnaire is here:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKyAkZlgFdIA6yXtPk8sHzp5ksm\\_61hIVArtnQqg9f-ilxuA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKyAkZlgFdIA6yXtPk8sHzp5ksm_61hIVArtnQqg9f-ilxuA/viewform?usp=sf_link)



May 2019

Please give it a go if you possibly can, and feel free to pass on the link to anyone else you feel could usefully contribute to the survey. Please try to fill it by the end of May if at all possible.

Many thanks!

For more information: see <https://erbfacility.eu/> or contact [chris.wernham@bto.org](mailto:chris.wernham@bto.org)



Participants in the ERBFacility Working Group 4 (Field Arena) workshop in Florence in March 2019

Top row (left to right): Antonio Juan García-Fernández (Spain); Joško Račnik (Slovenia); Oliver Krone (Germany); Rafa Mateo (Spain); Al Vrezec (Slovenia); David Noble (UK); Arianna Aradis (Italy); Abbie Maiden (UK); Stavros Xirouchakis (Greece); Tassos Saratsis (Greece); Cristina Kassara (Greece).

Bottom row (left to right): Rui Lourenço (Portugal); Yael Choresch (Israel); Pablo Sánchez Virosta (Finland); Silvia Espín (Spain); Pilar Gómez-Ramírez (Spain); Lucie Michel (Germany); Maria Dulsat Masvidal (Spain); Ulf Johansson (Sweden).

## Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) contact

Nina Schönberg: Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator (SRMC)

BTO Scotland  
Beta Centre (Unit 15)  
Stirling University Innovation Park  
Stirling  
FK9 4NF

[srmc@bto.org](mailto:srmc@bto.org)

Office (direct dial): 01786 458024  
Office (reception): 01786 458021  
Mobile: 07887 897817



